

TENANTS NEWSLETTER

December 2009

OFFICE OPENING TIMES

MONDAY – THURSDAY 9.00AM TO 5.00PM

FRIDAY 9.00AM TO 4.00PM

**Christmas Close down from 5pm 21st Dec -until
9am 5th Jan 2010.**

SEE ENCLOSED LEAFLET for Emergency numbers

Contact us on 01620 829300

Or by email info@homesforlife.co.uk

Homes for Life Housing Partnership
57 Market Street
HADDINGTON
East Lothian
EH41 3JG
Tel 01620 829300
Fax 01620 829993



Here's your winter newsletter to let you know how your Company is doing

This is your newsletter - if you would like an article published please send it to:

Hilary Mark
Customer Service Manager
Homes for Life Housing Partnership
57 Market Street
Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3JG

Homes for Life reserve the right to refuse publication

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- Rent Policy Consultation
- Board Changes
- Important Changes to Housing Benefit
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Please note Kingdom Gas phone no. **0800 389 9463** Some tenants are *still* using the old contractor Hepburn's number.

Important Consultation

Changes to our Rent Policy

Everyone should now have received their consultation pack with feedback sheet and reply paid envelope.

Within your pack was a ...

- ~ Guide to Understanding Rents
- ~ Consultation notice – explaining the proposals and why
- ~ Feedback Response Sheet (plus envelope)
- ~ Local Rent Comparisons
- ~ Summary of winners and losers under the new system

...and a letter showing how the proposed changes would affect your individual rent. Please take the time to read through what we're proposing and the reasons why and let us know what you think by 23rd December.

We'd like to thank the tenants who took part in the preliminary consultation and those who've agreed to be part of future initial consultations. Your contribution really does make a difference.

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Your New Board of Directors

We'd like you to welcome **Jim McLeish** as your new **Chair** and as **David Rose** as new **Vice Chair**, following elections of office bearers at the Board meeting held 30th September 2009.

Former Chair Jackie Sinclair saw the Board through a difficult year

The Board is now currently made up of:

Tenant Directors

Jim McLeish, MacMerry (Tenant Chair)

Jackie Sinclair, Haddington (Tenant Director)

Gordon Leitch, Gladsmuir (Tenant Director)

Tony James, Elphinstone (Tenant Director)

Louise Munro, Elphinstone (Tenant Director)

Ian Finlayson, Dunbar (Tenant Director)

Jamila Greig, Cockenzie (Tenant Director)

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Kevin Blackie, Gullane (Prospective Tenant Director)

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Co-opted Directors

Brenda Tonner (Director Muirhouse HA)

Tom Mitchell (Corporate & Risk Consultant)

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### **Other Directors**

Ian Wauchope (Finance Manager SFHA)

David Rose (Community Council, Vice Chair)

Victor Cummings (Community Council)

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The staff are pleased to be working with the new Board members to continue to improve the services to our tenants.

Housing Benefit Calculations

If you receive Housing Benefit to help you pay your rent, or you have recently failed to qualify for Housing Benefit, this information is important to you.

The Government is changing the way Housing Benefit is calculated. Up until now, Child Benefit has been counted as income when assessing how much Housing Benefit someone is entitled to. **From 1 November 2009,**

- Child Benefit will **no longer** be taken into consideration. So, **if you receive Child Benefit, you may now be eligible for Housing Benefit, or your Housing Benefit may increase.**

- They have also raised the **savings threshold** for people in receipt of **pensions**. If you currently receive Housing Benefit they will automatically recalculate your entitlement. If you've recently made an unsuccessful claim you may now be entitled.

If you applied within the last 13 weeks, all you need to do is contact the Council on the number below, and ask them to re-assess your application. If it was longer ago, you will need to complete a new application. East Lothian Council hope to begin re-assessing these applications in December 2009, but we do not know how long it will take them. If you think this affects you East Lothian Council on **01620 827 827** and ask for the Housing Benefit for Private Tenants Team.

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Service Improvements **Updates**

Trickle Transfer Properties - Upgrade Update

We are currently out to tender for half a million pounds worth of modernisation work required to ensure all 27 trickle transfer properties meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Priced tenders are due back on **Friday 18th December**.

It will be early January 2010 before we are able to confirm the preferred contractor's proposed programme. We hope that it will be possible for work to start at the end of January 2010 and to be completed by August 2010.

