



# May 2026 Newsletter

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Welcome to the next edition of our tenant newsletter.

For those of you who read this newsletter regularly, you will know that each month we provide you with information and updates from within our communities. This month, we share highlights from our April Tenant Committee meeting, our new flooring policy, as well as advice on how you can access additional financial support in light of the rising cost of living; and for those tenants who have planned home improvements taking place this year we share information on what to expect.

Additionally, we share a powerful case study from one of our Russell Street residents who has successfully become Sureserve's first female electrical engineering apprentice.

Finally, we wanted to dedicate this edition to Jane Bird, a longstanding Cambridge Housing Society (CHS) tenant and former Tenant Committee member and Chair, who has sadly passed away. A story honouring Jane can be found at the start of the newsletter.

Read on to find out more...



## Remembering and honouring Jane Bird

We're very sorry to share the news that Jane Bird, a CHS tenant and member of the Tenant Committee has passed away. Jane was nothing short of a legend in terms of tenant involvement and her legacy at CHS is monumental. Jane was a CHS tenant for 32 years and was dedicated to championing tenants' voices so that everyone living within our communities felt seen, heard, and valued.

Jane's stewardship at CHS was extensive and it is almost impossible to list everything she achieved in her time with us. Jane started out as an Estate Inspector and her passion for empowering tenants led her to join the Tenant Committee, which she chaired twice, alongside the Scrutiny Panel and Complaints Panel.

Jane was instrumental in ensuring these Panels and the Tenant Committee went from strength to strength and supported tenants' interests in both internal meetings as well as representing them in meetings with Board members. She had a keen eye on policy reviews, ensuring tenants' interests were at the core, and gave valuable feedback to help improve any proposed changes. Over many years Jane encouraged many new members to join the Tenant Committee and made an enormous contribution to the way our tenant engagement has developed, with a huge commitment of her own time.

It wasn't just within CHS that Jane had a huge impact. She developed the regional Social Housing Network, bringing together tenants from a number of social landlords across our region. Nationally, she was also a member of the Housing Ombudsman's Resident Panel as well as the government's National Social Housing Resident Panel which helps to inform national government policy.

Quite apart from her achievements, Jane was always friendly, approachable, positive, knowledgeable and candid. She will be sorely missed by CHS staff, tenants and Board members. Here are just a few of the comments we have received about her:

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**"Jane was a real mover and shaker in the resident involvement area. She was a larger-than-life personality who said it how it is and will be greatly missed."**

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**"Jane was a solid anchor, dependable, clear sighted, and unwavering. She clearly achieved a lot together with her teams."**

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**"Jane was so pivotal in my early life here. I'm sure there will be many, many people who'd like to pay tribute to her for who she was and everything she did."**



## Did you miss April's Tenant Committee Meeting? Here are the highlights

At CHS, your voice matters. This is why there are multiple ways for our tenants to share their thoughts and ideas on how we can continue to improve our services. We would like to thank everyone who attended our April Tenant Committee meeting, and we were delighted to welcome some new members.

Feedback from tenants was that they found this meeting both engaging and productive; particularly the discussion about our updated compensation policy. This updated policy aims to streamline the complaints process to ensure tenants know what compensation they are entitled to when things go wrong.

The Tenant Committee discussed our new Customer Service Standard, which sets out the standards we aim to provide. We will share more details on the updated compensation policy and Customer Service Standard in our June edition.

There were also updates from both the Tenant Scrutiny Team and Complaints Panel about their latest projects and insights from our Housing with Care schemes.

A workshop was also held to discuss reasonable adjustments where members discussed practical changes to help make our services more

accessible. Reasonable adjustments can include adaptations to your home to make it easier for you to move around, such as installing grab rails or ramps. These also include alternative ways of communicating with you such as large print letters, translations into other languages, text to speech software on our website, and using phone calls or text messages rather than email to share updates or contact you. To read the full minutes from the meeting [click here](#).

