

SPRING 2019

talkback

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east lothian housing association

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1. Log into your My Home account
2. Click the banner
3. E-mail your friends
4. Wait for your £20 voucher



Tracey Kerr, Director of Housing, Retires



Tracey Kerr, our Director of Housing, retired at the end of December 2018, after 25 years of service.

Tracey joined us from Scottish Homes in 1994, and was involved in the stock transfer which tripled our stock at the time. She was involved in the early development of Homehunt and more recently at the cutting edge of digital housing service development as a core part of the team developing My Home and the Key Tenant Scheme.

Tracey has made a huge contribution, not just to ELHA, but across the Housing sector and will be hugely missed.

I am sure that you will join us in wishing Tracey all the best for an action packed retirement!



Changes:

As a result of Tracey's retirement, Housing Manager, Karen Barry is the acting Director of Housing for six months, and Claire McMillan has been seconded into the Housing Manager post for the same period. As we are a part-time Housing Officer short, we have had to reshuffle the Housing Officer areas. If you're not sure who your Housing Officer is, you can find the list in the news section of elha.com or call us on **01620 825032** if you need to know and don't have access to the internet.

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An Ordinary Tenant – Key Tenant Case Study

You don't need to be a 'perfect' tenant to get a Gold Key Tenant discount. You just need to be working with us, and willing to put in the work to get your tenancy in order.

Case Study:

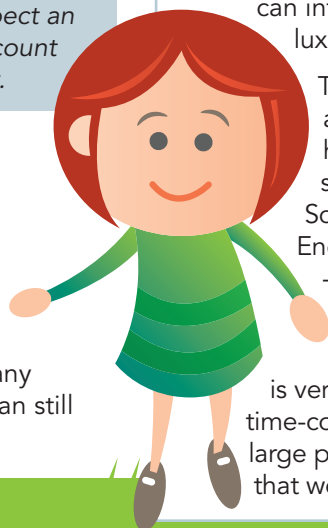
In April 2017, when we launched the Key Tenant Scheme, Ms X had substantial rent arrears. Her arrears had not changed much for three years, and traditional methods of recovering the overdue rent hadn't really worked. An arrangement would be made, and then one missed payment would set everything back to the starting point.

Ms X applied for a Key Tenant Discount when the scheme was launched, and after discussion with her Housing Officer, she was awarded a Gold discount. Every month her rent balance was checked, and every month she had stuck to her repayment arrangement, and qualified for another £10 discount.

It wasn't all smooth sailing; her discount was in jeopardy because of an incident involving a member of her household, but she engaged with us, put right some damage caused, and she kept her discount. Then she switched from Direct Debit to manual payments for one month and lost her discount, but this was quickly resolved, and she cleared the small amount left on her rent account with the next payment.

At the end of March 2019, Ms X had a clear rent account and we expect an application for a Platinum discount to be arriving any minute now.

While we are very strict with the rules for Platinum tenants – one missed survey and you're downgraded for a month – the Gold discount has a bit more flexibility. If a tenant is working with us, and doing everything they can to resolve any issues with their tenancy, they can still qualify for a Gold discount.



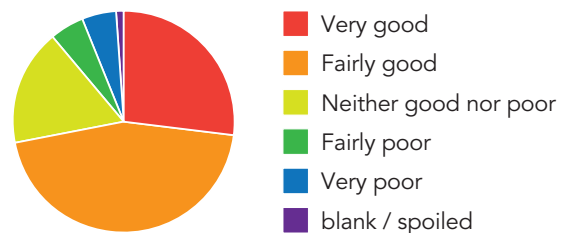
Best Response Ever!

Thank you so much to everyone who responded to this year's Rent Increase Consultation. We had exactly 200 responses, and some really useful comments and suggestions. Rent increases are never going to be popular, and it was great to read so many well thought out ideas on how we can minimise the impact of rent increases without compromising our ability to provide a full range of tenant services.

RESULTS:

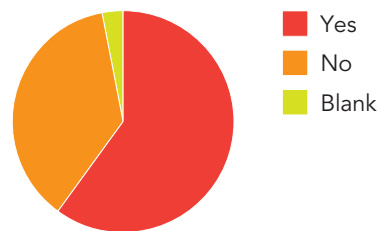
72% of responders said that they thought ELHA's rents were very good or fairly good value for money:

Taking into account the accommodation and services ELHA provides, do you think that the rent for your home represents good or poor value for money?



