



# Luchd-màil na Gàidhealtachd FIOSRACHADH

# Highland Tenant UPDATE

WELCOME  
FÀILTE



SUMMER 2011

Welcome to the summer edition of Highland Tenant Update. It's a busy time in social housing at a Highland and national level and we've tried to capture the most relevant and topical issues in this edition. As well as an update on what you think of the newsletter you can also see what you think about housing service performance for 2010/2011. How was your rent spent? How good is the service at recovering rent arrears, and how quickly are we re-letting empty homes?

This edition also includes a special feature on Repairs and Maintenance with information on our progress with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, the introduction of appointments for repairs and about what the Right to Repair means to you. At a national level, there's an update from the Scottish Housing Regulator who are conducting an extensive public consultation on the new powers and duties created in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, and we've also included some information about the Scottish Government's action plan for housing over the next decade - 'Homes fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'.

Closer to home, there's a timely reminder from Trading Standards about rogue traders, with some very useful advice on our rights in these circumstances, and also a call for a volunteer to help maintain the independent tenant web-site - Highland Tenant Voice. As you can see from this quick summary, the content is varied and interesting, and we hope there is something of value for all our readers.



*Margaret Davidson*

Councillor Margaret Davidson, Chair, Housing and Social Work Committee

## council house building & rents TOGAIL & MÀIL THAIGHEAN COMHAIRLE

A focus group of Highland Tenant representatives met in April 2011 to discuss the need for more council houses and the possible effect building new houses could have on rent charges.

The group recognised the need to increase the supply of social rented housing and agreed that increasing rents by a small amount to all existing tenants to fund the building of new homes was acceptable – as long as local housing needs were prioritised. The tenants involved also felt that the Council should be making the best possible use of its housing stock by continuing to promote exchanges and transfers.

They also felt that as new houses would be built to a higher standard, it was fair that the rents for new houses should be set at a slightly higher level. There was also a very clear view that the Council should be trying to work more efficiently to find savings to keep costs down and keep any future rent increases as low as possible.

Further consultation is to take place with Registered Tenant Organisations and tenants on the Register of Interested Tenants in order to discuss further how funding more homes will affect rent charges.

For more information you can check out the full report on the Council House Building Programme on the Council's web-site in the Housing and Social Work Committee Agendas of May 18 2011. You can use the following direct link:

[www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F1A08376-115A-48FB-B1E8-A9E701E6EDE9/0/Item6HSW4811.pdf](http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F1A08376-115A-48FB-B1E8-A9E701E6EDE9/0/Item6HSW4811.pdf)

or please phone and ask for a copy of this report.



New council houses, Invergordon (top) and Tain.

# Annual Performance Report

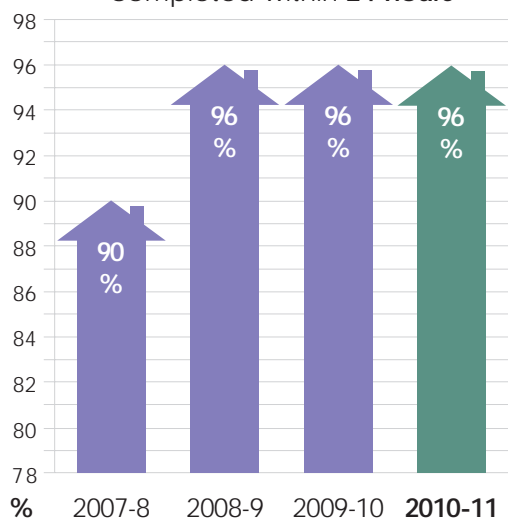
## Aithisg Choil eanaidh Bhl iadhnaid

Each year the Council returns information on its performance to Audit Scotland. This performance information is collected and reported for all councils in Scotland. The following tables show how we have performed over the last 4 years, and our performance compared to the national average for 2009/2010. (We cannot report the national averages for 2010/2011 yet, because the figures for all councils are not published until later in the year).

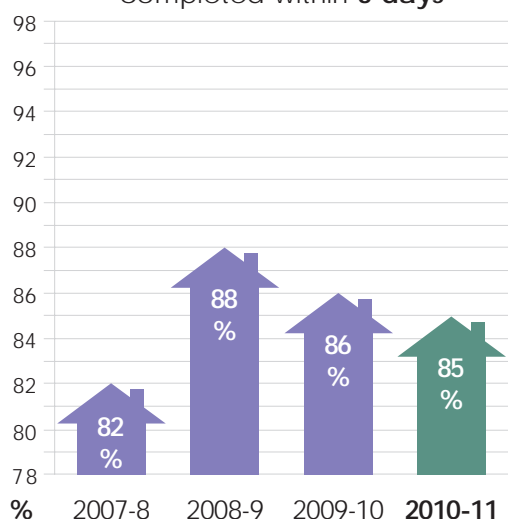
### Repairs To Council Houses

The Council has 3 main categories for repairs. We carried out over 40,000 individual repairs last year. The percentage of day to day repairs carried out on time against each category is shown below.

