

Avoid nasty surprises

Check your heating

Summer isn't quite over, so few of us will be in any rush to switch on the central heating – especially with the recent rise in energy costs. But when the weather does turn cold, imagine how dreadful it would be to find the heating doesn't work. It is worth switching it on now, just for 10 minutes or so, to check that everything is okay. That way, if you discover a fault, you can report it and have it sorted before you actually need the heating on.

Keep your boiler safe

There is a good reason why landlords are legally obliged to carry out safety checks on tenants' gas central heating boilers at least once every 12 months. If they don't, it could put you, your family and your neighbours at risk. It is therefore very important that you allow our contractor in to carry out this vital safety check. If for any reason you cannot keep the appointment, let us know straight away and we can arrange an alternative time.

We take the safety of our tenants seriously. If you prevent us carrying out this check, we will take legal action – and you will have to pay our costs.

Please note: if you are a homeowner or shared owner, your boiler is your responsibility. We would strongly advise that you have it checked every year.

Emergency repairs

If CDS is responsible for your repairs and you report the need for an emergency repair, we will send out a contractor to fix the problem or at least make it safe within a maximum of 24 hours. However, we can only do this if you can be there to let them in. We are unable to guarantee what time they arrive, so if you cannot be available throughout the 24-hour period, we will have to treat your problem as "urgent". In this case, we promise a five-day response, which will allow the contractor to arrange a visit at a time to suit you.

Please note, this applies if you report your repairs directly to CDS Co-operatives. On some estates repairs are organised by local estate maintenance officers and different rules may apply.

areas, crèches and environmental improvements.

If you have a great idea for your co-op but need money to carry it out, the Big Lottery Fund might give you a grant. Depending on the project, this could be as much as £500,000.

For more information see the website www.biglotteryfund.org.uk or call the BIG advice line on 08454 102 030. You can also discuss the idea with your co-op support officer.

See, you don't have to spend anything on the national lottery to be a winner.

Win the lottery... without buying a ticket



Too good to be true? Well, it's not. For every £1 spent on the National Lottery, 28p goes back into community projects through the Big Lottery Fund. As a result, the Big Lottery Fund has a whopping £630 million a year to give to organisations such as housing co-operatives, for projects such community buildings, sports groups, play

Warwick on the ball



Warwick Co-op's ball park before the works

Warwick Co-op in Canterbury had an area for children's ball games, but it had fallen into a very poor state of repair and was frankly a bit of an eyesore. What the estate really needed, the co-op decided, was an attractive hard-wearing purpose-built park that could be used for all sorts of ball games.

Through the hard work of their chair and the committee, they got a grant of £16,000 from the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and used some of their reserves to fund the remaining £36,550.

Now the co-op's children have a great new ball park, with built-in football goals and basketball hoops.



Shane Floyd, the Co-op's Chair, with some of the children who now use the area

If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address or telephone number shown on this document.

إذا رغبت في الحصول على المزيد من المعلومات بلغة الأم، يرجى مراسلتنا على العنوان المذكور في هذه النشرة.

यदि आपनार निज भाषा में अधिक जानकारी चाहते हैं तो कृपया इस दस्तावेज में लिखे हुए पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

आपने आपनी पोतानी भाषा में विशेष माहिती जोरती होय तो आ दस्तावेज में जबाबेदार सारनामे अपनारो संपर्क करशोऊ.

यदि आप अपनी भाषा में अधिक जानकारी चाहते हैं तो कृपया इस दस्तावेज में लिखे हुए पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

日本語での詳しい情報は記載住所までご連絡下さい。

한국어로 된 정보가 더 필요하시겠우 이 문서에 있는 주소로 연락해 주십시오.

آرٹھی این زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہر تہ سہرائی دسے آل ایسٹ اے ٹیکے ہونے پتہ تہ رابطہ کرو۔

मेवत दुवन्तु अपटी वेसी हिच उर नाववती सचीसे वै, उा क्षिण वरवे टिम समउवेस वे सिडे पवे वे सडे तल संपवव वटे।

உங்கள் மொழியில் மேற்கொண்ட தகவல்களைப் பெறவிருப்பீனால் எம்முடன் இட்பத்திரத்தில் தொடர்புருக்கும் விவரத்தைத் தயவுசெய்து தொடர்பு கொள்ளவும்.

آرکاپ اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو دیئے گئے پتہ پر ہم سے رابطہ قائم کریں۔

Information is also available in large print, braille and tape.

