

Autumn



ON THE

Issue 66: Autumn 2024

HOUSE



for Perth and Kinross Council Tenants



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rent level**

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Introduction

Welcome to the Autumn 2024 edition of **On The House** magazine for Perth and Kinross Council tenants.



I hope you all had an enjoyable summer, despite the unpredictable Scottish weather.

As we march towards the end of another year, it's that time again when we ask you to vote on your preferred rent level option. In the Spring, we asked tenants to let us know what your spending priorities were for Housing Services, and we have used that information, as well as some financial pressures we are facing, to put together three rent level options for 2025 to 2026.

Please use the form included with this magazine to vote, or you can complete the survey online at our Consultation Hub. The link can be found opposite on page 3 where you can read more about the process. Some of our Housing staff will also be contacting tenants by phone asking you to complete the consultation. More and more tenants are taking part, with over 2,900 of you voting in last year's consultation which was a record number. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey – it's very important to us that you have a say on this important decision, and you could win a £50 shopping voucher.

The high cost-of-living continues to be an issue for many people, and we know that some of our tenants are struggling with their finances at the moment. If you are having trouble paying your rent, we are here to support you. Our staff have a range of ways they can help, so if you need an extra bit of support please give them a call. You can find out more on pages 4 and 5.

As winter approaches it's important to know what you can do to keep warm, and also keep your energy bills to a minimum. Some helpful tips are laid out on page 5.

Elsewhere in the magazine you can read about our new offer of evening and weekend Repairs appointments, and about a new team we have set up to help tenants who are suffering from condensation, mould or damp in their homes.

Condensation and mould can often be dealt with by taking some simple steps in your home, and I would urge you to contact our staff if it's an issue for you. We can install free household Wi-Fi sensors that flag up if your home may be at risk from a build-up of condensation or related mould growth. See pages 6 and 7 for more information.

You can also find about the help available for tenants who might be struggling with their tenancy through our Housing Support Team on page 11. The Team is there to help anyone who needs it, so please get in touch if you think you could benefit.

Thank you to everyone who took part in our series of neighbourhood improvement walkabouts earlier this year. After discussions with tenants we have now agreed which Estate-Based Initiatives improvement projects are being taken forward this year. You can find out more on page 12.

I hope you enjoy this edition of **On The House**, and please remember to take part in the rent consultation.

Councillor Tom McEwan

Convener, Housing and Social Wellbeing

Contact Us

If you would like more information about anything mentioned in this magazine, please drop us an email at Communications@pkc.gov.uk or call us on 01738 476000.

You can also follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/PKCTenants, on X (formerly Twitter) at www.twitter.com/pkctenants and on Instagram at www.instagram.com/pkctenants/ to keep up with all your housing and neighbourhood news.

Have your say on rent levels for 2025 to 2026!

Once again, you have the chance to influence the decision-making process about the level of rent you pay and the housing services you receive.

For the eighth year we are putting forward a number of different options for rent levels, based on what tenants have told us are their priorities are for spending.

You can use the form enclosed with this edition of **On The House** to vote on which rent level you would prefer to pay for 2025 to 2026.

Last year a total of 2,944 of you responded to this consultation – the largest response we have received by far. Thank you to everyone who took part. You favoured a 6% rent increase which was approved by Councillors in January 2024 and came into effect from April.

You can once again choose from three proposed rent level options. These are based on what tenants have told us their priorities for spending are during our regular engagement with you and through the rent priorities consultation we carried out earlier this year. The Housing Revenue Account continues to face some particular financial pressures at moment, and this is reflected in the rent options.

The voting form includes some examples of the effects your choice would have on Housing Services, so that you can make an informed decision.

Four £50 High Street shopping vouchers are available as prizes for people who take part. One prize will be drawn for tenants in each of our four housing locality areas.

