

Putting Tenants First

Spring 2010

The Big Freeze

ACHA staff got their sleeves rolled up in January when temperatures fell to the coldest in 30 years! Staff gritted footpaths and used ACHA tipper trucks to help the Council deliver grit in Helensburgh, Rothesay and Oban and surrounding areas. Staff also phoned elderly or vulnerable tenants to make sure they had food and heating.

Thankfully everyone was alright but there was lots of damage caused by burst pipes when the thaw came (see inside story).



Pictured above is Joanne MacFarlane from our Helensburgh office calling tenants during the cold spell.



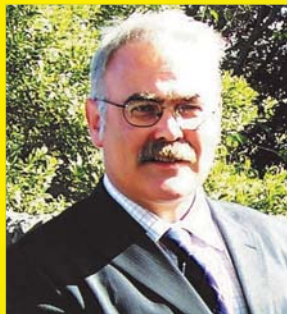
A new service for tenants

ACHA has successfully obtained grants of over £350,000 to fund a new **welfare rights** service for tenants. Part of the FISH Argyll project, over the next 18 months, four welfare rights officers will assist ACHA, Dunbritton Housing Association and West Highland Housing Association tenants. It is hoped that this will bring in over £2 million in previously unclaimed benefits.

More on **FISH Argyll** in our next newsletter.



argyll fish
Financial Inclusion
Services in Housing



Housing Bill to Reform the 'Right to Buy'

On the 14th January 2010 the Scottish Government published its Housing Bill which will be debated in the Scottish Parliament this year, with plans that it will become law in 2011.

The main proposals within the bill are a reform of the Right to Buy, A Social Housing Charter for tenants and the establishment of a new

Scottish Housing Regulator. If the proposals on Right to Buy become law, this will remove this right from any new tenants, and for tenants of any new homes. With respect to the Social Housing Charter, it is intended this will be a statutory mechanism whereby tenants interests will be protected by powers given to the new Scottish Housing Regulator. It is intended that the new Regulator will have greater powers than currently, to intervene with respect to standards and safeguards.

From ACHA's perspective, the organisation is of the view that reform of the Right to Buy is long overdue. By protecting homes in the future for affordable housing, the Association is of the view that a reasonable balance has been struck between the rights of existing tenants and the needs of those on waiting lists in the future. ACHA also has no difficulty with the concept of a Social Housing Charter if the powers of enforcement are fair and reasonable and take into account all relevant factors, including external issues.

ACHA, through the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, will input into the debate on the Housing Bill over the coming months. It is important that legislation that affects housing has input from housing organisations. ACHA will do all that we can to ensure that the Housing Bill that comes out at the end of this process is workable and relevant to the housing needs of today. ACHA is also pleased to report that many of the tenants and residents associations that we support have been involved in discussions on the content of the draft Bill with the Scottish Government.

Alastair MacGregor, Chief Executive

ACHA Passes First Inspection

On the 22nd January 2010 the Scottish Housing Regulator published its inspection report on the Association.

This was ACHA's first inspection since stock transfer in November 2006 and the Regulator found that ACHA, as a relatively young organisation, had made good progress on its commitments to tenants since transfer. The Regulator also praised the Association for its new build housing, estate management, financial reporting and access to its housing lists. The Regulator was of the view that some parts of the Association's investment programme were behind, and that the Association should continue to improve its business planning and performance management framework. The Regulator acknowledged that the Association was committed to continuous improvement. The Regulator's overall ranking for the Association was a C grade, which is regarded as fair.

The Association's Board of Management has used the inspection as a tool to assist continuous improvement. Areas within the inspection that the Association agree need to be progressed, will be reported to the Board on a quarterly basis to measure progress.

The full inspection report is available on both the Scottish Housing Regulator's and ACHA's website (www.acha.co.uk).



This was the scene of devastation when frozen pipes burst in a tenants home in January. Almost every room was water damaged but luckily the tenant was insured with a home contents insurance policy. We know of 28 homes that suffered damage over the cold snap, with damage totalling over £67,000. Sadly, only 4 of these had insurance to cover the loss to personal possessions. ACHA offers one of the most competitive insurance policies for tenants which is underwritten by Aviva (used to be Norwich Union). You could have peace of mind for as little as 86p per week (or 57p per week for those over 60). Ask staff at your local ACHA office about easy payment options.

Welcome to the Repairs Control Centre - we're here to help

When you phone the freephone Repairs Hotline number of 0800 028 2755 you will get through to one of our Customer Services Advisors at the control centre in Helensburgh. Repairs from all over Argyll and Bute are reported here where the staff code your repair as emergency, essential or routine and can ask for an inspection to be carried out if necessary. Remember that every time we carry out a repair we also send out a Repair Satisfaction Survey card which can be returned to us by Freepost. Tell us what you thought of your repair and the service you have received to help us make it a first class service every time.



ACHA recently completed an external insulated render contract at Glenbarr, Kintyre

« During

After »



How has your rent been set for 2010/2011?

A Rent Guarantee which means that rents will not increase by more than RPI (retail price index) + 1% is in place for all ACHA tenants which was agreed at the point of stock transfer. The RPI in December 2009 was 2.4% according to the Office of National Statistics (www.ons.gov.uk). In line with this ACHA's Board has agreed a rent increase of 3.4% from 1st April 2010. This equates to £1.92 a week increase on an average rent.

Last year's rent increase was limited and the increase this year is necessary to protect commitments ACHA has given to tenants and ACHA's business plan. Sheltered Housing service charges will not change this year and will be amended next year in line with actual costs.

