

Issue Number 11 - Autumn 2025

VIEWS

Veterans Housing Scotland - Friends & Beneficiaries



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sustainment
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Chairman meets
VHS founder's
great-grandson

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A few words from our CEO, Kevin Gray

As autumn settles in, it feels like the right time to share what's been happening at Veterans Housing Scotland and what lies ahead. The past few months have shown how much we can achieve when we work together. We will delve deeper into some of the following subjects in this newsletter.

Partnerships continue to shape our future. We are now formal partners of both the Scottish Veterans Wellbeing Alliance and Unforgotten Forces. These alliances bring together organisations with a shared purpose: making sure veterans and their families get the right support at the right time. By joining them, we strengthen our ability to respond to need and work alongside others who share our values.

Our Visiting Officers remain at the heart of what we do. Their role goes beyond tenancy visits. They offer reassurance, advice, and a trusted point of contact. Tenancy sustainment means more than keeping a roof over someone's head. It is about creating stability, building confidence, and ensuring no veteran feels alone and, crucially, is able to live

independently reducing the need for VO support. The feedback we receive shows just how much this support matters.

Alongside this, our Admin Team continues to play a vital role. They help beneficiaries manage and pay their rent, allocate properties as quickly as possible, and provide day-to-day support to the wider VHS team. Their behind-the-scenes work keeps everything moving smoothly and makes a real difference to those we support.

Our programme of house surveys is well underway. We plan to complete it by the end of 2025. These surveys help us understand the condition of our homes and plan future investment. Thank you to all our beneficiaries for your patience and cooperation while this work takes place. Your support allows us to plan improvements with confidence.

To sustain and grow our work, we have welcomed Laura as our new Head of Fundraising. This role will be central as we secure the resources needed to care for our homes and support our beneficiaries over the next decade. Laura has already made her mark and will play

an important part in strengthening how we operate.

On a lighter note, our Garden Competition continues to bring colour and joy. It is inspiring to see the pride people take in their gardens, turning them into places of peace, creativity, and connection.

We are also completing a special project: the writing of the VHS history booklet. Thanks to the generous support of the Old Edinburgh Club, we will soon be able to share the story of our 110 years of service. It is a chance to celebrate the people, properties, and partnerships that have shaped who we are today.

And finally, a word about Larry's part in "Op Wet Kipper." True to form, he threw himself into the task with his usual enthusiasm. A reminder that at VHS, work and humour often go hand in hand.

Looking ahead, winter is always a busy and important season. We will focus on keeping our homes warm, safe, and ready for the colder months. We will share more details soon.

Thank you for your continued support. Whether through partnerships, volunteering, fundraising, or simply reading this newsletter, you are part of what makes VHS strong. Together, we can build on our proud history and continue to support those who have served.



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Gardening competition winner

Mike Black was one of the first to submit images of his garden and the judges were delighted to select his as the most colourful for 2025. He said: 'This is amazing! I never expected to win. I will keep my vouchers to use at the start of next season'.



The colours of autumn

Across Scotland, autumn brings a spectacular shift. Woodlands, parks, and gardens turn golden, russet, and crimson. This change happens because as days shorten and temperatures drop, the green chlorophyll in leaves fades away. Hidden pigments are revealed: carotenoids bring vibrant yellows and oranges, while anthocyanins add deep reds and purples. Together, they create the rich displays that light up our landscapes from the Borders to the Highlands.

In the garden, fallen leaves are far from waste. Collected in a hessian sack or a simple wire bin, they slowly break down into leaf mould—a dark, crumbly material that improves soil and locks in moisture. This is especially valuable for our often wet and windy Scottish winters. Piles of leaves also shelter hedgehogs, toads, and insects, all of which are important for a healthy garden ecosystem. Leaving some areas a little untidy can be a simple act of care for wildlife.

Autumn's colours also offer something for us. A walk through a park, woodland, or even a quiet street lined with trees can lift the spirits. Their changing shades remind us of life's natural cycles and the importance of slowing down. As another Scottish year turns, autumn invites us to pause, reflect, and take joy in its fleeting beauty.



Tenancy sustainment service

In 1915, those who had served in the First World War and been injured on the front line started to return home to a land fit for heroes. Those who had served and supported their country were now in need of assistance. Throughout Scotland's towns and cities, homes and communities were created using the Garden City concept and Veterans Housing Scotland as it's now known was born.

For over 110 years, Veterans Housing Scotland has developed its support to meet the needs of veterans and their families. The nature of warfare has changed, the demands on our service personnel have changed and the support needs of our veterans have also changed. To meet the challenges, the charity has continued to change to meet the needs it faces from those who have served.

