

YOUR HOME

THE NEWSLETTER OF ATRIUM HOMES | NO. 57 - SUMMER 2023

SEARCH MOVES ONLINE

For several years, the Single East Ayrshire Register for Community Housing (SEARCH) has operated in East Ayrshire. It's the collective name given to the five social landlords within East Ayrshire who have agreed to form a Common Housing Register allowing applicants to complete just a single application form to apply for housing with any of the participating landlords.

After months of development and testing, the partner landlords are delighted to announce that new applications can now be made online. This allows you to:

- create an account via an email address
- apply for housing
- manage your application
- view your position on the list and
- contact us directly via your application at a time that suits you

We've worked hard to produce a customer-focused system that provides you with all the information you may need to make decisions regarding your housing application. Online SEARCH is an exciting new platform developed in partnership with software company, MRI.

To apply for housing, you now need to set up an account on the East Ayrshire Housing Register

(<https://housingregister.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/>). To do this, you must have a registered email address. Once you've created an account, you can apply for housing, manage your application, view your list position and contact housing directly through a personalised portal.

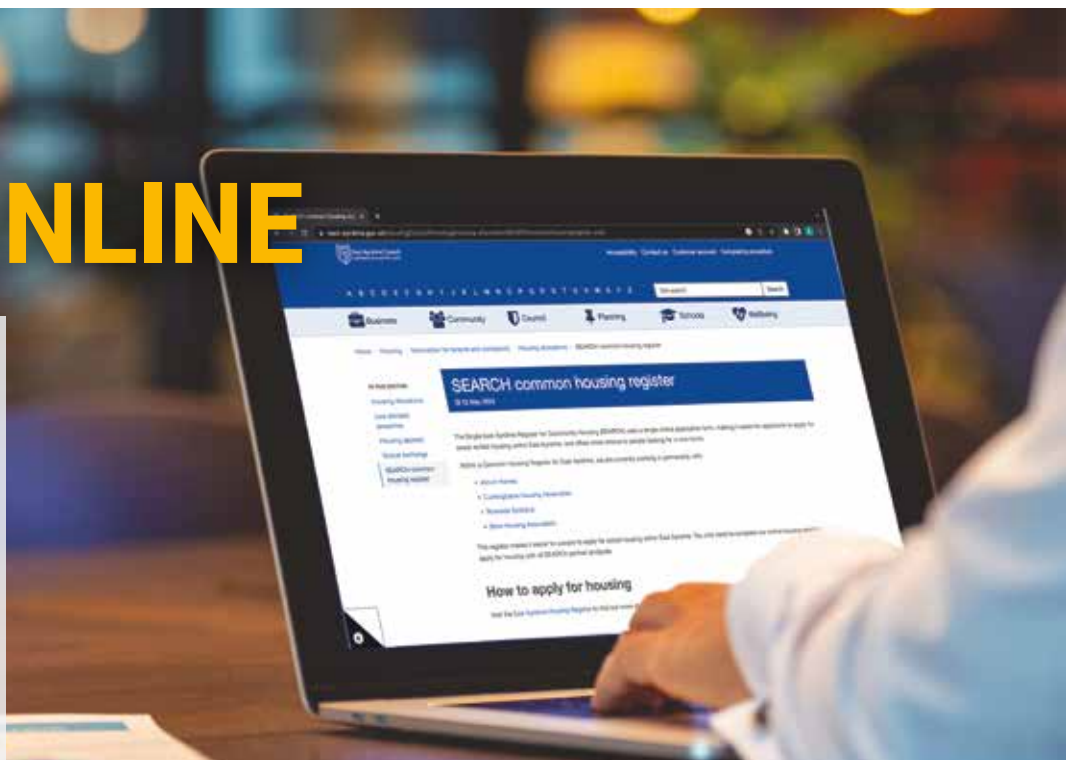
This system will speed up the housing application and allocation process, which will be fully digital from completing your application form to receiving your keys.

Our Housing List is open at all times to anyone aged 16 years and over. All applications will be assessed and prioritised according to their housing need.

