

Open Door, Summer 2021



For the tenants and leaseholders of Cambridge City Council



Editorial

From David Greening, Head of Housing Services



Welcome to your summer edition of Open Door. The [first article](#) explains some improvements we made to our Customer Service Centre when it reopened in May. As you can see in this edition, more and more council services are now available online, 24 hours a day.

In this edition you can also read about [improvements to our repairs service](#). And we have a new system coming that will let you book your own time-slot online for your repair.

The previous edition of Open Door fed back on the independent satisfaction survey that was sent to all council tenants and leaseholders a few months back. This present edition gives you [more detail](#) on which services residents were happy with, and where you requested improvements. And you can see the actions the Council is taking to deliver those improvements.

Many of us will not be travelling away for holidays this summer. So we have [articles](#) showing you the wonderful days out and summer leisure activities that Cambridge offers for free. From paddling pools and sun-decks to dinosaur museums and kids' activities during the school holidays, there really is something for everyone, cost-free.

This edition also brings lots of support and services, from free [grass-cutting](#) to protection from [domestic abuse](#). Please take a look too at the article showing the actions that we can all take together to [cut our carbon emissions](#) and restore the biodiversity of our beautiful green city.

Below, I am happy to introduce Robert Pollock, the new Chief Executive of Cambridge City Council. Robert has worked in leadership roles across central and local government, and has a keen interest in creating more equality across our local communities.

With best wishes,

David Greening



Hello, I'm Robert Pollock, the new Chief Executive of Cambridge City Council. I'm really passionate about public service and the opportunity to help make a difference. I've worked in central and local government and for a not-for-profit helping more vulnerable communities and tackling inequality.

We live in a fantastic city - the best small city in the world. We have over 7,000 social homes and the City Council has ambitious plans to build more. It's all part of the Council's commitment to provide more affordable homes.

We also want to make those homes more energy efficient to reduce bills for tenants as well as reducing carbon emissions. Take care and stay safe!

Receive Open Door by email

Why not receive Open Door by email instead of on paper? It's easy to read on any device with wifi, saving 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. To ask to receive a second copy for a joint tenant, email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

A panel of council tenants and leaseholders help select and edit the content of every Open Door edition. To get involved, email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

All main photographs are by Emily Watts

The cover photo shows a garden entered in the Residents' Garden Competition

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24-hour access to council services



Increasingly, access to services provided by the City Council will be available in one place, through the My Cambridge portal on the Council's website.

It's easy to access it and 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.

The My Cambridge portal gives you a single system where you can request services and see the progress of your requests, using your smartphone or other online device. It also gives you access to your own personal housing account, on the Tenant and Leaseholder Portal.

Currently, My Cambridge lets you:

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

And you will soon be able to make quick, easy appointments for repairs to your council home, choosing a time that suits you among the time-slots available.

Meanwhile, the Council's Customer Service Centre at Mandela House in St Andrew's Street reopened to the public in May, for those with pre-booked appointments only.

The Customer Service Centre will be supporting customers to get the most out of the Council's online services as they are introduced.

Online services also enable the Council to prioritise staff time for helping those customers who need it most.

If you visit the Customer Service Centre, you will be given help to access services yourself online. This includes making payments with the help of advice and personalised guidance from staff, and using council equipment and technologies.

The Council's former cash offices at Mandela House and 171 Arbury Road will now remain permanently closed. But cash payments can still be made through Post Offices or PayPoint outlets.

Customers who need extra support or who do not have ready access to the internet can still phone the Council at 01223-457000.

Customer service advisors will support you with information and assistance, including help to make payments or to book an appointment at the Customer Service Centre if needed.

Tablet Loan Scheme

The City Council is facilitating free digital access to eligible tenants and leaseholders, through a 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 residents who are at risk of social exclusion, to help improve their economic situation.

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

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

To be eligible, the resident must be a council tenant or leaseholder 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.

Covid home-tests, and getting vaccinated

As the country aims gradually to reduce restrictions around Covid-19, there are still many easy actions that we can all take to help keep everyone safe and well. They include:

- testing oneself regularly at home for free
- getting vaccinated, to protect oneself and others
- wearing masks
- keeping up our social distancing
- washing our hands frequently
- keeping our buildings well ventilated with fresh air

Scientific evidence shows that the Covid-19 vaccines provide protection from the most serious and deadly effects of the virus, and also help to reduce transmission of the infection. The best thing you can do to protect yourself, your friends and family is to get vaccinated as soon as it is available to you.

Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish between facts and fake news, causing us to feel confused and nervous about what to do next.

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

You can book your vaccine online at www.nhs.uk/book-a-coronavirus-vaccination

Or just type 'book my vaccine' into your internet search engine. If you don't use the internet, phone 119 for help with booking your vaccine.

Testing is another important tool to help us all keep on top of the virus. One in three people with Covid-19 do not notice any symptoms, so they can easily pass on the infection to others without knowing it.

Anyone can order a box of free home-tests from the NHS, for peace of mind when going to work, school or visiting family. Or you can collect them for free from a local pharmacy.

For further details, see the next article.

Do free self-tests at home

As part of tackling the Covid-19 crisis, we can all make doing a rapid test at home part of our regular routine twice a week.

It can just become a healthy habit: get dressed, brush your teeth, do the test... You can receive free, rapid tests through the door by post. Just request them online at www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests

Or you can collect free home-tests from a local pharmacy. For your nearest collection point, enter your postcode online at <https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>

It's free, easy and only takes a few seconds. But it can help fight Covid-19, keeping you and all those around you much safer. By doing this, we're all helping each other to return gradually and safely to a more normal way of life.

Services and support for you going forward

Improving your repairs service



A message from Lynn Thomas, head of your repairs service...

"Firstly, we would like to thank you for your patience with the restrictions placed upon your repairs service since March 2020, due to the pandemic.

