

## INTRO BY JAMILA

Looking back at 2021 it has been a challenging year for us all with the continuing impact of COVID on how we deliver our services.

Looking forward George Russell, Business Manager retired in November 2021 and we wish him well. As a result of this we will be conducting a Strategic Options Appraisal on how the organisation is shaped in the future in the best interest of our tenants. This will take place over the next few months.

Despite it having been a challenging year we have made excellent progress in a number of areas and go in to 2022 with a new Business Plan, new staff structure and improved ways of working which in turn will have a positive impact on how we deliver our services.

In early 2022, we will be carrying out a full Tenant Satisfaction Survey which will be conducted by Research Resource who are specialists in this area.

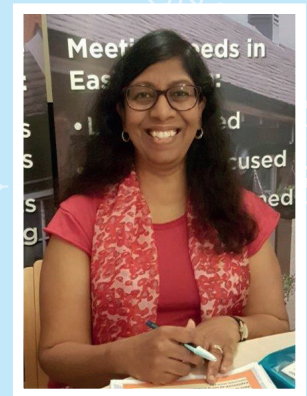
I am delighted to advise that the switchover to the new repairs service to R3 has gone smoothly and you are now able to phone and book repairs appointments. Next year we plan to roll out a tenant portal which will let you book repairs directly on-line.

At our December Board meeting the Board decided to make donations to the three Foodbanks we refer our tenants to, and all three were delighted to receive the donation and particularly at this time of year.

Finally, on behalf of the staff team and Board Members I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a safe and Merry Christmas and a Happy and prosperous New year and hope you can make use of the enclosed calendar.

Kind Regards

*Jamila Greig*



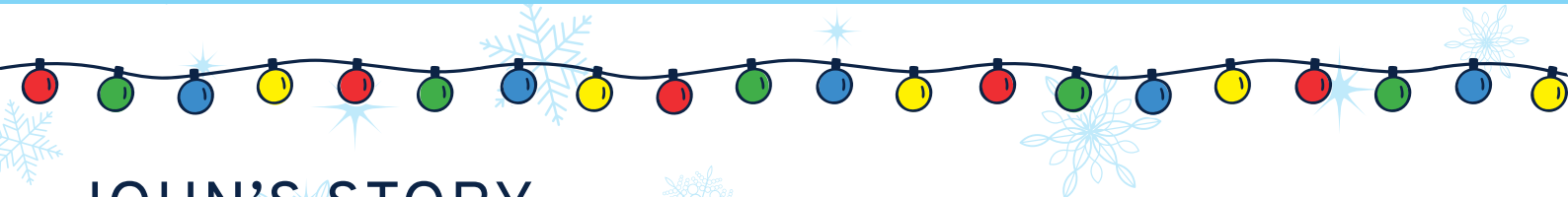
### CHRISTMAS SHUTDOWN

We will close for our Christmas break at **noon** on Christmas Eve and re-open at **9am** on **Thursday 6 January 2022.**

The emergency number to contact for all non-gas related repairs during this time is **R3 03000 999 247.**

For gas related repairs please contact Kingdom Gas on **0800 389 9463.**





# JOHN'S STORY

In the housing team you have to deal with many situations. One of the satisfying sides to the job is being able to impact positively on people's lives. This is the story behind one recent allocation. The tenant is happy to share his journey with you.

Having lived in a private rented flat in Haddington for 12 years, John's (not his real name) physical health and mobility deteriorated over the years. John made a request to his landlord to have adaptations carried out in the property to meet his medical need providing supporting evidence from Occupational Therapists and doctors. The landlord of the property was unwilling to make the necessary adaptations, and this prevented John from living independently in his home.

Earlier this year, John received a Notice to Quit from his landlord, which meant he had to leave his rented property, as the property was to be sold. This did not provide John with very much time to find suitable accommodation. Unfortunately, the move out date arrived, and John had been unsuccessful in finding suitable accommodation. John was moved into Temporary Accommodation facilitated by East Lothian Council until permanent housing could be identified.

After several weeks of living in temporary accommodation with belongings being held in storage. John was contacted by Homes for Life as a suitable property with a wet floor shower had come available that would meet his needs and due to his circumstances, as John was at the top of the allocations list.

We are happy to report that John has now been living in his home for the last 6 weeks enjoying his independence with the companionship of his pet cat.

### **If you need assistance:**

If you require medical aides such as grab rails, handrails, or adaptations such as a wet floor shower, please contact us on **01620 829300**.

