

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2022 EDITION



LANARKSHIRE
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

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 Autumn 2022 edition of the Lanarkshire Housing Association newsletter.



Since my last update in our Summer edition, it seems that the world has turned on its head with so many uncertainties. We understand that these have real-life consequences for you as our tenants and we are here to support you where we can. There has been much discussion around the increasing cost of living, increasing fuel costs and increasing inflation and what that means for tenants and landlords.

If you are struggling financially – whether that be in paying your rent or just in general, please contact our housing team. They are here to help and where specialist support or advice is needed, they will be able to refer you on to other agencies e.g. through our AFTAR project. Our team are constantly looking for funding opportunities to allow us to offer additional targeted supports and we will keep you informed if we are successful.

Unfortunately, LHA is not immune to these increases in costs and you will read more in this newsletter about the announcement of rent controls and the impact that this can and will have on our service provision.

Please be assured that we are doing all that we can to ensure we offer value for money services that are delivering for tenants, and we will tell you more about this as part of our annual rent review process in November/December.

Finally, and on a more positive note, I'd like to say thank you to all of you that responded to our recent Tenant Census exercise. We were delighted with the response and are currently analysing the data to help formulate our plans for the coming months and years taking account of the feedback you have given. We will be presenting the results to our Management Committee at their November meeting and will share these in our winter newsletter.

I hope you find the information in this newsletter helpful and if you would like to discuss anything in more detail, or if you have suggestions of what you'd like to include in future editions, please get in touch on **01698 269119** or **enquiries@lanarkshireha.com**.

Best Wishes

Simon McManus
Chief Executive

TERESA WARD OBITUARY



It is with great sadness that the death of the Association's former Housing Services Director was announced in August 2022.

Teresa joined the Association in 1985 as a Housing Manager having previously worked for the Scottish Special Housing Association. She was promoted to Housing Services Director in 1998 and remained in this position until her retirement in January 2020.

Throughout her career with the Association, Teresa was passionate about working with people. This translated into her being able to shape and deliver housing services which put the needs of tenants at the heart of

service delivery. This culminated in the award of "A" grades for both Housing Management and Maintenance Services by Communities Scotland following a performance audit in 2004/05, an achievement which Teresa took great pride in, as no other housing provider had recorded two "A" grades at that time.

Popular with tenants, staff and Committee, Teresa retired on health grounds in 2020. She is survived by her partner, Charles, and son, Stefan, and we send them our most sincere condolences.

THE PROPERTY SERVICES TEAM

Our Property Services Team recently welcomed a new member -Gillian McGuinness. Gillian joins us as our new Maintenance Assistant and will most likely be your first point of contact if you phone us to report a repair. Gillian brings with her a wealth of experience from another Housing Association in Glasgow and we look forward to working with her.



Gillian McGuinness

The Property Services Team are here to assist you if you need to report a repair or need advice in relation to any maintenance matter with your home. They liaise with our contractors to ensure that repairs are carried out on time and to the high standard that our customers expect. In addition to this, the team also co-ordinate our annual gas safety inspections to ensure that we meet our legal obligations to keep you safe in your home.

Where properties become empty, the team also inspect and instruct repairs to bring the property up to our lettable standard, ready for the new tenant to move in.

We are always investing in and upgrading our homes and the Property Services Team work with our contractors to oversee the delivery of our planned maintenance programme.



(L-R) Gavin Young, Property Services Director; Stuart Morton, Maintenance Officer; Allan Pollock, Estates Caretaker; Gillian McGuinness, Maintenance Assistant

In this past year this has included the upgrading of heating systems in a number of our properties with a window replacement programme due to start soon.

We will introduce you to our Corporate Services Team in the Winter newsletter and tell you about some of the work that they undertake in the background to keep the Association's business running smoothly.

LEGIONELLA

Keeping the water in your home safe

Legionella is the name given to a group of bacteria found in almost all water sources including rivers, streams and ponds. It can also be found in soil, compost and mains water, and it can sometimes enter domestic water systems.

Is legionella harmful?

