

Welcome to Circle's Spring Newsletter.

It's great to see the dark evenings move on and having the bright evenings come back.

We hope you and your family are keeping well and are excited for 2023. In this newsletter we have included some useful information on your home and for your wellbeing.

Spring 2023

New Year and Some New Faces

Dear Tenants,

My name is Adam Gannon and I began working with Circle VHA as the Customer Services Coordinator in August 2022. What attracted me to this role was Circle's emphasis on ensuring that everything we do is to improve our service offering to our tenants and how Circle encourage tenants to get involved via the Tenant Communication and Engagement Strategy.

When I joined Circle, our call abandonment rates were high, lines were busy, you told us that you weren't able to get through to the right person at the right time, and some of the calls we received went unanswered. I was tasked with reducing our abandonment rates down so that we answer as many calls as we possibly can.

We began working with our phone service provider immediately to brainstorm ideas to ensure your calls were answered. We worked out some background issues and reduced our abandonment rates considerably in September and October. To make sure we continued to improve, we added an

overflow process, which means that any calls that are not answered by a department are offered to our Customer Services and Repairs Team.

The overflow has been in place since the middle of November and along with changes to our voicemail and call back options, we are answering a lot more of your calls. In January 2023 the call abandonment rates had dropped to 4%. This has been a big improvement and we hope you are experiencing a better service when you call us.

If you are experiencing any issues reaching us by phone or if you have any feedback on our phone system, I encourage you to contact me at info@circlevha.ie



**Adam
Gannon**

Tenant Satisfaction Surveys 2023






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

To understand what is important to you and where we need to focus energy and resources, there are five different surveys which we carry out:

Survey Name	Frequency of Survey	Who is included in the Survey?
General Perception Survey	Quarterly	All tenants.
Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)	Quarterly	All tenants who have had an ASB case completed in the previous three months.
Complaints	Quarterly	All tenants who have had a complaint completed in the previous three months.
New Lettings	Quarterly	All tenants who have signed a tenancy agreement in the previous three months.
Responsive Repairs	Monthly	All tenants who have had a responsive repair completed in the previous calendar month.

We have been carrying out surveys each month since July 2021, and in this time, we can see where improvements have been made, and where further work is needed.

The following is a selection of results from 2021, compared to our targets and what we achieved at the end of 2022:

General Perception Survey		2021 Actual	Target	2022 Actual
	Net Promoter Score (the likelihood of recommending Circle VHA to someone else, on a scale of 1-10).	39%	45% (By Q4 2022)	48%
	Almost nine out of ten tenants are satisfied with the services Circle provide. Satisfaction with overall services has increased 8% since 2021.	79%	90% (By 2024)	87%
	More than eight out of ten tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home. This has increased by 3% since last year.	82%	95% (By 2024)	85%
	Almost all new tenants are satisfied with the overall move-in process to their new home. This has dropped by 6% since 2021, but is still above target.	100%	90% (By 2023)	94%
	More than nine out of ten tenants who had a repair completed in 2022 were satisfied with the overall repairs service. This is an increase of 5% from 2021.	89%	85% (By 2022)	94%



We are working to create more detailed reports on our survey results, which we are hoping to have published and available via our website in the coming months.



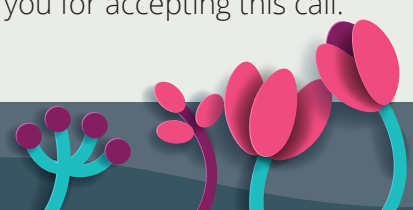
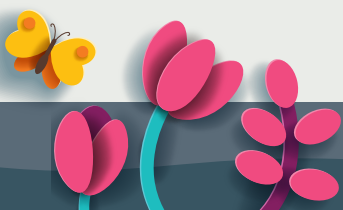
The feedback you are providing us through these surveys is vitally important and is something we are listening to and taking on board.



As the surveys continue, 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 (00441273 093939)**. There is no cost to you for accepting this call.



"They have been brilliant and supportive and we are safe and warm and happy."

"They're very friendly, very informative and I feel they would be good at supporting me should I need it."

