HULL HOUSING NEWS

Hull City Council

Developed for tenants, by tenants, working in partnership with Hull City Council

Autumn 2022 - In this issue

Blooming marvellous again!

Once again, we had a bumper crop of entries for the 2022 tenants' garden competition. After the limitations of COVID-19 it was terrific to be able to wander around the city and see the results of the hard work that had gone into creating a riot of colour across our estates. Winners included:

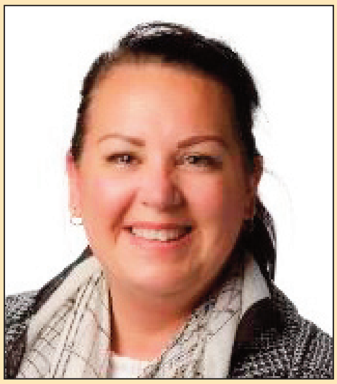
- **Lanyon Close Community**, for the Best Communal Garden in Park and East Areas
- **Shirley Stephenson**, from Bellfield Avenue, for the Best Individual Garden in Park and East Areas
- **Steven and Julia Steeley**, from Endike Lane, for the Best Individual Garden in North and Foredyke Areas
- **Outram Close** for the Best Communal Garden in Riverside, Wyke and West Areas

A full list of winners will be posted on the Hull Council Housing Facebook page.

Head judge Jeannie Webster said, "Once again, it was a privilege and a joy to be involved with the competition. It offers an opportunity for everyone, regardless of where they live to participate, whether they enter their front garden, hanging basket or container or if they work with others on a communal garden, eco garden or a veg patch. Well done to everyone who entered and congratulations to the winners."

Chat with the Chair

Nev chats with Councillor Jan Loft, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness



What do you see as the main issue affecting council housing in hull?

The biggest issue is the number of people who want a house, compared to the number of council houses available. It's a massive problem and can't be fixed quickly but I do want to change that. I'm determined to work in partnership with other organisations to increase the number of affordable homes on offer.

As a portfolio holder what are your ambitions for housing in the city?

I want to make sure that tenants get the top quality service they deserve so they can enjoy their home properly. Where repairs are needed, I want them to be carried out quickly and to a high standard. With the rising cost of energy we also need to explore new ways of making council homes more energy efficient. This is something that's vital in a time of energy and cost of living crisis. There are some real challenges, so it's important to innovate. Above all I want people to enjoy their home and feel safe in a clean, green local community.

How do you think communications with tenants can be improved?

I came into this role determined to make the council a listening council - enabling tenants to be involved in shaping the future of the housing service. We need good communications between the council, the repairs provider and council tenants to ensure that we deliver a top class, robust and seamless customer service. No resident should be sat waiting for a repair or frustrated to find that the work isn't getting done. Residents should be kept properly updated to understand what is happening and when.

As a portfolio holder, how do you see the tenant involvement process?

Tennant involvement is vital and I want to hear our tenant's views on the service they receive. It's important that residents feel that we listen to them and that we act on the issues they raise and not left feeling frustrated that their complaints fall on deaf ears. To me, it's vital that we listen to the voices of people who live with these issues daily. The Tenants' Forum and the TARAs are a very important part of that.

I appreciate that not everything can be resolved and there will sometimes be occasions when something people want just isn't possible.

But when that happens it is even more important that people get a proper explanation of why.

People who live in social housing are often stigmatised in the media and by society in general. How do you think we can work towards overcoming this?

Everyone should have the basic right to live their life and be treated with respect. There are all sorts of stigmas out there - where people live, how people live, where they come from in life, etc. Sadly, it's often human nature to judge other people and no matter how hard we try I suspect that it'll always be something we have to work hard to overcome. I want to see a world where living in social housing is viewed as no less valid a life choice than renting privately or owning your own home. How we treat people is what matters, not what kind of housing tenure they have. I want to use my role to showcase the fantastic people who live in Hull's council housing - the people looking out for their communities, the people running food banks to look after the vulnerable, caring for family, friends and neighbours. There are so many wonderful people out there and we need to make sure their stories are heard.