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### **Reprocurement of Repairs Service**

Now that the Trickle Transfer improvement program is under way it is time to focus the Company's consideration on improvements to the Repairs Service.

The Tenant Panel has considered the scope for/potential of single trade contracts with smaller contractors, but concluded that due to the limited scale of work generated and the broad distribution of our stock they could not be guaranteed an adequate service. Instead they preferred to restrict tendering to multi trade contractors with specific experience of delivering this kind of service and sufficient depth of resources. Also, tenants are keen to ensure that if possible, the re-procurement process does not exclude ELC who has already confirmed its interest in tendering. ELC will meantime extend current arrangements through to implementation of a new service in

**October 2010**, following re-procurement, whatever the outcome.

Due to the scale of the contract European Union Procurement rules will apply, which means open advertising in the European Journal in early January. We are already aware of two other locally based contractors with relevant experience who are interested in tendering.

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Landscape Maintenance Services and Gas Maintenance and Service

Last year we went out to tender for both the Gas Maintenance and Landscape Maintenance contracts following poor performance by the previous contractors.

Iss Waterers – have now carried out one season of cutting and after a shaky start we have witnessed a significant improvement in the service and tenant satisfaction. They are now starting the winter program. To address the backlog of works needed on the shrub beds. They are starting with the beds at Gullane, moving on to deal with the beds in Ormiston next, and then other developments.

Kingdom Gas – have successfully gained access to **all** properties to carry out their annual service within the statutory 12 month period – a considerable improvement on the previous contractor's performance and again tenants satisfaction with their service is significantly higher.

Please see the enclosed leaflet with details of the Emergency services and contact numbers during the Festive period.

If you are in doubt about what constitutes an Emergency Repair please refer to your Tenant Handbook and particularly the section titled "Right to Repair"

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The Council has made special arrangements for waste and recycling collections over Christmas and Hogmanay.

Due to the holidays, household collections of refuse bins and recycling boxes due on Friday 25 December will instead be collected on Sunday 27 December. Similarly the collection due on Friday 1 January will take place on Sunday 3 January. Householders are asked to use the blue box or bin to recycle greetings cards, envelopes, non-foil wrapping paper, cardboard packaging and Yellow Pages. This service can also collect large cardboard boxes if they are flattened and tied in a bundle or placed inside another cardboard box so they are easy to collect.

There will be no brown bin collections of garden refuse from Friday 25 December to Thursday 7 January 2010 inclusive. The recycling centres which are normally open seven days a week during the winter from 8.30 am to 4.15 pm, will be closed on 25 and 26 December and 1 and 2 January. They will also close early at 2.30 pm on Christmas Eve and Hogmanay. Once the holiday season is over, residents can compost their natural Christmas trees by taking them to a recycling centre, leaving them beside their brown bins on collection day, or phoning 01875 824 305 to request a collection

East Lothian Council's Noise nuisance team

Night Time Noise Service between 1830 Hours - 0330 Hours on a **Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday night**. - **0131 311 3131**.

Day time noise (0900 Hours - 1700 Hours) during Monday to Friday **01620 827 365**

Day time on a Saturday or a Sunday (or during other periods not covered by Noise Service) then you should call the Police on **0131 311 3131**

Digital Switchover Are You Ready?

East Lothian is part of the 'central' area covering Edinburgh & Lothians and the changeover to Digital TV is due to take place between April 2010 and June 2011. After this date, analogue televisions will no longer be able to pick up TV signals without a freeview box, telephone connection, or cable or satellite connection. While your aerial may be able to pick up digital TV, it may need to be replaced or adjusted. If you have a communal aerial, we will contact you nearer the time to discuss what needs to be done. If you do not have a communal aerial, the upkeep of your aerial is your responsibility. To check your aerial strength visit **Teletext 284**.

If you would like to replace your current aerial, you must fill in our alteration and improvement form and receive permission before you make any changes.

The only Homes for Life properties with a communal aerial are the flats at St Andrew Street North Berwick, Forth Street North Berwick, Kennedy Court, Haddington, Davidson Place/Terrace Haddington and the flats with a communal stair in Muirfield Gardens, Gullane.

If you are unsure if you have a communal aerial or not, please contact us though the website on www.homesforlife.co.uk by phone the office on **01620 829300**.

You can get advice and information on going digital by contacting Digital UK on 08456 50 50 50 or visiting www.digital.co.uk. They will in any case notify all license holders well in advance of their final timetable for switchover.