

Ross & Cromarty Albyn Tenants Forum

Note of Meeting held on Wednesday 25th February 2009, in the Albyn Housing Society Ltd Offices, Invergordon

Present

5 Tenants

In Attendance

John Clarke, Albyn Housing
Lucy Fraser, Albyn Housing
Anne Mackay (Notes), Albyn Housing
Mhairi MacSween, Outreach Officer, Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre

Lucy welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced John and Mhairi.

Mhairi MacSween, Outreach Officer, Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre

Mhairi made an informative and interesting presentation to the meeting, and the following tips for saving energy costs, and obtaining help and advice were highlighted:

- If leaving the room for more than a minute, then turning off a light does save money. Open curtains and blinds to get the benefit of the sun, closing them again at dusk
- Turning down the thermostat by 1°C on your hot water & central heating systems can save 10% on your fuel bills. Turn down the heating in rooms not used often, use the programmer / timer to control heating and hot water separately, and avoid using the boost.
- Fitting a jacket around the hot water tank can save £10 – 20 per year.
- Try to use energy efficient light bulbs
- Turn electrical appliances off rather than leave them on standby – mobile phone chargers keep using energy even when not in use!
- Only boil as much water as required, cook with lids on pans, and use the shower instead of the bath where possible.
- Wait until you have a full load of washing before doing it, and when possible use the lower temperature setting. Try to dry clothes outside / on airer
- Position your furniture so that the heat is not lost down the back of the sofa! Fit shelves above, and reflective panels behind, your radiators.

- Make investments e.g. Fit low cost secondary glazing, replace your old boiler, look for 'A' rated appliances
- Investigate if your electricity supplier can be changed, or if your tariff is correct. Seek advice and keep out of debt, claim benefits due.
- Information can be obtained at the Homeheat helpline, Tel 0800 33 66 99, or from the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre Tel 0800 512012

Mhairi gave out leaflets and invited questions from the tenants. A discussion took place about electricity tariffs, key payments etc, with the attendees giving each other very good advice. One tenant had saved over £450 per year by moving from electricity heating to gas heating. Another tenant advised that he had saved money by paying by Direct Debit, and that Hydro Electric do not charge to change from meter to DD (but some suppliers do charge). Mhairi advised that if a household fuel bill is more than 10% of the household income then you should contact the helpline to find out if you are on the correct tariff. She also advised that if you find yourself in dispute with a supplier, then 'Consumer Focus' can help mediate, Tel 08454 04 05 06

John Clarke, Property Maintenance Director, Albyn Housing

John gave a brief description of his post, and advised that he is responsible for increasing the Energy Efficiency in the Albyn housing stock, and that over the next 12 months his department will be carrying out a survey of all houses to establish the 'energy rating' of each property. By law, every rented property must be of a certain standard by 2015, and this includes a standard for the Energy Efficiency of the building. All new tenancies must get an Energy Performance Certificate for the property which also shows the potential of the house if certain improvements were to be carried out by Albyn. Every property must be scored for Energy Efficiency and if below the standard, then Albyn must improve it by 2015. At present all Albyn properties have double glazing and 150mm of loft insulation.

John explained that while all the new Albyn developments are of a high standard, some with solar panels, air-sourced heat pumps etc, there are some properties where there are problems due to the construction of the building. These tend to be with the older properties and where practical they will be brought up to the level required. The problem of heat loss tends to be with gable-end properties and Albyn may have to look at changing from electrical heating to gas heating for some properties.

Once the survey on all properties has been carried out, the Committee of management of Albyn Housing will then have to decide on the level of standard which can be afforded and a programme of works developed. It is important that Albyn receive feedback from the tenants while developing the programme of work so as to ensure that the worst properties get improved first.

At present the programme of work has been to replace kitchen and bathrooms in properties where they are below standard. This is almost completed. The next 5 year programme of work is to look at the Energy Efficiency and Safety & Security of the properties.

Question & Answer Time

The tenants took the opportunity to advise John of problems that they were experiencing with their own properties and also shared useful tips and observations.

- One tenant felt that some tenants did not know how to use the time switch controls of their heating / hot water systems and so could be losing money
- Tenants may not know how to close the door properly - the handle has to be pulled up on some doors before they close tightly
- One tenant felt that the painters contracted by Albyn were not doing their job properly, but others thought that they were
- Generally tenants were happy with their homes, except for the heating / insulation problems, and all reported that they were happy with the maintenance of the properties.
- Problems with the timing of the Total Control Heating, with one tenant paying more for heating than for rent in winter
- Paying by Direct Debit is cheaper than paying by meter
- The Help-lines advertised are not giving the service they are funded to, and are not providing support for tenants – John advised that the tenant should advise Consumer Focus of their experiences so that action can be taken. Mhairi reminded tenants that they can contact her office for free advice

Lucy thanked both Mhairi and John.

- Lucy asked the tenants if they would be prepared to pay more rent if their properties were improved – all said that they would.

Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place in September, and the topic for discussion will be the proposed Rent increases for the next 3 years and / or Anti Social Behaviour