

WEST WORLD

Official Newsletter of West of Scotland Housing Association

Have your say

Plans to separate from the Gentoo Group

West of Scotland Housing Association has been in partnership with Sunderland - based housing association, the Gentoo Group, since 2013. We are now proposing a change.

Following a comprehensive review, both organisations agree that the partnership arrangement is no longer in the best interests of our tenants.

Recently, we have written to all tenants with information about our plans and sent out a leaflet explaining the benefits of separating. In addition to this we have held a series of ten roadshows to discuss the partnership and gather the views of our tenants on our proposals. Throughout this process we have been working alongside the Tenants Information Service (TIS) which has provided impartial advice to us and our tenants.



We believe we could offer a better service to our tenants as an independent Scottish housing association.

So why leave the partnership?

Significant government and regulatory changes plus budget cuts over the last 4 years have affected the partnership, and the benefits of working with a larger organisation have been less than anticipated. We anticipated funding for new housing, the development of services for older people, support for our green agenda and a solar panel initiative. The priorities of Scottish and English housing associations have also changed due to devolution, so operating as an independent association will allow us to focus purely on our tenant's priorities. Having complete control will help us to concentrate on increasing the range of support services available and fund more front line staff working out in our communities. As an independent association we will decide on major investment for our homes and on priorities for maintenance and repairs services.

Additionally, we will manage our own IT systems and launch a new easy-to-use website which will help us communicate more effectively with our tenants.



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Welcome



We are going through an exciting period of change at WSHA. With the opportunity to leave the Gentoo partnership ahead, we will potentially have much greater control which will help us deliver better services for our tenants. I have enjoyed discussing the changes with members of the public at roadshows and appreciate the feedback.

We were pleased to give so many families and individuals the chance to attend festive events for free last year. A number of families told us they wouldn't have been able to manage without our help, and we were so glad to see everybody enjoying themselves in the pictures we received.

Our office restructure and move has taken place and it is great to have everyone settling in to their new role in the Camlachie office. You can check if your Housing Officer has changed on page 4.

If you have anything you would like to contact me about then please do not hesitate to get in touch on 0141 550 5600 or lynne.donnelly@westscot.co.uk. You can also follow our latest news and events on our Facebook (WSHAScotland).

Best wishes,

Lynne Donnelly

Lynne Donnelly
Chief Executive

So why leave the partnership? continued from page 1

The decision to leave the Gentoo partnership depends on the vote of our tenants. Later this year, a date will be set in consultation with the Scottish Housing Regulator for a ballot where tenants will be asked to support or reject leaving the partnership. Our information leaflet sets out our reasons for leaving, but we understand that you may have questions ahead of the ballot. To help answer any queries, we have set up a Freephone number for tenants to contact us for more information on our proposals. Call us on 0800 085 7375.

**Alternatively please contact Geraldine Connolly:
0141 550 5638.**

The Tenants Information Service (TIS) can provide independent advice on their FREEPHONE number: 0800 731 3772.

Nominate the next Community Champion

We recently presented our first Community Champion award to Janette Oliver of Fernhill, who runs popular bingo nights in Fernhill Community Centre alongside the committee every second Friday. If you know someone who makes a positive contribution to the community, whether it's big or small, we'd like to give them the credit they deserve.



To nominate someone, get in touch by emailing sophie.mead@westscot.co.uk or call 0141 550 5630

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Festive cheer



Christmas Activities Programme

Tenants celebrated Christmas in style by getting involved in a range of fun, festive activities.

The programme is designed to reduce the barriers preventing WSHA tenants from accessing opportunities due to a low income, poor health or disability. It also encourages individuals who are isolated to participate in wider social and community activities.

882 tenants and family members from across our communities participated in the programme. Events included 4 pantomimes, entry to the Irn Bru Carnival at the SECC and entry to Santa's Grotto at Heads of Ayr Farm Park.



“ This may be a small gesture from WSHA but it makes such a big difference to our lives ”

“ It was absolutely fantastic. It's great West of Scotland Housing Association provides it, especially for low income families who wouldn't be able to go along ”

Christmas Hampers

In December 2016 Willowacre Trust (WT) provided 29 Christmas hampers including food and Christmas gifts to families who were struggling or suffering from poor health. In addition to the work of WT, The Celtic FC Foundation provided 50 Christmas gift vouchers which were delivered to older tenants aged 65 plus. WSHA thanks The Celtic FC Foundation for their generous donation to our tenants.

