

Housing Matters

Taigheadas na Gàidhealtachd

IMPORTANT – Your Tenancy is changing

TENANT SCRUTINY

The Highland Tenants Scrutiny Panel is a group of tenant volunteers who are passionate about our involvement in working with the Highland Council to improve housing services and get the best value for money.

“We examine a part of our Landlord’s housing service from a tenant’s perspective and look at ways of improving the service and/or saving money.

“We have recently completed our first Scrutiny exercise which was to examine the Complaints process within Housing – we submitted our final report to the Council in July and they are now working on an action plan to implement our recommendations. The Council asked if they could share our report with the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).”

The SHR response to our report was very positive

“The panel’s report was very good. It was well structured, easy to read and made a number of recommendations that would lead to good practice.”

Noel McLaughlin, Service Improvement Manager, Highland Council said *“Working with the Scrutiny Group*



has been very rewarding. Their focus on ‘customer first’ around the complaints process has seen a direct positive impact on the way the council delivers the complaints service. I’ve valued my time with the group listening to what our customers are saying. The Scrutiny Group is a great way to have that open dialogue and to collectively seek Service improvements for all our customers.”

If you are interested in being part of the Highland Tenants Scrutiny Panel or would like a copy of their report, call **01463 702683** or email tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk and we will put you in touch with the Chairperson of the group.

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Plus Much More...

Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Sheltered Housing Tenants Gathering

What a get-together the Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Sheltered Housing tenants had for their annual Networking event! They all came together in Cromarty along with three tenants from the Sheltered Housing complex located within the picturesque village.

Councillor Raymond Bremner from the East Caithness Ward welcomed over 45 tenants to the event and expressed his delight that so many had travelled a fair distance to meet with tenants from other areas. Shona Gilfillan, NHS gave an excellent presentation on the new telecare system which is being rolled out throughout Highland. She demonstrated how the various pieces of equipment work and a lively question and answer session ensued.

Councillor Bremner and Margaret Ross, Principal Housing Officer for Caithness gave an update on various housing issues including the environmental budget which is made up of 5% of the annual Capital Programme. They encouraged tenants to think about their respective areas and to identify any potential environmental projects to housing staff.

Two Interested Tenants from Caithness, Lana Green and Ann Mackay gave a short talk on their involvement in tenant participation. Ann has been involved for over four years and has actively got involved in various initiatives including the Wick Interested Tenants Group; Health Issues in the Community; Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Area Forum Group and Highland Senior Citizens Network. Lana is a relatively new Interested Tenant and has actively embraced tenant participation. She attends the Wick Interested Tenants Group, is a member of the Highland wide Communication and Scrutiny groups as well as the Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Area Forum.

Lorna Simpson, Tenant Participation Officer said 'it was an excellent event

- and encouraging to see
- so many tenants taking
- an interest in housing
- matters. The Sheltered
- Housing tenants were
- particularly interested in
- the new Telecare system
- as it will affect them all
- in the future. The talk
- by the two Interested
- Tenants from Wick and
- Thurso respectively showed first-hand how tenants can get involved
- and make their voice heard. We finished off the event with a song by
- Councillor Bremner and new Lairg tenant Eilidh Matheson. What an
- ending to a very successful day!
- Councillor Raymond Bremner said "I was pleased to attend the CSER
- Sheltered Housing event held recently in Cromarty and absolutely
- delighted at the atmosphere within the venue – warm, friendly and
- engaging. It was great to see so many of the tenants getting involved
- and actively contributing to the event, not only asking well positioned
- questions but coming forward with ideas and seeking clarification.
- The presentations were helpful and informative and I was delighted to
- help contribute to a brilliant event. It was clear that those present are
- very much an inspiration within their communities and I am sure that
- everyone at Highland Council is aware of this. There was also a terrific
- relationship between the Highland Council team members which has
- obviously built up over time and is, what I like to think, typical of our
- Highland culture and hospitality. I am very happy to continue to support
- your efforts in whichever way I can."



Kingussie



On Tuesday 25th September in the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, our Tenant Participation team hosted an Older People's Get Together in co-operation with Highland Senior Citizens Network and Age Scotland.

The theme of this event was to stay Safe, Well, Active and Connected and was a perfect opportunity for older people's groups, individuals and their support network to talk with other local people and hear about local services which may be of benefit to them.

Amongst some of the stall holders were Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue, Trading Standards, Befrienders Highland, Badenoch & Strathspey Community Transport, Badenoch & Strathspey Therapy Gardens, Connecting Carers, Unforgotten Forces and Home Energy

- Scotland.
- Pupils from the local drama group in Kingussie High School attended
- and performed an excellent sketch to raise awareness of doorstep
- crime, as well as helping out with serving refreshments.
- A representative from High life Highland attended and put everyone
- through their paces as he provided an introductory session to Otago.
- This is an activity which anyone with any ability can take part in and
- involves gentle stretching and strengthening exercises.
- The Tenant Participation team kindly welcome any of our older tenants
- to these events so keep your eyes peeled for future events.....we hope
- to see you soon.

Senior Citizens' Event Success – Lochaber

Around 70 older people attended the first Senior Citizens "Staying Safe, Well and Connected" event in Caol Community Centre on Friday afternoon, enjoying a lovely afternoon tea along with a side-helping of helpful information and advice. Highland Council Tenant Participation Officer, Karin McKay, worked in partnership with Lochaber and District Lunch Club and Highland Senior Citizens Network to pull together a wide-ranging, interesting programme. Karin was delighted with the response to this first attempt at holding an event. "We wanted it to be attractive to local senior citizens - giving them both the opportunity to come together socially, and to pick up relevant information from services and clubs. Thanks to everyone for coming along and making this happen."

Several attendees took up the opportunity to try out the lunch club's delicious fare. Linda Campbell of Caol Regeneration, who supports the lunch club committee, encouraged everyone to spread the word about this valuable service. "Our lunch club is open to all, to any age-group, Monday to Friday of each week, providing company and a two-course meal at £5, which is good value. The more people who support it, the more enjoyable it becomes for everyone attending." The centre and lunch club staff and volunteers put a tremendous amount of work into making the day successful, while Lochaber Action on Disability and Lochaber Community Car Scheme did a sterling job in transporting folk. All received glowing praise for their efforts.

