

## 100th birthday!



“staff from Albyn presented Jessie with flowers and a card”

Mrs Jessie Gordon of Grantown-on-Spey celebrated her 100th birthday in July! Jessie’s step-daughter-in-law arranged a tea party to mark this special occasion, at which staff from Albyn presented Jessie with flowers and a card. Jessie has been a tenant with Albyn since 1988 and we know these interesting facts about her life.

Jessie has one daughter who lives in New Zealand; four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She also has five step children. She is the only surviving member of her four brothers and one sister.

Jessie was born in Advie and brought up in and around the area of Grantown-on-Spey.

Her father was gamekeeper to King Edward VII at Knockfrink House Estate.

We wish Jessie all the very best for her Centenary.

## Tenant participation scheme

Our tenants will now be able to play a more proactive role in shaping day to day, strategic and policy issues that affect them, their homes and their communities.

This follows the launch of a new and improved structure for tenant participation and involvement – the result of a two year consultation exercise.

The new structure for involvement will see new channels of communication created, as well as -some existing ones being continued. Tenants will now be able to join special advisory panels and be consulted on issues of interest, including how tenancies are let and

managed, repairs and maintenance, house design and rent setting. Four Area Forums will also be established, covering Caithness and Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness and Nairn, and Badenoch and Strathspey. Our popular Policy Bulletin survey will continue to be rolled out to seek tenant views on policy issues. We will also continue to support residents to set up local tenant and resident groups where they want to.

The consultation carried out has included a comprehensive Tenant Participation Audit, a tenant survey, and tenant focus groups in Inverness and Invergordon.

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[www.albynhousing.org.uk](http://www.albynhousing.org.uk)

## Emergency out of hours repairs service

The Society will shortly be introducing a new system for dealing with your out-of-hours emergency repairs requests. Under the current system, tenants have to leave a message on an answering service, which is picked up by the on-call Maintenance Officer, who then arranges for the necessary repairs to be carried out. Because it is an automated system, this can sometimes lead to delays in getting back to the tenant. We have now entered into a contract with Hanover Housing, another housing association who have a call centre staffed 24 hours a day to deal with emergency repairs.

This means that you will have direct access to a person on the end of the telephone who will be able to deal with your emergency repair immediately. It is anticipated that this new system will provide much quicker results when dealing with out-of-hours calls. This new system is going to be run for a six month trial period and we will then conduct a survey of those tenants who have used the emergency repairs service over that period to establish if the satisfaction levels have improved. We will contact all tenants with the new telephone number and a fuller explanation of how the system will

operate as soon as it is ready to commence. In the meantime, if you have any queries on this, please contact Property Maintenance Services on telephone: **01349 852978**.



## LIFT scheme takes off for first time buyers



After a slow start, sales have started increasing in the Scottish Government's Open Market Shared Equity pilot run by Albyn Enterprises Ltd, Albyn Housing Society's subsidiary company. The scheme mainly aims to help first-time buyers, housing association tenants, council tenants and people on low incomes who cannot afford to pay the full price for a property.

One of the first people to benefit was James from Alness who bought his property in Inverness in July with grant

assistance from the LIFT scheme. According to James: "If it wasn't for the LIFT scheme I wouldn't have been able to have get on the property ladder in Inverness." The property he bought was the second that James had looked at under the open market LIFT scheme, his first bid being unsuccessful for another property. "I would definitely recommend this scheme to other people in my position" continues James who works as a chef in Inverness "I am very grateful for the financial help I got to make this possible and I'd like to thank Albyn Enterprises for making it happen, the service was great."

The scheme isn't limited to first time buyers and public sector tenants though; it may be able to help you if you are looking for a new home after a significant change in your household circumstances or if you have a disability and own a house which doesn't suit your needs. As the name of the scheme suggests, only properties that are for sale on the open market will be considered.

Inevitably, there are eligibility criteria and rules about the use of the scheme. These include that the

property must be the purchaser's only home and it should be suitable for their current housing needs. As the Open Market Shared Equity Pilot is aimed at low income households, applicants are assessed by the registered social landlord to check whether or not they qualify.