Elaine Ritchie, Strategic Lead, Housing and Communities, explains:

“All of our tenants have the chance to vote on options for the level of rent increase you would like to see. It is very important that tenants are closely involved in decision-

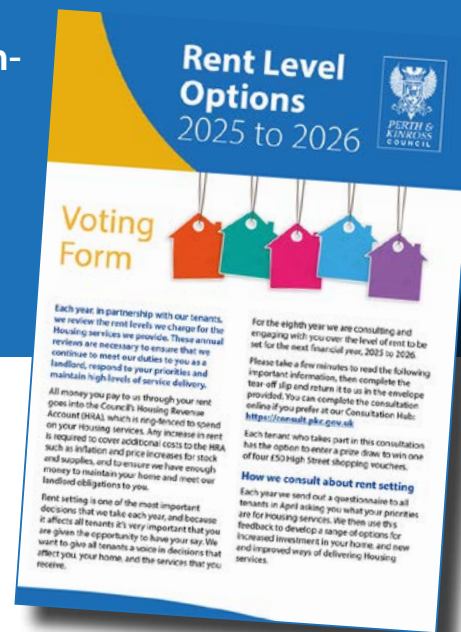
making about rent levels and the kind of services you want to receive.

“Last year almost 3,000 people took part in the consultation, which was a record number, and we want even more people to get involved this time.

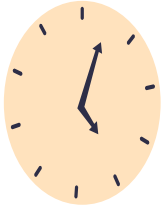
“I would encourage everyone to read the rent options form, complete it and then return it to us in the envelope provided. You can also complete the survey online if you prefer. Members of our staff will also be contacting some tenants over the phone to ask them to carry out the consultation. They will help tenants to complete the questionnaire over the phone.

“What tenants tell us about rent levels for the next 12 months will be presented to the Council’s Housing and Social Wellbeing Committee early next year, and Councillors on the Committee will make the final decision on what rent levels will be for 2025 to 2026. The consultation results will give elected members a clear picture of what our tenants are thinking.”

Please take a few minutes to complete the form and return it to us in the envelope provided. If you prefer, you can complete the consultation online at our Consultation Hub: <https://consult.pkc.gov.uk/>

