

CEO Update

Hello, it's hard to believe that when our last edition was being prepared we were wishing everyone all the best for a new year and a new decade, most of us at that time were working and living as normal. I'm sure like me terms such as, lockdown, social distancing and shielding were all very unfamiliar to you. It makes me realise how very fragile our world can be and how quickly things can change.

What a start to the new decade it has been. At the time of writing this Spring edition life as we know it is dramatically changed for us all and we are in the middle of the biggest public health crisis of a generation. To keep our staff, tenants, contractors and suppliers safe we have had to completely change the way that we do things. We have had to adapt and have had to do this very quickly as the situation changed very rapidly. I am enormously proud of our staff team here at Rural Stirling Housing Association. They have worked tirelessly throughout the last few weeks to ensure that we can continue to provide services and support where this is needed in extremely challenging situations. We have demonstrated that we are a strong and resilient team and can cope with the unexpected and I am very thankful to them all. I would also like to thank you for your patience and understanding during this very challenging time.

At the time of going to press our office remains closed. However, all our staff are working remotely from home and we are refocusing and reprioritising services to maintain essential services that keep our staff and tenants safe and looking for new ways to keep us connected with our tenants and help those who need it most.

We have moved as many of our services online as possible and have lots of information on our website www.rsha.org.uk This includes details of how to contact us by phone and email. We will keep you updated whenever the situation changes. See also our Asset Management & Housing Services articles within this edition for more detailed information and updates on services currently being carried out.

I hope you are finding the support, information, and guidance that we are providing helpful. If you have any feedback, please get in touch.

Finally, there is still a lot of uncertainty and anxiety about how long the situation will last, what our exit strategy out of lockdown will be and what our new normal will look like when this is all over. There is also no doubt that there will be long lasting impacts for everyone and we will do our best to help and support all of our tenants as best we can. If you are worried or anxious please talk to us as we are here to help. We have shown how well we can respond in a crisis situation and how resilient and supportive members of our communities can be. We can and will weather this storm together.

Please everyone stay safe, stay at home, protect our NHS and help save lives.

Donna
Donna Birrell, CEO



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Group Strategic Plan

In early March our Board approved a new three year Group Strategic Plan. This plan sets out our hopes and ambitions for the next three years. The plan was written pre coronavirus and obviously some of our priorities have changed however I would like to thank everyone who took the time to tell us what you thought about our proposals and for your feedback. We have also developed a new Risk Framework and produced new Business Plans for RSHA and for Venachar (our subsidiary organisation). Final versions of all of the above will be available shortly on our website.

Annual Assurance Statement

As we reported last year all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) must submit an Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) This provides assurance that we are complying with the relevant requirements of the SHR's Regulatory Framework. This includes regulatory requirements that apply to all social landlords and the Standards of Governance and Financial Management that apply to RSLs.

Our Annual Assurance Statement was submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator on 8th October 19. The Scottish Housing Regulator have recently written to us to tell us that 'Reviewing your statement we found that your statement covered all of the areas required by the statutory guidance.' You are able to read the assurance statement on the Scottish Housing Regulator's website by visiting: <https://bit.ly/2Ln7fjK>

If you would like any further information please contact us. We would like to involve our tenants and get your feedback on our next Annual Assurance Statement due to be submitted in October 2020.

Would you be willing to be involved in a small Working Group of Staff and Board members or could you take some time to give us your views? If this is of interest to you please contact us. enquiries@rsha.org.uk



We are currently recruiting new Board Members

We are an ambitious, forward-thinking organisation, committed to providing quality, affordable homes throughout the north and west rural Stirling Council area. A large part of our area of operation falls within the boundary of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park.

Our vision is for Strong and Attractive Rural Communities and our supporting mission is to provide affordable, quality housing and support community aspirations. We are already on target to deliver circa 140 new homes by 2023. This is a great time to join our Board as we are about to launch our new Group Strategic Plan 2020-2023.

We are looking for new Board members to sit on our parent company Board. This role offers you the opportunity to lead on the strategic direction of a growing organisation, playing a key role in delivering high quality services to our customers, defining goals and targets and working with our involved customers to scrutinise our performance. Whilst we would welcome applications from a wide and diverse range of individuals, we would particularly be interested in hearing from those who:

- share our values and the values of the social housing sector
- have a genuine commitment to strengthening our local communities
- have specific experience of being a social housing tenant, financial and risk management, asset management or development
- have the confidence and ability to question and challenge effectively
- have a good understanding of governance and the roles and responsibilities of being a board member

The role requires a considerable time commitment, attending Board meetings (held seven times a year) preparation for meetings, attending strategy days and training sessions. We value commitment and experience as much as qualifications and offer a full induction programme and ongoing support to all our Board members to help them in this challenging and rewarding role.

