

# Shire news

SUMMER 2021

NEWSLETTER 84



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# Shire Housing Association Excels at Customer Service!!!

Shire Housing Association are delighted to receive reaccreditation for Customer Service Excellence and 'Compliance Plus' for our work interacting and supporting our wider communities.



As one of the first Housing Associations in Scotland to be awarded the standard in May 2009, Shire are delighted to have our hard work and commitment to excellence recognised during an exceptional year when service delivery was significantly impacted by the pandemic.

The Customer Service Excellence ethos is at the heart of Shire and this award including the difficult to achieve compliance plus, provides assurance to our customers, staff and partners of our commitment to delivering our Business Plan Vision of **"Great Homes, Great People, Vibrant Communities"**.

Shire would like to thank the staff team, customers and partners who took the time to meet and share their experiences as a customer and partner with the Assessor.

Listening to customer and partner feedback is a key part of ensuring that our stakeholders are experiencing customer service excellence.



## Investors in People & Investors in Young People



We are excited to announce that we recently achieved the prestigious *Investors in People Gold Accreditation*.

For nearly 30 years *Investors in People* has been recognised internationally as a leading people accreditation. Reaching this level of award is a terrific achievement, demonstrating our commitment to recruiting, developing and retaining Great People.

At the same time, we retained *Investors in Young People Silver Accreditation*. This is a fantastic achievement given the restrictions Covid-19 placed on our ability to physically interact with young people over the last year.

Commenting on the awards, Lorne Campbell, Chair said, *"This is a fantastic achievement for Shire and confirms our efforts towards our Business Vision of Great Homes, Great People, Vibrant Communities"*.

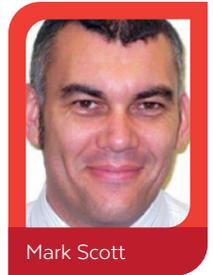
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# Planned Works Update



Lucy Urquhart



Mark Scott



We are delighted that we are now able to continue with our planned works in accordance with Scottish Government guidelines. This means that the Kitchen and Window Replacement and Rewiring works can restart along with the Re-roofing project.

## Kitchens and Windows

The kitchen and window replacement programmes have restarted with 26 kitchens being replaced and 25 homes getting new windows this financial year. We have written to all of our tenants involved in these programmes and thank them for co-operating with our Covid-19 precautions.

## Rewires

The rewiring of 206 homes is due to be completed this financial year and we are planning to begin works from July 2021 but are aware that not every tenant is keen to give us access to do this. Our Glasgow based re-wire contractor, GD Chalmers, will soon be contacting you to arrange home visits and discuss re-wire dates. These works are a safety upgrade to your home and it is essential that you allow us access to your home to have the works completed.

We appreciate that these works are disruptive so please contact Lucy Urquhart to discuss any worries you may have about this.

## Open Space Maintenance

We are currently re-tendering our open space contract which covers the maintenance of our open spaces, grass cutting at voids and tree maintenance. Following the completion of the tendering process, the successful contractor is due to be appointed for a start during October 2021.

## Heat & Smoke Detection and External Paintwork

Our 201 'new build' properties are going to be fitted with heat and smoke detectors and we are tendering for a contract to supply and fit these devices to help us meet current regulatory compliance by the end of February 2022.

We are also planning to complete an external paintwork programme at our new build properties that we hope to have completed this financial year.

We will be in touch, providing greater detail with all the tenants who are due to have this work done later in the year.

## Our Care & Repair Service

Just a wee reminder that the East Ayrshire Care & Repair service is running as normal for elderly or disabled homeowners.

The service can provide practical help with those small repairs around the home which may be difficult to address if you are an older person, or have a disability and the disrepair may pose an increased risk of an accident.

This is a free service, provided the repair meets the criteria. Just call Peggy-Anne or Charles on **01290 428001** if you want more information.

# Home Visits Start Again



Grace Scott



Wendy Torrance

While our offices remain closed to the public we have reviewed Scottish Government guidance and have decided to begin home visits again.

You will have noticed that our repair service is slowly returning to normal so we are happy that we are starting to reintroduce some home visits for our Customer Service Team, including our Financial Inclusion Team.

At this time, any home visits will continue to be an exception as protecting our staff, customers and communities remains our top priority.

We are keeping this decision under review and will update you of any changes as covid restrictions begin to ease further.

Prior to any visit to your home our Officers shall ask you to support them by taking the following precautions:

1. We'll ask you a number of Covid screening questions when arranging the visit and again on your doorstep. If there is any doubt on the questions, we are happy to rearrange the visit.
2. We'll ask you to make sure that the visit is on a one-to-one basis and any other family members stay out of the room where the visit is taking place.
3. We'll ask you to open windows for ventilation, wear a mask and maintain social distancing during the visit.
4. Our Officer will wear a mask, maintain social distancing, and use hand sanitisers before and after your visit.

