



THE NEWSLETTER FOR LANGSTANE HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS

LANGSTANE *news*

ISSUE 17 • WINTER 2008

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Joint Tenant Participation

On Saturday 8th November 2008, Langstane held a joint Customer Conference together with Grampian Housing Association in the Richard Donald Stand at Aberdeen Football Club's Pittodrie Stadium.

The event had been well advertised by both Associations and almost 50 tenants were present on the day. A number of workshops were available on the topics of Tenant Participation, Anti Social Behaviour, Designing your Home and Low Cost Home Ownership. There was also the chance to sample Reiki and Indian Head Massage Treatments.

Tenants interested in Football also had the opportunity to take in a tour of the Stadium.

The Headline purpose of the day was to tell those present a little bit more of the proposed Group Structure which Grampian and Langstane intend to set up. After a welcome from Steve Delaney, Chair of Grampian and Dennis Wood, Langstane's Vice Chair, the meeting heard from the Associations' Chief Executives, Alan Grant (Langstane) and Alan Moat (Grampian) on how the proposed Structure is intended to benefit the service given to tenants.

The presentation was followed by a question and answer session. Most tenants present sought and received reassurances as to the cost of the Group Structure and potential impact on rent levels. Both Chief Executives stressed that the proposal would not have an effect on rents other than by working together more efficiently opportunities ought to arise to reduce overall costs.

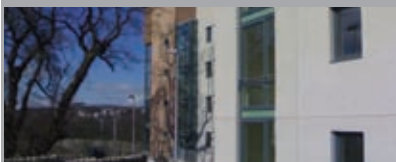
It was stressed that the whole process would require consent from the Scottish Housing Regulator, who will rightly expect the Associations to take due note of their respective tenants' views. To that end the Associations are to appoint an independent adviser. The adviser's role would be to be available for tenants and advise them on any concerns they may have.

Full details of how to contact the Adviser will be sent out shortly.

At the end of the event many of the tenants that attended won prizes in a free raffle. The prizes having been kindly donated by:- Marks & Spencer, Laurence Milne, Debenhams, Cineworld, John Lewis, Argos, Sainsburys and "Beekies Neuk"



New Buildings



King street - 8 properties, now occupied

Charlotte Street - 20 properties, now occupied

Buckie - 25 properties, due for completion Spring 2009.

REPAIR GUIDELINES

Over recent months a number of tenants, when phoning to report various maintenance problems at their tenancies, have enquired as to how long they may have to wait for the work to be undertaken.

We have produced the enclosed Repair Guidelines sheet which will hopefully clarify matters. Our 1st Response team call takers will also be using the document when giving advice over the phone.

STAFF NEWS

There have been a number of staff changes since the last newsletter.

"I Say Hello"

Julie Hall has joined our Property Service Team as a Customer Services Assistant



Katarzyna Gasiorowska, has joined our 1st response team as a Customer Services Assistant.

Katarzyna is Polish and will be available to help and translate for any of our Polish customers.

Sam Clark, has joined our DLO team as a Plumber.



Lisa Cameron has joined our 1st response team as a Customer Services Assistant.

Graeme Taylor, has joined our DLO team as a Joiner.

Carol Smith, has joined us as a Development Assistant.

"I Say Goodbye"



Andrew Johnston, Development Officer has left to take up a role in the Oil & Gas Support Industry.



Susan Henderson, Financial Services Manager, has left to take up a Finance role in a Commercial Company.



Susan Watson, Customer Services Assistant, has left to re-locate in India.



Helen Duncan, Business Development Officer, has left to return to New Zealand.



Brenda Bradbrook, has retired after being with Langstane for the last 9 years most recently as a Development Assistant.

We wish them all the very best for the future.

Remember your rent payments to us are your priority

So far in this year, we have:-

- Served **199** Notices of Possession on tenants.
- Taken **102** tenants to court.
- Evicted **23** tenants.

ALL FOR RENT ARREARS

Don't let this happen to you. Contact the Arrears Team to discuss your arrears before it's too late.

Ring us on **01224 423000**
We are here to help you.



