

Housing Matters

Taigheadas na Gàidhealtachd

Autumn 2021



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INTRODUCTION

Cllr. Ben Thompson – Chair, Housing & Property Committee

Welcome to the Autumn 2021 edition of the tenant newsletter, Housing Matters.

The reports delivered to the Housing and Property Committee on 30th September showed how our Housing Service continues to have a positive impact on our Highland Communities, including detailed reports on getting back to normal in repairs, maintenance, and new builds. I was delighted to see the recent Tenant Satisfaction survey indicate higher rates of satisfaction for five of the six performance indicators and a significant improvement compared to previous satisfaction surveys. I also welcome ongoing engagement with the Scottish Housing Regulator. My role means I sign the Council's Annual Assurance Statement and the Committee



also approved this year's Statement. The Statement provides the regulator with insight into the processes the Council follows and the priority we have on tenant safety and rent affordability. This year's statement is positive and shows the good work of the Housing Service, particularly against the challenging backdrop of lockdowns and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tenant Participation Team and frontline Housing officers have been actively encouraging tenants to be involved in decisions that will affect them, supporting tenants and the Council to work together to improve services and ensure tenants have all the information they need. I would also encourage tenants to participate as much as possible.



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



To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, CD, or suitable language, please contact The Tenant Participation team on 01463 702683 or email tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk

Getting Involved!

TENANT PARTICIPATION



Firstly, we would like to thank all our tenants who have continued to work with us, to make improvements to where they live, over the past year.

We have continued to carry out telephone and online tenant surveys, hold online tenant meetings and Forums, and deliver informational web casts on a variety of topical subjects e.g., Fire Safety, Mental Wellbeing, Energy Efficiency and Scams.

We have also successfully trialled a new type of survey. The Rate your Place survey is based on the Place Standard and is designed to gather a holistic view of how people feel about living in a specific place. This presents a visual interpretation of the issues most affecting our communities and has been very effective in reaching tenants and residents who are happy to work with us to set up residents' groups and improve their estates.

We are slowly getting back to some face to face meetings with tenants and tenant groups, but always mindful about tenant and staff safety. We have restarted Rate your Estate walkabouts - this is where tenants / residents, Council staff and local Councillors inspect an estate together and prioritise environmental improvements which need to be done.

In a survey of our interested tenants some of them said they were happy to meet up in small groups, but others told us they would rather continue to meet online. We also asked tenants who had not participated online, if we could provide them with support or training and loan them a suitable device, such as a laptop or tablet, with internet access, would they like to join online meetings? **Nearly 62% of those who responded said they would.**

If you think that you would like to get involved, or are interested in setting up a residents' group, and want to find out more, please get in touch. You can email: **tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk** or telephone: **01463 702683** or contact your local tenant participation officer directly.



We are often asked what is Tenant Participation?

Tenant Participation is about involving tenants in decisions about how we deliver their housing services, how we spend their rent money, and how we can improve our services and the areas they live in.

The Tenant Participation Team actively encourage tenants to be involved in decisions that will affect them and their communities, supporting tenants and the Council to work together to make improvements and ensure tenants have all the information they need to enable their involvement.

Tenant Participation Officers

Area: **Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross**
Officer: Jessica Boughey
Email: jessica.boughey@highland.gov.uk
Tel: 07774 337689

Area: **Mid and West Ross**
Officer: Maureen Cusick
Email: maureen.cusick@highland.gov.uk
Tel: 07387 234107

Area: **Inverness, Skye and Lochaber**
Officer: Karin McKay
Email: karin.mckay@highland.gov.uk
Tel: 0785477696

Area: **Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey and rural Inverness**
Officer: Andy Harvey
Email: andrew.harvey@highland.gov.uk
Tel: 07767 162258



TENANT AREA UPDATES

South Kessock Residents Association (SKRA)

South Kessock Residents Association have had a busy year working to improve the area. We had a very successful clean-up day in partnership with the Highland Council and a litter pick where we worked with the Velocity project who used an e-bike and trailer to take litter to the recycling centre.

The group are now working on developing a community garden, focussing on growing food for residents. An area has been identified on the large green space behind Craighton Avenue and the local councillors have agreed to fund fencing for the area and to purchase a container to store the garden tools. Other plans include identifying a space for a Community Hub for the area.



New residents' group in Windsor Place!

Following on from a Rate your Place survey, a joint estate inspection was carried out in Windsor Place in June 2021. Residents were joined by Highland Council staff and the local councillor to have a walk about the estate and to identify areas of concern.

In addition to the resulting action plan for the area, the newly formed Windsor Place Residents' Group has been constituted and the Highland Council are working with the group to set up a Community Hub to support the local residents for drop in advice and information sessions, as well as being a place for the resident's group to meet.

Plans are at an early stage, but these include a growing project for all ages, a clean-up day and looking into getting funding to improve accessibility for all residents by installing dropped kerbs where there are none.

Plantation Community Association, Fort William

Call out for residents to be part of the Plantation Community Association and make a difference! If you are resident in the catchment areas below:

- Kennedy Road • Pinegrove to Henderson Row • Mamore Crescent • Alma Road • Victoria Road
- Fassifern Road • Argyll Road • Union Road • Cameron Road • Hill Road

and would like to help us to make improvements to your area then please get in touch with

Karin Mckay, your Tenant Participation Officer, on **07785 477696**. A public meeting is planned for November, date to be confirmed. Once the new committee is formed the group will be supported by the TPO, along with the help of Voluntary Action Lochaber, the Community Support Coordinator and Lochaber Housing.

We look forward to working with you.



Are you a Beaully Tenant?

Want to find out more about housing or issues that affect your area?

Come along to our Beaully Interested Tenants Meetings! We'd love to hear about your experiences and thoughts on living in Beaully. It's also a great way to meet your fellow tenants.

