

SPRING 2024

RavenTimes



What's happening in our communities – an update from our wardens

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Welcome to the spring issue of your Raven Times!

We're really pleased to have re-launched our customer service drop in sessions, giving you the opportunity to come and speak to us in person about any issues or questions you have. You can find out more about these regular sessions on page 4.

Our Neighbourhood Wardens have been as busy as ever making improvements in local communities, find out more on page 3.

From April 2024 there will be changes to your rent and service charges. Please take the time to read your individual rent letter, you can read more about what you need to do on page 5. We understand that times are difficult but we're here to help with support from our Moneywise team and your Income Officer.

Don't forget you can contribute ideas for Raven Times or give us your thoughts by emailing raventimes@ravenht.org.uk.

Joanne Silner
Head of Customer Experience



Community noticeboard

The Raven Times community noticeboard includes things that are happening in your local community. It doesn't have to be a Raven initiative. It could be a new community group that's been set up, an event or activity you're planning that you want to spread the word about, or a community event that was a great success.

Please email your suggestions to raventimes@ravenht.org.uk.

Help in the Bushes community website

A local community group has created a website supporting the people who live in Whitebushes, Redhill. The website covers all the news, events and activities taking place in Whitebushes as well as general information on local services.

We're pleased that our Brighter Community Fund supported the development of this website, which is proving useful to the local community in Whitebushes.

www.helpinthebushes.co.uk



Family information directory in Surrey

Surrey Family Information Service has a free online directory you can use to find the details of local childcare, family activities, clubs and support services.

www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/families

Love your library

Our local libraries are free and welcoming places at the heart of the community. Not just for borrowing and reading books, there are also a number of activities and events that happen each week that you can get involved in.

From games clubs, crafts and rhymetime to support with computer skills, there's more to the library than books.

Find your nearest Surrey library and see upcoming events: www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraries/your-library/find-your-nearest

Find your nearest West Sussex library and upcoming events: www.westsussex.gov.uk/libraries/



What's happening in your communities – an update from our wardens

Improvements in Tadworth

If you live on Preston Estate in Tadworth, you may have noticed a couple of recent improvements.

There are new parking bays outside the Marbles Way shops to stop the grass being damaged and to help ease congestion on this busy bus route. There's also a new footpath to link Merland Rise and Preston Lane – this is a big improvement on what has always been an unofficial shortcut across the grass.



Car parking before



Car parking after

Stevie, one of our Neighbourhood Wardens, worked with local councillors and contractors on these projects. The funding was awarded after a successful bid to the Love Reigate and Banstead's Community Infrastructure levy fund.



Footpath before



Footpath after

Spring joy in Merstham



Neighbourhood wardens Conrad and Glyn spent a recent Saturday morning bringing some early spring colour to Portland Drive in Merstham.

They refreshed the flowers in the big planters outside the Merstham Hub and also did an early spring clean of the communal garden at our sheltered scheme there, Portland House.

The communal gardens at our sheltered schemes are really valued by our customers, providing somewhere to get fresh air and exercise, as well as space for socialising. We work closely with customers in our sheltered schemes, alongside our grounds maintenance contractors at Landscapes, to create welcoming outdoor spaces. We work with customers to come up with ideas for new garden features, upcoming projects include creating herb gardens and sensory flower beds.



Parking enforcement at The Dome



The Dome is a block of flats in Redhill town centre and for a number of years the carpark there has been used by shoppers and workers visiting Redhill as a free parking spot.

This has become worse and worse over the years, meaning people living at The Dome found they were unable to park. Following consultation with residents, we have introduced an ANPR enforcement system. This means that customers who live at The Dome have registered their cars and have an allocation of permits for guests. People who park their cars at The Dome now without a permit will receive a fine through the post.