Having a home to enjoy them in
PRICELESS

Housing Benefit Corner

A proportion of Langstane Housing tenants pay rent by claiming Housing Benefit from the local council.

Housing Benefit can be paid directly to the landlord. This is called direct payment.

Direct payment is an excellent way to pay rent. However there can be problems with it, such as:

- 1. Suspended or Cancelled Claims** – to avoid this, tenants must ensure that claims are up to date and correct. It is the tenant's responsibility to make sure that all changes in circumstances are reported to the Housing Benefit section, and to respond to all letters issued to them.
- 2. Breaks in Payments of Housing Benefit** – this is common when a tenant changes address. A new claim must be submitted immediately to avoid problems, and to establish how much Housing Benefit will be paid for the new address
- 3. Shortfalls Between Rent Charged and Benefit Paid** – in some cases a tenant does not receive the full amount of Housing Benefit to cover the rent. This shortfall must be paid by the tenant. Shortfalls normally occur because the

tenant has an income which is above the level set by the government to receive the full award of Housing Benefit.

- 4. Clawbacks/Deductions From the Housing Benefit Award** – sometimes an amount, usually £9.15 per week, is taken off the Housing Benefit award. This is usually taken from the tenant's award to pay a debt owed to the council for a previous overpayment of benefit. Unfortunately this means that the rent is not paid in full, and this must be paid by the tenant to avoid arrears of rent.

Please be aware that it is the responsibility of all tenants to ensure that rent is being paid, regardless of what payment method is being used. This includes if the tenant has a Housing Benefit Claim which is being paid directly to the Association. If a rent account falls into arrears, the Association will take action against the tenant and NOT the Housing Benefit Department.



CUT YOUR FUEL BILLS BEST VALUE ENERGY



SCARF energy advice teams provide free, confidential and impartial energy efficiency advice and information to all householders.

At this time of rising fuels prices it is critical that householders check to see if they can cut their fuel bills by making sure they are getting best value from their supplier. In addition there are now a number of 'Social Tariffs' available to help householders who are finding it difficult to cope with rising fuel bills.

SCARF's campaign message is 'Cut Your Fuel Bills - Best Value Energy' By choosing the best fuel supplier, the correct tariff and the best payment method, you can SAVE MONEY. Three simple steps to help you secure the lowest possible fuel costs.

Step 1. Your fuel supplier

Switching fuel supplier can save you money.

You need to check the most up-to-date fuel prices and compare fuel suppliers to make sure you are switching to the supplier with the lowest fuel cost

Step 2. Your tariff

Fuel suppliers have a range of tariffs available. You need to check that you are on the lowest rate tariff for your heating system and your household requirements.

This is most important if you have an electric storage heating system or where you have replaced an electric storage heating system with a new heating system.

Step 3. Your payment method

All fuel suppliers have a range of payment methods available to you. Choose a payment method to provide you with both the lowest cost for fuel and one, which suits your household budget. REMEMBER its important to keep warm in winter.

All of the above will help you secure the lowest possible cost for fuel this winter. For more advice and information on how to Cut Your Fuel Bills and for additional information on Social Tariffscontact the SCARF Energy Advice Team FREE on 01224 213005



Tenants Forum

- Do you have a good idea for a debate ?
- What do you want to comment on ?
- Do you want to find out what others think about regarding housing issues ?
- Do you want answers from Langstane ?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then check out our new Tenants Forum to be launched soon on the LHA Website. This will be a platform for anyone to post comments – it is easy and quick to use – you can either register to post a comment immediately, or post a comment without registering and wait for it to be issued.

You will be able to access it from the Latest News section on the home page when it goes live in the next couple of months. Keep checking our website : www.langstane-ha.co.uk



COMMENTS FORM - WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS

We would like to hear what you think about the information contained in this edition of the tenant newsletter. We would also welcome any comments you want to make about Langstane Housing Association or any of the services provided by the Association. Please complete this form, cut out and return it to the Association at the FREEPOST address below.

Name:

Address:

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Contact Details (e.g. phone number / email):

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Please tick the box if you are interested in becoming a member of the Association. We will send you more information and an application form.

