

horizon news

newsletter for tenants

Covid-19 update

A lot has happened during the past few months. When we published our spring newsletter three weeks into lockdown, little did we know what was ahead of us.

We are very pleased to have continued to support our tenants during lockdown. Our IT colleagues worked very hard to make sure everyone, including our customer services team, was able to work from home to provide key services.

Our estates and in-house maintenance teams have also been fully operational over the past few months, helping to keep our estates clean and tidy.

We've re-started our repairs service. If you have an outstanding repair you've not yet reported, please get in touch with us on e-mail@horizonhousing.org or **0330 303 0089**.

Any work we need to do in your home will be done following Scottish Government guidelines. In the interest of safety, please let us know if anyone in your household has symptoms or is shielding.



Horizon team update

In July 2020, we welcomed two new members of staff.

Craig Russell has joined us as our new head of housing and has a wealth of experience, having previously worked for River Clyde Homes, South Lanarkshire Council and Stirling Council.

We also welcomed **Lucas Anderson**, who is looking forward to gaining new skills and knowledge while working as our apprentice painter. As an organisation, we're pleased to pass on our knowledge and give someone the chance to develop. We have a busy schedule with the cyclical programme, so an extra pair of hands is welcomed!

Supporting our tenants through difficult times

Did you know, since lockdown, our tenancy sustainment team has supported 70 tenants to obtain more than £60,000 in welfare benefits and charity applications?

The team offers a range of free support and advice services, including welfare rights and housing support, all tailored to meet your needs.

Could the team help you? Contact us on e-mail@horizonhousing.org or **0330 303 0089** to find out!



In spring 2019, one of our tenants had her Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claim cancelled in error. Unfortunately, by the time this decision had been reversed, the tenant had already been advised to make a Universal Credit (UC) claim.

The tenant set up a telephone claim as she didn't have access to the computer or internet, but no housing costs had been added. UC tried to contact the tenant once and left a message. This was not picked up because the tenant didn't have voicemail facilities.

When we looked into this, we realised the tenant was being underpaid by UC and was entitled to an extra element of Limited Capability for Work (on top of housing costs). The team made various calls before it was added to the claim and the payments were processed. Our team was able to get the tenant an additional £128.25 per month.

We also were able to find items for the tenant's home and with assistance from a charity and our asset management team, organised for her living room and kitchen to get painted. Overall, we were able to get a carpet for the living room, new bedding, curtains, a microwave, cooker and Hoover. In total, an estimated £955 worth of goods and services.

As you can imagine, this made a huge difference to the tenant's mental health and wellbeing.

If you're struggling to pay your rent, we're here to help

We know this is a challenging time for everyone and money may be short, however, paying your rent needs to be a priority. If you are facing financial difficulties, please let us know – the sooner you speak to us the quicker we can help.

There are lots of ways we can provide support, including assisting you to make claims for Universal Credit or other benefits, making charity applications, referring you to foodbanks or, if you are facing problems with debt, finding you the right help.

If you already have an arrear, we will also be happy to discuss an affordable repayment arrangement. Contact us on **0330 303 0089** or e-mail@horizonhousing.org.

If you don't pay your rent, we may have no option but to take court action against you. This could lead to you losing your home. We won't take action against tenants who cannot pay their rent as a result of Covid-19, but you have to tell us about this and work with us to find solutions. We'd urge you to get in touch – if we don't know, we can't help.

RIG – improving our services for you!

Your feedback is important to us – it allows us to make real improvements to our services.

Our Residents' Improvement Group (RIG) is made up of Horizon tenants who work together to look at the services we provide and make recommendations for changes or improvements directly to our Board.



What's it like to be part of RIG?

Billy Durham, RIG member:

“Being part of RIG has been great for me.

“It's so good to have something to

do and look forward to. I really enjoy finding out how things work at Horizon and agreeing with the other group members how things could be better for all tenants.

“This year, we have been looking at satisfaction with the repairs service and have a few ideas we plan to recommend to Horizon to make this better.

“Obviously Covid-19 means we can't all meet face-to-face at the moment, so we are working with TIS (Tenant Information Service), our independent advisor, to look at how we can stay involved from home.”

What is RIG working on?

Sharon Donohoe, Development Director, TIS:

“TIS is delighted to continue to provide independent advice, support and training to

Horizon's RIG to scrutinise services from a tenant point of view.

“Group members are working on a review of tenant satisfaction with the repairs service and how Horizon seeks tenant views on how repairs are reported and carried out.

