

CEO Update

Welcome to our Spring edition of Rural Matters. We have another very full issue for you which is packed full of lots of information which I hope you can find the time to read and enjoy. We also have lots of links to other great sources of support and information on our website.

It's hard to believe that we have now passed the first anniversary of the UK going into lockdown. The last year has been quite a roller-coaster ride for us all in our work and home lives. We have had many challenges to deal with and perhaps even personal losses. We have had to adapt to new ways of working and living, almost all of it entirely at home – homes that were never designed for all this!

We have continued to work hard throughout the pandemic to continue to provide services and support to all our tenants and service users without too much interruption. I must congratulate my staff team for all their hard work. Thank you also to our readers for your understanding and patience and for embracing all the changes as we adapted. We managed to get through the last year together and we have been doing so well and for that I thank you all very much.

Please remember that our office is still currently closed with a reduced staff team in a few days a week to attend to tasks like opening mail, issuing keys to contractors and so on. The majority of our team are still working from home. We are ready to reopen just as soon as circumstances allow and have all the required measures in place to do so safely.

The prospect of a return to our office in the summer is now very real. We now need to turn attention to how we return to the office and the changes that might be necessary to allow us to return to work. In accordance with Scottish Government guidelines we will still encourage our staff to work from home, however with the vaccine roll out progressing and signs of restrictions easing gradually, the question of how we bring people back is an important consideration for our organisation.

In this edition we can tell you more about our plans and update you on when we hope to resume some of our projects and services that were affected by lockdown restrictions and when we hope these will be eased.

Keep safe everyone and please remember the key guidance – the FACTS: face coverings should be worn in enclosed spaces; avoid crowded areas; clean your hands and hard surfaces regularly and thoroughly; 2 metre distancing remains in place; self-isolate, and book a test immediately, if you have symptoms of COVID-19.

Donna Birrell, CEO

 **FACE COVERINGS**

 **AVOID CROWDS**

 **CLEAN HANDS**

 **TWO METRES**

 **SELF-ISOLATE**



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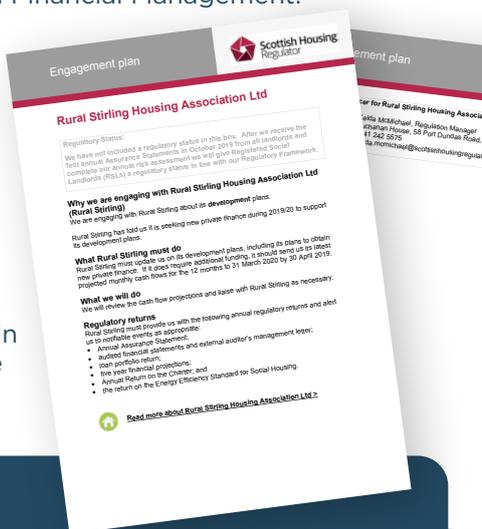
Scottish Housing Regulator Engagement Plan

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. We submitted our Annual Assurance Statement to the SHR in November 2020 and our **Engagement Plan** with the SHR was published in March 2021. We are delighted to advise that our Regulatory Status is **Compliant**. This means that the SHR is satisfied that we comply with all the standards of Governance and Financial Management.

The details of our Engagement Plan can be viewed on our website

www.rsha.org.uk

If you would like more information or to discuss our Annual Assurance Statement or Engagement Plan in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact us.



Social Housing Net-Zero Heat Fund Award



We are absolutely delighted to announce that we have been awarded a grant of just over

£486,000

from the Scottish Government. The grant will be used to replace heating systems in around

30 properties

with a low carbon solution, including the installation and commissioning of Air Source Heat Pumps, Solar PV, and batteries.

We are working in partnership with Changeworks to deliver this project. Changeworks help public, private, and voluntary sector organisations to reduce their impact on the environment. We will soon begin the process of consultation with tenants to provide more detail on the project and what to expect.