And 60% said that RPI + 1% is a fair increase:

Do you think that RPI + 1% is a fair increase for 2019/20?



The results and all your comments were reviewed by both the TIG-Panel and the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee.

We'd just like to add:

Several tenants commented that they would expect an increase in repairs & maintenance services to go with the increase in rent. We need to point out that the increase in rent is necessary to continue the current level of repairs & maintenance and meet the targets for standards and regulations which are required by law, not so we can introduce extra services, more frequent upgrades, or luxury options.

The cost of maintaining our properties increases well above the rate of inflation. Social housing is very heavily regulated, and there are a lot of housing standards we must comply with, for example the Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS), and the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) – although we are making good progress on this, see page 3.

Making sure all our properties meet these standards is very important to us, but it is a costly and time-consuming process. And other than the PV panels on a large percentage of our housing stock, it's not always obvious that we're doing all these things.

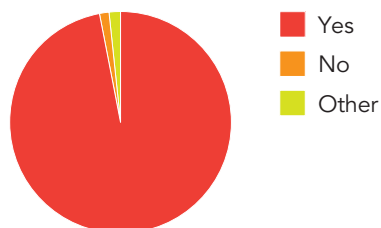
How Did We Do? RESULTS

Thank you to everyone who completed the How Did We Do? Survey, and for letting us know how you felt about this year's How We're Doing booklet. Several of you found the font difficult to read, and several more didn't like the pale text on a black background.

So we will not be using those combinations again!

On the whole though, most people seemed to like the booklet, which is great to hear. We're going to be trying something new for the 2018/19 performance information and we hope you like that too – watch this space for more information.

Do you think that the How We're Doing booklet is a good way to inform tenants of our performance?



EESSH!

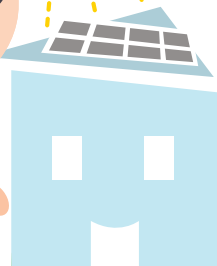
You may have heard us talking about the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESSH) in our How We're Doing booklet, but what is it?

From the Scottish Government website:

"The Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESSH) aims to improve the energy efficiency of social housing in Scotland. It will help to reduce energy consumption, fuel poverty and the emission of greenhouse gases.

The standard will also contribute to reducing carbon emissions by 42% by 2020, and 80% by 2050, in line with the requirements set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009."

Over 97% of our homes are now compliant with the EESSH, and we hope to increase this to 100% over the summer - almost two years ahead of schedule!



Did you know...



...there are changes coming because of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014?

- The length of a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (short SST) for tenants with a history of antisocial behaviour will increase from 6 months (with an option to extend for a further 6 months) to 12 months (with an option to extend for another 6 months) - if a successful Homehunt applicant has a history of antisocial behaviour, we can start their tenancy with a short SST in order to monitor their behaviour
- There are new grounds for creating short SSTs:
 - o At the start of a new tenancy, if the new tenant has a history of antisocial behaviour in the previous 3 years
 - o Where a current tenant's SST can be converted to a short SST because of current antisocial (in the past this was only allowed if the tenant had an ASBO)
 - o Homeowners can be granted a short SST to allow works to an existing home which cannot be lived in while the work takes place - this also applies to someone being convicted for using the house illegally or for an offence punishable by imprisonment committed in or in the locality of the house
- The rules for evicting antisocial tenants have been streamlined - if a tenant has been convicted of serious criminal or antisocial behaviour in or around their home, and this is having a significant and ongoing effect on their neighbours, the courts no longer have to decide if it is reasonable to evict the tenant or not
- The rules around making a change to your tenancy have also changed - this means that someone will have had to have been a named member of your household for at least 12 months before:
 - o you can add them as a joint tenant
 - o you can assign your tenancy to them
 - o you can sub-let your home to them
 - o they can succeed to your tenancy if you die

Those 12 months start from the day you tell us they are a member of your household. Adding them to your household details in My Home **does** count, as our systems record everything you do in My Home in an audit log which cannot be altered.

