

Tenant Newsletter



Office Opening Times

Monday—Thursday 9.00am to 5pm

Friday 9am to 4.00pm

Contact us on 01620 829300

Or by email info@homesforlife.co.uk

Spring 2017 ☀

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There's a lot in your newsletter this time – but we want some of it back!

Enclosures:

1. 4th Quarter Rent Statement
2. Any Changes Survey 2016
3. Results of Full Satisfaction survey
4. New Repairs Contractor Info

NOTE: The annual "Any Changes?" questionnaire enclosed can also be completed online

Estate Walkabouts

housing partnership

Do you want to help make your development a great place to live? If so, come and join an estate walkabout and help to improve the appearance of your estate.

What is the aim of an estate walkabout?

Estate walkabouts happen to give tenants and officers the chance to work together to identify improvement you would like to see in your development which will make it a better place to live.

Who is involved? Tenants are joined by their Housing Officer and other key staff who can help make improvements to the estate.

What do I have to do? All you have to do to take part in the walkabout is turn up on the day!

Thursday 1st June

Goldenstones Ave, Dunbar 10.00 am

Smiddy Wynd and Prestonkirk, East Linton 11.20am

Thursday 8th June

Limeylands Ct, Ormiston 9.15am;

MacFarlane Ct, Elphinstone 10.30am

Thursday 15th June

Roodlands Ct, Hadd 10.00 am

Davison Terr/Place, Hadd 10.45am

Kennedy Court, Hadd 11.45am

Thursday 22nd June

Barga Court, Cockenzie 9.15am

Hares Close, Cockenzie 10.15am

Walden Terr/Pl, Gifford 11.30am

Thursday 29th June

Muirfield Drive/Gardens, Gullane 10.00am

Report to Tenants on the Annual Satisfaction Survey

Enclosed is the full report on the results of our annual satisfaction survey.

Actions to take forward

- Look at development of alternative survey methods
- Look at use of social media to increase tenant engagement
- Ensure greater flexibility for repairs appointments and that contractor keeps tenant informed
- Shower installs and other planned maintenance

Any Changes Survey

Enclosed is the annual Any Changes Survey. **It is vitally important we have up to date contact numbers and information on who is living in your property.**

It'll only take a minute to complete and pop in to the pre-paid envelope. If you'd rather complete the very brief survey over the phone – please call Hilary on 01620 829300

Rent Statement

Enclosed is your **4th Quarter** rent statement January to end of March 2017. Your rent is charged one month in advance and your tenancy agreement states this should be paid **on or before the 1st of each month**. Your statement should show your account having a zero balance unless you are in **arrears**. Housing Benefit recipients may have arrears of up to 5 days due to the timing it has been paid up to.

Tenants in receipt of Universal Credit are responsible for paying their rent directly to Homes for Life. We have already had to carry out an eviction of one household who chose not to use the housing element of their Universal Credit to pay their rent, and we are at court with 2 other households. If you have any issues with managing your UC payment contact James – we're here to help!

If you have any problems understanding your statement please don't hesitate to contact Hilary, James, Jennifer or Caroline who will be happy to talk it through with you.

Planned Maintenance 2017-2018

During 2016/17, works we completed included:

- **Kitchen Unit replacements**- including upgrading of smoke alarm systems to include Heat Detectors in kitchens- Kennedy Court and Davidson Terrace/ Place
- **Gas Boiler replacements**- Davidson Terrace/ Place
- **Periodic Electrical Safety Testing** and remedials (*including upgrading of smoke alarm systems to include Heat Detectors in kitchens*)- all older ex ELC homes and Barga Court, Cockenzie

Regrettably, due to capacity issues R3 were unable to complete planned first shower installs for Roodlands Court, Haddington and St Andrew Street, North Berwick. These have now been included in the next year's programme. We have also carried forward provisions for remedial works to render where it meets external stairs at Roodlands Court, Haddington; Muirfield Drive/ Gardens; and Limeylands Court, Ormiston.

During 2017/18, works we plan to complete include:

- **Kitchen Unit replacements**- Goldenstones Avenue, Dunbar; Limeylands Court, Ormiston; Prestonkirk/ Smiddy Wynd , East Linton; MacFarlance Court, Elphinstone
- **Gas Boiler replacements**- Goldenstones Avenue, Dunbar; Limeylands Court, Ormiston; Prestonkirk/ Smiddy Wynd , East Linton
- **Shower Installs** (*only where none already fitted*)- Roodlands Court and Davidson Terrace/ Place, Haddington; St Andrew Street, North Berwick; Muirfield Drive/Gardens Longstone Avenue, East Linton (*replacement of ensuite cubicles where not already replaced and first installs for main bathrooms*)
- **External Painterwork** (*and Internal Painterwork to common closes where required*)- older ex ELC homes; Longstone Ave, East Linton; Hare's Close and Barga Court, Cockenzie; Bankfoot, Prestonpans; Kennedy Court and Davidson Terrace/ Place, Haddington
- **Periodic Electrical Safety Testing** and remedials (*including upgrading of smoke alarm systems to include Heat Detectors in kitchens*)- Longstone Ave, East Linton; Hare's Close, Cockenzie; Bankfoot , Prestonpans, Kennedy Court and Davidson/ Terrace Place, Haddington
- **External Stairs- render remedial works**- Roodlands Court, Haddington; Muirfield Drive/ Gardens; and Limeylands Court, Ormiston

We are currently negotiating 2017/18 works with new repairs contractor Novus. Tenants whose homes are included above will be contacted with further detail when this is available.

Repairs Re-procurement

Our longterm contract with R3 has come to an end. We are keen to secure improvements to maintenance services for our tenants. Ultimately, we plan to go out to tender but have meantime negotiated the appointment of **NOVUS Solutions** to provide a full repairs and voids service. This interim arrangement, for the next 12 to 18 months, will allow us to trial a different type of service before committing to longer term procurement.



Locally NOVUS already provide a quality service for Melville Housing HA's homes throughout Midlothian, as well as for Manor Estates, Microhouse and Home in the Edinburgh area. They come highly recommended by service users.

We will be in touch with more information about the re-procurement and asking for your input to shape the service you want receive that also provides best value for money.

NOVUS's management and customer service teams are based at their office Bathgate, West Lothian, supporting a network of mobile operatives locally and throughout their wide areas of operation. All NOVUS operatives wear company uniforms, have photo ID and their vans are readily identifiable in distinctive company livery.

Repairs

From Monday 15th May 2017, all calls for repairs (except gas or air source central heating and pest control) should be made direct to **01506 242 120**. This is the only number you will need as it includes any out of hours emergencies.

Priority Timescales

Priority time scales will remain as 4 hours for Emergencies and 10 working days for Routine repairs, but Urgent repairs will be treated under the Right to Repair legislation. Depending on the type of repair this will either be 1 day, 3 days or 7 days. We'll be sending you further information on this at a later date.

NOVUS say: *"We respond at times that suit our customers – anyone telephoning in a repair will be offered a **2 hour appointment slot**. We aim to Repair first time. It's not always possible, but with our carefully planned parts and stock holding systems and materials supply agreements we keep second visits to a minimum."*

Handover

Our current contractor R3 has agreed to extend their current service through to 14th May 2017. Where R3 cannot complete any reported repairs prior to handover, they will advise you and these will be passed to Novus for completion.. **You should continue to report your Urgent and Emergency repairs to R3 until 14th May 2017**

A reminder of the Repairs that you are Responsible for:

- ❖ Broken glass - unless caused by vandalism which has been reported to the police
- ❖ Replacement lost keys
- ❖ If your divisional fence needs some repair work this will usually be your responsibility.
- ❖ Interior decoration (wall paper, paint, carpets)
- ❖ Small fixtures and fittings (Light bulbs, fuses, door stoppers, coat hooks, plugs and chains,
- ❖ Spy-holes, door bells unless fitted by Homes for Life, etc)
- ❖ TV aerials (unless communal)
- ❖ Smoke alarm battery
- ❖ Lock changes due to lost or broken keys
- ❖ Window blinds and curtain rails
- ❖ Blocked waste traps – choked sinks, baths and basins (through neglect)
- ❖ Additional security, including lighting to front and rear doors
- ❖ Any wilful or accidental damage to property or fittings
- ❖ Uplift of laminate floors or floor coverings for access as required by our contractors.
- ❖ After 1st replacement in tenancy – tenant responsible for W.C seat
- ❖ Adjusting doors to accommodate floor finishes
- ❖ Showers – unless fitted by Homes for Life
- ❖ Skirting boards
- ❖ External items such as sheds, carports that have been put up by tenants.
- ❖ Clothes poles, ropes on rotary drier unless it is in a communal garden.
- ❖ Any damage to the property through neglect, accidental damage or wilful vandalism
- ❖ Condensation damage caused through lack of ventilation or use of heating.

Novus will only attend to these repairs once you confirm acceptance that you will be charged for cost of carrying the repair. We recommend you clarify and agree the costs beforehand

Further Information

We will be sending out further detailed information to you, along with reminders on which repairs qualify under the Right to Repair.

We look forward to working with **Novus** to bring you an improved service and hope you will be pleased with the outcome!

