

Putting Tenants First

Spring 2013



New ACHA homes in Dunoon

Fairways, Dunoon (pictured left) will provide 24 new homes, ready to let in April.

..... and in Dalmally

Scott Terrace, Dalmally (pictured below) will provide 8 new homes for rent and two for mid-market rent in June.



32 new homes in Campbeltown

The former Park Square site (left) will be ready in July of this year.



Port Ellen, Islay

Church Way is the name for 8 new homes in Port Ellen due to be completed in September.

and there's more...



Glenshellach in Oban will see 40 new ACHA homes started in spring with more new homes planned for Helensburgh and Bowmore in Islay. Whole house refurbishment at Dalaruan in Campbeltown will see 20 homes let in May. 9 homes in Dunoon and 22 in Sandbank have had major works done and these will be completed in May and June. A further 9 homes in Dunoon will have major works completed later in the year.

ACHA's 'Garden in Bloom' Competition 2013

Enter to win a trophy and vouchers yourself or nominate a friend or neighbour with 'green fingers'. Contact your local ACHA office to ask for an application form and check the closing date for your area.

Good luck and happy gardening.



In these challenging times we have set priorities for next year. We plan to invest **£16 million** in the coming year to continue modernisation of homes (to be completed by March 2015). As part of this work, heating renewals, rewiring, re-roofing and roughcasting will be key priorities. We will also continue with a substantial window and door replacement programme. We plan to complete 72 new homes for rent between May and September this year in Campbeltown, Dunoon, Dalmally and Port Ellen. In addition to these we plan to put on site 74 new homes for rent in Oban, Bonawe, Bowmore and Helensburgh between April and October. The Association has also set up an organisation called Argyll Homes for All (AHFA) which is wholly-owned by us. It will carry out the routine and cyclical maintenance of all our homes beginning in April. The coming year sees the full implementation of the new Scottish Social Housing Charter with its measurement of landlords services to tenants. There will be 16 areas of service that we will report against. We welcome this Charter which clearly outlines what we have to deliver on and report against in relation to services to you. The last issue I want to turn to is welfare reform. We have no issue with the principle of making the system less bureaucratic and more focused on those that need its services. However, we believe that the introduction of the 'bedroom tax' will cause huge economic disadvantage to around 620 of our tenants. We have, and will continue to, campaign to the powers that be to have it removed. I wanted to finish by saying that the Association values comments, ideas and suggestions from you about how we can improve and build on what we do. Please feel free to drop us a note either by email to enquiries@acha.co.uk or in writing to any ACHA office.



Alastair MacGregor, Chief Executive



“ April heralds the beginning of a new enterprise in the form of Argyll Homes For All (AHFA). ”

John Forbes, Managing Director, AHFA

Until recently, Argyll Community Housing Association carried out its repairs using a mixture of delivery methods. With the launch of AHFA, the Association hopes to improve upon the first class service previously provided. The main change you will see is in the people doing the repairs, as they will now predominately be employed by AHFA.

This gives us greater control over the repairs in terms of appointments and the quality of the work. In some areas, the trades' people have joined AHFA from existing service providers who have given an excellent service that we aim to continue, so you may well see some familiar faces. In other areas we have recruited outstanding new staff who are equipped to meet your high expectations. Our vehicles will be fully stocked to deal with many events and our goal is to complete the majority of repairs during a single visit.

The telephone contact number for reporting a repair remains unchanged (0800 028 2755) as we aim to make the transition to the new repairs provider, AHFA, as seamless as possible.

All our staff will carry identification badges with the AHFA logo (above) and you should always ask to see identification before allowing anyone into your home.

Hopefully you are enjoying the benefits of the investment work ACHA has put in and we look forward to the coming year and maintaining your home to the highest standard.



We are pleased to introduce a new service to help you with a mutual exchange. 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.

HomeSwapper will also email you at regular intervals with details of suitable exchange partners. If you don't have access to the internet at home, HomeSwapper will send you match alerts via your mobile phone every two weeks. If you need advice about where to get internet access please ask at your local ACHA office.



