

# Homefront

The newsletter for East Lothian Council tenants

SPRING/SUMMER 2023



Rosemary Way, Community Housing Development Officer; Wendy McGuire, Head of Housing; Councillor Andy Forrest, Cabinet Spokesperson for Housing and Property Maintenance and Richard Crowther, Commercial Director at Cruden Building at the start of construction of 30 new council homes in Pencaitland in February

## **In this issue:**

**Affordable Housing Programme**

**Local Improvement Plans**

**Community Support Projects**

**Financial Support**

# Contents

## In this issue of Homefront

### Tenant News

Affordable Housing Programme 3

### Housing News

Annual Rent Increase 5

Gardening 7

Local Improvement Plans 8

Support for Armed Forces 9

Damp and Mould Review 10

Downsizing your home 12

ELTRP News 13

### You & Your Community

Community Support Update 19

New Mental Health Café 20

Save Time and Go Online 21

Local Housing Strategy 22

### Money Matters

Our Financial Support Team 23

### Your Home

Safety & Compliance Checks 26

National Panel Survey 27

Get Homefront by Email 27

Useful numbers 28



If you need Homefront in another format e.g. Large Print, audio, or in your own language, please call **01620 827199**.

Homefront is East Lothian Council's newsletter for its tenants. Follow us on [Twitter](#) @ELCouncil, or [Facebook](#) East Lothian Council

# Affordable Housing Programme

East Lothian Council continues to deliver its extensive affordable housing programme. Since January 2023 we have seen completions in Macmerry, with 26 houses and flats providing much needed accommodation, built by Taylor Wimpey.



Housing Minister Paul McLennan MSP visited the Letham Mains development, with Head of Housing Wendy McGuire, in April. Photo © Chris Watt

We have started on 12 homes at Ravensheugh, Musselburgh and 30 homes at Lempockwells, Pencaitland. The new council homes at Ravensheugh are expected to complete in autumn 2023 and at Lempockwells in spring 2024.

We will see the completion of 37 new homes in spring 2023 at our Letham Mains site in Haddington with Taylor Wimpey providing 32 homes for general needs, two amenity homes for older people and three homes suitable for wheelchair users.

Persimmon Homes is building

45 new homes for the council at Craighall North (also known as Burgh Gate), Musselburgh which will be completed during the course of 2023. The development will include two homes suitable for wheelchair users and 10 ground floor flats with level access showers suitable for people with limited mobility.

Also, due to complete soon are 28 new council homes in East Linton, with a mix of one, two and three bed cottage flats and houses. Four units will be available for older people along with two wheelchair accessible bungalows.



The council has also bought 23 houses and flats across East Lothian off the open market (mainly in Musselburgh, Tranent and Prestonpans) since April 2022 which will be provided as new council homes.

Our affordable housing partners also continue to develop with LAR Housing Trust shortly providing much needed mid market rental housing in Prestonpans at their developments at Jim Bush Drive and Preston Works – 42 units with a mix of two bed flats and three bed houses. These properties will be advertised on LAR Housing Trust's website – [larhousingtrust.co.uk](http://larhousingtrust.co.uk) Wheatley Homes East (formerly

Dunedin Canmore) have seen a number of completions for social rent at their Wallyford development with Cruden Homes building 15 homes – a mix of four and three bed properties.

Places for People Scotland will see the first completions at Whitecraig with Miller Homes completing 25 units for social and mid market rent with a mix of two and three bed houses being available shortly.

Mid-market properties will be advertised by Rightmove or Zoopla and the social rent properties will be advertised in Home Search – [www.scotlandhomesearch.co.uk](http://www.scotlandhomesearch.co.uk)

Further information on new developments within East Lothian can be found on our website or by speaking to your local housing office.

# Annual Rent Increase

**In February, at a meeting of the full Council, the decision was taken to increase rents by 5% for the financial year 2023/24.**

This was a difficult decision, especially after our consultation with tenants where the majority of those that responded indicated a preference for a 3% increase. Respondents also told us that they believed the rent they pay is good value for money and the majority said they agree that we should continue to modernise our council houses and support our new build programme.

