

ISSUE 2

west highland housing news

Providing affordable homes and services to
the people of Oban, Lorn and the Isles

A GREAT BIG THANK YOU!

We want to take this opportunity to thank all of our tenants in what has been a very challenging time.

We appreciate everyone has faced different challenges; however, one thing is clear – we have exceptionally good tenants who have kept in contact with us, given us updates on their circumstances and continued to pay their rent.

As we move forward, we want to assure you we are here to offer help and advice and welcome phone calls, emails and any other form of contact. Whatever your circumstances are, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We have been contacting tenants to make sure they are managing and have been referring them to agencies who can offer help and we will continue to do this for as long as is necessary.

Once again, thank you for your patience and co-operation, it is very much appreciated by our entire staff team.

OFFICE UPDATE

In line with Scottish Government guidance, our office remains closed. However, our team is still available to assist with any enquiries you may have.

You can contact us via:

- Your My Home account;
- email mail@westhighlandha.co.uk;
- Facebook Messenger; and
- Freephone - **0300 323 11 70**.

If you need to speak to us face-to-face, we are happy to set up a video call.

Service update

Shielding If you are in the shielding group, we will have a discussion with you before we schedule any work. If you need a repair completed, please let us know you are shielding when reporting the repair.

Going paperless As we're currently not working from the office, we are using more paperless communication with our customers.

If we have your email address, we will now send you communications by email. If you have a My Home account, copies of your correspondence will be logged and stored in your documents.

If you are uncomfortable with this type of communication, please let us know and we will revert to paper communication.

Housing and estate management

General letting In line with Scottish Government guidance, we began reletting our properties on 29 June 2020 with additional measures in place to protect our staff and new tenants.

The control measure will ease as we progress through the lockdown phases. If you wish to apply for a house, or take part in a mutual exchange, please visit www.homeargyll.co.uk.

If you want to advertise your property on Home Argyll's website for a mutual exchange, please contact our office.

Grounds maintenance Since April, our grounds maintenance contractor (Tivoli) has been carrying out fortnightly high maintenance grass cutting services across our developments and since July, has been cutting hedges and attending low maintenance grass areas.

Estate inspections Our housing management team has been undertaking regular inspections around our developments. We ask you to please keep your development clear and free from litter and toys. We also ask tenants with their own gardens to regularly cut their grass.

Playparks Our playparks reopened on Monday 6 July 2020. We ask parents to supervise their children to ensure they maintain a safe distance and ensure they wash their hands with an appropriate gel cleaner before and after playpark use.

Close cleaning In response to Covid-19, we introduced a weekly close cleaning programme including cleaning of floors and frequently touched surfaces.

We would like to remind tenants they should continue to wash their hands before leaving their home and again when they return to reduce the risk of catching or spreading the virus.



Repairs and maintenance

Repairs As we move out of lockdown, we will be increasing the range of repairs we are able to carry out.

If you need to report a non-urgent repair, please bear with us, as we are making our way through a backlog of work and may ask you to hold off reporting the repair for a few weeks.

When arranging a repairs appointment, our team will ask you to confirm no one in the property has Covid-19 symptoms. If this changes, you must immediately call us to postpone the appointment.

Where a member of staff needs access to your home, they will:

- ask you to confirm if anyone in the household is shielding or has Covid-19 symptoms;
- maintain a safe social distance of two metres;
- wash their hands before entry and on leaving your home;
- wear a range of PPE relative to the task and additional PPE to both protect you and themselves from potential exposure to Covid-19;
- ask you to open windows and doors to ventilate the property, ensuring air circulation; and
- ask you, and anyone else in the property, to stay in another room while they undertake their work.



OPEN LETTER FROM SCOTTISH HOUSING MINISTER, KEVIN STEWART

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning has released an open letter to tenants to provide information and advice as we move forward out of the Covid-19 crisis.

You can read the full letter on our website:
www.westhighlandha.co.uk/openletter

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

We are now able to complete all emergency repairs with a range of Covid-19 controls in place. If you need to report an emergency repair, please call us on **0300 323 11 70**.

• External repairs

We've recommenced external repairs and are currently working through the backlog of work. If you need a non-emergency external repair, where possible, please report this via your My Home account or by contacting mail@westhighlandha.co.uk.

• Internal repairs

In the weeks ahead we will start addressing non-emergency internal repairs. Where possible, please report these via your My Home account or by email.

