

# Housing provider goes digital with first international viewing

A couple secured a dream move to a new home in Edinburgh after carrying out an innovative property viewing over WhatsApp – from South Africa.

Staff at leading housing provider Bield ensured distance and technology would not be a barrier after they received the request from the couple to view the property at Halmyre Street in Edinburgh – from their current home 8000 miles away.

Realising that it would be impossible to conduct a viewing in person, Bield proposed using WhatsApp to show images and video of the exterior and interior of the flat.

It was the first time Bield has successfully let a property using WhatsApp, underlining its new drive to enhance the role digital technology can play in helping to improve its service to older people.

Scott Robertson, Bield Housing Officer for the East, said: “Social media is such a big part of all of our lives, it didn’t really surprise us that it’s becoming the preferred method of communication when people are looking to rent or buy properties – especially if you’re living on the other side of the world.

“This WhatsApp viewing came about after I’d made contact with one of the applicants on our housing list for vacant

properties – and found out they were living in South Africa.

“Usually in these situations a friend or family member would come around to view the property, but we couldn’t find a time that suited everyone.

“The digital viewing worked out brilliantly. I was able to show them a perfect 360 view of the flat and I could answer their questions easily and almost as I would do in person.

“After the viewing the applicants agreed to accept the tenancy, so we sent the tenancy agreement to them by email. I arranged to meet them at the property when they arrived in the country to hand over the keys – it was great to meet them in person and they were thrilled the property was exactly as they’d expected.”

Halmyre Street is an Amenity Housing development in Edinburgh for people aged 60 and over who wish to retain their independence but want to leave the worries of repairs to someone else.

Scott added: “By being able to offer digital viewing services, Bield is able to show applicants properties no matter their location, be it local applicants with mobility issues to those in different parts of the UK or overseas.”

Bield has put a strong focus on making innovation a key driver as part of its business transformation and its future direction.

Val Hunter, Director of Business Development, said: “It’s our mission to keep adapting and changing in order to deliver the best possible housing and services to meet the needs of Scotland’s ageing population.

“The WhatsApp flat viewing was a forward-thinking way of letting a potential customer view the property from the comfort of their own home and in a way that is convenient for

them.

“Bield are committed to digital transformation and have implemented various measures to carry this out, from signing up to the TEC in housing charter to pledging to get the right infrastructure and engaging with customers to understand exactly what they want.

“We’re always looking to provide more features like the WhatsApp viewing, as people are at the heart of everything we do. Whether it’s our customers or the staff and volunteers who keep us moving forward, we want to ensure our technology reflects their needs.”

Digital services are also being incorporated throughout the organisation in other ways. Bield, in partnership with the Scottish Government, is currently working to switch their telecare service from analogue to digital ahead of BT’s plans to switch off their analogue telephone network across the UK by 2025.