

The Link

NEWS FOR TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS • WINTER 2011

YOU PAY YOUR RENT.
WHY SHOULDN'T THEY?
Why it could be a bleak and
homeless new year for
Dartford's rent avoiders

STAMPING OUT
TENANCY FRAUD

We need
your help

FRAUD!

GIVE US
YOUR VIEWS

You could
win £100!

PLUS...

Competitions and much more!



MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL OUR READERS

Welcome to *The Link!*

Coleman's Column

The lights are on, the tinsel is up, that can only mean one thing... Christmas is just around the corner!

This can be a time when we are encouraged to over indulge. Presents, sweets, decorations, it can all add up to an expensive month. Don't allow yourself to ignore your responsibilities this Christmas. January will be a bleak month for those who don't plan beyond the end of 2011.

If you want some hints and tips about how to be money savvy, sign up for the free Pound for Pound course (page 7) and make your money stretch a bit further in the New Year.

The New Year sparks change in the Housing Service which is currently undergoing a review. Make sure you let us know what you think of the services you receive. Your views are vital as they will help us to make services in 2012 better and improved (page 4 & 5).

I wish you a happy and peaceful Christmas and a healthy and contented 2012.



Cllr Pat Coleman
Member for Housing and
Housing Services



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• Children's colouring competition

PLUS THE REGULARS:
How are we measuring up? (page 3); Contacts (page 8)

CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

CHANGES TO REFUSE & RECYCLING COLLECTIONS

Normal collection day	Revised collection day	
Mon 26 December	Tues 27 December	One day later
Tues 27 December	Wed 28 December	One day later
Wed 28 December	Thurs 29 December	One day later
Thurs 29 December	Fri 30 December	One day later
Fri 30 December	Sat 31 December	One day later
Mon 2 January	Tues 3 January	One day later
Tues 3 January	Wed 4 January	One day later
Wed 4 January	Thurs 5 January	One day later
Thurs 5 January	Fri 6 January	One day later
Fri 6 January	Sat 7 January	One day later

Collections return to normal on Monday 9 January. Please make sure your bins are available for collection from 7am on the right days.

CIVIC CENTRE AND CASH OFFICE OPENING TIMES

Civic Centre:

★ Closes 4.45pm, Fri 23 December. Re-opens 8.45am, Wed 28 December 2011.

★ Closes 4.45pm, Fri 30 December. Re-opens 8.45am, Tues 3 January 2012.

Civic Centre Cash Office:

★ Closes 3pm, Fri 23 December. Re-opens 9am, Thurs 29 December 2011.

★ Closes 3pm, Fri 30 December. Re-opens 9am, Tues 3 January 2012.

Swanscombe Cash Office:

★ Closes 3pm, Fri 23 December. Re-opens 9am, Tues 3 January 2012.

For more information about Christmas in Dartford this year, visit
www.dartford.gov.uk/christmas/2011

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IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO CANNOT READ THIS BUT WOULD LIKE TO KNOW OF ITS CONTENT, WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO PROVIDE A COPY IN A SUITABLE FORMAT.



CHRISTMAS SHOCKING

PAYING THE RENT AND AVOIDING EVICTION MUST BE YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY THIS CHRISTMAS. DON'T PUT YOUR HOME AT RISK

The current financial climate is affecting all areas in our communities and the Council reminds all tenants that it is vital that they pay their rent.

Tenants need to avoid getting into arrears as:-

- £ it will affect their ability to get credit for things such as loans, mortgages and mobile phone contracts
- £ they won't be able to get a transfer or mutual exchange
- £ they won't be able to rent a garage
- £ they won't be able to apply for the right to buy
- £ they may not be re-housed if they are evicted due to rent arrears.

Peter Dosad, Dartford Borough Council's Head of Housing, added, "If we are forced to evict you from your home for rent arrears, in most cases, you won't be eligible to be re-housed by the Council. Christmas is an expensive time for everyone but if your rent account falls into arrears we have no choice but to use the full force of the law to recover any rent owed.

