



*Drovers Square, Ardgay*

## OFFICE FESTIVE CLOSURE 2019

Albyn's Offices will be closed from 5.00pm on Monday 23rd December.  
Reopening at 9.00am on Friday 3rd January 2020.

For emergency repairs during this period, please phone **0300 323 0990**.

Customers who are experiencing an issue, or breakdown, with a gas or oil heating system, please phone Heatcare direct on **01343 842042**

# CEO REPORT

Hello, everyone and welcome to our winter newsletter 2019.

I have now been in post for almost 6 months and it's been a very interesting time, getting to know the business, our staff and some of you, our tenants.

There are plenty of items in the newsletter that I would recommend to you and for my part, I thought it would be interesting to give you a flavour of some of the things I have been doing in recent months.

Firstly, I've been supported by the team to understand issues and performance surrounding stock quality, component replacements, maintenance as well as our new build programme. This is clearly a finely balanced challenge and one that will consume considerable energy in the years ahead. You would perhaps expect a chief executive to say that not all things are possible within the budget we have, however, what is very important to me, is that we are transparent about our decision-making, are open to challenge and are able to explain why we prioritise certain activities over others. I was reminded of the need for this recently when I met with members of the Milton Forum, our only registered tenant organisation, who are very passionate about their area.

Secondly, I've been concentrating my efforts on understanding the role that Albyn plays in the Highlands. We are the largest RSL in the area and are the third largest charity by income in the Highlands. This means that we have a considerable platform from which to make a difference to our tenants and we need to take the opportunity to use our influence and resources to better effect. At our recent strategy day, the Board and I agreed that while we must maintain our focus on the quality of maintenance and development programme, it is essential that we broaden the scope of our influence and that means seeking new opportunities in areas such as community development and community benefit, energy generation and storage to alleviate fuel poverty and improving the customer service experience.

Some of you will be aware that we are investing in a new housing management system, CIVICA CX, that will enable customers to access real-time information about your rent account as well as provide improved options for communicating with us. Graeme Hamilton is our new Project Manager for this work and although his early work will focus on the internal systems and training issues relating to the new system, you can expect to hear from him in due course about user testing and involvement once the system is built.



Thirdly, I'd like to thank everyone I've met in recent months for their time and effort as I've settled into the role. A special mention to Liam Salkin, a tenant member and co-optee on the Board's Performance Committee, Anne Sutherland, a recent joiner to the same committee and Carol Hart, tenant member on the City Region Deal Assisted Living Project Board. I'd also like to thank the Milton Forum for their recent contributions and every member of the editorial group who has given their time to improve our policies and who created the Tenant Charter Report 2019.

Finally, I'd like to wish all our tenants a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I hope that it is time well-spent with loved ones.

I look forward to working with you in 2020.

Best wishes.

Lisa



CEO REPORT



# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: OUTCOMES

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## **We held our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 3 September 2019.**

*There were about 50 people in all, who heard a thought-provoking talk made by our Guest Speaker Susan Aktemel, Chief Executive from Homes for Good. Susan discussed her inspiring tale of setting up and establishing Homes 4 Good as a leading disrupter in the social housing scene in Glasgow.*

*Our Board Co-Chairs Maxine and Ian gave a positive update on Albyn's progress during the last year, and thanked all staff and customers for their hard work in achieving this.*

*Five Board members had retired during the year. This left us with nine Board vacancies.*

*Justine Golesworthy, and Raymond Bremner were voted on to the Board as a full member (formerly co-opted members).*

*In addition, two new Board members were appointed. They are: Glynis Campbell-Sinclair, and Ann Boon. We welcome them all to the Board.*

*Our Chief Executive and Chair gave presentations which are contained in our Annual Report summary document. This can be accessed on our revised website in the document library. If you would like a printed copy sent to you, please contact our Corporate Team by email [corporate@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:corporate@albynhousing.org.uk) or telephone **01349 855774**.*

*The following office bearers were confirmed:*

- **Chair:** Maxine Smith
- **Vice-Chair:** Ian Fosbrooke
- **Company Secretary:** Justine Golesworthy

*Following the Annual General Meeting two new members of the Board have been co-opted, Ms Donna Smith, and Mrs Susannah Endeacott.*

*Further information on each of our Board Members is available on our website or as before we can send printed copies on request. If you would like to be a member of Albyn or wish to enquire about becoming a Board Member please contact our corporate team who will be happy to help.*

# TENANT CONSULTATIONS ON OPERATIONAL POLICIES

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Albyn has started the process to review our operational policies and procedures and want to thank each tenant who has been involved to date. Your input has been invaluable to shaping our organisation.

