

SPRING 2018

talkback



500 Paper Free Tenants!

We were delighted that in February, Mrs Janetta Marshall from Musselburgh became the 500th tenant to go paper free.



Pictured, Mrs Marshall being presented with a bottle of champagne, flowers and a gift card for £100 by Housing Officer, Gemma Rutherford

If you're not paper free too, why not do it today? We'll have a few more surprises in the future for new sign-ups! Just visit your My Home account and put the paper free slider to green, or contact us if you need any help.

Are You On Universal Credit?

Remember, we can't tell the DWP about your rent increase. If you do not inform the DWP of the change in your rent on the 1st of April, they will continue to pay you at the 2017-18 rate, and you will have to make up the difference yourself.



IN THIS ISSUE OF TALKBACK

- Why Not All Good Tenants Are Platinum or Gold Tenants2
- ELHA Membership.....2
- When We Get Things Wrong2
- Why We Don't Support Scottish Choices.....3
- Power Cut?3
- Planned Maintenance Calendar 2018/19.....4
- Let Us In!4
- Safe, Pest Free Gardens5
- Save Money, Save the Environment!....5
- Your Bin – Your Business.....6
- ELHA Pin Up!6
- Hcl Transport For People With Mobility Challenges6
- Rent Increase Consultation.....7
- Scottish Power Hardship Fund.....7
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 – What Does This Mean For You?8
- Visits to the Scottish Parliament.....8





Why Not All Good Tenants Are Platinum or Gold Tenants

Something that cropped up a few times in this year's Rent Increase consultation was that 'good tenants' should get discounts. The comments ran along the lines of:

"You should give a discount to good tenants like us, who always pay their rent on time and don't cause any bother."

We absolutely agree that someone who pays their rent on time and doesn't cause any bother may be a good tenant but, unfortunately, they're just not a Gold or Platinum tenant. To qualify for a discount, you have to do more than simply meet the terms of your Tenancy Agreement; you have to be prepared to do what it takes to manage your tenancy in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

Every tenant, including those who receive Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, can receive a discount and whatever's stopping you from applying (apart from just not wanting to!) we can help. We can organise free flexible digital skills training through the Library Service, we have launched the Friends & Family account for anyone who needs or wants someone to help them use My Home, we work with the Resolution Service to deal with neighbour issues, and much more.

So if you'd like to save money on your rent, you can – it's up to you.

Interested?

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.



When We Get Things Wrong

We do our best to provide excellent service all of the time but there will be times when we get things wrong and that's when our Complaints Procedure comes in. If you feel you've received poor service from us you need to let us know so that we can put things right and learn from any mistakes we have made. You can either use the Grumble icon on elha.com or our Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) model complaints procedure which will follow the process below:

Stage 1

We aim to be able to resolve complaints as soon as they are made either by apologising and making sure the problem is corrected, or by investigating and letting you know our findings. The target to resolve a Stage 1 complaint is 5 working days, but most are resolved quicker.

Stage 2

If you're unhappy with our response to a Stage 1 complaint or if your complaint is of a more serious nature, we will deal with it at Stage 2. A Stage 2 investigation is far more in depth and so our target to resolve a Stage 2 complaint is 20 working days.

If you have gone through our complaints process, and you're still not satisfied, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to investigate.

For more information about the complaints procedure, there is a booklet available to download on elha.com, or a print copy can be sent out on request.



Rent Increase Consultation

A big thank you to all of you who took part in this year's Rent Increase Consultation. We had the biggest response in over a decade – almost double last year's response. While some of the increase will be because responding to consultations is a Platinum Key Tenant requirement, we have noticed that paper-free tenants are far more likely to participate and that's a good thing because we get to hear more of your views. Over a third of tenants are now paper-free, so give yourselves a pat on the back because:

Thanks to paper-free tenants, we saved over 3,000 sheets of paper and 1,000 envelopes in the first 6 weeks of 2018!

