



Tenant Participation

We have just appointed consultants Housing Plus to carry out a tenant participation audit for us again. Their key tasks will be:

- to inspect how we work with tenants and other members of the wider communities in the area;
- to check whether we meet the requirements and good practice;
- and to develop recommendations to deal with any gaps they find during their audit process.

We will use the outcomes and recommendations of this audit for discussion at a tenants' conference in the late autumn, and also to develop new participation structures and to update our strategy for the next 3 years.

Housing Plus will be doing the audit over the summer, with the aim of producing a final report and recommendations by the end of September. They



would like to speak to some tenants direct about how we do tenant participation just now, especially those of you who are not usually involved in any formal groups. If you would like to speak to Housing Plus and take part in a short survey, you can let them know by contacting their free-phone number: 0808 100 1354. All information will be treated in confidence by the auditors, and will not be given to Albyn except as part of a general report.

THIS ISSUE

We have a very full edition of Newsview for you this time. We hope that you will enjoy the range of articles and that you will find all the information useful.

We are also introducing a couple of new features: Problems page & Quiz feature. We would be delighted to hear what you think of the new format, and any other ideas you have for future articles.

How to contact our housing and maintenance staff

Day in the life of a housing officer

How to deal with neighbour disputes

New district heating scheme in Wick

Tenant participation

New development programme

Your Problems & Quiz

Handyperson scheme

Albyn has been actively involved in setting up Handyperson Services in Sutherland and Ross-shire over the last 18 months as one of our 'wider role' activities. The Handyperson service is aimed at people aged 60 or over, or of any age with a disability. It allows people to contact a handyperson for odd jobs. People are only charged for materials used for the job and not for labour or travelling expenses of the handyperson.

An evaluation has now been conducted of both these schemes to identify the usefulness of the service to the people it is intended to serve. The findings have been hugely positive, with satisfaction levels between

98% and 100%. Clients comments ranged from "Absolutely excellent" to "I feel the Handyperson Service covers most of the assistance the over 60s need and I am most grateful for all your help".

We are obviously delighted with the evaluation results and are currently looking at how we can help to make sure funding continues for this service, so that it can carry on serving the people of Sutherland and Ross-shire for the foreseeable future.

If you wish to contact the Handyperson Service please phone 01549 402798 if you live in Sutherland or 01349 884774 if you live in Ross-shire.

Opening Times

The opening hours in both of our offices are 9.00 - 5.00 Monday to Friday. There may be occasions when the offices are closed over lunch. We aim to keep these to a minimum and always put notices on the office doors if we have to do this.

We have a public holiday on Monday, 28 August and both offices will be closed that day.

How to contact the person you need...

The two departments that you contact most often as tenants are Housing Management and Property Maintenance. All the staff in these departments are based at our main office in Invergordon. But because of the large area we cover and because it is important to be able to deal with a lot of queries face to face, our Officers are often out and about in different parts of the Highlands and Moray.

That does not mean that there will be nobody to help you if you happen to call in to our office or 'phone up when they are out. Most of the time, there will be a member of our administrative team or another of their colleagues available who will be able to help you with the information you need.

Housing Management

Our housing management staff deal with any issues to do with your tenancy (rent payments, arrears, neighbour complaints, parking, gardens, sub-letting and exchange requests). This work is dealt with by two housing management teams, who cover the North and South parts of our area.

The North team covers all areas north and west of Conon Bridge. The team members are:

- Paul Green (Housing Officer)
- Grace Mackay (Housing Officer covering secondment)
- Sandra Paton (Administrative Assistant)

North Team contact number:
01349-855979

The South team covers the remainder of the Black Isle and all other areas to the south and east, including Inverness city and Moray. The team members are:

- Catriona Naughton (Housing Officer)
- Patrick Quinn (Housing Officer)
- Heather McAnespie (Administrative Assistant)

South Team contact number:
01349-855992

There will be times when your Housing Officer needs to speak with you, or when you need to discuss something with them direct. If they are not available when you call, you can leave a message on their answering machines and they will get back in contact with you as soon as they can.