You should also seek an assessment from an Occupational Therapist. You can contact East Lothian Occupational Therapist Team on **0300 369 0680**. Their phone lines are open from **9am-1pm daily**.



**If you were to score Homes for Life out of 10 what score would you give us and why?**

Can you complete and return to us by 15 January 2022.

**/10**

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Please let us have your response by email to [info@homesforlife.co.uk](mailto:info@homesforlife.co.uk); or complete and return by post to the office; or phone us with your answer between the 6th and 15th of January 2022.

If you take part in this survey, you will be entered into a prize draw for one of five £25 amazon gift vouchers. Good Luck..... we want to hear from you. One entry per household.



# SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF NEW REPAIRS CONTRACTOR R3

We are delighted that R3 have now fully taken over our repairs service. As of the 8th of December, R3 have been taking all our repairs calls.

The move to R3 has been a smooth one and we are delighted to be working with a local, reputable repairs contractor. We are sure the quality of service to you, our tenants, will be second to none.

As mentioned in the Repairs Bulletin, next year we will be introducing a new service where tenants can book repairs online. You will be able to book repairs and choose a time slot that suits you all with a few clicks.

As always, if you have any question, comments or concerns, don't hesitate to get in touch with a member of the Maintenance Team.

Just a reminder,  
the R3 number to  
call is:

**03000 999 247**

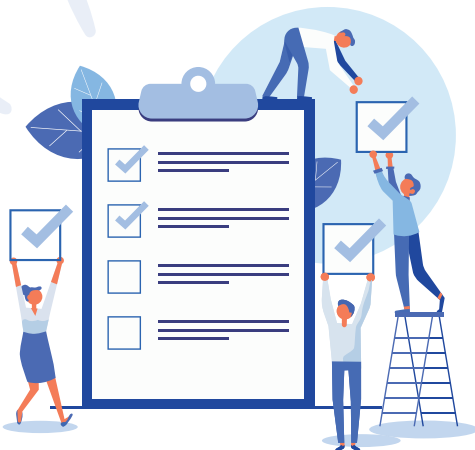


## STOCK CONDITION SURVEY

We recently had a full stock condition survey undertaken. Thanks again to all tenants for allowing the surveyors access. We now have all the information from this survey and will use it to plan all the improvement works we will be doing over the next few years. We will write to you in the new year to let you know what's planned.



## RENT CONSULTATION 2022/23... WHAT DO YOU THINK?



Each year Homes for Life consults tenants on the level of rent increase. We will be sending out the consultation packs in early January and this will include details on what is being considered and how you can have your say. Your feedback is very important to us so please respond using one of the variety of methods. There will also be a prize draw for those who have returned a response by the deadline.



# SURVEY RESPONSE... WHAT YOU SAID

Thank you to all who took part in the recent survey to “Help us shape the way we deliver services”. Thanks to all **84 households** who took part. A summary of the outcome is shown in the table below. What we have learned from the responses is that not having a physical office has not had a major impact on how you receive your services. As a result of the survey, we have or are about to:

- ✓ Review the need of having office premises and associated running costs
- ✓ Ensure we collect email addresses as part of our tenant data
- ✓ Move those who wish to a paperless service
- ✓ Arrange in-home visits subject to COVID restrictions
- ✓ Roll out a tenants portal where you will be able to view your rent account and report repairs etc.



We asked...	You said...
Our office has been closed since March 2020. Are there any services you have been unable to access as a result?	79 said No 5 said Yes. 3 of the 5 were contacting the office about incomplete repairs and the other 2 did not say.
What is your preferred method of contacting us?	The top answers were: 1st via telephone 2nd via email 3rd via letter
Prior to COVID how many times on average did you visit our offices	45 said never 34 about once a year 5 monthly
What was the purpose of that visit?	Top answers: 1st Repairs 2nd Collecting Forms 3rd Rent based enquiry
What method/ additional methods of contact with staff would you use if available?	1st Telephone 2nd Letter/Post 3rd In home visits
If we set up an on-line tenant's portal would you use it?	50 said Yes 33 said No 1 did not say





# SURVEY WINNERS

Thanks to all who took part in the service delivery survey. The prize draw was carried out at the December Board Meeting with the following tenants winning one of the five £50 vouchers.

J Crease	Kennedy Court	Haddington
L Milazzo	Muirfield Gardens	Gullane
N Orde	Longstone Avenue	East Linton
V Pandurov	Hare's Close	Cockenzie
J Welsh	Smiddy Wynd	East Linton

Pictured to the right is Jill Crease and son Daniel who were delighted to win one of the vouchers.



