

West Lothian

tenants news

informing and involving West Lothian's tenants



**BONFIRE &
FIREWORK
SAFETY!**

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West Lothian
Council



2018/19 was another successful year for HCBS, with congratulations going to our Tenant Participation Team and the members of the Editorial Panel for their achievement in being awarded the Tenant Information Service's Danny Mullen Scrutiny Excellence Award. The winning of this award provides recognition of the hard work and dedication shown in editing, proof reading and approving publications intended for West Lothian Council tenants.



Background

The Scottish Social Housing Charter (The Charter) was a requirement of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, and sets out standards and outcomes which social landlords should aim to achieve when performing housing activities.

The Charter came into effect on 1 April 2012 and was reviewed during 2016. The Charter applies to all local authorities and social landlords in Scotland, with each landlord being required to submit an annual return on their performance to the Scottish Housing Regulator (an independent regulatory authority) who monitors progress against these standards; this is known as the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

Within The Charter there are six standards:



Under each standard there is a clear statement of what tenants and service users can expect from their landlord. In total there are 69 Performance Indicators underpinning the six standards. The council is required to report performance against each of these indicators to The Scottish Housing

Regulator by the 31st May each year, and must publish a Landlord Report to tenants by the 31st October each year. Information in this report shows how well the council has performed against each of the standards that apply to them as a Landlord.

This report has been produced in association with the members of the Tenant Participation Development Working Group and Tenants' Editorial Panel, to ensure the information is clear and of interest to tenants and service users.

If you would like to compare the council's performance with up to four other social landlords in Scotland, you can do so at: <https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/landlord-performance>

Landlord Information



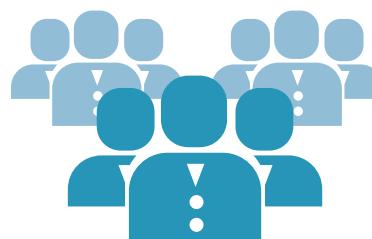
Council housing in West Lothian is managed by Housing, Customer and Building Services (HCBS).

The service is managed by a Head of Service, supported by a Senior Management Team; responsible for the following areas of service:

- Building Services**
- Customer and Community Services**
- Housing Need**
- Housing Operations**
- Housing, Strategy and Development**
- Performance and Change**

The council's aim is to offer an effective service; managing, maintaining and improving homes, whilst delivering an excellent value for money service.

To continue providing quality homes for rent, Housing, Customer and Building Services employs around 800 officers

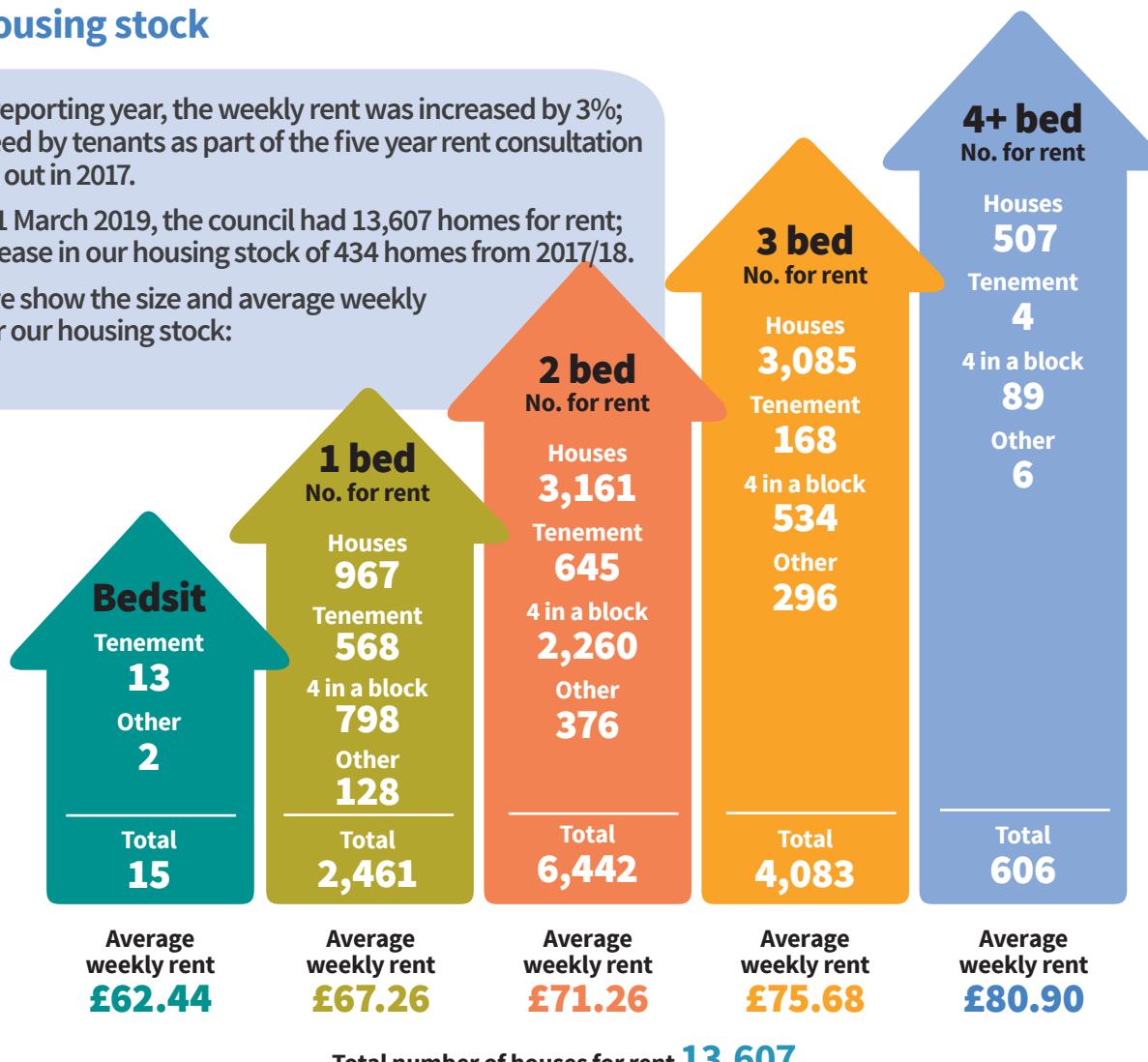


Our housing stock

In the reporting year, the weekly rent was increased by 3%; as agreed by tenants as part of the five year rent consultation carried out in 2017.

As at 31 March 2019, the council had 13,607 homes for rent; an increase in our housing stock of 434 homes from 2017/18.

Here we show the size and average weekly rent for our housing stock:



Performance against the ARC for 2018/19



Standard 1

The Customer Landlord Relationship

- every tenant and customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.
- tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.
- tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.