However, the consultation took place during a time when significant changes were happening in the financial world, making it difficult to allow accurate financial projections. This resulted in changes to the council's financial position and projections, due to a number of things including increases in debt charges because of increasing interest rates; increased costs of material and labour for repairs and for the maintenance and improvement of tenants' homes; and additional costs to meet increasing standards for energy efficiency and carbon reduction targets.

We understand the financial difficulties that some of our tenants

are currently experiencing and the council found it extremely difficult to reach the decision to raise rents by 5%, however, without this increase it would have been impossible for the council to continue to deliver the current level of service. This 5% increase will allow the council to continue to deliver the service and investment in kitchens, bathrooms and energy efficiency measures, as well as continuing to invest in our new build programme. All of these areas were seen as important to those that responded to the consultation.

We constantly monitor our budget and plan ahead for future financial years, estimating our spend and income for the next five years and beyond. Although we may budget for a rent increase in the coming years, each and every year we will consult with our tenants and ask you for your view, which is extremely important to the council in terms of any final decisions that are made.

More information on the council's budget decisions, including the rent increase, is available on the website [www.eastlothian.gov.uk](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk)

Annual Rent Increase (continued)

## Help and Support

We have produced a leaflet specifically about available financial support with the cost of living crisis, which you can download at

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/cost-of-living-leaflet](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/cost-of-living-leaflet)

If you are having difficulty in paying your rent you can get confidential advice from our Rent Income Team on **01620 827528**.

For help please contact our Financial Inclusion Team who offer free, confidential information and advice. You can email [welfarerights@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:welfarerights@eastlothian.gov.uk) or telephone **01620 827 827**.

We have also produced information for tenants who may be experiencing dampness and mould as rising energy prices are forcing some of our tenants to reduce their energy use. Please visit our website at:

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/condensation-and-mould](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/condensation-and-mould)



## Rent Review

The council's existing rent structure (how we calculate rents) has been in place for many years now and we are now looking to review this.

There is a huge amount of work involved in a rent restructure and we have just started this process. We will have to consider lots of things, for example, what size a property is, what type it is e.g. house or flat.

We will keep you, our tenants, informed of our progress and before any new rent model is introduced, we will carry out a public consultation and engage with all our tenants, to ask you for your views.

We will aim to provide you with further more detailed information in our next issue of Homefront.

# Time to get back into our gardens?

**As the weather improves and the nights get lighter, you may think about starting to get out into your garden again.**

Many of our tenants take great pride in their garden and take responsibility to keep their garden tidy. However, over the past couple of years, there has been an increase in the number of complaints we have received relating to untidy gardens.

It is the tenant's responsibility to keep their garden tidy and it is a condition of your council tenancy agreement. Sometimes complaints relate to rubbish or items of furniture being left in gardens or communal areas. The council has a Serious Tenancy Breach Policy for tenants who have been contacted by the Housing Officer to tidy their garden and/or dispose of rubbish. This may result in the council having to clear the items, cut the grass, and recharge the tenant for this.

Unfortunately, we may have some tenants who cannot look after their garden themselves anymore. They may qualify for some help through our Garden Aid Scheme. This helps tenants who, because of disability or age (over 60) are no longer able to maintain their gardens.



**If you think you need help maintaining your garden, talk to your local Housing Officer or visit [eastlothian.gov.uk/housing](http://eastlothian.gov.uk/housing)**

# Local Improvement Plans

Local Initiatives and estate inspections are a great way for tenants and Tenants and Residents Associations to get involved in their local area.



Galt Lane improvements  
Before (inset) and after  
(main image)



Mucklets Avenue,  
before (inset) and after  
(above)



Tenants are encouraged to get involved in estate inspections, which are organised by their local Community Housing Officer.

Sometimes representatives from other council departments, like Roads or Property Maintenance, may also be involved in the walk around the area.

Estate inspections look at things like bin stores, door entry systems, open spaces etc. and suggestions for improvements are made.

There is an annual budget of £200,000 for local initiatives across East Lothian and some recent initiatives have included improvements to fencing, resurfacing of drying areas and upgrades to play parks.

Estate Inspections in all areas are restarting now so if you would like to get involved or if you have any ideas about something that could be done to improve your local area please get in touch with your local Community Housing Officer.



# Support for Armed Forces Families

---

Are you a veteran, military partner or spouse, or do you have any other connection to the Armed Services?