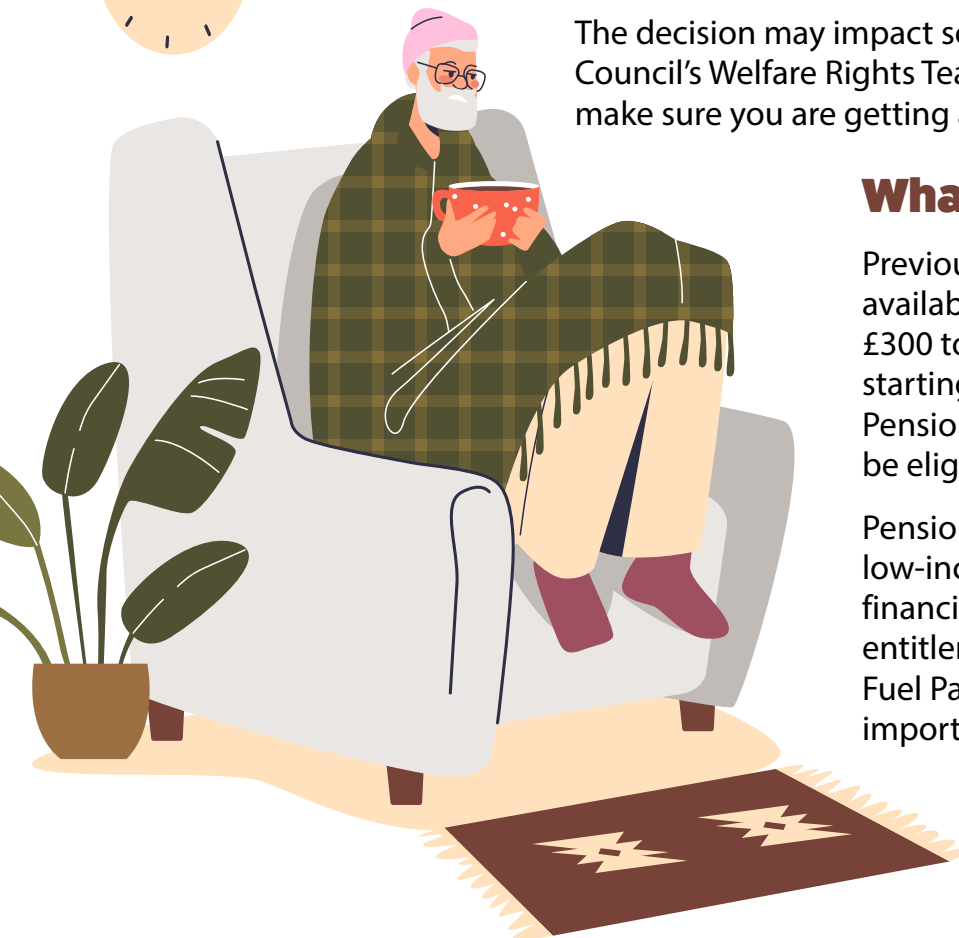


As the colder months approach, many older people could face a challenging winter due to recent news about the Winter Fuel Payment scheme



The UK government has announced changes to the Winter Fuel Payment scheme, limiting it to those on Pension Credit and some other means-tested benefits.

The decision may impact some of our tenants this winter, but the Council's Welfare Rights Team is on hand to provide advice and make sure you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to.



What has changed?

Previously, the Winter Fuel Payment was available to all pensioners, providing up to £300 to help cover heating costs. However, starting this winter, only those receiving Pension Credit or other specific benefits will be eligible.

Pension Credit is an important benefit for low-income pensioners, providing additional financial support and access to other entitlements. With the new link to the Winter Fuel Payment, it has become even more important for eligible pensioners to claim it.

Unfortunately, many pensioners are unaware of their eligibility or find the application process too difficult.

What you can do

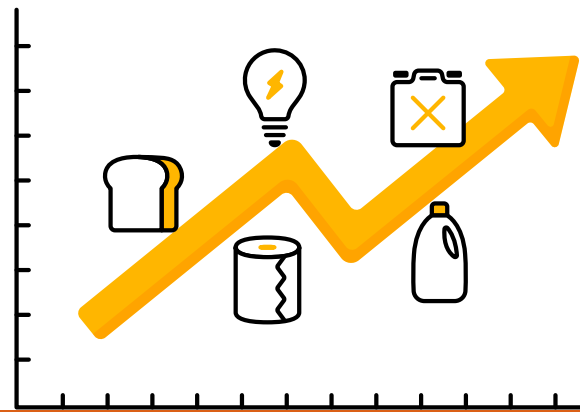
If you or someone you know might be eligible for Pension Credit, it is essential to check and apply as soon as possible. You can visit www.gov.uk/pension-credit for more information.

You can also use the free services of the Council's Welfare Rights Team, who can support you to make your application and check that you are claiming all the benefits that you are entitled to.

In the last year, the Welfare Rights Team helped to put an additional £8.5m of additional money into the pockets of people in Perth and Kinross.

To contact the Welfare Rights Team about how they can help you, please visit www.pkc.gov.uk/wrt where you can fill in a referral form, or call 01738 475000.

The high cost of living continues to be an issue for many people - if you are finding it hard to pay your rent, we are always here to help



As your landlord, we are here to help you as much as we can. If you are struggling to pay your rent this winter, please get in touch. We have some money available for tenants who need support.

Don't suffer in silence and think the problem will go away - you will be in danger of getting into rent arrears which can be hard to pay back. Lots of financial support and help is available for you.

Housing costs

If you are finding it difficult to pay your rent or bills you should contact your Locality Housing Team as soon as you can. You might even qualify for some money towards your housing costs.

We have already paid out over £200,000 to help tenants who were finding it difficult to keep up with rent payments.

Call your Locality Housing Team on **01738 476000 (Option 2)** or visit www.pkc.gov.uk/costofliving to see how our staff can help.

A range of other financial support is available for people who might be struggling. At www.pkc.gov.uk/costofliving you will also find information about free school meals, the school clothing allowance, the Scottish Child Payment Scheme, Council Tax reductions, Housing Benefits and lots of other help that is out there for you.

