

Highland Tenant UPDATE



MAY 2008

New Man at the Top

Fear Ùr aig an Stiùir

In this issue of Highland Tenant Update we'd like to introduce you to Steve Barron, the new Director of Housing and Property. Married with three sons, Mr Barron went to school in Inverness and has spent most of his working life in the Highlands.

He has a background of working in property management in public sector organisations and private businesses. He will be managing 540 housing and property staff delivering a service to households across Highland - including almost 14,000 council tenancies. Mr Barron told us:

"I am delighted to be joining The Highland Council. My early priorities include making sure we re-let our houses quicker and putting in place an improvement plan so that all tenants live in housing which meets high quality standards and are energy efficient."

There are also articles covering many different housing issues - from safety advice to telling you about new housing opportunities and services.

If there's anything you'd like to see included in future newsletters - or if you'd like to give us feedback - please tell us by phoning 01463 702000, handing your comments into your local Housing Office or Service Point or emailing us at: housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk



Improving and Maintaining your Houses A' Leasachadh is A' Cumail Suas Thaighean

We've put in place Highland's 'Standard Delivery Plan'. It sets out a programme of improvements for the next 7 years (to 2015) which aims to make sure that Highland's Council houses meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). Meeting this standard involves making sure that our houses are energy efficient, are free from serious disrepair, have modern features, and are safe.

This year (in 2008/09) we're planning to spend about £12 million doing council house improvements across Highland. These include installing over 1,000 new heating systems; providing nearly 900 houses with new windows and doors; fitting over 400 new kitchens and around 150 new bathrooms, and re-wiring over 360 houses. We will also be spending money on adaptations for our tenants who have disabilities or are elderly. If your house is included in any of these improvement contracts, you'll receive a letter telling you more about what to expect.

Chimney Cows & Caps Cinn Shimilearan

We know that some tenants have problems with birds nesting in chimneys but you should never fit any kind of covering to your chimney yourself – always contact the Council who will do it for you. This is important for all types of heating but particularly if you have a gas central heating system or gas fire - there are only certain types of chimney cowl or cap that are safe. **If the wrong covering is used, dangerous fumes might get trapped in your house.**

Making a Difference in their Community

A' Dèanamh Feum Sa Choimhearsnachd

Dalneigh Residents Association (DRA) have recently successfully raised several thousand pounds in funding which will benefit local residents.

Young people in particular have benefited with a successful fund raising event which raised over £1300 for the Soccer 7's and the Street League Football Team. The Teams now have their own team strips with the kind help and support of local benefactors. Inverness Area Sports Council and Coaching Highland, through the help of Alan Hoseason, paid for funding for coaching skills. Funding has also helped all the volunteers to become qualified in Coaching.

The DRA has also been given funding to open a new youth café. This will be held at the James Cameron Community Centre several times a week.

It's not only the young ones who can enjoy activities at the James Cameron Community Centre - DRA hold prize bingo there every second Friday of the month. You can get a tea or coffee at the interval. Children are also welcome. Once a month they hold whist sessions there. They even provide transport to help you get there and back.

There's more happening too – they've proposals for a new community garden, new community notice boards, a bus shelter for Bruce Gardens, and a summer carnival in August.

With so much going on Dalneigh Residents Association are looking for more volunteers to help bring changes to the Dalneigh area. If you feel you've the time to help make a difference, please get in touch with Tracey MacPherson at the James Cameron Community Centre – call her on 01463 718773. Tracey can also tell you more about the activities at the Community Centre.

Dalneigh Residents Association works closely with the Highland Council and the Community Warden Peter Taylor. If you have a housing problem, or any other issue in your neighbourhood, please contact him on 01463 718848.

Fancy Buying a House of Your Own?

Airson Taigh A Cheannach?