With rising prices and inflation overtaking wage and benefit increases, plus the recent tax rises, more and more people are feeling the pinch as the cost of living crisis bites. See our special feature* on the help and support to which you may be entitled, and the top tips you've shared with us for saving money.

*All information about the cost of living was correct at time of going to print.

Ask Nic

In every issue of Hull Housing News there is an opportunity to ask Nic Harne, Assistant Director for Neighbourhood and Housing Services a question. This time we were asked:

"I'm really worried about my neighbour. I often hear her partner shouting at her late at night. I have also seen bruises on her face and I am sure that he is abusing her. My family tell me to keep out if it. Have you any advice please?"

Firstly, thank you for raising this. It is important that domestic abuse is something that the whole community rejects and we need the support of neighbours, friends and families to help to tackle this - as it is often a hidden crime. The Housing Service has a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse. It is a breach of the tenancy agreement to commit any form of domestic abuse (which includes physical, emotional, psychological, financial and sexual abuse, as well as controlling behaviours) and we will pursue wrong doers wherever we can. We have worked very hard over many years to develop an effective and supportive response to those affected by domestic abuse. Our front line staff have all received training so that they can respond positively and sensitively. We are a key partner of Hull Domestic Abuse Partnership and have specialist domestic abuse housing staff available to provide advice and support.

Recently, we were the first social housing provider in the country to receive accreditation against a new, higher bench-mark set by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) in recognition of our work. People using our services can be assured that they will receive a positive and sensitive response.

If you are on friendly terms with your neighbour, perhaps you could find an opportunity when she is by herself to ask her if everything is okay at home? If she is willing to talk to you, find a private space where she will feel comfortable to talk, away from her partner. You do not have to be an expert in domestic abuse to be supportive and kind. She may not feel ready to talk to you, but your concern will mean a lot. There are a number of local services that she can contact for support, whether or not she wants to remain in the relationship.

These are:

Hull DAP 01482 318 759,

Hull Women's Aid
01482 446 099
(or national 24 hour helpline, freephone 0800 048 9944) and

Preston Road Women's Centre
01482 790 310.

If you are concerned for the immediate welfare of your neighbour and think she is in danger, call 999.

DOMESTIC ABUSE HOUSING ALLIANCE
Accredited Member
2022-2023

Support during the cost of living crisis

Hull City Council has launched a dedicated phoneline, web page and email address in response to the continued cost of living crisis. The channels will connect local people with advice, information and support, including how to check they are claiming any benefits they are entitled to, food bank details, grants and more. If you are worried about the rising cost of living, you are not alone - so don't be afraid to ask for help

We are working with partners and other organisations, to provide practical support in the current situation and to manage its consequences. Below are some of the ways we can help you through this crisis – and see the Top Tips people have sent us which appear on other pages. We also have dedicated pages on our website – go to www.hull.gov.uk/costofliving

Keeping in touch

During these difficult times, we will continue to provide information about help that is available, so keep in touch with us. If you rely on online services for information and you run out of data, there is free internet access in Hull's libraries and children's centres, customer service centres and the city centre has free public WiFi. If you're not online, staff will be able to help you access the information. Also there is a dedicated phone line 01482 300 303

Welfare benefits

The first step is to check whether you are entitled to any of the benefits listed below. You can do this by using the council's benefits calculator www.hull.gov.uk/benefitcalculator

It's free and anonymous to use and will quickly tell you what you can claim. If you have any queries, please contact the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on 0800 169 0190

Cost of Living payment

A £650 payment, in two instalments will be paid to more than eight million low-income households who receive the following benefits:

- Universal Credit
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Pension Credit.

Top Tip

Emma says:

Save any coupons and vouchers that come through your letter box. These are often forgotten yet they can help you make savings.

If you are entitled to the Cost of Living Payment, you will have received your first payment (£326) in July and you get the second instalment (£324) in the autumn. If you receive tax credits, the first payment will be in the autumn and the second during the winter. The payments will be paid automatically into your bank accounts.

