

18th January, 2021

Highland Council

Tenant Briefing – Coronavirus (Covid-19)

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This briefing was updated on 18th January 2021 and the information included was correct at that time however national guidance is being updated on a regular basis and the situation may have moved on. Please check the web sites listed on the next page for current updates.

Useful phone numbers

Housing enquiries / Homeless Service	01349 886602
HC Coronavirus hotline for people who need help with food or prescriptions	0300 303 1362
Welfare Support Team	0800 090 1004
Universal Credit – open from 9:30am until 3:30pm M - F	0800 328 5644 (phone) 0800 328 1344 (text)
Operations Team (Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reductions and other Council Benefits)	0800 393811
HMRC Helpline - open from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday	0800 024 1222
Scottish Business Helpline	0300 303 0660
Age Scotland	0800 12 44 222
NHS 24 (only to be called if local GP practice is closed)	111
Waste enquiries	01349 886603
Scottish Power	0845 272 7999
GAS (Emergency)	0800 111 999
Home Energy Scotland	0808 808 2282
Police	101 (Non Emergency)
Samaritans	116 123
Social Work-out of hours	0845 769 7284
Funeral Expenses Payment (the Social Fund enquiry line).	0800 169 0140
CAB	0808 800 9060

Useful Web Sites

Health and care advice	https://www.nhsinform.scot/
Health - Coronavirus	https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19
Scottish Government – Coronavirus advice and guidance	https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/
Travel advice	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus and https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home
Advice for refugees and asylum seekers	https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/access/healthcare-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers
Highland Council	www.highland.gov.uk
Universal Credit advice line	www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus
HTSI and Third Sector Response	https://www.covidhelp4highland.org/
Money Advice	https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/coronavirus-and-your-money and https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you

Remember **FACTS** for a safer Scotland

- F** Face coverings
- A** Avoid crowded places
- C** Clean your hands regularly
- T** Two metre distance
- S** Self isolate and book a test if you have symptoms



nhsinform.scot/coronavirus
#WeAreScotland



Stay at home

To minimise the risk of spreading the virus, you must stay at home as much as possible. By law, in a Level 4 area, you can only leave your home (or garden) for an essential purpose.

Full guidance on Level 4 Temporary Lockdown restrictions can be found here - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/>

Coronavirus: Protecting tenants and staff and maintaining essential tenant services

If you have access to the internet the latest advice is available via the Highland Council web site at https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1226/emergencies/896/coronavirus_covid-19 or there is a link on the front page of the Council web site www.highland.gov.uk

As we once again step up to prevent and limit the spread of Coronavirus throughout the UK and beyond, we are taking steps to minimise service disruption while following government guidance and minimising face to face contact. Unfortunately, that means many of our routine day to day services are affected.

Advice for council tenants

As a landlord, our priority is maintaining the welfare of our tenants and staff and providing you with essential services at this difficult time.

The situation is changing daily, but we will provide the most up-to-date information about where you can seek advice if you have any concerns about your wellbeing, income or other tenancy matters.

We do expect further guidance from the government over the coming days and weeks. We will provide you with relevant information as and when we receive it.

Staying Safe and Well

Information

Please seek the latest advice on hygiene and self-isolation from [NHS Scotland](#) (external link).

Vulnerable Tenants

Supporting our tenants is our main priority at this time. We will be trying to contact as many of our vulnerable tenants to see what support we may be able to assist with while you are staying safe or self-isolating. Where we can, we will direct you to other support at this time.

Council services

As you will be aware, most of our offices are closed until further notice and the way we will deliver services is changing. We are assessing how we can deliver non-essential landlord services at this time, while keeping in line with the changing Government guidance.

We will continue to carry out emergency repairs and we will ask questions to make sure it is safe for a trades person to attend. We have issued detailed guidance to our trades and contractors to ensure they follow Government guidance when carrying out repairs.

We are awaiting Government advice on rents and benefit maximisation at this time, but we would encourage all tenants to keep in contact with the Council if you have any concerns and we can direct you to the required advice and assistance.

We thank you for your cooperation and we will be in contact in due course regarding updates to our services.

Housing enquiries

**If you have any queries relating to housing and homelessness, contact us on
01349 886602**

Where to get help :-

Practical support in the community

Groups of volunteers have set up support groups across Highland. These groups are working under the guidance of the Highland Council and the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) and have received advice on keeping both you and them safe and well. These groups are working to help those in their communities who need help, whether by getting shopping for them, collecting medications / prescriptions, walking dogs or just providing a friendly chat on the phone. For information on what help is available in your area see <https://www.covidhelp4highland.org/> You may already have had a card or leaflet through your door with a local contact. If you do not have access to the internet, please call HTSI on 01349 808022 and they will put you in touch with local volunteers.

