

# YOUR HOUSING

December 2025



## In this issue:

Home improvements in progress  
Photography competition  
Cuckooing: What tenants need to know  
Tenant engagement update  
Housing Service Promise  
Contractor code of conduct

Improving our complaints service  
#JustBinIt in Castle Point  
Tenancy audits  
Exceptional Hardship Fund  
A Sheltered Housing Officer's day  
Help shape your neighbourhood



Cllr Rob Lillis (pictured right) at Sweetbriar Lodge with scheme employees and members of the Housing Management Team



# Welcome to the December issue of Your Housing

**Over the past few months, I've been out visiting some more of our properties including Sweetbriar Lodge, St Guiberts, Church Parade and Middlesburg. While there, I was pleased to speak with some tenants and staff. These visits are always helpful, and I want to thank everyone who took the time to meet me. Hearing about what's going well, and what's not, helps us to make things better.**

I was especially happy to meet Annie at Sweetbriar Lodge. She clearly knows our tenants there well and cares about them. Her kindness and hard work really stood out. In this issue, you can read a "Day in the Life" interview with Annie to learn more about what she does as a Sheltered Housing Officer.

You'll see updates and photos from recent improvement works, including new bathrooms and kitchens in our properties. I'm sure you'll agree that they look great and show how hard we're working to make your homes safer and better for you.

There's also an important article about 'cuckooing'. This is when criminals take over someone's home and use it for crime. Fortunately, this is very rare, but we all need to know the signs and speak up if we're worried about somebody.

Following consultation with our tenants, we've also launched a new Contractor Code of Conduct, and a Housing Service Promise.

These explain how we expect our staff and contractors to always treat our tenants with respect, honesty and care.

And finally, I'm pleased to announce that we're running a photography competition for our tenants. It's a fun way to show off your creativity and share what makes your neighbourhood special. Whether it's a lovely view, a happy moment, or something you love about your area, we'd love for you to share it with us.

As we head into the festive season, I want to thank you all for your support. We'll keep working hard to make our Housing Service the best it can be.

A quick reminder to lookout for vulnerable neighbours over the Christmas period as many older people may be alone at this time of year. Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and all the very best for 2026.

**Cllr Rob Lillis**  
**Cabinet Member for Health,**  
**Wellbeing and Housing**



Cllr Rob Lillis (pictured right) with interim Head of Housing Services, Michael Lerpiniere, in the gardens of Church Parade.



# Home improvements in progress

**We're making great progress on our Housing Improvement Programme for 2025/26 and it's all about making your homes safer, warmer and more comfortable.**

So far, we've been busy renewing roofs, fitting new kitchens and bathrooms, upgrading windows, improving fencing and carrying out important disabled adaptations in a number of properties.

And we're not stopping there. The improvement work will carry on into 2026/27 and beyond, helping to keep our homes up to a great standard for the future.

**Take a look at the photos here to see some of the recent upgrades.**



**It's a big investment - over £1.5 million this year alone and by the end of March 2026, around 180 homes will have had a makeover.**

# Update on the housing repairs service

As of 5pm on 31 October 2025, our previous contractor, MCP ceased trading. A new company, MCP Plus, took over immediately and is now handling all repairs and maintenance services on behalf of the Housing Service.

You might notice some small changes, such as new branding or different names on the vans and uniforms. These are just updates to reflect the new company but the service itself continues as normal.

**There are no changes to how you report repairs. All phone numbers and contact methods remain the same.**

**To report a housing repair and book an appointment:**

**Online: MCP Plus web portal**

<https://castlepoint.mcp.community>

**Email: [castlepoint@mcp.community](mailto:castlepoint@mcp.community)**

**Telephone: In an emergency or after hours telephone 01268 91907**

## Picture perfect: Enter our photography competition

**Do you have an eye for capturing special moments, places, or everyday life? We're inviting all our tenants to take part in our photography competition.**

You don't need to be an experienced photographer or have any expensive equipment. If you enjoy snapping pictures on your phone or camera, we want to see your perspective on what makes your home, neighbourhood or community special.

### **Themes:**

**Homes, neighbourhoods and communities**

It could be a cosy corner of your flat, a local park, or a community event, anything that reflects life in our community.

For privacy reasons we would prefer not to feature any identifiable people in the photo.

### **Deadline for entries:**

Submit your photo or photos by 31 January 2026 to be in with a chance of winning **£50 of Love to Shop vouchers**.



