

Contact

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE FOR MANSFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL TENANTS



Celebrating
**new
homes**
See page 3



Let's do
lunch!

See page 6

www.mansfield.gov.uk/housing



Mansfield
District Council

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Want to contribute?

Do you have any suggestions or ideas for articles you'd like to see in Contact? If so, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at MarketingandCommunications@mansfield.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you can write to the Marketing and Communications Team, Civic Centre, Chesterfield Road South, Mansfield NG19 7BH.

Foreword

Welcome to the latest issue of Contact. This winter edition is packed with news and events from across the community.

It seems that there's a whole lot of community spirit across the district. Read about the positive work taking place on the Bellamy Road Estate, where there's a host of community activities taking place. And check out the article about how volunteering changed the life of Housing Panel member, Sharon Brown.

If your mind is set on making a few New Year's resolutions then you'll find tips on how to get your finances into tip top shape on page 11.

And if you fancy taking up a new hobby then check out our feature about the groups and volunteers who are currently



Hayley Barsby

Head of Housing,
Mansfield District Council

helping out on the allotments and parks around the district.

While we're talking resolutions, we are promising to ensure that we continue to focus on delivering excellent services to you. There are so many positive projects underway as you'll see on page three, which outlines all the news of our latest housing developments.

We're looking forward to a positive year ahead and wish you all the best for 2016!

Hayley Barsby
Head of Housing Services

To keep up to date with all the news follow us on Twitter: [@MDC_News](https://twitter.com/MDC_News) and Facebook: www.facebook.com/mymansfielduk



Winter tips

There's no mistaking that winter is now with us. Here are a few tips on how to stay warm at home:

- Heat the main room to between 18 – 21 degrees and keep the rest of the home to a steady of 16 degrees
- Set the heating timer to come on before you plan to get up in the morning
- During really cold spells set the heating to come on earlier rather than increasing the temperature
- Ensure you drink warm drinks regularly throughout the day
- Heat your bedroom just before going to bed and switch it off when you go to bed
- If you use electric blankets make sure you check them regularly and don't use faulty blankets.

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

Celebrating **new homes**

Keys have been handed over for homes in Forest Town. The council, working with developer, Wates Living Space, have built 17 brand new bungalows on Flint Avenue.

The homes, which include a one-bedroom bungalow and 16 two-bedroom bungalows, have been designed for those over the age of 60. Four were specifically designed for wheelchair users.

The development has included the refurbishment of the community centre and landscaping in communal areas.

Executive Mayor, Kate Allsop, cut a ceremonial ribbon to mark the opening of the homes.



“ The development has included the refurbishment of the community centre and landscaping in communal areas. ”

All of the new homes have been let through the Homefinder service for those aged over 60, including those living in council accommodation and wishing to downsize.

The council has also recently developed houses at Bellamy Road in Mansfield and is currently developing homes at Centenary Road in the town. A further 20 properties are planned as a second phase on this same site and 12 family houses are also being built in Pye Avenue, Mansfield.



Spotlight on...



Cllr Barry Answer
Portfolio Holder for Housing

Cllr Barry Answer has been Portfolio Holder for Housing since May 2015. He was an elected councillor between 2003 and 2011. We put a few questions to him...

Q What does your role involve?

Tenant involvement, housing revenue account business plan, housing needs, homelessness, housing allocations, housing stock, disabled facilities grants, private sector housing.

Q What are your main aims over the next year?

My aim is to ensure we deliver the best service possible. We have a challenge ahead and not least because of the changing horizon as a result of Universal Credit, Right to Buys and rent reduction

but I know how important an asset social housing is and I am committed to providing more.

Q What do you think are the most positive things happening across the district's housing?

We are working hard to deliver and increase the provision of affordable housing. We are working with partners to provide an excellent offer for our older residents so they can live at home longer. We also know how important good accommodation is for families and we are working hard to ensure young people have access to affordable housing.



We are committed to ensuring our customers are getting value for money by reinvesting the rent we collect into improving the management and maintenance of homes.

A survey carried out last autumn shows that 81.2% of our customers believe they get value for money for the rent they pay. This was an improvement on the survey undertaken in 2013 where 78% of customers believed that they got value for money.