(Not to mention the savings in postage and staff time)



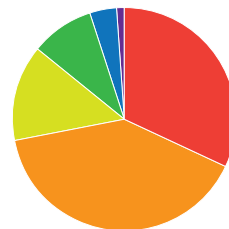
We're not complacent though – 60% of our tenants are not paper-free. That means for every sheet of paper and envelope we saved, we still had to send out two.

Because we got such a great response (14% of tenants), we know that the results are a better representation of how our tenants feel than we've had in previous years.

You also sent us a LOT of comments, and these were all passed to our Management Committee for consideration. Anyone who asked a question on their form will have been responded to within our customer care targets (see the Customer Care Charter leaflet included with your newsletter).

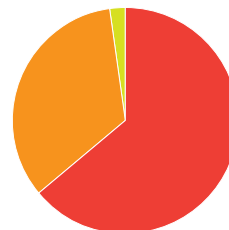
RESULTS:

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



- Very good
- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
- blank / spoiled

Do you think that RPI + 0.5% is a fair increase for 2018/19?



- Yes
- No
- blank / spoiled



Planned Maintenance Calendar 2018/19



Area	What's getting done	When the work will be done
Wallyford Fa'side	Gas Heating Replacement	Currently on site – expected to complete July 2018
Athelstaneford Mansefield	Electric Heating Replacement	April to May 2018
Haddington Artillery Park, Craig Avenue, Dunbar Road, Riverside Drive, Traprain Terrace	Bathroom Replacement	April to July 2018
Prestonpans Grey School Corner	Window and Door Replacement	June to July 2018
Dunbar Writers Court	Gas Heating Replacement	July to August 2018
Dirleton Castlemains	Window and Door Replacement	August to September 2018
Dunbar Brunt Gove, Brunt Lane, Lochend Crescent	Kitchen Replacement	January to February 2019
Haddington Garleton Drive, Hospital Road	Re-roofing	To be confirmed
Prestonpans Salt Preston Place	Roughcast Renewal	To be confirmed

This year we will spend just over £1.27 million on maintenance, excluding day to day repairs. 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.

(All work is subject to a pre-contract survey)

LET US IN!

We do all we can to organise appointments to suit you and will always be happy to re-arrange a visit if the time we have proposed is inconvenient. In return we ask that if you can't be at home for a planned visit you let us know so that our staff don't waste time and money calling at an empty property, having to re-arrange the visit and so on.

There are some visits that we must get in for - we are legally obliged to check the gas safety in your home every year and if a gas safety check is done even 366 days after the last one we are breaking the law. So it was really disappointing to see

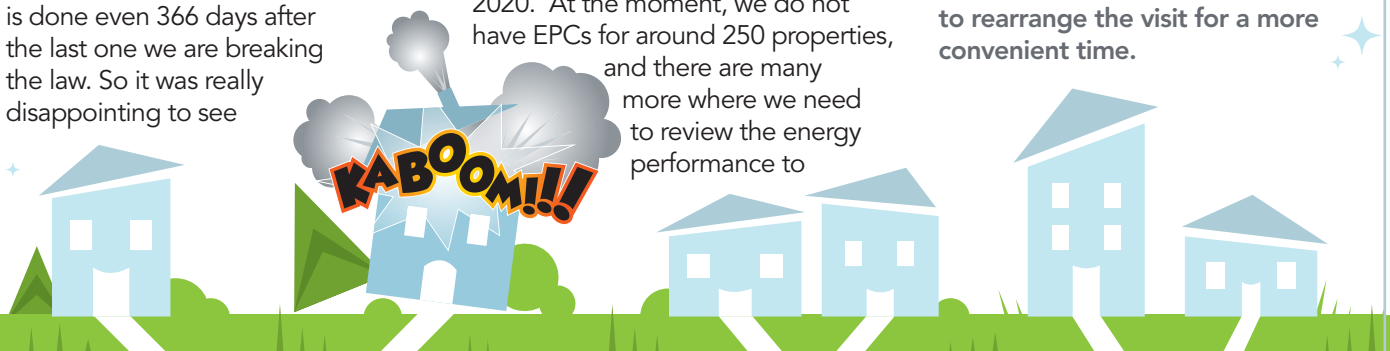
that in the last 3 months of 2017, 65 tenants weren't at home to let us in for gas safety inspections; we had to write to 53 tenants explaining why we needed in and warning that we would force entry if we had to and we had to force entry and cap the gas supply in 12 tenant's homes. Once we have capped a gas supply the tenant may have no heating until the gas safety check is completed and if we have forced entry, the cost of the joiner's time and a new lock is chargeable.

