

# talkback

WINTER 2015



**STOP PRESS!**

We understand that the latest version of the Universal Credit digital service will be trialed in East Lothian from January 2016 (through Musselburgh Job Centre Plus).

This will only affect new claims for Universal Credit, all existing claims will be unaffected. This announcement has only just been made by the Department of Work and Pensions, so the exact details are not clear yet.

We think this is potentially very good news, as the system seems to be very well designed and should mean it is quicker and easier to make new claims.



We also think it is great that residents in East Lothian get the chance to try them first – there will only be 5 sites in the whole of the UK, and East Lothian is the only one in Scotland. It does mean though that more people will use the Universal Credit system earlier than originally anticipated in the area.

Our friendly money advice service is available to help any of our tenants affected by this, and we will publish more information as we get it here, at [elha.com](http://elha.com) and on our facebook page, [www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation](http://www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation).

## My Home – Sneak Peek

We know we've been teasing you with glimpses of My Home, and our TIG-Web got early access to all the new features, but now we're giving any tenant who is already signed up for a digital tenant account the chance to have a look at their new My Home page.

The official launch won't be until the New Year, but if you have a digital tenant account, you can log in at [myhome.elha.com](http://myhome.elha.com) and enjoy all the features a few weeks early.

And if you spot anything strange, please let us know so we can fix it before the official launch!



## Festive Season Closure Dates

We close at 12.30 pm on Thursday 24 December 2015, and re-open at 9am on Tuesday 5 January 2016.

The dedicated staff in R3 will be working over the festive break but for emergency repairs only.

**If you have a repair that really can't wait until we re-open, phone the usual number: 03000 999 247**



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# 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 usually 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!



## Looking After Your Home

Can you tell the difference between damp and condensation? A great many reports of damp in properties turn out to be condensation, particularly at this time of year when people are more concerned about keeping the heat in than letting damp air escape.

You can find out how to avoid condensation and more by visiting [elha.com](http://elha.com), or picking up some of our information leaflets.



## Help Us to Improve

Every single time we order a repair, we ask the person who reported it to give us some feedback about how satisfied they were with the service - from the staff in the office who took the call; to the workmen who carried out the work, to the quality of the completed job. The forms can be completed online through your digital tenant account, or posted back to us.

All of the forms, both paper and electronic, are entered into a monthly prize draw to win a £50 shopping voucher. We do this

because we are always looking for ways to improve our service and your comments - good and bad - are important in helping us identify any problems and trying to make sure they are not repeated. It's also nice to know when we've done a good job or a particular staff member has been really helpful.

### Date Completed

Cancel Order

In Progress

Leave Feedback

03/12/2015

Last year we reported to our Management Committee that overall satisfaction with repairs was 84% but this was based on a tiny proportion (around 4%) of the repairs we completed. We didn't get any feedback on the other 96% of the work we carried out. We *could* just assume that the lack of feedback on the 96% meant that everyone was completely happy with every aspect of the service (and if that were true we would have a satisfaction rate of over 98%!) and that we can't get much better, but that's unlikely to be the case. So please, next time you get a repair done take 5 minutes to fill in the satisfaction form and help us to improve our service to you.



## Housing Officer Areas

The arrival of our new Housing Officer, Brian Parkin, who takes over from Claire McMillan, was an ideal opportunity to re-visit the areas each of the Housing Officers cover and has resulted in some changes.



Prestonpans  
Tranent



John McNally

Cockenzie  
Macmerry  
Musselburgh  
Port Seton  
Wallyford  
Whitecraig



Brian Parkin

Athelstaneford  
Bolton  
Dirleton  
Dunbar  
East Linton

East Saltoun  
Elphinstone  
Garvald  
Gifford  
Gullane  
Haddington

Innerwick  
North Berwick  
Ormiston  
Pencaitland  
Stenton  
West Barns



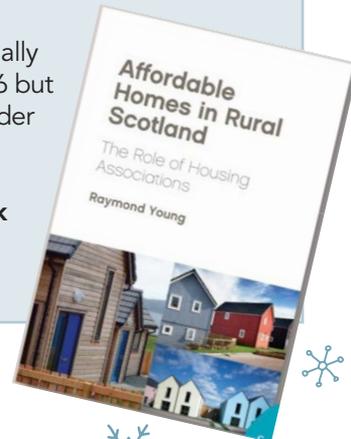
Dale Finlayson

As always, if you are planning to pop into our offices to speak with your Housing Officer, **please call first to make sure they are available.** Although we will always try to help, the Housing Officers spend much of the week out visiting people in their homes. When they're in the office they may already have a full calendar of appointments, or have blocked out time to update records, and so may not be available if you visit the office without an appointment. And remember, if you can't get hold of your Housing Officer other staff are available to help- just explain what you need to speak about to our reception staff and they will put you through to someone who can help.

