



# Your guide to a successful tenancy with Highland Council



**TENANTS  
ARE OUR  
BUSINESS**

This book is aims to give you all the information you need to be a successful tenant. It explains what rights you have as well as what things you are responsible for. It also tells you what we, as your landlord, are responsible for and how we can help you have a successful tenancy.

You will find information about being a good neighbour and how to be part of your community. You will also find information about dealing with antisocial behaviour, and how to get help if you need it.

This advice should be read alongside your tenancy agreement which is the legal document which covers the terms of your tenancy – this is the document you sign when you pick up the keys to your home.

Whether you are just moving in, or have been a tenant of the Council's for years and are transferring to a new home, we hope you take a few moments to read through this booklet. Keep it somewhere safe so you can refer to it again if you need to. If you have any questions, we will be happy to help. You will find some useful contact numbers below.

**Useful contact numbers:**

<b>Your Housing Management Officer is:</b> Name.....  Address..... ..... Telephone..... Email.....	<b>Your Housing Maintenance Officer is:</b> Name.....  Address..... ..... Telephone..... Email.....
<b>Your Sheltered Housing Warden is:</b> Name.....  Address..... ..... Telephone..... Email.....	<b>Your Tenant Participation Officer is:</b> Name.....  Address..... ..... Telephone..... Email.....

For general queries, contact us on:

Telephone: **01349 886602**  
Email: [housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk](mailto:housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.highland.gov.uk/housing](http://www.highland.gov.uk/housing)

More information on Housing and Property Services is available on our website at: [www.highland.gov.uk/housing](http://www.highland.gov.uk/housing). To request this information in an alternative format e.g. large print, computer disk, audio tape, or suitable language, information graphics please contact: **01463 702863**

The number to call to report repairs is: **01349 886602**

**Outside normal office hours (Monday - Friday, 9-5), we handle emergency calls through a single number 0845 700 2005.**

**If you have any queries about your repair once you have logged it, or it has not been completed in the agreed time, please contact us on 01349 886602**

**Gas Leaks**

Do not ring us - telephone National Gas Emergency Service (formerly TRANSCO) immediately on **0800 111 999**.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can contact Minicom/Textphone line **0800 371 787**. Use a phone outside your home to avoid the risk of sparking an explosion. Turn off the gas at the mains and open windows. Do not smoke, light a match, use a lighter or switch anything electrical on or off until the problem is fixed.

**Electricity Power Cuts:** Scottish Hydro Electric **0800 300 999**.

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# 1. Stick to the rules

Your Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement is a legal document that describes your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. One of our staff will go over the agreement with you when you pick up the keys to your new home. Even if you have been a tenant for a long time, and are just moving to another Council property, it is worthwhile reading the agreement regularly to remind you what it says. It is very important that you keep to your agreement. If you do not, Highland Council could take action against you and in some cases, this means you could lose your home.



***Keep your agreement in a safe place+. If you have mislaid yours, contact us and we can send you a copy.***

All tenants of a property are equally responsible for keeping to the rules. If you are a tenant along with someone else, you are a “**Joint tenant**”. Joint tenants are all equally responsible for all terms and conditions of the lease including the payment of all the rent. If you fall into arrears with your rent we can take all joint tenants to Court, or choose to take only one tenant to Court for the whole amount owed.

**Give us 28 days’ notice in writing when you want to give up your tenancy** - if you simply hand in the keys we will still charge you the rent for the 28 days’ notice period. If you move out before your tenancy actually ends you may not be entitled to Housing Benefit for that property. In both cases you could end up owing rent. If in doubt what to do, contact your Housing Management Officer - his/her name and number is at the start of this book.

**You must use the house as your only and principal home** – This means you cannot live anywhere else as a tenant or owner. If you do, then you may lose your rights as a secure tenant and Highland Council can serve a Notice of Proceeding to bring your tenancy to an end.

***If you are going to be away from the house for more than 4 weeks you should let us know. This is because if you go away for a long period without notifying the Council we may think you have left the property for good and a Repossession Order may be served and the property repossessed after 28 days if there is no response. You should also be aware that if you are absent from the property it may affect your entitlement to Housing Benefit.***

**As tenant, you are responsible for the property while your tenancy remains live.** If you are giving up your tenancy, you are responsible for the property until you hand the keys back to us.

***You need to make sure that your house is safe from damage from fire, water gas etc. whenever you leave the house. If the house is going to be unoccupied in the winter months e.g. if you are going on holiday or are visiting relations - you should tell the Council so that arrangements can be made to turn off the water. If you need advice on this telephone the repairs number 01349 886602***

**You should not allow the house to become overcrowded.** You should advise the Council of any changes to your household and seek advice if you consider that the house is becoming overcrowded.

You must not allow any **illegal or immoral** activities to take place in the house. This means you must not allow things like dealing drugs; dealing in stolen goods; running a brothel; illegal betting or illegal gambling to take place in the property. If you did, you would not only be breaking the law, but breaking the terms of our agreement, and we may take steps to end your tenancy.

**You should try and keep the house warm** and use any ventilation methods provided in the house to keep it free from condensation and dampness. If you are having difficulty heating your home, you can get free and independent advice from the Home Energy Scotland. For more advice on this and other issues, see the “Ask for help” section of this book.

***If you are worried that you are not working your heating system properly we can help. Either contact us on 01349 886602 and ask for advice or go to our Energy Advice page on the website. You can download lots of information sheets on things like:***

- ***how to work your heating system***
- ***how to set your room thermostat***
- ***how to work out if you are on the best tariff***

***and much more. Just search for Energy Advice at [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk).***

**DANGER!**

Please also note that the installation and use of heaters and cookers fired by paraffin or liquid petroleum gas (LPG) in your home is not allowed. If you are found to have such appliances you will be instructed to remove them to ensure the safety of both you and your neighbours

## 2. Pay on time

**When you become a tenant of The Highland Council you take on certain rights and responsibilities. One of these major responsibilities is to pay your rent on time. Your rent is used to pay for the repairs to your home. It also pays for the major improvements to houses - for instance new heating and new windows - as well as allowing us to provide other services such as caretakers and sheltered housing wardens.**

**If you do not pay your rent, you have broken an important part of your tenancy agreement, we can take steps to end your tenancy and you could lose your home.**

### *How much do I have to pay?*

The total rent and service charges for your home are listed on your lease. It is a condition of your lease that you pay any service charges related to your property along with your rent. The amount of rent or service charge shown on your lease will be eligible for Housing Benefit unless stated otherwise. You may have to pay a service charge for:

- **Caretaking /CCTV** – some flats in Inverness benefit from caretaking and CCTV coverage and there is an extra charge to cover the cost of providing these services. See “Be a good neighbour” below.
- **Sheltered housing** – if you live in sheltered housing, you will benefit from the services of a Sheltered Housing Warden. The warden offers a low level housing support service, visiting and advising tenants and checking on their well- being on a daily basis.
- **A telecare system** (otherwise known as a community alarm or help call), in sheltered property. This is for use in an emergency and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

***If you are in any doubt about the services you are being charged for please contact us – we will be happy to discuss any concerns with you.***

## ***How do I pay my rent?***

At the start of your tenancy, you will be given a plastic card – this will allow you to pay your rent at a variety of outlets – see below. It may take a few days to get your card when your tenancy begins – if you do not receive one, or lose it, please let us know as soon as possible.

