

YOUR HOME

THE NEWSLETTER OF ATRIUM HOMES NO. 55 - SUMMER 2022



Atrium tenants have benefitted from the distribution of almost £66,000 in funding to help with their rising fuel costs.

bid on offering a £50 payment to every Atrium household, along with costs to design and distribute a fuel poverty/ energy advice leaflet.

We submitted our bid before Christmas and received confirmation of the award of £65,950 in early January 2022!

So we could make payments to every household, our staff spent the last couple of months contacting all 1,209 tenants to obtain their banking details, prior to payments being made. This was a significant administrative task along with the team's day to day activities but we did it! every household received the payment that Atrium had secured on their behalf, recognising the significant impact of rising fuel costs on our tenants.

In addition, we also sent all households a leaflet outlining different ways to try and reduce the impact of higher energy costs.

If you need any further advice or are struggling to meet your energy costs, please contact us **01563 528 816** and we'll do what we can to support you with this. Ongoing information will be also be shared on the Atrium website and Facebook page.

I've taken over the reins from Stephen Black who led the work of Atrium Homes for 21 years. During his time as Chief Executive, Stephen saw the organisation grow and work to improve the lives of our tenants in the communities that we serve. Stephen leaves Atrium as a strong organisation with a dedicated staff team which is working hard for its tenants. We're grateful of the years of commitment Stephen gave to Atrium and hope he has a long, healthy and happy retirement.



This is my first newsletter since starting with **Atrium Homes** at the end of January 2022.

When the first lockdown started in March 2020, we could all have been forgiven for thinking that this was a short-term problem and things would be back to normal quickly. Sadly that was not the case, and many people's lives have been affected by the virus either because they or family and friends caught it, or because of the huge impact it has had on businesses and the economy, and the knock-on effect for many people's jobs and financial security.

Throughout the last two years, Atrium Homes has worked hard to keep its services for tenants going, from providing Money Advice support to making sure repairs to tenants' homes were done as quickly and safely as possible with the restrictions we were under from time to time. The pandemic did, however, prevent us from delivering all our usual services to our customers to the standard that they and we expect.

Our consultant who carried out our Customer Satisfaction survey at the end of 2021 is pulling together focus groups of tenants who responded to the survey, so that we can explore the themes from this in more detail. If you had previously indicated to him that you would be willing to participate in the focus groups and you still want to get involved, please do get in touch with him or us.

Over the past two years, progress on our Homes Fit for 21st Century Living Standard (HFF21CLS) improvement programme has been delayed due to lockdowns and the contractor struggling with labour and materials shortages. While the majority of restrictions have now been lifted in Scotland,

the contractor is still struggling with resources.

We remain committed to delivering the improvements we promised when we consulted with tenants in 2019, but the work has been slower than you and we would have liked. The lack of progress has been frustrating for you and us. We're working hard with our contractor, CCG, to try and get back on track, and we've included an update on what we think the realistic timing will be of the improvements we committed to deliver over the next few years. Phase 3 of the project should be starting soon and you will start to see our contractors out and about more.

Because of current events both in the UK and internationally, we have seen the price of food, gas and electricity going up in the last few months and many tenants are struggling to make ends meet. Continuing to pay your rent is important to make sure that you can stay in your home and that we can provide essential services to all our tenants. If you're struggling though, there is help out there and we've included some information on that in this newsletter.

Finally, if you need to speak to a member of the team to request a repair or to get assistance, you can get us on the phone, by email, by logging contact through our website, or by coming into our office in Shortlees which is fully open to our customers. If you want a face-to-face chat with a specific person, please call ahead to check the person you need to speak with will be in the office and available to see you when you come in.

Best wishes, Shannon Watson

Chief Executive ΓΕΝΑΝ

I hope you're all keeping well and looking forward to the warmer weather.

Atrium's Board has continued its work to support the management of Atrium Homes, helping to shape the strategy of the organisation for the next five years in our latest Business Plan. The Board is made up of volunteers who give their time to Atrium Homes. It meets 10 times a year and there are sub-committees which meet once a quarter and which deal with the three main areas of Atrium's business - Operations; Investment & Finance; and Audit & Staffing.

