

# YOUR HOME

The Landlord of Choice

THE NEWSLETTER OF ATRIUM HOMES | No 54 - Winter 2021

# THIS CHRISTMAS THE ATRIUM ELVES ARE BACK WITH GIFTS, GIVEAWAYS FANTASTIC SMART TECHNOLOGY PRIZES!

See inside for our Over
75's gift vouchers, daily
£50 supermarket voucher
giveaways and details on how
to win one of 3 Amazon Fire
tablets or our Grand Prize
of an iPad mini!







Wishing all our tenants and residents a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

# Dear Tenant, Welcome to Atrium's Winter 2021 newsletter.

I think it's fair comment to say 2021 has not gone quite as we'd hoped! This time last year we thought the worst of the Covid pandemic had passed and we were beginning to look forward to a more normal life, albeit within the restrictions of the newly 2020, followed by another lockdown from Boxing Day, which didn't begin to ease until we emerged back into Tier 2 in May 2021, with restrictions finally ending in August.

Although staff have been back in the office since then, it's only very recently that we've been able to open our doors to the public. We've also struggled to bring some of our services back online as quickly as we'd hoped. This is particularly true of our Homes Fit For 21st Century Living Standard (HFF21CLS) programme, where our principal contractor CCG has faced labour and materials shortages caused by the ping-demic of track and trace. Nonetheless, there are some elements of our services which are back online and some works have been going ahead. We're aiming still to catch up on our HFF21CLS programme in 2022 and complete it by 2024/25 as originally planned.

In this edition, we have some news about our other

STOP PRESS...

- Our Elves are back in full Christmas mode, hoping to bring Christmas cheer to many of our tenants
- our Money Advice team is available to help tenants with money
- and our Technical team has provided some information on how to prepare for the winter chills

Finally, this is the last newsletter I'll be contributing to, as I retire from Atrium at the end of the year. I'd like to say that it has been a privilege over the past 21 years. It has also been a pleasure to witness the changes we've been able to introduce to the areas and communities we serve, and to the lives of the people who live in them.

Atrium is a great organisation and it's full of great people who genuinely care and who always go the extra mile to help, and I'm enormously proud to have led them.



Just as we were going to print, we received a draft report from our recent Customer Satisfaction Survey 2021, which had been carried out by independent consultant Knowledge Partnership. During September and October, field workers carried out over 400 door-to-door interviews with tenants on a range of topics.

In the coming weeks, our Board will be presented with a full report on those outcomes which will then feed into an action plan for the year ahead.

We appreciate that over the last two years due to the interruptions of Covid-19 and the restrictions placed on us by government quidelines, we've not been able to deliver all our usual services to the standard that our customers expect.

Even with restrictions easing, there are still difficulties to be faced with delivering our reactive repairs and planned investment programme, due to the experiences of the construction sector with labour and shortages of materials.

We'd like to thank those of you who participated in the survey and look forward to working with tenants to develop our services moving forward.

If you'd like to work with a small group of tenants to try and help us improve our services, please contact Michelle Mitchell or Mareta Greig on 01563 528 816.





I hope you are all keeping well and looking forward to another Christmas - hopefully it'll go better for everyone than last year!

Atrium's Board has just held its first face-to-face meeting in over 18 months. It was a socially distanced affair and we linked it to the AGM, which was also faceto-face. Although we have coped well with virtual Board meetings via Zoom, it was great to be back in the same room as my fellow Board members and to meet some of them, in the flesh, for the very first time. Yes - the Board members who joined us in 2020 had never met their colleagues in person. In the short term it's not possible for us to revert completely to face-to-face meetings and going forwards, we'll be considering hybrid meetings - a mixture of face-to-face and virtual - to get the business done.

I'm telling you this because it's never been easier for tenant members of the company (and tenants) to get more involved in helping take key decisions at Board and sub-committee level. You can participate in these meetings from the comfort of your own home, using a tablet provided by Atrium. Key decisions taken by Board range from Business Plan objectives (what we'll do, where and when); to policies (how we'll do it); to rent review and increases (how do we get the money to do it). It also extends to employment responsibilities and decisions (how many staff do we need and how do we employ them). If this is something that interests you, please get in touch with us.