Your rent is due every week. You should pay in advance on or before the Monday of each weekly rent period. If you have not paid your rent by the Friday of the week it is due, your account will be in arrears.

If you would prefer to pay your rent fortnightly or monthly, this is not a problem – however, it must be paid in advance. Your Housing Management Officer can advise you further.

Once every three months we will send you a statement of your rent account. This will show the date that all rent charges were made to your account, and the dates of any payments made either by yourself or by Housing Benefit.



You can pay your rent in the following ways – the easiest and most convenient way is by Direct Debit.



### ***What are the advantages of paying by Direct Debit?***

- It is cheap and convenient – no car parking costs, bus fares or postage and no queuing at Service Points or cash offices!
- It's safe - you are covered by the Direct Debit Guarantee - we cannot by law take money from your bank account without giving you 14 days' notice of the first payment and any subsequent changes to payments. You are protected by the Banks' Indemnity Scheme and if an error arises, you will receive a full refund.
- You can budget your rent payments either weekly or with equal monthly payments across the year and choose your payment dates.
- Your rent is paid automatically and on time - no need to remember when to pay and once set up the arrangement will then continue from year to year.

You can also pay your rent in any of these ways:



- at any cash office or Highland Council Service Point (using your plastic swipe card) by debit or credit card only – please be aware there is a 2% surcharge when using a credit card;
- at most post offices (using your plastic swipe card) by cash, cheque, debit or credit card – please note that individual retailers may not accept cheques;
- at any outlet (including Post Offices and many Co-op stores) displaying the Paypoint sign (see below) using your plastic swipe card by cash, cheque, debit or credit card – please note that individual retailers may not accept cheques. (Please note that Post Offices can accept payments of up to £999, but at other outlets, the maximum which can be accepted in any one transaction is £199).



If you wish to pay more than this, the amount can be put through in two or more separate transactions).

- by deduction from salaries or wages (for Highland Council employees only)
- by telephone on **0845 602 4232** using a debit or credit card - (Mon-Fri 8am to 6pm, and Sat 9am to 12 noon). Payments by Credit Card will incur a 2% charge;
- by making a payment over the internet at the [online payments page](#) by debit or credit card
- you can also set up regular payments by Bank Credit Transfer, Tele-banking or Standing Order using your payment reference number and Sort Code 82 70 13 and Bank Account number 10000652.

If you pay at your local Service Point, Post Office or Paypoint outlet, you will be given a receipt.

***If you pay at the Post Office or through the bank there will be some delay between when you make your payment and the payment being received by the Council and appearing on your rent account.***

## Will my rent stay at the same rate throughout my tenancy?

As we explained above, your rent pays for the services tenants receive and pays for repairs and improvements to houses and other services. Every year we look at how much money we will need to fund these services, and if we need to increase the rent to pay for them. If it is agreed that a rent increase may be required, you will be consulted first – usually through the tenant newsletter, but we may also use other ways of getting tenant opinions such as focus groups. We are also required to give you 28 days' notice of any rent increase. If your rent is to go up, this usually applies from the month of April.

### “Free” weeks

The annual rent due on the house is normally charged over 48 weeks of the financial year – this means **there are 4 “free” weeks during the year**. These are usually 2 weeks over the Christmas period and the first 2 weeks of April. If you are paying the full amount due each week, you will not need to pay rent over these 4 “free weeks”. If you pay your rent weekly by cash or debit/credit card, these are usually two weeks at Christmas/New Year, when the Council Offices are not open, and at the beginning of April. If you are in arrears, you will normally be asked to continue paying any agreement to repay the amount owed over the “charge free” weeks.

***If you pay your rent weekly by Direct Debit or Standing Order you still get 4 “charge free” weeks in the year – however these may be different from those above. You will be sent a payment schedule when you set up a Direct Debit so you can see the dates your rent payment will be collected from your bank account – make sure you check this and contact us if there are any problems.***

***If you pay your rent monthly, you will not have any charge free periods. Your monthly rent is calculated as follows: “weekly rent x 48/12 = monthly rent.***

## What happens if I cannot pay my rent or I fall into arrears?

If you do not pay your rent and as a result you fall into arrears, we may take legal action against you which could result in you losing your home and incurring additional expenses such as court costs. **These court costs could be as much as £400.00.**

In cases where legal action is taken, legally we have to notify all “**qualifying occupiers**” e.g. everyone in the household who is over 16 where it has been their home for 6 months or more.

***If we apply to the court to take legal action to recover the home you live in all people over the age of 16 who live with you (such as your children or a lodger) will be informed about this and have the right to apply to the court to be included in future proceedings.***

If you do not pay your rent, we will immediately send you a reminder letter asking you to get in touch with your Housing Management Officer – they can help you come to an affordable arrangement to pay what you owe. They will also tell you where you can get advice to make sure you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to.

**If you get into difficulty paying your rent please contact your Housing Management Officer right away – they are there to help.**

#### **What happens to the amount I owe if my tenancy ends?**

If you end your tenancy in the future and still have arrears, or you owe us other outstanding debts such as court expenses or repair recharges, you will still be required to pay these amounts. We will write to you and remind you about these debts once your tenancy ends. If you do not pay the debt within a certain time, we will send you an invoice for the amount owed and if this is not paid, we will take further action to recover the debt. You can find out more by requesting a copy of our Former Tenant Arrears Policy.

***Please be aware that not dealing with this type of debt could mean that you will not be able to buy your house in the future and it may prevent you carrying out a transfer or mutual exchange.***

#### **Can I get help to pay my rent?**

If you are on some benefits or on a low income, you may be eligible to claim Housing Benefit to help you to pay your rent – please ask us if you would like more information about how to do this. You can get a form from any Service Point or download one from our website at: [www.highland.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.highland.gov.uk/benefits)

## Council Tax Reduction

As well as paying your rent, you will also be responsible for paying your Council Tax. Generally, the bigger the property is, the more tax will be charged. Most council rented properties fall into bands A, B or C. Water and wastewater charges are collected by the Council on behalf of Scottish Water. If you are on a low income, you may be able to claim Council Tax Reduction to help you pay this. Please ask us if you would like more information about how to do this. You can get a form from any Service Point or download one from our website at: [www.highland.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.highland.gov.uk/benefits) .

Please note that one form is used to apply for both of these benefits.