Although we have kept an essential service running throughout, we have not been able to attend to some of your non-essential repairs for a proportion of this time.

At the time of writing this, we are now operating a normal service again, and dealing with the repairs that have been on hold.

Secondly, we want to also thank you for your continued help in keeping yourselves and our repairs staff safe. You did this by complying with the requests we made of you during repairs appointments, such as clearing and cleaning the area of your home that our staff were working in, and maintaining social distancing during the appointment.

Back in January 2020, we told you about the review that we were doing of your services, and the improvements that we were planning to make.

Due to the impact of Covid-19, not all of these improvements have been possible, but we have been able to make a positive difference in a number of areas. Some examples of these improvements are:

In November 2020 we introduced a new appointment and mobile working system. This has improved the scheduling of your appointments, giving a better customer experience. Once we have addressed the backlog of repairs caused by the pandemic, you should experience a shorter wait for appointments.

We reviewed our internal processes and made changes to how we work, with the aim of improving communication with our tenants and leaseholders.

We have cut the time it takes to carry out repairs when properties are empty before being re-let. We achieved this through better planning and resourcing of the work.

We have introduced a dedicated team that is responsible for compliance with our landlord duties. They are currently working on further actions to develop this part of the service.

With the aim to improve customer satisfaction, we have also been looking at the complaints we receive and the reasons why a specific service that we delivered led to a complaint.

So we were pleased to see that in the year April 2020 to March 2021, there was a reduction in the number of complaints we received, particularly about the quality of repair jobs and delays in getting repairs completed.

The next improvement coming in the months ahead is our new booking service, where you will be able to book your own repairs online and choose your time from the time-slots available."

For more information or to contact your repairs service, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/housing-repairs-for-council-tenants or phone 01223-457060.

Help for using the internet

Cambridge Online is a charity that helps everyone learn to use the internet, so that no-one is left behind. Despite Covid-19 restrictions, their friendly Digital Champions are still available to you over the phone and by email.

Maybe you're a complete beginner with computers? Or perhaps you need to use the internet to look for work or benefits, find health information, or just get in touch with family and friends.

They can help you over the phone with all those things. Just phone 01223-300407: you may need to leave a message, but they will call you back.

They can also get you started with a suitable online learning course, until they can teach you face to face after Covid-19 restrictions are fully lifted. For more information, visit <http://cambridgeonline.org.uk/courses>

They also specialise in providing free, donated laptops and internet equipment to the residents who need them most. Phone them at the number above to see if you may be eligible for free equipment.

Free computer use at local libraries

Meanwhile, your local libraries are now open again, giving all residents free access to their public computers and free internet.

Note that you can only use those computers to access things like benefits and public services - they're not available for private internet surfing.

To use local libraries' public access computers, you must first register as a library user.

You can then pre-book your computer-use slot online or over the phone at 0345-045-5225.

At www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/libraries/visit-a-library you can see the opening times for your nearest public library.

They are spread widely around the city, at Arbury Court, Barnwell Road, the Grand Arcade in the city centre, Cherry Hinton, Clay Farm, Milton Road, Romsey and Rock Road.

Your housing account online

You can now access many of your landlord's housing services online, as the housing service has created a new Tenant and Leaseholder Portal.

You can register and log into it via the homepage of the City Council's website. See the first article of this edition to access your own account.

It provides a confidential, online space dedicated to your own personal housing account, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

On there, you can check and print out the current status of your rent account, viewing your past rent payments and any rent or arrears that are due. You can send messages to housing staff, update your personal information, order a new rent payment card, and much more.

If you need to book an appointment at Mandela House for face to face help with using your online housing portal, phone 01223-457070.

Free support services



Cambridge Virtual Community Centre is an online community hub that has been helping residents in many different ways throughout the Covid-19 crisis. They are still there for you every day at www.facebook.com/cambridgevcc

With over a thousand people involved online, it's a community space to share positive ideas, support and inspiration, encouraging everybody in Cambridge to remain safe and resilient during the ever-changing Covid-19 pandemic.

Cambridge Sustainable Food is helping to provide emergency food supplies around the city. As part of the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance, they run community food hubs around the city where people at risk of food poverty can access food for free.

They can also ensure that meals are delivered to those who need them most, including those at risk of lacking food during the school holidays.

If you are having difficulties with affording or accessing food, help is available. Just fill in the online form to ask for help at <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org/updates-and-info-covid-19>

Or if you know someone who is struggling to afford food, refer them to the online request form, or make the request for them.

Meanwhile, Cambridge Women's Resources Centre welcomes all women in Cambridge. They provide free or very low-cost resources, opportunities, support and a safe space for women who are in difficulty to change their lives for the better.

As well as advice and trainings, they help women gain friends and confidence through free events like a book club, art classes and a walking group.

They are gradually reopening their venue for in-person visits and events. To see what they have to offer, visit their website at www.cwrc.org, email them at info@cwrc.org.uk or phone 01223-321148.

Or follow their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CambridgeWomensResourcesCentre

Free Family Adventure Trails

The Council's Sports Team have created several free Adventure Trails in the city, ideal for families with kids aged 5-11.

You download the app Wildgoose's Mobile Adventures onto your smartphone (free from Google Play or the App Store). And a video shows you how the Adventure Trails work.

Each Adventure Trail contains a variety of fun challenges. The Trails are designed to get families having free, healthy, educational fun together outdoors. Why not have a go at one this weekend?

Every family who completes one of the Adventures wins a rosette! And if you complete five of the Adventure Trails, you can win a free outdoor sports game for your family, such as a swingball set or a cricket set (subject to availability).

Abbey Adventure Trail, for kids age 7 and over, takes 30-40 minutes. It starts near the Abbey Pool, and has a music theme.

The Cherry Hinton Hall Adventure, for ages 4-11, takes about 40-60 minutes and has a 'Can you find it...?' theme, while exploring Cherry Hinton Hall's beautiful grounds.