"I'm so happy with this house. I'm happy with everything. It's a lovely house and a lovely location, and not like other landlords they are more like friends."

Tenant Responses – Circle VHA

Tenant Engagement

It's shaping up to be a busy year for us here in Circle as we have plenty of tenant led groups up and running. The aim of the groups is to hear your voice on where we can improve.

We are always looking for more members, so please get in touch with me, Claire McDonnell, the Tenant Engagement Officer, at tes@circlevha.ie or 086 1034833.



Claire McDonnell

The four groups that we would like you to take part in are:

1. TAG (Tenant Advisory Group)



This group of tenants work in partnership with us here in Circle to improve services by giving their feedback, keeping tenants informed and overseeing the other groups. We have 6 meetings planned this year and most of them will be on Zoom. Our TAG are currently working with us and our Board to develop a process that will enable tenants to become future Board members.

3. Editorial Panel



This group of tenants meet 4 times a year online to advise what they would like to see in the tenant newsletter. They also sometimes write a piece for the newsletter. They have final approval over the newsletter, so it doesn't get published until the group is happy with it. As we work to develop other guidance documents for tenants, the Editorial Panel will continue to oversee and advise us.

2. IT Focus Group

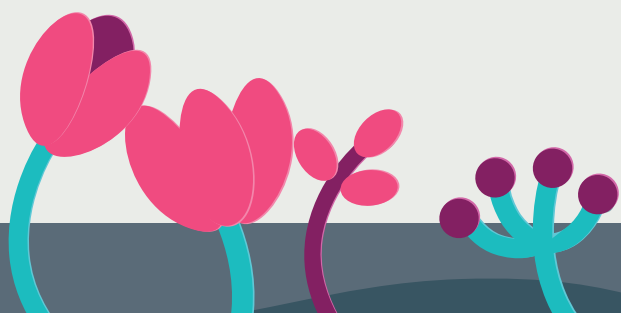


The IT Focus Group are testing our new Portal to make sure it is easy to use and has the right content available for tenants. This will be a short-term working project, and the group will help us decide how we communicate and roll out the Tenant Portal to all of our tenants. They will advise us on training needs and what works for tenants.

4. Shadow Group



This group of tenants meet online, normally in the evening, to review tenant related policies e.g. the Pet Policy, Tenant Communication Policy, etc., and have an input on what they feel works and what doesn't. The guidance we receive from this group ensures that how we work to deliver services is meeting the needs of our tenants. The group have reviewed 6 policies in 2022 and provided valuable input.





CIH All-Ireland Housing Awards

Our very own TAG (Tenant Advisory Group) and Intercultural Diversity Coordinating Group member, David, has been shortlisted for 'Housing Hero' in the CIH All-Ireland Housing Awards.

David has been an active member of the TAG since its establishment in April 2021. David gives freely of his time as a volunteer group member, showing up regularly for meetings and events, participating in a very real way to the important work of the TAG, and having a strong impact on the work.

Since the introduction of the partnership project, 'Quality in Our Diversity', David has enthusiastically become involved with this as well. He has brought his unique and positive perspective to all interactions and has generously shared his own personal insights, so that others can understand, learn and implement that learning in their everyday lives and work.

In volunteering his time and energy to help us improve our services and make sure we are thinking of all tenants needs, David has played a very important part in improving Circle. Volunteering can be tricky in today's busy life, so we are delighted to see a tenant volunteer being acknowledged.

Some feedback from attendees:

"The workshop was very informative and interactive and delivered from the heart."

"The workshop was an eye opener and we got to learn about culture. What culture is and how we can learn to respect other people's culture and equality."

"I really like the mix of tenants and staff along with the different AHB. I think this works very well and would be great to do something like this going forward."

The Coordinating Group is looking forward to continuing this learning journey with further online sessions on important and relevant areas such as Unconscious Bias, Understanding Migration, Privilege, and in person Anti-Racism training. If you want to be part of this important work and feel you have something to contribute, please get in touch, we are always happy to welcome new members.

