

Welcome to your spring newsletter

Take a look at what's happening
in the mhs community

Our first ever homeowner conference



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Win a giant Easter egg!

A **WHOPPING** 2.5kg Easter
egg could be yours.

To be in with a chance of winning this
delicious chocolate, complete our
Easter themed crossword on page 7. ♦





Help us shape services and have your say

We want to work in partnership with you to improve services. There are lots of ways to have your say, from being an estate champion to carrying out checks on our services. Everyone is welcome, and we're keen to hear from Heart of Medway customers who are currently under-represented.

By getting involved, you'll meet new people, use your skills and develop new ones. Visit mhs.org.uk/get-involved to find out more. ♦

Who we are



mhs homes and Heart of Medway are part of the mhs homes group. We build and manage homes for people who need them most. Visit mhs.org.uk to find out more about the work we're doing in your community. ♦

Meet Laurence, one of our estate champions



Laurence Ford has a passion for where he lives. He's one of the estate champions working with us to make your estates and local communities cleaner, safer and more resilient.

Laurence has been an mhs homes resident for 11 years. He lives in Luton, Chatham, and describes it as a thriving community where people really care about each other and their environment.

"We love living here, and we want

to protect it," he explains. "My role as an estate champion is to keep an eye out for any issues, to listen to what other residents are saying and make sure our voices are being heard.

"People tell me about things like nuisance neighbours or fly-tipping and I make sure they are raised with the housing and estates teams at mhs.

**"By shining a light on
what's happening,
we can get problems
sorted more quickly
and avoid some of
the frustrations."**

Laurence is modest about the difference he's making, but as a builder by trade he takes a very practical approach to some of the issues that come up.

"It's good to get out on the area walkabouts with mhs housing officers and local councillors so I can explain what's going on. I also get progress reports on how things we've raised are being dealt with."

Laurence says he'd encourage other residents to take up the opportunity to become an estate champion.

"If you want to help make improvements where you live, this is the way to go. mhs homes teams can't be everywhere, but by being involved and keeping them updated, we can be part of the changes we want to see." ♦



Ready,

set, grow!

Our supported living gardening competition is back for 2025 and we can't wait to see your entries!

It's about celebrating your horticultural skills – whether it's an amazing vegetable patch, a wildlife haven or a colourful sea of flowers.

No space is too small. If you're proud of your plants and gardens, then we want to see them too.

How to enter

Get snappy with your camera or phone and send your best photos to competitions@mhs.org.uk.

Get your **entry in by Saturday 12 July**. The winners will be announced on Friday 1 August at an awards ceremony at Broadside, Chatham.

For more information including prizes and other ways you can enter visit mhs.org.uk/gardening-competition ♦

Join our Board

We're looking for two mhs homes tenants to join our Group Board.

The board meet around 10 times a year to make decisions about how we're run. It's a great opportunity for you to help shape our future.

You'll get training and be paid £10,197 plus expenses as well.

Come to an online question and answer session to find out more:

Thursday 17 April | 12pm-1pm or 6pm-7pm | Microsoft Teams

Email governance@mhs.org.uk to book your space. ♦

What's on over Easter

Spring has arrived and we're looking forward to some warmer and sunnier days after the long winter. The Easter holidays are a chance to get out and enjoy some of the fun-filled activities that are happening around Kent. Here are some of our top picks:

- Visit Maidstone Museum | **Free**
- Enjoy a picnic at Mote Park **Free**
- Join the Lego club at your local library | **Free**
- Medieval Fayre, Maidstone **12 April | Free**
- Broadstairs Food Festival **18 - 20 April | Free**
- Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats **Entry is by donation**
- The Shell Grotto in Margate **From £2**



- Family special screenings at local cinemas | **From £2.75**
- Visit The Guildhall in Rochester **Free**
- Easter Trail at Leybourne Lakes **18 April | £5 per child**
- Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway | **From £7.50**

- Hadlow College Lambing Weekend | **26 - 27 April | From £10**
- Kent Life Easter weekend **18 - 21 April | From £11.70**

Go to visitkent.co.uk for what's happening in your area. ♦



Improving the experience of homeowners

A big thank you to everyone who joined us at Chatham's Historic Dockyard in February for a conference aimed at improving the experience of homeowners.

You've told us we haven't always got things right for you and you feel undervalued. This event is part of the work we're doing to listen to your feedback, address your concerns and improve services.

Some key themes included service charges, estates and grounds maintenance, communication and the time you spend waiting for communal repairs to be carried out at your home.

We're listening to what you've told us and we're making changes including:

- Improving our website so you can find what you need faster and easier
- More detailed and transparent information on services and charges
- Training for contact centre staff so you get the answers you need first time without needing a call back
- Learning from repairs so we aren't repeating work
- A more consistent approach to debt management and more support for homeowners
- More tailored information on My Account, your customer portal
- Improving the quality and speed of responses to your complaints.