---

We know that there are many members of the Armed Forces communities living within our area. Service leavers contribute their experience and skills gained through their time in their forces in paid and volunteer roles. As a signatory of the **Armed Forces Covenant**, East Lothian Council and its partners have committed to supporting members of the armed forces community in a number of ways.

This includes:

**Being a veteran friendly employer** – the Ministry of Defence granted the council its Employer Recognition Scheme silver award for the support it offers to Reservists, service leavers, veterans and their families. This includes supporting Reservists to balance their service commitments with their employment

**Dedicated veterans housing** including 'veterans' on new housing application forms, removing the locality connection for veterans applying for housing

**Supporting children and young people** in our schools where there is a parent in the services

**Working closely with health services and Forces organisations** to make sure support is available

If you are a veteran or if you live with someone who is in the forces in either a permanent or reservist role, please find out more about the dedicated support available to you. This could include access to financial support through dedicated forces organisations such as PoppyScotland.

Call our Freephone number on **0800 413 721** and leave your phone number. A member of the team will call you back to note your service status: this means we can make sure you receive appropriate support. Visit **[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/ArmedForcesCommunity](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/ArmedForcesCommunity)** to find out more.

# Damp and Mould Process Review

The Scottish Housing Regulator has written to all social landlords to consider the systems they have in place to ensure tenants' homes are not affected by mould and dampness and that they have appropriate systems to identify and deal with any reported cases of mould and damp effectively.

The council has set up a working group of professionals to review and develop our current damp and mould process.

Whilst developing the new process the working group is considering recommendations from **'Putting Safety First'** – recent guidance on damp and mould for social housing practitioners produced by the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO), Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland (CIHS), the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

Once the working group has concluded, a further article will be published in Homefront's Winter edition, providing further details on how the council will manage damp and mould going forward.



Further information on how to prevent condensation, which can lead to mould, can be found on our website at:

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/  
condensation-and-mould](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/condensation-and-mould)

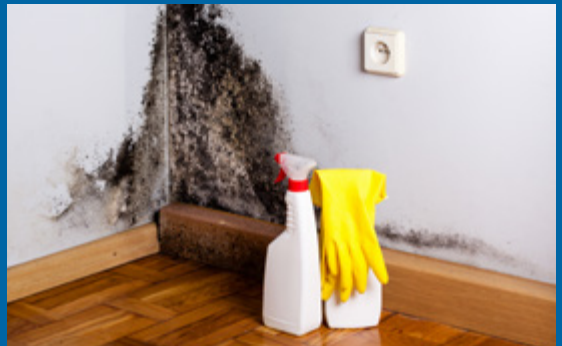
In the meantime, if you are experiencing damp and/or mould please phone the contact centre on T: **01875 824311**.

## Removing mould from walls

Presently, where damp/mould is reported we will arrange both an inspection by a repairs officer and a fungicidal wash, if required by the tenant.

You may also wish to remove any mould yourself to prevent any harmful spores being released. When removing black mould from walls, we'd suggest using a specially designed mould wash concentrate along with disposable wipes or kitchen roll, instead of bleach.

Mould wash is a fungicidal treatment that removes the mould and works across a variety of surfaces including, tiles, wood and painted surfaces whereas bleach simply changes the colour of the mould.



# Downsizing Your Home

Downsizing your home that is no longer fitting you or your family's needs can seem daunting, however it can bring many positive benefits.

All East Lothian Council tenants that have a secure tenancy can apply to transfer to another home. There are different incentives we can offer you to support you to downsize, such as a downsizing grant of £2000 or more per eligible move.

We've spoken to some of our tenants who have recently downsized and this is what they had to say:

"Moving to a smaller home has been economical in terms of heating and Council Tax. Our new home feels cosier and feel we're surrounded by more people our age. We fit in better in our new street."

"On the positive side, the downsizing to the two bedrooms has been very efficient for us. The home fits all our needs and the garden is so much more manageable. I no longer need to manage stairs and that's had a huge impact on my quality of life."

"We got great help from our housing team to support our move and I'd encourage as many people who can to downsize."

"I'm glad we downsized as we've been able to give a young family the opportunity of a bigger family home that we had when our kids were younger."

