

# talkback

AUTUMN 2016



## MAD HATTER'S TEA PARTY! AKA OUR 2016 AGM

We had a good turnout for our 2016 AGM, even the Mad Hatter attended, offering tea as members arrived (coffee was also available, but he regularly objected to serving it).

The guest speaker was David Orr, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation and former East Lothian resident, who gave an inspiring speech on imagination and leadership.

Also announced was the news that we would be consulting with tenants about our proposed Key Tenant Scheme, offering rent discounts to tenants who sign up to and use the most cost-effective tools and services we provide - see page 5 for more information.



The Mad Hatter meets Our Chief Executive, Martin Pollhammer, although it is not clear who is who!

## When is a Rent Increase Not a Rent Increase?

*You should have received the Key Tenant Scheme and Rent Increase Consultation – it's a lot to read, but we hope you'll agree that it's well worth the effort*

**When you get some of it back!**  
Read more on page 5.



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# Anonymous Complaints

Please remember that if you make an anonymous complaint, it will make it harder for us to investigate the issue reported, and we will not be able to inform you of the outcome of our investigation. We might also need more information from you once we start investigating and we can't get it if we don't know who you are.

Another problem can be when someone anonymously complains to us about something

which is out of our control, for example, about a parking issue on a main road, or someone dealing drugs. All we can do is pass the complaint to ELC or the Police; we can't investigate it or tell the person who complained that it would be faster and more effective to complain directly to the right place!



## Asbestos Inspections

A number of our older properties have low levels of Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) in some parts of the building structure. We carry out annual inspections of these as, although the ACMs in your property have been inspected in the past and found to be low risk, if they become damaged over time there can be a danger to health, and we NEED to check them.

ACMs are most commonly found in textured ceilings, but can be found in walls, flooring, and window ledges and plumbing insulation. It's important not to drill into any of these if you live in a property with ACMs. If you want to do a bit of DIY, get in touch with us so we can check it's safe for you to do so.

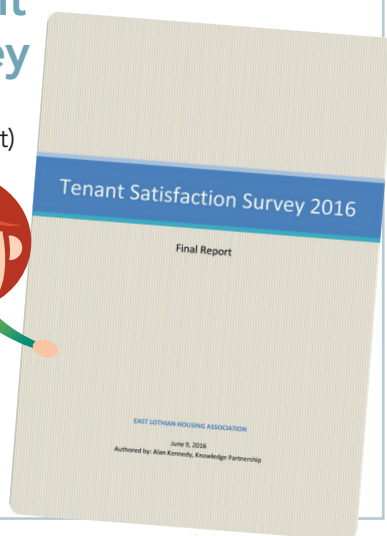
**If you live in a property with ACMs, please allow access for annual inspections.**

Inspections usually take place in the summer, and you will receive an appointment letter before a contractor calls.



## Large Scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Our 2016 large scale tenant satisfaction survey (TSS for short) is now available to download on **elha.com**. It's 44 pages long, so is only available online, or on request.



## New Housing Officer - Time for a Change!

We do our best to provide the highest quality services we can and our Housing Officers are an important part of our service. We are delighted to welcome Michelle Cassidy who joins us on 31 October 2016 to fill the vacancy left by Dale Finlayson. We have taken the opportunity to re-organise the Housing Officers' areas to try to address some issues and improve the service.

From **Monday 31 October 2016**



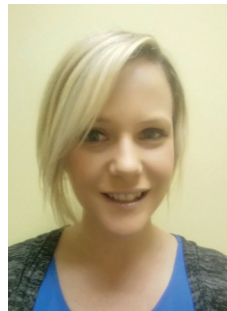
**JOHN MCINALLY**

Tranent  
Elphinstone



**BRIAN PARKIN**

Dirleton, Dunbar, Innerwick,  
North Berwick, Stenton,  
West Barns, Musselburgh,  
Wallyford, Whitecraig



**MICHELLE CASSIDY**

Athelstaneford, Bolton,  
Cockenzie, East Linton,  
East Saltoun, Garvald,  
Gifford, Gullane, Haddington,  
Macmerry, Ormiston,  
Pencaitland, Port Seton,  
Prestonpans

# Help Us to Help You

If you've tried to get a hold of your Housing Officer you'll know that they spend a lot of time out of the office and that often when they are in they have meetings to attend or appointments with tenants. But did you know that our three Housing Assistants, Denise Cran, Elaine Wilson and Liz Black are in the office almost all of the time and can deal with most enquiries meaning that you don't have to wait until your Housing Officer is available?

