

Tenants Today



Welcome to the 2016 edition of Tenants Today, the newsletter for tenants and housing applicants of Midlothian Council.

This edition includes:

- An invitation to all council tenants to come along to our Annual Tenants Day
- Important information on the changes to the Housing Allocation Policy
- The Tenant Garden competition
- Tenancy Fraud
- Find out more about our Tenant Panel and have your say
- Get involved with what is in the next Local Housing Strategy
- Update on new house building developments
- Update on how we performed during 2015/2016



Keep in touch...

Online Our website at www.midlothian.gov.uk is packed with news and information.

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Communicating Clearly We are happy to translate on request and provide information and publications in other formats, including Braille, tape or large print.

Come to Midlothian Tenants Day!

All Council tenants in Midlothian are invited to Midlothian's Annual Tenants Day which is being held on Friday 19 August 2016 at Dalkeith Art Centre from 1pm until 3:30pm.

This fun event is open to all council tenants giving them the opportunity to:

- Find out about the latest housing news, such as the new Housing Allocation Policy, Repairs and Maintenance and the Local Housing Strategy.
- Have a real say on how your housing service is managed
- Meet old friends and make new ones
- Bring along the kids for a free crèche, free face painting, free model balloons and free pick 'n' mix!
- Win great prizes
- Browse information stalls
- Have a go on the smoothie bike
- Take part in our Mid games and win a medal
- Have a great free lunch

Here's what some previous attendees had to say about Midlothian Tenants Day:

'Congratulations on a really successful event! The centre had a real buzz.'

'Well worth attending – thank you!'

'Really helpful to speak to people. Not a voice on the end of a phone.'

This event is only for Midlothian Council tenants. Numbers are limited at this event and we need you to reserve a place in advance to be sure of entry. Please contact our **Tenant Participation Officer** on **0131 271 3611** to book a place or find out more.

Housing Allocation Policy: You said, we did

Midlothian Council has recently reviewed the Housing Allocation Policy following consultation with tenants and housing list applicants in the autumn of 2015. A total of 1,288 tenants and housing list applicants responded to a postal survey. The majority of those surveyed:

- Supported giving more flexibility to single people and couples being allocated housing.
- Supported considering additional needs groups for future letting targets, such as a group for medical needs.
- Supported the use of ready to rent houses to help speed up the time it takes to let some properties.
- Supported taking into account if an applicant owned a home if applying to the council for a house.
- Supported the use of restrictions for applicants with a history of anti social behaviour.
- Were happy with the information they were given about the Housing Allocation Policy and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

Thanks to all of you who took the time to respond to the consultation and who attended the events. We have listened to your views and are now making some key changes to the Housing Allocation Policy.

1. Applicants will be placed into one of 3 groups depending on their current circumstances and need. These groups all have a target for the number of houses for let being allocated to applicants.

- Homeless (including HM Forces): Target is 45% of all lets in the Common Housing Register with Melville Housing Association.
- General Needs: Target is 45% of all Council lets. In this group there are targets for the allocation of housing for specific housing needs:
 - 15% of allocations for households who are overcrowded or under occupying.
 - 15% of allocations for households with medical needs.
 - 15% for other general needs.
- Choice – Target is 10% of all Council lets. The Choice group includes council tenants who are suitably housed and applicants who are not council tenants and have no identified housing need.

2. Single People and Couples can now apply for 1 or 2 bedroom housing. This will increase the number of lets that the Council can allocate to single people and couples. These groups make up 59% of all current housing

applicants. While this will improve access to housing for single people and couples, other households, such as applicants who currently qualify for a 2 bedroom property, may find their list position changes on the Housing List as the 2 bedroom Housing List will increase. All applicants who are on the one bedroom list now will be contacted to ask which bedroom size they wish to apply for.

3. Applicants who have engaged in anti social behaviour risk suspension from the Housing List.

Applicants will not be suspended until the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 legislation is approved by the Scottish Parliament which is expected to happen later in 2016. Applicants will be informed if their application for housing is affected.

4. Home owners will be suspended from the Housing List unless they have specific needs.

Applicants will not be suspended until the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 legislation is approved by the Scottish Parliament which is expected to happen later in 2016. Applicants will be informed if their application for housing is affected.