If you'd like to discuss a transfer further, you can contact your local housing office who will be able to provide you with more information. There's also lots of information on our website [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/housing)



# East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel Update



The ELTRP Christmas Party, Maitlandfield House Hotel, 2022

**Since the last Homefront in October, ELTRP has continued to engage with our membership in a variety of ways.**

The first engagement for our new Executive Committee was the highly successful event following their election at the Annual General Meeting. The committee invited various services based in East Lothian to come along and make themselves available to the ELTRP members. Services on the night included Community Housing, Housing Officers, Benefits & Revenue staff, Area Partnerships, Volunteer Centre East Lothian and Ageing Well. The event was an enormous success with tenants and residents commenting how useful it was to have staff members on hand to speak to and get information from.

Executive Committee representatives also participated in the Housing Revenue Sub-Group, which discussed and prepared the information that went out to tenants regarding the proposed rent increase. They are aware of the financial difficulties faced by East Lothian Council and that the rent increase comes at a difficult time for everyone. ELTRP will continue to ensure that tenants are at the forefront of discussion and will try our absolute best to make sure tenants' voices are heard.

And then it was Christmas...

ELTRP members work so hard throughout the year in their various local groups, whether it is improving their area with new greenery, seating, car parking or highlighting anti-social behaviour in their areas. So the ELTRP Christmas event is a time for relaxation and fun!

More than 60 members turned up to the Maitlandfield House Hotel for the annual Christmas Party. Jim Herron, Chairperson of ELTRP, thanked the members for the work they do in their community but also for their work on behalf of ELTRP. A great night was had by all!

Then it was back to the serious stuff of sub-groups and demanding work in the New Year, with ELTRP starting to plan for their involvement in reviewing East Lothian Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. ELTRP held an event on Thursday 23rd March where members looked at the four key themes of the existing strategy and gave their views on what they liked about it, what they did not like and made suggestions for improvements.

A report is currently being prepared and will be submitted to ELC. Highlights from the report will be available on ELTRP's website [www.eltrp.co.uk](http://www.eltrp.co.uk) and in our update in the next Homefront.

ELTRP will continue to carry out work and hold events that will help support and make a difference to our tenants and residents in their local communities.

Fiona Drape, our Administrator, is in the office now Monday-Thursday 10am-2pm and Patsy King and Sue Cairns are still currently working from home.

For more information about any of the groups contact Sue Cairns, Outreach Officer on [scairns@tis.org.uk](mailto:scairns@tis.org.uk) or Patsy King, Development Officer on [pling@tis.org.uk](mailto:pling@tis.org.uk) or visit our website [www.eltrp.co.uk](http://www.eltrp.co.uk).

For more information

e: [tenantspanel@hotmail.com](mailto:tenantspanel@hotmail.com)

[www.eltrp.co.uk](http://www.eltrp.co.uk)

 [@EastLothianTRP](https://www.facebook.com/EastLothianTRP)

 [twitter.com/ELTRP1](https://twitter.com/ELTRP1)

## What's happening in local Tenants and Residents Groups

There are currently 24 groups across East Lothian. All members of Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) in East Lothian are volunteers and work extremely hard to promote community participation.

The TRAs would be happy for more people to become involved, so please have a look at our website or contact us to find out if there is a TRA in your area.

ELTRP is also here to help start a TRA in your area if there isn't one already. For example, we are aware there is only one TRA in Tranent and it would be great to have more in such a large area. There are also other areas with no TRA representation, so please contact us to find out more and have a chat with Sue, our Outreach Officer.

The success of the TRAs comes with members of the community working together, and as more and more TRAs are meeting face-to-face again, community voices are becoming louder and voicing their opinions about changes and improvements they would like to see in their local community.

As always, the TRAs have been working

behind the scenes for the benefit of their local communities. Here's a snapshot of some of the excellent work being carried out in East Lothian:

### Haddington Central TRA

Haddington Central is interested in tackling anti-social behaviour and concerns over dangerous driving as well as looking into fun events and a special youth focused project. They are open to everyone in the Haddington Central area, and hope to make the town a great place to live and work for everyone.



