

talkback

WINTER 2017



Good News for Tenants Receiving Housing Benefit!

The change in the law needed to allow us to give Key Tenant discounts to tenants receiving Housing Benefit (HB) has now been made. This means that Gold and Platinum Key Tenants whose discount had been on hold, have now had that discount applied to their rent account without it affecting their benefits. Better still, the change happened in time for us to apply the discounts to the rent due on 1 December so less rent to pay and more cash for Christmas!

Our Key Tenant Scheme is intended to encourage tenants to use the digital services available through My Home and go paper free by offering a rent discount. This is good for us, as it saves us money, and good for tenants because it helps them to get used to managing aspects of their lives on line, something which is becoming increasingly important in the world today (for example, all Universal Credit claims must be made online, paper forms are not an option). We know that not everyone has the confidence or skills to make the change so we've made sure that help is available - please see page 4 for more details.



Festive Season Closure Dates

We will be closed from 12.30pm on Friday 22 December 2017, and reopen at 9am on Wednesday 3 January 2018. R3 will be available for emergency repairs over the festive period.

If you have a repair that really can't wait until we re-open, phone the usual number:

03000 999 247



Prize Draw Winners

Congratulations to Ms Forrest from Whitecraig, Ms Anderson from Musselburgh and Mr Smith from Tranent, who all won £50 in the monthly repair satisfaction survey prize draw.

Remember, you are entered into the repair satisfaction survey prize draw every time you give us feedback on a repair. It's really easy to give feedback - just click the Repair History button in My Home and select the feedback option. If you haven't activated your My Home account yet, and you're not sure how, just click on the Live Help button to have a chat about it to staff (or leave a message if we're closed).

Plan Your Festive Payments

Amount to pay £ (Required field) PAY ✓

Yes, we know that it's an expensive time of year and you've got plenty of far more interesting things to do during the festive period, but, please make sure your rent account is up to date before we close for the holidays. If you're busy, this might be the perfect time to find out just how easy it is to make a rent payment by card through My Home? If you're struggling to make payments, get in touch - we can help you manage your rent account before arrears become a problem.



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Do You Get Housing Benefit?

Want an extra £10 or £20 a month?

We now have permission from the Government to give tenants receiving Housing Benefit (HB) Key Tenant Discounts, without it affecting their benefits.

This means that HB is paid to cover your full rent but if you meet all of the conditions you pay the discounted rent and keep the difference. Tenants on HB who applied before the regulations changed, had their discounts held and have now received them in a lump sum – a nice little cash bonus of up to £140 just before Christmas!

There's no obligation to take part – if you're happy to continue getting your HB paid directly to us, that's fine, there's no penalty to leave things as they are. However, if you'd like to take advantage of the Key Tenant Scheme, and the only thing stopping you is how your rent is paid, all you need to do is;

1. Make sure you have a bank account that allows Direct Debits (see the article to the right for information on basic bank accounts)
2. Contact East Lothian Council's Housing Benefit Department on 01620 827729, and tell them you would like to have your HB paid directly to yourself, and give them your bank details.
3. Use your **My Home** account to set up a Direct Debit for the most convenient dates for you, e.g. a tenant who receives a fortnightly benefit payment every second Monday might set up their Direct Debit for every second Tuesday, or they may prefer to budget so they pay a full month's rent on the 1st of each month.
4. Once the first Direct Debit payment has come off your account, log into your **My Home** account and apply to upgrade to Gold or Platinum Key Tenant Status and claim your cash discounts.



Basic Bank Accounts

A basic bank account is ideal for people who have difficulty getting a standard bank account because they've never had an account before, or have a poor or no credit history.

There is no charge for basic bank accounts, and if you're on a low income and would like to take advantage of incentive schemes where you can qualify for a discount if you pay by Direct Debit, a basic bank account works well. A basic bank account allows you to set up Direct Debits, without the worry of bank charges if you don't have enough money in your account to cover a scheduled payment.

For example, you can save around 25% off your electricity costs by paying by monthly Direct Debit, rather than using a prepayment meter, or get £10 to £20 cash discount a month off your rent if you pay by direct debit and upgrade your Key Tenant Status

You also get a debit card, to make payments in shops and online, and can use cash machines to withdraw money from your account. If you want to find out more, get in touch with any of these banks.



Be a Cold Weather Friend

Cold weather can be especially dangerous for older people or people with serious illnesses, so if you have an elderly or ill neighbour, please check in on them if you can.

Something as simple as offering to pick up a few things from the shops, or clearing the snow from a path can make a huge difference to someone who may be struggling with the cold weather.



Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst!

If the worst happened and you had a fire, flood or other disaster how would you replace your belongings?

While we have buildings insurance to make repairs to your home, we are not responsible for your furniture, the decoration or any of your personal belongings. That's why we recommend that all of our tenants take out home contents insurance, and can provide information on insurance providers who specialise in insurance for rental homes.

For more information, please contact us by e-mailing

enquiries@elha.com,

calling on **01620 825032**,

or visiting elha.com and clicking on the Live Help button.