“The group has reviewed lots of different aspects of repairs satisfaction, including how tenant feedback is gathered, complaints and how repairs information is reported to Horizon's Board.

“Of course, we are all aware Covid-19 has brought new challenges, including how can we get together and hold meetings and discussions when we are in lockdown. TIS is working with RIG members and Horizon to make sure the RIG can continue fulfil its very important scrutiny role.

“We are drafting an interim report of the RIG's findings and recommendations so far, sharing views and ideas by post and telephone and looking at holding meetings virtually from the comfort of our own homes.

“Seeing each other on screen is becoming the new normal for many of us, allowing us to stay in touch with family and friends, continue to meet our group and community members and keep working.” [tis.org.uk/](https://www.tis.org.uk/)



Satisfaction survey results

We want to hear your views on our services so we know what we are doing well and how we can improve, which is why we asked an independent consultant, Research Resource, to carry out a telephone survey in April.



The survey looked mainly at overall satisfaction with all our services, satisfaction with our repairs service, satisfaction with our estates service and tenants' views on whether rent represented value for money.

256 tenants took part - around a third of all tenants. You can see the results below, compared with those of our last survey in 2018 and the national average for Scottish social landlords.

You can find the full results of the survey on our website and if you have any questions, please contact **0330 303 0089** or **e-mail@horizonhousing.org**.

Indicator	2020 survey	2018 survey	Scottish average 2018/19	How are we doing?
% of tenants satisfied with overall service provided	95%	89%	90%	
% of tenants satisfied with the repairs service	83%	86%	92%	
% of tenants satisfied with Horizon's contribution to the management of the neighbourhood	91%	92%	88%	
% of tenants who view Horizon's rent as good value for money	81%	83%	83%	

What are we going to do with the information?

- We were delighted with the increase in overall satisfaction with the service to 95%, up 6% since we last asked the question in 2018.
- We know there is some work to do to improve the satisfaction in our reactive repairs, so we're looking forward to getting RIG's feedback, which we will use to come up with an improvement plan. We'll tell you more in the next newsletter.
- Overall, 91% of tenants rated our management of our estates as good but there are differences in satisfaction rates over the 11 local authority areas we work in, with 100% satisfaction in Edinburgh and East Ayrshire, but satisfaction rates of 86% in North Lanarkshire and 89% in Fife. We'll consult further with tenants in these areas to see how we can improve.
- We are naturally disappointed with the drop in the proportion of tenants who think our rent represents good value for money. The recent rent restructure may have influenced this. We understand some tenants find this difficult, however, we now have a fairer and more transparent rent structure which means rents are equal for the same house property across our stock. We remain committed to keeping our rents affordable and will be working on this throughout the year and working hard to deliver high-quality services.

How did we perform?

Each year, by the end of October, we publish our annual report to tenants. We do this to be transparent about how we are performing and where we could improve. We are also required by the Scottish Housing Regulator to provide this information.

As can be expected, Covid-19 has caused delays. The regulator now expects landlords to tell tenants about their performance from April 2019 to March 2020 before the end of December.

We have decided to take a different approach in reporting our performance this year. Instead of publishing a separate annual report to tenants, we will use our newsletters to inform you about our

performance. Once the regulator publishes information on other landlords' performance, we will involve RIG in deciding in how to present this information to you in our next newsletter.

In the meantime, here are details of how we performed in key areas in the year from April 2019 until March 2020, compared with the Scottish average for 2018/19.



Indicator	Horizon 2019/20	Horizon 2018/19	Scottish average 2018/19	How are we doing?
Overall satisfaction	94.53%	88.9%	90.12%	
Complaints received Stage 1 Stage 2	Responded to in full 178 (total) - 100% 23 (total) - 100%	Responded to in full 173 - 100% 9 - 100%	98.5% 96.36%	
Satisfaction with quality of the home	92.02%	92%	88.12%	
% of tenancy offers refused	9.09%	16.1%	36.32%	
Emergency repairs	1.81 hours	2.15 hours	3.65 hours	
Urgent repairs	5.42 days	4.41 days	6.56 days	
Right first time	89.14%	96.8%	92.52%	
New tenancies sustained	100%	96.1%	88.82%	
% of tenancies that became vacant	6.68%	5.9%	8.56%	
Value for money	81.25%	82.9%	83.21%	
Gross rent arrears*	4.08%	2.9%	5.67%	
Void rent loss	0.25%	0.3%	0.88%	
Days to let	13.90	17.55	31.89	

* This includes tenant arrears written off during the financial year.

