

Contact

THE MAGAZINE FOR MANSFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL TENANTS



Meet Marie Still a tenant at 100

**Universal Credit –
are you prepared?**



See page 3

www.mansfield.gov.uk/housing



Mansfield
District Council

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Meeting your needs

We may be able to provide this information in larger print, in Braille, on audio tape, on CD or in another language. If you'd like to find out more please contact **01623 463463**, minicom **01623 463444** or email **mdc@mansfield.gov.uk**

Welcome to Contact!

There's plenty of good news in this edition of Contact and also important information – like the gradual roll-out of Universal Credit.

It pays to be prepared for these changes and we've prepared for it by taking on an extra member of staff to help tenants needing support to manage their finances and expanding the skills and knowledge of our staff to help deal with these important changes.

You may have noticed there is a lot of structural work taking place at the Civic Centre which means we are having to make changes and transfer some housing services to a town centre location in March. This is designed to be a temporary arrangement but may become permanent if it works better for tenants that way. See Page 3 for more details about this.

Elsewhere, a new report reveals how Mansfield's housing services compare with other UK housing authorities. It delivered encouraging results, particularly in relation our speedy repairs and re-lets.

The HouseMark report also highlighted a need to focus on planned maintenance and you



Barry Answer

Portfolio Holder for Housing

can find out in these pages where planned work will take place in the coming months.

There's also news about Town View, our £8.6m housing scheme currently under construction, which is going to provide fantastic purpose-built affordable accommodation for over-55s and will be a great opportunity to downsize from a larger council property.

Finally as, winter bites, I'm proud to highlight the superb work our staff do to help homeless people in this district.

Thanks to their dedicated efforts and close partnership working with the Mansfield Homeless Network and charities such as Framework, the number of rough sleepers in this district has gone down and we've been able to lay on an additional night shelter over the winter months, which goes beyond the severe weather minimum we have to provide.

I think it really shows how much we care about our most vulnerable residents.

Half size allotments available

Fancy growing your own food? Full and half-sized allotment plots are now available in Mansfield Woodhouse.

Mansfield District Council has cleared five plots at the Whinney Hill site and is offering them as 10 half-sized plots for £21 a year. Full and half plots are also available at

Priory Road Allotments in Mansfield Woodhouse.

Each plot comes with a free compost bin and the council will also rotate them once to get gardeners started.

Mansfield District Council provides 614 allotments at 14 sites across the district. To register for a plot, call



01623 463292 and for Mansfield Woodhouse, call **07873 502470** or email **phil.cooper@mwgha.org**.



Prepare now for Universal Credit



Universal Credit (UC) is a means tested benefit for people of working age which is being gradually rolled out across the country.

It combines and replaces six existing benefits: Income Support, Income based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

In Mansfield, some single claimants may already have transferred to UC and it will be introduced more widely to working age claimants, who have had a change in their

circumstances or make a new claim, within the district from September this year. Any remaining claimants, who have not transferred to UC in this way, will be transferred in 2020.

UC is paid monthly in arrears and households are expected to manage payment of their rent. It normally takes five weeks before the first payment. Claimants can, however, apply for an advanced payment which has to be paid back over a year.

To receive UC, you must have a bank account. Ensure it allows direct debits, so that you can pay your rent. The council can help you set this up.

Start paying a little bit extra on your rent now

If you are not already in arrears, paying extra rent will put your account in credit and help cover the five-week period while you are waiting for your first UC payment.

If you are struggling to pay your rent, and would like benefits or budgeting advice, contact the housing office on 01623 463842. Full details about UC can be found at www.gov.uk/universal-credit.

New location for housing services



Mansfield District Council is making some changes to its frontline housing services due to the refurbishment work at the Civic Centre.

From the beginning of March the Housing Services counter at the Civic Centre will close and face-to-face advice on homelessness and housing (Housing Solutions), and housing allocations (Housing Choice and Homefinder), will be delivered at the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) in the town centre. The address is 16 Regent Street, Mansfield, NG18 1SS.

Advice will still be available by phone on **01623 463121** or **463125** for Housing Solutions and on **01623 463402** for Housing Choice and Homefinder service.

