



## Transfer enters crucial period

On behalf of Argyll and Bute Council and Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA) I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all tenants a prosperous new year. 2005 promises to be an exciting time, with the transfer process entering a crucial period.

Your views as Council tenants are the most important factor in the process and both the Council and ACHA will supply the information you need to reach an informed opinion on the proposals in the months ahead, continuing with this joint newsletter.

Through the hard work of all involved we have made real progress taking the transfer process forward in 2004, resulting in the recent announcement of a Scottish Executive funding package of £40million (to meet ACHA's commitments set out in its Business

Plan) as well as an additional regeneration package of between £10-£15million for housing related activities in Argyll and Bute. With funding now secured, the coming months will see a great deal of activity leading up to a ballot of all Argyll & Bute tenants towards the middle of the year.

Argyll Community Housing Association's Business Plan is now with the Council for consideration, another major step in the process. Whilst the Council agrees that transfer is the best way forward for tenants, their homes and housing staff, we now want to consider the document in detail to be sure that ACHA's proposals represent the best possible deal for tenants.

*Councillor George Freeman*

## ACHA promises massive homes investment programme

Details of new and improved housing services, investment and plans heralding a 'new era of affordable, tenant-led, quality housing' for Council tenants throughout Argyll and Bute were unveiled in November.

For more details of what Argyll Community Housing Association is proposing for you and your homes, see page 2.



*Council and ACHA representatives at the Business Plan handover*

## Inside this issue...

ACHA promises to deliver	2	Tenant consultation	3	The way forward	5
Tenants to have say in setting local housing priorities	2-3	Region-wide roadshows kick-off	4-5	Positive identity vital for taking organisation forward	6

# ACHA promises to deliver

Argyll Community Housing Association's Business Plan - Putting Tenants First - sets out plans for the transfer of the whole of the Council's current housing stock of around 6000 homes into community ownership.

The plans - subject to approval by the Council and the Scottish Executive - give tenants reassurances on guaranteed affordable rents, protected rights and a major multi-million pound investment programme including upgrades and service improvements. They also outline details of how the Association will put tenants at the heart of the decision-making process, with tenants sitting on the management committee, ACHA's main decision-making body.

Speaking at the Business Plan handover, chairperson of Argyll Community Housing Association, Norman Beaton, commented, "Much hard work has gone into the production of ACHA's Business Plan, which marks a new era for quality affordable housing, putting tenants first throughout Argyll and Bute, and I'd like to thank everyone involved for their efforts.

"Over the coming months we will be working hard to communicate to tenants the benefits that we intend to deliver, benefits in regeneration, benefits in reinvestment and benefits in improved and expanded services. All of which will be delivered without significant rent increases and with all current tenants' rights, including right to buy, protected. I know that everyone within the organisation is looking forward to sharing proposals with tenants in the coming months."

## INVESTMENT

Investment will enable the upgrading of existing homes and allow the building of new houses to go towards meeting the high level of housing need across Argyll and Bute. On transfer, the Scottish Executive will clear the Council's existing housing debt of around

£48 million, which will not be passed on to Argyll Community Housing Association. In addition, the Executive is expected to contribute £40million towards ACHA's commitments as well as an additional regeneration package of between £10-£15million for housing related activities in Argyll and Bute.



ACHA Chairman Norman Beaton signs off the Business Plan

## PRIORITIES

Amongst the priorities set out in the Business Plan is the intention to exceed the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, by delivering modern kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, and re-wiring and insulation to all tenants' homes in the early years after transfer. In addition, proposed new services include a high quality responsive and reactive repairs service, handyman facilities, access to welfare rights officers, youth workers and community development staff, and communal maintenance and factoring services for both tenants and owner-occupiers.

As well as direct housing services, the Business Plan also sets out ACHA's intentions to support facilities such as community centres, open spaces, play areas and the clearance of long term empty houses and to build new homes on these sites.

## COUNCIL LIMITATIONS

Due to existing loan debts and strict borrowing requirements, the Council is unable to invest the minimum of £169 million that previous studies indicated was required to upgrade and maintain tenants' homes over the next 30 years. Currently 40 pence in every £1 of Council rents received goes towards repaying its housing outstanding loan debt. However, by far the lion's share of tenants' rent paid to ACHA following transfer will be spent on improvements such as upgrading homes and running housing services.

## Tenants to have say in setting local housing priorities

For the first time tenants in Argyll and Bute will have the opportunity to get directly involved in the setting of priorities for future housing investment and service improvements.

ACHA's structure is such that four

area committees will serve Bute and Cowal; Helensburgh and Lomond; Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islay; and Oban, Lorn and the Isles. The area committees will make local decisions on housing, and will involve tenants and other members of the community.