Each year Mansfield District Council, along with other social housing providers, sets the level of rent it can charge for your home based on a formula set by Central Government. This would normally mean you would see a rise in your rent.

However as part of the Summer Budget 2015 the Chancellor announced rents in social housing would be reduced by 1% a year for four years.

Are you getting

VALUE

★★ for ★★

MON£Y?

What does this mean for you?

From April you will see a reduction in the amount of rent you pay each week. For example if your current rent is £72, from April you will pay £71.28. This may vary if you claim Housing Benefit.

While the council will get less money in rental payments as a result, we would like to reassure our customers that we will continue to work hard to provide a good quality service.



However, we can only achieve this if all the rent that is due is paid in full and on time. In 2015 we collected 99% of all the rent that was due. While the majority of our customers pay their rent on time some struggle to do so.

We are here to help

If you do find you are struggling to pay your rent and other bills then we can provide advice from budgeting to claiming benefits. If you are facing financial difficulties, don't bury your head in the sand, you should contact your housing officer straight away by calling **01623 463463**.

Making a difference

Sharon Brown tells us what it's like to be a member of the housing panel

When Sharon Brown volunteered to join the council's housing services panel little did she realise how much she would gain from of it.

"You know what, it gave me my life back," she said. "I couldn't work after having an accident and so joining the housing group gave me a whole new focus."

At that point she was already a member of her local tenants and residents group in Mansfield Woodhouse and so decided to go along to one of the panel meetings to give it a try. "I loved it, joined and three years on I'm still enjoying it. I like that together we make a difference."

The panel meet once a month to look at the council's housing services and look at ways of improving them. They look at issues that affect tenants across the district and make suggestions on how they can be solved. Over the past year the group has examined the complaints system and, among other things, also looked at ways of improving how homes are let.

"We're able to look at things with a fresh pair of eyes and give officers advice from the tenants' point of view," added Sharon. "It's really satisfying to know that we are working with the

council to make things better."

"Sometimes problems can be easily nipped in the bud and that's where the panel comes in. As tenants we can spot issues and can inform the right people within the council so that they can be solved before they become problems."

What's more, all members of the group are given the chance to attend training courses. Sharon herself, a 44-year-old mum, says being a member has opened up so many training opportunities for her. She's joined courses at Trafford Hall, attended seminars and shadowed members of staff in the workplace to learn more about their roles. She's also joined the East Midlands Tenants Participation Forum and now helps to organise seminars.

"It's been great for me as it opens your mind to things going on in the bigger world," she added. "On a personal level I feel I've gained a lot since joining the panel. It's given me a new found confidence and I've met lots of people from different backgrounds. Together we're making a difference."

If you have some spare time and, like Sharon, want to join the panel then please call Tenant Involvement Officer, Milly Alonso, on **01623 463485**.



Housing Panel meetings

Our Housing Services Panel gets together every month to look at ways of improving how we deliver our housing services. Meetings will take place on: 16 February; 15 March; 19 April.

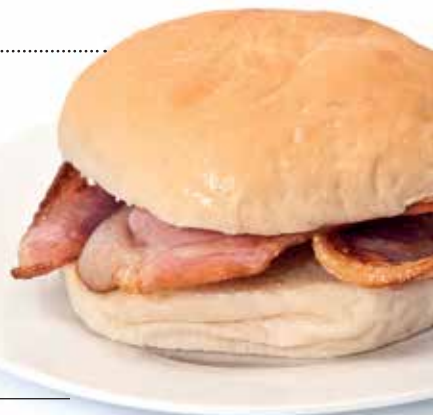
Times and details will be published on www.mansfield.gov.uk/housing and also on Facebook and Twitter.

 /mymansfielduk

 @MDC_News



Let's do Lunch!



Tenant and residents groups are serving up a treat

There are many groups who work with the council and other agencies to keep their residents informed and to improve their neighbourhoods.

The associations also organise many social events including bingo sessions, coffee mornings, breakfast and lunch clubs.

Recently the Cyril Stone Luncheon Club took on Tenant and Resident Association status. They have been running for 19 years providing lunch on Mondays and brunch on Wednesdays and providing a place for locals to meet up for a chat. They are now known as the Abbots Ward Tenant and Resident Association.

