

Highland Tenant UPDATE



SUMMER 2009

Introduction

Ro-ràdh

Welcome to our summer newsletter. In this edition we focus on our Highland Tenant and Residents' Associations who are busy in their communities with a wide range of interesting activities. We also want to keep you better informed about our services, and provide anyone who is interested with opportunities to become more involved.

The Highland Council has been urging the UK Government to stimulate the housing and construction industry in the Highlands during the economic downturn by releasing much-needed funds. The Council has a stock of 14,000 houses and is currently spending £15 million each year on loan charges to service its housing debt. This debt is the equivalent to 37p for every £1 of rent paid by tenants.

The Council believes that if the Government at Westminster eased this burden the Council could not only accelerate its programme of council house improvements to meet national standards, but resume council house building. This would create significant employment and help the construction industry at a time of recession. I welcomed the chance to meet and put our case directly to the Government and hope that our recent track record in providing affordable housing will convince the Minister that we can hit the ground running if we were given extra investment.



Margaret Davidson

Chair, The Highland Council's
Housing and Social Work Committee

Reduce, Re-use, Recycle

Lùghdaich, Ath-chleachd, Ath-chuartaich

For tips on how to Reduce, Re-use, or Recycle your waste check out the Council's website or take a look at the Freecycle site at www.freecycle.org

Remember too that **Newstart Highland** might be interested in your old furniture or in helping with house clearances. You can contact them on: **01463 782787**



Are you missing out?

A bheil thu a' call càil?

A NEW CONFIDENTIAL BENEFITS SERVICE COULD HELP

Did you know far more money goes unclaimed than is ever falsely claimed? The elderly in particular tend not to get the benefits they are entitled to. Forms can be confusing and some people worry that claiming might lead to a reduction in the benefits they already get. The Highland Council's Income Maximisation Team is on hand to provide **CONFIDENTIAL** advice.

Please call the **Income Maximisation Team on 01463 702931** to find out more about this free, no obligation and confidential service and to find out more about:

- Winter payments.
- Council tax benefits.
- Help with housing costs.
- Help with all benefit claims.
- Making sure pensioners and other vulnerable groups are getting all the benefits they are entitled to.
- Information about how council tenants can access special rates on home contents insurance.

Help with energy monitoring

Cuideachadh le cumail sùil air lùtha

A recent report by the Energy Saving Trust identified that 52% of households in Scotland have more than 5 appliances on standby mode. Each time an appliance is left on standby, it wastes energy and your money. Computers and equipment attached to them are some of the most common items that are left on standby.

If you would like to save some money we have 350 **PowerDowns** to give away that were donated by the fuel supplier E.ON. You can plug your desk top computer and equipment like printers into the **PowerDown** device and when the computer is turned off, all the other equipment is turned off automatically. The **PowerDowns** will be distributed on a first come first served basis so if you would like one, e-mail your details to energy-advice@highland.gov.uk or telephone **01463 703507** by 30 June 2009.

For more energy efficiency information and advice about how you can maximise your income and reduce your fuel bills contact the **Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre on 0800 512 012**

Changes to bulky uplift service

Atharrachaidhean don t-seirbheis airson togail trom

From 1 April 2009 the Council has introduced an important change to the bulky uplift service. There will be a flat charge of **£15** for the collection of up to three items during a single visit (e.g. sofa and two chairs), and **£30** for the collection of four to a maximum of six items during a single visit.

To request a collection, which must be pre-paid, either telephone the Council on **01349 886603** for payment by credit or debit card or visit your local Service Point for payments by cash or cheque. If you are unable to visit your local Service Point, or pay over the phone by credit/debit card, you can ask for an application form to be sent to you, or download one from the Council's website. You'll be advised of a collection day and every effort will be made to complete your request on that day.



Council budgets to improve Council houses

Buidseatan Comhairle gus taighean Comhairle a leasachadh

The Highland Council has identified the need to spend £88 million over the next six years to bring its houses up to Scottish Housing Quality standard by carrying out upgrading work including new kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors and energy efficient measures.

