



Winter 2023 - In this issue

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Could you be a volunteer?

Have you ever thought about giving up your time to help a community group, charity or with the council? Everyone who's involved with the Tenants' Forum and its activities are volunteers.

Volunteering is a great way of getting involved with something you enjoy and feel passionate about, plus you are choosing to do something that will make a difference which benefits others. You can decide how much time you can give and matched to an opportunity which best suits you.

Longstanding volunteer Mike Bickerstaffe says "I've been involved with the Bayswater Court Tenants' and Residents' Association, Estates Management Project Group, Multi-storey Living Group and the Tenants' Forum and I love it, the council listens to us and we get things done.

Volunteering offers a lot more than benefitting an individual, your community or the environment. It benefits the volunteer's wellbeing too, through interacting with new people and making friends, improving self-confidence, and self-worth, and can help overcome loneliness and depression. You can learn new skills that are transferable and if you are looking for work, having volunteering experience on your CV is always a plus point.

For information about volunteering with the Tenants' Forum email tenant.resident@hullcc.gov.uk

There are many opportunities across Hull from helping at events, dog walking, mentoring, and gardening to providing admin support, telephone befriending, working at a food bank, prison visiting, and much, much more. Everyone is welcome. However for some roles, volunteers must undergo a DBS check. Of course, volunteering is unpaid, but some organisations offer out-of-pocket expenses.

For information about volunteering contact Hull CVS phone 01482 324 474

<https://hullcvcs.org.uk/community-projects/volunteer-centre/volunteer-opportunities/>

Well done Kathleen!

Volunteer Local Area Champion Kathleen Elvin was highly commended in the Community Champion category of the prestigious, national Association of Retained Council Housing Awards. Kathleen has always been proud of her community. In 2020 she took on the role of Local Area Champion, and every week has litter picked and reported any problems that needed fixing. To date she has collected more than 600 bags of general rubbish and over 140 bags for recycling and raised more than 300 estate queries.

Well done Kathleen, you are a credit to your community!

If you would like to volunteer for our team of local champions, email tenant.resident@hullcc.gov.uk



Contact Hull City Council online at hull.gov.uk

Telephone: (01482) 300 300

Nev chats with Ann Reekie and Darren Milner, the driving forces behind Hull's Stop Social Housing Stigma campaign

Originally the campaign was launched in Parliament in 2018, but it has had a stop-start history with COVID-19 delaying progress, and although some headway was made, it was decided to re-launch the initiative with a new name - **Stop Social Housing Stigma**.

Why is the campaign important?

We want to stop the stigma associated with people who live in social housing. Why should people shame or knock us because our homes are council or housing association owned? For many it's a lifestyle choice, yet we get a bad image in the media - we are not the characters you see in *Shameless* or *Ackley Bridge*. We pay our rent, are responsible citizens with careers and very often play an active role in the communities where we live. Thanks to lobbying by the campaign, removing social housing stigma was a key part of the government's White Paper on Social Housing, and now we are going forward to implement it.

Why is Hull involved?

Hull City Council was the first local housing authority to sponsor the campaign from the very beginning, of which we are very proud. Nevertheless, we want greater acknowledgement across the council. Its aim is to build momentum among our tenants, other tenants, and influencers in the city to demonstrate that people should not be classified by their housing tenure, and we will challenge stereotyping and discrimination where we encounter it in the media and other walks of life. Too often people think we should put up and be happy with what we've got, and be happy with our lot in life.

So what are you going to do?

We are going to form a new local group to run alongside the national campaign Stop Social Housing Stigma. We will use it to build a majority which will fight for our



voice by appealing for help from other tenants and from influencers in our communities. We will focus on publicising the good things we do such as organising massive litter picks and general clean ups, bring out your litter days, and the role of our street champions across the city, all of which show the pride we take in our communities.

Most importantly we will work to ensure that our tenants can speak comfortably with council officers for support and understanding. Contributing to achieving this will be to develop a new E-learning package or training session run by our tenant volunteers in conjunction with the Neighbourhoods and Housing training team.



