

YOUR HOUSING

May 2025



In this issue:

Page 2 Welcome from Cllr Rob Lillis

Page 3 Damp and mould

Page 4 Repair satisfaction

Page 4 Stock condition surveys

Page 5 Abbeyfield House

Page 5 Sheltered housing

Page 6 Policy updates

Pages 6 & 7 Housing Improvement Programme

Pages 8 & 9 Fire and electrical safety

Page 10 Safe e-bike charging

Page 11 The Paddocks Community Centre

Welcome to the May edition of Your Housing Magazine

In our previous issue, we updated you on our plans to address the serious concerns raised by the Regulator of Social Housing. This month, we're pleased to share the steps we've taken so far and introduce the changes coming this year as part of our Housing Improvement Programme.

Over the past few months, I've had the pleasure of visiting residents' homes across areas such as Ozonia Gardens, Wrackhall Court, Manor Road, Wendy Goodwin Court, Kimberley Court and Templewood Estate. These visits have been invaluable in understanding the challenges you face and seeing the quality of our housing firsthand.

In our commitment to tackling damp, mould and condensation issues, we've partnered with ZapCarbon, an independent specialist. They will inspect and treat affected homes, ensuring safety and compliance with the upcoming Awaab's law, effective this October. This is a new piece of legislation that requires social housing landlords to fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes.

Additionally, we've introduced a new process for managing damp, mould and condensation putting residents' safety first while addressing root causes.

Keeping you safe remains our top priority. In this issue, you'll find practical advice on electrical and fire safety to help keep your homes safe.

We hope you enjoy this edition and find it both informative and helpful.

All the best
Cllr Rob Lillis
**Cabinet Member for Health,
Wellbeing and Housing**



Cllr Rob Lillis, Portfolio Holder and Angela Hutchings, Chief Executive during a visit to Templewood Estate.

Our new Damp, Mould and Condensation process

We have a zero-tolerance policy towards damp and mould. We recently consulted with some of you to help shape our new Damp, Mould, and Condensation process. Here's what you told us and what we did in response.

You said:

Can you employ a damp and mould specialist to deal with my concern?

We did:

We now have a specialist damp and mould contractor. They will visit homes where damp and mould are a problem to carry out a health check.

You said:

Can you get in touch with me about my damp and mould concern quicker?

We did:

When you report a concern with damp or mould to us, we will contact you within two working days to ask questions about the problem that will help us carry out a risk assessment. This risk assessment will help us prioritise the work we give to our specialist damp and mould contractor.

You said:

Can you deal with the damp and mould?

We did:

When our specialist contractor visits your home, they will carry out a "clean and shield" treatment that will provide protection from mould growth for three months. In most cases this will be long enough for our repairs contractor to visit you to carry out any work needed to remove the cause of the damp, mould or condensation.



Follow these steps if you have a concern about damp and mould in your home:

Step 1: Report Damp and Mould

You can report damp and mould by:

- Calling 01268 882326
- Emailing dampandmould@castlepoint.gov.uk (please remember to include your address and photos if possible)

Upon receiving a report, our repairs team will contact you to assess the severity and check for vulnerabilities within the household.

Step 2: Inspection and Treatment

We will instruct our specialist damp and mould contractor, ZapCarbon, to:

- Conduct a full damp and mould survey in your home
- Treat the symptoms to keep you safe
- Provide a report to us detailing the recommended actions to remove the root cause of the damp or mould.

Urgent cases can receive a survey and treatment within 24 hours. If your home becomes unsafe, we will arrange alternative accommodation.

Once we receive ZapCarbon's report, our repair surveyor will review it and instruct a contractor to carry out any necessary remedial work. If major works are required, for example, a new roof, more time will be required to rectify the cause. In these cases, our planned works team will take over. If damp and mould returns before any major works are completed, contact us immediately. We will arrange for further treatment to keep you safe.

Sensors may need to be installed in some properties for damp monitoring.

Step 3: Follow-up

A repair surveyor will inspect completed work. We will contact you after eight-twelve months to confirm the issue is resolved. However, you can contact us at any time if the damp or mould returns.

Repairs satisfaction survey

Surveys play an important role in improving our repairs service. When repairs are completed by our contractor, MCP, if we have your mobile number, you will receive a text message asking you to complete a satisfaction survey.

MCP's Resident Liaison Officer (RLO) reviews feedback from the satisfaction surveys.

