



homeward

hebridean housing partnership newsletter

Housing developments

Melbost Farm Continues

The Melbost Farm development will continue with a three phased development incorporating a mix of rent and shared equity units. Cycle paths/pedestrian routes are proposed to interconnect the various phases and provide pedestrian routes to the A866 Stornoway to Brooker road. The first phase of this development is planned to handover in 2 sections during 2015. 32 homes will include 16 for sale under the Shared Equity Scheme. Funding is being provided by the Scottish Government, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and HHP. ***If you are interested in the Government's Shared Equity Scheme, please contact Liz MacInnes at Tighean Innse Gall, 01851 70612 or email liz@tighean.co.uk***

Ailt Na Broige, Marybank

Negotiations are on-going with a contractor to agree costs and plans for a 7 house scheme for sale under the Government's Shared Equity Scheme.

Rural Developments

Hebridean Housing Partnership is in the process of acquiring land from CNES to develop rural housing schemes throughout the islands at Balivanich, Crowlista, Leurbost and Craigston on Barra.

Gibson Gardens Completed

This £3.5 million project was completed in September 2013. It provides 24 homes on a site formerly occupied by the old Gibson hostel. The project incorporates high levels of insulation, solar and photovoltaic panels. There is a mix of units including 6 adapted properties. Construction work began in April 2011 but the project was not without difficulties as the original contractor went into liquidation. Lewis Builders completed the development. The project was supported by CNES and the Scottish Government.



DON'T PUT YOUR HOME AT RISK THIS XMAS

Hebridean Housing Partnership understands that there are many reasons why some tenants have difficulty paying their rent especially with Christmas approaching. **Rent payments must be your first priority - do not put your family home at risk.**



- 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 make your rent payments.
- If you pay at the Comhairle's cash desk or at Hebridean Housing Partnership, you should pay your rent in advance for the period the offices are closed.
- You can also pay online with most major credit or debit cards (not Diners Card or American Express) on the Comhairle's 24 hour secure Internet payments service at <http://tinyurl.com/hhppayments>

Please talk to us immediately if you think you have a problem. We will deal with your problems in an understanding, sympathetic and fair way. If you are having problems paying your rent you can get confidential advice from your Housing Officer. Our staff will:

- agree reasonable repayments based on what you can afford
- conduct all interviews in private
- help you to ensure you are receiving all the income you are entitled to
- arrange for you to receive more detailed help with debt.

Your rent arrears WON'T go away... so address them TODAY!

WIN £100!

CLEAR RENT ACCOUNT

The first tenant selected at random after the holiday break who has a clear rent account on 1st January 2014 will receive a £100 voucher for a local shop of their choice.

**There will also be
2 runner-up prizes of £50!**

Although all homes have insulation and 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

- If possible set your heating to 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 ventilated, especially kitchens and bathrooms.
- 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.
- If you have an Air Source Heat Pump leave the heating at 15°C while you are away
- 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 15°C and allow heat to circulate all rooms

- If you are going to be 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 or switch off your SureStop switch if you have one
- 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 or switch off your SureStop switch if you have one
- 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

Insurance

- 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. It is important that you insure your own possessions.

Heating broken down

- Call HHP on 0300 123 0773 to 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



Watch Out for Winter



Best Kept Estate

This year HHP set up a new initiative for tenants to enter into a competition for the best kept estate/street award. The competition was open to all tenants and residents living in HHP housing areas. The judging panel for the competition consisted of HHP Housing Officers and Board Members and the judging took place in September.

From the entries received, Queensland Road was chosen as the winner in the Stornoway area, and Graham Park, South Dell won the Rural Lewis and Harris category. Unfortunately there was only one entrant in the Uist and Barra category but it did not meet the entry criteria. Queensland Road and Graham Park both received a £200 gardening voucher to further enhance the estate.

HHP would like to congratulate the winners on the hard work that has gone into making their street/estate a winner and we hope that this is an encouragement to maintain the good work.



Congratulations to our staff



HHP would like to congratulate our Estate Services Officer Magnus Johnson on being named winner of the Best Volunteer in Youth Football Award at the 2013 Scottish FA Grassroots Awards. The Scottish FA website said, 'without him the island's grassroots football community simply wouldn't exist.'



Well done to Housing Officer Martin for winning the WDFPF (World Drug Free Powerlifting Federation) World Championship in the over-55 age category. Earlier in the year Martin won the British Open Age title and set a new over-55 world record of 190kg in the process.



Congratulations to Karen Monk, our Customer Services Assistant in Balivanich, on the birth of baby Harris. In her absence Linda Johnson has taken on the role of receptionist in our Uist office.



