

your HOMES matter

Spring 2024

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www.charnwood.gov.uk

Garden competition returns for its fourteenth year

Tenants and leaseholders are being encouraged to enter our annual garden competition. This year is the fourteenth year of the competition, and there are nine categories to enter:

- Best house or flat garden**
- Best pots and hanging baskets**
- Best community garden**
- Best sheltered court**
- Best fruit and vegetable garden**
- Best newcomer**
- Best young gardener (entrant must be under 16)**
- Best flower display**
- Best eco garden (must show the use of upcycling, recycling, planting of wildflowers, environmentally friendly)**

Entries for the tenant garden competition need to be submitted by Monday, June 3 and judging will take place between July 22-26. Entrants will be notified of their judging date closer to the time.

Category winners will receive high street vouchers. The prizes are £100 for first place, £75 for second, £50 for third for each category, and all other entrants who don't win will receive a small gift.

To enter, tenants can call the customer engagement team on 01509 634679 or 01509 634955 or email involvement@charnwood.gov.uk for an application form. Alternatively, apply online or download an entry form via www.charnwood.gov.uk/gardens.



Explore the borough on foot with Active Charnwood

The Active Charnwood team, in partnership with Fusion Lifestyle, runs a programme of guided walks in and around Charnwood. The walks cater for a variety of abilities and are available to people of all ages.

Our volunteers lead walks that explore the countryside in and around Charnwood. These walks are generally a little longer in distance and duration than the Wellbeing walks. They will also generally head into the countryside along rights of way. The walks will often take you by historical features, through nature reserves and up hills to gain some great views across Leicestershire and its surrounds.

Countryside walks can be booked online at www.active-charnwood.org/countryside-walks. The team ask that people book these walks in advance to keep the group size manageable for the walk leaders. If you can't access the web call the Active Charnwood team on 01509 634673 during office hours (Monday-Friday 9am until 4pm) and they can assist.



Seated exercise sessions in the community

Do you know how many exercises can be performed with a stress ball alone? The answer is: a lot!

Residents at Longcliffe Road in Shepshed recently received the benefits of Sam from Charnwood Borough Council's sport and active recreation team's expertise in seated exercise and raised their heart rates with nothing but a stress ball before ending the session with a competitive game of Boccia.

If you are interested in holding seated exercise sessions at your setting, please reach out to Sam at samantha.balram@charnwood.gov.uk.



Complete the 'to do' task on your journal for your rent increase

Your rent increased on April 1. To make sure you receive the correct housing costs as part of your universal credit, you need to respond to your message on your "to do" task which says: 'Confirm your housing costs.' Follow the instructions to report the new rent and service charge if you have one. Your rent increase notice itemises the service charge and the rent charge from April 1.



Failure to report your rent in time may lead to rent arrears or could mean an underpayment resulting in you paying a higher proportion of the rent than you need to.

Do not report your new rent using the change in circumstances function on your journal. If you need help – please call our tenancy support team on 01509 634666.

A kind gesture at Beresford Court

In the lead-up to Christmas, Beresford Court in Shepshed had its communal lounge decorated free of charge by contractors Ian Williams, as part of the company's community initiative fund.

The work was completed as a thank you to the residents and staff for the inconvenience caused whilst ongoing work at the sheltered court had been carried out.



Tenant tales - John Mason

Sheltered accommodation: why not? A view from the inside.

"Many people living alone are sceptical towards living in sheltered accommodation, rather in their own home, but having been a resident in one such place since 2017 I would offer you the following reasons for considering such a move.

In 2016, I realised that I had a quite severe breathing condition and was struggling even to get up the stairs in my one bedroomed modern terraced house. After just under a year, I decided to do something about it and with the help of my local G.P. I successfully applied for a bedsit in one of Charnwood Borough Council's sheltered accommodation sites in Shepshed.

The fact that I had family living in the village and lived there myself made my application that much easier.

Since then, I have lived, amongst my new found friends, in what can only be described as ideal surroundings.

The rent is no more than private accommodation, sometimes cheaper, but included in your rent is your cost of central heating, water rates and other services which include a free laundry room so you don't need a washing machine, a communal lounge, a visiting warden should you need assistance or support, and an emergency lifeline system should you take ill at any time of the day or night.

