

Westworld

Official Newsletter of West of Scotland Housing Association

Spring 2020 Edition

Message from Chief Executive

Firstly, on behalf of all the staff and Board of West of Scotland Housing Association, I want to wish you and your families well during this worrying time.

I know this is a very challenging time and this edition of Westworld focuses on the support we, and others, can provide including advice about welfare benefits, food parcels or even a phone call. If you feel you need any extra help at all then please do not hesitate to contact us and we will do our very best to help.



Image Credit: Imagistical

Our staff have been working from home since 18th March and you will read about what services they are continuing to deliver along with additional support due to Coronavirus. We might have had to change where we work and how we work, however the reason why we work remains the same to provide support to tenants and communities when they need us most.

We will continue to provide regular updates and you can find latest information on our website www.westscot.co.uk/tenants/coronavirus/.

I once again would like to thank you for your patience and understanding at this very challenging time.

Brian Gannon

Chief Executive Officer

Repairs Service

Due to Government rules we can only carry out emergency repairs and you can report an emergency repair as normal on **0141 550 5600**. However, we are keeping a note of any non-emergency repairs requested and we will attend to these once the Government advises that normal business practices can resume.

Contact us

Whilst our staff continue to work from home, you can still contact us as normal. Our staff phones are diverted and should be answered as normal, however please let us know if you are having any difficulty getting in touch.

- Calling – **0141 550 5600** (please note if you are contacting your Housing Officer you can contact them using their direct dial number which is found on our website)
- Email – **info@westscot.co.uk**
- Facebook – **WSHAScotland**
- Twitter – **WSHAScotland**

Equalities & Communication Preferences Survey

Over the coming weeks we will be phoning you to get some important equalities information.

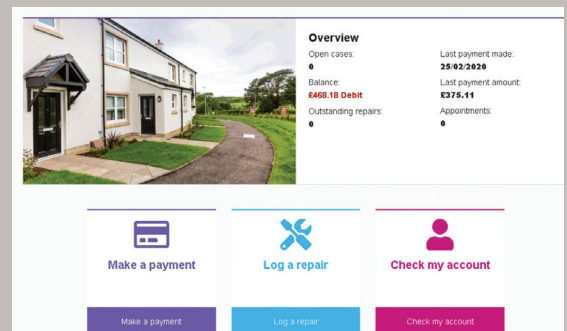
We need this information to enable us to deliver services to meet the varying needs of all customers. We also need this information to meet the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator who expect us to have evidence that we collect this information about our customers and use it to shape our service delivery, decision making and policy making. So it is really important that you provide this information to us. We have updated our data protection statement to reflect this data collection. You can find the updated statement at www.westscot.co.uk or can request a copy from our Data Protection Officer by contacting Jennifer Cairns on 0141 550 5625.

We also want to find out your communication preferences so we can ensure we contact you in a way that suits your needs so we will ask you about this too.



Tenant Portal

We will shortly be going live with our new tenant portal which will allow you to access your rent account, see all your transactions, make a payment and make requests for services online. If you are interested in registering for this service please email us at tenant.portal@westscot.co.uk with your name and address. You can also phone us on 0141 550 5600.



WSHA Service Delivery

Our staff have been working from home since 18th March 2020 and continue to provide services to tenants including:

- Respond to incoming calls, emails and texts
- Respond to emergency repair requests
- Resolve estate management and neighbour issues where possible via phone and email
- Provide Welfare Rights advice (telephone and online)
- Respond to support calls (tenant welfare, energy advice etc.)
- Respond to Complaints
- Process Transfer Applications
- Respond to enquiries made via social media

Repairs Service

Please note that we are following latest Government Advice and we are only carrying out Emergency Repairs and work that is required to comply with health and safety regulations. To report an emergency repair, please report it as normal by calling 0141 550 5600. When arranging the repair, you will be asked if you are experiencing any Coronavirus symptoms or if you are classed as high risk or vulnerable.

Gas Servicing

The current position from the HSE and UK Government is that gas safety inspections must continue, and that Landlords have a legal obligation to do so. This is primarily around the risk of life and building as a consequence of a gas explosion or carbon monoxide poisoning. To maintain our Duty of Care, and ensuring that all properties remain safe for you to live in, the annual gas safety service must go ahead and is classed as essential work.