Meanwhile, Cherry Hinton Recreation Ground Adventure has a theme around local and world geography. It starts and finishes at the centre of Cherry Hinton village, and is suitable for children aged 7 and older.

Coldham's Common Adventure Trail has a theme based on climate change and protection of the environment.

The Parkside Adventure, which starts outside Parkside pool, has a theme of sports trivia.

And Trumpington Meadows Country Park Trail, for kids aged 5 and over, takes 50-75 minutes, starting near the Park's Byron's Pool entrance.

To get started, visit <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/mobile-adventures-activity-trails>

And for more free, fun adventures around the city, follow Let's Get Moving Cambridge on Facebook or on Twitter

Enjoy summer around the city for free

Lounging by the water



Open since 1923, Jesus Green Lido is one of the few remaining examples of the lidos that were built around the country in the 1920s and '30s.

It's the largest pool in Cambridge, and one of the longest outdoor pools in the country. Across the summer season, it's open every day from 7am to 7pm.

It's in a beautiful setting, with both lawn and paved areas wrapped around it for sunbathing. The area is surrounded by mature trees that protect from the wind and give an enclosed sense of privacy.

There are male and female facilities for changing and showering, and a basket room for clothes.

The pool and its surrounds have been made Covid-safe. At the time of writing, you can swim for up to an hour, and you must book your swim in advance. Just choose your time-slot and book it online at www.better.org.uk/leisure-centre/cambridge/jesusgreenlido

Sessions cost £5 for adults, but £3 for children and seniors, or less if you become a member.

Social distancing applies, and you must arrive wearing your swimsuit under your clothes. You can only access the changing rooms after your swim.

When Covid rules allow, pool users will be able to use the sauna, deckchairs and cafe that are laid out for their enjoyment around the pool.

There are bike racks outside the pool, and buses stop nearby on Chesterton Road and on Bridge Street. There is full disabled access, with disabled toilet facilities and a hoist to help disabled residents to enter the pool.

Meanwhile, the Council's Abbey and Parkside Pools are also open. The Council also hopes to keep open its paddling pools, water play areas and splashpads this summer. They are at Cherry Hinton water play area, Coleridge paddling pool, Lammas Land paddling pool and Sheep's Green learner pool. The Splashpad water play areas are at Abbey Pool and Coleridge Recreation Ground.

For more information on all the above, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/swimming

Lots to do in local parks

With about 100 free play areas and nature reserves all over the city, there's always one near you. Or you could spend time this summer exploring parks you're not familiar with. Just pack a picnic and a frisbee for a fun day out for all.

You can browse a map of all the city's parks, nature reserves and playgrounds at www.cambridge.gov.uk/parks-and-playgrounds

You could vary the atmosphere of your days out, alternating between:

- manicured gardens like Christ's College in St Andrew's Street
- wild and 'secret', little-visited nature reserves like Logan's Meadow
- the children's play park and beautiful greenery of Lammas Land in Newnham
- the free tennis courts at Jesus Green

To locate the city's nature reserves, visit <http://lnr.cambridge.gov.uk/visit-the-cambridge-nature-reserves>

And to locate water-play equipment, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/splashpads

Free Music in the Parks



On Sunday afternoons in August and September, the Council will organise free live concerts in the city's greens.

In parks like Cherry Hinton Hall and Jesus Green, there will be local jazz and folk, and summery brass bands. Take a picnic for a relaxing, music-filled outing in the sun. The dates are:

- Cherry Hinton Hall, 8th August
- Nuns Way Rec, Kings Hedges, 15th August
- Coleridge Park, 22nd August
- St Albans Recreation Ground, Arbury, 29th August
- Jesus Green, 5th September
- King George V Playing Field, Trumpington, 12th September

- Nightingale Rec, Queen Edith's, 19th September
- Jesus Green, 26th September

For more information on these concerts, visit www.cambridgelive.org.uk/city-events or www.facebook.com/CamCityEvents

Free leisure activities for kids

ChYpPS is the Council's outreach service that provides free play and leisure activities for children and young people in Cambridge. They work all over the city and are based at Brown's Field Community Centre in Chesterton.

ChYpPS provide a welcoming, safe and exciting programme of activities and events for young people of all ages.

As trained professionals, they can offer innovative, educational forms of play that children particularly enjoy and learn from, such as Urban Adventure Play and Risky Play. To see what they are offering across this summer, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/chypps-activities

Last summer, due to Covid-19, ChYpPS had to deliver their usual programme of summer events online. Called PlayDaze, the school holidays programme provides crafts, quizzes, discos and much more to keep youngsters busy while they're not at school.

This year's summer schedule (available online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/chypps-activities) will run from Monday 26 July to Friday 20 August. It will be a mixture of online activities and play sessions at local parks.

Meanwhile, kids can still enjoy all the summer activities that ChYpPS posted online last summer.

They have collected all the videos of their 2020 online summer activities into a playlist on their YouTube channel.

You can use them and participate at www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLx4WhO_Kk6a4Qv14LkWoj1cmDbnElxf3E

The videos include arts and crafts, quizzes, discos and much more to keep children busy. So you can either catch up on any you missed last year, or enjoy them for the first time this year.

Follow their regular updates on Facebook, showing all the innovative fun that children and families are having with them, at www.facebook.com/chypps

Or for more information about this summer's activities, email chypps@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457873.

Crafting fun at the Community Scrapstore

The Council's Community Scrapstore offers fun arts and crafts supplies at very low cost. Kids, families or crafters can fill a basket with materials of their choice for just £1.50. (You first pay £5 membership per year, or £10 for a whole group.)

Follow them on Facebook to see the amazing arts and crafts that residents are producing from Scrapstore materials. As well as being creative, money-saving fun, it's an example of reuse and recycling: the materials are often donated to the Scrapstore by local businesses.

