

Newsletter

Spring 2023



Closed for the Public Holidays

Good Friday

- Fri 7th Apr 23

Easter Monday

- Mon 10th Apr 23

May Day

- Mon 1st May 23

Coronation

- Mon 8th May 23

Spring Holiday

- Fri 26th May 23
- Mon 29th May 23

Greenock Fair

- Fri 30th Jun 23
- Mon 3rd Jul 23

September Holiday

- Fri 22nd Sept 23
- Mon 25th Sept 23

Christmas

- Mon 25th Dec 23
- Tues 26th Dec 23
- Wed 27th Dec 23

New Year

- Mon 1st Jan 24
- Tues 2nd Jan 24
- Wed 3rd Jan 24

New Members Wanted

OTHA is seeking new Members to join its thriving Management Committee.

Do you want to improve your personal well being and your career prospects? Do you want a role in improving lives in the Inverclyde area?

If the answer is Yes, then volunteering as a Management Committee Member with Oak Tree might be for you.

We currently have 11 Members with an opportunity to co-opt a further 3 Members who could be on the Committee with the

AGM in August. At that point you could decide to stay on or if it is not for you, you could step down. This is an ideal opportunity to commit only for a few months and decide if it's something you would want to do longer term.

Meetings are held every two months and last usually no more than 2 hours. Attendance can be in person or remotely through Zoom or Teams. Support and training can be available as needed however is often not immediately necessary.

If you are interested, contact Mary McCreadie for a recruitment pack or phone 01475 807019 for a chat.

Building Better Futures

Leadership | Customer Focus | Team Working
Communication | Respect | Integrity



RENT CONSULTATION EXERCISE 2023

In January and February of each year, the Association traditionally carries out a consultation exercise on the proposed rent increase being considered from 1 April of that year. We made a start in December 2022 this time and the information pack and survey was issued with the Christmas newsletter.



We sent everyone information and a survey form by post and for those tenants that we have a mobile number or email address for, we sent an electronic version of the survey. We held 3 separate meetings at different times of the day in our office and these meetings gave us the opportunity to speak to tenants in more detail.

This year we were very aware that it was important to keep the increase as low as we possibly could. With inflation at 10.7% in December 2022 and the expectations that this will continue to rise, we were very pleased to have another below inflation increase of 6%.

Although 6% is significantly below inflation, it is still the highest increase that Oak Tree HA has applied for some years and we acknowledge that it will mean our tenants having to pay a considerable amount more of their income in rent.

This was reflected in the responses to our survey with only 174 responses (compared to 219 the year before)

We asked if tenants felt they had received enough information about the rent increase and 77% said they had. Only 30% said they agreed with the increase of 6% with 70% disagreeing.

We are always keen to capture feedback and we asked for tenants' comments on the rent increase. A total of 112 comments were received. There were some common themes and the comments were grouped into the same themes as in 2022 so a comparison could be made.

Although there were fewer comments than the previous year, the proportion of those who mentioned the cost of living was similar (both 26%).

Theme	Number 2023	Number 2022
Overall rise in cost of living	29	34
Fair increase	10	26
Too high	28	24
Property not up to standard	1	12
General comment	12	9
Planned maintenance comments	10	8
Dissatisfied with service - complaint	4	6
Repairs service	11	6
More information needed	0	4
Enquiry - follow up	6	2
Compliment	1	0
Total	112	131

Thank you to everyone who took the time to give us their views. Annual rent increases are a necessity to allow the Association to continue to maintain our services to our customers and remain financially viable.



Our next quarterly Consultation Café event is taking place on Wednesday 12 April 2023 from 2.00pm till 4.00pm in our office. Since this is during the Easter school holidays there will be some chocolate, cakes and treats available.

The topics we want to consult on are:-

1. Our Tenants Handbook

Every new tenant receives a Tenants Handbook when they sign for their new home. Whilst the information inside the

handbook is refreshed regularly to make sure it is up-to-date, the format of the Handbook hasn't changed for some time. We would like to speak to customers to see if we can review the content and the format to make it even more relevant and useful.

2. In-house Landscaping Service

We are delighted to be able to pilot a new landscaping service and we firmly believe that this will be an improved service to all our customers who benefit from it.

We want to discuss the service with our tenants and find out what aspects of the service are most important to you and how we can shape this new service to make the most of it.

Although this event will focus on the above, we are happy to talk about any aspect of your tenancy. We will have plenty of staff members available who can help with any queries you have.

If you want to come along to this event it would be really helpful if you could let us know in advance on 01475 807000 or email us on info@oaktreeha.org.uk. If you need help with transport please let us know and we will try and assist.

Off the Beatson Track!

Our colleagues Hazel Aitken and Suk Hopper put on their walking shoes on Sunday 28 August 2022 to take part in the 10K Off the Beatson Track event in Glasgow.

The Oak Tree team raised a total of £430.00 and this went towards the overall total sum raised of over £53,000 for the Beatson Cancer Charity.