Save money this winter by taking some simple energy-saving steps

We all want to keep our energy bills as low as possible. Just making a few simple tweaks to your everyday routine could help cut down your energy use and your bills this winter. Every little helps:

- **Turn your thermostat down slightly**
One of the simplest ways to save energy is by turning your heating down by a single degree. You might not think such a small amount would make much difference – but according to the Energy Saving Trust lowering your thermostat from 20°C to 19°C (for example) can save 10% on your heating bill.
- **Unplug your devices**
Your phone, tablet or TV still use energy on standby. You can save around £55 a year just by remembering to turn off your devices and appliances when you're not using them.
- **Move your sofa**
Big furniture close to your radiator can stop heat reaching the room. Move them an inch or two away for better air circulation and your rooms will be warm and cosy much faster.
- **Close the curtains**
Heat starts to escape when the sun goes down. Draw your curtains or close the blinds to keep the warmth in.
- **Switch off the lights**
Getting everyone in your home to only light rooms that are being used can help you save around £20 on your annual energy bills.

Condensation and mould issues

A new dedicated Housing Team is being put in place to help tenants tackle condensation and mould-related issues in their homes.

The Team of five staff (four existing members of staff, one new recruit) will be trained to nationally recognised standards to help tenants when persistent cases of mould occur.

Staff will work directly with tenants who need help or advice. They will also manage the system that monitors our network of household wi-fi sensors and will contact tenants when it looks like they might have an issue (see page 7).

In 2023 our Repairs Service raised 87 works orders to deal with condensation and mould-related cases in tenants' homes at a cost of £24,000. Staff on the new team will take an early intervention approach to stop cases getting to the point of needing a repair.

Mould growth is typically located in bathrooms, kitchens, bedrooms, or hallways. There is strong evidence most cases are caused by lack of proper ventilation or heating in a home, drying washing indoors or using an unvented tumble dryer, or cooking and showering without using extractor fans.

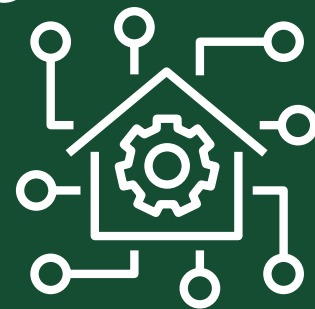
This leads to a build-up of condensation in the house which can cause mould to grow on walls, furniture and even your clothes. Mould can be a risk to the health of tenants, and we are keen to work with you to get on top of cases as soon as we think it might become an issue in your home.

In England, a new law has set social housing landlords strict time limits to investigate and fix damp and mould in properties. The introduction of our dedicated team will put us in a good position should a similar law be put in place in Scotland. We hope the new team will be working by November this year.

If you think you have an issue with condensation, damp or mould, you can contact the team for help by emailing HousingRepairs@pkc.gov.uk or by calling **01738 476000 (option 1)**.

Claim a free wi-fi sensor to help combat condensation and mould in your home

As you will have read on the opposite page, condensation dampness and mould are common issues that can significantly impact the health and comfort of your home. Fortunately, a free Council initiative offers a smart solution to tackle these problems effectively.



The power of smart sensors

Imagine having a small, unobtrusive sensor in your home that can alert you to potential issues before they become serious. These sensors, connected to an external Wi-Fi service, can help identify:

- **potential mould and dampness:** early detection of conditions that may lead to mould growth
- **ventilation improvements:** insights on how to enhance airflow in your home
- **air quality enhancements:** alerts when air quality could be improved
- **efficient heating use:** tips on using your heating system more effectively

How it works

Using a free smartphone app, you can monitor your home's environment in real-time. The Council also monitors a system that flags up any potential issues in your house, and our staff are ready to help resolve them. This proactive approach can prevent many household mould issues, which are often caused by condensation, poor ventilation, and inefficient heating.

Easy installation and immediate benefits

The sensors are quick and easy to install, taking just minutes to set up. Once in place, they can significantly improve the health and wellbeing of you and your family by maintaining a healthier home environment.

The sensors in action

One of our properties had an area which had experienced some mould growth. We dealt with the mould, then put sensors in to monitor any changes in the area and take necessary action. After a few months of having the sensor fitted, we called the tenant due to a high humidity alert on our system to see if they were experiencing any signs of mould in the area. We organised a Repairs Inspector to go out to check, and repairs work was issued – anti-fungal treatment and warm wall paint were used to treat the area. As a result of the work the humidity in the room decreased. The tenant confirmed there have been no mould issues since the work was carried out.

Get your free sensor today

By integrating smart technology into our homes we can create safer, healthier living spaces for everyone. Don't wait until mould and dampness become a problem – act now and enjoy the peace of mind that comes with a well-ventilated, efficiently-heated home.