There's no need to worry if you can't access online services – we're always here to help and can help you complete your application digitally. Simply contact the office on 01563 528 816 to make an appointment to pop in and see us.

Atrium's Operations Manager Michelle Mitchell commented:

“This is a great innovation for SEARCH, allowing people access to much more information about their housing application, 24/7. Once registered, applicants can see what properties are currently available across the partners and what kind of turnover there is in their chosen areas, all of which will help with their application.”



DEAR TENANT



Welcome to Atrium's Summer 2023 newsletter

Our last newsletter focused strongly on supporting tenants and service users as we navigated our way through the cost of living crisis and headed towards the coldest months of the year, while the cost of keeping our homes kept going up. I talked about the difficult decisions we would need to make to balance costs, while trying to absorb at least some of the impact of inflation on you, our tenants.

Since then, we consulted with you on rent increases and, with inflation peaking at 11.1% in October, we considered how we could continue our commitment to investing in the improvements in your homes, while trying to keep the rent increase as low as possible. We consulted on 5% and 7% rent increases, but we let you know that, with our costs to maintain and invest in your homes, rising much faster than inflation, the reality would be

that the Homes Fit for 21st Century Living Standard (HFF21CLS) work programme would take us longer to complete.

Our focus in the last six months has been on making sure that you are supported to have successful tenancies. Our Money Advice team have been meeting with tenants on a one to one basis during the past months, helping tenants to access all the benefits they are entitled to and making referrals to agencies that could provide support with energy bills. We had drop-in clinics on Wednesdays so that tenants could stop in and ask us questions, and we provided a warm space in our offices where you could get a hot drink and a biscuit.

The team was successful in getting over £75,000 of funding from the Scottish Government and other agencies which helped us to provide 'Eat, Heat and Light' goody bags for some of our most vulnerable tenants, as well as providing financial assistance to help tenants with their heating costs. We were also able to use £3,000 of Community Benefit funding from our HFF21CLS contractor CCG, to provide support to tenants.

We had another change to repairs contractors during the 2022/23 year, and we worked hard with our reactive and cyclical maintenance contractors to ensure that repairs are done as quickly as possible, and that you didn't experience a drop in service levels. I'm pleased to say that our response times have stayed the same or improved during the year, despite the changes.

We remain committed to delivering the improvements we promised when we consulted with tenants in 2019, but because of the pandemic, Brexit and then the war in Ukraine, over the past three years, the work has been slower than you and we would have liked. The

lack of progress has been frustrating for you and us.

CCG are working on Phase Three of this programme and we hope to complete the works by the end of March 2023. Our Technical Officers have also been visiting homes which are programmed for Phases Four and Five so that we can get a clear picture of the works that need to be done to these homes to get them brought up to the 21st Century Living Standard. This information, together with a detailed review of all our other homes in the coming months will help us to form a picture of the work we need to do and whether we can prioritise spending on improving the energy efficiency of the homes you live in.

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, through the portal, by logging contact through our website or by coming into our office in Shortlees. We are trialling a new hybrid way of working which means that the office is open to our customers Monday-Tuesday and Thursday-Friday. We are still working on a Wednesday and are contactable by phone and electronic means. 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.

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, please get in touch so that we can help you to find the support you need.

Best wishes,
Shannon Watson
Chief Executive

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

Atrium's Board has continued its work to support the management of Atrium Homes, helping to ensure that what we do fits with the strategy of the organisation set out in our 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 and Finance, Audit & Staffing.

We've been able to take care of business effectively by holding hybrid meetings. We've spent a lot of our time talking about the financial sustainability of the business and how we could cap our rent increases for 2023/24 at a rate which was well below the rate of inflation.

We received regular reports during the year on complaints about our service. We received 77 complaints during the year, five of which were treated as Stage 2 complaints, and the staff at Atrium upheld 71% of those complaints. They then worked with their team members

and contractors to resolve the complaints quickly and to ensure that tenants were happy with the outcomes, with response times improving during the year.

We're looking forward to working with the management team this year to review the investment plans for Atrium Homes for the next few years. With the cost of heating homes staying at levels we've never seen before, we'll be considering how we balance the money that we spend between work that will make your homes more energy efficient and ensuring that the rest of your home is of a good standard.