*Haddington*  
Central  
**TRA**

t: 01620 248 251  
e: tenantspanel@hotmail.com  
f @HADDCENTRALTRA  
t twitter.com/@HADDCENTRALTRA

## St Clements Wells, Wallyford

St Clements Wells (Barratt Homes) Residents' Association was set up initially in March 2023 as the majority of residents on the estate expressed concerns regarding dual factoring arrangements. These concerns prompted the residents to start the association with the aim of taking full control/governance of their own factoring arrangements.

This is currently the group's main priority but once the factoring arrangements have reached a suitable conclusion, the association will focus on other community needs, improvements and concerns.

## Wingate Flats TRA, Dunbar

Wingate Flats TRA started up just before the Covid pandemic. It was difficult to get people involved at that time, however a few people worked really hard to improve the stairwell. After working with ELTRP and liaising with ELC they had the stairwell decorated as well as new front doors installed.

Going forward, the group has suggested improving the green area surrounding the Wingate Flat blocks however, they would really like to hear from the local community. A possible open meeting could be held

in May/June if there is interest. For more information please contact Sue, ELTRP at [scairns@tis.org.uk](mailto:scairns@tis.org.uk).

## Dunbar Shore and Harbour Neighbourhood Group

Dunbar Shore and Harbour Neighbourhood Group has been up and running since 2011 and they have managed to complete many projects that 'make it better beside the sea', for residents and visitors alike.

They were responsible for The Creel Loaders statue, the information boards, the little lobster at McArthur's Store, the maintenance of the Fishermen's Monument, the maintenance of benches and garden ground and, most importantly, all the work that it took to regenerate the East Beach! They are particularly interested to hear from tenants who live in or around Colvin Street and Writers Court.

## Golf Drive TRA, Port Seton

Golf Drive TRA started their group on Zoom during the Covid pandemic. They are currently trying to increase parking provision and are exploring the possibility of extending the group to cover the whole of Cockenzie and Port Seton.

For more information please contact Diane at [golfdrivetra@gmail.com](mailto:golfdrivetra@gmail.com).



## Brunton Court Tenants Group (Musselburgh)

Brunton Court Tenants Group (BCTG) was successful in acquiring funding from the three Area Partnerships - Fa'side, Musselburgh and Preston, Seton and Gosford - to organise activities that helped to reduce isolation and loneliness after Covid in the Sheltered Housing complexes. It has been a huge success, with their last outing to the Orient Express experience in Leith recently.

This money was used to organise five outings for all the sheltered housing complexes in East Lothian. They visited Queensferry, Dunbar and Peebles as well as a Christmas Pantomime.

## Harkness Crescent TRA (Tranent)

Harkness Crescent Tenants and Resident's Association serves the 40 amenity flats in the Crescent. Over the past few years they have improved the local area by taking over the care of front and rear areas, maintaining and creating planters, planting flowers and shrubs, using their new greenhouse and generally looking after it all.

Their most recent project was carrying out a survey into the condition of the properties last year, and asking all the tenants what improvements could be made. This

was well received by both tenants and ELC. The council has agreed to undertake some improvements with others still under discussion.

## Ormiston West TRA

A BIG thank you to Mark Ormiston - we are all wishing him (and Shirley) all the best in his retirement from Ormiston West Tenants and Residents Association (OWTRA), which he has successfully chaired for many years.

The group is looking at the possibility of expanding to include the whole of Ormiston and would welcome the views of local people on this. An Open Meeting will hopefully take place in the near future. In the meantime, if you are interested or would like more information, please contact Grace at [mrsstirton@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mrsstirton@yahoo.co.uk).



Recent landscaping work at Harkness Crescent

## Levenhall TRA (Musselburgh)

Levenhall TRA has been running for several years now and they currently have three priorities for this year:

**Roads** - Access to the racecourse and a 20 mph speed limit for Ravensheugh Road. The group is endeavouring to work with the relevant people to resolve the issues.

**Community** - To develop a caring and inclusive community. This includes: Collections for the Food Bank and a recent successful jam & chutney sale to contribute to being a sustainable community. There are several members of Levenhall TRA who volunteer in various roles within the area.

Possibly developing a skills bank where members could share skills or offer each other short term support eg. company to go for a walk, getting shopping when someone is unwell etc.

A possible notice board for the community outside the shop.

