

up close

Issue 2, December 2009



Merry Christmas

Welcome

With a new decade almost upon us there is every reason for River Clyde Homes to be proud of its achievements over the last two years. It gives us the opportunity to reflect upon what has been done since stock transfer in 2007, but more importantly, it is a chance to look to the future. This seems like a good time to introduce you to our new Chief Executive, Lynne Carr, of whom you can read more about on page 3. It is Lynne who will guide us through the new decade.

There is a real sense that things are 'hotting up' at River Clyde Homes. One of the most ambitious house building projects in Scotland is underway, right here on our doorstep, and by spring of next year we should see tenants move into the first of their new homes.

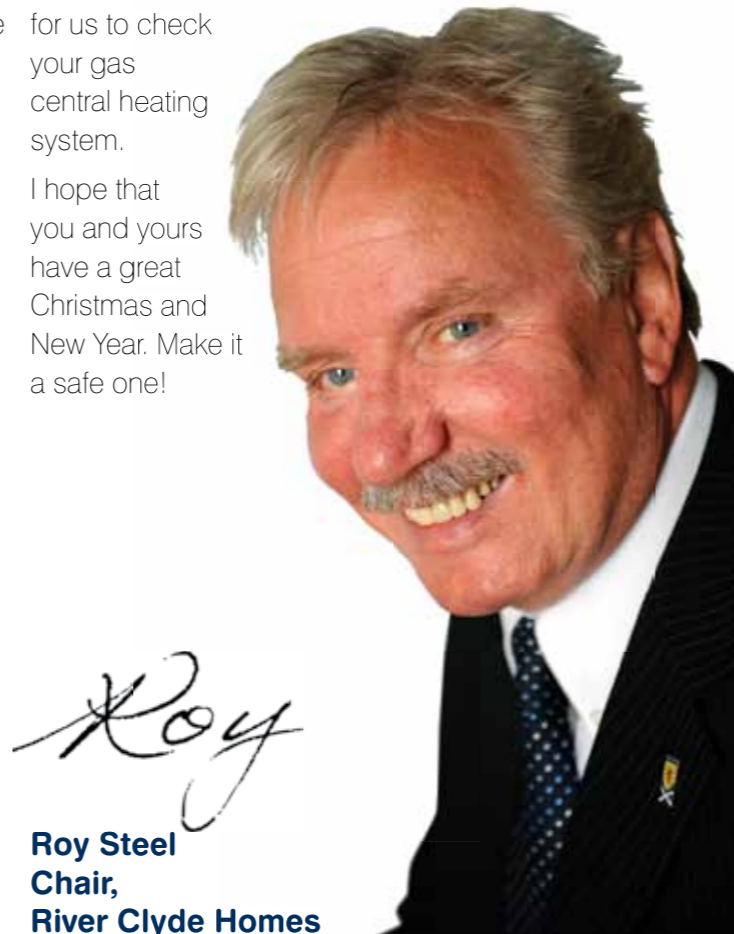
Another significant date for us is 2015 when all our properties have to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Significant works have been done to improve the fabric and interiors of our houses with the landmark 1000th 'mini-mod' not far away. It will surely be a cause for celebration.

The Board of RCH is pleased with the way the organisation is shaping up and is moving in the right direction. When you think about the sheer scale of what we inherited two short years ago, we should not underestimate what has been done.

The Board has made a number of important decisions in recent months. One, regarding gas safety, has an impact on the very lives of our tenants. We're pleased that RCH has achieved 98.5% compliance with regard to checking boilers and heating systems. But it's not good enough –

we need to reach 100%. Only then can we be sure that all our systems are in order. It was with some reluctance, but with an eye on the safety and welfare of our tenants, that we took the decision to allow forced access to properties where tenants will not let us in to check their gas. I hope it's something we never have to do, but the message is clear. Please make time for us to check your gas central heating system.

I hope that you and yours have a great Christmas and New Year. Make it a safe one!



