

# UPDATE

BERWICKSHIRE  
HOUSING  
ASSOCIATION



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## Welcome to our Summer Issue

**Welcome to the Summer edition of the BHA Update and what a different situation we find ourselves in since the last issue where we looked forward to a new decade and outlined an exciting year ahead, with the 25th Anniversary celebrations and events, our new properties and our aims and objectives around transforming the business.**

Firstly, I am hoping that all of you and your families have kept safe and well. It has been a difficult time for us all as we manage the restrictions around lockdown.

When I look back at the past couple of months, I see the challenges we faced to ensure that you, our tenants still received a service from us.

We, like others, have had to fundamentally change how it delivers its service. The key challenges have been how to run a Housing Association, provide advice and support to our tenants and run emergency repairs.

During these difficult times our focus continued to be supporting you, our tenants, with financial support through our Customer Accounts and Financial Inclusion Team and wellbeing support through our Housing Services and Community Initiatives Team.

Our staff have made over 8,000 calls supporting those in need, including reaching out to ensure food parcels were received, advising on mental health support and chatting to those affected by loneliness or isolation. It also included supporting people who have suddenly found themselves without a job and needing help accessing Universal Credit. Social media has also played an important role keeping our followers informed with specific campaigns tackling important issues during these difficult times.

Our BHA BeFriend Team have been helping people who are struggling. They have taken on some jobs they would not normally do, helping with gardens, shopping and the occasional socially distanced garden visit, even Holly the Therapet has joined in.

In April, I announced my retirement after being Chief Executive for 13 years. I have had a wonderful term of office here at Berwickshire Housing Association, I am very proud of all we have achieved and would like to thank the staff for the role they have played in this success.

From the start it has been a fantastic journey, creating an organisation that is focused on the people we house, their communities and getting it right for them.


As we start to look forward to the future our teams will be working hard to ensure we can continue to deliver on our commitments to you and our local community. There are some exciting times ahead with our Community Initiatives Team, following the successful application to the Supporting Communities Fund supported by Scottish Government and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. A total of £78,000 has been awarded to Berwickshire Housing Association to support community-based groups in response to COVID-19.

We will be using the funding to support digital inclusion, including a 'lending library' of digital devices, an expanded community initiatives programme and increased access to mental health support.

Our development projects to provide affordable homes in Duns and Ayton will continue to progress in accordance with Scottish Government advice and gradually increase to normal levels.

Our commitment to transforming the business will continue to be a focus with the foundations already being laid to improve customer service, increase efficiency and reduce costs. The results of our tenants' survey confirmed that for some of you we need to respond faster, to be more efficient and clearer in what we do, and we are committed to delivering this for all tenants.

Your new Chief Executive will be recruited over the coming months and shall be appointed to oversee all of this by the end of the year.



Helen Forsyth - Chief Executive



## Tenant Volunteer Chair retires after 13 years

Following over 13 years of service to Berwickshire Housing Association's Tenant Volunteers and Scrutiny Panel, George Pickering (Chair) has announced his retirement.

Our Tenant Volunteer Panel was set up in May 2007 in which George was one of the very first Tenant Volunteers.

George said: *"I was extremely proud to represent the Tenant Volunteers as Chair for a total of 7 years out of my 13 years of service. The Tenant Volunteers are a small but passionate group who continue to work to express their views and act as critical friends of the Association. One of my highlights was celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Tenant Volunteers in 2017 and making a real difference to local community events and organisations through the Community Grant Funding. I have also enjoyed the challenges of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel working*

*alongside tenants and BHA staff in providing recommendations to improve the tenants journey with BHA."*

In 2018/19 our Tenant Volunteers donated over £4,000 to local community events and initiatives, this will continue to be supported through our Community Initiatives Team.

Dan Blake, Operations Director comments: *"It has been a privilege to have George as part of our tenant engagement activity and for all his contributions over the past 13 years. The staff wish him all the very best in the future."*



## BHA Board welcomes new members

Following our Board Member recruitment campaign which took place earlier this year, we are pleased to introduce two new Board Members.