Our next Tenant Committee meeting will be held on **Wednesday 8 July** at Hive Leisure Centre in Ely. There will be an afternoon workshop followed by an evening meeting with refreshments provided. We will confirm the timings of the meeting in our June edition of the newsletter.

Please speak to us if you would like to attend the next meeting, either online or in person and we will always try to accommodate any transport, or adjustment needs you might have.

### **Contact:**

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## Accessing additional financial support: what you need to know

For those living in our communities, we understand the uncertainty in the Middle East may be having an impact on our households due to rising costs of living.

There are a number of ways that you can receive additional support, and we are always here to help, should you need it.

Firstly, if you do not currently receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, but are struggling with household finances, you may be eligible to claim support; this includes any pensioners who are only in receipt of the state pension.

Last year an estimated £24.1 billion worth of support was not claimed by the very people it is intended to help and so while you may not want to apply for this support or may feel you don't qualify for the help that is available, we strongly encourage you to do so.

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**Average missed support is over £3,400 per year per household.**

### Key unclaimed benefits and support (2025-26 estimates)

- **Universal Credit: £11.1 billion unclaimed**
- **Council Tax Support: £3.3 billion unclaimed**
- **Carer's Allowance: £2.4 billion unclaimed**
- **Pension Credit: £1.6 billion unclaimed**
- **Child Benefit: £1.5 billion unclaimed**
- **Housing Benefits (Pensioners): £1.1 billion unclaimed**

**If you would like more information on why benefits go unclaimed, visit the [website](#).**

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Many of us at some point need a little bit of extra help financially during difficult times, but don't think we qualify for additional forms of support. The [Entitled To](#) website has an easy to use [calculator](#) that will work out what support might be available to you. You just need to provide details about those living in your household and your household income, so, when you have a quiet moment why not grab a cup of tea and put in your details, you may be very surprised by what you are entitled to.

## Information for people receiving legacy benefits

Most people receiving legacy benefits have now moved to Universal Credit or have received a Managed Migration Notice from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). However, if you are still receiving means-tested legacy benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Housing Benefit, it is very important to seek advice before making a claim for Universal Credit.

**If you make a voluntary claim for Universal Credit, your existing legacy benefits may stop, and you could lose any entitlement to Transitional Protection that would normally be available through the managed migration process.**

If you are unsure about your situation or have not yet received information from the DWP, please seek independent welfare benefits advice before making any changes to your claim.

### Help to claim Universal Credit

If you're claiming Universal Credit for the first time, the Citizens Advice "Help to Claim" service is free and confidential. They can help you to:

- Check if you're entitled to Universal Credit
- Identify the paperwork and documents needed for your application
- Complete your application online
- Prepare for your first Jobcentre appointment
- Check your first payment is correct

### Citizens Advice Help to Claim

Call: [0800 144 8444](tel:08001448444)

Monday to Friday, 8.00 am to 6.00 pm

You can also talk to a trained advisor online through the Citizens Advice "Help to Claim" [webchat service](#).

### Additional support you may be eligible for:

**Council Tax reduction** – this is available for households on a low income, and you need to make an application to your local district council.

**Healthy Start** – if you are 10 weeks or more pregnant or have a child under four and receive qualifying benefits you can apply for Healthy Start.

**Prescriptions / dental / glasses** – check your eligibility for free help from the NHS with health costs.

**Free school meals** – apply for free school meals.

**Foodbanks can help with short term needs** – find your local foodbank [here](#).

**Baby banks provide a vital lifeline for families** in all sorts of challenging circumstances and give families access to pre-loved equipment, products, clothes and toys. Find your local baby bank [here](#).

**The Cambridgeshire Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme** offers [fully funded activity places](#) during Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays.

#### Useful websites:



[Money Helper](#)



[Citizens Advice](#)



[National Energy Action](#)

## Take action on debt

If you have bills or borrowing that you cannot afford, you can receive free, independent debt advice from a regulated service. A debt advisor can help you get some breathing space to manage your situation better and work out the best way forward.

