

TENANTS NEWSLETTER

OFFICE OPENING TIMES

MONDAY - THURSDAY 9.00AM TO 5.00PM

FRIDAY 9.00AM TO 4.00PM

Contact us on 01620 829300

Or by email info@homesforlife.co.uk

Homes for Life Housing Partnership
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HADDINGTON
East Lothian
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Here's your latest 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:

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Customer Service Manager
Homes for Life Housing Partnership
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Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3JG

Homes for Life reserve the right to refuse publication

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NOTE:

Please see the enclosed Briefing on the outcome of the Tenant Meetings to discuss the options for the future of Homes for Life

New Members of Staff

We are delighted to welcome three new members of staff!

The Company has gone through a very unsettled period, with uncertainty over the future resulting in the redundancy of our Development Officer Stuart Smail, our administrator Janice Thomson moving on to pursue other projects, and dependence on a succession of temporary Housing Officers. This meant there hasn't always been continuity in the service our tenants have received.

We are now very pleased to welcome our new Administrator [Alison Hume](#) and our new permanent Housing Officer [James McCallum-Browne](#). Alison has over 20 years of administrative experience and is a member of both the Association of Accounting and the Institute of Management. James is an experienced generic Housing Officer. He has worked for Heriot Watt University and Castle Rock Edinvar, holds a Diploma in Housing Studies and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Housing

If you have contacted the Company you most likely will have spoken to Jennifer Ellis, our very efficient and helpful Customer Service Assistant. Jennifer is now on Maternity Leave having given birth to a handsome baby boy! We are very lucky to have [Caroline Fletcher](#) covering for Jennifer. Caroline has 19 years of relevant experience in both finance and housing management in a wide variety of roles, most recently with East Lothian Housing Association.

New Directors

We are also delighted to welcome two new Tenant Directors to the Board of Homes for Life - [Louise Munro](#) from MacFarlane Court and [James Mcleish](#), from MacMerry. They are co-opted Directors. Two further tenants have agreed to step up to the challenge [Terry Martin](#), [Liz Salkeld](#) both from Barga Court Cockenzie, who are currently attending Board meetings pending election at the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM). We are also very pleased to welcome the expertise of [Brenda Toner](#) a Director at Muirhouse Housing Association to the Board.

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Rent Consultation

Rent Increase Consultation 2008/09

All Tenants were sent a consultation notice on the proposal to increase rents by 5%. There were a total of **23** responses from a good cross section of the Company's stock.

Tenants were offered the choice of implementing a lower increase this year and continuing to pay an above inflation increase next year or make this the last year rents are increased by RPI + 1% in line with the Business Plan. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 75%, have opted to pay the full 1% this year.

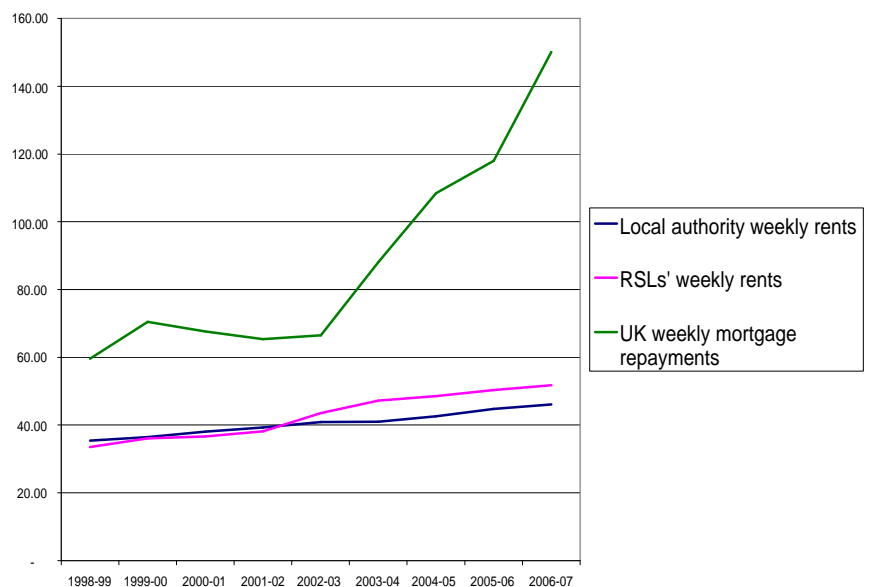
56% of tenants who responded felt Homes for Life's rents represent good value for money. 55% of tenants who responded felt RPI + 1% is a fair increase.

Some tenants felt there was not sufficient difference in the rents charged for different sized properties and that the rent for one bedroom properties in

particular was very high. The Company has agreed to look at the rent structure and consult tenants on this over the next year.

In response to some tenant feedback the graph below shows that over the past 10 years Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Local Authority (LA) rent have risen slowly in comparison to the dramatic increase of the average weekly mortgage payments.

Average weekly social landlord rents and mortgage repayments, 1998/99–2006/07



Other Local landlord's Rent Increases for 2008/09

East Lothian Council – 5.2%

East Lothian Housing Association – 5.0%

Castle Rock/Edinvar – 4.4%

Three Tenants indicated they would like to be involved in the Tenant Focus group to look in more detail at the Company's rent policy or any other tenant matters. We will be contacting these tenants directly.