## We're in a Book!

Raymond Young has written a book about the development of Housing Association's in rural areas of Scotland and it includes a chapter written by one of our Management Committee members, Peter Hayman, about the history of ELHA.

The book will be formally launched early in 2016 but if you would like to order a copy for the special price of £10, contact [reception@sfha.co.uk](mailto:reception@sfha.co.uk)



## Children in Need

As usual, we turned to our favourite form of fundraising for Children in Need – cakes!

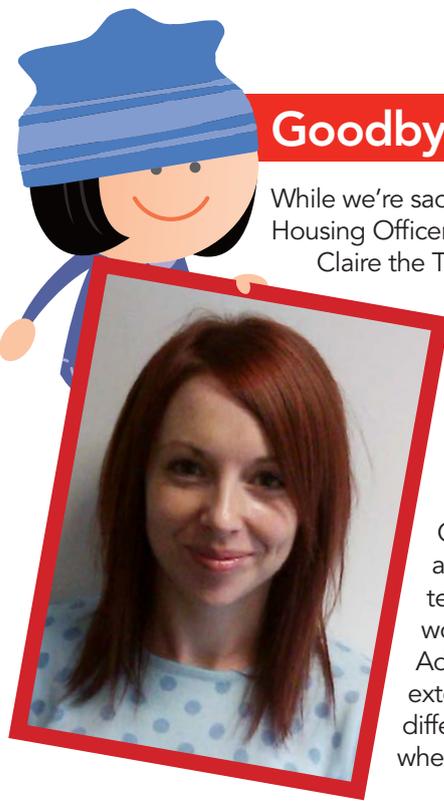
We also had a teddy bear costume competition (won by Sons of Anarchy Pooh Bear), Guess the Picnic Location (Bear Island in the Svalbard archipelago, of course), and other games and raffles and raised £183.18 for a great cause... but really – it's all about the cake!



## Goodbye / Hello, Claire!

While we're sad to see Claire McMillan the Housing Officer go, we're delighted to welcome Claire the Tenancy Support Officer. This is Claire's fourth job within ELHA – she started with us in 2006 as a Housing Assistant, then took on the role of our Tenant Participation & Support Officer, before becoming a Housing Officer.

Claire's new role will be to offer additional Tenancy Support to tenants who need it. She will be working closely with our Money Adviser, Anne Rattray, and many external agencies, who can provide different types of help and support when it's needed.



## Property Valuation

One of the conditions of the loans we took out to build or buy our properties is that the properties have to be valued every 5 years to make sure that they have been properly maintained and are still worth enough to cover the value of the loan.

This valuation will be carried out in the New Year when all of the properties will be looked at externally and so you may notice the surveyors walking around.

The surveyors will also need access to a few properties in each area. If we need access to your home for this exercise we will contact you directly.

As always, be safe-don't let anyone into your home unless they can show you proof of who they are and where they are from.



## 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)



## Have You Filled Out Your Census Form?

If you haven't yet, please do!

The more information we have about all of our tenants the better we can plan and deliver services. This will be especially important as Welfare Reform begins to affect many of you. If we don't have up to date information about you, your household and your contact details, you could be missing out on a whole range of services such as Money, Benefit and Debt Advice, Tenancy Support, Texting Services and My Home.

The financial information we ask for is confidential – even we won't know what you've put down on the form – but it helps us to estimate how many tenants will be affected by Welfare Reform and offer help. It is also useful for us to know about our tenants' average incomes when we are setting rents.

So please take a few minutes to help us to build a picture of our tenants and the services they might need.





## Solar Panels Mean Free Electricity

A lot of you will now have Solar Panels fitted to your roof and should be seeing the benefits of these as your electricity consumption reduces.

We are getting a lot of calls from tenants asking why they can't have panels fitted. In the main this is because your home doesn't face the "right" way. Solar panels work best if they are fitted on roofs that face either south or west or a combination of these. That's not to say that they can't be fitted on roofs that face in other directions but, unless they can be assessed as being able to produce a minimum amount of electricity, it isn't cost effective to fit them. That's why some of you will be disappointed.

