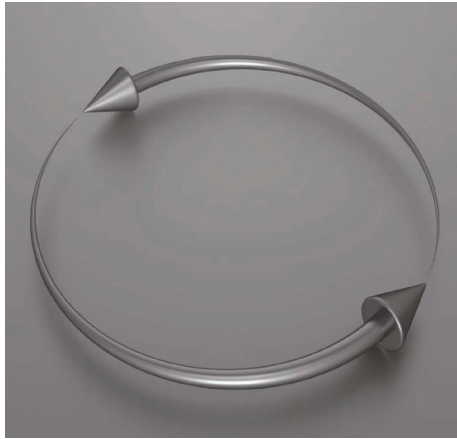


# talkback

winter '14



## East Lothian X Changes

**Social housing in East Lothian is in high demand – we have over 3,500 households registered with us for housing; last year we were only able to house 74 of them and only 13 of these were our tenants who needed to transfer to a more suitable home.**

A better option for people who are already in social housing is to find an exchange. Last year we completed 34 exchanges, which resulted in 43 new tenancies.

## Need To Move? Try Exchanging!

We work with East Lothian Council to provide a joint exchange list, East Lothian X-Changes. Any social housing tenant who lives in East Lothian, or wants to move to East Lothian, can advertise their home through the list. There are between 500 and 600 properties on the list at any one time. If you find someone you want to exchange with, whether they are another ELHA tenant, a Council tenant, or a tenant with another organisation, you need to apply for permission to exchange. We approve most applications to exchange, and normally only refuse if there are tenancy management problems, e.g. rent arrears, or if the property was unsuitable, e.g. someone applying to exchange into a property with disabled adaptations they didn't need.

Once everything is approved, and safety checks have been done, it's important to wait until you have signed your new tenancy agreement before you swap homes. The person you are exchanging with can back out at any point until they sign the tenancy agreement, and if this happens after you have moved, this can result in a great deal of expense and upset.

To visit East Lothian X-Changes, go to [www.elha.com/mutual-exchanges](http://www.elha.com/mutual-exchanges)

### In this Issue of Talkback!

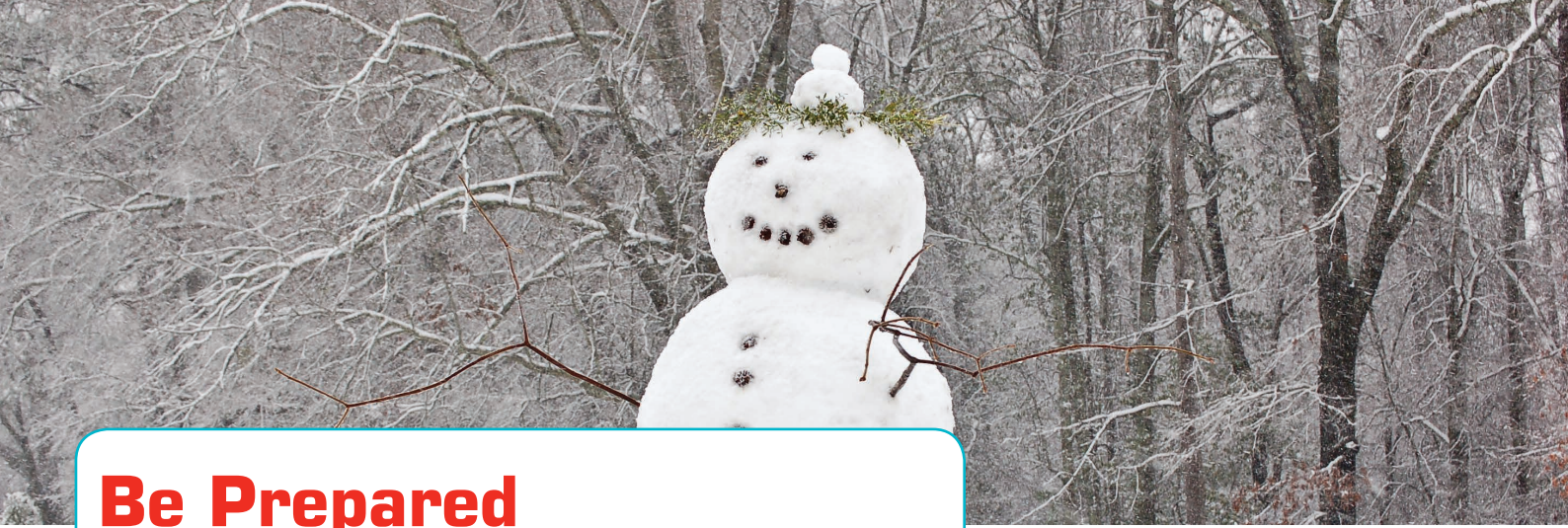
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### Festive Office Closure Dates

