We want your views!

Connect is written for the benefit of all tenants and leaseholders and we’d like to hear your feedback on the newsletter.

If there are any topics you would like us to cover in future editions of Connect please contact us at:

Housing
Kettering Borough Council
Bowling Green Road
Kettering
NN15 7QX

Website: www.kettering.gov.uk
Email: connect@kettering.gov.uk

The Tenants Editorial Panel is made up of the following tenants and staff:

Brian Kimpton
Leona Mantle
Maria Keane
Sara Martin
Mark Redding
Tracey Copeland
Elizabeth Eirene

Hello and welcome to the Spring edition of Connect. We have a packed edition for you with lots of news including how a tenant really benefited from her Periodic Tenancy visit and the expertise of her Neighbourhood Manager. It’s great to hear of this positive outcome as we know many tenants view our visits with some trepidation. This example really goes to show how we can support all our tenants and may be able to help to improve independence, wealth and quality of life.

We are also celebrating 50 years of Castle Gardens! You can read all about recent refurbishments the scheme has undergone via our successful Sparkle programme to bring the communal areas up to modern standards on page 6 and hear about the ways residents and staff celebrated the milestone birthday. You can also find out how to access Sheltered Housing on page 6, so get in touch if this could benefit you or a relative.

And finally, some more good news about your rent. For the third year running, we will be reducing rents by 1% in April. That will be an average weekly rent reduction of 81p.

John Conway,
Head of Housing

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And the winner is...

Congratulations to Donna Coleman who won £25 worth of shopping vouchers after finding the Christmas snowglobes hidden in the pages of the last issue of Connect!

Spot the daffodils and win!
Now it’s your turn to try and win £25 worth of shopping vouchers. Simply find the spring daffodils scattered amongst the pages of this newsletter and send the number you find to connect@kettering.gov.uk or by post to the Council’s offices.

Don’t forget to include your name and contact details. All correct entries will be checked and the winner drawn out of a hat. The closing date is 20th April 2018.

Here’s a spring daffodil to start you off!

Improving your repairs service
In September, we launched a project to review and improve our repairs service. Since then, we have:

• Changed how emergency gas repairs are dealt with
• Contracted out major repair works for 40 empty council homes
• Improved communication between teams
• Agreed new out of hours procedures for operatives
• Started to review the appointment systems

We hope to continue to improve our repairs service in the coming years and deliver a first class repairs service that is professional, customer-focused and cost-effective.
Rent Review
2018/19

Rents will be reduced by a further 1% this year.

You should shortly receive your ‘Notice of Rent & Service Charge Review’ which will tell you what your new weekly rent and service charge amounts will be, from the 2nd April 2018.

If you have any queries please contact the Housing Income team on 01536 410 333 or email rent@kettering.gov.uk

Pay Your Rent First

It is more important than ever to ensure that your rent gets paid on time so that your home is not at risk. Your Housing Income Officer can help you set a budget to ensure that priority bills like rent are always paid.

If you need more in-depth support, e.g. to claim benefits, open a Credit Union account, or deal with debt, our Budgeting Support team can assist. Contact us on 01536 534 247.

If you are having difficulties, never ignore the problem, especially if you are at risk of falling behind with your rent. Seek help now.

Get Ready for Universal Credit

Universal Credit comes to Kettering in October 2018 for working age households. It will affect those who make a new claim for benefits or those who have a change of circumstance. Pensioners are not affected and neither are families with three or more children.

Problems can arise due to changes in the way Universal Credit is paid. These include long waits for the first payment, payments being made monthly in arrears and housing costs going to claimants instead of their landlords.

