

ALMONDVIEW



ALMOND HOUSING ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2019



Praise from the Scottish Parliament

Showing our caring side to help tenants in need... *see page 2*

Photograph © Andrew Cowan

Celebrating 25 years

How Almond Housing Association came about, and our big anniversary plans for 2019... *see page 3*

DON'T FORGET... our office will close for the Easter weekend. We will be closed on Friday 19th April and re-open at 8.30am on Tuesday 23rd April.





Praise in the Scottish Parliament

Almond HA started the year by getting a mention in Scottish Parliament for all the work we did over the last few months to support our tenants.

Neil Findlay MSP, put forward a motion which proposed:

"That the Parliament applauds the commitment of staff at Almond Housing Association, who delivered food parcels to local families over the festive season; understands that staff delivered essential food items to tenants in need; acknowledges that this is a particularly financially challenging year for local people with the roll-out of Universal Credit; recognises that Almond Housing Association has also played a leading role in sourcing items for the Riverside Community Fridge, where items are donated by businesses and individuals and are shared among the local community, and thanks the housing association for the valuable difference that it has made to many local people in need this Christmas and throughout the year."

This motion received support from other MSPs including Angela Constance, Alexander Burnett, Colin Beattie, Bill Kidd, Kenneth Gibson, Jeremy Balfour, and Ruth Maguire.

Towards the end of last year Almond HA did all we could to help tenants most in need.

Our Winter Wellbeing packs went out to almost 300 households in November/December, containing a variety of items to help pensioners through the colder months

- including radiator covers, a thermal cup, a torch, shortbread and soup.

Housing Officers made door-to-door deliveries of food parcels, providing essential groceries to keep struggling families going over Christmas and the New Year, after Almond HA purchased a pallet of food containing a variety of cereal, vegetables, pasta and diluting juice as well as confectionery and other seasonal treats.

Our staff also sourced more goods to top up the Riverside Community Fridge, where surplus food donated by local business and individuals can be distributed in the community.

And we secured toys and gifts for 36 households from the Cash for Kids Mission Christmas appeal, making sure no child had to go without.

Almond HA staff are always here to help if tenants are struggling with any issues regarding their homes and tenancies. Please feel free to speak to your Housing Officer or call us on **01506 439 291**.



Making homes great since 1994

On March 22, Almond Housing Association celebrates its 25th anniversary and we're planning some events to celebrate. Watch our website and social media for more details to come.

Hard to believe it was more than a quarter of a century ago that Livingston Development Corporation started the process of winding up the New Town. Leading a team of former LDC staff, we set up Almond HA and became the first housing association to stand against a local authority in a ballot for houses – and win.

Although the accepted plan was to transfer the town's assets to West Lothian Council, the Board of the LDC wanted tenants of the rented houses to have a choice of landlord.

It was decided a ballot would be held, when tenants could choose between transferring to the council or to a housing association.

The problem was there were no housing associations in Livingston to take on the job! Was it possible to start one from scratch, and then persuade tenants to choose it above a tried and tested local council? I'm proud to say we did just that.

Both Craighill and Howden voted for Almond HA to be their landlord, with only three votes in Ladywell preventing us from taking on that area too.

We gained 1,600 properties, which meant alongside the properties we'd purchased, Almond HA had a total stock of 2,400 homes.

While much has changed over the years – *as you'll see from the pictures of me* – the customer service and value for money which won us tenants in the beginning has continued to serve our ever-growing number of customers.

I look forward to the coming celebrations, to mark how far we've come and to look forward to the next 25 years of serving communities in West Lothian.

George Webster, Chief Executive



New benefits to help Scottish families

Social Security Scotland has introduced the Best Start Grant, offering lower income families – whether they are in or out of work – help with the financial costs of a child's early years.

THE PREGNANCY AND BABY PAYMENT provides **£600 for a first baby**, and **£300 for subsequent children**. It can be claimed from when an expectant mum reaches 24 weeks pregnancy, up until the baby is six months old.

On June 3rd 2019 two more payments will open for application:

THE EARLY LEARNING PAYMENT will provide **£250 to help with costs during nursery and early learning years**. This can be claimed from a child's 2nd birthday up until six months after their 3rd birthday.

THE SCHOOL AGE PAYMENT will also be **£250 per child**, payable from June 1st in the year the child would normally start school, until February 28th in the year following the date they started school. If you plan to

defer your child's start date, you cannot defer payment.

Parents/carers will be eligible if they receive certain qualifying benefits such as: *Universal Credit; Income Support; Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; Income-related Employment and Support Allowance; Pension Credit; Housing Benefit; Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit*.

Parents who are under 18, or who are 18 or 19 and in full time education and dependent on their parent or carer, do not have to be on a qualifying benefit.

Applications can be made online, by telephone or by post for the Pregnancy and Baby Payment. More details on applying for the other two payments will be released nearer to the June launch date.

For information or help with applying for any of these new benefits, contact Social Security Scotland on **0800 182 2222**, see mygov.scot/benefits or call Almond's Welfare Benefits Advisor Drew McLellan on **01506 439 291**.

We have a winner!

Congratulations to Charles Milligan of Howden, who has won our Almond Award for this quarter! Mr Milligan was delighted when Housing Officer Kirsty Rankin presented him with **£250 worth of vouchers** for Almondvale Shopping centre and Asda.



The draw is our way of thanking folks for keeping on top of their rent payments, taking care of their home and generally being a good tenant!

Our next Almond Award will be run in Summer 2019. All you need to do in order to be entered for the draw to win £250 worth of vouchers is to:

- 1** Have maintained a clear rent account for a minimum period of three months immediately prior to the draw
- 2** Not be involved in any anti-social behaviour in your area
- 3** Maintain your tenancy and any garden area to a satisfactory standard
- 4** Have allowed our contractor to gain access to your home to complete the annual gas check

Well done to Mr Milligan and a big thanks to all our tenants!

Home contents insurance

While Almond HA is responsible for repairs to our properties, we'd like to remind tenants to make sure you have contents insurance to cover damage to personal possessions, in the event of something going wrong in your home.

As your landlord, we do not insure your furniture, belongings or decorations against theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes or any other household risks.

When you start your tenancy with us, you should receive a leaflet with details of Thistle Tenant Risks Insurance. If you

don't have one, please pop into reception or check out the website at www.thistletonants-scotland.co.uk

Standard Cover starts at 95p per fortnight – or you are free to shop around to find the best deal for you.



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

EMERGENCY "OUT OF HOURS" REPAIRS: 0845 038 0040

Almond Housing Association **01506 439 291** Homeless Persons

Gas Leaks **0800 111 999** Howden Health Centre

Citizens Advice Bureau **01506 432 977** Litter Hotline

Craighill Health Centre **01506 432 621** Police

Energy Advice **0808 808 2282** Refuse Collection

0800 032 3450 Scottish Power (General) **0845 270 0700**

01506 423 800 (Emergency) **0845 272 7999**

0800 616 446 St John's Hospital

01506 523 000

101 Street Lighting

01506 280 000

01506 280 000 West Lothian Council

01506 280 000