There's a new way to help council tenants who can't pay the full price for a house to become home-owners. It's called Open Market Shared Equity. It can help you buy a house, on the open market, in partnership with a housing association (HA). You own the majority share of the property and the housing association uses a Scottish Government grant to pay for the rest. For example, if you can afford a 75% share of a house or flat, the housing association pays for the remaining 25%. When you sell your house, you receive your share of the property's new value. You don't pay any rent. There are price limits set on what you can pay for a property depending on its size and where it is. For example the

price limit for a 2 bedroom house in the East Ross, Inverness and Nairn area is £100,700. Because this grant is aimed at people on low or modest incomes, you need to fill in a form to see if you qualify.

Rachael Ward in Albyn Housing Society - who runs the Highland's scheme told us: "This scheme has been running successfully in Edinburgh for a few years and is now being rolled out to other areas where there's a shortage of housing. It's mainly aimed at tenants but is also available for other first time buyers or households whose needs have changed. If people want information or help with the process of applying, they should contact me."

If you're interested, call Albyn HS on **01349 855991**. There's more information on the leaflet which came with this newsletter. You can get a booklet from www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/lift or ask at your local housing office or service point for them to download it for you.

Hot Water & Immersion Heaters

Uisge Teth & Teasachain uisge

Important Safety Information

If you have any concerns about your hot water system, here are some simple ways to find out if there's a problem.

For example if:

- * there is an unexpected rise in the temperature of your hot water or;
- * there is warm or hot water coming out of your cold taps; or
- * you hear any unusual noises from your heating system including banging or bubbling.

If you experience any of these problems, you should **immediately:**

- * **turn off the immersion heater** using the switch which is located near the hot water cylinder (e.g. in the airing cupboard);
- * **dampen down the fire, if you have a solid fuel fire with a back boiler; and**
- * **report the fault to the Council.**

During normal working hours, phone your local Service Point or Housing Office. You will find the telephone numbers in your Repairs Book or in the telephone directory. When the office is closed (Between 5pm and 9am call 0845 7002005

Helping You Keep Warm for Less Money

A' Cumail Blàth Gun Uiread A Chosg

As energy prices rapidly rise, many households are spending more of their income on trying to keep warm.

Some fuel companies offer special packages for priority customers - one such package is called **energyplus care**. It is available to Scottish Hydro Electric customers who are worried about being cold because of acute poor housing, health and income. They will check whether you are eligible by asking you a few simple questions over the phone.

To qualify for **energyplus care** you must:

- * be an existing Scottish Hydro Electric customer (as many council tenants are); and
- * spend 10% or more of your total household income on energy bills.

energyplus care offers eligible customers

- * up to 20% discount on their current fuel price;
- * free benefit entitlement check; and
- * energy efficient light bulbs.



To find out more, contact Scottish Hydro Electric Careline on **Freephone 0800 622 838**.

Other fuel suppliers also offer similar schemes – get in touch with them to find out more or call one of the energy advice officers at Highland Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (HEEAC) on **Freephone 0800 512 012**

Some No Cost Measures - Hints and Tips

Chosgais – Comhairle & Taic

There are other energy saving measures that you can take which can help to reduce your fuel bills as well as save the environment. These cost nothing but do involve changing the way you do things. This isn't as easy as it sounds and needs people to make a conscious effort to change so it becomes a habit. You may not save much energy by doing just one thing, but if you do lots of these the savings can mount up.

- * When making a cup of tea, boil only the amount of water you need.
- * When cooking, put the lids on pans whenever possible.
- * Don't leave lights on when there's no-one in the room.
- * Defrost your fridge and freezer at least every 3 months.
- * Hang heavy lined curtains in winter - they help stop draughts and will keep warmth in the room.
- * Avoid putting your furniture in front of radiators.
- * Turn your room thermostat down - 1c could save up to 10% on your heating bill.
- * Turn the television off at the set, not with the remote control – don't leave it on 'standby' (still showing the little red light).

Nearly half of Scottish households leave more than 5 electrical appliances on standby mode. Each time an appliance is needlessly left on standby is a waste of energy and money.