Language Strategy

The Coordinating Group and the TAG have identified a need for Circle VHA to ensure that language needs are supported throughout our work with tenants. We are designing and delivering a language strategy to ensure supports are in place, and are interested in hearing from tenants with additional language skills to assist us with this work.



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

[Link to
CIH All-Ireland Housing
Awards Finalists](#)

Quality in Our Diversity Project

Circle's Intercultural and Diversity Coordinating Group started off 2023 by attending online Cultural Competence workshops in early January. The workshops were delivered by Reuben Hambakachere, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer with Cultúr Migrants Centre in Navan.

Group members from Circle, and other Housing Associations, Clúid and Respond gathered online to explore the area of Cultural Competency and to share their perspectives and stories from their own cultures, from Cork to Khartoum. The workshops were very interesting with fascinating insights from right across the globe, with members sharing their own stories and experiences. The workshops were a lovely blend of listening, learning, laughing and were thoroughly enjoyable.

Anti-Racist Organisation

Circle VHA is an Anti-Racist organisation that has the welfare and well-being of all tenants at the core of all of its work. Circle has invested in the 'Quality in Our Diversity' project as a response to the impact of racist incidents in social housing estates. We are committed to improving standards and experiences of tenants from all backgrounds and are acutely aware of the increased activity of an anti-immigrant nature that has emerged in our country recently, and how that might impact on our tenant's day to day lives.

We would strongly urge any tenants who have any concerns, those who have had any racist experiences, or those who witnessed any racist incidents in our estates and developments, to contact their TSO for support and assistance in dealing with any issues. Additionally, tenants should make contact directly with the Gardaí for matters of a criminal nature.

To learn more about reporting hate crime and racism, please check out the Garda National Integration and Diversity Unit's webpage below and INAR (Irish Network Against Racism) iReport system on their webpage.

Click here to go to



Garda National Integration
and Diversity Unit



INAR

Get in contact with Marie, the Intercultural Diversity Coordinator.

As always, I am very happy to talk to any tenants who want to hear more or get involved. I am also available to discuss in confidence any issues that may have arisen for tenants in light of the recent anti-immigrant campaigns and happy to offer support in any way that I can. Please feel free to contact me at any time on 086 1075089 or mcorr@circlevha.ie



Counselling/ Psychotherapy



What is it and where to go

A piece from one of our tenants in Dublin

Have your problems ever got too much for you? Or has your anxiety stopped you doing important things in your life? Maybe you have an issue you haven't spoken to anyone about and feel unable to go to friends or family? If so then Counselling might be useful for you. Counselling/Psychotherapy (there really is little difference between these two titles) is where trained professionals help you when you experience personal issues, with the hope to alleviate these difficulties.

If we feel like we could do with some counselling, it can be overwhelming to think of where to go, and importantly, how much does it cost? This especially can put people off counselling as it can be expensive. With this in mind, below are a list of resources.

Where to go?

Firstly, go to your GP and discuss your mental health with them. They may refer you to counsellors or mental health services they know.

Private: The Irish Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (IACP) or Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP) have large databases of accredited counsellors/psychotherapists. Costs for these therapists can range anything from €50 to €100 per hour and note this is usually weekly. Usually some provide low-cost counselling so this is worth checking out.

Public: The HSE's National Counselling Service offers the following two options.

Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC). This is for adults over 18 years who are **medical card** holders and experiencing mild to moderate psychological and emotional difficulties such as depression, anxiety, panic reactions, relationship problems, loss issues, stress and impact of the pandemic. CIPC provides up to 8 free counselling sessions from over 240 locations situated throughout Ireland, typically local Primary Care Centres.

The childhood abuse or neglect service (CaPA) provides **free counselling and psychotherapy** for adults who have suffered abuse during their childhood. Childhood Abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. This is a self-referral service. Once referred you will be offered an initial assessment appointment to check suitability and then placed on a waiting list for counselling.

Look up The National Counselling Service/Counselling in Primary Care on the HSE website for contact details.

My Mind provides excellent low cost/free counselling online or in person.

Turn2Me offers **6 free online counselling sessions** to anyone living in Ireland and also low cost counselling after this.

