

TENANT'S NEWSLETTER WINTER 2015

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

OFFICE CLOSURE AND EMERGENCY REPAIRS

Our office will close on **Thursday 24th December 2015** at 12:30pm
and re-open on **Wednesday 6th January 2016** at 9.00am

Please note that if you need to report an emergency repair when our office is closed
you should telephone our contractor:

J.D. THOMSON & SON (PROPERTY CARE) LTD
ON 01655 882234

Our contractor will arrange for an appropriate tradesperson 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 or hot water, no electricity or gas, dangerous electrical fittings such as switches or sockets, insecure doors or 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.



OUR SEASONAL CARD

You should have received a wee booklet from us with this newsletter. We have worked again with pupils at Ayr's Kyle Academy who are completing their Higher photography course. With our designer Neil McGuire, they've created the six postcards for you to use during the year. The booklet also hands in the New Year with a donation to the Ayr based homelessness initiative, Care and Share. Neil McGuire has kindly topped up this gift by foregoing part of his fee.

SOUTH AYRSHIRE FOODBANK

Ayrshire Housing supports the work of South Ayrshire Foodbank. This year we have arranged a Christmas collection within the office as well as making a financial donation. If you would like more information and opportunities to donate please go to www.southayrshire.foodbank.org.uk.



Maintenance Officer John Hendry pictured with some of the donations!

PAYING YOUR RENT - ONLINE PAYMENTS

In a bid to continue to offer you the best service possible we have introduced a convenient payment option on our website. You can now pay by debit or credit card 24 hours a day by visiting www.ayrshirehousing.org.uk and selecting the *Pay Your Rent* link on the welcome page. You will be linked to the WorldPay secure website to make your payment.



COMING SOON!

In the New Year, we will be introducing a new automated phone call direction service. Our aim is to enhance our service by allowing tenants to select a direct link to repairs and maintenance or our main switchboard.

RENT CONSULTATION

Ayrshire Housing's Board agreed to consult with tenants on a proposal that our rents from April 2016 will be increased by no more than 2%. This would equate to an increase of no more than £1.64 a week for a typical 3apt house (2 bedrooms) and £1.85 for a 4apt house (3 bedrooms).

In considering this proposal the Board took into account the need to reconcile the financial pressures facing many of our tenants with the value that tenants have attached to the levels of service which we provide such as our repairs and property investment programmes, including major renewals of doors, windows, kitchens, bathrooms, etc.

Based on preliminary budgeting there is a reasonable prospect that the actual increase may be lower, however the Board agreed that it was prudent to consult on the maximum weekly increase of 2%. This would make for adequate allowance for the significant level of major improvement works that are planned for in the next year.

It is important that tenants are fully consulted on such proposals and we are keen to receive any views which you may have. In addition we are sending out a survey to the tenants on our Consultation Panel covering aspects such as whether our rents provide value for money. We are also providing the Consultation Panel with a number of options regarding the rent review and making clear the potential impact which each of the options would have on service levels and service quality.

If you would wish to be included in our Consultation Panel please **contact Caroline Donald, our Performance and Quality Manager**, for further information. Caroline can also arrange for a rent survey to be sent to you.

If you have any comments or views on the proposed increase we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact us either in writing, email at info@ayrshirehousing.org.uk, text or by speaking to your Housing Officer. We will take note of all your comments and feed them back to the Board before they make the final decision regarding setting rents at the February Board meeting.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Universal Credit (UC) is now being rolled out to Ayrshire and a number of our tenants have already had to make claims for this benefit.

We have been visiting many of our tenants who we think may possibly have to claim Universal Credit and provided them with advice and assistance regarding what they must do if they are required to claim Universal Credit.

This is a huge change to what many of our tenants will have been used to and it is important that you are fully aware of what you need to do if you have to claim Universal Credit.

What Does It Replace?

Universal Credit replaces a number of other benefits such as:-

- Housing Benefit
- Income based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
- Income Support
- Income based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit

What is the Difference Compared to Other Benefits I May Have Previously Received?

- You need to claim online.
- You will receive one, single payment each month.
- You will be wholly responsible for paying your full rent from your Universal Credit payment – you will no longer receive Housing Benefit separately.

How Will Universal Credit Be Paid?

It will be paid 4 weekly in arrears.
It will be paid into your bank account, building society account, post office account or credit union account.

You **MUST** have a valid account before you can claim Universal Credit – we can advise you about what type of account will be acceptable.

What Do You Need To Do If You Are Claiming Universal Credit?

You **MUST** tell your Housing Officer immediately. Your Housing Officer will give you as much advice and assistance as required.