January and February saw Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's **Fire Safety Awareness** campaign.

Over 60 ACHA staff attended events which were held in Oban, Helensburgh and Tarbert.

The main messages are that early detection and warning will play a vital role in increasing chances of escape. This is particularly important at night when your family may well be asleep and likely to react more slowly. Statistics show that a significant number of fire related deaths occur from fires started in living rooms and kitchens. Quick detection and alarm raising is imperative. Call **0800 0731 999** for a FREE Smoke Detector and FREE Home Fire Safety Visit - do it today!

As you know the Westminster Government has introduced the new Welfare Reform Act 2012.

This is likely to have implications for many of you and this regular article aims to keep you up to date with changes and how they might affect you.....



Over the past few months ACHA staff have been visiting the hundreds of tenants affected by the 'under-occupation' rules which came into force on the 1st of April 2013.

The 'bedroom tax' - are you affected? These rules mean that if you have what the Westminster Government regards as a 'spare' bedroom you will lose a percentage of your Housing Benefit. Depending on how many spare rooms you have and the amount of your rent, the amount per week that will no longer be covered by Housing Benefit is on average around £10. The cut does not apply if you or your partner were born before 6th October 1951. If you think you will be affected and haven't yet spoken to us please contact us (see back page for numbers). It may be that you are missing out on other benefit or tax credit income that you didn't know about that could make this charge easier to pay or it may be that you can apply for some extra help towards your rent because the charge will put you into financial difficulties. Either way our Welfare Rights staff can help you check this out. If you would like information about moving to a smaller house please contact us.



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

We asked you what you think about ...

ACHA consulted with all tenants during January of this year on the proposed rent increase of 4.95% for 2013.

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

We received 37 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 7th February.

After careful consideration, the Board approved an increase of **4.85%** which is (RPI +1.75%) RPI = Retail Price Index. This takes effect from 1st April 2013.



Tenants Charter

The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced by the Scottish Government last year. Tenants, including our Tenants Panel, were consulted on its development. The Charter contains 16 'outcomes' which are standards which ACHA must work to in delivering its services to you.

The outcomes include descriptions on how we will meet standards on:

Equalities Communication Participation Quality of Housing Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements Estate Management, Anti Social Behaviour, Neighbour Nuisance and Tenancy Disputes Housing Options Access to Social Housing Tenancy Sustainment Homeless People Value for Money Rents and Service Charges Gypsies/Travellers.

Over the next year, and each year, we will be producing a report for the Scottish Housing Regulator on our self assessment of the above areas. This self assessment report will be produced in collaboration with tenants and other service users and the method of doing this will also be agreed with tenants and other service users. This annual report on our performance will be called the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) and we will publish the comments by the Scottish Housing Regulator on our ARC report each year. If you would like a copy of the Scottish Social Housing Charter please contact Gillian McInnes on 01546 605801 or email gillian.mcinnnes@acha.co.uk.

Estate Management Inspections—Gardens—Trees

We will check the condition of trees in gardens before re-letting homes to ensure there are no obvious dangers and that trees are safe. It is a tenants responsibility to maintain trees within their garden particularly if the a tree is likely to cause nuisance to others. If, during estate inspections, we find a tree which has been damaged or become diseased we can instruct you to prune it back or remove it.

When carrying out garden maintenance you may wish to seek our advice if you are considering removing or heavily cutting back bushes or trees. Section 2.10 and 2.11 of your Tenancy Agreement states 'You must not remove, destroy or chop down any bushes, hedges or trees without our written permission unless you planted them'.



Oban Lorn & Isles

During December 2012, 4 local nurseries were invited to participate in ACHA's 'Create a Christmas Card' competition.

Area Committee Members had the hard task of picking a winning entry from some talented young artists aged 3 and 4. The winning entry was from 4 year old Rhona who attends 1st Steps Nursery in Oban.



