

Spring Today

Tenants' Newsletter Spring 2022



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Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of the Today Newsletter

The past two years have been a struggle for everyone in one way or another, but hopefully the end is in sight and we can all get back to doing what we want to do soon. We hope you find the information in this newsletter helpful.

Rent Freeze

We are pleased to let you know that tenant rents will be frozen for another year following the decision by councillors at the December 2021 council meeting.

It is hoped that this announcement will bring some much needed relief to the many tenants who have suffered financially because of Covid-19. This freeze will also apply to service charges and management fees for temporary accommodation.

The council has been working with tenants to help them try to meet their financial obligations, access benefit entitlements and to support them to sustain their tenancies.

Get in touch –not in debt

Any tenant facing difficulties should contact the council's Arrears and Revenues teams for advice and assistance. Please telephone 0131 271 3499 or email arrears@midlothian.gov.uk. If you prefer we can arrange to meet in your home. Remember if you have financial concerns, it's always best to contact us as early as possible: Get in touch –not in debt. You can also discuss any Council Tax issues with the same section.



Tenant Participation

The new normal has meant leaving face to face meetings and hard copy documents well behind us and embracing the digital world. We swapped meeting rooms for livingrooms via online Teams meetings. This work has allowed us to effectively engage and involve tenants through the pandemic, with no impact to the day to day service we deliver. One of the areas we want to increase in tenant participation is tenant's views and feedback on all areas on the housing services we provide.

There is a range of ways you can get involved- from joining the new email surveys group or becoming a member of our Tenant Panel.

How you want to take part and how much time you put in is entirely up to you. We also offer the chance of winning vouchers to tenants taking part in our email survey group.

You can contact the Tenant Participation Officer by email on: tenant.partuicipation@midlothian.gov.uk or calling 077853 82170 for further details.

The first “Tell us what it is like living in your new council home” surveys were sent recently to households which had been in their new homes for one year. The feedback on different aspects of the home and their experience so far is invaluable and highlights what works well and where we might be able to improve. Two winners will receive £50 in High Street vouchers and the lucky winners were from Penicuik and Loanhead.

Thank you to everyone who took part in this survey.

House Exchange



Midlothian Council has recently changed our Mutual Exchange scheme provider to House Exchange.

Have you been thinking about moving home? Maybe it's for a new job, more space or simply to be closer to friends and family. Whatever the reason, House Exchange can help you!

House Exchange is the new service we use to bring people together who are interested in swapping their homes. There are thousands of people looking to swap their properties right across the UK, so your ideal home may only be a few clicks away.

Enter your details at www.houseexchange.org.uk and the site will match you up with other would-be-house swappers. The website helps you to search, find matches and contact other council or housing association residents who want to swap their homes. There's also a free House Exchange App available on the Apple App and Google Play stores; so you can search on the move too!

Important things to consider:

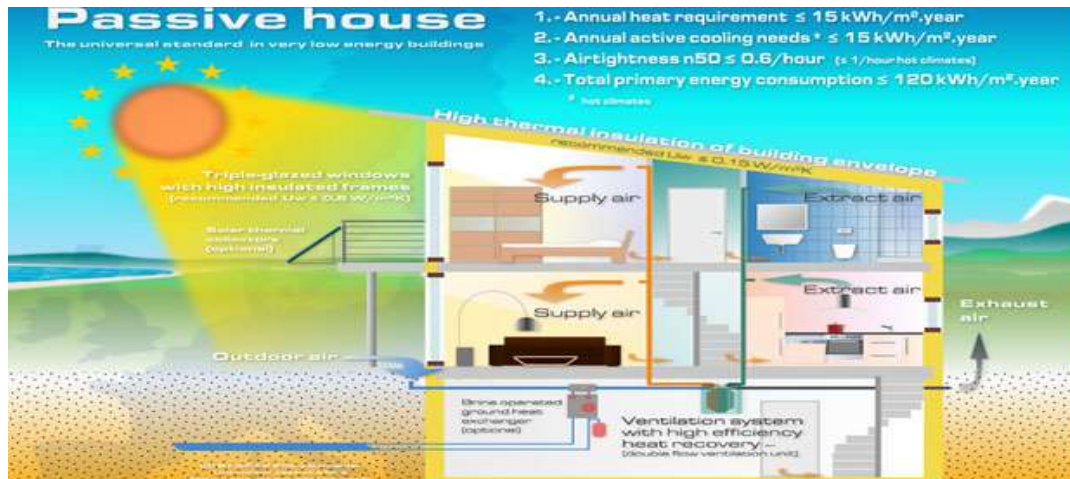
Add photos: You can have up to five photos of your property on your advert. This increases your chances of finding a swap because it allows potential swappers to see throughout your home. Try to make sure each room looks its best in the pictures.

