



Communication Strategy

2024 to 2027

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out our plans for effective communications both internally and externally; underpinning our commitment to achieving our vision of Healthy Happy Homes, our values, key priorities set out in our Business Plan as well as the communication outcomes and standards contained within the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- 1.2 This Communications Strategy, supported by the Tenant Participation Strategy, assists the Group to become a highly effective organisation by ensuring that information is presented in a manner that is appropriate, clear and concise.
- 1.3 While we refer to ‘digital by default’, and aim to provide 100% of services online, traditional methods are always available for anyone unable or unwilling to use digital communication. This means we operate a “digital first” approach in practice, which ensures all our core services continue to be delivered in ways that all our tenants can access.
- 1.4 With fewer than 15% of tenants now requiring printed information, we will continue to design and develop general communication materials for a mobile phone screen first, since this is the format most of our tenants use to read the information we send and which will also work on all other devices. We will only print the information when required to do so, for example where a tenant does not have access to a mobile phone or other device.
- 1.5 Since the introduction of this Strategy, we have:
 - Improved My Home services by developing:
 - Equality monitoring tools for tenants, staff, and Management Committee to meet regulatory requirements
 - A basket of repairs feature and repair workflows for ease of ordering repairs
 - A Rent Account Management system which allows tenants to arrange their own arrears repayments online without having to speak to staff
 - Launched specialised My Home services to Sharing and Factored Owners to improve communication. This was in response to feedback received through a satisfaction survey carried out by an external consultant in 2022

- Merged the My Home and elha.com websites into a single platform, and this included updates to elha.com's accessibility features and futureproofing for upcoming digital developments.
 - Developed the Rent Collector app, with all associated information videos, a 'How to Guide' and Frequently Asked Questions
- 1.6 During the next three years will continue to develop and improve our communication methods and aim to:
- Launch Instagram which uses images to get messages across to service users. This social media platform was identified during the large tenant satisfaction survey carried out in 2022 as one of the main platforms that our tenants use
 - Introduce dual logins for My Home accounts so that joint tenants can each use their own email addresses to interact with and communicate through My Home
 - Improve the My New Home services to allow exchange and transfer tenants to access information prior to the commencement of their tenancy, and more generally update the information and video's
 - Move all PDF downloads into printable web pages, so when a tenant or other service user requires printed material, this can be printed from elha.com.
 - Move all policies into a corporate template within elha.com, replacing the downloadable 'Word' documents to make them more user friendly via a mobile or other device
 - Develop a 'My Area' in a tenants My Home account to provide up to date information about the area they live in, for example, communicate stair cleaning standards and any planned or cyclical maintenance scheduled, order a communal repair or allow tenants to see if communal repairs have been ordered, and much more.
 - Review our group sign up processes to ensure clear communication for prospective tenants in new developments
 - Develop short videos to promote our annual performance in comparison to other landlords and promote our P365 microsite

2.0 Objectives

2.1 The key objectives of our Communication Strategy are to:

- Positively raise the profile of ELHA through effective communication
- Ensure all communication is instantly recognisable and corporately branded
- Provide a framework that provides clear, informative guidance to ensure high quality communication is produced that meets the needs of the target audience
- Reduce costs by ensuring the most efficient and appropriate communication method is used.

3.0 Key Principles

3.1 The key principles underpinning our Strategy are to:

- Ensure that all communication is in plain English, easy to understand and reflects the values of ELHA
- Ensure that written messages are not 'hidden' by using detailed pictures as a background
- Provide a range of options to choose when communicating
- Ensure that we consider accessibility issues when designing information and communicating with our customers. We will try to anticipate user requirements and encourage them to tell us if we need to adjust the way we deliver services to them
- On request, provide alternative communication methods where reasonable to do so, such as arranging interpreting and translation services (we are members of Happy to Translate), information on CD, in larger print, and in languages other than English, where this is required

4.0 Legal & Regulatory Framework

4.1 Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the foundations for the regulatory system that formally takes account of tenant's views, and in April 2012 the Scottish Social Housing Charter (the Charter) was launched; revised in 2017.

