

Dear Tenant

Resumption of Repairs Services, Property Surveys, Cyclical & Planned Works, and Staff Visits

Following consideration of current Government advice, and the risks of contact within the office environment, it has been agreed that Albyn staff will continue to operate a home-working model until the end of the year (31st December 2020) with periodic reviews.

Our offices will remain closed to visitors for the same period. All Albyn staff will continue to be available to tenants through the usual contact numbers, but you may notice some changes to the pre-recorded messages when you phone outlined on **Appendix 1**.

We will soon be recommencing our normal repairs service, property surveys, cyclical & planned works within your homes, with our contractors wearing the required Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) e.g. face masks, hand sanitiser etc. and observing the relevant safety guidance, to ensure that any work required in your property can be carried out as safely as possible, with minimum risk. More information on what will be required of staff, contractors, and tenants, is attached as **Appendix 2**.

If you have reported a repair since the lockdown and been advised that it was necessary to put this on hold due to the restrictions on visits to properties, you will be contacted to make arrangements for this work to proceed. Similarly, if you have been holding back on reporting a repair, you should contact the office now and your repair will be logged.

We have a substantial backlog of repairs and would ask you to bear with us in the meantime while our contractors catch up on this work.

We are also about to recommence staff visits to properties. Again, these visits will be carried out with the required safety precautions in place, including the use of PPE and observing social distancing. Before any visits to your property by either a contractor, or a staff member, goes ahead, you will be asked a number of questions in relation to the current Coronavirus pandemic such as whether you or any members of your household have confirmed Covid-19 or are showing any symptoms of it. The visiting staff member will explain this to you in more detail when arranging the visit, including information on how we will be managing track and trace.

Continued../...

☐ Registered Office:

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Tel: 01349 852978 Fax: 01349 853859
email: office@albynhousing.org.uk

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68 MacLennan Crescent, Inverness, IV3 8DN
Tel: 01463 712516 Fax: 01463 242590
www.albynhousing.org.uk

Annual General Meeting (AGM) Invitation

As a result of the Coronavirus emergency, we have taken the decision to hold our Annual General Meeting (AGM) online using the meeting application Zoom, taking place on Wednesday 16th September 2020 at 7.00pm. We are sorry that we will not have the opportunity to meet tenants this year, but we are sure you understand that we have decided to proceed in this way to safeguard public health and reduce the risk of community transmission of the virus. **If you would like to attend the virtual AGM, and have access to the internet with a computer, tablet, or phone please let our Corporate Office know by emailing: corporate@albynhousing.org.uk, or by telephone on: 01349 801 007 by Friday 11th September 2020.** If you would like to attend, but are unsure of how to use Zoom, please let us know, and we will do our best to support you with this. For those of you who cannot attend the virtual AGM we will be happy to post out copies of the Annual Report after the meeting which will also include the report from the Chair Maxine Smith, and Albyn's Group CEO Lisa Buchanan.

In addition to the Appendices mentioned above we have also included an update on the Tenant Hardship Fund and Rental Payments as **Appendix 3** and the open letter to all tenants from Kevin Stewart, along with Albyn's response as **Appendix 4**.

In the meantime, although we can't meet face to face there are still many ways to **Get Involved with Albyn Here's how to, and why!**

Online Focus Groups

Due to the current restrictions, we are not able to hold face-to-face meetings and so would like to try to hold some online focus groups.

Over the coming months we will be looking for tenants to help us review a wide range of publications and policies and would really appreciate your help – we need to be guided by tenants who are confident online, and also those who are not. *If you would like to participate in this way, but feel that you don't have the necessary skills, or equipment, then please still get in touch, as we will be able to help you to get involved.* Please give Anne Mackay a call on the 0789 456 8185 or email her at anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk.

We would very much appreciate your help with the following:

Customer Involvement Strategy

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.

If this is something you would be interested in doing, then please get in touch. The virtual meetings can be held during the day or the evening, will be very informal, and should last no more than 2 hours. We will supply a goody bag of refreshments for the event.