Include a description: House Exchange has a fantastic tool that allows you to create a description by selecting options that apply to your home, or if you prefer you can get creative and write your own. You can find both these options in the 'Update my advert' section, where you can also add key features such as a garden or balcony. The more detail you add to your description the more your advert will stand out.

Get in touch: Once you're registered, start messaging people; arranging viewings is a great first step in your House Exchange journey. If you cannot find a direct swap the easy to use Multi Swap tool can help you to build a chain of properties.

House Exchange will help you every step of the way to take the stress out of searching for a new home. Visit the website today to get started!

[Swap your home | Midlothian Council](#)



Energy efficient council homes for future

The most ambitious energy-efficient council housing programme in Scotland is underway in Midlothian.

182 “green” council homes

Midlothian Council is building 182 “green” council homes of the future. All of them will meet the demanding “Passivhaus” building standard.

What is Passivhaus?

The Passivhaus standard was developed by the Passivhaus institute in Germany. The standard sets out stringent requirements that ensures what is built is literally a “Passive House” that requires very little energy to heat and then recovers that heat to re-use within the home.

Building already underway

Six homes are already being built to the standard at Buccleuch Street in Dalkeith.

Ambitious programme

A further 46 homes with extra care are to be built at Polton Street, Bonnyrigg; 20 homes are planned at Burnbrae in Bonnyrigg; 20 more Passivhaus homes will be on Bonnyrigg High

Street and further work will begin on 90 homes on the site of the former Newbattle High School in Easthouses. All of these homes will be council homes for social rent.

Carbon neutral by 2030

Building homes to this green energy standard is a key element of Midlothian Council's route to Net Zero by 2030.

Key features of a Passive House:

- Allows for energy savings of up to 90% compared with typical building stock and over 75% compared to average new builds. Passive Houses use less oil and gas to heat one square meter of living space than conventional "low-energy" buildings.
- Passive Houses make efficient use of the sun, internal heat sources and heat recovery, rendering conventional heating systems unnecessary throughout even the coldest of winters. During warmer months, Passive Houses make use of passive cooling techniques such as strategic shading to keep comfortably cool.
- Passive Houses offer high level of comfort. Internal temperatures stay constant even in the face of extreme outdoor temperatures. Special windows and a building design consisting of a highly insulated roof and floor slab as well as highly insulated exterior walls keep the desired warmth in the house or undesirable heat out.
- A ventilation system supplies constant fresh air, making for superior air quality without unpleasant draughts. A highly efficient heat recovery unit allows for the heat contained in the exhaust air to be re-used.

Social Security Scotland

New Independent Advocacy Service opens - Support available for disabled people to access Scottish Social Security.

People with disabilities are now able to access a new advocacy service to get help applying for Scottish social security benefits.

The support is available to those applying for any Social Security Scotland's current and future benefits including Child Disability Payment and Adult Disability Payment.

It also covers advocacy support for people with disabilities to access payments for families with children, who need help to pay for a funeral, carers and young people entering the workplace.

This service will be delivered by the charity VoiceAbility and is entirely independent of the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. It will provide free and independent

advocacy to anyone who identifies as disabled and requires support to communicate. This may include people with a sensory disability, mental health condition or learning disability.

This support can be accessed by calling Social Security Scotland Freephone 0800 182 2222 and asking to be referred to the Independent Advocacy Service or contacting VoiceAbility directly Freephone 0300 303 1660 or visiting

helpline@voiceability.org

Warm and Well for Midlothian Council tenants

Midlothian Council is working with Changeworks to support tenants to be warmer in their homes and reduce energy bills.

The Warm and Well service for tenants is provided by Changeworks, a leading charity which has been giving expert advice and support to people across Scotland for over 30 years. Their advice is free, confidential, impartial and helps our tenants reduce energy bills and have warmer homes.