We will also be introducing new ones to ensure our services meet our customers' requirements, that we are continually improving and that we are complying in all areas we work in as a housing provider.

So far this year we have reviewed or introduced the following operational policies:

- Service Charge Policy
- Voids Management Policy
- Keeping Vulnerable People Safe
- Gas Safety Policy

You are very important to us and we want to make certain that you continue to have a say in how these services are developed and delivered.

Therefore, we will be launching several Customer Consultations soon, where there will be various opportunities to get involved, and we would very much appreciate you taking the time to be part of these conversations.

We don't want to leave anybody behind so we will be using social media, our website, postal surveys, text, email and face to face at our offices in Inverness and Invergordon.

Please watch out for further details coming soon!

## TENANT CHARTER REPORT 2019

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The Scottish Social Housing Charter helps to improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords provide, and does so by:

- making it clear what our tenants and other customers can expect from us, and helping them to hold us to account
  - focusing our efforts on achieving outcomes that matter to you
  - providing the standard for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on how well we are performing.
- This assessment enables the Regulator, tenants and other customers to identify areas of strong performance and areas which need improvement.



TENANT CHARTER REPORT

All Registered Social Landlords have to issue an annual report to their tenants advising how they have performed in meeting this Scottish Social Housing Charter, and you can find a copy of our latest Tenant charter report on our website.

If you would like to receive a printed copy of our Tenant Charter report 2019, then please get in touch with Anne Mackay on the number below. Copies are available in various formats e.g. in large print, braille, on coloured paper.

The style, layout, and content of this report were decided by Tenants, and we hope that you find it interesting and informative. We chose to compare our satisfaction rates with those of Grampian Housing Association and the Scottish average, where possible.

We would like to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH to all of the Tenants who have been involved with designing this report, we are extremely grateful for your help.

If you would like to be involved in designing the Tenant Charter report for 2020, or you have any comments to make, or require more information, then please get in touch with **Anne Mackay** on **01349 855976** or **anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk**



# GAS SAFETY POLICY

We would like to thank all our tenants who feedback to us, it was a tremendous response! Here are some results of the Gas Safety Tenant Consultation which were very encouraging:

**53%** of tenants who have gas responded to the survey

**99.8%** of tenants stated gas safety was important to them and their neighbours

**97.7%** wanted to be reassured that measures were taken to ensure their property was gas safe

**90%** of tenants knew who to contact in the event of gas leak

**94.7%** of tenants stated Albyn provided enough information around gas servicing and safety information

**20%** of tenants did not know that The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors all Registered Social Landlords on gas safety compliance

**5%** of tenants did not know we have a legal duty to inspect and service gas appliances annually with heavy penalties imposed if we do not do this

**93.6%** of tenants thought it was reasonable for financial penalties to be levied to tenants in the event of multiple failures to gain access to carry out the gas safety inspections

## CURRENT TENANT CONSULTATIONS

We are currently in the middle of a Tenant Consultation on Rent Collection (debt prevention) due to end 22nd December so please get your voice heard and complete the short survey!

This looks at how we approach rent collection at present, how we can support our tenants and prevent them getting into rent arrears, and what approach we will consider on collecting rent arrears in the future so we can continue to repair and invest in our property upgrades along with investing in your community.

We will also be commencing our Annual Rent Review process, which will determine the rent increase for 20/21. This will be going out to all tenants shortly.

Lastly, in the New Year we will be asking your opinion on our Repairs and Property Maintenance policy.

If you would like to get involved in our Tenants Consultations or have any ideas on how we can improve in consulting with you, please do get in touch!

We don't want to leave anybody behind so we will be using social media, our website, postal surveys, text, email and face to face at our offices in Inverness and Invergordon.

## NOTIFICATION: 2020/21 RENT REVIEW CONSULTATION

*Albyn is consulting on the Rent Review during December and January with a survey being sent by text.  
Please contact our office to update your contact details by calling > 01349 852978 or email > [office@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:office@albynhousing.org.uk)  
Paper copies will be available on request.*

*Further information will follow on our website: [www.albynhousing.org.uk](http://www.albynhousing.org.uk)*

# HOME IMPROVEMENTS 2019

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**We have been very busy upgrading 224 properties this year.**

- 62 Bathrooms were replaced in Thurso and Wick.
- 68 properties in Invergordon have new windows
- 39 Kitchens were renewed in homes in Nethy Bridge, Inverness, Conon Bridge, Wick, Brora and Nairn.
- 55 Heating upgrades have been completed during this programme of work, these homes are in Aultbea, Poolewe, Nethy Bridge, Inverness, Tain and Dingwall.