The Cost of Living payment will not be paid to people who receive the new style Employment and Support Allowance, contributory Employment and Support Allowance, or New Style Jobseeker's Allowance, unless they get Universal Credit.

There are also crisis loans and support grants available in some circumstances.
To check how to access them go to hull.gov.uk/benefits-support-and-welfare-advice.

Paying your rent

As a council tenant, if you are struggling to pay your rent, support is available. However, it's vital that you get in touch with us as soon as possible - we may be able to help reschedule payments or advise on other steps you can take or other support you can access.

Coping with energy price rises

Everyone is feeling the effects of the jump in energy prices. The council began distributing the £150 per-household payment from the government in May. If you pay your rent by standing order or direct debit, it will have gone straight into your bank account. If you pay by other means, the council will have been in touch to arrange payment. Anyone who hasn't yet received this payment should contact us via the call centre on 01482 300 300 because it's not too late to get it. A further payment per-household will be paid in the autumn. Households will see a discount of £66 applied to their energy bills in October and November, and £67 a month from December to March 2023.

All customers with a domestic electricity meter who pay by direct debit or by card will see an automatic deduction off their bills. Those with "smart" prepayment devices will see an automatic monthly top-up added to their account, meaning they will have to add less credit to their meter for the total energy they use.

The Hull Warm Homes team provides a specialist service with the primary aim of reducing the number of people who are experiencing fuel poverty, increasing domestic energy efficiency, and improving affordable warmth in the city. They can guide you where support is available.

Visit hull.gov.uk and search Warm Homes.

The council is looking at setting up a network of "Warm Hubs". These will be communal places where residents, who are already really struggling to afford their fuel bills, can meet, spend some time and avoid the expense of having to heat their homes for some time each day.

More information about Warm Hubs will be posted at www.hull.gov.uk/costofliving.

Affording food

For those who struggle to afford to eat, local food banks, community fridges and Fare Share distribution can provide free food. If you don't claim for free school meals, check if you are entitled to them. The council, with funding from the Department for Education (DfE), also provides the Healthy Holidays programme during the school holidays. Open to all, these are free activity sessions with a nutritious food offer included. It is designed to fill the gap left when free school meals are not available and offer a wide variety of sessions for children and teens. Additionally, we offer free "Cooking on a Budget" sessions, which help people develop cooking skills.

Financial advice for families

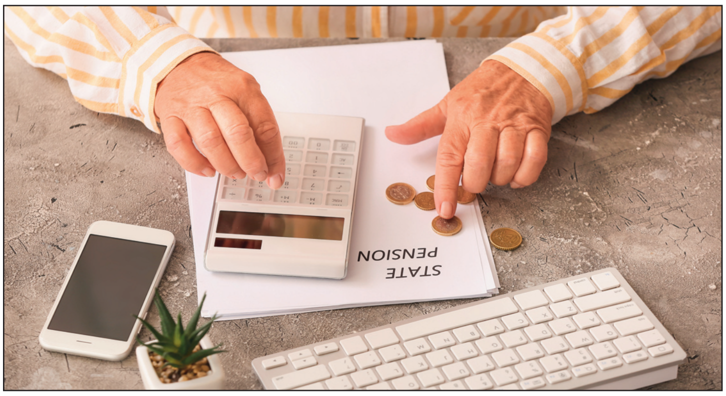
Hull also has its own Financial Security Network, which is a multi-organisation group aiming to improve the financial wellbeing for people in the city. It provides education, advice and support.
The Supporting Families Programme, part of the Early Help and Prevention programme, offers help and advice for families to manage their money.

Top Tip

Dawn says:

Keeping your curtains shut in the evening when the temperature drops can reduce heat loss in your home by up to 17%. Drawing blinds can also help, though curtains are said to be the best option for retaining heat.

Are you entitled to pension credit?



One in three people nationwide, according to the Department of Work and Pensions, who are eligible to receive pension credit, don't claim it. This added up to a whopping £1.7 billion in the 2019/2020 financial year, with as many as 850,000 people missing out on credit worth an average of £1,900 a year. **If you are eligible for pension credit, it's a very important benefit to claim because it opens the door to a number of other benefits and concessions.**

For new claims, both you and your partner must have reached pension age - the age at which you can receive state retirement pension. If you are of pension age and your partner is of working age (you are a 'mixed-age couple'), you should claim Universal Credit.

