



housing

news

The newsletter for Link tenants

Heard about the Tenant Zone?

Did you know that we now have a new website with a dedicated Tenant Zone which contains a wealth of information about your tenancy with Link?



and energy issues. You can also use the website to let us know if any repairs are needed in your home – and much more!

Visit the zone at www.linkhousing.org.uk/tenants-zone to find all the latest news from Link, information about how to get involved with decision-making and details of how to access sources of free and confidential advice on money, benefits, debt

Why not take a look and, if you have a couple of minutes to spare, give us your views by completing the online questionnaire so we can go on improving the site. This can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/tenant-web-survey>.

INSIDE

Involving you



Youth Forum



Tenants visit Newcastle



Five year maintenance plan You should have received a copy of the latest planned maintenance schedule enclosed with this newsletter. The schedule highlights the main work that will be carried out to your home between now and 2015. If you have any questions about the schedule, or you didn't receive one with your newsletter, please contact the Customer Service Centre on 08451 400 100 or email csc@linkhaltd.co.uk.

Are you a Link tenant aged 16-25? Would you like to meet other young tenants, pick up some advice and information that's relevant to you and try some new things, all for free? Then the first Link Housing Youth Forum could be for you!

Youth forum



instrument if you have one), before you head back home in the transport provided.

If you use your own car we will reimburse you at 40 pence per mile. Reasonable child/carer costs will be met if required (if there are enough children attending we may provide a crèche).

opportunity to indulge in a manicure or Indian head massage, use the internet café – and lots more!

The daytime sessions will be followed by dinner and the event will be rounded off with a jamming session for those who would like to take part (please bring along your musical

If you would like to attend please complete the form below and return it to Tenant Liaison Officer, Link Housing Association, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk, FK1 1XR.

The forum is taking place in the Park Hotel, Falkirk, on Thursday 5 August 2010 from 12.30 – 7pm. It will be opened by a mystery guest and a great afternoon of interesting workshops and entertainment is planned. There will also be the

Youth Forum booking form

Name	Address	Age	Transport required (tick)	Child/carer costs required (tick)

Unlawful subletting

When a tenant of Link Housing Association lets out their home without Link's knowledge or permission, they are unlawfully sub-letting. The tenant continues to pay the rent for the property directly to Link but charges the person they are sub-letting to at a much higher rate.

We take unlawful sub-letting very seriously – any tenant who sub-lets may be found to be in breach of their tenancy agreement, which could result in the loss of their tenancy.

We're excellent at involving you!



(L-R): Link Housing's Chair Angela Currie; TPAS Chief Executive Lesley Baird; Link Housing's Director of Housing Maureen Middleton; Link Housing's Tenant Liaison Officer Lenore Suddon.

Link Housing Association has become only the second Registered Social Landlord in Scotland to receive formal accreditation from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) recognising excellence in tenant participation.

During the five-month accreditation process, we undertook a self assessment, explaining how we involve tenants and residents. We then had to show evidence of how we comply with 11 key competencies in resident involvement, which include having an active tenant participation strategy in place, involving tenants in decision-making and ensuring staff have a good awareness of tenant participation.

TPAS then carried out a verification process which involved interviews with tenants and staff and an assessment of our performance by an independent scrutiny panel.

TPAS Chief Executive Lesley Baird who presented us with our accreditation said: "We were very impressed with Link's performance. They have worked really hard and recognise that while not everyone wants to be part of a tenants' group, they have a right to participate at a level that suits them – Link has a range of options for tenants to participate at the level that suits them best. Tenants are at the heart of the organisation and they're clearly involved in the decision-making process."

EASY WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT

Online

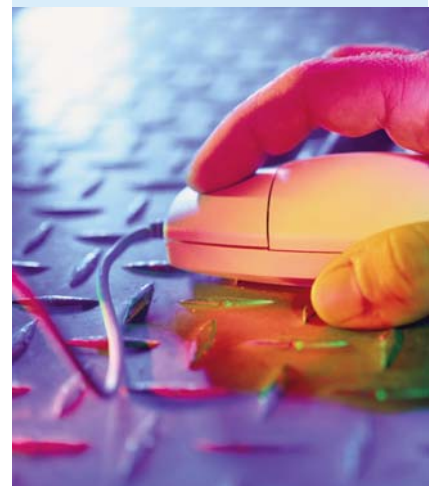
You can log on directly to **www.allpayments.net** to pay your rent. All you need is your Allpay card and credit/debit card to make a payment on a secure site.

By phone

If you do not have access to a computer then we can log on for you. Simply contact us on 08451 400 100 and have your credit/debit card at the ready.

