# Sky for tenants of South Kesteven

# Cost of Living help for tenants





SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL



SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCII

## Welcome

Here is the latest issue of Skyline, packed full of news and updates from South Kesteven District Council.

If you have any feedback about the magazine or any content you would like to see in future issues please get in touch.

For even faster news and updates why not follow us on social media? We're on all the popular platforms, including Twitter and Facebook. Find them all at www.southkesteven.gov.uk/ getsocial



General enquiries

Council offices Grantham (head office) St Peter's Hill, Grantham NG31 6PZ

www.southkesteven.gov.uk



Front cover: Cost of Living help for tenants this Christmas.

## Your tenant update

Welcome to this Winter 2022 edition of Skyline – we hope you find it an informative and enjoyable read. This latest edition is a chance to provide you, our tenants and leaseholders, with an Annual Report on South Kesteven District Council in its role as your landlord. You can find the Annual Report on pages 7-9.

It is an exciting time for us as a landlord. We have recently commenced work onsite at Earlesfield, Grantham, on a £4m project to upgrade 152 properties on the estate. This is a fantastic project and a real commitment from the Council to enhance the condition of our properties.

Within this Winter edition we also provide an update on progress with the Regulator of Social Housing, including our reported performance for October 2022. There is a dedicated section in relation to the works that we need to undertake to ensure Regulatory Compliance and the need for our tenants to allow us access to their homes. These works are of vital importance to ensuring your ongoing health and safety.

Our 'Day in the Life' feature continues. This time we follow one of our repairs operatives Ashley McLean, who undertakes responsive repairs to your homes.

Over the coming months we have lots of work ongoing. We report on our support of the recent White Ribbon Day and invite your input on our ongoing consultation on Service Charges.

As we approach Christmas the pressures of the Cost of Living situation become more apparent, and we have compiled some advice to ensure that you are aware of the numerous opportunities for support that may be available to you.

We close the Winter edition with an overview of the Armed Forces Act and SKDC's commitment through signing the Armed Forces Covenant. The final page is dedicated to some key contact details for SKDC and partner agencies.

With our best wishes for the festive season.



Craig Spence Acting Director of Housing ⊠ craig.spence@ southkesteven.gov.uk

## Driving up our housing standards

Sto improve the standard of its homes for tenants across the District.

The Regulator of Social Housing sets a series of regulatory standards for registered providers of social housing.

The Regulator takes a proactive approach on these standards with a particular focus on governance and financial viability.

Social housing includes low-cost rental (such as affordable rent properties) and low-cost home ownership. Registered providers of social housing include local authority landlords and private registered providers (such as not-for-profit housing associations, co-operatives, and for-profit organisations). The monthly meetings between inspectors from the Regulator and South Kesteven District Council's Chief Executive, and our Acting Director of Housing have continued.

We continue to share the latest performance figures for landlord health and safety (gas servicing, water hygiene, electrical safety, asbestos re-inspections, fire risk assessment, lift inspections and smoke and CO detection) along with updates on the various improvement plans that are being delivered.

We continue to present a report every two months to the Council's Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Compliance with the Regulatory Standard.

The Committee reviews and

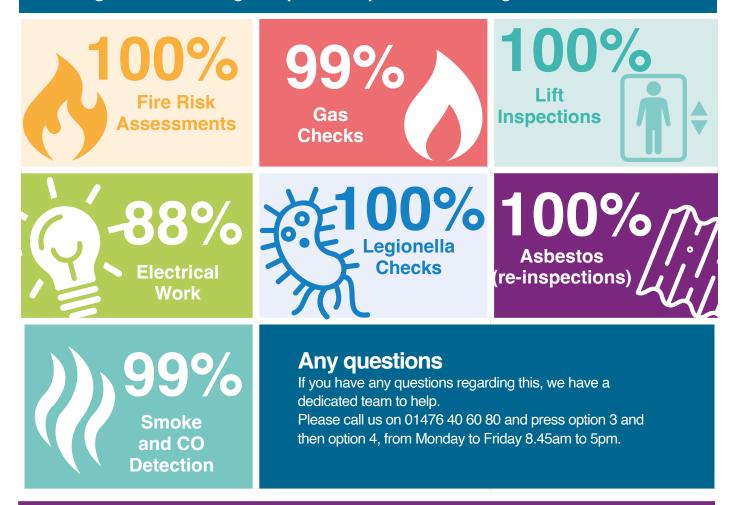
challenges the progress being made and asks questions. The report, improvement plans and performance figures are all freely available to all on the Council's website at the following web address https://bit.ly/ RuraIOS

The figures for October 2022 are shown below.