5. Increased financial support to help households downsize.

Existing council tenants who under occupy and move to downsize by 2 bedroom sizes or more will now receive an increased Incentive to Move Grant of £1,500 when accepting allocation of a smaller house.

6. Applicants who live in Midlothian receive more points than applicants who live outside Midlothian.

Applicants who live in Midlothian will still receive 20 points for being a Midlothian resident. Applicants who are employed in Midlothian but who are not resident will now receive 10 points (this was previously 20 points).

7. Local Letting Initiatives are used to allocate houses for a particular area or house type.

Local Lettings Initiatives will be developed for the Council's future new build housing sites.

If you want to read the Consultation Report and the Housing Allocation Policy changes in full you can request this from housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk or by calling **Midlothian Council** on **0131 271 3394**. It can also be viewed online at www.midlothian.gov.uk



Calling all green fingered tenants!

Midlothian Council is calling on all green fingered tenants to enter the annual garden competition. Now in its fifth year, the Midlothian Council Tenant Garden competition is very popular and gives all gardeners the opportunity to show off their skills. There are prizes for young and old, houses and flats, flowers and vegetables. This year's categories are:

- Best communal garden
- Best vegetable garden
- Best floral display
- Best ornamental garden
- Most improved garden (before photos must be supplied)
- Tallest sunflower (for the under 12s)
- Best overall garden

Up for grabs are gift vouchers for Dobbies Garden Centre or Pentland Plants and all entrants will receive a certificate. Entrants can enter as few or as many categories as they like. Councillor Catherine Johnstone, Leader of the Council, said: *'This is a great chance to show off your garden or nominate someone else that deserves recognition for taking pride in their garden'*. The closing date for entries is Friday 19 August with judging taking place in late August/early September. To enter or nominate someone else, call **0131 271 3611** or email tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk.

Want to have your say without having to attend meetings?

The **Midlothian Tenant Panel** might just be for you.... Our Tenant Panel is made up of Midlothian Council tenants who have volunteered to help us improve our housing service. Panel members don't have to attend meetings as all the activities can be done at home, at a convenient location or via phone or email!

The panel is perfect for people who want to be kept informed about housing service activities but don't feel comfortable attending public meetings. All panel activities can be carried out in a tenant's own home, an office or a community venue. Materials can be posted or emailed. Lillias Reid, a tenant in Bonnyrigg, explained "I enjoy being part of the panel, working with the Council in the best interests of tenants."

The Tenant Panel was established in 2015 and so far members have supported the development of:

- Midlothian Council rent consultation document 2015
- Midlothian Council allocation policy consultation documents 2015
- Scottish Housing Network's Midlothian Council Benchmarking Report 2015
- Midlothian Council Consultation Report Rent Setting 2015

If you would like more information on the tenant panel please phone **0131 271 3611** or email tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk.

Talking to Tenants in 2016

During the autumn we will be carrying out our tenant satisfaction survey to find out how you think we're performing and how satisfied you are with your home. In previous years we have posted a survey form to all council tenants for them to post back to us. This year we will be asking a smaller group of tenants to meet with an interviewer in their own home to talk about their thoughts and views on the housing service the Council provides.

For those tenants who are asked to take part there will also be a prize draw to win shopping vouchers. For more information about this project, or to make sure the interviewer is an authorised caller, call the **Housing Planning and Performance Team** on **0131 271 6698**.

Tenants Today



Tackling Tenancy Fraud

All of our Housing Officers have recently undertaken fraud awareness training which will allow them to identify fraudulent housing applications and they are jointly working with our Corporate Fraud Team to identify any suspect tenancies. They also carry out regular checks as part of letting houses and tenancy management to verify the correct people are resident in council properties.

Recent joint work has recovered several properties from tenants who were not entitled to them. These properties have now been offered to applicants on the housing waiting list with genuine needs. Tenancy Fraud comes in many different guises:

- **Non Occupation** – Tenant is not living in the property as their principal home
- **Subletting** – someone else has moved into the property without necessary permission
- **Misrepresentation** – given false information on Housing/Homeless application forms
- **False Succession** – person falsely claiming they have been resident in the property and apply to take over the tenancy

In order to continue our zero tolerance approach against fraud the Council recognises that this cannot be done without the vital assistance of our tenants. We would encourage anyone who has information regarding any suspected fraud to report it. This can be anonymous and is treated confidentially. If you suspect someone of committing fraud, please contact the Council's Corporate Fraud Team on **0131 271 3572** or **0131 271 3573** or email **corporatefraud@midlothian.gov.uk**.

