Talkback

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Summer 2025

Perryfield House

Knit and Natter Group

Perryfield residents recently raffled a beautiful handmade quilt to benefit the Hearing Dogs for Deaf People charity.

At our sheltered scheme in Crawley, residents host a regular craft group which is open to anyone wishing to join. They call themselves the Knit and Natter Group. Each year, they raise money for a chosen charity by selling or raffling their handmade goods and they often attend local craft fairs to raise funds.

The charity of choice this year is Hearing Dogs for Deaf People. One of the members has a daughter who is losing her hearing, so they all agreed this would be a good choice this time.

Several months ago, the group decided to start a quilting project with 12 members working on it. They recently held a raffle to win the quilt and raised £136 for the charity. They made two smaller quilts to give as runner-up prizes.

Joining the group

If you live at Perryfield House and are interested in the craft group, please speak with residents Bridget or Carol. If you are not a Perryfield House resident, you can contact our office and we can pass on your details.

There is no cost to join, but you are asked to pay £1.50 per week for refreshments provided.

The group are keen to convey that it is more than just a craft group. It is a social group, a support group and a lifeline for those who may be lonely. Bridget says: "It really is very therapeutic."

Well done to all those crafters for making such a beautiful quilt.

Working without fear

We have seen a concerning rise in residents being increasingly aggressive towards our staff and contractors, whether in person, over the phone, or in writing. **This behaviour is completely unacceptable.**

Our staff and contractors have the right to a workplace free from fear of aggression, harassment, and violence.

We are here to help and always aim to treat residents with respect and professionalism. In return, we expect the same courtesy. Being abused is not "just part of the job", and we will not tolerate it. If someone behaves in an aggressive, threatening, or abusive way, we will take action.

- We may restrict how you can contact us, under our 'Managing unreasonable behaviour procedure'.
- We could take enforcement action under your tenancy agreement in cases of serious or repeated incidents.

We're committed to maintaining a safe and respectful environment for staff, contractors, and you.

Complaints update

Between March and June in 2025, we received a total of three stage 1 complaints.

- One complaint, which we did not uphold, was about our housing management service.
- Two complaints (one partially upheld and the other not upheld) were about our maintenance service.

We didn't receive any stage 2 complaints.

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/residents/make-a-complaint
- By email at: info@housingombudsman.org.uk
- By phoning: 0300 111 3000
- By writing to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

Check out the special complaints section on our website, which includes our complaints performance and service improvement report for 2024-25, along with the Board's response.

You are welcome to contact us for more details about Keniston's complaints process.

Please report tenancy fraud

Housing providers are under increasing pressure to provide social housing. We must make sure our homes go to, and are occupied by, people who are entitled to them.

The National Fraud Authority estimates that tenancy fraud costs £900m each year. It is a criminal offence and offenders can be prosecuted under the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013.

If convicted, an offender could be fined, imprisoned or both. The courts can also make the tenant pay back any profit made.

To report tenancy fraud to us confidentially:

- Phone: 01689889700
- Email: fraud@kenistonha.co.uk
- Go to: https://www.kenistonha.co.uk/you-and-your-home/advice-and-information/tenancy-fraud/

A new kitchen and bathroom for Danielle

Danielle was delighted when she heard that her Whites Meadow home would soon get a new kitchen and bathroom. Now that the works are complete, we asked her how things went.

"The whole process from start to finish was excellent and 10 out of 10 for the contractors, and in particular for Keniston staff Jane and Paul. They went above and beyond."

Danielle was able to choose the colour of her kitchen worktops and the tiles she wanted. She says Jane has a good eye for combining colours, so really helped her with the decisions. Danielle chose dove grey units without handles.

Danielle says that all the units are a big improvement on the previous ones, especially the corner unit. It had been hard to reach, but the new unit is designed so you can get to everything.

"Due to my mobility, it was difficult bending and reaching. Jane advised me to go for the built-in cooker, situated at my level, so I don't need to bend down anymore. It's amazing."

And she is just as pleased with the new bathroom, complete with a low-rise walk-in shower, a padded seat, grab rails and a high-rise toilet. These were all recommended as part of an Occupational Health assessment of Danielle's mobility needs.

Danielle says: *"Big thanks to Jane and Paul for everything,"*

Beware of dangerous 'energy-saving' plugs

Taken from an article on the Which? website at: https://www.which.co.uk/news/article/illegal-and-potentially-dangerous-energy-saving-plugs-still-widely-available-aRj6E8g6e7AX

Dangerous 'energy-saving' plugs are still widely available through online marketplaces at a time when new laws are being discussed to help prevent the sale of unsafe products, a Which? investigation has found.

The plug-in devices falsely claim to save you money on your electricity bill by 'stabilising' voltage and 'balancing' electric current to 'optimise' the performance of household appliances. In truth, they do nothing of the sort. Yet despite

previous investigations by Which?, and a series of government recalls for similar looking devices, they're still widely available.

