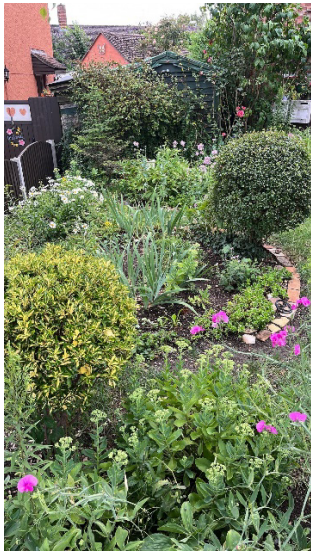


Open Door, Spring 2024



For the tenants and leaseholders of Cambridge City Council

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Editorial

From Samantha Shimmon, Assistant Director for Housing & Homelessness

Hello, and welcome to your Spring edition of Open Door.

Firstly, I would like to introduce myself. I'm Samantha Shimmon, Assistant Director for Housing and Homelessness. I have taken on the role from David Greening, whom I'm sure many of you know. I would like to thank David for all his hard work at Cambridge City Council, and wish him all the best in his new role.

A little bit about myself, I have been working in Housing for over 20 years and have worked for both Local Government and Housing Associations in that time. I have joined a great team here at Cambridge who, like me, are all passionate about our residents and ensuring we deliver great services. I have been out and about meeting both my new teams and some of our residents, and I intend to continue to visit as many areas as possible over the coming months.

There is lots going on in the Housing Sector, which we are busy preparing for. We have sent out a survey to a sample of our residents asking them for their feedback and it is really important for us to hear from you, so if you receive the survey please do complete it.

There is lots in this edition so please continue reading for more about getting fit this spring, and the free activities that are on offer. How to get online with the Council, and the offer of free data to help you do so. New standards that are coming into

Housing; how to contact us for housing services; and what to do if you need help with your finances...

Leaseholders, please do vote in your Leaseholder Representative elections coming up soon. There is more information too in this edition about how any resident can get involved with us: there are lots of ways, and some don't take up much time at all. I hope you enjoy this magazine and all its contents. If you want to see something in a future edition, please let us know by emailing opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

With best wishes, Samantha Shimmon

Stop Press - Please note that last month, four Tenant Representatives were elected uncontested to the tenant seats on the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee. As there were only four eligible tenant candidates, a tenant election will not be needed at this time. The leaseholders' ballot to choose their Leaseholder Representative on the Housing Scrutiny Committee will still go out to all leaseholders as planned.

Why not receive Open Door electronically?

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

Did you know that a Residents' Open Door Editorial Panel, made up of interested council tenants and leaseholders, helps to select and edit the content of every edition? They help ensure that Open Door continues to reflect residents' needs and interests. If you'd like to get involved, please email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

Your vote makes a difference! Register now...



In Britain, all residents must register to vote if they are asked to do so, and they meet the conditions for registering. (To vote, you must be 18 or over and British, or a national of an EU or Commonwealth country.) You can register online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or by using a postal form.

Or check whether you are registered at www.gov.uk/contact-electoral-registration-office. It's possible to avoid your name being visible in the open electoral register, available to anyone who wants to buy a copy. You could register to vote anonymously so your name will not appear on this register.

There are three ways to vote: in person at a polling station; or by postal vote; or by 'proxy'. All require you to be registered for them in advance.

Since 2022, voters must show a valid photo ID before they can vote in person at a polling station. To know the types of photo ID accepted, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/voter-id-in-polling-stations or phone 01223-457000.

If you don't have a suitable photo ID, you can apply online or by post for a Voter Authority Certificate, a free photo ID document for voting at a polling station.

Or instead of voting at your polling station, you could apply in advance for a postal vote, which doesn't need photo ID. Or you could nominate a person, known as your 'proxy', to cast your vote for you at the polling station.

For the deadlines for registering to vote, accepted voter ID and voting by post or by proxy, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/elections-and-voting or phone the City Council at 01223-457000.

The next set election will be on 2nd May 2024, to elect City Councillors to 14 of the 42 seats of Cambridge City Council. It will also select a Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner. The next UK-wide parliamentary general election will be no later than 28th January 2025. So don't be left out! Make sure you are registered to vote, and have your say on how your city and the country are run.

Choose your own local Councillors

Cambridge city is divided into 14 'wards' or neighbourhoods. In each ward, the local residents elect 3 City Councillors to represent them on the City Council, which has 42 City Councillors in all.

Together, City Councillors make the decisions about your local public services and budgets. For your housing service, they do this at the Housing Scrutiny Committee. Voting alongside them on there are 6 council estate residents elected by the Council's tenants and leaseholders citywide (see article in this edition for details).

To see and contact your neighbourhood's local City Councillors, visit <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

To see all decisions made by the Housing Scrutiny Committee or to watch its meetings online, visit

<https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=414>

Cheap or free internet if you need it

Those receiving Universal Credit can get discounts on internet costs. Called Social Tariffs, these deals:

- cost just £10-£20 per month
- provide fast, unlimited broadband
- have either no setup costs, or very little
- may be offered by your current provider, who may switch you to it for free (if they don't, switch for free to a provider that does offer a Social Tariff)
- can't rise in cost during the contract, which you end any time without exit fees

You can apply for most Social Tariffs online, or phone your provider and ask to switch. Your provider might let you leave your current contract without paying a penalty fee. Some providers also offer Social Tariffs to those on benefits other than Universal Credit (eg. Pension Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance, etc.).

For a trustworthy guide to switching internet providers, visit

www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/costs-and-billing/social-tariffs

Libraries can give free data



Your local library (via the National Databank) can now provide you with free data for your mobile phone or wifi device if you are over 18, have a low household income and...

- you have insufficient internet access at home, or
- you have insufficient internet access away from home, or
- you can't afford your monthly top-up or contract

This offer can give you access to free mobile data, texts and calls for up to 12 months. It's a bit like a 'food bank', but for internet connection data rather than food. Community organisations can also apply to access this databank, enabling them to provide free data to people in their communities who need it.

Over half a million people are already using the offer. Many vital services such as benefits, health care and training require you to be online. Both schools and employers also expect you to use the internet. But with increasing pressure on the cost of living, many struggle to afford all the data they need on their internet devices.