Councillor Dennis Rixson opened the afternoon, congratulating everyone on bringing together an excellent event combining enjoyment and information. PC Katy Duncan, Preventions and Interventions Officer with Police Scotland, outlined how to avoid being a victim of doorstep callers and bogus workmen. Colleagues from Scottish Fire and Rescue Service gave good advice on Fire Safety, and urged anyone who needed a Free Home Fire Safety Check to get in touch. The Libertie Project advised on how they could support people to save money by switching services

- online. Sam O' Connor of Scottish & Southern Energy urged attendees to sign up to the Priority Services Register.
- Following a delicious afternoon tea, Jamie Noble of Home Energy Scotland explained their role in helping older people improve energy efficiency. Jo Cowan, Highland Senior Citizens Network Co-ordinator, introduced short "pitches" from some of the "Good Connections" stallholders and attendees: Care Lochaber Community Car Scheme, The Tuesday Social Club, Connecting Carers Carer Liaison Worker, Step It Up Highland Health Walks, Lochaber Sensory Care services and social events and from Ewen's Room. Jo also mentioned some other groups locally that aim to keep people active and connected, including Talk Lochaber Talking Newspaper, Lochaber Young At Heart, Fort William Men's Shed and Friends Together.
- Also giving helpful face-to-face information from stalls were NHS Highland Technology Enabled Care, Highland Council Housing Service, Highlife Highland, Lochaber Care & Repair Dementia Project and Be At Home Service.
- For further information about this event and similar planned events contact:



Karin McKay, Highland Council Tenant Participation Officer 07785477696.

Linda Campbell, Caol Community Centre and Lochaber & District Lunch Club 07748980471.

Jo Cowan, Highland Senior Citizens Network Co-ordinator 07933653585.



Highland Senior Citizens Network
Nothing about us without us

HSCN Contact details: Anne McDonald **Contact:** 07933 653313; **Email:** anne-hscn@outlook.com (Co-ordinator for Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Inverness) **Jo Cowan Contact:** 07933653585; **Email:** jo-hscn@outlook.com (Co-ordinator for Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Badenoch and Strathspey, Nairn and Inverness) info@befriender.org.uk

SAFE, WELL AND CONNECTED (continued)

Inverness Tenants Get Together

Twenty one tenants and two residents from Inverness came along to a Housing event in the Mercure Hotel on Wednesday 25th July. Those attending were welcomed to the event by Housing Manager South, Sandra MacLennan, and the Tenant Participation team. After a light supper the group heard from volunteers from South Kessock, Merkinch and Hilton about the work they are doing to improve their communities and Jonathan Henderson, Housing Policy Investment Officer gave the group an overview of the Capital improvement programme.

This was followed by round table discussions on the tenants' priorities in their respective areas. Everyone enjoyed the evening and agreed that they wanted to take this forward as a regular Inverness Tenants Forum. The date of the first Inverness Forum will be Wednesday 7th November.

A Tenants workshop has also been organised for Tuesday 30th October to look at "How Tenants rent money is spent". Both of these events will take place in the Mercure Hotel.

If you did not attend the event on 25th July and would



like to come along to the Workshop or the Forum please contact **Jo Sutherland on 07785 477674** or email **tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk**

Orkney tenants visit Wick

Tenants from Orkney Islands Council and Orkney Housing Association Ltd braved the high seas of the Pentland Firth to meet with the Wick Interested Tenants Group on an annual exchange visit. A group of nine tenants and staff joined tenants from Wick and surrounding areas to discuss a wide range of housing issues.

Margaret Ross, Principal Housing Officer for Caithness welcomed the Orkney tenants to the meeting and expressed her delight that so many had taken the opportunity to meet with the Caithness tenants and exchange views, ideas and information.

Wick tenant Angela Krueger gave an interesting update on the Highland-wide Communication group which she Chairs. Angela explained that the group is working with Housing staff to help improve communication between tenants and Highland Council. The Communication group were instrumental in changing the way in which in the annual Customer Report is presented to tenants. In the past all tenants received a full copy of the Customer Report but the Communication group felt that it was too expensive sending it to everybody. They suggested that an abbreviated report should be included in the autumn edition of the newsletter and anybody who wished a full copy could request one. Highland Council took their suggestion on board and the response from tenants has been very positive.

The meeting also got an update on the Highland Tenants Scrutiny group which again is Highland-wide. The group examined Highland Council's complaints process and following their investigations, produced a report which gave recommendations for improvement.



The Orkney tenants explained that they too have been scrutinising an element of their housing service ie allocations and have produced a report which was circulated at the Wick meeting. Part of the Scrutiny exercise on allocations involved a 'mystery shopping' exercise which proved to be a very constructive exercise as it highlighted some of the ambiguities within the form. They also compared Orkney Housing Association Ltd application form with the one from Shetland Islands Council and found slight differences which they have taken on board.

Following a light lunch the whole group visited the Caithness Archive Centre at Nucleus, Airport Wick which proved very interesting.

Suzy Boardman, Tenant Participation Officer with Orkney Housing Association Ltd said 'we had a great trip and I have to say that the group were really buzzing after the visit. They got such a lot out of speaking with members of the Wick Interested Tenants Group and thoroughly enjoyed the day'.

Lorna Simpson added 'if any Highland Council tenant is interested in getting involved in housing issues please get in touch as we have many very diverse groups working to help develop and shape the Housing Service'.

Getting ready for winter ...

Here are some simple tips to keep you cosy for less this winter:

- Set heating controls to manage the temperature of your home – remember to use the weekday and weekend settings.
- Give your boiler its annual maintenance check.
- Think about switching your electricity supplier to get a better deal.
- Be prepared in case of a power cut. Find handy tips here <https://www.ssepd.co.uk/PreparingForAPowercut/>
- Check your fuel supply of wood pellets, logs or oil. Ensure wood is dry.
- Call Home Energy Scotland on 0808 808 2282 for free and impartial energy saving advice and for access to any support schemes available.

Helpful numbers for the winter months:



Home Energy Scotland – 0808 808 2282

Call for free advice on how you can keep your home cosy for less over the colder months.

NHS 24 – 111

You should phone 111 if you're too ill to wait until your GP practice reopens.

Power cut – 105

If you have a power cut, call 105 and you'll be connected to your local electricity network operator. It's free from all mobiles and landlines.

SGN customer service helpline 0800 912 1700

If you smell gas or are worried about gas safety, call the national gas emergency number immediately on 0800 111 999.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service 0800 0731 999

Call to book a free home fire safety visit. They will help you sort out a fire escape plan and fit smoke alarms free of charge if your home needs them.

Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register is a free service provided by suppliers and network operators to customers in need. Call Home Energy Scotland on 0808 808 2282 and we can refer you if you are eligible.



Thinking of Moving Home? Housing Options & New Opportunities

You may have seen new housing being built in your local community. Whether you or your family wants to rent, buy or own a part share, it may be that there's a housing option that's right for you.