Our offices will be closed from **12.30pm on Christmas Eve until 9.00am on 5 January 2015.**

R3 will be open on 29, 30 and 31 December to take your repair calls. Please limit repair calls to urgent repairs and emergencies only during the festive period. The emergency repair service will continue as normal.





## Be Prepared for Winter

As the days get shorter, it's time to start getting ready for winter. Be prepared for the cold weather by following our advice on avoiding frozen or burst pipes. Although last year was relatively mild, previous years saw some of you with frozen pipes, and unhappy to learn that frozen pipes are not treated as an emergency, particularly when staff and tradesmen are unable to get to work through the snow.

If your pipes do burst and your belongings are damaged, this is not covered by our buildings insurance – you should make sure you have home contents insurance.

### If your pipes do freeze

- Turn off the water at the stop valve. If you do not know where your stop valve is call our Asset Management department on 01620 825032 now 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

### Avoiding burst pipes

There are a number of steps you can take to avoid burst pipes and to lessen the damage if they do happen:

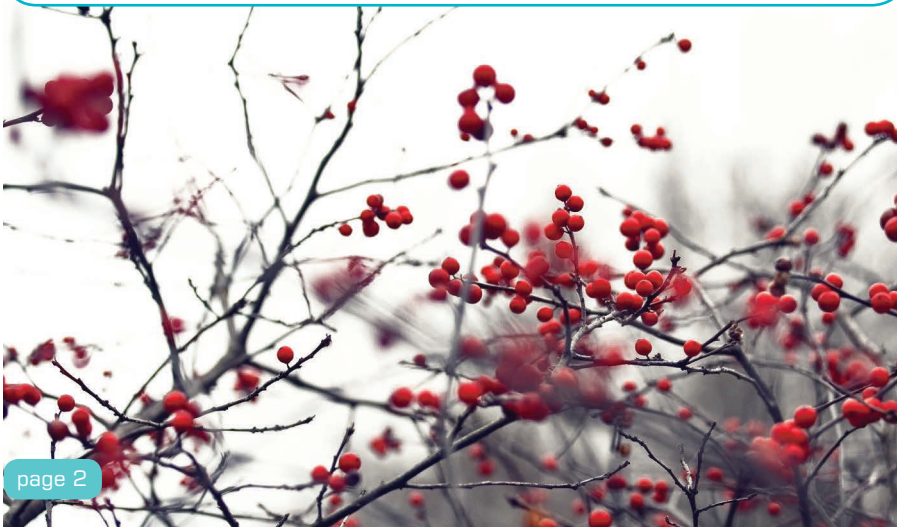
- Make sure that all water pipes are lagged/insulated. Please contact us if they are not
- Maintain the heat in your home at an even temperature and avoid peaks and troughs
- Allow heat to vent into the attic or roof space
- If leaving the house for any length of time, make sure that the system is drained 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!

## Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst!