It is good news that four of our seven performance statistics are at 100%. You may notice that we are now also reporting our compliance with the new regulation relating to smoke and CO detection which came into effect from October 1<sup>st</sup> 2022.

Please work with us to allow access to your home to carry out any required compliance checks – your safety is our priority.

#### The figures for Housing Compliance reported to the Regulator in October are:



## Knock knock! SKDC sometimes needs to access your home for different reasons

The Council has many legal, regulatory and contractual duties as a social landlord, some of which may require access to your home.

These include ensuring our social housing stock meets national legal standards in terms of conditions, as well as ensuring the safety of all our tenants.

In order for the Council to carry out its duties it may sometimes be necessary for us to access your home. We will always work with our tenants to ensure that access is mutually agreeable, providing support to tenants when necessary.

One example of why we must access your home is for gas safety checks. Faulty gas appliances can give off poisonous carbon monoxide fumes that cannot be seen or smelled, but can kill. As your landlord, the Council has a legal duty to make sure all our appliances are checked every year by qualified gas servicing engineers.

SKDC may need to inspect a property's condition or carry out work to meet legal, regulatory and/ or contractual obligations. On these occasions, we must give tenants the legally required notice of 24 hours.



There is a fair and transparent process we follow to gain access if a tenant has either a) not agreed to give access; or b) ignores any contact requesting access.

#### Your landlord must:

- Arrange gas or electrical safety checks
- Inspect your home for any repairs needed



The only time a landlord has the right to access one of its rental properties without permission is in an emergency. This is when there is a threat to the structure of the property or to life, such as:

- A fire in the property
- Structural damage that requires urgent attention
- Water flowing from the building
- A strong smell of gas
- Suspicion of a violent or criminal incident

A serious concern for welfare In these circumstances, an officer must be behaving 'reasonably' if they enter a property. They must be able to justify their access.

We may obtain photographic evidence of any issue, make clear notes, log any police incident number, and get signed statements from any contractor present.

Unless it is an emergency, landlords should always contact the tenant and give at least 24 hours' written notice before any property visits.



## No two days are ever the same

Operating across the District on a range of scheduled and emergency work, SKDC's Repairs Team completes an average 1,000 repairs every month.

For joiner Ashley McLean, no two days have been the same since he joined the Council in February 2022 after working as a self-employed sub-contractor.

It's the maintenance work that he enjoys the most, knowing he is making a difference to tenants across the district.

Ashley initially started his career as a labourer but his then employer offered him a joinery apprenticeship, which allowed him to work at the same time as developing his skills.

Ashley said: "Doing an apprenticeship was a great opportunity for me. I studied one day a week at Grantham College as well as working. I was able to gain valuable experience, while also working towards a recognised qualification." SKDC's Repairs Team carefully plans each day to make the most of everyone's time and minimise the environmental impact of travelling across the District.

"When I was self-employed I had to consider ongoing maintenance of my van as well as staying on top of paperwork," said Ashley. "Now, I can work without that additional pressure.

"It's something I have recommended to friends working in the same industry. It's a varied and rewarding job and I enjoy the satisfaction of helping people."

Ashley can really see the difference his work makes, whether it's a scheduled repair or an emergency call-out outside normal working hours.

From changing broken locks to installing accessibility aids, each job requires a different approach. Thanks to his skills and expertise Ashley aims to deliver a highstandard repair every time.



Fixtures and fittings can break or wear out over time. If that happens in your home we have a dedicated team available to visit and make any necessary repairs or replacements.

Always contact us as soon as possible to prevent any further damage to your home. You can request a repair at www.southkesteven.gov. uk/repairs or by emailing repairs@southkesteven.gov. uk or calling 01476 40 61 70.