It can be difficult to find housing in some communities. Many Housing Associations now offer Mid Market Rent. These properties are more affordable than the normal market. They are especially popular with people who are unlikely to get social housing in the communities where they want to stay. Other organisations offer Mid Market Rent with a future-option to buy - providing an easier way to fund a deposit. Research tells us that MMR tenants are very satisfied with their housing. It also tells us that many don't yet know about it and its benefits.

For people who want to be owners but can't afford the market price, new 'Shared Equity' low cost ownership housing is also being built. Tenants and first time buyers have a priority status for buying.

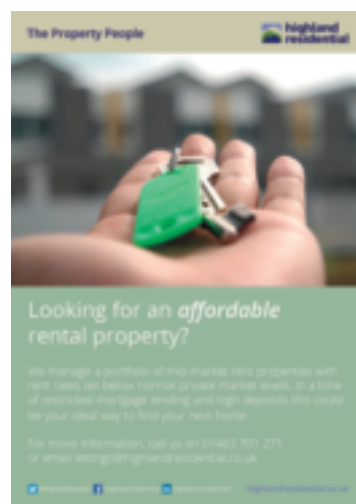
To find out more, have a look at the new information on the Highland Council's website (search for 'housing choices'). Or speak to your local housing team or housing association.

Alternative Housing Options

Homelessness is a difficult, stressful and costly experience. This is why we work hard with people to prevent them losing their homes. And it's why we help people find alternative housing before they become homeless. We are also making sure that, if someone becomes homeless, they are offered settled housing **as soon as possible**. We make best use of all the housing we have available. So, what is offered, may not be in the area or town where they wish to be. Options such as Mid Market Rent or a Private Residential Tenancy (PRT) can be the best way for someone to get a home in the place where they want to stay. The Council is helping more households to move into private renting – and helping them secure a let even if they are struggling to afford their move-in costs.

A new type of tenancy came into force last year. Called the **Private Residential Tenancy**, it replaced previous tenancy types. Private Renters have much stronger rights. These are:

- ✓ **No more fixed terms** - Private Residential Tenancies are open ended (not time fixed).
- ✓ **Rent increases** - your rent can only be increased once every 12 months and can be reviewed.
- ✓ **Longer notice period** - if you've lived there for longer than 6 months, you have to get at least 84 days notice to leave.
- ✓ You can stay in the property as long as you and the landlord want and you can't just be kicked out (evicted).



If you are having housing difficulties, make an appointment to speak to someone in your local **Housing Options Team**. More information is on the Council's website at www.highland.gov.uk

SNAP SHOT OF OUR ANNUAL CUSTOMER REPORT 2017-18

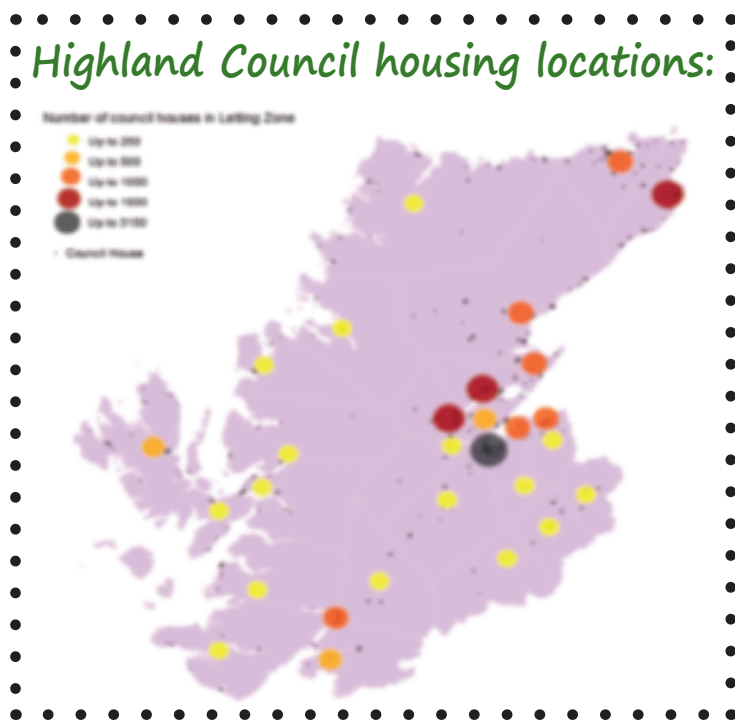
As at 31 March 2018, the Council owned and managed **13,947** council houses in 223 communities in city, town, rural, remote and island locations.






During 2017/2018, we let **1111** properties to homeless households and people on the councils' waiting lists. It took us **36.6** days to re-let our empty properties compared to the Scottish average of **30.7** days.



There has been continuous improvement in average re-let times over the last year, although performance remains below

our Highland target. This can be attributed to low demand for some areas of Caithness and Sutherland which has a disproportionate impact on overall performance on re-letting empty homes.



HIGHLAND COUNCIL HOUSING BY PROPERTY SIZE	NUMBER OF PROPERTIES	WEEKLY RENTAL CHARGE 2017/18	SCOTTISH AVERAGE 2017/18
 bedsit	246	£61.31	£67.44
 1 bed	3539	£67.08	£73.33
 2 bed	5718	£73.40	£74.94
 3 bed	4064	£82.13	£81.37
 4 bed +	380	£109.32	£90.39
Total number of properties:	13,947		

Full and detailed performance information will be available in our Annual Customer Report 2017/18, to be published in October 2018.

