

# talkback

summer '12



## Good Neighbour Award

We want to recognise tenants who have a positive impact on the community they live in, and we need your help.

You may have already spotted the nomination card that came with your newsletter. If you have a neighbour who makes a difference, by clearing snow from neighbour's paths, helping a neighbour get on-line, picking up shopping

for an ill neighbour etc, please let us know by filling in the card and popping it in the post.

Nominations for the **Good Neighbour Award** are open until the 31st of July, and the winner will receive a trophy and a cash prize at an award ceremony at our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September.



## ELHA Secures Prestigious Housing

We pride ourselves on offering a wide range of ways for our tenants to get involved, from returning comment cards and coming along to an estate inspection, to joining our Management Committee. We also aim to make sure all our tenants can get involved in any way they prefer, regardless of age, nationality, disability, etc. We have now been recognised for this and have achieved Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) accreditation.



## National Standards for Information and Advice

We have also received recognition for our Information and Advice services, and have been awarded Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers – Type I accreditation (formerly Homepoint).



*Our Chief Executive, Martin Pollhammer, said:*

**"This is a fantastic achievement and testimony to the great work of our staff and tenants. I would like to congratulate everyone involved and we look forward to working with many more of our tenants in the future."**

We're not going to let all this recognition make us complacent – There is always room for improvement. If you think we could be doing something else (or something better), please let us know.



## In this Issue of Talkback!

New leaflets .....	2
Changes to Adaptations Service .....	2
Consultation Calendar .....	2
Off-Line Isolation? .....	3
Digital Inclusion .....	3
Quids In! - winner .....	3
Scottish Social Housing Charter .....	4
Have your Say! .....	4
Financial Inclusion Service	
Case Study .....	4
Drop In Visits .....	5
Tenant Census and Large Scale Satisfaction Survey .....	5
Help Us Get Tenants Involved .....	5
Prize Draw Winner .....	5
Stay Safe in the Sun .....	5
Complaints Procedure Changes .....	6
New Staff .....	7
Estate Inspection Update .....	7
The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) wants to hear your views .....	7
Summer Courtesy .....	8
What Can I Change? .....	8
Spare Bedroom – Housing Benefit ....	8

# New Information Leaflets



We have just published two new information leaflets: one on preventing condensation in your home, and one giving information on asbestos containing materials (ACMs).

You should have received the Asbestos leaflet with your copy of Talkback (or a download link if you receive your Talkback electronically). Copies of both leaflets can also be picked up at our office in Haddington, or downloaded from [elha.com](http://elha.com).



**East Lothian Council**

## Changes to Adaptations Service

Some time ago, we reported that a self selection service for equipment (such as crockery, cutlery or help with getting dressed) and minor adaptations, for example grab rails, was available in East Lothian and can be accessed by contacting the Occupational Therapy Self Selection Service on 0845 603 1576.

For more major adaptations we have recently agreed to work more closely with the Occupational Therapy Service so that decisions are made jointly and, if an adaptation isn't the right solution, re-housing priority is awarded quickly. Adaptations can be really helpful in allowing people to stay in their own home for as long as possible. Unfortunately, not all properties are suitable for adaptation. Because we only have a very limited budget we aim to make sure that only properties that are suitable for the long term needs of a disabled person are adapted. If you want to find out more about getting your home adapted, please contact East Lothian Council on 0845 603 1576.

We will soon be carrying out a survey to try to establish how many of our tenants may need adaptations in the future so that we can plan accordingly. Please help us to spend wisely by taking part in the survey.

## 2012-13 Consultation Calendar

Annual Consultations	Involved	Date
Rent & Service Charge	All tenants	January 2013
Stair Cleaning	Tenants receiving the service	July 2012
Garden Care	Tenants receiving the service	September 2012
Policy Consultations	Involved	Date
Tenant Participation Strategy	Tenant Involvement Group, all tenants, ELC	November 2012
Rent Arrears Policy	All tenants	February 2013
Shared Ownership Policy	Sharing owners	December 2012
Other Consultations	Involved	Date
Large Scale TSS	All tenants	Sept-Nov 2012
Tenant Census	All tenants	Aug-Oct 2012

# Off-Line Isolation? >>>



You may have heard the buzz-words 'digital inclusion' flying around in the media recently. Let's face it – computers and jargon go hand-in-hand. While we always try to make our services as easy to access as possible, we know that there are tenants out there who aren't on-line, and even if they might be interested in learning how to access the internet – the jargon can put them off.



