



December 2025 Newsletter

Welcome to our December tenant newsletter, our final newsletter in 2025!

This month, we shine a light on the valuable work our tenant volunteers have done this year and share information about how you, our tenants and residents, can have your say on how we deliver our services, we share an insight into what being a net zero organisation means for our community members, news of how you can access support for family activities during school holidays, and an update on our Christmas and New Year opening hours.

For the last time this year, read on to find out more...



Images on this page are of donations recieved through this year's Shoebox Appeal

Our opening hours and reporting repairs over Christmas



With the festive season upon us, we would like to thank all our tenants and residents for your continued support this year and wish you a safe, peaceful, and enjoyable festive season.

To help you prepare, we have included information on our updated opening hours and how you can report repairs during the Christmas period.

You can now attach photos in your [online enquiry form](#) when reporting a repair so that our contactors can better diagnose the issue.

See below for our opening hours over Christmas and New Year:

Monday 22 December: Open 9am - 5pm

Tuesday 23 December: Open 9am – 5pm

Christmas Eve (24 December): Open 9am – 3pm

Christmas Day (25 December): CLOSED

Boxing Day (26 December): CLOSED

Monday 29 December: CLOSED

Tuesday 30 December: CLOSED

New Year's Eve (31 December): CLOSED

New Year's Day (1 January): CLOSED

From Friday 2 January: Normal hours resumed

You will still be able to report an emergency repair over the Christmas period by calling [0300 111 3555](tel:03001113555) where you will be connected to our out of hours service.

Emergency repairs are issues that present an immediate risk to health, safety, or your home. These include:

- Total loss of electricity
- Severe leaks or flooding
- No heating or hot water in freezing temperatures
- Fire or security issues, such as broken entry doors
- Unsafe plumbing, electrics, or structural damage

To better protect your plumbing from potential issues, remember to never pour hot fat or oil in your sink as it will harden and cause blockages. Let it cool and dispose of it in the appropriate bin.

PLEASE NOTE: If you need an emergency repair during the festive period, we will make the issue safe first before carrying out the full repair, which is likely to be when normal working hours resume during the New Year.

Non-emergency repairs

You can still email us with a query using our [online enquiry form](#). **PLEASE NOTE:** Responses to all queries made over Christmas and New Year will be sent after 2 January. Any non-emergency repairs reported during the holiday closure will be logged and scheduled once the office reopens.



Could you be eligible for support with activities during school holidays?

The Cambridgeshire Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme offers fully funded activity places during Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays. Funded by the Department for Education until 2029, the HAF Programme is subject to availability, and only applies to primary and secondary school children.

Across the three major school holidays, the HAF Programme funds:

- **Easter: 30 March to 10 April 2026 - 16 funded hours**
- **Summer: 21 July to 28 August 2026 - 64 funded hours**
- **Christmas: 21 to 31 December 2026 - 16 funded hours**

This year's Christmas HAF Programme runs from 22 December 2025 to 2 January 2026. Every child who is allocated funding can book a maximum of 16 hours across all holiday schemes, and are all provided with a healthy lunch and snacks.

For children to qualify for the HAF Programme, the following criteria must be met:

- **Families receiving income-related free school meals (FSM)**
- **Families where FSM eligible and non-eligible children live in the same household**
- **Families just managing financially (subject to referral from a professional)**
- **Recently arrived refugee families**

Eligibility codes for this Christmas were issued on 10 November 2025. The HAF team will assist with code and eligibility queries from this date.

To learn more about the available holiday activities and family experiences in your area, visit the [council's website](#).





Having your say at CHS

When you're a tenant at CHS, you can be as engaged as you want to be. This can involve providing us with your feedback, having the occasional conversation with us, or becoming involved in the community through one of our tenant groups. Through these tenant groups – our Tenant Scrutiny Team, Tenant Committee and Complaints Panel – tenants can have their say and raise issues faced by our communities and work with us on a number of different projects.

As an organisation, we are fortunate to have dedicated individuals who give up their time to make our services and communities better for all tenants and residents.

This year, our tenant groups have seen a number of changes. Trish Laver, who you may know as the Chair of our Scrutiny Team, has become the Chair of the Tenant Committee as its long-serving Chair, Jane Bird, stepped down. Following this move, Louise Downham stepped up to Chair our Scrutiny Team, while Ruth Driver takes on the role as Chair of our Complaints Panel, helping us to form a new group that monitors the quality of our complaints handling.

We would like to give our sincere thanks to our tenant volunteer, Jane Bird, who stood down as our Tenant Committee Chair earlier this year. Jane made a significant contribution to improving our services for all tenants, and her work will support tenants for years to come.