Given the necessity to continue, we have worked with our gas contractor City Technical to ensure that both our tenants and their employees are protected as far as reasonably practical against the spread of the virus.

- Engineers will wear masks, gloves, safety glasses and face shield if required
- Anti-bacterial solution used to wipe down any surfaces touched, including door handles on the way out
- Only engineers that are healthy and symptom free permitted to work
- Social distancing at all times and no signature required on completion

Your Neighbourhood

We are cautiously beginning some estate inspections to identify any health and safety

matters with safety guidance being observed. Although it may be some time before this service is resumed fully, you can still report any general estate management and property issues to us and we will try our best to resolve these via the phone and email. If you would like to contact your Housing Officer you can find their direct contact details at www.westscot.co.uk/aboutus/staff/housing-officers/

Paying your Rent

You should continue to pay your rent as normal and you can do this in a number of ways:

- Direct Debit
- By using your swipe card at any Post Office.
- At any shop or garage which has a Pay Point terminal.
- By telephone on 0141 550 5600.
Card payments only.
- Online at www.allpayments.net

We understand that the coming weeks may have an impact on the income of some of our tenants and customers. **If you feel you will have difficulties paying your rent then please contact us so we can assist you.**

Our Welfare Rights Team may be able to help you apply for any benefits you might now be entitled to.

Service Charges

For tenants who pay charges for services such as close cleaning we are aware that you are not currently receiving these services. It is very important to realise however that your current charges are largely based on the previous year's services provided so next year (from April 2021) you can expect a reduction in what you will be charged.

Supporting You and the Community

Support and Assistance

We know this is a worrying time and we have a number of support services tenants can use such as:

- Wellbeing Telephone Support
- Food Parcels
- Welfare Benefits Advice
- Money Advice
- Energy Fuel Top ups (Smart Meters Only)
- Mobile Phone Top ups
- Housing and Rent Advice



To access these services contact the Community & Support Service Team on 0141 500 5600 option 4 or 0141 550 5664 or you can complete a form on our website www.westscot.co.uk/tenants/coronavirus

Our Community and Support Service team have delivered a comprehensive package of support across our communities, this has included:

- **1,101** wellbeing telephone calls made to tenants over 65
- **2,634** wellbeing telephone calls made to our 211 sheltered housing tenants
- **359** hot cooked meals delivered to tenants in our Sheltered Housing sites
- **149** referrals have been received for assistance with food and twice weekly food parcel deliveries are being coordinated from Barrowfield Community Centre
- **171** referrals for support with welfare benefits since the end of March
- **67** requests for fuel

“ This is the first time that anyone has asked about me, this is super, what a difference this call has made to me ”

(North Lanarkshire)

“ It is really comforting to know that he is getting at least one properly cooked meal a week – Thank you ”

(Glasgow)

Your Wellbeing

You should follow official Government guidance which is to protect yourself and others:

- stay at home
- only go outside for essential food, health and work reasons
- stay 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people
- wash your hands regularly
- wash your hands as soon as you get home



More information can be found at www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus or if you don't have symptoms and are looking for general information, phone the free helpline on **0800 028 2816**.

Welfare Benefits Advice

Our dedicated Welfare Rights Team has been working tirelessly to support tenants who need advice and support due to Coronavirus impacting negatively on their incomes. The team received 171 referrals and tenant contacts from 30th March to 7th April. Eleanor Falconer, Senior Welfare Rights Officer, said: "Our customers and families are experiencing uncertain times with regard to jobs and reduction in income dues to the Coronavirus crisis."

Due to the unprecedented steps that have been taken to slow the spread of this virus, the need for access to financial aid has never been higher.

This has led to an increase in demand for our customers to seek advice from our Welfare Rights Team. Our Team has been able to provide telephone advice and assistance on what entitlements are available and on how to access these. The majority of enquiries have seen our customers worried about paying their rent, council tax and essential household bills.

Alongside our colleagues in Housing and Community Support Services, we are here to help so please contact us on **0141 550 5600**."

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE HELP IS AVAILABLE

Don't delay in seeking help during the current coronavirus situation. Call the 24-hour Domestic Abuse Helpline in confidence on **0800 027 1234** or visit **safer.scot**

Domestic abuse is a crime.
Call **101** to report it or **999** in an emergency.