The Housing and Social Work Committee has agreed to increase the total it will spend on upgrading houses to £13 million in 2009/10. Of this, £5.5 million will be spent on heating and £2.5 million on new kitchens and bathrooms.

2010 - 2015

Developing Highland's Housing Strategy

A' Leasachadh Ro-innleachd Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd

This year, we're developing a new Housing Strategy for the Highlands. Our plan aims to tackle the wide range of housing issues people face, such as:

- How we will provide more affordable housing and where it will be built.
- Making sure your house meets quality standards.
- What we will do to make sure that people can afford to heat their homes - and are not living in 'fuel poverty'.
- How we will help people who have community care needs.
- How we will support owners to repair their homes.
- What we will do so that all renters (including private renters), can be sure that they are getting a quality management service.

Because there are limited resources to tackle all the issues, we need to set priorities. We think the most important issue is finding ways to meet housing need in the communities with the most pressure on them. Although 1,079 new housing association rented houses and 474 low cost home ownership houses were built during the last 5 years, there is still a large shortage.

Our Housing Strategy covers issues which affect people who rent, own or who don't have a home. We need to consult widely and take account of the views of many different people. Over the summer we will be asking communities for their views on housing.

As we have 20 registered tenant organisations and around 150 registered interested tenants, we feel that the best way to consult on issues for the Housing Strategy is through them. If you'd like to be more involved you can become part of the register of interested tenants or your local tenants group.

If you have access to the internet, you can see a copy of the current Housing Strategy, and the summary, on the Council's website at www.highland.gov.uk otherwise please ask at any housing office. Please remember that everyone in Highland can get free access to the internet through their local library.

Tenant participation – taking part in Housing Services

Com-pàirteachas luchd-gabhail – a' gabhail com-pàirt ann an Seirbheisean Taigheadais

Since the last newsletter Highland's 20 Registered Tenant's Organisations, and 150 individual tenants who have registered an interest in taking a more active part in the review of housing service policies have been consulted on the revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan for 2009 – 2012.

Tenants widely supported the idea of encouraging less well represented groups to become more involved, in particular, how young tenants and tenants of sheltered housing can have a more active part in the delivery and development of services.

You also want to see a revised Tenant Handbook for new council tenants on the dos and don'ts of managing a tenancy, and work is underway on this.

Those consulted also thought it would be helpful if comprehensive feedback on consultation was provided to tenants who took their time to give their views. A feedback note has been circulated to tenant's groups and individual registered interested tenants.

If you would like to be more involved, but don't want or aren't able to take part in a local group, you can register to let us know you would like to be more involved in consultations or focus groups. To do this, phone us on **01463 702863** or complete the contact form on the Housing pages of the Highland Council web-site www.highland.gov.uk

Saving the day A' sàbhaladh an Là

Residents of the Plantation area of Fort William enjoyed warm soup and money-saving advice at a community money saving event held in January.

The fun day was organised by the Plantation Community Association in response to a local survey which highlighted concerns about heating bills.



Plantation Community Association (PCA) Chair person Mary Carol Souness commented: “People came to the event to get advice on how to lower their fuel bills, access community loan and saving schemes, to make sure everyone – especially older people – gets the support they’re due, and much more besides.

“We have had fantastic support to get this off the ground. It’s great to see so many agencies want to come to the Plantation and join our effort to support our community. From the CAB to Age Concern, the Energy Saving Advice Centre, Pensions Service, local Credit Union, housing association and the Council, everyone was really supportive in getting this off the ground.”

Glendoe - WHAT'S NEW?

Gleann Dotha - DÈ THA ÙR?

Dawn Beaton, Chairperson of Glendoe Terrace Residents' Association, Inverness, reports that since their tenants' survey took place last year with the support of **Tenants' Information Service (T.I.S.)** great things have been happening in Glendoe Terrace.

She said: “During last summer we put up some hanging baskets, 14 in total, which really cheered the place up. We finally got our second dog poo bin. The bins are located at both ends of the street and are being well used. They are for dog waste and rubbish.

“January brought us the lovely new double glazed draught proof windows which have made a big difference. Our 2nd graffiti wall was finished courtesy of Marc and several of the youngsters who enjoyed spray painting - legally!

