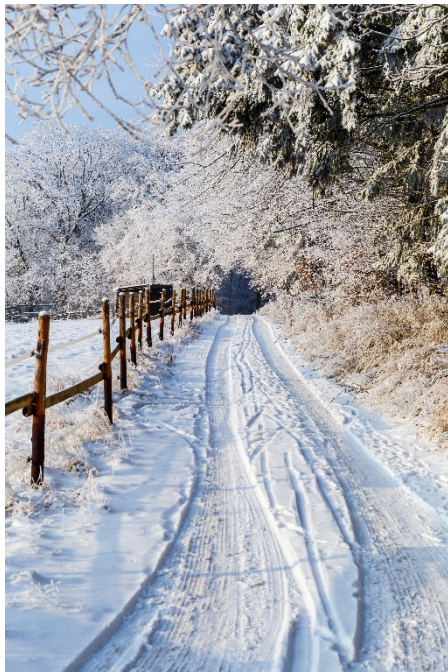


# Open Door, Autumn/Winter 2024

## For the Tenants & Leaseholders of Cambridge City Council



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Welcome to this Autumn / Winter edition of Open Door, which is packed with helpful information and support for you over the colder months ahead.

We continue our series about ‘zero tolerance’ on fly-tipping and items left in communal areas. With extra fire risks during winter, please do read it and check to ensure your own home and communal areas are fire-safe.

As every Autumn, we bring you a brief ‘annual report’ showing how your rent was re-invested in your housing service, plus snapshots of the year’s trends in our own performance as a service, and in residents’ complaints about our services. There’s also a look at the Improvement Plan that we are carrying forward based on your feedback in your annual tenants’ survey.

The service we are featuring in this edition is repairs. There is important guidance on how to tackle condensation and mould at home, when to call us in for it, and how best to use your heating system and your repairs service across the winter.

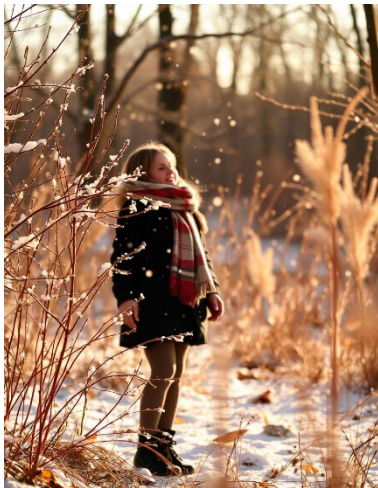
We bring you a wide range of practical support for the colder season. There is lots of financial help for energy bills. And we show you the ‘Warm and Welcoming Spaces’ and free activities for kids, families and all ages at our Community Centres around the city. Check our interactive map to find those nearest to you and make maximum use of them. There is also an article on The Haven, a new drop-in night-time facility for vulnerable women in the city.

We continue our new collaboration with NHS preventive health services out in your communities. Their articles bring you outreach from your local NHS Social Prescribers and mental health services; invitations to Wellbeing Hubs, Mental Health Cafes and NHS Talking Therapies; and tips for healthy eating on a winter budget.

This edition brings leaseholders important information about the costs to them when planned maintenance work is done on their buildings. We also include an interview with one of your newly elected tenant representatives, plus news of an exciting vacancy for a similar role. Please do get in touch if you're interested and as always, email us your feedback or suggestions for articles at [opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk)

With best wishes,

Samantha Shimmon, Assistant Director for Housing & Homelessness



### **Why not receive Open Door by email instead of on paper?**

It's easy to read on any device with wifi, saving on paper and carbon. To receive it by email instead of post, visit <https://camcit.co/opendooremail>

A Residents' Open Door Editorial Panel helps to edit the content of every edition. They ensure that Open Door continues to reflect residents' needs and interests. To get involved, please email [opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk)

### **New Fire Safety Policy is even stricter**

Your Tenancy or Lease Agreement states that you must never leave anything in communal areas, indoors or outdoors, however briefly. The Council has long had a

'Zero Tolerance' approach, with powers to remove items, charge offenders £95 costs, and get fines of up to £400 imposed. But it has now adopted an even stricter policy for Fire Safety in Communal Areas. Leaseholders who let their property must also ensure their tenants are fully aware of this policy.

Now, any items posing a potential fire risk in communal areas can be removed immediately by the Council. Other items must be removed within 5 working days, or the Council will take them.

Here we say hello again to Jamie Lambert, the officer implementing this on your estates.

Jamie, what's your main message?

"I've said it before. Anything left in a communal area:

- increases the risk of a fire
- increases the risk of a fire spreading
- obstructs residents getting out in an emergency, especially those with reduced mobility or small children
- obstructs emergency services coming in

What's gone well recently?

Our Housing Services and Streets & Open Spaces teams ran successful Community Clean Up Days at Wulfstan Way, Ekin Road and Davy Road. These allowed residents to dispose of items, big or small, for free.

Where possible, items are recycled or given to others to reuse. You should see the amount of flytipping and abandoned items we cleared out of a bin store - where there should be nothing but fully closed bins!

At these events I speak with local residents, and work with them to get their communal areas clear of items that would be a risk to them during a fire.

Another positive has been our Estates Improvement Scheme - extra funding used to reduce fire risk at various council estates recently. Our Estate Champions have worked to provide improvements like fire-proof wheelie bin stores, and new storage for bikes and mobility scooters. And some stairwells have been enclosed, to prevent items being stored there against the rules, causing obstruction and fire risk.

Any nightmare scenarios out on the estates?

Unfortunately, yes! I've attended several incidents where bin stores and storage cupboards had inappropriate waste dumped in them, or excess waste has been dumped near bins. Items dumped have included petrol and paint cans, vehicle parts... Misuse of bin stores can increase fire risk, and can be an increased risk for arson too. The sooner issues are reported, the better, and the safer your homes and communities will be.



Any advice for newer residents?

In new-build flats and for new tenants, I really urge you to ensure you genuinely know all the rules against storing items in communal areas. And ensure you're familiar with the fire safety information for your building. It takes five minutes to check it, but it could save your life, and your family's lives.

Any tips for fire safety in winter?