If you are a mixed-age couple and you have an existing claim (made before May 2019) for Pension Credit and/or Housing Benefit for pension age people, you retain entitlement to these benefits and you lose entitlement to both Pension Credit and Housing Benefit as a pensioner. Seek advice from the Pension Credit helpline 0800 99 1234 if you are not sure of your entitlements.

Top Tip

Richard says:

Yorkshire Water has several schemes designed to help people pay for the water they need. Some offer short term help and others for a longer time. Check out the website to see whether any are suitable for your household - yorkshirewater.com/bill-account/help-paying-your-bill/

Top Tip

David says:

To save about £28 a year on your energy bill, the Energy Saving Trust advises that you do one less load of washing a week, using your machine on a 30-degree cycle and making sure your machine is full.

Stop Loan Sharks

When money is scarce and prices rising, the offer of quick access to money can be very tempting. Money from these "loan sharks", which operate illegally, is never cheap because they charge exorbitant interest rates and often use underhand and frightening tactics to get their money back.

It can be hard to spot a loan shark, but there are a few warning signs to look out for such as:

- no paperwork is provided
- refuses to tell you the interest rate or how much you owe
- increases the amount you owe even though you are making regular payments
- takes items as security such as bank cards, passport or driving licence
- can be intimidating or even violent

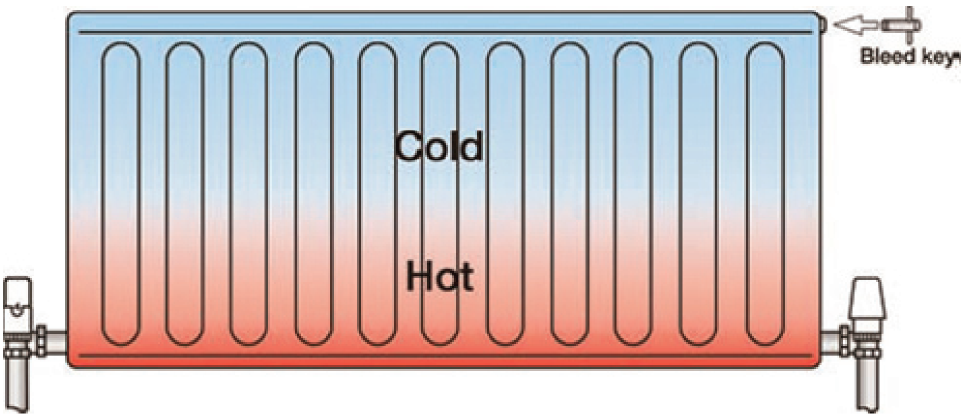
If you are on a low income with a poor credit rating and need a short term loan for a small amount of money, joining a Credit Union may be able to help. Hull and East Riding Credit Union is located at 38 Brook Street, Hull HU2 8LA
telephone 01482 778 753.

For details of how the Credit Union may be able to help and how to sign up go to its website www.hullandeycu.co.uk

Get maximum heat from your radiators

Air in radiators can be a common fault on some heating systems, but it can be easily put right. If the radiator is cold at the top and hot at the bottom this means there is an air lock so they won't work efficiently, you need to bleed it.

How to bleed your radiators



> **Top Tip**
>
> **Gemma says:**
>
> *Make sure your radiators are not blocked by furniture like sofas and beds.*
>
> *Furniture will absorb the heat and waste the heat and your money.*

Turn off the central heating.

A cloth should be held underneath the radiator bleed vent to catch any excess water.

Insert radiator bleed key into radiator bleed vent. (See diagram above).

Undo bleed vent anti-clockwise to a maximum of one turn, air should be heard escaping (hissing noise).

As soon as water starts to appear, turn off the radiator bleed vent by turning it clockwise – **do not overtighten.**

Turn on central heating and re-check the radiator.