The purpose of the Charter is to help improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords in Scotland provide and to set out who is responsible for meeting the 16 Charter Standards and Outcomes. There are two outcomes and standards applicable to this Strategy:

4.1.1 Outcome 1 Equalities

‘Social Landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that they support the right to adequate housing, and every tenant and other customer had their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect and receives fair access to housing and housing services.’

4.1.2 Outcome 2 Communication

‘Social landlords manage their business so that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides’

4.2 This Strategy takes account of the following legislation and good practice:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2019
- Equality Act 2010

4.3 The Strategy also takes account of the following:

- Tenant Participation Strategy
- Comments & Complaints Policy
- Information and Advice Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Customer Service Charter
- Customer Engagement Policy
- Openness & Confidentiality Policy
- ICT Strategy
- IT Policy

5.0 Target Audiences

5.1 Our audiences are all of the people we come into contact within the course of our work and include:

- Tenants
- Sharing Owners
- Owners
- These Homes applicants
- Members of the public
- Local Authorities
- Contractors and Consultants
- Other organisations that we work with

5.2 Although this Strategy is mainly aimed at external audiences, the standards set will also be applied to dealings between staff within the Group, our Tenant Involvement Group and Management Committee members.

6.0 Communication Methods

6.1 We use a variety of communication methods to ensure a style and format that promotes accessibility for all and aims to identify and agree the preferred method of communication with our individual audiences in advance depending on the communication type.

6.2 Clear guidance in the form of a Corporate Style Guidance Note, procedures and training is provided to those staff preparing and distributing communication on behalf of the Association. This will make sure that the most appropriate methods are used, and that all communication is easily understood and achieves its objective.

6.3 We will take into account any preferred communication methods and offer a range of ways in which we can be both contacted by and make contact with our audience.

6.4 There are many ways in which we can communicate with our audiences either individually or in groups; online, in writing or face to face and through publications such as e-newsletters, leaflets and press releases. The following is a list of our key communication methods:

6.4.1 elha.com & My Home

All of our housing services are accessible via elha.com and My Home (the only exception being where we need a person's signature). Tenants can manage their tenancies, read our policies or information leaflets, obtain money & home energy advice and make complaints online. Every page on elha.com and My Home has a praise or grumble feature which allows tenants to provide us with feedback, good or bad.

Tenants who have registered with My Home are automatically signed up for our paper-free service, which they can opt-out of at any time in their My Home account or by contacting our Head Office.

elha.com and My Home are designed to be highly accessible, easily navigated by tenants using screen readers or tabbed browsing and are Readspeak enabled. Every page of elha.com includes the option to translate the page into over 100 languages.

The Live Help service is the equivalent of a telephone call for people who cannot, or prefer not to, use the telephone. The service is open Monday to Friday and provides tenants and other customers with instant access to an online adviser who can provide them with a range of information and advice.

For people who may not be able to manage their tenancy or communicate effectively online, we offer a Friends & Family Service, which can be enabled by default where a Power of Attorney is in place, or on request from a tenant. This enables a friend or family member to manage the tenant's My Home account on their behalf. We maintain a robust audit trail of all changes made through this service.

6.4.2 My New Home

Applicants choosing to manage their future tenancy online can access their My New Home account before signing their tenancy, this gives them access to a range of information. It allows applicants to make decisions on how they would like us to communicate with them once they become a tenant.

6.4.3 These Homes

We use our new Digital Lettings Service, "These Homes", to communicate with prospective tenants online, advertising and allocating available properties for let, and linking the These Homes website to our Facebook

page and elha.com. Paper registration forms are available for applicants who prefer not to register on-line.

6.4.4 E-Talk & Talkback Newsletters

We aim to issue an E-Talk newsletter at least once a month, consisting of four to seven article summaries which link through to the full articles on our News page at elha.com.

Newsflash e-mails are also be sent when required, for example as part of a social media campaign, or if there is time-sensitive or important news which we need to get out to tenants as quickly as possible.

Once 15 to 25 E-Talk and newsflash articles have been published, we will produce a printed Talkback newsletter which is sent to all tenants who have not signed up to paper-free services.

6.4.5 Performance 365

Following feedback from tenants about our annual report, we replaced it with the introduction of our Performance 365 microsite on elha.com, which communicates up to date performance information for tenants and other interested parties.

