

#Network

The CHS Group Newsletter

Summer Edition – June 2023



CHS KEEPS WORKING TO TACKLE DOMESTIC ABUSE

Since 2019 CHS has been accredited with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). This is a reflection of our commitment to supporting those who experience domestic abuse, which affects so many households. It can happen anywhere.

We are delighted to have had our accreditation renewed for another 3 years, after an intensive period of reviewing all the different ways we try to support the victims and survivors of abuse.





We work closely with domestic abuse specialist services and the accreditation process demonstrated that this joined up working is a key aspect of the service we offer, making sure everyone involved can be proactive and supportive.

CHS also adapts the service to meet the individual needs of those who can have extra barriers to being supported, for example those with disabilities, from different backgrounds and age groups.

DAHA have made some suggestions for further improvements in the way we handle domestic abuse. We are keen to take this forward and continue to give absolute priority to those who experience domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse is not OK - if you are affected by it, you are not alone and there is help. It is not your fault.

Domestic Abuse need not be about physical violence — coercive and controlling behaviour of any kind is a crime and CHS will help you to stand up to it. You can contact us for advice, or there are many helplines including the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (0808 2000 247) See our website for many other sources of help including specialist providers, and to see what action CHS may be able to take to support you and help you to make your own decisions about what happens next.

Click the red Quick Exit button on our website to leave this website quickly. This will prevent a perpetrator from using the 'back' button to visit any pages you have been reading on our website, but it will appear as 'recently closed' on your 'history' which you may be asked to explain.

GARDEN COMPETITION WINNER 2022



Lynda Haines is the winner of the 2022 garden competition and she received a £50 youcher.

She said 'I'm a keen gardener with over 100 different plants (flowers, fruit, veg, trees and shrubs) in my urban oasis. The front is a specially designed drought-tolerant gravel garden (inspired by Beth Chatto's Essex Garden) that needs no watering and is based around a silver, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE KING OF ALL FEASTS



Bedford House in Ely, hosted Coronation celebrations organised by John Beckett Court tenant Christine Whitmore for the residents and day centre guests to enjoy. The event brought people together to share food, have fun and get to know each other. Entertainment was provided by Jason Bruce who sang 50s and 60s hits that had people dancing and singing along. A raffle raised £220 for the Air Ambulance. Christine said 'So many local businesses donated prizes. It's been amazing. I like getting people together and raising money for charity. The rain couldn't dampen our spirits, we had a wonderful afternoon.'



IN THIS ISSUE...

Tackling Domestic Abuse; Garden competion: Crowning Celebrations

Stephen Hill our new Chief Executive; Introducing our new Board Chair; Garden competition winner continued

Fosters on-line Booking Service; Rise in abuse of CHS Staff; Rent & the cost of living

How we can help with damp & mould; Tenancy Support; External decoration

Tenant Committee & CHS Services; Gasway repairs review by Scrutiny Panel

Customer satisfaction with repairs; TPAS membership; River Lane Clean-up Day; NHF Home Contents Insurance

How to report an issue or make a compliant

Blossoming and Blooming, Corona Art Exhibition; Shoe Box Appeal; How to contact CHS

CHS appoints a new Chief Executive

CHS has appointed a new Chief Executive, Stephen Hills. Stephen was appointed acting Chief Executive in December 2022 and took up the permanent position on 30th January 2023. Stephen joined CHS Group as Operations Director in July 2018. Previously, he was Director of Housing for South Cambridgeshire District Council, having worked as a housing consultant and lecturer at Sheffield Hallam and Middlesex Universities before that. Speaking about the appointment, Chair of the Board at CHS Group, Martin Wheatley, said: "The CHS Group board is confident that Stephen has the expertise, knowledge, and experience to lead our organisation successfully and position it strongly for a future role delivering good homes, a broad range of services across

Cambridgeshire, and a variety of other services

board and the whole team at CHS Group looks

promoting opportunity and wellbeing. The

forward to working with Stephen over the



Stephen Hills Chief Executive of CHS

Stephen commented: "I want to take the opportunity to thank each and every member of staff here at CHS Group for their unwavering hard work and commitment throughout the pandemic and the challenges faced in recent months. I am excited for the future of CHS Group and am completely committed to my new role as Chief Executive. I am looking forward to working together with staff, board members, stakeholders and members of the community in furthering our mission to ensure local people across Cambridgeshire achieve a better quality of life."

