



Scottish Government deliver 'Fair' verdict on HHP

The Scottish Housing Regulator published its inspection report on HHP at the end of March. The purpose was to provide an independent external assessment on the effectiveness of our housing services. The Regulator awarded the Partnership a 'fair' rating for its overall performance.

Michael Cameron, Head of Inspection at The Scottish Housing Regulator, said, "Our inspectors found that Hebridean Housing Partnership has some strengths but also some areas where improvement is needed."

"Hebridean Housing Partnership is a young organisation. At the time of our inspection it had operated for only two years. It has a clear focus on delivering the promises it made to tenants at the time of the ballot. It demonstrated strengths in a number of areas, including its approach to meeting housing need, its high levels of tenant satisfaction and the good standards it achieves in its new build housing."



Chairman George Lonie

"The Partnershipis aware that it needs to make improvements to its management of gas safety, its approach to the management of rent arrears and its response repairs service."

George Lonie, Chairman of HHP, commented, "The Scottish Government has demonstrated its trust in HHP by awarding £6.6 million to invest in new homes in the islands this year. Our tenants' satisfaction levels are high and we are carrying out home improvements on an unprecedented scale."

"The Regulator recognised that we are still a very young organisation. We have developed an improvement plan to address the issues identified by the regulator. We are already making good progress on a number of areas, For example we can reassure our tenants that all their homes have had up-to-date gas safety checks completed, rent arrears are being vigorously pursued and we are working closely with the Comhairle's COU to improve the repair service."

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New HHP offices in Balivanich

After many years working alongside their old colleagues in the Comhairle HHP staff in Uist have now moved into a new purpose-built office in Winfield Way.

With a new open plan office, spacious boardroom, staff kitchen, additional offices for Tighean Innse Gall as well as the Comhairle Homeless Service the new offices should provide a pleasant working environment for all concerned.



Area Manager John Alick MacQuarrie said "We are confident that our new offices will further enhance the delivery of HHP services in Harris, Uist and Barra".



WIFTRA TENANT 'S CONFERENCE

Judging from the feedback forms completed our tenants have voted WIFTRA's recent Tenant's conference in April a success.

The conference concentrated on the importance of tenants being involved in the planning and delivery of Housing services and on how best to provide opportunities for them to become involved in ways that suit them.

It gave HHP Chief Executive Angus Lamont and other officers the opportunity to hear what tenants really think about the services they receive. STA chair Calum Mackay said, "Tenants' views must direct Housing Services and it is essential that we at WIFTRA work together with HHP to make sure that tenants voices are heard."

Angus Lamont said "the conference gave an excellent opportunity for discussion and to build on the good working relationship that already exists between WIFTRA and HHP."

He added that "many people attending said that their preferred method of communication was by newsletter and this new and expanded edition of Homeward is part of the response to these views. We will issue Homeward on a regular basis and would welcome views on issues that tenants would like to see covered in future editions."

The conference itself was held over 2 days at the Caladh Inn in Stornoway. WIFTRA invited speakers from HHP, TPAS, Comhairle Homeless Service, Stornoway Police and Highlands and Islands Fire Safety. Topics discussed included Repairs and Maintenance, Young People and Sustaining Tenancies, Healthy Eating and Safety in the Home.



Breeze productions performed a homeless play



Tenants and residents attended various seminars

HOUSEHOLD INSURANCE

Do you have Household Insurance?

As your landlord HHP's insurance policy covers the structure of your home but it does not include any of your personal belongings.

As a member of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), HHP promotes their low cost Diamond Home Contents Insurance scheme for tenants and owner occupiers.

Home contents insurance is a way of protecting your personal belongings, floor coverings, furniture and decoration against damage caused by events such as fire or water damage. It also covers certain items stolen in a break-in and any accidental damage to your home which you will need to repair.

You can get cover from as little as 46p a week if you are over 60 or 60p a week for those under 60. If you would like more information on this insurance scheme, please telephone Customer Services on 0845 6039180.



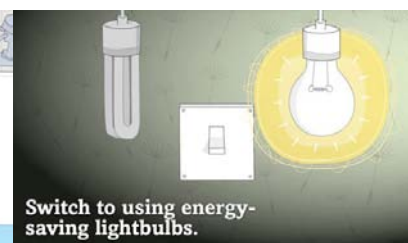
Recycle household waste using locally-provided facilities.



These tips can save you money



Turn the tap off when brushing your teeth.



NEWS FROM THE SOUTH

Since the last issue of Homeward, there has been good progress on HHP's service in the Southern Isles.

New Office

The move to our new office was a challenging experience for the Balivanich staff leading up to the Christmas period, but we have been more than compensated for this by the excellent standard of the facilities provided, which are greatly appreciated by both staff and customers.