You can get more advice for free from our Highland Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (HEEAC). Call them on **Freephone 0800 512 012** for things like:

- * Getting money off your fuel bill if you are in 'fuel poverty'.
- * How to select fuel suppliers, switching to the best payment method and making sure that you're on the right tariff.
- * Using your heating system in a way that costs you less money to run.

If you've got a computer you can also get information from the Council's website at: www.highland.gov.uk/energy-advice

The WASP Local Energy Savings Project Pròiseact Ionadail Caomhnadh Lùth WASP

Last winter, The West Alness SAVE (Save And Value Energy) Project was launched. It aims to help West Alness residents to save energy and reduce their fuel bills. The local residents groups decided to do this by employing an energy advisor, Brid Mckibben using money that they had successfully applied for.



Brid has already visited 50 houses and told us: “Most folk ask for advice on using their central heating timer controls. Others want to learn about their storage heater controls. Some folk have them on constantly and some not enough. It is important they are used correctly to keep costs down. Heating manuals can be very confusing and sometimes they get lost. Often folk don’t have the time to sit down to work out how to use their controls but once they are shown, they find them much easier to use.”

Already, Brid has been able to reduce the amount of time boilers are running unnecessarily by 50 hours per day. That translates to a massive reduction of 7½ days of boiler time per house over the winter months. This also means cheaper fuel bills.

Brid is also able to look round your house with a fresh pair of eyes to see where you might be losing energy and spending more money on fuel than you need. As she says: “Sometimes it’s the little things that can make all the difference.”

We hope these visits can be extended to the whole of Alness and eventually to everywhere in Highland. But that depends on getting the number of West Alness visits up to 200 before October. If you live in West Alness and are interested in Brid’s advice, she is based in the West End Community Centre, Firhill, Alness and can be contacted at **07920 437526** or **brid@westalnesssave.org.uk**. You can read WASP’s first newsletter by visiting: **www.westendcommunitycentre.org.uk** or getting one from Brid.

If you don’t live in West Alness but want to know how to use your heating controls better, call the Highland Energy Efficiency Action Centre (HEEAC) who can also give you advice for free. Call them on **Freephone 0800 512 012**.



Do You Have Gas?

A Bheil Gas Agad?

Stay in for your gas service or repairs!

If you have gas in your house, every year you get a letter from our gas servicing contractor telling you when he will visit you to check it. It is important, for your safety, that the gas engineer is able to get into your house when he visits. If you can’t be in, call the gas servicing contractor and re-arrange the appointment for a time that suits you. If repairs are needed, the gas engineer might need to order spare parts and call back another day - he’ll let you know when this is. Please make sure that he can get in to finish the repair.

PARTICIPATE - Take Part - PARTICIPATE - Be Involved - PARTICIPATE - Influence SIUTHAD - Gabh pàirt - SIUTHAD - Theirig an sàs - SIUTHAD - Thoir buaidh

We had a positive response following the last edition of Tenant Update in October 2007 in which you were invited to register your interest if you wanted to be kept directly informed with progress on the review of the Tenant Participation Strategy.

The message is very clear that some folk who prefer not to take part in groups and committees, do like to be a little bit more up to date and involved beyond what they read in the press! A more detailed update of progress with this important strategy, which looks at how we can get better at including you in Housing & Property service delivery, has been sent to everyone who registered an interest in taking part in this way.

Meantime more generally, we want to update that the Strategy Review Group – which consists of representatives from the Tenant Consultative Group – has met on 3 occasions since the last Highland Tenant Update, and has been busy working on proposals for a framework to make ‘tenant participation’ or ‘getting involved and represented’ simpler and more effective.

In particular, the Review Group has been developing a new structure which aims to help both collective and individual tenant participation. They wanted a framework which would take account of the contribution of representatives from Registered Tenant Organisations on the one hand, but equally could recognise that many people prefer to take part in a more individual and personal way.

The Review Group’s outline proposals will be considered by the Housing & Social Work Committee in late May 2008 following which there will be a consultation exercise where those with a registered interest will be invited to share views and opinions on the proposals, as well as indicate whether and in what way they would like to become more or better involved in the delivery, planning and design of Housing & Property Services.

