

# introduction



## Welcome!

This handbook aims to provide all the information you need about your tenancy with East Lothian Housing Association. It has been designed to answer many of the common questions we are asked and we hope that you find it useful and easy to understand.

A group of tenants and staff have worked together to prepare this handbook and we would like to thank them for their help and support.

If you have any questions about any of the services we provide, or about your tenancy, please check this handbook to find out what to do.

If there is something not covered by this handbook, or if you want to talk to someone, please do not hesitate to contact us on **01620 825 032** or visit our website, [elha.com](http://elha.com).

If you or a member of your household would like any part of this handbook explained, in larger print, or on tape/CD, please let us know and we will arrange to do this for you. If you need to meet with staff to talk about your tenancy we can arrange to have a signer present. We also use a telephone interpretation service called Language Line for people who require an interpreter.





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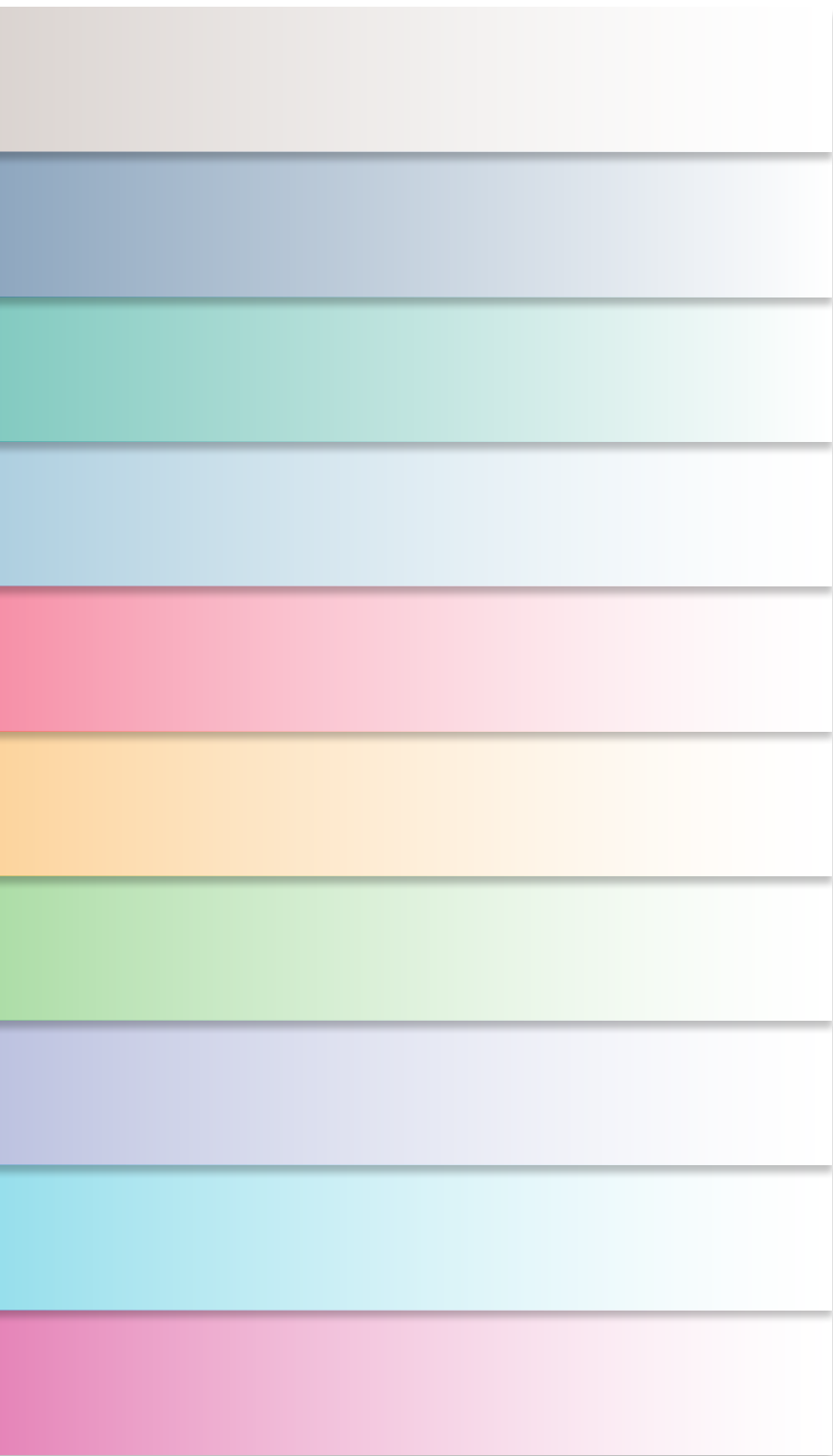
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## Our On-line Housing Office

**elha.com** is one of the best ways to access our services. All our main services such as rent payment, repairs reporting and applying for housing are available on-line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We aim to offer all our other services on-line too, so if you find you can't do something on our website that you would like to – let us know!

During the day, our on-line housing office is open, and you can 'chat' to our staff by clicking on the 'live on-line help' button (out of office hours you can leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as we re-open).

## Our web-based services

Most of our services are available to everyone, but some services are only available to our tenants (see additional services for registered users). To make sure all of our services are available on-line, we have staff available during the day to 'chat' to you through our on-line housing office.

We can help you by guiding you to the part of our website you need to deal with your enquiry, highlighting text on the screen for you, or even by opening web pages for you on your computer. We can also respond to specific questions, and e-mail information sheets to you if they could be of use. We work from the principle that you should get the same level of service in our on-line office that you would expect if you visited or telephoned us.

So, for example, as well as our main services, you can add your home to our Mutual Exchange register and search for exchange properties, report a neighbour problem, find out about any job vacancies we have, make a complaint or give us feedback on our services. You can also find lots more information about us, including copies of many of our policies and procedures, as well as an on-line copy of this handbook.

## Additional services for registered users

All of the services described above are available to anyone who is interested in the work we do, including tenants and housing applicants.



However, there is also an area of [elha.com](http://elha.com) that can only be accessed by our tenants. You have to register with us first to access this part of the website. If you have not already registered, you can register your details at [elha.com](http://elha.com). Registration is simple and free. Once registered, you can log in and:

- Look at your rent account and the payments you have made recently
- View and print out your rent account statement
- Report a repair and book your own repair appointment time slot
- View all the repairs that you have reported over the last 12 months
- Join our Paper Free Service to receive documents by e-mail
- Request to change your rent payments to Direct Debit
- Participate in on-line surveys and consultations

[elha.com](http://elha.com) is updated every day and we are always working on new services to make [elha.com](http://elha.com) even better, so make sure you log on regularly!

## Accessibility

Our website has links to a text translation tool, so that pages

can be translated into different languages. We also have a text re-sizing feature that allows you to view our web pages at a size that suits you. In addition, we subscribe to Browsealoud, a service that 'reads' our web pages for you – you can even choose from a range of different voices and accents!

We design and test our web pages to make them accessible to a variety of different browsers, including mobile phones. We aim to continually expand our on-line services and always welcome comments about our design, layout and accessibility.

## Mobile Phone Services

As well as all the other ways to contact us, you can send us a text message – just text the word [elha](http://elha.com) then your message to 88222 (messages charged at standard rates).

We will also continue to expand our range of mobile phone based services – please check [elha.com](http://elha.com) for our latest range of services.

# about us

About us.  
How we are run.  
How to get involved.

## Introduction

East Lothian Housing Association (ELHA) was founded in 1988 with the aim of providing good quality affordable housing within East Lothian. All of our properties are in East Lothian.

We are a charity and do not operate to make a profit. While our early work was in building new homes for rent, we now own and manage a wide variety of housing:

- Ex Scottish Homes houses acquired in 1996 (LSVT)
- Over 500 properties built by ELHA (Own Build)
- Sheltered and Amenity properties for older people
- Shared Ownership and Low Cost Home Ownership properties
- Workshop Homes

Our mission statement is 'to promote a balanced community by providing locally managed quality homes and services which meet the needs and aspirations of local people'.

## How to become a member

We are always keen to encourage our tenants and anyone with an interest in housing to become a member of the Association.

For a £1.00 fee you can become a member of ELHA for life. All you have to do is fill in a membership form which you will receive at your settling in visit soon after you become a tenant. Membership gives you the right to:

- Vote for who is on our Management Committee
- Stand for election yourself
- Attend and vote at the Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- Receive our Annual Report



## Who runs the Association

We are controlled by a Management Committee made up of voluntary, unpaid members who are elected at our Annual General Meeting (AGM). The Management Committee oversee the running of the organisation and are responsible for making decisions on issues such as housing policy and expenditure. Membership of the Management Committee is not restricted to tenants of the Association but is open to anyone with an interest in housing in East Lothian.

