

# VOICE

## The Tenants'

Summer 2008

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## Inspection of the Council's housing services

### Does the Council provide quality housing services?

The Scottish Housing Regulator is a government body which examines the housing services provided by councils and registered social landlords. To do this, it carries out inspections. This involves a team of inspectors visiting landlords. During this visit, the inspectors examine how the landlord provides housing management and asset management services. The inspectors also examine councils' homelessness services. Following the inspection, a report is published. This report indicates whether the services

provided are poor, fair, good or excellent and whether the services are being managed to achieve improvement. The Inspection Team will speak to tenants and other customers, as well as viewing first-hand how Council staff work.

The Moray Council expects to welcome an inspection team from the Scottish Housing Regulator to Moray in September 2008. Further information on the inspection will be included in the December edition of Tenants' Voice. The Inspection Report will be published by the Scottish Housing Regulator and will also be available on the Council's website.

## New Letting Standard and changes to decoration vouchers

In February 2007 we began sending questionnaires to new tenants asking for their views on their new home. You may remember receiving one. The results of the survey showed that some tenants were unhappy with the cleanliness and decoration of their new home.

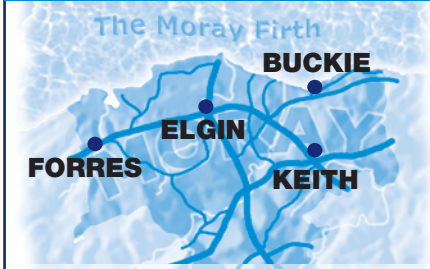
At the end of 2007 we started to review the way we prepare empty properties before they are relet.

As a result we have developed a Letting Standard. The Standard sets out the levels of safety, cleanliness and decoration that any new tenant can expect. All empty properties must meet the Standard before it is relet. Housing applicants will receive a copy

of the Letting Standard with their offer of housing letter. You can get a copy of the Letting Standard from your Area Housing Office or read it on our website at [www.moray.gov.uk](http://www.moray.gov.uk).

We have also reviewed our Decoration Allowance Policy and we have increased the amounts of the Decoration Vouchers that are offered to tenants and prospective tenants. You can get a copy of the new Policy from your Area Housing Office or read it on our website at [www.moray.gov.uk](http://www.moray.gov.uk). The Decoration Vouchers are not intended to meet the full cost but we wanted to offer realistic amounts which would allow tenants to pay for basic decoration of their own choice.

### Your local area housing office



#### BUCKIE

01542 837200

Buckie Area Housing Office,  
13 Cluny Square, Buckie, AB56 1AJ.  
E-mail: [buckieaccess@moray.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:housing.reception@moray.gov.uk)

#### FORRES

01309 694000

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

E-mail: [forresaccess@moray.gov.uk](mailto:forresaccess@moray.gov.uk)

#### KEITH

01542 885500

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



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

emergency out of hours: 08457 56 56 56

## Introduction,



Welcome to the summer edition of Tenants' Voice. As I write, work has already started on the preparations for this year's Tenants' Conference in September. This has become a major annual event in all our calendars. I enjoyed last year's conference immensely and I'm sure this year's will be even better. This is due in no small part to the hard work of the tenants who organise it and my thanks go to them. I look forward to seeing you there.

I am pleased to see that our Tenants Core Group has been given a grant from the Scottish Government to launch a website for each of our tenant forums. This adds a whole new dimension to the activities of our forums and I hope you will visit the sites to find out what is going on in your area.

I am also pleased that three of our tenants have become members of the Northern Lights regional tenants' network, the inaugural meeting of which was held in Aberdeen in April. I have been particularly impressed by the work of the tenants' representatives on our Housing Sub-Committee. This has been an exciting way of involving tenants in the important decisions about their homes. Through our Tenant Participation Strategy, which we reviewed in March, we will continue to work together with our tenants to improve our housing service.

The Council is always looking at ways to improve our service to our tenants. We recently improved our Letting Standard for empty properties and increased our Decoration Allowances. We also introduced a new rent payment card which provides tenants with easy ways to pay their rent at a large number of PayPoint outlets in their areas. As you will be aware, we have kept the annual rent increase to inflation plus 1%. This means that once again Moray has the lowest council house rents in Scotland. At the same time we are continuing to improve the quality of our housing, spending almost 50% of our annual budget on improvements and repairs.

I hope you find this edition of Tenants' Voice both enjoyable and informative.

**Councillor Eric McGillivray**

## A Day in the Life of the Estate Caretaker

Most days I am at the office at about 8:30am, and I spend some time catching up on paperwork, replying to emails and telephone messages. But it isn't long before I am out of the office and onto the housing estates, spending time at different areas throughout the day. I cover two different housing areas at the moment, and spend four half-days in each area, visiting different parts of the estates each time.

The only way to cover the estates effectively is to spend all day walking about them - no matter what the weather conditions! That's not so bad when it's sunny, but spare a thought for us when it's a howling gale, freezing cold and blowing rain in our faces! When walking, I keep an eye open for broken windows, broken tiles, damaged fences and gates - in fact pretty much anything that has been broken - and will arrange for it to be repaired.

An important part of estate management is trying to ensure that the estate looks as good as possible. This involves looking out for vehicles that are abandoned or in an unroadworthy condition, identifying areas of the estate that could do with maintenance (getting gutters painted, for example), and reporting flytipping. If I come across graffiti, I will try to remove it, and if this isn't possible, will arrange for it to be cleaned off. If I see a plank knocked off a fence I will try to repair it there and then.

When walking the estates, I notice when gardens have not been maintained as they should have been. It is my responsibility to speak to tenants to find out the reasons for this, and to persuade people to maintain their gardens if there is no good reason for them not doing so. Peoples' circumstances change, and I understand that. However, regardless of their circumstances, it is up to tenants to make sure their gardens are taken care of, even if this means they have to get a gardener in now and again.

Many of the tenants in the areas I cover live in flats, and the common areas of every block of flats is inspected every week to ensure that the areas are kept clean, tidy and safe.

If the common areas are not acceptable, I then talk to the occupants of flats to explain why the areas should be kept to the correct standard, and persuade them to do their bit. I always try to talk to tenants first if there is a problem, and always try to work with tenants to achieve a satisfactory result. Not everyone likes what I have to say, and I don't always get a polite response, but that's the way it goes sometimes.

I am normally back in the office by four o'clock, which is the time that I pick up messages, request the works that I have not been able to carry out myself and catch up on other paperwork. This is also when I arrange letters to be typed that need sending out to tenants who have not managed to

look after their gardens or common areas. Where needed I also refer matters to the Area Housing Officers for advice or just to discuss what I found on the estate that day.

So, that's what estate caretaking is about. It has many aspects that go largely unnoticed by the public, but we do our best to make the estates a more attractive and safer place to live. Having said that, most tenants still see me as "the man who goes about telling folk to cut their grass!" As you can tell, we do a lot more than that, and look forward to saying hello sometime when we are out and about.

**Simon Forder** - Estate Co-ordinator - Elgin

## Taking care of your Estate



**Jake Mitchell** -  
Unauthorised  
Encampments  
Officer - Estate  
Caretaker - Elgin



**Jeff Tall** -  
Estate Caretaker -  
Elgin



**Lawrie King** -  
Estate Caretaker -  
Keith



**Sandy  
MacKenzie** -  
Estate Caretaker -  
Buckie



**Simon Forder** -  
Estate Co-ordinator  
- Elgin



**Rennie Evans** -  
Estate Caretaker -  
Forres

Everyone wants to live in a neighbourhood that is safe, clean and attractive. Sometimes, however, this can be easier said than done. That's where the Council's team of five Estate Caretakers comes in.

In each Area Housing Team, we now have full time Estate Caretakers working with local staff and residents to make sure that we keep up the appearance and standard of your neighbourhood.

We are able to do this mainly by working with local residents and communities and by ensuring that we respond quickly to those things that might otherwise bring the appearance down.

These matters range from removing graffiti, abandoned cars and litter. Also dealing with untidy gardens, communal repairs and inspecting close cleaning.

As part of their job, Estate Caretakers work with others such as Area Housing Officers, Community Wardens and the Police to ensure that issues such as vandalism don't become a bigger problem and are tackled early.

To ensure that we cover all areas, we try at least once a year to organise an estate walkabout in your area with local Council and tenant representatives. This helps us get valuable feedback on the service we deliver and to see if we have got our priorities right.

If you have any views on how we might improve the service in your neighbourhood please let your Estate Caretaker know by contacting your local Area Housing Office.









# Estate Management Services

Everyone wants to live in a home and an environment that they can feel safe in and be proud of. That's where the Council's Estate Management Service comes in.

Through our Estate Management Policy and Procedures we deliver a range of services to tenants and owners to ensure we maintain local neighbourhoods to a high standard.

These services include, caretaking, close cleaning, common area and grounds maintenance, removal of litter, abandoned cars and furniture and the management of garages and lock ups. As featured in this edition of Tenants' Voice, each Area Housing Office has an Estate Caretaker who regularly visits estates to make sure standards are maintained.

It is our policy to deal with the following issues:

- Caretaking – regular inspections of common areas, stairs and gardens. Targeting specific areas for further action if necessary.
- Common Areas – ensuring tenants and owners meet their obligations for close cleaning, putting out bins, removing litter and avoiding dog fouling.
- Refuse disposal and litter – providing good facilities for refuse disposal and recycling and making sure that these areas are used appropriately and kept clean.

- Gardens – visiting tenants where gardens are untidy and agreeing specific timescales for improvement, with support if appropriate.
- Visual Appearance - maintaining grassed areas and seasonal shrubbery. Processing the removal of abandoned cars.
- Car Parking – ensuring that car-parking spaces are used appropriately and that tenants fulfil the terms of their lease of any lock up or garage.
- Graffiti - removal of graffiti, with particular urgency where graffiti is offensive.
- Fly-tipping – removal of fly-tipping and other rubbish from council land.
- Estate Audits – 6-monthly estate audits carried out by Housing Officers and Estate Caretakers with Elected Members and representatives from Tenant Forums.

We have also drawn up procedures to ensure that we do the things we say we will do. We are doing more work this year to improve our effectiveness and improve the service we offer you.

*We welcome any comments you have to make on this.*

## Housing Surgeries

### Dufftown

Dufftown Office, 26 Balvenie Street, Dufftown  
**Thursday 10:30am – 12noon**

### Aberlour

Aberlour Library, High Street, Aberlour  
**Thursday 3pm – 4pm**

### Lossiemouth

Lossiemouth Town Hall, High Street, Lossiemouth  
**Tuesday 2pm – 4pm**

### Roths

Roths Housing Surgery, Grant Hall, New Street, Roth's

**Wednesday 10am – 12noon**

### Lhanbryde

Lhanbryde Housing Surgery, Ian Baxter Community Room, Lhanbryde Village Hall, Robertson Road, Lhanbryde

**Wednesday 1pm – 3pm**

## The end of the traditional Garden Competition

For many years the Council has been running a garden competition for tenants. Prizes were awarded for 1st, 2nd and 3rd in each of the four housing area office areas. In addition there was an award for the best garden East and the best garden West and 7 town shields for Elgin, Forres, Buckie, Keith, Lossiemouth, Cullen, and Lhanbryde. This made a total of 21 available awards.

The competition was advertised in Tenants' Voice every year. However, interest has decreased year by year. Last year we only had 16 entries which left us with prizes we couldn't award.

The reason for the lack of interest is not known. It may partly be because many villages and towns enter Best Kept Village or Town competitions which gives more of a community focus than something that is restricted only to council houses. It is clear that many tenants with very nice gardens do not enter the competition.

Organising the competition takes up a significant amount of time for staff. The future of the competition was discussed at the Tenant Participation Working Group, and then with housing managers and the Tenants' Core Group. There was a consensus that the lack of entries devalued the competition, particularly as last year we had more prizes than entrants. Given the resources needed to organise this competition it was agreed to recommend to Housing Sub Committee that the competition be stopped.

The Council decided at Housing Sub Committee on 19 March 2008 that the Council would no longer run an annual garden competition for tenants.

Bilbohall Tenants' Forum organised their own garden competition last year and intend doing so again this year. The Housing Service will support any tenants groups that choose to organise their own competition.



## Tenants on the Web

The Moray Tenants Core group received a grant from the Scottish Government to design and launch a website for each of the Tenants' Forums in Moray.

CSS Web Design was engaged to design the websites for the Core Group and Tenant Forums. This work has now been ongoing for several weeks and will be completed in the near future.



Each area will have its own website which tenants can access to see what is happening in their area and what their local Tenant Forum is doing. All the websites are interconnected so anyone going into a website can visit all the websites and see what is being done in each of the areas. Each website will carry a local newsletter and the minutes of the meetings of the committee of the area's Tenant Forum as well as information about the area and the forum. There will also be a page on which consultations are taking place with the Council and the Scottish Government. There will also be a page called 'Notes' which will allow the committee to update tenants on a daily basis if necessary. There is a provision on each site for tenants to email queries or questions to the forum committee.

One site is called 'Armchair Tenants'. Armchair Tenants are tenants who do not want to belong to a forum or a formal committee but who would like to be consulted by the Council on matters, which concern them as tenants. If you want to be consulted in this way please contact Steven Christie on 01343 540524.

The addresses for each site are:

WWW.

- [Moraytenantscoregroup.co.uk](http://Moraytenantscoregroup.co.uk)
- [Armchairforum.co.uk](http://Armchairforum.co.uk)
- [Bilbohalltenantsforum.co.uk](http://Bilbohalltenantsforum.co.uk)
- [Forrestenantsforum.co.uk](http://Forrestenantsforum.co.uk)
- [Lossiemouthtenantsforum.co.uk](http://Lossiemouthtenantsforum.co.uk)
- [Rothestnantsforum.co.uk](http://Rothestnantsforum.co.uk)
- [Speycoastenantsforum.co.uk](http://Speycoastenantsforum.co.uk)

# Tenant Participation Strategy

The second new Moray Council Tenant Participation Strategy was approved by Housing Sub Committee on 19 March 2008. It covers the period 2008 to 2012.

The draft Strategy was summarised in Tenants Voice last summer. Many thanks to the Tenants who told us what they thought about it. The Strategy was also circulated for comment to all tenant groups and other interested organisations during September 2007. Officers and tenant representatives considered all comments received and the new Strategy was produced.

## Our Aim

The overall aim of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy continues to be:

"To work with tenants to ensure the provision of a quality housing service in Moray".

## Objectives

The previous Strategy was, by and large, successfully implemented. It was successful in increasing the involvement of existing tenant representatives in a constructive manner. As a result, the objectives of the earlier Strategy continue to feature in the revised document. Objectives 7 and 8 are new objectives.

### Objective 1

**To support the growth of existing and new tenant groups in Moray.**

Formal tenants groups remain an important part of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy. The Council will continue to provide grants to registered tenant organisations to assist in funding the administration costs of these groups.

### Objective 2

**To develop and promote the role of tenants in the process of policy formulation, service review etc.**

The Council recognises that tenants have a key role in determining the future direction of the Council's housing services.

The Council has already established a Housing Sub Committee with tenant members to consider policies and issues arising from its landlord role.

### Objective 3

**To enhance and improve the range and detail of information available to tenants and tenant groups across Moray.**

This Strategy recognises that some tenants will actively join Local Forums and participate collectively in the development of housing services in Moray. However, before tenants decide how they wish to be involved they need good quality information, which is accurate, up-to-date and easily understood. The Tenant Survey 2007 indicated that tenants wanted more frequent and more comprehensive information. Some tenants may be content with the opportunity to comment on the quality of service by responding to questionnaires.

### Objective 4

**To develop training opportunities for Elected Members, staff and tenants across a range of housing activities.**

Keeping up to date is essential for staff, Councillors and tenant representatives. While some training is appropriate specifically for tenants, wherever possible, joint training will be encouraged.

### Objective 5

**To ensure that tenant participation activities in Moray reflect the principles of equal opportunity and are accessible.**

The Moray Council's equal opportunities policy underpins tenant participation. The Council is committed to taking all steps within its power to eliminate discrimination and to promote equal opportunities and good relationships amongst all communities.

The Council opposes discrimination against service users on the grounds of: sex, gender identity, race, disability, religious belief,

marital status, civil partnership, age, language, social origin, employment status, sexual orientation, political belief, responsibility for dependants.

All tenants groups have equality statements in their constitutions.

### Objective 6

**To monitor and review progress in achieving the aim and objectives of the Strategy, jointly with tenants.**

Tenant Participation is a continuous process that should be regularly reviewed. As a result we will ensure that mechanisms are in place to keep the Strategy under regular review and to formally review it annually.

The Tenant Participation Working Group will monitor the Strategy. This group consists of Officers and Tenants from the Core Group. Every quarter a report outlining tenant participation activity over the 3 month period will be submitted to The Moray Council's Housing Sub Committee. Once a year, a formal review of the Strategy will be presented to the Housing Sub Committee. The annual review will be a public document.

Updates on the Strategy and information on the annual review will be provided in Tenants Voice.

### Objective 7

**To encourage greater involvement of tenants that are not currently represented by registered tenant organisations or other tenant organisation.**

The Tenant Survey showed that only a minority of tenants would "definitely " be interested in getting more involved giving their views. We also recognise that a lot of these tenants will not attend Forums but would like to give their views to the Council on an occasional basis on a range of issues. To allow this to happen we intend to set up a tenant consultation register. Further details are in a separate article.

### Objective 8

**To encourage the involvement of younger tenants.**

Younger tenants have not become involved in tenant participation and it is recognised that traditional methods of engagement will not work well with

them. Staff and tenants' representatives intend arranging an informal evening event for younger tenants to ask how they would like to be involved and what sort of information they would like. Experience elsewhere has shown this to be an effective way of getting younger tenants involved.

## Getting a Copy of the Strategy

If you have a computer with internet access or go to your local library you can access the Strategy using the search facility at [www.moray.gov.uk](http://www.moray.gov.uk).

If you want a copy of the Strategy sent to you please complete the slip below:



### I would like a copy of the Tenant Participation Strategy 2008 - 2012.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

.....

Postcode .....

Telephone .....

Mobile Telephone .....

email .....

Please send this slip to  
**Tina Ash, Housing Planning and Development, Moray Council, Council Headquarters, High Street, Elgin IV30 1BX**

# Anti Social Behaviour – Sample Case

Mrs Smith came into the Council Offices to complain about her neighbour Mr Jones.

Mrs Smith has an interview with her Housing Officer.

Mrs Smith is having problems with her neighbour's music, getting played loud at all times of the day and night.

Mrs Smith doesn't mind her neighbour playing music but it is getting later and later and her children aren't getting any sleep and are tired for school in the morning.

Mrs Smith has tried to talk to her neighbour herself as she didn't want any animosity between them and it did get better for a while but it is now getting worse and other neighbours in the block are being bothered by the noise as well. Mrs Smith feels that if the council got involved he would listen.

## The Housing Officer explained what would happen next:

A letter will be sent to Mrs Smith confirming we had received her complaint and setting out the timescales for the investigation.

We will then issue diary sheets to Mrs Smith, to note down any further incidents.

We will then investigate the complaint; this will include interviewing the neighbours within the block to see if they can confirm the noise incidences.

We will keep the complaint confidential and your neighbour will not be told who has complained about him, unless Mrs Smith wishes us to let him know.

We will interview Mr Jones.

If we find that the complaint is justified after these investigations are complete we will tell Mr Jones to stop causing a nuisance to Mrs Smith and her neighbours.

This will be followed up with a letter to Mr Jones.

We will then monitor the situation for 28 days and if we receive no more complaints we will close the case.

However if the nuisance continues and after investigations are complete we find the new complaints are justified, Mr Jones will be issued with a final warning and we will look at other avenues to solve the situation. This could include sound monitoring equipment or community mediation between Mrs Smith and Mr Jones.

Community mediation is carried out by an independent organisation. They will talk to both Mrs Smith and Mr Jones to see if an agreement can be made which suits both parties.

In most cases we are able to solve the problem. However if the problem persists we may need to take legal action. If we need to take legal action we need to have enough evidence to satisfy the courts. This will include the evidence gathered from Mrs Smith and she may need to go to court as a witness.

Very few cases go this far as we will try and do everything possible to solve the problem without going to court.

**ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**  
Helpline



Do you know who  
to contact if you're  
suffering from  
Anti Social Behaviour?

0800  
58 77 197

# IS SOMEONE YOU KNOW COMMITTING BENEFIT FRAUD?

The Government estimates that Welfare Benefit Fraud costs each and every family in the United Kingdom £80 per year. The Moray Council is committed to protecting public funds and tackling benefit fraud and has a dedicated anti-fraud team who investigate allegations of suspected Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit fraud.

Typical examples of benefit fraud include:

- People who work but do not declare this when they claim benefit
- People who claim they are single but actually live with a partner
- People who claim from an address but do not live there
- People who do not tell us their full income, savings or capital

**DO NOT LET FRAUDSTERS TAKE MONEY DIRECTLY OUT OF YOUR POCKET.**

**If you suspect someone is claiming Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit to which they are not entitled PLEASE TELL US ABOUT IT.**

You can call us on **01343 563611** or write to the **Benefit Fraud Team, Moray Council, Revenues Section, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX.**

**Any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence.**

## Review of Service Standards

The Moray Council aims to deliver a high quality housing service to its tenants. We use service standards as a way of measuring the quality of service you can expect from us. An example of a service standard is that we will carry out 100% of emergency repairs within two hours. We monitor our performance against our standards on a regular basis and this tells us if we are performing well or if we need to do better. Our service standards cover a wide range of the activities we carry out as part of our housing service, including:

- allocating houses;
- housing management;
- homelessness;
- property management;
- tenant participation;
- strategy and enabling;
- private sector housing grants;
- building services DLO and
- Gypsies/Travellers.

We are currently carrying out a review of our service standards, working with the Housing Sub Committee. Following this review, we will publish the revised standards on our website. The Tenants' Voice edition in December 2008 will also provide more details of the service standards.

# Investment Strategy

During the financial year 2008/09, we will spend around £8.5 million on the maintenance and modernisation of our properties through our investment strategy.

Expenditure on the investment strategy covers five main programmes:

- Response and void repairs;
- Estate Works;
- Planned Maintenance;
- Cyclical Maintenance and
- Other Investments.

Response Repairs, void works and some of the Planned Maintenance Programme is delivered through a Partnership Agreement with our Building Services Direct Labour Organisation (DLO). Expenditure on response repairs and voids for 2008/09 will amount to £1.85m. On an annual basis, there are around 20,000 works orders issued to the DLO for repair work to our housing stock, delivered through depots at Mosstodloch, Forres, Buckie and Keith. The main item of expenditure under the Planned Maintenance programme will be kitchen replacements. In financial year 2008/09, around 400 kitchens will be replaced, at a cost of £1.4m.

We consult with you at all stages of work and give you individual layouts for your kitchen along with a choice of units and decoration, to meet with our policy of full tenant choice.

Other expenditure planned for 2008/09 includes door and window replacements. This programme will have a value of £1.25 million, which will allow around 360 properties to be fitted with new doors, and a start to be made on replacing older inefficient windows in around 120 homes. We currently install high performance solid core doorsets with a 3 point locking system to improve security, and double-glazing. These improvement works all contribute to our 'warm and dry

programme' and to make sure that properties are fully double-glazed. A choice of style and colour is offered, where appropriate, for external doors.

Other works included in the 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 energy 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 embarking on a programme of installing newer technologies such as heat pumps and solar panels to reduce fuel bills.

Roof and Fabric Repairs are also included in the planned maintenance budget. This includes work such as external render replacements and rainwater goods replacements, both of which maintain and protect the structure of the dwellings.

The Cyclic Maintenance budget is mainly spent on the servicing of the Council's gas, coal and oil fired heating installations, and a regular six-yearly programmes of pre-painterwork repairs and external painterwork to the external fabric of the houses. The Council is also in the process of renewing a large number of existing smoke detectors under this budget.

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.

Details of the programme can also be found on the Council's website or by contacting your Area Housing Office or the Capital Programmes Team.

A number of tenant forums have been set up throughout Moray. Each of these forums have their own budgets under the Planned Maintenance, Estate Works category, which is split over the four main housing areas. Each forum has an agreed amount that they can spend on improvements within their 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.

## Moray Council Capital Programme 2008/9

Works	Area Housing Team	Town	Street	No of Properties	
Heating Replacement	Buckie	Buckie	Anton Street, Merson Street, Robert Street, Sutherland Street	28	
		Elgin	Deanshaugh Road	1	
	Forres	Lossiemouth	Park Place, Sunbank Place	5	
		Rothies	Provost Christie Drive	39	
		Burghead	Mckenzie Place	4	
		Forres	Fleurs Avenue, Hill Lane	4	
Kitchen Replacement	Buckie	Buckie	Robert Court	2	
		Fochabers	Castel Gordon Court, Ordiquish Road	16	
		Mosstodloch	Findlay Road, Spey Walk	13	
		Portknockie	Geddes Avenue	6	
	Elgin	Elgin	Beechfield Road, Birkenhill Place, Burnside Place, Castlehill Street, Glenlossie Drive, Haugh Road, Kingsmills, Leuchars Drive, Mannoeh Court, Mossend Place, Ontario Court, Quebec Place, Rashcrook Walk, Springburn Place, Wardend Place, Weaver Place	238	
		Lhanbryde	St. Moluag Place	6	
		Lossiemouth	Community Way, Gilmour Crescent, Kellas Avenue	32	
		Forres	Dyke	County Houses	3
			Findhorn	Linksvie	2
	Forres		Glenmore Place	22	
	Hopeman		Duff Street, Dunbar Street, Hutcheon Street, Park Street	6	
	Keith	Aberlour	Broomfield Square	6	
		Dufftown	Mount Street	10	
		Keith	Mar Court, Regent Street	29	
		Tomintoul	Main Street	5	
	Window Replacement	Buckie	Buckie	Craigbo Terrace, East Cathcart Street, James Street, Merson Street, St Peters Road, Well Road	24
			Portknockie	Bruce Place, Falconer Terrace, Mair Street, Samson Place, Samson Street	23
Elgin		Elgin	Millar Street, Murdoch's Wynd	23	
		Lossiemouth	Bailey Place, Cromarty Place	29	
Forres		Burghead	King Street, Kinloss Street, McDonald Crescent	17	

## Moray Council Capital Programme 2008/9

Works	Area Housing Team	Town	Street	No of Properties
External door replacement	Buckie	Arradoul	Westerton Cottages	1
		Buckie	East Cathcart Street, Lorraine Baron Street, Shanks Lane, Wallace Avenue	23
		Cullen	Logie Avenue, North Deskford Street, Victoria Crescent, Victoria Place	33
		Portgordon	Duke Street	1
	Elgin	Elgin	Batchen Lane, Blantyre Place, Braco Place, Brodie Drive, Castlehill Street, Fulmar Road, Gordon Street, Kingsmills, Ladyhill Wynd, Meadow Crescent, Mossend Place, Munro Place, Murdoch's Wynd, Robertson Drive, Weaver Place, Wellbrae Court	99
		Miltonbrae	County Houses Miltonduff	2
	Forres	Brodie	Burnbank	1
		Forres	Brig Wynd, Caroline Street, Cumming Street, Fleurs Crescent, Fleurs Drive, Fleurs Place, Hainings North, Hainings South, Hainings West, High Street, Kingsway, St Laurence Court, Strathcona Road, Tailwell, North Road	116
	Keith	Allanbuie	Loanbank Cottages	1
		Dufftown	Church Street, Louise Street, Macduff Place, Rinnes Place, Tomnamuidh Road	44
		Glenlivet	Braes Of Glenlivet	1
		Keith	Cuthil Avenue, Cuthil Road, Edindiach Road, Land Street, Regent Street, Taylor Road	30
		Knockando	County Houses	2
		Rothiemay	Lonach Crescent	1
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>949</b>

Details of the programme can also be found on the Council's website or by contacting your Area Housing Office or the Capital Programmes Team.

# REDUCE YOUR RENT AND COUNCIL TAX

## Find out if you can get a rebate.

If you are on a low income, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit may be able to help by reducing your rent and council tax bill. If you get other benefits, they won't be affected by Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit.

Find out if you are eligible by applying for a rebate today.

For further details and an application form please contact the Revenues Section on 01343 563456

# Heating Safety

The Health & Safety Executive have recently issued a 'Safety Alert' in connection with certain types of heating installations, and the possibility that cold water tanks could fill with expanding hot water and then overflow, causing damage to the property and affecting the safety of occupiers.

Although there is no clear evidence that The Moray Council's heating or hot water systems are faulty, we want to identify any possible problems and take action to prevent any future safety issues arising.

We are currently making preparations to undertake a series of safety checks to our hot water systems, and carry out any specific works identified by a survey.

Typical warning signs that tenants should look out for are:

- Excessively hot water coming out of the hot water taps;
- Excessive noise or 'bubbling' from the hot water cylinder;
- Hot water coming out of certain cold water taps (some storage cisterns also feed cold water taps in the bathroom);
- Steam or moisture in the roof space.

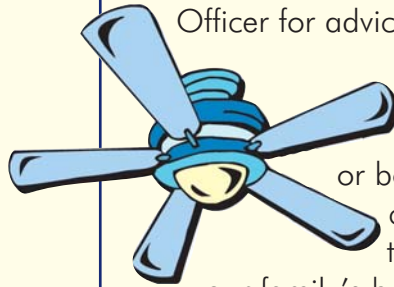
Any tenant who notices any of these things should immediately switch off the immersion heater or their heating system and then phone their **Local Housing Office, or the DLO Heating Line on 01343 829111 (24 Hours).**

We will investigate immediately. If you require any further information on this subject please contact the **Capital Programmes Team on 01343 823057.**



# Ceiling Fans

If you already have, or are thinking of installing a ceiling fan please talk to your Area Housing Officer for advice.



Did you know that if a fan is fitted in a room with a gas fire or boiler it may allow dangerous combustion gases to come into the room affecting you and your family's health when it is running?

From time to time, during the course of our annual gas servicing inspections we come across ceiling fans that tenants have installed in rooms with gas appliances. We are required by the gas regulations to test the gas appliance with the fan running, and if the appliance fails the test you will be asked to remove the fan from that room.

We want to make sure that you avoid this situation and get the right advice on where to install them.

So if you are thinking of installing a fan, please talk to us to discuss the details.

## Your local area housing office

The Moray Firth



**BUCKIE**

**01542 837200**

**ELGIN**

**01343**

**563429/563433**

**FORRES**

**01309 694000**

**KEITH**

**01542 885500**

# Your Right to Repair

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act, Moray Council tenants have the right to have small urgent repairs carried out within a given timescale.

The repairs which can be carried out under the scheme are listed below, and details of how the scheme operates can be found in Section 2 of your tenant's handbook.

When requesting these repairs through your local housing office, you will be given details of the timescales involved, who will be carrying out the work, and information on what to do if the repair is not completed on time.

## QUALIFYING REPAIRS

## MAXIMUM TIME FOR COMPLETION OF THE REPAIR IN DAYS

Blocked flue to open fire or boiler.	1
Blocked or leaking foul drains, soil stacks or toilet pans where there is no other toilet in the house.	1
Blocked sink, bath or drain.	1
Electric power-loss of electric power.	1
Partial loss of electric power.	3
Insecure external window, door or lock.	1
Unsafe access path or step.	1
Significant leaks or flooding from water or heating pipes, tanks, cisterns.	1
Loss or partial loss of gas supply.	1
Loss or partial loss of space or water heating where no alternative heating is available.	1
Toilet not flushing where there is no other toilet in the house.	1
Unsafe power or lighting socket, or electrical fitting.	1
Water supply-loss of water supply.	1
Partial loss of water supply.	3
Loose or detached banister or hand rail.	3
Unsafe timber flooring or stair treads.	3
Mechanical extractor fan in internal kitchen or bathroom not working.	7

A repairs receipt will normally be posted out to you, or handed over if you are reporting the repair personally in the office, advising you of the date for completion of the repair.

If our normal contractor fails to complete the repair within the required timescale, you can contact an alternative contractor from a list supplied by the council, who will then be instructed to complete the works if this is appropriate.

Our normal contractor is:

**Moray Council DLO, Unit 6, Mosstodloch Industrial Estate, Fochabers  
Telephone 01343 829000**

An alternative contractor may only be approached to carry out the work should the DLO fail to attend by the final date for completion of the repair.

If our normal contractor fails to carry out the work, you may also be able to claim compensation.

A new 'Right to Repair Booklet' has been produced giving information about the scheme, including the compensation amounts and list of alternative contractors for each Housing Area. Copies of this booklet are being posted out to all tenants.

The council is also introducing changes to the repairs system, which will allow area office staff to improve the service delivered. This new system will help staff to identify the correct repair and also to decide whether that repair falls under the Right to Repair scheme.

As part of this improvement to the service you will also be receiving a new 'Repairs Booklet', which will allow you to assist in identification of the repair that you are reporting. The booklet will also provide other helpful information such as who to contact in an emergency situation, or what to do in event of a gas escape.



# Repairs by Appointment

Did you know that Moray Council tenants can ask for their repairs to be completed on an appointment basis?

This allows you to arrange for the work to be completed during a morning or afternoon appointment, at a time and date to suit you.



Repairs which can be done under an appointment include things like faulty kitchen drawers and doors, broken locks, dripping taps, faulty sockets and lights, etc.

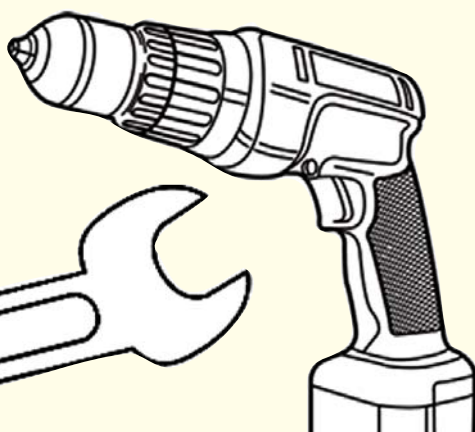
Safety related repairs, which are deemed as emergencies, would still be done within a 2 hour timescale.

Everyone benefits from the 'Repairs by Appointment' system:

- We can plan with our DLO when the tradesmen will be in an area;
- The DLO do not waste time calling when no-one is at home;
- You will not have to phone back to ask when a repair will be done; and
- You will not have to spend time waiting around for the DLO to arrive.

A repairs receipt will be posted out to you as a reminder of the date for the repair appointment.

When reporting a repair, ask for an appointment! This not only helps the Moray Council to provide a better service to our tenants, but it also allows you to decide when you want the repair done.



# ARE YOU COVERED?

The Moray Council does not insure your furniture, belongings or decorations.

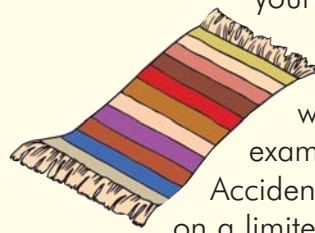
You need to take out your own household insurance either under a special scheme arranged by Aon, through Norwich Union Insurance Ltd, or by making your own arrangements.



The Aon Ltd scheme is open to all Moray Council tenants who have Scottish Secure or Short Scottish Secure tenancies. When you take out this insurance, it will cover most of your household goods and contents, including your furniture, TV, clothing, carpets and electrical goods. It also covers theft of your keys and the contents of your freezer. These items will be

insured against the risks of fire, theft, vandalism and water damage caused, for example, by burst pipes.

Accidental damage is covered only on a limited basis.



Your home contents are covered on a "new for old" basis with the exception of linen and clothing which will be replaced at their current cost, less an amount for wear and tear.

The cost of the insurance depends on the value of the items you insure. The lowest amount that can be insured is £6,000 if you are over 60 and £9,000 for all other tenants. The highest amount is £25,000. Quotes are subject to your application being accepted.

A booklet on the scheme is available at your Local Housing Office. To apply for cover you must complete the form attached to the booklet.

For further details please contact Housing Services on **01343 557186/187**

Details of the scheme are also available on the Council's Website.



# Closure of Cash Collection Facilities at Area Offices

All council tenants who regularly pay their rent at the Cash Collection facilities within their local area council offices will have received a letter from us explaining the changes to the ways you can pay.

This letter explains that these Cash Collection facilities have closed. You are now able to pay your rent at a number of different PayPoint outlets and Post Offices in your local area. Across the Moray area there are now over 50 different places you can make payments using your new unique Payment Card which has been issued to you.

Not only are there more places to pay, the opening hours of these outlets are, in many cases, more convenient, allowing you the chance to pay your rent in cash at the weekend and in the evenings.

These arrangements also apply to cash payments for your Council House Insurance, Garage Rental Payments and Council Tax Payments.

If you have any queries regarding the balance of your rent account(s), staff at your local Area Housing Office will continue to help you.

If you require a new payment card, for example to replace a lost card, please contact your area housing office where staff will order a new one on your behalf. They will also provide you with a temporary barcoded letter for you to use until your new card arrives.

If you are on a low income you may get help to pay some, or all, of your rent through housing benefit. Your Area Housing Officer can arrange for you to get help filling in a housing benefit form.

You can also choose to change the way you pay your rent. If you wish to set up a direct debit or standing order to pay your rent directly from your bank account to us, please contact your Area Housing Office who will give you the appropriate form to complete.

You can also pay your rent using a valid credit or debit card. This can be done by calling the Contact Centre (01343 563456) between 9am and 5pm on weekdays. Or alternatively you can call the 24hr Automated Payments Line (0845 601 8888).

The Housing Service and the Council are continuously working to improve services for our customers. Your comments and feedback are always welcomed.



## REDUCE YOUR RENT AND COUNCIL TAX

### Find out if you can get a rebate.

If you are on a low income, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit may be able to help by reducing your rent and council tax bill. If you get other benefits, they won't be affected by Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit.

Find out if you are eligible by applying for a rebate today.

**For further details and an application form please contact the Revenues Section on 01343 563456**

# EQUALITIES

## INTRODUCTION

As part of our commitment to equalities we recognise our responsibilities as community leader, service provider and employer and are encouraging the fair treatment of all individuals and tackling social exclusion. The Council recognises the diversity in the community and that all groups do not have the same resources, situations and needs. Therefore the Council must ensure that these issues are included in the planning, designing and improving of our services.

## LEGISLATION

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act, The Disability Discrimination Act and The Equality Act introduced equality duties for public authorities. The three Duties have a common aim of ensuring that the public sector works to promote equality and eliminate discrimination in all its activities. Each Duty places distinct obligations on the Council and its departments.

## EXAMPLES OF EQUALITY WORK

We have begun to assess our services and policies to highlight any areas we can improve with regard to equality issues. This means that for every service we deliver or each policy we write equalities issues should be considered within it. This is the only way we can ensure that we are being fair and meeting the needs of our increasingly diverse community. Through assessment we will begin to identify ways to make improvements to our services.

We are at the early stages of establishing an Equalities Forum to ensure that the views of service users are taken into consideration. Potential groups have been identified, including local and national representative for all equality strands. This forum will have the opportunity to comment and make recommendations on assessments of existing and proposed

policies and activities. This is to give consideration as to whether there is, or likely to be, a different impact whether direct or indirect on the grounds of race, disability, gender, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation.

We have successfully participated in the Happy to Translate logo initiative for two years, providing interpretation and translation services for those who require it. We offer British Sign Language interpreters, foreign language interpretation and translation, Braille, audio tape and large print.

Adaptation of Council buildings is ongoing to comply with the duties placed upon us by Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. To date we have completed 69 adaptations with 44 adaptations scheduled over 2008/09 nearing completion. Work is currently in progress on the Council's 55 school buildings.

## CONCLUSION

There has been a great deal of good work undertaken within departments of the Council to address equality issues in addition to the examples above. By actively tackling and promoting equalities and recognising the diverse needs of our communities we will continue to tackle discrimination and social exclusion to encourage the fair treatment of all individuals.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

# MORAY CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

## Outreach Sessions

Moray Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has been providing information and advice to the people of Moray for well over a decade. Their service is completely free, confidential, impartial and independent. The CAB are happy to advise on virtually any subject - and if they cannot provide solutions directly, they usually know someone who can!

As well as operating from their office in Batchen Street, Elgin, over the years, a growing part of Moray CAB's work has been the provision of outreach services across the county. These are now based at five locations, namely Buckie, Keith, Kinloss, Lhanbryde and Lossiemouth (details below). The CAB hope that, by going out to different towns, local residents will be saved the trouble of having to travel to Elgin for assistance.

Anyone can use the outreach services, and people approach the CAB with all sorts of queries - large and small. In many respects the earlier that advice is sought, the better, since many problems can be nipped in the bud without undue worry. Sometimes, the answer is quite straightforward. Nothing is ever too trivial - or too serious - to be considered.

Among the more common issues that the CAB meets are queries about consumer affairs, e.g. defective goods and services, poor workmanship, and non-delivery of goods, etc. Employment matters such as unfair dismissals, holiday and pay disputes and benefit claims, including disability benefits. Housing complaints concerning tenancy agreements, repairs, and rent disputes. Separation and divorce involving issues around maintenance, accommodation, and money. Neighbourhood problems, debts, legal matters, and health concerns also regularly feature, alongside countless other things. The list is endless!

If there is any issue where Moray Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to help, please either contact an outreach venue to make an appointment or telephone Jim McCourt on 01343 548421.

## VENUE, TIME AND CONTACT DETAILS

**Buckie Library**, Every 2nd Thursday Phone 01542 832121 10:15am - 12:30pm

**Keith Access point** Every Thursday Drop-in 1.30pm - 3.30pm

**Kinloss** Every 2nd Tuesday Phone 01309 672161 9.30am - 12.30pm

**Lhanbryde, Village Hall** Every Wednesday Drop-in 10am - 1pm

**Lossiemouth Community Centre** Every Tuesday Drop-in 9.30am - 11.30am

## National Fraud Initiative

Moray Council is committed to tackling fraud. This makes sure that services and funds are provided to those who most need them.

Section 100 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 requires us to take part in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data matching exercise. This means that, every 2 years, we have to provide information on all our tenants to Audit Scotland to match it with other data provided by other organisations. For example, the National Health Service, the Department of Work and Pensions and other local authorities. The information we give will also be matched with information provided by different departments of the Council.

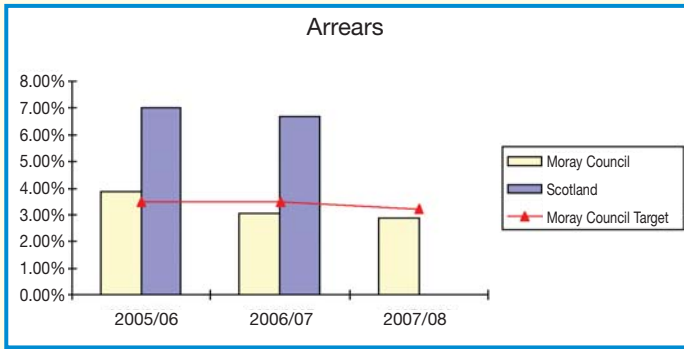
This process will help us to identify genuine errors and take action where necessary to put things right. However, if we receive information back from Audit Scotland that indicates fraud has taken place then we will fully investigate the matter.

The information that we must give to Audit Scotland on our tenants will be your:

- name;
- address;
- date of birth;
- tenant status (this means that we will tell them whether or not you are the first named tenant or the secondary/other tenant;
- housing benefit reference number (if you have one); and
- tenant/account number.

You do not need to do anything. If you have any questions you would like to ask, please contact your Area Housing Office. Their contact details are on the cover.

# Housing Performance 2007/2008

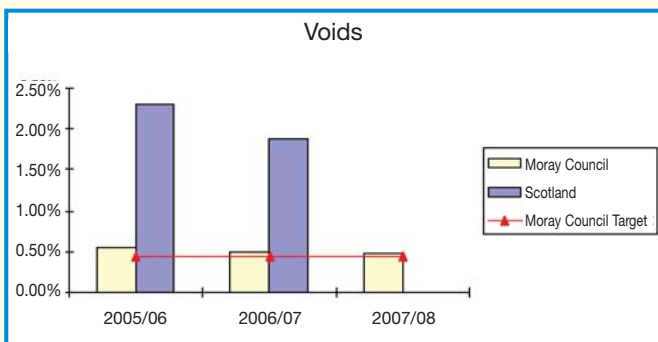


## Rent Arrears

In 2007/08 we continued to reduce rent arrears, with only 2.89% of total rents on homes and garages owed in arrears. Less than in 2006/07 (3.08%) and well below our target of 3.2%. Twenty-five tenants were evicted from their council homes during the year for rent arrears.

## Re-letting Empty Properties

During 2007/08 the amount of possible rent income lost due to properties being empty was 0.47% of all rents – down from 0.49% in 2006/07. By turning around empty properties quickly, and thus minimising rent lost, means the maximum amount of money is available for maintenance and improvements to our housing stock.



## Repairs

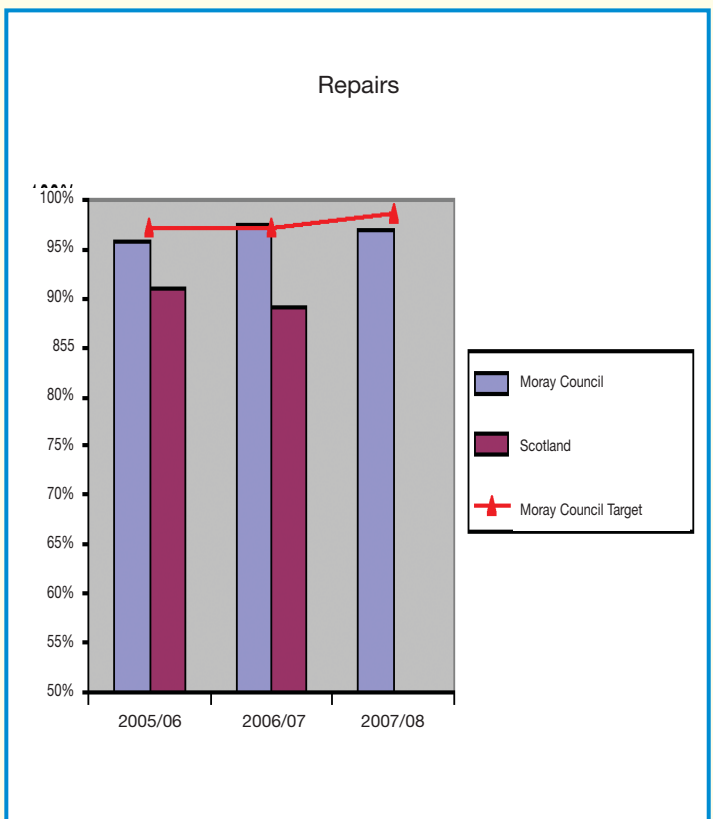
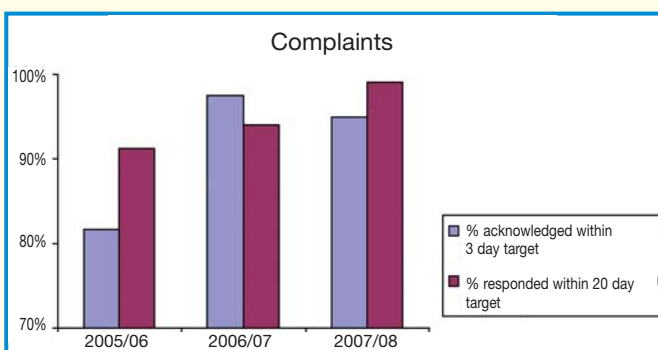
Moray Council continues to maintain its excellent performance on repairs year on year. The repairs are divided in to 4 categories:

- Emergency – within 2 hours
- Urgent – within 1 working day
- Priority – within 5 working days
- Ordinary – within 20 working days

In 2007/08 the council completed more Emergency repairs within the 2-hour target time than in 2006/07. There was only a minor dip in performance in the other 3 categories. The average repair performance in 2007/08 was 97%, compared to 98% in 2006/07 and against a target of 98%.

## Complaints

During 2007/08 the housing service acknowledged 95% of complaints within 3 days and responded to over 99% of those complaints within a target of 20 days.



## Anti-social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is split into categories and the housing service set target times to respond to each reported incident.

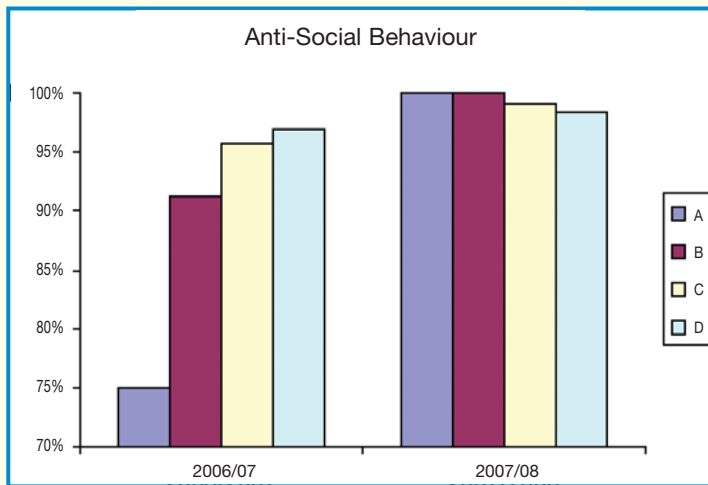
A (extreme behaviour) - 2 days

B (serious disturbance) - 5 days

C (lifestyle dispute) - 10 days

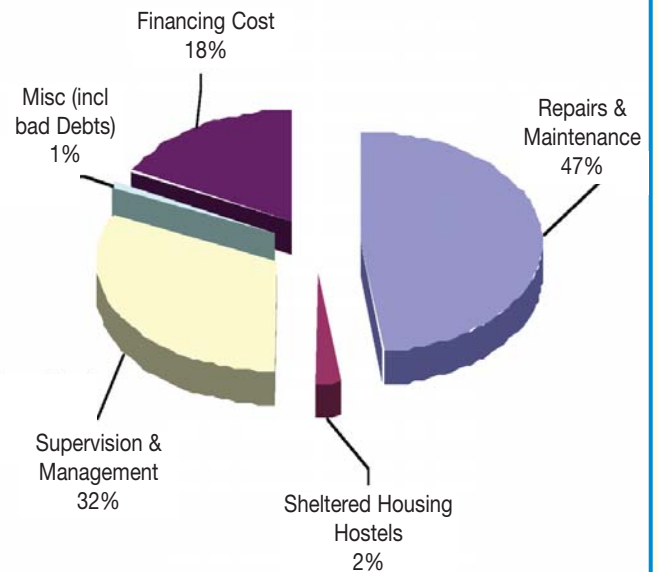
D (minor dispute) - 10 days

There was a significant improvement on the previous year with over 98% of cases responded to within target during 2007/2008.



## How your rent will be spent

Housing Revenue Account - Proposed Expenditure 2008/09 - £12,775,000



## Housing Sub-Committee Update

Since the last edition of the Tenants' Voice there have been three meetings of the Housing Sub Committee, with a further meeting to be held on 20 June 2008.

At its second meeting in January 2008, the Sub Committee agreed the details of the Tenants' Survey Improvement Plan. The Council's Capital Programmes Manager gave a presentation on renewable heating installations in Council properties, with particular emphasis on the Ground and Air Source Heat Pump programme. The Sub Committee also initiated a review of the Council's Housing Service Standards and considered the Council's response to the Scottish Government's discussion paper "Firm Foundations – the Future for Housing in Scotland".

At its meeting in March 2008, the Sub Committee approved the Tenant Participation Strategy for 2008-12 and agreed a Letting Standard for Council houses. The Sub Committee agreed to end the Garden Competition and also agreed in principle that the Volunteer Centre Moray to use a piece of land at Braco Place in Elgin for a Community Garden Project, subject to wider consultation.

Items on the agenda for the meeting in June 2008 include the revised Void Management Policy, the Review of Service Standards, parking projects, safety of domestic hot water systems and the forthcoming Housing Inspection.

At all its meetings, the Sub Committee is given progress reports on the Housing Budget and the Council's investment programme in its homes.

Housing Sub Committee meetings are open to the public. Like all other Council committee reports, the Sub Committee reports and meeting minutes will be available on the Council's website at [www.moray.gov.uk](http://www.moray.gov.uk).