



Welcome to Circle's Winter Newsletter 2023

This will be the last one in 2023. We hope you and your family enjoy the winter break and we look forward to seeing you all in 2024.

Remember to let us know if you would like this printed and posted, and/or translated into a different language.



A Message from the CEO

Welcome to this winter edition of our newsletter. It's hard to believe that another year has been completed and that we are preparing for 2024!

It's been a really busy year for Circle and I am delighted to say that we have seen many new initiatives started and beginning to show some real success. This year we have agreed to launch a new Tenant's First Link Committee that will be linked to our Tenant Advisory Group (TAG). This will be where tenants and Board members consider how we are performing and how we can do more as an organisation to ensure that our tenants' voices are at the heart of our decision making. I know we haven't always gotten things right, but we are working to improve and deliver the services that our tenants want, in the way that they want them delivered.

This year we also launched our first Cost Rental homes with more than 60 homes being offered at rents more than 25% below the normal market rent. This is a great initiative backed by the Government of Ireland, Fingal and Limerick County Councils and the Housing Finance Agency. We are delighted to say that we will have many more of these homes available over the next two years.

In this newsletter you will hear directly from our tenants, and get more of an insight into what we are doing across Circle. We hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter and know that you are welcome to contribute to it in the future. We really want to hear from you about how we can improve, not just in terms of the newsletter, but in relation to all of our services.

My sincere thanks to all the tenants that have helped us over the year through the different channels they have been involved, be it the TAG, the Shadow Group or one of the many other tenant groups that have been set up. I'd also like to thank those who have taken the time to use our complaints processes, we learn a lot through how we deal with complaints and how they arise. We hope to get things right after each complaint is lodged.

I'd also like to thank all of our staff for their time and their commitment to delivering great services and supports to all our tenants. I know that 2024 will be another opportunity for us all to do better and to help as many tenants as we can to have their voices heard.

I wish all our tenants and our staff a very happy and healthy Christmas and New Year.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John'.



New Staff Members



*Hi I'm Sophie,
I'm looking forward to
building communities together.*

My name is **Sophie Barrett**. I started with Circle as a Tenancy Services Officer (TSO) in July. I have several years' experience within the voluntary housing sector, although my background is in youth and community work. My main goal while in Circle is to implement Circle's main WE HEAR Values. Building communities and ensuring that all of our tenants, both young and older, live in a happy environment that supports them and that they can be proud of. I look forward to meeting you all.



*Hi I'm Philip,
excited to start getting
to know you all.*

My name is **Philip Doyle** and I started as a TSO on the 9th of October. I have previously worked with Tuath Housing Association and Citizens Information. I am excited and committed to working with our new and existing tenants at Circle to deliver excellent housing services. I respect and admire Circle's tenant centred philosophy, which encourages tenants voice and feedback. This is essential for Circle to continue building and developing as an organisation today and into the future.



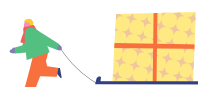
Welcome to all **ALONE Tenants**

Circle are delighted to welcome ALONE tenants. Circle will be providing all ALONE tenants with tenancy services, repairs and maintenance moving forward.

If you have any question or concerns, please contact your Circle Tenancy Services Officer, or your ALONE Support Coordinator.



YOU'RE NOT ALONE






Tenant Satisfaction Surveys 2023

Our tenant satisfaction surveys are still running on both a monthly and quarterly basis, and we continue to use this information to better understand where improvements can be made, and where we are performing well.

In terms of the results from our surveys, we have created a series of detailed survey reports for each quarter of the year, which are now available in the 'About Us' section of our website, under 'Publications' (<https://circlevha.ie/about-us/our-publications/>). Here you will find a breakdown of the results from each of our surveys. Please have a look and let us know what you think!

In summary, some of our latest results include the following:

Survey Question		2023 Year to Date
	Almost nine out of ten tenants are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live in the first nine months of 2023.	85%
	Where Circle are directly responsible for facilities management services, nearly seven-eighths of tenants were satisfied with their waste collection services during the first three quarters of the year	86%
	Up until October 2023, where tenants had reported a responsive repair, the majority were satisfied with the ease of reporting the repair.	97%

The feedback you are providing us through these surveys is vitally important and is something we are listening to and taking on board. We are making real progress across the teams in terms of studying the responses being received and implementing changes based on the survey responses, to ultimately improve the services we're providing you.