Tenant Satisfaction

In 2017 a total of 1,785 responses were received to our tenant satisfaction survey. The survey is sent out to all our tenancies every two years; you will soon receive your 2019 survey through the post. If you prefer you can also complete it online at: www.esurveycreator.co.uk/s/2019tenantsatisfactionsurvey



Scan with a QR Code reader on your smartphone to complete the survey online

Ann Marie Carr, Head of Service said:

“I would like to thank everyone who took the time to return their surveys in 2017; this information really helps us to see where we need to improve services. However, we need your help again! The 2019 survey is being sent out, and I would ask that you take a few minutes to complete this for us. We do value your views and opinions, which help us change and improve services to meet the needs of our tenants”

How satisfied are you?

Throughout this report, we provide information from the survey showing how tenants feel HCBS performed against certain charter indicators. We also show the number of tenants who responded to each question. These are shown as icons which represent:



very or fairly satisfied



neither satisfied or dissatisfied



fairly or very dissatisfied

Here we show how satisfied tenants are:

How do tenants feel HCBS keeps them informed about Landlord services? Of the 1,784 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



Q. How satisfied are tenants with the overall service provided by HCBS? Of the 1,774 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



Q. How satisfied are tenants with opportunities to participate in their Landlord's decision making process? Of the 1,773 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:





Standard 2

Housing quality and maintenance

- tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) when they are allocated; are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, and also meet the energy efficiency standard for social housing (EESSH) by December 2020.
- tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard was introduced by the Scottish Government in February 2004. Out of 13,677 properties, 29 have failed this year because of one or two elements requiring renewal, which will be repaired in 2019/20, with the exception of one property, which is planned to be repaired in 2020/21.



of properties
meet SHQS
standard

Q. How satisfied are tenants with the repairs and maintenance service? 3,635 tenants who had repairs carried out in the reporting period, and completed a satisfaction survey, reported satisfaction levels as:



Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESSH)

The EESSH aims to improve the energy efficiency of social housing in Scotland. The Scottish Government brought EESSH into force in March 2014; all social landlords will be expected to achieve this standard by 2020.



of properties
meet
EESSH standard

The EESSH sets a single minimum energy efficiency rating for landlords to achieve, meaning that tenants should benefit from a warmer home, which could mean lower fuel consumption, lower energy bills and fewer tenants in fuel poverty. We are delighted to report excellent progress with 13,677 of our homes meeting this standard.

Repairs

In West Lothian, repairs to our housing stock are carried out by our own Building Services operatives.

In 2018/19, they completed a grand total of **38,821** (emergency and non-emergency) repairs.



of repairs
completed 'right
first time'

Q. How do tenants feel about the Quality of their Home? Of the 1,780 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



Appointments

In West Lothian we offer scheduled appointments for routine repairs so there is a choice of a morning or afternoon slots (anytime between 9:30am and 4:30pm). In the reporting year we were able to attend 99.6% of these.



Routine repair
appointments
made

Book your repair online

Tenants have the option and flexibility to book routine repair appointments online. This is a simple and straightforward process accessed through the council website www.westlothian.gov.uk/request-a-repair.

If you don't have access to the internet, you can still call **01506 280000** or call into your local CIS office.



**Attended
99.6% of repair
appointments
made**

Emergency and Routine Repairs

Here we show performance information and the average cost of Category 1, 2 and 3 repairs:

Category One - Emergency Repairs

Category Two - Urgent Repairs
Category Three - Non Urgent Repairs

2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	
total no. of repairs	22,619	23,829	22,106	14,202*	23,829	26,112
average time to complete	6.56 hrs	5.89 hrs	5.56 hrs	7.85 days	9.47 days	8.24 days
average cost of repair	£74.78	£69.20	£65.41	£84.70	£87.36	£89.86

*this figure is less than previous years as the repairs categories changed this year

Gas Servicing

We carry out an annual gas safety check and service to our homes with gas heating systems to ensure these are kept in good working order.

It is a legal requirement that these checks are carried out; failure to allow us into a property will result in our operatives having to force entry.

99.97%
of our properties had
a gas safety check and
certificate renewed by their
anniversary dates.

Gas Servicing and Safety Check Performance

2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	
no. of properties requiring gas safety certificate	13,228	12,673	12,574
no. of certificates renewed by anniversary date	13,224	12,667	12,530
average cost of gas service	£46.27	£45.38	£43.82

Standard 3

Neighbourhood and Community

- Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe



Working Together

In West Lothian we work in partnership with tenants, customers, the police and other council services to manage our neighbourhoods.

Q. How do tenants feel about the management of the neighbourhood they live in? Of the 1782 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)

We record the number of antisocial behaviour complaints made to the council. These can include neighbour complaints, vandalism, fly tipping, street drinking or problems with unoccupied houses. Shown below is the number of cases reported and resolved.

Antisocial Behaviour Performance

	2018/19 reported cases of antisocial behaviour 301		2017/18 reported cases of antisocial behaviour 342		2016/17 reported cases of antisocial behaviour 374
	reported cases resolved 274		reported cases resolved 297		reported cases resolved 302
	cases resolved within locally agreed targets 215		cases resolved within locally agreed targets 273		cases resolved within locally agreed targets 286

One of the most important things you can do to improve safety in your community is to report antisocial behaviour. With your help we can stop antisocial behaviour before it escalates into something more serious. You can contact us by:

Tel: [the Customer Service Centre on 01506 280000](#) or [Police Scotland on 101](#) (Calls charged at a local rate).

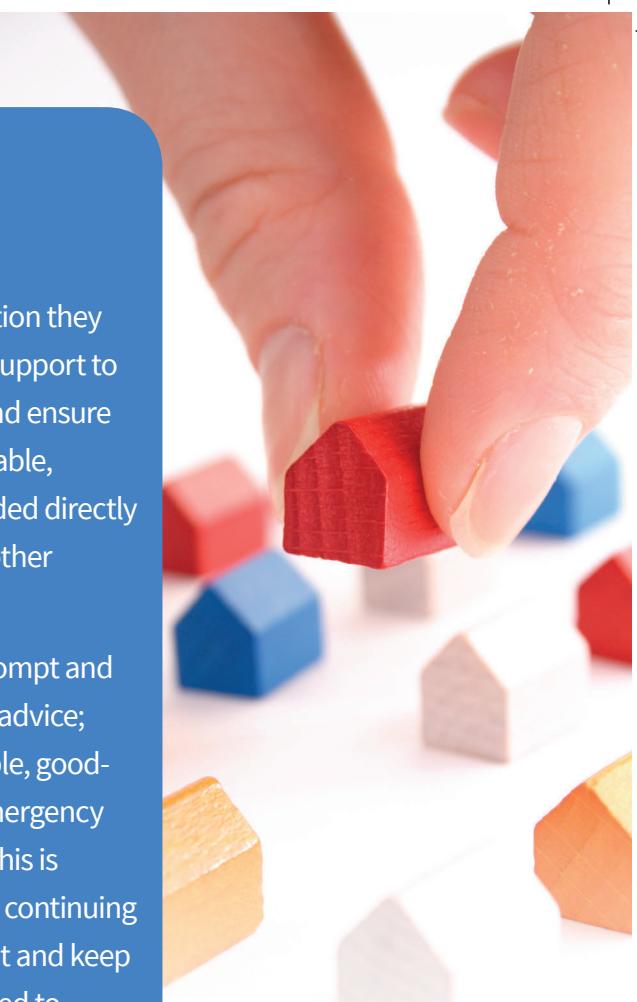
To contact us visit
www.westlothian.gov.uk/contactus

71.4% of cases reported were resolved within locally agreed targets in the reporting year.