***If you are eligible to claim Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction it is your responsibility to do so – if you need help with this our Service Point Officers or your Housing Management Officer can help. If you would like more information about benefits available, ask for our booklet “An Essential Guide to Money Advice, Energy Advice and other entitlements” available from any Service Point. If you require further financial advice on maximising your income, claiming benefits and addressing debt, you can contact our Money Advice Service/Income Maximisation Service or the CAB - their details are at the end of this book.***

It is also your responsibility to inform our Finance Service about any changes to your circumstances which will affect your claim for Housing Benefit – these changes could include starting new paid employment, finishing paid employment, a relationship breakdown, illness or having a baby. You can contact Finance using the following methods:

- e-mail Finance at [Operations.Team@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Operations.Team@highland.gov.uk)
- telephone Freephone 0800 393811
- by post at PO Box 5650, Inverness, IV3 5YX

It is also important you tell us in Housing if someone comes to live with you, or leaves your home – you can write to us, or fill in the form which you can download from our website: [www.highland.gov.uk/housing](http://www.highland.gov.uk/housing). Again, if you are in doubt, your Housing Management Officer will be there to help. Remember, if you are paid Housing Benefit to which you are not entitled, you will be liable to pay it back.

## 3. Work together

If this is your first tenancy, it can be very overwhelming moving to a new home, possibly in an unfamiliar area. Working with your neighbours to improve your local area is a great way to make friends, strengthen community spirit and create pride in your neighbourhood.

### Tenant Participation

The Highland Council is committed to supporting tenants to have a say in the management of their housing. This is because we believe that you can help us to improve our services to you, and help to make sure that we are delivering the right services. Because the Highland area is so big it is especially important for us to know what our tenants think in all of our areas. There is now a legal requirement to consult tenants on certain issues, such as major changes to policies.

### What is Tenant Participation?

Tenant participation can be a number of different things. It can mean getting involved in a tenants or residents association in your area, attending a one off public meeting. Or it can just mean letting us know what you think on a particular topic by returning a questionnaire or survey.

### Why should I get involved?

If you have a view about the housing service we provide or you want to improve the environment then getting involved can help you to achieve what you want for your community.



### Tenant Participation Strategy

Council tenants, elected members and staff worked together to create our most recent Tenant Participation Strategy. The independent Tenant Participation Advisory Service helped us to develop this strategy. By using them we made sure that we got an impartial view of the way we work with tenants at the moment, what tenants wanted in the future and how we can meet these needs.

The overall aim of the Tenant Participation Strategy is to make sure that "tenants have the capacity to influence and that the Council is open to influence". Involving tenants in housing decisions allows everyone to work together to create better places to live. If you would like a copy of our tenant participation strategy, you can either look on our web-site at:

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/councilhousetenancies/tenantparticipation/> or ask your Tenant Participation Officer – their details can be found at the beginning of this booklet.

## Tenants and Residents Groups, and the Register of Interested Tenants

If you would like to become involved in tenant participation, there may be an existing group in your community which you can join. Alternatively, Highland Council Tenants can join the “Register of Interested Tenants” to ensure they are contacted when any relevant consultations are happening.

To find out if there is a tenants’ group in your community or how to join the Register of Interested Tenants, please contact your local tenant participation officer - their details are at the beginning of this booklet.

If there is no tenant group in your community you may want to get together with others to start one. You can get support to do this from your local tenant participation officer. We may also be able to help with the costs involved. Remember if you are not sure how to go about this just ask – we can provide a lot of help and advice.



***You may wish to attend our very popular Tenant Conference which we hold annually usually in the autumn. If you are interested in coming along please speak to your Tenant Participation Officer***

### Different ways to get involved

We consult with tenants in different ways on different issues. For example, if we are making big changes to a policy like the repairs policy it is important that you tell us what you think. We also try to get feedback on our day to day service, for example, by one-off surveys which we have done in the past on rent arrears or by telephoning you to ask how things went after repairs have been done. It is helpful if you send these sorts of questionnaire back so that we can take account of your views and improve our services. We will also be using a simple electronic questionnaire in Service Points from time to time – if you see a notice about this do use it and let us know what you think. If you think that we should consult you in different ways or if there are other reasons why you can’t participate, please let us know.

## **Making a difference**

You may feel that getting involved will not make a difference – but it will! Here are a few examples of tenant power:

*The rent structure* – in 2010 we wanted to make our rent structure fairer and more understandable. We asked all our tenants what things they felt should be considered when we set rent charges. You told us that you felt people in bigger properties should pay more rent – for instance, the rent for a two bedroom house should be less than that for a three bedroom house. You also thought that people in houses and bungalows should pay more than those in flats. We listened to you, and introduced a new rent structure in 2010 which charges more for larger homes, and more if you live in a house or bungalow.

*The Tenant Repairs Focus Group* consisted of 6 tenant volunteers who met to discuss day-to-day housing repairs. Agenda topics included the information we give out to tenants, the monitoring of repairs and repair satisfaction surveys. Tenants have also contributed to amendments to the Repairs Book which we give out to all new tenants.

***Tenant Update - we publish a tenant newsletter regularly – this gives a mix of interesting articles on current issues, reports from tenant groups. It also gives us a chance to ask your opinion on a range of issues. If you want to see any back-issues, you can find these on our web page at: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/councilhousetenancies/> or ask your Tenant Participation Officer***

# Be a good neighbour

We've all got our own ideas about what it means to be a good neighbour. Some people are close friends with the people next door, others are polite, but prefer not to get too involved.

If you respect the people who live around you and try not to do anything to upset them, you should get on well. The secret to being a good neighbour is to understand that everyone is different. You and your family should treat your neighbours as you would like to be treated yourself. Respect their property and their privacy and be as helpful, friendly and considerate as you can.

Remember, communities are made up of people of all ages, with varying beliefs and backgrounds. You and your neighbours may be very different, but that does not mean you cannot get on.

***Why not say hello? If you have just moved into a new home or a new neighbour has moved in next door, why not say hello? As you get to know each other, you will hopefully develop a relationship that will suit you both***

Everybody has the right to live safely and enjoy their homes in peace and quiet without being faced with antisocial behaviour. The Highland Council is committed to tackling antisocial behaviour. As a landlord Housing Services has developed a policy for dealing with antisocial behaviour where it occurs in council housing.

***When you sign your lease for your house you agree not to cause a nuisance or harassment to your neighbours. Think about things like how loud your TV or music is, how late it is when you put on your washing machine to spin and think twice before fitting laminate flooring if you live in an upper floor flat (see below)! You must also keep your garden area and any common areas clean and tidy.***

If it appears that any tenant has breached the conditions of their lease, we will decide what action we can and should take depending on how serious the complaint is. This may vary from a verbal warning to, in very serious cases taking out an antisocial behaviour order, or even action for eviction. Some cases may be best resolved through mediation and discussion rather than any more formal action.

***If you are suffering from antisocial behaviour from your neighbours, please see the "Ask for help" section below.***



**You need to take care of the house, garden and any areas that you share with neighbours** and make sure that everyone living in your house (including any visitors) does the same.



**If you live in a flat, you will be expected to clean any common areas** e.g. stairs, bin stores or bin chute accesses, unless there is a Caretaking Service in place. You must also comply with any local arrangements for using and maintaining any common drying greens or drying areas. You must ensure that you do not cause a nuisance in common areas e.g. by parking vehicles where it may cause an obstruction.