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). We would encourage you to save this number to your phone so you recognise Acuity when they call. There is no cost to you for accepting this call.



Tenant Engagement: Tenant First Link Committee (TFLC)

The Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) wanted to keep you all updated on the excellent work they have been doing this year.

Firstly, there are 8 tenants on the TAG, and they meet roughly every two months online.

This year, they focused on the idea of how to enable a tenant to become a Board member and what might be needed to make this happen. The group came up with an 8-step process and have started to work their way through this process.

The 8 steps include training, visiting another housing body, and meeting our Circle Board members, amongst other things.

The TAG agreed that being a Board member is a big ask for a tenant, so they explored the idea of a committee that reports to the board on all things tenant related, in addition to training and any other supports necessary to enable a tenant to be involved. This committee would be a stepping stone to full board membership if tenants so wish.

The TAG has named this group the Tenant First Link Committee and it will consist of Board members and tenants, amongst others when it starts up. The TAG have developed the terms of reference for this new committee (basically the rules they operate by).

So, why are we telling you this?

Well, the TAG wanted to let all other tenants know what is going on and to see if they wanted to get involved with this new exciting process.

We need as many tenant's voices as possible to be included and heard at all levels within Circle. We would really love to get more people involved and there will be training opportunities starting in January 2024.

THERE ARE
NO SILLY
QUESTIONS?
JUST ASK.



The Tenant Engagement Officer and the TAG members are available to chat in person over coffee or online to explain the work in more detail if you have any further questions or need clarification.

We understand this is quite a lot of information, so all questions no matter how big or small are welcome! Please feel free to send them on whatever way suits you best.



Competition **Winners** and Suggested Films

Thanks to all who sent in their favourite films, the winners were **Natasha** and **Sonya** in Dublin, and **Nicole** in Wicklow, enjoy the cinema tickets!

Here are some of the films suggested by you, and the winter break might be the perfect time to watch them:

Shawshank Redemption
Once Upon a Time in America **The Green Mile**
Shrek 2

Spider Man The Butterfly Effect
Hocus Pocus
Beauty and The Beast
Home Alone Lion King

Customer Services and Repairs – A Year In Review

As we approach the end of 2023 we would like to inform you, our tenants, of the performance within our customer services and repairs team.

Customer Services

In 2022, nearly 15% of all calls to Circle were unanswered. This was a cause for concern amongst all teams. Our phonelines have undergone many changes in the last year to ensure that we answer your calls. The main change which many tenants may have noticed is that our customer services team backup all other lines to make sure we answer as many calls as possible.

For 2023, a target was set to ensure we answered a minimum of 94% of all calls. Up to the end of October this year, we have received nearly 12,000 calls with our teams answering 96% of all calls.

Other changes to our phone system mean that if callers are waiting in the queue, you can now request a callback or leave a voicemail message for our teams. This can be helpful if you are in a rush and would like us to call you back. If a caller selects one of these options, you will hold your place in the queue rather than waiting on hold.

Repairs

Home repairs are one of the main reasons our tenants contact us, so it is important we respond to these requests in line with our emergency, urgent and routine timeframes. In 2022, we completed 66% of repairs within their designated timeframes. While this is a good response, we strive for excellence and have set a target of 90% for 2023.

To achieve this, the Responsive Repairs Procedure was updated in late 2022 to ensure we are tracking repairs completions with our contractors more closely. This has had a significant impact on repairs completions. **Up to the end of September this year, 2,128 repairs were due to be completed, with 87% being completed within the designated timeframes.** While we still have work to do, we have learned throughout the year and have made consistent improvements.



Office Attendance By Appointment Only

Please remember that **staff still work remotely**. This means that if you call into any of our offices, it could mean that the staff member you're looking for may not be there.

If you would like to meet with any staff at one of our offices, please call 01 407 2110 and request a meeting.