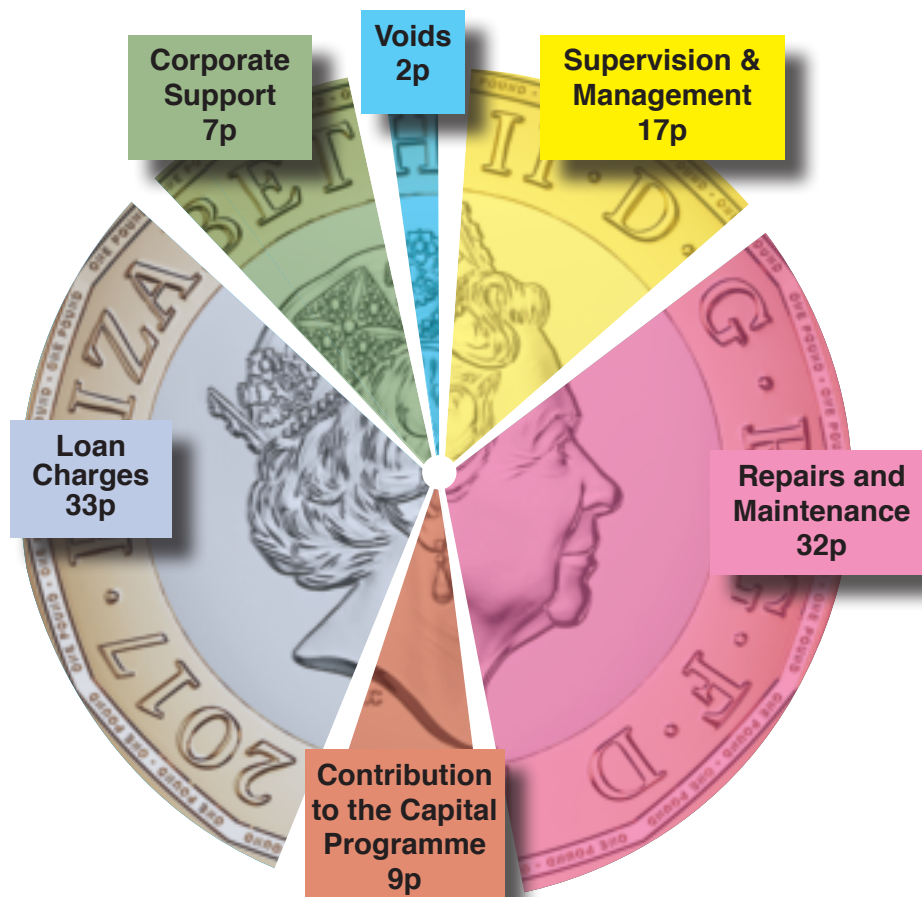
If you would like to order a copy telephone: **01463 702683** or email: **mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk**

The services we provide to you as your landlord are funded by the rent you pay. As a service we must ensure that we spend this money wisely and fairly.

We recognise that tenants want to live in warm, comfortable and well maintained homes in a nice area. For this reason we install new heating systems, kitchens and bathrooms, paint closes and cut grass. We try to do all the things that we know our customers want from us. Understandably this comes at a cost.

We strive to keep our costs as low as possible. In order to provide the best service it is vital that we collect all rent money. Without your rent money Housing Services cannot look after your estate or undertake repairs or improvements.

Each £1 of your rent is spent in the following way:



VOIDS & EMPTY HOMES RENT LOSS

	Highland 2016-17	Highland 2017-18
% rent loss through properties becoming void	0.94%	1.03%
	£460,087	£503,405
Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year	38.8 days	36.6 days

RENT ARREARS AND COLLECTION

	2016-17	2017-18
Rent collected as a % of total rent due in the year	99.3%	98.11%
	£48,739,936	£47,263,400
Gross rent arrears as at 31 March each year as a % of rent due in the reporting year	4.68%	5.03%
	£2,282,604	£2,458,571

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PERCENTAGE OF HOMES MEETING THE EESSH

2016-17



2017-18



66.8% (9,322 properties)

67.0% (9,519 properties)



The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) has been replaced with the “Energy Efficiency for Scottish Social Housing” (EESSH). The EESSH sets out the minimum energy efficiency standard for social housing. It has been developed by the Scottish Government following consultation with social landlords and tenants and will contribute towards the carbon emission reduction targets set by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Landlords must make sure that all social housing meets the new standard by December 2020.

We have been speaking to tenants to find out the areas of the repairs service they are unhappy with. Overall satisfaction has increased significantly but is still an area we wish to improve on.

VOIDS & EMPTY HOME REPAIR COSTS

Highland
2016-17

Highland
2017-18

Voids & Empty Home Repair Costs – average cost (per property)

£2,790.03

£ 3162.48

REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

2016-17

2017-18

Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs

7 hours

6.4 hours

Average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs (working days)

6.9 days

7.4 days

% of repairs carried out in the last year right first time

94.2%
(23,166 repairs)

94.3%
(36,381 repairs)

% of repair appointments kept by trades

86.7%
(18,035 appointments)

90.5%
(15,632 appointments)

PERCENTAGE OF TENANTS SATISFIED WITH THE REPAIRS SERVICE

2016-17

2017-18

93.5%

94.38%

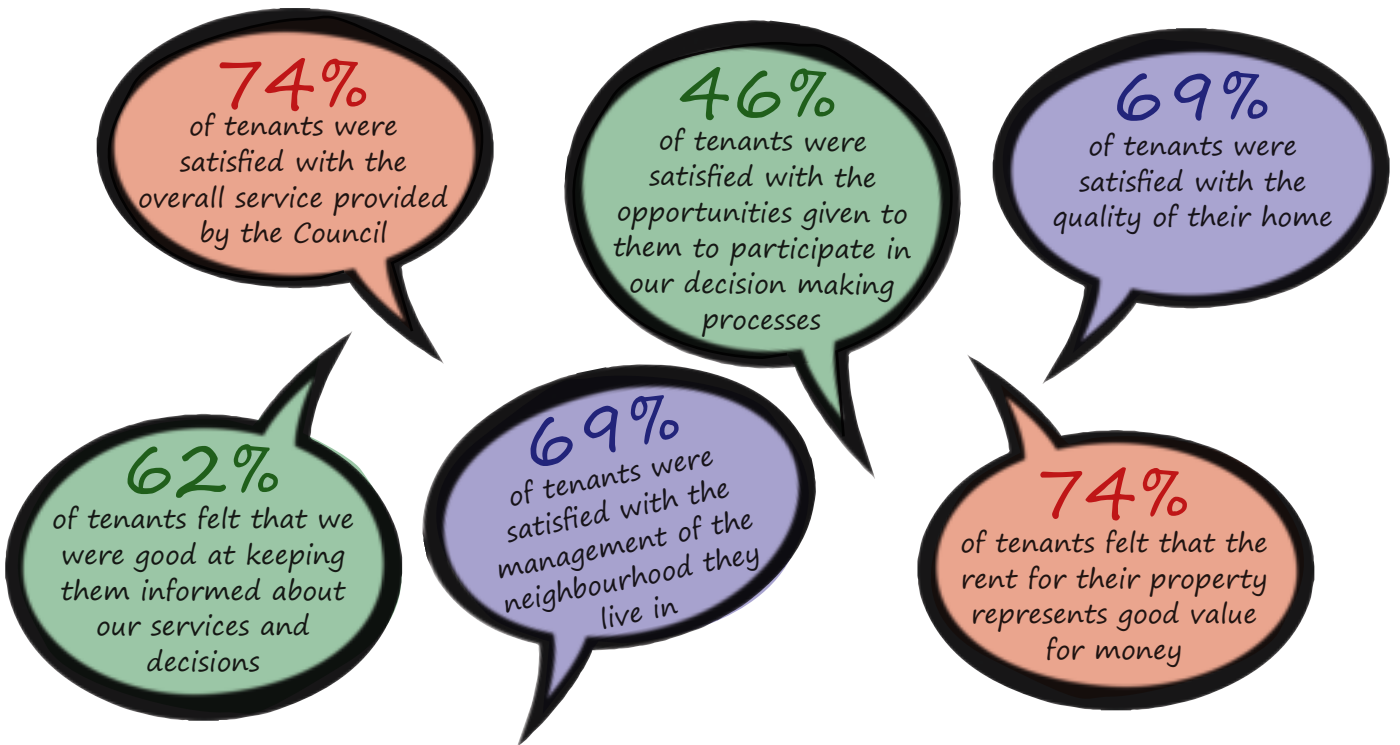
Housing Services have undertaken a range of work to improve the housing repairs service which has allowed us to complete repairs quickly and professionally.