Standard 4

Access to housing and support

- those looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them.
- tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.
- those at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.
- those looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.
- tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.
- homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.



Housing List Performance

The council allocates properties to people who have an active housing application. Applications are assigned to a group and points are awarded based on applicants housing need. Those with most points are given priority as per the full Allocations Policy which can be found at the council's website www.westlothian.gov.uk/apply-for-a-council-house

The information shown provides details of how we managed our housing list in the reporting year.

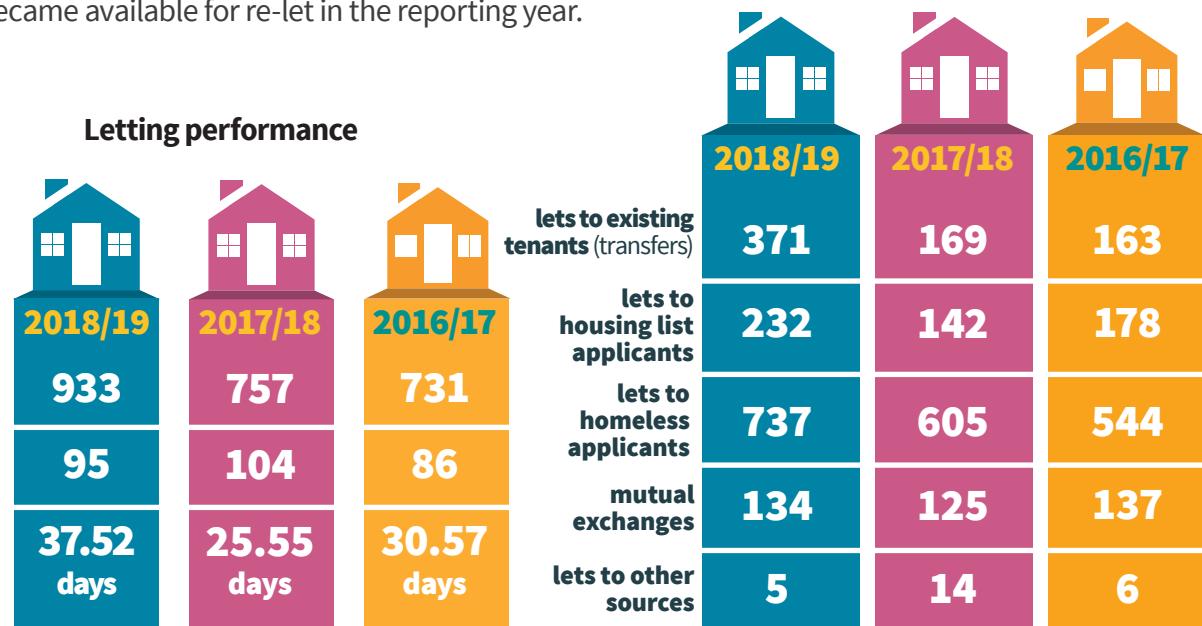
Housing List Performance

	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
applicants added to housing list	3,600	2,683	2,992
total applications cancelled from the housing list	2,111	3,116	1,829
total applicants on the housing list	8,271	8,824	9,517
offers of housing made	2,699	1,794	2,414
offers of housing refused	1,376	846	1,417

Letting our Houses

When a property becomes empty we do our best to re-let as quickly as possible; this maximises rental income and provides much needed accommodation for those on the housing list. **7.2%** of our lettable housing stock became available for re-let in the reporting year.

How we let our houses



Q. How do tenants feel about the standard of their home when moving in during the reporting year? Of the 667 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



84%
560



6.4%
43



9.6%
64

Homelessness

The council provide a 24 hour practical support and assistance service for people who are homeless or potentially homeless. Our homeless accommodation includes both emergency and temporary accommodation.

Homelessness Performance

2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
average time homeless applicants spent in temporary accommodation 244 days	average time homeless applicants spent in temporary accommodation 195 days	average time homeless applicants spent in temporary accommodation 82 days
households staying in temporary accommodation 1,973	households staying in temporary accommodation 1,427	households staying in temporary accommodation 1,257
houses in West Lothian used for temporary accommodation 424	houses in West Lothian used for temporary accommodation 412	houses in West Lothian used for temporary accommodation 405
Number who contacted the council's prevention service 1,127	Number who contacted the council's prevention service 730	Number who contacted the council's prevention service 1,070

Q. How do tenants feel about the quality of temporary or emergency accommodation offered? Of the 215 responses received, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:

83.2%
179

14.9%
20

1.9%
16

Medical Adaptations

At some stage in life, tenants may find their home is no longer suitable. This may be because the layout of the house is difficult due to illness, disability or if a tenant is elderly.

We can carry out alterations to a property (as approved by an Occupational Therapist), based on a tenant's medical needs. These adaptations are to help the tenant continue to live more independently in their own home. Adaptations can include grab rails, ramps or wet-floor showers. The information below shows how well we performed:

Medical Adaptations Performance

	2018/19 medical adaptations completed 552	2017/18 medical adaptations completed 682	2016/17 medical adaptations completed 812
	time taken to complete approved applications for medical adaptations 13.71 days	time taken to complete approved applications for medical adaptations 16.51 days	time taken to complete approved applications for medical adaptations 18.72 days

97.0% of approved medical adaptations were completed in the reporting year



Standard 5

Getting good value from rents and service charges

- tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.
- a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and other customers can afford them.
- tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including any details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.



Q. Do tenants feel that the rent for their property represents good value for money?

Of the **1,782 responses received**, tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



78.5%
1,399



12.3%
219



9.2%
164

44p
planned
investment

29p
repairs &
maintenance

10p
employee
costs

7p
supplies &
services

5p
support
services

3p
premises
costs

2p
voids & bad
debts

Paying rent

Rent money is used to fund the repair service, improvements to council homes and new-build projects. It is therefore very important that tenants pay their rent to ensure the council is able to deliver these vital services.

You can see how the rental income is being spent with over 70 pence in every pound collected being spent on Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Investment work on tenants' homes.

Rental Income

As a landlord we have a duty to collect as much rental income as possible, so we can provide a good value for money service to all our tenants. Against a challenging and difficult year for many, we were able to collect **97.6%** of the rental income due in the reporting year.

Our aim for 2019/20 is to continue to work to support tenants to maximise our income and reduce rent arrears.