However, we know that a lot of you do not like leaving messages on a machine. Heather and Sandra can therefore also take messages, and in many cases will be able to deal with your enquiry straight away - particularly if you just want to report a piece of information to us, or to check the balance on your rent account, for instance.

Allocations

If you want to find out about a move, you will need to contact somebody in our Allocations team. Again, the Allocations Officers are very busy and are often out arranging visits and new tenancies around the area. However, our administrative team will be able to deal with many of your enquiries when the Officers are out. The team members are:

- Natasha Shearer (Allocations Officer, North)
- Ann Darlington (Allocations Officer, South)
- Shirley Mack (Allocations Officer, new developments)
- Christina Ross / Sue Brown (Administrative Officer - job share)
- Rosemary Walker - Administrative Assistant
- Helen MacDonald - Administrative Assistant

Allocations contact number:
0845-130-1017

General Housing Advice

From time to time, you may need some general advice about where to go to get help with a particular problem that is making it difficult for you to manage your tenancy. You may have a problem managing your money and need some help to set a budget. Sometimes you might need somebody to help you fill in a form, or to advise you about what benefits you could be entitled to, or what other organisations you can turn to for advice or support.

Our Housing and Allocations Officers will be able to help you with most of these issues, but if you need somebody to spend a bit of extra time helping you to work things through, you may also want to speak to our Housing Plus Officer, Linda Armit.

Property Maintenance

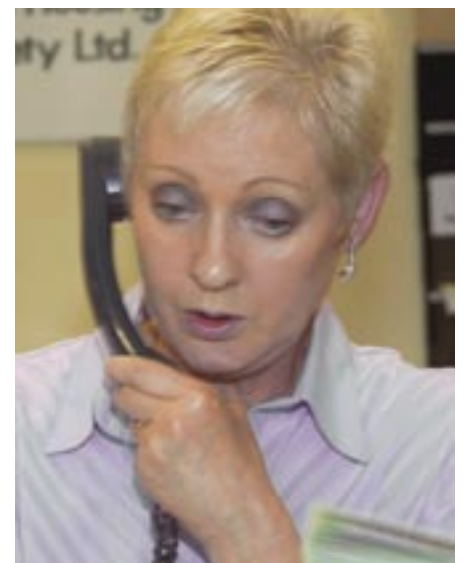
Our Property Maintenance team arrange all our day-to-day repairs, work to homes that become empty, and organise and manage a number of contracts such as landscape maintenance, kitchen and heating contracts.

They also manage our out-of-hours service for emergency repairs. The team members are:

- John Peteranna (Maintenance Officer, South)
- Ken McCance (Maintenance Officer, Mid)
- Brian Anderson (Maintenance Officer, North)
- Wendy Weatherall (Maintenance Assistant - north area)
- Mairi Gilmour (Maintenance Assistant - mid area share - job share)
(The other part of Mairi's job share post is currently vacant but should be filled soon)
- Yvonne Bisset (Maintenance Assistant, south area)

Repairs contact number: 0845-130-9995

Further information about the schemes covered in each area and when your **Maintenance Officer** plans to visit each month are included in this newsletter.



Property Maintenance Services Visit

Programme of site visits 2006/07

If you would like to arrange an appointment with the Property Maintenance Officer for your area, please contact our Invergordon Office and our staff will be happy to assist you in arranging an appointment.

Normal Office Hours:

Monday to Friday 9:00am to 5.00pm
Tel: 0845 130 9995 • TxT: 07821 260309
Email: repairs@albynhousing.org.uk

Emergency Repairs:

Outwith Normal Office Hours (Evenings/ Weekends/Bank Holidays etc) Tel: 0845 130 9995
Option 1: Message received and actioned next working day
Option 2: You will be transferred to a voicemail relay service to the Officer on call

2006-----> 2007----->

NORTH AREA: Maintenance Officer: Brian Anderson: Tel 01349 855984	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Durness/Kinlochbervie/Lochinver/Rosehall/Scourie	7	4	2	6	4	8	5	5	9	7	4	9
Bettyhill/Skerry/Talmine	14	11	9	13	11	15	12	12	16	14	11	16
Brora/Golspie/Thurso/Wick	21	18	16	20	18	22	19	19	23	21	18	23
Invergordon/Milton/Tain	Monday to Friday to suit											

