

house proud

January 2022

The magazine for St Leger Homes tenants



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A message from the Chief Executive

Happy New Year everyone and welcome to the January 2022 issue of HouseProud! I hope you all had a great Christmas and were able to see more of your family and friends than you did at this time last year.

On page three we tell you about the new apprentices and student placements who have recently started their careers with St Leger Homes. It is a pleasure to welcome them to the organisation each year and having met and spoken to everyone, I must say I am thoroughly impressed with the attitude, energy and enthusiasm they bring with them.

On page seven you can read all of the results from our Tenants' Choice Awards. This time our Tenants' Choice Awards had a focus on recognising and celebrating the outstanding efforts that people made to look after each other during the lockdowns we experienced in 2020.

From delivering vital supplies such as shopping and medicine, to making regular phone calls to

more vulnerable members of our communities - the spirit of friendship and caring for your neighbours that we saw was truly humbling. Congratulations to all of our deserving winners and runners-up.

Finally, we have information about how to get help and support if you are experiencing domestic abuse. Domestic abuse can take many different forms, but it's important to know that you do not have to live with it. Caring and experienced people from Doncaster Domestic Abuse Hub and other partner organisations are here for you. Find out more on page 10.

I hope you enjoy this issue of HouseProud.

Dave

**Dave Richmond,
Chief Executive**



Proud to support our Armed Forces

We are proud to tell you that we have signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant and given our commitment to support those who have sacrificed so much to protect our nation.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge that we will always show respect and support to serving and former members of the armed forces and their families. Those leaving the armed forces often find many barriers in their way when it comes to finding work and housing in the civilian world. As part of the covenant, we will help people by giving additional support to employees and potential employees who have served their country.

We already offer current and former Armed Forces members a guaranteed job interview if they meet the essential criteria for any role that we advertise. The covenant goes further by also granting leave to spouses and partners of employees who are going on deployment. These pledges also stand alongside the work we have done in recent years to support our armed forces by providing homes for homeless veterans.

You can find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant online by visiting www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk



New apprentices begin work with St Leger Homes

14 people are celebrating after securing apprenticeships and student placements with St Leger Homes which will help them to take their first steps in a new career.

Nine of the new apprentices will receive training up to NVQ Level 6 in a number of different trades within our Repairs and Maintenance teams including plastering; plumbing; gas fitting; bricklaying and electrical.

New apprentice plumber, Matthew Larter, said: "I am looking forward to my apprenticeship as a plumber, and to seeing where it gets me in the future."

As well as the trades based apprenticeships, we have appointed two office based apprentices who will work in our Access To Homes and Human Resources and Organisation Development teams. They will also be joined by two university work placement students and one Chartered Surveyor degree apprentice.

Lucy Roberts, who will be working as a Customer Service apprentice, said: "I never thought I was eligible for an apprenticeship in my forties so it was a great surprise to find out I was and a brilliant opportunity to learn new skills and retrain in something different."

We're absolutely delighted to be playing our part in helping these people to develop the skills that they need to begin a great career and make a positive difference for local residents and communities. We wish the best of luck to all our new apprentices and student placements!



Tenants' and Residents' Involvement Panel (TRIP) Chair Betty Clayton rings in the New Year for us.

Hello everyone, and a Happy New Year to you all! I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas despite the rising cost of everything, and are enjoying good health.

Unfortunately, two members of TRIP and myself have all experienced a spell of ill health (but not Covid) including operations during the last couple of months of 2021. However, I am pleased to report that we are all on the road to recovery and by the time you read this we will all be back

working for the benefit of tenants - albeit still virtually. Hopefully we will soon be able to meet face-to-face across the table.

The Tenants' Appeal Panel is still working hard and impartially protecting the interests of tenants. We are however still in need of more tenants to join us and become involved in TRIP - especially since, to put it in the words of officialdom, we are mostly 'aged primates'! It is for the good of all tenants that we continue to have a part in the service that St Leger Homes provide for us, so please do apply if you feel that you have something to offer - email customerinvolvement@stlegerhomes.co.uk or call 01302 862743.

Finally, we hope that 2022 brings all the things that are precious and important to us all, to make our lives happy and secure - especially better weather as I know I feel much happier and more content when the sun is shining!

Until next time, take care of yourselves and stay healthy and safe.