December Closing Days and Times

With the holidays fast approaching we are making plans for our phone lines. **We will be closed from 5pm on Thursday 21st December and will reopen at 9am on Tuesday 2nd of January.**

Our out of hours service will handle all emergency call outs during this period, so please call us on (053) 937 4832 for emergency repairs during this time.



Managing Dampness, Mould and Condensation

In November 2022, the tragic news of the death of Awaab Ishak, a 2-year-old boy living in social housing in the UK, was felt across the social housing industry in the UK and Ireland. Awaab died in December 2020 and following a coroner's inquest, it was concluded that exposure to black mould was a factor.

Many of us living in Ireland have had to deal with mould in our home at some point. To ensure none of our tenants go through the pain that Awaab's family endured, Circle's Board, along with our Director of Services, requested a review of our approach to managing dampness, mould and condensation. A new policy was developed specifically for these issues and was approved in August this year.

We began reviewing earlier reports of mould in February and have continued to track new reports

throughout 2023. Since beginning this process 83 individual reports of mould have been received and 68 have been addressed in full.

To give a small insight into this process, where mould is visible in your home, we employ a specialist mould contractor to clean and treat the affected areas. We then follow-up with an inspection 30-days post treatment to ensure this treatment has worked. If required, we will also employ a specialist ventilation contractor to survey your home and supply other recommendations to resolve the issue.

We would encourage any tenants that have mould in their home to contact us as soon as possible so we can assess and work to resolve the issue.

Repairs Satisfaction

As part of the repairs process, any tenant that reports a repair in their home may receive a call to take part in a satisfaction survey once the repair has been completed. At times, part of the repair may have been completed, but more works have been organised. This means that tenants may receive a survey prior to the full completion of the repair.

This survey tracks:

- ✓ Satisfaction with the overall repair
- ✓ How easy it was to report the repair
- ✓ Did the contractor keep to their appointment
- ✓ Friendliness and attitude of staff
- ✓ Quality of the work
- ✓ Was the repair completed on the first visit
- ✓ Were you kept informed throughout the process
- ✓ Has the problem been fixed

All results are reviewed monthly by our customer services and repairs team. The review looks at any trends appearing, results compared to previous months, any comments left by tenants for recommended improvements or any overall comments about their repair experience. These reviews help to inform our teams on what changes our tenants would like to see, what Circle are doing well and what areas we can improve in.

We have a target in place for 2023 for a minimum of 90% of our tenants to be satisfied with the overall repairs service. Up to the end of October 2023, 183 surveys have been conducted, with 91% of our tenants satisfied with the repairs service. Ideally, we would like 100% satisfaction, but we recognise that we will get things wrong and will always have areas for improvement. This is why your feedback is so important. **If you are not selected to receive a survey following a repair and have any feedback on your experience, positive or negative, please reach out to us via email at info@circlevha.ie or by phone on 01 407 2110.**

Working together with your Local Authority – **David's Story**

Throughout life, people can have various physical/ mobility challenges. For David, it was a physical impairment of restricted vision, which is a difficult and a daily experience, both indoors and outdoors.

David, with the support of Circle, submitted a bathroom adaption application to Dublin City Council (DCC) for an upgrade to help reduce the challenges he was experiencing within his home. DCC reviewed and approved the upgrade and associated finances for this to go ahead. They used DH Contractors to complete the bathroom works.

"Mobility for people living with sight loss (Visually Impaired), is a difficulty. Five years ago, I moved into an apartment that is conveniently located in a community that is accessible to local services. I was delighted and grateful to have an independent home. The apartment was pleasant, but I quickly realised that there were some changes needed including an accessible bathroom, to help me live independent at home.

The process of renovating the bathroom took some time however it is now completed. The bathroom was transformed and is now a safe, functional, aesthetically pleasing and accessible facility for a person with Visual Impairment. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to Circle and DCC for the support."



What David had to say



Development

Aderrig Scheme

Aderrig is an exciting **new development of 19 1-bedroom and 19 2-bedroom apartments** located in Adamstown, Lucan, Co. Dublin. This is a vibrant and growing neighbourhood, situated just 16 km west of Dublin City Centre.

These A-rated homes will be welcomed by families and individuals on the South Dublin local authority housing list, just in time for Christmas this year.