We've continued to hold meetings virtually and will be bringing in a hybrid solution that works for the Board and helps it to take care of business effectively.

We said goodbye to Stephen Black after 21 years at the helm of Atrium Homes, and welcomed Shannon into the role in January. Shannon has big shoes to fill and we look forward to working with her in the

We welcomed a new co-optee member to the Board in January. Julie Templeton is a tenant who is keen to support the organisation's work and decision making processes, and we appreciate the opportunity to have her input.

We've been on a recruitment drive for new Board members and hope to welcome a few new people to the Board who will bring fresh ideas and a different perspective, helping us to continue delivering the best possible service to our tenants over the coming months.

We're always keen to hear from tenants who would like to work with us to help shape our services and how they are delivered. Being on the Board is not the only way that you can do this, and you can be involved in a number of less formal ways. These include groups like our Armchair Panel and our Tenant Scrutiny Group. You can find out more on our website at www.atrium-homes.co.uk/ get-involved/.

Here's hoping that things get a bit easier for all of us in 2022.

Best wishes, Joe Keen Chair

PICKING UP YOUR COMMENTS

in becoming more on 01563 528 816 for an informal chat.

Customer feedback from our recent satisfaction survey has given us a lot of useful information. We know what we do well and some things that we could do differently or better. To make sure we fully understand these points before we look to action them, we've commissioned the Knowledge Partnership, who carried out the survey to undertake a small number of focus groups with interested tenants.

Once we have the output from the meetings, we'll let you know how we intend to move forward. Developing any changes to services needs your input and there are a number of ways tenants can get involved:

Armchair Panel - be the first to be sent revised policies and documents for comment, all from the comfort of your own home!

Tenant Scrutiny Group - have the chance to review and input into what we do. The Group generally meets at Atrium's office to discuss services, give views and make Estate Walkabouts – join staff and tenants on a walk around your estate to see issues first hand and explore ways of improving our neighbourhood management.

Survey Monkey - get involved with general surveys and consultations. There are lots of opportunities - keep an channels for more information.

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New arrangements for repairs

Last year we told you about a different approach to carrying out our reactive and void repairs. This involved separating all our properties into two areas, with different contractors appointed to cover each area, with the contingency that each provides cover for the other, if needs be.

As soon as arrangements have been information and website/social media updates, so watch this space! In the



arrangements for reporting repairs to us.

ways - by phone, email, via the Tenant then contact you directly to get more details

Cyclical Works Programme

As things slowly but gradually return to pre-pandemic arrangements, we continue to progress with various cyclical projects and works, including:

External Painterwork & Gutter Cleaning

Dumbreck Decorators has resumed activity on site, and is continuing works in various areas including Catrine, Dunlop, Cumnock, Fenwick, New Farm Loch and Kilmarnock. Tenants have been contacted over the last few weeks where work is planned for the coming year, in advance of the contractors' programme. Tenants who have received a letter will receive a further communication from the contractor nearer the time that the work is due to take place.

Fire and Smoke Detection Works

We've completed an extensive programme of works delivered by Magnus Electrical to upgrade the existing fire and smoke detection systems where required to comply with Legislation changes. We still have a limited number of properties where access is required and will continue to attempt to gain access to have this work completed. If you're unsure if you still need to have this work completed or if you missed any previous appointments, please contact the Investment team who can assist (01563 528 816, option 3).

Please carry out routine testing of your detector on a weekly basis to ensure it remains in working order and report any faults or issues to us as quickly as possible.

Electrical Periodic Testing

The existing contract that was in place with Alwurk Electrical has now concluded. We're in the process of setting up a new contract, so we can continue with the requirement to have the electrical installation inspected every five years.

Every 12 months we must carry out a service of the gas boiler in your property, if you have gas central heating. This is a requirement by law under The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998.

