

Housing News

The newsletter of Orkney Islands Council Housing Services.

Issue 76, Autumn 2021.



Carness Housing Development Welcomes New Tenants

Our latest social housing development was officially handed over from the building contractor on 22 November. The £4.7m, 32-property development at Carness Road in Kirkwall, is a mixture of flats and bungalows, with five of the properties allocated towards providing supported accommodation for households with particular needs.

All properties have been built to meet the latest, challenging energy efficiency standards, with the building work carried out by local firm R Clouston Ltd.



New footpaths have been added to provide connectivity to the existing paths on Carness Road, Weyland Bay and Islands View Road, as well as new streetlighting.

A second phase of the project, due to get underway in financial year 2022/23, will deliver a further eight 2-bedroom properties and six 3-bedroom properties.

Why Morgan is pleased about her new home in Kirkwall

“I’m so delighted to get my new flat in Kirkwall because I’ll be able to walk anywhere I want to go in Kirkwall instead of having to get Granny or Grandad to take me in the car from Rendall. I’m looking forward to being more independent but there will be carers there if I need some help or panic about anything. I like cooking for myself and I’m going to learn more recipes. I’ll have all my own things in my flat.”

Wendy and Colin have been working towards Morgan moving on and being able to look after herself. “This new development with the carers on site and contactable by Morgan is great. We’ll know she is safe while gaining more independence. As grandparents and her carers we need her to be safe so that we also can do some of the things we wanted to do in our retirement. It’ll take some of the stress of looking after Morgan away from us as we get older and not so able to keep up with her.”

Annual Assurance Statement

The Council is required to produce an Annual Assurance Statement covering Housing Services' performance. It must be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator by October each year. This information must also be made available to tenants and service users on the Council's website. Our Annual Assurance Statement is available from:

<https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/H/annual-assurance-statement-housing-services.htm>

Housing Services undertakes a broad range of performance-related activities and these include:

- Reports to our Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on performance across various functions.
- A range of statistical returns are complete for bodies such as the Scottish Government, Scottish Housing Regulator and Scotland's Housing Network.
- Housing Services is subject to various inspections.
- An Annual Return against the Scottish Social Housing Charter must be completed for the Scottish Housing Regulator each May.
- An Annual Report must be published for our tenants and will be available online.
- A customer satisfaction survey must be undertaken at least every three years and this is available from <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/C/elh-committee-9-september-2020.htm> (Item 11).
- Housing Services operates various internal processes intended to scrutinise performance.

We are required to evidence that our Education, Leisure and Housing Committee is assured that our performance processes are appropriate. Our committee report is available from <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/C/elh-committee-8-september-2021.htm> (Item 9).

Housing Services Annual Report

Housing Services Annual Report 2020-2021 has been published and details a strong performance across a number of areas.

The Annual Report looks at how the service is performing in comparison to last year and against similar local authorities – Shetland and Highland - and the Scottish average using national performance measures.

The report details areas in which the service in Orkney is performing well as:

- The properties are in good condition.
- A low number of repairs per property.
- The housing team's response to homelessness and anti-social behaviour are good.
- Improved satisfaction levels among tenants across the areas of performance.

The report is available in a range of formats and languages on request. It is also available on the Council website at: <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/H/housing-services-annual-reports.htm>

Right to Repair Scheme

The Right to Repair scheme applies to all Scottish secure tenants. We have a duty to notify all Scottish secure tenants of this right on an annual basis and we will do so via “Housing News” and the Council website.

We would like to know if you are satisfied with the repairs service that you receive and therefore we send repairs satisfaction surveys to tenants who have requested a repair. Please take the time to complete these surveys as the information you provide will help us to ensure that we deliver a good service and allow us to identify any areas that need improvement.

You are entitled to have a “qualifying repair” carried out to your house. Qualifying repairs are defined in law and examples include a blocked sink, bath or basin or a loss of internal electric supply. You will be notified immediately whenever you report a qualifying repair.

The majority of qualifying repairs must be completed within 1 working day. The maximum time allowed to carry out a qualifying repair begins on the first working day after:

- The date we are told of the repair.
- Where we inspect the house, the actual date of the inspection.