Whilst our performance has improved slightly in 2017/18, we still perform well against more measures when compared with other landlords and have plans in place to ensure that our performance continues to improve.

Full and detailed performance information will be available in our Annual Customer Report 2017/18, to be published in October 2018.

LANDLORD SATISFACTION

Every three years, we survey our tenants to gather views on the key areas of our service. Most social landlords survey a sample of their tenants but we feel it is important to give all our tenants the opportunity to have their say and to gather data that is as accurate as possible. In January 2016 surveys were sent to all **13,916** tenants and **34.3% (4,777)** surveys were returned. The main findings are shown below:



We really appreciate when you take time to share your opinions as we use this to improve our services.

DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

All tenants have the right to complain if they are not satisfied with the level of service that we provide. We take complaints very seriously and have a comprehensive complaints handling policy that is in line with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) complaints handling procedure.

Complaints give us valuable information that we use to improve customer satisfaction and make changes to our services.

All complaints are recorded through our corporate complaints system. To monitor complaints we divide them into:

- Stage 1 complaints which are straight forward and need little or no investigation
- Stage 2 complaints which are complex or more serious and need further investigation

In 2017/18, we received 319 stage 1 complaints and 99.06% (316) of these were dealt with within the SPSO target timescale of 5 working days. We also received 28 stage 2 complaints and 100% (28) of these were dealt with within the SPSO target timescale of 20 working days.

🏠	No. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED		No. COMPLAINTS UPHeld		% RESPONDED TO WITHIN SPSO TIMESCALES	
	2016-17	2017-18	2016-17	2017-18	2016-17	2017-18
Stage 1	362	319	83 (25.54%)	87 (27.53%)	325 (89.78%)	316 (99.06%)
Stage 2	27	28	7 (25.93%)	6 (22.43%)	27 (100%)	28 (100%)

Full and detailed performance information will be available in our Annual Customer Report 2017/18, to be published in October 2018.

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Summer Fun

West Aness Residents Association

For the first time this summer, we had help from teenagers sent along by the Active Schools Co-ordinator so all the children went down to the local primary school playing field for sporting activities. The weather was kind this year and they all loved it. There were very few days when they didn't manage to go out but we had craft activities ready in the Community Centre to keep them busy. We always have the favourite lego and hama beads available as well as jigsaws, painting etc. This year we bought piggy banks for them to decorate in the shapes of footballs, elephants and castles. There were the usual indoor games but more often than not, they opted to go out again, this time up to the play park for a while after lunch, under the care of a couple of our own teenagers who had earlier completed a child protection course at Balintore.

Numbers of attendees peaked in the first three weeks and as other play schemes started, some of our older children went off to them, but a surprising number rejoined us in no time at all. We did our own catering for lunches and tried to fit the menus to the favourite suggestions once we'd had a chance to talk things

over with the children. We ensured that there was always fresh fruit available for a 'pudding'.

We had our usual trip to Landmark towards the end of July and were again blessed with good weather. We try to make this a family outing for the children as it is not often that some of them get a day out with both parents. As usual, the Spa Coaches driver was 'child friendly' and we all enjoyed our outing. Another highlight was a surprise visit from a local magician who kept us entertained for an hour or so on a wet day when we couldn't go out. We also had a buffet and bouncy castle day, with music. We'll have another 2-week play scheme in the October holidays, again with lunches.

Our funding came from Children In Need and Cash For Kids and we'd welcome feedback from parents about possibly providing a lunch club for children who usually have school lunches in term time. We already have a Thursday Lunch Club for our senior citizens and a 3 course roast lunch on alternate Sundays in a bid to combat the isolation experienced by many people on Sundays.

South Kessock

The South Kessock Residents Association (SKRA) in Inverness has been very busy over the last few months delivering a wide range of activities and opportunities to get involved for local tenants.

The SKRA won over £1300 funding to help them plan a day out for local residents. Two coachloads enjoyed a free trip on a wonderfully sunny day to Lossiemouth, complete with ice creams, buckets and spades. For many this was their only summer treat. This was a great chance for the local community to come together and enjoy some quality time with each other.

Many local residents enjoyed a day of amusements, stalls, displays, music and a BBQ at the SKRA's annual fun day.

Since April the SKRA has been putting on a sports day on the first Sunday of every month. Local tenants can enjoy football, tennis, badminton and other activities free of charge, including free juice and snack to make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate in a healthy and enjoyable day in their local area.



Milnafua



What a summer for the Milnafua Community Group! They managed to secure £6K from Moray Firth Radio fund and £1500 from the Childcare and Family Resource Partnership. What a boost it has given the community as they were able to provide a seven week programme of lunches and fun activities for the children living on the estate. They were also able to purchase much needed equipment for the play scheme.

The Community Group managed to work with a wide range of agencies and groups to provide a very diverse programme for the local community. What a programme it was! Ross County Football Club volunteered to come over to Milnafua for three days to give the older children a bit of football coaching. Ross Sutherland & Invergordon Rugby Club also helped out for 2 days providing rugby coaching whilst Fyrish Gymnastics showed off their versatility and moves with the younger children.

Invergordon First Responders visited the community centre and did a bit of first aid training including how to use a defibrillator. What a success it was and those who completed it were given a certificate. Highlife Highland also helped out over the summer with their Young

Leaders and Active Schools Co-ordinator who held great sessions in the multi-sport cage. The children loved all the sessions and even picked food from the Milnafua allotments and with the help of Highlife Highland's Adult Learning team made some great tasty bites!

Every day the children were provided with a two course meal and included a vegetarian option! Michael Kay, Chairperson said 'we had a great summer and are very grateful to everybody who supported us. Pat Munro, Contractor donated £125 towards the play scheme and also gave us Hi-Viz safety vests for the children and young people when they went on trips'. Action for Children have given us an enormous amount of support and we are very grateful for their help.

