

Housing Matters

Taigheadas na Gàidhealtachd

Autumn 2023

Inside:

Pg 4 • Big Scottish Scam Survey | Pg 6 • News around the areas
Pg 10 • Customer Report | Pg 15 • NEW! Housing Online

INTRODUCTION

Brian Cameron - Interim Head of Housing & Building Maintenance

Welcome to our Autumn 2023 newsletter.

2023 to date has undoubtedly been a challenging year for almost everyone. The cost-of-living crisis has continued, and local and national news seems to focus on the difficult choices people are facing as they struggle to make ends meet in the face of high energy bills, increased food costs and high inflation.

It's essential therefore that our tenants provide honest feedback on the housing services that matter most to them and what they want their rent money to be spent on. This issue of the newsletter gives an update on our proposals for consultation on rent levels. The Council will meet to decide on rents for next year in January 2024 and your views are important as they guide Elected Members in their decision-making.

This edition of the newsletter also features information on how we performed as a landlord over the last year. This is called the Annual Customer Report and is based on the information we provide to the Scottish Housing Regulator each year. Considering the difficult circumstances facing us all in the last year I am glad to report that the Council's performance on the key indicators remains strong.

There's a number of other features as well and hopefully you find these interesting and informative.

I hope you enjoy the edition and please use the Tenant Participation contact details to keep in touch about your housing service.



Farewell to Mandy MacLeman

After 13 years of working in the Tenant Participation team Mandy MacLeman decided it was time to pass on the TP baton and take her well-earned retirement. She will be a big miss from all the tenant meetings and events around the Highlands and we would like to thank her for all her hard work and wish her a very long and happy retirement.



Meet Suzy Boardman, Principal Tenant & Customer Engagement Officer

We are pleased to introduce Suzy Boardman who has joined Highland Council to continue the work to reach and engage with our tenants. Suzy brings a number of years' experience to the role having worked for both Orkney Islands Council and Orkney Housing Association. Suzy may already be familiar with some of our tenants, having been an active member of the Northern Tenant Partnership since its inception in 2020.

Suzy has said she is looking forward to the new challenges of covering such a huge geographical area with so many different communities. 'The thing I like most about tenant engagement is getting to listen to our tenants, good communication is the foundation of all good relationships and it something that I value very highly. I am excited to explore new and creative ways to provide participation opportunities that meet the needs of our tenants and hope to meet with some of you in person or online very soon.'

Housing and Property Committee

As part of our commitment to making the decision-making process as open and transparent as possible, we webcast public meetings that are held in the Council Chamber, Inverness. This includes the Housing and Property Committee which we would encourage all tenants to take an active interest in. Papers relating to the Housing and Property Committee can be found at the following link prior to the meetings:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/committee/144/housing_and_property_committee

The next Housing and Property Committee meeting will take place on **9th November 2023**.

You can watch Council meetings conducted in public LIVE or view the archived version which is available within 48 hours of broadcast and remains online for 12 months, at the following link:

<https://highland.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>



Housing Support Services – Your Views Needed!

Have you been helped by a Housing Support worker? If yes, please complete our short survey. We need your views.

The Housing Support service is for people with housing difficulties. The support builds up their skills so they can deal with issues themselves. Some tenants get help when they first move in. Others get supported when they are struggling with issues which could lead to them losing their home.

We're looking at changing the support service. Could it be better? Does it help tenants in the right way? We need your feedback to help us decide what to do.

Our survey is short so should only take about 10 minutes of your time!

To give your views - Use the link below or scan the QR code to fill in the survey.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HSnewsletter>

You can also call us on **01349 886602** and request a call back from Tenant Participation, or write to us at **Tenant Participation Team, Property and Housing, Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX**

No-one else will see your answers. Your response will be anonymous and confidential.

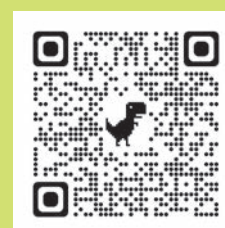


Getting Involved!

Tenant Participation is all about tenants and landlords working together to improve housing services and our housing estates to be the best they can be! The tenant participation team currently work with over 20 registered tenant and resident groups across Highland as well as informal tenant groups and individual tenants. We run focus groups on issues such as repairs, rents and estate management and we have a tenant forum who meet throughout the year to discuss Highland-wide policies and current issues. Many of our tenant and resident groups have won national awards for the work they are doing in their communities! (Photo: Caol Residents Group win National award – TPAS 2023) Check out our YouTube channel to see what some of our tenants are saying about their experiences in Tenant Participation and to also view other useful housing information videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/@tenantparticipationhighland/featured>

You can contact Tenant Participation by emailing tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk





Most Frequently Reported Scams in Scotland

Tenants are being encouraged by Trading Standards to stay Scam Aware and keep sharing information with family and friends about current scams.

Scams Survey Results

Trading Standards Scotland, the national team for trading standards in Scotland, recently ran the Big Scottish Scam Survey, asking Scots about the scams they had experienced in the last year.