## How we help in severe weather conditions

Avoluntary process (SWEP) is put in place by district housing authorities to ensure that people sleeping rough are not at risk of harm, or in extreme cases, death, during periods of extreme cold or severe weather.

SKDC has a series of actions designed to get rough sleepers into emergency temporary accommodation during severe weather in a protocol designed in line with Government guidance.

Anyone who is rough sleeping can contact the Council to access emergency accommodation while the Severe Weather Protocol is active, regardless of their eligibility under homelessness legislation.

Our Housing Options Team checks predicted outdoor temperatures on a regular basis and updates our website when SWEP is activated. We also notify all of the organisations and individuals that may come across rough sleepers during the course of their daily activities.

If you are sleeping rough, or know of someone who is and needs help with temporary accommodation whilst the SWEP is active call: 201467 40 60 80 201476 40 60 40 (Out of hours)





## Advice to combat damp and mould in your home

Tenants may receive advice and help to reduce the risk of condensation and mould following the death of a child in Rochdale from respiratory issues.

South Kesteven District Council inspects all of its social housing properties where an issue has been reported – and is sharing ventilation advice, providing mould treatment, and keeping clear records to help monitor housing stock.

As a responsible landlord, one of SKDC's roles is to make tenants aware of action they can take to help reduce condensation and the potential for mould in their homes.

Anyone can download the Condensation, Mould and Damp Control leaflet for more information from https://bit.ly/ DampMouldAdviceSK

We are looking closely at our own damp and mould processes to ensure a consistent and timely response when this issue is reported to us by our tenants.

During cold weather condensation becomes a problem in many homes. It is caused when warm moist air hits a cold surface, such as a window or external wall and condenses and runs down the surface as water droplets. If left this can develop into black mould which can cause damage to decorations, furniture, clothes and shoes as well as causing health problems.

Fortunately, there are steps that can be taken to prevent mould forming. In the first instance they include reducing moisture vapour created inside the home and ensuring the home is well heated and ventilated.

For example, drying clothes inside is a major cause of excess moisture in the air, leading to damp. In this instance, it is important to open windows to allow moisture to escape and air to flow through the room.

Any of our tenants who think dampness is a result of the building fabric of their home rather than the way it is used, or that the building cannot be properly ventilated, should report it right away via 01476 40 60 80.

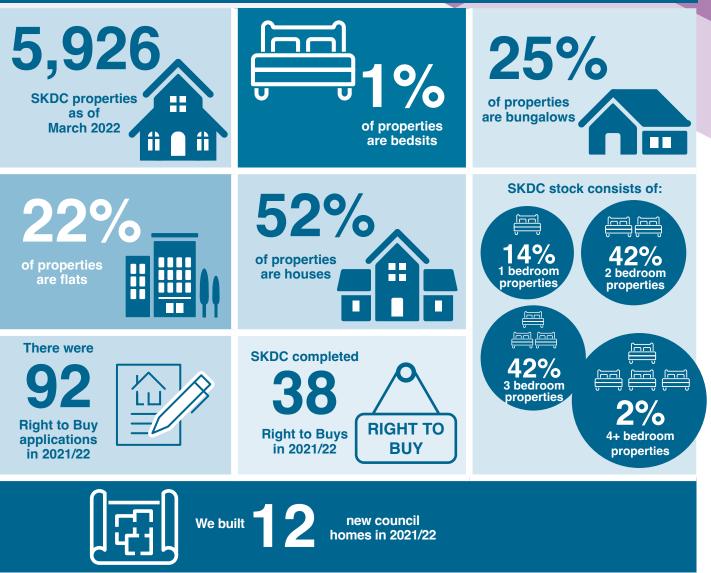
SKDC has dedicated resources to conduct inspections and remedial work to properties. We will undertake assessments of damp and mould issues affecting our properties and take necessary action we have identified in relation to these issues.