Low concentrations are generally not harmful. Legionella is only dangerous if the conditions are right for the bacteria to grow and if you inhale water droplets from a contaminated water system.

The bacteria can cause a number of infections, most of which are not serious; it also includes a form of pneumonia called legionnaires' disease, which can be fatal in a minority of cases.



WHAT IS THE HOUSING ASSOCIATION DOING?

We recently employed a water hygiene company to review legionella risk across a range of our houses and flats. In line with legal obligations, we'll continue to monitor and inspect buildings to check that water systems are clean and the water is safe to use.

LEGIONELLA

What you can do

The likelihood of legionella being in your home is generally low as most households do not store huge amounts of water. They also use water regularly, so it's not standing still in pipes.

Below is some advice you can follow to make sure the water in your home is safe.

Setting the right temperature

Legionella bacteria is more likely to grow between 20°C and 50°C. So where possible set hot water cylinders at 60°C or above, and fully heat them to this temperature at least twice per week.

Warning: *Be aware that water at this temperature may cause scalding. Regular use of cold water should also ensure temperatures stay below 20°C.*

De-scale taps and showers

Legionella bacteria can grow and multiply on scale or rust. So keep all shower heads and hoses free from a build-up of lime scale, mould or algae growth by de-scaling every three months or more frequently if the shower hose shows signs of blocking. Use any domestic de-scaling solution that you can buy from hardware shops or supermarkets (the same as you would for your iron or kettle). After descaling, flush the shower thoroughly and soak in bleach, which helps sterilise and kill any bacteria.



Use water taps once a week

This helps to make sure you don't have water standing still in pipes. You'll also need to run the water in your shower. Make sure you remove the shower head before doing this so the water doesn't spray and create water droplets. If you can't remove the shower head, cover it with a towel or a plastic bag while you run the water.

Flush away those bacteria

The water in your home is more likely to have legionella if you haven't used it for a while. So if you've been away for more than a week, you should:

- Heat up your water system to the normal temperature
- Run every tap for at least five minutes
- Slowly flush the cold taps until the water is really cold

Remember that when flushing taps or other outlets, open slowly so you don't splash water or release water droplets in the air.

Report problems to us

Report 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.





CONDENSATION

As the weather changes and we are spending more times in our homes, there is an increased risk of condensation developing.

This is caused by a build up of moisture within the property and can lead to dampness if left untreated.

When the moist air touches a cool surface, this turns into water droplets and appears as moisture on the surface. Quite often, this is visible on windows, ceilings or external walls and can be made worse if bulky items (e.g. beds or wardrobes) are placed against external walls. The moisture can often be accompanied by black mould on surfaces.

How can I manage condensation and mould?

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
- Keep your heating on at a low temperate (around 18 degrees)
- Not drying clothes indoors
- Close kitchen and bathroom doors when they are in use

2. Ventilate to remove moisture

- Ventilate kitchen and bathroom when in use
- Use the extractor fan in the kitchen and bathroom
- Leave space between furniture and walls to allow air to circulate
- Keep trickle vents in windows open and clear
- Open windows after taking a bath or shower

3. Remove excess moisture and mould

- Wipe down windows and sills and other surfaces where condensation forms on a regular basis
- Vinegar is a mild acid that can kill 82% of mould species – it is natural and non-toxic. Put white vinegar in a sprayer or bowl, wipe or spray and leave for an hour before wiping down. This may need to be repeated regularly to reduce reappearance.
- Baking Soda – add one quarter of a tablespoon of baking soda to a spray bottle of water. Wipe down the mouldy area with the baking soda and water solution. Scrub away the mould. This may need to be repeated
- Bleach – if the mould is growing on non-porous materials such as tiles, baths, glass and worktops you can use bleach and water solution. **Always read the instructions to ensure this is used safely**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

We know that energy prices are particularly high at the moment and whilst LHA's properties are generally very energy efficient, every little helps to keep bills down.

Through the AFTAR partnership, we have secured access to a number of energy efficiency measures (including energy efficient bulbs and radiator reflectors). Please contact us if you would like any of these – they will be issued on a first come, first served basis.