The associations also organise many social events including bingo sessions, coffee mornings

“ For under **£5** you will get a two course meal on Mondays, and a full English breakfast or other breakfast choices on Wednesdays ”

If you want to have lunch or brunch, visit the Cyril Stone Community Centre on Blyth Close in Mansfield where for under £5 you will get a two course meal on Mondays, and a full English breakfast or other breakfast choices on Wednesdays.

If you want to know where your nearest Tenant and Resident Association is and want to join in their activities contact our Tenant Involvement Officer on **01623 463485** for details.



Fancy a new hobby this year?

Mansfield and its district boasts a long list of Conservation and Friends Groups who regularly get together to volunteer on conservation projects.

They take part in activities on the many green spaces and

allotments across the district. Groups include, among many, the Maun Conservation Group, Oak Tree Conservation Group, Friends of Yeoman Hill Park, Friends of Fisher Lane Park, Friends of Forest Road Park, Friends of Hornby Plantation, Friends of the Carrs, and Millennium Group.



If you fancy joining any one of the groups check out our list with details about how to contact them on: www.mansfield.gov.uk/parks

Community spirit thrives on the allotments

Blink and you might miss it as you drive along Mansfield's busy Lindhurst Lane but if you look carefully you'll notice an army of volunteers working tirelessly on the allotments.

Even on a dreary, misty day in winter you'll find a regular hive of activity in the Lindhurst Lane corner of town. Community spirit thrives here.

The Bellamy Garden Group, which is part of the Bellamy Road Tenants and Residents Association, maintains a large section of the allotments. The allotments give the group the chance to meet up, get outdoors, get active and also learn about healthy eating.

"It does have a nice feel up here," said Lesley Salmon, secretary of the Tenants and Residents Association.

“The association meets once a month to talk about community activities and any problems there may be in the area and we work with the council to solve any issues.”

"In the summer it's even nicer and it's good to see people up here. There is real a community spirit.

"People get the chance to grow affordable and healthy food and any spare produce goes back into the community. Some goes to the local charity shop to be sold or is given to people who are on a low income."

The Bellamy Garden Group is just part of the many activities organised by the association. They also worked with other groups and organise an annual Summer Spectacular, which this year included a barbeque, table top

sales and displays from organisations such as the fire brigade and police. Vaughan Thomas, association chairman, explained: "The association meets once a month to talk about community activities and any problems there may be in the area and we work with the council to solve any issues."

The association also works with the local Stakeholder Group, which includes groups and clubs, the council, police, YMCA and St Peter's Community Centre among others. Their motto is 'Together we're making Bellamy Road estate a better place to live and work.'

It doesn't stop there. The association also supports a bingo group and a weekly coffee morning. It also takes an active interest in the Hooray for Homework Club, which is an after-school group run by the YMCA, and plays a part in the production of the local newsletter, the Bellamy Bugle.

The association organised this autumn a street party for the over 60s at Tuxford Court and have also organised a free performance for local people to see the annual pantomime this January at St Peter's Centre courtesy of St Peter's Church.

'Together we're making Bellamy Road estate a better place to live and work.'

For more information about the Garden Group or Bellamy Road Tenants and Residents Association email Lesley Salmon at lesley.salmon@hotmail.co.uk

Reviewing the way we **involve** our tenants



In order to establish a more integrated and modern tenant involvement structure that delivers value for money, we have undertaken a review of all our tenant involvement activities looking at both the opportunities and barriers to involvement.

A range of information was gathered and activities undertaken with the following key issues identified:

- There is a genuine shared commitment to embrace tenant involvement activities and work with tenants to shape and improve services.
- There is a significant commitment from tenant volunteers who put countless hours of their own time to ensure the current formal involvement structure keeps working.
- Although the current involvement framework meets the requirements of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard set by the Housing Regulator, the current models of tenant involvement are no longer working effectively for tenants or council officers.
- The existing involvement structure is traditional in its nature.
- Modern engagement and information sharing techniques to further encourage participation are not systematically used and are underdeveloped.

Jeanette Marples, Policy Unit Manager, responsible for the development and delivery of tenant involvement in Mansfield, said: "We are looking to offer a diverse range of new opportunities for tenants to get involved including the introduction of more innovative approaches and the wider use of technology and social media as part of the involvement options."