This management structure recognises the diversity of the communities across Argyll and Bute, helping Argyll Community Housing Association to serve your needs as tenants by giving you a strong voice in local decision-making on issues including how

# Tenant consultation

Argyll Community Housing Association staff have been demonstrating their commitment to transfer by conducting door-to-door visits across Argyll and Bute's 6,000 Council households. The home visits, which started in October last year and which will run through to the ballot, have allowed staff to answer questions and pass on information about ACHA and the proposed housing transfer.

Staff have reported a good level of awareness of transfer issues and a realisation amongst tenants that concerns with the current housing service had arisen due to the financial restraints faced by the Council, restraints that won't be passed on to ACHA. Tenants were widely supportive of plans to improve homes, housing services and to deliver broader community improvements, whilst giving tenants a greater say.

Coming out of the exercise were a number of questions that we would like to take this opportunity to answer:

**Q** The current repairs service isn't good enough. What will ACHA do to improve this?

**A** Both the Council and ACHA recognise that the current repairs service could be improved. ACHA has set out details of a new quick response repairs service that will be established within one year of transfer to improve both efficiency and quality of repairs.

**Q** Will my current rights be protected?

**A** Your current rights, including the right to buy your current home with discount will not be affected by transfer.

**Q** ACHA's plans sound great but do they mean that my rent will go through the roof?

**A** ACHA's promise on rent increases, as set out in its 30-year Business Plan, is a rent guarantee for the first five years of the transfer. This means that your rent will not increase by more than inflation plus 1% during that period. This is a rent guarantee that the Council cannot make. The Business Plan also pledges that, for years five to ten of the transfer, while the position cannot be guaranteed for this period, every effort will be made to maintain the same low level rent increase. Please remember that any rent increase will be decided by the Management Committee, on which tenants sit.

**Q** With the Council no longer managing the housing services, will I have any control over my home?

**A** Yes, in fact you will have a greater say in the priorities and management of your homes because tenants will have significant representation on ACHA's management committee, which has overall responsibility for all of the Association's decisions.

**Q** What will happen to my housing benefit/council tax?

**A** The amount of Housing and Council tax benefit, which those entitled to it receive, will not change because your landlord changes. ACHA is working with the Council's Benefit Team to ensure that the quality of service you receive remains of a high standard.

ACHA prioritises investment in your homes.

Tenants' voices will carry further weight, as each of the four proposed area committees will have a representative on ACHA's main management committee.

Elections for tenant representatives will take place on

a three yearly basis, timed so that they are staggered across the four areas, to ensure that tenant representation on the main board does not undergo a complete change at any one time.

ACHA invites local people who are interested in applying to become area committee members to write

to: **Alastair MacGregor, Argyll Community Housing Association Development Manager, Dalriada House, Lochgilphead, PA31 8ST; or phone him on 01546 604831. Alternatively you can send an email to: [alastair.macgregor@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:alastair.macgregor@argyll-bute.gov.uk)**

# Region-wide roadshows kick-off

Following on from last year's transfer roadshows and door-to-door visits, ACHA is holding a new series of tenant roadshows throughout Argyll and Bute, to help ensure that tenants fully understand transfer proposals.

These will allow you to find out more about the housing transfer proposals and will take place at venues from mid-January until mid-February.

At the events we will give a brief background to the reasons for considering transfer, the outline plans for investment and service improvements and outline the stages of consultation. Your questions afterwards will be welcomed.

Join us at the venue nearest to you:

## HELENSBURGH & LOMOND



At the time of printing well-attended events have already been held in Helensburgh and Lomond, taking in Rosneath and Kilcreggan, Garelochhead, Cardross and Rhu, as well as Helensburgh itself. If you missed the roadshow nearest to you don't worry, see pages 5 and 6 for details of further consultation planned and ways in which you can have any queries on the transfer plans and process answered.

## BUTE & COWAL



Roadshows have already kicked off in Bute and Cowal, with events starting on January 25 and taking in Dunoon, Sandbank, Strone, Blairmore, Kilmun, Ardentinny, Benmore, Rothesay, Port Bannatyne, Ardbeg and Strachur. Upcoming events are as follows:

DAY-DATE	LOCATION	VENUE	TIME
Mon 31 January	TIGHNABRUAICH & KAMES, COLINTRAIVE, GLENDARUEL, MILLHOUSE	Kames Hall Tighnabruaich	12 pm – 1.30 pm
Mon 31 January	INNELLAN, TOWARD	Innellan Village Hall	3 pm – 4 pm
Mon 31 January	LOCHGOILHEAD	Lochgoilhead Community Hall (Library)	6 pm – 7 pm

## MID ARGYLL, KINTYRE & ISLAY



DAY-DATE	LOCATION	VENUE	TIME
Tues 1 February	CAMPBELTOWN (Dalintober & Millknowe)	Dalintober & Millknowe Tenants Flat, 22 Parliament Place	2 pm – 4 pm
Tues 1 February	CAMPBELTOWN	Community Centre (Stewart Road) canteen	5 pm – 7 pm
Wed 2 February	TARBERT	Templar Arts Centre	11 am – 1 pm

