

**SPRING**

# ON THE HOUSE

ISSUE 59: Spring 2021



**for Perth & Kinross Council Tenants**



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# Introduction

Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of *On The House* - the magazine for Perth & Kinross Council tenants.

*Since we spoke to you in the Winter edition things have of course continued to be very challenging for tenants and Council services as we have experienced another period of lockdown.*

The restrictions put in place have had a knock-on effect for our Housing Services, especially in areas like Repairs. You can read about how our Repairs Service has been affected by lockdown on page 3, and how you can help us when reporting new repairs.

With the vaccine being rolled out across Perth and Kinross and Scotland we can now see better days ahead. Let's hope that a more normal way of life is just around the corner.

I would like to thank all tenants who took part in our consultation on 2021/22 rent levels which we carried out in November and December of last year. A record number of people responded to the survey and the preferred rent level of our tenants was approved by the Housing & Communities Committee in February.

We are now starting the rent setting process for 2022/23, and with this edition of *On The House* you will find a survey asking you to set out your spending priorities for the Housing Service. This information will allow us to begin to put together some rent level options for next year. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and return it to us in the envelope provided. It's very important that all tenants have a say in decisions that affect them. You can read all about the rent setting process on pages 4 and 5.

Once we have gathered information on your spending priorities, it will be discussed at a Tenant Summer Conference event on Thursday 17 June. To make sure everyone is kept safe the event will be held online this year, and I would encourage all tenants to take part. You can find out how to join the meeting on page 5. All you need is an email address and a smart phone, tablet or laptop.

We know that the pandemic continues to hit the finances of many tenants. On pages 6 and 7 you can read about the wide range of support that has been put in place by the Council and our community partners to help tenants who may be struggling. If you are finding it hard to pay your rent or bills I would urge you to get in touch to speak to us about it. You may be eligible for financial help towards paying your rent from our Tenancy Sustainment Fund.

On pages 8 and 9 you can read about the enhanced services we have put in place to help tenants get connected both socially and online through the pandemic, which was part of what we promised through the rent option you chose last year.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *On The House*, and finally I would like to send a heartfelt thanks to tenants for your understanding and patience during what has been a very difficult 12 months for everyone. We need to continue to look after each other and work together to get through what we all hope is the final stages of pandemic restrictions.

Take care and stay safe.

**Clare Mailer**  
*Depute Director (Communities)*



## Contact Us

If you would like more information about anything mentioned in this magazine please contact the editor **Scott Watson** on **07720 398531** or email **HousingInfo@pkc.gov.uk**. You can also contact us on Facebook and on Twitter:



[www.facebook.com/PKCTenants](https://www.facebook.com/PKCTenants)



[www.twitter.com/PKCTenants](https://www.twitter.com/PKCTenants)



# Repairs Update

***We'll carry out your non-urgent repairs as soon as we can***

The last 12 months have been very challenging for tenants, our staff and all Council services. Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions have meant completely changing the way we work, to keep you and our staff safe.

During periods of lockdown we have only been able to carry out emergency and urgent repairs for our tenants, in line with national guidance. Over the last year we have completed over 6,000 of these repairs to make sure tenants' homes have been kept weathertight and safe during the pandemic.

It is taking us longer to carry out repairs as our staff are observing strict Covid guidance while they are working in your homes.

This necessary focus on emergency and urgent repairs has meant we have not been able to carry out routine repairs on your homes for some time. A backlog of these jobs has built up and we currently have around 850 outstanding.

When Covid restrictions eventually ease we will be able to start work on the backlog, but it will take us some months to catch up. So, if you have reported a non-urgent repair that has not been carried out yet please be assured we will attend to your repair as quickly as we can. We request that you do not call or email the Housing Repairs Centre to follow up on your repair - we will have it on file and will get to you as soon as possible.

Thank you for your understanding. We know that you may feel frustrated if you are waiting for a repair to be carried out, but given the unprecedented situation our Housing Repairs Service faces we would ask for your continued patience.

If you have a new non-urgent repair you should report it to us online

using MyPKC (<https://my.pkc.gov.uk/>) rather than by calling our Housing Repairs Centre. The Housing Repairs Centre is available for reporting **only emergency and urgent repairs** until we have caught up with the backlog of outstanding work. If you do report a new non-urgent repair online please be aware that it will be some time before we can carry out the work.