Annual Assurance Statement 2021

We would like to involve our tenants and get your feedback on our next Annual Assurance Statement due to be submitted in October 2021.

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.



Update to phone system

We have recently introduced a call routing system on our main office phone line to help direct calls more efficiently to the right person. When calling the office you will have the following options:

- Option 1** for anything to do with repairs. Or
- Option 2** for Housing enquiries.

Board Roundup

The March Board had a packed full Agenda with a lot of key Strategic and financial reports being approved. At the March Board Performance Reports for Q3 2020/21 were also presented and the Board acknowledged a good set of results despite the impacts of COVID. Other items presented to the Board for approval included:

- **Group Strategic Plan:** Update to the three-year plan.
- **Business Plan Update 2021/22**
- **Strategic Delivery Plan Update 2021/22**
- **Venachar Business Plan and Budget 2021/22:** The Business Plan for our subsidiary and budget for the year ahead was approved.
- **Annual Budget 2021/22**
- **Three Year Investment Programme:** The Board approved the Three-Year Investment Programme, see the article in this edition for more information.
- **Customer Engagement Strategy:** The Board approved the first draft of the Customer Engagement Strategy and we are now taking forward tenant consultation. More information on this is also included in this edition.

All the above documents are available on our website www.rsha.org.uk.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO) Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP):

In the Winter edition of Rural Matters, we reported that the Board had approved the adoption of the SPSO new model CHP which we were required to adopt by the beginning of April. We carried out some consultation with our tenants regarding the new procedure and reporting arrangements.

The majority of tenants were satisfied with the two-stage approach and how we intend to publish performance information on the complaints we receive. The two-stage approach involves front line resolution as the first stage and a more detailed investigation stage 2. **All stage 2 investigations will be overseen by the CEO.** Some respondents did not feel that this was the best use of the CEO time and that the CEO should only get involved at the appeal stage. Under the terms of the CHP there is no appeal stage. If you remain unhappy with the decision at Stage 2 the next course of action would be to ask the SPSO to review your complaint. **Thank you to everyone for taking the time to complete the survey. Our new CHP is available on our website.**

Housing to



You may have seen the recent publicity about **Housing 2040** which was released last month. Housing to 2040 is Scotland's first long-term housing strategy that outlines the Scottish Government's vision for housing and communities

to ensure that everyone in Scotland has a safe, warm, energy efficient, affordable home in the future. Key priorities in the strategy, which will be taken forward subject to the outcome of the election, include:

- **delivering 100,000 more affordable homes by 2032, with at least 70% of these being for social rent**
- **setting a single set of standards for housing quality and accessibility, no matter whether a home is owned or rented**
- **decarbonising heating in all homes in line with Scotland's climate ambitions, ensuring this is done in a fair and just way, including by adapting and retrofitting existing homes**
- **aiming for all new homes delivered by registered social landlords and local authorities to be zero emissions by 2026**
- **supporting housing development in rural and island areas, helping to prevent depopulation, and enabling communities to thrive**

The strategy will influence many of our own objectives and priorities in the years ahead and is an important document. You can read the Housing to 2040 strategy document here:

www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/

and the Vision and Principles document here:

www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-vision-principles/

Both documents can also be found on the Scottish Government's website www.gov.scot



We are excited to launch our new video consulting service Near Me.

We will be putting a button on the home page of our website www.rsha.org.uk from 1 May 2021 which will allow you to access our waiting area.



Near Me is a video consulting service that enables people to attend appointments from home or wherever is convenient. The service is already widely used across NHS Scotland for health and care appointments, with around 20,000 consultation being held every week. The service is now being rolled out across a wide range of public services.

All you need is a safe and secure device for making video calls, like a smartphone, and an internet connection. Near Me is approved for use by the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland.

What are the benefits of Near Me?

- Reduced travel to appointments: time, cost, convenience
- Reduced time away from work or home
- Easier to attend if you usually need someone to take you to appointments
- Enables you to have someone with you for support at your appointment (either with you or joining the meeting by video from another location, even from abroad)
- Better for the environment
- Reduces spread of infectious diseases including Covid-19.



