Welcome to Saffron news

Welcome to our summer edition of Saffron News and I hope that as you read this you remain well and are in good health. I would like to thank you for your support, patience and understanding as we have had to pause routine services and appointments over recent weeks. We do understand these appointments may well feel much more than routine to you by now, and we are making plans for getting back to a full service as soon as we safely can. A full Coronavirus update, including what to do if you have any concerns about paying your rent, can be found on pages 4 and 5.

Our focus at Saffron very much remains on earning the highest levels of trust and confidence as a landlord and developer, an employer and as a positive force in the community. I would like to share with you some of the things we have been doing to accomplish this:

• In January this year we launched our new Community Foundation. The Foundation has provided support to charities that play a vital role in the communities we live and work in, including Wymondham Community Kitchen. As Coronavirus started to take grip across Norfolk and Suffolk, our Foundation asked staff who could no longer do their day job to volunteer. We currently have 68 staff volunteers who have made welfare calls to over 1,200 of our more vulnerable tenants and over 200 distributions of essential food and medical supplies. We are really proud of the difference the Foundation is making.

• In February we shared our plans with you to increase rents in April. We listened carefully to the advice of our Customer Voice group when considering our approach to the increase and how to communicate it. We hope that by capping the increase at local housing allowance rates we have managed to balance the rent remaining affordable and our plans to improve the quality of homes, which is where every penny of the increase will go. Our current aspiration is to bring all homes up to a minimum energy efficiency standard “C”. Rent levels and energy efficiency are important parts of making sure your home is sustainable for you to live in.

• Between October 2019 and January 2020 we had an “in-depth assessment” by the Regulator of Social Housing which included spending two days on site in Long Stratton and observing a Board meeting. By the time you receive this edition of Saffron News, we will have been made aware of the outcome. The details will be on our website.

I hope you enjoy the magazine....

Key dates
Keep an eye out on our Facebook - Saffron Housing Trust and our Twitter page @saffronhousing for useful tips, information and ways we get involved with the below dates. (The below events might not go ahead due to the Coronavirus outbreak, we will keep our social media channels updated with any changes).

May
27th April - 3rd May - Gardening Week
18th - 24th - Mental Health Awareness Week

June
1st - 7th - Volunteers Week
21st - Suffolk Day

Pride Month

July
5th - South Norfolk on Show
21st - Suffolk Day

August
30th - Break’s Duck Race

September
14th - 20th - Gas Safety Week
21st - 27th - Recycling Week

October
New issue of Saffron News
Coronavirus

(The below information is up to date at the time of writing.)

We have been working closely with our partners, following Government guidance, and doing what we feel is best for the people we provide our services to in order to achieve this.

Concerns about paying your rent

We understand there may be concerns about affordability in light of the current situation and we will do our best to support you. In line with Government guidance, you will be protected from eviction for three months if you are impacted by the coronavirus.

If you have any concerns regarding paying your rent, please speak to our Income Team who can offer support and advice.

There is also helpful information on the government’s website - https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses

Changes to our services

In response to the outbreak we have made changes to some of our services. We are only attending emergency repairs as well as essential compliance testing/servicing relating to gas boilers, legionella and fire safety.

We have the appropriate protective equipment and will take all necessary precautions as advised by the Government, which includes the 2 metre social distancing rule. However, if you feel uncomfortable with us entering your property and we’re unable to, for example, carry out gas servicing or emergency repairs due to the coronavirus outbreak, we will provide you with a special card which will enable us to book in a future appointment at a safe and convenient time. This will need to be within 12 months of the last inspection.

For a full list of our emergency repairs and our response to them, please visit our website - https://www.saffronhousing.co.uk/residents/coronavirus/

Our work in the community

We are proud to be working together with South Norfolk Council’s Help Hub. We have 68 staff volunteers offering their time to support our tenants and the local community. In recent weeks they have been carrying out tasks such as:

- Collecting food parcels from food banks and SNC Leisure Centres
- Shopping for people who are in self-isolation and have no other means of help
- Delivering food parcels to residents (non-contact)
- Feeding back to area lead co-ordinators regarding issues or problems in communities requiring more specialist intervention.

We have also contacted all of our tenants aged over 70 to personally check on their welfare and offer any support where we can. This has involved 1,143 telephone calls, those we could not get a hold of on the phone have received a letter providing support and advice. We are also in the process of contacting our tenants aged between 60 and 70.