6.4.6 Social Media

We know through our Large Tenant Satisfaction Survey that most of our tenants who use social media platforms, use Facebook. We have an active Facebook page which we use to promote our services and have over 1,000 followers.

Through the 2022 Satisfaction Survey we also know that many of our tenants now use Instagram which is linked to Facebook. We intend to launch this platform and use it as another way to get our messages across using images and short videos.

We will use social media to engage with service users, to channel them towards our various websites through the use of links. Cross-platform hashtags will be used, and the effectiveness of various social media platforms can be analysed using Housing Online's Matomo Analytics package.

Appendix 1 sets out our Social Media Strategy.

6.4.7 Consultations & Surveys

We have set a minimum standard for all consultations and each year we advise our tenants through our e-News and our newsletters about the topics

we propose to consult them on, or surveys we intend to carry out for the following year.

Our Rent Increase consultation starts with a micro-site and is designed for use on mobile phone screens first, and then for use on all other devices. The information from the micro-site is printed for those who require this.

All other consultations are carried out via a Survey Module which tenants' access via their My Home Account. Offline tenants will receive a letter and paper form.

Tenant feedback is received through their account, with staff inputting any paper forms received into My Home using My Home Help.

6.4.8 Direct written communication (letters, email and text)

All letters and e-mails sent to customers will be clear, easy to understand and to read and will be written in Plain English. Where we are unable to respond fully within the target response time, we will write explaining the reason for the delay and say when we expect to make a full response.

All letters will be sent in the name of the person dealing with the matter and will contain clear and accurate explanations about decisions that have been made. E-mails and SMS text messages will be sent from a central mailbox but will contain clear contact information.

6.4.9 Telephone Calls

We operate an automated telephone system which provides a range of options customers can select to get through to the department they want to speak to. All calls will be answered as quickly as possible and staff will greet callers in a polite and courteous manner, stating their name.

During opening hours, we will only use Voicemail when staff are unavailable. Recorded messages will be audible and accurate, and callers will be offered the option of leaving a voicemail message or being called back when the staff member is available. We also use answer phones when the office is closed. Recorded messages will be clear, audible and accurate, and will always give the caller the option of leaving a message. Messages will also inform callers of who they should contact in case of an emergency.

We will respond to answer phone messages at the earliest possible opportunity.

6.4.10 Home Visits

Where required, we will arrange appointments to visit customers at home during office hours. The customer will always be offered the option to change the appointment to a time more suited to them.

If we are unable to keep an appointment, for example due to staff absence, we will notify the customer as soon as possible, explain why we cannot keep the appointment and arrange another appointment at a mutually convenient time.

All staff will carry identification and will show it to customers before entering their homes. We will explain the reason for visiting and what, if any, action will be taken following the home visit.

If the customer is not at home, staff will leave a calling card detailing who visited and why, with contact information. Sensitive information will not be noted on calling cards.

We usually make an appointment before visiting customers. However, there are occasions when staff may visit without prior notice, for example if they notice an issue with a property whilst passing by, or if they have had difficulty contacting a customer.

7.0 Corporate Branding

7.1 To ensure that all communication is instantly recognisable and corporately branded, all forms of communication will include the appropriate logo(s), colours, contact details, registration number and web / social media information. See Appendix 2 for the corporate style guide.

8.0 Digital Inclusion

8.1 We will take advantage of new technologies and maximise digital opportunities to:

- Provide customers with greater accessibility to information and self service via My Home and elha.com
- Provide educational opportunities for customers who do not have digital skills
- Provide a website which ensures staff can access key corporate documents secure in the knowledge that they are the most up to date
- Increase our social media presence as a communication medium

9.0 Equality & Diversity

- 9.1 We will not discriminate in the operation of this policy on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. We aim to promote equal opportunities and comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
- 9.2 When we are communicating with or about someone whose gender is unknown, we will not use gendered language, e.g. we will use 'they', rather than 's/he'.