Add to this the fact that all repairs to the property, including those in your own flat (other than to your own personal goods) are carried out by council personnel, I can see no down side to I such a move.

The building is not my house, but it is my home, and I can get as involved in the community as I wish or just live my own independent life as I wish.

Where I live, we have formed our own residents' association and hold regular fund-raising events which finance regular trips out and function with the complex, which are sometimes subsidised by landlord services' Community Initiative Fund.

There are communal grounds, so if gardening is your passion there is plenty to do.

One of the biggest drawbacks for the elderly is loneliness; this does not happen in sheltered accommodation: there is always somebody around to talk to.

This year residents in my scheme will have trips to Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire for just £8, a pizza and plonk evening, probably a ukelele band accompanied singalong, a Christmas party, and a Christmas lunch at a local hostelry; so why sit at home on your own, when all of this is potentially available to you?

I understand that moving house can be a difficult experience, but the end benefits can be most rewarding.

Give it a thought, you might just find a new lease of life, like I did."

Have a tenant tale to tell for a future issue of YHM? Contact the customer engagement team on 01509 634679 or 01509 634955 or email involvement@charnwood.gov.uk.



John Mason, helping to judge the garden competition n 2021

Long-term vision for sheltered accommodation schemes

The council's Cabinet approved a long-term vision to improve its sheltered accommodation schemes in a meeting on March 7. The Sheltered Accommodation Strategy Framework outlines a range of possible options and opportunities to improve its schemes which offer accommodation for older tenants.

Many factors will need to be considered before any future improvements are undertaken including the types of homes people want or need and the level of demand. It also proposes that schemes with the highest number of bedsits and voids are likely to be prioritised and considered first.

The council has completed a range of improvements at four locations in the last several years. It comes as a project to redevelop St Michael's Court in Thurmaston was approved at Plans Committee recently. The scheme will see nine new bungalows created.

The framework also features possible options for the future of Fielding Court in Loughborough. The site has two blocks with just under 50 properties. However, A Block needs substantial repairs, and many properties were already empty as they have shared bathrooms and are difficult to let. Some tenants have already been moved to other properties.

Further options for the site will be considered later in the year. The Sheltered Accommodation Strategy Framework can be viewed at www.charnwood.gov.uk/SASF.



Artists' impression of how St Michael's will look once completed

Re-classification of our 45+ homes

Currently over a thousand of our council homes are designated to be let to people who are aged 45 or more. These properties are more difficult to let because of the age restriction and there are almost a hundred of these properties currently empty, many of which have been empty for a long time.

Restricting people on our housing register access to being able to live in almost a fifth of all our homes is also seen to be unfair.

In order to try to reduce the number of empty homes we have and to remove this barrier to people on our housing register being eligible to live in these properties simply by virtue of their age, the council's cabinet recently agreed to remove this age restriction and enable these homes to be let to all eligible housing register applicants, regardless of their age.

We recognise that this change may be seen as potentially disruptive to blocks of flats with existing communities of older people. We plan to remove the age restriction for future lettings gradually and in four tranches starting in June 2024. We will monitor and assess the effect of this change closely each time a new tranche is de-classified.

While the make-up of these tranches may change, we will provide details on our website of which schemes/blocks will be affected and when. Please be assured that this change only affects future lettings of these properties: existing tenancies are not affected at all.

Right Stuff. Right Bin.

The council's 'Right stuff, right bin' campaign focuses on reminding people to check which items can be recycled to make sure their recycling efforts do not go to waste.

On average, around 325 tons of recycling is collected in the borough each week and taken to Casepak, a materials recycling facility where it is sorted. On occasion, however, lorry loads of recycling can be rejected owing to it being contaminated by non-recyclable and dirty materials such as food, nappies and textiles.

Please visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/what_can_and_cannot_be_recycled to see a full list of items that can be recycled in your green bin. We have also put together a handy document below which you can print out and pop on your fridge as a reminder. Find it at www.charnwood.gov.uk/rightstuff.

Wheelie bin tips

Below are some top tips on ensuring your green wheelie bin is used only for things it loves:

- Empty, clean and dry items;
- Leave it loose;
- Empty plastic bottles;
- Leave the lids on!