Please tick the box if you are interested in joining the Langstane Register of Interested Tenants. We will send you more information and a registration form.

Have you ever viewed or used the Langstane housing association website available at www.langstane-ha.co.uk

Comments:

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Return to: Langstane Housing Association Ltd, FREEPOST AB264, 680 King Street, Aberdeen, AB24 1ZQ.

Emergency Numbers

Please note that in the first instance, whether you are an Aberdeen, Moray or Aberdeenshire tenant, during working hours you should contact **01224 423000** to report any repairs.

ABERDEEN

Gas (Heatcare) : **01343 545005**
Electricity – Power Cut: **0800 300 999**
Loss of Water Supply: **0845 601 8855**
Association's Out-of-Hours Emergency Cover: **01224 480281**

MORAY - As above

Association's Out-of-Hours Emergency Cover: **08457 565 656**

ABERDEENSHIRE - As above

Association's Out-of-Hours Emergency Cover: **08456 08 12 03**

Festive Season Office Closure

Please note that the office will be **closed** at 12.30pm on **19th December 2008** **re-opening** at 9am on Monday **22nd December 2008**

The office closes for the festive period at 12.30pm on **24th December 2008** reopens at 9am Monday **5th January 2009**.

Office Opening Hours

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm (Aberdeen and Elgin Office)

Aberdeen offices are closed between 9am – 12noon on the last Wednesday of each month for staff training

If you have a complaint, please contact the Association for further information on the complaints process. Any unresolved complaints can then be referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
4 Melville Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7HS.
Tel: **0870 011 5379**, email: enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk
website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk

Langstane Housing Association
680 King Street, Aberdeen, AB24 1SL
Tel: 01224 423000
Website: www.langstane-ha.co.uk
E-mail: info@langstane-ha.co.uk



Langstane's main contact number for all tenants

01224 423000

www.langstane-ha.co.uk

Winter Issues

Last winter's sub-zero temperatures cost the UK industry around £400m in insurance claims - with the largest proportion paid out for damage caused by burst pipes. With winter approaching fast, a little forethought and a few simple precautions could help to reduce the risk of hassle and heartache caused by burst pipes.

GIVE YOUR HOME A PRE-WINTER CHECK UP

If this is the first time you've thought about making sure your home is fit to face the ravages of winter - don't panic, it's not too late. Start to plan ahead now, and carry out a series of simple home maintenance tasks - starting today practical tips include:

- Check pipes and water tanks are in a good state of repair and make sure they are lagged. Loft pipes should be underneath loft insulation so heat from below will stop them from freezing.
- Show all the family where to find the stopcocks and fuse box. Make sure stopcocks and valves move freely.
- Make sure the house is kept warm at all times, especially at night.

- If a pipe bursts: turn the water off at the mains immediately and drain the system by turning on all cold water taps

STAYING AWAY FROM HOME

If you plan to be away from home for any length of time during the winter:

- Advise the Association if longer than two weeks.
- Leave automatic central heating running continuously at normal temperature.
- Even if your loft is lagged, consider opening the loft trap door, if you have one, to enable further warm air from below to circulate.
- For properties without central heating, the only alternative is to turn off the main water stopcock and drain down the entire water system.
- Get a trusted friend or neighbour to keep an eye on your property whilst you are away.



GRITBOXES

You may be aware that the Association have placed grit bins in various schemes over recent months and the hope is that we can provide them in more schemes in the next couple of years.

The Association will not be responsible for spreading the grit but we will ensure they are full during winter months. A contractor has been employed to fill the boxes on a regular basis and we have tasked our Estates Assistants to check on them during their routine visits in the winter months.

Should you find, however, at any time that the boxes do not have adequate supplies in them then please call 01224 423000 where we will instruct our contractor to fill them as a matter of urgency.

Langstane Housing Association
21 Culbard street,
Elgin, IV30 1JT
Tel: 01224 423000

**Association's Out-of-Hours
Emergency Repair Cover:**
01224 480281 (Aberdeen)
08457 565 656 (Moray)
08456 08 12 03 (Aberdeenshire)