Welcome to new staff

Linda Johnson has joined the team as a Part-time Receptionist in Balivanich. Linda previously worked for Strathclyde Police and the Scottish Police Authority for 18 years. Before that Linda was a manager for Remnant Kings, a textile designer for a weaving mill in Brora and her father's knitwear factory in Uist. Linda returned home in August after being away for 30 years.

We welcome Angela MacIver to our Stornoway office as an Administrative Assistant in our Corporate Resources team. Angela also works part-time as a Receptionist for The Group Practice.



Staff Help Local Charities at Christmas

In mid December HHP staff will be presenting two local charities with the money they have raised throughout the year through our Charity Fund. Money has been raised through dress-down days. Staff voted for their favourite charities and this year the successful charities are Alzheimers Scotland and the Food Bank who will both receive £500. Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

Struggling with Bedroom Tax?

Tenants who are affected by Bedroom Tax are urged to apply for Discretionary Housing Benefit (DHP). Since the Bedroom Tax was introduced last April, our Housing Officers are finding that many tenants are struggling financially, and are finding it difficult to pay this unfair charge.

The Scottish Government has made additional DHP funding available to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to help tenants cope with the effects of Bedroom Tax during the first year of its implementation. To date, uptake of DHP has been slow. Many tenants have not applied for DHP for different reasons. However, we again urge people to apply for the help that is available. Most tenants who have applied have been successful and there is still sufficient funding available to help all tenants who are affected.

John Alick MacQuarrie, Area Manager said, 'If you are affected by Bedroom Tax, please be aware that assistance is available and that no one needs to be struggling to make payments.'

Please contact your Housing Officer as soon as possible to discuss how to prepare a claim for DHP.

Hebridean Housing Partnership

WILL CLOSE for the festive season at 5pm on **Monday 23rd December 2013**

and **WILL REOPEN** at 9am on **Friday 3rd January 2014.**

For emergencies during this period phone **0300 123 0773**

We wish you all the best for the festive season and for 2014

Uists & Barra



UIST TENANTS EVENT 2013

The fourth Annual Uist Tenants Event was held in Balivanich on Friday, 13 September 2013. The venue was the Balivanich Community Hall which proved to be an excellent facility for the event.

There was a good turnout for the conference, 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 events, the main emphasis was on creating an informal setting in which tenants could engage with HHP.

An excellent buffet lunch was provided and a wide range of stalls were also set up to provide information on services provided by partner agencies. Displays were also provided by contractors who are currently working to deliver HHP's Investment programme. These included an air source heat pump display and a kitchen display.

Tenants took time to browse around the stalls and to chat with the team of HHP staff and WIFTRA representatives who were present.

A number of raffle prizes were donated by contractors and we acknowledge these with gratitude.

The conference format worked well and tenants enjoyed the event. HHP would like to thank all who contributed to the success of the day.



BARRA TENANTS' LUNCH

On Wednesday, 6 November 2013, HHP held its Annual Barra Tenants' Lunch at the Community Hall, Castlebay.

All our Barra tenants were invited to the lunch.

The main aim was to provide an opportunity for tenants to raise any issues of concern, in an informal setting. It was also an opportunity for discussion about our services and our decision making processes.

HHP is eager to involve our tenants in all aspects of service delivery and to keep you informed about the key decisions taken.

A team of Uist based staff, together with HHP's Director of Operations, John MacIver, attended the event.

A number of stalls were set up which provided information relating to services being provided partner agencies.

Feedback received from those that attended was positive and they were pleased to have an opportunity to engage with HHP in a relaxed atmosphere.

However, the low attendance at the lunch suggests that we may need to revisit our methods of engagement with our Barra tenants and that we need to consider a different format for future events.

A number of raffle prizes were donated for the lunch and we again acknowledge these with thanks.



John MacIver hands over a prize to one of our raffle winners





Pictured right to left: Angus MacNeil from HHP, Apprentices Luke Allen and Craig Paterson as well as Alec Blakely from FES FM

HHP & FES FM create 2 new apprenticeships in the Western Isles

Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) and FES FM continue to demonstrate their commitment to supporting local employment and opportunities for young people on the Western Isles through the creation of 2 new Services & Maintenance Apprenticeships.

The apprentices will undertake their training with FES working on the HHP Repair and Maintenance contract. They will also have the opportunity to gain additional experience working on the new Western Isles Schools where FES FM deliver facilities management services. As part of their 4 year apprenticeship, both Luke and Craig will attend a unique training course developed by FES FM at Forth Valley College in Alloa. The scope of these new apprenticeships covers heating systems, hot and cold water systems, electrical, air conditioning and ventilation, natural gas/propane gas/electric boilers, regulations and health & safety.