Winter is Coming Are You Ready?

We're told that until 21 December, technically it's still Autumn but the weather doesn't seem to know that! Be prepared for the cold weather and make sure that you avoid frozen or burst pipes. We will not normally treat frozen pipes as an emergency, particularly in snowy weather when staff and tradesmen might be snowed in themselves.

Avoiding frozen pipes

You can avoid frozen pipes and lessen the damage if they do happen:

- Make sure that all your water pipes are lagged/ insulated. If they are not, please book a Property Officer inspection through **My Home**, or give us a call on **01620 825032**
- Try to keep the heat in your home at an even temperature rather than turning the heat on and off
- Allow heat to vent into the attic or roof space
- If you're going away for a few days, make sure that your system is drained down. We will turn off your water and drain down the system free of charge before you go on holiday – so please tell us if you are going away, and give us a few days notice!

If your pipes do freeze

- Turn off the water at the stop valve. If you do not know where your stop valve is, the information should be in your My Property documents, or you can call our Asset Management team on **01620 825032** for advice.
- Switch off any water heaters, e.g. immersion heater
- Switch off the central heating. If you have a coal heating system, let the fire die down. Do not attempt to drain the boiler unless the fire has gone out
- Open all taps at sinks and baths
- If possible collect water in the bath for flushing the toilet and for washing



Public Roads – Winter Maintenance and Helpful Tools

East Lothian Council has a web page detailing how it prioritises road clearing and gritting, and gritting footpaths.



www.eastlothian.gov.uk/readyforwinter

In severe weather, ELC treat up to 600km of roads and around 30km of footpaths, and work around the clock if necessary. We understand that it can be frustrating to be snowed in, particularly around the festive season, but we are all at the mercy of the weather.

The A1 is maintained by AMEY on behalf of the Scottish Government. The 24 hour contact number for AMEY Scotland is: **0800 420 188**

Helpful Tools:

If you notice a problem after the ELC switchboard has shut for the day, or just don't like talking on the phone, there are tools available for you to report issues to East Lothian Council 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

My East Lothian App – this handy phone app gives you the ability to report abandoned vehicles, environmental health issues, fly tipping and much more.

www.fixmystreet.com is a great tool for reporting problems to East Lothian Council like broken streetlights or potholes on your street; you can even upload photos to better explain the issue.

Report an Untaxed Vehicle - To check if a car or van is untaxed, and report it if it is, go to www.gov.uk/report-untaxed-vehicle. The process is really simple, and can be done in minutes..

These tools are useful for everyone – at least one staff member has used the Fix My Street website to report parking issues and potholes in the road near their own home. And when a tenant is unable to access the internet to check potential abandoned cars themselves, we use the gov.uk website to check licence numbers for them.

TIG in Action – Improving Our Performance

The TIG Scrutiny Group has been examining the results of our Tenant Satisfaction Survey and was particularly interested in areas where you said our performance was poor (less than 80% satisfaction), but that didn't tie in with our actual performance.

They found that sometimes the dissatisfaction levels we must report on to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) is due to things we have no control over. The Group discovered that the (ARC) had lower than expected overall satisfaction with us as a landlord, but when they looked at the reasons why much of the dissatisfaction was with things like landscaping on land we don't own, car parking on public roadways, bin collection days, etc – areas that we're not responsible for and have little to no ability to fix.

We have tried to address these issues for example by working jointly with waste services at East Lothian Council to educate tenants about bin collection; changing our complaint procedures to help staff direct tenants to the agency that can help, and publicising some of the problems in this newsletter. The Group have recommended that now these processes are in place, we monitor complaints where we have signposted tenants to the correct agency and, as the next large scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey is due next year, we hope to see an increase in satisfaction levels.



Help to Access Our Online Services

In our last edition we announced our new **Friends & Family Service** which will let you authorise a friend, family member or perhaps someone who provides you with professional support, to be your representative and manage your **My Home** account on your behalf. They can help you upgrade your Key Tenant account to get a discount of either £10 or £20 a month off your rent. We're happy to let you know that this services is now available - see the enclosed leaflet for more information.

Meantime, if you want to upgrade your Key Tenant status but aren't sure how, remember our **Help Me!** service can help you to overcome any problems, including learning how to use your **My Home** account.



Care & Repair is 30!

East Lothian Care & Repair celebrated their 30th anniversary this year with a look back to the 1980's when the service was launched. Current and former employees, customers and supporters of the service attended a tea party event hosted at The Trinity Centre, Haddington, and a fine time was had by all.



How Did We Do?

Sorry to everyone who got the wrong survey card with their Autumn Talkback. It should have been a survey asking for feedback on the How We're Doing booklet, but there was a mix up at the printers, and around 800 tenants got the survey already issued with the Spring Talkback by mistake.

Paper free tenants got the correct survey because this was sent out from our office, another point in favour of switching to paper free! We're happy to say that so far, all of the feedback received from paper free tenants about the How We're Doing booklet has been really good, and there have been some suggestions made for the focus group to consider for next year's booklet.

