

# talkback

summer '14



## Irresponsible Dog Owner Loses Home

In our last newsletter we told you that we had made the difficult decision to withdraw one tenant's permission to keep a dog because she was allowing it to urinate in the common stair and not cleaning up after it.

We're sorry to report that rather than do as we asked and start cleaning up after her dog, the tenant left us no option but to take her to court and, when we won the case, she chose to give up her tenancy rather than get rid of her pet. We understand the last bit - pets are often much loved members of the family - but surely that means that you make sure they don't annoy your neighbours so that they can stay with you?

We thought we'd take this opportunity to remind all of our tenants that a tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract and so most of the clauses in it can be enforced through the courts. Whether it's controlling pets, keeping your garden tidy or paying rent we will always try to find out why the contract is not being kept and to help if we can, but if we have to we **will** go to Court to enforce the terms of the contract and we will always seek to recover the costs.

It's easy to think that you can't lose your home over something that seems trivial like not cleaning a stair or cutting your grass but, if all else fails, you can.



Well-wishers gathered to celebrate the 100th birthday of Nancy Patterson in June. Nancy has been a tenant in our sheltered housing complex in Cockenzie since she was a youthful 84.

Many thanks to the East Lothian Courier, who allowed our Chief Executive, Martin Pollhammer to bring along the 1914 archive, which included a newspaper from the day Nancy was born.

Amongst her accomplishments, Nancy was a Scottish Highland Dance Champion in the 1920s.

Local dancer, Fiona Matheson, daughter of one of our staff members, entertained everyone with a Highland Sword Dance.



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## Did You Know?

We can arrange private repairs, if you want some work done around your home.

If you need a repair that is your responsibility, or if you want to make an alteration or improvement to your home, we can arrange for someone to do the work for you. An example of work we may organise for you:

- Changing a lock
- Repairing a broken window
- Replacing broken fixtures and fittings
- Full home cleaning
- Stripping wallpaper

We offer a discount for prompt payers!

For more information, contact our Asset Management department by calling **01620 825032** or e-mailing [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com).

**UC** Universal Credit

## Hit the Red Button!

If you do not have internet access in your home, but do have Sky or Virgin Interactive, you can now find information about Universal Credit (UC) and finding work by hitting the red button on your TV remote control.

The new services, by the Department for Work and Pensions in partnership with Looking Local, have been designed to give the 7 million adults who do not have home internet, access to important information about the new benefit.



## Payday Loans Tools

In an ideal world, no one would need payday loans – we've all heard the horror stories – but some people feel there really is no other choice.

The Money Advice Service (MAS) has put together information to help people find the right option for them, whether that's a payday loan or one of the other alternatives.

Web: <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/payday-loans>  
Tel: 0300 500 5000



## Equalities & Diversity Statement

We pride ourselves on treating everyone fairly. We don't always get it right, but we are committed to making sure that everyone who contacts us gets access to the service(s) they need in the way they prefer.

Our Equalities & Diversity statement is available on request, or by visiting [elha.com](http://elha.com).



## Prepared for the Worst?

Would you like to be part of the emergency planning process for East Lothian?

East Lothian Council's Resilient Communities Workshop takes place at 9.30am on Saturday, 25th October, at the Brunton in Musselburgh.

The purpose of the workshop is to discuss best practice, share information and highlight/promote Resilient Communities. The workshop will be hosted by East Lothian Council and involve local community representatives, Police, Ambulance, Fire Brigade and East Lothian Council staff.

If you'd like to take part, or just find out a little more about emergency planning, take a look at the Ready Scotland website: <http://www.readyscotland.org/my-community>

# Housing Benefit Mythbuster

If you are off work sick and your income reduces, you CAN claim Housing Benefit, even though you have a job. Housing Benefit entitlement is based purely on your income, not your employment status.



# Special Uplift Waiting List

Please be aware that ELC's Special Uplift service has a waiting list of around three months. So if you're planning a clear-out, book your uplift first by calling **01875 824 305**.

Remember – if you leave discarded items and rubbish lying out in communal areas or on the street, we can and will charge you the cost of having them removed.



## Do something different today

### Join a car club

If you don't need to use a car every day, and if you drive less than 6,000 miles a year, it makes a lot of sense to join a car club. Save money, walk a bit more, and reduce your carbon emissions.

If you live in or near Haddington or Dunbar you could have

access to a fuel-efficient car that a car club insures, cleans and services so you don't have to. It costs only £25.00 to join, and a minimum £5.00 per month charge, and your membership allows you to use cars in either town, and indeed in other sister car clubs around the UK.

See the websites for more details.

Or phone Co-wheels **0191 375 1050**.



Car Club Haddington

Easywheels Car Club Haddington  
[www.easywheels.org.uk](http://www.easywheels.org.uk)



Sparewheels in Dunbar  
[www.sparewheels.org.uk](http://www.sparewheels.org.uk)

# NHS24 New FREE Number

NHS 24, Scotland's provider of telephone and web based health advice and information, is now available on a new, free to call number: **111**.

