

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2023 EDITION



AFFORDABLE HOMES
WITH PEOPLE IN MIND

*Making a
Difference*

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LANARKSHIRE
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD



INTRODUCTION FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of the Lanarkshire Housing Association newsletter.



It has certainly been a busy few months for our teams and a lot has been happening since we last updated you in the Autumn.

At that time, we were only starting to experience the colder weather and the darker nights and as a result, feeling the impact of the increase in fuel costs – amongst other things. We understand how difficult the increase in household expenses has been for tenants. We were delighted to be successful in our bid for funding to support several activities to help tenants most in need of assistance (more information on this inside).

We also updated you on the position where, at that time, there was a real possibility of a rent freeze/cap being introduced by the Scottish Government for all landlords – including Social Landlords. Our rent review process and consultation with tenants was undertaken in November and, with this in mind, we tried to provide as much information as possible to tenants to help you make an informed decision. Thank you to those of you who took the time to respond and tenant views were considered as part of the rent setting process for 2023/24. In the end, our Management Committee approved a rent increase of 4% at their meeting in February.

I appreciate that any increase in rent during these times will add to pressures on household incomes and please be assured we worked to keep the increase to a minimum.

We factor in the affordability of our rents but equally must ensure these are set at a level that allows us to continue to deliver our services and invest in our homes. If you are struggling to pay your rent, please get in touch with our Housing Services Team. We continue to be part of the AFTAR partnership with Citizen's Advice Scotland and can refer anyone requiring support to them for assistance.

Our Tenant Engagement activity has increased in recent months with the Tenant Focus Group recommencing and a Tenant Scrutiny Group has been set up with the support of the Tenant's Information Service (TIS). If you'd be interested in coming along to any future meetings, please get in touch with the team. I appreciate not everyone can come along to meetings and we will be working this year to offer other ways to have an input to shaping our services so watch this space.

I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter and if you have any ideas or suggestions for topics for future editions, please let us know at enquiries@lanarkshireha.com or **01698 269119**.

Best Wishes

Simon McManus
Chief Executive



TENANT SCRUTINY GROUP

Following the recommencement of the Tenant Focus Group last year, LHA contracted the Tenant Information Service (TIS) to help us set up and support an independent Tenant Scrutiny Group. This was a key commitment for us to ensure that we gave opportunities for tenants to have a meaningful opportunity to scrutinise Association policies, procedures and services.

We had a great response and a small group was set up with the first scrutiny exercise decided to be LHA's approach to void property management.

Stephen Connor, TIS's Development Manager was our key contact and supported the group from the outset – this included providing training, facilitating sessions with tenants and staff and supporting the group to prepare a report on their findings. Stephen says:-

"TIS were delighted to partner with Lanarkshire Housing Association's customers and staff to develop healthy proactive scrutiny of housing services. The Association's commitment to supporting its customers to **have a greater role in influencing housing services**, whilst ensuring they receive value for money, is clear for all to see. **It's important for customers to get involved** and share their personal experience of housing services. **Scrutiny empowers customers to learn more about housing services and decision-making and allows them to make recommendations for improvement.** The customer-led Service Improvement Group recently completed a successful review of Lanarkshire's approach to voids management, whilst making twenty (20) recommendations. The Group will continue to work in partnership with the Association to support positive changes, where possible. TIS look forward to continuing to support the Association's customers to make valuable contributions."

The group also got the opportunity to visit some empty properties with staff as part of their scrutiny work. Below are some photographs of the group in action.



The group really enjoyed their work and are already looking forward to their next scrutiny exercise. The detailed report they produced will be used to inform our upcoming review of LHA's Void Management Policy

DON'T JUST TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT. SOME QUOTES FROM THE GROUP...

"Our recommendations will support the Association and future tenants."

"The input of tenants through the scrutiny panel will be invaluable to the Association. At the end of the day, its tenants who are living in the properties and we need to take into consideration their views and opinions."

"This has been a great learning process for tenants who have been involved, and we're building confidence."

"As a tenant, I feel Lanarkshire Housing Association is amongst the best landlords. They've offered and provided me with support throughout my tenancy"

If you're interested in taking part in future scrutiny exercises, please get in touch with our Housing Services Team.