Following these changes to our tenant groups, we asked our newly appointed Chairs to reflect on the past 12 months:

Tenant Scrutiny Team

"The Tenant Scrutiny Team were asked to look at how tenants pay their rent and service charges. First, we made a video which explained the different ways tenants can pay their charges. We also designed a survey that went to tenants with questions on how and why they pay in the way they do. We sent a link to the video with the survey. We then spoke to some of the tenants on the phone and asked the same questions.

CHS' Finance team told us how they processed the payments and the costs involved. We asked them to look into other providers for processing payments.

The team put together all the responses from the tenant survey, input from Housing Officers of both general needs and Housing with Care (HwC) and Finance and we found that if we continue with our current provider there was a new plan available where CHS could save approximately £27,000 a year in fees. Housing Officers were informed that if new tenants were offered direct debit as a way to pay upfront rent payments, a further payment processing fee could be reduced. The report from Scrutiny was submitted to the Board and accepted. As a result of this scrutiny project and its recommendations, CHS has saved a significant amount of money annually. For more information read the full report [here](#)."

Trish Laver, Former Chair of Scrutiny Team

Tenant Committee

"There have been many changes this year. Fortem are now looking after repairs for CHS tenants. They took over from Foster Property Maintenance in April 2025.

Jane Bird resigned as Chair of Tenant Committee following several years as an outstanding Chair. She is sadly missed, and it will be impossible to replace her knowledge of both CHS and tenants. I stepped in as Acting Chair for the April and October meetings. Jacquie Taylor (tenant board member) thankfully stepped in as Guest Chair for the July meeting. I was voted in as Chair in the October meeting.

Several policies were approved including Complaints, Domestic Abuse, Awaabs Law, Damp and Mould and we reviewed the Customer Engagement annual report.

We welcomed several Board members to our quarterly committee meetings including, Jacquie Taylor, James Prestwich, Gareth Hillier, Nick Brown and Andrew Ryde. We also welcomed many staff members and some contractors as guests.

Stephen Hills, Chief Executive, left CHS at the end of this year. We thanked him for his excellent guidance and openness over the past two and a half years.

All tenants are welcome to come to a tenant meeting. If you would like to speak to any engaged tenants, please contact the Engagement Team."

Trish Laver, Chair of Tenant Committee

Complaints Panel

"Owing to the reduction of panel members and changes to the work of the panel, it was decided that recruitment was necessary so we could create a proper group to start again.

There are now nine members and, we are arranging meetings to suit members and have started working on examining complaints that CHS has dealt with. Our role is to check that complaints have been dealt with according to the Ombudsman's code of practice. CHS is determined to improve their practice regarding complaints and it is our job to ensure this happens. We always welcome new volunteers, so if you are interested, do get in touch, CHS can put you in touch with me."

Ruth Driver, Chair of Complaints Panel



(From left to right) Louise Downham, Trish Laver and Ruth Driver

Tenant group meetings - 2026

Date	Time	Event	Location
15th January	10.30am	Scrutiny Panel	CHS Head office in Histon
21st January	6.30pm	Tenant Committee - Click here to view the agenda	Meadows Community Centre
5th February	10.30am	Scrutiny Panel	CHS Head office in Histon
13th February	10.30am	Complaints Panel	CHS Head office in Histon
19th March	10.30am	Scrutiny Panel	CHS Head office in Histon
9th April	12.30pm	Complaints Panel	CHS Head office in Histon
29th April	TBC	Tenant Committee	TBC

All tenant group meetings are carried out both in-person and online via Zoom. If you would like to attend any of these meetings, please get in touch with our Customer Engagement Team, Laura Papanikolaou, on [07540 122624](tel:07540122624), lpap@chsgroup.org.uk; or Louise Higgins, louise.higgins@chsgroup.org.uk, [01223 713540](tel:01223713540).



Contractor Forums and residents' meetings

In 2025, we held three Contractor Forums with Sureserve (heating and hot water), Mark Walker Grounds Maintenance, and Fortem (repairs). During these forums, our contractors explained what they are doing to maintain or improve their performance, while tenants were given the chance to talk about their experience of receiving the service and ask about future plans.

Relations between tenant volunteers and Fortem were further strengthened, by a visit to Fortem's head office in Hitchin and working together with their social value team on a Community clean-up day at River Lane in Cambridge. Alongside this, our Building Safety Forums in February and September were a useful opportunity to gather ideas about how best to engage tenants to report repairs and hazards in communal areas in buildings. A pilot project was tested at Samuel Jones Crescent with new posters being trialled to encourage tenants to report repairs or hazards.



