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39A Victoria Street
Kirkwall
Orkney
KW15 1DN

- Tel: 01856 875253
- enquiries@ohal.org.uk
- www.ohal.org.uk

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Welcome,

It is my pleasure to introduce the summer edition of Rooftops.

I joined Orkney Housing Association on the 1st April 2024 which also involved a relocation to the islands at the same time. I greatly look forward to working with and on behalf of our tenants over the coming years. I have been hugely impressed with the hard work of all members of the Association's team and their dedication to the provision of excellent customer service. Over the next year we will be working on a number of projects and we will be in touch with you about these. One of our first being the revision of our Customer Charter.

In this edition we introduce new members of our team (including me) and our new Estates & Trades Team Assistant, Stephen Haddow, along with our new Management Committee Member, Suzanne Lawrence. We are always interested in welcoming new members to our Board and you can find out how to get in touch too if you are interested in the opportunity to actively contribute to the work of the Association. We are proud of the achievement of our Housing Services Officer, Donna Wilson, who has completed her CiH Level 4 qualification; this is a demanding course and essential in professional skills development within our team.

We then address the difficult subject of unacceptable behaviour towards our staff which, unfortunately, does happen, and we want to outline our approach; our simple request is to treat one another with respect.

Some information about smoke alarms and seeking assistance should you or someone you know have difficulties around hoarding follows. We then have an update about our new build and planned improvement programme.

Despite the increasingly difficult financial circumstances, we continue to work hard to attract funding and carry out important improvements to our tenants homes.

Our dedicated Energy Officer, Robert Leslie, provides some important information for anyone who is experiencing difficulties with their utilities. Robert is also happy to assist and his full contact details are included; please do not hesitate to make contact should you require support as this can be a complex area to navigate. Following this, we detail other sources of information and assistance.

Our friendly Customer Services team are the first point of call for any questions or enquiries, so if there's anything you would like help or advice about related to your home, please give them a call on 01856 875253 or email enquiries@ohal.org.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter.

Tracey Longworth
Director of Housing & Operations

Customer Charter

OHAL have, following consultation with our tenants and approval by our Management Committee, launched our new Customer Charter; this details our promises about how we will work with our tenants.

We always look to provide great customer service and ensure that our service is accessible, convenient, polite and professional. Our Customer Charter can be accessed [here](#).

Staff Noticeboard



New staff member

In April we were delighted to welcome Tracey Longworth to the organisation as our Director of Housing & Operations.

Tracey is a committed housing professional and chose to specialise in this career following the completion of her first Degree. She obtained her Postgraduate Diploma in Housing with Distinction in 2000 and completed an MSc in Housing in 2001. Her MSc dissertation on the Impact of the Extension of the Right to Buy was submitted as evidence to the Scottish Government and contributed to its suspension in 2011 and withdrawal in 2016.

Tracey has worked in a several housing associations across Scotland, both community based and national specialist housing providers. She was also a Policy Officer with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA). Prior to joining OHAL in April 2024, Tracey led the Housing Support team at Almond Housing Association where she co-developed Housing First for Youth with Rock Trust. The success of this project led to its adoption by several Local Authorities across Scotland and the model has also been replicated internationally.

In her spare time, Tracey enjoys spending time with her two retired Greyhounds and immersing herself in a good book.



Congratulations to Housing Officer, Donna Wilson, who has successfully completed her Chartered Institute of Housing Level 4 Certificate in Housing.

Well done for all the hard work, Donna! 🌟

Staff Noticeboard

Introducing the newest member of our Trades Team, Stephen Haddow, our Estates & Trades Team Assistant.

Stephen joined the team at the end of March. He previously spent most of his time in landscaping though he did start his career as a joinery apprentice, and this in part has led him to join the Association for a more construction type job.

Stephen's role includes minor house repairs, gutter cleaning, filter changing, landscape maintenance, etc. You will often see him out and about the county visiting various estates.



Q1 What is the best thing about working for the Association?

The various different jobs you get and the people you meet, no day is the same!

Q2 How would you describe your job being an Estates & Trades Team Assistant?

I would describe my job as always different, fencing one day to changing filters the next. It is a good job, and you meet people from all walks of life and get to know them over time. You build good relationships with folk and my team of Roy, Donald & Dennis are all spot on too.

Q3 What differences have you found working in the social sector with tenants compared to working in the private sector?