If interested, please contact: **Andy Harvey** on **07767 162258** or at **andrew.harvey@highland.gov.uk**





Smithton Residents Association

The team at the Smithton Residents Association have been busy over the last few months. The Smithton Clean-up has been hugely successful, giving people the chance to get rid of unwanted items and rubbish, they have been litter picking and weeding. Their most recent project saw them planting 11000 crocus bulbs and 200 daffodil bulbs. Smithton is going to look blooming marvellous next Spring. They are busy planning their Halloween event now, the kiddies in Smithton are in for a treat! See their Facebook page for further information www.facebook.com/groups/1103823379640269

Junior Warden Scheme

The Junior Warden Scheme is well underway with pupils from Alness Academy. The scheme is taking place over several weeks, featuring sessions with the RNLI, Police and Fire Brigade - as well as the Highland Council's community warden team. This is a fantastic chance for young people to learn more about their community and what it means to be a good citizen. The young people can also put the hours spent taking part in the scheme towards their Dynamic Youth Award. The Tenant Participation Team have developed this exciting programme along with Youth Development Officers from Highlife Highland.



Alness Academy pupils trying out some lifesaving kit during their visit from the RNLI.



The Junior Warden Scheme was also launched in Dingwall Academy with first year pupils in June 2021 with an 8 week programme including a walk with the community warden, meeting the local councillors, a litter pick, and a visit from the fire service. The group came together for a final meeting in September and were presented with certificates to recognise the work that they had done. Feedback highlighted the challenges the young people had faced during the previous 12 months due to the pandemic and how much they had appreciated coming together to work as a group.

Kinlochleven Environmental Regeneration Group

are a new group that are working to improve their area and are developing a food growing project for the community. If you are interested in Food Growing, then please get in touch with the group via Facebook www.facebook.com/groups/324499302524948

Kinlochleven has also been awarded the Place based funding which has been allocated to each Council Ward. The fund was discussed by the Lochaber Area committee on the 9th August and it was agreed to allocate £50k for play provision in Kinlochleven. We are now looking for a subgroup out with the Food Growing Project to take this forward and consult with local parents and children as to what they would like the money spent on.

The 50K allocated will not buy a lot and the group would need to try and raise further funds, and apply for other funds from elsewhere, if there is a desire to do more than replace one or two pieces of equipment. Some examples of less expensive park improvements that could be made could be a natural play area, using landscaping, stepping stones, small slopes, family picnic areas etc., often less expensive to do but just as much play value as putting in all fixed play equipment. This may also be more in keeping with the natural surroundings of Kinlochleven.

The new Community Support Coordinator, Jane Young, Bryan Gregg from Voluntary Action Lochaber and Tenant Participation Officer, Karin Mckay, are happy to discuss and support the subgroup. Please get in touch with Karin on 07785477696 if you would like to be involved in creating a better play area for the children in Kinlochleven.

Balintore & District Residents Group - Summer Of Hope Playscheme

The Balintore & District Residents Group ran a hugely successful playscheme over the summer holidays. The busiest day saw almost 100 children attend, with 167 children registering for the scheme in total. The scheme ran with additional funding from the Highland Council, Youth Highland, MFR Cash for Kids and the Arnold Clark Community Fund.

This year the group paid three youth leaders from their own community to run the playscheme, as well as training 6 young leaders over the course of the summer. As well as the free play activities there were opportunities for children to get creative with ceramic painting, badgemaking and clay modeling. There were also cheerleading sessions held by Jan Trumble, Rock Pooling and Beastie Hunts with Farmer Jones Academy and an exciting drumming session with Guarana Street band.

In addition to the playscheme the group re-introduced the senior Friday youth club and created a new junior youth club for P5 - P7 on Mondays.

The group plans to continue to employ the youth leaders, with funding applications already submitted. They would love to run an afterschool club Mon - Friday from 3.00 - 5.30 p.m. and to continue running the youth clubs.

Well done for all your hard work!



Mansfield Estate Community Clean Up

The Mansfield Residents Association ran a highly successful community clean up day back in June, in partnership with the Tenant Participation Team and CCAST.

The residents made full use of the skips provided and there was a steady stream of residents disposing of their rubbish throughout the day. There was also a support team with a trailer provided by CCAST. They made several trips to Tain dump to dispose of collected items that were unsuitable for the skips, such as white goods or electricals. Local resident David Urquhart kindly volunteered his quadbike and trailer to move heavy items from various locations around the estate to the skips, on behalf of residents who were unable to do so themselves. Lastly the community payback team provided much needed assistance to lift heavy and bulk items as well as transporting items to the dump. The group would also like to extend their thanks to Tesco, Tain who kindly donated sandwiches and biscuits as refreshments.

All in all this was a fantastic job done with two large builders skips filled with unwanted or broken items - this made a huge difference to the estate, well done to the group for all their hard work!



Annual Assurance Statement

Members of The Highland Council's Housing and Property Committee, on 30 September 2021, approved the Housing Annual Assurance Statement for 2021, which focused on the key themes of statutory requirements, legislation, charter performance, customer satisfaction and engagement.

The Statement is a regulatory requirement monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator which oversees how social housing providers are regulated and their reporting requirements.

Highland's 2021 Statement confirms Highland Council has achieved compliance with legislative duties and how it delivers essential services to tenants. It also emphasises the importance the council places on effective tenant participation.

The statement highlights there were no health & safety breaches in 2020- 21 resulting in intervention by the Health & Safety Executive.

The Council confirms its progress towards every tenant having fire alarms in place to meet the new standard by the February 2022 deadline.

Highland also complies with the Gas Safety Advice recommendations issued by the Scottish Housing Regulator to all social landlords on 3 September 2021.

Chair of the Housing and Property Committee, Cllr Ben Thompson, provided information on the remit of the Committee in scrutinising the Council's housing performance when representatives from the Scottish Housing Regulator liaised with the local authority earlier this year.

Cllr Thompson said: *"We very much welcome our ongoing engagement with the Scottish Housing Regulator. Our Assurance Statement will provide them with a helpful insight into the processes we follow and the priority we have on tenant safety and rent affordability."*

This year's statement is again very positive and underpins the hard work of everyone in our housing service, particularly against the backdrop of lockdowns and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic."

Having gained Committee approval, the Assurance Statement will now be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Worried about the energy price cap rise?

Britain's energy regulator Ofgem has announced that the energy price cap will increase from 1 October and some customers could see their annual bills rise by as much as £153 a year. The price cap increase is being driven by a rise of over 50% in energy costs over the last six months with record gas prices being reported.