We're saying goodbye to several familiar faces as well. Long serving Board members Jim O'Neill and Graham Piggott have tendered their resignations. Both served as office bearers of Atrium during their time on the Board and both contributed enormously to the development of the organisation.

And lastly, our Chief Executive, Stephen Black retires at the end of the year. Stephen is the longest serving staff member at Atrium, and has been at the helm of Atrium since it began delivering landlord services over 21 years ago. Stephen has been instrumental in making it the organisation it is today and we will miss his expertise, experience and leadership. We wish him a long, healthy and happy retirement.

Best wishes for Christmas and 2022

Chair, Atrium Homes

# **GET INVOLVED**

To find out more about joining the Board (or a sub-committee) or how Atrium works, contact us on 01563 528 816 or email info@atrium-homes.co.uk



## **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.

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

#### Will I get paid for being a Board

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

#### How much time is involved?

The Board meets roughly once a month, and allowing for time to read Board papers, members spend around four hours a month on Board business. We meet virtually, using video conferencing, and send the papers out electronically. We also provide a tablet/ PC to members should they need it.

#### 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 do I find out more?

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

**Festive Special Festive Special** 





### 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.

# Over 75's - Enjoy The Elf an Elfie Christmas Advent Calendar Dinner on us!

The Elves want to do something special again for Atrium's older tenants this year. - or maybe some treats for the grandkids!



# Giveaway

The Elves have come up trumps again! Last year saw our first ever Calendar Giveaway of £100 per day from 1st to 24th

Elves will randomly select TWO Atrium tenants from their special Elf Advent Calendar, and each tenant will receive

daily draw. Good luck!

#### Portal Prizes

Technology. There will be three Amazon Fire tablets to win and the Grand Prize of an iPad mini drawn on Christmas Eve.

To be eligible to enter the weekly draw, you who is registered for the Portal by 9am on Thursday 23rd December, will be eligible for the Grand Prize draw. Good luck!

#### Elf Assistance

(benefits, food, paying the bills, etc), please get in touch. Just phone us on 01563 528 816 or email info@atrium-homes.

### Christmas and New Year Holidays

Atrium will be closed completely over the Thursday 6th January 2022 at 9am.

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

# Paying Your Rent at Christmas

It's important to pay your rent on time. Every Atrium tenant is due to pay their rent on the 1st of the month, as detailed in your tenancy agreement. Although the Atrium office and shops will be shut over Christmas, that doesn't mean you can't pay your rent. There are plenty of other ways to make a payment:



**CALL US** 

You can phone the office on 01563 528 816 up to 23rd December 2021 and pay by debit or credit card.



DIRECT DEBIT

You can pay monthly by setting up a Direct Debit. To do this call us on 01563 528 816 - please have your bank details ready before you call. We'll set up your Direct Debit and you'll receive a letter from our Direct Debit provider - allpay.net within 7 days.



ONLINE OR PAYPOINT OUTLET Pay via the website www.allpayments.net/ allpayments/

Or pay at any Post Office or other outlets which display the PayPoint sign using your rent payment card.



**ALLPAY APP** 

Go to the app store and download the allpay app. To use this, you'll need your rent card and your debit/ credit card. Simply follow directions to set up. Once set up, this is a quick and simple way to make rent payments. It stores the last six months' transactions, so you can always check if you've made your rent payment.



Transfer your rent straight to our bank account: Sort code 82-65-30, Account Number 30300484. Please make sure you quote your Customer Account Number so your payment is assigned to the correct account. If you need your Account Number, please contact us at the office.



PORTAL

If you register with Atrium's tenant portal prior to 23rd December, you'll be able to make a payment in this way also.

#### Struggling to pay your rent this Christmas?

At this time of year, everyone feels the excitement of the festive season creeping up on us, together with the priorities that lie ahead. There's no denying Christmas is a costly time for all of us. However, we must remind you that you should continue to pay your rent as you would normally do.

If you're having any difficulty doing this, please contact us on 01563 528 816 as soon as possible so we can offer help and advice before any major problems develop for you. Your Estates Officer will be glad to help you manage your budget.