Equity stakes purchased generally fall between 60 and 80 per cent of the price of a property. In all cases, the maximum initial stake that you can take will be 80% of the price of a property. In exceptional circumstances applicants may be able to take a stake of less than 60 per cent but not less than 51%.

The Open Market pilot runs alongside the existing New Supply Shared Equity Scheme, formerly known as 'Homestake'.

Limits are set on the price you can pay for a property under the Open Market Shared Equity Pilot. More information on this at:

[www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/lift](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/lift)

Anyone interested in the scheme and who may wish to check their eligibility should contact LIFT staff on **01349 855991** or on [info@albyn-enterprises.co.uk](mailto:info@albyn-enterprises.co.uk).

## A day in the life of... Albyn's chairperson



Ella MacRae juggles running a very busy inn and helping to look after her new grandchild with her position as Chairperson of Albyn Housing Society's Committee of Management. Ella outlined the most recent Committee of Management meeting day:

"My first job this morning was to help look after my granddaughter. I then started work at the inn – it may not open until 11.00am, but there's plenty to be done each morning. I had to leave earlier than usual for Albyn's Committee of Management meeting today because the members are having their photographs taken, following the recent Annual General Meeting. You will see the outcome of that exercise in the photo above! "The Committee of Management meetings usually start at 10.30am and are held in Albyn's Head Office in Invergordon. At the meetings, my 11 colleagues and I discuss a wide range of issues presented to us by Albyn's management team. Some of these are papers that the management wish us to discuss, consider and approve. Sometimes we also ask for certain items to be presented to us for our information. The meetings usually last around two hours and our discussions are often wide ranging and lively. "We don't get paid for being

Committee of Management members, but we do have a nice finger buffet to help re-charge our batteries! The members also sit on a number of sub-committees, which include North and South Sub-Committees. As the name suggests, these are split geographically and members attend according to where they live. These two sub-committees are able to review in more depth data and issues that are specific to each area. There is also an Audit Sub-Committee which, as the name suggests, concentrates on financial and governance issues. Committee of Management members also attend meetings of the Staff Consultative Forum, in order to hear and consider views from the staff. Other Sub-Committees cover areas such as complaints. Members in general sit on two or three of these. In addition, we attend occasional conferences and training courses, which help to keep us up to date for our roles as Committee members. "We take our responsibilities very seriously. Committee of Management members are here to ensure that Albyn's management staff are guided appropriately, to ensure good governance and to provide an open and transparent organisation. Members are made up of people from all walks of life. As you can see from my opening comments, I run an inn in my day to day job. We have a number of members who are Albyn tenants. This is very important as it ensures that the people Albyn is here to serve have a say in the way the organisation is run and how it moves forward. The only requirement to becoming a tenant member of the Committee is that you need to be a member of the Society. In addition, other members come from backgrounds including the finance sector and local government. "I hope that this has given you a small insight into the Committee of Management and the role that the members play."

## Albyn website

You may have noticed that Albyn's website has gone through something of a facelift recently. This follows the launch of our new logo, which gave us the ideal opportunity to change the website to make it easier to use.

We would now like your feedback on the new site. Is it easy to use? Can you find what you're looking for? Is there any information you need access to that isn't on the website? Please let us know. The website is there for you to use and we want it to be a reflection of what you need.

Please send any comments or thoughts by email to: [Carolynn.lawrie@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:Carolynn.lawrie@albynhousing.org.uk)

Or by post to: Carolynn Lawrie, Corporate Officer Albyn Housing Society Ltd, 98-100 High Street, Invergordon IV18 0DL



## Garden competition

In our last newsletter, we asked for names of people who may be interested in a gardening competition. Although we had a few names sent in, we did not get enough interest to get a competition going for this year. But we still hope to get something set up for next year. If you would like to be involved in planning this or know anyone with good gardening contacts to give us tips and advice to use in the newsletter, please contact our Community Involvement Team on **01349 852978** or email: [office@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:office@albynhousing.org.uk).