We had between 40 - 72 children attending each day which was amazing! It was great fun especially the trip to Landmark and the fabulous 'Prom' event. The Committee, volunteers and residents put in a huge amount of work for the children living on the estate and we are now planning for the October holidays where we will have more activities and lunches for the children'.

Balintore and District Residents Group



A very hot and sticky summer has been the perfect backdrop to our Summer Playscheme this year in the Seaboard Villages. Our theme this year was Eco with our planned activities re-using, upcycling and recycling plastic bottles, jumble, glass jars, cardboard tubes and pebbles (rocks) to create keepsakes and memories for the children to take home.

By the end of our seven sessions, which ran on a Wed and Friday, gave the children an opportunity to play, create and chill in a safe environment. On top of all of the freeplay, drawings, painting, papier-mâché and scientific experiments; the children had created picture holders, plant pots, bird feeders, candle holders, t-shirts, festival bunting and finally our contribution to the Seaboard Gala scarecrow competition in the form of an upcycled Neptune and Mermaid.

In the mix of the crafts and games, we welcomed Highland Libraries who brought Bookbug and his pals to entertain the children through song and stories. David Ramage brought his expertise on bush craft in an interactive session which had the children mesmerised for two hours. There was also the opportunity to build cardboard box creations in a colourful session with Youth Highland.

On our one day with a 20 min shower of rain, Kayleigh - from Highlife Highland - brought sports and games to keep the children entertained - rounding off with very competitive game of rounders between children and adults.

We finished the playscheme sessions with a mini music festival of fun, with food, bouncy castle and colour throw. The children had great fun trying out some of the instruments that Isla and Jamie brought along - it was great to see 75 children, with family, turn out for the day.

By the end of the playscheme we had over 100 children register with us, most of whom were from the villages, some were on their holidays here and some from outwith the community.

As a new committee for the Balintore & District Resident Group we have been boosted by the support and positivity from the community, our volunteers, unofficial helpers and backers - Highland Council Mid Childcare & Family Resource Partnership Funding and Tesco Community Champion Kelly, who supplied the breakfast club throughout the playscheme. We look forward to putting on more activities over the coming year.

Our lucky winner was Audry Catto from Inverness. Audry is a tenant in a new development and is delighted with her new home! She was surprised when presented with the gift voucher as had just begun completing crosswords as a new hobby. Beginners luck indeed – **Well done to Audry."**



There was an error in printing the word search in the last edition of the Newsletter – the first column of letters on the left was missed off!

Unfortunately this was not noticed until the Newsletter had gone out. Many thanks to all of you who pointed it out and entered anyway!

Rent Consultation

Thank you to everyone who came along to one of our Rent Consultation drop in sessions! It is great to hear all your views about how you want us to prioritise spending your rent money. We are now about to start phase 2 of the consultation – a consultation document will be coming through your door in the next week or two – please fill it in and send it to tell us what you think. All forms returned by 5th December will be entered into a prize draw!

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION

Help is available to reduce Council Tax charges

Are you on a low income? Whether you rent or own your home you may be able to get help to reduce your Council Tax. Eligible households can receive up to 100% reduction from their Council Tax (and will only have to pay their Scottish Water and Wastewater charges). For a Band B property, a council tax reduction of 100% reduction is equivalent to £959.64 for 2018/19.

To apply for council tax reduction please access our website at www.highland.gov.uk/applyonce, visit our Service Points Alternatively, you may wish to contact our Welfare Support Team on our Freephone number 0800 090 1004 for help and support to apply.

To see if you qualify, our basic guide is a useful check for different family sizes with different levels of income: www.highland.gov.uk/ctax-reduction



Save the date!

Wednesday 28th November – The Townhouse, Inverness

The Scottish Housing Regulator is carrying out a consultation on their new regulatory framework at this event in Inverness.

For more info and to book a place call **01463 702683** or email tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk



The Highland Council Rent Arrears Policy

Sometimes things happen and you genuinely struggle to find the rent money - or struggle filling in the forms to claim housing benefits - please contact us right away if you think you cannot pay your rent - we can help.

We will send you a letter as soon as you miss a payment (even if you are claiming Housing Benefit or Universal Credit). If you do not pay what you owe or contact us we will send another letter then a housing officer will visit.

Letter/visit

If you have not paid what you owe or an arrangement to pay has not been agreed, we will issue a "Notice of Proceedings for Recovery of Possession". This is the first step in the legal process which may lead to eviction.

Legal Notice

If we have had to issue a Notice, your housing officer will visit you afterwards to explain what it means. They can still help you agree an affordable repayment plan and stop court action.

Visit

If you have not paid what you owe or an arrangement to pay has not been agreed, we will arrange a "Pre-Court Interview" with the Principal Housing Officer to discuss your arrears. **We still aim to come to an affordable arrangement with you to pay the rent you owe and your future rent and to prevent court action.**

Pre-court Interview

If you have not paid what you owe, an arrangement to pay has not been agreed and kept to or you do not attend the Pre-court Interview, we will take you to Court. If the Sheriff agrees it is reasonable to evict you, a "Decree" will be awarded allowing us to do this.

Court

We want to prevent eviction and will still work with you to come to an arrangement to pay the arrears. We will invite you to a Pre- eviction interview. This is another opportunity to discuss your arrears and come to an affordable. **We aim to come to an arrangement to repay the rent you owe and your rent, and if you stick to it, we will not evict you.**

Pre- eviction

If you do not attend the Pre- eviction Interview or contact us and the arrears are still unpaid, we will evict you.

Eviction

Please come and talk to us at any point in this process — we do not want anyone to lose their home and we will work with you to come to an affordable arrangement to pay arrears right up to the eviction stage.

As well as your housing officer being able to help, we can put you in touch with advice organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, our own Welfare Support Team or housing support providers — they can all help you access advice about benefits, budgeting and dealing with debt. Please speak to us on **01349 886602**

RATE YOUR ESTATE

How do you think we can tidy up your estate?

Following on from our recent pilot scheme conducted in South Kessock, Inverness, a series of tenant led estate inspections were carried out in Ross and Cromarty, Inverness and Lochaber. A total of 23 inspections took place over the summer with various issues identified, some of which included overgrown foliage, disused space, parking issues and fencing/paving in disrepair.

Housing staff were joined by tenants, elected members, and tenant participation officers to walk around the estate where the tenants were asked to identify and prioritise estate issues which are important to them and make suggestions about what we can do to improve the locality.

The funding for Rate your Estate comes from the Environmental budget – at the Rent Consultation last year

- tenants told us they would be happy to see a half percent rent increase if it improved services and one of the
- areas tenants wanted to see improvement was in estate
- management. This budget is split on a ward by ward
- basis and, although spend is ultimately approved by local
- councillors, it is up to Tenants to tell us what they want
- done. We need you to tell us how this money can best be
- spent to improve housing estates across the Highlands.
- Your input is absolutely essential to how we improve the
- service and we need you to get involved.

