



April/May 2004

Transfer news for Comhairle Tenants from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Hebridean Housing Partnership

# Homeward

## Transfer offers 'tremendous opportunity' says HHP Chairman

**Welcome to this, the second Homeward newsletter, filling you in on the latest developments in the proposed transfer of your home to Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP).**

I see the proposed transfer as a very exciting opportunity for residents in the Western Isles. The prospect of transfer gives tenants a tremendous opportunity to have fully modernised homes in the foreseeable future with guaranteed stable rents.

Transferring housing to HHP would also empower you, as tenants, by giving you the opportunity to have a bigger say in managing your home. Following transfer,

tenants would have real influence over what HHP does and how it does it and, as an islands-based organisation, HHP will develop specific local housing solutions to meet particular local needs.

Whilst the transfer of housing stock offers considerable potential benefits, particularly with regard to the employment

opportunities which would arise within the building industry, we are determined that you, as tenants, will have the opportunity to have your say.

As has been stressed throughout this

process, Comhairle tenants will ultimately decide on what course is taken.

If, in the run up to the ballot, you have any questions about any aspect of transfer, you can get in touch with the Comhairle or HHP. You'll find contact details on the back of this newsletter.

*George Lonie, HHP Chairman*



*HHP Chairman George Lonie (left) congratulates new HHP Chief Executive Angus Lamont, see back page for full story*

## What is HHP?

Based locally in the islands, Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) is a community-owned, not-for-profit housing association set up by the Comhairle.

As a not-for-profit organisation, all surplus money gained by HHP will be reinvested in the housing service. In addition, HHP will have greater ability to borrow money to carry out necessary improvements and new building work.

Communities Scotland, a Scottish Executive agency that regulates and inspects all

registered social landlords, will monitor HHP to ensure it meets the highest standards.

Tenants, who make up a minimum of a third of the HHP board, will be central to HHP decision-making. The board – made up of local tenant, community and elected council representatives – are all volunteers who only receive compensation for expenses but aren't paid for their work.

Transfer is not about privatisation. There will be no change to tenancy agreements should it go ahead.

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# The role of the Independent Tenant Adviser

As we told you in the last issue of Homeward, TPAS (Tenants Participation Advisory Service) has been appointed by tenants as the Independent Tenant Adviser for stock transfer. The role of TPAS is to give you clear, easy to understand information and independent advice regarding the Comhairle's stock transfer proposal.

Representing TPAS, regarded as the leading tenants' participation organisation in the country, are Lesley Baird and Steve Mason who, between them, have a great deal of experience working with tenants in the Western Isles.

Work is continuing with a wide variety of local organisations including the Western Isles Residents Association Forum and interested individual tenants to make sure tenants' interests are represented and that every tenant has the opportunity to find out more about community ownership.

To get in touch with Lesley or Steve, a freephone number is available, contact them on 0800 269645.

# First wave survey results

## Your survey said...

**We commissioned an independent survey of almost 500 tenants during December, selected at random across the islands.**

**What you told us can be summed up as follows:**

- awareness of the proposals for housing transfer is very high (88%),
- if a ballot had taken place the next day, almost twice as many people questioned would have voted yes than no (35% 'yes', 14% 'no', with 51% unsure),
- over 85% of tenants would either definitely or probably vote in a ballot,
- 67% are aware of the right to vote on transferring.

It is clear from the survey that there is high awareness of the transfer plans.

While there is strong support for transfer and the benefits it can bring, many tenants will need more information from us before making an informed choice.

Amongst the specific housing issues raised by tenants were the following:

- 'rent increases' - HHP's guarantee is to keep annual rent increases at affordable levels ,
- what 'transfer' means - you would not be required to move house – your current home would transfer to HHP, who would become your new landlord,
- 'repairs' - HHP would use rent money to run its services and modernise your homes. With the removal of the Comhairle's Housing Capital Debt of £39million, which currently costs 75p in every £1 of rent money generated, transfer will allow the majority of rent money to be invested back into improving homes and the housing service.

