

# talkback

spring '12



## Another New Service!

After much to-ing and fro-ing, consultation with our Tenant Involvement Group, and reassuring some staff who weren't keen, we are now on Facebook.

Staff, tenants and any other people with an interest in our work can now get together on-line in an informal setting. So far we've let people know about a temporary disruption to on-line tenant services, a Haddington Town Centre Vision meeting, an update to our available properties and an amusing anecdote about two Housing Officers and a faulty sprinkler system.

If you'd like to keep up to date, just search for East Lothian Housing Association on Facebook (we're the one with the seedling).



THE SCOTTISH  
HOUSING  
REGULATOR

## Inspection Report

The results of last year's inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator have been published, and you can download the full report on [elha.com](http://elha.com). We received a 'B' grade.

Our Chief Executive, Martin Pollhammer said:

*"Overall we are very pleased with the report, which recognised the quality of our services and in particular the innovative ways we are using and developing our website, [elha.com](http://elha.com)."*



## We've dropped the +1% for 2012!

### Plus record investment in our homes!

Since we started providing housing 22 years ago, our annual rent increase has been at least 1% over the Retail Price Index (RPI).

We realise though that these are difficult times for everyone, and given the work we have done recently to control our costs, we are keeping our rent increase down to an inflation only (RPI only) increase for 2012/13.

At the same time, we will be investing a record amount this year in the repair and maintenance of our homes (see our planned and cyclical maintenance calendar on page 6). And with R3 undertaking the majority of this work, this will make the money we are investing go even further.

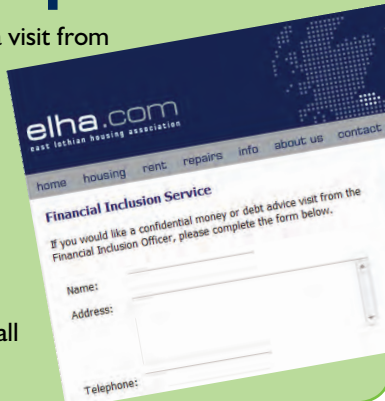
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## Financial Inclusion Service Update

You can now request a visit from the Financial Inclusion Service directly, instead of going through your Housing Officer.

Simply visit [elha.com](http://elha.com) and fill in the referral form and the Financial Inclusion Officer will call to arrange a meeting.



The screenshot shows the elha.com website interface for the Financial Inclusion Service. The header includes the elha.com logo and navigation links: home, housing, rent, repairs, info, about us, contact. The main heading is 'Financial Inclusion Service'. Below it, a text prompt reads: 'If you would like a confidential money or debt advice visit from the Financial Inclusion Officer, please complete the form below.' There are three input fields: 'Name:', 'Address:', and 'Telephone:'.

## Case Study – Financial Inclusion Service

Our Financial Inclusion Officer, Anne Rattray has been very busy since the Financial Inclusion Service was launched last year. While the details of the cases she handles are confidential, we will be publishing suitable case studies from Anne at regular intervals, to give you some idea of what the service can achieve.

*A new tenant was referred to me by his Housing Officer. He had applied to the Social Fund for a Community Care Grant (CCG) for essential household items but was refused help. After visiting him to establish the facts, I decided that we should ask for the decision to be looked at again. I prepared a letter on behalf of the tenant asking for a review of this decision.*

*The application was referred to the Social Fund Inspectors for review. The Independent Review Service decided to change the decision and awarded the tenant a CCG for approx £1200 for essential household items to help him in his new tenancy.*

*I also applied for charitable funding and the tenant was awarded a grant award of £100.*

*There was also a problem with his housing benefit (HB) and council tax benefit (CTB), due to his benefit being stopped. I intervened on his behalf and made a further application to East Lothian Council. This resulted in the tenant's HB and CTB being re-instated and he also received a lump sum backdated payment to cover the period when his housing benefit had stopped. This resolved the problem of rent arrears building up for the tenant, while I sorted out his benefit claim.*

We are concerned about the effect that Welfare Benefit reform will have on our tenants so we are increasing Anne's hours from April 2012 to ensure we can help as many tenants as possible.

## New Staff – Welcome Neil & Sarah!

We have two new staff, one joining our Asset Management Department, and one new voice taking repair calls for R3.

Property Officer, **Neil McCrudden** comes to us from Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) with 32 years experience in Asset Management.

R3 Repairs Administrator, **Sarah White** is also an ex-SBHA employee, and brings us her vast experience of handling repair requests.



## Did You Know...?

You can request copies of reports and minutes from our Management Committee meetings if you wish to see them.

To request copies, please contact us by visiting [elha.com](http://elha.com), e-mailing [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com) or calling on **01620 825032**.



**BIG BREAK -**  
Your Chance  **DIRECT Debit**  
to Win **£10,000!**

**Switch to paying by Direct Debit and you could win a £10,000 Big Break from your bills.**

Every tenant who changes their rent payments to Direct Debit will be automatically entered into the Big Break competition

run by Allpay. Plus, for every tenant who switches to Direct Debit, Allpay will make a donation to Marie Curie Cancer Care.



For more information, please contact your Housing Officer on **01620 825032** by e-mailing [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com), or fill in the Direct Debit request form on [elha.com](http://elha.com).

# Quids in!

## What do you think?

You will have noticed that this Talkback is a little slimmer than the last few editions. This was so we could include a copy of the new Scottish Quids In! magazine. We'd like your input on whether or not we should continue providing this magazine, or if you prefer the expanded newsletter we've been producing for the last year. Please fill in the enclosed comment card and return it to us by the 30th of April.

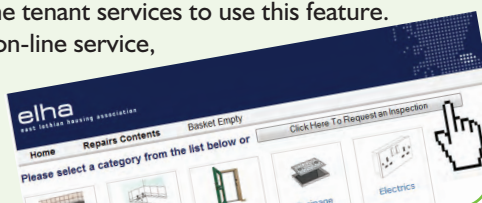


## Book a Property Officer Visit On-Line

We have now expanded our on-line repair service to include the option to book a home visit from a Property Officer. In the same way a repair call can be arranged, you can now book the day you would like the Property Officer to visit, and the time of day (morning, afternoon, avoiding the school run, or any time of day).

You do need to have registered for on-line tenant services to use this feature.

For more information on registering for on-line service, visit [elha.com](http://elha.com) or contact our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves by e-mailing [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com) or phoning **01620 825032**.



## Tenant Census and the Large Scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey

In order to help us plan for the future, and make sure we're providing the services our tenants need, we will be conducting two large surveys this year.

The first will be a tenant census, to find out information on who lives in our properties so we can:

- identify any tenants who may need help due to changes in the welfare benefit system
- plan for future adaptations for older tenants and those with special needs
- assess what types of new build properties we may need in the future (eg: larger homes for growing families, or smaller homes for young people)

The second part will be our Large Scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey (LSTSS). Our last LSTSS was in 2009 and gave us invaluable information on what our tenants think about our services, and where we need to improve. Following the 2009 survey, we were able to identify problem areas and deal with them.

These surveys will be carried out by an independent market research company. The surveys are vitally important to our future service provision, and we ask that all tenants return forms or take part in survey visits.



# Wimpey Community Association

**Wimpey Community Association (WCA) is an independent group that has been set up to promote the rights of people in their local area.**

It is run by a volunteer committee who work to influence a wide range of local issues including housing, roads, safety, environmental, anti social behaviour and many more. WCA will campaign for positive action and work in partnership with ELHA to improve tenant's services. Chairperson Andrew Price says;

*"We were delighted to see ELHA staff at our recent meeting and we have agreed a way forward so we can improve communication and promote WCA".*

WCA are especially keen to get some ELHA tenants involved in the work of the group and there are many different ways participate. WCA Secretary Mary Furnell says:

*"We need your skills, experience, input and knowledge to make WCA a success in our community. You don't have to come on the committee to be involved just get in touch and we can give you a menu of options and you choose"!*

WCA have plans for the future and these include carrying out estate inspections, producing a newsletter, developing a web site, holding an open/fun day and creating a new WCA logo that reflects the needs of local people.

**WCA represents the following streets:**

Delta Avenue, Court, Delta Crescent, Gardens, Delta Drive, Road, View, Galt Avenue, Drive, Galt Crescent, Road, Galt Terrace, Macbeth Moir Road, Moir Avenue, Crescent, Moir Drive, Terrace, Moir Place, St Ninians Court

**Do you live in any of these streets?**

If you would like to make a difference then you can get more information by contacting Housing Officer, John McNally on **01620 825032** or e-mailing [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com), or contacting the East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel (ELTRP) on **0131 665 9304** or email [tenantspanel@hotmail.com](mailto:tenantspanel@hotmail.com)



## Hedges, Trees & Nesting Birds

**Before planting a hedge or tree in your garden, please take a moment to consider the upkeep and possible impact on your neighbours.**

Overgrown or large hedges and trees can cause arguments between neighbours. During nesting season it is illegal to disturb a breeding bird and its nest. Before doing any work you must check for bird nests. Nesting season usually coincides with new spring and early summer growth for most types of hedge and tree, but can occur at any time of year depending on the breed of bird. This means that you may be unable to cut back overgrowth when you need to, resulting in an untidy garden and in some cases hedging which can block access to your or your neighbour's homes.

## Tenant Participation in Action – ESTATE INSPECTIONS

Our annual estate inspections have just restarted, giving tenants an opportunity to meet with Housing and Asset Management staff and work together to improve the areas our tenants live in. Last year's inspections resulted in a number of changes and improvements to developments in East Lothian.

We will write to you and let you know when the Housing Officer and Property Officer will be visiting your area so you can point out anything in your neighbourhood you feel needs attention. If you can't attend the inspection, don't worry – the letter will include a feedback form for you to send back if you have something you would like us to look at.



## Changes to Welfare Benefits - April 2012

There are a large number of changes to welfare benefits, due to come into effect over the next year. We will keep you up to date with changes as they happen. The following changes apply from 1 April 2012.

### Tax Credits

- Falls in income of up to £2,500 will be ignored so tax credit awards will not be increased in this circumstance
- Tax Credit claims can only be backdated for 1 month rather than 3 months as at present
- The '50 Plus Element' will be withdrawn
- Most people who currently receive only the minimum 'Family Element' will lose it altogether

### How can we help?

If you need further information about any of the changes to benefits or tax credits or indeed if you are experiencing any money or benefit problems, we can refer you to our Financial Inclusion Officer, Anne Rattray. If you'd like to talk to Anne, please contact your Housing Officer on **01620 825032**, e-mail **info@elha.com** or you can go to **elha.com** and fill in the self-referral form.

## Rent Increase Consultation – WHAT YOU TOLD US

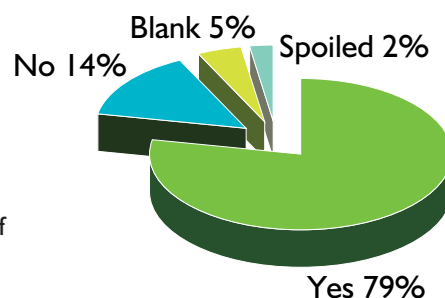
Thank you to everyone who completed and returned their rent increase consultation form. This was a big year for us: finally being able to offer our tenants a real choice about the rent increase. We consulted with all tenants, and around 10% responded. We asked:

1. Do you think that ELHA's rents represent good value for money?
2. If not why not?
3. Do you think that it's important for ELHA to keep on building homes?
4. Do you support a RPI+1% rent increase?
5. Do you support a RPI only rent increase?
6. Do you have any other comments that you would like us to consider?

### Value for Money

Seventy nine percent of responders said they thought our rents are good value for money. Our rents are around the average for a Scottish Housing Association, are higher than the average East Lothian Council rent, but are around half of the average rent for a private let in East Lothian.

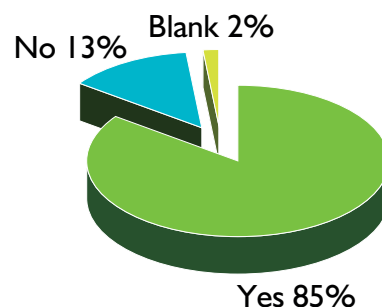
### Do you think that ELHA's rent are good value for money?



### Building New Homes

Eighty five percent of responders said they think it's important for us to continue to build new homes. As we have over 3,000 households registered for housing with us, and can only house around 60 households per year through relets, building new homes is still very important to us, despite the recent cuts in Housing Association Grant (HAG) funding.

### Do you think it's important for ELHA to keep building homes?



### RPI vs RPI + 1% Increase

This was a surprisingly close battle. Many staff assumed that given the choice, tenants would always choose a lower rent increase, even if this would mean reduced services. When it came down to it, RPI only won by just two votes! And as you can see from our front page, our rent increase this year is RPI only.

### Comments

Comments and questions were passed to the relevant departments for a response, and to our Management Committee.

## STAIRWELLS & FIRE HAZARDS

Rubbish and personal items such as bikes, buggies, toys, etc should never be left in a communal stairwell. As well as the risk of theft, this is a fire hazard. Recently twenty one people had to be rescued from a block of flats in Perth after a pram in the communal stairwell caught fire and filled the building with smoke.



DisabledGo provides online access guides to over 100,000 venues across the UK and Ireland.

You can find detailed information about access to all kinds of places – cinemas, parks, tourist attractions – the list goes on and on.

The website is free to use and you don't need to register, just go to [www.disabledgo.com](http://www.disabledgo.com).



[www.disabledgo.com](http://www.disabledgo.com)



## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS – Become a Member of ELHA

Anyone, aged 16 or older, can become a Member of East Lothian Housing Association. We are accountable to our Members, and encourage tenants to take an interest in how we are run.

A lifetime membership costs £1.00, and members can:

- Vote for the Management Committee
- Stand for election to the Management Committee
- Attend and vote at our Annual General Meeting
- Receive our Annual Report (as a tenant you should already receive this)

If you are interested in becoming a Member of the Association, please contact us for more information by calling on **01620 825032**, e-mailing [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com), or by visiting [elha.com](http://elha.com).



Through **National Spring Clean, Keep Scotland Beautiful** encourages people to get together and help pick up litter from their neighbourhood each spring.

If you and a group of your friends or neighbours are interested in finding out more, you can download an information pack from the **Keep Scotland Beautiful** website,

[www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/springclean](http://www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/springclean)



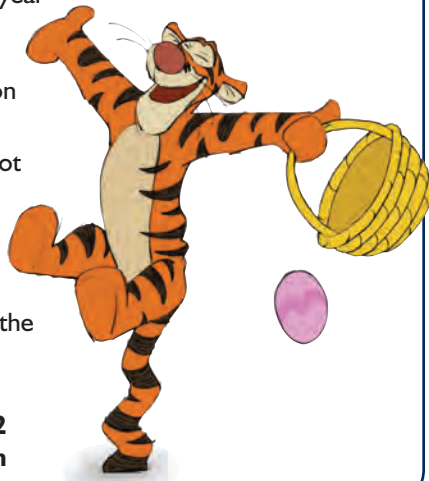
## TP IN ACTION – Our TIGgers!

Our Tenant Participation Working Group has been renamed – they're now known as the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG). We feel that the new name is a better description of the work the group does (plus, we feel the nickname TIGgers accurately describes the enthusiasm the group brings to Tenant Participation).

Our TIGers are looking for new members to join them in working to improve services. You don't have to have specialised housing knowledge, only a willingness to take part. The TIG meets 4 times a year and you're welcome to come along as a guest before making any decision about joining.

If you're interested, but not sure if it's for you, please contact our Housing Manager, Karen Barry, who will be happy to visit you and talk you through the work the group does.

To arrange a meeting, please call **01620 825032** or e-mail [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com)



## Garden Care Service

Our Garden Care service is a free service which we offer to elderly or disabled tenants who are unable to care for their garden. It covers basic garden maintenance such as: grass cutting, hedge trimming and weed spraying. The service is available to:

- Any tenant over 70, who does not have anyone living in the property (excluding children under 16) who can maintain their garden for them
- Any tenant who can provide medical evidence that they are unable to maintain their garden, and has no one living with them (excluding children under 16) who could take on the garden maintenance

If you are having difficulty with your garden, please contact your Housing Officer on **01620 825032** or by e-mailing [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com).

If you are registered for on-line tenant services, you can also apply on [elha.com](http://elha.com). If you don't qualify for the service, your Housing Officer may still be able to help you.

## OFFICE CLOSED

The office will be closed for the Easter weekend.

We close at 4.30pm on Thursday 5 April 2012, and reopen at 10.00am on Tuesday 10 April 2012.



# Planned & Cyclical Maintenance Calendar 2012-13



Area	Work	Estimated* Start Date	
Dirleton	Castlemains Place	Painting	August 2012
East Linton	Stories Park	Kitchen Replacement, Rewiring	July 2012
	Bridge Street	Kitchen Replacement, Rewiring	July 2012
East Saltoun	The Glebe	Window Replacement	July 2012
Garvald	Kirkbrae	Heating	May 2012
Gifford	Walden Terrace	Heating	June 2012
Gullane	Hopetoun Court	Painting	July 2012
	Muirfield Terrace	Painting	July 2012
Haddington	Edward Court	Kitchen Replacement, Bathroom Replacement	April 2012
	Kennedy Court	Painting	September 2012
Musselburgh	Delta View	Kitchen Replacement, Rewiring	In Progress
	Moir Place & Terrace	Kitchen Replacement, Rewiring	In Progress
	Pinkie	Bathroom Replacement	November 2012
North Berwick	Quality Street	Kitchen Replacement, Painting	May 2012
Ormiston	Clarks Buildings	Heating	July 2012
	Oxenford Buildings	Heating	July 2012
Pencaitland	Tyne Park	Painting	April 2012
Port Seton	South Seton Park	Painting	July 2012
Stenton	The Crofts	Heating, Painting	August 2012
Tranent	Plough Lane	Kitchen Replacement	April 2012
	Potters Path (amenity)	Kitchen Replacement	May 2012
	Well Wynd	Kitchen Replacement	May 2012
	Coalgate	Kitchen Replacement, Rewiring	August 2012
	The Hedges	Shower Installation, Painting, (Solar Collectors for 2 properties)	April 2012
Wallyford	Albert Close	Door Replacement, Painting	April 2012
	Fa'side	Painting	May 2012
West Barns	Edinburgh Road	Painting	August 2012

\*All works are subject to a pre-contract survey and are dependent on the availability of resources.