The annual service is completed to ensure the safety of our tenants in their home. It's therefore important to read the letters that you're sent about this and to take action before it's too late. We cannot extend the date of your service and we may gain access to your property if no access is provided.

We appreciate that people work and have other commitments, but you must allow us access to undertake the service when it's due. You can phone Gas Sure (our gas engineers) direct to arrange an appointment time on 01294 468113.

Legionella

Legionella is uncommon but can be dangerous. Here are some simple steps to protect you:

- O Run water through all taps on a weekly
- O Thoroughly clean and descale your showerhead every three months or sooner if it needs it.
- O When returning from holiday, run the taps and shower for a few minutes prior

HFF21CLS Contract -CCG (Scotland) Ltd



Phase 2 of the HFF21CLS contract works has recently been completed to a number of properties in Shortlees. Progress was slower than expected due to the type and amount of work needed to achieve the standard. The contractor's works programme was also disrupted through staff self-isolation and COVID-19 related absences. We wish to express our gratitude to tenants for their patience while works were carried out. Phase 2 tenants will have recently received a customer satisfaction survey form to complete and we would welcome your feedback on the process.

The contractor is making a start to the Phase 3 properties in New Farm Loch and has set up site facilities near Leslie Place. Works in this area will mainly consist of bathroom and kitchen replacements. If identified at the survey stage, then an electrical re-wire, boiler and heating system replacement might also be completed. We'll provide further information about this to tenants during the first march-in survey.

Phase 3







You can get further information on the HFF21CLS project via our website or by contacting the Investment team on 01563 528 816, option 3. We intend to begin the first surveys in some other areas included in Phase 3 during the course of the year and will make contact with you to arrange an appointment before we visit.



LET'S CLEAN UP OUR COMMUNITIES

From 18th - 22nd July join us to help tidy up our communities. We'll be running a series of events and social media campaigns to try and encourage everyone to consider how we can contribute to keeping our communities tidy and waste free.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, communities have been blighted with fly tipping and interruptions to waste collection, resulting in more litter strewn areas. We want to work with communities to try and reduce the amount of waste produced and to make sure that waste is responsibly stored and collected. We can't do this alone – it is down to all of us to take responsibility for the waste we generate and to think about its disposal. We also rely on partners such as the local authority, East Ayrshire Council, to assist through its various collection methods and recycling centres.



LITTER

Litter is ugly. It blights our beauty spots and it's harmful to the environment, to our health and to wildlife.

Research shows that many people are concerned about litter, and that some people consider it antisocial behaviour. Yet just as many people admit to dropping litter. In Scotland, around £46 million is spent on cleaning up litter, which is roughly £20 for every taxpayer. Seven out of every 10 items of discarded litter is food packaging or wrappers.

At Atrium we spend a considerable amount of time and resources trying to keep our estates clean and tidy, and spent almost

£7,000 over 12 months ordering clean ups and collection of large deposits of rubbish. In addition, we work closely with East Ayrshire Council, who are responsible for waste collection, to try and address the problem. But the bottom line is, while we try to assist communities by cleaning up large scale, random litter deposits, the problem is created by the community dumping their rubbish. So make use of the facilities available in your local community to prevent litter and fly-tipping:

- Use litter bins and Recycle on the Go bins to dispose of your waste correctly.
- If there isn't a bin available, take your waste home or keep hold of it until you find a bin.

- If you have large items you no longer need that are still in good condition, you can have them collected by your local Re-Use organisation. In this area, you can contact the British Heart Foundation at heretohelp@bhf.org.uk or Cunninghame Furniture Recycling Company@cfrcenquiries@chaltd.org
- Make use of your nearest Household Waste and Recycling Centre or Recycling Point.
- Request a bulky or special uplift by contacting East Ayrshire Council.
- Make best use of all options available through your kerbside collection to make sure you're recycling as much as possible to avoid excess waste.

The fight against fly-tipping

There are over 60,000 incidents of fly-tipping reported each year in Scotland, costing over £8.9 million of public money to clear up.