The social sector is different to the private sector as there is a lot more you need to look out for, such as vulnerable tenants where you need to take more time and consideration to build a relationship. Whereas in the private sector you don't really speak with the client, you just do your job and leave.

Q4 How have you found living and working in Orkney?

Living in Orkney is a good but different way of life. Up here it was hard to start with, as my wife and son were still down the road, until my wife started work at the hospital. Getting used to the weather took a bit of time, but we are getting there!

Q5 What is your favorite thing to do outside work?

I like to go fishing, watching football and doing dad stuff with my son, he keeps me on my toes!

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

We were delighted to welcome a new member to our Management Committee in November. Suzanne Lawrence has a background in healthcare and brings a range of skills and knowledge to Committee.

Suzanne Lawrence

I was co-opted onto the Management Committee in 2023.

I have lived in Orkney for 23 years. My background is in healthcare. I was a Non-Executive Director of NHS Orkney and a member of the Orkney Health & Care Board until retiring in 2016.

I have always been very impressed by the work of OHAL and Care & Repair and the work they do towards the wellbeing of our community and the sustainability of the islands into the future.

My interests include photography, music and ancient history.



Are you interested in supporting those within our community and the provision of affordable housing?

You could make a valuable contribution to our Management Committee, working with other like-minded individuals, setting strategy and making important business decisions.

Our Committee Members give their time for free and attend 6-10 meetings per year plus some training and networking events, both within and out with Orkney. All reasonable expenses are reimbursed.

Would you like to find out more about the work of our Committee, and possibly become a Committee Member yourself?

For further information or an informal chat please contact Mhairi Hughes:
mhairi.hughes@ohal.org.uk, 07739326922

Ensuring No Unacceptable Behaviour Towards Staff

We are here to keep our customers safe and to provide the best service we can, but we're also responsible for protecting our staff from abuse, hostility and violence.

We take a zero-tolerance approach to verbal or physical assault of any nature towards our staff.

The Scottish Housing Regulator requires housing associations and councils to have policies which help to manage customers who complain in an unacceptable way. Offensive behaviour can cause distress and worry. It can frighten staff and have a serious impact on their mental wellbeing, which can then impact on your service. Therefore, we do not expect our staff to feel they must deal with customers who show threatening, abusive, or violent behaviour.

Making a Complaint

We will always acknowledge or investigate something a customer feels is wrong. However, that doesn't mean our staff, contractors or others working on our behalf, will tolerate unacceptable behaviour from a customer, no matter how much the customer thinks it is justified.

Our [Complaints Procedure](#) explains how to complain, what the process is and what is, or isn't, a complaint and our [Anti-social Behaviour Policy](#) explains what we do to help a customer in need. However, these policies don't explain what we do when it is a customer behaving unacceptably towards our staff.

What we might do

If we, or our contractors, are faced with unacceptable behaviour from a customer, (whether that's aggression, violence or threats of violence, or any form of discrimination or abuse), we might end the call, visit or appointment. If we know a customer might behave in a certain way, we might make sure our staff do not visit them alone. These actions also work to protect the customer, particularly if that behaviour is made worse because of physical or mental conditions.

Every customer has a right to be heard, understood and respected, and we will make sure that happens in a fair and consistent way. We understand that distressing or frustrating circumstances can cause someone to act out of character, but that behaviour can become unacceptable if it continues or becomes so demanding that it affects our ability to provide our services to other customers.

What is unacceptable behaviour against our staff, and those working on our behalf?



These are the kind of behaviours we consider to be unreasonable or unacceptable:

- Unreasonable demands (such as asking for large amounts of information, for us to respond in a short time or for refusing to speak to a certain person or insisting on speaking with another person)
- Unreasonable persistence (refusing to accept our information, continuing to raise the same subject without any new evidence, adding to or changing the subject matter of the complaint)
- Verbal abuse, aggression, violence (this is not just limited to actual physical or verbal abuse but can include derogatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory allegations, and threats of violence)
- Excessive letters, calls, emails or contact via social media (this could include how often contact is made and the volume of correspondence received as well as the frequency and length of telephone calls).

This behaviour need not be just from a customer, it also includes the family, friends or visitors of that customer when dealing with us or living in or visiting our homes. As our customer, you are responsible for their behaviour.