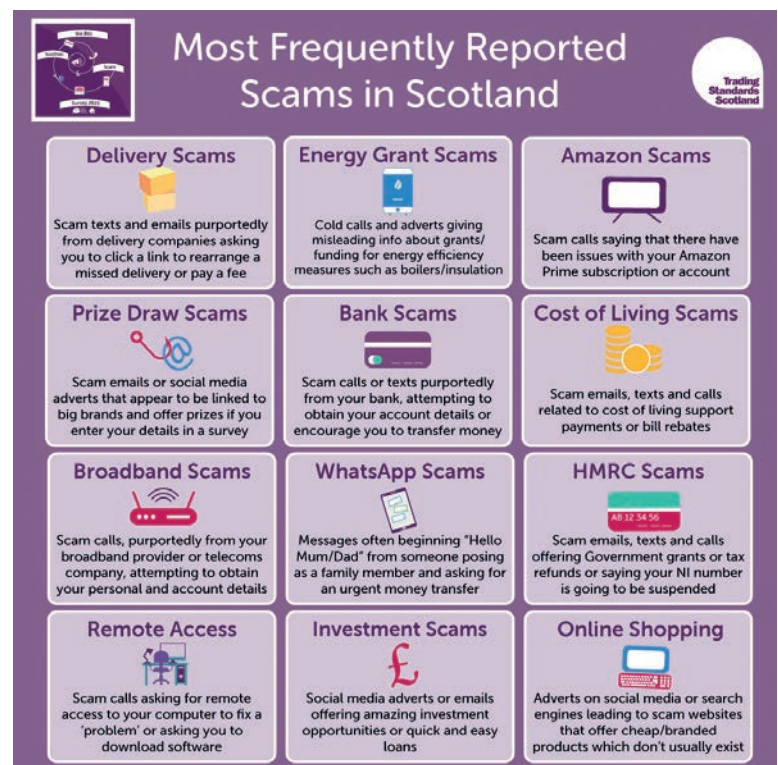
97% of respondents had experienced an email, text, phone, doorstep or online scam in the last year.

The most common scams were:

This year's survey shows an increase in scams relating to the cost-of-living crisis, such as email and text scams linked to the energy bill rebate and cost of living payments. There has also been a tremendous increase in WhatsApp scams, where a scammer poses as a friend or relative and asks for money to be sent urgently.

A quarter of those surveyed had experienced a scam related to energy saving measures. In most cases, this involved a cold caller providing misleading information about the availability of grants or funding for products such as insulation, boilers and double glazing.

79% of survey respondents had avoided a scam after seeing or reading about it, with **47%** going on to report the scam.



Reporting and Advice

Tenants can report scams to Trading Standards on 01463 644570 or to Police Scotland on 101.

If you have made a payment in response to a scam, contact your bank as soon as you can as they may be able to recover some of your money and will refund you in certain circumstances. If you or someone else is in immediate danger because of a scam – for example, being threatened by an aggressive doorstep seller, call Police Scotland on 999.

And remember – if something sounds too good to be true, it is a scam, do not engage!

Did you know?

You can keep up to date with the latest phone, email, doorstep and online scams with the Trading Standards Scotland's weekly Scam Share bulletin at - <https://www.tsscot.co.uk/bulletin/>.

Working in Partnership



Two tenant participation groups, North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together (NETRALT) and the newly established Northern Tenants Partnership (NTP), joined forces to host their first interactive virtual session centred around the theme of “Working in Partnership.” The event targeted tenants, residents, community groups and staff across Scotland and commenced with a keynote speech by George Walker, Chairperson of the Board of the Scottish Housing Regulator. A selection of topics was covered during the session, including youth involvement, scrutiny, community growing initiatives, participatory budgeting and Regiona Networks.

Catherine Coutts, Co-Chair of NETRALT and Castlehill’s Tenant Participation Officer, explained, “We were thrilled to partner with Northern Tenants Partnership to share the amazing work taking place in our communities. This event provided a unique opportunity for tenants to inspire one another, furthering our aims of sharing good practice, creating a valuable support network, and promoting tenant engagement far and wide.”

Suzy Boardman, Principal Tenant & Customer Engagement Officer at Highland Council, said, “Friday’s event really highlighted what can be achieved when we pool our resources and work collaboratively. It was inspiring to hear about the great work happening all across our region and come away with lots of ideas for future partnership projects.”

The success of this collaborative event highlights the commitment of tenant participation groups to foster meaningful partnerships, share knowledge and enhance the tenant experience across Scotland.

To find out more about both groups, visit ntp.netralt.org.uk

The TPAS Scotland National Good Practice Awards

At the TPAS Conference 2023, Lochaber, for a second year running, brought home an award! The Caol Residents Group came runner-up in the Best Practice in Developing Communities category for all their hard work and achievements in the community when they had only been up and running for one year! Pamela Hendry and Karin Mckay TPO collected the award on behalf of the group at the conference held in June. Several other tenants also attended the conference and a great time was had by all, sharing a dance or two, as well as experience and knowledge, with other social housing tenants and landlords!



The Tenant Participation Big Bite and Blether!

As part of the Highlands & Islands Climate Festival, throughout September, resident groups from across Highland held Bite and Blether get togethers for members of the community to come along, meet their neighbours and have a chat. Bite and Blether was first initiated by the Caol Residents Group in Lochaber with the support of their TPO Karin who, along with the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, decided to take the initiative Highland Wide with each Bite and Blether aiming to make some positive climate impact with enterprises such as clothes swaps and food sharing.

Karin TPO said “The Caol event was a great success despite the weather blowing a hooley with lot of residents turning up to sample the delicious food and swap some clothes.”

Catriona TPO thanked Co-op Member Pioneer Kay Ford for sourcing donations of vegetables that Queenspark Residents Group’s Chair, Morag Anderson, kindly turned into three different types of soup along with a massive selection of sandwiches and sweet treats for the Big Bite and Blether held in Queenspark Gardens, Nairn.