Eviction is seen as a last resort and we hope that tenants will ensure that rent payments remain a priority over the festive period. For those non-payers of rent, court action will begin again after Christmas with those who aren't paying their way facing eviction in 2012."

Tenants who are up to date with their payments are urged to use the two rent free weeks to help them budget over the holiday period. Keeping up with payments now will help prevent problems in the New Year. Everyone in arrears has been reminded of the need to carry on paying during the rent free weeks and further action will be taken against all those who fail to do so. If you are having difficulty with your rent payments, contact us today on 01322 343134 to discuss how we can help. If you need help with your finances you can contact Dartford CAB on 01322 334686 or CCCS on 0800 138 111.

HOW ARE WE MEASURING UP?	2011/2012 Target	Quarter 2
Average days for void turnaround	22	22.37
Percentage of rent collected due in the year	98%	93.95%
Percentage of emergency repairs completed in time	100%	99.62%
Percentage of urgent repairs completed in time	99%	97.07%
Percentage of non-urgent repairs completed in time	98%	92.11%
Number of housing related ASB cases	-	24



DBRF PUBLIC GENERAL MEETING
Dartford Borough Residents' Forum will be holding a public general meeting on Wednesday 11 January 2012 at Temple Hill Community Centre, Dartford.

The meeting, which starts at 6.45pm, will include a presentation from Trading Standards.

There will be a free prize draw for £25 in High Street vouchers, open to Dartford Borough Council tenants attending.

Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm.

CORRECTION

In the last edition of the Link under 'Keeping it Green' it read that 'the old style bayonet/screw type' fittings are no longer being manufactured.' The 'old style' referred to traditional type bulbs and manufacturing of these has now ceased. However, the new energy efficient bulbs are still available in the bayonet/screw type fittings. We would like to apologise for any misunderstanding and inconvenience that this may have caused.



101

There is a new contact telephone number for Kent Police.

The new number is 101 and has replaced 01622 690690.

101 is a 24 hour number for non emergency calls and for calling neighbourhood police officers. All calls, whether from a landline or a mobile, will cost 15p and never more than 15p for the duration of each call.

Please still dial 999 in an emergency.



MYSTERY SHOPPERS WANTED!

Tenants interested in helping to maintain high quality services are being recruited by the Council.

Mystery shopping is where council tenants act as customer inspectors and measure the level of service given to customers, identifying where improvements can be made. All areas of housing will be under the watchful eye of the mystery shoppers with each service being tested each time including supported housing, housing options and repairs. Tenants will contact housing offices or telephone helplines with an agreed task so that services can be assessed on how queries or problems were dealt with from start to finish.

Mystery shopping is designed to test service standards and is a form of market research which assesses services from a customer's point of view. Becoming a mystery shopper will help the Council continue to offer a high level of service. Tenants who are interested in acting as mystery shoppers should contact the resident involvement officer on 01322 343682 or visit www.dartford.gov.uk/housing



NATIONAL CHANGES IN HOW COUNCIL HOUSING IS FINANCED

In the last issue of the Link we told you that the way council housing is financed will be changing from 1st April 2012. This article tells you more about how the Council is meeting this challenge and what it means for you.

Under powers in the new Localism Act 2011, the Government is abolishing the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system and letting councils keep all their rental income in return for accepting a share of the national housing debt. For Dartford, this will mean a one-off payment to Government of about £87.5 million, but in return we get to keep all our rental income (about £18.5 million a year) and the opportunity to plan on a longer-term basis how we spend it. At the moment, we are paying nearly £5.8 million subsidy to HM Treasury – that's about 30p in every £1 of our tenants' rent.

This change will not affect tenants directly – it will not affect your tenancy, your rent, your rights or our role as your landlord. It should ensure a good and sustainable future for council housing in Dartford. We will be more accountable to tenants for what happens to the income from rents and this makes it all the more important to collect all the rent that is due. As well as deciding how we borrow (to manage this new debt), we need to plan carefully what we spend on repairs and improvements to our houses and estates. We cannot do everything at once and in 2012 we will be consulting residents on what you think the immediate spending priorities should be.