More information on the new opportunities for involvement will shortly be available on our website as well as Facebook and Twitter. There will also be further details in the next edition of Contact so watch this space.

Payment service gets an upgrade

Mansfield District Council has changed its payment system which means customers will be able to pay online and by phone, faster and with better security.

The new system brings a number of added benefits including:

- Improved reliability with added security checks.
- The most up to date security features, in line with legislation and security industry standards for card payments.
- Better functionality because the council will be able to increase the number of services which can be paid.

Initially the new system will deal only with payments for council tax, rents, business rates, fixed penalty notices, invoices and for garden waste. The authority will shortly be making online and automated telephone payments available for other services.



Estate walkabout



Want to have a say about *your* neighbourhood?

In our recent housing survey a massive 88% of you told us that you were happy living in your neighbourhood.

While that's reassuring to hear we always welcome feedback. Our local area neighbourhood walkabouts give you the chance to have your say and help us learn how we can improve the appearance of your area.

"We want as many people as possible to be involved in making their neighbourhood a great place to live," said Hayley Jackson, Housing

Officer "The walkabouts are open to all our tenants. It's a good opportunity for them to see what work is taking place in their area and how we're tackling issues.

"It also gives them a chance to raise any concerns and let us know of problems as they can speak with council representatives and police community support officers. It's also a great opportunity for them to meet people from their area."

Don't forget to check out



www.mansfield.gov.uk/housing and follow us on Facebook and Twitter for all the latest updates on estate walkabouts.



Estate walkabouts take place:

- Nursery Court/Terrace Rd Area**
26 February meeting at Nursery Court at 10am
- Saundby Avenue Estate**
2 March meeting at Cyril Stone Hall at 10am
- Forest Town**
23 March meeting at the Garibaldi Shops at 10am
- Brick Kiln Lane**
15 April meeting at Longstone Way Car Park at 2pm
- Woodlands Area**
29 April meeting outside Harold Harvey Hall Centre at 2pm
- Lower Ladybrook Area**
10 March meeting at the Civic Centre at 10am



Shaping safer communities

Ravensdale Safer Neighbourhood Group welcomes anyone interested in discussing issues that affect the local area to join them at their next meetings.

The meetings will give people living in the Newgate and Carr Bank wards the chance to meet with police, council representatives, neighbourhood wardens and other officers.

All are welcome to join the group who meet regularly at Babworth Court Community Centre, off Sandy Lane, in Mansfield.

For details contact our Community Engagement Team on **01623 463372** or email sdolan@mansfield.gov.uk



Champion drives online message

Housing panel chairman, Joe Bonser, is encouraging others to get online as part of a countywide drive.

“The internet has so much to offer,” the 75-year-old digital champion said. “Many people aren’t able to send an email or search the web and they are missing out.”

As part of the Nottinghamshire Digital Champions Network, Joe has been helping others learn basic digital skills. He feels it’s important to learn how to use the web as these days so much information and services are now online.

“It’s not as difficult as people might think,” he said. “One lady I knew just wanted to be able to Skype and contact her daughter in New Zealand. I think being a digital champion is about making it less scary for people.”

Want to join Joe and become a digital champion?

The Nottinghamshire Digital Champion Network is an initiative to create and support a team of digital champions across the county who can help residents get online. Launched as part of the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme, the initiative is being delivered by Digital Unite.

Would you like to be a champion? We’re looking for people who can help others to understand the benefits of being online

and can spend time showing them how to use computers and send emails and search the internet.

We would like to build up a team of champions in Mansfield to help residents get on line. If you feel you would like to be a champion please contact the Tenant Involvement Officer on **01623 463485** who will put you in touch with the Nottinghamshire Digital Champions Network. There will be full training and support given.

One lady I knew just wanted to be able to Skype and contact her daughter in New Zealand. I think being a digital champion is about making it less scary for people



+++ STOP PRESS +++ STOP PRESS +++

Our team is busy working on an exciting digital project to help more of our tenants have their say about our services. More information will be available soon so watch this space.

Meet our team

This issue we introduce
our Senior Housing
Solutions Officer....



Name: Helene Anderson
Role: Senior Housing Solutions Officer

Q When did you join the team?

I joined in March 1999 and moved into my current role in 2009.

Q How did you come to join the council?