Roy Steel
Chair,
River Clyde Homes

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Allocations: (01475) 715 644
Anti-social Behaviour Reporting: 0800 013 2198

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**Up Close is available in other formats, on request.
Please contact: Keith Moore on (01475) 712547.**

Cover: Christmas, 1948, outside Prentice's shop, Greenock.
Courtesy of Mrs. Sharp who contributed the photograph to the Up Close exhibition, 2009

Meet Lynne Carr, Chief Executive

Lynne was appointed Chief Executive of River Clyde Homes in September 2009. Her background is in housing management and she has worked for both local authorities and housing associations for over 30 years. Prior to joining River Clyde Homes, Lynne ran her own business, offering management and consultancy services to housing associations and charities. She was also the director of Cube Housing Association from 1997 for eight years, leading the organisation following two stock transfers and delivering a comprehensive new build programme. She also enabled improvements in the delivery of estate based services to Cube's tenants. Before joining Cube, Lynne worked with Thenew Housing Association providing consultancy services to other housing organisations and developing community care projects. Lynne's priorities are to ensure that River Clyde Homes continues the momentum it has built up in its first two years to improve the housing conditions in Inverclyde and also River Clyde Homes' housing services to tenants and owners. This will be achieved by working with residents and other local agencies in partnership to make change happen for our local communities.

She says: "I want River Clyde Homes to deliver a quality, value-for-money service to tenants. There is a lot going on at the moment with regeneration works to improve the fabric of buildings as well as one of the most ambitious new-build programmes in the country. It is my intention that we continue to improve the delivery of services to tenants and to listen to your suggestions for service improvement."



I don't know how I'll manage to pay my rent

Let's TALK about it

TALK to us
on **0800 013 2197**

This Christmas, help us to help you keep your home. If you're having difficulties paying your rent.

Our offices are closed from Fri 25 Dec - Tue 5 Jan but you can continue to make payments at any PayPoint outlet, Post Office or by using the 24-hour

Make your opinion count!

In the new year River Clyde Homes will be undertaking a tenants' survey to find out what you think about the services we provide and how we can improve them.

A company called Research Resource has been appointed to carry out the door-to-door survey of 10% of our tenants – that's approximately 600 interviews.

Tenants will be chosen randomly, although we will try to achieve a cross-section of representative tenants in terms of age and geographic location.

You may receive a letter from us asking if you are prepared to take part on the survey, which will take the form of a face-to-face interview lasting no more than half-an-hour.

Each interviewer will carry identification and a letter of authentication from River Clyde Homes.

We hope you will take the time to participate in the survey as the results will help us decide on how to prioritise services in the coming years.

River Clyde Homes' ambitious regeneration plans to build up to 1050 new homes by 2015 are now well and truly underway with works started on three sites.

Building works are most advanced on the Greenock East End site at Gilmour Street. Eventually 141 houses will be built in the area, the design of which has been informed by local residents following extensive consultation. The first 14 homes should be ready by the end of March 2010. This will be a landmark in our development plans and will see 14 families move from poor quality housing into brand new homes. Their former homes will then be demolished to make way for the next stage of the new build programme.

In Moray Road, Port Glasgow, the derelict flats have been demolished and work will begin on building 32 new homes in January. This includes three family sized bungalows which are fully accessible for wheelchair users. At the same time work will start on 61 new homes in Oronsay, Port Glasgow.

Meantime in Woodhall, site works started for 102 new houses last month. For health & safety compliance, a road and footpath closure has been granted and as a temporary measure there will be a footpath open from Broadfield Avenue to Parkhill Avenue at the wooded area. In addition a contra-flow traffic-light-system will be installed to allow major sewer and service diversion works to be carried out on Parkhill Avenue.

Roy Steel, Chair of River Clyde Homes said: "These are significant developments in Inverclyde and underpin our determination to deliver on the promises we made to tenants at transfer. It's great, after all the years of planning, to see these projects coming to fruition."

New Beginnings

Abseil-outlety Fab!