MCP share the results of satisfaction surveys with us every month. Knowing how you said they are performing ensures continuous service improvement.

How it works:

If you score 7.5 or above out of 10 you are considered satisfied with the repair.

If you score below 7.5, you will be contacted by an RLO to discuss your concerns. They will arrange for any additional works if required and manage your case until the issue is resolved. You will be sent a new satisfaction survey following completion.



Repairs service improvements

We are making improvements with our contractors to improve the repairs services you receive.

In the past month, our repairs contractor, MCP, has:

- Doubled the number of supervisors and planners
- Increased the number of staff able to carry out repairs by 50%
- Reduced overdue works in progress by 68%
- Brought in new subcontractors for pest control, technical drainage surveys and tree works

Surveying the condition of our homes

We are conducting surveys of all our homes to better understand their current condition.

This information will guide us in making informed decisions about investment and prioritising maintenance work where it is most needed.

We are working with Walker Management, an external contractor to complete these surveys. They will contact you directly to arrange an appointment. The survey will take approximately three hours to carry out. All that is needed is access to your home. Contractors will assess both the inside and outside. We are grateful for your cooperation while the surveys are taking place.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact us on 01268 882200

Transforming Abbeyfield House: A step towards housing solutions

In an important move to help tackle homelessness in Castle Point, detailed plans have been shared to redevelop Abbeyfield House.



Cllr Tom Gibson at Abbeyfield House (BBC Images)

What's changing at Abbeyfield House?

The Council bought Abbeyfield House in January 2025 after careful checks and securing vacant possession. The plan is to turn this former privately-owned sheltered housing site into 19 individual temporary homes for our residents who don't currently have a safe place to stay. This includes people forced to leave their homes or the Borough due to a lack of housing options.

Next steps

The Council's Development Management Committee (DMC) will decide on the planning application by summer 2025. If approved, the Council will quickly hire contractors to start the redevelopment process, which is expected to begin in autumn 2025. The new homes should be ready for residents to move in by spring 2026.

Cllr Rob Lillis, Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing, said: "The redevelopment of this property would be a major step in addressing ever increasing numbers of households now facing homelessness. It will provide safe and secure homes within the Borough, and we're fully committed to involving local residents in this scheme."

Cllr Tom Gibson, Cabinet Member for Special Projects & Assets, added: "This scheme shows how the Council's Asset Review Board is actively working to make the best use of existing buildings and finding new ways to use sites for the community's benefit."

We're upgrading our sheltered housing facilities

We are pleased to announce that we are in the process of surveying our sheltered housing properties in order to improve the facilities.

As part of these works, we will be replacing the laundry equipment to several schemes, and introducing a programme of upgrading the furniture, carpets and decorations as well as looking at arrangements for charging mobility scooters.

Externally, we are inspecting the footpaths and fencing including the shrubbery, to tidy them up and improve the way they look.

We are committed to upgrading the warden call system across all schemes and will ensure this happens as a priority. We appreciate your cooperation during this process. We will let you know how the upgrades are progressing in the next issue of this magazine.

Updates to our housing policies

We're improving our housing policies to make our services better for you.

For example, we are working on a new Complaints Policy. It follows the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, that was introduced in 2024, following extensive consultation with residents across England and Wales.

The policies and procedures we write form the basis of the services we provide to you.

We know a lot about housing law and best practices, but your input is very important to us. Your feedback helps us to understand what matters most to you.

Want to have your say?

If you'd like to get involved and take part in a focus group, or to answer a questionnaire we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch at tenantforum@castlepoint.gov.uk

Big improvements coming to Castle Point housing services

Major changes are taking place in housing services in Castle Point. The Council has created a plan called the Housing Improvement Programme (HIP) to make housing services better for everyone.

This programme will fix some important problems. It will help tenants have their voices heard, ensure all homes are safe, and make the whole housing system easier to use. To make these changes happen, the Council is investing over £2.3 million.

An estimated timeline for the schedule of Big improvements:

April

Safety and quality

We are implementing a new damp and mould procedure that will ensure all reports of damp and mould are actioned. We have appointed a new damp and mould specialist contractor who started work in April.

May

Transparency, influence and accountability

We are improving our communication with you by implementing a new Housing Complaints Policy which aligns to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. We aim to go live with the new policy in May.