Angus MacNeil, Asset & Contract Manager of HHP commented "By working in partnership with contractors

we try to create employment opportunities for the community. Our contracts provide a continuity of work over a number of years so contractors can commit to creating employment and apprenticeships."

Apprentice Luke Allen said, 'This is a great opportunity for me and I am over the moon to have had this chance. The new course is very in depth and is giving me a broad range of skills, which is suited to the properties we are working within. I am very grateful to FES FM and HHP for giving me this opportunity as it is very hard for young people to find employment never mind a career path'.

Alec Blakely Managing Surveyor for FES FM said 'we are determined to work with HHP to maximise opportunities for people locally and to support the local economy. These appointments demonstrate our long term commitment to the Hebrides'.

FES FM secured a 5 year contract with HHP in April 2011, to provide maintenance services to around 2200 homes across the Hebrides.

Moving Forward on Investment

We are currently planning our future investment programme for 2015 to 2019. Our current contracts for the investment programme will end on 31st March 2014. Through 2014 we will be conducting a tendering process to deliver the programme through to 2019.

The main elements of the investment programme will be windows, doors, kitchens, bathrooms, heating, roofing and rendering work.

Tenants will also be aware that we have undertaken a recent Stock Condition Survey and a separate Tenant Satisfaction Survey. The investment programme for 2015 to 2019 will be based on the findings and recommendations in the surveys. These highlight the importance of warmth and affordability for tenants and we will continue to do all that we can to reduce fuel poverty.

If you wish to discuss our plans further please contact Angus MacNeil, our Assets and Contracts Manager on 0300 123 0773.



You may be eligible for

FREE SAFETY EQUIPMENT

if you have at least one child under the age of five living at home and are in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Carer's Allowance
- Employment Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based)
- Disability Living Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Tax Credits (AND have a valid NHS tax exemption certificate)
- Council Tax Benefit (not council tax discounts)

Families who are eligible for the scheme will receive a resource pack of information and free installation of home safety equipment including:

- Safety gates
- Window restrictors
- Non-slip bath or shower mats
- Fire guards
- Locks for kitchen cupboards
- Corner cushions
- Blind cleats
- Door jammers

If you would like to have this important safety equipment fitted into your home please contact Donnie Macdonald or Catherine Smith at Tighean Innse Gall on 01851 706121 or email catherine@tighean.co.uk

Performance to 30th September 2013

Rent Arrears – HHP Target <2.5%

	Apr 2013– Sep 2013 (half year)	Apr 2012– Mar 2013 (full year)	Apr 2012– Sep 2012 (half year)
Total Current Tenant Arrears	£213,320	£233,036	£193,044
% Level of Arrears	2.76%	3.13%	2.55%

Repairs Response Times – HHP Target 95%

Completed within timescale	Apr 2013– Sep 2013 (half year)	Apr 2012– Mar 2013 (full year)	Apr 2012– Sep 2012 (half year)
Emergency – 4hrs	97%	94%	94%
Response Time – 24hrs	95%	95%	97%
Response Time – 3 days	96%	97%	96%
Response Time – 7 days	97%	96%	97%
Response Time – 20 days	100%	100%	100%
Total Number of Repairs Completed	1828	3918	1971

Allocations

	Apr 2013– Sep 2013 (half year)	Apr 2012– Mar 2013 (full year)	Apr 2012– Sep 2012 (half year)
New applications added to housing list	281	442	226
Average number of days taken to add applicant to list	2	2	2
Number of lets	91	211	99
Average time taken to re-let	18 days	19 days	15 days
Average time taken to re-let less difficult to let properties	15 days	14 days	13 days

Annual Rent Loss Due to Voids – HHP Target 1%

	Apr 2013– Sep 2013 (half year)	Apr 2012– Mar 2013 (full year)	Apr 2012– Sep 2012 (half year)
Rent Loss Due to Voids	£21,445	£36,805	£16,617
% of monthly rent due that was lost to voids	0.63%	0.49%	0.51%



HHP Charity Donations

Following a resolution at the AGM, charity donations of £500 were made to four local charities. Mairi Bremner, Board Member, presented the cheque to Sheena Stewart of Caraidean Uibhist, Jane Mackinnon, Board Member presented the cheque to Fiona Macdonald of Cobhair Bharraigh, Kevin Paterson, Board Member, presented the cheque to Catriona Stewart of Eilean Siar Foodbank and Angus Lamont, HHP Chief Executive, presented the cheque to Angus Macleod of Western Isles Kidney Patients Association.