For more information on this offer, visit www.goodthingsfoundation.org/databank or contact:

- Cambridge Central Library, 7 Lion Yard, CB2 3QD, tel. 0345-0455225
- Cambridge Online, Hester Adrian Centre, Hawthorn Way, CB4 1AX, tel. 01223-300407
- Citizens Advice Bureau, 66 Devonshire Road, CB1 2BL, tel. 0808-278-7808

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

Your new Consumer Standards for Social Housing

New standards + new satisfaction surveys

To improve and maintain the quality of social housing around the country, the government has created new Consumer Standards for Social Housing - a detailed set of standards that all social housing must meet. From April 2024, they will include four new standards covering:

- Safety and Quality – for safe, quality homes and quality services
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability – for open information, fairness and respect, an easy complaints process, and tenants influencing decision-making
- Neighbourhood and Community – for landlords' collaboration with partners to create safe, well-maintained neighbourhoods
- Tenancy – for fair allocation and letting of homes, and management of tenancies

Future editions of Open Door will bring you information about all these service areas. Or to explore the full Consumer Standards for Social Housing online, visit www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

Social landlords will now be required to survey their tenants annually, measuring how satisfied they are with their home and landlord services. The questions these surveys must ask are known as Tenant Satisfaction Measures. (You can view the full details online at www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenant-satisfaction-measures-standard)

Here at Cambridge City Council, we will do the first of these annual surveys in the coming months, and then publish the results to you here in Open Door. The results must also be sent on to the national regulator.

With the help of your elected resident representatives, the City Council will analyse your survey responses to identify any areas of low satisfaction, and will work with staff to improve them. Across the year, Open Door will report to you on the actions being made to improve these service areas.

'Transparency, influence + accountability'

For the new Standard for Transparency, Influence and Accountability, landlords must demonstrate that they are providing:

- Engagement with tenants – taking tenants' views into account in decision-making
about how landlord services are delivered
- Clear information about landlord services - to help tenants understand:

- what to expect from their landlord
- how best to use their services
- how to hold their landlord to account
- Performance information – so that tenants can see and measure how services are performing against targets
- An easy complaints process – kept simple and accessible, so that all tenants are told how to make a complaint if they need to (see the article below)

Open Door can be of particular help in delivering this Standard for tenants. A Residents' Editorial Panel works alongside council staff on every edition of Open Door, to ensure the edition reflects residents' interests and meets their information needs. Going forward, every edition of Open Door will now bring you articles on all four of these areas above that we are required to report to you on, ie. engagement with tenants influencing services; clear information on how to use services; how services are performing; and how to complain.

Please do email us your feedback and any requests or suggestions for articles at opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

How are your services performing?

As your landlord, the City Council has Performance Measures for each of its different service areas, eg. repairs, estate services, safety checks, the re-letting of vacated homes, and so on. Their levels of performance are captured and monitored every three months. Each edition of Open Door now brings you a recent selection of them.

They show you the 'direction of travel' of specific services' performance during the three months from October to December 2023. In other words, did performance improve or deteriorate since the previous three months?

Or else they show you how the current performance rates against an annual target that has been set for that service for the whole financial year of April 2023 to March 2024.

Repairs done in target time: 93.4%

Up from 79.6%

Repairs finished on first visit: 77.8%

Up from 64.3%

Repairs appointments kept: 94.1%

Up from 90.5%

Days to re-let vacated homes: 63.7

Was 63.1 before

Satisfaction with Estate Services: 88.1%

Up from 80.7%

Homes with valid gas safety cert: 100%

Target: 100%

Overseen by City Councillors and your elected resident representatives, council managers monitor dozens of performance measures like these, to keep up performance and productivity.

Remember that other volunteer tenants and leaseholders also help the City Council to do this sort of monitoring. And they are always keen for fellow residents to join them. So if you are interested in getting involved to have your say - or if you'd like to just get involved in monitoring a particular service area such as grass-cutting or repairs - please do email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

How to make a complaint



Internally, the City Council is in a major transformation process, reshaping its services and ways of working. Going forward, staff are required to perform their job in a way that is Collaborative, Courageous, Compassionate and Accountable. These are the Council's core values.

If a problem ever arises when you have requested a service or response from the City Council as your landlord, please try first to resolve the issue with the staff involved. But if you then end up dissatisfied with the standard of a service or actions - or lack of actions - by our staff, please tell us using our simple Complaints Process, so we can help and put things right for you.

It's quick and easy to make an official complaint, either on our website at www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions or by phoning us at 01223-457000. On the phone, you will be asked briefly about your complaint, then transferred to the relevant department to record it and discuss it further. We'll do our best to put things right and ensure it doesn't happen again to you or someone else. You'll just need to tell us...

- your name, contact details and the details of your complaint
- what you would like us to do to put things right
- whether you have raised this issue with us before and if so, who was dealing with it

We will say who is dealing with your complaint, and aim to reply within 10 working days. If we need longer, we will say why. If unhappy with the final outcome, you could complain to the Housing Ombudsman. For support with doing that, visit <https://socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk>

Your housing services - what you can expect

Accessing your housing services

These pages give you an overview and reminder of the various housing-related services that you can access:

- at any time via the City Council's website at www.cambridge.gov.uk/

council-tenants

- at any time via your own personal Housing Account on our online portal at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk>

- during office hours by phoning the City Council's Customer Service Centre at 01223-457000

If you prefer to phone rather than contacting us online, phone 01223-457000 to discuss your issue with our Customer Service Centre. Staff there are fully trained on all the housing issues listed in the article below. They will pass your call on to Housing Officers' teams only if it is a complex issue that they are unable to deal with themselves. (Note they cannot just transfer a call at your request.)

Your Housing services online



Remember that you can now access many of our housing services online, via your personal Housing Account online at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk>

On there, once you have registered, you can request or report on many housing services without needing to speak to staff.

You can check your rent account, print a statement, update your personal information, and much more. You'll also find clickable links through to our many online forms and systems.

Large numbers of council tenants and leaseholders are already benefitting from these quick and easy 'self-serve' resources online. So please do register now at <https://my.cambridge.gov.uk>

Then you can sign in at any time to check on your service requests. Some of them can also send you progress reports by email if you wish.

And if at any time you can't find what you want on the Council's website, there are contact details on each webpage so that you can email or phone the relevant staff on the spot.

Improving customer services

In a Residents' Satisfaction Survey of Cambridge City Council tenants and leaseholders done in 2020, the Council as a landlord was considered easy to deal with by:

- 73% of general council tenants
- 82% of tenants in sheltered accommodation
- 55% of council leaseholders

Since then, the Council has adopted a new, improved telephony system that makes it much easier for you to contact the staff members you need. This system has aimed to improve on the customer satisfaction rates above.