June

Safety and quality

We are investing in new and effective IT solutions to manage our properties. We are focusing on our housing asset management and compliance system as a priority. We aim to have this system in place by June.

July

Transparency, influence and accountability

We are working with tenants, staff, and independent tenant engagement experts Tpas to design an engagement framework influenced and shaped by tenants. Research and design work with Tpas will be completed by end of July. Tpas is an independent organisation that specialises in improving tenant engagement.

We are finalising the results of our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) for the year 2024/2025. From these, you will be able to see how well we are performing. We will publish our TSM results in July.

Continued over the page...

Estimated timeline for the schedule of **Big improvements** Continued...

August

Neighbourhood and community

We are updating our housing policies and procedures to reflect how we will deliver our housing services going forward including: our Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) Policy, Domestic Abuse Policy, Hate Crime Policy and Safeguarding Policy. We aim to have these updated policies and procedures in place by August.

September

Tenancy

We are updating our housing policies and procedures to enable long term sustainability in our housing service. We aim to have these updated strategies, policies, and procedures in place by September.

November

Safety and quality

We are carrying out stock condition surveys of all our homes to understand their current condition. Knowing about our homes will help us to best direct investment and prioritise work where it is needed most. We aim to have these completed by November.



December

Transparency, influence and accountability

We are updating our website to improve on accessibility and information, resources and channels we have available to you. We will make changes to our website as we progress through the Housing Improvement Programme and aim to have our website up to date by December.

Tenancy

We are going to update our Tenancy Handbook to ensure you have access to all the information and resources available to you. We aim to complete these updates by December.



Keeping you safe from fire at home

We are doing all that we can to keep you and your home safe from the devastating effects of fire, and you can help too.

Smoke alarms save lives

Test your smoke alarms once a month. You can do this yourself by holding the button on the alarm for up to five seconds. If your smoke alarm goes off by mistake, wait for it to stop. Do not take out the batteries or cover the smoke alarm – it is in place for your safety.

Top tips for keeping safe at home

Fires are more likely to start at home than anywhere else. Here are some useful tips that you can use to ensure your home and communal areas of your building stay as safe as possible:

In the kitchen:

- When using the hob, keep your saucepan handles turned in so they do not get knocked off. If you need to leave the room, take your pans off the heat.
- Keep tea towels and cloths away from your cooker and be careful when wearing loose clothing near flames or heat sources.
- If you are cooking with oil and it catches fire, never use water on it as it will cause a fireball. If you can, turn off the heat and cover the pan with a lid or damp towel.
- Switch off all non-essential appliances at night and when you are not at home.
- Keep your oven, oven hood filters, and hob clean and free of grease and food debris as this can quickly ignite and cause a fire.

Keep children safe:

- Do not let children play with electrical items.
- Use plug guards in sockets and unplug appliances that children could trip over.
- Keep matches, lighters, and candles out of sight and reach of children.
- Always use a childproof fire guard, and do not let children play or leave toys near a fire or heater.
- Take care when cooking - never leave children alone in the kitchen.
- Make sure your evacuation route is clear of any toys or pushchairs which may block it.
- Keep doors closed at night.
- Discuss the importance of fire safety with your children.

Cigarettes:

- Do not smoke in your property - always find an outside space away from the stairwells or building to smoke.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Do not leave lit cigarettes, cigars, or pipes lying around.
- Stub cigarettes out completely and dispose of them safely.
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children.

Communal areas

If you live in a building with multiple flats, communal areas including entrances, stairwells, corridors, landings, and service cupboards must be kept clear of personal belongings.

In the event of a fire, items in communal areas can fuel a fire, block important escape routes, and obstruct firefighter access to emergency equipment.

You must clear any items that you may have outside your home, in communal areas, or in service cupboards, including:

- Bikes including e-bikes.
- Pushchairs.
- Mobility scooters or e-scooters.
- Shoes or shoe racks.
- Plants and other decorations including picture frames, posters, Christmas or other religious decorations.
- Furniture, including white goods.
- Household rubbish.

***Highly flammable items like barbecues, gas cylinders, petrol, diesel, or oil cans must not be stored anywhere in the building. ***



Electrical safety at home

Can you work out all the safety faults in this picture?



It is vital to look after your electrical equipment. Electric shocks and fires caused by electrical faults are a major cause of injury and can be fatal. Simple checks could save your life.