Please ensure that extra Christmas waste is binned correctly! And if you buy or receive items like electric bikes or scooters, make sure you read carefully both the product guidance on charging and storing them, and the safety guidance on e-batteries at [www.cambsfire.gov.uk/community-safety/take-charge-and-be-safe/e-bikes-and-e-scooters](http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/community-safety/take-charge-and-be-safe/e-bikes-and-e-scooters)

Mobility scooters must always be stored either inside the resident's home or away from communal areas. Residents must not store or recharge electric bikes or electric scooters in communal areas other than those designated by the Council.

And of course, fire safety indoors is crucial too in winter. Risks then include overloading plugs with appliances, faulty Christmas lights, candles, maybe drinking and smoking at the same time...

For safety reminders that could save your family's lives, see [www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-in-the-winter/fire-safety-in-the-winter-accessible](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-in-the-winter/fire-safety-in-the-winter-accessible)

Jamie, how can residents get rid of waste items legally?

If they fit, place them in your estate's waste or recycling bins. Or take them to Milton Recycling Centre for free. For items you can't transport, the Council will remove them for £30 (plus £5 per additional item). Request it at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/arrange-a-bulky-waste-collection](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/arrange-a-bulky-waste-collection) or phone 01223-457000.

One final question for now: how to report left items?

To report items left in indoor communal areas, please email me at [Jamie.Lambert@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:Jamie.Lambert@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223-457000. For flytipping or items left in estates' outdoor communal areas, please report them online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/reportflytipping](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/reportflytipping) or phone 01223-457000."



## **How your rent was re-invested in 2023/24**

Average weekly social rent for a 2-bedroom council home in Cambridge was approximately £119.56

Approximately £66 was re-invested in improving kitchens & bathrooms, sheltered housing, building new council homes, etc.

Approximately £26 was re-invested in day to day repairs & maintenance, inspections, preparing properties to re-let, etc.

Approximately £14 was re-invested in paying interest on the debt of the Housing Service

Approximately £9 was re-invested in Managing tenancies, lettings, anti-social behaviour, resident involvement & support services

Approximately £4 was re-invested in Other costs in providing social housing as a Council

## **Does Cambridge council rent give you value for money?**

Average weekly social rent for 2-bed Cambridge council home, March 2024 = £119.56

Average weekly rent for 2-bed home on open market, March 2024 = £359.50

(Average open market rent is taken from Cambridge City Council report 'Key Facts - Private Rented Housing', March 2024)

## **How was the overall housing budget invested in homes?**

75% on building or buying more council homes

19% on 'Decent Homes' programme that improves kitchens, bathrooms, doors & windows

5% on other investments in homes

1% on improving estates through the Estates Improvement Scheme

## **Improvements to the city's council housing**

The City Council's overall Annual Report 2023-24 is available online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/corporate-plan-2022-27-our-priorities-for-cambridge#report](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/corporate-plan-2022-27-our-priorities-for-cambridge#report) Within it, providing quality council homes, maintaining council estates well and tackling the city's inequalities are high priorities. The report shows the improvements underway for the city's council homes, including the following.

### **Tenancy Audit Visits**

In 2023-24, almost 10% of our council tenancies received a Tenancy Audit Visit. Through these visits, 27 victims of domestic abuse were helped. 195 households got support and advice on moving to more suitable accommodation. And 70% of the homes visited were found to have a maintenance problem that can now be addressed.

### **New Policy on Damp, Condensation and Mould**

A new law is forcing all social landlords to fix damp and mould within strict time limits, after a child died due to mould in his social housing in Rochdale. This year, condensation, damp and mould have been a big priority for Cambridge City Council. We created a new policy on mould with clear timescales for action. We received 608 reports of damp and mould, a significant increase. A specialist team are now inspecting these properties to get these problems resolved, and we've been trialling environmental sensors to help survey properties.

## **Making council homes more energy efficient**

In 2023-24, our External Wall Insulation Programme for council homes transformed 58 homes that had poor energy efficiency. They received external wall insulation, better ventilation and where needed, new external doors and loft insulation. This programme installing Energy Efficiency. Improvements will continue for a further two years, benefitting 260 council homes in all. Our Programme for Net Zero-Carbon Homes is now upgrading 51 council homes, and we have completed 21 Passivhaus homes, including two that are wheelchair-adapted with lifts.

## **More affordable housing to rent**

As part of our ongoing council home-building programme, we got 248 new council homes built during 2023/24. Additionally, 21 existing properties were bought into council stock to house Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. We are currently building 84 more new council homes. 43 of these will be let to those who don't qualify for social housing, but are struggling to afford private housing: those homes will be let by the Council for rents that are 20% cheaper than open market rents.

## **Reletting vacant council homes more quickly**

In 2023-24, empty council homes (called 'voids') took on average almost 61 days to let - considerably higher than our target of 28 days. So we are running a Voids Improvement Project to analyse and improve the whole process and measurably bring down these turnaround times.

## **The Transformation of your City Council**

The City Council is undergoing a multi-year Transformation programme called Our Cambridge. This programme has three main strands, transforming:

- how the City Council works with communities and partners
- how the Council is organised and managed internally
- how it delivers services

In 2023-24, the programme has already brought a cascade of major changes to how the City Council operates, including:

- our new code of values, published in Open Door at the start of the year, requiring our staff to be at all times 'Collaborative, Compassionate, Courageous & Accountable'
- our new 'Target Operating Model', training staff on the detail of our new ways of working
- major restructures to management and staffing
- restructuring of our Communities department, which includes your housing service and other services that we provide to your council estates and communities

Over three years, the City Council needs to save £6 million. This will protect and reprioritise the services that residents need most, and make them sustainable long-term. Savings achieved in 2023-24 have made significant steps towards the overall savings target. For more information, visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/our-cambridge-transformation-programme](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/our-cambridge-transformation-programme)

## How services performed

### Keeping performance up

Together with City Councillors and your elected resident representatives, the Council sets annual performance targets for each of its service areas. The figures below show the extent to which these services reached their performance targets in the year 2023-24.

Homes below 'Decent Homes' standard: **0.2%**

Target: max. 1.38%

New affordable council homes built: **308**

Target: 270

Repair appointments kept: **96%**

Target: 95.8%

Satisfaction with estate services: **94.1%**

Target: 95%

Repairs finished on first visit: **72.1%**

Target: 84%

Repairs done in target time: **89.2%**

Target: 97%

With the help of resident representatives, council managers monitor dozens of performance measures like these four times a year, to help implement improvements that keep up performance and productivity. Each edition of Open Door brings you a snapshot of our quarterly performance ratings, showing a selection that have improved or deteriorated.