This maximum time will be suspended if there are exceptional circumstances. This may include extremely bad weather conditions or the unavailability of parts. We would try to make temporary arrangements in these circumstances and we will let you know if the maximum time has been suspended.

If you refuse access to the contractor then the timescales will not apply. We will provide you with a reasonable opportunity to provide access.

If the contractor has not started the work within the required time you have the right to instruct another listed contractor to carry out the qualifying repair. Full details on how to contact approved contractors will be provided when you report the repair.

If you do instruct another contractor they have to advise us immediately of that instruction and we will tell them when to complete the repair.

Further information on the timescales for qualifying repairs is available in our Qualifying Repairs Leaflet. Copies are available from the Council Offices, in the Tenants Handbook and online at <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/H/repairs-and-improvements.htm>

Forthcoming Consultations

We will soon be consulting on changes to the Tenant Participation Strategy and revised versions of the Profile of Homelessness and Homelessness Strategy. Your views on these would be really helpful.

We will also be consulting with all of our tenants regarding the proposed rent increase for the coming financial year. Your opinion is important in making the final decision and we will write to you about this soon.

Coffee Mornings

When things had started to look like they were beginning to settle down again after the pandemic, we worked hard to try and re-introduce some of the social activities that our Sheltered Housing tenants enjoyed, before COVID-19 put a stop to everyone's social calendar.

We continue to try and ensure the health and wellbeing of our Sheltered Housing tenants during the most challenging of times. This has resulted in many of the tenants being very isolated as our Sheltered Housing Wardens have been unable to carry out their usual face to face house calls to some of our more vulnerable tenants. However, the wardens have been required to phone tenants on a daily basis to do the 'check ins'. Whilst this has been very difficult for many of our tenants, it has meant that they have been able to continue to have a natter from a friendly voice and keep our wardens up to date with how things have been going.

Over the summer months, our tenants at Rae's Close took the initiative to re-start the coffee mornings on a Tuesday. The event was held outside in the courtyard at Rae's Close and benches, tables and chairs were set up for tenants to make use of. They had been very lucky with the weather there on a Tuesday, and you could guarantee that if there was any sun to be had in Orkney on a Tuesday, then you should head over to Rae's Close, as it was always there. I guess the saying does go "the sun shines on the righteous"!

When October and November were approaching, the coffee mornings moved to the former indoor venues of the community rooms at both Rae's Close and Lambaness Sheltered Housing sites.



As we were still very aware of the concerns regarding transmission of COVID-19 amongst some of our more vulnerable tenants, the coffee mornings were being held over 2 days and there is a rota of attendees. Each of the community rooms allows four tenants to attend and the warden, in line with the 1 metre distancing recommendations. We were hoping that this would have been relaxed further to allow more people to come together and socialise. However, sadly, this was not to be the case. Towards the end of October and beginning of November, COVID-19 cases in Orkney had escalated dramatically and

so again, we have been forced to suspend the coffee mornings. A big disappointment to our tenants and wardens, who had all enjoyed a short return to some sort of 'normality'.

With Christmas fast approaching, it would be good if our tenants might be able to come together in a bigger group to enjoy the festivities, as they have done in former years.

We're continuing to actively promote handwashing and hand hygiene for staff, and we've added extra hand sanitising points around the community rooms for everyone to use. We're asking anyone who has any symptoms of COVID-19 to self-isolate and request an NHS test, and encouraging everyone to support the NHS Test and Trace initiative if they're contacted. We're always rigorous about cleaning but we've increased deep cleaning and sanitisation of all areas.

We'll continue to take government guidance and to change our procedures and approaches accordingly. We're in regular communication with all staff, sharing up-to-date advice, changes and clarifications to government advice, and information about the decisions we are making as a local authority. Let's hope we can resume social activities again soon.

A Challenging Time

We recognise that there has been a lot of information in the media recently around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs and many people facing financial difficulties. As a result, we have included a range of articles in this newsletter from partner agencies that we work closely with. This is intended to provide advice and guidance around areas such as managing rent arrears, getting help with financial difficulties and some tips to help you heat your home and reduce condensation. We hope you find this helpful.

Rent Arrears – what should I do?