I studied Housing at university and knew instantly that homelessness was the area that I wanted to work. My early career was providing Welfare Rights advice.

Q Can you sum up your job in one sentence?

It's fast paced as we deal with priority cases.

Q What do you enjoy most about your role?

The challenge: trying to find somewhere for people

to settle and arranging support to ensure that the accommodation is sustainable.

Q What does an average day look like for you here at the council?

That's a hard one. There is no such thing as an average day. I might start out with a plan of what I would like to do but the day is decided by applicants calling in either by phone or in person. We deal with wide ranging subjects throughout the day from domestic violence, house fires to hospital discharge and homelessness.



Make rent your priority

Last year 36 families lost their homes after repeatedly falling behind on their rent.

If you're struggling to pay your rent please call our team straight away. We're just at the end of the line and here to offer advice and support to you to help make sure you're able to pay your bills and meet your rent payments. Call **01623 463463** for help and advice.

nottingham
CREDIT UNION

Credit union advice

Most people experience money difficulties at some point during their lives.

Changes in circumstances such as a job loss or change in personal situation, debts or not receiving the correct benefits can all cause problems. And this time of year can be particularly difficult for many people.

If you fear that you won't be able to pay your rent then there's always someone at the end of a phone to offer advice here at the council.

There's also support available through the Nottingham Credit Union Rent Payment Account, which is free to use.

It works like this:

- Some or all of your benefits are transferred to your Credit Union account
- The Credit Union pays your rent directly to the council
- The benefit, which is left over is paid to you
- Other bills can be paid and you can open a savings account.

Nottingham Credit Union has been providing value financial products since 1992. Only people living or working in Nottinghamshire can join. To find out more telephone **0115 8283121** or email: info@nottinghamcu.co.uk

Mansfield branch opens

Nottingham Credit Union have opened a branch at 3 Clumber Street in Mansfield.

It is open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays between 10am and 2pm.



Register to vote and make sure you have your say

Don't forget to check out www.mansfield.gov.uk/housing and follow us on Facebook and Twitter for all the latest news.



As a council tenant your views matter to us and we want to make sure that you are able to vote and have your say.

Bev Smith, the council's Electoral Registration Officer, is urging all residents to make sure they're on the electoral register to make sure they have their say in the 2016 elections and a possible Referendum on the European Union.

Police and Crime Commissioner elections are due to take place on 5 May and there will be a Referendum on the European Union in 2016 or 2017. If you are not registered to vote, you will not have the chance to have a say on who represents you.

Being on the electoral register enables you to vote and gives you a say on important issues that affect you. It can help you influence council decisions which may affect your street, neighbourhood or local area. It can also help you to get: a mortgage; a mobile phone contract; a bank account; and/or credit.

In 2014 the way you register to vote changed. Under the old system the "head of every household" could register everyone who lived at their address. Now individuals are responsible for registering themselves. The new system means you can now register online which is straightforward and takes just a couple of minutes. To register you need to provide your national insurance number and date of birth. This makes the electoral register more secure.

Go to www.gov.uk/register-to-vote and make sure you have a say in how things are run!

If you don't have access to a computer, tablet or smartphone, you can ring our Electoral Services team on **01623 463345** and they will do it for you or, if you prefer, we can send you a form.



For many the thought of being able to own their own home seems a dream.

But one Mansfield couple have spent their first festive season under their own roof thanks to a shared ownership scheme.

Chris Betts and Emma Ashley had been living with Emma's parents when they saw the council starting to refurbish a nearby property, which had lain empty for 20 years.

On discovering it was being offered on a shared ownership basis, they decided to go for it, moving in this year.

For details:
www.mansfield.gov.uk

GET IN TOUCH

⇒ Mansfield Housing Office	01623 463129
⇒ Housing Repairs Contact Centre	01623 463463
⇒ Out of hours Emergency Contact (repairs)	01623 463050
⇒ Ashfield and Mansfield Homefinder	01623 463402
⇒ Central Control	01623 463341
⇒ Housing Advice Service	01623 463125
⇒ Money Advice Officer	01623 463451
⇒ Welfare Rights Officer	01623 463450
⇒ Right to Buy/Leaseholders Officer	01623 463062
⇒ Tenant Involvement Officer	01623 463485



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