Finally, we would ask that you continue to treat Repairs staff with respect. The vast majority of our tenants are polite and courteous when speaking to our staff, but sadly there has been an increase in abusive calls during the pandemic. We realise that sometimes customers will feel annoyed that their repair has not been carried out, but bad language and raised voices will not be tolerated.

Please bear in mind that our staff have worked right through the pandemic in very challenging circumstances. We need to continue to be kind to each other and work together so we can get through these difficult times.

*Thank you again for your continued patience and co-operation.*



# Rent level for 2021/22 agreed in line with views of tenants

With the last edition of ***On The House*** we sent you a Rent Options Form so that you could have a voice in rent levels for 2021/22.

A total of 1,282 tenants responded to the consultation - the fourth year running we have given tenants the opportunity to vote on rent levels. Thank you to everyone who took part - it was the largest response so far.

**Option 2 was the preference of tenants, with 38% of you voting for it:**

- *A rent increase of 1% that will cover the existing costs of running the Council's Housing Revenue Account for 2021/22 and also allow the provision of:*
  - *enhanced digital and financial inclusion support for tenants;*
  - *a new Social Inclusion Support Service for tenants.*

This new rent level for tenants was agreed at a meeting of the Housing & Communities Committee on Wednesday 3 February 2021.

The low increase reflects our commitment to maintaining rents at an affordable level for our tenants, and will keep Perth & Kinross Council rents amongst the lowest in Scotland when compared to other local authorities. It will also allow the provision of enhanced housing services to help tenants through the pandemic.

Communities Depute Director, **Clare Mailer**, said: *"I would like to once again thank every tenant who took part in the consultation - it is vital that your voices continue to be heard and we were delighted with the response."*

*"We know that many of our tenants are facing financial difficulty because of the pandemic and so we were committed to keeping this rent increase as low as we possibly could."*

*"Our response to the pandemic over the last 12 months has shown us that many of our tenants are struggling with digital exclusion, which means they have no access to the internet and its range of vital services. Social isolation is also a problem for a significant number*



# Rent setting process for 2022/23 starts now!

With this edition of **On The House** you'll find our annual Rent Setting Survey, which is our first step in working with you to set the rent you will pay for next year - 2022/23.

Your rent pays for the services we provide such as repairs and neighbourhood services, so it's very important that all tenants continue to have a say in how that money is spent and what services are important to you.

Please take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and return it to us in the envelope provided. You can also take part online at the Council's Consultation Hub:

**<https://consult.pkc.gov.uk/>**

The survey gives you the opportunity to be involved in the Council's rent setting process and lets us know what you think we should be spending your rent money on.

We'll use the feedback you give us to take forward rent proposals for 2022/23. The information gathered will be discussed with tenants at a special online Tenant Conference on 17 June where you can give us a bit more detail about what you would like to see your rent money spent on. Some information will be available online for you to view ahead of the conference so you can think about your spending priorities.

The online event will be held from 11.00 am and if you would like to join in please contact **Kevin Heller** on **07880 095411** or email **KHeller@pkc.gov.uk**. You can take part in discussions or just sit and listen, it's totally up to you how involved you want to be.

From these discussions at least three rent options will be developed for 2022/23 rent levels. These will go out for further consultation with all tenants before a final rent level is agreed by Housing & Communities Committee in January 2022.

*of our tenants, and financial pressure caused by reduced incomes, furlough or redundancy is having a real impact.*

*"The preferred rent level option of tenants will enable us to provide enhanced financial and digital support to tenants who need that important help, and also put in place Social Inclusion Support to link people with services and organisations in their communities so they are not alone.*

*"Affordability is also very important. The 1% rent increase will give Perth & Kinross Council an average rental figure of £71.47 per week, compared to £81.67 for other social housing providers in Perth and Kinross and £71.68 in neighbouring local authorities.*

*"We are determined to continue to provide quality services and high levels of support to our tenants as the pandemic continues, and adopting this preferred rent level increase will allow us to do that."*



# Working to help tenants who are socially isolated

Social isolation, or feeling lonely, is a serious issue that can really impact on someone's mental and physical health. If someone is socially isolated they are often cut off from normal social networks due to factors like a loss of mobility, unemployment or health issues. Isolation usually involves staying at home for long periods of time without any access to social support or services that can help.

Through the work we have done with tenants during the pandemic we know that social isolation and loneliness are problems many people are facing, particularly older people.

As part of the rent setting process for 2021/22 our tenants voted for a preferred option that will put in place an enhanced service to support people who are suffering from social isolation.