Welcome to our new Chair of the Board

coming years."



CHS Board Chair

We are pleased to announce that Martin Wheatley took on the role as our new Chair of the Board from 1st November 2022.

Martin Wheatley is a specialist in governance, research and advice in the fields of housing, planning, social policy, public service management and the environment. He has over 20 years' experience at national and local level where he has focussed particularly on strong internal leadership skills and developing sector partnerships and coalitions. Martin has 6 years' experience on the Board of another housing association where he chaired their Business Effectiveness and People Committee. He also chairs the Croydon Independent Housing Improvement Board which provides advice

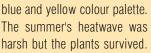
and independent assurance to Croydon Council on improving their housing service. He grew up in Cambridge and has recently moved back to the area.

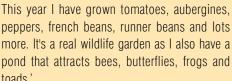
In his new role, Martin will lead the Board in setting the strategy of CHS Group and ensuring it delivers excellent service for its customers and great value for money.

Speaking about his appointment, Martin said: "I am so pleased to be joining CHS Group as Chair of the Board. With its crucial, broad range of services, the organisation does so much to help people and communities in and around Cambridgeshire and I look forward to taking that forward in the years ahead."

Martin takes over as Chair of the Board from Heidi Allen. We thank Heidi for her work as Chair over the last year and are delighted that she is staying on the Board.

GARDEN COMPETITION WINNER 2022 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1





If you would like to enter the 2023 garden competition, please send photos with your name and address to Laura Papanikolaou $-\,$

laura.papanikolaou@chsgroup.org.uk





Book a repair via the Foster online repairs booking service

You can now book a repair request with our contractor Foster online via the Foster Repairs Booking Service on their website

https://fpm-ltd.co.uk/reporting/ – *Please note* this service is for booking routine repairs only. If your repair is an emergency please call **01945 586999** and select relevant options.

If it's an out-of-hours emergency please phone **0300 111 3555**

You can also use this service to send photos of the repairs you have reported to Foster, to help them better understand the issue or you can send them by email to:

fostercentral@fpm-ltd.co.uk Or via: WhatsApp 07377 989073

Please include your address when you send through the photos

Rise in abuse towards staff

Sadly, we have recently seen an increase in abuse towards CHS staff by customers and this is having a significant psychological toll on those affected. Whilst the majority of our customers are polite and respectful, some may act out of character during time of trouble or distress. We understand that some customers may feel angry or frustrated at our response to the issues they have raised with us, but if this escalates into aggression, abuse, or violence towards our staff, this will not be tolerated. Abuse or harassment towards CHS or our contractor's staff is a breach of tenancy conditions, and your tenancy could be at risk.

If a customer is behaving in a way that is not acceptable, a warning may be issued and logged and if the behaviour continues, then staff may terminate the conversation immediately. Please consider how you approach our staff when raising an issue. We are here to help, and a little kindness goes a long way, so working with us in a polite manner can be the most effective way to get the outcome you want.



Rent levels and the cost of living

If you pay rent to CHS, then you will have received confirmation of the new rents due from April onwards. CHS is very conscious of the pressures on households as a result of the cost of living crisis, and that rent payments make up a significant part of your household expenses.

Each year for rented homes the rent is increased by the amount of price inflation in the previous September (Consumer Prices Index, or CPI), plus 1% which is a formula set by central government. Last November the government announced that because the CPI rate was 10.1% it would apply a 'rent cap' so that rents would increase by no more than 7% this April instead of 11.1%.

CHS had the option to increase rents by less than 7%, and considered this carefully. Our operating costs have also been increasing sharply and CHS faces higher than inflation increases in costs for energy, materials and staffing. The future costs of achieving net-zero carbon targets for CHS homes are very high with no current indication of government funding to support such costs. Another factor that leaves CHS in a challenging position is that rents were reduced by 1% per year between 2016 and 2020, so that current rents levels are around 16% lower than they would have been. This has already had a significant impact on CHS's ability to invest in homes and services.