• Pre-inspections

We are not yet able to undertake pre-inspections. Where you have a complex repair that needs to be assessed before issue, please send photographs or video call us so we can assess the repair.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's annual general meeting (AGM) was due to be held on 20 August at our offices. In response to Covid-19, we've decided to hold a virtual event instead on 18 September at 12.30pm.

If you would like to attend, please let us know and we will provide you with a link to the meeting.

If you are a member of West Highland, you can stand for election to our Board. If you're interested, please get in touch. If you're not a member but are interested in learning more about the work we do, please contact Iona Smith on **01631 700073** or iona@westhighlandha.co.uk.

GET INVOLVED AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

As a West Highland tenant, you can get involved in a range of activities that can help you build confidence, meet new friends, help shape the housing services we deliver and learn how to make a difference in your community.

For more information on the range of activities available, visit www.westhighlandha.co.uk/getinvolved.

Manage your tenancy with MyHome

Most of our tenants are now enjoying the convenience of using My Home to manage their tenancy 24/7. With My Home, you can:

- manage and update tenancy information;
- complete and submit housing forms online;
- check your rent account and make payments;
- get access to rent and benefits information and application forms;
- request non-urgent repairs and monitor the progress of your repairs;
- access letters and your tenancy documents;
- provide feedback on our services; and
- help the environment by going paper free.

Setting up a My Home account is easy and takes only two minutes to do.

If you've not had the opportunity to sign up for an account, this may be because you have not provided us with a working email address. You can do this by contacting mail@westhighlandha.co.uk and we'll send you a link to My Home to get you started.



MY HOME





Remembering Ruby

All the staff at West Highland Housing Association were deeply saddened by the loss of Ruby Campbell, our Housing Assistant, who passed away in April after a brave battle against cancer.

Ruby brought joy and laughter to all those around her and was loved and respected by staff and tenants. She worked tirelessly to assist tenants to settle into their homes and was always ready to lend a hand to anyone in need.

Ruby worked with us for 14 years, during which time she made an outstanding contribution to the management of our estates and the lives of our tenants and she is sorely missed.



Welcome! **Ben Robinson** joined us in January 2020 as an Administrative Assistant in our repairs team.

Goodbye After 12 years with West Highland, **Kat Higgins**, our Business Analyst, left us at the end of July. We wish her all best in her new venture!



Raising money for cancer research

Graeme Bruce, as part of a team, recently raised almost £7,500 for research into pancreatic cancer by walking loops around Gallanach over 24 hours. Well done Graeme!

Charitable donations

We were delighted to donate £1,920 to Rockfield primary school to assist with the funding of a trip to an outdoor education centre, where primary 7 pupils will be taking part in challenging and exciting activities which will help them build new skills.



Garden maintenance

Now the better weather is here, those of you with gardens may want to get out and make the most of the more pleasant conditions.

Cutting your grass regularly is an important part of your garden maintenance regime during the growing season. It's also crucial to deal with weeding, including paths, parking bays and driveways.

We regularly inspect our developments to check gardens, open spaces and common areas are well-maintained. Well maintained gardens and open spaces create a warm welcoming feeling to our estates. We thank tenants for looking after their gardens and hope to see many photos entered into our garden competition.

Remember, if you are making any alterations or improvements in your garden or around your home you must ask for permission from us first.



Good neighbour competition

Do you have a good neighbour? Perhaps your neighbour has gone above and beyond the normal call of duty during these challenging times.

Whether they have provided care and support to you, are always on hand when needed, or simply a friendly face around your neighbourhood, you can nominate them for our good neighbour competition!

Please include as much detail as you can to support your nomination and highlight the values that make your neighbour great.

How can I nominate my neighbour?

Contact mail@westhighlandha.co.uk or write to West Highland Housing Association, Crannog Lane, Oban PA34 4HB before **30 September 2020**. Once we receive all nominations, our panel will shortlist and choose our winner. All shortlisted winners will receive a gift voucher to recognise their efforts.





Building sustainable communities

We continue to invest in the development of new homes in some of our more remote, rural communities.

Work recently started at our 10-house development at Craighouse, Isle of Jura and we have 10 homes nearing completion at Inverbhraec Cottages, Barcaldine in North Lorn.

We also recently completed eight properties at Imeraval, Port Ellen, Islay; six of which were for sale under the Scottish Government's New Supply Shared Equity scheme. The two larger four-bedroom properties for rent were available for new families to occupy just at the start of lockdown.

A further eight units are now under construction at Imeraval and these will be completed in approximately 12 months' time. There will be four one-bedroom and two three-bedroom properties for rent and two three-bedroom properties for sale. The properties for sale will be marketed on our Facebook page and website.