Notes: If you are interested in this opportunity please visit our website to find out more about us www.rsha.org.uk or contact us on 01786 841101 or email enquiries@rsha.org.uk to request a copy of our Recruitment Pack.

To have an informal chat please contact Donna Birrell, CEO donna@rsha.org.uk

Maintenance Update



Planned Maintenance Works

It will come as no surprise to you that following the Scottish Government's Coronavirus advice we have had to suspend all the Planned Maintenance works programmed for the immediate future.

These works included Everwarm's kitchen installation works, SST's fire safety upgrades, Corgi's gas safety audits and Mitie's external painting contract.

Please be assured that these contracts will start again as soon as it is safe to do so.

Reactive Repairs

We continue to work hard to ensure that our Contractors are available to carry out the most serious of repairs. You will appreciate that during the lockdown period we can only attend to the most critical of repairs such as gas related works or water leaks etc.

Our landscape contractors, Nurture and Aquaklenz have key worker status and this period of lockdown has been ideal for them to attend to the render staining that has affected some of our developments. We have had some excellent feedback from tenants who have seen a huge improvement after the treatment works.

Aquaklenz are also attending to the communal stair cleaning in our flats in Doune and Callander whilst our current contract cleaners are unable to work.

We are still legally required to carry out the annual gas safety inspection and service to all gas appliances. You may be apprehensive to allow access for this to be undertaken due to the COVID-19 situation, however our Contractor's engineers will undertake this work following all up to date government guidelines and wear the appropriate PPE as necessary. We would ask that you continue to allow access where possible for this essential service.

Please be assured that we are currently logging all urgent and routine repairs that are reported to us and will attend to these as soon as the restrictions are lifted and our Contractors can resume normal service.

Unfortunately, this also means that the Right to Repair scheme has been suspended temporarily too.

We appreciate the inconvenience these measures may cause and thank you for your patience.

Out with the Old and In with the New - Nurture

We learnt about the demise of our landscaping Contractor, Resolution at the start of the new year and quickly moved to secure to our second place framework Landscaping Contractor to take over the landscaping Maintenance works in time for the new growing season.

Nurture Landscapes is an award winning national horticulture, landscape and grounds maintenance business. Their head office is in Kilmarnock and they have a number of satellite depots across the whole of Scotland. They have a wide variety of clients across the UK, both in public and private sectors, and are committed to maintaining our assets to the highest standards of safety and quality.

Because Nurture provide communal maintenance services they are deemed to hold key worker status during the lockdown period. The Scottish Government advised that people working alone providing community services such as gardeners or window cleaners can continue to work providing they conduct their business safely and observe social distancing etc.

Nurture's work force has been somewhat depleted over recent weeks whilst operatives self isolate, therefore the extent of their services offered has been reduced and likely to change at short notice.

However they have adopted new working measures to ensure their staff are safe at all times and will be attempting to keep on top of our grass cutting during this lockdown period.

Please feel free to introduce yourselves to the Nurture operatives when you see them and thank them for keeping their services running during these uncertain times. As always, we are consistently striving to improve the services we offer our tenants so we welcome your feedback and comments, good or bad.

We would like to recruit some additional Landscape Representatives to support the current team to help us ensure landscaping is being carried out to a good standard in every development. All that is required is a monthly walk around your development with the landscape contractor supervisor to look at the work carried out, followed by the completion of a brief form to confirm work has been carried out as required. If you would like to become a Landscape Representative for your development, please contact your Housing Officer or the main office.

Gas Safety Audits

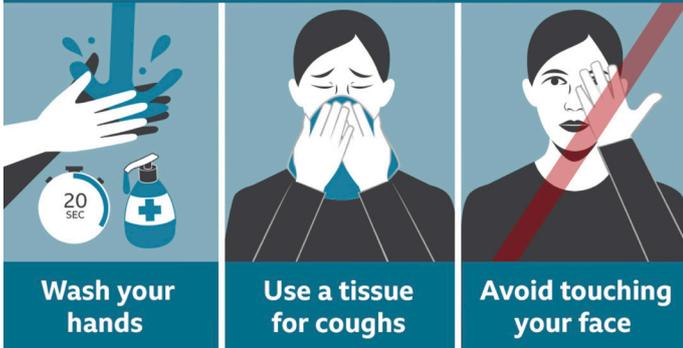
As part of our ongoing commitment to ensure good practice and workmanship amongst our Maintenance Contractors and, in particular, those companies that undertake our gas installations and repairs, Rural Stirling Housing Association have appointed Corgi to carry out a full audit report and quality inspections on gas works undertaken over the course of the next 3 to 4 years.

