

Housing News

The newsletter of Orkney Islands Council's Housing Service.

Issue 87, Summer 2026.



What's in this issue? Page...

Featured articles	1
Information and updates (Housing Services).....	7
Tenant Participation.....	9
Benefits, support & other info.....	10
Office contact details.....	15

The 3G switch-off and how it might affect your smart meter p.2

Newsletter Preference Survey enclosed – tell us how you'd like to receive the Housing Newsletter p.3

Citizens Advice - Money Talk p.10

An end to the two-child benefit cap p.12

Find us on Facebook - www.facebook.com/OIChousingservices/

If you would prefer to receive future editions of this newsletter as an online digital copy, please email claire.pritchard@orkney.gov.uk, or complete and return the survey enclosed.

Featured Articles

Join the Armchair Panel!

The Housing Service seeks tenant feedback on different areas of the service. We use this feedback to make decisions and implement the necessary improvements to the service. Feedback is generally sought through consultation and engagement opportunities, where service users can take part in surveys, discussions, and events, etc.

The Armchair Panel gives tenants the opportunity to take part in consultation and engagement opportunities from the comfort of

Now Recruiting

Members for our Armchair Panel

We are looking for tenants to join our Armchair Panel and contribute towards the improvement of the Housing Service

their own home. Tenants can choose how often they take part, along with their preferred method of engagement. There are a range of engagement methods available to members of the Armchair Panel, these include:

- Telephone methods;
- surveys – either paper copies via post, or online versions and;
- online events.

What is expected of members?

We contact members any time a consultation or event is coming up, and they can choose whether they'd like to take part.

What are the benefits of joining?

Members of the Armchair Panel can:

- Learn more about Housing Services.
- Contribute towards improving the service and making a positive change.
- Shape policy and influence decisions.
- Learn new skills and add something to their CV.

How do I join?

You need to be a Council house tenant of Orkney Islands Council to join. No prior experience is needed – we welcome tenants of all ages.

If you would like to join, **please complete the question relating to the Armchair Panel (Q.3) in the Newsletter Preference Survey** that is enclosed with this Newsletter.

To request more information, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer, Claire Pritchard on:

Email: claire.pritchard@orkney.gov.uk or telephone 01856 873 535 (please note that Claire's working hours are Tuesday and Wednesday, 8:30am – 5pm, excluding public holidays).

The 3G switch-off & your smart meter

Mobile services in the UK currently operate four networks that deliver texts, calls and data services. These networks are known as 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G, with 2G and 3G being the older of these networks. Mobile network providers have started switching off their 3G networks to make way for the more advance and newer networks, 4G and 5G. If you have an older mobile phone or device that relies on 3G, then the 3G switch-off might affect this device. The 2G network is scheduled to end by 2033.

Networks will shut down on an area-by-area basis. Your mobile network provider will inform you if you are likely to be affected. You can check your device's settings to see whether it is 4G compatible, alternatively, you can contact the device's manufacturer. If

your device is not 4G compatible, you may need to replace it when the older networks shut down.

Devices that might be affected by the switch off:

- Certain alarm systems such as telecare alarms
- Mobile phones (older models are more likely to be affected)
- Tablet devices with network capability
- Smart meter systems

How might this affect my smart meter?

Communication hubs that are installed alongside your smart meter system rely on network connectivity – they will work using either 2G, 3G, 4G or 5G. Communication hubs that rely on older networks and are not 4G compatible will lose their ‘smart’ functionality once the network shuts down. When this happens, your smart meter will no longer submit readings automatically to your energy provider and you will need to submit manual readings instead. Your energy provider will contact you if your smart meter is likely to be affected and they will organise the installation of a 4G compatible communication hub. If your communication hub is 4G compatible, no further action will be necessary, and your smart meter will continue to work after the 3G network is switched off. If you have any questions relating to this, you should contact your energy provider directly.

Other sources:

You can visit the following website for more information:

www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/coverage-and-speeds/3g-switch-off

The Newsletter Preference Survey

The Housing Service would like to know how you’d prefer to receive your copy of the Housing Newsletter. Tenants of Orkney Islands Council can choose to receive the Newsletter as either:

- (1) A digital copy via email or;
- (2) a paper copy via post.