Our Management Committee is made up of up to 15 people elected by our members. Management Committee members are not paid and give their time and commitment freely to the Association.

The Management Committee controls ELHA's business by:

- Approving the policies to be followed by staff
- Ensuring staff carry out all legal and financial responsibilities of the Association
- Give authority to staff to carry out the decisions of the Management Committee and attend to the day to day business.

As ELHA is a fairly large organisation to run, the Management Committee also has the following two Sub-Committees:

- Housing & Property Services - meet every three months to deal with issues such as allocations, rent arrears, housing policies, repairs, maintenance and new housing development
- Finance & Audit - meet every three months and deals with accounts and budgets





## What is expected of Management Committee Members?

Management Committee members do not have to be professional people, but they must have a keen interest in housing and have a commitment to ELHA.

Each Management Committee member will serve on the Management Committee for three years, when they have to stand for re-election at the AGM. One third of the Management Committee stands down each year to allow new members to join. If no new members wish to join, the existing Management Committee members may be re-elected.

It is vital that Management Committee members understand how we work and what the key housing issues are. We provide training and support to

make sure that Management Committee members have the skills needed to run ELHA, and we pay them out of pocket expenses for attending meetings and seminars.

## Who controls the Management Committee?

The Management Committee is responsible to our members. This means that if members are unhappy about how ELHA is being run they can elect a new Management Committee at the AGM.

Management Committee members must work within the rules of the Association and the law. They are also accountable to The Scottish Housing Regulator, a government housing agency that monitors the work of all Housing Associations in Scotland.



## Information available to you

We are committed to being open in everything that we do. We will make non-confidential information, including copies of our policies, widely available and will continue to regularly issue information about our work to tenants, members and other interested parties.

## How to get involved

You have a legal right to be involved and consulted about how we operate and the decisions we make: don't let it go to waste!

Tenant Participation is about tenants taking part in the decision making process, influencing decisions about housing policies, housing conditions and housing related services. Participation or "taking part" can mean different things to different people. It can range from getting information that is well presented and easily understood to becoming a

member of the Management Committee, involved in the running of the Association.

We support and actively encourage tenants taking part. Our Housing Officers and our Customer Information Officer work to ensure that any tenant who wishes to become involved in Tenant Participation can do so. We also have a commitment from all staff and Management Committee members towards Tenant Participation in all areas of our work.

We give you the opportunity to get involved in the management of your home in a number of ways, and at different levels, so you can be as involved as much or as little you want to be. The choice is yours.

### What you can do

- Become a share member of the Association for £1.00
- Join our Management Committee
- Form a tenant or resident organisation in your area



- Read our leaflets and newsletter articles, and return the comments cards
- Complete and return one of our questionnaires or surveys
- Let our Customer Information Officer or your Housing Officer know that you would like to be involved and what subjects interest you
- Join our Tenant Participation Working Group
- Let us have your comments, suggestions and complaints
- Leaflets giving information about a service
- E-mail (if you provide us with an e-mail address)
- Telephone
- Text messages
- On our website

**Some examples of how we will communicate with and/or consult with you are:**

- Letters in Plain English (or in large print, on CD or a format to suit you, if required)
- Questionnaires to find out what you think about a particular subject
- Satisfaction surveys
- Meetings on specific subjects
- Newsletters

## Satisfaction Surveys

We recognise that the best way to identify our strengths and weaknesses and make improvements is to ask our customers. We carry out a range of satisfaction surveys throughout the year to find out how well our customers think we are doing in various key areas of our service. These surveys may be on-line or postal questionnaires, telephone interviews or home visits. We hold a prize draw every month for all repair survey forms returned.

Every four years we carry out a comprehensive tenant survey using an independent researcher.



## Equal Opportunities

We have clear policies and procedures which promote equal opportunities and respect the needs of everyone in our community.

Our policies cover opportunities for tenants to get involved in our work and the recruitment, employment and training of all staff.

We will act swiftly and firmly against any form of discrimination, for example on the grounds of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, colour, race or ethnic origin. Same sex couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples.

# your tenancy agreement



## Introduction

The majority of our tenants have a Scottish Secure Tenancy (only those people who are tenants of a Workshop Home or have a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy have different tenancy agreements). The tenancy agreement is the legal contract which allows you to occupy your home. This legal document sets out your rights and responsibilities and those of East Lothian Housing Association. Please make sure you keep this document in a safe place (it fits in the pocket inside the back cover of this handbook!) as it lays out the terms and conditions of the agreement between you and us.

Most of the information in this section is a summary of your Tenancy Agreement. It is not intended to change or add to the Agreement. This summary tells you the most important things you need to know about your tenancy.

## Moving into your new home

You must move in at the start of your tenancy, if you don't you could lose your home. Normally you will not be able to get Housing Benefit until you move in - but your rent will still be due.

Decorating is your responsibility but we may give you an allowance to help with the costs of decoration if your new home is in poor decorative order. Decoration allowances are not given to tenants who exchange tenancies.

If you are unable to carry out your own decoration work and have no friends or family who can help, we may be able to advise you where to go for help.



## Pets

You are allowed to keep pets in your home unless they are forbidden by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 or any other law. You must keep your pets under control and make sure that they do not cause a disturbance. We are entitled to ask you to remove your pet if it is causing a nuisance. You can also be prosecuted and fined, for example, if your dog barks continually or you do not clean up after your dogs. If your pet causes nuisance or annoyance to others this is in breach of your Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement.

## Security of your tenancy

Your Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement can only be ended in one of the following ways:

- By you giving us four weeks notice, in writing, that you intend to end your tenancy
- By written agreement between you and us
- By the Association taking court action for a decree to evict you
- By the Association taking back the house if you abandon it
- By your death where there is no-one who qualifies who wishes to succeed to the tenancy (see [Succession](#) on page 12)
- By us changing the tenancy to a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy if an Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) is made against you or a member of your household

A joint tenant can end their interest in a joint tenancy, by giving four weeks notice, in writing, to the Association and to the other joint tenant. This will end their interest in the tenancy, but will not end the tenancy.

We cannot evict you unless a Sheriff is satisfied that it is reasonable to do so.



We can take legal action against you if you harass someone living in or visiting the area.

You could lose your home if we find out after you move in that you gave false information in your housing application. If we take legal action against you, other residents (for example, lodgers) have the right to be heard in any legal action.

## The Right to a Joint Tenancy

Two or more people who live (or intend to live) in the house can apply for a joint tenancy. This will only be granted where all of the proposed joint tenants will live in the house and we can only refuse consent where there are reasonable grounds for doing so.

## Abandoned Houses

If you move out of your home without telling us, we may end your tenancy and let the property to another applicant. We will do this by

writing to you telling you of our intention to repossess the property because it has been abandoned. You will have 28 days to respond to this letter. If you do not respond we will write to you again and end your tenancy.

If you have a joint tenancy and we have grounds to believe that one of you no longer occupies or intends to occupy the property, we will write to the abandoning joint tenant telling them that we intend to end their share of the tenancy. They will have 28 days to respond to this letter. If they do not, we will write again and their interest in the tenancy will end 4 weeks later. Copies of these letters will be sent to the remaining tenant.

If you think we were wrong to end your tenancy in this way, you can make a formal complaint to our Director of Housing within 6 months of the tenancy being ended. You can also appeal to the Sheriff Court for a period of up to 6 months from the end of your tenancy.



## Succession (Inheriting a Tenancy)

Succession to a Scottish Secure Tenancy means a person, who is a “qualifying person”, inheriting that tenancy on the death of the tenant. A Scottish Secure Tenancy can only be succeeded to twice. Each time there are three levels of priority to decide who the “qualifying persons” are, which are explained below. If the tenancy has been inherited twice, the third death will normally end the tenancy.

- **First level**

Priority goes to the surviving spouse, co-habitee of either sex (providing they have lived there for at least 6 months before the tenant’s death) or joint tenant;

- **Second level**

If no-one qualifies at the first level, or a qualifying person does not want the tenancy, then priority goes to other members of the tenant’s family, (providing the house

was their only/principal home at the time of the tenant’s death);

- **Third level**

If no-one qualifies at the first or second level, or a qualifying person does not want the tenancy, then priority goes to carers aged 16 and over, where the house was their only/principal home at the time of the tenant’s death and they gave up secure accommodation to care for the tenant or a household member.

