



June 2021

## Welcome

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter. We hope you, your family, and friends, are all keeping safe and well. As we emerge from what has been a strange and difficult year, we look forward to warmer days and the sun setting later in the evening. In this edition we will look at what is new in Circle and the different ways you can become involved. Please let us know if you have any feedback on this edition. Below are areas in which you can have your say, either on an ongoing basis by engaging with our tenant advisory group, completing surveys or by contributing to this newsletter.

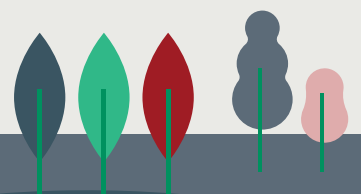
If you wish to contact us for a specific issue, you can access our Compliments, Complaints & Feedback form online or by talking to our Income, Repairs or Tenancy teams.

### Tenant Satisfaction Surveys 2021

#### Your Input is Valuable to Circle

We want to provide the best service possible to you, our tenants. To help us better understand what is important to you and where we need to focus our energy and resources, we have commissioned Acuity, an independent research company to carry out surveys on our behalf. Acuity has a lot of experience running surveys in Ireland and the UK. From July onwards a representative from Acuity will contact a sample number of tenants to ask about your overall experience of being a Circle tenant as well as contacting tenants who have had a recent repair completed or tenants who have raised a complaint with us. They will be asking about your level of satisfaction, your needs, your expectations in relation to your home and the services Circle provide.

***If you have call display on your phone, the call display will show a UK number with a Brighton area code (01273 093939). There is no cost to you for accepting this call.***



## Customer Feedback

When the Acuity representative calls, you will be asked if you want to participate, this is a voluntary survey, and it should not take any longer than 10 minutes. If it is not a convenient time, the representative will arrange another time to call you back. If you agree to participate in any of the surveys, your answers will remain completely confidential and will not be known to Circle unless you give Acuity consent to pass your details on to us. You might want this if, for example, you have an outstanding issue that you would like Circle to take action on.

We would love you to get involved and give us feedback, and if you have any questions about the survey, please contact us.



## TAG The Tenant Advisory Group, Planning for the Future

The Tenancy Advisory Group, or TAG as it has become known, had its first meeting in May just gone. The group is made up of tenants who live in homes either owned or managed by Circle. The aim of this group is to improve our tenants experience and to help develop and influence areas such as future housing, policies, and direction. We would encourage anyone interested in bringing ideas and willing to participate in developing a strong tenant influence in the organisation, to contact us. You can talk to members of the Income, Repairs or Tenancy teams.

(Call on 01 407 2110 or email [info@circlevha.ie](mailto:info@circlevha.ie), or visit [www.circlevha.ie](http://www.circlevha.ie)).

## Supporting Communities

In March 2020 Circle engaged the services of Supporting Communities to assist in the development and implementation of a revised 2021 Tenant Engagement Structure and Strategy. The impact of Covid-19 resulted in repeated delays in delivering the first phase of the training plan. It was always Circle's and Supporting Communities intention and preferred plan to deliver training and support to tenants and staff face to face. However, the ongoing restrictions led to Circle and Supporting Communities having to revise our plan to allow for training to be delivered online. Phase one of the action plan was delivered and included:

- Delivery of tenant participation workshop and action planning session for staff.

- Delivery of tenant participation workshop and action planning session for the tenants and development of our Tenant Steering Group.
- Delivery of workshop and action planning session to support development of the Steering Group for staff & our Board members.
- Development of the Terms of Reference for the Tenant Steering Group which was approved by tenants.

## Action Plan

The action plan for 2021 has been established and will continue laying the groundwork for the Tenant Steering Group to hand over responsibility to the soon to be established Tenant Advisory Group. The TAG will be tasked with developing:

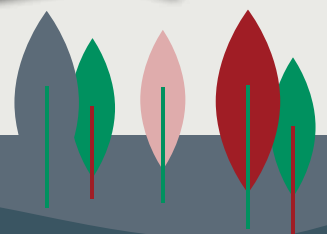
- A Code of Conduct and Terms of Reference for the Tenant Advisory Group.
- A tenant approved logo for use on all tenant related materials and policies.
- A revised Tenant Communication and Engagement Strategy.
- A Tenant Advisory Group led action plan.