If customers prefer a home visit or would like to meet at an alternative location, we will always try to accommodate this, providing there are housing officers available and we have sufficient notice.

Sarah Troman, Director of Communities at Mansfield District Council, said: "As always, we try to provide residents with the best service and we're making these changes to prevent disruption to our customers. Moving our frontline staff to the CAB is a trial project but if it proves successful and effective, this change could become permanent."

Rooms with a view

Good progress is being made on the construction of the council's £8.6m Town View housing scheme for people aged over 55.

Six of the bungalows and 32 of the apartments will be rented by the council at an affordable rent (80% of the market rent)

The former General Hospital site – for years an eyesore – will see 42 one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments and 12 two-bedroom bungalows built in secured, landscaped grounds.

They are expected to be ready for occupation in May.

All the properties have been designed either to accommodate wheelchair users or to be adaptable for wheelchairs to accommodate the possible future needs of tenants.

The development includes a community hub in the apartment block consisting of a communal lounge, dining room, kitchen, activity rooms and outside terrace.

Six of the bungalows and 32 of the apartments will be rented by the council at an affordable rent (80 per cent of a market rent) via the council's Homefinder service. Bidding for these is likely to start in March and people downsizing from an under-occupied council home will score more highly in this process.



The remaining 10 apartments will be designated as Extra Care Units, and these tenancies will be allocated via Nottinghamshire County Council's allocation process.

The remaining six bungalows will sold as Older Persons Shared Ownership. They are expected to go on the market in March.

Living independently – at 100 years old

Meet the amazing Marie Rowley, probably one of Mansfield District Council's oldest tenants.

She still lives independently in her two-bedroomed bungalow at the Poppy Fields Extra Care sheltered housing complex where she recently celebrated reaching her centenary.

Able to do much of her own personal care, cook light meals and get about with the help of a wheeled frame, Marie has support from carers and wears an alarm call pendant so she can

speak to a central control room at any time of the day or night if she has any concerns.

A regular at the Poppy Fields Luncheon Club, she spends her days reading, retaining a keen interest in poetry which she continues to write in a meticulously neat script and recites with a fluent gusto.

Sharon Mays, (pictured) a Council Assist Response Officer, said: "Marie is amazing – it's really unusual for someone to be living independently at such an age but she manages very well.



Older people prefer to be in their own homes and places like the Poppy Fields enable this to happen."

Marie was born in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and worked as a coal board ledger clerk. She married three times and has two sons, one grandchild and a great grandchild.

And her secret to a long life? "Not overdoing things – don't rush things, you are not missing anything."

Many happy returns, Marie!



Is it time to downsize?

Have your children flown the nest? Perhaps you are finding your now under-used family home hard work to manage and more costly to maintain.

As you approach your senior years, are the stairs in your home are getting more difficult to face? Along with the garden...

Or you feel like you might in future need more support and company.

Mansfield District Council has a number of sheltered housing complexes for the over 60s across the borough which offer safe and comfortable one-bedroom accommodation on one floor.

Many have been refurbished and offer self-contained apartments each with intercom door entry, full kitchen facilities and full bathrooms, often with walk-in showers. They are heated by district heating, gas central heating and air source heating.

A Careline alarm service is fitted and available to all residents and Assist Staff visit each complex throughout the week to help with tenants' problem.

Most of these sheltered housing homes are located on main bus routes and all them are close

to local amenities, such as supermarkets and shops.

They also have their own laundries, free for all residents to use, and a communal lounge

Any social housing tenant wanting to downsize is given priority on the Homefinder lettings waiting list.



where regular activities take place, so you will never be short of company or short of something to do.

So if you feel ready to move to a safe environment with like-minded people and feel part of a community, give Homefinder a call on **01623 463402** to check the availability of our sheltered housing.

Café in the Hub



A café – open to anyone – is now open at Poppy Fields, Mansfield District Council's extra care housing scheme.

It runs at the Poppy Fields Community Hub, Monday to Friday, 9am to 2pm, serving breakfasts, snacks and drinks, and good value, freshly cooked, set-menu lunches, made on site by Catering Academy.