Ann Reekie and Darren Milner are leading Hull's campaign to stop social housing stigma.

If you would like to get involved with Hull's new Stop Social Housing Stigma group, email tenant.resident@hullcc.gov.uk.

For more information about the national Stop Social Housing Stigma campaign, go to <https://stopsocialhousingstigma.org>

Keeping your home free from damp and mould

We treat reports about damp and mould in your homes very seriously. Not only are they unpleasant but can be bad for your health.

Your wellbeing and safety are vitally important to us, which is why you should report damp and mould because we have procedures in place to assess the problem and take the appropriate remedial action. In most cases there will be simple solution, but it may be the result of something more serious, such as a water leak or rising damp, which needs a structural repair.

You can report a problem with damp and mould using the council's website www.hull.gov.uk and search council housing repairs. Or, if you have registered for My Housing Online, you can use your smart phone, tablet, laptop, or other digital device 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year and once it's in the system you can track its progress.

We are looking at previous requests for repairs relating to damp and mould and will be checking that the repair work has been carried out and the problem resolved.



Tackling the causes of damp and mould

We don't want anyone living in a home with damp and mould, and there are things we can all do to prevent and deal with it. Just by living in our homes and doing everyday things like taking a shower, boiling a kettle or cooking, we create moisture. This can be worse in winter when the weather is cold and wet when we tend to keep windows closed to keep our homes warm. However there are a few things we can do to help prevent the build-up of condensation. Here are a few tips:

- put lids on pans when cooking and don't leave kettles boiling
- close the doors to other rooms when cooking or bathing
- open windows, even on the trickle vent, to increase ventilation
- if you have to dry washing inside, open a window
- don't overfill drawers and cupboards so no air can circulate
- don't let rooms get too cold, even if you don't use them
- don't put furniture in front of radiators - it stops the air from circulating
- if you can't open a window after bathing or cooking wipe condensation from surfaces with a dry cloth

Ask Nic

In every issue of Hull Housing News there is an opportunity to ask Nic Harne, Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and Housing a question.

This time Dave asks:

“You encourage us to get in touch with any complaints and comments about the service we get. How do you deal with complaints and what happens to the feedback you receive?”

We are always keen to hear from tenants about your experiences. You can send us your comments using the online form on the council's website www.hull.gov.uk and search customer feedback or contact the call centre. Or, if what you want is a job done on your home, you can use your My Housing Online on your smart phone, tablet, laptop, or other digital device register to request what you need.

We always try to get things right first time. However, sometimes things can go wrong. If you are unhappy with any work carried out at your home or about the service you have received, let us know as soon as possible. As soon as you log your complaint, you will get an automatic acknowledgement. We assess what you have sent to determine whether it is a complaint or a request, such as asking for a repair to be carried out; and sometimes we may send your feedback to another part of the council because it doesn't relate to Neighbourhoods and Housing.

Help from tenants to resolve your complaint

We will try to satisfy you first time, and you can ask for a second review if something was still missed. If you are still unhappy after our second response, you have the option of referring it to the recognised tenant panel.

The panel is a trained group of tenants, all of whom are volunteers, who are supported by, but **independent** of, the council. Its role is to help resolve tenants' problems locally by having a fresh and impartial look at the complaint. You still have the right to take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. You can find more information about the panel on the Hull City Council website www.hull.gov.uk and search complaints.

You said... We did

You're the experts on our homes. You live in them, and we always look at your feedback to see whether there are any lessons we can learn and implement to make improvements. Here are a few examples of what you said as feedback, and what we did.

You said

There is a lack of written guidance on when/how to hand in keys when leaving a property/ending a tenancy.

We did

We now provide written information for residents who are moving out of their council home, which clearly explains the procedure to hand in keys and deal with other administrative issues.



You said

People climbing on waste bins in communal areas, despite the area being closed off, are a nuisance.

We did

A review of the bins area around blocks of flats was carried out, and we have increased the fencing and changed it from wood to metal to increase its security.

You said

The welcome message when you phone the call centre is too long.

We did

We re-recorded the message and cut it by 40 seconds which means you can get through to the service you require quicker.