## New Child Disability Benefit started 22 November 2021

The Scottish Government is taking over delivery of certain disability benefits over the next few years and the first of these was introduced in Glasgow on 22 November 2021. Child Disability payment has replaced Child Disability living allowance and will provide extra financial support for families with children under 16 who need extra help due to a health condition or disability.

Many families who look after children with health conditions do not know that they could be entitled to extra help. The new benefit won't just be for children who are physically disabled, it can cover a wide range of medical conditions and you may be entitled to it even if you wouldn't consider your child to be "disabled". As long as your child needs a lot more care or supervision compared to a child the same age as them, and they have needed the help for at least 13 weeks, it is worth applying.

The amount you will get will depend on the level of care and support your child needs but the lowest rate is **£23.70 per week** and can go up to **£152.15** for children who need the most help.

Families who are already getting Child DLA will continue to get it as normal and do not need to apply for Child Disability Benefit. The payment rates for the new benefit will be the same as DLA so you will not be missing out. You will be contacted by Social Security Scotland in the future to transfer on to the new benefit.

For working age people with disabilities the new Adult Disability Payment which replaces PIP is expected to be introduced in Scotland beginning **Spring 2022**, and Pension Age Disability Payment will also be introduced to replace Attendance Allowance for older people.

You can apply for this benefit online by visiting <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/benefits>

## For the kids under 12...

*how many Santas can you find hiding in the Newsletter?*

Send your answer to us along with your name, address and age by 15 January 2021 to have the chance of winning one of 3 x £10 Amazon vouchers. One entry per household. See front cover for how to submit your answer.



# MEET THE HOUSING TEAM

## DONNA DOUGAL – SENIOR HOUSING OFFICER



Hello, my name is Donna Dougal and I am the current Acting Senior Housing Officer.

I previously introduced myself in the August Bulletin. I have worked in social housing for over 20 years and looking forward to working with you in delivering a successful housing management service involving tenants along the way. My area of responsibility is housing management, that includes allocations, rent arrears and void management.

Over the next few months, I will be reviewing the housing management systems and procedures and look forward to working with as many of you through this process. I strongly believe that tenants should be at the centre of all the services we provide resulting in Homes for Life being the best we can be for you.

## ZOE STEVENSON – COMMUNITY HOUSING OFFICER



Hello to all our tenants. For those of you I have not had the opportunity to meet yet, my name is Zoe Stevenson, and I am your new Community Housing Officer.

I joined Homes for Life in September this year and bring with me 5 years' experience in the social housing sector. I am looking forward to meeting everyone over the next few months and becoming a familiar face in the community.

Tenant participation is extremely important during times of change, to ensure we capture tenants needs and opinions. I would like

to encourage all our tenants to consider joining our tenant participation group we are in the process of setting up to have your voice heard. However, if this does not interest you, you can still contact me directly.

As well as the usual housing queries I would like to hear from you if you are experiencing financial hardship, unsuitable housing needs (such as requiring medical adaptations) or if there are any other outstanding issues.

I look forward to hearing from you.



## JENNIFER NISBET

My Name is Jennifer Nisbet and I have worked for Homes for Life for 19 years, firstly as a full time Customer Services Assistant, then in 2009 returning to work after maternity leave as a Part Time Customer Services Assistant, Job Sharing with Caroline Murray, responsible for the administrative support of the Housing Management Team, and Repairs.

After a staff re-structure, my role has been updated. My new Job Title of Housing Admin Assistant concentrates my support to the Housing Management Team, working 3 full days per week – Monday to Wednesday.

I remain dedicated to providing the best possible service to you, our tenants, and I look forward to the future and supporting you on the journey.

## NEW STAFF MEMBERS

As well as Zoe joining our Housing team we have another new staff member Lynn who introduces herself below...



## LYNN MOODIE

Hi, my name is Lynn Moodie and I only started with HfL on 4 October as Corporate Services/Finance Assistant.

Starting a new job during this pandemic has been challenging to say the least especially whilst working from home but we have a fantastic team and I've been made to feel very welcome. I've worked in both private and public sector organisations (not Housing though) in a variety of roles from PA, Office Manager to Data Manager, Finance, Procurement, IT support & Website/CMS related systems all of which I am using in my new role.

I'd like to say Thanks to the tenants I've spoken to so far for their patience with me learning all your names/addresses.