Reporting to you on the Scottish Social Housing Charter

Every year we ask for your help to design the Albyn Tenant Charter Report – this is a report for Albyn tenants which gives details of our performance in meeting the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

All Registered Social Landlords must publish this annual report advising how they have performed in meeting this Charter. You can find a copy of our 2019 report on our website.

If this is something you would be interested in doing, then please get in touch with Anne using the details above. We would need you to be able to join us - online in the comfort of your own home - for two sessions of approximately 2 hours.

You will find a copy of the 2017 Scottish Social Housing Charter on our website www.albynhousing.org.uk

Project Phoenix

In the summer 2019 edition of Newsview, we advised you that in order to improve the service we deliver to you, we were looking at replacing our current Housing Management System. We called this project 'Project Phoenix' and asked for your input to ensure that the new system would be user friendly and be of benefit to all tenants. One of the major changes will be the 'Customer portal', which will allow you to do things electronically, like pay your rent, report a repair, change your personal details, etc. **This portal needs to be designed with advice from the tenants who will use it, and so we would like to set up a steering group of tenants to work with us. If you are interested, please get in touch with Anne.**

..... and just to let you know.....

Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020

In February 2019, we carried out a Customer Satisfaction Survey, and the results from the survey were reported to you in the Summer 2019 edition of Newsview. At that time, we advised that we intended to carry out another survey in February 2020, when we would contact every household by text, by email or post.

We are sorry that we were unable to carry out the 2020 Customer satisfaction in February, but intend to do this in September. It would be extremely helpful if you could let us know if you have recently changed your mobile phone number or email address.

Please take part, this is your chance to tell us how to improve. Thank you

Albyn Housing Digital Champions

COVID 19 has shown us how important it is for everyone to be digitally included in society. We now have staff who can help you to get online safely, or to use your phone to skype or facetime, or to do one of the many things we use technology for. If you need any help just give us a call, it's that easy.

Changes to our telephone system

We are making some changes to our telephone system shortly that are aimed to improve the service we provide you. Here's a summary of what you can expect:

- 1- Our telephone system will now give you 3 options to choose from when making a call:
Option 1 – A Direct route to the person you want to speak to if you have their 4-digit extension number, press 1. The 4-digit extension numbers will be printed on all our correspondence.

Option 2 – If you want to speak to the next available Customer Services Assistant (who will deal with all your housing needs) press 2.

Option 3 – Or for all other enquires please press 3 and this will take you to our reception team (who will manage any general queries).
- 2- We are improving our call routing. What does this mean? Simply put it means your call will be answered as efficiently as it can.
- 3- We will soon be including an option for you to make payment to your account directly to AllPay and without the need to speak to anyone for your convenience. Note: this will be an option and you can speak to one of our customers services to make payment if you wish

As many of you will already know from calling us, all our calls are recorded in the interest of quality and the service we deliver to our customers. This will include both incoming calls from you and calls we make to you.

Please note that we do not record the part of the telephone call where you give us your credit/debit card information, and at all times you can choose not to have the call recorded.

Albyn Housing Society (AHS) is the Data Controller for any information we hold about you. We will treat your personal data with care. You can find out more about this in our Privacy Notice on our website, www.albynhousing.org.uk or speak to your housing officer for more information.

COVID-19

Safety Measures

This is a short message to explain how we are working to ensure we can enter your home (or other place you spend your day) safely whenever we need to do so in order to provide you with our services.

To help us prepare for our visit there are a few simple questions our staff & contractors will ask **before** coming to see you:

COVID-19

Safety Measures

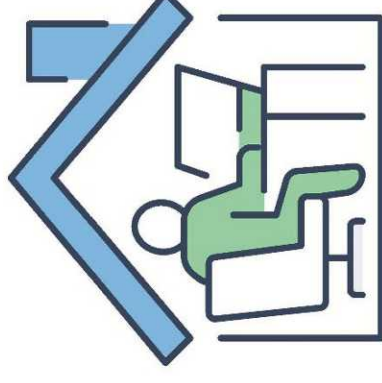
1 Are you or any members of your family displaying symptoms of COVID-19, such as high temperature, new and persistent cough, or loss of taste or smell?