Which? tested eight devices from AliExpress, Amazon, eBay, Shein, Temu and TikTok Shop and found no evidence that they work. Worse, all of the plugs tested failed to meet electrical equipment safety regulations and it is illegal to sell them in the UK. Official recalls for four similar devices in 2022 cited a "serious risk of fire and electric shock".

The platforms removed the listings after being contacted by Which?, but despite repeatedly claiming customer safety is a top priority, many identical looking devices were still available weeks later.

A new home in sheltered housing

A move to sheltered housing with Keniston is making a world of difference for one of our newest residents.

Sheltered housing is the name given to housing schemes for older people, where there is support available in an emergency.

Sheltered housing lets you live independently and all the flats are fully self-contained.

We have sheltered housing with a Scheme Manager at:

- Darrick Wood in Farnborough, Kent
- Sunningdale Court and Perryfield House in Crawley, West Sussex
- Tarling Close in Sidcup, Kent

We also have housing for older people without a Scheme Manager at: Nethewode Court in Belvedere, Kent; and at Whites Meadow in Bickley, Kent.

Direct waiting list

We recently offered a home to someone on our direct waiting list who had been privately renting an unsuitable and expensive home. Not only did the rent keep rising to an ever-more unaffordable level, but the stairs were a problem for someone with health issues.

Our new sheltered resident is overjoyed with their new studio flat and can't believe how big it is.

"It all happened so quickly. I had thought it would be a very long wait. I put my name down when I turned 55 and within a year I was being visited by Keniston staff to discuss a new home and conduct affordability checks. When I got to see the flat, I fell in love with it and am very happy

here. The whole experience was amazing and five stars. I was kept well informed throughout. Happy days!"

Existing residents

If you are already a Keniston resident, you can apply for a move to sheltered housing via our internal transfer list.

You would need to meet the criteria set out in our Selection & Allocation Policy. Go to: https://www.kenistonha.co.uk/about-us/publications/kenistons-policies – or ask us for a copy.

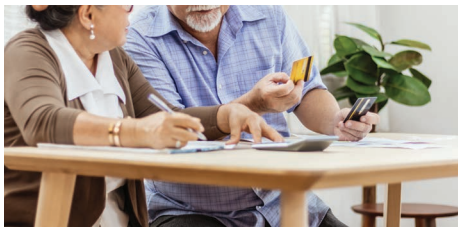
Rent Income Officers are here to help

Eviction is a last resort and our Rent Income Officers try to reach out to residents before things get that far.

Sadly, residents don't always work with us. We recently evicted a resident for rent arrears of over £7,000. This sounds a lot, but court action can be a slow process and if the rent remains unpaid each month, the total owed can grow very quickly.

Our Rent Income Officers can help in ways you may not be aware of.

- They signpost residents to debt advice services, to help them manage their finances.



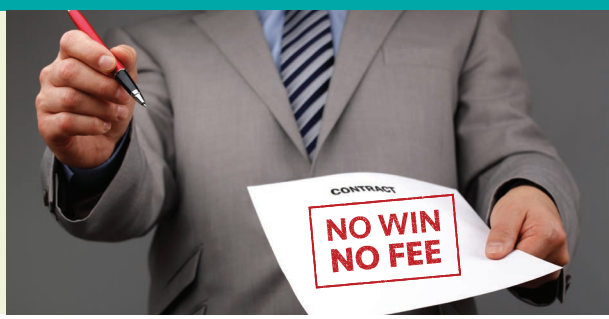
- They refer residents to food banks for short-term support.
- They signpost people to benefit advice services. Many Keniston residents have found they are eligible for Pension Credit. In some cases, people's incomes have increased substantially.
- They can apply for grants for essential items, for example white goods, on behalf of residents.
- They support residents to apply for discretionary housing payments (DHPs), if they are affected by the bedroom tax. DHPs are temporary, but give people time to find a smaller home or find ways to maximise their incomes.

Please always contact your Rent Income Officer at the first sign of struggling with your financial situation.

- **Jan Lewis** covers Darrick Wood, Southwood Close and Whites Meadow
- **Natalie Marchant** covers all other schemes

Disrepair claims – be careful

The ‘no win, no fee’ companies are still trying to make money out of disrepair cases. At first they were calling residents, but now we hear that they are turning up at the door asking about repairs, damp and mould.



Darrick Wood development

We recently held a drop-in session to consult further with residents on the landscaping designs for Darrick Wood. Many thanks to all who came along and to anyone who completed the survey.

All your comments are being looked at by the Management Team and our architects. We will send out an update soon in a ‘Future of Darrick Wood’ newsletter.

Summer noise

The summer holidays are here, and we want everyone to enjoy their time outside. However, we ask you and your children to think of your neighbours and keep noise to a minimum.