Don't give fire a home!

A lot of us are now spending extra time at home, either through home working, social distancing or self-isolation and, now more than ever, it's important you know how to minimise your risk of a fire and what to do in the event of one.

Here are some tips to help you stay safe:



Electrical appliances

- don't overload sockets or extension cables;
- switch off items when not in use and overnight, unless they're designed to be left on such as fridges/freezers; and
- only use approved chargers for appliances, cheaper alternatives may be unsafe. Never leave them on overnight.

Smoking

- don't smoke in bed or when tired; and
- ensure cigarettes are fully extinguished.

Communal areas

- don't obstruct communal areas with bikes, prams, mobility scooters, as these are often the escape routes for the block;
- please keep the main door closed; and
- if you've got items for uplift, please ensure they are safely stored until your council is to collect them.

Cooking

- don't leave pots and pans unattended;
- make sure the cooker or hob is switched off after use;
- clean your grill pan regularly; and
- keep a close eye on children who may be helping in the kitchen.

Escape plan

- keep exits and stairs clear at all times;
- ensure everyone knows where the keys are kept for final exit doors;
- If there is smoke, keep low where the air is clearer; and
- get everyone out and close all doors behind you. Dial 999 and ask for the Fire and Rescue Service.

To book a free fire home safety visit, please call 0800 0731 999 or text "FIRE" to 80800.

Great gardens

We know many of you have been making the most of lockdown by using it as an opportunity to get your gardens in tip-top condition.

We appreciate the efforts many of you put in as it really brightens up our estates. Like last year, we will be issuing tenants with great gardens with a certificate and a voucher as a thank you.

Don't be shy, send us a photo of your garden to e-mail@horizonhousing.org. We are looking forward to seeing your results!



Protect yourself from scams

It's important you're aware of new scams around at the moment as a result of Covid-19. Scams to look out for include:

- advertising face masks or medical equipment at high prices;
- emails or texts pretending to be from the government;
- emails offering life insurance against coronavirus; and
- people knocking at your door and asking for money for charity.

If you see emails or texts about Covid-19 from someone you don't know, or from an unusual email address, don't click on any links or buy anything.

Don't give money or personal details to anyone you don't know or trust - for example, someone who knocks on the door and offers to help.

- If you feel threatened or unsafe, contact Police Scotland on **101** or **999** in an emergency
- Report scams to Advice Direct Scotland on **0808 164 6000**
- Online web-chat Scams Action Service Citizens Advice Scotland
- Suspicious email? Forward it to the National Cyber Security Centre - Suspicious Email Reporting Service (SERS) reporting@phishing.gov.uk
- For further information on nuisance calls, please refer to mygov.scot



Staying in touch

We're constantly adapting so you can get in touch with us in different ways.

For example, did you know you can get in touch with your housing officer via video call? You can also contact us through the MyHorizon app – available to download for free on Google Play and the App store.

Join our Board of Management

Do you want to help people who feel invisible to be seen and heard? Our Board of Management is looking for people who can think out the box, challenge orthodox thinking and have a questioning mind with a good sense of humour!

You'll have a chance to learn new skills and interact with people from different experiences, attend conferences and events and get support with equipment and technology if you need it.

Join our Board and influence the future of your home! For more information, visit www.horizonhousing.org/board or call 0330 303 0089.

We also have a Facebook page, where we publish information and updates on our services. Why not give us a like?

www.facebook.com/HorizonHA

You can also sign up to e-communications by visiting www.horizonhousing.org/digital. Please make sure your contact details (email address and mobile number) are up to date as this will allow us to contact you to confirm appointments or provide you with important updates.

Let your voice be heard!

Do you want to help to influence and inform other organisations, such as tenant groups, landlords, the SHR, Scottish Government and the Tenant Regional Network? Then Tenants Voice Scotland is your place to be! It will give you a say on the things that matter most.

For more information, visit www.tpasscotland.org.uk/tenant-voice-scotland/

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www.horizonhousing.org

Opening hours:

Monday – Tuesday 9am – 5pm, Wednesday 10am – 5pm, Thursday 9am – 5pm, Friday 9am – 4pm. Our office remains closed to the public until further notice.

Out of hours **emergency contacts:**

Gas boiler and heating repairs: 01334 650 452

Other emergency repairs: 0800 783 7937

This newsletter is available in larger print, other languages, audio or other electronic forms. Should you require a copy of this newsletter in any of these formats, please contact **0330 303 0089**.



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