



## Welcome

Welcome to our Winter newsletter, the theme of this edition is “a year in review.”

In this edition we want to tell you about some of the changes that have been made within Circle and celebrating a few of the achievements that have been made in the last 12 months. We have some great winter wellness tips, some lovely Christmas recipes to try out and much more. We welcome your feedback and would love to hear from you - send us your news, stories, and comments to [info@circlevha.ie](mailto:info@circlevha.ie)

## Note from our CEO

As the darker nights draw in and we reflect on the months gone by, I am pleased to celebrate the changes that have emerged within Circle regarding our publicly stated acknowledgment and recognition that our tenants come first. First in the services we provide, in the communities we aim to foster and, in every decision and direction that we as an organisation make. This has not been something that we have always done in the past, but it is very much about how we want to deliver quality services for the future, with our Tenants’ voices leading us in what we do.

We now have our Tenant Advisory Group established, please do get in touch if you would like to be involved – email [cmcdonnell@circlevha.ie](mailto:cmcdonnell@circlevha.ie). This group will aid in ensuring that our tenants’ voice is heard, that it is felt in every decision made and that it is recognised as the pivotal tone we must align with. My expectation is that our tenants will be our biggest critics but also our biggest supporters, if we get this approach right.

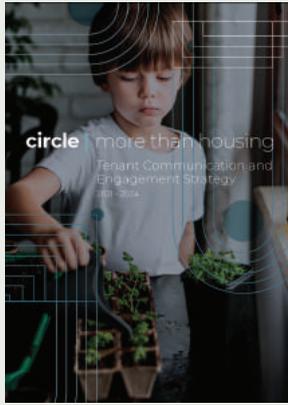
We have launched our Organisational 3-year strategy titled, Strategy 24, which amplifies and strengthens our Tenant First approach, Tenant First being our first goal and the one that underpins the remaining 3 organisational goals. For a copy or further details please do ask your Tenancy Services Officer who can explain and provide any further information you may require or go to our website – [www.circlevha.ie](http://www.circlevha.ie).

It has been another difficult year for a lot of people as we continue to navigate the pandemic; it has brought its challenges, trials, and tribulations. It is our wish for you to know that you have the support of Circle as your landlord to assist you in the enjoyment of the peace and security of your home. Our teams are comprised of the most excellent and professional people in the sector and the changes we have made to our Services and Property teams will, I am confident, provide you with the avenues required to assist in responding to your queries. Please do not accept or feel that sub-standard services are acceptable. Please let us know where and how we can do better.

As Christmas approaches it only remains for me to wish you and your loved ones the very best for the coming season and new year. From the Board, Management and Staff of Circle we wish you a very merry Christmas season and a happy new year.



Our Office and Phone lines will be closed from Friday the 24th of December and reopen on Tuesday the 4th of January. The out of hours number is 053-9374832



### Tenant Handbook

We published our 2nd tenant handbook

### Tenant Communication & Engagement Strategy

Get in touch if you would like a copy or you can view it on our website

<http://circlevha.ie/who-re-we/publications/>



### Tenant Engagement Launch

Circle had their official Tenant Engagement Strategy launch on the 4th of November in the Temple Bar Gallery. We would have loved everyone including staff and tenants to join us, but due to Covid 19 restrictions we had to limit the number of guests attending. It was an incredibly positive morning, and it was great to see everyone attending a physical event.

On the day, TAG (Tenant Advisory Group) members, the CEO John Hannigan and the chair of the board Chris Ellison spoke about the 3-year tenant engagement action plan and the 13 opportunities for tenants to get involved.



### New Tenant Engagement Officer (TEO)

Hi there, my name is Claire McDonnell and I am Circle's first Tenant Engagement Officer.

The aim of this role is to get tenants more involved within Circle and to make sure the tenant voice is heard throughout what Circle does. There are currently 13 opportunities/subgroups, in the Tenant Engagement Strategy, that we would love tenants to be involved in. Your opinions and thoughts are particularly important and we believe that tenants should be able to shape the services they receive from us.

Most meetings will be online and no matter what your time schedule is like, we can work around each tenant's needs. There is something for everyone. If you would like to know more and get involved, please contact me on [cmcdonnell@circlevha.ie](mailto:cmcdonnell@circlevha.ie) or text/WhatsApp 086 103 4833.