Later this year, Open Door will bring you the results of the 2024 Residents' Satisfaction Survey that will take place in the coming months. Inside this edition are further details of how, from now on, satisfaction surveys must yield specific Tenant Satisfaction Measures that must be reported back to the housing regulator annually.

Services provided by your housing teams



If an issue is not listed in this article, it is not covered by your housing service. It should be addressed instead to the relevant council department that does cover it.

Your housing service covers...

Income Management, that is:

- advice and support to reduce rent arrears
- payment arrangements to clear rent debts
- pursuing unpaid arrears
- advice on budgeting, and applying for benefits or grants where necessary
- issuing vouchers for financial help

Tenancy Management, that is:

- applications for new tenancies
- queries about your *Tenancy Agreement*
- adding someone to your tenancy
- deaths, succession, survivorship or name change requests for your tenancy
- advice on exchanging your home for another council home
- abandoned, under-occupied, over-occupied or sub-let tenancies
- renting of garages and parking spaces
- pursuing former tenants' unpaid arrears
- tenancy audit visits to homes

Neighbour problems, including:

- enforcing tenancy rules
- neighbour disputes
- animal-related nuisance
- misuse of communal areas or parking
- overgrown gardens
- evictions

Caring for homes, that is:

- authorising alterations to your home
- inspections of homes
- forced entry for gas safety checks
- handling vacated properties (except on redevelopment sites)

Caring for vulnerable tenants, eg.:

- safeguarding concerns
- supporting victims of domestic abuse
- dealing with hoarding
- liaising with other agencies, from police to social care

Tenancy Management staff cover geographical 'patches', handling complex aspects of the issues above that have been referred on to them by the Customer Service Centre. These Tenancy Management staff may occasionally visit homes unannounced, and will always carry identity badges. If you are ever unsure whether such a visitor is genuine, please phone the Council at 01223-457000 to confirm.

Services on estates

Grass-cutting and maintenance of shrub beds is done by the Council's Streets and Open Spaces Team. The Council also provides caretaking services to some of its estates.

Communal building cleaning is done weekly by contractor Goshen. They can be contacted by emailing cs@goshenmultiservices.com or by phoning 0754-2826553.

Residents who pay for communal window cleaning receive it from contractor Hi-Spec three times a year in April, August and December. They can be contacted by emailing helpdesk@hispecservices.co.uk

All these estate services are delivered in line with the Caretaking and Cleaning Standards of the independent quality agency Housemark. They are monitored by housing staff, and by trained resident representatives known as Green Inspectors. If you would like to become one, please email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Who to contact



To pay your rent

You can pay your rent:

- online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/pay-your-housing-rent
- over the phone at 01223-457779

- using your Rent Payment Card at any Post Office, or anywhere that displays the PayPoint sign

To request a repair

To request a repair for your home:

- log on to your Housing Account on the Council's website at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk/housing/www/dashboard>

[cambridge.gov.uk/housing/www/dashboard](https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk/housing/www/dashboard)

- or phone 01223-457000
- outside office hours, phone the Out-of-Hours emergency line at 0300-303-8389

To report anti-social behaviour

- Report anti-social behaviour or a neighbour dispute to the City Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team. Email asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk or tel. 01223-457000.

- Report Noise complaints to the City Council's Environmental Health Team. Email env.health@cambridge.gov.uk or tel. 01223-457000.

But note that criminal offences like the following must be reported directly to the police:

- assaults or threats of violence
- drug dealing or smells of drugs
- threats on social media

However, note that the following issues cannot be addressed either by council staff or by the police. They need to be resolved between neighbours as part of day-to-day living:

- sounds of babies crying
- sounds of children playing, closing doors, running up and down stairs, etc.
- disputes between children

To exchange your council home

To exchange homes with another council tenant, start by visiting www.homeswapper.co.uk or www.exchangelocata.org.uk

If you find a council tenant with whom you would like to exchange homes, our Tenancy Management team will process your application. For details, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/swap-your-council-home or phone 01223-457000.

Our commitments to you

Our Tenancy Management Service Standards have been developed with the involvement of your resident representatives. So when you request a service from your housing staff, we aim wherever possible to:

- phone you back within 24 hours for emergencies
- phone you back within 5 working days for non-emergencies
- if a disclosure of Domestic Abuse has been made, phone you back within 24 hours, arranging a meeting within 5 working days
- reply to letters and emails within 7 working days

- if you request a visit, phone you back within 5 working days to arrange one
- investigate all reports of tenancy abandonment and non-occupation within 10 working days
- if you apply to exchange your home for another, give a decision within 42 days

If you wish to make a complaint about services, please visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions

Your Tenancy Agreement

This states what you as the tenant are responsible for, which includes:

- keeping communal areas clear, to ensure fire safety for all
- keeping your home in good repair, fixing any damage caused by you
- keeping your garden tidy, and pruning its trees and bushes
- quietening and cleaning up after your pets
- allowing us access to your property for needed repairs and inspections
- parking without blocking access to neighbours' vehicles or property, or damaging grass verges
- being responsible for the behaviour of everyone (including children) who lives in or visits your home, inside or outside
- getting council permission before making alterations to your home

- arranging your own home contents insurance to cover theft of or damage to your possessions

Please check your Tenancy Agreement for more details on your responsibilities and rights.

Help for the cost of living, debts and money-worries

Downsizing, lodgers & rent

Got a spare room or two? If you're on benefits, one or more spare rooms at home mean your benefits are reduced. But do you still need such a large (and costly) property? For instance you could...

Downsize to a smaller council home

Moving in Cambridge or elsewhere could:

- save you money on utility bills
- prevent your benefits being reduced because of an unoccupied spare room
- mean your moving costs get covered by the Council
- give you a fresh start in a new setting

Or get a lodger

- If you're a council tenant, first get permission from the Council. They can also help you to find a lodger, and collect a deposit and the first month's rent.

- Have an advice session with the Council's Financial Inclusion team to see how a paying lodger might affect any benefits you receive.
- For instance, if receiving Universal Credit, you would still be deducted for a spare room but the extra income from a lodger will counteract this.
- The government's Rent-A-Room scheme allows you to earn up to £7,500 tax-free from paying lodgers. Visit www.gov.uk/rent-room-in-your-home

Get one to one help at your housing service

If you can't afford your rent, please contact your housing service's Financial Inclusion Officer today. They can:

- help you budget to avoid debt
- make a plan to clear your rent arrears or housing-related debts
- ensure you receive all benefits that you are entitled to
- help you apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment

To contact them, phone 01223-457000.