### **How to enter:**

- Email your photo to: [communications@castlepoint.gov.uk](mailto:communications@castlepoint.gov.uk)
- Include your name, email and short caption or description of the picture.

Selected entries will be showcased in a future edition of the magazine celebrating the creativity of our tenants. Images will need to be a high resolution to be reproduced.

**Terms and conditions apply, for details visit:**

<https://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/pictureperfect>

# Cuckooing: What tenants need to know

Cuckooing might sound like something out of a nature documentary but it's a serious crime affecting vulnerable people in our communities. Named after the cuckoo bird that lays its eggs in other birds' nests, cuckooing involves criminals taking over someone's home to use it for illegal activities.

## What is cuckooing?

Cuckooing happens when someone's home is taken over by others, usually to:

- Deal drugs
- Store weapons or stolen goods
- Hide from police

Victims are often people who live alone, are elderly, have mental health challenges or struggle with addiction. The criminals may initially appear friendly offering gifts, drugs or companionship but their intentions are far from kind.

Once an individual gains access, they will often invite a larger group to attend the property. Before you know it, the vulnerable person is outnumbered and overwhelmed and would be unable to remove them from their home. It is common to use a property for a short amount of time, moving addresses frequently to reduce the chance of being caught.

## Signs to watch for

If someone you know is being cuckooed, you might notice:

- Strangers coming and going at all hours
- Sudden changes in behaviour or appearance
- Increased noise, antisocial behaviour or damage to the property
- The tenant seems frightened, withdrawn or reluctant to talk

## How to prevent it

Here's how our tenants can protect themselves and their neighbours:

- Be cautious about who you let into your home
- Don't feel pressured to accommodate people you don't trust
- Speak up early if something feels wrong - trust your instincts
- Look out for neighbours who may be vulnerable or isolated

Neighbourhood Management Officers are trained to help and can take enforcement action to prevent cuckooing from taking place at a property.

## How to report it

If you suspect cuckooing:

- You can speak to your Neighbourhood Management Officers about your concerns
- Call 101 to report non-emergency concerns to the police
- If someone is in immediate danger, dial 999



**Cuckooing thrives in silence. By staying informed, looking out for each other and reporting concerns, we can help keep our communities safe and supportive.**



# Tenant engagement update

We held a successful event at the Paddocks on Canvey Island on 23 September, where we met some of our tenants, listened to feedback about the repairs and maintenance service, and discussed the Council's previous approach to resident involvement.

We all agreed that we need to continue our efforts to improve services so that you receive the quality you deserve. We also took the opportunity to discuss our Housing Service Promise, which you can read about below.

In addition, we drafted our Contractor Code of Conduct, which will sit alongside our Repairs and Maintenance Policy. Tenants who attended the event suggested creating a Repairs Forum, and we're pleased to confirm that we'll be setting one up.

**If you'd like to get involved, please email [housingenquiries@castlepoint.gov.uk](mailto:housingenquiries@castlepoint.gov.uk)**



## Housing Service Promise

### **Our commitment to our tenants and leaseholders.**

#### **Transparency, Influence, and Accountability**

##### **We commit to:**

- Always treat you respectfully and fairly
- Be open about our performance and services and we will publish this regularly in our newsletter and on our website
- Provide you with clear information on your rights and responsibilities and ways you can hold us to account
- Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement, so that you can have a say in how we deliver our services

##### **You can expect to:**

- Have your voice heard and be involved in decisions that affect you and the services delivered to you
- Be provided with safe communal areas

#### **Complaints**

##### **We commit to:**

- Handle complaints promptly, fairly and effectively

- Have a robust complaints process that follows the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code

#### **Neighbourhood and Community**

##### **We commit to:**

- Play an active role in contributing to the safety and wellbeing of the neighbourhoods where you live
- Provide you with opportunities to get involved in your neighbourhoods if you'd like to

##### **And for our tenants:**

#### **Safety and Quality**

##### **We commit to:**

- Keep your home free from serious hazards
- Maintain your home to a good standard
- Provide you with a safe and good quality home

#### **Tenancy**

##### **We commit to:**

- Allocate our homes fairly and transparently
- Support you to sustain your tenancy
- Take tenancy enforcement action when you are not keeping to the rules in the Tenancy Agreement

