



hebridean housing
partnership

December 2012

homeward

Customer Services 0300 123 0773

Bedroom Tax to hit tenants

Working age tenants who are in receipt of Housing Benefit will have their benefit cut from 1st April 2012 if they have "spare" bedrooms in their home.

This is part of the Governments welfare reform changes. In assessing whether there is a spare bedroom, the following criteria will be used:

The rules allow one bedroom for:

- every adult couple (married or unmarried)
- any other adult aged 16 or over
- any two children of the same sex aged under 16
- any two children aged under 10
- any other child, (other than a foster child or child whose main home is elsewhere)
- a carer (or team of carers) who do not live with you but provide you or your partner with overnight care

If tenants have one spare bedroom, they will lose 14% of their Housing Benefit. If there are two or more spare bedrooms, then they will lose 25% of their Benefit.

The Comhairle Housing Benefit team have already written to current claimants who they believe are affected. It is estimated that nearly 300 tenants will be hit by this. We realise that this is going to cause hardship to tenants. HHP officers will therefore be visiting those who are affected over the next few weeks to discuss how tenants are going to make up this shortfall and to give advice on any options they have.

If you want to talk to someone about this now, please contact us on 0300 123 0773.



Paying your rent should be top of your Christmas list.

If you're behind in your payments, please contact us – we can make arrangements for affordable payments to help clear your arrears.

Contact your Housing Officer to see how we can help

Phone 0300 123 0773

**WIN £100 FOR
YOUR CLEAR
RENT ACCOUNT!**

The first tenant selected at random after the holiday break who had a clear rent account on 1st January 2012 will receive £100 voucher for a local shop of their choice. There will also be 2 runner up prizes of £50.

Well attended AGM 2012



HHP's sixth Annual General Meeting took place on 13 September 2012. The Vice-Chair, Mr David Blaney, welcomed a strong crowd to the County Hotel in Stornoway, and reported on HHP's operation over the past year.

The Director of Resources, Dena MacLeod, gave a presentation on the financial statements for the year and introduced Mr Ross McLauchlan of Wylie & Bissett, who gave the Partnership a clean audit report for the sixth year running.

Ms MacLeod commented on various elements the Partnership would be concentrating on in the coming year, such as welfare reform and the continuation of progress towards the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

The Membership then approved a resolution to donate £500 each to local branches of the following organisations: Crossroads Lewis; RNLI; Stornoway PHAB Club; and Western Isles Carers, Users and Supporters Network.

Tribute was paid to the immense contribution and commitment of Mr George Lonie, HHP's outgoing Chair. Mr Lonie will remain on the Board as a Community Board Member.

Following a ballot in the Community Member category, Calum MacKay was elected to the Board, and Mairi Bremner was re-elected. In the Tenant Member category Kevin Paterson was also re-elected.

The AGM concluded with an enjoyable and informative talk from Mr Sandy Matheson (pictured below) on "Deafness: A Personal Perspective".



Allocation Policy Review

In October 2011 a Working Group of staff and Board members was set up to examine all aspects of HHP's Allocation Policy, to ensure that it enables properties to be allocated on a fair and transparent basis.

The Group examined all aspects of the policy to ensure it meets these objectives and also complies with legislative guidance issued by the Scottish Government.

Over the seven month period that this

work was in progress the policy has been changed substantially from the original document.

The Working Group presented its revised Draft Version to the Board of HHP in June 2012, when it was agreed to proceed with stakeholder consultation.

The Consultation Period ran from 1 September to 31 October and all stakeholders were invited to submit comments. In particular, all Housing Applicants who are currently on the Housing List were contacted, as they are most directly affected by the policy.

A significant number of responses were received, both formal and informal. These comments ranged from those who expressed the view that the policy seemed very satisfactory and fair while others made very specific recommendations about changes they wished to see in the content.

Following consideration of the feedback received, a number of changes have now been implemented to the policy. The Allocation Policy was approved for implementation at HHP's Board Meeting in November.