They are located at Unit 17, Barnwell Business Park, Barnwell Rd, CB5 8UZ. While Covid-19 rules last, you must book your visit in advance and browse only one person at a time, with only those over 11 allowed to enter. To book your visit email playeast@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457923.

Free days out on a bike



Cambridge is known for its excellent network of cycle paths in and around the city. Why not use them this summer to explore parts of Cambridge that you don't know yet, or perhaps haven't seen for a long time?

All around the edges of the city there are newly built, beautifully landscaped neighbourhoods that you may not have visited yet.

Most have quality cycle paths that join them up to the centre of town, to promote cycling and walking, rather than car-driving.

Cambridge is Britain's cycling capital, with a third of trips in the town now made by bike. For a free, healthy mood-boost while getting around on two wheels, there is nowhere better in the country.

The city has an increasing number of dedicated cycle lanes, and also has one of the best off-road cycle routes in the country, running alongside the guided busway. Wide, safe and smoothly surfaced for 14 miles, it has no other traffic except the occasional guided bus. It has become a favourite cycle outing for locals, whether they just follow it to the edge of the city, or take it further out into the countryside.

Beyond the city limits there are flat fens with big skies and long, straight country roads well suited to days out on a bike.

For instance you can head south towards Grantchester along a dedicated cycle path, or north towards Waterbeach. However far you want to go, there are beautiful cycle routes to suit every level of fitness.

For maps and guides to three such days out locally on a bike, visit https://cycle.travel/city/cambridge/days_out

You can pick up a free copy of the city's cycle routes at the Tourist Information Centre behind the Guildhall, and in many shops.

Or you can download the cycle route map at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/cycling/cycle-routes-and-maps

Have you visited the city's free museums?

Cambridge has more museums and galleries per square mile than anywhere in the UK outside London. Many, including the following, are free.

The Fitzwilliam Museum in Trumpington St, CB2 1RB, is the most popular free attraction in East Anglia. It offers everything from medieval weapons to impressionist paintings.

It's open Tues-Sat, 10am-5pm & Sun, midday-5pm.

The Scott Polar Research Museum at Lensfield Rd, CB2 1ER has the world's biggest collection about the polar regions, with boats, tools and maps of polar explorers' adventures.

And the Sedgwick Museum (Downing St., CB2 3EQ) takes you back billions of years, with its collection about dinosaurs, fossils and minerals. It's open Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm, 2pm-5pm & Sat, 10am-4pm.

Council actions responding to your feedback



An independent satisfaction survey was sent to all the Council's tenants and leaseholders a few months ago. The results show your satisfaction levels with aspects of your housing service. From now on, each Open Door edition will show you the actions the Council is taking to improve specific services. (You can read the full survey results at www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement-strategies-updates-and-reports)

Only 52% of you felt you get the opportunity to make your views known to City Homes.

So the Council is pledging...

- to advertise resident involvement opportunities more widely through Open Door, an e-newsletter and the Council's website.
- to do more frequent resident surveys via email and post, which residents can respond to quickly and easily.

Only 50% feel that City Homes publicises improvements made using tenants' feedback.

So the Council pledges...

- that, starting with this present edition, every edition of Open Door will include a 'You said it, We did it' feature where each service area in turn shows the specific improvements they have made in response to residents' survey feedback.
- to further promote the Residents' Panel that gives residents input on housing policy and procedures. Housing staff consult the Residents' Panel about service changes, and embed their feedback. The Residents' Panel is open to all tenants and leaseholders - to take part, phone 01223-458323 for more information.

Only 66% feel City Homes is good at keeping you informed.

So the Council pledges...

- that all teams across the housing service are responsible for keeping residents better informed about the services they provide. Information on these actions will be in future editions of Open Door.
- that a new Resident Involvement e-newsletter will be published 3 times a year. It will be emailed out between editions of Open Door magazine, reducing communication gaps between the housing service and its residents.

To be added to the e-newsletter mailing list, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk

(If you don't have email access, a paper copy can be posted to you on request

if you phone 01223-458323.)

72% of tenants are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live (down 9% since 2014). But only 59% are satisfied with its overall appearance. Residents' priorities for improvement are paths (54%), estate lighting (39%) and the health and wellbeing of tenants (31%).

So the Council pledges...

- to make more physical improvements to estates guided by the resident priorities above, funded by the Council's Estate Improvement Scheme. If you have suggestions for improvements to your estate, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.
- to continue to involve residents in monitoring estate services like communal cleaning, communal window cleaning and grounds maintenance. This will improve standards and ensure value for money.

To boost the sense of community on your estate, why not create a local community group or Resident's Association with your neighbours? Your Resident Involvement team can help you to do this, if you email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk

Residents' preferred means of communication is by letter (61%) and email (23%). 74% of tenants have access to the internet. 20% had signed up to the My Cambridge Portal (see article on that in this edition) but 50% didn't yet know about it.

So the Council pledges...

- to continue to send correspondence like Open Door and consultations via post, as well as an e-newsletter via email which can be posted to residents without internet access.
- to further broaden its range of digital inclusion activities, helping residents who don't yet have internet access and skills to engage online.

Your home and your services



Your tenancy team

The Tenancy Management Team at your housing service deal with a wide variety of queries and issues related to your tenancy. These include:

- rent payment and managing rent-arrears
- queries about your Tenancy Agreement
- renting garages and parking spaces
- advice on exchanging your home for another council property
- dealing with sub-letting
- dealing with abandoned tenancies

- adding someone to your tenancy, e.g. by succession, survivorship or assignment

You can phone your Tenancy Management Team at 01223-457070 or email them at housing.officer@cambridge.gov.uk Their service standards policy means they will:

- phone you back within 24 hours for emergencies
- phone you back within 5 working days for non-emergencies
- for a report of domestic abuse, phone you back within 24 hours and arrange a meeting within 5 working days
- reply to your letters and emails within 7 working days
- for a request to visit your home, phone you back within 5 working days to arrange a visit
- investigate reports of abandonment and non-occupation within 10 working days
- provide a decision on Mutual Exchange applications within 6 weeks

Paying your rent is a top priority for keeping your home. You can pay your rent by:

- paying on the internet at www.cambridge.gov.uk/pay-your-housing-rent
- paying anywhere that displays the PayPoint sign, or at any Post Office
- paying by phone at 01223-457779

But if you have difficulty paying your rent, phone the team promptly at 01223-457070 to arrange a payment plan that's manageable for you. They may be able to arrange for you to pay less or no rent for a few months, then pay more to catch up in later months. They can also help you claim any benefits you are entitled to, and provide support for you to manage your personal finances.