2006-----> 2007----->

MID AREA: Maintenance Officer: Ken McCance: Tel 01349 855984	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Applecross/Lochcarron/Sheildaig/Torridon	8	5	3	7	5	9	6	6	3	8	5	3
Aultbea/Gairloch/Inverasdale/Poolewe/Ullapool	15	12	10	14	8	13	13	13	10	15	12	10
Alness/Beauly/Dingwall/Conon Bridge/ Evanton/Maryburgh/Muir of Ord/Strathpeffer	22	19	17	21	12	23	20	20	17	22	19	17
Avoch/Rosemarkie/Fortrose/Kirkhill/Inverness (Nth)	29	26	24	28	19	30	27	27	24	29	26	24

2006-----> 2007----->

SOUTH AREA: Maintenance Officer: John Peteranna: Tel 01349 855982	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Ardersier/Auldearn/Balloch/ Croy/Daviot/Dores/Dyke/Inverarnie	9	6	4	8	6	10	7	7	4	9	6	4
Aviemore/Carrbridge/Grantown/Kincraig/ Kingussie/Laggan/Nairn/Nethybridge	16	13	11	15	13	17	14	14	11	16	13	11
Drumnadrochit/Ft Augustus/Foyers	23	20	18	22	18	24	21	21	18	23	20	18
Smithton/Inverness (Sth)	Monday to Friday to suit											

Problem page

We asked one of our receptionists, Kerry Maclean, to take a note of the first three queries she got one afternoon, and what advice she gave out - you may also want to contact us with some questions of your own, or with any other comments about this newsletter. If so, please write in to The Editor, or email us at office@albynhousing.org.uk

Q. I have recently applied for a move - how long will it take before I get somewhere?

A. The length of time you will wait will depend on your personal circumstances compared to

other people on the list; on the areas that you have chosen; and on how often the right type and size of house becomes empty. Often there are a lot of other people waiting for the same area. Our Allocations Team can give you advice about whether you need to consider a move to other areas, or to make sure that you are receiving the maximum points.

Q. My mother has recently found it difficult to get in and out of the bath herself. Could she get a walk in shower fitted instead?

A. Contact Niki Rother at our Invergordon office initially, who will arrange for an occupational therapist to visit your mother and check what adaptations she might need.

We will then get a referral and will be able to get an adaptation arranged, subject to the funding available to us each year.

Q. I would like to put a shed at the bottom of my garden. Would this be possible?

A. This would initially depend on your property. If you were living in a flat unfortunately you would be unable to have a shed as the garden area is communal and other residents would not be able to use it. If you have your own garden, you must write to Property Maintenance Services to let them know what you want to do and to get approval first.



Community Needs Initiative Seminar

We held a seminar in Aviemore on the 19 June to discuss our proposed way forward for Local Lettings Initiatives. The seminar was well attended by 58 delegates including representatives from community groups, Community Scotland and housing associations from Shetland down to the Borders.

Liz Pritchard from Shialdaig Community Council gave her communities' first hand impression of the Local Lettings Initiative process as was. Professor Paul Spicker told us about his research into that work and clarified his proposals for the way forward. Liz Burns from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations told us the legal and good practice issues that will guide what comes next.

There was general consensus that the Local Lettings Initiatives already implemented were well received by those communities where they were used. There was also agreement that we should continue to build on what we have learnt when developing our Community Needs Initiatives, the successor to the Local Lettings Initiatives. The majority of people at the seminar agreed that there needed to be a method of prioritising particular communities' needs in certain areas where we can show that the usual allocations system could not reasonably be expected to meet them.

We are very pleased with the backing we received on the day for our proposed Community Needs Initiatives and are now actively considering which areas in Highland we will be piloting them in.

If you would like a copy of the conference report, please contact Lucy Fraser at our Invergordon office.

smoking ban

The new law introduced on 26 March introduced a smoking ban in all public places and workplaces in Scotland to protect people from the dangers of passive smoking.