Changeworks advisors can help you

- check if you're eligible and apply for the [£140 Warm Home Discount](#)
- understand and check your gas / electricity bills
- choose a gas / electricity supplier, tariff, and payment option
- negotiate with energy suppliers on your behalf to resolve gas and electricity billing problems, including incorrect bills
- agree repayment options if you owe money to your supplier
- read your meters
- get the most out of your heating and hot water system
- deal with condensation in your home.
- access grants to ease financial stress

Energy saving tips

Top ten tips to help you avoid wasting energy in your home

We know it's a challenging and worrying time right now, with bills going up and uncertainty over what the future holds. We're here to help and try and put your mind at ease. Get in touch for help with any issue related to your fuel bills and we can help keep you warm.

Request a call back or find out more at:

www.changeworks.org.uk/referral

warmth@changeworks.org.uk

Freephone 0800 870 8800 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Being a good neighbour

As our tenant you need to keep your property and garden (if you have one) in good order. Every tenant has the right to enjoy living in their home in peace and comfort. Therefore you or anyone living with you, or a visitor to your home must not cause your neighbours any problems or harassment.

If you have any neighbour problems please contact your Housing Officer on 0131 271 3394 or email complaint housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk

Looking after your home

Midlothian Council are responsible for giving you a safe home to live in and keeping any areas around it that we own or maintain, in good condition. As a tenants you are responsible for keeping your home clean and in good order.



Improving your home – Always ask us first

Midlothian Council regularly carries out essential repairs, maintenance and improvements to its properties as part of a planned programme of work. However, some tenants are tempted to go that one step further, by investing their time and own money in their home to get it looking how they want.

Tenants are responsible for taking reasonable care of the house, a responsibility that includes carrying out internal decoration and minor repairs, whereas, general repairs and larger home improvements, such as new kitchens or bathrooms are the council's responsibility. However, some tenants choose to do these themselves rather than wait until their home falls into the programme of improvements for this.

While the council recognises that some tenants may wish to do this, under the terms of their Tenancy Agreement the tenant can only make alterations or improvements to their house with the council's permission.

The council is often supportive of tenants wishing to make home improvements, provided tenants have first obtained their permissions or building regulations or the other necessary consents required. Tenants must ensure that all work is carried out to a satisfactory and safe standard.

Do not take any chances by carrying out any work without first checking with the council. If any alterations are carried out without permission the council is entitled to restore the house to its previous condition during or at the end of tenancy. We are entitled to charge the tenant for this and this could result in a large bill for the tenant.

When is permission needed?

Tenants need to obtain the council's permission in advance to carry out various types of works to their home. Some common examples of these works include:

- altering or improving the house, its fixtures or fittings
- adding new fixtures or fittings –kitchen, bathroom, heating system, double glazing
- putting up a garage, shed or other structure
- building a driveway
- decorating the outside of the house
- erecting a satellite dish

How do I apply for permission?

Email: housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk

Or submit in writing. Please address to Housing Officer

Midlothian House

40-46 Buccleuch Street

Dalkeith

Midlothian

EH22 1DN

What happens next?

Applications will be considered and tenants will receive a written response informing them of our decision. We may wish to carry out an inspection before making a decision, but we will keep in touch with tenants throughout the process.

When we write with our decision, we will tell tenants if we agree to the work being carried out, this will include any conditions we attach to the approval. If we refuse to the work being carried out this will also include the reasons behind this decision.

The council can only withhold permission if it has reasonable grounds for doing so.

Building Maintenance Service

As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and to ensure the safety of all our staff and customers, over the past 2 years the Building Maintenance Service has had to change the way we worked. During the lock down period, the service had to move to undertake work which was categorised as an emergency. This change has meant that new work or repairs is taking longer to complete than before, or has had to be rescheduled. As a result of this, there is now a backlog of outstanding work.

As the COVID-19 restrictions are now in the process of being lifted, we expect to be able to catch up on the repair backlog.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our customers for their patience and understanding, and for bearing with us as we process the repair backlog as swiftly as we possibly can.



Useful Numbers

NHS24 - 111

Non-Emergency Police - 101

Electric (Power Cut) - 105 or 0800 3163 105

Age Scotland Helpline - 0800 1244 222

Samaritans Support Line- 116 123

Midlothian Waste & Recycling- 0131 561 5284