We would like to welcome both Stephen Scott and Sam Hart.

Stephen is a Business Development Manager at Fleming Homes in Duns, helping private clients bring to life their self-build dreams across the North of England and Scotland. As first point of contact through to sale for budding self-builders Stephen will liaise with private clients, architects and main contractors to present Fleming Homes self-build solutions. Previously Stephen worked for Greenvale AP as UK Sales and Technical Manager, a job which also saw him with responsibility for some of the emerging markets for the company, involving working throughout Europe and launching their crop storage systems in Canada.



Sam is an Innovation Manager at the Construction Scotland Innovation Centre (CSIC), overseeing the acceleration of industrialisation through modern methods of construction, offsite manufacturing, sustainable product development, quality and procurement.

He has worked in housebuilding and the wider construction industry for over 25 years, with experience designing and implementing quality management systems and health and safety programmes, specifically in an off-site manufacturing context.

Sam is also a Board Member of Offsite Solutions Scotland (OSS), an organisation incorporating ten of Scotland's foremost off-site construction companies, with a combined manufacturing output of £170million and employing more than 1,000 individuals. OSS was founded following a successful UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) project, culminating in a Cooperative Development Scotland Collaboration Prize.



## Customer Satisfaction Survey

The results of our 2019/20 customer satisfaction survey are in. Thank you to the 711 of our tenants who shared their views on repairs, neighbourhoods, housing quality, value for money and how we communicate.

It seems you are happy overall with our services but there are some key areas that we need to address.

We take your feedback seriously and are already progressing actions to transform our organisation to become more customer-focussed over the next 6-18 months.

### Here are the topline results from the survey:

**77%** of respondents are satisfied overall with our service

Good – but we would like more of you to be satisfied.

**88%** said that their neighbourhood is a good place to live in

Working in partnership we can do more to improve the quality of your neighbourhood such as increasing community events and greater staff presence.

**77%** think the rent we charge is value for money

We hope to see this figure rise following our rent restructure which is designed to ensure your rent is fair based upon the size, type and age of your home.

**18%** said our repairs to your home are not good enough

We will increase the number of inspections following any repairs carried out on properties to ensure the quality is kept to a high standard by our contractors.


**24%** of tenants who were dissatisfied with the repairs service felt we could do better at communicating progress/status of repairs


We intend to update you more frequently. You will receive regular communications on progress until the repair is completed.

**21%** were dissatisfied with the quality of their property.

We will communicate our plans to make major improvements to your home early in the planning stage, so that you are clear about the timescales for improvements to your home.

Importantly, 79% of respondents think that we communicate well. We will continue to share relevant information on our website and via our social media channels, including Facebook and Twitter.

 Find us on Facebook/BHAThrivingCommunities

 Follow us on Twitter @BHACommunities

## Our stated commitments to you

1. We will increase the number of inspections to completed repairs to ensure we continuously assess the quality of our service.
2. We will improve the way we communicate with you regarding the status and progress of your repair.
3. We will contact those of our customers who raised issues with the quality of their homes and rectify or communicate when improvements will follow (this will be only for customers who have given permission for our surveying consultant to pass their contact information to us).
4. We will improve the way we review outstanding repairs service requests and manage the timescales for more efficient delivery through our contractors.
5. We will commence a full and comprehensive stock condition survey within 2020/21\* to assess where improvements are needed with your homes.

\*This has unfortunately been delayed due to Covid 19, and will be completed during 2021.

6. We will communicate in advance our plans to make major improvements to your home, such as new windows, kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems, so that you are clear about the replacement timetable for your home.
7. We will review our rents annually through our new rent restructure process to ensure you are charged a fair rent for the size, type and age of your home.
8. We will be more visible and present within our communities, working with more mobile technology and ensuring your communities and estates are healthy, vibrant and safe places to live.
9. We will seek customer's feedback on the quality of our landscape maintenance and reflect the feedback in the work our contractors do within your community.
10. We will improve the way we capture your requests, seeking to complete every call or contact in the first instance, and ensure, wherever possible you are given clear understanding as to when we will respond and resolve your enquiry if this is not possible.