If you'd like to join a group of tenants to discuss Tenant issues through the Tenant Forum please contact Hilary or James on 01620 829300

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Planned Maintenance

Our New build properties

After the successful completion of Phase One of Electrical safety testing and Painting we have nearly completed Phase Two of the painterwork to :

- Goldenstones Ave, Dunbar
- Limeylands Court, Ormiston
- Smiddy Wynd, East Linton
- Prestonkirk House, East Linton
- Roodlands Court, Haddington
- MacFarlane Court, Elphinstone

As a result of tenant feedback we have now stained and painted the previously untreated cedar boarding. The wood finish was originally installed as a low maintenance aspect to some properties but many tenants did not like the natural "weathered" look which resulted !

We are currently about to accept a tender for the Electrical safety testing for the same set of properties. We will be writing out to the tenants of the properties once dates have been finalised.

Our Trickle Transfer Properties

The maintenance priority for the year ahead is the general upgrade of our Trickle Transfer properties. These are 27 properties, mainly bungalows, spread throughout East Lothian which the Company bought from East Lothian Council in 1999 and 2001.

We have set aside **£147,000** in the budget for this year to start the First Phase of kitchen, heating and rewiring upgrades across the stock of these older properties. We will be writing out to the tenants of these properties to give them details nearer to time.

Not all properties will need all improvements and packages will vary from property to property.



Tenancy Management

We are continuing to service a number of complaints from tenants about how their neighbours are managing their tenancy.

In spite of repeated reminders and letters sent out tenants are still having to put up with inconsiderate neighbours. The main complaints are

- Dog Fouling
- Car Parking

Dog Fouling

A number of tenants have been reported to the Dog Warden and have been warned by the Warden that if they come to his attention again they will be subject to a statutory fine. The Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003 has made it an offence not to clean up immediately after dog fouling and dispose of the mess properly. The new law extends to all open spaces including grass areas, pavements and communal back gardens

If you fail to clean up after your dog, Police or Council Environmental officials may give you a fine. If you fail to pay your fine this will result in criminal proceedings

One witness is sufficient to provide evidence !

Car Parking

At the time you signed your tenancy agreement you were advised that each development provided restricted parking of **one space per household** whether this was by way of a driveway or a space in a parking bay. Again in spite of repeated letters out to tenants we are continuing to receive complaints that tenants cannot park because of the selfish behaviour or other tenants who have parked two and sometimes three vehicles in the development.

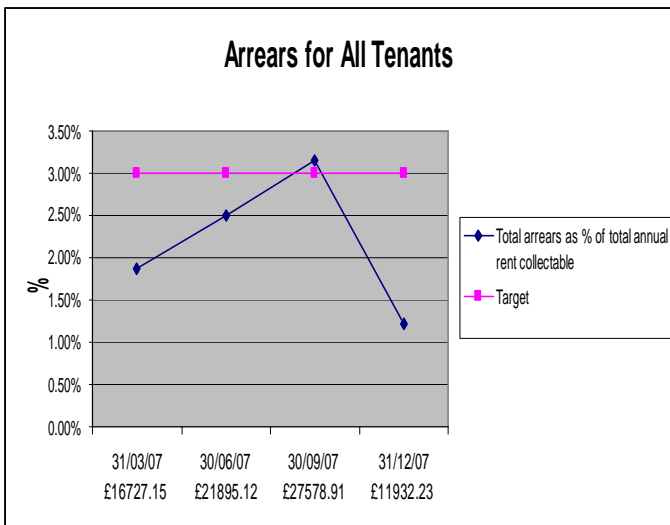
Allowing your dog to foul outside without clearing it up and inconsiderate parking are both breaches of your tenancy agreement.

Please be a good neighbour!

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Rent Arrears

We were commended in Communities Scotland's report on our low level of rent arrears and are pleased to report that our performance at collecting rent continues to be very good.



However in the past few months we have had three tenants end their tenancy without giving the Company the 28 days notice required by the Tenancy Agreement.

In one case the tenant had abandoned their property without telling anyone. In the other two cases the tenant had been rehoused by East Lothian Council and failed to notify us. In these cases, where we do have their details to pursue them for their outstanding rent, we will do so.

If you do wish to give up your tenancy please remember you must notify the Company 28 days before are intending to move house.



Repairs Telephone Numbers



1. DURING OFFICE HOURS

Phone East Lothian Council's call centre on:

0845 602 2223

2. EMERGENCY REPAIRS

Outside office hours for an EMERGENCY repair that cannot wait until the morning - Contact East Lothian Council's Property Service on their Emergency Number

01875 612 818

- for all EMERGENCY repairs except Gas Central Heating.

PLEASE NOTE - if you call out an emergency repair which is either your responsibility or which is not a genuine emergency, the cost of the call out and the repair will be charged back to you.

3. GAS CENTRAL HEATING

Your gas central heating is covered by a contract with Scottish Gas and if you experience any problems with your system you should call **0845 600 3455**.

If you think you can smell a gas leak, **NEVER** attempt to find a gas leak yourself. Instead contact **National Grid Gas plc** immediately on the following number - **0800 111 999**

Telephone 01620 829300

Fax 01620 829993

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