For answers to any other queries or concerns you may have, contact the Comhairle on 01851 709338 or the Independent Tenant Adviser, TPAS, on freephone 0800 269 645.

# Local staff with local knowledge

If Comhairle tenants vote to transfer the housing stock, employees of the Comhairle's housing service would also be transferred to HHP so familiar faces would continue to deliver services in your local area housing offices.

This means that you would continue to deal with the Comhairle staff that you know and whose local expertise would ensure you are always provided with the best knowledge available, whilst maintaining the high standards of service that you have come to expect.

*If you vote for transfer to HHP, Comhairle housing staff will also transfer along with the housing stock*



# Meet the Board...

**The HHP Board – consisting of five elected local councillors, five tenant representatives and five members of the community – has a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences at its disposal and is made up of representatives from across the Western Isles.**



## **E** George Lonie (Chairman)

The chairman of the Hebridean Housing Partnership's Shadow Board, George has been a councillor for the Coulregrean area since 1990 and is currently the vice chairman of the Housing committee. A founder member of the Cearnas Tenants Association (the largest housing scheme in the Isles), George has worked with Caledonian MacBrayne ferries for the past 28 years.



## **T** Iain Reid (Vice Chair)

Formerly a member of the Scottish Ambulance Service, Iain is secretary of the Tenants Group in South Harris and has close ties with the community through a number of fundraising projects.



## **C** David Blaney (Treasurer)

David was formerly a councillor and is currently treasurer for the Uist Citizens Advice Bureau and the South Uist Development Group, as well as being a committee member of the local health council and Buidheann Taigheadais Na Meadhanan, the South Uist-based housing association. A retired banker, David worked in the finance sector for 20 years.



## **E** Archie K Campbell

Archie has been councillor for the Paible area of North Uist since 1999 and is currently chairman of the Sustainable Development Committee. A retired teacher, Archie has been involved in community activities for many years.



## **E** Neil Campbell

Recently elected as councillor for the Laxdale Ward, Neil is also a member of the Cearnas Community Association and currently represents Camhairle on the board of Voluntary Action Lewis and the Western Isles Tourist Board. Neil has worked as a technician for Scottish Water, as a consultant job finder for an Enterprise Company and as a project engineer in the oil industry.



## **C** Hamish Fraser

The Comhairle's Director of Environmental Services for over 24 years, Hamish retired after serving in local government for almost 40 years. Hamish, who lives in South Uist, is on the Board of Tighean Innse Gall, and has previously served as a member of the Children's Panel, social security tribunals and the Western Isles Health Board.



## **C** Calum Mackay

Currently chairman of the Western Isles Residents Forum, Calum has been heavily involved in the setting up and day-to-day running of the local Cearnas Residents Association. He has a good understanding of housing procedures and has been involved in rent setting and environmental projects alike. Calum also sits on the board of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).



## **T** Alasdair Mackenzie

Alasdair is a member of the Tong Residents Group and represents council tenants on the Board. With an HNC in computing from Lews Castle College, Alasdair provides the Board with information technology and administrative skills.



## **C** Jane Mackinnon

Jane, a member of the Barra & Vatersay Housing Association, is manager of the rural sub Post Office in Barra and she represents the views of tenants from a small island community perspective.



## **E** Murdo MacLeod

Murdo, a retired assistant rector, has been the councillor for Manor Park ward since April 2000 and has worked with the local residents association to promote both his ward and the wider Western Isles.



## **E** Norman M MacLeod

Councillor for the Knock & Bayble ward since 1999, Norman is chairman of the Housing Committee. He is also a member of the TIG & Muirneag Management Boards, the Northern Joint Police Board and the Highlands & Islands Fire Board. Norman has been employed as manager of BP Fuel Marketing Limited for the past 12 years.



