



Intro



2023 marked the 25th Anniversary of Homes for Life Housing Partnership and the start of a new chapter for the Organisation as we embarked on a journey of investing in our Services, our Homes, our People and our Future. To mark the occasion a 25th celebratory family event was held in the Tweeddale Arms Hotel in Gifford, followed by our AGM on the 20th of September. Tenants, local businesses, partner organisations and representatives across finance, housing, construction and the community got together for an afternoon of food and fun. At the post AGM Board meeting Jamila Greig was re-elected for her final term as HfL's Chair and Olga Krasteva as HfL's Vice Chair.

We are committed as a locally based social landlord to assist in the delivery of good quality affordable homes which help our tenants and communities in East Lothian to thrive and flourish.

In the last 8 months we have fully refurbished and re-opened our Offices in Haddington and have following extensive renovations brought back in to lettable stock 8 properties above our Offices for social rent, receiving heart-warming feedback from our new tenants.

"We are totally blown away with the flat. It has been decorated to the highest of standards," said new tenant Mary Edmond.

"The homes for life team are so nice and helpful which is amazing." Steven Laing said,

"I am ecstatic with my new home. Great service from a friendly and helpful team". "Love the flat, couldn't have wished for anything more. Homes for Life have been so supportive throughout the whole process", said Lee Ness

After a year of many milestones, including the creation and launch of our new Website and Tenants Portal, re-opening of our Offices and commencement of Planned and Cyclical maintenance programmes, and the appointment of new Team members we are now ready to take the next step, upgrading the organisations existing properties to meet tenants and future customers housing needs and aspirations and recommence building new affordable homes. Over a million pounds will be spent on the existing stock over the next year and investment put in place to progress affordable housing development activity by Homes for Life. We will continue to seek feedback on our homes and services from our tenants to help us keep improving and provide the best possible services and homes we can.

On behalf of the Homes for Life Team and Board, we wish to express our thanks to our Tenants and send our best wishes for a safe, healthy, and restful break over Christmas and New Year.

Gill
CEO



CHRISTMAS SHUTDOWN

We close down for our Christmas break at noon on the **22nd of December** and re-open on **Thursday 4th of January**

To report emergency repairs during the Christmas break, call R3 on **03000 999 247**

For any gas emergencies, call Lothian Gas on **0131 440 4666**



Rent Consultation 2024/25

Enclosed with your Newsletter is our Rent Consultation 2024/25, please either complete and return in the pre-paid envelope provided or alternatively if you would prefer to complete online scan the QR code to the right.



Please contact the office if you need any assistance.

Rent Statements

Your 3 monthly rent statement is also enclosed with your Newsletter.

Rent Harmonisation During 2024

We will be carrying out an exercise to harmonise rents in 2024/25. Tenants affected will be contacted on the process and impact.

Equalities

Homes for Life is committed to promoting an environment of respect, understanding, encouraging diversity and eliminating discrimination by providing equality of opportunity for all.

Equality is not always about treating everyone in the same way but recognising that a person's needs may sometimes be met in different ways. We aim to ensure that all employees and service users are treated with fairness and respect and not discriminated against and that our policies and procedures promote equality and to do this we need to collect equality data.

The Scottish Housing Charter includes an outcome on equalities which states that social landlords should perform all aspects of their housing services so that they support the right to adequate housing and; that every tenant and other customer have their individual needs and rights recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

An equalities questionnaire will be added to our Tenant Portal in the New Year for Tenants to complete online. We will send a text letting Tenants know when the form is available. If you would prefer to complete a paper version or the questionnaire or complete the equalities questionnaire by phone please contact us at info@homesforlife.co.uk.



Emergency Out of Hours Numbers

Non-Gas Emergencies: R3 - 03000 999 247

Gas Repairs/Air Source Heat Pump Repairs: Lothian Gas - 0131 440 4666

If you think you can smell a gas leak, **NEVER** attempt to find a gas leak yourself. Instead contact **NATIONAL GRID** immediately on the following number – **0800 111 999**

One of our new kitchens



Kitchen Replacements

We are halfway through the kitchen replacement programmes at Gifford with JR Facilities Management due to complete all 35 by March 2024. You can see one of our recently renovated kitchens on the top right of the page.

Bathroom Replacements

Bathroom replacements have started at Macfarlane Court in Elphinstone with 10 bathrooms to be completed by March 2024.