11. We will seek to engage you on key areas of our business and ask that you help us influence and shape future service improvements through facilitated small working groups.
12. We will survey a proportion of our customers every month, rather than annually to more regularly assess how satisfied you are with the services we provide.
13. We have and will continue to work to improve the way we identify and respond to customer complaints, through staff training and review of complaint trends as they are received by the organisation.
14. We will focus on some of our least satisfied communities in Greenlaw and Coldstream to understand how we can provide better services to you.
15. We will aim to engage and support working households and customers with children who were less satisfied (on average) with the services you received from us.

## The future of Customer Satisfaction Surveys

We will be working in partnership with Knowledge Partnership who have been operating for over 16 years in the Scottish market research industry and are specialists in carrying out tenant satisfaction surveys and tenant focus/workshops for Housing Associations and Councils. The company carried out our most recent large scale tenant satisfaction survey earlier this year.

They will soon be commencing a programme of telephone surveys to you, our tenants.

The purpose of this will be to assess your satisfaction with our services on a regular basis. Gathering your feedback in this way will help us to keep improving the services we provide. Any views you provide as part of the survey are strictly confidential and will be anonymous to us.

Knowledge Partnership will be looking to interview 80 tenants each month by telephone starting in July 2020. The surveys will run for a period of one year initially, and if you are contacted, we very much hope that you will be able to take part.

Alan Kennedy from Knowledge Partnership said: *"We are looking forward to working with tenants to assist Berwickshire Housing in its pursuit of increased customer satisfaction. Berwickshire Housing are one of only a handful of landlords in the UK who are seeking to use new techniques, such as continuous monitoring of customer satisfaction, to drive improvements in the services they provide to tenants. We hope that tenants will enjoy being part of this survey process, and will over time, see the results of their input in the form of increased customer focus, and enhanced customer services".*





We ask our contractors and our staff to use suitable Personal Protective Equipment - PPE, such as using hand sanitisers and wearing face coverings.

## Repairs & Maintenance Update

In line with the Scottish Government guidance we have been carrying out only emergency repairs and essential maintenance, such as gas safety servicing, to your homes. We are working to keep you, our staff and our contractors as safe as possible during this very difficult, unusual time, and we thank you for your understanding and patience.

### Repairs

When you make an appointment for a repair, we ask you the 4 questions that we have put on our Facebook and social media pages about whether anyone in your household has symptoms, is self-isolating or is shielding, and we ask our contractors to do the same before they actually enter your home to carry out the repair work, in case something has changed since you called about the repair.

When our contractors come to your home, we ask them to use Personal Protective Equipment - PPE, such as using hand sanitisers and face coverings.

When our staff or contractors call at your home about a repair, we ask that you keep 2 metres away from them - social distancing - and stay in a different room from the room the repair is in. Sometimes you may want to speak to our staff, to point out repair works, or to the contractors, and that can be difficult to do from a distance, but we ask that you do this for everyone's safety. If possible discussions may take place outdoors.

If you could take a picture of your repair, and send it to [Technical.Services@berwickshirehousing.org.uk](mailto:Technical.Services@berwickshirehousing.org.uk)

[berwickshirehousing.org.uk](http://berwickshirehousing.org.uk) this will help us to understand your repair, and so make it easier when we visit your home to keep the social distance.



## Preparing for Safely Restarting Works

**We are preparing programmes with our contractors for re-starting works, safely. We are following the Scottish Government Route Map and the different phases in the Map.**

At the moment we are looking at re-introducing external repairs, working with our contractors on the additional safety and hygiene measures they are putting in place to allow them to work as safely as possible. We are preparing with our contractors the safety controls for non-emergency works to be carried out in you homes. When these are in place we will update our changes on social media, and this will give the up to date information about what repairs and maintenance will be carried out, and where there are still restrictions on the services we can provide safely.