When customers act in this way, we will try to reach an arrangement which stops us taking more formal action. This is to allow the person time to change their behaviour. We may suggest mediation to try and improve the situation. If this fails, we may issue a warning before taking any formal steps. We will explain why the behaviour is unreasonable and what will happen next if it continues.

What action can OHAL take?

We could:

- Provide a single point of contact.
- Limit contact to a single form, letter, or email, for example.
- Limit contact to certain times or a limited number of times.
- Not investigate further unless new evidence or information is provided.
- Limit how many issues we can investigate, if there are a number.



In certain cases, such as if there is physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards an employee, we will take further action, which may involve the police or other legal action. Unacceptable behaviour can also put the tenancy at risk, as it is a breach of the tenancy agreement, customers have signed.

Our priority will always be to protect our customers and staff. If the focus of a customer's complaint is not about service but the staff member, then these will also be investigated using our appropriate policies.

We expect our staff to offer you service with respect at all times. Please respect those that deliver our services to you.

Smoke Alarms

The manufacturer recommends the following:

1. Regularly check to see that the green mains power light is on.
2. Press the test button (5-10 seconds or until the alarm sounds) weekly to check all alarms in the system.
3. Regularly check that the red light under the test button or on the cover flashes approximately every 40 seconds.
4. Clean the cover of the alarm regularly using a barely damp, lint free cloth.
5. On a monthly basis (at least) check the alarm for signs of contamination from dust, cobwebs or insects. Use a vacuum cleaner around the cover of the alarm to remove contamination.
6. Check (at least annually) that the alarm will operate on back up battery power only by switching off the mains supply and pressing the test button.

If you have any concerns or require assistance with your detectors, please contact us and we will arrange for someone to give you advice.

Help with Hoarding

We probably all know someone who doesn't like to throw anything away – but when does hoarding become an issue and what are the real reasons behind it?

Hoarding can be a coping mechanism used to deal with a trauma or difficult period in someone's life and it can be a very difficult condition to break. Local research shows that hoarding in Orkney is rising but support and advice is available through the Adult Social Work Services on 01856 873535. Orkney Island Council have recently launched their Hoarding Protocol.

Hoarding – keeping possessions and not getting rid of them – affects around 1.2million people in the UK. Hoarders tend to acquire items that appear to have little or no value but are unable to discard them. That can include books, newspapers, clothes and even pets. This can lead to problems.

Clutter in the home is a fire risk, with items blocking exits and an excess of flammable material lying around. The state of the home often means hoarders won't allow access for safety inspections or repairs, which also has a serious impact on safety.

We will ensure that tenants with hoarding difficulties are supported in a co-ordinated way to tackle the issue. At the heart of the approach is a multi-agency response, with housing teams working closely with social care, health and voluntary sector partners to ensure that tenants are supported with a range of actions that will help them regain control of their homes and their lives. If you think that you need assistance in this area, please contact your Housing Officer.



New Build and Planned Improvement Programme

As everyone is aware, the fluctuation in prices over the last few years has caused pressures on all household budgets. This is no different for OHAL. The unprecedented increase in prices across the construction and trades sector has led to real challenges on the New Build and Planned Improvement programmes.

Proceeding with all previously scheduled works in this environment is not sustainable, which means we need to make difficult choices regarding what works we take forward and those that are delayed. We understand it can be frustrating waiting for improvement works you understood were on the way, which is why we really appreciate your continued patience while we navigate this challenging period.

The increase in building costs also impacts on our programme to deliver new homes. While we have received valuable support from the Scottish Government's More Homes Division, progressing new sites is proving more challenging. However, if we were to stop building it would not help to keep rents affordable for existing customers. As such, we are planning to keep building properties for Orkney's communities where possible.

Net Zero Funding

The Scottish government's grant scheme entitled the Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund (SHNZHF), is available to support heat and energy efficiency projects in the social housing sector. A total of £200 million has been made available until 2026 to support social landlords to install zero direct emissions heating systems and energy efficiency measures across their existing stock only.

This funding avenue has allowed us to complete various non-planned fabric first works in a handful of small schemes set out below, including some of the remotest parts of our community. This has helped reduce the heating demand in those properties and increase the EPC rating.