If you need help or support from your local Help Hub please call 0344 8008 020 if your local authority is in Norfolk or call 0800 8766 926 if your local authority is in Suffolk.

Domestic abuse

This is a difficult and worrying time for everyone but especially those who experiencing domestic abuse. We are aware that there may be increased risks as households are following Government guidance to stay at home. At this time, both national and local domestic abuse services are still open. In the current climate, they can provide support over the phone and by email.

If you or anyone you know, is suffering from domestic abuse, call the 24 hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline 0808 2000 247.

Always remember, in an emergency call 999. If you cannot talk or make a sound after dialling 999 stay on the line and dial 55. The call will then be transferred to the police who will know it is an emergency.

We also have lots of information, including how to contact the relevant services, on our website – www.saffronhousing/residents/coronavirus/
Community Foundation

“Making a lasting difference through community investment and effective partnerships to bring about positive change” - Our Vision

“Transforming our communities into, thriving, vibrant, inclusive places where individuals are encouraged to come together and are empowered to enrich the lives of themselves and others” - Our Mission

In January we officially launched our Community Foundation Programme. A key priority is to create and sustain ongoing relationships with our tenants across Norfolk and Suffolk. The new Community Foundation aims to create new initiatives and partnership working with other local organisations such as charities and local authorities to help tenants lead better lives and create places people want to live.

The Foundation is based around six themes providing a holistic offering to truly make a difference:

- Assisted Gardening and Decorating Scheme
- Apprenticeships and Employment
- Customer Training Programmes
- Community Project Grants and Improvement Grants
- Staff Volunteering
- Help and Support

The launch event was an opportunity to outline Saffron’s ambition of the Community Foundation Programme and to create partnerships to help shape what it will look like as it evolves.

Emilie Hildreth, Community Foundation Manager at Saffron, said: “A lot of the publicly funded tenancy support services have recently been cut or have gone altogether, leaving more vulnerable people without any help. Social and health agendas are increasingly playing key parts of landlords’ responsibilities. We want to be more than just a landlord and are committed to the communities where we work and, through the work of our Foundation, want to enhance the life chances of our tenants.”

We are working with our older people within our communities to increase activities which are encouraging wellbeing and the reduction of loneliness. One such community group is Friends of Churchill Place, they have been supported by Saffron and encouraged to start up a range of activities including fish and chip lunches, darts, music evenings and meals such as Christmas dinner.

Lorna King, a member of the group, said: “Setting up friends of Churchill place last year has made such a difference to our community, it has enabled many of the neighbours to get together for different events each week giving us all something to look forward to instead of spending a lot of time on our own indoors. We now have a thriving friendly neighbourhood and everyone joins in with new ideas weekly.”

Within the organisation, Saffron is also looking for volunteers to sit on a new ‘Grants Panels’ for its Community Project and Improvement Grants. The panels will consist of staff across different departments and representatives from Saffron’s Customer Voice group as well as independent advisors.

The Panel will decide which projects are awarded Saffron’s funding, looking at criteria such as sustainability and demonstrating social value amongst communities throughout Norfolk and Suffolk.

The Community Foundation is already helping to make a difference in Wymondham after donating £3,000 towards a Community Van for the Wymondham Community Kitchen.

This is the first donation for the Foundation and included donations from other organisations such as Wymondham Town Council, East Anglian Motor Auctions, and South Norfolk Council. The new van will help the Wymondham Community Kitchen play their crucial part in helping serve the local community.

Wymondham Community Kitchen said how thankful they are: “We are extremely grateful to the organisations that donated, they too have played a crucial role in helping the community.”

Grants up for grabs!

Community Improvements

Grants – awards up to £10,000

These grants are aimed at activities or physical improvements which primarily benefit Saffron tenants or Saffron communities.

Activities will be supported or championed by Saffron employees and funding could cover a venue for an event, volunteer expenses, equipment and resources, refreshments, publicity and marketing.

Event examples:
- Community clear up days
- Litter picking
- Neighbourhood improvements including new bin store areas and enhanced safety and security measures
- Gardening projects
- Competitions or events.

We will prioritise ideas and activities which:
- Enhance local areas and communities
- Include those who are hard to reach
- Encourage new participants and address social isolation
- Address gaps in local provision
- Make the best use of other local services, partnerships and networks
- Enhance life chances.

Community Project Grants – awards up to £5,000

These grants are aimed at local groups and not-for-profit organisations who share our vision for place-shaping and creating positive futures.

We will support schemes which develop new ways to reach and include Saffron tenants and the wider community.

