

Open Door, Autumn/Winter 2022



For the tenants and leaseholders of Cambridge City Council

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Editorial

From David Greening, Head of Housing Services



Welcome to this Autumn/Winter edition of Open Door.

We have a major focus this time on helping you with the cost of living crisis. For example, we bring you dozens of grants, discounts and other forms of financial aid.

This is also the time of year when small lifestyle changes can help us make the most of our home and budget. This edition brings you tips for heating your home more affordably, but also for airing it well, to avoid the build-up of condensation and the mould that can result otherwise.

Meanwhile, we also bring you our annual overview of the Housing Service, including how your rent was entirely reinvested in the service, and some of the service improvements made last year.

In this issue you can read a tenant's account, in her own words, of what it's been like to move from her lifelong council flat to a new-built eco-flat provided by the Council. There is also an interesting report on the Tenancy Audit Visits that we have been making, to gradually visit every individual home. An interview with Housing Officers shows the range of assistance that they have been able to bring to the tenants they met during these visits. You will see the hidden needs they encountered, from financial to health to housing needs. Without these visits, we wouldn't have met these tenants in person, nor known about these issues that we could help them with.

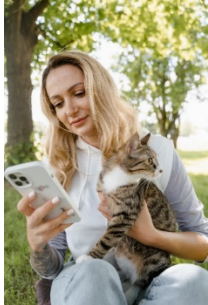
Our environment pages are uplifting this time, with features from residents themselves showing how they are getting pesticide-use stopped on their estates, and planting wildflowers that boost wildlife and biodiversity. And there is an article on our annual Residents' Garden Competition, which rewards gardens that boost nature and wildlife.

Please do have a look too at the large-scale resident consultations explained towards the end of this edition. They show the huge work that is going on to involve residents in planning radical improvements for whole neighbourhoods, including building lots of new social housing.

With best wishes,

David Greening

Receive Open Door electronically



Why not receive Open Door by email instead of on paper? It's easy to read on any device with wifi, at the same time saving on paper and carbon footprint. To receive it by email instead of post, visit <https://camcit.co/opendooremail>

One copy of Open Door is sent to each council home. If you'd like to request another copy for a joint tenant, please email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

An editorial panel of council tenants and leaseholders help to select and edit the content of every edition of Open Door, to ensure it continues to reflect residents' needs and interests. To get involved, email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

Are you using your online Housing Account?

You can register for your own personal Housing Account online at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk/housing/www> On there, you can:

- request a repair, booking your
appointment slot
- follow the progress of your repair

- check your account balance and

print statements

- make payments
- communicate with council staff

For wider City Council services, there is the My Cambridge portal on the Council's website. It's easy to register, in the top right-hand corner of the Council's homepage at www.cambridge.gov.uk Or just type my.cambridge.gov.uk into your search engine's address box. On there, you can, for instance:

- manage your Council Tax account
- claim benefits
- notify about a change of circumstances
- report a missed bin collection
- report issues in streets or parks

Meanwhile, the Customer Service Centre in Regent Street is open for appointments from Wednesday to Friday. And you can still phone the Council at 01223-457000.

Tablet Loan Scheme

The City Council is enabling free access to the internet for eligible council tenants, through a free tablet loan scheme. These wifi-enabled tablets are pre-loaded with 20GB of data and are loaned for 3 months initially.

The scheme is for tenants who are at risk of social exclusion, to help improve their economic situation.

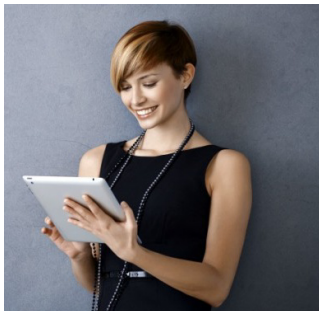
Using the internet can help them to access employment or benefits, for instance, or to swap utility providers.

The loan period can be extended for an additional 3 months if the resident still needs the tablet for internet access.

To be eligible, the resident must be a Cambridge City Council tenant who has no access to digital equipment or wifi at home (other than smart phones), and they must be receiving Universal Credit or Housing Benefit.

To apply, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Free data if on benefits



As well as the tablet loan scheme just described in the previous article, the Council is also offering its tenants on benefits 6 months of free data for their own internet or mobile device, even if they're not borrowing a council tablet.

To receive free data from this scheme, you must currently have an O2 pay-as-you-go SIM card. (The offer will hopefully be available to users of other networks in the near future.)

Many vital services such as benefits, health care and training require you to be online. Both schools and employers also expect you to use the internet.

But with increasing pressure on the cost of living, many struggle to afford all the data they need on their internet devices. For more information on this offer, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

If you don't have access to a computer, tablet or smart phone or are unsure how to use them, the charity Cambridge Online can help at little or no cost to you. You can phone them at 01223-300407.

Covid-19 vaccination this autumn

Science shows that vaccines do protect against the most serious effects of Covid-19, and that they help to reduce the transmission of it.

The most recent, accurate NHS advice on Covid-19, the vaccines, who is eligible, and vaccine safety is available at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19

What Covid-19 vaccines are available, and for whom?

The following vaccinations are still available to everyone, if you wish to get yours now.

- 1st and 2nd doses of the vaccine: for everyone aged 5 and over
- a booster dose: for those aged 16 and over, and for some children aged 12 to 15
- a possible 3rd dose before the booster: this is for people aged 5 and over who had a severely weakened immune system when receiving their first 2 doses; they will be offered a 3rd dose before any booster doses.

Vaccination without appointment

Vaccinations are available without an appointment seven days a week from 8.30am to 4pm at the Grafton Centre, Cambridge CB1 1PS.