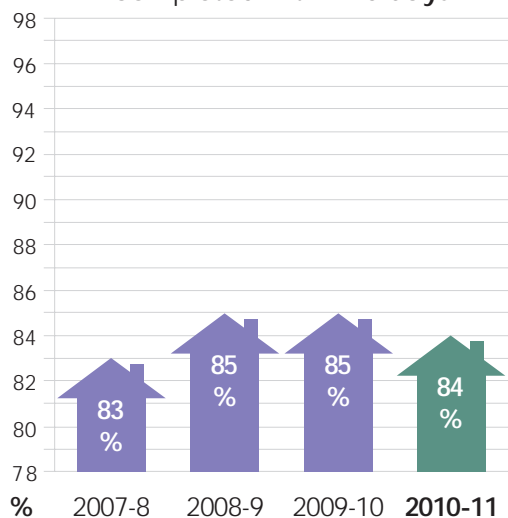
% of emergency repairs completed within 24 hours



% of high priority repairs completed within 3 days



% of routine repairs completed within 20 days



These tables show that we are continuing to provide a high proportion of our repairs on time. The overall national average for repairs completed on time in 2010-11 was 93%.

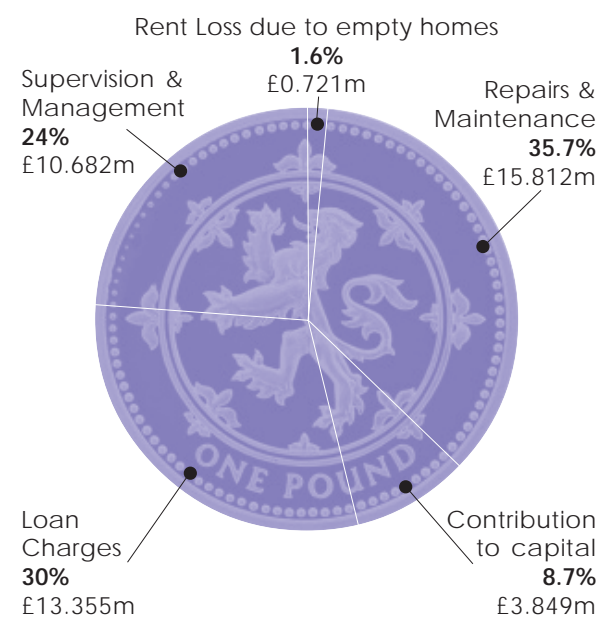
### How Your Rent Is Spent

The rents you pay cover the costs of providing housing services to Council tenants. This year we expect that 35.7% of rental income will be used to fund day to day repairs to council housing, and 24% to cover the management costs of the service, including staff and other service costs.

Loan charges, or the amount the Council pays in relation to its housing debt, will be around 30% of rental income.

We are expecting to use around 8.7% of rent income to fund the council's housing improvement programme, which aims to bring all our housing up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

Around 1.6% of rent income is required to cover rent loss due to empty homes.



### Managing Rent Arrears

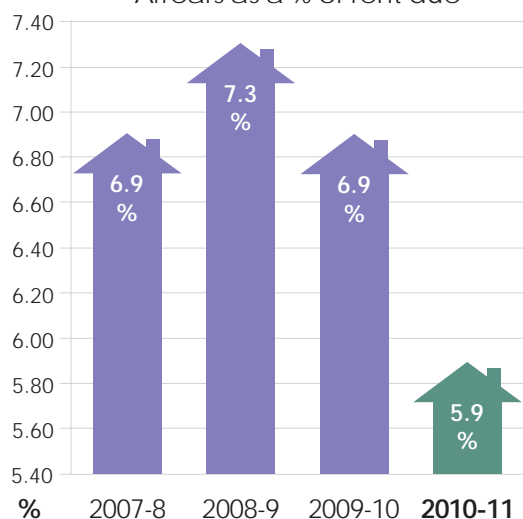
The following table gives information on our performance in managing rent arrears.

The table shows that over the last year we have reduced the percentage of tenants with arrears over £250 or over 13 weeks.

% of tenants in arrears



Arrears as a % of rent due

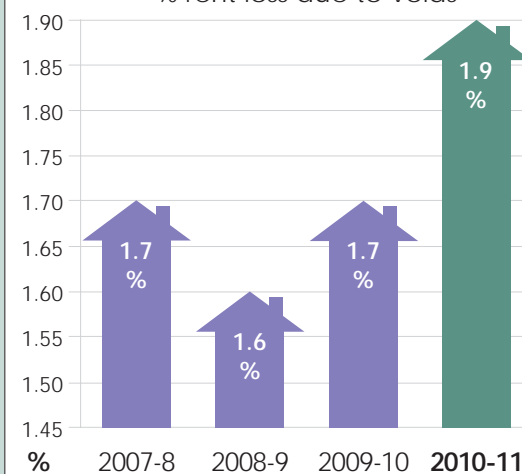


Nationally 4.2% of tenants had arrears of over £250 and arrears accounted for 6% of net rent due in 2009/10.