In 2022, the charity introduced a tenancy sustainment service to support those most in need to help retain their homes and educate beneficiaries to empower and enable them to have the confidence to help themselves. The service provides our beneficiaries with not only long term security and the benefits of a stable home but also the knowledge that someone will always be there to listen and help, if needed. Whether the need is practical support, advice, or simply a friendly face, The VHS Visiting Officers, themselves veterans, bring lived experience and understanding that helps break down barriers and build trust.

VHS CEO, Kevin Gray said: 'Our experience has proven, there is a broad and varied range of support required to help today's

veterans who are our beneficiaries. This could range from help with paying their rent to referral to the appropriate social work department. Previously we helped beneficiaries whenever we could with the tools we had. However, it became clear that there was a growing need for a dedicated resource within our charity to provide the additional support that is becoming increasingly necessary.

Karen Hill, Senior Visiting Officer, said: 'Every beneficiary is different. For me, it is all about prevention. Ensuring that we help our veterans before an issue becomes overwhelming is key whether it is practical help, signposting or simply listening. It is important that we work together as a team, with compassion, dignity and empathy.

Kevin Gray continued: 'We are constantly learning and refining the VOs role, tailoring it to suit the different needs of our beneficiaries. It is not about 'doing it' for them. By visiting regularly, we can establish a relationship and build trust which allows us to help. Many questions will be similar however others will be unique to the beneficiary or their location.

'One of the biggest challenges we faced as we rolled out the new Tenancy Sustainment Service across Scotland

was funding. As is always the case with initiatives of this type created to meet the changing needs of the charity, the benefits are significant but so are the costs involved in providing the additional support some people need. We were very fortunate to attract support from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The AFCFT financial support allowed the charity along with partnership with the Defence Medical Welfare Service, another charity that shares our values and vision, to introduce a service that has real impact. The complex clinical needs support provided by the team at DMWS is crucial to the successful delivery of the service. The partnership helps us achieve our ambition to ensure that our beneficiaries and their families are happy and enjoy a good quality of life and can access even wider opportunities and services, when they need it.'

This is the real benefit of being part of the VHS family - a safe home, a trusted support network, and the promise that no veteran or their family will ever be left to face challenges alone.

Veterans' Housing Scotland's ground-breaking initiative to introduce a nomination rights scheme in Scotland for veterans is progressing well with local authorities and other housing providers. The charity was thrilled to secure its first agreement with Midlothian Council. This news was particularly welcome because the Council has approved the ongoing provision of two properties per year, giving nomination rights to VHS veterans and their families with the properties maintained by the Council with the wellbeing needs of the veteran looked after by Veterans' Housing Scotland. Other Councils have followed including West Dumbartonshire.

VHS has also established a partnership with Hanover Scotland making properties available across several regions, offering veterans a dependable pathway to integrate fully into their communities. By working with Hanover Scotland, VHS is helping beneficiaries build lives within strong, supportive communities where they feel valued and at home. In addition to offering homes, Hanover Scotland extends its Armed Forces Independence Payment option to veterans.



Return of Exercise Wet Kipper

Two welcome additions to the partnerships list are Scottish Veterans Wellbeing Alliance and Unforgotten Forces

Kevin Gray commented: 'By working in partnership we are able to help our veterans find their perfect home in their perfect location and enable them and their families to live a fulfilled life.'

Income maximisation

Andrew Inches has been with VHS for almost a year helping beneficiaries in many different situations. 'There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach - sometimes beneficiaries manage their finances with preventative measures, whilst others come to us only when their situation is unmanageable for them and they feel they have no one to turn to.'

'One example was helping to address rent increase top-ups - small amounts per month/4 weeks - which by themselves are minor problems however over time, and when the same issue is spread over multiple beneficiaries, can become an issue for VHS. For us then, we see the bigger problem and our efforts to tackle it are similar to our arrears recovery. This can be a shock for our beneficiaries, who only see their individual situation.'

'My approach has always been that of empathy. By establishing trust and providing the facts as they stand, along with good communication and with the support of colleagues, I have made sure that direct debits were established, payments were taken, and that information regarding housing costs are provided to Housing Benefit/Universal Credit to update their housing costs.'

'If any beneficiary does need advice or support please email me directly. I will be delighted to provide assistance at any level.'

Andrew Inches is available at IMO@vhscot.org.uk

Employers were once again put through their paces by the Royal Marines Reserve (RMR) Scotland during an exercise in Highland Perthshire.

Exercise Wet Kipper was jointly organised by RMR Scotland and Highland RFCA and held at Polney Crag and the River Braan, Dunkeld.

Visiting Officer Larry was invited to represent Veterans Housing Scotland at the event.

Larry had a great time. 'An engaging day that introduced employers who support the veteran community to some of the more specialised Royal Marine activities. The activities included scaling steep slopes and abseiling down them, knots and their uses, and finished with learning the practical need for these knots in doing a river crossing.'