Or to find a vaccine event near you, visit www.thevaccinators.co.uk

Who is the autumn booster for?

An autumn booster vaccine against Covid-19 will be offered to:

- people who are aged 50 or older
- residents in care homes for older people
- those aged 5 and over who are in a clinical risk group
- carers
- health and social care staff

Appointments for the groups above will be available from the National Booking Service - see details below. Note that autumn boosters are currently not available as a walk-in service.

Get vaccination appointments without using the internet

Many people make vaccination appointments using the internet, at www.thevaccinators.co.uk

But if you don't use the internet, you can just phone 119 for free from a mobile or landline phone to book your vaccination. They will support you to choose a booked appointment over the phone.

Dialling 119 can also get you support in up to 200 languages, as you can speak to a translator via this number, if you need one.

Those who use British Sign Language can use textphone 18001 119. Or they can dial 119 to use the NHS British Sign Language interpreter service.

How your rent was reinvested in 2021/22



The average weekly rent for a council home in Cambridge is £106.27

About 44% of this was spent on improving kitchens & bathrooms, sheltered housing, building new homes, etc.

About 24%, on day to day repairs & maintenance, inspections, preparing properties to re-let, etc.

About 19% on paying interest on the debt of the Housing Service

About 9% on managing tenancies, lettings, anti-social behaviour, resident involvement & support services

About 4% on other costs in providing social housing as a Council

Is a Cambridge City Council home good value for money?

The average weekly rent for a 2-bed Cambridge City Council home is £106.27

The average weekly rent for a 2-bed home on the open market in Cambridge is £320.77
(Average private rent is from Cambridge City Council report
'Strategic Housing Key Facts', March 2022)

How was the Housing budget invested into homes?

65% was spent on building or buying more council homes

29% on the 'Decent Homes' programme that improves kitchens, bathrooms, doors & windows

5% on other investments in homes

1% on improving estates through the Estates Improvement Programme

What residents said they wanted improved (2020 survey)

Top priorities of general tenants

Pathways – 54%

Estate lighting – 39%

Health and wellbeing of tenants on the estate – 31%

Top priorities of sheltered tenants

Pathways – 49%

Landscaping and planting – 28%

Health and wellbeing of tenants on the estate – 28%

Top priorities of leaseholders

Appearance and look of the estate – 42%

Pathways – 36%

Landscaping and planting – 35%

£1 million invested in Estate Improvements

33 improvement projects delivered on estates in 2021/22

20 providing new stores for bikes and mobility scooters

7 providing new estate fencing or railing

5 providing new secure facilities for bins and recycling

5 providing new security gates, locks or firedoors

3 providing new pathways

Other improvements in 2021/22

Repairs: All repairs, apart from emergencies, are now given an appointment: tenants book their own appointments online, with a choice of date and time.

Customer Service Centre: City Homes reviewed each customer complaint individually last year, to identify where it could improve. Customer Service Centre

staff received further training on when to pass queries through to specialised Housing staff.

Grounds Maintenance: A new Engagement, Education & Enforcement Officer was appointed to enforce zero tolerance of items left in communal areas. Estate Inspections were improved, examining and feeding back on more elements.

Anti-Social Behaviour: The Sensitive Lettings Policy was published, and procedures were tightened for managing difficult tenants. Advice from the Residents' Panel led to exploring the Neighbourhood Resolution Scheme for resolving neighbour disputes.

Help for your energy bills



For an overview of the help available to ease the cost of living, visit the Council's webpage www.cambridge.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help The range of support available specifically for energy bills includes...

Warm Home Discount - £140 Households on means-tested benefits with high energy use may be eligible for £140 from their energy supplier, taken off their electricity bill before 31st March '23. The government will decide who is eligible and notify them by post. Those on Pension Credit should receive this discount automatically.

Energy Bills Support Scheme - £400

Spread over the 6 months from October '22 to March '23, households should receive a monthly discount on their energy bills, credited directly to their account or prepay meter, totalling £400.

Priority Services Register

All energy and gas companies have a priority services register for households in more vulnerable situations. The support available will depend on your supplier and your needs but it offers additional protection - contact your supplier to find out more.

Cold Weather Payment

For those on certain specific benefits, for very cold weather lasting 7 days or more between November and March. Visit www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment

Winter Fuel Payment - up to £600

State pensioners should automatically receive their usual £200 (or £300 if over 80) before December, plus a one-off payment of £300.

Cambridgeshire Home Energy Support Services

Provides advice and support around heating and energy. When you contact them or get referred to them, a phone call or home visit will be booked in with one of their energy advisors, who will help you with energy issues at home. Email

warmhomes@pect.org.uk, phone 01733-568408 or fill in their form at www.pect.org.uk/projects/warmhomes

Energy Price Guarantee or 'Cap'

Households with typical energy use will now pay on average £2,500 a year total energy bill - on average £1,000 less than they would pay without this price 'cap' imposed by government.

More grants and finance help

Energy supplier grants

Bigger energy suppliers like Eon and British Gas can support households with energy-bill debts (you don't have to be their customer). Ask Citizens' Advice to refer you: phone 0808-278-7808 or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting/budgeting/get-help-with-bills/#

Household Support Fund - £100

Up to £100 to help with energy bills and food, for those in immediate financial hardship. You can find out about eligibility and apply directly online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/household-support-fund Or email community.resilience@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457000.

Stay Well Grant – up to £400

For individuals and families facing fuel poverty, and for the homeless to help keep warm. Contact Citizens' Advice (details just listed above) or visit <https://www.cambscf.org.uk/stay-well>

Cambridge Local Assistance Scheme

For those under exceptional financial pressure, they provide supermarket vouchers, energy vouchers, new cookers, or recycled white goods and furniture. See eligibility details at the top of the back cover of this edition, and more information at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/parenting-and-family-support/cambridgeshire-local-assistance-scheme

You apply for the scheme through Citizens' Advice Bureau: contact them at www.cambridgecab.org.uk or Freephone 0808-278-7808, Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.

