

Operational Procedure OP 51

Annual Rent Notification Letters

Responsible Officer	Service Manager – Housing Business Support						
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Shetland Islands Council – Housing Services
Annual Rent Notification Letters – Operational Procedure 51

Amendment and Authorisation Record

OP 51 – Annual Rent Notification Letters

Date	Author	Paragraph ref	Nature of change	Authorised by

Annual Rent Notification

Each year we must notify our tenants of any changes in the amount of rent and other charges they have to pay. These changes take effect around the end of March and the exact date should be sought from the Rent Section.

We must, as a legal requirement, give a minimum of 4 weeks notice of changes to rent charges to tenants. Due to the remote locations of some tenants in Shetland we aim to notify them 6 weeks in advance. This date can be calculated once the effective date of the increase is known.

The Report is usually at full council for ratification early in February and a copy of the report is passed to the Rent section so that they can increase the figures on the Rent system

These procedures should assist in the planning and execution of the processes which need to be gone through to get the letters out on time.

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| 1. Update letter templates | Beginning of February |
| 2. Prepare Inserts | Beginning of February |
| 3. Order stationery | Beginning of February |
| 4. Prepare envelopes | Second week of February |
| 5. Check Tenant details | Second week of February |
| 6. Prepare exceptions list | Second week of February |
| 7. Book conference Room | As soon as Rent section prepare letters |
| 8. New tenancies/terminations | As soon as Rent section prepare letters |
| 9. Format letters | As soon as Rent section prepare letters |
| 10. Print letters | 7 weeks before new charges effective |
| 11. Arrange collection of letters | 2 to 3 days before ready to go |
| 12. Envelope letters | 7 weeks before new charges effective |
| 13. Re printing of letters | 7 weeks before new charges effective |
| 14. Posting the letters | 6 weeks before new charges effective |
| 15. Advise staff that letters have been sent | When sent |
| 16. Update internet | End of March |

1 Update letter templates – beginning of February

These updates need to be done in the Finance Office as the letters do not open correctly at Housing.

The letter templates are held in Z:/IbsApp/Extracts. This is the drive used by Finance for the Rent system. To access the Z: if it is not available on your PC, map the network drive as follows,

- From “My Computer”
- Select Tools
Map Network Drive
- Select Z: in the drive field and type [\\Crapapp\IbsApp](#) in the folder field.
- Click on [Finish]

Letters used and the Management Areas they apply to.

- Incentif12a HP12A (12a North Road)
- Incentifcvans CVANS (caravan Sites at Hoofields)
- Incentifgar GAR (Garages)
- Incentifgn GN, ED, NSICE, NSICGN, GNNON
- Incentifgsite GSITE (Garage Sites)
- Incentifhp HPNON, NSICH, HOSTEL
- Incentifsh SH, VSH, NSICSH

The template letters have to be updated with the new year dates, etc.

The following dates have to be updated in all letters.

**THIS LETTER CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR RENT FOR 2008/2009 -
2 Breiwick Road Lerwick Shetland ZE1 0AS.**

The Council has now agreed the council house rents and charges for the financial year 2008/2009. The new weekly charges will take effect on 7th April 2008 and will be as follows:

Check that the spacing at the top margin is correct for the headed paper by printing a copy of each template and checking it against a sheet of headed paper.

At this stage you should also check that the address shows correctly in the window of an envelope.

2 Prepare Inserts – beginning of February

The inserts which have to go out with the letters should be prepared and checked for quantities, etc.

The **Right to Repair leaflet** must go out annually to all tenants to whom it applies, i.e. All tenants with a Scottish Secure Tenancy.

This covers GN, ED, SH, VSH – approx 1800 leaflets need to be prepared. The leaflet is called Right to repair leaflet and can be found in

- O:\Business Support\Research & Information\Information Leaflets.

A **Housing and Council Tax benefit leaflet** must go out with the rent letters. This leaflet is prepared and supplied by Finance and goes to all tenants of dwellings and caravan sites. (Does not go out with GAR or GSITES letters). Ask Finance to prepare the leaflets. Approx 2100 should be prepared.

There may be **other inserts** to go out so check with Allison Christie and Anita Jamieson to see if they have anything to go.

3 Order Stationery – beginning of February

A box of **headed paper** needs to be ordered (2500 sheets). *Order via Admin.*

Check if **envelopes** need to be ordered and order these if necessary. (The size of envelopes is dependant on the inserts going out). A5 envelopes are cheaper to post than A4 envelopes. *Order via Lynn/Sharon.*

When the above arrives ensure it is held separately for the purpose of doing the rent letters so that nobody else uses it accidentally.

4 Prepare Envelopes – second weeks of February

Finance (Revenues) hold a mailsort order book and stamps. These should be borrowed from them and the envelopes required for the letter run stamped when they are available. Using this method means that the letters do not need to be franked. There must be a minimum of 2000 letters before this method can be used.

The envelopes are stamped in the top right corner and care should be taken to ensure that the writing on the stamp is legible.