- Glaitness Park, Kirkwall** – Windows, loft insulation top ups and cylinder jackets;
- Greenfield, Toab** – Windows and loft insulation top ups;
- Howanbrek, Westray** – Windows and loft insulation top ups;
- Johnston's Road, Rousay** – External doors and Velux roof lights;
- Parkhead House, Finstown** – Windows, loft insulation top ups and cylinder jackets;
- Marengo Road, St Margaret's Hope** – Windows, loft insulation and cylinder jackets; and
- Easdale Close, Kirkwall** – Windows, doors, loft insulation and cylinder jackets.

We were disappointingly unsuccessful in securing additional funding at February's checkpoint. This has, unfortunately, put quite a dent in the quantity of works we were hoping to carry out, but we will still be proceeding with a significant level of works as part of our planned maintenance programme. Moving forward, we will continue to monitor any available funding resource and assess our current housing stock to identify properties that may benefit from these schemes.



Programmed Renewals & Replacements for 2024/25

Below are the properties which have been identified as due for planned maintenance and property improvements this year. We will be consulting with the individual tenants in due course.

Please note that all listings may be subject to change and refer to RENTED properties only

Replacement / renewal works



Window Replacement
Seafield, Finstown
Skail Road, Kirkwall

External Doors
Seafield, Finstown



Velux
French Road, Lyness

Replacement Heating
Hillside Park, Stromness
Parkhead Gardens, Finstown



Fascias & Rainwater Goods
Skail Road, Kirkwall

Loft Insulation
Hillside Park, Stromness
Parkhead Gardens, Finstown

Development Programme for 2024/25

Walliwall Phase 8: Expected completion Sept 2024

6 x 1 bedroom – General Needs Standard – NSSE sale
2 x 4 bedroom – General Needs Standard – NSSE sale

Walliwall Phase 9: Expected completion April 2024

3 x 1 bedroom - General Needs Standard - Rented
4 x 2 bedroom - General Needs Standard - Rented
2 x 4 bedroom - General Needs Standard - Rented



The Scottish Secure Tenants (Right to Repair) Regulations 2002

Under the terms of the above legislation the Association is required to let its tenants know of the provisions of these Regulations - this leaflet can be found in the downloads section of our website - https://www.ohal.org.uk/docs/id16-right_to_repair.pdf - or a copy can be obtained from the office.

REPAIRS TIMESCALES

Type of Response	Timescale	Description
Emergency	0-6 hours	Works to make safe where there is either a risk to the tenant or members of the public or to make a property secure or prevent further damage.
Urgent	1-3 working days	Works not classified as emergencies but which would cause a high degree of inconvenience or may cause further damage if not attended to within 3 days. Some repairs are covered by the 'Right to Repair Scheme'. For further information please refer to your Tenants Handbook.
Routine	20 working days	All other repairs which are not Emergency or Urgent.



Voids

Tenants moving on is a natural occurrence, and we usually have around 70 houses (voids) to relet every year. Normally, our Housing Officers will visit within the termination period to check any alterations, discuss final rent payments and look over the properties for any repairs that are required.

We would like to think these houses would be returned to us in the same condition they were let in. To achieve this, we have a relet standard, updated earlier this year, which is different in two main aspects from our previous document. We now allow flooring to be left, so long as it is in reasonable condition and does not cause any issues such as laminate flooring creating noise transmission between flats. We also now allow the outgoing tenant's decoration to remain if it is well cut in and in good order, though very strong colours would be subject to discussion.

Dennis, our lead voids tradesman, who has been 16 years with the Association, spoke about the change with these properties over his time. He said that voids do take more time to repair now, with the fixtures and fittings in the older Association stock needing work more often, and he has noted more unnecessary damage and neglect. Saying that, with almost 1500 people currently on the Orkney Common Housing Register there is no shortage of new tenants, but we want to hand over the properties in good condition, so that people enjoy their new home.

Allocation is always an issue with so many people looking for homes, but we do have a focus on housing local folk.

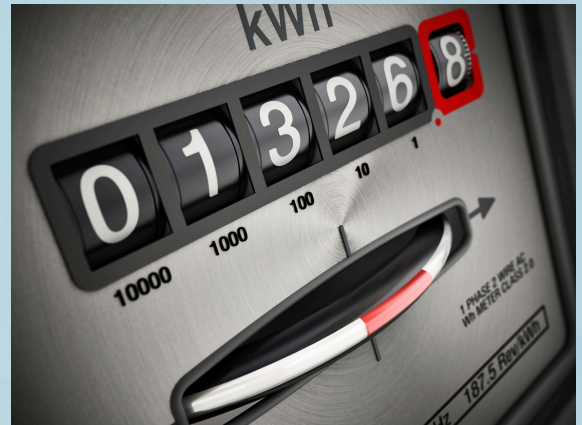
ENERGY ISSUES

Summer may be a quieter time for energy-related issues, with outdoor temperatures hopefully high enough to allow heating to be turned off or down for a few months.