We are now in the process of putting this support in place, initially for a two-year period through a new project for tenants aged 50 and over within Perth and Kinross. This will be focused initially in the North Muirton and Invergowrie areas, but has the potential to be rolled out in other areas.

The project will provide support to tenants on:

- *wellbeing and reducing isolation;*
- *advice and assistance on budgeting, health aids and adaptations;*
- *support and assistance to get online;*

- *referrals to other services such as Community Alarm or Welfare Rights;*
- *management of the home - safety, security;*
- *vulnerability concerns - adult protection, health issues, fire risk, debt.*

We also hope to hold informal community events in future, where tenants can come along to meet new friends and find out about the range of community services and support that is available. We will help tenants to attend these events and to make connections.

Referrals for the project will come mainly from your Locality Housing Teams who will identify tenants who may need some support, but referrals will also be considered from Health and Social Work, Police and the Fire Service.

We hope the new service will improve the wellbeing of everyone who needs support within the pilot areas, make people feel more included in their community, keep them safe and allow them to live independently in their home for longer.



If you, or someone you know, is socially isolated and needs some support please call your Locality Housing Team on **01738 465000 (option 2)** to see how they can help.



# Helping tenants make the most of the internet

Under the preferred rent option chosen by you, we also promised to improve the support we give to tenants to help them get online and make the most of the internet.

The internet is vital for keeping us connected to friends and family, informed and entertained, and able to learn, work, shop and access health information and other public services.

COVID-19 has highlighted the need for a greater focus on digital inclusion, as there has been a significant shift to people relying on the internet for online services and social interaction.

Our response to the pandemic has shown us that many of our tenants are digitally excluded and struggle to use online services. This means that they have no access to important information about their services, finances and communities, and can't keep in touch with friends and family.

To address the issue we plan to deliver some improved services that will focus on improving our tenants' digital skills, making sure more of you can access the internet and online services. We will also give people access to devices that will allow them to get connected.

We are already working with Connect Scotland - a Scottish Government initiative that aims to get everyone in the country online.

We have received a number of tablets from Connecting Scotland for older or disabled tenants, families and single parents who are isolated and will benefit from being online. A 'Digital Champion' staff member is assigned to them so they can contact someone for support and advice.

**Steven Ramage** from Carpenter Court Sheltered Housing complex is pictured using his tablet. He regularly 'facetimes' his daughter, shops online and he also joined an online Sunday church service. He says he is really happy to have had a connection with family, friends and the world, especially over the last 12 months.



To find out more about digital inclusion support for tenants you can contact **Kevin Heller** on **07880 095411** or email [KHeller@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:KHeller@pkc.gov.uk)

# Feeling the pinch because of the pandemic?

## A range of financial advice and support is available



We know that the Covid-19 pandemic is continuing to have a financial impact on many of our tenants, whether it be through redundancy, furlough, reduced income or the need to self-isolate.

However, there is a range of support and help available in Perth and Kinross.

If you are struggling with your finances please ask for help. The Council and our community partners are here to support you through this.

Here is some of the wide range of help available to you if you feel you are struggling.

### Housing Costs

If you are struggling to pay your rent or bills you should contact your Locality Housing Team as soon as you can. Your Housing staff can offer a range of help, and you may even qualify for financial support towards your housing costs. For example in the last year we have paid out over £200,000 to tenants through our Tenancy Sustainment Fund to help people who were finding it difficult to keep up with rent payments.

You may qualify for a Discretionary Housing Payment or a grant from our Tenancy Sustainment Fund. Call your Locality Housing Team on **01738 476000 (Option 2)** or visit [www.pkc.gov.uk/arrearsadvice](http://www.pkc.gov.uk/arrearsadvice)

### Benefits Support and Advice

The Council's Welfare Rights Team is there to ensure that the residents of Perth and Kinross are not missing out on their entitlement to benefits and other related help by providing a free, confidential and impartial benefits advice and information service. During 2019/20 the Team generated an additional £6,516,633 of income for people. If you need advice about your benefits call them on **01738 476900 (Option 1)**.

### Financial Insecurity Fund

Perth & Kinross Council has created a new fund to help tackle financial insecurity and support households with essential needs and priority debts over the winter. The Financial Insecurity Fund has been created using the Council's share of £20million provided by the Scottish Government for this purpose.

