



YOUR HOME

THE NEWSLETTER OF ATRIUM HOMES | NO. 59 - SUMMER 2024

ATRIUM REACHES OUT TO **CONNECT** with **CUSTOMERS**



We recently launched a new **'Reach and Connect'** initiative, designed to offer a support and information service to our tenants – this will allow us to tailor and develop our services to better meet your needs.

Through 'Reach and Connect' we'll be developing our communication channels, improving your access to services, giving more opportunities for feedback and, ultimately, improving engagement with our communities.

The overall aim of the Reach and Connect project is to build positive, trusting relationships with our customers – we want to empower you to reach your full potential, and to ensure your views are communicated and reflected in Atrium's activities.

WHAT ARE WE OFFERING?

Reach

The aim of the 'Reach' part of this initiative is - through early intervention/prevention, advice and practical help - to support tenants on a short-term basis to maintain stable accommodation and develop the skills they need to sustain an independent tenancy and avoid homelessness.

To do this, we've created a new Community Coach post to provide a visiting service to help people manage their money or offer support to give them confidence to be independent and take control of decisions that affect them.

Connect

When tenants engage with their landlord, it benefits everyone:

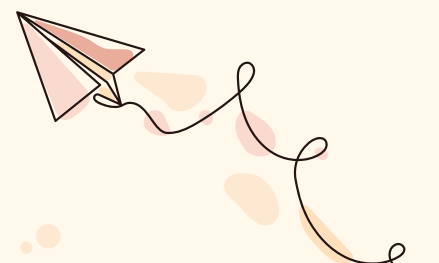
- **For us, your landlord**, it lets us see things from your point of view - what you feel is working well, or not - and helps us continually improve our services or introduce new initiatives to make life as an Atrium tenant better.
- **For you, our tenants**, it can be a great way to learn some new skills. It can help you understand how Atrium works and how you can make a difference to the way we deliver services.

Communication is key in any area of work. At Atrium, we want to provide a range of new communication methods so

you can receive relevant information in a timely, clear and transparent manner.

To do this, we've created a new Community Connector post to take our tenant engagement forward. Working with all internal departments and customers, they'll take a more proactive approach to our communications and marketing, as well as develop the Tenant Scrutiny Group and other channels for feedback.

We look forward to introducing our new Community Coach and Community Connector to you in the next issue, and working together with you, our customers, to improve our connections and services.





Dear Tenant

Atrium's team has been busy during the past few months since our last newsletter.

Our last newsletter focussed strongly on supporting tenants and service users as we navigated our way through the continuing cost of living crisis and headed towards the coldest months of the year, while the cost of keeping our homes warm kept going up.

We've continued to provide a Money Advice service to tenants, as well as securing more funding to help tenants in need. We've distributed £29,000 of cash assistance to almost 600 of our tenants to help with the cost of heating their homes through the winter. And we secured £16,500 of funding to provide 'Warm & Well' starter packs to new tenants, to make sure they had the essential items they needed to be warm in their new homes.

We also worked with our fellow social landlords in Ayrshire to secure funding for an Energy Advisor who could support those tenants who contacted us because they were struggling to deal with energy supply tariffs and debt.

We collected almost 100% of the rent due to us in the past year, and lost only 0.4% of our rental income to properties which were empty during the year. The number of new tenancies which have been sustained for more than a year has also remained at a high level of 93%. All of this has been achieved by you working with us to ensure your tenancies are as successful as they can be, and by keeping in touch with us if you're struggling so we can support you as much as we can and signpost you to the advice you need.

Our reactive and cyclical maintenance contractors have worked with us over the past year to ensure repairs are done as quickly as possible and that you don't experience a drop in service levels. I'm pleased to say that our response times have improved during the year, with over 98% of routine repairs and 96% of emergency repairs completed within the agreed contractor timescales. Our percentage of repairs completed Right First Time has also improved from 85% last year to 94% this year.


Our spend on day to day and cyclical repairs to your homes totalled £1.1 million in 2023/24, and we also invested £2.7 million in improvements to empty and tenanted homes in the year.