# USEFUL INFORMATION

## Supporting warmer homes this winter with Home Energy Scotland

**Home Energy Scotland** is a network of local advice centres covering all of Scotland. Their expert advisors offer free, impartial advice on energy saving, keeping warm at home, renewable energy, greener travel, cutting water waste and more. They are funded by the Scottish Government and managed by Energy Saving Trust, and their mission is to help people in Scotland create warmer homes, reduce their bills and help tackle climate change.

They can help you stay warm and well - Recent research by Home Energy Scotland has revealed that 70% of people in Scotland feel concerned about energy bills rising, with almost two thirds using more energy than usual during the first 12 months of the pandemic. The research also found that 59% of Scots have noticed a worrying rise in their energy bills already.

### Top tips for a cosier winter

Everyone wants a warm home without spending too much on their energy bills and with winter upon us, here are some top tips to help keep you cosy for less.

- Set your heating controls to manage the temperature of your home. Remember to use the weekday and weekend settings.
- Keep your radiators clear and avoid putting furniture against them. Drying your washing on the radiator can make your house colder, and can also encourage condensation and mould growth.
- Your room thermostat should be set to the lowest comfortable temperature (typically between 18°C and 21°C) Turning down the room thermostat by one degree can save up to £55 a year.
- Use heavier curtains during the winter months and make sure you close them when it gets dark to keep the heat in and the cold out.



Speak to a Home Energy Advisor - If you're worried about your energy bills or would simply like some advice about saving energy at home, call Home Energy Scotland free of charge on **0808 808 2282**. You can also contact our Advice Team by email at [adviceteam@sc.homeenergyscotland.org](mailto:adviceteam@sc.homeenergyscotland.org)

<https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/how-to-claim>



### Warm Home Discount Scheme

You could get £140 off your electricity bill for winter 2021/22 through the Warm Home Discount Scheme.

The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October and March. The discount will not affect your Cold Weather Payment or Winter Fuel Payment.

There are 2 ways to qualify for the Warm Home Discount Scheme:

- you are in receipt of Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit
- you are on a low income and meet your energy supplier's criteria for the scheme You can still qualify for the discount if you use a 'Pay as you Go' electricity meter. Speak to your supplier for more details.
- Read more at: [www.gov.uk/the-warm-homediscount-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/the-warm-homediscount-scheme)





## Tenant Hardship Loan Fund

The Scottish Government have launched a £10 million Tenant Hardship Loan Fund offering interest-free loans to tenants who are struggling with rent arrears. The interest-free loan is available to private tenants and social housing tenants who have had their finances impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and do not have other means of support.

The loan is aimed at people who don't qualify for other help. You will need to pay this money back so if you might be entitled to other non-repayable help towards your rent, such as Universal Credit or Discretionary Housing Payments - which do not need to be repaid - then these are likely to be a better option for you.

The loan is a good short-term option to support you in managing your rent arrears and get you back to paying your rent. It's a good option if you know that your drop in income is only temporary - and if you are confident that your money issues will improve soon. Loan repayments will be deferred for six months as standard and repaid over a five-year period.

To apply visit <https://tenanthardshiploan.est.org.uk/> or call us on **0800 678 1228** and we can help you apply and look at other options to help with your rent arrears.

### Winter Tips

Keeping your home safe this Winter

Do you know where your main stop valve is to turn off the water if you have a burst? If you don't, call us and we will arrange for someone to pop round and show you where it is.

**Keep Cosy**.... keep your home as warm as you can. If you notice any unlagged pipes please let us know.

**Frozen Pipes**.... Usually, you are not aware the pipes are frozen until the heating does not come on. Damage to pipes happens when the pipes start to thaw. If a pipe is frozen, isolate it and turn off the stop valve. Do not try and thaw with naked flame. Don't switch on water filled heating appliances until you are sure the system has thawed out.

**Prevent Fire**.... Test your smoke alarms monthly, never leave cookers unattended, never place candles or other open flames near your Christmas tree, don't overload electrical sockets, close all doors when you leave the house or go to bed to prevent fire spreading.

## STAY SAFE THIS CHRISTMAS

The lead up to Christmas can sometimes lead to an increase in burglaries/thefts taking place. At Homes for Life we wanted to remind you of some of the do's and don'ts to keep you safe:

**DON'T** give access to anyone you do not know unless they have identification such as a gas engineer

**DON'T** leave valuables in front of windows

**DON'T** leave doors and windows unlocked

**DO** ask for identification and contact the office for confirmation if the person is at your house on Homes for Life business

**DO** set alarms and light timers if you have them

**DO** please keep safe this Christmas



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