

Tenant & Customer Updates

In light of the latest instruction issued by both Westminster and Holyrood on Monday 23rd March 2020, we will only be dealing with emergency situations.

We will be operating a very limited service, with the following repairs classed as emergency;

- Total loss of electrical power (not a power cut)
- Burst water pipe or hot water tank
- Blocked or totally unusable toilet (where there is only one in the property)
- Blocked drain if there is serious leakage or risk of flooding
- A tenant who is elderly, disabled or has young children or special needs is locked out
- Tenant is locked in (cannot get out any door of the property)
- Property is insecure following a break-in (broken window or door)



No other repairs will be completed at this time. Completion of emergency repairs will be subject to the availability of both contractors and materials.

Where an emergency repair is reported, tenants will be asked a number of screening questions in relation to COVID-19 to protect the health and safety of our staff and contractors.

Please see page 3 for more information on rent payments and electricity payments during this time or check our website www.hjaltland.org.uk for regular updates.

Out Of Hours Repairs Service

Remember if you need to phone about an emergency repair, the number to all is 01595 692387.

If the repair is an emergency according to the Maintenance Policy, the response centre will arrange for a contractor to attend. If the repair is not an emergency it will be dealt with when the office re-opens.

When contacting the service, please be aware there may be times when they are dealing with a large volume of calls. Please continue to wait when it is ringing as your call will be transferred through to an answer service after 90 seconds where you can leave your details and you will receive a call back.

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Financial Award Benefit Scheme

If you did not qualify for the SSE Warm Home Discount payment scheme which is now closed to new applicants, you may be eligible for their Financial Award Benefit payment.

The Financial Assistance Benefit (FAB) is a pilot scheme from SSE that is designed to help its customers who don't qualify for Warm Home Discount (core or broader) but would benefit from a £140 credit to help with their energy bills.

It's a one-off payment and there are strict eligibility criteria.

To be eligible, you must meet all of the following criteria:

- Have a household income below the minimum income standard* and are spending 10% of this income on fuel
- All electric heating or off gas-grid or electric and/or gas supplied by a pay as you go meter - customer has electric central heating (THTC, Superdeal, E7, E10 etc.) on a credit or pay as you go meter, or buys oil in bulk to heat their home as gas isn't available
- On our Priority Services Register (Chronically sick/disabled, children under 5 or pensionable age)

Or all of the following criteria:

- Household income under minimum income standard*
- In an emergency heating situation (e.g. heating has broken and high-cost temporary heating is being used or self-disconnecting/self-limiting)

On our Priority Services Register (Chronically sick/disabled, children under 5 or pensionable age)

*Minimum income standard – this has been set by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and varies depending upon the household:

- 1 Adult £18800
- 2 Adults £28000
- 1 Adult with children £36000
- 2 Adults with children £41200

If you would like to find out more information to see if you qualify, please contact SSE Customer Relations on 0345 0719852 or 01738 457930. Alternatively you can contact Jennifer here at our office who will be happy to assist you.



An Up-to-date Resource to Help Beat the Coronavirus

In this difficult time where some of you may be struggling to be living as normally as possible, we'd like to point you in the direction of a fantastic local resource that's been set up to help. This site has up-to-date info on which local businesses are open in Shetland and which of them are currently doing home deliveries. Any news (local & national) is also posted on the site and it has hints and tips on alleviating boredom and suggestions of activities you can do with your kids while isolating. For more info please visit their website here: <http://www.shetlandtogether.uk/index.html>

They also have their own Facebook page with even more info, you can find that here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/supportshetland/>

In this trying time, it's great to know that Shetland, as a community, is really pulling together to help each other out.

Help during these uncertain times

Rent

A reminder to all tenants who may be worried about their finances in the current climate of uncertainty – our Financial Inclusion Officer is on hand to offer advice and assistance. Whilst we can't complete face to face appointments at present, we are happy to support you through phone and email – call us today on **01595 694986** or email jennifer@hjaltland.org

Other sources of support include the following;

Universal credit helpline

Contact the Universal Credit helpline if;

- You cannot use digital services at all; this might be due to disability or your circumstances
- You have a question about your claim and cannot access your online claim

Telephone; 0800 328 5644

Textphone 0900 328 1344

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

DWP JC+ Lerwick: 01595 732053

Shetland Islands Council Benefits team

Telephone: 01595 744682

Email: benefits@shetland.gov.uk

Website:

www.shetland.gov.uk/Welfare_Reform_.../ScottishWelfareFund.asp



Electricity meters

For tenants who have pre-pay electricity meters & may be struggling to afford to top up during the coronavirus "lockdown", visit Citizen's Advice Scotland online at www.citizensadvice.org.uk for advice on how to get some help with this issue.

If you can't afford to top up your meter

- Tell your supplier if you can't afford to top up because you're ill with coronavirus or following guidance to 'self-isolate'. You'll find their contact details on their website or on your bill.
- They'll try to help you find other ways to keep your energy supply connected. For example: let someone else top up for you, add funds to your account or send you a pre-loaded top-up card

You'll need to pay back any credit your supplier gives you - ask them when and how you'll need to do this.