Free skills trainings



Cambridgeshire Skills offer free trainings to eligible adults. They are getting residents back into face to face classes and trainings, in Covid-secure venues around town.

Many of their skills trainings are free if you:

- earn less than £18,000 per year, or
- are unemployed, or
- receive certain benefits

(For free courses, you must be aged at least 19 and have lived in the UK or European Economic Area for at least 3 years.)

They are now offering more online courses than ever before, with a wide choice of subjects, and different ways of learning.

All their courses come with full tutor support. But their 'Flexible Online Courses', for instance, let you learn at your own pace, at a time that suits you.

Meanwhile, their 'Live-Streamed Online Learning' combines the benefits of flexible home study with regular live-streamed sessions direct from their tutors.

To improve your basic skills levels, you will find a wide range of topics including Maths, English, English As a Second Language, and computers and IT.

And to improve your employability or help you find a job in a specific field, they offer specific courses on things like Employability, Hospitality, Retail, Garden Design, and Health and Wellbeing.

As a well-respected community learning service, 91% of their learners have succeeded in achieving their learning goals. It's one of the highest achievement rates in the country.

To be a part of their success story or to get details of their free courses, just phone their friendly team at 01353-613013 or email cambsals@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

You can search their entire range of courses online at www.cambsals.co.uk

Or follow them on social media [@cambsskills](#)

Tackling perpetrators of domestic abuse

In 2019, Cambridge City Council became just the fifth local authority in the country to be awarded the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation.

DAHA recognises that housing providers are in a unique position to identify abuse, prevent it and provide help for people suffering its effects. The DAHA accreditation is the national benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse.

As part of its DAHA accreditation, the City Council is strengthening its approach to managing perpetrators of domestic abuse who use, or wish to use, the Council's Housing Services.

This new approach to managing those committing domestic abuse includes:

- the option to prevent them from joining the Council's housing register, in line with the Council's Lettings Policy
- guidance for staff on building a strong case against perpetrators, and gathering the evidence required to pursue enforcement action against them
- providing sole tenancies to abuse survivors, with the help of specialist legal services
- reinstating survivors in their tenancies under the same terms as their previous tenancy

The Council will ensure that domestic abuse survivors will not lose their security of tenure as a result of leaving their home due to domestic abuse.

It will repossess properties where the abuser is the remaining tenant and there are clear benefits to ending the tenancy or repossessing the property.

The Council will work with partner agencies to signpost perpetrators towards rehabilitation services. (New funding from government to help reduce national reoffending rates is particularly welcome.)

In addition to its DAHA accreditation, Cambridge City Council has also recently retained the White Ribbon accreditation that it first gained in 2015.

This reaffirms the Council's commitment to ending male violence against women and girls.

The White Ribbon Campaign:

- speaks out about violence against women and girls
- engages men on the subject

- challenges gender stereotypes that underpin this violence
- challenges cultures that lead to harassment, abuse and violence against women

The events at the women's demonstration at Clapham Common in March, and the new Domestic Abuse Bill recently brought into law, both demonstrate that tackling domestic abuse and violence against women is more relevant than ever.

Cambridge City Council is proud to be a leading voice on this issue locally. Advice for those impacted by domestic abuse and details of how the Council can help are at www.cambridge.gov.uk/advice-for-people-affected-by-domestic-abuse

Or phone your housing officer for confidential, one to one help at 01223-457070.

Council's actions for equality and diversity



To find out more about how the Council is promoting equality and tackling discrimination in the city, you can attend the city's Equalities Panel.

This is an independent body that supports the Council's decision-making on equality and diversity actions. The public are welcome to attend or watch online (depending on Covid-19 rules), to listen and ask questions.

The meetings are held twice a year. For meeting dates, see <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=185>

Cambridge City Council is fully committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different and diverse communities.

This includes all people with the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation.

Some of the topics recently discussed at the Equalities Panel meeting include:

- the City Council's response during Covid-19 to supporting people with the protected characteristics listed above
- the Council's cross-party Black Lives Matter motion
- the Council's work in tackling domestic abuse

The Council also coordinates an Equality and Diversity events calendar for the city, including activities for:

- Black History Month
- Disability History Month
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month
- Holocaust Memorial Day
- International Women's Day
- LGBTQ History Month
- Mental Health Awareness Week

- South Asian History Month

You can report discrimination or harassment to the Council by emailing community.safety@cambridge.gov.uk or phoning 01223-457950.

Disabilities may not be visible

Some disabilities may be hidden or not obvious, for instance those around learning, mental health, mobility, speech, vision or hearing. And a hidden disability can make it difficult to comply with social distancing or wearing a mask.

Those with hidden disabilities can face daily verbal abuse or harassment from people who are annoyed at them, because unaware of the disability.

People with hidden disabilities may wear the Sunflower Badge provided by Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda and Aldi - though some may choose not to. For more information about the Sunflower, visit <https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com>

Blindness charity RNIB asks us to 'maintain the space, be patient and be helpful', keeping hidden disabilities in mind. For more information, visit www.rnib.org.uk/campaigning/social-distancing

Information for leaseholders

Your Estate Services are being improved



At the end of 2020, an independent satisfaction survey was sent to all the City Council's leaseholders, to assess their satisfaction with the City Council's services for its leaseholders. (See inside this edition for details.)