Fly-tipping represents waste that is disposed of illegally and irresponsibly. It can include anything from a single black bag of household or garden waste, to large volumes of tyres and construction waste. Black bags full of household rubbish account for 63% of all fly-tipping.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

NO FLY TIPPING

Report it.

If you see evidence of fly-tipping you can use the Dumb Dumpers website www.zerowastescotland.

org.uk/DumbDumpers

- the national public reporting tool for fly-tipping in Scotland - and the details will be passed to the relevant enforcement agency.
Or you can contact East Ayrshire Council on 01563 576 790 or you can report it to us on 01563 528 816.



DO YOU WANT TO BE A LOCAL LITTER HERO?

Everyone needs to take responsibility for protecting our environment. Littering and damage to our natural surroundings is completely unacceptable and there's no place for this type of anti-social behaviour anywhere in Scotland.

If you and a small group of friends are interested in helping clean up your community, we can help you by proving free litter picking kits, containing litter pickers, high viz vests and disposable gloves. We'll also put you in touch with Clean Up Scotland who can help organise your litter pick and we'll keep you advised about any necessary permissions you require, depending on where you're collecting.

To register your interest for a litter kit, call us on **01563 528 816**. Thank you!

GARDEN WASTE

At the end of March 2021, the way you dispose of your garden waste changed, as East Ayrshire Council no longer offered a free uplift of your brown bin.

You now have two options for disposing of your garden waste:

- Purchase a garden waste permit for £30 which will get you collections every four weeks, from March to November.
- Take your garden waste to a recycling centre on Western Road, Kilmarnock or Garlaff, near Cumnock, and dispose of it for free.

To apply for a garden waste permit, you need to register first for an East Ayrshire customer account. You can do this at https://our.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/. If you don't have internet access, you can call 01563 554 400 (please select Waste Management) to purchase a permit.

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- Give us 28 days' notice to vacate your home.
- Ensure all your rent payments are up-to-date.
- O Discuss with our staff at the pre-termination inspection if you can leave any items, such as floor coverings, blinds, etc.
- Remove all your furniture plus possessions and arrange for the disposal of any unwanted items. East Ayrshire Council provides a Special Uplift service if you phone 01563 554 400 or complete an online form through www.east-ayrshire.gov. uk/Housing/RubbishAndRecycling/Skips-and-specialcollections/Specialuplifts.aspx
- O Cut the grass and clear all rubbish from garden areas.
- O Clean the property throughout.
- Return all sets of keys on termination day.

Over the past year, we've have had an increase in the number of properties returned where tenants have left lots of household $\dot{}$. $\dot{}$. This impacts on the time it takes us to re-let a property, as items. This impacts on the time it takes us to re-let a property, as we need to arrange for the removal of the items and pursue the outgoing tenant for the cost of doing this. It's essential for tenants to take responsibility for clearing all items before vacating the tenancy to avoid any recharges.

Please speak to our Operations staff if you have any difficulty in removing your items before you leave.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS: where can I go for help and advice?

It's hard to ignore the rising cost of living at the moment. Inflation is high, food prices are going up and many of us have seen our energy bills double from the start of April. This is a worrying time for many, particularly those on low incomes. Many people who have never struggled before are now finding it difficult to make ends meet.

It's important to remember that help is out there if you're struggling and there's no need to bear the burden alone. We've gathered together a list of resources that can help if you're struggling:

Food and other essentials

Are you worried about food? East Ayrshire Council has a webpage which has lots of information and tips for healthy heating and help to access food:

www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/ CouncilAndGovernment/Foodprovision/Food-provision-in-East-Ayrshire-communities.aspx

This webpage includes lists of Community Larders that you could become a member of as well as Foodbanks in the East Ayrshire area, with an interactive map (www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/ CouncilAndGovernment/Foodprovision/Food-provision-sites.aspx) to make it easy for you to find the support you need.

Money and debt advice

It's important you continue paying your rent, as without this money, we can't provide vital services to our tenants. If you find yourself falling behind in your payments, please don't ignore the situation; contact us so we can work with you to find a solution.

