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The Moray Council has confidence in its stock

The Moray Council presented a positive report to the Community Services Committee on 30 March 2005 demonstrating how its housing stock will meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

The new Scottish Housing Quality Standard applies to all housing tenures in Scotland. The Executive placed a requirement on all local authorities to produce and submit a standard delivery plan to demonstrate how they will achieve this by 29 April 2005.

The publication of a Scottish House Condition Survey estimated that 70% of Scotland's social housing falls beneath the new standard, although many houses miss it only marginally.

In very broad terms, to meet this standard houses must be:

- ▲ above the tolerable standard (this is the minimum standard that a house must meet);
- ▲ free from serious disrepair (such as major roof, dampness or structural problems);
- ▲ energy efficient (it must have effective insulation and central heating);
- ▲ provided with kitchen and bathroom fittings (in a good and safe condition); and
- ▲ safe and secure (for example it must have a smoke detector, secure doors and safe electrical and gas systems).

A working group was set up to develop the Standard Delivery Plan. Membership of the group included several elected Members, officers from The Moray Council and tenant representatives.

Local authorities were required to undertake an Option Appraisal Review as part of their submission. Following the Option Appraisal Review, a strong recommendation was made by the working group that the Council should continue its commitment to the retention of its housing stock. The Community Services Committee reaffirmed this in March.

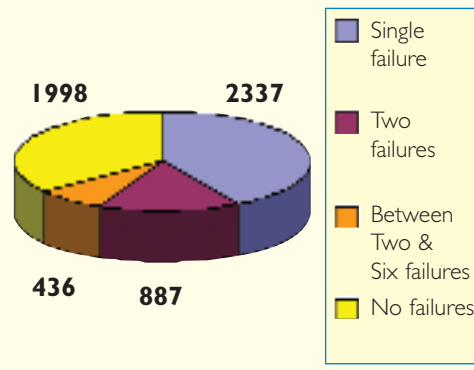
The Council's consultants developed a Housing Business Plan. This Plan detailed the works required to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard over a 30-year period.

The Standard Delivery Plan itself involved a detailed analysis of Council stock. At present 44% of the stock meets the standard and

information published by Communities Scotland states that this is the highest percentage for social rented stock in Scotland.

Properties Failing Scottish Housing Quality Standard

(Total No. of Properties = 5658)



The works required to bring the stock up to Standard will influence planned maintenance programmes in the future.

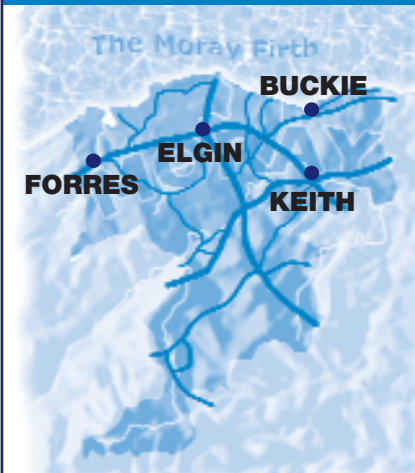
The estimated investment required by The Moray Council to take its stock up to standard is £3.385 million with 54% of this relating to external walls, chimney stacks, rainwater goods, external wall finishes, windows and access doors, and damp-proofing.

In addition, the Council will have to meet costs to prevent properties falling below the standard before 2015/16. This is estimated to be £4.958 million taking the average cost per dwelling to £1,270.

In 2001, The Moray Council developed its own standard, known as 'The Moray Housing Standard'. In terms of improvement objectives, the Moray Standard requires a significantly enhanced provision in areas such as electrical provision, fire safety, kitchen provision and environmental provision. A decision has been taken to review the Moray Standard in consultation with tenants.

If you would like more information on the Standard Delivery Plan you can contact your local area housing office or Jill Stewart, Chief Housing Officer on 01343 563532 or John Macdonald, Capital Programmes Manager on 01343 823056.

Where are the local housing teams



BUCKIE

01542 837200

Buckie Area Housing Office,
13 Cluny Square, Buckie,
AB56 1AJ.

ELGIN

01343
563429/563433

Elgin Area Housing Office,
Council Office, High Street,
Elgin, IV30 1BX.

FORRES

01309 694000

Forres Area Housing Office,
Auchernack, High Street,
Forres, IV36 1DX.

KEITH

01542 885500

Keith Area Housing Office,
The Institute, Mid Street,
Keith, AB55 5BJ.





Dear Tenant,

The last six months have seen many changes within the Moray Council.

We were very pleased to keep the rent levels low with the increase in April being 3.5% - i.e. inflation plus 1%. This still means that the rents in Moray are among the lowest in Scotland. This has not however, affected the quality of stock that we have.

The demands faced by the housing service are varied and continue to challenge the staff involved. However, the improvements in service delivery outweigh any frustrations that can be felt.

In October 2004 the Council established a working group to look at how the Council will ensure that its housing stock meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015. Tenant representatives played an active role in this group.

As part of the work needed to feed into the above, three key documents were produced – an Option Appraisal Review, the Council's Housing Business Plan and the draft Standard Delivery Plan itself.

The Council is confident that it can meet the standards set down within the Scottish Housing Quality Standard without a burden being placed on tenant rents. To allow us to deliver a sustainable Plan, a rent increase in line with inflation plus 4 years at 1.5% within the first 10 years and 1.0% for all other years will be needed.

I look forward to seeing you all at the next tenants' conference that has been arranged for **17 September 2005**. I am sure that there will be something to interest everyone and that the day will be as much of a success as the last one.

George McIntyre
Vice Chairperson
Community Services Committee

Tenants Conference 2005

Following the success of last years Tenants Conference it has been agreed that a similar event should take place every year. The purpose of a tenant's conference is to provide you with all kinds of information to help you understand how the Moray Council Housing Department works.

It is proposed that this year's conference will be held on Saturday 17 September in Elgin. The event will run from 9:30am to 2:30pm and lunch will be provided.

The agenda for this year's conference is still to be finalised but it is proposed that delegates will be provided with further information on the Standard Delivery Plan and there will be a session on the benefits of tenants participating in the management of their homes. During the course of the day you will have the opportunity to attend workshops on a variety of topics, for example:

- ▲ Community Wardens/Antisocial Behaviour;
- ▲ Moray Against Poverty; and
- ▲ Trading Standards.

There will also be a variety of stands full of information from how to save money on your fuel bills to advice on consumer rights.

Officers from the Moray Council's Housing Service, and representatives from the Local Area Forums will be available on the day to discuss housing issues with you. Local councillors will also be invited along. The conference will also give you an opportunity to meet tenants from across Moray.

We look forward to seeing as many tenants as possible at this years event and here's hoping it is as much of a success as last years.

If you would like to attend please complete the application form below and send it to:

Kate Fulton,
Community Services, The Moray Council, Council Offices, High Street, Elgin. IV30 1BX

Booking Form for Moray Council Tenant Conference, 17 September 2005

Name

Address

.....

Phone Number

Please detail any dietary requirements

.....

No. of persons attending:



Tenants' Workshops

The Moray Council is committed to consulting with tenants on all housing and housing related issues in an attempt to improve its housing service. To provide tenants with the information that they might need to make informed decisions about housing services, the Moray Council has developed a series of Workshops and all tenants are invited to attend. The Workshops are also aimed at developing practical skills which members of Local Area Forums will find useful. Topics included in the current Workshop Programme are detailed below:

Name of Workshop	Brief Description of Workshop
Minutes and Agendas	This Workshop will consider how to plan, run and record forum meetings. In particular it will look at how to prepare an agenda and develop your skills in minute taking.
Bookkeeping	The aim of this workshop is to increase your confidence in managing and recording small budgets.
Information Technology	The purpose of this workshop is to give participants a better understanding of computers and what they can be used for. During the Workshop you will have an opportunity to develop your skills in producing documents, e.g. letters, minutes, agendas etc.
Best Value	The Best Value framework looks at ways in which service delivery can be continually improved and can be a useful tool for tenants as it places their views at the centre of shaping and improving services. The aim of this Workshop is to increase your knowledge of what is meant by 'Best Value' and to discuss ways in which the local government measures, manages and improves its performance in all public services through this framework.
Date Protection / Freedom of Information	The aim of this Workshop is to enable participants to develop a better understanding on the law surrounding the storage and access of information.
Equal Opportunities	This Workshop will enable participants to develop mechanisms for the promotion of equal opportunities and to increase their knowledge surrounding equal opportunities in Tenant Participation
Regulation and Inspection	The Scottish Executive has introduced a Regulation and Inspection process to ensure that all social landlords are well run, accountable to their tenants and other service users, and are continually improving their service provision. This workshop will look at the Regulation and Inspection process and the important role tenants can play in the process.
Effective Committee Skills	This Workshop will look at how to run your Local Area Forum effectively and will look at the different roles of all forum members.
Community Safety and the Role of Community Wardens	This Workshop will explore the role of Community Wardens with regard to managing antisocial behaviour, thereby improving the quality of life in our communities.
Planning a presentation	This workshop is aimed at all tenants who wish to develop their presentation skills. This workshop considers the preparation stage of giving a presentation.
Giving a Presentation	This workshop compliments 'Planning a Presentation' and will give participants the opportunity to give a short presentation on a topic of their choice.
Housing Law	The purpose of this workshop is to raise participants' awareness of the different pieces of legislation that govern a housing service and the effect(s) they may have on tenants of a social landlord.

To get a full copy of the Workshop Programme containing the Workshop Timetable and an Application Form please contact:

Kate Fulton

Community Services, The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin, Moray. IV30 1BX

Telephone: 01343 563585. Email: katharine.fulton@moray.gov.uk



Chartered Institute of Housing Conference 2005

Nine tenant representatives attended this years Chartered Institute of Housing conference which took place in Aberdeen. Those who attended it were able to hear a keynote speech from Malcolm Chisholm, Minister for Communities, on the current condition of Scotland's housing stock.

Delegates also had the opportunity to attend various workshops. The one that appeared to be of most interest to delegates was on the proposed changes that are about to be made within the Housing Benefit system. One of Moray's delegates went on a bus tour of Aberdeen City's housing stock which proved to be very informative.

As at every conference, delegates had the opportunity of browsing around the various displays. The display that attracted most interest was the one on energy efficiency and the use of solar heating.

All who attended greatly enjoyed themselves despite it being a rather long day.

Gas Servicing

The Moray Council has a duty under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 to ensure that all gas installations in its properties are safe to use and serviced on an annual basis.

The Council's own Direct Labour Organisation has been carrying out this work since 2000 after being appointed as the main servicing contractor. As well as servicing the gas heating systems in over 4800 council homes, the DLO also provides a response maintenance service for gas heating related faults.

In order to carry out servicing the DLO arranges access on a pre-programmed appointment basis. The appointment information is sent out to tenants 14 days before access is required and gives an opportunity to rearrange the visit if the given date or time is unsuitable.

It is important that contact is made with the DLO through the dedicated Gas Servicing/Repairs line on Elgin 01343 829111 to make alternative arrangements for access if the first appointment offered to you is unsuitable.

The Council is required by law to carry out servicing of gas systems for health and safety reasons, and therefore places a high priority on the regular servicing and maintenance of the gas appliances installed in its properties.

In the event of any serious fault occurring in the gas heating system in your home, your safety - and that of your neighbours - could be affected.

If you think that you have not had the gas heating installation in your home serviced within the last 12 months, or do not have a copy of the gas service certificate for the last time that the installation was serviced, please contact your local area housing office as soon as possible.



Revised Allocations Policy

In April 2005 the Moray Council's Housing Service introduced its new Allocations Policy. The Allocations Policy aims to tackle housing need in Moray. Where possible, we take account of what you would really like as a new home. The revised policy helps us decide who we think is in most need of housing and how to make the best use of the housing we have available.

You can get a copy of our Allocations Policy, free of charge, from your local Area Housing Office, or from our website at www.moray.gov.uk.

What are the main changes of the revised Allocations policy?

The main change of the revised Allocations policy is the allocation of council housing to two groups (waiting and transfer applicants). Applicants will also be asked to choose 3 preferred areas of choice and they will have up to two refusals of properties as long as they are reasonable refusals. There is no maximum level of points and the points calculations have been simplified.

What points are awarded?

◆ Homelessness

Priority need	500 points
No priority need	100 points

◆ Overcrowding

For every bedroom you are short	100 points
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◆ Home too big for your needs

For every extra bedroom you don't need (transfer applicants only)	100 points
For every extra bedroom you don't need (waiting list applicants only)	50 points

◆ Poor housing conditions

Below acceptable standard (lacks facilities)	250 points
Below acceptable standard (with facilities)	150 points
Meets the standard (lacks facilities)	100 points

◆ Sharing facilities

(kitchen, bathroom, or toilet)	100 points
Key workers	100 points

◆ Care and support

Residential care or support is no longer appropriate	
Supported accommodation is no longer needed	250 points

◆ Flats or maisonettes

(if children under 16 years are part of your household)	
Living in first floor flat or maisonette with ground floor access for one year or more	40 points
Living in second floor flat or above or maisonette above ground level for one year or more	75 points

◆ Rural connection

	50 points
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◆ Exceptional circumstances

	0 – 500 points
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(the Housing Needs Review Group will assess this)

Are there any other changes?

Further changes have also been made to the revised policy. These are:

- ▲ two reasonable offers will be made and suspension from our Waiting list for refusal will be reduced from 1 year to 6 months;
- ▲ points are now awarded to homeless households not in priority need; and
- ▲ appeals will be considered by the Housing Needs Review Group.

If you are affected by our revised policy and would like further information, or a copy of the policy, you should visit your local Area Housing Office.

Flood Protection

The Moray Council has recently completed the fitting of flood prevention products to 237 properties in the Kingsmills, South Lesmurdie, Pansport and Chanonry Road areas of Elgin, and also in Land Street and High Street, Rothes.



The aim of these products is to safeguard the properties from any future flooding events, preventing water entering through openings in the external walls and causing damage to the fabric of the building.

The guards are fitted over all external door openings, and any ventilators situated above or below the floor level, which may become susceptible to flood water.

The guards are individually tailored to each property. They were supplied and fitted by a specialist manufacturer who has wide experience in this field.

The guards also meet the relevant British Standard for flood prevention products, and have been recognised by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency as providing a suitable barrier to flood water entering homes. They were chosen after research was carried out into the various products available.

In conjunction with this initiative, the tenants who have guards fitted to their homes can also be connected via telephone to the new flood warning system operated by the Moray Council Environmental Services Section. This new system will automatically warn those connected to it of any likely flooding event, allowing ample time to evacuate properties if necessary.

In the event of an automatic flood warning being raised, the flood guards would be fitted to tenants' homes by operatives from the Moray Council Direct Labour Organisation.

The Housing Management section of Community Services would also liaise with those affected to ensure that properties were evacuated and occupants moved to a place of safety until such time as it is safe to return home.

Money Advice

If you find yourself falling behind with your rent payments, have difficulty in paying your bills or need help to manage any other debt you can contact Trading Standards Money Advice Section who will advise you on all aspects of credit and debt.

This advice service is free and confidential.

On your behalf Trading Standards can negotiate with creditors and can even set up single weekly or monthly payments to all your creditors. If you want advice about your debts then you can speak to Trading Standards on **01343 554623** or visit them at **232 High Street, Elgin.**

There are many companies who charge for money/debt advice, and many who claim to offer free advice but make money by selling loans to those in debt. The choice is yours, but why not use one of the free, independent advice agencies such as Trading Standards or one of those listed below:



Citizen Advice Bureau	01343 550088
Payplan	Freephone: 0800 085 4298
Consumer Credit Counselling Service	Freephone 0800 138 111
National Debtline	Freephone 0808 808 4000

Drowning in a sea of debt?



We can help you and it won't cost a penny

The Moray Money Advice Partnership gives **FREE, CONFIDENTIAL** advice and assistance with **ALL DEBTS**, including:

- Comprehensive review of situation
- Negotiations with creditors
- Set up repayment plans
- Set up single monthly (or weekly) payments to pay all creditors

DON'T DELAY CALL TODAY!

Moray Citizens Advice Bureau
30 Batches Street, Elgin
01343 550088

Trading Standards
232 High Street, Elgin
01343 554623








Scotland
CRIMESTOPPERS
0800 555 111
 Working in partnership with the police

CRIMESTOPPERS IN MORAY

Crimestoppers is the only charity helping to solve crime. It is not part of the police or the government or the council. Crimestoppers is there for you if you want something done about crime in Moray but you have a particular reason to fear retribution from criminals or involvement with the criminal justice system. Perhaps you know the name or location of someone who is committing crime or you know of a crime that is being planned. Perhaps the criminal lives or works or socialises with you or uses your premises. Perhaps you have had a particular experience with the police or the courts that stops you picking up the phone and calling your local police. It is important that you do call the police – on 999 if it is an emergency or on 0845 600 5 700 for all non-emergency calls if you can – but if you can't and have information about crime you can phone Crimestoppers.

- ▲ You can call 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- ▲ Your call will not show on itemised phone bills.
- ▲ Your call will not be answered in Moray but at the Crimestoppers Call Centre in Glasgow by trained staff.
- ▲ Your call will not be traced or taped.
- ▲ No-one will ask your name or any personal details.
- ▲ No policeman will call you back or visit you.
- ▲ You will not have to visit a police station or a court or sign a statement.
- ▲ You can call about any crime from drug-dealing to wildlife crime
- ▲ You do not have to tell anything you do not wish to tell.
- ▲ You can receive a reward without losing your anonymity.
- ▲ You can call whatever age you are.

The information you provide will be passed on to your local police who will act on it according to normal procedures. You may be providing the first piece of information they have about a crime – in which case action may have to wait until other evidence is available. You may be providing the last piece in a jigsaw puzzle – the one piece that the police have been waiting upon to act.

Crimestoppers Grampian/Highland is responsible for raising awareness in the Moray area. Its campaigns in schools and across the area are managed by a steering committee on which Moray is represented by Councillor George McIntyre. Crimestoppers is a member of the Moray Community Safety Partnership and has recently received funding from them to develop a video, a schools resource tool-kit and a range of sports-based activities to raise awareness of how to tackle vandalism, drink-driving, car theft and disqualified driving in Moray.

To find out more about Crimestoppers and join in the Play the Game sports challenge visit www.0800555111.com or speak to your school, community beat officer, Leisure Centre or community warden.



For more information on Play the Game please contact

Alison Chandler,

**Projects Organiser, Crimestoppers Grampian/Highland,
 c/o Northsound Radio, Abbotswell Road, Aberdeen
 AB12 3AJ Tel: 01224 337048**

email: alison@crimestoppersscotland.com

FORUM UPDATES

Bilbohall Estate Forum

During the last few months our forum has discussed various topics from the telecommunications mast to moss removal. We have been very fortunate to build up a good working relationship with both Elgin High School and our new Community Warden, Chris Beard. Our members would like to thank Mr Simpson and all staff and pupils for our invitation to both their Dance and Music concerts. We thoroughly enjoyed them.

Chris Beard had been instrumental in assisting us with the quick siting of three anti-dog fouling signs around the estate. Since residents have realised that it is now an offence not to clean up after their pet we have received a mixture of complaints following the siting of these new signs.

This year should see the completion of fencing on the estate, most of which will be paid for from our Forum Budget. Additionally, several properties have received replacement doors and kitchens.

Currently the forum is in the process of discussing future projects to spend its Forum Budget on. Ideas suggested so far have included the removal of moss from the roofs of all properties in the area and providing extra security lighting at the pensioner bungalows.

The forum is always looking for new ideas from all tenants in the area and anyone wishing to discuss an idea with the forum is welcome to attend our monthly meetings, which take place on the first Wednesday of each month in the Seaforth Club, Academy Street at 7pm.

If you would like more information about how you could become involved in the work of the forum you can contact **Steven Christie (Chairperson)** phone number is **01343 540524**.

Alternatively you can contact Mrs Moira Sutherland (Secretary) – phone number 01343 547490

Bishopmill Area Forum

A meeting was held at the end of March in Bishopmill to encourage tenants to start up a forum. There was a good turn out and there was much interest shown about

having regular meetings and constituting a forum in the area. The meeting also produced active discussion on what the Forum Budget might be used for with many ideas being put forward.

The forum is currently in the process of organising its next meeting in May, where it is hoped that the group will be formally constituted. All new members are most welcome to come along.

For further information please contact Mrs Avril Cooper, Area Housing Officer, Elgin Area Housing Office on 01343 563140.

Elgin Central Forum

The forum continues to establish itself as a progressive group and plan some improvements to the local environment over the coming year. Meetings, held at the Moray Resource Centre in Maisondieu Road, are being well used as an effective means of consultation and communication between tenants, Elected Members and The Moray Council. Representatives from several Council departments including Land and Parks, Community Wardens and Environmental Services have given talks at meetings and have been well received as being both interesting and informative.

Amongst some of the more visible work done by Elgin Central Forum is the supply of a set of goalposts at the park in South Lesmurdie and the path between Kingsmills and the river being levelled and tarred. Areas of new fencing have also been funded by the group to help improve the appearance of the neighbourhood and more works of a similar nature are being planned over the longer term.

Elgin Central Forum sadly suffered the loss of Mrs Esther Dunsmuir who had served the group so enthusiastically in her post as Forum Secretary. Esther died suddenly in February this year and the commitment and energy she gave to this role will be sadly missed. As a founder member of the group, her personality and determination played a significant part in the development and success of Elgin Central Forum.

New members are always welcome. If you would like further information about the group please contact Harry Torry (Chairperson) – phone number 01343 541475.

Forres Area Tenants' Forum

Fourteen months ago forum members visited the residents of Leys Road Sheltered Housing complex to find out if residents had any requests for any improvements they wanted made to the external area of this small complex. The forum were prepared to allocate part of their Forum Budget to any proposed improvements. After an extensive walkabout a list of improvements was drawn up. Proposed improvements included upgrading the drying areas, creating new outside drying areas, levelling uneven paving stones and improving drainage in the area.

Members of the forum have recently revisited the complex and were delighted to see the improvements that have been made to the area. Councillor George McIntyre, Vice Chair of Community Services, was invited to join the forum on this visit and to see for himself what the forum has spent some of their Forum Budget on. Also at this visit Councillor McIntyre presented forum members with their Certificate of Registration.

Chairperson, Sandy Stewart, returned to Burghead and met up with Ron Tolmie [Burghead representative], Mrs Phyllis Watson and her family to unveil the memorial plaque placed on one of the benches that has been erected as a memorial to our late forum member, Tommy Watson.

The forum, along with the other tenant groups in Moray, have been consulted on several Moray Council policies as well as being invited to be part of several active working groups.

Members of the forum are planning to go back out on "safari" to the villages within the Forres Housing Area. This proved very popular last year.

The Forres Area Tenants Forum continues to meet every second Friday of the month in the Nicholson Building, St Catharine's Road, Forres. This is a disabled friendly building and assistance with transport can be provided, if you live outside Forres, and childcare is also available. All meetings start at 10.15am and last no more than a couple of hours.

For more information about the group please contact Sandy Stewart [Chairperson] on 01309 671356 or Heather Anderson [Secretary] on 01309 671154

Garmouth, Urquhart, Lhanbryde and Lochhills Tenants' Association (GULL)

The Council is interested in hearing from all tenants within the catchment areas of Garmouth, Urquhart, Lhanbryde and Lochhills who would be interested in reforming the local area housing forum. Being a member of the forum means you will have an opportunity to collectively tell the Council what you think needs done in your area for the benefit of everyone living there. Many tenants who are already a member of a local area forum have found it easier to voice their opinions as a group rather than trying to voice them on their own. You will also have the opportunity to discuss all policies and strategies the Council produces regarding the management of your home before the Council introduces them. The Council frequently consults with local area housing forums on the management of its housing stock and welcomes all suggestions from tenants on how to improve its service. Without your input we would not be able to provide what you want from a housing service.

More importantly if there is local representation of Council tenants in the area, the forum will be able to apply for a Forum Budget which is allocated to each recognised local area housing forum. In the past GULL has used its Forum Budget for upgrading fencing in the area, providing extra dog fouling bins, organising projects for cleaning up litter, upgrading garden paths, etc. More recently members of the forum were discussing the possibility of developing a new play park in the area. If you have any ideas on how your area could be improved for the benefit of everyone living there then please tell us.

If you would like more information on how you can become involved please contact your Area Housing Officer, Mrs Julie Barrowman. Her phone number is 01343 563431.

New Elgin Tenant Forum

The New Elgin Tenants Forum continues to meet regularly to discuss what improvements can be made to the local environment and agree on projects for the area.

Much of the Forum Budget for this year will again be spent on fencing as the lack of any fencing around properties continues to be an issue.

Forum members have also undertaken several walkabouts both on their own and accompanied by the Area Housing Officer (Donnie Riggs), Grant Speed (Land and Parks) and our local Councillor (John Divers) to identify any problem areas where improvements could be made. A few areas have been identified and after consultation with the local residents and further discussions with Moray Council Officers there have been various ideas of how best to use our budget. These include removing some of the thorny bushes that catch litter at Wellbrae Court and replacing them with more suitable plants for a play area as well as adding grass and seats.

Forum members have been attending Tenant Core Group meetings regularly, attended the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference in Aberdeen and have taken advantage of the workshop programme set up by Moray Council by taking part in workshops on Tenants Rights, Housing Finance and Antisocial Behaviour.

Our Community Warden, Chris Beard and Sandra Borthwick from the CAB have both been guest speakers at our Forum meetings, which are again being held at the New Elgin Hall. Why not come along, we would be interested in any ideas you have for your area?

Or you could get in touch with the Area Housing Officer, Donnie Riggs - phone (01343) 563423 or the Chairperson, Muriel Ettles - phone (01343) 545394.

Keith & Speyside Forum

The Keith and Speyside Area Forum has continued to meet since it amalgamated last summer. The forum now alternates its meetings between Keith and the Speyside villages to allow as many people to attend as possible.

Over the past 12 months the forum has funded several works from their Forum Budget throughout the Keith and Speyside areas. These included:

- ▲ fencing in various locations throughout the area;
- ▲ landscaping works; and
- ▲ provision of extra car parking in the area.

The forum has been awarded its Forum Budget for the coming year and suggestions are eagerly being sought by forum members for suitable projects to spend it on.

In March 2005 the Keith and Speyside Forum arranged their first Annual General Meeting as a joint forum. This was advertised and was open to all tenants throughout the Keith and Speyside Areas. Unfortunately the meeting could not go ahead as there were insufficient members in attendance. The Area Housing Office is currently attempting to rearrange this meeting and hope that there will be more interest from other tenants wishing to get more involved in the way that the council manage their homes.

It is essential that the Keith and Speyside area keep their tenants' forum. Without it the area will lose its group representation for any consultation carried out by the Council regarding the management of your homes and equally importantly the area will lose its Forum Budget.

Please keep an eye out in the local press and shops for the details of the forthcoming Annual General Meeting, and the Keith and Speyside Forum members look forward to seeing you there.

If you would like more information about the forum please contact Robert Williams (Area Housing Manager). His phone number is 01542 885515

Lossiemouth Tenants' Forum

In December 2004 the forum registered with the Moray Council. At their meeting in April 2005, Councillor McIntyre, Vice-Chair of Community Services, presented members with their Certificate of Registration. Now that the forum has officially registered with the Council it can access Registered Tenant Organisation grant funding from Communities Scotland to carry out projects within the area for the benefit of Lossiemouth residents.

The forum has recently received their annual Forum Budget from the Council and, over the past months, members have been discussing suitable projects to spend their budget on. These have included fencing work at Dunbar Court, Gilmour Crescent, Schoolhill Terrace and Grant Lane. The proposed work is due to begin within the next few months.

Members of the forum have attended various seminars and conferences over the past few months, namely the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference and a seminar held by Communities Scotland on Tenant Assessors. Tenant Assessors are tenant volunteers who join Communities Scotland's Regulation and Inspection teams to bring a tenant's point of view within the inspection process of all social landlords.

The forum is currently in the process of trying to increase their membership. It meets on the second Tuesday of each month in the Lesser Town Hall, Lossiemouth at 7pm. **If any tenant within the Lossiemouth area would like more information about the forum and to become more active within the management of your home please contact the Chairperson - phone number: 07909 752023.**

Roths Tenants' Association

In the last edition of the Tenants' Voice it was reported that the forum was having a problem in attracting new members. In November 2004 the forum attempted to hold their Annual General Meeting, but due to a poor turnout the meeting was unable to go ahead despite the hard work of existing forum members in advertising it.

However, this situation has now changed. In February 2005 a few of the forum members got together to discuss the future of the forum and it was agreed that they would like to organise another Annual General Meeting. This took place in March and was well attended. The forum has now been able to elect office bearers for the coming year and six residents in the area have agreed to join the Committee.

The forum is now busy planning suitable projects to spend their Forum Budget on. Recently the Chairperson, Mrs Helen Mackie, and the Area Housing Officer carried out an estate walkabout to identify what work needs doing in the area. In the past the forum has used its budget on new fencing in the area and the cleaning of guttering on all properties in the area.

If you would like more information about the forum please contact Mrs Helen Mackie (Chairperson) on 01340 831535.

Spey Coast

The Spey Coast Forum has been very busy over the past months and has overseen a number of fencing contracts which are now completed. Members of the forum are busy discussing future fencing projects within the rural areas of Rathven and Berryhillock. In order to identify future projects that the forum could become involved in some forum members have been involved in a series of estate walkabouts. Suitable projects identified have included the replacement of slabbing stones at various locations within the Buckie area and the removal of moss from all council property roofs. Members are proposing to hold their next walkabout at the beginning of June within the Milton Drive area.

Members have invited various external speakers to their

meetings including Mr David Crawford, Community Warden for the area, and Mr Sandy McKenzie, Estate Caretaker. Members are planning to invite their Community Policeman to a meeting in the near future.

In an attempt to increase their membership, the forum would like to hear from tenants within the areas of Mosstodloch, Fochabers, Findochty and Portknockie. A warm welcome would be made to any tenant who would like to attend a forum meeting.

The forum meets the last Thursday of each month and meetings begin at 7:15pm. If you would like more information about the forum please contact their Chairperson, Mrs Barbara Davidson. Her phone number is 01542 831242.

The Moray Council Tenants' Core Group

The Tenants' Core Group draws their membership from all the Local Area Forums in Moray. Each forum is able to nominate up to three of their members to attend the Core Group's monthly meetings. Currently eight forums have representatives on the Tenants' Core Group.

From time to time members of the Core Group are invited to join various council working parties. At present the group has representatives attending the following working parties:

- ▲ Tenant Participation Strategy Working Group;
- ▲ Standard Delivery Plan Working Group;
- ▲ Rent Restructuring Working Group; and
- ▲ Housing Best Value Working Group.

The Core Group also has two nominated non-voting tenant representatives who attend Community Services Committee meetings. This is something that does not happen in all local authorities.

Since the last edition of the Tenants' Voice members have been consulted on the preparation of the Standard Delivery Plan and the results of the recent Tenant Survey.

Currently the group is in the process of applying for grant funding from Communities Scotland to produce a toolkit to promote the process of tenant participation within a rural authority.

Members of the group have attended various housing conferences and seminars over the past few months, which has provided members with the opportunity to meet tenants from other local authorities.

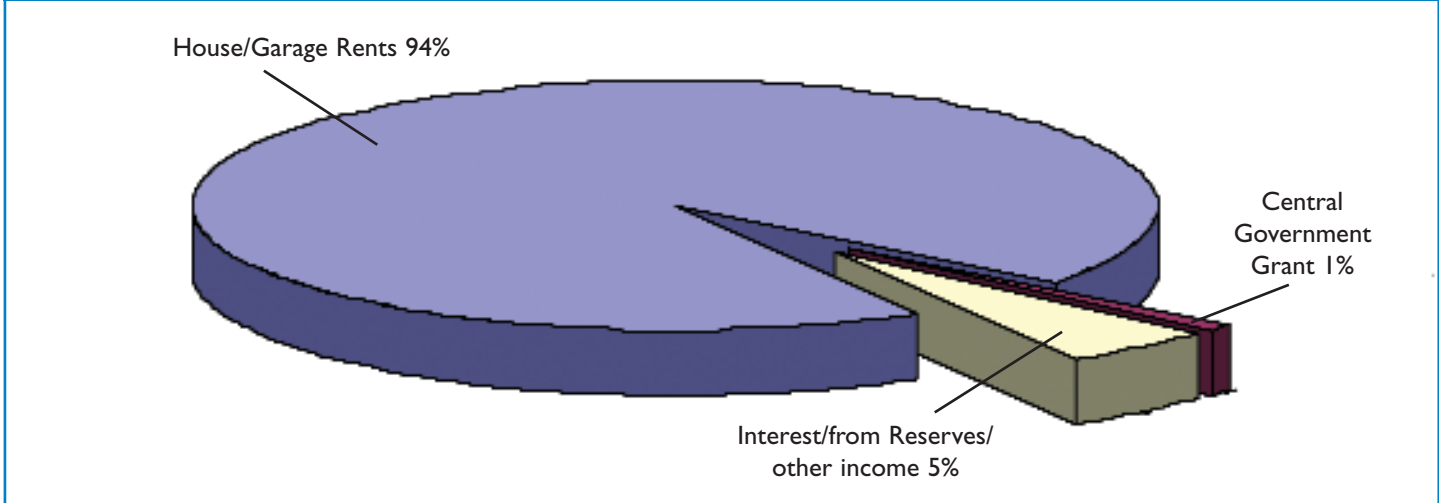
For more information on local forums please contact your Area Housing Office.

Housing Performance 2004/05

HRA Income 2005/6

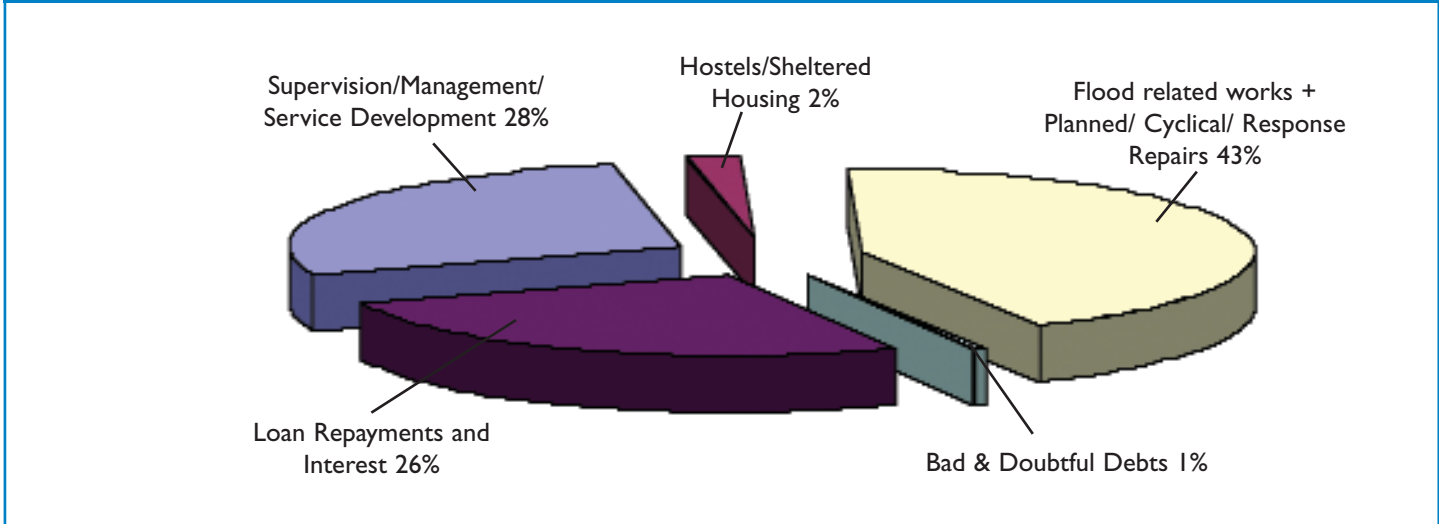
Income to the Council for housing services comes largely from rental income. Average rent levels in Moray (£35.54) are the lowest in Scotland (National Average = £44.93) and have increased by 3.5% in 2005/6 compared to a National Average of 4.3%
 Source: COSLA

Housing Revenue Account - Projected Income 2005/6 = £12,116,291



HRA Expenditure 2005/6

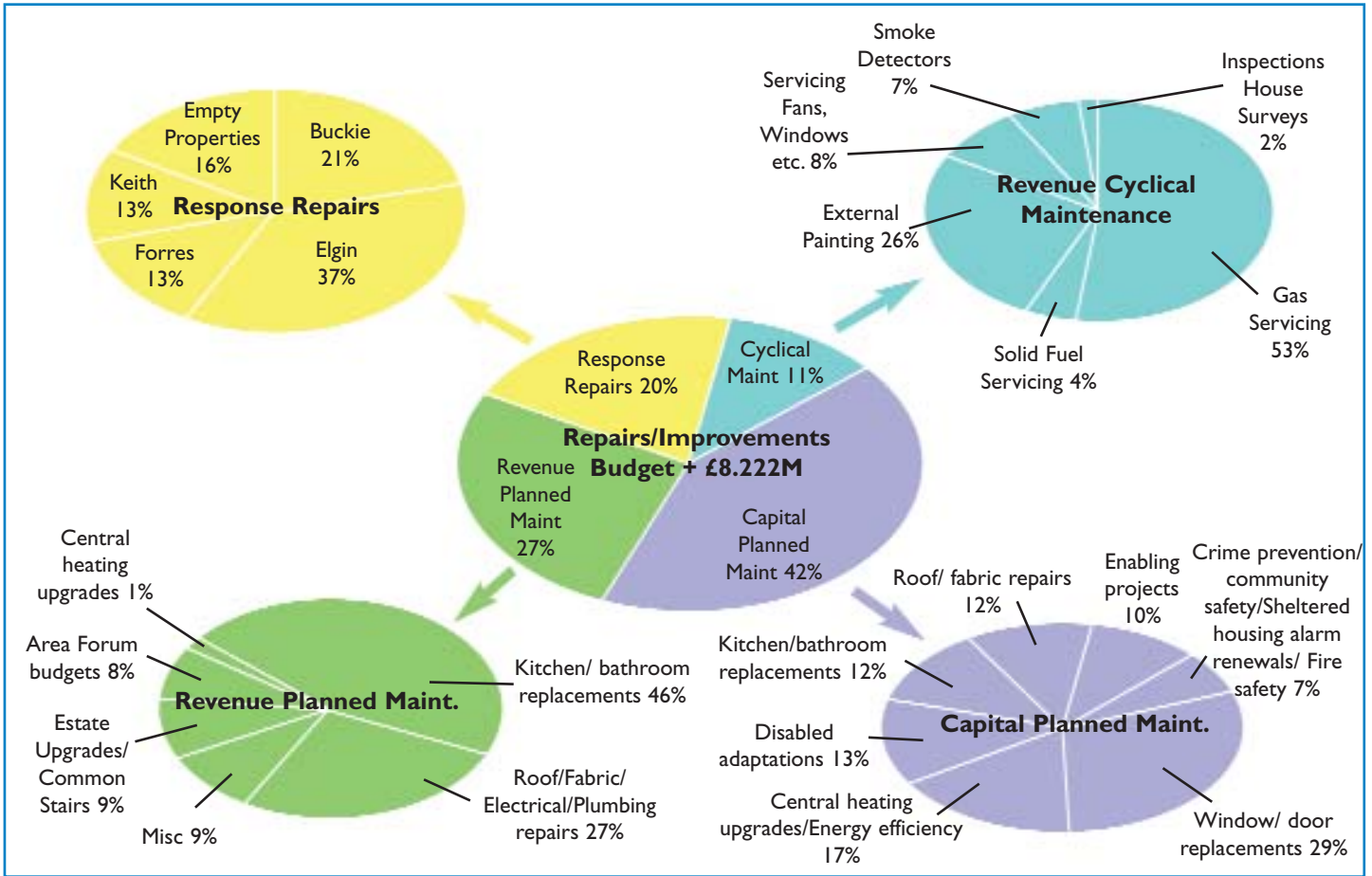
Housing Revenue Account - Projected Expenditure 2005/6 = £11,595,541



- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| Supervision/Management/Service Development | = | Salaries and office overheads |
| Hostels/Sheltered Housing | = | Costs associated with the running of these specialised types of housing |
| Flood related works | = | Financial provision for flood works which were not covered by Moray Council's insurance and for future flood protection works |
| Planned Maintenance/Cyclical repairs | = | Improvement works and regular maintenance to Moray Council's housing stock |
| Response Repairs | = | Adhoc repairs as reported by tenants |
| Bad & Doubtful Debts | = | Debts to be written off |

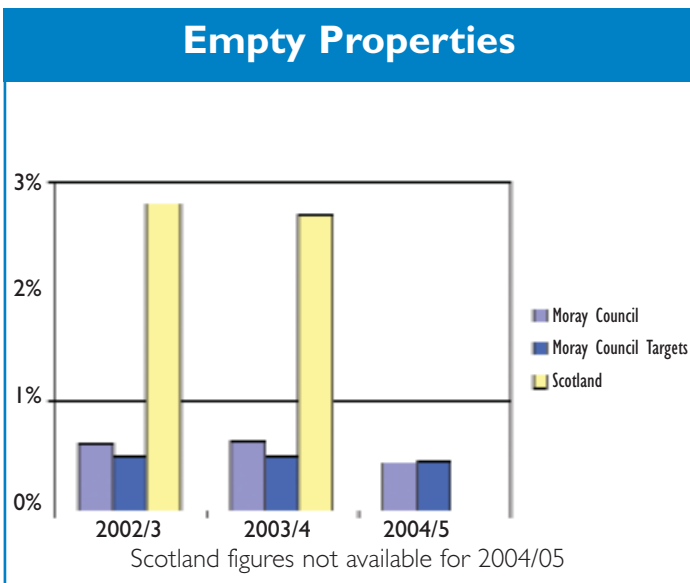
Housing Capital and Revenue Budget 2005/6

This budget makes provision for 409 kitchen replacements and 93 heating upgrades during 2005/6.



Voids

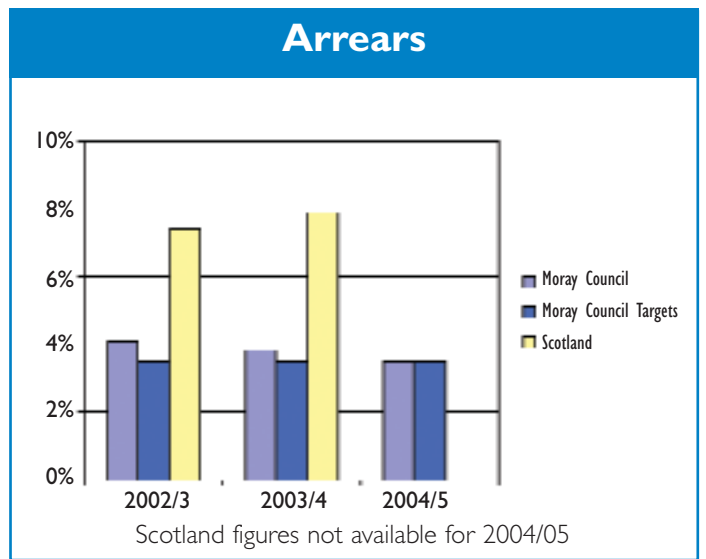
During 2004/5 rent lost due to empty properties was 0.44%. Overall the Council continues to do well in comparison to other Councils. The target for 2005/6 is 0.45%.



Source: Audit Scotland Performance Report 2003/4, and Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2004/5

Arrears

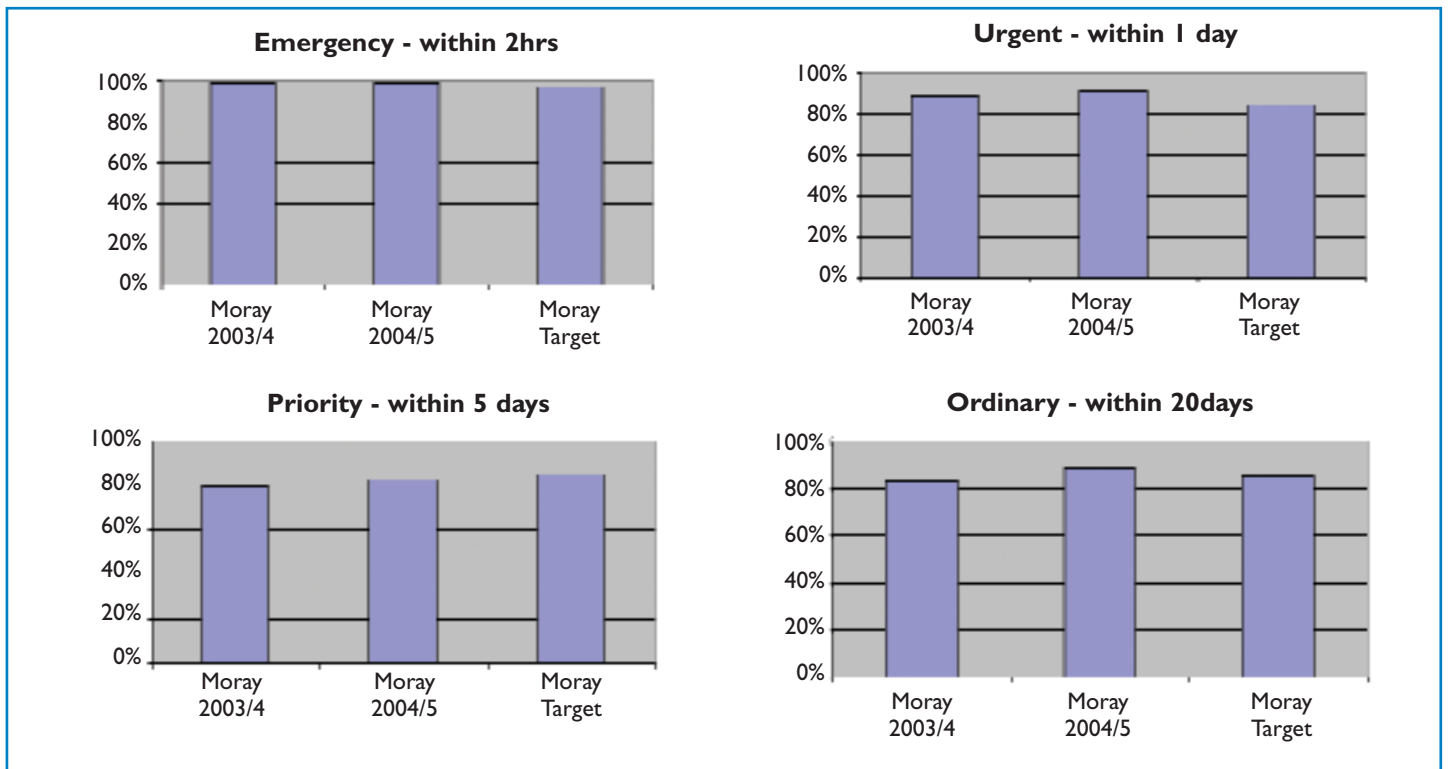
Moray Council's rent arrears for house and garage rents in 2004/5 were 3.52% of net rent receivable, down from 3.84% in 2003/4. Six tenants were evicted during the financial year for non-payment of rent. A challenging but realistic target of 3.3% has been set for 2005/6.



Source: Audit Scotland Performance Report 2003/4, and Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2004/5

Repairs

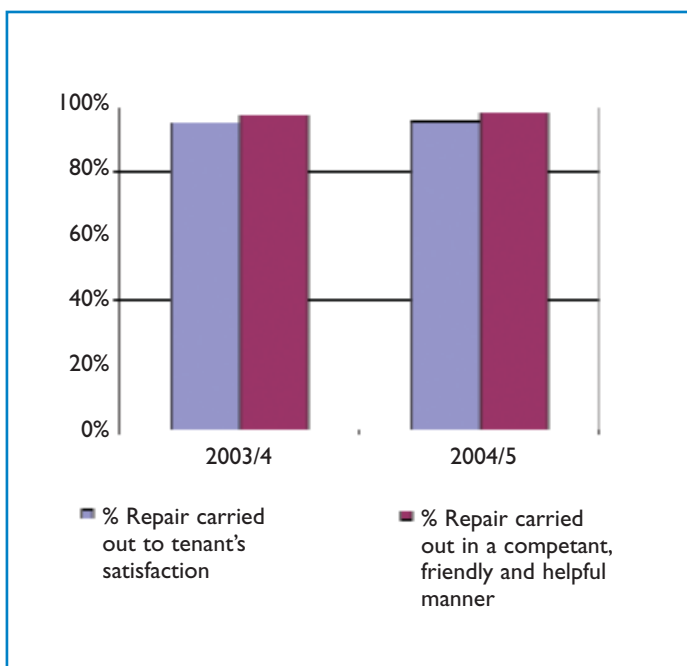
Moray Council has shown continued improvement in the number of repairs completed within their respective target timescales



Source: Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2004/5

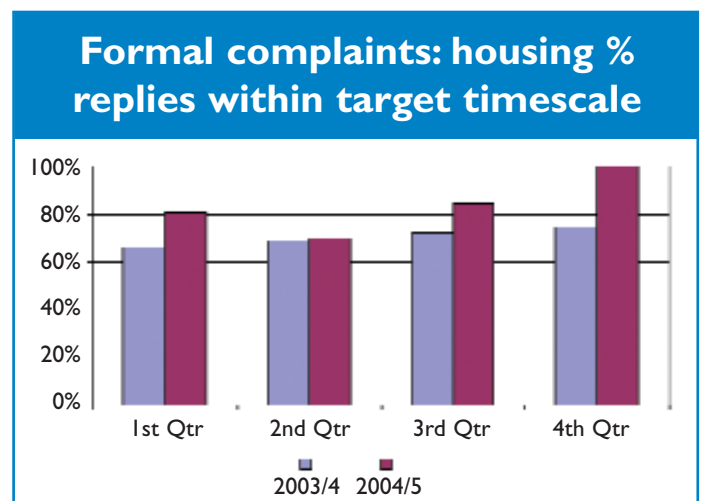
Repairs Questionnaires

If we have carried out a repair on your property you may have received a follow-up questionnaire. The results of returned questionnaires are shown below. On average during 2004/5 95% of the tenants who responded were satisfied with the service they received. However only 20% of the questionnaires were returned. If you receive one, please do return it as we value your opinion.



Formal Complaints

Moray Council has a Formal Complaints procedure and the Council aims to ensure a reply to complaints within 20 working days. As shown below, we have continued to improve our response rates throughout 2004/5, 82% of complaints received their response on time. The Housing Service aims to improve this further and meet timescales in 100% of cases in 2005/6.



Mediation

A sensible way to resolve your differences

For those of you who have had difficulties with your neighbours, you will know that this can be a very stressful and unhappy experience.

Thanks to the launch of a new community mediation service in March this year between the Moray Council and community safety specialists SACRO, specialist professional advice is now available to Moray residents to help them agree a way to resolve their differences.

The service offers free mediation to neighbours and communities involved in disputes over noise, boundaries, high hedges, car parking and other related issues.

Community Mediation is a well proven and cost effective way of helping to resolve disputes with many schemes operating nationally. Over 90% of face to face visits by mediators to clients end in agreement.

The scheme works by referring people who are in dispute to the Community Mediation Service. Trained mediators then arrange to meet both parties separately and help them through discussion come to a mutually agreeable solution to their problem. The service is free, independent and impartial.

Mediation concentrates on reaching practical solutions for the future and aims to improve the situation for everyone involved.

The scheme is supported by the Scottish Executive, the Moray Council, Grampian Police, Citizens Advice Bureau and local Housing Associations.

For further details please contact your **local Council Housing Office, Registered Social Landlord, Police Office or Citizens Advice Bureau.**



Arrears Recovery Policy

In May 2005 the Moray Council introduced a new arrears recovery policy. This policy covers tenants who have a Scottish Secure Tenancy, a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy and a garage lock-up lease agreement. This policy also covers former tenant arrears.

The main change that you will notice is that arrears recovery action will be started much sooner. The purpose of this is to ensure that any advice and assistance we can give to tenants is started as soon as they fall into difficulties.

More focus is placed on preventative work and the Council operates a debt advice service through the Trading Standards Team.

We would urge any tenant who is experiencing difficulties in paying their rent to contact their area housing office as soon as possible. A housing officer will be able to offer you a confidential interview to discuss your situation, agree affordable repayments with you and stop any further action (if you keep to your repayment plan).

A copy of this policy is available on the Moray Council's website at www.moray.gov.uk or contact: Gillian Thomson, The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX, or phone 01343 563331.

Draft Customer Feedback Policy

A Customer Feedback Policy is currently being developed to set down the roles and responsibilities of The Moray Council's Housing Service to ensure customer feedback is meaningful, effective and acted upon.

The Council values the contribution that tenants and other customers can make in improving our service delivery and we are continually looking at how this can be done.

You do not have to be a tenant to benefit from this policy – you could be applying for a Council house or used other services provided by the Housing Service. However, if you are interested in getting more information, or would like a copy of the draft policy, please contact: Helen Gauld, Service Development Manager, The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX, or phone 01343 563506.

Estate Management Policy

An Estate Management Policy has also been developed and will be introduced in July 2005. This policy focuses on land and property that is owned by the Housing Service and ensures that the neighbourhood you live in is attractive, well maintained and safe and secure. This is not always easy when there are properties with different landlords/owners in the same area.

The introduction of Estate Caretakers has been essential in ensuring that areas are regularly inspected, that the condition of gardens and estates is monitored and that appropriate staff from other services are involved in implementing this policy.

A copy of this policy is available on the Moray Council's website at www.moray.gov.uk or contact: Gillian Thomson, The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX, or phone 01343 563331.

www.moray.gov.uk

New Website – What do you think?

The Moray Council recently launched its new website. You can access it on www.moray.gov.uk. On the new website you can view all the current housing policies and strategies and contact details for your Area Housing Office.

There is also a page for Tenant Participation that is currently under development. The Council would like to include more information on this page for example, contact details for all the Local Area Forums, when and where your forum meetings are held, links to other national tenant organisations, etc.

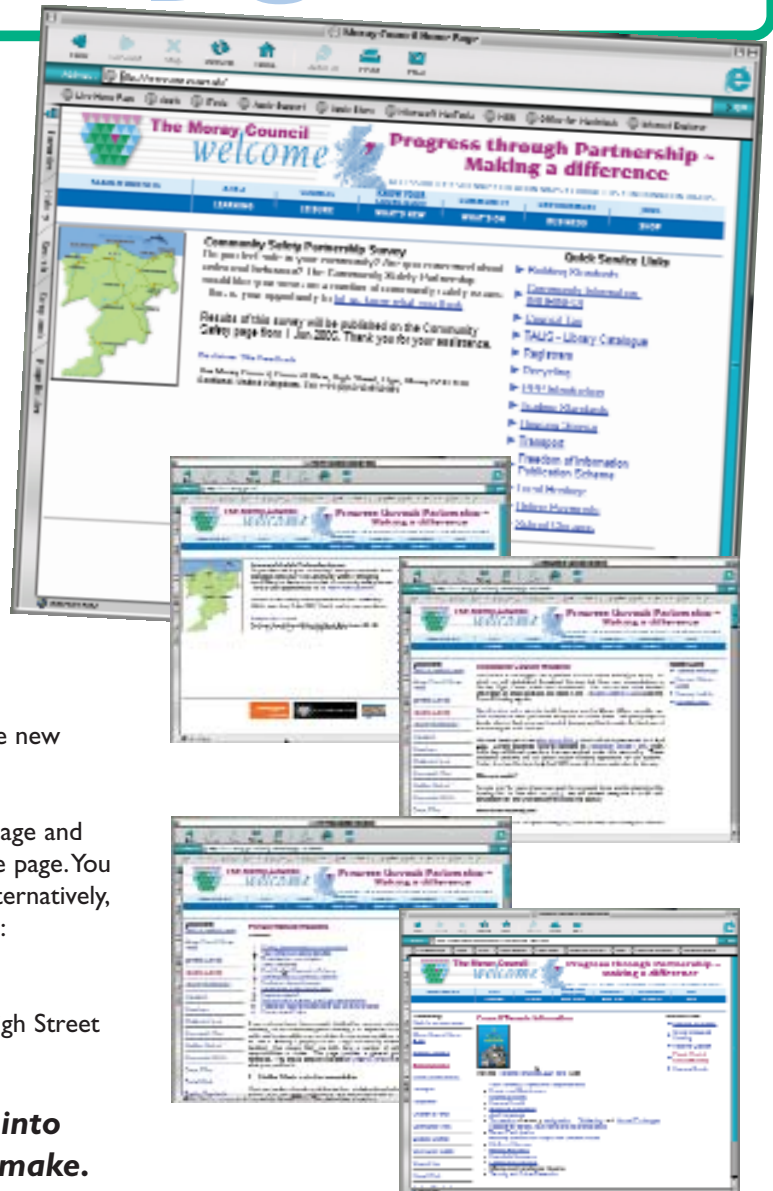
The Council would like to hear what tenants think about the new website.

You can give us feedback online by going to the main homepage and clicking on the link called Site Feedback at the bottom of the page. You can then complete a form online and email it back to us. Alternatively, you can send all your points of views on the new website to:

Fiona Geddes

Community Services, The Moray Council, Council Offices, High Street
Elgin IV30 1BX. Telephone: 01343 563588

We value your opinions and will take into consideration any suggestions that you make.



Grass Cutting Scheme



The Housing Service provides a grass cutting service, which is available to all council tenants over retirement age, and to younger tenants who are medically unfit to cut their grass.

To qualify for this service you must be:

- ▲ aged 65 or over with no physically able adults aged 18- 64 living with you who would be able to help you cut the grass;
- ▲ under 65 and either registered blind or in receipt of any physical or mental health related benefit such as:
 - Disability Living Allowance;
 - Attendance Allowance;
 - Severe Disablement Allowance; or

- ▲ any age and due to 'vulnerability', you would not be capable of cutting the grass. That is, if you need any kind of care or help, because of your physical or mental condition, you may be eligible to get help with your grass cutting.

The Council operates this service between April to October. If you qualify for this service you will get your grass cut 15 times during this period. This service is purely for cutting the grass and will not include any other kind of gardening work for example, picking up grass cuttings or weeding flowerbeds.

If you qualify for this service and receive any amount of Housing Benefit you will not be charged. However, if you do not get Housing Benefit you will have to pay for the service, this is currently £31.05 for the season.

If you feel that you qualify for the grass cutting service and would like more information about it please contact your local Area Housing Office.

Attention!!

Moray Council Tenants & ('Groundforce Gardeners')



Its time again to be preparing your garden or flower pots for this years Moray Council Housing Garden competition.

Time to throw out last years leftover plants that did not survive the winter and plant your best blooms ready to be judged during the last week in July (week beginning 25 July).

Entries can be any shape or size.

This year we are delighted to have judges from Christie Elite in Forres who will be giving their expert advice when deciding who the winners are.

Entry Forms are available from each Area Housing Office.

Don't forget there are lots of Prizes!

BEST KEPT GARDEN COMPETITION 2005 ENTRY FORM

NAME:

ADDRESS:

.....

TEL NO:

GARDEN: FRONT / BACK / BOTH (please delete as appropriate)

Please return this form to your local Area Housing Office.



What do you think?

Having taken into consideration your comments to change the format of the Tenants'Voice we would now welcome your views on it. Please can you take some time to fill in the questionnaire below to tell us what you think about the new format.

Do you like the new size of the Tenants Voice?

Yes No

If no, can you please tell us what would improve the format?

.....

Were you happy with the articles included in this edition of the Tenants Voice?

Yes No

If no, can you tell us what type of information you would like to see in the future?

.....

The Tenants' Voice is published every six months. Do you think it should be:

- More often
- About the same
- Less often

Are you happy with the newsletter being called the Tenants'Voice or would you like to rename it? If you would like it renamed please give us some suggestions.

.....

Name

Address

.....

Phone Number

Please return all completed questionnaires to:

Kate Fulton
Community Services
The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin
IV30 1BX