New Housing

There has also been significant progress on the provision of new housing in the area, over the past few months.

On Barra, three houses have been newly built at Cialla, Eoligaray and were handed over to HHP in April. These include a four-bedroomed house which is the first time a house of that size has been added to the rented sector in Barra.

On Berneray, renovations to the former schoolhouse are nearing completion. Appropriately named 'Taigh Sgoile', the former school building has been converted into three flats. These houses are heated by means of air source heating pumps. It is the first time this form of heating has been used in social housing in the Uists and we are sure tenants will appreciate how effective and energy efficient these systems will be.

On Harris, two additional houses were added to the



Beinn Mhor Cottages in Howmore, South Uist

housing stock by buying properties 'off the shelf'. The two houses in MacQueen Street and the Doctor's House at Northton are now tenanted.

Investment Work

I am also pleased to report good progress on delivering the Investment Programme works with the replacement of kitchens in Maol Domhnaich, Cearn Eoghainn and St Michaels Cottages in Barra.

In Uist, replacement doors and windows were provided at Mishigarry, Sollas and kitchens were replaced in Ashdaill Cottages, Strome Cottages, Sealladh Tharsal and Slighe Ruairidh Chalum Ruairidh.

On Harris, kitchens were replaced in Scott Road and Parkview Terrace in Tarbert and also in Parkview Terrace in Scalpay.

ARE YOU GETTING WHAT YOU ARE DUE?

Ever tried to figure out the benefits system?

If you fall into one of these categories then you could be entitled to something:

If you have children

If you have no children, work, earn less than £16,000

If you are out of work

If you have an illness or disability

If you are a carer or a guardian

If you are over 60

Lots of people are in these categories. Now you can log onto www.entitledto.co.uk, to see what you may be entitled to.

You can also call the following agencies directly

Who.	What they deal with	Telephone Number
DWP	Attendance Allowance, Bereavement Benefits, Carers Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Allowance, Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance, Widowed Parents Allowance	0800 88 22 00
HMRC	Child Benefit,	0845 300 3900
Direct.gov	Education Maintenance Allowance	0808 101 6219
CNES	Council Tax Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payment, Housing Benefit	01851 703773
Pension Service	Pension Credit	0800 99 12 34





NEW BUILD

The HHP development programme has 8 new build projects on site and has plans for a large number of new schemes throughout the islands. These schemes range from large scale developments in Stornoway to proposals for smaller schemes in rural areas in Uist and Barra.

Here is news of 2 projects which are currently nearing completion.

Galson Old School

HHP are building 6 houses in the north of Lewis, 4 are for rent and 2 will be for sale by HHP under the Scottish Government's Low Cost Initiative for First Time Buyers (LIFT).

This scheme is designed to help people on low incomes and who wish to own their own houses but can't afford to pay the full price. It allows eligible people to purchase a share of the property whilst the Government retains the rest. This is the first time HHP has built houses for sale. Further details of the LIFT scheme can be found at HHP offices.

The new housing at Galson will be called Tom Na Ba after a local landmark. They are due to be finished later this summer.



Hebrides Alpha



HHP are delighted to be working with the Hebrides Alpha Project on this exciting and innovative development. It will meet a significant need in our community.

The development at Coll will consist of 3 properties which will house residents and staff. Hebrides Alpha will manage the project and aim to provide a rehabilitative, supportive and life changing housing facility for people who have special housing needs. The project will be run on Christian principles and is intended to help people to return to living independently in their communities.

A Project Manager and care staff will be based on site around the clock. The project should be available for its first residents in autumn this year.

DIGITAL SWITCHOVER: What is it?

TV in the UK is going digital, and the existing analogue TV signal will be switched between now and 2012. Switchover means that almost everyone will be able to receive digital TV through their aerial.

What does digital TV switchover mean for HHP tenants?

If you live in a flat it is likely that you receive your TV signal through a communal TV aerial. Some of these will need to be upgraded or adapted to receive digital TV. HHP will find out whether your building is ready to receive digital TV.

Once you have checked that your building is able to receive a digital TV signal, you will need to upgrade or adapt all existing TV equipment - If you haven't already done so.

Adapting or upgrading TV equipment can be simple and inexpensive. The simplest way is to connect a



DON 'T RISK YOUR HOME

- by hiding from rent arrears

Without income from tenants' rents we wouldn't be able to deliver services, do routine repairs, or invest in our houses. The majority of our tenants pay rent when it is due, but a small minority hide from their responsibilities and don't pay their way.