# Contractor Code of Conduct



## **Our contractors will be customer focused They will always:**

- Introduce themselves and show their ID card
- Behave in a polite and professional manner
- Endeavour to keep all repair appointments
- Aim to fix the repair at the first visit
- Let you and any neighbours who may be affected by the work know what they're doing
- Respect your home and contents
- Ensure your safety and that of your household members
- Keep you informed about the status of a repair (in the event of any delay or cancellation notifying you as soon as possible)
- Report any safeguarding concerns to the Council

## **Whilst working in your home they will:**

- Let you know about the work and how long it will take
- Be respectful of shared areas such as gardens, car parks and access ways
- Be polite and courteous and not use abusive or offensive language
- Keep you up to date while they are doing the job
- Be considerate of any needs that you may have
- Use shoe protectors or dust sheets
- Keep disruption to a minimum
- Provide their own power source
- Make sure all materials and equipment used at your home are kept safe

- Clean up all rubbish created by the work
- Complete repairs to a high standard, within the specified target time
- Let you know when the job is complete
- Check that you're happy that the work has been completed to a high standard

## **Whilst the contractor is working in your home they will not:**

- Leave entrance doors to your home or common areas open and unattended
- Play music or the radio without your permission
- Use your toilet, phone, or any of your belongings unless you give them permission
- Smoke in your home or garden

## **When leaving the contractor will:**

- Leave your home clean, tidy and secure at the end of each working day
- Clean up thoroughly and remove all materials upon completion
- Make sure that, wherever possible, supplies of gas, electricity and water are fully restored at the end of each day, or where this is not possible ensure that there is a temporary supply
- Ask you to complete a satisfaction survey

If you feel a contractor doesn't meet our standards then please let us know on 01268 882200 and ask for the Repairs Team.

# Improving our complaints service

We have improved the way we manage, handle and respond to complaints to ensure you receive the standard of service you deserve.

As part of our housing review, we carried out a full assessment of our complaints process. This included listening to stakeholders, reviewing internal procedures and checking our approach with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

Our complaints service now reflects our commitment to clear communication, timely responses and good customer service.

## What you can expect

- All complaints will be acknowledged within five working days.
- A full response will be provided within 10 working days of the acknowledgment.

- For complex cases requiring more time, we will keep you updated at every stage.

Complaints are not just issues to resolve, they are opportunities for us to improve. If you are unhappy with the service that you've received from us, then please let us know directly.

## How to make a complaint

- Email: [housingcomplaints@castlepoint.gov.uk](mailto:housingcomplaints@castlepoint.gov.uk)
- Call: 01268 882200
- In writing or in person: Council Offices, Kiln Road, Benfleet, SS7 1TF
- Online: [wp.castlepoint.gov.uk/make-a-complaint](http://wp.castlepoint.gov.uk/make-a-complaint)

**We are committed to building a better Housing Service for everyone.**

## Blocked pipes, flooded homes: Let's **#JustBinIt** in Castle Point

**Wet wipes, sanitary products and leftover cooking fats might seem harmless but when they're flushed or poured down the drain, they can cause big problems for our sewers and our homes.**

Last year Anglian Water cleared over 35,000 blockages from sewers. Most of these could have been avoided. Blockages don't just clog pipes, they can lead to sewer flooding in homes and streets and damage the environment.



Wet wipes are the biggest problem. They don't break down like toilet paper, and when they mix with fats and oils in the pipes, they can form blockages.

Canvey Island is a particular hotspot. In just one year, Anglian Water cleared 180 blockages there caused by things that shouldn't have been flushed. During a recent investigation, teams pulled 2,311 wet wipes from Canvey's sewers in just two weeks!

The fix is simple. No matter what the packaging says, all wet wipes block pipes. So please bin them, don't flush them. The same goes for sanitary products, cotton buds and leftover cooking fats and oils.

Let's work together to keep Castle Point's sewers flowing freely and protect our homes, streets and environment. **#JustBinIt**

Learn more at [anglianwater.co.uk/justbinit](http://anglianwater.co.uk/justbinit)

CLlr Michael Fuller, Cabinet Member for the Environment, with Anglian Water and the Castle Point Borough Council team, showing the #JustBinIt campaign.



# Tenancy audits: What are they and why do we do them?

To ensure our Council housing continues to meet our tenants' needs, our Neighbourhood Management Officers carry out unannounced tenancy audits across our homes. These visits are done as part of our commitment to providing responsible tenancy management, identifying support needs, maintaining fairness and understanding who is living in our homes.

