

Putting Tenants First

Spring 2014

Do you need some confidential advice on debt?

If so, we've made it easy for you get that essential help ... pictured right is Audrey who works for Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau and was employed through the Lottery funded FISH project to give ACHA tenants free, impartial and confidential advice ... so give her a call today on 01436 670006.

The national organisation, the Money Advice Service reported in February that an estimated 9 million people in the UK are in debt but shockingly only 20% of them are currently seeking help. Audrey said "Debt advice works and the earlier people get help the better their chance of a good outcome."



Are you affected by the spare room subsidy or Bedroom Tax, as it's known? If so then hopefully you've had assistance to meet the cost of your rent through the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) provided by Argyll and Bute Council. The Scottish Government has announced that an additional £15million will be made available in Scotland in 2014/15 for DHP's. Please make sure that you speak to local ACHA staff about this if you think you need to claim or re-claim in April.

Garden Competition 2014

Our annual garden competition began in 2010 and has always proved successful with entries received throughout Argyll and Bute. As an opportunity to recognise the hard work and commitment from tenants in maintaining their garden, tenants and neighbours are able to nominate ACHA gardens from April until mid-August. Members of each of the four ACHA Area Committees will judge nominated gardens. Apply now to your local office.



One of the winners in Mid Argyll last year

It is hard to believe that in March of this year we reached the milestone of 10 years of ACHA. Although the Association took over the housing from the Council in November 2006, two years of planning, including winning the stock transfer vote, took place prior to that.

Looking back over the 10 years a lot has been achieved but there is a lot still to do. In terms of meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard for our homes, we have completed 82% of the work. This has resulted in over £100million being invested in the Association's 5,000 plus homes. We have also made considerable progress in building new homes with over 170 built and over 100 on site in the coming year.

The Association over the years has added to the services we provide. This has included Welfare Rights, Allpay, grass cutting for elderly and vulnerable tenants and factoring and services for owners.

Challenges still lie ahead. With over 3,500 families and single people on the Home Argyll waiting list we need to build more homes. With huge challenges in relation to fuel poverty in Argyll and Bute we need to redouble our efforts to make our homes as energy efficient as we can make them. Lastly, the challenges around the Bedroom Tax and the development of the Universal Credit system continue to cause concern to the Association in terms of the wellbeing of many of our tenants.

The first 10 years have gone by very quickly. The next 10 will be about building on what we have achieved and continuing to meet housing need in all its formats.



Alastair MacGregor, Chief Executive

ALIENERGY

Argyll, Lomond & the Islands Energy Agency

Alienergy helps communities to benefit from improved energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty. The *Affordable Warmth for Sustainable Rural Communities* project focuses on identifying people in need of assistance and working with individuals to give them the knowledge and confidence to help them out of fuel poverty. Qualified staff can help with advice on energy efficiency, fuel bills and checking that tariffs are correct. Alienergy are also looking for volunteers so if you need help or think you could offer help, contact the teams:

Argyll:

Tara, Jenny or Rachel 01631 56 5183

Bute:

Julie or Alma 01700 50 2784

We Want Your Views!

We are looking for more tenants to join our Consultation Register to provide feedback and comment on policy reviews which affect your tenancy and the management of your estates. This year we will be reviewing the following:

- Debt Management Policy
- Allotment Policy
- Estate Management Policy
- Anti Social Behaviour Policy
- Void Management Policy
- Low Demand Strategy

If you are interested in participating, even in just one review, please contact Gayle Power by email at Gayle.Power@acha.co.uk or by telephone on 01546 605 984.

STOP PRESS....STOP PRESS.....STOP PRESS....STOP PRESS....STOP PRESS...

At the end of March we were 82% compliant with the Scottish Housing Quality Standards having spent over **£93 million** on improvements to your homes.

Another 102 new homes will be on site by April:

- 40 new homes - Glenshellach, Oban
 - 2 new homes - Bonawe
 - 8 new homes - Connel
- 20 new homes - Bowmore, Islay
- 12 new homes - Inveraray
 - 8 new homes - Tarbert
- 12 new homes - Helensburgh

The new HOME Argyll Allocations policy is due to be finalised in July 2014.