Shire are still here to help and thank all our customers for their support. You can continue to contact us by telephone, email and letter.

## Gardens and Open Space

Now that the growing season is well underway, we will be working closely with Tivoli, our open space contractor, to ensure all the estates are maintained to a high standard and will be on the lookout for fly tipping.

Our Customer Services Officers shall be out and about in your area and we would also like to remind you that, as part of your tenancy agreement, you are responsible for ensuring that your garden is kept in a neat and tidy condition and free from rubbish. This means that you must remove weeds and any litter, cut the grass and cut back branches. Tidy gardens add to the appearance of your neighbourhood and enhance the local area. If you fail to do this, we can decide what work requires to be done and issue a bill direct to you for payment.

Should you have large bulky items of rubbish, you can arrange a special uplift with East Ayrshire Council by contacting the **Department of Cleansing Services on 01563 554033 or 01563 554032**, or contact the office where our customer service team may be able to assist you. You can also book a slot at EAC recycling centre by applying for a resident's permit by visiting <https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk>

If you have items of furniture to be disposed of that are still in good condition you may wish to use the services of one of the furniture donation schemes. The following telephone number may assist you to do this.

- **Cunninghame Furniture Recycling 01294 475560**
- **Cumnock and Doon Valley Gift Furniture Scheme 01290 550525**
- **British Heart Foundation 0844 499 4155, furniture and electrical items**

# Financial Inclusion News



Diane Balfour



Leanne Morrison

## Carers & Young Carers

Carers in Scotland who were getting Carer's Allowance on 12 April 2021 will receive a Carer's Allowance Supplement of £231.40 on 16 June 2021. If you haven't received your payment by 23 June 2021, please call Social Security Scotland **0800 182 2222**.

The Young Carer Grant is a yearly payment of £308.15 for young carers in Scotland. To be able to get the grant, you must be 16, 17 or 18 years old and you must also have been caring for 1, 2 or 3 people for an average of 16 hours a week for at least the last 3 months. If you care for more than one person, you can combine the hours of the people you care for to average 16 hours a week. How you spend the Young Carer Grant is up to you. You could use it for things like new clothes, driving lessons or a holiday. You do not need to tell us what you spend the money on. Please call Diane or Leanne on **01290 421130** to find out more.

## Barclays Mobile Banking Van



We had a visit from the Barclays Mobile Banking van on Thursday 27 May. The van will be in various locations across East Ayrshire during the coming months and the staff are able to offer advice on using online banking safely. They are also able to assist you to open a bank account, particularly if you may be having difficulty doing this due to not having the relevant photographic ID. If you want to know more about the services on offer or to book an appointment for the next visit to Shire, please call us on **01290 421130**.

## Fuel Support Fund

In April, we were successful in gaining grant funding from the Social Housing Fuel Support Fund. This was funded by the Scottish Government and managed by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. We used the grant to purchase energy vouchers totalling £2472.40 and 72 of our tenants were able to use the vouchers to help meet the cost of their gas and electricity. The support fund closed at the beginning of June, however, keep an eye on our Facebook page for any news of other funding support that may become available in the future.

## Best Start Grant – Opened for Applications on 1 June 2021

This year's Best Start Grant School Age Payment opened on 1 June 2021 for families who get tax credits or certain other benefits and have a child who was born between **1 March 2016** and **28 February 2017**.

Even if your child is not starting school, you should still apply before the closing date on **28 February 2022**.

**Best Start Foods** payments are set to increase to £4.50 per week on **1 August** to support families on a low income to buy healthy food for children under the age of three.

## Clothing Grants & Free School Meals

The online application process is open now. To apply, you must have registered for an **Our East Ayrshire** account.

If you need help to open an account or to complete the online application, please call **01290 421130** and ask for Diane or Leanne.

# Financial Inclusion Teams round up of the impact of Covid 2020/21 -

The Pandemic meant that we were unable to contact and meet our tenants in the usual face to face manner but we adapted well and still managed to make 264 contacts with tenants and helped them to claim a variety of benefits and support.

**£2,400**  
of weekly  
**Universal Credit**

**UC Universal Credit**

**£743**  
weekly other benefits

with **£6,000** in lump sums

**£1,800**  
in **health support grants/bequests**

**£994**  
in weekly  
**Housing Benefit**

with **£5,400**  
backdated awards

We provided **advice and support** to

**109**  
tenants

**9**  
referrals to Citrus Energy for **fuel advice**

**£2,450**  
**Fuel vouchers** from the Scottish Energy Redress Fund

In addition to the benefit gains, we also provided practical support to our most vulnerable tenants, thanks to the generosity of our Management team, staff and contractors.

