



**ATRIUM  
HOMES**

The Landlord of Choice

# YOUR HOME

THE NEWSLETTER OF ATRIUM HOMES | No 48 - Winter 2018

What would you do  
with £744?



**That's the amount you could save each and every year by being online, according to official research from Lloyd's Bank.**

Going online and searching the internet is guaranteed to save you money – from shopping for food and clothes, to booking holidays or finding cheaper gas and electricity suppliers.

It's so easy to do – and now we can help you do it!

Atrium has been awarded just over £8,000 from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations' Digital Participation Charter Fund to help us help you improve your digital skills and feel confident enough to get online.

We're using the money to run a project called 'Making the Connection', where we can show you how to use the internet and start saving money. It could also help you find a job, as being online makes that easier too.

*Here's how YOU can make the connection:*

- Look out for our pop up events on our Facebook page.
- Come along to our weekly drop-in sessions in our office.
- Ask us for 1-1 support.

Don't miss out – this is YOUR chance to make a bit life easier for yourself.

For more information call our Making the Connection team on 01563 528 816 or email [info@atrium-homes.co.uk](mailto:info@atrium-homes.co.uk)



*Dear  
Tenant*



*Merry Christmas!*

**Stephen Black, Chief Executive**



**The long, hot summer of 2018 is a distant memory and it's time for our Winter Newsletter once again.**

**As well as providing some useful information on how to stay safe and warm in your home this winter, this edition also picks up on the theme of our revised Business Plan and future plans for our communities.**

As promised, we held some open events over the summer and also conducted a major online consultation process involving every single tenant. The outcome was very helpful to us in finalising our plans. On pages 5 - 7 we've summarised the responses to the main questions we asked, and have also included a cross section of your comments; there were too many to include them all, but what's here is a representative sample.

Elsewhere, we've highlighted some of the broader community activities we've been involved in. I think you'll see

from this that Atrium is a community organisation, delivering services to its tenants and other customers for the benefit of its communities. If this inspires you to get more involved with us, then please get in touch.

Looking ahead to 2019, our first project aimed at delivering our Fit for 21st Century Living Standard will see external insulation fitted to a number of properties in Stewarton, with other projects at the planning stages. And by early spring we aim to be on site with our latest new build project which will provide 27 new properties within Shortlees. All in all, it's a busy time for the staff and Board at Atrium, and looks set to get even busier in 2019.

On behalf of the whole staff team, have a great Christmas and New Year.

## Quick Reminder

Atrium is governed by a voluntary Board who oversee how the organisation is run. This includes what services we provide and how we provide them. Our Board is led by Chair Joe Keen and made up of Board members. This is called our 'governance arrangements'.

*Hello!*



**I'm Joe Keen and I am the newly elected Chair at Atrium.**

I joined Atrium's Board in 2015, when I retired from a career in housing in local government. Although I had worked in housing for 40 years, I quickly found that an organisation like Atrium operates differently to a local authority housing department.

For a start, the Atrium Group has a Board of volunteers who are responsible for overseeing the activities of both Atrium Homes and Atrium Initiatives, a subsidiary company of the organisation - unlike local authority councillors who are elected to represent a community, and may be on a committee responsible for the housing service.

In my short time at Atrium, I've witnessed the very immediate and positive impact that a housing association can make on its communities. And I've been delighted to be able to help fellow Board members settle into their role through mentoring them. After a year as Vice Chair, I'm now stepping up to the principal role within the organisation and I'm looking forward

to helping steer Atrium through the next phase of its journey, as we aim to accelerate investment and bring all our housing stock to a much better standard as quickly as we can. We call this 'Fit for 21st Century Living'.

I also want to extend an invitation to you to come along to a Board or sub-committee meeting to see what we do. We want to get tenants involved much more in shaping the objectives of the business and helping make sure we're doing the right things, as well as doing things right.

Or if you'd like to know more about being a Board member, I'd be delighted to meet with you.

Best wishes for Christmas and 2019.

**Joe Keen**

Chair

## Come on Board – we need you!

**We want to strengthen our Board by appointing new members. Would you like to join us?**

Board members set Atrium's overall organisational strategy and objectives, and also monitor our performance. So it's important there's a good mix of skills and experience on our Board at any one time to match our business needs.