What we'd like to know is how can we make it easier for you to access our on-line services? We will be updating our website later this year, and we would love to hear any suggestions you have.



We actively promote our on-line services, and the benefits of using on-line services are clear to see:



- electronic communication is a fraction of the cost of paper, envelope and stamp,
- getting your newsletter e-mailed to you instead of being sent one in the post reduces your carbon footprint (and you get it faster),
- asking for information via the Live Help service is often faster than a phone call, and you can have a transcript of what was discussed e-mailed to you,



- you can check your rent balance or report a repair 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year.

**So please – whether you're a technophile or a technophobe – we want to hear your opinions. Our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves, is waiting for your call/text/letter/e-mail/Live Help session!**

# Contact Us:

Web: [www.elha.com](http://www.elha.com)  
Text: Text elha and your message to 88222 (message charged at standard rates)  
E-mail: [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com)  
Tel: 01620 825032  
Letter: East Lothian Housing Association  
18-20 Market Street  
Haddington  
East Lothian  
EH41 3JL

## Digital Inclusion - Benefits for All

There are many good reasons to join the digital revolution:

- Children's education improves – no internet use could mean a child's lifetime earnings will be reduced.
- Cheaper services are available on-line. For example, insurance.
- People who aren't on-line are missing out on savings of approximately £560 a year from various sources.
- 3.1 million people, with an average age of 65 years, see someone less than once a week – on-line tools such as Skype can improve this.
- Internet users feel more confident and in control of their lives and the world around them.

## Quids in!

Congratulations to Karen White from Musselburgh, who won the £50 Quids In! Star Letter. Due to the feedback we received on the 5 minute comment cards, **Quids in!** will be back in the Autumn.

# Scottish Social Housing Charter



Scottish Social  
Housing Charter



The new Scottish Social Housing Charter has now been approved. The Charter sets out the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords in an easy to understand format. To read the Charter, or learn more about what it means to you, visit the website: <http://housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk/>

## Have Your Say! Tenant Consultation Event



The Tenant Information Service (TIS) is organising tenant consultation events all over Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to give you an opportunity to hear their proposals on measuring and reporting on progress being made by social landlords to meet the Scottish Social Housing Charter, ask the Regulator questions and to give your views on their plans.

Edinburgh  
Tuesday 14th August  
Edinburgh City Chambers Business Centre



The events are free and refreshments will be provided.  
For more information contact TIS by phone: 0141 248 1242,  
e-mail: [info@tis.org.uk](mailto:info@tis.org.uk) or visit their website: [www.tis.org.uk](http://www.tis.org.uk)

## Financial Inclusion Service Case Study

Our Financial Inclusion Officer, Anne Rattray was contacted by a tenant who had experienced a severe drop in her income when her daughter left the household. She also had a number of debts that were barely manageable. The tenant worked part – time 20 hours a week.

With the change in her household, outgoings such as rent, council tax, fuel bills etc became overwhelming. Claims to means-tested benefits were unable to take account of the tenant's particular problems.

Over several weeks Anne made representations to ELC and creditors on behalf of the tenant. This led to her receiving new income – Discretionary Housing payments, which contributed to her rent, and an agreed reduction in the amount she needed to pay to her creditors towards clearing her debt. Overall the tenant's income had improved and her financial situation had been stabilised.



Financial Inclusion  
Officer,  
Anne Rattray

# Drop In Visits



While we have an open-door policy when it comes to tenants dropping in to the office, please be aware that your Housing Officer is only in the office two or three days a week, and even if they are in the office they may have appointments already arranged and may be unable to speak to you. If you plan on visiting the office to speak to your Housing Officer, please call or use the Live Help service on our website, to make sure your Housing Officer is available first, particularly if you are travelling from outlying areas, to save you a wasted journey.

## Tenant Census and Large Scale Satisfaction Survey

As mentioned in our Spring Talkback, this year we will be carrying out a full tenant census so we know which services will have the highest demand in future years and which households may need support following the changes being made to many welfare benefits, including the introduction of the so called "Bedroom Tax".

