

The value of some of the programmes of works we have carried out over the last financial year.

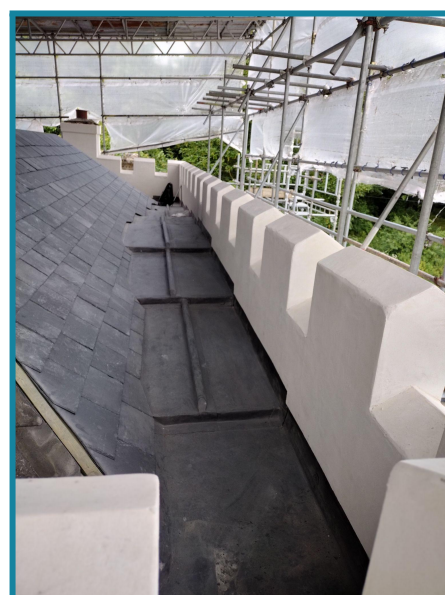
Electrical rewiring	£114,322
Replacement Heating	£203,808
Window and door replacement (new contract)	£157,236
Block lift refurbishment	£680,855
Roof replacement	£273,290
Kitchens and bathrooms	£395,600
Structural repairs	£181,770
Fire precaution work	£380,943



Left: External decorations

Bottom left: Brunswick Court new lift plant

Bottom right: Park Lodge - new roof decoration



Garages

We have garages across the district that are available for all Thanet residents to rent, not just council tenants and leaseholders. Rental income from our garages is invested into service and property improvements.



Total number of garages owned by Thanet District Council	291
Number occupied at 31/03/23	182
Number of garages available to rent	109
Investment in garage refurbishments during 2022/23	£55,000
Income received from the rental of garages 2022/23	£200,250.58

Landlord Compliance

Keeping our residents safe is our highest priority. We do this by making sure we follow landlord health and safety legislation and regulations.

Our compliance performance is shown in the table below:

Compliance area	March 2022	March 2023
Gas safety	100%	100%
Fire risk assessments	100%	100%
Asbestos surveys	100%	100%
Water risk assessments	100%	100%
Electrical testing - communal area	99.38%	99.37%
Electrical testing - domestic units	90.21%	93.70%
Passenger lifts	100%	100%

Building Safety Act 2022

In 2022, legislation was introduced that brought new duties relating to fire and structural safety, to improve the safety of high rise residential buildings. These are buildings which are 18 metres or higher and include at least two residential units. Thanet District Council owns six residential buildings that fall into this category.

In preparation, we recruited to a new role in the Compliance Team, a Building Safety and Compliance Manager. This officer works closely with Kent Fire and Rescue Service to ensure our high rise buildings meet the required standard and to enhance the safety of our residents.

Training exercise at Invicta House

Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) carried out a training exercise at Invicta House, one of the council's high-rise buildings, on Tuesday 21 June 2022.

As part of the successful training exercise, KFRS simulated using a height vehicle to get water to the floor of the fire from outside the building.



Fire Safety

During 2022/23 the following incidents of fire were reported:

Major fire incidence	2
Minor fire incidence	0

Fire can devastate people's lives. The two major incidents displaced 13 families, but thankfully there were no injuries. In both cases the cause of the fire was found to be arson, where belongings were set alight outside the block.



Our Housing Officers and Housing Response Officers work hard to minimise fire risk. They clear belongings and refuse from communal areas and help residents to move stored items that could pose a fire hazard.

Our buildings include many features that will help to prevent or control a fire should one occur. For example, all the doors in a communal area are made to withstand smoke and fire for up to one hour, allowing time for residents to escape.

The bin chute hoppers will seal if there is a fire in the chutes or bin store. This means that the smoke from a fire will not fill the communal areas.

The bin stores in our high rise buildings are fitted with a sprinkler system to dampen the fire should one occur in this area.

Estates

This year we published our Estates Strategy, Policy and Standard. These documents outline our commitment to maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with our homes, and how we intend to achieve this.