We also asked our Housing Officers for ideas to help them improve the service and here's what they told us; *"People often contact us about things that aren't ELHA's responsibility. We will always try to help but usually the problem would be dealt with more quickly and effectively if they contacted those responsible directly"* Examples of things often reported to us where all we can do is pass on the report are:

## Who To Contact When Things Go Wrong...



In an ideal world, we'd all live in blissful harmony. Unfortunately, we live in the real world, where things go wrong, arguments break out and pets make a mess in inconvenient places.

We produce a 'Getting Along With Neighbours' leaflet which gives advice on what to do when you and your neighbour(s) are having problems. The leaflet gives contact details for Community Mediation, the Dog Warden service, the Safer Communities Team, and more.

You can download the leaflet on [elha.com](http://elha.com), pick it up in the Reception area at our Head Office in Haddington, or get in touch and we'll send you out a copy.



### And When You Don't Need To Contact Someone...

Please, before calling us to complain about something, ask yourself if you really need to. Is someone breaching the terms of their Tenancy Agreement? Is the issue related to an ELHA property/tenant? Is there actual anti-social behaviour, or is it just the everyday irritation of living around other people you may not have much in common with?

A few examples of vexatious complaints we have received on the recent past:

- The man from the house across the road is standing in his garden smoking, and I think he's looking at my house
- Someone revved a motorbike engine at the end of the street
- My neighbour moved my wheelie bin
- There are children playing in next door's garden (mid-afternoon)
- Seagulls pooped on my car

Our Housing Officers are busy, out and about most of the time, and are usually only in the office a couple of days a week. Every frivolous complaint they have to deal with means they have less time to spend on delivering our service.

## Untaxed or Abandoned Cars On Your Street – What To Do

If you think that a car on your street has been abandoned, you can check if it has up-to-date vehicle tax or has been declared SORN (off the road), by using the gov.uk vehicle tax checking tool: [www.gov.uk/check-vehicle-tax](http://www.gov.uk/check-vehicle-tax)



All you need is the registration and the make of vehicle, and if the vehicle is untaxed, you can report it right away on the same website. Unless the car is parked on ELHA land and is causing a problem, we will not normally get involved.

East Lothian Council also has the power to remove abandoned vehicles. If you suspect a vehicle has been abandoned in your neighbourhood, get in touch with ELC's Environmental and Consumer Services on **01620 827365**, or by e-mail at [ehs@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:ehs@eastlothian.gov.uk).

## Landscaping – Who is Responsible?

Recently we received a number of complaints about overgrown grass in a landscaped area. When we investigated, we found that we don't own the land. We contacted the tenants, informed them of this and signposted them to East Lothian Council's Landscape & Countryside Department.

To find out who is responsible for a landscaped area, check your Annual Rent Increase Letter – unless your service charges include 'Landscape Maintenance', we do not own or maintain the landscaped areas in your neighbourhood. You can find a copy of this letter in your My Home Documents.

If you don't pay a Landscape Maintenance service charge, and you're not living in a development with a factoring service, the landscaped areas will belong to East Lothian Council, and any issues should be reported to them by calling **01620 827 421**.



## More Solar PVs!

If your home was assessed as being suitable for Photovoltaic (PV) panels, but didn't have them fitted before the cut-off date earlier this year, we may have good news. Despite Government funding cuts for green energy initiatives, we have investigated options and our Management Committee has approved the installation of PV panels to around 150 additional properties between now and March 2017. We're also continuing to install Sunamp batteries for anyone with PV panels and a compatible boiler to maximise savings in fuel costs for our tenants.