“ This made a big difference... we are not in a good financial situation at the moment so this was such a good experience ”

What You Told Us






151 tenants provided feedback and 98% responded very positively. 66% of those who participated stated that they would not have been able to access the activity without WSHA's support due to their low income.

“ Having a day like that at Christmas really helps create memories with my family ”

Staff restructure

Over the past 6 months, we have been developing a new staffing structure in order to improve the way we provide services to our tenants. The new structure is now in place and will ensure we have more frontline housing staff out and about in our communities. The restructured repairs and maintenance team will ensure sufficient resources are in place to provide an improved service for day to day repairs and planned maintenance. The introduction of a Tenancy Engagement Officer post will develop and expand our interaction with tenants. We will be monitoring and evaluating the new structure to ensure it is delivering the best outcomes for our tenants.

In an effort to improve the service we provide to tenants we are reducing the area covered by each Housing Officer.

South Lanarkshire	North Lanarkshire	North/South Lanarkshire	Cowlairs	Glasgow North, South and West
Blackwood Douglas East Kilbride Kirkfieldbank Kirkmuirhill Lanark Law Stonehouse Strathaven Uddingston	Airdrie Coatbridge Cumbernauld Kilsyth Moodiesburn Queenzieburn	Bellshill Blantyre Fernhill Halfway Hamilton Motherwell	Cowlairs (all stock)	Anniesland/Yoker Auchentoshan Glasgow N/E Govan Road Hillhead / Royston Glasgow South Glasgow West Govan / Elderspark The Point / Possil Yoker
Sharon Cowan 	Heather MacKenzie 	Karen Lennox 	David Henderson 	Karen Burns 
0141 550 5609	0141 550 5075	0141 550 5624	0141 550 5063	0141 550 5610

Ayrshire/Glasgow	Ayrshire	Glasgow East	Glasgow East	Ayrshire
Irvine Kilmarnock Ardrossan Crookston Pollokshields Broomhouse	Ayr Prestwick Mossblown Monkton Troon	Camlachie Barrachnie Gallowgate Tollcross	Camlachie Dalmarnock Easterhouse	Ayr Prestwick Mossblown Monkton Troon
Ashley Burns 	Claire Robertson 	Yaw Frempong 	Eileen Macdonald 	Susan Greenan 
0141 550 5066	0141 550 5656	0141 550 5626	0141 550 5055	0141 550 5607

What's new?

Are you interested in growing?

Do you want to grow your own fruit and vegetables or learn more about wildlife gardening? 'Beginner's Guide to Growing' classes start in April in Crownpoint Community Garden on Crownpoint Road (next to St Mungo's Academy).

To find out more, come along to one of the drop-in sessions on Saturday 8th April or Monday 10th April 1-4pm and chat to one of the gardeners. There will be an opportunity to look around and perhaps think about having a space of your own to grow in.



For more information call Michelle on 0141 550 5633 or James on 07736 808 646



New boiler service with City Technical

We will be working alongside City Technical (CT) to improve services relating to boiler breakdowns and gas servicing requests. The partnership will mean that calls are directed straight to CT, giving tenants a single point of contact at all times. Tenants will be able to arrange servicing appointments 24 hours a day, and the contract is a three star agreement which brings numerous benefits. For example there will be more vans and all vehicles will be stocked with all commonly used boiler parts, so CT do not need to wait to authorise orders. Transferring calls direct to CT will allow staff to be more productive in other areas.

Wheelie bin replacement

Following a successful wheelie bin pilot project, all small metal bins with lids will be replaced with green wheelie bins throughout Glasgow.

A number of people had approached Councillor Paul Carey about the metal bins with issues concerning rats, foxes and birds ripping the refuse bags open. The other issue was that the metal bins were too small to meet the needs of the households. Therefore, a case was put forward to persuade the council to carry out a pilot project within the local area. The pilot project was so successful that the Council has now decided to spend over £6 million replacing all metal bins with green wheelie bins.





