



# TIGHRA TALES

You can get a printed version of this newsletter, which includes photos, from our office.

**AUTUMN 2004**

## NATIONAL TENANT ENGAGEMENT MOVES FORWARD

A national conference has been organised by Communities Scotland to take forward the Scottish Executive's initiative to engage with tenants at a national level. The event will be held in Glasgow on Monday 8th November at a venue which will be confirmed soon. Only registered tenant organisations will be invited to the event and currently the Tenant Participation Development Team are undertaking a survey of groups to determine the nature of topics which should be covered at the initial event. TIGHRA members had a chance to put forward their views on the proposals to Anne Cook at the TIGHRA conference on Saturday 4th September. Some members have expressed concern already that care should be taken by the Scottish Executive to ensure that rural and dispersed communities get a realistic opportunity to engage in the process. There are comparatively few registered tenant organisations representing small rural communities beyond the central belt and this must present a challenge if a balance of views is to be achieved. Communities Scotland have indicated that some financial assistance to delegates may be available for travel or accommodation costs to the national event, so we hope that this will encourage tenant representatives from more remote areas to attend the event and have their views heard.

### BRIGHT IDEAS WANTED!

Applications are currently being invited for the new Registered Tenant Organisation Grant Scheme.

The scheme supports new and innovative projects which get tenants involved in tenant participation and tenant organisations, forums and federations which are registered can apply for a grant of up to £10,000.

Contact Communities Scotland TP Development team on 0131 479 5317

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## INTRODUCING JENNIFER

Communities Scotland have announced that their new TP Development Officer for Northern Scotland will be Jennifer Horne. Jennifer, who originally comes from Aberdeen and has been working with the Investment team in Edinburgh, will be based at the Communities Scotland office at;

**2nd Floor, Suite A  
Johnstone House  
50-54 Rose Street,  
Aberdeen AB10 1UD  
Tel 01224 624960**

## FIRHILL AND MILNAFUA LIGHT UP TENANT PARTICIPATION!

Readers may remember from our last issue that Firhill Residents Association in Alness won £100 to spend on tenant participation.

The group organised an open day on July 10th in the local Community Centre and had a stall promoting tenant participation. As an extra attraction to bring tenants in, they were able to distribute free low energy light bulbs for each household. This gave an opportunity to discuss the work of the association, and tenant participation generally, with as many people as possible. Stalls, side shows and teas were available and there was also a chance to hear about the work of Alness Credit Union. A further event is planned for later in the year.

At Milnafua, the Residents Association has been distributing energy-saving light bulbs on behalf of Npower's energy efficiency programme.

The bulbs use 80% less electricity than ordinary ones.

## PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL?

If you are involved in running a tenant or residents' group, then you should have an understanding about the basic rules of data protection.

At first glance the law seems quite complex, but the principles laid down to ensure that personal information is fairly and properly processed are practical to implement.

Every group will collect some personal information from its members and potential members. If you collect enough information to identify someone—and that can simply be a name linked to an address, then you have a responsibility to process the information in accordance with the law. The way that you collect, store, use and dispose of the information should comply with the eight principles of data protection which are defined in the Data Protection Act.

In addition to requirements for paper and computerised records the legislation also affects how photographs, video, web-cam and other similar records are used.



Your landlord has particular responsibilities in respect of data protection and there are some areas of policy development which will be influenced by a landlord's need to maintain confidentiality about personal information. It is helpful for a group to understand the basic requirements and restrictions of data protection law in order to join in consultation opportunities where this is a factor for consideration. TIGHRA is currently preparing a new leaflet for tenant groups about data protection and this will be available from the office and on the website.

Also, we can arrange a training session on this subject. Contact Judith for details.

## TIGHRA FOCUS

### HOUSING ASSOCIATION WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Castlehill Housing Association has won an environmental innovation award for a new scheme of houses and flats in Inverurie..

The Envirobuilt Award rewards innovation in the creation of energy efficient buildings and the use of sustainable materials.

Only one central heating boiler provides the heating for the development, and tenants' heating bills are expected to be around £100 per year—offering a significant saving over traditional heating systems.

Ventilation systems take warm air from the roofspace to heat incoming fresh air on a continuous basis. This will keep air from getting stale and should provide a healthier living environment.

Other innovative ideas incorporated in the development include external timber cladding which should require no maintenance and sun-spaces in some houses which act as heat collectors.

Castlehill and its tenants will be monitoring how successful the systems are in cutting costs and creating comfort.

### ARK HOUSING ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Ark Housing Association specialises in providing accommodation and support for people with learning difficulties, some people with mental health issues and elderly people.

Its aim is to allow people to play a full part in the community and they currently manage around 600 flats and houses in the East of Scotland.

Ark has just launched a new website which allows users the opportunity to hear spoken summaries of the main text as well as read it. Hopefully this idea will be taken-up by other housing providers who acknowledge that not all the visitors to their websites find reading the pages easy.

### NEW TENANCIES ALL SIGNED-UP IN PERTH AND KINROSS

Perth and Kinross Council became the first Council to have all of their tenants signed up to the new Scottish Secure Tenancies. Speaking at the sign-up celebration, Perth and Kinross Federation Chair, Muriel Miller recognised the care taken by everyone concerned from the outset of the programme.

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE—THE FUTURE OF HOUSING SUPPORT

Some of our readers will be aware that there have been changes made to the way that housing support services are regulated, administered and paid for. The new framework for the regulations is known as 'Supporting People'

Many people in our communities receive some form of housing support service to enable them to retain their independence. The best-known support service is that which is provided in sheltered housing complexes to older people. However, other people also benefit from housing support. Some young people setting up home for the first time, those leaving long-stay hospital care and those with physical disabilities are but a few of those who may get this help.

The nature of housing support varies considerably—some examples include, occasional advice from a support worker on household management, arranging repairs or cleaning windows and rooms in certain circumstances. A proper assessment of a person's needs is always made to determine what level and type of support they require.

Those who have to pay for their housing support service now receive a separate invoice from their local authority. In the past the costs were incorporated along with their regular rent payment. Anyone who is paying for their support service but is worried about meeting the costs should ask for a financial assessment to be carried out as they may be entitled to some financial help.

One of the aims of Supporting People is to ensure that those who use the service should be able to exercise a greater choice in the way that the service is delivered. To back this up, a number of controls have been developed to monitor the quality of services. The support provider, local authority and the Care Commission all have duties and responsibilities to ensure that a person receiving support has a high quality of service and has an effective mechanism for having his or her views heard.



The Supporting People regulations and arrangements are detailed and specialist officers are employed in local authorities to administer them. Tenant representatives should, however, be conscious of the need to monitor the future development and funding of housing support in their area as this could have implications for the most vulnerable members of that community.

If you would like an overview of the new arrangements we have prepared an Information Sheet called **Supporting People and Housing Support Charges**. Contact the office for a copy or visit the website. If you would like a short presentation for your group on the basics of Supporting People we can also arrange this.

## LEGAL SNIPPETS

### FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002

This Act comes into full force on January 1st 2005. It aims to increase openness and accountability in government and across the public sector by ensuring that people have the right to access information held by Scottish public authorities.

People will be able to see and question how these bodies function and how decisions are made.

The Act applies to a wide range of organisations including local authorities and the police. It can also apply to some private companies carrying out a function for a public authority. However no decision has yet been made which would confirm whether or not housing associations will be included.

### ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ETC (SCOTLAND) ACT 2004

This long-awaited legislation has now completed its passage through Parliament. At Stage Three an amendment was reversed which now means that local authorities and housing associations will be able to convert a Scottish Secure Tenancy into a short SST where an Anti-social Behaviour order has been taken out against a young person aged between 12 and 15 years. There is, however, an emphasis that any reduction in security for the household has to be accompanied by support. Amongst new measures to help authorities cope with the new legislation will be practical training sessions, a telephone advice line for professionals and a website for practitioners.

## TIGHRA NEWS

As ever, life has been quite hectic in the TIGHRA office in Inverurie.

We are continuing to work on our training videos and have spent a total of five (very full) days in Inverness and Aberdeen filming our young tenants' training video — A Home Of Your Own. The messages in the video are aimed at making young people not only more aware of their rights and responsibilities but also introducing them at 'ground-level' to tenant participation. The video is only a part of a training programme which will also include a couple of group exercises to stimulate discussion and

debate on the subject matter.

We intend that work on this project will complete by the end of September and we will have the finished item to promote later in the Autumn.

At last year's conference we were handed a challenge—to prove that it is more expensive to deliver good quality tenant participation in rural areas. The ensuing action required that we conducted research into the actual costs of delivering tenant participation and therefore, now that the financial year is completed for most landlords, we have been asking some detailed questions about the resources which they have committed to TP. A questionnaire has been sent to all the members of the Tenant Participation Officers Network and their responses will be collated, along with the results of sample interviews with tenant groups.

Work will start shortly on our other major research report into the use and support of tenant volunteers in rural Communities. This should lead to the development of a training programme and we will keep members updated on progress.

The Tenant Participation Officers Network continues to flourish with a regular attendance of some twenty officers. In September we will be taking the group over the sea (which we hope will be calm) to Orkney. Thanks to support from Orkney Council and Orkney Housing Association we have a full programme planned over a Monday and Tuesday. Anne Cook and Jennifer Horne will be joining us to update members on Communities Scotland issues and we also hope to have sessions on community grants and data protection. We will invite interested tenants to come along to these sessions.

### A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY!

We will be holding a **Money Advice Day**, in conjunction with SCARF in Aberdeen on 30th October. This will be a free event. Its aim is to raise awareness of some services which potentially could be introduced to help tenants save money and maximise income.

Tenant group representatives, individuals and officers are welcome to attend.

Members will receive further details in September.

## BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

### Sandy Allan

Sandy first became involved in tenant participation issues in 1993 when he joined Gordon District Council's 'Housing Consumer Panel'. He joined TIGHRA in 1997 and has served as Secretary, Chair and Treasurer at various times since then. In Aberdeenshire, he has been involved since 2000 in the Tenant Participation Promotion Team (TPPT) which currently looks after all Aberdeenshire-wide TP matters. An increasing number of local tenant groups (currently 11) participate at a local level. Successfully achieving RTO status, the TPPT now comprises seven tenants elected on a rolling basis by and from all tenants in Aberdeenshire interested in taking part. Elections are held at a 'Tenant Event' in the Autumn to which all 15,000 Aberdeenshire tenant households are invited via the quarterly newsletter.

Sandy's main concerns are that all tenants are given the opportunity to participate and that rented housing standards improve to match what would be expected by anyone buying a home. He has concerns that recent initiatives like the RTO legislation, and the current consultation on national tenant representation, are aimed at resolving urban central-belt problems and have not taken into account rural realities. The Right-To-Buy has eroded rural villages of affordable homes to rent. Many rural areas just do not have the people to set up and run a tenant group along the lines of an urban model. Any national framework must take rural tenants into account and tenant participation cannot be limited to RTOs.

## MEMBERSHIP

OUR THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO HAS JOINED US OR RENEWED THEIR MEMBERSHIP FOR THE YEAR 2004-5.

OUR LANDLORD MEMBERSHIP HAS GROWN THIS YEAR AND WE ARE NOW KEEN TO SEE MORE TENANT GROUP MEMBERS.