We will also be managing the properties currently being constructed by Link Group at Dunbeg. The Covid-19 pandemic has delayed this project, but it's hoped the first tenants will move in this year.



Investment works

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all works have been on hold. As a result of our investment contractor entering administration, we are in the process of re-tendering for work due to be carried out in the contract.

We do not anticipate undertaking any internal investment works before September 2020. Once we have a new programme agreed we will be in touch with the tenants concerned to arrange pre-start surveys and agree a start date.

Any works will be carried out adhering to Scottish Government guidance.



Missed appointments and costs

We have always had a very low number of missed appointments where we have prior agreement for access to undertake essential servicing work. However, this has recently started to rise, particularly in relation to mandatory electrical safety tests.

These failed appointment cost around £168 each (including VAT) as the contractor is unable to reallocate the labour dedicated to this work at short notice. During July, we had 10 missed appointments with abortive costs of £1,680.

High levels of failed appointments are not sustainable and impact on our operating costs which ultimately impact on our rents. We appreciate and understand people have busy lives and sometimes arrangements change. If you cannot keep your appointment, you must immediately notify us via your My Home account or by phone so we can attempt to rearrange.

Planned /cyclical work

The planned work to upgrade and test our common stairwells and closes has been progressing with social distancing measures in place.

We are now in a position to start contacting tenants who are due to have electrical tests and fire detection upgrades done in their properties. This is a legal requirement and we would appreciate your assistance to facilitate access when requested. Additionally, if you need to cancel an agreed appointment you must contact us immediately to reschedule.

The external decoration of stock within the 2020/21 contract at McKelvie Road, Oban on 3 August. Tenants will receive a letter outlining what will be required in advance of the work.

Our grounds maintenance contractor has been able to carry out their work after a short delay because of Covid-19.

Keeping your home safe

The Scottish Government recently made changes to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard around the requirements for electrical testing and fire detection. This means we are now required to undertake periodic electrical testing to your home every five years. Similar to the requirements for gas safety testing, this is a mandatory requirement and we need access to your home to undertake this important work which helps keep you, your family and neighbours safe.

We are also required to upgrade fire detection equipment, which in most cases involves replacing existing detection units and adding units to your kitchen and living room. We have a tight deadline to achieve this compliance and ask for your support and cooperation by allowing us access to your home for this work to be completed. We will write to all households in the months ahead with provisional dates, after which our delivery contractor (OES) will contact you directly to arrange an appointment for this work to take place. **Remember, it's vital you provide access to enable this essential work to take place.**



CYLINDER SERVICING

In May, our service engineer, Paul, recommenced his programme of safety related inspections. He is currently working in the Oban area and we will be contacting customers to arrange appointments. Again, this is important safety related work and we ask for your assistance by keeping appointments and providing access.

Virtual tenant get together!

This year, due to Covid-19 restrictions, we're not able to host our usual Brew and Blether event and instead, invite you to our first Virtual Tenant Get Together!

Held on 23 September at 1.30pm, the get together gives you a chance to take part in virtual bingo and have some fun while connecting with other people.

If you would like to take part, or want more information, please contact mail@westhighlandha.co.uk no later than 20 September 2020.

BENEFITS ADVICE

During the past few months, we've supported a high number of tenants to claim benefits following furlough and redundancies.

If you're experiencing financial difficulties, we're here to help! Please contact Diane MacDonald on **01631 566451** or diane@westhighlandha.co.uk.

We also regularly post on our Facebook page promoting benefits and grants which may be of use to many of our tenants. To view these posts, please like our page [facebook.com/westhighlandhousing](https://www.facebook.com/westhighlandhousing).

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR RENT, WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

We know this is a challenging time for everyone and money may be short, however, paying your rent needs to be a priority. If you are facing financial difficulties, please let us know – the sooner you speak to us the quicker we can help.

If you need advice on paying your rent, ordering a new rent card or guidance on benefits, contact Aileen Michie on **01631 566451**.

If you are in receipt of Universal Credit, your payments for your housing and living costs may come early, so please remember to make your rent payment when you receive this.

WAYS TO PAY

Here are a few of the payment methods we offer which you can use from the comfort of your own home:



Debit card

West Highland tenants can pay their rent with their debit card by calling **01631 566451** during office hours.



Pay online

Use your Allpay payment card to pay online at www.allpayments.net – please have your debit card handy.



