

talkback

spring '14

Healthy Happy Homes



We launched our new Vision, Healthy Happy Homes, one year ago. Since then we've been busy making little changes to the way we work, to make our services simpler to use and easier to understand. This year will see us re-design our website and introduce new digital services (more information in future editions of Talkback!), including developing our "Assisted Digital" service which will help anyone who

has difficulty using our online services to use them. We will also provide our tenants with more information about our performance through our "How we're Doing" report, instead of producing an annual report.

We are very keen to hear your opinion, and have enclosed a Healthy Happy Homes leaflet to give a bit more detail about what we're trying to achieve, and how we're going about it, in the hope it will stimulate some discussion with our tenants about how we can improve our services. The back page of the leaflet sets out the various ways in which you can get in touch, but perhaps the easiest ways are to go to **elha.com** and click the Live Help button and chat to us, or click the "Praise or Grumble" button and leave us your thoughts.



Our Head Office has had a stylish makeover - let us know what you think!

Are You Online?

Computers and the internet are no longer just for kids – with everyone and their grandmother checking in on Facebook and Google on your phone, people without access to the internet face big disadvantages. It is never too late to learn something new, and there are introduction to computing courses available all over East Lothian. To find out more, contact East Lothian Council's Adult Education department on **01620 827627**.

And once you're surfing with ease, why not take a look at our digital tenant services? You too could be booking in a plumbing repair at 10pm at night, paying your rent while you digest a Sunday lunch, or reading this newsletter with the text expanded to **really large print!**

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Problems with Your Home?

We do our best to make sure that your home meets your needs at the start of your tenancy. However, things change and over time your home can become unsuitable for you. Small problems are easily dealt with - you can apply for small adaptations yourself, by using East Lothian Council's Occupational Therapy self-selection service. This includes internal grabrails, knob-turners for door locks, tap turners and other small fittings which are provided for free and can be a big help.

To get in touch, call 01875 824309 or
e-mail communitycare@eastlothian.gov.uk

If you have bigger problems like managing stairs or getting in and out of the bath, unless you already live in a ground floor property often the best solution is to move to a more suitable property and our allocations policy is designed to help our tenants who need to move.



We understand that leaving a home you have been happy in for a long time can be difficult and that many people prefer to stay where they are and get their home adapted but the sad fact is that adaptations are often not the answer. Taking out a bath and fitting a level access shower makes no sense at all if the bathroom is upstairs - if you're having problems getting in and out the bath, how long will it be before you have problems with the stairs? Fitting a custom made stair lift costs a lot of money and will never make a property entirely suitable for someone who can't manage stairs.

Of course if we can't help you find a more suitable home then an adaptation may be the only solution.

For larger adaptations, for example: a wet floor shower or a stairlift, you will need to undergo an Occupational Therapy Assessment. If you need an adaptation, the Occupational Therapist and your Housing Officer will visit to go through all your options.



We need to make the best use of the money we have available to adapt properties and so we may refuse to adapt the property if:

- The adaptation would not resolve all the issues, ie: the property would still be unsuitable
- The adaptations would make the property less suitable for other people living in the property, eg: a stairlift would block access for able-bodied members of the household
- The adaptations aren't suitable for the type of property, eg: a level access shower or wet room on an upper floor
- The property is under-occupied, eg: a single person living in a four bedroom house

If you feel that your home is no longer right for you please get in touch with your Housing Officer by calling on 01620 825032 or e-mail info@elha.com.

Under Occupancy Charge (Bedroom Tax) Are You in a Loophole?

If you are affected by the Housing Benefit under-occupancy charge (also known as the bedroom tax), **and** you have lived in the same home since 1996 **and** you have been claiming Housing Benefit the whole time, you are probably eligible to have the charge refunded to you.

This is due to a loophole in the rules covering Housing Benefit which is too complicated to explain but very good news for some people!