TENANT SUPPORTS



At the end of 2022, and keen to support our tenants struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, LHA looked to identify sources of funding that could be used to ease the pressure on household incomes. Bids were submitted to two separate funds



We are housing Scotland

Scottish Federation of Housing Association (SFHA) Social Housing Fuel Support Fund

We were awarded a total of £68,750 for a number of different activities to assist groups of tenants we identified most at risk of the effects of increasing fuel costs

- Prepayment Top-Up Vouchers - £15,750 to support up to 300 tenants with expensive prepayment meters by offering £50 top-up vouchers for gas and/or electric meters

- Winter Support Packs - £50,000 to offer packs of energy efficiency measures such as air fryers, high-tog duvets, thermal curtains and a variety of other items
- Capped Meters - £3000 to help tenants who had no heating as a result of having capped meters as a result of having debt in their meter



National Lottery Community Fund

We were awarded £15,000 by the National Lottery Community Anchor Fund which was to assist by offering £50 supermarket vouchers to help tenants affected by the cost-of-living-crisis.



A HUGE HELP AT A DIFFICULT TIME

The feedback that we have had from a number of tenants has been that these measures have been a huge help at a very difficult time.

We still have some limited availability of vouchers so please get in touch to see if we can assist you.



FLY TIPPING

Fly-tipping continues to be a problem in some of our estates with large household items such as sofas, white goods and other items being left in bin areas or other common areas.

When this is left on Association land, we have no option other than to arrange for the removal of these items. Whilst every effort is taken to identify those responsible, we are often unable to and the items are removed at a cost to the Association. Ultimately, it is tenant rent money that is used – diverting funds that could be used for other vital services or to improve common areas. Please note that failure to arrange the proper disposal of rubbish is a breach of our tenancy agreement and appropriate action will be taken where we can identify who is responsible.



If you require a special uplift or wish to take items to your local recycling centre, you can find more information on North Lanarkshire Council's website at www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/bins-and-recycling or you can call them on 0345 1430015



COMMON AREAS

Over the past few months, now that all COVID restrictions have been lifted, our team are back out in estates more regularly and have noticed a marked increase in items being stored in common areas. The photographs below are some examples that we have identified.



We can and do, follow up with individual residents where we identify these items but it is a persistent problem in some of our blocks.

We will be working with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to look at ways to overcome this issue.

Whilst we appreciate that storage is limited in some of our buildings, it is important that closes and stairs are kept clear. It is for the safety of all residents and we appreciate your co-operation in this matter.



It is vitally important in flatted accommodation that all common stairwells and landings are free from obstructions or combustible materials. These represent trip hazards and a serious risk to residents in the event of a fire.

The close/common stair is your only means of escape in the event of a fire.



Have you ever thought what you would do if fire were to break out in your close/common stair? It may not necessarily be in your flat! A fire started in a close/common stair could kill you and your family. Even a small bag of rubbish can create enough smoke to fill a whole close/common stair. Items left in a close/common stair are often deliberately set on fire.

Keep it clear

- Get rubbish, old furniture, etc out of the building.
- Make sure storage areas are kept locked.
- For advice on uplifting items contact your local Council.

If fire does start

- Keep doors closed to prevent smoke filling your house.
- Dial 999 and ask for the Fire and Rescue Service, giving as much information as you can.



To request a free Home Fire Safety Visit

CALL 0800 0731 999

For more fire safety advice visit:

www.firescotland.gov.uk



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

GAS SERVICING

The Association will soon be starting the annual gas safety inspection process for this year.

It is vitally important that we are able to check and service your boiler on an annual basis to ensure it is operating safely. This is for your benefit and all landlords are legally required to ensure these checks are carried out every year. We will try to be as flexible as possible with appointments but ask for your co-operation in facilitating these essential checks. Whilst only considered as a last resort, if we are not provided with access, we would have no option but to arrange for your meter to be capped – this may involve forcing entry to your property if your gas meter is inside.



PLANNED MAINTENANCE – WINDOW REPLACEMENT

Highly energy-efficient windows are to be installed in 111 properties in Motherwell as part of a planned maintenance workstream led by Lanarkshire Housing Association.

CCG (Scotland) will be responsible for the fabrication, supply and fit of its own 'Passivhaus' accredited window known as the GENE0, which is designed by REHAU UK, a polymer supplier for the manufacture of uPVC window and door products.

The term 'Passivhaus' is commonly used in new housebuilding whereby homes are created to such an enhanced standard of performance and are so well-insulated, they require very little need for space heating.