We've had really positive feedback from customers and it's working well to free up spaces for those who live at The Dome. One customer said: ***“What a difference it's made, I never used to go out in my car in the evening and weekends due to not being able to park on my return...but now I can go out whenever I want without the worry that when I return home there won't be a space available.”***

Come and say hello at our Customer Service Drop Ins



We're now running monthly drop in customer service sessions in Horley, Woodhatch, Merstham and Tadworth.

At these regular drop ins, members of our team will be on hand to support with:

- General information, advice and guidance
- Help with using MyRaven to raise repairs and pay rent
- Support with tenancy related issues
- Cost of living support and advice

Where to find us

- **First Friday of the month** from 11am – 1pm at Horley Community Centre, Albert Road, Horley, RH6 7JA – next session Friday 5th April
- **Second Wednesday of the month** from 12-2pm at Woodhatch Community Centre, Whitebeam Drive, Reigate, RH2 7LS – next session Wednesday 10th April
- **Third Wednesday of the month** from 12-3pm at Merstham Community Hub, 2b Portland Drive, Merstham, RH1 3HY – next session Wednesday 17th April
- **Fourth Friday of the month** from 1-3pm at St Mark's Church, St Mark's Road, Tadworth, KT18 5RD – next session Friday 26th April

Accessibility features on our website

Did you know that as part of our commitment to making sure that you can access the information you need, we have some features on our website that make it easier to use?



Our website has the ReachDeck Toolbar, which can be launched by clicking on the round orange button with a person inside it.

But what exactly does the ReachDeck Toolbar allow you to do?

It helps you to read and translate all the content on our website, it can help by:

Reading website text out loud. You can turn text-to-speech by clicking on, or selecting any text to hear it read aloud.

Translation. You can translate our website content into over 100 languages.

Simplifying web pages. This tool removes clutter from the screen and only displays the main text, you can also change the font size and colour of the display.

If you have any questions or need help using these features, visit www.ravenht.org.uk/accessibility

No appointment needed – drop in for a chat with someone from our friendly team. For more information, call us on 0300 123 3399.

Rent increase 2024

An important update about your rent



This year, most of our rents will go up by 7.7% from 1st April 2024. This is in line with a government formula that Housing Associations must use when setting rent.

It's really important you read your individual rent letter and understand what you need to do next. If you have any questions after reading your letter, please contact your Income Officer.

53-week year

If you're charged weekly then you need to know that the financial year 2024-2025 is a 53-week year, instead of the usual 52 weeks. This happens every five or six years and means there are 53 chargeable Mondays. This additional week also applies if you have a 48-week tenancy, meaning that this year you'll be charged for 49 weeks.

What do I need to do about the rent increase and the extra week?

If you receive Universal Credit, please update your online journal from the 1st April, and not before, with your new rent and charge amount. If you don't do this, you could miss out on money you're entitled to.

Universal Credit won't pay for the additional 53rd week, and so you'll need to pay the extra. This means you'll notice that your monthly benefit will be slightly less than what you're due to pay to us. If you have a Direct Debit in place, we'll amend your payments automatically. If you pay in another way, you'll need to make a payment plan to cover the difference and pay this gradually over the year.

If you receive Housing Benefit you need to let your local authority know your new rent amount, unless you're with Reigate and Banstead Borough council, as we'll let them know for you. You don't need to wait until the 1st April to do this, so we recommend letting them know as soon as possible.

If you're receiving full Housing Benefit, the additional 53rd week of the year will be paid for you. If you pay part of your rent, you need to make sure you're paying your part of the extra week. If you have a Direct Debit in place, we'll amend your payments automatically. If you pay in another way, you'll need to make a payment plan to cover the difference and pay this gradually over the year.

If you pay your rent yourself please make sure you have a plan for paying the 53rd week. If you have a Direct Debit, we'll make sure this is set up to cover the extra week, so you don't need to do anything. If you don't have a Direct Debit, please check your individual rent letter which shows what you need to pay from April in your usual way.

Regardless of whether you receive benefits or not, if you have a Direct Debit with us, you don't need to do anything. We'll adjust your Direct Debit based on your new rent amount and collect the additional week. We're here to help if you have any concerns.