If you would like to be kept informed, and have not already previously registered an interest in taking part in this way, please let us know by returning the tear off slip below (no stamp required).

Otherwise look out for a further general update in the next edition of Highland Tenant Update. If you would like further information about Tenant Participation in your area, or in general, please contact:

- * Carol Elliot – Tenant Participation Officer **01349 877408**
carol.elliott@highland.gov.uk
- * Phill McCormack – Tenant Participation Officer **01463 72456126**
phill.mccormack@highland.gov.uk
- * Lyn Kilpatrick – Housing Policy Officer **01463 702863**
lyn.kilpatrick@highland.gov.uk

**Please keep me informed of progress with the
Tenant Participation Strategy Review**

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Email address.....

RETURN TO: Tenant Participation, Housing & Property Service,
The Highland Council, FREEPOST SCO2032, Inverness



If you're worried about paying your rent, or if you are already behind with payments - we may be able to help.

If you are finding it difficult to pay because you are on a low income, have you checked what benefits you may be entitled to? For example, you may be able to get Housing Benefit and /or Council Tax Benefit. Nearly two-thirds of Highland Council tenants get Housing Benefit.

You can get more advice and information about these benefits from your local Housing Office or Service Point. If you need forms in large print, just ask. They can also help you fill in the forms and tell you what documents you need to include with your form.

You can get free help and advice on debt or benefit issues from the Council's Money Advice / Income Maximisation Service. They can be reached on: **01463 702391**
or by e-mailing
Money.advice@highland.gov.uk

Local advice agencies, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx), can also help. They have welfare rights staff who can check to make sure that you are receiving all the benefits income due to you (such as family tax credit, pension credits etc.). They can even tell you about help with costs associated with school.

Look for the address or contact details of your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) or advice agency in the Yellow Pages. You can also call their Advice Line on 08444 994111. Alternately use the website www.citizensadvice.org.uk to find your local CAB office.

If you want to use the website listed above but do not have a computer in your home, remember that you can get access to a computer in your local library. Ask the staff in the library about how you can do this.

Remember, you're better off finding out!

New Supply Shared Equity Taighean Ùra is Seilbh Roinnte

Buying a new house at a price you can afford.

Newly built low cost houses are available for households on modest incomes to buy through the LIFT 'New Supply Shared Equity Scheme'. Previously known as 'Homestake', it works in a similar way to Open market shared equity. We included information about it in the last Highland Council Newsletter. This table shows where new LIFT houses are being built. These will be available to buy over the next 14 months. For more information about applying to buy these houses, contact the housing association in your area. Look out for the open days when you can see for yourself, the high quality of housing they're building. These schemes are grant funded by the Scottish Government as part of 'LIFT' (Low-cost Initiative for First-Time Buyers).



HHR Application Forms Foirmean Tagraidh HHR

Have You Returned Your New Housing Application Form?
Make sure you're on Highland's Housing Register.

The Highland Housing Register (HHR) is now up and running and we, and the other landlords, are allocating houses from it. This Register will make it easier for you to apply for housing. You'll only need to fill in 1 application form to be on a single list for housing from not only The Highland Council, but also the 5 housing associations operating in the Highlands - Albyn; Cairn; Lochaber; Lochalsh & Skye; and Pentland.

If you were sent a new application form and haven't returned it yet – do it quick if you still want to be re-housed. Just post it or drop it into your local Housing Office or Council Service point. If you don't, you'll no longer be on the housing list. This means that you won't be considered for any houses which become available.

Carolyn Thain, the HHR Development Officer told us "Although we've had adverts on local radio and in local newspapers, some people still haven't returned their Highland Housing Register application forms. If they send their forms in we can work out how many points they have and add them to the housing list."

If you didn't get a new application form or can't find it; contact your local Housing Office or Council Service Point right away. If you need help filling in the form, just ask.

New Shared Equity houses will be available for tenants and others to buy, over the next 14 months, in these locations.