There was good news for tenants and homeowners across the area as our Maintenance and Factoring Teams took an unusual approach to tackling neglected guttering on buildings across Inverclyde.

In some areas blocked gutters have been a long-standing problem causing water ingress to many of our properties which results in dampness and expensive repairs further down the line.

Aspect Work at Height Ltd won the contract for this work and are quite literally dropping in on some 500 properties as they abseil onto the roofs to carry out the repairs.

This innovative method of carrying out this essential maintenance has not only become quite a talking point amongst tenants and home owners, it's a cost effective way of doing the work as it does away with the need of hiring and erecting expensive scaffolding racks.

Praise for Sheltered Housing Services

River Clyde Homes' sheltered housing accommodation has been awarded one of the highest ratings in Scotland, for a first graded inspection, following an inspection by the Care Commission.

The inspection looked at six aspects of the service and involved an assessment of policies and procedures, visits to the complexes, discussions with relevant staff and analysis of feedback from residents and their families.

River Clyde Homes' service was awarded one 'excellent' grade, while the other five were assessed as being 'very good'. The Commission looked at two features in each of three areas of the service: Quality of Care and Support; Quality of Staffing and Quality of Management and Leadership. The 'excellent' grade was awarded for tenant participation in sheltered housing complexes.

Roy Steel, Chair of River Clyde Homes' Board said: "We are very pleased with this report. The inspector was very complimentary about the service and was impressed with the staff with whom he spoke. He also stated that feedback from residents showed a high level of satisfaction. My congratulations and thanks go to all the staff involved in the inspection and to the wardens and staff of the complexes."

Lynne Carr, Chief Executive, added: "We are rightly proud of the effective service we provide to 282 tenants in our nine sheltered housing complexes. This is a valuable and popular part of the housing services we provide in Inverclyde and one which I hope we can build upon and enhance in the future."

Earlier this year Mairi and William Wright were recognised jointly as Real Community Heroes for being the type of neighbours anyone would benefit from having. The couple moved to Greenock three years ago and have already made a positive impression on their local community in the Belville Street area.

They have been active members of the Belville Community Association and recently became tenant members of River Clyde Homes.

As Mairi explains: "There's a lot going on in the Belville Street area and the demolition of the high flats is a very real sign of the change. We really like living here and want to have an input to what happens in our community in the future."

There is consultation underway currently with the local community as to what will happen to the site of the multis in the years ahead.

Mairi continued: "Becoming a member of River Clyde Homes seemed like the logical next step for us. Housing in Inverclyde is changing and we want to have a say in things which affect our tenancy and our neighbourhood. There's little point in not participating and then complaining about decisions once they're made."

Tenant members of River Clyde Homes are not obliged to attend meetings or to give up any time, however members do have voting rights on special resolutions and are invited to attend and vote at the AGM. In short, why not follow Mairi's advice, join us now and let your voice be heard!



Let your voice be heard!

For further information, contact Lawrence Pavia on (01475) 712615 or e-mail: lawrence.pavia@riverclydehomes.org.uk

Date for your diary



As a tenant of River Clyde Homes you are invited to a conference on January 30 2010 to discuss how your rents are spent.

The meeting will give tenants the opportunity to become more involved in River Clyde Homes' financial decisions and hear how income from rents is spent.

Over the next year (2010/11) River Clyde Homes expects to spend in the region of £1million a month improving existing homes and a further £20million on regeneration projects, with tenants' rents helping fund this investment.

Full details of the event will be announced in January and River Clyde Homes Chair Roy Steel is encouraging local people to attend. He said: "This is an exciting time for tenants in Inverclyde with record investment in housing.

"We want to see even greater tenant participation, which we see as being vital to the long-term success of River Clyde Homes and events such as this have been organised to give our tenants a greater say on the future of housing services in their communities."

Further information: Jim McNee, Tenant Participation Officer, (01475) 712639

Grand Central Savings

Are you one of the 17,000 people in Inverclyde who has struggled to open a bank account? Have you ever been forced to pay charges and fees just to get your hands on your own money? Then help is at hand in the shape a new service in Inverclyde.