Financial Guidance

We know that these are increasingly worrying times for tenants and families. We are continuing to monitor the situation and identify relevant advice and support to share with tenants. We have our own in-house Welfare Rights Team who can give you advice and support. You can contact them on 0141 550 5600 or welfarerights@westscot.co.uk

Please note the information below is subject to change and we will continually review this information to provide regular updates to tenants. You can keep up to date via our website www.westscot.co.uk/tenants/coronavirus/

Statutory Sick Pay

Those who follow advice to stay at home and who cannot work as a result will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP), even if they are not themselves sick. Anyone not eligible to receive sick pay, including those earning less than an average of £118 per week, some of those working in the gig economy, or self-employed people, are able to claim Universal Credit and or contributory Employment and Support Allowance.

Job Retention Scheme for ‘furloughed’ workers

The Government has set up a fund, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, for employers to pay employees 80% of their salary (up to a maximum of £2,500 a month). You are classed as a ‘furloughed’ worker, if you are unable to do any work but you are kept on your employer’s payroll, rather than being laid off.

Been made redundant

If your employer has chosen to make you redundant there are rules that they need to meet – they cannot ignore your usual rights. The company may have its own policy which is more generous than the statutory minimum. If it does not have its own policy and you have worked for your current employer for at least two years you should be entitled to:

- Half a week’s pay for each full year you were under 22.
- One week’s pay for each full year you were 22 or older, but under 41.
- One and half week’s pay for each full year you were 41 or older.

You can calculate how much you are entitled to here www.gov.uk/calculate-yourredundancy-pay

Universal Credit

Tenants affected by the Coronavirus who are worried about paying their rent can claim Universal Credit from the Department of Work and Pensions which includes support for housing costs, if eligible. The UK Government has introduced some changes to make this easier. If eligible, you can apply for Statutory Sick pay or Contribution Based Employment and Support Allowance and UC, you should do this as soon as possible. For support and further information please visit www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/ or contact our Welfare Rights Team. You can also call the Universal Credit Helpline on 0800 328 5644.

Please note that if the Job Centre needs to contact you then the number they phone from may show as withheld. If you have made recent application then please answer calls from withheld numbers.

On top of the planned rise to UC from 6 April 2020, the Government increased UC payments by another £80 per month (for 12 months).

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction

If you are already in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction, you should report any changes to income direct to the Local Authority. These change can affect the help you get for your rent and council tax.

If you do not already get help with your Council Tax or have moved over to Universal Credit, we advise that you make an application.

Tax Credits

If you are currently getting tax credits, your entitlement may be affected by the coronavirus outbreak. Child tax credit (CTC) provides support for children, and working tax credit (WTC) provides support for people working at least a certain number of hours, employed or self-employed, on a low income. You should report any changes in income to HMRC.

The government has announced that the basic element of WTC will increase by £1,045 on top of the planned rise from 6th April 2020. The basic element will be £3,040 for 2020/21 (a daily rate of £8.33).

Self-Employed and Small Businesses

The Scottish Government has announced a rescue package for businesses with cash being made available to support business through the Covid-19 pandemic. Payments are expected to be made in June.

It will include rates relief, grants for small businesses and a £50m Hardship Fund for the self-employed or people who lose their jobs as a result of measures taken to limit the spread of the virus. You should contact your local authority for more details and how to apply.

A dedicated helpline has been set up to help businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress and with outstanding tax liabilities receive support with their tax affairs. Through this, businesses may be able to agree a bespoke Time to Pay arrangement. If you are concerned about being able to pay your tax due to Covid-19, call HMRC's dedicated helpline on 0800 0159 559.

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme

The Chancellor has announced details of the above scheme. The Scheme is for those who are self-employed or a member of a partnership and have lost income due to coronavirus and will allow you to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of your trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for the next 3 months. This may be extended if needed. HMRC will contact you if you are eligible for the scheme and invite you to apply online.