Why You Should Add Us To Your Safe Senders

While we had the best ever response to a Rent Increase Consultation (200 responses!), a small minority of Platinum tenants lost their discount because they had not added us to their safe senders (also known as a whitelist), and their e-mail provider sent the notification e-mail to their spam folder.

The only person who can edit the settings on your e-mail account is you. Just because you have received one e-mail from us does not mean you will receive all e-mails unless you have specifically told your e-mail provider to let all our messages through. Different e-mail providers have different rules for what they consider to be spam, so we cannot tell you why our e-mails may have gone to your spam folder.

If you're not sure how to add us to your safe senders, most e-mail providers have a help section. If you can't find it, a Google search with your e-mail provider and 'safe sender' should give you the information. If you're still having problems, the East Lothian Library Service have IT help sessions, please contact your local library to find out more.

Think of your e-mail's spam filter as being a bit like owning a dog that occasionally chews up letters. Most of the time, the only thing he chews is junk mail, so you don't really mind. But sometimes he destroys something important. Adding important e-mails to your safe senders list is a bit like making sure important letters are sprayed with vinegar before they go through your door, so your dog won't eat them.



Cheaper.
Faster.
Greener.

Go PAPER FREE on My Home

If you're the sort of person who checks their e-mails every day or two, go paper-free. It takes 2 to 3 days for a letter to arrive, but only a moment to receive an e-mail. All you need to do is log into your My Home account and click the paper free button, and your next letter from us will arrive in your inbox.

And don't forget – this could be the first step on your way to a rent discount through the Key Tenant Scheme.



Take the survey, help improve services...

Would you like to help improve social landlord services in Scotland? The latest National Panel survey is now available to all service users!

The Panel is one of the ways that the Scottish Housing Regulator can hear what people think and make sure they focus on the important things. Members receive occasional surveys, information updates and invites to take part in other feedback exercises. Participation is always optional, and you can leave at any time.

You can take part:

Online at www.bit.ly/shr-panel

Call Engage Scotland (who manage the Panel) on **0800 433 7212**

Or e-mail natpan@engagescotland.co.uk

The Regulator wants to include as many different voices on the Panel as possible, including people who are not involved in other ways of giving views on landlord services (most members are not part of local tenant forums).

Members include Council and Housing Association tenants, people who are using or have used homeless services, home owners who receive factoring or common repairs from a social landlord, and people living on social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites.



Scottish Housing Regulator
National Panel

The Good, the Bad and The Ugly

You had a lot to say about this year's rent increase. So much so that the report to our Management Committee was 25 pages long! It was great to hear from so many interested tenants, and we would like to respond to some of the comments – good, bad and ugly.

THANK YOU
for getting involved



THE GOOD:

We are happy that all tenants are being consulted regarding the rent increase every year and we are being given all the numbers and details to understand it very well.

Thank you! We try to make things as clear as possible. The rent increase letter is a very large document, and every year we worry that people won't have time to read it before they complete the form.

As I am out of work at the moment, I'm just getting by on Universal Credit. Your Financial Advisor, Anne, has been a great help I have to say.

Yes, Anne is amazing. Her feedback surveys almost always come back with 10 out of 10 in every category. Every year she helps our tenants access benefits, grants and other support to the tune of over half a million pounds!

THE BAD:

Too much. Our wages don't increase with same rate.

We are the only Housing Association in the UK offering rent discounts through our Key Tenant Scheme. If you are not claiming them yet, your rent could go down, not up.

Although we try to keep our rents as low as possible, our costs can increase by more than RPI. The letter which goes out with the consultation shows what the rent has to cover: our running costs, maintaining homes and loan repayments. We are a non-profit organisation, and if we don't increase rents to cover our costs, we would have to reduce services.



THE UGLY

ELHA homes in Dunbar two bedroom houses are £80 a month cheaper than one bedroom.

No, they're not.

While it is possible for the rent on a two bedroom property to be less than a one bedroom property, there's always a reason for that. For example, a tenant in a large one bedroom property with a garden, driveway and service charges for courtyard lighting and bin-store cleaning could be paying more than a tenant in a small two bedroom property with no garden, parking space or service charges. (We checked the rents of most expensive one bedroom property and the cheapest two bedroom property in Dunbar and there is less than £10 a month difference.)