Defence Employer recognition scheme

Kevin Gray was thrilled to receive the news that VHS had achieved the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award. He said: 'We are honoured to receive this prestigious award from the Employers Recognition Scheme recognising our unwavering commitment to veterans and their families. At VHS we believe safe, secure housing is the foundation for a dignified life after service. We are proud to count so many veterans within our own team.'

10 minutes with VHS new head of fundraising, Laura Porteous

Welcome to Veterans Housing Scotland Laura!



What is your background?

My whole career has been spent in the charity sector. I've been lucky to work for some fantastic organisations such as Save the Children, Shelter and Alzheimer Scotland. Most of my roles have been in partnerships and fundraising. I love connecting with people and bringing them on a journey with the work of a charity. It's interesting to find out what makes funders and supporters 'tick'!

Why did you want to join VHS?

VHS is such a fantastic charity with a clear focus on providing safe, secure and affordable homes for disabled veterans in Scotland. The fact the charity has been supporting veterans for 110 years is testament to its success and how much these homes and support are needed. That's why I want to raise the money to enable us to carry out the necessary upgrades and renovations to our homes, some of which date back to WW1. With building costs continuing to rise, it's going to be a challenge. I'm looking forward to introducing people to VHS. I'm really passionate about how important having a secure home is in providing a foundation

on which to thrive. Nobody deserves that more than those who have served their country.

What's your proudest achievement to date?

Professionally, I am really proud to have helped fundraise for the opening of an Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre in Badenoch & Strathspey, in the Cairngorms National Park. It stemmed from me reaching out for a small amount of match funding to the Cairngorms National Park for some dementia activity groups. This led to us being part of a successful multi-million pound National Heritage Lottery Fund bid. That one email led to us raising over £600,000 for an amazing outdoor resource centre for people living with dementia.

What are you looking forward to most?

Connecting with people who haven't heard about VHS and telling them about what we do. I'm also looking forward to working in such a tight-knit team who are so passionate about what they do.

What do you do in your spare time?

Most of my spare time is spent with my family, which includes my young son and old dog! I try and get to the gym as often as possible and then ruin any progress by eating out.

Greenburn charity golf day

In August, Veteran Robert Storrie held his annual golf day at Greenburn Golf Club in Fauldhouse with fellow Veterans and friends. He kindly chose to donate fundraising proceeds from the day to Veterans Housing Scotland, raising £1380. A huge thanks to Robert and his friends for taking part and donating to VHS!

Picture shows left to right:
Colin Stewart from sponsor Amey,
Brian McWilliams and Robert Storrie.



Leonard Harper Gow

As part of the research for our forthcoming history project funded by the Old Edinburgh Club, it was a particular highlight to meet Leonard Harper Gow, great-grandson of Veterans Housing Scotland founder, Lord Salvesen.

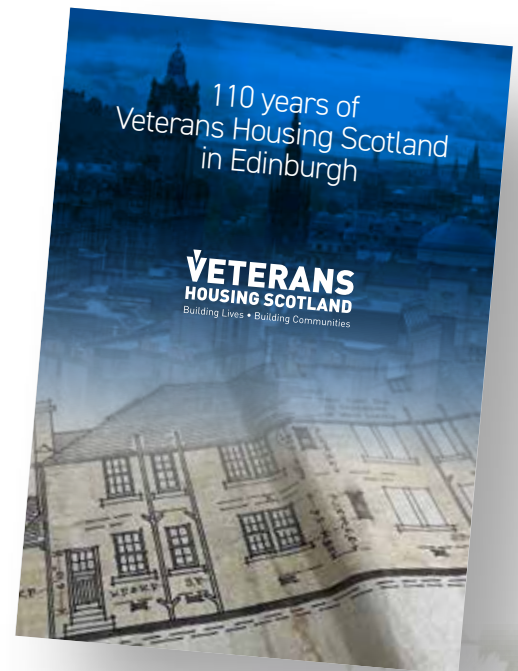
Here, we have an extract from his chat with Chairman, Group Captain Bob Kemp who said 'It was a privilege to be able to introduce Lord Salvesen's Great Grandson to Earl Haig Gardens.'

Leonard Harper Gow added: 'It was a wonderful experience to walk around Earl Haig Gardens in Edinburgh with the Executives of Veterans Housing Scotland. This was one of many charitable projects started by my Great Grandfather, Lord Edward Salvesen. He lost two sons in

WW1 and this increased his wish to support a wide variety of schemes, both here in Scotland and also in Norway where the Salvesen family had originated.'

Bob Kemp, added: 'In this 110th Anniversary year, it was a real pleasure to welcome Leonard to one of the first developments his Great Grandfather had created. The donation of the land was probably one of the most significant gifts the charity has received.'

Veterans Housing Scotland 110 Years will be published in October. To receive a PDF copy, please email comms@vhscot.org.uk





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