Tenants Take Over

The Tenants' Voice

We are currently developing our new Tenant Voice Strategy, setting out how tenants want to be heard and the ways in which they want to be involved.

We have spent a lot of time listening to tenants to make sure we get this right and, when published, we hope it will give reassurance that St Leger Homes remains as committed as ever to putting tenants at the heart of how services are delivered.

But we can't do this without your help!

Why are we doing this?

We want to make sure that the ways in which tenants work with us are attractive and appealing; so that as many tenants as possible are able to put forward their opinions and views in ways most convenient to them.

We have also been taking into account the Government's new Charter for Social Housing Residents, which was published in November last year. This focuses on ensuring that tenants are safe, listened to, live in good quality homes and that landlords put things right when they go wrong.



The Charter sets out seven commitments that tenants can expect from their landlord. This covers things such as building safety; ensuring tenants have an effective voice; and also measures to ensure that landlords comply with the Charter and that tenants know where to go if things go wrong.

Wanting to listen to our tenants and putting your needs at the centre is nothing new for St Leger Homes, but we hope judging ourselves against these standards will help us learn where we can do better.

What have we done so far?

We have made some significant achievements since our last strategy was launched in 2018.

We have:

- Increased our digital mechanisms for Customer Involvement to make it easier for tenants to get involved
- Increased involvement and engagement with young people
- Implemented a new Customer Involvement Model to forward plan and demonstrate value for money through outcomes
- Assisted tenants and residents to set up new community groups and Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) and assisted with funding bids
- Delivered positive activities with groups and volunteers, supporting activities through the Positive Activities Group Funding
- Developed the Tenants' and Residents' Involvement Panel (TRIP) increasing membership, skills and effectiveness
- Developed a Tenants' Appeal Panel to look at complaints appeals
- Established a High Rise Forum to engage and involve tenants living in high rise properties in the management and safety of their homes
- Further developed tenant-led reality checking to expand this to wider services

But we never rest on our laurels and we know that more than ever, we need more people of all ages and areas across Doncaster to help shape our services.

– a call to action!

What are the next steps?

We have already reviewed the current Customer Involvement and Young Persons' Strategy and have viewed these against the Government Charter. We did this with tenants, residents, key partners and stakeholders, who helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our current ways of working, to think up some new ways to do things and to prioritise the things we need to build on.

We would like to thank all the people who have been involved so far. However there is still a long way to go to achieve the ambitions of you, our tenants, and work will continue to make improvements over the next few months. **If you would like to help in any way – no matter how large or small, or how much or little time you can spare – please get in touch.**

Your contribution will really help us.

Here are a few ideas that have come from our conversations with tenants so far, what do you think?

- Introduce a new 'ladder' of engagement so people can be involved in a way that suits them, when it suits them
- Establish a range of new tenant panels such as Customer Voice, Repairs, Your Neighbourhoods and Building Safety Panel
- Deliver better digital engagement
- Establish Tenant Inspectors – people who can meet with staff and contractors and hold us to account
- Set up quarterly themes on the issues most important to tenants
- Support tenants and residents groups, helping them to play an even bigger role in their local communities



Do you want to have your say in how we shape our services? Do you want to help us develop better ways of listening to customers? If you do, then please call us now on **01302 862743** or email us at **customerinvolvement@stlegerhomes.co.uk**



St Leger Homes wins Gold award for sustainability



For the second year in a row we have achieved the SHIFT Gold accreditation for the work we are doing to reduce the environmental impact of council housing in Doncaster.

SHIFT (the Sustainable Homes Index for Tomorrow) carried out an independent assessment to examine how we are performing against some challenging environmental targets. This looked at things like our carbon dioxide emissions, landfill waste generated and our water use. This year we were delighted to see that our overall environmental score had improved, which shows just how hard we are working to combat climate change.

Here are some key highlights from the SHIFT report:

- 100% of our office waste was recycled or diverted from landfill
- 96.5% of waste from maintenance work on homes was diverted from landfill

- 95.4% of homes are protected from overheating
- 32.8 tonnes of CO2 reduced through 'resident engagement' (such as providing information about how tenants can save energy)

We do take the issue of climate change very seriously and are keen to play our part in improving the local, national and global environment. As we head into the future we will continue to do all we can to reduce our carbon footprint and ensure that our homes, offices and supply chains are as environmentally friendly as possible.