We were in the unpleasant position of having to carry out an eviction recently and were very unhappy to find that the tenant had been growing cannabis plants in the attic space. The police removed approximately £2,000 worth of the illegal plant along with all the growing equipment. Cannabis is a Class B Drug under the **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971**, it is unlawful to cultivate any part of a cannabis plant and can carry up to a 7½ year custodial sentence.

All tenants are advised at the time they are allocated their tenancy that the attic space is **not load** bearing and should not be used for storing *anything* other than possibly a light cardboard box of Christmas decorations.



Due to the intense lighting, excessive wiring and amount of flammable material, cannabis cultivation is a serious fire hazard. When it is in a loft space it means that when a fire takes hold, it spreads rapidly and the fire may only become apparent when it is well developed. There are also serious flood and condensation risks from the irrigation equipment.

Police urge you to ask the following questions if you think a nearby property is being used to grow cannabis:

- Are the windows of the property permanently covered from the inside?
- Do people visit the property at unusual times of the day or night?
- Does no-one appear to be living at the property?
- Is there a vent protruding through the roof or a rear window?
- Is there a pungent smell coming from the premises?
- Is there a lot of noise coming from the equipment, such as cooling fans?
- Have a large number of pots and lights been moved into the premises at the same time?
- Do shared walls appear wet to the touch?
- Are powerful lights being left on overnight?



If you suspect that a property is being used to grow cannabis, please contact the Police by dialling 101. If you don't want to speak directly to the police, contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or at www.crimestoppers-uk.org. Crimestoppers is an independent charity, and not part of the police



We thought we'd take this opportunity to remind you that we have a right of access to inspect your property, and we propose to carry out inspections of roof spaces over the next few months.

Allocations 2016-2017

We advertised **11** vacancies through homehunt, of these 6 were advertised for priority homeless pass holders. We arranged **4 internal transfers** and **9 mutual exchanges**.

Area	Nos. of vacancies	1 bed flat	2 bed flat	3 bed House	Average nos. of applicants per property
Totals	11	7	3	1	84
Cockenzie	2	1	1	0	124
Gullane	2	0	2	0	197
Gifford	2	2	0	0	85
Elphinstone	2	1	0	1	104
Ormiston	2	2	0	0	67
East Linton	1	1	0	0	50

From this Allocation information you will see the majority of advertised allocations went to 1 bedroom flats. We advise tenants who are looking for larger properties or houses that a Mutual Exchange with another social landlord is very often a much quicker solution. We always look at our own tenants needs before we advertise but were only able to accommodate **4** transfers

We have a joint mutual exchange list with East Lothian Council and East Lothian HA called **East Lothian X-Changes**. You can search for a property here:

<https://www.elha.com/mutex/search>

Length of time on Homehunt of <u>successful</u> applicants	Year/length of time waiting
Earliest date application	June 2011
Most recent dated application	Jan 2016
Longest on register	6 yrs
Shortest	< 1yr
Average	3yrs

Almost ⅔ of the vacancies were for 1 bedroom flats with only three 2 bed flats and one 3 bed house becoming available. The 3 bed house was used for an ELC nomination.

Our Allocations Policy needs to be reviewed and its important tenants are involved in this review. We will be discussing this during our upcoming coach trip round our properties this summer.

Useful Numbers

We use **allpay.net** to collect rent. *In order to use any of the Allpay services other than Direct Debit or Callpay you need your allpay card number. Don't have one? Call us and we'll order one for you. We can take 'one off' payments by debit card over the phone or at the office counter.*



Rent

1. Our preferred method of payment is Direct Debit

All payments made by Direct Debit are guaranteed, this means that in the unlikely event a payment is made in error, you will receive a full and immediate refund. **Please contact the office and we can arrange your direct debit over the phone**

2. Telephone Payments - contact telephone payments on: **0844 557 8321**. You'll need your allpay no. to hand.

3. Online at

<https://www.allpayments.net/allpayments>

4. By allpay Card at various outlets – for example the **Post Office** or anywhere displaying the **Paypoint** logo

5. You can also pay rent using your Smartphone Allpay have launched their new **smartphone app**. The app is available for Apple and Android smartphones. Try scanning it!



Repairs

1. DURING Office Hours

Phone **Novus** on **01506 242 120**

2. OUT of Office Hours Call the same number 01506 242 120



But please remember that only repairs that cannot wait until the following morning to be reported, should be called in after 5pm

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 **Kingdom Gas** and if you experience any problems with your system you should call **FREE** on **0800 389 9463** or **01334 650452**

THINK YOU SMELL GAS? 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 **0800 111 999**



Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline– 0845 6018518

Telephone 01620 829300

Fax 01620 829993

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