No thank you!

Your green wheelie bin is not a fan of:

- Textiles – pop these to a charity shop or clothing bank instead;
- Food – use as much as you can before popping food waste into the black bin;
- Black plastic bags - unfortunately these cannot be recycled so please pop them in your black bin;
- Nappies - these should be put in the black bin only please;
- Greasy pizza boxes - only clean and dry cardboard can be recycled. No grease please!
- Polystyrene - unfortunately this cannot be recycled so please pop it in your black bin.

Not sure of how to dispose of an item?

A handy A-Z of how to dispose of items can be found on the Leicestershire County Council website at www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/how-do-i-dispose-of.

Keep in the loop with council news

If you would like to keep updated with all the latest news from the council - including events, updates from the Active Charnwood team, business news, planning news and much more - subscribe to our email alerts at www.charnwood.gov.uk/alerts.

As YHM is a quarterly magazine, the 'news for council tenants' topic will give you the most timely updates. Get subscribed and stay in the loop.

Fire safety in the kitchen

More than half of the house fires attended start in the kitchen. Here is some advice on the risks to look out for and how best to stay safe. What are the main causes of fire in the kitchen?



- Deep fat frying with chip pans;
- Distractions – always keep an eye on your cooking and use a cooking timer. Always turn off appliances when you've finished. NEVER leave cooking on when you're not in the house;
- Alcohol – drinking alcohol and cooking can be a fatal mix: don't drink and cook;
- Cooking oil - When cooking with oil, take extra care because hot oil can catch fire easily. It is best to use just a small amount of oil.

We have created a webpage that is filled with great advice on fire safety in the kitchen that covers deep-fat fryer fires, frying pan fires, microwave fires and the type of alarms to have in your kitchen. There's also what to do if your clothes catch on fire. Visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/kitchen. Please contact the customer engagement team on 01509 634679 or 01509 634955 or email involvement@charnwood.gov.uk if you would like a copy of the guide emailing to you or posting to you.

New contractor for the communal cleaning scheme

After four years the contract we had with Spotlight Cleaning Services recently came to an end. The council's landlord services team invited tenders for a new two-year contract (with an option to extend for two additional one-year periods) and we are pleased to say that, since March 1, the cleaning service has been taken over by aAFD Services, a company based in Coalville, Leicestershire.

The new contractor already provides similar services to several nearby local authorities, and we are looking forward to working with the company in order that residents will receive an excellent service over the initial two-year period of the contract. Residents can view the complete specification and find out more about the scheme at www.charnwood.gov.uk/communal_cleaning_scheme.

Live in Thorpe Acre? Join the community association

The Thorpe Acre Community Association formed in 2010, and with assistance from funding from tenant bids and the community initiative fund, residents have been able to transform the area, situated in Loughborough, including adding raised flower beds and seven benches to the Thorpe Acre Green on Knightthorpe Road.

If you are out and about in Thorpe Acre on Fridays, you can stop by Thorpe Acre Church Hall between 10am and 12pm when a coffee morning takes place. The community association is also looking for new members who could help with the maintenance of the flower beds and the painting of the benches. The raised beds are planted twice a year with summer and winter bedding.

If you would like to know more about the association, email their chairperson June Bush at june.bush15@virginmedia.com.

Flooding in Charnwood – our response, the future and which organisation is responsible for what

Flooding caused by Storm Henke had a devastating effect on thousands of Charnwood residents when it hit the borough on January 4, and some council tenants were badly affected in areas such as Loughborough and Syston.

Over 200 homes and businesses were flooded internally throughout the borough.

The council helped around 25 households into temporary accommodation; and many of our officers worked all hours to gather information and signpost residents to information and advice, especially where residents couldn't leave their homes. We also helped residents and tenants find housing support where applicable.

The council worked with various agencies to support communities in Charnwood affected by the flooding, including the county council and fire service.

Our waste contractor, Serco, came out to clear debris and arranged for a special collection of waste for that area to collect waste caused because of flood damage – around 90 tons in total.

CBC has worked alongside the county council, Environment Agency, Canal and River Trust, emergency services and many others to respond to the floods and we continue to work with them on the recovery of the borough.