Volunteer tenants and leaseholders work with the Council to monitor these performance trends, and are always keen for more residents to join them. If you are interested in getting involved to have your say, please email [resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223-458323.

### **An easy Complaints Process**

If you are ever unhappy with a service or response from the City Council, please try first to resolve it with the staff involved. If you are still unhappy with our service, use our easy complaints form at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-)

suggestions, or phone us at 01223-457000. We aim to reply within 10 working days, and will say why if we need longer.

If you are ever unhappy with the final outcome of a formal complaint to us, you could take it to the Housing Ombudsman. For details, visit <https://socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk> To view the full Consumer Standards for Social Housing, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rsh-sets-new-standards-to-drive-improvements-in-social-housing>

### **Telling us where to improve**

The national Social Housing Regulator now requires all social housing landlords to survey their tenants' satisfaction annually. Landlords must publish the results each year, and report them to the Regulator. The previous edition of Open Door brought you the results of your 2024 Tenant Satisfaction Survey. And you can read the detailed report at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement)

The Council is now implementing an Action Plan to improve on areas of lower satisfaction highlighted in your survey. Some of the highlights of this plan are laid out in an earlier article in this edition. Your elected tenant and leaseholder representatives on the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee are helping to oversee and monitor these improvement processes.

If you would like to join them, there is a vacancy available! Note that the role qualifies for an annual allowance of up to £1,434. To find out more, email [resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223-458325. Or have a look online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/housing-scrutiny-committee-elected-tenant-and-leaseholder-representatives](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/housing-scrutiny-committee-elected-tenant-and-leaseholder-representatives)

### **Residents' complaints in 2023-24**

We are learning from your complaints. Our approach at Cambridge City Council is to:

- ensure residents can complain about services, without feeling intimidated

- take each complaint seriously, and find a solution
- analyse any trends, to learn from them

Across all City Council services in 2023-24, there were 953 complaints. About 1 in 1,000 of our contacts with residents (ie. 0.1%) resulted in a complaint. 90% were resolved at the first stage, without escalating to stage two. 72% were resolved within our target time of 10 working days. 86% were made online via our Complaints Form, 7% by email, 5% by phone, and just 2% by letter or in person.

Sometimes, a 'complaint' is really just a request for a specific service. But analysing our complaints has shown us that many complainers are also seeking a service or result that the Council cannot provide. We will try to reduce this through Open Door features clarifying what residents can expect from each of our services. Complaints trends show us that we need to communicate this more clearly.

But other complaint trends require that we just manage those service areas better, within the Council's resources. Each year managers implement a plan for doing that.

### **Complaint trends about housing**

In this article, we look at the year's trends in complaints about three aspects of your landlord service: repairs, City Homes and Customer Services. Note that these three are also the services that have the most numerous contacts with residents each year.

### **Complaints about your Customer Services Centre**

Across 6 months of last year, Customer Services received feedback from 946 customers. 82% were 'very satisfied' and 16% dissatisfied. Analysis of those 16% found that most wanted a different outcome than the Council could ever give them, rather than being unhappy with the staff member who delivered that message.

This is the same theme described in the previous article, of us not communicating clearly enough to customers what the Council can and cannot provide. You will see it repeated again in the complaints about City Homes.

### **Complaints about repairs**

There were different complaints about different aspects of housing repairs.

Out of about 20,000 repairs done, there were 184 complaints in all, i.e. about 9 complaints per 1,000 repairs done.

Complaints about damp, condensation and mould increased, perhaps due to more reporting in the media about the problem nationwide.

### **Complaints about City Homes**

Just over 1% of City Homes' 7625 tenants made a complaint, with 85 complaints about the service. 56 were about Housing Officers, who have by far the most contact with tenants. The main causes of these 56 were:

- neighbour disputes where City Homes could never provide the outcome the complainer wished for
- our insufficient communication in advance about what we can and cannot provide.



## Your repairs service in Winter - and what you can expect



### Winter problems with your heating

If you experience a burst pipe, this needs an emergency repair: phone the Council at 01223-457000 (or if out of hours, at 0300-303-8389). If you have a pipe that is frozen without bursting, you can take the following steps yourself:-

- Turn off your water supply at the stop tap. Your indoor stop tap is usually under the kitchen sink, or it can be in an airing cupboard or in the bathroom. Close this tap off by turning it clockwise. This will reduce the amount of water passing through your pipes.
- Turn off your central heating, or extinguish the fire if you have a back boiler.
- Drain your water system by turning on your taps until they run dry.
- Find out where the pipe is frozen.
- If it is frozen in the loft, open the hatch to your loft to let the warmer air in from below. (Do not enter the loft space.)
- Thaw the pipe with a fan heater, hairdryer or hot-water bottle.

If you are a council tenant whose heating is affected while a pipe is frozen, we may be able to provide some portable heaters until it thaws. Contact us to check.

If you have a Glow-Worm boiler and it displays Error code F1, F4, F28, or F29, there is a problem with your condensate pipe. This error appears when the pipe is frozen, which can happen in cold weather. Condensate pipes usually freeze at their most exposed point, outside your property.

To thaw this pipe outside, pour lukewarm water over it. Do not use boiling water or the pipe might crack. You might need to do this several times. Take care when doing this: if the water then freezes on the ground below, it could be a slip hazard.

For more information and guidance, visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/defrost-a-frozenpipe](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/defrost-a-frozenpipe)

### **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>
- or phone 01223-457000
- outside office hours, after 5.15pm, phone the Out-of-Hours emergency line at 0300-303-8389

### **What you can expect from us**

We want to provide you with a safe, comfortable home. So it's in both our interests to do your repairs quickly and efficiently. We class most repair requests as either routine, urgent, or emergency, and we respond within these times:

- for emergency repairs: 24 hours

- for urgent repairs: 3 working days
- for routine repairs: 20 working days

TSG are the Council's heating services and maintenance contractor. To contact TSG, phone 0800-111-4044.

If you have any concerns about a repair, please contact us to report or discuss the problem, so we can resolve it for you. (If you are in a newly built home, please check your welcome pack for your repairs information.)