At the same time as this change coming from the Government, we have been carrying out our own review of the Housing Service to ensure that we are fit for purpose to meet the many new challenges coming our way. There will also be opportunities in early 2012 for residents to have their say as part of that review process.

You can find out more about the housing review, and the reform of council housing finance, on the housing review page of our website www.dartford.gov.uk/housing/strategicreview.htm

ESTATE INSPECTIONS

From clearing litter, fixing broken handles, cutting hedges and fixing guttering – we're working through your 'to-do' list!

If you have something bugging you then why not help us by coming and pointing it out on an estate inspection.

JANUARY 2012

Date:	Time:	Area:	Meeting point:
4 Jan	10am	Bean	45-61 Beacon Drive
11 Jan	10am	Joydens Wood	Steadman Close/Joydens Wood Road
18 Jan	10am	Wilmington	High Road Flats
25 Jan	10am	Darent	Leonard Judge House Flats

FEBRUARY 2012

1 Feb	10am	Stone	1-12 Bevis Close
8 Feb	10am	Tree Estate	Outside Warren Court main door
15 Feb	10am	Swanscombe	33-39 Durrant Way
22 Feb	9.30am	Fleet Estate	Outside Sweet Shop, Fleetdale Parade
	11am	Sutton-at-Hone/ Hawley	Church Road Flats

MARCH 2012

7 Mar	10am	Temple Hill	Joyce Green Lane Playground
14 Mar	10am	Temple Hill	Patterson Court
21 Mar	10am	Temple Hill	Bridges Drive
28 Mar	10am	Temple Hill	Hilltop Gardens Sheltered Scheme

YOUR VIEWS COULD BE WORTH £100!

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF US AS YOUR LANDLORD

Some tenants will soon get a survey asking for their views about the Council as a landlord. If you receive a survey, remember to fill it in and send it back. By doing so you'll be in with a chance of winning £100 cash!

A random sample of 2,500 tenants will be sent a survey by Ipsos MORI in January 2012. The survey aims to find out tenants' views and priorities of the services provided by the Council as a landlord.

Tenants are the best people for the Council to ask when looking at ways to improve the services it provides. The survey asks what tenants think about topics including housing and neighbourhoods, repairs service, how

anti-social behaviour is dealt with and how tenants' views are listened to and acted upon. Tenants can also share what they feel their priorities are. All information is confidential and no personal information about those who responded will be released.

WHY SHOULD I TAKE PART?

The results will show where the Council is doing well and where improvements can be made. The Council will focus resources to try to make improvements in the areas that matter most to you, the tenant. The results will be published in the next edition of the Link.

Everyone who takes part will also be entered into a prize draw for £100 in cash.



I WANT TO GIVE MY VIEWS BUT DIDN'T GET A SURVEY

Not all tenants will receive a survey as it is only being sent to a random sample of 2,500 tenants. Tenants in supported housing and leaseholders are not included.

If you don't receive a survey you can give us your views in other ways to help shape the housing service you receive. Contact the Resident Involvement Officer on 01322 343682 for more information.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY

If you have any questions about the survey please contact the Housing Policy Officer on 01322 343625.



MERRY CHRISTMAS &
A HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL OUR READERS

HELP STAMP OUT TENANCY FRAUD

Tenancy fraud is wrong and those who are guilty must be stopped. We need your help to stamp out tenancy fraud by reporting any suspected incidents to us.

Most tenants who have signed up to a Dartford Borough Council tenancy have done so legally and have every right to live in one of our homes. Unfortunately, a few people will take advantage of the housing register to get a home they are not entitled to.

Tenancy fraud involves getting a property by deception, e.g. people claiming to be homeless when they own a property or already live at an address, or illegally subletting a property when they move, instead of handing back the keys to the Council.

The Council only has a limited number of homes available meaning people with the greatest housing need are being swindled out of a home by this sort of behaviour. People committing tenancy fraud are housing cheats that rob people in genuine need of housing. The Council takes this very seriously and will press for eviction when this is reported to be happening in any Council tenancies.