Legionella Alert

Legionella is a type of bacteria found naturally in freshwater environments, like lochs and streams. It can become a health concern when it grows and spreads in human-made water systems like showerheads, taps, hot water tanks and heaters.



Catching Legionnaires disease in your home is rare but if you have been away from home for more than a week there are a few steps you can take to minimise the risk such as:-

- Flushing out your water system eg If you aren't using showers or taps regularly, make sure you flush them through at least once a week.
- To flush out your water you need to run the water in all showers, baths, wash basins, sinks and taps continuously for at least 2-3 minutes, beginning with the sink taps. You must do both hot and cold taps.
- When turning taps on, turn them on slowly so that you don't splash water, as this might release water droplets into the air.
- Flush toilets with the lid down following a period of non-use.
- When flushing showers, remove the shower head and lower the hose into the bath. If you are unable to remove the head, wrap it in a towel or facecloth to make sure there is no spray that you could inhale. Keep all shower heads and taps clean and free from a build-up of lime scale, mould or algae growth.



Making Sure You are at the Heart of Everything We Do

“We will deliver excellent customer services, which place the customer right at the heart of everything that we do. We will further develop our knowledge and understanding of our customers’ wants, needs and expectations, and use this information to continue to improve our performance in this area.”

This is one of our main objectives. To achieve this, we need to improve how we engage with you and make it easy for everyone to give us their feedback.

That is why over the last year we have, with your help, produced a new draft Customer Engagement Strategy, which sets out our plans to ensure we are consulting you about the right things in the right way.

We have recently asked you for your feedback on the new draft Customer Engagement Strategy. If you were not contacted about this and would like the opportunity to give your feedback, please let us know. We will be looking at what you have said soon, and we will put the results of the consultation on the website as soon as possible.

We will then make any amendments needed, before seeking Board approval to adopt the strategy.

This is a great time to get involved and help us develop our knowledge and understanding of your wants, needs and expectations. We would love to hear from you if you would like to get involved in any of the following.

Please contact Jackie Leeds, Housing Services Manager at Jackie@rsha.org.uk or by phone on 01786 843030.



Jackie Leeds, Housing Services Manager

- Our customer group – to be run by you, for you and renamed by you! This group will meet three times a year (or more if required) to discuss subjects of your choice with the relevant members of staff.
- The repairs service and how we improve it.
- To be included on our consultation database so that we will make sure you are included in our consultations. This could be for new policies and any changes to services and service delivery.
- Landscape Reps, to monitor the work completed by our landscapers and let us know about any problems or positive feedback.

Benefits Update

Changes in 2021 are set out below. Also note that the freeze on the benefit system has been lifted, so benefits will increase.



Please be aware that if you receive a state pension this increases every year and tenants must inform housing benefit if you are in receipt of this.



Benefit Changes Timetable 2021

Please note that information about some of these changes is limited at present and also subject to further change. Although some will happen quickly, others may be introduced gradually over several years.

If you are worried about how you may be affected, you should discuss this with our Income Maximisation Officer Kevin McGhee kevin@rsha.org.uk or by contacting the office on 01786 841101.



On 14th February 2021, the **Scottish Child Payment** was introduced for families with children aged under six. The Scottish Child Payment will be a payment of £10 per week for each child or qualifying young person in the household. Only households that get Universal Credit, income-related Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Housing Benefit, Income Support, Pension Credit or tax credits will be able to get the Scottish Child Payment.

From April 2021, there will be changes to how the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) recovers Universal Credit advances. The maximum repayment period will go up from 12 months to 24 months. This will mean people will have less money taken off their payment every month. The maximum deduction rate will go down from 30% to 25% of standard allowance.



The Minimum Income Floor in Universal Credit will start to be reintroduced from August 2021.