The new telephone number was launched at the end of April and means that people throughout Scotland can contact the service free of charge from a landline or mobile.



## Hi – Can You Read Me?

This newsletter is available in several formats – print, CD and electronic document.

If you need/want to switch how you get your newsletter, please contact our Customer Information Officer, Mary Hargreaves, by e-mailing [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com), calling on **01620 825032** or visit [elha.com](http://elha.com) and either change

your preferences on your digital tenant account, or click the big red Live Help button.



# UC Universal Credit Housing Benefit Pilot Scheme

We want to be ready for the changes that will come with Universal Credit (UC). One of the biggest changes is that the housing component of UC will be paid to tenants and they will have to pay their rent on to us, rather than it

coming straight to us. In order to find out the challenges this will bring, from the 1st of April, we have asked some of our new tenants on Housing Benefit to have it paid directly to them and set up regular rent payments.

We will be monitoring these cases closely to identify any areas where we might need to have extra support in place to help people through the transition to UC. And we'll keep you updated with what we find.

# Your Neighbourhood



While the sun is (hopefully) out, we're conducting our annual estate inspections. You can find the dates as they're arranged on our 'Dates for your Diary' web page and on Facebook. If you'd like to be contacted before your area is inspected, please let us know, either by calling us on **01620 825032**, or by filling in the survey form on our diary page on **elha.com**.

And talking about your neighbourhood, we've had a request to clear up some things about gardens, so time for a Q&A:

## Q: What am I allowed to do to my garden?

A: Whatever you want, within reason. Your development may have restrictions in the Deed of Conditions you should check, and if you want to dismantle a wall or put up a shed, you will have to ask permission from us, but for most things – go for it.

## Q: But what if I want to dig up my front lawn and grow potatoes?

A: Absolutely fine, and a wise money-saving project!

## Q: Can I put in a driveway?

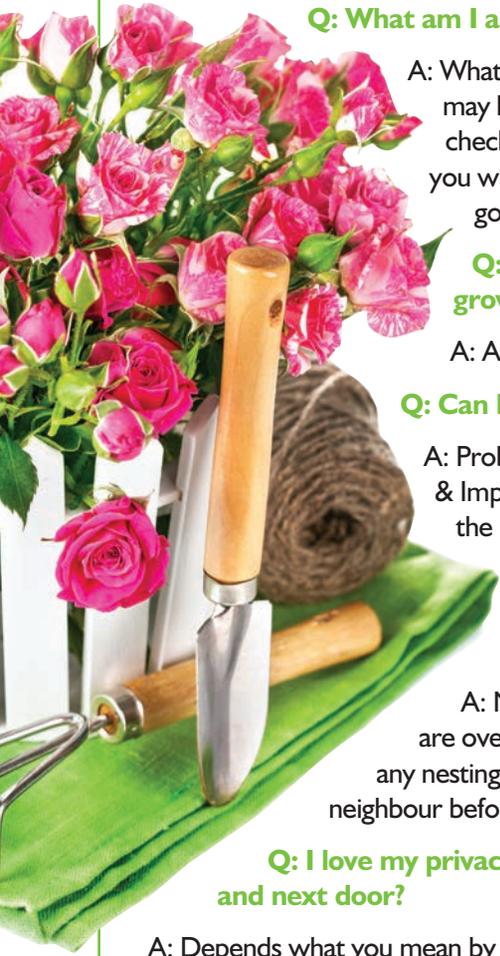
A: Probably, yes, but you need to fill out an Alterations & Improvements form first. Also – you have to drop the kerb, so you will have to get permission from East Lothian Council.

## Q: My neighbour has a big tree that hangs over into my garden, can you chop it down?

A: No, we can't. You can remove any branches which are over the property line, as long as you are not disturbing any nesting birds. Although we do recommend you talk to your neighbour before getting out the chainsaw!

## Q: I love my privacy – can I grow a huge hedge between my garden and next door?

A: Depends what you mean by 'huge'. Up to a 6 foot hedge is unlikely to cause problems, but over that your hedge may be considered a sun-blocking nuisance.



# Welcome Back, Claire!

It seems like no time at all since Housing Officer, Claire McMillan went off on maternity leave, but she will be back in August. While we're looking forward to having Claire back, it means a sad farewell from the Housing Team to Julie Peat, our temporary Arrears Officer, who will be heading back to the Finance Department.



Claire McMillan



Julie Peat



## How We're Doing - Watch This Space

The observant among you will have noticed that there is something missing from this summer edition of Talkback – our How We're Doing booklet. Don't worry – we're not hiding anything or running late, we've merged the booklet with our Annual Report and the new Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) Report into one bumper issue, so it will go out later in the year to coincide with our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September.