We recognise that individuals make choices based on their own circumstances and preferences. This is why we give our tenants the option to receive the Newsletter in a way that suits them. Reading the Housing Newsletter online is an easy and convenient way to access useful information, and it helps to reduce the amount of paper we use. However, other tenants may prefer to read a paper copy of Newsletter.

We are also asking our tenants if they would like to join the Armchair Panel. The Armchair Panel allows our tenants to take part in consultation opportunities from the comfort of their own home. Feedback gained from these consultations is then used towards making decisions relating to the service and implementing improvements. More information on the Armchair Panel can be found in the ‘Join the Armchair Panel’ article contained on page 1 of this Newsletter.

I have returned one of these surveys in the past, do I need to do it again?

If you have completed this survey before, your details or preferred method have not changed and you do not wish to join the Armchair Panel, you do not need to complete it again. You will continue to receive the Newsletter as you previously requested. To anyone who has **not** indicated their preference on a previous occasion, we will continue to send you the Housing Newsletter as a paper copy via post. Where we have no recorded preference, this will be the default method. You can change your preferred method at any time by contacting our Tenant Participation Officer on the details contained at the end of this article.

How do I return the survey?

You will find a copy of the Newsletter Preference Survey enclosed with this edition of the Newsletter, along with a freepost envelope. Please complete the survey and return it using the freepost envelope provided by **Friday 7 August 2026**.

If you need help with completing this survey, or you require a different format, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer, Claire Pritchard:

- Telephone Housing Services on 01856 873 535 - Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm (excluding public holidays) or;
- email: claire.pritchard@orkney.gov.uk

Changes to the energy price cap

1 April – 30 June 2026

Ofgem is the regulator for the energy sector in Britain. In February 2026, Ofgem announced a reduction in the energy price cap for the period covering 1 April to 30 June 2026. This means that the average energy bill for a typical household will fall by around 7%.

Despite the name, the energy price cap does not place a limit on the amount that you pay for your overall annual energy bill. The more energy you use, the larger your bill will be. Instead, the price cap applies to the cost of the unit rate and the daily standing charge. The daily standing charge is the amount that you pay for having your home connected to the energy grid. The cap generally applies to households on a standard variable tariff, it does not cover those on fixed price deals, certain smart use or green tariffs.

The actual rate you pay may vary and is dependent on what type of meter you have, where you live and how you pay your bill. The Energy price cap varies by region with Orkney coming under the region of 'Northern Scotland'. The energy price cap unit rates for Northern Scotland are as follows:

Energy price cap rates for Northern Scotland (1 April – 30 June 2026)

	1 April – 30 June 2026
Cost per unit	25.02p per kwh
Daily standing charge	57.5p

You can see what rate you are paying for your energy by checking your recent energy bill. Alternatively, you can contact your energy provider to find out more.

It's worth noting that you could save money by switching your tariff. Contact your energy provider to check that you are getting the best deal.

To find out more about the energy price cap, you can visit the following website: www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/energy-price-cap-explained.

Smart meters – Ofgem announces new rules from Feb (2026)

Ofgem (The 'Office of gas and electricity markets') is the Energy Regulator for Great Britain. In January 2026, Ofgem announced new standards and compensation relating to the roll-out of smart meters. These new standards came into force in February 2026 and apply to both smart meter installations and repairs. The aim of the new guaranteed standards and compensation scheme is to provide better outcomes for customers and to support the nationwide roll-out of smart meters.

In March 2025, Ofgem announced plans to review the 'Guaranteed Standards of Performance'. The Guaranteed Standards of Performance provide the minimum service standards that energy suppliers must meet. In cases where they are not met, customers may be entitled to compensation. On 30 January 2026, Ofgem announced the following:

'Ofgem has confirmed it will take forward new rules which mean customers will automatically receive a £40 payment when:

- a customer has to wait more than 6 weeks for a smart meter installation appointment
- a smart meter installation appointment fails due to a fault within the supplier's control
- a customer reports a problem with their smart meter, but the supplier does not provide a resolution plan within five working days of the report' - Ofgem

From February 2026 - where customers have experienced any of the above - they should receive the £40 compensation payment automatically. Where they have not received the payment, but believe that they may be entitled to compensation, they should contact their energy provider directly to discuss the matter further.