## What are tenancy audits?

Tenancy audits are short, unscheduled visits by Neighbourhood Management Officers to check that properties are being lived in by our Council tenant(s), and the tenancy conditions are being fully met. Officers will check who is living at the property, confirm identification and assess the condition of the home. These visits are designed to ensure our housing stays secure, well-managed and is fairly allocated.

## Why we do this?

Unannounced tenancy audits help to:

- Ensure homes are occupied by the rightful tenants
- Keep tenancy records accurate and up to date
- Promote safe, well-maintained neighbourhoods
- Identify tenants with support needs so we can make referrals to get help in place
- Identify tenancy fraud, including illegal subletting and abandonment

## What to expect

A Neighbourhood Management Officer will visit without prior notice. During the visit, they will:

- Confirm who is living at the property
- Request to see proof of identity for household members
- Identify any support needs
- Check the condition of the home
- Update tenancy records

All officers will carry identification and conduct the visit respectfully.

Unannounced tenancy audits are part of our wider effort to protect social housing and ensure it reaches those in genuine need. By working together, we can build stronger, safer communities and make sure our homes are used fairly and responsibly.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your Neighbourhood Management Officer.  
Telephone: 01268 882200 Email: [housingenquiries@castlepoint.gov.uk](mailto:housingenquiries@castlepoint.gov.uk)

# Exceptional Hardship Fund

## Extra support when you need it most

The Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF) is designed to provide additional help for residents who are struggling to pay their council tax due to financial hardship or personal circumstances.

## Who can apply?

To qualify for support through the EHF, you must:

- Already be in receipt of Council Tax Reduction
- Be able to provide evidence of the issues affecting your ability to pay

## How to apply

Applying is simple:

- Online: Please visit [castlepoint.gov.uk/exceptional-hardship-fund](https://castlepoint.gov.uk/exceptional-hardship-fund) where you can also upload supporting documents
- Telephone: If you need help completing your application please call us on 01268 882200

# A day in the life of a Sheltered Housing Officer

**In the first of a new series looking at different roles across the Housing Service, we meet Annie Rogers, a Sheltered Housing Officer at Sweetbriar Lodge. Annie has worked in sheltered housing for almost a year.**



## **What's the first thing you do when you arrive?**

When I arrive, there are usually residents doing their washing or waiting to ask me any questions they have, and I help them in any way I can. I sign in and check my emails. I'll have a walk around the scheme to make sure everything is safe and check in on a few residents. I will then do my 40 welfare calls to make sure everyone is ok and see if they need anything.

## **How do you prepare for the day?**

I try to prepare for the day ahead, but every day is different. I go into work with an open mind and ready to deal with anything. On some days I may need to cover for colleagues at other schemes, attend meetings or take part in training.

## **Is there a typical routine, or is every day different?**

Every day is different, but I do like to keep to the routine of doing my welfare calls at 9.30am as I know my residents are awake by then and they know to expect a call from me at that time.

## **What kind of support do you provide to residents?**

I provide all different kinds of support - help with forms to fill in, general enquiries, problems with maintenance, family or health related problems or just supporting residents by providing a listening ear.

## **How do you build relationships with residents?**

I build relationships with the residents by listening and supporting them, being consistent and always having my door open for them to come and see me if they need a chat or have any problems. We also have a cuppa in the lounge or the garden and have a chat or do crosswords together.

## **Can you share a moment that made you feel especially proud?**

Arranging a quiz afternoon with my residents. One resident was the quizmaster and he thought of all the questions. We put on snacks and drinks, held a raffle and invited the other schemes.



The afternoon was a great hit, and we raised enough money to buy some flowers for the garden which made the residents very happy and they were able to choose and plant the flowers themselves.

### **What tasks do people not realise are part of your role?**

We give emotional support when needed. We follow up on appointments residents might have, chase medication and doctors/hospital appointments. We make sure that our residents live in a scheme which is safe and secure. We make sure all fire regulations are in place, laundry is running smoothly and maintenance work is done. We are also on call 24/7 as a team.

### **How do you work with other teams or services?**

We work closely with adult social care, social workers and health care workers, to make sure the residents get the best care. We also work with Neighbourhood Management Officers to make sure the residents get the best out of their Council.

### **What is the most challenging part of your job and how do you handle it?**

The most challenging part of my job is making sure the residents are all happy, healthy and safe and trying to make sure their day-to-day living is as trouble-free as I can make it. It can be hard to switch off at the end of my working day as some residents and their troubles stay with you on an emotional level.