We are continuing to carry out work to allow our empty (void) properties to be let. We no longer carry out pre-termination visits because of the virus, instead our staff carry out the initial inspection when the property becomes empty. We are asking customers who are leaving a BHA property to move elsewhere to put their keys in the key safe which we attach outside the property, to minimise the handling of keys.

## Home Improvements

**Every year we carry out a number of replacement works and this year we had planned for heating replacements, insulation and new windows.**

We are reviewing the programmes for our planned works, which stopped because of the Covid 19 restrictions. We are working with our contractors on a safe way, in line with the guidance, of carrying out surveys for the heating replacement,

energy efficiency and window replacement works. We will contact everyone involved in these programmes as our plans are finalised, and keep you informed of progress.



## Before COVID-19

We completed most of the improvements we planned last year during 2019, finishing just before lockdown in March 2020. Our contractor, Sidey installed new windows in Marine Square and in Earlsmeadow in Duns. We also completed our kitchen and bathroom replacements in 2019.

The first phase of our fire safety detection programme was completed by our contractor R M Markby, bringing these properties up to the new Building Regulations Standard. We are currently working on developing the next phase of this safety programme for 2020. We completed the planned heating replacements, insulation and energy efficiency works last year, and started the process of developing the programme for the current year. The COVID-19 crisis has meant that we have not been able to carry out the survey work for this, which we had planned for Spring 2020. We are reviewing this to allow us to restart work safely with our contractors as soon as possible. We will contact you if you are affected by these works.



## Freda is a star on ITV Border News

**BHA BeFriend, which offers one to one companionship and group activities to older people within the local community, have increased their activities to assist people whose mental health was suffering due to loneliness and isolation. The service has seen demand nearly doubling during the coronavirus outbreak.**

The team at BHA BeFriend has had to adapt to how they operate but they know that their service is now more important than ever before. One of the changes which had to be made was the move to mostly phone-based befriending. Terri Bearhope, our BeFriend Project Manager explained: *"We have been phoning about 100 people between the team to ensure we speak to as many people as possible. Since the start of the pandemic, over 700 calls have been made."*

Freda, (aged 83) a service user from Kelso, hadn't seen her family since Christmas and said she would have been lost without the team's support.

Freda said: *"They mean so much to me, they're so kind and caring. If I didn't have them I don't know what I would do."*

On a weekly basis Kerry, one of our BeFriend Group Workers would sit in Freda's front garden and they would have a good catch up. For Freda and the other service users Kerry visits, it's the only real social contact they're getting outside the four walls of their home.

Kerry said: *"My experience is when I've sat in someone's garden and chatted with them they've been a bit more honest about how they're feeling or they might bring up a subject that's been worrying them."*

## A day in the life of (during COVID-19) by Kerry Hague, BHA BeFriend Group Worker



Like many befriending initiatives, our Big Lottery funded BeFriend project had some significant changes to make when social distancing measures were introduced because of COVID-19.

Our team responded by replacing face-to-face befriending with telephone befriending and with more people experiencing loneliness than ever before, we began

accepting new referrals and continue to do so. The scope of what our befriending service includes has expanded too and day to day duties now vary greatly.

Teaming up with Scottish Borders Food Train has meant that we have been able

to help with shopping for those in need of Scottish Borders Food Train services, across the Scottish Borders.

Like in many workplaces across the country, we have been making extensive use of video calling for virtual meetings, and this has included virtual get-togethers for BeFriend staff, volunteers and befriendees.

Our social media pages have been full of helpful information, which are updated daily on how our staff and volunteers are making a difference.

One volunteer said: *"Being a befriender is key to my wellbeing and gives me the reason to get out and make someone else's life less lonely."*

It's important to BeFriend that we fully use our social media platforms to keep

people entertained and informed. It provides a small ray of positivity amongst the usual social media posts they will have seen.

I am proud of how we at the BeFriend Project have risen to the challenge of altering our service delivery in a rapid timely manner meaning that no service user was left in isolation because telephone befriending commenced on day one of lockdown measures coming into force.

Once these alterations were made we began our socially distanced external visits to people so that befriendees were able to have some face to face contact. This is particularly important for those who do not use technology such as video calling to keep in touch.