CDS Co-operatives,
3 Marshalsea Road
London SE1 1EP
Help Desk 0845 450 8545

Complaints

It is very important that if you are dissatisfied in any way with our services you must let us know. Your complaints show us where we are falling down and what we have to do to rectify it. So we do need them!

You can make a complaint by writing to us at 3 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP

telephoning on 0845 450 8545 or emailing enquiries@cds.coop.

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Struck by lightning

Six families from Hazel Housing Co-operative, in Slade Green, Erith, had a lucky escape on July 4 after lightning hit the roofs of their properties causing a serious fire. Fortunately, no-one was injured, though one person was treated for shock, and everyone lost prized possessions.

It took five fire engines five hours to stop the blaze. All six buildings suffered major structural damage, with ceilings and roofs falling in, and it will be months before they are habitable again. The contents were ruined too, both by fire and water damage.

After a night in a nearby hotel, the affected residents are now in temporary accommodation. As many of them had only the clothes they stood in, Hazel Co-op, through CDS, arranged for emergency funds to cover essential outgoings.

"Our thoughts go out to all the households affected," says Maureen Stables, chair of CDS's Board of Management. "We are doing all we can to help Hazel Co-op remedy the situation, but



It will be months before these Hazel Housing Co-operative properties are habitable again

the reconstruction is likely to take some time. We hope that the residents can bear with this."

CDS Co-operatives has put £1,500 into an emergency disaster fund to help residents caught up in such events. To find out more, please contact Mark Howarth, Interim Housing Services Manager, on 0845 450 8545.

Fortunately, most of the residents had contents insurance, so that when they do go back to their homes they can replace their furniture and other belongings. Accidents like this, and another fire, at Rutherford Gate Co-op in Milton Keynes at the end of July, remind us how important it is for residents to take out insurance. Better to be safe than sorry.

This newsletter and other documents can be made available in other languages or in large print or audio tape. Please phone the Help Desk for more information on 0845 450 8545.

This year, one star



At last the Audit Commission has published the findings of its week-long inspection of our services in January: "CDS Co-operatives is providing a fair (one star) service with promising prospects for improvement."

Although two thirds of the housing associations inspected in the London area received the same score as we did, we were a bit disappointed not to achieve two stars. Next time we will do better. And we were pleased that the report said we are continuing to improve.

The report did say we had many strengths including:

- Homes are well maintained; estates are generally clean and tidy; tenant satisfaction is high.

- The Help Desk staff provide a polite and efficient service; staff are well motivated and morale is high.
- We perform well on collection of rent, arrears and service charges.
- We have comprehensive and challenging customer service standards.

However, it also found some weaknesses:

- Our customer service standards could be better monitored and there are weaknesses in the complaints system.
- We need to know more about our tenants, in terms of race, age, disability, etc, so we can develop policies and procedures to suit their needs.

- We do not have a complete asset management strategy.
- We need to check if victims of antisocial behaviour are satisfied with our efforts to stop it.

As a result of the Audit Commission's recommendations, over the next few months we will be aiming to ensure that:

- We arrange all tenants meetings in accessible accommodation that meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- We monitor repair works from the time of the tenant's call to completion of the work.
- We publicise key policies and publications to all tenants.
- We deal more speedily with complaints, and check users' satisfaction with the service.
- We improve efficiency and give value for money by setting up purchasing (procurement) strategies in consultation with tenants.

You can read the full inspection report and our formal response on www.audit-commission.gov.uk You will also find links to both documents on our own website, www.cds.coop. If you want to comment on the Audit Commission's findings, please email David Rodgers, Executive Director of CDS Co-operatives, at enquiries@cds.coop or write to 3 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP.

Get covered – it's worth it

Sound advice from Lawrence Zollner, board member

Some tenants believe that their landlord's insurance cover covers their possessions when there is an accident to their property. This is not true. The co-op or housing association's insurance will only cover damage to the building, not to personal property. The only way to ensure that your belongings are covered against loss or damage in a burglary, a fire or a flood is to take out contents insurance.

The cost of insurance will depend on things like the area you live in, existing security measures (such as window locks), the value of the items you own, and so on. Some companies allow you to pay by instalments.

Shop around for a good deal – and consider getting together with other tenants, as you may be able to negotiate a more favourable rate.