We are looking for schemes and projects which will:
- Encourage community engagement and cohesion
- Promote and enable training and education-based activity
- Reduce social isolation in all age groups
- Promote Saffron community rooms
- Increase engagement in activities with underrepresented groups

We will prioritise schemes and projects which:
- Make the most of existing provision
- Include those who are hard to reach
- Encourage new participants and address social isolation
- Address gaps in local provision
- Make the best use of other local services, partnerships and networks
- Enhance life chances

If you have any suggestions or projects for the Foundation please email communityfoundation@saffronhousing.co.uk
Due to the expansion of the role of Customer Voice, we are looking for a volunteer to join the team to work with us to achieve our objectives and improve services.

Saffron are fully committed to involving and engaging our tenants in all that we do. We are an ‘Overarching Group’ of volunteer members and we need you!

Our role is to

- Oversee the involvement of Saffron tenants in decisions that affect the services they provide
- Review Saffron’s performance and work with us to make improvements
- Agree the annual Tenant Consultation Plan
- Review tenant facing policies and have input into service strategies
- Nominate three Non-Executive Directors for the Board.

Experience of this type of role is not necessary. What we need is your knowledge, feedback and understanding of the issues affecting you, your home and your community. Saffron offer full training and support, and all reasonable expenses are covered.

For an informal chat in the first instance, and to obtain an application form, you can contact the Customer Voice Team by emailing info@saffroncustomervoice.co.uk

You can be the one to make a difference!

We hope both Saffron and the Board will be impressed with what we have set out and already achieved as a group, including:

- Task and Finish sessions and working groups
- Tested the new tenant portal along with other tenants
- Helped in the Older Persons strategy review – along with other tenants and staff
- Reviewed a number of policies
- Looked at the old local standards and the new Saffron standards
- Attended the launch of the Saffron Community Foundation.

We have also reviewed the results of the Star Survey and complaints that are sent into Saffron. Based on that information, over the coming year we plan to look at the following areas:

- Repairs
- Communications
- Complaints
- Holding pop-ups and roadshows to meet tenants and find out what issues they are facing
- Getting tenants involved in surveys and task & finish sessions.

Saffron have already asked for our support and guidance on a number of items and implemented our feedback where they can. We will continue to share our outcomes and feedback with all staff at Saffron so we can keep communication open and active.

We are all very excited about the plans we have and will be keen to share and ask for support from you all to try and collectively earn the trust of all our tenants.
Below you can see where we are building across Norfolk from the 1st April 2020, how many properties are on site and if they are rented or Shared Ownership.

Keep an eye out on our ‘properties currently available to rent on Home Options’ page on our website and make sure you are registered with the Home Options scheme via your local council.
A day in the life of....

James Carter
Customer Contact Advisor

We took a day out of our usual routine to spend time with James to see what a typical day is like for him and we asked a few questions along the way.

1. How long have you worked for Saffron?
I have been with Saffron for just over three years, I started on 13th February 2017.

2. What do you do in your role and do you enjoy it?
I am one of the first points of contact in the Customer Contact Team, responding to enquiries from all Saffron customers by email, phone and face to face.

3. How many staff members are in your team?
We currently have two Customer Contact Managers and 10 Customer Contact Advisors.

4. How do you provide good customer service within your role?
Excellent listening skills and problem solving abilities with a happy can-do attitude combined with empathy and professionalism – I treat everyone how I would want my nan to be treated.

5. What does a typical day look like for you?
On average we deal with 260 calls a day and 60 emails, they vary consisting of diagnosing and logging repairs, taking rent payments, lettings enquiries – no day is the same.

6. Do you get to know our tenants?
We are always here to help and our tenants are happy to share information about their lives with us and have good chat on the phone. Hopefully, with the Community Foundation grant applications coming this year we will also be able to signpost them to help their communities.

7. Do you have any top tips for our tenants?
When I first started the Contact Team was in its infancy and tenants were experiencing long wait times in their calls being answered. Things have improved and the average wait time is no more than a minute.

A few things tenants might not know is:
• We have a queue buster, after a minute’s wait you can pick that option – your call will remain in the queue and Saffron will call you back at no cost to yourself. Callbacks on average take no more than 20 minutes.
• We cover the phones 24/7 365 days a year - if you have an emergency outside of office hours please call as we have an out of hours service which can help.
• If you have made a repairs appointment and you won’t be in, please let us know so we can rebook the appointment for you. Time wasted travelling to a missed appointment can be better spent completing a job for someone else.