Currently, we're very fortunate to have people from different backgrounds, who can contribute across a wide range of areas. However, we're really keen to attract more new members who have experience of our services as customers, and are committed to service excellence and continuous improvement.

## GET INVOLVED

**To find out more about joining the Board (or a sub-committee) or how Atrium works, please phone Shelley Gilmour on 01562 528 816 or email [info@atrium-homes.co.uk](mailto:info@atrium-homes.co.uk)**

*Interested?*

*Here are a few more things you might want to know:*

**Will I get paid for being a Board member?**

No, a Board position is voluntary, but we can offer you reasonable expenses to help you attend Board meetings or cover childcare costs.

**Will I receive any training?**

Yes, there's a full induction for new members, plus further training and support, depending on your individual requirements.

**How much time is involved?**

The Board meets roughly once a month (in the evenings at our office in Shortlees) which members are expected to attend. In total, members spend around four or five hours a month on Board business.

**How do I find out more?**

For an informal chat about the role, please contact Shelley Gilmour on 01563 528 816.





# MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

Once again this year, we'll be sending our festive greetings to friends and colleagues by email.

We're donating the money saved on producing and posting corporate Christmas Cards to a local charity. We haven't decided which one/s yet, so if you have any suggestions, please let us know. Call us on 01563 528 816 or email [info@atrium-homes.co.uk](mailto:info@atrium-homes.co.uk)

## Atrium Elves' Christmas Specials



The Atrium Elves will be out and about again this year, spreading Christmas cheer and goodwill to many of our tenants.

The Elves are here to help everyone, so if you need our assistance this

Christmas with any welfare matter (benefits, food, paying the bills, etc) please get in touch. Just phone, email or pop into the office. We'll be glad to do what we can to make your Christmas merrier.



## Helping Hillhouse



Hillhouse is a social enterprise in Ayrshire which helps individuals and families who are struggling financially. Hillhouse offers these people practical support by supplying good quality second hand children's clothing, footwear and equipment throughout the year. They also organise a Christmas Present Project and last year gave 1,964 presents to 982 children, which included pyjamas and an age appropriate toy for each child.

Inspired by the Elves, our staff have been bringing in donations for Hillhouse to help with this year's Christmas Present Project and you can help too. Hillhouse would be glad to receive:

- toys suitable from birth to 12 years
- toiletries or make-up sets for older children
- pyjamas from newborn - 16 years
- good quality Christmas paper, sellotape or Christmas cards.

If you'd like to donate something, you can either bring it into the office or give us a call and we'll try to pick it up from you when we're out and about. Please note all donations must be brand new and unwrapped.

*Thanks for supporting this!*

## Sweet treats



Atrium is delighted to be giving selection boxes to all the Primary 1 - 3 pupils at James Hamilton Primary School and New Farm Loch Primary School during their school discos. When we did this last year a very special visitor turned up, so fingers crossed he might make an appearance again...

## Christmas and New Year Holidays

Atrium's offices will be closed completely over the holiday period. We'll close on Monday 24th December at 12.30pm and re-open on Wednesday 3rd January 2019 at 9am.

If you have any emergency repairs during this period, please phone the office on 01563 528 816 and you'll be redirected to our emergency service.

# Business Plan 2018-23

In our last newsletter in June, we set out our proposals for our Business Plan objectives for the next few years. Back then we said that we believe we'll achieve our vision of quality affordable homes, sustainable communities and life chances for people by focussing on four elements which are all related:

- ✓ Taking care of our Customers
- ✓ Taking care of our Housing
- ✓ Taking care of our Communities
- ✓ Taking care of the Business.

We also highlighted that our last Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2016 showed differences between how tenants in different areas perceive the quality of our houses: tenants living in newer houses were more satisfied; tenants living in older houses were less satisfied.

Dissatisfaction related mainly to the internal condition of the properties. In response, we developed Atrium's 'Fit for 21st Century Living' Standard. This covers a range of elements of a property - inside and out - and sets an Atrium Standard for what we see as 'quality affordable housing'. We aim to use this to help plan our future investment activity so that we bring all our housing to this Standard by 2025.

In August, we ran a consultation exercise for customers on the key income and expenditure elements of the Business Plan proposals to make sure we have it right.