The programme has been completed in partnership with Compass Building and Construction Services.

Ms Jennifer Grant is one of our tenants in Broomhill Court said:

“Albyn recently fitted new kitchens and central heating systems here in Broomhill Court, Nethy Bridge and I am delighted with the results. An amazing group of contractors to whom nothing was too much trouble completed both tasks with minimal disruption and faster than seemed possible. The workmanship was first class and the results speak for themselves.”



# BIG LOTTERY MONEY MATTERS

## - ENERGY ADVICE SERVICE

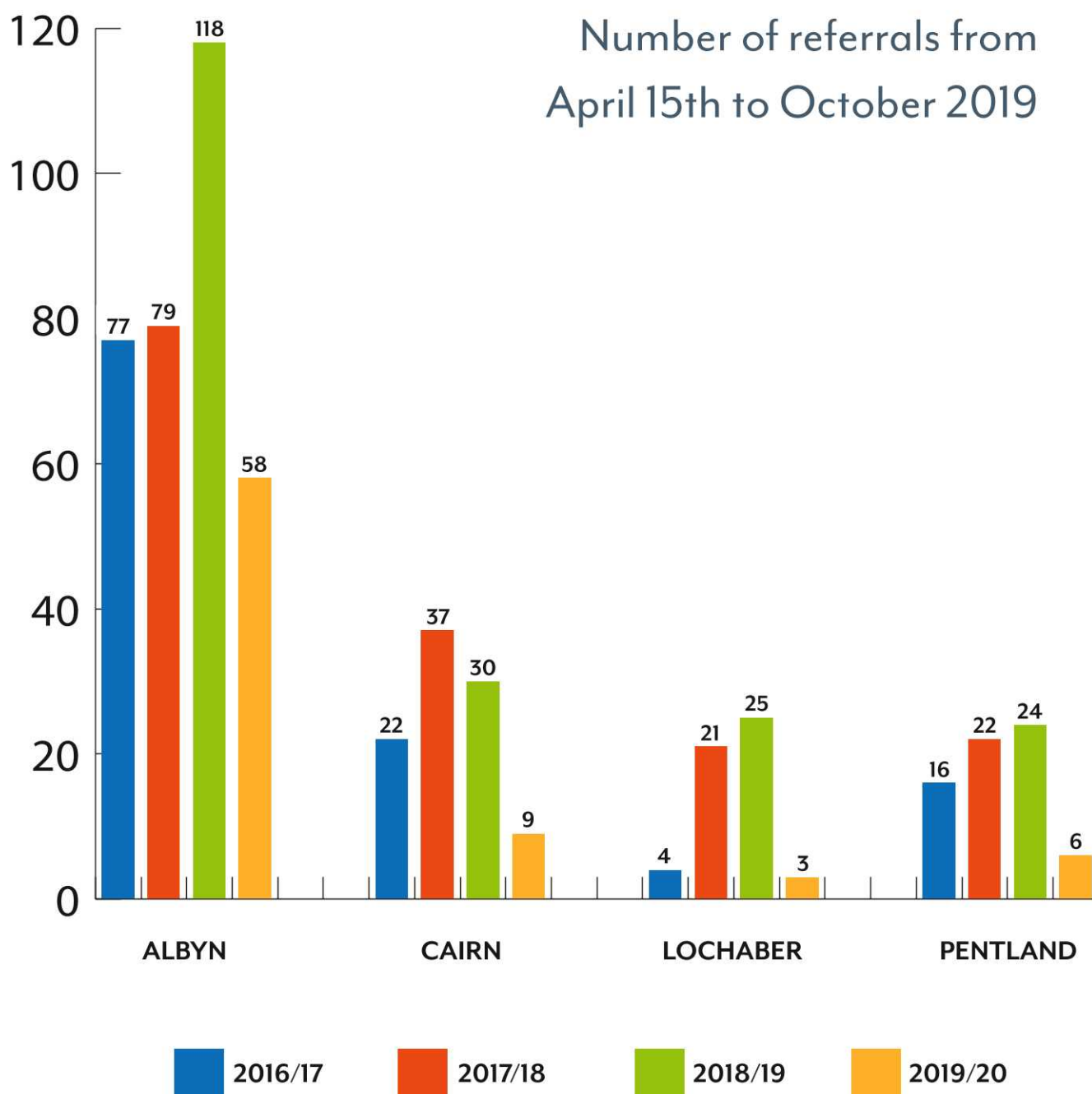
There have been 551 referrals to the energy advice service of the Money Matters Highland project from April 2015 until end October 2019. This has resulted in 469 households receiving support to manage their energy more efficiently. 377 of these households have been able to reduce their energy costs. Referrals have been received from all over the Highlands from Thurso in the north to Poolewe in the west and as far south as Spean Bridge to Dyke in the east.

