

Pressured Area Status – The Highland Council Staff Guidance Note November 2005

Introduction

The purpose of this guidance note is to help staff answer questions about pressured area status.

Much of the Highlands were designated as “Pressured Areas” on 15 November 2005. It is hoped this will help tackle the shortage of affordable housing. It is the result of an application by The Highland Council which was agreed by The Scottish Executive.

Q1 Which tenants does it affect?

The designation means that Highland Council tenants who began their current tenancies on or after **30 September 2002** in the designated “Pressured Areas” have their Right to Buy (RTB) suspended for the next **5 years** i.e. from **15 November 2005 until 14 November 2010** whilst the designation is in place.

This includes tenants who have their tenancy through: succession to e.g. a son, daughter, carer etc.; transfers and mutual exchanges. It does not include tenants who have ‘succeeded’ to their tenancy due to a joint / sole tenancy change e.g. husband / wife / partner successions.

Council tenants who are still able to buy their home include:
tenants whose tenancy started from before this date
tenants who don’t live in the designated areas (see Q3).

A small number of Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association and Lochaber Housing Association tenants (who would have otherwise been eligible to buy) are also affected.

Q2 - What does pressured area status mean for tenants?

It means that affected tenants have their RTB suspended for 5 years i.e. from **15 November 2005 until 14 November 2010**.

During the 5 year suspension period, tenants will continue to build up time towards their qualifying period.

At the end of the 5 years, the Council can apply to the Scottish Executive for the period to be extended.

Q3 What if a tenant in a Pressured Area has already applied to buy?

The suspension has no effect on applications to purchase which have been received prior to designation even if they are still being processed.

Q4 Which communities are designated as Pressured Areas?

The communities that are designated as "Pressured Area" include:

all communities in the Badenoch & Strathspey Area.

all communities in the Inverness Area except the estates of Merkinch and Hilton.

all communities in the Lochaber Area except Kinlochleven; the Plantation estate and the three streets of Carn Dearg; The Corries and Polmona in Claggan.

all communities in the Nairn Area.

all communities in the Ross and Cromarty Area except Alness, Aultbea, Balintore and Milton.

all communities in the Skye and Lochalsh Area.

We have not applied for any parts of Caithness or Sutherland to be designated. The RTB will continue as before in Caithness and Sutherland.

In the non-designated (i.e. 'except') estates / communities, the RTB will continue as before.

The boundaries should be self-explanatory except:

Merkinch letting area does not include the houses in Glebe e.g. Friars and Glebe Street.

Hilton letting area boundary does not include County Cottages, Tomatin Road, Druid Road and Old Edinburgh Road

Plantation boundary (please note, not all these streets have council stock in them although some have HA stock) e.g. Braemore Place, Bruce Place, Henderson Row, Morvern Place, Pine Grove Court, Shaw Place, Kennedy Road, Wallace Place, Douglas Place and Young Place.

In Claggan only Carn Dearg; The Corries and Polmona in Claggan are excluded from Pressured Area Status all other Claggan streets have the RTB suspended.

Milton in Ross and Cromarty does not include Kildary where the RTB is suspended.

If necessary, please check the boundaries of non-designated communities.

Q5 How do tenants know about Pressured Areas?

A press release was issued and so it will be reported in the local media.

A short article has been included in The Highland Council's performance news supplement

An article is going to be included in the next tenant newsletter due in December

The offer letter for new tenancies located within the pressured areas, has been amended to include information on the Pressured Area designation. In locations where some communities are excluded from the designation there is a choice of

letters. Please check the boundaries if there is any uncertainty about whether a property could be sold through the RTB.

Q6 Why is the Council doing this?

This action is possible because of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. It helps to make sure that Council housing is available to let in communities where there are very large shortages of housing. Although more housing association rented housing is being built, it's not enough to replace the Council housing that has been sold through the Right to Buy. For every 3 houses that were sold through the 'Right to Buy' over the last 10 years, only one has been built to replace it.

The Highland Council was the 2nd Scottish Council to be awarded this designation.

Q7 How can tenants who want to become home owners still do so?

There are a number of different ways that the Council and housing associations can help tenants to become home owners. These will still be available to tenants who are affected by the Pressured Area designation. The Council and housing associations will continue to support all tenants, including those who have their Right to Buy suspended, to access these alternatives and become home owners.

More information about low cost home ownership (LCHO) options is available from: the Housing Options Manual (Chapter 6); on Housing Services website; Housing Services' Development Officers or Accommodation officers; housing associations and; Communities Scotland's Highlands and Islands Area Office. LCHO Leaflets can also be printed off Communities Scotland's website and Lochalsh and Skye HA's website.

A leaflet setting out the low cost home options will be produced in the near future which can be given to tenants.