Ofgem said that any customer in vulnerable circumstances or worried about paying their energy bill should contact their supplier to access available support. Other help is available too. Home Energy Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government, provides impartial energy advice to help you reduce your heating costs and make your home warmer and more energy efficient. Home Energy Scotland's Highlands and Islands advice centre advised over 10,000 households during 2021/22 and you could benefit too.

One of the main ways to keep your bills down is to stop wasting energy. According to Energy Saving Trust you can save around £35 a year* just by remembering to turn your appliances off standby mode. You can also save around £22 a year from your energy bills just by using your kitchen appliances more carefully.

If you would like more help to reduce your bills call Home Energy Scotland free on 0808 808 2282 to speak to an advisor or watch their energy saving tips video.

**This saving includes all appliances, consumer electronics, lights and chargers that have been left on standby mode or have been left on and not in use.*



HOMEENERGYSCOTLAND.ORG
0808 808 2282
FUNDED BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

delivered for Scotland by
energy saving trust



The CONNECTING SCOTLAND Programme

aims to get 60,000 digitally excluded households online by the end of 2021 by providing Digital devices (iPads or Chromebooks), Internet connectivity – a mobile WiFi hotspot with 24 months unlimited data. Training and support will also be available.

The current application round is for people who are at risk of social isolation and loneliness

WHO IS ELIGIBLE? We can apply for support for people who meet all the following criteria:

- They are digitally excluded – they currently do not have access to an appropriate device and/or internet connection at home.
- They are from a low-income household – they cannot afford to buy a device or pay for internet access from their household income.
- They are at risk of social isolation or loneliness.

The three priority target groups are:

- Older people (aged 60+)
- Disabled people
- Single parents

If you think that you meet the criteria above, then please contact the tenant participation team on **01463 702683** and leave your name and number and we will call you back.

Or you can email tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk



UPDATE ON HOUSING SERVICES

The delivery of services continues to be impacted by the covid-19 pandemic but many of our housing services have partly or fully-resumed as restrictions have eased nationally.

All repairs are being carried out in line with the health and safety guidance. There is a backlog of non-emergency repairs caused by the restrictions but our trades and contractors are working through these and any committed works will be carried out in the coming weeks.

Capital work improvements – such as new heating, bathroom and kitchen installations – were able to resume from 26th April and again it is a case of working through the backlog of outstanding works. The Tenant Liaison Officers will be in touch with tenants to update them on revised schedules for capital works. Tenants will be aware of some of the issues in the construction industry regarding material shortages and contractor capacity, so continued patience is appreciated while works are organised.

Tenancy management visits and other frontline contact has resumed and officers follow a risk assessment process to ensure the safety of both tenants and officers. Where possible, digital or phone contact is continuing and tenants

are encouraged to advise officers of their preferred means of contact.

Tenant participation has also resumed in-person subject to risk assessment. Tenants are encouraged to speak to the Tenant Participation Team in regard to their preferred means of contact.

Across the Council, most services have resumed although they continue to be impacted by the pandemic. Customer Services has advised that most of the Service Points will re-open in the next few weeks and tenants should keep an eye out for Council press releases to confirm these arrangements.

Work is ongoing upgrading Fire Alarms to meet the Scottish Government's updated fire safety legislation. We will be contacting tenants who have still to get this work done over the next few months. It is essential that access is permitted to ensure this legislative work is carried out

Once again, I would like to pass on the thanks of the Council officers for the patience and support offered by our tenants during this difficult period.

Brian Cameron - Housing Policy & Investment Manager

Opportunities for Highland's Gypsy Travellers to Influence Improvement Plans

Many residents have links to Highland's Gypsy Traveller community. They're a long established part of Highland's history and culture. We have four sites where Gypsy Travellers can stay if, for example, they want opportunities to maintain their cultural heritage in this way.

We are currently exploring ways to 'future-proof' these sites. We want them to be **"great places to live and bring up kids"** – with decent accommodation and satisfied tenants. We're involving our site tenants in the plans.

We'd like to give anyone, with links to the Gypsy

Traveller community, the option to get involved. We know that you, or your family, may wish to stay on our sites in the future.

If you'd like to get involved in giving us your thoughts and ideas, please get in touch. **Contact your Tenant Participation Officer, or Housing Officer, or email us on: tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk**

We can tell you more about what's happening.



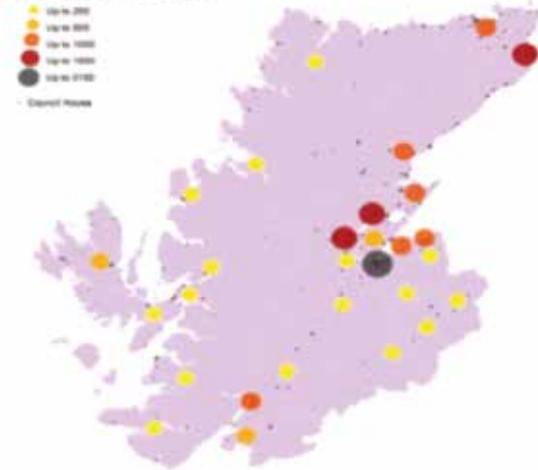
Summary of our Annual Customer Report from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

This is a summary of the figures submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator in May 2021. The Strategic Tenant Finance group have reviewed the figures and agreed the presentation

As of 31st April 2021, the Highland Council owned and managed **14,337** council houses in 223 communities in city, town, rural, remote and island locations.

Highland Council housing locations:

Number of council houses in Letting Zone



14,337 homes owned and managed by the Council, made up as follows:-

234

Bedsit properties

3,709

1 bedroom properties

5,876

2 bedroom properties

4,116

3 bedroom properties

402

4 bedroom plus properties

During 2020/2021, we let **900** properties to homeless households and people on the councils' waiting lists
900 lets were made by the Council during the year: -

| | |
|---|--|
| 292 To existing tenants (transfer list) | 253 To waiting list applicants |
| 249 To Homeless applicants | 57 Mutual Exchanges were carried out |

Voids & Empty Homes Rent Loss

| | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | SHN Average |
|--|----------|----------|-------------|
| % rent loss through properties becoming void | 0.69% | 0.89% | 1.37% |
| Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year | £347,070 | £460,945 | 56.3 days |

It took us **44.2** days to re-let our empty properties compared to the Scottish Housing Network (SHN) Benchmark Group average of **56.3**. The increase in relet times is directly related to the impact of the Covid pandemic but we are still below the Scottish average.

Voids & Empty Home Repair Costs

| | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | SHN Average |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Average cost per property | 31.9 days | 44.2 days | 56.3 days |

Rent charges and Rent Arrears

In 2020/21 the total rent collected for the year was **£51,460,991** (this includes current and advance rent payments, housing benefit and rent arrears recovered), which was **99.28%** of the total rent due in the year.

The Gross rent arrears on 31st March 2021 were **£2,940,783** this was made up of **£2,657,975** current tenant arrears, **£189,668** former tenant arrears and **£93,139** write offs.

Average weekly rent for each property size in 2020/21

|  | Highland Council | Scottish Average |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Bedsit | £67.22 | £73.61 |
| 1 Bed | £71.87 | £79.59 |
| 2 Bed | £79.02 | £82.67 |
| 3 Bed | £87.80 | £89.82 |
| 4+ Bed | £97.56 | £99.99 |



88.92% of tenants thought their rent was good value for money

Percentage of homes meeting the EESSH

| 2019 - 20 | 2020 - 21 | SHN Scottish Average |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 73.9% (10,479 properties) | 74.6% (10,699 properties) | 88.7% |



Repairs Performance

| | 2019 - 20 | 2020 - 20 | SHN Average |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs | 6.0 hours | 8.52 hours | 4.22 hours |
| Average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs (working days) | 5.3 days | 7.92 days | 6.74 days |
| % of repairs carried out in the last year right first time | 94.9% (22,571 repairs) | 92.9% (34,179 repairs) | 91.5% |
| % of repair appointments kept by trades | 91.8% (24,342 appointments) | 94.33% (19,051 appointments) | Not Available |

The increase in length of time taken to complete both emergency and non-emergency repairs in 2020-21 was directly impacted on, due to the Covid pandemic.



97.52% of tenants were satisfied or very satisfied with the repairs service

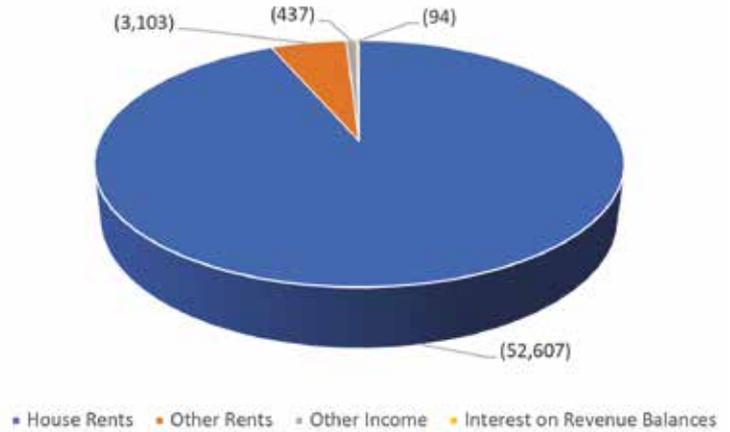
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

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. The chart on the right shows where the money comes from. This money is ring fenced and can only be spent on services that improve our housing stock and benefit tenants.

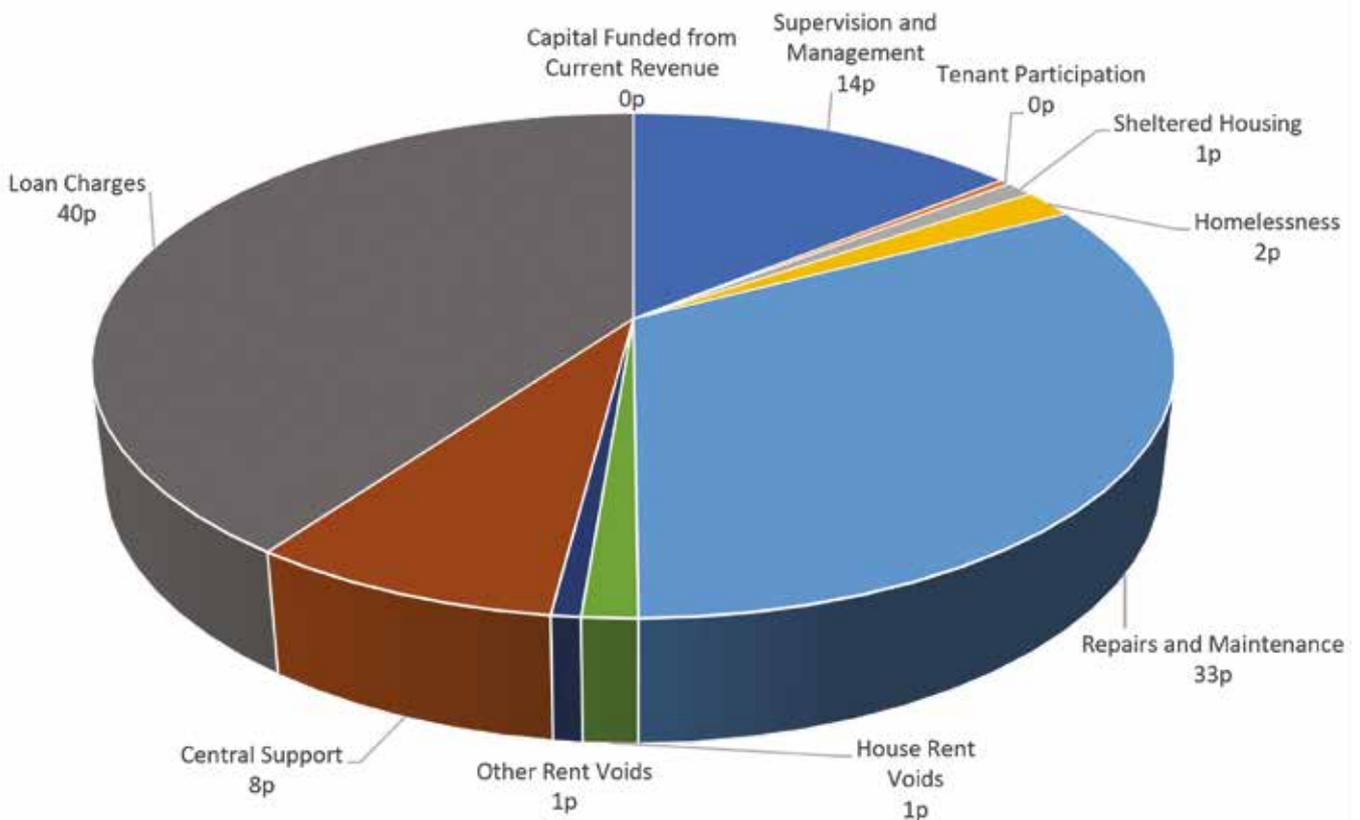
We recognise that tenants want to live in warm, comfortable, and well-maintained homes in a nice area. For this reason, we install new heating systems, kitchens, and bathrooms. We also carry out estate improvements which arise from our Rate your Estate inspections. We try to do all the things that we know our customers want from us. Understandably this comes at a cost.

The chart below shows how the money is spent:

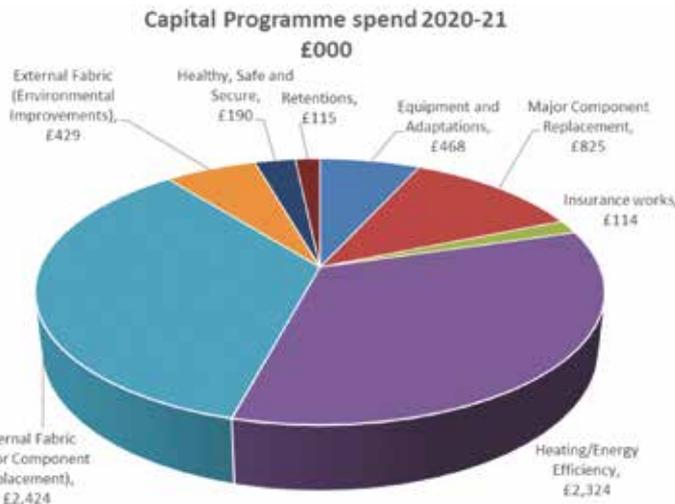
Housing Revenue Account Income 2020 - 2021



How each £ of your rent was spent 2020 - 2021



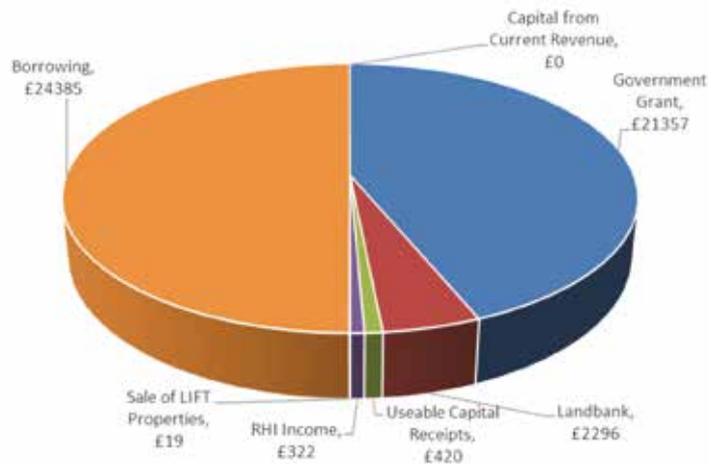
Capital Programme



The Capital programme is mainly funded from prudential borrowing with some funded through the HRA (Capital funded from Current Revenue). In 2020 - 2021 we spent £6.89m on the Capital programme across Highland. This was considerably less than had been budgeted for, but the pandemic meant most of the capital contracts had to be halted. These have now been restarted and will complete in 2021-22.

In addition, the Council House Building Capital Programme spend for 2020-21 was £41.9m, the chart on the right shows how this, and the Capital Programme above, were funded.

Investment Programme funding 2020-21 (£000)



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 complaint 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

| | No. of complaints received | | Time taken to respond to complaints 2020-21 (days) | | Percentage of complaints responded to in full | |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------|--|-------------|---|-------------|
| | 2019 - 20 | 2021 - 21 | Highland | SHN Average | Highland | SHN Average |
| Stage 1 | 301 | 203 | 12.4 | 5.04 | 100% | 97% |
| Stage 2 | 123 | 94 | 129 | 9.01 | 97% | 92.6% |

Landlord Satisfaction

Every three years, we survey our tenants to gather views on the key areas of our service. Previously, we conducted a paper-based consultation, sending consultation papers by post to every tenant. This year, due to the pandemic, we were unable to do this and instead we engaged an independent research company to carry out a telephone survey on our behalf. They contacted a representative sample of 1001 tenants from all types of property, household sizes and geographic location.

There is more information on this survey on page 17 of this newsletter.

- 1) **860 tenants (85.9%) were satisfied with housing services overall (78.1% in 2018 survey)**
- 2) **773 tenants (77.2%) were satisfied with the quality of their home (75.2% in the 2018 survey)**
- 3) **881 tenants (88.0%) were satisfied with the management of their neighbourhoods (68% in 2018 survey)**
- 4) **938 tenants (93.8%) were satisfied with the opportunities to participate (55.7% in 2018 survey)**
- 5) **926 tenants (92.5%) felt the Council were good at keeping you informed (69% in 2018 survey)**

New Build Council House Programme

The new build Council House programme is part of the Highland's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) which sets out the Council and housing association plans for the development of affordable housing over a 5-year period.

As we come through the pandemic our sites and contractors remain affected due to incidents of covid breakouts along with labour shortage and delays in the supplies of materials. The Council is working hard with our contractors to ensure any delays are minimised to bring much needed homes on stream as soon as possible.

There are currently 397 Council build properties on site within 18 projects in various locations within Highland. A further 205 properties in 15 projects are due to start on site within the current year with 103 completions so far of the 270 programmed for the year. These include projects in Skye, Fort William, Nairn, Evanton and Inverness.

What to do if something goes wrong

We are committed to providing high quality services. Sometimes, you may feel our standards are not good enough. When this happens we want to try to understand, fix any issues and learn from them. If you are dissatisfied about something we've done, you can make a complaint. Telling us for the first time? Please give us the opportunity to put things right before complaining. Report your problem first. If it doesn't get sorted, make a complaint using our online form. Find it on our website at www.highland.gov.uk We use the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

Living in sheltered housing? If you can't resolve your issue with your local housing team, you can now use the Highland Council's complaint process. This is instead of contacting the Care Inspectorate. This is because we are no longer registered with them. All our sheltered housing services are now regulated solely by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Affected tenants in South Highland were asked for their views on deregistration and no-one objected.

LIVING WITH A DISABILITY IN THE HIGHLANDS

A new type of residents' group has been set up by one of our tenants in Beauly – Liz Richardson, chair of the Housing Disability Panel, has a huge amount of knowledge and experience in the areas of disabilities and equalities. The group will work with the Council to help improve the accessibility and suitability of housing for anyone with any kind of disability. Below is a message from Liz.

"Disability exists within the context of the environment. When we change the environment, the disability fades into the background."

Anyone who lives with or cares for someone who lives with a long-term health condition, disease, or disorder knows how mentally and physically exhausting it is just managing everyday challenges. Our home shouldn't be one of them. Rather, it should be a welcoming space... quiet, safe, accessible. Anything less diminishes our quality of life, independence, and dignity.

Accessible housing is only accessible if it's been designed inclusively for everyone. Unfortunately, what we continue to see are houses designed for people with physical impairment, in particular wheelchair users. While it's a good place to start, it is still the bare minimum. The fact is, only 8% of disabled people are wheelchair users. What about the needs of the 92% of people with other physical impairments, cognitive or sensory impairments, chronic

mental or physical ill health, neurodiversity?

And not forgetting our ageing population which increases every year. They, too, will be needing accessible entrances, bathrooms and kitchens, the use of colour to distinguish one house from another, suitable lighting and acoustics, biophilic settings, and so on.

So, we should be focussed on future-proofing our housing stock to suit the needs of everyone, from cradle to grave, able to cope with any changes that might happen. In doing so, we also make our homes sustainable. Inclusion is sustainability.

As people who live with the many and diverse challenges of disability, we know what the barriers are and have experience of what works and what doesn't. That is why we are needed at the table, with the other experts, working as a team, creating designs, adaptations, and problem-solving... together.

We hope to provide a collective voice on all issues of disability in relation to our housing and housing services. We look forward to working with our Council on the challenges confronting us both, striving for positive outcomes wherever possible. Liz Richardson, Beauly

If this is something you're interested in, or just want to learn more about it for now please get in touch with your tenant participation officer by emailing tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk or call 01463 702683 – leave a message and someone will call you back.

LIVING IN ACCESSIBLE / ADAPTED HOUSING? BE ONE OF OUR STAR TENANTS!

Are you living in a property designed for someone with health or mobility needs? We desperately need homes for families who are wheelchair users or need 'accessible' / special design features.

We urgently need to speak to you:

- **If you're in a family sized 'accessible' home, and you're no longer using all your bedrooms or;**
- **If you don't need the adaptations or accessible design features in your home.**

We can give you a new home and help towards the cost of moving & furnishing etc. You could move into a newly built energy-efficient home - or closer to your friends and family. If you let us

know your preferences for rehousing, we can identify ones which might appeal. You can help someone who benefited as you did.

Whilst landlords have a right to, if necessary, move tenants, so that others who need the adapted / accessible features can be helped too, we'd much prefer all moves to happen willingly and happily. This applies to all 'accessible'/specially designed social housing across Highland.

Speak to your housing officer or email us on housing@highland.gov.uk

Tell us what you'd like - and what help you need to move.

Mobility Scooters – What You Need to Know

Mobility scooters can make a real difference to people's lives, helping them to take part in activities and get out and about easily. However, before you buy a scooter, **it is important to think about where you are going to store it and charge the batteries.** They can cause serious and deadly fires. If badly stored, they can prevent you getting to safety because of the smoke and heat. Because of the risk to you, to others, and to properties, anyone thinking about buying a mobility scooter needs to get our permission before keeping one at home. If you've already got a privately purchased mobility scooter, you'll also need our permission.

We will carry out a health and safety risk assessment with you. We'll help you identify how to prevent fires. We'll give permission if you can safely store it, charge it and you have the correct insurance in place. We won't unreasonably refuse any requests.

We've got new advice for tenants. You can find it on our website www.highland.gov.uk/housing or speak to your local housing team.

We consulted with the new Housing Disability Panel about this new policy. They raised useful issues which we then included.



AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Many of us live busy happy lives at home, regularly in touch with others, often without a thought for those who are living around us.

How many people in your local area live alone?

How many find it difficult to get out and about because they are older or in poor health?

How many have regular visits from friends or family?

It's important to spare a thought for our older neighbours. Many of them live alone, or are full-time carers, often with very little, if any, social interaction.

Thinking about making steps to becoming a better neighbour? If so, here's a few suggestions:

SAY 'HELLO'

It all starts with a simple 'hello' and a smile when you see a neighbour out and about. Be friendly and approachable each time you see them. Over time, this may lead to more regular chit-chat. You never know, this could be the only social interaction your neighbour has that day/week.

OFFER TO RUN ANY ERRANDS

If your neighbour finds it difficult to get out and about, why not offer to run any errands for them that they might need doing? If you're popping to the shops, why not offer to pick up any items they need?

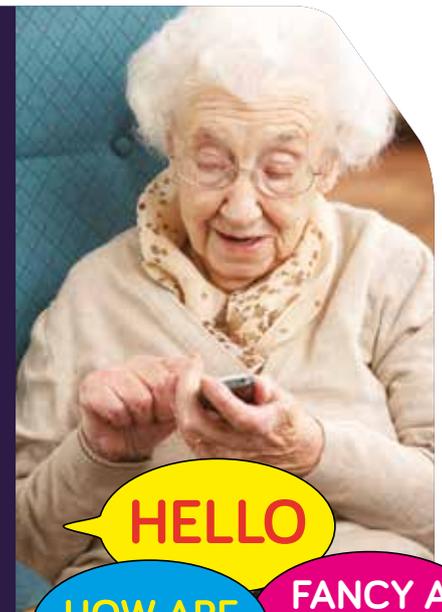
POP ROUND FOR A CUPPA

If you've got a spare 10 minutes, why not pop round to their garden for a cup of tea? Alternatively, you could have them visit yours. Whichever you decide, it's a great way for them to chat about their day and have a change of surroundings.

PAY GENERAL ATTENTION

If you know your older neighbour doesn't have many visitors, they may appreciate someone looking out for them – do their lights come on at night? Are the curtains opened daily? If there's any reason you think they might not be ok, it's important to check on them.

You could be providing some very valuable help to a person that might otherwise be too polite to ask for it. You never know, you might even make a new friend out of being a good neighbour. **Why not get others involved in being neighbourly too and strengthen your community?**



HELLO

HOW ARE YOU?

FANCY A CUPPA?

KEEPING IN CONTACT WITH OTHERS

Partnership work between the Tenant Participation service, Highland Senior Citizens Network (HSCN) and Age Scotland continues despite our usual Get-Togethers across Highland not being possible at the moment. Getting information to people who aren't online and keeping people connected with others have been our main priorities. In Lochaber, when time and COVID restrictions allow, Karin McKay has joined Jo Cowan, HSCN Co-ordinator, on a weekly radio show "On Air Community Coffee Morning" on Nevis Radio. Now, as groups begin meeting again, the show has moved to a once monthly two-hour slot on the first Friday of the month and changed its name to "Community Connections".

Over the past 10 months the show has featured a wide range of services – but possibly the most vitally important ones have been those offering contact through a friendly call.

Morning Call in addition to their daily checking morning call, HSCN offer a regular call for a chat through their telephone befriending service **07514 494053**

Age Scotland's Friendship Line 0800 12 44 222 offers someone to listen, a friendly chat and support

Befrienders Highland 01463 712 791 offer befriending calls for those experiencing mental ill health or memory loss or for those who are carers.

Re-engage Call Companion Service 0800 716543 offers friendly calls for older people living alone

There are several other local befriending services in various areas of Highland – so please do get in touch for Jo or Anne for contact details.

Keeping in touch with others is vital for mental-wellbeing.

Highland Senior Citizens Network produces a monthly newsletter for members – membership is free. They also host a weekly online **Highland Hello Tea-break** on **Thursdays between 11am and 12 noon** Contact Jo or Anne for more information:

Jo Cowan: jo-hscn@outlook.com - 07933 653585 | Anne McDonald: anne-hscn@outlook.com - 07933 653313



Condensation and Mould in Council Homes



With winter fast approaching condensation can be a real problem for tenants. This occurs when humid air settles onto cold surfaces of windows and walls which, if it cannot dry through good air flow, can turn into black mould. When more severe, it can develop mould that will affect walls, paintwork, and furniture particularly in corners of rooms where there is little airflow.

Here are some tips to help prevent condensation and mould

Heat your home

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

Keep your home ventilated

- Ensure good ventilation, especially in kitchens and bathrooms. Close the doors when these rooms are in use, open windows slightly, use an extractor fan and do not cover air vents. This will help direct moisture outside the house and reduce condensation.

Reduce moisture levels

- Dry clothes outside, use a condenser tumble dryer or ensure the air vent goes outside
- Cover pans when cooking
- Open windows when running a bath/showering
- Leave a gap between furniture and walls

Remove excess moisture

- Wipe windows and sills regularly with a clean dry cloth to remove any water.

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.

Remove mould (wearing gloves)

- Wash 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
- Do not reuse cloths infected with mould/spores to prevent spreading

Damp vs Condensation

Many people mistake condensation for penetrating damp. Condensation is trapped, settled moisture due to lack of airflow which may result in mould spores growing.

Penetrating damp only occurs when water enters the fabric of a building from things like a leaking pipe, roof or the foundations.



MAGGIE'S

Everyone's home of cancer care

If you or someone you care about is diagnosed with cancer, Maggie's can help.

We offer psychological, practical, and emotional support to anyone with cancer and their families. Maggie's Highlands is in the grounds of Raigmore Hospital, and is a warm, welcoming place where you can meet people who are experiencing the same things you are, find support groups specific to your needs and get advice and information from our professional staff.

You don't need an appointment and all our support is free.

We're here Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm and we can support you in person, over the phone, or virtually.

Phone: **01463 706306**

Email: highlands@maggies.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/maggieshighlands



Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Every three years we carry out a comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey. This is a questionnaire focussing on the key indicators from the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This was due to be carried out in 2021 and was completed in May. A telephone interview was conducted on our behalf by an independent market research company, and their full report can be viewed on the Highland Council web site https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/23939/tenant_satisfaction_survey_2021. The following table shows the results for the Scottish Housing Regulator indicators for Highland Council, compared to the Council's previous tenant satisfaction survey undertaken in 2018.

Since the 2018 survey was conducted:

- Overall satisfaction with the services provided by Highland Council has increased, from 78% to 86%
- The proportion of tenants who were of the opinion the Council were good at keeping them informed has increased, from 69% to 93%
- Satisfaction with opportunities to participate has increased from 56% to 94%
- Satisfaction with the quality of the home has not changed significantly, rising slightly from 75% to 77%
- Satisfaction with Highland Council's contribution to the management of the neighbourhood has increased, from 68% to 88%
- The proportion of tenants who were of the opinion the rent for their property represents good value for money has not changed significantly, rising slightly from 88% to 89%.

The table also compares Highland Council's 2021 survey results with the ARC 2019/2020 Local Authority average. This shows that Highland Council are performing above the LA average across five indicators, most significantly with regards to satisfaction with opportunities to participate (14% points above average) and are underperforming with regard to just one indicator, the quality of the home, where Highland Council's satisfaction level is 77% compared to a LA average of 81%.

| Scottish Housing Regulator indicators | 2018 | 2021 | LA ARC 2019/20 |
|---|--------|--------|----------------|
| 1 - Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by Highland Council's Housing Service? (% very/ fairly satisfied) | 78.1% | 85.91% | 82.14% |
| 2 - How good or poor do you feel Highland Council's Housing Service is at keeping you informed about their services and decisions? (%very good/ fairly good) | 69.0% | 92.51% | 85.94% |
| 5 - How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the opportunities given to you to participate in Highland Council's Housing Service's decision making process? (% very/ fairly satisfied) | 55.7% | 93.81% | 79.43% |
| 7 - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of your home? (% very/ fairly satisfied) | 75.2% | 77.22% | 80.50% |
| 13 - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Highland Council's Housing Service's contribution to the management of the neighbourhood you live in? | 68.0% | 88.01% | 85.04% |
| 25 - Taking into account the accommodation and services Highland Council's Housing Service provides, to what extent do you think that the rent for this property represents good or poor value for money? Is it... (% very good value/ fairly good value) | 87.69% | 88.92% | 84.17% |

PAYING YOUR RENT

Why do I need to pay rent?

Paying your rent on time is a condition of your tenancy. If you do not, you could end up losing your home. Now that the Highland Council area has moved beyond Tier Zero, the legislation put in place during the pandemic banning social housing evictions has come to an end. We also need you to pay your rent so we can continue to provide services such as repairs and improvements to your homes. Here are some FAQs:

I am in arrears with my rent – what can I do?

If you are in arrears, whether caused by the pandemic or for other reasons, please do not ignore the situation, get in touch with your housing officer as soon as possible – there is help and advice available. You will find their contact details on any recent reminder letters or telephone 01349 886602. They are the first level of support for any tenant in arrears and can help you access welfare benefit, debt, money management and housing support advice.

Who else can help?

WELFARE SUPPORT OFFICERS – their aim is to put more money in people's pockets so that they can pay their bills, heat their home and have a better quality of life. They can provide:

- Advice and support about all the benefits and other entitlements that are available (this includes Council Tax discounts/disregards/exemptions and reduction)
- Undertake benefit checks to ensure clients are not missing out on any benefits/entitlements
- Support to help complete the relevant forms
- Support with all aspects of Universal Credit
- Support with debt and personal budgeting

INTENSIVE SUPPORT OFFICERS – these officers can support/advise Highland Council tenants with rent arrears, especially those who are at risk of losing their tenancies or facing court action as a result of non-payment of rent. They can:

- Deal with cases holistically by investigating why arrears are happening, ensuring clients are receiving the correct benefits and entitlements and agreeing payment plans for arrears
- Support Universal Credit clients to effectively manage their payments
- Encourage client engagement with housing officers and other agencies who can assist with finances
- Dedicate time to work intensively with tenants
- Provide mediation in respect of rent arrears

Both of the above services can be accessed through your housing officer.

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX – Citizens Advice Bureaux are local, independent charities that provide free and confidential advice and information. They provide practical advice, negotiate on behalf of clients and even represent them formally, such as at tribunal hearings. Common areas of inquiry include benefits, debt and money advice, work related problems, relationship problems and consumer advice. Many bureaux have specialist advisers with expert knowledge in a particular area, such as debt and money advice, benefits or housing. They can be contacted on <https://www.cas.org.uk/bureaux> or you can get their details from your housing officer, local Service Point or from our Service Centre on 01349 886602

Removal of the Universal Credit 'Covid-19' £20 Top-Up

If you are currently receiving Universal Credit you might have already seen a note in your journal reminding you that the £20 per week top-up payment is due to end. We know that this may cause some of you a lot of concern. If you are worried about how this might affect you, or that you are unable to pay your rent, please contact your Housing Officer as soon as possible. They will be able to offer you advice and assistance.

Alternatively, you can find information at www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/ or by contacting the Council's Welfare Support Team on 0800 090 1004 or contacting your local Citizen's Advice Bureau.





RENT CONSULTATION

CO-CHOMHAIRLE MAIL 2022/2023

Have your Say! Take part in this year's Rent Consultation.

This year, the rent consultation for 2022/2023 will commence on Monday 1st November and run until Sunday 21st November.

It will be mainly an online consultation. We will send out a link to full information on the options available to tenants by November 1st. This will be sent by email or text where possible. There will also be a link to the consultation on the home page of the Highland Council web site.

Please make sure that we have your up-to-date contact details – you can update your email address or mobile number by contacting your housing management officer or emailing tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk. We will write to tenants who do not have internet access.

You can take part in the consultation by

- completing a brief online survey, or
- emailing us at tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk
- texting us your response to 07856 957056

You can also call us on the above number if you wish to discuss the rent consultation in more detail. (**note: this number will not be "live" until 1st November**)

We will also be running online workshops where we will go through the process of how we set your rents. Please see below for times and to book a place.

| | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| Rent Consultation Workshop | Monday 1st November 2021 | 10:30am |
| Rent Consultation Workshop | Monday 1st November 2021 | 6:30pm |
| Rent Consultation Workshop | Wednesday 3rd November 2021 | 2:30pm |

The above will be held via Microsoft Teams and will last for approximately one hour.

Please email tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk or call 07856 957056 to book a place.

If you have not used Microsoft Teams before, we can support you with getting connected.



Trading Standards Scam Alert!

We have been alerted to a scam telephone call received by a Highland tenant from someone pretending to be from the Council. The tenant was asked if she had any housing repairs to raise and to call back if she did. The telephone number used by the caller was a London landline.

This has all the hallmarks of an **'impersonation scam'** whereby the caller uses the guise of a trusted organisation to obtain personal and financial details, from a person. Any tenant who receives a telephone call asking if their home requires any repairs is urged to not give out any personal information, particularly bank account or debit or credit card details and end the call as quickly as possible. Anyone with any queries about repairs to a Council property should contact the Highland Council on 01349 886602 in the first instance. Reports about this scam can be made to Trading Standards via Advice Direct Scotland (ADS) on Freephone 0808 164 6000 or by email through their website at: www.consumeradvice.scot.

Anyone who believes they may have fallen for a scam should contact their bank immediately on a number known to be correct, such as the one listed on a bank statement, their website or on the back of a debit or credit card. It is also important to report what has happened to Police Scotland on 101.



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 - Monday - Friday</i> | phone 0800 328 5644 text 0800 328 1344 |
| Operations Team <i>Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reductions and other Council Benefits</i> | 0800 393811 |
| HMRC Helpline - <i>open from 8:00am to 4:00pm 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 - Emergency | 0800 111 999 |
| Home Energy Scotland | 0808 808 2282 |
| Police Non Emergency | 101 |
| Samaritans | 116 123 |
| Social Work - <i>out of hours</i> | 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 - <i>Coronavirus advice and guidance</i> | 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 www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you |