If you are interested in having a free sensor installed, contact the Repairs Service Centre at **01738 476000 (option 1)** or email HousingRepairs@pkc.gov.uk

Take the first step towards a healthier home.

Tenants can now make repairs appointments in the evening and at weekends thanks to new arrangements



We are offering electrical, joinery and plumbing repairs appointments on Tuesday to Friday evenings until 7.30pm, and on Saturdays from 8am to 1pm.

Repairs Service Manager, **June McColl**, said:

“The introduction of evening and weekend repairs was something that tenants have told us they would like to see, and it has been made possible by the budget choice that tenants made in last year’s rent level options vote.

“We know that many tenants work during the day, and so this will give them the flexibility to get their repairs carried out at a time that is more convenient for them.”

To contact Repairs, you can email HousingRepairs@pkc.gov.uk or call **01738 476000 (option 1)**.

The hours and days that the appointments are available may change depending on public holidays, and during periods of severe weather when there will be pressure on the Repairs Service.

We are planning long-term energy efficiency work across our housing stock, helping residents to reduce energy bills and contribute to a greener environment



Energy efficiency is not just about saving money; it’s also about reducing our carbon footprint and promoting sustainable living. By ensuring your homes are well-insulated and equipped with efficient heating systems, we can make a significant impact on both your bills and the planet. That is why we are planning to invest in your housing using money from our HRA Capital Programme.

With this in mind, we are carrying out some energy efficiency assessment visits to tenants’ homes.

If your home has been selected for an assessment, you will receive a letter from the Council. The assessment process is straightforward and will take no longer than an hour. A fully qualified contractor will visit your home to gather necessary information about your windows, heating systems, and overall insulation.

We understand that our tenants have busy lives, so we will ensure that appointments are scheduled at a time that suit you. It’s crucial to provide access to all rooms in your home during the assessment to allow the contractor to gather accurate data.

The information collected will enable the Council to plan and implement necessary improvements to enhance the energy efficiency of our housing stock.

If you receive a notification for an assessment, please ensure that you are available at the agreed appointment time and provide access to all areas of your home. Your co-operation is essential to make this initiative a success.

For more information, contact **Darren Malpas**, Project Manager on **01738 476231** or email DMalpas@pkc.gov.uk.

We work with all our external repairs contractors to bring community benefits to tenants and residents

When we sign a contract with an external company, we often include agreements that will see the company work on community projects in Perth and Kinross.

Recently, one of our repairs contractors, Bell Group, has helped to get local people online by donating some recycled laptops to local groups.

Access to technology and online services is vital to ensure that people can make the most of education resources, employment opportunities, local authority and healthcare services and social connections.

The Council was able to connect Bell with Perth Autism Support, and laptops were donated to the charity to be used by young people in their new Youth Hub. The Council's Skills and Employment Support service also received some laptops for their service users.