However, if you are having issues with your electricity bills or your meter, or are struggling to persuade your energy provider to return any extra credit you have built up with them, this may be the time to sort it ahead of winter.

The Association has in the past year been able to help tenants reclaim four-figure sums of their own money that they were struggling to get energy companies to pay them back. The money is better in your account than making interest for energy companies.

Latest estimates are that energy companies are holding onto around £3 billion of credit from around 16 million households across the UK, averaging £210 per household, but with some households having much higher credit.



This can be caused by overestimated direct debits, or the fact that households have been rationing their electricity usage.

Citizens Advice suggest that before claiming back any money, you should think about:

- whether you're likely to have higher energy bills in the months ahead
- if it will be difficult to pay your bills without keeping the credit on your account

If the amount you're owed is more than the amount you pay as a monthly direct debit, you might want to claim back the difference.

Contact your supplier and tell them how much credit you'd like them to refund you. Their contact details should be on your bill or online account. You'll need to give them an up-to-date meter reading.

According to Citizens Advice, your supplier might not give you a refund if they have a good reason. For example, they might not give you a refund if you only have a small amount of credit on your account during summer. This is because you're likely to need the credit for your higher bills during autumn and winter. If your supplier says they won't give you a refund, they must explain their decision.

If you are having any difficulties with your energy company, our Energy Officer, Robert Leslie, may be able to help. He can be contacted on 875253 ext 404, or by email at robert.leslie@ohal.org.uk.

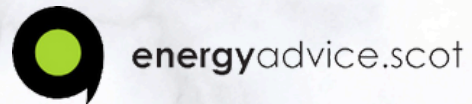
Other Sources of Help and Information

Energy Domestic Consumer Advice

A specific guide for domestic customers has been published, although please check the main web page to ensure the latest version is being accessed.

[Visit Website](#)

Energy Advice Scotland



Free, practical advice and information on energy-related matters for the citizens of Scotland can be found on their website.

[Visit Website](#)

Energy Saving Trust

The Energy Saving Trust has produced some quick tips on how to save money on your energy bills.

[Visit Website](#)

**energy
saving
trust**

Scottish Welfare Fund

The Scottish Welfare Fund is aimed at providing assistance for people on benefits, or considered to be on a low income. The Council administers the fund on behalf of the Scottish Government and provides two types of grant:

Crisis Grants - Providing a safety net in the event of a disaster or emergency.

Community Care Grants - Providing help to leave care and live on your own, or to continue living in your own home.

[Visit Website](#)



Scottish Social Security

Responsible for managing Scottish benefits - click link below.

[Visit Website](#)



Orkney Charitable Trust



The Orkney Charitable Trust provide financial help for people under 25 living in Orkney during times of ill health, disability, hardship or disadvantage. Financial support is available to these people and their families in the form of grants, loans or other support. Visit their website to find out more about what they're doing.

[Visit Website](#)

Free School Meals and Clothing Allowances

Information on how to apply for free school meals and clothing allowances can be found on OIC's website:

[Visit Website](#)



Orkney Money Matters Working Together To Get The Right Support For You

Orkney Money Matters is a partnership project which aims to reduce financial insecurity within Orkney through advice and a cash-first approach to support.

The close working between front-line support organisations, including Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau, THAW Orkney and Orkney Blide Trust, and the creation of a referral pathway from other local agencies, including Orkney Housing Association, ensures that there is 'no wrong door' approach to seeking support. This approach allows people to access support in a way that suits them and ensures that you don't feel that you need to retell your story over and over again.

If you would like someone to support you to attend appointments sort paperwork, or work out the next steps, there is a Money Matters and Mental Health Links Worker within Orkney Blide Trust who is available to guide you each step of the way.



If you don't know where to start and need support to navigate the available services, or if you are in a position where you can't afford essentials such as food or heating, please get in touch with the Orkney Money Matters Links Worker in Orkney Citizens Advice on : 01856 875621 or email: LINKS@orkneycab.casonline.org.uk