

VOICE

The Tenants'

Winter 2011



More Affordable Homes for Moray



Alba Road, Buckpool, Buckie

under construction at sites in Elgin, Buckie and Keith. It is expected that a small number of the Phase 2 houses will be ready for occupation before the Christmas holidays with the remaining houses being completed in stages during 2012.

In September, the Scottish Government announced that the Council is to be awarded funding of £900,000 for a third phase of its house building programme. The funding will enable the Council to build a further 20 houses at Barhill Road in Buckie and 10 houses at Inchbroom Avenue in Lossiemouth. Work is scheduled to start on the new houses early in 2012 with completion around one year later.

The Government's award is especially welcome as it comes at a time when public funding for investment in housing is severely constrained and the need for affordable housing is greater than ever. The 30 houses provided by the third phase will bring the total number houses in the Council's new build programme to 202. The first phase of 48 houses in Elgin was completed in March of this year and the second phase of 124 houses is currently

As well as providing badly needed affordable housing for the people of Moray, the Council's new build programme is also making a valuable contribution to supporting jobs in the local construction sector during the current economic downturn.

The Phase 3 houses will provide accommodation for a broad range of households, including the elderly, families and people with disabilities. The houses will be built to the same high standards as the earlier phases of programme with high levels of insulation and energy efficient heating systems to minimise fuel costs to tenants.



Hossack Drive, Elgin

Your local area Access Points



BUCKIE 0300 123 4566

Buckie Access Point,
13 Cluny Square, Buckie, AB56 1AJ.
E-mail: housing@moray.gov.uk

ELGIN 0300 123 4566

Elgin Access Point,
Council Office, High Street, Elgin,
IV30 1BX.
E-mail: housing@moray.gov.uk

FORRES 0300 123 4566

Forres Access Point, Auchernack,
High Street, Forres,
IV36 1DX.
E-mail: housing@moray.gov.uk

KEITH 0300 123 4566

Keith Access Point, The Institute,
Mid Street, Keith, AB55 5BJ.
E-mail: housing@moray.gov.uk



the moray council

emergency out of hours: **08457 56 56 56**

New lettings plan agreed for new build Council housing

In October, the Council's Communities Committee, agreed a new local lettings plan for new build council housing developments in Buckie, Keith, Lossiemouth and Elgin.

Local lettings plans are used by landlords to develop policies and letting arrangements that:

- respond to local housing need and demand;
- help to suitably match applicants to properties; and
- help landlords achieve a balance housing mix within a particular area.



The overall local lettings plan aims to build a strong sustainable community, where a broad range of households are represented.

Before agreeing the lettings plan, we consulted widely with registered tenant organisations in Moray, local community groups, including community councils, area forums etc in the areas where the new build properties are situated and through the Council's website.

New build developments are unusual in terms of housing allocations because of the number of properties that are available for let in a short period of time in one area.

For this reason, we developed the local lettings plan to manage the letting of these properties. The local lettings plan will only be in place for the first allocation of new build properties.

Any future vacancies will be let under the Council's Allocations Policy.

The objectives of the local lettings plan are:

- **To make best use of properties which are suitable for households with mobility needs.**

Some new build properties provide facilities for households who have specific needs, for example wheelchair accessible housing. In such cases, a property may have been designed in order to meet the identified need of a specific household. For these cases, properties will be "pre-allocated" to the specific household. For other properties, housing and occupational therapy staff will assess those households on the Councils' Housing List. This will make sure that best use is made of specialist accommodation.

- **To make best use of property to address overcrowding.**

Research has shown that there is more demand for three+ bedrooms than there is supply. Therefore, the allocation of three+ bedroom properties will be targeted towards those households where overcrowding is most severe. When letting the property, officers will also consider other needs factors including medical, unsatisfactory housing conditions etc.

- **To make best use of property to enable existing tenants to downsize.**

We have recently consulted on a Downsizing Incentive Scheme. This provides incentives for tenants who live in homes with three or more bedrooms which are too big for their needs, to move to smaller accommodation. We will try to allocate smaller properties to tenants who want to downsize. This will release larger properties for relet elsewhere.

- **To create sustainable communities.**

When we allocate new build properties, we will try to avoid any concentration of vulnerable or inexperienced households. We will consider the overall mix of households within any flatted block. For example, we may consider the age and support requirements of the prospective tenants.

Letting houses under the local lettings plan

Our Housing List is made up from three groups of applicant – homeless priority, waiting list and transfer list. We normally apply quotas for allocating to each group, which are agreed yearly by Committee. Under the local lettings plan, we will not apply these quotas. Instead we will let properties in a way that achieves the objectives detailed above.

Local Lettings Plan Panel

We have set up a Local Lettings Plan Panel made up by officers from our Housing and Property Service, with input from other relevant services, for example Community Care, Children and Families etc, when appropriate.

For each property type, all three lists will be examined by Panel. They will then decide who offers of housing will be made to. The recommendations of the Lettings Plan Panel will be approved by the Housing Needs Manager.

We will make sure that robust checks are carried out in relation to applicants' current tenancy histories, support requirements etc. Any decision to bypass an applicant for a property must be related to the stated objectives of the Lettings Plan and will be authorised by the Housing Needs Manager.

We will closely monitor the local lettings plan on an ongoing basis to ensure that no groups or individuals are unfairly disadvantaged. We will make sure that a full audit trail of decisions is maintained and are monitored on an ongoing basis to make sure that no individuals or groups are being unfairly disadvantaged.

Rent increase consultation

The Council agrees its Housing Revenue Account budget in February. This budget funds the management and maintenance costs relating to Council housing.

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. Almost half of the expenditure from the Housing Revenue Account is on repairs and improvements to Council houses.

Moray Council has the lowest Council house rents in Scotland, despite annual increases of 3.5% in line with our Housing Business Plan. If the Council were to consider a rent increase of 3.5% for 2012/13, this would add approximately £1.65 to the current average weekly rent of £47.18 (based on 48 weeks rental charges).

If you have any views on this, please contact



Jill Stewart

Head of Housing & Property
The Moray Council
Council Offices
High Street, Elgin
Moray
IV30 1BX



phone: 01343 563532



email: jill.stewart@moray.gov.uk



New Mobile Phone for Christmas

For all of you with new mobile phones, or even a new landline, please let us know your new number. It is important for us to be able to contact you and for your details to be up to date.

Thanks for your co-operation.



Pay your Rent

24hr Telephone Payment System

0845 601 4444

Our around the clock telephone payment system allows you to pay your rent, housing benefit overpayment, former tenant arrears, rechargeable repairs, tenants insurance, garage and garage site rent anytime.

You will need your **10 digit pin number** found on your swipe card and valid debit or credit card.

You can also pay online at: www.moray.gov.uk or by calling the Contact Centre on 0300 123 4566 quoting your payment reference which can be found on your swipe card.

You can also make payments at your local Post Office or any PayPoint outlet or by Standing Order and Direct Debit.

Look out for your new Tenants' Handbook

In early Spring 2012, all Moray Council tenants will receive a copy of the new Tenants' Handbook

Over the past few months, council staff have been working with tenant representatives to produce a revised and updated Tenants' Handbook which aims to tell you about things you need to know as a tenant of The Moray Council.

There are some useful hints to help you keep your home in good condition, but more importantly, it gives you information on what to do if you have a problem and who to contact.

The new handbook is colourful and easy-to-use and will now include the Repairs Booklet which

offers you handy hints on how to fix common household problems.



The revised Right to Buy and Pressured Area Status

There is a lack of affordable houses in Moray. One of the reasons for this shortage has been the effect of the Right to Buy policy. Some tenants purchased their Council homes but not enough new homes were built to replace them. Pressured area status suspends a tenant's right to buy their property for a 5-year period where their tenancy began on or after 30 September 2002. **If your tenancy began before 30 September 2002 you will retain your right to buy even if your area is designated as "pressured".**

We already have pressured area status for some areas of Moray. Full details are available on the Council's website at http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_44662.html.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 allows the Council to apply pressured area status to house types as well as towns or locations, and for a 10-year period, instead of a 5-year period. We are investigating whether there is enough evidence to justify extending pressured area status to cover certain house types and sizes. We think there is a particular shortage of properties with 1 bedroom, and properties with 3 or more bedrooms.

We would like to know what you think about this. Please help us by filling in the tear off slip below and returning it to us. Alternatively, you could fill in our online questionnaire at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/jcjqsy>

Your views will help us decide what to do about this.



Right to Buy and Pressured Area Status Consultation Survey

Please answer the following questions by a tick ✓

| | | Yes | No |
|-----------|--|-----|----|
| Q1 | Do you agree with the council's proposals for pressured area status for properties with 1 bedroom? | | |
| Q2 | Do you agree with the council's proposals for pressured area status for properties with 3 or more bedrooms? | | |
| Q3 | Would you like to see other house types included? <i>If Yes, which house types should we include:</i> | | |
| Q4 | Would you like to see other areas of Moray included? <i>If Yes, which areas should we include:</i> | | |
| Q5 | Any other comments? | | |

Please post it to Housing Strategy, Housing & Property Services, The Moray Council, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX. Alternatively you can hand it to your local Access Point.

Thank you for filling in this survey.

If you would like more information please call us on **0300 123 4566**

Reduce your rent arrears

Please make sure you use the rent-free weeks to catch up with any rent arrears

We understand that Christmas can be a very demanding time of year financially, and every year we provide two rent free weeks to all our customers. This year our rent-free weeks start on Monday 19th December and Monday 26th December 2011.

If your rent account is in arrears, please continue to make payments regularly so that you clear any outstanding rent arrears.



School Closure Dates



Moray schools finish for the Christmas holidays on Wednesday 21st December 2011 - the children go back to school on Thursday 5th January 2012.



Beko fridge-freezer

Do you have a Beko frost-free fridge-freezer? If so, it could be a potential fire hazard. But don't panic. It's easy to find out if you have one of the affected machines, and Beko should sort the problem, free, in minutes.



Check the serial number on the label inside. If this begins with 00, 01, 02, 03, 04, 05 or 06, there is a possibility that in certain circumstances the defrost timer could overheat and cause a fire.

Full details can be found on the website refsafety.beko.co.uk, or call the manufacturer free on 0800 009 4837 between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday

Let's Beat the Winter FREEZE!

Now that we're well into our journey through winter, it's important that we do all we can to protect ourselves against the cold.

If it's cold outside you need to be **warm inside** – here are some tips for keeping safe and warm:

- If you can't heat all your rooms, make sure you keep your living room warm throughout the day and heat your bedroom before going to bed.
- A balanced diet will help keep you warm and healthy in the winter – make sure you and your family eat at least one hot meal a day. Soup is nutritious and warming, and inexpensive to make or buy.

- Wearing the right kind of clothes can help keep you much warmer – layers are best. T-shirts and under clothes to keep the base of your back warm, will heat you from the core.
- Staying active is good for your health, walking for example, can be beneficial. If the weather prevents you getting outside, stay active indoors – catch up on all the household tasks you've been putting off.
- Talk – especially if you've been stuck in the house for a few days. Lift the phone and call friends or family for a blether.
- If you have elderly relatives or neighbours who might need help, please check on them. You can get a warm feeling inside by ensuring they are warm on the outside!

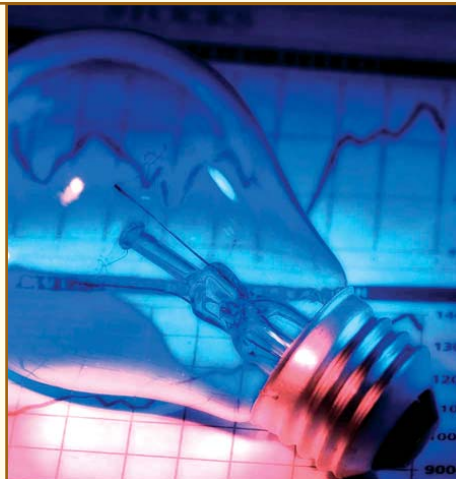


Switching Energy Supplier

A good way of ensuring you stay warm this winter is by making sure that the amount you are paying for your gas and electricity is as low as possible.

The government regulator, Ofgem estimates that those people who have never switched their energy supplier could save £100 a year on their bills. In fact, if you use a card, key or token meter, you could be paying over £200 more than you need to.

Find out if you are paying too much by either ringing round the energy companies or by using



an approved price comparison website. Before starting your search of prices available from the various energy suppliers, you will need to have a clear idea of the amounts you are currently spending on gas and electricity, so make sure you keep your most recent bills for reference. If you use a payment method which

means you do not receive any bills, keep a manual record of the amounts you are paying in a month.

By having accurate amounts to hand, you will be able to get a clear picture of the savings that are available. Most customers will be able to change supplier, even those who owe their current suppliers up to £100



Investment Strategy- Planned Maintenance



During the current financial year, so far, we have spent over £2m of our annual £9.5m budget that we have to carry out repairs, maintenance and modernisation of our properties. We have works to the value of over £7.5m committed with contractors, with the remainder programmed for completion by the end of March 2012.

Expenditure covers a number of areas including:-

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

The majority of projects within the Planned Maintenance Programme are now being delivered through a Partnership Agreement between our own Building Services, the Property Design Section, and the Property Resources Section, who now all come under the remit of the Housing & Property Service.



The main area of spend under our Planned Maintenance programme is on kitchen replacements, and this financial year around 400 kitchens will be replaced, at a cost of £2.3m. We have completed installations in around 107 properties to date, with the remaining properties in the design and programming stages of the process. We also have a budget of almost £0.7m within the Planned Maintenance programme for door and window replacements. This is allowing

us to complete our programme to fit flatted properties with new common access doors and individual flat doors where required. We are also in the second year of a major window replacement programme and will be replacing windows in around 200 homes this year with new timber windows which are both environmentally friendly and more energy efficient.

In order to improve energy efficiency of our properties further, and reduce tenants' fuel bills, we are also replacing old heating systems with more fuel efficient ones. Around 80 houses have already received new gas heating systems this financial year, and we are about to embark on the remainder of the heating programme to complete works to a small number of remaining properties by April 2012.

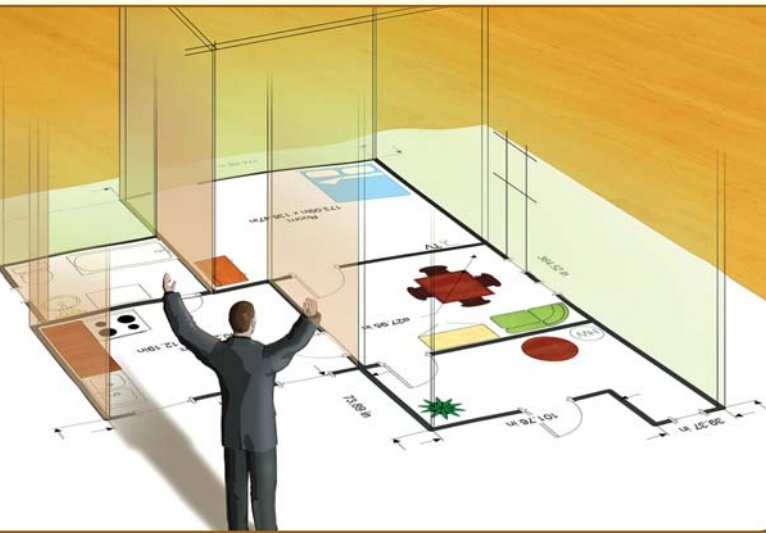
We are also starting on a re-rendering contract under the Roof and Fabric Repairs budget to improve the external fabric of 85 properties. This is in addition to having completed a wide range of other fabric repair works, including cill, lintel and chimney repairs to 70 properties during the current year. The majority of our Cyclical Maintenance budget is being spent on the servicing of the Council's gas, coal and oil fired heating installations, with some of the remaining budget being used to carry out regular six-yearly programmes of pre-painter work repairs and external painter work. The programme to renew our existing smoke detectors is also continuing, and the final phase of a 3 year programme will be completed during the remaining months of the financial year.

The balance of the planned maintenance programme consists of Estates Upgrading, including fencing and external works upgrades, Garage Upgrading and Safety & Security projects, a large proportion of which are currently on site.

More details of the current programme can be found on the Council's website or by contacting your Local Access Point or the Capital Programmes Team.

House Downsizing Incentive Scheme

The Council is considering the introduction of a Downsizing Incentive Scheme. This is a voluntary scheme. It will help Council tenants who live in homes which are too big for their needs move to a smaller home and make larger family homes available for those who need it most.



Why does the Council want to encourage tenants to move to a smaller council property?

There are several reasons:

- We want to make the best use of the existing housing stock and this scheme will help tenants move into accommodation that best suits their needs.
- In the current financial situation, this will help us both to save money. This scheme could also help us both use resources more effectively.
- Some housing applicants are waiting for large properties, while at the same time a number of households live in properties that are too large for their needs and would like to move to smaller properties if support is available.

We have already consulted tenants who may be eligible to establish if there is interest in a downsizing incentive scheme. The positive response means that we will present the proposed downsizing incentive scheme to the relevant Council Committees for approval. If approved, we hope to start the scheme in April 2012.

We know that it can be challenging, both financially and practically, to move house. Therefore, we have developed the scheme with this in mind.

Eligibility

- Council tenants who currently live in a 3, 4 or 4+ bedroom house, who no longer need this size of property may be eligible.
- Tenants who want to downsize will have to submit a transfer application, unless they already done so. The points to be awarded to transfer applications will be assessed in terms of the Council's Allocations Policy.
- We will accept registrations where there is evidenced need for the size, type and location of the property they would be leaving.

Why would tenants want to move to a smaller house?

Tenants who may find the scheme useful include those whose family members have moved out leaving them with a house that is now too large for their needs. Moving to a smaller and easier to manage home may be more suitable for them.

For example, moving to a smaller house may:

- reduce your running costs - a smaller house means lower rent, council tax, heating and electricity bills
- reduce the size of future utility price rises.
- lower insurance costs.
- make it easier to clean and manage.

For more details contact your local access point.



Protect your home from the

COLD

Unfortunately, things like burst pipes can happen to any of us and dealing with the consequences can be very distressing and costly.

Prevention is better than cure and there are some simple measures that you can take to ensure that the risk of damage to your property is minimised. Any damage to your house, flat, close or garden must be reported to us without delay.

By following the few simple steps given below, you can avoid the misery and upset caused by burst pipes.

- Set the thermostat on your heating to at least 10 degrees centigrade
- Leave internal doors open to allow air to circulate
- If you are going on holiday make sure that the heating is left on low, to prevent any pipes bursting in your home or causing water damage to the property. Or, before going on holiday, you can ask us for a **FREE drain down of your water system**, call us on 0300 123 4566 to arrange this
- In very cold weather open your loft hatch to let warm air move around storage tanks or pipes

If you do have burst or frozen pipes:

- Turn off the water at the stopcock
- Switch off electricity at the mains (in case water comes into contact with fittings or wiring)
- Switch off the water heater
- Turn on all taps (make sure plug holes are not blocked)
- Let your neighbours who may be affected know
- Let us know by contacting our office or the out of hours

Emergency Number
08457 565656

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If you need more information regarding the above, or you need to be shown how your heating works, or you are not sure where your stopcock is, please contact your Local Access Point.

Contact details for your Local Access Point can be found on the front page of the Tenants' Voice.

Changes to response repairs policy

The Moray Council is currently consulting council tenants across Moray on proposed changes to our housing repairs policy. The overall aim of the policy is to ensure that tenants continue to receive a high standard of service focused upon the main areas of repairs that the Council undertakes. This policy sets out how we intend to do this. The objectives and principles of the policy are unchanged.



The revised policy proposes that the response repair times for emergency repairs is extended from 2 hours to 4 hours, in line with – or still exceeding – most other Local Authority targets. The classification of an emergency repair remains unchanged. In cases of severe emergency, for example, a gas leak or extreme water leak, tradesman will still aim to attend within 2 hours.

Whilst the repair categories remain the same, a further change is proposed in an enhanced range of appointment times to reflect the Council's new ways of working through the automated workforce scheduling system, Opti-time. Available appointments will be **All Day (8am – 4.30pm), Morning (8am – 12.30pm) Afternoon (12pm - 4.30pm) and School Run (10am – 2pm)**.

The consultation finishes on 13th January 2012. You can view the proposed revised repairs policy at www.moray.gov.uk

If you would like to comment on the proposed changes please respond in writing or email by 13th January 2012 to:

The Housing Policy Team
Housing & Property Services
The Moray Council
High Street, Elgin IV30 1BX
Email: housingpolicy@moray.gov.uk

Have you applied for your Winter Fuel Payment yet?

If you were born on or before January 5, 1951 then you may be able to get a Winter Fuel Payment to help pay for keeping warm this winter. The Winter Fuel Payment is a tax free payment and can be anything between £100 and £300 depending on your situation. The Winter Fuel Payment is aimed at helping people pay for their heating and won't affect any other benefits you may get. To get a claim form sent to you, contact the

Winter Fuel Payment Helpline on 0845 9 15 15 15.

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.

The new annexe at the Moray Council

As part of the council's commitment to offering residents improved access to first class services, the Elgin customer service points will soon move. A one-stop-shop of services will be provided from the new Annexe building. The former supermarket next to the council's Elgin HQ, is due to open to the public in early spring.

The new access point will make it easier and more convenient for people to have their enquiries dealt with, make payments, lodge applications, book appointments and get advice. There's more convenient parking too.

The relocation will lead to the closure of the current reception points in the HQ building on Greyfriars Street. Notices will be put in place before the move to alert visitors to the change. As customers make their way into the Annexe through the glass entrance from the east end of Elgin High Street, they will immediately be struck by the bright, airy and welcoming environment.

What was once a supermarket has been totally transformed into a modern environment for visitors and staff. Visitors will be welcomed by customer services advisors who will be on hand to assist them in getting initial information or directing them to the support they are looking for.

The five reception desks will be manned by staff trained to handle a wide range of enquiries. Appointments can be made to see council officers and there are six private interview rooms. A comfortable waiting area has also been created.

Help will be available to access a bank of self-service computer terminals linked directly to the Moray Council website, where with just a few clicks residents can carry out on-line transactions such as paying bills and booking a bulky uplift, look up information on services and events and take part in consultations.

People visiting the council access point by car will find it more convenient, with a pay and display car park right behind the Annexe which includes disabled bays for Blue Badge holders and cycle stands.

The Annexe access point will open Monday to Friday from 8.45am to 5pm. The new access point does not replace the local services which will continue to be provided from the access points in Buckie, Forres and Keith. In all three towns the standard of accommodation currently provided is under review with the intention of improving facilities for customers.



The creation of the Annexe is a key element in the council's programme of Designing Better Service for the people of Moray, which has already secured savings of £1 million and is set to deliver £4.4million of recurring savings by 2014. The council's major improvement programme involves services being redesigned from the first point of contact to the way they are planned, prepared and delivered. The bold redesign was embarked upon as a positive response to increasing financial pressures and is providing opportunities to eliminate unnecessary waste and generate major savings which can be used to protect frontline services.

Help us to help you: Leaving your Council home clean and tidy



Because of housing shortages in the area we want to re-let our Council homes as quickly as possible when a tenant leaves. One of the problems we face is where Council homes are left by a tenant in a bad state.

How you can help us

Give us 28 days notice

If you want to end your tenancy please give us 28 days notice by filling in a Termination of Tenancy form. You can get a form by calling 0300 123 4566 or e-mailing: housing@moray.gov.uk

You can also download a form from our website at www.moray.gov.uk. During this period your Housing Officer will contact you to make arrangements to inspect the property, and give advice on how the property should be left.

Clear all rubbish and possessions

Please make sure that the property and garden are completely free of all your possessions and any rubbish when you leave. If we have to clear

the property then you will be re-charged this cost. The Council offers a bulky waste collection service. The service is provided at a cost of £17.94 per lift for items which are in excess or too large for your wheelie bin.

Fridges, freezers, cookers, washing machines and tumble dryers are uplifted free of charge. If you would like to book a bulky uplift, please telephone 01343 557073 or e-mail bulkyuplift@moray.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you can submit a request via our online form at www.moray.gov.uk

Keep an eye out for problems in your neighbourhood

If you think that a Council property in your area is not being looked after by the tenant then please let us know.

Signs could be rubbish piled up in the garden or damage to the outside. It may mean that the tenant is struggling to look after their home and we may be able to provide assistance.

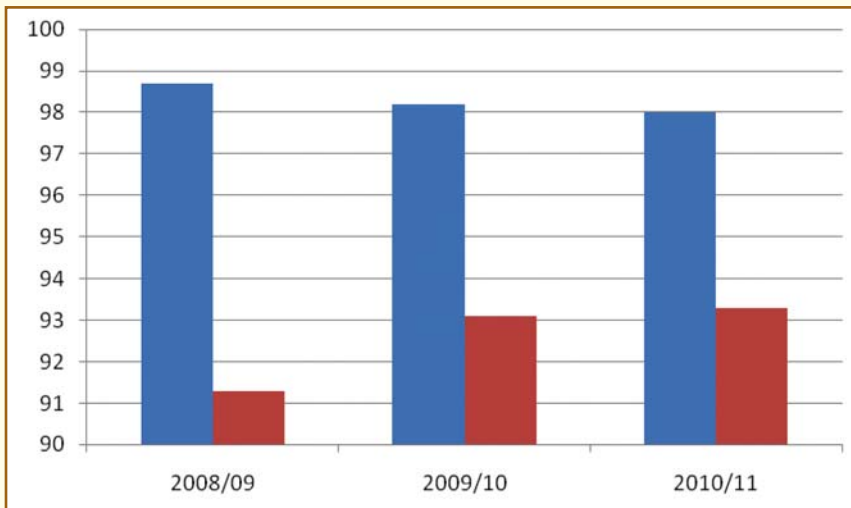


Housing Performance and Service Standards

It is important that our customers are happy with our services. These graphs show how we are performing in each of our service areas. We set challenging targets, and use customer feedback to try to continuously improve.

Response Repairs

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



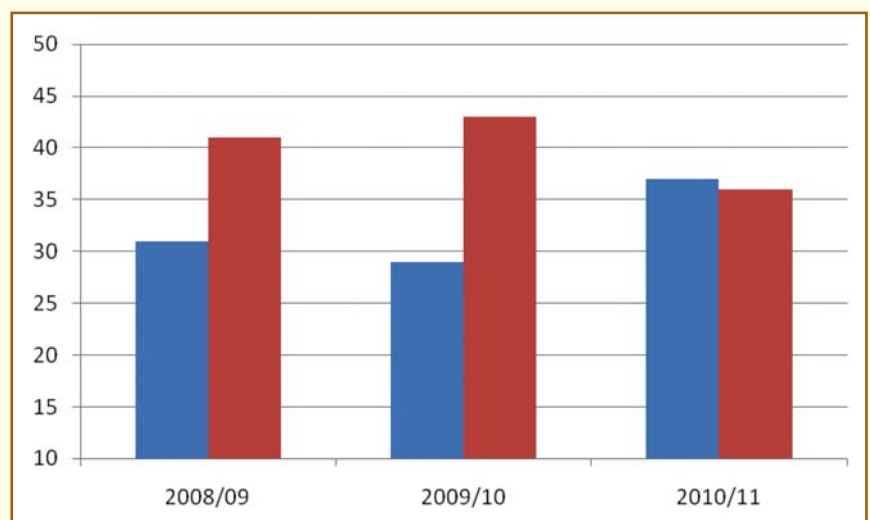
During 2010/11, we completed over 19,700 repairs and 98% of those were completed within target response times. Although we saw a slight decrease in performance this year, we still exceed the Scottish average and are ranked 2nd best in Scotland.

■ Moray Council ■ Scotland

Re-letting Empty Properties

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.

In 2010/11, 0.68% of net rental income was lost through empty properties, although we had an increase of 0.19%, from the previous year, we are still amongst the top performing authorities in Scotland.

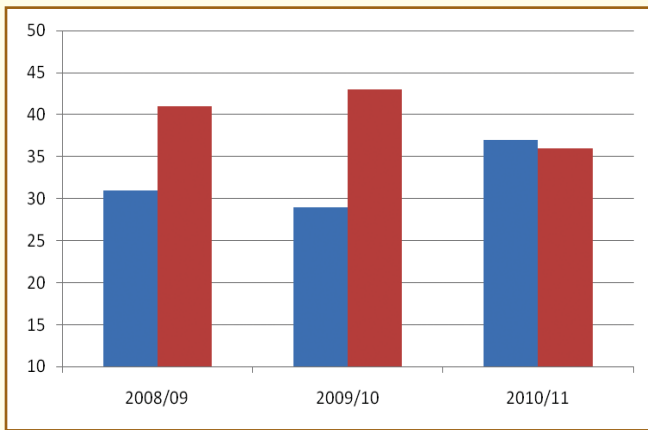


■ Moray Council ■ Scotland

Rent Arrears

We set a target level of rent arrears to be achieved each year. We report our performance against this target.

Our rent arrears figure for 2010/11 was 3.48%. Although we didn't quite meet our target of 3%, we continue to be one of the top performing authorities at keeping rent arrears to a minimum. The current economic recession has had an effect on the level of rent arrears outstanding. We will be reviewing our rent arrears procedures in an effort to help reduce these arrears whilst recognising the financial difficulties some tenants may be experiencing.



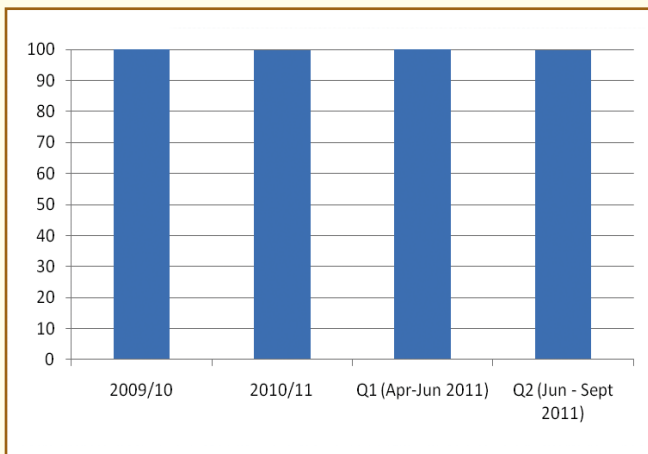
■ Moray Council ■ Scotland

Gas Safety

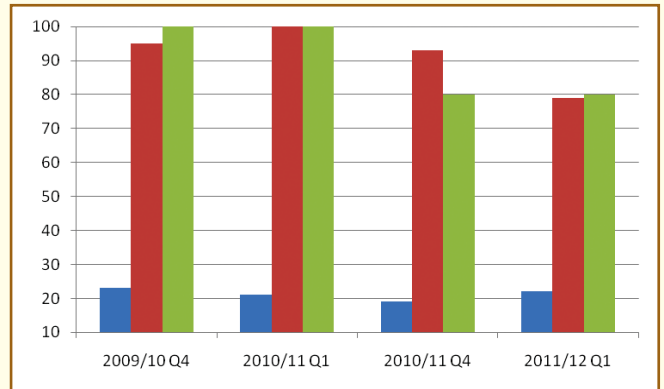
We are continuing to perform well in ensuring properties with gas are serviced annually. During 2010/11, 99.8% of our properties held a valid gas safety certificate.

Formal

■ Moray



Complaints

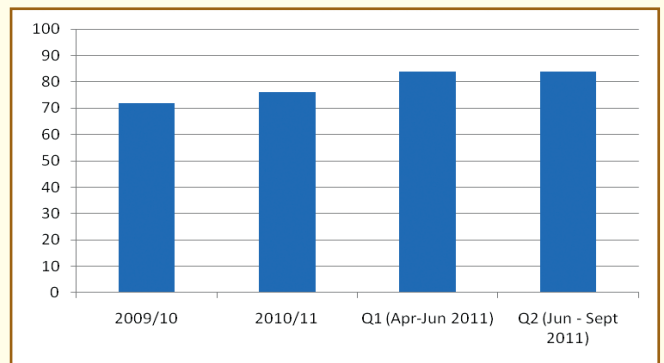


■ Number of complaints received
 ■ No of complaints acknowledged within 3 days
 ■ No of complaints responded to within 20 days

Moray Council has a formal complaints procedure and the Council aims to ensure a reply to complaints within 20 working days.

Although we saw a slight dip in performance during the latter part of 2010/11 and the first Quarter of 2011/12, we continue to work at improving our response rates.

Scottish Housing Quality Standard



The Scottish Housing Quality Standard was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2004 and sets a national standard for the physical quality of rented properties that all Scottish social housing providers aim to achieve by 2015.

Moray Council continues to make steady progress towards meeting the SHQS. During 2010/11, the number of properties meeting the SHQS was 75.8%, exceeding our own target of 74%

Have Your Say...



Tenants' Voice is put together for YOU, the tenants and customers of Moray Council, so it is important that you like what you see. If there is something in the Tenants' Voice that you like or dislike, for whatever reason, we would like to hear your views.

It is important that Tenants' Voice is informative for its readers, so if you have comments, or would like to share your news and views on what you think should go in the newsletter or if you know of something that is happening in your area or have ideas for articles to go in the next issue, please tell us.



Details

.....

.....

.....

Name

Date

Address

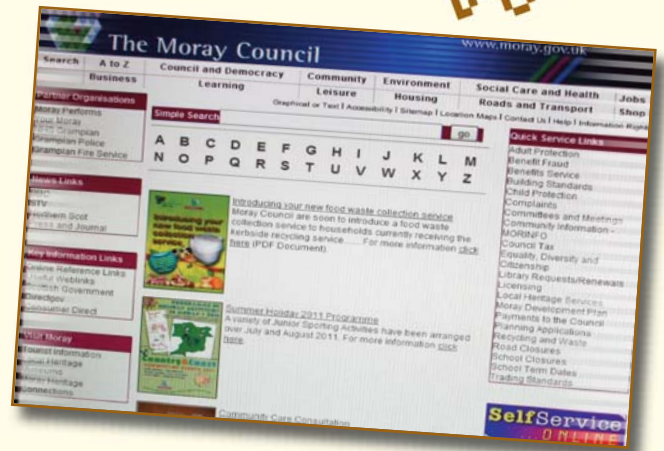
.....

Contact No:

Please return your comments to:

**The Housing Policy Team,
Housing & Property Services,
Council Offices, High Street,
Elgin IV30 1BX
email: housingpolicy@moray.gov.uk**

Better by design



Out with the old.....



.....and in with the new

Moray Council's new website went live at the beginning of August 2011. The website, which attracts an average of 2,500 visitors each weekday, has been redesigned by the Council's own IT team.

It is the first overhaul of the website for five years. New features include a mapping facility which allows users to identify local facilities such as council offices, hospitals and health centres and includes easy-to-follow directions on how to get there.

The website continues to feature a wide range of information on council services from schools, road closures, winter maintenance, community centres, swimming pools, harbours and cemeteries to adult learning, housing, planning, road safety, recycling, youth justice and public transport.

Wanted



**Volunteers to become Tenant Inspectors and
Mystery Shoppers to test our services**

can you help?

We are looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help monitor, improve and influence the services that Moray Council provides.

This brand new project will enable tenants to inspect the Housing Services. We want to involve as wide a range of people as possible.

...Be in at the start!

The aim of the project is to develop ways in which tenants can conduct hands on and detailed assessments about how the Council's Housing Services looks after its customers.

Mystery shopping

Mystery shoppers can help us to test the quality of our services. Posing as customers, you can test the contact centre, and local access points by visiting or ringing in with a query, or even by looking for information on the website.

Mystery shoppers will help us to establish which services are performing well and which areas need improving. You can also help us answer basic service delivery questions, such as whether customers can always access a particular service and how well enquiries are dealt with. All council tenants and prospective tenants can take part in mystery shopping.

Tenant Inspectors

Tenant Inspectors are volunteers who are trained to monitor services, collect data themselves and actively report on how well our services are doing. The Tenant Inspectors

decide which service area they want to inspect, and they receive feedback on their recommendations for improvement.

Volunteer Tenant Inspectors look at how well our services are doing and make recommendations. They are given FREE training (which could be ideal support for a return to work). Any expenses incurred by tenants taking part in the Tenant Inspection process will be reimbursed

Amanda Gregory, Senior Housing Policy Officer said: "We are looking for tenants who want to get involved in how council housing is managed. Tenants will be able to find out what is happening in housing throughout the area and influence change to improve services."

Anyone who expresses an interest in getting involved in the project can choose the areas they wish to work on. Training will be provided for all volunteers.

Want to know more?

If you are interested and want to know more please contact Amanda Gregory, Senior Housing Policy Officer on **01343 563538** or e-mail: amanda.gregory@moray.gov.uk

"Remember this is your chance to participate in a brand new project. With your help and commitment we can make it a huge success."

Work With Us to Make Your Voice Heard



Your opinions about your home and neighbourhood are very important to us

As part of Moray Council’s commitment to tenant participation, we are currently looking for tenants who would be interested in having a say in the way we manage our homes.

We want to know your views about the service you receive. We need to know where we are going wrong, what we could do better and what works well. This will help us to improve the service that we provide to you.

There are many ways of taking part — you do not have to attend meetings or give up a lot of your time.

Tenants Forums

You could work with your neighbours and set up a Tenants’ Forum to work towards improving your local area and build a sense of community or you could join a Forum that is currently operating in your area.

Tenants Focus Groups

These are informal groups who will meet periodically to review and discuss various housing management policies and procedures.

Postal Survey Group

If you became a member of our postal survey group, we would send you a survey once in a while to ask for your views on aspects of our service.

Email Survey Group

This group would also be sent surveys, but by email.

No experience is required, other than an interest in working with us to shape the services we offer our tenants. Here’s your chance to discuss where improvements are needed and to consider new ways of doing things.

Your opinions really do matter to us

If you would like to become involved in the management of your home please indicate on the form below and return to Amanda Gregory, Senior Housing Policy Officer, Housing & Property Services, The Moray Council, High Street, Elgin IV30 1BX. Alternatively hand it into your local access point.



I would like to

(Please ✓ all those which interest you)

- Join an existing Tenant’s Forum
- Set up a Tenant’s Forum
- Join the Moray Tenant’s Core Group

I would like to be consulted by the following method(s):

(Please ✓ all those which interest you)

- Postal questionnaire
- Email survey / online questionnaire
- Telephone survey
- Face to face survey
- Focus group

I would like to join a Focus Group. I am particularly interested in:

(Please ✓ all those which interest you)

- Repairs and maintenance;
- Rent setting and arrears management;
- Void management (how we deal with houses that become empty);
- Allocations
- Estate management
- Tenant participation strategy review
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Name:

Address:

.....

Telephone:

Email:

Your participation is voluntary and confidential!

connecting folk, work and place

REAP

SCOTLAND

IS YOUR HOME WRAPPED FOR WINTER?



Environmental charity REAP has three energy advisers who are working hard across Moray to help people reduce their energy costs and insulate their homes. They have a new free phone number to call for energy advice and to book an insulation survey:

Tel:
0800 085 4008

(calls free from land lines)

or text 'CALL' to
07553 202 372

REAP are having an increasing number of calls from people saying insulation companies have contacted them offering insulation 'deals' that need to be signed for straight away but are finding most people prefer to deal with someone local that they can trust.

REAP have agreed a contract with Carillion Energy Services to survey and install properties as and when we receive requests from clients.

For many people, insulating their home will be FREE (for both loft and cavity wall), especially for people over 70 or on benefits (priority clients). For householders ineligible

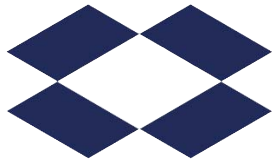
for grants, REAP have negotiated a discounted price. Carillion will also provide a free energy monitor for priority clients and draught proof one external door. Further draught proofing will cost £20 per door. So, in addition to having some local control over the process, we have negotiated some added extras which can help to reduce energy use further.

With winter just around the corner and increases to the cost of energy, REAP are encouraging everyone to stop as much heat escaping from their homes as possible. Using less energy is also vital to keep costs down and simple measures can make a big difference.

The team can work with home owners and tenants, including Moray Council tenants. They will be organising events and advice sessions over the coming months and can also visit vulnerable people in their homes. If you are interested in a visit from our Team, would like more information, or have a query, please call our free phone number above or the office on: **01542 880200**, email insulation@reapscotland.org.uk or visit www.reapscotland.org.uk.

REAP works in the North East of Scotland to encourage social enterprise, promote sustainable development and raise environmental awareness.

REAP is a company limited by guarantee (No: 316989) and a registered charity (No: SC037988)



THE SCOTTISH
HOUSING
REGULATOR

The new Scottish Housing Regulator was established on 1st April 2011. Created by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, its objective will be to safeguard and promote the interests of tenants and others who use local authority and Registered Social Landlord housing services.

The Regulator will operate independently of Scottish Ministers. The new powers and duties from the 2010 Act will be "switched on" once the Regulator has finalised the guidance on the new approach to regulation in April 2012. Until then, the existing Scottish Housing Regulator, acting on ministers behalf, will continue to operate the regulatory provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

You can find out more by visiting the Regulator's website at:



Website:

[www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/
newregulator](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/newregulator)



Phone: 0141 271 3810



e-mail:

scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk



Looking for another house? Why not try the apply4homes website.

We have been working with other social landlords in Aberdeenshire and Moray on a system to make it easier for tenants to find another tenant to swap properties with. This is part of a common housing register we have been working on.

Apply4homes is a new website that helps tenants in social housing swap houses locally, regionally or nationally. It may be a quicker way of moving than waiting on an allocations list. As a Moray Council tenant, this service is free of charge and to register, log on to www.houseexchange.org.uk and follow the registration process. If you don't have access to a computer you can pop into your local Access Point for advice and assistance. You can also advertise a swap in the local press or put an advert in local shops and supermarkets.

Moray Council tenants influence the proposals for the new Scottish Social Housing Charter.

The Moray Council facilitated a joint North East Social Landlord Housing Event at the Mansion House Hotel, Elgin on 27 September 2011. This event brought together tenants, tenant representatives, landlord staff, councillors and housing association board members.

Moray Council tenants participated in a range of discussions and had the opportunity to meet representatives from the Scottish Government.

Anne Cook from the Scottish Government led a discussion on the proposed outcomes of the new Scottish Social Housing Charter. The Charter will set out the outcomes and standards that tenants can expect from their landlords. It will be used, from next year, to regulate social landlords by the newly established independent Scottish Housing Regulator.



Waste Management Service

Christmas and New Year Arrangements 2011/12

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

Refuse/Recycling Collections

The existing collection arrangements of residual waste and garden waste alternating weekly will continue over the festive season.

Households with blue and orange recycling boxes will continue to receive a weekly collection of recyclables. Those on the new recycling system will continue to have their purple and blue bins and orange box serviced fortnightly.

Please refer to the Waste Guide at www.moray.gov.uk for further details.

Normal household refuse collection arrangements will remain in place over the festive period.

Your collection may be earlier than normal please present your bins/boxes by 7:30am.

The Bulky Household Collection and Waste Hotline will be closed from: 3pm Friday 23rd December 2011, re-opening at 9am Wednesday 4th January 2012.

Disposal

Landfill Sites, Civic Amenity Sites and Recycling Centres. All facilities will be closed Monday 26th December 2011 and Monday 2nd January 2012.

Public Conveniences

All facilities will be closed Monday 26th December 2011 and Monday 2nd January 2012.

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:-

Chanonry Industrial Estate, **ELGIN**;
Waterford Road, **FORRES**;
Dallachy, **SPEY BAY**;
Balloch Road, **KEITH**;
Gollachy, Golf View Road, **BUCKIE**.



Avoid the Christmas debt hangover...



It's coming, we don't want to admit it; we're pretending that it's still months away but it's December already and you know how it goes: you open your first Christmas card and as quick as you can say "Only Fools and Horses on TV again!," you're carving the Christmas turkey, and then Bam! All of a sudden it's January.

That's right, Christmas is coming, and more specifically:

Christmas shopping, Christmas travelling, and Christmas entertaining. Anything Christmas-related that costs money.

These top tips may help you avoid the debt pitfalls in the build up to Christmas. Pay your regular bills first. Rent, utilities, food, debts and loans, etc., must take priority.

Watch out for expensive warranties and insurance premiums. Consider whether these are worth the money.

Remember consumer regulations automatically require goods to be of satisfactory quality, durable, and fit for purpose

Some providers offer interest free credit which may seem like a good idea but you need to be careful to pay the full amount before the free credit period expires. If you are even 1 day late you may have to pay interest on the total cost.

What seems like a good deal, can have hidden costs. For example, minimum payments or a payment holiday can result in substantially larger total payments.

Be vigilant when considering store cards. These may seem convenient but some charge interest of 30% per year or more.

If you can't afford to pay for goods outright, don't be persuaded to take out credit unless it really does work out cheaper or better fits your financial plans.

Every now and again take time to do a quick `financial health check`. Write down your income (monthly or weekly) and everything you need to spend money on over the same period. Make sure you are able to make ends meet and are not using credit to `rob Peter to pay Paul`

If you think your finances may be getting out of control, seek help from an appropriately qualified independent agency, such as, The Moray Council Money Advice Service. Our advice is FREE and CONFIDENTIAL.

Don't delay, contact us today for an appointment with a Money Adviser.



In case of emergency



We all carry our mobile phones with names & numbers stored in its memory. If we were to be involved in an accident or were taken ill, the people attending us would have our mobile phone but wouldn't know who to call.

'ICE' is a method of contacting your preferred contact in an emergency. All you need to do is store the number of a contact person or persons who should be contacted during emergency under the name **'ICE' (In Case Of Emergency)**. The idea was thought up by a paramedic who found that when he went to the scenes of accidents there were always mobile phones with patients but they didn't know which number to call.

In an emergency situation, Emergency Service personnel and Hospital Staff would be able to quickly contact the right person by simply dialling the number you have stored as **'ICE'**.

For more than one contact name simply enter ICE1, ICE2 and ICE3 etc.



Right to Repair Scheme

Did you know that the "Right to Repair Scheme" enables you to have certain small essential repairs? these are called 'Qualifying Repairs', attended to within a maximum timescale set by the Government.

When you report a repair we will tell you if it is a qualifying repair and what the associated timescale should be. If we fail to meet this timescale, then you are entitled to instruct a contractor (approved by the Council) to perform the work at our cost.



Additionally if you do have to instruct a contractor (approved by the Council), we will compensate you for the inconvenience caused. Remember, not all repairs are 'Qualifying Repairs' under the Right to Repair Scheme, so check with your local access point before instructing another contractor.

For further details of the scheme and how it works please see your Tenants' Handbook. Alternatively a Right to Repair leaflet is available if you contact the Customer Contact Centre on 0300 123 4566 or visit your local Access Point.

Being Young Being Heard

Young people in Scotland have been hit hard by the effects of the recession. Whether they are school leavers, students, graduates, employees, or apprentices, young people across the country are struggling.



Citizens Advice Scotland's new report, "Being Young Being Heard", outlines the impact of the recession on young people in Scotland in their own words. The report shows that the effect of the recession has been that too many young people have

become trapped in unemployment; in low paying unsatisfying jobs; in expensive private lets; on benefits that keep them afloat but don't give them a leg up; and ultimately in a place where their potential is going to waste.

The report also shows the issues that face young people in the housing market. Many young people living with their family cannot afford to make the jump to independent living, which can cause emotional problems and frustration. Priced out of owner occupied housing, and unable to access social housing, many young people are only able to access expensive private rented housing

As a result of these problems, almost a third of homeless applications in Scotland are made by a young person under the age of 25.

Citizens Advice Scotland produces a wealth of information on a wide range of subjects. For more information visit: www.cas.org.uk/publications



Neighbour nuisance

Neighbour nuisance is a common problem related to anti-social behaviour which can have a significant impact on people's lives

Anti-social behaviour covers a range of selfish and unacceptable activities, all of which can have a negative impact on communities and individual lives.



As a Landlord, Moray Council is committed to working with tenants to deal with and resolve problems related to anti-social behaviour. Examples of anti-social behaviour are harassment & intimidating behaviour; behaviour that causes fear; drunken & abusive behaviour to name but a few.

Neighbour nuisance is a common problem related to anti-social behaviour which can have a significant impact on people's lives. Domestic noise, such as DIY or the playing of loud instruments, hi-fi equipment, radios or television at volumes likely to cause disturbance to neighbours, cats, dogs or other animals not kept under proper control (including excessive barking) are some examples of neighbour nuisance.

'Dealing with Neighbour Nuisance: A Guide for Council Tenants provides practical advice to tenants about action they can take, as well as the Council's role in dealing with neighbour nuisance. The guide also highlights other help available to tenants and provides a useful list of contact numbers for Council services and external organisations.



Winter word search



Why not try your luck and find the ten words in the word search and find twelve differences in the Spot the Difference competition. There will be two winners each receiving £20 in High Street Shopping Vouchers.

Good luck!

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R | R | F | D | A | X | N | S | N | O | W | M | A | N |
| S | A | T | H | E | R | M | A | L | S | F | H | U | V |
| E | L | C | V | Z | Q | U | C | R | M | R | O | G | K |
| W | A | E | S | V | S | K | F | H | A | O | L | I | E |
| W | S | R | D | I | B | Q | W | G | C | S | I | G | Q |
| Z | Y | H | M | G | C | E | B | R | I | T | D | O | O |
| U | A | S | A | U | I | E | R | N | G | Y | A | X | P |
| B | Z | W | N | S | F | N | S | R | V | Q | Y | M | S |
| P | Y | K | E | D | K | F | G | K | I | R | V | A | N |
| H | D | U | A | M | D | W | S | L | A | E | H | H | I |
| Q | P | U | B | U | H | G | T | X | D | T | S | I | U |
| J | I | C | I | C | L | E | S | B | K | D | I | J | Q |
| P | B | E | M | T | P | M | H | Y | J | J | W | N | J |
| I | E | K | C | H | E | S | T | N | U | T | S | Y | G |

Try to find the 10 hidden winter words in the word search below:

**THERMALS, SNOWMAN, ICICLES, FROSTY
ICE SKATING, CHESTNUTS, BERRIES
EAR MUFFS, SLEDGING, HOLIDAY**

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Can you spot the twelve differences between the cartoons?



Please return all completed forms to: The Housing Policy Team, Council Offices, High Street, Elgin IV30 1BX

Your name:

Your telephone number:

Your address:

.....
.....



Merry Christmas
to all our tenants and readers



Office Closure during the Christmas and New Year Period

All offices will be closed from 3pm on Friday 23rd December 2011 and will re-open on Wednesday 4th January 2012.