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

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/getinvolved/.

Best wishes
Joe Keen
Chair

HELLO

HYBRID WORKING COMES TO ATRIUM

From Wednesday 3rd May 2023, Atrium Homes began trialling a new pattern of office opening.

For a six month pilot period, our office at Central Avenue will be open four days per week – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, during normal hours. But the office will be closed on a Wednesday, when staff will work from home or on site. Full services will still be available every Wednesday and it'll be business as usual, except that staff will not work out of the office.

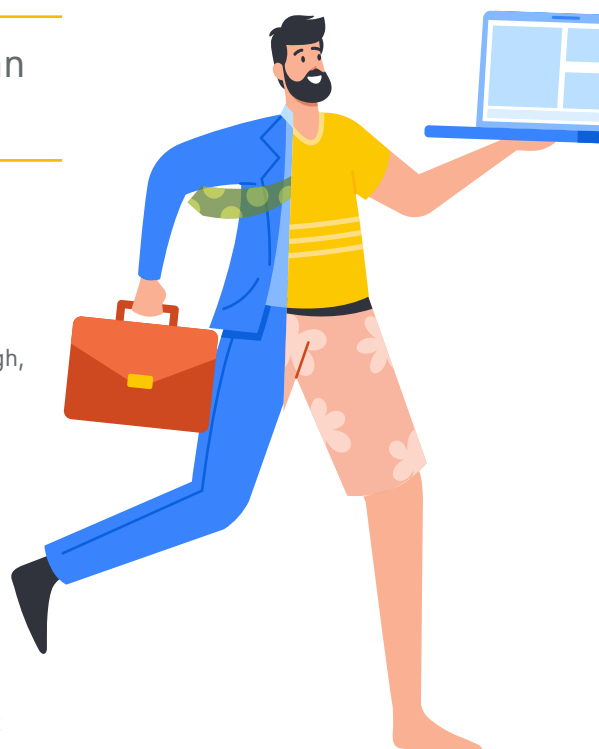
The pilot will run for six months, during which time we want to try out innovative ways of working, look at how we can improve our digital communications, find out what cost savings can be made and generally review service delivery and the work/life balance for staff.

You, our customers, will have a key role to play in whether we change our office opening beyond the term of the pilot. We'll be asking how you find service on Wednesdays, how quickly calls are answered and how easy it is to get through, etc.

You can continue to contact us on a Wednesday by:

- Phone on 01563 528 816
- Email to info@atrium-homes.co.uk
- Portal enquiry
- Website enquiry at www.atrium-homes.co.uk

And for the other four days, you can visit us at 14 Central Avenue too.



Ongoing investment

Phase 3 of the Homes Fit For 21st Century Living Standard (HFF21CLS) contract works with CCG is nearing completion within New Farm Loch.

This has mainly involved the electrical re-wiring of homes, along with upgrades to kitchens and bathrooms. Other works within some properties have included upgrades to the heating system, plasterwork and external door replacements.

Within Phase 3, there was some dissatisfaction from tenants around communication and timescales as works progressed. We appreciate the inconvenience and disruption caused by the works and we'll continue to monitor this. However, please contact us or the contractors Tenant Liaison Officer if you want to discuss any aspect of the works planned within your home. The contact details for the Tenant Liaison Officer are included in the letter you receive from CCG before the works begin. We're grateful to all tenants for their patience while works are carried out, so thank you.

A customer satisfaction survey is underway for Phase 3 tenants, who have had works completed, and we would welcome your feedback on the process. We use information collected from this survey to plan future works, so please respond and have your say. So far, the information collected from responses shows that we need to look at the type of work we're including within each property at the same time, so that we reduce disruption and the length of time the contractor needs access to complete the work. This type of information is really useful and may lead to some changes in the way we complete works in the future.

For further information on the HFF21CLS project, see our website or contact the Investment team on the main office line, 01563 528 816 option 3.



We're grateful to all tenants for their patience while works are carried out, so thank you.