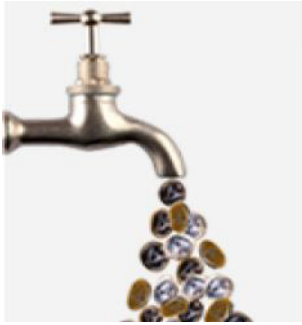
More grant information is available at:

- www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply
- <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk>
- www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/grants

Are you or your partner turning 66?

Do you receive Housing Benefit? If so, do a Benefits Check before one of you reaches 66 (State Pension age), to see whether you would receive more by claiming Universal Credit instead. Do a 'Better Off Calculation' at www.cambridge.entitledto.co.uk/home/start Or phone the Council's Financial Inclusion Officers at 01223-457000.

Reduce your energy bills with these tips



Small steps can give you big, quick savings.

Thermostat: Lower it by just one degree to save about £116 a year

Low-energy lightbulbs: free from PECT; email warmhomes@pect.org.uk

Hot water: set it 60 degrees; close the door when bathing or showering

Repairs: if your home has draughty windows, doors or fans, request a repair from the Council, to save on heating bills

Devices left on 'Standby'

Appliances left on unnecessarily, whether on purpose or not, can add hundreds to electricity bills. Computers, TVs, phone-chargers, lights, heated towel-rails use costly energy even on standby. Switch them all off when not using them, especially overnight. Experts explain that this 'phantom' energy use can total 275w per year, costing the average household up to £683. But that could rise to as much as £1,253 with this winter's price rises!

If you switch things off when not needed, you could reduce your 'phantom' energy-use to 100w, saving you up to £797 this autumn.

And if prices rose by 20% more in January, you would save up to £957 on 'phantom' costs this year. Examples are:

- Extra or old fridges or 'beer fridges'

Average annual cost @52p per unit: £182

Average if that price rises by 20%: £271

- Old desktop computers on standby

Average annual cost: £145

Average if price rises by 20%: £174

- Over-sensitive outdoor security lights

Average annual cost: £92

Average if it rises by 20%: £109

- 2 x 60w outside lights, 10 hrs per night

Average annual cost: £229

Average if it rises by 20%: £274

- Electric towel rail

Average annual cost: £273

Average if it rises by 20%: £327

Some things, like fridges and freezers, must stay on all the time: focus on using them in the most efficient ways possible. But note that running older or less efficient models costs two to three times as much as the most efficient models. For more practical tips to lower bills, visit www.nea.org.uk/get-help/advice-resources/'phantom load'

Know your bills & actual use

A Smart Meter, installed for free by your supplier, shows you how much energy you are using at any given moment. Check on your meter the amount used, and tell your supplier if their estimate claims it was more. Your bill lists...

'Unit cost': Gas and electricity are sold in units of 'kilowatt-hours' or 'kWh', prices varying with suppliers. You pay their unit cost multiplied by the number of units you use.

'Standing charge': fixed by supplier, regardless of how much you use.

'Energy Price Cap': for average households £2,500 is the maximum suppliers can charge for units of energy and standing charges. But bills

can be higher if you use a lot: using less energy is the part of your bill that you control.

VAT: set at 5% of your overall bill

Discounts: eg. for taking both gas and electricity from one supplier, or for paying by direct debit

Add-ons: charges for extra services, like for paper bills being posted rather than emailed

Help for the cost of living and food

Cost of Living Payments

Those on means-tested benefits receive an extra £650 this year (half paid last July, half this November). Those on disability benefits received an extra one-off payment of £150 in September.

Cost of Living Support Pop Ups

This autumn there will be pop-up events around the city, bringing together the help and support available for the cost of living, heating and health. City Council officers along with the County's Think Communities team will be available, as well as a wide range of other agencies. Come along to ensure you receive all the support available:

- Chesterton: Wed 19 Oct, 1-4pm, Methodist Church
- Mansel Way: Tues 1 Nov, 9.30am-12.30pm, Church of the Good Shepherd
- Newmarket Road: Thurs 3 Nov, 3.30-6.30pm, Christ the Redeemer Church
- Coldham's Lane: Wed 9 Nov, 11am-2pm, C3 Church
- Cambridge Central Library: Tues 15 Nov, 1-4pm
- Trumpington: Thurs 17 Nov, 3-6pm, Clay Farm Centre
- Mill Road: Thurs 24 Nov, 4-7pm, Cambridge Central Mosque
- Queen Edith's: Tues 29 Nov, 2-5pm, St James Church

For more information visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support-popups or phone the Council at 01223-457000.

Emergency food



If you or someone you know is struggling to afford or access food, phone the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance at 01223-967426, Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm. Or fill in their contact form online at <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org>

Residents in crisis can receive a voucher for a Food Bank. This gives you access to basic store-cupboard foods up to 3 times over 6 months. Phone 01223-967426 for help getting a voucher (you can't use a Food Bank without one). You can also phone the helpline at 01223-967426, or see the full range of help online at <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org>

Lower your water bills

Just using less water will save you money, but so can...

Water meters: Ask your supplier whether having them install a free water meter will save you money. Or find out using the calculator at www.ccwater.org.uk/watermetercalculator

WaterSure: This helps those on benefits who have a water meter and use a lot of water either for medical reasons, or because they have 3 or more children. Their water bill is capped so they won't pay more than the average home in their area.

Water-saving devices: Your water company can provide free water-saving devices. Contact them to find out more.