By Direct Debit

We can set this up very quickly over the phone, just give us a call on 08451 400 100 and have your bank account details ready. This method ensures you never forget to make a payment. We can also amend your direct debit just as easily if your circumstances or your rent change.



Summer outing 2010

Last year's outing to Blair Drummond Safari Park was a 'roaring' success so we have decided to return to the park for our 2010 summer outing on Wednesday 28 July 2010.

This year's visit will be even bigger and better, with a barbecue, children's races, competitions, raffles and much more. The day out will hopefully allow our tenants to have fun and get to know each other.

Places will be allocated by drawing names "out of the hat". If you want to attend with your

neighbours, make sure you put all your names on the same application form. Coach transport, entrance to the park and the barbecue are free – all you have to do is cross your fingers and hope the sun shines!

To be in with a chance for this great day out, please complete the application form below and return it before 9 July 2010 to:

Tenant Liaison Officer, Link Housing Association, Watling House, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk, FK1 1XR.

Please note that this trip is for Link tenants only.

Summer outing booking form

Name	Address	Age	Contact telephone number

TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

WE WILL shortly be sending every tenant a copy of our Tenant Participation Strategy for 2010 - 2013. The strategy, which was produced jointly by Link staff and tenants, details our commitment to our tenants and how we aim to encourage more of you to get involved with Link

and its decision making.

The publication contains lots of information we hope you will find useful. For example, we have listed the areas where Registered Tenants' Groups and Village Voices are present and details of how to contact them. For those who do not have a

group in their area we have provided information on how to start up your own.

We also detail the many different ways that you can become involved with Link.

If you would like to discuss any item in the new strategy please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.

MYSTERY SHOPPING



During December 2009 and January 2010, tenant ‘mystery shoppers’ reviewed how our Customer Service Centre (CSC) provides its services. The tenants were asked to call the CSC with a query and rate the quality of the response they received.

Details of the results are shown below. We know there is room for improvement which we are addressing through ongoing training and monitoring.

Overall quality of call

- The Link advisor recapped the conversation in 48% of calls
- The Link advisor asked tenant for their contact details in 44% of calls
- The Link advisor opened the call politely in 88% of calls
- The Link advisor ended the call politely in 88% of calls

Technical knowledge of Link advisor rated out of 10

Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of shoppers who gave this rating	4	4	24	0	0	4	16	0	0	43

Thank you to all the ‘mystery shoppers’ who took part in the review.

If you would like further details on how to become a mystery shopper please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.

TENANT-LED INSPECTION

LINK has recently recruited seven Tenant Inspectors who will be reviewing a number of areas of our work. The inspectors attended a three-day training course before going on to plan their first service review which was of our Void and Re-let Standard. The standard is set to minimise void periods and ensure properties are presented effectively to prospective tenants.

After familiarising themselves with our void policy and procedures the inspectors worked alongside staff and visited new tenants to find out about their experience of becoming a Link tenant. The review is ongoing and the results will be published in the Christmas 2010 issue of Housing News.

Tenant-led inspections are a relatively new development in housing and a way of involving tenants in the review and development of the housing service. Tenant Inspectors receive expenses and remuneration gift vouchers for taking part in this worthwhile and enjoyable exercise. If you would like further details on how to become a Tenant Inspector please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.



Energy Performance Certificates

In January 2009, the government introduced new legislation regarding the energy performance of all buildings. We cannot now let a property without an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). The certificate provides an energy rating for the property and lists suggested works that may improve its energy efficiency, which we consider when planning for the future.

The information collected from the EPCs will inform our planned maintenance programme and we may carry out work to your home that improves its energy efficiency. If you would like to know more about EPCs please call the Scottish Building Standards Agency on 01506 600 400.

2010 Housing Bill

In January 2010 a new Housing Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament.

The remit of this Bill is to safeguard social housing for the use of future generations of tenants. The Bill is due to become an Act later on in the year as the Scottish Government aims to reform the Right to Buy and improve value for money to all tenants and taxpayers through a modernised system of social housing regulation.