External Painting

External painting works are well advanced with the following locations complete:

- Roodlands Court – Haddington
- Hares Close and Barga Court - Cockenzie

The final areas to be completed are St Andrews House and Forth Street in North Berwick and this is expected to be completed before Christmas, weather permitting.

Heating

We are currently investigating heating options for Gifford and hope to be able to update tenants by March 2024.

Grounds Maintenance

We have appointed a new Grounds Maintenance contractor Chris Smith Gardening Services who has already visited Homes For Life's main estates and has started work. Tenants are expected to maintain the upkeep of their own gardens including grass cutting and shrubbery maintenance and can contact the office where there are queries.

Gutter Cleaning

The gutter programme is now complete for 2023. Remember, you can still contact R3 any time you feel your gutter requires a clean.

2024 Planned Maintenance Programme

Planning is already underway for the 2024 programme which starts in April. We will be able to provide details in the next newsletter and affected tenants will receive a letter with more details nearer the time.

Financial Support from the Winter Hardship Fund

Homes for Life are continuing to support our tenants during the Cost-of-Living Crisis and have been successful in obtaining grant money to support tenants with energy costs. Please contact the housing team on info@homesforlife.co.uk if you are requiring financial assistance.



Department of Work & Pensions Update November 2023



To support families with the cost of living, the Government are:

- ✓ **Maintaining the triple lock for pensioners** and uprating the State Pension by 8.5% in line with earnings.
- ✓ Increasing **working age benefits** (including Universal Credit) in line with inflation by 6.7%
- ✓ **Disability benefits** such as PIP and Attendance Allowance will also increase by 6.7%
- ✓ To support families that need most help to pay their rent, the Government will increase the **Local Housing Allowance rate to cover the cheapest 30th percentile of local properties in the private rented sector**
- ✓ Increase the **National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage** from 1 April 2024. the National Living Wage will increase by 9.8% to £11.44 an hour and the National Minimum Wage rates will increase for young people and apprentices: for people aged 18-20 by 14.8% to £8.60 an hour, for 16-17 year olds and apprentices by 21.2% to £6.40 an hour



Tenant Satisfaction Survey

2023/2024

Research Resource have been appointed by Homes for Life (HfL) to carry out our 2023/24 Tenant Satisfaction Survey.

Since the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, Research Resource have carried out customer satisfaction surveys which meet the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator for over 90 registered social landlords.

To let us know how we are doing and inform HfL's Annual Return on the Charter for 2023/24 satisfaction surveys will be carried out by telephone by Research Resource during February 2024.

The Results will be available at the end of March 2024 and will be shared with Tenants in our Spring Newsletter.



Tenant Board Member Recruitment

Our Board currently has a vacancy for a Tenant Member. If you would like to find out more, please contact Gill Binnie, CEO by emailing gill.binnie@homesforlife.co.uk



Landlord Report Card 2022/23



Scan the QR code to the right to view the video report.

Area of comparison	Our results	Scottish average	Our score	What we will do to improve on our current results
Homes and Rent				
1 bedroom rent average weekly rent	£85.69	£83.46	✗	Implement a new Rent Setting Policy
2 bedroom rent average weekly rent	£96.64	£86.28	✗	
3 bedroom rent average weekly rent	£96.64	£93.96	✗	
% tenants who were satisfied with overall service	88%	87%	✓	Use Tenant feedback to help review and improve how we deliver each of our services
% tenants think landlord good at keeping them informed	98%	90%	✓	Increase our types and use of different communication platforms
% tenants happy with opportunities to participate	96%	86%	✓	Continue to embed our Tenant Participation Strategy
Quality and maintenance of homes				
% of our homes meeting SHQS	98%	79%	✓	Work towards 100% compliance
Average hours to complete emergency repairs	2.8	4.2	✓	Work with contractors to maintain and improve performance
Average days to complete non-emergency repairs	7.2	8.7	✓	Work with contractors to maintain and improve performance
% of reactive repairs carried out right first time	82%	88%	✗	Investigate and improve
% satisfaction with repairs & maintenance service	82%	88%	✗	Investigate and improve
Neighbourhoods				
% of anti-social behaviour cases resolved	93%	94%	✗	Investigate and improve
Value for Money				
% rent due collected in year	100%	99%	✓	Continue with early intervention
% rent due not collected through homes being empty	0.6%	1.4%	✓	Continue with early intervention
Average length taken to relet homes in last year (days)	59.8	55.6	✗	Review our Empty Homes Policy and our re-let processes

Tenants Portal

It is designed to make your life as a Homes for Life tenant easier. It is an online, one-stop place to organise and access all your tenancy services. Tenants Portal is secure and confidential and is available to you 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

A YouTube video explaining how to register and use the Tenants Portal can be found with the QR code to the right.