Reduced tariffs: Many water companies offer reduced bills for customers who are struggling to pay. Contact yours to find out more.

3 steps to reduce condensation and mould



The 3 simple steps explained below will reduce condensation and help avoid mould developing in your home.

There is always some moisture in indoor air, even when we can't see it.

Condensation is when it collects on cold surfaces or in corners with little airflow.

Most homes have some condensation. But too much moisture indoors, or condensation left too long on surfaces, can cause mould, mildew and even rot.

Condensation can appear on cold windows, tiles, walls or mirrors, for instance after a bath or shower. It can also form in corners or behind wardrobes and cupboards. It mostly comes from:

- too much moisture in indoor air

- lack of airflow and ventilation
- inadequate indoor temperatures
- cold surfaces

The 3 steps below will help a lot.

Step 1. Reduce moisture

Outdoors: Dry laundry outdoors if possible. Or hang it in a sunny room with the door closed and a window slightly open. (Don't ever put it on radiators with windows closed - it's a recipe for mould!)

Wipe any condensation off windows and sills every morning. Dry kitchen and bathroom surfaces whenever they get wet.

Cook only with pan lids on. In kettles, only boil as much water as you need (saving on electricity as well as on condensation). Turn the kettle off promptly once boiling.

Fans & vents: Always put an extractor fan on when showering, bathing or cooking. Or keep a window slightly open nearby, closing doors to other rooms. Use a dehumidifier if you have one.

Baths: run cold water before the hot, to reduce condensation by 90%!

Step 2. Increase airflow

Windows: Always open some windows daily to let moisture out and fresh air in - ideally first thing in the morning, even if just for 10 minutes.

Furniture: Don't put any furniture, including beds, against outside walls, if possible. Leave a gap for airflow between all walls and furniture.

Step 3. Heat your home enough, and steadily

Heating: Keep your heating on for longer stretches at a lower temperature, rather than in short bursts at higher temperatures.

This is also more cost-effective, as well as helping against damp and mould. Try to keep all rooms at a steady temperature between 18° and 21°.

Insulation: If you can, use thick carpet with a good thermal underlay and heavy, lined curtains: these will keep your home warmer for less.

How to get rid of existing mould

By far the best way to prevent mould is to follow the 3 steps in the previous article, namely:

- reduce moisture indoors
- ventilate well
- keep your home warm enough

But if your home already has mould, these are the steps you can take yourself to remove it:

- wash and wipe away any mould using a special fungicidal wash or spray
- specialised paints can prevent or delay the return of mould
- also take all the steps advised in the previous article to reduce indoor moisture and condensation, or else the mould will inevitably grow back

But if the problem continues even after removing mould and following all the advice above for reducing moisture indoors, then contact the Council to arrange a visit.

A combination of council repair works and lifestyle advice should soon get your home free of mould and damp.

You can book a repairs visit online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/request-a-repair-for-your-council-home On there, you will be able to choose your own appointment slot and time. Or to request an appointment, you can email housing.repairs@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457000.

Indoor air: how many pints of moisture ?

Drying clothes indoors: adds 9 pints of moisture

Cooking and boiling a kettle: adds 6 pints

Bathing or showering: adds 2 pints

Washing dishes: adds 2 pints

Two people at home just breathing: adds 3 pints!

Total: 22 pints of moisture added to your home daily!

A warm, dry home for less

Step 1 - Keep heat in, cold out

The first step to lower your bills is to keep the heat in, and where it's needed.

- Thick, heavy curtains block heat-loss. Draw them at twilight, tucking them behind radiators, never in front of them.
- Keep furniture away from radiators.
- Buy or make a sausage-dog draught excluder for your external doors.

Step 2 - Tweak your controls

- Set your room thermostat to between 18 and 21 degrees. Adjust radiator thermostats as needed in each room.
- Ventilate steamy rooms: it takes more energy to heat moist air than dry air.
- If your water is scalding hot, ask for its temperature to be lowered at the next boiler service.
- Get a free Smart Meter installed, to keep track of energy use as you go. Otherwise, give your supplier monthly meter readings so your bill is accurate.

Step 3 - Get the best tariff

- Check the tariff on your bill, using price comparison websites to find a better one.
- Use an online account and direct debit (to save about 6%) but monitor that your debit amount remains correct.

Step 4 - Apply for financial help or discounts

There is help available if you are struggling on a low income, eg. a Warm Home Discount of £140 if you meet certain criteria: ask your supplier.

- Emergency fuel vouchers are available if you can't afford your pre-pay meter: contact the Council's partner PECT, who also give free energy-saving products. Phone 0800-8021773 or email warmhomes@pect.org.uk

- For general help with your finances, contact Cambridge Citizens' Advice at www.cambridgecab.org.uk or phone helpline 0344-848-7979. For more help or information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/home-energy-and-water-use or email the Council's Home Energy Officer at homeenergy@cambridge.gov.uk

Step 5 - Keep active and eat well

Wear several warm, light layers rather than one heavy one. Ensure you have at least one or two hot meals each day. And ensure you keep moving, even if only indoors. Cooking, housework,

walking upstairs, stretching, or taking the air in the garden or just outside your door will all help keep you warm and healthy. For helpful tips on winter well-being, visit www.keep-your-head.com/cyp or www.nhs.uk/change4life

Further help

If you are struggling to keep your home warm due to high energy bills, you may be eligible for other financial support. Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help to see the help available.

A welcoming, heated venue - Your local Community Centre

Always warm and welcoming, your local Community Centre can be a real 'home from home' this winter, giving a range of practical help for the cost of living crisis. Why not get to know it better? You can drop in to enjoy quality time just relaxing in a warm, welcoming space. Or benefit from its many free community events and resources. Or enjoy a very affordable hot meal there.