*In some of our flats in Inverness we have a caretaking service to clean and maintain the communal areas. You will be charged a service charge to cover the cost of this – this will be clearly stated on your lease at section 1.6. If you are in a flat with a caretaking service ask for a copy of the “Caretaking Service Standards” – these tell you what to expect from the caretaking service and how to complain if things are not up to the required standard.*

**You are also responsible for putting out your own household rubbish for collection** and using the proper containers e.g. individual wheelie bins, recycling boxes or communal bins. You are also responsible for keeping the bins and boxes clean and keeping them in their proper place. If you require a replacement wheelie bin or recycling box, contact your local Service Point or the Service Centre.



**Keep your garden tidy if you have one** – there is more information about this below.

## 4. Ask permission

### Assignations/Successions

As a Scottish Secure Tenant your tenancy can be passed on to certain people living in the property when you die. This is called **Succession**.

You also have a right to request that your tenancy be transferred to another person – this is called an **Assignation**. If you want more information about this, please contact your Housing Management Officer or the Service Point/Service Centre You can also get more information on our website at:

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/housing-links.htm>

### Lodgers/sub-lets

**You are allowed to take in lodgers or to sub-let the property – but you must ask for permission in writing first.** Remember, if you receive Housing Benefit, the amount that you receive may be affected if you take in a lodger. If you ask, we cannot withhold permission without good reason. Reasons for refusal might include: the request will result in overcrowding or the condition of the property may be affected. We can also refuse permission if we believe the proposed rent you will be charging is unreasonable. Even if you do get permission to sub-let or take in a lodger, you always remain responsible for ensuring that rent is paid and that the other tenancy conditions are not broken. Lodgers and Sub-lettees can apply for rent allowance (Housing Benefit) to help them pay their rent to you.

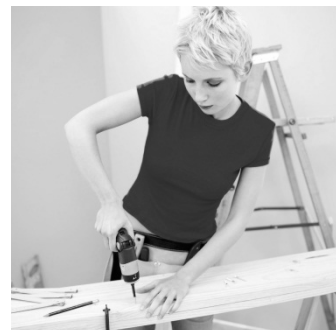
### Running a business

**You cannot run a business from your home without permission** from the Council. You will normally need both planning permission and permission from the Housing and Property Service. The Council will take into account the likely effect on the neighbours and the suitability of the property for the proposed use.

### Alterations

You must contact us if you want to make any alterations or improvements to your house, and we will give you a form to fill in. You must get our written permission before you begin. These alterations/improvements can include:

- Altering, improving, or enlarging the house, or its fixtures or fittings
- Adding new fixtures or fittings (for example kitchen or bathroom installations, central heating or



other fixed heaters, double glazing or any kind of external aerial or satellite dish).

- Putting up a garage, shed or other structure.
- Decorating the outside of the house.

We will not refuse permission unreasonably, but we may apply some conditions regarding the standard of work and who does the work. You may be entitled to some compensation for certain improvements at the end of your tenancy. Please see the Scottish Executive's leaflet on "Compensation for Improvement" which is available from all Service Points and Housing Offices.

## Change in circumstances

If you are a Highland Council tenant, it is important that you keep us up to date with any changes in your household, such as a new baby, or new partner or in your employment status. You may also want to request that someone now living with you becomes a joint tenant, or you may want to take someone's name off your tenancy, after a relationship breakdown for instance. Letting us know about these changes as soon as they happen will allow us to keep our records up-to-date and to give you the best information and advice about how the change affects things like Housing and Council Tax Benefit and other welfare benefits. You can download a "Change in Circumstances" form from the website.



## Laminate flooring

You should write and get our written permission before laying laminate flooring, no matter what type of property you live in. Laminate flooring can cause noise issues - ask for the leaflet "Neighbour Noise between flats" which explains some of the issues around laying laminate flooring in flats. Even if you do not live in a flat, you lay laminate flooring at your own risk. If we need to take it up to effect a repair, you will be responsible for the cost of re-laying it – we will not do this for you.



## 6. Look after your home

The Repairs Booklet in your pack will give you all the information you need about reporting day to day repairs to your home. This booklet also gives information on what type of repairs we carry out for you, and which ones you have to take care of yourself. If a repair is required as a result of damage caused by yourself or your family or friends, we will ask you to pay for it.

**The number to call to report repairs is: 01349 886602**

**Outside normal office hours (Monday - Friday, 9-5), we handle emergency calls through a single number 0845 700 2005.**

### **Gas Leaks**

Do not ring us - telephone National Gas Emergency Service (formerly TRANSCO) immediately on **0800 111 999**.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can contact Minicom/Textphone line **0800 371 787**.

Use a phone outside your home to avoid the risk of sparking an explosion. Turn off the gas at the mains and open windows. Do not smoke, light a match, use a lighter or switch anything electrical on or off until the problem is fixed.

### **Electricity Power Cuts**

Scottish Hydro Electric **0800 300 999**.

**Make sure you find out where your stop cock is** just in case you need to turn the water off in an emergency! Every house is different, but the most likely places to find it are under the kitchen sink or in a ground floor WC. If you cannot find the stop cock, please contact us for help – your Housing Maintenance Officer will be able to advise – his/her name and number is at the start of this book.

**Look after your keys** - You are responsible for the keys and please be aware that we do not keep spare keys - if you lose them you will have to get the locks changed at your own expense. **Please note: While the Highland Council Home Contents Insurance Scheme covers *stolen* keys, it does not cover lost keys – see “Ask for help” below**

***Please be aware that the Council can enter your home on 24 hours notice to inspect the house or carry out any necessary work. There may be some minor repairs to the property still to be done – these are not carried out while the property is empty to speed up the letting process.***

**Decoration** - We do not routinely re-decorate properties when they are empty, or when we have had to damage decorations to carry out essential repairs. As a general rule a “Decoration Allowance” will be paid to new tenants if the wallpaper in your new home is badly torn, paintwork is badly scratched, if unusual materials have been used or if there is serious smoke discolouration. If the paint and wallpaper is clean, whole and complete then no allowance will be paid, regardless of the age/colour of the decoration.



The Decoration Allowance will be paid in the form of B&Q vouchers or a Highland Council order to a local supplier, depending on where you live. You can use these to buy a range of re-decoration materials and equipment. You are not able to use the vouchers or order for anything other than this. A Maintenance Officer may call to check what re-decoration you have done.

**Registration with gas and electric suppliers** – We have arranged for Scottish Hydro Electric to supply the electricity and gas (if applicable) in the property. You will be responsible for paying electric and gas bills from then. The Welcome leaflet in your pack gives you some information and contact details.

**If you don't want to continue with Scottish Hydro, you can change to another energy supplier at any time after the first 28 days of your tenancy.**

If the property has a credit meter you will receive bills quarterly from Scottish Hydro for your electric and gas. You can change the way you pay by contacting them to find out about cheaper payment methods. You can also get clear and impartial advice on how to check you are getting the best deal by contacting the Home Energy Scotland advice centre on **0800 808 2282** or going to our web-site and looking for Energy Advice.

**Cookers, washing machines, dishwashers etc.** - Highland Council does not fit household appliances such as fires, cookers, washing machines, dish-washers etc. for you – this is your responsibility. If the supply pipes and valves were fitted by the previous tenant, we will leave them for you to use – however, if they are not fitted, it is up to you to have this done. You are also responsible for the repair and maintenance of your own appliances

**Smoke alarms** - We supply mains wired smoke alarms in all our properties – we advise all tenants to test their smoke alarms regularly.