# Annual report 2021/22

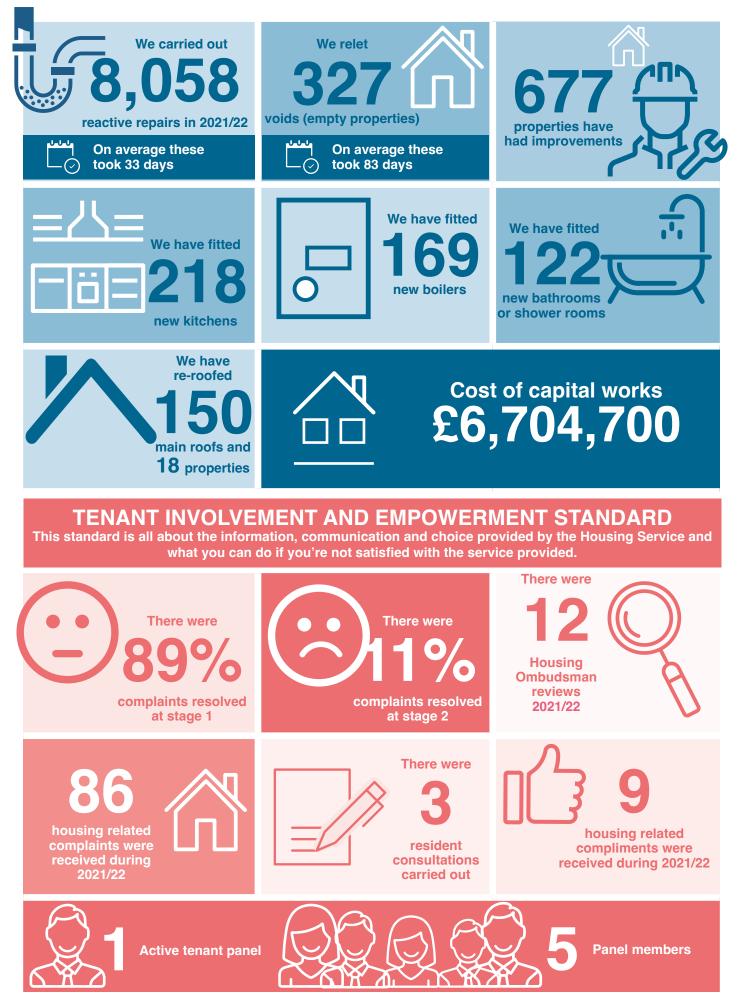
Welcome to the Housing Services annual report for 2021/22 which offers an insight into the work we do. South Kesteven District Council aspires to provide high quality homes and services to those who rent property from the Council.