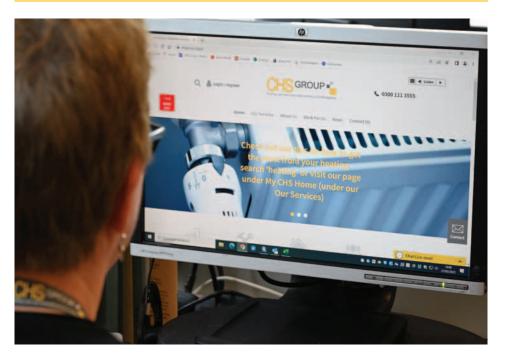
As a result we need to increase rents by the maximum allowed this year which is 7%. We need

to do this to keep providing services for you and to maintain and invest in your home.

We're sorry this rent increase may put further pressure on your household finances. If you already receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit that includes a 'housing element', they will increase in line with the rent increase. If you don't already claim these benefits, perhaps you might now qualify for them — it's worth applying to check. If you're not sure about this, or want to discuss your finances generally please seek advice from our **Money Matters** team — call us on **0300 111 3555** and we'll arrange for someone to talk it over with you.

You can find other sources of advice at https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/support-advice/money-matters/

If you are a shared owner then the annual rent increase is also higher than usual, although we have decided to apply a lower rate of increase this year than the 'formula' contained in leases. Again, please contact us if you are finding it difficult to manage your payments, our **Money Matters** team is also available to you.



Damp and mould in your home – we can help

We understand that mould in your home is a worry for many people, particularly following the tragic news of the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak. We want to reassure you that we take any report of mould in a CHS property seriously and want to remind you that we are here to help. If you're worried about mould in your home, please get in touch.

Last month CHS sent information to the Regulator for Social Housing explaining how we deal with damp and mould in our homes. Whilst we have detailed procedures in place, we want to make sure we receive feedback from tenants about how these procedures are working in practice, so that we ensure we are responding promptly to tenants and maintaining our homes to a good standard.

We recently emailed tenants who have reported damp, excessive condensation or mould in their home in the last 4 years to check that the work we carried out or the advice we gave, has resolved the problem. For any home where the issue hasn't been resolved, we will arrange for a surveyor to visit and assess what further work is required and raise the repair order with Foster.

Our Tenant Scrutiny Panel have also contacted some of these tenants to ask about their experiences of reporting it to CHS and how it could be improved, and these findings will help us to make further improvements to our damp and mould procedures.







EXTERNAL DECORATION OF YOUR HOME

CHS is currently reviewing its external redecoration programme, which means some properties may be decorated later than planned whilst we carry out condition surveys. We will advise customers once this review is complete and of the outcome.

Tenancy Support

As well as helping with general tenancy issues such as rent, our Housing team are also on hand to offer additional support to those tenants who may need it.

Please get in touch with your Housing Officer if there is an issue we may be able to help you with, or if you are struggling to cope generally.

Case Study

Tenant J recently split with his partner. He had relied on his partner for financial and practical support, and he has health and sensory issues, which had reduced his confidence and left him feeling isolated. J wanted to become more active and improve his social life, and he was interested in technology to assist with sight and hearing impairments. The Housing Officer encouraged J to attend local events of interest where he can meet people. The Housing Officer referred him to the Adult Early Help team at Cambridgeshire County Council. As a result, J has received help from:

Befriending service – J receives a weekly call from a volunteer to chat.

Cam Sight – J attends a monthly meeting in the library for those with sight problems.

NHS nurse - J gets weekly visits from a nurse to support his healthcare needs.

Technology Enabled Care Team – A lifeline has been installed with a pendant so if J is ill, he can press the button which links to operator help.

Sensory Team (Sight/Hearing) - A technician will upgrade J's smoke alarm and doorbell and will advise him on a phone which is hearing aid and vision compatible. 'Bumpons' — high vis bumpers have been put on his cooker and washing machine to prevent bumps and J knocking the dials.

J needed to raise a new urgent claim for Universal Credit now that he was living alone. The Housing Officer obtained a fast-track Joint-to-Sole tenancy agreement within 2 days. The Money Matters team were able to assist him in his claim. Money Matters also advised J to reapply for Personal Independence Payments (PIP). An application was made to the Household Support Fund for £100 and the 'Stay well' scheme for £400 towards energy vouchers. The CHS New Horizons team advised J about banking, a Council Tax reduction for a single person, rent arrears and arranged a Job Centre meeting. J received £84 of HACT vouchers from the Energy Hardship Fund towards his energy costs.