Once registered on the Tenant Portal you will be able to see information about your tenancy and at the same time carry out various tasks to keep your tenancy records up to date and communicate with us, including:

My Tenancy – to see information on your tenancy and calendar appointments.

My House – to see your repair history or report a routine repair.

My Account – to view your rent account and make a payment.

My Household – to tell us about changes in your household.

My Documents – recent correspondence from HfL such as rent increase letters.

My Calendar – scheduled repair appointments

My Messages – to send us a message.

My Feedback – to give us your views by completing surveys and questionnaires.

To set up your new Tenant Portal please call us so that we can set up an account for you.



Happy Tenants

A couple of our new tenants at our recently renovated properties in Market Street Haddington, on move in day with our Community Housing Officer Zoe.

“Myself and my partner have just moved in, and we are totally blown away with the flat. It has been decorated to the highest of standards. The homes for life team are so nice and helpful which is amazing. Thank you so much for all your time put into the properties. Would highly recommend.”



Mary

Condensation Advice

At Homes for Life we are on a mission to make your home not just a place to stay, but a warm and comfortable haven.



Condensation is the primary cause of dampness, arising when water vapor inside the home encounters colder surfaces, like windows or walls. The resulting condensation can affect wallpaper, paintwork, or plaster, and woodwork fostering the growth of black mould. Typically occurring in colder months, it's prevalent in corners, north-facing walls, and areas with limited air circulation, such as behind wardrobes. Achieving a balance between warmth and ventilation is crucial.

Understand the cause

- Condensation results from interior moisture meeting colder surfaces.
- Common locations: corners, north-facing walls, windows, areas with poor air circulation.
- Striking a balance between warmth and ventilation is vital.

The Warmth-Ventilation Equation

We understand heating your home is expensive and opening windows may seem counterproductive, but it expels warm, moisture-laden air. The resulting dry cool air is more cost-effective to heat than warm moist air. In the long run this saves money and promotes a healthier living environment.

Produce less moisture

- Cover pans when cooking.
- Dry clothes outdoors in warm weather, do not cover radiators and consider using a dehumidifier when you have to dry clothes indoors.
- Ventilate tumble driers outside.
- Avoid gas heaters which are dangerous and produce excessive water vapour.

Ventilate to remove moisture

- Open windows or ventilate during kitchen/bathroom use
- Close bathroom and kitchen doors to contain moisture and make sure extractors are turned on.
- Continue ventilation after showering, bathing, or cooking
- Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes, and blocked chimneys.
- Open bedroom windows daily and clear clutter from window sills.

Wipe away excess moisture

On average, an adult may release approximately 0.2 to 0.5 litres of water vapor per hour through breathing during sleep. Over the course of a night's sleep, this can accumulate to a significant amount. Modern homes are often well insulated leaving nowhere for this moisture to escape through. Daily removal of this moisture from windows and window frames should be an important part of your daily routine to ensure a healthy home.

Keep your home adequately heated

Recognize the challenge; implementing the above preventive steps regularly reduces condensation.

For assistance with condensation issues, contact us. We're here to help you create a healthier home environment. If you are struggling to afford heating payments please contact us and we can discuss any available assistance with you.

If you require further information The East Lothian Energy Advice Service can be accessed via the Home Energy Scotland help line **0808 808 2282** or The Energy Saving Trust hotline on **0808 808 2282**

Team Updates

Our **Community Housing Officer, Zoe** will be finishing in December to have her baby. We wish Zoe all the very best with motherhood. **Andro Sneddon** will be joining us when we return in January for 12 months to cover Zoe's maternity leave.

Andro Sneddon has spent the last ten years within the housing industry and has gained a wide range of experience in the sector. Working closely with tenants and partners, Andro has helped improve developments and resident satisfaction across Glasgow and Dundee. He is excited to be joining Homes For Life, work with the team and HfL Tenants.



Caroline Lavery will also be joining us at the start of the New Year as our **Business Support Officer**. Some of you may remember Caroline from previously working at HfL as an Admin Assistant during in 2020 and 2021. Caroline has worked in the social housing sector for over 30 years with a background. She is excited to be returning to HfL and is looking forward to developing this new role of Business Support Officer and providing a high quality, responsive service to all.

Shona Maxwell will be joining our Senior Management Team in February to take up the position of **Maintenance and Asset Manager**. Shona is delighted to be taking up this position which offers an exciting opportunity to be part of a smaller Housing Organisation; operating in an area she has a deep fondness and connection to.