News from around the Areas

Claggan Residents Association

held an afternoon tea on the 18th August attended by residents along with Karin TPO and the food on offer was amazing! The next planned event is a Halloween Spectacular 1pm to 3pm on the 29th of October at An Drochaid Centre. Christmas events will be planned and advertised on Facebook. The Claggan Residents Association meetings are held on the second Monday of every month at 6pm at the An Drochaid Centre apart from January when they take a break.



Caol Residents Group

Caol Resident Group have been successful in gaining more funding to run their well-attended Bite & Blether every Monday 2pm to 4pm in Caol Youth Centre. It is run by the group in partnership with Tenant Participation and Highlife, providing a safe warm place, free food, some good advice, a hot cuppa and most importantly, a good blether! The group recently raised over £2500 at the Prize Bingo held on the 15th September with all moneys raised going to the future events and projects for Caol. Caol Resident meetings are the first Monday of every month apart from January and July when they have their break.



What's happening in Aviemore?

The **Alain Baxter Court Residents' Group** held their AGM in September after a successful first year of bringing local issues to the group and having them addressed. Future plans include adding plants to the communal areas and organising social events.

The **Aviemore Sheltered Housing Interested Tenants Group** meet monthly in the lounge in the Glen Centre and sometimes further afield such as their summer trip to the Rothiemurchus Old School Café where many of the tenants went to school. Transport was arranged and the group had a wonderful time, along with Warden Lucie and TPO Catriona, reminiscing and

visiting the shop and café. The group's last meeting involved at Rate Your Estate, meeting with Councillors and Housing Staff to look at environmental issues in the area and prioritising what can be done. The group hope to make plans for a Christmas get together at future meetings.



Lochside Community Group

Lochside Community Group held a summer event in July which was a huge success raising £500 which will be used to help fund regeneration areas, benches and garden tools. The group are running a best decorated house/garden competition for Halloween and the winner will receive a local restaurant voucher. Lochside will be joining Caol in their Christmas event and switching on their Christmas tree on the same night with Santa making a quick stop at the park first before heading back to Caol.



Plantation Community Association

PCA meet the first Tuesday of every month at the PCA hall at 6.30pm apart from January and July when they have their breaks. Recently the group, supported by Tenant Participation and Highlife Highland, Voluntary Action Lochaber and Lochaber Environmental Group, had a big summer clean up on the 1st August with the group supplying bacon rolls hot drinks and cakes at the hall for all that helped or wanted to come along and see what the group are doing. The skips were funded by Lochaber Housing and through the locality funding. Both skips were well filled and local Cllr Angus Macdonald helped residents get their items to the skips. Even the roads department came out and filled in some potholes that tenants had been complaining about so it was a good day for the Plantation!



The group has also received more funding for their new larder project which will help residents during times when inflation is so high. Halloween and Christmas events are to be planned as well as decommissioning the gym equipment from the park area after consulting with the residents about its use and most agreeing it was not used enough.

The McLean Court Residents' Group in Nairn have been meeting monthly but also hold weekly coffee mornings and fish supper Fridays. They have guest speakers at some of their meetings and have also met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Queenspark Resident Group to share aspirations and experience of running their respective groups. The group are currently in the process of purchasing curtains for their communal areas in time for the winter months. The group also organise minibus trips to different places including a regular trip to the local shops.



Mansfield Residents' Association

On 31st July, the Mansfield Estate experienced a day filled with laughter, games and activities at the Fun Day event. The day got fantastic turnout from local children and their families – despite the occasional heavy shower! The event was organised by the group with support from CCAST Highland and the Tenant Participation Team. The event featured plenty of activities for everyone to enjoy. Children excitedly took part in dart football and facepainting. The children loved both the puppet classes and a magic show, run by the talented ladies from Trapeze Entertainment. There was also a tombola for everyone taking part. No community event is complete without food, and the fun day delivered on that front- there was all sorts of delicious treats, all available at £1 per plate. A cake decoration competition, ran by the Tenant Participation Team, also meant there were plenty of sweet treats to be eaten once the judging was complete! Thank you to the Lord Lieutenant, Joanie Whiteford, who kindly came to judge to competition and had the tough job of deciding the winner.

The day was a roaring success, and this shows the power of bringing residents together for a day of fun, laughter and togetherness. Well done to the Mansfield Residents' Association for organising this wonderful event!



Upper Achintore Regeneration Group

The group continue to have well attended monthly meetings with Councillors in attendance. However, they would really like more support from the 700 households that comprise Upper Achintore as they have a great many projects in hand but we really need more people to carry them through. So please come along to their next meeting! Contact their Facebook page for details: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1002084936580374/?locale=en_GB

Work continues on Skeegan's Way Footpath with additional funds and materials having been sourced and work on the Ross Place Pitch is due to commence soon. The group have set up a sub-group to look at the play area provision in the area and their Community Hub Project is making great progress with sketch designs and an agreement on the principle of a community land asset transfer of the site from HIE. They are being assisted by DTAScot and have been awarded a grant for the preparation of a Business Plan and the legal costs involved. UARG intend to hold an all-day public consultation event in the near future.