If you think you might fit into the loophole, and want to find out please get in touch with East Lothian Council Housing Benefit Department on **01620 827 827** or contact our Arrears Officer, Julie



Problem Pets

We all love our pets, but the sad truth is that some people are not responsible pet owners. Apart from a few developments where there are specific rules, we allow our tenants to keep pets as long as they're kept under control.



The Tenancy Agreement that all our tenants sign states that we may withdraw permission to keep pets if they cause a nuisance.

We recently had to withdraw permission from a tenant, and then take legal action when the tenant refused to remove her dogs after a long history of problems. This is not something we do lightly, but in this case it was clear that the problems would not be resolved without taking this extreme step. If you are experiencing problems with a neighbour's pet(s), there are things you can do:

1. Talk to your neighbour – they may be unaware there is a problem.
2. If there is dog mess being left in your area, and you know whose dog is responsible, report the owner to the Dog Warden on 01875 824305. The Dog Warden can give fines to careless dog owners, which we cannot do.
3. Let us know whenever there is an incident with a nuisance pet. We may not be able to take instant action, but if we know there is an on-going problem, and are kept informed of what's going on, we can try to help manage the situation.

Get Ready for Universal Credit



the Money Advice Service

FREE · UNBIASED · INDEPENDENT

Despite the delays in rolling out Universal Credit (UC), it is on its way, and if you receive benefits, you do need to be ready for it. The Money Advice Service (MAS) has lots of helpful advice on getting ready, which you can view on their website: www.moneyadvice.org.uk/en/categories/universal-credit or call on 0300 500 5000.

The information includes:

- A guide to choosing a bank account
- Help deciding if you need a joint account
- Advice on checking if you can set up automated payments (Direct Debits & Standing Orders)
- Help drawing up a budget
- Help to access the internet

We will keep you updated with information as UC comes closer – watch this space.

How We Allocate Homes



Our Allocations Policy sets out the rules for how we decide who gets the properties we have available. With housing in East Lothian in such high demand (we have an average of over 100 people applying for every available property), and that demand increasing much faster than the rest of Scotland, we have to make sure that the people who need the properties the most are the ones who are offered housing.

We review our policy and procedures regularly and consult with our tenants and the people on our housing list before we make any changes. The last consultation was in 2012 but, although the majority of people who responded agreed with the changes we proposed, making the changes was delayed while we developed our new HomeHunt Web system. Now that it is up and running, we can put the changes into place to try to make sure we are offering the right properties to the right people.



- Priority passes will now be awarded for two years, instead of one
- Under - occupancy passes for our tenants and Homes for Life tenants will now go up to gold level
- Applicants will be prioritised by the amount of time they have been in need, not by their date of registration. This means that an applicant who had been registered for a year and had immediately been awarded a silver priority pass would be considered before someone who had been registered for two years but had only had silver priority for six months.

Our priority pass structure will look like this:

Priority Type	Platinum	Gold Plus	Gold	Silver plus	Silver	Bronze plus	Bronze
Homelessness	✓						
Harassment					✓		✓
Medical			✓		✓		
Unsuitable Housing			✓				✓
Overcrowding			✓		✓		
Under-occupation			✓		✓		
Need to be in a Community					✓		✓
First Affordable Home					✓		✓
Transfer			✓		✓		✓
Cumulative		✓		✓		✓	

Changes will include:

- Giving higher priority to tenants who want to move (transfers). Allocating an available property to an existing tenant frees up another property, meeting the needs of two households instead of just one
- When an applicant qualifies for two passes at the same level, for example, silver medical and silver overcrowding, they will receive a plus pass, which gives them a higher level of priority
- We will continue the agreement with ELC for homeless allocations, however, as the rules covering priority have changed, anyone who has been accepted as homeless by ELC will be entitled to a platinum pass, which will be valid for only 50% of advertised properties

We are finalising changes we need to make to our computer system and don't yet have a date for the changes to be implemented but when they are our updated allocation policy will be available to download from elha.com, or on request by e-mailing enquiries@elha.com, calling us on **01620 825032** or at our head office in Haddington.