2 Are you or any of your family considered vulnerable or have you been self-isolating? Are you awaiting COVID-19 test results or have you been recently contacted by NHS track and trace?



3 Are you happy for us to enter your home? There may be occasions where more than one person may need to visit at a time.



It is important that you remember to inform us of any change in circumstances before the date we are coming to see you.

COVID-19 Safety Measures

Before our staff or contractors enter your home there are some simple steps you can take to help us do so safely. If possible, please:

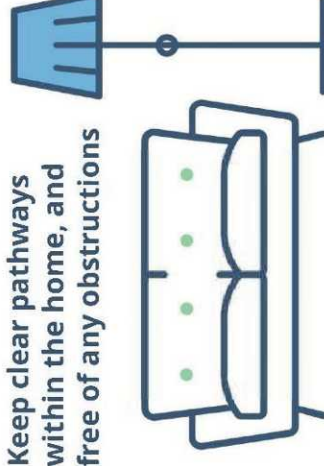
1 Leave all internal doors open



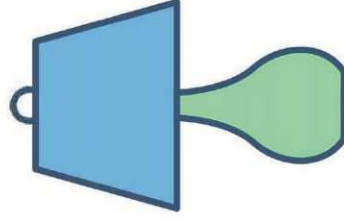
2 Leave windows open for ventilation



3 Keep clear pathways within the home, and free of any obstructions



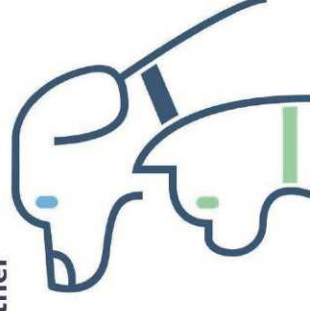
4 Keep all areas well-lit and any open window coverings



5 Where possible other occupants of the house should vacate the property and stay together in one area such as the driveway or garden or, congregate in one other room



6 Shut pets away safely within another room





Our staff have received training on how to conduct their business safely whilst within your home and will take the following steps to ensure everyone's safety.

COVID-19

Safety Measures

7 simple steps our staff & contractors **always** take to ensure everyone's safety

COVID-19 Safety Measures

1 On the day of the visit, we will ask you our safety questions again, prior to the visit taking place.



2 We will wash or sanitise our hands before and after every home we visit.



3 If requested we will wear a pair of disposable gloves during the visit. We will dispose of used gloves safely without compromising you.



4 Where we are unable to maintain social distancing we will wear a face covering during the visit. We will dispose of these safely without compromising you.



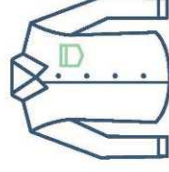
5 Any equipment used will be disinfected before and after each use.



6 To minimise the time we spend within your home, we will try to complete our notes and forms outside of your property.



7 We will take care to keep our clothes clean during visits and will also wear fresh workwear daily.



We will only visit your property where it is absolutely necessary. Where possible we will contact you via telephone, email, texts etc. and we may ask you to submit photos or videos as an alternative to visiting in person.





Thank you for
considering this.

We are committed to
providing a safe working
environment for our
people and for service
users whose properties
we may have to enter
from time to time.