We continue to live in challenging times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has impacted on the employment and financial situation of many people over the 18 months.

So, what should you do if you are experiencing financial difficulties and are unable to meet your rent payments? The most important thing to do is speak to your Housing Officer and make them aware of the situation. Our Housing Officers are mainly working from home but are still contactable via the Housing Service on 873535 where we can arrange for your Housing Officer to call you back.

The purpose of this call would be to discuss your financial position and give you advice on how best to resolve your situation. If you are in arrears with your rent, a special arrangement can be made to help you to repay your arrears. Any repayment plan must be reasonable, and you must pay your current rent plus an amount towards the arrears. This would be based on your financial situation.

It is important to note that rent payments are considered a priority debt and failure to pay this type of debt could lead to serious consequences, such as losing your home, if you don't do anything about them.

It may be that your Housing Officer feels that a referral to another agency such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and/or THAW Orkney would help you. These agencies provide services such as support, debt advice and help with income maximisation.

Finally, if you have an arrangement to repay your rent arrears, it is important that you continue to meet these payments to prevent legal action being taken against you.

Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Under-occupancy and Hardship payments

Under-occupancy payments

If your entitlement to Housing Benefit, or Universal Credit, has been reduced because you have been assessed as under-occupying your property, you may be able to ask for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

If you have more bedrooms than your household need you will be considered as under-occupying the property. If you are of working age, the amount of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing costs that you receive may be reduced by:

- 14% if you under-occupy the property by one bedroom.
- 25% if you under-occupy your property by two bedrooms or more.

These reductions in benefit are also often referred to as "spare room subsidy" or "the bedroom tax".

Hardship payments

If you are finding it difficult to keep up with rent payments due to your financial situation then you may be entitled to Discretionary Housing Payment. For more information on whether you are eligible for hardship payments contact the Benefits Section.

For all enquiries in respect of Discretionary Housing Payment you should contact the Benefits Section, Orkney Islands Council, Council Offices, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1NY. Telephone: 01856873535 extension 2116 or direct dial 01856886312, email: benefits@orkney.gov.uk or visit the Council's website www.orkney.gov.uk

Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau

At Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau, we have always provided help to Orkney residents who are struggling with finances. This has been even more important since March 2020 when so many people were unable to continue working. We are aware that a growing number of local people are struggling to pay their bills and their rent. That is why we want to tell you about the help that is available to you – all free, independent and confidential.



Income Maximisation

We offer free, income maximisation checks to everyone in Orkney. This involves asking you for information about your household income and circumstances and then checking if you are entitled to any benefits. It doesn't take long to do and all the information is kept confidential. If we find any benefits you can claim we can also help you with the claims process. We know that many benefits go unclaimed because people do not know what they are entitled to but by contacting us you can make sure you are receiving the correct money.

Money Advice

If you are struggling with debts, we can help with that. Our trained Money Advisers are available to discuss your income and outgoings and find a way to help you deal with your debts. We will never tell you what to do – our service is about helping you to identify the options available to you. For example, you may want to set up a repayment plan or you may feel that writing your debts off by going bankrupt is the best option for you. Your adviser will listen to what you want to happen and then help you to work out the best way to achieve that. We can also help to put your preferred option in place.

We know that it can seem easier to ignore the reminder letters as sometimes the amount owed seems impossible to deal with but we have never yet come across a situation we couldn't help with. For a chat in confidence, all you have to do is contact us.

How to get in touch

Due to COVID-19 our bureau is running a reduced service. However, all of our advisers are working and able to help. We can offer appointments by telephone or by video call. To arrange an appointment, you can call us on 01856875266 between 10:00 and 14:00 Monday to Friday. Alternatively, you can email us at bureau@OrkneyCAB.casonline.org.uk or leave a telephone message outwith these hours and someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

We can also help with a range of other problems so if anything is troubling you and you are not sure what your rights are, please do get in touch with us.

Community Learning and Development

Employability Support Team



The Community Learning and Development Employability Support Team can offer personalised one-to-one and group work support to people who are looking to increase their confidence, knowledge and skills in various areas and progress towards learning, training or employment.