Welfare

UK Government Plans to Close & Merge Jobcentres across the UK:

In December 2016, plans were announced to close half of Glasgow's 16 Jobcentres. Under the proposals, Castlemilk and Langside Jobcentres will move to Newlands; Parkhead, Easterhouse and Bridgeton will move to Shettleston and Anniesland will move to Partick. Further announcements have recently been made that one in 10 Jobcentres across England, Wales and Scotland will close. The Government cites that more people make use of online and telephone services, changing the way in which services are accessed and delivered.



Local Housing Allowance Cap for General Needs & Support Housing

In the Summer 2016 newsletter we advised that the LHA cap for general needs housing was to be introduced in April 2018 for people signing tenancy agreements after April 2016. This has now been delayed to April 2019 for both general needs tenancies and supported tenancies. Due to higher rents/service charges associated with supported housing, a consultation is being carried out by the Government as to how to fund the potential shortfall in housing costs. We will provide updates when available.

Chronically ill claimants of Employment Support Allowance

The Government announced late last year that ESA claimants who are chronically ill with deteriorating health conditions will not have to undergo repeated 'fitness for work' assessments. Under the current system, reassessments can be carried out every 2 months to 2 years. A full list of conditions exempt from reassessment will be made available in due course.

Use of flexibilities in Universal Credit

The Scottish Government has announced its intention to use its new devolved powers in Welfare to make changes to the way in which Universal Credit is paid e.g. twice monthly payment and the option to have the housing costs element paid direct to the Landlord. Work to deliver this is ongoing.

Other benefit changes which come into force in 2017:

- * New tax free childcare scheme aims to provide up to 1.8 million families across the UK with up to £2,000 of childcare support per year, per child via a new online system.
- * Bereavement Support payment replaces the current bereavement benefit system.
- * New Employment Support Allowance - claimants who are placed in the Work-Related Activity Group will receive the same rate of benefit as those claiming Jobseekers Allowance. Whilst there is no financial benefit to being placed in the WRAG group, work seeking activities should not be as stringent as for those claiming Jobseekers Allowance.
- * 18-21 year olds who are on Universal Credit Full Service will have to apply for an apprenticeship or traineeship, gain work-based skills or go on a work placement 6 months after the start of their claim. Apart from certain exceptions (those considered vulnerable) they will not be allowed to claim housing costs.
- * Those starting a family after April 2017 will no longer be eligible for the Family Element in Tax Credits. This means that new claims for child tax credit will be £545 per year worse off than those who are currently getting tax credits.
- * Universal Credit first child premium (£277.08 per month) will not be available for new claims after April 2017, where the first child is born after 6 April. All children born after this date will be entitled to a flat rate of £231.67 per month.
- * In households with two or more children, any subsequent child born after April 2017 will not be eligible for further support. For example if a third child is born after this date, child benefit, child tax credits or Universal Credit will not be offered for this child and any born after it. Housing Benefit will also be restricted for new claims. You will still be entitled to these benefits for children born before April 2017.
- * Parents with a youngest child aged 3 or older (including lone parents) who are able to work, will be expected to look for work if they are claiming Universal Credit.

Contact us:

You can contact our Welfare Rights Team by email at welfarerights@westscot.co.uk or by direct dial on 0141 550 5662.



How we can help

Energy Advice Service

Do you know that WSHA has a free and impartial Energy Advice Service exclusively for our tenants? This service has assisted more than 500 tenants with energy advice and support. This has included:

- ✳ Switching you to a new, more competitive energy deal or tariff saving you money and giving you peace of mind.
- ✳ Negotiating an affordable repayment plan with your energy provider if you are in debt.
- ✳ Accessing energy trusts funds to assist with high arrears (and in some cases having the full debt cleared).
- ✳ Providing you with energy efficiency tips.
- ✳ Assisting you with operating your heating controls.
- ✳ Carrying out energy bill health checks to make sure that you are not paying too much for your energy.

These are just some of the services that the WSHA Energy Advice Service can offer you. Typical monthly direct debit customers on a standard tariff plan with a supplier can save up to £200 per year just by switching their tariff or supplier. Tenants who have pre-payment meters can also save money by moving on to more competitive deals.

Willowacre Trust and WSHA can also provide 'Warm Home Packs' and offer an 'Emergency Top Up' service to tenants who require urgent assistance. These services can help you insulate your home, maximise the efficiency of your heating system and access emergency credit.