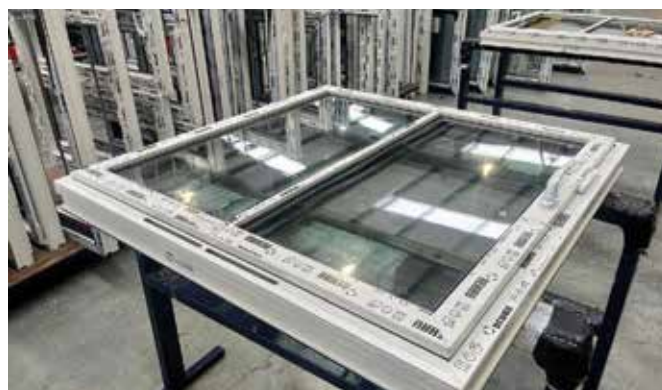
The GENE0 Window works in a very similar way; the product is triple-glazed and has insulation integrated into the frame to drastically reduce heat loss.

This standard of finish also improves soundproofing whilst the use of uPVC as a material offers enhanced durability with a greater resistance to weathering over a 40-year lifespan.

Lanarkshire Housing Association chairperson, Charles Millar, said: "The Association will deliver a "fabric first" project through the installation of high-quality triple glazing. This will improve energy efficiency and make tenants' homes warmer and easier to heat. We are delighted to acknowledge the financial contribution of the Scottish Ministers and Social Housing Net Zero Fund Programme."

The window products are also being installed alongside composite door sets also manufactured and fitted by CCG.

CCG manufacturing manager, Craig Smith, said: "We launched our new, uPVC window and door factory in 2020 and since then, we have established a manufacturing capability that can deliver in excess of 15,000 units per year which has been achieved as a result of strategic investment by the CCG Board and the formation of our UK-based partnership with REHAU UK.



"The GENE0 Window has been used to support the delivery of over 100 Passivhaus homes in Glasgow but given the very nature of the product and the advantages it can bring to existing homes, it is no surprise to see them now being used in planned maintenance workstreams.

"When you consider that this product can reduce heat loss associated with comparable, older window products by as much as 76%, it is a no brainer in this current cost of living crisis and we are delighted to be working with Lanarkshire HA and their tenants on this contract."

CCG Asset Management manager, Jim Cunningham, said: "Alongside the enhanced energy performance characteristics, the GENE0 window product will also generate long-term added value for Lanarkshire Housing Association in the form of reduced maintenance costs as uPVC is not prone to rot or weathering. Our installation team will also ensure a high-quality finish and will minimise intrusion upon the occupier over our 10-week programme."

CONDENSATION AND MOULD



As we move into spring and summer there should be less risk of condensation developing. It is caused by a build-up of moisture inside a building, possibly leading to dampness and mould growth if left untreated.

During the last few months, especially as concern about condensation in houses has been in the news, we have visited all properties where dampness, mould, or condensation has been reported, before referring to contractors or specialists as appropriate.

To minimise the risk of condensation or mould yourself, you can:

1. Produce less moisture

Moisture is released into the air through everyday activities such as cooking, washing, showering – and even breathing.

You can reduce this by:

- Covering pots and pans when cooking
- Not drying clothes indoors
- Close kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use
- Keep your heating on at a low temperature (around 18 degrees)

2. Ventilate to remove moisture

- Ventilate kitchen and bathroom when in use
- Leave space between furniture and walls to allow air to circulate
- Keep trickle vents in windows open and clear

3. Remove excess moisture and mould

- Wipe down windows and sills and other surfaces where condensation forms on a regular basis
- Clean off mould using vinegar, baking soda, or bleach. Always read the instructions to ensure this is used safely

Dampness and mould can affect your health, so if it continues after you have followed our advice you should make contact to arrange an inspection.

LEGIONELLA

How to keep the water in your home safe

The Association reviewed legionella risk last year. Here's a reminder of the main points:

- While low concentrations are generally not harmful, legionella can be dangerous if the conditions are right for the bacteria to grow and if you inhale water droplets from a contaminated water system.
- Legionella can cause infections, most of which are not serious; but include a form of pneumonia called Legionnaires' disease, which can be fatal in a minority of cases.
- As most households do not store huge amounts of water the likelihood of legionella in your home is generally low.
- To make sure the water in your home is safe:
- Where possible set hot water cylinders at 60°C or above, and fully heat them to this temperature at least twice per week, but be aware that water at this temperature may cause scalding.
- Use cold water taps regularly so that its temperature stays below 20°C.
- De-scale taps and showers to prevent legionella growing in lime scale, mould or algae.

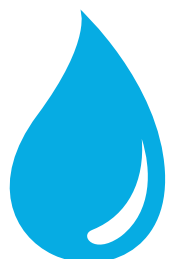
- Use water taps at least once a week, and if you haven't used water for a while heat up your water system to the normal temperature, run every tap for at least five minutes, and slowly flush the cold taps until the water is really cold.
- Report problems to us, especially any deposits such as rust or any unusual matter flowing from your taps.
- Let us know if hot water is not heating properly or if you experience any other problems with the system.