Meeting tenants and residents

Over the summer, our Tenant Committee and Scrutiny Panel Chairs, Trish Laver and Louise Downham, met tenants at our Sheltered Retirement Housing Scheme at Barnabas Court in Milton for its 25 year celebrations. Trish also attended a tenants' meeting at Moorlands Court, one of our Housing with Care schemes in Melbourn and in October, our Scrutiny Team held a coffee morning in Cambourne inviting tenants to provide their feedback on the current Tenant Handbook.



Volunteer training

Through training on chairing meetings, complaints handling, data protection and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), our volunteers are given the opportunity to strengthen their skills and knowledge.

In May, two tenant volunteers attended the Tpas Eastern Region meeting in Norwich, which focused on the regulator's new Consumer Standard and the campaign to Stop Social Housing Stigma. Later, in July, three of our tenant volunteers attended the Tpas National Conference and said that they found it interesting and inspiring, and they planned to visit some of the housing associations they made contact with there.

We would be delighted to welcome you to one of our friendly tenant groups. If you are interested in joining, come and chat to one of our tenant group's Chairs, who can explain how it works. We can cover travel costs or arrange a taxi for you to attend any meeting and if you have any accessibility needs, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you.

To find out more please get in touch with our Customer Engagement Team, Laura Papanikolaou, on [07540 122624](tel:07540122624), lpap@chsgroup.org.uk; or Louise Higgins, louise.higgins@chsgroup.org.uk, [01223 713540](tel:01223713540).



Regulator of Social Housing

Regulator of Social Housing - judgement

Last year, we were thrilled to announce that the Regulator of Social Housing graded our governance and financial viability to G1 and V1 – the highest possible grading.

Following an annual stability check, we're pleased to announce that these ratings have been upheld, and our governance and financial viability remain as G1 and V1.

The confirmation of these top-tier ratings demonstrates our continued financial strength and operational excellence, providing assurance to our tenants and residents who rely on our care, support and community investment services. The G1 and V1 ratings mean CHS continues to meet all regulatory viability requirements and maintains the financial capacity to navigate a wide range of adverse scenarios while continuing to deliver quality housing and services.

To learn more about the Regulator's assessment, visit our [website](#).



Supporting our communities this Christmas

Tenants at our sheltered housing scheme Ellis House in Cambridge enjoyed festive bingo and tea on 10 December. This was thanks to a CHS neighbourhood grant, which awarded the tenants £50 to host a community event.

Would you like to host a community event? Get in touch with our Customer Engagement team to enquire about a grant: Laura Papanikolaou, on [07540 122624](tel:07540122624), lpap@chsgroup.org.uk; or Louise Higgins, louise.higgins@chsgroup.org.uk, [01223 713540](tel:01223713540).





What does reaching net zero carbon mean for our tenants?

We are pleased to share that our net zero carbon project is due to be completed in early 2026.

This project was made possible after CHS was awarded funds from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 2.2. This funding is allocated to social housing landlords to upgrade properties to an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C or higher, with the goal of improving energy efficiency and helping the UK reach its net zero targets.

What is net zero carbon?

Net zero simply means that we're no longer adding extra carbon into the atmosphere. We've reduced as much as we can, and we will continue to support trusted environmental projects that remove carbon elsewhere.

What we have done

Over the past year, we have been working behind the scenes to:

- Improve energy usage in our homes and buildings
- Upgrade equipment and systems to make them more efficient
- Work with suppliers which share our commitment to the environment

To improve our homes, we have installed:

- External wall insulation to 42 homes
- Loft insulation to 103 homes
- Double glazed windows to 48 homes
- Solar PV to 24 homes

This work not only allows us to reduce our environmental footprint, but it helps to keep our homes and services running efficiently, while reducing utility bills for tenants and creating a healthier, more sustainable community.

What happens next?

While reaching net zero is a big achievement, it's not the end goal. We will continue to look for ways to save energy, check our progress each year and make improvements as technology and good practice evolves. To help us keep your homes safe, comfortable and energy efficient, our staff or contractors may need to visit from time to time. These visits are to ensure that all the work carried out is delivered to the correct standard.

If you receive an appointment date for us to visit, please make every effort to keep it. Missed appointments can delay important work, and extend the time needed to complete repairs or upgrades for everyone in our community. If the appointment time you receive isn't suitable, please do let us know as we are always happy to rearrange.

We'd like to thank our tenants, partners, and staff for your co-operation with our net zero project this year. Your support helps us build communities that are not only affordable and welcoming, but also part of a greener future.



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.**

