



CHS GROUP
housing, care, and community services in Cambridgeshire



December 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to the last tenant newsletter of 2024! To start our December newsletter, we would like to wish all of our tenants a merry festive period and a happy New Year!



In our final newsletter of the year, we share an update on our Christmas and New Year opening hours, how we can protect you against domestic abuse now and throughout 2025, news of a brand new repairs and maintenance contractor, and details of how you could win a £50 Amazon voucher.

Read on to find out more...

We recently upgraded our phone system which should make it easier to find the person you need to speak to. We've noticed that sometimes when we call you, the number can be displayed on your phone as one of our housing schemes due to internet search technology, which can be confusing.

You need to be vigilant about scam calls, so you're right to be wary if you're not sure it's us calling. We're unable to change internet search technology, but we advise you to save our number in your phone so that you know it's us calling – our telephone number is [0300 111 3555](tel:03001113555).

Our Christmas opening hours

Our head office in Histon will be closing for Christmas from Tuesday 24 December, until Thursday 2 January. See below for our opening hours over Christmas and New Year:

Monday 23rd December Open 9am – 5pm	Thursday 26th December Closed	Tuesday 31st December Closed
Tuesday 24th December Early closing open 9am - 3pm	Friday 27th December Closed	Wednesday 1st January Closed
Wednesday 25th December Closed	Monday 30th December Closed	Thursday 2nd January Open at 9am

You can still email us with a query using our online enquiry form: <https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/make-an-enquiry/>. Please note, responses to all queries made over Christmas and New Year will be sent after 2 January.

Emergency repairs

If you need an emergency repair, please call our usual number [0300 111 3555](tel:03001113555) and you will be transferred to our out-of-hours service. Please note that during this period, we will normally make the problem safe and then complete the repair during normal working hours in the New Year.



What is an emergency repair?

If a reported issue has an immediate and severe health, safety or security risk, or if there is significant damage in the property, we will work with you immediately to rectify the issue – this is an emergency repair. An emergency repair could occur because of:

- Water leaking through a ceiling
- Burst pipes
- Blocked main drains
- Unsafe electrical fault likely to cause injury or fire
- Complete loss of electrical power or light
- Complete loss of heating in cold weather (31 October – 1 May) or at any time if resident is elderly or vulnerable
- Complete loss of hot water
- Insecure external door or ground floor window
- Blocked soil pipe (where the toilet is found to be blocked and you have no alternative toilet, you will be charged for the cost of the work, plus an administration charge)
- Offensive graffiti

If you use this service when it is not necessary, you may be charged the extra cost of carrying out the repair out of hours.

For tenants living in our Supported Housing services and Housing with Care schemes, staff will be available on site for the duration of the Christmas and New Year.

Protecting you against domestic abuse

As the Christmas and New Year period approaches, many people look forward to celebrating with their loved ones. However, for those living with an abusive partner or relative, this can be a frightening and isolating time.

During this time of year, there are factors that increase risk – such as increased alcohol consumption, financial pressures, tensions surrounding family commitments – but none of these excuse domestic abuse. It may not be physical abuse, it may be emotional, financial, sexual or coercive control. Abuse is a pattern of behaviour that seeks to control and dominate, and at CHS Group, we have a zero tolerance policy against all forms of abuse.

If you do not feel safe in your home, please do not suffer alone. We are here to help, and we can provide you with the support needed to ensure your safety. If you are worried that someone you know may be experiencing abuse, you can also seek advice on how to support them, or raise your concerns here:

<https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/daino223981934k/>

(Please note our Christmas & New Year closing times)