"If you have rent arrears and are struggling to cope, we can help with a range of practical advice and assistance. The last thing we want is to end up in court seeking a decree to evict any tenant. We want to work with tenants in difficulties, but we will not ignore rent arrears and we will take firm action to recover debt including eviction," explains John Maciver, HHP Operations Manager.

SO IF YOU ARE IN RENT ARREARS, DON'T DELAY, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR HOUSING OFFICER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. WE'RE HERE TO HELP.



HOUSING BENEFIT 'Help with your rent'

In these times of "credit crunch" and "economic difficulties" the government is recognising some of the difficulties that households face in trying to keep a roof over their heads.

There have been changes to the regulations for Housing Benefit. In October 2009, child benefit will be disregarded as a source of income. This means that if you have children for whom you receive child benefit and currently receive housing benefit then you may be entitled to more help with your rent from October. Pensioners will also receive more help, as the amount of savings disregarded is increased from £6,000 to £10,000 from November 2009 so if you are already receiving help you may be entitled to more. This will be calculated automatically for you by the Housing Benefit team.

If you are not currently in receipt of housing benefit but feel that these changes could mean that you could be entitled to help

from October then please contact your

Housing Benefit Office on 01851 709379, who will issue you with a form to complete and return at the end of September.

The "Claim it team" can also help you make your claim for pension credit, attendance allowance and disability living allowance. They can visit you in your own home, so please phone Susan on 07990803774 or Sandra on 07920088028.

digital box to your TV set. Alternatively you can replace your existing TV with a Integrated Digital TV (IDTV) which is a TV with a digital box built in which provides Freeview through an aerial.

There are three main ways to receive a digital TV signal through a digital box:

- Through a satellite dish (Sky, Freesat from Sky, Freesat)
- Through an existing aerial (Freeview, Top Up TV, BT Vision)
- Through a phone-line (Tiscali)

When will the changeover happen in the Western Isles

Lewis, Harris and Uist will switch-over between Jul & Sep 2010 Barra will be between Oct & Dec 2010

If you are still unsure about the Digital Switchover phone **08456 50 50 50** for assistance.





INVESTMENT

HHP have agreed this years Kitchen replacement contract for Lewis and Harris with Alex Murray Construction. Alex Murray have been installing kitchens for HHP for the last 3 years and are delighted to have secured this years contract.

Director Alex Murray stated "This secures work for our dedicated kitchen replacement squad and we look forward to continuing our good relationship with HHP."

Property Services Manager Peter O'Donnell added "The performance of Alex Murray Construction has been excellent over the years and this has been backed up by a high level of tenant satisfaction."

Also awarded recently were the Painterwork contracts throughout the islands. Comhairle COU were awarded both Lewis and Harris, RJ Monk was awarded North Uist and Benbecula and John Skinner was successful in winning South Uist and Barra. The painterwork programme has proved popular with the tenants and HHP hope to build on that success with these contracts.

HHP are also preparing a 3 year bathroom replacement contract for tendering this summer. Works will include the replacement of the existing bathroom suite along with the installation of an over-bath shower. 97 homes in Lewis and Harris and 52 in Uist and Barra will benefit from these works.

Windows and door replacements are underway in Murdoch Place with Braes Road, Gearra Mor,

Lower Sandwick, Airidhantium and Pentland Drive to follow this summer. Kenneth Drive in Lochboisdale will also have their windows and doors replaced this summer.

Enclosed with Homeward is a list of all schemes involved in this years Investment and Painterwork programme. Tenants will be kept informed of start dates for all projects by HHP and the contractor throughout the duration of the works.



Peter O'Donnell congratulates Alex Murray



Painterwork at MacLennan Place

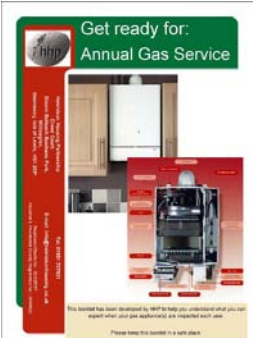


New kitchens at Dunmore Crescent

GAS SAFETY

In line with the Scottish Government's Inspection Report HHP are now ensuring that all homes receive their Annual Gas Service within 12 months. To achieve this we are working to a 10 month programme and will be issuing all our tenants with an appointment in advance of their service. We will also give tenants the opportunity to change their appointment to a time that suits them.

Property Services Manager Peter O'Donnell said "HHP are working together with our gas service contractor Scotia Gas Networks to provide the best service possible for our tenants but we still need to ask tenants to make sure they are available on the day of their service. Cancelled appointments cause problems for everyone so I would ask tenants to make sure that the date they are given is suitable for them. If not phone the number on the letter and change it."