If the house is designed or adapted for a person with special needs, no person will qualify under level 2 or 3 unless that person has special needs requiring that type of accommodation. If a person would have qualified, we will make other suitable accommodation available.

**Please make sure you always tell us, and if appropriate, the Council’s Housing Benefit Department, who is living in your house, and let us know when anything changes.**





## Assignment

There are certain circumstances (such as marital breakdown), when you might decide to leave your home and wish to pass your tenancy to another person who lives in the household.

You have the right to assign your tenancy to anyone who is aged 16 years or over provided that person lived in the property as their only/principal home for a minimum of six months. You must get our consent for this and we can only refuse consent if there are reasonable grounds for doing so.

## Sub-letting

If you are going away from home for a period of time, for example six months, and do not want to leave your house empty, you have the right to sub-let it, provided we give our consent. If we approve your sub-let you will still be responsible for the tenancy.

This includes the payment of rent and the behaviour of the sub-tenant. Where we give consent, we normally allow a sublet for 6 months, however, depending on the circumstances, may agree to extend this to 12 months.

## Lodgers

If you have enough room in your house you may want to take in a lodger. A lodger is a person who is not a relative but lives with you and pays you something towards their keep. You have the right to take in a lodger but must obtain our written permission to do so first, and we can only refuse if we have reasonable grounds.

If you get Housing Benefit you must tell the Council that you have a lodger as this will affect the amount of Housing Benefit you get and the amount of rent you will need to pay to us. If you are getting Income Support you must also tell the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).



## Exchanges

You have the right to exchange (swap) homes with a tenant of another Registered Social Landlord or Council provided you get written consent from both Landlords. **See Section 9, Moving Home**, for more information.

## Running a business from home

Your tenancy agreement states that your home is for residential purposes only but there may be occasions when we will consider allowing you to run a business from home. If you do want to do this, you must apply to us for permission first, and we can only refuse if there are reasonable grounds to do so.

## Repairs

(See also Section 4, [Repairs and Maintenance](#))

By law we must make sure that your home is wind and water tight and fit for human habitation. We must also

carry out repairs within a reasonable period of time.

We will repair damage to boundary walls and fences within a reasonable period of time if the damage significantly affects your use of the communal areas of your home or it poses a danger to any user. We will carry out inspections of the communal areas at reasonable intervals.

We will carry out an annual inspection of your heating system in your home if you have gas central heating and we will provide you with a copy of the inspection report.

We will repair your home if it is damaged by fire, flood or an Act of God (e.g. extreme weather). We have the right to get access to your home to inspect it or carry out repairs, as long as we give you 24 hours notice.

You have the right to have certain essential repairs carried out within a specified period. If these are not done you may be entitled to compensation.



You have the right to compensation at the end of your tenancy for certain types of improvements you have made to your home with our permission. See **Section 4**, Repairs and Maintenance for more information.

We have the right to charge you the costs of restoring the house to its previous condition if you carry out any alterations or improvements without our permission or you have had permission but not carried out the work to an acceptable standard.

## Information

- We will give you a written tenancy agreement
- We will give you information and advice on your Right to Buy position including obligations likely to be incurred if you buy your own home
- We will provide you with information about our complaints procedure

- We will provide you with information on a range of matters, including policies on rent setting, allocations and repairs if you ask for this.

## Right to Buy

You do not have the Right to Buy unless you were a tenant in 1996 and transferred to East Lothian Housing Association through the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of Scottish Homes' housing stock in 1996. This is because the Government restricted the Right to Buy for Associations with charitable status, which includes us.

## Consultation

We will consult you on issues which affect the management of your home, such as proposed increases in rent or services charges (which relate to services we may provide to you and your neighbours, such as communal stair lighting), or changes to any of our policies which may have a significant effect on you.



## Right to withhold rent

If you think we have broken the tenancy agreement or failed to do anything we promised, you can make a complaint using our Complaints Procedure. See **Section 6**, Comments and Complaints, for more information.

If we have failed to carry out our maintenance obligations under the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement, you have the right to withhold your rent until we do comply with our obligations.

However, you may only do so if:

- You have notified us of the need for a repair in writing; AND
- We have not done these repairs within a reasonable period; AND

- You have made a formal complaint under our Complaints Procedure; AND
- You have finished the Complaints Procedure and are still dissatisfied, and 3 months have passed since you made the formal complaint.

**You are strongly advised to take legal advice if you are considering withholding your rent, as non-payment of rent could result in your home being repossessed.**

# repairs and maintenance



## Introduction

We aim to respond to your repairs quickly and efficiently to give you a first class maintenance service. We also aim to maintain our houses to a high standard on a regular and planned basis.

## New or Improved Houses

If your house is new or newly improved, there is a different repairs procedure. During the first 12 months, the contractor who built or improved your home is responsible for putting right any defects caused by faulty materials or standard of work.

Plaster and timber can take up to a year to dry out, which can result in shrinkage and cracks appearing in the plaster or woodwork. You should not re-decorate your house during this period. The contractor will visit your house at the end of the 12 months (known as the defect liability period) and correct

any problems such as cracks. After this 12 month period you can re-decorate your house if you wish. We will then take over responsibility for repairs.

## Repairs

Please see our contact details for the ways that you can report a repair.

In order that your repair can be processed as efficiently as possible you should:

- Describe the repair in as much detail as possible
- Tell us when you will be at home to allow the workmen access

**We cannot normally give an exact time when the repair will be carried out, but we can offer you a range of options. These include an appointment between 8.00am and 1.00pm, an afternoon appointment between 12 noon and 4.30pm, or an appointment avoiding the 'school run' between 10.00am and 3.00pm.**



If you are unsure when you will be in, please tell us your telephone number so the contractor can arrange a suitable time with you to carry out the repair.

The details of your repair are recorded on our computer system. We then arrange for the work to be carried out by an approved contractor. In some cases, one of our Property Officers will inspect the problem before getting the contractor to carry out the repair. If you are not in for your repair or visit by the Property Officer, a card will be left for you asking you to contact us or the contractor.

### **How quickly will repairs be done?**

To make sure that our repairs service operates as efficiently as possible, your repair will be assessed. The nature of the repair will define which response category the order will be placed in. We have three response categories:

### **Emergency Repairs: 2 Hours**

A contractor will call at your home within two hours of receiving an emergency repair call. They will assess the situation and if possible carry out the repair. Sometimes parts need to be ordered to complete works. If this is the case the contractor will carry out a temporary repair and arrange for a follow up visit to complete the repair.

Emergency repairs are things that require immediate attendance to ensure the safety of tenants and the security of the property. For example:

- Dangerous electrical faults
- Complete loss of heat, power or water to your home
- Serious water leaks
- Insecure external doors or windows
- Blocked drains (if these present an immediate hazard to health and property)



### **Same Day Repairs:**

#### **1 Day**

Repairs which cause serious inconvenience will be attended on the day reported, for example:

- Complete loss of heat, power or water to your home

### **Urgent Repairs:**

#### **3 Working Days**

These repairs are defined as being a potential danger or major inconvenience, for example:

- Re-glazing work
- Faulty fire alarm system
- Blocked drains
- Central heating breakdown
- Water leaks (plumbing leaks, small roof leaks)

**Please note:** some targets may not be met if, for instance, storm conditions would make working unacceptably dangerous or the repair is dependent on the availability of parts.

### **Routine Repairs:**

#### **10 Working Days**

These include non-urgent repairs such as:

- Joinery repairs - for example, to internal doors, skirting boards or kitchen fittings
- Minor plumbing repairs

## **Who is responsible for repairs?**

We are responsible for most of the repairs to your home. There are some items for which you are responsible. You are also responsible for repairs which would be our responsibility, but where the damage has been caused by carelessness, negligence, or an accident on your part. You can get home insurance policies that cover the cost of such repairs. **See Section 7** for further information.



<b>Bathroom</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Who is responsible?</b>		<b>Comments</b>
	<b>Us</b>	<b>You</b>	
Bath	✓		
Shower unit		✓	Unless the shower unit was provided by us and we have assumed responsibility for it
Toilet seat and fixings		✓	
Toilet pan	✓		
Toilet cistern	✓		
Wash basin	✓		
Bathroom door lock	✓		
Pull cord	✓		
Electric wall heater	✓		
<b>Heating</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Who is responsible?</b>		<b>Comments</b>
	<b>Us</b>	<b>You</b>	
Chimney and flue	✓		
Chimney sweeping		✓	
Coal bunker	✓		
Coal fire grates and bars	✓		
Electric storage system	✓		
Fireplace tiles		✓	

Please contact us if you are unsure of who is responsible for any repair.