Help for prioritising your bills

The Bill Prioritiser is a safe tool online that can help you prioritise your bills and payments into the best order. It will also explain what to do if you're struggling, before you miss making an all-important payment like your rent. Visit www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/money-troubles/cost-of-living/bill-prioritiser.html

Help at home

Help for Child Maintenance

If you have tried unsuccessfully to arrange Child Maintenance payments, contact the Child Maintenance Service at www.gov.uk/child-maintenance-service/how-to-apply or phone 0800-171-2345. They can advise and help with getting an arrangement set up, or they can help with collecting or paying the necessary funds on your behalf

Child eligible for free school meals?

If so, this could save you up to £470 a year. Your child may be able to receive free school meals if you are receiving any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-Based Job Seekers' Allowance
- Income-Related Employment Support Allowance
- Tax Credits (with earnings under £16,190)
- Universal Credit (with earnings under £7,400)

To apply, visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-learning/help-with-school-learning-costs/free-school-meals or phone 01223-703200.

Help for heating your home

Want to cut your household bills and keep your home warm for less? Local charity PECT help residents to maintain a warmer home affordably, and to reap the health benefits that a warmer home can bring.

As a partner of Cambridge City Council, PECT's Cambridgeshire Home Energy Support Service can offer practical help to residents. Visit their website at www.pect.org.uk/energy-advice to download your free Home Energy Guide and access lots of other resources. Their free Energy Advice Service can also offer you a one-to-one assessment of your energy use, and help you to stay warm for less cost.

To avail of this service:

- email them at energyadvice@pect.org.uk
- or Freephone them at 0800-802-1773

Are you claiming all the help you are due?

Help for paying rent

If your income is low, you may be eligible for help with rent, by applying for Universal Credit. And those of pension-age on a low income may be entitled to Housing Benefit. Use the Benefit Calculator on the Council's website to see how much Universal Credit you could receive, plus any Council Tax reductions or other benefits. It's at <https://cambridge.entitledto.co.uk/home/start>

If you receive Universal Credit or Housing Benefit that don't cover your full rent and you are struggling, apply to the Council for a Discretionary Housing Payment. Email benefits@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457000.

Reduced Council Tax

Those on low incomes and single people may be eligible for reductions to their Council Tax. Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/council-tax

Claim all benefits due to you

The charity Turn to Us helps people access all the benefits, grants and other help available to them. Visit <https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk>

The MoneyHelper website also shows how to claim all benefits you're entitled to, which might include Pension Credit, Carer's Allowance, the Marriage Allowance, or help with tax bills. Visit <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits>

Benefits loans

You may be eligible for a Budgeting Loan if you've been on certain benefits for six months. You will have to pay back the amount you borrow, with repayments taken automatically from your benefits. Visit www.gov.uk/budgeting-help-benefits

Are your wages correct?

Use the National Minimum Wage Calculator online to ensure your pay (and deductions like income tax, national insurance, etc.) are correct. Visit www.gov.uk/am-i-getting-minimum-wage

To challenge any mistakes, Citizens' Advice can help you: phone 0344-848-7979 or 01223-222660, email caba@cambridgecab.org.uk or visit www.cambridgecab.org.uk

Travel costs

If on Universal Credit, you may be eligible for a Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount Card that gives up to 50% off train travel. Phone 0800-169-0190 or ask at your local Jobcentre.

Free food and meals

There is a wide range of places in Cambridge that provide free or low-cost food or meals to people who are struggling to afford food. For a list of times, places and contact details, visit <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org/emergency-food-access>

If you are struggling to afford or access food, please don't stay alone with the problem. There are so many groups and organisations around the city who can give you a friendly welcome, advice and the food you need.

Other support with food

Some foodbanks require referrals, but others don't. To view the options in Cambridge, visit <https://cambridgecity.foodbank.org.uk> or tel. 07772-538628.

City Council tenants who are struggling to afford food can request free food vouchers from the Council's housing service. Phone them at 01223-457000 or email incometeam@cambridge.gov.uk

Get help to sort out debts

Debt and money advice

Debt can happen to anyone. But don't despair - lots of free support is available to help you manage your debts, reduce monthly payments on them, and eventually become debt-free.

Cambridge Money Advice Centre are a trustworthy local charity giving one-to-one advice and support to get you out of debt, and on to financial stability. Phone 01223-727455 (if you get their answer machine, leave a message and they'll respond promptly). Or email info@cambridgemoneyadvicecentre.org.uk or visit www.cambridgemoneyadvicecentre.org.uk They are based at Barnwell Baptist Church, Howard Road, CB5 8QS.

Citizens' Advice also give reliable advice on debt and money problems. They can also offer help with form filling and letter writing. Visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk or www.cambridgecab.org.uk, or Freephone 08082-787808.

Step Change give trustworthy free advice on debt and money management at www.stepchange.org Or phone 0800-138-1111, Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm or Sat, 8am-4pm. Online advice is at www.stepchange.org/setting-expectations.aspx

Avoid loan sharks

Please beware of loan sharks, who lend money at unmanageable interest rates. Report them confidentially online at <https://www.gov.uk/report-loan-shark>

Use Credit Unions instead

Instead, Credit Unions are the safe way to borrow small amounts. Check out Eastern Savings & Loans Credit Union at www.esluc.co.uk or phone them at 03336-000690.

MoneyHelper website helps those on a tight income, helping you to plan a personal budget and manage your spending, with personalised tips for making savings. Visit www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/money-troubles/cost-of-living/squeezed-income Try their Personal Budget Planner at www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/everyday-money/budgeting/budget-planner

Mental health and debts

Breathing Space is a government scheme for those with mental health problems who have debts. It keeps creditors off your back while you receive debt advice and solutions for getting out of debt long-term. For up to 60 days, the scheme prevents creditors from chasing you or adding further interest or charges to your debts. If you are being treated for a mental health crisis, the scheme can last a month longer.

The type of debts involved can include loans, 'payday' loans, overdrafts, overdue utility bills, rent arrears, council tax debts, or debts on credit cards or store cards.