Grand Central Savings is opening its doors in Cathcart Street, Greenock in the New Year. Aimed at helping the financially excluded in Inverclyde to manage their money on a day to day basis, the charitable organisation provides free banking facilities for everyone.

Launched in 2001 in Glasgow, GCS helps thousands of customers to pay in and withdraw their money in a fair, free and simple way. GCS accounts are free and there are no bank charges to worry about. Opening an account is quick and easy and benefits, tax credits and wages can all be paid directly into accounts. Staff are on hand to offer customers help and advice to manage their money and are committed to treating customers with dignity and respect.

There are many benefits for River Clyde Homes in GCS coming to Inverclyde, not least that tenants on state benefits can have their money paid directly into their account and set up standing orders for their rent.

River Clyde Homes is delighted to be supporting GCS open its second branch by providing part-funding and staff for the operation as part of our commitment to financial inclusion.

As Income Generation Manager, Joan Beatty, explains: "A recent study by Inverclyde's Financial Inclusion Partnership found that there are 17,000 people in the area without bank accounts. Many of these are our tenants and they face a deepening financial crisis as they tend to use cheque point centres outlets and can lose around 10% of what little they have got in commission charges.

Joan added: "Grand Central Savings has a policy of not charging customers and helps them with budgeting. The current economic problems has put many of our tenants on less stable financial ground, with some finding themselves, for the first time, unable to pay their rent. RCH continues to seek innovative solutions to helping our tenants to manage their money and we are delighted that Grand Central Savings has chosen to open in Inverclyde."

Let us in!

Gas safety compliance is a key responsibility for River Clyde Homes. Under legislation it is required that every tenant receives an annual inspection and servicing of their gas central heating appliances.

Since stock transfer the 'gas team' has made huge inroads into reducing the number of houses/appliances falling out with this regime, from 87% to 98.5%.



In November the RCH Board ratified that 'forced entry as a measure of last resort' may be used at houses which still require the annual inspection to ensure compliance with the law and ensure health and safety.

Gordon Smart, Asset Manager, said : "River Clyde Homes is responsible for guaranteeing the safety of the gas central heating appliances in all its properties. We are very close to securing 100% of properties being checked and I would ask that all tenants ensure that our teams can gain access to check equipment. Put bluntly, by not letting us in they are risking the lives of themselves and their families."

If you have ignored our attempts to check your central heating in the last 12 months, or are unsure if your system has been checked, please contact: Gas Service Team (01475) 715618.

In addition to the above, the team project manages the gas system replacement programme. Last financial year 221 systems were replaced and from the April 2009 'til the end of October 76 were replaced.

How are we doing?

Our performance figures for the half-year to the end of September 2009 are now published.

Income Collection

Rent arrears are currently sitting at 1.08% for the year.

Staff Attendance

We have exceeded our target 96% with an actual attendance 96.05%

Repairs

99.72% emergency repairs responded to within the target time of 24 hours

95.94% urgent jobs responded to within 4 days

82.30% routine jobs responded to within 20 days

Gas Safety

97.88% of gas inspections completed within 12 months against a target of 100%

Voids

Performance on Voids is improving. However, the average turnaround time is currently 120 days which is still well above this year's target of 95 days. Over the past few months, the time taken to undertake jobbing repair works in void houses has dramatically reduced and changes have been made which should also result in a significant reduction in the time taken for Investment Work. Attention is also being given to the high rate of refusals which is adversely impacting on overall timescales. We are in the process of reviewing all our procedures relating to Voids and will shortly be inviting interested parties to provide feedback on some fresh proposals.



Don't let your common close become a...

DEATH TRAP

In the period July to November 2009, fire fighters in Inverclyde have been called out to deal with eight separate fires involving combustible materials left or stored within common closes. Occupants have had to be evacuated from their homes and extensive damage has been caused.