Your feedback is important to us, and we welcome any further suggestions about how we can improve our services. We would also like to hear from you if you feel a service is working well or wish to compliment a team or member of staff for their work in your community.



Warm Spaces for you

There's no need to be cold and lonely this winter

The sharp increase in the cost for energy is affecting everyone, with many of us choosing to turn down the heating in our homes. Recognising this, as part of the council's cost of living campaign, #HullTogether, the council and other organisations have set up Warm Spaces across the city where people are welcome to spend time and enjoy some company for free. All council supported spaces have safeguarding policies in place.

There are Warm Spaces across the city in a wide range of locations and venues, such as libraries, community centres and church halls. You'll get a warm welcome and usually a warm drink too! Some spaces may be offering activities such as keep fit exercises or free internet use, advice and support on budgeting or cooking cheap nutritious meals. Everyone is welcome to attend, either alone or with family or friends. You can just come along for a chat.

You can find your nearest Warm Space on the interactive map on Hull City Council's website, which also shows the locations for community food providers and fairtrade points. This map is updated regularly as more locations are added to the list.

From hull.gov.uk choose the link at the top to My Hull Maps. Under the My Maps tab you will find lots of helpful links in the Local Information section, like where to find Warm Spaces, Food Banks, free internet access, etc.

Homes to have carbon monoxide detectors

Over the next ten months KWL, on behalf of the council, will be installing a carbon monoxide detector to all rooms which contain a gas burning appliance with the exception of gas cooking appliances.

Carbon monoxide has no smell or taste and you can't see it, yet it is a very poisonous gas. It's a by-product of burning a carbon fuel such as natural gas. Make sure that your gas appliances are working properly by having them inspected annually which minimises any potential risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. However to be on the safe side in between inspections, it is now law that all social housing properties which meet the legislative requirements should be equipped with a carbon monoxide detector. KWL will be installing the detectors when they carry out your annual gas service, or in some cases when they carry out the planned heating replacement work.

If you persistently fail to keep your gas servicing appointment the council can apply for a court order to enter your home. To do so would require the locks to be changed and you would be charged for new locks and keys.

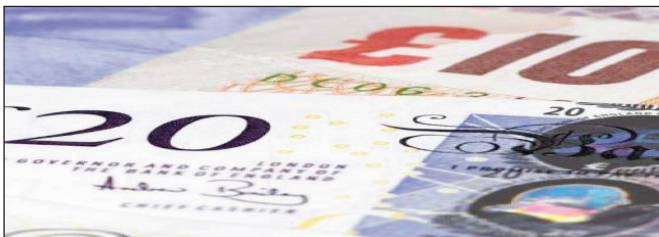
You and your family's safety is a top priority for us, which is why it is vitally important that you keep your annual gas safety inspection appointment. It's also a legal requirement. It's free and takes approximately an hour of your time.



Tips to help you manage your money

When times are tough, it's quite normal to have worries about money and how we will cope with paying our bills. There's no magic solution, but there are few ways which can help us manage our money better.

- check when contracts run out, such as for mobile phones, broadband, TV streaming, domestic energy, housing or car insurance and see if you can get a better deal
- review your spending regularly. With prices for fuel, food and other necessities going up you may need to look at how and where you spend your money and whether you need to make any changes, such as to a cheaper supermarket or switch to own-brand goods
- use the money advice on comparison websites and TV programmes. They look out the best deals for a wide range of goods and services, from insurance and credit card interest rates to deals on your shopping which can help you save on your bills



- get a free budgeting app for your phone to help control your spending. It will connect to your bank account and credit cards, automatically download the cost of your purchases, and itemise your spending to match your budget, and more depending on the app you choose
- look out for free money advice sessions about managing your money, some of which are being held at Warm Spaces in Hull
- even after the two week rent “holiday” for December for people whose council rent is in credit, January is always a tough month for bills. If you are having difficulty paying your rent or other essential bills, get in touch with your tenancy officer, who will be able to help you, by for example, helping you set a manageable budget or rescheduling your payments.