### Debt advice services

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#### Citizens Advice Rural Cambs

(Fenland, Huntingdon. Limited advice for East Cambs)

<https://www.citizensadvicerruralcambs.org.uk/>

(Online debt chat service)

[0808 278 7807](tel:08082787807)

#### Cambridge & District Citizens Advice

(Cambridge & South Cambs)

<https://www.cambridgrecab.org.uk/>

[0808 278 7808](tel:08082787808)

#### Cambridge Money Advice Centre (debt advice)

<https://www.cambridgemoneyadvicecentre.org.uk/>

[office.mac.cambridge@gmail.com](mailto:office.mac.cambridge@gmail.com)

[01223 727455](tel:01223727455)

#### Huntingdon Money Advice Centre (debt advice)

<https://www.huntsmoneyadvice.co.uk/>

[help@huntsmoneyadvice.co.uk](mailto:help@huntsmoneyadvice.co.uk)

[01480 418866](tel:01480418866)

#### Christians Against Poverty

[www.capuk.org](http://www.capuk.org)

[0800 328 0006](tel:08003280006)

#### StepChange Debt Charity

<https://www.stepchange.org/>

[0800 138 1111](tel:08001381111)

#### National Debt Line

<https://www.nationaldebtline.org/>

(Webchat and online debt advice tool)

[0808 808 4000](tel:08088084000)

For those with business debts:

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**Business Debtline:** Run by the Money Advice Trust, Business Debtline can help those who are self-employed or have small businesses. Call [0800 197 6026](tel:08001976026) or visit their website.

#### Avoid loan sharks

Loan sharks often target people who feel they have nowhere else to turn. If you are offered money with very little paperwork but high charges and pressure to repay, please avoid borrowing and contact the free Illegal Money Lending Team helpline instead on [0300 555 2222](tel:03005552222).



# Your quick guide to planned home improvements

Maintaining our homes to a high standard is our top priority to ensure the comfort and safety for our tenants and the long-term quality of our homes. As part of our 2026-2027 planned programme, several homes will undergo planned works such as kitchen or bathroom upgrades, as well as window and door replacements. If we have contacted you to let you know that your home is scheduled for improvements, here's what you can expect throughout the process.

## Initial survey and assessment

Before any work begins, your home may require a validation survey. Validation surveys are undertaken to confirm the planned programme of works. As part of efficiencies, we have started incorporating a stock condition survey while on site when carrying out the validation survey.

The purpose of the validation survey is to assess whether key areas, such as your kitchen or bathroom, meet the required standards or qualify for replacement.

Our contractor Fortem or a nominated sub-contractor such as a window installer will contact you to arrange a convenient time to visit your home.

### During this visit, they will:

- Inspect the current condition of your kitchen, bathroom, windows or doors
- Confirm whether a replacement is needed
- Discuss the proposed work with you
- Show you samples and options for finishes, fittings, and styles

This is a good opportunity to ask any questions and raise any concerns you may have.

### Scheduling the work

If your home is approved for improvements, the work will be scheduled within the programme period (between May 2026 and March 2027). You will be contacted in advance with dates for the installation.

For door or window replacements, a separate measured survey will take place first. Once measurements are confirmed, an appointment will be arranged for the installation of works.

### During the installation

The actual work in your home is typically completed within:

- 7 to 10 working days for kitchen or bathroom replacements
- An additional up to 2 days if extra work such as re-plastering is required
- Windows and door replacements typically take 6-8 weeks from survey to installation, this can vary for fire doors. Appointment to be agreed with tenants.



**While every effort is made to minimise disruption, you should expect:**

- Some noise, dust, and general disturbance during working hours (08:00 – 17:00, weekdays only unless permission is given to work at weekends). Contractors will carry out a general clean daily. Carpet protection is used throughout your home, and dust sheets are used to protect furniture.
- Access to your home will be required on a daily basis.
- Temporary inconvenience in the affected areas – you may want to move some personal or fragile items.
- On occasions, the work may go beyond 12 days, but our contractor will keep you informed of any expected delays.
- Pets should be kept away from working areas.

