



**CHS GROUP**  
housing, care, and community services in Cambridgeshire



# November 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to our November newsletter! In the penultimate newsletter for 2024, we share news on Aaron Services' tenant prize draw, changes to our Service Charge Policy, updates to Aaron Services' plan to maintain high standards in the winter months, how you, our tenants, had a say in our organisation in 2024, as well as an exciting update on our annual Christmas Shoebox Appeal.

**Read on to find out more...**

## Having your say in 2024

Ensuring that you, our tenants, have a voice and are listened to is a key priority for us at CHS Group.

Throughout 2024, we worked closely with Tpas, the tenant engagement experts, to learn how we could improve the way we engage with tenants to ensure we're amplifying your voice. After discussions with Tpas, we implemented a Customer Engagement Strategy which focuses on creating ways for tenants to share their views and have their say.

When you're a tenant at CHS Group, you can be as engaged as you want. This may involve giving us feedback, having the occasional discussion with us, or becoming more involved in the community and committees. We have three tenant groups who volunteer their time to work with us on a number of different projects and bring a voice that represents tenants in discussions.





## Surveys, focus groups and building residents' meetings

In 2023, we consulted tenants using e-surveys on improvements to your home and how we communicate with you. In 2024, we asked you about how you would like to have your say, and what you think is important for the new repairs and maintenance contract.

Alongside this, we also held two online focus groups in the evening. These meetings were one-hour sessions where participants were asked their opinions on certain topics. The first topic was around our Annual Report, with the second on our communities strategy. By holding these sessions, we gained valuable insight which informed our report and strategy.

An in-person meeting was held with Campkin Court residents in Cambridge in March 2024 to discuss issues with the building, such as waste disposal and fire alarms, and understand what residents' preferred solutions were. Similar meetings are also held in our Housing with Care and sheltered schemes about issues relating to those specific schemes.

We wanted to share with you a summary of each of our three tenant groups, explain what they do and showcase what they have achieved during the last year.





# Tenant's Scrutinising Team

Our **Tenant's Scrutinising Team** holds four monitoring meetings a year with additional monthly project meetings held online and in person.

Earlier this year, the Team produced a damp and mould report which assessed how we manage reports of damp and mould in tenants' homes and made a number of recommendations. This led to a new Damp and Mould policy and the introduction of a new procedure, which means that when a tenant reports an incident of damp and mould, a CHS Group surveyor will contact them to assess the situation and visit the property when needed and follow up with the tenant to ensure that the issue has been resolved.

Our **Tenant's Scrutinising Team** showcased their project at the Regional Tpas Meeting in September 2024, which was attended by tenants and landlords from across East Anglia. It was so well received, the Team was invited to present it at the National Tpas Scrutiny Conference in October.

CHS Group recently nominated its Chair, Trish Laver, for the Tpas Engagement Heroes Volunteer Recognition Scheme.

Speaking at Trish Laver's nomination, Laura Papanikolaou, CHS Group's Customer Engagement Officer said, *"She is a passionate advocate for scrutiny, and she puts a lot of work and energy into developing the team working on the reviews, recruiting new volunteers, and promoting the value of scrutiny."*

*"The team have done some excellent projects and reports, first on heating repairs and second on damp and mould. This has led to a new damp and mould policy and procedure, including better communication with customers and faster response times. We have had good feedback from individuals who have been happy with the way their damp and mould case has been handled, and it has improved the issue."*

During the year, members of our Tenant's Scrutinising Team also took part in scrutiny training to help members understand their roles and responsibilities. The Team's current project is assessing the ways tenants pay their rent, with a report being presented to us in early 2025.



## Tenant Complaints Panel

Our Tenant Complaints Panel meet in person every quarter and regularly review complaints that have been made by tenants about our housing management and repair services. The Panel can act as an advocate for a tenant regarding a complaint, helping them navigate the complaints process.

If a tenant is dissatisfied with CHS Group's handling of a stage 1 complaint, the Tenant Complaints Panel may conduct a stage 2 review, deciding whether to uphold the complaint and proposing fair redress if appropriate.