In recent weeks, we have held drop-in sessions for residents affected by flooding in Loughborough and Syston to come down and tell their stories, speak to CBC officers and other organisations and get the support and guidance they need.

The council would like to thank the emergency services and all other agencies for their response to support our communities during this significant flood and to the communities themselves. A huge amount of gratitude is owed for their fantastic work in pulling together for one another in the form of voluntary work, parcel collections and fundraising taking place to help those who have been hit the hardest by the events that took place.



A first-person account...

A resident of Staveley Court (who wishes to remain anonymous) kindly gave us their account of the flooding as it happened.

"I woke up and jumped out of bed into water that reached halfway up my leg. I sleepily thought the washing machine had sprung a leak, but wading through the water I realised there was too much water for that! I then saw blue lights flashing and the fire service was knocking on our doors to make sure everybody was OK.

And so began a very wet start to the day thanks to storm Henke...

During the night the water had cascaded from the canal, and the rain was non-stop. It was a scary sight to see the flats flooded with water.

In a very short time, the council were ringing us to let us know they were sorting out temporary accommodation for everybody. We were given a point of contact who rang us with information, advice and sorted out any problems. They were working all hours to keep us safe and out of our wet and smelly homes. There were a lot of tenants with various needs during our stay.

There has been a lot of support from various sources, and it has been an experience we will never forget. Throwing out our furniture and household stuff made me appreciate what really matters, as I can honestly say I never felt alone throughout the ordeal. I thank everybody who worked tirelessly to help us."

Responsibilities when flooding occurs

In a flood situation, organisations including councils, emergency services and others work together to co-ordinate the response through the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Resilience Forum.

We have created a webpage that details which organisation is responsible for what - from clearing drains, ensuring sewers are running properly, finding emergency accommodation and more.

Visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/flooding_responsibilities for the full breakdown. There is also a handy leaflet that can be downloaded via the webpage. Contact us if you would like a copy emailing or posting to you.

The council provides buildings insurance for all its properties. However, we recommend that tenants insure their contents and being uninsured will mean that you will most likely be responsible for covering all costs of flood damage. Information on home contents insurance can be found at www.charnwood.gov.uk/hci.

Call 999 if you or anyone else is in danger because of a flood. For information, advice and guidance on flooding, visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/flooding.



Latest estate walk

Our estate walkabouts are continuing throughout 2024 and we wanted to let you know what we found at our most recent walks, and more importantly, what we will be doing about it.

Sileby – 12 October, 2023

What we found	What we did
Repairs identified	<p>Repairs were noted with a leaking wastepipe at Jubilee Avenue. A repairs appointment has been arranged.</p> <p>A query was received regarding scaffolding outside a property on Jubilee Avenue. We confirmed that scaffolding was required for asbestos works.</p> <p>Repairs to fencing at Homefield Road has been scheduled.</p> <p>Concerns were raised regarding the garden at a property on Barradale Avenue and our voids team has been made aware.</p>
Anti-social behaviour problems discussed	A concern was raised regarding neighbour problems at Homefield Road, and an appointment was arranged to discuss the matter.
Grounds maintenance problems identified	<p>Rubbish was noted at the garages next to Greedon Rise. The rubbish has now been cleared.</p> <p>A small area of overgrown grass and brambles at Barradale Road has been scheduled to be cut back.</p>

We are visiting the following estates in 2024. Please note that we will be writing to tenants who live on these estates closer to the time so that they are made aware of when we are visiting.

- Warwick Way Estate, Loughborough - Wednesday May 15
- Tuckers Road Estate, Loughborough - Wednesday June 19
- Shelthorpe Area, Loughborough - Thursday September 19
- Quorn - Tuesday October 15

All walks begin at 10am, with a drop-in session at 12pm. Letters will detail where the drop-in sessions take place. We would also like to hear your views about where you would like us to go next.

If have any suggestions for locations or you would like us to come to your estate, please contact the customer engagement team on 01509 634679 or 01509 634955 or email involvement@charnwood.gov.uk.



What a 53-week rent year means for you

Every four or five years, owing to your rent being charged on a Monday, there are 53 weeks where the rent is charged rather than the usual 52.