Under construction!

In 2015 Midlothian Council completed three new council housing developments in Penicuik.

Currently there are 5 sites under construction in Midlothian.

Site	Year of Completion	Number of Homes
Edgefield Road Loanhead	2016	41
Polton Street Bonnyrigg (Library Site)	2016	18
Eastfield Farm Road (John Chant Centre) Penicuik – This Site is only for tenants with complex care needs.	2017	12
Stobhill (Greenhall School) Gorebridge Phase 1	2017	37
Stobhill (Greenhall School) Gorebridge Phase 2	2017	24

Midlothian Council has agreed to a third phase of new council housing and is currently planning for further council housing developments across Midlothian.



Eibhlin McHugh (Director of Health and Social Care) and Provost Joe Wallace at the construction site for 12 homes for households with complex care needs in Penicuik.

Want to have your say on the Local Housing Strategy?

Midlothian Council needs to develop a Local Housing Strategy for 2017 – 2022 which considers local housing issues and what actions the Council and other partners such as housing associations, private landlords and private developers need to take to tackle them. We want to know your views on the housing issues that matter to you.

By getting involved, you:

- Will help us to understand the views of the community in relation to housing issues.
- Can find out more about housing issues in Midlothian.
- Have the opportunity to shape the future priorities for the Local Housing Strategy.

Examples of topics that the Local Housing Strategy will cover:

- **Support and access to housing across all tenures**
 - Give us your views on the availability of affordable housing and private housing in Midlothian. Let us know what you think we could do to help.
 - What in your view should be our priorities for affordable housing investment?
- **Homelessness Prevention**
 - How can we improve the advice and assistance offered to people looking for suitable housing?
 - Can you suggest other ways to prevent homelessness in Midlothian?
 - Have you been affected by homelessness?
- **House Condition**
 - Tell us about your local area - the quality of housing in your area, the positives and the negatives.
 - What housing you would like to see improved in your community over the next five years.
- **Specialist Provision and Independent Living**
 - Share your views about the support available to help people live independently, including older people and people with a disability.
 - Tell us about why you feel health issues can be improved by appropriate housing.
- **Fuel Poverty and Climate Change**
 - Tell us how best to identify households in fuel poverty
 - How can we best help people who cannot afford their fuel bills?

There are several ways you can tell us what you think. You can attend one of our drop in sessions in September. We are able to provide transport to enable you attend.

Please get in touch with us using the contact details below to arrange transport. If you have any comments or queries, please contact the **Housing Planning and Performance Team** for more information on **0131 271 6698** or email **housingstrategy@midlothian.gov.uk**.

If you cannot attend you might want to fill out our Local Housing Strategy questionnaire online which will only take a few minutes to complete: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/midlothianLHS>.

Location and times of Local Housing Strategy Drop in events

Day 1: Venue and time:	Monday, 5 September 2016 Loanhead Library, 1.00pm - 4.00pm
Day 2: Venue and time:	Tuesday, 6 September 2016 Penicuik Library, 4.00pm - 7.00pm
Day 3: Venue and time:	Tuesday, 13 September 2016 Gorebridge Library, 4.00pm - 7.00pm
Day 4: Venue and time:	Wednesday, 14 September 2016 Dalkeith Art Centre, 1.00pm - 4.00pm
Day 5: Venue and time:	Thursday, 22 September 2016 Bonnyrigg Pitcairn Centre, 10.00am - 12noon

Do you provide unpaid help and support to a family member, child, partner, relative or friend, who could not manage without you?

This could be due to age, a long term condition, disability, physical or mental health problem or addiction, VOCAL could be a service for you.

VOCAL supports and empowers unpaid carers/family members to ensure they are resilient, have choices, care with confidence, manage their own well being and have a life of their own. VOCAL offers 1:1 counselling, benefits advice, health checks, power of Attorney surgeries and support to access Short Breaks Funds. They also have a training programme and social opportunities which give carers the chance to meet others in similar situation. The VOCAL Carer Centre is based in the Hardengreen Estate just off Dalhousie Road, Eskbank Dalkeith.

To find out more call **0131 663 6869** or email **midlothian@vocal.org.uk**.