Tenant Committee helps shape CHS services

Since our last update, the Tenant Committee have met three times. At our October 22 meeting, the focus was largely on reviewing CHS's Domestic Abuse policy, where we made a number of recommendations to make the policy easier to understand. It proved very thought-provoking as the Committee cares considerably for those who suffer from abuse. I'm delighted to say that our contribution was acknowledged, and we have been thanked for our valuable input. The January 23 meeting saw us congratulate Stephen Hills on accepting the position of Chief Executive. He has already acknowledged the importance of tenant involvement in his future plans for CHS! We agreed to go ahead with a Smart Review with TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) to assess how well CHS engages with tenants and where improvements could be made. Also at the January meeting, Sue Reynolds from the Money Matters team discussed the cost-of-living crisis with us and explained how she and her team have

been helping those who are struggling. General tips and ideas were discussed and many of us left the meeting with thoughts of how we could save some money!

At our April 23 meeting we were delighted to welcome three new tenants to the committee, and we look forward to working with them in the future. We also welcomed James Jackson and Karl Chappell from Foster Property Maintenance who gave a presentation on the new Repair Booking Service on Foster's website, which you can access by visiting the CHS website and clicking on the 'report a repair' icon on the home page. James also explained that tenants can use What's App to send in photos of their repair so that Foster can better understand the problem. Karl shared that to celebrate Foster's 50 year anniversary, they are planning to do 50 acts of volunteering, where Foster staff donate their time and skills for a community project, for example to redecorate a community room. Do you have any ideas? If so,

please contact Laura Papanikolaou, using the details below. We are always looking for more members to join the Tenant Committee, so if you would like to find out more our next meeting, is on Wednesday 5th July 10.30am at the William Collyn Community Centre in Girton.

Jane Bird, Chair of Tenant Committee

CHS want to be inclusive and hear from diverse voices so we hold our tenant meetings at a wheelchair accessible venue and will try and accommodate your needs, such as hearing or mobility. If you drive, we can re-imburse you for mileage and if not, we can pay for a taxi to get you there and home again, alternatively you can attend meetings online. Contact Laura Papanikolaou, Customer Involvement Officer, at

laura.papanikolaou@chsgroup.org.uk or phone 07540 122624 for more information.

Laura Papanikolaou, Customer Involvement Officer



Scrutiny Panel reviews Gasway repairs

The Scrutiny Panel surveyed tenants who had had a recent Gasway repair to find out about their experience. We found the tenants whose repair was completed on the first visit were very happy. Tenants didn't like being kept in the dark about what was happening with their order when the engineer was waiting for a part. Gasway told us during our visit to their head office in Norwich that they are recruiting a member of staff to phone suppliers to ensure that the parts are in and keep the customer informed.

A long repair time caused the most stress for tenants because people were worried that they would be out of pocket when using electric heating. We recommended that CHS review compensation levels so that they are in line

with current energy prices, and the compensation policy has now been updated. We recommended that the Gasway engineers should consistently make the follow-up appointments. A lack of heating and hot water can be particularly disruptive for people with health needs, so we recommended that the recording of customers' disabilities and health conditions on both CHS and Gasway systems needs to be done consistently. If you think CHS may be unaware of a need you have, such as for a visitor to knock and wait, please let them know. Thank you to everyone who took part in our survey. If you would like to read the full report it is available here: https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/our-services/get-involved-volunteering/

CHS & Contractor CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH REPAIRS

We were pleased to see customer satisfaction with CHS repairs overall rose from 79% in the month of April 2022 to 83% in April 2023 and satisfaction with our repairs contractor Foster increased from 77% to 78% over the same period. Although satisfaction with our heating contractor Gasway dropped from 100% to 94% in April 2023, satisfaction remains very high.









WE'RE PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF TPAS

CHS is committed to engaging with customers on the issues that affect them, and we know the importance of this to improving service delivery and building sustainable communities. Being a member of Tpas (Tenants Participation Advisory Service) allows us to access their expertise and support to help achieve this and we have commissioned Tpas to carry out a Smart Review of our Customer Engagement activities to identify where we can make improvements. We are expecting their feedback in early June and will use their recommendations to create an action plan that will help us to implement the changes we want to make.