5 Check Tenant details – second week of February

Create a new folder in Z:/ibsapp/extracts called “incletters xxxx” eg incletters 0910.

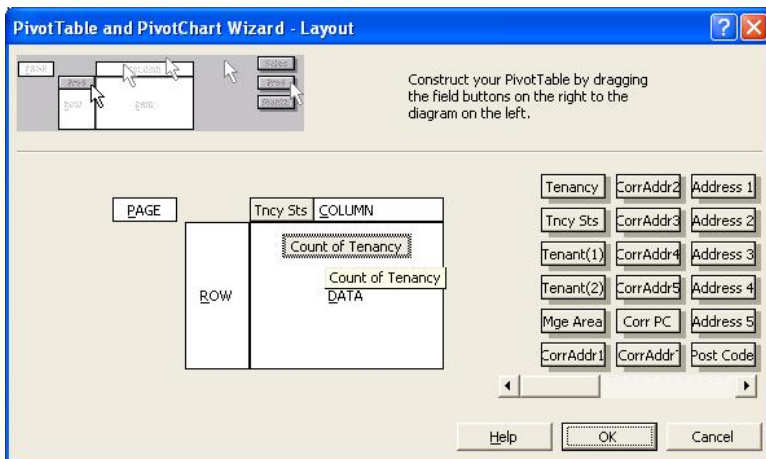
Ask the Rent section to run a “balances report” and save it in the new folder in Z:.

Open the file in excel and save it as “eoy tenancy list”.

Delete all but the following columns

- Tenancy, TncySts, Tenant(1), Tenant(2), MgeArea
- CorrAdd1, CorrAdd2, CorrAdd3, CorrAdd4, CorrAdd5, CorrPC, CorrAddType
- Address1, Address2, Address3, Address4, Address5, PostCode
- All the charges columns from Rents through to VAT
- Central Heating, Double Glazing, Rent, RACS

Create a pivot table



In the pivot table double click on the total under CUR and rename the sheet as Current tenants.

Hide the CorrAdd columns and format for printing.

Print the report and split among staff to check against Orchard and Highlight discrepancies.

Discrepancies could include

- Wrong name
- Joint/sole
- Management area
- Former tenancies

These should now be checked and sorted if possible before the letters are printed.

6 Prepare Exceptions list – second week of February

Exceptions are where the letters have not been set up to include additional charges on GN properties, etc.

Amend the pivot table to show the Management Areas as rows.

Double click in the total for GN/CUR.

Set an auto filter on the sheet and in turn check each charge to see if there are any on for the properties.

- There should be approx 28 Garage charges for the properties with attached garages.
- There should be approx 6 SHED charges for properties which have council sheds (Soldian Court and Voder View)

A note (or print) should be taken so that these charges can be manually added to the letters before printing.

This need to be repeated for all management areas to ensure that all charges are picked up and included in the letters when they are printed.

7 Book Conference room

Book the conference room (using Outlook) for enveloping the letters and recruit volunteers for the stuffing process (e-mail to All Staff – Housing)

8 New tenancies/terminations – as soon as Rent section prepare letters

Housing Officers and Technical Officers should be reminded that any tenants signing up from now on have to have the new charges included on both their offer letter and the SST/Agreement. A copy of the relevant report documents will be available from the Rent Section and should be circulated to Housing and Technical Officers. The charges will also be on the Rent System.

Details of any keys being returned by tenants should be notified to the person dealing with the letters so that letters are not sent to these people.

9 Format letters – as soon as Rent section prepare letters

The letters are prepared by Finance who will save them in Z:/ibsapp/extracts/incletters xxxx (the folder created earlier)

The letters are run by management area with General Needs split into 8 manageable sized documents. (LK1 – 4 and LW1 – 4) and are in rent account reference order.

Each document must be gone through and formatted before printing.

Check that the names in the address and the Dear XXX are the same.

The Names should be in the format

- Mr John Smith, Mr & Mrs J Smith, Mr J Smith and Mrs S Smith or similar, and not something like,
- Mrs and Mr John Smith, Mr JOHN Smith or MR JOHN SMITH and Mrs S Smith.

Check the exceptions sheets and add the relevant charges to the letters. Use the Find option and Rent reference to locate individual letters in the larger documents.

The HP letters may include fields where there is no charge and the additional fields need to be deleted.

The charges are held in text boxes on the letter and care needs to be taken when adding or deleting charges to ensure that the boxes are aligned and the contents visible.

There are also hidden calculation fields on the letter and it is important that these are not disturbed in any way.

When adding a charge to a letter, the charges need to be shown individually and a total given. This may involve amending the text box sizes and/or repositioning them.

The excerpt from a letter shown below shows the outline of the text boxes and the calculation figures used. These are normally hidden.

The Council has now agreed the council house rents and charges for the financial year 2008/2009. The new weekly charges will take effect on 7th April 2008 and will be as follows:

121.76 1.40 123.16

Rent	£	60.88
Shed	£	0.70
Total	£	61.58

If you are already receiving Housing Benefit your benefit will be adjusted automatically for

Check that the figures on the letters have 2 decimal places. The calculation fields will not show the 0 if the amount is 6.50 for example.