# How are we doing?

Each year in April, we have to provide a range of information and statistics to the Scottish Housing Regulator. 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. (Last year's figures are shown in brackets for comparison)

## Repairs

Repair type	Maximum response time	Number of repairs done	Completed on time
Emergency	8 hours	507 <b>(436)</b>	97 % <b>(98%)</b>
Urgent	2 working days	2,914 <b>(2,821)</b>	87% <b>(86%)</b>
Routine	10 working days	3,704 <b>(2,872)</b>	89% <b>(91%)</b>

## Rent Collection

Rent due	Actual collected
£6.5 million <b>(£5.7 m)</b>	94.4% <b>(94.6%)</b>

## Empty Houses

New homes let	Re-lets	Rent loss from empty homes	Average time to let
145 <b>(114)</b>	222 <b>(207)</b>	1.6% <b>(1.6%)</b>	6 weeks <b>(6 weeks)</b>

## Housing Applications

Number of applicants on housing list at end of year	Average number of new applications per month	Average time to process new applications
5,380 <b>(5,380)</b>	170 <b>(170)</b>	14 days <b>(14 days)</b>

## Finances

We made a surplus of £1,479,000 (2007 - £1,616,000) before any expenditure on Major Repairs. Albyn invested £242,000 (2007 - £966,000) of this year's surplus on major repairs through contracts to fit new kitchens in various areas and new heating systems in East Ross.

The surplus will be added to our cash reserves, which is kept to allow us to have a major repair investment programme and to meet the new Scottish Housing Quality standards over the next few years.

More information about our results can be obtained from our Invergordon office and will also be available in our annual report which will be sent to you shortly.

## Satisfaction Survey

CA Market Research Ltd also carries 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 spring are available to download from our website or are available from our office on request. The overall results are once again very positive.

You have reported very high levels of satisfaction again with us as your landlord (93%), with the quality of services we provide (89%), and with the quality of advice and assistance provided by our staff (91%). You think we are very good at keeping you informed and good at taking account of your views.

You are highly satisfied with the overall design and layout of your homes (89%), and with the general neighbourhoods that you live in (88%). The majority of you (81%) think that your rents are good value for money, and that you have enough information about how your rent is decided (75%). We have also run an ongoing survey of new tenants to ask about our allocations process. We got very high levels of satisfaction with this – 98% were happy with the overall process. You were particularly pleased with the speed of the process, our communication with you, and our explanation of the terms of your tenancy agreement.

As part of our surveys, we offered a prize of £100 drawn at random from everyone who sent a completed Resident Satisfaction form, and £50 drawn from tenants who took part in the allocations survey. Congratulations to our winners: Elizabeth Glover from Invergordon; and Alexander Flint from Inverness.

# Tain Rose Garden

Tain Initiative Group are leading a project to re-develop Tain's Rose Garden which, in recent years, has suffered from a lack of investment and as a result has become somewhat neglected.

The Rose Garden Project aims to develop the area to create a quality, all-inclusive facility as part of the town's environmental, social and recreational attractions. The project will create a feature of cultural importance for the coming generations and will generate a sense of pride of place within the community.

The project is being supported by the BBC's Beechgrove Garden

programme, which will be filming the work from the initial stages through to completion. The resultant programme is due to be broadcast in Spring/Summer of 2009.

Fiona Robertson from the Tain Initiative Group has approached Albyn to ask if any of our tenants would like to volunteer to assist with this project. Anything that you can do to help would be greatly appreciated. If you want to become involved, please contact Fiona as below: Email: [fs.robertson@btinternet.com](mailto:fs.robertson@btinternet.com) or telephone: 07747 793354

## Dates for your diary

**Registered Tenant Organisation Meetings – open to all local residents**

### Albyn Invergordon Residents Association

Meets monthly. Please contact Lucy Fraser on tel: 01349 852978 if you are interested in joining the group or attending the meetings.