Paying Rent

Paying rent is part of your tenancy agreement and it is important that rent is paid on time and in full. If you are having difficulty paying rent, please contact your housing officer for help and advice.

Tel: 01506 280000 | To contact us visit www.westlothian.gov.uk/contactus

Former Tenant Arrears

The income and arrears performance information below also includes figures for former tenant arrears. This is because when a tenant leaves a council property with rent arrears, we keep a record of these and work with our colleagues in Revenues to collect the money owed.

Income and Arrears Performance

	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
rent due	£47,851,906	£45,624,943	£45,473,545
rent collected	£46,699,279	£45,062,199	£45,319,348
rent arrears (gross)	£3,184,868	£2,378,178	£2,227,481

Rent lost due to Empty Properties

When properties become empty, we do our best to re-let as quickly as possible. However, sometimes this can take longer than we would like, due to improvement work being carried out on the property. In the reporting year **0.81%** of our rent, a total of **£389,572** was lost due to properties being empty.

Priorities for 2019/20

- Continue to provide a high quality Repairs and Maintenance service to meet the needs of our tenants
- Continue to increase the numbers of new, affordable homes- we have a target of building 3000 homes by 2022
- Improve existing council homes by helping tackle fuel poverty- we do this through a range of energy efficient measures which will ensure that we will meet the new Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing by 2020
- Providing tenants with a range of support to help them stay in their tenancies
- Reduce anti-social behaviour through a range of targeted, preventative, diversionary and educational means
- Provide high quality customer services and facilities that are accessible and meet the needs of our customers
- Continue to provide statutory services in both our Libraries and Registration Services



The biggest challenge for Housing, Customer and Building Services continues to be tackling homelessness. Over the next five years, the service will support the delivery of the actions of West Lothian's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) to reduce homelessness. The RRTP is a document which we are required to produce for the Scottish Government and which shows that we have identified the main homeless issues in West Lothian. The main challenge in West Lothian is increasing demand from households presenting as homeless against the available supply of suitable housing. We will reduce homelessness through:

- Working in partnership with other partners to deliver the supply of affordable housing;
- Move towards a West Lothian-wide Housing Options and Homeless Prevention approach;
- Remove the use of B&B accommodation;
- Reduce lengths of stay in temporary accommodation.

Taking Part

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and 2010 gives tenants legal rights in relation to participation and places a duty on Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to consult with tenants on a range of housing issues.

In West Lothian we have a Tenant Participation strategy which sets out how the council will communicate, consult and most importantly, take on board the views and opinions of tenants and use

these to influence decisions that shape services. Any tenant or service user can take part, either as an individual or through one of our tenants and residents groups in a way that suits them. We have various initiatives and activities available that provide a means for tenants to come along and find out about changes or improvements to services, such as rent levels, repairs or any other housing or environmental issue.

If you would be interested in taking part, please contact us by:

Email: TP@westlothian.gov.uk

Telephone: **01506 280000**

IN YOUR NEW BUILD COUNCIL HOME



MOVING INTO A NEW HOME CAN BE A STRESSFUL YET EXCITING EXPERIENCE AND A NEW BUILD PROPERTY MIGHT BE DAUNTINGLY NEW. HERE IS A LIST OF DO'S AND DON'TS THAT MAY HELP YOU THROUGH THE FIRST MONTHS OF MOVING INTO YOUR NEW HOME.

-   read your Tenant's Handbook, it's full of useful information about your new build home – it may answer any questions you might have without the need to contact the council.
-  stress about your heating system – easy read instructions have been left within your Tenant's Handbook. Please contact the council if you are still having trouble.
-  keep a note of hairline cracks, screw pops and other common defects; these will be dealt with after the first year of occupation at an 'End of Year Defects Inspection'. For information on what are considered defects, refer to your tenant's handbook.
-  report minor defects to the council or to the developer who built your house, these will be dealt with after the first year of occupation at an 'End of Year Defects Inspection'.
-  fill out an Alteration and Improvement Application Form and contact your Community Housing Officer before making alterations to your home. This can be found on the Council's website: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/25805/Planning-on-improving-your-home>
-  fix down flooring, paint or paper your walls before your 'End of Year Defects Inspection' has taken place and all defects taken care of.
-  reduce condensation by using your extractor fans and keeping window vents open. If possible open your windows when cooking or showering.
-  leave your heating off during very cold weather. Your thermostat will have a frost protection mode that will protect your heating system.
-  contact your Area Housing Office to apply for permission if you wish to install a Sky satellite dish.
-  allow a Sky engineer to route cables through the walls of your house – there will be a small white satellite box at the eaves of your house to which a dish can be wired. Four in a block style houses will have a communal box.
-  flush wipes, nappies, sanitary products, cotton buds, plasters, contraceptives or contact lenses down the toilet. Or, pour oil, soup, gravy, sauces, milk or leftover food down the sink.

AND FINALLY:

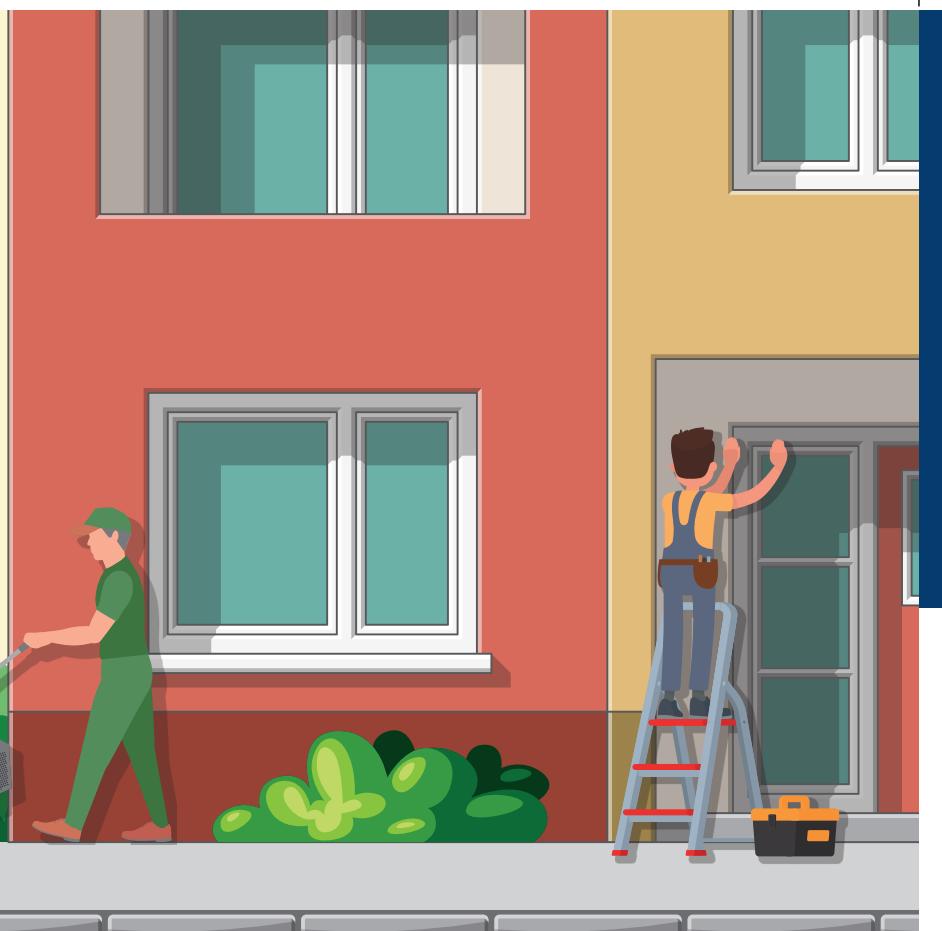


complete a new build satisfaction survey to let us know how you feel about your new home, at www.westlothian.gov.uk/new-1000-houses