HHP would like to thank all who responded to the Allocation Policy Consultation and also to acknowledge that the responses received have been very helpful in shaping the policy.

Work is now ongoing to take forward the implementation of the policy and more information will be provided on this as work progresses.



On Friday 26th October, HHP staff took part in national "Wear it Pink" day to support Breast Cancer Research and raised a total of £100.



Stock Condition Survey

During January and February, HHP will be undertaking a Stock Condition Survey. HHP will be appointing surveyors who will be undertaking an internal and external condition survey of a sample of houses.

Surveyors will not be authorised to survey houses where no-one is at home or where there are no adults present.

A proportion of the housing stock will be surveyed. **The properties identified for a survey will be issued a letter stating that they are to be surveyed.** If a date is unsuitable then HHP should be notified in order that an alternative date is arranged or another property selected. If surveyors are working in a particular area and do not get access to a pre selected property then they may take the opportunity to the door of the neighbouring property and ask to carry out a survey.

Surveyors will also carry a letter of authorisation and ID to show that they are genuine callers. If you are in any doubt, do not let them in and phone HHP or the Police.

Access will be required to all rooms and loftspace. The survey will be visual and will not require lifting of floorboards, carpets and suchlike.

The reason the survey is needed is that data is required to inform the future investment programme. As tenants will be aware, the investment programme consists of works such as window, heating, kitchen, bathroom and heating replacements. As these surveys are used to shape the Investment Programme it is very important that if tenants are contacted for survey that they allow access.

HHP may also be asking the surveyors to gather data on energy efficiency and fuel poverty. These are huge issues in the islands and it is important that we have information so we can help tenants with these problems.



Local firm's innovative approach to recycling raises £1500 for charities

Neil Mackay & Co. was awarded the contract for replacement windows and doors in over 100 houses for H.H.P. As part of their approach to community benefit and recycling of waste they came up with the idea of selling all the windows and doors for £10 each and give the proceeds to local charities.

"They have been selling at a steady pace and are generally used for sheds and a lot of people have also been taking them to make greenhouses. So it's a win-win all round for HHP and ourselves," commented company boss Neil Mackay.

To date Neil Mackay & Co. has raised £1500.



New fleet of Handymen vans

HHP handymen and the new fleet of vans, with a representative of Donald Campbell Motors.



Watch Out for Winter

Although our houses have central heating, there is still the risk of frozen or burst pipes during periods of heavy frost. Following the few simple steps below should help you to avoid any damage to your home:

Keep cosy in your home

- Try to keep your heating at 21°C (70°F) during the day and 18°C (64°F) at night.
- Eat at least one hot meal a day and take plenty hot drinks.
- Wear warm layers of clothing especially when you go out.
- Keep active and wrap up warm if you go outside
- If it's really cold, set your heating to come on earlier and turn off later rather than turning up the thermostat. This saves you money and is better for the environment.
- Remember to keep your home well ventilated.
- If you are going to be away from home then, if possible, leave your heating to come on at least once a day for a couple of hours. draw your curtains at dusk and keep
- Close doors to block out draughts
- Find out where your main stopcock or tap is

- Report any dripping taps or running overflows to HHP so that they can be fixed
- Always try to keep your home heated to at least 10°C and allow heat to circulate all rooms
- If you are going away from home for any length of time during winter ask HHP to drain down your water supply. We will do this at no charge.

If your Pipes Freeze

- Turn off the water at the stop cock or tap
- Switch off your immersion heater or boiler
- Turn on taps at sink, bath, etc.
- Turn on as much heating as you can if you have storage heating or air source heating
- Call HHP on 0300 123 0773 to report the problem

If you have a Burst Pipe

- Turn off the water at the stop cock or tap
- Switch off your immersion heater or boiler
- Turn on all taps to empty your tanks

- If water comes into contact with electrical fittings, switch off the electricity at the mains
- Call HHP on 0300 123 0773 to report the problem

Remember burst pipes can cause a lot of damage. HHP will repair your house but we are not responsible for damage to decoration or to your furniture, carpets or other belongings.