What we can offer

This will be down to the individuals and groups we work with, and what people tell us they would like support with. It could include:

- Gaining confidence with new situations.
- Support with health and wellbeing.

- Getting involved with the local community.
- Information on benefits and support to apply.
- Information about learning opportunities available.
- Support to access and gain qualifications.
- Support to look at work tasters/volunteering.
- Support to access career information.
- Support to look for and apply for jobs.
- In work support.

We will work with people to establish their goals and aspirations' and offer continued support to help them achieve these. You will have access to regular contact and support in a way that suits you.

If you would like more information on the support we can offer, please contact employability.support@orkney.gov.uk or call us on 01856873535 extension 2413.

THAW Orkney could help with your heating costs this winter



For folk who are experiencing difficulties affording to heat their homes this winter, THAW Orkney may be able to help in some way.

With energy prices increasing, and energy companies disappearing, switching has virtually disappeared as an option to make savings. The general advice in what is a fast-changing energy market, is that electricity customers should stick with their present suppliers, given that any available switching options are only likely to result in higher prices. Contacting energy suppliers to sort any issues can be difficult, and THAW Orkney is able to provide a third-party service to help clients with this.

In terms of financial support, THAW Orkney is a referral partner of the Fuel Bank Foundation, meaning we are able to access funds for emergency electricity vouchers for folk on prepayment meters, and from the Fuel Bank Foundation's heat fund to pay for oil or solid fuel.

We are also a referral partner for the Scottish Government's Home Heating Support Fund, from which we were able to secure almost £25,000 for clients last March, helping pay off debt and giving them some breathing space on their energy bills. This is due to open again in December, so we will hopefully be able to help folk secure funding over the winter.

With fewer choices for switching to cheaper tariffs, keeping an eye on electricity usage may be more important than ever. THAW Orkney is partnering with ReFLEX Orkney and may be able to fit an energy monitor in homes to help raise awareness of what is using the most electricity, and whether savings could be made.

THAW Orkney will also have Cosy Home Packs available again this winter, which contain useful items to help folk keep warm and save energy.

THAW Orkney can be contacted on 01856 878388, by email at info@thaworkney.co.uk or via the contact form on our website at www.thaworkney.co.uk.

RSORKNEY

counselling, mediation & family support

Help for those affected by alcohol/drugs

Many of us associate alcohol and drugs with socialising. They can become a major part of how we connect and interact with those around us. But when our own or a loved one's drinking or drug use starts to negatively affect our relationships, it can also impact on our lives and wellbeing.

At Relationships Scotland Orkney, we offer free, non-judgmental and confidential services supporting those who are concerned about their own or someone else's drug/alcohol use.

Our support is flexible and tailored to each person, we offer:

- Emotional support.
- Information and advice.
- Practical skills and harm reduction techniques.
- Goal setting and effective coping strategies.
- A personal plan.
- Signposting to other services and practical support to engage with them.



We also provide specialist alcohol/drugs counselling, helping people to explore underlying causes of their alcohol/drug use in a safe, non-judgmental space.

For families, friends and loved ones affected by someone else's drug/alcohol use, we have workers trained in Community Reinforcement and Family Therapy (CRAFT). The idea is to help friends and family members change the ways they interact with someone they love who is drinking or using drugs to harmful levels. CRAFT is a non-confrontational approach, which focuses on learning skills to improve your own wellbeing and your relationship with your loved one. CRAFT can be one-on-one with a support worker or in a group with other family members.

CRAFT can help people to:

- Learn or re-learn how to take care of themselves.
- Identify triggers for and consequences of their loved one's substance use.
- Help them to communicate with their loved one.
- Help their loved one to access effective addiction treatment if that is what they want.
- If violence or the potential for violence exists, help family members identify triggers for violence and develop a safely plan.

We also offer specific support for young people. The Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach (ACRA) involves working with young people to develop their problem-solving skills to cope with day-to-day stresses, to improve their communication skills, and to help them actively participate in positive social and recreational activities.



Relationships Scotland Orkney puts positive relationships at the heart of recovery.

If you would like to know more about our services please contact us by phone on 01856877750 or by email at enquiries@rsorkney.org.uk

Relationships Scotland Orkney is open for pre-booked appointments 9am-5pm Monday to Friday. Appointments are available face-to-face, by phone or via Zoom (online video platform) outside of these times.

