

# homingin

[www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/councilhousing](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/councilhousing)

March 2009



Tracy Short with her son and Dave Martin from our partner contractor in Wickhurst Drive, Portslade at their 'action day.' Tracy chairs the new residents' association set up by young parents on the estate. They organised repairs and outside work.

## In this issue

Tackling antisocial behaviour

**Residents help shape improvements and repairs**

Creating wildlife banks

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Looking after your tenancy



Brighton & Hove  
City Council

# Looking forward to a new start



Councillor Maria Caulfield

**“We’re aiming for no contract price increases on communal heating charges this year and all charges for garages and car parking to be frozen until 2010.”**

**As we move into the new financial year in April, we’ve been working with residents to set the budget and make sure our services are providing value for money.**

**Despite the challenges of having limited government funding available to spend on our homes, the council is expected to deliver a break-even budget for council housing.**

**We’re aiming for no contract price increases on communal heating charges this year and all charges for garages and car parking to be frozen until 2010.**

**By doing things differently we can also make savings, such as**

**the initiative on the Clarendon Estate in Hove where changing waste collection saved £40,000 and increased recycling.**

**We’re currently tendering for long-term contracts to improve council homes across the city. These are expected to save over £100 million over the next 30 years.**

**Through the Asset Management Panel, tenants from different backgrounds and areas have been looking at how improvements should be carried out, setting a Brighton & Hove Standard to achieve decent homes for all, and developing performance measures for the new contractors when they are appointed.**

**Improving the environment where you live is another priority, whether investing in energy efficiency or clearing up outside spaces. The ‘community pay back’ scheme has been well received by tenants and, together with our partners, we are taking action on antisocial behaviour.**

## Come to the City Assembly

Now is the time to book your place for the next meeting of The City Assembly. The meeting will be at Hove Town Hall, in the Banqueting Suite, on 6 May 2009, from 6.30pm until 9pm.

Brighton & Hove’s City Assembly is the new forum for residents’ associations across the city. Each association sends representatives to debate and vote on issues that affect everyone.

All tenants and residents are welcome to attend and watch the debates taking place.

For more information please call John Austin Locke (Policy, Performance and Community Participation Manager) on 01273 291008.

Homing In is produced by Brighton & Hove City Council’s communications team and the tenant editorial board. Contributors: Barry Hughes, Sam Griffiths, Beverley Weaver, Chris El-Shabba, Chris Kift, John Joliffe, Ray Freeman, Tina Urquhart, Nicky Jones, Tracy Short, Tom Whiting. If you have a story or an item to include in the next issue, please email [homingin@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:homingin@brighton-hove.gov.uk), call 01273 291037 or write to Homing In, Communications Team, Room G11, King’s House, Grand Avenue, Hove, BN3 2LS.

## Council and tenant meetings

**11 March** Housing Cabinet Member Meeting, Hove Town Hall, 4pm

**24 March** Housing Management Consultative Committee, Hove Town Hall, 3pm

**1 April** Housing Cabinet Member Meeting, Hove Town Hall, 4pm

**29 April** Housing Cabinet Member Meeting, Hove Town Hall, 4pm

**All council meetings are open to the public – and you can submit public questions. Call 01273 291058 for more information. View reports and decisions on our website at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)**



Sam with Asset Panel members

# Looking after your assets

**Sam Griffiths, one of 12 tenants and leaseholders from across the city selected to sit on The Asset Management Panel, talks about the work they are doing.**

The Asset Management Panel was set up by the council to consider the way improvements and repairs are carried out.

Since August 2008 we have been involved in some very interesting work through our monthly meetings. We provided input into the Brighton & Hove Standard, which is the standard that all empty properties must meet before being re-let. Some additions we made were the installation of washing machine plumbing and two double electrical sockets in all bedrooms.

Most of our time has been focused on the appointment of a new contractor to carry out future improvements and repairs on our homes. The panel helped develop performance indicators which the contractor's performance will be measured against.

Interviews for the new contractor are taking place during March and we will be involved. Some of us will assist with interviews and others will be making site visits to talk to tenants where contractors are working.

The Asset Management Panel will work on behalf of tenants in partnership with the council and the contractor. We'll have regular meetings to discuss the works that are carried out on our homes.

Our responsibility is to ensure that all tenants receive quality repairs and improvements. Over the coming months, we'll be making sure this is achieved.

## Talk about standards

From next year, the Tenant Services Authority is set to become the new regulator for council housing.

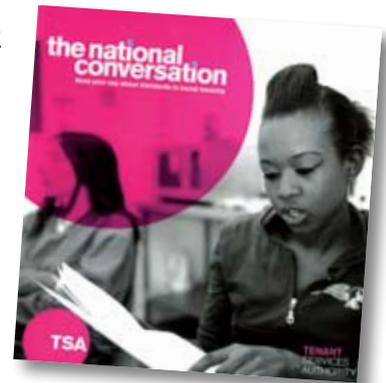
It will set the standards for how the council should manage your homes.

