

PRIMA NEWS

SUMMER 2021



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Welcome to the Summer 2021 Edition of Prima News



We know the past year has been difficult for most. Not seeing family, friends and colleagues as often as we're used to has taken its toll. However, a return to normality feels closer than ever with millions of people already vaccinated and lockdown restrictions slowly easing in stages.

At Prima Group, we've been busy making sure we continue to deliver a high quality service to all of our tenants despite the ongoing restrictions. Back in March 2020, the sudden lockdown meant that we quickly had to change how we worked and embrace recent advancements in technology. Now we're more than a year into the pandemic, we are seeing the benefits of working more closely with technology. Our efforts have even been recognised by Housing Digital, who placed us 10th in their Top 30 Digital Housing Providers list (p. 9).

We are very excited with the new properties we're building in Kirkby, Leasowe and Walton. These schemes represent the beginning of some big development plans we have coming up over the next few years.

They also provide our local communities with some much needed new homes, as well as employment and training opportunities. Please get in touch for further information about these opportunities.

We have continued to support our tenants throughout the pandemic. Whether you need financial, physical or mental support, we are here to help. We also have a variety of local partners who are available to help.


If you have any questions about what you read in this newsletter, please don't hesitate to get in touch and we will do our best to answer them. We would also love to hear from you if you're interested in getting involved in how we work, either informally through our estate walkabouts and clean up days, or by becoming a Customer Voice member.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your summer and make the most of the good weather. I look forward to seeing some of you in person in the near future. In the meantime, stay safe and well.

John Ghader
Prima Group CEO

Contact Us

We are here to help and you can contact us using our Customer App, through our website or by calling us. We are working differently at the moment due to current COVID-19 guidance, so our reception areas remain closed. They will be open by appointment once the restrictions are lifted.

 0151 452 0202

 www.primagroup.org/contact-us

Opening Hours

Monday - 9am to 5pm
 Tuesday - 9am to 5pm
 Wednesday - 11am to 5pm
 Thursday - 9am to 5pm
 Friday - 9am to 5pm

You can also find us on social media:

 /PrimaGroupHousing  @prima_grp


 Prima Group  @prima_grp

Download the Prima Customer App

Manage your home at a time that suits you.

With the Prima Customer App, you can now easily:

- ✓ check your balance
- ✓ see mini-statements
- ✓ request a statement
- ✓ report a repair
- ✓ request visits
- ✓ report ASB

 Search for **Prima Group**



Building New Homes

During 2021, Prima Group has started work on two new developments to create 41 new homes. These homes will provide much needed accommodation for families and people living with disabilities.

It is great to see the progress of our new development in Kirkby where 11 two-bedroom houses are on track for completion at the start of next year.

Our experienced construction partners Ecogee are doing a great job in managing the development. Located off Roughwood Drive and Kenbury Road, these homes will be a welcome addition to the neighbourhood, where there's a need for two-bedroom houses, and they are expected to be very popular for smaller families.

All of the bungalows will include charging points for mobility scooters.

Our new homes will be available at affordable rent prices. They are being built to a higher specification using timber frame construction, smart heating controls and electric car charging points. All homes will have off road parking and front and rear gardens. The timber frame will be given a traditional look and feel through a brick facade, tiled roof, PVCu windows and secure composite entrance doors, which complement the nearby homes.

The development at Twickenham Drive in Leasowe will start later this year and will provide 30 new two-bedroom homes, 20 houses and 10 bungalows. Wellcare Construction, another experienced contractor who we've worked with before, will be building these homes for us. Two of the bungalows will be fully wheelchair accessible with covered access from the drive to the front entrance. The remaining eight bungalows will be suitable for people with mobility issues but not requiring a wheelchair.



Both sites repurpose brownfield land that had previously been used for unpopular flat type accommodation which had been demolished several years ago. The new homes will be supported by funding from Homes England, through their Affordable Homes Programme. At Twickenham Drive, funding has also been provided by Wirral Council to support the additional requirements for the accessible bungalows. These two schemes are part of our wider development programme, and go some way to meet our plans to provide many more affordable homes locally.