Between 2020 and 2022, there was a lack of progress on the Homes Fit For 21st Century Standard Living works to tenants' homes which was frustrating for you and us. In 2023/24, however, our contractor improved the standard of almost 150 homes, bringing Phase Three to a successful end.

We reviewed the condition of the remaining 400 homes due to be improved in Phases Four and Five of the programme, and the Atrium Board confirmed their commitment to completing the improvement works needed on these homes over a period

assistance with your tenancy, you can get us on the phone, by email, through the portal, by logging contact through our website or by coming into our office in Shortlees. The office is open to our customers on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. We still work on a Wednesday (though the office is closed) and are contactable by phone and electronic means. If you want a face-to-face chat with a specific person, please call ahead to check the person you need to speak to will be in the office and available to see you when you come in.

Many tenants are struggling to make ends meet. However, continuing to pay your rent is vital to make sure you can stay in your home and that we can provide essential services to all our



If you're struggling, we will try to support you as much as we can and signpost you to the advice you need.

of three years. CCG have now started work on Phase Four of the programme in Stewarton and we're working with tenants and the contractor's staff to ensure that lessons learned from the earlier years of this project are considered in the way that we work going forward.

If you need to speak to a member of the team to request a repair or for

tenants. If you're struggling though, please get in touch so we can help you find the support you need.

Best wishes

Shannon Watson
Chief Executive



Hello

I hope you're all keeping well and enjoying the summer so far.

The Board has continued its work to support the management of Atrium Homes, helping to ensure that what we do fits with the strategy set out in Atrium's Business Plan. The Board is made up of volunteers who give their time to Atrium. It meets 10 times a year and there are sub-committees which meet once a quarter to deal with the three main areas of Atrium's business – Operations; Investment; and Finance, Audit & Staffing.

We've been able to take care of business effectively by holding a mixture of virtual and in-person meetings. We've spent a lot of our time talking about the financial sustainability of the business and how we can continue to invest in improving the homes our tenants live in, while managing increasing costs.

We received regular reports during the year on complaints about our service. We received 60 complaints during the year, seven of which were treated as Stage 2 complaints, and the staff at Atrium upheld 57% of those complaints. They then worked with their team members and contractors to resolve

the complaints quickly and to ensure tenants were happy with the outcomes, with response times staying strong during the year.

We worked with the management team this year to review the investment plans for Atrium Homes for the next few years. With the cost of heating homes stabilising, but staying higher than historic levels, we'll continue to consider how we balance the money that we spend between work that will make your homes more energy efficient, and work which will ensure the rest of your home is of a good standard.

We made good progress on the Homes Fit For 21st Century Living Standard work programme in the year to 31 March 2024. We upgraded almost 150 houses in the year and we've now upgraded over 400 houses under this programme.

Our contractor has now started work on Phase Four of the programme, working in Stewarton. We held a drop-in session for tenants in the town ahead of the work starting, to give them the opportunity to meet key members

of the delivery team and get more information on the work which would be happening in their homes.

We said goodbye to one of longest serving Board members in March, Joe Keen. Joe was on our Board for almost nine years and had served as Chair for five years of that time. The Board will miss his input to meetings and decisions being made, and wish him all the best for his retirement.

We're always keen to hear from tenants who would like to work with us to help shape our services and how they're delivered. Being on the Board is not the only way that you can do this, and you can be involved in a number of less formal ways. These include groups like our Armchair Panel and our Tenant Scrutiny Group. You can find out more on our website at www.atrium-homes.co.uk/get-involved/.

Best wishes

Alistair Reid,
Chair

COME ON BOARD – WE NEED YOU!

We want to strengthen our Board by appointing new members. Would you like to join us?

Board members set Atrium's overall organisational strategy and objectives, and also monitor our performance. So, it's important there's a good mix of skills and experience on our Board at any one time to match our business needs.

Skills and knowledge that we would love to see further represented on our Board just now include an experienced finance professional; individuals with experience of social housing or of working in the

third sector, especially with vulnerable groups; or a business leader interested in the work of social landlords.