**Securing outbuildings** - If there are any outbuildings that go with the house, such as sheds or garages, you are responsible for making them secure with locks or padlocks etc. Generally it is not recommended that goods of high value are kept in outbuildings. You may wish to consider insurance cover for your shed or other outbuilding – find out more at “Ask for help” below.



**Asbestos in the home** The Highland Council, in common with other local authorities owns houses which may contain these materials. Asbestos is only a health hazard if it is damaged or disturbed and the fibres are released into the air and inhaled – please contact us and ask for the leaflet “Asbestos in the home” which gives you more information.

**Right to Repair** - Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, tenants with Scottish secure tenancies or short Scottish secure tenancies have the right to have small urgent repairs carried out by their landlord within a given timescale. If the repair is not started within the time limit set, you can ask an alternative contractor from our list of approved contractors to carry out the work. This second contractor will then tell us that you have asked them to carry out the repair and will invoice us the costs.

We will write to you to advise you that you can claim £15 compensation for the inconvenience. Please see the leaflet in your pack for more information

## 7. Don't miss an appointment

**Repairs** – if you report a repair, you will be asked when you will be at home to let the tradesman in. Please stay at home for the agreed time – or if you have to go out, ensure another responsible adult can let the tradesman in.

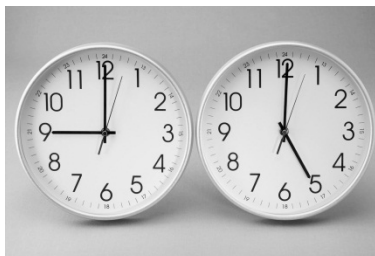
**Gas Safety** - If there is gas in the property the gas heating system has been checked and there are some instructions about how to operate the system in the property as well as a copy of the Landlords Gas Safety Record.

Once a year from now on we will arrange for your gas heating system to be serviced and checked to ensure that it is working properly and that it is safe. The Council has a legal obligation to do this so when you get a letter giving you a time and date for this servicing visit, please make sure that you have gas and electricity available and that you are at home. If you cannot be at home on the date and time given, you should contact the servicing contractor whose number is given in the letter to make alternative arrangements.

**You must allow reasonable access for these inspections or you will be in breach of your tenancy agreement and could risk losing your tenancy.**

***Please note that if you do not let us in to service your gas heating system, we will force entry to your home, and re-charge you the cost of this. We are allowed to do this under the terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy lease – see section 5.9.***

Some areas in Highland (such as Sutherland and Skye) do not currently have any mains gas supply and you may be tempted to use bottled gas. **Highland Council advise you not to use heaters (or other appliances) fired by Paraffin or Liquid Petroleum Gas (e.g. bottled gas).**



## 8. Keep your garden tidy

Your lease states that you are expected to keep your garden in a neat and tidy condition.

***The Highland Council operates a scheme to assist Council tenants with their gardens. To be eligible for this scheme, tenants must confirm the following:***

- ***that they are over 60 years of age or in receipt of Disabled Living Allowance***
- ***that they are in receipt of Housing Benefit***
- ***that there is no able-bodied person living as part of the household or nearby who can carry out the work***

***Applicants must meet all three criteria to be eligible for the scheme. To apply for the scheme, you can download and complete the Garden Aid Application Form from our website and return it to your nearest Service Point. Alternatively you can contact the Service Centre on 01349 886602 or your local Service Point to ask for a form***

**Garden Aid Scheme** - The Garden Aid scheme provides a free grass cutting service to tenants who are aged over 60; in receipt of Disabled Living Allowance and Housing Benefit and have no able bodied person living with them or nearby who can carry out the work. The scheme has only a small budget and there may be a waiting list.





## 9. Don't be antisocial

**Everybody has the right to live safely and peacefully without worrying about being bothered or harassed.** When you sign your lease for your house, you agree not to cause a nuisance or harassment to your neighbours. You must also keep your garden area and any common areas clean and tidy. You must ensure that any visitors and other members of your household do not cause a nuisance to neighbours.

If you are in a flat, carpets can help to deaden noise to the flat below. It is also best not to put music or TV speakers hard against party walls – if you need more advice about noise control ask your Housing Management Officer or Housing Maintenance Officer. This also means that your neighbours must ensure that they do not bother or harass you. If you have a problem with a neighbour, we encourage tenants to try and sort out the problem in a friendly way in the first instance, by talking to the neighbour involved. If this doesn't work, you should contact your Housing Management Officer for advice.

The Antisocial Behaviour Charter leaflet is in your pack and a separate booklet is available which provides more details on how complaints can be managed.



### Look after your pets



➤ **If you have pets, you must keep them under control** and prevent them from causing a nuisance to neighbours, the public or Council staff or contractors. This includes fouling, smell or noise. You are not allowed to keep a pet that is prohibited by law. Failing to keep pets under control could mean that you will be asked to remove them.

# 10. Ask for help

We can give you lots of advice and information on a range of problems or concerns which may come up during your tenancy – or we can pass you on to another organisation which can help – please let us know if you are having any problems. Here are a few examples of ways we can help:

## **Help with Antisocial Behaviour**

Everybody has the right to live safely and enjoy their homes in peace and quiet. The Highland Council is committed to tackling antisocial behavior. Section 8 above explained that as a tenant of Highland Council, you are expected not to behave in an antisocial way. However, what happens if **you** are the victim of antisocial behaviour?

As a landlord, Housing Services has developed a policy for dealing with antisocial behavior where it occurs in Council housing. .

### **What is Antisocial Behaviour?**

A range of types of behaviour can be seen as antisocial. These may vary from minor disputes to serious breaches of tenancy. Examples of minor disputes might be parking in unauthorised areas, while serious problems may include criminal activities such as threats or actual physical violence.

### **What can I do?**

If possible you should try to sort out the problem in a friendly way. It may be that the person causing the problem isn't even aware of it. If this doesn't work or you don't feel comfortable talking to your neighbour, you should contact us and we will give you advice. It would be helpful if you write down what has happened and give as much detail about the problem as possible.

### **What happens next?**

What happens next and how quickly it happens will depend on what type of complaint you have made and how serious this complaint is.

We will usually visit the tenant who is being complained about to let them know that there is a problem and see what they say about it. We do not give out details of who made the complaint but people may be able to guess who it was.

If it is a serious complaint that may involve legal action we will ask you to keep a record of what happens, e.g. what type of problem, dates and times. We will give you a record sheet to help you do this. We may also contact other people and the

Police for additional information.

### **What will the Council do?**

If it appears that the tenant has breached the conditions of their lease, we will decide what action we can and should take depending on how serious the complaint is. This may vary from a verbal warning to, in very serious cases, taking out an antisocial behaviour order or even action for eviction. For more information about antisocial behaviour orders see our leaflet about them. Some cases may be best resolved through mediation and discussion rather than any more formal action.