Here’s how you can help prepare yourself:

- Build up some credit in your rent account by paying a little extra between now and October to avoid rent arrears building at the start of your claim
- Likewise, start saving a small regular amount now to help you manage while waiting for a payment (can be up to 6 weeks)
- Set up a budget for household bills and regular expenditure so you know where your money goes. On Universal Credit you will receive a single monthly payment so you will need to budget monthly
- Once your budget is set, see if you can make savings, e.g. by switching utility providers like gas, electric, phone and broadband
- Make sure you have a bank account in your own name to receive your money

For support and advice with budgeting and managing your money, call 01536 410 333.
Tenancy visit brings big benefit to tenant

The Housing team are visiting everyone who has been a long standing tenant of the council. A visit from Neighbourhood Manager Julie Chambers made a massive difference to a tenant who did not know what help she was entitled to:

“I visited Mrs C in November and noticed she was paying full rent, so as part of my chat I asked whether she had considered applying for benefits. She thought she wasn’t entitled to any help as she had some savings put by.

I suggested that she log on to ‘Entitled To’ to check if she might be eligible for some help, as she was using her savings to pay her rent and bills. However, she didn’t use a computer so couldn’t do this herself.

I agreed to check for her, so she gave me her income and savings details. A quick benefit check found she was eligible for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Pension Credit totalling around £110 per week. I sent her the report along with a Housing Benefit form and advised that our Tenancy Support service were there if she needed further help.

Since filling in the forms she received just over £1300 in Housing Benefit and her rent liability has reduced to just £6.12 week instead of the £100+ she had been struggling to pay. She was refunded £1115.38 just before Christmas and her Council Tax bill has changed significantly too!”

Pension Credit is a non-taxable benefit based on a person’s income. The benefit tops up pensioners' weekly income to £159.35 for single people or £243.25 for couples. Many older people like Mrs C either have no idea they are entitled, don’t know how to claim, are put off by the process, or are simply too proud to ask for help.

Thanks to Julie’s visit, Mrs C now receives all the help she is entitled to. To check if you or a relative may be eligible for Pension Credit call: 0800 99 1234.
In January 2018, the Mayor of Kettering, Cllr Scott Edwards, officially opened the refurbished community lounge of Castle Gardens Sheltered Scheme in Geddington. As well as being our latest Sheltered Housing Scheme to benefit from our ‘Sparkle’ improvement programme, it was also the 50 year anniversary of the official opening of the scheme!

Residents and staff joined together to celebrate, with many residents reporting their delight at the new modern feel to the building.

Could you benefit from sheltered housing?

Sheltered housing is designed to meet the needs of over 55s who want to live independently but would benefit from additional support. We have ten sheltered housing schemes across the Borough of Kettering, each with a dedicated Scheme Manager assisted by our team of Support Workers. All schemes consist of either self-contained flats or bungalows for rent, some of which have been adapted for people with disabilities.

You can apply for sheltered housing at one of our Customer Service Centres, by calling 01536 410 333, or online at www.keyways.org.uk
Across the local area a wide range of agencies work together to provide a range of specialist advice and services to residents. Kettering Futures Partnership (KFP) has been set up to make sure local people have seamless access to quality advice and support in a range of areas including housing, skills and financial inclusion.

This helps organisations refer customers to other agencies quickly and easily, ensuring residents receive the best advice and help available in the right place, at the right time and with the right person.

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**Yearly Gas Safety Checks**

As your landlord we ensure your gas fittings, appliances, pipework and flues are kept in a safe condition. We must carry out a service on every gas appliance in your home once a year – for which you will be given a certificate.

You are legally required to allow us access to your home to carry out maintenance and safety checks on gas appliances. It’s a breach of your tenancy conditions to refuse us access, and we could take legal action or end your tenancy.

If you have any concerns about your gas equipment, turn it off and contact National Grid immediately on 0800 111 999.

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**Homes For The Future’s Lasting Legacy**

The Hampden Crescent refurbishment continues apace with block A due for completion in summer 2018 and work due to begin on block B soon after.

We’ve been working with the site contractors Lovell’s, to deliver a lasting legacy in the local community. Grange Primary Academy benefited from a classroom make-over on the 15th February where the team painted and decorated a classroom and gave it a fresh new look. Lovell’s are also planning on creating a new footpath in the playground which will feature a new time capsule area.