We also carry out a large scale tenant satisfaction survey every three years – the information gained from this survey shapes future services and lets us know how well we're doing compared to other Housing Associations.

Both the census and the survey will be carried out by an external consultant, the contract for which will be out to tender shortly.



## Help Us Get Tenants Involved!

We will be reviewing our Tenant Participation Strategy this year, and we would like to invite any interested tenant to get involved in shaping the new strategy, in any way they'd like.

*For example:*

- Download the current strategy document from [elha.com](http://elha.com), then fill in the on-line consultation form and tell us what needs to be changed.
- Ask us to send out a paper copy of the strategy by calling on 01620 825032 or e-mailing [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com), then send us your comments
- Leave a comment on the 'What do you think about Tenant Participation' post pinned to the top of our Facebook page.
- Come along to one of our Tenant Involvement Group meetings – everyone is welcome!

## Stay Safe in The Sun!

When the sun comes out, so do the tee-shirts and shorts. Just remember that even a Scottish summer can do serious damage to your skin. Fifteen minutes can be all you need to burn in the sun, and repeated sunburns can cause skin cancer.

How to prevent sunburn:

- Minimise the amount of time you spend in the sun between 10am and 4pm.
- Use a sunscreen that provides UVB and UVA protection with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15.
- Apply sunscreen before you go out in the sun, and reapply according to the instructions on the packaging.
- Wear a hat with a peak or brim to shade your eyes and face.