We may only be able to take legal action if you help by providing evidence. However, we will talk to you about this and any concerns you may have.

Taking legal action may take several months but the Council will keep you informed of what is happening.

### **How can I report antisocial behavior?**

Cases of antisocial behaviour can be reported to your local Housing and Property office or if the incident is of a criminal nature it should be reported to the Police <http://www.northern.police.uk/contact.html>.

### **How can I find out more?**

If you would like to find out more about what to do if you are experiencing antisocial behaviour, please contact your local Housing and Property Office.

Alternatively you may wish to contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau, local Advice Agency, or your Solicitor.

For more information, please e-mail: [housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk](mailto:housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk)

### **Help with Home Contents Insurance**

Highland Council insures the building we are renting you – **but our insurance does not cover your household contents and personal possessions** – you will have to take out insurance of your own to cover these. Highland Council offers a very competitive Home Contents Insurance Scheme, which you can pay weekly with your rent – see the Information Pack enclosed with your pack.

### **Help with avoiding Loan Sharks & Pay Day Loans**

**Hi-Scot Credit Union** offers you access to flexible & convenient loans, gives an attractive dividend on savings and there are no transaction fees for borrowing or saving. You can pay money into your account using a standing order or at any Paypoint outlet or at any post office.

You can withdraw funds either by a cheque sent to your home address or transfer into a nominated bank account. To join HI-SCOT you can access forms and information on-line at: **www.hi-scot.com** or by calling **01851 701865**.

### **Help with furnishing your home**

If you are moving into your new home and need to furnish it, or need to replace items after a fire or flood, the following organisations may be able to help in some areas – they can provide low cost furniture and other household goods at a low cost:

- If you live in Inverness area, Lochaber, Ross-shire or Badenoch & Strathspey, **New Start Highland** are a charitable organisation who may be able to supply you with good quality 2<sup>nd</sup> hand furniture, electrical items etc. Contact **01463 715 615**.
- HomeAid Caithness & Sutherland are a charitable organisation who may be able to supply good quality second hand furniture, electrical items etc. Contact **01847 890696 or 891300**
- **Blythswood Highland** is based in Evanton and are a charitable organisation that may be able to supply good quality second hand furniture, electrical items etc. Contact: **01349 830 777**

### **Help with reducing your fuel bills**

You can get free advice through one easy ‘Healthy Homes’ referral.

Call Home Energy Scotland on **Freephone 0800 808 2282**. They can call you back straight away or you can arrange another time for them to call. Mention ‘Healthy Homes’ and tell them whether you’d like help and advice with:

1. Ways to reduce fuel costs or help with fuel bills
2. Getting more income from tax credits and benefits
3. Money issues including dealing with problems or debt
4. How your home could be made safer (a Fire Safety visit)

Alternatively get the Council Officer to make a referral for you. You will be contacted by Home Energy Scotland within 2 weeks. All the advice, from existing advice services, is arranged through Home Energy Scotland.

**You can find out more about Healthy Homes on the Council website at;  
<http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/howtogetmoreinformation/healthyhomes.htm>.**

## **Help with debt**

### **You're better off finding out!**

Everyone is facing financial challenges these days and many people find, for a variety of reasons, that their outgoings are exceeding their income.

If you feel your finances are out of control, The Highland Council's Money Advice service can provide advice and assistance to help you deal with your debts. We can:

- check if you are getting all the income you are entitled to.
- tell you what creditors can and can't do.
- discuss what options are available to you, to help you deal with your debts.
- get in touch with your creditors and negotiate on your behalf, taking the stress out of dealing with your bills.
- provide advice and in some cases, representation if your creditors are taking court action.

If you contact us, you will be given advice by an experienced money adviser, so if you are worried and don't know who to turn to, why not call us and talk things over?

We can deal with all types of debts - including mortgage, rent and Council Tax arrears, no matter what stage they're at. Getting in touch is the first step to freeing yourself from those sleepless nights.

We also work closely with the Council's Customer Income Maximisation Team. You can contact our Customer Income Maximisation Team at [income.maximisation@highland.gov.uk](mailto:income.maximisation@highland.gov.uk) or by telephone on **0800 090 1004**.

You can find out more at:

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/counciltax/money-advice/default.htm>

### ***Citizen's Advice Bureau***

You may also want to get independent advice from the Citizen's Advice Bureau – your local Service Point or the Service Centre can give you their details by telephoning **01349 886602**.

## Other agencies which can help with debt advice:

**The Chartered Institute of Housing** has teamed up with a charity to help people in debt. Turn2us offers free advice to people facing financial difficulties. It is launching an expanded online service that helps people struggling with money to maximise their income through benefits, tax credits and grants.

The Turn2us benefits and grants searches help people to assess what money is available based on their personal need. They are also able to contact grant-giving charities on and off-line and to find an adviser or organisation to support them further with benefits applications.

Shortcut to: <http://www.turn2us.org.uk/>

**Shelter** - Ring 0808 800 4444 or use their website [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk) to get online assistance. You can also link to the “Entitled To” website from here - this provides a useful calculator to help you check your entitlement to various benefits and tax credits – or you can go straight to the site on [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk)

**National Debt Helpline:** This helpline provides free confidential and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems. Their website can be found at:

[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland)

**or telephone: 0808 808 4000**

*If you want to use the websites listed above but do not have a computer in your home, remember that you can get access to a computer in your local library. Ask the staff in the library about how you can do this.*

# 11. What we do

The Scottish Social Housing Charter – a new Charter has now been published by the Scottish Government. It came into effect from 1st April 2012.

## What's the Charter for?

- to help to improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords deliver for their tenants and other customers.
- to provide tenants and other customers with a clear statement of what to expect from social landlords, and helping them to hold landlords to account.
- to focus the efforts of social landlords on achieving outcomes that matter to their tenants and other customers.
- to provide the basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on how well landlords are performing.

The emphasis is on accountability to tenants and other customers:

## Decision Making

The Charter emphasises the importance of involvement of tenants and other customers in housing services.

## Service Standards

It will also mean improved involvement of tenants and other customers in measuring the standard of service being delivered by the Council.

## Customer Satisfaction

The Council will need to develop an improved and more comprehensive understanding of tenant and customer satisfaction with housing services.

The Charter marks a significant change in the way social rented housing services are to be delivered. This will take time, willingness and co-operation of staff, tenants and customers of housing services.

If you would like to know more about the Charter, or are interested in becoming more actively involved in working with the Council on these changes to landlord services, then please register your interest by emailing us at [housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk](mailto:housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk).

Volunteer Expenses are paid to all tenants participating in housing services.

A copy of our Volunteer Expenses Policy is available at:  
[www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/councilhousetenancies/tenantparticipation/](http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/councilhousetenancies/tenantparticipation/)

## Know your Housing Service Standards

We deliver a range of landlord services and we care about the quality of these services.

We want our tenants and staff to know about the range of landlord services we provide, and to know what standard of service is expected.

To help improve awareness and knowledge of our service standards, we have published **Housing Service Standards**. This publication sets out each of the housing services provided by the Council in its landlord role, and notes the standard of service you can expect as a tenant.

