

SPRING 2024

talkback

elha.com
east lothian housing association

New Services!

In-House Money & Home Energy Advice Service

Some of you may remember that we offered an independent Money & Home Energy Advice Service which came to an end in July last year. We're now pleased to announce that we have re-launched this service and our new Money & Home Energy Adviser, Andrew Collinge, joined us at the end of January 2024. Andrew comes to us from Dalkeith Citizens Advice Bureau and has over 20 years' experience of working in welfare benefits and energy advice.

We know that many people need help with their finances at some time in their lives for any number of reasons, and our new service can help with budgeting, benefit applications, debt repayment, energy advice, grants and loans and so much more.

If you'd like to have a chat with Andrew, you can:

- Visit **My Home** and click the Money Advice button (My Account box) and leave a note, or for energy advice, click the Energy Advice button (My House box) and leave a note
- Visit **elha.com** and fill in the self-referral form - you'll find it in the Tenancy Support section of the website
- Contact your Housing Officer at **enquiries@elha.com** and ask them to refer you or telephone **01620 825032**



Housing & Community Outreach Service

We know that some people need help to manage their tenancy, and our Housing Officers are trained to do this. However, the recent pandemic and cost of living crisis, including huge energy costs, have brought about many new or increased challenges for some tenants. Through our Healthy Happy Home Checks we have identified tenants facing challenges where more specialised help is needed, for example:

- social isolation
- debt
- poor internal condition of some homes
- significant mental health issues

Because of this, we launched a Housing & Community Outreach Service in July 2023 and James McCallum-Browne, a former Housing Officer, took up the role of Housing and Community Outreach Worker.

Housing Officers can refer any tenant who needs some extra help to James' service. James can help new vulnerable tenants to set up their home and develop the skills needed to thrive in their tenancy. He can also give support to existing tenants who are at risk of homelessness, for example: due to debt or harassment and anti-social behaviour, or to people who were managing well in their home but have experienced recent life changes that have caused difficulties.

James can also act as an advocate for tenants and their households, going with them to appointments where required, and helping them to access any of the range of support organisations available in East Lothian.



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Rent Increase Consultation Results 2024

Captain Discount returned for a final mission - to help battle inflation with increased Rent Discounts.

Consultation Process

After his previous three year mission, which had seen rents reduce in real terms by over 10% and Rent Discounts increase, this consultation proposed an increase of inflation + 1% (7.1%), offset by a further increase of £5 per month to all Rent Discount levels.

1,352 tenants were consulted, 1,161 (86%) by e-mail and 188 (14%) by post. The Consultation Form went live on 1 January 2024, and letters and e-mails promoting the consultation were sent once the office reopened.

Banners were prominently displayed on the elha.com front page and in the My Home dashboard, reminders to take part were posted on social media, the link to the consultation in each tenant's My Home account was a highlighted red button and the monthly 'thank you' message all paper-free tenants receive when they pay their rent also included a link to the consultation. In addition, follow up e-mails and calls were made to Platinum Key Tenants to try to make sure no-one lost their Platinum Key Tenant Rent Discounts (responding to this consultation was a requirement for Platinum Key Tenants).

As well as seeking views on the proposed approach, tenants were also asked how the increased Rent Discounts would affect their Key Tenant Status.



Consultation Responses

426 (31.5%) tenants responded, a decrease from 33.4% in 2023. Only seven offline tenants returned a paper form, a drop from 14 last year.

In previous years, the ARC question, "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?" has been asked. Current guidance is that this question should be part of a three yearly tenant survey only, so was dropped from the 2024 consultation.



Results

What is your Key Tenant Status?

	Number	Percentage of total
I'm already claiming the maximum Rent Discount	271	64%
I'll upgrade from Gold to Platinum to claim an extra £10.00 a month Rent Discount	40	9%
I'll upgrade to Gold or Platinum for the first time to claim up to £30.00 a month in Rent Discounts	24	6%
I'll upgrade from Bronze to Platinum to claim an extra £20.00 a month Rent Discount	9	2%
I'll upgrade from Bronze to Gold to claim an extra £10.00 a month Rent Discount	13	3%
I'll go paper-free so I can claim £10.00 a month Bronze Rent Discounts	15	4%
I'm happy as I am and I don't intend to claim or increase a Rent Discount	33	8%
Blank	21	5%

Tenant Comments

Where tenants had made additional comments and/or asked questions or requested clarification on points raised in the consultation or general tenancy issues, all were responded to in line with the timescales detailed in the Customer Service Charter. Where there was any delay in responding, an apology was sent.

