

Sage at Home

FEBRUARY 2023 WINTER EDITION



Cut down
on your
energy
use this
winter



What Heart of Sage
has already done
Page 9

Keep your home damp and mould free

Some top tips to keep your
home safe and dry.

More on page 4

Money matters – Get financial support

Ways to get financial help if
you are struggling financially.

More on page 5

Answering your questions – fast

Our new live chat system has
now launched on our website.

More on page 7

Happy New Year from Lucian Smithers

Hello,

We take our responsibility for being England's leading provider of new affordable homes very seriously.

We have worked very closely with a large range of customers to understand how we can be a better landlord and how we can provide the support our customers need.



We have also increased our communications to our customers through newsletters like this and through our webinars, where we explain what we're doing, give our customers the chance to meet the team and answer your questions live. In these sessions we talked about how we have brought more people on the phones to answer your calls and introduced LiveChat trials on our website to give you more ways to get the answers you need. We'll look to hold more webinars this year, working more closely with you.

We're also keen to make sure that we can help our customers manage the pressures that are caused by inflation which is hurting everyone. Inside this newsletter you'll find information on how to reduce your other household costs,

check out our article on money matters (pages 5-6). You'll also find articles on our new antisocial behaviour mediation service (page 7), our Service Quality Managers' work (page 8) and our new Heart of Sage fund – sponsoring and giving grants for local projects in the community.

As we move into 2023, I'd like to reassure you that Sage Homes is very much here for you. We'll continue working on your behalf to reduce costs and improve services wherever we can.

Lucian Smithers
Chief Customer Officer



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COMPETITION WINNER!

Our winner from our Autumn newsletter was Tegan with this terrifyingly good drawing of Pennywise the Clown! Tegan wins a £25 voucher for their efforts.



What's cooking?

We'd love to share your recipes for delicious wintry dishes, tasty springtime snacks and more. Send your favourite recipe to us and we'll pick a winner to receive a £25 voucher!

Email your recipe to customercomms@sagehomes.co.uk – don't miss out!



Free wellbeing webinar

Stay tuned for details about a free wellbeing webinar for all our customers run by MyndUp. You'll access useful tips and tricks to maintain good mental health.

Cut down on your energy use this winter

We know this winter is difficult for many of you, with increasing worries and energy bills. Here's some top tips for reducing your energy bills through small changes:

- Try lowering your heating temperature – just one degree can save you up to £80 a year (and use a thermostat if you have one so it only comes on when needed)
- Only boil the water you need – it saves significant energy
- Prepare food in bulk – it cuts down energy use significantly and means you have meals ready made each day!
- Draw your curtains when it gets dark to keep heat in and keep your radiators clear of furniture so the heat circulates
- Energy-saving lightbulbs use 75% less energy and save you up to £80 per bulb
- Switch off any appliances you're not using (don't leave them on standby)
- Working from home? You can claim tax relief – check out gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees.



Keep your home damp and mould free

We want to make sure you stop any mould or damp growing in your home. Here's some top tips to keep your home safe and dry:

- Open your windows every now and then to let in some fresh air
- Turn your heating on for an hour or two in the morning and evening.
- Wipe away any condensation from windows and doors
- Keep internal doors open in your home to let air circulate
- Dry your clothes on a rack away from the radiator so the warmth moves around
- Keep extractor fans on when showering or cooking

If you have persistent damp and mould in your home, please be sure to report it immediately to enquiries@sagehomes.co.uk.



Protect your pipes

Stop any pipes freezing this winter by making sure your boiler has been serviced. You can also buy cheap pipe lagging from a DIY store and insulate the pipes in cold areas of your home.

Get financial support

With winter bringing cold weather and increased energy costs, it's been a challenging financial situation for many of us. Take a look at these ways to save money and get financial support.



New Cost of Living payments

UK households on means-tested benefits will receive an additional £900 Cost of Living payment, across several instalments in 2023-24.

Those on non-means-tested disability benefits will receive a £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment in 2023-24 to help with the extra costs they face.



Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund has reopened. This means you may be able to get help with essential costs (like food and energy bills) from your local council. For more information visit www.gov.uk/cost-living-local-council.

Warm Home Discount Scheme

You may be eligible for the Warm Home Discount, offering £150 off your energy bills. You don't need to apply for this and will be paid automatically by your energy supplier if so. You should have received a letter telling you if you're eligible by mid-January 2023 and the payment will be made by March 2023.

Cold Weather Payment

If you receive certain benefits, you'll receive an extra payment if the average temperature in your area is recorded at (or forecasted to be) zero degrees celsius or below for seven consecutive days. You'll get £25 for every seven day period of very cold weather between 1 November and 31 March.