Designed by BKD Architects, Aderrig is the latest development by Quintain. Aderrig will offer contemporary homes built to the highest standards. Tenants of this scheme will also benefit from the many facilities at the 27-acre Airlie Park, located on the doorstep of the development.

Quintain is also well advanced in the construction of The Crossings which is Dublin's newest retail offering located just 5 minutes' walk from Aderrig.

The Crossings will also be a place to dine, relax, work out, entertain, and live every day. At its core is a central urban plaza designed to bring the neighbourhood to life and which will play a significant role in promoting a destination and a place for the community to come together, which is part of Circle's tenant first philosophy and approach.

Adamstown offers an array of sporting facilities such as a full-size GAA all-weather pitch and cricket ground, tennis courts as well as changing facilities, equipment storage and a coffee dock. For golfing enthusiasts, Lucan Golf Club is just a short stroll away.

There is a wide variety of education facilities in the area with a range of Montessori's, creches, primary and secondary schools. Transport links are in abundance, whether travelling by bus, car, or train with Adamstown Train Station just eight hundred metres from the Aderrig development.



This new neighbourhood has been designed to accommodate 11,700 sq. m of retail space with Tesco already open and Aldi due to open early 2024

Cost Rental Homes

On Thursday the 9th of November we welcomed 22 new tenants to Lanestown View, Donabate, North County Dublin. The new tenants attended pre-tenancy training and then got the keys to their new home.

Congratulations to all who collected their keys and best of luck in your new home!



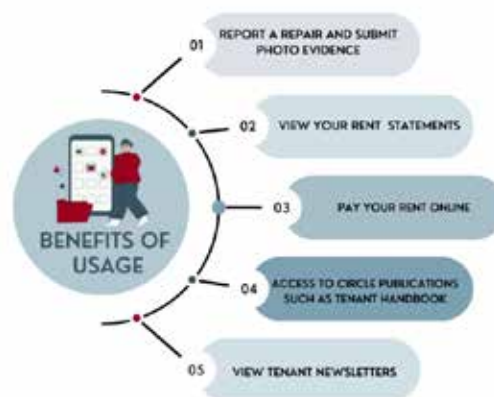
If you would like to know more about cost rental, check out our website:
<https://ciclevha.ie/cost-rental/>
or call us on 01 407 2110.



Circle Engage Tenant Portal

In 2023, Circle developed the 'Engage Portal' which is an application tenants can access through the internet on their phone. The Portal allows tenants to manage items in relation to their tenancy at the touch of a button.

BENEFITS OF USING THE ENGAGE TENANT PORTAL



Frequently Asked Questions

• What is the Circle Engage Portal?

The Portal is an online site which current tenants can use to access their rent statements, view their rent payments, view their home repairs history, log a repair, log feedback or complaints, access Circle publications and more.

• How to access the Portal?

To access the portal, you need to be a current tenant of Circle, with an occupancy number and a valid email address.

It is also necessary to have either a smart mobile phone or a device that can connect to the internet.

Access to the Portal is available 24/7.

• Do tenants have to use this portal for communication with Circle?

No, it is not mandatory for tenants to utilise this portal as all other methods of communication – email, phone, website can still be used. Tenants will have to opt-in to avail of this service.

• I made a rent payment online, but it is not showing on my rent transaction list?

Payments will take approximately 10 days to appear online.

• How secure is this Portal?

The portal uses secure encryption to protect tenants information. Tenants will set their own password for the Portal, which must be used in conjunction with other authentication methods.

• How to log a repair on this?

Tenants can submit maintenance requests through the portal, detailing the issue and attaching relevant photos.

• Can tenants access rent statements online?

Tenants can view their complete transaction history, including rent payments and any additional charges or fees.

• If a tenants wishes to provide feedback on the Portal or make suggestions, who should they contact?

To provide feedback or suggestions on the Portal please contact the customer services team. This can be done through the following:

email: info@circlevha.ie

phone: (01) 407 2110.

• When can my scheme avail of this service?

The roll out of this service is on a phased basis by scheme. Tenants will be contacted to advise when their scheme is next on the list.