10.0 Complaints

- 10.1 Although we will always strive to deliver excellent service, we acknowledge that we will sometimes make mistakes and will not always get things right first time.
- 10.2 We will make it easy for customers to complain, formally or informally, by publicising our Comments and Complaints Policy and making it readily available to anyone who wants to use it.
- 10.3 Our website includes various ways for customers to give feedback, such as contact forms, "praise or grumble" and the Live Help service, as well as giving on-line access to, and information about, our comments and complaints service.
- 10.4 if a customer complains on any of our social media platforms, we will always signpost them to our Complaints Handling Procedure and to support available.
- 10.4 We will investigate complaints and resolve them as closely as possible to the point of frontline service delivery. We will ensure that the person making the complaint is kept fully informed throughout the complaint handling process and if a complaint is about more than one service area, we will ensure a single co-ordinated response is made.
- 10.5 If a customer is unable or reluctant to make a complaint, we will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.
- 10.6 When we make mistakes we will apologise, put things right as quickly as possible and use the experience to improve our service in the future.

11.0 Performance Monitoring

11.1 Our standards and targets for communication are set out in our Customer Service Charter. Performance is reported on our Performance 365 microsite and monitored through the submission of a number of quarterly reports to our Audit & Assurance Committee. For example (the list is not exhaustive):

- Complaints & praise quarterly analysis
- Consultations
- Satisfaction survey results
- Tenant participation reports
- Web use, Facebook and E-Talk statistics
- Digital Service Development

An Annual Report will also be provided to our Audit & Assurance Committee measuring and evaluating the success of this Strategy.

12.0 Strategy Review

12.1 The Director of Housing will ensure that this Strategy is reviewed every three years, and any amendments required will be submitted to the Management Committee for approval.

Social Media Strategy

Introduction

This Social Media Strategy supports the Communications Strategy; its purpose is to inform staff on the use and maintenance of any social media platforms in use by the Association and any subsidiary companies. This is to ensure that all social media use associated with the ELHA Group is in line with the corporate vision.

This strategy is a living document and may be updated at any time, but campaign calendars will be reviewed annually with the Tenant Involvement Group and the full document will be reviewed every three years.

All staff should make themselves aware of the content of this strategy before engaging in any use of social media in ELHA's name or while publicly associated with ELHA or subsidiaries.

Reasons for using social media

Community engagement

The primary reason for using social media is to interact with tenants, applicants and other service users. Social media is a very useful Tenant Participation (TP) tool and should be used in conjunction with traditional TP methods to ensure that any tenant who wishes to participate can.

Information sharing

Social media is an invaluable tool for informing service users of available services and activities, both internal and external. For example, announcing in advance on Facebook and in e-News that property upgrades are a legal requirement may reduce the number of abortive visits or access refusals that operatives experience.

Service promotion

Related to the above, the use of campaigns can be used to bring service users to new services which they would benefit from. Rather than just informing the public that a service exists, they can be guided to application forms or sign up options (a 'conversion').

Public relations

As a sector leader in digital services, we should be present on social media on a corporate level. Staff may engage with professional social media services such as LinkedIn.

Performance Monitoring

Performance indicators will be unique to the platform used, but broadly:

- Followers/Friends – the number of people following us on a social media platform
- Number of posts
- Engagement – the percentage of followers who have engaged with our output (e.g. liked, commented or shared a post)
- Conversions – where a service user has clicked through from a social media post to one of the Group's websites
- Campaigns – where we run a series of themed posts relating to a service, event or awareness-raising

Social Media Platforms

Facebook (in use)

<https://www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation>

Facebook has been in use since 2012. Facebook posts are made in a friendly informal style and should always contain at least one hashtag and one of the following:

- An image
- A link
- A video

All campaigns and regularly scheduled posts should have a campaign-specific hashtag, e.g. #ELHAEnergy2020 (the 2020 energy advice campaign), #ELHAHomes (the weekly available property update).

Twitter (dormant)

@HousingEast

We do not currently use Twitter, although a placeholder account is available. Proposed uses for Twitter are:

- Public Relations
- Service announcements
- Social media campaigns

As with Facebook, Twitter posts should have at least one relevant hashtag.

YouTube (dormant)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCezwmwgWzOwkGJACj19gfxQ>

There is a placeholder channel (associated with our Corporate Google account), but it is not currently in use. Proposed uses for the channel are:

- Publication of My Home instructional videos
- 'How to' tutorials for new services, e.g. These Homes
- 'How to' do minor repairs around your home (R3 – potential for PR and marketing)
- Third party videos, e.g. the 'what to expect when we visit you' video provided by the CIH
- Community engagement and public interest, e.g. walkthroughs of new builds, updates on estate management projects, etc.