COVID-19

Safety Measures

Staying COVID-19 Secure in 2020

We confirm we have complied with the government's guidance on managing the risk of COVID-19

• FIVE STEPS TO SAFER WORKING TOGETHER •

- ✓ We have carried out a COVID-19 risk assessment and shared the results with the people who work here
- ✓ We have **cleaning, handwashing and hygiene** procedures in line with guidance
- ✓ We have taken all reasonable steps to **help people work from home**
- ✓ We have taken all reasonable steps to **maintain a 2m distance** in the workplace
- ✓ Where people cannot be 2m apart, we have done everything practical to **manage transmission risk**

For the Health and Safety Executive at www.hse.gov.uk/covid-19/

We are happy to confirm that we have complied with the government's guidance on managing the risk of Covid 19. This guidance is often referred to as **"Five Steps to Safer Working Together"**. You may have seen this poster which explains the five steps.

Please contact us on:

Customer Services South 0300 323 0991
housing.south@albynhousing.org.uk

Customer Services North 0300 323 0990
housing.north@albynhousing.org.uk

COVID-19 Hardship Support and Rental Payments

Tenant Hardship Fund

We continue to support tenants most impacted by the effects of the pandemic by way of our hardship fund. Many tenants have and continue to benefit from this.

The criteria for making an application to the fund and details of how you can apply are available by contacting your Housing Team either by email or phone:

North – housing.north@albynhousing.org.uk 0300 323 0990

South – housing.south@albynhousing.org.uk 0300 323 0991

The fund will make awards based on the merits of each application and provide support only where you meet the specified criteria set out in the application.

It is important to stress that the fund is limited and may not be able to support all of those who may need to access it.

What does the fund support?

- Food Vouchers
- Help with energy costs
- Help with mobile and internet costs
- Help with rent payments (Note- not available to those on UC or Housing Benefit)

Rental Payments

You should continue to make rental payments on time and in full. If you are struggling financially the most important thing is that you continue to communicate with us which in turn will allow us to continue support you in the best possible way.

More guidance is available on our website or at:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-covid-19-guidance-for-social-housing-landlords-and-tenants.pdf>

Minister for Local Government, Housing and
Planning
Kevin Stewart MSP



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot
7 July 2020

Open letter to Council, Housing Association and Housing Co-operative tenants in Scotland

In the short space of a few months, none of us could have envisaged the significant impact that Covid-19 would have on Scotland. I know this has been an extremely difficult time for you and your families and it has brought unprecedented challenges for our country.

I am writing to social housing tenants to provide information and advice, following the publication in May of [Scotland's Route Map](#) for moving out of the crisis, which sets out the steps that will help us to return to a more normal life. This is being done on a gradual basis, as quickly and fairly as possible, and is being matched with careful monitoring of the virus.

As we move through the different phases of easing restrictions we are providing clear guidance on what that will mean for individuals and families in Scotland. Individual landlords are also now beginning to plan for resuming services following the guidance available, and taking account of local circumstances.

During this crisis I have been particularly impressed at how people have come together to support each other and I greatly appreciate the inspiring community effort that we've seen up and down the country.

I want to thank every single individual, organisation and volunteer who has responded to the pandemic and helped to keep people safe, connected, and well and every social landlord in Scotland who has been working tirelessly to maintain and provide essential and wider community services in these challenging times.

The safety, security and wellbeing of all social housing tenants is a key priority for both the Scottish Government and social landlords, and we have been working closely together to address the challenges that have emerged in the social housing sector as the weeks and months have progressed.

If you're experiencing financial difficulties or are having difficulty paying your rent as a result of coronavirus

If you are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of coronavirus, there is a variety of financial support available as well as advice on maximising income. You can access this through your local welfare advice agency including [Citizen's Advice Scotland](#) and the [Money Talk Team](#).

The efforts that tenants are making to ensure their rent is paid during this difficult time is much appreciated and you must still continue to do so if you are able. If you have difficulty paying your rent at any time you should contact your landlord immediately as they will be able to provide or direct you to sources of financial advice and agree a plan with you to pay your rent.