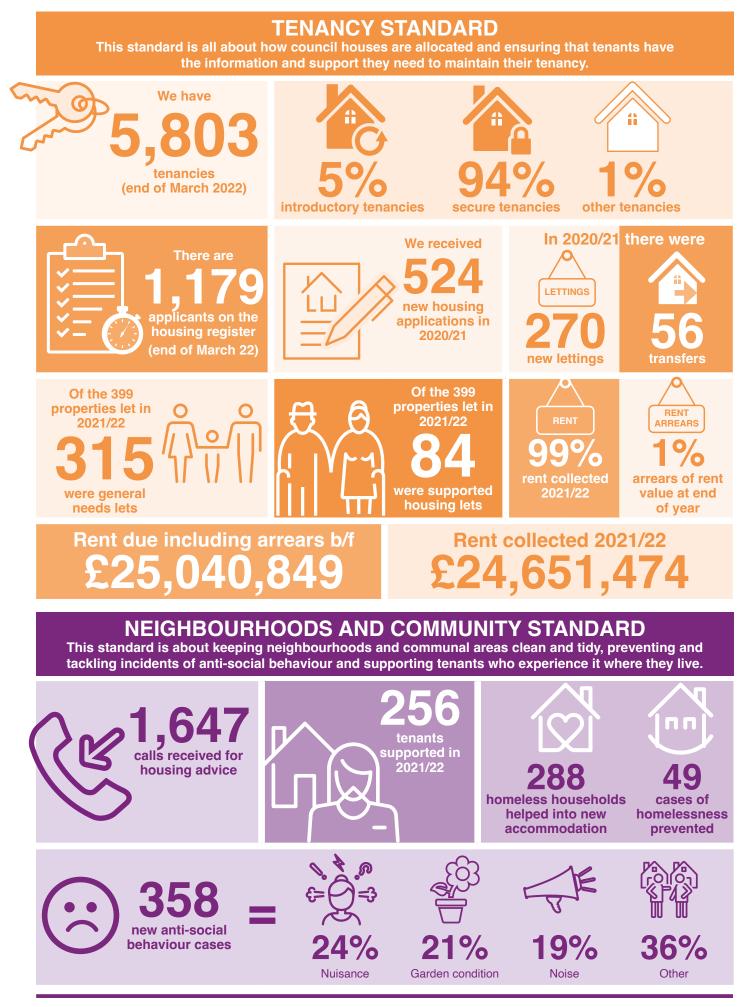
**HOME STANDARD** 

This standard is all about ensuring you have a decent home and a good repairs service that meets your needs and maintains the quality of your home.



#### Skyline Winter 2022 www.southkesteven.gov.uk





# Making the White Ribbon Promise to keep communities safe

South Kesteven District Council supported White Ribbon Day in November as staff pledged to "never use, excuse, or remain silent about men's violence against women."

Acts of violence and abuse within homes and communities continue to rise and, although everyone can be affected, statistics show most is committed by men, and experienced by women and girls.

White Ribbon is the UK's leading charity working with men and boys to raise awareness of violence against women. Through education and taking steps to move away from harmful attitudes, the charity hopes women and girls can be safer, both at home and in public.

Craig Spence, Acting Director of Housing, said: "It is the Council's vision that South Kesteven is the best district in which to live, work and visit.

"To achieve this, communities across the District must feel safe, supported and be able to live without fear of violence.

"SKDC has a zero-tolerance approach to violence and abuse in all instances and is taking steps to ensure that the safety of women and girls across the District is a priority."

A recently updated Domestic Abuse Policy is in place setting out how the Council can best support individuals and families.

In the first instance, anyone experiencing violence and/or domestic abuse should contact the police, if it is safe to do so.

SKDC is also on hand to support individuals in a sensitive and confidential way by establishing communication with the police and arranging safe spaces to meet with staff.

SKDC staff can also offer advice



on options for short and longerterm housing, welfare benefits and referrals to specialist outreach support services, such as End Domestic Abuse Now (EDAN Lincs).

EDAN Lincs is a registered charity and support service operating through Lincolnshire.

#### You can call them on 01522 51 00 41, email info@ edanlincs.org.uk or visit their website https://edanlincs.org.uk.

If you are unable to use technology to get in touch, Safe Spaces are also available in participating stores, pharmacies and banks across the District.

They provide a safe and discrete way to reach out to friends and family, and contact specialist support services.

Many Safe Spaces are also prepared to respond to the 'Ask for ANI' codeword. 'Ask for ANI' is a nationwide scheme where victims of domestic abuse can discreetly ask for immediate help in pharmacies by mentioning the codeword.

The Silent Solution system could also be useful – it enables a 999 mobile caller who is too scared to make a noise or speak, to press 55 when prompted to inform police they are in a genuine emergency.

If you are experiencing violence or domestic abuse, SKDC can help. Call on 01467 40 60 80 or email us on customerservices@ southkesteven.gov.uk.



## Service charges are under review

We value the opinion of our tenants. To ensure your voice is heard, keep an eye out for an invitation to take part in consultation on proposed changes to service charges.

A service charge is a fee levied to cover the cost of providing and maintaining services in the internal and external communal areas for anyone living in sheltered housing or a general needs flat.

SKDC does not make a profit from service charges.

We calculate the service charge as either fixed or variable, as follows:

Fixed – if the service is contract based, such as grounds maintenance, cleaning, health and safety costs, then we know how much these are likely to be increased by each year as part of the contract.

Variable – if the charge is for a cost which can vary (such as utilities) we will base the estimated costs on the actual cost of the service in previous years.

You will receive a breakdown of how this charge has been calculated each year and the services covered could include:

- Employing a caretaker
- Cleaning shared areas, including windows, and removing rubbish
- Cutting grass and hedges
   Repairs to shared facilities such as door-entry systems,
- television aerials and lighting
   Providing and repairing lifts, including the cost of contracts and life insurance
- Providing firefighting equipment, including repairing and testing emergency lighting and smoke alarms
- Providing water, electricity and gas supplies to shared areas

There are some charges which are unavoidable, such as the cost of lighting. Some charges are discretionary, such as a window cleaning service.