Our Tenant engagement Strategy and the list of opportunities can be found on our website or if you would like a copy sent out, just let me know. <https://circlevha.ie/who-we-are/publications/>

### TAG Update

The Tenant advisory group (TAG) had their last meeting of 2021 in November, and it was a full agenda. The new tenant housing app was presented to the TAG for comments and thoughts. This app will be trialled by a group of tenants and then go for sign off for all tenants to use.

The TAG also gave their thoughts on Circle's proposed new Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure.

The next meeting will take in January 2022.

## Getting Involved



We are currently looking for tenants to get involved with the IT Focus Group and the Shadow Group. We can work around your weekly schedule as we would love to get your input. Most meetings/training are done online.

#### The IT Focus Group

Will be asked to trial our new tenant app and see if there are any improvements/changes we can make before it goes to all tenants to use. It does not matter what your tech ability is, all levels are welcome and training on the app will be given.

#### The Shadow Group

Will be asked to have a look over some of Circle's key documents on an ad hoc basis. We want to make sure that our policies and procedures are easy to understand, and tenant approved. We will gather your feedback and recommendations to improve the services you receive.

*If you would like to get involved, please contact Claire McDonnell.*

## Tenant Satisfaction Surveys 2021

*Your Input is Valuable to Circle – Thank You, and Please Continue to Take Part*

To better understand what is important to you and where we need to focus energy and resources, we have commissioned Acuity, an independent research company, to carry out surveys on our behalf. Since July, Acuity have been contacting tenants to ask about your experience of being a Circle tenant. They have also been contacting new tenants, those who have had a repair or gas servicing recently completed, and those who have raised a complaint with us. We want to thank everyone who has taken part so far for their time and feedback. These surveys allow us to review and hopefully improve the services we offer you. So far, we can see that improvements have been made since our 2019 survey, but there are areas where further work is needed.



This year we have also introduced transactional surveys, and with these, new questions. The below is a selection of results to satisfaction levels which we have started tracking this year:

Survey Type	Measure	2021
Complaints	How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way your complaint was handled by Circle?	67%
Gas Servicing	Overall, how satisfied, or dissatisfied were you with the ease of booking your Gas Service?	95%
New Tenants	If you are a new tenant with Circle, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the information and advice provided before moving in?	90%
Responsive Repairs	How satisfied or dissatisfied were you that Circle kept you informed throughout the repairs process?	89%

We have already been following up with tenants and acting based on the survey results.

The surveys will be continuing over the coming months, and we would encourage all tenants, if they are happy to do so, to please take part.

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.

## New Phone System

A new phone system has been implemented to better serve communications with you. It was acknowledged that getting hold of Circle and Circle staff was quite difficult. A project team was put together to source and implement a new phone system that would alleviate the struggle of trying to get a hold of us. We have gone from 4 Circle staff answering the phones to 9 with an expanded menu option.

To help you navigate, outlined below are your phone menu options:

**Menu Option 1,** Rents - If you would like to pay your rent, service charges, or have a rent related inquiry.

**Menu Option 2,** Repairs - If you would like to report or follow up on a repair.

**Menu Option 3,** Tenancy Officer – If you have any tenancy related queries or ASB complaints.

**Menu Option 4,** Finance – For all payment related queries, not tenancy related.

**Menu Option 5,** Development & Facilities – For all property related queries related to Circle VHA Managed Properties, not tenancy related.

No matter if you have multiple queries, we can transfer you between departments once your relevant query has been dealt with to your satisfaction. If in the unfortunate circumstance a Circle Staff is on the line already when you call, there will be an option to request a call back when the line is free and/or to leave a voicemail.

As nothing new goes off without a hitch, please feel free to let us know of any issues you may have while on the phone lines or have any further comments or suggestions to further better our phone services.



## Rents

### ***Avoid Christmas rent arrears***

With some pre-Christmas planning you can prevent your rent account getting into arrears. We know that Christmas can be a busy and expensive time of year with serious pressure to buy gifts and entertain friends and family, but to protect the roof over your head, you must keep paying your rent. Christmas should be a fun time, it is absolutely no fun suffering with the stress and worry that comes with mounting arrears in the new year so get the New Year off to a good start by making sure you do not miss any payments and keep your account free from debt.

### ***Planning and Budgeting ahead***

It is a clever idea to set yourself an affordable budget. Putting a plan in place to prevent rent arrears occurring will help to ease some of the financial stress around this period. This Christmas make sure all your priority bills are being paid – rent, gas, electricity, etc.