The new booklet will be produced in partnership with our Tenant Involvement Group (TIG), and will include our ARC performance data, set out with the same unique styling that's made our past annual reports such a talking point.

We'll do our best to make sure it's worth the wait!



## Consultation Calendar

We will be consulting with tenants on the following this year:

<b>Stair Cleaning</b>	<b>July</b>
<b>Garden Care Scheme</b>	<b>September</b>
<b>Rent Increase</b>	<b>November to January</b>

Plus, we run small surveys via the 5 minute comment card and Facebook/Survey Monkey during the year, and you are able to leave feedback on anything by using the Praise or Grumble feature on [elha.com](http://elha.com).

Is there anything you think we should be asking you about? If you have any ideas, please let us know by getting in touch with: a letter, a telephone call, a text message, an e-mail, a live help chat, a Facebook message, or popping into our office. We value your opinions!



## Money Advice

### Case Study



**I recently saw a tenant who had been made redundant on health grounds and was struggling to manage. She had a number of priority debts, including rent and council tax arrears, and several non-priority debts.**

**“Over several weeks I helped her make benefit applications for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) due to her health problems.”**

I visited her at her home and she told me that dealing with bills had become overwhelming. The situation had gone on for several months as the tenant had taken the ‘Ostrich’ approach and buried her head in the sand, not being able to deal with any of it.

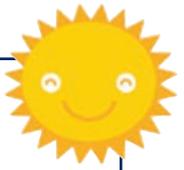
Over several weeks I helped her make benefit applications for Employment and Support Allowance

(ESA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) due to her health problems. I also did a referral to the East Lothian Food Bank as she had no money left for food and made an application to the Scottish Welfare Fund for a crisis grant as she needed money for her gas and electricity meters and other living expenses.

The tenant was paid ESA and placed in the support group. She was also awarded DLA middle rate care and lower rate mobility components.

Once her benefits were in payment I was then able to help her sort out her budget and finances to a manageable level. I spoke to the council and the other creditors on her behalf which led to a reduction in the money she was paying out every week to priority creditors for council tax and utility bills. Payments to other creditors were frozen for 6 months to enable her to manage her budget and get to the point where she would then be able to resume normal repayments.

My intervention helped the tenant sort out her affairs, and get to a point where she was more confident in managing financial matters.



## CRIME FIGURES

East Lothian residents should be aware that burglaries in rural coastal areas are on the increase. As the weather warms up, please be aware of the risks of leaving unattended windows and doors open for ventilation, and **if you see anything suspicious don't be afraid to dial 101 and report it.**



## Talk to us about repairs!

When we did our large scale survey last year, you told us that you feel repairs are the most important service we provide. Unfortunately, getting feedback on individual repairs can be quite hard - we tend to only get feedback when something has gone wrong. And while we absolutely do want to know when things have gone wrong, it would be good to know when things have gone 'not bad', 'fine', 'pretty good' or 'wow' too.

Although not all our repairs are carried out by R3, for example, we use Lothian Gas for many heating repairs, most day-to-day repairs will be done by R3. And anyone in an R3 shirt who carries out a repair on your home should give you the chance to fill out a short satisfaction survey on their handheld device. If they don't - please ask for it! The survey is confidential: the tradesperson won't know how you've scored them, so please take the time to tell us what you think.

**And don't forget - you can leave feedback on [elha.com](http://elha.com) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.**



**Respond  
Repair  
Rebuild**

## Your Local Heroes!

Out of the blue, in late May, our out of hours repair contractor, First Call, terminated their contract, effective immediately. As you can imagine, this could have been a disaster of epic proportions!

Fortunately, R3 Repairs Limited saved the day. R3 had run a trial out of hours service over the festive season which had gone really well, so with some super-speedy organisation, they had an effective out of hours service up and running less than half an hour later!

So from now on, when you report a repair after 5pm, you'll get R3. Just call the usual number - nothing has changed except you'll be getting a better service.



## Your Home, Your Rent

If your rent is always paid on the 1st of every month and you never have any problems making that payment, thank you and please feel free to skip this article (although you may want to hang onto the leaflet - just in case).

Paying rent isn't a choice, if you live in one of our properties, you must pay for it, the same way you have to pay for your food, your gas/electric, and other essentials in life. You can receive help to pay, eg: Housing Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), but the bottom line is that you must pay your rent, and if you don't, you may lose your home.

In the last three years, we have evicted 14 households for not paying rent. If you are having problems, contact your Housing Officer or get in touch with our Money Adviser - don't let this happen to you.

## Prize Draw Winners

Congratulations to Marc Strang from Ormiston, who won April's repair survey prize draw, and Vicki McClung from Dunbar who won our Digital Services survey prize draw.

Both tenants are now £50 better off, and remember - we give away £50 every month to someone who has completed a repair satisfaction survey!



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