The survey itself was prepared in conjunction with our Tenant Scrutiny Group over the summer - their comments influenced the questions we asked and the information we provided as part of the consultation exercise. Here's what you told us:







QUESTION	
Between now and 2025, we plan to upgrade around 770 older properties to the Fit for 21st Century Living Standard. At the same time, we aim to build around 70 new properties. What is your view of this plan?	
RESPONSE	
I agree with it	86.67%
I disagree with it	1.33%
I have no particular view	12%

QUESTION	
Do you agree with the content of our Fit for 21st Century Living Standard?	
RESPONSE	
YES	98.7%
NO	1.3%

QUESTION	
Have we correctly identified the work which we propose to do to your house type?	
RESPONSE	
YES	94.59%
NO	5.41%

Finally, we asked for your view of how we can finance the work. We need to borrow money to do it and how much we borrow is influenced by how much rental income we can generate through rent increases. Again, this is what you said:

QUESTION	
Our financial projections indicate that we can deliver our plan by 2025 and still restrict annual rent increases to no more than inflation (RPI) + 0.5%. Do you think that annual rent increases of this level are ok?	
RESPONSE	
YES	86.49%
NO	13.51%

QUESTION	
Would you be prepared to see annual rent increases of no more than inflation (RPI) +1% to get all the work done faster?	
RESPONSE	
YES	79.73%
NO	20.27%



## Positive response

It's great to see such a positive response to our proposals from the tenants who responded to the consultation exercise. This level of endorsement allows us to proceed knowing we're on the right lines for both the investment plans and income generation.

We received a similar response from the Tenant Scrutiny Group when we discussed our overall proposals with them - in advance of the consultation exercise - and again when we shared the outcomes with them after it was completed.

"I am sure Atrium is well aware that the external environment has a significant effect on how people view their neighbourhood and on how it is viewed by other passing/visiting it. Items such as fencing really matter!"

## What happens next?

We've already initiated the next phases of activity so we can begin to deliver the Fit for 21st Century Living Standard across all our housing stock.

First of all, we've taken advantage of some government funding which will allow us to install external wall insulation to some properties in Nether Robertland, Stewarton. This initial work will begin early in 2019.

We'll need a number of different contractors, for both external and internal works. We've already started trying to find suitable contractors capable of carrying out the bulk of the main activities, to the standard we require over several years. It's quite a complicated process and must be done in accordance with strict Scottish Government Guidelines, but we're making good progress so far.

We've also started to work out the programming schedule, covering what work could be done where and, of course, when. We're adopting some simple principles here which can be varied if needs be:

### Priority:

We have to ensure we carry out work to the properties in order of need.

### Location:

We need to split the works into logical geographical packages for the contractors.

### Numbers:

With 765 properties and a 7 year programme, we'll be doing roughly 110 units a year (2 a week), completing in 2025. This changes to 153 units per year (3 a week) if we aim for a 2023 completion date.

### Cost:

We need to make sure the rate at which properties are completed is affordable.

Ultimately, we'll need to discuss and agree all these points with selected contractors before we finalise the programme. But we're on schedule to do this by March 2019, and we're aiming to give every tenant an approximate date for when to expect work to be carried out to their property by April 2019.

One thing we're very keen to ensure is that we get access to every property, so that we - and you - have a detailed list of works being done to your home before a contractor starts. We call this a "march-in survey". This will be done in stages, in line with the identified programme. We'll give you plenty of notice of both the march-in and the works starting.

# You said

"Think these are excellent plans and approve look of the area."

"I have lived here for 6 years. In this time I'm very satisfied with all the repairs and safety checks."

"Dampness should be a high priority before building new houses."

"Let tenants know of improvements asap so they don't waste money on decorating or improvements, etc."

"I think as a landlord you have a duty of care to your old properties and tenants. The year 2025 is far too long for the tenants to wait for a kitchen that went out of date (life span) in 2017 and a new replacement bathroom for the original that's from the dark ages."



# ANNUAL RETURN ON THE CHARTER 2017/2018



Atrium submitted its 4th Annual Return on the Charter in June 2018 to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The ARC Report is broken down into 5 sections: Homes & Rents; Tenant Satisfaction; Quality & Maintenance of Homes; Neighbourhoods and Value for Money.