Scottish Social Housing Charter – How Midlothian Council is performing 2015/16

Every year Midlothian Council publishes performance information in relation to the Housing Services that we provide. We also compare this to other landlords to help tenants and other service users understand how we compare. We also tell you about how we feel about our performance and what we are focusing on for improvement.

How we compare our performance to other landlords

To ensure a realistic comparison between Councils the Scottish Housing Regulator has developed a 'peer group' system which groups councils of similar size together for ease of comparison. This is because comparing larger and smaller councils may be less useful although we do now report the average results for all Scottish Councils too. Our peer group councils are: Angus, Clackmannanshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Moray, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

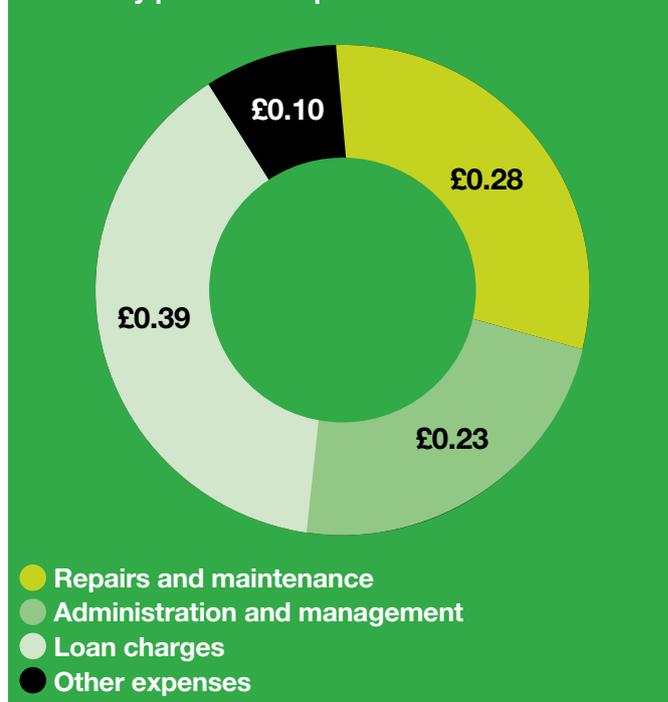
How we show Midlothian Council's performance

	If we are one of the best performing councils among those that we are comparing ourselves to we will attach a green smiley face to the indicator.
	If we are one of the second best three performing councils among those that we are comparing ourselves to, we will attach a yellow smiley face to the indicator.
	If we are one of the third best three performing councils among those that we are comparing ourselves to, we will attach an orange straight face to the indicator.
	If we are one of the poorest performing councils among those that we are comparing ourselves to, we will attach a red unhappy face to the indicator.
	If we have improved our performance since the previous year we attach a green arrow pointing upwards to the measure.
	If we have performed similarly to the previous year we will indicate this by placing a grey horizontal arrow next to the measure.
	If our performance is not as good as last year we will indicate this by placing a red downward facing arrow next to the measure.

Money Matters

During the financial year 2015/16 you paid £21.9 Million in rent payments for council housing and lock up garages. The pie chart shows that just over half the income is used on managing and maintaining the stock. Spend on loan charges account for £0.39 in every pound collected. These charges are used to fund the development of new council housing and major investment plans such as reharing properties.

How every pound was spent



On average, Midlothian Council tenants pay lower rent charges than our peer group and also compared to the Scottish average for councils. In 2015 tenants and applicants voted on future rent plans. A total of 1,268 responses were received. Tenants and applicants were given four options for future rent charges, with bigger increases allowing more funding for more new council housing. The most popular choice was a 6% increase, but as many tenants had chosen lower increases a 5% increase for the next three years has been agreed. This is higher than other councils with the average rent increase being 3% in Scotland. However, Midlothian's rent charges are lower than both the Scottish average and our peer group for all property sizes.

