

# Tenants Today

## Winter 2020 Newsletter

### Lockdown easing

Over the last few months lockdown restrictions have eased and things are starting to slowly return to a new normal. Services delivered by the council can change on a weekly basis depending on the status of the virus in our local area. So where are we in the route out of lockdown at this time?

(Please be aware due to the Lockdown restrictions, sections within Midlothian Council might change at short notice)

### Will Buccleuch House be opening soon?

The Scottish Government continues to advise that non-essential offices should remain closed and we will not reopen the office until this guidance changes. Until then we will provide the vast majority of our services remotely. People requiring Homeless Services and Welfare Grants are permitted entry only by prior arrangement.

### Can I now get a face-to-face appointment?

We aim to try to resolve any queries over email or telephone in the first instance, if required you can speak to the Housing Team and request a face-to-face appointment

### Is the repairs section back to normal service?

Although we are working hard to continue providing essential services to those who need them most, our housing services are inevitably feeling the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak

This means that we are currently only able to carry out emergency repairs. Please check our website for latest updates to our services

### Gas Safety checks

We have a legal responsibility to service gas heating systems within a 12 month period and carry out other checks. We will require access to your home once a year to carry out the service. The service is carried out by our contractors who will contact you to advise when they will visit your home. If this time is not suitable this can be rearranged, but the date must be within the deadline of the service date. If these appointments are not kept we will force entry and change the locks. There is a significant cost incurred for the forced entry and change of locks which you will be liable for.

### Financial Challenges

If anyone is struggling to pay their rent or Council Tax, for whatever reason please contact our Arrears Team on 0131 271 3499 or email [revenues.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:revenues.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk) for further advice so the problem doesn't escalate further.

With the news channels telling us of more companies laying off staff on a daily basis, some people might find themselves having to apply for Universal Credit for the very first time in their lives. The main benefit you need to know about is Universal Credit (UC).

The amount you get is based on the number and ages of people in your household, the rent you pay, and your income and savings. Universal Credit claims are made and managed online. This means you have to go online to report changes, find out about the payments, and send and receive messages to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

### **Tips regarding UC Claims:**

- Once you're claimed make sure you've regularly log into your online account and check your "to do" list. If you don't do this you might be sanctioned.
- Check your online account for details of your payments, how they've been worked out, and when you should receive them.
- Use your journal to report any changes, such as work, income or people living with you.
- If you need an advance at the start of the claim, use your online journal.
- Remember to make separate claims for help with Council Tax to Midlothian Council who can help also if you have extra bedrooms award DHP payment. Please call 0131 271 3499 for more information.

Find out more, including a handy benefit calculator, at [www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk](http://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk)

You can also call the Universal Credit Helpline free on 0800 023 2581

## **Are you entitled to a Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods?**

### **Best Start Grant**

This is a package of three payments providing extra money to parents and carers during the early years of a child's life.

- Pregnancy and Baby Payment

£600 for a first child and £300 for other children. There will be an extra £300 if you have a multiple birth. This will help with expenses in pregnancy or having a new child, for example maternity clothes, a pram or additional heating.

- Early Learning Payment

£250 payment for eligible families on certain benefits or tax credits who have a child between the ages of two and three years and six months. This is to help with costs of early learning around the time your child might start nursery.

- School Age Payment

£250 payment made around the time a child normally starts Primary 1 to help with the costs of a child starting school.

### **Best Start Foods**

This replaces the UK Government's Healthy Start Vouchers in Scotland. Paper vouchers are replaced with a new payment card, giving you more flexibility in how you use it.

You get £17 every four weeks during pregnancy and for any children between one and three years old, this payment increases to £34 for any child under one.

You may be entitled to a Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods if:

- You live in Scotland
- Get certain benefits or tax credits, unless you are under 18
- If you are pregnant
- If you are the parent or carer of a child

You can apply directly to Social Security Scotland by calling their Freephone helpline 0800 182 2222. Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods are administered and delivered by Social Security Scotland. For the latest Social Security Scotland news, and also to submit online claims, go to [www.mygov.scot/benefits](http://www.mygov.scot/benefits)

## **Midlothian Council Draft Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2020-2023**

We want to hear the views of tenants and other service users about this draft Strategy which includes the proposed actions we plan to take so that tenants and other service users find it easy to participate in and influence decisions in our services to you.

You can view the draft strategy:

[Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2020-2023 \(PDF\)](#)

Or contact us on [tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk) by 30 November 2020 with your comments.

## **Are you an EU Citizen?**

EU citizens have until the end of June 2021 to apply for settled status to be allowed to continue to live, work and study in the UK as well as continue to use the NHS. Even if you have lived in the UK for a long time, you need to apply.

More information from [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland) or [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

## **Draft Equality Outcomes – tell us what you think?**

The Equality Act 2010 requires all public bodies to publish equality outcomes at least every four years.

