

# OAK NEWSLETTER

# Update from Chief Executive



Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Ark Newsletter. It has been sometime since we shared our news with you as a result of the many positive changes we have gone through and in this packed edition of the newsletter you will hear all about those changes.

When I last wrote to you, I told you about some of the work coming up, aimed at making the continuous improvements we all want to see in Ark and in this edition, you will read about the progress we have made across a number of key areas.

We have now relocated to our new office which is a bright, modern, open plan space for colleagues and customers to use. The move has gone well and colleagues report that the new environment is a much more positive and welcoming space to work in.

We have been busy with events since moving into the new office at the beginning of July; in August we welcomed a large group of visitors from a Danish Housing Association, keen to learn about Scottish housing associations and the work we do here. The day went very well and a huge thanks to colleagues from Care and Support and Housing for facilitating the visit.





In September we held the first in person Voices Group meeting and we heard news from the local Speak Out Groups and their activities, which are detailed within this Newsletter and a week later we held our AGM where we also celebrated successful events in both our care and housing operations. We were joined by customers of Ark who spoke about the positive difference Ark has made to their lives and heard from colleagues how much they enjoy working for Ark and the difference they feel they make every day.

In this and each Newsletter we publish, there is as section on becoming a member of Ark. As a membership organisation, it is important that we maintain a good number of members, who can come along to the AGM, hear about the year gone past and ask questions of the Board and senior team on the performance of the organisation.

It is also by being a member you are eligible to be appointed to the Board of Management, so please consider this option and get more involved. We have just appointed four new Board Members:

- Jane Dunlop
- Richard Stark
- Kerrie Mitchell
- Isla Gray

We warmly welcome them to the Ark Board, and I am sure they will make a positive difference to the future of the organisation.

It really has been a busy period here at Ark, which you will see throughout the Newsletter, and I hope you as customers and colleagues who work for Ark are beginning to see positive differences in your own experience.

We are now beginning to think about our plans beyond this year and I will detail them for you in the Spring 2025 edition of the Newsletter.

As always, a huge thanks to colleagues across Ark as without you we would not be making the positive difference to people's lives every day and to our customers, thank you for choosing Ark.

**Bobby** 

Please tell us about what you think by e-mailing us at admin@arkha.org.uk, using the CONTACT US function on the website or by phoning us on 0131 478 8146. Please also tell us what information you would like to get from us in future editions.

## Organisational updates

#### **Change of office**

On the 8 July 2024, Ark relocated our head office to a new modern, fully accessible and energy efficient office space, which reflects the needs of our employees and customers.

We previously wrote to all tenants/ guardians to notify them of this and to update our contact address. We don't get many tenants visiting our office so there very little impact on them, however it is important to note our new address should you need to write to us. Our new address is:

Lochside House, Ground Floor West Suite, 3 Lochside Way, Edinburgh, EH12 9DT.

In moving office, we have also reviewed how people can contact us. We now have a dedicated team of 3 Customer Services Advisors who will be your first point of contact in relation to housing or asset (property) queries. Please direct all queries to them and they will decide who is best placed to deal with your query.

This can be done by phoning **0131 447 9027** and pressing **OPTION 1**. Please do not press any other number as this will take you to one of the other departments within Ark, such as HR or Finance.

You can also continue to use the **0131 478 8143** number.

The 0131 478 8146 number is NO LONGER in use.

If you wish to e-mail us, please do so on **customer.services@arkha.org.uk** 



#### **Become a Member of Ark**

Ark aims to have a broad-based membership which matches our purpose and objects and the communities we serve. We welcome membership applications from tenants, service users, community groups and other residents of the towns and villages in which we are active.

If you have an interest in our work and can bring your skills, views and experience to help the way Ark is run, please apply to become a member by contacting us at admin@arkha.org.uk

You will be sent an:

- application form;
- a data protection consent form;

- details of how the application should be sent to us and how it will be processed. The Board of Management will look at each application at their first meeting following receipt of the application form, or as soon as possible thereafter. If the application is approved, membership will take effect immediately, and within 7 working days the applicant will:
- get written confirmation of the decision;
- have their name entered in the Register of Members;
- get a Share Certificate.