The main advice was given around operating heating systems, financial advice, payments and tariffs as well as learning to be more energy efficient.

Funding awarded for the provision of energy advice services to Highland Housing Associations tenants came under the umbrella of the Big Lottery Project and ceased on 30 November 2019.

Over the four and half years that the project has been in place it met all project targets, assisted our highland housing association tenants and increased the knowledge base on energy.

Number of referrals from  
April 15th to October 2019



# NEW ELECTRIC STANDARD - KEEPING YOU SAFE IN YOUR HOME

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The Scottish government has been introducing a new standard for fire and smoke detection. For most of our homes this means we need to install additional equipment for detecting fire and giving warning in the event of fire. This standard is known as LD2.

You may have noticed that we have been upgrading properties during our planned electrical testing and gas servicing contracts to include:

- one smoke alarm installed in the room most frequently used for general daytime living purposes (normally the living room/lounge)
- one smoke alarm in every circulation space on each storey, such as hallways and landings

- one heat alarm installed in every kitchen
- all smoke and heat alarms to be ceiling mounted
- all smoke and heat alarms to be interlinked

The Scottish Government have a deadline of February 2021 to upgrade all of our properties so if you receive a request from our Asset Management team for any works which will help us to make sure your home is as safe as possible, please allow access to our contractors.

## SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR: HOW WE REGULATE: A GUIDE FOR TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS

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The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has published a 'How we regulate: a guide for tenants and service users.' The document provides information about :

- Who SHR are and what they do
- what you can expect from your landlord
- how you can find out about your landlord's performance
- how to raise a concern about your landlord

The SHR has also produced two short videos about **who we are and what we do** and **how to raise a concern about a social landlord**.

SHR is also working with British Sign Language Scotland (BSL) to make a version of the guide for BSL users which will be launched soon.



ABOUT THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR



HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN ABOUT A SOCIAL LANDLORD



# HOW WE COLLECT RENT ARREARS

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**We are always striving to improve the services we provide and make the way we work more efficient and effective.**

**Rental income is essential to keep the Society financially viable and able to provide the range and standards of service our residents currently enjoy. It is therefore essential that we ensure that we maximise our levels of rent collection and arrears recovery.**

To help staff do this our procedures concentrate on some key principles:

- Early identification of an arrear
- Immediate action to prevent the arrear increasing
- Early contact
- Personal contact as the preferred method of contact
- Keeping clear records of all contact
- Keeping tenants informed
- Providing appropriate advice and support
- Court action and evictions only to be used as an absolute last resort

A number of members of our Customer Services Team are involved in the recovery of rent arrears so it may not be your Housing Officer who contacts you when your account first shows an arrear. Just like your Housing Officer, all of our staff are there to offer support and advice to help you prevent the arrear increasing and to clear the debt.

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**PLEASE REMEMBER – THE CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM IS HERE TO HELP YOU. SO IF YOU FIND YOURSELF STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR RENT, CONTACT US IMMEDIATELY.**

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# REDUCING THE RISK OF LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE



**Legionnaires' disease is a serious lung infection caused by the Legionella bacteria. Initial symptoms usually include flu-like symptoms. The disease is caused by Legionella bacteria infecting your lungs. It is usually caught by breathing in small droplets of contaminated water. The infection isn't contagious and can't be spread directly from person to person. Legionnaires' disease can be particularly serious in people with pre-existing health conditions, as well as young children and older folk.**

Most of us will have heard of the disease and associate it with large water systems in factories, hotels, hospitals and the like. Legionella is bacteria that can exist in natural and artificial water systems.

However, it is possible for Legionella bacteria to live in smaller water supply systems like those used in domestic premises.