If you haven't had a chance to have your say yet, we're leaving the survey open until 8 January 2018, just to make sure no one is left out.

Also on the subject of how we're doing, we have enclosed a copy of the report on our performance produced by the Scottish Housing Regulator.



5 Minute Comment Card
alha.com
East Lothian Housing Association

Let us know what you thought of this year's How We're Doing booklet for a chance to win £20 in our prize draw. The easiest way to do this is to log into your My Home account, but you can return this card if you prefer.

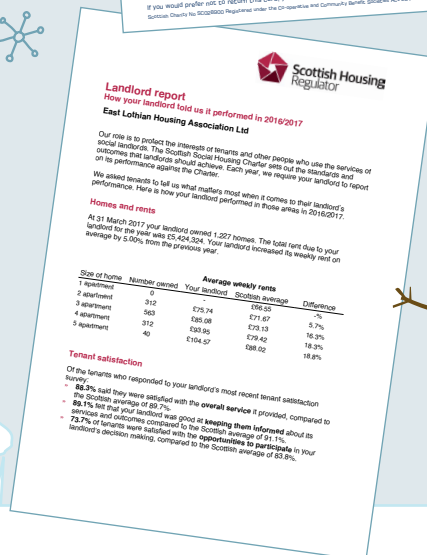
Do you think that the How We're Doing booklet is a good way to inform tenants of our performance?
 Yes No Other

What would you like to see in future editions?/Comments on the booklet: _____

I'd like to be invited to next year's How We're Doing session

Name: _____
 Address: _____

If you would prefer not to return this card, you can complete this survey in My Home.
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Scottish Housing Regulator
Landlord report
 How your landlord fared as it performed in 2016/2017
 East Lothian Housing Association Ltd

Our role is to protect the interests of tenants and other people who use the services of social landlords. The Scottish Housing Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that landlords should achieve. Each year, we require your landlord to report on its performance against the Charter.

We asked tenants to tell us what matters most when it comes to their landlord's performance. Here is how your landlord performed in those areas in 2016/2017:

Homes and rents
 At 31 March 2017 your landlord owned 1,207 homes. The total rent due to your landlord for the year was £5,424,324. Your landlord increased its weekly rent on average by 5.10% from the previous year.

Size of home	Number owned	Your landlord	Scottish average	Difference
1 apartment	312	£75.24	£76.25	-1.0%
2 apartment	563	£85.08	£77.87	8.7%
4 apartment	312	£28.25	£28.13	0.4%
5 apartment	40	£104.57	£79.42	32.1%

Tenant satisfaction
 Of the tenants who responded to your landlord's most recent tenant satisfaction survey:
 - 82.5% said they were satisfied with the overall service it provided, compared to the Scottish average of 80.7%.
 - 88.1% felt that your landlord was good at keeping them informed about its services and outcomes compared to the Scottish average of 91.1%.
 - 72.7% of tenants were satisfied with the opportunities to participate in your landlord's decision making, compared to the Scottish average of 83.8%.



Our Housing Team

Claire McMillan's return to work as a part time Housing Officer has given us the opportunity to rearrange things a little. Our Housing Officers each have an area they are responsible for and these are noted below but please remember that if your Housing Officer isn't available you can speak to any of the Housing Officers or one of our Housing Assistants (Elaine Wilson, Denise Cran or Liz Black) who will usually still be able to help you.



Michelle Cassidy



Brian Parkin



Claire McMillan



Gemma Rutherford

Area	Housing Officer
Athelstaneford	Brian
Bolton	Gemma
Cockenzie	Claire
Dirleton	Brian
Dunbar	Brian
East Linton	Brian
East Saltoun	Michelle
Elphinstone	Michelle
Garvald	Gemma
Gifford	Gemma
Gullane	Brian
Haddington	Brian
Innerwick	Brian
Macmerry	Michelle
Musselburgh	Gemma
North Berwick	Brian
Ormiston	Michelle
Pencaitland	Michelle
Port Seton	Claire
Prestonpans	Claire
Stenton	Brian
Tranent	Michelle
Wallyford	Gemma
West Barns	Brian
Whitecraig	Gemma

Medical Adaptations and Medical Priority

We get a grant each year to pay for medical adaptations, such as grab rails or showers, to help tenants stay in their homes if that's the best long term solution. This doesn't mean we will always do an adaptation; for example, we would not normally install a level-access shower or a full wet room in an upstairs bathroom if there was suitable ground floor accommodation in the area. In these cases, we would award the tenant a medical priority pass for a bungalow and/or ground floor flat. This is because when we spend the limited grant money available we try to ensure that the property is made suitable for a future tenant with disabilities - an adapted shower upstairs is no use to anyone who can't manage stairs!

Housing Officers work with Occupational Therapists (OTs) to investigate what is the best option both for the current and future tenants. Sometimes this will involve joint visits to meet the tenant and inspect their home before making a decision.



If you are finding it difficult to manage as you are getting older, there is help available.

The Occupational Therapy Service can be contacted by calling 01875 824309 or e-mailing communitycare@eastlothian.gov.uk