During the year, the Panel assessed CHS's policy against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and made recommendations on improving the handling of complaints. They plan to increase the number of complaints they review in 2025.



## Tenant Committee

The role of our Tenant Committee is to represent tenants and ensure their voice is being heard when decisions are made about how we run our services.

The Tenant Committee meet on a quarterly basis, both in person and online, with members receiving free training to help them in their role. Some of the free training it has received this year has included Tpas smart review training, and committee skills training. In their quarterly meetings, policies and strategies are considered, sometimes in a workshop, where members ask questions and give suggestions on how they can be more in line with tenants' needs. CHS Group's contractors are often invited as guests to these meetings to explain the improvements they have made to their service and to take questions.

In 2023-2024, the Tenant Committee played an important role in sharing its views in the Tpas Smart Review, which looked at how CHS Group engaged with tenants, and made recommendations on how we can improve. The Tenant Committee also contributed to our new Customer Engagement Strategy. This contribution included a recommendation to trial different times of the day to hold meetings so that more tenants could be involved, as well as a recommendation to increase the resources available for tenant engagement.

Throughout 2024, our Tenant Committee continued to act as advocates for our tenants in our Housing with Care schemes who experienced difficulties with a new care provider. The Committee was also involved in securing the new heating and electrical contract as well as the upcoming new repairs and maintenance contract.

# Tenant Group Meetings for 2025

Date	Event	Location
15th January	Scrutiny Panel	CHS Head office in Histon 10.30-12.30
22nd January	Tenant Committee	Online via Zoom 18:30-19:30
9th April	Scrutiny Panel	CHS Head office in Histon 10:30-12:30
16th April	Tenant Committee	Meadows Community Centre, Cambridge 10:30-12:30
2nd July	Tenant Committee	Meadows Community Centre, Cambridge 18:30-20:30
16th July	Scrutiny Panel	CHS Head office in Histon 10:30-12:30
15th October	Tenant Committee	Meadows Community Centre, Cambridge 10:30-12:30

If you would like to attend any of these meetings or want to find out how you can get involved, please get in touch with our Customer Engagement Officer, Laura Papanikolaou, on [07540 122624](tel:07540122624) or [lpap@chsgroup.org.uk](mailto:lpap@chsgroup.org.uk).



## Could you be the next winner in our tenant prize draw?

At CHS Group, ensuring that all our homes are safe and well-maintained for you is our top priority. This is why we carry out regular gas and electrical checks in our homes.

In our September newsletter, we announced that all tenants who stick to their initial appointments given to them by our gas and electrical check contractor, Aaron Services, will be automatically entered into a prize draw with a chance to win a **£75 voucher**, with the winners chosen at random by Aaron Services Ltd.

There is one prize draw for gas servicing appointments, and another for electrical checks. If you do not allow access on the first attempt, **you will be ineligible for the prize draw**. Our Aaron Services Customer Liaison Officer, Connor, presented one of our winners with their voucher earlier this month – could you be our next winner?





# Changes to our Service Charge Policy

Recently, we reviewed our Service Charges Policy, which covers the charges made to tenants for work completed in communal areas.

In the last few years, we have been required to carry out more rigorous safety checks in our communal areas, and we need to ensure that these charges can be paid and are fairly applied to homes that have these services.

After our policy review, we identified and wrote to around 600 tenants who may be directly affected by some of the proposed changes and asked for their feedback. We would like to thank everyone who provided feedback on the proposed changes, and while those who did reply were not necessarily happy about the prospect of a higher service charge, it was understood why we have to carry out essential services and why costs have to rise.

After discussion with our Tenant Committee, CHS Group's Customer and Homes Committee has decided to add the proposed charges to our Service Charge Policy. This higher service charge will mean we can carry out additional services, such as fire risk assessments, asbestos surveys, electrical safety checks, water risk (legionella) assessments and pest control in communal areas.

The estimated cost of these additional services is included in the letter we sent you and will be included in your service charge from April 2025. If you have any concerns about meeting these costs, please get in touch – our Money Matters team is always happy to help.

