

Putting Tenants First

Winter 2013

Argyllhomes FOR ALL

ACHA is pleased to announce the formation of a new subsidiary organisation called **Argyll Homes for All (AHFA)**.

The principal activity of AHFA will be to contract with ACHA to carry out all repairs works to tenants homes. This will build on the good work done by our in-house repairs teams over the past 6 years. The new organisation will improve control of our repairs service, bring savings through the reduction of VAT and offer all tenants a consistent service. It is planned that AHFA will have 46 staff, 26 of whom will transfer from ACHA. The final business plan of AHFA went to the Board of Management on 13th December for approval and the service will go live on 1st April this year.

Bill McIntyre, ACHA's Chairman said,

“ We are delighted to be building a modern, wholly owned repairs and maintenance business for ACHA. We look forward to seeing improved services for tenants and getting better value for our money. ”



The last few winters have brought some very challenging weather conditions for us all. Being well prepared for emergency situations is sensible but according to a survey this year by British Red Cross and the Scottish Government, only 39% of people are prepared for periods of severe weather. We've listed below some items to consider for a winter emergency kit.

- A battery operated torch (and batteries)
- A battery operated radio (and batteries)
- Any essential medication, some toiletries and a first aid kit.
- Three days supply of bottled water and ready-to-eat food (that won't go off).
- Hot water bottles and blankets.
- Your home contents insurance policy.
- Baby milk formula
- Pet supplies
- Emergency phone numbers including neighbours and friends.
- Keep the ACHA number handy

0800 028 2755

More information inside

It is hard to believe that we have just passed the 6th anniversary of ACHA becoming your landlord. A lot has happened in those six years. We are around half way through bringing our properties up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, a target we plan to meet by 2015. Our first investment commitment to tenants was to complete kitchens and bathrooms by March 2013. We have around 150 homes that have still to receive a new kitchen and bathroom, largely due to access issues. If you are one of our few tenants that still has not had a new kitchen and bathroom installed, could you contact your local office and we will organise this timeously. We have also made good progress in installing new windows and doors and in the current year we plan 1863 heating and rewire installs. In the last two years, we have developed a focus for improving thermal efficiency in our homes which has included internal insulation and external render.



The Association always wanted to build new homes in Argyll and Bute, we have completed over 100 and we currently have a further 74 on site. We hope to put another 66 on site in the coming year. We still have huge challenges in meeting housing need but we will continue to invest and build to tackle the challenges we face.

You will see in this newsletter reference to the implications of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. If you feel that any of the issues relating to Welfare Reform affect you or your family, please contact your local Housing & Neighbourhood Services staff who will be glad to assist you in any way they can.

Could I finish off by touching on preparing for winter. The last few winters have brought huge challenges in Argyll and Bute. The advice we have in this newsletter is basic but absolutely vital for emergency situations. If you could check against it and prepare, you will be well placed.

Best wishes, Alastair MacGregor, Chief Executive

Good Neighbour Award 2013

Is your neighbour one in a million?

Do they make a difference to you or the lives of people in your community?

We're looking for nominations of ACHA tenants for this award and the winner will receive a £50 shopping voucher. The winner will be selected by representatives from each of our four Area Committees. Closing date for nominations is Friday 9th August 2013. Contact your local ACHA office and ask for a nomination form.

Tips for Keeping Safe and Warm During Winter

If you can't heat all your rooms, make sure you keep your living room warm and only heat your bedroom before going to bed.

Make sure you and your family eat at least one hot meal a day - soup is nutritious, warming and inexpensive to make.

Wearing the right kind of clothes can make a huge difference - layers are best, using natural fibres like cotton underneath with air-trapping top layers like fleece or wool.

Keep active - if the weather prevents you from going for a walk try to keep active indoors.

If you have elderly relatives or neighbours who might need help please check on them. Clear paths and driveways to try to prevent slips and falls but ask for help if you can't manage this yourself.

Some tenants have been asking us why certain repair jobs are delayed when we are still spending huge sums on re-wiring, heating, roughcast etc. The reason is that when the housing association was formed, there was agreement by the Scottish Government and by our lenders on how much would be spent by 2015 to bring all homes up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. A plan was put in place to do all the large replacement works, with kitchens and bathrooms taking priority. This is known as the Investment Programme and money set aside for the investment programme cannot be spent on repairs.