CYCLICAL WORKS PROGRAMME

We're continuing to progress with various cyclical projects and works. This includes:

Gas Safety

There is a legal requirement for us to carry out an annual safety check of the gas boiler in your property if you have gas central heating. This is to ensure the boiler remains safe for use and that the detectors in place for carbon monoxide and fire are in working order.

It's really important that the contractor gains access to undertake this work, as we can't extend the date of the existing safety certificate. We may have to 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. If the appointment you are given doesn't suit, you can phone GasSure (our gas engineers) on 01294 468 113 to arrange an alternative time.



External Painterwork & Gutter Cleaning

Our contractor, the Bell Group, is on site completing paintworks. They'll be carrying these works out in various areas including Catrine, Dunlop, Cumnock, Fenwick, New Farm Loch and Kilmarnock.

Tenants have been contacted where work is planned, in advance of the contractor's 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.

Electrical Periodic Testing

Our electrical contractor, Magnus Electrical, continues to complete the required electrical testing.

Contact will be made direct with tenants who are included in the programme as it progresses. The electrical testing is a key aspect of making sure your home remains electrically safe and we appreciate your co-operation in having this test carried out.

Stock Condition Surveys

We're currently conducting stock condition surveys on some properties across all our housing stock. The information we collect from these surveys will allow us to see the condition of our homes and help us prioritise future work.

We're also arranging for external surveyors to conduct a sample of condition surveys. We'll contact you direct if we need access to your home to have this type of survey completed.

The condition survey is different to the type of survey we do when we're about to complete work in your home.

This information, along with the information we've collected from tenants

during the HFF21CLS project will help identify future investment requirements.

Given the length of time that's lapsed since the HFF21CLS project began and the external changes experienced since - mainly general cost of living and rise in energy costs - we appreciate that tenants may prefer a focus on improving the energy efficiency within their home. We're planning to consult with tenants on how you would like us to invest in your



homes for the future, so that we continue to deliver the HFF21CLS project in a way which is most beneficial to tenants.

Condensation and Dampness Control

We're happy to visit you if you experience any issues with condensation or damp. Please contact us as soon as you notice the problem - don't hold off, as things will only get worse. We'll instruct any necessary repairs and then actively monitor and assess the problem until it's fully resolved.

To help you avoid condensation dampness being created in your home, here are some simple Do's and Don't's:

DO

- ✓ Report the issue to us
- ✓ Clean the mould with hot soapy water
- ✓ Open window trickle vents
- ✓ Use fans and extractors
- ✓ Open the windows when cooking/washing
- ✓ Keep you home free of clutter
- ✓ Contact us for financial assistance/support

DON'T

- ✗ Try to manage alone
- ✗ Use bleach on mould
- ✗ Keep all your windows and vents closed
- ✗ Cover or stop using fans and extractors
- ✗ Dry clothes on radiators
- ✗ Hoard lots of items in your home

Medical Adaptations

Medical adaptations enable you to live independently at home. Adaptations can be small aids to help with everyday living, such as grab rails, additional bannisters, lever taps, etc. Adaptations can also be more extensive, such as removing the bath and replacing with a wet floor shower.

If you think adaptations to your home would help you, we recommend you speak to your GP who can make a referral on your behalf. This will result in an Occupational Therapist visiting you to carry out an assessment of your needs.

Legionella

Although there's no cause for alarm, as a precautionary measure, we must highlight there are some possible risks from legionella. Legionella are bacteria that can live in domestic hot and cold water pipes and tanks. The bacteria can survive low temperatures and grow rapidly at temperatures between 20°C and 45°C. They are killed at higher temperatures and this is the main method used for their control in domestic water systems.

Legionella is uncommon and here are some simple steps you can take to help minimise any risk of infection:

1. Run water through all taps on a weekly basis.
2. Thoroughly clean, disinfect and descale your showerhead every three months or sooner if it needs it.
3. Run water through all taps for a few minutes when you return from holiday.





Changed your number or email address? Let us know!

We've recently been distributing funding to our tenants via text messaging or email address. Please call on 01563 528 816 or email info@atrium-homes.co.uk to make sure we have your up to date contact details. Thank you!