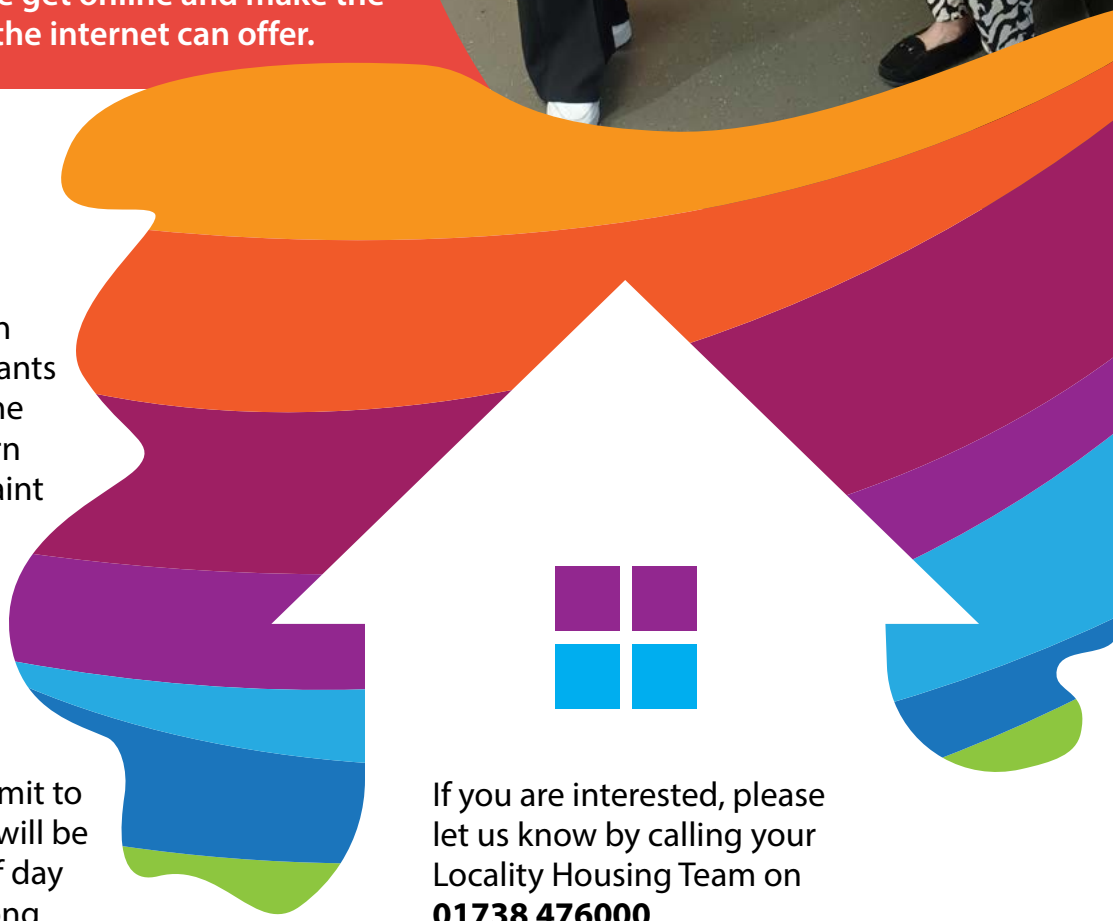
Thank you to Bell Group for their kind donations, which will help local people get online and make the most of the opportunities the internet can offer.



Decorating workshops for tenants

Bell Group is also offering an opportunity for Council tenants who have been in their home for six months or less to learn more about how you can paint and decorate your new house.

If enough tenants are interested, we will hold free sessions lasting two hours over a 4-week period. Tenants would have to commit to attend each session, which will be held at a convenient time of day to allow people to come along.



If you are interested, please let us know by calling your Locality Housing Team on **01738 476000**.

The Council is set to launch a new Downsizing Scheme to encourage tenants living in properties that are too large for them to move into a smaller home



This policy comes after we asked tenants and residents to comment on a review of our Common Allocations Policy earlier this year.

The Downsizing Scheme will be launched in April 2025. It is hoped that the scheme will result in some 3 and 4-bedroom properties becoming available for let to larger families who are currently living in overcrowded conditions.

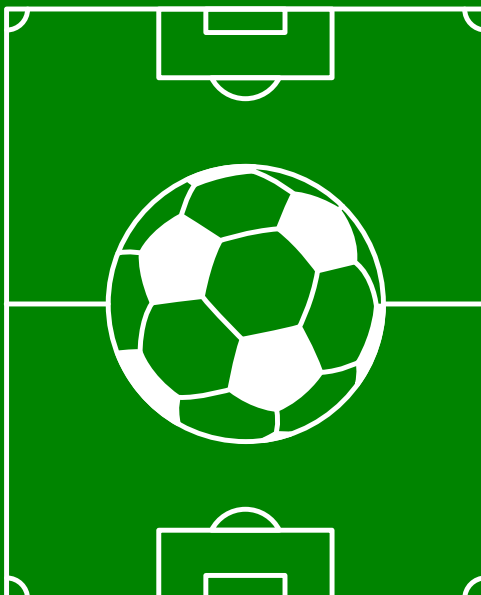
A menu of incentives will be available to tenants, including cash and non-cash options.

A proactive approach will be taken, with tenants in certain circumstances being contacted about the scheme even if they have not applied for rehousing.

We will announce full details of the scheme in the new year.