Among other questions, the survey asked you to name which leasehold services you most want the City Council to prioritise.

Your feedback showed that leaseholders' two top priorities are about the estate services that they receive.

Estate services that leaseholders receive from the City Council can include:

- grounds maintenance
- caring for the appearance of the neighbourhood and external areas
- cleaning of internal communal areas
- window cleaning

Responding to this feedback, the Council is continuing to deliver a well-funded programme that is now improving neighbourhoods on council estates.

Examples of its upcoming improvement projects include:

- improvements to landscaping (gardens, seating areas, planting, fencing, etc.)
- improving safety and security (eg. with railings, improving visibility, etc.), with the aim to 'design out' crime
- a focus on preventing and reducing flytipping

If you have any ideas or suggestions for small neighbourhood improvements as part of the programme described above, please email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Meanwhile, your elected Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives on the Housing Scrutiny Committee have been successful in gaining funding for a dedicated officer to work with residents in areas where flytipping is a problem.

The aim of this post will be to work with the resident community to reduce and prevent flytipping. The new officer will educate about and promote recycling, and other ways of discarding unwanted items without having a detrimental impact on the neighbourhood.

In April 2021, a new company, HighSpec, were appointed by the City Council to provide the window cleaning service to communal windows within flat-blocks and sheltered housing.

The Council is also developing ways to improve its monitoring of contractors, to ensure it can provide quality performance feedback to the residents receiving those contractors' services.

Meanwhile, your Estate Services staff team are committed to:

- improving the standard of cleaning within communal areas
- improving the monitoring of cleaning standards - both by officers and by resident inspectors - to ensure an improved cleaning service

If you would like to be a resident inspector monitoring the quality of council services on your estate, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Alterations to your home



As a City Council leaseholder, you must get the Council's permission before carrying out certain alterations to your property. These include, for example, alterations to your kitchen, bathroom, boiler, heating system, or removal of internal walls. External alterations to doors, windows and garden sheds also require permission.

If your alteration application is refused, you will be given a reason. Permission will be subject to conditions, such as the work being carried out by a competent tradesperson, and potentially being checked by a council surveyor. Failing to comply with the conditions could breach your leasehold agreement.

Applications for alteration permission cost £30, paid in advance. If requiring a surveyor's visit, this incurs a further £125 fee.

Applying retrospectively incurs an additional £25 charge. You will be told if the alteration requires an amendment to your lease, incurring further charges and a solicitor needed to act on your behalf.

The Council aims to respond in full within two weeks. But alterations requiring a visit can take up to six weeks and those requiring amendments to the lease, up to six months. Your alteration might require building regulations approval or planning permission. You can apply for those first if you wish, but they won't influence the Council's decision whether to grant permission, which could be refused even if you have planning permission.

To reduce noise, your lease requires you to keep your entire flat substantially carpeted, except in the kitchen or bathroom where cork, rubber or other noise-reducing flooring can be used. If you install unsuitable flooring and complaints are received, you will be required to remove it and replace it with a material that complies with your lease.

Note that if you sell your property, any alterations that have been done must be left in good condition, with relevant paperwork passed on to the buyer.

For more information email leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457835.

Rules on lofts

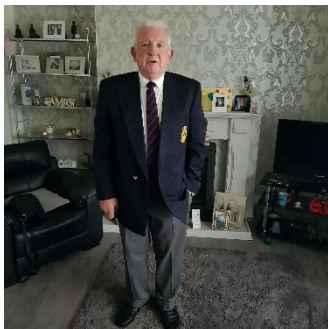
For leaseholders of top floor flats, it may be that the roof space above your home is accessed from inside your property. But this loft space remains the property and responsibility of Cambridge City Council. The Council will not sell it, and you do not have the right to access it without Council permission. You must allow the Council to access it via your home on request.

Any alterations to your property must be contained within your own flat. For instance, boilers or extractor fans must vent out through external walls: they cannot run through lofts or communal areas. And the Council will not grant permission for new wiring or services to run through the loft. But permission will likely be granted for tradespeople to enter the loft space to upgrade, replace or remove existing services only.

For more information email leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457835.

Resident involvement

Message from a tenant rep



“Hi all, My name is Colin Stevens. My wife and I moved to Cambridge just over two years ago. Being semi-retired and with little to do, I decided I would try and get involved with the local Council.

When a letter dropped through the door asking for people to put themselves forward for the role of Elected Tenant Representative on the Housing Scrutiny Committee, I thought 'Ideal opportunity!'. I completed the application form and returned it.

I was fortunate enough to be elected as one of the five Tenant Reps who, along with one Leaseholder Rep, sit and vote on the Housing Scrutiny Committee. As Tenant and Leaseholder reps, we are your voice on the City Council.

We ensure that your voice is heard. And we can and do influence decisions.

I have really enjoyed being involved in several decisions that not only affect things now, but will influence the way decisions are made for years to come.

Councils are now getting more and more tenants involved. You could be one of them, and you can make a difference.

So my one piece of advice would be: GET INVOLVED! I am glad I did."

To contact us, your elected Resident Representatives, email hsc.residents@gmail.com or leave us a phone message at 01223-458323.

There are also lots of other roles available as a tenant or leaseholder representative that can be tailored to suit you, depending on whether you want to give a lot or just a little of your time.

For more information, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323."

Involving residents

Cambridge City Council is proud of its track record for involving its tenants and leaseholders in the delivery and management of their housing services.

Volunteer tenants and leaseholders act as resident inspectors and panel and committee members, affecting and scrutinising key decisions within the housing service. And the resident communities on the estates participate via surveys, resident newsletters, social media and local residents' groups.