Rents for garages, garage sites and service charges for newly built houses will rise in line with the general rent increase at RPI+1% or 3.4%

Digital TV Switchover

As you know TV is going digital and the existing analogue TV signal will be switched off area by area. The three transmitters which currently cover Argyll and Bute are to be switched off :

Torosay (SW Highlands and Islands) - 13th October 2010
Darvel & Rosneath (parts of central Scotland, Argyll & Bute)
- April to June 2011



If you currently have satellite TV this should not affect you. Otherwise your existing TV can be converted with a digital box which connects to your TV using a 'scart' cable.

If you have any concerns or want further information please contact **digital UK**
Call 08456 50 50 50 or on line at www.digital.co.uk

If you are over 75 there is a Switchover Help Scheme, call 0800 408 5900



We want to know what you think of our offices

ACHA recently ran a pilot survey in its mid Argyll and Campbeltown offices. The survey asked tenants who came into each office what they thought of the reception area and of the service they received.

A prize draw of completed surveys resulted in two lucky winners who both got £25 shopping vouchers. Pictured left is Angela Burnett from Inveraray. The winner in Campbeltown was Hannah McManus. The survey is being extended to all our other offices so look out for the questionnaires and prize draw in your local ACHA office. Congratulations to both the lucky winners.



Left, Norman Beaton (ACHA Chairman) presents a hamper to Mr McCrae of Ardrishaig. Right, Mrs Graham of Cragroy sheltered housing complex in Dunoon receives her hamper from ACHA staff member Alice Clark.



Becoming a 'member' of ACHA has its advantages.

Every year, at Christmas, a prize draw will take place and four lucky 'members' (one from each area) will be presented with hampers containing delicious Scottish food. Along with the winners above, Mr Birnie from Oban and Miss Aitken from Helensburgh were also winners in December — congratulations to all.

Life membership of ACHA costs just £1 and as well as receiving a copy of ACHAs Annual Report and Accounts you will be eligible to attend Board AGM's and your local Area Committee AGM and elect those who sit on these groups. This means that you will have a real say in how ACHA is run. Pick up a Membership Application form at any ACHA office or call us and one can be sent out to you.

Garden Competition



Last year successful garden competitions were run for tenants in Oban (above) and on Mull. This year we are looking for winners across Argyll and Bute. If you think you or your neighbours fingers are green why not pop in to your local ACHA office and pick up a nomination form.



Complaints Policy

ACHA thinks the best way to improve services is to listen to what our customers say.

We ask for your views through surveys and questionnaires and we welcome any complaints or suggestions. If you don't tell us about your complaint then we don't get the chance to put things right. To help us pinpoint where we do go wrong we developed a new policy and database to track customer feedback. The database lets us see where there are recurring problems but hopefully we'll be able to sort out any problems first time round. We'll report on how we are doing in future Newsletters but in the mean time if you have anything to say -good or bad— be sure to let us know. You can do this by phoning or writing to your local ACHA office (details on back page). You can find our Customer Care Charter and the policy on our website: www.acha.co.uk or ask at any office.

How To Contact ACHA Area Offices

Helensburgh & Lomond telephone 01436 658700
31 James Street, Helensburgh G84 8AS

Cowal telephone 01369 708688
Dolphin Hall, Manse Avenue, Dunoon PA23 8DQ

Bute telephone 01700 501314
Union Street, Rothesay PA20 0HD

Mid Argyll telephone 01546 604800
Dalriada House, Lochgilphead PA31 8ST

Kintyre telephone 01586 559055
Old Quay Head, Campbeltown PA28 6ED

Islay telephone 01496 301312
Jamieson Street, Bowmore PA43 7HP

Oban, Lorn and Isles telephone 01631 567962
Menzies House, Glenshellach Business Park, Oban PA34 4RY

Mull telephone 01688 301025
Breadalbane Street, Tobermory, Mull PA75 6PX

ACHA's Community Action Fund

Youth Blue Light Discos,
Helensburgh
Ardchattan Primary School,
Eco garden
Mid Argyll Pipe Band,
Youth music workshops

These are just some of the groups recently making use of a small grant of up to £300 from ACHA.

If you are involved with a community group who could make good use of a grant then please contact ACHA on 01631 567912 and ask for an application form for the Community Action Fund

Burns Supper in Inveraray

It was a great turn out at the Burns Supper at Chalmers Court in Inveraray with 3 friends from McCracken Court in Lochgilphead coming along too. The tasty haggis was donated by Tesco in Lochgilphead and was expertly piped in by piping champion, Stewart Liddle along with two of his young pupils. Addressing the haggis was Kenny Stark from the local Burns association and accordion music provided by Iain McAskill. A huge "thank you" to all who, donated their time and skills, it is very much appreciated.

Also in attendance were June and Sheena (ACHA staff) and the new minister for Inveraray Parish and his wife, Rev and Mrs Bezuidenhout.

Everyone is looking forward to next years event.



The youth **Blue Light Disco** in Helensburgh got a boost from ACHA by way of a grant for prizes for the youngsters. The discos are run in partnership with Police and MOD and there were 2 charities benefiting from the proceeds of the disco; Yorkhill Childrens' Foundation and 'Help for Heroes' pictured above are the reps. receiving their cheques of £135 each.

If you would like this newsletter in larger print, in an alternative language, on audio cassette or in an electronic format or you would like someone to read it or explain any of it please contact Gillian McInnes on 01546 604576 or gillian.mcinnnes@acha.co.uk

www.acha.co.uk

There were 1,984 visitors to the website in January and 983 of those were new visitors.