If you're struggling to pay your rent, please get in touch with our team on 01563 528 816 as soon as you can. We can help to ensure that you're accessing all the benefits you're entitled to, as well as signposting you to other agencies that could help you. . Remember, as long as you work with us to deal with your rent debt, we'll do what we can to help you keep your home.

- O Citizens Advice have useful advice on debt online at: www.citizensadvice.org uk/scotland/debt-and-money
- O East Ayrshire Citizens Advice Bureau can be contacted on **01563 543 379** or email eastayrshirecab.org.uk
- Money Advice Scotland offers support with money worries, and have a telephone and text service: www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk

As your landlord, we insure the building you live in. We do not, however, insure your contents and belongings. This includes things like your furniture, personal belongings, appliances or internal decoration. If any of these are destroyed or damaged in a fire, due to burst pipes, by accident or are stolen, you'll need to pay for them to be replaced if you don't have contents insurance.

It's important you take out your own Home Contents Insurance. Your policy should cover damage caused by fire, flooding, storms and theft. You may have to pay extra to cover accidental loss or damage to your possessions. This may be worth considering if you have children or pets. However, always check what's included. Your policy may not cover the contents of a freezer or a mobile phone and there may be an upper limit for a single item.

Most policies carry an excess. This means that you won't be covered for the first amount of a claim. A typical excess may be between £50 and £100. You can find out more information on Home Contents Insurance at the website on the left.

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CASH IN THE COMMUNITY

Are you an individual, community group or organisation operating within Atrium's communities? Are you looking for funding or financial support to help with a specific project?

We're delighted to announce that Round 1 of our Cash in the Applicants can apply for funding up to a maximum of £1,000. Applications will then be assessed by a staff panel, with successful bids requiring to meet certain basic criteria.

Previous successful awards have been made to New Farm Loch Community Council for the purchase of a defibrillator

If you think this fund might be of interest to your group, call us on 01563 528 816 to find out more and ask for an application.

The closing date for Round 1 is 30th June 2022. The panel will



Sponsorship and donations

From time to time, we receive requests to sponsor local activities and/or events that contribute to or generate community activity. These can be events such as gala days, children's outings or support for local youth clubs. The donations we make are often smaller, allowing us to support a greater number of clubs and groups.

Recently we were delighted to sponsor the boys football team at Stewarton Annick and contribute to a supporters bus for Shortlees Amateurs.



Gifted in gardening? Fancy growing your own food? You might like this. Yes, it's time to get your gardening gloves on again for the Annual Tenant Gardening Competition.

As usual, we're keen to make the Garden Competition open to as many of our tenants as possible - so you don't even have to enter OR have a "proper" garden to win! Every year, usually in June or July, a panel of staff will inspect our gardens.

Many of our tenants take great pride in their gardens and we feel it's important to mark this and encourage neighbours to get involved. We have a wide range of fantastic displays each year from small

Hornov Hornov Gorolen Competition

We thought we'd plant the seed -

the Atrium Homes Gardening Competition is back!

Our staff will be out and about looking for outdoor spaces of all shapes and sizes where they feel tenants have made a real effort - from hanging baskets and tubs, to flower beds, vegetable patches and main

gardens to window boxes to back courts.

gardens. So, whatever or wherever you grow, it could win you a prize!

Summer Gardens

The competition is open to all tenants, in every estate. All gardens shortlisted in the competition will be entered into a draw, with 10 prizes of £25 available. The panel will also select an overall winner who'll win £50. We'll announce the winners by 21st August 2022. So, start now and give yourself a winning chance.

Ready... steady... grow!

Platinum Jubilee

This year, Her Majesty The Queen will become the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee after 70 years of service. To mark this special occasion, the Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) is a unique tree planting initiative which is inviting people from across the UK to "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee".