The Beatson is an internationally renowned cancer centre and the busiest in the UK in terms of clinical activity and patient numbers as well as being the second largest cancer centre in the UK delivering all of the radiotherapy and much of the chemotherapy to the population of the West of Scotland, with a catchment area of 2.5 million people, which is around 60% of Scotland's population.



It was a great event to be a part of and the staff team have some more fundraising ideas for the coming year.



Dealing with Pest Infestations at Oak Tree HA properties

Types of Pest Infestations

Luckily, pest infestations are very rare and the vast majority of our tenants never have any problems with pests of any kind.

However, from time to time there can be problems and this article gives you information on what to do if you become aware of any of the following in your home or surrounding areas, signs to look out for, and tips on what you can do to prevent infestations.

Definition of a Pest

An "Urban Pest" means a destructive insect or other animal which has human health or wellbeing implications.

Examples include:-

- Bedbugs
- Rats
- Mice
- Cockroaches
- Wasps
- Fleas and insects

Urban pests can:

- Spread diseases
- Damage tenants' homes and belongings
- Sting or bite
- Aggravate asthma, eczema, and other allergies



Who is responsible?

The responsibility for pest control and prevention depends on the where the infestation is, the type of pest and the circumstances of how the infestation came about.

Before you moved into your home and the property was empty, Oak Tree Housing Association would have taken measures to make sure that there were no infestations evident in the house or flat and that common areas and gardens appeared to be free of pests and vermin.

Our Housing Services and Maintenance staff regularly check common areas and estates and any evidence of vermin or pests will be dealt with promptly.

We will be responsible for carrying out repairs and treating the infestation (regardless of the pest) if it is apparent that an infestation is caused by disrepair or lack of action on the Association's part.

We will be responsible for carrying out remediation work of neighbouring properties affected by the infestation or commence the block treatment if the infestation spreads to another building.

We will intervene on the most serious infestations promptly (i.e. rats and cockroaches) as they can spread disease and are a risk to public health. Additionally, we will assist, and if need be intervene, if there is an infestation of bed bugs, as if they are not treated promptly they can spread into the fabric of the whole building and can become very difficult and expensive to eradicate. This will include notifying other residents who may be affected.

We will not be responsible for dealing with an infestation if it is caused by the tenants own negligence (i.e.

if they have left food out or have not disposed of rubbish correctly).

In certain cases where the infestation is caused by the tenants own negligence, the tenant may be held liable for the cost of treating such infestations and will be recharged the cost incurred by us for doing so.

We will not be held responsible for any damage caused by pests to tenants' belongings.

What should I do?

Please report problems to the Association as soon as you can, to get advice or assistance as follows:-

Common Areas

If you notice any pests (e.g. mice, rats, wasps, cockroaches) in the common areas, please report this to our repairs or housing services section and we will deal with this.

If the infestation is due to a specific tenant's negligence then we may recharge the cost

Mice, Rats, and Wasps

If you have an infestation in your home, please report this to us via our repair line 01475 807001 and we will arrange the appropriate treatment. This may be in conjunction with Inverclyde Council's Environmental Services department.

Fleas, Beetles, and Insects

You are responsible for arranging your own treatments. Products are readily available in local shops or online. Please read the instructions carefully.

Bedbugs

In the first instance, dealing with bedbugs is your own responsibility but we can help if you need us to.

Bed bugs can spread quickly through your home as they travel in furniture, cases, bedding, and clothing. If you think you may have bed bugs you should wash your bed linen and clothes at as high a temperature as the clothes can handle (ideally 60C), or dry them in a clothes drier, as any temperature above 50C will kill them. Vacuum carpets thoroughly and you may need to use an insecticide for bed bugs. You will need to repeat this several times to kill the eggs.

If you find that these measures haven't been successful then contact the Association and we will contact Inverclyde Council's Environmental Services department who will carry out the treatment.

Preventing Pest Infestations

Here are some tips for a Pest Free Home:

- Make sure food containers are tightly sealed.
- Clear counters, tables and floors of any crumbs and spillages as soon as possible.
- Don't leave any food out on counters for pests to find.
- Drain baths and basins after use; some pests thrive in water.
- Ensure all rubbish and recycling is securely tied and correctly disposed of.
- Avoid feeding birds in the areas around your home.
- If you are a cat/dog owner, regularly treat your pet with a suitable flea treatment. You can ask your vet for more information about this.
- Clear food from behind/underneath cookers and fridges regularly to reduce the chance of insect infestation.



Maintenance Update

In the recent past, the Association awarded contracts for their day to day reactive repairs and void properties to large companies as a result of procurement regulation changes.

We have found that in order to win the work that these companies had been pricing low and then struggling in order to deliver the target timescales required by the Association. This has been mainly due to insufficient labour being in place. This has unfortunately been the case for the last few contracts.