### How would you replace your belongings in the event of a fire, flood, or other disaster?

While we have buildings insurance to make repairs to your home, this does not include your furniture, the decoration and any of your personal belongings. We recommend that all our tenants take out home contents insurance, and can provide information on insurance providers who specialise in social housing tenants.

For more information, please contact us by e-mailing [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com), calling on 01620 825032, or visiting [elha.com](http://elha.com) and clicking on the Big Red Button.





# The Volunteer Experience

Earlier this year, we sent two staff members off to see how other Housing Associations (HAs) work with tenants. The trip was organised by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service and visited several large HAs in the North of England and South of Scotland. We got some great new ideas, so keep an eye out for more opportunities to make your voice heard.

We asked involved tenants from these organisations why they volunteer their time to social housing committees and panels, and what qualities make a good involved tenant. The answers were very interesting.

**“I grew up here, I’m proud of where I live, and I want to do what I can to keep it that way.”**

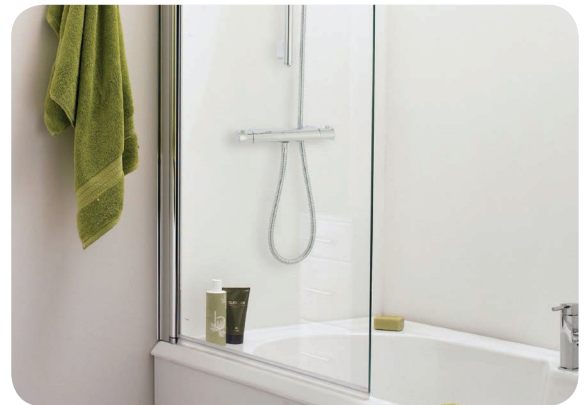
**“I’m a nosy so-and-so; I like to know what’s going on.”**

**“I had to give up my job because of poor health, but I still have a lot to offer – being on the scrutiny group means that I can make a real difference, even if I can only give a few hours a month.”**

**“It’s something to keep my mind active since I retired. Retirement is great for the first few months, and then you get bored. Without this I’d have gone doolally years ago.”**

If any of this sounds familiar, why not find out more about our Tenant Involvement Group? You can get involved at whatever level you feel happiest at, whether that’s an occasional focus group, testing our web services or getting stuck into a scrutiny project.

To find out more, please contact our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves, by visiting [elha.com](http://elha.com) and clicking the Big Red Button, by emailing [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com) or calling on 01620 825032.



## Work To Your Home

So far this year, good progress has been made on the improvement programmes, with kitchens being installed as scheduled in Musselburgh and Prestonpans and heating replacements being carried out in Pencaitland, Port Seton and Innerwick. We plan to replace the kitchens and bathrooms in six of our properties in Cockenzie with some thought being given as to how best to minimise inconvenience to tenants when this work is being done. This is now likely to be done in January to avoid inconvenience in the run up to Christmas.

We are also looking at the type of heating we may fit in Athelstaneford, as a recent project in Stenton has highlighted the benefits to be gained from combining new heating with solar panels. This may mean that this project does not start on site until March 2015.

We are consulting with private owners in Musselburgh about fitting door entry systems in blocks where we have tenants and we are hopeful that we will be able to carry out some of the planned work before the end of March 2015.

Following the review of our external painting programme, the properties most in need at The Hedges in Tranent have been completed along with other identified priorities. Given the break in the weather, we don’t expect to start any new projects until Spring 2015 when those held back from this year will be the first to start.

If you have any questions about when work is planned for your home, please contact our Asset Management Team on 01620 825032. They’ll be pleased to help.

Being green doesn’t have to cost more. Why not take a look at Start UK, providing information on living an affordable and sustainable life.

start

[www.startuk.org](http://www.startuk.org)

**UC** Universal Credit

**– coming soon?**

Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith has announced that Universal Credit will be rolled out to all Job Centres and local authorities across the country from early 2015.

We expect that this will only be for new claims from single jobseekers to start with, and that families making new claims will not be affected, but if you are affected please let us know.