Pieta House provides **one-to-one free** therapeutic service to people who are in suicidal distress, those who engage in self-harm, and those bereaved by suicide. No referral is needed.

Aware provides free support services to individuals experiencing depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, or other mood related conditions as well as to people who are concerned about a loved one. They have a **Freephone 1800 80 48 48** (Monday to Sunday 10am to 10pm). They also have peer group support and self-care groups which are face to face or online. Check out the Aware Website for details.

Finally, if you are having a mental health crisis and you are unsure of who to contact, please attend your nearest Emergency Department.



Saving the environment and your wallet!

Circle have recently discovered the “Too Good To Go” service offering which allows supermarkets, butchers, restaurants, cafés and more to sell their unsold food to customers. This excellent and innovative service allows retailers to reduce their waste, allowing for a greener and more sustainable approach to business, alongside being a cost effective approach to consumers during this cost-of-living crisis. An example of the offering is a local butcher selling €40 worth of produce for €9.99, allowing consumers to benefit from the huge saving, alongside freezing the items for a longer shelf life.

How it works:

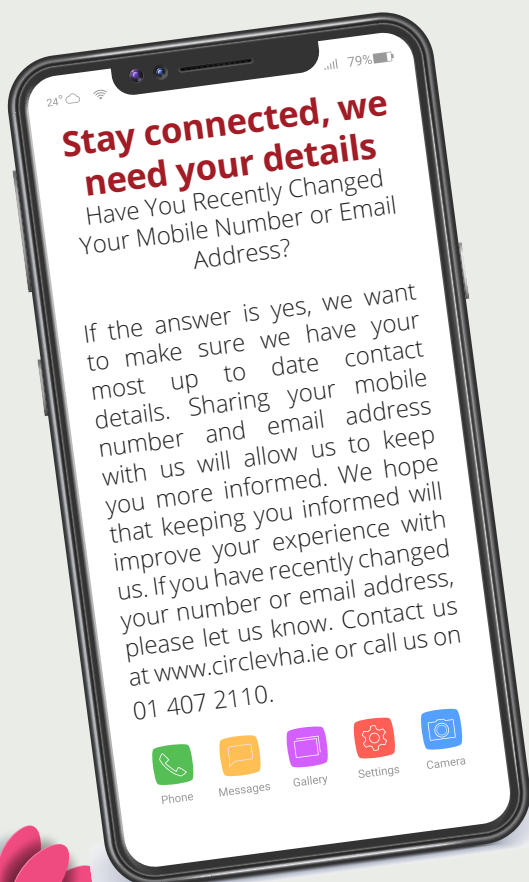
Simply download the “Too Good To Go” App via the Google Play store for Android, or Appstore for iPhone users, or visit the Too Good To Go Website

Set your location to view the offerings in your area, or simply search for shops in your area, such as Aldi or Supervalu.

View the offers to see if there are any bags available for collection and check the collection times.

Collect your bag, pay, and enjoy a delicious meal or treat which has helped the environment, your pocket, and the local business.

If you are interested in “Too Good To Go”, you should also check out Olio Food Waste In Ireland website.



How to Log a Repair with Us

Making sure your home is kept in good condition is a shared responsibility between you and Circle. We want you to enjoy your home, keep you safe and help you care for it.

If you have a repair, please get in touch with us. There are a number of ways for you to contact us below. If you are not sure if the repair is your responsibility or Circles, please get in touch, we are more than happy to provide you with advice and answer any questions you have.

You can also check your Tenant Handbook for guidance.

Reporting Repairs In Office Hours

You can report repairs by e-mail, telephone or through our website.

E-mail: repairs@circlevha.ie

Website: www.circlevha.ie

Telephone: 01 407 2110

Reporting An Emergency Repair Out Of Office Hours

We carry out emergency repairs outside of office hours where the situation is so serious that there would be a risk of harm or damage to people or property if we waited until the next working day.

If you have an emergency repair outside of office hours, you can report this to our emergency repairs team on 053 937 4832.

Boiler Service Announcement!