## HOMES AND RENTS

At 31 March 2018

No. of homes owned by Atrium:  
**1,172**

Total rent due for year:  
**£4,824,568**

Increase on weekly rent:  
**2.90% on average from previous year**

At Atrium Homes we allocate all our available properties through the Common Housing Register for East Ayrshire, known as SEARCH. Properties are allocated from 5 lists, with targets for each agreed at the start of the year - Waiting, Transfer, Homeless, Strategic Needs and Outwith the District.

The number of new applicants added to the housing list(s)

**2742**

The number of applicants on the housing list(s) at end of reporting year

**3870**

The number of suspensions from the housing list at end of reporting year

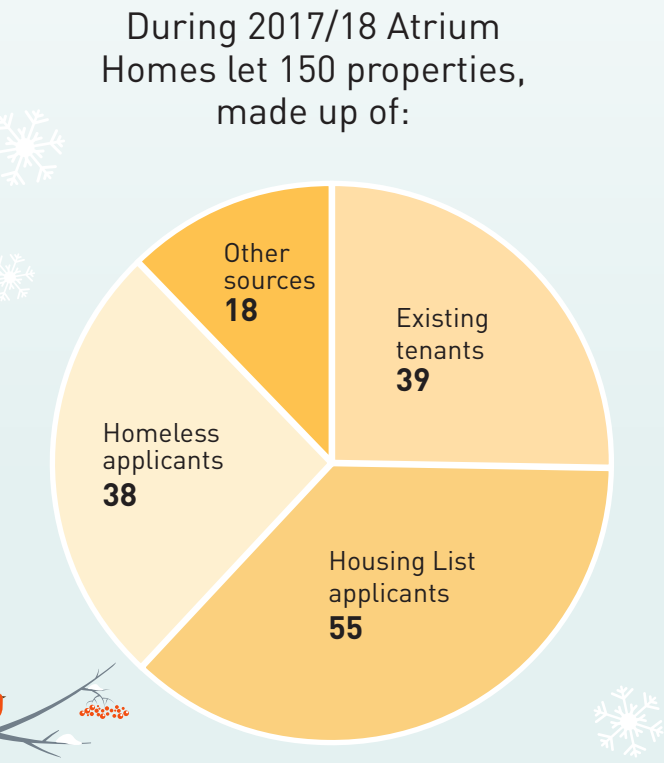
**453**

The number of applications cancelled from the housing list during the reporting year

**1801**

Average weekly rents

Size of home	Number owned	Atrium	Scottish average	Difference
1 apartment	0	£0.00	£67.44	-%
2 apartment	120	£68.64	£73.33	6.4%
3 apartment	528	£78.98	£74.94	5.4%
4 apartment	484	£89.98	£81.37	10.6%
5 apartment	40	£98.25	£90.39	8.7%



## TENANT SATISFACTION

The figures shown here are from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2017 and may not reflect current satisfaction levels. Updated results will be published separately when available.

	Atrium	Scottish average
Tenants satisfied with landlord's overall service	82.2%	90.5%
Tenants who felt their landlord was good at keeping them informed about its services and outcomes	87.1%	91.7%
Tenants satisfied with opportunities to participate in landlord's decision making	81.1%	85.9%



## NEIGHBOURHOODS

For every 100 of Atrium's properties, 8.8 cases of anti-social behaviour were reported in the last year.

	Atrium	Scottish average
Percentage of anti-social behaviour cases resolved within targets agreed locally	99%	87.9%

## QUALITY & MAINTENANCE OF HOMES

We aim to provide well maintained homes for all our tenants.

	Atrium	Scottish average
Landlord homes meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard	98.9%	94.2%
Average time taken to complete emergency repairs	2.1 hours	4 hours
Average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs	4.3 days	6.4 days
Reactive repairs completed 'right first time'	92.9%	92.2%
Appointments kept under repairs appointments system	93%	95.5%
Tenants satisfied with the service they received for repairs or maintenance carried out on their home	84.2%	92.1%

## VALUE FOR MONEY

We recognise the importance of delivering value for money in all our services.

	Atrium	Scottish average
Percentage of total rent due in the year collected by landlord	98.4%	99.4%
Percentage of rent due but not collected due to empty homes	0.9%	0.8%
Average number of days taken to re-let homes	34.7 days	30.7 days



# glorious gardens

As our long, beautiful summer drew to a close, so did our Annual Garden Competition.