You can read more information by visiting the following website: www.ofgem.gov.uk/press-release/ofgem-roll-out-tougher-smart-meter-rules-february.

The latest updates to the Radio Teleswitch Service

From April 2026, the latest stage of the Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) phase-out will begin in Scotland. This is likely to affect residents in Orkney who have not yet had their RTS meter replaced. Any residents affected by the switch off should have already been informed by their energy supplier. If you still have a RTS meter, is important for you to engage with your energy supplier to arrange for a meter upgrade as soon as possible. This will help you to avoid any issues with your heating and hot water after the service ends.

What is the Radio Teleswitch Service?

The Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) relies on radio signals to remotely control certain types of electricity meters. These meters were designed to switch between different electricity rates at different times. 'Economy 7' and 'Total Heat, Total Control' are the tariffs that are generally associated with these meters. These tariffs offer cheaper rates of electricity at different times throughout the day. They were first introduced to help consumers with storage heaters, as these typically charge over-night when the cost of electricity is cheaper. The RTS is outdated technology and is becoming costly and difficult to maintain. As a result, the RTS is being phased out and replaced by newer, more modern technology.

Signs that you might have a Radio Teleswitch Meter:

- Your home is heated via storage heaters.
- You are on a dual tariff such as Economy 7, giving you cheaper electricity at certain times throughout the day.
- There is a switch box located near your meter labelled with the words, 'Radio Teleswitch'.

If you are unsure, please contact your energy provider directly to check whether you have a RTS meter.

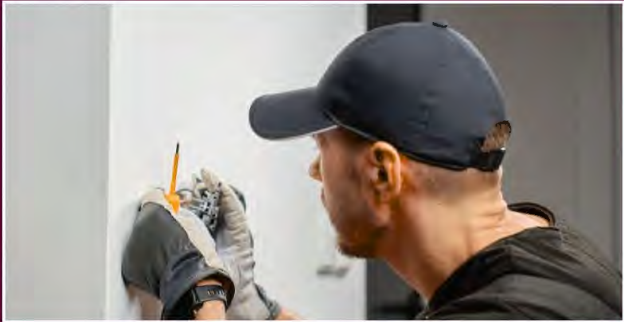
Advice for consumers with a Radio Teleswitch Meter

Radio Teleswitch Meters are being replaced with smart meters. The installation of a smart meters will give consumers access to a wider range of tariffs and monitor energy usage in real time. Smart meters also allow meter readings to be sent directly to your energy provider, doing away with the need to provide manual readings.

If you have a RTS meter and you have not yet had it replaced - please **contact your energy provider as soon as possible** to arrange the upgrade. Please also note that the Council is not directly involved in the process relating to meter upgrades.

Important Announcement

The Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) is ending -



Do you have a meter that relies on the RTS?
If YES, please contact your energy provider to arrange an upgrade.



ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Information and updates (Housing Services)

The Tenant Satisfaction Survey, 2026

In Scotland, social landlords are required to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey every three years. Despite this, the Housing Service at Orkney Islands Council chooses to conduct this survey every two years. This helps us to stay informed of our tenant's latest views on the different areas of the service. In turn, this helps us to identify the areas that require improvement and plan future services. Results from the survey are also submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator, who assess our performance and compare it to other landlords in Scotland.

IBP Strategy & Research conducted the tenant satisfaction survey on behalf of Orkney Islands Council in February and March 2026. Using an independent company to carry out the survey gives tenants the opportunity to express their views more openly.

We will report the results from this survey in a future edition of the Housing Newsletter.



What does your rent pay for?