← **Routine Repair**
Gates and fences are logged as 'routine' or non essential repairs.

Investment Programme

new windows being → installed in Inveraray.



When a tenant calls us about a repair, the type of repair is graded ; Emergency, Urgent or Routine. Some routine repairs such as a broken fence, letter box, gate, whirly-gig etc may not be carried out as quickly as we would like. The repairs budget is set each year and there are some factors out with our control as to the demand for repairs, for example, the unprecedented storms of the last few winters and the resulting pressure on the annual repairs budget to repair storm damaged homes.

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.

There are leaflets in all our offices which explain Right to Repair in more detail.

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.....



In our Summer edition last year we told you about Under Occupation. This change to Housing Benefit will affect around 600 ACHA tenants who have a 'spare' bedroom (as defined by the UK Government's Department of Work and Pensions DWP).

Please note that this will not affect you if you, or your partner, were born before 6th October 1951. During January, February and March we will be speaking directly to everyone affected by this change and helping people plan for the change.

“ Remember, we have staff who can advise you on benefits and tax credits and help you claim anything you are due now or if your circumstances change. Changes such as ; if your health deteriorates, you have a new baby, a change to hours worked/ redundancy, death in the family etc. ”

We want you to be involved in what we do

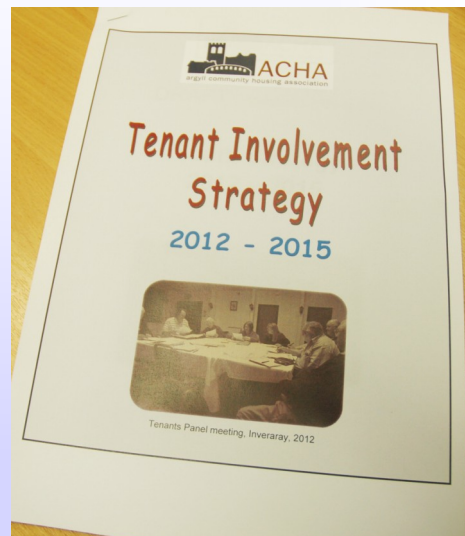
Do you know about the range of options you have to get involved with us? ACHA's Board have just approved the Tenant Involvement Strategy 2012 - 2015. This strategy replaces the previous one and was re-drafted by the Tenants Panel. You can find the strategy on our website www.acha.co.uk or You can request a copy from your local ACHA office.

We encourage you to be involved with us in a way that suits you. Some tenants want to join groups and attend meetings, others just want to be able to comment on some of the things we do.

There are currently 96 tenants on our Tenants Consultation Register. These are tenants who have said they want to be able to comment on policies and strategies from their own home. If you would like to know more about this please ask at your local ACHA office for an application form.

The Argyll Tenants Panel has 15 members from as far afield as Appin and Cardross. The Panel meets once a month and sets it's own agenda. Each month there are invited guest speakers and ACHA's Directors and Chief Executive are regular guests. The Panel has links to both local tenants groups and also the national Regional Networks of tenants who meet with the Scottish Government policy makers and advisors. All Tenants Panel minutes can be found on our website.

We also support 5 local tenants associations and are keen to help others set up. If you would like more information about any of these options please ask to speak to your local ACHA Housing and Neighbourhood Services Officer for advice.



ACHA adopted the Registered Social Landlord's model Complaint Handling Procedure, which began on 3rd October so has been in operation for just over 3 months now.

The new process includes:

- Stage 1 - frontline resolution (usually within 5 days)

- Stage 2 - investigation (usually within 20 days)

- All complaints are recorded

- Complaints performance is reported to ACHA's Senior Management and Board members at least quarterly.

Service improvements will now be recorded and shared with tenants - through these newsletters and via our website www.acha.co.uk

Our first quarterly report to cover October-December 2012 will be provided for Senior Management in January 2013 and to the Board in February 2013.



Pictured left is Miss Casey from Helensburgh who won the prize draw in 2012 for those who have agreed to receive newsletters and other information from ACHA using an email address.

When presented with her shopping vouchers she said ...