Since the pandemic the larger firms have struggled financially and have either went into administration or requested to negotiate their existing contracts. The Association was no different and we had struggled to maintain tenant satisfaction on repairs to the levels that we require and we apologise for the dip in service to our tenants.

Presently, the Association is in the process of setting up their own contractor framework of various trades such as joiners, electricians, plumbers etc. This will predominantly be made up of small local contractors who the Association is currently using on an interim basis. We hope to have this in place by the end of May 2023 and will update you nearer the time.

We hope that you have noticed a difference in the current contractors being used by the Association as we are now improving on our target timescales and we are happy with the quality of work undertaken when post inspecting works on completion.



Annual Gas Servicing Update

As you are aware, the Association services the boiler in your property every year in order to comply with statutory legislation.

In the majority of cases, the service will go well and the engineer will issue us with a certificate advising that your boiler is safe to use. In a small number of cases, the engineer may issue us with a warning notice if the boiler is unsafe to use. This could be for a number of reasons but as soon as this warning notice is issued then as a landlord we require your boiler to be switched off immediately as a health and safety precaution. This is for your benefit as well as neighbouring properties.

We realise that this will cause you an inconvenience being left without hot water and heating and apologise for this in advance. We would arrange for our contractor to leave you with some temporary heaters and to treat your case as a priority in order to have your boiler up and running again as soon as possible.

We hope that you understand that we require to make this difficult decision in order to protect your safety and those living in neighbouring properties. As a landlord we must comply with gas safety regulations and we have a duty of care to our tenants.



Damp, Cold and Condensation

Every winter the Association publishes an article on how to prevent damp, mould and condensation appearing in your property.

Due to the recent media coverage regarding the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, there has been an increase in reports of damp and mould to the Association which our Maintenance Officers have attended to immediately.

All our Maintenance Officers have received refresher training and will be able to advise you on what steps you can take yourself to alleviate any issues in your home. They will also advise on where the Association is required to undertake remedial works i.e. if there is a leaking pipe that requires to be sealed.

Please contact our maintenance team if you have any concerns regarding your property and this will be treated as a priority.



Maple Road Demolition

In February 2020, the Management Committee took the decision to demolish 72 flats at numbers 7 to 29 Maple Road. This decision was not taken lightly but was as a result of careful consideration. These flats had become increasingly unpopular and taking all factors into account, the sensible decision was to retain 6 blocks at 1-5 and 31-35 Maple Road and demolish the 12 blocks in between.

The project was estimated to take 3 years and we are pleased to report that it will be completed on target. There are no plans to redevelop the site but there will be improvements made to the remaining blocks with improved boundary fencing.

Here are some photos of the site being cleared



Task Area	Task Targets	Target Times (Annual %)	Method of Measuring Performance	Performance Q4 (Jan-Mar) 2021-22	Performance Q1 (Apr-Jun) 2022-23	Performance Q2 (Jul-Sep) 2022-23	Performance Q3 (Oct-Dec) 2022-23
Answer incoming telephone calls	Within 20 secs	100%	Export of data from telephone system	99.06%	99.36%	98.9%	96.7%
Return telephone call	By end of next working day	100%	Checking complaints register and Customer Care survey for non-compliance	100%	100%	100%	100%
Email response	5 working days	100%	As above	100%	100%	100%	100%
Social Media response	5 working days	100%	Facebook inbox & comments	100%	100%	100%	100%
Check new housing application, point and process	10 working days	100%	ICHR Housing Connections Software	Not available – see note **	Not available – see note **	Not available – see note **	N/A – see note **
Time to wait for an appointment to see specific member of staff	Same or next working day	95%	Survey carried out twice per month (rotating days)	N/A – office partially closed	N/A – office partially closed	N/A – office partially closed	N/A – no survey
Task Targets							
Appointments kept/ attended on time	Within 5 mins of agreed time	100%	Survey carried out twice per month (rotating days)	N/A – office partially closed	N/A – office partially closed	N/A – office partially closed	N/A – no survey
Area							
Acknowledge or fully respond to a written enquiry	5 working days	95%	Incoming mail register	90%	100%	100%	98%
Behavioural code of Committee, Staff and Contractors/Agents	Adherence to Code	100%	Based on complaints received via Complaints Handling Procedure	100%	1 incident	100%	3 incidents
Behavioural code of Customers	Adherence to Code	100%	Managers reporting incidents	2 incidents	1 incident	100%	1 incident

** Check new housing application, point and process

There was a significant change to the Inverclyde Common Housing Register in March 2022. The Home Connections system closed on 15 March 2022 and applicants needed to re-register on the new These Homes system. Applications to the new system opened on 23 March 2022. Processing times are not available as applicants can apply immediately for properties once they have registered. All applications are checked and priority passes awarded if applicable. Quarterly reports are being prepared to monitor the number of registrations, lets, complaints and customer feedback to see if trends emerge but processing times will no longer be measured.