Communal Areas

Our Responsibilities

You may remember that in the summer edition of Tenants News, there was an article on Tenants Responsibilities in flatted properties.



Many of you live in flatted properties and it is the responsibility of all those who share the communal areas, such as stairs and gardens, to ensure they are kept clean and tidy for everyone. The council plays a part in maintaining these areas. We do this through our Enhanced Estate Management Service.

The dedicated Estates Management Team clean and maintain communal staircases, landings, entrance halls and other communal areas in and around blocks of flats and maisonettes on Council estates. The Service includes:

- Repairs to communal areas
- Cleaning of communal areas
- Maintenance of door entry systems
- Grass cutting and other grounds maintenance associated with the block

- Sweeping of leaves
- Gritting of footpaths
- Dealing with lighting faults
- Abandoned vehicles removal

We also use 'Council Aware' stickers as a means of communicating to tenants and residents where there is a known problem in the communal area. If a fault is found or personal belongings have been left in stairwells during a block inspection, and cannot be repaired/ removed there and then, a 'Council Aware' sticker will be used to make residents aware that their block has been inspected and faults have been reported.

The stickers include the target completion date for the work to be carried out. The stickers will be removed by the team once work is completed.



Each block is visited on a fixed schedule so that residents know when to expect them and what will be done in their block – you can find details of your cleaning schedule in your notice board.

Please remember both the council and residents play a role in maintaining standards within communal areas. If you have any comments/concerns about the service, please contact Customer Services on **01506 280000** or email us your enquiry at: www.westlothian.gov.uk/contactus

Changes to your Scottish Secure Tenancy Rights introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014



Every tenant will have received a letter in October 2018 informing them about changes to their Scottish Secure Tenancy Rights and what, if anything, they needed to do before and when the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 became live.

The changes will be live from 1 November 2019 and will affect applications for:

- Assignations
- Joint Tenancies
- Subletting
- Successions

If you apply for any of the above after 1 November 2019 the new criteria will be used to make a decision on your application. The main criteria to be aware of is:

Assignment	Joint Tenancies	Subletting	Successions
The person taking on the tenancy must have lived there for 12 months	The person becoming a joint tenant must have lived there for 12 months	There will be a requirement that the tenant must have been the tenant for 12 months before making an application to sub-let	12 month residency requirement for all levels except spouse/civil partner/joint tenant
The landlord must have been notified of them being in the property and the 12 month residency period starts when the landlord has been notified	The landlord must have been notified of them being in the property and the 12 month residency period starts when the landlord has been notified	If they were not the tenant of the property then they may still be able to get permission to do so as long as they were living in the property for the 12 month period and the landlord was notified of this	The landlord must have been notified of them being in the property and the 12 month residency period starts when the landlord has been notified
	Includes spouses, civil partners and co-habitees	There is no residency requirement for the incoming sub-tenant	

If you would like to discuss how any of these changes could affect you and your family members, please get in touch with your local housing office by:

📞 01506 280000 📧 To contact us visit www.westlothian.gov.uk/contactus

A guide as to what is contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, has been created for tenants and can be found under related documents on the council website:

www.westlothian.gov.uk/TenantParticipation

Don't give **COLD** a chance...

Protect yourself and your home

Inside your home:

Frozen Pipes:

- turn off the water supply (make sure you know where this is).
- turn off the stopcock in your cold water tank, if you have one.
- protect everything around the frozen pipe to avoid damage; if it bursts, place buckets, basins and towels around the area.

Thawing Out:

- open the tap nearest to the part of the pipe you think is frozen, so the water can flow through when it has melted.

- thaw the ice in the pipe with a hot water bottle or hairdryer (taking care to keep it well away from any water). Start from the tap end and work back toward the cold water tank. NEVER use a heat gun or blowtorch – the pipe needs to be thawed out slowly and safely!

Try the following care tips:

- if your tank is in the loft, open the loft trap door on very cold days to let heat in.



- if you're going on holiday and your home will be empty, contact your local housing office to make arrangements to drain down the water system.
- in very cold weather, if you're going out for the day, or perhaps away for a couple of days over the Christmas period, keep your heating on, or set it to come on a couple of times a day.

Following this advice should minimise the risk of having a frozen or burst pipe. However, should this happen, please report it immediately to our Customer Service Centre on 01506 280000.

Outside your home:

In very severe cold spells, care should be taken outside your property due to the formation of icicles, which can become dangerous when they grow large, especially if they have a long distance to fall.



WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO

Don't try to knock large icicles off the gutters. Hitting icicles could cause more pressure on the guttering which in turn could cause them to collapse. Large icicles in particular are unpredictable when they fall and could cause injury or property damage.

THE BEST THING TO DO

Is leave them alone and monitor them. If necessary cordon off or block the area where the icicles are hanging to prevent and deter anyone from walking directly below them. More information and advice on being 'Winter Ready' can be found at: www.westlothian.gov.uk/winter

Don't risk it, get insured today!

For more information either call **01506 282020** or scan the QR code using a QR code reader on your smartphone.



Editorial Panel Scoops Prestigious Award

West Lothian Council and the Tenants Editorial Panel have been recognised at the Tenants Information Service National Excellence Awards, in the 'Danny Mullen Scrutiny Excellence' category.

The Tenants Information Service (TIS) work with landlords and tenants in the social rented sector to support involvement of tenants in landlord's decision making processes. They hold an annual Conference and Awards ceremony to recognise and honour excellence in everything from, partnership working and scrutiny practice, to digital innovation and community regeneration.

This year, the Council's Tenant Participation Team and the Editorial Panel won the Danny Mullen Scrutiny Excellence Award in recognition of the hard work and dedication shown in editing, proof reading and approving publications intended for West Lothian Council tenants.

The members of the Editorial Panel ensure that each letter, document or publication is written in plain

English, is easily understood and is 'tenant friendly'. Each document scrutinised by the panel, will then receive the 'Tenant Approved'

stamp to show that this meets their high standards, in terms of content and design.