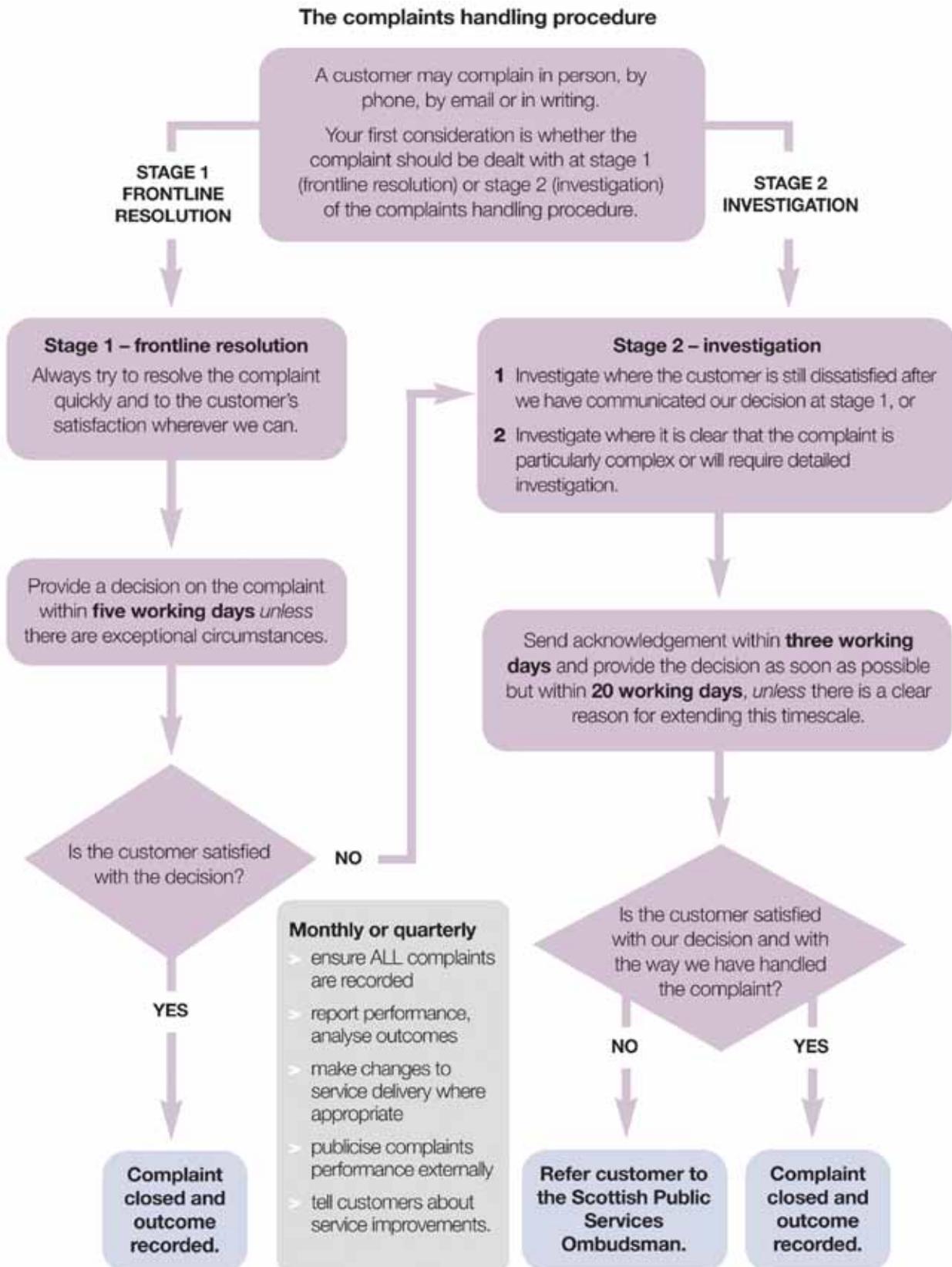
### Prize Draw Winner

Congratulations to prize draw winner Samantha Brown, from Tranent whose 5 minute comment card was drawn from the hat. Miss Brown won a £50 shopping voucher.

# MAKING A COMPLAINT

While we always aim for our customers to be happy with the service we've provided, we know that mistakes can be made and we need to know about them in order to fix them and/or prevent them from happening again.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has published a new model complaints handling procedure, which will come into effect later this year. This aims to streamline the way complaints are handled, ensuring that your complaint is resolved as quickly as possible.



(source – Model Complaints Handling Procedure – Scottish Public Services Ombudsman)

We will report on our revised complaints procedure in a future newsletter.

# New Staff for



East Lothian Care & Repair have expanded their services for owner-occupiers and private tenants over 50 to include Home Safety and Gardening. You may spot a familiar face, as Elaine Hill, Care & Repair's new part-time Gardening Officer, has also been employed previously as a Personal Assistant, a Receptionist and as our Office Move Co-ordinator.

The new part-time Home Safety Officer is Jeannie Cole, a former nurse at Leuchie House, who brings a wealth of experience in home safety with her.

More information on these new services can be found on

Care & Repairs website:  
[www.careandrepaireastlothian.co.uk](http://www.careandrepaireastlothian.co.uk)



Elaine Hill



Jeannie Cole

## Estate Inspection Update ...

We are well underway with this year's Annual Estate Inspection Programme and have noticed a general improvement in most areas compared with last years' inspections. There are still some areas we would like to improve and we are compiling a list of the priority works we wish to carry out. If your area has not already been inspected, please look out for the letter informing you of the date of your inspection and be sure to attend and give us your input. Even if you have missed your Annual Estate Inspection, we would be delighted to hear from you about how you think your area could be improved.

Last year we carried out around half of the works which were requested, but some of the larger jobs could not be done within the budget. We will look at how we might be able to budget for these in future years, so do not worry if the jobs you asked for last year have not been done. They are not forgotten and your input is still vital for us to plan for necessary improvements in the long term.



Scottish Housing  
Regulator

## The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) wants to hear your views

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is asking for your views on its proposed report to tenants on their landlord's performance on the indicators for the Scottish Government's Social Housing Charter.

The Scottish Parliament agreed the Charter in February 2012. It sets out standards and outcomes that describe the results that tenants and other service users can expect from landlords.

The Regulator worked with stakeholders to develop the range of indicators it proposes to use to help it monitor how well landlords are doing on the Charter outcomes. It is now consulting on these indicators. The consultation also sets out how the Regulator will inform tenants and other service users about how a landlord is performing. This will give tenants and other customers of social landlords an insight into the comparative performance of their own landlord.

### Kay Blair, the Regulator's Chair said

"We are consulting on the proposed range of indicators and information that we will require landlords to give us so that we can monitor and report on their achievement of, or progress towards, the Charter. The indicators will be key to our approach to regulation but these are not the only way we will assess social landlords' progress. We will also use a range of other approaches including thematic inspections. We are also consulting on how we propose to report our findings which will help tenants to find out how their landlord is performing and compare with other landlords. We are very keen to hear from tenants, homeless people and others who use the services of social landlords."