NEWSLETTER IS GOING ONLINE!

From our next edition of Your Home (Winter 2023), we'll be emailing a copy to all tenants who have provided us with an email address. This saves on printing and postage costs, and means the newsletter is available to you instantly.

If you don't have an email address, we'll continue to post the newsletter out to you.

If you do have an email address and not yet told us, please do so by emailing info@atrium-homes.co.uk

Developing our Service Standards

Service Standards are the service commitments we make to our customers. They confirm how specific services will be delivered to you and outline the quality of service you should receive. They tell you exactly what you can expect from us and therefore make it easier for you to know whether the services we deliver are falling below standard or exceeding it.

While standards are outlined in all our individual policy statements, we'd like to pull them together in a single document and would like your help to do this. The service standards need to reflect the areas of service that are most important to you and the level of service required.

Maybe you've been dissatisfied with service you've received from us recently or been unclear on what we should be doing regarding, for example, estate management or repairs. A clear set of service standards will make it easier to complain where failures in service arise. It will also highlight areas of consistent service.

Does this sound like something you'd like to contribute to? It will only take a couple of meetings to progress this and maybe a final meeting to sign it off for wider tenant consultation.

To find out more or state your interest in getting involved, please email info@atrium-homes.co.uk and mark the Subject as Service Standards.

HELP US TO HELP YOU



- Are you passionate about tenants having a voice?**
- Do you want to make a difference in your community?**
- Do you want to challenge how Atrium Homes performs?**

We're inviting tenants to express an interest in joining our Tenant Panel. The panel will give tenants the opportunity to examine and challenge the way we deliver our services.

Panel members will play an important role in bringing about positive changes to services. The panel will be responsible for examining and scrutinising different areas of the service. The role is varied and will involve taking part in team discussions, analysing performance information and challenging how we can improve.

Alternatively, or in addition, we're also considering setting up a Virtual Group where a small group of tenants will be asked to comment on new policies and procedures, changes to existing policies and procedures, tenant publications and general consultations via email or social media threads.

If you would be interested in becoming a member of either the Customer Panel or the Virtual Group please let us know by emailing info@atrium-homes.co.uk or calling 01563 528 816.

At Atrium we try hard to support our tenants in
From goodie bags to supermarket vouchers, si
here are just a few of the things we've being do
little bit easier for some.



We distributed 'Heat, Eat & Light' bags to 250 tenants. Each bag contained energy efficient light bulbs, a hot water bottle, food stuff and a handy information leaflet giving a tasty recipe and energy saving tips!

If you never received a bag and would like one, please get in touch on 01563 528 816.

We ran **Cost of Living Surgeries** from November to April in our office. Tenants who came along received advice and information on how to maximise their income and reduce their bills, as well as a £10 supermarket voucher. We also had partners such as Citrus Energy and Ayrshire Credit Union on hand, with some tenants receiving low cost cooking appliances from Citrus Energy.



lots of different ways.
 m cards to cups of tea,
 ping to make life that



We received **100 sim cards** from Vodafone to distribute to our tenants to help get them 'digital-ready'.

Each sim card has unlimited texts/calls and 40GB of data each month. Get in touch if you would like one!

Our office is still open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday should you wish to come in and use our wi-fi or just to have a chat with staff!



We provided a list of warm places for tenants all over East Ayrshire to drop into. Tenants could also pop in to the **daily 'Warm Café'** at our office for a blether, to enjoy some tea/coffee and biscuits, to use free wi-fi and to get help with any queries they had. We also had our **'New2U'** project – a selection of lightly worn winter coats, clothing and newly knitted hats – available on a first come, first served basis.



Over the Festive period, the Atrium Elves were as busy as ever with our **Elf Advent Calendar Give Away** – every day from 1st to 24th December. Lucky Atrium tenants were randomly selected from our special Elf Advent Calendar, each receiving £50 supermarket vouchers.

As always, the Elves had a special treat for our older tenants with those over 75 receiving a gift of **supermarket vouchers** to help cover the cost of **Christmas Dinner...or even a treat for themselves or their loved ones!** Courtesy of our contractor, CCG, the Atrium Elves also provided some help for tenants who needed **Elf Assistance** make their Christmas merrier!