## **T** Angus Morrison

Angus is an active member of the Tenants Group in Barvas and has worked for the Comhairle as a special needs care worker for several years.



## **C** Chris Morrison (Secretary)

Chris is chairman of the Newton Ward Tenants Group, treasurer of the Newton Sandwich Community Partnership and a member of the Western Isles Residents Forum. Formerly employed in retail management, Chris is currently studying computing.



## **Charlie Nicolson**

A team leader with the Community Education Service in Lewis and Harris, Charlie is in an excellent position to represent the youth of the community. He is also a representative on the Stornoway Trust.



## **T** Jackie Swan

Jackie was a founder member of the Balivanich Residents Association and is currently studying for an NVQ in Information Technology. Jackie also donates her time to several voluntary organisations in Uist.

**E** = Elected representative

**T** = Tenant representative

**C** = Community representative



# Breaking News...

## HHP appoints chief executive

The Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) team has been strengthened with the appointment of Angus Lamont as chief executive.

The decision was officially ratified at the March meeting of the HHP Board.

Speaking at the meeting George Lonie, HHP chairman, said, "The Board was pleased to have been able to offer Angus

the position of chief executive designate, and we are delighted that he has accepted. This appointment represents a step forward in the housing stock transfer process and means we are able to move towards the ballot with confidence."

Angus, who lives in the village of Garrabost in the Point district of Lewis, has worked for the Comhairle for 18 years and has been the director of housing since 1994. On his appointment he commented, "I'm delighted to be given this opportunity at

what is, potentially, a very exciting time for Comhairle tenants. There is a great deal of hard work required if

our plans to deliver fully modernised and affordable housing are to come to fruition, but we have a great team here and, with the support of the Board, we have an excellent chance of success."

Angus will take up his position immediately.



## Scottish Homes tenants vote in favour of transfer to Comhairle

**With the main housing transfer ballot expected later this year, a dress rehearsal of sorts has recently taken place in the Western Isles with Scottish Homes tenants balloted on the future ownership of their houses.**

The ballot saw tenants vote overwhelmingly in favour of transfer. Of the 67% percent of Scottish Homes residents who responded, almost 98% voted in favour of transferring ownership of their homes to the Comhairle.

Residents of the 67 Scottish Homes houses spread across the Isles were given the assurance of a rent freeze and increased investment should the transfer be successful.

Transfer is expected to take place in early April, with Scottish Homes tenants then becoming Comhairle tenants, allowing them to take part in the Comhairle's own Stock Transfer proposals and vote in the main ballot expected later in the year.

## Key Dates

The **Ballot of Tenants** will give you the opportunity to vote on whether or not you wish the transfer to happen. The ballot is expected to take place later this year. You will be sent a ballot paper to enable you to participate in a secret postal vote – neither the Comhairle nor Hebridean Housing Partnership will know which way you have voted. Every tenant of the Comhairle is entitled to vote therefore if you and your partner are joint tenants, you will each have separate ballot papers. The ballot is only open to tenants.

Detailed consultation on the proposed transfer will take place late summer/early autumn.

## Get in touch

For further information or advice regarding the proposed housing transfer, you can call the following numbers:

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on **01851 709338**

Hebridean Housing Partnership on **01851 706368**

Steve/Lesley at the Independent Tenant Adviser, TPAS on **0800 269645**

Alternatively visit the website:

**[www.cne-siar.gov.uk/hebrideanhousingpartnership](http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/hebrideanhousingpartnership)**

If you wish a member of staff to call at your home to answer any queries you may have about the transfer, please contact the Comhairle on the above number.

If you have any comments or queries on this information bulletin please contact:

Ken Newton or Dan Hughes, TNC, tel 01698 420420, fax 01698 424000 or email [team@tnc.uk.com](mailto:team@tnc.uk.com)

## Special communications needs

If you, a relative or neighbour needs assistance with understanding this bulletin because of visual impairment, learning difficulty or language reasons please tell the Comhairle and we will arrange for help.