We were delighted to have access to a variety of different funding awards that have allowed us to help some of our tenants that have been struggling with the cost of living

and in particular the steep increase in heating and energy bills. We couldn't offer help to every one of our tenants so we have had to prioritise households as best we can.

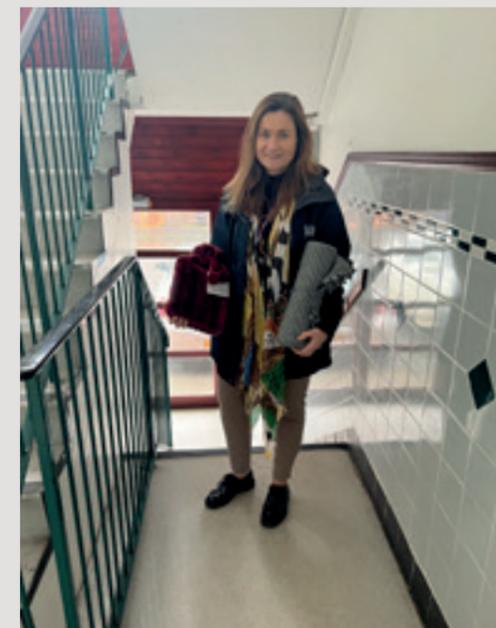
We have been able to refer tenants for energy advice and vouchers to top up their gas and electricity, we have been able to issue our own vouchers and we have access to "warm packs". The items in a warm pack vary but they are designed to help people stay warm and healthy at a low energy cost. Examples are:-

Electric blankets, duvets and blankets, hot water bottles, slow cookers etc. Its not going to solve the cost of living crisis or reduce the cost of energy but it's a small step to helping struggling households.

The funding is ongoing at the moment so there will be an update in a future newsletter when we hope to give you a round up of everything we were able to do.

If you need help, please get in touch and speak to a member of the Housing Team. We want to help and we will do what we can.

Here are Louise Blue and Louise Ward out delivering some warm pack items



Spring Flowers Word Search

Y F C O H O K A G H Y L E C H
 E E L J I C J W Y X Q P S A B
 R H O I I S Z D L J W V O R D
 S S V G L O R J N F U L R N R
 C H R Y S A N T H E M U M A E
 P C G L N N C Y N N D U N T D
 O W J G I L A O L A S I R I N
 P F E A M D M P I I S V A O E
 P A Y E G E O S D S L I Y N V
 Y Q V M N E Y F O R C H I D A
 Z Q R A Y W V X F B A H R M L
 R E W O L F N U S A L G X I U
 T Q R M W C A Q F T D G O O U
 C I M W Y X N O K C I A P N V
 J Q A A U N W I T H U A L D X

Anemone Daffodil Iris Lily Rose
 Carnation Daisy Lavender Orchid Snapdragon
 Chrysanthemum Hydrangea Lilac Poppy Sunflower

Inverclyde Womens Aid moves to new premises

Inverclyde Women's Aid have been providing support to women and young people in this area for over 35 years and they recently moved into Oak Tree Housing Association's former office premises at 41 High Street, Greenock.

There has always been a strong working relationship between the 2 organisations and this move to larger premises will benefit more women and children as the services being provided can now expand.

If you need support, advice or just someone to talk to about domestic abuse, rape or sexual abuse then please contact Inverclyde Women's Aid offices on 01475 781689. There is a refreshed website at www.inverclydewomensaid.co.uk which has lots of information about the services they provide and how to get support – including their dedicated helplines.

You can also speak to a member of our housing team in the first instance if you prefer.



Taking steps to stop Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is one of the biggest issues in society today. The true scale of the problem is difficult to determine because a large proportion of domestic abuse goes unreported, but studies suggest many millions of people are affected every year. Tragically, two women are killed every week by their partner or ex-partner.

Oak Tree Housing Association takes this matter very seriously and our Joint Allocations Policy with Inverclyde Common Housing Register states:-

18.1 We recognise housing need due to domestic abuse by the award of a Gold Priority Pass. We also recognise that not all applicants will want to approach their local authority as homeless but know that victims and children are potentially at severe risk and continue to remain in that position whilst they remain in their home. ICHR Partners will seek to support victims who want to remain in their home but may need to move temporarily. Advice will be given to applicants on relevant agencies that can provide support to anyone experiencing domestic abuse. Applicants will be asked to provide evidence of the support they are receiving from these agencies before a Priority Pass can be awarded

Our Housing team will also deal with disclosures from tenants about domestic abuse in confidence and provide support and signposting to other agencies who can offer specialist advice and support.

Our Lettings Plan allows us to accept direct referrals for rehousing from organisations such as Inverclyde Women's Aid (01475 781689) and the ASSIST team who are a specialist organisation based in Glasgow (0141 276 7710)

We work closely with the Police and if we receive an estate management complaint that we believe relates to domestic abuse then we will speak to the tenant and encourage them to make a complaint direct to the Police and we can also report it to the Police on their behalf.