If you ever wish to make a complaint about your landlord's services, please visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions)

### **Your 3 actions to help prevent condensation**

Cambridge City Council has long been committed to tackling damp, condensation and mould. Mould is caused by condensation, when warm, moist air meets cold surfaces. Taking preventative steps is the first protection against mould: if you reduce condensation sufficiently in your home, mould will not usually occur.

So before the Council can do works on your home to remove damp or mould, we must first ensure that you are following the 3 key steps below. They will help prevent the excess condensation in your home that would inevitably cause mould.

#### Step 1. Reduce moisture

**Laundry:** Dry laundry outdoors if possible. Or hang it in a sunny room with the door closed and a window slightly open. (Don't ever put it on radiators with windows closed - it's a recipe for mould!)

**Wiping:** Wipe any condensation off windows and sills every morning.

Dry kitchen and bathroom surfaces whenever they get wet.

Cooking: Always keep pan lids on when cooking. In kettles, only boil as much water as is needed (saving on electricity, water and condensation). Turn kettles off promptly once boiling.

Fans & vents: Always have an extractor fan on when showering, bathing or cooking. Please don't be nervous about the cost of running fans: it only costs pennies. Or keep a window slightly open nearby, closing doors to other rooms. Use a dehumidifier if you have one.

Baths: Run cold water before the hot - this reduces bath condensation by 90%!

## Step 2. Increase airflow

Windows: Always open some windows daily to let moisture out and fresh air in (ideally first thing in the morning, even if just for 10 minutes).

Furniture: Don't put any furniture, including beds, against outside walls, if possible. And leave a gap for airflow between all furniture and walls.

## Step 3. Enough steady heat

Heating: Keep your heating on for longer stretches at a lower temperature, rather than in short bursts at higher temperatures.

This helps prevent damp and mould, as well as being a cheaper way of heating your home in the long term. Try to keep all rooms steadily heated between 18° and 21°.

Insulation: If you can, use thick carpet with a good thermal underlay.

And try to also use heavy, well-lined curtains that you close at twilight. Both of these will help keep your home warmer for less.

## How to remove mould

The 3 key preventative steps in the previous article are by far the best method for helping to prevent mould from developing. Again, they are:

- reduce moisture indoors
- ventilate well
- keep your home warm enough

If your home already has mould, you can remove the mould yourself by washing and wiping it away using a special fungicidal wash or spray (available in most supermarkets).

For your health and well-being we strongly advise that you fully take these three preventative steps to reduce indoor moisture and condensation in your home. Otherwise mould will inevitably grow back.

If you have done all of the steps above consistently and still have problems with damp, condensation or mould, then please report this to the City Council by:

- using our damp reporting form online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/reducingdamp-in-your-home](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/reducingdamp-in-your-home)
- or if you don't have access to the internet, phoning 01223-457000

When using the damp reporting webform, it will ask you questions which will help us to triage your report. We will then arrange for a specialist surveyor to visit your home to inspect the problem. Once they are satisfied that you are following the three key preventive steps, they will then decide what action our repairs teams can also take to resolve the mould problem for you.

Remember that for other types of repairs, you can simply book a repairs visit online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/request-arepairfor-your-council-home](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/request-arepairfor-your-council-home)

## **How much moisture is in your home's indoor air?**

Drying clothes indoors adds 9 pints of moisture

Cooking and boiling a kettle adds 6 pints

Bathing or showering adds 2 pints

Washing dishes adds 2 pints

Two people just breathing adds 3 pints!

That's already a total of 22 pints of moisture added to your home daily!

## **Repairs need access**

Last year our repairs teams lost 218 working hours to tenants who wouldn't allow staff in to do necessary repairs on their home. The staff had arranged these appointments in advance. But when they came to the home at the appointed time, no one was available or the tenant refused them access to the property.

These hundreds of wasted hours could have been spent on repairs for other tenants who needed them. So to avoid keeping other tenants waiting for their repairs, please let the Council know in advance if you cannot keep an appointment, and you need to change the time or date.

It is stated in your Tenancy Agreement (Point 20) that you must allow staff access to your home to carry out necessary repair or maintenance works. Point 20.1 specifies that you must allow our staff, our agents including contractors or anyone else working on our behalf, and companies who provide utilities including electricity, gas and water, access to your home to carry out any inspections, maintenance, improvements or repairs that we consider necessary, or for any other reasonable purpose.

You will usually be given a minimum of 24 hours' notice by phone or in writing, unless there is an emergency and this is not possible.

## **Help and support for you this Winter**

### **For kids, families and all**

Winter can be challenging. Kids can get restless; you may worry about heating bills, or feel a sense of social isolation...

So why not just pop in to your nearest Community Centre to get warm, have a cuppa and a chat, and see all the free activities available for your family?

Use their communal spaces to work, plan your day, enjoy time with friends, or just relax and stay warm. Many provide free hot drinks and snacks. With 16 around the city, there's one near you. To find them, visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/community-centres](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/community-centres) and also [www.cambridge.gov.uk/warm-and-welcoming-spaces](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/warm-and-welcoming-spaces) Try their own Facebook pages too for their latest offers and activities.

For instance, at Brownsfield Community Centre (31a Green End Road, East Chesterton, CB4 1RU) the Foyer space is open to all on weekdays 9am-4.30pm, with tea and coffee by donation. Their weekly Lego Club for all ages is on Fri, 3.30-4.30pm. Their Christmas Drop-In, open to all, is on 27th Dec, 10am-2pm. Visit [www.facebook.com/brownsfieldcc](http://www.facebook.com/brownsfieldcc)

Akeman Community Centre (80 Akeman Street, CB4 3HG) run a free Breakfast Club from 9am-11am every Thursday, followed by the Shah Jalal Food Hub from 11am-12 noon. Visit [www.facebook.com/akemanstreetcc](http://www.facebook.com/akemanstreetcc)

Free activities for families at Clay Farm Centre (Hobson Square, Trumpington CB2 9FN) include a Christmas event on Sat 7th December; an Eco Christmas Market on Sun 8th Dec, 10am-2pm; and Clay Farm Christmas Coffee Morning on Mon 30th Dec, 10.30am-1.30pm. Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/clay-farm-centre](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/clay-farm-centre)

The Meadows Community Centre (299 Arbury Road CB4 2JL) has a Children & Families Wing just for kids' activities, and for parents to mingle. They offer Free Holiday Lunches for kids, plus activities all autumn and winter. Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/meadows-community-centre](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/meadows-community-centre)

### **Do you need free emergency food?**

If so, contact Cambridge City Foodbank:

- online at <https://cambridgecity.foodbank.org.uk/get-help/how-to-get-help/foodbank-vouchers>
- or by emailing [contact@ccfb.org.uk](mailto:contact@ccfb.org.uk)
- or by phoning 07772-538628

If genuinely needed, you can receive at least three days' of emergency food from your nearest Foodbank centre.

