



housing news

The newsletter for Link Housing tenants

DECEMBER 2004

Link wins top participation award

LINK recently won the top accolade in the annual "Good Practice in Tenant Participation" awards for 2004. The award was presented to Jim Mathieson who is a tenant in sheltered housing in Falkirk and a member of Link Housing's management committee.

Jim said, "This award recognises Link's achievements in involving tenants in a range of initiatives and increasing the number of tenants on its committees. This hasn't been easy because of the wide range of customers and the fact that they are spread across the whole country."

Over the past few years, Link has worked with local communities in Clydebank, Airdrie, Coatbridge, Falkirk, Grangemouth and Edinburgh to combat social exclusion by promoting employment initiatives, healthy living, community regeneration, computer literacy and environmental improvements.

Tenants now make up one third of Link's total membership and form a majority on Link Housing's management committee. If you are interested in becoming a member of Link, please contact Pam Clark (tel 01236 725625) for further information.



Jim Mathieson holding the award.

RENT REVIEW

AS you know, Link reviews its rents and service charges in April each year.

Once again, we are proposing to increase rents by inflation plus 1%.

The inflation rate will be the figure announced for December.

For the small number of tenants whose rents are still below the amount set by our rent pointing system, there will be an additional increase of 4%.

Those tenants whose current rent is still higher than the points rent will again have no increase.

Service charges will be reviewed at the same time.

These will be set at a level which covers the cost of providing the service, based on previous years' expenditure and contract prices.

We have already consulted with the Tenants Advisory Panel on the proposed increase for

2005. The Panel approved the increase but they asked us to provide a more detailed explanation when tenants receive notification of the new rents in February.

We have agreed to do so.

In the meantime, if you have any comments or would like further information on Link's rent policy and points system, please contact your Area Manager.

Tenant Participation Update

Sheltered Housing Forum

THE second forum meeting took place on 13 July at Ben Lui Place in Cumbernauld, with 24 tenants from seven sheltered housing developments in attendance.

There was lively discussion around a variety of issues, including the new tenants' handbook and repairs procedures.

It had proved difficult to elect two representatives from each complex so it was agreed that attendance at the next meeting



would be open to all. If, however, numbers prove to be too great for the chosen venue, preference will be given to those tenants who had been unable to attend previous meetings.

The next meeting will take place early in the New Year.

Tenant Participation Strategy Review

MANY thanks to all who responded to the review paper enclosed with the last newsletter. We have taken account of all your comments and a copy of the revised Strategy will be winging its way to you shortly. Winners of the prize draw were Arthur Diamond (Lanarkshire area), Charles Palmer (Falkirk area), Angela Bessant (Edinburgh area) and Janet McArthur (Paisley area).



Paisley winner, Janet McArthur from Dalmuir, receives her voucher from Area Manager, Jacqueline Norwood.

National Tenants Advisory Panel

THE Panel met in Edinburgh on 20 October. There were staff presentations covering anti-social behaviour and the annual rent review.

Maureen Middleton, Director of Link Housing, looked to the future and highlighted some of the areas where Link is seeking to improve its services to tenants.

A draft of the new Tenants' Handbook was presented for the

group's comments. Alternative methods for involving tenants were discussed, in particular the use of



e-mail and Link's website.

Anna Winters from Communities Scotland's Tenant Participation Team, explained her team's remit and highlighted

the benefits of tenants' associations becoming Registered Tenants' Organisations.

It was disappointing that only a small number of Panel members were able to attend, but all agreed the day was enjoyable, informative and

thought-provoking. If you would like to become a member of the Panel and help shape Link's future, please contact Pam Clark, Tenant Liaison Officer.

Local Newsletters

WHAT did you think of your local newsletter? Did it contain the information you want? What's happening in your area? Let us know and we'll let everybody else know.

Contact your local office (or Pam Clark) with your stories, comments, photos, jokes, recipes and announcements.

For further information on any of the above topics please contact Pam Clark, Tenant Liaison Officer, 16/17 Carron House, Tay Walk, Cumbernauld G67 1BU. Direct tel: 01236 725625.

Public Relations and Tenant Participation Team

THE Public Relations and Tenant Participation Team consists of staff and tenants and is responsible for promoting Link Housing's activities – this includes the production of the local and national newsletters.

We want tenants to be involved in all aspects of Link's activities and we have places for two more tenants on the team.

Meetings are informal and take place monthly, usually in the Falkirk office. If you are interested in joining the team, please contact Pam Clark.

Link Group receives good inspection report



REGISTERED Social Landlords like Link are regulated by Communities Scotland, which carries out rigorous inspections every few years to ensure that the landlord is providing a good service to tenants and is meeting a wide range of performance standards.

Link was "inspected" earlier this year and we were pleased to receive an overall "B" grading.