The TAG will be provided with formal training on Circle's structure and governance, as well as how Circle is financed and regulated. Good governance, components of effective meetings, and the role of the chairperson will be covered.

## Our Newsletter

### Four Times a Year

We are looking for contributors to get involved in our quarterly newsletter. Don't think anything is too big or too small, maybe share a story from your lived experience or share a creative contribution, this is an exciting opportunity for you to get involved. Our new tenant handbook was distributed during April 2021, if you have not received your copy, please contact us and we will get one out to you. We have also designed a new tenant logo which will be used on all information approved by the TAG members.



## Quality in Our Diversity

Over the past twenty years, Ireland has become markedly diverse in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity. Integration is something that does not just happen - it requires work to promote and enable it.

We are committed to creating cohesive communities where diversity is recognised and respected, where people living in communities feel included.

Diversity, for us, is about respecting differences of all of our tenants and employees, recognising the positive contribution that diversity brings and ensuring that all people who come into contact with Circle experience the same high standards of behaviour and service. In 2020, the Quality in our Diversity project was set up with Community Action Network, and five of the largest AHB's in Ireland. We came together to establish a Steering Group that worked towards making diversity a core strand in our work of providing quality homes in sustainable communities.

We want to continue this work in 2021 and 2022 and develop a model for a Quality Mark standard. Circle, Cluid Housing and Respond Housing have decided to work on this project together. We will be setting up a partnership group of tenants, front line staff and management. Our new Steering Group will continue to be independently chaired by Community Action Network and our partner organisations have committed to continuing to work together by recruiting a dedicated Diversity Officer. The Diversity Officer will work across all three organisations in establishing an action plan at grassroots and policy levels to develop a Quality Mark in building intercultural leadership and tackling racism in housing.

If you would like to be involved in the work of this steering group, please contact Gavin or Monique.

## Provision of homes on International Women's Day

Here at Circle we are very proud of our commitment to equality and diversity and there was no better day to showcase this than on International Women's Day! It was a proud moment for staff and tenants alike as they put the key in the door for the first time and smiled broadly. On this day we welcomed two of our newest tenants to our most recent scheme, Limekiln Place. This scheme is a result of a continued partnership with South Dublin County Council and consists of a variety of 1-3 bed apartments. All apartments come with A rated energy ratings, triple glazed windows and spacious living areas as well as being complimented by day-to-day amenities such as a shop, chemist and hairdressers all on the ground floor. Welcome to your new home Yana & Onyema, we wish you the very best of luck!



We are proud of our commitment to provide high quality homes and sustainable tenancies for tenants with specific needs. We do this in partnership with local authorities and other partner organisations. We have recently engaged in a new initiative involving the HSE and the Creating Foundations project in the South Dublin County Council area as well as DARA community living in the Kildare County Council area. The partnership with HSE, SDCC & Creating Foundations Project called the 'Shared Living Initiative' caters for tenants who require supports in the areas of mental health and the ability to live independently. Likewise, our partnership with DARA Community Living also provides homes to people with intellectual disabilities with the provision of on-site support from DARA staff to assist our tenants to live independently.

## Alone/La Casa

Circle are working in partnership with Alone on a pilot scheme. The scheme itself is being completed by CeADAR, Dept of Science, UCD. This research involves exploring how electronic sensors can be used in a person's home to make it safer and more sustainable. This research will help Circle and our tenants understand how we can improve living conditions by monitoring and detecting issues to do with their property. For example, sensors can detect moisture levels in the air and may help highlight damp in the homes. Tenants will also be able monitor energy use and reduce energy consumption and bills while helping climate change.

This pilot initiative will help tenants and Circle monitor moisture, noise, motion, and energy levels over a 9-month period. Circle would like to thank the 45 tenants who have kindly agreed to partake in this pilot.



## Munster

New residents started moving into 85 Main Street Youghal in February. This is a development of apartments that Cork County Council delivered with our support. From the street you would not realise there is a hidden gem hidden behind the doors. This complex is close to all amenities offered in Youghal, and the main Cork to Waterford bus route is close by.



Living here you would not need a car as you are close to everything that you would need. This development provides low-cost energy heating and appliances to aid our residents in reducing their day to day living expenses. Residents have now settled into their new homes. The sea is just a laneway away and you can walk for miles from there to get the views and fresh sea air, Youghal is a great location to be living in.