### Milton Housing Forum

Meets at the Community Wing at Milton Primary School at 1.00pm the third Wednesday of each month

# A soapy welcome...



We recently agreed a deal with Ness Soaps to provide products for us. We used their branded products at the Black Isle Show as gifts for people who visited our stand and we will also use them in our tenant packs. Calum Macaulay, our Chief Executive, said: "We've always been keen to support Ness Soaps, which is based

just around the corner from our new Inverness office. As an organisation it helps to transform the lives of disadvantaged adults, a number of whom are tenants of ours. "At Albyn we see ourselves as much more than just a landlord or property developer. We work hard to shape positive communities where

people feel valued and involved. Organisations such as Ness Soaps really help to make this happen. "And, importantly, the organisation also makes great soap, as anyone who visited our stall or theirs at the Black Isle Show found out." Ness Soaps provides work placements for 23 adults with learning disabilities and unemployed people living in the Merkinch area of Inverness. Lucy Morrison, Project Manager, said: "We're delighted with Albyn's order to provide soaps for tenants and corporate gifts. "As an organisation Albyn has lots of experience of social enterprises and the staff have really helped guide Ness Soaps as we've developed. "Support from local businesses is vital to ensure the long term sustainability of social enterprises like ourselves and this kind of deal really boosts sales and helps us towards our annual target of £25,000."

# Albyn's annual general meeting and committee of management

Albyn held its 2008 Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 19 August. This was attended by 36 people including tenants, members and guests.

At the meeting, Mrs Ella MacRae, Albyn's Chairperson, gave the following report:

## Chairperson's Report (Extract)

Welcome everyone to our AGM

But, some things that I must crow about, on Albyn's behalf about meeting our targets –

- Spending over £25 million on new properties;
- £19 million came in grants from Communities Scotland (now Scottish Government) and the Highland Council;

- we built 144 new rented homes, plus 78 shared equity properties

As well as this we completed the refurbishment and expansion of the head office in Invergordon and our new build office in Inverness, which houses our Housing Support team.

We completed 68 shared equity sales through Albyn Enterprises Ltd, under the badge 'Homestake Highland'.

Whilst there was a good deal less major repairs investment in 2007/08, this was due to the cyclical nature of this work. The good news for our tenants is that we have a large-scale programme of bathroom replacements due to begin very soon. We are continuing with our very successful partnering approach to major repairs, which includes tenant and Committee representation on the working group.

The Scottish Government has made major changes to the level of Housing Association Grant funding and implemented these with little notice. Our calculations show that the new HAG levels for our typical new build developments will make a loss from the start, and will take many years before they contribute towards the management and maintenance of the stock. This has potential implications for our ability to continue to deliver high quality services and housing to our tenants. Similarly, it is likely to challenge our ability to keep rents at an affordable level.

The Highland Housing Register came into being this year. It will take some time to realise the benefits as it was such a radical change from the six or more waiting lists and allocations policies that were there before. Hopefully applicants are

finding the new system easier to work with.

I have given you a flavour of how busy and productive a year we have had. To cap it all we now have a new logo. It includes our main functions of "Building homes.... Supporting communities".

Before I sit down, I would like to express my thanks to:

- our dedicated and hard working staff
- the many different communities across the Highlands with whom we work
- our many suppliers, consultants and contractors
- last but not least, my fellow Committee members for their hard work for the Society and support they have given me over the last year, and a special thanks to Anne MacLean who is standing down from the Committee, after ten years service, including five as our Chairperson.

Also, not forgetting our two fellow Committee members Fiona Samson and Jennifer Cameron who stood down during the year.

The Chairperson's report was followed by one from our Chief Executive, Calum Macaulay:

## Chief Executive's Report (Extract)

Ella has given you a report that shows that Albyn has had yet another busy and successful 12 months. Hopefully, I can help to reinforce that image, as will my colleagues Robin Nairn and Donald Lockhart, shortly.

During the year we had one very unfortunate incident connected with the death of one of our tenants. We subsequently had internal auditors undertake a review of our own performance in relation to this incident. We have learned the lessons we needed to learn,

and have been working closely with other agencies with similar responsibilities to ensure we reduce the likelihood of this kind of situation occurring again.

Regarding Albyn's commitment "to support communities to thrive". There have been many examples of our work towards this end. These include:

Our inclusion in the Highland Housing Register's Common Allocations Policy of points to reflect when there is a strong and verifiable need to prioritise applicants who will help sustain a community's wellbeing; and

Accessing Wider Role grant, through what used to be Communities Scotland, and Highland 2007 monies for a variety of community organisations, including Calman Trust; Golspie Film Society; two Community Woodland associations; the Inverness city centre open air ice rink; New Start Highland; Inverness High School's CIC REAL and 18th Inverness Scouts, amongst others.