Lynn McCulloch, Head of Inspection at Communities Scotland, commented, "Link has been a good landlord for a long time and it has grown to be one of Scotland's largest associations

by embracing change and new challenges. We were particularly impressed by its excellent new and improved homes and we are confident that the organisation will continue to improve."

Douglas Sievewright, Chairman of Link Group, said, "We are delighted that many of our strengths have been recognised but also acknowledge that there are areas where we need to improve."

The process of making improvements to our service has already begun and we hope that, over the next few months, tenants will notice the difference!

Link's gas servicing programme

GAS servicing is necessary to ensure that boilers and fires in tenants' homes are safe to use.

Faulty appliances produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide which can prove fatal. The danger is greater because you cannot see or smell carbon monoxide so you may not know there is a problem until it is too late.

Link has a gas servicing programme which ensures that every appliance is checked at least once a year.

The vast majority of tenants allow our contractors access on request but there are still a few who do not co-operate.

In order to make sure we comply with our legal obligations, we have made changes to our procedures and timescales. The new arrangements are as follows:

Stage 1 – around 44 days prior to the anniversary of the last

service, you will be given 7-10 days notice of the service date.

Stage 2 – (34 days prior to the anniversary). If the contractor did not get access the first time, you will be given 7-10 days notice of a second appointment.

Stage 3 – (24 days prior to the anniversary). If the contractor did not get access on the second appointment, you will receive a letter from Link giving you 7-10 days notice of a third appointment.

Final Stage – (14 days prior to the anniversary). If the contractor did not get access on the third appointment, you will be given 7-10 days notice of a final appointment. If you do not allow access for the service on that day, Link will force entry to your home and carry out the service.

If that is not possible (e.g. insufficient credit in the meter), we will cap the meter so that you cannot use the fire or central

heating until the service has been carried out.

We recognise that appointments made by the contractor may not always be suitable. If that is the case, you should contact the contractor to make an alternative arrangement.

Please note, however, that if the new appointment is later than the original one, you will still receive a "no access" calling card. This is simply to ensure that we have an audit trail to prove that we followed our procedures.

If you have any questions about gas servicing, please contact:

Gas Servicing Team
Link Group Ltd
45 Albany Street
EDINBURGH
EH1 3QY
Tel: 0131 557 0350

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

What is it?

In May, the Scottish Executive announced its commitment to delivering good quality, sustainable and affordable housing for everyone in Scotland. They have set a target date of 2015 for all housing associations and local authorities to achieve a national housing quality standard. As the first step, Link must submit a plan by next April showing how we will do this.

What is the standard?

There are actually a number of standards. In simple terms, every dwelling must be:

- Healthy, safe and secure
- Free from serious disrepair
- Energy efficient

- Provided with modern facilities and services

How will this affect me?

We are confident that the vast majority of our properties will meet the standard and many will actually exceed it. Nevertheless, we are required to carry out surveys in order to gather sufficient information to prove this. These surveys are scheduled to be done over the next 12 months and you will be advised if we need access to your home.

We will keep you updated on our progress in the next tenants' newsletter. In the meantime, if you would like more information please contact Terry Doherty on 0131 557 0350 or email tдох@linkhaltd.co.uk.

Tax Credits

ARE you receiving Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit?

Between April and July, the Inland Revenue sent every customer an annual renewal pack with a view to finalising last year's award and renewing the award for this year.

The Inland Revenue will continue to pay tax credits throughout the renewal process.

You **MUST** however return your renewal pack to the Inland Revenue no later than 31 January 2005.

If you do not return your renewal pack by this date, your tax credit payments will stop and the Inland Revenue will recover all the tax credit paid to you since 6 April 2004.

If you need help or more information about this process, please contact:

Tax Credit Helpline 0845 300 3900

Or

Linkwide Welfare Rights Team on 01324 625881

Ask for Michelle, Rhona or Karen.

Beat the freeze

Tips to avoid burst pipes

- Keep your heating on – even at a very low setting. This is especially important if you are going away from home for any length of time. Even if you are at home, it is worth keeping the heating on at night when temperatures are at their lowest.
- If you are away for a while and don't want to leave the heating on – turn off the mains water supply at the stopcock*. Switch off any water heaters and turn on all your taps until the water stops running. (* If you don't know where the stopcock is, contact your area office).

What if the worst happens?

Although your pipes are well insulated, they can still freeze and

burst in exceptionally cold weather. Here's what to do:

- Turn off the mains water supply at the stopcock
- Turn off any central heating boilers or electric immersion heaters (unless you are certain that the burst is only on the mains supply pipe)
- Turn on all taps to drain down your storage tank
- If water comes into contact with any electrical fittings, switch off the electricity supply
- Telephone Link (or the emergency contractor if it happens outside office hours)
- Warn any neighbours who might be affected
- Try to store some water in the bath or another large container so that you have water for flushing the toilet, washing etc until the burst is repaired

Holiday arrangements

Link's offices will close at 12.30pm on Friday 24 December and re-open at 9.00am on Wednesday 5 January. We would like to wish all of our tenants a Merry Christmas and a Guid New Year.