Any discrepancies from the checklist which have been sorted can also be changed before printing the letters.

10 Print letters – 7 weeks before new charges effective

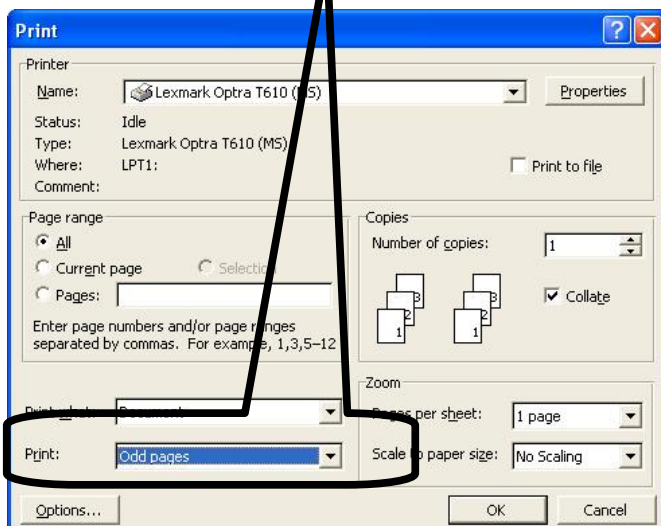
The bigger batches of letters should be printed on the Photocopier. (Some printers can't cope with the quantities).

Headed paper should be inserted correctly (Do a test print before sending a large batch). Inform all staff (by e-mail to All Staff – Fort Road) that the photocopier is being used for large prints and will not be available for a while.

Print one page – select the print current page radio button on the print menu. Check that the letter fits correctly in the envelope and the address is showing correctly.

Once a batch is printed, go through the checklist, pulling out discrepancies which have not been sorted and ticking off the checklist where the letters are okay to be sent. This will ensure that every tenant will receive a letter.

Sheltered and Very Sheltered letters – these are larger font and go onto two pages. To print these, select the option to Print Odd pages only first followed by Print Even pages, using plain paper for the even pages.



Any letters addressed to Reps of should be pulled out.

It is advisable to keep the letters in order at this stage so that any can be found if necessary.

Inform staff that the photocopier is available again.

11 Arrange Collection of letters – 2 to 3 days before they are ready to go.

Advise Internal Mailman that there will be a couple of thousand letters going out shortly, and if necessary arrange a time for him to collect them.

12 Envelope letters – 7 weeks before the new charges effective.

The Conference room should be booked in advance, for a whole day if possible. The room should be sorted into workstations and piles of leaflets, stamped envelopes, inserts and the letters arranged at each workstation.

Volunteers should be sought in advance so that the necessary number of people and workstations is correct. An hour per volunteer is ample time to be working on it.

The process should take around 20 man hours, i.e. 5 people for 4 hours each.

When stuffing the envelopes staff should check that the address is visible in the window, and should try and keep the letters in order, removing any for a different Postcode and re-sorting these in order.

The mailsort process is dependant on the letters being in postcode order, i.e., ZE1, ZE2, ZE3, AB1 etc.

13 Re printing of letters

Discrepancies, etc which are sorted after the main printing of the letters can still be printed by finding and amending the letter and printing “Current Page Only”

Where a letter has not been printed (checking the checklist), it may be because the charges have not been updated. Check the rent system and liaise with the Rent Section, Finance Judy to sort this. She can then print a letter for that tenancy and save it in the folder using the tenancy reference number, so that it can be picked up and printed at Housing.

14 Posting the letters – 6 weeks before new charges effective

Make sure that the letters are sorted in batches according to Postcode.

Count the letters and complete the Mailsort book from Finance (instructions are shown in the book). Give the relevant copies of the Posting Cheque from the Mailsort book to the Mailman along with the letters.

Keep the relevant copy of the Posting Cheque (from Mailsort book) and return the book to Finance.

15 Advise staff that letters have been sent

Advise Admin that the letters have been sent and that queries should be dealt with as follows:

- Name on letter is wrong – pass query to Housing Officer
- Charges are wrong –
 - find out if that is because they receive housing benefit. If so, explain that the charges shown are the full charges for the property and that they will be advised of the amount of housing benefits they will receive from the Finance Service shortly.
 - If it is the furniture charges that are wrong, pass call to their Housing Officer.
 - Other queries regarding charges should be passed to Rent Section, Finance.
- “I pay by Salary Deduction/Direct Debit/Standing Order, what do I have to do?” – advise them that they do not have to do anything, and that they will receive information on their payments shortly from Finance Services.
- “I would like to pay by Salary Deduction/Direct Debit/Standing Order” – pass query to Rent Section, Finance

Advise the Housing Officers, Technical Officer and Rent Section, Finance that the letters have been sent.

16 Update Internet – end of March

A copy of the relevant documents from the report should be forwarded to the Research and Information team so that the Internet can be updated..