#### **Staffing Updates**

To reflect our strategic and operational objectives and priorities Ark has recently reviewed their Housing and Property Services staffing structures and redesigned how we deliver our customer facing services, capital investment and our tenant and resident safety obligations.

As from the 1st April 2024 the new structure was introduced and along with this we have welcomed some new members to the team.

Tessa Sutherlands' temporary post as Customer Services Advisor was made permanent. Tessa's post is part time, and she works every morning between 9.00am and 12.30pm. Mark Bower and Liam Rennie joined us as Customer Services Advisors. They have both come from customer services roles so have been able to adapt into the new roles very quickly. They are still undertaking the necessary training within Ark so ple

necessary training within Ark so please be patient with them if they advise you that they have to get an answer to your query and get back to you.

David Weddell, who has been a Customer Services Advisor for the past 5 years, was successful in getting a promotion to Customer Services Officer. David will train and manage Tessa, Mark and Liam. David Reynolds has joined us as the Housing and Customer Services Manager. David will manage the Customer Services Officer and the two Housing and Neighbourhood Services Officers, Lyn Davey and Lesley Henderson.

Claire Young, the Housing Officer in the North area, was successful in getting a promotion to the Neighbourhood and Partnership Manager for Ark Services and Ark HA North area. Claire will continue to undertake Housing Officer duties but will also work with a number of partners in the north area to improve our relationships and services that we provide.

#### Ark has a new Participation Officer

Jamila started as Ark's new Participation Officer this summer. She has been out meeting Ark's customers and has heard that there is lots of excitement about what participation activities are in store – especially the next Voices Group. Keep an eye out for updates from Jamila on Ark's website and social media to see what is happening in Participation.

#### **Asset Management**

As part of the restructure, we have created a new Asset Management team who will primarily focus on property compliance, cyclical maintenance and capital investment.

#### **Asset and Compliance Manager**

Victoria Hennessy

#### **Development Manager**

Colin Young

#### **Asset Officer**

Jon Mitchell

#### **Compliance and Contracts Officer**

Lisa Walker

The Asset Mangement team are also supported by the Customer Services Team.



#### **Learning and Development**

In the Winter Newsletter we gave you an update on the Talent & Engagement pilot which focused on recruitment and retention of support staff in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Following the highly successful 1-year pilot project we have now expanded this support to cover all Arks services throughout Scotland.

Lindsay Fallon who led the pilot project has been joined by Talent & Engagement Project Assistant, Emma Duff, who will support us in a 2-year project plan to increase staffing level across Ark. This project will run alongside the Care & Support strategy ensuring that the organisation recruits and retains the right people to deliver our packages of Care & Support to our supported people.

Ark is looking for dedicated and caring individuals to become Support Workers and our current job vacancies can be viewed on our website – <a href="https://www.arkha.org.uk/work-with-us/vacancies/">https://www.arkha.org.uk/work-with-us/vacancies/</a>



We held a staff morning in our new office, where all our teams came together and learned what we are all doing within our teams. It was great to meet others from other teams that we don't know as well as our own teams and learn from each other.

### **Ark Services**

#### **Annual Rent Increase**

In April 2024 we wrote to all tenants living in the 4 Ark Services developments in Aberdeen (Balnagask Court, Provost Mitchell Circle, School Drive and Greenfern Lodge) to advise them that the rent would change from 1st August 2024. If you are entitled to housing benefit, we have already notified the Local Authority

of the change. If you pay by direct debit, we will have processed the change for you. However, if you pay by standing order, you must notify your bank of the change and ask them to update your payment. If you have queries about this, please contact us.

#### Planned Investment 2024-2026

Ark Services Board have approved £1,381,000 of capital investment across the next 2 years with works commencing later this year. We will be writing to our tenants, guardians and care and support partners over the coming weeks to share

more detail of the planned works and to initiate individual discussions on any potential decant arrangements to enable works to be carried out safely.