Support in your area

Combatting Isolation

During this time of social distancing many of us will miss the interaction with family and friends and the routine of our normal lives. As well as physical health, social isolation has a number of effects on mental health:

- Stress
- Loneliness
- Negative self-esteem

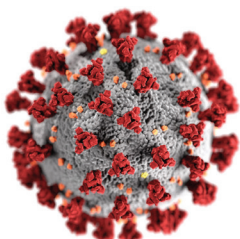
The NHS advice to look after your health and wellbeing is to:

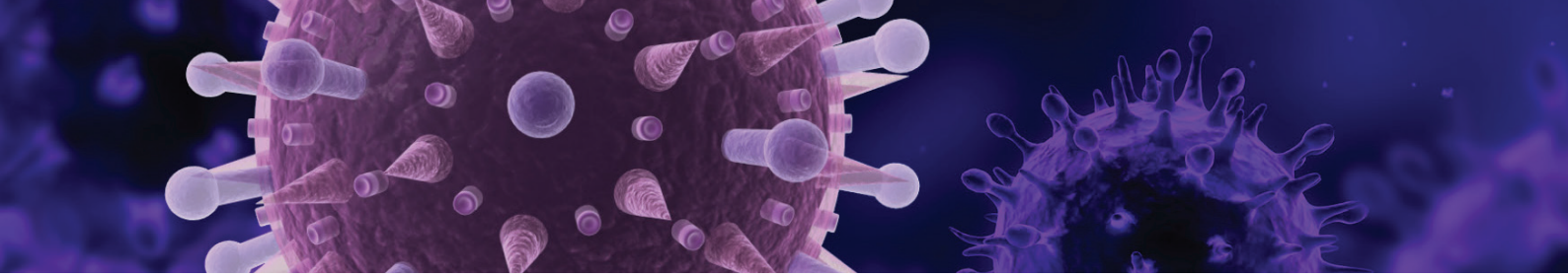
- Keep in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media. Continuing to communicate will reduce the feeling of loneliness.
- Try to fill your day with activities such as cooking, reading and online learning.
- Do light exercise – if you feel well enough.

There are a number of simple accessible tools available to support vulnerable individuals and support inclusion for different groups:

- Becky Wass has created a #Viralkindness post card introducing yourself and what you are able to help with. Copies of this postcard are included in this Westworld if you want to offer help to your neighbours.
- Back to Basics – a simple letter posted through a neighbour's door noting what help you can offer.
- Technology can play a key role in addressing social isolation, to stay connected and safe:
- WhatsApp groups can be created to engage with surrounding people and offer support where requested and for sharing of information.
- Groups on social media platform such as Facebook have also been created to highlight new information and updates in communities

If you would like any advice or support to use digital technology to stay in touch with your family and friends you can contact our Digital Participation Officer, Sarah Neary, on 0141 550 5664.





Scottish Government Helpline

A helpline has been set up to provide essential assistance to those who don't have a network of support, or who are at increased risk if they contract Coronavirus (COVID-19). It is for anyone who cannot get online, is over 70, is disabled, requires the support of mental health services, is pregnant or who receives a flu jab for health reasons.

This service is in addition to localised support already available for people who have received letters advising them to shield themselves. However, any of those in the shielding category who are not yet receiving assistance, who do not have a network of support and cannot get online can access support via this new helpline.

The helpline – 0800 111 4000 – will operate during core working hours of Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Callers will be automatically connected to their local authority who will support them to access the service they need, such as:

- essential food and medication
- links to local social work services for vulnerable children or adults
- emotional support
- contact with local volunteer groups



**Healthier
Scotland**
Scottish
Government



**The NHS is still
open for everyone**

The NHS is still open, so please don't ignore the early warning signs of serious conditions.

If you are unwell with non-coronavirus symptoms, it's important to continue to seek medical help by contacting your GP. If symptoms worsen out of hours, call 111. In an emergency, dial 999.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus (a high temperature or a new and continuous cough) go to www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus. You only need to call 111 if your coronavirus symptoms worsen or do not improve after 7 days. In an emergency, dial 999.

Compensation Policy Update

Our Board recently approved (subject to consultation with TAG) our new and updated Compensation Policy to ensure it continues to meet the needs of tenants and WSHA. The reviewed Compensation Policy sets out those instances where WSHA will compensate tenants where they have suffered a loss as a result of an action, inaction, or maladministration by WSHA or a contractor working on our behalf. It clarifies our approach to tenants who are decanted and sets out how we will aim to encourage tenants to purchase their own home contents insurance.

The key changes approved include:

- The scope of the policy has been extended to cover situations where not only an action of WSHA may lead to a potential compensation claim from a tenant but also an inaction
- Increased focus on need for tenants to have their own home contents insurance
- A new section specifically relating to decant procedures is introduced and sets out how WSHA will cover meals in hotels where appropriate
- The Procedure now includes a timescale for responses to compensation claims aligned with a staged two complaint of 20 working days

We recognise the importance of tenants having their own home contents insurance and we are currently exploring different options in how we can help tenants to take out adequate cover. We will be sending out a special home insurance communication in the coming weeks. Once approved by TAG, the full compensation policy can be found on our website www.westscot.co.uk.