The publication is available from our website at [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk) or you can phone **01349 886606** or email [housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk](mailto:housingandproperty@highland.gov.uk) to request a copy.

We will be working with our tenants to help us monitor and review how well we are doing against these standards. If you are a Council tenant and would like more information about taking part in housing services, email us at the above address, or contact your Tenant Participation Officer.

## Scottish Housing Quality Standard

We are currently working hard to bring all our houses up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015, by targeting our available funding at work which will achieve this. You can view our [Capital Programme Management Procedures](#) to find out the various stages of this process and you can see the latest Standard Delivery Plan report under "Current Documents" on our web-site at: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/councilhousetenancies/>

You can also link to a useful Scottish Government leaflet "A Tenant's Guide to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard" on this web-page – if you do not have access to a computer, please ask at your nearest Highland Council Service Point.



# 12. Useful Information

## Buying your home

As a Scottish Secure Tenant of a local authority, you may or may not have the right to buy your house. **If this is your first tenancy or you have returned after a voluntary break, you will not have the right to buy.**

If you are a transferring tenant moving from a tenancy which started before 30<sup>th</sup> September 2002 (including Mutual Exchange moves), your right to buy changes with the new tenancy – **you will go on to the modernised right to buy rules.**

If you are an ex-service person who was housed by the regular armed forces and are transferring directly into this tenancy you will have the modernised right to buy.

Tenants with the modernised right to buy, who are living in communities which are covered by the Pressured Area Status designation, have their right to buy suspended until the designation no longer applies. **All communities in Highland are covered by Pressured Area Status designation except for some in Caithness.**

If your tenancy started before 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011 and you are moving into a ‘new-supply’ house you will not have the right to buy that house. This restriction only applies for the time you live in that property. A ‘new-supply’ property is one which has been built or bought since 28 June 2008.

### **CAITHNESS ONLY**

The communities which **are** covered by Pressured Area Status in Caithness are: Thurso and its small neighbouring communities of Forss; Geise; Glengolly; Janetstown; Scrabster; and Weydale. If you live in any other Caithness community it is **not** covered by Pressured Area Status. If you have the modernised right to buy, then you may have the right to buy your home. There is more information in the leaflet “Your right to buy your home” – ask for a copy.

***Tenants in sheltered housing cannot apply to buy their home. If the property is not sheltered but has been specially adapted for the elderly/disabled it may also be exempt from the right to buy. Please check with your local housing office if in doubt.***

Remember, if you exercise your right to buy, you will then be responsible for all repairs and improvements to your home.

# Moving house

## Giving Notice

Under the terms of your lease you must give us at least 28 days' notice before your tenancy can be ended. You must give us this information in writing, and everybody who is a joint tenant of the property with you must sign it. You should tell us when you intend to move out and what your new address is.

## What you need to do before you move out

Before you move out you must make sure that your rent and any other debt (e.g. court expenses or recharges for repairs) is paid up to the end of your tenancy. If you do not, we will invoice you for any outstanding amounts. You must also make sure:

- You leave your house and garden in a clean and tidy condition.
- Carpets and belongings are removed unless you have reached an agreement with the Housing Officer to leave items for the next tenant.
- Any sheds or outbuildings are removed if they are in a poor or unsafe condition.
- That you check with the Housing Officer whether any improvements you may have made are to be left or removed. You may also be entitled to compensation for some improvements that you have made – see our leaflet on Compensation for Improvements for more details.

## House Inspection

We will contact you to arrange a suitable time for us to come and inspect your house before you move out. It is important that this inspection takes place as we can then discuss any problems. You may be asked to carry out some repairs before you leave if there is any damage to the house, fittings or decoration that is not just fair wear and tear. If you do not carry out these repairs or damage is identified after you leave, we will carry out the work and charge you for the cost of it.

## Handing your keys in

It is important that you hand in all sets of keys - this will normally be two keys for each lock. If you do not hand in all your keys we will change the locks and recharge you for this. If you hand your keys in late you may be charged extra rent.

If you move out before the end of your tenancy and this is between October and March please let us know so that we can drain the water system to avoid burst pipes. If you do not let us know and damage occurs due to burst pipes you will be recharged for this.

## Transferring to another Council house

Normally we will only offer a transfer to another Council house if your rent account is satisfactory, and your house and garden are in a clean and tidy condition. We will inspect your house before we confirm an offer of another tenancy. What happens next will depend on the condition of your house. The offer may not be made or you may be asked to carry out some repairs before you leave if there is any damage to the house, fittings or decoration that is not just fair wear and tear.

Once you have accepted an offer, you will be told what date the new tenancy will begin. The new tenancy may begin very soon after you have accepted the offer, as the 28 days' notice on your home does not apply. All essential repairs will be done before the tenancy starts, however some minor repairs may be held and carried out after you move in.

You must hand in the keys to your old house by 12 noon on the day after the end of your old tenancy. If you hand them in later than this you will be charged rent on both houses at the same time. Housing Benefit will not normally cover both rents.

## Mutual Exchange

A mutual exchange is where two tenants exchange their properties. If you find another tenant to swap with, you must get permission from both landlords before you move. If you move without permission you could lose your home. You can download a "Request for permission carry out a mutual exchange" form from our website. A Mutual Exchange can offer several benefits including:

- It may be much quicker than waiting for a housing transfer
- You can arrange multiple swaps where a chain of tenants swap properties to find their perfect home
- Swaps can take place between Highland Council tenants, Housing Association tenants, and tenants of other councils.

Highland House Exchange at <http://www.highland.houseexchange.org.uk/> is a website for social rented tenants who are looking to swap homes. When you register with them you will be asked for some details about your home and the type of home you are looking for. You can search their website to find someone to swap homes with. To ask for an exchange, you and the other tenant need to complete a Mutual Exchange Request form and a Housing Application form. Both properties will be inspected by the landlords, and rent accounts must be satisfactory. If you transfer or exchange houses your right to buy entitlement may change.

# Data protection

Housing and Property holds certain information relating to your tenancy and housing application. We may hold information about your health; social care or housing needs; criminal convictions; race and gender; family and financial details. This is held in writing and electronically. Some of the information requested is needed to ensure that we can operate our policies in a way that safeguards the rights of the individual and ensures that the Council complies with the law. Other information provided by you will be used in assessment; care planning housing and meeting the needs of you or your dependents. We also use information for statistical and planning purposes.

To comply with the law, information must be collected and used fairly; stored safely and not disclosed to any other person unlawfully. To do this, the Housing & Property Service must comply with the Data Protection Principles which are set out in the Data Protection Act 1998. This means that personal data will be:

- Processed fairly and lawfully and shall not be processed unless certain conditions are met
- Obtained for specific and lawful purposes and not further processed in a manner incompatible with that purpose and processed in accordance with data subjects' rights
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Accurate and where necessary up to date and kept for no longer than necessary
- Protected by appropriate security

You have the right to see the information that is held about you. You are entitled to know:

- What personal information the Housing & Property Service holds about you and why (subject to conditions of the Act)
- How to gain access to it

To ask for personal information held about you please contact the Council by:

- Picking up, completing and returning a Subject Access Request form. These can be found at Council Service Points, Libraries or Council Offices; or
- Writing to the Freedom of Information Officer giving as much information about your request as possible along with your name, date of birth and address; or
- Downloading a subject access request form from the website.

