

## 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	
2023 - 2024	387
2022 - 2023	324
2021 - 2022	217

This shows a 19.44% increase in referrals since March 2022 and correlates directly to the effect of the increased cost of living.

Financial Wellbeing Team - Performance indicators	
Residents contacted within seven days of a referral	95%
Cases resulting in reduced rent arrears	92%

The referral to the FWT has a huge success rate. 92% of referrals resulted in a reduction in rent arrears. Thus avoiding eviction. This includes £22,783.96 received directly into rent accounts.

We were able to access financial support from the Household Support Fund (HSF) again this year. The Department for Work and Pensions funds the HSF. £190k was given to 743 households, needing help with living costs. For example, when switching to UC. A tenant might need support with food and fuel while they wait for the first payment to come in.

The HSF was also used to help residents with rent arrears that they were already paying towards, but didn't qualify for DHP. Every resident that received help from HSF also had income maximisation advice from FWT. We hope that this will prevent them needing help from HSF or other funding in the future.

Household Support Fund (HSF)		
Item	Number of Households	Cost
Carpets	81	£73,000
Food and Fuel	641	£55,000
Rent arrears	21	£18,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>743</b>	<b>£190,000</b>

## Tenancy services

### Customer Transactions team

The Customer Transactions Team is the first point of contact for our residents, by phone and by email. They are trained to answer most calls at first point of contact but sometimes they will need to refer a call to a specialist officer.

Call statistics	
Number of phone calls received during 2023/24	8892
Call answer rate	92.9%
Average wait time (minutes)	1:19

The Customer Transactions Team also coordinates and monitors all complaint responses, including requests for information from the Housing Ombudsman when a complaint is escalated.

The Housing Ombudsman asks that we produce an Annual Complaints and Performance and Service Improvement Report. This can be found at the following link:

[thanet.gov.uk/info-pages/policies-and-reports](https://thanet.gov.uk/info-pages/policies-and-reports)

### Tenancy fraud

We work with Ashford Borough Council. They investigate cases of suspected tenancy fraud on our behalf. In 2023/24 our Housing Officers referred ten cases of suspected tenancy fraud. Where there had been a suspicion of sub-letting or non-occupation.

Tenancy fraud in numbers	
Number of tenancy fraud cases reported to TDC (excluding Right to Buy)	14
Number of Cases referred to Ashford Borough Council for fraud investigation	10
Number of cases where allegations of fraud were not substantiated	9
Number of cases where allegations of fraud were substantiated and action taken	1
Number of cases carried over into 2024/25	4

In September 2023, we introduced an online form for anonymous reporting of tenancy fraud.

[thanet.gov.uk/info-pages/reporttenancyfraud](https://thanet.gov.uk/info-pages/reporttenancyfraud)

### **Investigating tenancy fraud**

*It was reported that a tenant was sub-letting their property while owning another property. The case was referred to Ashford Borough Council who investigated. They confirmed that the tenant did own another property. The tenant was interviewed in the council offices under caution. They admitted the fraud and terminated their tenancy with immediate effect.*

*The property was quickly re-let to a family in need of housing.*

## Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)

Number of ASB reports received	
ASB cases opened in 2023/24	148
Anti-social behaviour cases opened per 1,000 homes.	48.7
Anti-social behaviour cases that involve hate incidents opened per 1,000 homes.	2.3

There are two roles in our Housing team that deal with unacceptable behaviour. Each role has distinct responsibilities:

### ASB Caseworkers

Our ASB Caseworkers investigate all complaints of ASB. And take action to deal with anti-social behaviour by:

- Enforcement or intervention. Using the tools and powers as set out in the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- Using low level actions. Such as a Community Protection Warning (CPW), Community Protection Notice (CPN), injunctions. Where there is more serious ASB, they use Mandatory Possession Orders, Closure orders and Criminal Behaviour Orders.

They often work with external agencies, including the police. As well as provide support to both victims and perpetrators.

A lot of their work includes safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. So they attend district safeguarding meetings for Kent, and multi-agency meetings.

## Housing Officers

Housing Officers deal with breaches of tenancy. Including untidy gardens, infestations, low level nuisance, damage to property and hoarding. They are also responsible for a whole range of estate and tenancy management.

**ASB Case Study** - A tenant and their visitors to one of our blocks were behaving in an intimidating and aggressive manner in communal areas. A lot of visitors were coming and going at all times of the day. There were allegations of drug dealing.

