



PARKING ISSUES
(written by tenants)

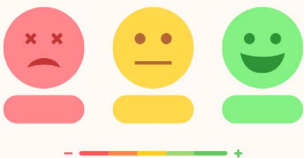
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**COLD WEATHER
PRECAUTIONS**

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Your Feedback is Vital!



**COMPLAINTS
PROCESS**

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Thank you so much to the tenants who have invited us into their homes recently as we find new ways to support tenants and understand your experiences. Read more about our initiatives on page 3.



0300 323 0990
office@albynhousing.org.uk

AUTUMN NEWSVIEW WELCOME!



Kirsty Morrison, Group CEO



Welcome to our Autumn 2024 newsletter.

Inside you'll find lots of helpful information and updates on what's happening at Albyn, including the ways we've been trialling different methods of engaging with you in your communities. It's been wonderful to get out and visit both remote and urban areas, hearing directly from you.

As we move into the latter half of the year, we're focusing heavily on fulfilling our obligations as a Registered Social Landlord. In September, we held our Annual General Meeting where we published our Annual Report for 2023-24. I would encourage you all to take a look and see how Albyn is performing.

With Winter fast approaching, we understand that this can be a challenging time for many of our tenants. That's why we've packed this newsletter with advice to keep you safe, warm and well supported through the colder months. Inside, you'll find helpful tips on cold weather precautions, including how to protect your home from frozen pipes. We know that damp and mould can also be a concern at this time

of year, so we're working closely with tenants to address any issues, as outlined in our damp and mould prevention guide. Please reach out to us if you have concerns.

We remain committed to improving the energy efficiency of your homes, and we're excited to share updates on our ongoing work to create sustainable communities. These efforts are designed to reduce your energy bills and help you stay comfortable during the winter months.

Following on from the positive Tenant Satisfaction Survey which we reported on in the last edition, we remain committed to gathering your feedback and making improvements to our services. Our Autumn newsletter features two articles on how this process works, including some clarification around our Repairs Satisfaction surveys and the introduction of a complaints improvement plan. This plan ensures that making a complaint is as straightforward as possible, and that you know we take your concerns seriously, delivering high standards in our responses.

As always, we are here to support you. If you have any concerns as we head into winter, please do reach out to us. Wishing you all a safe, warm, and comfortable season ahead.

Kirsty



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BRINGING OUR SERVICES TO YOU

In 2024, we've been trying new ways to support our tenants following the Customer and Property Services Redesign. Our programme of events is just one of the ways that we have developed that provides the opportunity to listen to your needs, gather your feedback, and understand your experiences better.

Last summer, we began by joining forces with local events organised by groups like Tain and District Development Trust, Easter Ross Community Partnership, and Apex Highland. These events, promoted by our partners, were a great opportunity to meet not only Albyn tenants but also other residents in the area. For those of you who attended, we appreciated your input, especially during our rent consultation, where you helped us identify key priorities for future improvements.

Our roadshow events were a special chance to bring our services directly to you. Members of our Customer and Property Services team travelled to community centres and village halls across the Highlands, starting in Caithness with visits to Wick and Thurso. Our priority was to reach out to areas that are furthest from our offices and where support is needed most. We let you know about these events through our website, social media, newsletters, and direct communication, including letters and text reminders. After the events, we followed up with those who attended to gather feedback and ensure that any concerns raised were addressed. For those who couldn't make it, we sent out reminders about how you can stay in touch with us and access our services.

Another initiative we've introduced is our "Behind Closed Doors" visits. These visits are unique because they pair a frontline worker with a member of our back office staff—someone who typically doesn't interact with tenants. This approach not only allows us to connect with you more effectively but also helps ensure that everyone in our organisation is better educated and informed about your needs. The goal is to provide you with an even better service as our staff gain firsthand experience and understanding of your concerns.

At our first Behind Closed Doors, a team of around 15 staff visited a neighbourhood with pre-arranged appointments. The presence of technical and factoring staff meant that we were able to follow up on any issues with the home or grounds maintenance immediately. At our most recent Behind Closed Doors, members of our extended leadership team paired up with housing officers to visit multiple tenants in various areas, along with conducting estate walkabouts. If you were among those we visited, we hope the experience was positive and helpful.

How Can We Serve You Better?

We're always looking for ways to improve how we support you. If there's anything specific you'd like us to know or if you have suggestions for future events, please don't hesitate to reach out. Your feedback helps us make sure we're meeting your needs effectively.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We held our 2023-24 AGM on Wednesday 25th September which was an opportunity for the board and society members to review the previous year as well as confirming the board who will support Albyn going forward.

Our Chair of Board Lesley McInnes, and CEO Kirsty Morrison delivered their reports of 2023/24 to Society shareholders, noting it had been a positive year for Albyn despite many external challenges.

You can find our Annual Report on our website: www.albynhousing.org.uk/agm-2023-24

Elections to the Board took place and we are pleased to confirm the following appointments:

Lesley McInnes, Chair
Clea Warner, Vice Chair
Ian Fosbrooke, Secretary
Carl Patching
Fiona Mustarde
Lynne Holburn

Jackie Bugden
Niall Owen
Scott MacLeod
Craig Levy
Craig Russell



Important Updates



Age Scotland

The cost-of-living crisis is forcing many older people to make incredibly difficult financial choices between heating and powering their homes, and the food they can afford to buy. With many people set to lose the Winter Fuel Payment, at minimum, a quarter of a million pensioners in Scotland on the lowest incomes will no longer receive this vital financial support over the winter months. Age Scotland are campaigning against this change and offer free advice can help you to access the information you need.

Contact Age Scotland

0800 12 44 222
helpline@agescotland.org.uk
www.agescotland.org.uk

Tenant Charter Report

The Tenant Charter Report will be sent to you by the end of October. The Charter is developed and designed by a group of volunteer Albyn tenants. It is something that the Scottish Housing Regulator requires from all social landlords and gives tenants the rights to look in depth at how we are performing as a landlord. **If you want to learn more about getting involved contact Communities Assistant, Anne Mackay, 07894 568 185 or anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk**

Annual Review of Rent Levels

In November, we will be 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. We will use your recorded communications preference which will be either through email, text or postal survey. Please let us know if you want to update these preferences.

Become a member of the Society

Did you know that for around the cost of a sausage roll at a bakery, you could become a Society member?

A Few of the Perks

- Hold one share within the Society
- Become eligible for Board membership consideration
- Attend and vote at General Meetings
- Be added to our Register of Members
- Get a SHARE certificate confirming membership

How to Apply

Complete and return an application form along with a £1 payment (by cheque or postal order) to the address on the form. Your application will be considered by the Board at their next meeting, and you will be informed of the outcome in writing.

Get the application form by calling us on 01349 801 007 or downloading a form from our website.

WRITTEN BY A MEMBER OF OUR TENANT EDITORIAL GROUP.

In recent years, parking in our housing schemes and on local roads has become a major concern. Too often, cars are abandoned on kerbs, at junctions, and generally anywhere the driver deems convenient. It's important to remember that in Scotland, it is illegal to park on pavements, at dropped kerbs, and to double park.

Even if you think you've left enough space or will only be parked for a short time, parking on pavements can cause significant harm to those who need to use them. It can lead to obstruction, damage to property, and wear and tear on pathways, making places like the Dalmore area difficult to navigate. Parking in private household driveways is not a solution, either.

While there are often extra parking spaces available in housing schemes or on high streets, there does seem to be a shortage in some areas. One solution might be to convert some of the weeded areas into parking spaces — even an additional two or three spaces could make a difference. Another helpful action would be to ask visitors not to park on kerbs or in a neighbour's driveway.

While parking enforcement officers are present in the area, more frequent patrols would be beneficial. With the ongoing development of new homes, parking provision should be adjusted accordingly. It is also important to remember that junctions are not parking spots, and tenants and their visitors should use their allocated spaces.

In some areas, each tenant has a designated parking space or double driveway. However, it seems that laziness or convenience often leads to poor parking choices. It is essential to be considerate of elderly and disabled residents when parking, as blocking exits, driveways, and kerbs is dangerous. It could delay emergency services and, ultimately, impact the speed of critical treatments.

So, please — “Think before you park.”



Have your say!

Our Performance Monitoring group will be beginning their next project beginning in October. Performance Monitoring, also known as Scrutiny, offers tenants the chance to to examine a landlord's services and standards, including their delivery in accordance with these standards & make recommendations for service improvements. The proposed topic for the upcoming project is to review how Albyn manage void properties. A property is void when there is no current tenant. Whilst the property is void, the organisation cannot collect a rental income and this can have an impact on the quality of service Albyn can deliver. Effective void management will help ensure that Albyn are meeting the needs of the applicants who are on the Highland Housing Register (HHR). If you want to **learn more about getting involved** contact Communities Assistant, Anne Mackay
Email: anne.mackay@albynhousing.org.uk or Call: 07894 568 185

Working together to deal with damp and mould

Condensation

The most common form of damp is caused by condensation. This can lead to mould that appears as a cloud of little black dots. Condensation occurs when moist air meets a colder surface like a wall, window. Making sure there is enough ventilation in your home can reduce this problem as can wiping down windows when condensation occurs.

Condensation also occurs in places the air is still, where possible try to leave room for air to circulate between walls and furniture and check regularly for signs of condensation.



Penetrating damp

Damp can also occur when water penetrates the walls of a property through an external defect like a loose tile on the roof or defective plumbing.

This type of damp is usually much more noticeable after it has rained, and you'll normally see a damp patch on the wall or ceiling that looks and feels damp to the touch.



Rising damp

Some damp is caused by water rising from the ground into the walls of ground floor rooms, or basements.

Rising damp usually leaves a tide mark on the wall no higher than around 1 metre, you may also notice salt crystals on the affected areas and it may cause paint to flake.



What to do if you have mould?

If you see the early stages of mould, it's important to clean it off the surface with a bleach or fungicidal wash. Be careful not to upset mould by brushing, dusting or vacuuming. This can cause the mould to spread to other areas of the house.

If soft furnishings or carpets have been affected by mould, it's important to clean them thoroughly to remove the mould spores. If you do have mould growing, it's good to clean it off straight away to minimise any health risk, but you also need to fix the underlying damp problem to stop it coming back. This is where we can work together. Please contact us so that we can begin an investigation.

COLD WEATHER PRECAUTIONS

Keep warm

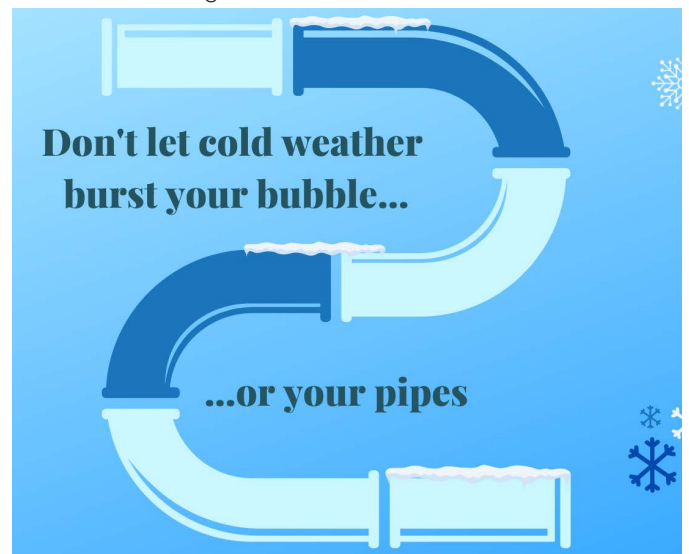
In order to avoid burst pipes try to keep your house warm day and night. If you choose to only have the heating on downstairs, leave room doors open to allow heat to circulate. Burst pipes can be avoided by keeping your radiators at the frost setting, so please consider this if you will be away during cold spells. Check on attic spaces, especially if water and storage tanks are there. Make sure insulation which should cover pipes and tanks has not been accidentally moved.

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 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).

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.

The society is not responsible for any damage caused to your personal belongings by frost damage or burst pipe or tank. Have you insured your household contents? Check out Page 9 for more information.



Your Feedback on Repairs Performance

Albyn understand that repairs are a key priority for tenants and we want to ensure that our performance in this area meets and exceeds your expectations. The best way that we can judge, and improve our service is by getting feedback. We regularly ask tenants how satisfied they are with our repairs and maintenance service. This helps us understand what's working well and what we can improve. We also share these results with the Housing Regulator each year. The questions we ask are set by the Housing Regulator, and all social landlords ask the same ones, including the satisfaction scores.

At Albyn, we usually send surveys by text message, but sometimes we may also call or write to you to get more detailed feedback. Some tenants have told us they found the scoring a bit confusing, so here's a reminder of the question we ask and how the scoring works:

Thinking about the LAST repair done at your home, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service?

5: Very satisfied (The service was exceptional and I was very happy with it)

4: Fairly satisfied (Some aspects of the service were great and I was somewhat happy with it)

3: Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (I have no opinion on the service)

2: Fairly dissatisfied (Some aspects of the service were challenging and I wasn't very happy)

1: Very dissatisfied (The service was terrible and I was very unhappy)

When we ask this, we want you to think about whether you were treated with courtesy and respect, the speed and efficiency of the repair, the flexibility of the repairs service, and whether you felt informed about the process.

HOW WE MANAGE SEAGULLS



Wild Gulls in the UK are protected by the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. This means it's illegal to kill, catch, or harm them, or to disturb their nests, eggs, or chicks without a special permit.

Whilst it may feel like gulls are common in our local area, many species have declined dramatically in the wild because their natural food supply has reduced for various reasons such as **overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction**. Gulls have learned that food is readily available in the hand of an unsuspecting tourist, or a rubbish bag full of kitchen scraps on the pavement.

Wild gulls nest on cliffs, and it just so happens that our roofs provide an equally suitable alternative, conveniently near to their new food source.

Gulls are highly protective over their eggs and chicks while nesting, and this causes further conflict between us and these feisty seabirds. The gull species which most often come into conflict with humans and that most tenants contact us about is the **Herring Gull**. Herring Gulls are on the **red list of Birds of Conservation Concern**, meaning it is at risk.

In 2024 all license applications to remove nests (using the criteria below) were refused.

- Aggression resulting in direct strikes
- Frequent dive bombing
- Noise disturbance
- Droppings contaminating foodstuffs
- Gulls attacking pets

NatureScot who process applications and approve applications responded as follows;

"NatureScot is not satisfied in this case and with the information provided by the applicant that gulls are causing a health and safety issue to public & gulls attacking pets is not a public health and safety risk.

Given the endangered status of Herring Gulls, future licence applications must meet a very strict threshold and the removal of nests in coastal communities will only be granted in exceptional circumstances."

Taking the above into account Albyn have taken the decision to cease licence applications until the Herring Gull is removed from the red conservation list.

Programmes of work (component replacements)

In the Summer newsletter we reported the installation of new Windows and Doors at Reed Court, Carrbridge and Mayfield Wynd in Tain. We have also completed the following works:

64 – Heating Upgrades

57 – Bathroom upgrades

6 – Kitchen upgrades

We have also revised our Void Standard and this is available to review on our website.

Commitment to Sustainable Communities

In the summer newsletter we shared our commitment to Sustainable Living. We actively seek grant funding to allow us to upgrade and improve the energy efficiency of our tenants' homes. Funding is challenging and the scale of the task is significant, which is why we are delighted to announce a successful outcome.

We have recently secured grant funding for our Solid Wall Properties. We are working in partnership with Union Technical Services, and they will write directly to tenants to arrange access to complete a survey of your home prior to works commencing. The works will consist of the following;

- Internal Wall Insulation
- Heating Controls
- Insulation to loft/floor
- Ventilation

Tenants can remain in their homes, the Internal Wall Insulation is installed using internal drill access and the installations are complete within a day. Decoration

allowances will be provided upon completion which could cover the cost of a contractor if needed. We would urge all tenants that receive a letter to contact Union Technical as soon as possible, the works will be completed by area. If Union Technical and Albyn do not gain access then your home may not be eligible for an upgrade at a later date as the funding is only available for a set time period.

PROTECTING YOUR BELONGINGS

When life gets busy and things are going well, it can be easy to forget about home contents insurance.

Like most forms of insurance, it is something we hope we will never need, but the value becomes clear if we ever have to use it.

You should be aware that whilst we insure the building, it is your responsibility to obtain cover for your own household belongings as we are not able to replace these for you if they are lost in a major incident.

If you already have insurance but want to make sure that you are fully covered, don't be afraid to call your service provider and ask questions.

Contents insurance can cover replacing personal belongings in your home (and typically outbuildings) if they are damaged, destroyed, or even stolen.

Examples of items covered include: floor coverings, washing machines, fridges, phones, tablets, laptops, televisions, and jewellery. You can even insure personal possessions such as clothing. Exclusions do apply so ensure you get advice to understand your policy.

Check out moneysavingexpert.com for advice on getting the best value and read some handy FAQs. There is also content insurance providers that specialise in insurance for social housing tenants such as thistle Insurance Scheme, visit www.thistlemhome.co.uk for more information. They offer flexible payment options, and low minimum sums can be insured.

The risks of not having insurance are high – if catastrophe strikes, there may be no way of replacing appliances, tech, or a number of other household goods without paying a premium.

We hope you sign up soon!



Home fire safety visits

Enhance fire safety in your home with a home fire safety check or visit.

What is a home fire safety visit?

We offer everyone in Scotland a free home fire safety visits.

We'll take you through a questionnaire and then we'll help you sort out a fire escape plan. We can provide information about smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms. If you need advice on the new standard alarm legislation, please visit the Scottish Government website.

Book a home fire safety visit

Phone: 0800 0731 999

Text: FIRE to 80800 on your mobile phone

Online: Book online by completing our booking form

Online home fire safety checker

Complete our online home fire safety checker and we'll provide you with a document with tailored fire safety advice for you and your household.

Referring someone for a visit

If you know someone over the age of 50, who smokes and either lives alone, has mobility issues or uses medical oxygen, we need your help to identify them.

Ask them to get in touch or if you are a family member or a carer, refer them to us. We will undertake a home fire safety visit where possible.

Make the Call, it could save a life.



IMPROVING HOW WE MANAGE COMPLAINTS

Having to complain about the quality of service you receive is something we hope you never need to do, however there will be times where you feel we have let you down in some way, whether it's failing to deliver on our promises, or because of the service we have provided. When this happens, we want to ensure that your experience is as positive as it can possibly be, and that where we identify failings, we learn the lessons from this to ensure we deliver the high standards we expect of ourselves to improve the service for all tenants moving forward.

Over the last year, we have introduced a complaints improvement plan looking at doing exactly that. At its core is ensuring high quality responses in a timely fashion and focusing on the experience of the complainant throughout.

So how is it going?

Since April, we have:

- Improved our complaints response time by 6% for Stage 1 Complaints, compared to our performance in 2023.
- Improved our complaints response time by 27% for Stage 2 Complaints, compared to our performance in 2023.
- Invested in specialist training for all staff members who investigate and handle complaints.

This has been delivered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and ensures that staff are best equipped to carry out thorough, high quality investigation. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman are the independent reviewer of social housing complaints and help to set the standards of good practice in complaints handling across the public sector.

We're still early in our complaints plan and have a raft of improvements we will be rolling out in the coming weeks and months to improve the experience. So, what key things have we learned from reviewing what has gone wrong for tenants, and how are we going to fix it?

1

What we've learned:

When we visit your home as part of repair inspections, we undertake a visual inspection for damp and mould given how important early identification is in these cases. However, if we identify anything we consider needing further investigation, this necessitates a second visit with full equipment. This impacts your time as we need to visit again.

What we've done to fix it:

Since April 2024, all our staff are now permanently equipped with Protimeters, which is a piece of specialist equipment used to identify damp and mould. This means no need for repeat visits, and more accurate diagnosis first time. If you have any concerns over damp and mould in the property, please call us on 0300 323 0990 and select option 1 to speak to a member of our repairs team.

2

What we've learned:

New tenants don't always feel confident to operate their heating and hot water systems independently, especially non-traditional systems like Air Source Heat Pumps

What we've done to fix it:

As of May 2024, we have ensured that all new tenants are informed of how to operate their systems when they sign up and are provided with a how to guide, enabling them to be run correctly to ensure they are used as efficiently as possible, minimising unnecessary spend on bills.

3

What we've learned:

Tenants don't always feel well informed if works are going to be taking place in their area.

What we've done to fix it:

Beginning in June, we have ensured that when there is work taking place, all tenants on the site receive a letter detailing the scope of works, timescale for completion and any expected disruptions ahead of the start date.

At Albyn, we are committed to ensuring your concerns are dealt with seriously and to a high standard. If you would like to raise a complaint, please contact us at complaints@albynhousing.org.uk.

COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

Tenant wanted to say thank you to Dot for all her help with the stairwell cleaning issues and said he didn't think it would have been fixed if it wasn't for her.

Tenant had a Ring doorbell fitted and wanted to thank Vikki for the supply of the doorbell and for having a professional & kind manner.

Tenant wanted to say thank you for the rapid exam and replacement of decking. The contractor measured and replaced rotting decking with brilliant non slip recycled rubber decking. Tenant is pleased with how it looks and is reassured that it feels very safe underfoot.

Complaint received regarding standard of grounds maintenance. Resolution; a full apology from contractors and reassurance that new landscapers have been hired, and work will be carried out to a higher standard. Albyn to carry out site inspections to ensure we are happy with quality of the service.

Tenant complained about ASB. After a visit from Tenancy Operations, the neighbour came to apologise and they have come to an agreement. Tenant wanted to thank Tenancy Operations for their support and understanding.

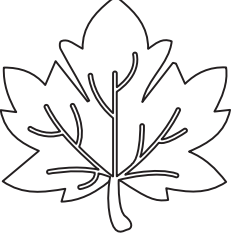
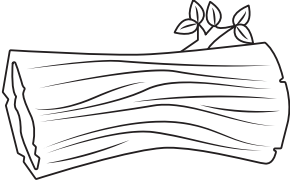
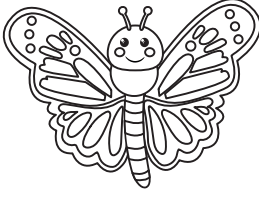
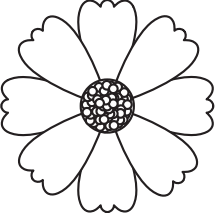
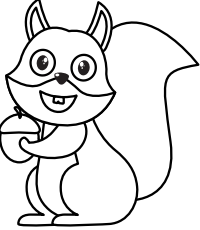
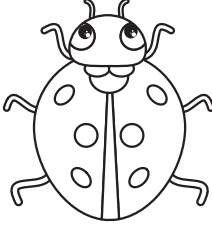
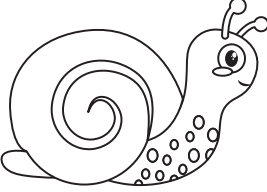
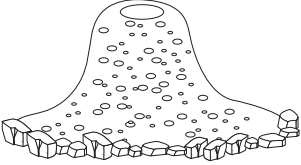
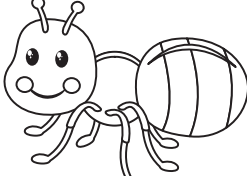
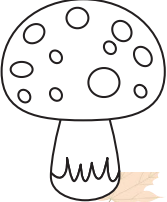
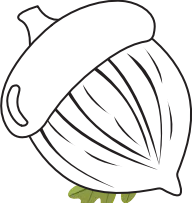
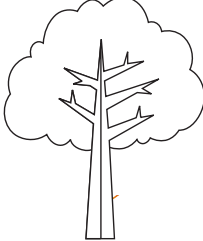
Do you wish to make a complaint or provide a compliment?

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

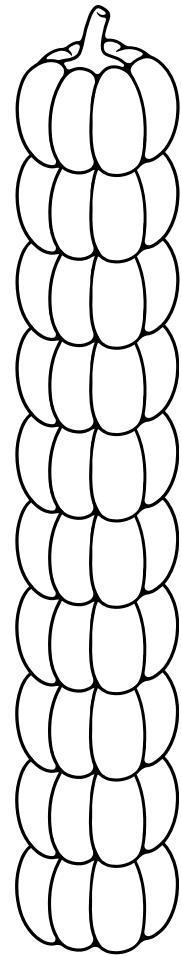
- Call us on 0300 323 0990 and select option 4.
- Report your complaint via our website, www.albynhousing.org.uk
- Email us at office@albynhousing.org.uk



KIDS PAGE

 Leaf	 Log	 Butterfly
 Flower	 Squirrel	 Bug
 Snail	 Ant Mound	 Ant
 Mushroom	 Acorn	 Tree

COUNT THE PUMPKINS



Invergordon Office | 98 - 104 High Street | Invergordon, Ross-shire | IV18 0DL

Inverness Office | 68 MacLennan Crescent | Inverness | IV3 8DN

Call us on 0300 323 0990.

More information can be found on our website: www.albynhousing.org.uk

Join the conversation