Mid Argyll, Kintyre & Islay continued on page 5

## MID ARGYLL, KINTYRE & ISLAY - CONTINUED

DAY-DATE	LOCATION	VENUE	TIME
Wed 2 February	ARDRISHAIG	Ardrihaig Public Hall cafeteria	2 pm – 4 pm
Wed 2 February	LOCHGILPHEAD	Community Centre Room 6	5 pm – 7 pm
Monday 7 February	INVERARAY	Inveraray Community Hall	11 am – 1 pm
Tues 8 February	ISLAY, Port Ellen	Ramsay Hall Main hall	10.30am – 12 pm
Tues 8 February	ISLAY, Bowmore & Bridgend	Bowmore Village Hall Lesser hall	1 pm – 2.30 pm

## OBAN, LORN AND THE ISLES

DAY-DATE	LOCATION	VENUE	TIME
Thurs 10 February	CONNEL, BONAWE, NORTH CONNEL, BARCALDINE, BENDERLOCH	Connel Village Hall	4 pm – 5 pm
Thurs 10 February	DUNBEG	Dunbeg Primary School	6 pm – 7 pm
Mon 14 February	OBAN (central) Kilmore, Kilninver	Church Hall Glencruitten Road	12 pm – 3 pm
Mon 14 February	OBAN (Dunollie & Longsdale)	St Columbas Church Hall	4 pm – 6 pm
Mon 14 February	OBAN (Soroba)	Community Flat – Scalpay Terrace	7 pm – 8 pm

# The way FORWARD

The coming months are crucial to the transfer process. To give you an idea of how events will progress included below is an outline timetable:

**Spring 2005 – Stage 1 period of formal consultation begins.** All Council households will receive a copy of the Stage 1 notice, which is a document detailing what tenants can expect from ACHA following transfer. Every tenant will have the opportunity to respond to the transfer proposals during Stage 1.

During this period there will also be further door-to-door visits giving you the opportunity to speak to staff about the proposals.

Additionally during the run up to ballot ACHA staff will be visiting communities to give you the chance to see examples of the types of kitchens and bathrooms available to tenants following transfer.

**Following Stage 1, Stage 2 of formal consultation begins.** During this second stage of formal consultation you will receive further information from the Council answering any questions and issues raised during Stage 1 regarding ACHA's plans.

**Mid 2005 – ballot.** An independent and secret postal ballot on the transfer of all Council housing to ACHA will be conducted by the Electoral Reform Society. Each tenant has the right to vote. In the case of a joint tenancy, each of the joint tenants will have a vote. Other members of your household will not have the right to vote. Only in the event of the majority of tenants who vote, voting in favour will transfer then take place.

**In the event of a 'yes' vote, and subsequent approval from the Scottish Executive, transfer itself would take place in early 2006.**

# Positive identity **vital** for taking organisation forward



In the run up to Christmas Argyll Community Housing Association unveiled its new logo which will play an important part in the transfer process.

The logo, chosen over several other strong candidates, reflects the differing communities across Argyll and Bute, representing famous landmarks from the region's communities. The four selected landmarks are The Bell Tower in Inveraray, Helensburgh's Hill House, McCaig's Tower in Oban and Rothesay Castle on the Isle of Bute. When used to represent one of Argyll and Bute's four localities, the logo also has the flexibility to be adjusted accordingly to give prominence to a particular region.

Norman Beaton, ACHA chairperson, speaking at the launch commented, "This design received very strong support from ACHA's shadow committee and I am delighted that we now have a positive identity for the organisation. Whilst we recognise that it has not been possible to represent every community across the region, it was felt that it was important to give the logo a 'local' feel, acknowledging the diversity of our communities.

"We will now be looking to establish our new identity amongst tenants, who can expect to see a lot more of it in the future," he continued. "It will be integral in

taking the organisation forward towards next year's ballot after which we will be able to deliver on our promises to tenants in all Argyll and Bute communities."

Welcoming ACHA's new identity, Argyll and Bute Council's housing spokesperson Councillor George Freeman, said, "It's very important that ACHA should have a powerful identity to represent the strength of local communities. We are confident that, should transfer take place, we will be handing over to a strong organisation that will look after the needs of tenants throughout Argyll and Bute."



*Members of the ACHA management committee with the new logo*

## GET IN TOUCH

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

**Argyll and Bute Council: 01546 604412**

**Argyll Community Housing Association: 01546 604827**

**Independent Tenant Adviser, PS Scotland: 0800 0853928**

**Alternatively visit the website: [www.argyllcha.org](http://www.argyllcha.org)**

If you wish a member of staff to call at your home to answer any queries you may have about the transfer, please contact ACHA 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 Council and we will arrange for help.