### **E-Visas only from 1st January**

The UK border system is going 'digital only' by 2025. This means that for people who need a visa to enter or stay in the UK, all physical immigration documents will become un-usable from 31 December 2024 onwards.

Note that it's just the document format that is changing: this won't affect your actual immigration status or your permission to enter or stay in the UK.

But if you currently hold a physical immigration document, such as a biometric residence permit or a passport with a stamp or sticker, you must now go online to exchange it for the new electronic version - your 'eVisa'.

It is free and easy to do this in two simple steps at [www.gov.uk/evisa](http://www.gov.uk/evisa):



1) create your personal account on there

2) access your new, electronic 'eVisa'

An eVisa is just an electronic record of your immigration status. From 31-12-2024, it will replace physical documents for all those who need a visa to enter or stay in the UK.

Your new eVisa will be necessary for those who need to check your immigration status, such as employers and landlords. So if you don't claim your eVisa now, you might no longer have access to certain services that you need.

We know that some of our Cambridge City Council tenants will need to make this changeover from their old paper immigration documents to their new eVisas. So please don't be left behind.

Note that British or Irish citizens do not need an eVisa. They will just continue to use their passport as before.

The Home Office are explaining these changes to customers, to those who need to check people's immigration status, and to new visa applicants. The new eVisa system will make travelling easier, provide a more cost-effective service, and will make the immigration system more secure.

For more information and for help with getting your new eVisa, visit [www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa)

### **Help for energy bills this winter**

For a wide range of help, visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/energy-bill-help](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/energy-bill-help)

## **Emergency energy vouchers**

If struggling on a pre-pay meter, contact PECT. They can give support, free items or vouchers. Email [warmhomes@pect.org.uk](mailto:warmhomes@pect.org.uk), phone 01733-568408 or fill in their form at [www.pect.org.uk/projects/warmhomes](http://www.pect.org.uk/projects/warmhomes)

## **Warm Home Discount**

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.

## **Cold Weather Payment**

For those on certain specific benefits, for very cold weather lasting 7 days or more between November and March. Visit [www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment](http://www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment)

## **Winter Fuel Payment - £200-£300**

Pensioners on means-tested benefits such as Pension Credit qualify for this tax-free payment of £200 (or £300 if over 80). Visit [www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/how-to-claim](http://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/how-to-claim)

## **Cambridgeshire Home Energy Support Services**

If you contact them or get referred to them, a phone call or home visit can be booked in with one of their energy advisors, who will help you with energy issues at home.

Email [warmhomes@pect.org.uk](mailto:warmhomes@pect.org.uk), phone 01733-568408 or fill in their form at [www.pect.org.uk/projects/warmhomes](http://www.pect.org.uk/projects/warmhomes)

## **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](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting/budgeting/get-help-with-bills)

## **Household Support Fund**

Financial help of up to £500 with energy bills and food, for those in immediate financial hardship. You can find out about eligibility and apply directly online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/household-support-fund](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/household-support-fund) Or email [community.resilience@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:community.resilience@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223-457000.

## **Stay Well Grant – up to £400**

For individuals and families facing fuel poverty, and for the homeless to help keep warm. Contact Citizens' Advice or visit <https://www.cambscf.org.uk/stay-well>

## **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](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/parenting-and-family-support/cambridgeshire-local-assistance-scheme) You apply for the scheme through Citizens' Advice Bureau: contact them at [www.cambridgecab.org.uk](http://www.cambridgecab.org.uk) or Freephone 0808-278-7808, Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.

## **Free electric blankets**

Octopus Energy are giving out 10,000 free electric blankets, which they find can save customers up to £150 on their gas bill. Visit [www.octopusenergy.com](http://www.octopusenergy.com)

## **More energy grants**

The charity National Energy Action offers advice and practical support to those struggling with the cost of their energy bills. Due to a combination of poor housing, low incomes, and high bills, 6 million UK households are now grappling with fuel poverty.

This means that these households spend at least 10% of their income trying to keep their homes warm, and they may fall into debt over it. Average energy bills are nearly £500 more than they were three years ago, and householders are now in debt to suppliers for £3.7 billion.

An example of a person who was helped by the National Energy Action charity is Maria, 57, who receives Universal Credit and disability benefit. Maria has multiple disabilities and needs accessibility adaptations to some rooms in her house.

Unfortunately, Maria lost her job as a result of severe respiratory illness. Due to her condition, medical staff advised her to keep her home heated to 21 degrees. But it has been next to impossible for Maria to be able to afford this.

National Energy Action was able to get a grant of £700 added onto Maria's electricity meter (via the Warmth on Prescription service). She also received tailored energy advice for saving money on her bills. And she was signposted on to local organisations who were able to offer her further advice and support.

'When I received this grant into my electricity meter, I kept checking the meter to see if it was real!', she said to the charity. 'I just pressed the button again and again for

10 minutes to make sure I hadn't misread the amount. This must be what it feels like to win the lottery. I was absolutely overjoyed. I can't thank you enough.'

This grant means Maria is able to keep her home at the temperature she needs to stay healthy, without falling into debt over it. She also understands much better now how to use energy more efficiently, so her electricity stretches further and costs her less.

If you are struggling with your energy bills go to [www.nea.org.uk/energyhelp](http://www.nea.org.uk/energyhelp)

### **The Haven for vulnerable women in the city**

The Haven is a safe, welcoming, drop-in, night-time venue open 2 nights a week for vulnerable women in Cambridge. It welcomes women who are homeless, vulnerably housed or otherwise needing a safe space.

At The Haven they can relax, have hot food and drinks, take a shower, or use the laundry service. Experienced female support staff can connect women up with services for healthcare, escaping abuse, addictions, etc.