TIG in Action

The Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) are now working on their first inspection of our services– looking at how repairs are organised through the handheld devices all R3 operatives carry. It's something of a test case for everyone involved, and both TIG members and staff are learning a lot about the best way for them to go about inspecting what we do.

We will be keeping you up to date on their progress here and on elha.com, and if you'd like to know more about how to get involved with the TIG, please contact our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves by e-mailing info@elha.com or calling us on **01620 825032**.



A helping hand with debt

A new website has been set up to help people struggling with debt. The website gives simple practical advice and points people to the right services and support in order to help them get out of debt.

Visit the website: www.handwithdebt.co.uk or contact us for information about other services available.

Home Contents Insurance

Please remember to insure your belongings. While we have building insurance to cover structural damage to your home, you are responsible for insuring your home contents. There are a number of insurance organisations who specialise in insurance for tenants, if you'd like more information, please get in touch by calling us on **01620 825032**, e-mailing enquiries@elha.com or visiting elha.com and clicking the big red button.

Planned Maintenance 2014/15



Internal Fittings

Scheme	Works	Number of Homes	Survey Start Date
Musselburgh, Delta View, Delta Drive, Macbeth Moir Road	Kitchen Replacement	30	April/May 2014
Cockenzie LSVT*	Kitchen Replacement	6	November 2014
Musselburgh, Galt Avenue, Galt Terrace, Galt Crescent, Delta Road	Kitchen Replacement	30	May/June 2014
Musselburgh, Ladywell	Kitchen Replacement	7	July 2014
Prestonpans, Grange Crescent East, Grange Crescent West, South Grange Avenue	Kitchen Replacement	30	August/Sept 2014
Prestonpans, Bankfoot	Kitchen Replacement	22	October 2014
Cockenzie LSVT*	Bathroom Replacement	6	November 2014
Wallyford, Albert Close	Bathroom Replacement	10	December 2014
Ormiston, Clarks Buildings, Oxenford Buildings	Electrical Rewiring Check	15	February 2015
Cockenzie, Osbourne Court	Electrical Rewiring Check	16	March 2015
Musselburgh, Windsor Park, North High Street	Electrical Rewiring Check	11	January 2015

Heating Replacement

Scheme	Works	Number of Homes	Survey Start Date
Pencaitland	Gas Heating	20	May/June 2014
Port Seton	Gas Heating	9	April 2014
Innerwick	Electric Heating	5	July 2014
Athelstaneford	Electric Heating	16	August 2014
Whitecraig	Gas/Electric Heating	14	Oct/Nov 2014

Common Areas

Scheme	Works	Number of Blocks	Start Date
Moir Place**, Moir Terrace, Delta View, Musselburgh	Controlled Entry System	7	October 2014
Windsor Park, Musselburgh	Controlled Entry System	4	October 2014
Castle Street, Dunbar	Controlled Entry System	1	October 2014

Cyclical Programme 2014/15

Scheme	Works	Number of Homes	Start Date
Innerwick	External Painting	5	April 2014
Gifford	External Painting	26	March 2015
Garvald	External Painting	7	April 2014
Edward Court	External Painting	11	May 2014
Goose Green	External Painting	24	July 2014
Baxters Gate	External Painting	34	August 2014

The work we plan to carry out to improve and maintain our properties is shown above. Some tenants in Musselburgh have already been contacted to arrange to measure up and design their new kitchens with work planned to start of the first of these in April. The "Survey Start Date" is a guide to when we will start surveying an area. This may vary throughout the year but we will keep you updated through future newsletters.

If you want to find out any more details on what is planned for your home, please contact the Asset Management Department by calling us on **01620 825032**, e-mailing enquiries@elha.com or filling in the contact form on elha.com.