These standards are important as the new authority will be checking them and they will be about the services that are most important to tenants.

The new authority is currently undertaking the biggest consultation ever carried out with tenants, called 'the national conversation.'

It wants to find out what you think of your landlords and their services and what areas are the most important to get right.

You can take part by completing a questionnaire online at [www.nationalconversation.co.uk](http://www.nationalconversation.co.uk) or call the Tenant Services Authority on 0845 230 7000.



Cover of national conversation booklet

## Saving resources

**Energy efficiency and use of environmentally friendly materials will play a significant part in the improvement programme for council homes.**

**The council is currently inviting tenders from companies to provide long-term (10 year) contracts for capital investment, repairs and maintenance for council properties.**

**Contracts will include measures to reduce energy consumption and advice to residents on how to operate their homes and heating systems efficiently.**

**Builders will have to give a commitment to recycle as much waste as possible on site and use local, environmentally friendly materials wherever possible.**

**Any old materials being taken out of buildings will be recycled if possible or safely disposed of, with a minimum amount going to landfill.**

**Brighton & Hove's current kitchens and bathrooms programme includes a commitment from contractors to recycle and use recycled materials as much as possible.**

# Better support for sheltered



Lindfield Court

Changes to the city's sheltered housing service will give much better support to the larger schemes and provide two new dedicated site-based managers.

Residents lobbied the council to maintain a site-based service where individual managers look after their schemes.

The proposals were drawn up with resident representatives from the Sheltered Housing Action Group.

The council is the largest provider of sheltered housing in the city, with 24 schemes and 855 homes.

Councillor Maria Caulfield, said:

“By making changes we'll be able to fund two additional sheltered scheme managers.

“Site-based managers will be the bedrock of the new service and they will be working together to make sure all our sheltered housing schemes are equally covered.

## Quality service

“Our aim was to make improvements, retain staff, and make sure we provide a high quality, value for money service now and into the future.

“Now that we have agreed the future shape of the service, we have an excellent starting point to continue making improvements suggested by residents themselves.”

There is currently an imbalance in the amount of cover sheltered housing schemes receive, but by investing in support, the council can afford to redeploy services more fairly.

## Let us know your views

**'Older People and Community Safety' is the subject of a cross-party Scrutiny Panel set up by the council. The panel is investigating older people's concerns about community safety and suggesting changes to respond to those concerns.**

**We are now gathering information from older people, their carers and organisations and services that support them.**

**The Scrutiny Panel, chaired by councillor Mo Marsh, is looking at older people's feelings around being safe in the community, and investigating current research and good practice to see what action can be taken.**

**We'd like to hear from you with suggestions about how we can improve older people's safety in the community.**

**If you have information that you think will help the panel, call the scrutiny team on 01273 291062 or e-mail them on [scrutiny@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@brighton-hove.gov.uk)**

## Swallow Court open for business

A new community office in Whitehawk has brought together a number of different services, making it easier for residents to talk to staff about any issues they may have.

Residents led the way in the development of the new service at Swallow Court. It is the first of its kind in the city, providing repairs, police and community services under one roof.

Swallow Court has brought together staff from the council, our partner contractor and Sussex Police community support officers.

The new service is expected to speed up repairs, be more user-friendly and give residents more control of how and when work is carried out.



Tenant representative Chris El-Shabba, Inspector Bill Whitehead and councillor Maria Caulfield at the launch of the new office

# Payback makes communities safer

Over the past three years, estates across the city have benefited from the Community Payback scheme where offenders do unpaid work to put something back in the community.

Their work has made a real difference in improving the environment and making areas safer and has been much appreciated by residents.

Around two years ago, a pilot began which concentrated the scheme's efforts in one place to see what a difference it could make. The trial took place on the Bristol Estate, with residents and Sussex Probation Area organising the work.

It has been such a success that a similar scheme has just started in Whitehawk.

"Community Payback

supplements the council's regular maintenance work, but what's really good about it is that residents take the lead on the



**Community payback offenders at work**

work that needs to be done. The offenders get the opportunity to put something back into the community and learn skills such as gardening or painting,"

said environment improvement manager Matt Easteal.

Community Payback has also been operating in the Tarner neighbourhood where a large amount of greenery was cut back which was providing cover for street drinking and illegal drug taking. They have cleared away rubbish from Tarner Park and helped paint over graffiti.

Sonia Crozier, Chief Officer of Sussex Probation Area, said: "It's important that the work of Community Payback benefits communities which are harmed by crime.

