

More completions at Lochside

Ayrshire Housing has just completed a further 25 new homes in the Lochside area of North Ayr. The homes, which have been built for tenants with a variety of different housing needs were built by Ashleigh (Scotland) and were supported by funding from the Scottish Government. The project is expected to be fully completed by April 2010, adding a total of 100 additional homes to our housing stock for affordable rent in Ayr.



Pearl Boyd (vice chairperson) is pictured with a delighted Dionne Shields in her new home.

A Christmas gift for the environment

The Scottish Government's Go Greener campaign is encouraging people to make an extra effort in the lead up to Christmas and reduce their energy use by making small changes to the way they live. And it's not only the environment that will benefit. Reducing the amount of energy you use throughout the year will also help you pocket some extra money in time for the holiday season.

- Recycle household waste using locally-provided facilities
- Turn the tap off when brushing your teeth
- Switch to using energy-saving light bulbs
- Leave the car at home and walk, cycle, use public transport
- Car share at least once a week
- Use rechargeable instead of disposable batteries
- Re-use carrier bags when you shop
- Buy more seasonal and unpackaged food
- Hang your washing up to dry rather than using a tumble dryer
- Organise or volunteer in an environmental project in your local community

For more information and tips, plus a chance to win some fantastic giveaways and money saving offers visit www.infoscotland.com/gogreener.



Ayrshire Housing resident represents Scotland in New Zealand



Congratulations are in order for Ayrshire Housing resident Stephanie McGarrity. Stephanie plays with the Scotland Under-21s netball team, and has recently returned from representing Scotland at the World Youth Games in the Cook Islands. Stephanie, who lives in Ayr, is pictured with her Ayrshire Housing book-bag in Auckland, New Zealand during the tour.

Staff News.....

Healthy Working Lives Bronze Award

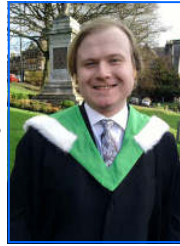
Sharon Ritchie and Zoe McGrady are delighted to receive the Bronze Award through the Healthy Working Lives programme. This achievement celebrates the success of Ayrshire Housing providing a healthier workplace for their employees.

Sharon and Zoe are pictured with Nick Nairn, TV celebrity chef.



Graduation

We are delighted that our Housing Assistant Ross Morris recently graduated from the University of Stirling, having completed his postgraduate diploma and MSc in Housing Studies. Ross studied at the University's Housing Policy and Practice Unit and was supported in his studies by Ayrshire Housing.



BABY NEWS

Congratulations to Rose Estelles, Project Manager with the safe arrival of baby Theo!

Carol Young, Senior Housing Officer will return to work in January after the recent arrival of baby Andrew.

TENANT INFORMATION

We know that Christmas is a time when we all face extra pressure on our finances. Additional burdens and demands can lead to many debt related problems. It is important to remember, however, that rent payments due to the association are maintained throughout the festive season. While it may be tempting to miss a payment in order to meet some of the costs of Christmas the consequences of doing so may be serious.

The association cannot make allowances for payments missed at this time of year. If a tenant's account goes into arrears we will pursue the recovery of the rent due in line with our arrears policy and procedures irrespective of the time of year.

It is important that you contact us immediately if you are having difficulty meeting your rent commitments.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Dog fouling:

It is an offence under the Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003 to not immediately remove any pet fouling from open public spaces. This includes common passages, closes, stairs, back garden areas as well as open areas of landscaping. Failure to do so could result in a fixed penalty charge and failure to pay such could result in a court hearing.

If anyone sees a dog-owner who doesn't clean up after his or her dog and they can identify them they should report this to South Ayrshire Council's Environmental Health department on (01292) 618222.

Common area cleaning:

In some of our flatted developments with common areas, Ayrshire Housing provides a stair cleaning service. We would like to remind tenants that this is a basic cleaning service only, and that the day-to-day cleaning of stairs and common areas is the responsibility of ALL tenants.

Rent Setting Consultation 2010-2011

The decision to set the rents for next year has to be taken by the Board at their meeting in February 2010. Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 we have a duty to consult tenants on the proposed changes to rents and service charges. This article will provide some of the information that is taken into account when changes to rents are being considered.

Ayrshire Housing is a “not for profit” organisation. This means that the rent you pay is used to meet the costs of the management and maintenance of your home and any services that are provided. From the rent we receive we also make payments on loans which were part of the funding package when your property was acquired or developed.