Ask your doctor or healthcare worker to refer you. You'll need a signed referral form from them. You can also start applying by yourself online at <https://breathingspace.zentsocloud.com/AdvicePro/BreathingSpaceReferral>

Get fit and active for little or no cost this Spring

Free and low-cost physical activities



The City Council's Active Lifestyles & Recreation team provide a huge range of free or low-cost activities around the city. There really is something for everyone - families, women, girls, older people, those with long-term medical conditions or mental health issues... Why not try an activity that's new to you, or one you haven't done for a while? Or get their free monthly e-newsletter at <https://mailchi.mp/cambridge/getmovingcam>

Get Families Moving – This service provides a variety of short activity courses that get the whole family active together, at a low cost. To date, the service has provided courses as varied as climbing, ice skating, racket sports and fishing, with specific

activities for family members with a disability. For courses available this Spring, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/sport-and-fitness-for-families

Pilates for Health - Why not try this class at the Central Library with the Council's Active Lifestyles & Recreation team? From April 1st, it's just £3.50 per session if booking a series, or £4 per individual session. For more information visit <https://bookwhen.com/camsport>

Healthy You – This programme offers free support and activity opportunities to anyone wanting a healthier lifestyle. Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/healthy-you-cambridge

Exercise Referral - This service is a personalised exercise programme for adults with long-term medical conditions or disabilities. Available at six sites across the city, at a low cost. For information on how you could be referred, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/startup

Invigorate – This programme is for those who may be struggling with their mental health, and wishing to improve their wellbeing through regular activity. Activities are either free or low-cost. They include sessions in T'ai Chi, multi-sports, yoga and health walks. For more information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/invigorate

For information on all these and other activities, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/sport, email sport@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457532. Or follow Get Moving Cambridge at www.facebook.com/getmovingcam or on Instagram [@Getmovingcambridge](https://www.instagram.com/Getmovingcambridge)

Online tasters

Why not set some goals for feeling healthier and stronger, now that Spring and the brighter days are coming? Good goals could include:

- for example, to improve any pain in your back or joints
- to improve your core strength (which will protect your back too)
- to gain better health by enjoying some regular exercise

The YouTube channel of the Council's Active Lifestyles team has free taster sessions to sample online. There are different types of exercise classes, meditation, cook-along videos, breathing exercises... Try them for free at www.youtube.com/@getmovingcambridge

Free short online courses

Or try their free online courses on topics like Relax & Unwind, Get Back into Yoga & Movement or Strength Training at Home. Get started for free by having a browse today at www.cambridge.gov.uk/online-fitness-activities

Free group walks for your health & wellbeing

As the NHS puts it: "Walking is simple, free and one of the easiest ways to get more active, lose weight and become healthier. Sometimes overlooked as a form of exercise, walking briskly can help you build stamina, burn excess calories and make your heart healthier. You do not have to walk for hours. A brisk 10-minute daily walk has lots of health benefits..."

Free Wellbeing Walks

These are short, friendly group walks that help you to become and stay active. Led by trained volunteers, they are free to join and everyone is welcome. See below some of the the range available around the city.

Wellbeing Walks run by local Social Prescribers team

These free walks are led by NHS Well-Being Coaches. Available to all, no matter what GP surgery you are registered with:

- First Wednesday of the month at 2pm, from Nuffield Road Surgery, Nuffield Road, CB4 1GL.
- Second Thursday of the month at 2pm, from Edge Café, Mill Road, CB1 3DF to CoFarm off Barnwell Road and back.

It's worth booking in advance, though you could just turn up. Book at <https://bookwhen.com/walks> Or for information email maria.carvalho5@nhs.net Or for more on Wellbeing Walks, visit the Ramblers' website at <https://beta.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/wellbeing-walks>

Mental Health Mates Walks

Mental Health Mates are peer support groups run by people who have experienced their own mental health issues. They meet regularly to walk, connect, feel supported and share their experiences in a kindly environment. To find out more or join a Mental Health Mates walking group, visit www.mentalhealthmates.co.uk/get-involved

For more information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/sport, email sport@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457532. Or follow Get Moving Cambridge on Facebook, Instagram or Youtube (links to the accounts are in the articles above).

Fun activity sessions

With Spring on the way, it's time to take action to:

- devote some regular time to yourself and your health

- prioritise your mental wellbeing
- start practicing self-care for the year ahead

So why not try the Council's Yoga For Health classes? They're at three different locations around town - at the Meadows Centre in Arbury, Fields Nursery in Galfrid Road and Nightingale Pavillion on Nightingale Avenue.

To browse the wide menu of fun, welcoming, very low-cost activities like this that the Council's Get Moving team provide around town, visit <https://bookwhen.com/camsport>

They range from Back on Court - Return to Tennis classes to Social Badminton. There's bound to be something for you.

Swims and activity trails

Swimming is one of the best workouts for body and mind. It exercises your whole body gently, while also being relaxing and refreshing. There are low-cost and even free options at the city's council-owned pools.

For example, those on benefits and the over-60s can enjoy half-price swimming and sports with a Pay & Play Concession Card. Available at Parkside and Abbey pools, Cherry Hinton Village Centre, King's Hedges Learner Pool or Jesus Green Lido, the card costs just £5 per year for adults, and £2.50 per child.

Standard Pay & Play cards (for those not on benefits nor over 60) give up to 30% discount. They cost just £10 for adults per year, and £5 per child.

Pay & Play Student Cards, at £7.50 per year, give up to 35% discount for full-time students. Meanwhile at weekends, the Adult & Child sessions at the city's council-owned pools give free swimming for up to 2 children with every paying adult!

And as the weather improves, why not get outside too for a regular dose of fresh air and exercise? You'll feel so much better for it.

There are lots of opportunities to get active in the city's green and open spaces, including free public tennis courts and table tennis tables, outdoor 'green gyms' and 'trim trails', and running and walking trails.

There are weekly free Park Runs on Coldhams Common and Storey Field, and a free Park Tennis session on Jesus Green.

For families, the free 'Love Exploring' smartphone app provides a variety of fun, augmented-reality trails on many green spaces in the city.

These include Nightingale Recreation ground, Cherry Hinton Hall, Trumpington Meadows Country Park and Nuns Way.

For more information on the variety of free opportunities for fitness and where they are located in the city, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/sport

Do you eat too many 'UPFs'?

By Dr Richard Hoffman, Registered Nutritionist, University of Hertfordshire

Studies show that illnesses due to poor diet are the number one cause of death in Britain. And we hear about the harm from eating too many 'ultra-processed foods' or 'UPFs'. But what are they?