Queenspark Residents' Group

On the 22nd of July the group held an Eden Communities "Big Lunch" - Picnic in the Park at Riverside in Nairn. What a wonderful success the day was with 450 residents turning up to eat, chat and have fun in the sun. Highland Council's Cost of Living Fund allowed the group to provide free picnic box lunches for all those who wanted one. Sainsbury's and the Co-op provided free fruit and free water/sugar free kids drinks. There was music from several local artists, face painting, raffle, tombola, bake sale, kids crafts, Narinian Ponies' "Magical" with her handler, Eve's Scrap Art and Nairn Yarnbombers displays along with HC tenant participation and the local community



council with their Local Place Plan consultation. Cllr Babs Jarvie was on hand to help out and we had a visit from Martin Quigley from Eden Communities Scotland. Martin had provided the group with a lot of lovely freebies, bunting, seed packs and community games and ideas. The whole day would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of all the members (and their family and friends) that both organised and staffed the day itself. With surplus from the Cost of Living Fund award, the group decided to buy afternoon tea supplies for Whinnieknowe Care Home and Queenspark Gardens residents who couldn't make it down to the picnic.

Planning is now well underway for Halloween and "Fright Night" Queenspark style!



South Kessock Residents Association

SKRA hold monthly meetings (usually the last Monday of the month) 6pm at the Madras Hall and all are welcome. The group encourage tenants to come along and see what it's all about! SKRA has had a fun packed summer putting on a number of events for their local community. Back in May they hosted a coronation garden party that was fun for all ages with a tombola and sports day style games and BBQ. The group also held a sports day for their community in August and although the weather was dreich, this did not dampen their spirits! The day was a great success and the local children had a super time. The community garden has had a good growing season and produced a bounty of fruit and veg. To further develop their skills, a few members of the group will be attending a growing workshop in Fort William. The group hosted a fundraising Bingo in September for which a bounty of great prizes were donated by residents and local businesses. **You can follow SKRA on Facebook and to get in touch you can email southkessockra@outlook.com.**

Raigmore Community Residents Association (RCRA)



This summer RCRA have leaped into action since gaining funding and land use permission and have carried out a huge amount of planting for their community food forest. The transformation has been amazing from a grassy bit of land to bursting with plants and trees springing up creating the foundation of the food forest. So what can you find in the food forest? The group have planted fruit trees, fruit bushes and variety of seasonal veggies with the ethos that the community have free food available on their estate throughout the seasons. The food forest is located at the back of the community centre. RCRA also held a successful litter pick day back in August which got a few folk out kitted up with gloves, litter pickers and black bags. Luckily they got a good dry day for it and thanked the volunteers with refreshments afterwards. RCRA has also produced a newsletter which was hand delivered to the whole estate and they plan to do this annually.

RCRA meet every two months in the community centre and would welcome any residents to attend. The next meeting will be on December 14th 6pm at the community centre.

Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/raigmore-estate/home>

Email: RCRA2022@gmail.com Facebook www.facebook.com/groups/raigmorematters

Windsor Place Residents Association

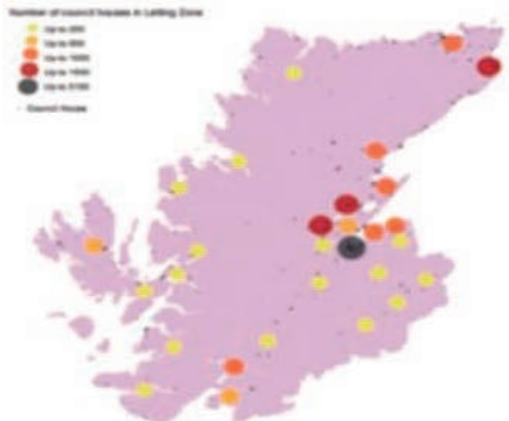


The Windsor Place Residents Association in Conon Bridge has been working on the development of a garden project. The Community Payback Team in Alness has kindly agreed to remove old roots and weeds from the concrete tubs around Windsor Place. Members of the Association met with the Highland Council Community Food Growing Co-ordinator who shared valuable advice on what could be planted in these tubs. So far, the group has planted some raspberry bushes, hydrangeas, and other plants. If you are interested in the adoption of one of the tubs or getting involved in making Windsor Place a better place to live, please contact us the group by email WindsorResidentsA@outlook.com or through their Facebook page <https://m.facebook.com/groups/966082160639082/?ref=sha>



The next meeting will be on 21st November at 6pm.

Summary of our Annual Customer Report from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

This is a summary of the figures submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator in May 2023. Tenant Representatives from the Area Forum & Communications Group have reviewed this report.

<p>As of 31 March 2023, the Highland Council owned and managed 14,858 council houses in 223 communities in city, town, rural, remote and island locations.</p> <p>Highland Council housing locations:</p> 	<p>14,858 homes owned and managed by the Council, made up as follows: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 218 Bedsit properties 3,904 1 bedroom properties 6,080 2 bedroom properties 4,234 3 bedroom properties 422 4 bedroom plus properties
--	--

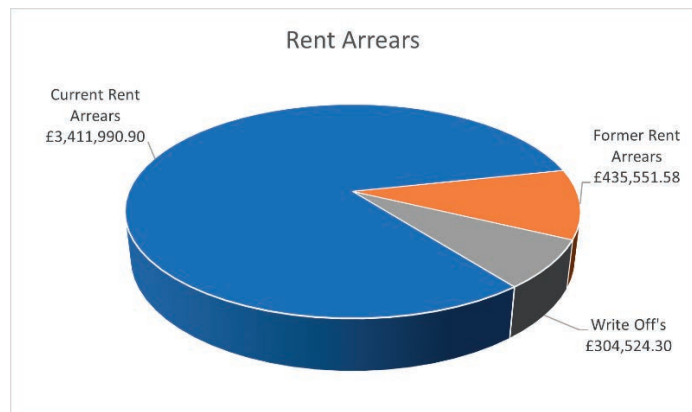
<p>During 2022/2023, we let 1,348 properties to homeless households and people on the councils' waiting lists</p>	
<p>1,348 lets were made by the Council during the year: -</p>	
<p>363 To existing tenants (transfer list)</p>	<p>352 To general list applicants</p>
<p>633 To Homeless applicants</p>	<p>82 Mutual Exchanges were carried out</p>

Voids and Empty Homes Rent Loss			
	2021-22	2022-23	Scottish Average
% rent loss through properties becoming empty	1.02% £576,581	1% £562,946	1.4% £38,706,897 
Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year	35.8 days	32.1 days	55.6 days 

Rent charges and Rent Arrears

In 2022/23 the total rent collected for the year was **£53,969,848.16** (this includes current and advance rent payments, housing benefit and rent arrears recovered), which was **98.02%** of the total rent due in the year.

Percentage increase across all rents for 2022/23 was **4%**




Average weekly rent for each property size in 2022/23

	Highland Council	Scottish Average	
Bedsit	£70.10	£78.26	
1 Bed	£73.44	£83.46	
2 Bed	£81.52	£86.28	
3 Bed	£90.65	£93.96	
4+ Bed	£101.33	£103.72	

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



Percentage of homes meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH)


2021 - 22	2022 - 23	SHN Scottish Average	
76.3% (11,174 properties)	77.3% (11,485 properties)	87.6%	




The EESH standard looks at lots of elements of the home such as heating, windows and doors to assess how energy efficient it is. These standards are set by the Scottish Government designed to reduce energy consumption, fuel poverty and carbon emissions. They will be carrying out a review of these standards next year.

Repairs Performance

	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	Scottish Average
Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs	5.8 hours	5.47 hours	4.2 hours 
Average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs (working days)	7.5 days	7.59 days	8.7 days 

% of repairs carried out in the last year right first time	89.4% (17,704 repairs)	86% (18,542 repairs)	87.8% 
--	---------------------------	-------------------------	--

In order for data to be collected on tenant satisfaction with the repairs service, to monitor performance next year, we are hoping to bring back the surveys which we stopped on handheld trade devices due to Covid.

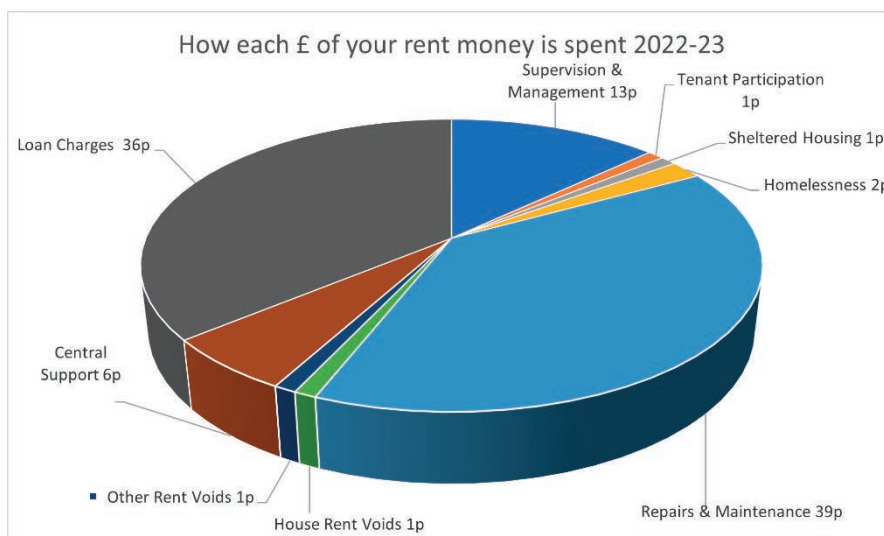
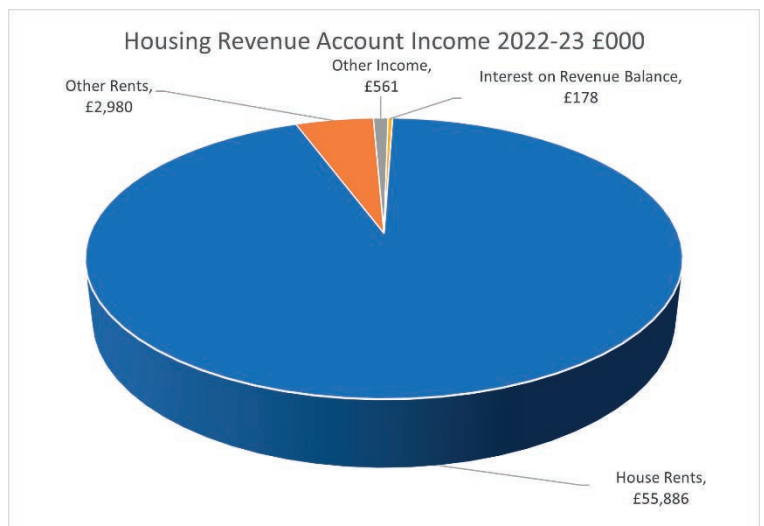
Anti Social Behaviour	2021-22	2022-23	Scottish Average
% of ABS cases resolved within locally agreed targets	78.02%	49.04%	94.2% 

Highland Council does everything it can to resolve reports Anti-Social Behaviour, however the % cases resolved reflects the on-going nature of some of these cases. Anyone experiencing anti-social behaviour are encouraged to speak to their housing officer.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

What happens to your rent money?

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 came from last year. This money is ring fenced and can only be spent on services that improve our housing stock and benefit tenants.

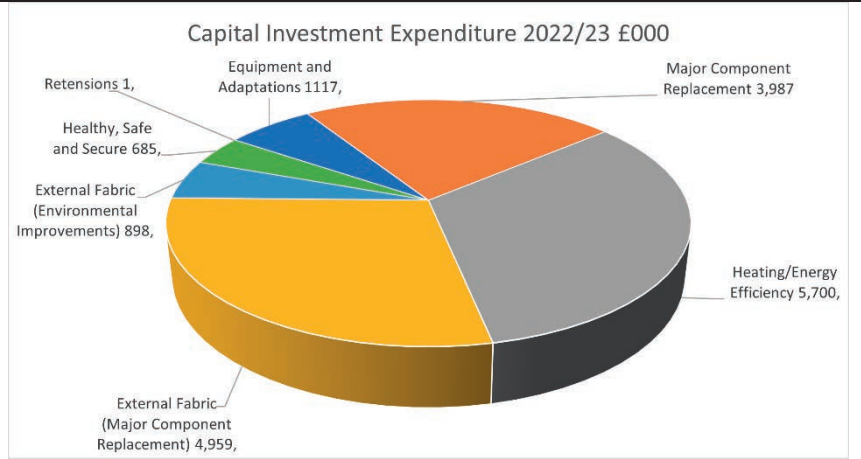


We recognise that tenants want to live in warm, comfortable, and well-maintained homes. For this reason, we install new heating systems, kitchens, and bathrooms. We regularly engage with our tenants to seek views on their priorities. The chart on the left shows how your money was spent.

Capital Programme

This year Highland Council have faced significant increases in the cost of delivering improvements and upgrades to your homes.

In addition, the Council House Building Capital Programme spend for 2022-23 was **£40.6m** which delivered 244 new homes as well as a further 73 homes through one-off individual purchases.



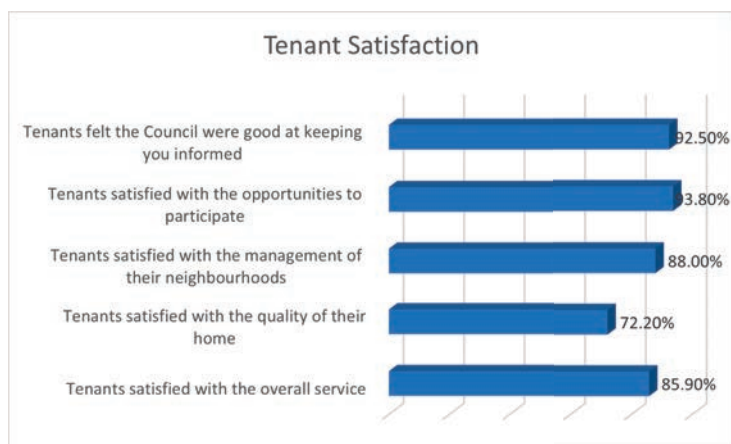
Dealing with Complaints

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 resolved during the initial contact.
- Stage 2 complaints which are complex or more serious and need further investigation.

	No. of Complaints received		Average time taken to respond to complaints 2022-23 (days)		Percentage of complaints responded to in full	
	2021-22	2022-23	Highland	SHN Average	Highland	SHN Average
Stage 1	237	106	3.94	6.25 	98.31	95.21
Stage 2	101	74	31.04	22.77 	85.37	86.21



Landlord Satisfaction

Our last tenant satisfaction survey was carried out in 2021, which produced some excellent results. We will be carrying out another satisfaction survey in Spring 2024, giving you a chance to let us know your views on the services you are receiving from us.

New House Build 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.

Our sites and contractors remain affected due to labour shortage and delays in the supplies of materials. However, 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 231 Council build properties on site within 19 projects in various locations within Highland. A further 143 properties in 6 projects are due to start on site within the current year with 91 completions so far of the 185 programmed for the year.

KEEPING SAFE FROM FIRE

Power-chairs, mobility scooters, e-bikes (and e-scooters) are increasingly popular. Many are powered by rechargeable lithium-ion batteries.

Always charge them safely. This avoids the risk of a fire putting you and your family in danger. Sometimes, batteries fail catastrophically and cause rapidly developing fires.

Avoid your risk of fire by:

- Always unplugging your charger when it's finished charging.
- Following the manufacturer's instructions when charging.
- Charging your battery while you are awake / at home so you can respond quickly.
- Avoiding batteries overheating when charging. Do not cover chargers or battery packs when charging.
- Not overloading socket outlets. Make sure your extension lead is the right power rate for what you are plugging in to it.
- Always charging (and storing) your mobility scooter / power-chair in the 'fire-safe' place you agreed with us when you were given permission.
- Checking your fire alarms regularly to make sure they are working.

Remember - you need our permission before keeping and charging a mobility scooter / power-chair. This is to keep you safe from fire. Find information on permissions and your tenancy on the Highland Council website at www.highland.gov.uk/tenancy



Information on keeping safe with lithium batteries can be found on the Fire Scotland's website - <https://firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/at-home/electrical-safety/lithium-ion-batteries/e-scooter-and-e-bike-safety/>



Moving to Universal Credit – what do I do if I get a “Migration Notice”?

Are you currently claiming any of the following benefits?

- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

These benefits are ending and are being replaced by Universal Credit by **March 2024**. Other benefits, such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP), will stay the same.

Between now and March 2024, if you are moving over to Universal Credit you will receive a “Migration Notice” from DWP. You must claim Universal Credit by the date on your Migration Notice to continue getting financial support.

For information on what to do if you get a “Migration Notice” see: [Universal Credit if you receive a Migration Notice letter - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) or contact the Universal Credit Migration Notice helpline on: **0800 169 0328**

[Relay UK](#) (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): **18001 then 0800 169 0328**

[Video relay service](#) for British Sign Language (BSL) users.

Watch the video to find out [how to use the Video relay service on mobile or tablet](#)

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm - 0800 telephone numbers are free to call from mobiles and landlines.

If you need further advice on benefits you may wish to contact the Council’s Welfare Support Team on 0800 090 1004 (email: welfare.support@highland.gov.uk) or your local Citizens Advice Bureau – to find your local branch, telephone [0808 800 9060](tel:0808 800 9060) or look at: [Bureaux | Citizens Advice Scotland \(cas.org.uk\)](#)

Remember – if you get a “Migration Notice” you must claim Universal Credit by the date on your Migration Notice to continue getting financial support.

You can also find on-line calculators which can help you decide if you are better off on UC – such as Moving to Universal Credit from other benefits - Citizens Advice Scotland or Am I better off on universal credit or other benefits? MSE (moneysavingexpert.com)

Check Your Rent Online!

New! Check your rent account balance on-line at a time that suits you!

You can now check your rent account balance and latest rent payment and benefit transactions at a time that suits you using our new on-line tool called **Housing On-line**. Go to: www.highland.gov.uk/housingonline and follow the on-line instructions.

We intend to develop this over the coming months so you will then be able to set up a Direct Debit to pay your rent and make an arrangement to pay any low level arrears – watch this space!



ALIENERGY help tenants with fuel poverty

Fuel poverty is affecting a large number of tenants, particularly in remote rural areas of the Highland region, and many tenants are finding it a struggle to afford to adequately heat their homes. Although the control of energy prices is out with the control of the Council, we need to help our tenants who may be facing fuel poverty. To do this, Highland Council has funded a partnership with energy charity ALIenergy. Their Affordable Warmth Advice Team can access various fuel poverty crisis intervention grants and schemes, alongside support to improve resilience to fuel poverty going forward and assist tenants who are at high risk.

Highland Council Tenants

have free access to ALIenergy's Affordable Warmth Service, funded by Highland Council

Did you know...

If you are struggling to afford to heat your home, you are not alone.

Over 40% of households in rural Scotland have difficulty paying their heating bills.

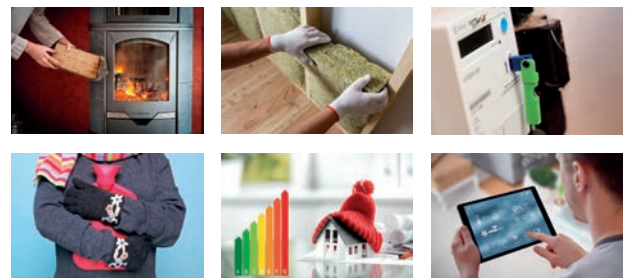
ALIenergy's Affordable Warmth Advice Team can access various crisis intervention grants to help with heating costs, alongside support to improve resilience going forward.

Contact ALIenergy for an appointment for free and friendly advice:

enquiries@alienergy.org.uk 01631 565183

Crisis Grants—Bills—Energy Suppliers—Tariffs
Insulation—Appliances—Prepayment Meters
Smart Meters—Debt Relief—Fuel Vouchers

ALIENERGY



Affordable Warmth Service

Free, confidential and impartial
home energy advice and support



The Highland Council Employability Team supports people across the Highlands to move towards work. We also help parents already in work to try and overcome the barriers that are limiting their earnings or holding them back in their careers.

Our team can help you access a range of opportunities such as training, volunteering, work experience and work placements.

We also know that there are people who may need extra support and we would be happy to hear from you: -

- **People aged 16 to 26, including care experienced young people.**
- **Families more likely to experience poverty - lone parents, families with disabled members, 3+ children, minority ethnic, youngest child aged under 1 and mothers aged under 25.**
- **Disabled people.**

As well as individuals, we work with employers to ensure they can: -

- **access support to give someone an opportunity to enter employment**
- **recruit staff of all ages with the core employability skills they need**
- **secure work-based learning and training to support parents already in work**

To find out more, contact us via email employability@highland.gov.uk or call us for free on 0300 303 1570

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Employability Team Sgioba So-fhastachd

Supporting people:

- Into work
- To develop their skills
- To re-train

Supporting Employers:

- To give someone an opportunity

Please get in touch for an informal chat
Email: Employ.Ability@highland.gov.uk
Call for free on: 0300 303 1570
www.highland.gov.uk/employability

[@HighlandCouncilEmployabilityService](https://www.facebook.com/HighlandCouncilEmployabilityService) [@THC_Employ_Serv](https://twitter.com/THC_Employ_Serv)



Information & Data Protection

We care about our tenants and their information. Our Privacy Notice helps you understand how we look after, share, and use the personal data provided to us. It explains your rights and how the law protects you.