If you're experiencing feelings of distress and need to speak to someone urgently, please call the Samaritans free 24-hour helpline on 116123.

A member of Relationships Scotland



Condensation, Damp and Mould

No one wants to live in a damp home. Damp can cause mould on walls and furniture and cause wooden window frames to rot. It can also be unhealthy.

1. Building Fabric Checks

'Penetrating damp' is caused by moisture entering the house through leaking pipes, a damaged roof, blocked gutters, gaps around window frames and cracked or defective rendering and brickwork. All these problems can be remedied so need to be reported in the normal way.

Newly built homes can sometimes feel damp because the water used during construction is still drying out, this will disappear after a short period if your home is appropriately heated and ventilated.

2. Let the damp air out and the fresh air in

Extractor fans are a good way to get rid of moist air and steam so that less condensation forms. Some very modern homes have extractor fans which run continuously, fitted in the ceilings of bathrooms, shower rooms and toilets. They use little electricity and don't add much to your energy bill. If your home doesn't already have extractor fans, then it is worth asking for them to be fitted in the bathroom and kitchen. Fans that run on a timer, humidistat or pull-cord (for example, when you turn on the bathroom light) typically have a rating of 8-30W, so would cost about 10p if they were on all day. These can be fitted where there is evidence of moisture issues in the property.

Stop moist air getting into the rest of your home. When cooking or bathing, keep the kitchen or bathroom door shut and open the window so that the steam can escape outside. Meanwhile, let fresh air circulate to avoid mould forming where the air is not moving. Make sure there is a gap between your furniture and the walls and give wardrobes and cupboards a good airing regularly.

3. Insulate and draught-proof your home

Warm homes suffer less from condensation, so you may need to check it is well insulated. If you can safely do so, checking the loft has insulation to a depth of roughly 270mm (about 11 inches), make sure it is not compressed by stored goods or been misplaced by workmen etc. and your cavity walls (if your house has them). Your windows and external doors should be draught-free when fully closed. Condensation mould is unsightly and can cause health problems so is well worth acting early to avoid issues later on.

4. Heat your home a little more

While you don't want to waste money heating rooms you don't use, very cold rooms are more likely to get damp and mould. Generally, set the heating thermostatic radiator valve to 1, or the storage heater to low in unused rooms so the radiator gives out a little bit of heat whenever the heating is on. If you don't have central heating, consider using a room heater with a timer and temperature control. Remember, unused rooms will need a good airing from time to time. If you have wall mounted heaters as part of the storage heating system, it is likely that they are connected to the cheap rate tariff so will be much cheaper and safer than using a portable heater.

More tips

You can catch condensation dripping from windows with condensation channels and sponge strips (available from DIY shops). If you wipe down windows and sills in the morning this will also help but be sure to wring out the cloth rather than dry it on a radiator. In extreme circumstances you may need to invest in a dehumidifier. These can help a lot but cost anything from £40 to over £200 and larger, old fashioned ones can be quite costly to run if left on high constantly, so make sure and set them on high for a short time, then set them down to low to keep on top of the condensation and make them more affordable to run. Remember, dry air is cheaper to heat than moist air so costs may be higher until things dry out properly.

And finally, if you already have mould on your walls and ceilings then you need to clean it off properly. An effective method is to start by cleaning off the mould with spray containing bleach. This will help remove the staining that persistent mould can leave behind. Leave to dry overnight and then spray the affected area with an anti-fungal wash and allow that to dry. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions and consider wearing a face mask when spraying if recommended. You could also treat the affected area with a mould resistant paint, available from most local hardware stores, if applied as per the instructions provided with the product, this is likely to reduce the chances of the mould returning for a considerable time.

A typical place for condensation mould is on an outside wall or behind furniture that is tight to the wall.