By law we must also have energy performance certificates (EPCs) in place for all of our properties by 2020. At the moment, we do not have EPCs for around 250 properties, and there are many more where we need to review the energy performance to

make sure we are complying with the new Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (EESHS).

It is usually in your best interests to have your property inspected. A gas inspection will identify any problems with your gas – for example, carbon monoxide emissions or gas leaks and ensure your safety. And if your home does not meet EESHS, it will be upgraded to be more energy efficient.

So if we write to you to make an appointment and you're not going to be in, please either arrange for someone to let us in, or contact us to rearrange the visit for a more convenient time.

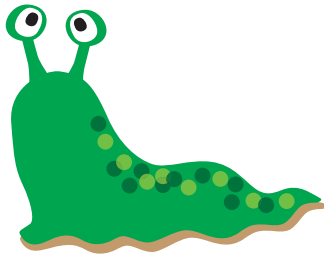


Safe, Pest Free Gardens

Spring is on the way so it's a good time to remind everyone of things you can do to deter unwanted visitors to your garden.

Slugs

No gardener wants slugs in their garden but before you reach for the maximum strength poison, did you know that slug pellets can be incredibly harmful to birds and small animals (which eat the poisoned slugs). You can make your own safe slug bait by leaving bran or oats in small piles around your garden, the slugs will eat it, bloat up and dehydrate, and will be easy pickings for predators. The leftovers will either safely biodegrade, or be eaten by birds.



For the more bloodthirsty gardener there are also nematode slug killers. Nematodes are tiny parasites which infect and kill slugs, and are a natural part of the environment, so you're not introducing anything new or harmful. Spraying your garden with a nematode slug killer can keep your garden clear for months.

Pigeons & Seagulls

We know that many of you are loving the cheap electricity, unfortunately birds seem to love the PV panels we've put up to keep fuel bills down. We are putting up anti-bird mesh where the birds are a problem but it's a slow process as we cannot disturb any active nest sites. Until we get to you, bird decoys of hawks or owls can be a cheap, effective and attractive way to discourage birds from nesting on your roof. You can also use ultrasonic bird scarers, including solar-powered models, which can be placed near problem areas.

Cats

Cats do not respect anyone's privacy and have boundless curiosity – the harder you try to keep a cat out of somewhere, the more they want to see it. A better strategy for keeping cats out of your garden is to make your garden the sort of place cats don't like. Cats are very sensitive to smell, and will avoid things like citrus, lavender, rue and pennyroyal, so if you plant a few pungent plants around your garden, it will discourage cats.

You can also make an anti-cat spray to spray around your garden – mix up a teaspoon each of ground pepper, ground cinnamon, mustard powder and crushed garlic with a few drops of citrus essential oil, and add it to a squirt bottle of water.

Spray any area you've seen cats lurking around, and they will avoid it in future.



Save Money, Save the Environment!

We have a few Sunamp batteries left over from the PV panel installations.

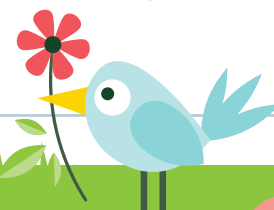
These batteries store excess power from the PV panels as heat energy, and can save you money on your heating even when the sun is not out. The batteries aren't suitable for everyone, so check the list below to see if you have:

1. PV Panels, AND
2. A gas combi-boiler, AND
3. Space under your boiler for a battery about the size of large suitcase



If you have all three, congratulations, you could shortly be saving money on your gas bills and reducing your carbon footprint.