Station Commander Paul Devlin, based at Greenock Community Fire Station has asked that the residents in Inverclyde to be more vigilant regarding their own safety; particularly those living in flatted accommodation. The storage of excess furniture and combustible materials within a common close greatly increases the risk from fire for those occupants within the common close. Within Inverclyde, sadly there are wilful fire raisers who will take advantage of these situations putting lives at risk.

One in five of the total number of reportable fires – those which involve damage to property, injuries or fatalities – in houses or flats in the last 12 months have been due to the storage of materials left in common closes.

To report any items blocking communal areas, or causing a fire hazard in properties please contact your local Community Fire Safety Officers by telephone on 01475 722223.

In addition to the above service Strathclyde Fire & Rescue Service also provide free Home Fire Safety Visits, to arrange your home safety check please telephone your local Community Fire Station:

Greenock	01475 722222
Port Glasgow	01475 741222
Gourock	01475 632222

Setting up a Tenants' & Residents' Association

One of the main ways to make sure you have a voice and are able to influence the decisions that affect your home and your tenancy is to become involved in a tenants' and residents' association.

There are many reasons why tenants and residents set up local groups, for example, having more of a say in how your housing service is delivered and how policies are developed. You might also wish to encourage a better 'community spirit' in your neighbourhood.

Associations organise around issues that affect people in their community. For example, some tenants may be unhappy about the standard of the repairs service or there may be refurbishment work planned for their area that they want to be fully consulted on. Some associations concentrate on tackling one particular issue or a range of issues over a period of time.

An association can also act as a representative voice for communities and give information and advice to tenants and residents.



How to start

Most tenants' and residents' associations start with just a handful of people who are keen to do something for their area. You can find other interested people by talking to neighbours or putting up notices locally or sending letters to see if other tenants and residents are also interested. River Clyde Homes will help with this.

You could arrange small planning meetings with interested neighbours. River Clyde Homes' Tenant Participation Co-ordinator and local Neighbourhood Housing Officers will help you to do this. At the planning meetings, think about what you want to achieve, how to share responsibility and find out who else can give you help and support.

Public Meeting

You could then arrange a public meeting to test wider support for your ideas and find out if local people feel the same way as your small group. You can also launch the tenants' and residents' group and elect a steering committee.

To find out more call Jim McNee, River Clyde Homes' Tenant Participation Co-ordinator on 01475 712639; mobile 07748703077 or, email Jim on jim.mcnee@riverclydehomes.org.uk



The Committee

There are no hard and fast rules regarding organising a tenants' and residents' association. A committee is simply a way of bringing people together to consider problems and make decisions on behalf of the full membership of the association. River Clyde Homes will help you to put together your constitution and plan for future meetings.

Funding and support

River Clyde Homes will provide grants to help your association get started and keep going. Most registered tenants and residents groups are eligible for a start-up grant of £200 and an annual administration grant of up to £300. Groups can also apply for a Project Grant for up to £500.

River Clyde Homes can also arrange for free training for tenants' and residents' groups on topics such as the role of the committee, basic book-keeping and arranging public meetings.

Up Close with local business

In November River Clyde Homes hosted an event at Port Glasgow Town Hall called Up Close with Local Business.

The day was designed to explain to local businesses and contractors about what kind of contracts we have and to explain the tendering process RCH is keen that local businesses have the opportunity to tender or sub contract for that work.

The award of many RCH contracts is guided by European legislation and this is monitored to ensure compliance.

Companies tendering for work have to meet a raft of statutory obligations and criteria which can sometimes seem complicated. The aim of the day was to explain to local contractors the process involved and the criteria companies should expect to meet. Local businesses will also have the opportunity to meet with some of the current major contractors to explore opportunities to sub-contract works.

I hope that we will see more local companies tendering for work and that contracts can be awarded locally.

The event received positive feedback from the 35 representatives of local companies who attended.