There is no charge for making a Subject Access Request. You should receive a written response and copy of any appropriate access documents within 40 days of receipt of any request.

# Making a complaint

The Highland Council as a whole, as well as the Housing & Property Service is committed to providing high-quality customer services. We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.

**If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services please tell us.**

**You have a right to complain** under the Council's complaints procedure - for example you may feel that a repair has not been carried out on time, or to the correct standard.

You will find a copy of the complaints procedure on our web-site at <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/contact/complaints.htm> or ask at your local Service Point.

## Some useful information you can download and print out:

THC Complaints Leaflet – this can be accessed on-line at:  
<http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/07A4F779-206F-466A-87A8-1893C5138C25/0/complaintsleaflet.pdf>

Compensation for Improvements leaflet – this can be accessed on-line from the Scottish Government at:  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/46737/0028756.pdf>

It is also available in [Arabic](#) ; [Bengali](#); [Chinese](#) ; [Hindi](#) ; [Punjabi](#) and [Urdu](#)

The Scottish Social Housing Charter booklet – this can be found at;  
<http://housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk/media/34241/the%20scottish%20social%20housing%20charter.pdf>

Housing Service Standards – these can be found at;  
<http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/024C4C71-D239-480A-B903-DBB51EA110B4/0/housingservicestandards.pdf>

## HOMELESSNESS

As a Highland council tenant, you have a secure home. However, you may be reading this because you are living with a Highland Council tenant or visiting, and are worried about not having a secure home of your own.

You don't have to be living on the street to be homeless. The law says you are homeless if you:

- Have no accommodation at all.
- Are living in accommodation such as a hostel or bed and breakfast or if you normally live in a mobile home or a caravan or a boat but there is nowhere for you to put it.

You may also be legally homeless if:

- You have accommodation but cannot live in it, if for example you are threatened with violence from a current or an ex partner or from neighbours.
- If you cannot gain entry to your accommodation because the landlord has changed locks or if it is not reasonable for you to stay in your accommodation if for example it is in very poor condition
- If your accommodation is so overcrowded that it affects your health or
- If family or friends have asked you to leave.

### **If I am homeless or think I might become homeless what can I do?**

As soon as you have housing difficulties, whatever your housing circumstances, please contact the Council for help and advice. This can help to avoid a crisis. We may be able to prevent you becoming homeless. For example, you can get money advice if you are having trouble paying your mortgage or rent, advice on your rights if you are a tenant or advice if you are separating from your partner.

If you are worried that you may become homeless in the future – **Act Now** – contact The Homeless Prevention Team on the telephone number or email address below for help and advice. You may also want to seek independent advice from one of the agencies listed below.

### **What happens if I become homeless?**

The Highland Council has certain legal duties towards people who are or who may become homeless.

If you are homeless, or think you're going to become homeless, we will make sure that you get free advice and information. The Council can give advice and assistance with the following:

- Housing including council housing; housing associations; private renting and home ownership
- Emergency / temporary housing (and women's aid refuges)

- Assessing your legal rights under homelessness law
- Getting support to stay in your home or to move
- Referring you to specialist services for more help and advice e.g. Money Advice
- Rent including rent arrears and housing benefit.

Exactly what the Council can do for you is set out by law. For example if you are unintentionally homeless and have a connection to the Highland area then we will normally give you temporary housing until we assist you to secure settled accommodation. If you are homeless but have knowingly done or not done something to create this situation e.g. not paid your rent or you're your accommodation when you didn't need to we will usually give you temporary housing so that you have some time to find somewhere to stay. If you are unintentionally homeless but don't have a connection to the Highland area we may be able to refer you to a local authority where you do have a connection. If you don't agree with our decision you have a legal right to ask us to review it

**If you are having housing difficulties don't delay in contacting the Homeless Prevention Team for help – either ask at your local Service Point or Housing Office or call the telephone number below, or email the prevention team to arrange an appointment.**

### **Contact Information**

To contact the Homeless Prevention Team call 01463 785104 or email [homeless.prevention@highland.gov.uk](mailto:homeless.prevention@highland.gov.uk)

### **Looking for Help at Night or the Weekend?**

If you become homeless and need urgent help out of normal working office hours you can contact The Highland Council's Emergency Helpline for help and advice. They can be contacted by phoning **0845 700 2005**.

### **Domestic Abuse**

Domestic abuse includes physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse. If you have to leave your home because of domestic abuse you will get help from the Council. However you may also want to seek help from Women's Aid. There are four Women's Aid Refuges (Inverness, Dingwall, Fort William and Wick). You can get help or support wherever you live as the Women's Aid Groups also provide an outreach support service. They can provide temporary accommodation for single women and families in the refuges. They also provide support for people who do not want to leave their home. You can contact any of the refuges by phone or you can contact the National Domestic Abuse Helpline – see the phone numbers listed below. Domestic Abuse Freephone Helpline – 0 800 027 1234

- Womens Aid Inverness - 01463 220719
- Womens Aid Ross-shire - 01349 863568
- Women's Aid Lochaber - 01397 874216
- Women's Aid Caithness - 0845 4080151

## Where can I get more advice or information?

### Advice Agencies

Specialist organisations can also provide support and advice to you. Some of these are described here. Many will also have information on their websites. You can get free access to the internet at most libraries.

**Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB)** offer free, independent, confidential advice and information on a whole range of subjects including housing and homelessness, legislation, tenants' and landlords' rights and responsibilities, debts and welfare benefits. You can find your nearest office in the telephone directory or in the handbooks below. Their website address is [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

### Finding Housing in the Highlands

This handbook gives a wide range of information about the different housing options in the Highlands. There is one available or accessible in each Service Point or Housing & Property Office. Just ask the staff. It is also on the Highland Council's website at <http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/findinghousing/aguidetohousingoptions/>

### Streetwise Highland

This is a directory of services which anyone facing homelessness will find useful. It gives information about the many different housing, support, health and other useful services and how to contact them. It is available in all the Service Points and Housing Offices. Just ask the staff. It is also on the internet at [www.streetwise-highland.org](http://www.streetwise-highland.org)

**Shelter** provides free independent housing advice and assistance to anyone who is homeless and they also help anyone who has a housing problem. They have a 24 hour free national advice helpline at 0808 800 4444 or email them at: [www.shelterscot@shelter.org.uk](mailto:www.shelterscot@shelter.org.uk) They also have useful advice on their website at [www.scotland.shelter.org.uk](http://www.scotland.shelter.org.uk)



## Change Control

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Changed/Up-dated by</b>	<b>Change/Update</b>
Final version V1	9 July 2013	Shirley Mackenzie	
V2	8 Nov 2013	Shirley Mackenzie	Additional useful information – links to web-sites/leaflets
V3	11 Nov 2013	Shirley Mackenzie	Inclusion of info on LPG etc on page 6 in line with change to leases