As everyone, except a handful of properties, have four rent-free weeks during the year, this means you will be charged for 49 weeks instead of 48, and this changes slightly how we calculate your rent.

If you pay weekly, it is simple, you just make 49 weekly payments throughout the year.

If you pay monthly or four-weekly, see the example below to get an idea on how to make sure you pay the right rent. If you pay by direct debit, we will automatically amend your direct debit as shown, however, if you use other payment methods, use the information to work out what you need to pay.

Important - if you are on universal credit, the DWP will only pay you for 52 weeks, therefore you must pay the extra week yourself to make sure you do not get into arrears.

A reminder, if you are in arrears, you still need to pay on the rent-free weeks to reduce any outstanding rent balance. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact your income officer via the new online enquiry form at www.charnwood.gov.uk/how_your_rent_is_worked_out or on 01509 634666.

We're here to help

If you are struggling with your rent or need help and advice regarding benefits to help boost your income, your income officer can help. They can refer you to the tenancy support or financial inclusion officers or signpost you to other agencies that can help.

Call your income officer on 01509 634666 or contact them via the new online enquiry form at www.charnwood.gov.uk/help_with_your_rent.

Council tax support is underclaimed by universal credit claimants.

Go to benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk to see if you should apply.

Direct Debit – any day, any week!



Direct debit is an increasingly popular way to pay your rent. Since to introduction of any day direct debits, many of you have seen the convenience of making a payment when it suits you. Mostly this is taken on the day you get paid your wages, universal credit or other benefits.

There is no restriction in the frequency you can make payments. As well as being able to make a payment on any day of the week or month, you can also pay two or four weekly to further match the day you get paid. If you already pay by direct debit and want to change the day to make your payment to one that is more convenient to you, contact your income officer via the new online enquiry form on the below webpage or on 01509 634666.

If you do not pay by direct debit already, you can now set up your direct debit up online at www.charnwood.gov.uk/how_to_pay_your_rent.

Dear Leaseholders

You should have all received your estimates of service charges for 2024/25 and April 1 quarterly invoice. If you haven't, please get in touch. We are now entering into phase 2 of the leasehold team calendar, which involves gathering and preparing your certified summaries for 2023/24. Please can we ask that you read the 'Certified summaries' article and follow the information detailed within this.

As a reminder, rather than calling the leasehold team regarding repairs, disputes with neighbours, to take payments and many other services, please call 01509 634666 or visit the CBC website for these services. This will get you to the right team quicker. The leasehold team will be able to help you with the following:

- service charge queries;
- certified summary queries;
- new fd30 fire door enquiries;
- lease enquiries;
- transfer of lease queries;
- gas safety certificates;
- electrical installation condition report;
- extending your lease.

We should like to take this opportunity to remind you all that we have now resumed the Leaseholder's Forum and we invite all leaseholders to attend. If you would like us to offer a workshop, for example, explaining how the certified summary figures are all collated etc or anything else, please feel free to let us know and we will incorporate a workshop within one of the forums.

Best wishes from

Sarah and Trevor

Certified summaries

From June you will start receiving your certified summaries and it is important that, as soon as possible, you:

- **check your certified summary and raising any queries you have before the deadline date on the accompanying letter.**
- **supply the details requested on the letter if you have a credit on your account (which means that the money we have collected from you is greater than the cost of the services for which you have been charged)**

If you have a debit (this means that the cost of the services for which you have been charged is greater than the money we have collected from you, please note that an invoice will arrive in September 2024 for this amount in the form of a separate invoice from your service charge quarterly charges.

We are still awaiting some bank details from refunds for 2022-23 and you would have been sent previous reminders if this is the case.

Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to chase leaseholders continually for their bank details and we cannot get your bank details from other services i.e. the invoicing team owing to data protection restrictions and so from March 31 we will not be issuing any further reminders.

Your questions answered

Why have you sent me a 'letter before action' letter regarding my front door.

If you have neither provided us with required documents that certify that your existing door is compliant nor have you contacted us to discuss the replacement of your door we will have no option other than to start a process that could end up in our having to take legal action in order for your door to be replaced with a compliant one. The first stage in this process is us sending you what we call a 'letter before action.'