Latest Update on Coronavirus

We are still providing support on tenancy issues and offering advice as we normally would. We know that COVID-19 is still causing concern for our customers for a variety of reasons. Please contact us if you are worried about your tenancy, your home, or struggling to manage your finances – we are here to help.

We are continuing to deliver all of our usual tenancy management services to customers and are carrying out appointments over the phone, and by video call rather than through office/home visits. We always follow the latest government guidance and are looking forward to being able to visit you at home again soon.

Feedback from customers tells us that you like having access to the Neighbourhood Team at home, so when the restrictions end, we will continue to come out to visit you rather than asking you to come into our office. This new approach means the office will only be used to meet you on an appointment basis, rather than being open at set hours.

The quickest and easiest way to get in touch with us is by using our Customer App.

With the app you can access many of the services that you may have previously done over the phone or at an office. The app allows you to pay your rent, check your balance,



Photo by John Cameron

report a repair, report ASB and contact us all from your smartphone or tablet. You can download the app for free from the App Store or Google Play Store. Please contact us if you need any help getting set up.

Repairs

During the restrictions, we have continued to provide our repairs service almost as normal for emergency calls, urgent repairs and any works outside the home, with extra precautionary checks in place to keep you and our team safe.

If we are to attend your home in any capacity, you need to ensure that:

- There is one point of contact (this is to minimise the interaction between household members).
- There are only household members in the property.
- Household members must not be in the same area/room that we are working in.

- You wear a face mask while we enter and exit the property, and also if you are present while we carry out the required work.
- Safe distances of at least two metres must be adhered to at all times.
- Access to the area where the work is being carried out is clear and doors are left open.
- The area where the work is being carried out is well ventilated (windows opened before our arrival, and remain open during our visit).

We will:

- Ring ahead to ensure that there are no positive COVID-19 cases in the household, or if anyone has symptoms.
- Sanitise our hands, put on PPE, knock on the door, and step back to keep a safe distance.
- Show our ID badges and explain the work that we are carrying out.
- Ask a series of questions to ensure that it is safe for us to enter.
- Only target the repair area that we are working in and safe distances will be adhered to throughout the visit.
- Wipe down any surfaces once we have finished.

Gas and Electrical Checks

We would like to thank customers for helping us continue to keep homes compliant with the gas and electrical safety requirements so far. We are still legally required to carry out gas and electrical safety checks to make sure you remain safe in your home. The safety checks are continuing as normal in line with the latest guidance.

We will contact customers and ask that you let us know whether you are self-isolating or are experiencing symptoms of coronavirus so that we can re-schedule appointments. If we visit your home to carry out gas or electrical safety checks, then you will be required to follow the guidelines listed in the previous section.

Supporting You

If you would like to receive regular welfare calls from us, then please just let us know by calling 0151 452 0202. One of our friendly team will be in touch to make sure you are receiving the support you need.

Latest Government Advice

Vaccines were originally offered to people most at risk from COVID-19 first. They are now being offered to people based on their age. As of 18th June 2021, those aged 18 and over are eligible to book a COVID-19 vaccination appointment through the NHS. You can book your appointment by visiting: www.nhs.uk.

Research has shown the vaccines:

- Significantly reduce your risk of getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19
- Reduce your risk of getting symptoms of COVID-19
- Will help reduce your risk of catching and spreading COVID-19

Limits on meeting others have recently been eased and you are now able to meet up to 30 people outdoors and six people from two households indoors. Cinemas, theatres, concert halls, bowling alleys, casinos, amusement arcades, museums and children's indoor play areas are now open with social distancing measures in place. Indoor hospitality venues such as restaurants, pubs, bars and cafés are also open again.

Funeral attendance is no longer limited to 30 people, but will be determined by how many people the COVID-secure venue can safely accommodate with social distancing.

Government guidelines change regularly, so make sure you keep visiting www.gov.uk to find out the latest advice.



The poster features a stylized silhouette of a person's head and shoulders, composed of a grid of small dots. The background is dark purple. In the top left corner, the HM Government logo is visible. In the top right corner, the NHS logo is present. A large yellow box on the left side contains the text "Join the millions already vaccinated" in bold black font. At the bottom left, it says "We'll let you know when your Covid-19 vaccine is ready for you." At the bottom right, it says "EVERY VACCINATION GIVES US HOPE" with the word "HOPE" in a larger, bold font.