We have six Housing Response Officers (HROs) who work across all of our estates. Their role is to:

- carry out block inspections
- identify and report communal repairs to Mears
- ensure bin stores are tidy and bins are rotated where bin chutes discharge
- mop the lobby of high rise blocks daily - where there is a high footfall

When time allows, Housing Response Officers will:

- carry out litter picking
- remove larger items of waste
- weed paved areas or car parks

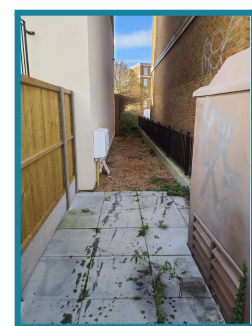
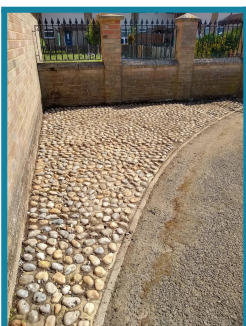
Our HROs carry out vital work to maintain health and safety and the condition of our blocks.

Some of the work of our Housing Response Officers

Before



After



Anti-social behaviour

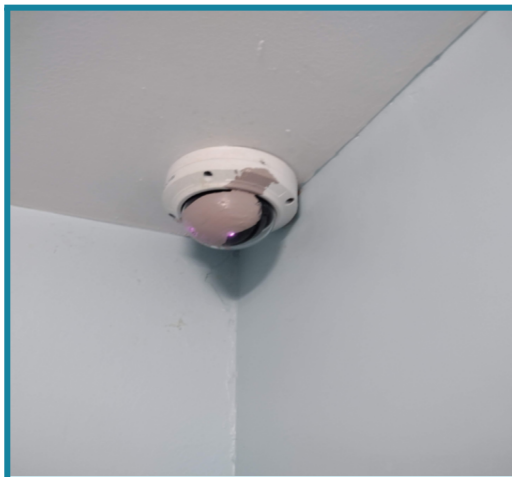
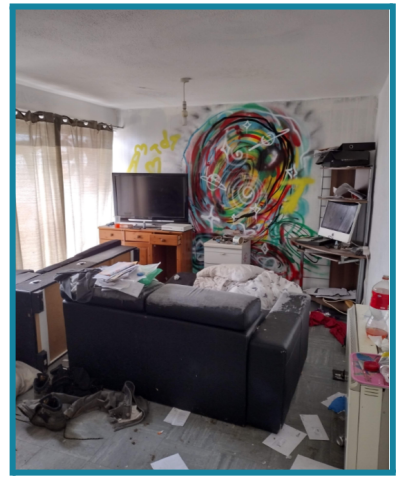
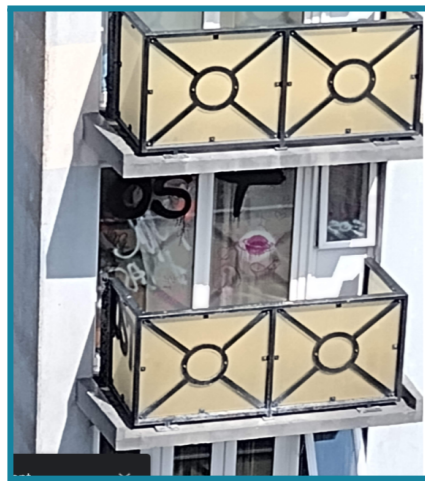
Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is distressing and disruptive for those affected by it. ASB will not be tolerated and the team deals with incidents swiftly.

The installation of personal surveillance cameras, for example, video doorbells or CCTV, has been a cause of many neighbour disputes this year.

Most neighbour disputes can be dealt with by mediation but in some cases we need to take more serious action, as the example below demonstrates:

A resident was causing alarm and distress to the community, Thanet District Council employees and contractors by causing violent criminal damage to council property. We applied to the Magistrates Court for an order to close the property, which meant removing the tenant from the flat and building.

The removal of the tenant from the building gave the community some peace and quiet. The Closure Order granted the council mandatory possession of the property and we pursued a claim for criminal damage via Kent Police.



Income Recovery

This year has been extremely difficult for residents financially, with cost of living increases having a huge effect on household expenditure.

The Household Support Fund (provided by central government) gave us funding to allocate to low income families, to be spent on fuel, food, white goods, carpets and rent arrears.