All our offices are now completely non-smoking. In addition, our staff now also have the right to ask you not to smoke if they are visiting you in your own home. If you are not able to do this, they may end their appointment and try to set up a different meeting arrangement with you.

A day in the life of a Housing Officer

When Housing and Community Services Director, Helen Barton, asked her Housing Officers if they could write about a typical day for the newsletter, she was quickly told there is no such thing! Every day is as important and different as the people we deal with and try to help - but we hope the following 'day in the life of' will give you a flavour of the sorts of things we do ...

8.00-9.00am

Thank goodness for flexi time - that hour in the morning whilst office is closed is a godsend to try and catch up with file notes. My plan is to stay in the office today to work on former tenant arrears - will I succeed? We'll see how it goes! My computer calendar is waving frantically at me with reminders that I must see to today - firstly, I log onto the system (rent accounts), print off my reminders and open my e-mail - there are 3 messages I must attend to (2 from solicitor and 1 from Beth, the Community Warden). I respond to these first. Beth's reports that during her scheme visits she noted 2 cars which appear to be abandoned (no road tax) and there's furniture dumped at one of our schemes - what would I do without Beth - she's a star! Last but not least...I print off the report I need to work on my former tenant arrears.

9.00-12.00 noon

Start working on my arrears - phone rings - it's reception to say someone has popped in to see me about an arrears letter - they don't agree with the balance (rechargeable repair) - I see them and return to my desk - another colleague advises me of a possible abandoned property. In the absence of the admin assistant (who's on annual leave) I type out the relevant notices - put my voice mail on - have to check this one out - visit the tenancy, no-one home - serve an Abandonment Notice. While I'm here I take the opportunity to slap the relevant notices on the abandoned cars I was told about earlier. Meantime I'm approached by a tenant with a complaint - I make a quick note and advise them I'll look into the matter, and get back to the office just in time for the tea run - shock horror, Patrick's making the tea!!! (Must remember to complete the proforma for abandoned properties for stats purposes; log it on the system; make a file note and tell the Housing Benefit office).

Pick up my voice mail messages, then the phone rings, someone with a neighbour

complaint - make a quick note and let them know how I'll follow it up - meantime, the day's mail has arrived and is waiting for me. Respond to my voice mail messages and start to deal with the mail - Reception phones to tell me there is another visitor to the office - voice mail on - off to speak to the tenant - return to my desk.

Phone rings, this time it's Housing Benefit concerned about one of our elderly tenants who's mail is being returned "addresses gone away" - I speak with a colleague to check her family's address, and off I go - visit the home of the elderly tenant, no response, check it out with her daughter who tells me her Mum is in hospital - return to the office and contact Housing Benefit to let them know so that her benefit isn't stopped - so much for my planned day!

High noon

Lunch time - quick half hour today as I want to make a start of my former tenant arrears - haven't looked at them so far.

The afternoon

Start work on my arrears cases - get a call from the Citizens Advice Bureau and set about negotiating an important payment arrangement to prevent one of my tenants from losing their home. Type up an agreement letter to tenant and log call on the system - receive more calls - deal with them and continue working on arrears - still on page 1 of 12!

Reception 'phones to tell me I have another visitor - voice mail on and off to reception - this one's a neighbour complaint - try to help them and back to my arrears report. Oops, voice mail flashing (3 messages) - start to return these calls - one is a tenant wanting to finish a joint tenancy, and another is worried about a legal notice I have served - last one is a housing benefit query. Phone rings - call concerning dog mess - I make a note and advise I'll send a general letter to all concerned. Back to the arrears report - manage to get to page 3!

4 pm and nearly home time - so much for my day in the office - never mind maybe tomorrow eh! Oops forgot to log the dumped rubbish with maintenance - log that - must remember to deal with the tenant complaint I received whilst out earlier and to note I have to send a letter to all concerned re dog mess. Home time - must hand deliver a legal notice on route. Another day over!