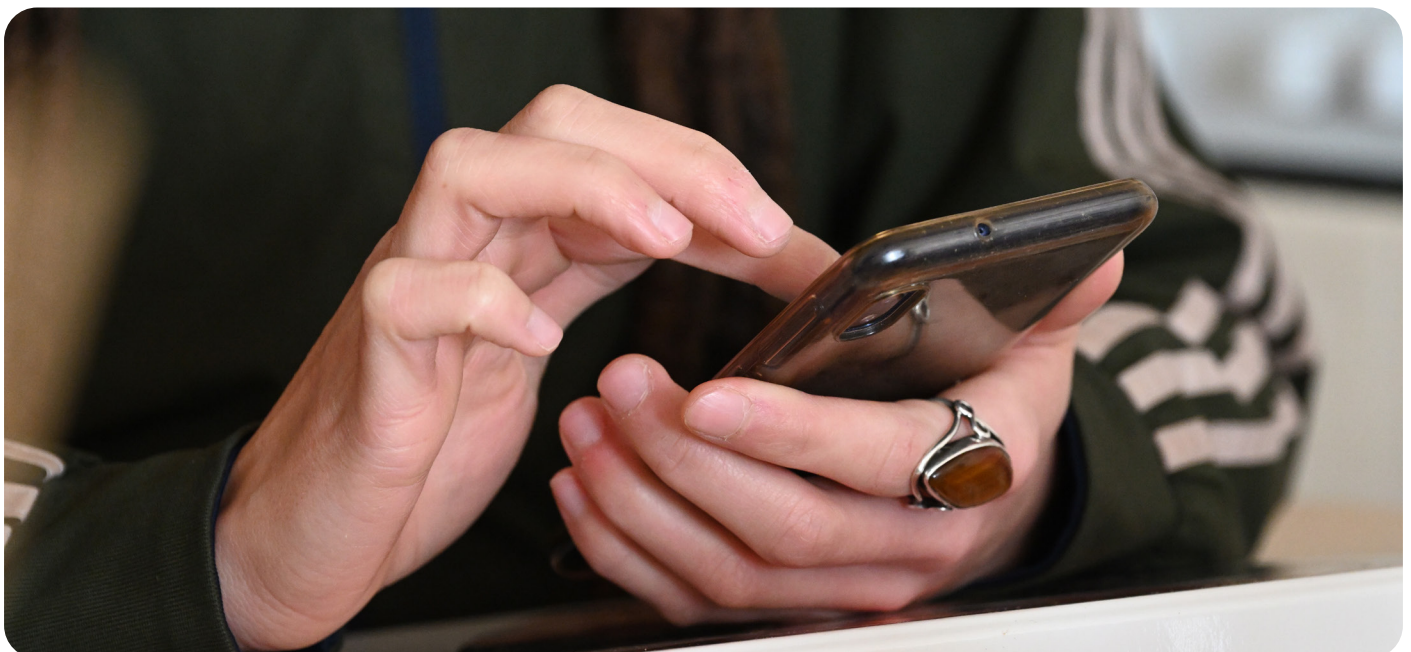
More help and advice

If you are concerned about other people knowing you have visited our Domestic Abuse webpage, click the red **Quick Exit** button at the bottom of the screen to leave the page quickly. This will prevent others from seeing the page in your internet history or recently visited sites but it will appear as 'recently closed' on your 'history' which you may be asked to explain.



If you are experiencing any form of domestic abuse, please reach out for support. You can call us on [0300 1113 555](tel:03001113555) (please note our Christmas & New Year closing times); you can also contact:

- National Domestic Abuse Helpline - national helpline is available 24 hours a day - [0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247)
- Cambridge Women's Aid - [01223 460947](tel:01223460947)
- In an emergency, always call [999](tel:999)



Welcoming our new repairs and maintenance contractor

Following an extensive procurement process, with the support of Echelon Consultancy, we're pleased to announce that we will be working with a new repair, voids, planned and cyclical maintenance provider next year.

We tendered this long-term contract using a procurement process compliant under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and we have now chosen our preferred bidder with the help of our tenants, who were included in the scoring panel alongside CHS staff.

The preferred bid was submitted by Fortem Solutions Limited, based on an evaluation criteria of 60% quality, 10% social value, and 30% cost. Subject to a final consultation period with leaseholders, and a period of standstill, the contract with Fortem Solutions Limited will run for four years, starting on 1 April 2025, with the option to extend up to a maximum of 10 years.

The contract will be formally awarded in January 2025, where we will issue an update to you explaining what will happen next. From now until 31 March 2025, your repairs, voids, and planned maintenance service will continue to be delivered by Foster Property Maintenance, and the cyclical redecorations programme will commence with the new contractor, Fortem Solutions Limited, in 2025.

