



January Housing Newsletter

Welcome to the Housing January newsletter. Articles included in this newsletter:

- Struggling with energy bills
- Changes to Employment Support Allowance
- Introducing the new TACT board
- Dealing with damp & mould in your home
- How to deal with frozen pipes on your boiler

For up-to-date housing news follow our [Tenant Partnership Facebook page](#)

Rent Increase & Budget Consultation – thank you for taking part

Towards the end of last year, many of you took the time to share your views on potential changes to our housing budget as part of our housing budget survey.

Thank you for telling us about the services you value most. Throughout the results, it was clear that having access to an efficient and effective repairs and maintenance service is really important to you, and you place value on us

meeting regulatory requirements and making homes more energy efficient.

Like many other councils, we're facing continued budget pressures ranging from heightened inflation on building supply costs to high interest rates. All of that means we need to find £2 million to ensure a balanced budget so we can continue to effectively deliver the housing services that matter to you. Your feedback has been really key in helping to prioritise areas which are important to you

On 12 February, Cabinet will discuss proposed changes to our budget. The proposals include reducing the cost of non-essential services and making repairs and maintenance more efficient. There is also a proposed rent increase of 2.7%. This is in line with guidance set by Government, so that we can continue to invest in the services that are most important to you.

Any rent increase would not start until 1 April - if you're worried about what impact a proposed increase might have on you, we can help with things like repayment agreements, budgeting advice and benefits support.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to our Tenancy Sustainment Team through [My Winchester Tenancy](#), by emailing housingincome@winchester.gov.uk or calling 01962 848 205.

Free Support with Digital Tasks!



Are you having trouble with your digital device? Or perhaps you're looking for some help completing everyday tasks online? If so, our digital champions can help!

We run regular digital drop-in sessions at King Harold Court and our City

Offices in Winchester, as well as Makins Court in Alresford, where you can come along, bring your device and talk through troublesome tech tasks with our friendly champions.

If you've got a more complex problem, we can also put you in touch with our charity partner AbilityNet, who can provide you with further free digital support. Iris, an Alresford resident, attended a recent session so she could better understand how to manage the apps on her phone:

"I came with two specific problems that I was having, and both have been rectified just by the session, so it's been so productive and so, so helpful."

Dates for the next few sessions are:

- **City Offices**, Winchester, Thursday 6 February 12.30 - 2.30pm
- **Makins Court** Alresford, Friday 7 February 10am - 12pm
- **King Harold Court**, Winchester, Tuesday 11 February 10am - 12pm
- **Greens Close**, Bishops Waltham, Wednesday 26 February 10.00 – 12.00

For more information about the digital drop in session, [visit our website](#).

Get help at our Community Hubs

If you've got a housing issue, are worried about the cost of living, or have any other concerns, and you'd find it helpful to talk things through, why not come along to one of our Community Hubs?

The hubs are a place for you to grab a free cuppa and have an informal chat with our friendly Community Engagement Officers about your concerns, and the kinds of support available to you.

We currently run three hubs which take place monthly in Winchester, Alresford and Wickham. Here are the details of the next few sessions:

- **Coffee#1**, Alresford, every fourth Friday 10am - 12pm
 - **Wickham Community Centre**, every first Monday 2.30pm - 4.30pm
 - **Unit 12**, Community Pantry, Winnall, every third Thursday 10.30am
-

12.30pm

Struggling with energy bills?



Are you on a prepayment meter and struggling with the costs of your energy bills? You may be eligible for up to £147 in fuel vouchers.

To find out more, contact:

- Financial Inclusion Officer Samantha Lee on 01962 848 230 slee@winchester.gov.uk or our
- Tenancy Sustainment Team on 01962 848 060 TenancySustainment@winchester.gov.uk

Changes to Employment Support Allowance

DO YOU RECEIVE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ALLOWANCE (ESA)?

If so, your benefits will change this year.