## Income

In our bid to take efficiency and effectiveness to new levels our online submission of confidential income statements and queries was launched, and our online payment system has also begun. The ability to collect rent online is an incredibly valuable feature for everyone, especially during Covid-19 lockdowns. This cuts out our tenants having to go to banks to pay their rent. We also introduced a new system that enable us to reassess rents faster so that tenants are getting new rents more quickly.

## Rent Payment Options

### Standing Order

- This is our preferred method of payment for tenants who have bank accounts. Tenants can request a standing order form by contacting Circle. It is convenient and may help tenants to manage their finances more effectively.

### The Household Budget Scheme

- The scheme is available to tenants who get their social welfare benefits paid at the post office.
- No charge is levied on the tenant for using this service.
- Rent is deducted from benefits at source, which can help tenants who have difficulty managing money, to pay their rent and other essential bills on time.
- However, this scheme is not available to tenants in paid employment.

**Telephone Payment just call: 01 407 2110**

### Online Payment

Payment can be made online 24 hours, 7 days a week at your convenience, visit our website: [www.circle.ie](http://www.circle.ie), then click on **Tenant Assistance+**, click on **Pay Rent Online**. To pay online you need to quote your occupancy number.

### Rent Payment Card

Our Rent payment cards have just been launched and these will replace rent lodgement books fully in 2021, everyone will be able to use the card in any post office and/or pay zone near their homes.



- Lodgement Books are being phased out and when you next need a replacement, please feel free to request a Rent Payment Card either by phone **01 407 2110** or email to **Rent@circle.ie**
- The minimum transaction amount is €10 and there is no upper limit.



01 407 2110



[www.circle.ie](http://www.circle.ie)



01 407 2110  
Rent@circle.ie

## Are You in Rent Arrears?

- We are here to support you, please contact our Specialist Income Management Team on **01 407 2110**
- Free, Confidential Help and Advice is Also Available From:  
The Residential Tenancies Board  
**01 702 8100, [www.onestopshop.rtb.ie](http://www.onestopshop.rtb.ie)**
- MABS Services (For Budgeting & Money Management)  
**076 107 2000, [www.mabs.ie](http://www.mabs.ie)**
- Threshold (for Housing and Homelessness support)  
**1800 454 454**





## Asset Management

Hello from the Asset Management Team. We are delighted to let you know that we have commissioned a Stock Condition Survey of 25% of Circle properties commencing at the end of June. This will provide us with insight into the current lifespan of various components within your home and enable us to deliver a programme of works in line with our Asset Management Strategy over the coming months.

The purpose of our Asset Management Strategy is in direct response to the previous stock survey and a need to review how well our current housing stock is performing. It has identified key areas that require investment and maintenance and provides a plan for us to deliver a better service in the near term, and also recognises the need to build on this strategy to help deliver longer term goals. Planned upgrade works and stock assessment are at the core of our strategy. We have no doubt that these works will greatly enhance your comfort and wellbeing within your home, and we look forward to delivering these in the coming months.

## Facilities

In Facilities we aim to improve the response times for residents and tenants when problems arise and fix the issues as quickly as we can. We are already seeing a reduction in calls to our Facilities and Property Services teams. We are at the beginning, and we hope to improve our services going forward but there is an awful lot of work to be done. We will continue to improve our facility services over time and give our residents and tenants the best service we can provide.

## Customer Services

### A Message from the Customer Services Team

Hello! My name is Shauna Rutledge the new Customer Services Coordinator and I am a part of our new Customer Service Team. It's more than likely that we have already spoken on the phone. I'm the one who sounds American but am Canadian eh! If not me you have probably spoken with Karen Dowling, Sian Coote or Alisha Curtis, all of whom make up the team.

Here at Circle, we have had a restructure. Another one you ask? Well yes! It may not seem like it at times, but we are constantly striving to do and be better for our tenants. Not only was it unanimous on that very long survey we asked you to fill out and return in 2019, but over the course of the last year we frontline staff have heard that you find it hard to get a hold of us, hard to get timely responses and our phone lines... well believe me, we know about the struggles with the phone lines. Thus, the Customer Services Team was born.