If you are concerned about the safety of a neighbour, a friend or a family member, please do not hesitate to contact the Police. You can do it anonymously if you prefer. If you witness what you believe is domestic abuse taking place – for example you can hear noise from a neighbouring property or you directly witness something that concerns you – please call 999 straight away.

The Scottish Government has recognised the importance of tackling this issue. A landlord's ability to end a perpetrator's interest in a sole or joint tenancy is a key part of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021. The Scottish Government is currently developing the necessary secondary legislation and guidance and is working with the Scottish Court Service to develop changes to court rules and forms. Although the Bill was passed in 2021, the provisions aren't expected to come into force until later in 2023.

Being a Good Neighbour



Respect your neighbours:

Everyone should be allowed to enjoy freedom from nuisance and annoyance caused by their neighbours, their family or visitors to their home. Good neighbours can usually work out differences without falling out. Where differences can't be resolved, our policy is to work with residents to try to find a solution or to change the behaviour, which is causing concern.

Noise

This is one of the most common complaints we receive. It can be very disruptive noise that affects several neighbours e.g

- Rowdy Visitors
- Parties
- Loud music being played
- Dogs barking

Or it can also be general household noise e.g.

- Noise from televisions
- Household appliances on after 10.00pm (vacuum, washing machines etc)
- Children playing
- Doors slamming
- Walking on laminate flooring with shoes
- DIY noise particularly in the early morning or evening

Sometimes a tactful approach to your neighbour can resolve noise problems. Most people will try to reduce a noise problem when they are aware of it.

With adjoining properties, particularly flats, noise can travel through floors and walls. Sometimes, even ordinary levels of noise can transfer if the sound insulation is poor. A tenant will only be in breach of their tenancy agreement if the noise level is unreasonably high or the noise happens at anti-social hours. In this type of case, OTHA will contact the neighbour on your behalf to discuss the situation.

In a serious & enduring case, we can apply to the Sheriff Court for an eviction decree if a tenant continues to create excessive noise. An alternative is to apply for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) which if breached leads to criminal penalties.

There are a number of other agencies that you can contact who have powers to deal with a noise problem:

Complain to the Environmental Health Services at Inverclyde Council. They can lend noise-monitoring equipment and can issue a notice requiring your neighbour to stop any noise nuisance. If the noise still continues, they can then take your neighbour to court and have them fined.

Complain directly to the police at the time the noise occurs. They will attend and have powers to deal with any breach of the peace and to remove hi-fi equipment if necessary. It also gives an independent report of the problem, which can be used as evidence.

Are you looking to move

Whether you are looking to move to another Oak Tree HA property or to another landlord, there are some important items that you need to be aware of to make sure you are eligible for a transfer or to avoid costly recharges once you have left your current tenancy.

This article gives you some information on what to expect if you are offered a property from OTHA and what you need to do to get ready to move.



House Visits

If you have applied for an available property with Oak Tree or one of the other ICHR landlords and you are shortlisted, a visit will be carried out to your home to verify your circumstances.

Your priority for rehousing may be based on the number of people living in the house, the size and the type of house you live in, or because you or a member of your household has a medical condition that you have stated is affected by your current accommodation. Before an offer is made the landlord allocating the property you are interested in needs to be satisfied that you have been awarded the correct priority and you are eligible for this property.

An offer of rehousing will only be made to tenants who have a satisfactory tenancy record.

This means that your rent account must be clear, you have no outstanding charges for repairs carried out and your property is in good condition.

The staff member carrying out the visit will discuss this matter with you in more detail and if you need to carry out repairs to your property or make payments to your rent or recharge account, you will be advised of what is required.

Depending on the level of arrears and the condition of the property, you may be given a short amount of time to clear the account or carry out repairs. If there are high arrears or the property is in poor condition then you could find that your application is suspended until the tenancy conditions are met.

Condition of Property

As a general guide, the following items in your home need to be in good condition before you will be approved for a move.

Kitchen – all units and worktops to be clean and not damaged or incomplete.

Bathroom – no missing tiles, toilet seat, no cracked sanitary ware and all items to be in a clean condition.

Doors, skirtings and facings – no missing or damaged sections and all must be in good decorative order. Handles should not be loose or missing.

Light switches and sockets – must be in a clean condition with no paint marks or damage.

Light fittings – no non-standard light fittings and all pendants to be in working order.

Decoration – In general, the standard of decoration should be satisfactory. No torn or missing wallpaper or poorly finished decoration.

Garden – any garden area should be kept in a tidy condition and grass cut. No items of bulk refuse lying in the garden.

These items are not an exhaustive list but should give you an idea of the condition we would expect your property to be in before we can allow you to move.

Offer of Housing

If an offer is being made, you will be shown the property by a member of staff and will usually have 24 hours to decide whether or not to take it.

If you do decide to take the offer, you will be asked to sign for the house or flat either the same day or the next day. An appointment will be made to “sign up” for the tenancy. This appointment takes about an hour.