Scottish Housing Quality Standards

In 2004, the Scottish Executive issued a document that required all Councils and Housing Associations to reach five specific quality standards by 2015 for the homes they own. The standards say that all our homes must:

- be up to the Tolerable Standard set out in housing law
- be free from serious disrepair
- be energy efficient
- have modern facilities and services
- be healthy, safe and secure

We have given the Executive's housing agency, Communities Scotland, a report about how many of our houses and flats meet the new standards they have set. Where our homes do not meet the standard, we have given Communities Scotland a plan for how we will deal with this.

We do not have any properties that don't meet the Tolerable Standard or have Serious Disrepair. The kitchen contracts we are doing now will make sure we meet the standard for Modern Facilities and Services within the next 2 years.

Under the Healthy, Safe and Secure standard, we will look at how we can improve security in some of our older homes, especially in Invergordon. We plan to do this at the same time we replace front and back doors, between 2010 and 2015.

We do have properties that currently fail the energy efficiency rating. This is a measure of the effectiveness of the heating system and insulation value of the property. We currently have approximately 200 homes that do not meet this standard, in particular where we have older homes and where traditionally we have only been able to fit electric heating systems because other fuel supplies have been unavailable or too expensive. We are carrying out more work just now to look at these homes in detail and to find ways to improve this situation. Other articles in this newsletter explain some of the different types of heating systems that we are already starting to look at.

AVIEMORE SUSTAINABLE HEAT PROJECT TAKES SHAPE



Locally Produced Wood-chip To Heat 130 Homes

Work to install a new district heating boiler is well underway on an industrial estate in Aviemore. This innovative wood-chip heating project which will eventually heat 130 homes in the Dalfaber area of Aviemore, including the new houses that Albyn are building there now. The £676,000 district heating energy centre will be an affordable and carbon-free alternative to traditional heating systems. The project uses the latest woodchip boilers from Austria. The wood will be supplied from a variety of local sources, including forestry and local sawmills. The energy centre will run automatically every day of the year, producing hot water for room heating and domestic hot water.

Donald Lockhart, our Development Director said: "This is a very important project for us and our partners, and also for our future customers who will benefit greatly from affordable energy. The important environmental benefit of the project is that it will save about 700 tonnes of the greenhouse gas Carbon Dioxide from being added to the atmosphere every year."

Each house will have its own heat meter. Householders will pay for the heat they use in advance using a smart card, which they will be able to top up at a local office in Aviemore. Already, other tenants groups and Housing Associations are showing a lot of interest in seeing how the Aviemore heating system works.



New Heating at Hallow Park, Golspie

Our Property Maintenance service has recently installed a high-tech heating system on a test basis to one of our properties in Hallow Park, Golspie. This involved fixing solar heating panels on the roof to provide hot water and providing an air source heat pump to operate the heating system.

"Solar panels? In the north of Scotland? Have they gone completely mad?" you might be thinking. But no, read on! Whilst in years gone by, the availability of solar heating may have been restricted to the warmer climes enjoyed by our Mediterranean neighbours, the units are much more efficient these days, meaning that even here in the chilly, ice-blown wastelands of northern Scotland, solar heating is now a viable option. The

manufacturers claim that these solar heating panels will produce an average of 70% of the domestic hot water requirements over the year. This hot water is produced free of charge to the tenant of the house, and has the additional benefit of substantially reducing the amount of carbon dioxide produced.

The air source heat pumps operate a bit like a refrigerator, but instead of keeping food cold, they supply hot water to radiators within the property. "Sounds technical," I hear you say. The manufacturers say: "The heat pump absorbs low grade heat from the ambient air, compresses it to a high temperature and uses it to heat radiators". Our representative in Property Maintenance Services says: "This magical process takes place using a sophisticated device known as a

fancy gadget. This gadget is only available from outlets in deepest Faerieland and must be installed by a fully qualified Wizard." We prefer his description!

We hope that these two systems combined will provide domestic hot water and heating within the property at a much cheaper rate than more traditional systems, particularly as gas and electricity prices continue to rise at an alarming rate. We will be monitoring the systems over the next year or so, and comparing the running cost to neighbouring properties. If the savings are as much as we hope they will be, then we will look to provide the same systems in the rest of the houses in the scheme.

