



CHS GROUP 
housing, care, and community services in Cambridgeshire



August 2025 Newsletter

Welcome to the August edition of the CHS tenant newsletter.

In each of these newsletters, we provide updates to you, our tenants and residents, so that you are up to date with news and changes from within the CHS community. This month, we introduce our new Chief Executive, share how you can check if your boiler is working as we prepare to head into the winter months, give an update one year on from our revised tenant engagement strategy, outline details of the latest Mark Walker Contractor Forum, share some positive news regarding one of our young residents, share with you some information about the upcoming Emergency Alert Test and let you know how you could get an interview outfit cleaned for free at Timpson.

Read on to find out more...

Welcoming our New Chief Executive

We are delighted to share that Chris Harris has been appointed as our new Chief Executive and will take up the role on **3rd November**.

Chris is a highly respected figure in the UK social housing sector. Since June 2021, he has served as Chief Executive of Arhag Housing Association, an organisation that closely aligns with Cambridge Housing Society in both values and purpose. With over 30 years of

experience in the housing sector, Chris has held senior leadership roles at Genesis Housing Group, Catalyst Housing Group, London & Quadrant, and spent over six years as Executive Director of Customer Services at Southern Housing Group.

Chris brings with him a deep commitment to social values and a strong track record of leadership. He is passionate about our mission to help people flourish by

providing security and creating opportunities through high-quality, locally focused housing and support services.

We are confident that Chris has the vision, expertise, and experience to lead us through the next exciting chapter in our journey, including our centenary year in 2027 and beyond.

With Chris at the helm, we look forward to building on the significant progress and strong foundations achieved under Stephen Hills' outstanding leadership. Everyone at CHS is indebted to Stephen for his seven years of dedication and service to CHS, above all as Chief Executive over the last two and a half years. Here, and in his previous role at South Cambridgeshire District Council, Stephen has worked tirelessly and with great success to look after and expand the desperately needed stock of affordable housing in our sub-region. We hope you will join us in wishing Stephen a very happy retirement.



Chris Harris, Incoming CHS Chief Executive

Do you know how to check if your boiler is working?

With Autumn just around the corner, now is a good time to check that your boiler is working properly. This is necessary for a number of reasons:

- It helps us to identify any issues before they escalate during the colder months when you most rely on your boiler for heating your home
- Our heating engineers from Sureserve are typically less busy during summer, so if you spot any issues now, scheduling a repair may be quicker and more flexible
- Ignoring your boiler in the summer can lead to issues such as corroding pipes or malfunctioning parts, which may cause significant issues when you need your heating

What to do:

- **Check for power** – if there is no power, get in touch
- **Check the water pressure** – your water pressure should be between 1 and 1.5. To increase pressure, slowly open the filling loops, which is usually two valves, located at the bottom of the boiler
- **Test your hot water** – run your hot water tap for a few minutes and see if your water heats up. While your water is running, listen out for unusual noises, such as banging, vibrating, gurgling or whistling
- **Run your heating system** - by running your heating system for 5-10 minutes every couple of weeks, you can prevent components, such as pumps and valves, from seizing due to inactivity

If you are experiencing issues with your hot water or heating, watch some of these guidance videos that are available on our website.

Our customer engagement annual report

To ensure that we are giving all our tenants a voice, we agreed a new strategy for customer engagement in February 2024 with our Tenant Committee who were heavily involved in developing our new approach. The strategy is based on a shared vision of working with customers to ensure we can improve our services and remove any barriers to effective communication and engagement.

As part of this new strategy, we identified a number of ways in which customers can be involved with CHS in ways that suit them:

- **Stay informed** – read our monthly newsletter, annual report, and information available on our website and the myCHS portal
- **Provide feedback** – complete our surveys, submit complaints where necessary and keep in day to day contact with us
- **Contribute to discussions** – take part in focus groups
- **Lead on the Tenant Voice** – take part in our various committees, such as the Tenant Committee, Tenants' Scrutinising Team and Customer Complaints Panel to ensure that tenants' views are represented



Now one year on, we are pleased to share what has been delivered over the past 12 months:

- We expanded our Customer Engagement team to provide more support for our involved tenants and to deliver our new strategy
- We changed the format of Tenant Committee meetings to be a mix of online and in-person as well as morning and evening meetings to allow more tenants to get involved
- We increased contact with tenants to encourage them to be involved with the Tenant Committee and Panels
- We consulted tenants and our Tenant Committee about policy changes that will affect them directly
- We recruited 429 members to our online panel who are willing to give us feedback on particular topics
- We revised our core groups with contractors to involve a wider range of tenants who will all be invited to online Contractor Forum events
- We worked with tenants to develop the design of de-carbonisation work in their homes during our net zero project
- We started a project to improve satisfaction levels among shared owners
- We have been working to improve our website in how it promotes the range of ways to be engaged with CHS