Community Centres' mission is to be places where 'local people and community groups can meet, learn, work, exercise and play'. They include:

- Akeman Community Centre
- Brown's Field Youth & Community Centre
- Buchan Street Neighbourhood Centre
- Clay Farm Centre
- Meadows Community Centre
- Storey's Field Centre
- 37 Lawrence Way Community House
- Nuns Way Pavilion
- Ross Street Community Centre
- Trumpington Pavilion

For more information and a map of the locations of Community Centres, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/warm-and-welcoming-spaces

Grants for community venues

Funding is available this winter for local community groups to provide similar venues and activities. Could your group open a community building as a heated, welcoming space providing community meals or other activities? For information on these funds, visit <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/apply-for-up-to-1000-community-solutions-for-cost-of-living-provision-of-warm-spaces-winter-grant>, email community.resilience@cambridge.gov.uk or phone the Council at 01223-457875.

Living the new-build dream



Tenant Diana Minns tells her story: "I had never expected to move from my 3-bedroom flat at Hanover Court, a 1960s block from the long post-war programme of building council homes, when the Council used to aim to build 500 per year!

My flat was my home and my refuge (literally, after time in the local women's refuge) - stability and security for my children and me. I was very involved in the local community, organising events, our Residents' Association and community room. Yet I moved, after almost 23 years.

Our flats were cutting-edge 54 years ago, but now needed major works. The Council hadn't made any decisions, but offered us the chance to move anyway, with the option of new-built flats at Mill

Road Ironworks or Cromwell Road's Timberworks, near the city centre, as our old homes were. So I chose to be 'decanted', as they call the process.

It meant uprooting, shedding belongings and memories. But we were supported by a great team at the Council. We got grants and a Home Loss Payment that allowed many to buy electrical goods or furniture. That grant was well-used, judging by the procession of deliveries in our new block!

There were delays and challenges. But now I live in a new, clean, ecologically heated home (so it's greener, too). I feel like I'm in a home-makeover TV show! I'm getting used to a new, less cluttered way of living, a new location and new community.

My experience will happen for many tenants in the coming decades as the Council improves and redevelops old estates, creating new sustainable homes.

If you get the chance, I do encourage you to seize it and take that 'awfully big adventure'. Make sure to use all the excellent support offered by the Council for the process, because I certainly found it worked for me."

A new contractor on estates

The City Council is pleased to announce that from 22nd of November, it will be working in partnership with TSG Building Services plc, who will deliver gas servicing and maintenance for tenants, including for boiler breakdowns and routine repairs. So we are saying farewell to the contractor Mears, who have provided this service since 2016.

Gas safety and compliance remain a very high priority for all. The Council is confident that the transition of the service from Mears to TSG will be successful. More updates on the new contractor will come in future editions of Open Door. However, in the unlikely event that you experience any issues, please do contact the Council.

Or if you have any concerns or questions about the transfer to the new contractor, please get in touch via the Housing portal at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk/housing/www/dashboard> or by phoning 01223-457000.

Digital Inclusion Directory

Would you like to gain computing skills - or improve the ones you have - so that you can access and benefit from all the resources the internet has to offer? Or perhaps you can't easily access the internet from home and want to know the many places around town where you can access it for free?

Cambridge Online offer a thorough guide to getting online, providing support for digital issues, from starter training to more advanced levels. It also lists local groups and organisations that can help, whether you're an absolute beginner or just want to learn more. Download this Digital Inclusion Directory at <https://cambridgeonline.org.uk/digital-inclusion-directory>

Lives improved by Tenancy Audit Visits



Anna Hill is the manager of City Homes. Anna is overseeing the Tenancy Audit Visits that her Housing Officers are currently making to each of the Council's tenanted homes. As she described in a previous edition of Open Door, Housing Officers aim to visit at least 15% of homes by April, and to continue until all are visited. This Tenancy Audit Visit means council officers visit your home to check on the condition of the home so as to get repairs done, discover any needs your household has, and ensure tenancy rules are being respected. Anna told Open Door:

"I want to thank all the tenants who have already had their Tenancy Audit Visit. We know that many found it extremely helpful. The accounts from Housing Officers below show the unmet needs that they discovered during the Visits, and the practical help they were able to arrange to improve tenants' lives."

Six Housing Officers explain in their own words:



"I met two elderly siblings who had lived in their home for decades. Struggling financially, they sensibly prioritised paying rent and council tax. But they were skimping on food! They didn't know they could receive benefits, nor how to apply. Our Financial Inclusion Officer helped them apply for three different benefits that they're entitled to. They are now much better off financially, going forward.

I met a lot of tenants who are living in flats above the ground floor but have significant mobility issues. I was able to reassure them by explaining the various options that are open to them.

I met a tenant with multiple disabilities. The Council didn't know he can't open or respond to letters or phone calls - only emails. I've now ensured the Council and our contractors contact him only via email. And we removed a £50 penalty he incurred by not responding before.

I met an elderly tenant so scared about the cost of living, she wasn't even using her phone to call her GP. Our Financial Inclusion Officer is helping her to apply for benefits. Her household will be significantly better off from now on.

I met a tenant who had applied to move, due to medical issues and harassment from a neighbour. But listening to her, I felt her move should have higher priority. I got her moved up to the highest 'Band A' priority, putting her in a very strong position now to bid for available homes.

I've come across tenants discharged from hospital, and anxious as to whether they could continue to live at home. I got the Council's Independent Living Service to arrange Occupational Therapist visits, so they can be supported to stay living independently in their own homes."

What are Tenancy Audit Visits for?