The Bill states that the Scottish Housing Regulator should involve tenant representatives in how it delivers its functions and establishes the development of a Scottish Social Housing Charter, giving tenants the opportunity to participate with the Scottish Government to raise housing standards and services. The new Social Housing Charter will:

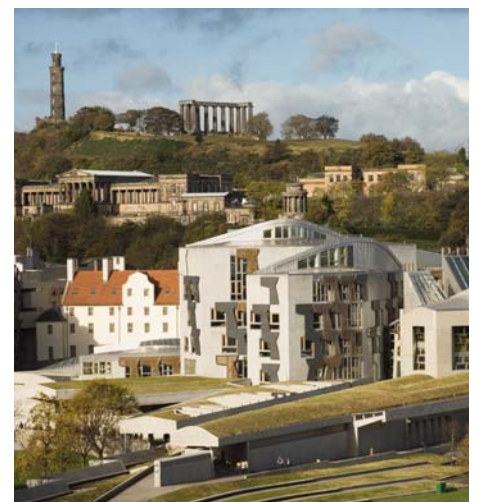
- **Set national and local outcomes**
- **Provide high level descriptions of what landlords should achieve**
- **Be developed by tenants/stakeholders and provide a framework for assessment of performance and value provided by landlords**
- **Allow the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess Landlord's performance against the Charter**

TIMETABLE FOR CHARTER

A period of consultation/development has been set as follows:

- **Stakeholders discussions**
Autumn 2010
- **Discussion paper published** Early 2011
- **2nd stage stakeholders discussion** Spring 2011
- **Statutory consultation**
Summer 2011
- **Submission to Parliament**
Late 2011
- **Charter in force**
April 2012

If you would like to know more about this and/or wish to be considered to take part in the consultation discussions with the Scottish Government, please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.



Recipes

Now that the weather is warmer, why not treat yourself or your family to these delicious barbecue treats?

BBQ Lemon Chicken

Yellow pepper cut into pieces
2 large chicken breasts (chopped into 1" pieces)
2 oz butter
Juice and rind of a lemon
2 cloves garlic crushed (more if you like)

Melt the butter slowly in a pan. Take off the heat and add the juice and grated rind of the

lemon, garlic, yellow pepper and mix well. Pour into a freezer bag and add chicken pieces, give it all a good shake. Leave to marinate for 30 mins.

Thread the chicken and pepper onto a skewer (if using wooden skewers, soak them for at least 30 mins in cold water



before use), season with salt and pepper if required and place on BBQ, turning until chicken is cooked through.

Classic Fruit Punch

12 ice cubes
Fresh mint leaves
Bottle of lemonade, chilled
Bottle of ginger ale, chilled
Half a cucumber cut into small thin strips
1 lemon cut into thin slices
1 green apple, thinly sliced
10 strawberries, halved

Place all ingredients in a large jug, stir with long spoon and serve. Add more fruit and/or ice if desired.

Summer Garden Competition 2010

Judging for our annual garden competition will take place during the second week in August 2010.

I would like to enter the Tenants Gardening Competition and the category I have chosen is:

- Garden, patio or yard
- Hanging basket or window box
- Communal garden
- Best vegetable patch



Name

Address

Tel no.....

This year's categories are:

- Hanging basket or window box: first prize £15 B&Q vouchers, 2nd prize £10 B&Q vouchers
- Garden, patio or yard: first prize £20 B&Q vouchers, 2nd prize £15 B&Q vouchers
- Communal Garden: first prize £50 B&Q vouchers, 2nd prize £25 B&Q vouchers
- Best Vegetable Patch: one prize only – £20 B&Q vouchers

If you would like to enter, please submit your application form by Monday 12 July to:

Tenant Liaison Officer, Link Housing Association, Watling House, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk, FK1 1XR, or give it to your local area housing officer.

GOOD LUCK to all who enter!

Tenants visit Newcastle

Dunedin Canmore Housing Association invited Link tenants to join them on a trip to Newcastle in April 2010, along with tenants from Castle Rock Edinvar and City of Edinburgh Council.

The visit, arranged jointly by Dunedin Canmore and senior lecturers at Newcastle and Edinburgh Universities saw the tenants visiting the Byker Estate which has won numerous architectural awards.

The group, pictured, also visited the new Places for People mixed tenure development in the Walker area of Newcastle and had a very productive meeting with



representatives and staff from the Newcastle Tenants Federation.

We aim to plan more exchange visits between tenants and residents across the country

in order to help improve tenants' knowledge of a variety of matters, from mixed tenure and factoring issues to mental health awareness.

Good advice

If you need advice on benefits and money then why not contact the Link Advice Team?

We are:

Approachable – we can help with benefits, welfare or debt/money matters.

Diverse – we will do what we can to help everyone with any matter relating to their benefits, debt or welfare whether it be about their income, finances, health, utilities, isolation, adaptations, housing, education, their local area.

Very nice people – who just love to help and sort things out for you.

Industrious – many of our clients have physical and mental health difficulties and we try to navigate and negotiate through complex benefits, welfare and debt systems. We constantly evaluate how we do things to try and improve efficiency and the services we offer.