The Council has a new Tenancy Fraud Policy in place to outline what we will do to prevent it from happening. We carry out stringent identification checks at tenancy sign up and we ask all new tenants to have their photograph taken for identity checks.

You can do your bit too to help tackle tenancy fraud. Local residents are very well placed to notice changes in activities within their communities, which may lead to suspicions of tenancy fraud.

To find out more about what the Council does to stamp out tenancy fraud, visit our dedicated tenancy fraud website page at www.dartford.gov.uk/housing and view a copy of our new Tenancy Fraud Policy.

FRAUD!

REPORT IT

If you know of anyone unlawfully subletting or taking possession of a Council property fraudulently then tell us straight away.

To report suspected subletting you can

- Call the Fraud Hotline number - 0800 496 3245 to speak to a trained investigator.
- Leave a message on the automated subletting hotline - 0800 032 0031.
- Visit the website www.dartford.gov.uk or drop an email to fraud.team@dartford.gov.uk.
- Make a report in person by visiting Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR.

All reports are treated in the strictest of confidence and every report is investigated. You can remain anonymous or you can leave your name and contact details.

ARE YOU COVERED?

What would you do if you came home to find your home full of water and all of your Christmas gifts ruined?

Your furniture, decorations and other belongings are not insured by Dartford Borough Council. If you haven't got insurance cover, you could be in for a shock. However, you can now arrange to insure the contents of your home at a special affordable rate. The cover, provided by Jardine Lloyd Thompson UK Ltd, has been designed to help you insure your belongings as easily as possible and also covers you against theft, vandalism and fire. The minimum value of possessions you can insure is £6,000 (£9,000 if you are aged under 60) and premiums start from as little as £2.26 a fortnight (over 60's) and £3.33 a fortnight (under 60's).

For more about contents insurance contact 0845 601 7007 or email Crystal@jltgroup.com.

WIN £25 HIGH STREET VOUCHERS IN OUR KIDS' CORNER CHRISTMAS COLOURING COMPETITION

Open to all our young budding artists from 5 to 16 years living in a Dartford Borough Council property. Please send your entries to the FREEPOST address below by Monday 23 January 2012. Entries will be judged by Councillor Coleman and the winning entry will be featured in the next edition, along with nine runners up.

Extended by One Week - Due to Public Demand

CRAIG REVEL HORWOOD
as The Wicked Queen

ANN WIDDECOMBE
as Wicked as Witches

Snow White AND THE Seven Dwarfs
A 'Strictly' Wicked Panto!

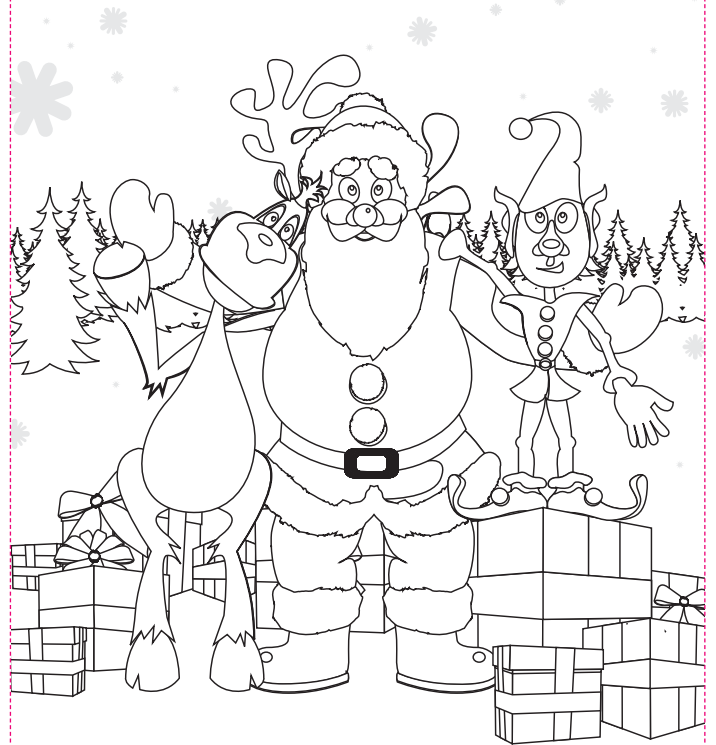
Friday 9 December 2011 - Saturday 7 January 2012