## Musselburgh Flood Protection

**Scheme** - ensuring meaningful two-way communication between the council and residents of Musselburgh, working alongside Fisherrow Links TRA and Beach Lane TRA to identify and

feed back the views of the community.

## Haddington West TRA

A Haddington West TRA Open Meeting was held on 5th April 2023 at the Green in Haddington. Attendees raised issues such as antisocial behaviour, increased traffic, speeding, parking concerns and a discussion took place with regard to council properties receiving new windows and doors in some areas. Another meeting will be organised before the end of June to try and encourage other tenants and residents in the area to get involved. In the meantime, if you want more information or would like to get involved, please contact Sue at [scairns@tis.org.uk](mailto:scairns@tis.org.uk).

## Well Wynd Tenants Group (Tranent)

Well Wynd Tenants Group (WWTG), is the newest TRA in East Lothian - a group based in the Sheltered Housing complex in Tranent. A meeting was held on 6th April 2023 and the group identified some issues they would like to tackle including improvements to the conservatory and bin store; new doors, communal decorating; improvements to the back garden; forming a lunch club, possible new TV, chairs and much more. Good luck to this new group!

## Community Support

# Reconnect - People know how

**Reconnect offers support to adults and families to help them improve their wellbeing by increasing digital and social inclusion.**

They aim to reduce social isolation through building digital skills and maintaining connections, helping people to stay connected, improve financial health, increase employability, access resources and more.

They provide support through digital groups, one-to-one sessions, and through the Connecting Scotland digital support helpline. Through these interventions, they can help with:

- Using devices like smartphones, tablets, laptops or desktop computers
- Connecting to the internet
- Navigating the web and social media
- Completing everyday tasks online
- Connecting with the community, family and friends
- Managing finances, paying bills and saving money online
- Reducing costs (energy providers, data plans, shopping, etc.)
- Finding opportunities for education and employment
- Feeling less isolated and having someone to talk to

## Warm Places

Throughout East Lothian there are a number of council and community-run buildings that are open to the public, such as libraries and community centres, where people can use services and participate in activities in a warm and welcoming space.

To find out more and locate a warm space in your area please visit

[eastlothian.gov.uk/warm](http://eastlothian.gov.uk/warm)

To get help and more information you can call them on **0800 0590 690** or visit them at [www.peopleknowhow.org/reconnect](http://www.peopleknowhow.org/reconnect)

# Keep The Heid

## New mental health café begins in Tranent

Following the success of the **Keep The Heid** group in Haddington, a new mental health café has been set up in Tranent.

The group aims to provide a safe space to talk about mental health and the impact of conditions such as depression and anxiety. The sessions are run by a professional facilitator and volunteer with lived experience of dealing with poor mental health.

It is free to access and there are no waiting lists. You can make a self-referral.

**The group runs on Tuesdays at the Fraser Centre, 3 Winton Place, Tranent from 7pm to 9pm.**

For more information and to make contact, please use the following details:

**e: [keeptheheidcafe@gmail.com](mailto:keeptheheidcafe@gmail.com)**

**t: 07548136575**



# Save time and go online

Many council services are available online 24 hours a day through our website, and we're working hard to bring even more services online.

## [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/council-tax](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/council-tax)

Pay your council tax online, apply for council tax reduction, tell us about a change of address or switch to e-billing.

## [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/boost](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/boost)

Find out about financial support available to help ease the cost of living challenges faced by many local households. Use the online benefits calculator to check you're getting everything you're entitled to. Or apply online for a Community Care Grant through the Scottish Welfare Fund.

## [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/waste-services](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/waste-services)

Order new bins, boxes or bags, check your collection days or tell us about a missed bin.

Save yourself a journey and do your 'life admin' at a time that suits you

## [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/jobs](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/jobs)

Search for a local job you love or get careers advice.

## [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/pay](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/pay)

Pay online for all kinds of things from rent, school payments, planning applications to coastal car park permits.

## [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/report](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/report)

Report repairs or let us know about many different issues like fly tipping, potholes or antisocial behaviour.



# Local Housing Strategy 2024-29



**East Lothian Council is preparing the next Local Housing Strategy 2024-2029 (LHS). The LHS sets East Lothian's ambitions on the delivery of new housing.**

It considers all types of housing within the social and private sector and looks at the quality of existing housing and how to respond to homelessness.