### Reletting Empty Houses

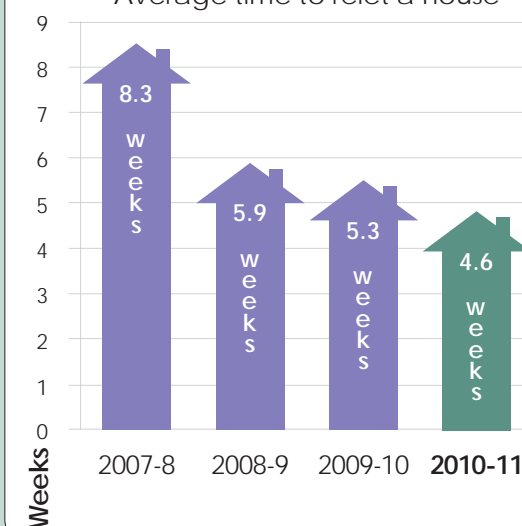
We have a high demand for most of our houses and want to relet any empty houses as quickly as possible. We have been making real efforts in the last 3 years to improve our performance on reletting empty homes.

% rent loss due to voids



Unfortunately the % rent loss due to empty homes increased last year. However the table below illustrates the improvements we have made to reletting times.

Average time to relet a house



Our current performance on rent loss due to voids is still below the national average but our average time to relet houses is now below the national average.

## HIGHLAND TENANT CONFERENCE 2011 CO-LABHAIRT LUCHD-MÀIL NA GÀIDHEALTACHD 2011

Due to popular demand this year's conference will once again be held in the Chambers at The Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness.

The date for your diary is **Saturday 29 October 2011**. An invitation will be through your door in due course and places will be allocated on a first come first serve basis. Book early to avoid disappointment!

The conference is a chance to network with tenants from all over Highland, to hear about the innovation and activities that are taking place within communities through active tenant and resident associations, and to take part in topical and interesting workshops. This year's workshops include mystery shopping and tenant led inspections, the council house building programme and the impact on rents, and a housing quiz in a Snakes and Ladders format!

For some culture, there's a performance by Naomi Breeze of her homelessness play 'H is 4'.

This year's conference will also be available by web-cast on the Council's web-site.

## EVICITION LEVELS IMPROVE ÌREAN FUADAICH A' FÀS NAS FHEÀRR

During 2010/11 Highland Council carried out **26** evictions due to rent arrears amongst its 13,500 tenants, a decrease of 3 cases compared to the previous year.

Our Rent Arrears Policy focuses on early intervention – we will send you a letter telling you as soon as you miss a rent payment. We will not start the legal process leading to eviction without trying to speak to you first and we will not take you to Court without inviting you in for a chat about your arrears and to give you advice and information which can help. We aim to make sure that all tenants have access to good quality advice. We do consider eviction as a last resort, but our eviction figures actually indicate the low number of evictions we carry out compared to the number of houses we manage.

Eviction is preventable. Any tenant who is struggling to pay their rent should contact their:  
Housing Management Officer  
on **01349 886602**

or

The Council's Money Advice  
and Income Maximisation Team  
on **0800 090 1004**

You can also get help from your local Citizen's Advice Bureau or independent advice service - their details are on our web-site at:  
**www.highland.gov.uk**

## MOVING HOME? A' GLUASAD DACHAIGH?

**Don't Forget to clear your Rent Account as well your house!** *If you are considering giving up your tenancy - have you made sure your rent account is up-to-date?*

Did you know that 15% of tenants who gave up their home last year left outstanding rent arrears - we call this **Former Tenant Arrears**. We want to reduce the number of people leaving tenancies with arrears.

**If you are thinking of giving up your tenancy, or are waiting for a transfer, here are some tips on how to avoid ending up with rent arrears at the end of your tenancy.**

- Make sure you give us the required 28 days notice, in writing. If you don't, and simply hand your keys in, you will be charged rent for the full 4 week notice period. If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit to help you pay your rent, this will not cover this 4 week period as benefit will stop from the date you were no longer living in your home. This will mean you end up with 4 week rent arrears.
- Make sure you return your keys on the date stated in your acknowledgment letter. You are charged rent until the date you actually hand your keys in. If you normally receive Housing Benefit to help you pay your rent, this does not cover these extra days.
- Make sure you discuss your moving date with a Housing Officer if you are transferring to another Highland Council tenancy, or to a tenancy provided by one of our HHR partners. Housing Benefit can only be paid on one address, so it is important that you move into your new address as quickly as possible after getting your keys, and return the keys to your old address to us. If not, you may find that you owe rent on either your old tenancy, or your new one. Your Housing Officer can give you advice on how to minimise this.
- Make sure you have cleared any court charges you owe us. If we have ever taken you to court because you had rent arrears which were not being addressed, you may also have outstanding court charges to pay. This cost is still due even if you cleared your arrears and continued your tenancy.

### What action can the Council take to recover Former Tenant Arrears or Court Expenses?

If you ignore former tenant arrears or outstanding court expenses, ultimately the debt will be invoiced and passed on to our Sheriff Officers for recovery. We may take further action against you to recover the debt, which may lead to additional legal costs to you. If we take further legal action against you, your wages or bank account could be arrested. This debt will be disclosed in any reference the Council provides in respect to your tenancy history and could have an adverse effect on your credit rating.

### Can I apply for another Council tenancy if I have outstanding Former Tenant Arrears or Court Expenses?

You can apply to join the housing list through the Highland Housing Register, but any outstanding debts you have could prevent you from being allocated a tenancy unless you agree to and have maintained an arrangement to repay the debt(s).

## ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR STRATEGY RO-INNLEACHD GIÙLAN MÌ-SHÒISEALTA

The Highland Council and Northern Constabulary have recently produced a Strategy on their proposals to tackle antisocial behaviour.

The Strategy was made available for public consultation from April to July 2011 and the final version was reported to Housing & Social Work Committee in August.

The Strategy details the multi agency coordinated approach that is already in operation in Highland communities and sets out future priorities to improve on practices that are already in place.

An information booklet is available which provides details of what can be done about incidents of antisocial behaviour and contact details for agencies responsible for investigating these incidents.

The Highland Council have developed a Charter which provides details of the Council's Policy on dealing with complaints of antisocial behaviour.

More information on antisocial behaviour, the booklet and Charter can be found on the Council's website:

**www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/anti-socialbehaviourandneighbourhood/**

or by phoning:  
**01349 886602**



# SPOTLIGHT ON REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

## SOLAS AIR CÀRAIDHEAN & CUMAIL SUAS



### INTRODUCTION OF APPOINTMENTS FOR REPAIRS TOIRT A-STEACH AMANNAN SÒNRAICHTE AIRSON CHÀRAIDHEAN

The Council's Building Maintenance team are introducing appointments for response repairs. This means that repairs can be carried out at a time which is convenient to you. As well as arranging appointment slots, our trades operatives will be using a handheld device to update the status of the repair when it happens. This means that we can see throughout the day which responsive repairs have been completed, and where we need to arrange additional appointments.

From autumn appointments will be offered for non-emergency plumbing repairs to Council properties within Inverness, Lochaber, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland and Caithness. This pilot phase will run for 6 weeks before rolling out to the other trades in the areas.

#### What does this mean for me?

When you log a repair request with the Highland Council for non-emergency jobs, you will receive a call back within 48 hours offering you an appointment time.

#### What are the appointment times?

<b>Morning:</b> 8am - 1pm	<b>School run:</b> 10am - 2pm
<b>Afternoon:</b> 1pm - 4pm	<b>All day:</b> 8am - 4pm

#### Will a Council trades operative always attend?

In the case where the work is issued to a subcontractor, you will be informed of who will be carrying out the work. The subcontractor will be in contact direct to arrange access.

#### What if the appointment cannot be kept?

If there are unforeseen circumstances and our trades operative is unable to attend, we will phone to advise you and arrange another suitable appointment time. Likewise, if you are unable to be at home during the appointment slot, contact us to arrange a more suitable appointment slot.

### gas safety SÀBHAILTEACHD GAS

#### Access for Gas safety checks

If you have gas heating or a LPG appliance, we have a legal obligation to carry out a gas safety check at your home once a year. This is an essential check to ensure the safety of you and others in your home.

If you receive a letter to tell you that your gas service is due, please ensure that you provide access for the engineer or contact them to make an alternative appointment. Have credit on your gas and electric meter for the check.

Unfortunately every year a number of tenants refuse to allow access for this vital safety check despite repeated efforts by us to make a suitable arrangement. Ultimately we have the legal right to schedule a forced entry to a house. In these cases, tenants will be charged an administrative fee of £120 plus VAT. This is payable for all tenants who reach the forced entry stage and will be charged even if the tenant allows entry at this stage.

Please allow access to your home for the gas safety check to be carried out to ensure the maintenance and safety of your heating system.

## THE RIGHT TO REPAIR CÒIR CÀRAIDH

#### What is the Right to Repair scheme?

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, tenants with Scottish secure tenancies or short Scottish secure tenancies have the right to have small urgent repairs carried out by their landlord within a given timescale. We will give you up-to-date information about this scheme each year, including how to find a list of contractors who are prepared to carry out the repair if we fail to do it.

#### What types of repair qualify under the Right to Repair scheme?

These are certain repairs up to the value of £350. These are called 'qualifying repairs'. They include:

- ▶ Unsafe power or lighting sockets or electrical fittings
- ▶ Loss or partial loss of electric power
- ▶ Loss or part loss of gas supply
- ▶ A blocked flue to an open fire or boiler
- ▶ External windows, doors or locks which are not secure
- ▶ Loss or part loss of space or water heating if no alternative heating is available
- ▶ Toilets which do not flush (if there is no other toilet in the house)
- ▶ Blocked or leaking foul drains, soil stacks or toilet pans (if there is no other toilet in the house)
- ▶ A blocked sink, bath or basin
- ▶ Loss or part loss of water supply
- ▶ Significant leaking or flooding from a water or heating pipe, tank or cistern
- ▶ Unsafe or rotten timber flooring or stair treads
- ▶ Unsafe access to a path or step
- ▶ Loose or detached banisters or handrails
- ▶ A broken mechanical extractor fan in a kitchen or bathroom which has no external window or door.

#### What happens when you report a qualifying repair?

We will tell you:

- ▶ That it is a qualifying repair under the scheme
- ▶ The maximum amount of time we have to carry out the repair (usually either within 24 hours or within 3 working days)
- ▶ Your rights under the Right to Repair scheme
- ▶ The name of our main contractor
- ▶ Information on how to find an alternative contractor if requested
- ▶ The access arrangement for the repair

#### How long do we have to carry out the repair?

These times are set by law, not by us. We will advise you of this when you report the repair. We will tell you if there is a reason why the repair may not be completed on time (for example, severe weather conditions), which will extend the maximum time limit.

