

Welcome to the Winter edition of your **Irvine Housing Association** newsletter

House & Home

Issue 01 Winter 2017

A better service where you live

Over the next couple of months you should start to see some big changes to the service you receive from Irvine Housing Association.

We've restructured behind the scenes so we can have more housing officers working out and about in neighbourhoods like yours.

It's a big, new investment in the frontline because we want to make sure we're providing a consistently good service, no matter where you live.

Full story: See page 3



'More staff out and about'

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Introducing our Head of Service Delivery

We welcomed Heather Anderson to the team in July. Heather's background is in housing management.

Heather said:

"I am really excited about joining Irvine Housing Association.

The organisation has an excellent reputation for delivering fantastic services and high quality housing to customers and communities. This role is a fantastic opportunity to drive the service delivery of an organisation determined to grow, proud of its roots, and with its customers at its heart.

Heather added: "These are exciting times for the Association as it journeys through its transformation programme and I'm looking forward to working with such a motivated team to deliver positive outcomes for our customers and communities."



Irvine Housing Association and Riverside

Irvine Housing Association (IHA) became a subsidiary of the Riverside Group in 2011 after our shareholders overwhelmingly voted in favour of joining the Group .

Riverside is a leading social housing provider with approximately 50,000 properties across England. This partnership has created many opportunities for IHA and has enabled the Association to grow, transform and improve. We have been supported to modernise our services to ensure they are 'fit for the future' and develop our business so we can withstand future risks and challenges that may arise across the Scottish housing sector.

IHA has retained its autonomy with its own Board, governance structure, and Business Plan. The rental income received from IHA properties is used to deliver services to IHA tenants and to manage and maintain IHA housing stock. Although key decisions are made locally, being part of the wider Riverside Group has enabled us to: introduce new services, for example our money advice and affordable warmth services; continue with our new build programme; invest more money in improving our homes; as well as sharing knowledge and skills so that we can make the best use of our resources and the rental income we receive. We could not have achieved all of this on our own.



Our partnership with Riverside has enabled us over the past year to restructure and make savings behind the scenes so we can invest more where it matters most – in your neighbourhood.



If you would prefer to receive our newsletter by email, or not at all please email dianne.palmer@irvineha.co.uk with your name and address stating your preference.

More staff time can be spent 'out and about'

The world's changing fast and we are modernising so you can get what you need from Irvine Housing Association in a way that's more convenient for you.



As a result, from this winter, your Housing Officer will be spending much more time out and about in your neighbourhood to ensure you receive the best possible customer service. More time will be spent getting to know tenants and helping you face to face with any housing matter you may have.

Their hours will be more flexible so they can support you when it better suits you.

They'll have a tablet or smartphone to access 'live' information about your tenancy. And they'll have more time to resolve your issues because new teams back at our offices will pick up the admin.

If you like to manage your affairs online, we're developing a range of new digital services to make it easier for you to do this at a time and place that suits you.

If you'd rather ring, we've expanded our 24 hour Customer Service Centre (CSC) to assist with more enquiries and help you to access our website. We now have a local CSC presence at the weekend and until 7.00 pm Tuesday-Saturday.

As we make progress, it should mean a better service in your neighbourhood, online and on the phone.

Are your contact details up to date?

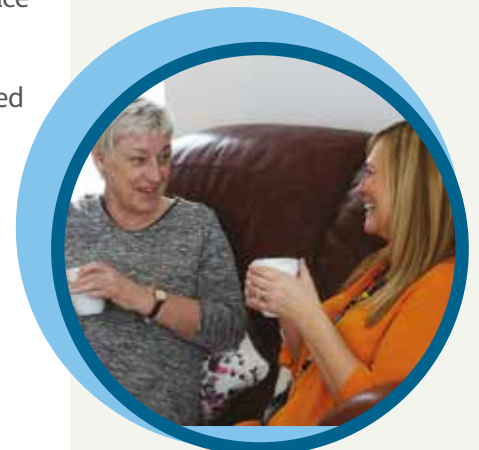
Our staff and contractors rely on information to make access arrangements to your home.

This is extremely important for essential maintenance programmes including Gas Servicing and Electrical Testing.

It has been identified on numerous occasions that the contact information held in the system, particularly home/mobile telephone numbers, are inaccurate.

Our customer service team call handlers routinely check customer contact details each time a tenant contacts the customer service centre.

Please advise us when your contact details change e.g. home/mobile telephone numbers, email address etc. **You can do this by calling 0345 112 6600 or by emailing us at info@irvineha.co.uk**



Help us improve our services

We are committed to providing opportunities for our customers to assess our performance as a landlord, and help us shape our future services.

