

SPRING 2021

talkback

elha.com
east lothian housing association



Lockdown Update

Office Open

It has been both a busy and a quiet few months due to lockdown, but following the easing of lockdown restrictions, we expect to re-open the office on 26 April 2021.

Only a limited number of visitors will be allowed in the office, and face coverings must be worn. As most of us will still be working from home, if you would like to speak to someone in particular, please call or e-mail instead of visiting the office.

Repairs & Maintenance

Any repairs you reported during lockdown will be scheduled starting from 26 April. We have quite a backlog to work through, but we will get to everyone. We expect to have repair booking available in My Home on 15 April. You will only be able to book repairs from 26 April, and availability is likely to be limited while we schedule repairs which have been waiting for lockdown to be lifted. You can track your repairs in the My Home Repair History page.

Planned Maintenance is expected to start on 3 May 2021 – see our Planned Maintenance calendar on page 4 for more details.

If you had planned maintenance booked which had to be postponed due to the lockdown, we will be in contact with you to arrange a new date and time. This includes the fire alarm upgrades.

Allocations & Mutual Exchanges

We were only carrying out mutual exchanges during lockdown where there was a specific housing need, but from 26 April we will be accepting all mutual exchange requests (and if we need to visit you we will still be using safety procedures – watch the video). Allocations have continued as normal and if you have been registered with Homehunt, don't forget you need to re-register with These Homes by 16 April 2021 to keep your original registration date.



THESE HOMES

www.thesehomes.com

If your exchange was approved, but no sign up had been arranged due to lockdown, your Housing Officer will be in touch to arrange a sign up and exchange date. The same goes for any other tenancy changes.

Captain Discount Says "Thank You for Taking Part!"

We had a record-breaking response to this year's rent increase consultation. 379 of you responded by the deadline, that's 28.5% of our tenants, beating last year's record of 24.4%!

69% of you preferred Captain Discount's 3 Year Deal, 28% the 5 Year Deal and 3% had no preference. The 3 Year Deal was approved at our February Management Committee meeting, and rent increase notifications confirming the new (or not new) rent were sent at the end of February.

The good news is, if you received your rent increase notification by e-mail, then you're already amongst the 80% of our tenants that are paper-free, so our new and increased Key Tenant Discounts mean you will be getting a Rent Freeze this year (unless you decide it's time to earn yourself an even bigger discount!).

But if you are reading a paper copy of this edition of Talkback, then unfortunately you need to go paper-free before you can qualify for our Rent Discounts, and the rent you pay will increase by £5 a month on 1 April. Please get in touch if there is anything we can do to help you claim your Rent Discounts, we don't want any of our tenants to miss out.

Please remember that Service Charges are not part of the rent increase and may have gone up or down depending on the cost of any services you receive.

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The Good the Bad and the Ugly

Well, the 2021 rent increase consultation definitely made January interesting! We're really pleased that most tenants who took part visited the new consultation area and read the information there, including the frequently asked questions (FAQ) before commenting.

As usual, we would like to highlight some of the comments received by you.

The Good

"I was given a chance of a home and it's great. I was looked after by your staff and they have been very helpful, the house itself is amazing and well worth the rent."

"Rents are a little more than the Council, but the repairs and help services are so much better."

"Live in a lovely area. Couldn't ask for anywhere better."

Year	ELC	ELHA
2015/16	5%	2.1%
2016/17	5%	4.95%
2017/18	5%	4.4%
2018/19	5%	4.2%
2019/20	5%	3.2%

The Bad

"The price I pay in rent for a one bedroom flat is more expensive than a two bedroom flat with the Council. This never makes sense to me. Surely my one bedroom flat should be cheaper???"

(Some of the main reasons why our rents are not the same as ELC are detailed in the FAQ at the back of the leaflet, or it's still available to read on elha.com. It is worth noting that our rent increases have been lower than ELC's for the last 5 years)

Visit the info page

www.elha.com/consultations/rent-2021/more-information.php



The Ugly

"I do not have a computer so these questions do not apply to me."

(Yes, they do. If you don't have a computer, the questions were still asking your opinion about the rent you pay and to choose between Captain Discount's 3 Year or 5 Year deals. Tenants who are not yet paper-free were sent a printed form to return. If a consultation is only relevant to tenants who use My Home, we only send it to My Home tenants).



www.nhsinform.scot

NHS Inform is Scotland's national health information service. Their aim is to provide the people in Scotland with accurate and relevant information to help you make informed decisions about your own health and the health of the people you care for.

NHS Inform has a lot of information on what to do if you are unwell and would typically make an

appointment to see your GP, but are unsure if that's the right thing to do during lockdown. They have self-help guides for common illnesses and injuries, and contact information for hundreds of support groups around Scotland.

Their information is available in many formats and languages, including BSL.

Fraud Prevention

If we make a major change to our services, we will always write to you to let you know. If you are paper free, you will either receive a PDF letter attached to an e-mail or a branded newsletter-style update.

If you receive an e-mail that appears to be from us, asking you to change the bank details for your next rent payment, don't make any changes but instead please contact

our Finance Team by e-mailing CustomerServices@elha.com or calling on **01620 825032** and choosing the rent payment options on the phone system.

You can also check the correct information by logging into your **My Home** account and clicking **Do More** in the **My Account Box** – our bank details are halfway down the page.



A Virtual Meeting, Viewing and Sign Up!

Our allocation process usually involves a home visit with the potential applicant. Last year one of our successful applicants, Fern, was from the West Coast, so the usual visits weren't possible, and travelling across the country for a viewing and sign up before moving wasn't an option. So James, one of our Housing Officers, arranged for the allocation interview, property viewing, and sign-up appointment to take place on Teams, a video conferencing platform.

Because of this, Fern could view the property over Teams as James carried out a walk-through of the property, letting her see all the features. She was really pleased with the personal tour and accepted the offer of a new home. We made arrangements to send the paperwork to her securely and arranged another Teams meeting to meet online and carry out the sign up so the signing of the tenancy agreement could be properly witnessed.

This was a really successful experience both for us and for Fern, who was able to do the entire process from her location and then collect the keys safely from our office to start the next challenge of moving into her new home and getting settled in on time for Christmas.

Here is what Fern had to say about her experience:

Applying for a new home and the process of moving house in a pandemic is definitely a different experience to during more normal times!

I moved into an East

Lothian Housing Association property last October and went through the application, interview and viewing process virtually. Despite being my first time using Microsoft Teams (which was used for the viewing and signing tenancy agreements) the whole experience was stress free and easy to navigate. Through doing the paperwork online and remotely it made the process a lot safer and simpler than working out tiers, restrictions and travelling.

While I was a bit nervous about viewing the property, not in person but by video link, James was brilliant at showing me round the property and answering questions so when I moved in it did feel like I had already seen it.

Everyone in the office was brilliant at communicating with what was happening, the process and finding ways to make the application and moving process possible through different methods and really went out their way to help. While moving in a pandemic is never ideal it was a lot more straightforward and simpler than I had anticipated.

We are waiting for restrictions to ease before meeting face to face for a settling in visit. Meanwhile we continue to stay in touch by phone and email.



These Homes – Live

These Homes launched on 22 March 2021.



www.thesehomes.com

If you are a Homehunt applicant and you're planning on re-registering for housing with us, you need to do this by 16th April in order to keep your original registration date.

When you go to These Homes, click on the Register button on the top right, and enter your details. On page 2 of the registration, you'll be asked for your Homehunt number – please have this ready.

We ask a lot more questions than we did through Homehunt. This is to make sure that we know all of your needs and aspirations so that you are only considered for the homes which are right for you. So, please make sure you answer all of the questions we ask you.

If you get stuck on anything, there's a Q&A post pinned to the top of our Facebook page.

www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation





Right to Repair and Alternative Contractors

The Right to Repair Scheme ensures that Housing Association tenants receive a good repair service for important repairs. Repairs which fall under Right to Repair must be completed within a set response time, and if we fail to meet this timescale, we must pay you compensation. You also have the right to use an alternative contractor to carry out a repair if we're unable to do it, and we will cover the costs (as long as the reason we were not able to complete the repair isn't because you were not home or refused access to your home when a repair operative arrived).

Right to Repair works will still be carried out during lockdown restrictions.

The alternative contractor for all repairs other than repairs to your gas systems is East Lothian Council. The alternative contractor for gas repairs is R3 Repairs Limited.

To find out more, please visit the Right Repair page on elha.com.

Money & Home Energy Advice Service

Anne is available for both money and home energy advice. While home visits aren't an option (yet), she is still able to help over the phone or can provide information and advice by e-mail or post.

If you would like to chat to Anne about benefits, debts, utility bills, changing energy provider, or any of the many ways Anne can help you get the most out of your income, just drop your information into the Money Advice or the Energy Advice boxes in your **My Home** account, and Anne will be in touch or call on **01620 825032**.



Planned Maintenance 2021-22



We normally publish the new financial year's planned maintenance calendar around this time of year. Due to Lockdown restrictions, what we can and can't do is liable to change from month to month. We will keep you updated as things progress, but this is what we hope to do in the coming months:

- Complete the kitchen replacements in Dury Way, Wallyford that we had to place on hold due to the pandemic. We hope to do this around May/June 2021
- Complete the gas boiler replacements that we had to place on hold due to the pandemic. We hope to do this around June 2021
- Replace the kitchens at The Maltings in Haddington around June/July 2021
- Depending on when we can get window supplies confirmed, replace the windows at Woodbush Place and Castle Street, Dunbar around July/August 2021

We will also start to fit the smoke and heat detectors that are required by the Scottish Government. We were making great progress on this before the latest Lockdown and we would like to start this again as soon as it is safe to do so. Expect us to start getting in touch with at least some of you to arrange this with you from early May 2021.

Social Security Scotland Update for Parents

Scottish Child Payment

Scottish Child Payment helps towards the costs of supporting your family. It's a weekly payment of £10 that you can get for every child you look after who's under 6 years of age. You'll get the payment every 4 weeks if your application is successful.

It's up to you what you choose to spend the money on. You could use Scottish Child Payment for things like:

Travel costs

Nappies and other essentials

Childcare

Family days out

Scottish Child Payment does not affect any other UK or Scottish Government benefits that you, or any person in your household, currently get. If you want to know how Scottish Child Payment might affect local council allowances or grants, such as the Scottish Welfare Fund, you can contact East Lothian Council.

Anyone applying for Scottish Child Payment will not get a decision until after 15 February 2021. The first payments will reach families after 22 February 2021. Social Security Scotland are expecting a high number of applications, so payments might take longer.

Further details can be found on mygov.scot. or you can call Social Security Scotland free on **0800 182 2222**. Lines are open 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Department for Work & Pensions Update

Extension of furlough and support for the self-employed

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will be extended until the end of September 2021. Employees will continue to receive 80% of their current salary for hours not worked. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) will continue with a fourth and a fifth grant. Many people who became self-employed in 2019-20, may now be able to claim direct cash grants under SEISS.

Universal Credit uplift and advances repayments

The Government confirmed a temporary 6-month extension to the £20 uplift and a one-off payment worth £500 for Working Tax Credit claimants.

New claimants will be able to spread Universal Credit advances repayments over a 24-month period and the maximum rate of deductions from Universal Credit will be reduced for all to 25%.



**Department
for Work &
Pensions**



Allocations Policy Consultation

The review of our These Homes (Allocations) Policy, and the switch to These Homes has been an ongoing project since 2019. We carried out two consultations with tenants and applicants – one in 2019 and another in 2020.

The questions and results are available on elha.com, or on request. You should already have received a summary leaflet, detailing what the changes to the policy are, and what this may mean for you. If you did not receive this leaflet, either as a paper-free download or a printed document, or if you would like to discuss the changes, please contact us by calling **01620 825032** or emailing enquiries@elha.com.

New Staff

Welcome to Eric Stoddart, our new Executive Support Officer.



Eric has worked in Banking & Financial Services for many years, specialising recently in Change Management & Business Improvement to leading Financial Services businesses, including Lloyds Banking Group, RBS, and Tesco Bank.

Eric has also served for over 10 years on the Chartered Banker Institute's District Centre Committee, including as Chairman, and is currently serving on the Institute's new Membership Forum.

Eric was elected as Fellow of the Chartered Banker Institute in 2013, and is also a Chartered Banker, Chartered Governance Professional (ICSA), member of the Association for Project Management (APM) and holds PRINCE2, and AgilePM qualifications.

Get Involved from Home

If you're looking for something new to do during lockdown, why not get involved in some of our projects? There's a lot you can do from home.

For example:

- **Why not pop into your My Home account to see if you have any open surveys or consultations?**
Repair surveys can be found on your Repair History page in the 'My House' box (just click the comment bubble next to your repair to leave feedback), and all other surveys and consultations can be found in your 'My Ideas & Opinions' box.
- **Follow our Facebook page** – we update it frequently with everything from available properties to helpful tips, to new support services and information. www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation
- **And how about coming along to a virtual TIG meeting?**
Tenants meet every two months over Teams to chat about community engagement, scrutiny projects, the outcomes of surveys, and just have a catch up with someone outside their own bubble. If you'd like to come along, you can fill in the 'Join In' form in My Home, drop an e-mail to info@elha.com marked FAO Claire McMillan or call us on **01620 825032**.



Social Media

Our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves, has completed a Professional Diploma in Social Media for Government & Public Sector, and graduated (virtually) just before the festive break. Watch this space for more social media news.



Direct Debits

With the rent increase and "rent freeze" for all the paper free tenants, we've been doing a lot checking and rechecking whose Direct Debit will change. As any tenant has up until the 28th of March to switch to paper free, and we have to amend Direct Debits a bit further in advance, some tenants may receive a Direct Debit change notification from Allpay saying that the rent payment is going up by £5.

If you are paper free but still got an increase in your DD – this may be because you only recently qualified for a discount. We will do a full check of all Bronze tenants as soon as the update is run, and if you've had a £5 increase in your Direct Debit when you shouldn't, we will make sure that this is amended as soon as possible. You also may have had an increase in your service charge. This should be on your rent increase letter.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