Tenancy Audit Visits enable the Council to:

- check the condition of your property, to discover any repairs we can do for you
- update our information on your household
- identify any needs you may have (in terms of your housing, finances, health, etc.), and get you the help you need
- identify households whose homes are too large or too small, providing support if they wish to move
- spot any tenancy fraud or breaches of the Tenancy Agreement

Given the large number of homes involved, we normally do your Tenancy Audit Visit without an appointment. This also helps verify that the home is occupied by the people who should be living there. Under your Tenancy Agreement, we are normally required to give you 24 hours' notice before visiting you. But if we can do your Tenancy Audit Visit the first time we come to you, it would be really helpful. If you can't let us in, we will return the next day or as soon as possible. For more

information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/council-tenants or phone your Housing Service at 01223-457000.

Residents' Garden Competition helps nature



This year again, council tenants and leaseholders entered stunning gardens for the Residents' Garden Competition. The cover and all the large photos of this edition feature gardens from the competition. It favours nature-friendly gardens that use the methods listed in the article further below. These gardens on council estates form a patchwork of refuges for wildlife and biodiversity across the city, as well as being a private haven for the residents who tend them. (See the article on Logan's Meadow further below to learn about the wider concept of Nature Recovery Networks around the country.)

To enter the 2023 Residents' Garden Competition, try adopting some tips from the list in the gardening article below. Then next spring, download your entry form at www.cambridge.gov.uk/tenant-and-leaseholder-garden-competition or email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Gardeners who are helping nature to recover

They...

- stop using chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers: as well as potentially harming human health, they harm bees, butterflies, birds, hedgehogs, toads and other wildlife.
- mow a lot less: they let daisies, buttercups, dandelions, plantain and nettles come through to feed birds, bees, butterflies and other insects.
- grow natural flowers with single blooms: bees and butterflies can't feed from 'double' blooms.
- compost garden and kitchen waste, for free fertiliser that improves their soil.
- collect rainwater, to water for free.
- put mulch down to prevent weeds, protect plants and reduce watering.
- grow their own organic veg to save money and eat healthily; they use physical barriers like fleece, rather than chemicals that poison wildlife such as thrushes.

Winning Gardens, 2022

New Garden ~ Caithness Court

Environment-friendly ~ Godwin Way

Community Garden ~ Princess Court

Kitchen Garden ~ Wulfstan Way

Nature & wildlife ~ Bridewell Road

Tubs or Baskets ~ Budleigh Close

Communal Garden ~ Rawlyn Court

Established Garden ~ Ross Street

Friends of Logan's Meadow achievements

Logan's Meadow Nature Reserve is an important green space, rich in biodiversity, in the north east of the city. It is part of the country's Nature Recovery Networks. These are joined-up, nature-rich spaces of all sizes, helping nature to recover across at least 30% of our land and sea within the next 7 years. To see a map of them, visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-map

The Friends of Logan's Meadow is a community group that helps to care for the nature reserve, improving and promoting it. Last year they planted over 250 trees, with over 150 resident volunteers. And they help run a range of public events showcasing the biodiversity of this urban nature reserve. They've had bird walks, small mammal tracking, bat detecting, amphibian evenings, moth traps and more...

Rare moths needing fenland habitat were recently recorded there for the first time. A migrant warbler was caught and ringed there this summer. Endangered bats, newts and other amphibians have found refuge in these now protected wetlands.

Volunteers help to make all this happen, so why not join them? Membership is free and open to all. And the group can also advise you on boosting nature in your own garden or on your estate. For information or news of future events, visit

www.logansmeadow.wordpress.com or email friendsoflogansmeadow@gmail.com



Recycle small electricals

You can now recycle things that have plugs, batteries or cables. Drop-off sites are at the car parks of Gwydir Street, Lammas Land, Abbey Pool and Tesco in Fulbourn; at Chesterton Road public toilets; at Glebe Farm Drive, Fawcett Road and Hawkey Road; or in-store at Curry's, Newmarket Road.

Always donate working items to charity, or take faulty ones to a free Repair Café (website address below). But after that, recycle your old mobile phones, tablets, laptops, printers, cables, games consoles, DVD players, kettles, hand-blenders, hand-held vacuums, electric toothbrushes...

They contain gold, aluminium and steel needed to make new items, but they must be recycled separately. Yet 450 tonnes a year have been going to landfill, never breaking down, just harming our environment. For more information, visit www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk and <http://circularcambridge.org/repaircafe/cambridgecity>

Residents' wildflower meadow



"Autumn greetings from us, Paula and Cath, residents of the East Road council estate, near St Matthew's Street. Like most, we have been increasingly concerned about the climate crisis, and its negative impact on nature. We knew we urgently needed more trees and wild areas on our estate, and to encourage insect life, especially bees.

So we got help from the City Council, and Cambridge biodiversity charity On The Verge gave us wildflower seeds, with planting instructions for our neighbours. We knocked on every door of our estate, talked to residents, and offered free seeds to plant in their garden, balcony or pots. We found people very keen to help create an estate environment that's good for bees, butterflies and insects, as well as people.

We also held Community Planting Days on the estate. Result: spring bulbs, a wildflower bed, a bee-friendly border and 9 new trees! Individuals volunteered to 'Adopt a Tree' and water it regularly.

But pollinator-friendly plants are only half the solution: it's also crucial to stop using toxic chemicals that kill the pollinators we're trying to encourage! This isn't just about biodiversity. Our doorstep chats with residents also showed a general concern about pesticides and health, which makes us all the more delighted that chemical spraying by the City Council will be stopped entirely from January."