On the 23rd February each child in the school painted a pebble, which will be installed at Hampden Crescent and in the school grounds. The children really enjoyed the pebble painting activity and will be visiting the Hampden Crescent site to see the results of their hard work once in place.

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**KFP: Helping partners work together, to help you quicker!**

Across the local area a wide range of agencies work together to provide a range of specialist advice and services to residents. Kettering Futures Partnership (KFP) has been set up to make sure local people have seamless access to quality advice and support in a range of areas including housing, skills and financial inclusion.
In December we held 2 award ceremonies to celebrate the wonderful achievements of our housing customers. Congratulations to all our winners!

**Silver Service Community Hero Awards**

The Silver Service Community Hero awards recognise those good neighbours or unpaid community volunteers who regularly help others and make our sheltered housing schemes a better place to live because of their acts of kindness. 18 winners who were nominated by our sheltered housing customers all received a certificate and award.

**LifePlan and Tenancy Support Awards**

Our 9th LifePlan and Tenancy Support awards recognised the successes of the winners over the year. This included 3 Tenancy Support award winners and 8 LifePlan award winners who were all presented with a certificate and gift vouchers.

The LifePlan Achiever of the Year 2017 was presented to Mark Jeffery who also received a trophy.

**New falls cushions are a big success!**

In partnership with the East Midlands Ambulance Service, our sheltered housing Support Worker team have been trialling a new falls cushion, which help residents get up safely after a fall or keep them comfortable while waiting for an ambulance.

We’ve had an extremely positive response so far and will be putting forward a bid to buy cushions for all of our sheltered schemes next year. Our residents have also recently had the chance to receive training to prevent falls and strength balance exercise classes.
FREE 'Your Courses 2018'
by LifePlan

Following the success of last year’s Your Courses brochure, next year we will be running even more FREE LifePlan courses for all tenants!

There are a wide range of courses available throughout the year, including:

- Introduction to Food Hygiene
- Everyday First Aid
- Fire Safety
- Dementia Friends
- DIY Skills
- Cooking on a Budget
- Love Your Garden
- Falls Prevention Training
- Art Workshop – NEW!
- IT Workshop – NEW!

Look out for our 2018 Your Courses brochure which will give you all the information you need on the new courses. You’ll find it in the Council’s reception or you can request one from Leone Reed, LifePlan Advisor on 01536 534 319, or download a copy at www.kettering.gov.uk/lifeplan

“I have completed nearly all of the courses which I have attended with a couple of my friends...
I am looking forward to the new Art Workshop that Leone has told me about.”

Jonathan

Campaign seeks to end stereotypes of social housing tenants

A Benefit to Society campaign has been launched to address the problem of stereotyping social housing tenants. The operation brings together nearly 30 housing organisations across the country by delivering a high impact campaign that will challenge the way the public think and will help tackle the stigma associated with social housing.

The campaign was officially launched on 28th February, and was attended by Kettering Borough Council tenant Martyn Lund, who visited Parliament and met with MPs to discuss the issue. Martyn has also helped produce a Fair Press for Tenants guide that helps journalists report social housing fairly.
Improving your areas

Every year the Neighbourhood Managers put forward a list of environmental improvements to be considered by an Environmental Working Group, made up of officers and Tenant Representatives.

Potential environmental improvements are identified from:
- Requests and suggestions from tenants and leaseholders
- Issues spotted by Neighbourhood Managers during Estate Walkabouts
- Suggestions put forward by our partner agencies

There is an environmental budget of £10,000 to fund the chosen improvements. This year, ten schemes were approved by the Environmental Working Group with a couple of examples shown below.