Lunches, served from noon to 2pm, are £3.95 for main courses, £1 each for soup and desserts or £4.95 for two courses. Meals must be pre-ordered by calling **07867 492226**.

There is a Lunch Club every Tuesday for Poppy Fields residents but others can join in if there is space.



Mansfield scores well for its housing service

Research has taken place to see how Mansfield District Council's housing services compare with the services of other housing authorities around the country.

Mansfield's results for 2016-17 show the council's housing services come out well in a number of areas.

The research covered areas such as the time it takes to re-let a property, how quickly repairs are done, how satisfied tenants are with their property and neighbourhood and how well we handled complaints.

The benchmarking survey was carried out by HouseMark which allows the council to compare its performance against other councils that own and manage their own housing stock in England, Scotland and Wales – from borough and district councils to large city councils and London boroughs.



Sarah Troman, Mansfield District Council's Interim Director of Communities



On the whole Mansfield scores well.

The survey showed that our tenants are generally very happy with their neighbourhoods and that we also have very good turnaround times for re-letting properties – and I am pleased to say these are continuing to improve.

When things need repairing, we repair them quickly. However, we need to look at our planned

maintenance and replacement programmes as the survey shows we tend to fix things once they have broken rather than replacing or upgrading items before they break and need an urgent repair.

This is an area we are working to improve on in the coming year, and there are various upgrade and replacement programmes planned for things like roofs, doors and soffits and fascias.



Survey results

Re-let times

Mansfield was among the top performing authorities with an average turnaround time for re-letting properties of 22 days compared with 85 for the worst authority and 12 for the best authority. It consequently also scored well on the percentage of rent lost due to properties lying empty.

Rent arrears as a % of rent due

Mansfield was slightly better than average on the level of rent arrears with 3.3 per cent of total rents due not paid, compared with 10 per cent in the worst performing authorities and 0.9 per cent is the best. However, other authorities may have been affected by the introduction of Universal Credit which is due to be rolled out more widely in Mansfield from September 2018.

Repairs

Mansfield was among the quickest authorities to complete repairs, taking an average of 6.6 days, compared to 18.7 days for the worst performing authorities and 4.8 days for the best, with 92 per cent of repairs being completed on the first visit.

Planned maintenance and major works

The district's costs on planned maintenance work were the lowest in the country – £550 compared with £4,420 for the highest spending authority. The council was also one of the lowest spenders on the major works, spending 4.5 per cent of its service provision budget, compared with 17.8 per cent for the highest spending authorities and below an average of 6 per cent.

For satisfaction with day-to-day repairs, Mansfield achieved

97.5%

making it one of the best performers in the country.

Calls answered

Mansfield scored well, being the third best in the country with 97 per cent of calls answered. The average length of time it took to answer calls in Mansfield was 40 per cent above the average.



Satisfaction

Mansfield is among the top performing authorities for satisfaction with its overall housing services, with 87 per cent of tenants saying they were very or fairly satisfied.

For satisfaction with day-to-day repairs, Mansfield achieved 97.5%, making it one of the best performers in the country.

Satisfaction among residents was also in the above average range for the quality of their home (86 per cent) and that their views are listened to (71 per cent). Satisfaction with their neighbourhood, achieved 84 per cent which was in line with the national average.

The HouseMark figures for satisfaction were based on the results of the council's Survey of Tenant and Residents (STAR) report and by carrying out individual questionnaires following repairs or after letting a property. More about the results of the STAR report and the council's Annual Report on Housing will be published later this year.

Helping our vulnerable residents

The number of people sleeping rough in the district has fallen by 45 per cent according to a snapshot survey in November 2017.

That snapshot count recorded 15 people sleeping rough in Mansfield compared to 27 the previous year.

This reduction has been put down to intensive outreach work funded by the council and delivered by one of our partners, the charity Framework, to support rough sleepers with complex needs.

In addition the council helped organise an extra winter shelter over six nights during Christmas and New Year. This is on top of the emergency shelter the council has a duty to provide whenever the weather dips below 0C for three consecutive nights.

Another effective part of our work is homelessness prevention, a service which also goes beyond the council's statutory duty. This team supported 858 people in 2017 – a 30 per cent increase in this work.