With a focus on planting sustainably, the QGC is encouraging us all to play our part to enhance our environment by planting a tree between October to March. The aim is to create a legacy in honour of The Queen's leadership of the nation which will benefit future generations. Our landscape contractor John O'Conner has kindly donated a tree to be planted to celebrate the Jubilee and to allow Atrium to participate in the QGC initiative.

Crowning Glory

At Atrium we celebrated the Queen's Jubilee marking 70 years of her reign by offering prizes in each of our communities. Two lucky winners in each area received a Jubilee afternoon tea hamper. There was no need to apply - winners were selected randomly using a number generator.

There's something for the children too with two prizes for the best crown in our colouring competition. Download the template from Atrium's website or pick up a copy from the office. The winners will get a Smyth's gift voucher. To give them a chance to get creative winners will not be drawn until 15th July 2022.

FEELING SWAMPED?

It's part of your tenancy obligation to keep your garden and exterior of your property in a clean and tidy state. Over the summer months, our staff will be back out on site most of the working week and will take note of properties where this obligation isn't being met.

Atrium's Director of Operations, Joyce McCroskie said: "We appreciate tackling a large garden can be daunting for someone who perhaps doesn't have the right equipment or know where to start. That's why we'll do our best to help you to address the problem and turn your garden into a place you can truly enjoy. If you've got a problem relating to garden maintenance, please contact us for advice as soon as you can."

You may also want to consider registering for the Garden Maintenance scheme. To see if you're eligible, call 01563 528 816 or email info@atrium-homes.co.uk



Throughout the month of May, our landscape contractor John O'Conner supported 'No Mow May', letting sections of the rough cuts areas and the woodland in New Farm Loch grow wild for one month, initially encouraging biodiversity. The perceived benefits include:

- Providing increased nectar for the bee population.
- Encouraging butterflies, wildlife and birds to thrive.
- O Increasing native flower growth.

This initiative was designed to support both the National Trust and Plantlife.



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DEALING WITH PESTS IN THE HOME

Occasionally, you may need to report vermin or insect pests within your home, such as mice or rats and externally wasp nests.

Dealing with an infestation of any type of vermin in your home can be an unpleasant thing. However, dealing with such issues is the responsibility of tenants, not Atrium Homes. The only exception is in the reporting of rats which is considered to be a matter of public health. We will, of course, deal with any necessary repairs such as holes where vermin are gaining access or if you believe underlying housing conditions are contributing to the infestation.

With the warmer weather over the summer, you may experience problems with infestations of ants, wasps or other insects. A wasp nest should not be disturbed, however they can be removed by the Pest Control Officers. As with mice infestation, we'll arrange for repairs to the structure of the building if necessary.

East Ayrshire Council's Pest Control Team can carry out treatments to deal with these and a wide variety of other pest control problems. Please call **01563 576 790** (Option 5),



email **RegulatoryServices@east-ayrshire.gov.uk** or report online to request this service.

Please note, this is not a free service and is NOT paid for by Atrium.
In general, all pest control work undertaken by Environmental Health is chargeable. Payments for services should be paid in advance. The current charges are:

- £48 including VAT, for all pest control work (except fumigations)
- £120 including VAT, for fumigations

The Pest Control Team will advise you of the costs involved for your specific problem.

Some minor pest problems can be tackled with a number of 'over the counter' solutions and most hardware stores and garden centres sell a wide range of products such as sprays and powders which can be used to eradicate insects. Before using any product, make sure you read the instructions carefully and use only as directed.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS SERVICE

Keep these numbers next to your phone for easy reference.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS
Atrium Property Services 01563 528 810

GAS OR HEATING EMERGENCIES
GasSure 01294 468 113

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:

- O Burst or leaking pipe
- Loss of power to the house
- O 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.



RATS: Reporting an Incident



All reported sightings of rats should be reported directly to us. We'll arrange for the Pest Control Officers to investigate and deal with the problem.

Rats and mice are generally classified as 'High Priority', as are wasp complaints because of the perceived risk of harm. Ants, slaters and other insect pests are generally rated as 'Low Priority' for action.



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