

TENANT COMMUNICATION

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) – Advice for tenants and information about measures being taken by the Society to deliver services during office closure.

We are committed to keeping our customers informed about the measures we are taking to maintain services and provide support while we work as a nation to limit the spread of Coronavirus.

Below, we have provided a helpful guide to the most frequently accessed services. This includes information about where you can seek advice if you have any concerns about your wellbeing, income or other tenancy matters.

We do expect further guidance from the government over the coming days and weeks. We will alert you to relevant information as and when we receive it.

1. Staying Safe and Well

(i) Information

Please seek the latest advice on hygiene and self-isolation from the NHS Scotland website: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19#>

This website will provide you with information about the precautions that should be taken by all individuals, including housemates and visitors, if they are symptomatic or self-isolating.

The Government has also shared specific advice for those sharing kitchens and bathrooms, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance#use-of-shared-spaces-if-you-live-with-others>

(ii) Vulnerable Tenants

Tenant welfare is, and always will be, our first priority.

If you are among known vulnerable groups below, please expect to receive contact from the housing services team, who will be checking in to see if you require any additional support during the self-isolation period.

- Over 70s
- Those with known health conditions (physical and mental)
- Those who are pregnant
- Anyone who routinely received the flu jab
- Households where there is known to only be one occupant

2. Albyn Housing Society Offices

Office Receptions

The reception areas in Invergordon and Inverness will be closed during this critical period, and we will communicate with you when we are able to confirm when they will reopen.

In the meantime, all services can be accessed using the usual 0300 telephone numbers.

3. Albyn Housing Society Services

(i) Repairs

Again, during this critical time, all repairs will be restricted to emergencies only, in order to minimise direct social contact.

Your housing officer will assess the situation and advise whether a repair can be made. If a repair can go ahead, they will then assess whether it is safe for everyone involved for a contractor to enter the property, and then put measures in place to address any wellbeing risks.

Where you have a gas installation in your property we will continue to undertake servicing in the interest of keeping you safe in your home.

Tenants should be prepared to be asked:

- Are any of the residents showing symptoms of the virus?
- Are any of the residents aged above 70?
- Have any of the residents been exposed to anybody who has, or is suspected to have, the virus?
- Do any of the residents have any underlying health issues that place them at increased risk?

Please be reassured that all contractors are required to wash their hands or use hand sanitisers both before entering and after leaving a property.

They will also be required to maintain a distance of at least two metres from the tenant or other people within the home. It is good practice for people within the household to remain within another room and to ensure windows are kept open during visits.

Other tenancy visits deemed non-essential will not be carried out until further notice.

(ii) Ending your tenancy

Should you choose to end your tenancy with us during this period, we will manage this process as far as we possibly can over telephone and email.

We will not be carrying out the usual pre-inspection, however, you are still required to leave the property in good conditions, and if you can, provide photographs to evidence this.

You will still be charged for any necessary repairs.

(iii) Starting a new tenancy

The process of starting a new tenancy will be conducted as much as possible by telephone, email and post, however, it will be essential for your housing officer to meet with you to complete the sign up and witness the signing of your Tenancy Agreement.

In advance of the meeting, all the necessary documentation will be sent to you in advance, and the housing officer should go through this, including the terms of the Agreement, with you over the phone.

If you are self-isolating because you are showing symptoms of the virus or have been in close contact with someone who has symptoms, then all contacts should be avoided until the end of the isolation period.

(iv) Mutual Exchanges

Mutual exchanges always require a significant amount of face-to-face contact due to the need for tenants and staff to complete home viewings and new tenancy arrangements.

For this reason, all mutual exchanges are being postponed until further notice.

4. Paying Your Rent

Rent arrears due to COVID-19

As always, if you have any concerns about your ability to pay your rent, please make contact with your housing officer who will do everything they can to support you.

You can also seek advice from a range of helpful organisations, such as those we have listed below. They will be able to provide advice and information about any benefits, sick pay or aid you may be entitled to:

- Shelter Scotland
- Citizens Advice Scotland
- The Money Advice Service
- Scotland's Financial Health Service
- StepChange

Information from the Government is constantly being updated, and we do expect an announcement to be made in relation to support for those who are facing rent arrears as a direct result of Coronavirus and its wider economic impact.

We will share this information as it becomes available. In the meantime, please help us to help you by providing your housing officer with your most up-to-date phone number and email address.

If you do not have a phone number or email address, then you may want to ask a friend or relative to provide theirs so that they can share this information with you when it is released.

We wish to avoid depending on posting information where possible due to the changing nature of the COVID-19 Emergency and the need to share information as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your attention.

As always, if you have any further questions, your housing officer will be happy to assist.