



albyn
Housing Society

Tenant Charter Report 2023



The style, layout, and content of this report was decided by Tenants, and we hope that you find it interesting and informative.

The tenants have chosen to compare our satisfaction rates with only the Scottish average for 2022/23, as they feel that it is unfair to compare Albyn to any other housing provider this year. Where we have levels of satisfaction produced in the 22/23 year these will be compared with the Scottish average, but where we have only statistics obtained in the previous years, they will not be included. We will show comparisons next year once a Customer satisfaction survey has taken place.

We would like to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH to all of the Tenants who have been involved with designing this report, we are extremely grateful for your help.

If you would like to be involved in designing the Tenant Charter report for 2024, or you have any comments to make, or require more information, then please get in touch with Anne Mackay on 07894 568185 or email anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk

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Outcome 1: Equalities and human rights



At Albyn Housing we are committed to making sure we promote equality and respect diversity.

The definition we use for equality is: 'preventing, removing or limiting discrimination between anybody because of their sex, marital status (whether they are married or single), race, disability, age, sexuality, language, social position or any other personal qualities, including their beliefs or opinions.'

The definition we use for diversity is: 'recognising and valuing the fact that society is made up of many different groups with different interests, skills, talents and needs.'

Policy and strategy

Last year we advised you that we would be reviewing our Equalities & Human Rights policy and explain how we will use your data to inform our decision making and drive our service provision. We are really pleased to be able to tell you that this has been done and you can find the policy and the new Equalities & Human Rights Strategy on our website using the following links.

[Equalities and Human Rights Policy](#)

[Equalities and Human Rights Strategy](#)

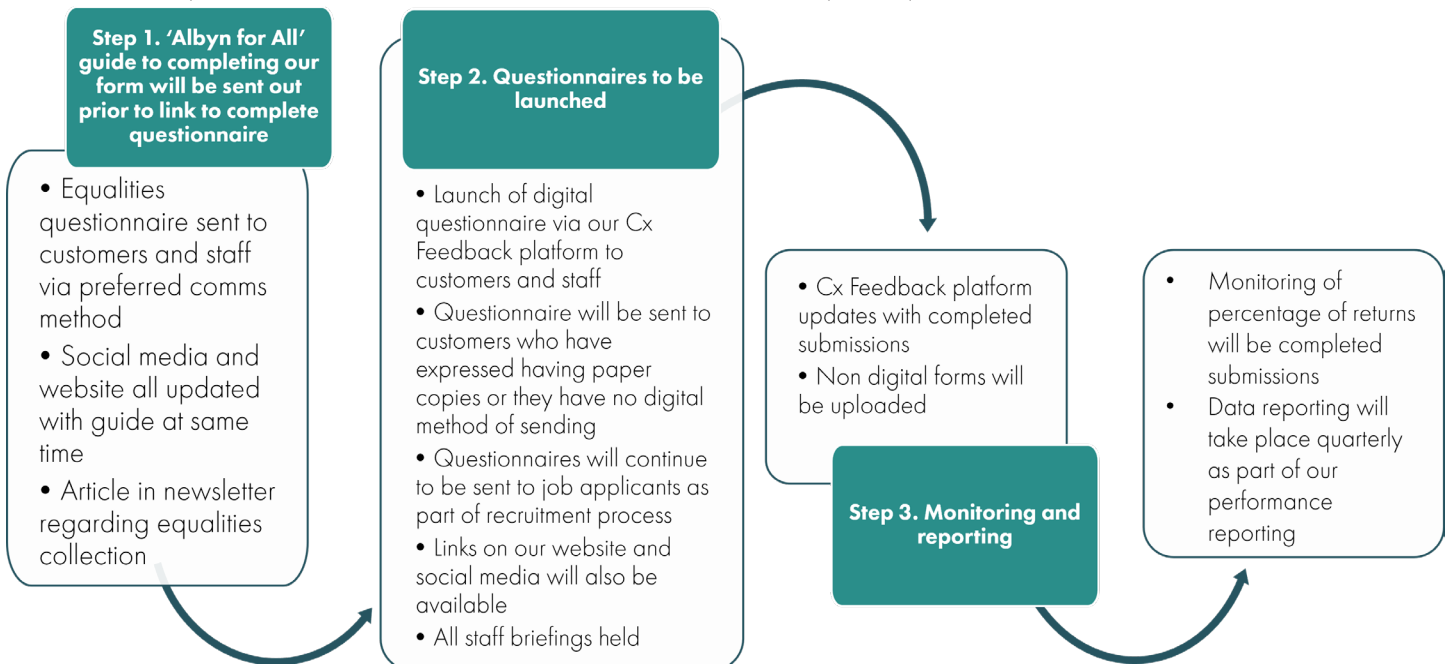
If you would prefer to have a paper copy, then please get in touch

IMPROVE

We will soon begin stage 1 of the data collection process per the diagram below. This will allow us to tailor our services to match the needs of our tenants.

Data Collection Process

Please see our process below on how we will collect, monitor and report equalities data.



Outcome 2: Communication

Since our return to the office, our Housing team have shifted to a hub home and roam hybrid working model. Our staff will spend their time in the office, working at home or working in the community/patch. Our staff will be working flexibly to meet the needs of our tenants. Our offices remain closed to tenants without prior appointment.

You can communicate with us in the following ways:

- By Telephone
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Face to face in the office (by appointment only)
- Face to face when Officers are out and about in the community.
- Face to face pop-up surgeries

We communicate with you in the following ways:

- Newsletter
- Our website
- Email
- Letter
- Phone calls
- Facebook & Twitter
- Tenant handbook
- Face to face in the office (by appointment only)
- Face to face when Officers are out and about in the community
- Face to face pop-up surgeries

Communicating with your Customer Services team

The Tenants who have worked on this report highlighted the importance of being able to get in touch with their Housing Officer & Housing Assistant. They also advised that they sometimes find it difficult to locate the telephone numbers and email addresses for the staff members.

Due to our staff trialling the hub, home and roam model, our Officers and Assistants will be away from their desks more often. If tenants need advice, to log a repair, pay their rent they should contact Albyn via the switchboard.

Digital communication

We have now completed the build of our tenant portal, and we are in the process of internally testing it to ensure its fully working as expected. Our next stage will be to test it with a small group of tenants before we roll it out fully. This testing is likely to commence in the coming months so thank you to anyone who has already volunteered for this, we will reach out in due course.

0300 323 0990

Select **Option 1** to report or get an update on a repair
Select **Option 2** to pay your rent or speak to somebody about your rent account
Select **Option 3** for any other queries.

Information, Participation & Feedback

In the past 12 months we have asked your views on:

- The content of the Tenant Charter report 2022
- The Rent level and Service Charges
- How you want to communicate with your housing officers
- Fuel Support Fund
- SFHA Winter Hardship Fund
- Factoring Satisfaction

Pop up surgeries

Local pop ups - You can meet with housing officers, tenancy sustainment and more. Look out for news of more events happening in your area on our website and facebook.



IMPROVE



HOW WE WILL IMPROVE....

Albyn have identified the need to review our Customer Experience Strategy and this will be scheduled for 2024.

Outcome 3: Participation

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

- Joining / starting up a tenants' or residents' groups
- Joining / starting up a registered tenant organisation (RTO)
- Attending meetings: Board of Management, Performance Committee, Customer Involvement Strategy Monitoring Group, Tenant Charter report group, and then more occasionally at events such as the Annual General Meeting, pop-up surgeries, or focus groups. By Zoom, Teams or face-to-face meetings.
- Filling in questionnaires
- Performance Monitoring Group to scrutinise our current work practice
- Taking part in our Customer satisfaction surveys
- Joining our Editorial group
- Coming to one of our community pop-up sessions
- Becoming a member of Albyn Housing Society by paying a one-off charge of £1.
- On Facebook www.facebook.com/albynhousing

We want to encourage more tenants to have their say and help us to make improvements – you don't have to be wait until you are not happy about services.

This is what some of our tenants have to say about getting involved....

"I was reluctant to get involved to start with didn't think I knew enough or could offer anything, I wasn't unhappy about Albyn

so what would be the point?

"But I was so wrong I have gained so much by being part of the group it's not all powerpoints and lectures, it's more like a social club we all support each other. No one judges your views and we do make a difference"

Jackie Bugden

"I am happy to be involved with the Report. I find that involvement from Tenants is important and is also fun and a chance to meet others and feel a sense of achievement."

Mike Grist

"For anyone who is looking to join the Tenants' group, I would emphasise that everyone is welcome and that their input to the group's discussion is important. It is not so much what you know that is of value but what one's experience as an Albyn Tenant can be brought to help in our meetings. In so doing the quality of our talks is much more meaningful."

Liam Salkin

"It was suggested to me that Albyn Housing were looking for tenants to join the group to let them have input into how things could be done from a tenants point of view. What I have found is yes, Albyn do listen and try to improve the way they work with their tenants and systems they put in place. It is not all about complaints its about working together – one of Albyn's staff hit it on the nail for me when they said, "it may be their house but it is your home."

"Also I can say I have made some lovely friends in the group and in the staff and had some really good laughs together."

Odetta MacDonald

IMPROVE



HOW WE WILL IMPROVE....

Albyn's Customer Involvement Strategy has been reviewed following consultation with the tenants in 2021, this is now going to the board for approval and should be live on our website in the new year.

Outcome 4: Quality of housing

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

This year 87.3% of our homes met the SHQS standards. This improved from 86% last year. We expect the total to increase again by March 2024. If you would like more information on how this is measured, and statistics calculated, then please get in touch.

Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH)

SHQS is made up of five categories – one of which is EESH – but this is no longer reported separately. In 2022-23, we identified that a number of EPCs had not taken account of key component in homes – such as an upgraded heating type – which affected the EESH. We started a process of reviewing these, and this is still underway.

This year, our stock condition surveyor is also reviewing all our EESH fails and arranging some work to improve efficiency. We expect the number of fails to fall significantly by March 2024. Finally, there is also a project underway to look at our exempt homes and assess the best way of improving efficiency in these properties.

Find more information on the SHQS and EESH standards: [Improving Housing Standards - www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

Outcome 5: Repairs, maintenance & improvements

In the past year, we have made the following improvements to our homes:

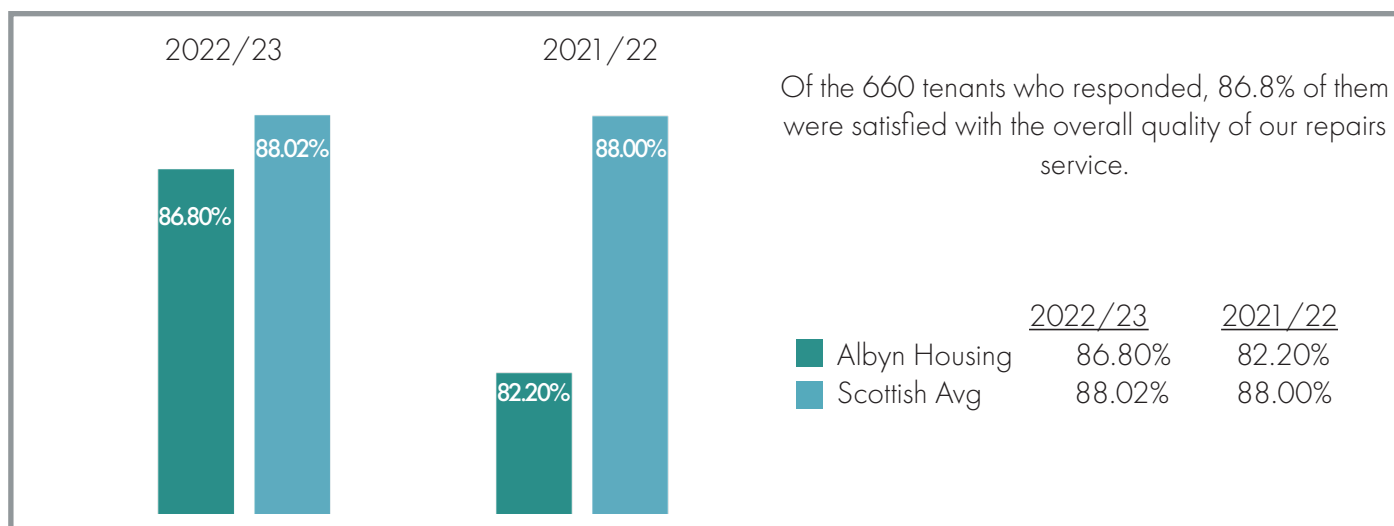
Replacement type	Number of homes
Heating systems	21
Oil/gas boilers	55
Window and door replacements	132
Kitchen replacements	13
Bathroom replacements	143
Total spend	£3.09 million

Reactive Repairs

The total number of reactive repairs completed during the reporting year was 6,916

Category	Performance Measure	Target	2022/23	2021/22
Emergency	Average time to complete	8 hours	7.3 hours	5.44 hours
Non-emergency	Average time to complete	10 days	7.04 days	6.85 days
	Right first time		85.96%	86.58%

The increase in time taken to complete Emergency repairs was due to having a finite number of contractors who were undertaking both major, planned and day to day works. Due the redesign and the procurement exercise being undertaken, we expect this to improve in 2023/2024.





Outcome 6: Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes.

Number of Anti-social behaviour cases opened in the year		2022/23	2021/22
Category 1	Most serious and involves criminal activity	32	26
Category 2	Deliberate attempt to cause disturbance or annoyance	113	86
Total		145	112

Other websites which offer advice if you are dealing with ASB:

[Antisocial behaviour - Citizens Advice Scotland](#)

[How to deal with antisocial behaviour by a neighbour - Shelter Scotland](#)

[Report noise or antisocial behaviour - mygov.scot](#)

In the 12 months covered by this report, 0 households were evicted due to Anti-social behaviour.

Community Fund

Albyn Housing has a Community Fund that provides small grants to local community groups. Grants of up to £500 are available for specific community projects that benefits the local community. The grants can be used to aid any activities that help make stronger communities. For example; improvements to a town or village hall, sports equipment or childrens or pensioners parties.

If you want to make an application either download an [application form](#) from our website or contact the office for a form. If you have any questions about the community fund please [email](#). The decision of the application is at the discretion of the Tenancy Sustainment Manager.

If you have any ideas on how to improve the area you live in, then please get in touch with our Communities team. We are keen to hear from tenants who want to work with us to make a difference.

Outcome 7, 8, 9: Housing options

Mid-Market Rent is available from Highland Residential. This is an option for tenants who maybe don't qualify for a social property and would struggle with a private rental value to afford to pay rent and live. You would sign a Private Residential Tenancy (PRT) agreement. We offer people the opportunity to rent a home that meets your requirements at a reduced rental price - rent levels are usually set at around 85% – 100% of the local housing allowance..

If you're looking to rent but struggling to find an affordable home to rent privately, then you might want to consider the option of a mid-market rental property. Mid-market Rent, provided by Highland Residential aims to help people who may have difficulty accessing social rented housing/private rent or buying their own home. Please see below a sample of individual factors that would be considered for a prospective applicant:

- Have been employed by current employer for a minimum 6-month period or a permanent employment contract
- Have an immediate re-housing need, due to a change in circumstances such as health or disability, overcrowding or relationship breakdown
- Are a local authority / public sector / housing association tenant
- Members of the armed forces, veterans who have left the armed forces in the past year; widows; widowers, and other partners of service personnel
- Their household has a local connection either through work, family or providing / receiving support
- Are registered on the Highland Housing Register or with another public sector landlord
- Have a household income within a specified range and have independent means, enabling them to pay the specified rent without immediate recourse to Housing Benefit
- Will occupy the house as the households' sole or principal home

If you are interested in further information about applying for mid-market rent, please email: lettings@highlandresidential.co.uk or apply directly online: www.highlandresidential.co.uk/rent-a-home/mid-market-rent

Highland Residential manage the (LIFT) & (NSSE) schemes, which is for Low Income First Time Buyers (LIFT) & New Supply Shared Equity (NSSE) purchase options. This is funded by the Scottish Government and helps first time buyers purchase homes, this could either be a new build or a re-sale LIFT property.

The initiative is to help and support first time buyers (FTB) who maybe can't afford 100% of the purchase price of a home and you would buy an equity share of between 60 %to 80% under this scheme. The remaining equity share will be held by the Scottish Government (SG), you do not pay rent on the share owned by the SG. There are also some exceptions where non FTB could qualify for the scheme. We give priority to applicants who are already a local authority / housing association tenant. For more information on the LIFT New Supply Scheme and how to apply please call 01463 70127, or email LIFT@highlandresidential.co.uk

Mutual Exchange

Finding A Property

If you are looking to move, but your Housing Application does not place you highly on the housing waiting list, you could look to undertake a mutual exchange. You can register for free on the House Exchange website www.houseexchange.org.uk. This is a free tool that allows you to showcase your property to potential swappers. If you need support with your application, you can contact the Tenancy Operations Team who can support and advise.

What to check before agreeing to an exchange

At the viewing, you should get a chance to look around and ask questions. Check:

- how much the rent is
- the average cost of bills
- the condition of the property – no decoration or upgrades

will be carried out for your move

- if the location suits your needs – for example, if there's enough public transport or parking nearby
- what fixtures and fittings are included – for example, carpets, curtains or light fittings

If you're looking at homes elsewhere in the UK, you should also check what type of tenancy you would get. Your rights will be different depending on the tenancy type. If you're staying in Scotland, you'll usually get a Scottish secure tenancy with the same rights. You cannot offer someone money to get them to agree to an exchange.

You or the other tenant can change your mind before the exchange is finalised. Try not to spend any money on moving before you've signed your new tenancy agreement – this cannot be recovered if the agreement falls through.

Applying

Once you have agreed to exchange, both parties need to complete the application form. The application will be considered by the landlord(s), who will undertake checks, before undertaking an inspection. Once the checks are undertaken and the exchange reviewed, the landlord will respond in writing. Written confirmation is required before the exchange takes place. You should not move into your new tenancy until you have signed your new tenancy agreement.

We may not allow the exchange to go ahead if:

- either of you have rent arrears;
- either of you have not looked after your home

- either of you have had complaints about behaviour made against you;
- we cannot get a satisfactory reference from the other tenant's landlord.
- if it will result in our property being overcrowded or is much larger than the new tenant need
- if your home is of a special type and the other tenant does not need that particular type of housing

To get information on mutual exchange please contact us on (0300 323 0990) or our website.

Outcome 10: Access to social housing

In the past year, we had 295 lets. Of these, 36 were by Mutual Exchange - if your home isn't suitable for your needs, then this may be an option for you. Please see above for information on where you can get help.



Our website has a section which shows where we have housing to rent or to buy. Please get in touch with our Tenancy Operations department if you need advice or information

We manage around 3,757 homes for rent or low cost ownership in 70 different communities across the Highlands. We let our houses to people who are registered on the **Highland Housing Register**. This single housing list is operated by a partnership of the six main providers of affordable rented housing in the Highlands (Albyn Housing Society, Cairn, Caledonian, Lochaber, Lochalsh and Skye, and The Highland Council). This process means that people who want to be housed by the Council or any of the housing associations with housing in the Highlands only have to fill in a single application form.

If you'd prefer, you can get an application form from our office or from any of the other Highland Housing Register landlords. Anyone who is age 16 or over may apply for

FitHomes

At Albyn we truly embrace innovation especially through our FitHomes projects. Through our FITHomes project we are working with public sector partners to deliver innovative digital solutions to our customers that enable them to live independently in their homes for longer. Our successful application to the Knowledge Transfer Partnership fund has allowed us to recruit an Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Associate, and they are working to develop our FitHomes sensors further. This is a really exciting time as Albyn lead the way in new technology specifically designed to allow our customers to live at home, independently, for as long as possible.

Customer Feedback on FitHomes

"I feel that these FitHomes are the way forward for anyone with care or support needs - they are the new sheltered housing. I hope we see many more of them going forward."

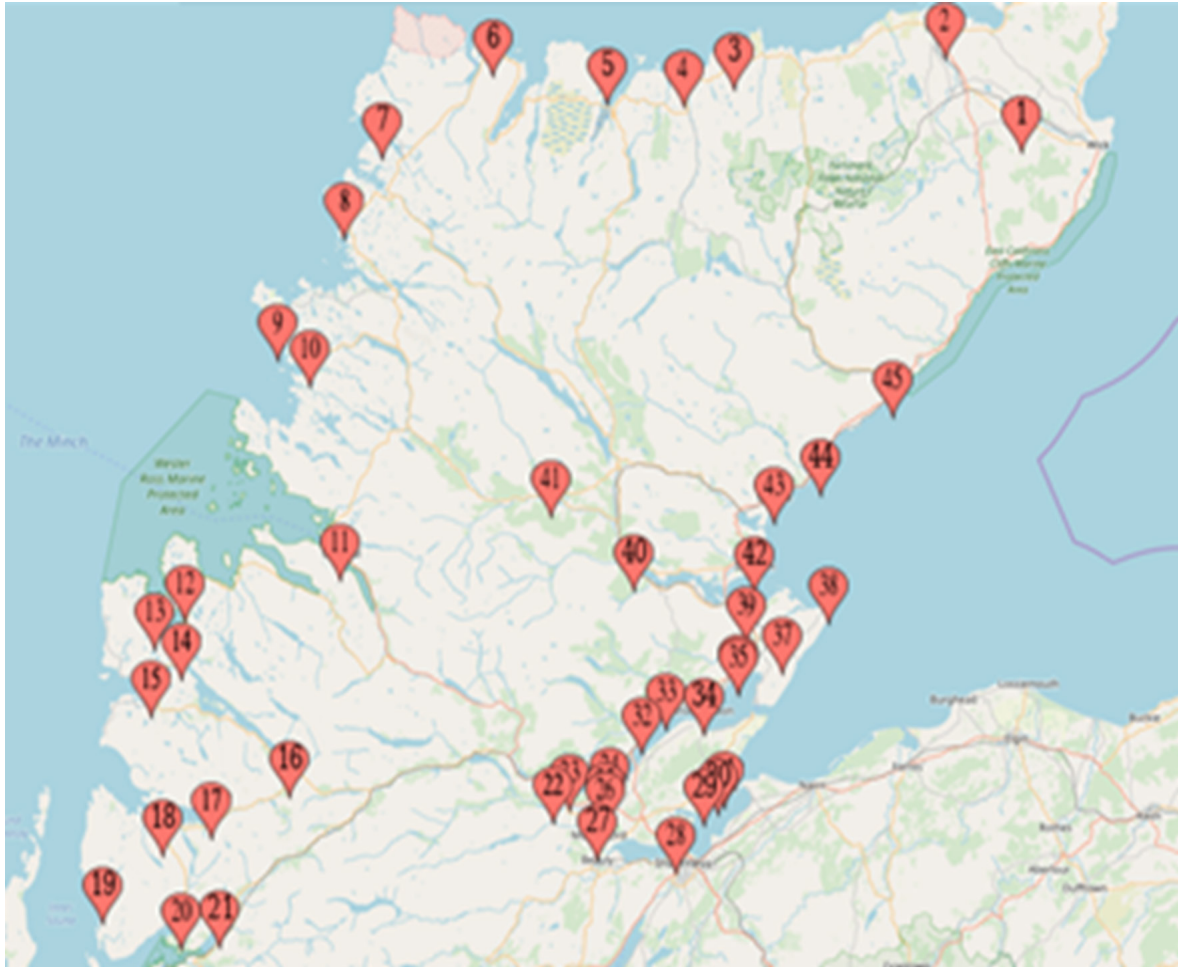
housing by completing a form (though there may restrictions on us accepting your application if you have come to Britain from abroad).

We award points for your application based on your current housing circumstances and needs. The Housing points system is currently being reviewed, changes will be highlighted on our website. When a house becomes available, we will generally allocate it to the person with the highest points who needs to live in the area and size of home available. To understand the points system visit the Highland Council website, or get in touch with our Tenancy Operations team.

At present, if the applicant should refuse a reasonable offer of housing, we will contact them to make sure the information in their application is correct and give them advice about their housing options. If they refuse a second reasonable offer we will suspend their application for 6 months. There are different rules for applicants who are declaring themselves Homeless

The length of time you have to wait will depend not only on your points, but also on the availability of suitable houses in the area you have chosen to live in, and the number of other applicants on the list and their circumstances relative to yours. If any applicants have any queries regarding the form or the policy rules, please contact us. More information is also available on The Highland Council website.

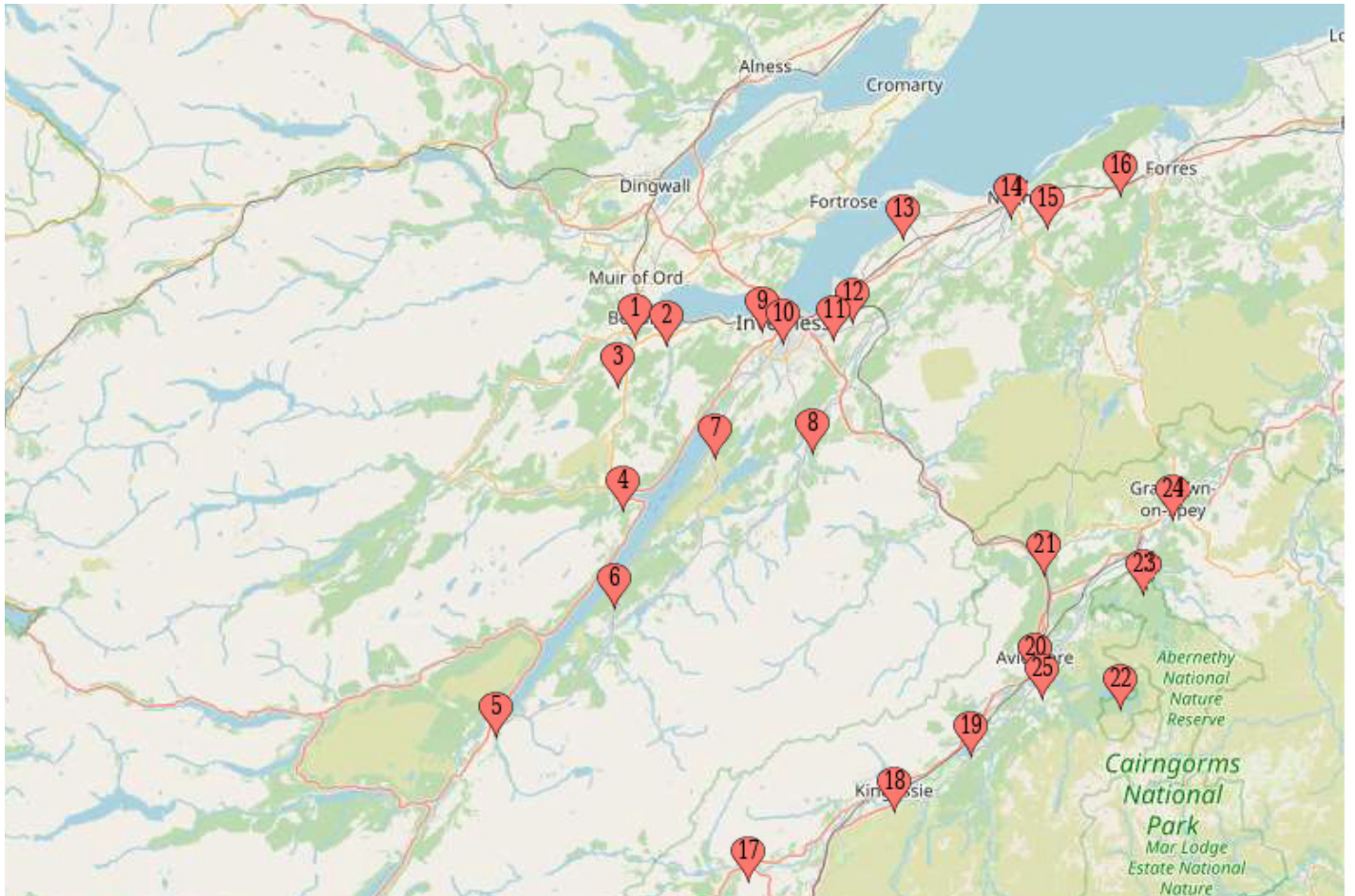
Where we have homes in the Highlands – North area



The number in the bracket indicates how many rented houses we have in each community
 The number of new builds in 2022-23 indicated in orange

1	Wick (62)	16	Kinlochewe (6)	32	Evanton (45)
2	Thurso (45)	17	Torridon (9)	33	Alness (175)
3	Armadale (2)	18	Sheildaig (10)	34	Invergordon (388)
4	Bettyhill (4)	19	Applecross (8)	35	Milton (93)
5	Talmine (6)	20	Kishorn (8)	36	Kildary (1)
6	Durness (8)	21	Lochcarron (14)	37	Fearn (7)
7	Kinlochbervie (7)	22	Muir of Ord (50)	38	Portmahomack (9)
8	Scourie (6)	23	Conon Bridge (92)	39	Tain (168)
9	Stoer (4)	24	Maryburgh (18)	40	Bonar Bridge (2)
10	Lochinver (26)	25	Strathpeffer (28)		& Ardgay (2)
11	Ullapool (11)	26	Contin (1)	41	Rosehall (2)
12	Aultbea (12)	27	Dingwall (117 + 30)	42	Dornoch (56 + 8)
13	Inverasdale (4)	28	North Kessock (22)	43	Golspie (28)
14	Poolewe (20)	29	Avoch (14)	44	Brora (25)
15	Gairloch (14)	30	Fortrose (45)	45	Helmsdale (4)
		31	Rosemarkie (4)		

Where we have homes in the Highlands – South area



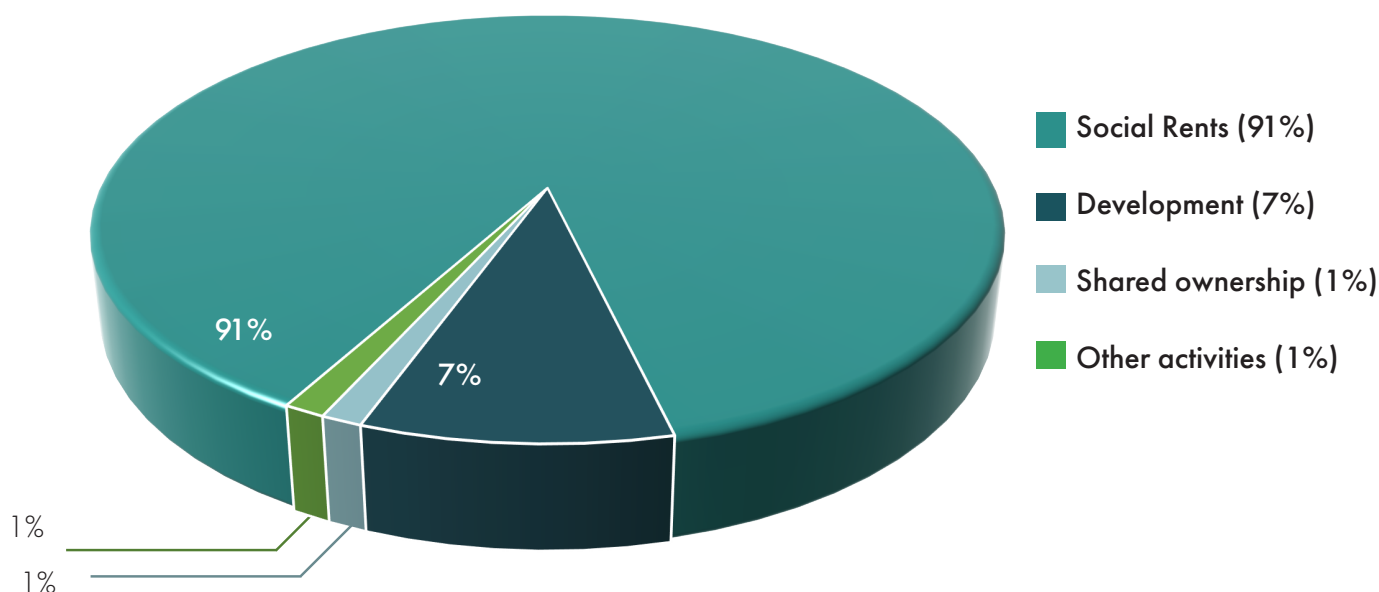
The number in the bracket indicates how many rented houses we have in each community
 The number of new builds in 2022-23 indicated in orange

1	Beaully (42)	9	Clachnaharry (16)	17	Laggan (6)
2	Kirkhill (19)	10	Inverness (870 + 8)	18	Kingussie (30)
3	Kiltarlity (25)	11	Smithton (20)	19	Kincraig (14)
4	Drumnadrochit (31)	12	Balloch (5)	20	Aviemore (148)
5	Fort Augustus (25)	13	Ardersier (46)	21	Carrbridge (18)
6	Foyers (11)	14	Nairn (230)	22	Glenmore (2)
7	Dores (10)	15	Auldearn (43)	23	Nethy Bridge (37)
8	Inverarnie (11)	16	Dyke (12)	24	Grantown-on-Spey (32)
				25	Rothiemurchus (6)



Outcome 11: Tenancy sustainment

The percentage of tenancies created in 2022/23 that were still successfully in place after a year has increased from 94.87% to 95.24%



- Albyn's income continues to come predominantly from tenant rents, with 91% through this source in the financial year
- Development activity of 7% includes the sales of New Supply Shared Equity Homes as part of the Government's Low-Cost Initiative for First Time Buyers programme (LIFT)
- Other Income includes activity from district heating systems and home adaptation programmes

Universal Credit

If you have made a claim for Universal Credit (UC), and you are unable to pay your rent, please get in touch with us immediately as we can only help if we are aware of your circumstances. Please don't let this escalate.

Visit [CAB](#) for online advice.

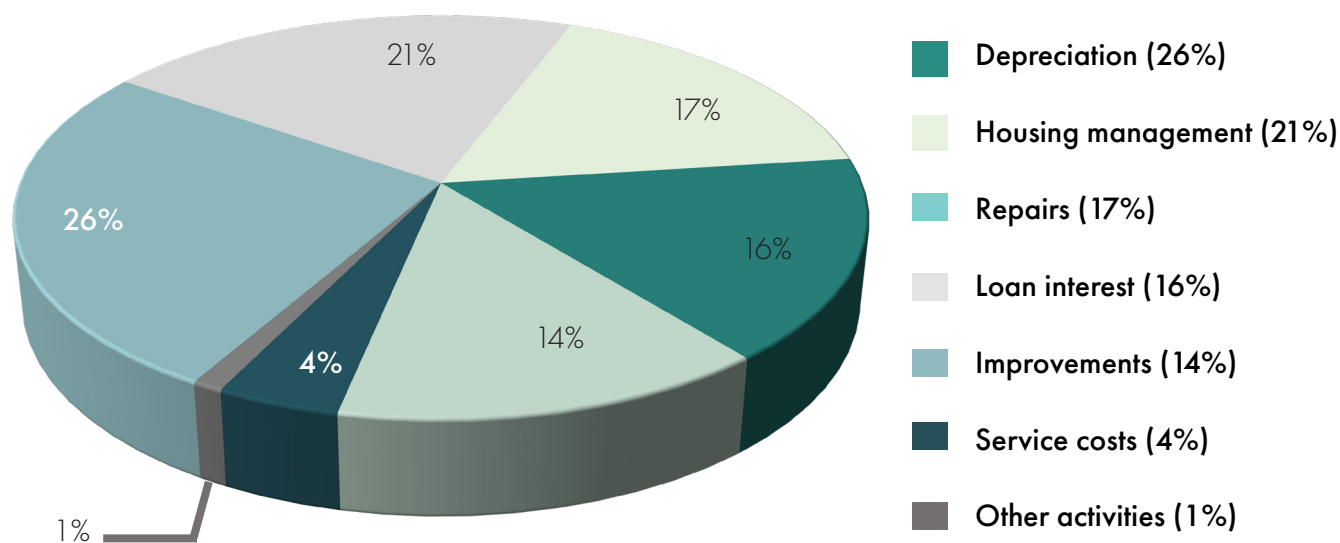
Some information we hope will help:

- Communication is extremely important and tenants should tell us immediately when they are invited to make a claim for UC.
- You will need a bank account and access to the internet or a phone with internet connection to create a UC account.
- The Job Centre and local libraries have internet access which you can use to make your claim.
- We will not have access to the UC account in the same way as we did with Housing Benefit so please update us as things progress/change so as to avoid arrears actions being taken.
- **We can organise food parcels for gaps in benefits if required.** If possible, stock up now on food cupboard items and pet food as a preventative measure.
- Have your Housing Allowance paid direct to you as this method is quicker and means you will have greater control of your income. Let us know if you will struggle doing this as we can offer referrals to CAB.
- The Highland Council Welfare Team are there to give advice.
- If you need help to get online safely then please get in touch with us.

Cost of Living Support for our Customers

With the rise in energy prices, increased inflation and a struggling economy, it's been an extremely difficult time for everyone. However, for those on lower incomes – including many of our customers - this amounts to nothing less than a cost of living crisis not seen in over 60 years. We identified that an increasing number of customers were struggling to manage and sustain their tenancies. While a wide range of factors were contributing to this, the cost of living crisis was adding considerable pressure to many households, with access to support limited or non-existent in some areas.

Outcome 13: Value for money



The chart shows Albyn's expenditure for 2022/23.

Depreciation of our housing stock continues to make up the largest share of our expenditure each year, representing 26% of costs in 2021/22. The management of our homes consumes 21% of expenditure in the year and includes the cost of operating the business to provide services to tenants and sustain tenancies.

Loan Interest represents 16% of Albyn's expenditure, up from 13% in the previous year as higher costs of borrowing result from higher interest rates. Our borrowing is used to build new homes for future tenants.

17% of our expenditure is taken up by repairing our homes, increase from the previous year (16%) through planned maintenance or responsive repairs that arise during the year. 14% of expenditure was targeted at improving tenant's homes, replacing heating systems, kitchens, bathrooms and other core components. This increased from 11% in the previous year.

Any surpluses generated are reinvested in the Society's primary purpose of housing those in need through provision of good quality homes.

Abandoned properties

There were 13 properties abandoned in the past year.

Outcome 14, 15: Rent and service charges

Empty Houses (Voids) & Letting

Average days taken to re-let properties	2022/23	2021/22
Albyn Housing Society	30.72 days	29.39 days
Scottish Average	55.61 days	51.57 days

Rent Increase

The table below shows the average weekly rents for 2022/23 compared with the Scottish average.

Size of home	Number of homes	Albyn Average Weekly Rent	Scottish Average Weekly Rent
1 bedroom	43	£66.85	£78.26
2 bedroom	828	£85.08	£83.46
3 bedroom	1,799	£94.28	£86.28
4 bedroom	759	£103.48	£93.96
5 bedroom	157	£118.21	£103.72

The rent increase with effect from 1 April 2023 was 5%.

Consultation took place in November and December 2022 on the proposed increased of rents from 01 April 2023. Our policy requires us to set our rents with reference to the rate of inflation and we use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for this, however, due to the unusually high rate of inflation as at October 2022 of 11.1% we instead offered 3 options 5%, 6%, and 7%. The outcome of this consultation was that 81.1% of 832 respondents chose 5%.

Service Charges

Service charges are based on the actual costs incurred. The costs are budgeted for the year ahead and the actual costs are then reflected two years in arrears with an adjustment to that subsequent year's charge. Whilst an adjustment can reduce the charge to nil, any increase to the charge is capped at £5 per month. The average monthly service charge increased from £16.69 to £16.85 year-on-year.

Outcome 16: Gypsy/Travellers

Local councils and social landlords with responsibility for managing sites for Gypsy/Travellers should manage the sites so that:

- Sites are well maintained and managed, and meet the minimum site standards set in Scottish Government guidance for Gypsy/Traveller sites, and those living on such sites have occupancy agreements that reflect the rights and responsibilities set out in guidance.

All the standards and outcomes in the Charter apply to Gypsy/Travellers.

The Highland Council own and manage the sites in our areas, Albyn Housing Society does not have any sites.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read our Tenant Charter report for 2022/23.
Please complete the attached questionnaire to let us know what you think about the report.

The Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their everyday housing activities and measures how social landlords are meeting the needs of their customers.

Find more information at the [Scottish Government website](#).

Call us on 0300 323 0990. Select **1** for repairs, **2** to pay your rent, and **3** for everything else.



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Join the
conversation