If you are interested in downsizing your property you can speak to our Housing Options Team by calling **01738 476000** or by emailing HousingOptions@pkc.gov.uk

Our popular Football Memories sessions in Perth are open to anyone who wants to come along



The events at Carpenter Court Sheltered Housing Complex are held on the second Monday of each month at 10.30am, run by Saints in the Community.

The sessions offer the opportunity to share memories of your favourite football team and matches. There is always a lot of good-natured banter between fans of different teams!

Old TV footage is shown, allowing everyone to reminisce about games from the 1960s onwards. Memorabilia is shared too, and this prompts discussions about games played back in the day.

If you are interested, or know someone who might benefit, come along and meet some friendly football folk. Free tea, coffee and biscuits are provided at each session.



Did you know we have dedicated staff working to ensure that everyone has a safe and secure place to call home?

The Housing Support Service is there to help people who are struggling to maintain their tenancy or having problems with their accommodation.

We have three teams of Support Officers, each catering to different types of customer:

- **Greyfriars Support Officers:** two officers provide support to residents in Greyfriars House hostel
- **Central Support Team:** based in Pullar House, this team of 10 officers serves a range of customers, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- **Locality Teams:** nine officers are spread across our four Locality Teams, providing housing and tenancy support to PKC tenants throughout Perth and Kinross.

The aim of the Housing Support Service is to prevent homelessness by providing tenancy help for people according to their individual needs.

The Team also supports households who are living in temporary accommodation to settle into permanent homes, reducing the risk of repeat homelessness.

Our Housing Support Officers can offer advice on a wide range of issues, including:

- **accommodation:** resettlement and tenancy support, advice on rent arrears, household maintenance, and property upkeep

- **health:** assistance with finding and registering with a GP, accessing health services, and providing a listening ear during crises
- **safety and security:** guidance on reporting repairs, addressing fuel poverty, and support for those affected by domestic violence
- **social, economic, and wellbeing:** help with Housing Benefits, Welfare Rights, Council Tax, and energy bills; we also offer advice on cooking, nutrition, and personal confidence
- **employment and voluntary work:** support to access voluntary work, career services, and training opportunities

The Housing Support Service is there to ensure that everyone is given the best chance to keep their tenancy and live well.

Get in touch

If you are a PKC tenant and feel you could benefit from our support, please speak to your Locality Housing staff. For those who are not PKC tenants but could benefit from our services, contact the Central Support Team via the Housing Options Team at **01738 476000** or email HousingOptions@pkc.gov.uk



A wide range of neighbourhood improvement projects have been agreed following walkabout events held earlier this year across Perth and Kinross



Tenants and residents were invited to join walkabouts in their local area to identify small local improvements under our Estate-Based Initiatives (EBI) programme which sees budget put aside in each Housing Locality Area for EBI projects.

An extra £50,000 was invested in our EBI programme this year, thanks to the decision taken by tenants when voting for rent levels for 2024 to 2025.

The popular and successful scheme sees small neighbourhood improvement projects taken forward by the Council in partnership with tenants and residents.

Any proposed project must be on communal ground/property owned by the Housing Revenue Account, and should contribute to at least one of the following:

- community safety
- improving the appearance of the area
- increasing tenant involvement in their community

This year walkabouts were held in places including Crieff, Methven, Bridge of Earn, Scone, Dunning, Almondbank, Rattray, Aberfeldy, Caputh and Murthly, Aberfeldy, Alyth, and Coupar Angus.

Thank you to all tenants and residents who took the time to join Housing staff and their local elected members to tell us what improvements you would like to see in your area.

You can find out what neighbourhood improvements are planned as a result of the walkabout events on our web page www.pkc.gov.uk/EBI24/25

Keep an eye on our social media channels for news about any planned future walkabouts!

If you or someone you know would like a copy of this document in another language or format, (on occasion, only a summary of the document will be provided in translation), this can be arranged by contacting the Customer Service Centre on 01738 475000.

You can also send us a text message on 07824 498145.

All Council Services can offer a telephone translation facility.

BSL users can contact us via Contact Scotland BSL, the online British Sign Language video relay interpreting service. Find out more on the Contact Scotland BSL website <https://contactscotland-bsl.org>

www.pkc.gov.uk (PKC Design Team - 2024148)