Last year we introduced a new service to help you if you wanted to exchange or swap your home. A mutual exchange, or swap, not only offers you a better choice for finding a new home, it could be a quicker option than waiting for a move on our transfer list. HomeSwapper is easy to use and automatically matches you with tenants who are interested in your home and have a home that you may be interested in. All you need to do is register at www.homeswapper.co.uk and you can add up to nine photographs of your home. When your registration has been approved, you will be able to access information about tenants who may wish to exchange properties with you. If you need any advice please don't hesitate to get in touch with us - all contact details are on the back page.

Tenants Charter update



We have been working on the report to the Scottish Housing Regulator called the Annual Report on the Charter (ARC). The ARC will contain performance information on the 16 areas of the Charter and will be given to the Regulator in May of this year.

In October we will publish a report on the outcomes and this report will be produced with the assistance of the tenants and other customers who are part of the 'Your Voice' Group. If you would like any more information please contact your local ACHA office.

Right to Repair - under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 tenants have the right to have small (up to £350), urgent, repairs carried out within a given timescale. These are known as 'Qualifying Repairs'. When you report a repair we will let you know whether it is our responsibility and whether it is a qualifying repair. We may need to inspect your home to find out. If the repair does qualify under the scheme, we will explain your rights under the Right to Repair scheme and advise you of the time allowed to carry out the repair. In some circumstances we may be unable to do the work in the allotted time but we will advise you of this and make temporary arrangements. Included with this newsletter is an insert all about Right to Repair and there are leaflets in all our offices.



We asked you what you think about ...

All your comments are included in each report to the Board so they can see what you've said.

ACHA consulted with all tenants during January of this year on the proposed rent increase of 4.35% for 2014/2015.

All tenants were sent out a booklet in January which explained the current circumstances and asked for comments and feedback.

We received 88 responses to the consultation and these responses were given to the ACHA Board when it considered the rent increase and the implications for ACHA's 30 year business plan at its meeting on 12th February.

After careful consideration, the Board approved an increase of **4.45%** which is (RPI +1.75%) RPI = Retail Price Index. This took effect from 1st April 2014.

Each year we ask our Sheltered Housing tenants a number of questions about the service they receive and the response to our 2013 survey was particularly positive with 92.7% of those responding (111 surveys) rating their experience of living in Sheltered Housing as excellent or very good.



'Your Voice'

We sent out an information flyer to you in our last edition of 'Tenants First'. A quick update is that we now have 17 people interested in joining the group. There are a number of owner occupiers considering joining too which is good news. The group will soon begin to look at what is involved in being a member of the 'Your Voice' group. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact your local ACHA office where copies of the leaflet (left) can be found or look on our website www.acha.co.uk

What's the role of the 'Your Voice' Group?

- Monitor performance
- Challenge service delivery
- Identify service improvements
- Support development of policies and procedures
- Help ACHA achieve value for money
- Ensure that customers influence service delivery



'Your Voice'

At ACHA we want our tenants, owners and other customers to be involved at the heart of our organisation. You can help us make changes to give everyone the best possible service.



If you want to move house because of the Bedroom Tax, read on...

Just under 500 tenants are affected as they are deemed to have more bedrooms than they need. Over the last year staff have assisted tenants to claim Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's), with debt management and with applications to move to smaller properties. Last July our Board of Management agreed to a number of temporary changes to policies to assist tenants (affected by Bedroom Tax) to move house. This included the award of additional points to help facilitate an early move to another house. **These additional points will only be available up to 30th June 2014** after which normal points as per the HOME Argyll Allocation Policy will be applied. If you, or anyone you know, are affected by the bedroom tax and need advice on Benefits or moving house, please get in touch with staff at your local ACHA office.



The **Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee** had the responsibility of judging ACHA's Employee of the Season 'Summer' award. In November 2013 Committee members were faced with the difficult task of reviewing six nominations.

All were worthwhile winners but Jenna Shaw, Administration Officer in Mid Argyll & Kintyre was eventually announced the winner. Pictured above is Jenna receiving her certificate and vouchers from the Lomond Area Committee members. Interested in becoming a Member of the Area Committee?