The consultation runs from 1 June to 24 August. The Regulator is holding a series of events across Scotland for tenants, homeless people, other service users and landlords to discuss the proposals.

You can get the consultation document and more information on the consultation events on SHR's website or by contacting the Regulator.

You can find the details below: **website:** <http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/consultations>  
**phone:** 0141 271 3810 | **e-mail:** [consultation@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)

# Summer Courtesy

Summer is here, and we all want to be out in the sun enjoying ourselves. While we would never want to spoil anyone's fun, we would like to point out that your fun may be Antisocial Behaviour to your neighbours.

## Noise



As the days get warmer, and we all spend more time outside or with our windows open, please be aware of the impact household noise may have on your neighbours. What may be a low-key evening sitting out in the garden with some friends for you could be a major irritation for a neighbour who has to get up early for work the next day.

## Dog Fouling



Please clean up after your dog – if you leave dog mess laying in your garden the smell will become unpleasant, particularly at this time of year. You are also legally required to remove any dog mess left by your dog from public areas immediately – this is a Health & Safety hazard and you can be fined up to £1,000 or issued with an Antisocial Behaviour Order (ASBO) for persistent fouling.

Under the terms of your Tenancy Agreement, we have the power to require removal of nuisance pets.

East Lothian Council's landscaping operatives will not maintain any grassy or planted areas which contain dog mess.

## Children

Please do not allow your children to play in parking areas – there is a real risk of children being hit by cars if they are allowed to play where people will be parking. Parking areas are not playgrounds – as well as the potential danger, every summer we receive complaints from tenants whose cars have been scratched, dented or otherwise damaged by children playing nearby.



## Alcohol



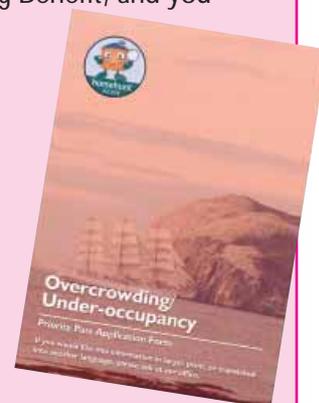
Remember that in most parts of East Lothian public outdoor drinking is banned. This includes having a bottle of wine while picnicking in a park.

# Changes to Welfare Benefits – Do You Have an 'Extra' Bedroom?

Recent changes to the Welfare Reform Bill mean that if you are on Housing Benefit, and you have an extra bedroom from the 1st of April 2013, your benefit will be reduced and you will be expected to pay the difference yourself.

An 'extra' bedroom, as defined in the law is one that is:

- Empty,
- Only used part of the time (eg: kept for access visits by children, or used by carers),
- Only used by one child under 16 if there is another child of the same sex in the household who has their own bedroom.



We will shortly be surveying all of our tenants to find out who will be most affected by the benefit changes. The more information we have, the more we can target help to those who most need it.

We can offer any of our tenants who want to downsize their home a silver priority pass for rehousing through Homehunt. Our tenants also have transfer priority, putting them before anyone else with a silver pass.

If you would like to know more about homehunt, you can find information on [elha.com](http://elha.com), the homehunt website, [www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info) or contact us on 01620 825032 or [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com).

# What can I change in my Garden?

On a recent survey card, one of our tenants asked what they could and couldn't do in their garden, and it raised some discussion in the office. Everyone should know that large changes, like building a shed or putting in a driveway, requires written permission from us. An Alterations & Improvements form should be filled in (forms can be sent out, picked up in the office, or downloaded from [elha.com](http://elha.com)) and, in some cases, a planning application submitted to East Lothian Council.

Smaller changes, however, aren't quite so straightforward. For properties in private developments, there may be rules regarding hedges and fencing. Some properties from the large scale voluntary transfer from Scottish Homes may have high-maintenance gardens which a new tenant may want to change. Some tenants may have a piece of garden they'd like to turn into a vegetable patch.

**As a rule of thumb – anything which is a permanent change to the garden, eg: changing lawn to a paved area, planting a hedge or tree, or building raised flower beds needs to be checked with us first.**