The additional £80 per month payment received by people getting Universal Credit will end in September 2021.



Connecting Scotland - supporting everyone in Scotland to get online.

Being online is an essential lifeline.

Throughout the Coronavirus crisis, the internet is keeping us connected to friends and family, informed and entertained, and able to learn, work, shop and access health information and other public services.

However, some people can't access these benefits because they don't have the confidence, kit and connectivity at home.

Connecting Scotland is working to change this and help every citizen get online.. The object is to have as many people as possible digitally included in Scotland by the end of 2021.

We applied for free devices, provided by the Scottish Government, and have been successful in obtaining Chromebooks and iPads with a years' worth of data provided by Vodafone.

The criteria for receiving the above devices includes those who are currently digitally excluded and are on low incomes, specific benefits or elderly.

Tenants who receive a device, or anyone who has access to the internet but feel they need some additional support can receive support from the Association's staff, all of whom are Digital Champions. Digital Champions are members of staff who have been trained to give digital support to colleagues & tenants.

Kevin McGhee,
Income Maximisation
Officer



Your Housing Officers



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

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



John Mallon

Tel: 01786 843035
Mob: 07464 543157
Email: john@rsha.org.uk

Doune and Kippen
Estate visits will take place
on the **Second Thursday**
of the month (pm)

Callander and Deanston
Estate visits will take place
on the **First Tuesday**
of the month (pm)

Gargunnoch, Balfron,
Drymen, Strathblane
and Killearn.
Estate visits will take place
on the **Third Tuesday**
of the month (pm)

Aberfoyle, Kinlochard,
Buchlyvie, Gartmore,
Stronachlachar, Strathyre,
Lochearnhead, Killin
and Tyndrum.
Estate visits will take place
as follows; **Aberfoyle,
Kinlochard, Buchlyvie, Gartmore**
First Thurs of the month (am)
Stronachlachar
First Thursday (am) of every
quarter starting 6th May
Strathyre, Lochearnhead
Third Thurs of the month (am)
Killin, Tyndrum
Third Thurs of the month (pm)

Housing Services Update

Many of you will be aware that we will soon have fifty new properties in Callander. Having the additional properties has meant reviewing the Housing Officer patches to ensure you continue to receive the same high level of contact with your Housing Officer.

Please look at 'Your Housing Officers' on page 6 to see if your Housing Officer has changed. Please also check the dates and times when your Housing Officer will be carrying out estate inspections (Walkabouts) in your area. These will be resuming from week commencing 3rd May. The Housing Officers will not be able to come into your homes but will be available to have a chat outside if you would like to speak with them.

We have continued to deliver most of our tenancy services throughout the last 12 months, with the help of digital technology. The pandemic has made us all aware how important it is to be digitally connected and to have access to the internet. Most of our communication with you is now either via email, text or on the website. That is why it is extremely important that we have your current email address and mobile phone number. Please let us know as soon as you can if any of your contact details have changed.

Don't forget that our staff are trained Digital Champions and will be happy to help you if you are having any difficulties getting digitally connected.

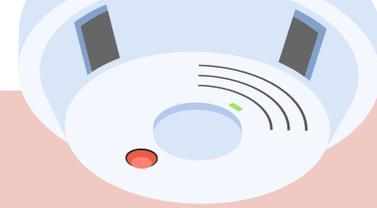


We are pleased to announce that RSHA gained Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation on 31st March 2021.

Cyber Essentials is a Government-backed, industry-supported scheme to help organisations protect themselves against common online threats.

We take control of the sensitive data we hold seriously and this accreditation gives assurance to our customers that we have both technical and organisational measures in place to mitigate against threats to the cyber security of the Association.

For more information about cyber security issues and how to keep yourself and your families safe online visit the National Cyber Security Council website: www.ncsc.gov.uk/



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.)