Currently these audits have been suspended whilst the Coronavirus lockdown is in full force however when normal service resumes, Corgi will carry out a selective audit every month of our reactive works orders, our gas servicing contracts and boiler replacement contracts.

We will pass a full list of the addresses where these works have been undertaken to Corgi who, in order to ensure impartiality, will choose a random 10% of homes to visit. Corgi will contact you directly to advise that your home has been selected for an audit and will arrange a date to visit. Your cooperation in making access available to the Corgi Engineers is greatly appreciated.

CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION

Coronavirus: What you need to do



If you have developed a new or continuous cough and/or a fever/high temperature in the last 7 days, stay at home for 7 days from the start of your symptoms even if you think your symptoms are mild.

Do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital. You should phone 111 if:

your symptoms worsen during home isolation, especially if you're in a high or extremely high risk group

breathlessness develops or worsens, particularly if you're in a high or extremely high risk group

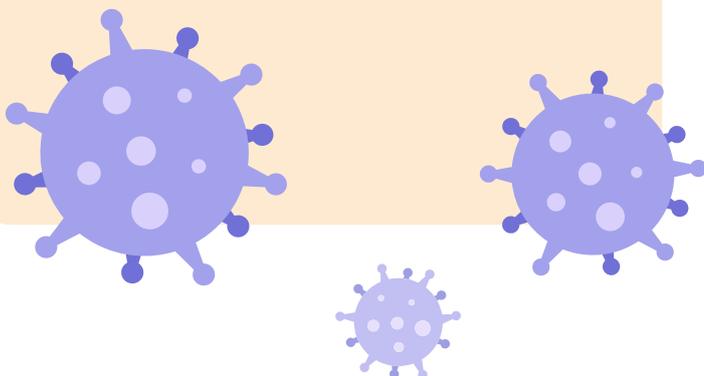
your symptoms haven't improved in 7 days

If you have a medical emergency, phone 999 and tell them you have COVID-19 symptoms.

Do the people I live with need to take any action?

If you live with other people and have symptoms, they'll need to stay at home for 14 days from the start of your symptoms even if they don't have symptoms themselves. If they develop symptoms within the 14 days, they need to stay at home for 7 days from the day their symptoms began. They should do this even if it takes them over the 14-day isolation period

For more information about support and financial help available, please visit our website www.rsha.org.uk



Housing Services Update

At the time of writing this article, the Coronavirus lockdown measures are still in place. Social isolation, whilst essential for our health, can be very difficult, particularly if you have underlying health conditions or are living on your own. Our main priority is to contact all of our tenants to ensure everyone has the support they need to remain healthy and safe in their homes.



If your Housing Officer has not contacted you yet and you need help or advice, please contact them. Andrew Robinson, Peter Davies and Gillian Lynas, are working from home during normal office hours and can be contacted by email or phone (**please see page 6 for details**). Rebekah Hawkins is currently not working. **page 6** explains which Housing Officers will be covering Buchlyvie, Aberfoyle and Gartmore in Rebekah's absence. We will let you know when Rebekah is back at work.

We are currently testing new procedures that will allow us to allocate and let homes safely and hope to resume this service soon. Whilst travel to move home is permitted under the Coronavirus Act 2020, moving in the current situation will undoubtedly be more difficult. If your current home meets your housing need, please bear this in mind before deciding to move. All other housing services are being carried out as normal with the exception of home visits and estate management visits.

Your Income Maximisation Officer, Kevin McGhee and Housing Officers have been working hard to help everyone who has been financially affected by Coronavirus to claim the appropriate government benefits and grants.

Please remember that we do not receive any financial assistance from the Government (other than grants to help us build new homes). We rely entirely on the rent you pay for our income. That is why it is so important to continue to pay your rent or contact your Housing Officer for help and advice if you are unable to do so.



Development Update

Claish Farm, Callander

Lovell Partnerships Ltd were formally appointed by RSHA back in February 2020 to take forward the build of 50 new houses in Callander. They took possession of the site and works started in earnest and were progressing well until the First Minister announced that all construction works that were not related to the building of hospitals were to cease during the Coronavirus lockdown.

Lovell secured the site with immediate effect and works will commence again when it is safe to do so. It is inevitable however that site closure will delay the contract completion date until summer/autumn of 2021.

The Claish development, once complete will deliver the following high quality newbuild units.

House Type	No of Units
2 Bed x 4 Person Semi-Detached House	26
3 Bed x 5 Person Semi-Detached House	14
4 Bed x 6 Person Semi-Detached House	3
2 Bed x 4 Person Semi-Detached Bungalow	3
1 Bed x 2 Person Detached Bungalow	3
3 Bed x 5 Person Detached Bungalow	1

Lampson Road, Killearn

The Design Team was appointed for Lampson Road back in 2019 and early engagement with the Community Panel established by the Community Council helped inform the Lampson Road site layout proposals. RSHA entered into a Section 75 agreement with Stirling Council just before the Coronavirus lockdown. Stirling Council will shortly release their formal outline planning consent in line with the recommendations by the Planning Committee last summer.

The Architects are currently working on the developed design and we hope to have a Design and Build Contractor appointed by late summer with a view to works commencing by the end of the year.

Buchanan Crescent, Croftamie

An outline planning application for 14 housing units at Buchanan Crescent in Croftamie was submitted to Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park early in February 2020. Our development agents Gregor Cameron Ltd presented the scheme proposals to the Croftamie Community Council on the 11th March 2020. However the March Planning Committee meeting was suspended and we await a date for the reconvened meeting.

Gartness Road Drymen

MacTaggart and Mickel had previously indicated their aspirations to start building at Gartness Road in Drymen this summer but their site start date will no doubt be under review during current times. A more thorough update on all developments will be contained within the next edition of Rural Matters.

Remember to test your Smoke Alarms!

All our properties are fitted with a smoke alarm. This will give you an early warning by making a loud noise if fire breaks out. (We can provide a different type of alarm for tenants who have hearing difficulties - please ask our Housing Officer for details.)

You should not:

- **Disconnect your alarm**
- **Move it**
- **Remove the battery (unless replacing it with a new one)**



Check your alarm at least once a month to make sure it is working properly. You can do this by pressing or holding the test button until the alarm sounds. Many of our properties now have mains powered alarms. These do not require battery replacement. However, many are also fitted with battery back-ups. The battery should be changed in these smoke detectors once a year or when the battery "chirps".

It is also recommended that you have a fire escape plan for your home that all of the occupants are clear about. Practise this regularly - a few seconds saved can save lives. For further information and good advice try visiting the Fire & Rescue Service website on:

<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/for-householders/in-an-emergency.aspx>

<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/for-householders/in-an-emergency.aspx>

During the course of 2020-2021 we will be carrying out upgrades to Fire Safety equipment to bring them up to the new standard. We have until February 2021 to undertake these works. Our Contractor SST has already made contact with a number of households and when planned maintenance works are allowed to resume they will restart their upgrade works.



Your Housing Officers

All Housing Officers, except Rebekah Hawkins, are currently working from home during normal office hours and can be contacted by phone or email (see contact details below).

We will let you know when Rebekah returns to work. In the meantime, if you live in the following areas;

Buchlyvie

contact Andrew Robinson

Aberfoyle (Lomond Court & Old Kirk Loan)

Contact Peter Davies

Aberfoyle (Craigmore View, Balliech, Renagour, Lochard Cottages) & Gartmore

Contact Gillian Lynas

TELL US HOW WE CAN HELP YOU



Gillian Lynas

Gillian works part time, all day Monday & Tuesday and till 1.00pm on Wednesday.

Tel: 01786 843034

Mob: 07341 730601

Email: gillian@rsha.org.uk



Peter Davies

Tel: 01786 843031

Mob: 07464 543154

Email: peter@rsha.org.uk



Rebekah Hawkins

Rebekah works part-time, from 1pm on Wednesdays, all day Thursday and Friday.

Tel: 01786 843034

Mob: 07464 543158

Email: rebekah@rsha.org.uk



Andrew Robinson

Tel: 01786 843035

Mob: 07464 543157

Email: andrew@rsha.org.uk

Kippen
Estate visits will take place on the 2nd Tues (pm) of each month

Callander
Estate visits will take place on the 1st Tues (pm) of each month

Deanston, Doune, Lochearnhead, Killin, Tyndrum and Strathyre.
Estate visits will take place as follows; Doune /Deanston - 1st Thurs of each month (am), Strathyre / Lochearnhead (pm). 3rd Thurs of each month, Killin(am), Tyndrum (pm).

Gargunnoch, Balfron, Drymen, Strathblane and Killearn.
Estate visits will take place on the 3rd Tues (pm) of each month

Aberfoyle, Kinlochard, Stronachlachar, Buchlyvie and Gartmore
Estate visits will take place on the 2nd Thurs (pm) of each month

The input and feedback you give us are crucial. They help us provide you with services that meet your needs and preferences.

Over the last few months we have been working with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to help us improve the way in which we engage with you, in particular giving you greater opportunity to tell us how you think we can do things better when we are reviewing our services and different ways to improve communication with you.

We started by holding workshops with you, our staff and Board members to bring together ideas about how we can broaden our approach and ensure you really are at the heart of everything we do. The workshops were very successful and some great ideas were discussed. Thank you to everyone who attended. Your time and effort were very much appreciated.

We are now working with TPAS to incorporate the feedback from the workshops into a new Customer Engagement Strategy. We will be sending draft copies of the strategy to everyone who attended the workshops, for their feedback. If you didn't attend the workshops and would like the opportunity to comment on the draft strategy, please contact the office and we will send you a copy.



You are at the Heart of Everything We Do

Well Done Josh!

Josh Graham joined the Association as our Modern Apprentice in July 2019 to complete a 12-month apprenticeship.



We are delighted to report that Josh has completed his Level 6 Business Administration qualification with 5 months to spare! Josh has been working within the Finance & Corporate Services function and has been a great addition to the staff team.

Congratulations Josh!

The staff team at Rural Stirling wish him every success for all that follows.

In the meantime, please contact our Housing Services Manager, Jackie Leeds, on 01786 843030 / jackie@rsha.org.uk or the main office on 01786 841101 / enquiries@rsha.org.uk if you would like to share your ideas and thoughts about how we can improve the following:

- The repairs service.
- Tenant publications like Rural Matters and our Performance Report.
- The rent increase consultation.

How our Income Maximisation Officer can help you



Our Income Maximisation Officer, Kevin McGhee, wants to make sure you're getting the financial support you are entitled to.



Coronavirus – Financial Help and Support



Employees

If you are employed but unable to work because you need to self-isolate, you may be able to claim Universal Credit - Statutory Sick Pay. If you are furloughed, you should receive 80% of your income based on your last month's wage. You may also need to claim Universal Credit (UC) to help pay your rent. If you receive Working Tax or Child Tax Credits and claim UC your tax credits will stop immediately (this is the case for both employed and self-employed).



Self- Employed

If you are self-employed you may be eligible for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) The scheme will provide a grant to self-employed individuals or partnerships, worth 80% of their profits up to a cap of £2,500 per month. This will not be available until June 2020. You may have to claim UC in the short term if you have limited income. When you receive the SEISS, this will be taken into account and treated as income. Your UC payment will adjust in response to changes in your income.

For more information about financial help available please visit

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/>

Digital Inclusion

Universal Credit must be claimed online. If you need help with this, please contact your Income Maximisation Officer, Kevin McGhee by email kevin@rsha.org.uk or phone 01786 842121. You could also access the Learn My Way website: <https://www.learnmyway.com/> which is a great website with free online resources to help you with online basics, internet skills, using public services online and much more.

Students

If you are a student and receive student loans or bursaries, please contact your College or University who will be able to help you claim additional income from the Hardship Fund.



Support

If you are elderly, disabled or have underlying health conditions and need help to get your shopping or medication please contact Stirling Council Coronavirus Community Support Line on 01786 404040 or email communitysupport@stirling.gov.uk where support can be arranged for you. You can also contact the Scottish Government Helpline for those who need support on 0800 111 4000 where you will be automatically connected to someone who will help you access the support you need. Alternatively, please contact your Housing Officer who will help you get the support you need.

Contact Details

Stirling Road, Doune, FK16 6AA

Tel: 01786 841101 www.rsha.org.uk Email: enquiries@rsha.org.uk

(Normal working hours are 9am - 5pm Mon to Thur and 9am - 4pm Fri)

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Rural Stirling Housing Association is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 No. 2376 (s)
Registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator No. HAL232
Property Factor No. PF000330
Letting Agent Registration No's LARN 1907004 & LARN 1904083



Rural Stirling
Housing Association