"As well as making amends for the harm they have caused, offenders are being provided with practical skills which has proved successful in preventing reoffending."

## Bristol Estate improved

The first payback scheme started on the Bristol Estate and over the past year, almost 800 offenders have worked there.

Their activities have greatly improved the environment and reduced vandalism.

During their time on the estate they have cleared



**We've been working with residents to improve open spaces**

large overgrown hedgerows, refurbished the basements of 11 tower blocks, removed litter and graffiti, painted railings and steps, and cleared fly-tipped rubbish and overgrown allotments.

Ray Freeman, chairman of the Bristol Estate Residents Association, said: "The look and feel of the estate has changed massively since the project started in our area.

"We have been provided with a lot of free manpower and have been able to get big things done on a very small budget to improve the quality of life of people who live here.

"Residents feel the work has benefited them and made the community feel safer."

## What is Community Payback?

**Unpaid Work is a sentence available to courts. It is intended as a punishment and also as a means by which offenders can make amends to the community for the harm they have caused.**

**Community Payback offenders are at work in Sussex seven days a week. The type of work carried out includes:**

- landscaping and forestry
- grounds clearance
- building and maintenance
- painting and decorating
- litter picking and graffiti removal

# Estate bins save £40,000

Recent changes to waste collection on the Clarendon Estate in Hove have saved £40,000 which can be spent on other housing services.

The estate of 400 predominantly high rise flats is set close to Hove Station.

It was built with rubbish chutes running through the blocks. These were closed in favour of on street 1,100 litre Euro-bins dotted around the grounds and better recycling facilities.

The chutes were designed for a 1960s lifestyle when waste was typically only a few scraps of carrot peelings and other household waste.

## **New service**

By 2008 the chutes were often becoming blocked with pizza boxes, large rubbish sacks and even duvets.

Staff from the Lavender Street Housing Office worked with Cityclean, the estate cleaning service and residents on

the plans to close chutes. Staff also went round door to door to explain the revised rubbish collection scheme.

Now all waste is collected on the ground floor, recycling has increased dramatically and tenants can easily separate their waste for glass, paper and tins as well as other waste that cannot be recycled. It is hoped to include plastic recycling later in the year.

Housing manager Robert Keelan explained:

“The scheme helps the environment and will also save the council thousands of pounds a year in rubbish chute unblocking and repairs.

“Where residents are unable to get to the ground floor due to ill health or disability, our estate cleaning assistants will visit and collect their rubbish for them.”

For more information, call the Lavender Street Housing Office on 01273 293260.

## Recycling your rubbish is now easier

If you receive Cityclean's black box collection service, improvements mean you no longer have to sort all your recycling before putting it out.

Instead paper, cardboard, can and plastic bottles can all be put out together in the recycling box. You now only need to separate glass and batteries.

The changes follow the opening of a new materials recycling facility in Hollingdean where all recycling is sorted.

They complete the restructuring of refuse and recycling rounds in the city.

Councillor Geoffrey Theobald, the council's cabinet member for environment, said: “We know many residents are already committed to recycling and, by making it even easier for people, we will be able to increase the amount of waste that is put to good use and recycled.”



Hollingdean recycling centre

## Hard Times

**Tenants in Brighton & Hove are no strangers to difficult economic times, making do on less and coming up with good money saving ideas! Now is the time to share them. Homing In is inviting you to tell us about your best ways of saving money, making economies and just plain common sense ideas. Share your ideas with your fellow tenants and leaseholders and we will publish a selection of the best.**

**Send your ideas in to John Austin Locke, Lavender Street Housing Office, Lavender Street, Brighton, BN2 1JU or email [homingin@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:homingin@brighton-hove.gov.uk)**

# How to create a wildflower meadow

Barry Hughes talks about plans for a wildflower haven in the heart of the city.

**On the Sylvan Hall Estate we have had a number of attempts to create pocket wildflower meadows to encourage butterflies and other insects but we have been largely unsuccessful, so we sought the help of Sussex Wildlife Trust.**

**Alison Patrick, from the trust, came to see me and I showed her where we had scattered wildflower seeds in previous years. She made it quite clear that throwing seed over grassy areas will not work, as the grass needs to be removed in order for the seeds to grow.**

**The poor soil quality indicated that we should go for cornfield flower patches, as the seeds for these varieties can cope in less fertile ground.**

**Ideally we should have started our preparation in early autumn but seeds can be sown as late as April. With our grassy banks in their 'winter' state, we scarified areas of turf to remove the grass and planted a mixture of cornfield annuals (poppies, cornflowers, etc).**

**Fingers are firmly crossed and we await the arrival of our pocket meadows. Sussex Wildlife Trust publishes a number of helpful guides - they can be contacted on 01273 492630.**



Cowslips at Ashton Rise

## Craven Vale gets fruity

This spring the fledgling gardening club at Craven Vale will benefit from three fruit trees.