Get cut-price broadband and phone services

If you claim Universal Credit, Pension Credit or other benefits, you may be applicable for Social Tariffs (low-cost packages for those on low incomes). You could save around £180 a year. **Find out more by visiting: [ofcom.org.uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk).**



Get help on your energy and water bills

Struggling with your energy and water bills? Contact your suppliers directly for details of how they can help you.

For energy bills, you can also contact AgilityEco (agilityeco.co.uk) for advice and support. For water bills, some companies have introduced cheaper tariffs for struggling customers, visit ccwater.org.uk for more information.

UK Power Networks is offering free support to vulnerable individuals, including signing them up to the Priority Service Register.

Visit ukpowernetworks.co.uk for more information.

Keep your money safe

We know it can be tempting to borrow money when times are tough. We recommend you avoid borrowing from Home Credit (someone offering money on your doorstep) or 'payday loans' (short term loans from online or at a high street shop). These will involve high interest rates that are tricky to pay back.

If you meet a loan shark (illegal money lenders charging very high interest rates), please don't use them but report them instead. They can seem friendly at first but can become violent and intimidating when collecting the debt.

Report them by emailing reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk or calling Stop Loan Sharks on 0300 555 2222.

Still need a loan?

Please talk to us before you borrow any money or if you want to discuss your financial wellbeing – just email enquiries@sagehomes.co.uk. You can also talk to Citizen's Advice (find your nearest one by visiting citizensadvice.org.uk). If you've spoken to us and still want to borrow money, Credit Union loans are a fair lender and usually less expensive than doorstep or payday loans.

Find out more information at abcuk.coop/about-us/about-abcuk.



Learn more online

Don't forget that our Barclays Digital Wings offers you free training on how to stay safe online and use social media effectively. We've partnered with Barclays to offer training courses for online, home and work all on one handy site. You'll learn how to protect yourself from scams, tips for budgeting and how to stay safe and secure online.

Our customer scrutiny panel tried it out with one member saying "I like the recommended courses offered [to customers]" while another said "I think it is a great idea".

Try it out today by visiting the learning zone on our website: sagehomes.co.uk – it only takes a minute to sign up!

Resolving neighbour issues together

No matter how carefully we live, sometimes we'll irritate our neighbours. We might be making too much noise or disturbing you while you try to relax. We could argue over parking.

At Sage Homes, we want you to chat to your neighbours, resolving issues in a friendly way. Most of the time just talking it through sorts out the problem as people aren't aware of their own behaviour's impact.

Starting that conversation can be stressful, and many of us might avoid having it for fear it will develop into a bigger row – even though this is rare. To help you, we've developed a new mediation service.

If you're experiencing nuisance from your neighbour and want help, we can offer you access to our mediation service. Trained mediators will:

- Give you tips on how to have a useful conversation
- Facilitate a conversation between you and your neighbour (either separately or together - your choice)
- Support you to have healthy conversations moving forwards.

Mediation is proven to be the single most effective way to resolve concerns. We all want to be a part of our community – talking with each other is the first step.

Want more information? Email us at communitysafety@sagehomes.co.uk.

Our new antisocial behaviour app



We're trialling a new app to help you report any antisocial behaviour. The app lets you send us photo, video or audio evidence in real time using your mobile, tablet or computer.

The antisocial behaviour (ASB) app will be provided free to customers who've opened an ASB case, helping them share evidence (like noise recordings) directly with the officer managing the case.

Any reports will be date-stamped and geo-tagged to within 15 feet, meaning the recordings can be used to take appropriate action quickly.

This removes the need for any diary sheets or handwritten records. We're trialling this ASB app for three months as part of our commitment to delivering excellent services to customers experiencing nuisance or ASB.

Answering your questions – fast

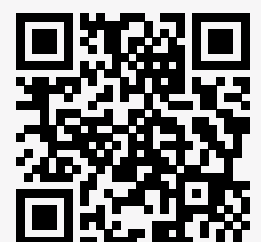
Our new live chat system has now launched on our website. This system blends automated responses and live advisors to answer your questions quickly.

Try it for yourself!

Scan the QR code below to go to our website and click 'help' at the bottom right. You'll be taken to a chat with an automated system that can answer many simpler questions immediately. If you're still not happy with your answer, you can then choose to speak to a real advisor who'll be able to help you in real time.

We've launched live chat because you told us you have difficulty getting through. Live chat means you don't have to call us and because it's the same people answering phones and live chat, you get access to the same knowledge and service.

We want to make it easier and quicker for you to contact us – letting you get on with the more important things, faster.



60 seconds with Rebecca: Service Quality Manager



We caught up with Rebecca Lobo, one of our Service Quality Managers (SQM) who visits our sites and works with customers and Sage Homes' partners.

'I'm one of eight SQMs working across England. I look after the northern most parts of our business from North Yorkshire right down to Warwickshire.