The poster has a black background with a red, textured, splatter-like pattern. The word "SHARK" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters at the top. Below it, the date "12/04/2021" is written in white. Underneath the date, it says "A BRANCHING STORY BY PERCEPTION THEATRE" in white. At the bottom, it says "PROUDLY FUNDED BY ENGLAND'S ILLEGAL MONEY LENDING TEAM" in white.

SHARK: An Interactive Film About Loan Sharks

An interactive online film which highlights the dangers of loan sharks on social media has been launched by the England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT).

The new film called 'SHARK', is being rolled out to secondary schools, colleges and universities in England as part of a drive to educate young people about the risks associated with borrowing from loan sharks on social media.

The film has been funded from cash recovered from loan sharks under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA). SHARK follows Liam's story as he desperately tries to find money to pay back his friend who has taken out a phone contract for him. After confiding in a separate friend about his financial problems, Liam is introduced to a loan shark on Snapchat who is well-known for lending money to students.

The film puts viewers in the shoes of the main character, allowing them to make choices on his behalf and decide what happens next.

You can watch the film here: www.perceptiontheatre.com/shark.

If you need advice about your finances, please get in touch with Prima Group's Income Team.

Prima Group Named as One of the Top 10 Digital Housing Providers in the UK

We are proud to announce that we made the top 10 in Housing Digital's Top 30 Digital Housing Providers.

We are particularly proud of this achievement as we are the smallest housing association in the top 10. This shows, when we think big, we can make big things happen.

Over the past year, we've been using digital technology to ensure our tenants continue to receive quality services despite the difficult circumstances.

Since March 2020, our entire workforce has been home-based, but this hasn't stopped our digital transformation. So far, we've implemented:

- A new cloud-based, cost-efficient phone system
- A new finance system
- Virtual transactions
- Virtual sign-ups with Signable
- Video viewings
- Drone property inspections
- Video Neighbourhood Plans
- A new intranet site
- Virtual repair inspections using AR tool - XM Reality
- More ways to contact us than ever



Until recently, our contact with customers relied heavily on face-to-face and phone transactions. Whilst these are important ways to build relationships with customers, they add huge limitations on when and where our services can be provided. With additions such as a customer app, web forms with direct integration into our housing management system, web chat, social media and more, our services have become available 24/7 and are more accessible for those who find digital channels best.

We will continue to build on our digital channels and integrating more access points, looking at chatbots, digital engagement software and refreshing our website. We are keen to implement a fully digital customer journey for most customers, aligning all of our contact channels.

Join the Customer Voice

Our Customer Board has been up and running since December 2019. It has been a great way to put customer voices right at the heart of how we work. Since they began, they have suggested changes to all the policies we have recently implemented, played a key part in reviewing customer complaints and gave us a reality check on what it's like to live in a Prima Group home.

As part of a recent review, we've renamed our Customer Board; it's now become the Customer Voice, and we are on the lookout for new members. No experience is needed, but you must be a Prima Group tenant who is willing to share your views and have the ability to think about how certain decisions affect your neighbours and our other residents.

Joining the Customer Voice will give you a great opportunity to make sure customer experience is considered when important decisions are being made about the services we provide to you. In return for your time, we will provide you with a tablet or laptop for the role, look to support you with any necessary training you may need, and cover any expenses you incur by spending your time with us. We will also offer formal qualifications and other courses to improve your CV if you are keen to add to your skills.

Getting involved is all about meeting new people, learning new things and working with us to improve our services and your neighbourhoods. It doesn't always mean lots of meetings, paperwork or people talking at you. Whether you have a few minutes to spare every few months or you can give more of your time, we are currently working on lots of different ways you can get involved that work around you. **Head to www.primagroup.org/get-involved to find out more.**



Updated Policies & Procedures

All our customer facing policies are reviewed by the Group's Customer Board to receive a tenant sense-check before they go on to our main Board for approval.