The Council will be writing to tenants who live in flats and sheltered housing about proposed changes to service charges. The letter will include a weblink and QR code to an online survey. If you would like a paper copy of the survey please email housingconsuktation@ southkesteven.gov.uk or call 01476 406080 and ask for the Housing Community Engagement Officer.

We value your opinion. Please take this opportunity to have your say.



## Cost of Living – help for tenants Are you finding it difficult to make ends meet? Is paying your rent and other

bills a real struggle or are you just about managing? Are you sure that you're claiming everything you're entitled to?

t doesn't matter if you answer yes, no or don't know to any of these questions, the graphic below has been designed to help you. It outlines various schemes that are being provided at both a local and national level, groups you can contact, as well as things you might be able to do to help ease the cost-of-living burden currently being

**Dealing with debt** 

Lincolnshire

Support available from various

voluntary sector providers

and Citizens Advice South

including StepChange

experienced by many. It also includes information on the support services SKDC provides for its tenants.

For those of you who are unable to use the internet or don't have online access or, a directory of useful telephone numbers has been provided on page 14.

Working with our partners across

#### Maximising your income

- Check if you're eligible for Universal Credit
- If you're on the minimum wage, check your pay to make sure you're getting the rate you're entitled to, and your tax code is correct

government and in the voluntary sector, the Council is committed to providing our tenants with information and support during what we know will be a difficult winter.

Visit www.southkesteven.gov.uk/ costofliving or scan the QR code below for further information.

#### If you're unemployed or on a low income

- Apply for Jobseekers Allowance
- Check if you're eligible for Universal Credit

#### Your energy bills

- Energy Price Guarantee. This means a typical household on average usage would expect to pay around £2,500 per year and the guarantee is in place until April 2023
- Energy Bill Discount of £400 available to all households with a domestic electricity connection
- Check if you're eligible for support to pay your water/ gas bill
- Check if you're eligible for a Warm Home Discount of £150

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#### If you're a tenant

Ask for support from SKDC's Housing Section

- Housing Officers work with tenants to resolve any housing problems they may have
- Tenancy Support Officers work closely with specific clients to ensure tenancies can be sustained
- Sheltered Housing Officers help those living in sheltered housing to live independently

The Money Helper service is free, confidential and impartial: www.moneyhelper.org.uk

Information and links for all your cost of living enquiries: www.helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk

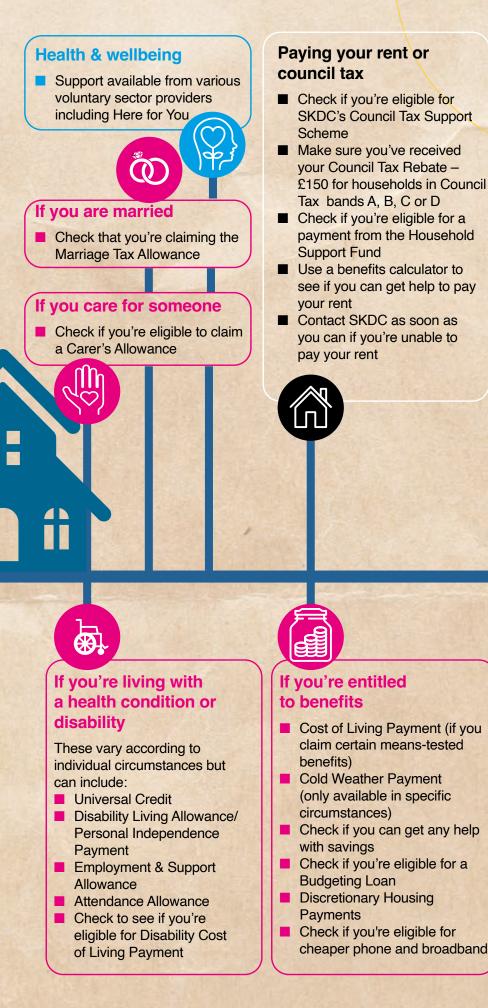


#### If you're a pensioner

- Pensioner Cost of Living Payment (if eligible for Winter Fuel Payment)
- Winter Fuel Payment
- Check if you're eligible for Pension Credit
- Check if you're eligible for Housing Benefit
- Free TV Licence (over 75s)
- Free bus pass (if over state pensionable age)