“ I'm delighted to win, it's not very often you get good news and the £100 will come in handy especially at this time of year. I'm chuffed, thanks ACHA. ”

We are over half way through making sure that all homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by March 2015. However we still have improvements to make to some homes and while we appreciate that you have been very patient we will need access to complete all works. At the moment there are over a hundred households not allowing us access to install new kitchens, heating and rewire work. We have particular concerns as our loft insulation contractor, Solas, has found it difficult to get access homes to do surveys. This insulation work will improve the energy efficiency of your home and reduce your heating bills. We would all ask tenants who are contacted regarding a survey to agree to give access. If you have concerns about the work planned you can discuss it with the surveyors and we will see if we can assist with any difficulty you may have. If you continue to refuse access, after reasonable communication, then we may have no choice but to follow our 'No Access' procedure which could lead to us using the terms of your tenancy agreement to force access. Please help us survey your home and allow the improvement works to be completed. Thank you.

Succession to an ACHA tenancy

A number of recent cases have raised issues regarding succession (the right to a tenancy) on the death of a tenant. ACHA supports succession and will always look to assist a legally qualifying occupier (a person who has been formally recorded as living in the house) to take over a tenancy after a bereavement. However, in some cases it has not been possible to agree to this due to sketchy or inconsistent information regarding residence or failure to have advised Housing Benefit of residence at that address.

In terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, on the death of a tenant, there are 3 levels of priority that determine who can qualify to succeed to the tenancy. In all cases the house of the deceased tenant must have been the **only or principal home** of the legally qualifying person and staff will ask for evidence that can verify this for example: bank statements, utility bills or reference to the electoral roll or census information.

Difficulties can arise where the person who claims the right to succession has not been declared to ACHA as an occupier at the time they moved in or through our annual Household Questionnaire. If the deceased tenant claimed housing benefit the person claiming the right to succession should have been notified to the Housing Benefit section of Argyll and Bute Council so we would also check with them. If you would like any details of the 3 levels of priority for succession to a tenancy please ask at your local ACHA office.

Locked - out what do I do?

From time to time tenants call us because their keys have got lost, been stolen or have broken in the lock. If this happens, you should call our Customer Service Centre on **0800 028 2755**. If this is during office hours we will ask you to give us some form of identification over the phone; date of birth, national insurance number etc. You will also be asked for your agreement to pay the costs of a joiner changing the lock (which may be substantial). If you are locked out of your home in the evening or at a weekend you should call us on the same number but we will not be able to check your identity over the phone. You will be asked to contact your local Police office where they can check your identity and give you a Police Incident Number. When you get this, call us back and we can then instruct an emergency joiner to do the work.

We advise everyone to let a friend or family member keep a spare key to avoid this inconvenience and expense. If your keys are stolen you should arrange to have your lock changed as soon as possible to avoid theft.



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

If you are part of a charity that could make use of a small grant, then contact ACHA on 01546 605922 and ask for our Community Action Fund application form - good luck!

Some recent grant recipients:

Oban and Lorn Marie Curie Cancer Care
Feis Oigridh Ile agus Dhiura (Islay & Jura)
Dunoon Link Club
Interloch Transport
Fyne Families

ACHA offices will be closed on the public holidays listed below:

1st and 2nd January 2013

29th March and 1st April

6th May

24th May and 27th May

27th Sept and 30th Sept

14th Oct

25th Dec and 26th Dec

Are you a Member (£1 for life) of ACHA?

If not, you could be missing out on the chance of winning a lovely food hamper.

Each year just before Christmas, ACHA puts the names of all our Members into a hat and draws out one name for each of the four areas. Ask any member of staff about applying for membership.

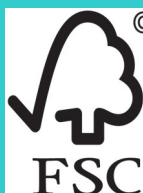
Below are the four lucky winners for 2012:

- Lorraine Anne Drysdale, Appin
- John Docherty, Tighnabruaich
- Jessie MacPhail, Campbeltown
- Frances Warren, Helensburgh

If you would like to become a Member ask at any ACHA office for an application form.

Tenants at Cragroy Sheltered Housing complex in Dunoon have raised even more money than last year for Macmillan Cancer Care. By contributing to the Big Coffee morning the tenants have raised the absolutely brilliant sum of £1,063.

Well done to everyone involved.



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**To report a repair or make a payment
0800 028 2755**

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 can be downloaded from our website www.acha.co.uk