“However one of our greatest joys was our long awaited bus shelter. Not purple as first hoped but rain and wind proofed and greatly appreciated. A big thank you to the diehards in the tenants association, especially Elaine, who have kept the group going. There was many a day when it was just Elaine and I and we came so close to packing it all in. But thankfully we didn't and as a result of our hard work and perseverance, we are now awaiting the full refurbishment which will begin next April. The long awaited new kitchens, bathrooms and heating, floors and rewiring. What a joy that will be. A big thank you to Steve Barron and his trusty team who have restored our faith in The Highland Council.”



Bught Area Residents' Association, Inverness Comann Luchd-còmhnaidh Sgìre a' Bhucht

Residents at Bught, Inverness, have had a busy social calendar over the last year including a trip to Landmark Adventure Park with lots of tired little (and big!) residents arriving back to the Bught Stop.

The group hosted their Anniversary Open Day in October with a successful barbecue and a visit from Nick Martin ('The Bug Man') who came along with some of his 'friends'. The day also included face painting, jewellery making and a visit from our local Policeman – to name just a few of the attractions from the day.

Funds of £78 were raised through the Tombola, baking and refreshments stalls which will help future events.

And not forgetting the Halloween "jamboree" where all involved got into the spirit by dressing up, dunking for apples and generally getting very mucky n' messy! Those who wanted to be a bit less 'ghoulish' enjoyed cake decorating and Halloween colouring-in activities.



Dochcarty celebrates a year of achievements Dochartaigh a' comharrachadh bliadhna de choileanaidhean

Residents at Dochcarty, Dingwall, held its AGM recently, electing new Chairman Colin Morrison and giving a heartfelt vote of thanks to outgoing Chair Anne Logie. "In her time as Chair, the DRA made huge achievements" commented Colin. Activities in the past year included: Pathways and bridge work in Maggie's Wood being completed; clearing of overgrown bushes; holding a community clean up and BBQ; drinking by-law signs put up; getting alleyways which attracted anti social behaviour blocked off; and a fundraising event held at the National Hotel with Ezra playing.

Colin noted: "If you live in an area, you see the things which need improving day in day out. Having a residents association ensures that local residents get their voice heard and action taken on things that concern them. Its not always easy, but we do make progress and I'm proud of what we have achieved in Dochcarty over the years, long may it continue."

Cromarty residents inspire community activities

Luchd-còmhnaidh Chrombaidh a' brosnachadh ghnìomhan coimhearsnachd

Townlands Together, the residents' association based around the Townlands estate in Cromarty, are becoming expert event organisers – putting on friendly events which bring the community together and help everyone put something back in to the area too.

Christmas time saw many residents attend the annual Townlands Santa party. Mulled wine, music and warm mince pies were enjoyed by everyone. Santa was the star turn – giving out presents to the children and enjoying the festive fare on offer! Thank you to everyone involved in making this a friendly, enjoyable community get-together. Coming next is the Townlands Cromarty Spring Clean – it is hoped to repeat the success of last year's litter pick, with a barbecue to round off a fun day for all.

Bridaig Park Residents' Association: creating better places to live Comann Luchd-còmhnaidh Pàirc Bhrìodaig: a' cruthachadh àiteachan- fuirich nas fheàrr

Well over 30 people came along to our last meeting to discuss ideas to reduce crime and the fear of crime in our area.

Inspector Matthew Reiss of Northern Constabulary spoke about the need to change cultural attitudes to drink, about how well managed events could divert young people away from dangerous activities, and how good communications could help address anti social behaviour.

Clair Nicols of The Highland Council's youth development team announced four new youth session workers were being recruited to a "streetwork" team. This team will reach out to young people (under 25s), find out what kind of constructive activities they would like, and bring people together to develop these schemes. Some of those at the meeting suggested that the new "streetwork" team be directed to the Fingal Road area to ask the young people who spend their leisure time in this area what activities they would like to see.



Got a bee in your bonnet?

Whether its parking, crime, dog fouling or you want to see more fun events in our area; don't just sit there and wish... get involved and make things happen!