### **Is there a story or resident interaction that's stayed with you?**

A resident needed a bit more support as their health was deteriorating. I helped them get a care package in place and items in their flat to make them more mobile and comfortable.

It took time but when it was all in place both the resident and I were so pleased. I was presented with a lovely bouquet of flowers from my resident to say thank you for my help and support. It was a very lovely surprise and quite emotional.

### **What do you most enjoy about your job?**

The most enjoyable thing about my job is helping my residents and making sure they are all happy. And of course, having a cuppa with them and listening to their stories, and working with an amazing team. We all have many laughs, especially in the summer sitting in the garden or at our raffles and quiz afternoons.

### **What keeps you motivated?**

Motivation comes from happy residents and my team of Sheltered Housing Officers for support.

### **What would you say to someone considering a role in sheltered housing?**

Being a Sheltered Housing Officer is challenging at times but so rewarding! You get to meet lots of different people and get to help residents live their best life by making sure their homes are well looked after and by lending an ear if they need it. The support you get from your team of Sheltered Housing Officers is fantastic and everyone at Castle Point Borough Council is extremely helpful and always just on the end of the phone if you need them.





# Neighbourhood matters

## Neighbourhood Management Officer patches now align with wards boundaries.

We're making changes to how our Neighbourhood Management Officers serve your community - and it's all about bringing services closer to home.

From November, Neighbourhood Management Officer patches now align with local ward boundaries. This means each officer will be responsible for a clearly defined geographical area.

**Jess Williams:** Thundersley North, Thundersley South, St Michael's, Hadleigh St James, St George's, Appleton

**Michelle Tilson:** St Mary's, Canvey Island South, Canvey Island Central

**Rasheed Atiku:** Canvey Island Winter Gardens, Canvey Island East, Canvey Island North

## What are the benefits?

- Stronger local presence: Officers will be more visible and accessible within your neighbourhood
- Improved accountability: Clearer boundaries mean better coordination with key stakeholders
- Faster response times: Being geographically focused allows officers to respond more quickly to issues
- Better local knowledge: Officers will develop deeper understanding of the specific needs and priorities of your neighbourhood
- Joined-up working: Easier collaboration with other Council services

## What this means for you

You'll now have a dedicated Neighbourhood Management Officer who works exclusively within your neighbourhood. They'll be your first point of contact for tenancy issues, estate concerns and community improvements. Look out for updated contact details on our website.

This change is part of our ongoing commitment to delivering responsive, resident-focused housing services. If you have questions or want to meet your new Neighbourhood Management Officer, please contact the team by emailing

[housingmanagement@castlepoint.gov.uk](mailto:housingmanagement@castlepoint.gov.uk)

## Help shape your neighbourhood: Join our neighbourhood inspections

As part of our commitment to maintaining safe, clean and friendly neighbourhoods, your Neighbourhood Management Officer regularly carries out neighbourhood inspections and we'd like you to be part of them.

## What are neighbourhood inspections?

Neighbourhood inspections are scheduled walkabouts led by Neighbourhood Management Officers, with tenants, leaseholders, local councillors and other key stakeholders invited to join. Working together, we assess the condition of communal areas (internal and external). We identify issues like fly-tipping, broken lighting and graffiti, pick up on any safety hazards and look for opportunities to improve the neighbourhood.

## Why your involvement matters

- Spot issues first hand: You will often notice things others miss. Your input helps us to act faster
- Hold services accountable: Your presence ensures concerns are recorded and followed up
- Build community pride: Working together strengthens the sense of ownership and pride in where you live
- Shape improvements: Share ideas for things like better lighting, new planting in green spaces, or other community facilities

## When and where

Neighbourhood inspections take place regularly across all our housing areas. You can contact your Neighbourhood Management Officer to find out when the next inspection is happening in your area, or go to [www.castlepoint.gov.uk/myneighbourhood](http://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/myneighbourhood)

## Join us

Join us for the next neighbourhood inspection and help us make your neighbourhood better.

Together, we can create a cleaner, safer and more vibrant place to live.



For more information contact your Housing Team by

Phone: 01268 882200

Email: [tenancyofficers@castlepoint.gov.uk](mailto:tenancyofficers@castlepoint.gov.uk)

Or visit the Castle Point Borough Council website at: [castlepoint.gov.uk](http://castlepoint.gov.uk)