As we are a TPAS member, all tenants can access a range of services to help them become more involved in shaping the services CHS offer, including:

- In-person workshops and conferences
- Free webinars
- Newsletter
- · Advice on engagement issues
- Tenant only online networking group

We encourage any of our tenants to access these member benefits by contacting our Customer Involvement Officer, Laura Papanikolaou Ipap@chsgroup.org.uk 07540 122624, or visiting the Tpas website https://www.tpas.org.uk/, searching The Cambridge Housing Society Ltd (CHS Group) and click Join as tenant.



RIVER LANE COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP DAY

River Lane residents and volunteers from City Church held a community clean-up day on the estate. There was a massive clear-up of garden waste and rubbish. The children did most of the litter picking, while the adults did the gardening and dealt with the larger items. Angelina Muller from City Church said 'Many residents came out to chat during the BBQ and do some crafts and the ones we helped in the garden were so grateful, we made wonderful connections. A few residents said the event has helped people who they don't normally see leave their houses come out and talk, others were happy to get their jobs done.' Housing Officer Adele Dant said thank you to the City Church volunteer team for the wonderful work they did.



MY HOME CONTENTS INSURANCE

Thistle Tenant Risks, administer the My Home Contents Insurance scheme and it is the National Housing Federation's (NHF) preferred supplier of tenant contents insurance. CHS does not insure your possessions and without an insurance policy, your home contents could be at risk if an incident were to occur within your home. The scheme can provide cover against fire, theft, flood, and other household risks. You can choose from a range of payment options including, fortnightly, monthly, or annual (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge). There is no long-term contract, providing a pay-as-you-go option. If you would like to find out more, please visit their website www.thistlemyhome.co.uk where you can request a call back. Or call My Home on 0345 450 7288

The Network - Summer 2023



If I have a problem, how do I get it resolved?

Contact CHS in one of the following ways to report an issue. If you have already discussed the issue with someone previously, but can't remember who you spoke to, a Customer Service Advisor may be able to bring up the details of your previous call which will

ensure you are put through to the right person.

Telephone: 0300 111 3555
Email: info@chsgroup.org.uk
Website: www.chsgroup.org.uk

Complete an online form or use **LiveChat** to speak to one of our customer services advisors in the chat box.

Book a repair online: Fill in the form on Foster's website https://fpm-ltd.co.uk/reporting/

Write: CHS Group, Endurance House, Chivers Way, Histon,

Cambridge, CB24 9ZR

Visit: Our office reception at the above address is now open for in person enquiries.

2. Reporting a repair

Heating repairs - Gasway

For a new repair, call 0300 111 3555 and select 1

For an existing repair or to change/cancel an appointment, call **01603 309544**

All other repairs – Foster

For a new repair call 0300 111 3555 and select 2

For an existing repair or to change/cancel an appointment, all **0330 1340150**.

You can send photos relating to the repair you have reported by emailing **fostercentral@fpm-ltd.co.uk** or by sending them on **WhatsApp 07377 989073**

Please include your address when you send the photos

3. Urgent or Out of Hours repairs

If the issue is urgent, phoning us will be the quickest way to get a response. If it is outside of office hours, we have a 24 hour phone service using the main number **0300 111 3555**, this is only for emergencies.

HOW TO REPORT AN ISSUE OR MAKE A COMPLAINT

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a service you have received by CHS e.g. if you have reported a leaky tap a number of times with Foster and they haven't fixed the issue and the issue is ongoing. At that point you can make a complaint about how your report was dealt with.

You have a right to complain

You can complain about any service provided to you by CHS or our contractors and you will not be penalised for making a complaint. You can complain directly to Foster or to Gasway about an issue with their service, and if you are unhappy with the way your complaint is dealt with by them, you can then complain to CHS about any contractor.

How to complain

If you are unhappy with the service you have received, you can contact CHS by phone, email, online via the website or in writing (details outlined above). It is important to clearly explain what the issue is and what you would like us to do to resolve the issue. The resolution that you are seeking has to be reasonable and within CHS's power to provide.

What CHS should do in response to your complaint

Once you have made a complaint, if we can resolve it to your satisfaction there and then we will. If not, CHS will write to you to acknowledge the complaint and set out what we will do to put things right.

