

# VOICE

## The Tenants'

Winter 2008

## Rent increase consultation

Setting rents is a balance between providing affordable housing and ensuring funds for future management and maintenance costs. In February 2009, the Council will decide its housing budget for the forthcoming year.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the budget which funds management and maintenance costs relating to Council housing. As part of the process for preparing the budget, we must consult with you. We have a statutory duty under Section 25 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to consult with you where we propose to increase rent or service charges that you pay to the Council.

For the past three years, Moray Council has had the lowest rents in Scotland.

In past years, the rental increase has been limited to inflation plus 1% (3.5%). The budget process for 2009/10 will be based on the assumption that any rent increase will be as in previous years – i.e. inflation plus 1%. However, inflation is now running at a higher level – 3%. The rent increase could therefore be 4%. This level of increase would add approximately £1.71 to the current average weekly rent of £42.68 (based on 48 weekly payments a year). The extra income generated will be invested in improving services.

If you have any views on this, please contact



**Jill Stewart**

Chief Housing Officer  
Community Services  
The Moray Council  
Council Office  
High Street  
Elgin  
Moray  
IV30 1BX



jill.stewart@moray.gov.uk

## Housing Inspection

As reported in the last edition of the Tenants' Voice, the Scottish Housing Regulator carried out its inspection of the Council's housing service in September and October 2008. The Inspection Team were in Moray for three weeks. During that time, the team members met a number of tenants and Tenant Forum members, in addition to staff and elected members in Moray.

The provisional feedback received at the end of the inspection was generally positive. The final report will not be published until early 2009 and therefore it is anticipated that further details on the findings – and improvement actions that the Council will take – will be provided in the next edition of the Tenants' Voice. The final report will be published on the Scottish Housing Regulator's website.

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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](mailto:buckieaccess@moray.gov.uk)

### ELGIN

**01343 563429**

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 winter edition of the Tenants' Voice. I would like to thank all of the tenants who attended the Tenants' Conference with particular thanks to the tenants who gave up many hours of their own time to fund raise and organise the Conference. The Conference was a huge success with interesting and informative workshops and a highly entertaining performance from the Out of Darkness Theatre Company on recycling in the home.

In the recent Tenant's Survey, many of you said you would like a shower over your bath. I am pleased to say that the Council has responded to your views on this. I would encourage you to complete and return the slip provided.

The Tenants' Core Group and tenant forum websites are now all up and running. I hope you will visit the sites to find out what is going on in your area.

As you know the Scottish Housing Regulator recently visited the Council to assess the quality of our housing service. The inspection was a positive experience for our housing staff and a good opportunity to help us improve our service to you. We look forward to receiving the Regulator's report early next year.

Finally, with the onset of winter I would like to draw your attention to our handy hints for winter article. Most importantly I would like to wish you, your family and friends a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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

**Councillor Eric McGillivray**

# Are you interested in having a shower fitted?



You may remember filling in a Tenants' Survey Questionnaire which included a question on showers. The results of this survey showed that tenants would accept an increase in rent to fund having a shower fitted.

As reported in the Northern Scot on 31 October, the council is now considering offering its tenants the opportunity to have an overbath shower fitted in their homes. This improvement would mean an increase in your rent of around £1 per week, but may save you money on your fuel bills.

In order to make this decision we need to gather information on who would be interested in having a shower installed. We would welcome your comments on this.

**Please return the slip below to your local housing office.**

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

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Would you be interested in having a shower fitted?: Yes  No

Would you be willing to pay the additional rent?: Yes  No

Further comments: .....

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Please note that this is not an application form. If and when we introduce a shower upgrade programme you will be invited to apply.



# SCARF

save cash and reduce fuel

## Cut Your Fuel Bills

With suppliers increasing the cost of fuel, many of you may find it more difficult and expensive to heat your home, especially during winter months. If you want to know more about ways to cut your fuel bills, then read on.

SCARF, (Save Cash and Reduce Fuel) may be able to help you. SCARF is an agency that provides free impartial and accessible energy efficiency advice and information services to help save energy, save cash and help save the environment.

The SCARF Fuel Cost Campaign aims to address the cost of fuel and increase awareness of opportunities available to help householders, like you, to get the best value fuel costs. The campaign message is '**Cut Your Fuel Bills - Best Value Energy**'

To help you find the best fuel supplier and secure the lowest possible fuel tariff and best payment method, which will in turn save you money, there are just three simple steps.

### Step 1 Your fuel supplier

Switching your fuel supplier can save you money. You will need to check the most up-to-date fuel prices and compare fuel suppliers to make sure you are switching to the supplier with the lowest fuel costs for you.

### Step 2 Your tariff

Fuel suppliers have a range of tariffs available. You will need to check that you are on the lowest rate

tariff for your heating system and your household requirements. This is most important if you have an electric storage heating system or where you have replaced an electric storage heating system with a new heating system.

### Step 3 Your payment method

All fuel suppliers have a range of payment methods available to you. Choose a payment method that gives you the lowest cost for fuel and suits your household budget.

### SCARF's Energy Advice Team can help you with steps 1, 2 and 3.

SCARF Energy Advisors will provide you with free, independent and impartial advice.

### How to contact SCARF

If you want more advice and information on how to cut fuel bills and stay warm this winter then contact SCARF.



**Phone the SCARF Energy Advice Team on 0800 512012. This is a free phone call.**



**Visit the SCARF website at [www.scarf.org.uk](http://www.scarf.org.uk).**



**E-mail [moray@scarf.org.uk](mailto:moray@scarf.org.uk)**









Also to be noted is that people attending Forum meetings can claim reasonable expenses, for travel, etc.

The Moray Council allocates us a considerable sum of money yearly and the Forum undertakes projects for the benefit of tenants and the environment. We are always looking for new projects and new members. If anyone would like to participate they would be made very welcome at our meetings which are held on the second

Thursday of each month at 7:30pm in Buckie High School where they can join in the discussions.

The first point of contact would be to have an informal chat with the Secretary or any other office bearer.

**Jean Walton is the Secretary and Harry Walton is the Chairperson, they can be contacted on 01542 835282.**

# Plumbing Safety in Winter

## If a pipe bursts...

- \* Locate the stop valve which controls the water supply entering your home and turn it off immediately. The stop valve is often - but not always – located under your kitchen sink and normally closes by turning clockwise.
- \* Then switch off your immersion heater and central heating boiler.
- \* Open all hot and cold taps to drain them of any remaining water to minimise the damage.
- \* Let any solid fuel fires die down.
- \* You should also warn your neighbours so they can take steps to reduce the chance of any damage to their homes.
- \* Switch off your electricity supply at the mains if there's any chance that water could come into contact with electrical wiring or fittings. Water and electricity can be a deadly combination, so if you are in any doubt about what to do in this case, don't take a risk.
- \* Phone your local area housing office, or if outside normal office hours phone 08457 565656.
- \* It's important to remember to make sure your hot water system is refilled BEFORE you re-light your boiler or switch on the immersion heater.

## If a pipe freezes...

- \* Turn off the stop valve immediately and switch off your immersion heater and central heating.

Let any solid fuel fires die down. Open all COLD taps to drain the system, but NEVER turn on the hot taps – your hot water cylinder may collapse if the pipes leading to it are frozen.

- \* Phone your local area housing office, or if outside normal office hours phone 08457 565656.

## Thawing out your pipes...

- \* Never attempt to thaw out frozen pipes by switching on your immersion heater or central heating boiler. Instead, check for leaking joints or bursts in the pipes. Then gently heat any frozen sections with a hairdryer or a heated cloth wrapped around the pipe. Never apply a direct flame.

**If you are going away this winter, and don't want your pipes to freeze, you should ensure that your heating still comes on at regular intervals on a low temperature. Alternatively, you can ask The Moray Council to drain off the water in your property. To arrange this, please call your local area housing office.**



# Dog Fouling



The problem of dog fouling remains a concern throughout Moray. It is an offence under the Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003 for any person in charge of a dog to fail to remove any mess after the dog has fouled in any public place.

Selected council officers, the Police and Community Wardens are authorised to issue Fixed Penalty Notices to any person they believe has committed an offence under the Act.

## I have a complaint about dog fouling, what can I do?

You can contact the Council's Environmental Health department, who will investigate and pursue the complaint. Their number is 01343 563345.

## Where does the dog fouling legislation apply?

It applies to any public open place. This means any place which is open to the open air and to which the public or any section of the public has access on payment or otherwise. It also includes any common passage, close, court, stair, back garden, yard or other similar common area.

## Are there any exemptions?

A blind person in charge of a working guide dog is exempt. A person with a qualifying disability is exempt. A person in charge of a working dog, either for farming purposes or military, customs or police purposes is also exempt.

Children and the elderly are not exempt.

## What can I use to pick up the waste?

Waste can be picked up using an ordinary plastic carrier bag, or using a specific 'poop scoop' device available from pet stores and The Moray Council Access Points and Libraries.

## What if there are no bins nearby?

Dog waste suitably wrapped in a plastic bag or similar can be disposed of in any litter bin or dog waste bin. If there are no bins nearby you can also dispose of it with your household rubbish.



## What happens if I am caught not cleaning up after my dog?

You can be issued with a fixed penalty fine, this is currently £40 and will increase to £60 if it is not paid within 28 days.

## I read that dog mess can be dangerous to health – is that true?

Yes, dog mess contains parasites and bacteria that are dangerous to other dogs and to other people, particularly children. Be good to yourself, your

# Tenants' Survey Improvement Plan

The recent Tenants' Survey was a great opportunity for the Council to get your views on the Housing Service. But the important part is how we use your views to improve our service. In the Winter 2007 edition of Tenants' Voice we told you we would be drawing up an Improvement Plan and asked you to help us identify the specific actions we need to take. A list of actions was then drawn up and included in a Tenants' Survey Improvement Plan, which the Housing Sub Committee agreed in March 2008. During the year, the Council has been working to ensure that the agreed actions are achieved.

## You asked that we give you more information on our Capital Improvement Programme.

We listed details of all the properties included in this year's programme in the Summer 2008 edition of Tenants' Voice including details of kitchen replacements. We will keep you fully informed of progress in future editions.

## You said you were not entirely clear about the role of Estate Caretakers.

In the Summer 2008 Tenants' Voice, we provided information on what Estate Caretakers do and details of the caretaker in your area.

All our caretakers will soon be wearing high visibility vests when they are out on the estates so you can recognise them easily.

## You felt that we could improve our communication with our tenants.

We have tried to help you become more familiar with your area teams. When you visit Area Housing

Offices you will see staff photographs in reception. Staff will also be wearing name badges. We have added advice on your Right to Repair to the repair receipts you receive and have listed the Emergency Out of Hours Number on DLO vans.

## Many of you said that you would like the Council to provide a shower over your bath.

We are now considering offering tenants the opportunity to have this improvement carried out. There is a separate article on page 2 of this newsletter.

## You expressed concern about the cost of heating your homes.

Advice on energy efficiency has been added to the information pack we give to new tenants. We are working towards providing training to housing staff on energy issues so they can help answer any queries you have. We will also be looking at other ways of helping you save money on heating costs in the future.

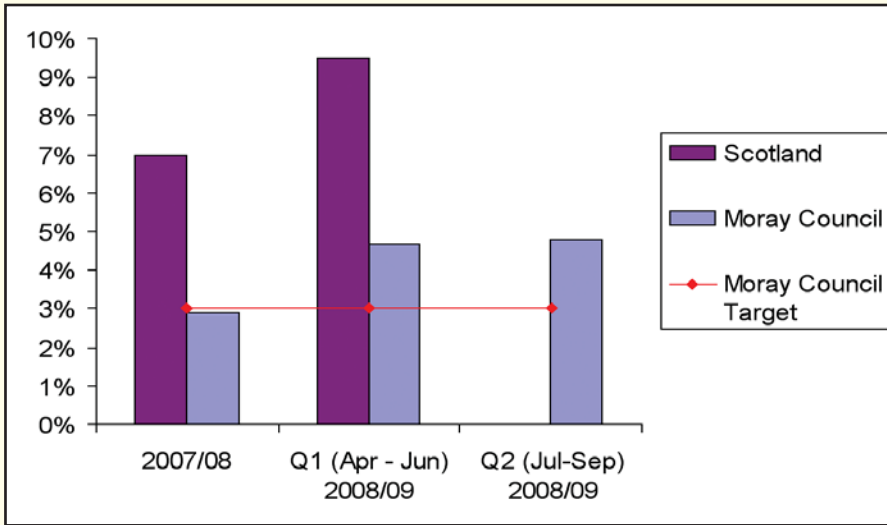
Other key actions we aim to carry out in 2009 include improving customer feedback on our services through phone surveys and developing local newsletters for your areas. We will also look at holding Housing Open Days in your area.

We will keep you fully informed of progress in delivering these actions in future editions of the Tenants' Voice.

If you want to know more about the Tenants' Survey Improvement Plan, please contact:

**Graeme Davidson**  
**01343 563506**  
**graeme.davidson@moray.gov.uk**

# Housing Performance



## Rent Arrears

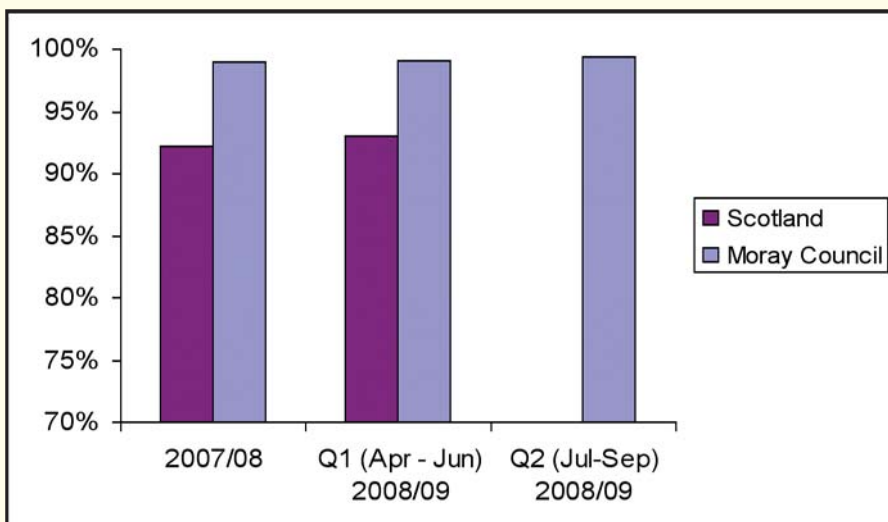
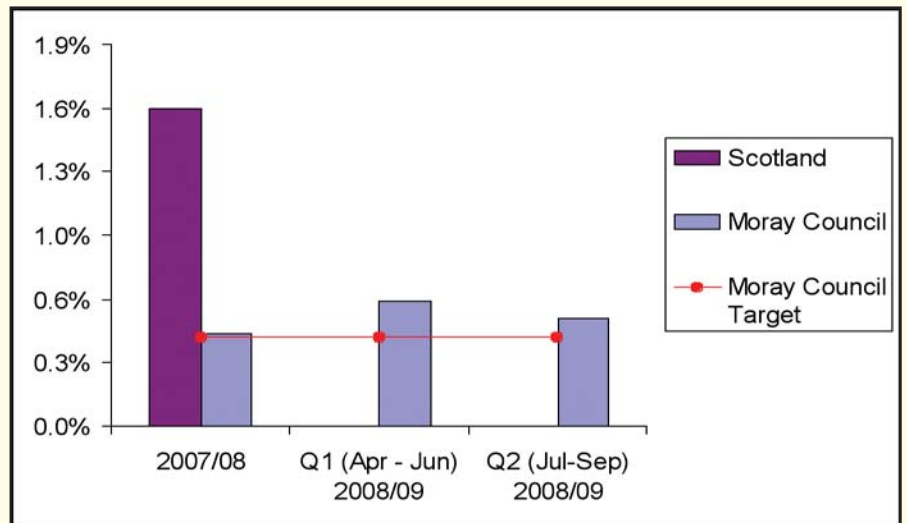
Although rent arrears have risen slightly, we continue to be one of the top performers in Scotland.

At the end of Quarter 2 rent arrears were 4.78% of net rent receivable.

## Empty Property Management

We aim to turn around empty properties as quickly as possible to minimise rent loss and maximise the amount of money available to pay for maintenance and improvements to other properties.

Less than 0.6% of rental income was lost due to properties being empty during Quarter 2.



## Repairs

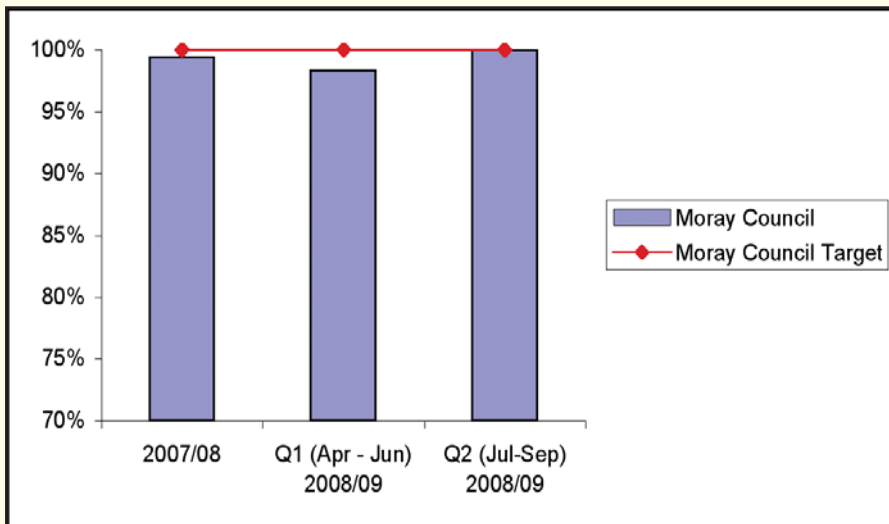
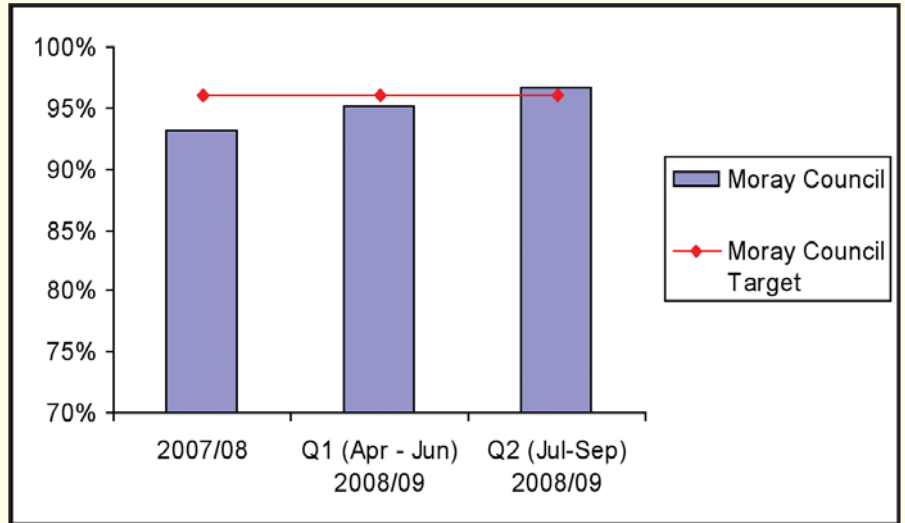
We continue to maintain our strong performance on repairs.

At the end of Quarter 2, we had completed 99.38% of repairs within target and consistently perform well above the Scottish average.

## Gas Safety

We reviewed our Gas Safety Procedures in April 2008 and as a result have seen an improvement in performance.

At the end of Quarter 2, 96.60% of properties with gas were serviced within 12 months of the previous service.



## Anti Social Behaviour

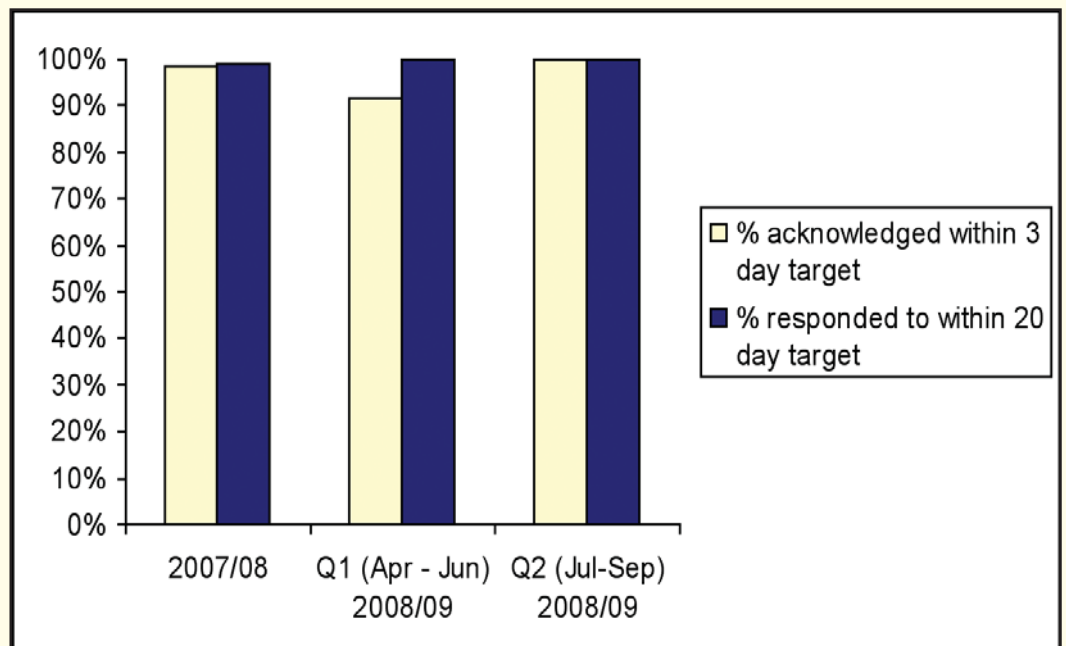
We take instances of anti social behaviour very seriously and aim respond to each incident within 2-10 days depending on the type of incident reported. During Quarter 2, we responded to 100% of cases within target.

So far this financial year we have evicted 2 tenants for anti social behaviour.

## Handling Complaints

We acknowledged 100% of the complaints we received within the 3 day target time. This is an improvement on the previous year.

We also investigated and responded to 100% of complaints within the 20 day target.



# Investment Strategy – Planned Maintenance



During the financial year 2008/2009 to date, we have spent around £2m of our annual £6m budget on the maintenance and modernisation of our properties, with several major projects currently on site and programmed to be completed by the end of March 2009.

## **Expenditure for**

### **this year covers:**

- Planned Maintenance;
- Estate Works; and
- Cyclical Maintenance.

Many projects within the Planned Maintenance Programme are being delivered through our own Building Services Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) in conjunction with Property Services, and the Capital Programmes Team.

The main area of spend under Planned Maintenance is our kitchen replacement programme. In the financial year 2008/2009, around 400 kitchens will be replaced, at a cost of £1.4m. At present we have fully completed installations in 112 properties, with many more in various stages of progress.

Also within the Planned Maintenance programme we have a budget of £0.75m for door and window replacements. This is allowing around 360 mainly flatted properties to be fitted with new common access doors and individual flat doors, and we have also made a start on replacing older windows in around 120 homes. Currently around 126 houses have had their doors replaced, and around 92 houses have had new windows installed.

In order to improve energy efficiency and reduce tenants' fuel bills, we are also replacing older style heating systems with more efficient ones. Some 39 properties have already received new gas heating systems this financial year, and we are about to embark on the remainder of the heating programme, installing 68 Air Source Heat Pumps in Rothes, to provide energy efficient renewable heating systems for our tenants.

We are also well on the way to completing a range of major works under our Roof and Fabric Repairs, such as re-rendering of properties, internal refurbishment, and replacement of rainwater goods.

Our Cyclic Maintenance budget is mainly being spent on the servicing of the Council's 4500 gas, coal and oil fired heating installations, as well as regular six-yearly programmes of pre-painterwork repairs and external painterwork. The Council is also in the process of renewing a large number of our existing smoke detectors, and this work will be programmed to take place during the remaining months of the financial year.

The remainder of the programme consists of Estates Upgrading, Garage Site Upgrading and Safety & Security projects, many of which are currently on site and progressing well.

More details of the current programme can be found on the Council's website [www.moray.gov.uk](http://www.moray.gov.uk) 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.

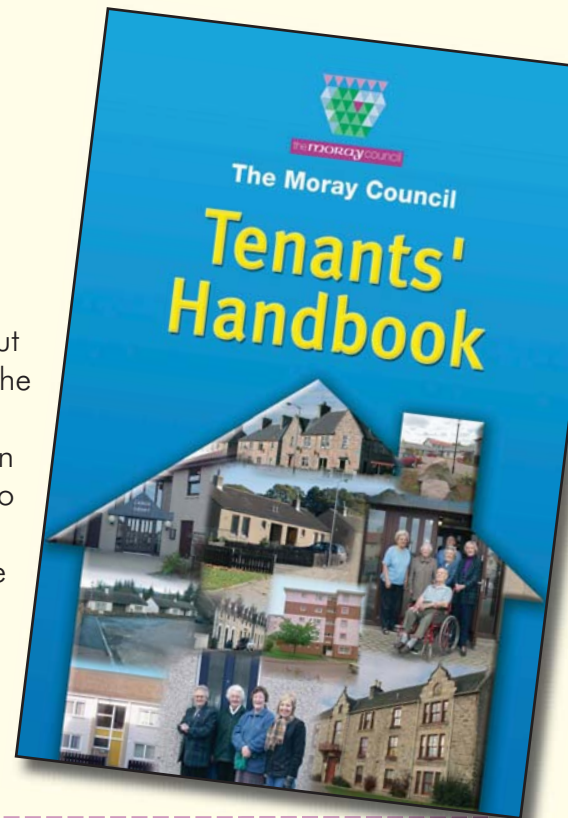
**For further details and an application form please contact the Revenues Section on 01343 563456**

# Tenants' Handbook

You will have a copy of the Tenants' Handbook. We published the Handbook in 2004, following consultation with tenant groups, staff and other professional organisations. The Handbook gives you information that you need on the housing services we offer you.

We are planning to update the Tenants' Handbook over the coming months to improve the information that we give you. It's important that the Tenants' Handbook meets your needs. So we would like your views on what you want from the Tenants' Handbook. Do you think that there is anything missing from the Handbook? Is there anything that

you would like added? If you have any comments about the content of the Tenants' Handbook, then we would like to hear from you. Please fill in the box below or email [gillian.henly@moray.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.henly@moray.gov.uk)



**I want to make the following comments about the Tenants' Handbook:**

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**Please return your comments to Gillian Henly, Policy Officer, Department of Community Services, The Moray Council, Council Offices, High Street, Elgin, Moray, IV30 1BX**

# Housing Sub-Committee Update

The Housing Sub Committee has met three times since the last edition of the Tenants' Voice.

At its meeting in June 2008, the Sub Committee agreed changes to the Council's policy for managing changes of tenancy. The changes are intended to reduce the time a property lies empty before a new tenant moves in. The new policy also allows carpets in good condition to be left in the property for use by the new tenant. Also in June, the Sub Committee agreed to allow the Volunteer Centre Moray to use a piece of land at Braco Place in Elgin for a Community Garden Project. New criteria for considering requests to upgrade garage sites were also agreed.

At its meeting in September 2008, the Sub Committee received reports on the performance of the Housing Service and the Allocations Policy Annual Performance Report for 2007/08. The Sub Committee also received update reports on the Tenant Participation Strategy and the Moray Fuel Poverty Strategy. The Sub Committee also began work on a review of its role and operation to be completed later in the year.

At the October 2008 meeting, the Sub Committee agreed to consult with tenants on the fitting of showers over baths in Council properties. A report was submitted highlighting the success of the Tenants Conference in September 2008. The Sub Committee was advised of an increase in the cost of the Tenants' Household Contents Insurance Scheme. The Sub Committee was also advised of the significant progress made on the Tenants' Survey Improvement Plan.

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).

# New Tenant Survey Prize Draw

On February 2007 we started sending out questionnaires to our new tenants. All new tenants receive this questionnaire a few weeks after they move in. All returned questionnaires are entered in to an annual prize draw to win £50 of vouchers.

The results of this survey are used to monitor and improve our services to you and future tenants. Unfortunately, only a quarter of those surveys issued this year were actually returned.

From these, however, we were able to confirm that the majority of new tenants found it easy to apply for a council house and were happy with the amount and quality of information they were given when they came to sign their new tenancy.

In the Summer 2008 issue of the Tenants' Voice we told you about the new Letting Standard and our Decoration Voucher Policy. Of the 54% of new tenants who were not satisfied with the décor of their new home, 85% of them were given decoration vouchers.

85% of our new tenants are satisfied that the rent they pay is good value for money.

Unfortunately a small number of our new tenants are not confident in how to use their heating system. If you are unsure about how to operate your heating, please contact your local housing office and they can arrange for someone to give you advice.

The New Tenant Survey is now in its second year and on 29 October 2008 Councillor Eric McGillivray drew the winner for this year.

Mr & Mrs Evans from Lossiemouth were presented with their prize by Amanda Gregory, Area Housing Officer.

## Estate Caretaker Uniforms

Following proposals from the Tenants' Survey Improvement Plan, The Moray Council has decided upon a new Estate Co-ordinator/Caretaker uniform.

Raising the profile of Estate Caretakers played a large part in the previous edition of the Tenants' Voice, and it is hoped that the new uniform will increase Caretaker visibility whilst they are out in the estates.

The uniform consists of royal blue polo shirts, navy blue work trousers and a fleece. Hi-Visibility jackets and waistcoats with Estate Co-ordinator/Caretaker on the back will also be issued to cope with more inclement weather.

Rolling out in December, the Moray Council hopes the new uniform will make your Caretaker both easily identifiable and approachable.

## Emergency out of hours service

### Out of hours emergency phone number 08457 565656

Our offices will close for the festive season at 3pm on Wednesday 24 December 2008. We will re-open at 8:45am on 5 January 2009.

If you have an emergency that happens when our offices are closed and this can only be dealt with by a Council Officer, for example, loss of electricity in your home, burst water pipes, homelessness, and so on, please phone 08457 565656 for help.

You should only use this number when we are closed and if the matter is urgent. To help us, please wait to report non-urgent matters when our offices are open again in January.

## Going on holiday?

Are you going on holiday during the winter? You can ask us to drain down your hot and cold water systems, so they cannot freeze up. Contact your area housing office for more information.

## Handy Tips for Winter \* \* \* \*

- Get to know your heating controls. Central heating thermostats and timers can be complicated. You can get advice on how to use these from The Moray Council or from an energy adviser.
- Make sure you don't lose energy out of your windows. Keep all windows closed as much as possible and close your curtains and blinds at night.
- Find your stopcock – the tap that turns off the main water supply. It is probably in the kitchen near the sink. In the event of a burst pipe or a leak you can turn off the water supply.
- If you are going away this winter, and don't want your pipes to freeze, you should ensure that your heating still comes on at regular intervals on a low temperature. Alternatively, you can ask The Moray Council to drain off the water in your property. To arrange this, please call your local area housing office.
- If there are drafts coming under your doors, a rolled up towel placed at the bottom of the door works as a draught excluder. Draught excluders are also available from most DIY stores.
- Keep Christmas presents out of view of windows. Thieves may be tempted if they can see you have something that might be worth stealing.
- Candles give a nice festive glow but can be very dangerous, never leave them burning unattended.
- Keep your home warm: make sure heaters are well-maintained and working properly. Keep furniture away from radiators and other heat sources so they don't block heat from circulating freely. Thick, lined curtains are very effective at slowing down heat loss. You can also fit aluminium foil behind any radiators which are on outside walls to reflect heat back into the room.
- Keep a small emergency pack handy in case of loss of power or other services – include items such as a torch, radio (with batteries), candles and matches. Keep it in an easily accessible place where you can find it when you need it, even in the dark.
- Keep a note of the telephone numbers of your local area housing office and the out of hours emergency number (08457 565656) for emergency use (you may want to keep a copy in your emergency pack).
- Be a good neighbour: when cold weather hits, keep an eye out for your neighbours, especially the frail, elderly and disabled.

# Waste Management Service

## Christmas and New Year Arrangements 2008/09

Members of the public are asked to note the following arrangements:

### Refuse Collection

The existing collection arrangements will continue through the festive season, urban areas on the kerbside recycling scheme will continue to receive a weekly collection of recyclables and an alternate fortnightly collection of residual and garden waste. Those in rural areas not on the kerbside recycling will continue to receive a weekly collection.

Christmas day and New Year's Day arrangements as follows:

#### No Collection on these days:

- Thursday 25 December 2008
- Thursday 1 January 2009

#### Substitute Collection Days:

- Saturday 27 December 2008
- Saturday 3 January 2009

**Your collection will be earlier than normal - please put out refuse by 7:30am.**

Special Collections:- The Special Collection line will close on Tuesday 23 December 2008 at 4pm and will re-open on Monday 5 January 2009 at 9am.

### Disposal

#### Landfill Sites, Civic Amenity Sites and Recycling Centres

All facilities will be closed Thursday 25 and Friday 26 December 2008, Thursday 1 and Friday 2 January 2009.



### Public Conveniences

All facilities will be closed on Thursday 25 and Friday 26 December 2008, Thursday 1 and Friday 2 January 2009.

**YOUR OLD CHRISTMAS TREE**  
Your present to the environment this year -  
**RECYCLE YOUR TREE**

#### Please take it to:-

The Wood Recycling Training Project, Unit 7 Chanonry Industrial Estate Elgin

OR

One of The Moray Council Recycling Centres at:-

Waterford Road, Forres;

Dallachy, Spey Bay;

Balloch Road Keith;

Gollachy, Golf View Road, Buckie.

**For further information please contact telephone no: 01343 557045**