The Council is keen to ensure that Resident Involvement remains a targeted service that gives value for money, responds to residents' needs and meets national standards well. So its new Resident Involvement Strategy:

- addresses the priorities of tenants and leaseholders as expressed in their recent satisfaction survey
- targets resources and support for effective Resident Involvement
- ensures that residents and communities can influence and scrutinise their housing services appropriately
- links Resident Involvement directly into the business plans of the housing service
- facilitates methods for involving residents in the Council's physical improvements to their neighbourhood environments
- commits to providing information to residents, and gathering feedback from them, in the ways that they prefer
- ensures that the impacts and value for money of Resident Involvement are measured
- arranges for reporting back transparently to communities on all the above

Open Door will update you regularly on the progress of this new Resident Involvement Strategy. Or to read it for yourself, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement

To find out more about getting involved in improving your housing service, view the many opportunities online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement, or email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Help for communities

Free grass-cutting service



As part of your Tenancy Agreement, it is your responsibility to maintain your garden. This means keeping it tidy and free of rubbish, pruning trees and bushes as needed before they get out of control, and keeping your grass cut reasonably often.

Failure to look after your garden can negatively affect your property, as well as affecting your neighbours and the local area.

If you find you are not able to maintain your garden, you could consider requesting a move to a suitable council property without a garden.

But in the meantime, Cambridge City Council's Housing Service is currently able to provide a free grass-cutting service for eligible council tenants who are unable to cut their own grass.

The service includes one free grass-cut per month between 1st April 2021 and 31st October 2021. (This free offer only covers grass-cutting, not any other kind of garden maintenance or garden clearance.)

Naturally, there is limited availability on this free service. So in order to ensure that the offer benefits those who need it most, those who qualify as eligible must:

- have a disability
- provide proof that you receive benefit in relation to your disability
- live alone, or with other people who are also eligible
- have no family living within a 10-mile radius who could do your grass-cutting, and are willing to do it
- be a Cambridge City Council tenant aged 18 or over

To apply for this free grass-cutting service if you think you or someone you know may be eligible, please contact your Resident Involvement team by phoning 01223-458323 or emailing resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk

You will receive a simple application form that will enable you to apply for this helpful free service.

Save on energy bills

Are you worried about your energy bills? We have all been spending more time at home recently, and may have seen a significant increase in our energy bills. This can be a cause of much financial worry, but help is available.

The environment charity PECT has a Warm Homes service that gives free energy advice and support to vulnerable Cambridge residents. Eligible residents can get support with energy debts, reducing your energy bills and providing free energy-

saving items such as LED bulbs. The service can also assist with small home improvements and help to access grants.

They will check to ensure you are receiving the best energy and water tariffs, and whether you are eligible for discounts. They can also show you simple, effective ways to save money on your energy bills, just by changing the way you use your appliances.

Their energy-saving tips include:

- When working at home, ensure you do so in an area that has natural light. And always use LED lightbulbs, which use less energy.
- When filling the kettle, only use the amount of water you actually need.
- Always put lids on your cooking pots: it saves energy and reduces condensation and mould.
- Every day during cold weather, switch off your heating for five minutes and air your space by opening windows. Even a few minutes brings in the fresh air you need. Then switch your heating back on after closing the windows - this airs your home with minimal waste of energy.

To see if you're eligible for one to one help from Warm Homes, phone 0800-8021773 or email warmhomes@pect.org.uk Visit online at www.pect.org.uk/WarmHomes Also see the City Council's bill-reducing tips at www.cambridge.gov.uk/home-energy-and-water-use-advice

As a council tenant, you can also receive free, one to one financial support and advice from the Council's Financial Inclusion Officers. They help struggling tenants to claim the benefits they need, manage their finances and arrange payment plans for bills. You can contact them by phoning 01223-457070.

Tackling climate change

Zero emissions from the Council by 2030



The City Council has committed itself to producing net zero carbon from its own corporate buildings, vehicles and work travel by 2030.

The Council's new Climate Change Strategy has also set a vision for the city as a whole to produce net zero carbon by 2030. The Council will lead by:

- eliminating carbon emissions from its own buildings, vehicles and services
- imposing carbon-cutting requirements on its external contractors and grant-recipients

In the five years up to 2020, the Council invested over £1.4m in energy efficiency and renewable energy in its buildings, which reduced its carbon emissions by almost 29%. Further actions will include:

- changing its buildings from gas to low-carbon heating
- installing heat pumps and additional solar panels at Parkside and Abbey Pools, reducing the pools' carbon emissions by over 440 tonnes per year
- only buying ultra-low emission vans, trucks and refuse vehicles, whenever a council vehicle needs replacing

- all council vehicles to be electric or hydrogen-run by 2028

The Council also requires all the city's taxis to be ultra-low or zero carbon vehicles by 2028 (the earliest date set by any UK council). And to hasten the city's shift to electric vehicles, the Council has installed 21 charging points for taxis, put charging points in council car parks, and will pilot on-street charging for residents.

The City Council itself produces only 1.1% of the city's carbon emissions. This new strategy recognises that everyone in the city must play an active role in carbon reduction. The Council will also help by promoting sustainable food and a circular economy, and encouraging cycling, walking and low-emission vehicles.

You and your household can make a real difference. See the next article to find out how to calculate your own carbon footprint, with practical ways to reduce your carbon footprint without reducing your quality of life.

For more information visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/climate-change-strategy or email sustainablecity@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223- 457176

Take your own actions

The city's Climate Change Charter enables you to take personal, hands-on action against climate change, by actively reducing your own personal carbon emissions.

You just sign up online, use the online tool to calculate the size of your own carbon footprint, and then use the Charter's practical tips to measurably reduce your own carbon impact.

It's very satisfying to do, because you'll see that you're making a real difference at your own individual level. It's at

<https://cambridgecarbonfootprint.org/charter/individual/>

The site provides advice, resources and training to help you understand and reduce your carbon footprint.

Or for more information, email sustainablecity@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457176.

Plant a tree for Cambridge and the planet

Cambridge City Council is part of the Nature Smart Cities project which is preparing towns and cities for the impacts of climate change.