## What You Thought

We've had the 'How We're Doing' booklet, and the 'How We Compare' article with comparisons against other local Housing Associations, and now 'What You Thought' to let you know about the feedback from tenants on our performance and how we've publicised it.

The feedback we got was almost entirely positive. There were only two negative comments, and one of those was from someone who hadn't read the report because they thought it would not be interesting.

The only negative comment from someone who had read the booklet was from a tenant who thought the paper quality was too good – a very good point, as the printer had accidentally used a much higher quality paper than we had ordered, resulting in us getting a discount!

Although this was the third year we've published a How We're Doing booklet, this year's was the first to be part of the Scottish Social Housing Charter requirements. Both staff and tenants worked together to produce it, and we, and our Tenant Involvement Group are delighted that it has received such great feedback.

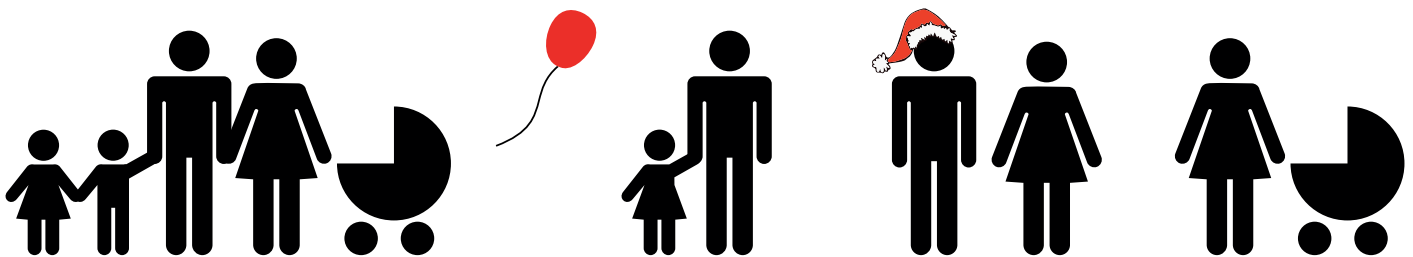


## Scrutinising ELHA!

Our TIG-Scrutiny tenants are preparing to take on their second scrutiny project. They can choose any part of our business to look at, and with this year's How We're Doing booklet, The Scottish Housing Regulator's benchmarking tool allowing them to compare our performance against other social landlords, and the quarterly complaints report on elha.com, they have lots of information to help them pick a project.

If you would like to suggest an area of our work that they should look at, we have a handy form in the Tenant Participation section on our website:

[www.elha.com/tenant\\_participation](http://www.elha.com/tenant_participation)



## Your Household

It's important to keep us up to date with who lives in your home. For example, if you are on Housing Benefit and you have older children, you may have a non-dependent deduction from your benefit when they leave full time education, or, if they move out, you may have an under-occupancy deduction (the 'Bedroom Tax'). If we're kept up to date with this information, we can help you prepare for these changes.

Also, if we know that your home is overcrowded, we can give you advice on exchanging into a larger home, or applying for a priority pass for rehousing.





# Your Estate – Your Suggestions

Although attendance at estate inspections has dropped this year, we have had a phenomenal amount of feedback from tenants suggesting ways to improve their neighbourhoods. This means that we now have a wide variety of projects on our estate improvement plan! For example:

**Tenants in Haddington reported that underage drinkers were congregating in a small lane near to the Co-Op, where they were drinking and urinating. The lane was in a poor state, and smelled extremely unpleasant. We put a gate across the lane, and just heard back – the lane is now pristine!**

**In Dunbar, tenants reported that the whirligigs in the drying area were not well placed. We re-sited them, allowing better access to the area, and allowing a footpath to be extended.**