**You can do your bit to help minimise the risk** and we recommend that you all undertake the following actions:

- Flush through hot and cold water taps throughout the property on at least a weekly basis to prevent water stagnation.
- Run showers at least once per week to ensure there is regular water flow.
- Clean and disinfect shower heads every three months.

- If toilets have not been used for more than a week these should be flushed twice before use to circulate fresh water through the system.
- Where hot water storage cylinders are provided, ensure the hot water is switched on and the water is brought up to 60°C for a minimum of one hour once per week.
- Don't adjust the hot water temperature controls on the boiler or hot water cylinder or on any thermostatic mixing valves on taps. (The central heating temperature is controlled separately and you can adjust this using the room thermostat and radiator valves to suit your preferences.)

## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

We also want to know how you would like to receive information from us. There are numerous ways that we communicate with you, from phoning, letters, to text, to email, and newsletters like this one etc..

Our new housing system will allow us to give you the option to choose how you receive specific information e.g. your rent statement by email, newsletter by text link, surveys by post. We will be asking for your preferences during the next year as part of this project, so please complete this information as it will help us to engage with you more effectively.



# GET INVOLVED AND HAVE YOUR SAY

Do you think that Albyn Housing Society is doing a good job, but could do better? Do you wonder how we spend our money? Or how we decide if the service we are giving you is adequate? Do you want to get involved and work alongside the Albyn management and tell us your experience as a customer and where we can make improvements? Are you looking for voluntary work to help gain skills, experience and confidence to help you get a new job? Well.....

We are now looking for tenants with an enquiring mind and confidence to ask questions to join our **Focus groups**. We really need customers to help us to look at how well we communicate with you, deliver services to you, etc, and to make improvements where possible.

We are about to review our '**Customer Involvement strategy**' and we need to know what you think. This strategy covers how we plan to develop our services for involving those customers who want a say in the decisions we make about our services, delivering good services to customers, and promoting equality and diversity. This includes how we communicate with you, how you can influence the decisions we make, and how you can have your voice heard.

In our latest Customer satisfaction survey, 67% of you who responded told us that you were very satisfied / satisfied with the opportunities to participate in decision making. Unfortunately a large number of you told us you were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, and so we need to know if this is because we are not providing suitable opportunities, or are we not communicating properly, or is it just that you are too busy, or not interested, etc. In the same survey, 78% of respondents told us that we are outstanding / good at keeping you informed about our services

and decisions. Quite a large number of tenants thought we were ok, but there were a few who felt we are poor, or really poor, so we need to identify where we are letting you down, and improve. We can only do this with your help. A copy of the current Customer Involvement Strategy can be found on our website [www.albynhousing.org.uk](http://www.albynhousing.org.uk)

So... if you have time and would like to take part in a focus group then please get in touch with **Anne Mackay** on **0789 456 8185** / [anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk)

## What you have participated in so far this year....

Since April we have asked for your opinions with: our Gas safety policy (53% of tenants with a gas supply replied); the content and design of the Tenant Charter report for 2019 (24% of all tenants responded), and currently are asking for your participation with the Rent collection part of our Debt prevention policy (30% of all tenants have responded already). We are so grateful to everyone who has taken the time to give us their views, and have been delighted with the success of the 'text' consultations sent to those of you with mobile phones. Please let us know if you change your number, or if you now have a mobile phone and would prefer to be consulted by text.

As well as the above consultations, we have ongoing surveys, of our new tenants (8% have responded to date), and of the tenants who are lucky enough to be moving into a new build (21% have responded to date). All of this information helps us to identify what's wrong, what's right, and how we can improve -- thank you very much, and please keep these surveys coming back to us.

## FIRE ALARM BATTERY INFORMATION

Please help protect your home from fire by regularly testing your smoke alarm – we recommend doing it monthly.

### Test by:

- Pressing and holding the red "test" button until you hear it bleeping
- Let go of the button. The system will bleep for a little longer
- If the system continues to bleep without stopping, you need to replace the battery

Always have a spare battery ready to replace the back up battery in your alarm. The replacement battery is a 9 volt PP3 6LR61 square battery. Never leave yourself or your home unprotected by removing the battery to stop the alarm bleeping. If you have difficulty changing the battery, ask a friend or let us know. If you're unsure what to do, get in touch with us.

# FROST PRECAUTIONS

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## ARE YOU INSURED?

You must make your own insurance arrangements. Have you insured your household contents? Some tenants still have no household insurance. Fire, floods and accidents can mean financial disaster.

## ATTIC SPACES

Check on attic spaces, especially if water and storage tanks are there. Make sure insulation, which should cover pipes and tanks, has not been accidentally moved.