Please don't ignore any letters we send you regarding your rent - this could put your tenancy at risk.

Remember, as long as you work with us to deal with your debt, we will do what we can to help you keep your home. So tell us as soon as it starts getting tough.

YOUR HOME / WINTER 2021 / 5

# annual return on the charter 2020/2021

Atrium submitted its 7th Annual Return on the Charter in June 2021 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.



#### tenant satisfaction

Of the tenants who responded to this landlord's most recent satisfaction survey:

	atrium	scottish average
Tenants satisfied with landlord's overall service	89.3%	89.0%
Tenants who felt their landlord was good at keeping them informed about its services and outcomes	91.1%	91.7%
Tenants satisfied with opportunities to participate in landlord's decision making	89.8%	86.6%

#### 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	99.3%	99.1%
Percentage of rent due but not collected due to empty homes	1.5%	1.4%
Average number of days taken to re-let homes	68.4 days	56.3 days

#### homes & rent

#### at 31 march 2021

No. of homes owned by Atrium: 1,202 homes
Total rent due for year: £5,424,927

Increase on weekly rent: 1.8% 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.

#### average weekly rents

size of home	number of homes owned	atrium	scottish average
1 Apartment	-	-	£73.61
2 Apartment	122	£74.42	£79.48
3 Apartment	561	£85.73	£82.60
4 Apartment	478	£98.19	£89.81
5 Apartment	41	£107.71	£99.97

# 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%	91.0%
Average time taken to complete emergency repairs	2.1 hrs	4.2 hrs
Average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs	10.7 days	6.7 days
Reactive repairs completed 'right first time'	88.0%	91.5%
Tenants satisfied with the service they received for repairs or maintenance carried out on their home	88.6%	90.1%

#### neighbourhoods

For every 100 of your landlord's homes, 8.5 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	98.6%	94.4%

6 / WINTER 2021 / YOUR HOME YOUR HOME YOUR HOME

# HOMES FIT FOR 21ST CENTURY LIVING STANDARD (HFF21CLS): UPDATE

The impact of Covid-19 is still affecting our ability to deliver works within the timescales set out in the 5 phase plan we originally consulted you on, as well as the revised version we provided in our Summer 2021 newsletter.

We're working extremely hard to look at how we can pull back on this slippage to ensure the HFF21CLS is delivered as near to these timescales as possible.

We'll keep you informed of any significant changes to the timescales outlined in this programme.

#### Phase 2 Works

From June this year, works have been ongoing to a number of 'pilot void' properties, and in September we began work on occupied flats in Shortlees.

Progress has been slower than expected, mainly due to the level and type of works required, but also the contractor's difficulties with staff requiring to isolate because of Covid-19 or related illness. The main contractor CCG (Scotland) Ltd, has recently increased the estimated turnaround time from 12-16 working days to 21-26, which means this phase is now not likely to be completed until February/ March 2022.

We'll continue to liaise with all tenants having works undertaken in this phase to explain how these timescales may impact on completion times previously discussed with you. For any issues or concerns while works are taking place in your home, please contact the Investment Team on 01563 528 816.

#### Phase 3 Works

March-in surveys started back in August for the occupied No Fines properties in New Farm Loch and will continue throughout the course of 2022. We'll also be contacting tenants in some other areas and build types that are proposed to be completed during Phase 3.

The Phase 3 works will consist of bathroom and kitchen replacement, and upgrade of detectors and fans. Electrical rewire, boiler and heating system replacements may also be completed, depending on whether these have been identified for properties with each area and build type. We'll provide further information about this to tenants during the first march-in survey.

We'll also be contacting some tenants to arrange a joint march-in survey with the contractor. At this stage we'll identify the work needed, and agree quality standards and specific requirements with tenants (including colour choices and finishes). Undertaking the joint march-in surveys before works begin, means everyone knows what is to happen when the contractor arrives to start work.