Why not contact your local Area Office at 31 James Street Helensburgh and pick up a Membership Application form.

Mid Argyll and Kintyre Area Committee

Are keen to make sure that everyone is aware of how to reduce energy consumption as far as possible (and of course costs too). The majority of these costs come from heating, but you can still save by using low-energy bulbs, switching off lights when not used and by not leaving unused appliances on standby. To save on heating costs, keep room temperatures at a reasonable level; 21°C should be adequate for your living room. Turn down heating in bedrooms when not in use and keep doors and windows closed to prevent draughts and close your curtains at night (remember to use extractor fans to prevent condensation in your kitchen and bathroom). Only use appliances such as washing machines when you have a full load and keep your freezer fairly full. Make sure you are on the best energy tariff. If you are in doubt contact Allenergy (tel 01631 565183) who can provide free advice. Visit ACHA's website for energy efficiency tips.

Oban Lorn & Isles

Area Committee Members would like to acknowledge the vast number of tenants throughout Argyll that maintain their gardens to such a high standard. During 2013 OLI Area Committee Members had the immensely difficult task of choosing the winners for OLI's 9 garden trophies. As well as being awarded with the area trophy, each area winner receives a £30 gift voucher. Judging for 2014 will take place at the end of Summer with awards being distributed after September's Area Committee Meeting.



The Bute & Cowal Area Committee

would like to pay tribute to the work of Bill Pirnie who sadly passed away in November 2013. Bill, who served when the committee was first formed in 2007, was a keen proponent of sustainable building and brought his expertise and vast knowledge to the committee.



The Committee would also like to thank Jeanette McIntyre who has retired from the committee.

Jeanette, who lives in Rothesay, worked keenly to promote the interests of the Association within her community and actively represented the concerns of her fellow tenants.



How to Contact ACHA:

Customer Service Centre 0800 028 2755

(Freephone but mobile charges will apply)

Helensburgh & Lomond

31 James Street, Helensburgh G84 8AS

e-mail: housing.lomond@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605920

Cowal

Dolphin Hall, Manse Ave, Dunoon PA23 8DQ

e-mail: housing.cowal@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605950

Bute

Union Street, Rothesay PA20 0HD

e-mail: housing.bute@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605870

Mid Argyll

Dalriada House, Lochgilphead PA31 8ST

e-mail: housing.midargyll@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605800

Kintyre

Old Quay Head, Campbeltown PA28 6ED

e-mail: housing.kintyre@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605880

Islay

Jamieson Street, Bowmore PA43 7HP

e-mail: housing.islay@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605890

Oban, Lorn and Isles

Glenshellach Business Park, Oban PA34 4RY

e-mail: housing.lorn@acha.co.uk

telephone 01546 605930

ACHA's Community Action Fund

- 1st Port Bannatyne Boys Brigade
- Argyll Riding for the Disabled
- Royal British Legion Scotland (Easdale)
- Kintyre Youth Enquiry Service
- Inveraray and District Pipe Band
- Friends of Oban Community Playpark
- Mid Argyll Community Enterprises
- Keeping Well Group
- Tarbert Youth Group
- Jigsaw Cornerstone
- Helensburgh & Lomond Highland Games
- Peninsula Players

If you are part of a registered charity that could make use of a grant up to £500, then contact ACHA on 01546 605922 and ask for our Community Action Fund application form - it's only one page. Good luck!



Pictured above is Mrs Laye (right) from Bunessan, Mull who was presented with her £100 prize for being the winner of the Direct Debit draw. Presenting the cheque is Karen Heath from the ACHA office in Oban. If you would like to pay your rent by direct debit please contact your local ACHA office.

Attention ACHA Members
Date for your diary. The ACHA
AGM will be held on Thursday
18th September in Inveraray.



Public Holiday dates in 2014

18th April, 21st April, 5th May, 23rd May, 26th May, 29th September,
13th October, 25th December, 26th December.

If you would like this newsletter in larger print, in an alternative language, on audio CD or in an electronic format or you would like someone to read it or explain any of it please contact any ACHA office or email us on enquiries@acha.co.uk

All our newsletters are available on our website www.acha.co.uk