Do you agree with our proposal for increased Rent discounts alongside our proposed increase of inflation +1%?

	Number	Percentage of total
Yes	336	79%
No	82	19%
Blank	8	2%

Number / Percentage of Responders

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Responders	318	379	345	443	426
Percentage of Total Tenants	24.3%	28.5%	25.9%	33.4%	31.5%



Captain Discount's Final Mission



Over 30% of our tenants responded to Captain Discount's Rent Increase Consultation. A huge thank you to the 426 tenants who took part, with 79% of those supporting our proposals. We will now take this to our Management Committee later this month, and confirm everyone's increase in personal notifications we send out at the end of the month.

After several years of below inflation rent increases, this year we consulted on an inflation+1% increase, and an increase in our Key Tenant Rent Discounts to offset part of the increase. We remain the only Housing Association in the UK offering Rent Discounts, and we're delighted that over 85% of our tenants receive one. But if you could get a higher Rent Discount, now is the time to think about applying, to keep your personal Rent Increase even lower.

What Tenants Told Us:

It was great to see so many well-informed and constructive comments – it's very rewarding to know we're explaining things clearly, and getting rid of 'jargon' words only other housing professionals understand. As always, we've pulled together a small sample of comments for you.

The Good:

"I appreciate the graphics and clear communication for a topic that is hard to understand if it's not your thing.

I also appreciate the discount and that you are keeping rents as low as possible beating the crazy inflation. Thank you"

Thank you! It can be a bit of a dry topic, and we've worked hard to make our consultation microsite (and the leaflet for our offline tenants) easy to read and use. With Captain Discount's retirement though, we need to think of something else for next year!

The Bad:

"The rent should be kept the same for now and the priority should be ensuring the upkeep of the building is brought up to scratch. I've lived here for over two years now and the stairwell hasn't had a deep clean inside or out. The fortnightly cleaning is of a poor standard and repairs of the building are not done quickly or efficiently."

Unfortunately, this is an example of where we've not communicated effectively. The rent does not cover stair cleaning – this is a service only some tenants receive and is paid for via a Service Charge, which is completely separate from the rent. The stair cleaning is a basic clean only, and deep cleans are only carried out every

three years. To do this yearly would mean a much higher Service Charge. In the past we have consulted with tenants if they want to pay more for a more thorough service, but this has never been popular.

As for repairs – see our Customer Service Standards article below for information on repair timescales.

The Ugly:

"I think you already charge a lot of money for tiny flats it's ridiculous that you are planning on charging more.

A decrease in rent as what you charge compared to the council is shocking for the tiny flats"

We are a Housing Association and a charity, and are funded in a completely different way to Council Housing. We may seem similar because we give the same type of tenancy but a lot of our services are very different. We need to increase the rents to keep in line with rising costs so that we can continue to provide a first-class service.

Unlike East Lothian Council, we are still repaying loans taken out to buy almost all our homes, and this accounts for 47% of what our rents have to cover.

We did address some of the many reasons why our rents aren't as low as East Lothian Council on the consultation microsite, and this is still available to read.

Consultation Information & FAQ

www.elha.com/consultations/rent-2024/information.php

It's also important to make sure you are claiming your maximum Rent Discounts – visit your My Home account to find out more, or ask a member of staff.

Scrutinising New Builds



Our latest TIG-Scrutiny Report is now available

The tenants on the Scrutiny Group looked at satisfaction with new builds and the defects* process. They have made several recommendations to our Audit & Assurance Committee and changes will be made to processes from 1 April 2024.

You can find the report (and the reports on past scrutiny projects in the Join In section:

www.elha.com/page/tenant-scrutiny

**Defects are the name for anything which needs fixed in the first 12 months after someone moves into a new build home. For example, if the door sticks, a light switch is missing a screw, a squeaky floorboard, or something else which was missed while the property was being built.*

Right to Repair and Alternative Contractors

The Right to Repair Scheme ensures that Housing Association tenants receive a good repair service for important repairs. Repairs which fall under Right to Repair must be completed within a set response time, and if we fail to meet this timescale, we must pay you compensation. You also have the right to use an alternative contractor to carry out the repair if we're unable to do it. If this happens, we will cover the costs as long as the reason we were not able to complete the repair isn't because you were not home or refused access to your home when a repair operative arrived.