It’s in my nature to be helpful. I love my role as I’m passionate about delivering excellent customer service.

“...If you have made a repairs appointment and you won’t be in, please let us know so we can rebook the appointment for you. Time wasted travelling to a missed appointment can be better spent completing a job for someone else.”
The rent increase explained

In February you will have received your annual rent letter which may have included information about your rent increasing.

To help understand the rent increase we have created a video which can be found on our website here at www.saffronhousing.co.uk/residents/make-a-payment/the-rent-increase-explained.

We have also put together some frequently asked questions below which we hope you will find useful.

Please note the rent totals included in your rent letter do not take into account any Housing Benefit/Universal Credit you may be entitled to.

1/. Why is there a rent increase now?

The government guides any changes in rent made by all housing associations, which includes Saffron. There has been a reduction enforced by the government for the past four years, but they have recently announced that they have permitted all housing associations to raise their rents.

2/. Who will be affected by the 2.7% increase?

The majority of rents will be increased by up to 2.7%.

However, in an effort to keep homes affordable we will not be applying the increase if your rent is currently higher than the local housing allowance – a measure used to calculate housing benefit. This applies to over 500 households.

3/. How much does the increase equate to?

The amount will vary, but in general terms, for a two-bedroom property on average, your rent may increase by:

• £2.23 per week for tenants in a social rented property

• £2.93 per week for tenants in an affordable rented property

4. How do I calculate my new monthly rent?

This financial year, 6th April 2020 to 4th April 2021, is a 52-week year compared to the financial year 1st April 2019 to 5th April 2020 which was a 53-week year.

To calculate your new monthly amount, you will need to subtract any HB/UC/Saffron rebate you may be entitled to from the new Gross weekly amount, then multiply this by 52 weeks and divide by 12 payments.

5/. What is Saffron going to do with the extra money?

The information we have on your home tells us that we want to increase the amount of money we spend on maintaining and improving them.

The rent increase will generate just over £750k for Saffron. Based on our assessments and priority, we will use it to make improvements to your homes over the next year.

6/. Who can help me if I have concerns?

Once you have received your rent letter and you know what any changes will be to you, you can contact Saffron and speak to a member of our team in the usual way – by calling 01508 532000 or emailing info@saffronhousing.co.uk if you live on a supported housing scheme you can speak to your support coordinator.

However, you may need to consider how you are going to budget for the rent increase. If you are struggling to pay your rent, you may want to apply to see if you are entitled to any support from Universal Credit. Benefit eligibility is partly relative to your household income not just your work status.

There are a number of organisations which can also help you with money advice and support:

Pay by Direct Debit

Direct debit is available if you do not receive housing benefit or universal credit, which is paid direct to Saffron. If you have access to a computer, you will find the direct debit mandate at www.saffronhousing.co.uk/residents/make-a-payment/how-to-pay-your-rent/

Please fill in and either email rents@saffronhousing.co.uk or alternatively, you can either print off and return the mandate to us or contact us on 01508 532000 to request a mandate be posted to you.

Payment dates will be either weekly or the 15th of each month. You must continue to make payments yourself until you receive confirmation from us that your direct debit instruction has been processed. If you currently pay by standing order and you would like to change it to direct debit, it is your responsibility to cancel the standing order with your bank.

Wordsearch

Find all the words from the list below, then return it along with the completed entry form for a chance to win £20 Love2Shop voucher.

A S D F G H J B U N N Y K L Z X
A P O I U Y T R E W Q M N B V C
P S D D F S B M A L G H J K C L
R Z X A C V B N M Q W E C R H T
I U K F M N B B P O I H U I Y
L J N B H F Y L T G V C O F C R
S A Q Q A Z O S W E S X C D K E
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E W I Q Z X C V B N M L T K J H
R T P Y U I O P L K J H E G F G
S T S J M M N B V C Z X A S D G
Q W E R T G N I R P S Q W E E
H G A S F J G A S D N H F F D G

Name: ____________________________________
Address: ...........................................................
Telephone: ......................................................

Send your completed entry form to: Communications & Marketing Team, Saffron Housing Trust, Saffron Barn, Swan Lane, Long Stratton, NR15 2XP

Closing date: Monday 6th July 2020

A big thank you to everyone who entered our wordsearch competition in the October issue of Saffron News.

Congratulations to Mrs Cassimo who was the winner of the Love2Shop vouchers, we hope you enjoy them.
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