Is your home at risk of flooding?

In 2021 we saw upsetting news coverage of severe flooding in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Whilst we hope that we won't see a return of the flooding that affected some communities in Doncaster in 2019 we do know that as a result of climate change, extreme weather events and flooding are likely to reoccur. Fortunately, there are things that you can do to prepare.

The Government has information online where you can check if your home is at risk of flooding, get practical advice on how to prepare for a flood, and you can sign up to receive free flood warnings. You can find this at **www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings**

If you would prefer to speak to someone, you can check the flood risk in your area and sign up for flood alerts by calling the 24-hour Floodline on **0345 988 1188**. (Please note that the flood warning service does not cover the risk of surface water flooding because this is very difficult to predict.)

Did you know?

St Leger Homes has a home contents insurance scheme which is arranged by Marsh and underwritten by Royal Sun Alliance. Having home contents insurance can be an absolutely massive help for you and your family should the worst happen.

Our scheme offers:

- Easy weekly payments from just £0.64p per week
- No excess payable in the event of a claim
- No security requirements on your property
- New for old cover
- Cover for theft, flood, fire, water damage, freezer contents and vandalism
- Accidental damage cover
- Cover for theft or loss of keys

Don't risk losing your possessions - for information on our home contents insurance scheme call us on **01302 862859**, or email **incomemanagementteam@stlegerhomes.co.uk**

Tenants' Choice Awards 2021

In September we were delighted to see the welcome return of our Tenants' Choice Awards - the event where we join with tenants and residents to honour those exceptional individuals who have made a difference for people living in their communities.

The awards proved very popular, with over 1,800 votes being cast for our shortlisted nominees. This goes to show the huge appreciation that we all feel for these local heroes and is a fitting tribute to the outstanding work they have carried out for local residents over the last year.

After attending the event to give the trophies out to our winners, Dave Richmond, Chief Executive of St Leger Homes, said: "I'm proud that we have been able to honour these tenants who have continued to work so hard to help and support their neighbours through this difficult last year.

"Congratulations to all of our Tenants' Choice Awards winners, and to the many nominees who have also dedicated so much of their time and energy to make a difference in our communities."

In total, six Tenants' Choice Awards were handed out to local people and community groups who have supported others during the coronavirus pandemic.

The winners were:

Tenant of the Year award

The Tenant of the Year award was won by Janet Atkinson. Janet has been a member of Barnby Dun Tenants' and Residents' Association (TARA) for many years and during the pandemic she took a leading role in supporting people in the local community. She stopped at nothing to make sure everyone received the help they needed - from coordinating food deliveries, to checking in with residents daily by telephone to see if there was anything they wanted. Her regular contact with people helped to reduce the social isolation many had been feeling.

Janet said: "It is an honour to win a Tenants' Choice Award, I've never had something like this before! You do all of these things for others but you don't expect to get anything for it - you just do it because people are struggling and if you can help them, then you help.

"Before the pandemic we ran the TARA group, drop-in centre and coffee mornings, so every day during lockdown I would ring round the people that used to attend these to check in and see



how they were doing. I made sure I got in touch with somebody each day to check they were OK.

"It's lovely to win this award, you always know that people appreciate what you do but to win something like this is really lovely."

Young Person of the Year award

The Young Person of the Year award was won by Samuel Finn. Samuel is an incredible young person who is a volunteer with St Leger Homes; part of the Doncaster Youth Council; and a member of The Scout Association. He has a real passion to get involved and make a difference in his local community.

Samuel said: "It's always great to receive an award that recognises the work you do for your community.

"Awards like the Tenants' Choice Awards reward people from all backgrounds and for all different types of community work. The work I do is focused on helping young people and I think that as a young person, to win an award like this is very motivating. It gives me the drive to keep going and getting involved and I would hope that



it inspires other people of all ages to get involved with their communities."

Community Champion award

The Community Champion award was won by Joanne Wood. Joanne helped people during the pandemic by delivering over 4,000 food parcels and collecting food donations from local supermarkets on a weekly basis to deliver to communities. She will always make time for people and go that one step further to help residents in need - even completing a sponsored bike ride from Balby to Cleethorpes to raise £500 for the local community support hub.



Best Green Initiative award

The Best Green Initiative award was won by Balby and Hexthorpe Community Interest Company (CIC).