The Department of Work and Pension is aiming to move everyone currently receiving ESA over to the Universal Credit system by the end of the year. If you receive ESA, you should get a letter by the DWP asking you to apply for Universal Credit.

You shouldn't normally need to apply for Universal Credit before you get your

notice. Once you have received your notice you will get “transitional protection” to make sure your Universal Credit is not less than your benefits now.

Everything you need to apply for Universal Credit [can be found on gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) – or alternatively you can call the Universal Credit Helpline for free on 0800 328 5644.

Remember to budget for a five week wait for your first Universal Credit payment – and **if you’re concerned about the changes or need help with the Universal Credit application, support is available:**

- Citizens Advice have a free help-to-claim telephone service: 0800 144 8 444.
- You can come along to one of our Community Hubs (details above)
- You can contact our Tenancy Sustainment Service on 01962 848 060 or by email TenancySustainment@winchester.gov.uk, or our Financial Inclusion Officer Samantha Lee, 01962 848 230 or slee@winchester.gov.uk

Sign up for housing benefit e-notifications

You can now sign up to receive your housing benefit notifications by email! The service is a quick and convenient way to receive updates on housing benefits, and by subscribing to the service you’ll be helping to save paper too.

To subscribe for housing benefit e-notifications, [visit our website](#)

Introducing the TACT Board - Your voice in housing services



The TACT (Tenants and Council Together) Board is a newly formed group that represents the views of tenants, leaseholders and shared owners when decisions are being made about our housing services.

The Board is made up of **four tenant representatives and two independent members** who work with us to help shape the future of services. Board members have a crucial role in making sure housing services are delivered with quality, transparency, and accountability - they work alongside councillors and senior council officers to help make sure your needs are at the heart of service improvements.

What Does the TACT Board Do?

- **Oversight and Scrutiny:** Ensuring housing services meet tenant needs while aligning with council strategies.
- **Housing Standards Groups:** Participating in open forums that inform our work around housing standards
- **Collaboration and Improvement:** Representing tenant's concerns, reviewing reports, and supporting decision-making.

Board members are also encouraged to attend relevant Cabinet meetings to stay engaged in broader housing-related decisions.

For us, working with the TACT Board is an important opportunity to shape our housing services for the better, and we're excited about the work ahead. Stay tuned for updates from the Board in future newsletters!

More details about the groups can be found [here](#).



ENERGY SAVING HOMES

Energy Saving Homes Update

We're making steady progress on our work to improve the energy efficiency of our 21 Swedish Cottages, with roof installations nearing completion on 13 properties.

Projects like this can sometimes come with complexities, but our Project Manager and Retrofit Coordinator have been working closely with the contractor and the tenants to address any concerns, to keep everything running smoothly and make sure residents are supported and informed every step of the way. We'll be running tenant forums in to meet Swedish Cottage residents, including those from the remaining eight properties, face to face for a progress update and to tackle any queries or issues head on.

In other retrofit news, we're also working hard to secure a contractor to help us deliver upgrades as part of the government's Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (SHF). The programme will aim to improve the energy rating of EPC D homes to a C or higher by taking a fabric-first approach, which aims to tackle heat loss through walls, floors, ceilings, roofs and windows. The SHF programme will result in upgrades to a minimum of 540 homes.

The funding will also help us explore ways to make improvement to 'non-traditional' properties, making them cheaper and easier to keep warm with technology such as air source heat pumps and solar panels.

We're excited to see the improvements taking shape and remain committed to making these homes more energy-efficient and comfortable for everyone.



daha

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

Improving our response to domestic abuse

We've been working hard over the past 18 months to improve our response to domestic abuse and put in place standards set by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).

We recently submitted evidence to demonstrate how we're meeting DAHA's standards. A lot of work has already gone into improving our policies and procedures, raising awareness of available support, training staff and more - and the last step of our journey is to look at how we can further support those experiencing domestic abuse through our management of cases.