## £78k funding secured from The Supporting Communities Fund

**We are pleased to announce a successful application to the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund to support small community-based groups deliver activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The Supporting Communities Fund has been established as part of the Scottish Government's investment package to provide financial support targeted through community anchor organisations, working in partnership with others in the community and with public services, in coordinating local responses to the pandemic.



**We will coordinate the funding to support digital inclusion**

The support of Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the representative organisation for Scotland's Housing Association sector, was crucial in securing these funds for BHA.

We will coordinate the funding to support digital inclusion, including a 'lending library' of digital devices, an expanded community initiatives programme and increased access to specialised mental health support. We will coordinate and disseminate this funding in partnership with community groups to increase support options for all, including our tenants.

Dan Blake, Operations Director commented on the good news: *"BHA is delighted with this news and we will ensure the Supporting Communities Fund will be used effectively across Berwickshire. We will work with our dedicated local community partners to support as*

*many people as possible during these challenging times. We are grateful to the Scottish Government for their confidence in our ability to do this and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations who supported and guided our application from the outset."*

Since the introduction of lockdown measures it was quickly recognised that isolation and loneliness was affecting many people. This has accelerated our goal to increase access to digital communication and support people in how to use digital devices.

Our Digital Champions will now extend their work with community partners to help others, including our tenants, communicate with family and friends during these difficult and challenging times. Dougie Paterson, Community Initiatives Manager added *"This new funding is especially welcome at a*

*time when some people feel very disconnected from their family, friends and social networks. We are excited to work with a range of local partners to help people reconnect with others, including new options to do this digitally."*



## Being a Good Neighbour

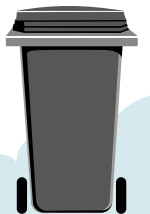
### We're stronger together!

When you move into a BHA home we expect you to be a good neighbour and not cause a nuisance. We want our estates to be attractive places to live and the communities within them to thrive and feel safe.



Each of you can make a difference by promoting positive behaviour, treating your neighbours with respect and looking out for them in times of need. As a BHA tenant you must have consideration for your neighbours and a little bit of give and take will mean you will be happier in your new home.

- We are all different and people may not live their lives in the same way that you do –try to be tolerant of others' lifestyles
- Try to avoid disturbing neighbours with loud and persistent noise. Sometimes you will not realise that you may be disturbing others
- Keep your pets under control and clean up after them
- Accept responsibility for the behaviour of your children but respect the rights of children and young people to play and meet in a safe and happy environment
- Be responsible for the behaviour of visitors to your home
- One-off events such as the odd party or BBQ can be annoying at the time but they are part of everyday life and if not very frequent should be tolerated
- We encourage residents to try and resolve lifestyle issues and minor nuisance by talking to each other
- Anti-social behaviour is a breach of your tenancy agreement and will be dealt with under our policies and procedures
- Car-parking – please recognise that you don't have an automatic right to park outside your home unless you have a designated parking bay
- Keep your garden tidy and free from rubbish



#### What BHA Cannot Do:

We cannot get involved with low level neighbourhood disputes. These are part of everyday life and not something a landlord can manage. We expect you to work out issues with your neighbours but we can offer you mediation to help you with this. This is via a trained mediator at Scottish Borders Council.



## 'All about dogs' day a great success

**Over 70 dogs and their owners attended our 'All About Dogs' day in the Volunteer Hall, Duns.**

Organised by our Pet Champion Nikki Robertson, the event was an outstanding success and provided a chance for both tenants and members of the public to attend with their pets and seek advice and assistance from dog experts - there were even visitors from as far afield as Edinburgh and Exeter!

During the day Borders Pet Rescue held a Dog Show with a variety of classes.

Winners were: **Waggiest tail - Millie (Susan Taylor); Best sit - Petra (Louise and Charles Innes); Looks most like owner - Hunter (Liam); Best trick - Koda (Sue Reynolds); Dog the judge would like to take home - Sandy (Hailey Shaw).**

The money raised at the event was split between BARK, Borders Pet Rescue, Therapet and the Greyhound Trust.