Gas-fired system with radiators	✓		Including gas fires if we have fitted them
Gas-fired warm-air system	✓		Including gas fires if we have fitted them
Solid fuel system (except fire bars)	✓		
<b>Doors</b>			
Item	Who is responsible?		Comments
	Us	You	
Door bell		✓	Except secure door entry systems or if fitted by us
Door chain	✓		Unless you have fitted it
Door name plate		✓	
House numbers	✓		
Letter flaps, inside and outside	✓		
Glass on inside door and screen	✓		Only for normal wear & tear, or where a Police incident number is provided
Inside doors	✓		Including handles and locks, but not adjustments to fit carpets, and not where fitted by you.

Please contact us if you are unsure of who is responsible for any repair.



Keys		✓	
Locks	✓		
Night latch (Yale type locks)		✓	Unless this is the only lock on the door
Outside doors	✓		Including entrance doors to tenements
<b>Electrical</b>			
Item	Who is responsible?		Comments
	Us	You	
Communal TV aerial system	✓		
Electric fire	✓		Unless you have fitted it
Immersion heater	✓		
Individual TV aerial		✓	
Light fittings etc	✓		Not including table lamps or light fittings installed by you
Extractor fans	✓		If fitted by us
Satellite dish		✓	Unless part of a communal satellite system
Plugs		✓	Including fuses
Smoke detectors & carbon monoxide detectors	✓		
Sockets	✓		

Please contact us if you are unsure of who is responsible for any repair.



Close and stair lighting	✓		
Light switches	✓		
Light bulbs, fluorescent tubes and starters		✓	
Fusebox	✓		
Wiring and circuits	✓		

### Kitchens

Item	Who is responsible?		Comments
	Us	You	
Cooker		✓	
Cooker connection point (gas or electric)	✓		Does not include cooker installation
Kitchen units	✓		Fair wear and tear only. Does not include kitchens fitted by you
Blocked sink waste		✓	Unless the drains are found to be faulty
Sink bowl and drainer	✓		

### Tenant Alterations

In most cases, tenants are responsible for the maintenance of any alterations or improvements they have made. If you have told us about an alteration or improvement before you fit it, and we have approved it, we MAY, in some circumstances, agree to maintain it from then on.

Please contact us if you are unsure of who is responsible for any repair.



If you have not received written approval to make an alteration or improvement which you later carry out, you will be responsible for 100% of the maintenance, and will usually be asked to remove the alteration or improvement and put the property back to its original state at your own cost

On some occasions, new tenants may be given the option for retaining an alteration or improvement put in place by a former tenant. In these cases the new tenant would be asked to sign a disclaimer stating that they assumed responsibility for the alteration or improvement

Please contact us if you are unsure of who is responsible for any repair.



## Chargeable Repairs

We will charge tenants for damage done to their property due to misuse, accident or neglect by the tenant, a member of their family or visitor. This includes forcing entry to the property for whatever reason or for repairs required following a forced entry.

We can also carry out repairs that are your responsibility on your behalf at a fixed cost. If you want us to carry out a chargeable repair, we will tell you:

- that the repair is your responsibility,
- how much it will cost you, and
- that you can arrange the repair yourself using your own contractor.

If you agree to us carrying out the repair, we will instruct our contractor and we will send you an invoice once the work is complete, which must be paid within 14 days.

If you pay the invoice on time you will get a prompt-payment discount.

If you do not pay the invoice we will not instruct any further chargeable repairs on your behalf until you either pay the bill or come to a suitable arrangement to repay it.

## Planned Maintenance Information

As part of the process of keeping your home in good repair, we operate a five year planned maintenance programme. This programme makes sure that, for example, all metal gutters and downpipes, external woodwork and common stairs are painted regularly.

Please contact us if you would like further information on the planned maintenance programme.



## The Right to Repair Scheme

The Right to Repair Scheme was introduced by the Government to make sure that all Housing Association tenants throughout Scotland receive a good repairs service for important repairs.

If a repair that is covered by the right to Repair scheme is not attended to within a set response time, we must pay you compensation for the inconvenience. You also have the right to appoint your own contractor from our approved contractor list to carry out the repair and we pay the costs, but first we will double check with the initial contractor as to why they did not complete the work.

**Qualifying repairs** covered by the Right to Repair Scheme are:

- Blocked flue to a boiler or open fire
- Blocked/leaking foul drain, soil stack or toilet pan (when there is only one toilet in the house)
- Blocked sink, bath or drain
- Toilet not flushing (when there is only one toilet in the house)
- Significant leaks or floods from water or heating pipes, tanks or cisterns
- Total or partial loss of water supply inside the house
- Total or partial loss of electricity supply inside the house
- Unsafe power or light sockets or electrical fittings
- Total or partial loss of gas inside the house
- Total or partial loss of space or water heating (when there is no alternative heating available)
- Insecure external window, door or lock
- Loose or detached bannister or handrail
- Unsafe timber flooring or stair treads



- Mechanical extractor fan in the kitchen or bathroom not working (when that room has no window)

When you report a repair we will tell you if it comes under this scheme. If it does, you will be told the maximum time we have to complete the repair, the name of the contractor and what action you can take if the repair is not carried out.

Please note that if the contractor cannot gain access to your home at the arranged time, your right to repair will be cancelled. You will then have to re-apply and start the process again.

## What to do if you want to improve your home

If you make an improvement to your home during your stay, you may be entitled to compensation at the end of your tenancy, provided you have obtained our written permission for the improvements first. This is called the Tenants Right to Compensation for Improvements Scheme.

For example, if you get permission to fit a new kitchen or bathroom, we would pay you compensation taking into consideration the initial cost of the improvement and depreciation (the reduction you would be paid based on the length of time the improvements have been fitted) when your tenancy ends.

Below is a list of improvements covered by the Right to Compensation for Improvement Scheme.



Item	Improvement
1	Bath or shower
2	Sound insulation
3	Wash hand basin
4	Toilet
5	Kitchen sink (including base unit)
6	Storage cupboard in bathroom/kitchen
7	Worktops
8	Space/water heating
9	Thermostatic radiator valves
10	Insulation of pipes, water tank or cylinder
11	Loft insulation
12	Cavity wall insulation
13	Draught proofing of external doors/windows
14	Double glazing/other window replacement/secondary glazing
15	Installation of mechanical ventilation in bathrooms
16	Rewiring/provision of power and lighting/other electrical improvements (including mains wired smoke detectors)
17	Security measures (excluding burglar alarm systems)

**Please remember you must get our permission before carrying out any alterations or improvements.** If you are considering making an improvement to your property, please contact us to discuss this. We will only pay compensation for alterations which have been approved and carried out to a standard that we consider to be acceptable.





## Equipment and Adaptations

If you or someone in your home is disabled or less able to manage personal and domestic tasks, equipment or an adaptation might help you. An adaptation is usually an alteration to your home such as a ramp to your front door or a walk-in shower. Equipment can be items such as grab rails or external handrails. We are able to access grant funding if you require adaptations. We can only access this funding if we receive a report from an Occupational Therapist stating that this adaptation is necessary.

If you think that you would benefit from some equipment or an adaptation you should approach your Social Work office or Occupational Therapist who will assess your needs. Please phone us for advice if you think you may qualify, or contact East Lothian Council's Access Team direct on **08456 031576**.

## Annual Gas Servicing

As your Landlord we are **legally required** to carry out an annual gas service to your gas heating. It is extremely important that you give us access to your home to carry out this work so that we can make sure that your gas heating is working properly and safely. You will receive a copy of the servicing report direct from the contractor on the day your heating is serviced.

If you do not give us access to carry out the annual service we will force entry to gain access. You must be aware that if this is necessary you will be recharged the cost of doing this. The cost of forcing entry can be considerable.

We will normally cut off the gas supply to a gas fired heating system if:

- You prefer to use another form of heating and are not using the gas fired heating system



- You have had the gas cut off because you have not paid the bill and we cannot carry out an annual service
- You have insufficient funds in your prepayment meter to allow us to carry out an annual service

We will reinstate the gas supply to your heating system as soon as you contact us to advise that you want to use the gas heating, you have paid the bill or that there are now sufficient funds for us to carry out the annual service. We will carry out the service at the same time as reconnecting the gas.

**By law and for your safety gas servicing must be carried out every year.**

## Inspecting Repairs

If we need to inspect a repair you have requested we will aim to carry this out within 5 working days. If you are not at home when our Property Officer calls, they will leave a card asking you to contact us to make another appointment. Please contact us as soon as possible to make sure the repair is not delayed.