For council tenants, the LHS influences the maintenance of East Lothian Council properties. It also considers allocation policies and tenancy support services. The LHS also sets how to invest in more social housing over the next five years.

During 2022 and 2023, the Housing Strategy Team will speak to various council services, local organisations, tenants and residents as well as

children. This will help the team to understand housing issues and draft a Local Housing Strategy.

The draft LHS will be published in Winter 2023, if approved by Cabinet. Everyone will have the chance to comment on the draft Local Housing Strategy. An online survey will be available on the council's consultation page for you to take part, at [www.eastlothianconsultations.co.uk](http://www.eastlothianconsultations.co.uk)

There will also be opportunities to give your views on the LHS in person at consultation events, dates and venues will be publicly available nearer the time.

# Our Financial Support Team

The cost of living crisis has been tough and it's a worrying time for council tenants and other local residents.

With rising food prices, fuel costs and more, you're not alone if you're worried about money or have been struggling to make ends meet.

East Lothian Council's Financial Support Team delivers a wide range of services, providing support for many people who have been faced with a crisis or emergency or are just struggling to cope. Linda Ritchie is the Team Manager, assisted by 3 Senior Financial Support Officers and a team of fantastic Financial Support Officers, who want to help.

## How can the team help?

### Help to reduce your Council Tax

You may be eligible for help with your Council Tax payments via the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Eligibility depends on your income, including income from people who live with you.

You won't qualify if you have more than £16,000 in savings,

although the savings rule does not apply if you receive the guarantee element of Pension Credit. You may also qualify if you receive Adult Disability Payment, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment or Carer's Allowance.

**Note:** It's worth checking to make sure you're not missing out on Pension Credit, or other benefits as this can help you access other financial support. Use our online benefits calculator for a quick estimate at

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/entitled-to](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/entitled-to)

### Help to reduce your housing costs

If you are pension age, you may qualify for Housing Benefit to help pay your council rent. You can apply if you're working or out of work. How much you get depends on how much rent you pay, how many people live with you, your household income, including benefits, pensions and savings.

Working age Housing Benefit is only available if you live in supported or temporary accommodation. If you're working age and in general accommodation, you can apply for Universal Credit to help with your housing costs.

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing cost element and need further financial assistance to meet your housing costs, you may qualify for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing cost element and are affected by the benefit cap, you should apply for Discretionary Housing Payment as you can get help to replace the amount of benefit removed by the cap.

### Help if you're in crisis

**The Scottish Welfare Fund** provides a safety net for people on low incomes. This is a discretionary scheme which means it provides grants that do not have to be repaid. Qualifying conditions apply, for the two types of grant available:

**A Crisis Grant** aims to help people on a low income who are in crisis due to a disaster (such as a fire or a flood) or an emergency (such as where money has been

lost or an unexpected expense has arisen) and can provide occasional assistance to people where there is an immediate threat to the health or safety of that person or their family.

Examples include if you need help with food or with heating costs; if you're a victim of domestic abuse and need help with things like moving away from an abuser; or if you're facing a gap in your normal income because of redundancy or change at work.

**A Community Care Grant**, which is usually goods or services, can be provided to people who need help in order to establish or maintain a settled home. You can receive support if you:

- are leaving care or might need to go into a care institution if help is not provided
- are homeless or living an unsettled way of life
- or someone in your household is facing exceptional pressure such as a relationship breakdown

### How many people have been helped?

The Financial Support team have provided help to thousands of local residents in 2022/23.



## Testimonial

One of our customers provided feedback to say:

**“My appreciation goes to you because of the financial support you provided. Those you help in this way are enjoying the relief of no worry. I just felt at Christmas your work needed to be sung for once. Much appreciation for saving ours.”**

A message from Team Manager Linda Ritchie...