The Chair of Balby and Hexthorpe CIC, Shaun Kessell, said: "It's so nice to get this recognition from the local community and all of the people

who voted in the Tenants' Choice Awards. It has made all of the volunteers feel really proud to be a part of our company.

"We have been doing as much as we can for the local environment - we have regular litter picks and are in the middle of creating a community garden within the grounds of one of the community centres, which hopefully people will enjoy and make the most of."

During the lockdown they helped volunteers increase their daily exercise by carrying out daily walks in the estate to get rubbish removed, collecting over 400 bin bags of rubbish during the pandemic. The group have many projects to help the local environment including a weekly litter pick in Balby and Hexthorpe, and have been creating a wild flower bed to encourage bees and other insects.



Community Project award

The Community Project award was also won by Balby and Hexthorpe Community Interest Company. Over the last year the group have supported the community by sending out food parcels; helping over 6,000 residents on a weekly basis; delivering prescriptions; and creating a



'free from' food parcel range for people with specific dietary requirements. The team started a period poverty support hub which each week helped up to 50 young women who were struggling to buy sanitary products.

The Chair of Balby and Hexthorpe CIC, Shaun Kessell, said: "There can be a lack of community engagement in Doncaster, so we wanted to try and do what we can to bring the community back together.

"We delivered more than 10,000 food parcels over the last 18 months during the pandemic which helped a lot of people, and we had a lot of support from St Leger Homes throughout and that was really good. We also help residents by signposting them to all of the different services that are there to help them with their issues."

Community Group award

The Community Group award was won by Barnby Dun TARA. This group support the community with a range of activities. Before the coronavirus pandemic they held coffee afternoons, special Easter and Christmas events, lunch clubs and craft and dance sessions. During the pandemic they helped to keep people going by staying in touch with them to reduce social isolation and support one another through difficult times. They organised food parcels and made sure that everyone had deliveries from the local shops.

Barnby Dunn TARA Chair, Margaret Angus, said: "I was over the moon to find out we had won the award. After all these years we came first - I wasn't expecting it! At the community centre we've got a second prize trophy on the shelf that we've had for years, but now we have a first prize one to go with it!

"We were all absolutely buzzing, it was fantastic news. After Covid and everything we have all been through, this has picked us all up - it was just what we needed.



"I've always done things for neighbours and the community, it's the way that I was brought up. My dad and my family have always done fundraising, sponsored walks and other things like that. I've done it since I was a teenager and then all through my working life I always managed to keep it up and fundraise for some good cause. Charity and volunteering has always been a part of what we do, we were brought up to help other people."

Congratulations to our Tenants' Choice Awards winners and runners-up, and thank you all for the tireless hard work, time and effort you give to help others in our communities - it is much appreciated!

Get support for domestic abuse



We all deserve to be treated with love and respect, and nobody should suffer physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse. If you are in a situation where a family member, partner or ex-partner is doing this to you, then this is domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse doesn't appear overnight, it happens over a period of time and can be very subtle. You do not have to be physically assaulted to be abused - it could be someone taking money, belittling you, calling you names or withholding medication from you or keeping you locked in the house. It could even be a family member forcing you to marry someone against your will.

Where to get help

The Domestic Abuse Hub is run by highly experienced staff who can help people escape from abusive situations and move on to live healthy, happy lives. Their first priority is to get you to safety. They will then support with practical issues such as housing and debt, and provide emotional support to help you overcome your experience. If you want to speak to someone about getting support, you can telephone the Domestic Abuse Hub on **01302 737080** or email **dahub@doncaster.gov.uk**

If you need to speak to someone outside office hours, you can get help by contacting:

- National 24-hour Domestic Abuse Helpline - **0808 2000 247**
- Mental Health Crisis Team - **0800 804 8999**
- Samaritans - call free on **116 123** or email **jo@samaritans.org**
- St Leger Homes homelessness service - **01302 736000**

South Yorkshire Police also take domestic abuse very seriously and you can get help 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling **101**.

Remember, in an emergency you should always dial 999.

You can find lots of useful information, phone numbers and links to further support at **www.doncaster.gov.uk/domesticabuse**

If you are living in an abusive situation please do reach out and get the help that you deserve.

Meet our new Director of Housing and Customer Services



We are pleased to tell you that Mark McEgan has been appointed as our new Director of Housing and Customer Services.