Equality outcomes aim to achieve specific and identifiable improvements in people's life chances, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations.

Midlothian, Edinburgh and West Lothian councils working in partnership with NHS Lothian, Midlothian Health and Social Care Partnership and East Lothian Integrated Joint Board have developed a set of draft equality themes and outcomes. Housing is one of the themes covered.

Your views on the draft themes and outcomes will help shape and influence the development of the final outcomes and help to agree actions that can make a difference to people's lives.

[Equality Outcomes Survey - tell us what you think](#)

## **Help from Changeworks Affordable Warmth Team**

In the coming months with winter fast approaching, many more of us are staying in our homes for longer periods. Heating our homes will be a big worry for many of us.

The Affordable Warmth team is here to help you. It's a friendly, experienced energy advisors team who can help you reduce energy bills and stay affordably warm, in whatever housing accommodation you are in at present. They can also offer other free services to help lower other household bills and can advise you of any grants, discounts and assistance available from the Scottish Government and energy companies. They can give support to help with fuel debt, and billing issues.

To find out how Changeworks' advisors could help, call 0131 555 4010 and ask for the Affordable Warmth team or email [warmth@changeworks.org.uk](mailto:warmth@changeworks.org.uk)

## **Considered a move?**

At some stage over the last few months you might have found your Council home is no longer suitable for you. Have you considered moving to somewhere that fits your needs now?

## **Moving to a smaller property – downsizing - How we can help**

Midlothian Council offers grants to council tenants who wish to move to a smaller property that might suit their needs more now. This could lead to cheaper rent and council tax bills in the long-term. This payment aims to encourage tenants who are living in properties that are too large for their needs to move in order to free up family sized accommodation for those who need it.

If you would like further information please contact our Housing Officers by email [housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk) or telephone **0131 271 3394**.

## **Tips on pets and your tenancy:**

- Tenants have automatic permission to keep one domestic pet. If you would like more you must ask the housing services team.
- You should contact your housing officer before putting up any structures like a kennel, an aviary or pigeon loft in your garden.
- Keeping pets on a balcony is not permitted.
- If you want to keep fish in a large tank please contact your housing officer. The size and weight of a tank can pose problems, especially if you live in a flat.
- If you own a dog please be responsible and have consideration for your neighbours. Pick up any dog mess left behind by your pet and make every effort to keep its barking to a minimum.
- Tenants are also responsible for the behaviour of any visitors' pets.

If you have any questions please email [housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk) or phone 0131 271 3394.



## **Responsibilities in Communal Areas**

There are specific responsibilities if your house has shared areas with other residents.

- If you share a common stair, you must take your turn in regularly cleaning and washing the stair.
- You must not leave any items in communal stairs as this is dangerous and a fire hazard.
- Please respect other residents' privacy.
- You must allow reasonable access to shared paths. If you lock the gate you must have permission from your neighbour and they must be provided with a key.
- Keep the areas you share in a clean and tidy condition, this includes cleaning up after pets.
- Keep shared walkways clear of rubbish, bikes, toys etc.
- Keep bin storage areas clean and tidy.
- If you share waste/recycling bins/boxes you must take turns to place them on the kerbside at the appropriate time and bring them back in.

A rota system can be introduced if tenants fail to take turns in cleaning the communal areas.

## **Changes which came into force in November 2019 regarding your Scottish Secure Tenancy Rights**

Back in 2018 every tenant was informed by letter about the changes which were due to come into force in November 2019. Here is a reminder of these main changes:

**Assignment** – The person taking on the tenancy must have lived there for 12 months.

Midlothian Council must have been notified of them being in the property and the 12 month residency period starts when the council have been notified.

**Joint Tenancies** - the person becoming a joint tenant must have lived there for 12 months.

Midlothian Council must have been notified of them being in the property and the 12 month residency period starts when the council has been notified, this includes spouses, civil partners and co-habitees.

**Subletting** - There will be a requirement that the tenant must have been a tenant for 12 months before making an application to sub-let.

Midlothian Council will need to authorise any change in the tenancy before any move is made by the tenant and there is no residency requirement for the incoming sub-tenant.

**Successions** - 12 month residency requirement for all levels except spouse/civil partner/joint tenant.

Midlothian Council must have been notified of them being in the property and the 12 month residency period starts when the council has been notified.

If you would like to discuss how any of these changes could affect you and your family members, please get in touch with your Housing Officer: 0131 271 3394 or email [Housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:Housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk)

### **Useful numbers**

- Police Scotland Non-Emergency 101
- Scottish Water Enquiries 0845 601 8855,
- Gas Emergencies 0800 111 999
- Electric (power cut) 0800 092 9290
- Citizens Advice Bureau (Penicuik) 01968 675259
- Citizens Advice Bureau (Dalkeith) 0131 660 1636
- Age Scotland – Friendship line 0800 12 44222
- Scottish Women’s Aid 0800 027 1234