Our association would like to form working groups to tackle individual issues that are key to the vibrancy of our community. If you live in our area come along to our next meeting and help shape the future of your area.

Stock survey to start soon

Suirbhidh stuic a' tòiseachadh a dh'aithghearr

A few years ago we carried out surveys of some of our houses to find out what condition they were in and what needed to be replaced. We hope to carry out some more surveys starting this summer to help us draw up a programme of improvements for the next few years.

If your house is selected for survey, you will be contacted in advance by the surveyor to make arrangements with you. The survey will take about 30 minutes. All our surveyors will carry identification and you should check this before you allow them into your house.

Consultation on sheltered warden charges

Co-chomhairle mu chosgaisean luchd-gleidhidh fasgaidh

Over the next few months, The Highland Council will be carrying out a review of the charge some tenants pay for the sheltered housing warden service. This does **not** mean there will be an increase in the charge. We want to ask sheltered housing tenants what they think about the charge and how we might be able to improve the way we go about charging.

If you are a sheltered housing tenant you will be hearing more about this during this year. We will be asking for your views about the service you receive and the charge you might be paying for your warden service. This is your chance to have a say in the decisions we make about the service and we would value your input.

How we're going to reduce homelessness in Highland

Mar a tha sinn dol a lùghdachadh dìth dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

Homelessness has increased in the Highlands. Households applying to us for help have doubled since 2000. More people are living for longer in temporary accommodation. Many homeless households have children. Most people have become homeless through no fault of their own.

We've put a new plan into action to tackle homelessness in the Highlands. We are changing our services so that they are more focused on preventing people becoming homeless.

We will do more to help people into a wider range of housing options such as good quality private rented housing.

We will provide support which helps people to live independently successfully and not lose their home. Some people might only need this help for a short time, others might need it for longer.

We will also try to make sure that anyone who needs support to stop them losing their house gets it.

Help us prevent homelessness. If you know anyone who is in danger of losing their home, tell them to go to the Council for advice or help as soon as they can.

You can get a copy of the Homeless Strategy (or the summary) from the Council's website www.highland.gov.uk or by asking at any Council office.

FIRE DESTROYS...

THA TEINE A' SGRIOS...

Fire is devastating – especially when it happens in your home.

Several Highland Council tenants have recently had the terrible experience of a house fire, resulting in them having to stay in temporary accommodation until their homes are repaired.

Some lost all their personal possessions – clothes, furniture, bedding, children's toys, electrical goods – everything.

How would you replace all these things if this happened to you?

FLOODING DESTROYS...

THA TUIL A' SGRIOS...

We had a much colder winter this year than in recent years – hard frost for several days in a row resulted in many tenants having burst pipes.

You can help prevent this by arranging for your water to be turned off and drained down if you are going away over the winter period, and leaving your heating on at a low level – see your Repairs Handbook for details.

Burst pipes can result in severe damage to your home and again, destroy personal belongings such as carpets, bedding and furniture.

How would you replace all these things if this happened to you?



The devastation caused by these incidents has again highlighted the need for home contents insurance.

Remember, Highland Council does not insure the contents of your home or your personal possessions and strongly recommends that you arrange home contents insurance.

We do provide a specialist affordable home contents insurance scheme for tenants and further information on this can be obtained by contacting us on **01463 702448**. You can get cover from as little as 46p per week if you are over 60 or 69p per week for everyone else!

You can now apply for home contents insurance over the telephone – just use the number above and our staff will explain the scheme to you and complete the application over the telephone. Your cover will start right away – easy!



Crimestoppers

If you wish to pass on information
about crime anonymously,
please call **Crimestoppers** on:

0800 555 111

or fill out our anonymous online form at:
www.crimestoppers-uk.org

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU CLUINNEAMAID BHUAIBH

If you've any interesting news or articles for a future newsletter why not let your local group know, or write to us at:

**The Highland Council, Housing and Property Services,
FREEPOST SCO2032, Inverness IV3 5BR**

or send us an email through our contact form on the Housing & Property pages
of the council's web-site at:

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/>