Ultra-processed or UPF 'foods' are industrial, factory-made products concocted from cheap, highly processed ingredients. Most boxed breakfast cereals are UPFs. So are packaged snacks, and many ready-to-heat meals like chicken nuggets and pizzas. UPFs are often designed to be addictive, so it's hard to stop eating them once you start! For instance, who ever leaves a packet of crisps unfinished?!

But UPFs are causing major health problems. In the factory, most of the healthy vitamins, minerals and fibre are removed from the original ingredients. Onto this 'blank canvas', the factory then adds addictive chemical flavourings and textures, and lots of fat, sugar and salt.

For many in the UK, more than half their weekly shop is made up of UPFs. These people are filling up on products that have almost no nutrients, causing them massive health problems. They end up overweight but under-nourished! As a result, hospital admissions for nutrient-deficiencies (of iron, B vitamins and other essential nutrients) have almost tripled to over 800,000!

Vitamin deficiencies are not always obvious. Some do cause dramatic diseases like scurvy. But for most people, the lack of vitamins and minerals in their diet instead increases their risk of cancer and dementia.

The solution is simple: live on natural, un-processed foods that your parents would have recognised as 'food'! Plenty of vegetables, wholegrains and fruit, with some dairy, fish and meat, will supply all the nutrients your health needs.

(Vitamin pills are not a simple solution. Though useful for treating specific, immediate deficiencies, studies show that for most people, they bring no long-term benefit.) A diet of natural foods is the long-term solution for your health. See the next editions of Open Door for cheap, easy and tasty ways to achieve it...

Your housing service

£5 million invested in estates

The Council has invested £5 million over the past five years in making improvements to the communal areas of its council estates. Proposals for this Estate

Improvement Scheme often came from residents, and all residents affected by each project were consulted at a door to door level across the five years.

Examples of the improvement projects over the five years have included:

- new lighting
- storage for bikes and mobility-scooters
- more secure bin stores and new, tidier recycling facilities
- resurfaced pathways that are safer and more attractive
- works and fittings that increased security, such as new gates and locks
- works that prevent anti-social behaviour, for instance by closing off unwanted access

Over 130 such projects have been completed around the city over the past five years, giving estates a major facelift and investment. All these estate improvement projects had to meet at least one of the following needs:

- reducing crime or anti-social behaviour
- making a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of the estate
- contributing to strengthening the estate community
- improving residents' health, safety or wellbeing
- spending money now that will save money later

Most of the projects actually served several of those needs at once. Projects also had to add lasting value to the estate, rather than just being a more temporary

change such as new foliage, for instance. And they had to be in addition to any planned maintenance works that the Council would already be doing anyway.

If you have further suggestions to improve your estate, even if different from those above, please email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

For more information on the scheme, or to see annual reports overviewing completed improvement projects over the years, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/estate-improvement-scheme

Neighbourhood Clean-Up Days

Do you have clutter, rubbish or unwanted items lying around in your garden, sheds or home? Fancy a thorough clear-out for free, without any costs or travel?

Did you know the Council runs free Neighbourhood Clean-Up Days around the city's council estates? They bring free skips and recycling bins to help clear up communal areas, and for residents to have a free clear-out of their own homes and gardens too.

For instance, they plan to be in Thorpe Way, Ekin Road and Wulfstan Way from 8.30am to 2pm on Saturdays 11th May, 27th June and 21st September, respectively. Across the city, residents always receive a flyer in advance, letting them know when their own local Clean-Up Day will be happening.

Up to 25 can be run on the city's estates each year, and they remain extremely popular with local residents. Run in the mornings by the Council's Streets & Open Spaces team, there's a fun atmosphere as everyone gets down to getting rid of those unwanted items, without having to pay fees to get them taken away.

You just bring your household and garden waste to the free disposal skips and bins on the day. Recycling Champions are usually present too, to answer your questions about what you can recycle.

And there's usually an ever-popular 'Take It Or Leave It' stall where you can drop off or claim for yourself a wide range of unwanted items for free.

The skips can take anything from sofas and wardrobes to metal, timber and rubbish for landfill. Council staff can help unload cars into the skips, and will help sort materials that can be recycled. But remember to bring your waste all the way to the skips on the day - you could be prosecuted for flytipping if you just leave it in a public place. Residents with disabilities may be able to book for council staff to carry their items to the skips for them.

For more information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/neighbourhood-clean-up-events, email housing.officer@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457000 or 01223-458084.

Garden to help Nature recover

Garden for bees, birds and butterflies

Our home gardens can be a living refuge for nature and wildlife. The habitats of beloved wildlife like sparrows and hedgehogs are disappearing fast. So they are increasingly reliant on our gardens for their food, shelter and water.

Please leave some undisturbed 'wild' patches in your garden as a refuge for wildlife, with log-piles for insects. See how long it takes to attract a resident hedgehog! In winter, leave a lot of tidying up until late spring. Birds can then eat your winter seed-heads, with ladybirds sheltering in dead flower stalks.

Attracting birds into your garden is a wonderful hobby: just hang up some bird food, put out a saucer of water and watch who drops by! Put up nesting boxes in safe spots (out of cats' reach), and see who moves in.

A mixed hedge gives food and shelter, if not trimmed too much. Without harmful chemicals, garden pests are controlled by encouraging their natural enemies: birds, frogs and hedgehogs all eat slugs and snails. Ladybirds and hoverflies eat greenfly and their eggs. So watch the good wildlife clear out your pests!

Note that Cambridge City Council have now stopped using herbicides in most of the city. Yet the total combined space of our gardens dwarfs the size of city parks. So going pesticide-free at home will make a huge difference to our city's wildlife and our health. At www.pesticidefreecambridge.org, you can pledge to go pesticide-free today!

Planting disease-resistant varieties also removes the need for chemicals. And for vegetables, companion planting combats pests. For instance, marigolds attract the ladybirds and hoverflies who will eat up your greenfly and other pests.

Mulching with your grass clippings keeps down weeds, improves your soil and saves on watering. Please only use peat-free compost in your soil: peat extraction destroys wildlife habitats elsewhere. Instead, save money and shopping by just piling up your own garden compost or leaf mould.

For lots more ways to make your garden a haven for wildlife, visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/how-you-can-help/wildlife-gardening

Grow for bees



On The Verge Cambridge is a resident-led group promoting nectar-rich flowers in our city. Wildflowers are badly needed as food sources for our pollinating insects, now in catastrophic decline. Including bees, butterflies and other pollinators who pollinate the nation's food crops!