A summary of the planned works is presented overleaf:

#### **Provost Mitchell Circle railings**





Planned Works
✓ Bathroom replacement
✓ Shower room replacement
✓ Utility room replacement
✓ New mechanical ventilation in bathrooms
✓ Kitchen replacement
✓ Internal doors
✓ Internal decoration
✓ Environmental improvements
✓ New communal entrance doors
✓ New flat entrance doors
✓ Environmental improvements
✓ Bathroom replacements
✓ Kitchen replacements
✓ New secure boundary fencing
✓ Environmental improvements
✓ External storage
✓ Bathroom replacements
✓ New front entrance doors
✔ Potential central heating replacement (gas to local heat network)
✔ Remodel existing office, amenity, and community space to utilise under used spaces, enhance staff areas, provide additional residential units, and improve the external environment.

### Participation

#### **Speak out**

The role of Speak Out groups is to give people the opportunity to share experiences, discuss issues that are important to them and influence the service they get from Ark as well as their community.

- because some members had noticed there were quite a few scams going around. They spoke about how to spot a scam and what to do about it. Some people told stories about scams they have dealt with before. The meeting stopped for a dance break in the middle and finished off with everyone sharing their ideas for future Speak Out meetings and activities. Lots of exciting things to come in Forfar!
- Blairgowrie's Speak Out group have been busy! In April they went on a trip to Nether Kirkton farm followed by another day out to Blair Drummond Safari Park.
  - Blairgowrie's Speak Out members have also formed a gardening group and have been working hard to brighten up their outdoor space.



• Glenrothes Speak Out Group met in July and their topic was bullying. They spoke about the different types of bullying and the group shared their thoughts about people can do if they are being bullied, or if they see someone else being bullied.



Everyone had a good catch up, made a piece of art together and finished off with a game of bingo.

#### **The Rainbow Group**

The Scrutiny Group now has 6 members coming from a wide range of areas across Scotland: including Forres in Moray; Forfar in Angus; Grangemouth in Falkirk and Dalkeith in Midlothian. Over the past 12 months the group have been very busy looking at the way Ark provides a repairs service. This included some of the members coming into our office to spend time with the customer services staff. They have produced their second report which is currently being considered by the management team. We will always welcome new members so if you would like to get involved in the group, please contact Sharon Donohoe from TIS on 0141 248 1242 or by e-mailing her at sdonohoe@ tis.org.uk You can get more information on the activities of TIS on their website www.tis.org.uk

"I find the work rewarding and do it in hopes that it can make a difference for other Ark



tenants, I do enjoy attending the meetings and having input on how things can be improved. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to participate in different meetings and visit Ark's head office. I have also enjoyed getting to know the tenants from other developments as well."

# Housing & Assets

#### **Tenant and Resident Safety**

#### Focus on Legionella?

Legionella is a type of bacteria found naturally in freshwater environments, like lochs and streams. It can become a health concern when it grows and spreads in human-made water systems like showerheads, taps, hot water tanks and heaters. Catching Legionnaires disease in your home is rare but if you have been away from home for more than a week there are a few steps you can take to minimise the risk such as:

- Flushing out your water system e.g. If you aren't using showers or taps regularly, make sure you flush them through at least once a week.
- To flush out your water you need to run the water in all showers, baths, wash basins, sinks and taps continuously for at least 2-3 minutes, beginning with the sink taps. You must do both hot and cold taps.





- When turning taps on, turn them on slowly so that you don't splash water, as this might release water droplets into the air.
- Flush toilets with the lid down following a period of non-use.
- When flushing showers, remove the shower head and lower the hose into the bath. If you are unable to remove the head, wrap it in a towel or facecloth to make sure there is no spray that you could inhale. Keep all shower heads and taps clean and free from a build-up of lime scale, mould or algae growth.