We also inspect some of the completed repairs carried out by our contractors. It is important for us to check the work done by the contractors to see if you are satisfied with the work and make sure that we are receiving value for money. Please help us do this by giving us access to your home to check repairs.



## Satisfaction with Our Repair Service

When you order a repair we will automatically send you a satisfaction survey form to find out how happy you are with the service you have received from us and our contractor. We will also send you a satisfaction survey form after any contract we have carried out to improve your home. Your comments are valued, so please take a few minutes to take part in the surveys. We look at the results on a regular basis and when we review the service and the contractors we use. We report our findings to our Management Committee, telling them of any recurring problems and how we aim to resolve these.

If you have a complaint about our repair service or an idea to help us improve our service, we want to know. Please call us on **01620 825032** or refer to **Section 6, Comments and Complaints**, or contact us through our website, [elha.com](http://elha.com).



# tenancy management



## Introduction

The term Tenancy Management covers many of the services we provide in our role as a landlord.

Your Housing Officer is your main point of contact and you can arrange to see them in person at our office. Please make an appointment to make sure that they are available when you come in.

Alternatively your Housing Officer can visit you at home, or you can contact your Housing Officer through our online housing office at [elha.com](http://elha.com).

## Care of Neighbourhoods

We aim to ensure our estates are maintained to a high standard, and inspect them every year. Tenants are invited to attend these inspections, and take an active role in caring for their neighbourhood.

We regularly monitor the fabric and cleanliness of communal areas including

stairs, bin stores, lock-up garages, parking areas and drying facilities and take appropriate remedial action to resolve any issues that may arise.

We operate a stair cleaning contract in many of our communal stairs, for which residents are required to pay a service charge.

We monitor this contract on a regular basis to ensure that the work is being carried out satisfactorily. We carry out an annual satisfaction survey of this contract to obtain tenants views and to ensure a high level of service is being achieved.

## Car Parking

Car parking spaces are available to tenants and their visitors in some of our developments. Since the number of spaces is limited it is not normally possible to allocate spaces for the sole use of specific tenants. In areas where there is severely limited parking, we may operate a permit-only scheme.



Our car parks are provided for the sole use of parking private cars belonging to residents and their visitors. We will take appropriate measures to remove vehicles parked without authorisation (e.g. caravans, commercial vehicles) if they are causing a problem, or vehicles that have been abandoned in our car parks.

Untaxed cars will be reported to Environmental Services who have the authority to remove them. We will not allow major repair work on cars or other vehicles parked in car parks owned or managed by us.

You must not park any kind of vehicle in your garden unless you have a proper driveway or our permission in writing.

## Garages & Garage Plots

We have garages and also some plots where you can put up your own garage in some of our areas. When these become available we will advertise them on our

website and in local libraries and Council offices.

We will give our tenants priority over non-tenants when allocating a garage, and proximity to the garage will also be taken into consideration. Disabled applicants would also be given priority. There are no succession rights to garage leases. We will, however, give priority to spouses and co-habitees if the tenant dies and their partner wishes to continue with the lease.

We will only grant permission for garages that can be dismantled to be erected on our garage plots.

## Gardens

If you have a garden you are responsible for looking after it. You must:

- Keep it free from rubbish
- Make sure shrub beds and hedges do not become a nuisance to neighbours
- Make sure that bonfires do not affect your neighbours or cause danger
- Keep your gardens tidy



If you are unable to look after your garden due to ill health or age you may be able to get assistance. We operate a free garden care scheme for tenants aged 70 and over, who cannot maintain their garden and are living alone. Tenants under the age of 70 can apply to be part of the scheme if they provide a letter from their doctor explaining why they need help with their garden. Applications forms are available from our office.

## Rubbish Disposal

The Council collects household waste once a week from the wheelie bins provided. It is your responsibility to place the bin on the road side on the refuse collection day and take it back to the correct place after it has been emptied.

Bulky items will not be collected with household waste but the Council will collect them separately if you call to make

arrangements. Please see **Section 10** for the telephone number.

No furniture, cookers etc should be left in the stair, pathways or garden areas. If you do not contact the Council for a special uplift, we will uplift this and send the bill to the person who dumped the rubbish. If we cannot find out who has dumped the rubbish the cost of us picking it up will be added to the service charges for the area and everyone will have to pay.

## Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbour Disputes

Every tenant is responsible for the behaviour of all the members of their household, including visitors and pets. Under the terms of your Tenancy Agreement, excessive and persistent noise, disturbance or abusive or threatening behaviour towards neighbours or our staff are all breaches of the Agreement.



Anti-social behaviour is any behaviour which harms the quality of life of residents in an area, causing distress or alarm. It includes threats, drug dealing, theft and vandalism. Nuisance includes persistent noise, disturbance or abusive behaviour which causes distress to others.

If you are having a problem with a neighbour we would advise you, wherever possible, to speak to them first and try to resolve the problem. If you can't sort it out or you think that it is too serious for you to deal with on your own, you should contact your Housing Officer.

If your neighbour is a tenant of ours there are a number of ways your Housing Officer can deal with the problem:

- Visit both parties to discuss the problem and hopefully sort it out
- Arrange mediation if you and your neighbour are agreeable

- Speak to other organisations which might be able to help you, for example the Police or Social Work
- Seek an Anti-Social Behaviour Order
- As a last resort, take legal action against the tenant if they are in breach of their tenancy agreement to evict them

We also work in partnership with East Lothian Council's Anti Social Behaviour Team, Lothian and Borders Police and other local agencies to prevent and tackle antisocial behaviour. If you are being affected by anti-social behaviour you can contact the Anti-Social Behaviour Helpline, which is run by East Lothian Council, on 0845 601 8518 or by e-mail at [asb@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:asb@eastlothian.gov.uk)





## Drug use and drug dealing

We take drug use and drug dealing very seriously. We will consider taking repossession action against a tenant if they, anyone who lives with them, or any visitors to their home are found guilty of using our property for the use or supply of drugs.

## Harassment & racial harassment

Harassment is the deliberate interference with the peace, comfort or safety of any person. Harassing anyone on the grounds of race, colour, religious belief, gender, age, sexual orientation, culture, physical or mental disability, or lifestyle is a breach of your tenancy agreement and in some cases can be a criminal offence. This includes graffiti, damage to property, abuse and threats.

We know that all forms of harassment can cause great

distress and will deal with all complaints regarding harassment as a matter of priority. We will be understanding and deal with complaints confidentially.

You should contact your Housing Officer if you are suffering harassment. Your Housing Officer will consult you to find out how you wish the complaint to be dealt with. The action that can result can vary from a verbal warning to taking legal action against the tenant or tenants responsible.

## What to do if you are suffering domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is the physical, mental and/or sexual abuse of a man or woman by someone with whom he/she is or has been in a relationship. Domestic abuse also affects the children living in the house and there are links between domestic abuse and all forms of child abuse.



We will take a supportive, non-judgemental and positive approach to all persons who ask us for help and advice on domestic abuse. We will treat complaints seriously, sensitively and in complete confidence. We will not ask for evidence of violence or abuse but if you can offer any information or documents which could help with investigating the complaint, these could be very useful and we will accept them.

We would make sure that your home has the appropriate security precautions and treat any repairs required to make the property safe as emergency repairs. We would also assist you in obtaining temporary housing or suitable permanent accommodation as appropriate. If you are a victim of domestic abuse we would encourage you to seek help from one of the following agencies:

### **East Lothian Women's Aid**

69 Eskside West,  
Musselburgh  
Phone Mon - Fri  
10.00 a.m. – 3.00 p.m.  
**0131 665 9552**  
Help Line every day 10.00 am  
– Midnight **0800 027 1234**

### **Shakti Women's Aid**

**0131 475 2399**

Shakti is a specialised, non-judgemental safe and confidential service for all black and minority ethnic women and their children, who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Shakti and Women's Aid are able to provide advice and temporary accommodation to women with or without children.

Or contact:

### **The Citizen's Advice Bureau**

46 Court Street, Haddington  
**Tel: 01620 824471**

141 High Street, Musselburgh  
**Tel: 0131 653 2748**



## Marital or Relationship Breakdown

The Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981 and the Family (Scotland) Act 2006 give certain rights to tenants if their marriage or relationship has broken down.

If you and your partner decide that you can no longer live together, a decision has to be made about who will stay on in the house. It is important that you act quickly to protect your rights. No tenant can be made to leave his or her home except by a Court Order. The court has to be satisfied that there are good reasons for making you leave your home.