Mark is passionate about housing and has always worked hard to make a difference for local people. He has served in local authorities and housing associations across the country for many years, and has also been Chair of the Chartered Institute of Housing Yorkshire and Humberside regional board.

"Mark is someone who knows what an excellent customer focused housing service looks like and has a track record of delivering it", said Chief Executive, Dave Richmond.

"He actually chose a career in housing after spending a two-week work experience in his local housing office when he was fifteen years old - and hasn't looked back since!"

Welcome to St Leger Homes, Mark!

Planning a house move?

Whether you want to downsize, upsize, change area or move to a different type of property, there are some important things you need to do before you move house to avoid being hit by unexpected bills, or even the possibility of missing out on your transfer.

If you have made changes or improvements to your home, you must have permission for them. If you didn't ask us for permission at the time, it's not too late - you can get advice about permissions or make an application online at www.stlegerhomes.co.uk/my-home/coi/ or by calling us on **01302 862270**.

Have you been meaning to sort out a broken kitchen drawer or that door with a hole in? You must sort out issues like this before you move - failure to do so could mean you get charged for the cost of fixing it, and, if you are transferring to another St Leger Homes property, it could put your move at risk.

Please be sure to leave your property clean, tidy and clear of any belongings - and don't forget any items you may have in your loft or outbuildings! If you do leave items or the house is in a dirty state, then you may be charged for cleaning costs.



Finally, if you are leaving St Leger Homes you must give us four weeks' notice in writing - if you hand in your keys without giving notice you will be charged for those additional four weeks. If you just leave without telling us then you may face many months of rent charges until we find out you have gone, as we cannot legally end your tenancy until we know you aren't living there anymore.

Once you have taken care of these things then you are good to go - and we hope you enjoy your new home!

The Repairs Excellence Project

We are excited to tell you that we are launching our Repairs Excellence Project - a new way of working that will modernise our repairs service and ensure we always stay focussed on you, our customers.

In recent satisfaction surveys you clearly told us that one important way we can make our repairs service better is by improving the way we communicate with you. As a result, we are now moving to a system that is similar to how delivery services such as Amazon work, using modern technology to keep customers informed about what is

happening at each stage of the repair.

A pilot scheme is starting where our trade operatives will ring ahead before they attend your



repair. This has two benefits: we can diagnose the repair before attending and ensure we have the correct materials; and, we can make sure someone will be at home to answer the door to us, which will prevent wasted journeys and make us more efficient. To do this we will need up-to-date contact details for you, so we will soon be asking customers to provide these.

This is just the first step in modernising our services - please do let us know if this change is helpful for you, and if you have any other suggestions on how we can improve the way we work, get in touch!

Universal Credit update



In the Chancellor's Autumn Budget statement, he announced some key changes to the way that Universal Credit (UC) is calculated for people who are working. These changes, which took effect from December 2021, are as follows:

Changes to the UC taper rate

The UC taper rate is the amount of benefits that a claimant loses for each pound that they earn. The taper rate means that if people work more hours their support is gradually withdrawn.

Previously the taper rate started at 63p (65p for Housing Benefit claimants), but this has been reduced to 55p. This means that for every £1 a person earns, their UC payment is now reduced by 55p.

This permanent cut to the taper rate ensures that more money will now stay in the pockets of people who are working.

Increase to the work allowance

The work allowance is the amount that a person can earn before the UC taper is applied and support begins to be withdrawn.

Households on UC that are in work and either looking after a child, or have a household member with limited capability for work, are now being supported with an increase in their work allowances.

Work allowances are currently set at £293 a month if the household receives housing support, or £515 if they do not receive housing support. These are both being increased by £500 per year (£41.67 per month).

If you would like more information on this, please contact the Tenancy Sustainability Team on **01302 862050**.



Did you know?

If you want to increase your household income so you can benefit from these changes, we can help!

Our World of Work scheme is here to provide help and support for tenants who are looking to get back into employment. We offer a wide and varied range of support to meet your individual needs - including paid six month 'support and learn' training roles working with St Leger Homes! We can also help you with writing a CV, job searching, interview preparation and general employment advice.

To find out more contact us on **01302 734384**, email **wow@stlegerhomes.co.uk** or visit **stlegerhomes.co.uk/worldofwork/** and we will be happy to help you.



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