Measure	Midlothian	Peer Group	Scottish Average	How do we compare?	Compared to last year
Rent and rent collection					
The total number of council homes	6,841	6,209	13,627		
Total rent due in the year	£21.9 M	£20.1M	£47.1M		
Average rent charge for 1 bedroom property	£54.66	£60.80	£62.74		n/a
Average rent charge for 2 bedroom property	£61.56	£64.74	£67.90		n/a
Average rent charge for 3 bedroom property	£68.55	£69.44	£73.88		n/a
Average rent charge for 4+ bedroom property	£72.31	£74.38	£80.50		n/a
Average rent charge for all properties	£63.13	£64.82	£67.94		n/a
Annual rent increase	5%	3%	3%		
The length of time it takes to repair and re-let houses that become empty.	52 days	32 days	39 days		
The percentage of rent lost through properties being empty in the last year.	0.8%	0.8%	1%		
The percentage of rent due collected.	98.7%	99.3%	99.3%		
The amount of rent in arrears at the end of the year.	6.9%	7.6%	6.3%		
The percentage of properties abandoned in the year.	0.2%	0.6%	0.7%		
The percentage of new tenancies that are still in place a year later.	94.2%	90.3%	88.8%		
Measure	Midlothian	Peer Group	Scottish Average	How do we compare?	Compared to last year
Repairs and Maintenance					
The percentage of your homes that are meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.	93.1%	95.3%	93.2%		
The average length of time to complete emergency repairs.	7 hours	5 hours	6 hours		
The average length of time to complete non-emergency repairs.	9 days	9 days	9 days		
The percentage of repairs appointments kept.	80.6%	95.5%	94.3%		
Measure	Midlothian	Peer Group	Scottish Average	How do we compare?	Compared to last year
Homeless households					
The percentage of new tenancies given to homeless households.	45.4%	46.6%	40.5%		
The average time that homeless households stay in council managed temporary accommodation.	206 days	113 days	96 days		

Measure	Midlothian	Peer Group	Scottish Average	How do we compare?	Compared to last year
Customer Satisfaction					
The percentage of tenants who feel Midlothian Council is good at keeping them informed about services and their outcomes.	82%	81.7%	83.7%		
The percentage of tenants satisfied with the quality of their property.	84.5%	85.9%	84.2%		
The percentage of tenants satisfied with a repair that has been carried out in the last 12 months.	80.2%	85%	88.2%		
The percentage of new tenants satisfied with the quality of their property when moving in.	84.5%	83.1%	84.5%		
The percentage of homeless people satisfied with the quality of their temporary accommodation.	73.4%	84.9%	88.3%		
The percentage of tenants satisfied that their rent offers value for money.	73.1%	80%	79.4%		
The percentage of tenants satisfied with overall service of the council.	77.5%	81.8%	83.6%		

Key Points

- Our rents are cheaper than many other landlords but we are increasing our rent charges to help pay for investment in new and existing housing.
- Our customers appreciate the quality of accommodation when they first move in. To ensure a good letting standard this can mean empty houses take longer to relet due to repair and maintenance work going on in the property. However we intend to speed up the time we take to let houses next year.
- In terms of homelessness, more homeless households are being housed in Midlothian but households generally spend a long time in accommodation due to the shortage of affordable accommodation in Midlothian.
- 15 smiley faces and 12 unhappy faces show that there are many areas where the Housing Service performs well in comparison to our peers. In most areas where we are not performing as well as our peers we are not far away from the average, such as for overall tenant satisfaction. We are carrying out a tenant satisfaction survey during 2016 which will replace the survey indicators which was undertaken in 2014. We hope to see an improvement in the level of customer satisfaction and in some of the poorer performing indicators.

If you want to find out more about our performance, you can get detailed information from the Scottish Housing

Regulator's website: www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk.

We would also be happy to talk to you if there are specific things you want to know about our performance. We are able to discuss performance information in more detail at tenants groups or you could join our tenant panel if you want to help identify ways we can improve. You could also just contact us for a chat about the report. For more information call us on **0131 271 6698** or email housingstrategy@midlothian.gov.uk.

Useful contact details...

Housing Services: **0131 271 3394**
Homelessness and Housing Advice: **0131 271 3397**
Revenues and Benefits: **0131 271 3201**
Repairs: **0131 663 7211**
Arrears: **0131 271 3499**
Anti-social behaviour hotline: **0131 271 6677**
asb@midlothian.gcsx.gov.uk/text ASB to 66777
Police: **101** (Non emergency)
Mediation service: **0131 271 3617**
Emergency Homelessness: **0131 663 7211**

For online housing options advice, why not visit:
www.eastscotlandhousingoptions.co.uk/midlothian.html