

Policy Update Bulletin July 2015



Feedback & proposed actions from last consultations

Rent Review

In the July 2014 edition of the Policy Bulletin we asked your views concerning the rate of increase that should be applied to the rents for 2015 – 16. The vast majority agreed with the proposal to increase the rent by CPI plus 1%. The Board accepted this proposal in January and approved an increase of 1.5%. You will have received your individual letters by now. This increase is a historical low for Albyn and the Board feels that we are able to apply this rate of increase while maintaining our financial viability. We believe that this increase is among the lowest in the Highlands and within Scotland

Study with Us

Thank you very much to all of you who replied to say that you were interested in the free online Tenant Qualifications which TPAS Scotland is delivering for us. The first batch of students is due to begin in June, and will study 2 modules: Voids management and Allocations. Please get in touch if you are interested in studying, and have not been offered a place on the course

Digital Inclusion

We explained that we would like to make it easier for more of our residents to be able to use the internet; to save money and to improve opportunities available for education and training, finding employment and quality of life. We asked if any of you were interested in being part of a group to look at how we could do this and for volunteers with a bit of time to become 'digital inclusion champions' for other tenants.

Over 30 of you have come forward from a wide range of areas and said you would be interested in this

We will be in contact with the people who put their names forward soon to organise an informal discussion group to talk about how we can develop this over the summer

Healthy Working Lives app

We would like to thank everyone who replied to say that they would be interested in being part of a pilot scheme for the Well@Work app, and apologise for the delay in getting back to you to discuss this further. The pilot scheme for this app was delayed, but it is hoped that it will begin in July. We will be contacting everyone who indicated that they were interested in being part of the pilot scheme over the next few days, so if you have not heard from us, and are still interested, please contact Anne Mackay on anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk. Thank you

Redecoration Policy

We explained to you that we offer allowances towards the costs of redecoration for tenants in some circumstances, such as at the start of a tenancy or after major improvement works have been carried out. We explained that we had reviewed how other organisations deal with this, and suggested that the new Dulux Refresh scheme could give us simple and convenient ways to provide tenants with either vouchers or packs of good quality materials that are available for delivery right across our area. Introducing this scheme would also make discounts available of up to 25% for all tenants

We got responses from 227 tenants and our registered tenant group. 61% of you thought it would be a good idea to start trying the new scheme and end how we do things now.

Most of you thought we should offer a choice between supplying the packs or vouchers. Almost two thirds of you also thought you might be interested in purchasing decorating materials through one of the Dulux Decorating Centres in the future and claiming a discount.

The main concern of people who did not agree with the scheme was that the materials would still be more expensive than other brands; and that local suppliers would be affected in areas away from Inverness.

What we did next

We ran a short test of the new scheme in the Customer Services South area a few months at the end of 2014. Feedback from both tenants and staff was very positive. Everyone found it easy to use and was pleased with the wide choice of products, the quality of materials supplied and thought they were good value for money. We have now rolled the scheme out so that it is available across our whole area and will monitor the feedback we get from tenants to make sure that it continues to provide a good service. We will also monitor and review the resultant savings from this new scheme, the impact on the historic local providers, and will feedback to the tenants on this in future newsletters once the scheme has been running for a 6-12 month period.

Repairs Policy

We explained to you that we will be starting to review our repairs policy. We asked you to tell us what you think about how things are working now before looking at any changes we might need to make.

The aim of the policy is to make sure that we carry out repairs to your home when they are needed in an efficient and cost effective way. We aim to get the highest possible levels of customer satisfaction with our service, and to make sure we continually improve both the quality and value of services we provide. We asked for your feedback about this.

We got responses from 227 tenants and one of our registered tenant groups. The feedback you gave us about our existing repairs service was very positive.

92% of you thought that the existing repairs categories and timescales that we are working to are reasonable, and did not have any changes. We recognised that in some cases we could provide a shorter timescales in our more urban areas where we have more contractors available and shorter distances to cover. But 87% of you thought we should continue to apply the same service standards across the whole area. You told us that repairs are generally done very promptly by local workmen and that the staff and contractors you speak to are helpful. Most of you did not think it would be worth increasing our costs to achieve a faster service.

We asked you to tell us what the most important things are for a repairs service. Top of the list were:

- Repairs done to a high quality standard
- Work is done in reasonable time

After that you rated the following things fairly evenly as the next most important aspects of a service

- We use local contractors
- Repairs are completed properly on the first visit
- It is easy to report repairs when you need to

Less important to you were

- You can get appointments at times that suit you
- Costs are kept as low as possible
- Contractors are friendly and polite

We asked you how well you think we achieve each of these things now, and this is how you responded:

Your order of Priority	Aspect of Service	Always Achieved %	Sometimes achieved %	Rarely or Never achieved%	Don't know %
1	Repairs are always done to high standard	58	30	4	2
2	Work is done in reasonable time	66	25	4	1
3	We use local contractors	61	20	1	28
4	Repairs are completed properly on the first visit	47	39	4	3
5	Repairs are easy to report when you need to	78	11	2	3
6	Contractors are friendly and polite	75	16	1	1
7	You can get appointments that suit you	58	25	5	4
8	Costs are kept as low as possible	47	17	2	32

We asked you if there are things we need to think about changing. Some of the issues you raised were to do with particular problems at your home, which we will follow up with people individually.

We also got some other very helpful suggestions, which included the following:

- Keeping tenants up to date with access arrangements (10 people)
- Following up after work is done to check it has been done properly (5 people)
- Making sure contractors are always polite and carry ID (5 people)
- Getting our empty homes up to a better standard before we let them again (2 people)
- Managing tenants who cause damage to property better (2 people)
- Review how we manage defects and out of hours repairs (2 people)
- Allow tenants to pay for us to arrange minor repairs that they are responsible for, such as tap washers (1 person)

- What we will do next
 - We will update our policy but not make any changes to the items that Albyn and tenants are responsible for, or the timescales that we aim to complete repairs in
 - We are reviewing how we can make sure repairs are always done to a high standard and completed right first time wherever possible. There are a few new things that we have introduced or are looking at doing which should help us to pick problems up more quickly:
 - Reports are now produced to prompt Officers to carry out inspections of a minimum percentage of completed repairs
 - We send postal slips out to tenants every time they order a repair so that we can get feedback at the time repairs are done. We are looking at ways to make this a simpler process and to do the surveys by email or text where possible. This will help to make sure that any problems are identified and put right quickly
 - All our contractors have been asked to complete new registration details to be on our approved contractor list recently. This includes their undertaking to meet high standards when they deliver services on our behalf. If we find these are not being met we will meet with the contractor to try and agree how we can improve the situation.
 - We will provide you with more information about who our main contractors are in each area, and about the costs of our repairs work and how we achieve best value for money from your rents in a future newsletter or tenants report

“Quids In” Magazine

- Last year we sent everyone 3 free editions of “Quids In” magazine with helpful hints about how to manage finances better and save money. We asked for some feedback about whether we should continue with it or not.
- Less than 200 of you expressed a view, with about two thirds finding it very helpful and one third not.
- *Whilst many people find the magazine helpful, it is also clearly not for everyone. We will therefore have another look about whether it is worth continuing to get supplies of it over the coming year; but also whether we can target it to be sent only to tenants who specifically ask for it or will get most use from it.*