Cityclean, in partnership with aluminium recycler Alupro, has given a specially hardy apricot.

The donated tree was part of a larger scheme that rewards the city's residents for their efforts to recycle aluminium.

Craven Vale Community Association has also provided two apple trees.

Sue Hes from the Trust for Developing Communities, said: "We've done some planting around Craven Vale and repotted indoor plants in the community centre. Now we're gearing up for spring and would welcome new members."

Anyone interested in joining Craven Vale gardening club should contact Grant, Carol or Sue on 01273 571573.

## Blossoming young artists

**We're looking for budding young artists to create a picture for this year's City in Bloom poster competition.**

**The theme is 'Flowers in My Street' and posters will be used to promote this year's campaign.**

**There are some great prizes to be won and the overall winner will receive a trophy and have their work displayed all over the city.**

**Anyone aged 18 and under can enter - just design your poster on A4 or A3 paper.**

**Do not write any words on the design, but please make sure your name, age, address and, if applicable, your school and teacher's name is on the back.**

**Winners will be chosen in four age groups - up to 7 years old, 8-10, 11-15, and 16-18.**

**Send your work to Stella Richardson, Hollingdean Depot, Upper Hollingdean, Brighton BN1 7GA, by end of Friday 12 March.**

**Contact Stella on 01273 292217 for more information.**

# We stuck together to beat antisocial behaviour

**Residents took a stand and joined with the council and police to rid Craven Road of serious antisocial behaviour involving several families**

The Craven Vale estate in Brighton has always been a popular place to live. It's close to the city centre, and has great views and a sense of

community. Many residents have lived there for decades.

But over the past two years the atmosphere in a large part of the estate dramatically changed as a number of new households moved into the area and began to cause some of the most serious nuisance ever seen in the city.

Antisocial behaviour was occurring

all over the estate and included frequent incidents of shouting, screaming and abusive language.

Serious incidents included allegations of assaults and intimidation, break-ins, criminal damage, threats to kill, domestic violence, a bladed weapon in the street and public disturbances.

In one incident the police closed the road for some hours and sent in a specialist unit.

Although there were a number of households involved in the nuisance the problems centred on one particular address. It became the meeting point for all the people causing nuisance in the area.

The family acted as if they could do what they wanted and intimidated neighbours.

But fortunately some courageous residents decided that, despite their fears, something had to be done.

They contacted their housing officer and kept detailed records of what was happening.

The housing officer referred the case to the council's antisocial behaviour team, which worked closely with residents and agencies to take action and secure eviction.

The council's family intervention project also got involved and has continued to work with the family since the eviction. As a result there have been no recent complaints of antisocial behaviour and the family is responding well to support.

**If you're having trouble with antisocial behaviour, please contact your housing officer at your local housing office.**

## How residents took a stand

**Former Craven Road tenant Nicky Jones describes what it was like to live with antisocial behaviour on her doorstep.**

We moved to Craven Road in 2004 hoping that it was going to be a happy place to live after hearing good reports from people who lived there.

Unfortunately this was not to be and we moved out last August because of the constant noise and antisocial behaviour.

This escalated into physical assaults on my husband, daughter and myself and criminal damage to my car.

Residents felt vulnerable. They were worried about what may happen to them if they complained, but the council and police did not have enough evidence to take action.

As a family we decided to start compiling evidence. This meant getting up in the middle of the night



**Nicky Jones**

when the noise started to record what was going on.

One evening at least 20 young men sat on a bank drinking and swearing until the early hours of the morning.

Every time we went out we were sworn at and spat at, so we ended up going out in pairs with a member of

the family watching from indoors just in case anything happened.

This took a toll on us and led to my husband having a heart attack.

That's when we decided a move was the only option.

We have to stick together and support each other and in Craven Road we know that there is strength in numbers.

I hope residents are enjoying the peace and quiet now that this family has been evicted and wish them all a happy, peaceful and pleasant summer.

# Specialist support got results

**Richard Jordan, an experienced antisocial behaviour worker, handled the Craven Road case.**

**He said: “We are a small team that specialises in dealing with serious or complex cases.**

**“Our job is to end nuisance through using appropriate enforcement and support measures, and to provide protection for the community. To do this we work very closely with Sussex Police and other agencies.**

**“I was very shocked by this case and we began legal action immediately. We tried**

**hard to get the family to stop the nuisance and avoid court.**

**The police and parenting support workers from the Community Safety Team worked closely with the family and together we tried to improve things.**

**“In fact the situation only**

**got worse.**

**“So we went to court as soon as possible and were able to get an immediate eviction, which meant the family left before Christmas.**

**“We only got this result because some brave residents were willing to record events and give evidence. Without them we would not have got this outcome.**

**“It shows that when the council, police and others work closely together, with residents also prepared to make a stand, even the most serious of**

**cases can be resolved.**

**“This case has had a very damaging effect on the lives of many residents. But now the situation has completely transformed, with no incidents at all being reported for the past few months.”**



Richard Jordan

## Woodingdean evictions

Joint working between housing officers and neighbourhood police has resulted in immediate eviction of a tenant who was cultivating and supplying cannabis from a house in Bexhill Road, Woodingdean.

