

Housing Matters

Taigheadas na Gàidhealtachd

Spring 2021



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David Goldie - Head of Housing and Building Maintenance

Welcome to the Spring Edition of Housing Matters. This newsletter is an important way that we can update you on issues affecting you as a Council House tenant.

Let me introduce myself. My job is to lead the housing management and repairs services that are delivered across Council housing in Highland. I am also responsible for services in response to homelessness and for ensuring that the Council complies with all its legal duties in relation to housing services.

This has been a very challenging year for us all and we have had to adapt our services in view of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This has meant that local housing teams have had less face to face contact with people, and there have been restrictions on the types of repairs and house improvements we can undertake. I realise as well that many of you will have been finding life difficult under lockdown.

This newsletter contains an update on some of the things that have been happening in the housing service and highlights some useful information and updates. I hope there is something of interest to everyone in this edition.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all those of you who responded to our consultation on rent levels and for everyone who has been involved in tenant groups, the area tenant forums or in any other way as an "interested tenant". We need your feedback and your input to reviewing our services and making sure they are reflecting your priorities.

I am really pleased that we have been able to continue to "meet up remotely" using Teams Meetings and other social media, and that this has worked really well for many people, but we are all hoping that we can return to "face to face" meetings soon.

For anyone who would like to get more involved or find out more please get in touch with the Tenant Participation Team.



Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of Housing Matters!

The past year has been unprecedented, and I am sure a lot of us have struggled in one way or another, but hopefully the end is in sight and we can all get back to doing what we want to do soon. There is a useful list of telephone numbers and web sites on the back page of this newsletter and we are still updating the online Tenant Briefing with the latest information and sources of help and advice. You can access it on the Highland Council web site at www.highland.gov.uk/tenantbriefing.

The Tenant Participation Team

To contact us email: tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk or call 01349 886602 and ask to speak to a member of the Tenant Participation team.



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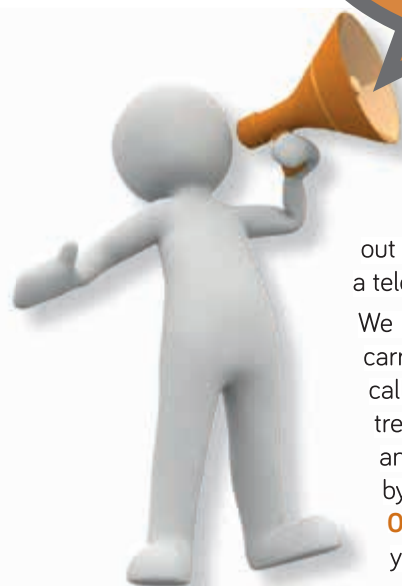
Did you know you can now keep updated on
Tenant Participation by following us on Facebook?

Just 'like' our page and you will be notified when we
post updates.

Find us on Facebook - **Highland Tenants Together**

You can also call us on **01463 702683** or
email: tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk

Tenant Satisfaction Survey



It is very important that we know what our tenants and customers think of our Housing Service to allow us to focus on areas where we can improve and reflect your priorities. Your feedback will help to develop our activities in the coming year.

Our Tenant Participation Team work very hard to involve as many tenants and customers as possible in contributing to the decision making process in matters relating to your housing and environment.

Every three years we carry out a comprehensive satisfaction survey and we report the satisfaction levels to the Scottish Housing Regulator. Previously we have carried out the survey by post, but have had quite a low response rate, so this year it is going to be a telephone survey.

We have asked an independent research company (Research Resource Scotland Ltd) to carry out the survey on our behalf to make sure that your views are clearly represented. If they call you, we would like to reassure you that the call is genuine, and that your responses will be treated in confidence. Research Resource will begin carrying out interviews on 29th March and continue until 7th April, not every tenant will be called, if you have not received a call by 7th April and want to take part please email tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk or call **01349 886602** and ask to speak to a member of the Tenant Participation team and we will pass your details on to Research Resource.

RENT CONSULTATION 2021

We would like to thank everyone who responded to our rent consultation. We would particularly like to thank those of you who also added comments. There were many well informed and well thought out comments, and we are in the process of working through these.

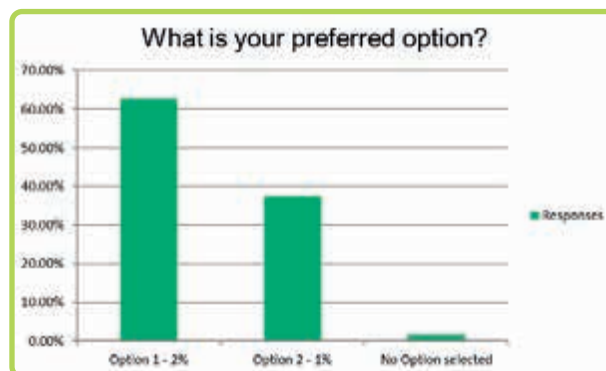
The consultation on proposed rent increases for 2021/2022 ran from 4 December until 21 December 2020. As a result of the ongoing social distancing measures the consultation was mainly digital with Highland Council tenants being contacted by either email, text message or, where we did not hold email or mobile contact details, by post. All tenants were given the opportunity to respond by email, by text or by phone.

The consultation was available on the Highland Council website and was promoted on Facebook and Twitter. We arranged a series of public webinars and rent discussion workshops. We also held meetings with groups of interested tenants via Teams. These workshops focussed in greater depth on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the affordability of rent and the priorities of tenants.

Overall the response rate to the consultation was 1,768 (12.45%). This was an increase in the responses to the consultation from previous years. The responses are in the table opposite:

Feedback from tenants also indicated support for prioritising capital and cyclical maintenance and for increasing consultation with tenants as to what they regard as the priorities for future investment in their homes. Tenants also indicated that the improved delivery of repairs is essential, and a tenant focus group will be established in early 2021 to consider this in more detail.

The 2% rent increase was approved by the Housing and Property Committee on 27th January and will be effective from 29th March 2021.





Annual Rent Increase 2021/2022

Useful Information for Highland Council Tenants

If you are in receipt of Universal Credit Housing Costs to help you pay your rent, it is your responsibility to notify the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) of your annual rent increase.

This year, Highland Council rents are increasing on the 29th March 2021. You will probably receive a 'To-do' in your Universal Credit journal during April 2021 asking you if you have had an increase. Please follow the instructions below to report your rent increase.

Step 1

1. Date of change

Confirm your housing costs

Date of change

Did your housing costs change on 29th March 2021?

Check the letter from your landlord for the change.

☐ Yes

☒ No

Continue

Select **NO**, and follow the instructions to put in the **29th March 2021**

Select **'YES'** and type in your new rent charge as detailed on your Rent Increase Letter

Step 2

Confirm your housing costs

Changes to your rent

You are currently charged £100.00 per week (to rent)

Your landlord should have written recently with details of changes to rent or eligible service charges.

Are you still charged weekly for your rent?

☐ Yes

☒ No

How much is your new rent per week?

£

Step 3

Confirm your housing costs

Changes to your service charges

You are currently charged £5.00 per week in eligible service charges

Your landlord should have written recently with details of changes to rent or eligible service charges.

Are you still charged weekly for your service charges?

☐ Yes

☒ No

How much are your new eligible service charges per week?

£

If you have **'Service Charges'** included in your rent, these will be detailed on your Rent Increase Letter. If you are unsure which eligible service charges to put in your UC journal, please contact your Housing Officer on **01349 886602** for further advice.

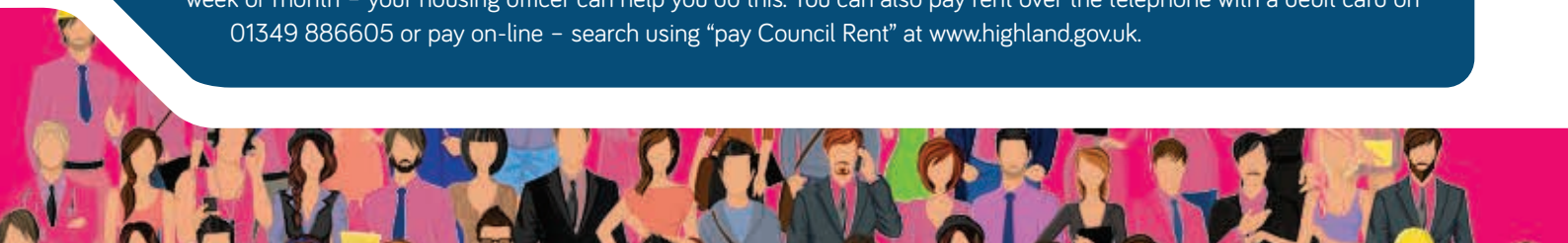
Remember: All Highland Council Tenants have four 'rent-free' weeks per year. The 'To-do' will only ask you about changes to your rent and any service charges, it will not ask you about rent free weeks. You can check you have the correct number of rent-free weeks declared by looking at the housing costs that you have previously declared. If you have any queries about your annual rent increase and your Universal Credit claim, please contact your Housing Officer on 01349 886602 for further advice.

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 to 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.



Ways to Wellbeing from Ewen's Room



Ewen's Room is a mental health and wellbeing charity based in the West Highlands of Scotland. They are passionate about supporting mental health and wellbeing and working to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health issues.

This past year has been one of the most challenging that any of us have had to face. On top of the general challenges we all overcome in day to day life the worry, pressures and uncertainty that we have lived through during 2020 and into 2021 are unprecedented for every single one of us. While there is finally hope on the horizon for a return to the lives we used to have it is no surprise that so many of us are struggling.

You may have heard of the **Five Ways to Wellbeing** - the five steps that have been shown to help with helping your mental health and wellbeing. Ewen's Room would like to share some tips about how to make the five ways to wellbeing part of your self-care routine.

CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE - one of the toughest things for all of us during lockdown has been being apart from our family and friends. Unable to share a hug, touch a hand or just sit side by side. Even while we are apart though there are ways to keep that connectedness. Make sure you spend some quality time with the people you live with or have social contact with. For those you are apart from, dedicate some time to a really long phone catch up or writing a letter. Think about having a watch party where you both start a film at the same time and chat on the phone or online as though they were next to you on the sofa. If you are feeling lonely or isolated then reach out to others and don't forget services like the Ewen's Room helpline and text line where trained volunteers are happy to listen to whatever is on your mind. You don't have to be in crisis to benefit from talking things over. Monday to Friday 5-10pm, weekends 12 noon to 10pm. **Helpline 0800 689 3317 / textline 07537 431637.** We also have a regular zoom peer group meeting which is open to everyone, every Thursday from 7-8pm. Come and join us for a catch up chat, a fun activity and some new friendly faces.

GET ACTIVE - whether that is signing up for a physical challenge or just making sure you spend 15 minutes a day outside in the fresh air. Being outside is brilliant for our wellbeing, particularly in the beautiful corner of the world we are lucky enough to call home. With spring in the air you are sure to notice signs of flowers appearing and wildlife starting

to appear again. Ewen's Room have an Up & Out Challenge we'd love to have you join us for. Check out www.ewensroom.com/events/upandoutchallenge/ for more information.

LEARN SOMETHING NEW - It's never too late to learn new skills from arts and crafts, to a musical instrument or a new language. There are more low cost and free online courses available than ever before so travel is no longer a barrier and many are pre recorded for you to learn in your own time. Creativity is great for boosting wellbeing so if you've always fancied trying your hand at a new hobby now could be the perfect opportunity. Ewen's Room have been running Creative Workshops during the winter and are planning to continue them into the future. Keep an eye on our website and social media to see when we next have courses being run.

GIVE TO OTHERS - Whether it is signing up for a regular volunteer slot with a charity or organisation, helping out your neighbours or simply spotting a once a week opportunity for a random act of kindness doing something nice for others is guaranteed to give you a warm fuzzy feeling for the rest of the day, help boost your feeling of having done something worthwhile and also helped someone else too. It's a win:win situation! If you can spare some time and are a good listener then Ewen's Room would love to hear from you about becoming a volunteer for our helpline or fundraising. Get in touch with our volunteer coordinator Hugh at hugh@ewensroom.com

BE PRESENT - We've all heard about mindfulness and being 'in the moment' but it really does help you to feel grounded and present. Paying close attention to the right here and now, the moment you are living in and what is around you can be really useful if you are feeling overwhelmed. Letting go of the past and taking some deep breaths rather than fretting about the future can really centre your thoughts and calm you down. If you struggle with this then learning some meditation techniques, finding out about activities like forest bathing or practising the 5,4,3,2,1 technique can be really useful. Stop and focus on 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel or touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste just where you are right now.

Nic Goddard. Ewen's Room

www.ewensroom.com

www.facebook.com/ewensroom

www.instagram.com/ewensroom

TENANT PARTICIPATION GOES DIGITAL!



Over the past 12 months, while we have not been able to meet in groups face to face, the Tenant Participation Team have been working with interested tenants across Highland to engage with them digitally. We now have over 200 tenants who are able to meet with us online using Microsoft Teams. Tenant and Resident groups have been meeting regularly via Teams or Zoom; Tenant Area Forums have been taking place on Teams and groups of interested tenants have been meeting up online to discuss housing in their areas.

The Highland Tenants Scrutiny Panel have been working together on Teams to look at Tenant Satisfaction with the Empty Homes Standard. We have carried out a Rent Consultation, Tenant Repairs Focus Group and many local consultations online.

It hasn't all been work though, there have been online quizzes, Christmas get togethers and useful workshops on Energy Efficiency, Scam Awareness and Mental Wellbeing as well as a regular weekly online "Coffee Morning" to help folks stay in touch.

Tenant Participation is very important to make sure that the Housing services we provide are what you want them to be. Tenants' rent money pays for the service and it is important to us that you get value for money and that we are spending money on the things you want us to and providing a good service. If you think you could help us to do this and would like to get involved, either now (digitally) or in the future (face to face) please get in touch with a member of our Tenant Participation Team by email to tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk or by calling us on 07557 744413.

GARDEN AID FOR COUNCIL TENANTS

The Council operates a garden aid scheme for tenants who are unable to cut their gardens as a result of age and disability.

We are still awaiting further guidance on the Covid-19 restrictions, but we are hopeful that our contractors will be able to start cutting gardens, for existing

garden aid recipients, from the second half of April onwards. Gardens will be cut roughly every 2 weeks during the summer season although this will be dependent on the restrictions (and the Highland weather!).

We currently accept tenants on a waiting list for the scheme although please note that the scheme is currently fully-subscribed and there is no provision to cut additional gardens.



Worried about paying for your heating?

Our Highland based advisers are here to help you:

- Take control of your energy costs, especially if you have all electric heating
- Check you are on the best tariff
- Talk to your energy company on your behalf

Access our free and impartial service today:

Call 0800 870 8800 free

Email warmth@changeworks.org.uk

For more information visit changeworks.org.uk

Changeworks Resources for Life Ltd is a company registered as a charity and limited by guarantee with Charity No. SCO15144 and Company No. SC103904. Registered office: 36 Newhaven Rd, EH6 5PY.



Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Services is here to help

Highland residents overall pay some of the highest energy tariffs and have to deal with the coldest weather in the UK. For over seven years, our Affordable Warmth Advisers have helped people in Ross and Cromarty, Badenoch and Strathspey and Inverness reduce their heating costs, especially for expensive electric heating, by checking their bills are accurate and giving energy saving advice. We work on a case-by-case basis.

How we helped Mrs S Save £440

Mrs S has all electric heating and had unaffordable high bills. She had tried to switch supplier but was declined by other companies because of the type of tariff she was on. She felt trapped so she came to us for help.

Our Adviser found out her bills were due to overestimated usage, so she was overpaying. The Adviser took meter readings and spoke to the supplier on her behalf, resolving the billing issue. Our Adviser also helped Mrs S access the Warm Home Discount, a payment of £140 from her supplier. She was given advice on effective heating use and options for switching suppliers to benefit from a lower tariff. Mrs S's home is now warm, and she is not worried about her bills.

Get in touch today and find out how we can support you.

HOME HEATING SUPPORT FUND

A £4 million support fund has been launched to help Scots struggling with their energy bills during the coronavirus lockdown. The Home Heating Support Fund is open until March 31 2021

Individuals who are not able to access a nationwide referral partner can contact Advice Direct Scotland for free on 0808 800 9060 or visit the web site <https://www.advice.scot/>. Their expert debt advisers will assess eligibility and apply for funding on the individual's behalf if appropriate.

Targeted funding will reflect individual's circumstances, with extra support available for households where one person is over 75, they rely on electric heating, or live in a remote or island community.

Eligibility is based on households which are 'self-rationing' their energy, meaning those who are deliberately limiting their energy use so that they can afford to spend money on other goods or services. This could be as a result of home-working or home-schooling due to the pandemic.

HOME CONTENTS INSURANCE ARE YOU COVERED?

Highland Council Housing Service has provided a Tenants Home Contents Insurance Scheme for a number of years. Our insurance partners Thistle Tenant Risks advised that the underwriters Allianz are moving away from the household insurance market which means that the service will cease on 31 March 2021. We have written to all tenants paying into the scheme to advise them of this and to ask them to make alternative arrangements from 1 April 2021.

As a Highland Council tenant, you are responsible for providing your own home contents insurance to cover your personal possessions in case of fire, flood or accident.

There are many different comparison sites on-line to help you consider what a home contents insurance policy would cover you for in order to help you make an informed decision on the type of policy you need. You can find out more about home contents insurance from Citizens Advice Scotland at www.citizensadvice.org.uk or at www.moneysavingexpert.com.



NEWS



TRIBUTE TO GRACE

It is with regret that we have to announce that Grace Hainey, a tenant from Hilton Inverness, very sadly passed away on 17th November 2020.

Grace has been very involved in Tenant Participation for many, many years. Grace moved to Highland in 1995 from the Maryhill area of Glasgow where she first got involved in tenant participation. Grace was involved in all aspects of TP – she sat on many tenant focus groups; chaired the very first Highland Tenant Scrutiny group; was one of the first Tenant Representatives to attend the Housing and Property committee and was a longstanding member of the Inverness Tenants Forum. Latterly Grace focussed her efforts on the Strategic Finance Group and her contribution will be sorely missed. Grace was also very active in her community and was the Chair of her local Community Council.

Our thoughts and condolences are with her family and friends

ONLINE COFFEE MORNING – A WEEKLY GET TOGETHER!

The Tenant Participation team have been hosting a weekly online coffee morning via Microsoft Teams. It's an easy-going and open setting to have an informal chat with other tenants from across Highland.

Most of our meetings focus on a variety of easy but fun activities that can be done at home. So far we've been learning how to make salt-dough, making bird seed treats for the garden and doing little crafts from rope. It's a great chance to meet new people and share ideas, while enjoying a cup of something hot.

The coffee morning is every Tuesday at 11am.

If you would like to take part in the coffee morning, or require help in using or accessing the technology to use Teams, then please get in touch through tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk or phone Jessica Boughy on **07774 337689**



WICK INTERESTED TENANTS GROUP

The Wick Interested Tenants Group meets every six weeks for a good chat and to learn about the housing service. As well as information on housing, the meetings feature different guest speakers who focus on a particular topic. Recently there have been talks from Police Scotland to raise awareness on cybercrime and scams, benefits and welfare explainer sessions provided by Citizens Advice Caithness, and advice on energy and fuel bills. Councillors Raymond Bremner and Willie Mackay also attend frequently to provide updates on the Wick and East Caithness ward. The group is a great place to find out more about housing issues as well as connecting with other tenants in Wick and the surrounding areas.

The group is open to any council tenants who live in or around Wick. If you are interested in taking part, then please contact Jessica Boughy, Tenant Participation Officer, on **07774 337689**.

GREAT NEWS!

Our very own Tenant Participation Officer Catriona Sutherland, and her husband Iain had a beautiful baby boy! Torrin Alexander was born on 29th January. Huge congratulations to Catriona and Iain and welcome to the world Torrin!



BALLIFEARY GROWING PROJECT

Last autumn, with funding from HIE's Covid19 community recovery fund, tenants from Ballifeary, Inverness worked with the Ballifeary Community Council to set up a new community growing project ("Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught") in the paved area at the corner of Ballifeary Lane and Springfield Gardens.

It consists of four large wooden planting containers, each about 4m x 2 m, which are waist-height to make them as accessible as possible. They are currently planted up with a range of winter vegetables including leeks, different kinds of kale, spinach, sprouting broccoli, Swiss chard, kohlrabi and winter lettuce, and we are hoping for a nice harvest in the spring when people will be encouraged to pick the produce free of charge.

Although social distancing rules meant that we had to carefully limit the numbers of people involved in planting up the containers, there has been a high level of interest in the project from local residents wanting to find out about the project and get involved, and we hope to be able to run community events and activities when restrictions ease. Local children have already painted wooden bunting which will go up when the weather gets better, and we also decorated one of the cherry trees with lights over Christmas and invited people to hang decorations. The project has a Facebook page "Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught" where we post news.

We have recently received more funding from the Covid19 community resilience fund to install community cupboards

SHOUT OUT TO PAULA AND CATHERINE

We would like to offer huge congratulations to two of our tenants, Paula Lloyd, a tenant from Hilton, was awarded the BEM in the New Year's Honours List for services to the homeless and Catherine Stoddart, a tenant from Ballachulish, was elected on to the TPAS Scotland (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Board as a tenant representative.

Well done to you both!

(for distributing surplus food as well as produce) and a noticeboard beside the vegetable containers, and these should be in place soon.

We are very grateful to Karin McKay for her support in consulting with local tenants, and we were also delighted that the Council was able to arrange to get the paving pressure-washed and the railings and benches painted.

We are hoping that it might be possible to use more unused spaces around Ballifeary for vegetable and fruit growing in due course.



Smithton Residents Association are doing an Easter Project for all the children in the Community, the children have to decorate an Easter poster and display in their window on Easter Sunday (4th April)

The children will be visited by one of Smithton's Easter Bunnies and receive an egg on their door step.

The Smithton Residents Association are working hard to make sure that their community are safe and looked after, they have carried out numerous successful projects during lock down and are still delivering Food parcels to those that need them.

If you would like to see what is happening in the Smithton community join in on our Virtual AGM on Tuesday the 30th March at 7pm new members are always welcome, email smithtonresidents@gmail.com for the link to join.

CYCLING PROJECT – HILTON

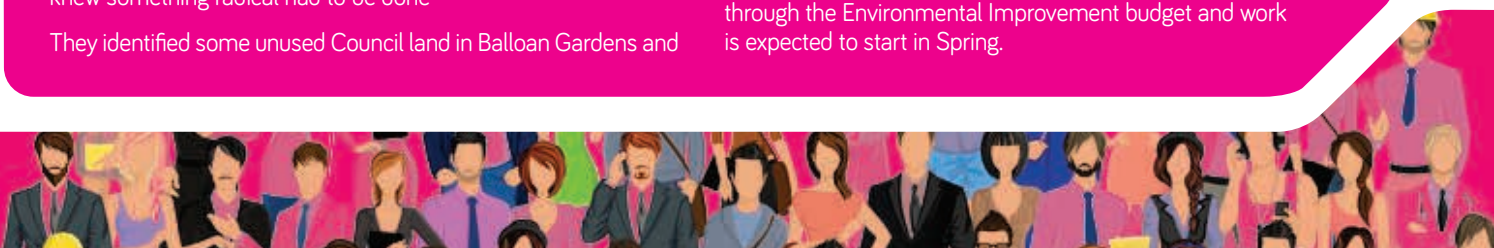
During Covid pandemic restrictions tenants and residents from Hilton, Inverness, who are keen cyclists, started to discuss the importance of cycling infrastructure. They had seen wonderful innovations and facilities for cyclists and bikes when travelling in France and the Netherlands.

Keen to tempt local people out of their cars and onto bikes and to encourage children and young people to take up cycling they knew something radical had to be done

They identified some unused Council land in Balloan Gardens and

outside the community centre at Oldtown Road and wondered if bike shelters, tool stations and air pumps could be installed. Existing CCTV outside the community centre will give added security and reassurance to people parking their bikes in the racks.

Local groups were consulted and Brendan Dougan from WheelNess (Cycling UK) gave invaluable expert advice and was able to show where similar projects have been successful elsewhere in Scotland. Funding for this project was secured through the Environmental Improvement budget and work is expected to start in Spring.



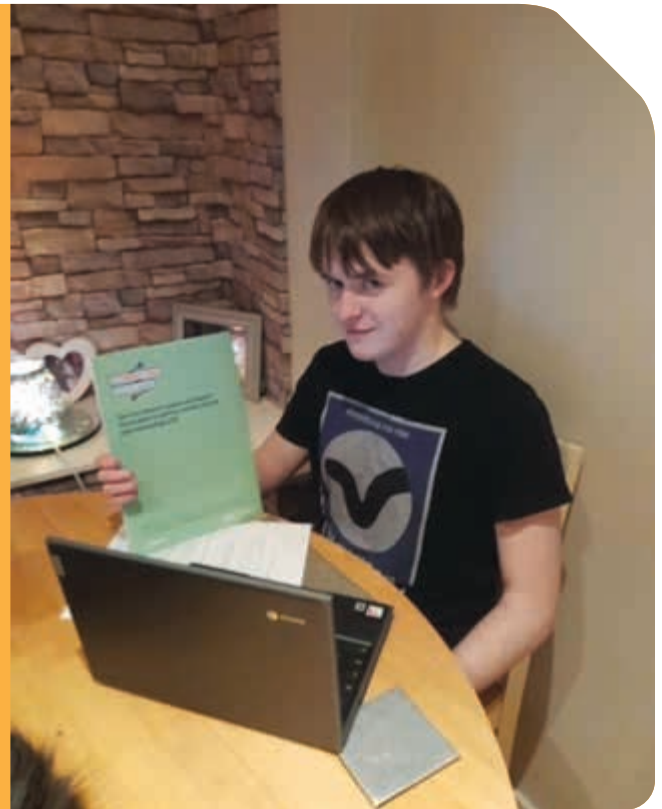
GETTING ONLINE

Throughout the COVID pandemic, the Tenant Participation Team have been helping our Tenants get online! Through providing one to one support, we have enabled them to get connected to attend meetings and events online. Working with the Libertie Project we were also able to provide android tablets to 32 households who did not have a suitable device.

We are now into a second phase of this scheme and the Libertie Project are working with the SCVO to deliver the Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland programme in the Highlands.

The programme will now provide either a Chromebook or an iPad, and a mobile WIFI device with 24 months of unlimited data allowance per month (fair usage applies), and access to digital support and training for individuals who meet the eligibility criteria.

The Tenant Participation team have been referring tenants or residents who meet the criteria for these devices to help them keep connected to their families and friends, order shopping online and even get them involved in Tenant Participation!



GOOD “GREEN” NEWS IN UPPER ACHINTORE

The Upper Achintore Regeneration Group (UARG) is actively working to combat climate change and enhance the local environment. Inspired by the Woodland Trust's Plant Britain Movement, UARG is launching an ambitious two-year programme to get us all planting to help combat climate change and at the same time, boost our wellbeing and wildlife.

The Group has initially identified two potential tree planting sites – firstly, alongside the open burn between Kinross Place and Zetland Avenue and, secondly, alongside the path running from Sutherland Avenue to Lundavra Road, as potential planting sites. The Group is also asking residents to suggest possible planting sites and is working with the Highland Council to promote this. Group Chair Mark Linfield said “If every householder with a garden planted just one tree, possibly a fruit tree, then, combined with the UARG planting scheme, we could easily achieve 2,000 new trees over the life of the two-year challenge”.

As well as this, with in-kind sponsorship from Ben Nevis Distillery, UARG is installing and planting up to ten recycled whisky barrels throughout its area. This scheme is well under way and is being actively supported by local volunteers



EMERGING COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS SCAMS ALERT

While the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine provides a reason to be positive and it can be exciting to receive a text, email or call about it, it is important not to get complacent when it comes to scams. Scammers are continuing to take advantage of the current coronavirus situation, whether it is to extort money, steal personal information or to gain access to homes. And the consequences of being a victim of these scams may go beyond financial harm.

COVID-19 VACCINATION SCAMS

Fake NHS texts, emails and calls are currently circulating telling people they are 'eligible to apply' for the Covid-19 vaccine. Scam messages containing a link to a convincingly fake NHS page asks for personal and financial details which the scammer uses to buy goods, obtain credit in the victim's name, or to create a false identity, likely to be used for other criminal purposes.

There have also been very concerning reports of scammers posing as NHS staff who have visited vulnerable people at home and offered them the vaccine for a fee, or even administered fake vaccines.

Tenants are reminded that across Highland the Covid-19 vaccine is only available on the NHS and you will be contacted by NHS Highland when it is your turn on the priority list to receive it. The vaccine is free for everyone and if you are contacted by someone asking you to click on a link or to provide your personal information, proof of identity or bank details then it is a scam and you should hang up immediately and report it to Trading Standards or the Police on 101.

COVID-19 CRISIS GRANT SCAM

Scammers are sending bogus text messages offering crisis grants of £1500 to individuals who need support during the pandemic and ask the recipient to click on a link to check eligibility, gov.crisis-grant.com.

The link isn't an official Government site and by clicking on it, the scammer obtains the victim's personal and financial data which will likely be used for criminal purposes.

Anyone who receives one of these scam texts should delete it from their device.

Any tenants in need of financial support should contact the Council's Welfare Support Team on **0800 090 1004** or by email to welfare.support@highland.gov.uk.

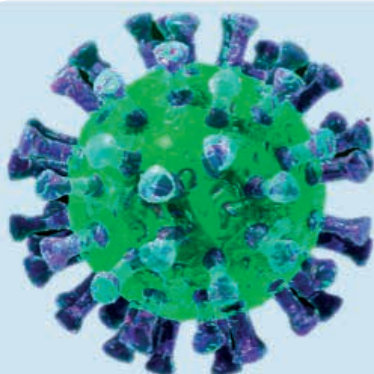
OTHER COVID-19 SCAMS TO BE AWARE OF

- people offering miracle coronavirus cures
- home cleaning services, stating they can sterilise your home and driveways
- people impersonating healthcare workers, claiming to be offering 'home-testing' for coronavirus
- fake emails saying you can get a refund on taxes, utilities or similar
- fake products that say they can protect you or cure coronavirus
- new mobile phone applications that claim to give you updates on the virus but instead lock your phone and demand a ransom
- people offering to do your shopping or collecting medication and asking for money upfront and then disappearing
- scammers trawling social media platforms for people posting their requirements for emergency repairs to be carried out in their homes. If you need work carried out, either use a trade association backed trader or a trader you've used before.

To report rogue traders, contact the Highland Council's Trading Standards on 01463 644570 or Police Scotland on 101. If you have been the victim of a scam, contact your bank immediately and report the incident to Police. If a scam causes you to feel threatened or unsafe, contact Police Scotland on 101 or 999 in an emergency. Free and confidential advice can be obtained from Advice Direct Scotland on 0808 164 6000. You can stay up to date on the Covid-19 pandemic through the following official websites:

- Scottish Government - www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/
- NHS Scotland - www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus
- UK Government - www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- World Health Organisation (WHO) - www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance

Advice is also available on the Highland Council Trading Standards dedicated Covid-19 webpage which is updated on an ongoing basis to keep consumers and businesses informed. The webpage is www.highland.gov.uk/info/20000/trading_standards/900/covid-19_scams_advice_and_guidance



COVID-19

- Scams
- Business Advice
- Consumer Issues

www.highland.gov.uk/coronavirus/tradingstandards

Condensation and Mould in Council Homes



Due to covid 'stay at home' restrictions, people are spending more time at home thus generating more moisture via daily living. Due to the cold, it is likely there is less ventilation too.

Condensation can be a real problem for tenants but is simple to prevent. Condensation is moisture on the surface of things like windows and walls that, if left, can turn into black mould.

When humid air settles on cold surfaces it turns into condensation. If these water droplets cannot dry off through good air flow or are not wiped away this may become a problem and mould may grow.

Often, condensation can be seen on windows and sills. When more severe, condensation and mould will affect walls, or it even may soak into wallpaper, paintwork and furniture. It can often be found in corners of rooms where there is little airflow.

How to prevent condensation and mould

The following steps can help:

Heat your home

- Maintain a warm environment - constant low heating is better than extreme hot and cold.

Keep your home ventilated

- The single most important step is to ensure good ventilation, especially in kitchens and bathrooms. Open windows slightly, use an extractor fan when using these rooms and do not cover air vents. These steps will help to direct moisture outside the house and prevent condensation in your home.

Close kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use to prevent steam escaping into colder rooms.

Reduce moisture levels

- Dry clothes outside if possible, use a condenser tumble dryer or make sure the air vent goes outside
- Cover pans when cooking
- Open windows when running a bath/showering
- Clear window sills of clutter, so it's easier to open windows
- Leave a gap between furniture and walls

Vacuum regularly

- Vacuuming helps to remove mould spores and dust. Mould feeds on dust
- Do not brush sills etc, as this spreads spores

Remove excess moisture

- Wipe windows and sills with a clean dry cloth each morning to remove any water that has settled overnight

What to do if you already have condensation and mould

Condensation

- Use a dry cloth to wipe away moisture from windows, sills, mirrors or walls each morning.

Remove mould (wearing gloves)

- Wash the mould growths with bleach and water (one part bleach to four parts water)
- Clean with a mould spray (fungicidal spray)
- Leave surfaces to dry with plenty of ventilation

Housing First and Homelessness

The Highland Council has embarked on a new pilot initiative called Housing First. The project seeks to support those experiencing long-term homelessness into a tenancy. Once there, they receive wrap around housing and harm-reduction support to prevent repeat homelessness and reduce drug and alcohol use.

Housing First operates under seven principles and these are key to the project's success. Some of the principles include housing as a human right, having a person centre support plan and giving individuals choice and control. The method differs to the 'tenancy readiness' approach and avoids placing someone into supported accommodation before allocating a tenancy. This is in recognition that with the right support, anyone can manage a tenancy.

Housing First Highland comprises of a small multi-disciplinary team consisting of a Highland Council Housing Officer, a Salvation Army Specialist Housing Support Worker and a Drug and Alcohol Recovery Nurse.

The project is funded by the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and our entry criterion reflects their

goal of reducing drug and alcohol related harm in the Highlands. It also focuses on those experiencing long-term homelessness, repeat offending and mental health issues.

We are happy to report that we have a small number of people that have been allocated tenancies across the Inner-Moray Firth. Our clients have a combined homeless history of over several decades and a history of alcohol and drug issues. With the help of the Housing First Team, these tenants are re-connecting with family, offending less, have no or little rent arrears and are receiving treatment.

Some major improvements have seen clients experience their longest spells out of prison and improving their engagement with drug and alcohol support.

Our Housing First pilot project is now being evaluated by the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership and our wider partners to inform how we may be able to develop Housing First and continue the implementation of the approach in the Highlands

UPGRADED SMOKE ALARMS

The Scottish Government have updated their fire safety legislation and social landlords are upgrading the smoke alarm systems in their houses.

This is classed as essential work and we have been working towards the new standard. We will be attending many of our houses over the next few months to carry out these essential upgrades, most of which can be carried out by a qualified electrician in a single visit. Prior to works being carried out you will be contacted by letter to advise of an intended visit. More information on the new standard is available on the Scottish Government Website www.gov.scot/publications/fire-and-smoke-alarms-in-scottish-homes/





HOMES *for the* HIGHLANDS



Glendoe, Inverness



Academy Street, Inverness



Carrbridge

The development of new affordable housing within the Highlands remains a priority for the Council and their housing association partners. The programme of development is reviewed annually by the Council, as the strategic housing authority, in consultation with the Scottish Government who provide grant assistance to support development.

The most recent programme, which looks at development over a 5-year period was agreed in November 2020 with the next review due in November 2021. The programme (the Strategic Housing Investment Plan), which is available on the Council's website, www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4334/economy_and_infrastructure_committee was prepared on the basis that it will be possible to approve around 500 units each year, of which 70% will be for affordable rent and 30% for intermediate affordable housing (e.g. low-cost home ownership or mid-market rent).

The Council has the ability to develop around 180 new homes of the 500 target, with our housing association partners providing the remainder.

Within the programme there is an assessment of which housing provider is best able to take forward any particular project. The

assessment considers location and the capacity of a particular landlord. In many cases there will be more than one housing partner e.g. homes for social rent by the Council, homes for mid-market rent by a housing association and homes for sale through the shared equity low-cost home ownership model.

Inevitably the building programme was suspended on site for over 3 months during the first pandemic lockdown. But in line with guidance that house building could continue on site during the current lockdown period, construction recommenced later in the Summer with enhanced site safety measures to minimise the spread of Covid-19. Although the lockdown has delayed completion of a number of projects resulting in completion of 130 new Council homes this year, against the target of 180, it is projected that the delayed projects will be completed by July 2021 and that the total number of completions during 2020/21 will be around 350. Currently there are 500 homes under construction for the Council with other projects being planned.

Recent completions include homes within Inverness at Slackbuie, Torvean and Academy Street. Completions have also recently taken place in Nairn and Carrbridge. Many other developments are underway throughout the Highlands.



Munlochy



Strathpeffer



Avoch



Feedback

What you told us about our Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocation Policy Proposals

There's been good feedback on the changes that we're thinking of making to the way that we let our houses. We're changing how we prioritise housing applications. We asked every applicant and tenant to give us their views. The response was excellent. Over 1,300 people took part in our survey. Whilst the majority agreed with each proposed change, some proposals were more popular than others.

Our changes aim to: make sure we are targeting people in urgent need of housing more fairly; respond to the changing needs of Highland's communities and meet our legal duties.

Support was most widespread for changes giving better protection to households needing to move out of domestic violence into safety (8 out of 10 people supported this). Many also supported proposals to assess, in new ways, applications from: those living in housing in poor condition (68% agreed); those who need (or give) essential care or support (65% agreed); those who have a 'need to reside' in particular

communities (63% agreed); and those who are home-owners (61%).

There was support, but less so, for the proposed changes to assessing housing applications from people living in over-crowded circumstances (59% agreed); those who have too many rooms (59%); and applicants who are currently private renting or sharing facilities with others (53% agreed). Generally HHR tenants and HHR applicants were more supportive of the changes than others.

Over a quarter of people giving their views were tenants of a Highland Housing Register landlord. We'd like to thank all those tenants who took time to feed in their views.

It's really important to us that we take people's views into account. So, we are now considering this feedback and looking again at some of proposals. We will update you on what we plan to do in our next tenant newsletter.

NEEDING A NEW HOME?

House swaps continue to be an excellent way of helping tenants get their needs met and get what they want. If you are thinking about applying for a transfer, why not consider a mutual exchange too? You might get what you need quicker than you think!

We've updated the things we consider when deciding whether to approve a swap. But, there's been no changes to the way it works. Have a look at our new Mutual Exchange Form on our website (search: highland/mutual exchange). It sets out what you need to know.



We've made these changes so that HHR tenants, who need to move, have opportunities to swap. The changes also help us use our resources wisely. For example, we now re-charge some costs to tenants who move house again very soon after a swap (unless their reasons for moving were unavoidable).

Have a look on the Highland Housing Exchange Website to see what potential swaps are out there: www.houseexchange.org.uk

ARE YOU LIVING IN A LARGE HOME IN A COMMUNITY WHERE HOUSING IS IN HIGH DEMAND?

Do you have more rooms that you use? If so, we're keen to help you explore your options. We may be able to assist you (and take the pain out of moving). Because we need homes for families, we need your help. You can call your housing officer to discuss on 01349 886602.

Useful phone numbers

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

Useful websites

Health and care advice	www.nhsinform.scot/
Health - Coronavirus	www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/ infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19
Scottish Government Coronavirus advice and guidance	www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/
Travel advice	www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus and www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home
Advice for refugees and asylum seekers	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	www.covidhelp4highland.org/
Money Advice	www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/ coronavirus-and-your-money and www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/ coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you