'Our job is what it says in the title. We check the quality of the services our customers get. This might be making sure the grass is cut and windows are washed – or it might be dealing with Health and Safety issues like unfinished roads.

'I visit each site regularly. I also visit if there are any complaints or issues. I talk to our partner organisations including Places for People and Optivo regularly to make sure everyone's happy.

'Sometimes things aren't in our control. For instance, a fallen tree was proving dangerous. It was on a site where we work with a managing agent. I spoke with the managing agent directly to send out a tree surgeon and help resolve the issue.

'We're the eyes and ears for health and safety. We're also trained in gas and electricity safety and safeguarding. Everything we do is about your comfort and safety.

'One piece of advice I'd give my customers? Treat the communal areas as your own. It makes the neighbourhood look nicer – and everyone benefits.'

Got any suggestions about how we can improve your neighbourhood? Let us know at: customercomms@sagehomes.co.uk

Making things better: our Customer Scrutiny Panel



Mark is a member of our Customer Scrutiny Panel, a group of Sage Homes customers from rented and Shared Ownership homes. They meet four times a year to help us make sure everything we do is customer-focused, feeding back on how they – as customers – feel.

"We bought a Shared Ownership house in September 2019. When the Customer Scrutiny Panel started, my wife saw an email looking for people to join. She said the role would be ideal for me – so I applied. For some years I've been doing voluntary work with Cancer Research UK, influencing politicians and lobbying MPs. I also spent time working in the Children and Young Persons' Insights Panel for Cancer UK, giving input on policies and leaflets.

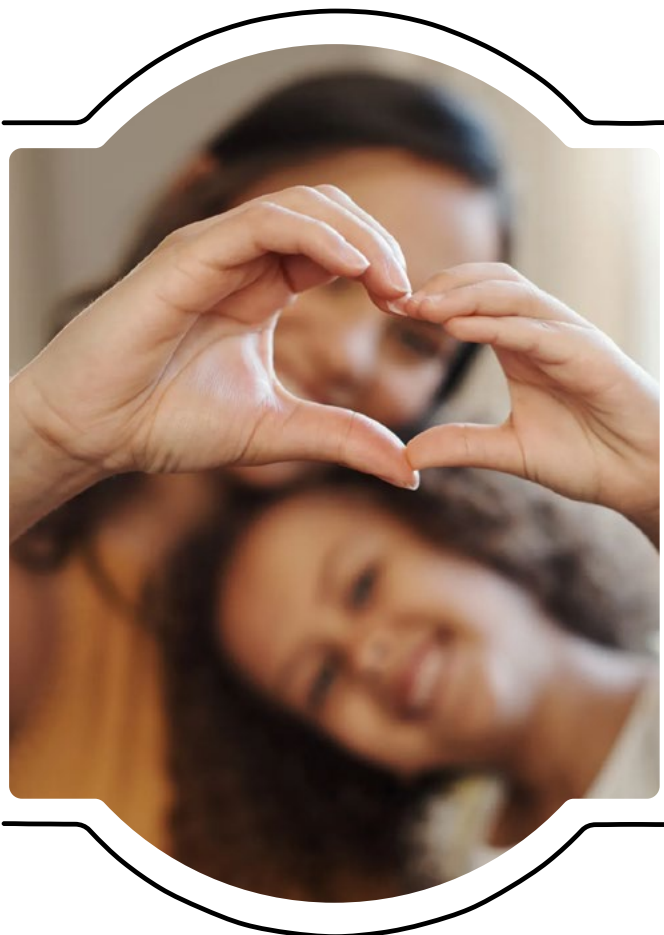
"Because Sage Homes are growing fast, they have the classic growing pains – things can seem quite disjointed. But Sage Homes are quite unique, they want to make things better. On the Customer Scrutiny Panel, we all work together – it's not finger-pointing, more 'how can we make things better.'

"We review policies, for instance we discussed the recent antisocial behaviour policy, looking

at it from a customer's perspective and checking that it reads well. We also looked at the complaints procedure – a big topic from last year was the customer surveys, how customers see Sage and what they're doing. It helped Sage understand a lot more, and we challenged their feedback, seeing where they could improve.

"We now have six Customer Scrutiny Panel members from all walks of life. We work together as a team, with Sage Homes to work on the customer's behalf and improve ways of working.

"As part of the Customer Scrutiny Panel, I feel that I'm part of an organisation that's growing rapidly. I find it rewarding that they listen to me – at the end of the day, I'm just a Sage Homes customer and they listen to me and try to help. We're a great team and because Sage is still a new organisation, we have an opportunity to shape things for the future. Ultimately I'm here to help Sage Homes engage better with their customers."



We want to help our communities with more than just affordable homes. Heart of Sage is our community benefit society, supporting projects, organisations and individuals to make a difference in their community.