### The problem with pigeons...

We have discovered that pigeons like the PV panels – they're warm and sheltered and efforts to move pigeons on have not gone well. R3 will be out fitting anti-pigeon measures on the panels in areas where pigeon nuisance has been reported, but as it is illegal to disturb a nest with eggs or fledglings, this may take some time to complete.

## What's My Rent Balance?

You can see your rent balance at any time by logging into My Home. The balance shown is the amount of rent you owe us, and does not include any expected Housing Benefit, chargeable repair costs, court costs or any non-rent money due or owed.

For example, you may log in and see that you have rent arrears of £200. As Housing Benefit is paid 4 weekly in arrears, and we charge rent monthly in advance, that £200 may be covered by an expected Housing Benefit payment. To check when your Housing Benefit has been paid up to – look at your rent statement. You will see the date that the last Housing Benefit payment came in.

You could also see that you have a credit of £200 and request a refund. If you owe us money for other services, for example if you had requested that we change your locks after you lost your keys, we would not refund the credit on your rent account until you had paid for the lock change.



## The Rental Exchange

We've seen our first results from joining the Rental Exchange. For tenants on the scheme:

- 73% have no arrears or have arrears under 8 weeks rent, so their credit scores have improved
- 15% of these tenants will now be able to access credit deals and services that were previously inaccessible
- Only 4% of tenants had arrears high enough that their credit score was reduced, and of those, 16% (that's only 6 tenants) would be rejected for credit deals
- 23% of our tenants are on full Housing Benefit which is paid straight to us, so there would be no change to their credit score, but these tenants would still benefit from additional digital ID
- The number of tenants that hold two or more electronic proofs increased from 66% to 93%, meaning that 270 tenants now have the two proofs of digital ID that many organisations require before they provide services

This is excellent news for almost all the tenants on the scheme, and our Money Adviser is available to help the small number of tenants whose credit score dropped so they can turn things around and improve their score.





## How We're Doing

We hope you all enjoyed your trip down the rabbit hole! We enjoyed working on this year's How We're Doing booklet and were pleased with the results – but it's your opinion of it that counts the most! As always, we've included a 5 minute comment card so you can tell us what you liked and didn't like about the booklet, and any suggestions you have for next year.

If you'd like to get involved in the development of next year's report, get in touch – our Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) are always looking for more members.



## Prize Draw Winners

Congratulations to Ms Pauline Maiwald from Dunbar, Mr Alexander Hay from Haddington and Mr Stuart Martin from Prestonpans who all won £50 in the monthly repair satisfaction prize draw.



Remember, you are entered into the repair satisfaction prize draw every time you give us feedback on a repair. It's now even easier to give feedback – just click the Repair History button in **My Home**. If you haven't activated your My Home account yet, just drop us an e-mail at [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com) and we'll send you out a link to get started.

## New Five Pound Notes

All UK Banks have issued new polymer five pound notes to replace paper notes. The new Bank of England notes were introduced on 13 September and the old paper notes will no longer be legal tender from May 2017. The Scottish Banks will introduce the new notes on 27 September (Clydesdale Bank), 4 October (Bank of Scotland) and 27 October (Royal Bank of Scotland). The paper £5 notes from Scottish Banks will be withdrawn from circulation when they are next presented to the banks.



## Congratulations!

Well done Roisin, Lily and Kyle, three of our Modern Apprentices, pictured here receiving their certificates from our Chief Executive, Martin Pollhammer. Roisin and Lily, who have been here since September 2015 have completed their SVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration, and Kyle, who has been with us since February 2015 has completed his Level 3 Diploma in Accounting (Advanced) and SVQ Level 3 in Accounting.

Kyle has now finished his Apprenticeship, and we're pleased to welcome him as a full time Finance Assistant.



### How about this?

If you have problems reading our newsletter, we can provide it in large print, or on CD. And don't forget – if you're paper-free you will receive the newsletter as a PDF, and PDFs can be resized so the text will be as large as you'd like.

