

VOICE

The Tenants'

Summer 2006

Gas Safety

Did you know....

- approximately 30 people die each year from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning;
- many others suffer illness due to faulty gas appliances and flues;
- you cannot see, taste or smell CO but it can kill without warning in just a matter of hours;
- you are at greater risk if your appliance has not been checked for safety or maintained regularly.

You should never....

- use an appliance if you think it is not working properly;
- cover an appliance or block the convection air vents;
- block or obstruct fixed ventilation grilles or air bricks;
- block or cover outside flues;
- carry out any DIY on gas appliances;
- sleep in a room that has an 'open' gas appliance in it; or
- smoke or use electrical equipment (including lights and the doorbell) when you think you have a gas leak.

You should always....

- let our CORGI registered engineers in to service your gas appliances at least once a year;
- (if it is safe to do so) shut off the gas supply at the meter if you suspect there is a gas escape and get out immediately opening windows, doors and extinguishing naked flames as you go. You should immediately phone the Gas Emergency Freephone number: 0800 111 999;
- report any faulty gas appliance to us immediately;
- make sure that you have an up-to-date gas safety certificate (known as

a CPI2) within 28 days of your safety check being made; and

- make sure that you advise us of any gas appliances that you want to fit and use a CORGI registered engineer.

By law we have to carry out a yearly safety check on every house where there is a gas appliance. You do not have to pay for this - it is free. If the first appointment we give you is not suitable, we will offer you another one. However, if we have difficulty getting into your property and have to take legal action against you, you may have to pay our costs. This can be approximately £145.

When our engineers carry out the safety check they will check:

- the gas supply pipework;
- that all gas appliances are working safely;
- that all gas flues are working safely and are suitable; and
- that gas appliances have adequate ventilation.

By law, the engineer does not have to check:

- any appliance owned by you;
- flues or chimneys solely connected to an appliance owned by you; and
- any gas appliances that are exclusively used in a part of the premises occupied for non-residential purposes.

If you do not have an up-to-date gas safety certificate (a CPI2) you should contact your local housing office immediately and arrange for a qualified engineer to service your appliances.

You should also contact your local housing office if you have any more questions about gas safety.



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Your local area housing office



BUCKIE

01542 837200

Buckie Area Housing Office,
13 Cluny Square, Buckie, AB56 1AJ.
E-mail: buckieaccess@moray.gov.uk

ELGIN

01343
563429/563433

Elgin Area Housing Office,
Council Office, High Street, Elgin,
IV30 1BX.
E-mail:
housing.reception@moray.gov.uk

FORRES

01309 694000

Forres Area Housing Office,
Auchernack, High Street, Forres,
IV36 1DX.
E-mail: forresaccess@moray.gov.uk

KEITH

01542 885500

Keith Area Housing Office, The
Institute, Mid Street, Keith, AB55 5BJ.
E-mail: keithhousing@moray.gov.uk



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE



Log on to: www.moray.gov.uk

Dear
Tenant,



I hope you find this latest edition of the Tenants' Voice interesting and informative.

The Council approved a rent increase of 3.5% in April 2006. This increase is in line with our Business Plan and will help us to meet the standards set down in the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight an area of particular concern to us at the moment. This is the number of tenants who routinely do not allow our engineers in to service their gas appliances. This provides a greater risk for the safety of the household and their neighbours. I would ask for your co-operation in this matter and hope that you will help us meet our legal requirement to make sure your home is safe and secure.

Another area of concern is the rise in evictions that have taken place over the last financial year. Although eviction remains the last resort for us, we will use this option where it is appropriate to do so.

On a more positive note, I see that tenants are taking a more active role this year in developing the tenants' conference which is due to take place on 5 October 2006. I believe that a number of local businesses have generously donated prizes for a free prize draw at the end of the day. I hope you enjoy the day and look forward to seeing you then.

George

George McIntyre

Vice Chairperson

Community Services Committee

Eviction - the last resort

Over the last 12 months, we have had to evict seven tenants resulting in them and their families losing their homes. Six were evicted for rent arrears and one for antisocial behaviour.

It is never pleasant to see a family lose their home. We only use eviction as a last resort and when we have taken reasonable steps to reduce the need for court action to recover possession of a property. For example, we may apply to evict tenants who will not stop behaving in an antisocial manner against their neighbours or who are in arrears of rent and all other means of recovering the arrears have been exhausted.

Your tenancy agreement sets out both our responsibilities and yours. As part of these, we have a duty to take enforcement action against tenants who breach their tenancy. In most cases, this will be for non-payment of rent or antisocial behaviour against tenants, their visitors or families against their neighbours.

In line with our Rent Arrears Policy and the Neighbour Disputes and Antisocial Behaviour Policy, Area Housing Officers use a preventative approach to manage situations. This includes contacting tenants early in an attempt to agree specific actions and prevent the need for eviction. Where this fails, we will take legal action through the Sheriff Court to get consent to end the tenancy and evict tenants.

We are developing an Evictions Policy, which explains when we will use eviction and the associated activities and responsibilities involved.

For more information on the draft Evictions Policy, please contact:

✉ Helen Gauld
Service Development Manager
Department of Community Services
Council Offices, High Street, Elgin
IV30 1BX

📧 helen.gauld@moray.gov.uk
☎ 01343 563506

Tenant Participation Strategy review

In 2003, The Moray Council published its first Moray Tenant Participation Strategy. An action plan was agreed and a working group set up to make sure the strategy met its objectives. Three tenant representatives agreed to be part of this group.

The time has now come to review the strategy and make any changes that we feel would improve tenant participation in Moray.

We will be trying to gather people's views in a variety of ways including talking to tenants' forums and the Moray Tenants' Core Group.

We have also developed a questionnaire. We would be grateful if you could take a moment to fill it in and send it back.

It is important for all our customers to feel confident that their views are taken on board and that what they tell us influences any decisions that are made.

The results from this questionnaire will be printed in the next edition of the Tenants' Voice.

If you would like to talk to someone about the Tenant Participation Strategy Review, please contact Helen Gauld (contact details are at the end of the questionnaire) or your local area housing officer.

Moray Tenant Participation Strategy 2003 - 2006 - Review Questionnaire

In 2003, the following objectives were agreed:

- Objective 1: To support the growth of existing and new tenant groups in Moray
- Objective 2: To develop and promote the role of tenants in the process of policy formulation, service review, etc
- Objective 3: To enhance and improve the range and detail of information available to tenants and tenant groups across Moray
- Objective 4: To develop training opportunities for Elected Members, staff and tenants across a range of housing activities
- Objective 5: To ensure that tenant participation activities in Moray reflect the principles of equal opportunity and are accessible
- Objective 6: To monitor and review progress in achieving the aim and objectives of the strategy, jointly with tenants

Do you agree that the above objectives are still relevant? Yes/No

If no, please state which ones you feel are not relevant

Would you like any other objectives to be considered? Yes/No

If yes, please state which ones you would like to be considered

Are you a member of tenants' group/forum? Yes/No

If yes, please tell us the name of the group

If you are not a member of a tenants' group/forum, would you like to join? Yes/No

When there are changes to housing policies and service delivery, would you like to become involved in giving your opinion? Yes/No

Are there any ways you can suggest that would improve the opportunities tenants have to give their opinions to us?

Would you like to give any more information about tenant participation in Moray?

Would you like to give us your name and address (this will be necessary if you want to become more involved in tenant participation in the future or you would like us to reply to you)

Name
 Address

 Postcode
 Phone number

Please return to: Helen Gauld, Service Development Manager, The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX. Phone 01343 563506.



Taking care of your estate

Everyone wants to live in a neighbourhood that is safe, clean and attractive. Sometimes, this can be easier said than done. This is where our team of five estate caretakers comes in.

In each area housing office, we now have a full-time estate caretaker working with local staff and residents to make sure that we keep up the appearance and standard of your neighbourhood.

In an attempt to cover all areas, we try twice a year to organise an estate walkabout in your area with local Councillors and tenant representatives. This helps us get valuable feedback on the service we deliver and to see if we have our priorities right.

Late last year we teamed up with housing staff from other Councils and invited them to inspect our service. We were pleased to see that the service we offer was highly rated by tenants and the inspectors. We are now looking at their suggestions to improve the service. These include:

- establishing better links between central and local offices;
- updating our understanding and target the needs of minority ethnic groups; and
- explore new ways of encouraging 'difficult to reach' tenants to become involved in estate management issues.

If you have any views on how we might improve the service in your neighbourhood please contact your estate caretaker at your local area housing office.

A day in the life of an estate caretaker

- Derek Taylor

Each day brings different challenges.

When I set out in a morning I have to be prepared to deal with a variety of issues within each of the areas I cover.

I am responsible for estate caretaker duties within the council estates of Bilbohall, Lossiemouth, Bishopmill and Kingsmills.

Walking my areas (I work to a weekly rota) I have to deal with issues of overgrown gardens – (the season for this is soon to be upon us), abandoned vehicles, removal of graffiti, vandalism, fly tipping etc.

If I see any need for repairs to fencing, paths, garages or communal areas I report them to the area housing officers who arrange to have the work carried out.

I can offer advice on removal of rubbish, dog fouling and minor neighbour disputes. I work closely with the community wardens and I can be seen from

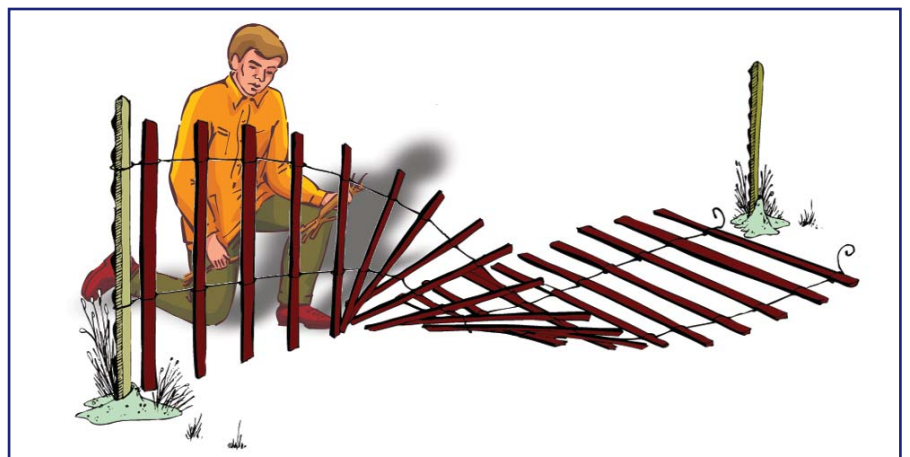
time to time walking the areas with the wardens. This allows us to agree which areas need the most attention.

After spending most of my day walking the estates I return to the Elgin area housing office where I have to record the events of the day onto the computer – nobody is free from paperwork!

This time of day also gives me the opportunity to report back to the area housing officers on any problems that I have come across and get instructions for the next day.

I hope I am seen as an approachable member of the housing service. I am glad to pass any issues that are reported to me while I am out on the ground back to the area housing officers.

Come wind, rain, snow or sun you will see me pounding the streets. If you want to stop me to report any matter or need advice on any of the above I will be glad to hear what you have to say.



Investment strategy

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) defines what is acceptable good quality housing. We have until 2015 to make sure that our stock meets the standard. We submitted a SHQS Standard Delivery Plan to the Scottish Executive which has received favourable feed back.

A local house condition survey in relation to the SHQS was completed in late 2004. The data collected was also combined with other stock condition information held by us to assess all of our stock against the SHQS.

During the financial year 2006/2007, we will spend around £8.4 million on the maintenance and modernisation of our properties through our investment strategy. This will help us to meet the SHQS standard.

Spending on the investment strategy covers five main programmes:

- response and void repairs;
- estate works;
- planned maintenance;
- cyclical maintenance; and
- other investment.

Response repairs and void works are delivered through a partnership agreement with our own Direct Labour Organisation

(DLO). Spending in 2006/2007 is estimated to amount to £1.65m. The main item of expenditure under planned maintenance is the kitchen replacement programme. In 2006/2007, around 350 kitchens will be replaced, at a cost of £1.4m. If we replace your kitchen, we will consult you at all stages of work. We will give you individual layouts for your kitchen along with a choice of units and decoration. This helps us meet our policy of full tenant choice.



Other spending planned for 2006/2007 includes door and window replacements. This is estimated to have a value

around £1.4million, which will allow around 900 properties to be fitted with new front and rear doors, and a start to be made on replacing older style windows. These

improvement works all contribute to our 'warm and dry programme' and make sure that properties are fully double-glazed. We will give you a choice on the style of door fitted, the glazing used, and a colour from our standard colour range.

A number of tenant forums have been set up throughout Moray. Each forum has its own budget under the planned maintenance, estate works category, which is split over the four main housing areas. Each forum has an agreed amount that it can spend on improvements within its local area. The main types of works carried out are:

- replacement fencing;
- increased parking facilities; and

- works of a safety & security nature. For example fitting external security lights to houses in vulnerable locations.

Other works included in the capital budget are heating upgrades, which again contribute to our 'warm and dry' policy and give you a choice of heating systems where appropriate. In order to improve efficiency and reduce your fuel bills, we are replacing older style off-peak electric heating systems with either total control or gas systems, and inefficient coal fired systems with more efficient enclosed room-heaters. We are also considering newer technologies such as heat pumps and solar panels to reduce fuel bills.

The cyclic maintenance budget, is mainly spent on the servicing of the our gas and coal fired heating installations, and regular six-yearly programmes of pre-painterwork repairs and external painterwork to the external fabric of the houses.

Other items of expenditure within the investment strategy include disabled



adaptations to council properties and the provision of finance to allow local housing associations to provide new affordable housing.

All of the above works help meet our obligations under the 'warm and dry' policy, and meet targets set out in the Home Energy Conversation Act 1995 to reduce energy consumption throughout the Moray area by 30% by the year 2006.

WARNING

Child safety message

An 11-year-old boy from Portknockie who was injured while hanging on to a council vehicle during a game of 'dare' had to have his face surgically rebuilt.

Connor Steven was playing with friends and was hanging on to the spare tyre of the stationary vehicle as it pulled away and dragged him under the wheels. He was airlifted to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary where he underwent surgery to rebuild part of his face and to insert a steel plate into his leg.

His mum, Michelle Brown, has warned other youngsters about the dangers of playing near vehicles. She said her son had been lucky to survive and was still shaken by his ordeal. His mother said: "I'd just say don't hang on the back of cars and trucks and watch if you are crossing the road because the next one might not be so lucky. Please just be careful. If Connor had been hit on the chest or the head he wouldn't be here."

Connor also said he did not want other boys and girls to go through a similar ordeal, and urged them not to play near vehicles.

Although incidents of 'dare' games or of youngsters playing near council vehicles are not common, youngsters need to be aware of the dangers.

Please make sure that your children know about the dangers of playing near parked vehicles.

Local Housing Strategy

We are carrying out our second annual update of the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) for submission to Communities Scotland. The update is in two parts. Part one provides information to the public about the actions carried out in the year April 2005 to April 2006. Part two is a revised action plan that takes account of the changing political and social environment and the achievements with the LHS of the previous year.

Significant achievements last year include:

- investment in the Council stock to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS);
- record investment on new affordable housing in Moray primarily in the form of new housing association houses for rent;
- the purchase of Defence Estates Properties in Pinefield (Elgin) for rent and low cost home ownership;
- increased work in the care and repair scheme;
- implementing the homelessness and tenant participation strategies;
- the designation of pressured area status for Elgin, Lossiemouth and the villages round Forres (please see the separate article in this Tenants' Voice); and
- work in the private rented sector including developing private sector leasing and rent deposit schemes.

The update will be finished in July and copies will be available on our website. Or, you can contact

✉ **Iain Terry**
Housing Programmes Manager
The Moray Council, Council Offices, High Street
Elgin. IV30 1BX

📧 iain.terry@moray.gov.uk

☎ 01343 563517



Repairs and maintenance - best value review



We are about to start a best value review of the partnership agreement between the housing service, the Direct Labour Organisation and property services. This agreement details how we deliver all response repairs and planned maintenance works.

Best Value can be defined as the continual improvement of services to make sure that they meet the needs of service user and that they are delivered using the following key principles:

- effectiveness
- efficiency
- sound management and use of resources
- competitiveness
- sustainability
- equality

We must look at our performance and put in place measures that make sure that our services continually improve and meet your needs. We must show that we have applied the four Cs of continual improvement. These are:

- challenging – why the service is delivered and the way it is provided

- comparing – our performance with others, both in the public and private sector
- competing – demonstrating that we have embraced the principles of fair competition in deciding who should deliver the service
- consulting – this is at the centre of any review process. Local service users and residents' views and expectations of the service must be reflected in the outcome of the review.

The objectives of the review are to consider how the services are currently delivered and if it is possible to improve on current practice. As part of this review, we would like to know your views, especially if you have recently had any response repairs or other planned maintenance works such as kitchen replacements carried out to your home. We would like to know what you thought about for example, the standard of works carried out, and any contact with partner sections within the council during the improvement or repair process.

If you want to take part in the best value review, please contact the Capital Programmes Section using the details given below.

✉ Capital Programmes Section
Housing Division
Unit 6, Industrial Estate, Mosstodloch
IV32 7 LH

📞 dlo.planning@moray.gov.uk
01343 823056

How to find out about mutual exchanges

If you are considering a mutual exchange, you may want to look at our website where there are a number of properties available for an exchange. You can do this by going to www.moray.gov.uk. Then click on -

- housing service (on the right hand side of the page);
- council tenants' services;
- mutual exchanges (after succession of tenancy); and
- who can I exchange with?

Or, for a direct link, you can type the following address into your toolbar.

<http://tellus.moray.gov.uk/webapps/mutual/mutualist.asp>.

Here you will find an on-line search facility that lists the properties that you may want to exchange your home for.

If you find a property that you want to consider for a mutual exchange, contact your area housing office.

You can also fill in an application form to put your home on the mutual exchange list. You can do this by going to www.moray.gov.uk. Then click on -

- housing service (on the right hand side of the page);
- council tenants' services;
- mutual exchanges (after succession of tenancy);
- how do I find somebody to swap with? and
- application form.

Or, for a direct link you can type the following address into your toolbar.

<http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file44625.pdf>

Service Standards

We have made a commitment to develop service standards for some of the activities we deliver. We want to get our services right and having clear standards helps both our staff and our customers know exactly what to expect of each other. In housing these standards cover the following:

Allocating houses

We publish our Allocations Policy in full and leaflet format, available on request, or on our website.

We accept at least 70% of applications on to our housing list within 28 days.

We contact applicants each year to make sure that their applications are kept up to date.

We set targets each year on the percentage of allocations to be made to waiting and transfer list applicants. We will publish our performance against these targets in a yearly report on allocations. For 2005/06, the target is 70% allocations to waiting list and 30% to the transfer list.

We set targets each year on relet times in time bands, for example percentage of houses let within 2 weeks. We publish these targets and publish our performance against them. For 2006/07 these are:

0 - 2 weeks	35%
2 - 4 weeks	45%
5 - 8 weeks	15%
9 - 16 weeks	4%
more than 16 weeks	1%

Building Services Direct Labour Organisation (DLO)

We publish performance targets each year for Building Services, Housing and Property Services and we report on performance once a year. We make sure that the Building Services DLO breaks even over a three year rolling period.

Gypsy Travellers

We visit unauthorised camps within 2 working days of being told about the camp.

Homelessness

We publish and are following an effective five yearly homelessness strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness in Moray. We publish a progress report once a year.

We give an interview within one working day for applicants who are homeless and within five working days for applicants threatened with homelessness.

We ask users for their views about the homeless service through satisfaction surveys when they leave the service.

We carry out an assessment of homelessness applications within 28 days. Where we cannot meet this target, we will tell applicants.

We arrange for the provision of independent information and advice through Moray Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). We publicise the availability of this service in letters to and interviews with homelessness applicants.

We give information in decision letters detailing the right to appeal against any of our decisions.

We try to make sure that families spend no more than 14 days in bed and breakfast accommodation.



Private Sector Housing Grants

We aim to spend 100% of the Private Sector Housing Grant awarded to the Council each year. We monitor our performance quarterly. We ask for customer feedback on the service given by the Council or the Care and Repair service. We measure satisfaction on the procedure for applying for a grant and on grant aided works.

Housing Management

We carry out a pre-tenancy interview at the lease sign up in which the rights and responsibilities of the tenancy agreement are clearly explained.

We set rents and service charges for properties in line with the Council's policy on charging for rents and services. We publish a summary of rental income and how it is spent each year when we tell tenants of increases in charges and in the Tenants' Voice newsletter.

We set a target for the level of rent arrears to be achieved each year. We report our performance against this target. For 2006/07, our target is 3.5% of net rent due.

We prioritise neighbour complaints in relation to the seriousness of the complaint. We respond in timescales set for each category as follows.

A	extreme behaviour/assault etc	two working days
B	threats, abuse, serious disturbance	five working days
C	lifestyle disputes	10 working days
D	minor disputes	10 working days

We remove graffiti from housing property within seven working days (within 24 hours where graffiti is offensive).

We remove flytipping from council land within seven working days.

We carry out six monthly estate audits with representatives from Tenant Forums and Elected Members.

Property Management

We set and publish targets each year for carrying out repairs within timescales

emergency	within 2 hours	100% of all repairs
urgent	next working day	98% of all repairs
priority	within 5 working days	96% of all repairs

ordinary	within 20 working days	95% of all repairs
by appointment	on appointment	100% of repairs
empty houses	within 15 working days	95% of repairs

We send a repairs receipt to tenants detailing the repair to be carried out, the contractor and the date by which the repair is to be completed within 24 hours of issuing a repair order to our contractor (for priority, ordinary, by appointment repairs).

We have published our plan to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015 and we publish our progress towards this each year.

We have valid safety certificates for 100% of properties with gas installations.

Strategy and Enabling

We meet the assessment standards published by the Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland for strategies that we produce.

We consult and involve tenants when we develop strategies. This may be through public meetings, consultation letters etc.

We publish a progress report once a year on the achievement of plans set out within strategies.

Tenant Participation

We have published our Tenant Participation Strategy and each year we monitor our progress in achieving the objectives and actions detailed within the strategy. We involve tenants in producing and updating our strategy, through tenant participation in working groups, and meetings with Tenant Forums and the Core Group.

We give grants to Registered Tenant Organisations once a year.

We give a minimum of 10 training opportunities to Tenant Forums each year.

We carry out a tenants' satisfaction survey on a three yearly basis.

We welcome your suggestions about how standards can be improved and whether we should introduce new standards. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact:

✉ Gillian Henly
Policy Officer
Department of Community Services
Council Offices, The Moray Council
High Street, Elgin. IV30 1BX
gillian.henly@moray.gov.uk
☎ 01343 563331

Moray tenants' conference 2006

The third annual Moray tenants' conference will take place on Thursday 5 October 2006 between 9.30 am and 2.30 pm in Elgin Town Hall. The theme this year is 'talking tenants'.

A full programme is planned and will include guest speakers, workshop sessions and an open panel. A wide variety of exhibitors will also be on hand with display stands and information for tenants.

The organising committee, made up of five tenants and a member of the Council's housing service, used information from last year's conference to plan this year's event. The organisers will also arrange transport to the venue for those who need it and childcare can also be arranged. The cost for these will be refunded on production of valid receipts. A buffet lunch will be provided and the day will end with a free prize draw, the tickets for which will be distributed earlier in the day. If you would like to attend the Moray Tenants' conference, please fill in and return the form below.

Anyone wanting more information about this year's conference is welcome to contact me direct, or any member of their local forum, and we will do our best to help.

Steven Christie (tenant)

01343 540524

stevenchristie672@btinternet.com



The Scottish Executive announces pressured area status for Moray.

We are now the fourth local authority to obtain 'pressured area status' to help keep our stock of affordable housing in areas where demand is greatest.

The announcement that Moray had been successful, was made by Communities Minister Malcolm Chisholm at the Chartered Institute for Housing Conference in March this year.

From 7 March 2006, you will have your right to buy temporarily suspended for 5 years, if you became a tenant on or after 30 September 2002 and if you live in the following areas:

- Elgin
- Lossiemouth
- Forres Rural (Brodie, Dyke, Burghead, Dallas, Rafford, Findhorn, Hopeman, Duffus, Kinloss and Kellas)

If you live in one of these areas, you will have had a letter giving you more details of how it may affect you.

If you want more information, contact your local area housing office.



The Moray Council's Tenants' Conference 5 October 2006 9.30 am - 2.30 pm - Elgin Town Hall, Elgin

name

address

.....

postcode:.....

phone number.....

number of people attending

do you have any special dietary needs e.g.

vegetarian yes no

If yes, please tell us what

.....

do you require help to get to and from the conference yes no

If yes, please tell us how we can help

.....

please return this form to
Your local area housing office

or

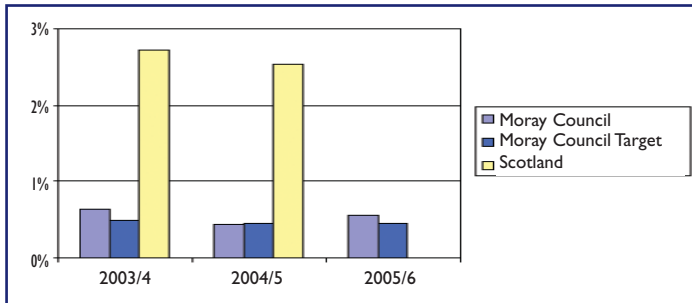
Helen Gauld,
Service Development Manager,
The Moray Council, High Street,
Elgin, IV30 1BX



Housing Performance 2005/2006

Reletting Empty Properties

During 2005/6 rent lost due to empty properties was 0.56% (£64,980) of all rents. Moray Council continues to perform well in comparison with other Councils. Minimising rent lost in this way means the maximum amount of money is available for maintenance and improvements to our housing stock. The target for 2006/7 is 0.45%

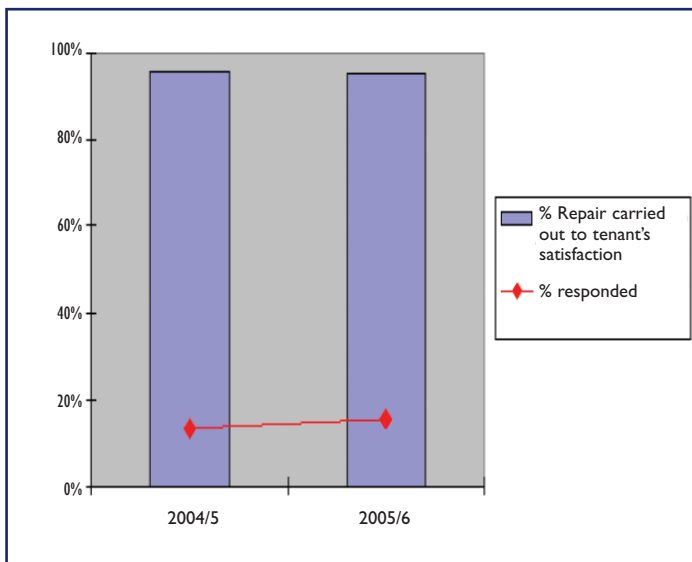


Scotland figures not yet available for 2005/6

Source: Audit Scotland Performance Report 2004/5, and Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2005/6

Repairs Questionnaires

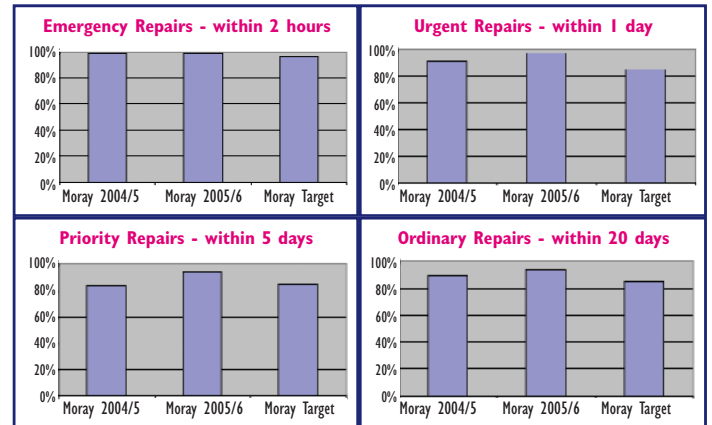
Even though we provide an efficient repairs service, we still want to improve. If you have had a repair done to your property you may have received a follow-up questionnaire. The results of the questionnaires we got back during 2005/6 are below, 95.2% of tenants were satisfied with the service they received. However only 15% were returned so, if you receive one, please do return it as we want to hear your comments, good or bad.



Source: Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2005/6

Repairs

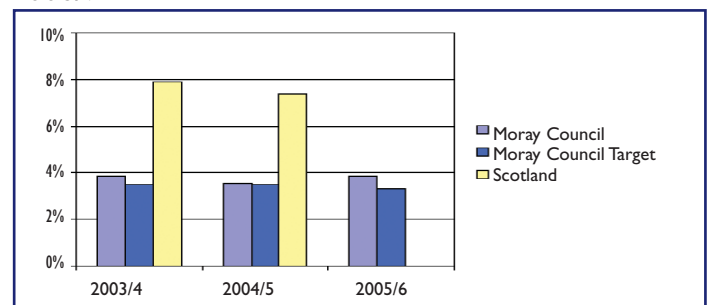
Moray Council continues to improve its performance on repairs year on year and we have exceeded our own targets.



Source: Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2005/6

Rent Arrears

Tenants' rent arrears on house and garage rents in 2005/6 were 3.85% of all rents up from 3.52% in 2004/5. Six tenants were evicted during the year for rent arrears. A target of 3.5% has been set for 2006/7

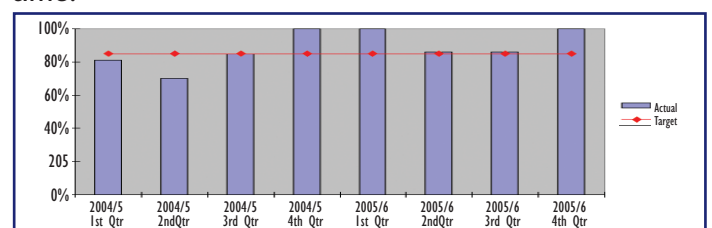


Scotland figures not yet available for 2005/6

Source: Audit Scotland Performance Report 2004/5, and Moray Council Housing Service Performance Indicators 2005/6

Formal Complaints

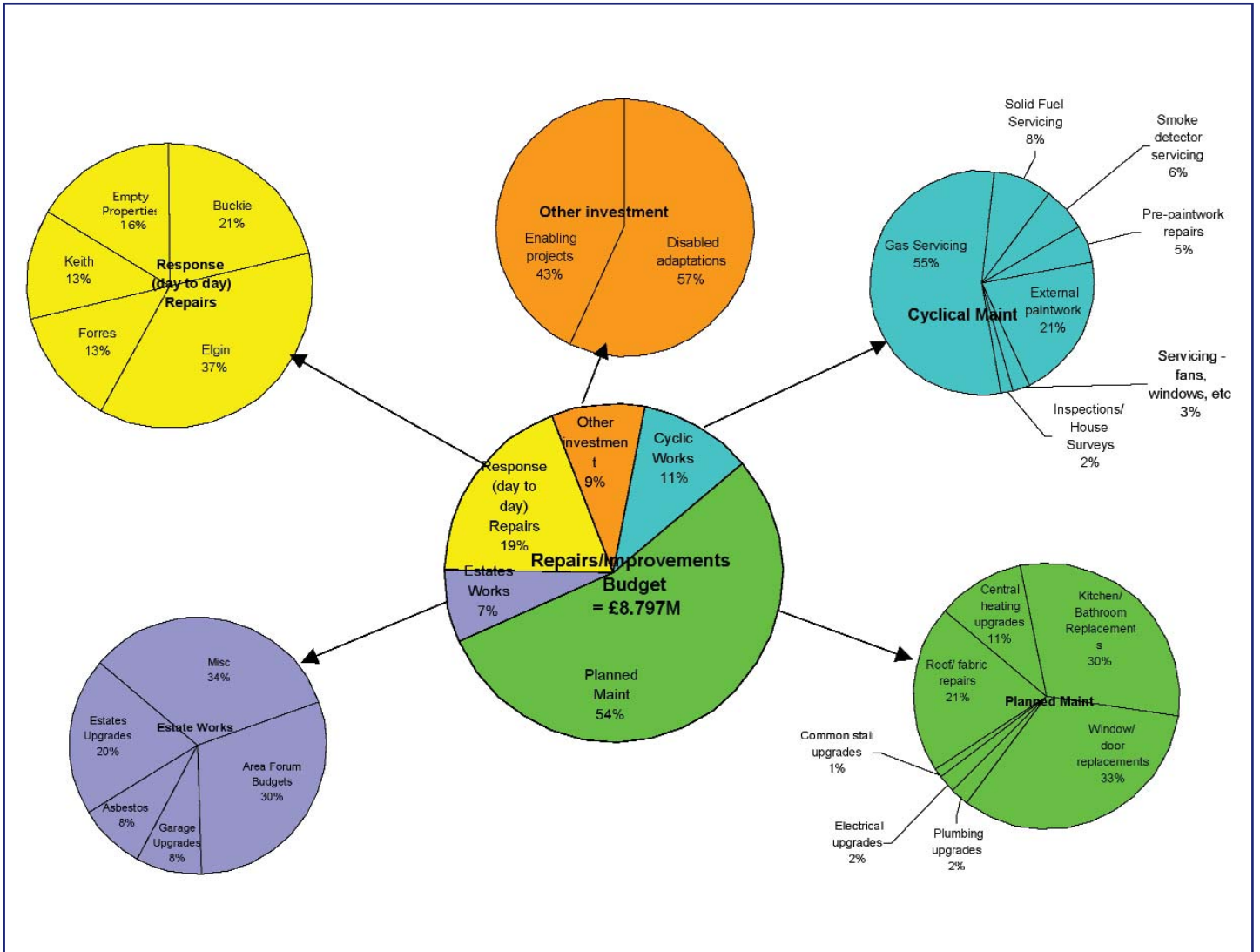
Moray Council has a Formal Complaints Procedure and we aim to provide a reply to complaints within 20 working days. As shown below, we have continued to improve our response rates during 2005/6. 91.3% of complaints received their reply on time.



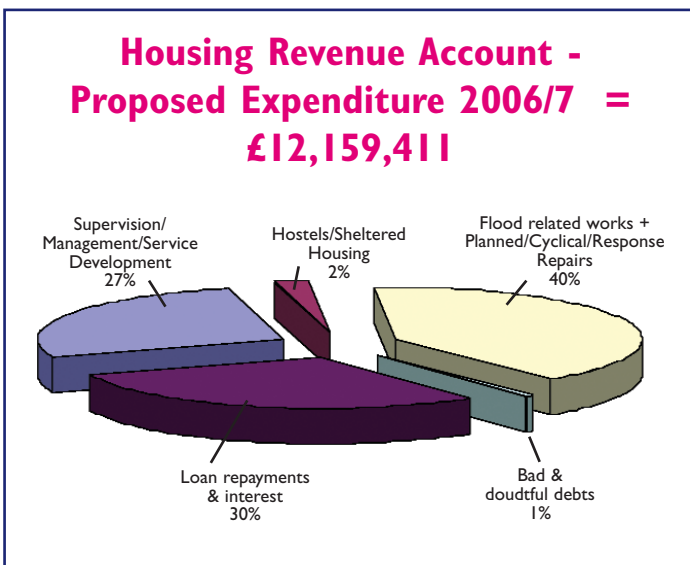
Housing Budget

2006/2007

How your money is spent



Income to the Council for housing services comes mostly from rents. Moray's average rent (£35.49) is again the lowest in Scotland (Scottish average £44.78) and increased by 3.5% 2006/07. The average rent increase in Scotland was 4.2%.



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 housing stock

Bad & Doubtful Debts

= Debts to be written off

Come on green fingers – it's garden competition time

Now 'spring has sprung' our thoughts turn to gardening. Looking around Moray, there are many talented Moray Council tenants who take great pride in putting much effort into developing some great displays. Whether your garden is large or postage stamp size – be it window boxes, tubs or whatever – please consider entering the annual competition. Or, why not talk to a Council tenant neighbour who may be reluctant to enter, but could be talked round!

Last year representatives from Christies in Forres judged the competition. Certificates and vouchers are awarded for first, second and third places in each of the four Moray housing areas.

Some tenants have had considerable success, including Brian Ritchie of the Fleurs area of Forres, who has now won the Forres competition on three out of four occasions. A great achievement!

If you would like to enter, fill in and return the form to your local area housing office by Friday 21 July 2006.

Judging will take place on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 July 2006. The judges this year will be from Christies Garden Centre in Fochabers.

Good luck!



Best kept garden competition 2006



name

address

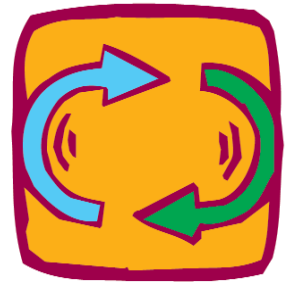
postcode:.....

phone number.....

garden front
 back
 both
 (please tick)

Please return this form to your local area housing office

Transfer of tenancy



If you are a tenant and would like to transfer to another property, you will need to fill in a housing application form. You can write, phone, e-mail or call in at your local area housing office for an application form. Or, you can download a form from our website at www.moray.gov.uk.

What happens next?

When we get your application, we will arrange to inspect your house to make sure it is suitable to be relet. This inspection will let us identify any repairs that are our responsibility and any that are yours. If your home meets with our relet standard, your application will be placed on the housing list.

If you are shortlisted for an offer of a house, we will carry out a more in-depth inspection of your home.

This inspection will let us:

- agree the condition that you must leave your house in;
- identify any repairs that are our responsibility and any which are yours;
- identify if you made improvements or alterations to the house that we approved; and
- discuss any concerns that you may have.

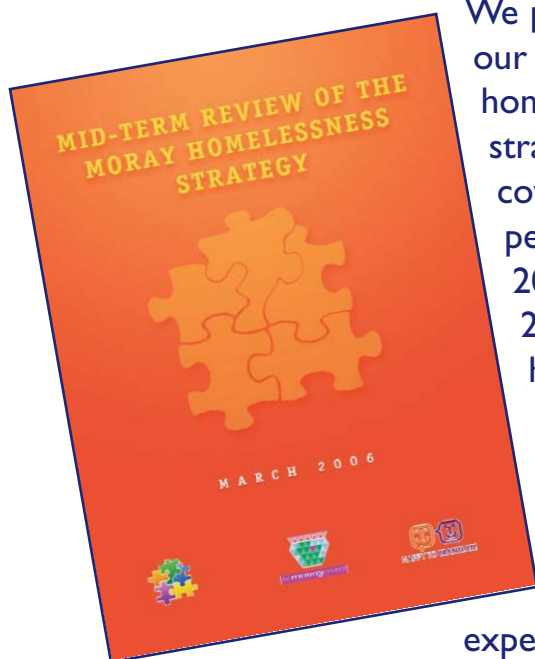
You must let us inspect your home. If you do not we may withdraw your application and suspend you from the housing list.

What happens if my house does not meet with your relet standard?

You will be given the chance to carry out work necessary to meet with our standard. If you do not or if the work does not meet with our standard, we will carry out the work needed, and will charge you for the cost involved. Under your tenancy agreement you will be responsible for paying this. Any outstanding debt you leave may affect any future housing application you make.

If you want more information please contact your local area housing office.

Mid term review of the homeless strategy



We published our homelessness strategy in 2003 covering the period up to 2008. Since 2003 there have been changes to the ways that local authorities are

expected to deal with people who find themselves to be homeless.

More changes to homeless legislation are expected. These include:

- the distinction between priority and non priority need is to be abolished by 2012; and
- all households found to be unintentionally homeless will be entitled to permanent accommodation with appropriate support by 2012.

In a Ministerial Statement in December 2005 which reported on the progress local authorities have made in meeting the 2012 target, the Scottish Executive set an interim objective that non priority homeless assessments were to be reduced by 50% by March 31 2009.

In November 2005 we started a review of the homelessness strategy which considered;

- an analysis of homeless applications;
- an evaluation of the strategic actions undertaken and completed;

- the impact of other partner agencies like the NHS and voluntary organisations;
- how the 2012 target can be achieved; and
- to identify any other gaps that need to be addressed.

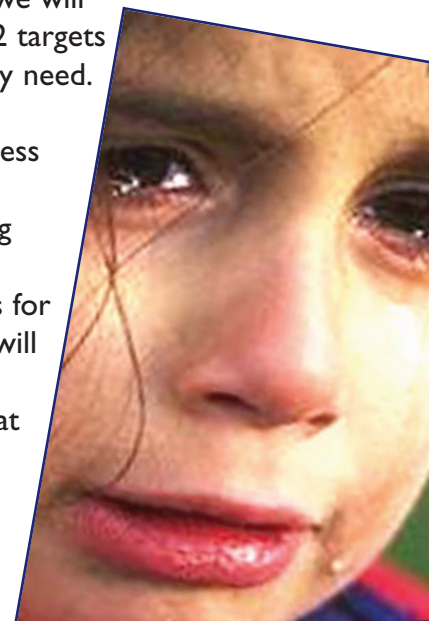
When looking at these areas the review also considered; the availability of housing support services, customer feedback from people who had used homelessness services, and the views of partner agencies.

We completed the review at the end of March 2006 and a report on the outcome of the review has recently been published. The recommendations from the report include:

- improved partnership working with a greater involvement by NHS and Community Care services in assisting homeless people;
- that the Homelessness Strategy is reflected in Community Planning;
- more investigations of the reason behind 'not homeless' assessments, applicants who lose contact with services, and why people submit repeat applications;
- improve links with the private rented sector, maximize lets available for homeless people from registered social landlord;
- increase the supply of housing for single people and single parents; and
- increase the number of temporary accommodation units including direct access options; and increase the availability of housing support services for vulnerable people.

Along with our partners in the Homeless Strategy, we are considering the recommendations from the report. We have to consider how the recommendations will influence a revised action plan for the strategy and how we will achieve the 2009 and 2012 targets for the abolition of priority need.

The changes to the homeless legislation and the recommendations resulting from the mid term review mean significant challenges for us. We and our partners will have to consider carefully how we can make sure that these targets can be implemented.



Community wardens

Community wardens have been patrolling communities in Moray since in June 2004. The wardens provide an important link between communities and agencies, particularly the Moray Council and Grampian Police.

The warden's role has developed greatly over the past two years. The introduction of community wardens is intended to:

- reduce crime and the fear of crime;
- reduce vandalism and antisocial behaviour;
- improve the environmental quality; and
- assist in building community pride.

There are five full-time wardens in Moray allocated to the communities of

- Elgin
- Buckie/Keith
- Lossiemouth/Hopeman / Burghead
- Fochabers/Lhanbryde / Upper Speyside
- Forres

There are two part-time wardens who work mainly on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Wardens play an important role in the fight against antisocial behaviour and in an attempt to make our communities strong, safe and attractive places to live and work. Wardens act as the 'eyes and ears' of the community and as a liaison between residents and relevant agencies. Their main role is to build relationships and to work in partnership with their communities to tackle identified problems. Without the support of the communities, wardens would not be able to carry

out their duties effectively and efficiently.

The Antisocial Behaviour Partnership has given money to local neighbourhood forums. Wardens will have to access to these funds when they are needed for local initiatives to tackle antisocial behaviour.

In Moray, litter and dog fouling are continually identified as a major concern. To help tackle this wardens have been trained and are authorised to issue fixed penalties for these offences.

Communities have been very supportive of wardens using these powers and fixed penalties have been issued for offences. Wardens are also trained in both restorative justice and mediation and these are used regularly in the course of their duties.

Community wardens play a crucial role in the solving of neighbour disputes. They investigate all owner-occupier complaints. They work closely with the Council's Housing Service and Registered Social Landlords. For example, they carry out joint visits to help achieve successful outcomes at an early stage in disputes.

If you want more information on community wardens please log on to the Moray Council website at www.moray.gov.uk



Andy Jamieson

Corporate Policy Unit

The Moray Council, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, Moray. IV30 1BX



andy.jamieson@moray.gov.uk



01343 563322

Forum news

Bilbohall Estate Forum

Since the last issue of the Tenants' Voice, our Forum has held its annual general meeting (AGM). The evening was well attended. Our thanks go to our guest speaker, Chris Beard, Cllr Burns and all council staff and tenants who attended and not forgetting Mr Frankie Barton who allowed us to use Cedarwood for our venue this year. All our office bearers were re-elected and thanks to you all for your votes.

Our fencing contract is nearly finished with work currently being done on the pensioner's bungalows which will make a difference to that area of the estate.

We have various items included on our 'wish list' for the future including moss

removal, cleaning of guttering, public path upgrades, kitchens and the levelling of parking bays. If any tenant has any ideas to help improve either the housing or environmental standard of the estate please let us know. Despite the placement of anti dog-fouling plaques, we are still receiving several complaints, which are being addressed.

On our last committee walk-about we noticed that several tenants had beautiful gardens and we would like to encourage these green fingered people to enter the annual Moray Council gardening competition. You will find more information in the gardening competition article.

The Forum meetings are held on the

first Wednesday of each month in the Seaforth Club, Elgin. All tenants are welcome and transport is provided. Additionally child/adult care fees will be paid where required.

For more information please contact



Moira Sutherland

Secretary

35 Brinuth Place

New Elgin

Elgin



01343 547490



Steven Christie

Chairman

45 Mossend Place

New Elgin, Elgin



01343 540524

Forum news continued....

Elgin Central tenants' forum

The efforts of the members of Elgin Central tenants' forum have resulted in a number of improvements to the area it serves. A number of fencing projects have been arranged and funded by the forum which benefit all residents of the area. Other improvements include:

- goal posts at South Lesmurdie play park;
- landscaped common ground at Pitgaveny Court; and
- tarring of pathways and repairs to masonry work at Kingsmills and Pluscarden Road.

Elgin Central Forum decided to suspend their activities for a short period to try and encourage other tenants to get involved.

The Elgin Central tenants forum hope that they can continue to play a positive role in the improvement of the local area. If you want to get involved or want more information please contact:

✉ eddie.calder@moray.gov.uk
 ☎ 01343 563419 or
 ✉ liz.thomson@moray.gov.uk
 ☎ 01343 563381

Or contact the Elgin Area Housing Office.

Forres Area tenants' forum

The Forres Area tenants' forum, in conjunction with The Moray Council, are pleased to announce, after months of hard work and consultation, the completion of the Califer Road Play Park.



The idea to upgrade the playing area came to light back in the autumn of 2005. Since then every resident in the Pilmuir area received a hand-delivered letter inviting them along to an open evening at the local primary school, where they could view the three proposed designs and vote on which one they preferred. The children at the

local primary school were also given the chance to vote on their favourite design as well. A painting competition was run at the school and the children were asked to design a play area of their choice. The overall winner from the three professional companies was Jupiter Play. The forum would like to thank Archie Hockney (Estate Caretaker, at the time) and Margaret Cowie (Community Warden) for all their help in completing this project.

The forum still continues to have representation at the Moray Tenants' Core Group and three working groups within the Council, as well as attending three Scottish Executive groups (Tenants Regulation Advisory Group, The Collaborative Rent Setting Group, and The National Tenants Group).

All Moray Council tenants are welcome to attend the forum meetings, where housing and environmental issues are discussed, so if you live within the Forres housing area then why not come along and see for yourself the improvements we are trying to make.

Please remember that tenants do have a say on how the Council deliver their services.

For more information, please contact **Heather Anderson**, Secretary
 ☎ (01309) 671154 or
 Forres Area Housing Office
 ☎ (01309) 694000

Lossiemouth tenants' forum

Cath McGowan has left Lossiemouth to take up the post of Senior Housing Officer in the Elgin housing area office. Her replacement is Amanda Gregory who has been the housing officer for Bishopmill for the past four years. We wish Cath well in her new post and welcome Amanda to Lossiemouth and hope she has a pleasant stay with us.

The Lossiemouth fencing programme for 2005/2006 has is now finished and the 2006/2007 programme will start shortly. The properties included in this year's fencing programme are:

- Kellas avenue;
- Hillview Place;
- Castle Court; and
- MacDonald Drive, where the programme will be phased over several years.

Work on upgrading the town hall is starting shortly so the meeting place of the Tenants Forum may be changed temporarily. The meetings will still take place on the second Tuesday of the month and will be announced in the Town and Country section of the Northern Scot the previous Friday.

For more information contact **Charles French** on
 ☎ 07909 752023

Or, you can contact the area housing officer or the housing office.

Spey Coast Forum

Once again the Spey Coast Forum has been busy over the past year and has overseen various environmental projects, including:

- various fencing projects within Linn Crescent, Harbour Street, Robert Street, William Street, Berryhillock near Cullen, and Raffan Road; and
- garage site drainage and site resurfacing.

This coming year will see the start of various projects:

- various fencing projects within McIntosh Avenue, The Bow, Lady Road, and Dunbar Street;
- other projects are waiting confirmation subject to costing; and
- replacement of doors within Milton Drive.

Sandy, who is our Estate Caretaker, has been invaluable to the area by keeping it tidy and ensuring that rubbish, old furniture, and abandoned cars are regularly removed. Sandy is helpful and approachable, which has earned him the respect of many tenants.

The Forum meets on the last Thursday of the month in Buckie High School, and starts at 7:30 p.m. The meeting is normally attended by various Councillors, Council Officials, Housing Projects Officer, Estate Caretaker, Community Beat Officers, Community Wardens, and invited guests.

For more information on the Forum, please contact

Barbara Davidson,
 Chairperson
 ☎ (01542) 831242 or
David Harrison,
 Secretary
 ☎ 07786 793915