Protection from eviction during the pandemic

In response to the public health crisis, the Scottish Government passed an emergency law to protect tenants from eviction during the pandemic. This requires landlords to give longer notice periods to tenants, of up to six months, where they intend to take legal action in the Sheriff Court to re-possess a property and end a tenancy. To ensure landlords and the courts were able to continue to deal with serious antisocial and criminal behaviour, which cannot be resolved by other measures during the pandemic, shorter notice periods are in place for those cases.

Support for victims of domestic abuse

It is a Scottish Government priority to ensure that anyone who is a victim of domestic abuse gets access to the support services they need. For anyone who is or feels they are at risk of abuse, help and support is available to you, including police response, online support, helplines, refuges and other services. You can find further information here:

<https://safer.scot/da/page-6/>

Allocation of properties and mutual exchange requests

The Scottish Government eased restrictions on house moves on 29th June and social landlords are now beginning to plan for resuming allocations safely and for processing mutual exchange requests. For some time to come, most landlords will however be prioritising allocations to those who have become homeless during the pandemic. If you have any questions about moving home, want to apply for housing or have submitted a housing application with a landlord you should contact them directly as they will be able to provide advice on all your housing options.

Staff and contractor visits to your home

I know that some tenants will be anxious about having staff, contractors and gas engineers into their home to carry out repairs and safety checks, however be assured that your landlord will have clear processes in place to ensure this can happen safely, in line with the current public health guidance and including any Personal Protective Equipment required.

If an appointment for a home visit is being made with you, you should let your landlord know if you are vulnerable, shielding, self-isolating, or having symptoms of the virus so that appropriate arrangements or rescheduling of the visit can be agreed with you. Appointments will be made in advance and you will be advised of the process that will be followed, and anything you need to do to prepare for the visit.

Repairs, maintenance and planned improvement programmes

Since the start of the pandemic, social housing landlords have been prioritising repairs and have been focussing on providing emergency repairs and other essential services. As we move forward, landlords are now starting to plan how they can safely resume routine repairs and planned maintenance work. This includes programmes such as window, bathroom and kitchen replacement, adaptations and installation of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and fire alarms. You should continue to report any repairs to your landlord as normal. As your landlord begins to work through any backlogs, your repair may take a bit longer than normal so please bear with them. Your landlord will get in touch with you if they require to get into your home to carry out any work and will have processes in place to ensure this can happen safely and in line with the current public health guidance.

Gas safety checks

Landlords are continuing to make every effort to meet statutory safety obligations, such as annual gas safety inspections. When you receive your gas inspection letter, please contact your landlord immediately if you are vulnerable, shielding, self-isolating or having symptoms of the virus, so that appropriate arrangements or rescheduling of the visit can be agreed with you. Please do not ignore the letter as your landlord may not know about your situation and will continue to contact you to arrange a visit. These checks are essential to ensure the safety of your household and it is therefore very important that you allow access to your home so they can be carried out.

If you smell gas, or if you have concerns about the safety of your appliances, you should call the gas emergency service provider on 0800 111 999, and switch off appliances until the gas emergency supplier, or a registered gas engineer, has attended and confirmed that the appliances are safe to use.

Anti-social behaviour

Tenants in Scotland have displayed exceptional respect, care and kindness towards their neighbours in these difficult times but regrettably not everyone has done so and instances of antisocial behaviour are still going on. Social landlords take antisocial behaviour very seriously and have a wide range of measures, including legal remedies and liaising with other agencies, to deal with persistent antisocial or criminal behaviour which breaches the terms of their tenancy agreement.

If you experience anti-social behaviour you should contact your landlord in the first instance and if you feel that you are in any danger you should contact Police Scotland. Your landlord will be able to provide you with support and advice on what they can do to help resolve the situation. More information can be found online at <https://www.mygov.scot/antisocial-behaviour/>

Wellbeing

The coronavirus outbreak has had an effect on everyone's daily lives and information on wellbeing and sources of support can be found at the mygov.scot website. This covers a wide range of issues including looking after yourself and others, how to look after your mental health, food, medicine and other supplies, work, unemployment and sick leave, domestic abuse and child protection.