Your rent pays for the staff costs involved in running the association and also for other direct costs such as office accommodation, computers and stationery. Repairs to the properties are also paid for from the rent income.

Affordability

We are also bound to consider whether our rents are affordable. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations provides guidance to associations on how to measure affordability. Based on this, our rents have been considered to be affordable.

Longer term planning

We also have to ensure that the income we receive is available for the future management and maintenance of our properties rather than just the next couple of years. For example, at some point in the future your kitchen or bathroom or central heating may need to be replaced. Other components such as windows and gutters also need regular painting or maintenance. Between November and January each year the association’s senior management work on financial projections to ensure that income we receive from rents is sufficient to cover all projected costs. We have to adopt a sensible and prudent approach to financial planning. While we don’t want to increase rents more than is necessary we have to be sure that funds are sufficient to secure the future of the association and its properties for the benefit of current and future tenants.

Comparisons with other landlords

We also compare our rents with those of other housing associations and the local councils. Inflation levels, interest rates and costs in the construction industry are also analysed as these all affect our financial projections.

Proposed increase

Taking account of the various elements we have to consider, it is proposed that we will be able to restrict any increase to no more than 2%. This represents an increase of £1.21 a week for a typical 2 bedroom house. For comparison the equivalent increase last year was £1.98.

Rent Guarantee

The tenants who joined the association in 1999 from Scottish Homes were given a guarantee that rents would not increase by no more than 1% above inflation (RPI) for the first ten years. We were required as a condition of the transfer contract to report on compliance to the Scottish Government. The Board is pleased to report that for several years, it was able to set the annual increase well within this limit. The Government is now proposing to release Ayrshire Housing from the remaining terms of the contract. Service standards and rent levels will however continue to be closely monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator. The Board welcomes the proposal but wants to hear your views before making a final decision in January. In particular, it will allow us to retain £600,000 in sales receipts which would otherwise have to be sent back to the Government. If the contract is set aside, this can be used to further improve services for the benefit of existing and new tenants.

Expressing your views

We are inviting you to give us your views on the proposals for next year’s rent increase and contract with the Government. In particular we would like you to tell us if you think our proposals are fair and also do you think that the basis for settings rents is fair.

You can let us know your views in several ways:

- By writing to us at our office
- By telling your housing officer who will pass on your views to senior management
- By e-mailing your views direct to the association at info@ayrshirehousing.org.uk
- Post your comments on our blog at website at www.ayrshirehousing.org.uk

All views expressed will be considered by the Board when making their final decision.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS, OFFICE CLOSURE AND EMERGENCY REPAIRS

Our offices will be closed from lunchtime on Thursday 24th December 2009 and will re-open on Wednesday 6th January 2010 at 9.00 a.m.

Please note that if you need to report an emergency repair when our office is closed you should telephone the following number:-

0845 719 0019

This is the only number you should use for emergency repairs when our office is closed. This emergency response centre will arrange for an appropriate tradesman to respond if the request is an emergency. It is important that this service is only used for genuine emergencies.

Examples of these include:

Burst pipes, No heating, No electricity or gas, Dangerous electric fitting such as switches or sockets, No hot water, Insecure doors / windows at ground floor level, Toilet not flushing (if there is no other toilet that you can use in the house), Blocked sink, bath or drain.

WINTER WEATHER ADVICE

Going Away.....

If you are going to be away overnight leave your heating ticking over at a background heat setting. If you are going away on holiday turn off the water at the main stopcock. Make sure you have sufficient credit in your meter if you have a power card or gas card meter. If you are going away for any long period please contact John or Murray, our maintenance officers on 01292 880120 who can advise of any other precautions that should be taken.

To avoid burst pipes try to keep your home reasonably warm during the day and night. Make sure you know where the main stopcock is for your cold water supply and make sure it works. This can prevent substantial damage to your home if you have a burst pipe.

If you do have a burst or notice any signs of leaks or flooding:

- Turn off the water supply at the stopcock
- Fully turn on all taps as quickly as possible to drain the system
- If you find where the leak is, bind it tightly with a towel and place a bowl or other container to catch any drips
- If the water is likely to come into contact with electrical fittings switch off the electricity supply.
- Warn neighbours who might be affected



THE STAFF OF AYRSHIRE HOUSING
WISH YOU SEASON'S GREETINGS



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