But there's more to do. Our priorities are finding new ways to listen and act quickly on what you tell us. This includes making sure repairs in communal areas are completed faster and you're kept updated with progress. We're also committed to improving our communications, with more content that's focused on you. ♦



Help us improve our website

We're reviewing our website to provide better information, accessibility and functionality. As part of this we'll be improving My Account, your customer portal.

We'd love your input on this important work. Please contact communications@mhs.org.uk if you would be interested in joining a focus group. ♦



Your service

charge estimates

If you're a leaseholder or shared owner, you will have received your service charge estimates by now. We've estimated the cost of servicing and maintaining your block, communal areas and estate in 2025-2026. The charge will be applied from 1 April.

At the end of the year, we'll calculate what we actually spent and if our estimate was higher, we'll refund you the difference. If the estimate was lower, you'll be charged the difference.



Did you know you can arrange to spread the cost of your service charges over a year by monthly direct debit?

To find out more, or if you need support with paying your service charges, please contact the team at homeownership@mhs.org.uk ♦

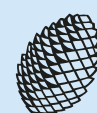


We're recruiting!

The Customer Scrutiny Panel, which carries out independent checks on mhs homes services, is keen to recruit homeowners to gain your unique perspective.

You don't need any previous experience to get involved, just the enthusiasm to make a difference!

Find out more at mhs.org.uk/get-involved ♦



mhs homes group | Customer Scrutiny Panel





Understanding

what biodiversity and green spaces

mean to you

As a social landlord operating in urban areas, not all our customers have easy access to green spaces. The places you live in may lack biodiversity, such as a wide variety of birds or flowers. We know we have a role to play in supporting biodiversity and improving green spaces in these areas.

We want to understand how you feel about the green spaces near you, how you use them, and the role they play in your lives.

Please tell us how important biodiversity is to you and the improvements you'd like to see.



The survey, which should take around five minutes to complete, can be found at

mhs.org.uk/biodiversity-survey or by scanning the QR code. ♦



Meet your grounds team

We know our customers want to live in clean, safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods. Meet the team who are working to make places you're proud to call home.

"A high-quality grounds maintenance service really matters to our customers," says manager Stewart Tucker (pictured right).

"We're recruiting more people and changing the way we work so you'll see us visiting your estates and communities more often."

The team have stopped the seasonal way of working which focused on grass cutting during the summer months, and hedge, shrub and tree works in the winter months.

They now work on a four week round, looking at what needs doing as a priority at each job so they can use the time most effectively.

Stewart encourages his team to use their training in plant identification and understanding biodiversity. "We want to improve

green spaces with wildflower and tree planting," he says.

"You'll see us

visiting your estates

and communities

more often"

"Sustainability and reducing our impact on the environment is important to us, and it's important to our customers," says Stewart.

"By being responsible with our grounds maintenance, we can create welcoming places for people and for nature." ♦

Pictured are members of the Grounds Workstream, a representative group who meet to discuss ideas for service improvement.



Poo patrol

Young artist promotes important safety message

Keeping the local environment clean is everybody's business. Cirina Spencer Smith, aged 7, is helping us promote this important message with her winning entry to our poster competition.

We asked young artists to design us a poster encouraging dog owners to clean up after their pets. Dog fouling is a health

hazard and a big problem in some public areas.

Judges awarded Cirina's poster first prize for its eye-catching colours and design, but also for its strong message asking people to stop and think.

The poster will be displayed in your communities to encourage residents to help us tackle this important issue. ♦



“We had to run... run for our lives”

In February 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine, causing destruction to its towns and cities and forcing millions of people to leave their homes.

Two of those people were Oksana Pankina and her 12-year-old son. They got into their car with just a few possessions and fled their home in the central city of Dnipro.

“I just drove,” says Oksana. “It all happened so fast, we had to run... run for our lives. I can still remember how frightening it felt to arrive alone in a foreign country where we couldn’t speak the language. That is how our new life in England began.”

In Ukraine, Oksana had studied law and worked as a sales manager. But she realised she had to move on and support her child,

so she began studying English at adult education classes.

“When a flat came up with mhs homes, I couldn't stop thanking the whole world.”

“When a flat came up with mhs homes, I couldn't stop thanking the whole world. It was incredible and fabulous.”

mhs homes teams visited regularly, using a Ukrainian interpreter to help Oksana feel more confident and at ease.

“At the most difficult moment of our lives, the team at mhs homes reached out to us. Most importantly my son and I have our beautiful home.”

Oksana volunteers in a charity shop and sits on the mhs homes Customer Scrutiny Panel. She's continuing with her studies and hopes to get a paid job. Her son has settled at school and joined a local football team.