Where we were once a team of two receptionists and two property services officers, we are now one team of four. All trained to handle general requests along with processing repairs and maintenance as well. The objective is to lessen your struggle with getting to speak with the right person with your query.

That leads us to the phone lines. Unfortunately, all I am allowed to say at the moment is we're working on it! But please stay tuned for the next newsletter for further updates. So please, give us a call if you need us. Until then have a safe and lovely summer!

*Your Customer Care Coordinator,*  
**Shauna**

## Development

### 52 Older Persons Homes for Emmett Road, Inchicore.

The Circle Housing Development Team are in final preparations to start construction on a development of 52 new homes for older persons who require support services to maintain independent living in the community. More than €16 million will be invested into the new development by Circle Housing with the bulk of the finance being provided by the Department of Housing using the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS).



The homes have been designed for tenants who are aging and require accommodation that meets their needs and have been designed with features such as walk-in showers, open plan living areas and accessible kitchens.

The development also includes a community space which will be operated by the organisation ALONE who will also provide wraparound services to tenants living in the development. The scheme will be the first Housing With Supports scheme (HWS) to be delivered in Ireland and will act as a model for all future HWS projects. The tender process is currently underway with the contractor due to be selected over the summer and construction due to start in October 2021, with an 18 month programme. This scheme is one of four new Circle Housing construction projects due to commence in 2021.

# Repairs

## Silverfish in The Home

We have all seen them. They have made us all jump when turning on the bathroom light at night or opening a press to see one wiggle away. While silverfish can cause damage to stored food, clothing and books, it is a relief to know that they are not venomous, they do not bite, are not harmful to humans nor do they carry diseases.

### What do Silverfish Look Like?

Proper identification can help you fight the war on silverfish, but it also helps us to evaluate the problem and the degree to which an infestation is taking place within your home.



### Silverfish are:

- Silver, blue or grey in colour
- Tapered, tail-like appearance
- Wingless with two slender antennae
- 10-12mm in length

### Popular Silverfish Hang Outs

Silverfish are nocturnal insects and are most active during the night-time. Due to their proclivity to the dark, they are extremely sensitive to light. They prefer damp and high humid conditions to thrive.

### Common areas for activity:

- Bathroom sinks
- Attic
- Kitchen
- Basements
- Old books

### The War on Silverfish and How You Can Fight It

They are a common sight in many homes, but you can take action against them before their numbers grow beyond your control.

- Use dehumidifiers – good for more than just silverfish, these can be found at any electrical appliance store.
- Ensure proper ventilation in the home. Opening windows, using extractor fans after bathing or while cooking or washing/hanging laundry.
- Reporting any leaks you notice within the home immediately to Circle.
- Deny them of any sort of sustenance by reducing the level of dust in the house and vacuuming damp areas of the house.
- Food should be stored in properly sealed containers to prevent them from reaching their food sources.
- Treat cracks, crevices, wall voids and other likely hiding spots in the areas where there has been activity. Common household insecticides can be purchased over the counter at any hardware store.

### When to Report Silverfish to your Customer Service Team:

We would encourage you to try all of the above, however, we are certainly here to help. If you have exhausted all avenues and treatments to get rid of them and are finding them in uncommon areas of the home in excess number, then please be sure to call the Customer Service Team at **01 407 2110**.

## Information that May be Helpful

The Department of Social Protection will roll out their Back-to-School clothing and footwear scheme in the coming weeks, this is to help families who are struggling to cover the cost of school wear and supplies for children between the ages of 4 – 22 years.

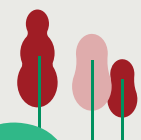
For more information, go to:

[www.welfare.ie/backtoschoolclothingandfootwear](http://www.welfare.ie/backtoschoolclothingandfootwear)

## Free Things to Do this Summer

Go to a park, explore what your town or city has to offer. Go swimming, your local community pools will be back open this summer with limited access.

Go to the library, this place is awesome! If you are near the city there are lots of local attractions that are free, to find out more visit: [www.mykidstime.ie](http://www.mykidstime.ie)



## Get in Touch

Circle Voluntary Housing Association  
Phoenix House, 32 - 34 Castle Street, Dublin 2

**Phone:** 01-4072110

**Email:** [info@circlevha.ie](mailto:info@circlevha.ie)