DARTFORD ORCHARD orchardtheatre.co.uk
TICKET OFFICE 01322 220000

Tickets from £19.50
Family meal deal available

KMFM KENT KM

CHRISTMAS COLOURING COMPETITION



First name:

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

Age:

Parent/guardian name:

- Please send an information pack to the address above

Return to: FREEPOST (DT26), the Link, Housing Services, Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DR. No stamp needed.

The prize draw is open to children living within a tenanted Dartford Borough Council property excluding Councillors and employees of the Council, their respective families and agents or anyone professionally linked with the prize draw. Prizes are subject to availability and there is no cash alternative. The Council reserve the right to cancel or amend this prize draw. The winner will be chosen by Councillor Pat Coleman.

The Crystal Insurance Scheme is a product name arranged and administered by Jardine Lloyd Thompson Tenant Risks. A division of Jardine Lloyd Thompson UK Limited. Lloyds Broker. Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Services Authority. A JLT Group Company. Registered office: 6 Crutched Friars, London, EC3N 2PH. Registered in England No 00338645 VAT No 244 2321 96.

HELPING MEND BROKEN HEARTS

You'll be proud to know your town is a Heart Town. It's a shocking fact that heart and circulatory disease is the UK's biggest killer. 340 people have a heart attack every day. That's people in your community. Your next door neighbours. Your friends. Your family.

Now we can all do something about it. The Council have teamed up with the British Heart Foundation (BHF) and together are fighting back with the exciting new scheme "Heart Towns". A "Heart Town" involves whole communities coming together to support life-saving, pioneering work.

To raise vital funds, order or download a One Day fundraising kit, full of fundraising ideas and everything you need to help you organise your One Day and make it a big success, check out the BHF website at bhf.org.uk/oneday. You can also contact your local BHF manager by emailing howej@bhf.org.uk or calling 01474 537997.

In support of Dartford Heart Town there are many projects happening locally Dartford which can help to improve your Heart Health, including Get Active for a Healthier, Happier Dartford and free Healthy Weight management projects.

For more information about these, visit www.dartford.gov.uk/healthyliving, email health@dartford.gov.uk or call 01322 343067.



DAMP OR CONDENSATION?

Each winter the housing teams receive an increased number of complaints about damp, with many of them needing nothing more than a dry cloth and an open window to deal with condensation.

Condensation occurs where the moisture in the air gets cooler and tiny water droplets appear on surfaces, for example when a mirror mists over when you have a bath. It usually happens during cold weather and appears on cold surfaces in places where there is little movement of air such as corners of rooms, on or near windows.

If condensation persists mould can start to grow, which although unsightly, shouldn't be confused with rising damp, which is an altogether more problematic issue.

Residents can help to prevent condensation by following these very simple steps:

- Cover saucepans and don't leave kettles/pans boiling for longer than necessary.
- Dry clothes outside – or with a window ajar if indoors.
- Don't cover any airbricks or window vents.
- Vent tumble driers outside unless they are designed for indoor use.
- Keep a window ajar when cooking or bathing.
- Keep doors closed, especially to the kitchen and bathroom.
- When running a bath, run both hot and cold taps together and open a window.
- To help reduce condensation wipe off excess moisture on windows, walls etc with a cloth and wring out in the sink.
- If mould growth appears use a fungicidal mould wash as per the manufacturer's instructions. Redecorate affected areas using a fungicidal paint.
- Maintain an even temperature within your home, i.e. low level heating all day rather than quick blasts when necessary.



For more information on condensation you can check out our website www.dartford.gov.uk/condensation or call 01322 343800 to find out what you can do to prevent condensation and mould in your home.

STAY OUT OF TROUBLE IN 2012 - GET MONEY SAVVY WITH OUR POUND FOR POUND TRAINING

Tenants wanting their money to stretch further can learn how to do this in a new training session.