You must act immediately to avoid us having to take enforcement action, which could end up in court and lead to your losing your home through forfeiture. This will incur additional court costs and the costs to conduct the remedial work or replacement which will be recharged to you.

We do not wish to take such action but as leaseholders you are responsible for ensuring that your front door meets current fire regulations and as a landlord, we are responsible for ensuring that every block has compliant fire doors.

How do I pay my invoices?

If you look at the back of your invoice you will see details on how to pay it. You can also ring our customer services team on 01509 634666. Please be aware that certain times, such as Monday mornings and lunchtimes, will be busier than others. We in the leasehold team cannot take payment ourselves.

Can I install a gas fire?

Please contact us if you wish to do this as in some cases the flues have been capped for safety reasons.

I want to change a window to a patio door.

It all depends on your lease and what is written within it. If you wish to make any alterations to the fabric of the building you can check your lease. In some leases the information could be at point 4.6, but not all the leases are the same. We are happy to help; so please contact us if you have any queries.

Contacting the leasehold team

The leasehold team comprises Trevor Banbrook and Sarah Taylor. Their contact details can be found below:

Telephone: 01509 634575 Monday and Tuesday 9.30am to 4.30pm (Trevor). 01509 634830 Tuesday to Friday 9am to 3pm (Sarah). Email: leaseholders@charnwood.gov.uk.

Invoice payments Please refer to the back of the invoice or call 01509 634666 (9am until 4pm Monday to Friday)

Payments enquiries income team: 01509 634817

Report a repair and/or anti-social behaviour: Please call our customer services team on 01509 634666 (out-of-office hours number for emergency repair work only - 0333 200 8811). You can report ASB at www.charnwood.gov.uk/asb and request a repair online at www.charnwood.gov.uk/repairs.

Request for buildings insurance schedule Please email the insurance team at insurance@charnwood.gov.uk or call the customer service team on 01509 634666.

Want to move home? Consider a mutual exchange

A number of residents are registered on the Charnwood's housing register to transfer to a more suitable home, but they might not realise that they can look for a mutual exchange at the same time.



A mutual exchange is where a tenant swaps properties with another council or housing association tenant following permission from the landlord(s) involved. The council entered into partnership with the nationally recognised HomeSwapper scheme. It is the UK's largest online community of social housing tenants looking to swap homes. You can register at www.HomeSwapper.co.uk. Once registered you can access the site to view other people who wish to exchange to find a match. It costs you nothing.

Contact the person you would like to swap with, and if that person is interested, you arrange to view each other's property. If you want to proceed after the viewing, application forms can be downloaded at www.charnwood.gov.uk/mutual_exchange or via our contact centre on 01509 634666. A completed application is required from all parties involved in the exchange. Find out all the information you need (including legal) on the webpage. Don't delay – register on HomeSwapper today. You could find the home of your dreams.

From the editorial panel to you

The editorial panel is made up of council tenants and our customer engagement officers meet the panel regularly to consult them over what they (and their fellow tenants) would like to see in Your Homes Matter. After all, it is a magazine for you. Below is some important information that the panel thought would be of interest and importance for tenants:

Community centres in Charnwood. They are listed on the CBC website at www.charnwood.gov.uk/community_centres_and_facilities.

What to do if you experience a power cut. Vulnerable tenants will receive text messages and phone calls. But if it happens and you're unsure what to do, call 105. You can also visit www.powercut105.com/en/ to see if a power cut has happened in your area. Just enter your postcode.

Emergency out-of-hours number. If you have an emergency outside council opening hours (Monday-Friday, 9am until 4pm), please call 0333 200 8811. This number is a local rate number meaning you will only be charged for a local call.

Scammers. Before you let anyone into your home to carry out a repair, inspection, or gas service, you should check they are who they say they are. All our staff and any contractors doing work for us must show you their identity card. Remember – when in doubt, keep them out.

Reporting things when you don't have the internet. Contact our customer services team on 01509 634666 between 9am and 4pm Monday-Friday (or on the out-of-hours number above). Face-to-face appointments are available at the CBC offices with a customer service adviser. Requests for an appointment will be assessed on an individual basis prior to booking. Please call 01509 634560 if you wish to request an appointment.