Lynne Carr welcomed the initiative, saying: "River Clyde Homes is committed to ensuring that local employment opportunities for apprentices and unemployed people are maximised through our contracts. It follows naturally that,

where possible, local businesses have a real chance to bid for work."

She continued: "Obviously, because of the rigorous regulations involved we cannot guarantee work to any contractor,

local or otherwise. What we can do however is give contractors a better understanding of those regulations. I hope that the end result will be that we will see more local companies tendering for work and that contracts can be awarded locally."

Registered Tenants Organisations

The following groups are Registered Tenant Organisations with River Clyde Homes.

- Bardrainey Tenants & Residents Association
- Bagatelle Court Tenants Association
- Belville Community Association
- Branchton Association of Tenants and Residents
- Broomhill & Anne Street Tenants & Residents Association
- Chapelton Residents Action Group
- Clune Park Tenants and Residents Association
- Cowdenknowes Residents Association
- Eastern View Residents Association
- Glebe Court Residents Association
- Greenock Central Residents Action Group
- Gibshill Residents Association
- Grieve Road/Fancy Farm Tenants & Residents Association
- Octavia Court Tenants Action Group
- Park Farm Tenants and Residents Association
- Rankin Court Residents Association
- Riverside Gardens Tenants and Residents Association
- Slaeuir Tenants and Residents Association
- South Maukinhill Tenants and Residents Association
- Wellpark Community Association
- Woodhall Community Association



To contact any of the groups get in touch with Jim McNee, River Clyde Homes' Tenant Participation Co-ordinator on 01475 712639; mobile 07748 703077 or email jim.mcnee@riverclydehomes.org.uk

Merry Christmas!

River Clyde Homes wishes all its tenants a safe and peaceful Christmas and New Year. Our offices will be closed from 4.45pm on Thursday 24 December and will re-open on Tuesday 5 January. During that time you can report emergency repairs by using our freephone repairs line: 0800 013 2196 and you can continue to make rent payments using the Post Office or PayPoint. Below we have printed some telephone numbers which we hope will be useful.

River Clyde Homes Repair Line: 0800 013 2196
Gas Central Heating Faults: Saltire: 0800 048 2710
Gas Central Heating Faults (Sheltered Housing only) Quality Gas : (01475) 788080
Anti-Social Behaviour Helpline: 0800 013 1701
Homelessness Service: (01475) 715880
Social Work Services: (Out-of-Hours) 0800 811 505

Police: (01475) 492500
Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 027 1234
Scottish Power: 0845 2723 7999
Scottish Gas Networks: 0800 111 999
Scottish Water: 0845 600 8855

Rechargeable Repairs

During the festive period we will only be able to carry out emergency repairs. Please be aware that if you want work carried out that is not an emergency, you may be charged for that repair.

Similarly, throughout the rest of the year the out-of-hours service is for emergencies only, where not carrying out the repair immediately would be a threat to safety of individuals or property. If, when our operatives attend during those times and it is found that the situation has been exaggerated, or we have been misinformed so that we will attend out-of-hours, or where it would have been reasonable for the tenant to have rectified the fault or taken temporary measures to avoid the call-out, the tenant will be re-charged for the call-out and work undertaken, or the call-out even if no action can be taken.

Some common examples of rechargeable repairs, where attendance is normally requested as an emergency, and which are rechargeable, are:

Leaks at waste pipes or washing machine etc

Water leak at supply pipe or taps

(containable by using towel, basin or turning off isolating valve)

Blocked sinks, or blocked toilet

(due to disposal of food stuff, sanitary towel, nappies, or other foreign objects)

Toilet not flushing (not blocked and where tenant is unwilling to self flush, where able to do so)

Repairs to communal doors or door entry systems

Electrics tripped

(due to faulty appliance, bulb etc)

Sockets not working (unless all sockets)

Lights not working

(other than bathroom or all lights)

Faulty locks (if more than one lock fitted on door)

Windows not lockable (but can be closed)

Locked out or in due to lost, stolen or misplaced keys etc

Vandalism or malicious damage where no crime incident number is provided