What if I'm struggling to pay my rent?

Talk to your Income Officer

If you're finding things difficult, it's always best to talk to us so that we're aware of your circumstances and can offer the right support. Your Income Officer is at the end of the phone, or you can raise a request on MyRaven if you'd prefer to email.



Moneywise team

Let us know as soon as possible if you need support with budgeting, applying for benefits, benefit appeals or advice on reducing your bills. We're here to help. This advice is free and confidential for all Raven customers.

Get in touch -

Call: 0300 123 3399

Email: raven@ravenht.org.uk

Send us a message through your MyRaven online account.



Easy ways to pay your rent



Direct Debit
You can set this up through MyRaven or call 0300 123 3399 so your rent is automatically paid



MyRaven
Pay 24/7 through MyRaven by debit card

Struggling with your rent?
We're here to help, talk to your Income Officer by calling 0300 123 3399



Do you receive Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit?

If you're currently entitled to Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit, you'll soon receive a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions telling you that Tax Credits are ending. If you want to continue to receive benefits, you'll need to claim Universal Credit instead.

The migration to Universal Credit for those on Tax Credits will happen in stages. The first people to receive this

letter will be those who only get Tax Credits (without also getting Income Support, Housing Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, or Jobseeker's Allowance as well).

There is more information about Universal Credit on our website.

www.ravenht.org.uk/universalcredit

The letter you'll get from the Department for Work and Pensions will tell you the date

that your Tax Credits will end and the deadline you have for claiming Universal Credit instead.

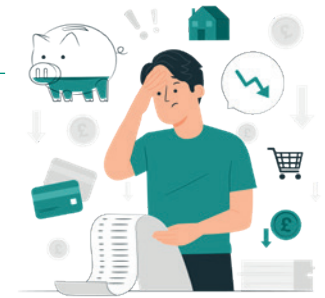
If you don't claim Universal Credit by the deadline your Tax Credits claim will stop.

You can also visit gov.uk website for more information.

www.gov.uk/guidance/tax-credits-and-some-benefits-are-ending-move-to-universal-credit

If you need help with switching to Universal Credit, or are worried about how it will affect you, then our Moneywise team is here to help. You can make an appointment with Moneywise by calling **0300 123 3399** or by raising an enquiry on **MyRaven**.

Free debt advice for Raven customers



Our Moneywise team works closely with Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead (CARB) who provide Raven customers with debt advice.

Being in debt is nothing to be ashamed of, it can happen to anyone. A relationship breakdown, the loss of a job, or a reduction in income due to changes in family circumstances are just some of the reasons people find themselves in a bad financial situation. Added to this there is the ongoing pressures of the cost-of-living crisis. These situations can result in more money going out than there is coming in and debts can quickly spiral out of control.

Our Moneywise team can help you with checking you're receiving the benefits you're entitled to or claiming charitable help, as well as looking at your budget and ways to reduce what you spend. In some cases, this additional income can be enough to cover the costs you have and avoid you building up debt.

If our Moneywise team is unable to help you with balancing the books, more help is available through the CARB Debt Team. As a Raven customer you can access CARB's support for free and in confidence.

The first thing the CARB team does is write down all the money coming in and all the money going out (this is a financial statement). Then they see if any savings can be made. They explain all the essential expenditure that must be covered and work out priorities of what debts should be paid over others. The aim is to try to find a debt solution that will give you a fresh start financially.

If you think that the CARB Debt Team could help you, contact our Moneywise team for a referral on **0300 123 3399** or contact CARB directly on **0808 278 7945** and asked to be referred to the Debt Project.

A closer look at our commitment to sustainability and social impact



Each year we produce an Economic, Social and Governance report and make this available to you on our website. This report shows how we maintain good governance, whilst also making sure we make a positive social impact and use money wisely.

The report goes into the detail of how we meet standards around

energy efficiency, how we ease climate risks and our work to increase green spaces, promoting biodiversity near our homes.