Staying connected while social distancing

It is very important that people who are staying at home and social distancing do not become isolated completely. Age Scotland have increased funding to their Helpline service to support the over 50's – if you are feeling lonely or just need someone to talk to give them a call!

Scotland's national helpline for people over 50 - 0800 12 44 222

The Age Scotland helpline is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland. Our helpline is free to call and available Monday - Friday 9am-5pm. Call to speak with a friendly adviser on 0800 12 44 222

[Find out more](#)

Mental Health and Wellbeing

You may find that the current situation has a negative effect on your well-being because of changes to your work and finances. You might also experience low moods or feelings of anxiety because of health issues or ongoing social isolation. Often these feelings pass, but sometimes they can develop into a more serious problem.

It's OK to ask for help and there are services you can reach out to if you need support at this time:

- Breathing Space - **0800 83 85 87** is a free, confidential, phone service in Scotland for over 16's experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. <https://breathingspace.scot/>
- Samaritans - **116 123** (calls are free and do not show on a phone bill). <https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/how-we-can-help/>
- Mikeysline - **07786 20 77 55** text line service for people in Highland struggling with mental health difficulties. www.mikeysline.co.uk
- Highland Mental wellbeing - a collection of resources to help. www.highlandmentalwellbeing.scot.nhs.uk

General information on keeping well through this time is available on the NHS web site <https://www.nhsinform.scot/>

COVID-19 Highland Helpline

The Highland Council has a free helpline on **0300 303 1362** to give assistance during COVID-19. You can get advice if you are struggling to get food or prescriptions and there will also be advice for businesses who may need help with financial support. The free helpline is open **Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm.**

Financial Help and Advice

If you are struggling financially you can get help and advice from the **Welfare Support Team** by calling **0800 090 1004** or from **Scotland's Citizens Advice Helpline on 0800 028 1456**, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Calls are free

The Highland Council has also produced a useful leaflet "Worrying about Money" which can be downloaded here https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/23081/worrying_about_money

Covid-19 Self-Isolation Support Grant

The Scottish Government has announced a new Covid-19 Self-Isolation Support Grant for individuals who are in receipt of low-income benefits and who will lose income as a result of being required to self-isolate to prevent the spread of Covid-19. If you have been asked by NHS Test and Protect Service to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020, either because you have tested positive for Covid-19 or you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, you may be entitled to a £500 Self-Isolation Support Grant. More information is available at https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20016/coronavirus/940/self-isolation_support_grant

Who is eligible?

People who are 16 or over, live in the Highland Council area and have received notification from NHS Test and Protect Service (or equivalent service across the UK) to self-isolate, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus, have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive or are awaiting a test result. From 7 December 2020 parents or primary carers of children who are required to isolate are eligible to apply.

In addition to the self-isolation period you must meet the following criteria:

are employed or self-employed; are unable to work from home and will experience reduced earnings as a result; would have been entitled to Universal Credit if an application had been made prior to your self-isolation period; are currently receiving, or have been awarded but not yet received, a payment of the following benefits:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Universal Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working Tax Credit
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income-based Employment and Support Allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit

You can apply by calling our Scottish Welfare Fund Team on **0800 083 1887** or the Welfare Support Team on **0800 090 1004**.

Help with Heating and Electricity costs

Stop wasting energy at home - Energy Saving Trust

You might be surprised by how much money you can save by making simple changes to cut your energy use at home. Switching your appliances off at the wall instead of leaving them on standby could save you £35 a year and won't cost a penny. Likewise, turning your thermostat down by just one degree could save you £60 a year and you might not even notice a difference in temperature. Call Home Energy Scotland free on 0808 808 2282 to help you stop wasting energy and start saving money.

The Energy Saving Trust website also has plenty of [practical quick wins](#) (external link).

If you are struggling with fuel debt and need tailored support, contact Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Advisors free on **0800 870 8800** (see advertisement below right for more information).

Do you need help paying fuel costs for your home?

Low income households within Highland experiencing fuel insecurities can apply for a non-repayable £60 grant.

What is the purpose of this fund?

The Scottish Government has made funding available to local authorities to support people experiencing financial hardship over the Winter period as a result of COVID-19 including providing a contribution towards your fuel costs.

