

Spring has Sprung



Winter may be just behind us, but the Society's Estate Team is busy preparing for the growing season ahead and our contractors will get back to cutting the grass and shrubs across our various schemes.

Your garden will also need maintaining, which means it will be time for you to get the lawn mower out and start to spruce up your outside space ready for those warm summer evenings. Remember that as a tenant of the Society your garden should be:

- free from litter & household rubbish
- not be overgrown
- you should regularly trim hedges, which shouldn't grow over neighbouring gardens or public paths
- your grass should be cut regularly

We carry out routine garden inspections which identify any garden areas that aren't maintained to an acceptable standard. Should tenants gardens fall below these standards they will be contacted to discuss and rectify this matter, in line with their tenancy agreement.



The Society would like its customers to be involved. We want customers to talk to us, engage with us and help to improve services.

Becoming a member of the **Customer Panel** is something that all customers can do. Getting involved can help you to develop new skills, meet new people and influence the way that things are done.

The Customer Panel meets every quarter to discuss a range of subjects and its ideas, suggestions and comments are fed back to the Society's Board at their Board meetings.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Customer Panel please do contact:

Allan Guest, Customer Panel Chair
allanbnre@gmail.com or call Allan on 07936325264

or

Lisa Liston, Housing Officer
info@stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk or call Lisa on 07841492984 or 01782 968566

Feedback



We always aim to provide great service, but understand that occasionally we might not get it right. When this happens, we want to know about it so that we can put it right.

You can give us feedback, make a complaint or tell us if you have received great customer service by talking, emailing or writing to us.

A complaint is any dissatisfaction expressed by a customer after they have received a service from the Society. It can also be about a lack of action or standard of service by the Society or person/s acting on its behalf.

You can complain about the delivery of a policy however we won't uphold a complaint against a policy itself - although we will listen to your feedback of course.

The following won't be considered a complaint:

- A resident complaining about the behaviour of another resident – this would be dealt with under the Society's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.
- A request for service, e.g. a repair.
- The complaint is received more than six months after the matter came to the complainant's attention.
- The complainant refuses to reasonably engage with the Society after making the complaint, is abusive to staff or acts unreasonably.

Take a look at our Complaints Policy in our **Contact Us** section at www.stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk.

Keep in Touch

Our website: www.stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk

Email: info@stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk

Telephone: 01782 968566 (9am to 5pm Mon to Fri)

In person: Customer Reception, Dickson House, Ridgway Road, Hanley, Stoke on Trent ST1 3AX (see website for opening hours)

Write to us: The Trevor Jones Office, Hammond House, Ridgway Road, Hanley, ST1 3AX

****Out of hours:** should you have an **emergency** repair or situation outside of normal office hours **call 01782 968566** and then **press 1** on your telephone keypad to be put through to our emergency service.



Your Voice - Your Views



Welcome to our **April 2018** newsletter, put together by staff and members of your Customer Panel. If you have any feedback on this newsletter or if there's anything that you would like to see included in any future editions then do please get in touch on 01782 968566.

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Direct Debit for your Convenience



Did you know that we provide an any day/any frequency Direct Debit service to make it easier for you to pay your rent or other charges directly via your bank account.

Set up is simple and can be done over the phone in just a few minutes. For more information go to our website

www.stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk

or call us on **01782 968566**.

Meet the Team

This newsletter we would like to introduce you to Rachel, who has been part of the Society's Housing Team since April 2017.

Having spent 9 years working in customer services for a large telecommunications company Rachel changed her career focus to specialise in Social Housing Services, spending the next 8 years as a Housing Assistant for a small well established Housing Association based in the South of the City.

In Rachel's latest role as Housing Assistant for the Society, she deals with a wide range of tasks and is here to assist customers with queries they might have about their tenancy—such as repairs, rent and general tenancy support. Rachel can also give advice and help to deal with transfer and new housing application enquiries.

Rachel undoubtedly has one of our most important roles. When you telephone our office it will usually be Rachel that you initially speak to. She keeps the office running like clockwork and the team would be lost without her.



Stoke on Trent foodbank provide three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food and support to local people who are referred to them in crisis. They are part of a nationwide network of foodbanks, supported by The Trussell Trust, working to combat poverty and hunger across the UK.

Did you know that the Society Team can issue foodbank vouchers to customers who are having financial difficulties such as benefit issues, delayed wages, homelessness or ill health.

Contact us on **01782 968566** for more information.

Plans for Home Upgrades

Ensuring that our properties are in good order and that all of our customers have a home to live in which meets what is known as the Decent Homes Standard is a major objective of the Society.

In order to continue to achieve this standard the Society's Board has approved a rolling programme of upgrades to customer homes that will include new kitchens and replacement windows for some of our schemes. A budget has been agreed and work has started on pulling together a plan of action that we hope to commence this year.