If you would like to find out more please contact our Energy Advice Service on 0141 550 5664



URBAN STARS

FREE Football, Dance and Multi-Sport sessions for young people aged 8-19 years old

Just turn up and join in on the day it's FREE

ARTS Tuesday 5pm-7pm, Barrowfield Community Centre

FOOTBALL Friday 5pm-7pm, Barrowfield Community Centre

DANCE Saturday 12pm-2pm, Barrowfield Community Centre

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION :
CALL 0141 551 4321 or EMAIL cfcfoundation@celticfc.co.uk
Barrowfield Community Centre: Yate Street, Camlachie, G31 4AE

Celtic FC Foundation is a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (number SC024648) with its registered office at Celtic Park, Glasgow, G40 3RE

Handy Person Service

West of Scotland Housing Association is delighted to announce that the Handyperson Service is celebrating its second birthday. The service has now completed 410 jobs and is targeted at tenants aged 60 and over and those living with a disability who meet certain criteria. The service can offer support to tenants by carrying out odd jobs including:

- ✦ Hanging shelves, pictures, mirrors, curtains and window blinds
- ✦ Rearranging furniture
- ✦ Flooring coverings
- ✦ Assembling flat packed furniture
- ✦ Painting and decorating
- ✦ One off garden tidy
- ✦ Other basic services

If you are interested in finding how the service can support you please contact our Community & Support Services Team on 0141 550 5664, email communitysupportservices@westscot.co.uk



Money Advice Service



West of Scotland Housing Association's Money Advice Service launched in 2014 and has already provided advice to 515 tenants, offering a wide range of financial support.

If you are having difficulties with personal debt, dealing with creditors, budgeting, or maybe you just want assistance to open up a bank account, our Money Advice Service can offer you support. Contact our Money Advice Service on 0141 550 5664.

Case Study

One tenant recently contacted the service because they had exceeded their overdraft limit and the charges that they were incurring continued to rise. The tenant felt "desperate" as they watched their income reduce month by month. The Money Advice Service helped the tenant open a basic bank account and stop the charges on the previous account. This allowed the tenant to repay their outstanding debt through affordable monthly payments without the pressure of it continually increasing. The tenant was given support and advice on how to compare new accounts, making sure that they chose the right one for them. All existing direct debit and regular payments were also transferred over hassle-free via the service.



Which services can we help with?

A recent survey showed a small number of our tenants have issues that they are concerned about, but they don't approach the Association as they don't think we can help. In some cases we may not be able to help directly, but very often we have partners who can. Below are examples of some issues we can get involved in and who we would work with to try and resolve the issue.

Issue	Partner we would work with	What we have done
Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)	Local Authority's ASB team and the police	In the last 6 months we have dealt with over 124 ASB cases
Medical Adaptions	Local Authority's social work department	In the last financial year the Association spent over £190,000 on 72 medical adaptions in tenant's homes
Problems with benefits	Local Authority's Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentres and other benefit agencies	From April to December last year our Welfare Rights Team have managed to help tenants get over £283,192.16 in backdated benefit
Want to move home to another area	Web based company called Homeswapper www.homeswapper.co.uk	Our tenants can get free access to the site allowing them to discuss mutual exchanges throughout the UK.

Cowlairs Office Closure

The office in Cowlairs is now closed. If you have any enquiries or wish to speak with a member of staff, please call the Camlachie Office on 0141 550 5600.

A drop-in service is now available for the Cowlairs/Glasgow North area at 232 Gourlay Street within our Sheltered Housing Development. Appointments with Housing Officers and other support staff can be arranged directly with them for Tuesdays between 10.00am until 12.00pm and Thursdays between 2.00pm until 4.00pm as follows:

Appointment with	Contact	Number
Housing Officer	Claire MacBeth	0141 550 5064
Welfare Rights Officer	Welfare Rights Team	0141 550 5662
Money Advice Officer, Energy Advice Officer, Older People's Services or another support service	Cameron Stewart	0141 550 5664



Looking after our properties



We have a number of programmes in place to ensure our tenants' homes meet the correct standard.

Health and Safety

The safety of our tenants is paramount so we have a number of programmes in place to ensure all properties are adequately maintained.

