

Talkback

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Spring 2025

Time for a refresh?

Interior design on a budget

We heard on the grapevine that our resident Jeylan is a budding interior designer, having turned her property into a beautiful and stylish home. We took a tour to see for ourselves and to ask how she does it without spending a fortune.

On entering, we were greeted with the glorious smell of home cooking, as Jeylan had a lamb soup on the hob. As well as being very creative with decorating, she has superb cooking skills and is a great host.

Jeylan's home has light clean walls against dark flooring, which creates a great contrast and ensures that the space doesn't feel too enclosed. Most of the furniture is pre-owned. Jeylan can see the potential in everything and takes the time to

sand, re-paint and varnish items to either bring them back to life or give them a new look.

"You can definitely make your home look good on a budget. I love finding items in the charity shops. Many of the finishing touches are bought there. I also use baskets as a way of gaining extra storage and they look nice."

We saw plenty of wicker and fabric baskets during our tour. They are a great way of storing towels and bedding if you have limited space. Mirrors were also a feature in some the rooms, providing the illusion of extra space and light.

The furniture has been sanded back and freshly varnished or painted. Jeylan has gone for contrasting dark brown and white finishes which complement the rest of the décor. The fireplace was originally pine but some fine sanding and paint has transformed it. Jeylan also makes her own wreaths and flower arrangements.

Anyone can turn their property into a show home, you just need the time and creativity to create something beautiful.

Jeylan's top tips:



- Source items from charity shops, boot sales, online auctions, friends or relatives.
- Invest in a low-cost sanding tool if you can. It makes sanding much easier than by hand. You can find them for £20-30.
- Ask friends or relatives if they have any leftover varnishes or paint they don't need.
- Find new handles for drawers or doors, as these can really change the look.
- Mirrors, baskets and flowers really add a nice touch to each room.
- Get some inexpensive storage boxes for inside your drawers to help organise your items and maximise the space you have.
- Roll your clothes to save even more space.



allpay



Extra hours, extra support

allpay will soon launch a new webchat service on its site at allpay.net – making rent payment queries even simpler.

When the service goes live, you will be able to use it to contact their team of experts directly – without having to phone.

New
webchat
service

Longer
contact
hours

allpay have also extended their Contact Centre hours.

Ready to help

You can now get customer support until 8pm on weekdays and 12 noon on Saturdays by calling: 0330 041 6497. You can also use this number 24/7 for their automated service.

Keep your rent account clear

As set out in your tenancy agreement, you are required to pay in advance – so that your account is always clear or in credit.

This means that:

- if you pay weekly, you must pay each Monday for the week ahead, and
- if you pay monthly, you must pay for the month ahead, not the month behind.

If you are in rent arrears, you are breaking your tenancy conditions – and this can impact some of the services you get from us.

Getting a move

If you're in arrears, we can turn down your request to go onto our transfer list or make a mutual exchange – even if you usually end up paying the correct amount by the end of each week or month.

We will not look at your application until you have cleared your arrears and kept your account clear for six



months. This includes residents who want to downsize.

Tenancy changes

You will need to clear any rent arrears before we agree to make changes to an existing tenancy, such as removing a joint tenant or assigning the tenancy to a potential successor. This is because a new tenant cannot be held responsible for any existing debt.

Home upgrades

If you're in arrears, we will not install a new kitchen or bathroom in your home as part of our current works programme. You will have to wait until the following year's programme for us to reconsider your home.

If you receive benefits

If you get benefits towards your housing costs, you still have to pay any extra amounts. We recommend paying an extra £3.85 per week to build up a minimum of a week's credit in advance as a safety net.

Payment agreements

If you wish to discuss a repayment plan to get your account out of arrears, please contact your Rent Income Officer, Jan or Natalie.

Jan (janlewis@kenistonha.co.uk) covers Darrick Wood, Southwood Close and Whites Meadow.

Natalie (nataliemarchant@kenistonha.co.uk) covers all our other schemes.

Staff awards extended

In the winter edition, we asked you to put forward staff for our customer service awards. As we only got two nominations, we have extended the deadline.

To take part, nominate one Keniston staff member you met with in person or on the phone over the past 12 months.

We judge on merit, so we need to know your reasons for putting them forward. It might be because they gave you great customer service on one

occasion, or if they consistently gave you excellent service.

We need to hear from you by 31 May 2025. Our Resident Panel and Management Team will then make a shortlist. We will present a certificate and prize voucher to the winner and announce the results in Talkback.

Send nominations to Lynn Russ. Call her on 01689 889700 or WhatsApp 07713 388010, email lynnruss@kenistonha.co.uk, or write to her at our office.

Our key amnesty runs from 1-30 April



With housing in such short supply, we're making sure our homes are being let to and lived in by the right people.

We're cracking down on fraud

If you're committing tenancy fraud, now is the time to hand back the keys, so that someone else can move in.

We recently took back a London property that the tenant had abandoned. We had to investigate to prove the tenant had not been using the property for some time, before serving a 'Notice to quit'. We regained the property in January.