Some central heating systems are sealed, so after removing the air from your radiators you will need to re-pressurise the system.

> **Top Tip**
>
> **Margaret says:**
>
> *Check that your fridge is running at the recommended temperature of 4 degrees centigrade or lower.*
> *The average UK household throws away £70 worth of otherwise edible food a month because it hasn't been stored correctly.*
> *That adds up to £840 a year.*

> **Top Tip**
>
> **Julie says:**
>
> *Just boil as much water as you need.*
> *By avoiding overfilling the kettle you can save around £11 a year on your electricity bill.*

Win a £200 voucher

Complete the annual tenant satisfaction survey and you could win a £200 shopping voucher.

Every year we send a questionnaire to a random selection of tenants asking for their views on how we've performed in delivering our housing services.

We really value your involvement because your views can help us make improvements.

All completed surveys returned will go into a prize draw for the shopping voucher.

All responses are confidential and completely anonymous.

Annual report to tenants April 2021 to March 2022

Welcome to our annual report for April 2021 to March 22. It was another challenging year due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic with the lockdowns and restrictions they brought. Then, as the financial year was ending, we faced the challenge of supporting refugees from war torn Ukraine.

As a result of these factors our performance over the year was mixed. It was monitored over the year against the four consumer standards set by the government.

Working with partners enables us to deliver successful services. We are particularly grateful to members of the Tenants' Forum, its committee and the many focus groups and other activities which they carry out. Many of these continued despite the pandemic, with tenant representatives providing invaluable feedback and constructive challenge. More than 200 tenants across the city are very actively working with us on aspects of the service. Their time is very valuable so we aim to offer opportunities to involve them which takes up as much or as little time they can manage.

We face some tough challenges ahead, not only in getting back on track after the pandemic, but also the effect of the cost of living crisis, and the need to tackle climate change. How we will meet these challenges is outlined in our Housing Strategy (go to www.hull,gov.uk and search Housing Strategy), and our approach to achieving our ambitions is embodied in Our Vision "building great places together, putting residents first" (also on the council's website), which will ensure that our residents are at the heart of everything we do.

"It was another challenging year for people having to spend most of 2021-22 living under the restrictions caused by the pandemic. In these circumstances, having such a constructive working relationship between tenants and officers was never more important. We shared experiences, identified how challenges could be met and looked at how we could improve customer services overall."

Nev Allison
Hull Tenants Forum Chairman

How the money was spent

Planned home improvement works	38.61%
Running the service	19.65%
Bad debts	0.64%
Financing costs	23.75%
Responsive repairs	10.14%
Work to bring homes up to a suitable standard	7.21%

Home Standard

Creating a better place to live

Keeping your homes in good repair and maintaining the Decent Homes Standard is a top priority. Like many areas of the construction industry, our work was affected by the pandemic with restricted access to properties, tenant refusals and the national shortage of building materials. Despite these challenges, we worked with COVID-19 safety measures in place alongside our contracting partner KWL and other local contractors to maintain our performance levels for repairs.

We continued to invest in your homes, continuing our energy efficiency improvement and the new build muti-tenure programme being built by our developer partners across the city. We built 59 new council homes, bringing the total number of new build council homes to 335 over the last ten years, and a further five empty homes were brought back into residential use. We completed the first stage of our small sites developments by building bungalows on brownfield sites for local people using new building techniques, such as “fabric first” to save energy and help us respond to the climate emergency.

Tenancy Standard

Helping you to find a Council home and supporting you once you are in it

Throughout the year the demand for social housing remained high. This was not helped by having a backlog of empty council properties, due to the pandemic. We worked with our partners to address this and aim to improve our performance next year.

We worked with other landlords in the city who offer good rental housing to maximise the supply of homes to those in most need.

More new tenants retained their tenancies for longer than a year too.

Neighbourhood Standard

Offering a safe and secure place to live

Hull’s housing services are much more than just providing a roof over people’s heads. They’re about creating new neighbourhoods and strengthening communities. Our tenant volunteers continued to be “eyes and ears” despite the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, and together we carried out almost as many estate walks as the pre-pandemic year.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

Putting our customers at the heart of everything we do

The pandemic, staffing challenges and a very high number of calls to the call centre affected the level of service we could provide in 2021-22. This year we offered alternative online access channels, enabling people to access services digitally and paved the way for further expansion.