# Rent Increase Cousultation

In the next couple of weeks, you'll receive communication from us inviting you to respond to our proposal to increase your rent for the period 2022-23. We want you to tell us what you think. You can do this by:

- completing the survey monkey survey form at www. surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ AHrentconsult21
- calling us on **01563 528 816**
- emailing info@atrium-homes.co.uk
- completing the form on the Portal

This will give us valuable feedback which the Board will consider in its final deliberations on the rent increase, at its meeting in January 2022. Thank you to those who have already responded. We'll let you know the outcome in due course.

Any changes to your rent will take effect from 1st April 2022. We'll issue all tenants with further correspondence in February detailing their new rent charges. If you have any queries on the rent review, please contact us on 01563 528 816.



# Tenant Grant Fund for tenants in social housing and the private sector

The Scottish Government has set up a Tenant Grant Fund to provide financial help to tenants in social housing and in the private sector who are at risk of becoming homeless because they've fallen behind with their rent payments during Covid-19.

The grants will help tenants who have struggled financially as a direct result of the pandemic, allowing them to reduce or pay-off any rent arrears they have built up. The grants do not have to be repaid and are available to tenants in council, housing association or privately-rented accommodation.

Payments are being administered by local authorities and East Ayrshire Council has received an allocation of funding which is only available until 31st March 2022.

The scheme is designed to be flexible but there are eligibility criteria set by the Scottish Government:

- The grants are limited to helping with rent arrears that built-up between 23rd March 2020 and 9th August 2021 to a maximum of 12 months within this period.
- Grants can be used to make a full or partial payment of arrears, depending on individual circumstances.

- Grants will be targeted towards current tenants who are at risk of becoming homeless and do not have any other way of clearing the arrears.
- Private sector landlords should be registered on the Scottish Landlord Register.
- Landlords should have carried out steps to resolve the issue before making an application in line with pre-action requirements.
- Payments will be made to landlords rather than tenants on the strict condition that the payment will be used to credit the tenant's rent account, and that any ongoing proceedings to end the tenancy will be ceased.

#### How to apply

If you're a tenant, call our Rents Team on 01563 528 816 and ask about the Tenant Grant Fund. We'll submit the application on your behalf, so you must contact us to discuss this first and review your eligibility.



# 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

**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:

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.

# **Warm Home Discount**

Did you know you could get £140 off your electricity bill under the Warm Home Discount Scheme?

The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October 2021 and March 2022. If your supplier provides you with both gas and electricity, you might be able to get the discount on your gas bill instead. Contact your supplier to find out.

The discount will not affect your Cold Weather Payment or your Winter Fuel

**Payment**. There are two ways to qualify for the Warm Home Discount Scheme:

- You receive the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit - known as the 'core group'
- You're on a low income and meet your energy supplier's criteria for the scheme - known as the 'broader group'

Please contact your electricity supplier for further information.

# WINTER WARNINGS - PROTECT YOUR HOME & AVOID DISASTER!

At all times of the year it's vital that you keep yourself safe in your home, but especially during the harsher winter months. We'll carry out necessary statutory checks such as gas servicing, but there are also things that you can do yourself to protect your family and home.

### FESTIVE FIRE SAFETY

- Please be aware of the extra risks of fire in your home at Christmastime fairy lights, candles, etc. are all potentiual fire hazards. It's vital to be extra vigilant and review your fire precaution measures.
- Remember the Fire Service can provide advice on fire prevention and the action you should take in the event of a fire.
  To arrange a Home Fire Safety Visit, log on to www.firescotland.gov.uk.
- We provide both smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and carry out an annual inspection of both. However we encourage you to undertake periodic checks yourself, by pressing the test buttons. If the alarm fails to sound, report this to us.

#### **FROST PRECAUTIONS**

As we approach winter, there's always a risk of damage to your home due to frost or flooding from frozen pipes. Here are our top tips to help keep you and your home safe this winter, along with steps to take should the worst happen.



#### If the water pipes freeze

- Turn the water off at the main stopcock.
   You should find this under the kitchen sink or where the service pipe enters your home.
- 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.
- 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.
- If the hot water system is frozen, turn off any water heaters.
- If you have some water, fill available containers to ensure you have an adequate supply of water should the pipes freeze further.

The only real remedy for frozen pipes is a significant thaw. While you should report any 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.