What you think of us

First, a big thank-you to the 500 residents who agreed to be interviewed by PH Research for our second STATUS survey in July. We carry out this survey to find out what you think about the services provided by CDS Co-operatives and your co-op, and your participation is really valuable.

We have now had the results and are pleased to say that residents are more satisfied with our services than they were when the last survey was carried out two years ago.

Almost 9 out of 10 (86%) tenants and co-op members said that they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service we provide. This figure is up 1% on 2004 and better than the national average of 79%. Disappointingly, however, only 58% of our leaseholders said that they are satisfied. Our staff

are currently looking at how we can improve the service for homeowners, so that when the next survey is done in 2008, they will feel more positive.

We also asked tenants and co-op members about opportunities to participate in the management of their home or co-op. Over 84% said they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied – well above the national average, which is only 62%. Out of 104 similar-sized housing organisations in the south east of England, only three had a better score.

When it came to the quality of your accommodation, over 90% of you – rising to 95% of homeowners – said you were satisfied or very satisfied.

A large majority of you said your estate was a good place to live, apart from some areas of Bexley and Milton Keynes. We think this

is because of higher rates of antisocial behaviour on these estates and also environmental problems such as noise, traffic and litter. Our staff will be talking to people there to see how we can work together to improve things.

Almost every registered social landlord carries out this same survey. Because the government publishes the most important results on the Housing Corporation's website, you can check how well your landlord is doing compared to others. You can see selected results from the STATUS survey on our website.

Congratulations to Ms C Griffin of Hauksbee Gardens in Milton Keynes, who won the £100 prize in the STATUS survey draw, and thanks again to everybody who took part.

Mystery shoppers needed

One of the ways our new "tenant auditor", Maxine Ruddock, tests the quality of our services is by "mystery shopping". This involves contacting CDS Co-operatives by phone, email or letter, to see whether we reply promptly and efficiently, as we promise in our customer service standards.

We now want 15 residents from the different regions to join her on the mystery shopping panel. It only takes about two hours every three months, and you can do it from home, although you will need to attend a training session at our head office (we will pay travelling expenses). As most of the work has to be done during

office hours, you do need to have time free during the day. We will pay £20 for each mystery shopping session completed, up to £80 a year.

To find out more, please contact our Interim Housing Services Manager, Mark Howarth, on 0845 450 8545.

CDS People

Maureen Stables – from tenant to CDS chair



Maureen Stables with Lord Graham of Edmonton PC, CDS Co-operatives Honorary President, at the Houses of Parliament

Not many housing associations can boast of having a chair of its governing board who began as a tenant. CDS Co-operatives can!

Maureen Stables, the chair of our Board of Management, began her involvement with CDS Co-operatives as a tenant in 1978. In 1979 she was elected to our Board as the representative of Furbank Co-operative in Welwyn Garden City where she lived as a single parent with her four children. That began a passionate interest in housing, years of dedicated commitment and work for CDS Co-operatives and the wider co-operative housing sector.

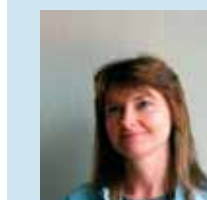
Maureen was elected chair in 1982 and has been re-elected without fail every year by her fellow board members. But that is not all. As well as bringing up her four children, Maureen had a successful career in housing. Maureen worked for Welwyn and Hatfield District Council before being appointed director of Praetorian Housing Association, in St Albans. She was director for ten years during which time she chaired St Alban's Homelessness Network. Later she served as director of Alamo Housing Co-operative in Islington, and finally as director of a charitable trust providing emergency housing for young

single people in Luton. Maureen retired from full time work in 2001 to care for her second husband, Bob, who has a chronic illness.

Maureen's care for her husband and her work for CDS is not her only interest. She has two grand children who live in France whom she adores and sees often. She is active in the local Multiple Sclerosis Society, is a keen gardener, plays bridge and has just started learning Italian!

Maureen says that housing and co-operatives can be addictive. She is a great example of the potential tenants have to make a contribution to housing and we are glad she has made it through CDS Co-operatives.

Kate Becque – our new support officer



We are pleased to welcome Kate Becque who joins our staff as our second home-based co-operative support officer, with responsibility for the Maidstone and Dartford co-ops. Before coming to CDS Co-operatives Kate last worked for Canterbury City Council as a housing officer. She is a keen outdoor enthusiast, and is looking forward to meeting you and your committees.