We currently have a group of tenants who commit their time and energy to work with us to improve service delivery and performance through meaningful scrutiny.

Our Scrutiny Panel has been helping us to review and improve various service areas to ensure we achieve the outcomes and standards set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This has included visiting empty properties and reviewing reasons for tenancy terminations, carrying out a telephone survey of tenants who had required a higher than average number of repairs and reviewing the information on our website. The panel has made various recommendations that have gone to our Board for consideration.

All relevant training is provided for our panel members to ensure they have the right skills and knowledge to effectively scrutinise and improve services for all of our customers. If you would be interested in joining our Scrutiny Panel volunteers please contact Lyndsay McLaughlan our Customer Involvement Officer. Travel expenses will be reimbursed.

What is customer involvement?

We are committed to involving and empowering our customers in decision making because we understand the value that can be gained from learning and understanding their views, expectations and experiences.

Recently we held a half day “Involvement – Fit for the Future” event in partnership with TPAS Scotland which brought together involved customers from our Tenant & Resident Association’s, Scrutiny Panel and members who were in our ‘Count Me In’ panel. The event provided an opportunity to gain valuable feedback on how we can better our customer engagement and we fully recognise the improvements needed to make that happen. You said you wanted more ways to be involved and provide feedback, so we are launching a new online Customer Panel. Your suggestions and input have directly shaped our decision to ensure all of our tenants received this edition of the newsletter by post.



Customer Panel

We’re working hard to develop our digital services and provide our customers with the opportunity to engage with and be involved in key decision making online.

We are now looking to recruit to our new Customer Panel. The panel is for customers who want to have their say on our services and how we deliver them. Customers registered on the panel will be given opportunities to influence and comment on key policies in a way which suits them. We will use a variety of methods to interact with the panel, for example, formal

consultation events, short online surveys and quick polls, and small focus groups.

It will be for each panel member to decide what activities they participate in and how much time they give.

By using this approach we hope to obtain feedback that is more representative of our customers’ views.



Our Landlord Reports are available to view on our website www.irvineha.co.uk/about-us/how-were-doing

Join Now!

Can you spare 10 minutes of your time to have your say? Joining our customer panel has never been easier.



Email your name and first line of address to **lyndsay.mclaughlan@irvineha.co.uk** using the email address you want to be contacted on. Please note in the email it's for the Customer Panel.



Call Lyndsay McLaughlan, our Customer Involvement Officer, on **01294 316785** and provide your email address.

Your consultations

Rent Restructure and Rent Setting

Your views matter!
All feedback will be entered into a prize draw for a £50 supermarket voucher.

You will have already received a leaflet setting out the Association's rent setting options for 2018/19, and our proposal to restructure the rent levels across all our properties.

Re-structuring our rent charges will ensure that tenants living in similar property types and sizes are paying the same amount of rent. This will help to ensure greater consistency and fairness and will make it easier for you to understand how your rent charge is calculated.

If you haven't already done so please read through the leaflet that has been sent to you, or you can view the information and ways to provide feedback on these proposals on our website www.irvineha.co.uk



Upcoming Consultations

As a member of our Customer Panel you will have the opportunity to influence and comment on these consultations. If you aren't a member of our Customer Panel yet turn to page 5 for details on how to join.

Rechargeable Repairs Policy

The Association is in the process of developing a rechargeable repairs policy. Each year there are a number of repairs carried out by the Association which have been caused due to tenant damage or neglect. This costs the Association time and money which could be better spent on other repair and maintenance priorities. The Association is keen to support tenants to take responsibility for these repairs as far as possible and ensure we have a consistent and fair approach to applying recharges.

Formal Customer Involvement Strategy

Engaging with our customers is at the heart of what we do, whether it be on an individual or collective basis. We have a strong history of involving our customers and our new strategy will set out how we build on this and engage with even more customers so that as many people as possible can have their say about how we provide our services to you.

Aids and Adaptations

In the past few months we have invested more funding to deliver aids and adaptations for our tenants. We are in the process of developing a new prioritisation and delivery process for adaptation works to ensure that tenants who are most in need receive them within required timescales. This will involve close working with our partners in Health and Social Care services and we will be asking for your opinions on our proposals in the New Year.

Your views matter! For your chance to win a £50 shopping voucher, please complete the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy Review Survey by 29 January 2018 online at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NAHRConsultation

Stay frost free this Winter

With Winter upon us it is important to know what to do in the event of burst or frozen pipes.