Some ideas on how to re-focus energy use at home:

- Give your clothes a day in the sun and give your tumble drier a break. Clothes dried in the fresh air feel great, and there are drying days in winter, too.
- Catch them young. Encourage your children to switch off electric toys, games machines and lights that they're not using. Make it a challenge and they'll soon get the hang of saving energy and help save the planet!
- Be a friend to your freezer. Defrost it regularly to help it run more efficiently, don't leave it open for longer than needed as it costs more to cool it down.
- Don't over-fill the kettle (but do make sure you cover the metal element at the base).
- Dodge the draught! Draw your curtains at dusk to keep the heat in.
- Turn your heating down by 1 degree. You'll hardly notice the change in temperature, but it'll make a big difference to your heating bill.
- Sleep tight. Make sure all the lights are turned off when you go to bed. If you want to light a child's room or a landing, use a low-wattage night light.
- Buy Smart. Consider using LED lamps when you need to replace lamps, these use a fraction of the energy the old traditional ones use, they have also become much better for lasting longer and costing less.
- Buying a new appliance? Check the energy label and buy A-rated or higher goods for the most efficient way forwards. Compare the annual running cost which should be listed with the appliance details, consider this cost as well as the cost to purchase.

New fire and smoke alarm standard applies from February 2022

Orkney Islands Council have been checking and if needed, upgrading any existing smoke alarms over the last 18 months to meet the new fire and smoke alarm standards by February 2022.

Once in force, every home in Scotland must have interlinked fire alarms. Interlinked means if one goes off, they all go off, so you will always hear an alarm wherever you are in your home.

What each home needs

By February 2022 every home must have:

- One smoke alarm in the living room or the room you use most.
- One smoke alarm in every hallway or landing.
- One heat alarm in the kitchen.

All smoke and heat alarms should be mounted on the ceiling and be interlinked.

If you have a carbon-fuelled appliance – like a boiler, fire, heater or flue – in any room, you must also have a carbon monoxide detector in that room, but this does not need to be linked to the fire alarms.

Orkney Islands Council have appointed E Fraser Electrical to carry out a review of what is fitted in your home, and then upgrade any smoke alarm systems where necessary.

If you receive a call or letter about this it is essential that we are able to do this, so please get back in touch to arrange a suitable time for the inspection and upgrade work to be done.

Chimney Sweeping

Tenants who have coal fires are reminded that it is your responsibility to sweep your chimney or to get someone to do it. We suggest that this is done twice a year to help prevent chimney fires and dangerous fume emissions as sweeping your chimney eliminates the build-up of soot or obstructions such as birds' nests and debris.

Keeping Pavements and Footpaths Clear

Just a gentle reminder for you to ensure that you regularly cut back branches from trees, plants and bushes from within your garden to ensure that pavements are not obstructed and that street signs remain visible to road users and pedestrians. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.



Office Contact Details

Housing Management Section:

Telephone: 01856873535.

Email: allocations@orkney.gov.uk

Homelessness and Advice Section:

Telephone: 01856873535.

Email: homeless@orkney.gov.uk

Homelessness Out of Hours Service:

If you require emergency housing outside regular office hours, please telephone 07921582962. An alternative is to contact Police Scotland on 101 and ask for Kirkwall Police Station.

Write to us:

Housing Services, Orkney Islands Council, School Place, Kirkwall, KW15 1NY.

Emergency Duty Worker Service:

This service can be accessed by telephoning the Balfour Hospital on 01856888000 and asking to speak to the Duty Social Worker.

Out of Hours Repair Service

The out of hours service is for emergencies only. Emergencies are defined in the tenants' handbook. The staff on standby will act in a supportive manner and help any caller.

Where the caller genuinely needs immediate technical guidance or an emergency repair to be carried out, this service is included within the tenants' rent and no further charge is due.

If the caller has called where there is obviously no emergency, then Housing Services will decide if there is a charge to be made. Recharges will reflect the cost of providing the callout service as well as an abortive charges by workmen.

If you need to contact the out of hours service in an emergency, call 01856873430.

If you lose your keys and call our out of hours repair officer, we will charge for this. You may wish to consider keeping a spare set with a friend or relative who you can trust.

Homelessness Service

If you require immediate emergency housing outwith office hours, please telephone the mobile number 07921582962. An alternative is to contact Police Scotland on 101 and ask for Kirkwall Police Station.

Please contact us if you would like a paper copy of this newsletter.