Heating broken down

- Telephone HHP and report the problem as soon as possible

Gas Safety

- It is our legal responsibility to carry out a gas safety check in your house every year.

If we contact you to arrange a gas service make sure you let us in as this will allow us to ensure your heating is working safely and effectively.

Stay healthy

- If you are over 65, or have a long term health condition, you can get a free flu jab from your GP to protect against seasonal flu strains

Gibson Gardens



Development Programme

There are two new build schemes currently on site. Gibson Gardens in Stornoway was at standstill for a number of months following the demise of UBC Ltd. We are pleased that work is now underway again with the contract to complete the contract having been won by Lewis Builders Ltd. It is now scheduled for completion in mid 2014.

The development of 10 houses at Melbost is on target. The first 6 houses which are for sale under the Scottish Government shared equity scheme are due to be completed shortly. The other 4 properties which are for rent will be completed by April 2013.

HHP are working with the Comhairle to develop a number of sites across the islands between now and 2015. These include the old Craigston school site in Barra, part of the old Balivanich school and a site in Leurbost. There are also discussions taking place with a developer regarding a site at Anderson Road in Stornoway. Further details will be provided on these in the next newsletter.

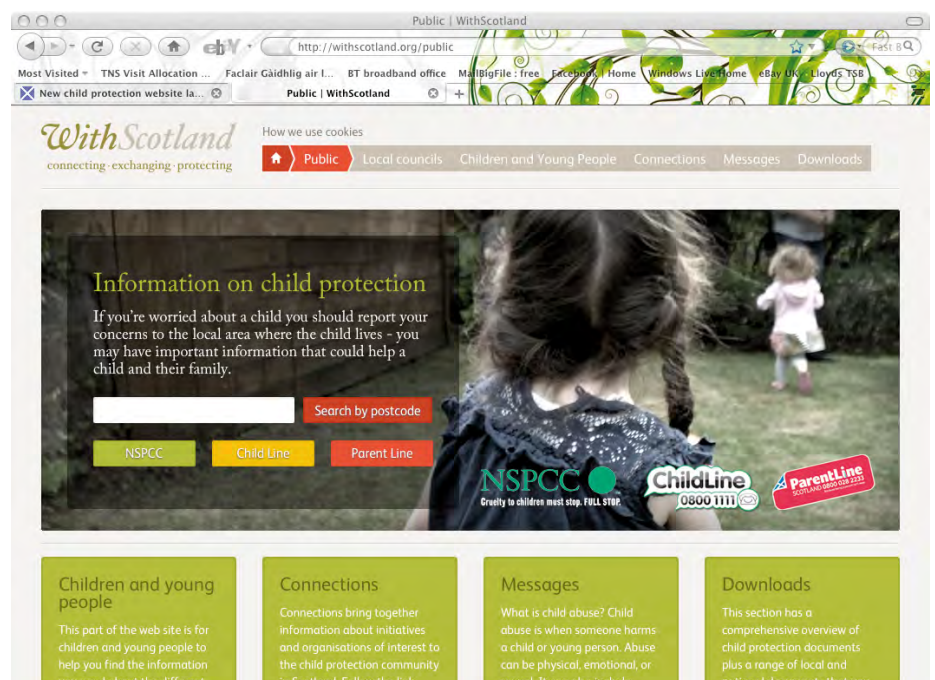
Mackenzie Park



New website coordinates approach to public awareness around child protection issues

The Scottish Government has launched a new national website offering help and support to vulnerable children and families on child protection issues. The new site - childprotectionscotland.org - includes clear, accessible information on what the public should do if they are concerned for a child's welfare. It will also feature a range of information and links to downloadable materials for children themselves, including cartoons and online games providing child safety tips.

The new site can be found at www.childprotectionscotland.org. It was developed in conjunction with the Scottish Child Protection Committee Chairs Forum (SCPCCF) and the Multi Agency Resource Service (MARS). It follows recommendations from a Ministerial Working Group for a more coordinated approach to public awareness around child protection issues.