The antisocial behaviour housing officer at Oxford Street initiated regular meetings with the neighbourhood policing team for East area, which also involves housing association partners.

It meant that the housing officer had access to all the police documentation once it had been through the courts.

This provided the council

with vital evidence to secure a swift eviction.

The council’s witness statement also focused on the impact of cannabis cultivation and supply on the neighbourhood.

The eviction released a three-bedroom family home for the council to re-let.

There are two further eviction cases in the pipeline where tenants have been caught growing cannabis by the police, and the neighbourhood policing team is helping the council and a housing association with their tenancy enforcement action.

## Mediation – it’s free and confidential

Brighton & Hove Independent Mediation Service is a charity that has been working in the community since 1993.

The service is independent of all other agencies (such as housing or the police), confidential and free to local residents.

It is non-legal, will not tell you what to do, judge or give advice.

Mediation offers support to resolve problems between people in their community.

Disputes may be related to noise issues, pets, antisocial behaviour or shared spaces.

Neighbour disputes can cause considerable stress. The aim of mediation is to relieve this stress, allow people to be heard, and explore options on how to improve the situation.

Our mediators receive training, visit people at home and listen to everyone involved. They find out how things have been affecting them and help those involved identify possible solutions and improve understanding.

### Mediation is:

- a voluntary process based on goodwill
- a process where people compromise and bring creative solutions to problems
- as easy and short as the parties want to make it

Call us on 01273 700812 or contact your local housing office.



# More options in time of need

It's good to know that during difficult financial times, there is a service dedicated to helping you keep your home.

The council's housing options service works with voluntary organisations, health, probation, social services and other housing advice centres to offer direct help when people are threatened with homelessness.

Staff identify people at risk and give advice and support to help them stay in their home.

In situations where residents do have to move, the team provide help in finding alternative accommodation, usually in the private rented sector, or supported housing.

For tenants and leaseholders concerned about homelessness or who want to transfer, the service provides more options and choice.

Rachel Timms, service improvement manager for the housing options service, said: "In 2004 we changed the way we work to help people before they become homeless, rather than just dealing with it when it happens.

"Together with our partners we prevent homelessness for around 1,500

families and vulnerable adults a year."

Since the service refocused its efforts on prevention, the number of homeless applications has reduced from around 3,000 to 1,000 a year.

The numbers of households living in temporary accommodation has also fallen and, despite the increasing numbers of households at risk of homelessness due to the credit crunch, the number of homeless applications continues to fall.

To find out more about how housing options could help you, contact your housing officer.



**Our service helps people keep their homes.**

## Pat Forster

Many tenants in Brighton & Hove will have been saddened to hear of the death of Pat Forster.

Pat was active in the tenants' movement for years as chairman of Hollingdean Tenants' Association, as a founder member and chairman of the Brighton & Hove Association for Tenants with Disabilities and as a representative of tenants in the city.

Born in 1937 in London, Pat was a representative standard swimmer and not far from Olympic standard. She came to Brighton with Stan and lived most of her time in Hollingdean.

Fellow representatives will particularly remember her battling for the simple improvements that made the lives of people with mobility problems easier. She was a knowledgeable, determined advocate but always kept her sense of humour and knew when to turn on the charm.

We are lucky to have many active tenant volunteers but Pat is very much missed and we thank partner Stan for the lifelong support that helped her achieve so much.

## A more relaxing move

**New tenants will soon to be able to move in to their homes on any day of the week, making it a little easier to get organised and settle in.**

**We are working up a new scheme to allow tenants moving into council properties to collect keys and move in on any day of the week, rather than just on the Monday as it is now.**

**The change will give people moving from one council property to another more time to carry out their move before returning keys to their nearest housing office on the Monday they are due back. New tenants will get a few days to do extra jobs, such as decorating or laying carpets.**

**By allowing this extra time, residents leaving council property will also be able to remove all items from their previous home.**

**Work to change locks can now be spread out over the week and properties can be occupied sooner than they can at present.**

**For more information contact Ododo Dafe on 01273 293201.**

## Be a mystery shopper

We would like you to help us check that our services are customer and tenant focused.

If you are able to use a phone, follow a questionnaire and attend a half day training session, then you could become one of our 'mystery shoppers'.