Location	No. Being Built	Location	No. Being Built
WICK	2	THURSO	4
DORNOCH	6	EVANTON	4
GRANTOWN ON SPEY	4	AVIEMORE	8
POOLEWE	8	MUIR OF ORD	6
AULDEARN	9	NAIRN	10
BROADFORD	12	PORTREE	26
MUIR OF ORD	3	DINGWALL	12
INVERGORDON	10	ALNESS	4
NETHYBRIDGE	4	CONON BRIDGE	7
KILTARLITY	8	INVERGORDON	8
STRATHPEFFER	10	TAIN	15
BRORA	4	INVERNESS	117



Photograph © Ken Bebbington

Are you having difficulties coping with your home? A bheil duilgheadas agad le do thaigh?

Sometimes people may need a little help with every day activities at home. This is known as housing support. Its aims to help people to live independently in their own home.

It can include things like:

- Help with budgeting and paying bills.
- Planning meals, shopping and learning how to do these things by yourself.
- Help with housework (if you're unable to do it yourself).
- Emotional support and learning how to keep safe and secure.

You may want housing support if you:

- Have a physical disability.
- Are a young person in your first tenancy.
- Are a young single parent.
- Have a mental health issue.
- Are moving into a tenancy after being homeless.
- Or are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Have a learning disability.



Support is usually provided by a support worker, who will visit you in your home. It doesn't matter where you live or the type of housing you live in. The amount of support you get depends on how much you need. Some people only need a couple of short visits each week until they can cope themselves, while others will need to see someone every day and have access to an on-call service.

If you think that you would benefit from housing support you should contact the Supporting People Officer through your local Housing Office or Service Point. They will speak to you about your needs. You can also ask your GP or social worker.

Insurance Arachas

The Highland Council Home Contents Insurance Scheme - now with optional Accidental Damage Cover!

What would you do if you arrived home after a night out or a trip away to find out that someone had broken into your home? Your belongings are not automatically insured by Highland Council against theft or other incidents - so, if you haven't thought properly about insurance cover, you could be in for a shock!

If you are a Highland Council tenant, it is easy for you to protect your belongings – you can arrange your insurance at a special, low cost rate, and pay the premium along with your rent. This could cost you as little as 46p per week if you are over 60, or 69p a week for everyone else.

This will cover items such as your furniture, TV, clothing, carpets, electrical items and general household goods and also covers the replacement cost of external locks if your keys are stolen, and the contents of your freezer.

From April 2008, we are also pleased to announce that we can now offer tenants an optional accidental damage cover (you have to pay the first £50 of any claim) – this can cost from as little as 21p more a week.

To apply, contact your local Service Point or telephone the Council on 01463 702417 for an application form and information leaflet. If you need help with completing the application form, officers will be pleased to help.

Once you have applied, you will be sent a welcome letter. This will tell you how much you need to pay and the date of your first payment.

For peace of mind at an affordable cost, apply today!

Competition - WIN £25 of Vouchers!

There are eight differences in the two pictures shown. Some are easier than others to spot! Can you identify them all? If so, mark them up clearly on **Picture A**, cut out around the dotted line and return to Caroline Skinner, Insurance Section, Highland Council HQ, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX before **30th June 2008**. You could be the lucky winner of the vouchers. The winner will be the first correct entry drawn.

Picture A



Picture B



Name: Telephone number:

Address:

I would like more information about the special home contents insurance scheme (please tick one)

YES NO

The Highland Council competition rules apply.

A copy of these rules is available from Caroline Skinner at the address above or telephone 01463 702448.

The Highland Council tenants insurance scheme is provided by Jardine Lloyd Thompson Tenant Risks. A division of Jardine Lloyd Thompson UK Limited. Lloyd's Broker. Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Services Authority. A member of the Jardine Lloyd Thompson Group. Registered office: 6 Crutched Friars, LONDON, EC3N 2PH. Registered in England No 00338645. VAT No. 244 2321 96.