Rent Rise Consultation 2013/14

Following a consultation exercise last year, the Board agreed the rent increases for a three year period:

2012/13 RPI 5.5%
 2013/14 RPI+1% 2.5%
 (forecast) + 1% = 3.5%
 2014/15 RPI+1% 2.5%
 (forecast) + 1% = 3.5%

The Board use the RPI figure at the end of November for setting the rent. It is therefore unlikely that the rent rise will be more than 3.5% for the coming year.

The Board would like your views on the proposed rent increase and on the areas it plans to spend money on over the next three years. A consultation document will be available on HHP's web page from 14 January 2013 to 31 January 2013 for your comment. The Board would also be happy to meet with groups of tenants if there is sufficient interest. If you are interested in attending a consultation meeting please phone 0300 123 0773 and ask for Shona Paton and she will take your details. We will get back in touch with you to let you know the date and time of the meeting. The details will also be available on our webpage.

Just Say Access On Line

The Department of Work and Pensions are running a new promotion campaign for on-line services which they provide.

What you can do now.

You can currently apply for Jobseekers Allowance through www.gov.uk/jsaonline. You can check for benefit entitlement

Our Performance April to September 2012

Rent Arrears – HHP Target <2.5%

	Apr 2012-Sep 2012 (half year)	Apr 2011-Mar 2012 (full year)	Apr 2011-Sep 2011 (half year)
Total Current Tenant Arrears	£193,044	£186,653	£210,865
% Level of Arrears	2.55%	2.63%	2.96%

We have continued to make progress on reducing rent arrears.

Allocations

	Apr 2012-Sep 2012 (half year)	Apr 2011-Mar 2012 (full year)	Apr 2011-Sep 2011 (half year)
Number of lets	99	265	164
Average time taken to re-let	15 days	33 days	28 days
Average time taken to re-let less difficult to let properties	13 days	19 days	21 days

Performance on letting empty houses has improved significantly.

Annual Rent Loss Due to Voids – HHP Target 1%

	Apr 2012-Sep 2012 (half year)	Apr 2011-Mar 2012 (full year)	Apr 2011-Sep 2011 (half year)
Rent Loss Due to Voids	£16,617	£54,401	£28,939
% of monthly rent due that was lost to voids	0.51%	0.83%	0.94%

The amount of money due to empty houses has been reduced.

Repairs Response Times – HHP Target 95%

Completed within timescale	Apr 2012-Sep 2012 (half year)	Apr 2011-Mar 2012 (full year)	Apr 2011-Sep 2011 (half year)
Emergency – 4hrs	94%	95%	98%
Response Time – 24hrs	97%	96%	93%
Response Time – 3 days	96%	96%	98%
Response Time – 7 days	97%	98%	97%
Response Time – 20 days	100%	99%	99%
Total Number of Repairs Completed	1971	4779	1998

Performance on completing repairs continues to be good.

through www.gov.uk/browse/benefits.

There is now the new job matching service through www.gov.uk/jobs-jobsearch.

You can also register for Government Gateway and this will then provide you with an account that can be used to log into a range of online government services. You will be asked to create a password and be given a user ID that allows you to register

and log into the services.

There is a vast amount of information available through www.gov.uk that can provide information, help and advise on housing, tax and benefits.

Any problems please contact Stornoway Jobcentreplus on 01851763119 or e-mail Stornoway-Jobcentre@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk



First Barra Tenants Conference

On Tuesday, 6 November 2012, HHP held its first Barra Tenants Conference. The venue for the event was the Community Hall, Castlebay.

HHP had intended to hold a Board Meeting in Barra during the current year but practical difficulties prevented that from happening. Subsequently, it was agreed that HHP would organise a tenant event which would be attended by senior officers and Board Members.

The Barra Conference was attended by David Blaney, Chair of HHP's Board together with Vice Chair, George Lonie and local Board Member Jane

MacKinnon. John MacIver, HHP's Director of Operations and Local Area Manager, John A MacQuarrie also attended.