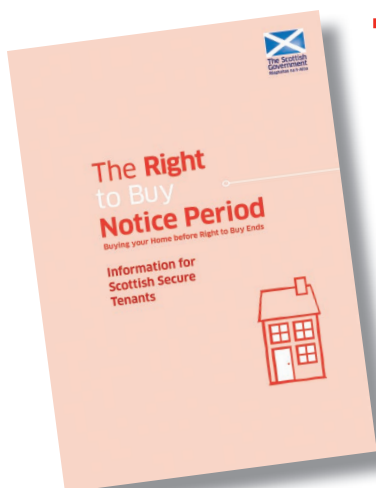
**In Musselburgh a communal area was in a poor state of repair, with abandoned furniture from a previous tenant and broken concrete littering the area. We cleared the mess and levelled a grassy area, making the communal ground a far more pleasant place for everyone living in the building.**

One of the most exciting projects is The Hedges Community Project. The project aims to revamp an area of common ground at The Hedges in Tranent into a Community nature garden. Led by tenants, the project is a collaboration between ELHA, ELC’s Landscape & Countryside and Countryside Rangers, and potentially local schools further down the line.

At the moment, residents are being invited to give us their ideas for the design of the project, and if funding can be put in place it will be incorporated into the final design. The aim is to deliver a community area which is attractive to visit but also supportive for wild birds, butterflies and bees, and educates visitors about the plants and wildlife present.

These are only a few of the projects we’re running at the moment – we expect to have completed at least a dozen large and small estate improvements by the end of the financial year. From adding road signs in developments where the house numbering can be confusing, to adding dog fouling bins in areas where people walk dogs, to marking off safe walkways for elderly tenants.

All these projects came from the estate inspection program and were suggested by tenants, for the benefit of tenants. Getting involved can make a difference!



## The End of Right to Buy in Scotland

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 received Royal Assent on 1 August 2014. This means that right to buy will end for all tenants in social housing in Scotland on 1 August 2016.

As we are a Registered Scottish Charity most of our tenants do not have the Right to Buy. Around 120 of our tenants have the Preserved Right to Buy because they were tenants in their current home under Scottish Homes before we bought the properties in 1996.

The Scottish Government has produced an information leaflet: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/11/8564> for any tenant who currently has the Right to Buy, which explains how the scheme will end. Information packs are also available from our Finance Department.





## Winter Road Maintenance



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

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/readyforwinter](http://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 Ready Scotland website is full of good information and advice on making sure you're prepared for severe weather this winter.

[www.readyscotland.org](http://www.readyscotland.org)



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## Children in Need

Children in Need is one of our favourite fundraising events. Everyone gets into the swing of things (helped along with all the sugar from the home baking). This year we raised £211.35, and fun was had by all – particularly at the judging for the 'Best Scone' competition.



## Housing Benefit Fraud

From 1st November 2014 the DWP has taken over responsibility for Fraud Investigation of East Lothian Housing Benefit cases.

To report suspected Housing Benefit Fraud:

**By telephone:** 0800 854 440

**By textphone:** 0800 320 0512

**Via the website:** [www.gov.uk/report-benefit-fraud](http://www.gov.uk/report-benefit-fraud)

**By writing:** NBFH, PO Box 224, Preston PR1 1GP

We have a legal obligation to report suspected cases of benefit fraud. Tenants found guilty of claiming Housing Benefit by giving false information face serious consequences, up to and including a prison sentence.

## Prize Draw Winners

Congratulations to Miss Alexander from Prestonpans who won a £25 gift voucher in the 5 minute comment card prize draw.

And winning £50 in our monthly repair satisfaction prize draw are Mrs Robertson from Tranent, and Mr & Mrs Harrow of Athelstaneford.

Remember, you are entered into the repair satisfaction prize draw every time you complete a repair satisfaction form. It's now even easier to give feedback – the form is available by going to the Repair History page in your digital tenant account and clicking the feedback button. If you haven't activated your digital account yet, visit [elha.com](http://elha.com) and fill in your details, or e-mail us at [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com) and we'll send you your activation e-mail.