- **If you want to discuss having a Rate your Estate**
- **inspection in your area, please get in touch with our**
- **Tenant Participation Team by telephoning 01463**
- **702683 or email us at tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk.**



CHANGES TO YOUR TENANCY...

You may remember in a previous edition of Housing Matters when we told you about a number of changes which are coming into force following the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014. The Scottish Government has now completed its guidance and given us dates when these changes will come into effect. The letter printed below and on the next page has been prepared by the Scottish Government to fully explain what the changes to your tenancy are. Please note that, although these changes apply to all tenancies there will be no need for you to sign a new tenancy agreement.

Dear Tenant

CHANGES TO YOUR SCOTTISH SECURE TENANCY RIGHTS INTRODUCED BY THE HOUSING (SCOTLAND) ACT 2014

The tenancy agreement you have with us is a Scottish secure tenancy agreement. This letter explains the changes to Scottish secure tenancy rights made by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014.

This letter affects your rights under the tenancy agreement you signed when you took up your tenancy. You should keep it in a safe place along with your tenancy agreement in case you need to refer to it in future.

Telling us about changes to your household

To ensure that your tenancy rights are protected it is very important to ensure that you advise us of any changes to your household.

This includes telling us about anyone who has previously moved in with you who you haven't already told us about, and when anyone moves into or out of your home in the future at the time they do so.

If you are unsure about whether you have told us about anyone who has moved into your home let us know now.

You can do this by contacting your Housing officer.

Subletting, Assignment and Joint Tenancy

There are changes if you want to sublet all or part of your house to someone else, if you want to assign your tenancy (pass on the tenancy to someone else) or want another person to be included with you as a joint tenant.

Subletting

If you want to sublet all or part of your tenancy, this needs our consent as your landlord. Section 12(2) of the 2014 Act makes the following changes:

- you must have been the tenant of the house throughout the 12 months immediately before you apply for written permission to sublet your home (previously there was no qualifying period), or
- if you were not the tenant throughout the whole of that period, the house must have been your only or principal home during those 12 months; and the tenant must have told us that you were living there prior to the start of those 12 months.

This change will come into effect from 1 November 2019. If the tenant has already told us that you are living there then no further notification is needed. As is already the case, before you can sublet your home you must ensure that you apply to us for permission.

Assignment (passing your tenancy to someone else)

If you want to assign your tenancy (pass the tenancy to someone else), this needs our consent as your landlord. Section 12(2) of the 2014 Act makes the following changes:

- the house must have been your only or principal home during the 12 months immediately before you apply for written permission to pass your tenancy to someone else (previously there was no qualifying period); and

Changes to your tenancy... (continued)

- the person you wish to pass your tenancy to must have lived at the property as their only or principal home for the 12 months before you apply (previously the qualifying period was 6 months); and
- the 12 month period cannot begin unless we have been told that the person is living in the property as their only or principal home. We must have been told that by you, a joint tenant, or the person you now wish to pass the tenancy to. If we have already been told that the person is living in the property we do not have to be notified again.

We can refuse permission to assign a tenancy if it is reasonable for us to do that. Two new reasons when we can refuse an application for assignation have been added to the existing list of reasons at section 32 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. These new reasons are:

- where we would not give the person you wish to pass the tenancy to priority under our allocations policy;
- where, in our opinion, the assignation would result in the home being under occupied.

This change will come into effect from 1 November 2019. As is already the case, before you can assign (pass) your home to someone else you must ensure that you apply to us for permission.

Joint Tenancy

If you want to add a joint tenant to your tenancy agreement, this needs our consent as your landlord. Section 12(1) of the 2014 Act makes the following changes:

- the proposed joint tenant must have lived at the property as their only or principal home for the 12 months before you apply for them to become a joint tenant (previously there was no qualifying period); and
- the 12 month period cannot begin unless we have been told that the person is living in the property as their only or principal home. We must have been told that by you, a joint tenant, or the person you now wish to become a joint tenant. If we have already been told that the person is living in the property we do not have to be notified again.

This change will come into effect from 1st November 2019. Before you can add a joint tenant to your tenancy agreement, as is already the case you must ensure that you apply to us for permission. The person you wish to add as joint tenant, and any existing joint tenants, must apply along with you.

Ending a Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement

By Court Order

The Act changes the way in which a Scottish secure tenancy can be ended following a conviction for serious antisocial or criminal behaviour. Section 14(2) of the 2014 Act means that a court does not have to consider whether it is reasonable to make an order for eviction where the landlord has grounds for recovery of possession under Schedule 2 paragraph 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

These grounds are:

That the tenant (or any one of joint tenants), a person residing or lodging in the house with, or subtenant of, the tenant, or a person visiting the house has been convicted of:

- (a) using the house or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes, or
- (b) an offence punishable by imprisonment which was committed in, or in the locality of, the house.

This means that we can end a Scottish secure tenancy if someone living in or visiting the home is convicted of a serious offence in the area of the house. It allows us to end the tenancy where behaviour has had a serious impact on neighbours or others in the community.

A serious offence is one that the offender could have been imprisoned for, whether or not they actually were sentenced to imprisonment.

If we are intending to end a Scottish secure tenancy in this way, we would serve a notice on you advising that we intend to seek recovery of possession of the property. That would be done within 12 months of the conviction (or, if it was appealed unsuccessfully, of when the appeal ended).

A tenant has a right to challenge a landlord's decision to take court action to end the tenancy on these grounds.

This change will come into effect from 1 May 2019. This change does not apply if we served the notice on you before that date and the notice is still in force at the date when court proceedings are raised.

Adapted Properties

Section 15 of the 2014 Act allows any social landlord to ask a sheriff to grant an order to end the tenancy of an adapted property that is not being occupied by anyone who needs the adaptations. This only applies where the landlord requires the property for someone who does need the adaptations. If this situation happens we would give you notice before applying to the sheriff. We would offer you suitable alternative accommodation. You would be able to ask the sheriff to consider whether our actions were reasonable and to challenge the suitability of the alternative accommodation.

This change will come into effect from 1 May 2019.

Conversion to a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy for Antisocial Behaviour

Section 7(2) of the 2014 Act extends the circumstances when we could serve you with a notice converting your Scottish secure tenancy to a short Scottish secure tenancy. This means that in certain circumstances we can change your tenancy agreement to a different type of tenancy agreement called a short Scottish secure tenancy which gives you fewer rights and less protection from eviction than a Scottish secure tenancy. A short Scottish secure tenancy has a fixed duration, unless we agree to extend it or convert it back to a Scottish secure tenancy.