Cables:

- Check cables for damage - there should not be any cuts or frays.
- Be careful not to overload extension cables.
- Make sure extension cables are fully uncoiled during use.
- Do not 'daisy chain' extension cables.

Plugs:

- Plugs should fit tightly into sockets.
- Plug casings should not be cracked or chipped.
- Do not use a plug if it has burn marks or signs of damage.

Sockets:

- Check sockets for burn marks and signs of overheating.
- Make sure sockets are properly secured to the wall and not loose.
- Make sure the socket switches work properly.

Chargers:

Different devices require different levels of charge. Branded chargers are specifically designed for a particular device.

Fake chargers are often made with poor quality components that fail to meet UK safety regulations. Fake chargers may supply too much energy into a device, leading to overheating. This means they can cause injury, electric shocks, and even fires.

Top tips for electrical safety:

- Make sure your electrical appliances have a British or European safety mark.
- Regularly empty fluff and lint from tumble dryers.
- Switch off appliances when not in use.
- Hair dryers and straighteners can get extremely hot – leave them to cool on a heatproof surface after use.
- Do not use an extension lead for high powered appliances like washing machines.
- Remember that water and electricity are a deadly mix – do not use mains-powered appliances like hairdryers, straighteners, or radios in the bathroom.
- Regularly clean your oven and hob to avoid a build-up of food debris which poses a fire risk.
- Check your children's chargers and electrical equipment regularly to make sure it is in good condition.
- Register your white goods – it could save your life if a product is recalled for safety reasons. You can check for product recalls here:

www.whitegoodsafety.com/product-recalls

Charging e-scooters and e-bikes safely at home

E-bikes and e-scooters can pose serious safety risks if used and charged incorrectly. If you own an e-bike, e-scooter, or mobility scooter, always follow the guidance for charging safely as most fires occur whilst charging. Charge batteries on a hard, flat surface. Store your e-bike or e-scooter in your property on a flat, non-flammable surface near a smoke or heat alarm.

E-bikes, e-scooters, and mobility scooters must be stored and charged inside your home rather than in communal areas.

They should never block an emergency exit.

Top tips for keeping safe whilst charging e-bikes, e-scooters, and mobility scooters at home:

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging.
- Never leave the device unattended while charging.
- Only charge your device when you are at home and awake - avoid charging when you are asleep.
- Always unplug your charger once it has finished charging your device.
- Always use a charger approved by the product manufacturer and buy an official one from a reputable seller.
- Be cautious buying batteries from online marketplaces as they may not meet the correct safety standards.
- Do not attempt to modify or tamper with the battery. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Check the battery for damage before charging. If there is any damage, do not use it.
- Do not dispose of lithium-ion batteries in general household or recycling waste. Batteries can be taken to your recycling centre.
- Do not use electrical power points in communal areas to charge any personal items.

Make sure you have home contents insurance. If there is a fire in your home and your belongings are lost or damaged, it is your responsibility to replace them.



Helping young people build skills and revive The Paddocks



Can you spot the Leader of the Council, Cllr Dave Blackwell in the photo?

We have been working with VIY (Volunteer It Yourself) and Dulux to give local young people the chance to learn trade skills as part of The Paddocks Community Centre refurbishment.

VIY helps young people who've had a tough time or struggled with school and training. With guidance from professional tradespeople, they can earn Entry Level 3 City & Guilds qualifications in trade skills like painting and decorating, and even move on to more training or jobs. About 20 young people from Castle Point were involved, contributing to the community while working toward their qualifications.

This project was funded by the UK Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund through Castle Point Borough Council, with added support from Dulux and the Essex Community Foundation. Dulux has donated paint and materials, provided volunteers, and offered expert advice on colours.

Cllr Tom Gibson, Cabinet Member for Special Projects and Assets, said: "We were excited to work with VIY and Dulux on The Paddocks Community Centre project. It was a great chance for young people to learn valuable skills, make a difference

in their community, and earn qualifications. It was inspiring to see their enthusiasm as they transformed the Centre into a vibrant community space."

This partnership not only supports young people's growth but also creates a welcoming community space for everyone. Thanks to teamwork and funding, The Paddocks Community Centre is now a fantastic asset for all Castle Point residents.





For more information email:
info@castlepoint.gov.uk

Or visit the Castle Point Borough Council
website at: www.castlepoint.gov.uk