Remember that we do not allow BBQs on balconies or in shared areas. And you must not use leather footballs – they are noisier than plastic ones and more likely to cause damage.

Most recently, a group of men in smart suits, who looked official, knocked at homes in a communal block and were allowed inside to inspect. We do not know who they were or where they were from.

Please be careful. Don’t let people you don’t know into your home or even a communal block. If they do have an identification badge, check it carefully to see who they are. As we employ contractors, it is easy for these companies to act like they have been sent out by Keniston and even to mention us by name.

Their aim is to persuade you to bring a legal case against your landlord for disrepair. By doing so, they earn a large portion of any successful claim. Their objective is to make money. These companies often use unscrupulous methods to persuade or even pressure you to sign up. They may not always give you all the facts so that you can make an informed decision.

If you sign up with them:

- Your repair problem won’t get fixed more quickly – you need to talk directly to us about it.
- If we got things wrong, you are unlikely to end up with more compensation – and paying your solicitor’s expenses can take thousands of pounds out of our repairs budget, reducing the amount we can spend on everyone’s future repairs.
- You may be liable to pay fees if you decide to abandon the claim after legal work has begun.
- You may also be liable to pay fees if your claim proves to be fraudulent, false or if you refuse to cooperate fully as part of your claim.
- If your ‘no win, no fee’ claim is unsuccessful, the defendant (Keniston in this case) has the right to claim their court and solicitor’s fees from you.
- Always check your written agreement with the ‘no win, no fee’ company thoroughly. Each provider will have their own specific terms. It is not always as simple as ‘no win, no fee’.

We genuinely want to help fix any repair problems in your home. So, please do the following.

- Report your problem directly to us first – we can’t take calls from a solicitor about repairs you have never told us about.
- If you aren’t happy with our response, use our complaints system to tell us why.
- If you wish, you can also discuss your complaint with the Housing Ombudsman (www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk). They can award compensation if they judge we have failed.

By doing this, you will allow us to continue to invest as much of our budget as possible into good quality repairs for all our homes and protect yourself from the risk of potential fees.

If you would like a ‘no cold calling’ sign to display, we have a free download we can email to you.

Contacting us? What to expect

When you contact anyone at Keniston, we will answer phone calls promptly and give our name. We aim to return calls and texts as soon as possible but within set timescales.

These are:

- Emergencies – 24 hours
- Urgent – two working days
- Non-urgent – five working days

Many of our calls fall into the non-urgent category and staff will have five working days to respond. Please be patient and do not ring again unless your issue becomes urgent, or you have not heard back within the specified time.

If we cannot respond within these times, we will keep you updated.

Examples of an emergency would be cases of domestic abuse or hate crime. Please ask, if you aren't sure which category your call falls into.

For email and letters our aim is to respond within 10 working days. If your enquiry is urgent, you must call us instead.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Publications

On our website we have a publication section where you can find lots of useful information. This includes the estate services satisfaction surveys and the estate action plans for where you live, as well as our annual reports and strategic plans.

Go to https://www.kenistonha.co.uk/about-us/publications/

If you ever need a paper copy of a publication, please ask our Customer Services Team.

Staffing changes

Starters and leavers

Since our last staff update, we have said a fond farewell to Andrew Shiatis, Finance and Resources Director. We wish him all the best for the future.

We welcome Ruby Judt who has taken over this role.

We have also welcomed Leslie Back as Merrow Street Caretaker, Barry Bailey as Darrick Wood Caretaker, Gerry Daley as Management Accountant and Trina Keeping, who is now the Sheltered Scheme Manager for Sunningdale Court and Perryfield House.

Finally, Romy Neau-Gaterell has changed her role from Sheltered Scheme Manager to Housing Officer. With an additional Housing Officer, the areas the officers cover have changed.

Our new Housing Officer patches

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Patch 1</th><th>Patch 2</th><th>Patch 3</th></tr>
<tr><td>Andrea Spittle</td><td>Susan Rimmer</td><td>Kelsey Thorogood</td><td>Romy Neau-Gaterell</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">housingofficer1@kenistonha.co.uk</td><td>housingofficer2@kenistonha.co.uk</td><td>housingofficer3@kenistonha.co.uk</td></tr>
<tr><td>Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday morning</td><td>Wednesday afternoon, Thursday, Friday</td><td>Monday - Thursday</td><td>Tuesday - Friday</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Bromley – Darrick Wood
  </td><td>Bexley – Pound Green, Tarling Close, Dromore, Nethewode Court</td><td>Crawley – Sunningdale Court, Perryfield House</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Bromley – Southwood Close, Whites Meadow</td><td>Croydon – Foxley Hall</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Southwark – Merrow, Hayles Street, Elliotts Row</td><td>Islington – Hornsey Road, Tollington Park, Silver Court, Byers Court, Burnhill House</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td>Lambeth – Lyham Road</td></tr>
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