## Temporary changes to our allocation process

### ADVERTISING

We suspended advertising properties as soon as lockdown was announced. Properties which were already offered were prepared to accommodate those in most need to move. Advertising of our properties began again in mid-June.

### CRITICAL NEED

In line with Scottish Government guidance and direction, we continue to work closely with Scottish Borders Council in housing those in critical need.

### PREPARING A PROPERTY TO A LETTABLE STANDARD

Tradesmen are back to work ensuring the available properties are safe to let.

### VIEWINGS

We cannot accompany a customer into the property to view at present. In some cases we are able to take a video of the inside of the property or viewings can take place with a Housing Officer being outside of the property.

### TENANCY AGREEMENTS

We now have a telephone conversation instead of a face to face meeting to discuss the tenancy.

The tenancy agreement paperwork is left in the property for signature, and collected when the customer leaves the property.

It is fair to say these are challenging times for us and for our customers. We really like to take time with our new customers and get to know them and them us. We will aim to do this in a different manner until it is safe to do otherwise.







The homes provide a range of housing options to suit different household needs including family homes, smaller household flats and bungalows designed for wheelchair users.

## Development round up - Completion of Todlaw project in Duns

**We have been developing new energy efficient homes in Duns over several phases. We completed the latest phase in Todlaw in January this year with 27 new affordable homes.**

These 27 new homes at Millar Court, Station Crescent and Station Drive now take us to a grand total of 87 new homes within the Todlaw area. The homes provide a range of housing options to suit different household requirements, including family homes, smaller household flats, and bungalows designed for wheelchair users.

This latest phase, built by Hart Builders (Edinburgh) Ltd has 11 flats and 16 houses. There are 16 family houses, and 11 one bedroom flats. Hart Builders used local & regional suppliers and tradesmen throughout

the project, which helps to support the local borders economy.

All of the ground floor homes were designed with level entrance paths and wider internal doors making them accessible for wheelchair users. One of the accessible properties is a five person home, making it suitable for a larger family.

All properties meet the "Silver Standard" for lower carbon dioxide emissions to help address the climate challenge.

In order to be as energy efficient and as economical to run as possible, highly energy efficient "A rated" gas central heating, high levels of insulation and PV panels have been fitted to the homes.

We have also made it possible for car charging points for electric cars to be fitted in the future.

We have worked with our partners, Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Government to develop these new homes with housing grants, bringing much needed new and affordable homes to the Berwickshire area



**New development at Springfield in Duns**

Within the Todlaw community we have included an area of meadow where we are creating a community garden. We are working in partnership with Abundant Borders, and, when it is completed it will provide the opportunity for local people to grow their own fruit and vegetables, as well as enjoying this peaceful place.

#### **Works progress at Springfield, Duns**

We are also working with Springfield plc to create 29 new homes at Springfield in Duns providing a mixture of 2 and 3 bed houses with some 2 bedroom flats. All homes are being built to high energy efficiency standards, with air source heat pumps for hot water and central heating, which will make them cost effective for the families who will live in them. The development has been delayed due to COVID-19, but we hope to start letting these later this year.

#### **Ayton Beanburn**

We have not built any affordable housing in Ayton for 18 years and are excited to be bringing 31 new, much needed homes to Ayton, at Beanburn. The work began in January, but due to the COVID-19 restrictions the site was closed in March. Following the Scottish Government's guidelines, work has gradually started again, and we hope that if things continue to progress well with the COVID-19 situation that these homes will be finished in late summer next year.

Our Property Director, Angela Taylor said: *"We have owned this site for over 25 years and we are delighted that we can now bring new, much needed, high quality affordable homes to Ayton".*

## **£5m funding secured for future developments**

In April, we were pleased to announce a new partnership with Allia C&C to support the financing of our ongoing development programmes for affordable housing and vision to create thriving rural communities.

Allia C&C has been supporting the vital development of affordable homes across Scotland with its Scottish Charitable Bond programme. The bonds provide simple, affordable loans to Housing Associations

solely for building affordable housing, using Scottish Government investment.