Where a lot of changes are being made to a policy which is being reviewed, or where we are introducing a policy for the first time, we will invite you, our customers, to give us your feedback and opinions. You may have noticed on social media when we asked for feedback on our draft Allocations Policy and Mutual Exchange Policy. This is an opportunity for you to get involved in how Prima Group deliver services to you. We will let you know if there are certain elements that cannot be influenced, for example, because we need to do something to adhere with the law.

Over the last few months, the Customer Board has been very busy and has helped us review the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Aids and Adaptations Policy, Mobility Scooter Policy, Former Tenant Debt Recovery Policy, Charging Policy (Re-charges), Electrical Safety and Testing Policy, Customer Complaints Policy, Repairs and Maintenance Policy and the Mutual Exchange Policy.

All of our customer facing policies are available to view on our website.

Kickstart Your Career

The Kickstart Scheme is a new government-funded scheme offering young people the chance to get real jobs at great local companies.



These opportunities are for those aged 16-24 and claiming Universal Credit with no earnings. You'll work 25 hours a week for six months and be paid National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage.

So far, we've hired an Admin Assistant for our Neighbourhoods Team and have a few opportunities available in our Governance, Insight & Innovation and Income & Support Teams.

Head to www.primagroup.org/kickstart to find out more.

Customer Complaints Policy

It was recently agreed with our Customer Board to adopt best-practice and change our Complaints Policy to use the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint and to modify the timescales for how quickly an appeal to a complaint can be made. You can see our Complaints Policy and our self-assessment on our website here: www.primagroup.org/feedback-complaints.

We love to hear from our customers and if you feel like we have let you down and not got things quite right, please get in touch to let us know. Similarly, if you have any positive feedback, we would love to hear from you. Feedback from our tenants is what lets us know where we can improve our services and learn from our mistakes.

Neighbourhood Plans

We have been busy updating our Neighbourhood Plans so they include the latest information for all of the areas in which we have homes.

In the latest versions, we include details on:

- The local area
- Local facilities
- Community events and clubs
- Travel
- Our action plan for the area
- Local councillors
- Neighbourhood statistics
- Planned improvements
- Our staff members

Take a look for yourself by visiting:

www.primagroup.org/neighbourhood-plans



Charter for Social Housing Residents

Last November the Government published its 'Charter for Social Housing Residents', setting out what it will do to ensure that residents are safe, listened to, live in good quality homes and that things are put right when they go wrong.

The Charter has a strong focus on health and safety and customer involvement. It places more emphasis on tenant satisfaction, engagement and how we listen to our tenants, so our services meet your needs. To show that tenants at the heart of Prima Group, we need to ensure you:

- Are safe in your home
- Know how Prima Group is performing
- Have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- Are treated with respect.
- Have your voice heard by your landlord
- Have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
- Are supported to take your first step to ownership

Prima Group's first big step to putting residents at our heart was setting up our Customer Board, who have done a great job over the last 18 months, you can find out more about their achievements on our website.

We have three customer consultations planned over the coming weeks which we'd love your feedback on - customer service standards, engagement policy and service charges.

If you want to help us ensure customer voices are heard and that residents remain at the heart of what we do, please get in touch on 0151 452 0202. No experience is needed, we just need you to know what it's like to live in one of our homes and be willing to tell us where we get things right and wrong.

Housing the Homeless & Support During the Pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government was concerned about the safety of homeless people and introduced the “Everyone In” initiative; where anyone who was homeless was offered accommodation in hostels or hotels. Liverpool City Council wanted to provide a long-term solution to homelessness and were concerned as to what would happen when the initiative ended. LCC were able to bring together all the Housing Associations that have properties in Liverpool to offer suitable properties across the city to homeless people in temporary accommodation.

To date, over 750 families and single households have been rehoused through the scheme. We have taken part in the scheme and have been able to rehouse over 25 households so far. The scheme is running until September 2021. We have also been working with Wirral Council and Sefton Council, helping them to rehouse homeless people and we have rehoused six households to date.