Escalating your complaint

If you're unhappy with CHS's response, reply setting out why you are dissatisfied, what the outstanding issues are and what you think CHS should do to put things right.

Further sources of support for making complaints

CHS has a Customer Complaints Panel made up of tenant volunteers who are trained to consider customer complaints and their purpose is to ensure fair outcomes for tenants. You can contact them for advice, and they can act as an advocate to help you voice your complaint and guide you through the process. You can contact them by emailing **complaintspanel@chsgroup.org.uk** or calling **0300 111 3555** and asking for a call back from the Complaints Panel.

The Housing Ombudsman's website **www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk** has videos with tips about making a complaint. You can contact them for advice at any time: phone 0300 111 3000. The CHS complaints process includes: an initial contact about something that has gone wrong; a formal complaint; and if you are unhappy with the response to a formal complaint, you can ask for a formal review, which may be carried out by our Customer Complaints Panel. If you are unhappy after a formal review, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.



An art exhibition showing works created by some of our residents and members of the Corona community was held on the weekend of 22-23rd April at the Artworks gallery in Cambridge. One exhibitor said: 'We have all bloomed and blossomed through art and have inspired and supported each other. Through that process we have learnt that women are powerful. We hope that this exhibition will in turn inspire and encourage you to love yourself and love the world."

it helps to build confidence and self-expression. The exhibition was well attended, and seven pieces of work were sold from three of the artists as well as books, zines and postcards from all of the women. The artwork and poems were of a very high standard. Below are some words of praise from the comments book,

"Lovely uplifting exhibition." – "Beautiful creations elegantly presented."- "Exceptional talent and individual personality so clear in the work."

Bloom Like a Flower Blossoms

Bloom like a flower blossoms Unfold your inner self If beautiful waterlilies root in muddy waters Then you too can Blossom in difficult situations A flower beyond words Cannot speak But just blooms All beings are flowers In a blossoming universe. 🛊 Tegan

SHOEBOX APPEAL SPREADS FESTIVE CHEERS

CHS distributed more than 275 festive parcels across supported housing services in Cambridgeshire in December, to ensure all residents had a Christmas gift under the tree.

The CHS Group Shoebox Appeal, now in its fourth year, invited individuals, schools, churches, businesses and community groups to donate shoeboxes filled with Christmas gifts. Supporters of this year's campaign included CB3 Consulting, Sawston Village College, St Faiths School in Cambridge, Morley Memorial Primary School, Friends of Little Thetford School, RxBiologics and Cambridge Country Club

In total, more than 275 shoeboxes were distributed to residents in CHS Supported Housing, YMCA Cambridge, Cambridge Youth Foyer, Whitworth House and Castle Project, as well as to CHS tenant families. Additional donations went to Jimmy's Cambridge, a community-based charity providing both support and housing to people who are rough sleeping.

Stephen Hills, Chief Executive at CHS Group, said: "We are so grateful for the generosity and support of the Cambridgeshire community who came together to bring so much joy and happiness to our residents, at a time when they may have felt at their most isolated.

"With the cost of living crisis, a year without presents would have been a sad reality for many people in our services, but we are thrilled to have



been able to change that and make a lasting, positive difference at Christmas time. I want to thank everybody who supported our campaign and donated to people in need across our region."

CHS Group provides a number of accommodation and support services in Ely, Wisbech and Cambridge - supporting people who would otherwise be homeless, young parents and their children, as well as people with autism, learning difficulties and those experiencing mental health

To find out more about CHS Group's Shoebox Appeal, visit:

https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/supportedhousing/chs-shoe-box-appeal-2022/

CHS Contact Details

Head Office

CHS Group, Endurance House, Chivers Way Histon, Cambridge CB24 9ZR

Please note that our head office in Histon is now open to visitors.

General Enquiries

Tel: 0300 111 3555 Minicom: 01223 713784 Email: help@chsgroup.org.uk Web: www.chsgroup.org.uk

Repairs

Tel: 0300 111 3555 (24 hours for emergency repairs) Email: repairs@chsgroup.org.uk

E-newsletter

If you would like to receive this newsletter in an email, please contact CHS to provide your email address. It can also be downloaded from the MyCHS portal. Register online via our website chsgroup.org.uk

Please contact us if you would like it in audio or large print formats.

Follow us on:



