

HELPING HILLHEAD THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

There is no doubt this last year has been particularly difficult for everyone, and some families' circumstances have led to even more challenges. Lots of households have suffered financial difficulties as well as struggles related to home schooling children.

We are delighted to have been able to source a variety of funding to allow us to give help wherever we can. Details of how we have provided help are on page 9 of this newsletter.

We will continue to look out for more opportunities to help and support our community when this is needed more than ever.



RENT INCREASE CONSULTATION 2021/2022

We received 95 responses to our recent consultation on rent levels for 2021/22. A big thank you to all tenants who responded. We entered the names of all tenants who replied into a prize draw for £50 of High Street vouchers, this was won by a tenant in Hillhead Road – congratulations!

This response rate was 11.5% of all tenants, which means we were able to take more views into account than previously as last year's response rate was 7%, and historically we have received even fewer responses.

This year as well as the consultation document being sent to all tenants, we also encouraged tenants to respond by telephone. The results of the consultation were:

I want Hillhead Housing Association to maintain investment in homes and services by increasing rents by inflation (CPI at 0.7%).

I do not agree with the proposal to increase rents by inflation (CPI at 0.7%).

Agree	60	63%
Disagree	35	37%
No opinion	0	0%
Total	95	



Of the 95 who responded, 40 are self-payers, 8 are in receipt of partial Housing Benefit (HB) / Universal Credit (UC) and 47 are in receipt of full HB / UC. However, it is

the not the case that those on benefits always agreed with the increase, nor did self-payers always disagree with the increase. A detailed analysis is shown below.

	Full HB	Part HB	Self-payer
Agree	33	3	24
Disagree	14	5	16
No opinion	0	0	0

The consultation also asked for comments where tenants could provide us with reasons why they agreed or disagreed with the proposal. We received a wide range of comments and all of these were passed to our Management Committee in full for them to be considered when the final decision was taken on this year's rent review.

As you may expect many comments were in relation to the varied effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on individual households, the community and the Housing Association. A small number of typical comments are produced below to provide a flavour of the responses the Management Committee used to inform their decision;

"I feel that the proposed increase is fair and offers tenants the opportunity for secure house @ a reasonable price unlike private lets. Also considering the level of service and repairs this seems a fair increase."

"Content to pay the small rent increase."

"I am against a rent increase. Many people including myself have either had to take a pay cut or lose their job as a result of COVID 19."

"With everything that has happened in the past year and with all families being affected, there should not be an increase in rent."

"I am very happy with upgrading of smoke alarms etc. & happy to pay increase."

"I am okay with this given that it is a cost of living increase only."

The Association's Management Committee deliberated long and hard over the results of the consultation. They also looked at the financial models that seek to ensure that the Association remains in sound financial health over the longer term and can continue to invest in its homes and services. Based on this, the Management Committee made the decision that rents would go up by 0.7% in the coming financial year. This is significantly lower than last year's increase of

3.1%. It is also significantly lower than many other Housing Associations and Councils across Scotland.

A big thank you again to all those tenants who took the time to talk to us, comment on Facebook or complete the consultation document.

Individual letters were issued to all tenants at the end of February 2021 providing exact details of the new charge from 28 March 2021 for their property.

RENT INCREASE – CHANGES YOU MAY NEED TO MAKE

If you pay by standing order you will need to contact the bank and increase your payment or if you have on-line banking you can log on and update the figure yourself.

For those tenants paying by direct debit the Association will amend the payment accordingly. If you are interested in changing your payment to a direct debit please contact your housing officer who will be able to set this up for you. Once set up you never need to worry about having to update your rent figure again.

If you are in receipt of Universal Credit (UC), it is your responsibility to keep the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) informed about any changes to your rent. Any change of circumstances you report to the DWP take effect for the whole of your

Assessment Period, so it is important to report the change as soon as possible.

The DWP are going to set a 'To-Do' for you in your journal about your rent increase. This is likely to appear in your journal at the beginning of April, which is after the rent increase. If you fail to update your journal before the end of your Assessment Period, which includes the rent increase, you will have to make up the shortfall between what UC will pay towards your rent, and the new rent amount. It is therefore extremely important that you update your journal with the new rent amount as soon as possible.

If you need to confirm your new rent amount, or if you have any queries, or require assistance on updating your journal, please contact one of our Welfare Rights Officers:

Morag Bisset: 0141 776 8631 / 07458 309043

Moira Escreet: 0141 776 8630 / 07458 309022

If you have lost your letter and are not sure what to pay please contact us and we can let you know.



REPORTING REPAIRS

If you require to report a repair, you are able to do this in several ways, including through your Housing Officer or Housing Assistant.

However, there are times when the Housing Officer/Assistant may be on leave or absent from work. Therefore, if you have left a voicemail message or email / text message regarding a repair, this may not be picked up for several days.

To make sure that your repair is reported and dealt with, please contact a member of the Property Services team:

Diane Bridges, Property Services Assistant
0141 776 8625 / 07458 301116

Malcolm Macdonald, Property Services Officer:
0141 776 8627

Marie Savage, Property Services Officer:
0141 776 8623
(Tuesday-Friday)

You can also send a text message to report a repair (Repair + message) to 07491 163429.



HOME CONTENTS INSURANCE

As your landlord, Hillhead Housing Association insures your property/building, however it does not insure any of your contents. This includes things like your furniture, personal belongings or decoration. If any of these are accidentally damaged or destroyed, for example through fire or burst pipes, you will need to pay for them to be replaced if you have no contents insurance.

It is important that you take out your own Home Contents Insurance to protect your belongings and replace them if need be. It not only covers your household goods but it can cover things like replacing keys if they are lost or stolen.

If you would like a leaflet sent out or you would like more information regarding contents insurance, please contact the office. Details can also be found on the Association's website.



ESTATE MANAGEMENT

Keeping Our Gardens Clean & Tidy

Life remains very different for us all and everyone is spending more time at home. Hopefully the weather improves and more of us are likely to be out in our gardens. Do you want to sit in a garden full of old household rubbish and bulky items where children cannot play freely, or enjoy the sunshine in a clean, tidy and well maintained garden?

We may not be in the office, or out and about in Hillhead & Braes of Yetts, but the Housing Officers are still keeping an eye on the estate and responding to complaints. Unfortunately, the Housing Management Team are dealing with an increasing number of complaints about bulk household rubbish left in gardens.

With the help of our colleagues in the office, these tenancies are monitored and contact made to make sure that an uplift has been requested. If you have arranged for an uplift, it is best if you phone to tell us.

We are aware that in some cases tenants are leaving their rubbish lying there for months on end. It can upset neighbours having to look at it all the time, could attract vermin, potentially be a fire hazard, as well as a hazard to young children.

It is a breach of your Tenancy Agreement which the Association takes seriously and it is your responsibility to organise the clearance of any rubbish or household goods.

Be aware that anything you dispose of outside needs to be removed. If you cannot afford to pay for an uplift, please do not put the items out until you can.

When the charity shops reopen you may find that they can make use of items you no longer want, particularly any furniture, so please do bear this in mind. If you are getting a new fridge/freezer or washing machine can the supplier take the old one away? Many companies offer this service for a small additional fee.

Please make sure that you arrange to clear all your unwanted items from your garden either by taking to the Council dump yourself, or by arranging an uplift through the Council by calling them on **0300 1234515**. There is a fee for this service which must be paid before any items are uplifted.



COMMON AREAS

We would encourage any tenant or resident in the area to report any Health & Safety issues they may see in the common areas within the estate and backcourts. We do not have as many staff out and about on the estate but we are still carrying out inspections of common areas in order to record and monitor their condition and will take any necessary remedial action.

Common areas include: entrance doorways; close area/stairs; bin stores; backcourts/drying areas; pathways and driveways/parking bays. If your home is within a common close you are required to keep the close and backcourt areas clean, clear, litter free and



tidy on a weekly basis. Common closes and stairways should always be free of hazards, particularly those that would restrict easy exiting of the building should an emergency situation arise.

LEGIONELLA

Legionella is the name given to a group of bacteria that's found in almost all water sources including streams, rivers and lakes. It can also be found in soil, compost and mains water, and it can sometimes enter domestic water systems.

Is legionella harmful?

Low concentrations of the bacteria are generally not harmful. It's only dangerous if the conditions are right for it to grow and if you inhale water droplets from a contaminated water system.

The bacteria can however cause a number of infections, most of which are not serious. However, legionnaires' disease can be fatal in around 10% of cases.

What you can do

The likelihood of legionella being in your home is very low as most households do not store huge amounts of water. The majority of Hillhead Housing Association properties water supply is fed direct from the mains and heated via a combination condensing boiler. Only a limited number of properties have any kind of water storage system.

TIPS TO MAKE SURE THE WATER IN YOUR HOME IS SAFE

Setting the right temperature

Legionella bacteria is more likely to grow between 20C and 50C, so where possible set hot water cylinders at 60C or above. Our properties are fitted with a thermostatic mixer valve at the bath, which would then reduce the temperature of the water going into the bath. Always carefully test the temperature of hot water to avoid scalding and of course keep children away from hot water. Regular use of cold water should also ensure temperatures stay below 20C.

De-scale taps and showers

Legionella bacteria can grow and multiply on scale or rust. So de-scale taps and showers every three months or when there is an obvious build-up of scale.

The harder the water in your area, the more frequently you should de-scale.

Clean the taps in your bath, basin, and sink by brushing the scale off with a nylon brush or wiping them with a diluted bleach solution. You can also use any de-scaling solution that you can buy from hardware shops.

If you have a shower that has a flexible hose, fit it with a "hose retaining ring". This will stop it falling into bath water and so decrease the risk of contamination.

Use water taps once a week

This helps to make sure you don't have water standing still in pipes. If you've been away for more than a week, you should run all your taps for a few minutes before using the water.

You'll also need to run the water in the shower. Make sure you remove the shower head before doing this so the water doesn't spray and create water droplets. If you can't remove the shower head, cover it with a towel or a plastic bag while you run the water.

Flush away those bacteria

The water in your home is more likely to have legionella if you haven't used it for a while. So if you have been away for more than a week, you should:

- Heat up your water system to the normal temperature
- Run every tap for at least five minutes
- Slowly flush the cold taps until the water runs cold

Remember that when flushing taps or other outlets open slowly so you don't splash water or release droplets in the air.



Test It Tuesday!

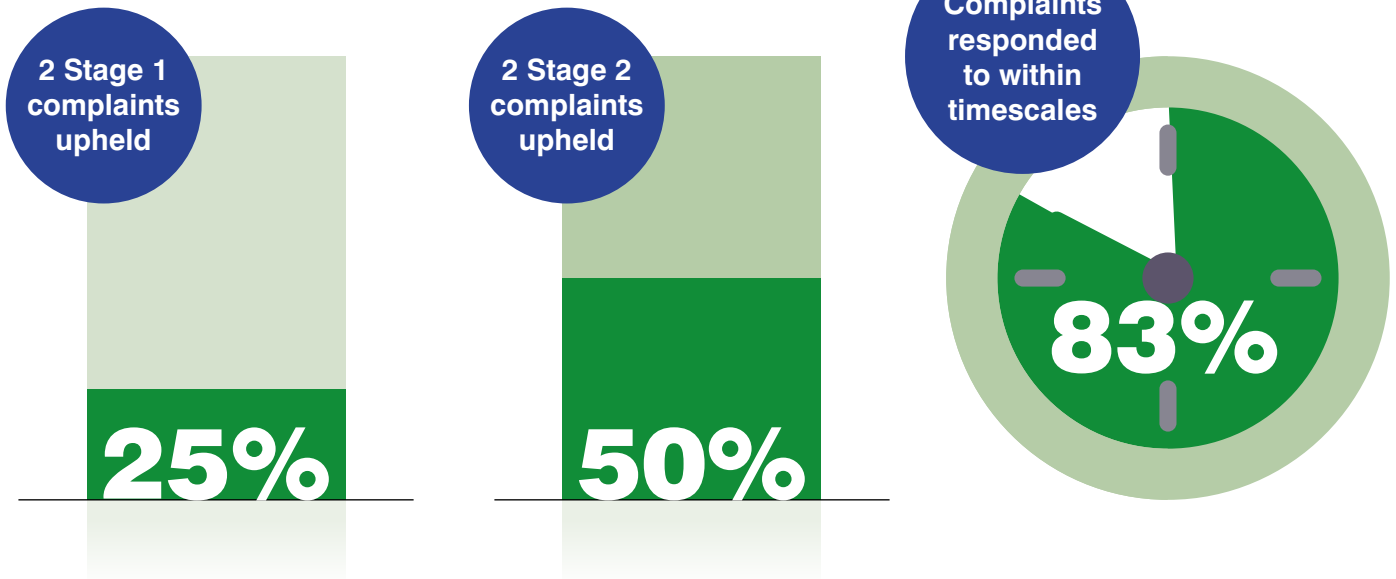


Making sure you have working smoke & heat alarms could save your life. Test them weekly to make sure if fire does break out everyone in your home has time to get out safely. More: <https://firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/fo>

COMPLAINTS

Between 1 September and 31 December 2020, we received 8 Stage 1 complaints and 4 Stage 2 complaints. When you complain, we always aim to resolve the issue as soon as possible and within 5 working days. However some complaints are more complex and require detailed investigation, meaning they are treated as Stage 2 complaints which we aim to respond within 20 working days.

Complaints Results



Revised Complaints Handling Procedure

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) first published Model Complaints Handling Procedures (MCHP) for local authorities and housing sector in 2012.

In 2018-19, the SPSO conducted a review of the MCHP to establish its effectiveness and usability and following consultation they were revised to standardise

core text across public services as well as promoting positive complaint behaviours and improving access to complaints for vulnerable groups.

The updated procedures were published in 2020 and are required to be implemented from 1 April 2021. At that time we will publish them on our website, however if anyone would like a copy sent to them, please let us know.





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You will recall the 2 Stars and a Wish form which was included with our Annual Performance Report sent out earlier this year. A big thanks to everyone who returned this and for all your positive feedback!

TELL US TWO THINGS THAT WE ARE DOING WELL

- Nothing due to pandemic
- Repairs
- Friendly Staff
- Repairs and Welfare Rights are second to none
- An honest, fair and Caring Association which always has the community in mind and will always do their best to resolve a situation no matter what
- Keeping in touch with the tenants and treating them in a caring and respectful way
- Keeping the areas around Hillhead nice and tidy
- The Housing Association is doing well with upgrading the outside of property's (sic) this has made them look more appealing to live in Hillhead
- Repairs are quick to be done
- Social Work Department second to none
- Upkeep of housing. Maintenance Excellent
- The staff are very nice and friendly
- You repairs get done on time
- Repairs once reported are arranged quickly
- Easy to contact even during the pandemic
- Always check on tenants
- Always helpful, if needed
- House Repairs
- Quick response for repairs
- Grass Cutting
- Yes I would like to send a letter to every tenant on the ladder (sic) to clean each time every Saturday me for 4 years since I collect bags of garbage by the door and smell awful
- Prompt response in case of breakdowns in the house
- Updating us on information about the latest changes in the office

TELL US ONE THING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE US TO DO BETTER

- Better internal home improvements
- Happy with the way things are
- Can't really fault them on anything!!
- Maybe a wee bit more gardening help for our elderly residents. Would be good if people could actually employ some of your staff for gardening and decorating at reasonable prices!!
- Can't think of a thing ☺
- I would like to see Hillhead housing their own litter and dog fouling bins in Hillhead. I think it would make a big difference to tackling these problems in the hillhead area
- Back garden rubbish taken away
- I think u are doing a good job
- Be tougher on irresponsible dog owners who don't pick up after their pets. It is illegal anyway
- Keep doing the good work
- Anti-social behaviour
- Mess outside houses
- Drainage garden is really bad and water logged
- Send someone to wash the window of the block from the outside Thank You
- Improve drainage around the house

HELPING HILLHEAD

As highlighted on the front page, we have been lucky to source a variety of funds which have allowed us to help families in different ways over the last year:

£5300

Received from Cash for Kids which has allowed us to give grants to children who didn't qualify for free school meals

£910

Obtained from Cash for Kids to support families financially affected. We purchased shopping vouchers for some local people with this money.

£1386

With help from the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust we used this money to provide some families with energy vouchers.

6 x Laptops & £200

Received from The Family Fund, a charity supported by Children in Need, and allowed us to purchase laptops for children of families facing particular difficulties. £200 worth of toys were also given to younger children in the community.

£10,000

With the help of Advice UK we secured this funding from the Scottish Government's Debt Advice Levy Fund which allowed us to work with Hillhead Primary School to provide advice and support to families, including the provision of IT equipment

£2800

Every year we help local residents apply to their energy supplier for the warm home discount and to date have helped them obtain around £2800 worth of support.

£10,000

Received from the Supporting Communities Fund, allowing us to provide financial support to the Foodbank and other organisations who are supporting local residents. We also used some of this money to provide food vouchers and assistance with back to school costs.

£1500 +

We used our own funds to provide vouchers to families who would normally have benefited from the Cash for Kids Christmas Grants which came to an end last year.

£800 in Energy Top Up Vouchers

Received from One Parent Families Scotland to support local families. Likewise, £231 from a fund called The Mega Fund to help with household energy costs.

£12,500

Further funding obtained from the Scottish Government's Communities Recovery Fund which is again helping us support other local organisations and allowing us to provide more vouchers for shopping and energy costs for our tenants.

LET'S KEEP TALKING

If nothing else - the events of the last year have taught us the importance of being able to communicate and staff at Hillhead have noticed, particularly during the most recent lockdown, that tenants are not engaging as readily as they did during the early stages of the pandemic.

The majority of our staff have been working from home throughout the past year and along with tenants, have had to get used to different ways to communicate with each other. Gone are the face to face interviews or the "bumping" into your Housing Officer in the street for a quick catch up which have now been replaced with emails and online video calls.

For those of our tenants who are not online, do not own a smart phone or are just not comfortable with these new means of communication we appreciate that this

period has been even more difficult. However our staff can still be easily contacted via telephoning them direct on their direct line numbers which are available on the Association's website or by contacting the office directly between the hours of 10am to 3pm Monday – Friday on the usual number 0141 578 0200.

Please do not hesitate to pick up the phone if there is anything you wish to talk to us about.



BE KIND

Be kind is a phrase we've all heard a lot recently, but what does it actually mean? Well for us at Hillhead it means treating tenants, applicants and other customers with dignity and respect. And through the pandemic, more than ever, it has meant offering a listening ear when people are struggling to cope in challenging circumstances. At times it has also meant offering practical assistance like food and fuel vouchers. Being kind also means being honest, and at times our staff have to say no because we just don't have a bigger property to allocate or your house isn't due for a new kitchen yet.

Our staff are always guided in their actions by our policy and procedures, and these are designed to ensure we are being consistent and fair.

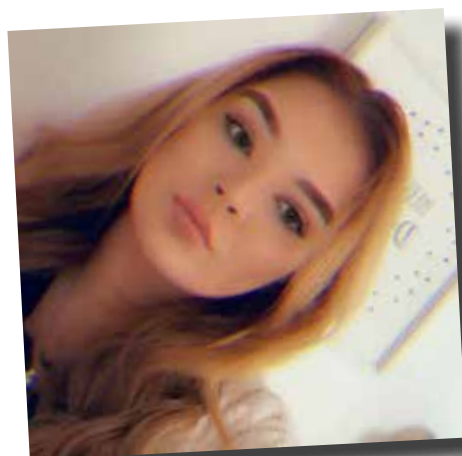
In return we'd ask you to remember that our staff are people with varied home lives and circumstances too. Many of us have found the huge upheaval in our lives tough going just like you. We will treat you with dignity and respect and we ask that you do the same for our staff. Please don't shout, swear, or be sarcastic or aggressive. Our staff will help you as much as they possibly can. So please be kind.



CHAIR'S FUND

In our December newsletter we advertised the relaunch of this fund which has been set up to support and develop young people by providing financial support to take part in educational, vocational and character-forming activities. We are delighted to have already been able to grant £300 to the daughter of one of our tenants – Emma Buchanan. Here is what Emma had to say:

"Aged 17, I was offered a place at the University of the Arts, London in September to study for a BA in Acting and Performance. I have since been living in London on my own and while it has been really strange, it has also been the best time of my life! I have made lots of new friends and feel at home. I am currently sitting exams for the end of first year and came out in the top 1% of the class. As a Scottish student, the student finance is a lot lower – especially when living in the most expensive city in the country. I was so pleased when the Housing Association gifted me a grant to help further my studies – this has been such a good help, thank you!"



If you wish to know more about this fund please contact the Association.

Get ready for spring with our top energy saving tips



Most people who contact Home Energy Scotland, the Scottish Government's free impartial energy saving advice service, are keen to make sure they're not overpaying on their bills. And with longer days and

(hopefully) better weather just around the corner, spring is a great time to be looking at ways you could save some pennies. Have a look at our top tips to help you prepare for warmer months ahead and see what you could save over a whole year.