But she misses the life and the people they were forced to leave behind. “My brother, my father, our friends are still in Ukraine. I worry about them as it's very dangerous.”

Oksana says she did what she had to do to save her child. “Life is not easy, but it is safe.” ♦

Do you have a story to share?



Every mhs homes customer has their own unique story.

We'd love to hear about your experiences with us, whether you're celebrating moving into your new home, marking an anniversary, or making a

difference for your neighbours or in your local community.

If we publish your story, you'll receive a £25 voucher. Contact us at communications@mhs.org.uk and we'll be in touch! ♦



We're answering your calls more quickly

You've told us how frustrating it is to wait on hold, and we've been working to improve our call response times. We've restructured and increased our customer service team which means we're now answering calls faster.

What's changed?

Over the past year, we've more than doubled the size of our Customer Service team and invested in more training. Every new team member has what they need to provide you with the best possible service, from day one.

A year ago, you might have had to wait over 10 minutes to speak

to someone. Now, the average wait time is just two minutes – and in many cases, calls are being answered in under a minute.

Call wait time



January 2024	11:41
January 2025	02:01

We're proud of how far we've come but we know there's still work to do to give you the best possible service every time. Watch this space for more updates...

We've received some positive comments from customers who say they're really noticing a difference...

"My query was answered immediately! The whole call lasted less than five minutes, and the advisor was amazing! So friendly and helpful. Best experience I've had calling mhs homes!"

"I just wanted to say how lovely and helpful you were. Nothing was too much trouble, and you went above and beyond to get my issue resolved." ♦

Win a giant Easter egg

Get ready for a cracking good time! Complete our special Easter crossword puzzle for a chance to win this giant Easter egg. To enter, simply send us a photo of your completed crossword to competitions@mhs.org.uk.



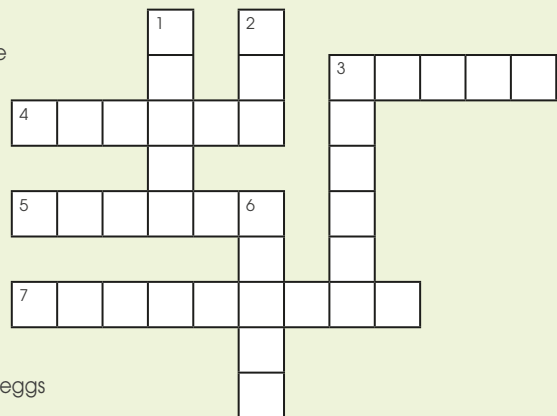
We'll choose one lucky winner from all the entries. Don't miss out on this egg-citing opportunity!

Down:

- 1. A baby bird that symbolises new life
- 2. You hunt for these during Easter
- 3. A type of hat often worn at Easter
- 6. A colourful flower that blooms in the spring

Across:

- 3. The animal that delivers Easter eggs
- 4. The season when Easter is celebrated
- 5. What you might use to collect Easter eggs
- 7. A sweet treat often found in Easter eggs



Domestic abuse:

How to get help

and support

No one should have to face domestic abuse alone. Help is available.

If you or someone you know needs support, please tell us. Our team of support workers can offer housing support and advice and talk to you about your options. We also work with other agencies to get the support you need.

Visit our website mhs.org.uk/domestic-abuse or call us in confidence on 01634 565333. ♦

Bring a burst of colour to your home

with our spring seeds giveaway!

Spring is here, and what better way to celebrate than by growing your own beautiful geraniums? Whether you've got a garden, a balcony, or a sunny windowsill, these vibrant flowers are easy to grow indoors or outdoors.

Geraniums are not only bright and cheerful, but they're also low

maintenance and long-lasting. Perfect for adding a splash of colour to your home all year round!

Want to get growing? We have 100 packets of seeds to give away. Order yours today by filling in our online form at mhs.org.uk/spring-seeds or email us at springseeds@mhs.org.uk ♦



Housing

Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service is a free service that looks at customer complaints about their landlord.

You can contact them at any time if you're not happy with something, or for independent advice and guidance.

They will usually only investigate if you've already complained to us and we have responded, so please tell us first. We want to put things right if we've got it wrong.

If you want to make a complaint, you can fill out a form on our website, call us on 01634 565333, or visit our head office in Chatham.

If you need to contact the Housing Ombudsman, you can do so by:

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housingombudsman.org.uk

Website: housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Tell us how you want to receive your newsletter



We hope you're enjoying your newsletter. We'll send this out to you three times a year in spring, summer, and winter.

We're committed to producing your newsletter in a way that looks after the environment. We use recycled, carbon-balanced paper which is 100% recyclable.

However, if you'd prefer not to receive a copy through the post, or you'd like to receive it in another format such as large print, please let us know.

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The email now includes a PDF, Word and plain text version of the newsletter! ♦



Get in touch

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