If you suspect that you or someone in your home has contracted Legionnaire's disease, contact your doctor immediately. You should also contact us so that we can take the appropriate measures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The Health & Safety Executive is the government body responsible for water hygiene and Legionnaires' disease. You can view further advice and information at their website

www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires



ALLOCATIONS QUOTAS

The Association's new Allocation's Policy went 'live' in January. There were a number of changes to the points categories and levels introduced under the new policy and all applicants were written to with an individual statement of their points.

We have also introduced a quota system to ensure all categories of applicant receive offers. We will offer 50% of our lets to North Lanarkshire Council to nominate applicants from their list. The quotas for the remaining 50% of lets for 2023/24 are as follows: -

Category	% Target
Waiting List	75%
Homeless	15%
Transfer	10%

The full policy is available on our website (www.lanarkshireha.com) or if you have any questions about your application, feel free to call the team on 01698 269119

OWNER UPDATE

We are currently carrying out a review of the factoring service that we provide to owners and sharing owners. We want to ensure we offer the best possible service to owners and are keen to increase and improve the communications that we offer.

An Owner Update will now be a standing item in our newsletters, and we'd be keen to hear if there is anything of specific interest to owners that we can include.

It is also our intention to carry out some engagement events this year to hear about any general or development-specific issues that you may be experiencing. Depending on interest, we will offer the opportunity to take part online

For content suggestions or if you'd be interested in attending the owner forums, please contact us on enquiries@lanarkshireha.com

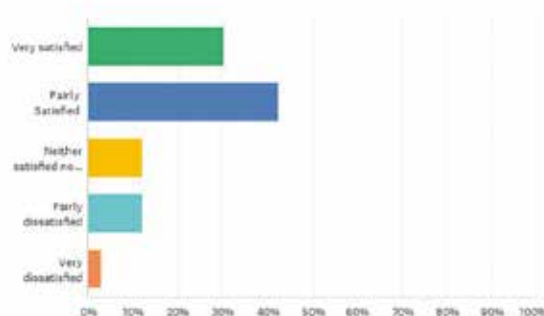
FACTORED SATISFACTION SURVEY

Our last satisfaction survey was carried out in 2018 and we felt it was important to get a more up to date feel for how our owners feel about the factoring service to help inform our review.

We wrote to all owners in March 2023 and asked "Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the factoring service provided by Lanarkshire Housing Association"

We look forward to working constructively with owners to further improve satisfaction with the service and address areas where it needs further work. We will keep you updated on progress in this area as part of this section of the newsletter moving forward.

Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the factoring service provided by Lanarkshire Housing Association



Find us on 

Don't forget that the Association now has a Facebook page. We will start to post more regular updates moving forward and would love to hear from you if there is anything you'd like us to share with you. If you haven't done so already, please follow the LHA page.
www.facebook.com/LanarkshireHA

AFTAR PROJECT STATISTICS

LHA continue to be a part of the AFTAR Project (Advice For Tenants and Residents).

This is a partnership between several local landlords and Citizen's Advice Scotland (CAS) to offer support and advice to tenants experiencing difficulties in a whole range of areas. This can include benefits advice (73% of referrals), utilities, tax, consumer advice amongst many other things. The AFTAR project is a holistic, one stop shop with highly trained advisers offering help and advice with a combination of 'in-person' and telephone appointments.

We refer tenants directly to CAS where a timely intervention helps to prevent issues from escalating. It can also have a positive impact on a person's financial position as well as their general health and wellbeing.

On average, each client needs advice on 3 issues, mainly benefits, debt and energy. Given the current cost of living pressures, cases are becoming more time consuming as the vast majority of clients also need help with food and fuel poverty. Once any initial crisis is averted, CAS look to offer help with any underlying issues to help address the main causes of poverty.

If you need any assistance or think an appointment with CAS would be of benefit, please get in touch.

Below are some key statistics for the AFTAR project for LHA tenants last year

NO. OF REFERRALS	NO. OF ISSUES	CLIENT FINANCIAL GAIN	RESCHEDULED DEBT
315	641	£223,754	£40,181



In addition to the above, support was also offered on digital inclusion and employability. This included activities to assist individuals to increase their IT skills (some of which are SVQ accredited).

In terms of employability, they can offer assistance in obtaining CSCS cards (generally required to work on construction sites) and also help with online applications and mock interviews.

DIGITAL INCLUSION – IT, EMPLOYABILITY, ONLINE BENEFITS	231
ENERGY ADVICE PROVISION	97 (£6051 financial gain and £4571 debt relief)





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