As a local authority, we are required by law to maintain a dedicated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for our housing stock. This account is used to manage the income and expenditure relating to Council Housing, including any rental payments we receive from Council Houses and other HRA assets. The Housing Revenue Account must be kept separate to ensure the accountability and transparency of the Housing Service.

There are laws relating to the Housing Revenue Account that outline what the funds can be spent on. Funds from within the Council's HRA can be used towards the following:

- Managing our housing stock;
- repairs to Council Houses and;
- carrying out improvements to Council properties, including energy efficiency improvements.

The Council currently has 1045 self-contained properties. The money we received from rental payments in 2025/26 has helped the Housing Service to manage its current housing

stock and carry out repairs and improvements. In 2025/26, the rent you paid to us contributed towards:

- 374 emergency repairs
 - 1704 non-emergency repairs
 - 21 properties acquired
 - A total of 89 lets
 - Carrying out improvements to ensure that homes are energy efficient – in 2025/26 94.64% of our housing stock met the energy efficiency standards.
-

Removal Grant Policy

Are you a tenant of Orkney Islands Council – do you live in a property with too many bedrooms? Are you looking to downsize? There are many advantages to downsizing your home with us. Generally, smaller properties have lower rent, council tax and lower fuel bills. They can also be easier to keep clean!

If you are looking to downsize your home to a smaller Council property, you may be eligible for the 'Removal Grant Scheme'.

What is the Removal Grant Scheme?

The Removal Grant provides a sum of money that is paid to a tenant who wishes to move to a smaller Council property when one becomes available. The payment is intended to help with the extra costs that come with moving house, such as removal costs and the cost of new floor coverings.

Why do we offer the Removal Grant Scheme?

Many of our tenant's needs have changed over time. For instance, a tenant may have had children living with them when they initially moved into their home – these children may have since grown up and moved away. In such instances, these tenants may find that they are living in a home which is 'under-occupied'. This simply means that they are living in a property that has more bedrooms than they currently need. It also applies to cases where a tenant is living in a property that has been adapted, but these adaptations are no longer needed.

There is no legal requirement for Orkney Islands Council (OIC) to operate this Scheme. However, OIC provides this Scheme as it allows tenants to leave larger properties that are under occupied and move to a smaller property without the worry of financial constraints. In turn, this helps to free up larger properties for families who need them.

How much is the grant worth?

The level of payment that tenants may receive is based on an eligibility criteria, along with the reduction in house size:

Moving from:	to a 1 bedroom	to a 2 bedroom	to a 3 bedroom
A 2 bedroom	£1041	N/A	N/A
A 3 bedroom	£1342	£1041	N/A
A 4 bedroom	£1643	£1342	£1041

These figures are based on our 2026 Removal Grant Policy.

For more information on the eligibility criteria and how to apply for this scheme, please contact your Housing Officer.

An important reminder - Water Safety Risk Assessments

Water Safety Risk Assessments are being carried out to all our properties. These tests will help to ensure that the water supply in your home is safe and free from bacteria such as Legionella, along with the risks it poses. We have arranged for Environmental Technical Services UK Ltd to carry out these assessments.

Water Safety Risk Assessments have already been carried out to a number of our properties, with further testing scheduled throughout 2026. If your home is scheduled for testing, you will be notified via letter in advance of the visit. The Assessment should take around twenty minutes to complete and access to your hot-water tank and thermostatic mixing valves (if you have them) will be required.

If you receive a letter notifying you of a Water Safety Risk Assessment, please do not ignore it. These tests are important and help to ensure the safety of the water in your home. If you have received a letter and would like to confirm that you are due a genuine visit, please contact Housing Services on 01856 873 535 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm, excluding public holidays).

Tenant Participation

Tenant participation opportunities

Tenant participation is very important, it allows tenants and service users to engage with their landlord and work together with the aim of improving Housing Services. One of the main aims of tenant participation is to gather tenant feedback. This feedback is used to influence the decisions that we make and helps us to determine areas of the service that require improvement.

The Housing Service offers a range of tenant participation opportunities, some require little commitment, whilst others require more. Tenant participation ranges from reading information provided to you by your landlord, attending any events we organise, to forming a Residents' Association.