For advice on taking steps like these on your own estate, just email Paula and Cath at communityactionfornature@yahoo.com

Going pesticide-free at last



The sad reality is that pesticides kill beautiful wildflowers, as well as bees and other insects. Fortunately, thinking and behaviour have moved forward in Cambridge now, to embrace the importance of wildflowers and reject harmful chemical sprays.

Pesticide-Free Cambridge is a community group who are working with the City Council to make the Council's Herbicide Reduction Plan a reality. Last spring, public land in Arbury and Newnham went herbicide-free. The Council no longer sprays glyphosate-based herbicide on verges, paths or gutters in these two wards.

And they have committed to ensuring that by spring, all the city's public spaces will be herbicide-free! This is fantastic news for biodiversity, and potentially for human health too. But there is plenty more to do. You can help by signing up to the Happy Bee Streets scheme, which will help to manage your street in ways that are better for biodiversity and health. Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/adopt-yourstreet-to-help-improve-biodiversity

There is also a campaign to make the city's schools pesticide-free. Visit <https://www.pesticidefreecambridge.org/schools-campaign>

Ask your local school which pesticides they use: many apply them to the school's wild plants, insects and even buildings! If asked, it's not difficult for a school to stop using synthetic pesticides and switch to less harmful alternatives.

To see how you could achieve these things in your own locality, visit www.pesticidefreecambridge.org or email info@pesticidefreecambridge.org

Or visit their Facebook page 'Pesticide-Free Cambridge' or their Twitter account at <https://twitter.com/PANUKPFC>

Leaseholders

Selling to the Council

Your flat was originally owned by the City Council, but was sold through the Right to Buy scheme. Be aware that if you are selling it, and you are the original tenant who bought it through Right to Buy in the past 10 years, the Council legally has the Right of First Refusal on the sale of your property.

Before putting such a property on the open market, you must first formally offer it to be purchased by the City Council. The Council then has 8 weeks to consider the offer.

If you are not the original purchaser of the flat through Right to Buy, this Right of First Refusal does not apply. But the Council may still be interested in repurchasing your property, if it has a need for that size of property in that area of the city.

Selling your flat back to the City Council would allow you to avoid paying estate agent fees and other selling fees. It could also be quicker than selling on the open market, as the City Council is a 'cash buyer' and you would not be in a 'chain'.

So if you are considering selling your property, please do email the City Council to let us know at leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk

Please give the address, size and approximate value of your property, if known, and we will let you know promptly whether we may be interested in buying it from you.

Rules on subletting

As a leaseholder you have the option to sublet your flat. But your Lease Agreement explains the important rules you must follow. For example, your flat must be sublet to one person or family only, not to a group of individuals, nor as a holiday let.

Breaching your lease could cause your home to be repossessed without any compensation to you. To see all the rules, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/subletting-your-leasehold-property Or for more information, email the Council at leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457835.

Warm home grants

There are grants available for homeowners on low incomes, to do home improvements that will keep your home warm more affordably. If you are on a lower income, check your eligibility.

City Council: offer Action On Energy grants for lower-income homeowners at www.cambridge.gov.uk/action-on-energy-grants-for-low-income-households

Cambshia: offer grants for works improving energy efficiency in eligible lower-income homes, or for vulnerable or elderly residents. To find out more, visit www.cambshia.org

Some energy companies: offer grants for works that improve your home's energy efficiency. Eon is an example, but check for other suppliers at www.cambridge.gov.uk/energy-company-obligation-eco-energy-efficiency-scheme

Approved installers of energy efficient home improvements: these can often access funding on behalf of your household; a list of these installers is available at www.trustmark.org.uk

PECT: If struggling to top up a pre-pay meter, PECT can assess you for a free Emergency Fuel Voucher. Visit www.pect.org.uk/projects/cambridgeshire-energy, email info@pect.org.uk or phone 01733-568408.

For more information on any of the above, email homeenergy@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457900.

Leaseholders' Consultation Forum

Thurs 24 Nov, 12.30-2pm online

At this annual meeting leaseholders receive updates and raise to the Council any issues of concern. Your elected Leaseholder Representative on the Housing Scrutiny Committee gives a briefing on relevant council policies.

Previous meetings discussed planned maintenance work, service charges, fire safety, etc. If you miss them, you can view past meetings at www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholder-forum-meetings

To join the next meeting online, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Resident Involvement

Consulting residents on area developments



As well as building new council homes, the Council also has a legal duty to keep existing council estates up to standard. This includes things like homes' healthiness, safety, energy efficiency, comfort and disability access. Some estates can be refurbished. But sometimes a bigger redevelopment can give better long-term solutions for tenants, as well as providing extra new council homes.

East Barnwell

In a consultation on regenerating the East Barnwell area, residents there named their priority issues, and their relative importance. The aim of the East Barnwell redevelopment is to create a vibrant, sustainable neighbourhood with a new community centre, library and pre-school facilities. There will be improved open spaces, new high-quality housing and better walking and cycling routes.

A City Council statement in August '22 explained: "Nothing has been decided at this stage but the public's feedback will help us develop the emerging proposals for the area. Back in 2020 and 2021, we asked local people and community groups for their views and ideas on potential changes to improve East Barnwell, and hundreds of responses were received.

Many of these ideas and suggestions have now been incorporated into the more developed proposals for regenerating East Barnwell, starting with the central area near the Newmarket Road, Barnwell Road and Wadloes Road roundabout."

To find out more or get involved, visit <https://thefutureofeastbarnwell.co.uk>

Ekin Road

Ekin Road may also offer an important redevelopment opportunity for the local community. A Council statement in June '22 explained: "Nothing has yet been decided. We really want to hear from local residents which is why we are consulting now ahead of any decision..."

A number of options are being considered – from remedial works to maintain existing council homes, to a partial redevelopment of some areas, or a full redevelopment of the site. We have to consider which options are feasible and which provide the greatest benefits.