Amount of Household Support fund allocated to our tenants	£153,934.23
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Along with meeting the Kent County Council criteria for supporting these families, it also stabilised rent collection, making tenancy sustainment easier.

Current rent arrears

We experienced a sharp increase in rent arrears during the summer and autumn of 2022. We were able to recover and finish in a better position than the year before.

Our target was to reduce the debt by 0.50% over the year and we achieved a 0.53% improvement. Below are our end of year figures:

Current tenant arrears as a % on 31 March 2023	4.79%	£708,629.47
Tenant arrears as a % 31 March 2022	5.32%	£752,444.18

The main factors in meeting this target were:

- A fully staffed, experienced team of Rent Officers
- The introduction of any-day monthly direct debits
- A new court and eviction process
- A campaign to communicate heating charges in tower blocks

Financial Wellbeing Team

The Financial Wellbeing Team (FWT) provides residents with a bespoke service that assists with budgeting, checking benefit entitlement and applications for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) where appropriate.

Annual FWT referrals by year	Number
FWT referrals 2022 - 2023	324
FWT referrals 2021 - 2022	217

This shows a 49% increase in referrals and correlates directly to the effect of the increased cost of living.

£31,516.21 was received directly into rent accounts in the form of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit backdated payments, or DHP to cover arrears, as a result of these referrals.

We trialled new performance indicators for the Financial Wellbeing Team this year:

Performance indicators	Percentage
Percentage of residents contacted within seven days of a referral	84.57%
Percentage of cases resulting in reduced rent arrears	84%

These figures have given us a baseline to monitor future years and set reasonable targets.

Right to Buy

During 2022/2023 we received 15 applications under Right to Buy legislation. This is 53% fewer applications than in the previous year.

Right to Buy in numbers

Number of properties sold	12
Number of applications denied	3
Total value of properties sold	£2,480,500
Total value of discount applied	£990,260
Number of properties bought back	2

Tenancy fraud

According to the Chartered Institute of Housing, the true cost of tenancy fraud is £42,000 per detected case.

We work with Ashford Borough Council who investigate cases of suspected tenancy fraud on our behalf. In 2022/23 Housing Officers referred 17 cases of suspected tenancy fraud, where there had been a suspicion of sub-letting or non-occupation.

Following formal investigation, one property was successfully returned to Thanet District Council and has been now re-let to a family from the waiting list. Proceedings are ongoing to recover a further property.

Number of cases referred (excluding Right to Buy)	17
Properties returned	1
Properties where proceedings are ongoing	1

And finally.....

Here is an unexpected highlight from 2022/23. In April 2022 we received an unusual request from a film company. They wanted to film on the 15th floor of Kennedy House in Ramsgate - with a donkey!

The donkey's name was Tracey. She was quite a star, with another film role booked in the same week. She was so well behaved, and there were no untoward incidents (although she brought her own shovel along just in case). Tracey took the lift to the 14th floor but had to walk up the final flight of stairs, which was pretty impressive but didn't seem to worry her at all.

The film is entitled *Kahr: Don't mock the Donkey*. It is funded by the Arts Council, in partnership with UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency).



Plans for 2023/24

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The social housing white paper sets out ways that the Regulator for Social Housing can improve the experience of people living in social housing. One of these steps will be to introduce Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

TSMs allow for the performance of a social housing landlord to be assessed, regarding the provision of homes and services. Our Resident Involvement Team is preparing for the first submission of TSMs in April 2024.

Tower block refurbishment and retrofit programme

The next three years will be really exciting for Thanet District Council's Tenant and Leaseholder Services, as we embark on a £20 million refurbishment and retrofit project for our tower blocks.

This project will improve both safety and energy efficiency as well as the environment for 405 households. It is a highly complex project due to the nature of the buildings, using multiple funding streams and requiring compliance with the new Building Safety Act.

We aim to keep residents at the heart of this project, as there will be much disruption as we commence this work and new technologies are installed. Works will include replacement of external wall systems, insulation, heating systems, ventilation, replacement windows, repairs and decoration of communal areas.



Contact us



Visit our website

thanet.gov.uk/services/myhome



Email myhome@thanet.gov.uk



Speak to us from Monday to Friday, 8.45am to 5.00pm
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