Delivered

**17**  
food parcels

**48**  
children's Christmas gift cards

**£250**  
in gifts and donations to East Ayrshire Young carers

**£500**  
in food and donations to local Food Bank

Some of the challenges faced by our communities due to the pandemic included.

**96**  
new  
**UC Universal Credit**  
claims

**26** **SORRY WE'RE CLOSED**  
new **Universal Credit** claims  
due to local business closures

**30**  
minutes  
waiting time on telephone to Universal Credit

**Longer than average**  
UC processing times

# COMMUNITY

# Engagement



Hi, Alan here.

It has been a busy wee time on the community work front.

Alan Thomas

Our **Digital Drop In's** have begun with the first two in Newmilns and Dalmellington. So much of what is done now relies on us being able to get online, I shall be at various locations offering people free use of our devices and data, to help them get online. Check out our Facebook page to see where I will be and when.



## Cumnock & District Men's Shed

is a fantastic opportunity for local men to get involved in something positive and combat social isolation. The group now have charity status and are starting a few projects including taking part in The Scottish Men's Shed Association's "Cartie" race up in Aberdeen next month, building their own cart, which I will hopefully be going along to see! Fingers crossed.

They have also been offered the use of some land at the Islay Dog Rescue Centre so watch this space for how this develops!



The **Mosaic** has been installed in the community garden space at the Netherthird community centre to celebrate their 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We will share photos from the official unveiling in the next newsletter.



NETHERTHIRD COMMUNITY'S MOSAIC LAUNCH

And finally for this month, we can apply for more funding for projects to support communities in their shift from lockdown into recovery. Not all areas of Scotland are eligible to apply for this round of funding, so we are pleased that East Ayrshire is included.



Alan pictured with the DEN group from New Cumnock Primary School working hard in their school garden.



# Eco Eggs are here! Save money and the Planet!



Thanks to Dawn Blackhurst, Customer Services Advisor we have 12 Eco Eggs to give away.

The Ecoegg Laundry Egg is a unique and innovative laundry washing system that cleans clothes effectively, using two types of mineral pellets plus a small amount of detergent, encased in a recyclable egg.

Containing **no harmful chemicals** and kind to your skin,

the ecoegg Laundry Egg completely replaces laundry detergent and fabric conditioner, giving you a kinder laundry solution. Refills are available and will make your wash just 10p per load.

The company were more than happy to help once Dawn emailed them suggesting that our tenants would appreciate the savings from using the egg as an alternative to expensive washing powder.

We shall deliver a free egg to the first 12 tenants who contact our



offices, asking for one. All you've got to lose is the dirt from your washing.

## Are you interested in reviewing our Policies?



Ann Black

Your views help shape the services we offer whether existing or new – so your opinion is important to us. We are starting a review of our policies and would like you to “HAVE YOUR SAY” to help influence the way we do things. We hope to get together for a big face to face event in August but due to the current Covid 19 restrictions we might have to do postal surveys, texts or an online event. Watch this space!

We will also be meeting with our Tenant Panel to have a look at these policies and welcome their feedback.

If you would like to become a member of our tenant panel or even be an armchair critic, please contact Alan or Lucy on **01290 421130** who will be able to give you more information.

We welcome your views and would encourage you to take part. Remember – your views are important to us.

Some of the Policies being reviewed are:-

- Asset Management
- Lone Working
- Arrears Recovery
- Financial inclusion
- Rent Review



# Staffing Update

Our long-serving Maintenance Officer, Bobby Howat, left the Association at the end of May 2021. Bobby has worked with Shire H.A. since its formation in 1997, and everyone at the Association wishes Bobby well for the future.

We are currently recruiting a new Maintenance Officer, and details of the post can be found on our website.

We are also delighted to announce that our Modern Apprentice, Jenna Croasdale, will be staying with the Association for a further six months as an Administrative Assistant.



Bobby & Peggy-Anne Miller



Jenna Croasdale

## Save the Date! Join us at our AGM



Our Annual General Meeting will take place on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021 at 6pm. Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and Government restrictions on gatherings, the event will take place via Microsoft Teams. The event is open to all our members so why not join us to find out what we've been up to and tell us what matters to you?

Whilst tenants who are not members are unable to vote in the formal section of the AGM, tenants are more than welcome to join.

Being a member of the Association enables you to vote at the AGM and have your say on various issues affecting tenants. Becoming a member is simple, a short application form and £1 joining fee is all that's required.

## Become a Board Member at the AGM

We're also always looking for members to join our Board to help us do the right things to continue to protect the interests of our tenants. If you have a few hours to spare each month and want to help influence what we do, then why not consider joining our Board? We'd love to hear from you.



Jade McLelland

If you are interested in joining us at the meeting or becoming a member or a Board member, please contact Jade McLelland on 01290 421130 or at [jmcllland@shirehousing.com](mailto:jmcllland@shirehousing.com).