Shona has been employed in Assets and Property Management sector for approaching 20 years. **The last 11 for a well-known Registered Social Landlord** in Edinburgh. She has a wealth of customer service, housing, maintenance and property regulation experience.



Extra Fuel Payments for Pensioners

A Winter Fuel Payment is a one-off, tax-free payment made during the winter to help with heating costs. It is made to households that include someone over **State Pension age**.

Most people born on or before 25 September 1957 will usually qualify for a payment in 2023/24 (the date changes every year).

Most payments are made automatically during November and December. If you apply for the first time, you should receive your payment before Christmas.

The amount (between £250 and £600) you can receive each winter can vary according to your personal circumstances. Your age or other people living with you who are also eligible can affect the amount you receive.

A Winter Fuel Payment does not count as income when working out your entitlement to other benefits.

In 2023/24 people who get a Winter Fuel Payment will also get extra between £150 and £300 Pensioner **Cost of Living payment**.



How to cook a full Christmas dinner in an Air-Fryer

Now that December is here, you might be thinking about your plans for Christmas Day.

The air fryer can cook a variety of food including your entire Christmas dinner while saving you money. Making the change from a conventional oven to an air fryer can help you save up to 70% on energy costs.

During the busy day of festivities, you can use an air fryer to produce crispy roast potatoes in around 30-40 minutes. You can steam your brussels sprouts and veg in an air fryer.

Using an air fryer to cook a turkey joint will give it a crispy skin and succulent, tender meat.

Air-Fryer Turkey Crown (Serves 6)

Prep: 5 mins | Cook: 50 mins

Cook this turkey crown in an air fryer to free up oven space and speed up the cooking process. Before cooking, be sure to check that your air fryer will fit the whole crown

METHOD

1. Heat the air fryer using its preheat function, or set to 180C for 2 mins. Pat the turkey crown dry using kitchen paper, then rub all over with the oil. Season well, then scatter the dried herbs over the skin. If the crown allows, stuff the clementine halves, shallot, garlic cloves and fresh herb sprigs into the cavity. If this is not possible, tuck them around the crown in the air-fryer basket instead. Either way, ensure the turkey crown is skin-side down in the air-fryer basket.
2. Cook for 30 mins, then turn the crown over and cook for a further 20-30 mins, or until the juices run clear when pierced with a knife in the thickest part, or a meat thermometer reads 65C. Carve into slices to serve.

Suggested cooking times for a Christmas dinner in an air fryer

- ✓ Turkey joint (1.25kg) - 45 mins
- ✓ Roasted honey parsnips (from frozen) - 15 mins
- ✓ Roasted honey parsnips (from fresh) - 25 mins
- ✓ Brussel sprouts (whole fresh) - 25 mins
- ✓ Pigs in blankets and sausage stuffing balls (mixed) - 15 mins
- ✓ Roast potatoes (no part-boiled needed) - 15 mins

INGREDIENTS

- 1.7 kg turkey crown
- 1 tsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp dried mixed herbs
- 1 clementine (halved)
- 1 shallot (halved)
- 2 garlic cloves (bashed)
- A few fresh herb sprigs, such as sage, thyme or oregano



Mars Bar Christmas Crackles



INGREDIENTS

- 200g Mars Bar (chopped)
- 2 tsp pouring cream
- 2 tsp cocoa powder (sifted)
- 3 cup Rice Crispies
- Oil or vegetable oil spray
- 100g white chocolate
- 24 Smarties



Prep: 20 mins | Serves: 6

Chocolate crackles are a kids' favourite at every birthday party. Now you can amp up the chocolate flavour with this Mars Bar version of the traditional chocolate crackle. And if you want to make them a little bit healthier, you could add a handful of dried fruit too.

METHOD

1. Spray a little vegetable oil spray into 2 x 12 cup mini-muffin trays.
2. Melt the Mars Bars, cream and cocoa in a glass bowl over simmering water. The bowl should not touch water. Stir the mixture until smooth.
3. Put the Rice Crispies in a separate large bowl, pour in the chocolate mixture and stir until well mixed.
4. Spoon the mixture into the muffins tray and press down gently.
5. Refrigerate for 2 hours and turn out onto a tray to decorate.
6. Melt the white chocolate in the microwave checking and stirring it at 30 second intervals. Pour it into a piping bag while warm and snip the tip off.
7. Turn the crackles upside down and pipe the chocolate on. Finish with a red chocolate button on top of each one.