Together, our gardens and verges can form joined-up corridors where bees and other pollinators can feed without having to fly long distances. So let's plant metres and miles of what they need: wildflowers! Pick up wildflower seeds at your local shop, or buy them for £3.50 (incl.post) or 3 packs for £10 at www.onthevergecambridge.org.uk.

And why not do some wildflower-planting at your child's school, or on your council estate? As partners of the City Council, On The Verge would be happy to advise. For more information, visit www.onthevergecambridge.org.uk

This year try 'No-Mow May'...

The Royal Horticultural Society are asking all home gardeners to put away their lawnmower this May, allowing some wild plants to come through your grass.

This will provide some desperately needed nectar for wildlife. Dandelion flowers, for instance, provide crucial nectar for bees and other pollinators who are in drastic decline. Allowing even a little more wildlife in our garden can give huge help to plants, butterflies and bees.

It's simple: just take a break from mowing across May, then count how many new plants have come through your grass. Last May, over 250 different species of wild plants were recorded in 'No-Mow-May' lawns, from wild strawberry and garlic to rare saxifrage and snake's-head fritillaries. A wide range of orchids, like the Bee Orchid, also appeared. Why not see what wildflowers your own grass can produce?

It's a fun, educational game for kids, grandkids or anyone: checking your un-mown grass across May, to count the wildflower species coming through. You can add your count to the Every Flower Counts citizens' survey at [@Love_plants](https://t.co/E8tMrya2Fa) [pic.twitter.com/vdwNgaKkuM](https://t.co/vdwNgaKkuM)

Gardeners are also being asked to mow less across summer, leaving at least a zone of your grass always unmowed, to support bees and butterflies. This 'two-tone' approach (shorter grass complemented by areas of longer) looks

smart, adding texture to your garden. It's a return to the traditional English Cottage Garden, a more relaxed, natural style of gardening that is famous the world over (as opposed to the severely cropped American style, now outdated).

Reconnecting us with our heritage, having even a patch of English Cottage style in our garden also reconnects us with the natural world outside our door.

Pesticide-free gardening



The group Pesticide-Free Cambridge cites huge evidence that pesticides are a major problem: they kill creatures they target, but also harm other wildlife and ourselves! Linked to cancers, Parkinson's and autism, they may be especially dangerous for those with allergies and chronic conditions. Glyphosate is the focus of many legal actions due to its links with cancer.

Slug pellets kill our hedgehogs, in danger of extinction in the UK. Insect numbers have fallen catastrophically, with pesticides a leading cause. Yet we need bees and butterflies to pollinate our crops and gardens!

There are effective alternatives. Ants? Bicarb of soda and sugar works, and harms only ants. Aphids? Let ladybirds and blue tits loose! Caterpillars? Just pick them off. Slugs? Use beer-traps. On 'weeds', use a hoe or boiling water. For lots more tips, get your free guide from Pesticide-Free Cambridge at www.pesticidefreecambridge.org/pesticide-free-guide

Residents have their say

Residents' achievements in the past year

Over the past year, residents and resident representatives have again influenced decisions in over 40 council service areas that affect their housing. In keeping with national regulations, the City Council maintains a Resident Involvement Strategy that resident representatives help to design and monitor. It guarantees the wide range of opportunities that tenants and leaseholders have for influencing their Housing Service. You can view the current Resident Involvement Strategy (2021-2024) on the Council's website at www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement-strategies-updates-and-reports



This past year again, services influenced by resident representatives at the high strategic level included:

- planning the budget of the Housing Service
- the city's Housing Strategy: its future planning for getting social housing and affordable homes included in new developments
- the Council's own building programme, building new council homes in the city
- redevelopment of existing council estates to bring them up to modern standards

- programmes to boost biodiversity on council estates and land

In the day to day running of council estates, residents again actively influenced services like:

- the quality monitoring of repairs, maintenance and work on vacated homes
- estate services like communal cleaning, window-cleaning and grass-cutting
- the Estate Improvement Scheme that invested £5 million into hands-on local projects improving estates
- selecting a contractor to run your 2024 resident elections for choosing your resident representatives

Whether a service is delivered by the Council or by its contractors, resident representatives monitor how well each service is performing. They also review complaints about services, to see whether the Council has responded with improvements.

Interested in a particular service area? To have your say in a way that suits you, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Your elected resident reps

Council tenants and leaseholders citywide receive a vote every 4 years to elect 6 resident representatives to champion their interests on the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee. For instance, at the Committee's January meeting, your resident reps debated or voted on decisions like:

- the budget for the Housing Service for the year ahead

- a 'Compliance Report' on how the Council is meeting legal requirements for the safety and maintenance of council homes
- the progress of the Council's ongoing, long-term programme of building new council homes
- grants to organisations preventing homelessness

To contact your elected resident reps at any time, email hsc.residents@gmail.com or phone 01223-458323 to leave them a message. For minutes of their Committee meetings, visit <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx> and click 'Housing Scrutiny Committee'.

Enter the Residents' Garden Competition

This summer again, many council tenants and leaseholders will enter their gardens for the friendly annual Residents' Garden Competition. Why not have a go yourself? The total prizes are worth over £500.

Whether you have a big garden, a veg plot or just a few pots, there's a category for everyone. Communal gardens are welcome too. It's not the type or size of your gardening efforts that matters - just that they be nature-friendly, and avoid using pesticides or herbicides.

The competition favours healthier gardening methods that support nature, wildlife and biodiversity, with approaches like those featured in the article below.

Gardens like these on council estates are actually vital. Together, they form a crucial 'patchwork' of havens where bees, hedgehogs, birds and other wildlife can find refuge - which they can't in gardens that use pesticides and herbicides. Gardeners are now realising that these chemicals kill birds and hedgehogs, who eat the

poisoned slugs and are in turn killed themselves too! We are sure that's not what you want.

So please join council residents' nature-friendly garden movement. To enter the 2024 Residents' Garden Competition, just adopt some of the green, money-saving tips from the list here on the right.

The deadline to apply for this year's competition will be at the end of June 2024. Friendly judges will arrange a time with you to visit your garden in July. And a fun prize-giving event will be held in September.

You can download your entry form at www.cambridge.gov.uk/tenant-and-leaseholder-garden-competition or request one by emailing resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phoning 01223-458323.