GO GREENER

Households could save money by paying closer attention to how much food they throw out. Whether it's binning half a plate of pasta after cooking too much, or coming home from the supermarket with a bunch of bananas when there's already some in the fruit bowl, we all waste food.

Reducing waste is currently a key focus for the Scottish Government's Go Greener campaign. HHP is supporting the drive which offers advice to families on how they can save money by cutting back on the food they throw away. It might not seem a big issue to put a still-wrapped package of vegetables or left-over dinner in the bin a few times a month, but the cumulative effect can be bigger than you might expect.

The average Scottish household throws away enough food to fill a 50-litre bin every year - the equivalent of £410. Less waste also benefits the environment, as less energy is required to create and process wasted products and the need for landfill sites is therefore reduced. Less landfill also means that less methane, the powerful greenhouse gas released by rotting food, is introduced into the atmosphere. If all Scottish households stopped wasting food, it would have an environmental impact equal to taking one in four cars off the road.

So what can be done to reduce food waste?

Make sure you only buy what you need when you go shopping. Smaller portions reduce the chance that there will be anything left over at the end of dinner.

Make sure you check the "best before" and "use by" dates on packaged food before you throw it out.

If it's still good to eat, could you make a soup, stew, curry or other tasty dish from these ingredients instead of throwing them out?

For more information on reducing your food waste, including advice and recipes from some of Scotland's top chefs and food writers, visit

Waste Aware Scotland's website

www.wasteawarelovefood.org.uk



The Scottish Government's 10 steps to a Greener Scotland are:

- recycle household waste using locally-provided facilities
- turn the tap off when brushing your teeth
- switch to using energy-saving light bulbs
- leave the car at home and walk, cycle, use public transport or car share at least once a week
- use rechargeable instead of disposable batteries
- reuse carrier bags when you shop
- buy more seasonal and unpackaged food
- hang your washing up to dry rather than using a tumble dryer
- organise or volunteer in an environmental project in your local community
- avoid flying when you can, and pay back the environmental impact of any flights you take.
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Visit the Go Greener website, where you can benefit from lots of offers. To sign up to the 10 steps and to see some more green tips and offers, go to

www.infoscotland.com/gogreener



From April 1st 2009, Gas Safe Register will be the new watchdog for gas safety in Great Britain. Always ask to see the Gas Safe Card.

www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk

HHP use Scotia Gas Networks to carry out all gas servicing on our properties.

All engineers carry the Gas Safe Card

COMPLAINTS

Hebridean Housing Partnership is committed to providing a first class housing service which meets the need of all our customers. But sometimes things go wrong. We want to know when this happens, sort out the particular case and take steps to avoid the same problem occurring again. We will also want to sort out the particular cases when things go awry.

We will use our Complaints Policy and Procedure to gather information from our customers and improve our services accordingly

Let us know if you feel:

- We have done something wrong
- We have not done something we promised
- We could do better
- You have been treated unfairly or inappropriately

HOW TO COMPLAIN

Informal Complaint

Our aim is to try to resolve complaints informally. Contact your local office and tell them about your complaint or comment. They will look into it and get back to you. Most complaints or comments on our service can be resolved or dealt with this way.

Formal Complaint

Put your complaint in writing or ask us to do this for you in person or by phone. We have a complaints form available to help you. You can ask for assistance to complete the form. Your complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days and you will be advised of an outcome in 28 days. Formal complaints will be dealt with by a senior member of staff.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

When contacting HHP either by phone or at our office you will as a first contact speak to one of our friendly customer services team.

You will find each of our team members to be courteous, efficient and putting you the tenant first. You may well feel that we ask a lot of unnecessary questions, but the more information we take from you the better equipped we are to handle your query efficiently and quickly.

Customer Services aim to resolve most of your questions themselves. If they cannot you will be transferred to someone who can help you or we will ask you for your contact details and a member of staff will call you back. The answer may not always be what you wanted to hear, but you will be given an answer and an explanation of how the decision was made.

TENANTS HANDBOOKS

The Tenants Handbook gives important information about your tenancy, the service HHP provide and both our and your rights and obligations. It also includes:

- Your Secure Scottish Tenancy agreement
- Customer care
- Making a complaint
- Paying your rent and rent arrears
- Housing and Council Tax Benefit

The Repairs Handbook gives important information about the repairs service and standard we provide. It tells you what repairs you are responsible for yourself and how to carry out some of these repairs. It also includes guidance on reporting repairs, response times and heating systems.



For all repairs and general queries please contact our Customer Services Team on 0845 603 9180

Remember to read your handbooks before you call.

Tenants' Handbook

Repairs Handbook



hebridean housing
partnership

Hebridean Housing Partnership, Creed Court, Gleann Seileach Business Park, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis

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