One of our aims in consulting is to build up a better picture of the needs of local people. If council tenants do have to move they will continue to have the option to be secure tenants of the council. We will work closely with tenants to best meet their needs; we expect this would be from the homes the Council owns in the area but some tenants may want to move further afield.

It may be possible for some tenants to return to the Ekin Road estate as it is redeveloped. People who own their homes would be offered the market value of their homes through sale back to the Council. There is also a compensation package for both tenants and owners, and financial support for the costs of relocating. Only in autumn 2022 or early 2023 will an initial decision be made about likely next steps, and all residents in Ekin Road will be kept updated as soon as we know more."

The Council also plans to work with a steering group of residents to help shape future plans. The Future of Ekin Road is a website dedicated to these consultations, at <https://ekinroad.co.uk> To get involved, email ekinroad@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 0800-193-1565.

Where to get financial help



Struggling to afford food?

To see how to get a voucher so you can visit one of Cambridge's Food Banks, visit <https://cambridgecity.foodbank.org.uk> or phone 07772-538628.

Can't pay your rent?

Phone 01223-457000 today to request a

payment plan, spreading the cost over months, to avoid losing your home.

If you need to claim Universal Credit...

Apply online at www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit

If you can't pay your Council Tax...

See if you are entitled to claim Council Tax Reduction. Apply online at www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction

If struggling with mobile phone or internet bills...

See online at www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk/2020/04/keeping-everyone-connected to find companies supporting customers who are having difficulty in paying.

Can't pay your water bills?

Cambridge Water may be able to help at tel. 0800-587-7701 or online at www.cambridge-water.co.uk/household/extra-help/help-with-paying

Cambridge Citizens' Advice can also help with all the issues just listed. Contact them at tel. 0344-848-7979.

Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme can provide help in the form of supermarket vouchers, energy vouchers, used cookers, white goods, furniture and clothes. Freephone 0808-278-7807, Mon-Friday, 9.30am-3.30pm. To be eligible, you must:

- have no savings
- if working, have a total household income of less than about £16,000 per year
- if on benefits, receive Pension Credit, Universal Credit, Income Support, Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance or Income-related Employment & Support Allowance

To apply, phone Cambridge Citizens' Advice Bureau at 0344-848-7979 or 01223-222660, or email them at caba@cambridgecab.org.uk

If you don't have access to the internet... or you want to learn to use the internet, Cambridge Online may be able to help you for free, if you phone them at 01223-300407.

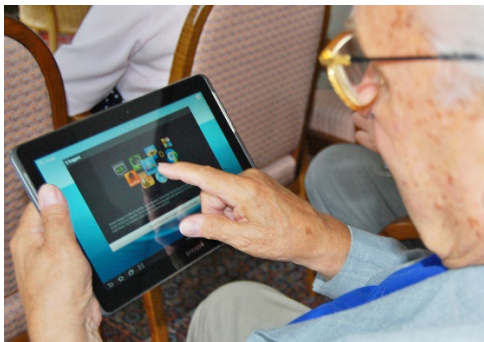
£1,500 for local groups

The Cambridge Good Life Fund is giving grants of up to £1,500 to local residents who create or run a group encouraging people to connect up and learn new skills. Examples might be a book club, walking group, craft class, gardening group or any other activity that reduces isolation and supports wellbeing. They hope to approve as many applications for small grants as possible. So do apply if:

- your activity promotes wellbeing
- at least four people are involved
- they are volunteering their time and energy
- your group is open to all, without discrimination

See the information video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3HrFZfT6I0 Apply online at www.cpslmind.org.uk/how-we-help/good-life-service/good-life-fund, or email goodlifefund@cpslmind.org.uk or phone 0300-303-4363.

Who to contact for services



Register for your personal Housing Services account at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk/housing/www>

Cambridge Virtual Community Centre

For support around effects of Covid-19 visit www.facebook.com/cambridgevcc

Domestic Abuse 24-hour Helpline

Tel: Freephone 0808-2000-247

Visit www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Make council payments by phone

Tel: 01223-457779, with bank card

Rents, tenancies, lettings, renting a council garage

Tel: 01223-457000

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/council-tenants

Repairs

Tel: 01223-457000; or 0300-303-8389 for out of hours emergency repairs

Contact Council in Sign Language

Register <https://signlive.co.uk>, then dial 01223-457000 for a live interpreter

Council Tax

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Housing for Older People

and Visiting Support Service

E: independent.living@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457199

Home-Link lettings

Visit www.home-link.org.uk

Tel: 01223-457918

Homelessness & temporary accommodation, outside office hours

Tel: 03300-538-109 (same cost as a normal landline)

Housing & Council Tax Benefits

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Bins, recycling, street-cleaning

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/bins-recycling-and-rubbish

Tel: 01223-457000

Bulky waste collection

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/arrange-a-bulky-waste-collection

Tel: 01223-457000

Report tenancy fraud

E: fightfraud@cambridge.gov.uk

Report anti-social behaviour

E: asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457950

Noise complaints

E: env.health@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Council emergencies out of hours

Tel: 0300-3038389

To complain about council services

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions.

Council's contractors on estates

TSG Services

E: enquiries@tsgplc.co.uk

Tel: 01223-828777

Goshen communal cleaning

E: cs@goshenmultiservices.com

Tel: 0754-2826553

Hi-Spec window cleaning

E: john.landiers@hispecservices.co.uk.

Suicide Awareness



If you or someone else feels suicidal, dial 111, then option 2, for help from NHS mental health professionals.

And www.stayingsafe.net is a free website offering practical help for people with suicidal thoughts, and for those caring for them.