GAS SAFETY

We are about to start a gas service audit. This means that an independent contractor will carry out checks on our gas safety servicing contractor, Lothian Gas.

This is to make sure that Lothian Gas are meeting current Health and Safety standards. Around 10% of our tenants with a gas supply (that's roughly 100 tenants) will be visited by MFH Service Quality Management Ltd over the next year. The tenants who will receive a visit will be selected at random, and if you are selected then MFH will contact you direct to arrange an appointment. The contractor who visits you will carry a letter of authority and will have identification when they visit you.

If you would like more information, please e-mail us at enquiries@elha.com and mark your message 'For the attention of Asset Management', or call us on **01620 825032** and select 'other maintenance issue' from the phone menu.



Renovation Calendar

Thanks to a suggestion from one of our tenants, we're going to have a quarterly maintenance update in every edition of talkback, in addition to this annual calendar.

Sometimes dates change – a bad storm can mean a lot of roof repairs, which means a delay in starting roof replacements; a change to our kitchen supplier could mean we can start kitchen replacements sooner – we publish our expected start dates, but things can change over the year.



Area/Location	What's Getting Done	Estimated start date
Wallyford, Fa'side	Continue Reroofing Project	April to June 2019
Castlemains Place, The Crofts & Hopetoun Court	Bathroom Replacements	March to July 2019
Musselburgh, Delta View, Moir Place & Moir Terrace	External Wall Insulation	June to September 2019
Artillery Park, Craig Avenue, Dunbar Road, Riverside Drive, Garleton Drive, Edinburgh Road	Heating Replacement	June to September 2019
Woodbush Place, North High Street & Castle Street	Window & Door Replacement	August to September 2019
Davidson Terrace, Writers Court, Colvin Street,	Electrical Rewire	August to November 2019
Dirleton, Castlemains Place	Window Replacement	October 2019
Stenton, The Crofts	Boundary Wall Repairs or Replacement	November 2019
West Barns, Edinburgh Road	Kitchen Replacement	January to March 2020
Tranent, The Hedges	Air Source Heat Pumps – to replace defective Ground Source Heat Pumps	February/March 2020
Prestonpans, Salt Preston Place	Roughcast Renewal	February/March 2020

This year we will spend just over £1.27 million on making sure your homes are comfortable, energy efficient and safe. Please remember that the dates given in the table are an estimate and subject to change. We will of course be in touch shortly before any work starts to arrange definite dates.

Making Changes to Your Home

Please remember that you must fill out an Alterations & Improvements form, and have received written permission, before you make any changes to your home. If you make changes without permission, you may be told to put things back the way they were before – sometimes a costly process.

If you're not sure what you need permission for, please get in touch through the contact form on **My Home** or **elha.com**, or by e-mailing **enquiries@elha.com** and marking it 'For the attention of Asset Management', or calling us on **01620 825032** and pressing the 'other maintenance' option on the phone system.

You can also find more information in your Tenancy Agreement.

***These rules may be different for new build homes which are still in the 'defects' period, so please check with us before you start work.**

Examples:

Needs permission	Does not need permission*
Changing light fittings	Redecorating
Putting up a shed or decking in the garden	Installing a new washing machine
Building a driveway	Laying new floor coverings
Installing a satellite dish	(note: permission is needed to lay laminate flooring if you live in an upper flat)
Putting in a shower	

TIG in Action

– Scrutinising Communication

(our phone system)

If you've called us recently, you know we have a new automated phone system. Our TIG-Scrutiny tenants took an in-depth look at it and have made several recommendations.

1. **A change to voicemail procedures for ELHA staff.** In the past, staff have only given their name and the office number if they need to be called back. The group pointed out that the phone system doesn't give the caller the option to select a staff member's name. All staff have now been told to leave either their extension number, or instructions on which options to choose on the phone system to contact them.
2. **A 'return to the previous menu' option on the phone system,** so if someone has selected the wrong option, they can go back a step. This has now been introduced.
3. **Informing tenants which department does what – the group felt that this wasn't clear.** A perfect example is that the Housing department sounds like it should deal with houses, but it doesn't – anything to do with the house (or flat) is dealt with by the Asset Management department. There's a guide for you explaining what the most commonly contacted departments do to the right.