This year in numbers

Event	Number	Notes
All Committee and Panel meetings	17	Now mixed format and timing, in-person daytime and online evening
Online Focus Group / Forum	3	Topics – the CHS annual report, Communities Strategy, building safety
Induction and training sessions for involved tenants	6	Committee skills, scrutiny
Tenants attending national conferences	7	Tpas national conference, scrutiny conference
Hosted Tpas regional event	1	Over 40 attendees from 16 landlords from across East Anglia attended the event to share ideas and good practice
Site visits	3	Contractor head offices, de-carbonisation project in Cambridge
Committee / Panel Chairs meetings	6	Including oversight of the Engagement Action Plan
Tenants involved in scoring contract tenders	4	This was for the responsive repairs contract, our biggest contract
Number of monthly online tenant newsletters	12	On average 55% of those we emailed opened this e-newsletter
Number of replies to surveys	4,441	16 different surveys
Number of tenants personally contacted about volunteering	119	40 by phone, 79 by email
New volunteers taking part in committees, panels and focus groups	17	
Number of Estate Inspectors	22	Inspectors provide monthly feedback on the quality of estate services
Sheltered scheme tenant meetings	12	
Housing with Care tenant meetings	28	



Are you coming to the Mark Walker Contractor Forum?

Next month, we will be hosting our second Contractor Forum, with our grounds maintenance contractor, Mark Walker. This forum will take place online at 7pm on 25th September 2025.

The discussion will include hedge cutting, schedule change, palette of plants, trees, winter plans and the difference between grounds maintenance and gardening. There will be an opportunity for tenants to ask questions and share your experiences. Send us your questions in advance if possible!

Join by clicking the link [here](#).

You don't need a Zoom account, just click on the above link on your device.

Let us know if you're coming by getting in touch with our Customer Engagement Team on lpap@chsgroup.org.uk or louise.higgins@chsgroup.org.uk or contact us on [07540 122624](tel:07540122624).



Positive news for one of our young residents

At CHS, it's our mission to help people flourish by providing security and creating opportunities. As part of this, we offer high-quality homes across the county, along with support services that people need to thrive.

A recent example of this is with our Wheatsheaf Close service in Ely, which supports young people aged 16 to 25 years old who would otherwise be homeless. Two years ago, Sam* moved into Wheatsheaf Close and was facing significant challenges in his life. However, with guidance, encouragement and support from our team, Sam worked hard to turn his life around. As a result, we're thrilled to share that Sam has now moved into his own flat!

To help him settle into his new home, Sam received a grant from our Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) to purchase a washing machine. He also received another grant from our partner, Thomas Parsons' Charity, to buy a cooker.

Reflecting on his journey, Sam said:

"Without the support from Wheatsheaf Close, I would not have had the opportunity to make changes and have a second chance at life. It is a supportive, non-judgemental environment that always prioritises the best interests of its residents."

Everyone at CHS is so incredibly proud of Sam and all he has achieved in the two years he has been with us, and we wish him all the very best for the future!

* name has been changed.



Are you eligible to have an interview outfit cleaned for free at Timpson?

If you are unemployed and are currently looking for work, there is help available to you on your local high street.

Timpson, who typically provide locksmithing services, photo processing and shoe, watch and phone repairs, will clean an outfit for you for free if you are unemployed and going for an interview.

This service is available at 500 of their locations nationwide, with some branches also offering free shoe repairs. You do not need a voucher to receive this support, you just need proof that you have a job interview scheduled. Just pop in store and have a chat with one of their colleagues.





National Emergency Alert Test

On Sunday 7th September, an Emergency Test Alert will take place at around 3pm. This test will function like a real life Emergency Alert and works on all 4G and 5G phone networks.

Your mobile phone or tablet does not need to be connected to mobile data or wifi to get alerts. During the alert, devices will vibrate and make a loud siren sound for roughly ten seconds and a test message will also appear on screens.

The message will say *"This is a test of Emergency Alerts, a UK government service that will warn you if there's a life-threatening emergency nearby. You do not need to take any action. In a real emergency, follow the instructions in the alert to keep yourself and others safe. Find simple and effective advice on how to prepare for emergencies at gov.uk/prepare."*

These alerts contain life-saving information and devices should be kept switched on for your own safety. However there may be scenarios where it is sensible to opt out of alerts, including victims of domestic abuse with a concealed phone.

If you wish to opt out full instructions are available at <https://www.gov.uk/alerts/opting-out> (if you continue to get alerts after opting out, you will need to contact your device manufacturer for help).

If you are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted, during the test audio and vibration attention signals will let you know you have received an alert, if accessibility notifications have been enabled on your phone or tablet.

For more help and guidance or to check your rent account and raise repairs, don't forget to log into [myCHS](#).

We'd also love to hear your thoughts on our newsletter. To get in touch, email: info@chsgroup.org.uk.