If you would like a referral for advice on energy bills and usage, please contact us and we can refer you to the AFTAR project for support. Contact us on 01698 269119



SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RENT CONTROLS

The First Minister announced in her Programme for Government speech in September 2022 that she intended to table emergency legislation to the Scottish Parliament that would freeze rents across all sectors until at least 31st March 2023. In addition to this, there would be a ban on evictions over the winter period (with some specific exceptions).

Most Housing Associations increase their rents from 1st April each year, so the freeze announced has no immediate effect on the social housing sector. Whilst we understand the desire to help tenants with the significant increase in cost of energy and the cost of living more generally, we don't believe that this approach is the best way to achieve this aim.

Like many Housing Associations in Scotland, Lanarkshire Housing Association is a registered charity and rent is our main source of income. We are acutely aware of the pressures many of our tenants are facing and your rents allow us to deliver the vital services that our housing staff offer to our tenants. In addition, your rent is used to invest in your properties to deliver newer and more energy efficient heating systems, windows and other measures that will improve the energy efficiency of your home. Like our tenants, our costs to deliver on these commitments have risen significantly and a freeze/cap on rent into 2023/24 will make it difficult to continue with our planned investments at the same rate as we anticipated.

We have a legal requirement to consult with our tenants on any proposed rent increase and we would always want to do this as your views and priorities really do matter.

At this time, the Scottish Government have a deadline of 14th January 2023 to advise on whether they intend to extend the freeze or apply a cap beyond 31st March 2023. If there is to be a cap, they will advise what this will be set at.

What does this mean for your rent from April 2023?

Ordinarily, we would be starting our plans to consult with you on our proposed rent levels for the year ahead. We would be busy looking at our planned maintenance programme as well as other service priorities. We would use this information to determine what level of rent increase would be required to deliver on this before consultation with tenants.

We still intend to carry out this work and we will also undertake an assessment of the affordability of our rents using the Scottish Federation of Housing Association (SFHA) Affordability Toolkit.

We will use this information to identify some options to put to tenants for discussion. However, this year, for the first time, it may be that a different rate is imposed that is out with our control. If that were to be the case, we would have to review what that means for the services we deliver to our tenants.



A message from our Housing Services Director, Craig Russell

"We understand that many of you will be struggling financially right now and discussions on a future rent increase will be worrying for you. Please be assured that LHA, like other housing

associations, do not increase our rents un-necessarily and we always factor in the affordability of our rents for tenants when considering our options. We cannot escape the fact that our costs are also rising and in order for us to continue to offer the level of service you expect and to continue to invest in your homes, we need to ensure the rent level set supports this.

We will be taking a different approach to our consultation this year and will be using a variety of ways to engage with you. We will also be providing as much information as we can to assist you in making a decision. Your opinion matters so I would encourage you to take part in the consultation if you can."

We are here to help you so please contact us if you need any support or advice or if you are finding it difficult to pay your rent.

AFTAR PROJECT

LHA has a partnership with other RSL's in North Lanarkshire and Citizen's Advice Scotland (CAS) – AFTAR (Advice for Tenants and Residents). CAS have highly trained, specialist staff who can help in a variety of areas (income maximisation and assistance with benefits, energy advice and digital skills). **Our housing team would be happy to refer you or alternatively, you can contact the AFTAR team direct on 01698 265349.**



ADAPTATIONS

Adaptations such as wet floor showers, ramps and handrails play a vital role in ensuring tenants can continue to live independently in their homes and sustain their tenancy.

This is a priority area for us, and we receive funding from the Scottish Government to assist us in delivering these essential works. Normally, a referral is required from an occupational therapist to allow us to ensure any adaptation proposed meets the needs of the tenants and will be eligible for funding.