It's that time of year again when our boilers need to be serviced. Your boiler needs to be serviced regularly, therefore Gaswise, on behalf of Circle, may have already contacted you by letter stating a time and a date for them to visit your home and service your boiler. Please ensure you are available in your home at the time stated. If you need to reschedule your appointment, please contact the number Gaswise provided in the letter. If Gaswise cannot service your boiler you are flagged on our system as “no access”, in turn delaying your service.

Gas safety is vitally important. Ensuring your boiler is working correctly is our responsibility, but we do need your support. Please let Gaswise know when you'll be home so that they can carry out your boiler service.





How-To Guide

Window and Door Handle Tightening/Lubricating

Why do I need to lubricate window and door locks?

One of your responsibilities as a tenant is carrying out minor, regular pieces of maintenance on your home.

Lubricating your window and door locks and hinges regularly is one of the best ways to expand their lifespan.

Lubricating the locks and hinges not only repels moisture which prevents rust, but it also protects the moving parts as they slide past each other and helps to relieve any stiffness.

We recommend using a silicone, graphite or Teflon based spray for this, as grease sprays can attract dirt and grime that will clog the mechanism.

We recommend WD-40 Dry PTFE spray which retails for approximately €12.99



Why do I need to tighten window and door handles?

As a tenant, you are responsible for tightening loose window and door handles in your home.

Tightening window and door handles when they become loose is the best way to prevent heavy wear and tear and excessive force being needed to operate the handles.

It is important to use light pressure when tightening window handles, so as not to damage the threads in the handle.

To tighten window and door handles safely and effectively, you will need a screwdriver.

We recommend a Philips head screwdriver as it will work on almost all door and window handles.

Philips head screwdrivers can retail from €5-10, depending on the brand.



How to tighten and lubricate a window handle or lock

Step 1 -

Move the window handle to the 'Open' position (this will give you access to screws for tightening).

Using your screwdriver, turn the screws gently to the right to tighten.

REMEMBER: Use light pressure when tightening the screws.

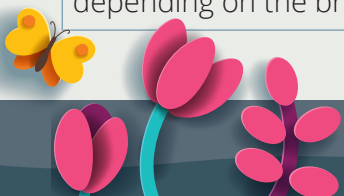


Step 2 -

To lubricate the window lock, open your window so you have access to the lock mechanism.

Insert the lubricant nozzle into the areas shown on the picture and spray a small amount of the lubricant.

Move the window handle from the 'Open' to the 'Closed' position a few times to see if it feels lubricated enough. If not, you can apply more lubricant and test again until all stiffness is gone.

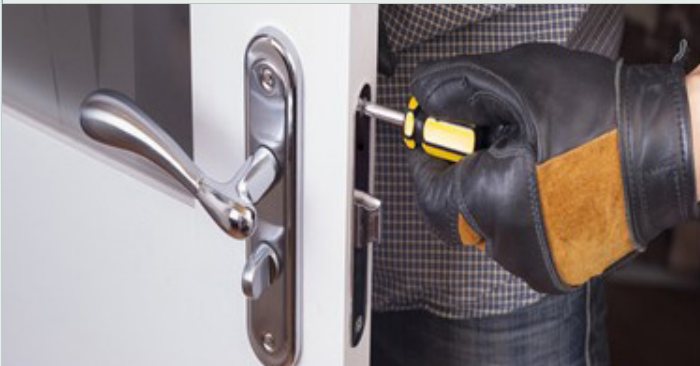




How to tighten and lubricate a door handle or lock

Step 1 -

If your door handle has exposed screws as show in the images, proceed with tightening the screws on the handle (inside and outside) and lock to remedy any looseness. If your door handle does not have exposed screws, remove the plate at the base of the handle with care. This will expose the screws and allow you to carry out any tightening necessary. Once you are finished tightening, put the plate back in place



NOTE: There is usually a small opening around the perimeter of the plate for removal.

This will expose the screws and allow you to carry out any tightening necessary. Once you are finished tightening, put the plate back in place



Step 2 -

To lubricate the lock, open the door so you have full access to the locking mechanism.