#### What if the repair is not carried out in time?

If the repair is not started within the time limit set you can ask an alternative contractor from our list of approved contractors to carry out the list. This second contractor will then tell us that you have asked them to carry out the repair and will invoice us the costs. We will write to you to advise you that you can claim £15 compensation for the inconvenience.

The second contractor will have the same length of time to carry out the repair. If they do not carry out the repair within the set time limit, we will pay you £3 per day until the repair is completed. The most compensation we will pay is £100 for any one repair.

If there is no other contractor available to carry out the work our main contractor will carry out the repair and we will write to you offering you the £15 compensation.

# Downsizing update

## FIOSRACHADH ÙR AIR GLUASAD GU TAIGH NAS LUGHA



### Do you have bedrooms sitting empty?

You may be entitled to money to help with the cost of your move

If you move to a house which is 1 or more bedrooms smaller than your present home we will give you a payment. If you free up 2 bedrooms, you may get a payment of £1500. Additional bedrooms attract additional payment.

We can also help you with your move. For example, we can help you with your removal arrangements including getting rid of any unwanted furniture. We also give practical assistance to deal with "change of address" arrangements for your fuel and other bills. We can also help you get your new home ready for your move.

This 'down-sizing' payment is open to all tenants who move to a smaller council or housing association house through Highland's Housing Register - if their home can be used for a family in housing need.

A number of tenants have benefited from Highland's down-sizing scheme already.

We are doing this because there is a huge need for housing which is large enough for families. We know that whilst many families are overcrowded, other tenants have empty rooms because their children have left home.

By moving to a smaller house, many tenants reduce their heating bills. We know that some older tenants also struggle to manage their large homes. This can become a much bigger problem as they become frail.

This downsizing payment may be available for a time-limited period only. The scheme is being piloted. Once we know how successful it is, we will decide whether to extend it.

Please contact your local housing office for more information on moving to a smaller home and getting this payment.  
Call the Highland Council on: **01349 886602**

### Volunteers Wanted

#### SAOR-THOILICH A DHÌTH

Are you computer literate? Do you have some spare time on your hands? We are looking for volunteers to regularly update the tenants' web site: [www.highlandtenantvoice.org.uk](http://www.highlandtenantvoice.org.uk) Although some computer experience is essential, full training can be given and we can cover any expenses incurred.

For more information please call:  
**Mandy Macleman on 07774 337684**  
or email [mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk](mailto:mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk)

### ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

#### ASBESTOS SAN DACHAIGH

There has been widespread publicity about the dangers of asbestos and we are aware that it is a subject which often causes anxiety.

Asbestos was a common material used in buildings all across the UK up until the 1980s. It was mostly used for insulation purposes and is most commonly found in:

- ▶ Boards lining heating cupboards
- ▶ Heating and ventilation flues
- ▶ Boards forming enclosures to pipe work
- ▶ Artex ceilings

**Asbestos only poses a risk to residents when it is damaged or disturbed.**

For this reason we ask all tenants to seek permission and advice before carrying out alterations in their homes.

If you have any concerns please contact your nearest Housing & Property Services Office or Service Point.

### scottish housing quality standard

#### ÌRE CÀILEACHD TAIGHEADAS NA H-ALBA

#### Progress towards Scottish Housing Quality Standard

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard has been set by the Scottish Government to establish if our properties reach the required minimum standard. We have until April 2015 to bring all our houses up to the Standard. The Standard influences decision making on housing investment.

The table below shows the progress we have made towards meeting the target since it was introduced as a target in 2007:

SCOTTISH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS	No of dwellings compliant 2007 as % of stock	No of dwellings compliant 2010 as % of stock	No of dwellings compliant 2011 as % of stock
Tolerable standard	100%	100%	100%
Free from serious disrepair	99.6%	100%	100%
Energy efficiency	17.4%	31.3%	37.5%
Modern facilities and service	69.2%	81.2%	84.5%
Healthy, safe and secure	34.6%	100%	100%
<b>OVERALL TOTALS</b>			
Total dwellings SHQS compliant=	<b>473</b>	<b>3514</b>	<b>4344</b>
Total dwellings SHQS compliant as % of stock	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>32.1%</b>

Although like most social landlords there is a lot of work to do to meet the Standard for all our properties, we are confident of reaching the target by 2015 based on high expenditure in our capital improvement programmes.

In 2011/12 we are investing over £16million in our capital programme which will involve:

- ▶ Over 300 new kitchens
- ▶ Over 250 new bathrooms
- ▶ Over 1000 new heating systems

To date we have carried out over 6500 stock surveys to help improve our knowledge of our properties so we can prioritise what work is required. We recognise that tenant expectations may exceed the Standard, especially in the cases of relatively old kitchens and bathrooms which may currently meet the Standard. It is our intention to prioritise the modernisation of these following the investment work to bring identified failures up to Standard.

If you would like more information on the Standard you can visit the Scottish Government website at:

[www.scotland.gov.uk/shqs](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/shqs)

or alternatively speak to Brian Cameron, Housing Policy Officer at:

Tel: **01463 702862** - Email: [brian.cameron@highland.gov.uk](mailto:brian.cameron@highland.gov.uk)

Your local Housing & Property office should also have details of future capital programmes and address lists of proposed works.