Scourie Open Day

Albyn welcomed new tenants and other local people at an open day for our 6 new houses at Scourie recently. The houses have been built on a site originally bought by the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust. The project is a result of a long-running community consultation started by the Trust and continued throughout the project by our own Development and Housing staff and the local Community Council. The houses have been built to provide additional affordable housing to boost employment opportunities, and to meet housing needs identified in a Community survey. Our Community Lettings scheme was used to give additional priority to people working locally.

In addition to the new houses in Scourie, Albyn will shortly be completing other houses in rural areas of North Sutherland including Lochinver and Armadale, as well as progressing plans for Bettyhill and Melvich."

Old Pulteney steams ahead



Our Committee of Management have recently given the go-ahead for us to be involved in an exciting new district heating system that is currently being installed in the Pulteneytown area of Wick. District heating is where the heating and hot water is produced at a central point and then supplied to a number of properties through a network of supply pipes. Because this heat is "mass produced" and distributed, it tends to be a good deal cheaper for the individual user.

The process of producing our country's national drink at the nearby Old Pulteney Distillery creates a lot of steam. This would normally just be let out and wasted. The steam produced at the distillery is now going to be used to heat water that will then be pumped through underground pipes to be laid to around 500 properties in the immediate area, including our 40 houses in Bremners Walk and Battery Road. This means that we will now be able to provide radiator heating systems in these properties, where previously we have only been able to provide electric storage heaters because of the lack of a mains gas supply in Wick. Hot water and heating will then be supplied to these homes at a much lower cost to our tenants than the current electric systems.

The scheme will eventually be expanded by the introduction of two biomass boilers that will produce hot water using woodchip as fuel. Eventually, a total of 1500 properties in the area will have their hot water and heating provided by this plant. And so, it will not just be your favourite dram that is produced at the Old Pulteney Distillery.



HOW ARE WE DOING?

Each year in April, we have to provide a range of information and statistics to our regulators, Communities Scotland. This helps them and us to keep a check on how we are performing in key areas. These are some of our key results for this year.

Rent Collection

We collected 95.2% of our rent from existing tenants

Rent Due	Actual Collected
£5.4 million	95.2%

Empty Houses

During the year, we re-let 223 existing homes and also 76 new homes.

The rent we lost whilst homes were empty (void) was 2.5%.

This meant that on average it took 26 weeks to let each home.

(However, this included allocations of a number of very long-term empty homes. Our current figure is around 7 weeks, and is continuing to improve).

We had 4,254 applicants on our housing list at the end of the year. We receive about 200 new applications each month, and it took us an average of 14 days to add each new application onto our housing list.

Finances

We had a successful year financially, achieving a surplus of £840,000. Most of this surplus will be kept aside for when we need to do major improvements or upgrades to our homes in future years, particularly to meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standards. We also spent £876,000 this year on major repairs (a similar level to last year) through contracts to fit new kitchens in various areas.

Repairs

Repair type	Maximum Response time	Number of repairs Done	Completed on time
Emergency	2 hours	419	100 %
Urgent	3 working days	1,861	92.2%
Routine	10 working days	3,135	91.5%

Calum Macaulay, our Chief Executive, says "We are delighted with our results for rent collection and repairs, which compare well with other similar housing providers. We are working hard to improve our lettings performance. Additional staff and some changes to how we work have seen big improvements since last year, which we hope to build on so that you see further improvements in the year ahead."

More information about our results will be available at our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in August, and in our annual report that will be sent to you after the AGM.

Satisfaction Survey

In addition to this, TL Dempster have also been carrying out a satisfaction survey for us amongst a third of our residents each year. The key results from the survey report that we received this March are included in a supplement to this newsletter. The overall results are very positive.

You have again reported high levels of satisfaction with; us as your landlord; with the quality of services we provide; and the helpfulness and friendliness of staff. You are very satisfied with the overall design and layout of your homes, and with the general neighbourhoods that you live in.

The majority of you think that your rents are good value for money, and that you have enough information about how your rent is calculated.