Give our Asset Management department a call on **01620 825032** extension **262** or e-mail us at enquiries@elha.com.



Your Bin – Your Business



Providing and emptying refuse bins is the Council's responsibility but you wouldn't believe the number of complaints we get that we have almost no ability to resolve. Here are a few examples of the comments, questions and complaints we receive:

Q: My neighbour keeps putting her manky cat litter in my bin, can I put a lock on it?

A: It's your bin, you can do what you want with it. Just remember to unlock it on bin day.

Q: Can you tell my neighbours to stop moving my bin when they're parking?

A: Firstly, we would always suggest that you ask them - how would you feel if we arrived at your door about a problem you knew nothing about? And secondly, why do they need to move your bin? Are you blocking a parking space? Everyone needs to be considerate of their neighbours and if you're blocking a parking space, they've every right to move your bin.

Q: Someone stole my bin!

A: Have you had a wander around the neighbourhood to see if it's lying somewhere? If you can't find it, you need to call Waste Services on **01875 824305** or e-mail wasteservices@eastlothian.gov.uk for a replacement.

Q: Can I get an uplift? / Can I have a new bin? / Why can't we have weekly bin collections?

A: Since we're not the Council we can't help. For all bin enquiries, please contact Waste Services at the e-mail address/phone number on the left.

Q: I've got a new sofa, is it ok to leave the old one in the bin store until it's uplifted next month?

A: No, **absolutely not**. You should put it out 24 hours before the uplift and no earlier. The bin stores we provide are for storing bins. If you leave furniture lying outside your house or in communal bin stores, we will ask you to move it immediately, and if you don't, we can arrange to have it removed and charge you the cost.

Q: The cleaners were supposed to clean the bin store this month, why didn't they?

A: If there were just bins in the bin store, please do let us know if it isn't cleaned- you pay for the service. But usually when we get a complaint like this it's because someone left a sofa in there! Or bin bags, random pieces of wood, a broken fridge, or it's being used as an impromptu bike shed. If there's anything other than bins in there, the cleaners are not going to clean it.



Scottish Power Hardship Fund

Scottish Power has a new independently administered Hardship Fund for customers who are vulnerable or experiencing hardship and struggling to pay their gas and electricity bills. Priority will be given to the elderly, disabled and families with small children.

To qualify, you must be a Scottish Power customer and be on benefits, or have a household income under £16,190. You must also have been in contact with a debt advice agency, such as National Debtline or our own Money Advice Service, and have demonstrated a willingness to make regular payments.

If you are having difficulty paying your heating bills from this winter, please get in touch with Anne, our Money Adviser, by filling in the Money Advice Referral form in **My Home**, or calling us on **01620 825032** extension **255** to arrange an appointment.



SCOTTISHPOWER



Universal Credit (UC) has been fully implemented in East Lothian since March 2016 which means that if you're under pensionable age and need help paying your rent you cannot apply for Housing Benefit but have to make a new claim for Universal Credit. The Scottish Government is now starting to introduce Scottish Choices allowing claimants to choose to split their monthly payment into two payments instead of one each month and to have the Housing Cost Element paid directly to their landlord. The option to do this will show up on a new UC claimant's to do list in their journal after the first UC payment has been made.

You might think that we would support these changes and we are in favour of claimants being able to choose how often they are paid if that helps them budget their money better. We understand that it can be a shock to go from a weekly wage to a monthly UC payment and we see the split payment option as a stepping stone to monthly UC payments.

However, we do not agree that the UC Housing Element should be paid directly to us. One of the aims of UC is to make it easier for people to move into work. If you work and earn enough then you pay rent, and we think that it will be easier to budget to do that if you are used to paying rent each month. One of the problems with Housing Benefit (which is usually paid direct to the landlord) is that many tenants who have been in receipt of Housing Benefit for a long time think that they don't pay rent. ALL of our tenants pay rent, and ALL of our tenants are responsible for making sure their rent is paid, whether the money to pay it comes from wages, pensions, Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

We fully support tenants being responsible for their financial commitments. Tenants who have never had to make rent payments because they have been on full Housing Benefit are much more likely to miss payments and have difficulty managing their rent account when they have to take responsibility for making sure their rent is paid.

In preparing for the introduction of UC, we asked all of our new tenants to have their Housing Benefit paid into their bank account and then pay their rent to us. We did this for two years before UC was introduced, and this proved that they were no more or less likely to miss a rent payment than tenants who didn't qualify for Housing Benefit.

We want to help tenants develop good habits, which is why one of the requirements of the Key Tenant Scheme is that rent is paid by a regular Standing Order or a Direct Debit. This helps tenants on benefits get used to paying rent, and encourages them to be more interested in things like our rent increase consultation. Because Universal Credit and Housing Benefit payments are based on the full rent, it also gives all our tenants the opportunity to increase their income by £10 or £20 every month.

We understand the temptation to have Housing Costs paid directly to us so that you don't have to think about paying rent but if you choose to have your rent paid direct to us you will not qualify for any rent discounts and will not have an extra £10 or £20 every month income to help you budget.

Please note – if you intend to have the rent paid directly to us, remember that this is only offered AFTER you receive your first UC payment, and that this first payment will include the housing element (rent), which you must pay to us.

POWER CUT? CALL 105

SP Energy Networks are the local distribution network operators. This means that they are responsible for getting the power to your home, regardless of who your electricity supplier is.

105 is the new number to call if there is a power cut. It's free of charge and will put you through to your local network operator who can give you help and advice.

If you have young children or if you have support, for example, a stairlift in place which will be affected by a power cut, or you have medication which must be kept refrigerated, you can register for priority services.

You can join the priority services register if you:

- Are over 60
- Have special communication needs
- Depend on electricity for home/medical care
- Have a child under 5 years old
- Have a chronic illness

For more information you can visit the SP Energy Networks website at www.spenergynetworks.co.uk, e-mail them at customer care@spenergynetworks.com or call them on 0330 10 10 167.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 – What Does This Mean For You?

While the biggest change – the end of the Right to Buy – has already happened, there are other changes due around February 2019 that will make it really important for you to make sure that you let us know about anyone moving into or out of your home.

Assignations / Sub-letting / Joint tenancies

There will now be a 12 month qualifying period before you can apply for any of these. This means that you must have been a tenant for at least 12 months, and in the case of an assignation, the person you want to assign the tenancy to must have been on our systems as a household member for at least 12 months before the application is made.

Succession

There will also be a 12 month qualifying period for any family member wishing to succeed to a tenancy on the tenant's death. This 12 month qualifying period starts on the day that we are notified that a

family member has moved into the property. We need no longer accept bank statements, utility bills or other documents as proof that a person has been living in the property prior to the tenant's death.

Please note that updating your household details in your My Home account **does** count as notifying us. When you update your household details, an audit log is created on the system. This audit log records who was added and when.

Antisocial Behaviour

We will have more powers to end a tenancy if the tenant is guilty of antisocial behaviour. At the moment we can only convert a tenancy to a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy

Agreement (SSST) if there is an Antisocial Behaviour Order (ASBO) in place. Once the new law is in force, we will be able to convert a tenancy if there are least two anti-social behaviour complaints, we are satisfied that the antisocial behaviour took place, was of a serious nature, and is likely to reoccur.

The length of a SSST will change from 6 months to 12 months. This is to allow sufficient time for the behaviour to improve.

There will also be a streamlined process to evict an antisocial tenant before the end of a SSST, where the behaviour has an ongoing and significant impact on neighbours.

We will write to all of our tenants to confirm these changes to the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement when we have more information about when they will come into force.



Visits to the Scottish Parliament

Two members of staff recently visited the Scottish Parliament. Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves attended the launch of the new Happy to Translate Toolkit, sponsored by MSP, Christina McKelvie just before Christmas.

Housing Officer, Michelle Cassidy (pictured third from left, with other Housing professionals and social housing tenants) attended a Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) event, 'Engaging With the Scottish Parliament'.