For married couples both partners have the right to stay in the house even if the house is only in one partner's name. This is known as an occupancy right. If your partner refuses you entry

or tries to evict you, you can go to court to have your occupancy right enforced. If you cannot agree who is to leave we cannot decide this for you. A court will have to make this decision for you.

If you are joint tenants and one of you wishes to leave, that person can end their share of the tenancy by giving us 28 days notice in writing. The tenancy would then continue in the remaining person's name.

If you are not married but are living together and the tenancy is not in your name you do not have an automatic right to stay in the house if your partner asks you to leave. However you may have occupancy rights and can apply to the Court for the right to stay in the house. You should seek legal advice about this as soon as possible.

Section 9 of this handbook contains advice and information on what to do if you are looking to move to a new home.



## Short Scottish Secure Tenancies (SSST)

Our tenants are generally given a Scottish Secure Tenancy but there are some special circumstances when we will use a SSST. For example, if an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) is made against a tenant or anyone living with them, we may convert their tenancy to a SSST.

We may use a SSST as a probationary tenancy when a prospective tenant has been previously evicted for anti-social behaviour within the last 3 years, or they, or a member of their household, is the subject of an ASBO. This probationary tenancy will last for a minimum of 6 months and can be for up to 12 months. We can convert it to a full Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) at any time during this period.

# comments and complaints

## Introduction

We aim to provide our customers with an excellent service, but we know that sometimes things can go wrong. We welcome complaints as a valuable way of letting us know about problems so that we can improve our services. We need to know where we are going wrong in order to put things right. Equally it helps us to know when we are doing things well, so we also welcome compliments on our service.

Anyone who receives or requests a service from us can make a complaint, and so can their representatives, such as solicitors or MSPs.

We will treat all complaints confidentially.

You may wish to make a complaint if:

- We have not provided a service you think we should
- There has been a delay in providing a service
- You feel our service has been poor
- You have not been happy with the attitude of our staff or contractors

- You are not happy with a decision we have made
- You are not happy with our policy and procedures
- You think information we have provided is wrong or misleading

Our Complaints Procedure is very simple. You can contact staff in person or over the phone, as well as in writing or through our website [elha.com](http://elha.com).

## Informal Complaints

In most cases, we can resolve problems quickly and easily, so it is always best to try to sort out the problem informally by speaking to the staff in the relevant department. Most complaints are normally resolved at this point. We aim to give explanations that are clear and easy to understand and we will apologise if we have got things wrong. We will then take steps to make sure that, if possible, changes will be made to make sure the problem does not arise in future.



## Formal Complaints

If you feel that your complaint has not been resolved then you can make a formal complaint, either in writing, by telephone, or online at [elha.com](http://elha.com). The complaint will usually be dealt with by the Manager of the relevant department.

Complaints about Reception staff or a visit to our office	Corporate Services Manager
Complaints about Repairs or Maintenance	Asset Manager
Complaints about Housing staff or how Tenancy Management issues have been dealt with	Housing Manager
Complaints about making a payment, or errors in your rent balance	Finance Manager

If you remain dissatisfied with the response to your complaint, we have an appeal process. For more information, please ask for a copy of our complaints leaflet, or visit [elha.com](http://elha.com).

At each stage of our complaints process you will receive confirmation that your complaint has been received and is being dealt with, and we will send you a written response to your complaint.

### Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, having completed our Complaints Procedure, you feel we have not dealt with your complaint properly, you have the right to contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman at:

Freepost EH641  
Edinburgh  
EH3 0BR

**0870 011 5378**  
**[www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)**



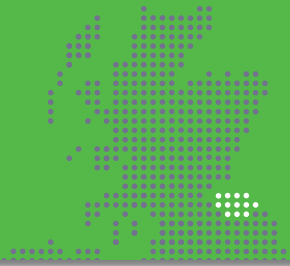
The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman provides a service for members of the public who feel they have suffered an injustice in the delivery of a public service. They investigate complaints of maladministration or service failure. If the Ombudsman decides we have not dealt with a complaint properly they will make a recommendation about what we should do to put things right. We will take on board any recommendation made by the Ombudsman.

Normally, any complaint to the Ombudsman must be made within 12 months of the problem arising.





# looking after your home



## Insurance

How would you replace your possessions if there was a flood, fire or you were broken into?

We have buildings insurance for all our properties, but you are responsible for the house contents insurance.

We would strongly recommend that you take out contents insurance to insure against damage to your possessions (such as your furniture, carpets, clothing, and appliances such as your TV, washing machine, DVD player etc).

You can obtain contents insurance from many insurance companies but the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations have a Diamond Insurance Service and Jardine Lloyd Thomson have a Crystal Insurance Scheme which are specialist schemes for Housing Association tenants and offer competitive rates. We have forms for the Diamond

Insurance Scheme, and other insurance companies who specialise in Housing Association contents insurance in our office. Please contact us if you would like us to send you out an application form.

## Frost Protection

During cold weather you can avoid frost damage and burst pipes by following these steps:

- Set the thermostat on your heating to at least 10°C (50°F) and leave it at this level while the cold weather persists. This should keep your home reasonably warm
- Leave the doors to each room open – this allows warm air to circulate
- Contact our Asset Management Department if you are going away for a lengthy period and leaving the house unheated. We can arrange to drain water



tanks **free of charge**

## Burst Pipes

If you do get a burst pipe, follow these steps:

- Turn off the water at the stop valve. If you don't know where this is, please contact us on **01620 825032**
- Switch off the electricity at the mains
- Switch off any water heaters
- Switch off the central heating system. If you have a solid fuel fire or system let the fire die down. Do not attempt to drain the boiler until the fire has gone out
- Open all sink and bath taps
- If possible, collect water in the bath for flushing the toilet and washing
- Call our office or the emergency number if the office is closed



- Warn any neighbours who might suffer damage
- Put buckets/towels under the leak

## Preventing Condensation

When warm air in your home comes into contact with cold surfaces such as windows and cold walls it can condense, the moisture resulting is called condensation and can cause dampness.

Signs of excessive condensation:

- Damp patches with mould growth on cold surfaces such as the inside or outside walls or around the windows
- Mould appears on clothes and furniture and there is a musty smell

These signs are often worse in cold weather.

If you keep your home warm and well ventilated you are unlikely to experience problems from condensation. Some additional tips to prevent condensation are:

- Never cover up permanent ventilators built into walls and, if your windows have trickle ventilators, keep them open
- Do not let kettles or pots boil longer than necessary
- Avoid drying washing over radiators or other appliances
- If you have your own tumble dryer, ensure that it is not allowed to ventilate into your home
- Keep doors to kitchens and bathrooms shut when the rooms are in use to prevent water vapour spreading through the house



- If your house is fitted with extractor fans, use them whilst cooking or having a bath or shower
- To ensure that air can circulate do not overflow cupboards and wardrobes

If you take all these precautions and you are still experiencing problems, please contact our Asset Management Department.

## Electrical Problems

- If an electrical appliance, such as a light or kettle stops working, it could be that the bulb needs to be replaced or there is a problem with the appliance
- If a light still does not work when the bulb has been changed or you think the appliance is not broken, switch off at the socket and check your fuse box (known as the RCD). This is situated near your electricity meter. If one of the trip switches is in the off position, put the trip switch to the ON position

- Switch the light switch or plug back on. Hopefully this will have solved the problem
- Contact us if the light or plug for the appliance is still not working
- You could check to see if your appliance is faulty and can do this by trying another appliance in the socket

## Fire

Fires can result from the slightest thing – dropped cigarette ends, sparks from fires, or chip pans. To reduce the risk of fire in your home:

- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children
- Put out carefully, all cigarettes, especially at night



- Close all internal doors at night
- Unplug all appliances when not in use and do not overload sockets
- Never leave chip-pans or any pots unattended on a cooker
- Make sure all family and friends know of the escape route if fire were to break out in your house

**In the event of a fire you cannot control:**

**Phone the fire brigade**

- If possible close the door to the room where the fire is located, using a cloth or towel to cover the handle of the door in case it is hot. Closing the door will help to contain the fire and the spread of any poisonous fumes
- Warn other people in the house and leave quickly. Don't stop to collect anything. Remember your escape route can be

cut off very quickly

- If your exit is cut off, close the door of the room you are in and seal it with a blanket or other cloth. Call for help from a window
- Don't go back for any reason

## Smoke Alarms

All of our properties are fitted with smoke alarms, which will give you an early warning by making a loud noise if fire breaks out. We install them for your safety.

**You should never:**

- Try to disconnect the system
- Paint over it
- Move it
- Remove the batteries

When the smoke alarm is working normally, the red light flashes every 40 seconds. Check your alarm at least once a



month to make sure that it is working properly.