#### **Annual Safety Checks**

#### **Gas Safety**

We have a legal requirement to carry out annual checks on appliances such as boilers, cookers and gas fires in your property. By law, only engineers registered with Gas Safe are qualified to carry out these checks. All of our contractors (such as a central heating engineer or someone coming to carry out a repair) have the necessary qualifications, skills and experience to undertake this work. You should always be satisfied that the person is who they say they are before letting them enter your home. If you have any concerns, do not let them in. You can contact us and, if they are a genuine caller, we will be able to verify their identity. If you smell gas you should immediately phone the Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999.

#### **Electrical Safety**

Every 5 years, we have a legal responsibility to carry out an electrical inspection in your home to make sure your wiring is safe. A qualified electrician will carry this out. Our contractor will contact you to in advance to let you know the date of the safety check. If this is unsuitable for you, you can arrange a more convenient time. Help us to help you by giving us access when we need it to ensure that your wiring is safe. Failure to allow us access to your home to carry out this check is a breach of your Tenancy Agreement and may result in legal action being taken against you.

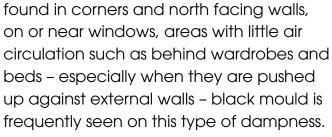
#### **Mould and Dampness**

#### **Condensation Advice**

This is the most common cause of dampness. Now summer has just come to an end, it is a good time to start thinking about impact that cooler temperatures can have on our homes and the actions you can take to prevent moisture related issues occurring such as surface mould resulting from condensation.

Condensation is caused by water moisture from inside the home coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The water drops (or condensation) may then soak into the wallpaper or paintwork or even plasterwork and attract black mould to grow on its surface.

Condensation mainly occurs during the colder months and is usually



It is very important to strike a balance between warmth and ventilation. It may appear that by opening windows that you are losing heat, but this actually allows warm moisture-laden air to escape and permits cool dry air to enter your home. Dry cool air is actually cheaper to heat than warm moist air! So this actually saves you money, as well as resulting in a healthier living environment. Take preventative action – If you feel the dampness and/or mould growth is caused by condensation:

#### 1. PRODUCE LESS MOISTURE

- Cover pans when cooking.
- Dry clothes outdoors in warm weather.
- Ventilate tumble driers to the outside.
- Do not use paraffin or liquid petroleum ('bottled') gas heaters. They produce masses of water vapour and are very expensive to run.

#### Storing personal items in loft spaces

We do not recommend storing belongings in loft spaces. These spaces provide access for maintenance and should be kept clear. Lofts are also insulated and as a result can be prone to surface moisture due to the cold and wet climate of our area. The purpose of the insulation in the loft is to keep heat in the living areas of the house, meaning the loft will be cold. Loft spaces are not habitable spaces and are not intended as storage spaces. In addition to the risk of damage to your belongings, storing items in the loft areas can cause damage to ducting used for ventilation of the rooms below and impede air flow in the loft area which is vital to minimise moisture build up. If you choose to store items in loft spaces you do so at your own risk.

#### 2. VENTILATE TO REMOVE MOISTURE

Always ventilate, or open a window when the kitchen and/or bathroom are

- in use and close other internal doors so as to prevent moisture laden air from spreading to other parts of your home.
- Continue to ventilate for a time after a shower, a bath or cooking.
- Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes and (with blocked up fireplaces) chimney flues.
- Always open bedroom windows (for up to one hour) as soon as you rise, and throw back the sheets or duvets to air the bed and bedding.
- Clear window sills of clutter that will impede window opening.

#### 3. WIPE AWAY EXCESS MOISTURE

Always wipe the windows (and window sills if required) of your home, every morning, to remove condensation. This is especially important in the bedroom; just opening the window is not enough.

### 4. KEEP YOUR HOME ADEQUATELY HEATED IF POSSIBLE

Keep low background heat on all day, even in the bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom.

### 5. ABOVE ALL REMEMBER DEALING WITH CONDENSATION IS NOT EASY!

- Carrying out as many of the above steps as often as possible will help to reduce condensation in your home.
- Please do not hesitate to contact us about condensation issues in your home. We are here to help. If you feel that your dampness is due to rising damp, penetrating damp or from a repair issue then please contact us.