People can apply to the Financial Insecurity Fund if they have:

- no access to public funds;
- priority debts including fuel debt;



- broadband debt that prevents you getting online or you require a data package;
- difficulty meeting the essential costs of children under two-years-old or a child with disabilities of any age, such as nappies, milk or wipes;
- additional costs of living rurally.

Applications can be made at [www.pkc.gov.uk/financialinsecurityfund](http://www.pkc.gov.uk/financialinsecurityfund) or by calling our Customer Service Centre on **0345 30 111 00**.

## Scottish Child Payment Scheme

If you are the parent or carer for a child aged under 6 years old and you are in receipt of certain benefits you may qualify for Scottish Child Payments.

You can visit the Scottish Government website to find out if you are eligible for a payment and to apply: [www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment/who-should-apply/](http://www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment/who-should-apply/)

## Free School Meals and Clothing Grants

Free school meals are offered to all pupils in P1-P3. If your child is P4 or above you may be able to claim free school meals if you are claiming certain benefits. You may also qualify for a school clothing grant for your children. Call **01738 476200** for more information.

## Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit

You may be able to get Council Tax Reduction if you are liable for Council Tax. If you also rent your home, you may also get Housing Benefit. Please contact us on **01738 476049** for more information.

## Self-Isolation Support Grants

If you have been contacted by Test and Protect and asked to self-isolate because of COVID-19, you may be eligible for a Self-Isolation Support Grant. You can apply at any time during the period you've been asked to self-isolate for. Visit [www.mygov.scot/self-isolation-grant](http://www.mygov.scot/self-isolation-grant) for more information.

## Gypsy/Traveller Community

MECOPP (Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project) is providing support for members of the Gypsy Traveller community. It is running a Financial Resilience Helpline, where advisors help community members find and access all the benefits they are entitled to. Contact Alex Hendriks on **07931 555390**.



For more information on all the financial help and support available contact our **Welfare Rights Team** on **01738 476900 (Option 1)** or visit our webpage [www.pkc.gov.uk/feelingthepinch](http://www.pkc.gov.uk/feelingthepinch)



# Be a good neighbour by thinking about noise



We've all been at home much more than usual over the last 12 months, and this can sometimes lead to tensions between neighbours about noise.

Noise is a part of everyday life, but excessive noise or vibration can be annoying for neighbours and can also affect physical or mental health.

The most noise common complaints the Council receives from tenants are about music, people's voices, children playing, barking dogs, DIY, banging doors and vehicles.

Sometimes the actual noise may not be the main problem, but the time and duration might make it one.

It is important that neighbours treat each other with respect, and if you live in a flat, or maisonette it is even more important.

It's easy to be a good neighbour if you bear some simple things in mind.

A good neighbour will:

- keep noise from stereos, radios and TVs at reasonable levels;
- not carry out noisy DIY or housework during the evening or at night time;
- warn your neighbours if you are going to do something particularly noisy;
- wherever possible don't place TVs or speakers against walls that you share with your neighbours;
- try to be quiet when you return home late at night;
- be a responsible pet owner;
- consider how your children's playing habits might affect your neighbours.

Sometimes noise disputes can be caused by poor sound insulation in a building, and where this is the case the Council can sometimes carry out work to improve the situation for tenants.

However, we will always look to mediate in noise disputes between neighbours but its best if they don't come up in the first place. If you follow the advice above, you will be a good neighbour and get along with everyone who lives around you.



If you do have a noise concern you can speak to your Locality Housing Team on **01738 476000 (option 2)**.

## We are the Champions!

The communities of Perth and Kinross have come together over the last year to make sure our neighbours, friends and family were kept safe and secure through the most difficult of times.

So, we're asking tenants to once again nominate a '**Community Champion**' - a neighbour or friend who has gone that extra mile to help people in their street or community and makes a positive difference to people's lives.

The person you nominate can be of any age - young, old or in-between - as long as they make a difference to their community.

If you know someone who you would like to put forward please let us know. You can complete

the simple nomination form included on your Rent Setting Survey and send it back to us in the stamped address envelope provided.

Please tell us briefly why you think your nominee deserves an award.

A judging panel made up of Housing Service Staff and your Tenant Representatives will pick the winners who will all receive a £25 supermarket shopping voucher.



# Smoke detectors to be upgraded in all tenants' homes



Work is underway to upgrade smoke detectors in all tenants' homes in Perth and Kinross to keep our tenants as safe as possible.