You can then apply lubricant to the moving parts of the locking mechanism and in the keyhole if you wish.

NOTE: Some doors have more than one moving part. When the door is in the open position, lift the door handle up and down; this will allow you to see all moving parts of the lock that need to be lubricated.

After applying the lubricant spray, move the handle of the door gently up and down to test if all stiffness has been relieved or if the lock requires more spray



Regular maintenance is essential to keep your homes fittings safe and reliable.

Lack of maintenance or inadequate maintenance can lead to breakages and shorten the life of your fixtures and fittings.

Routine maintenance is a great way to avoid issues from occurring before they happen as you can prevent small problems before they become large problems.



Inspections

As you may know, we carry out annual inspections on our properties. Of course, during the pandemic this was almost impossible, but we are now back to carrying them out and would like to explain to you the reasons we do them and how they can be of benefit to you.

Some tenants believe we are there to 'spy' on them, but this is simply not true. In fact, it is quite the opposite, inspections are not meant to be intrusive and there are 3 main reasons we carry out annual inspections which we highlight in detail below:

1. Condition of the property

An inspection is an opportunity to identify any issues that arise over time in properties. As it is the responsibility of the tenant to report repairs, this is a good time to make sure you are aware of how to report a repair and to check with your TSO what repairs are your responsibility and what are ours. For example, a gas boiler is our responsibility to service, but it is your responsibility to allow that service to go ahead on time.

2. Tenant engagement opportunities

Inspections are a good time to discuss the opportunities to get involved with us, if you haven't already. By now most of you are aware of our Tenant Communication and Engagement Strategy, but you may have questions to ask and haven't had the time to do so.

The inspections also allow you to give us feedback on all aspects of your tenancy which we can use to improve our services.

3. Tenant and landlord responsibilities and obligations

Inspections are an ideal time to discuss responsibilities and obligations. You might want to know how much notice you need to give before moving out, how much notice we need to give you to remedy any issues that arise, or you might be unsure of what we can and can't do in certain situations. You may have forgotten the contents of your tenancy agreement, or it is old and you have misplaced it. You may not have known how to make a complaint or raise a dispute with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB). We will be able to guide you on these matters and give you a full explanation regarding obligations and responsibilities.

Some of the most common questions we receive are:

Q) How much notice will I get?

A) We will give you a minimum of 7 days' notice in writing before arranging an inspection with you.

Q) Do I have to wait to be scheduled?

A) No. If you see us out and about in your area, you can invite us to carry out the inspection then.

Q) Can I reschedule an inspection?

A) Yes. We will facilitate a reschedule, but we would hope to rearrange no later than 28 days after the original date.

Q) Can I refuse an inspection?

A) Yes. However, this would be a breach of your tenant responsibilities and would lead to action being taken against you.

Q) How many inspections do I have to allow?

A) You will be scheduled for an inspection once every year. If any further inspections are required, we will discuss it with you first.

Should you have any specific questions about inspections please let us know and we look forward to seeing you over the course of the coming year!

Coming Soon – NEW APARTMENTS

Circle VHA are delighted to have six new turnkey apartments coming on stream very soon.

Based on the Old Cabra Road, this fully refurbished property now consists of 1 studio apartment and 5 one-bed apartments.

Circle VHA are working closely with Dublin City Council to ensure that a number of approved applicants on their housing waitlist as housed in these apartments as soon as they are ready to be tenanted.



Competition Section



It was great to see all the winners of the Christmas Panto lottery attend Snow White Panto at the National Stadium. Thanks a thousand to everyone who entered.

Easter Picture Competition



Get the colouring pencils at the ready, we want to see your Easter pictures! It could be the Easter bunny or the chocolate Easter egg you got. Once it's coloured by you and has something to do with the Easter holiday, send the coloured picture in to us.

Send your picture to competitions@circlevha.ie by the 14th of April to be in with a chance to win a one for all voucher and to be featured in the Summer Newsletter.

Get in Touch

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Phoenix House, 32 - 34 Castle Street, Dublin 2

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Email: info@circlevha.ie