# BEWARE - ROGUE TRADERS

## AN AIRE – CEANNAICHEAN CEALGACH

Highland householders are warned to be on guard against doorstep rogue traders. Trading Standards officers are calling for us all to be on our guard against rogue itinerant traders calling at our homes. This is a popular time of year for offers to carry out work on home repairs and maintenance. It may sound like we are getting a bargain but reports already suggest that some of the work carried out this year has been shoddy and overpriced. Some doorstep callers also use bogus names and addresses and claim to be based in the Highland area, when in fact they are not.

### Know your Rights

Did you know you have a statutory seven day cooling off period during which you can reconsider and cancel a contract, without penalty? This takes the form of a Cancellation Notice that the doorstep caller is required to provide you with, and which must inform you of their full name and the address of the business of the doorstep caller. This cooling off period can only be waived when the doorstep caller receives a written statement from you that allows the work to commence within the seven days.

### What if the Doorstep caller hasn't provided a Cancellation Notice?

If you didn't receive a cancellation notice, nor waive the cooling off period in writing, then the deal is not enforceable and the doorstep caller cannot insist on payment, even through the Courts.

Gordon Robb, Trading Standards Manager, said: "Every year we receive complaints about traders who temporarily move into the area and attempt to sell their services or goods door to door. The nature of the complaints we receive is mainly about shoddy workmanship and overcharging, but sometimes also about some quite aggressive practices that can leave the most vulnerable people in our communities quite upset and suffering considerable financial loss. The seriousness of this activity has led us to make a clear statement to all residents not to allow anyone to carry out repairs or maintenance unless they can provide satisfactory identification, a clear written quotation of the work to be carried out, the total cost of the work, and give legal notice to the resident that they can cancel or give written authorisation for the work to commence within the seven day cooling off period."

Mr Robb added: "We urge Highland residents not to be conned by rogue tradesmen and to take time before agreeing for work to be done on their home. The message is for residents to do their research first and find out if there are any reliable local contractors who can do the necessary work for them. Once a doorstep caller is gone they are usually gone for good, along with your money. It is vital to remain vigilant and to be wary of callers at your home and to seek advice if in doubt."

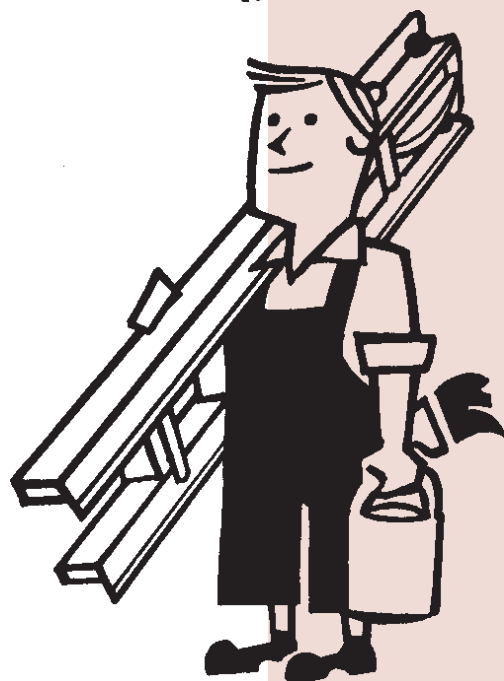
Doorstep callers commit criminal offences when they mislead, hide their identity or do not give written notice of cancellation. Highland Council Trading Standards will investigate complaints made and urge residents to get in contact if they are at all suspicious. Highland Council Trading Standards liaise with Northern Constabulary in a combined effort to combat this crime.

If you are concerned, please contact The Highland Council's Trading Standards Section at 38 Harbour Road, Inverness or telephone Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 for free and confidential advice regarding doorstep sellers.

You can also pass information anonymously to **Crimestoppers** on **0800 555111** or visit the **Crimestoppers** website at: **www.crimestoppersscotland-uk.org** to make a secure complaint online and find out more information on home security.



More information about your consumer rights can be found by going to the Consumer Direct website at: **www.direct.gov.uk**



## HOMES FIT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

### DACHAIGHEAN FREAGARRACH DON 21MH LINN

Earlier this year the Scottish Government published their strategy and action plan for the next decade - called **Homes Fit for the 21st Century**. It reaffirms their commitment to meeting the 4 major housing targets for homelessness; Scottish Housing Quality Standard; energy efficiency and fuel poverty and signals an intention to introduce more energy efficiency targets.

