



Albyn Housing Society

Annual Report Summary 2020/21



Drovers Way, Ardgay

Welcome

Welcome to the Albyn Housing Society Annual Report Summary 2020/21.
We hope you enjoy reading about what we achieved in the year.

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We can provide this document in Braille, large print, and community languages.
Please contact corporate@albynhousing.org.uk / 01349 801 007

Who we are

Albyn Housing Society Limited serves an ever-growing number of communities in the Highlands, providing good quality, affordable housing for thousands of people across the region. Through four decades the Society has listened and responded to the views of its customers, local government, communities and businesses in meeting housing needs in the Highlands. Our principal activity is to provide homes in the Highlands of Scotland to people in housing need, and work with them to sustain their tenancies.

Our vision

We are a best in class social landlord that reinvests our surpluses into better quality and more homes for future generations of tenants in the Highlands.

Our mission

To provide affordable, high quality homes to people who need them.

Our objectives



Our homes - We will provide high quality, affordable, sustainable, and energy-efficient homes by implementing an asset management strategy driven by tactical analysis of data and targeted investment



Customer experience – We will streamline our customers' journey and improve customer satisfaction by developing a Customer Experience Strategy. Underpinning this strategy will be the delivery of a new housing management system, which will support efficient and effective service delivery, that allows customers to decide how they choose to engage with the Society.



Our people – Our working culture is respectful, effective, engaging, and inclusive and driven by our tenants' needs. We embrace agile and flexible working and the lessons we are learning from COVID 19, enabling cultural change, and driving the people agenda.



Our finances – We will be efficient and effective stewards of our tenants' money and charitable resources to enable the delivery of affordable, quality services for our tenants. We will support the business to invest in stock improvement, systems, and our people.



Our partnerships - We will use our expertise to influence social housing policy and develop partnerships across the Highlands that add value to our communities.

Our Values

- ✓ We are responsible and accountable for our actions
- ✓ We are open and honest in how we conduct our business
- ✓ We are inclusive, fair, and respectful in how we treat each other and our customers
- ✓ We are open to challenge
- ✓ We make a difference and improve the lives of our tenants
- ✓ We listen to our tenants and partners and respond effectively to feedback
- ✓ We celebrate success and recognise our achievements
- ✓ We work together to be the best we can working as a team to drive excellence
- ✓ We will undertake our business and manage our relationships with appropriate reference to ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) criteria

Our homes

Managed Property Numbers	2021	2020
Tenanted Properties	3,244	3,229
Managed on Behalf of Others	16	15
Shared Ownership Properties	117	122
Properties Leased to HRL for Mid Market Rent	166	159
Total	3,543	3,525



Rothiemurcus development, Aviemore

Chair's Report



Welcome to Albyn's annual report for 2020/21, marking an unprecedented time in the Society's history – a full year of operating during a global pandemic.

With lockdowns and restrictions, often imposed quickly by Scottish Government to curb the spread of the virus, Albyn has adapted well despite significant service disruptions. Through it all, we remained a firm commitment to customers, communicating changes through a COVID-19 service delivery route map, special mailouts, and digital updates. In addition, supportive measures were put in place to ensure customer well-being, ranging from contractor personal protective equipment (PPE) during essential repairs to providing food parcels for individuals and families.

The longer-term effects are becoming clearer as the country emerges from the pandemic. Our development programme is moving slower than anticipated, compounded by issues in supply chains with unrelenting demand. Whilst operating the organisation from outside of the main offices, teams learned to problem solve remotely, frequently through emergency scenarios spanning much of the year. It will take some time before we experience more normality.

In last year's report, we shared that 193 new units were brought into use, which is a sharp contrast to this year's 21 units. However, as programmes remobilise, we remain optimistic that over 200 units to be completed in the next financial year.

Improvements to existing homes were also restricted, as teams focused on fulfilling statutory obligations, such as gas safety checks, and other emergency matters, however our catch-up programmes for the year ahead will ensure we deliver on our delayed asset management improvements.

Despite the challenging circumstances, we have managed to continue in our journey to becoming a best-in-class RSL. We remain committed in progressing a full and exciting programme of Business Transformation, change and continuous improvement. Our staff teams are keen to deliver improvements to the services we offer you. The last year has shown us, perhaps more than ever, our capacity for change.

A final note on Board matters – Paul Adams stepped down from Board in May 2021 and Maxine Smith stepped down as Chair in August 2021 after 17 years of service to the Society. Board recruitment is underway, presenting the opportunity to find new members with a depth of RSL experience that will enhance the strength of the Board and ultimately, our service to tenants.

The Board remain focused on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, especially in a post pandemic world. There has never been a better time for us to reimagine and refresh our engagement and service offer to you. I hope this report offers that sense of commitment to you from the Board and all within the Society.

Carl Patching, Acting Chair of Board

Albyn Housing Society

Chief Executive's Report



As we welcome you to the Annual Report for 2020/21, we must acknowledge the difference from the start of the financial year to when it concluded.

Albyn was immediately responsive when COVID-19 began to take hold, springing into action to set staff up with home working to minimise disruptions to customer service, and tackling challenges head-on throughout the year. Looking back today, there have been valuable lessons learned about how we operate and provide services that will impact the organisation for years to come.

A few months after the conclusion of the 2020/21 financial year, there was a change in leadership, with Group Chief Executive Lisa Buchanan stepping down, and myself appointed as Interim Group Chief Executive, until a permanent CEO is in place. With this change, the Board, supported by the Leadership Team will lead a process in 2021/22 reviewing our Business Plan and our aims and objectives in detail. We will do this collaboratively with customers and staff.

One of the most valuable ways Albyn continued to serve our customers throughout the pandemic was through the initiatives put in place to provide support. With great effort, the Customer Service team conducted a huge number of welfare calls, personally checking to see how customers were during an unprecedented period, and if they needed any practical assistance. The Board agreed a hardship fund of £200,000 to help those most in need. Although there was a planned rent increase for April 2020, the decision was made to postpone the increase until September 2020, saving tenants collectively £200,000.

As restrictions were lifted, Albyn worked hard to remobilise staff, contractors, and supply chains. We developed a clear route map for our customers and staff, ensuring customers had a clear indication of our progress through the Scottish Governments COVID levels, and our service delivery at those times.

With all of the changes in a fluid situation, it is unsurprising that Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) indicators experienced a difference from the prior year. Albyn managed rent arrears well, however we saw significantly higher void days due to the new requirements around letting homes, and keeping customers, staff and contractors safe. In 2021/22, there is a greater focus in bringing indicators back to pre-pandemic levels.

Change is a catalyst for growth, and both staff and leadership have spent countless hours discussing how to incorporate the positive changes that have been made to shape service delivery moving forward. As Albyn continues to move through the pandemic and its aftermath, we are determined to increase the value customers receive, as we deliver services in new and more inclusive ways, as well as looking after our staff's health and wellbeing as we move to a post pandemic world. We are always delighted to hear your thoughts and views on any of the above.

**Kirsty Morrison, Interim Chief Executive
Albyn Housing Society**

Customer Services

83.9% of tenants who responded to our survey were satisfied with the overall service we provide.*

We supported households with £78,074 from our Hardship Fund in 2019/20

High quality customer service is central to the success of our business. Over the last few years, we have been developing new ways to improve our service delivery, both through changes to organisational structures and through building on the successful methods we currently use.

Tenant Engagement

66.7% of tenants who responded to our survey were satisfied with the opportunities to participate in our decision making.*

78.5% of tenants who responded to our survey felt we were good at keeping them informed about our services.*

We understand that the importance of engaging with our tenants and making sure their voices are heard in the design and delivery of our services. Next year will see the development of our Customer Engagement Strategy to make sure that tenants are able to participate in our decision making and are well informed about our services.

How we have engaged with tenants in 2020/21

- ✓ **Focus Groups:** Our Customer Involvement Group continued to meet virtually throughout the pandemic
- ✓ **Tenant Surveys:** We have surveyed tenants on **rent levels** and **service charge** policy with a strong response rate of **40%**
- ✓ **Keeping Tenants Informed:** We have communicated regularly with our tenants during the pandemic providing notification of changes to service levels in response to the emerging Government guidance

*No Tenant Survey completed in 2020/21 due to the pandemic, data taken from 2019/20.

Housing Lets

100% of tenants responding to new tenancy surveys indicated that they are satisfied with the condition of their home when they move in.

0.8% of rent due this year was not collected because homes were empty (0.4% in 2109/20).

We constantly review the performance of our homes in terms of the amount of money they cost us and how happy our tenants are with them, so that we can be proactive in deciding the future use of our homes.

The average number of days taken to fill our empty homes increased significantly due to period of lockdown where tenants could not be allocated homes.

Families re-homed in the year	2020/21	2019/20
Re-lets	172	216
New Build / other Acquisitions	17	142
Total	189	358
Average days taken to fill an empty home	38.5	6



Balvonie Development, Inverness

Rent Matters

£14,630,961 collected in rent this year (£14,018,250 in 2019/20)

1,310 tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit at the end of 2021 (1,178 at the end of 2020)

To support tenants in sustaining their tenancies, we have developed early intervention activities to identify those who are having difficulties in paying rents so that they can be referred on to relevant support services.

We also work closely with other local RSLs, Highland Council, and the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure that tenants are able to access support to manage their rents.

Tenancy Management

86.5% of anti-social behaviour cases reported in the year were resolved (67.8% in 2019/20)

We continue to work in partnership with other local agencies to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and to manage our estates.

Number of ASB Cases opened in the year		2020/21	2019/20
Category 1	Most serious and involves criminal activity	15	23
Category 2	Deliberate attempt to cause disturbance or annoyance	53	96
Total		68	119

Reactive Repairs

6,220 reactive repairs completed during 2020/21

90.71% of tenants surveyed said we completed reactive repairs 'right first time' (89.8% in 2019/20).

78.2% of tenants who had repairs of maintenance carried out were satisfied with the service they received (77.7% in 2019/20).

Communities

We are committed to working with our tenants and communities to develop innovative solutions to enable people to live in their own homes as long as it is safe for them to do so. During the year we have worked closely with our subsidiary, Albyn Enterprises Ltd, to assist it in achieving a number of innovative projects.

Since 2015, we have been the lead partner in a successful funding bid for £880,000 from The Big Lottery to AEL in partnership with the four other main RSL's in Highland for a project entitled Money Matters Highland. This funding has been enabling us to deliver support to our tenants across the Highlands, specifically focusing on the negative impacts of the introduction of UC and the effects of fuel poverty in the area.

The success of this project led to a further extension into the 2020/21 financial year when the original end date of the programme was 31 March 2020. This extension enabled those in need of money advice to access professional services to assist in managing personal finances.

We are continuing to develop our software platform to assist people to live safely in their homes, as well as working on an innovative design for homes to enable people who are unwell to live at home for as long as is possible, rather than being in a bed in hospital.

Complaints

68 complaints received in 2020/21 (56 in 2019/20)

53 complaints resolved at Stage 1 (43 in 2019/20)

15 complaints escalated to Stage 2 (18 in 2019/20)

This year, we updated to the new Scottish Public Services Ombudsman model complaints handling procedure.

We use the complaints we receive to identify service improvements. We are continuing to improve our communication, both verbally and in writing, to keep tenants informed of progress with work or issues that they have raised. Full details of the complaints we receive, and the lessons learned from them are available on our website.

Asset Management & Investment

We have now covered the majority of our housing stock in carrying out an extensive stock condition survey to ensure that all properties have been inspected and that the information we hold about them is accurate.

Improvements

99% of Gas Safety Certificates issued on time (compared to 100% last year)

Expenditure on improving our homes was drastically reduced in the year due to the restrictions in place as a result of the pandemic. Our programme will return to normal levels of investment, subject to restrictions being eased in the next financial year. During the year we spent money on improvements to our homes as follows:

Replacement Type	2021 £000's	2020 £000's
Energy Efficiency Measures	308	1,053
Window and Door Replacements	2	571
Kitchen Replacements	15	329
Bathroom Replacements	-	508
Individual Property Upgrades and Other Costs	21	19
Total	346	2,480

Development

21 new homes for rent in year (compared to 193 in 2019/20)

£13,347,000 development expenditure on completed and ongoing projects

The ongoing development programme was affected by the lockdown restrictions at the start of the year, which was followed by an easing of restrictions as developers implemented covidsafe working practices. This has had the effect of delaying the development programme which has resulted in fewer properties being handed over in the financial year.

Looking ahead, the Board have approved a medium-term ambition to develop 100 properties each year to enable resources to be focused on stock improvement as well as new home development.

Finance & Corporate Services

£20.639 million Group turnover in 2020/21 (compared to £21.919 in 2019/20)

Albyn's Finance & Corporate Services Team, which includes ICT and Human Resources, continued to support the Albyn Group throughout the year. The team supported the Board in reviewing the number of houses we would build and ensuring that the corporate and financial governance of the Society remained strong.

The full financial statements, including an unqualified auditors' report by RSM UK Audit LLP, are filed with the Financial Conduct Authority and are available from Albyn's offices in Invergordon and Inverness, or alternatively online at www.albynhousing.org.uk

Human Resources

3.81% staff sickness absence for year (compared to 7.52% in 2019/20)

17.61% staff turnover (compared to 13.51% in 2019/20)

94 staff head count as of 31 March 2021 (compared to 87 in 2019/20)

2 'Pulse' staff surveys carried out in the year



Development in Alness

Leadership Team

On 03 August 2021 the Chief Executive left the Society after two years of service. Kirsty Morrison was appointed as the Interim Group Chief Executive on 09 August 2021 whilst the Board undertakes to recruit to this post.



Kirsty Morrison

Interim CEO
Interim Director of
Customer Services



Andrew Martin

Director of Finance &
Corporate Services



Morag Beers

Interim Director of
Assets &
Subsidiaries



Laurie MacLeod

HR & Operational
Development
Manager

Albyn Housing Society Board

Albyn has a Board which is elected by the members of Albyn. It is the responsibility of the Board to undertake the strategy, setting of policy and overall direction for Albyn. Board Members undertake this work in a voluntary, unpaid capacity.

As of 31 March 2021, the Board included the following Members:

Maxine Smith (Chair) – *resigned 10 August 2021*

Carl Patching (Vice Chair)

Ian Fosbrooke (Secretary)

Jim Convery

Donna Smith

Raymond Bremner

Paul Adams – *resigned 26 May 2021*

Isabell McLaughlan

Fiona Mustarde

Clea Warner

Nicola Drummond

Our Subsidiaries

Albyn Housing Society also has three wholly owned subsidiaries:

- **Albyn Enterprises Limited** - to undertake activities of a non-charitable nature that will help Albyn to meet its objectives.
- **Highland Residential (Inverness) Limited** - to undertake factoring and low cost home ownership and rental
- **Suund Limited** - formed for the potential exploitation of innovation. Currently a dormant company.

Albyn Enterprises Ltd

During the year employees of AEL continued to support Albyn in its innovation activities and to further its aim to enable people to live in their own homes as long as it is safe for them to do so. They also continued to manage “Money Matters Highland” funded by the Big Lottery to provide advice and help to those requiring money advice.

Highland Residential (Inverness) Ltd

The Highland Residential team has continued to develop its offering to the affordable homes market through expansion of Mid-Market Rentals and further development of the factoring service.

The Factoring Services team continued to deliver services to tenants of Albyn as well as the owners of homes in our developments and grew their business locally by becoming the factor of choice for a number of local home builders.