Our recent Tenant Census told us that concerns around mobility play a significant part in whether our tenants see themselves living in their home in the next 5 years. Adaptations are one way to prevent the need for someone to leave their home if it can be altered to meet their specific needs. **Please get in touch if you think you may benefit from an adaptation and our Housing team will be happy to assist you.**

ALLOCATIONS POLICY UPDATE

In our Summer newsletter, we told you about our new Allocations Policy that was approved by our Housing Sub-Committee. Since then, our team have been busy preparing for the new policy to 'go-live' in January 2023.

Preparations include making changes to the Common Housing Register (CHR) and our Housing Management system to allow us to make changes to the affected applications. This is still in progress, and we expect to be able to contact individual applicants in the coming weeks.

We will soon be writing to all applicants to advise of the changes and our website will be updated with more information.

DID YOU KNOW...

We carried out a consultation exercise on the new policy with a) applicants on the list b) existing tenants c) other partners such as Local Authorities

- 85.42% of respondents agreed with the aims of the policy
- 82.29% agreed with categories of applicants defined as in urgent housing need
- 73.20% agreed with the points categories and associated criteria
- 83.51% agreed with the introduction of quotas for different priority groups

Full details of the consultation responses will be available on our website when the new policy goes live in January

TENANT PARTICIPATION UPDATE

We were delighted to be able to reconvene the Tenant Focus Group in September for their first meeting since 2020. It was great to have some familiar faces as well as some new members.

For the initial meeting, we discussed the results from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey that was carried out in February this year as well as the headline results from our Tenant Census that was carried out over the summer.

It was also a chance to talk about our exciting plans for the months and years ahead as we start to prepare our strategic plans for the next 5 years.

Stephen Connor from the Tenant's Information Service (TIS) also came along to talk about tenant scrutiny and how TIS can support interested tenants in carrying out some scrutiny work on areas of LHA operation.

The Focus Group met again in October and our Housing Services Director, Craig Russell provided an overview of the emergency rent controls announced by the Scottish Government and what this meant for housing associations and the rent review process for next year.

This prompted lots of discussion around the costs of rents and striking the balance between rent increases versus investment in our properties and service delivery. **We will be revisiting this topic in the November meeting so please get in touch if you're interested in coming along.**

We also talked about our Void Management Policy which is currently under review. We shared with the group the various elements of an empty property that we need to repair.

Some of the group will be working with the support of TIS to carry out a scrutiny exercise looking at our void management processes – hopefully including a visit to a void property

This will hopefully be the first of many such exercises to ensure continuous improvement in LHA services.





GARDEN COMPETITION WINNER

We're pleased to announce that we had several entries this year for our garden competition - a combination of nominations by staff and residents.



WINNER

Sapphire Road



RUNNER UP

John Bowman Gardens

All entries were presented to our Tenant Focus Group at their meeting in October and they chose our winning garden and runner up.

Congratulations to the winners and a garden related prize will be making its way to both residents.

Thanks to all those who entered this year, and we look forward to seeing the entries for 2023.

Winner - Sapphire Road



Runner Up – John Bowman Gardens



You may be eligible for our **£150** Fuel Hardship Payment

TO FIND OUT MORE AND APPLY TODAY PLEASE VISIT:

**[www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/benefits-and-money/
cost-living-help/fuel-hardship-payment-october-2022](http://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/benefits-and-money/cost-living-help/fuel-hardship-payment-october-2022)**



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Call Lewis on 07741 735402
For any computer or device help
and learning,
CV & Job searching,
or help with Job centre
commitments

Advice For Tenants And Residents





Advice For Tenants & Residents

FEELING POWERLESS?

The AFTAR project works in partnership with Lanarkshire Housing Association to provide one to one advice and support on a range of subjects including:

- Benefits
- Debt
- Housing Energy
- Employment
- Consumer
- Council tax
- Family
- Pensions Guidance

Struggling to pay your energy bills?

Our AFTAR team is here to:

- Maximise your income
- Reduce energy costs
- Apply for grants to pay off/reduce your debts
- Apply for energy vouchers
- Help to make your home more energy efficient
- We can help you over the phone or arrange a Home visit at a time to suit you.

Contact Motherwell CAB to seek help on: 0808 196 9180

maria.shelley@motherwellcab.casonline.org.uk

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