It also includes new policy objectives and approaches. Some of the actions and proposals included in the strategy are:

- ▶ Reforming the preserved right to buy e.g. discounts
- ▶ Introducing a new Scottish housing quality standard which will require higher levels of energy efficiency
- ▶ Introducing 'housing health checks' to help tenants and others review their housing options
- ▶ Making £50 m available through bidding to Registered Social Landlords, councils and developers for providing new affordable housing in 2011/12. This is a lower budget than previously and means fewer new affordable houses will be built than in recent years.
- ▶ Supporting an expansion of intermediate rented housing (e.g. mid market rent) and shared equity housing.
- ▶ Widening the types of possible tenancies for people in intermediate housing.
- ▶ Publishing a strategy for older people and simplifying access to adaptations
- ▶ Making it easier for social landlords to diversify their activities e.g. to provide mid-market or market rented housing
- ▶ Giving landlords more responsibility for deciding how they will meet needs through allocations

You can keep up to date with housing strategy and policy through the Scottish Government web-site: **www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing**

If you are interested in becoming more active as a tenant in social housing policy and practice at a Highland or national level, please contact your

Tenant Participation Officer:  
**North Team: Lorna Simpson**  
**01955 607707**  
**South Team: Mandy Macleaman**  
**01349 868471**

Alternatively, find out more about active tenant participation through the tenant led Highland and Argyll & Bute Regional Network at: **www.regionalnetworks.org.uk**

## Scottish Social Housing Updates Fiosan mu Thaigheadas Sòiseal ta na h-Alba Scottish Housing Regulator

The new, independent Scottish Housing Regulator was established on 1 April 2011. Its first task is to develop and consult on plans for a new regulatory framework, and initially it will exist alongside the existing Scottish Housing Regulator agency.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the functions, powers and duties of the Scottish Housing Regulator. During 2011/12 the Regulator has been developing plans for a new regulatory framework. The public consultation on this framework is scheduled to commence September 2011.

Further information and copies of its consultation will be available at:  
<http://newregulator.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/>

## Scottish Social Housing Charter

This is an important time for social housing in Scotland. The Scottish Social Housing Charter will set out the outcomes and standards that all Scottish social landlords should be achieving for their tenants.

The Scottish Government is consulting on the contents of this Charter from August to the end of October 2011. Registered Tenants Organisations in Highland are on the Scottish Government's circulation list and are encouraged to make a formal response.

Further information about the Charter is available from Tenant Participation Officers, or from:  
<http://housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk/>

## HOMELESS POLICY REVIEW

## ATH-BHREITHNEACHADH POILEASaidh DÌTH DACHAIGH

The Council recently reviewed its Homeless Policy and procedures.

### Homeless Prevention

A new team of officers has been set up to assist people who have housing difficulties (Homeless Prevention Team). The work the Prevention Team will undertake will include working closely with people leaving the parental home to allow them to leave in a managed way when they have accommodation to move into. They will also work with people who are having difficulty paying mortgage or rent to ensure that they can continue to live in their home.

### Housing and Other Support

The Council recognises that homelessness is often linked to other issues affecting individuals or families. For example mental health, drug and alcohol problems can make people more likely to become homeless and their homelessness more difficult to resolve. The Council has developed a housing support assessment tool and multi-agency arrangements in order to assess and deliver appropriate services and support in these circumstances.

### Resolving Homelessness

In order to respond to homelessness as quickly as possible and to minimise the time spent in temporary accommodation the Council will make one offer of housing to applicants with homeless priority. This will be the best offer possible from within the housing stock it has available and will take account of the applicant's needs. If this offer is refused the household's housing application will be dealt with according to the general allocations policy, but without homeless priority.

The Council will work with applicants to identify whether there are other ways in which they can resolve their homelessness. This will include discussions about the household's ability to access other housing options and we will offer advice and assistance to do this.

If you are or know of anyone who is experiencing housing difficulties please ask them to contact the Homeless Prevention Team either by email:

[homeless.prevention@highland.gov.uk](mailto:homeless.prevention@highland.gov.uk) or by phone on 01463 703824

## tenant participation COM-PÀIRTEACHAS LUCHD-MÀIL

### Morefield ullapool

Morefield Residents Association in Ullapool have been awarded a grant from The Big Lottery to upgrade the Riverside Nature Walk adjoining Morefield Estate. Over the past years the bracken has taken over a lot of the open spaces in the wood smothering the native wildflowers and plants and the paths have eroded badly in places due to the water running off the hill. The Lottery grant will enable the group to have the bracken professionally removed to allow the re-growth of native plants. They are also going to reinstate and improve the paths, build a new pond specifically to attract dragonflies and build a pond dipping platform and a duck nesting island on the existing pond. There will also be additional bench seats along the river walk. A project with local schoolchildren and the countryside ranger will install bat boxes and bird boxes throughout the woods.

### Lochalsh & Kyle tenants group

Following on from a Tenants Information Day in Kyle of Lochalsh a number of residents expressed an interest in setting up a Residents Association in Lochalsh and Kyle. A small steering group has now been formed and they have set up a Facebook page for anyone who is interested in being involved. (search for Lochalsh and Kyle Residents) In the first week the page attracted 56 friends!!! The next meeting to take this forward will be on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September in Kyle. It is hoped to hold two meetings on this day, one in the afternoon and another in the evening to allow as many as possible to attend. Times will be advertised locally closer to the date. Meanwhile, if you require any further information, please contact **Mandy Macleman**, Tenant Participation Officer, THC on 07774 337684 or email [mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk](mailto:mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk)

### News from the plantation

The Plantation Community Association in Fort William are to work in partnership with the Highland Council to run an Employability project in the Plantation Estate. This will kick off with a weekly Work Club in the Community Hall in Young Place starting off at the end of August. This will be followed up by needs based training and is open to anyone who is unemployed.

A community Gala Day on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August in the Pinegrove recreation area will have something for everyone! There will be face painting and bouncy castle for the kids, 5 a side football match, barbeque and music. The day will also be used to promote the start of the locally based work club and talk to local residents about the plans the PCA have for the future development of the Pinegrove recreation area.