## GOING ON HOLIDAY

If you go away in the winter please contact the Society who can arrange to drain the cold water system on your behalf, for which you will sign a 'Recharge Form' estimated costs can be advised in advance. We will then invoice you on receipt of the Contractor's invoice.

Alternatively we can recommend one of our contract plumbers who you may wish to approach independently. If you leave the house empty for a period, e.g. holidays, it is a good idea to leave keys with a relative or neighbour and to inform the Police and Albyn Housing Society Ltd

## KEEP WARM

In order to avoid burst pipes this winter try to keep your house warm day and night. Houses with no heating upstairs – leave room doors open to allow heat to circulate.

## IN THE EVENT OF A BURST PIPE

1. Turn off water
2. Switch off the electricity at the mains, including the water heater.
3. Switch off central heating systems. If you have a solid fuel fire close down the damper and let the fire die out. Do not attempt to drain down the boiler unless the fire has gone out.
4. Open all taps to sinks and bath (if possible collect water in the bath for "flushing" the WC and washing).
5. Call Albyn Housing Society Ltd

**THE SOCIETY IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY DAMAGE CAUSED TO YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS BY FROST DAMAGE OR BURST PIPE OR TANK.**

# ELECTRICAL TESTING

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Albyn is required to carry out inspections of the electrical installations in your home every 5 years to make sure they are safe and well maintained. Over time, the condition of the installation can deteriorate due to many factors such as wear and tear, corrosion and age. The priority is to keep you safe in your home therefore if your property is due to be checked, you will receive a letter from us between 4-6 weeks before a proposed visit from Sangsters Electrical Ltd.

It is important that access is given to the electrician - if the proposed visit is not suitable, please contact Sangsters on 01862 832683 to re-arrange.

Sangsters will check your fuse board which is usually located in a cupboard. As clear access is required, please arrange to remove any items stored around this on the day of testing. The electrician

will also test some of your sockets and switches, light fittings and smoke alarms throughout your home. An inspection and test of your smoke and heat alarms to ensure they meet with the current standard will be part of the electrical check. This means that we may have to replace any units which are faulty, missing, or out of date, and fit extra units to your main daytime living areas and kitchen.

If any repairs are identified which require urgent attention, they will be completed at the time of the test. If parts are required to be ordered, the electrician will make you aware and Sangster's will be in contact to organise a return visit.

Sangsters Electricians will be in a sign written vans, branded uniform, and will carry identification, if you have any concerns about any contractors please contact Albyn's offices.



# DIGITAL CHAMPIONS

We are delighted to be able to tell you about our new service to help and support tenants to get online safely.

Seven of our customer services staff members are now able to provide one-to-one advice and support to allow you to do things like using social media to stay connected to family and friends, or to log on to our website to report a repair, or to save money by finding the cheapest price for household utilities etc.

We can work with you in the office, or in your own community, whichever suits you best. Just get in touch, it's easier than you think



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## Invergordon Office

(Invergordon area and the north):  
98-104 High Street, Invergordon,  
Ross-shire IV18 0DL  
Tel: **0300 323 0990**

## Inverness Office

(Inverness area and the south):  
68 MacLennan Crescent, Inverness IV3 8DN  
Tel: **0300 323 0991**  
Email: **office@albynhousing.org.uk**

# CHRISTMAS QUIZ 2019

**Here's your chance to win a £25 gift voucher!  
Please send us the answers to your questions.**

**Don't forget to include your name and contact information! We will put all the correct responses into a hat and pull one lucky winner out.**

Please return your completed entries by  
Monday 20 January 2020

### Question 1 >

In the song "Frosty the Snowman," what made Frosty come to life?

### Question 2 >

Which Hollywood actor played six different roles in The Polar Express?

### Question 3 >

How many ghosts are there in A Christmas Carol?

### Question 4 >

In what country did the custom of putting up a Christmas tree originate?

### Question 5 >

Who played George Bailey in the Christmas classic "It's a Wonderful Life?"

### Question 6 >

What Bing Crosby song is the best-selling single ever?

### Question 7 >

Which author wrote the book A Christmas Carol?

### Question 8 >

Three of Santa's reindeer's names begin with the letter "D". Name them.

### Question 9 >

Jimmy Boyd sang which hit Christmas song at 12 years of age?

**Entries should be sent to the Invergordon Office  
or email [corporate@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:corporate@albynhousing.org.uk)**