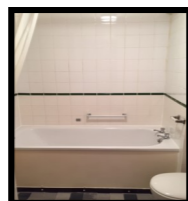
To help us decide exactly what type of works we need to complete and to which homes, we will be using historical stock condition survey information gathered by technical officers on our behalf. This information, along with feedback gathered from our contractors and customers will be used to further develop our upgrade programme. This process may result in different types of work being completed on different schemes at different times, as work is looked at on a scheme by scheme basis rather than a property basis.

If we're going to be carrying out work on your home, we'll let you know, and we'll provide you with contact details so you can get in touch if you have any questions or concerns. We'll also be updating our website with information in the near future so that we can keep you updated - www.stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk

Available Homes

We have lots of information about available homes on the Society's website.

- * **No administration fees**
- * **No rent deposit required**
- * **24/7 repair service**
- * **Locally based staff for housing advice and assistance**



If you have family or friends looking for a home to rent please ask them to get in touch on **01782 968566** or sign post them to: www.stokeontrenthousingsociety.org.uk

Coming soon to Hanley

The Society is currently building 20 x 2 bedroom houses on a small development off Lichfield Street in Hanley.

Ready to move into in June 2018, 10 of these properties will be allocated as per the Society's Allocation Policy and the remaining 10 homes will be passed to Stoke on Trent City council for nominations from their own waiting list.

Anyone interested should register at www.homehunt.co.uk and www.stoke.gov.uk or call the Society on **01782 968566** for further information.

Don't get bitten by a loan shark!

Have you or anyone you know:

- Been offered a cash loan without paperwork?
- Been threatened when you couldn't pay?
- Had your bank card taken from you?
- Had a loan which keeps growing even though you are making payments?

If you can answer yes to the above you may have been bitten by a Loan Shark.

For confidential help contact the Illegal Money Lending Team
Telephone: 0300 555 2222 (local call rate)
Email: reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk

Stop Loan Sharks **BIS** Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

Fire safety update

So far the Society has completed independent Fire Risk Assessments on all of our 3 multi storey apartment schemes in Hanley and 2 of our low rise schemes in Penkhull. We plan to complete further assessments on all of our schemes over the next 6 months.

In January we attended a workshop hosted by the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit to capture any learning from the Grenfell incident and in March we went along to a RAVEN exercise also hosted by the CCU.

If you have concerns over Fire Safety get in touch on **01782 968566**



Universal Credit - what you need to know

What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit (UC) is the new single monthly payment that will affect everyone between 16 and 64 who claims:

- * *Income Support*
- * *Income Based Job Seekers Allowance*
- * *Income related Employment and Support Allowance*
- * *Housing Benefit*
- * *Tax Credits*



In June 2018 the full Universal Credit service will begin to rollout in Stoke on Trent for all new claimants and after that process has been completed the Department of Works and Pensions will begin to move all remaining existing benefit claimants to the full Universal Credit Service. In addition if you have a change in your circumstances on your current Universal Credit claim or any other benefit claim as listed above you will have to move over to the new Universal Credit (full service).

How is Universal Credit paid?

All benefits, including Housing Benefit, will be paid in a lump sum to the claimant every month. You will not receive your first payment until one calendar month plus seven days after the date of your claim. This payment will include an allowance for one month's rent. You will need to pay rent yourself, directly to Stoke on Trent Housing Society, as it will no longer be paid directly to us by Housing Benefit.

How can I prepare for Universal Credit?

Many tenants who have moved onto Universal Credit are already getting into difficulties - make sure you are not one of them! Universal Credit can only be claimed online and payments are made into a bank account on a monthly basis (in arrears). You will need:

- ◆ **Access to the internet** and an **email address**
- ◆ **Verify your identity online** at www.gov.uk/government/publications/introducing-govuk-verify/introducing-govuk-verify
- ◆ **Bank Account** that will allow your payment to be paid in – post office accounts are not suitable
- ◆ **Set up a Direct Debit with Stoke on Trent Housing Society** to pay your rent, preferably for the day that your Universal Credit is paid to you
- ◆ **Make additional payments** to your rent account to build up a credit so that you don't fall into arrears whilst waiting for your Universal Credit payment

It's important that you have access to the internet and the necessary skills to maintain your online Universal Credit account. If you don't have access to the internet at home you can go to any library to set up and manage your account. Computers are also available in jobcentres, along with WiFi which you can access via a smartphone or tablet.

As a Stoke on Trent Housing Society tenant, it is important that you understand that you will be directly responsible for paying your own rent in the future.

If you are struggling to pay your rent or are struggling with any of the above you need to talk to us as soon as possible so that we can help. We have a confidential team who can help set up an affordable arrangement so you can pay any rent arrears and keep you from losing your home. Call us on 01782 968566.

Repairs Satisfaction

We've recently introduced a Repairs Satisfaction Survey so that we can understand what we're doing well and to identify the areas that we need to improve.



Our contractor will hand you a Survey Form when they come to your home to complete a repair. There are only 5 questions on the form to make it quick and easy for you to complete. Just complete and sign the form and hand it back to the contractor. We'll then give you a call back if there is anything that you have told us that you aren't happy about.

We'll publish results of your feedback in future editions of this newsletter.