Working with KWL, and by having digital access, there was a significant reduction in the number of calls about repairs. This led to 70% of all calls made to the call centre being answered within three minutes.

As part of our local offer to you, we welcome your feedback because you are the experts on council housing in Hull, because you live in our houses. Last year, we achieved 100% success in acknowledging your feedback within three working days.

We will continue to give people the opportunity to be involved in improving their local area by conducting Estate Walks around the city.
These walks highlight problems which residents feel need action such as abandoned cars, bulky items, fly-tipping, graffiti, noise nuisance, litter, or overgrown gardens.

How did we do?

Measuring our performance in numbers 2021 - 2022

We closely monitor our performance against a number of targets, some of which are set by the government. Other targets that we aim to achieve are "local offers" which we set ourselves based on your feedback about what you consider to be additional priorities for the service.

Our performance against these targets are listed below.

Creating a better place to live

proportion of non-decent council homes	**4.2%**
average number of days taken to complete repairs	**12**
repairs completed 'right first time'	**90.4%**
satisfaction with repairs and maintenance service	**92.2%**

Helping you to find a council home and supporting you once you are in it

average empty property relet time	**80 days**
proportion of lettings which are through Homesearch	**60.6%**
new tenancies lasting over 12 months	**93.9%**
number of overcrowed properties	**3,683**
number of under-occupied properties	**2,022**
proportion of rent collected	**96.5%**
tenancies ending with arrears outstanding	**1,312**
processing housing applications/amendments within 10 working days:	
✧ applications backlog	**35 days**
✧ amendments backlog	**48 days**
visit every new tenant within 15 days of their tenancy starting	**58.3%**

Offering a safe and secure place to live

number of anti-social behaviour cases	**2,718**
anti-social behaviour service requests met within timescale	**99.7%**
estate walks to identify areas which need action	**104**

Putting our customers at the heart of everything we do

% of calls answered within 180 seconds	**76%**
number of complaints received	**908**
complaints closed within two weeks	**75.6%**
customer feedback acknowledged with three working days	**100%**

Spotlight on Great Thornton Street Tenants' and Residents' Association

Great Thornton Street (GTS) Tenants' and Residents' Association (TARA) was set up in 2018. It had a stuttering start getting residents to engage and then COVID-19 intervened, but now GTS TARA is flourishing.

Initial activities included a seasonal party in December 2018, and in 2019 a well-attended, and greatly enjoyed, cultural party with delicious food from many of the countries where the residents have connections with.

In a way, COVID-19 was the making of GTS TARA. The lockdowns meant residents looked out for their neighbours and those living in the blocks of flats were able to deliver essential information to residents without breaking the regulations.

Then attention turned to getting the community garden into shape, and this was formally opened at a grand party celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The garden is a focal point for the TARA where they held their meetings during the pandemic and organised different activities. They are planning to use the garden to grow their own vegetables and enable children to learn about seeds and plants and for many, it's an area to sit, relax and socialise.

A highlight of 2019 calendar was a coach trip to Skegness. It was so popular that this year's seaside outing saw three coaches depart for a day in Bridlington. Peter Doncaster who chairs the GTS TARA said, "We had a few challenges in the beginning but now we are doing really well. More and more people are getting involved and having a TARA has helped to develop a community spirit around the flats. We've lots of things planned too."

Top Tip

Ian says: *Turn your lights off when you're not using them or when you leave a room. This will save you around £20 a year on your annual energy bills.*

Tenants' Forum meetings

Dates and guest speakers for the Tenants' Forum meetings 2022 all of which are held in The Guildhall

Date	Time	Guest Speaker
20 October	1 - 3pm	Katie Welsh, Warm Homes Team, Energy, Efficiency and Regeneration Team
28 November	10am - 12pm	Martin Budd, Climate Change Manager

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