Confidential – we treat the information we receive in the strictest confidence.

Enterprising – we are very good at developing new services and projects.

Tenacious – once we get our teeth into a problem we will not let it go.

Enthusiastic – we are very enthusiastic about what we do and strive to provide the best level of service at all times.

Adaptable – there is no such thing as a standard day in the Advice Team. Every client and every case is different.

Mindful – we are very mindful of your needs and strive to do our best at all times.

Why not contact us on 01324 417174 or visit us at www.linkhousing.org.uk/tenants-zone/getting-advice to see how we can help you?

TENANT PARTICIPATION EVENTS CALENDAR

<p>JULY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant summer outing • Tenant Panel tour of West Region • Sheltered housing tenants' newsletter (planning) 	<p>AUGUST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Care Policy – consultation • Committee Skills training • Youth Forum 	<p>SEPTEMBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Panel member elections • Shared Ownership Policy – consultation • Tenant open session 3: What it is like to be a tenant involved in Link activities
<p>OCTOBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Participation Advisory Service – National Conference • Tenant Panel election • Christmas edition of Housing News (planning) • Equality and Diversity training for members of Registered Tenants' Organisations 	<p>NOVEMBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystery Shopping training • Committee Skills Training • TP Strategy evaluation and monitoring meeting 	<p>DECEMBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Charges Policy consultation • Complaints Policy – consultation • Tenant groups' get-together • Mystery shopping exercise • Tenant open session 4: Shadowing a housing officer/maintenance officer • Customer Care Policy – consultation

If you would like to take part in any of the above focus groups or activities or would like an informal chat about what is involved, please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.

Free attractions in Scotland

Many of us here at Link have the same concern as you over the school holidays – what to do with the kids! We have therefore asked staff what free attractions are in Scotland which they have enjoyed with their families.

- 1 The summit of Arthur's seat** is the highest point in Edinburgh and is easily to walk to in 30-60 minutes by most people in good health. The views from the top are exceptional.
- 2 Callendar House, Falkirk** tells stories spanning 600 years of Scottish history and is situated amidst magnificent park and woodland. Open daily, the 1825 kitchen forms the centre-piece of this interactive experience

and you can sample authentic Georgian food, listen to stories about life below stairs and watch kitchen staff go about their daily tasks.

- 3 Palacerigg Country Park, Cumbernauld** – Palacerigg's animal collection is unique in Central Scotland and provides an opportunity to see many rare breeds in addition to other friendly farm animals.
- 4 Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow** is the largest civic museum and art gallery in the UK, with collections of international importance.
- 5 Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh** is one of the world's finest botanical gardens (an admission charge applies to glasshouses).



*Last year's winner,
Margaret Tait*

Do you know our next Community Star?

The search is on for 2010's Community Star. This award recognises people who are prepared to "go that extra mile" for the good of the community and their neighbours. If you know of anyone in your area who deserves this award and would like to put their name forward for consideration, please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.

The winner will receive a £50 voucher and we will donate £200 to a charity of their choice.

Stair and window cleaning contract

We are currently looking to procure a new contract for some of the stair and window cleaning in our closes. Over the coming months, you may see Link employees in your close taking down information and measuring up to ensure we hold the correct details to help create the contract documentation.

How are we doing?

The table below shows how we are performing in some key areas. We must report these statistics to the Scottish Housing Regulator on an annual basis.

We had set more challenging targets for the new repairs contractor for 2009/10 compared to before and it has been tough to achieve these. Improving the service to you is a priority and we have been working with Connaught, our repairs partner, to make sure that we do that over the coming year. We have managed to deliver more new kitchens and bathrooms and central heating upgrades than expected through our planned programme and we have carried out 87 adaptations to make houses more accessible.

If you would like more information about our performance, please contact the Tenant Liaison Officer using the contact details on the back page.

Key Performance Indicators	Target	08/09 Year end total	09/10 Year end total
Lettings Average time properties take to be repaired and let (When repairs done, average time to let properties)	15 days	20.3 6	25.3 4.7
Loss of rent on empty properties	0.60%	0.57%	0.8 %
Average Annual Rent Increase	–	3.4%	1.9%
Total Rent Arrears	6.8%	5.5%	3.7%
Repairs			
Emergency	100%	96.7%	94.3%
Urgent	96%	93.4%	85.7%
Routine	96%	93.4%	88.2%
Customer satisfaction (repairs) Customer satisfaction with improvements	95%	83.1% 91.7%	82.58% 91.23%
Number of planned improvements achieved 2009/10 (Target for period 2009-2014 is 5238 homes)	1197 units	1028 units	1626 units
Complete all gas servicing on or before service anniversary date	100%	88%	97%

Christmas competition winner The winner of the Christmas competition in the December 2009 issue of Housing News was **Ms Yuill** of Falkirk who received £25 of M&S vouchers.