Equally, we're always very keen to attract people who have had experience of our services as customers and who are committed to helping us improve those services. What is most important to us, is that Board members share our core values and objectives, possess an inquiring mind and demonstrate a willingness to challenge.

All positions are voluntary but reasonable expenses to facilitate attendance at meetings will be paid. Induction and further training will also be provided.

You can find out more about our activities by visiting our website www.atrium-homes.co.uk/ or the SHR website www.housingregulator.gov.scot/



You can download an application pack by clicking on this link: www.atrium-homes.co.uk/resources/Board-Member-Application-Pack.zip

Closing date for applications: Friday 28th June 2024 at 12:00 midday

This is an excellent opportunity for someone to help make a difference to people's lives. Please contact us at info@atrium-homes.co.uk or call **01563 528 816** for an informal discussion with Shannon Watson, Chief Executive.



Maintenance Special

TENANT AND RESIDENT SAFETY

Gas Safety

It's essential that our contractor GasSure can gain access to your home to carry out the annual gas safety check of your boiler - Atrium is legally required to do this.

We appreciate that people have other commitments, but you must allow us access to undertake this service when it's due - otherwise we'll have to gain entry to your home.

The process starts well in advance of the certificate expiry date, so there's time to change appointments if the initial date you're given doesn't suit. You can contact GasSure on 01294 468 113 to arrange an alternative time.

Electrical Periodic Testing

Our contractor, Magnus Electrical, continues to complete electrical testing where this is required. Contact will be made directly with tenants who are included in the programme.

The electrical testing is an important aspect of making sure your home remains electrically safe and we appreciate your co-operation in having this test carried out. We must carry out an electrical safety test of your home every five years.

Legionella

As the weather turns warmer, there's a potential increased risk of Legionella forming in water tanks and pipes. Follow these simple steps to help protect yourself and family, and limit the likelihood of this bacteria forming in your tank:

1. Run water through all taps every week.
2. Thoroughly clean, disinfect and descale your showerhead every three months or sooner if it needs it.
3. Run water through all taps for a few minutes when you return from holiday.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS SERVICE

Keep these numbers next to your telephone for easy reference:

Emergency Repairs

01563 528 816

Gas Emergencies

GasSure on 01294 468 113

Gas Leaks

Scotland Gas Networks on 0800 111 999

General Repairs

Atrium Homes on 01563 528 816

Please only use the out of hours emergency service when it is a **REAL** emergency such as:

- Burst or leaking pipes
- Loss of power to the house
- No heating or hot water
- Storm damage which requires action to ensure the property is wind and watertight

If the problem can wait until office hours with only minor inconvenience, it would not be classed as an emergency. If tradesmen are called out to incidents that are not emergencies or are found to have been caused by you, we will recharge the cost of the call out. The minimum cost of this is £75.

OUR MAINTENANCE LINE IS AVAILABLE 24/7 AND REPAIRS CAN BE REPORTED BY PHONE, EMAIL, TENANT PORTAL OR VIA OUR WEBSITE



INVESTMENT WORKS



Works in Phase 4 of our major investment programme have already begun. CCG are upgrading properties in Stewarton and will then move into Shortlees later in the year. Surveys are ongoing to allow tenants to make their choices and detail the required works. The indicative programme for Phases 4 and 5 is available on our website and we'll also contact you when work is planned in your home.



Following feedback from tenants who hadn't received enough information before works started on their homes, staff held a 'Meet the Team' event in the Stewarton Area Centre. This gave tenants the chance to drop in and chat over the process with the teams involved in delivering the upgrades. We'll hold a similar event for tenants in Shortlees before CCG move to this area and will keep tenants included in this Phase updated on this event - we'd be delighted to see you there!

STOCK CONDITION SURVEYS

Stock condition surveys are carried out on a rolling basis in properties in various areas. The information we collect from these surveys helps us prioritise future work. We've been doing more of these surveys in the last couple of years, especially on properties where planned investment work hasn't been carried out in recent years.