2020/21 has been one of our most successful years in terms of tenancy support. Our Housing Team have generated over £92,000 worth of benefit backdates, DHP awards and furniture and grant awards, which all went back into sustaining tenancies. Some examples of how we have helped our customers are below:

- **Tenant One:** This tenant was recently divorced and was struggling financially. Staff identified that the tenant, who was working, was actually entitled to and missing the Housing Element in UC due to the decrease in household income. The tenant was advised what to do to get this additional element and now receives full HCE minus bed tax - totalling £337 pcm - a huge difference in the families income.
- **Tenant Two:** After discussing their financial difficulties, the tenant was advised by staff that they were actually entitled to Disability element added to their UC claim. Staff identified this by taking time to ask questions to ensure that they were receiving what they were entitled to. This resulted in a £1,322.44 backdated payment and rent entitlement has now been increased by £203 per month.

If you feel you could benefit from our support, please don't hesitate to get in touch and we will do everything we can to help.

Repairs & Appointment Texts

Customers have told us that they want more information on the progress of their repairs. With this in mind, we are now sending our customers text messages to confirm their repairs order has been raised. The text messages give you details of the repair reference, the contractor who has been asked to carry out the work and the target date for when the work should be completed. If you wish to receive these messages, please ensure you provide us with an up to date mobile number when reporting your repair.

In the near future, we will also be sending out text messages to confirm repair appointment dates, ensuring that we keep our customers updated during the repairs process.

Watch Out for Cold Callers

We have become increasingly aware that canvassers have been acting unscrupulously within our neighbourhoods and have led our tenants to believe that they are acting on behalf of Prima Group.

Who Are These People?

These canvassers represent claim handlers or solicitors. They aim to make money – usually up to £500 per referral (whether the claim is real or not). They may tell you that your home is in need of repair and encourage you to put in a claim against us. We want you to be aware of them, what happens if you claim and how it affects us.

Be Aware

They will tell you that you can claim on a ‘No Win - No Fee’ basis. However, if you decide in the future that you don't want to continue with a claim, there could be charges that you have to pay to exit the agreement.

Some tenants have been left with the costs of £1500 for building survey charges and credit agreement charges of over £500 for the “No Win -No Fee” scheme which covers the cost of the legal insurance that they will need to take out. Please be careful before you commit to any agreements with these canvassers; they could put you at financial risk.

How Disrepair Claims Affect Us

We are forced to spend thousands of pounds defending these claims. This is money that could and should be spent on improving our homes and our communities.

The people that benefit most from this legal action are the solicitors and not our tenants. Legal fees can easily amount to between £5,000 and £10,000.

Do You Need Repairs Completing?

Please tell us if you need us to complete a repair by downloading our Customer App, contacting us on the internet at www.primagroup.org/contact-us or by phoning 0151 452 0202.

Always Check for ID

We've recently received reports of someone trying to access a few of our properties claiming to be one of our contractors.

Please remember that our staff and contractors will always be carrying ID and if you are unsure, you can contact us on 0151 452 0202.



Ecogee Jobs for Prima Group Tenants

Ecogee are an Energy Solutions and Construction company based in Liverpool. Trading for nine years, they are looking to expand their ever-growing company. Ecogee are looking to employ local people from the communities they serve.



Ecogee are looking for, Multi-Skilled Workers, Trainee Tradespeople, Joiners and Plasterers. They offer full-time positions (8am to 4:30pm), a full company pension scheme and 25 days holiday entitlement plus bank holidays (3 days will be allocated for Christmas shutdown).

Any suitably qualified applicants from Prima Group households will be guaranteed an interview and will need to quote Prima Group in their application email. Applications are particularly welcome from women and people from BAME communities who are currently under-represented in the sector. If you require any further information or you want to apply, please contact sophie@ecogee.co.uk.

Clean-Up Days & Estate Walkabouts

We are now allowed to safely plan our regular clean-up days and estate walkabouts. These events have been really successful in the past, allowing us to identify issues in our local communities, litter pick and give tenants the chance to dispose of any unwanted bulky items that may have been sitting in their homes for a while.

We have clean-up days and estate walkabouts planned for Crosby, Wavertree, Vauxhall, Leasowe, Belle Vale, Toxteth, Bootle and Birkenhead.

The dates for each event are subject to change, so please keep checking our website to find out when we are in your area.

Visit the **Neighbourhood Plans & Walkabouts** section of our website to find out more (found in the Your Home menu).

www.primagroup.org