We were overwhelmed by the number of entries we received, as well as by the amazing transformations residents had made. Perhaps the gorgeous weather helped, but this year's entries were some of the best we have ever seen and all of the gardens were an absolute credit to the people looking after them. So thank you and well done to everyone who got involved.

The Garden Competition gives recognition to those who lead by example and inspire others in the community to look after their gardens. From the 45 entries, votes were broken down into categories to make scoring as fair as possible. The judges were amazed by the stunning flowerbeds, colourful containers and the creative way in which people made their gardens look fabulous.

Thanks to support from our landscape maintenance contractor EEG, we could present seven winners with £50 B&Q vouchers, as well as award the 'prized' certificate to the Best Garden Overall.

The winner of the Best Garden Overall 2018 was Mrs M, of Crusader Crescent in Stewarton.

*Her beautiful garden is pictured above.*



Mrs M. of Crusader Crescent in Stewarton

## Garden Improvement Grants

This summer, we also launched our Garden Improvement Grants. We awarded three grants of £100 to tenants to purchase much needed equipment to help them maintain their gardens.

Pictured is Miss S of Sinclair Court, New Farm Loch who was delighted to be able to use her award to purchase a new lawnmower and strimmer, having struggled to keep her garden under control without the proper equipment.



If you'd like to apply for a Garden Improvement Grant, contact Julianne Scarlett at our office, on 01563 528 816.



## Making an Entrance

Thanks to additional funding from the Big Lottery Our Place fund, we were delighted to finally replace the Shortlees entrance sign to complete the Welcome to Shortlees project along Caprington Avenue. We had fantastic support from the kids at Shortlees Primary School to replant the beds over the summer and keep the floral displays looking their best.

## CASH IN THE COMMUNITY

We started the year with a £5,000 pot of cash to share with community groups and organisations. So far two groups have benefitted from this funding:

### Shortlees Primary School's Walking Bus

The Walking Bus was initially started through funding from The Big Lottery. Along with City Technical Services and McTaggart Construction, we were pleased to make a donation to ensure the future of the service.

Currently 20 children walk to school with two staff members and parent volunteers. The route begins on Central Avenue and children are collected at the bottom of all the adjoining streets, before safely crossing at the patrol. When the children arrive at school for 8.25am, they receive a healthy breakfast at the Breakfast Club.

Atrium's Director of Investment Celia Taylor commented: "Many of our customers have children at Shortlees Primary, so we're delighted to be able to support the Walking Bus which has a positive impact on the health and sustainability of our community."

### 4ward 2gether Community Weekend

Following an application from New Farm Loch Community Council, we were delighted to award £500 towards their annual 4ward 2gether Community Weekend. This event is planned and organised by a wide range of age groups from the community, and includes a music festival to showcase young people's talents. The events are free so all members of the community can join in.

If your group would like to apply to Cash in the Community, there's a simple application process. You can get more details on our website or contact the office on 01563 528 816. The next round of funding closes on 5th January 2019.

### COMMUNITY COMPETITIONS

We run several seasonal competitions throughout the year and it's been fantastic to see the efforts people have made to join in recently, including:

- Father's Day Competition** – we presented three winners, with £100 Restaurant Vouchers each
- Halloween Pumpkin Carving Competition** – we made two awards of a £37 ticket to Illuminight at Dean Park
- Policy Reviews** – we awarded £25 to customers who responded to our online surveys in advance of policy changes.

We've also donated over £400 to several other community groups to fund activities such as trips to Blair Drummond Safari Park for school kids; the purchase of new equipment for a local nursery and a contribution towards a festive lunch for some of our older tenants.



# Housing (Scotland) Act 2014

We recently wrote to all our tenants advising of changes being introduced following Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 coming into force.

Most of the provisions come into force from 1 May 2019, with the exception of the provisions on joint tenancy, assignation, subletting and succession for Scottish secure and short Scottish secure tenancies, for which the date is 1 November 2019. The Act introduces a number of significant changes to the rights which tenants have under the terms of their tenancy agreement. All social landlords like ourselves were obliged to notify their tenants in writing of these changes. This was so that existing tenants who have not already advised their landlord of who is living in their property, had plenty of time to do so - all tenants must satisfy the new notification and residency requirements for joint tenancy, assignation, subletting and succession when the new provisions come into force. If you don't keep Atrium advised on who is in your household, this may prevent us agreeing to a future request to sub-let, assign your tenancy or even become joint tenants. For full details of the Act, go to our website [www.atrium-homes.co.uk](http://www.atrium-homes.co.uk)

# Atholl Steel/ demolition and rehousing

Preparatory work on our latest new build development is moving along nicely and we hope to be on site in the spring of 2019. The contractor is McTaggart Construction who have worked with us before.