Rent

The rent charge starts on the day you sign for your new house or flat. As you will be aware, the Association

charges rent in advance and it will be a condition of the offer that you pay the full month in advance before signing for the property.

Please note that you will be liable for rent at your old property until you hand in your keys. Even if you are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit – you cannot claim for two homes – you will accrue arrears if you do not move immediately.

Council Tax

You are responsible for Council Tax and you will need to advise Inverclyde Council accordingly and make arrangements to pay or make a claim for Council Tax Benefit.



No Access for Repairs

The Association is unable to offer an appointment when a repair is reported to us as we do not have access to our contractor's appointment schedule. Our contractors are supplied with your contact telephone number(s) when we are raising a work order for your repair to them and they contact you direct to make an appointment.

We are experiencing a high volume of tenants not providing access when appointments are made with the contractor and have therefore updated our Contractor No Access Procedure. Please note that our contractors have been instructed to notify us if they have been unable to reach you to make an appointment after two attempts. We will then cancel your repair on our system and make a note for the cancellation reason.

We would ask that you ensure that we have your up to date telephone number so that there is no delay in your repair being carried out.

If an appointment has been scheduled and not kept by you and the Association is charged for this aborted visit, then we will re-charge the cost to you.

Our Maintenance Officers are back to carrying out pre and post inspections. We can visit your home to carry out a pre inspection if a diagnosis is required ahead of raising a repair with our contractor. Also, please get in touch with us if you have any concerns regarding the quality of the workmanship for repairs carried out in your home. Our Maintenance Officers can assess the work carried out and ask for our contractor to return if the work is found to be below our expected standard.



Annual Gas Servicing

We would like to update our tenants on our current position with regards to carrying out annual gas servicing in our tenanted properties. We had suspended our forced access procedure for those tenants who were not providing access during the period when the Scottish Government had suspended all non-emergency works due to Covid-19. Now that a normal service has resumed for all categories of work, this includes re-instating our forced access procedure where required.

We do realise that some tenants may still test positive and would prefer not to provide access under these circumstances, however, the Association will insist on access and force access where required as we are obliged to carry out our statutory obligations.

Our gas contractor has advised that their engineers will attend wearing the appropriate PPE and would ask that the tenant remain in another room from where the engineer is working.

Please do not ignore any letters requesting access for your annual gas service as this is for you and your neighbours' safety. If you require to change your appointment date then please get in touch with our repairs line staff on 01475 807001. This process will remain in place unless the Scottish Government changes their position on what works cannot be undertaken.

Any costs incurred with forcing access to your property will be re-charged to you.



The vast majority of our contact with customers is positive and we always do our very best to help. Occasionally we do encounter customers whose behaviour towards our staff and/or contractors is what we consider to be unacceptable and unfortunately there has been an increase recently in the number of incidents recorded.

Unacceptable behaviour can take several forms. It includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that can cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

It can be quite extreme behaviour which takes the forms of verbal or physical threats or violence but also it can be personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. We also consider inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations to be unacceptable.

The last few years have been a difficult time for everyone. The stress and anxiety of the Covid 19 pandemic with its restrictions on our lives and the current pressures from the cost of living crisis is affecting us all. We are now back to providing our full service after a period of restrictions but there may still be a backlog in some departments and we are working through these items.

We have an Unacceptable Actions Policy in place. It can be downloaded from our website or we can provide a copy on request.

We do not routinely record telephone calls but this is a feature that we can use if we need to. We will always tell you if we are recording your call.

If we feel that a customer has behaved unacceptably then we will let them know. We may decide to restrict our service e.g. only correspond in writing or ask that someone is nominated to deal with matters on their behalf. There is the right to appeal any such decision.

It is just as important that our staff or anyone acting on our behalf behaves in an acceptable manner. Our Customer Care Charter states that staff, contractors and agents will:-

- Be polite, friendly, courteous and welcoming
- Treat all customers with respect and dignity
- Always show identification when out of the Association's office on business
- All staff members will wear a name badge and will introduce themselves by name and position in the Association.
- Always ensure confidentiality and privacy
- Adhere to the organisation's equalities policy
- Be sensitive, patient and understanding when dealing with customers
- Never use foul or abusive language

If you have experienced a service that has fallen short of these standards and you have not previously raised this with us, please contact our office to discuss it.

 Scottish Housing Regulator
National Panel of Tenants and Service Users

Share your views...

Want to help improve social landlord services in Scotland? The latest National Panel survey is now available!

What's involved?

The Panel is one of the ways that the Scottish Housing Regulator hears from tenants and people who use council or housing association services. Feedback helps the Regulator focus on the important things.

We have more than 400 people already having their say. Members receive occasional surveys and take part in other feedback exercises. Participation is always optional.

Who can join?

The Panel is open to anyone who uses Council or housing association services. Members include social tenants, people who have been homeless, homeowners who receive factoring or common repairs from a social landlord, and people on social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites.

Take the survey and join...

