

TENANTS NEWSLETTER

December 2008



OFFICE OPENING HOURS

OVER

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR

The Office will be closed from
3.00pm on Friday 19th Dec 08
and reopen at
9.00am on Monday 5th Jan 09
or by email info@homesforlife.co.uk

REPAIRS

Please note during the Christmas close down our contractors will be operating an **EMERGENCY ONLY** service. Please keep the enclosed leaflet handy for the telephone numbers you may need if you have an Emergency Repair during this period

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



Tenant Panel Meeting



On Wednesday 12th November we held a meeting with our tenants who had agreed to be part of a Tenant Panel to look at :

- ✓ the procurement of the Repairs and Maintenance Contract
- ✓ the procurement of the Gas Service and Maintenance Contract
- ✓ restructuring Rents
- ✓ reviewing a number of Housing Management policies such as
 - Rechargeable Repairs,
 - Estate Management,
 - Compensation for Improvement
 - Planned Maintenance
 - Rent
 - Tenant Participation

A group of tenants have agreed to look over these policies and submit feedback which we will report back to you in your next Newsletter.

If you would like to be part of future Tenant Panel meetings please let us know and you will receive an invite to the meeting.

If you would like a copy of the minutes of this meeting please contact the office and we'd be pleased to send them out.

ELHA – Allocation Policy changes

The main changes to their policy.

Everyone who registers after 1 December 2008 will be assessed under the new policy. Everyone who is already registered before 1 December 2008 will get a letter telling them how the changes affect them. They will start using our new policy to allocate properties in January 2009.

Equal Opportunities

It was clear from some of the answers to the consultation that many people think that higher priority is given to some groups of applicants such as single parents or migrant workers. The policy on equal opportunities has not changed, everyone is treated the same in homehunt. The rules governing who gets a Priority Pass and who doesn't, apply equally to everyone and no group or individual is given preferential treatment.

Changes to Priority Passes

This is the most significant change. If you already have a Priority Pass and it needs to be changed, this will happen automatically. They have also introduced a new "First Affordable Home" Priority Pass which is awarded at two levels- Silver, if you are living in private sector accommodation and spending more than half of your income on rent; and Bronze, if you are unable to leave home because you can't afford to. If you don't have a Priority Pass you will be sent a form to apply for the new Pass if you think you will qualify.

So, for example, if you were awarded a silver overcrowding pass under the old policy, this will automatically be changed to a gold overcrowding pass. If you have a medical pass, it will not change.

Advertising Properties

Each property is advertised on our website, ELHA's website and the homehunt website. In addition, adverts are displayed in East Lothian Council offices, libraries and Citizens Advice Bureaux. Under the old policy adverts also appeared in the East Lothian News, Musselburgh News and Lothian Times for two weeks and the closing date for applications was five days after the second advert appeared in the newspapers.

From January 2009 adverts will appear in the press for **one week only**, but the closing date for applications will be seven days after the newspaper advert. All of the other forms of advertising detailed above will continue and the advert will run for 10 days.

Appeal Process

Applicants have the right to appeal any decision made about their homehunt registration or application for Priority Passes. The appeal process has been brought into line with their Comments and Complaints policy. **Information about the right of appeal is included in all letters sent to applicants.**

The table below shows the level of passes awarded under the old policy and the level now awarded under the new policy.

Pass Type	"Old" Policy			"New" Policy			
	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Gold Plus	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Homelessness	√		√	√			√
Harassment		√	√			√	√
Overcrowding		√	√		√	√	
Under-occupation			√			√	
Unsuitable Housing		√	√		√		√
Need to be in a Community			√			√	√
Medical	√	√			√	√	
First Affordable Home	n/a	n/a	n/a			√	√

Have yourself a merry, **GREEN** Christmas!



Christmas! A time of goodwill and celebration, often accompanied by seasonal increases in eating, drinking and spending. If all goes well this combination should result in a lot of fun, but unfortunately it will also result in an estimated **3 million tonnes of waste**. Around half of the waste produced by households at Christmas could easily be recycled, but last year almost 90% ended up in the dustbin. But you can have the best of both worlds. With a bit of thought you can limit the impact you have on the environment this Christmas and still have a great time.