### Reporting Repairs via the new customer services e-mail address

### Reporting Repairs via Phone & The New Customer Services E-Mail Address

You can report repairs in the 2 ways below:

- If you wish to e-mail us our new e-mail address is: customer.services@arkha.org.uk
- If you wish to phone us, our contact number is: 0131 478 8143.

Please provide as much detail of the repair as possible to ensure we appoint the correct contractor & trade.

Let us know the location of the repair & if it is for a Flat or Room or if the repair is for a Block / Communal area.

Please provide the Tenants Name, Address & Phone Number and / or the on-call staff 24-hour contact number if a Supported tenant.

If you have multiple repairs, it is may be easier to email with photos if appropriate, as this gives us a better idea and more details and information to try & determine the best course of action and where an inspection may be required.

We will provide you with the Priority (Emergency 24 Hours, Urgent 3 Days or Routine 10 Days) of the repair & the Contractor appointed who will contact you to arrange access & an acknowledgement will be issued to the tenant with a request to provide customer feedback.



If the repair is deemed as tenant responsibility, we will advise you of this.

If the repair is a tenant responsibility, and you do not wish to arrange your own contractor, Ark can arrange the repair & will **recharge** back to you in due course.

If you can arrange your own local contractor to carry out the works, this will likely be cheaper than using Ark's contractor.

Please refer to your Tenancy Agreement and the Ark website for more information on Ark Recharges & Tenant Responsibilities.

#### **Ground Maintenance**

Ark's grounds maintenance contractors Glendale are now entering year 3 of the 3-year grounds maintenance contract with our contractor. The contract includes an option to extend for a further two years. The grounds maintenance service includes grass cutting, pathway weeding, litter picking and the clearance of hard-standing areas.

We acknowledge in some locations the contractors have had to implement a very basic grounds maintenance service. If any visits are missed, they will make sure they're rescheduled throughout the remaining months of the year to ensure the full grounds maintenance specification is met.



If you have any issues with grounds maintenance, please contact your Housing & Neighbourhood Services Officer to discuss, or contact our Customer Services team.

#### **Ark HA Planned Investment**

Ark HA Board of Mangement approved the investment of £4.8 million in our existing Stock over the next 5 years, the investment underpins our approved Asset Mangement Strategy and will focus on replacing poor and failing components such as kitchens, bathrooms, windows etc. Our Asset and Compliance Manager is currently refreshing our stock condition survey information and developing a programme of works for launching from 1 April 2025. The budget of £417,000 for this financial year has been committed to non-compliant and/or failing components. As we move forward into next financial year the annual budget increases to an average of £1 million per year.









#### **New Build Development**

#### **Crusader Rise**

We recently took handover of our first new build development in over 13 years, the 20 new homes for social rent were completed in July and we welcomed our new tenants throughout August.

The development provides a mix of oneand two-bedroom flats, with two three bed houses, all for general needs. The ground floor properties are supported flats.

All the upper flats benefit from solar PV panels to generate electricity, while the houses and ground floor flats have air source heat pumps. All properties have fibre broadband pre-installed ready for activation by the tenants.

The supported flats are all built to wheelchair standards and benefit from special kitchens with height adjustable sinks and electric hobs, as well as motorised wall units that lower to worktop height for ease of access to the contents. All have wet floor showers rooms with height adjustable wash hand basins.

All properties have digital tenant support systems made by Appello with a touch screen in every property. Flats that are off the communal stairs all have video door entry systems. This system can also provide emergency alarms and wellbeing services for tenants that require this.





#### **Windsor Square**

The scheme in Penicuik will provide 12 cottage style flats for social rent and has recently started on site in July and is due for completion early next year. Due to the confined nature of the site, Ark are using a Modular construction process where part of the building units are constructed inside a factory and brought on site part completed with wiring, plumbing internal walls and kitchens already installed. This has great benefits in terms of quality and speed as the construction of the houses is not affected by weather and means less time on site and subsequent disruption to surrounding residents.