This phase of development activity will see 27 new bungalows, flats and houses built on a small site on Knockmarloch Drive/Sunnyside Square West in Shortlees. The site is part historic "brownfield" use (it previously housed Orlit houses which were demolished in the late 20th century) and part occupied (it has Atholl Steel flats on it which still need to be demolished).

We've been liaising with the tenants of the Atholl Steel units for some time on our plans, and to make sure we knew their preferences for rehousing in the short and longer term. Over the last few months, we've been identifying alternative housing for them and arranging their moves. Looking ahead, we're aiming to start demolishing the Atholl Steel units early in the new year, so that construction works can begin.

# Surf the net for under £10

BT offers a basic broadband package "BT Basic + Broadband" for £9.95 for people in receipt of certain benefits. If this might be of interest to you, find out more at: <https://goo.gl/TXJekf>

Other providers will offer similar packages so you could use a comparison website such as [www.uswitch.com](http://www.uswitch.com).

# Money Advice Service here to stay

As part of our staffing review, we've now formalised our Money Advice Service and incorporated it into our mainstream services.

Funding for the service originally came from the Scottish Legal Aid Board but when that expired, we kept the service running for a further period. The staffing review has allowed us to make the service permanent and to focus it squarely on our own customers.

- In 2017/18 we:**
- Helped 219 tenants, with an ongoing case load of 86 at the year end.
  - Supported tenants to claim more than £947,183.43 in ongoing benefits.
  - Accessed £27,247.33 of Discretionary Housing Payments.
  - Secured over £87,097.98 in lump sum payments.
  - Assisted tenants in receiving over £13,094.03 in backdated benefits.

# Case Study 1

When Miss L was admitted to hospital, the Department for Work and Pensions stated she was no longer actively seeking employment, and cancelled her claim for Job Seekers' Allowance within two days of her hospital admission.

**Here's how we helped:**

- Our Money Advisor assisted Miss L and her partner to apply for a variety of benefits.
- While the couple were waiting on receiving payments, we issued them with food bank vouchers.

When the benefits were processed, their household income increased by over £1,000 a month.

# Case Study 2

Mrs A's family contacted us after her husband passed away.

**Here's how we helped:**

- Money Advice helped Mrs A claim Universal Credit as a single claimant, which included housing costs, as well as her standard allowance.
- We helped Mrs A to apply for Bereavement Allowance and assistance towards funeral costs, as she had very little savings to pay for her husband's funeral.
- We advised her on how to claim Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payment, due to her tenancy being under occupied.

Mrs A stated that without assistance from Money Advice, she would not have known where to go for help with benefits at this difficult time.

As part of our revamped Money Advice Service, we can now offer appointments to any of our tenants who feel they might benefit from a financial health check.

**Contact us NOW on 01563 528 816 for a New Year/New Start Financial Review.**

# EMERGENCY REPAIRS SERVICE

Keep these numbers next to your phone for easy reference.

- EMERGENCY REPAIRS**  
**Atrium Property Services**  
01563 528 816
- GAS OR HEATING EMERGENCIES**  
**City Technical Services (UK) Ltd.**  
0844 579 6493
- GAS LEAKS**  
**Scotland Gas Networks**  
0800 111 999
- GENERAL REPAIRS**  
**Atrium Homes**  
01563 528 816

Please only use the out of hours emergency service when it is a REAL emergency such as:

- burst or leaking pipe
- loss of power to the house
- no heating or hot water
- storm damage which requires action to ensure the property is wind and watertight.

If the problem can wait until office hours with only minor inconvenience, it would not be classed as an emergency. If tradesmen are called out to incidents that are not emergencies or are found to have been caused by you, we will recharge the cost of the call out. The minimum cost of this is £75.