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:

www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/for-householders/in-an-emergency.aspx

New Fire and Smoke Alarm Standard Scotland - implementation by February 2022



During the course of 2021-2022 we will be carrying out upgrades to Fire Safety equipment to bring them up to the new standard. We have until February 2022 to complete these works. Our Contractor SS Testing will be undertaking the upgrades on our behalf.

www.gov.scot/publications/fire-and-smoke-alarms-in-scottish-homes/



Meet Some New Members of Our Team:

We have been busy recruiting some new staff to our small (but growing) team to ensure that we can provide an efficient and effective range of services. We are delighted to announce the following appointments:



Director of Housing & Property Services

Craig Wood will start with us on Monday 24th May.



Property Services Assistant

Dana McNulty started with us on Monday 15 March



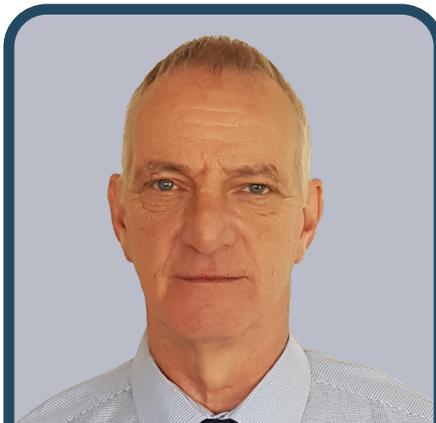
Housing Services Adviser

Lesley McGregor started with us on Monday 15 March



Finance Officer (Part time)

Deborah Martel started with us on Tuesday 9 March. Deborah's working pattern will be four days Tuesday to Friday.



Clerk of Works (Fixed term appointment for 3 years)

John Cannell started with us on Monday 15 March



Governance & Compliance Officer (Part time)

Hilary Tennant started with us on Tuesday 6 April. Hilary's working pattern will be four days Monday - Thursday.

We are currently recruiting new Board Members

Board Recruitment

We are also recruiting for new Board members.

We successfully recruited 2 new Board members as part of our recruitment campaign last year and we would be delighted to hear from anyone who would be keen to volunteer and get involved. We are particularly looking for someone with health and safety skills and experience.

Please get in touch with our CEO if this is of interest donna@rsha.org.uk

GOODBYE!

We have said goodbye to **Fiona Maguire, Asset and Development Manager** who left us in March 2021 for pastures new.



We wish Fiona all the very best.



How do I report a repair? ??



Report a repair using the link provided in our website: <https://www.rsha.org.uk/repair-service/>

Click in the Action box **REPORT A REPAIR**

The screenshot shows the Rural Stirling Housing Association website. At the top left is the logo and name. To the right are links for 'Listen to our site', 'Select Language', and a search box. A navigation menu includes 'Home', 'About Us', 'Tenant Services', 'Find a Home', 'News and Events', 'Your Views', and 'Contact Us'. Below the menu are four large buttons: 'PAY YOUR RENT', 'APPLY FOR A HOUSE', 'REPORT A REPAIR' (highlighted with a green arrow), and 'Comments, Complaints and Compliments'. A 'Tenant Services' sidebar is on the left, and a 'COVID-19 - Reactive Repairs Service' section is on the right.

At the bottom of the page click on the box **REPORT A REPAIR**

Reporting a repair

You can call us during office hours to report the repair, come in to the office or e-mail the Association using the form below (Please note the email enquiries address is not checked outwith office hours.)



enquiries@rsha.org.uk send in your name, address and details of the repair and access preferences.

Note: To report an emergency outwith office hours please refer to the emergency numbers that are provided above.

Then simply choose the repair you need from the list of options.

My Repairs (0)

Report a Repair Home

Please choose a category from below



Plumbing



Doors and Windows



Kitchen and Sinks



Heating and Electrics



External



Roofs Chimneys and Drains



Walls Floors and Stairs



Damp and Mold



Communal Facilities

Your repair will then be submitted to our enquiries@rsha.org.uk email address.