By phone

0800 433 7212

Online

bit.ly/shr-panel

On your smartphone:



**Take part for
a chance to win £50!**

Simple steps to save money on your energy bills



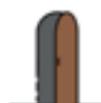
1 IN THE KITCHEN

- Always use the right sized pot or pan for the job. Pots with lids are best and use the correct hob ring for each.
- Pre-boil the water in a kettle before adding it to your pan.
- Keep the oven door shut as much as possible. Make sure the glass door is clean so you can see what's going on without opening the door.
- Let warm food cool down before putting it in the fridge.



2 DOING THE WASHING

- Most clothes don't need washed after every wear. Try airing them between wears instead.
- Spin clothes on the machine's highest spin cycle before tumble drying. This will help reduce the time needed in the dryer.
- Washing clothes at 30 degrees could save around 57%* of the energy used each year. (*Energy Saving Trust, correct as of May 2020)
- Wait until you have a full load before putting on a wash.



3 YOUR DOORS

- Fit draught excluders around the front door and over the letter box. These don't have to be expensive, in fact you can make one out of an old pair of joggers. Visit our YouTube channel for an upcycling tutorial.
- Putting a curtain over the front door can also help keep the draughts out.
- Get into the habit of closing all internal doors to help build up heat quicker



4 IN THE BATHROOM

- A quick shower uses less energy than a bath.
- Invest in a shower timer to help you see how much time you spend in the shower. After all, shorter showers use less energy.
- Don't leave the taps running continuously while you brush your teeth, shave or wash your face.
- If you have a hot water tank, set your programmer to best match the times of day when you use hot water. This will avoid heating water when you don't need to.



5 RADIATORS AND HEATERS

- Your radiator valves allow you to heat up the full house or room by room: 5 is the maximum heat setting (for cold days) 1 is the minimum heat setting (for hot days)* 2, 3 and 4 can also be used depending on your needs



6 WINDOWS

- Almost one third of energy loss is through your windows. Using heavy (or lined) curtains can help to reduce this.
- In the winter, close your curtains at dusk to help keep the heat in. Likewise, in the summer, keep curtains closed in rooms you aren't using to help keep them cool.



7 LIGHTS

- Replace all of your bulbs with LED equivalents. This can help you save around 69% of your annual lighting costs –around £40 a year.
- It seems obvious but the most common-sense solution to reducing your lighting costs is to turn them off when you're not using them.
- Use automatic timers to turn your lights on as it gets dark outside and to turn off at the same time you go to bed.
- Place lamps in the corners of your rooms. This allows the light to bounce off of two wall surfaces and reduce the number of lamps needed.



8 PLUGS AND APPLIANCES

- Try to avoid leaving your TV, games consoles and kitchen appliances like toasters and kettles, plugged in and switched on when you're not using them.
- Don't leave your phone plugged into charge all night long. It should only need a few hours to full charge.
- Be proactive in checking the wattage of an electrical appliance

OUR EXPERT HEAT ADVISORS ARE HERE TO HELP WITH ANY HOME ENERGY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE.

0800 092 9002

[thewiseenergy.com](https://www.thewiseenergy.com)

@wiseenergy



9 BOILERS AND TIMERS

- Always check the pressure gauge on combi boilers. Is it settling between 1 and 2? If not, the pressure is either low or high. This means the boiler has to use more energy than it needs to for the water and heating.
- Don't switch a combi boiler off at the wall, always leave it on standby.
- Use your programmer (or timer) for your heating and hot water. Use it to your advantage so they can be ready for you as and when needed, rather than using the 'boost' function.
- During the winter, set the heating to switch off a short while before going to bed, that way it won't stay on too long after going to bed. Also set the heating to come on a little while before you wake up in the morning.



10 BILLS AND TARIFFS

- If you have a billing cycle and a non-smart meter, try to provide your supplier with meter readings at least once a month. This helps to ensure accurate bills and to avoid the risk of over or under-estimated bills.
- Be aware that Fixed Rate or Fixed Price tariffs mean that the unit prices for gas and electricity are fixed, not the direct debit or bill amount.
- It's important to compare available tariffs to make sure you're getting the best deal for your energy. Not sure where to start? That's something we can help with.

Internal Management Planning Day 2023

On Saturday 25 February 2023, we held an event for our Staff and Committee at the Tontine Hotel. This used to be an annual event but it was the first time we had all been together since February 2019.

We discussed the following items and how these will fit into our Business Plan, our Internal Management Plan, our Risk Strategy and our Asset Management Strategy.

- Our Vision
- Our Values
- Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (known as SWOT)
- How we are affected by Political, Economic, Social and Technical factors (known as PEST)
- Feedback from our recent Asset Management exercise
- Functional Priorities for 2023-24

It was an enjoyable day with 21 staff and 5 Committee members in attendance. We had lots of participation in the workshops and some great ideas that the Management Team can take back for further discussion and implementation.