If you want to read the full report, you can find it on elha.com, in the Join In section.



Jargon!

Departments!

TIG in Action!



During our most recent scrutiny project (see left for details), one thing that came through very strongly was that tenants need to know what the various ELHA departments do. A common topic was 'Asset Management is incomprehensible jargon'. So – to give you an idea of some of what we do:

(We've limited this list to the things you're most likely to contact us about, and the departments you will be in contact with)

Asset Management: deal with anything to do with making improvements and maintaining your house or garden, (with the exception of repair reporting, which goes to R3, and the condition of your garden, which is dealt with by your Housing Officer). For example, if you want permission to make changes to your home, you need to reschedule a gas servicing appointment, you have a pest infestation, your kitchen needs to be replaced, you want to build a shed in your garden, or anything else which is related to your home. According to the Scrutiny Group, they can be tricky to find on the phone system, so if you need to speak to someone about your home or garden - select the option 'other maintenance issue'.

Finance: take rent payments, set up and manage Direct Debits, update your rent account with Housing Benefit and Universal Credit payments (where these are paid directly to us by ELC/DWP).

Housing: deal with anything to do with people - tenant participation, tenancy support, allocations & lettings, changes to your tenancy, and any breaches of the Tenancy Agreement by tenants (rent arrears & anti-social behaviour). Housing staff also manage elha.com & My Home, and produce the newsletter and leaflets.

Reception: take care of the day-to day management of our Homehunt allocation system and the mutual exchange list, welcome visitors to our office, help visitors to complete forms, take rent payments, report repairs and give information & advice.



Policies – We Want Your Opinions!

We normally publish our consultation calendar in the summer edition of Talkback, but we have a few important policies up for review very soon, and wanted to give everyone the opportunity to have their say.

We are legally required to consult tenants in the review of our policies if we are making any significant changes to our services or before introducing a new one (although we would do that anyway – it just makes sense to consult with the people who would be affected). Over the coming months we will be reviewing the following policies:

- Customer Care
- Domestic Abuse
- Tenant Participation Strategy

We don't intend to make big changes, but you may have some views and would like to be involved in the review of one or all of these policies.

If this is the case, please contact Claire McMillan, Housing Manager, by email at info@elha.com or call on **01620 825032** for more information on how to get involved.

PRIZE DRAW WINNERS

Congratulations to Miss Watt from Prestonpans, Ms McKenzie from Tranent, and Ms O'Neill, also from Tranent, who all won £50 in our Repair survey prize draw.

We draw one lucky winner every month, so make sure you remember to click through to leave your feedback when you get a repair survey e-mail (or send back your completed survey forms if you're not paper-free yet).

Become a Member

So you've completed a few surveys, maybe taken part in an estate inspection or two, you always read the How We're Doing booklet cover to cover – why not become a Member of East Lothian Housing Association? Life membership costs only £1, and for that you can:

- Attend and vote at our Annual General Meeting (AGM), and enjoy the informal part of the event too, where you can chat with staff, Management Committee members and guest speakers
- Vote for who is on our Management Committee, the people who decide how much rent we will charge, and what we do with that income

- Stand for election to our Management Committee – at the moment we have no tenants on our Management Committee and you could bring a much-needed tenant's perspective

If you're interested in finding out more please get in touch by popping onto elha.com and clicking the Live Help button, contacting us at enquiries@elha.com, or calling **01620 825032**.



My Home

Tap Your Home Screen to Access My Home

The TIG-Panel have been one step ahead of our web developers. At the last meeting, they discussed a My Home app, and asked staff to investigate options.

As My Home was designed specifically for phones, all that really needed to be put in place was a mobile-friendly home screen bookmark. Something the development team had in place less than a week later!

How you add the My Home icon to your home screen depends on the type of browser you're using, but for all of them you start by opening My Home (<https://myhome.elha.com>):

1. In Safari, click the add icon and select 'Add to Home Screen'
2. In Chrome, click the menu dots and select 'Add to Home Screen'
3. In various Android browsers, click the bookmark star, then the drop-down and select 'Add to Home Screen'

Once My Home is on your phone's home screen, you just need to tap to access all our services.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

