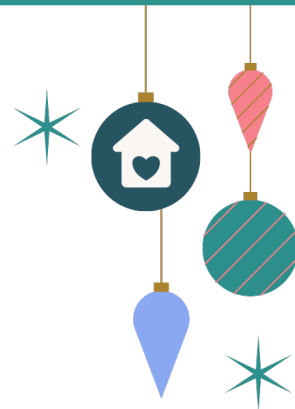


**All of us at Albyn wish  
you a safe and happy  
Christmas and New Year.**



### Office Festive Closure & Contact Details

Offices will be closed from 5:00 PM on 23rd December 2021 until 9:00 AM on 5th January 2022.

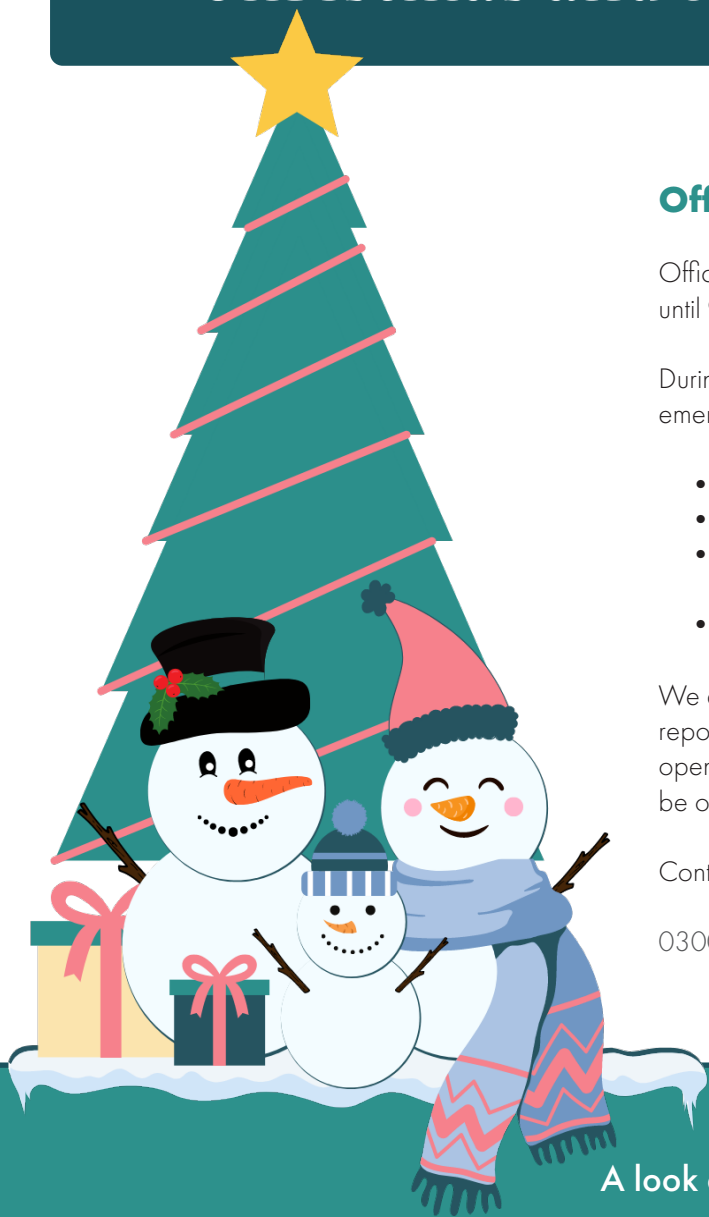
During this time, we can only deal emergency repairs. Types of emergencies we will attend to are:

- No heating and hot water
- Blocked toilet in properties with one toilet
- Loss of electrical supply (not generated by power cuts or self-disconnection on pre-paid meters)
- Burst pipes/flooding and serious water ingress

We ask all our customers to consider if the repair that you are reporting is an emergency and, if not, wait until the office re-opens on the 5th January 2022. This will ensure that our focus can be on the emergencies that require immediate attention.

Contact details for emergencies during the festive period are:

0300 323 0990 (North) or 0300 323 0991 (South).



**A look at what's inside:**



**Tips for Staying  
Warm this Winter**  
Page 6



**Rent Payments  
Over the Festive  
Period**  
Page 3



**Important Customer  
Services Updates**  
Page 4

# Winter Newsletter Welcome!



I'd like to thank our customers for working with us during what has been another challenging year for Albyn. Not least, the continuation of COVID-19 and the impact this has had on our service delivery. We have tried to continue to provide the best possible customer service we can, whilst still working at home.

We continue to learn from the challenges the pandemic has posed for us, whilst also celebrating our successes, including adapting to our customers' needs throughout this period, more of which is covered in this newsletter.

I hope you all have a happy and healthy festive period, and enjoy some down time with your families. I look forward to continuing to work alongside you in 2022.

Best wishes,

Kirsty Morrison  
Interim Group Chief Executive

## Meet Our New Board Members

Following our recent recruitment drive, we are pleased to share an update about our new Board Members who bring a wealth of social housing knowledge and experience. We hope you will join us in welcoming them.

### Lesley McInnes, Chair of the Board

Lesley has been involved in housing for over 35 years, working with both Councils and Registered Social Landlords. She understands the difference good quality housing makes to communities and is proud to be part of Albyn and to continue the good work in the Highlands. Lesley is currently CEO at West Highlands Housing Association.



### David Cargill

David is a housing professional currently serving in the Social Housing sector with Cairn Housing Association. He is passionate about the development, maintenance, and sustainment of homes and communities for the people of the Highlands. He is looking forward to digging into the work ahead.



### Angela Currie

Angela has worked in social housing for most of her career. She is specialised in performance management, business transformation, and strategy development. She has held several Board positions in housing and social care organisations. Angela is currently CEO at Hanover Housing Association.



### Nile Istephan

Nile was Vice Chairman of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations for 5 years and has also served on the Boards of several other housing associations. He has held senior roles in Scottish Homes, Communities Scotland, and the Scottish Government. Nile is the current CEO at Eildon Housing Association.

## Contents

Office Closure & Contact Details.....	1
Winter Newsletter Welcome.....	2
Meet Our New Board Members.....	2
We Need Your Views for the Rent Consultation.....	3
Rent Payments Over the Festive Period.....	3
Customer Service Staff News.....	4

Welcome New Customers to Ardersier & Dalmore.....	5
Helping You Stay Warm This Winter.....	6
Additional Winter Support.....	7
Performance Committee Tenant Representation.....	7
TRUST Fund Reminder.....	8
Kid's Competition.....	8

# We Need Your Views for the Rent Consultation



We are currently consulting with all of our tenants on options for the annual review of rent levels. We will be guided by our tenants' responses to this important consultation, so please look out for your chance to have your say, either through a text message or postal survey.

If you have not received a survey, please contact us for a copy.

Updates on our consultations can be found at [www.albynhousing.org.uk/tenant-consultations](http://www.albynhousing.org.uk/tenant-consultations).

## Rent Payments Over the Festive Period

Pay your rent before it's spent.  
**Contact us – we can help!**

We know that Christmas can be a real strain on finances. December and January can be very expensive. We do not want any of our customers bringing in the New Year and then struggling to catch up with rent. Your home is important we ask that you protect it and ensure that your rent is your priority and that your rent is paid on time in December and January, even if the office is closed.

Customer Services staff will be contacting you during December if you pay by phone to assist you in other ways to pay whilst we are closed or to take early payment. It is vital that you do not miss your rent payment and that if you have concerns regarding meeting payments that you talk to us as soon as possible.

We now have a Financial Inclusion Officer working for the Society that can help with budgeting and benefit checks. If you would like to arrange a discussion, please contact your Housing Officer or our Customer Services Team and they will be happy to arrange this for you.

If your usual rent payment date falls during the festive period, it is worth noting the office closure dates. We will be closed from 5 PM on 23rd December 2021 and reopen at 9 AM on 5th January 2022.

There are various ways to pay if you cannot reach us on the phone. If you would like to discuss how to pay, please contact us we would love to hear from you and provide advice on the best option for you.

For Emergency Repairs Out of Hours, Call 0300 323 0990 (North) or 0300 323 0991 (South) for Our Out of Hours Service

### Ways to Pay

- **Direct debit** – no need to do anything if this is how you pay usually.
- **Standing order** – this is set up directly with your bank.
- **Allpay card** – please contact us if you require a replacement card.
- **Online banking** – done via your own bank.
- **Allpay Text service** – register online first at [www.allpayments.net/textpay](http://www.allpayments.net/textpay).
- **Allpay App** for your smart phone.

Scan to get the  
Android App:



Scan to get the  
Apple App:



- **Allpay Telephone Automated Service** – 08445578321.

Full details on our website or call Customer Services during office hours on:

South Team – 0300 323 0990

North Team – 0300 323 0991

# Customer Services Staff News

## Welcome Our New Specialists!



Over recent months, a few changes have taken place that will benefit all our customers. Albyn are delighted to introduce the services of a welfare benefit specialist: David Kelly, who will assist our customers in providing benefit advice along with support on rent arrears and budgeting to meet financial commitments. If you feel that you need some support in these areas and you are having problems with universal credit, housing benefit, tax credits, or any other benefits, or just want to check that you are getting all that you should be, you can call David on 07976 751069 or email him at: david.kelly@albynhousing.org.uk.

Appointments are available with David to discuss your financial circumstances and all information is treated in the strictest confidence. The service is free and available to all our customers. We already have several customers who are using and benefitting from this service.

We are also delighted to introduce Joe Connor and Paul Gracie, who will be providing technical support to the customer service team. Both are qualified Clerk of Works and will be out in properties to inspect the quality of work provided by our us. In addition, Joe and Paul will pre-inspect work that is more complex in nature and will advise Contractors in carrying out works of a specialist nature to ensure that standard of work is high and that value for money is provided to our tenants. Over the coming months we will be seeking your views on this service and hope that you will participate in sharing your views.

## Two Senior Housing Officers

There is even more good news to share with some faces you may already be familiar with. Gayle Anderson and Elaine Wilkinson have been promoted for a six-month period to the role of Senior Housing Officer.

The roles were brought in as a project to support Customer Services and service improvement to the Customer Services Team within Albyn. Both Officers have a wealth of experience with the Society – Elaine has been with us for 7 years and Gayle 13 years. They both live and are from the Highlands and are passionate about providing the best service for our customers and making the Society a high-performing

housing association and first choice for new customers in the Highlands.

Gayle will be supporting the North Team and Elaine the South Team; however, they will be working closely together to ensure a consistent approach and service delivery across the whole of the Highlands.

Some of the key projects that they will be working for on your behalf include reviewing the tenant handbook, developing robust processes for the Customer Service team to ensure consistent and excellent customer service delivery. They are also reviewing the management of rent and arrears to ensure that we maximise our income to the improvements we make to the home you live in. They are also implementing a new void standard to ensure that each empty house is handed over to its new tenants in the best condition possible.

It is hoped that these projects – along with the others already identified, will bring benefits to the great service already provided and ensure that our staff and customers have the best experience possible with the Society.

## New Customer Welcome Packs



Thank you, Paula!

We have taken handover of many new builds in Dalmore, Torbreck, Ness Side, and Ardersier in the last few months. For handover day, we decided to try something new for these sign-ups. We have issued welcome packs to incoming customers. Each household received a bag with items such as much needed everyday items such as hand soap, antibacterial wipes, teabags, coffee, sugar, milk, mug, pen, biscuits, sweets, a tea towel, magnet, and a loo roll! Paula Cross from the South office put these together for both the North and South. A big thank you to Paula for all her efforts. These have been well received and we are now looking at how best to roll this initiative out across the Society for all sign-ups and transfers.

If you have any suggestions for what you would like to see in these packs, please let Customer Services know. We always welcome your views and, as we are continually look to improve our services, we would love to hear from you. Please let us have your suggestions and we will enter all suggestions into a prize draw with 5 shopping vouchers to the value of £20 each up for grabs. Get your ideas in by 21st January.



# Welcome New Customers in Ardersier & Dalmore



## Dalmore

Albyn has recently had new build handovers at Dalmore, Alness. This was completed in 2 phases – the first phase being completed late October 2021 and the second phase completing early December 2021. This development delivered a total of 37 properties for rent and they ranged in size from 1-4 beds and comprised a mix of flats, bungalows, and houses.

This much-needed affordable housing helped house a range of applicants including existing tenants being moved into more suitable accommodation and waiting list applicants. The new tenants have been delighted with their new homes and our team worked hard to ensure all the necessary support and advice was available to the new tenants when they got their keys.



## Ardersier

22 properties were allocated in Ardersier on the 12th of October 2022.

The properties built by Springfield were allocated to a variety of application sources, including homeless applicants, those on the waiting list and transfers from our HHR partners.

With views over the North Sea, these homes have been well received by new tenants who are happy to be in a growing community. Close to the airport, Nairn, and Inverness, Ardersier has provided families with the space that is not always possible in Inverness with large homes and gardens. Many families moved into the area and Albyn are looking at ways to work with the local school and support the wider community.



For Emergency Repairs Out of Hours, Call 0300 323 0990 (North) or 0300 323 0991 (South) for Our Out of Hours Service

# Helping You Stay Warm This Winter



## Winter Energy-Saving Tips

- Make sure your radiators are clear without furniture touching them.
- Avoid drying your clothes on the radiators to lower chance of cold and damp.
- Use heavy curtains and make sure to close them when it gets dark to keep the heat in.
- If you have a thermostat, set it between 18°C and 21°C degrees.
- Put on an extra layer of clothing and wear socks so you do not feel the need to turn up the heating.



## Fire Safety Awareness at the Holidays

- Test your smoke alarm weekly.
- Switch off all lights and plugs before going to bed or leaving your home.
- Check that your Christmas tree lights carry the British Safety Standard sign.
- Do not overload electrical sockets with lights and appliances.
- Have a plan for how to escape in an emergency and share it with family and visitors.
- Make sure cigarettes are put out and disposed of properly and never smoke in bed.
- Close doors downstairs before going to bed if you sleep upstairs.
- Never leave lit candles unattended and never light candles near curtains, Christmas tree, or materials that easily catch fire.
- Keep candles, lighters, and matches out of reach of children.
- Avoid leaving kitchens unattended whilst cooking.
- Avoid cooking when under the influence of alcohol.

- Do not attach decorations to heaters or lights as they can burn.
- Never leave flammable items on top of your cooker, even when it is turned off.
- If you have a real Christmas tree, please ensure you water it regularly.



## In the Event of a Burst Pipe

Burst pipes can be avoided by keeping your radiators at the frost setting, so please consider this if you will be away during cold spells.

You should never ignore a minor water leak. A small leak may be okay overnight, but if left for several days, it could cause major damage within your home. If a leak happens, these are the steps you should take:

1. Turn off the water supply. The stop valve is usually under the sink.
2. Switch off the electricity at the mains.
3. Call your local Customer Services team at Albyn to report the emergency.
4. 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.
5. Use a bucket or basin to catch any water leaking from the burst.
6. Open all taps to sinks and bath (if possible, collect water in the bath for flushing the WC and washing).



## Home Contents Insurance

Please remember to make arrangements for contents insurance



if you have not already. In the event there is damage to personal belongings from frost, a burst pipe, or a burst tank, contents insurance can help to cover replacing your items.



### Going Away on Holiday

If you go away in the winter, please be advised that you

should take care to drain your pipes or leave your radiators on the frost setting to prevent damage to your property.

If you go away for more than 2 weeks' time, you should let the Society know you will be away and where a key can be obtained in case of emergencies.



## Additional Winter Support



### Struggling with Heating Bills or Supplier Problems?

Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Services help tenants having difficulties with high electricity or heating bills, billing issues, supplier problems, and accessing emergency funds. Call their friendly expert advisors for free on 0800 870 8800, Monday to Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM, or email [warmth@changeworks.org.uk](mailto:warmth@changeworks.org.uk).

### Warm Home Discount Scheme

[www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme)

You could get £140 off your electricity bill for winter 2021 to 2022 under the Warm Home Discount Scheme. The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October and March. You may be able to get the discount on your gas bill instead if your supplier provides you with both gas and electricity. Contact your supplier to find out. The discount will not affect your Cold Weather Payment or Winter Fuel Payment.

### Cold Weather Payment

[coldweatherpayments.dwp.gov.uk](http://coldweatherpayments.dwp.gov.uk)

You may be eligible to receive a Cold Weather Payment if you are getting certain benefits or Support for Mortgage Interest. Check the website for details. Payments are designed if the average temperature in your area is recorded as, or forecast to be, zero degrees Celsius or below over 7 consecutive days. You could get £25 for each 7-day period of very cold weather between 1st November 2021 and 31st March 2022.

### Winter Fuel Payment

[www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment](http://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment)

If you were born on or before 26 September 1955, you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills. The deadline to make a claim for winter 2021 to 2022 is 31st March 2022. Any money you get will not affect your other benefits. Please see the website for more details.

### Inverness Winter Payment: [www.highland.gov.uk/invernesswinterpayments](http://www.highland.gov.uk/invernesswinterpayments)

If you are on low income and live in Aird, Loch Ness, Inverness West, Inverness Central, Inverness Ness-side,

Inverness Millburn, Culloden, Ardersier, or Inverness South, you may be eligible for a one-off payment of £88.

## Performance Committee Tenant Representation

We have been working with our Customer Involvement Strategy Management Group (CISMG) to develop a process to enable tenants to propose who they want as their representatives on Albyn's Performance Committee. This is part of improvements to how our tenants can influence our decision making and have further opportunities to engage with the Society.

The Performance Committee's remit includes looking at how well the Society has performed against targets on an annual basis and reviewing relevant policies. Members have the opportunity to meet the staff responsible for service areas and ask any relevant questions.

The Performance Committee remit will allow for up to two tenant members to be selected by a process agreed with tenants through the Customer Involvement Strategy. This

change in our governance process will be going to our Board very shortly for approval.

The proposed process will include:

- One tenant to be nominated by the CISMG from their membership, and one tenant to be nominated by the new Performance Monitoring group, from their membership.
- Tenants to be nominated on an annual basis.
- A tenant member can sit on the performance committee for up to a maximum of 3 consecutive years.
- Tenant representatives will undertake an annual appraisal process regarding their role on the committee, as our Board members are required to do.

We will be seeking tenant's views on the proposals very soon. Further information can be obtained by contacting [Anne.Mackay@albynhousing.org.uk](mailto:Anne.Mackay@albynhousing.org.uk) (phone: 07894568185).

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# TRUST Fund Reminder



Albyn place an important emphasis on how we can support our customers during this difficult time, which is why the Society has created the TRUST Fund.

We introduced the TRUST Fund in the Autumn newsletter. TRUST stands for Taking Responsibility Uniquely Supporting Tenants. This fund allows Housing Officers and Assistants to oversee a set amount of funds for their specific patches, as well as a dedicated amount for specific projects.

We wanted to remind you that this fund is here if you are struggling. Should you find you have an exceptional need, please contact your Housing Officer or Assistant to see if they can help.

Examples of ways the fund can be used include support with electricity bills due to a tenant losing their job, mobile phone top-up to allow tenant to remain digitally included, or the purchase of a school uniform after a mid-year growth spurt. This support allows our customers to continue to make their rent payments and prioritise this payment.



## Kid's Competition!

Here's your chance to win £25! We have 2 £25 gift cards to be won by two of our customers' children. Draw a festive themed picture and send it to the address below. You could draw a gingerbread house, Christmas tree, Santa, elves, a snowman, or your favourite holiday snack! Just draw something you like about the holidays. Albyn would like to add your drawing to some of the customer art we already have in our offices.

We will feature the winning pictures in the Spring edition of Newsview and send the winner a £25 gift card. Applicants should be under 12 to apply.

Please send submissions by 15th January 2022 to:

Abby Reat

Albyn Housing Society

98-104 High Street

Invergordon, Ross-shire IV18 0DL

Good Luck!!! We can't wait to see what you come up with.