Energy Bill Support Scheme



Everyone is entitled to a £400 cut in their energy bills.

This will automatically be deducted from your bill in six instalments between October 2022 and March 2023. If you have not started to receive your reduction, contact your energy provider.

If you have a traditional pre-payment meter which requires topping up via a key or card in a local newsagent, post office or wherever there is a Paypoint, the money off energy bills comes in the form of a voucher. You should have received your vouchers for October to December by post, yet it seems that a lot of people haven't redeemed them. Please check any unopened post and also check that your contact details are up to date. If can't find your vouchers, please get in touch with your energy supplier as soon as possible - the vouchers are only valid for 90 days.

Service Level Agreements

Tenants' Forum Chair Nev Allison has signed the renewal of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the council's Street Scene Services for grounds maintenance and the Community Safety Partnership for its Neighbourhood Nuisance Team to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour; and an agreement was also signed for the cleaning of communal areas in blocks of flats.

This was a landmark event for the Tenants' Forum because it was the first time that tenants had been involved in negotiating SLAs. This shows both the level of trust and the good working relationship between the council and its tenants.



Have you seen someone rough sleeping?

Are you sleeping on the streets?
Tell us – we can help.



Contact

Streetlink on 0300 500 0914 or streetlink.org.uk

Download the StreetLink app

If you think a rough sleeper is in imminent danger call 999



Tax allowances

If you are working, there are some tax allowances which reduce the amount of income tax you must pay.

For example the married couple's allowance and the marriage allowance provide a tax credit that can reduce the amount of income tax you pay.

People earning less than £50,000 a year can receive Child Benefit, which helps with the costs of your children. It's usually paid every four weeks.

If you're eligible, you'll get £21.80 a week for your first child and £14.45 a week for any children after that.

Check out other tax allowances relating to your income and circumstances at:
www.gov.uk/browse/tax

Go to hull.gov.uk and search 'benefit calculator' to work out if there is anything else you are entitled to that you could be missing out on



One-stop, drop-in advice centre opens on Elmbridge Parade

The council, in association with Greatfield Big Local, has opened a drop-in advice centre for residents at Elmbridge Parade where local residents can talk face-to-face with staff from council services and partners on topics including housing, benefits, managing debt, energy saving, and more.

The centre will be open Tuesday to Thursday from 10am to 4pm.

TARAs get winter warmth funding

Oakington, Charterhouse and Bayswater Court Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TARAs) were successful in their bids for funding from Hull City Council's Winter Warmth Community Grants scheme, which is part of the #HullTogether cost of living crisis initiative. Set up to help residents cope with the record price rises for energy and everyday items, the scheme is financed by the council Leader's Fund and donations from businesses which are active in the city. This includes Efficiency North and Fortem, who have collectively donated £83,000.

The scheme is facilitated by Forum, which coordinates community and voluntary organisations in the city. These groups, including the TARAs, were identified as best qualified to know where help was most needed because of their unique knowledge of their local areas. At Bayswater Court, which is home to a number of elderly and disabled residents, the TARA is organising a number of communal activities as well as distributing a number low energy use items such as slow cookers. Bedding, draught excluders and slow cookers are among the items being distributed by Charterhouse TARA and similarly by Oakington.

For more information about the support and advice you can get from #HullTogether visit www.hull.gov.uk/costofliving or email costofliving@hullcc.gov.uk

Advice and support during the cost of living crisis

Are you worried about the inflation rate, the cost of living with rising prices for food, energy bills, and transport? You are not alone.

Whatever your money worries, advice and guidance is available, so don't be afraid to ask.

There's a dedicated telephone number (01482) 300 303, website hull.gov.uk/costofliving, or email costofliving@hullcc.gov.uk



Tenants' Forum meetings

Date and guest speakers Tenants' Forum 2023

Date	Time	
12 January	10am - 12 noon	Business Insight and Quality Manager (Steve Shirra) and Performance Manager (Geoff Bradley)
14 February	11am - 3pm	Speakers to be confirmed
14 March	10am - 12 noon	Speakers to be confirmed

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