Tenant participation opportunities

Service users can engage with us in a variety of ways, this includes:

- Staying up to date with news and information from the Housing Service by:
 - reading the Housing Newsletter;
 - joining our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/OIChousingservices/ (you will need a suitable device with an internet connection and a Facebook account to view our page).
- Sharing your views and feedback with us by:
 - completing surveys;
 - attending Tenant Participation events or;
 - joining our Residents' Panel, or the Armchair Panel.
- Giving your community a voice and improving the area you live in by:
 - forming a Residents' Association, or joining an existing one;
 - forming a focus group – this is a short-term working group that considers a matter that is likely to affect you or your local area.

For more information, contact our Tenant Participation Officer.

Email: claire.pritchard@orkney.gov.uk Telephone 01856 873 535

You can also visit the Tenant Participation section of the OIC website:
www.orkney.gov.uk/our-services/housing/i-am-in-a-property-and-need-advice/tenant-participation/

Benefits, support & other information

Citizens Advice – Money Talk Team

The Orkney Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) can provide you with free, high quality and non-judgemental advice. Any advice given is confidential, independent and impartial - this includes advice relating to money matters, finances and debt.

The CAB's 'Money Talk Team' advisers can help you to improve your financial situation and identify ways to deal with the increased cost of living. Advisers can help you to maximise your income by providing free advice relating to money, benefits, and any debt that you may have.

What issues can advisers help with?

Advisers can:

- Help you to find out what benefits you might be eligible for.
- Provide you with support for benefit applications and decision challenges, where appropriate.

- Look at your income and expenditure and discuss ways to maximise your income and reduce your outgoings.
- Provide you with advice and support relating to debt matters, including an assessment of your debt and advice on statutory debt remedies.

Can advisers help with complex cases?

The CAB aims to connect individuals with advisers who have experience in dealing with cases that relate to your situation. All advisors, whether paid or volunteer, undergo many hours of training and advice is subject to consistent review and monitoring.

I am hesitant to share details relating to my financial situation –

Advice is confidential and information isn't shared without the client's permission. Advisers are empathetic and non-judgemental, they can help to improve a client's situation and overall, make them feel better about their finances.

Get in touch

You can book an appointment to meet with an adviser at Orkney Citizens Advice by telephoning 01856 875266 (between Monday – Friday, 10am and 2pm)

You can find out more information by visiting the following websites:



www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/debt-and-money/other-resources-related-to-debt-and-money/money-talk-team-s/

www.moneytalkteam.org.uk

Or you can visit www.moneymap.scot – this is a self-help tool that can help users find ways to increase their income, reduce bills, and ease the cost of living.

The over 80 pension

The over 80 pension is available to people who are 80 years old and above. Eligibility for this type of pension is not based on National Insurance contributions. You cannot get the over 80 pension if you reached State Pension age on or after April 2016.

The over 80 pension pays up to £105.70 per week. For example, if you are 80 years old and you get a basic pension of £43 per week, the over 80 pension payment may top this up by £62.70 to give you a total of 105.70 per week.

Eligibility –

To be eligible for the over 80 pension, you must meet all the following criteria:

- You are 80 years old, or older.
- Your basic state pension is less than £105.70 per week (2025-26) – **OR** - you do not receive a basic State Pension at all.

- You were 'ordinarily resident' in the UK, Isle of Man or Gibraltar on the day that you turned 80, or the date you made a claim for the 'over 80 pension'.
- You were resident in the UK for a period of at least 10 years out of 20 (this does not have to be 10 years in a row).

How to claim

You can start a claim for the over 80 pension 3 months prior to your 80th birthday.

To claim the over 80 pension, you will need to complete a claim form. You can visit the Jobcentre to complete the relevant form, or you can contact the Pension Service on the following details to request a form:

Telephone: 0800 731 7898

[Relay UK](#) (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 731 7898

An end to the two-child benefit cap

The two-child benefit limit was introduced in 2017. The limit meant that families would not be able to claim Universal Credit or Tax Credits for a third or subsequent child born after 6 April 2017. You could only claim for any subsequent children if a 'special circumstances exception' applied, i.e., the birth of triplets, etc.