THISTLE
TENANT RISKS

The Thistle Tenant Risks Team are here to help!

We understand the importance of being able to speak to one of our customer service team. That is why we offer a call back service.

For tenants and owner occupiers wishing to discuss home contents insurance, the cover available and payment methods, why not request a call back.

How can you do this?

Visit: www.thistletenants-scotland.co.uk complete the enquiry form and wait for one of our helpful Team to call you back.

Email: tenantscontents@thistleinsurance.co.uk leave your contact details and someone will call you at a convenient time.

Thistle Tenant Risks – making life a little easier!



Energy Saving Tips



Heating

(This probably costs you the most, so make sure you're not wasting heat)

- ✔ Put on another layer before you turn the heating on, lots of thinner layers keep you warmer than one big one.
- ✔ Make sure your furniture isn't right up against your radiators. It will block the heat.
- ✔ Close the curtains when it's getting dark and tuck them in behind the radiator.
- ✔ Turn the thermostat down by one degree to save 10% on your bills.
- ✔ If you have health concerns, are elderly or children in the house, don't go below 18C.
- ✔ Turn the heating completely off overnight and when no-one is in the house. Use your central heating timer to do this for you automatically.
- ✔ Use your programmer to suit your routine. Set times for heating to come on when you're home and switch off when you're out.

Further Hints & Tips

- ✔ Use Energy efficient LED light bulbs. LED bulbs can use up to 85% less energy than a normal bulb and emit the same amount of light.
- ✔ Don't leave your hot water heating on all the time. It's much cheaper to set the timer to heat it up for a couple of hours each morning (or in the night).
- ✔ Keep your showers to four minutes (especially if you have an electric shower – they use a lot of electricity).
- ✔ If you need to dry clothes inside, don't dry them on radiators. Hang them on a clothes airer in a room near an open window, and close the door. (This helps stop condensation and mould).

Kitchen

- ✔ Only boil as much water as you need in your kettle. If you have an electric hob, boil water for cooking in the kettle first.
- ✔ Keep lids on your saucepans when cooking, You'll be able to turn the hob down.
- ✔ Cook more than one meal at a time and freeze it for another day.
- ✔ Defrost your freezer regularly to remove the build-up of ice. It'll help it work better. When you're defrosting food, leave it in the fridge. This helps cool your fridge for free.
- ✔ Use a microwave for small items of food and reheating things, rather than the oven – it's cheaper.
- ✔ Only put the washing machine (or dishwasher) on when it's full. Two half loads use more water, detergent and electricity than one full load.
- ✔ Wash clothes at 30 degrees to save electricity. Most modern fabric detergents work just as well at 30 as they do at higher temperatures.



Third 2023/24 Cost of Living Payment dates announced

On 13 December, the Government announced that millions of UK households will shortly get a Cost of Living Payment of £299. This payment will be made to eligible claimants on means tested benefits between Tuesday 6 February and Thursday 22 February.

This is the third of three payments over the financial year totalling up to £900.

Customers will receive the payments automatically. They do not need to contact DWP or do anything to receive the payment.

If a household becomes retrospectively entitled to a Cost of Living Payment or someone believes they are entitled but do not receive one, they can report this on GOV.UK from the 23 February

Christmas Wordsearch

Find these words in the puzzle

Chimney
Vixen
Blitzen
Cupid
Dancer
Sleigh

St. Nicholas
Donder
Comet
Dasher
Reindeer
Prancer

N	R	N	K	U	Z	P	R	N	S	B	O	H
F	E	T	I	P	R	A	N	C	E	R	I	A
D	I	Z	S	C	U	P	I	D	R	M	E	P
O	N	D	T	O	H	P	Y	D	E	H	N	P
N	D	M	I	M	O	C	H	I	M	N	E	Y
D	E	S	C	E	L	L	L	A	S	S	G	C
E	E	Z	H	T	U	B	D	A	C	L	J	H
R	R	Z	R	V	I	X	E	N	S	E	P	R
V	P	I	V	I	K	C	I	D	A	I	Q	I
S	T	N	I	C	H	O	L	A	S	G	D	S
U	F	K	D	A	N	C	E	R	G	H	A	T
P	D	A	S	H	E	R	C	I	B	B	A	M
I	J	T	Y	M	S	A	E	T	A	C	E	A
D	B	L	I	T	Z	E	N	C	O	J	Z	S

Surfing Santa Colouring In



Homes for Life Housing Partnership

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