** We will only be able to do this work if owners agree to join in.

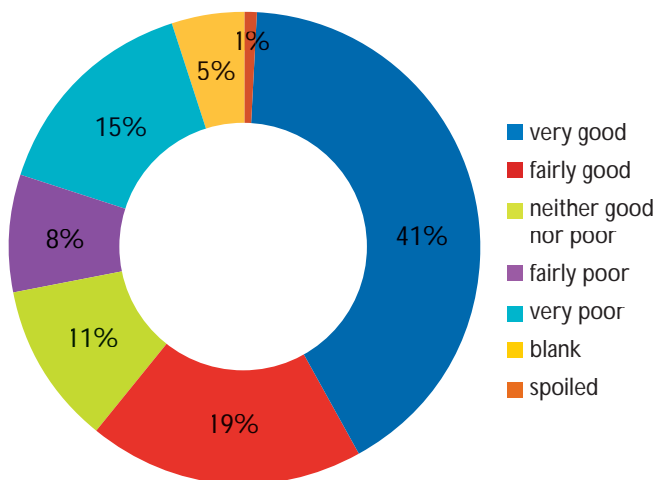
*LSVT – Large Scale Voluntary Transfer, ie: properties which were part of the transfer from Scottish Homes.

Rent Increase Consultation

We consulted with you about the proposed 2014/15 rent increase of 3.6% back in January. The response was lower than we had hoped, with only 108 tenants out of over 1,200 returning their forms or filling in the on-line consultation.

Twenty five tenants (less than 2% of all tenants, and 23% of tenants who responded to the consultation) said they felt our rent was poor value for money. Seven tenants (less than 1% of all tenants and 6% of responders) left the question blank or spoiled their form.

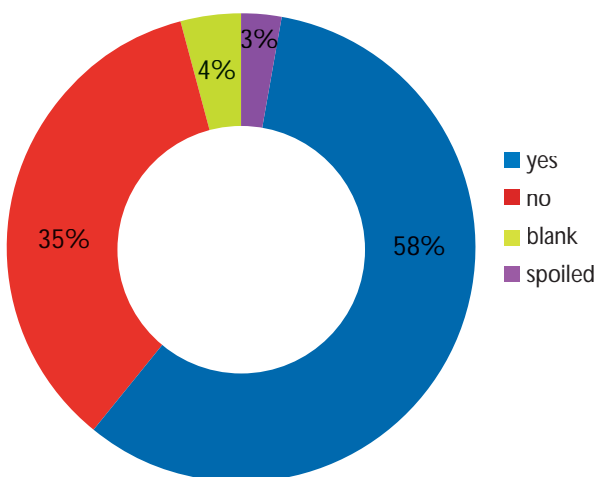
Taking into account the accommodation and services ELHA provides, do you think that the rent for your property represents good or poor value for money?



We also asked you if you felt that this year's increase of 3.6% (RPI + 1%) is fair increase.

Thirty eight tenants (3% of all tenants and 35% of responders) did not think that the increase was fair. Eight tenants left the question blank or spoiled their form.

Do you think that RPI+1% is a fair increase for 2014/15?



Many of those who completed the form left comments. Where we had contact information, we responded to these comments. Where the comments were made anonymously, they were passed to the relevant department as feedback, and we will address some of the concerns in this and future editions of Talkback (see page 6).

Become an ELHA Member

We are always looking for interested tenants to become members of the Association. Membership costs only £1, and for that you have the right to:



- Vote for the Management Committee
- Stand for election to our Management Committee
- Attend and vote at our Annual General Meeting (AGM)

If you'd like more information on becoming a member, we have a handy leaflet and application form which you can download from elha.com, pick up at our head office in Haddington or phone us and we'll send it to you.

Advice for a Healthy Easter



People in East Lothian are being encouraged to prepare ahead for a healthy Easter this year, as part of a national campaign.