New development updates

Plantation, Balmaha

We have now received Scottish Government funding to develop our site at Plantation, Balmaha, after many years in the development process.

We are currently finalising contract details and discussing site start and completion dates with our approved contractor. We hope to be able to announce a site start very soon. Please keep an eye on our website for news updates for this development.

Lampson Road, Killearn

We are addressing some outstanding planning conditions including a further bat survey at our Lampson Road site. We hope to have a favourable planning decision made by late summer.

Burngreen, Kippen

We are delighted to announce a site start at Burngreen, Kippen, where Dawn Homes are building 31 new homes of which 9 will be for RSHA. The project was funded with support from the Scottish Government and we hope to have the new homes completed in Spring 2022.



Gartness Road, Drymen

We are working in partnership to develop this site with MacTaggart and Mickel. We are progressing plans to acquire this site and we aim to settle the acquisition in April 2021 and achieve a full site start in May 2021.

Croftamie

We have now purchased the site at Buchanan Crescent, Croftamie, which allows us to progress with the appointment of a contractor and make a site start later this year. We expect to be able to report more detail on progress in the next edition of Rural Matters.

Claish Farm, Callander

After some delay, due to Covid-19, the handover of the first 10 homes at Claish Farm, Callander took place on the 4th May, with the balance scheduled in phases up to the end of November this year. These are the first of a 50-new home development being constructed by Lovell Homes. With recent good weather the site is really progressing well and looking good.

From left to right: Matthew Collins, Site Manager Lovell Partnerships, tenants Courtney Paterson, Riley and Callum Redhead, and Mark Griffiths, Chair RSHA.



Return of routine and planned repairs

With lockdown restrictions gradually being lifted we have been able to reactivate our planned repairs programmes, in particular kitchen replacements, external painting and fire safety upgrades. We will also be able to start carrying out routine repairs, of which there is an understandable backlog. We ask you to bear with us as we address this backlog, which will be subject to contractor availability and gaining access. We will not be able to clear it overnight, so we ask for your understanding, if you have to report a new repair we will endeavour to carry this out as quickly as is possible.

It is very important that if we make an appointment with you, particularly for gas safety checks and fire safety upgrades, that you keep this appointment.

It is also important to understand that some routine repairs will take priority over others, and again we ask for your cooperation and understanding.

Consultation on NEW office opening hours

We intend to carry out a follow up survey to the COVID 19 survey carried out last year at the start of lockdown. Respondents to the above survey told us that they would support altered office opening hours to allow our staff to continue to work flexibly from home and office and to allow us to invest more time in developing online service solutions for our tenants. Please help us to design how we work in the future and continue to give you the best possible service. We hope to be able to reopen our office to tenants from the beginning of August, subject to the easing of restrictions and Scottish Government guidance. We will be carrying out tenant consultation over the summer months so please look out for this when it goes live. We will of course keep you informed of any changes we make and provide you with full feedback from the survey.



(asset management)

At the March board meeting an updated 3-year investment programme was approved in the financial years 2021 - 24.

As a result of three successive lockdowns our planned programme was severely disrupted in 2020/2021.

3 major works programmes of **Kitchen Replacements** by Everwarm, **External Painterworks** by Mitie, and **Fire Safety Upgrades** by SS Testing, have been carried forward into this financial year.

This means a huge commitment in this financial year not only to complete these programmes, but also to include a substantial electric storage heating upgrade to **8** properties in Kippen, **22** in Lochearnhead, **36** in the Aberfoyle area and **15** in Tyndrum, which we are carrying out with a substantial input from Changeworks, with the help of a 50% Scottish Government grant.

This is an ambitious planned programme of works which is expected to cost around **£2.7M over the 3 years**. We propose to regularly update you on this programme which also includes in its later stages' further kitchen replacements, some window and bathroom replacements.

Tenants will be given plenty of advance notice of what is proposed and when works are expected to start. Watch this space in future editions where we will update on our progress.

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)

Registered as a Scottish Charity No. SC037849.

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