Grounds Maintenance

You may be aware, our grounds maintenance service was suspended due to Coronavirus. We have been continually monitoring the situation closely with our contractor. We have now agreed to resume our grounds maintenance service whilst ensuring the health and safety of the staff and adhering to Government advice regarding social distancing. Due to this temporary suspension of services the first seasonal grass cut will be later than normal. If you have any questions or would like any further information then please do not hesitate to contact us.



Getting Involved

Tenant Engagement

The Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) managed one meeting this year before we had to close our office. At this meeting they agreed on a number of policy areas that they wanted to look at in the year ahead.

One of the big areas of work in the year ahead will be a full scale review of how we set our rents for our homes. We, and TAG, agree that the current system is complicated and difficult to understand and will therefore work together to develop a new rent policy that is fair and transparent for all our tenants. We expect to undertake a detailed consultation exercise between August and September this year.

Despite no meetings taking place we are still keen to gather the views of our tenants.

We are working with tenant volunteers to review the templates that staff use to correspondence with our customers.

If you want to join our Readers Panel please get in touch at haveyoursay@westscot.co.uk



Performance and Complaints

Complaints and Customer Satisfaction

We are committed to listening to your views so we can deliver services more effectively, or where we can do more things that you want us to do. To support us to do this, we regularly monitor the complaints we receive, and also use an independent company Research Resource undertake monthly satisfaction surveys. Where an issue comes up as part of a complaint, or is fed back to us by Research Resource we will look to make changes to how we work.

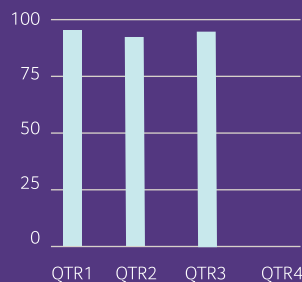
Complaints Update

During Quarters three and four (October to March) we received 80 complaints from our customers. 60 of these complaints were considered under Stage one of our complaints procedure and 20 under Stage two. Almost half of the complaints related to our day to day repairs service and we continue to raise any issues with the relevant contractor where we identify problems with our service.

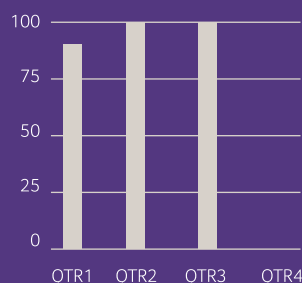
You Said	We Did
We received some complaints about the tone of a letter sent to tenants regarding issues in the area with dog fouling.	We have reviewed our standard letters that we send to tenants regarding estate management issues

WSHA Customer Satisfaction 2019/20

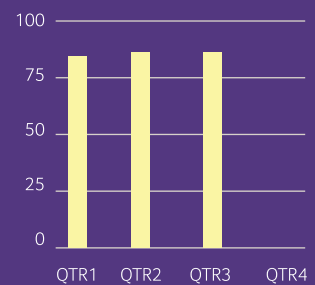
Overall, how satisfied were you with the repairs and maintenance service received?



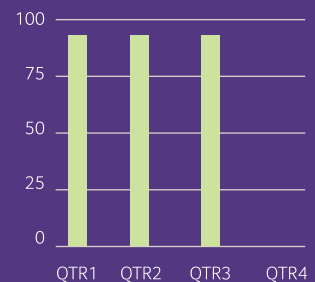
% of tenants satisfied with planned maintenance



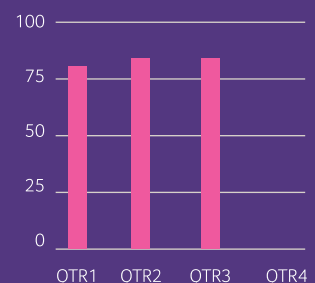
Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by West of Scotland Housing Association?



Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the landlords's management of the neighbourhood you live in?



Taking into account the accommodation and services your landlord provides, do you think your rent for this property represents good value for money?



For more information please contact:

t: 0141 550 5600

w. westscot.co.uk

e. info@westscot.co.uk

f WSHAScotland

t WSHAScotland



West of Scotland Housing Association