The half day course will help tenants learn about

- budgeting
- plugging spending leaks
- maximising income
- bank accounts
- types of credit
- clever saving
- tips on making money go further



Each tenant who attends will take away a pack filled with information about being savvy with their money. The next course will run in January so return the below form today to get yourself a place. Courses are only for tenants of Dartford Borough Council and refreshments will be provided.

Drop us a line if you'd like to come along – by phone on 01322 343682, email rio@dartford.gov.uk or complete the form below and return it to FREEPOST (DT26), the Link, Housing Services, Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR.

I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE PART IN A POUND FOR POUND TRAINING...

Name:

Address:

Contact tel:

Email:

Preferred day (please circle):
 Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri
 Preferred time (please tick):
 Morning (9am to 1pm)
 Afternoon (1pm to 5pm)
 Other (please write here)

Contact us...

You can contact Dartford Borough Council via its main switchboard on **01322 343434** Monday to Friday between 8.45am and 5.15pm (4.45pm on Fridays).

At any other time, call the emergency out of hours line on **0845 634 1212**.

You can also visit our website www.dartford.gov.uk

or write to us at:

**Dartford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Home Gardens
Dartford
Kent DA1 1DR**

Allocations:

01322 343907

Benefits:

01322 343705

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB):

01322 224686

Community centres:

01322 343902/343066

community.centres@dartford.gov.uk

Community Safety Unit:

01322 343000

www.safedartford.gov.uk

Council tax:

01322 343700

Domestic Abuse Information Line

(Kent and Medway):

0845 603 6813

Housing repairs:

01322 343800

www.dartford.gov.uk/housing/interactive.htm

repairs@dartford.gov.uk

Housing options & advice:

01322 343814/343082

Housing management team:

For help with tenancy issues, anti-social behaviour, etc

01322 343133

Housing services:

housing.services@dartford.gov.uk

Kent Highways:

08458 247 800

Kent Homechoice bidding line:

0906 294 0020

Leaseholder service charges:

01322 343368

leaseholders@dartford.gov.uk

Payment line:

01322 343760

Propertyline:

01322 343100

Refuse, recycling & cleansing:

01322 343290

Rents team:

For help with rents, payments and arrears

01322 343134

www.dartford.gov.uk/housing/interactive.htm

rents@dartford.gov.uk

Resident involvement officer:

Louise Gray:

01322 343841

Right to buy:

01322 343832

righttobuy@dartford.gov.uk

Senior supported housing officer:

Terry Smith:

01322 343366

Supported housing:

supported@dartford.gov.uk

Text service:

Text REPAIR, CHASE or RENT followed by your surname, first line of your address, when you are available and details of the service you require to 07881 668706.

Emergencies should be reported verbally via the office or out of hours contact numbers above.

Examples of text:

Examples of text:

- REPAIR Mrs Smith 65 Tintagel Manor in all day Tuesdays blocked toilet
- CHASE 47 Cooke Street repair front door
- RENT Mr Smith 45 Main Street check payment amount

PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT AND WIN A PRIZE!

Paying your rent has never been easier! You can pay on the 1st, 9th, 16th or 23rd of the month and all you have to do is fill out a form and we'll do the rest.

All tenants and leaseholders paying their bills by Direct Debit are entered into a monthly prize draw for a pair of Orchard Theatre show tickets. Payments are automatically adjusted each year to take account of any changes to the amount you need to pay and you can keep track of your payments through your bank statement.

If you would like to pay your rent by Direct Debit, please download a form from our website www.dartford.gov.uk/housing or contact the rents section on 01322 343070/343570.

PRIZE DRAW WINNERS

Congratulations to the lucky winners of the August, September, October and November draws. Mrs G, Mrs M and Mr R all won tickets to shows at the Orchard Theatre, Dartford.

Dartford Borough Council competition rules apply, a copy is available from Dartford Borough Council.



The Orchard

An HQ Theatre



THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE LINK WILL BE WITH YOU IN MARCH.

RECYCLE ME!

Finished reading the Link? Put me in your recycling bin or pass me on for family or friends to read...