

SPRING 2020

talkback

elha.com
east lothian housing association



Rent and Coronavirus

We know that this is a strange and difficult time for everyone, and that some of our tenants are really going to need our help to manage their rent payments.

That's why it is so important that every other tenant who can still pay their rent does their bit and continues to pay it. Otherwise we won't be able to help anyone!



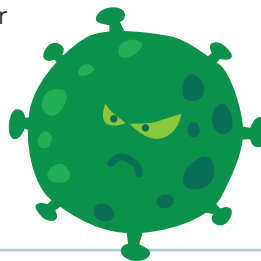
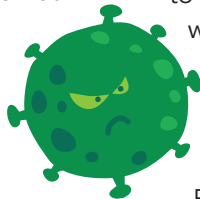
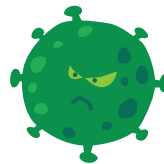
We're proud to be an independent housing association, based in East Lothian, and we're here solely to make sure our tenants can continue to live in our safe, secure homes. We do not get any public money towards our running costs, and we rely on our rental income to survive – it makes up almost all of our income.

We will help every tenant who needs our assistance with getting their rent paid. We have extended our online Live Help hours at **elha.com**, and our staff are now available 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday, (4.00pm on Fridays). If your income has gone down or even gone completely, don't wait, don't ignore it – we can help, right now.

Many of our tenants though will not see a change to their normal income, and will continue

to receive their wages, welfare benefits or pensions as normal. We need these tenants to continue to make their rent payments.

For our Association, that is as important a response in this crisis as it is to follow the government advice – please keep doing your bit to help all our tenants in your community by maintaining your rent payments if you can.



What About a Rent Holiday?

Unfortunately, there is no such thing. It is also very unlikely that the government would ever introduce one, since Universal Credit and other welfare benefits ensure that rental payments for affordable rented homes can always be met. This sort of support is available to people with mortgages – but don't be fooled – a "mortgage holiday" is not free money, it simply defers mortgage payments for a period of time, which then have to be made up later. It also means the total amount of interest that homeowner pays will increase in the longer term, as the loan will now take longer to pay off, and so more interest will be charged.



Continued overleaf

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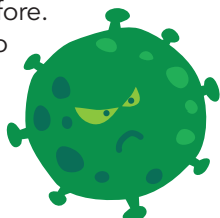


If you have lost income, don't miss your rent and think it will be OK. Contact us instead and we will help you get the money you need to make your rent payment.

First Timers and Not Sure if they Should Bother us-ers

Don't think twice about whether to contact us or not – just go to **elha.com** and use our **Live Help** service, or call **01620 825032**. We have also increased the hours of our Money Advice Service, and our Housing Team are all still working and ready to help.

If you can't pay your rent, then do your bit and contact us so we can help. We appreciate that some of our tenants will never have been in this position before. There is nothing to be embarrassed about, this situation is no-one's fault.

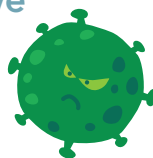


And although our staff are busy (so please be patient if we take a little while to answer), it's what we do, and our services are always friendly, free and confidential.

The sooner you contact us, the sooner we can get your issue sorted.

What Else can we Help With?

It's not just welfare benefits, we can talk to you about practical issues like adjusting your rent payment days or about any support packages the Government may put in place to cover missed earnings. We can also talk to you about any financial questions or difficulties, including any worries about managing gas or electricity payments, as well as a wide range of housing and tenancy related issues.



We Can Do This!

If our tenants and staff all pull together, we can make sure everyone living in one of our homes can get through this. Your **My Home** account is available 24 hours a day, or you can contact us through **Live Help** at **elha.com**, by email to **info@elha.com**, or call us on **01620 825032**.

We will try our best to help with anything that you need just now and, if we can't help directly, we will try to put you in touch with someone who can.

CHANGES Community Health Project

CHANGES provides free support to anyone over 16 who lives in East Lothian.

They can help support you with:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Panic
- Worry
- Low mood
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Negative thinking



CHANGES

Promoting positive wellbeing

CHANGES can be contacted by phone on **0131 653 3977**

or by e-mailing

info@changechp.org.uk

Visit the Changes website:

www.changeschp.org.uk

The Scottish Government has set up a new helpline for those at high risk from Coronavirus. It will offer practical and emotional assistance to those who do not have family/community support, including those who are disabled, elderly, and who are in the high risk categories.

Helpline: **0800 111 4000**



What are our staff doing?

Almost all our staff are working from home. A very small number (usually two or three staff members) go into our Head Office each day to keep our essential services running, including postal services for our tenants that are not yet paper-free.

A small number of ELHA staff, along with many R3 staff, have now been placed on Furlough. However, some R3 staff are continuing to work to provide cover for urgent and emergency repairs, and to do any works to empty homes to be allocated to homeless households. So, if you see an R3 van out

and about, please be assured that our operatives are undertaking essential work.

Occasionally, ELHA staff will also be working in the community, but again relating to urgent or essential work only. Our priorities at the moment relate to the safety and wellbeing of our tenants and preventing or alleviating homelessness.

But we have been very busy. In particular we have been working with tenants affected by the crisis and helping to support people who need help to apply for Universal Credit or other welfare benefits.

We also want to be a responsible business, so we are making sure things like payments to our suppliers continue to be made on time, and as it is also our financial year end, this is keeping staff involved in that side of things rather busy too!

Fortunately, because of the investments and developments in IT that we have made in recent years, our systems support widespread remote working amongst our staff, so we have been able to follow the Government guidance around working from home, whilst also keeping all our core services running.

We extended the opening hours of our online **Live Help** at **elha.com**, as well as our repairs line (**03000 999 247**) as soon as the Government started to impose restrictions. We will continue to do this until these restrictions are lifted. These services are available Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm (4.00pm on Fridays).



Thank you!

We are thrilled that over 300 of our tenants chose to take part in this year's Rent Increase Consultation – that's almost a quarter of all tenants!

We were also very impressed by the high number of well thought out comments, demonstrating that our tenants are keeping themselves well educated on how we operate.

The results and all the comments were reviewed by the Management Committee at the 26 February meeting, and the 2020 rent increase was confirmed.

You can download a copy of the consultation report from the news section of **elha.com**, or we can provide a copy on request (please note that as our offices have minimal staff during lockdown, there may be a delay in providing printed copies).



Settled Status

Following Brexit, there will be a transition period for EEA nationals until 31 December 2020. During this period, free movement continues, and so EEA

nationals (and their family members) will be able to rely on their right to benefits under the current rules.

From 1 January 2021 (or 30 June 2021 if there is a deal in place), EEA nationals will need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK. They will be awarded either pre-settled or settled status, depending on their circumstances and this will enable them to continue living in the UK, and if they have settled status – the right to claim benefits.

All EEA nationals should apply for settled status before the deadline, to apply, go to the link below:

www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families



Temporary Changes to Allocations

The current Government guidance is that everyone should delay moving home if they can, during lockdown.

This means that we will not approve any mutual exchanges at the moment, and we have made some temporary changes to how we will allocate available properties.

Clearly we do not expect to have many available properties in the next few weeks but we will still be advertising and allocating any that we do have, when priority will be given to those with a Homeless (Platinum) Priority Pass. We will only let new tenants move in straight away if they have used this type of Priority Pass, otherwise they will have to wait until restrictions have been lifted before they can move in.

Once the lockdown is over, if this results in a significant increase in allocations to homeless households, we will increase the number of non-homeless allocations until the proportion of allocations over the year is back to 50/50 – half to homeless households, and half to households with other levels of priority.

We will keep tenants and applicants up to date with any new information, new guidance and any further changes on our Facebook page, and the news section on elha.com.

Read the Government Guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/government-advice-on-home-moving-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Visit our Facebook page here: <https://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 the 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).

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: https://www.elha.com/right_to_repair

Trainee Estates Assistant



You may recognise our new Estates Assistant, Hannah Strachan – she started at ELHA as a Modern Apprentice

in our Housing Department. Now that she's completed her apprenticeship, Hannah will be taking over estate management – communal stairs, gardens, estate inspections, and some community engagement.

Hannah's first big project was making sure that all our communal stairs are safe – a task that required a lot of spot checks and stickers. This is now on hold and Hannah won't be out and about again until the lockdown is over. Once things are back to normal and Hannah is able to visit your neighbourhood again, please say hi (and take in any prams or shoes you've left in the communal landing).



Are you following us on Facebook?

During the lockdown, we will be putting out regular updates on our Facebook page.

To keep up to date with what's going on, just go to:

www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation



Coronavirus and our Repairs Service

The way we provide repairs services is having to change to adapt to the guidance being issued around Coronavirus – but our responsibility to repair and maintain your home is still the same.

You can continue to report all repairs using your **My Home** account or by telephoning **03000 999 247**, but you can only book appointments for urgent or emergency repairs at the moment. All other repairs will be booked, but we will only make appointments to do them once the current restrictions have been lifted.

As a business, we are following the guidelines and advice given by the Government and acting accordingly. We would never pressurise any of our staff to work, or allow them to attend a job, if they had any of the Coronavirus symptoms.

The current guidance relating to repairs and maintenance, issued by the UK Government (which is why it refers to Public Health England, but does apply in Scotland), is as follows:

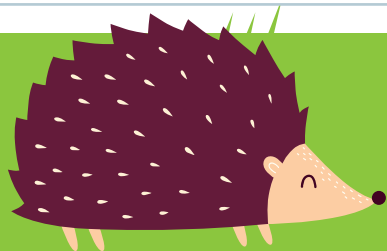
Work carried out in people's homes, for example by tradespeople carrying out repairs and maintenance, can continue, provided that the tradesperson is well and has no symptoms. Again, it will be important to ensure that Public Health England guidelines, including maintaining a 2 metre distance from any household occupants, are followed to ensure everyone's safety.

No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless it is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing or repairs, and where the tradesperson is willing to do so. In such cases, Public Health England can provide advice to tradespeople and households.

No work should be carried out by a tradesperson who has Coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

Our staff are considered "Category 1 Key Workers" under current guidance when doing urgent repairs, and so are allowed to travel to and from work. In addition to this, all R3 staff are supplied with disposable gloves which are only used once and thrown away after each job, as well as hand sanitizer, which is used before and after each job.

Although the current guidance does allow us to do other, less urgent, jobs, we hope you will agree with our approach to only undertake essential works at this time. However, if you have a particular reason why you need a routine job doing now, please call **03000 999 247** to discuss this, we would consider making exceptions if there is a good reason, as long as we can still comply with the Government guidance.




Have you noticed...

...the video icons in your My Home account?


We now have short videos to explain the main features in each of your **My Home** sections. To watch the videos, all you need to do is log into your **My Home** account and click on the icon in the top right of each box.


While we were upgrading your **My Home** account to include these videos, we've also improved your 'My Ideas & Opinions' box so it shows if there are any surveys running (excluding repair satisfaction surveys) and when the survey closes.

MY IDEAS & OPINIONS

Mr Alexander  Tenant we know we don't have the monopoly on good ideas - this is where you can get involved, share your ideas for improving our services, or just see what other tenants are doing.

TIG-Web ON

My New Home Survey  Completed: Thu, 23 Jan 2020

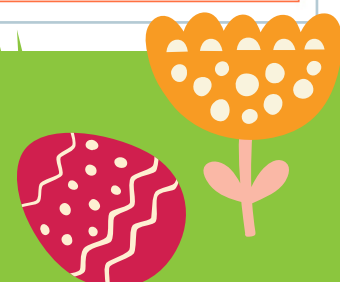
5 Minute Survey - e-Talk  Closes: Sun, 15 Mar 2020

TIG Zone

Join In

Make a Complaint

Suggestions for Talkback



Calling TIG-Web!

We're looking for a few tenants to test a new payment service, which we'll hopefully offering to tenants later in the year. To take part in the testing you must have a **My Home** account, a smartphone, and be willing to download and test a new app. We can offer some shopping vouchers as reward!

If you would like to know more, please contact our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves, by e-mailing info@elha.com



Waste & Recycling

Bin and recycling box collections by East Lothian Council should continue as normal during the Coronavirus lockdown, but brown bin collections and special uplifts are on hold, and Recycling Centres are closed. Please do your part to keep your neighbourhood tidy by using your bin and boxes correctly.

Please do not put bulky items out in your garden or in a communal bin store – they will not be picked up until the lockdown is lifted, and by that point they may have rotted to the point where the special uplift team will refuse to take them away.

As the brown garden waste bins aren't going to be collected during the lockdown, please bear this in mind when gardening.

Please make sure bins and boxes are outside your home by 7am on collection days, as the times of collections may change.



Energy Action Scotland

Energy Action Scotland, responding to the urgent situation now facing many people with the spread of Coronavirus, has put together some energy saving tips for people having to self-isolate and spend extended periods of time in their homes. There are also some energy saving changes people can make to their home, advice for people who have prepayment meters, and contact details for suppliers.

We can help too! Our Money Adviser, Anne, is working extra hours to help as many of our tenants as possible, just contact us through **Live Help** at elha.com or telephone **01620 825032**.

Visit the Energy Action Scotland website: https://www.eas.org.uk/en/coronavirus_56247/



Energy Support for Vulnerable People through Coronavirus

New emergency measures with the energy industry have been agreed by the government to protect the domestic energy supply of those most in need during the disruption caused by Coronavirus.

From 26 March customers with pre-payment meters who may not be able to add credit can speak to their supplier about options to keep them supplied. This could include nominating a third party for credit top ups, having a discretionary fund added to their credit, or being sent a pre-loaded top up card so that their supply is not interrupted.

More broadly, any energy customer in financial distress will also be supported by their supplier, which could include debt repayments and bill payments being reassessed, reduced or paused where necessary, while disconnection of credit meters will be completely suspended.

Customers that are unable to top up their pre-payment meter are advised to contact their supplier immediately to discuss how they can be kept on supply. Ofgem recommends consumers leave the meter box unlocked if they need someone else to top up the meter. Smart meter customers should be able to top-up remotely, such as by phone, mobile application or online.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