Missing rent payments in December and January means that you will start the New Year with arrears, this can add additional stress to you and your family.

Make sure you inform your Income Management Officer if there is any change in your circumstances that may affect your ability to pay your rent and do so promptly.

Where possible, try to pay an additional week's rent early in December.

If you have paid an extra week of rent in advance, it removes the burden of extra financial pressure.

### ***Paying an additional week's rent in advance going to be a struggle?***

Continue paying your rent as normal but consider adding a little extra each week in the lead up to Christmas. That way, you will be up to date, or even a little ahead when the festive season rolls around.

### ***Still worried?***

If you are worried about being able to pay your rent, please call our helpful Income Management Team on 01407 2110 option 1.



**1512**

**NUMBER OF REPAIRS  
COMPLETED**



**01 407 2110  
Rent@circle.ie**



## Development

We will be delivering 57 new homes in December and January in Waterford. Our Development team and Tenancy Services Team are working hard to finalise this scheme so families with a housing need move into their new homes as soon as possible.

Monut Neil is located approx, 2km to the South West of Waterford City and is located on Carrickphierish road leading out of the City, the development comprises of 57 houses.

The Houses are Block work construction, rendered Externally with Smooth plaster and some brick finish, pitched tiled roofs and uPVC glazed Windows. The completed homes will have radiator central heating and hot water provided by heat pumps and a Demand Controlled Ventilation (DCV) system will be provided. The Homes will have a BER rating of A2, We're really Excited about the new homes and will keep you updated on our progress.



## Deerpark Community Centre

In November, Circle celebrated the re-opening of the Deerpark Community Centre. Circle collaborated on this renovation project with South Dublin County Council (SDCC) and Foróige. Circle were delighted to have welcomed SDCC Mayor Peter Kavanagh to officially open the centre. Along with vital youth services, this centre will act as an office base for Circle and Foróige staff and will be a centre Deerpark residents can avail of. Thank you to those involved who enabled us to deliver this project. We are planning with South Dublin County Council to re-establish our drop in clinic here in the new year Covid allowing.



# WINTER WELLNESS TIPS

## LET'S GET TOUGH ON GERMS

Reduce the spread of germs that cause colds and flu's and Covid-19. Wash your hands regularly, Soap and water are best and do this for about 20 seconds. If you are out use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wear a mask in public spaces and remember to practice social distancing.

## LOOK AFTER YOUR SKIN

Chilly air and low humidity can lead to dry, itchy skin. To protect your skin, limit the time you spend in the showers or baths to 10 minutes or less and do not use hot water, use warm water. Blot dry gently and slather on a moisturising cream or lotion. Use hand cream daily to prevent cracked skin.



## EXERCISE IN WINTER

When the weather permits, walking, jogging, and cycling are great cardio activities year-round. But when it gets colder wrap up warm before you go out to exercise. Walking and getting outdoors can work wonders for your physical and mental health. Remember if you are going out in the evening wear something reflective and stay safe.



## BEAT THE WINTER BLUES

For some people, winter time can be hard. Make sure you stay connected with other people and try to keep physically active.

## PUT THE D IN DIET

The body can make vitamin D when skin is exposed to sunlight, but we never get enough in Ireland. You can get vitamin D from food like fish especially salmon, trout & tuna; mushrooms and eggs are other good sources.

## Christmas Safety Tips

It is that time of year when our thoughts turn to Christmas and how we are going to decorate our homes to get us into the festive spirit. At Circle we wish everyone a lovely Christmas with family and friends but would ask everyone to take into consideration some of the following when decorating your homes.

It really is worth taking a few moments to think about safety in your home at Christmas time to ensure that you, your family, and any visitors are properly protected.

### Fairy Lights

- Unplug fairy lights or other electrical Christmas decorations when you leave the house or go to bed. Check fairy lights are in good working order and replace any bulbs that have blown.
- Bulbs can get extremely hot, do not let them touch materials that can scorch or burn easily, such as paper or fabrics.
- Make sure the fuse in the plug is the correct rating. If you need to plug more than one appliance into an electrical socket use a multi-socket adaptor which is fitted with a fuse and has surge protection.
- Never overload electrical sockets - take particular care with Christmas lights.
- Most of us use extension leads in our homes all the time, using four-way bar adaptors to increase the number of appliances that they can plug into a wall socket. However, although there is space to plug in four appliances, this does not mean it is always safe to do so. Different electrical appliances use different amounts of power. To avoid the risk of overheating and fire, you should never plug into an extension lead or socket appliances that together use more than 13 amps or 3000 watts of energy.
- Maybe time for a change of lights or they require upgrading, please ensure the CE trade mark is on the lights you purchase.
- Outdoor lights – make sure they are low voltage and clearly sold as suitable for outdoor use.