Gardening to help Nature



- Don't use chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers. They can harm human health. And they destroy bees, butterflies, birds, hedgehogs, toads and other wildlife.
- Instead, use barriers like fleece to protect plants, rather than chemicals that poison wildlife such as thrushes.
- Put down mulch to block weeds, protect plants and reduce watering.
- Mow a lot less, so wildflowers and nettles can come through to feed bees, butterflies, other insects and birds.
- Grow natural flowers with single blooms: bees and butterflies can't feed from artificially-bred 'double' blooms.
- Compost your garden and kitchen waste as free fertiliser to improve your soil. Collect rainwater, to water for free.

- Grow your own organic veg to save money and eat more healthily.

Leaseholders

Payment for major works

The City Council sometimes needs to do planned works on our flat blocks. Examples include re-roofing, resurfacing paths and roads, structural works, cyclical repair and redecoration, or replacing communal doors, entry systems or lighting.

If your individual contribution is expected to be more than £250, the Council must by law serve you a 'Section 20 Notice', detailing work planned and your estimated contribution. Under your lease, you are liable to pay a reasonable proportion of any costs incurred by the Council in maintaining and repairing the building in which your flat is situated.

The initial figure you receive will be an estimate, and can increase or decrease. The final cost of the works will appear in your service charge 'Actuals' in the September after the financial year when the work was completed. You will then receive the 'Reconciliation Adjustment Invoice' in October, to pay within 14 days as per the terms of your lease.

If you already pay by Direct Debit, the amount will be split across the remaining payments of that financial year (across 6 payments if paid monthly, or across 2 payments if paid quarterly). Please contact us if you wish to switch your Direct Debit to be monthly.

Some planned works are expensive, such as re-roofing or structural works. And your lease does not require the landlord to offer payment options other than the process above. But we recognise that some leaseholders may struggle with payments. So we could arrange for you to pay any remaining balance across 18 months interest-free, so long as your service charges payment is by Direct Debit.

Are you expecting a large bill for planned works this year? We have sent out 443 Section 20 Notices this financial year, for planned works that will be invoiced in October 2024. If you want to start paying sooner, to reduce the monthly payments from when your invoice arrives in October, we can arrange this for you.

To know what works are currently planned at your block, please email us at leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457835.

The rules on subletting

Your Lease Agreement lays out the legal agreement between you and the City Council. It includes the option to sublet your flat, but there are a number of requirements involved. If you wish to sublet, the Council recommends you first get a solicitor to ensure that your proposed tenants, and your Tenancy Agreement with them, comply fully with your lease.

For instance, your Leasehold Agreement stipulates that you must 'use and occupy the flat solely and exclusively as a self-contained flat in one family occupation only'. This means you can only sublet the flat to one person or family, not to a group of individuals who are flat-sharing, and not as a holiday let.

If you breach the conditions of your lease, the consequences can be very serious. The City Council has in the past taken legal action against leaseholders who ignored this clause in their lease.

The Council can apply to the courts to end your lease and repossess your property. There is no compensation for you if this happens, and you would lose all rights to the property.

If you decide to go ahead, any sublet must be formally registered with the City Council's Leasehold Team, on the form provided. (This is separate from any other

contact you may have about your leasehold with other council departments, eg. about Council Tax.)

Registering a sublet with the Council costs £75 administration fee. You can download the form at www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholders

You remain responsible for the behaviour of your subtenants and their visitors, who must all adhere fully to the terms of your lease. You must ensure they know and fulfill all the responsibilities of living in a council leasehold property.

Even if renting via an agency, subtenants must be fully briefed and compliant with all the rules on number of occupants, noise and anti-social behaviour, visitors, parking, keeping communal areas clear, bins, recycling and so on.

For more information, please visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholders, email leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk or phone the Council at 01223-457835.

Help for energy bills

Although we are heading into the warmer months now, very many households will still struggle to pay their bills. For a really wide range of help, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help

On there you can see many forms of help, such as grants directly from the City Council or discounts on things like your Council Tax, or support from the Council's partners with things like food vouchers, energy grants and help to manage debt. Consider too the sources of help below.

Warm Home Discount - £150 Households on certain means-tested benefits with high energy use may be eligible for £150 from their energy supplier, taken off their electricity bill this winter. The government will decide who is eligible and notify them by post. Those on Pension Credit should receive this discount automatically.

Priority Services Register

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

PECT Energy Advice Service

If struggling on a pre-pay meter, contact PECT. They can give support and help you access funding. Freephone 0800-8021773 or email energyadvice@pect.org.uk

A phone call or visit can be booked in with one of their energy advisors, who will help you with energy issues at home, including keeping your home warm and applying for financial support. Freephone 0800-8021773 or email energyadvice@pect.org.uk

Energy supplier grants

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

Household Support Fund

Financial help with energy bills and food, for those in immediate financial hardship. For eligibility information or to apply visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/household-support-fund Or email community.resilience@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457000.

Cambridge Local Assistance Scheme

They support people facing unexpected financial difficulties. For more information visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/parenting-and-family-support/cambridgeshire-local-assistance-scheme

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

As well as the supports and resources on the City Council webpage given at the beginning of this article (www.cambridge.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help), please do have a look too at the version on the government's website at www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills

Who to contact for services

Register for your personal Housing Services account at www.cambridge.gov.uk/online-accounts

Domestic Abuse 24-hour Helpline

Tel: Freephone 0808-2000-247

Visit www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Make council payments by phone

Tel: 01223-457000, with bank card

Homelessness & temporary accommodation, outside office hours

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

Rents, tenancies, lettings, renting a council garage

Tel: 01223-457000

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

Repairs

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

Contact Council in Sign Language

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

Council Tax

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Leasehold services

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholders

E: leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457835

Housing for Older People and Visiting Support Service

E: independent.living@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Home-Link lettings

Visit www.home-link.org.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Housing & Council Tax Benefits

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Bins, recycling, street-cleaning

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

Tel: 01223-457000

Bulky waste collection

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

Tel: 01223-457000

Report anti-social behaviour

E: asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Report tenancy fraud

E: fightfraud@cambridge.gov.uk

Noise complaints

E: env.health@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223-457000

Council emergencies out of hours

Tel: 0300-303-8389

To complain about council services

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

Council's contractors on estates

TSG Services

E: enquiries@tsgplc.co.uk

Tel: 01223-828777

For gas or hot water, tel 0800-111-4044

Foster Property Maintenance

E: info@fpm-ltd.co.uk

Tel: 01945-586999

Goshen communal cleaning

E: cs@goshenmultiservices.com

Tel: 0754-2826553

Hi-Spec window cleaning

E: helpdesk@hispecservices.co.uk

Suicide Awareness



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

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