2017/18’s environmental improvement schemes:

**New Buildings, Kettering:**
Community event and clean-up day arranged to help residents reclaim their communal area.

**King Street, Kettering:**
Security gates and lighting installed to enhance resident safety and security.

**Grafton Street, Kettering:**
External lighting installed to enhance resident safety and security.

**Spring Gardens/Well Lane, Rothwell:**
Communal entrance doors and hand rails repainted and fascias cleaned.

**Bridge Road, Desborough:**
Bollards installed to green area to stop unauthorised parking.

Why not join your area walkabout?
Every 3 months Neighbourhood Managers carry out full inspections of your area to identify:
- Communal repairs
- Overgrown gardens and parking issues
- Suspected abandoned properties

We are always looking for volunteers to join these walkabouts as local people know the issues where you live better than anyone!

You can find the list of dates and locations at [www.kettering.gov.uk/walkabouts](http://www.kettering.gov.uk/walkabouts)

Alternatively please contact Tracey Copeland, Tenant Engagement Officer on 01536 535 649 or traceycopeland@kettering.gov.uk
Tenant and Leaseholders’ Garden Competition 2018

Do you enjoy gardening? Are you proud of the results? Then send in your entries for the Tenant and Leaseholders’ Garden Competition 2018.

There will be prizes for:
- Best front garden
- Best back garden
- Best shared/communal garden
- Clever use of space
- Best new garden
- Best hanging baskets/tubs
- Best vegetable garden

Judging is to be held week commencing 18th June, with a presentation evening held in October. If you would like to enter please complete the form below and return to us by Friday 8th June.

We welcome entries from new gardeners as well as established gardeners.

Garden Competition 2018

FREE PARKING*

ALL DAY ON
Good Friday, 30th March
Easter Saturday, 31st March
Easter Sunday, 1st April
Easter Monday, 2nd April
*In all Council owned car parks

WHAT’S ON

Check out the new What’s On guide, bringing you events in and around Kettering.

Pick up a copy in a Customer Service Centre or download the latest version at www.kettering.gov.uk/whatson

Tenant and Leaseholders’ Garden Competition 2018

Name: 
Telephone: 
Address: 
Category (pick one): 

Please return to:
Garden Competition, Housing, Kettering Borough Council, Bowling Green Road, NN15 7QX
How to contact us

- **Call us on** 01536 410 333
- **Write to us** at Kettering Borough Council, Municipal Offices, Bowling Green Road, Kettering, NN15 7QX
- **Come and see us** in one of our Customer Service Centres in Kettering, Desborough, Rothwell or Burton Latimer
- **Email us** at housing@kettering.gov.uk
- **Send a TEXT message to the Council**
  Write a short message and send it to 07824 451281
- **Send a PICTURE message to the Council**
  Attach a picture and send it to 07824 451281

You can also check your Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits online at:
www.kettering.gov.uk/connectonline

Please remember, our Customer Service Centres are able to deal with:
- Repair reporting
- Tenancy queries
- Rent queries and payments
- Housing benefit
- Council Tax benefit
- **Follow us** on Twitter @KetteringBC

You can access our Kettering Customer Service Centre from
8.30am to 5.30pm weekdays and 9am to 1pm on Saturdays, or telephone 01536 410 333
8.30am to 5pm weekdays or 24 hours a day at www.kettering.gov.uk

Support Services

- **Age UK**
  0800 169 6565
  www.ageuk.org.uk

- **Free Fire Safety Check**
  (Free) 0800 389 9950
  For further information, visit the Northamptonshire County Council website

- **Youth Information Helpline**
  01536 510 089

- **Citizens Advice Bureau**
  0844 855 2122

Utilities

- **National Grid** – report gas leaks or for general gas information
  0800 111 999

- **Anglian Water**
  08457 145 145

Visit Us

Find out about events, things to do & places to eat, drink & shop in the Borough of Kettering at
www.thisiskettering.com

If you are interested in supporting your community by joining Northamptonshire Street Watch, please visit
www.northants.police.uk/streetwatch

Utilities

- **National Grid** – report gas leaks or for general gas information
  0800 111 999

- **Anglian Water**
  08457 145 145

Kettering
Borough Council