### Candles

Never place candles near your Christmas tree or furnishings and do not leave them burning unattended. Lots of us use candles to help decorate the house or give the place a more festive feel, however, candles do pose a significant fire risk. If you do use candles or tea lights here are some key safety tips to keep you, your home, and your family safe.

- Make sure that when in use, candles are secured in a proper holder and away from materials that may catch fire – like curtains, Christmas trees, decorations, and toys.
- Put candles out when you leave the room, and make sure they are put out completely at night.
- Always make sure tea lights are placed in a proper holder. The foil container which tea lights come in can get extremely hot. They can melt through plastic, such as a bath, and have the potential to start a house fire.
- Use a snuffer or a spoon to put out candles. It is safer than blowing them out when embers can fly.

### Older Neighbours and Friends

Take the time to check on elderly relatives and neighbours this Christmas, make sure they are fire safe.

- Look out for elderly relatives and neighbours over the festive period.
- Year on year, the festive and New Year period sees a peak in deaths and injuries resulting from house fires. Many of us know a friend, relative or neighbour, often someone living alone, who could be vulnerable to a fire.



## Can you spot the 10 differences?



### Traditional Irish Griddle Bread

#### Ingredients

2 cups of Self-Raising Flour  
1 Teaspoon of salt  
250-300 millilitres of Buttermilk



#### Method

Sift the flour and the salt in to a bowl, add 250mils of buttermilk mix with a fork until it is soft wet dough, but not sloppy.

If the dough is too dry add some more buttermilk.

Press the dough until it is about 7.5cm or 3 inches thick.

#### Cooking

Heat a dry frying pan over a medium heat, turn down the heat to low and dust the dry pan with some flour. Place the dough in the pan and cook for 8 minutes on each side.

Allow to cool and enjoy.

### Raspberry Scones

#### Ingredients

500g self-raising flour  
1 tsp baking powder  
120g butter, chilled  
100g caster sugar  
180ml milk  
2 large eggs  
100g fresh raspberries



#### Method

Preheat the oven to 220 C, dust a large baking sheet with flour. Combine the flour and baking powder in a large mixing bowl, using your fingertips, rub in the butter until the mixture resembles rough breadcrumbs.

Add the sugar to the bowl and mix it through the crumbs. Mix the eggs and milk together.

Pour this into the crumb mixture & mix through with a table knife until a rough dough. Add the raspberries and mix through the dough. Use your hands.

Dust a clean work surface with a little flour, put the dough out and press into a round shape. With a rolling pin, roll the dough out to a thickness of 25mm (or 1 inch). Cut out the scones.

Brush each scone with a little milk and sprinkle with sugar (optional). Bake for 12-14 minutes until they have risen and turned to a lovely golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.

Enjoy with a nice cup of tea, jam, and some whipped cream

## Winter word search

G	N	I	K	A	B	Y	E	C	C	O	L	D	R
C	O	Z	Y	R	T	S	S	T	F	I	G	A	I
C	A	K	H	S	A	E	L	C	I	C	L	C	Y
D	R	F	O	F	O	O	D	R	A	I	O	Y	S
A	C	R	C	H	O	C	O	L	A	T	E	C	E
L	F	C	A	A	R	L	S	C	F	I	I	A	I
C	R	Y	N	H	G	C	E	L	A	S	A	N	R
F	B	A	O	S	H	S	L	S	D	C	M	D	R
A	C	A	F	I	T	C	D	C	C	A	E	Y	E
M	T	R	L	I	C	S	N	H	W	R	A	C	B
I	R	L	N	N	N	D	A	O	O	O	S	A	N
L	Y	S	D	O	Y	R	C	Y	N	L	B	N	A
Y	K	O	H	G	C	A	D	C	S	S	S	E	R
I	S	G	C	S	I	C	B	C	Y	S	L	S	C

CHILLY  
FROSTY  
CHOCOLATE  
CANDLES  
CRANBERRIES  
CARDS  
FAMILY  
FOOD  
CANDY CANES  
SNOW  
GIFTS  
BAKING  
COLD  
CAROLS  
COZY