Here are some examples of environmental improvements we've recently made:

- Planted wild meadows on some of our green spaces
- Provided 20 nesting spaces for swifts in 2022/23
- Ongoing work with local bird groups to install more bird boxes for protected species on our buildings.

We're maintaining good governance by:

- Encouraging a more diverse mix of board members

- Assisting staff wellbeing with a trained team of mental health first aiders
- Paying the real living wage.

We prioritise making a meaningful contribution to our customers and communities:

- Providing support to customers who are struggling to maintain their tenancy
- Offering help with money management and benefits claims
- Building 274 affordable homes from 2020-2023.

You can read the full report on our website www.ravenht.org.uk/how-are-we-doing/financial-performance/

Spotlight on our apprentices

In February we celebrated National Apprenticeship Week, sharing what an apprenticeship at Raven looks like and some personal stories from some of our Raven apprentices.

We recruit new apprentices each summer, so people are ready to begin working in September.

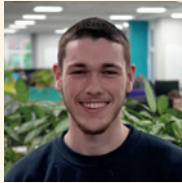
If you or someone you know is interested in an apprenticeship, you can register your interest to find out more here.

www.ravenht.org.uk/registeryourinterest

Meet Aaron

Aaron completed his work experience at Raven, and he obviously enjoyed it, as he's now joined as an apprentice. Aaron, who is 16, told us about the benefits he is already seeing from choosing to do his Painting and Decorating Apprenticeship and why he chose Raven.

"My Mum has worked at Raven for a while and has always talked



about it being a very supportive environment, so recommended for me to go to the Apprenticeship Open Day. I found the opportunity to work in the social housing sector really interesting, Raven's ethos appealed to me, and I wanted to do a job that would help people."

After doing his GCSEs, Aaron took his Mum's advice and went along to an open day to find out more about the apprenticeship scheme at Raven. He then had an interview in August last year and started his apprenticeship in September.

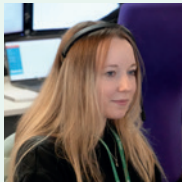
He says: *"I love the job that I do. I genuinely feel like I'm making a difference to people's lives, making their homes look good before they move in. Sometimes I walk past a home where a family has moved in and know that I've helped to make their life more comfortable, which feels great."*

Aaron highlighted another benefit of learning a trade through his apprenticeship too, adding: *"It is also great to be able to learn a life-long skill that will help me when I have my own home."*

Meet Kacey

When we think about apprenticeships, often what comes to mind are hands-on, trades-based roles. But Kacey, 19, is a great example of the benefits of choosing an apprenticeship for a more office-based career.

Kacey joined Raven in September on an 18-month Customer Service Apprenticeship, after seeing the role advertised online. She works



four days a week and completes her college work online one day each week.

She says: *"I wanted to learn about the housing sector and to work somewhere where I could make a difference. I've found Raven a really supportive place to work, in fact it was one of the things that attracted me to Raven, along with their culture and ethics. The values we work to are really positive and everyone at Raven cares about the customers, which is what it should all be about."*

After completing her A levels in Maths and Business Studies and a BTEC in Hospitality, Kacey was actively looking for an apprenticeship, seeing it as a great way to learn while working, earning and gaining experience at the same time. She has enjoyed the experience so far and is looking forward to her future with Raven.

"I can see myself progressing here, there are lots of opportunities. I would definitely recommend it to other people looking for an apprenticeship." she says.

What do you want to see in Raven Times?

This is your quarterly magazine to show you what's going on at Raven and in our communities. We hope you enjoy having a read of it over a cuppa! We'd love to know what you'd like to see more and less of to make this something you find informative and useful. Drop us an email raventimes@ravenht.org.uk with any feedback – thank you!

Call: 0300 123 3399 Facebook messenger: RavenHousingTrust

Email: raven@ravenht.org.uk Address: Raven House, 29 Linkfield Lane, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 1SS



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