The alternative contractor for all repairs other than repairs to your gas systems is East Lothian Council.

The alternative contractor for gas repairs is R3 Repairs Limited.

To find out more, please visit the Right to Repair page on elha.com:

www.elha.com/page/right-to-repair



**MAKE
A
STAND**

Our homes, our people,
our problem.

Domestic Abuse Help

If you've been threatened or feel unsafe

Call the police on 999 if you need protection immediately. If it's too dangerous to speak, dial '55' on your mobile when you're prompted.

You can also let the operator know you need help by tapping the phone or making a noise.

Resources:

[Our domestic abuse page](http://www.elha.com/page/domestic-abuse)

www.elha.com/page/domestic-abuse

[Citizens Advice Scotland](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/law-and-courts/gender-violence1/help-for-domestic-abuse-s/) has some great resources for persons experiencing domestic abuse.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/law-and-courts/gender-violence1/help-for-domestic-abuse-s/

We're not able to provide temporary accommodation, but East Lothian Council and Women's Aid can:

[Women's Aid](https://womensaideml.org/)

<https://womensaideml.org/>

[East Lothian Council](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210552/helping_you_find_somewhere_else_to_live/11944/homelessness)

www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210552/helping_you_find_somewhere_else_to_live/11944/homelessness





Planned & Cyclical Maintenance

We have lots of upgrade works scheduled to take place during the 2024/25 financial year. While this is our current plan, dates are subject to change.

All projects are subject to a pre-maintenance survey.



Town	Bathroom Replacement	Door Replacement	Kitchen Replacement	Heating Upgrade	Shower Upgrade	Window Replacement	External Painting
Bolton			5				
Cockenzie				16 Osborne Court			
East Saltoun	9						
Gifford		26	2				
Gullane	12	12				12	
Haddington			14 Hardgate Court				51 Bothwell Avenue
Macmerry							1
Musselburgh			30 New Street & North High Street	30 North High Street		2 Delta View	
Ormiston			1				
Pencaitland	1						
Prestonpans	17 Grey School Corner	17 Grey School Corner	25 Flying Scotsman Way & Mallard Walk	4 Grange Crescent East			83
Tranent	2 Plough Lane		106 Baxters Gate & The Hedges				
Wallyford					1		57 Fa'side – all areas
West Barns				8 Edinburgh Road			



Keep the Heid Café

Do you need a safe place to talk?

Keep the Heid is a weekly mental health café for anyone over 16.

Available 7pm to 9pm

Tuesday evenings at The Fraser Centre, 3A Winton Place, Tranent, EH33 1AF

Thursday evenings at the Hope Rooms, 34 Forth Street, North Berwick, EH39 4HD

Friday evenings at The Trinity Centre, 5 Church Street, Haddington, EH41 3EX

Doors open at 7pm for an informal chat, then at 7:30pm the session will begin. After that there is an opportunity for everyone to talk – or you can just listen if you prefer. Keep the Heid is designed as a safe space to talk about your worries or stresses, but is not an advice service.

Free coffee, tea and snacks are provided.

If you have any queries, you can get in touch:

Email: keeptheheidcafe@gmail.com

Phone: 07548 136575

Some quotes from users:

"When you've been through the system, it's like a lifeline. It's not fixing you. It's a place of safety."

"It's a wonderful thing to be able to share and learn that it's ok to not be ok, and that with somewhere to go to be open and get things out there in a very trusting place is a true lifesaver."

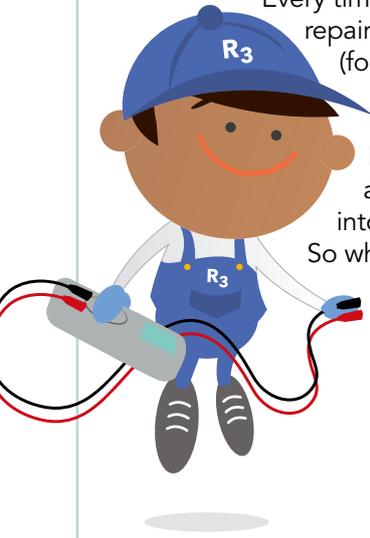
"Thank you for giving us the support we need...the bond I have with other members...they are the tribe I've never had in my life; the impact of this group is immense."