If you would be interested in joining the Editorial Panel or would like more information on what's involved, please email us at TP@westlothian.gov.uk or call the Customer Service Centre on **01506 280000** and ask to speak to the TP Team in Housing, Customer and Building Services.

Blackburn Homeless Unit Garden



The garden and seating area provides a pleasant environment where residents can socialise and spend time in the fresh air. It has been well used and appreciated by everyone staying at BHU. It has also been used for residents meetings during the summer evenings (when it's not raining!).

The project was funded by Community Action Blackburn, who engaged West Lothian Youth Action Project's young

The staff and residents at Blackburn Homeless Unit (BHU) have been working hard on their garden project at the rear of the building. They would like to thank everyone for their kind donations and assistance, which has made this project possible.

people to build and install the raised planters. Help was also received from Blackburn Community Council, who provided the soil for the planters; the Community Inclusion - Learning Disability Team, who provided, built and installed the bench and garden table; and The Bathgate Divas who provided funds for pots, plants and garden furniture.

All at the BHU would like to say "a huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to this fantastic project".

What's new in your local library?

Boardmaker Technology

From early Autumn 2019 all West Lothian library members will be able to access Boardmaker technology in our libraries. Boardmaker is a software package that contains thousands of Picture Communication Symbols, which can help those with special needs. Customers can use the pre-designed symbols or create their own designs to produce communication flashcards then print and laminate them in the library (standard printing charges apply). You can book a session on one of our Public access PC's online at:

www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/1974/Computers-and-WiFi

All you need is your library membership number and PIN or just visit the library and use an available PC. We also have large key and high visibility keyboards available on request. If you require any help using the Assistive Technology in the libraries, please speak to a member of library staff who will be happy to help.

Micro:bit Technology

We will also be introducing Micro:bit technology to our libraries this year; this is a powerful handheld, fully programmable, computer designed by the BBC to encourage children to get actively involved in technical activities, like coding and electronics. Starter Packs will soon be available for all budding Coders to borrow, thanks to Micro:bit Education Foundation.

For more information on this, contact your local library directly.

Online library

The online library is available 24/7 and offers ebooks, digital talking books, digital magazines, digital comics and access to a range of online resources.

The BookMyne App is now available for you to access your library account and our online catalogue from your phone, iPad or tablet. Just use your library barcode, create an account and start downloading.

If you are not already a library member you can start your application online www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/6545/Library-membership then simply present at your chosen library with two forms of ID (one must show your address) and collect your membership card.

On the colder nights why not curl up with a good book, join one of our book groups or sign up to a Book Chain.

Our libraries are warm and welcoming and offer a wide variety of services and activities for people of all ages and abilities.

**For more information please visit
www.westlothian.gov.uk/libraries or if you
have any enquiries, comments or suggestions
please email: library.info@westlothian.gov.uk
or speak to a member of library staff.**

We need your help!

Do you have a disability?

We would like to hear from you!

Back to the Future West Lothian

We are collecting stories for our oral history project.

We want to show how people with disabilities
have shaped and influenced West Lothian.

The project aims to show what living with a disability has been like.

fb.me/BacktoTheFutureWestLothian



Disability
West Lothian



**We are looking for volunteers to help
with various aspects of our project:**

Hosting Events, transcribing interviews,
helping with our mobile exhibition and
compiling a booklet to share our findings.

Contact us by email or telephone:
debbie.forsyth@disabilitywestlothian.org
07548 539911

winter

Wordsearch competition

The winner of the £25 prize from the summer editions was Miss Cowie from Polbeth.

If you would like to be our next £25 winner, please find each of the Scottish inventions listed in the wordsearch, then complete and return it to: TP Team, Housing, Customer and Building Services, West Lothian Council, Civic Centre, Howden South Road, Livingston, EH54 6FF

Scottish inventions

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

BICYCLE
GRAND THEFT AUTO
HYPNOSIS
KALEIDOSCOPE

LOGARITHMS
PENICILLIN
RADAR
RAINCOAT

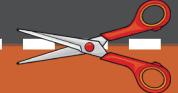
TARMAC
TELEPHONE
TELEVISION
VACUUM FLASK

Your name:

Your tel no:

Your email:

Your address:



Recipe Corner

Winter Creamy Chicken Recipe

Try this gorgeous creamy chicken recipe, it will warm you up on a cold winter's night, just delicious!

What you need:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 clove of garlic, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 200g pack cherry tomato
- 4 boneless skinless chicken breasts either whole or cut into smaller pieces (whichever you prefer)
- 3 tsp pesto
- 3 tbsp crème fraîche (half fat is fine)
- fresh basil
- ¼ tsp of brown sugar

What you do:

- 1 Heat the oil in a frying pan, preferably non-stick.
- 2 Add the chicken and fry for 12-15 mins until the chicken is cooked through. Season all over with a little salt and pepper.
- 3 Add the onion and garlic and stir until soft.
- 4 Halve the tomatoes and throw them into the pan, stirring them around for a couple of minutes until they start to soften.
- 5 Reduce the heat and stir in the brown sugar, pesto and crème fraîche until it makes a sauce.
- 6 Scatter with a few basil leaves if you have them, then serve with rice and salad or mash and broccoli.

Rent Consultation- A Reminder

You may remember that in the autumn of 2017 we gave you the opportunity to vote for, and give us your views on the options for the annual rent increase from 2018 to 2023. In addition, we also ran local drop-in sessions and an online campaign to provide tenants with as many opportunities to respond as possible.

We received our best ever response to a rent consultation, with 1,192* surveys returned.

As you can see most who voted, chose **Option 1 – a 3% increase over five years to 2022/23.**

At its budget meeting in February 2018, the Council were provided with the results of the survey and agreed to increase the rents in accordance with the most popular option chosen by tenants, Option 1. This increase is enabling investment in our existing houses, over the next five years, whilst also supporting the council to continue to invest in the supply of new council homes for the future.

Included in the survey response card we asked three questions that we wanted your views on. Out of the 1,192 responses returned, some had to be discounted either because the questions were left blank or no clear answer was given.

Option 1

Annual increase of **3%** over five years



Option 2

Annual increase of **4%** over five years



Total votes: 1,156

The questions were:

Q1 Should the council continue to add to the supply of, and build new council houses, even if this means increase to rent?



Amount: 813



Amount: 368

Q2 Should the council continue to invest in our existing council houses, even if this means increase to rent?



Amount: 963



Amount: 221

Q3 Do you feel your rent is affordable?



Amount: 861



Amount: 321

As you can see from the responses received, a significant majority of tenants said “Yes” to each question, giving us valuable information which we will use when considering further future plans and developments.

In March this year you would have received information as to your “increased” rent costs for the financial year 2019/2020.

You will receive the same information again in March 2020, showing your new rent amount, which will include the 3% increase for the financial year 2020/2021; this increase will take effect on 1 April 2020.