So, that is my report for the past year.

I will finish by expressing my thanks to my colleagues for all of their hard work during the year, and to the Committee of Management for their support in helping us to achieve what have been some remarkable results and helping so many Highland communities to flourish.

Thank you!

The Chief Executive's report was followed by a presentation on this year's financial information, which will be included in the forthcoming Annual Report, due for circulation shortly. Donald Lockhart, our Development Director, gave a slideshow presentation on the year's housing developments.

This was followed by elections to the Committee of Management.

## Committee of Management Elections

### Tenant Vacancies

There was one tenant member vacancy on the Committee of Management. At the deadline date, no valid nominations had been received.

### General Member Vacancies

There were four general member vacancies on the Committee of Management. At the deadline date, four valid nominations had been received from: Mrs I MacRae, Mrs M Cairney, Mr J Convery and Mr W Shand. All of those nominated were elected to the general member vacancies on the Committee of Management.

## Appointment of Auditors

Baker Tilly were re-appointed as the Society's auditors.

## Guest Speakers

Albyn were delighted to welcome Gary Campbell, Director of HSPC and Willie Gray, of William Gray Construction Limited, to give a talk to the meeting. Gary and Willie gave a very interesting and informative presentation on the recent changes in the market and how these had affected their businesses. This led to plenty of feedback from the audience and resulted in a very lively debate.

## Nomination of Chair, Vice-chair and Secretary

Immediately after the Annual General Meeting, the Committee of Management met to nominate a Chairperson, Vice-Chair and Secretary. The following people were elected:

**Chairperson** Mrs Ella MacRae

**Vice-Chair** Mrs Isabell McLaughlan

**Secretary** Mr George Kelman



Our guest speakers Willie Gray and Gary Campbell

# Seagull hazard... Seagull hazard... Seagull hazard

Many Albyn tenants are suffering from the problems that can arise from feeding seagulls. Unfortunately, encouraging seagulls by feeding them can have a harmful effect. This is because they are more likely to nest in the area and lose their fear of people. As a result, seagulls will swoop down on unwary passers-by to either protect their nests or to steal food. They also create a lot of mess over properties, gardens and cars.

Obviously, tenants are welcome to feed birds if they wish. We would just ask you to try and ensure that what you do doesn't encourage seagulls and the problems that they bring with them.



## Highland housing register launch



The single Highland Housing Register went live on 1 April 2008. The photo shows Albyn Chairwoman Ella Macrae (left) signing the Partnership Agreement for the Highland Housing Register with Cllr Margaret Davidson, Chair of the Council's Housing and Social Work Committee. Also present at the launch were some of the staff members from the Council and the five housing association partners who have worked together over the last three years to develop a shared policy and register for all applicants across the Highlands. Albyn Chief Executive Calum Macaulay (third left standing) said: "Our staff have worked hard with partners to develop this project, and we are delighted that after all the meetings and discussions and high levels of co-operation we

have reached agreement on so many shared processes. Applying for affordable rented housing and transfers will now be so much easier and less confusing for applicants. Staff from all the partners will also be able to give much better and more consistent advice to people about their housing options." Head of Housing with The Highland Council, David Goldie (seated right) said: "The Highland Housing Register is a really exciting initiative. The housing organisations in the Highlands are among very few in Scotland to have taken such a shared approach. We think it reflects our strong culture of working together to find better ways of providing services of people in the Highlands, and we are really proud to have played our part in this."

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## Race for life



10 hardy women from Albyn took part in the 5 kilometre Race for Life on Sunday 11 May. Their exertions raised an amazing £1,486.50 for charity. Those who took part, from left to right in the photo above, were: Gill Garland, Sandra Connolly, Niki Rother, Mairi Gilmour, Yvonne Bisset, Wendy Weatherall, Shirley Mack, Catriona Naughton, Di Norris and Sue Mackinnon. Hazel Warner also participated, but unfortunately she missed the photo opportunity.