Prize draw winners The following tenants have each won a £25 voucher for the high street store of their choice after entering the planned maintenance satisfaction survey prize draw:

Janet Andrew Edinburgh, **Joseph Young** Falkirk, **Paul Morrison** Falkirk, **James Alexander** Falkirk, **Pamela Thomson** East Kilbride, **William Anderson** Camelon, **George McIntosh** Falkirk, **Agnes Clark** Airdrie, **William Edmond** Falkirk.

YOU SAID, WE DID



This year, one of the major planned maintenance projects has been extensive works at our properties in Wallace Street, Falkirk.

The living area of the properties used to consist of a living room and extremely small kitchen. Link recognised that the layout was not ideal for current and prospective tenants so set about holding consultation meetings with tenants and architects to put forward plans to remodel the living area.

The results are excellent with the bottom and middle floor flats having an open plan living room and kitchen with a small utility area enclosed at the back of the property and the top floor flats consisting of a separate kitchen, living room and utility room.

One of the current tenants said:

"I'm absolutely delighted with the kitchen units. The open plan layout provides more room to function and prepare meals. The increased cupboard & storage space is fantastic."

Have you had a repair carried out recently?

Our repairs contractor Connaught will now leave a Repairs Satisfaction Survey with a freepost envelope with you after every job. In order for Link and Connaught to improve their service please fill out the survey and return it to Link in the freepost envelope provided – you never know, you might be the lucky winner of a gift voucher!



Contents Insurance

Are the contents of your home insured?

LINK insures all of its properties but this only covers the buildings themselves, fixtures and fittings, glass (in windows and external doors) and fixed sanitary ware - bath, toilet and wash hand basin. It is your responsibility to have insurance for your furniture, floor coverings, internal decoration and personal belongings.

Some types of home contents insurance will also give you Accidental Damage Cover. Some insurance will make you pay more for this, while others will include it in the basic cost – it is important to check the terms of your policy.

Asbestos

AS a responsible landlord, we hold a register of all our common areas where asbestos is known to be present. Over the coming months, a contractor called Scientifics will be visiting these areas to survey the asbestos again so that the information we hold is up to date. If you have any concerns about Asbestos, please contact us on 08451 400 100.



Contact the Tenant Liaison Officer

Our Tenant Liaison Officer is Lenore Suddon. She can be contacted in the following ways:

By phone:
Customer Service Centre
08451 400 100

By email:
TLO@linkhalted.co.uk

By post:
Tenant Liaison Officer,
Link Housing Association,
Watling House,
Callendar Business Park,
Falkirk, FK1 1XR

Calling the Customer Service Centre

We have recently changed the options you are given when you call our Customer Service Centre. The new recorded message you will hear when you call will ask you to choose from the following options:

- Applying for gas heating and boiler repairs - **press 1**
- Repairs that are not gas heating or boiler related - **press 2**
- Applying for a house - **press 3**
- Rent arrears - **press 4**
- Property management (factoring) - **press 5**
- Any other issue or help directing your call - **press 6**

Emergency contact numbers

For repairs to all **new** boiler or central heating systems that are LESS than 12 months old call **British Gas 08459 500 400.**

For repairs to any **new** kitchen installations that are LESS than 12 months old call **EAGA 01506 417111.**

For any gas central heating repairs call **Saltire** on **08451 400 100** pressing **Option 1.**

For all other emergency repairs call **Connaught 0141 646 3886.**

If you experience any problems, contact the **Customer Service Centre** on **08451 400 100.**

Horizon joins Link



Welcome to all tenants of Horizon Housing Association which became part of Link at the end of 2009.

Link and Horizon will use their joint strength and experience to go on providing quality housing and to tackle wider neighbourhood issues across a large part of Scotland.

Horizon's expertise lies in meeting the housing needs of disabled people. The new partnership will continue to ensure that housing for disabled people is fully integrated in the community.

Link will produce this information on request in Braille, Audio Tape, Large Print and Community Languages. To find out more, please telephone the CSC on 08451 400 100. Link Housing Association Limited is a company registered in Scotland. Company registration number SC216300. Registered Office: Link House, 2C New Mart Road, Edinburgh EH14 1RL. Part of the Link group.



LINKHOUSING