Remember, if you're experiencing a domestic abuse situation, we can help. There's lots of useful resources on our website or you can speak to your Housing Officer about additional support.



Hobbs View, Southbrook Cottages, Micheldever

Back in December, we cut the ribbon on 6 brand new flats in Micheldever. The new homes at Hobbs View are all earmarked for affordable rent, are part of our efforts to meet the demand for housing in the district.

They're also highly energy efficient, having been built to high performing 'Passivhaus Plus' specifications, with features such as solar panels, an airtight design, air source heat pumps and a heat-recovering ventilation system.

It's estimated that the homes' overall CO² emissions are 70% less than the UK average for buildings of a similar type and, as a result, their future tenants will enjoy reduced energy bills.

Dealing with damp & mould



With the colder weather comes greater risk of damp and mould in our homes and, to help our tenants keep their homes free from the risks, we've **added some guidance to our website**, including a short video explaining how to spot and deal with any issues.

Preventing and treating damp and mould is one of our priorities and any tenants with concerns about their homes can get in touch with us via **My Winchester Tenancy**, by emailing **housing@winchester.gov.uk** or by calling us on **01962 848 400**.

Frozen Condensate Pipes on a boiler



Frozen condensate pipes are one of the most common winter problems with modern boilers and, during very cold weather, the issue accounts for the highest percentage of repairs call outs. If part of your condensate pipework is outside, then in very cold weather it may freeze which could cause your boiler to stop working.

You can always contact us in an emergency, but if your condensate pipe has frozen there are some things you might be able to do that can help.

If your condensate pipe has frozen, your boiler may show one of the following error codes, depending on the brand:

- Vaillant: F29, F68 or F77
- Remeha/Baxi: E4
- Potterton: E133

If you come across a frozen condensate pipe, you can pour warm (not boiling) water over the end of the pipe to thaw it using a container like a watering can. Make sure to mop up any excess water so it doesn't freeze under your boiler.

Once you've thawed the pipe, reset your boiler by holding in the reset button for 3-10 seconds and wait for the boiler to re-fire (the reset button may be clearly marked "RESET" or "R", or it may be highlighted by a picture of a flame with a line through it).

If you've tried to thaw the pipe and the boiler still isn't working, contact our housing repairs team by emailing hhub@winchester.gov.uk), calling 01962 848 400 during opening hours or phoning our out-of-hours service on 01962 865 405.

Conveniently access your tenant services with My Winchester Tenancy



Did you know that you can quickly and easily make rent payments, check your account balance and much more using My Winchester Tenancy?

My Winchester Tenancy is our online portal designed to let you access tenant services in a way that is convenient for you, no emails or phone calls needed. Other services you can access at the click of a button include requesting non-urgent repairs, checking repair appointments and more

You can access the service at any time by simply going to the [website](#) and logging in.

It's easy to sign up too – just head over to [My Winchester Tenancy](#) and make sure you have your Tenancy Reference Number and National Insurance Number to hand.

Cat and Dog Microchipping



If you own a dog, it's important to make sure they're microchipped. Apart from being a legal requirement, microchipping makes it much easier to reunite you with your canine companion should they ever go missing, providing you with peace of mind. It also acts as proof that a dog belongs to you.

Microchipping for cats is now also a legal requirement – find out more on the [Petlog website](#).

You can also find out more on our [Lost Dogs and Microchipping webpage](#).

February Half Term Football



We've partnered with local coaching provider ActiveMe 360 to offer low-cost football coaching sessions in Whiteley, Wickham, Highcliffe and Winchester City over the February half term.

Each day will be packed with fun games with a chance for children to make new friends and learn new skills. Sessions will take place from Monday 17 – Friday 21 February at just £1.00 per day.

Bookings can be made by visiting [ActiveMe 360's website](#) and searching for "Winchester" – you can also email hello@activeme360.com to find out more.

If you have any comments on this newsletter or any suggestions on what you would like to hear about please contact us by [email](#)



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