Eleanor Rooke, Finance Director of Berwickshire Housing Association, *"We are thrilled to have secured support from Allia C&C for the Springfield and Ayton development projects, which supports our long term business plan and commitment to building new homes".*

Daniel Carrico, Head of Origination at Allia C&C, said *"We're really pleased to be working with Berwickshire Housing Association on this project. This is the first loan to be issued in the 2020/21 programme, which has a £40 million investment from the Scottish Government. We're looking forward to supporting more housing associations in their development of affordable housing this year and creating further social impact."*



## Easter Egg Competition Winners

We received so many amazing entries into our Easter Egg Competition in April, it was a tough job picking just three winners.

Helen Forsyth, Chief Executive commented to all that took part *"There were Dinosaurs, vegetable patches, egg boxes, underwater worlds, superheroes and heroines, beautiful eggs coloured in so many lovely ways. To each and every child that took part I was blown away by what you, your Mums, Dads and family did to help. We hope you had fun taking part, you are all winners. Congratulations to the three lucky winners and thank you for taking part"*.



5 & UNDER CATEGORY WINNER  
Jessica Johnson age 4



6 - 10 YEAR OLD CATEGORY WINNER  
Stephanie Finlayson age 6



11-15 YEAR OLD CATEGORY WINNER  
Rokas and Domantas age 7 and 11

## Flowerbed Competition Winner

As part of National Gardening Week (27th April – 3rd May) we invited all green-fingered youngsters to take part in a competition to design a flowerbed for our new community garden at Todlaw, Duns.

In conjunction with Abundant Borders it was a great opportunity for young people to make a lasting contribution to the new community garden.

The winning design was created by Romilly and Reuben Oliver and will be the centrepiece for the garden and be a vibrant space for everyone to enjoy and we look forward to enjoying the new garden.



**Tell us about  
your favourite  
walk with  
photos and  
feature in our  
2021 Calendar**

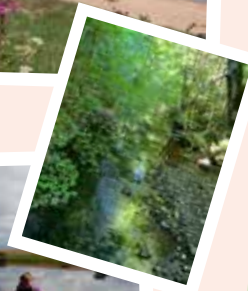
- Our Competition is open to all ages
- To enter, email your 'actual size' photographs to: [info@berwickshirehousing.org.uk](mailto:info@berwickshirehousing.org.uk) along with your name and contact number
- Entries must be digital images of Berwickshire
- Images need to be landscape and high resolution
- Closing date 30th September 2020
- Winners announced 12th October
- As well as the winning entries appearing in our 2021 Calendar, each winner will receive a £25 Amazon Gift Card



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## Our Digital Journey

**A lot has been happening at BHA with regard to our Digital Journey.**

We have managed to secure funding through the Supporting Communities Fund and aim to use this fund to launch a Digital Lending Library. This will not only be available to our tenants but to individuals and organisations throughout Berwickshire. It is hoped by providing people with the technology they need to enable them to get online will open up a whole world of possibilities and opportunities, especially in the strange and unprecedented times we are living in at present.

We have also secured support for a number of our tenants to gain access and support through working in partnership with Connecting Scotland which aims to connect up to 9,000 more people on low incomes who are considered vulnerable, to access services and support and connect with family and friends in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme will provide selected tenants access to iPads along with personalised support and broadband to help them develop their digital skills and communicate with family and friends.



Jennifer Mitchinson, Digital Champion said, *"During the COVID-19 pandemic some of our tenants were faced with several challenges many of which may have been avoided with digital access, support and connectivity and are pleased we can now offer support where we can".*

We are proud to be working alongside various organisations throughout Berwickshire including; BAVS, Scottish Borders Council, Citizens Advice Bureau and Borders Care Voice to set up a Digital Network of support for people in our area.

## What is Business Transformation and how will it affect you ?

### What is Business Transformation?

Housing Associations are falling behind other sectors such as retail, utilities and financial services in terms of technology and being able to provide a more digital and flexible service. This is where Business Transformation comes in by helping identify key areas for improvements. We're at the start of our journey to transform the business by adopting new and modern business systems and processes, which will help our way of working to make sure our services are what you want.