Prize Draw Winners

Congratulations to James & Faye from Gullane for winning £50 in the monthly repair survey prize draw.

Every time you complete a repair satisfaction survey (found by clicking the little speech bubble icon in your repair history), you're automatically entered into the monthly draw. So why not pop over to My Home and check your repair history page?



Dogs And Your Home

With the new legislation around the XL Bully dog breed, we'd like to remind tenants that they must abide by this and current rules regarding dogs.

We know this is a sensitive topic – pets are part of a family – and we will deal with any issues around any pet with care. Please keep in mind that the tenant is responsible for anything which goes on in their home, and any negative impact on neighbours through the actions of other household members, including pets. We also do not allow dogs in communal stairs, unless we have given permission for someone to have a dog, e.g. qualified guide dogs or you registered your dog with us in 2017.

Also, if you are experiencing problems with a neighbour's dog, we do have advice available on elha.com

Money Advice

Our new Money & Home Energy Adviser, Andrew is settling in well, and helping tenants who are looking for a bit of money advice or help to heat their home efficiently. Andrew is not the only source of advice for our tenants though - Citizens Advice Scotland also provides free confidential advice and can help tenants for example, if you're being moved from legacy benefits onto Universal Credit and need a little extra help with the application process



Haddington CAB:
01620 824471
Musselburgh CAB:
0131 653 2748



Health & Safety Reminder

Just a quick reminder that if you're a smoker, please air out your home before any of our staff visit you at home. Please also do not smoke when repair operatives are working in your home.

Second-hand smoke, or passive smoking as it's sometimes called, is detrimental to people's health. Being exposed to second-hand smoke even for a short time can cause eye irritation, headache, cough, sore throat, dizziness and nausea.

We therefore ask if you would do everything possible to provide a smoke free environment when our staff visit you in your home.



Customer Service Standards

We publish our Customer Service timescales and expectations on elha.com and here in **Talkback**. We explain the best way to get in touch with us, and how quickly you can expect a response.



	Target Response Time (all within)
Written Communication	
Time taken to reply to your letter (including those sent through My Home)	5 working days
If we cannot reply to your letter in 5 days, we will let you know we've received it and respond in full	(10 working days if we have contacted you to let you know we cannot respond in 5 working days)
Statutory requests (for example, and application for an exchange, to add a joint tenant, sublet, etc)	
Acknowledgement	2 working days
Full response	20 working days
Reply to your Facebook comment	1 working day
Full Tenant Consultations	
Respond to individual comments	20 working days
Feedback to all tenants on outcome	3 months
Complaints	
Stage 1	5 working days
Stage 2	3 working days (acknowledgement) 20 working days (full response)
Appeals Against Decisions	
1st Appeal	2 working days (acknowledgement) 10 working days (full response)
2nd Appeal	3 working days (acknowledgement) 20 working days (full response)
Neighbour Complaints	
initial response to a complaint	
Category A - very serious, e.g. violence involved	3 working days
Category B - serious or persistent issues	5 working days
Category C - routine	10 working days
Repairs	
Routine Repairs	10 working days
Urgent Repairs	3 working days
Emergency Repairs	2 hours
Phone Calls	
Answer the telephone	6 rings
Respond to voicemail	1 working day
Office Meetings	
By appointment	We will see you on time
Appointment required	You will get an appointment within 1 week

Become a Member

Do you have an interest in how we're run? Why not become a member? A life membership only costs £1, and becoming a member gives you the right to:

- Vote for who is on the Management Committee that runs ELHA
- Stand for election to our Management Committee
- Attend and vote at our Annual General meeting (AGM)

You can apply by completing a simple form and paying your £1. All applications for membership are considered by our Management Committee, which meet seven times a year.

New members will be issued with:

- A Share Certificate
- A copy of our Rules
- A copy of our most recent Annual Report
- Details of how Members can participate in the Association, including the AGM, and how to stand for election to the Management Committee

To find out more, please contact us by filling in the Join In form in your **My Home** account, or e-mail us at enquiries@elha.com.