Surveys are ongoing and we'll contact you directly if we'd like access to your home to have a stock condition survey completed.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Our maintenance line is available 24/7 and repairs can be reported by phone, email, tenant portal or via our website. We'll record them and pass instructions to the relevant contractor to carry out the repair. The contractor may then contact you directly to get more details on the repair or to make an appointment with you. Please note that any emergency repairs should be reported to us immediately by calling the office.

EVICTON UPDATE

Atrium taking action

Most people are aware of landlords carrying out evictions for rent arrears or antisocial behaviour and for Atrium this does represent the majority of cases that, sadly, we require to take action against.

Recently, however, we've had to start eviction proceedings on a number of cases due to both the condition of the tenant's garden and their property. This is an unprecedented situation for us, as we try to work with tenants to improve the conditions of their home. But we feel we can no longer allow the blight on the wider community that some of these properties cause.

If you don't look after your home and garden, it's considered to be a breach of this condition of your tenancy and we can raise legal action to recover your home:

Within the Tenancy Agreement, it clearly states one of the conditions of your tenancy as:

3. Deterioration of the property

If you or someone you live with has caused the home to get into a bad state, either by damaging it or not taking care of it, you can be evicted.

This also includes areas you share with your neighbours, like the stairwell or the garden.



Atrium does not take this step lightly.

We have attempted to work with tenants for years to improve/have them improve their property and garden conditions using methods such as:

- Action plans, with small tasks set incrementally
- Paying for skips
- Paying for clearances
- Working with third party organisations to offer support and signposting to other assistance
- Regular visits by staff to support individuals

However, some tenants refuse to engage or make any reasonable attempts to address the condition of their property and garden. This can lead to environmental and pest control issues that often impact neighbouring properties and lead to regular complaints from surrounding homes.

While we will always try to support vulnerable tenants and work with people to support them through their issues, we also have a duty to support the wider communities and feel we have no alternative but to start taking legal action against households who are simply making no progress towards improving the conditions of their home and garden.

Keep on top of your rubbish!

Not disposing of household waste properly continues to be a problem across much of our communities.

This includes dumping bulk items in bin areas, leaving bags at the side of bins or disposing of general household waste in recycling bins.

This can attract vermin such as rats and foxes. This is not only a threat to public health, but also makes our communities look unsightly and can represent a fire hazard/health hazard.

- If you know of anyone disposing of rubbish improperly and in an antisocial manner, please report this to your Housing Officer.
- Help us to make sure our communities are attractive areas we can all be proud of - dispose of all your household waste responsibly.

Remember - East Ayrshire Council is responsible for any cleansing issues including bins not being emptied, so please call them direct on **01563 554400** if you notice any issues with your bins.

Your collection services

This leaflet provides you with important information on how to use your containers.

Recycling Trolley & Food Waste	Brown Bin	Green Bin
Paper, card, plastics, cartons, cans, mixed glass, food	Garden waste	Landfill waste
		
Collected weekly	Collected every 4 weeks MARCH - NOVEMBER	Collected every 3 weeks

Check your calendar for collection days

LITTER HUB

Did you know you can contact Atrium for equipment to clean up your community, street, backcourt or anywhere you think needs a tidy up?

The pack contains litter pickers, black bags, gloves and hi-vis vests. You can borrow the equipment by contacting the office on **01563 528 816**.



Excess & additional recycling

Collected as required - recycling trolley materials, small electrical items, household batteries or textiles, using either of your existing black or red boxes.

YES	NO
Place all bagged items in box(es) or place on top of recycling trolley unless otherwise advised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ No liquids ✗ Large electricals * ✗ Loose batteries in box ✗ Loose or soiled/wet textiles ✗ Carpets * ✗ Duvels * ✗ Cushions* ✗ Pillows * ✗ Do not mix bagged materials - the crew will check and if mixed will be left
<p>Bagged & Tied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Paper & card ✓ Plastics & cans ✓ Clean & dry textiles, including paired shoes ✓ Household batteries - tie loosely to trolley handle 	<p>*If in good condition can be reused via Recycling Centres or donated to Charities</p>
<p>Loose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mixed glass - in either red or black box ✓ Plastics & cans - contained in red box by net ✓ Large flattened card - place alongside the recycling trolley on collection day 	
<p>Small Electricals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Items such as hairdryers, kettles, drills, small games consoles (no bigger in size than a standard four slice toaster) within the box, if an item is too big it will be left at the kerbside 	<p>TOP TIP: Try not to place your red or black box out on windy days - either store until next week or take to your nearest recycling centre or recycling point</p>

Summer's here and the growing season is in full swing, so we all need to play our part in keeping our areas looking their best.

Our landscapers are now out regularly cutting grass and maintaining common areas. However, individual gardens are the responsibility of the tenant, in line with the terms of your tenancy agreement.

It's always great to see well-maintained gardens and growing spaces, and Atrium holds an Annual Garden Competition to recognise tenants who have made a particular effort to keep their area beautiful.



ANNUAL *Garden* COMPETITION

Ready... steady... grow!

We know many of you take pride in your gardens and the places you live. Our Annual Garden Competition is an excellent opportunity to celebrate your homes, and the hard work and commitment you put into making sure your properties stand out in your neighbourhoods.

You don't have to be a professional gardener to enter. We're simply looking for tenants with passion, enthusiasm, originality and a good eye for detail.

The Annual Garden Competition is open to all tenants, in every estate. You don't even have to enter OR have a "proper" garden to win. Our staff will be out and

about looking for outdoor spaces of all shapes and sizes where they feel tenants have made a real effort - from hanging baskets and tubs, to flower beds, vegetable patches and main gardens. So, whatever or wherever you grow, it could win you a prize!

The competition is open to all tenants, in every estate. All gardens shortlisted in the competition will be entered into a draw, with 10 prizes of £25 available. The panel will also select an overall winner who'll receive £50. We'll announce the winners by 6 August 2024. So, start now and give yourself a winning chance!

HERE ARE SOME PHOTOS FROM PREVIOUS YEARS TO GIVE YOU SOME INSPIRATION!



GARDEN IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

**Awards to help make
your garden grow.**

Maybe you feel you're a million miles away from winning a prize in the Garden Competition. If you're keen to improve your garden, but could do with a bit of a hand, you could apply for a Garden Improvement Award.

For a couple of years now, we've been offering awards to individuals who would like to improve their garden/s but don't have the means - either financial or practical - to do so.

We're doing things a little bit differently this year. Once you apply for some assistance, we'll assess your garden and decide what equipment would make the most difference - a lawnmower, strimmer, extension lead, etc - and we'll get the items delivered to you. After that, we'll keep in regular contact and do some visits to make sure you're getting the most out of the equipment.

Interested? All you need to do is tell us a little bit more about your ideas and what help you need.

So go on, collect a form for a Garden Improvement Award from our office, email info@atrium-homes.co.uk or contact us via Facebook.





We know it's just the start of summer, but here's some helpful information to consider before the kids go back to school...

Do you have a child either starting or remaining at school?

You may be eligible for support from the benefits listed below in addition to Universal Credit, Tax Credits, Child Benefit and Scottish Child Payment that you already receive.

We've included the links to the websites to check eligibility and allow you to apply. Our Money Advice team are happy to help with any benefit queries. Please contact them on 01563 528 816 to arrange an appointment.

Clothing grant and school meals

- If you qualify for a clothing grant, you're entitled to an award of £120 per child attending primary school and £150 per child attending secondary school. This can only be paid once a year. If your child is

intending to stay on after 4th or 5th year, any award will not be paid until they return to school in August.

- If you qualify for free school meals, a weekly allowance will be added to your child's ParentPay account. This will allow them to choose a standard two course meal daily. (All children in primary 1-5 are automatically entitled to free school meals.)
- **You can apply via East Ayrshire Council:** <https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/CouncilAndGovernment/Benefits/Benefits-EducationAndSchool/Clothing-grants-and-free-school-meals/Apply-online.aspx>

School Age Payment

The Best Start Grant School Age Payment is a £314.45 payment to help

with the costs of preparing for school.

To find out more or apply, go to: www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/best-start-grant/

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

An EMA is a weekly payment of £30 for students who are planning to continue in post-compulsory education from August 2024. If you have a child aged between 16-19 years old, who is attending school or college, they may be able to get an EMA, which is dependent on your household income

To find out more or apply, go to: www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/councilandgovernment/benefits/benefits-educationandschool/schools-maintenancegrants/educationmaintenanceallowance.aspx

DEALING WITH PESTS IN THE HOME



Occasionally, you may experience vermin, such as mice or rats, in or around your home. And over the summer, infestations of ants, wasps or other insects can be common.

Dealing with such vermin or infestations is the responsibility of tenants, not Atrium Homes - the only exception is rats, which is considered to be a matter of public health.

Rats

All reported sightings of rats should be reported directly to us. We'll arrange for East Ayrshire Council's Pest Control Officers to investigate and deal with the problem.

Wasps and other pests

You should NEVER disturb a wasps nest - these must be removed by East Ayrshire Council's Pest Control Team, who can also deal with other pest control problems.

You can call them on **01563 576 790 (Option 5)**, email

RegulatoryServices@east-ayrshire.gov.uk or report online to request this service.

Please note, this is not a free service and is NOT paid for by Atrium. The Pest Control Team will advise you of the costs involved for your specific problem. Payments for services must be paid in advance and currently are:

- £48 for all pest control work (except fumigations)
- £120 for fumigations

Rats and mice are generally classified as 'High Priority', as are wasp complaints because of the perceived risk of harm. Ants, slaters and other insect pests are generally rated as 'Low Priority' for action.

Remember, some minor pest problems

can be tackled with a number of 'over the counter' solutions and most hardware stores and garden centres sell a wide range of products such as sprays and powders which can be used to eradicate insects. Before using any product, make sure you read the instructions carefully and use only as directed.

Repairs to prevent reinfestation

Although Atrium is not responsible for dealing with vermin or infestations in your home, we will, of course, deal with any necessary repairs after the problem has been dealt with, for example, holes where vermin such as mice are gaining access or if you have had a wasps nest removed.

We'll also carry out maintenance if you believe underlying housing conditions are contributing to the infestation.



The Pest Control Team will advise you of the costs involved for your specific problem.

Let's Kick Off the Summer



Here at Atrium we're all looking forward to a summer of football and will be cheering on Scotland in Euro 2024 in Germany! So, to kick things off we have two Euro competitions for everyone to enter.



WIN DINNER, BED & BREAKFAST FOR TWO!

🏆 BEST DRESSED SUPPORTER

No matter where you watch the Scotland games, either at home or in Germany, we know Scotland fans will be dressed up in football tops and all things tartan, so we'd like to see your photos. There will be a prize of an amazing dinner, bed and breakfast deal for two at Ayrshire Hotel The Loans Inn, which also includes access to the nearby thermal suite at The Gailes Hotel & Spa (T&C's apply). Simply add your photos to the comments section on our Facebook post to enter or email your pictures in to info@atrium-homes.co.uk. We'll pick a winner at the end of Scotland's tournament.



WIN A SCOTLAND SHIRT

🏆 SHOTS ON TARGET

Our next competition requires a bit more guesswork! We'd like you to tell us the number of shots on target the eventual winners of Euro 2024 will have throughout the tournament. All correct guesses will be entered into a draw to win a Scotland top, home or away, of any size. To enter, please **check out our Facebook page** and enter your guess by Friday 28th June 2024. Good luck!



ATRIUM HOMES

The Landlord of Choice

If you have any comments or questions or want to know what Atrium is doing at the moment, then please get in touch. Our contact details are:

Atrium House
14 Central Avenue, Shortlees
Kilmarnock / KA1 4PS

T. 01563 528 816
E. info@atrium-homes.co.uk
W. www.atrium-homes.co.uk