The council has 44 units of temporary emergency accommodation to help those in most urgent need who find themselves without a roof.

Since 2016, the council has worked closely with a newly created group, Mansfield Homeless Network, to address homelessness in the district.



The STAR report can be found on the council's website at:
www.mansfield.gov.uk/getinvolved

Looking to start up in business?

Whatever business you dream of starting this programme can help! Transform your idea into a business with the help and support of a FREE* great package of training and funding.

On this programme, you'll get to meet other like-minded people and benefit from the expertise of a company with over 30 years' experience in helping people start businesses.

Support will be on hand to provide you with advice every step of the way.

Register your interest for this fully funded opportunity here:

www.mansfield.gov.uk/startup

* THE HELP AND SUPPORT IS PROVIDED AS A FUNDED SERVICE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NBV ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS AND IS SUBJECT TO ELIGIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY



Mansfield
District Council



European Union
European Structural
and Investment Funds

Get involved and make your voice matter

Mansfield District Council has changed the way it involves tenants in its landlord activities. It has also improved the way in which tenants can provide feedback, including how they can make a complaint.

We will continue to develop and support resident-led partnerships and community groups which work to improve their neighbourhood.

Why not check out how you can apply for council funding to support community initiatives at www.mansfield.gov.uk/getinvolved or speak to your local housing officer.

We also pledge to continue to improve the ways in which you can provide feedback

Opportunities

We offer a diverse range of new opportunities for tenants to get involved including:

- Neighbourhood champions
- Mystery shoppers
- Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

Look out for our range of "How to" leaflets on the council's website at www.mansfield.gov.uk/getinvolved.

Did you know?

70%

of tenants are satisfied that the council listens to their views and acts on them.

88%

of all complaints were responded to within the target.

Your Housing Services Panel

The Housing Services Panel is made up of volunteers who scrutinise and try to improve the services delivered by the council in its role as landlord.

In addition to holding the council's landlord service to account, panel members can make recommendations to ensure the council provides a better service to tenants.

Improvements recommended by the panel and implemented include:

- Reducing the number of days to respond to complaints from 15 days to 10
- Increasing the staff available to support tenants experiencing financial difficulties
- Producing a clear set of service standards which explain what tenants can expect from the council and what the council expects of tenants in return. These can be made available on request.

If you are interested in becoming a panel member, see www.mansfield.gov.uk/getinvolved

Government seeks your views on social housing

The Government is inviting tenants across the country to take part in a national survey about issues and concerns regarding social housing.

The Department for Communities and Local Government wants to gain an understanding of how there can be a more effective voice for tenants.

Tenants wishing to give their views can take part in an online questionnaire which will be open from 31 January at: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/tenants2017>. Views expressed will help form part of a Government discussion document to be published in the spring.

Neighbourhood walks

Estate-based walkabouts are held regularly to give tenants and residents the chance to meet up with housing officers to discuss issues affecting their neighbourhood.

If you would like to join the walkabouts please call the housing team on **01623 463463** or your local housing officer. Dates from August onwards will be advised in the next edition of Contact.