OLI Area Committee Members are happy to report that Cllr Ian Angus MacDonald has joined the Committee as Argyll and Bute Council Representative for the Area. Our OLI Area Committee AGM is being held on 1st July at 11am at the ACHA office (Menzies House), Oban - all welcome.

Helensburgh and Lomond

The Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee will be attending the local Highland Games in Helensburgh on the 1st June and Rosneath on the 14th July. Why not come along to our stall? We will have information on a wide range of services, including Welfare Reform, 'Homeswapper' the on-line mutual exchange register, Tenants & Residents Associations and the Factoring Service.

Our AGM is being held on 4th July and we are looking for new Members. If you are interested in becoming a member of our Area Committee please contact the local ACHA office for more details. We have made our meetings more open and accessible by extending an invitation to tenants to come along and observe or take part in Question & Answer sessions at the end of the meetings. Our next meeting is on 2nd May in the Cardross Community Flat, 1 Kirkton Road Cardross at 11am. If you are interested in attending please just contact your local Area Team.

Cowal & Bute

Alexander Johnston, Chairperson of our Cowal and Bute Area Committee urges tenants to become involved with ACHA by becoming members of the Association. Members should support the aims and objectives of the Association and we welcome applications from organisations as well as individuals.

Mr Johnston said "Being a committee member is very rewarding, I enjoy helping to make decisions such as which local groups should receive ACHA's Community Action funding and helping to support my community."

If you wish to discuss participation with someone in person, there will be a member of our local Area Committee available to answer any questions you may have on Friday 26th April 2013 between 10.30am - 12 noon at the local ACHA offices at Dolphin Hall, Dunoon and also at the ACHA office at Union Street, Rothesay.



Mid Argyll and Kintyre

Area Committee are keen to let pre 5 nurseries (age group 3-5) know about our 'Grow the Largest Sunflower' competition.

Seeds will be supplied to all nurseries who wish to participate – all entries welcome! Do you know of someone with a beautiful garden OR would you prefer to nominate yourself? The competition is open to all tenants across categories; best garden, best container and best vegetable patch. Closing date for MAK applications is end of July. To win an award and vouchers, contact your local area office for a form and we will do the rest! Area Committee and staff will be at the Kintyre Agricultural Show and Inveraray Highland Games. Have a chat with us about *your* community and *our* services; Immediately Available Properties, Allotments, Factoring, New houses. The Mid Argyll and Kintyre Area Committee AGM will be held on Wednesday 10th July in Campbeltown.

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

Bute Community Media (Bute FM)

Keeping Well Group (Mid Argyll & Kintyre)

Tayinloan Youth Club

Tobermory Endeavour

Highlands and Islands Music and Dance

Festival

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 or get it from our website www.acha.co.uk. Members of our four Area Committees have the difficult job of considering each application. Best of luck.

We are really pleased to say that two new tenants groups have been formed; Duncholgan Travelling Persons Association in Lochgilphead and the Kirkmichael Tenants and Residents Association in Helensburgh. Both groups will receive help and assistance from us and we wish them every success for the future.

AGM

If you are a member of ACHA, our annual general meeting this year will be held on Thursday 19th September in Inveraray. If you would like to apply for membership, ask at any local ACHA office.

£2,234.42 This is how much money ACHA staff have raised over the last year for various charities including World Cancer Research, Macmillan Cancer Support, British Heart Foundation, Help for Heroes, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Breast Cancer Campaign and Comic relief. Specific mention should go to one of our Directors, Nick Pollard, who raised £1,048 for the British Heart Foundation through a sponsored marathon. Well done to all.

Please note that the next Tenants Newsletter will be issued in the Autumn.

We are about to review our Allocations Policy and will be consulting those on the HOME Argyll consultation register. If you would also like to be involved please ask at your local ACHA office.

Forest
Stewardship
Council



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 Gillian McInnes on 01546 605801 or gillian.mcinnnes@acha.co.uk

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