Having a green Christmas doesn't mean being a Scrooge! Just follow these simple action points for cutting down on Christmas waste:

- Buy a UK-grown real tree with roots that can be planted in your garden or kept in a pot for next year. Ensure your tree goes out on the Brown bin collection day for re-cycling. Artificial trees are a good alternative as they can be used many times.
- Take your own re-usable shopping bags with you when you do your Christmas shopping. Around 125,000 tonnes of plastic packaging are thrown away over Christmas.
- It's tempting to over-buy food at Christmas, but save yourself some cash by trying to plan menus for the holiday season. **The average family wastes around a third of the food they buy.**
- On the day, don't rip open those beautifully wrapped presents from friends. Carefully remove the paper and use again for wrapping up presents, flower bouquets and wine bottles, making decorations or even covering books.

- **The Council operates a network of over 80 Recycling Points throughout East Lothian** which provide facilities to recycle glass and cans, with the larger sites also having facilities for paper and textiles. By using these banks for wrapping paper, wine bottles etc you will reduce the volume of material sent to landfill sites and help the environment. At the four Recycling Centres in the county there are also facilities to recycle a range of other materials including electrical goods, food and drink cartons, scrap metal, garden waste, rubble, cardboard, wood and plastic bottles. We've enclosed a sheet showing where your nearest recycling point is and what it can take.

- **If you've been inundated with junk mail this Christmas**, contact the Mailing Preference Service on 0207 291 3310 to remove your name from mailing lists

- **Last year we sent around 744 million Christmas cards**. If all these were recycled instead of thrown away, it would help to save the equivalent of 248,000 trees. You can take them to either Tesco stores or WH Smiths for recycling. This service is available from 3rd Jan and collected cards are sent to the Woodland Trust for recycling.

- **More than 8,000 tonnes of wrapping paper will be used on Christmas presents**, using the equivalent of approximately 50,000 trees. Last Christmas, DEFRA estimated that 83 square km of wrapping paper ended up in UK rubbish bins Choose charity cards and wrapping paper which have some recycled paper content.

- **You can recycle your stamps too!** Cut out stamps leaving a 3mm margin around each one, pop them in a bag and take them to your nearest Oxfam Shop

- **Finally** - Put on that wooly Christmas jumper and save money on your heating bill !



A Special Note for Elderly People

During the winter, you could be at risk from hypothermia or other illnesses if you don't keep warm. Older people or people who are not well sometimes don't notice that they're getting cold.

Please consider the following to protect yourself from the cold:

- keep your house well heated, especially rooms where you spend most time
- if you are moving into another room (for example, a bedroom), try to heat it up for a while before you move in to it
- have at least one hot meal a day and have regular warm drinks in cold weather
- take a flask with a hot drink to bed if you feel cold at night
- take regular exercise and split your chores throughout the day – this will help keep you warm
- if you find someone who you think has hypothermia, call an ambulance and warm them gently (don't heat the person too quickly as this can be dangerous)

Winter fuel payments

The Government will again be making Winter Fuel Payments to people aged 60 or over for winter 2008/09. A Winter Fuel Payment is an annual payment to help people aged 60 and over with the costs of keeping warm this winter.

● **If you are aged 60 to 79 you will get either £125 or £250**

● **If you are aged 80 or over you will either £200 or £400**

You do not pay tax on Winter Fuel Payments.

If you got a Winter Fuel Payment last winter, you should have automatically got one this winter. **If you need to make a claim for a payment for winter 2008/09, you should contact the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline is on 08459 151515**

Your New Board of Directors

We are delighted to welcome **Jackie Sinclair** as your new **Chair** and **Jim McLeish** as **Vice Chair**, following elections of office bearers at the Board meeting held 28th November 2008.

At the AGM held in September the members voted for a change to its Articles of Association and the structure of the Board of Directors which saw the representatives from East Lothian Council and East Lothian Housing Association step down to make way for further tenant directors.

The new Board is currently made up of:

Tenant Directors

Jackie Sinclair, Haddington (Tenant Chair)
Jim McLeish, MacMerry (Tenant Vice Chair)
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)

Co-opted Directors

Brenda Tonner (Director Muirhouse HA)
Tom Mitchell (Corporate & Risk Consultant)

Other Directors

Ian Wauchope (Finance Manager SFHA, former Finance Director Ark Housing Association)
Victor Cummings (Community Council)
David Rose (Community Council)

The staff are looking forward to working closely with the new Board members to continue to improve the services to our tenants.

Telephone 01620 829300

Fax 01620 829993

email: info@homesforlife.co.uk

Registered Social Landlord No.311 web : www.homesforlife.co.uk

Registered Charity No.028542

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