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Albyn For All



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Repairs - rights and
responsibilities



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Fire suppression
system myths - busted

Albyn turns 50 in 2023

Find out how you
can get involved
in the celebrations
as we mark our
Golden
Anniversary





Kirsty Morrison, Group CEO



Welcome to our first newsletter of 2023!

Our Spring newsletter is filled with positive stories of the work we are doing at Albyn to support our customers and to improve our delivery of services to you.

Whilst we have been working throughout winter to provide energy vouchers, air fryers, thermal curtains and other energy saving products to our customers as part of our huge effort to provide cost of living support, we have also been developing a new structure that will help you to get the best possible service from us.

Later in this newsletter you will see the work that has been carried out to merge our customer and property services departments to provide a seamless journey when you interact with us. We have also created a bespoke tenancy sustainment team, recognising our role to ensure customers are supported where needed. This also includes the management of our innovative FIT homes project.

Finally, we are 50 this year. Albyn was created in 1973 to rehouse workers who came to Invergordon to work in the smelter. From these small roots we have grown significantly, and now house almost 3,800 customers across the entire Highlands in both social and mid-market rent homes. We continue to develop new affordable homes through our development programme.

We have a number of plans to celebrate this milestone, and we would love your help, we invite you to share your stories and pictures of Albyn through the years. In addition, our community pop up events will be an opportunity to celebrate with you and I hope to meet some of you at them.

Kirsty



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Get involved - tenant participation

Tenant participation - what does it mean?

For some of you, it might mean responding to a survey, attending a pop up session that we hold, joining tenants or residents' groups in your local community or even just reading **this newsletter**. However, the work that goes on behind the scenes to manage your homes is done with a lot of support from tenants and you can get involved.

We hold a register of interested tenants, some of these tenants are keen to get involved in very specific issues, such as rent setting, anti-social behaviour or repairs and some tenants are more generally involved in activities across the organisation.

Our **Customer Involvement Strategy Monitoring Group (CISMG)** meet every three months to get an update on what is happening in Albyn and ensure that tenants are being given the opportunity to participate in key decision making. In addition, our **Performance Management Panel** was set up last year to look at the processes within Albyn. The panel questions why things are done a certain way, and provides feedback and support to Albyn to ensure we have systems and processes that deliver for our customers.

Our Performance Management Panel have just finished looking at our process for new developments, from purchasing land, right through to handing over the keys. They spoke with the teams involved, asked insightful questions and together tenants and Albyn staff agreed some outcomes that could improve the service and reduce costs. The report will be available on our website in the coming months.

Next on the agenda is our policy for void properties and

we'll let you know how they get on. (void properties have been vacated and are receiving repairs before they can be relet to new tenants.)

Two of our interested tenants, Jackie and Sinead, recently took their participation a step further and became involved in a Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation committee for disabled people. We spoke to Jackie to find out what they learned. You can read that on page 12.

We have developed a number of other ways for you to get involved. These include the following:

- Joining tenants' or residents' groups
- Joining registered tenant organisations
- Attending meetings and local pop up sessions
- Registering an interest in a particular issue
- Taking part in area forums
- Filling in questionnaires
- Taking part in our resident satisfaction surveys



For more details, phone our Community Involvement Team on 01349 855972 or 01349 855976



Turn our communities golden

We've included some sunflower seeds with this issue of the newsletter and we invite you to plant them in your community as part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations.

Sunflowers are a symbol of hope, vitality, and renewal, and they can bring a sense of joy and optimism to your communities.

By planting sunflowers, you can create a beautiful, vibrant display to enjoy for the entire 50th anniversary.

We'll have more celebrations throughout the year. If you have any photos from your communities over the years we'd love to feature them in our celebration of Albyn's history.

Send your photos to lane.macgregor@albynhousing.org.uk

Our redesigned service - supporting you



Over the past 18 months Albyn has been reviewing how we best serve our tenants during what has been a challenging period as we recover from the effects of the pandemic and now tackle the current cost of living crisis which impacts the daily lives of everyone. The pandemic has resulted in a significant drop in external support services provided by a wide variety of organisations including NHS and Highland Council. Reducing our ability to refer tenants to services and support that previously existed, sadly the number of tenants needing additional support in the current economic climate has stretched the services that Albyn provides in its present form.

The current Customer Services structure was formed in 2013 and was delivered on a geographical patch basis. Each patch was served by one Housing Officer and Assistant who provided all the services including repairs, rents, allocations and several other tenancy related matters.

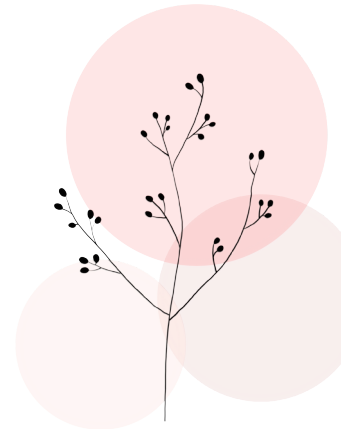
Since then Albyn has increased the number of homes we manage making it challenging to maintain the current patches to the same level. It has also impacted the time that Housing Officers are able to spend on certain duties within their patch, restricted some of the services delivered and made it harder to ensure tenants in our more rural areas are looked after.

As a result of all the above Albyn took the decision to review the delivery of services and how the existing staff compliment could be re-designed to meet current and future needs of all our tenants. It was essential that we understood all the information and data we held around call volume and service demands that our tenants expect. We reviewed options on how to best manage and improve the services to tenants and to ensure that it was adequately resourced. The option that we took enables us to build specialist teams that we will develop to support our tenants in several ways but also to ensure that we look after all of the staff delivering the services.

The redesign will create one team and one contact number. When you contact us by telephone on 0300 323 0990 you will be offered 3 options: **Option 1** for repairs, **Option 2** to make a rent payment and **Option 3** for any other enquiries.

Our dedicated call handlers will ensure your call is handled professionally and they will:

- provide you with a service between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday
- answer your enquiries with specific timeframes
- always tell you their name
- treat you all with courtesy and respect and in a professional and friendly manner
- treat all your contacts in the strictest of confidence
- quickly establish the reason for you contacting us and tell you how best we can assist you
- deal with the enquiry if they can, if not, they will pass it to the right person or department
- tell you the name of the person or department to which your enquiry is being referred to
- always give you clear information when dealing with your enquiry
- offer to take a message if the person you wish to speak to is unavailable and ask them to call you back or contact you on your preferred method



The services will be delivered by one team that comprise of four distinct service functions consisting of:

Income: there will be a staff compliment of 11, responsible for rent collection and prevention of arrears, housing benefit and universal credit enquiries, rent reviews, rent increase and tenancy enforcement for non payment of rent.

Tenancy Sustainment: there will be a staff compliment of 8, responsible for supporting tenants, managing our FIT Homes, provision of aids and adaptations, TRUST and Energy Fund distribution, external referrals including energy and welfare advice. They will also look at the introduction of innovative technology to support tenancies.

Tenancy Operations: there will be a staff compliment of 12, responsible for allocations/voids, mutual exchange's, downsizing, new tenancy visits, estate management, anti-social behaviour and coordinating complaints.

Repairs and Maintenance: there will be a staff compliment of 15, responsible for delivering services on day to day repairs, inspection of repairs before and after works, managing contractors to ensure quality and value, ensuring compliance on gas and electrical contracts, void property works, major works contracts, cyclical works, stock condition surveys and energy performance monitoring.

In the coming weeks there will be a publication issued to all tenants by post which will detail all of the team, their photographs and specialisms, we will also update our website and social media. If you'd like to find out more about the changes then please contact us for an informal chat.

4 Albyn for all - Equalities and human rights



Albyn Housing Group operate across the Highlands, which is a vast area including rural communities, a challenge when we wish to deliver our services in the way that customers need and want them delivered.

In the last couple of years, things have been changing at Albyn Housing Group. Our new values of **Being Caring, Being Adaptable** and **Being Professional** are embedded in our Board and Staff teams.

We acknowledge that customers have lived experiences that are all different and this creates a requirement for services to be accessible to all.

We value that our customers, staff and Board, have differences and we want to ensure that there are no

barriers to service delivery, experienced by anyone, particularly those who may be part of a minority.

Most people would be used to being asked equality questions. For example, at your local doctor's surgery you may be asked for your age, race or whether you are disabled – the biggest collection of this sort of data is through the Scottish Government Census that was last collected in 2022.

Through collecting and maintaining this information, organisations like us, local authorities or indeed Scottish Government can use this to inform our decision making and ensure we that we're directing our services to the right people and communities. This also helps us improve our services for you as an individual – but we need your help to do so.

As a social landlord, we are required by the Scottish Housing Regulator to collect data on each of the protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) from our existing and new customers.

This means we ask about: age; disability; gender identity, marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex, and sexual orientation.

You will soon receive more information on why we are collecting this data, how to provide your details anonymously as well as what we intend to do with it.

Please be assured that Albyn will protect this information, and will not be able to identify you or your address from the data collected.

An afternoon of relaxation

It's normal to find yourself worrying from time to time but if you often find yourself feeling stressed or anxious then this is for you!

Albyn is planning an event to support tenants with their mindfulness and reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. The event will be free to attend, but please get in touch with Paula Cross to register your interest.

Try something new, register your interest to get updates
Call Paula on 01463 712 516 or email paula.cross@albynhousing.org.uk.



Fuel Support fund

what we have provided

199

credit meter vouchers

212

prepay meter vouchers

44

BACS payments in lieu of energy vouchers

116

air fryers

4

microwaves

3

slow cookers

3

energy efficient kettles

281

winter duvets/blankets

47

Stormguard draught proofing kits

73

sets of fitted thermal window curtains

38

fitted thermal door curtains

7

households fitted with carpeting and underlay

Support Delivered by Albyn 2022/23

Energy Fund

With the cost of living crisis developing and significant concern about energy prices, Albyn set aside £100,000 to support tenants needing help with energy costs during 2022/23. We were able to support 1,300 tenants with supermarket vouchers to free up money for energy.

Social Housing Fuel Support Fund

Albyn was successful in applying to the Scottish Government's Social Housing Fuel Support Fund for £145,000 to help households known to be most at risk from rising energy costs. This fund was targeted at Albyn tenants who pay more to heat their homes because they live in homes with poor energy efficiency, and some tenants with additional qualifying circumstances. We are delighted that this fund was able to help 456 tenants.

In addition to the direct support provided by this fund found on the left of this page, the Housing Officer who led the project was able to use the opportunity to check on the welfare of many of our tenants and signpost many to additional sources of help available with a wide range of matters.

TRUST Fund

Each housing patch was allocated £2,000 during 2022/23 to provide short-term support to tenants who find themselves in exceptional need. We were able to support 270 tenants through this fund. This could be used in a range of ways depending on need and included vouchers, food parcels, and support for families at Christmas.

Winter Hardship Fund (Food)

Albyn was successful in applying to the Scottish Government's Winter Hardship Fund for £21,000 to help tenants experiencing food insecurity who have limited or no access to local food projects. We are in the process of finalising distribution of £50 cash payments to 420 tenants to help with the cost of food during challenging times.

Other Sources of Help

The government has announced further Cost of Living Payments will be made between spring 2023 and spring 2024. These payments are:

Eligible low income benefit	Eligible disability benefit	Pensioner Household
£301 in Spring 2023 £300 in Autumn 2023 £299 in Spring 2024	£150 in Summer 2023	£300 in Winter 2023/24

Looking for further advice? Our website has a list of support that we update regularly, it includes details of Albyn funds as well as other support that is available www.albynhousing.org.uk/ways-we-can-help

Contact us if you'd like a paper copy of that information sent to you.

The Highland Council have launched a new Worrying About Money? mobile app for Apple and Android devices.

Use the QR codes or search your app store for Highland Worrying About Money





Our responsibility

We have a legal duty to maintain your home in a fit and safe state for you to live in. We also have a commitment to provide good-quality housing. In our Annual Report we will state how we have spent your rent on maintaining all the properties we own and managing our organisation.

Generally, we are responsible for keeping the structure and outside of your home in a good condition, for ensuring that sanitary fittings (toilets, sinks, baths etc) and installations for supplying water, gas and electricity are in good repair and proper working order. If the damage is caused by your neglect or misuse, we will carry out the work but may charge you for it.

Your responsibility

You are generally responsible for decorating the inside of your home and maintaining the fixtures and fittings. This means that you should make sure your home is well decorated at the end of your tenancy.

You must:

- report repairs as soon as you notice them.
- allow us into your home to inspect it or carry out repairs.
- look after any garden or other ground let to you as part of your home.
- with your neighbours, keep any shared gardens or stairs clean and in good order.

Detailed information listing many household items and identifying who is responsible (You or Albyn) for their maintenance and repair can be found in section 4 of the Tenants Handbook.



Get your copy of the tenants handbook by clicking the link on our homepage at www.albynhousing.org.uk or by speaking to Customer Services using contact details at the foot of this page.

Reporting a repair

You can report a repair by calling or emailing using the details at the bottom of this page. We have set target times for completing repairs, depending on the type of work that needs to be done.

Emergency repairs

Emergency repairs will be carried out as soon as possible after they have been reported, and always within eight hours. If a temporary repair is carried out, you will be told when you can expect the permanent repair to be completed and whether or not you will be charged for the work.

Urgent repairs

Some urgent repairs will be carried out within one working day. These repairs include the following.

- Blocked sink, bath or drain (if there are no other sinks or baths in the house)
- Dangerous paths and steps
- Repairs to toilets (if there are no other toilets in the house)

Other urgent repairs will be carried out within two working days. These are repairs where any delay of more than two working days could cause damage to your property. These repairs include the following.

- Floods or leaks causing damage to ceilings or walls
- Broken glass, doors or locks
- Faulty immersion heaters (if there is no other hot-water supply)
- Heating repairs in cold weather

Routine repairs

Most other repairs will be routine repairs and will be carried out within 10 working days.

There will be situations where the time it takes us to respond to repairs will be different because of special circumstances. We will tell you about these when you report your repair.



Emergency
8 hours



Urgent
1 or 2
working
days



Routine
10
working
days

Following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in 2017, Scottish Government introduced changes to the Building Regulations, all new built affordable housing now requires a fire suppression system, mostly referred to as fire sprinklers. Albyn is now taking handover of new build properties which include sprinklers.

Sprinklers provide protection from fire damage and, most importantly, they give people a greater chance of getting out if there is a fire. By reducing the damage and severity of a fire, they can also save money, too.

How they work

Sprinklers react to heat. When the temperature in a room fitted with a sprinkler reaches 60 – 70 degrees, the sprinkler will spray water across the room and suppress the fire that has caused the rise in temperature.

However, there several common myths related to sprinklers:

Myth 1: In a fire, every sprinkler head will activate, flooding my property.

Answer: Only the sprinkler heads in the immediate vicinity of a fire will operate. Each head is set to operate individually, and it will only be triggered to spray water onto a fire when it reaches its predetermined operating temperature.

Myth 2: Damage from an Automatic Fire Suppression System (AFSS) will be more extensive than fire damage.

Answer: Water egress from an AFSS will be far less severe than the damage caused by water from firefighters' hoses.

A residential concealed nozzle head releases 49 litres of water per minute, compared to 700 –4,000 litres per minute discharged by fire service hoses and jets. Sprinklers attack the fire quickly and directly so less water is needed.

Myth 3: Sprinklers are ugly and will spoil the look of my building.

Answer: Concealed residential sprinklers are almost invisible - they're recessed, flush with the ceiling, and covered by a flat plate. However, these cover plates must not be decorated, as this could inhibit the activation of the sprinkler in the event of a fire.

Myth 4: A smoke detector will always provide enough protection.

Answer: Operational smoke detectors do save lives; however, they do nothing to extinguish a growing fire.

Myth 5: Sprinklers go off accidentally.

Answer: This is very unlikely. The odds of winning the lottery are greater than the 16 million:one chance of an accidental activation.

Maintenance

Sprinkler systems are installed to protect our customers and their homes, to ensure systems remain functional we will require access to undertake maintenance on the system once per year. We will arrange this in the same way we carry out all our inspections and planned maintenance. We will contact you using your primary contact information to arrange access. Access will always be during office hours, except during emergencies.

We understand that this can cause disruption and inconvenience to you and your family, we aim to minimise this by combining works where possible.

For access requests which are required by law, such as on your gas and sprinkler systems, we will do everything we can to contact you, but we do have the right to force entry into your home.

We would therefore urge all our tenants to work with us to ensure everyone's safety by allowing our contractors access.





Since the start of 2023 we have managed to take ownership of 28 properties which includes:

- 8 FitHomes at Stratton Farm, Culloden,
- 8 Mid-Market Rent homes at Achmore Court, Kinmylies,
- 8 home for social rent and 4 LIFT homes at Allan Gardens, Dornoch

We continue to develop low cost housing with homes for social rent, mid market rent, LIFT and FitHomes under development in areas across the Highlands including: Beauly, Kirkhill, Nairn, Alness, Lairg, Dornoch, and Dingwall.



Culloden



Kinmylies



Dornoch

Unacceptable actions towards our staff

Our staff members work extremely hard on behalf of our tenants. Many have been passionate about housing for decades and they deserve to feel safe at work. We recognise that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress, however the actions of customers who are angry, demanding or recurrently persistent may cause distress to staff or result in unreasonable demands being placed on our time and resources.

Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

We understand that customers may have genuine cause to be angry, we consider it unacceptable however, if that anger escalates into aggression towards staff. We will not tolerate any form of violence or abuse towards staff and expect all customers to display courtesy and respect.

Aggression can include physical acts of violence that may result in harm or injury. It also includes behaviour or language (whether verbal or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused. We also consider inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations to be abusive behaviour.

Unreasonable Demands and Unreasonable Persistence

Individuals may make what we consider unreasonable demands on staff, as a result of the amount of information or assistance they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect or the levels of contact they make or maintain with us. We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of staff, including taking up an excessive amount of time to the disadvantage of other service users.

We ask that you treat all our staff with courtesy and respect, you can view our full policy on our website, or ask us to send you a paper copy.

Preparing for the end of Radio-Teleswitched electricity meters

You may have received a letter from us regarding the changes to radio-teleswitched (RTS) meters. If you will be affected by this change because you are on a dual tariff meter set-up and don't currently have a smart meter, you should contact your energy provider to ensure that they install a smart meter before 31st March 2024. Unfortunately we cannot ask your energy provider to make this switch, they will only accept this instruction from you, however please speak to your housing officer or CAB Scotland if you require support. Call us for more information or read our website noticeboard.

Compliments and Complaints

The table below shows our response to complaints from October to December 2022 along with the figures for the year to date (April - December 2022).

We welcome complaints, comments and compliments in order to ensure you receive a best-in-class service.

If you have a suggestion but don't wish to make a formal complaint you can let us know in the usual ways you contact us, found at the bottom of this page.

Period	Percentage of complaints responded in full at stage 1	Avg time to respond (days)	Percentage of complaints responded in full at stage 2	Avg time to respond (days)
Q3 2022 (Oct-Dec)	100%	3.08	90%	12.6
YTD 2022	96.88%	4.39	80.47%	15.2

Stage 1 complaints are generally able to be resolved quickly, and where we provide the services, this could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, and immediate action to solve the problem.

Stage 2 usually refers to complex complaints that require investigation, it may also refer to complaints not able to be resolved at stage 1.

Below we've included some of the compliments our teams have received recently.



"Claire you are a star, thank you very much this is why I love my home."

Praise for our Assets Team

"Very good experience, Margaret was a fantastic help and kept me informed throughout. Couldn't have asked for better help and support when purchasing my first home."

Praise for our HRIL Team

"Had a welfare call from Dot. It was very heartwarming to know that Albyn are mindful enough to call in this freezing weather to check up on the vulnerable and/or elderly people. It's comforting to know Albyn care".

Praise for our Customer Services Team

"Thank you all so much for all the help you have given Jacob. We consider ourselves very lucky to receive all the amazing energy saving products and heating bill help you have provided. I can't thank you all enough!"

Praise for our Tenancy Sustainment Team

"Thank you Elaine for inviting me and making me feel welcome. I think if you didn't invest all that time and energy in the beginning, I could never have done all this, and I was thinking back to last year roughly this time and I was in a bad way not coming out of my bedroom. I think it's important to acknowledge this as it goes way beyond a housing service."

Praise for our Customer Services Team

Do you wish to make a complaint or provide a compliment?

Get in touch in a way that is convenient for you:

- Call us on 0300 323 0990 and select option 3.
- Report your complaint via our website, www.albynhousing.org.uk
- Email us at office@albynhousing.org.uk





If you are taking advantage of the brighter days to do a spring clean and find yourself with heavy items you no longer want: here's a reminder of the ways to dispose of them responsibly.

Curb collection by the Highland Council's **Bulky Uplift** service. The service must be requested at least 2 days in advance and costs £25 for up to 3 items, or £50 for up to 6 items.

Visit www.highland.gov.uk and search bulky uplift.

If your items are in a good, safe condition, consider donating them to **New Start Highland**, they will collect from your home and they will help people back on their feet after experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

Find out more at the New Start Highland website:

www.newstarthighland.org/get-involved/donate-furniture

Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation

Two of our involved tenants, Jackie and Sinead, recently took their participation a step further and became involved in a Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation committee for disabled people. We spoke to Jackie to learn more about the experience.

How did you get involved?

"Scottish Government wanted to know why more disabled people didn't get involved with politics, was it purely a physical barrier or a social barrier. I applied to be involved and was invited to a virtual session."

What made you want to participate?

"I got involved because I'm a champion for disabled people and wheelchair users. I find that a lot of organisations have a basic idea of how to support people with unique needs, but there can be a lot of practicalities that aren't taken into consideration. For example, as a wheelchair user, if I wanted to go to Holyrood, yes they have lifts, and ramps but what's in place for if I need to get a cup of coffee from the counter to the table?"

What sort of topics were discussed and do you feel it made a difference?

"One of the topics that came up was the lack of pavement dips to get across roads in sensible places. When we raised this as an issue, they thought all wheelchair users would be accompanied everywhere they go. I was disappointed by that but hopefully we were able to get that point across to them. It's frustrating that in this day and age we are still fighting these battles. Another thing that came up was making it illegal to park on pavements, which allows easier and safer passage for wheelchair users, the ministers were already considering this as a bill but it was given more gravitas from our input at that session and now it's being discussed in parliament".

What do you find rewarding?

"I enjoy meeting new people and hearing other people's views, I find we can get caught up in our own perspective so hearing how these can have an impact for other people is important, but also it's fun and it's educational.

What would you say to anyone thinking about getting involved in this type of committee, either with Albyn or another group?

"You can make a difference, it's not just a tick box exercise. Another thing is that it opens up the doors to other opportunities and you learn more about yourself. I wasn't involved in anything like this in the past, I was a team manager on an IT support desk, you learn that you can put skills that you thought were related to one thing and use it in another way".

As always we are so grateful to our involved tenants, if you'd like to join them and help to improve Albyn's services, contact our Communities Assistant, Anne Mackay on 0789 456 8185 or email on anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk.

Kids activity page

Can you unscramble these Easter words?

unbny _____

gegs _____

unth _____

saerte _____

S B M A L R E T S A E C
G N E T A L O C O H C A
H O T C R O S S B U N S
X C H I C K E N S I R I
G S L I D O F F A D Z T
N T S S T E K S A B H S
I N G G E R E T S A E U
R U E Y V R A B B I T N
P H D U C K L I N G S D
S J E L L Y B E A N S A
V H Y A C I N T H F V Y
C A N D Y T E N N O B Q

CANDY
BASKET
BONNET
EASTER EGG
HOT CROSS BUNS
HYACINTH
CHICKEN
CHOCOLATE

JELLYBEANS
DAFFODILS
LAMBS
DYE
RABBIT
SPRING
DUCKLINGS
EASTER SUNDAY

How many Easter Eggs can you find throughout the pages of this newsletter?
