

# Your house & home

Welcome to this edition of your service update from Irvine Housing Association



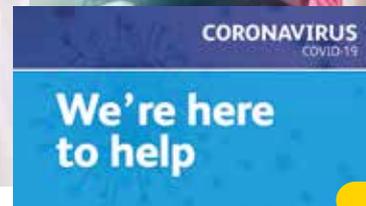
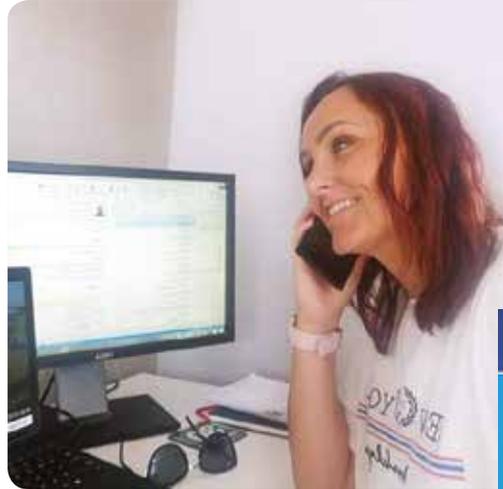
## Welcome to our new Chair

We recently confirmed the appointment of a new Chair to the Irvine HA Board, starting from September.

Jim Strang – who has more than 40 years’ experience within the housing sector – will join the Board of Governance at our AGM in August, with a view to taking on the role of Chair from September.

He will replace current Chair Duncan McEachran, whose five year maximum tenure comes to an end at that time.

Jim served as President of the Chartered Institute of Housing in 2018/19 and held a number of key strategic and managerial roles within the housing sector over the past four decades.



## Looking ahead to a brighter 2021

With the announcement of the Scottish Government’s roadmap out of lockdown, 2021 is starting to look brighter for us all.

We’d like to extend our thanks to all of our customers, staff and volunteers for continuing to keep people safe and well during this time.

As we continue to adapt our service we wanted to keep you updated with all the latest changes and in this edition of Your House & Home you will find updates from across the business on the latest developments.

The last year has been a time of great change for all of us, including how we do things at Irvine HA, and across The Riverside Group.

In this edition of your service update, we’ve got a special interview with Paul Hillard, Managing Director of Irvine HA, to talk you through the improvements we have made to our service.

We’re also bringing you the latest news on our repairs and maintenance service, as well as highlighting ways for you to get involved and have your say.



### Your Services

Read our interview with Irvine HA Managing Director Paul Hillard about the changes we’ve made to our service.

### Your Updates

Get all the latest news and find out what’s happening in your area.



## “My focus has been the wellbeing of our customers”

With coronavirus changing the way we all live on a day-to-day basis, we caught up with Irvine HA Managing Director, Paul Hillard, to ask how the business is adapting.



### Hi Paul, first of all, how have you been dealing with the pandemic?

I'm well, thank you. Like many people, I've been working at home throughout but aside from that, as far as possible, it's been business as usual, continuing to work on trying to get things right for our customers.

### What's been your focus since this whole situation began?

My focus has been the wellbeing of our customers. Once the first lockdown began, we set our team a challenge – to contact every single customer just to check-in and say “are you ok?” I just felt like it was the right thing to do – to offer our support. Our team embraced it and made contact through thousands of calls, emails and texts. We got great feedback and that, along with the surveys we've been doing throughout, helped us get a sense of the challenges people were facing.

### So what were those challenges?

Aside from the impact on people's physical and mental wellbeing, the biggest was financial. Lots of people started to build up rent arrears – whether because they'd lost jobs, were on furlough or something else. We knew we had to act so we quickly launched our Let's Talk Rent campaign. We knew we had to reach out to people struggling. While it doesn't take away the financial hardship people are facing, it has been a real success. We've had more than 2,800 conversations and helped thousands of customers claim an additional £215,000 in benefits. Our team continues to contact customers to check their welfare and to sign-post them to local community hubs and our own internal support systems.





## What about the challenges for Irvine HA? What's been most difficult in terms of maintaining services?

Managing and continuing with repairs has been challenging. There have been times when we were only able to do emergency repairs. This means a backlog builds up and has created some delays, although we hope to be able to return to full service again soon. We're grateful to our customers for their patience during this time.

## Has Irvine HA been able to continue to make improvements for customers during this period?

That's one of those questions that only customers can answer and it will depend on their experience. We've certainly tried to implement a number of improvements which make a difference. The greater communication we've done has been a factor – check-in calls, website updates, the Let's Talk Rent campaign, Facebook webchats – we've communicated much more since coronavirus came along. We've certainly made digital improvements – we're planning to launch a new system to allow people to track when our team are on their way to do a repair in a similar way to delivery companies. That will make a big difference. On homelessness and supporting the customers who need it most – there has been an amazing effort to safeguard and support those people through the crisis, something I'm very proud of. We're going to keep up the additional support we're offering on rent too and, across the Riverside Group, we're also working to improve our Customer Service Centre, altering the way we work to ensure your calls are always answered and answered effectively.

Despite facing the challenges around delivering services during a pandemic, thanks to the hard work of our team, operational delivery was maintained throughout, and the much needed support for our customers continued to be delivered.

## How to get support

### Coronavirus

Find out the latest information on our services at <https://www.irvineha.co.uk/coronavirus-faqs/> or by calling **0345 112 6600**.

### News

To stay in touch with the latest news from Irvine HA, visit <https://www.irvineha.co.uk/about-us/news-blog/> or follow us on social media. Search "Irvine Housing Association" on Facebook or Twitter.

### Wellbeing

If you are struggling with your mental wellbeing, there are organisations that can help. You can contact Samaritans by phone on **116 123** or you can email them at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). Another option is Shout, which you can contact via text message on **85258**.

### Repairs and other services

For queries on your tenancy, repairs or other services, please first visit [www.irvineha.co.uk](http://www.irvineha.co.uk) and use the search bar to search for information about your query. Many of the calls we get can be solved with a simple visit to the website and this helps to keep telephone lines free for emergencies and calls which cannot be solved via the site. If your query isn't answered, please get in touch with our Customer Service Centre on **0345 112 6600**.



If you have any questions about how you can access our services, call our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on **0345 112 6600**.

## Your new rent from April

Every year we ask you to take part in a rent consultation so you have an opportunity to have a say in how much rent you pay.

We know what a challenging time it has been and remains for many of our customers and we have strived to keep rent increases to an absolute minimum whilst continuing to deliver our services to you.

Taking into account feedback from customers, this year rents will increase by 1.5% (in addition to any increase from the rent restructure implemented in April 2018).

The increase will allow us to maintain current levels of service, which includes a £1.8m investment in improving the quality of our properties, making homes more energy efficient and a dedicated fund to improve our estates and reduce anti-social behaviour.

## Modular housing

Work is underway on a new modular housing development – our first in South Ayrshire, which will deliver 63 new affordable homes in Dundonald.

We've partnered with The Wee House Company on the project and once finished there will be a blend of house types, including one bedroom flats, three bedroom houses and two bedroom amenity bungalows.



## Would you like to become a tenant Board member?

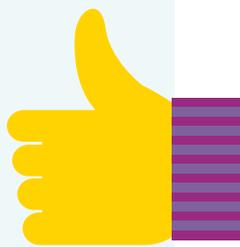
We will start recruiting soon for a new tenant member of our Board to represent our customers and contribute to the decision-making of the association.

If you'd like to find out more please email [donna.boyle@irvineha.co.uk](mailto:donna.boyle@irvineha.co.uk).

## Our performance

Don't forget that all housing association tenants can report significant performance failures to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Just go on the Scottish Housing Regulator's website and select the "For tenants" tab to find out more.



### Find us on Facebook and Twitter

You can talk to us and keep up to date by joining us on social media.

Search for **Irvine Housing Association** on Facebook and **@IrvineHA** on Twitter.