We look forward to giving you more information on the Penicuik site when it is nearing completion.

On the 10 September, Ark celebrated starting on site with a sod cutting ceremony marking the occasion, which was attended by Ark, Connect Modular and local councillors.



#### **Stage 3 Adaptations**

#### **Adaptations**

To help you live in your home Ark can apply for grant funding for adaptions to your home in the form of grabrails, wet floor shower, hoists etc. To apply for funding, we would need you to have received a referral from an Occupational Therapist (OT) detailing what type of adaptation you require. When this has been received this is placed on a waiting list and when funding is available, we can have the work caried out to your home.

The past three years have been a challenge for adaptations works for Ark. This means that we have been unable to complete all the adaptation requests that have been received. A significant challenge has been that in the last two years materials prices have risen markedly, meaning less jobs have been able to be competed for the same amount of grant funding. This year we have also had a significant reduction in grant funding. With less grant funding and increased costs, the number of adaptations requests that we can complete has reduced and people may have to wait longer for their works to be completed. Those that are not completed this year will be carried forward into the next financial year.





You are still encouraged to seek an OT referral if you feel that living in your home has become more difficult.

If you can access alternative funding, or wish to fund the works yourself, you would still require permission from Ark to complete the works. Please contact the Asset Team who would be happy to discuss this with you.

If you are unable source other funding and wish to consider moving to another property, please contact the Housing Team who will be happy to discuss options open to you.



### Complaints Section

During Q1 April to June 2024, Ark received a total of twelve complaints which has reduced from sixteen in the previous quarter.

Eight complaints were responded to with a frontline response at Stage 1 with twenty points identified. 'Frontline complaints' are relatively straightforward complaints which can usually be responded to within five working days.

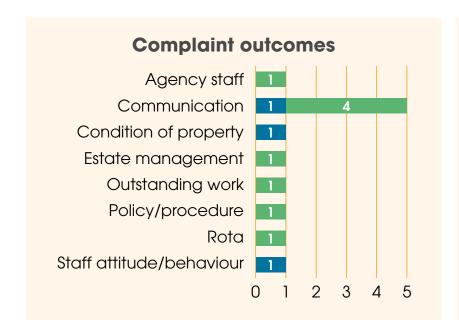
88% of Stage 1 complaints were closed within 5 working days. One complaint was closed out with target with extensions agreed with the customers.

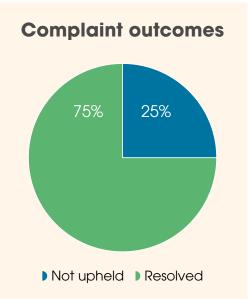
Stage 2 is where a customer is dissatisfied with the frontline response or refuses

to engage at the frontline stage, insisting they wish their complaint to be investigated.

Four complaints were investigated directly at Stage 2 with ten points identified. 75% of these complaints were closed within our target of 20 working days. One complaint was closed over target due to a delay in reaching a satisfactory resolution with the customer. The customer was communicated with on several occasions before agreeing a successful outcome.

Zero complaints were escalated to Stage 2 due to the customer being dissatisfied with the frontline response.















# SHR Updated factsheet for complaints and serious concerns

The Scottish Housing Regulator sets out the standards all social landlords in Scotland need to achieve.

They have updated their factsheet for 2024, for tenants who wish to complain about or report serious concerns regarding their social landlord.

The factsheet outlines what you should expect from Ark and how to make a complaint if you feel Ark has failed in the delivery of a service. The factsheet includes how to report a serious concern

if you feel Ark has regularly and repeatedly failed to achieve our regulatory requirements.

The factsheet can be accessed on the website of the Scottish Housing Regulator (www.housingregulator.gov.scot) and is listed in the section called For Tenants.

The Regulator has also produced this information in video format: https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/for-tenants/watch-our-videos-for-tenants-and-service-users/