Diana Minns, one of the council tenants that you elected to represent you on the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee, has been a proactive leader in the efforts to get The Haven set up and funded. Diana is also very active in the city's Women's Homelessness Action Group.

For more information about The Haven, please email contact [haven-info@itac.org.uk](mailto:haven-info@itac.org.uk)

### **NHS services and local health support for you**

#### **Help the NHS to help you**

Winter is often a very busy time for healthcare services, as more of us tend to get poorly during the colder weather. But by using the right service when you need

medical help, you can help the health and wellbeing services that will be here for you throughout the winter.

If you have an urgent but non-emergency medical issue and you don't know what to do, think 111 first. NHS 111 is open 24/7, every day of the year: they can give you medical advice and get you seen by the right service if you need medical attention. You can use 111 online via [111.nhs.uk](https://111.nhs.uk), or phone them by dialling 111. They can help with both physical issues, and mental health problems.

If you're in a mental health crisis, phone 111 and select the Mental Health Option: you will be put through to a trained professional who will get you the support you need.

For less urgent issues, please consider visiting your local pharmacy. Pharmacy teams are experts in their field. They can help by giving you advice on common illnesses and medications, and by providing you with a range of over-the-counter medicines such as painkillers.

Through a national initiative called Pharmacy First, many pharmacies in Cambridge can also now offer you treatment for seven common conditions, including urinary tract infections, sinusitis and earache, without you needing to see a GP.

But if you need urgent care for a serious injury, or if you're faced with a life- or limb-threatening emergency, please phone 999 or go straight to the Accident & Emergency (A&E) section of your nearest hospital.

By using A&E and phoning 999 only when you're dealing with a genuine medical emergency, you are helping to ensure that NHS staff at A&E can focus on looking after those people who really need emergency care.

You can find out more about the various medical services available near you at [www.cpics.org.uk/local-services](https://www.cpics.org.uk/local-services)

## **Free NHS mental health help: Just text HEAR 85258**

This is free, immediate support 24 hours a day for anyone struggling with mental health. Just text HEAR 85258 to get through to a mental health professional who will take you from crisis to feeling calm. They then signpost you to helpful mental health services. This texting service is confidential and anonymous, with no record on bills, no app, no registration. (But if a life is at risk due to mental health, dial 111 and choose the option for mental health crisis.)

## **Social Prescribers from your GP surgery**

GPs' teams now include Social Prescribers who can work out a unique personal Care and Support Plan with a patient. They connect you with any help or service you need to support your health, from socialising and fitness to help with debt or home repairs. For more information please visit [www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing](http://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing)

## **Wellbeing Hub**

The NHS Wellbeing Hub on Tenison Road in Cambridge provides free short courses for understanding and managing your mental health, wellbeing and physical health.

As one of the UK's 85 Recovery Colleges, its Autumn 2024 offer includes courses on self-care and mindfulness, stress awareness, introduction to journaling, and one called 'Let's talk about psychosis'.

These are flexible, 'bite-size' courses designed and delivered by people with a unique mix of expertise. They include health professionals, those with lived experience of mental health and physical health challenges, and qualified trainers.

The courses are for everyone, whether you currently receive support from health services; you are a carer or supporter for someone with health challenges; you are employed in healthcare; or you're just keen to learn more about it all.

You don't need to be referred - you can apply directly to the Hub yourself. Find out more about it at <https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/rce-wellbeing-hub>



### **NHS Talking Therapies**

The service NHS Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Talking Therapies is now making psychological therapies more accessible to those with common mental health problems like depression and anxiety disorders. At any age from 17 onwards, it can help those experiencing generalised anxiety, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, health anxiety, panic, phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

A diagnosis is not required. They also treat people with problems like stress, low confidence, sleep disturbance and self-esteem issues. Sessions are free and last about 35-60 minutes. The number of sessions depends on need, but this is short-term therapy only (mainly through Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and wellbeing workshops).

They also work with those with long-term physical conditions like coronary heart disease, respiratory problems, chronic pain and diabetes, who are more likely to experience depression and anxiety. A professional may refer you, or you can use the self-referral form online.

Find out more at <https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/talkingtherapies>



## Visit a Good Mood Café!

Many of us may experience a dip in our mood as we head into winter. Thankfully there's lots of support available locally to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing.

These free services can help you stay connected, learn new things, and build your mood's 'resistance' during the shorter, colder days. Read on to find out more about what's on offer to help you take care of your mental health during winter. For instance, Good Mood Cafés connect up communities and help people feel better.

Designed to help boost your mood, Good Mood Cafés are an informal space where you can meet new people to share interests, skills and wellbeing tips. They run sessions in Cambridge on a weekly or fortnightly basis.



Good Mood Cafés are drop-in sessions that usually last an hour and a half. You don't need a referral to attend - just drop in! There is no expectation that you have to stay for the full session. Why not just pop in to say hello?

Many Good Mood Cafés take place in community cafés or community centres. An area may be reserved for the Good Mood Café, or it might be in a separate room within an ordinary café.

Good Mood Cafés are open to everyone over 18, and are very much led by those who attend them. A member of the Good Life Team attends the session to support you, but there is no formal format.

People are encouraged to chat about things that have a positive impact on their wellbeing. These might be interests, skills or hobbies, or strengths within their wider communities.

Good Mood Cafés are held weekly at Cambridge Central Library, the C3 Centre, and the EDGE café in Cambridge. Visit [www.cpslmind.org.uk](http://www.cpslmind.org.uk) and search 'Good Mood Cafés' to register for a session. Or email the Good Life team at [goodlife@cpslmind.org.uk](mailto:goodlife@cpslmind.org.uk) For more on local mental health services, visit [www.keep-your-head.com](http://www.keep-your-head.com)

### **What's healthy, cheap & tasty?**

Tips from nutritionist Dr. R. Hoffman: 'Home cooking, that's what! Studies show it is the healthiest and cheapest way of eating. It's one of the best things you can do for yourself and your loved ones. And it's far cheaper than junk food, takeaways or ultra-processed foods. So why do many of us still harm ourselves and our families with the unhealthy option?

Heavy advertising and supposed 'convenience' are two reasons. Busy lives can make cooking a low priority. We get hooked instead by clever marketing of 'convenience' foods that are suddenly filling our trolley. But when you know how, healthy home meals can be just as fast and convenient as 'fast food'.