FUEL SUPPORT



For the second consecutive year, we're pleased to have been able to distribute funds to help our tenants with their fuel costs.

Following the Scottish Government's Social Housing Fuel Support Fund award, we were successful in distributing a further £72,000 to help support tenants from the worst impacts of fuel poverty. Every tenant received vouchers of either £75 or £42.50 to help alleviate fuel poverty over the winter. This was in addition to the £50 each tenant received last year.

If you need any 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.

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 2 of our Cash in the Community Fund is now open for applications for 2023-24. 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 and Take a Bow Musical Theatre Company to allow two funded places for kids to access musical theatre classes.

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 2 is 30th September 2023. The panel will not meet to consider applications until after the closing date.

Calling All Garden Gurus!

Yes, it's that time of year again for freshening up gardens and getting some colour back into our estates. Every year we hold our Atrium Gardening Competition where green fingered tenants can be rewarded for the hard work they put in to maintaining beautiful gardens.

Many of our tenants take great pride in their gardens and we feel it's important to recognise this and encourage neighbours to get involved too.

As usual, we're keen to make the Garden Competition open to as many 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.

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

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 £25.00 available. The panel will also select an overall winner who'll win £50.00. We'll announce the winners by 25 August 2023. So, start now and give yourself a winning chance.

Ready... steady... grow!

Garden Waste

Don't spoil all your hard work in the garden by keeping garden waste stacked up in the corner!

You have two options for disposing of your garden waste:

1. Purchase a 2023 garden waste permit for £30 from East Ayrshire Council which will get you collections every four weeks, from March to November 2023.

Once a permit has been purchased either online or by phone, a permit sticker will be issued – stick this to your garden waste bin using the instructions provided. Please note that your sticker may take up to 21 days to arrive. East Ayrshire crews will have your permit information so even if you don't have it yet, your bin will still be collected.

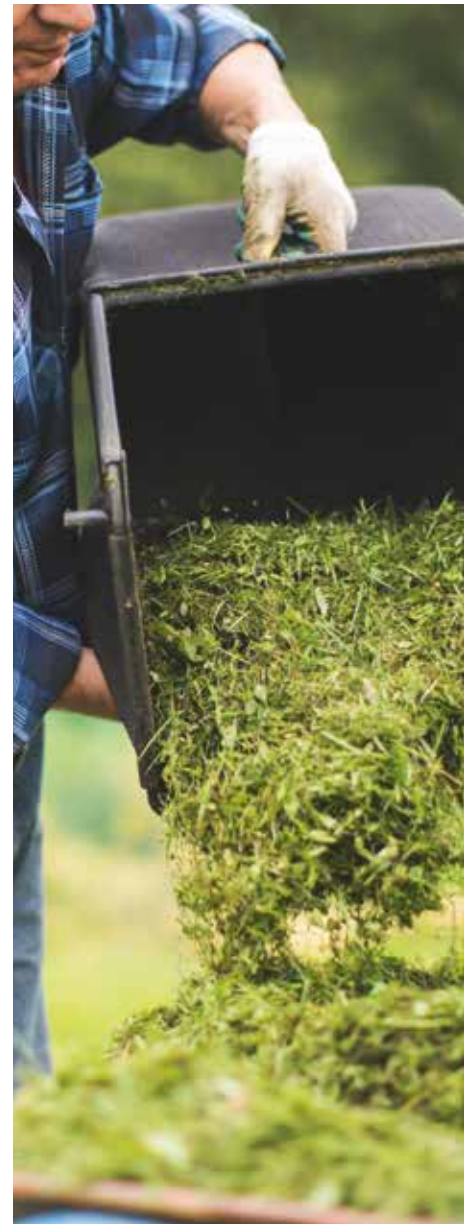
With a permit, you can recycle:

- **Grass cuttings**
- **Small twigs and branches**
- **Leaves**
- **Cut flowers**
- **Houseplants**
- **Weeds**
- **Hedge clippings**
- **Sawdust**
- **Bark**
- **Hay**

2. 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.



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.