You can do this by pressing and holding the test button until the alarm sounds. This may take up to ten seconds. When you press the button, the red light on it should flash continuously. The alarm should stop soon after you take your finger off the button.

The smoke alarm works off your electricity supply. It also has a battery for back-up in case the power fails. Clean your smoke alarm regularly to keep the dust off and improve its efficiency.

## Gas Escapes

### If you smell gas

- Put out cigarettes. Do not use matches or naked flames
- Do not operate electrical switches or doorbells
- Open all doors and windows and keep them

open until the escape is stopped

- Check to see if a gas tap has been left on accidentally or if a pilot light has gone out
- Contact us during office hours on **01620 825032** or Lothian Gas on **0131 440 4666** if the office is closed. If you cannot get a reply from the above numbers please call Transco free on **0800 111 999**

## Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be caused by faulty gas appliances. There are no obvious signs of carbon monoxide poisoning although symptoms may include tiredness, drowsiness, headaches and chest pains.

To reduce the risk we regularly check and maintain gas appliances we have installed to ensure high standards (**see section 7** for further information).



We have also installed carbon monoxide detectors in all our properties that have gas. These work like smoke detectors and an alarm will sound if carbon monoxide is detected. Some of the carbon monoxide detectors are battery powered - please contact us if the battery in your carbon monoxide detector runs out and we will have it replaced.

To prevent any further risk from carbon monoxide poisoning, follow these instructions.

- Never use a gas appliance if you think it is not working properly. Signs to look out for include yellow or orange flames, soot or stains around the appliance and pilot lights which frequently blow out
- Never cover an appliance or block the vents
- Never block or cover outside flues

If you have any doubts about the safety of your gas appliances, contact us.

## Door Safety

Certain types of entrance, particularly shared entrances to blocks of flats, are fitted with self closing doors. These are designed to ensure the doors remain closed when not in use. These doors should never be wedged open. The security of your house is at risk if entrance doors are left open and the door entry system (if one is installed) is not used properly.

As self closing doors are potentially dangerous young children should be discouraged from playing around them.

Never attempt to adjust the self-closing mechanism. Please report any faulty or broken doors to us immediately.

If you have a door entry system, please do not let anyone other than your visitors into the stair. Allowing other people in can lead to problems and disturbance.



## Windows

Windows, especially those on or above the first floor, can be a source of danger. There is a real risk of infants and small children falling out of open or unlocked windows and suffering potentially serious injuries. We have a policy of fitting safety catches to all windows above ground floor level.

You can help prevent accidents by taking the following precautions.

- Check that safety catches are fitted to all your windows above the ground floor. If in doubt, contact us
- Do not leave children alone or unattended in the house
- Wherever possible, do not place beds or furniture below windows as this provides a climbing platform for a child
- Do not tamper with any window bars which have been fitted

## Security

Most burglars are opportunists. Take a few simple precautions to reduce any risks:

- Never leave keys in a 'secret' hiding place
- If necessary, leave keys with a trusted neighbour
- Always lock doors and windows when you go out even for a short time
- If the house is going to be empty after dark, leave a light on in the living room and draw the curtains
- If you are going on holiday make sure you remember to cancel newspapers and milk. Ask a neighbour to keep an eye on the house
- Keep ladders locked away out of sight
- If a contractor or official calls, ask for identification. If they cannot produce it, ask





them to come back later and use the time to contact their organisation to check that they are genuine

- If in doubt, call the Police
- To check how secure your home is, when you leave the house, ask yourself: “If I forgot my keys how would I get back in?” If you can get in without breaking a window or bashing the door in, your home is not secure!

## Legionella

Legionella bacteria occur naturally in locations such as rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, Legionella bacteria may also be found in:

- Domestic water systems in residential accommodation
- Locations where aerosols may be formed such as showers and taps
- Hose pipes

The most likely route for infection is inhaling the bacteria when it is carried in water droplets, for example: in shower spray.

Legionella bacteria will thrive in any suitable water system. The optimum temperature at which the bacteria will multiply is between 37°C and 46°C. The temperature setting on hot water storage tanks include a thermostat which will enable stored water to be kept in the temperature range above 46°C.

**To reduce the risk of exposure:**



Disinfect your shower head every month, and descale it every three months in addition to the normal cleaning process. (for example, products like 'Milton' or disinfectants with a biocidal effect)

Showers and water outlets that are not used regularly must be flushed weekly for several minutes. If showers are not used for two weeks or more the shower head should be removed and the shower run for two minutes. The shower head should be disinfected before being re-fitted.

Hoses should be flushed for several minutes without creating aerosols each time they are used. External hose pipes should be flushed through weekly and if they are not used for two weeks or more the nozzle should be removed/adjusted to prevent aerosol formation

and the hose run for two minutes. The nozzle should be disinfected before being re fitted.

# money matters



## Your Rent

The amount of rent you pay has to cover the cost of:

- The day to day management and maintenance of our houses
- Improving properties – e.g. replacing kitchens and bathroom fittings, installing new windows, and central heating systems
- Rent lost through empty properties and rent arrears
- Paying back loans taken out to improve and build new houses

## Rent Increases

We review your rent every year and any changes to your rent are made in April each year. We will always consult you over any proposed changes to your rent to give you the opportunity to give us your comments. You will then be given one month's notice in writing of your rent increase to enable you to re-budget or to make an application for Housing Benefit.



## Paying Your Rent

Your rent is due on the first of each month and should be paid in advance. If it is easier to pay weekly, fortnightly or four weekly you can do so, but please speak to your Housing Officer to confirm this arrangement.

You can pay your rent by **Standing Order** or **Direct Debit** - please contact us and we will send you a form to be completed and returned to us.

Or, using your elha payment card, you can pay:

### Online at:

[elha.com](http://elha.com) or [allpay.net](http://allpay.net).

Internet banking is also available, contact us for details.

### By 24hr Telephone on:

0870 243 6040

**In person at:** any Post Office or shop displaying the Paypoint logo.

Payments (cheque, debit or credit card) can be made at our office. You will be issued with a receipt.



We also accept debit or credit card payments by phone on 01620 825032 and payment at a bank if we give you a pay in slip.

## How to Get Help with Your Rent

Housing Benefit is a national scheme administered in East Lothian by East Lothian Council. Anyone who pays rent can apply, even if they are working or getting other benefits such as Income Support or a State Retirement Pension.

You should ask East Lothian Council for an application form if you want to make a claim or get advice. Please contact us if you would like any help or advice completing the form.

The amount of Housing Benefit you will get depends on the amount of money you have coming into the house and any savings you may have. The number and ages of any people in



your house will also be considered.

East Lothian Council will send you a letter telling you the outcome of your claim. You should contact us to find out how much rent you have to pay. Even if you do not qualify at first, if your circumstances change in any way you can contact the Council to make a new claim.

**Please note that any delay in applying for Housing Benefit may mean a loss of benefit and could result in rent arrears.** Housing Benefit can be paid direct to you or to us. Even if the payment is paid direct to us it is still your responsibility to make sure it is being paid. Please also ensure that you reply to any letter you receive from the Council. If you don't it could lead to your Housing Benefit being cancelled, leaving you with the full rent to pay.

## Difficulty in paying your rent

We appreciate that tenants may at some time have difficulty paying their rent. Help and advice is always available and we will make every effort to take a sympathetic approach where someone is having financial difficulties.

If you know you will have difficulty paying your rent it is best to get help and advice as quickly as possible from your Housing Officer. You can discuss your arrears by telephone or make an appointment to come to the office. If this is not possible your Housing Officer can visit you at home.

Our staff can make an affordable arrangement for you to pay back your arrears. We do this by taking into account how much money you have coming in and how much you have to pay out.



We also provide an Independent Financial Inclusion Service, which offers confidential advice on a range of welfare benefits and money matters.

The Financial Inclusion Service can provide you with advice and support:

- checking if you are receiving all the benefits you may be entitled to
- acting as your agent to negotiate with any creditors
- arranging an energy check to make sure your home is energy efficient
- helping you to prioritise payments

If you would like to talk to someone from this service, please contact your Housing Officer.

If you are joint tenants you should remember that each member of the joint tenancy is responsible for making sure that the rent is paid in full.

### **If you do not pay your rent you could lose your home.**

We will take legal action against you to repossess your home if you do not keep to any repayment agreement you have made with us and you continue to be in arrears with your rent payments.