The trick is to make home cooking easy, through a bit of planning! Figure out: what prevents you from home cooking? Lack of confidence or know-how? Not sure how to shop for ingredients? Worried how your household might react to home-cooked food?

So many great TV programmes, like Jamie Oliver's, have helped people handle these issues, with a bit of simple planning and discussion. Studies show that healthy home cooking can add ten years to your life and that of your loved ones. It will bring you closer together as a household, and it saves loads of money on takeaways and junk food. What could you do with the cash saved? So why not give it a go?

Your local library has lots of celebrity cookbooks to get you started. They often include a week of planned meals, buying all ingredients in a single shopping trip. Step by step videos online for cooking quick, simple meals are a lot of fun too. Make it a bit of 'Me Time' in the kitchen.

It will save you lots of money if you cook from basic, natural ingredients. Armed with your ingredients list at the supermarket, you'll sail right by those aisles trying to hook you with expensive, brightly-wrapped junk-food that will cost your family's health, as well as more money!

Studies show that a diet of junk food, takeaways and ultra-processed foods can cause many chronic diseases, be it obesity, type 2 diabetes or heart disease - even dementia and some types of cancer. This should be sufficient motivation for us all to make that change!

## **Leaseholders**

### **Paying for major works**

You have now received your service charge 'actuals' statement for the year 2023/24. If your block had major works completed in the year, a line in the statement will probably describe the works in general terms.

You will then receive a 'Reconciliation adjustment' invoice, to pay within 28 days. If paid by Direct Debit, the amount is automatically spread over the rest of this financial year. So if you pay quarterly, we recommend you change to monthly.

Your lease does not require the Council to offer any payment plan, but we know some leaseholders may struggle financially to pay in one go. We may be able to spread the 'Reconciliation' amount in interest-free instalments over a maximum of 18 months from the invoice date. You must pay these by Direct Debit, and if any are missed, the full amount must be paid at that point.

Contact us to discuss your situation, as instalment plans are only allowed on a case-by-case basis and not all leaseholders are eligible.

Reasons for refusal include if you were made aware of the works prior to purchasing, or if you sublet your property, effectively running it as a business. Leaseholders who bought their home through 'Right to Buy' in the last 10 years may be eligible for a Service Charge Loan under specific legislation, though interest is charged on this option.

If works are expected to cost any individual leaseholder more than £250, you will receive an S20 Notice describing the works in detail, stating the estimated cost to you. Most receive the S20 notice around 18 months before the invoice for the works, giving plenty of notice and time to plan for paying. There is absolutely no obligation to pay in advance, but many prefer to do so.

Most of our flat blocks are coming to an age where works are needed to keep the block maintained and in good condition for the future. The Council does 'Cyclical Repair & Redecoration' works to all blocks every 7-10 years. So you should expect these major works on your block during your ownership.

Please always contact us if you have concerns and wish to discuss ways to pay.

### **Are all your affairs in order?**

In the last issue, we asked leaseholders to think about how well your home will serve your needs into the future. We also want to ask you to consider whether your legal affairs around your leasehold property are all in order, should you at any stage become unwell or if the worst should happen.

For all of us, leaving loose ends for others to deal with after we die can result in our loved ones having to deal with complex legal issues at a difficult time. It also means that your assets, including your home, its contents and so on, might not be inherited according to your wishes.

The City Council frequently receives contact from the loved ones of council leaseholders who have had to spend significant time in hospital, or had to move into a care home. It can be complicated and stressful for these people to have to settle their loved one's legal and financial affairs, if they are not in order beforehand.

So please do make sure you have in place:

- a legally valid will
- a nominated Next of Kin, if you do not have family or friends locally
- and a Lasting Power of Attorney

A Lasting Power of Attorney means that you delegate someone you trust to make decisions on your behalf, should you ever become incapacitated, medically and legally. There are two types of Lasting Power of Attorney, one governing your property and finances, and the other governing your health and welfare.

For us all, we should think now in advance about who could handle our affairs for us if we were ever medically incapacitated, and unable to handle them ourselves.

For a council leaseholder, this could range from simple tasks like checking on your property while you are away and turning off the water, all the way to helping to sell the property if that was ever necessary.

The government gives easy, straightforward advice on making a will and a power of attorney. For information, visit their website at [www.gov.uk/make-will](http://www.gov.uk/make-will) and [www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney](http://www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney)

## Resident Involvement

### Meet Justyna, your tenant representative



Meet Justyna Ulman-Jaworska, whom you recently elected onto the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Hi Justyna. So, why stand for election?

“14 years ago I was in a very bad place in life, and I received a lot of support and kindness from City Council staff and housing officers. They allocated us a property so I could rebuild my life, creating a safe environment for my four-year-old son. I have always wanted to give something back.

Also, as a council tenant I have experienced frustrations when reporting things like repairs and anti-social behaviour. So when I saw in my letterbox this opportunity to stand for election to represent tenants at the Housing Scrutiny Committee, where the top decisions about our housing are made, I thought, this is it!

How was your first Committee meeting?

It was long! It started at 5.30 pm and finished after 10pm. But apparently that one was exceptionally long. I was surprised by the variety of topics that the Committee examined, and they were a bit different from what I was expecting.

For instance, one item we examined that night was a report on the 'Stage 2 Options' for redeveloping the Council's Ekin Road estate. A group of Ekin Road tenants

attended the meeting in person. They raised a number of questions and shared their requests regarding the redevelopment plans for Ekin Road. It was intense!

At that point I realized how the role of Tenant Representative is so relevant to people's actual lives! It has also proven to me how important it is to have tenant representatives involved at the Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Has it changed your perspective, having an elected role in the city's decision-making?

I do feel the pressure of it a little bit. I take this role very seriously, working to ensure that residents are considered in every decision the Committee makes. I want to represent Cambridge City Council's tenants in the best way possible! Not least because I'm aware that Cambridge is one of the only local authorities that has elected residents on its Housing Committee, to vote on the big decisions alongside City Councillors. So I encourage tenants to make the most of that opportunity by sharing your concerns and questions with us, your representatives.

Does it give you any new insights into democracy, and how it works?