Mystery shopping is a form of market research where individuals are trained to observe, experience and evaluate the customer service of an organisation.

Call Michelle Johnson,  
Community Participation Officer,  
on 01273 293360 for more information.  
Training and support will be given and  
all expenses reimbursed.

## A check up does you good

Most tenants will have received several visits during the first year of their tenancy. Many have not contacted us since, so we want to make sure everyone is okay.

During 2009, we aim to visit half of all our tenants and will visit the remaining people in 2010. We are calling these visits 'tenancy checks'.

The checks are there to find out how we can help you. We appreciate most people are happy in their homes and simply do not contact us because they don't feel there is anything we can do. Sadly, many people who would benefit from our help do not contact us.

Recently, we discovered a tenant living alone with no electricity supply and little furniture

Secondly, as a responsible landlord in an area where demand for social housing is very high, we need to be sure the legitimate tenant is living in each home. If they are not, then we may need to let it to someone else. Your council tenancy must be your main home.

Tenants also have a responsibility to look after their home.

You don't need to wait for our visit. If you think we can help you in any way, please contact your housing office.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

## Customer satisfaction survey

**Springfield Road resident Jenny Lyons (pictured) won a £100 Argos voucher in a customer satisfaction initiative organised by Breyer Construction.**

**Breyer, which employs 35 local staff, has been refurbishing the outside of around 500 properties, and distributed customer satisfaction surveys to find out what people thought of their work.**

**The company also offered a draw from the surveys to thank residents for taking the time to give them**

**their comments.**

**Tenant liaison manager Tony Philips said: "The information provided**

**by tenants is a good indication of how our staff are doing and helps us perform better.**

**The survey was a great success and we are planning to do another at Easter."**



# St James's House are doing it for themselves



**Chris Kift hands over the 'Notice to Manage' to Nick Hibberd, assistant director of housing management.**

For some time council tenants have had the right to manage the property and estate they live in.

St James' House in the High Street, Brighton, however, is the first to start the process of doing it.

Chris Kift, secretary of St James's House Residents' Association, said: "We looked into how we could manage our building of 120

flats, a laundry and car park.

"Our Independent Tenant Adviser conducted a survey of all the flats and the residents' committee made sure everyone was kept informed.

**"There was an overwhelming response for moving forward to self management.**

"The hard work starts now with the Residents' Committee being trained on how to run a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) and the legal requirements.

"We're hoping that St James's House will be able to employ its own cleaners, security staff and caretaker and take control of small repairs, laundry and car parking.

"The future looks good and, with the support of both the council and residents, we're moving forward to a new era of council/tenant involvement.

More information from Michelle Johnson on 01273 293360.



Sheltered housing residents came up with the idea of sharing mobility scooters to get them out and about, and the new scooters were put through their paces at Jubilee Court. The council and local organisations are supporting the free scheme, which was launched by council leader Mary Mears.

## New tenancy agreement

In April 2008 a residents' focus group was set up to review and update our tenancy agreement.

The current agreement was last revised over 10 years ago. The group recognised that they needed a clear, fair and easily understood agreement which took account of best practice and set out the responsibilities of tenants and the council.

The group presented the draft tenancy agreement to the Housing Management Consultative Committee and Area Panels were asked for comments in February.

In April, tenants will receive a copy of the draft.

It is important that we hear what you think and we welcome your comments. All views will be considered.

Councillor Maria Caulfield, cabinet member for housing, said: "As well as protecting tenants and setting out their rights, the revised tenancy agreement will strengthen the council's ability to take enforcement action where necessary."

A 28 day formal variation notice will then be issued to all tenants. This will have the effect of varying the terms and conditions of your agreement, so you will not need to sign a new one. We expect that the revised agreement will come into effect late summer 2009.

If you would like to receive the draft tenancy agreement in an alternative language or format, please contact your housing office now.

## Charging for damage

**Tougher action is to be taken to make sure tenants who cause damage to property pay for the repairs before they move out.**

**The move has come from tenants themselves, who are fed up with seeing money wasted on problems like vandalism, uncleared rubbish and damage done by unregulated alterations to properties.**

**They would rather see this money spent on things like new kitchens, roofs and security.**

**The council has had a 'recharge policy' in these circumstances for several years and is working with tenants and leaseholders to improve and enforce the policy and simplify procedures.**

**In addition, the new allocation policy will not allow tenants who have damaged their homes, or have an outstanding recharge, to transfer.**

## Tribute to Tina

Tina Urquhart, who has been representing tenants in west area for the past 25 years, is standing down due to ill health.