Estate walkabouts

Bellamy Road area

13 June, 2pm

Meet at Tuxford Court

Brick Kiln Lane area

13 July, 2pm

Meet at Longstone Way

Bull Farm

7 June, 4, 10am

Meet at the shops on Peel Crescent

Burlington Drive

26 July, 10.30am

Meet outside William Ireland Hall

Dundee Drive area

19 July, 10.30am

Meet outside Dundee Drive Community Centre

Eakring Road area

6 June, 2pm

Meet at Reindeer Pub car park

Garibaldi Road area

4 July, 10am

Meet outside shops on Garibaldi Road, Forest Town

Ladybrook A

12 June, 10am

Meet at the bottom of Armstrong Road

Ladybrook B

26 June, 10am

Meet at the end of Jenkins Avenue

Ladybrook C

3 July, 10am

Meet outside the One Stop at junction of Devon Drive and Westfield Lane

Ladybrook D

17 July, 10am

Meet at Harrop White Road shops

Ladybrook E

24 July, 10am

Meet at junction of Drayton Avenue and Westfield Lane

15 May, 10am

Meet at Redgate Close

Lawrence Avenue area

7 June, 10.30pm

Meet outside Park Road Resource Centre at 10.30am

Lower Ladybrook

22 June, 10am

Meet at Civic Centre Reception

Nursery Court

15 June, 10am

Meet at Nursery Court

Portland Street area

31 July, 10am

Meet at the bottom of Lord Street

29 May, 10am

Meet at Stockwell Court

Ravensdale area

6 July, 10am

Meet at Sandy Lane GP surgery

Sherwood Court

17 May, 10am

Meet outside Sherwood Court centre

South Oak Tree Lane

23 May, 2pm

Meet at Roston Court

The Woodlands

18 May, 2pm

Meet at Harold Harvey Hall Upper Oak Tree

27 June, 2pm

Meet at Willingham Court car park

Vale Road area

7 June, 10.30am

Meet outside Park Road Resource Centre

Warsop

6 June, 10am

17 May, 13 June, 2.30pm

Meet at Warsop Town Hall

Meet our team

Our team of housing officers can be seen out and about across the district on a daily basis. The team is available to help tenants and liaise with organisations to solve issues.

Tenancy services is undergoing a staffing restructure and this will affect the way in which some services are delivered. A full update will be included in the next edition of Contact.



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Lorraine Spalding

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Ian Aspinall

Poppy Fields and ASRA properties

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t: 01623 463078

Get in touch

- ➔ Mansfield Housing Office
- ➔ Poppy Fields Extra Care
- ➔ Welfare rights/money advice
- ➔ Housing Repairs Contact Centre
- ➔ Out of hours emergency contact (repairs)
- ➔ Ashfield and Mansfield Homefinder
- ➔ Central Control
- ➔ Housing Advice Service
- ➔ Money Advice Officer
- ➔ Welfare Rights Officer
- ➔ Right to Buy/Leaseholders Officer
- ➔ Tenant Involvement Officer

01623 463129
01623 463076
01623 463147
01623 463463
01623 463050
01623 463402
01623 463341
01623 463125
01623 463451
01623 463450
01623 463062
01623 463485



Gas checks are for YOUR safety

It is really important that the council carries out checks on the safety of gas appliances in its rented homes each year.

Because these checks are vital to ensure our tenants' safety – as well being a legal requirement for us as a landlord – we have changed our system to make sure we can deliver the checks.

Tenants will be sent a letter giving two weeks' notice of an appointment to check appliances. If this date is unsuitable, you can contact the Gas Team to rearrange it to make it easier for you to keep.

For example, we can provide morning or afternoon slots, or a slot which avoids school run times, and if you let us have your mobile phone number, we can also text you a reminder 48 hours before the appointment so you don't forget it.

On the day of the inspection tenants need to ensure that the Gas Operative can get to the boiler easily and that there is some credit on the gas meter in order to carry out the safety checks.



Please also be aware that safety checks have to be carried out even if the meter has been isolated and capped.

“ We can provide morning or afternoon slots, or a slot which avoids school run times and text you a reminder to your phone ”

You must keep the appointment because if we can't gain entry, we could be forced to take legal action to ensure the checks are done – and any court action could result in a hefty £1,000 bill for you.

Tenants who miss the appointment will be left a card asking them to contact the Gas Team urgently to rearrange an appointment. If you don't get in touch within ten days, a letter will be sent informing you of our intention to pursue court action to gain entry to the property.

More homes in line for new heating systems

District heating schemes at Skegby Lane, Newcastle Street, Park Hall Road and at Beech Court are to be decommissioned between April 2018 and 2020.

They will be replaced with individual gas supplies and central heating systems in each property. This will give each household control of their heating usage and costs.

The council will also carry out the upgrade of the current boilers in Vale Court, Sherwood Court and Melville Court.

These properties will continue to have communal heating but from a more reliable and cost-effective system as they will be connected to an individual gas supply and boiler.

To keep up to date with all the news follow us on Twitter:
@MDC_News and Facebook: **www.facebook.com/mymansfielduk**