In December 2024, the Scottish Government announced plans to introduce the 'Two Child Limit Payment' which was intended to help families affected by the two-child cap. However, in November 2025, the UK Government announced that from April 2026, they will be ending the two-child benefit limit. Since this announcement, the Scottish Government has stated that the 'Two Child Limit Payment' is no longer needed.

From **April 2026**, eligible families who have three or more children will be entitled to claim Universal Credit for a third child and any subsequent children. If you receive Universal Credit or you are making a new claim in April 2026 – and you are responsible for three or more children, - you may be entitled to the additional amount under the 'child element' of Universal Credit. Despite the name being the 'two child benefit cap', this change applies to Universal Credit and not to 'child benefit' itself.

It is important to note however that despite this change, the benefit cap still applies. This means that if you already receive the maximum amount of benefits as per the cap, your payments will not increase. Please also remember that your entitlement to Universal Credit depends on your own personal circumstances, such as your household income, savings, how many people you live with and their ages, etc.

For help with applications for benefits, you can contact the Orkney Citizens' Advice Bureau: email: bureau@orkneycab.casonline.org.uk, or by telephone: 01856 875266 to book an appointment. **(opening times Monday – Friday 10am – 2pm).**

HENRY

✿ Supporting Families in Orkney – Visit Our Local HENRY Webpage! ✿

Are you a parent or carer looking for trusted, friendly support to help your family build healthy habits, boost wellbeing, and enjoy more positive routines at home?

Our local HENRY website is packed with information about free programmes and workshops designed to support families with children aged 0–12 to get the best start by building healthy foundations to learn and grow together.



♥ What you'll find on the HENRY page:

- ✓ Tips for mealtimes, healthy snacks, and active play
- ✓ Guidance on emotional wellbeing, routines, sleep, and screen time
- ✓ Details of local 8 week Healthy Families and Growing Up programmes (online & in person)
- ✓ Workshops on topics such as Starting Solids, Eating Well for Less & Understanding Children's Behaviour

Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) Service – NHS Orkney

Although the name is staying the same, the Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) Service is now also supporting people living with cardiac conditions, alongside those affected by cancer. ICJ, delivered in partnership with Macmillan, provides free, confidential, non-clinical support to help people navigate the wider impact of their health condition.

A diagnosis of cancer or a cardiac condition can leave people feeling unsure about what help is available or how to access it. ICJ is here to guide individuals through that maze and connect them with the right support at the right time.

Non-clinical concerns may include:

- Support to access local teams who can help with money, housing worries, or benefits
- Advice around caring or work responsibilities
- Help addressing physical or day-to-day challenges

Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) Service

Have you or someone you know got a cancer diagnosis or heart condition?

The Improving the Cancer Journey Service offers non-clinical support and a personalised care plan for people in Orkney affected by cancer and those living with cardiac conditions.

We are here to help with finances, practical issues, emotional wellbeing, housing & benefits, and links to local services.



- Access to complementary therapies
- Emotional wellbeing support and links to local services

Information to answer questions or concerns about diagnosis or treatment

Anyone accessing ICJ will be offered a Concerns Checklist, a simple tool that helps identify what matters most to them across financial, practical, physical, emotional, and spiritual areas of life. Following this, an ICJ Link Worker will work with the person to create a personalised support plan.

People can refer themselves into ICJ or be referred by a professional. Referral and self-referral forms, along with further information about the service, are available on the ICJ page of the NHS Orkney website: [Improving the Cancer Journey \(ICJ\) – NHS Orkney](#)

Completed forms can be emailed to ork.icj@nhs.scot

If you have any questions or would like to learn more, please get in touch. We are here to help in any way we can.

Email: ork.icj@nhs.scot

Phone: 01856 888084 (Public Health Department)

Office contact details

Housing Management:

Telephone: 01856873535.

Email: allocations@orkney.gov.uk

Homelessness and Advice:

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.