You **MUST** pay your full rent. You need to be aware that you will no longer receive Housing Benefit and will be wholly responsible for paying your rent. Your Housing Officer will advise you as to how much and when you need to pay. If you do not keep your rent payments up to date you will be in rent arrears and we will pursue recovery of these arrears.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING UNIVERSAL CREDIT PLEASE
DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT YOUR HOUSING OFFICER –
WE ARE HERE TO HELP

ANNUAL GAS SERVICING

Ayrshire Housing has achieved 100% access for gas servicing for the past year. Despite the obvious benefits of getting an annual gas service carried out, the association and our gas contractor sometimes have problems in gaining access to some properties and some tenants still leave it as late as possible before providing access. It has also been necessary to force entry into several properties in order to complete the gas service within the statutory period.

Tenants are reminded that the association has a legal requirement to carry out an annual service on all gas appliances provided by the association. The servicing of the gas equipment is extremely important – not only for your safety, but also for others, who may share the building with you.

During the gas service our gas engineers, James Frew (Gas Sure) will ensure that all gas appliances, flues, gas pipework, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed by the association, are maintained in a safe condition. They will also carry out a visual inspection of your gas cooker, if you have one.

The gas service normally takes around 30-45 minutes. As well as making sure that the appliances are safe, it also has the added benefit of ensuring that your gas system is working as efficiently as possible so that you will use less gas and keep your gas bills down. It is therefore in everyone's best interest to have an annual gas service carried out.

We would therefore ask that when access appointments are made that you ensure that someone is available to allow access and that pre-payment meters are topped up with sufficient credit to allow the service to be completed.

Should you be unable to make an arranged appointment time, please contact the office at the earliest opportunity to enable a more convenient appointment time to be arranged.

As indicated, the association has a legal requirement to carry out an annual gas inspection. Where necessary, we will force entry to properties where the tenant fails to provide access or alternatively we will cap the supply externally. It should be noted that any costs incurred in respect of forced entry procedures will be re-charged to the tenant.

We would therefore ask that occupants co-operate with the association in order to ensure access is provided for the engineer and that the annual gas service is completed.



HOME SECURITY

At this time of year, more than any other, it is important that you take every possible step to protect your property and belongings. Follow these simple steps and ensure you have a safe, secure, crime free festive season.

- **Lock all doors even when at home.**
- **Lock all windows when out, particularly those that are vulnerable, even if only for a short time.**
- **Secure the rear access to your home; this is the area where it is most likely to be attacked.**
- **Don't leave valuable items unattended giving the thief the opportunity.**
- **Look after neighbouring property, it may be you next time.**
- **If you see anything suspicious report it immediately to the Police on 101, or contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.**

Don't be afraid to call the police. When you do so, you need not provide your name and address. The police now use a state of the art encrypted radio system which is immune from interception by any scanning devices so you can call with confidentiality guaranteed.

CONDENSATION ISSUES

Tenants often contact the association to report problems with dampness in their homes. However investigations often find that the majority of these problems are caused by condensation.

What is Condensation?

It is caused when warm air comes into contact with a cold surface. It usually occurs during cold weather and affects cold surfaces and where there is little movement of air.

It is most likely to occur in the corners of rooms, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes, cupboards and rarely used rooms.

What are the Effects of Condensation?

- Water running down cold surfaces, i.e. windows, bathroom fittings, tiles, painter work,
- Black, brown or green spots appear on walls, ceilings, skirting boards, along window cills and tile grout.
- Mould growth on clothing or furnishings.

What can Cause Condensation?

- Drying laundry inside your home
- Not using extractor fans, where these are provided
- Keeping windows and window vents closed so that there is no air circulation in the property
- Not dealing with mould as soon as it appears
- Placing furniture or stacking belongings against walls for prolonged periods of time.

How Can I Help Prevent Condensation from Occurring?

- Open windows and window vents whenever you can to allow air to move around your home
- Always use extractor fans
- Vent tumble driers to outside, or use condensing tumble driers
- Wipe condensation off cold surfaces such as window cills, tiles and sanitary ware
- Keep your house reasonably warm in cold weather – it is better to heat your whole house to a lower temperature rather than heat one room to a high temperature
- Avoid drying washing on radiators or hot water tanks
- Cover pots when cooking
- Ventilate your bathroom after use – leave a window open and keep doors closed





KEEPING SAFE OVER CHRISTMAS!