Inspired to do something to improve Downland Court, she started by chairing the residents association there and helped set up an after-school club

"One of the first things we did was set up a neighbourhood watch," said Tina. "Over the years I've been involved with just about everything to do with housing and I've met the Queen and been to 10 Downing Street, but I'm particularly proud of the community hall at Downland Court and helping to get somewhere safe for children to play."

# Think before you flick

The terrible loss of life in Australia last month was an extreme example of the devastation caused by fire.

Not the sort of thing you expect here, but late last year a blaze broke out on the balcony of an eighth floor flat in Brighton and the fire brigade said that it was probably caused by a lighted cigarette dropped from one of the flats above. Luckily no one was hurt but there was smoke damage and the heat smashed the windows.

This incident highlights two lessons - one, dispose of your cigarette in a thoughtful manner, and, two, be sure that any items

stored on your balcony, such as decorating materials, are protected.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service figures have revealed more people die in fires caused by smoking than in fires with any other single cause.

Particularly dangerous is falling asleep while a cigarette is still burning. Another and probably little known hazard is the use of peat with potted plants. A lighted cigarette thrown into the plant pot can cause the peat to smoulder.

**If there is a fire the advice is get out, stay out and call 999 straight away.**

## It's party time

**Residents at Churchill House sheltered housing started the new year in style thanks to the generosity of local businesses.**

**Local councillors raised over £1,700 from local firms, including a £250 donation from the Argus appeal and a £100 gift from the Hove-based Dorothy Jackson charity.**

**£1,000 provided four Christmas parties for older people in Hangleton & Knoll, at Churchill House, the 'Get Together Club', the 'Forget-Me-Not Club' and the 'lunch club' at St Richard's Church.**

**Residents at Churchill House also benefited from a further £770 raised to buy a new large TV and Nintendo Wii.**



Joyce Bavilliant, Darryl Eleazer, Margaret Prior from Churchill House in Hangleton

# eBenefits - a new way to claim

Brighton & Hove City Council's Housing Income Management Team and the Benefits Service have joined forces to introduce a new way of claiming Housing Benefit.

Trained staff help customers claim benefit as soon as they move to their new council property at a face to face interview.

Only relevant questions are asked of the customer to fast-track their claims and reduce rent arrears. Customers are advised prior to the interview of the evidence required to support their claim, which is then transferred automatically to the benefits system.

Average turnaround times have improved dramatically, with some claims taking as little as two days to process.

Sue Baker, Housing Income Management Team Leader said: "Our staff can now deliver a fast, effective service to customers, helping them through what can be a very difficult benefits process. We are able to pick up immediately on any other tenancy related issues for the customer and can point them in the direction of other support services."

The new scheme is due to be further improved by the introduction of a mobile solution so that staff can visit people in their own homes where they are unable to get into the office.

Please contact Sue Baker housing.incomemanagement@brighton-hove.gov.uk or Mo Lawless housing.benefits@brighton-hove.gov.uk for more information.

## A clean sweep of qualifications

**Sixteen of our Estates Service staff have recently passed their NVQ level 2's and BICS (British Institute of Cleaning Science) qualifications.**

**Tenants supported the council in offering formal training to staff to help them excel in their jobs.**

**Hilary Edgar, head of housing management, said: "Everyone has worked hard and we'd like to thank Merton College and trainer Martyn Butcher for their assistance."**

**A second group of estate assistants are in the process of being trained and a further group will be started later in the year which will include tenant representatives.**

**Funding for training came from the 'Train to Gain' scheme, so there was no cost to the council.**

**The successful candidates were Simon Allen, Peter Bartholomew, Lynn Bearman, James Bebb, George Browne, Hilary Edgar, Matthew Houghton, Sam Howell, Leigh Kent, Peter Lehany, Tony Ormiston, John Robertson, Sam Sheehy, Vaclav Stromsik, Stephen Walmsley and Lisa Whipp.**



Estates staff with their certificates

## Young people's drop-in

Brighton & Hove Youth and Connexions Service now run a young people's drop in for 11-19 year olds at The Pankhurst Haven, Pankhurst Avenue on Thursdays from 4.30-6.30pm and at The Vale Community Centre (formally known as The Shed), Hadlow Close on Fridays from 3.30-5.30pm.

They offer information, support and advice on issues such as:

- looking for work and CVs
- education and training
- bullying
- sexual health
- housing
- drug and alcohol use

There are free drinks and snacks, plus quizzes, art, cooking and games.

Those aged 20-25 are also welcome to come along and get information about housing, benefits and job searches.

Find out more from Caroline on 07870 168947.

# Aiming high on performance

We are always keen to share with you news of our performance in delivering services.

The council publishes information about targets that you help set for us, and these can be viewed at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hm-performance](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hm-performance).

Our performance figures are routinely reported to the Housing Management Consultative Committee, on which tenant

representatives from across the city sit, and to the Housing Cabinet.