Board Member Mairi Bremner presented a cheque for £500 to Sheena Stewart of Caraidean Uibhist. Caraidean Uibhist provides volunteer befriending for people over 18 living in the Uists who would benefit from the support of a befriender. Their aim is to reduce social isolation and support people to have increased opportunities to take a more active role in their community. Mairi was delighted to make the presentation to what she considers a well deserving cause.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

In September 2013 BMG Research carried out a tenant satisfaction survey on behalf of HHP. The main aim of the survey was to measure tenant satisfaction and aspirations with their homes; environment and services provided by HHP. Data collected will also be used in HHP's first Annual Report on the new Scottish Social Housing Charter.

HHP values the opinions of our tenants and would like to thank the 422 tenants who responded to the postal survey and 441 tenants who participated in the telephone survey.

The survey results show that 73% of our tenants are satisfied with the overall service that HHP provides and 74% are happy with the quality of their home.

HHP are now working hard to identify the things we need to do better. An action plan will be drawn up to further improve the level of service experienced by tenants. We will use these results to track progress in future years.

QUESTION	Satisfied & Very Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by their landlord (% satisfied)	73%	11%
Percentage of tenants who feel their landlord is good at keeping them informed about services and decisions (% good)	75%	12%
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in their landlord's decision making processes (% satisfied)	63%	25%
Percentage of tenants who moved into their property in the past 12 months satisfied with the standard of the home when they moved in (% satisfied, for those who moved into their property in the past 12 months)	69%	8%
Percentage of existing tenants satisfied with the quality of their home (% satisfied)	75%	9%
Percentage of tenants who have had repairs or maintenance carried out in the last 12 months satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (% satisfied, for those who say they had a repair carried out in last 12 months)	74%	8%
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the management of the neighbourhood they live in (% satisfied)	72%	17%
Percentage of tenants who feel that the rent for their property represents good value for money (% good)	71%	15%

Do you receive the benefits below?

If so call now on 0800 888 6040 for free under-floor, loft, room in roof and cavity wall insulation.

Child Tax Credit & Income below £15,860 ☒

Pension Credit ☒

Or One of the combinations below:

		Receive a work related activity or support component	Parental responsibility for a qualifying child*	In receipt of a qualifying component	Disabled worked element or severe disability element	Over 60
Income related Employment and Support Allowances	AND one of the following	☒	☒	☒	X	X
Income based Job Seeker's Allowance	AND one of the following	X	☒	☒	X	X
Income Support	AND one of the following	X	☒	☒	X	X
Working Tax Credit and has a relevant income below £15,860	AND one of the following	X	☒	X	☒	☒

* Is under 16 or over the age of 20 and in full time education (other than higher education) and be ordinarily resident with the benefit/tax credit recipient.

** Conditions apply: A Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland; Area Based Scheme delivered by Taigh Blath on behalf of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.





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Winter Warmers!

These recipes were kindly provided by HHP Board Member, Mairi Bremner. Please let us know if you try them out and we will have more for you in our next issue.

Winter warmers from the croft – no weights or measures required: just a pot and whatever is going!

Fish Stock Broth

Fish is a popular meal in these islands, especially if you are fortunate enough to get it straight from the sea. Boiling is a common way of cooking it, but remember never throw away the water it is cooked in as you can make a lovely soup from it. After cooking and removing your fish keep the water in the same pot and add an onion, a leek, and a few potatoes and boil until cooked – about 15 minutes. If you have a liquidiser put all of this into it, blend, put back in pan, add a little salt, pepper and parsley if you have it and you have a cracking winter warmer! Alternatively, if you haven't got a liquidiser mash all the ingredients together and although not quite as smooth, is still a very tasty bowl of soup on a cold day.

Tomato Soup

It is notoriously difficult to persuade children to eat vegetables so how about tomato soup – full of vegetables. Many vegetables work well with this soup but I use carrots, onion, leek, turnip, potatoes and of course tomatoes or tinned tomatoes work

equally well. If using fresh tomatoes (and you can use tomatoes that are going soft) pop them into a bowl of boiling water for a few minutes to allow you to peel the skins easily. Once you have done this put all the ingredients into a pot preferably with chicken or beef stock but a stock cube

also works. Boil until the ingredients are soft (about 15 minutes). This is a soup that works better when liquidised but again mashing will work as well. Season and enjoy, or to make it more appealing to children, try adding a cheap can of tomato soup at the end, which is bound to win them over!



Charity Climb

Pictured is Laura-Jayne Davis, HHP's Customer Services Assistant and Debt Management Officer, at the summit of Ben Nevis. The girls climbed the mountain in aid of Cancer Research and raised a total of £21,000 for the charity – well done Laura-Jayne!



WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN NOW PAY YOUR RENT ONLINE?

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:

- By rent payment card at any Post Office or Paypoint/Payzone
- At your local HHP office;
- By Direct Debit mandate on a weekly or monthly basis;
- By Bank Standing Order;
- By telephone using your debit or credit card – phone 01851 709296;
- At your local Comhairle office.