LinkedIn (partially dormant)

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/east-lothian-housing-association>

Again, there is a placeholder account with branding, but it is not currently active.

Instagram (no account)

While there is no account set up yet, there are plans to use this platform for engaging with tenants via estate management, for example, ELHA's Garden of the week.

As Instagram is owned by Facebook, linking the two accounts gives the opportunity to cross-post popular content.

Use of hashtags is a requirement, and should be consistent with Facebook, e.g. #ELHAGardens.

Hashtags

Hashtags should be used on social media for several reasons:

- To make relevant or related posts easier for service users to find
- To measure the engagement levels during social media campaigns
- To raise awareness of our social media presence outside our current follower group, and increase followers with an interest in engaging with us

Advertising

There is the opportunity to use social media for targeted advertising. Should a budget for this be put in place, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Advertising posts should remain in the same informal style as organic posts
- Targeted advertising should match the appropriate platform. For example, we receive high engagement on property advertising on Facebook, therefore this would be the appropriate platform to publish paid posts targeted at These Homes users.
-

Staff use of social media

Staff should not display that they work for ELHA on social media. Exceptions may be made for professional social media, e.g. LinkedIn, and all public posts must conform to the Code of Conduct. Staff may be asked to remove or restrict access to any public post which does not align with the corporate vision.

Updates to the corporate Facebook account must be made through a personal Facebook account with Administrator access (this does not publicly link the two accounts). As many staff will prefer not to have their personal Facebook account linked to the corporate account, and ELHA cannot compel staff to link their personal accounts to the corporate account, this should be taken into consideration when assigning staff social media roles.

Corporate Style Guide

All publications, including digital publications and letters must meet the Corporate Style Guide.

Letters

Unless the recipient of a letter has requested that letters are sent in large print, all letters must be in 12pt Arial.

Letters must contain

- A header, consisting of the Healthy Happy Homes Logo and the elha.com logo
- A footer containing our registered office, charity number, contact details and other relevant information

A letter template can be found here: <M:\SDM\SDMLetters\Template.docx>

Logos and footers can be found here: <J:\Corporate\Key Information\Logos\ELHA Logo 2008>

Leaflets & Newsletters

All new leaflets and newsletters should have the following:

- All relevant logos & accreditations
 - Healthy Happy Homes
 - Happy to Translate
 - Cyber Essentials
 - Real Living Wage Disability Confident Employer
- A QR code to elha.com



- Our contact details (back page for leaflets, strapline footer for newsletters)

Before reprints of leaflets are ordered, the back page is checked in case any amendments are required, such as a new accreditation logo to be added, the fax number to be removed, etc.

Webpages

Unless otherwise arranged, all web pages will correspond to the relevant website template.

Any additional images embedded in webpages must:

- Be less than 400 pixels wide
- Have 5 pixels of horizontal and vertical spacing
- Not have visible borders

Any embedded tables should be left aligned and set to 100% of the available space. Borders should not be used unless the table is difficult to read without them.

Embedded video should be centre aligned (this is the default for iframe data).

Links to downloads (excepting listed links like the policy downloads) and external resources should be displayed as a button by using the 'download button' option from the WYSIWYG style drop-down.

All pages should contain links to the Privacy Policy and the Fair Processing Notice (GDPR Statement).

E-mail

Staff should refer to the Use of Information Technology procedure for e-mail configuration.

Press Releases

All press releases should include a copy of the elha.com logo

Use of Sprites

There is a bank of sprites available for staff use on letters or other publications. Before permanently changing a letter template to include a sprite, this should be discussed with the relevant manager.

Sprite Bank: <J:\Corporate\Publications\Sprite Themes>

General

- Text should not be put on top of images
- Text should be black on a pale background (white on a dark background should only be used for emphasis, and should be no more than a paragraph or two)
- The most recent versions of letter templates must be used, as new accreditations may have been added to the footer
- Do not type in all caps unless it is required for emphasis, e.g. FINAL WARNING