## East Lothian Council Welfare Rights Team

East Lothian Council provides free, independent and confidential advice in all matters relating to benefits. Please contact: Welfare Rights, Brunton Hall, Musselburgh. Tel: **0131 653 4303** to find out where and when surgeries are held.

### **Dealing with Debts**

If you are having problems paying other bills or debts please seek help. If you don't want to use our Financial Inclusion Service, there are various agencies who offer sympathetic, independent and confidential advice.



### **Citizens Advice Bureaux**

46 Court Street, Haddington  
**01620 824 471**

141 High Street, Musselburgh  
**0131 653 2748**

### **Shelter Housing Advice Centre**

Ground Floor, Unit 2  
Kittle Yards, Causewayside  
Edinburgh  
**0131 466 8031**

Brunton Hall, Musselburgh  
**0131 653 4304**

### **National Debt Line**

Telephone **0808 808 4000**

National Debtline has trained advisors who will help you. They can draw up repayment plans in order to get debt problems under control. Please don't put off asking for help - with the right advice, most debt problems can be turned around.





# moving home



## Introduction

If you find at some point that your home is no longer suitable for you, or perhaps someone in your household would like to apply for a house in their own right, there are a various options open to you.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people looking for housing in East Lothian, and this could mean that you may have to wait some time to be re-housed.

## Transfer

We allocate our properties through our homehunt service, which allows you to choose which properties you are considered for. Current tenants who want to move to another one of our properties can complete a short and simple registration form.

Once you have registered for homehunt, we will send you a registration pack

with information on how you may qualify for priority over other applicants and how properties are allocated. You can apply for any of our vacant properties that are advertised on the website **[www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info)** and in the Musselburgh News and East Lothian News. These papers are available at your local library, where you can also access the internet free of charge. We also advertise our vacant properties at our office, in all libraries in East Lothian, the Citizen Advice Bureaux and East Lothian Council offices.

You can get a registration form from our office or online at **[www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info)**, or, for more information, visit **[elha.com](http://elha.com)**.



## Mutual Exchanges

All of our tenants have the right to exchange, provided we and the other landlord agree to the request. It is up to you to find someone suitable to exchange with. They can be tenants of East Lothian Housing Association or another Housing Association, Housing Co-operative or a Local Authority such as East Lothian Council.

We have an Exchange Register of people who are looking for an exchange. The Exchange Register has details of the property the person currently lives in and the type of property and area that they would like to move to. Please contact us if you want your details to be added to this register.

You can search for suitable properties on the exchange register, or download the full list of properties online

at [elha.com](http://elha.com). The register is also available to view at our office, at East Lothian Council offices, and local libraries. East Lothian Council have their own Exchange Register and you can also add your details to this by contacting one of their local offices.

Once you have found someone who wants to exchange with you, you **must** get our written agreement **before** making any arrangements to move. We will respond to you within 28 days of receiving your application. Some examples of where we will not agree to an exchange are:

- if you have rent arrears or chargeable repairs accounts outstanding
- if you have been served with a Notice of Proceedings which is still valid



- if the house has been designed or adapted for someone with special needs
- where the house is too big or too small for either party

If we do not have all the information we need within 28 days of your exchange application to allow the exchange to take place, it will be refused. If extensive work is required, the request will be refused. If the exchange is approved, the incoming tenant must accept the house as it is.

## Shared Ownership

Shared ownership was introduced by the Government to help people in housing need who cannot afford to buy a house outright. The scheme is mostly aimed at first time buyers and you can buy a share (or tranche) of the property, usually raising a mortgage

to pay for it, and pay a reduced rent (called an occupancy charge), for the share you do not own. Shares can be bought at 25%, 50% or 75%. The sharing owner can increase their share at a later date to 100% if they wish.

We have properties in various parts of East Lothian that are available on a shared ownership basis and any available properties are advertised through homehunt. Please contact us for further information and a homehunt registration form if you are interested in shared ownership, or, for more information, visit [elha.com](http://elha.com).



## Moving On

When you know you are moving, you should make the following arrangements:

- if you have been receiving Housing Benefit at your previous address, you must inform the Housing Benefit office that you are moving. Housing Benefit will only be paid for your new home once you have left the previous home and moved into the new one
- contact electricity, gas and telephone companies to confirm when you want them to provide services to your home
- check that you have been given a copy of the current gas safety certificate for your home
- tell East Lothian Council's Council Tax department that you are moving.
- if you claim Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance or Family Tax Credits, tell the Department of Work and Pensions that you are moving
- arrange for your mail to be re-directed

# useful contacts



## To Contact Us

**Visit us, or chat to us  
on-line at:**  
elha.com

**E-mail us at:**  
enquiries@elha.com

**Speak to us:**

01620 828422  
(repair line)

01620 828415  
(homehunt line)

01620 825032  
(all other enquiries)

**Send us a text message:**

Text elha then your message  
to 88222 (messages charged  
at standard rates)

**Write to us at:**

18-20 Market Street,  
Haddington,  
East Lothian. EH41 3JL

**Visit us at:**

18-20 Market Street,  
Haddington,  
East Lothian. EH41 3JL

Monday 9.00am – 4.30pm

Tuesday 10.00am – 4.30pm

Wednesday 9.00am – 4.30pm

Thursday 9.00am – 4.30pm

Friday 9.00am – 4.00pm

## East Lothian Council

East Lothian Council provide  
a range of services to people  
living in East Lothian. You  
can visit their website at  
**www.eastlothian.gov.uk.**

The following telephone  
numbers may also be useful:

- Main Switchboard  
**01620 827 827**
- Housing Benefit &  
Council Tax Enquiries  
**01620 827 827**
- Homeless Unit  
**0800 169 1611**
- Welfare Rights Team,  
Brunton Hall  
**0131 653 5230**
- Building Control and  
Planning  
**01620 827 216**
- Recycling Helpline  
**01620 827 215**
- Special Uplift for cookers,  
settees, fridges etc  
**07875 824 305**
- Social Work Department  
– Community Care  
**0845 603 1576**



East Lothian Antisocial  
Behaviour Helpline

**0845 601 8518**

Or email:

**asb@eastlothian.gov.uk**

You can contact the helpline if you are being affected by antisocial behaviour.

Victim Support Mid and East Lothian **0131 660 3030**

For people who have been affected by crime, either as a victim, witness or family member.

**ELVON – Furniture  
Recycling Project**

Macmerry Industrial Estate  
Macmerry **01875 615797**

ELVON's good quality second hand furniture is available for people who need furniture and are on benefits – we can make a referral for you.

**The Job Centre**

North House, Eskmills Park  
Station Road, Musselburgh  
**0845 606 0234**

**East Lothian Police Stations**

Dunbar **01368 862 718**  
Haddington **01620 824101**  
Musselburgh **0131 665 9696**  
North Berwick **01620 893 585**  
Prestonpans **01875 810 250**  
Tranent **01875 610 333**

**Scottish Public Services  
Ombudsman**

(see **Section 6** on Complaints for more information)

4 Melville Street  
Edinburgh  
EH3 7NS

**0800 377 7330**

Website: **www.spsso.org.uk**

**East Lothian Energy  
Efficiency Advice Centre**

**0800 512 012**

Provides advice on how you could make your home more energy efficient and save money on your fuel bills.



## Housing and Welfare Advice and Information

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

46 Court Street  
Haddington  
East Lothian  
**01620 824 471**

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

141 High Street  
Musselburgh  
East Lothian  
**0131 653 2748/2544**

Please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check their opening hours.

### **Shelter Housing Aid Centre**

4th Floor, 6 Charlotte Street,  
Edinburgh. EH2 4AW  
**0808 800 444**  
Opening hours:  
9am-5pm Mon-Fri

### **Shelter, East Lothian Project**

Brunton Hall  
Musselburgh  
East Lothian  
**08445 152 400**

### **Welfare Rights Services**

Brunton Hall  
Musselburgh  
**0131 653 5230**

The Welfare Rights team also hold surgeries in local East Lothian Council offices on a regular basis, please contact them for further details.

### **East Lothian Women's Aid**

69 Eskside West  
Musselburgh  
East Lothian

**Office: 0131 665 9552**

Monday-Friday 10am-3pm

**Helpline: 0800 027 1234**

Every day 10am-Midnight

### **Shakti Women's Aid**

Norton Park  
57 Albion Road  
Edinburgh  
**0131 475 2399**

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 10am-4.30pm

Shakti Women's Aid is a safe, confidential service for all black and minority ethnic women and their children who are experiencing or fleeing domestic abuse.



**The Samaritans**  
**08457 90 90 90**

The Samaritans provide confidential, non-judgemental support, 24 hours a day for anyone who is experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