In the event of a burst pipe, turning the cold water stopcock off will immediately minimise damage. Your stopcock is usually under the kitchen sink, or in a pipe chase in the ground floor toilet. When turned off there should be no water supply at your kitchen sink cold tap.

- Turn off water at the stopcock.
- Turn on all taps and flush the toilet to drain the system of any water.
- If the burst pipe is within the central heating, pipework, radiators etc. turn off your central heating system.
- Bind the leak tightly with a towel placing a basin or bucket below to catch any drips.
- If near electric cables or cables are wet, turn off electricity at the mains.
- Call our Customer Services Team immediately on 0345 112 6600.

In the event of frozen pipes

- Turn off water at the stopcock.



- Turn on all taps and flush the toilet to drain the system of any water.

If you are unsure please call our Customer Services Team on 0345 112 6600.

If going on holiday leave the heating system on at a continuous setting of 10°C. As long as your gas and electricity supplies are left on, the heating system will operate as normal to protect against frost damage.

I have no gas – call your gas supplier.

I can smell gas – call TRANSCO on 0800 111 999.

I have no heating/ hot water – call Customer Services on 0345 112 6600.

I have no water at all – call Scottish Water Emergency Helpline – 0845 600 8855.

Universal Credit

The government is in the process of rolling out massive changes to welfare benefits which will affect the money you receive so it's important that you are prepared.

Full service Universal Credit is being rolled out in Irvine Housing Association's areas from November 2017 and will affect a large proportion of our customers.

Get in touch as soon as you hear you're moving onto Universal Credit. Claims are made and maintained online and it takes around six weeks from making a claim to receiving your first payment so it is really important not to delay.

We can help you get started, answer any questions, ensure you get everything you're entitled to, and understand the process. Our experts are highly trained in all kinds of benefits including Universal Credit. We can also help you access other support, open a bank account and get online to make your application easier.

Home Contents Insurance



Make sure that you are covered for the unexpected by taking out home contents insurance - this covers furniture, floor coverings, internal decoration and personal belongings.

If you have no home contents insurance you can apply for cover at an affordable rate by calling Thistle Tenant Risks on 0345 450 7286 or by visiting www.thistletenants-scotland.co.uk

For free practical advice visit www.irvineha.co.uk or contact our money advisors Clair Christie and Jocelyn McConnell on **01294 316 784/775**.

“I can afford to heat my home now.”

This summer our affordable warmth officer, Kathryn Morrison began working with a customer who was struggling to heat his home and live comfortably.

Kathryn met Mr Smith* in July after one of our asset team made a referral to her following a visit to his property.

Mr Smith is a vulnerable customer in his sixties who had been unable to keep up with the day-to-day management of his property, his finances and his health. He had also isolated himself from his family and would not accept any support.

As a result of his extremely poor health Mr Smith attends hospital weekly and needs his heating on 24/7.

When Kathryn visited his property, it became apparent that the condition of Mr Smith's home and garden was very poor. Mr Smith was heating his home with unsafe electric heaters. He was not using gas heating as he had a high debt on his meter and did not have enough money to top up both his electric and gas meters.

Kathryn got to work straight away, contacting Mr Smith's energy supplier and reducing the debt recovery rate on his gas meter. She provided a £49.00 Helping Hands paypoint voucher to allow Mr Smith to top up his gas meter and start using heating.

Kathryn arranged for gas engineer to carry out inspection of the boiler and heating system and arranged various repairs to his home and garden.

Mr Smith was added to the Priority Services Register.

Kathryn submitted an application for the Warm Home Discount on Mr Smith's behalf, as well as a trust fund application to his energy supplier.

Kathryn also referred Mr Smith to our money advisor to assist with benefits, and to our allocations team to assist in submitting an application for a change of property.

Five months on and thanks to Kathryn's intervention Mr Smith is now using gas central heating and maintaining top ups each week. Mr Smith is no longer using unsafe electric heaters.

His trust fund application was successful and Mr Smith has had over £1,010 debt cleared from his gas meter as well as being awarded the £140 Warm Home Discount.



Our money advisor is assisting with a review of Mr Smith's personal Independence Payment and submitting with an application for a higher rate.

Our allocations team has assisted with an application for a change of property and Mr Smith is now on the waiting list for sheltered housing.

Maintenance works have been carried out to the property and garden, including paintwork, new sink units, fencing works and a general tidy up.

Mr Smith and his family are delighted with the assistance provided and have fed back that Kathryn's intervention has transformed his life. Mr Smith can now remain safe and comfortable in his property and is able to heat his home without the stress and worry of debt.

For free practical advice visit www.irvineha.co.uk or contact Kathryn on **01294 316756**.

* customer's name has been changed.