Here is a photo at the close of the day





Lifetime membership of the Association costs just £1 and you can apply at any time. As a member, you would be invited to attend the Association's AGM where you would be entitled to vote for the Management Committee or stand for election to the Management Committee yourself.



If you would like to find out more about membership of Oak Tree Housing Association, or you would like an application form, please contact our office on 01475 807000 or email us at info@oaktreeha.org.uk.

Investors in People



Following our re-accreditation assessment in October 2022, Oak Tree Housing Association were awarded Silver accreditation by Investors in People.

Carrot, ginger and turmeric soup

Rustle up this comforting soup made with fresh carrots, fragrant ginger and warming turmeric, topped with a spicy garnish. This hearty soup is bursting with flavour and makes a delicious midweek lunch or dinner.

1. Heat the vegetable oil in a large pan over a medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, celery and bay leaf and cook for 10 minutes, stirring often. Add the ginger, turmeric and garlic. Mix well and cook for five minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Pour over the stock and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat, and then simmer for 15 minutes until the carrots are tender. Remove the bay leaf. Allow the soup to cool a little and then blitz (in batches in a food processor or using a stick blender) until completely smooth. Return to the heat and warm through.
3. In a small bowl, combine the ingredients for the garnish. Ladle the soup into bowls and top each with a little of the coriander garnish. Serve immediately.

Freezing and defrosting guidelines

Make the soup, then leave to cool at room temperature. Freeze (without garnishes or toppings) in a rigid container, leaving a bit of space for expansion, for up to 1–3 months. Reheat either from frozen or defrost in the fridge overnight. Once piping hot, add toppings or garnishes and serve.

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 onion, roughly chopped
- 750g carrots, roughly chopped
- 2 sticks celery, roughly chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 5cm (2in) piece ginger, finely sliced
- 2 tsp turmeric
- 2 garlic cloves, finely sliced
- 1ltr (1 3/4pt) vegetable stock
- 4 tsp sesame oil
- 2 tsp lime juice

For the garnish

- handful coriander leaves, roughly chopped
- 4 spring onions, sliced
- 1 green chilli, diced



Lighter toad-in-the-hole

This toad-in-the-hole recipe adds earthy sage and plenty of veg to the batter – red onions, yellow pepper, peas and tomatoes – for a lighter and more colourful dish that the whole family will love.

1. Preheat the oven to gas 7, 220°C, fan 200°C. Put the flour in a bowl, season, and gradually whisk in the eggs and milk to make a smooth batter. Stir in the sage and set aside.
2. Put the onions and pepper in a 22 x 28cm ovenproof baking dish and drizzle over the oil. Roast for 10 mins, then add the sausages, tomatoes and peas and roast for a further 10 mins. Remove from the oven, pour over the batter and cook for a further 30–35 mins until puffed and golden.
3. Meanwhile, steam the broccoli for 5–6 mins until tender. In a small pan, mix the gravy pot with 220ml cold water and bring to the boil, stirring constantly. Simmer for 1 min. Serve the toad-in-the-hole with the broccoli and gravy.

Ingredients

- 100g plain flour
- 2 free-range eggs, beaten
- 150ml skimmed milk
- 1 tbsp chopped sage leaves
- 2 red onions, cut into 8 wedges each
- 1 large yellow pepper, deseeded and cut into 8 slices
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 8 Healthy Living Cumberland sausages
- 8 cherry tomatoes
- 75g fresh or frozen peas, defrosted
- 220g pack Tenderstem broccoli
- 1 chicken gravy pot (from a 112g pack)



Pathways to Construction

Oak Tree Housing Association were the only successful organisation to be awarded funding over the last two and a half years to deliver the Pathways to Construction programme. Over this time, we have given the opportunity of employment, training and support to 32 people from the age of 17 – 58. Pathways to Construction was also uplifted in its numbers by the No One Left Behind programme, supported by Inverclyde Council. Programme candidates have been very successful in moving on to fulltime employment within Inverclyde. The programme finishes at the end of March 2023 as unfortunately we were unsuccessful in being awarded further funding.

Both programmes under the guidance of Oak Tree and Supervision of Robert Dowds, have provided training in practical skills including:

- Various Hard Landscaping
- Timber Fence/Gate Building
- Paint & Decoration
- Drywall Installation
- Ames Taping & Plasterboard Repair
- Joinery Machine Shop Skills
- Brick/Block Walls
- French/Soak Away Drainage
- Recycle Timber into Garden Furniture
- Concrete Shuttering
- Soft Landscape



....candidates have been very successful in moving on to fulltime employment within Inverclyde

Training certificates achieved by participants:

- L1 Award/REHIS
- PASMA
- Asbestos Awareness
- First Aid
- Working at Confined Spaces
- Working At Height
- Manual Handling
- Fire Marshalling
- Abrasive Wheel
- CSCS Card

STAY in TOUGH!



01475 807000
(please leave a message
and we will contact you)



info@oaktreeha.org.uk



**Oak Tree
Housing Association**



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