#### Cost of food

Support available from voluntary sector providers, including Foodbanks in Grantham, Stamford, Bourne and Deepings; the Trussell Trust; Grantham Passage Day Centre; and Stamford Second Helpings

#### Childcare costs

- 15 or 30 hours of free childcare per week for children aged 2, 3 and 4 (depending on eligibility)
- Claim Tax-Free Childcare
- Claim Child Benefit

If claiming

**Universal Credit** 

#### Check if you can claim back costs of childcare Check if your child can get Free School Meals

- Access to free activities and food during school holidays if eligible for free school meals
- Check if you're eligible for **Healthy Start Vouchers**
- Check if you're eligible for the Sure Start Maternity Grant



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cheaper phone and broadband

## nkesteven.gov.uk/costofliving

- Cost of Living Payment (if you
- Check if you can get any help

If you are not online or are unable to navigate the internet, on this page we are sharing some useful telephone numbers to get you started with finding the right support for your individual circumstances. Some are local groups, others are run by the government – but all can find a pathway to valuable support when you need it.

#### FINANCIAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT

#### Citizen's Advice South Lincs: 0808 278 7996

Confidential and impartial advice on debt and budgeting. Can also support in the early stages of a Universal Credit claim, from application through to first payment Lincolnshire Credit Union:

#### O330 004 0842

Credit Unions help people save money and can offer affordable loans as an alternative to loan sharks and pay-day lenders and can help avoid financial problems

Money Advice & Pensions Service: 0800 138 7777

Government funded debt advice, budgeting tools and money advice offering free, impartial help with money matters

#### StepChange debt advice: 0800 138 1111

Help with money worries offering free, confidential debt advice and money guidance, helping find the best solution or service for your circumstances

Universal Credit support: © 0800 144 8444

A payment to help with your living costs



#### PAYING YOUR RENT OR COUNCIL TAX

#### South Kesteven District Council: © 01476 40 60 80

Check if you're eligible for help with your rent or council tax. Contact SKDC for more information.



**Grantham Food Bank:** (1-2 Grevfriars): **O7816 872 561 Stamford Food Bank:** (27 West Street): O7570 583 799 **Bourne Food Bank:** (United Reformed Church Hall, Spalding Road): 01778 782 365 **Deepings Food Bank:** (63 Hereward Way, **Deeping St James):** 07516 717 346 **Trussell Trust food** bank network: O808 208 2138

#### Free School Meals: © 01522 782030

Children in low-income households may be entitled to free school meals

### Healthy Start Scheme: 0300 330 7010

Pre-paid card for pregnant women and parents of children under 4 to help buy milk, fruit and vegetables



#### Pension Credit: • 0800 99 1234

Can provide extra money to help people of State Pension age and on a low income with living costs and housing costs such as rent or service charges

#### Age UK: 🕒 03455 564 144

Free and confidential support to older people, their families and carers on housing, money, benefits, health and wellbeing, loneliness



#### WELLBEING

#### Wellbeing Lincs: • 01522 782140

Supporting adults to achieve confident, fulfilled and independent living and offering help through life's changes, such as ill health, disability, new financial circumstances, medical needs or isolation

#### Connect to Support Lincolnshire: **0** 0300 303 8789

(Monday to Friday 2pm to 7pm) Information and advice library and community directory for adults, with signposting to groups, activities and support in local communities.

#### Here For You: 0800 234 6342

Mental health and emotional wellbeing advice line for young people, parents and carers



#### HEATING YOUR HOME

#### Simple Energy Advice: 0800 444 202

"Empowering millions of householders every year to make better energy choices" National Energy Action:

#### **Offering a part Warm**

Offering a new Warm and Safe Homes Advice to end fuel poverty. Also webchat online www.nea.org. uk/webchat

## Housing support for military

New Armed Forces legislation will ensure that all residents who serve in the Armed Forces face no disadvantage and are supported when it comes to accessing social housing.