The Council has introduced this fund for households in Highland who are struggling to pay their fuel bills during the current COVID-19 pandemic. This is a limited fund which will not extend beyond 28 February 2021. For more information and to apply go to

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/fuelsupportfund>

Or if you require help with your application please contact the Welfare Support Team

Email: welfare.support@highland.gov.uk or

Phone: **0800 090 1004**.



Get help with your electricity and heating bills

These days we are spending more time at home. This means using more heating, hot water and electricity, and for some a decrease in income too. Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Advisors can help you keep your home warm and your heating and electricity bills low.

We can help you:

- Understand your heating and electricity bills
- Switch to different suppliers
- Talk to your energy company on your behalf
- Access emergency credit and funds
- Keep your bills down



Our Inverness based advisors can contact you via telephone, email or video call.

Call 0800 870 8800 (free)
Email warmth@changeworks.org.uk

For more information visit [changeworks.org.uk](https://www.changeworks.org.uk)

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Neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour

All Highland residents, including Highland Council tenants, are asked to be considerate and tolerant neighbours during the coronavirus lockdown period.

Whilst everyone is spending much more time indoors, some people will inevitably be affected by the actions of some neighbours.

If you are at home or have use of a garden or open space close to your home, it is very important that you ensure your actions do not disturb other neighbours.

Most activities will not be a problem but we ask that you think about the volume of your music and the times when you carry out any activity, including DIY tasks, for example.

Please ensure dogs are kept under control and do not cause a nuisance to neighbours.

The Highland Council is limited to the action it can take during the lockdown period so if you have a complaint to make regarding antisocial behaviour, contact from our Housing staff will be limited to telephone or email only. If you wish to make a complaint, please call **01349 886602**

If you are a victim or witness to a serious incident of antisocial behaviour, such as assault, threats, intimidation, harassment etc., please report this to Police Scotland on 101, or 999 in an emergency.

If you call the Police regarding a noise nuisance complaint, Officers may be unable to attend due to other priority calls. In these circumstances, please keep a diary of noise incidents, to include the date, time, duration and description of the noise. This will be useful information if we need to take action once the lockdown period is over.

If you witness a crime, including drug activity, and you wish to report this anonymously, you can call Crime stoppers on **0800 555 111** or contact them online via <https://crimestoppers-uk.org>

Domestic Abuse

To report it call 101 or in an emergency call **999** or call the 24hr [National Domestic Abuse \(external link\)](#) helpline on **0800 027 1234** or go to **safer.scot**

Please ask for help if you have been affected by violence or abuse. There are many services that can help:

- Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline - freephone **0800 027 1234**
- Inverness Women's Aid - **01463 220719**
- Ross-shire Women's Aid - **01349 863568**
- Lochaber Women's Aid - **01397 705734**
- Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid - **0345 408 0151**
- [Abused men in Scotland \(external link\)](#) **0808 800 0024**

If you feel it is not safe for you or your children to remain in your home, we can provide you with temporary accommodation. This can give you a chance to make long term safe accommodation arrangements. Contact our homeless team on **01349 886602** or **01349 886691** (evening & weekend)

Support for tenants in rent arrears during COVID-19

During the coronavirus pandemic, our priority is to keep our tenants and staff safe. It is important that we support you with some practical advice on paying your rent as well as assisting you to get help and advice on benefits, and other support if you are finding it difficult manage at this very difficult time.

Please be reassured that Highland Council will not evict any tenant who is unable to pay their rent due to the impacts of the coronavirus situation - however, we need to know how you have been affected so please speak to us as soon as possible if you are on furlough, are self-employed or have lost your job due to the impact of Covid19. We will support you based on your individual circumstances. If you need further advice on paying your rent or think we do not have your contact details or have recently changed your telephone number or email address, please let us know on 01349 886602.

If you usually pay your rent using the Paypoint system at a post office or Coop, or at a service Point, and you cannot get out think about changing to Direct Debit. This is easy to set up and means you do not have to remember to pay every week or month – your housing officer can help you do this. You can also pay rent over the telephone with a debit card on **01349 886605** or pay on-line – search using “pay Council Rent” at www.highland.gov.uk.