The conference was hosted jointly by HHP and the Western Isles Forum of Tenant & Residents Associations (WIFTRA).

The main emphasis, when deciding the Conference format, was on creating an informal setting in which tenants could engage with HHP.

On that basis, an invitation was extended to all tenants to participate in a buffet lunch. A number of stalls were also set

up to provide information on a range of services being provided by partner agencies.

Prior to the arrival of lunch, tenants took time to browse around the stalls and also to enter into informal discussions with the team of HHP staff that was present.

Feedback received from tenants suggested the format worked well and they were pleased to have an opportunity to engage with HHP in a relaxed atmosphere.

A number of raffle prizes were donated and we are very grateful for these (the raffle prize winners are pictured above).

Uist Tenants Conference 2012

The third Annual Uist Tenants Event was held in Balivanich on Thursday, 6 September 2012. The venue was the Balivanich Community Hall which proved to be an excellent facility.

There was a good turnout for the event, which was hosted jointly by HHP and the Western Isles Forum of Tenant & Residents Associations (WIFTRA). The event was Chaired by Kevin Paterson of WIFTRA.

In response to tenant feedback from previous conferences, the format was changed so that the main emphasis was

on creating an informal setting in which tenants could engage with HHP.

On that basis, an invitation was extended to all tenants to participate in a buffet lunch. A wide range of stalls were also set up to provide information on a range of services being provided by partner agencies.

Displays were also provided by contractors who are currently working on site, delivering HHP's Investment programme. These included kitchen, bathroom and heating display and these were presented to a high standard by the

contractors.

Prior to the arrival of lunch, tenants took time to browse around the stalls and also to enter into informal discussions with the team of HHP staff that was present.

Following the buffet lunch, tenants were invited to participate in a Question and Answer session.

A number of raffle prizes were donated by contractors?? We acknowledge these with gratitude.

The new conference format worked very well and HHP would like to thank all who contributed to the success of the day.





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Cash Card processing update

In the last newsletter, we advised you that a cash payment card scheme was in the process of being set up for HHP, which would allow tenants to make rent payments at a wide range of Girobank, Paypoint and Payzone outlets across the Western Isles, with an expected implementation date of the end of August 2012.

As you will appreciate, the timescale for this process has suffered some delays but the issues which caused these delays have now been resolved and the system is now expected to be operational before Christmas. Further information as to how to use the cards will be provided with them when they are issued in the next few weeks.

Festive Period Services

Hebridean Housing Partnership's offices will be **closed** from 5pm on Friday 21st December 2012 to 9am on Thursday 3rd January 2013.

It is important that you make acceptable arrangements to pay your rent during that period.

If you pay your rent by Direct Debit or Bank Standing Order you must make sure that there are sufficient funds in your bank account to honour the rent payment. If you pay at the Comhairle's cash desk or at Hebridean Housing Partnership offices, you should pay your rent in advance for the period the offices are closed.

To pay online go to: <http://tinyurl.com/hhppayments>. This takes you to the Comhairle's 24 hour secure internet payments service. Select HHP Housing Rents and you can make your rent payment using this secure site with most major credit or debit cards.

Win £100 - see front page

May we take this opportunity to wish you a very merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year from all at HHP



EMERGENCY REPAIRS

If you have an emergency repair during the holidays, phone us on

0300 123 0773



WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN NOW PAY YOUR RENT "ON-LINE"?

To access this method of rent payment go to:-

<http://tinyurl.com/hhppayments>

This takes you to the Comhairle's 24 hour secure Internet payments service. Select HHP Housing Rents and you can make your rent payment using this secure site with most major credit or debit cards.

You can also pay your rent by the following options:

- At your local HHP office;
- At your local Comhairle office;
- By Direct Debit mandate on a weekly or monthly basis;
- By Bank Standing Order;
- By telephone using your debit or credit card – phone 0845 600 2772