**“We have seen a huge increase in the number of people contacting my team, many of whom have not had to access help before. Many of our customers are anxious about the future and unsure where to go for help.**

**“If anyone is struggling or needs advice, I would urge you to get in touch straight away, you’re not alone. Even if my team can’t help, we work with lots of other council teams and external agencies who may be able to help you, for example ways to boost your income, help to manage debt, help with food and energy costs and also help if your mental health has suffered.**

**“We have also been telling our customers to check out our Helping with the cost of living crisis leaflet, which has lots**

**of helpful information about support available. We will shortly be publishing a spring/summer version of the leaflet so this will be available very soon.”**

Visit [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support) to find out more.

## How to contact us

You can find more information about all of our services on the council website, including application forms, so if you can get online, we would encourage all local residents to check this out at [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/financial-support](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/financial-support)

If you need to speak to an officer about a Community Care Grant or Crisis Grant, you can phone our Scottish Welfare Fund line on 01620 828790 Monday to Thursday 1pm to 5pm or Friday 1pm to 4pm or you can email [scottishwelfarefund@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:scottishwelfarefund@eastlothian.gov.uk)

If you need to speak to an officer about Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit or a Discretionary Housing Payment, call **01620 827730** Monday, Tuesday Thursday & Friday 9am to 1pm or Wednesday 10am to 1pm or you can email [financialsupport@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:financialsupport@eastlothian.gov.uk)

# Safety and compliance checks

Tenant Safety is paramount to East Lothian Council and we have been taking the necessary steps to adapt the way we work as well as investing in a number of measures.

The coming months will see the introduction of more flexible service and inspection procedures as we seek to achieve improved first time access to properties. We will be updating you ASAP on these new procedures.

Over last year alone, we have completed **10,924** Landlord Gas Safety Checks and **3224** Electrical Installations Condition Inspections. In addition, we have completed a further **712** new alarms installation to comply with as Smoke, Heat and CO Detections standards as well as fitting **225** new fire doors to our properties in shared stairs.



## Receiving Homefront by email

In the past few years, more tenants have started to receive their copy of **Homefront** by email. We do still post out paper copies to some of our tenants, if we do not have an email address for them.

We are always looking at ways to improve and get information out to tenants quickly so if you would like to receive your copy of Homefront by email,

# National Panel of Tenants and Service Users

**Would you like to help improve council and housing association services in Scotland? If you would, you can take part in the latest National Panel Survey.**



please contact your area housing office and ask that your contact details be updated to include your e-mail address. Or the next time you are in contact with the council e.g. for a repair, ask them to record your e-mail address.

The survey is one of the ways that the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) can hear what tenants and service users think and make sure it focuses on what matters most.

Members of the Panel receive occasional surveys and invites to take part in other feedback exercises. It gives you a chance to share your experience and give your views on issues which may affect your council or housing association's services. Participation is always optional and you can leave at any time.

If you would like to join the Panel visit the SHR website for more info <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/for-tenants/how-we-include-tenants-and-service-users/national-panel-of-tenants-and-service-users>

or contact **Engage Scotland** on Tel: **0800 433 7212**.

# Get in touch

## AREA OFFICES

Call 01620 827 827, email us, or visit your nearest housing office.

### MUSSELBURGH

The Brunton, Ladywell Way  
musselburgharea@eastlothian.gov.uk

### HADDINGTON

John Muir House, Brewery Park  
haddeast@eastlothian.gov.uk

### TRANENT & PRESTONPANS AREA

The George Johnston Centre,  
35 Winton Place, Tranent EH33 1AE  
housingtranent@eastlothian.gov.uk  
housingprestonpans@eastlothian.gov.uk

### NORTH BERWICK

Library & Customer Services, School Road  
housingnorthberwick@eastlothian.gov.uk

### DUNBAR

Bleachingfield Centre,  
Countess Crescent  
housingdunbar@eastlothian.gov.uk

Benefits  
01620 827730

Council tax  
01875 824314

Housing  
01620 827827

Homelessness  
01620 827536

Repairs  
01875 824311

Scottish Welfare Fund  
01620 828790

Social work  
01875 824309

Special uplift  
01875 824305

Switchboard  
01620 827827

Welfare Rights  
01620 827827

Antisocial Behaviour  
01875 824 307

Gas Leaks  
0800 111 999

If you need Homefront in another format  
e.g. Large Print, audio, or in your own  
language, please call 01620 827199.



Spotted a broken street light?  
Pothole? Fly tipping?  
01875 824 305

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/reportit](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/reportit) 