The NHS Scotland Be Ready for Easter campaign, which launches at the end of March, is advising people to take a few simple steps to keep themselves and their families well.

These steps include making sure you have a supply of over the counter medicines so you can treat common colds and coughs, knowing when your GP surgery is open and making sure you have enough repeat prescriptions to last over the Easter holiday weekend. This year many GP surgeries will be not be open for four days from Good Friday (April 18th) to Easter Monday (April 21st).

NHS 24 Medical Director Professor George Crooks said:

"After winter, Easter is the busiest time of year for Scotland's health services. The Be Ready for Easter campaign wants to remind people of the small steps they can take to ensure illness doesn't ruin their Easter.

"Having some simple home remedies available and having enough repeat medication to cover you can make all the difference if illness does strike. Easter is still several weeks away but you can take a few minutes now to help prevent you and your family from becoming ill. We would also remind people of the wide range of health information available online at www.nhsinform.co.uk"

NHS 24 helpline: **08454 242424**

Textphone number: **18001 08454 24 24 24**

The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

Many of the tenants who completed this year's rent increase consultation added comments. Where they gave us their name and address, we responded to the points they had made, but many people made comments but didn't give us contact details. We always appreciate feedback, good or bad, but we cannot investigate, or even locate, a problem if you don't tell us who you are.

Below are samples of the anonymous comments we received this year:

The Good:

Comment "I have been a tenant for 19 years and the properties are maintained well through a planned schedule. Any reported repairs are quickly responded to and all staff I have met have wanted to help make things better. All this for a reasonable rent!"

Response Thank you!

The Bad:

Comment "The windows need replacing, the patio doors are old. It costs a fortune to heat this property in winter, it's cold!"

Response Please get in touch with us so we can inspect your property and discuss a referral for an energy efficiency assessment

The Ugly:

Comment "What services do we get? No help for vulnerable people, benefit claimers, etc especially re bedroom tax. You're just money grabbers."

Response We operate a free money advice service, which has saved tenants an average of over £1,000 per year. Our ELHA Assistance Scheme (EAS) has been put in place to help tenants facing hardship because of the 'Bedroom Tax', and is currently being considered as a model for assisting tenants across Scotland. We're a non-profit organisation and a Registered Scottish Charity. If people don't pay their rent, they are removing our ability to provide services to everyone else.

We do our best to provide high quality services our customers need. Although everyone is entitled to their opinion, is there really any need to be rude and aggressive? (Especially when also being factually incorrect!)



Why is My Rent Higher than the Average?

The average rent for our properties is calculated by adding up the weekly rent for every house, flat and bungalow, and dividing it by the number of properties. We have a wide variety of property types and sizes across East Lothian, and this creates a great deal of variation in rent.

Depending on your home, the rent was set one of two ways.

If your home was part of the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) from Scottish Homes, your rent is based on the rent which was set by Scottish Homes before we took over the property. Increases have been made every year at the rate agreed at that time, apart from the 2012 increase, when we increased the rent by less than the agreed rate.

If your home was built through our development programme or bought from a developer (we call these our "own build"), the rent was set using property points and increased at the same rate as the LSVT properties. These points are for features such as:

- Type of property: house, flat, bungalow, etc
- Number of double and single bedrooms
- Number of bathrooms/WCs and fittings
- Size of garden(s)
- Type of heating
- Parking
- Communal areas/facilities



In addition, you may also have a service charge. Service charges vary from street to street. You may have charges for maintenance to communal facilities, warden charges if you have a community alarm, etc. These service charges are not taken into account when calculating the average rent, and are calculated each year based on what they actually cost.

Both LSVT and own build properties can be above or below the average. For example our lowest rent for a one bedroom property is for an LSVT house in Dunbar, while the highest is for an own build flat in Wallyford, but the lowest rent for a two bedroom property is an own build flat in Haddington and the highest is an LSVT house in Musselburgh.