If any tenant would like to comment on this increase, please send your comments to us at tp@westlothian.gov.uk

If you are failing to pay your rent, for whatever reason, don't make things worse - speak to us now! You can do this by calling your Housing Officer on 01506 280000 or emailing us your enquiry at: www.westlothian.gov.uk/contactus

*Note: All totals do not add up to 1,192 as questions on some paper returns were not fully answered.

RENT INCOME

Rent money is used to fund the Repairs Service, Improvements to your homes and New Build projects. It is therefore very important that tenants pay their rent, to ensure the Council is able to continue to deliver these services to our tenants.

However, we understand that rent arrears can happen to anyone, due to a change in personal or employment circumstances. It can be an extremely distressing and stressful experience and as your landlord we will do everything in our power to help sort this out.

If you find that you are struggling to pay your rent, we can help:



- you maximise your income and ensure you are claiming all benefits you may be entitled to.
- you to prioritise debts to ensure your rent is paid
- work out a realistic repayment plan with you taking into account your income and expenses
- sign post you for welfare and money advice

If you do fall into rent arrears we will contact you in a variety of ways such as:



TEXT MESSAGE



TELEPHONE



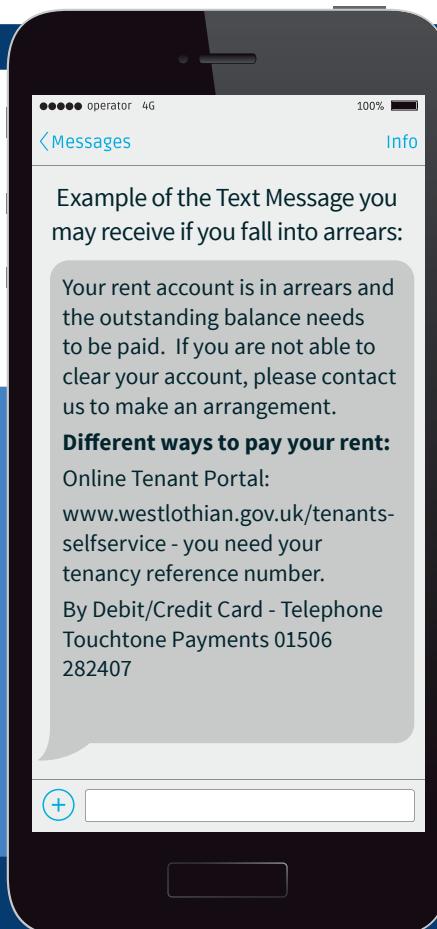
LETTER



HOME VISIT

It is important therefore you address any rent arrears as soon as possible by contacting your housing officer on **01506 280000**.

Remember, as a tenant of West Lothian Council, you are responsible for paying your rent and managing any arrears you may have.



Almondell Road Flats Environmental Upgrade

Major improvement works have been carried out to the external courtyard area of Nos. 1 to 45 Almondell Road and their linked flats at 2 to 24 Strathbrock Place.

This was successfully achieved by removing obsolete buildings and tall trees from the top of the garden; improving drainage to the area; laying down new light coloured paving and installing access ramps beside each set of steps, with the addition of seating areas, some small shrub beds to break up the paved areas and new improved lighting.

The area at the front of the flats at the junction of Almondell Road and Strathbrock Place has also been upgraded with new slabs and planters. New communal bin areas have been created and security measures and gates fitted around the flats to improve the area. This additionally increases the safety and security of the residents and ensure the rear area is accessible only to those living in the properties and their invited visitors.



The whole area was in poor condition, mainly due to the lack of light, which had caused an issue with widespread moss across the courtyard area. The project was planned in consultation with those living in the flats, with the main focus being to increase lighting and improve the use and access to the area for all.



FLY-TIPPING IS CRIMINAL



RECOGNISE THIS MESS?
THIS COMMERCIAL WASTE WAS FOUND JUST OUTSIDE LOGANLEA.

The owner didn't check that their tradespeople had a valid Waste Carriers' Licence, which allows them to dispose of waste legally and safely.

HOUSEHOLDERS CAN HELP:

Always check that the tradespeople you employ have a Waste Carriers' Licence. Don't use tradespeople who can't provide you with a Waste Carriers' Licence. You should ensure that the removal of waste is included in any quote for work and get a waste transfer note/receipt for taking your waste away.

If you have not made these checks, and your waste is dumped illegally, you could share liability jointly with your tradesperson and be subject to enforcement action, a fixed penalty notice or court action.

REPORT IT: www.westlothian.gov.uk/report or 01506 280000



Meet and Greet in the Street

Over the summer months, the Tenant Participation Team took advantage of the warmer weather and took to the streets to talk to tenants in West Lothian.

Our 'Meet & Greet on the Street' events were supported by local housing staff, with the idea being to promote tenant participation and offer tenants the opportunity to talk to us about any issues they may have in their home or community. Tenants were able to find out about:

- allocation of council houses
- garden maintenance
- environmental issues
- tenants responsibilities
- home contents insurance
- care and repair service
- Danny Mullen Good Neighbour Award
- Assisted Decoration Scheme and much more...

With 10 events taking place, the team pitched their gazebo in various streets across West Lothian including, Whitburn, Blackburn, Armadale, Livingston and Bathgate and spoke to over 100 people.

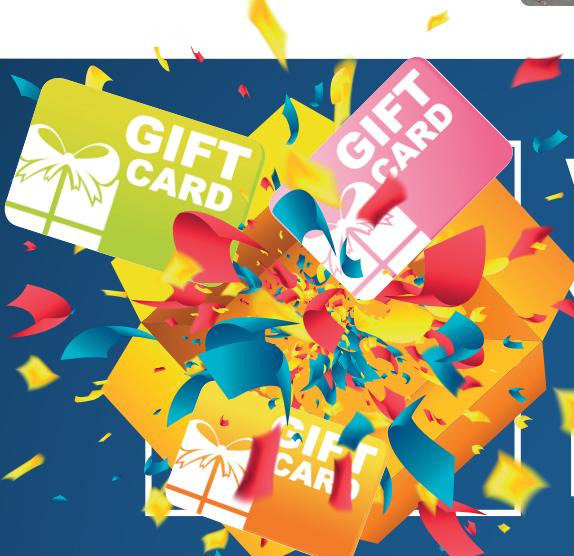
Tenants found it very informative, and went away having had a chance to talk to their local housing officer and

discuss any issues with their tenancy.

The TP Team handed out several applications for the Danny Mullen Good Neighbour Awards and discussed with several people in the same community about setting up a tenants group. If you would like to get involved you can email TP@westlothian.gov.uk



WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK



Watch out for your Tenant Satisfaction Survey coming through your door shortly!

As your landlord, we would like you to tell us what you think about the services we deliver and how you think we could do better, so please complete and return the survey to us by 02/12/2019.