If you have not been contacted about the proposed changes to our Service Charge Policy, these changes will not affect you or your household.

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**Read more about our new Service Charges Policy [here](#)**

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## Preparing for Winter:

**AaronServices**   
Part of the Sureserve Group

As winter approaches, Aaron Services has rolled out its comprehensive proactive initiative, the Maintenance Winter Mobilisation Plan, which is designed to ensure the continuity of their high-quality service throughout winter.

By focusing on resource management, infrastructure support, and risk management measures, the plan aims to provide stability and assurance to tenants by effectively addressing the unique challenges and pressures that arise during the season. Recognising the increased demands on maintenance services, this plan seeks to mitigate potential disruptions, ensuring that our tenants receive the support they need when they need it most.

### Key components of the Maintenance Winter Mobilisation Plan

Effective resource management is essential for maintaining service quality during winter. Key elements include:

#### Admin working hours (providing engineers with back-office admin support):

- Monday to Friday: 8am-8pm
- Saturday: 8am-4pm
- Sunday: 8am-4pm



**24/7 engineer rota: Engineers will be on call around the clock to address urgent maintenance needs.**

- Rolling plans: Weekly updates will be based on volume forecasts, directly matched to labour availability. Any shortfalls will be highlighted immediately, allowing for prompt action.
- Long-term service appointment planning: Advanced scheduling will ensure that services are pre-arranged and well-organised.
- Flexible shift patterns: Engineers can work additional hours as necessary, with a standby system for unforeseen demands.
- Mobilisation of engineers: The ability to deploy engineers from other offices will enhance response capacity.

**This delivery planning is integrated with Aaron Services’ workforce planning to identify any gaps early and ensure that resources are readily available**

- The Right Engineer – multi-skilled with a range of capabilities

**To support surges in demand and achieve high levels of first-time fixes, Aaron Services has implemented a multi-skilled approach:**

- Core repair skills: Service engineers are trained with fundamental repair skills to handle a variety of issues.

- Multi-skilled repair engineers: These engineers possess plumbing and electrical qualifications, enabling them to address complex problems efficiently.
- Commercial engineers: Equipped with domestic repair skills, these engineers can transition seamlessly between commercial and residential tasks.
- Qualified supervisors and managers: All supervisory staff are gas qualified, providing an additional layer of expertise and safety.

In addition to this plan, when Aaron Services carry out its annual gas servicing appointment in your home, the engineer will carry out visual damp and mould checks and report any cases to CHS Group.

For information on damp and mould in your home, [read our damp and mould leaflet](#). If you are experiencing any damp and or mould in your home, please get in touch with us via our website or call us on [0300 1113555](tel:03001113555).

Aaron Services’ Maintenance Winter Mobilisation Plan for CHS Group reflects a robust and proactive approach to ensuring that our service has continuity during the winter months. By prioritising resource management, and optimising workforce planning for engineers with diverse skills, the plan will provide tenants with the support they need.



## Our Shoebox Appeal

We are delighted to launch our Christmas Shoebox Appeal for its **sixth year**. Our Appeal is about ensuring that all young people (16-24 years old) living in our supported services have a gift to open at Christmas. In previous years, this was the only gift some of our young residents received.

Over the past six years, we have received donations from individuals, schools, churches, businesses and community groups with shoeboxes filled with Christmas gifts, with personal messages and notes also included, similar to what they may already put in a stocking – such as toiletries, clothing, sweets, savoury treats, stationery and retail gift cards.

As with previous years, any surplus shoeboxes will be redistributed to other supported housing services and community groups across Cambridgeshire who also support people in need.

**And there's more...**



We want this year's appeal to be our biggest yet! And, to reach as many people as possible, we are excited to announce that we've teamed up with [Cambs Youth Panel](#).

Every year, Cambs Youth Panel host a Christmas Fair for over 800 children from families facing financial hardship. To spread the joy of our Shoebox Appeal, we're aiming to raise £1,000 to help pay for gifts that will be given to the children attending the Cambs Youth Panel's Christmas Fair in December.

[Click here for more information](#)







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