### Mid Ross & Black Isle Sheltered Housing Tenants Group

Mid Ross & Black Isle Sheltered Housing Tenants Group got together on the 16<sup>th</sup> June for their informal meeting at the Kinkell House Hotel in Easter Kinkell. Around twenty tenants were welcomed by Principal Housing Officer Jonathan Henderson who introduced guest speakers Jo Cowan from AGE Scotland and Tom Aitchison from the Handy Person service. Both speakers were warmly welcomed and gave the tenants a lot of very useful information.

The theme for the afternoon was "Royal Ascot" and everyone had been invited to decorate a hat with a prize for the most outrageous! After a lovely afternoon tea Jonathan announced the winner of the hat competition, Chrissie MacKenzie from Muir of Ord with a fabulous creation which sported what looked like a live hen! Jonathan said "it has been a very difficult choice as there were so many fantastic hats - everyone has put so much effort into them!" Housing Management Assistant Toni Bell presented Chrissie with her prize of a Fair Trade food hamper. The next meeting of the group is on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September.



Housing Management Assistant Toni Bell presenting Fair Trade food hamper to winner Mrs Chrissie MacKenzie

# PRESSURED AREA STATUS CONSULTATION

## CO-CHOMHAIRLE INBHE ÀRAINNEAN FO CHUIDEAM

We have been consulting with tenant representatives over a proposal to extend Highland's pressured area status from five years to the new maximum period of 10 years. This aims to make sure that social rented houses are available to rent in the future. The outcome of the consultation will be reported to the Council's Housing and Social Work Committee in August.

Suspension of right to buy due to Pressured Area Status (PAS) only affects tenants living in the designated areas with modernised right to buy entitlements i.e. those who have started a tenancy, including through transfer or succession, since 30 September 2002. If approved, affected tenants will have their right to buy suspended for 10 years. The Council can then renew the designation.

Councillor Margaret Davidson, Chairman of the Housing and Social Work Committee, said: "When we assessed the need for affordable rented housing across the Highlands, it was clear that the large shortages we are currently experiencing are likely to persist into the future."

This proposal won't affect everyone. Tenants with the preserved (old) right to buy and those living in communities not covered by pressured area status can still buy their homes. The proposal is possible because of changes arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. In addition, councils can now decide locally whether to designate the area as pressured and suspend right to buy. Other Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 changes also means that first time tenants, including those who have taken a voluntary break, who start their tenancy after 1st March 2011, do not have the right to buy. This also applies to tenants living in newly built council housing.

## NEWSLETTER SURVEY UPDATE

### FIOS ÀS ÙR MU SHUIRBHIDH NA CUAIRT-LITREACH

Thanks to everyone who responded to the survey about the newsletter that we ran in the last edition. Congratulations to Grace Hainey of Inverness who was the winner of £30 High Street Voucher.

#### WHAT DID YOU TELL US ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER?

We had 51 responses:

- 40 thought the newsletter was good value for money, 8 didn't, 2 weren't sure, and 1 person didn't believe that it costs just under £1 per year per tenant to produce.
- 38 felt that 3 editions a year was about just right, 5 felt it was too much and 8 felt it was too little
- Equally, 38 felt that 8 pages was just about right, 6 too much, and 7 too little

- 35 had no internet access at home
- 46 felt that the newsletter should not only be in internet format
- 43 agreed that we should explore the use of advertising and sponsorship to further reduce costs

Our survey is telling us that at the moment, the newsletter is felt to be of most value to tenants for providing advice and information updates on services, and then for consulting with tenants on the quality and standard of these services.

National housing issues, how rent is spent and how well the Council is delivering the services that rent is spent on were the next very important issues.

How to get involved and participate more actively in housing services or tenant or resident groups is clearly worthwhile content, but was not felt to be as important as information on wider housing issues, housing service costs and standards and measuring these costs and standards.

This is useful for helping with the balance of content of future editions.

We intend that future editions of the newsletter will include appropriate advertising to meet the cost of production.

If you have any ideas about content, any articles that you would like to submit, or photos of local events, then please get in touch at:

[housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk](mailto:housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk)

#### HOW YOU RANKED CONTENT

How do you rate the following content:	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Information about tenant & resident activities & successes	9	27	15
Information about national housing issues	6	28	17
Performance & Budget Information about Housing & Property Service	5	30	16
Consultation and results on surveys, eg, rents, repairs, allocations	4	23	24
Information on how to get involved	8	28	15
Advice and Information, eg, on benefits, anti-social behaviour, refuse collection	3	13	34

## HOW TO CONTACT US

### MAR A CHUIREAS TU FIOS THUGAINN

You can get information on housing through The Highland Council Service Centre  
**Telephone: 01349 886602** Monday to Friday 8am-6pm, Saturday 9am-12pm,  
 at any Highland Council **Service Point** or by contacting the **Housing & Property Offices for your area.**

Details are available through the service centre or on line at:  
[www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/findinghousing/areahousingoffices/](http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/findinghousing/areahousingoffices/)

To request this information in an alternative format e.g., large print, computer disk, audio tape, or suitable language, please contact:  
**01463 702863**