If your meter is outside and it's safe to get to it, it's a good idea to leave it unlocked. This means someone else could top it up for you.

For all other queries about paying for your electric, please call your provider or go online at www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Properties on Site

We are currently on site at 2 locations; King Harald Street, Lerwick and our next phase at Houlland in Sandwick

If you are interested in applying for any of these properties when they become available, please ensure you have an up to date application in with us and SIC housing and keep an eye out on our website and in The Shetland Times.

Photo right: The striking façade of our new one bedroom flats at King Harald Street, Lerwick.

There will be 27 properties available for



Photo left: Work has started on 12 properties at Houlland, Sandwick.

These properties are due for completion in early 2021.

Mutual Exchanges

Family sizes change over time; children grow up and move out or families can grow. The Association acknowledges this and would encourage our tenants to look at an exchange as an option if they are experiencing overcrowding or if they wish to move to another area.

The Association works in partnership with 'Homeswapper', a national service to help social housing tenants exchange homes. Go to www.homeswapper.co.uk to register and to find potential swaps. Alternatively, you can join one of the many social media pages set up specifically for mutual exchanges, advertise in your local paper or in your local shop/supermarket.

Once you identify a possible swap, you should view each others properties in the first instance. If you wish to apply for the swap, please contact the office for an exchange application; this provides us with all the information we require to start processing your request. You must also have a current Housing Application form in with us.

There are, of course, some conditions that you must meet. These include:

- You mustn't organise a swap without our permission.
- You must have resided in the property for 12 months and
- Your rent payments must be up to date.
- You must have kept your property in good order
- The property to which you want to move must be a reasonable size for your needs.

If you can tick all those boxes, a swap can help you move on in your life, bring you closer to friends or family and perhaps release a larger house that's needed by someone else. You can of course always contact us to discuss your current housing situation on (01595) 694986 or pop into the office.

Fuel Bills

Most households with an electricity supply will receive a regular bill, showing how much energy has been used and how much has to be paid. Your fuel bill may be calculated using either an estimated meter reading or a reading provided by you or a meter reader.

Your bill will clearly state what has been used and estimated bills may have a reading with an “E” at the end to indicate it is an estimated reading for example 4857E.

If your bill is based on an estimated meter reading(s) you should read your meter(s) yourself and provide this information to your energy supplier, so that they can send you a revised electricity bill based on your actual usage.

Reading your meter and keeping a record of the readings on a regular basis will help you to keep track of how much fuel you are using. It may also prevent a large debit or credit balance building up on your account.



You may find yourself in arrears with your electricity payments for a number of reasons. Whatever the reason, it's important that you contact your supplier straight away – if they don't know you are struggling they can't help you.

Rent Consultation

Thank you to all the tenants who took the time to complete our Rent Consultation exercise, which was open during all of January and the first weeks of February.

We were delighted to receive an excellent return, with a total of 126 responses. The final results were as follows;

- 17% of respondents indicated a preference for Option 1 (The current Business Plan level of RPI inflation + 0.5%)
- 83% of respondents indicated a preference for Option 2 (Bringing forward a reduced increase one year early – RPI inflation only)

A report was presented to the Association's Management Committee on Thursday 20th February 2020 and they adopted Option 2, in line with the consultation results.

All tenants should now have received rent notification letters for April 2020. If you have not received your letter, or you have any queries or concerns regarding the payment of your rent, please contact the Association office.

If you pay your rent by direct debit we shall adjust your rent as appropriate. If you pay your rent by standing order or bank transfer, please ensure that you adjust your payments to the new amount from April.

If you have any questions or queries regarding your rent payments, please do not hesitate to us on 01595 694986.

Our staff are here to help and can provide you with support if you are struggling with your finances.

Hjaltland Housing Association
2 Harbour Street
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE2 9LB

Phone: 01595 694986
Emergency Repairs: 01595 692387
E-mail: mail@hjaltland.org
www.hjaltland.org

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Tenants get involved

The Association was delighted to welcome Tenants to the first of our quarterly Tenant Focus Group meetings this year which was held at the end of February. The purpose of these regular meetings is to involve our tenants in the decision making of the Association, to make suggestions for any improvements on services provided and to review our policies and procedures.

We try to make these meetings as informal as possible and it's a great opportunity for tenants to meet other tenants and network.

There were a number of items up for discussion including the recent rent consultation where we had 126 responses which was a fantastic return. We thank all tenants for giving their time for feedback. Ian Bray, Head of Housing and Customer Service also gave a presentation on how we allocate our properties; this was to illustrate each step in the allocation process, from the tenant handing in their notice to the new tenant signing up. The staff which are involved in this was noted as well as their role in this process.

Another item on the agenda was asking Tenants to get involved in our quarterly newsletter; we asked members for suggestions for articles to go in the newsletter which they would feel were, as a tenant, interesting and informative. This provided much discussion and we have lots of ideas now for future newsletters.

If you are interested in becoming a member of our Tenant Focus Group, please phone the office on (01595 694986) or email Estelle@hjaltland.org. Our next meeting shall be held in May 2020.