Cities' over-reliance on concrete, tarmac, and natural stone make them vulnerable to climate-related problems. But, by using natural materials and approaches – so called 'Green Infrastructure' – some of these problems can be lessened.

Trees, rain gardens, green roofs, green walls, sustainable urban drainage and other approaches can be used to help cool cities, capture heavy rainfall, and improve air quality. They also support wildlife and improve our physical and mental health.

So Cambridge is piloting the Cambridge Canopy Project, using trees' canopy cover to make our city more liveable for the future. It aims to increase the city's tree canopy cover by 2%, bringing it up to 19%. This requires 16,000 new trees.

The City Council is planting 2,000 new trees in public spaces. A further 1,500 trees will be given to residents for free to plant themselves as part of the Free Trees for Babies scheme (www.cambridge.gov.uk/free-trees-for-babies) and local Neighbourhood Canopy Campaigns (www.cambridge.gov.uk/neighbourhood-canopy-campaign).

But 12,500 more trees are also needed, and you could help! There are thousands of council homes across the city, many of which have their own front or back garden. Why not plant a tree or two in yours to contribute to the city's canopy cover target?

Appropriate council home gardens can offer a great opportunity for tree planting. They could substantially increase the number of trees across the city and its canopy cover.

By planting even a single tree in your garden, you will contribute to Cambridge's collective 'urban forest' that is made up of all the trees in the city – those on our roads, in the parks and college grounds, and those in private gardens.

By doing so you will also be helping to increase the supply of benefits from all these trees – what we call the 'ecosystem services' that trees provide for free. They include shade, shelter, cooling, water absorption, flood reduction, wildlife habitat and, crucially, the reduction of carbon and other air pollutants.

Planting a tree is one of the simplest ways that you can take personal action to help in the fight against climate change and help to make your city better adapted for the future.

There is a tree out there to suit almost any space, no matter the size of your garden. Some varieties will even grow happily in containers on patios. If you want to help grow our urban forest and contribute to making Cambridge more climate-resilient, ensure you choose 'the right tree for the right place'.

Help and information for doing this can be found via the Cambridge Canopy Project webpage at www.cambridge.gov.uk/cambridge-canopyproject

Or visit the project on Twitter @CamCanopyProj

Where to get financial help



If NHS Test & Trace tell you to self-isolate...

You may be entitled to a £500 Support Payment. To apply, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/test-and-trace-support-payment or email selfisolationpayments@cambridge.gov.uk

If your wages have reduced or stopped...

If receiving housing benefit, Council Tax reduction or Tax Credits, ensure you inform HMRC. They will adjust your benefits to reflect changes in your income.

If you need to claim Universal Credit...

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

If you can't pay your rent...

Explain the situation to your landlord as early as possible. They may agree a plan to spread payments over time.

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 having problems paying energy bills...

During the Covid-19 crisis, energy suppliers are not allowed to disconnect your gas or electricity if you miss a payment. They must offer a payment plan you can afford.

For a prepay meter that you can't top up, ask them for 'Emergency Credit'. Also email homeenergy@cambridge.gov.uk - they may be able to help with a Temporary Fuel Voucher.

If struggling to pay your water bill...

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

If struggling with mobile phone or internet bills...

See www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk/2020/04/keeping-everyone-connected for companies supporting customers with difficulty in paying.

Cambridge Citizen's Advice can help with all the above at tel. 0344-848-7979. And Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme can provide help in the form of supermarket vouchers, energy vouchers, new cookers, or recycled white goods and furniture. Freephone 0808-278-7807, Mon-Friday, 9.30am-3.30pm.

Deliveries obstructing communal areas

The recent increase in online shopping has meant that delivery companies are increasingly leaving boxes and packages on front doorsteps. In flat blocks with communal areas, this can cause an obstruction and be a significant fire safety hazard.

To ensure the safety of residents, the Council has a zero-tolerance policy in relation to any obstructions in communal areas. So if your front door opens onto a communal area, please ask your delivery company to leave items in a safe place, not outside your door.

And please remember that packaging boxes must be collapsed flat before being placed into the recycling bin.

Who to contact for services

Your My Cambridge account and your Housing Services account online

www.cambridge.gov.uk (top right corner)

Cambridge Virtual Community Centre

For support during the Covid-19 crisis visit www.facebook.com/cambridgevcc

Domestic Abuse 24-hour Helpline

Tel: 0808-2000-247 (Freephone, no cost)

Visit www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Council Payments by phone

Tel: 01223-457779, with bank card

Rents, tenancies, lettings, renting a council garage

Tel: 01223-457070

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

Contact Council in Sign Language

Register at <https://signlive.co.uk>, then dial 01223-457000: a live Sign Language interpreter will interpret during your call

Repairs

Tel: 01223-457060; or 0300-303-8389 for out of hours emergency repairs

Council Tax

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457790

Housing for Older People, Visiting Support Service, Community Alarms

E: independent.living@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457199

Home-Link lettings

Visit www.home-link.org.uk

Tel: 01223-457918

Report tenancy fraud

E: fightfraud@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 0800-328-0572 (confidential Freephone)

Report anti-social behaviour

E: asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457950

Housing & Council Tax Benefits

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457775

Bins, recycling, street-cleaning

Visit <http://bins.cambridge.gov.uk>

Tel: 01223-458282

Homelessness & temporary accommodation, outside office hours

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

Bulky waste collection

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

Tel: 01223-458282

Noise complaints (reduced service)

E: env.health@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457900

Out of hours: 0300-303-8389

Council emergencies out of hours

Tel: 0300-3038389

Complaints

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

Council's partners for housing

Mears gas servicing: Freephone 03332-070-766, including out of hours; (for leaseholders' gas emergencies, tel. 0800-111-999)

TSG Services: E: enquiries@tsgplc.co.uk, Tel: 01223-828777

Suicide Awareness

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

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