In February 2019, as a result of the Grenfell Fire, the Scottish Government published legislation making it mandatory for smoke/fire detection systems to be brought up to a new standard in all domestic buildings.

The Council has been installing upgraded smoke and heat alarms since 2016 and as a result there are already over 3,000 of our properties which meet the new standard.

A £1.82m programme is now underway to upgrade the rest of our homes. The new systems being fitted are mains-powered with a battery back-up, and alarms will be interlinked by radio frequency. Smoke detectors will be fitted in halls, living rooms and dining rooms. There will also be a heat detector installed in kitchens.

Where there is a fossil fuel burning appliance in the property carbon monoxide detector(s) will be installed and linked to the smoke alarms.

The work is being carried out for the Council by contractor BRB Electrical, and their staff will observe strict COVID-19 guidance when carrying out the work to keep you, your family and themselves safe.

We have sent a letter to all tenants to inform you about this work. Ahead of the work on your home you will be contacted by the contractor who will arrange a visit to carry out the work at a convenient time.

As this is a legal obligation this work needs done. We will always try to make sure that the work is carried out at a time that suits you. These works are necessary so please ensure that staff can gain access to your home to upgrade your detectors.

If you need to reschedule an appointment as you are self-isolating or showing symptoms of COVID-19 contact the **Housing Improvements Administration Team** on **01738 476846**.

The improvement project should be completed by March 2022.

This project is one of a range of improvements planned for the year ahead which include further investment in environmental Improvements, external fabric repairs works and central heating upgrades.





# Congratulations to the Making Where We Live Better Group

The Making Where We Live Better group - made up of tenants and residents with learning disabilities - has celebrated its 10th anniversary.

In October 2010 Perth & Kinross Council's Customer & Community Engagement Team (now called the Tenants and Residents Participation Team) had an event at the Grampian Hotel in Perth where people with learning disabilities could talk to the Council about housing issues.

We wanted their voices to be heard and to give this group of tenants and residents more control and choice about where and how they live.

They talked about what is good and bad about where they lived, and what issues were most important to them.

The group picked their top three priorities which are:

- better information/improved communication;
- anti-social behaviour needs addressing;
- more opportunity for community involvement.

The group have been very active over the last 10 years and have held various conferences as well as producing a DVD on disability harassment called "It goes on and on and on" to raise awareness of the difficulties they can face on a day-to-day basis. You can view this on the group's webpage at [www.pkc.gov.uk/makingwherewellivebetter](http://www.pkc.gov.uk/makingwherewellivebetter)

The group has continued to meet virtually during lockdown, sharing information about the current pandemic and where to get help, as well as just having a good chat.

Congratulations to the group and all its members on its success and here's to the next 10 years!

Anniversary celebrations are being planned over the year, subject to Covid restrictions.

# Tenant Participation Dates for Your Diary

Most meetings and discussions with our tenants have moved online over the last 12 months due to the pandemic.

We know that not all tenants have the skills and confidence to get online for a meeting, so we are offering support to help you get involved.

The **Annual Summer Tenant Conference** will be held online on **Thursday 17 June**, from 11.00 am. The information that we would normally present at the conference about spending priorities for the coming year will be put onto the Council website and on social media ahead of the meeting for you to look at.

You can look at the information then feed back to us and send in questions.

Your feedback and questions will then be discussed with Housing Managers during the online Conference, so that we can agree on your priorities for housing spending.

## Other dates for your diary:

**Thursday 5 August 2021 at 1.00 pm**  
**Tenants' Forum**

**Thursday 7 October 2021 at 11.00 am**  
**Autumn Tenant Conference**

**Thursday 9 December 2021 at 1.00 pm**  
**Tenants' Forum**

We currently plan to hold all these meetings online, but if Covid restrictions allow the arrangements may change.

If you would like to attend any or all of these online meetings please contact **Kevin Heller** to get set up, by emailing [KHeller@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:KHeller@pkc.gov.uk) or calling **07880 095411**.

You don't have to participate, you can just listen if you want to - it's totally up to you how much you want to get involved. Please take part if you can.



HELP SHAPE YOUR SERVICES HAVE YOUR SAY

It's vital that tenants' voices are heard in decision-making processes about your housing services.

If you or someone you know would like a copy of this document in another language or format, (on occasion, only a summary of the document will be provided in translation), this can be arranged by contacting the Customer Service Centre on 01738 475000.

You can also send us a text message on 07824 498145.

All Council Services can offer a telephone translation facility.