Gas servicing is taking place on 3033 properties across our stock which includes 3 star maintenance. We are also carrying out electrical inspections, a total of 700 per year. As a landlord, it is our duty to risk assess every property and carry out maintenance regimes, so water safety and fire safety inspections are undertaken. Additionally, we have a programme to inspect and upgrade smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.

Improvements

Our kitchen replacement programme will include work on over 300 kitchens across a range of properties. Work is also planned for renewal of 100 bathrooms. External door replacements will take place in Mossblown and Govan road and window replacement will continue throughout the year at Uddingston, Glasgow, Hamilton, Easterhouse and Cumbernauld. A heating replacement programme is also in place for over 350 boilers.

Major repairs

Nursery Avenue in Kilmarnock currently has kitchens which must be modified to meet SHQS standards, so work will take place this year. There will be refurbishment works in Anniesland and Barrachnie and roof repairs to resolve ongoing water ingress problems are due to take place in Weavers Court and Mainholme Court. Major roof work will take place in David Court and Newfield Court.

“I can't thank the Association enough for the recent work on my kitchen and new door, I'm so happy with it!”

Mrs Brand, Yate Street

If you would like to organise a repair, get in touch with our repairs team on 0141 550 5600 option 1.



Rent-setting questionnaire results

We recently sent out a questionnaire about the changes to rent setting and the results are outlined below. Firstly, we asked if you agree that it is fair to set rents mainly by property size (number of bedrooms) and the type (flat/house).

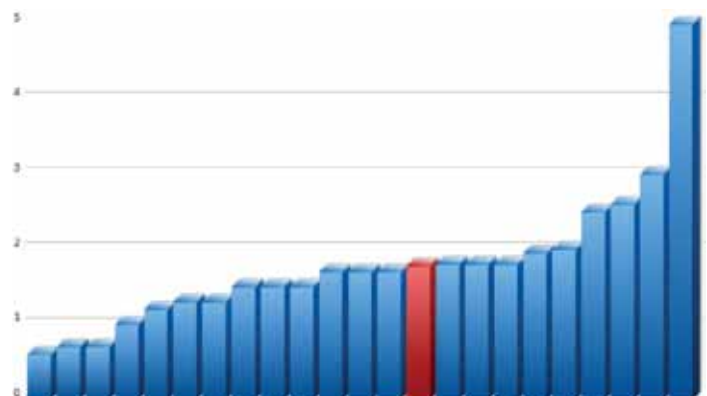
	Yes	No	Blank
Lanarkshire	60%	28%	12%
Ayrshire	76.9%	23%	0%
Glasgow	64.2%	35.7%	0%

The majority of respondents believed rents to be set fairly in accordance with the number of rooms and property type. However, others considered the following factors to be important:

Issue	Feedback from WSHA
Income/financial circumstances	We do have to keep our rents affordable and eligible for Housing Benefit.
Property condition	We have the flexibility to adjust individual rents if a property is not in good condition: more than 94% of our homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and we continue to prioritise investment in properties needing improvements.
Rent comparisons with other landlords	We do compare our rents with other social landlords and our average rents are middle of the range.
Next door neighbour pays less for the same size of property	Rents can vary which is the main reason for introducing changes to the way we will set rents in the future. However, there may still be differences. For example, between Fair Rents (set by the Rent Officer) and Scottish Secure Rents.
Rent should depend on the land the property is set on e.g. 3-4 bedroom house is set on more land than a block of flats which is occupied by 12 people.	We don't plan to increase rents based on the amount of land attached to a property. Although common land, for example surrounding some flats will often be our responsibility to maintain, the cost of this is met with a service charge in addition to the rent. The garden belonging to a house is private and will be the responsibility of the tenant to maintain.






To see full analysis of this survey, go to www.westscot.co.uk/rents-and-benefits/how-we-set-your-rent/

The red bar in this chart illustrates where West of Scotland Housing Association is positioned in comparison to other housing associations in terms of weekly rent increase.



Please let us know if you need help to read or understand this information. If you require this information in large print, audio or any other language, please contact Sophie Mead on 0141 550 5630 or email sophie.mead@westscot.co.uk.

This newsletter is also available on our website www.westscot.co.uk.

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West of Scotland

 Housing Association

 It's how you live