Latest figures, from December 2008, show we are collecting 97.9% of all rent due. This is up on a year ago when we were collecting 97.1%.

It may not sound like a big change but to improve the collection rate by 0.01%, we have to increase collection rate by £43,000.

For emergency repairs we are now completing 97.9% on time compared with 88.3% a year ago.

On gas servicing 99.7% of all properties now have a valid gas safety certificate and we're taking action to make sure we gain entry to the 29 outstanding properties that are in need of a service.

The Estates Service Tenant Monitoring Group

has been focusing on cleaning performance. We're completing 99% of all cleaning tasks and are working on further improvements.

If you have any questions about performance or would like to know how we are doing in any particular area, please call John Austin Locke, on 01273 291008 or email [homingin@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:homingin@brighton-hove.gov.uk)



**Brighton & Hove Mayor, councillor Garry Peltzer Dunn, with residents at Somerset Point sheltered housing.**

## Wii love it at Somerset Point

The Mayor of Brighton & Hove, councillor Garry Peltzer Dunn, tried his hand at Nintendo Wii at a tournament held at Somerset Point sheltered housing flats in Kemp Town.

Around 45 residents from sheltered housing across the city took part.

The tournament was organised by Age Concern Brighton & Hove, as part of their healthy living campaign. There have been a number of sessions and over 150 residents have been playing Nintendo which has led to them forming a new ten pin bowling league – and next they're planning a snowboarding competition.

## Tenant Compact Review

This year the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group will be reviewing the Tenant Compact.

The compact sets out how councillors, council committees and officers, all the tenants' associations, area panels and other groups will work together.

There will be a chance for all residents, whether you are involved with an association or not, to get involved.

If you haven't done so already you can read the current Tenant Compact document on the website and contact your community participation officer with any comments. Go to [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/resident-involvement](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/resident-involvement).

We look forward to hearing from you.

For general questions call John Austin Locke on **01273 291008**. Thank you.

## Useful contacts

### Housing Offices

Central (Lavender Street) **293260**  
Community Participation Officer  
Trevor Jones **293265**

### Brighton East

Whitehawk  
(Manor Place Office) **293200**  
Moulsecoomb  
(Selsfield Drive) **293171**  
Community Participation Officer  
Peter Mustow **296639**

### West

(Victoria Road) **293377**  
Community Participation Officer  
Jane White **293374**

### North & East

(Oxford Street) **293230**  
Community Participation Officer  
John Bain **292365**

Repairs Hotline **0800 052 6140** or  
text 'repairs' to this number: **07786 204352**  
There is a voicemail option for  
tenants calling out of hours

### Carelink **673105**

Housing Benefit **292000**  
Housing Income Management Team  
**293224**

Noise Patrol **293541** (operates weekends  
Fri/Sat & Sat/Sun between 10pm & 3am)

Noise Nuisance **292929** (or out of office  
emergency **292229**)

Police **0845 6070999**

Community Safety Team **291099**

Women's Refuge **622822**

Victim Support **234009**

Community Resource Centre **606160**

Community Grants **296746**

Estates service **293170**

Abandoned vehicles **292929**

## Open market revamp

A planning application is expected this spring for the multi-million pound transformation of Brighton's open market. Plans include new market stalls, workshops for craftspeople and 86 affordable homes.

Find out more at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/business](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/business)

## Translations

Translation? Tick this box and take to any council office.

ترجمة؟ ضع علامة في المربع وخذها إلى مكتب البلدية. Arabic

অনুবাদ? বক্সে টিক চিহ্ন দিয়ে কাউন্সিল অফিসে নিয়ে যান। Bengali

需要翻譯? 請在這方格內加別, 並送回任何市議會的辦事處。Cantonese

ترجمه؟ لطفاً این مربع را علامتگذاری نموده و آن را به هر یک از دفاتر شهرداری ارائه نمایید. Farsi

Traduction? Veuillez cocher la case et apporter au council. French

需要翻譯? 請在這方格內划勾, 并送回任何市议会的办事处。Mandarin

Tłumaczenie? Zaznacz to okienko i zwróć do któregoś z biura samorządu lokalnego (council office). Polish

Tradução? Coloque um visto na quadrícula e leve a uma qualquer repartição de poder local (council office). Portuguese

Tercümesi için kareyi işaretleyiniz ve bir semt belediye bürosuna veriniz Turkish

other (please state)

This can also be made available in large print, Braille or on audio tape

## Having trouble finding a secure and guaranteed parking space?



Did you know we have available garages and car parking spaces for rent in your area?

For price and availability, please contact...

**The Car Park & Garages Team**

Tel 296646 or email  
[parking.domestic@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:parking.domestic@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

Please note that these are not free spaces and must be used for parking vehicles only