However we need to make sure that you know what our office opening hours are, and how to contact us. You have also asked us to give you more information about improvements, anti-social behaviour and the repairs service.

We need to make sure that you know how to make a complaint if you need to, and that you know how the Society is run.

TL Dempsters also ran focus groups for us with staff and with tenants in areas where the satisfaction levels were lower than average to see if there are other things that we could do better.

Further details about what they found and how we plan to take these forward are included in the supplement to this newsletter. Anyone who would like a full copy of this year's report can get it by contacting Housing and Community Services Director, Helen Barton.

As part of our survey, we offered two prizes of £100 to two people drawn at random from everyone who sent a completed form back. Congratulations to both our winners: Theresa Anderson of Tain and Janice Murray of Inverness.



Resident Satisfaction Survey prize draw winners receive their cheques from staff members Barbara Gardener and Helen Barton.

Welcome to our new quiz feature...

1. How many tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions will be saved by our new heating system in Aviemore?
2. When will our tenant participation audit be finished?
3. What will be off the wall next in Invergordon?
4. What year do we have to fully comply with the Scottish Housing Quality Standards by?
5. Who do you 'phone to check your rent balance if you live in Golspie?
6. What page of her report did our Housing Officer get to by 4pm?
7. What percentage of rent did we collect last year?
8. How many abandoned cars did our housing officer deal with?
9. What area does Brian Anderson cover for Property Maintenance Services?
10. How much are Communities Scotland giving us to develop new houses in 2006/07?

Answers to all the questions can be found in this edition of Newsview. Send your answers in to us by Friday 25th August. A draw will be made from the correct answers at our next Committee of Management Meeting, and the lucky winner will receive a voucher for £25 for a store of their choice. So don't forget to include your name and contact details when you send your answers in!

Development update

The Development Programme for 2006-07 is going to produce a higher number of affordable homes throughout the Highlands than ever before. We are receiving £14.5million grant funding from Communities Scotland towards the total costs of about £22m for our programme.

This year, we will complete 137 homes for rent, and 73 homes for sale under the Homestake scheme. A further 197 will be approved to start being built later in the year. New developments coming up in the next few months include Alness, Armadale, Aviemore, Lochinver and Inverness

Corporate News Round-up

Office Developments

The extension to our Invergordon office is going well. We hope to start using the extra space during August. Over the following months it will be used by staff while the rest of the office is refurbished. We are hoping to keep disruption to our visitors to a minimum. There may be brief times when access to the office will be restricted. We will include notice of any such disruptions on our front door and on the website. At these times, you may find it easier to contact us by 'phone or email. One of the main benefits of the improvements will be a much better reception space and more interview rooms for our staff to use when you call into the office.

Invergordon: Off the Wall

We have just agreed that the Off the Wall project in Invergordon can use a second wall of our office for one of their new murals. Discussions are currently underway about the subject, which is likely to be either the "Natural History of the Firth" or "High Street". Local children will be helping the artist to paint the mural.

Annual General Meeting

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held in the Strathpeffer Pavillion on Tuesday 15 August at 7.30 pm. We will be arranging buses from some areas to Strathpeffer and further details regarding this will be included in letters sent to tenants and members. Besides presenting the annual accounts, receiving reports on the past year's activities and holding Committee elections there will be a guest speaker. Alan Hobbett, of the Dunfermline Building Society, will be this year's speaker. His subject will be community renewable energy schemes in rural areas.

Staff News

There have been a number of staff changes in recent months. The new faces include Angela Kay, Development Services, and Cheryl Haddock and Kerensa Davidson, who are both temporary Support Services staff. We are advertising for two new posts of Team Leader in our Housing Management team, and a job-share Administrative Assistant post in Property Maintenance Services. We will also be advertising our Housing Manager post again later in the year, as we have still not been able to fill it.

Recent departures include Barbara McAskill, Sheena Menzies and Jackie MacKenzie (all support services), as well as Hazel Skeet (housing management).



contact us:

Office opening hours: Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm
HEAD OFFICE:

98-100 High Street, Invergordon, Ross-shire IV18 0DL

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