From my own background and personal experience elsewhere, I've seen that democracy can be very easily misused. So in being the tenants' elected representative, I appreciate this opportunity to influence council decisions. Democracy comes from demos in ancient Greek, meaning the people and kratos meaning power. I want to make sure that this 'power of the people' is reflected in the way the Council govern and listen to the will of the people who use their services.

To contact us, your resident representatives, please email [hsc.residents@gmail.com](mailto:hsc.residents@gmail.com) or phone 01223-458323 to leave us a message."

### **Vacancy for a tenant representative**

Do you want to make a difference to your housing service? Five tenant representatives and one leaseholder representative can sit and vote alongside City

Councillors on our Housing Scrutiny Committee, making the big decisions about your housing service.

We currently have one remaining position available to be a tenant representative! We need a tenant representative who can help us focus on tenants' priorities. We want them to work alongside council staff and City Councillors to identify improvements needed in our services, and help us to prioritise resources.

You would also be helping us develop policies to deliver a housing service that focuses on the needs of people living in Cambridge City Council homes.

We provide support and free training for all resident representatives. As a tenant representative, you will receive an annual allowance of up to £1,434 (if you give about 120 hours per year to the role). Or you could give just 50 hours per year, for a lesser allowance.

As an example to give you an idea of the kind of topics involved, at the latest meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, the tenant representatives debated and voted alongside Councillors on topics such as:

- rents for council homes
- charges for renting council garages
- looking ahead at the overall budget for the housing service
- the City Council's new policy on Fire Safety in Communal Areas
- the Council's compliance with national regulations and standards

If you would like to find out more, please email [resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223-458325. Or have a look online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/housing-scrutiny-committee-elected-tenant-and-leaseholder-representatives](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/housing-scrutiny-committee-elected-tenant-and-leaseholder-representatives)



## From the comfort of your own home

Residents' involvement and influence are very important to the City Council. But we realise that not everyone has enough free time or energy to get involved at the level of the vacancy described in the previous article. So why not get involved in your housing service just on the odd occasion, from the comfort of your own home? We are looking for residents interested in being 'armchair reviewers' of our housing services.

This is to help us at the City Council to review our housing policies, and make sure that your views and experience are embedded in how we deliver your services.

For more information and to show your interest, please fill in our online form at <https://forms.office.com/e/DjMFa0nALL> ! or phone 01223-458323.

## Gardeners' corner



Thanks and congratulations to all the entrants of this year's Tenant and Leaseholder Garden Competition. Some of our gardeners met with Deputy Mayor Cllr. Dinah Pounds, at the prizegiving event in September. Roger Amies of St Kilda Avenue won the Anna Vine-Lott Cup.

Once again, we were impressed with the variety of gardens on display, and everyone's ability to turn a humble plot of land into something quite special. The competition promotes nature-friendly gardens that use ecological methods.

Avoiding the herbicides and pesticides that are so harmful to nature and wildlife, nature-friendly gardens on council estates are now building up an important mosaic of refuges that help wildlife and biodiversity across the city. The gardeners also tell us that their garden is a private haven of relaxation and wellbeing for themselves.

There is a major shift now among council estate gardeners to this safer, healthier gardening, avoiding the toxic chemicals that kill our bees and songbirds as well as the slugs they are used against.

Next Spring you can get your 2025 Garden Competition entry form online at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/tenant-and-leaseholder-garden-competition](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/tenant-and-leaseholder-garden-competition) Or request one by emailing [resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk) or phoning 01223-458323.

### **Winning Gardens, 2024**

Nature & wildlife ~ St Kilda Avenue

Environment-friendly ~ Godwin Way

Communal Garden ~ Rawlyn Court

New Garden ~ WulfstanWay

Tubs & Baskets ~ Strathcarron Court

Kitchen Garden ~ Wulfstan Way

Community Garden ~ Lichfield Road

Tallest Sunflower ~ Mowbray Road

### **Home gardeners on council estates help Nature recover**

They:

... stop using chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers: as well as potentially harming human health, these harm bees, butterflies, birds, hedgehogs, toads and other wildlife.

... mow their grass a lot less: they let daisies, buttercups, dandelions, plantain and nettles come through to feed birds, bees, butterflies and other insects.

... grow natural flowers with single blooms, because bees and butterflies can't feed from artificially-bred 'double' blooms.

... compost their garden and kitchen waste, producing their own free fertiliser that constantly improves their soil.

... collect rainwater, so they can water their garden for free, including during draughts.

... put mulch down to prevent weeds, protect plants and reduce watering.

... grow their own organic veg to save money and eat healthily; they use physical barriers like fleece, rather than chemicals that poison wildlife like thrushes and hedgehogs.

### **Who to contact for services**

Register for your personal Housing Services account at [www.cambridge.gov.uk/online-accounts](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/online-accounts)

Domestic Abuse 24-hour Helpline

Tel: Freephone 0808-2000-247

Visit [www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk](http://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](http://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](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk)

Tel: 01223-457000

### Leasehold services

Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholders](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholders)

E: [leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:leasehold.services@cambridge.gov.uk)

Tel: 01223-457835

### Housing for Older People and Visiting Support Service

E: [independent.living@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:independent.living@cambridge.gov.uk)

Tel: 01223-457000

### Home-Link lettings

Visit [www.home-link.org.uk](http://www.home-link.org.uk)

Tel: 01223-457000

### Housing & Council Tax Benefits

Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk)

Tel: 01223-457000

Bins, recycling, street-cleaning

Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/bins-recycling-and-rubbish](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/bins-recycling-and-rubbish)

Tel: 01223-457000

Bulky waste collection

Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/arrange-a-bulky-waste-collection](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/arrange-a-bulky-waste-collection)

Tel: 01223-457000

Report anti-social behaviour

E: [asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk)

Tel: 01223-457000

Report tenancy fraud

E: [fightfraud@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:fightfraud@cambridge.gov.uk)

Noise complaints

E: [env.health@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto: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](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions)

Council's contractors on estates

TSG Services

E: [enquiries@tsgplc.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:info@fpm-ltd.co.uk)

Tel: 01945-586999

Goshen communal cleaning

E: [cs@goshenmultiservices.com](mailto:cs@goshenmultiservices.com)

Tel: 0754-2826553

Hi-Spec window cleaning

E: [helpdesk@hispecservices.co.uk](mailto: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](http://www.stayingsafe.net) is a free website offering practical help for people with suicidal thoughts, and for those caring for them.