You can hand back your keys to any staff member, with no questions asked. If you do this during the amnesty, we guarantee that you will not be prosecuted for tenancy fraud. All you need to do to finalise the process is complete a short form signing over the tenancy.

After 30 April, our investigations will resume as normal and you could be prosecuted.

Email your queries to fraud@kenistonha.co.uk or call our Customer Services team on 01689 889 700. If you suspect tenancy fraud you can report it to us confidentially.

Tenancy fraud

You are committing tenancy fraud if you:

- lied to get your home
- are subletting your home
- lied about having tenancy succession rights
- 'sold on' your keys, or
- left your home without telling us.

Tenancy fraud is a criminal offence under the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2023. You could be fined, imprisoned or both. You could also be made to repay any profit you made.



Complaints update

Between April 2024 and February 2025, we received 14 stage one complaints.

Of the complaints we received:

- 10 were about our housing management service – nine were not upheld and one was partially upheld
- three were about our maintenance service – two were not upheld and one was partially upheld
- one was made about a staff member and was upheld.

We also received four stage two complaints. Three were about housing management and were not upheld. One on a maintenance issue was partially upheld.

We responded to all the complaints within the timescales set by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

How to complain

You can complain by email, phone or letter, meet us face to face, use our social media or the contact form on our website. Or you can call the office to ask for a form – on paper or by email. If, at any stage, you aren't happy with our responses, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service in the following ways:

- Online at: www.housingombudsman.org.uk
- By email: info@housingombudsman.org.uk
- By phoning: 0300 111 3000
- In writing to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

Check the dedicated complaints section on our website, which includes our complaints performance and service improvement report for 2023-24, along with the Board's response. You can also contact us for more details about Keniston's complaints process.

DHPs change in Bromley

Bromley Council is changing its system for making DHP (Discretionary Housing Payment) awards.

In future, their DHP fund will only provide short-term awards and they will no longer help people affected by the bedroom tax – who get less benefit because they have more bedrooms than they need.

We are not aware of significant changes in the other council areas we operate in but we would encourage residents to check with their local council if they have concerns.

Bedroom tax: other options

We strongly recommend that you look at all your options if you are under-occupying.

- **Consider downsizing.** Contact

us for advice and/or register at www.houseexchange.org.uk for social housing exchanges across the country.

- **Join the housing register.** Apply to join the Council's Housing Register by completing the form on their website.
- **Review your entitlement.** If you are over-occupying and receiving hardship payments due to a disability, make sure you keep the Housing Benefit Department, or your Universal Credit account, updated about changes in your household.
- **Seek additional advice.** There are many free, financial advice services online and locally.

Bromley residents with questions can contact the Council's Welfare Reform Manager by emailing: Colin.Smith2@bromley.gov.uk, or by calling 020 8461 7820.



Christmas competition winners

Thank you to the residents who entered our Christmas competition from last issue.

We have awarded £25 vouchers to each of our two winners.



Your landlord does not cover your home contents and personal belongings

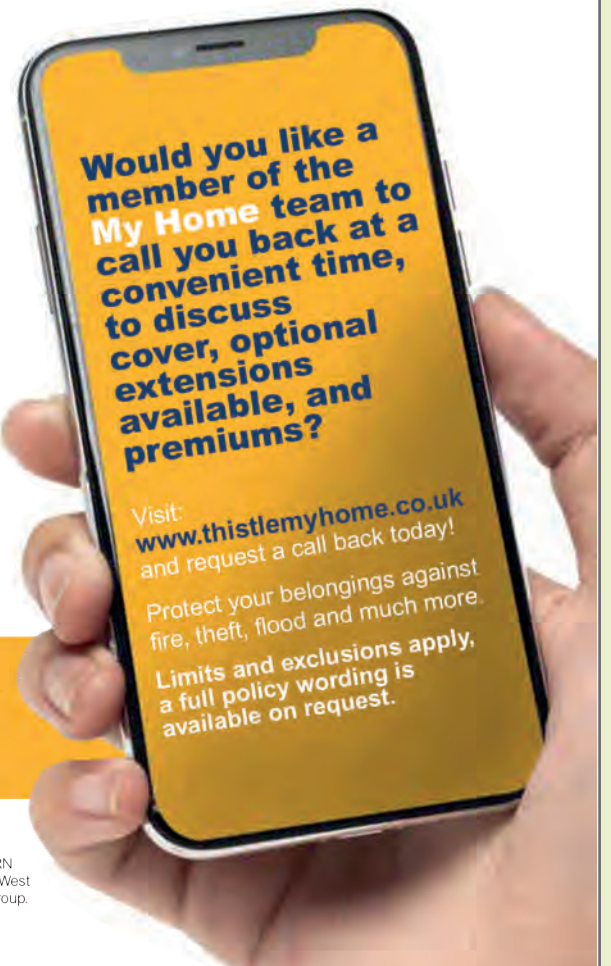
So it's a good idea to consider what a home contents insurance policy would cover you for.

When you move into your property, you should think about **protecting your personal possessions** and **home contents**.

These include your furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, and electrical items. And don't forget your jewellery, pictures and ornaments.