It's important to us that we get the best value for money from our maintenance contracts whilst delivering the best possible services to you. We understand that you may be concerned that appointing a new maintenance contractor could lead to rent increases, but we want to assure you that this will not be the case.

The government regulates our annual rent increase, meaning your rent can only go up in line with a government formula that is based on the rate of inflation. We understand that the past two years saw larger increases, however, the rate of inflation is now much lower, so a rent increase in April will be significantly smaller. We will inform all our tenants of the exact amount once it is confirmed.

Thank you to all our tenants who were involved in the procurement process. Your feedback was invaluable, and helped us identify the improvements needed in our communication for follow up appointments. The aim of the new contract is to provide a service that gives you more visibility and control over your appointments.

We are looking forward to working with Fortem Solutions Limited, who will help us to continue to provide you with high quality homes and services that exceed your expectations.



Enter our tenant survey prize draw

Ensuring that our homes are safe and maintained for you, our tenants, is our top priority. This is why we regularly carry out surveys in our homes, and why we have commissioned Pennington Choices to undertake a survey of our current housing stock, which will take place between now and April 2025.

These surveys will enable us to plan what type of works programmes will be required in your home in the future, and comprise of a brief inspection (including photographs) of your home. These inspections look at the external features, internal fixtures and systems to establish their condition and future maintenance needs.

Once Pennington Choices are able to survey your home, they will contact you to arrange a convenient time for your appointment. Please note that if Pennington Choices do not hear from you, they will knock on your home whilst surveying other homes in your area. If you are not home when the surveyor calls, they will leave a card asking you to contact them directly to arrange an appropriate time.

**The survey will take up to 30 minutes.
We would be grateful if you could make yourself available for your appointment.**

All Pennington Choices surveyors carry an identification card which you should always ask to see before giving anyone access to your home. You can also check the surveyor's identification by calling their freephone number on [0800 833 0334](tel:08008330334), or emailing SCS@pennington.org.uk with any queries.

We're encouraging all of our tenants to arrange an appointment with Pennington Choices so that they can carry out important work. By allowing them access to complete their survey, you will automatically be entered into a monthly prize draw with the chance of winning a £50 Amazon voucher with the winners chosen at random. Good luck!

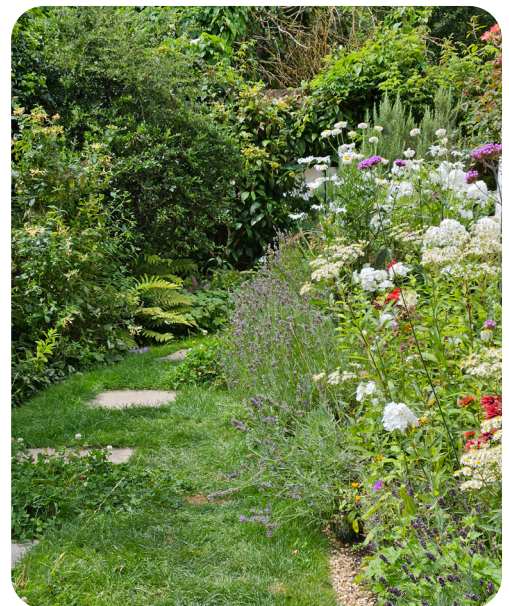


Our prize winning tenants

Garden Competition

We are pleased to say that Dr. Anna Constantas, a keen gardener from Cambridge, won a £50 gardening voucher as the winner of our resident garden competition!

Speaking to us after her win, Anna, said: "Providing a range of plants with different leaf shapes and flowers not only creates interest in the garden, but it encourages more pollinators to visit. I sit amongst the ferns, daisies and roses, watching butterflies, bees and frogs. This simple connection to nature makes me smile, but the slugs don't!"



Customer feedback prize draw

This year, we've given out £250 every quarter in a prize draw to customers who gave us feedback on our surveys. Each piece of feedback was considered an entry, with winners chosen at random. Congratulations to our winners, Sara Gibson, Rebecca Day and our two winners from Cambridge who wish to remain anonymous.



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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.