1. Reset your thermostats

During the winter, you probably set your temperature at a high level so be sure to reset your thermostats to reflect the warmer weather. Dropping the heat by just 1°C can save you on average £80 per year. And don't forget to reset any thermostat timers – more sunlight means your house will naturally be warmer and lighter, so you'll not need the heating on as much, if at all.

2. Get a better energy deal

Did you know that switching energy supplier could save you hundreds each year? According to OFGEM, switching from a Standard Variable Tariff to the market's cheapest tariff could save you around £305. It's easy to switch, and there are a number of energy comparison websites you can use to find the best deal for you, including the Citizen Advice Bureau's Comparison Tool.

3. Change the way you pay

Contact your supplier directly to find out if there is a better way for you to pay your bill that might save you money. For example, most suppliers offer a discount for paying your bill by direct debit. You may also get discounts for receiving bills online, as this cuts down on paper and reduces costs for the supplier and is good for the environment.

4. Embrace the great outdoors

Take full advantage of the warmer weather by line-drying your clothes instead of using the tumble dryer. This could save on average £35 a year on your electricity bill. Less time spent indoors also means less money spent on your energy bills, so why not head outdoors for a bike ride or take a stroll around the park if you can? Enter our greener travel quiz to win a Garmin Vivoactive 3 GPS Smartwatch. Full details at www.homeenergyscotland.org/wingreentravel.



5. Switch off

If you're planning any day trips away, remember to switch appliances off at the wall. Turning off appliances rather than leaving them on standby could save you around £30 a year on your bills each year.

For more energy saving tips and free advice to help you reduce your bills and keep warm at home, contact Home Energy Scotland on freephone 0808 808 2282, visit homeenergyscotland.org or follow 'HomeEnergyScotSC' on Facebook and @HomeEnergyScot on Twitter.



Useful Telephone Numbers

Below is a list of contact telephone numbers that we hope you will find useful

Advice and Response EDC
0141 775 1311

Emergency Housing EDC
0141 578 2133 / 0141 578 8000

Kirkintilloch Integrated Care Centre
0141 232 8200 /
0141 304 7400 / 0141 355 2200

EDC – The Hub
0800 901 057

Housing Benefit
0800 901057

Caledonia Housing, Kirkintilloch
0141 578 0260

Police Station, Kirkintilloch
0141 532 4400 or 101

Special Uplift
0300 1234515

Cleansing and Recycling
0300 1234514

**Environmental Protection
(including dog fouling, dog
barking, antisocial noise)**
0300 1234510

Fire Station
0141 776 6263

**National Grid (formerly Transco)
Gas Emergency**
0800 111 999

DWP (Cumbernauld)
01236 786500

Local MP, Stuart McDonald MP
01236 453 969

Local MSP, Rona Mackay
0141 776 1561

Citizens Advice Bureau
0141 775 3223

Crimestoppers Scotland
0800 555111

How to contact us:

Hillhead Housing Association,

2 Meiklehill Road, Hillhead, Kirkintilloch, G66 2LA

**Please refer to Direct Dial Numbers for
all staff on enclosed Staff Contact List**

Email: admin@hillheadhousing.org

Web: www.hillheadhousing.org

Free Phone Number: 0800 0523 188

Tel: 0141 578 0200 • Fax: 0141 578 4817

Text Number: 07491 163429

Due to the pandemic our main office number is only available between 10am-3pm, however staff can be contacted on their direct phone numbers during normal working hours

OUT OF HOURS EMERGENCY REPAIRS CONTACT NUMBERS:

(Gas Heating repairs–James Frew Ltd)	01294 468 113
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(all other repairs–Rodgers & Johnston)	0800 999 2520
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For tenants of new build properties built within 1 year call NPA	0345 6016 084
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**KEEP US
UP TO DATE!**

Please remember to let us know of any changes in your circumstances, for example change of name, change of number in household etc.



PUBLIC HOLIDAYS - OFFICE HOURS

Our office will be closed on the following dates:

Friday 2 April, Monday 5 April, Monday 3 May,
Friday 28 May, Monday 31 May

Please let us know if you require any information within this newsletter in larger print, Braille, cd/tape or in another language.