Further advice on coronavirus

It is essential that we all continue to follow the current public health guidance, practise good hand hygiene and follow the guidelines on who, where and how we meet others.

The Scottish Government guidance on Coronavirus is reviewed regularly so please check for updates at www.gov.scot/coronavirus

Advice is also available from the Scottish Government's Coronavirus helpline - telephone: 0800 111 4000, Scotland's Citizens Advice helpline - telephone: 0800 028 1456 and Shelter's Housing Advice helpline - telephone: 0808 800 4444.

If you have any specific questions about your home or tenancy that need to be dealt with urgently you should contact your landlord directly.

I would finally like to take this opportunity to thank all social housing tenants and landlords in Scotland for everything you have done, and are continuing to do, to help control the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and save lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Stewart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

KEVIN STEWART

Response to Open Letter from Kevin Stewart

Protection from Eviction

Currently not serving NOPs.
Tenants that were due to be evicted as lockdown started had the action stopped and additional support offered to try and save the tenancy.
Extension of the emergency legislation putting a hold on evictions to March 2021 (currently 30 Sep) shortly to be put before the Scottish Parliament.

Financial impact

Referrals to money advice continued to be offered and made.
Signposting to other sources of support made.
AHS introduced Welfare fund to further support customers impacted by Covid19.

Support for victims of domestic abuse

Fast tracking of Albyn Domestic Abuse Policy. AHS and partners continued to hold MARAC meetings virtually and take action to help victims. Four MMR properties had been assigned for emergency accommodation for victims of domestic abuse. Due to zero use of these, we have re-let these properties and will source any emergency property requirement from existing mainstream or MMR voids.

Allocation of properties and mutual exchange requests

Allocations have resumed helping ease homelessness in the Highlands.
All allocations had been halted at the start of the pandemic and AHS worked with the local authority to provide properties for them to use as TFA.
For properties that were not deemed suitable for TFA officers worked with THC Homeless team to identify suitable tenants that could be allocated to AHS via section 5. Therefore, freeing up TFA accommodation.
MEX are being looked at on a case by case basis. At this stage only requests of an emergency nature where the housing need of one or more of the applying households is being improved. Mirrors the other HILG members.
Newbuild properties had been put on hold but staff are now working to sign people up safely as handovers are now agreed.

ASB

AHS have continued to action ASB. However only in exceptional circumstances have home visits been conducted alongside Police.

Wellbeing	Tenants have been supported where possible. Welfare calls in the first instance and where required food or essentials organised. High risk tenants have been identified and regular contact made.
Staff and Contractor Visits to homes	
Assets & Investment	
End of Defects Inspections, Stock condition surveys, inspections to provide technical advice/troubleshoot	Phase 3 with measures compliant with Government advice
Reintroduction of repair, maintenance, and Planned Improvements	
Assets and Investment	
Limited commencement of planned repairs compliant with government advice within budget constraints	Phase 4 – measures compliant with Government advice
Install of additional smoke detection to recommence in Phase 3 (end July) with aim to deliver LD2 compliance during 2021/22, government deadline extended until May 2021, however it is not realistic to meet this due to budget and loss of 5 months	Phase 3 – measures compliant with Government advice
Gas servicing has continued over lockdown and phases 1 and 2	Continued subject to Government advice
Day to day repairs carried out by contractors	Phase 3 – measures compliant with Government advice. Due to commence on Monday 24 th August. Contractors to be issued with guidance on use of PPE and social distancing protocols to ensure there is a consistent approach. Approval for this to commence was agreed at the New Normal Group Meeting on 23 rd July.
Home Visits by staff	Phase 3 – measures compliant with Government advice. Due to commence on 24 th August. All field staff to receive appropriate training beforehand. No staff to carry out visits until they have received the training. Staff have received guidance on the use of PPE in advance of the re-commencement of home visits. Approval for visits to commence was agreed at the New Normal Group Meeting on 23 rd July.