For more information, contact:

My Home on **0345 450 7288**
email: myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk



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Planning appeal granted

In December 2024, after a long wait, we finally learnt that our Darrick Wood planning appeal had been granted.

The new decision means that we now have planning permission to build 26 new homes on the site near the top of Isabella Drive, which is part of our Darrick Wood estate in Farnborough.

As a smaller housing association, we cannot make a big impact on the housing crisis on our own – but we can make a difference together with other social landlords. Our new scheme will change the lives of 26 more households – who will benefit from having an affordable, safe, secure and permanent home.

A resident who recently moved on sent us the email below, which demonstrates perfectly the role of social housing providers.

We know that not all existing residents will welcome the news that the development is going ahead – especially those living closest to the site. We invite all interested residents to work constructively in partnership with us to get the best outcomes for everybody.

Our previous newsletters about the development can be found here: <https://www.kenistonha.co.uk/about-us/publications/future-of-darrick-wood/>

Contact us

You are welcome to contact us by emailing futureofdarrickwood@kenistonha.co.uk, or by leaving a comment on: 01689 664514.

Dear Keniston

"I will be forever grateful to all staff at Keniston. From around 1990 onwards, Keniston housed me during a very vulnerable time when I had no support and was homeless. I was adopted and had been supporting myself since I was 17 years old and had reached a point of emotional exhaustion. Keniston was a life saver and more than that, it gave me a place to call home finally and somewhere safe to start building a more secure life for myself at an affordable rent.

"During this time in the two flats that I had with Keniston, I had two sons and raised them as a single mother. I was able to re-educate myself and eventually gained a degree in fashion and went on to become a secondary school

teacher teaching design and technology. My sons thrived and we were treated kindly and with respect and care always by all of the staff at Keniston.

"I am now retired, married and able to move on with my sons. We are delighted to free up the property so that another family can have the chances I had, provided by Keniston. I send love and care and forever thanks!"



Major works

By the end of the 2024-25 financial year, our stock reinvestment programme will have achieved:

- heating upgrades to 79 homes at Darrick Wood and Foxley Hall
- kitchen refurbishments at 44 homes at Darrick Wood
- window replacements at 7 Darrick Wood homes
- bathroom and kitchen refurbishments at White Meadows, as well as heating upgrades to 22 of the homes, and
- an upgraded pump for Burnhill House.

We will also have completed redecorations at: Nethewode Court, Southwood Close, Tarling Close and Sunningdale Court.

Better homes, better neighbourhoods fund

Tarling Close

- We have revarnished a memorial bench dedicated to a former resident.
- We purchased a trolley to help residents get their shopping to their flats.
- We replaced broken and rotting benches with a more durable composite bench.



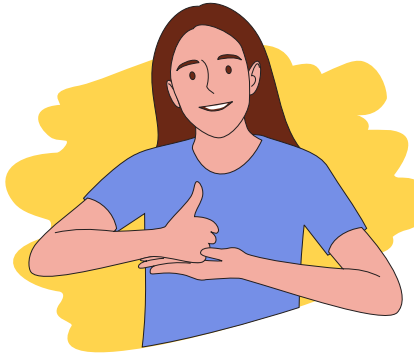
Foxley Hall

Our gardener, Phil, installed a new planter to stop the bin men driving over a grassed area, after we received resident complaints.



Can we communicate better?

Do you need to get information from us in a different format? If so, let us know.



We can communicate with you in various ways including using:

- text messages
- email
- large print
- coloured paper
- audio files
- Language Line translation, or
- a British Sign Language (BSL) signer.

Please contact our Customer Services team to update them with your needs.



Let's stop the vandalism

We are getting reports of criminal damage at some of our housing schemes.

Cars belonging to residents and staff have had their tyres slashed and their doors have been scratched and dented. We are also finding graffiti, which is costly to remove.

If you see someone causing damage, please call the Police on 101 and let your Housing Officer know if you know who is doing this. If anyone is convicted of vandalism, we may consider tenancy action against them.

Memorials for Jonathan

£360.61 raised



When our Darrick Wood caretaker, Jonathan Mavunga, sadly passed away in 2024, we set

up a GoFundMe page where staff and residents could donate to a memorial.

We would like to express our deepest thanks to everyone who sent in their donations, which have totalled £360.61 so far. It is not too late to donate at the Gofundme link. Go to: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/jonathan-mavunga>

As Jonathan worked at Tarling Close for a long time, we have planted a rose bush there. We plan to order benches for Darrick Wood. Each memorial will have a plaque to remember Jonathan.

Once we have the plaques ready, we will organise an official unveiling and you will be welcome to come along. We will send invitations by email and text message.

Change of name for Keniston Gossip

Our online Facebook group for residents has changed its name to **Keniston Community**. All residents are welcome to join and chat to each other.

You can use the group to:

- share useful local information and events
- advertise your mutual exchange request (don't forget to sign up to House Exchange as well)
- talk about housing topics

- find out about other housing schemes, or
- to ask us a question.

It's an opportunity for you to get to know Keniston residents from different schemes. We just ask you to be kind and courteous.

You can find the group at: www.facebook.com/groups/kenistoncommunity



Keniston Housing Association

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