Allpay Payment app

Debit card payments can be made at your convenience through the Allpay payment app, available to download for free on the Google Play and Apple App stores.



Direct Debit/standing order

Paying your account by direct debit or standing order offers a hassle-free solution to those who worry about paying their bills on time or are maybe just a bit forgetful! Please contact Aileen Michie on **01631 566451** to set up an agreement.

ALIENERGY/HOME ENERGY SCOTLAND - PREPAYMENT CUSTOMERS

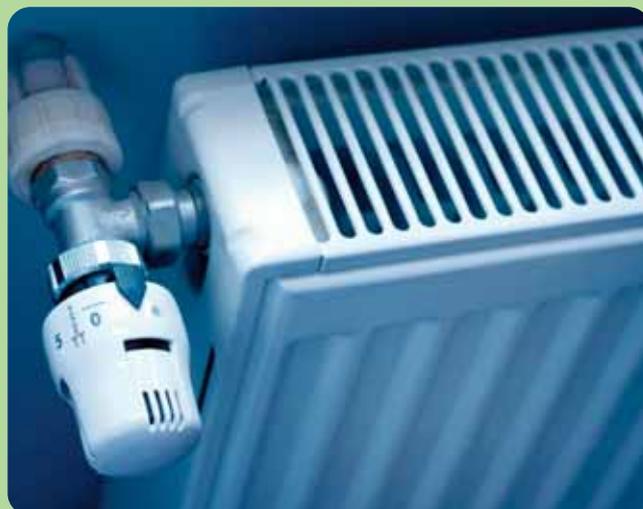
Alienergy has teamed up with Home Energy Scotland to work with prepayment customers.

This includes advice on how to heat your home within your budget, money saving tips and assistance to access support if you need it. For more information, please contact our office or contact Jenny at Alienergy on **07860 774 930** or jenny@alienergy.org.uk.

WARM HOMES DISCOUNT

Warm Homes Discount is a service provided by most energy companies which offers a one-off annual credit of £140 to your meter.

Some providers have already opened their applications and others open from August onwards – check with your supplier to find out when they are open for applications.



- If you receive the guarantee element of pension credits you should automatically qualify and don't need to apply – if you don't receive a letter confirming your entitlement, you should contact your electricity supplier direct
- If you are on a low income and receive certain means tested benefits you could qualify however you need to apply.

To find out more please contact Diane MacDonald on **01631 566451**, or diane@westhighlandha.co.uk or contact your energy supplier directly.

Are you struggling due to Covid-19?

The UK government has launched a GOV.UK online service to find out what help you can get if you are affected by Covid-19 (coronavirus). You can use it for yourself or someone else.

You can find information about:

- feeling unsafe
- going in to work
- paying bills or being unemployed
- getting food
- having somewhere to live
- mental health and wellbeing

Please visit www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support.gov.uk or contact mail@westhighlandha.co.uk for more information.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SCAMS

It's important you're aware of new scams around at the moment as a result of Covid-19. Scams to look out for include:

- advertising face masks or medical equipment at high prices;
- emails or texts pretending to be from the government;
- emails offering life insurance against coronavirus; and
- people knocking at your door and asking for money for charity.



If you see emails or texts about Covid-19 from someone you don't know, or from an unusual email address, don't click on any links or buy anything.

Don't give money or personal details to anyone you don't know or trust - for example, someone who knocks on the door and offers to help.

- If you feel threatened or unsafe, contact Police Scotland on **101** or **999** in an emergency.
- Report scams to Advice Direct Scotland on **0808 164 6000**.
- Online web-chat Scams Action Service Citizens Advice Scotland.
- Suspicious email? Forward it to the National Cyber Security Centre - Suspicious Email Reporting Service (SERS) **reporting@phishing.gov.uk**
- For further information on nuisance calls, please refer to **mygov.scot**



TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING SERVICE

Call Companions is a new, free telephone befriending service from Re-engage for older people who are feeling lonely and/or isolated. Its volunteers are great listeners who are waiting to chat, share stories and offer friendship.

To get in touch, call freephone **0800 716 543**, or sign up via **www.reengage.org.uk**.

When you sign up, Re-engage will take some details about when a good time is to call and if you have any special interests so it can match you up to the right person. You will never be asked to pay a penny.



@westhighlandha



facebook.com/westhighlandhousing

West Highland Housing Association Limited is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, Registered Number 1691R(S).

Registered Office: Crannog Lane, Oban, Argyll, PA34 4HB.

It is a Charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number, SC017357.

Part of the Link group © Link Group Ltd 2020.