Over the course of a year, we are able to sponsor individuals and give grants for projects which fuel real change in our communities.

Whether you have an idea about how to support health and wellbeing, education and skills or reduce carbon emissions, we want to hear from you!

Find out more by visiting sagehomes.co.uk and filling out our quick and easy application form!

Sage Homes colleagues walk 10k for Shelter



Sage Homes colleagues took part in a fundraiser for the homelessness charity Shelter. The Financial Wellbeing Team walked 10 kilometres on 7 December, starting from Sage Homes' headquarters in London.

Shelter fight homelessness and the money raised will help them continue campaigning to end rough sleeping, build more social homes and protect renters who raise discrimination and eviction. This is the first team fundraiser by the Financial Wellbeing Team and is part of Shelter's Walk for Homes initiative.

The team raised £1,000 in total, including support from Sage Homes.

What Heart of Sage has already done

We've sponsored a coffee van and provided mince pies at the recent Christmas fair in Upper Lighthorne.

We've helped fund workshops with Matipo Arts, giving children from low- or no- income families to take part in creative activities.

We've worked with partners to provide a £7,500 grant of Doncaster Plant Works boxing club.

.....
How could we help you and your communities?
.....



Stay safe this winter

Our health and safety team have shared some top tips to stay safe in these chilly days! Follow this guidance to stay safe while having fun with friends and family.

Drive safely

Be prepared for any unexpected weather (which can mean icy roads). Give yourself breathing space to complete your journey in time comfortably.

Reduce any slip risks

If there's ice or snow on your walkways, make sure they're gritted and salted so people don't slip or trip. You can also put doormats inside your home to remove any ice from your shoes.

Keep your valuables safe

Don't let thieves steal your prized possessions! Move valuables (like expensive TVs or computers) away from your windows so they can't be seen from the outside. You can also close your blinds for privacy.

Get home safe

If you're out late, stick together with friends at the end of the night and check any taxi has a license plate and registration before you get into it.

Stay warm

Check that your boiler has been serviced recently and any needed maintenance is carried out – you don't want to be without hot water in the winter!

Be careful with candles

Candles can easily cause house-fires so be cautious if lighting them. Put them on a heat-resistant surface and keep them away from curtains, shelves, children and pets. Make sure to blow them out before leaving a room and double check they're fully out.





Meet our 10,000th customer!

The McKenzie family are Sage Homes' 10,000th customer, having moved in to their new affordable home in Chichester, West Sussex.

Peter, his wife Joanne and their sons Riley and Swaylee have rented in the private sector for 16 years before moving into their new home, giving their sons their own bedrooms for the first time. They've previously received two no-fault evictions from private landlords and they're delighted to no longer have the uncertainty of renting someone else's home.

Peter, 43, a self-employed landscape gardener who volunteers with a local food bank and church, said: "This means the absolute world to us, and it especially gives security for our youngest boy and his autism because moving home is a big thing for him.

"A month ago, if you had given Joanne a blank piece of paper to explain her dream home, this is what she would have said."

This is a significant milestone for Sage Homes, as we are on our journey to deliver 30,000 affordable homes in the next eight years.

Joanne said: "I couldn't be more grateful for what we have now. Living in other people's homes, you don't want that phone call to say 'we're selling' – we have had five different homes in the last 15 years. I feel like I'm floating and I keep pinching myself and I can't believe it; it's beautiful and we love it."



'Sage Homes are the largest provider of new affordable homes in England, for the second year running'



Accessibility

Sage Homes is committed to making our communications accessible to everyone to ensure a universally accessible and enjoyable experience.

If you prefer communications from us in a different format like accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or raille, please contact our customer service centre by:



emailing: enquiries@sagehomes.co.uk



submitting a general query online:
sagehomes.co.uk/contactus



calling: **020 8168 0500**

January

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

- 1 New Year's Day
2 'New Year's Day' observed

February

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27	28					

March

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27	28	29	30	31		

26 Daylight Saving Time (clocks forward)

May

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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- 1 Early May Bank Holiday
8 Bank Holiday for the Coronation of King Charles III
29 Spring Bank Holiday

June

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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
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26	27	28	29	30		

July

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31						

September

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October

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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

November

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13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

29 Daylight Saving Time Ends (clocks back)



Want to chat?

Scan the QR code to go to our website and click 'help' to use our LiveChat



Fix issues fast

Scan the QR code to get u household tips including w if you find mould or damp

2023 Calendar

April

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

7 Good Friday
9 Easter Sunday
10 Easter Monday

August

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

28 Summer Bank Holiday

December

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

25 Christmas Day
26 Boxing Day

Notes

Useful
what to do
at home



Everything in one place

Scan the QR code to go to our Customer Hub where you'll find advice, useful documents and learning opportunities.