As part of this journey we are working on ways to provide self-serve options to help you manage your interaction with us through an online customer portal as well as an improved property lettings system. We don't want to do all of this without some input from you....so please read on!

### We need you!

#### Would you like to earn £50?

We are looking for two groups of ten people to test our new software. We are developing a new lettings programme and a customer portal. The lettings programme is to deliver a system where people with specific housing need do not get missed. Currently an applicant has to apply for priority if they feel they qualify, in our new system an applicant will answer a series of questions which will take them down a specific route applicable to them in order for us to assess need. The system will also determine where someone wants to live, giving us a clearer idea of demand in an area.

Our customer portal will allow our customers to manage some aspects of their account online, they can look up their

rent account, make payments and report a repair along with other tasks. This will deliver an accessible service to all.

We need a core group of our customers to test these systems before they go live, this will help us understand what you like and what you would like to see in the future. It will help us iron out any glitches and ensure we are launching the best possible service we can.

If you would like to be involved please contact us at: [businesstransformation@berwickshirehousing.org.uk](mailto:businesstransformation@berwickshirehousing.org.uk)

**We would appreciate if you can respond by 4th September 2020.**

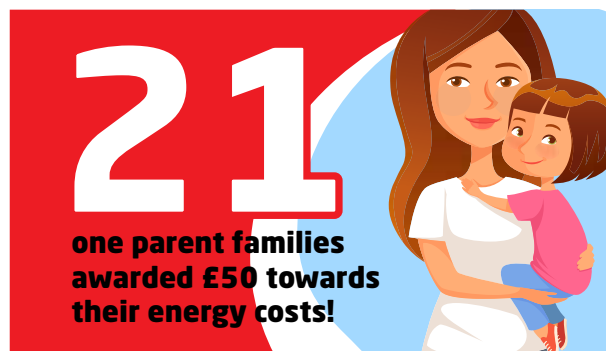
Thank you!

## Financial Inclusion providing an increase in assistance due to COVID-19

**During lockdown our Financial Inclusion Service has seen an increase in the number of our customers requiring help.**

In the months from April to June 38 of our 110 referrals were as a direct result of COVID-19. Many of these were from people who had never had experience of the benefits system and were understandably very worried, as they saw their incomes take a dramatic turn.

The team had to adapt and learn very quickly, as benefit rules changed on a daily basis as the Government introduced various schemes to help workers. Technology proved vital during these times assisting with claims and signposting to support services. Some of the biggest concerns were around making claims for disability benefits, not being able to visit those who have lost someone close to them and provide face to face support and assisting families with the increase of utility usage during lockdown.



One key success for the team was working with One Parent Families Scotland – Emergency Energy Fund which secured financial assistance for 21 one parent families to apply for grants of £50 towards their energy costs.

We also made 53 applications to the Duns and Eyemouth Food Banks for tenants in need, an increase of 32 for the same period last year.

**If you need advice and support please call our Financial Inclusion Team on 01361 884000.**

## Keep in touch

There are many ways to contact us.

**55 Newtown Street, Duns, TD11 3AU**  
**38 Church Street, Eyemouth, TD14 5DH**

 **T: 01361 884000**

 **T: 018907 50888**

### OUT OF HOURS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAY EMERGENCY REPAIRS

If you have an emergency please contact the following numbers:

- If you need to report an emergency repair call our repairs hotline on **0800 652 8104**
- If you have problems with your gas or solid fuel heating system call Dalex on **0800 038 5599**
- To report a power cut call Scottish Power on **105**
- If you smell gas in your home call Transco for help and advice on **0800 111 999**



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Follow us on Twitter @BHACommunities



Write to us at BHA, 55 Newtown Street, Duns, TD11 3AU



Email us at [info@berwickshirehousing.org.uk](mailto:info@berwickshirehousing.org.uk)



Visit our website at [www.berwickshirehousing.org.uk](http://www.berwickshirehousing.org.uk)