# Customer Satisfaction Survey



Over the past months a polling company called the Knowledge Partnership has been conducting an independent survey of Atrium's customers to get a better idea of what you think of the services we provide. Some of you may have taken part in the survey. We hope to have the results very soon and will be publishing them on our website [www.atrium-homes.co.uk](http://www.atrium-homes.co.uk)

# The smart way to pay

Never worry about missing a rent payment again! If you've got a smartphone, you can pay your rent and other bills in seconds with the Allpay App. Download it from the Apple App Store, Windows Phone Store or Google play. It's quick, easy and hassle free.

*Download it today!*





# WINTER WEATHER WARNING

## ACT NOW TO AVOID DISASTER

Whether we like it or not, winter's on its way. Over the years many of our homes have been badly affected by frozen and burst pipes. Sadly, this resulted in extensive damage to furniture and decoration, as well as a great deal of distress for our tenants. It's therefore vital that everyone takes the necessary precautions NOW to minimise potential frost damage in the coming weeks and months. To help you keep your home safe this winter, we've put together our top tips along with steps to take should the worst happen.

If the damage occurs outside working hours and you consider this to be an emergency, contact the out of hours contractor on **01563 528 816** who will assess the situation.

### HOW TO DEAL WITH A FROZEN PIPE

**1.** Turn the water off at the main stopcock and open all your taps to drain water from the system. Remember to close the taps again when you're finished. (Make sure you know now where the stopcock is - it's usually on the ground floor, under the kitchen sink or in a downstairs toilet.) Closing the stopcock will stop the supply of mains water into the house, helping to reduce damage.

**2.** It's best to let the pipes thaw naturally, but you can try to thaw the ice in the pipe with a hot water bottle or hairdryer (taking care to keep it well away from any water). NEVER use a heat gun or blow torch.

**3.** Check if the blockage is at the u bend at the kitchen sink (most likely, as this will be the point of entry of the water supply). You may be able to clear this by pouring hot water down it.

**4.** If the hot water system is frozen, turn off any water heaters.

**5.** If you have some water, fill available containers to ensure you have an adequate supply should the pipes freeze further. The only real remedy for frozen pipes is a significant thaw. While you should report any cases of frozen pipes to us to monitor, in most cases the contractor will NOT attend as there is little beyond the advice given here that they can do. Atrium Homes is also unable to help tenants by providing water supplies. You should try to use the facilities of neighbours, friends and family for water, toilet, etc if they're unaffected.

#### REMEMBER:

If you fail to take reasonable care and precautions to guard your home against burst pipes etc, you could be held responsible for damage caused by frost to the structure and fittings, as well as to your own household items or decor.

### HOW TO REDUCE THE RISK OF DAMAGE

#### Keep your home warm day and night

In very cold weather, you'll need to leave your heating on a low setting continuously. Most modern boilers have a frost protection thermostat which turns on automatically if the temperature drops to a level which will cause your pipes to freeze. Check this is working properly.

#### Open internal doors

As an added protection on cold days, open your loft trap door and also your sink cupboards to let the heat in.

#### Check pipes regularly

If you're going away for a while, ask a friend or relative to check your home regularly to make sure your pipes haven't burst or frozen.

#### Check your insurance

Make sure you have adequate contents insurance in place to help cover the cost of replacing damaged items if needs be. Don't miss your renewal date - check it now!

#### Keep on top of maintenance

Maintenance is key during winter. For example, did you know something as simple as a dripping tap can block your pipes? So avert potential disaster by checking all your taps and putting a new washer on any which are dripping - otherwise they could freeze, causing pipes to block.

### WHAT TO DO IF A PIPE BURSTS

**1.** Turn the water off at the main stopcock and open all your taps to drain water from the system. Remember to close the taps again when you're finished. (Make sure you know now where the stopcock is - it's usually on the ground floor, under the kitchen sink or in a downstairs toilet.) Closing the stopcock will stop the supply of mains water into the house, helping to reduce damage.

**2.** Turn off water heaters.

**3.** Find the leak and bind it tightly with a towel, placing a bowl below to catch any drips.

**4.** If water is lying on top of a ceiling and making it bulge, pierce the ceiling using a screwdriver to let the water escape.

**5.** If electric cables are wet, switch off the supply at the mains. DO NOT TOUCH THE CABLES THEMSELVES.

Contact our office for help, or if outside office hours, contact our emergency service (see page 13).