The circumstances now include any situation where a tenant or someone living with the tenant has acted in an antisocial manner, or pursued a course of conduct amounting to harassment of another person. This conduct must have been in or around the house occupied by the tenant and it must also have happened in the 3 years before the notice is served.

Section 7(2) of the 2014 Act also places new requirements on social landlords when issuing a notice to a tenant converting a tenancy to a short Scottish secure tenancy as a result of antisocial behaviour. In cases where no antisocial behaviour order has been granted by the court, the landlord must include in the notice the actions of the person who has behaved in an antisocial manner, the landlord's reasons for converting the tenancy and details of the tenant's right of appeal to the sheriff.

This new ground to convert a tenancy will come into effect from 1 May 2019

Taking Over a Tenancy after the Tenant's Death (known as Succession)

The 2014 Act changes some of the rules around when certain people can succeed to (take over) a Scottish secure tenancy on the death of the tenant. To ensure rights to succession are protected you must have told us that the person wishing to succeed to a tenancy has moved in with you at the time they do so.

Unmarried Partners

Section 13(a) and 13(d) of the 2014 Act make changes to the rules on succession for unmarried partners:

- the house must have been the unmarried partner's only or principal home for 12 months before they qualify to succeed to the tenancy (previously this was 6 months); and
- the 12 month period cannot begin unless we have been told that the individual is living in the property as their only or principal home. We must have been told that by you, a joint tenant, or the person who wishes to succeed to the tenancy.

Changes to your tenancy... (continued)

Family Members

Section 13(b) and 13(d) of the 2014 Act make changes to the rules on succession for family members:

- the house must have been the family member's only or principal home for 12 months before they qualify to succeed to the tenancy (previously there was no qualifying period, the person simply had to be living there at the time of the tenant's death); and
- the 12 month period cannot begin unless we have been told that the family member is living in the property as their only or principal home. We must have been told that by you, a joint tenant, or the person who wishes to succeed to the tenancy.

Carers

Section 13(c) and 13(d) of the 2014 Act make changes to the rules on succession for carers:

- the house must have been the carer's only or principal home for 12 months before they qualify to succeed to the tenancy (previously there was no qualifying period, the person simply had to be living there at the time of the tenant's death and have given up a previous home to provide the care); and
- the 12 month period cannot begin unless we have been told that the carer is living in the property as their only or principal home. We must have been told that by you, a joint tenant, or the carer.

These changes will come into effect from 1 November 2019. If we have already been told by the appropriate person then we do not have to be notified again.

Right to Buy

Right to buy ended for all tenants of social housing in Scotland who had a right to buy on 1 August 2016

This letter provides a summary of the changes to your rights under your tenancy agreement.

If you need more information on how these changes affect you, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

David Goldie,

Head of Housing and Building Maintenance

GETTING INVOLVED



We recently sent a Customer Satisfaction Survey out to all tenants (if you haven't sent yours back yet it's not too late!). Or you can complete it online at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NDZP8LQ>

Some of the comments on the responses we have had asked if there were opportunities to get involved for tenants who work full time – the answer is YES!

A lot of meetings/events are held in the evenings and if you are interested in taking part in something that is on at a time you can't manage then please get in touch and we can arrange a time that better suits you.

We are always looking for Tenants to join the **Register of Interested Tenants** then, when we need to ask your views on something or we are looking for tenants to join a focus group or review panel we can get in touch!

We are actively supporting Tenants who want to set up a Tenants Forum – there is a well-established Forum in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and a new Forum in Inverness. We would love to see Tenant Forums in the other areas of Highland; Ross and Cromarty, Lochaber, Skye & Lochalsh and Nairn Badenoch & Strathspey.



In some of our more remote, rural communities it can be more difficult for tenants to meet up to

discuss housing issues and not everyone has internet access so we are piloting a **"Community Voice"** scheme where a member of the community is happy to talk to friends and neighbours and feed back their views to the Tenant Participation team.

We have a tenant led **Communications Working Group** who feed back to the Council on any communications going out to Tenants. They also give their opinion on publications such as the Tenants handbook, Repairs Book and Customer Engagement Strategy.

- The **Finance & Participation Group**
- look at the performance data and Value for Money to make sure that we are getting best value for your rent money.
- The **Scrutiny Panel**
- are a group of tenants who examine the way the Council delivers services, they look at the processes and the policies from a tenants point of view and recommend ways to improve the service or save money.

Tenants Chat

- Feedback from some tenants say they would like to see a "letters from Tenants" page in the Newsletter
- – If you have something that you would like to say, a question you want to ask



Highland tenants together

please write in to **Highland Housing Matters, The Highland Council, Community Services, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX** or email: **tenant.**

- **participation@highland.gov.uk**
- stating clearly that this is a letter for publishing in the Newsletter.

If you would like more information about any of the ways to get involved contact the Tenant Participation team on:

01463 702683

or email:

tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk

Find us on facebook: search

Highland Tenants Together.

COMPETITIONS

This time we have two competitions for our younger tenants –each focussing on environmental issues and helping to protect the environment. These competitions are open to all children and young people under the age of 23.

The first competition is “Plastic Challenge”

Create a piece of art (junk modelling) using 'found litter'. Litter is waste in the wrong place – you will normally find this outside.

Your art could be a free sculpture, a collage or a junk model of a character. The theme is: climate change's effect on the natural environment. Ideally each piece of art should include a minimum of three pieces of found litter and may contain other items.

For health and safety, none of the litter items collected should be sharp or dangerous, they should be cleaned to ensure they are no longer smelly, and remember, don't collect smelly litter like rotting food – it doesn't make for good art!

Take a photo of your piece of art and email it to:

tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk

or post the photo to:

**Junior Highland Eco Warrior competition, Community Services,
Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX**



A winner will be selected on 5th December & will receive a Garmin VivoSmart HR activity tracker.



The second competition is to write a story or draw a picture about “How you can help to protect our environment”.

The story should not be more than 250 words and it can be emailed to **tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk** or posted to the address above. If you would rather draw a picture – again it can be scanned or photographed and emailed to us or you can post it.

The winner will also be selected on 5th December & the prize for this competition is a FitBit Charge HR

Prizes have been generously donated by the Highland Council Climate Change Team



We're all paying for the clean-up

Litter on our streets forces local authorities to divert public money away from other public services like schools and roads. Every year Scotland spends at least **£46 million** cleaning up after our litterers – that's around **£20.00** for each taxpayer.



Contact us on 01463 702683 or email: [Tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk)

“Follow us on Facebook ... Highland Tenants Together”