You can see our Privacy Notice for Housing Applicants and Tenants on the Highland Council website at www.highland.gov.uk/privacy-housing_tenants



Electrical inspections

The Scottish Housing Regulator has confirmed that social landlords in Scotland are required to carry out electrical inspections on all social housing. This is a 5-yearly requirement. During the pandemic, Highland like most other landlords focused on carrying out these inspections at the void stage or when carrying out major works. Highland now intends to resume cyclical inspections to ensure the safety of our houses and it is anticipated that around one-quarter of our properties may be inspected in the coming 12 months.

In the course of 2023/2024, Highland will be issuing work orders to our own electricians and our contractors to carry out these inspections.

The electrician will test and inspect the fixed electrical installations in the property. This will include wiring, plug sockets, light fittings, fuse boxes, electric showers and extractor fans. They can make any immediate hazards safe before they leave your home and may have to return if there are longer-term improvements identified (for example, replacing a fuse box).

The average inspection takes approximately 2 hours and unfortunately the electricity will need turned off for the duration of the inspection.

Please note that this is a health and safety requirement and your cooperation is appreciated in providing access for this work.

KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

As a Highland Council tenant if you are planning to make certain improvements to your home you must seek permission.

With Autumn approaching and the need to keep warm in the colder months; don't be tempted to install heating appliances without permission. Poorly fitted appliances can pose a danger to you or anyone entering your home.

SOLID FUEL STOVES

- You **MUST** seek permission before commencing installation and **MUST** satisfy a list of minimum requirements before permission can be granted. These requirements include the use of a competent contractor for the installation.
- You must ensure that the installation complies with all relevant building regulations and determine whether a building warrant is required.
 - You will be liable for all costs incurred with respect to the work and the ongoing maintenance.

For a full list of requirements that **MUST** be met before permission is granted, please contact your local maintenance team.
01349 886602

Installation of a stove without permission may constitute a breach of your tenancy agreement. Any appliance found to be installed with no permission will be required to cease being used. The cost to remove or complete remedial repairs to poorly fitted appliances will be that of the tenant.

To ensure safety and regulatory compliance

PLEASE SEEK PERMISSION.



Rent Consultation 2024 – 2025

We are currently working with the “Value for Money” tenant working group to develop our tenant consultation on proposed rent increases for 2024-25.

We will be in contact with all our tenants throughout November to ask your views on proposed rent increase for 2024-25 and this will help us understand what is important to you. We will contact you by email, text, letter or phone. It is very important that we hear from as many tenants as possible. Last year, 11% of tenants took part in the consultation. To those 11%, we thank you and ask that you try to encourage at

least one neighbour, friend or family member, that you know to be a Highland Council tenant, to complete the consultation. This way, you can help us double the response rate.

The rent setting consultation will include information on how your rent money is spent, what the costs of delivering housing services are, and the impact of rising costs and inflation. If you would like to discuss this with us in person, by telephone or in a virtual meeting then please email us on tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk.

Annual Assurance Statement

Tenants at the Highland Tenant Forum on 20th September were given the opportunity to comment on the draft Housing Annual Assurance Statement for 2023, which focuses 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 2023 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.

Having Committee Chair approval, the Assurance Statement will now be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator. It will be presented to Housing & Property Committee on 9th November.

The full Annual Assurance Statement can be viewed on the Highland Council web site at https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/925/council_housing/263/tenant_participation/8



Suspension of non-essential repairs

Please note that we are continuing to suspend non-essential housing repairs as a measure to reduce budget pressure.

Non-essential repairs are largely associated with the external fabric of properties and environmental improvement works. Examples are:- repairs to fencing, walls, ceiling cracks, gates, garages and pathways but

this is not an exclusive list of affected repairs.

These works will be treated as minor works and therefore no timescale is set for their completion. You will be contacted when the work is likely to take place but, if the repair gets worse and needs more attention, please contact the Service Centre on 01349 886602.

These repairs will be regularly reviewed to assess the risk of potential or further deterioration.



USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

Housing Enquiries / Homeless Service	01349 886602
Out of hours Housing emergency repair / homeless service	01349 886691
Welfare Support Team	0800 090 1004
Universal Credit – open from 9:30am until 3:30pm Monday - Friday	0800 328 5644 (phone) 0800 328 1344 (text)
Operations Team (Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reductions and other Council Benefits)	0800 393811
HMRC Helpline – open from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday	0800 024 1222
Age Scotland	0800 12 44 222
NHS 24 (only to be called if local GP practice is closed)	111
Waste enquiries	01349 886603
Scottish Power	0845 272 7999
GAS (Emergency)	0800 111 999
Home Energy Scotland	0808 808 2282
Police	(Non Emergency) 101
Samaritans	116 123
Social Work-out of hours	0845 769 7284
Funeral Support Payment (Social Security Scotland)	0800 182 2222
CAB	0800 028 1456

USEFUL WEBSITES

Health and Care Advice	https://www.nhsinform.scot/
Scottish Gov Cost of Living Support	http://gov.scot/costoflivingsupport
Highland Council Welfare Team – Worrying about Money leaflet	https://bit.ly/3JnUBNp
Citizen Advice Scotland	https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/debt-and-money/
Dept of Work and Pensions	https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions
Mental Health and Wellbeing	https://breathingspace.scot/how-we-can-help/what-we-do/#
Advice for Refugees And Asylum Seekers	https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/access/healthcare-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers
Highland Council - Help with Cost of Living	https://www.highland.gov.uk/costofliving
Universal Credit Advice Line	https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk
Money Advice	https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk