

ALMONDVIEW

ALMOND HOUSING ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2025



*Our office will close from 12 noon on Wednesday 24th December
and reopen at 8.30am on Monday 5th January*

WELCOME FROM THE CEO

"Hi All... As we experience colder weather and the various challenges this can bring, we are clinging on to the memories of summer by bringing you the results of our newsletter survey which we distributed following the summer Almond View. Thank you to everyone who took part. The results can be found on page 4 and your feedback has already been taken into consideration for this issue.

We are delighted that a number of families are now benefiting from warm, new energy efficient homes with the recent completion of our development in Blackburn and the completion of the re-build in Katherine Street. Thank you to colleagues for their hard work in getting these much-needed new homes over the line. In particular, the Katherine Street development was very pleasing to see given the impact of the fire. Further information can be found on page 17.

I am proud of the work our colleagues deliver on a day-to-day basis and their continued work to provide you with the best possible service. It was again pleasing that we were able to report strong performance to the Scottish Housing Regulator. Our Annual Charter Report provides a summary of this and demonstrates how we compare to other landlords.

It is also acknowledged however that we do not always get things right and we place a lot of importance on learning from when we get things wrong.

This issue includes information from our Annual Complaints Report. We are pleased to report a reduction in complaints received this year but we remain committed to learning and improving from those occasions when we could have done things better. Please continue to provide feedback via our ongoing satisfaction surveys or by contacting us directly.

At our recent AGM, Adam Turner stood down as Chair of the board, with Vicky Bluck appointed as our new Chair. I would like to thank Adam for all his support and guidance during his time as Chair. We are fortunate that Adam has retained a position on the board and look forward to working with Vicky in her new role.

I hope that you are looking forward to a restful and peaceful festive period and that you can spend quality time with friends and family.

*As ever please contact me at **john.davidson@almondha.org.uk** if you have a particular issue that you would like us to address or ideas on how we can improve the services we provide.*





SURVEY RESULTS

Almond View



Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our survey following the summer edition of Almond View. The results have been helpful as we now have a better understanding of what you would like to hear more about and how you would like to receive the newsletter.

Following the results of the survey, we're pleased to confirm we will continue with bi-annual publications of the newsletter. We have also used these results to personalise how you receive this issue. After sharing how much it would cost to print the newsletter and how much it would cost to send it digitally, many customers opted for

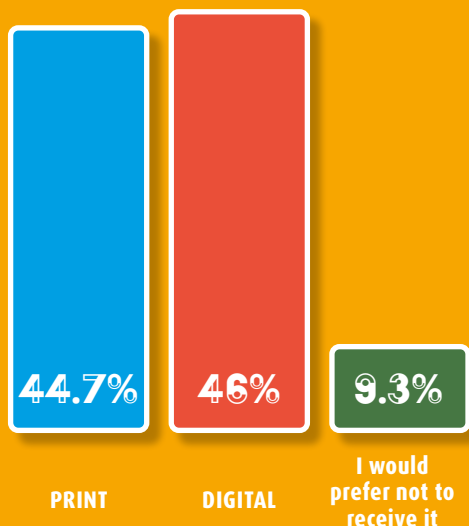
the digital version. Those who indicated they would prefer to receive it by post will continue to do so. Please let us know if you would like to update your contact preferences.

In the survey, we outlined the organisational cost of producing and sending the newsletter but this was for information only. Please note, we will not charge you to receive the newsletter.

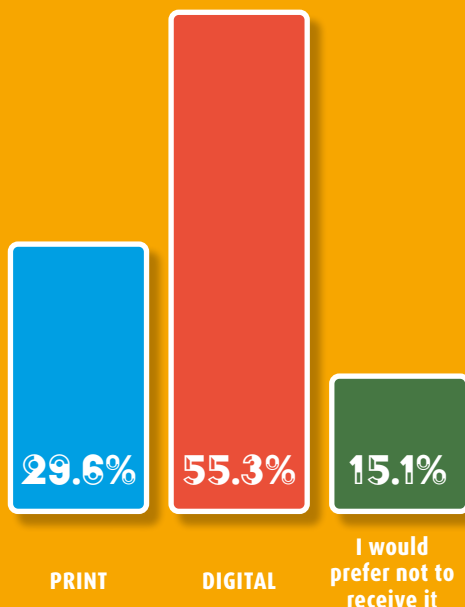
Community Engagement

We also shared a survey about Community Engagement recently. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey. We are reviewing the feedback and the information gathered will help to shape our Community Engagement focus going forward.

How would you prefer to receive Almond View?



Knowing the costs involved, how would you prefer to receive Almond View?



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Following feedback from the recent surveys, we understand that there is a lot of interest in community activities.

We have more information on our website about community groups, but for our newsletter, we have decided to create a Community Spotlight section. For each newsletter, we will shine a light on one of the community groups in the area and share more information about what they do.

For Winter 2025, our Community Spotlight will be HomeAid West Lothian.

HomeAid West Lothian is a not-for-profit charity based in Bathgate. For the past 25 years, and with the support of the community, they have provided a free/low cost furniture service to homeless and low income families and individuals in need throughout West Lothian.

A new retail space is expected to open on the ground floor of Almond's office building early in the New Year. In addition to low-cost home furniture and white goods, a clothing and bric-a-brac section will be available for members of the community to donate to and purchase from.

**WATCH THIS SPACE FOR MORE DETAILS
ON OPENING DATES AND TIMES!**



BeeKind Campaign

On Wednesday 17th September, we celebrated Scottish Housing Day by launching our BeeKind campaign. The theme for Scottish Housing Day was 'everybody needs good neighbours', so we felt this was the perfect opportunity to launch a celebration of kindness, connection and community spirit.

Community Engagement Officer, Jane commented: *"The BeeKind yearlong project aims to inspire and recognise kind acts for others, the community, nature and yourself! It is about fostering positive social connections, promoting kindness, and supporting local initiatives that benefit the environment and individuals. The world feels that bit tougher at the moment,*

and a little kindness can make all the difference."

The launch event took place in The Big Living Room. Key speaker, Dr David Hamilton, spoke about the scientific research behind kindness, explaining how it is good for your health and releases tension in the arteries, inflammation and positively impacts the rate of biological aging!

In addition to this inspiring speech, guests were entertained by performers from OpporCHANCEity Knocks Variety Theatre, Pupils from Riverside and Letham Primary Schools and Community Partners from across West Lothian. The event concluded with closing remarks from The Lord Lieutenant, Ms Moira Niven MBE.



BeeKind Events

This month, we held a Christmas event in Craigshill Community Garden. This included an elf trail, food and drink, biscuit decorating, bulb planting and the opportunity to meet Santa in his Grotto! Thank you to the community partners who worked with us to make this event a success, and our contractor Response for providing selection boxes.

We also held two Christmas parties in partnership with Daisy Drop In. The children were able to meet Santa and our contractors, Sidey, kindly provided gifts for the events.

SAVE THE DATE

We're excited to share that we have organised a Winter Warmer Event on Thursday 15th January from 2pm to 4pm in The Big Living Room. This will be an opportunity to drop in, try some free winter warmer food and drink and speak to our community partners about how to save money on food, energy, clothes and furniture.

We will also be holding a Home Safety event in partnership with our contractor, Bell. This will take place in The Big Living Room on Thursday 12th February from 10am to 12pm.



Service with respect

At Almond HA, kindness and respect are two of our organisational values. We ask colleagues to instil these values throughout their working day, both with one another and with our customers.

We are committed to helping and supporting our customers and providing the best possible service that we can. We understand that there may be occasions where customers are not happy with an aspect of the service we provide or may wish to make a complaint. We encourage feedback and have a variety of options for doing so.

Recently, we have witnessed some unacceptable behaviours by a few of our customers. We have a zero-tolerance approach towards abuse and when our colleagues experience this behaviour, we are required to take action to protect them. This may include limiting contact methods, contact frequency or involve the police. Persistent issues could affect your tenancy. The vast majority of our customers treat our teams with kindness and respect, and we truly appreciate this. Together, we can maintain a positive environment for everyone. Thank you.



Our colleagues are here to help, please treat them with kindness and respect

We have a zero-tolerance approach towards abuse.



Aaron learns British Sign Language



We're delighted to share that one of our Housing Officers, Aaron Devereaux, has achieved his Level 1 British Sign Language (BSL) qualification!

Aaron was inspired to learn BSL after interacting with one of our tenants. Previously, the tenant would have come into the office and written his queries on paper, but Aaron wanted to do more to break down the communication barriers.

After doing some research, Aaron signed up to BSL Level 1 course with Deaf Action Scotland. He gave up his time on Wednesday evenings for 18 weeks and completed a total of 40 hours of online learning and practicing with other pupils.

Aaron commented: *"My fellow pupils were from a diverse range of organisations, as well as those who were learning for personal reasons. Although learning a new language was challenging at times, it was rewarding and I'm glad I committed to attending every Wednesday night after work."*

I am pleased to have completed this course and happy to put my skills to good use. If there's anything I can do to help, please get in touch."

Throughout this course, Aaron learnt about lip reading, finger-spelling, family members, numbers, time, location, activities/hobbies, weather and general basics of BSL conversation. Please contact us if Aaron could help.

AGM 2025

Thank you to everyone who came along to our AGM in September.

After 4 years of Chair of the Board, Adam Turner stepped down from his role. Although he will be staying on as a Board member, he reflected with pleasure on his time as Chair:

"It's been a real privilege to have held this role for such an inspiring organisation. I've particularly enjoyed the role the Chair plays in guiding the Board towards collective and clear decisions, whether that's responding to the challenges that inevitably arise or in steering Almond into the future.

A recent highlight was attending the premiere of "The Squinty Tree" hosted in our Big Living Room at Almond HQ. It was a pleasure to experience first-hand the positive difference we make to the communities we serve, and the key role we play in bringing the community together. Creating a home beyond a house is important to Almond and I'm delighted to have supported the Association in this role."

Taking over the reins is Vicky Bluck, who is Almond's second ever female Chair. Vicky has had a long career in Risk Management and currently leads a large team within the Consumer business of Lloyds Banking Group. When asked what she is looking forward to about this new role she said:

"Almond Housing is looking to the future, with a focus on how we continue to provide quality social housing for communities across West Lothian and it's a real privilege to be leading the Board through this period

of exciting change. I'm also looking forward to spending time with our communities and seeing the amazing work of Almond in action."



If you are interested in attending our next AGM, you can become a member of Almond HA by applying and paying a one-off fee of £1. This gives you the right to attend and vote at our AGMs and to nominate another member for Board election. It also gives you the opportunity to stand for election to the Board yourself. Find out more on our website as we will be recruiting for Board Members early next year!



ALMOND AWARD

As we are now producing a bi-annual newsletter, we have two award winners again for this issue. Congratulations to **Emma Aird** and **Janet McKenzie Wood** who were both presented with **£250 of vouchers**.

The Almond Award is our way of thanking customers for keeping on top of their rent payments, taking care of their home and generally being a good tenant. To ensure you are eligible for the draw simply:

- Maintain a clear rent account for a minimum period of three months immediately prior to the draw
- Ensure you have not been involved in causing anti-social behaviour in your area
- Maintain your tenancy and any garden area to a satisfactory standard
- Allow our contractors to gain access to your home where appropriate

- Be a member of our tenant consultation group and complete at least one survey each year.

Contact us or visit our website to find out more and sign up.



HOMEMASTER – A New Housing Management System

In October, our team embraced a new Housing Management System and we wanted to say thank you to our customers for being patient with us during this time. The Housing Management System is vital to the running of our services and we really appreciate the support we have received from our customers so far.

There has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes to get this new system live and now that it's up and running, we're planning the next steps. This will include

looking at the customer portal side of the system. The portal will allow customers to login to their account, access their personal details, rent balance, repairs requests and more.

We are still in the planning stages for this, but we will be in contact with more information in the coming months.





DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION STRATEGY

We are developing an ambitious long-term strategy to improve homes and communities. This is an opportunity for you to shape the future of your housing and neighbourhood and there are a variety of ways to get involved. We have recently held some workshops with tenants, colleagues and board members to discuss ideas and thoughts on what our priorities should be.

WHY THIS MATTERS:

- Around 50% of the homes that Almond provides were built between 1966-1971. A number of challenges have emerged that highlight their increasing age and increasing cost of maintenance to meet modern standards.
- Rising energy costs are affecting tenants. The new strategy will aim to reduce energy bills by having homes which are more energy efficient.
- There is a known housing emergency in Scotland. Livingston and the wider West Lothian region is growing and has become popular with families seeking more affordable accommodation which meets modern day aspirations.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE:

- More homes that meet modern standards and your needs
- Lower energy costs through enhanced heating systems and insulation
- More homes available in your community
- Stronger communities with improved facilities

There will be more opportunities to get involved and to inform our longer-term plans. Please contact us if you are interested in joining the conversation.

GET INVOLVED

Thank you to everyone who has been getting involved to help shape our services recently. We have had a great few months of feedback, with tenants joining the conversation on our Development and Regeneration strategy, responding to our Rent Review survey, attending our tenant forum to discuss RAAC and the repairs contract, submitting compliments and complaints on our website, members attending our AGM and more.

We really appreciate all the feedback we receive, and it helps us to improve our services. To get involved, find a method that suits you and sign up today.

Tenant Focus Group

Join a group of tenants to focus on one issue at a time, such as reviewing a policy or set of standards, carrying out an assessment or activity.

Tenant Consultation Group

Sign up to receive the occasional text or email survey. You choose what is of interest. If you respond to at least one consultation per year, you will be entered into the Tenant Award with a chance to win £250. ✱

Short Term Working Groups

Groups of tenants who are interested in a particular subject that we want to look at in more detail.

Registered Tenants Groups

Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) were introduced by Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and give important rights to groups who register with their landlord. You would represent your street or area, putting forward views and concerns and contribute to the decisions around services we provide.

Become a Member of Almond HA

For a fee of £1, you can become a member of Almond HA. This gives you the right to attend and vote at our Annual General Meetings, as well as stand, or nominate another member to stand, for Board election.

This is a selection of feedback methods but more information is available on our website.

Contact us to get involved or use the QR code to sign up using the online form.



✱ Terms and conditions apply. See page 12 for more information.



New Developments

Rowan Terrace, Blackburn

Following our previous update on Rowan Terrace, Blackburn, we are pleased to share that the development was finalised in September 2025 and nearly fully occupied within the first few days.

This development was built with grant funding support from the Scottish Government and contains a total of 20 one- and two-bedroom flats. On 24th September 2025, the contractor, G Dunbar and Sons, handed over the keys and we, almost straight away, handed them on to tenants. By the first weekend, 19 of the 20 flats were occupied.

Housing Manager Jonathan Bertram explained:

"The team worked really hard to ensure that the property could be occupied as quickly as possible, with Linsey allocating the flats and Wil completing the viewings and sign-ups. It is a fabulous development and all tenants seem really happy with their new homes, which for some is their first home."

Just over 50% of lets were to those who were homeless or at risk of being homeless. In addition, also housed were two graduates of the Rock Trust Live and Work project which supports young people to live independently and engage in education, employment or training.





Katherine Street, Craigshill

November saw completion of the works at Katherine Street which had proved to be a complex project. The fire re-instatement works provided the opportunity for minor changes to the layout including open plan kitchen and living rooms spaces, French doors on the ground floor flats and simplifying external elevations.

We also significantly improved the thermal efficiency of the block which should result in lower bills for residents. This work along with the installation of Air Source Heat pumps was partially funded by the Scottish Governments Net Zero Fund.

While some of the original residents of Katherine Street opted not to move back, we were pleased to welcome others back and they, along with new tenants, moved in very quickly. The contractor, McTaggart's, provided a high-quality finish and it is great to finally see the block without scaffolding and temporary fencing.

This project has not only been about bricks and mortar, but it has also been about rebuilding a community and giving people back a place they can truly call home.

RAAC

Following our update in the summer newsletter, we are pleased to confirm that at the time of writing, we have completed 68 of 239 RAAC removals. The project started with an unexpected setback, as we discovered the need to remove four panels instead of two in some of the properties. Although this delayed the works, we are pleased to report that we have now completed more than 28% of the work to date.

Some properties require a full RAAC removal and some are partial. For those who have had a partial removal, we will still need an engineer to reinspect the remaining panels going forward. Some properties need reinspected every year and others' every two years. Please look out for a phone call from us, as we may be arranging a reinspection.

As we continue removing RAAC from homes, we will be sending regular updates directly to those affected. You will have recently received a letter outlining when your RAAC removal is expected and once the removal is complete, you will receive a satisfaction survey. We would really appreciate any feedback to help us improve as we move forward with the project.

We would like to say thank you to everyone who has helped us to complete this work so far. We understand that it is a lot to move out of your home while we complete the work, and your support is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding RAAC, please contact our Tenant Liaison Officers, Mandy or Laura, on 01506 439291.

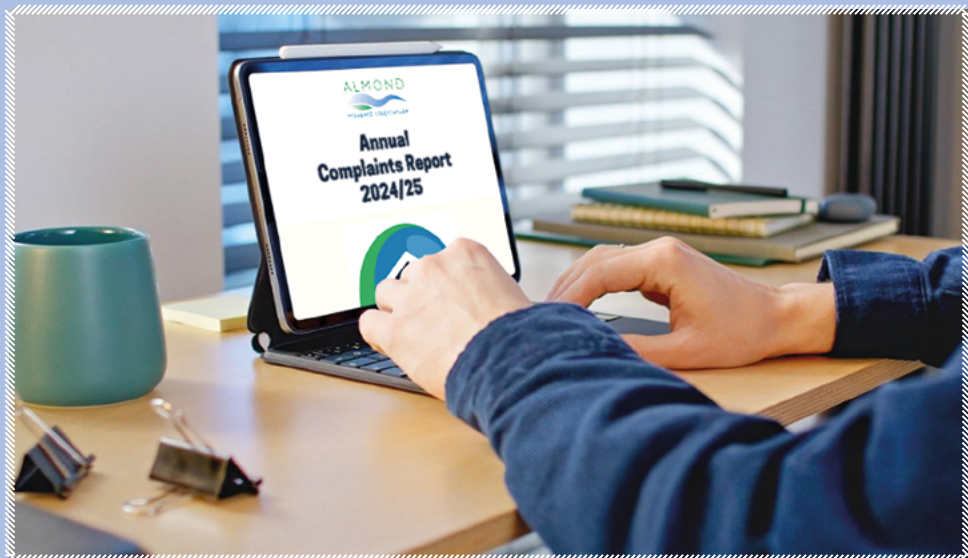


RAAC removal



Decant property

COMPLAINTS



Our Annual Complaints Report for 2024/25 reflects our commitment to listening to you and improving services. Our complaints procedure has two stages:

STAGE 1: FRONTLINE RESOLUTION

STAGE 2: INVESTIGATION

Last year, we received 194 Stage 1 complaints and 17 Stage 2 complaints, marking a reduction from the previous year. Stage 1 complaints were resolved in an average of 2.6 days, and Stage 2 in 14.83 days, both well within the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) targets of five and twenty working days, respectively.

Most complaints related to Asset Management, with common issues including quality of work, outstanding repairs, and communication challenges. For Stage 2 complaints, policies and procedures were the leading cause.

We have made several changes based on customer feedback from complaints. We improved communication about delays, enhanced contractor oversight, and provided clearer letters for gas safety checks. Staff training and participation in the Complaints Handling Network also ensures continuous improvement.

Looking ahead, we plan to streamline processes with the new housing management system and gather more feedback from complainants to deliver an even better service.

You can view our full Complaints report by scanning the QR code.



WINTER TIPS

It's important to keep you and your home safe and warm during the winter months. We've included some of our top tips below about how to prevent condensation and frozen pipes.

Condensation

You may experience some condensation during the colder months, which happens when your home does not get enough heating or fresh air. This can cause the air to become moist and appears as condensation on walls or windows.

To help prevent condensation:

- Use your central heating system
- Open any window vents
- Use an extractor fan to get rid of steam
- Keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed to stop steam spreading throughout the house

It can also be useful to wipe condensation off your windows in the morning and let some fresh air into your room. Simply open the window and close the door to keep the heat in the rest of your home. If you experience damp or mould in your home, please contact us as soon as possible.



Preventing frozen or burst pipes

As well as managing condensation, you can follow these additional steps to reduce the risk of burst pipes in very cold weather.

- Know where your water supply stop valve is so you can turn the water off in an emergency. If you're not sure, please ask us to show you.
- If you go away for a few days, turn the water supply off. If you are going away for longer, please let us know so we can take action to stop burst pipes.

What to do if you experience frozen pipes:

- Turn off your water supply immediately.
- Open cupboard doors to allow air to circulate.
- Keep your heating on.
- Place a hot water bottle or towel soaked in hot water onto pipes (never a naked flame).

If you experience a burst pipe or leak, please contact us as soon as possible.



FESTIVE OPENING HOURS

We are closed from 12 noon on Wednesday 24th December until 8.30am on Monday 5th January.

To report an emergency repair when our office is closed, please call 01506 439291 and select option 3, or contact the out of hours service directly on 0141 225 2842.



ENERGY SUPPORT

This year saw our third year of funding for energy support. Those who were eligible were able to access free Energy advice, Income Maximisation advice and receive £150 towards their energy bills.

One tenant who benefited from the support, commented:

"I found the advice received by The Bridge to be very helpful. They put my mind at ease, told me about benefits that I can apply for, including Council Tax rebate and advice on finances when my husband retires. Changeworks were also excellent as they arranged for me to get a heated throw and heated clothes drier. Due to my health problems, I need my heating on especially now with this cold weather. Once my benefits are sorted, we will be in a far better position. It's been amazing and thank you Almond Housing!"

To find out more about the support we have available, please contact us or visit our website. We have access to Income Maximisation advice, Energy advice and we have an in-house Tenancy Sustainment Officer who can support you to stay in your home.



KEEPING WARM THIS WINTER

Here are some of our top tips for keeping you safe and warm this winter.

- Keep your heating on a low constant temperature, rather than heating your home up quickly and allowing it to cool again.
- Close all blinds and curtains at night.
- Keep furniture away from radiators to allow heat to circulate.
- Be aware of where your grit bins are.

BOOST THE ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF YOUR HOME BY:

- Placing reflective panels behind your radiator to reflect heat back into your room
- Lay rugs on hard flooring to keep heat in
- Use draught excluders around the base of your doors
- Report any repairs such as gaps or cracks in window frames that could be allowing heat to escape

SAVE MONEY ON YOUR ENERGY BILLS:

- Turn down your thermostat by 1 degree. This could save you around 10% on your bill!
- Move furniture away from radiators to feel the benefit of your heating system
- Reduce your hot water usage by having a shorter shower

ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT

The Scottish Housing Regulator requires all social landlords to produce and publish an Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) by 31st October each year.

The AAS is a declaration from our Board of Management confirming that we comply with regulatory standards in respect of governance, tenant safety, financial management, and the Scottish Social Housing Charter. If any significant non-compliance was found by the Board, this would be noted in the AAS, however none was found. Any areas for improvement or irrelevant non-compliance are detailed in an action plan.

The AAS provides tenants and other customers with the assurance that Almond is meeting its obligations as a social landlord and meets its obligations in respect of tenant safety.

Scan the QR code to read our full Annual Assurance Statement.



CHARTER REPORT

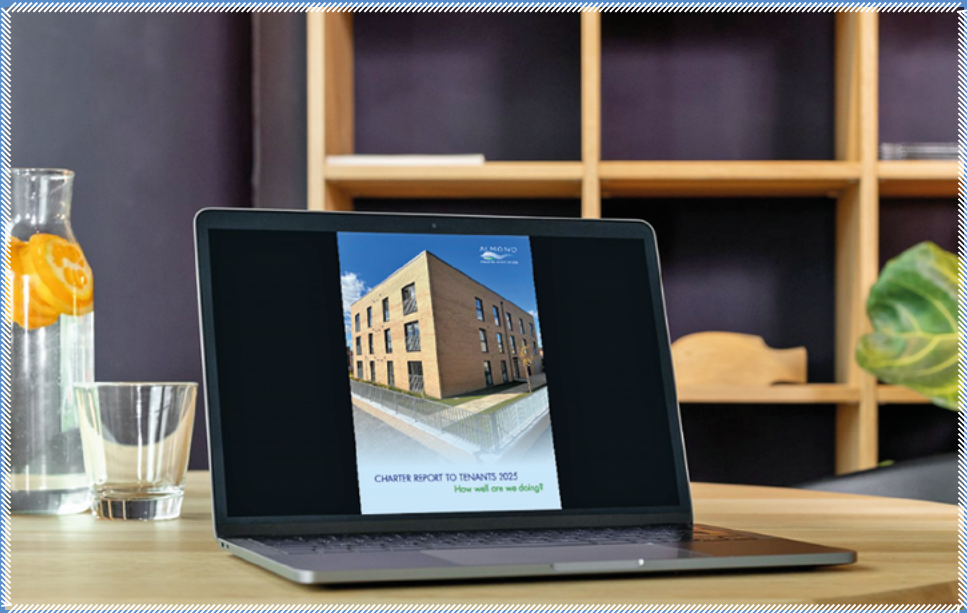
Each year, we present a Charter Report to Tenants detailing how we have performed as your landlord. We compare our performance to the previous year, the Scottish Average and our peer group of similar social landlords.

We are pleased to report that the number of complaints responded to in full and percentage of lets to homeless were above the Scottish Average and we had improved on our performance from the previous year. Our performance in tenancy sustainment, medical adaptations, emergency repairs, gross rent arrears, empty properties, time taken to relet properties and satisfaction with our repairs service were all above the Scottish average.

Overall tenant satisfaction was slightly lower than the Scottish Average. The time taken to complete non-emergency repairs and the number of anti-social behaviour cases were also below the Scottish Average but had both improved on our performance from the previous year. You can view our full Charter report with comparison figures by scanning our QR code.

We welcome your feedback on the format, content and style of our Charter report.

Please get in touch with your views.



Carers of West Lothian Locality Clinic

Carers of West Lothian supports unpaid carers and disabled people across the community. The locality clinic in Almond's Big Living Room runs on the last Tuesday of every month from 1pm to 3pm. This is a great opportunity to access advice, information, and one-to-one support in a friendly, local setting.

Appointments are available by emailing support@carers-westlothian.com or calling 01506 448000.

You can also book directly on the Carers of West Lothian website:

www.cowl.org.uk/appointments

Drop in to get help with practical guidance, emotional support, and connections to local resources.



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Are you an Almond HA tenant with a child under the age of 5? If so, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library could help your child to build their very own library!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book gifting programme that posts free, high-quality books to children from birth to age five. The books are carefully selected, age appropriate and full of variety. They include

traditional stories and rhymes, books by beloved authors and illustrators, and newly published titles.

Almond HA tenants with a child under the age of 5 can sign up to receive a free book every month up until their 5th birthday.

Visit our website to find out more and sign up, or email

imaginationlibrary@almondha.org.uk



West Lothian Council Recycling Service

West Lothian Council is making improvements to the waste and recycling service provided to flats. These changes will take place gradually beginning in the next

few months. If you live in a flat, you will receive a letter with more information from West Lothian Council about the changes and when they will take place in your area.



WINTER WORD SEARCH



snowflake

scarf

presents

gloves

blanket

snowman

santa

baubles

holidays

december

tree

christmas

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

To report an emergency repair when our office is closed, please call 01506 439 291 and select option 3 or contact the out of hours service directly on 0141 225 2842.

Almond Housing Association	01506 439 291	Refuse Collection	01506 280 000
Citizens Advice Bureau	01506 432 977	Scottish Power	(General) 0345 270 0700
Craigshill Health Centre	01506 432 621		(Emergency) 0800 092 9290
Gas leaks / emergency	0800 111 999	St John's Hospital	01506 523 000
Home Energy Scotland	0808 808 2282	Street Lighting	01506 280 000
Homeless Persons	0800 032 3450	West Lothian Council	01506 280 000
Howden Health Centre	01506 423 800		(Freephone) 0800 616 446
Police	101		