Department for Work and Pensions Support

The Government has announced a number of ways it will support people in and out of work and who have been impacted by the current crisis. If you are currently claiming benefits to help you pay your rent, or now need to do so, new guidance has been issued which can be found through the [Department of Work & Pensions \(DWP\)](#) (external link)

The DWP guidance covers changes to Jobcentre appointments, special arrangements for people already claiming benefits, advice for people making new claims, and information for self-employed people. Please note that up-dates are coming from the Government and DWP daily so please keep checking to make sure you are getting the most up-to-date advice.

Temporary Changes to DWP / Job Centre Services from 18th January 2021

To help keep customers and staff as safe as possible in the latest phase of the pandemic, the DWP has decided Jobcentre opening hours will be 10am to 2pm beginning on Monday the 18th January 2021. This temporary change means the DWP can continue providing safe, essential services for those who need to visit a Jobcentre and who are unable to interact on the phone or digitally. The opening hours of the DWP [phone lines](#) remain as they were. In addition, the [Relay UK service](#) and the [Video relay service](#) are both still available.

Anyone entering a Jobcentre will be required to wear a face covering, unless they are in an [exempt category](#). If the DWP need to make an appointment with a you, this will be by phone. A message will be left in your journal before they call you.

Brexit: new rules for UK Benefits and the EU

There are new rules from 1 January 2021. Advice and information is available on GOV.UK.

UK nationals planning to move to the EU - [there are new rules on benefits for those who now move to the EU](#). People should [check which benefits they can get abroad](#) before moving.

UK state pension recipients retiring to the EU will carry on receiving their UK State Pension, which will be increased each year in the EU in line with the rate paid in the UK.

EU citizens living in the UK – EU citizens, and their families, who were living in the UK by 31 December 2020, should apply to the [EU Settlement Scheme](#) to continue living, working, studying and accessing benefits in the UK after 30 June 2021.

Changes to homelessness services

Due to restrictions and the closure of Council Service Points as a result of the the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been a change in the way Highland Council provides its Homeless services.

If you become Homeless, please contact our Service Centre on **01349 886602** (during office hours) and **01349 886691** (out of hours) for further help and support.

All contact should be made by telephone in the first instance.

Your enquiry will then be passed to one of our area Housing Options teams who will contact you as soon as possible.

Please only use this service if you are experiencing homelessness and have no accommodation available to you.

If you have been provided with emergency homeless accommodation, it may not be possible for your Housing Options Officer to maintain the level of contact with you that you have been used to up until now, so there may be a delay in your Housing Options Officer responding to any non-urgent enquiries which you make for the current period.

The Scottish Government has confirmed that there will be no evictions granted by the courts for any of the rented housing sectors. No evictions extends to local authorities, housing associations and the private rented sector.

For more advice about Homelessness contact [Shelter Scotland online \(external link\)](#) or call their emergency helpline on 0808 800 4444

Housing Support

If you are receiving short-term housing support or we refer you for support during the COVID-19 outbreak, the support you will receive will mainly be provided by telephone, email or other digital channels. Face to face contact will only take place in emergency situations once a risk assessment has been undertaken and it has been deemed safe to visit. Your support worker will regularly keep in contact with you to ensure that you are safe and well, and to check that you have access to food and medication, particularly if you are self-isolating.

Highland Council Trading Standards webpage on COVID-19 Scams

It has become apparent that in the wake of the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, individuals and organised groups of criminals are now operating throughout the country. Highland Council Trading Standards have launched a webpage on the Highland Council website aimed at both consumers and businesses to identify the scams known to Trading Standards and our partners. The webpage can be found at www.highland.gov.uk/tradingstandards

David MacKenzie, Trading Standards Manager states, "It is clear that scammers are now seeking to capitalise on the current COVID-19 coronavirus, by attempting to take advantage of consumers and businesses at this difficult time. These are blatant attacks on the economy and attacks on ordinary consumers at a time of great uncertainty. The purpose of this webpage is to focus on the scams associated with COVID-19 coronavirus, to make available advice to business at this time, and to provide a link to wider information for consumers and businesses alike."

The advice from Highland Council Trading Standards is to be extra vigilant at this time. Scammers will go to great lengths to convince you to part your money and scams are evolving all the time. The Trading Standards webpages will be updated on an ongoing basis to keep consumers and businesses informed.

Members of the public wishing advice on a particular matter can contact Advice Direct Scotland on 0808 164 6000 or visit www.consumeradvice.scot

Thank you

We would also like to take this opportunity to say a massive thank you to all the key workers amongst you and to the many tenants who are volunteering in their communities. Please stay safe and follow volunteering advice – this is available at <https://www.readyscotland.org/coronavirus/advice-for-community-groups/>