Nobody wants to have to deal with an emergency during the festive holiday. You can take some sensible steps yourself to avoid problems including:

- Leave background heating on if cold weather is expected. This stops your pipes freezing up in a cold snap.
- Consider leaving contact details or keys with a trusted neighbour/relative if you are going away in case something happens. Damage can be much worse if no one can get in to deal with a problem.
- Avoid fires by not cooking when 'under the influence' and try not to smoke when you are tired.
- Be careful with candles – they may look nice, but should be kept under supervision at all times.
- Check the batteries in your smoke detector and stock up on torch batteries in case of a power cut – a torch is safer than candles especially if kids are around.

Help When You Need It

The emergency call out service is available during the festive period when the office is closed, on **01655 882234**. Please only call in the case of a genuine emergency. These are repairs, which could cause danger to health, resident safety, or serious damage to property.

Contractors carrying out an emergency call out will normally make safe only. This enables full and proper repairs to be undertaken during normal working hours. Some of the types of emergency work they attend include the following:

- Severe roof leaks
- Burst pipes
- Total loss of water supply (this may be the responsibility of Scottish Water)
- Blockage of your only toilet
- Complete loss of electrical power or lighting (may be due to a power cut)
- Loss of gas (this may be the responsibility of National Grid / Transco)
- Loss of heating in cold weather where there is no other form of heating available
- Security of the property following a break-in or forced entry
- Blocked drains where the problem is serious
- Electrical fault which may endanger a building or residents

If you call out an emergency contractor for a less serious repair you may be recharged for all the costs involved. The response time to attend an emergency call out is 4 hours. However there may be instances where attendance may be delayed including severe adverse weather.

If you make an emergency call out, please stay in until the tradesman calls. To help save time in an emergency it is helpful if you know how to turn off your water, gas and electricity in your home.

FROST PREVENTION—TIPS TO AVOID PROBLEMS

During the winter season it's important to take the necessary precautions to minimise the risk of frost damage and prevent frozen and burst pipes. Make sure that your home is adequately heated during the winter months.

Below are some handy hints on how to look after your home:

Keep your home warm day and night by keeping your central heating on continuously at a low thermostat setting.



Find out where your stop valve 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 the house, helping to reduce damage in the event of a burst.



Ask a friend or relative to visit your home every day if you're away. This will mean that if you do suffer a burst pipe, it'll be detected as soon as possible and any damage caused will be minimised.

Make sure you have adequate contents insurance to help cover the cost of replacing damaged furniture and personal belongings. Ayrshire Housing staff can provide details of low cost contents insurance.



IF YOU EXPERIENCE FROZEN PIPES:

- Turn off the water at the stop valve
- Switch off gas and electric water heaters
- Remove or protect any possessions that could be damaged by a burst pipe
- Gently heat the frozen section of pipe using a fan heater, hair drier, hot water bottle or heated cloths.
- Never use a blow torch or naked flame.
- In the event of very severe cold weather resulting in frozen external supply pipes, there may be little the association or its contractors can do.

IF YOU EXPERIENCE BURST PIPES:

- Call the office or the Emergency Repairs Service immediately
- Turn off the water at the stop valve – open all taps to fully drain the system
- Switch off the central heating system/hot water heater if the burst pipe is affecting the heating pipework.
- Switch off any electrics affected – switch off the power at the mains if the flooding is extensive.
- Warn neighbours who might suffer damage due to a burst especially if you live in an upper floor flat and have other properties below your home.
- Minimise damage – if water is coming through the ceiling, put buckets and basins underneath and move items that might be damaged by water.
- If the ceiling starts to bulge, pierce the plaster to let the water through without the ceiling collapsing.



It should be noted that Ayrshire Housing cannot provide temporary water supplies or bottled drinking water. Tenants are asked to utilise the facilities of neighbours, friends or family to gain access to water or toilet facilities.

NEW TENANT COMPETITIONS!

BEST DECORATED ROOM

Do you have a room in your house that you love? Are you good at decorating? If so, why not enter our best decorated room competition!

If you would like to enter our new competition please send a picture of the room along with a short description of why you feel it should win, to Ayrshire Housing, 119 Main Street, Ayr KA8 8BX or email us at info@ayrshirehousing.org.uk. Closing date for entries is **Monday 29th February**. Winners will be announced in our **Spring 2016** newsletter.



GOOD LUCK!

GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARD

Do you have a neighbour who has gone the extra mile to support others in their community? If so, nominate them for an award!



Ayrshire Housing are looking for tenants who go above and beyond to give them the recognition they deserve!

If you believe your neighbour should be recognised for an award, write to us at Ayrshire Housing, 119 Main Street, Ayr KA8 8BX or email us info@ayrshirehousing.org.uk and tell us why (in no more than 100 words) including the name and address of your neighbour. Competition closing date is **Monday 29th February!**

KIDS' COLOURING IN CORNER!



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