Please take the time to complete the short survey giving us your honest views and opinions. As a thank you for taking the time to give us your views, every tenant who responds will be entered into the free

prize draw, giving you the chance to win a first prize of shopping vouchers worth £300! There are also two runners-up vouchers worth £100.

You can also complete the survey online if you prefer, as can other members of your family living in your home. All you have to do is go online and complete the survey at www.esurveycreator.co.uk/s/2019tenantsatisfactionsurvey



Scan with a QR Code reader on your smartphone to complete the survey online



BONFIRE & FIREWORK SAFETY!

**IF YOU ARE ATTENDING AN ORGANISED BONFIRE OR FIREWORK DISPLAY, IT IS
IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF HOW TO STAY SAFE. FIRE CAN CAUSE DEVASTATING EFFECTS
ON PEOPLE'S LIVES, BY READING THIS INFORMATION IT WILL HELP YOU STAY SAFE
AND MINIMISE ANY RISK.**

**IF YOU ARE AWARE OF ANY ILLEGAL BONFIRES BEING ORGANISED IN YOUR LOCAL AREA,
PLEASE CONTACT POLICE SCOTLAND ON 101 TO MAKE THEM AWARE OF YOUR CONCERNs.**

Last year fire crews across the country responded to 330 unofficial bonfires and in some instances crews were subject to physical and verbal abuse by groups of youths. The fire service have advised that any such criminal action will be taken extremely seriously and the fire service will work with police to ensure those responsible are identified and held to account.

**To report any concerns, please call Police Scotland on 101 or alternatively
Call the anonymous Crimestoppers helpline on 0800 555 111.**

BONFIRES

Advice from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is to only attend safely organised bonfire and firework displays.

Here are some top tips to stay safe:

- **Never** drink alcohol if you are tending a bonfire or setting off fireworks - remember it is an offence to consume alcohol in a public place
- **Never** throw combustible materials on the bonfire, untreated wood and paper based materials should be used
- **Never** throw pressurised containers or sealed vessels on a bonfire - these will explode and could cause serious injury
- **Never** throw fireworks on bonfires
- **Never** use flammable liquids to ignite bonfires - only use proprietary fire lighters
- **Never** endanger nearby property with sparks, flying embers or burning debris
- **Never** leave a burning/smouldering bonfire unsupervised - make sure it is completely extinguished.

FIREWORKS

Watching fireworks can be great fun. However, figures show that over half of all firework injuries are sustained by children, including babies and toddlers. Firework injuries can be severe and can cause scars that will last a lifetime. They may heal over time, but the trauma for them and their parents can last for years. It only takes one stray firework to have devastating effects on a young person's life, so **Be safe and always follow the fireworks code!**

It is an offence:

- To set off fireworks between 11pm and 7am (or after midnight on bonfire night)
- To modify, tamper with or misuse fireworks
- To throw or set off fireworks in any highway, street, thoroughfare or public place
- To sell fireworks to anyone under 18
- For anyone under 18 to possess fireworks in a public place
- For anyone other than a fireworks professional to possess display category fireworks
- To cause unnecessary suffering to any animal.
- To throw or direct fireworks at emergency workers

SPARKLE SAFELY

- Sparklers get five times hotter than cooking oil and should never be given to a child under the age of five
- Always light sparklers one at a time and wear gloves
- Never hold a baby or child if you have a sparkler in your hand
- Plunge finished sparklers hot end down into a bucket of water as soon as they have burnt out. Remember, sparklers can stay hot for a long time.

IN AN EMERGENCY

- Cool the burn or scald with cold water for at least 10 minutes
- Cut around material sticking to the skin - don't pull it off
- Don't touch the burn or burst any blisters
- Cover the burn with clean, non-fluffy material - clingfilm is ideal to prevent infection
- If clothing catches fire, get the person to stop, drop to the floor and roll them in heavy material like a curtain
- Get advice from your doctor or accident and emergency department at your local hospital

You can find a wide range of fire safety information at www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety.aspx

DIVERSIONARY ACTIVITIES FOR BLACKBURN



A new Friday night Twilight Basketball session will start from 11 October at 6.30pm in Blackburn Partnership Centre.
It is a FREE session, for all abilities, catering for ages 11-13 year olds from 6.30pm – 7.45pm and 14-21 year olds from 7.45pm – 9pm.

For more information contact Stephanie by email: Stephanie@ssf.org.uk or call: **0141 218 4640**

f Shell Twilight Basketball

Further activities will be delivered over the bonfire season, to find out more on what these will be and to be involved contact: Lisa at Community Action Blackburn by email: lisablackburnwestlothian1@gmail.com or Michelle at West Lothian Council by email: michelle.kirkbright@westlothian.gov.uk or call: **01506 283233**

The Blackburn Bonfire Night Action Group meet in Blackburn Partnership Centre to discuss and develop actions to address the issues that have affected Blackburn during the bonfire season. If you would like to know more about the group and get involved, please don't hesitate to contact either Lisa or Michelle on the details above.

Our customer information service offices

email: customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk

Almondbank Centre
Shiel Walk, Craigshill

Armadale CIS
(Payment Facility available)
7 North Street,
Armadale

Bathgate Partnership Centre
(Payment Facility Available)
Lindsay House, South Bridge St
Bathgate

Strathbrock Partnership Centre
(Payment Facility Available)
189a West Main Street, Broxburn

Blackburn Partnership Centre
Ashgrove, Blackburn

Carmondean Connected
(Payment Facility Available)
Deans, Livingston

Fauldhouse Partnership Centre
Lanrigg Road, Fauldhouse

Linlithgow Partnership Centre
High Street
Linlithgow

Livingston CIS
(Payment Facility Available)
Arrochar House, Civic Square
Almondvale Boulevard
Livingston

West Calder CIS
within West Calder Library
Harburn Road,
West Calder

Whitburn CIS
within Whitburn Library
(Payment Facility Available)
Union Road, Whitburn

For all enquiries call our Customer Service Centre on

01506 280000

Social Work Emergency Number:
01506 281028 (Social Work Only)

For all other emergencies call:
01506 280000

If you have used the council's complaints procedure and you are still unhappy, you can pass your complaint, within a year, to:

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman,
Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR
Tel: 0800 377 7330
www.spso.org.uk

Customers with special requirements

Information is available in Braille, tape, large print and community languages. Please contact the interpretation and translation service on

01506 280000

Text phones offer the opportunity for people with a hearing problem to access the council.
The textphone number is **01506 591 652**
A loop system is also available in all offices.

www.westlothian.gov.uk

online 24 hours a day

Log on and you can:

- Pay your council tax, rent, or fines online
- Apply for a house
- Report a repair to your home
- Make an enquiry for information
- Make a comment on any council service

We hope you have enjoyed reading Tenants News. If you would like to get in touch with the editorial panel please contact us by writing to: TP Team, Housing, Customer and Building Services, West Lothian Council, Civic Centre, Howden South Road, Livingston EH54 6FF or email TP@westlothian.gov.uk