**However, contractors will ensure that:**

- You have access to a working sink and cooker at the end of each day.
- If you only have 1 toilet in the property, they will discuss the time it will be unavailable with you; it should not be out of action for more than a couple of hours.
- The site is left safe and tidy after daily work is completed.

**Communication and support**

- Throughout the process, the contractor will keep you informed about progress and next steps. They will also be available to address any issues or concerns as they arise.
- Clear communication is key, so don't hesitate to ask questions at any stage, from the initial survey through to completion.
- Fortem will share with you with details of the Customer Liaison Officer who should be contacted if you have any concerns.

**The benefits of planned improvements**

These upgrades are part of a wider commitment to ensure we maintain our homes to a good standard.

Improvements such as modern kitchens, updated bathrooms, and new doors or windows can:

- Enhance comfort and usability
- Improve energy efficiency and could reduce your bills
- Improve the appearance of your home



## You said, we listened - introducing our new flooring policy

Following recent feedback from new tenants, we have developed a new flooring policy. Our aim with the new policy is to make moving in more affordable, to help make your accommodation feel like home straightaway, and of course reduce waste.

The impact of this cannot be underestimated. Through a survey and recent focus group, new tenants told us that the costs of setting up home is very expensive and if flooring is in good condition, it should be left for the incoming tenant. The survey also found that:

- Almost two thirds of new tenants said they had either no flooring, or flooring in the bathroom and kitchen only when they first moved in.
- Two fifths of new tenants said that a lack of flooring stopped them from inviting neighbours or friends over.
- And about one in five said they still had rooms with bare floors 18 months after moving in.

We would like to thank all who responded to our survey and joined the focus group. You have directly helped to improve the moving in process for new tenants, making it cheaper, less wasteful, and hopefully more sociable.



## Celebrating Molly's journey to becoming an Electrical Engineer

At CHS, seeing those living in our communities flourish is a powerful reminder of why we do what we do. We are delighted to share some positive news from one of the residents from our Russell Street Service, Molly\*, who is excelling in her role at Sureserve as its first female apprentice in Electrical Engineering.

### Molly's journey

Our Russel Street Service (RSS) in Cambridge provides accommodation and support to residents with learning difficulties and autism who are at risk of homelessness, and have support needs. When Molly first arrived at RSS, she faced some difficult challenges but was met by our kind staff who took the time to listen and reassure her she was not alone.

Molly dreamed of being an electrical engineer but faced a number of barriers preventing her from achieving her dreams. As Molly's confidence grew, the RSS team encouraged her to apply for college. She was accepted onto an electronics course, a major step forward in her achieving her goal of becoming an engineer. During this period, she also began driving lessons, recognising how vital this would be for her future career.

Once she had finished college, Molly found it difficult to find an apprenticeship. Around this time, CHS launched its Social Impact Partnerships Initiative, and as a part of our contracts with Fortem and Sureserve, our tenants and residents are guaranteed an interview if they are applying for a job vacancy and meet the qualifications. Sureserve had an apprenticeship vacancy, and Molly had the qualifications required to apply.

The RSS team supported her in preparing her application and liaised with Sureserve to arrange reasonable adjustments for her autism, going above and beyond to support her. A few

days after her job interview, Molly received the news that she had both been accepted onto the apprenticeship course and passed her driving test (on the first attempt)! It was a life changing moment and one she'll never forget.

Today, Molly is thriving. She is proud to be Sureserve's first female apprentice in Electrical Engineering. She feels confident in herself and has formed new friendships - something she once thought was impossible. Molly is an active and valued member of her RSS community, contributing ideas for resident activities and offering support to others going through difficult times.

Molly is now preparing for the next step in her journey, moving into her own home within the next 6-12 months. With the life skills, confidence, and independence she's developed, there's no doubt she will continue to flourish.

Molly's story is a powerful reminder of what can happen when safe housing, patient support, and partnership working come together. Through perseverance and the compassion of those around her, Molly transformed her life into one of confidence, independence, and hope.

*\*name has been changed to protect privacy*



**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](mailto:info@chsgroup.org.uk).**