The ASB Case Worker spoke to the residents affected over a number of months to gather evidence. This included incident logs, CCTV images and witness statements.

The evidence was put into an application for a closure order to the Magistrates Court. The ASB Caseworker gave evidence at the hearing and the court was satisfied that it was appropriate to grant a closure order for property. The property was closed to the tenant and their guests for 3 months. We then applied to the courts for possession of the property, obtained a possession order and the tenant was evicted.

This outcome would not have been possible without continual engagement from the residents. It took many months to gather enough evidence to ensure the court judgement went in favour of closure and eviction of this tenant.

## Right to buy

During 2023/2024 we received 16 applications under Right to Buy legislation.

The property that we sold this year was valued at £60,000. As the purchaser was entitled to the maximum 70% discount, it was sold for £18,000.

Right to buy in numbers 2023/24	
Number of applications received	16
Number of applications withdrawn	6
Number of applications rolled into next financial year	5
Number of properties sold	1
Number of applications denied	4
Total income from properties sold	£18,000
Total value of discount applied	£42,000



# Responsible neighbourhood management

## Estates

We have a dedicated team of Housing Response Officers (HROs) on our estates. They maintain health and safety standards and keep estates looking nice. They have a range of responsibilities that include:

- Carry out block inspections.
- Remove dumped rubbish from communal areas.
- Monitor cleaning standards.
- Respond to reports of hazardous waste in internal communal areas (including needles, urine, faeces and vomit).
- Some litter picking.
- Provide contractor access to communal areas.
- Clean the foyers and lift carts of tower blocks.
- Rotate communal bins if there are bin chutes.
- Some weeding and general grounds maintenance.



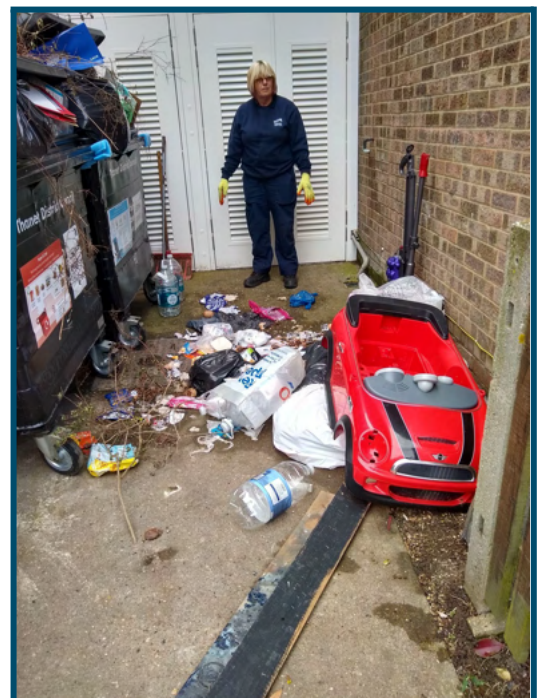
## Challenges

The HROs have many challenges on a daily basis and often receive abuse from residents. This can be due to a perception they are not keeping their estate to the standard they would like.

Much of the challenges are due to the behaviour of our residents or people visiting the estate.

These include:

- Pets urine and faeces in internal communal areas and gardens.
- Putting non recyclable items into recycling bins so they cannot be collected
- Leaving items/rubbish in communal areas.
- Blocking bin stores with bulky waste so bins cannot be emptied.
- Inconsiderate parking blocking bin stores
- Fly tipping on estates





## Working together

Our HROs are also well known in the community. They are friendly and helpful and will be greeted by a lot of residents.

An example of where HROs and residents have worked together with a fantastic outcome is at Northmore Walk in Ramsgate. Due to complaints about weeds, two of our HROs went to clear them. Local residents worked with them for the afternoon, making a fabulous difference to the area.



## Recycling

As part of our Estate Strategy, we want to improve the refuse areas and introduce recycling. One of our most successful projects this year was to resolve the long standing issue of contaminated recycling bins on one of our estates. Overflowing bins were situated beneath resident's windows and would smell. Understandably this upset residents.

To resolve this, we extended hardstanding for all the bins in one corner of the estate. With the addition of a rail to stop bins being blown over.

Residents can now be confident that their waste will be recycled, rather than contaminated and then dumped. Bins are not overflowing as they are being emptied regularly. And there has been a reduction in fly tipping.