SKDC housing staff have been kept up to date with details of the Armed Forces Act as it went through Parliament.

The Act covers all Regular or Reserve forces, those who have served in the past and their families, addressing concerns that some members of the Armed Forces community still face disadvantage when accessing essential public services like housing.

SKDC signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012 as a commitment of support for the military community. The new legislation makes previously advisory practices into a legal requirement.

Anyone applying to join the housing register is asked whether they have served. Although this does not imply preferential treatment, there could be factors that affect assessment of their application.



When assessing a housing register application, a key consideration is an applicant's 'local connection' with the area to which they are applying.

As a serving member of the Armed Forces, this can be a challenge as often the usual criteria of residence or family members in the area cannot be met. Therefore, certain exemptions are applied to ensure that members of the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged by this.

The council's new 'people-first' approach will help to ensure that personal circumstances are noted.

The Act has made specific changes, including that anyone

leaving the military can apply for housing anywhere in the country and, as mentioned, should be classed as an exemption to the local connection criteria.

Another key area affects homeless ex-military, where Lincolnshire's homeless strategy is benefitting from specialist advice from the East Midlands Pensions and Advisory Committee.

Homeless Veterans can also use the location of work to establish the local connection required by homeless teams, rather than their last military base.

A copy of SKDC's current Housing Allocations Policy can be found on our website at:

www.southkesteven.gov.uk





Our housing team has worked hard to ensure that staff understand, fully respect and implement our responsibilities under this Act. Sometimes the issue is a lack of awareness of how social housing works for families or individuals who have up to now been living in service accommodation. We are here to help explain their options and see how we can help. Jodie Archer Head of Housing Services

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## Our services

South Kesteven District Council You can contact the Council about benefits, rent or other issues. We are open by appointment only for Council services as follows:

#### Grantham:

Monday - Friday 9am to 1pm Bourne: Monday 9am to 5pm, Wednesday 9am to 6pm Friday and Saturday, 9am to 1pm Bourne is also for library services **1476 40 60 80** 

Out of hours 01476 40 60 40 customerservices@ southkesteven.gov.uk



Tenant Engagement Contact Ken Linford, Community Engagement Officer ☎ 01476 40 60 80 ⊠ HousingFB@southkesteven. gov.uk

## Other organisations that can help:

## Age UK (Lincoln and South Lincolnshire)

Companionship, advice and support for older people. 201522 696 000 30 www.ageuk.org.uk/ lincolnsouthlincolnshire/

#### Lincolnshire County Council

#### **Lincolnshire Resilience Forum**

A county helpline for people who are self-isolating. **2** 01522 782 189 Customer\_services@ lincolnshire.gov.uk <sup>(\*)</sup> www.lincolnshire.gov.uk

### Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service

A charity supporting the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals in Lincolnshire. **1205 510 888 1 www.lincolnshirecvs.org.uk/ covid-19/** 

#### Grantham & District Poverty Concern Group

Supports vulnerable members of the community to relieve both poverty and homelessness. **Contact Chris Thomas on** 

☎ 07517 943 792 or via
 ☑ granthampovertyconcern
 @gmail.com
 <sup>⊕</sup> www.granthampoverty

concern.org.uk



**2 01476 40 60 80 / 01476 59 00 44** 

**Reporting Anti-Social Behaviour** 

## National advice lines

#### Citizens Advice

☎ 03444 111 444
⑦ www.citizensadvice.org.uk/ about-us/contact-us

#### Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

☎ 0345 606 0265 <sup>(\*)</sup> www.gov.uk/government/ organisations/department-forwork-pensions

#### Victim Support 2008 506 1688

Victimsupport.org.uk
 The National Domestic Abuse

Helpline 2 0808 200 0247

NHS- non-urgent medical need 111 \* www.111.nhs.uk/

#### If you are online

**Emergency repairs** 

**2 01476 40 60 80** 

A www.southkesteven.

⊠ HousingManagement@

For other kinds of anti-social

**101** if it is not an emergency. (**999** if it is an emergency)

southkesteven.gov.uk

behaviour, such as criminal activity,

you should contact the police - use

gov.uk/nuisance

You can find the latest information, and browse our services on our website at **www.southkesteven.gov.uk**