### STORM DAMAGE: WHAT TO DO WHEN

It might not be cold, snowy weather that your home is exposed to over the winter months - there's the risk of storm damage too. Here's what to do when:

#### If tiles are blown off your roof, but there's no water penetration

Contact Atrium on 01563 528 816. We'll log the details of your repair, which will be classed as a Routine Repair, and a roofer will call within 7 working days. However, please remember working on roofs in bad weather is dangerous, and due to the number of calls and the weather conditions it may be more than 7 days before a roofer can get up onto your roof. Our staff will keep you advised.

#### If water starts to penetrate through the roof

There's roofing felt under the tiles and this should prevent water coming into your house. However, if your roof does start to leak, use a bucket or container to catch any water coming into rooms and lay a plastic sheet over any possessions which are close to the leak. You should inform us immediately to update the information. We may be able to lay visqueen (heavy duty polythene) in your attic to prevent any further water penetration until it's safe to allow workmen on the roof.

#### If there's any doubt about water in the electrics

Turn off the electricity at the meter box and inform us immediately.

#### If there are loose slates

Loose slates can pose an immediate danger to life or property, so if you can see any slates hanging off your roof, report this to us immediately.

#### REMEMBER:

If the damage occurs outside working hours and you consider this to be an emergency, contact the out of hours contractor on 01563 528 816 who will assess the situation.





## SWITCH ON TO CHRISTMAS SAFETY

Over the last few months we've had a number of house fires. Thankfully no one was seriously hurt, but at this time of year when we're all decorating our homes the risks go up - Christmas lights and candles are two of the most common causes of house fires. So let's all remind ourselves about fire safety this festive season.

## FAIRY LIGHTS

- Check fuses are the right type (see the box for the maximum size of fuse you should use).
- If bulbs blow, replace them.
- Don't leave fairy lights on when you go out or go to sleep.
- Don't let the bulbs touch anything that can burn easily, like paper.
- Don't overload sockets.

## CANDLES



- Always put candles on a heat resistant surface. Be especially careful with night lights and tea lights, which get hot enough to melt plastic. TVs are NOT fire-resistant objects!!!
- Don't put candles near curtains or other fabrics, or furniture. And keep them out of draughts - curtains can waft into the flame.
- Don't put candles under shelves. It's easy to forget that there's a lot of heat above a burning candle. If you put a candle under a shelf or other surface, then it can burn it. Make sure there's at least three feet (one metre) between a candle and any surface above.
- Keep candles out of reach of children and pets.
- Keep candles apart. Leave at least four inches (10cm) between two burning candles.
- Take care with votive or scented candles. These kinds of candles turn to liquid to release their fragrance, so put them in a glass or metal holder.
- Don't leave candles burning. Extinguish candles before you leave a room. NEVER go to sleep with a candle still burning. And never leave a burning candle or oil burner in a child's bedroom.
- Make sure candles are completely out. Even candles that have been put out can go on smouldering and start a fire, so double check.

## DECORATIONS

Decorations made of light tissue paper or cardboard burn easily. So:

- Don't attach them to lights or heaters.
- Don't put them immediately above or around the fireplace.
- Keep them away from candles.



## CHIP PANS

It's not just about our decorations at this time of year - be fire aware when you're cooking too, especially with chips.

Chip pan fires cause one fifth of all accidental house fires attended by the Fire and Rescue Service in the UK each year.

If you think about what you're doing when you're deep frying: you're heating several pints of oil to extremely high temperatures. The oil can not only cause terrible burns, but it can go up in flames. In fact, it's an ideal fuel for a fire, and difficult to put out.

If you do choose to deep fat fry

your chips, make sure you do it safely. Better still, choose oven chips or use a thermostatic fryer.

### Top tips to protect your family from chip pan fires:

- Never fill a chip pan more than a third full of oil.
- Consider using a thermostatically controlled deep fat fryer.
- Never leave your chip pan unattended - even if the phone or doorbell rings.
- If you've had a drink, don't be tempted to cook with a chip pan. It's just too high a risk to take.

Remember - fires start when your attention stops. Don't put yourself or your family at risk.



**ATRIUM**  
HOMES

The Landlord of Choice

If you have any comments or questions or want to know what we're doing at the moment, then please get in touch. Our contact details are:

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