The other side to this is that a lot of you who live in homes where we can fit panels haven't got back to us to organise the work. If you are one of these tenants, please contact us on 01620 825032 now, as this is work that has to be done before the end of January 2016, when the change to Feed in Tariffs will make this uneconomic.

If you are a tenant who lives in a Conservation area, don't worry, wherever possible we are working with East Lothian Council Planning Department to try to get permission to fit panels to your home. We should hear about this no later than the beginning of January and then we'll be in touch.

We are also working with our partners, Edison Energy, on fitting panels to our flats in communal blocks. This is more complicated due to the shared roof, but again, we are working on this and making progress. If we can, we'll fit them so that as many tenants as possible get the benefit of free electricity.

Once we have completed the solar panel installation we will start to look at ways we can reduce energy costs for tenants without such sunny roofspaces!

## Planned Improvements

Our programme for replacing kitchens, bathrooms and central heating hasn't been going as smoothly this year as it usually does. The reason for this is the Solar Panel installations we are doing. If any reason for a delay is a "good" reason, then this is it.

What has happened is that we have delayed work on replacing kitchens and central heating systems so that we can try and tie these up with the solar panels being fitted. The solar panel project started in October, four months later than we had hoped, and this has led to delays on other work.

The fitting of the solar panels affects kitchens, as we need to design the kitchen to take the "Sunamp" battery that helps to heat hot water for the gas boiler and saves tenants even more money on fuel bills. With central heating, we are aiming resources at doing the homes that have had solar panels fitted and where we are fitting the "Sunamp" batteries. This is so we can get the most benefit for tenants before the end of January when the solar panel project is due to stop.

All of this has slowed down the bathroom replacements as our plumbers are working on, yes, you guessed it, fitting "Sunamp" batteries.

This is no doubt frustrating for those of you in Prestonpans, Musselburgh and Tranent who are waiting to have your kitchens, heating and bathrooms replaced. We hope that you'll understand why we are working on getting the best deal for all of our tenants and don't worry, we will do the work, it's not cancelled, just delayed.



## TIG in Action

The TIG-Web have been really helpful testing our new, soon to be released, website and feeding back to us what they think of it - many thanks to all of you.

The scrutiny group that examines an area of our work in detail and suggests ways that we can improve have started looking at how we deal with neighbour complaints and more serious antisocial behaviour.

So far they have compared our performance to other landlords and interviewed some of the staff involved. Look out for their report early next year.

Meantime, if you think you might like to be more involved in what we do and how (or even why) we do it and would like more information please get in touch and we can arrange for you to meet some of the TIG members.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

## Happy to Translate Goes Mobile

We don't have many requests for translation or interpretation services, but we like to be prepared. We're members of Happy to Translate, which is a great resource to help us communicate with non-English speaking tenants and applicants.

Happy to Translate have just launched a new mobile app to help staff who are out & about, and our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves, got a sneaky selfie with the guest speaker at the launch party - none other than Nicola Sturgeon.

## Prize Draw Winners

Lynda McCran, Kelly Fleming & Elizabeth Durie, all from Musselburgh, won £50 each in the repair satisfaction prize draw

Samantha Brown from Tranent and Ronald McIntyre from Musselburgh won £25 gift vouchers for the 5 minute comment card prize draw

## Mythbusters!

Rumours and wrong information can spread fast and cause confusion and sometimes anger or resentment. Here are a few of the most common myths that we've heard recently along with the facts.

### "The "Bedroom Tax" doesn't exist in Scotland anymore"

Yes, it does. At the moment, anyone whose benefit is affected can apply to have it 'topped up' by a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) provided by the Scottish Government, but there is no guarantee that the funding for this will continue indefinitely.

### "You can only claim Housing Benefit if you do not work"

Wrong - Housing Benefit entitlement is based solely on how much your income is compared with your family size and cost of your rent. If you are on a low income and are struggling to pay your rent it is important that you find out if you qualify. Contact your Housing Officer if you would like advice on this.

### "The Right To Buy is coming back for Housing Association Tenants"

Wrong - the Right to Buy may be extended in England, but in Scotland it will end on 1 August 2016. As we are a Registered Scottish Charity, most of our tenants don't have the Right to Buy - only a small handful of tenants, who were part of the transfer from Scottish Homes in 1996 are still eligible to apply.

### "You have to be in your home for 6 months before you can exchange"

Wrong - This is an old rule that has been scrapped, although it is still used by many other social landlords as a policy. We do not have any time restrictions on applying for an exchange, and if you really have to you can apply as soon as your tenancy starts.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