How Link is dealing with Customer Complaints

LINK received 66 formal complaints from tenants between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2004, an increase of 42 on the previous period. The table below shows the number and type of complaints.

As you can see, by far the biggest increase involved our gas servicing contract. Most of these were about delays in carrying out repairs but some were about the attitude of the contractors. We have raised these issues with the contractors and are confident that the service will improve and the number of complaints will fall accordingly.

Of the nine complaints about staff attitude, two led to action against the staff involved. The other seven involved customers who were not happy with the response they were given, even although the staff concerned gave them the correct information and delivered it in the appropriate manner.

There were nine complaints about reactive repairs, broken down as follows:

- 3 had not previously been reported to Link
- 3 were delays by Link
- 1 lengthy delay to a medical adaptation was the fault of a contractor who was subsequently removed from Link's approved list
- 1 lengthy delay to a shower replacement was a mix-up between Link Group and Link Housing
- 1 concerned the unacceptable attitude of a contractor who was warned about his future conduct

	2002-03	2003-04
Gas servicing	7	29
Reactive repairs	5	9
Problems caused by anti-social neighbours	4	8
Staff Attitude	0	9
Problems arising from major repairs/upgrades	0	5
Decant conditions	2	1
Disagreement with allocations decisions	1	2
Inadequate kitchen units	0	1
Poor landscaping	0	1
Lack of staff cover (sheltered housing)	0	1

Of the 8 complaints about anti-social behaviour, only 1 was from a tenant who felt that the staff member had not dealt with the problem properly. The other 7 were actually about neighbours' behaviour rather than poor performance by Link staff.

One case, involving complaints by owners about their neighbour (a Link tenant), was referred to the Ombudsman who decided that there had been no maladministration by Link.

There was one other complaint which got as far as an appeal to the Director – it concerned delays by both Link Housing staff and Link Group Buildings staff in

authorising and arranging a replacement shower.

It is disappointing to see the number of complaints about gas servicing increase so much and this is an area where we are determined to improve.

On a positive note, the fact that 64 out of 66 complaints were resolved at the first stage is encouraging.

Link welcomes complaints from tenants – they are a very useful way of finding out what you think of our service and can help us improve the way we do things. If you have something you wish to complain about, please contact your area manager.

Contacting Link

Edinburgh Area Office

Glenorchy House
20 Union Street
EDINBURGH EH1 3LR
Tel 0131 623 8090
Fax 0131 623 8091
E-mail eao@linkhaltd.co.uk

Falkirk Area Office

33-35 Wellside Place
FALKIRK FK1 5RL
Tel 01324 634768
Fax 01324 627055
E-mail fao@linkhaltd.co.uk

Lanarkshire Area Office

16/17 Carron House
Tay Walk
CUMBERNAULD G67 1BU
Tel 01236 725625
Fax 01236 737317
E-mail lao@linkhaltd.co.uk

Paisley Area Office

Abbey Mill Business Centre
Mile End Mill – Unit 1005/1011
12 Seedhill Road
PAISLEY PA1 1JS
Tel 0141 840 6380
Fax 0141 840 6381
E-mail pao@linkhaltd.co.uk

Pam Clark

Tenant Liaison Officer

16/17 Carron House
Tay Walk
CUMBERNAULD G67 1BU
Tel 01236 725625
Fax 01236 737317
E-mail pc@linkhaltd.co.uk

Emergency Numbers

Edinburgh Management Area

Transco

0800 111999

For suspected external gas escapes/leaks

Kingdom Gas Services

0800 3899463

For gas heating and hot water emergency repairs

Skillbase

08459 30 30 31

For all other emergencies

Falkirk Management Area

Transco

0800 111999

For suspected external gas escapes/leaks

Kingdom Gas Service

0800 3899463

For gas heating and hot water emergency repairs.

Skillbase

08459 30 30 31

For all other emergencies.

Lanarkshire Management Area

Transco

0800 111999

For suspected external gas escapes/leaks

Kingdom Gas Services

0800 3899463

For gas heating and hot water emergency repairs

British Gas Housing Services

0141 445 2789

For gas heating and hot water emergency repairs – former Gap stock only

Rodgers and Johnstone

07776 193720

For all other emergencies.

Paisley Management Area

Transco 0800 111999

For suspected external gas escapes/leaks

Kingdom Gas Services

0800 3899463

For gas heating and hot water emergency repairs

British Gas Housing Services

0141 445 2789

For gas heating and hot water emergency repairs – former Gap stock only

Abercorn Builders Ltd

0141 887 8932

For all other emergencies.



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