We also cannot help tenants by providing water supplies. Try to use facilities of neighbours, friends and family for water, toilet facilities etc if they are unaffected.

# TO AVOID BURST PIPES

Keep your home reasonably 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 that will cause your pipes to freeze. Check this is working properly.

#### Open internal doors

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

#### 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. Check your renewal date now!

#### Keep on top of maintenance

Maintenance is key during winter.
Put a new washer on any dripping taps
- if they freeze, they'll block your pipes.

#### **IF A PIPE BURSTS**

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 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 your house, helping to reduce damage.

- Turn off water heaters.
- Find the leak and bind it tightly with a towel, placing a bowl below to catch any drins
- If water is lying on top of a ceiling and making it bulge, pierce the ceiling using a screwdriver to let the water escape.
- If electric cables are wet, switch off the supply at the mains. DO NOT TOUCH THE CABLES THEMSELVES.

Contact our office for assistance on 01563 528 8126 or outside office hours, contact our emergency service (see page 9).

#### **STORM DAMAGE**

It might not be cold, snowy weather that your home is exposed to over the winter months – there's a risk of storm damage too.

If tiles are blown off your roof but there is 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.
- 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 the roof. Our staff will keep you advised.

#### If water starts to leak through the roo

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 that are close to the leak.

#### Tell us immediately to update the information.

We may be able to lay visqueen (heavy duty polythene) in your loft to prevent any further water penetration until it's safe to allow workmen on the roof.

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

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

#### f there are loose slates

 Report this to us right away - loose slates can pose an immediate danger to life or property

#### REMEMBER!

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

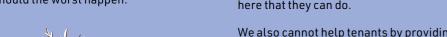
### BOILER AND HEATING PROBLEMS

Some boilers have a condensing pipe that drains to the outside, and the liquid in this pipe can freeze in extremely low temperatures causing the boiler to shut down. The pressure gauge on your boiler should sit between 1.5 and 2.0 when the boiler is running. If the pressure keeps dropping, then there may be a leak in one of the heating pipes. Report any of these faults to our Gas Heating contractor GasSure on **01294 468 113**.

#### **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.











10 / WINTER 2021 / YOUR HOME

# Annual Assurance Statement 2021

As part of our Governance and Compliance Requirements, Atrium's Board is required to submit a formal statement every year to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) outlining our compliance or otherwise with their Regulatory Framework. This year's statement, considered and approved by the Board, is below:

#### **Annual Assurance Statement 2021**

 $\frac{1}{2}$ 

As an organisation committed to continuous improvement, Atrium Homes has embraced the self-assurance process, and the Board has continually monitored organisational performance and compliance.

It is the judgement of the Board of Atrium Homes that we have appropriate assurance we continue to materially comply with

- all relevant regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework
- all relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- all relevant legislative duties

This judgement extends to our wholly owned subsidiary Atrium Initiatives.

In making our judgement, the Board has taken account of the considerable impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and we have communicated changes clearly to our tenants. Any reduction in the delivery of core services in the period since Covid-19 restrictions were introduced, are wholly related to the restrictions themselves and as restrictions ease, service delivery standards are improving.

We will be considering the recently issued guidance on the collection of equalities information over the coming period with a view to starting to implement it from April 2022. We understand that housing specific guidance on human rights from SHR/CIH (Scotland)/Scottish Human Rights Commissioner is in the pipeline, and we will consider our position in the light of it.

The judgement expressed in this statement is to the best of the Board's knowledge and belief, based on factors including, internal review of background information and reports presented to the Boards of Atrium Homes and Atrium Initiatives on an ongoing basis, supplemented by independent reviews conducted by internal and external auditors.

This statement was considered and agreed by the Board of Directors of Atrium Homes at its meeting on 28 September 2021.

Signed on behalf of the Board

Joe Keen

Joe Keen

Chair of Atrium Homes



The Landlord of Choice

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:

Atrium House 14 Central Avenue, Shortlees Kilmarnock / KA1 4PS T. 01563 528 816

E. info@atrium-homes.co.uk

 $d_{x}$ 

W. www.atrium-homes.co.uk