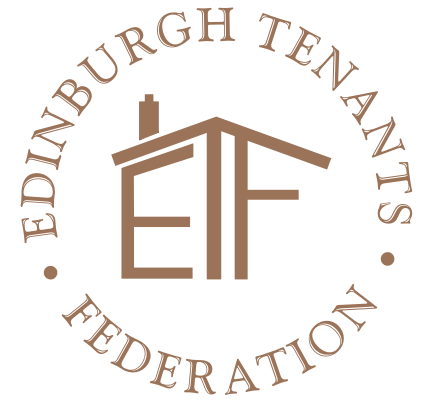


Tenants Voice



Issue : 67 : March 2008

ETF Burns Supper was a Gas



The Orwell Lodge Hotel played host to ETF's quarterly Federation Meeting on 31st January which, responding to popular demand after last year's event, was again combined with a Burns Supper and live music.

Important business was covered in the Federation meeting. Betty opened the meeting with Mary giving the apologies - sadly too many - and then Maureen gave the progress report which was carried by 15 votes. This contained information about the council's proposed new rent structure (read more about this inside this issue of Tenants Voice).

We then moved onto Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland – and ETF's response. Betty asked Raymond to present the draft ETF response by outlining the main points. This was followed by questions and was carried by 16 votes. The meeting was then wound up by Betty. Congratulations to the membership for their cooperation in completing a busy and complex meeting in such a professional and competent manner, not like in the days of yore.

We were then served with haggis, neeps and tatties, which were excellent. After the plates were cleared we were admirably entertained by North Sea Gas with a mixture of humour and superb music. Every one seemed to get into the spirit (not whisky I hasten to add) with much clapping along, a rousing cheer for the last verse of "looking for a job with a sky high pay, a four hour day and a three day week", all joining in with the hand signals, singing along with other choruses led by Nikki, even a highland fling by Justine, and many cries of "CD's which are for sale over there". If this last bit does not make sense it's because you weren't there and sadly missed out on an excellent evening.

It is to be hoped that we will have more Burns Nights in the future but, like everything ETF does, it depends on members giving their support to the meeting and enjoying the reward of a social event afterwards where you can relax, meet other members, staff and executive committee members and exchange information and ideas.

*Harry Sunderland
North Bughtlin Tenants Association*

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Rent review... how will it affect you?

Council tenants will soon be having an opportunity to have their say about proposals to radically change the way in which their rents are structured.

ETF have spent quite some time with the council looking at ways of simplifying the current complex arrangement of rent charges and working up a simple and fair rent charging system to replace the current one which we feel is outdated and unfair. This is the third time that we have been involved and supported a change in the way our rents are structured: twice before the council has shied away from introducing a simple and fair system and as a result our current system has become ever more complicated and unfair.

In Edinburgh, where there are around 21,000 council homes, there are over 2000 different rent charges which means that some tenants pay quite a lot more than their neighbours for the same type of home. The difference between the lowest and highest rents paid for council housing in Edinburgh is very large: currently the lowest rent is £35 a week and the highest rent is £148 per week. ETF were involved in looking at the system and felt it needed to be changed. What is needed is a fairer way to deal with the issue so that, for instance, the rent for a flat with two bedrooms is the same anywhere in the city.

We have come up with a proposal that reduces the current number of rent levels from over 2000 to just nine. The proposed new levels are based on the number of bedrooms a property has and whether it's a house or a flat. The new rent scheme would be introduced gradually over a three to four year period. Transitional arrangements have been identified in order that tenants who could end up paying more – or less

– have a cap placed on how much their rent will change in any one year. The suggested cap is £4. Outside of the annual increase of inflation plus 2.7% to pay for improvements, nobody's rent will increase or decrease by more than £4 a week a year as they move to their new rent charge. Those in receipt of Housing Benefit would not be affected by the changes.

Once introduced, we believe this would result in a rent charging system that is simple, easy to understand and, above all, fair. As an illustration, this is how it would look for 2008-09:

House Type	House Size – Number of Bedrooms				
	0	1	2	3	4
Flat	£52.50	£58.50	£68.00	£77.50	£82.50
4 in a Block	£52.50	£58.50	£68.00	£77.50	£82.50
Multi-storey	£52.50	£58.50	£68.00	£77.50	£82.50
Maisonette	£52.50	£58.50	£68.00	£77.50	£82.50
House	£52.50	£61.50	£71.00	£80.50	£85.50
Total Number of Rent Levels	1	2	2	2	2

We believe that the proposal to introduce a rent structure that is fair and easy to understand is a good one, but it's your view that's needed before councillors make a decision later this spring.

All tenants will soon be receiving information from the Council on this proposal, with an opportunity to make their opinions known. There will be drop-in sessions and public meetings in order that tenants can ask questions and find out how the proposed new rent structure would affect them. Get involved and let your opinions count.

David Thomson
Redbraes Residents Association

Edinburgh Tenants Federation Quiz Night

On 30th November last, at the Northumberland Hotel, 14 teams took part in the ETF Quiz Night. The Quiz Master this year was Harry Woodward from Dunedin Canmore Housing Association, who bravely carried on asking questions and fielding comments throughout the evening.

The jam packed hall buzzed with good natured rivalry and semi-serious competitiveness, and everyone enjoyed

a break mid-way for a buffet before returning, refreshed, to the 'battlefield'.

The winners were a team from the Housing Support and Inclusion Service with a magnificent score of 81 points. The Addams Family came second, The Feds third, and 3 teams tied for 4th place – Scrambled Egg Heads, Highlanders 2 and The Inchers. Next came Fort Hams, then the NBTA team – Santa's Little Helpers (complete with Santa hats!); 9th joint were We're With Stupid and It's All Scott's Fault, closely followed by The Misfits, then Team Hendo, Highlanders 1 and finally The Weakest Link in last place.

Once again, the Quiz Night proved to be

a major success: apart from the quiz itself, the occasion gives activists a chance to chat with each other and find out what other areas are working on. Roll on next year!

Tina Beattie
North Bugtlin Tenants Association



B&Q

You Can Do It Awards

B&Q have announced that the You Can Do It Awards will re-open for applications on 28 January 2008. The awards aim to play a key part in helping local communities create inclusive and sustainable projects.

Awards in 2007 included the refurbishment of local sporting facilities, social enterprise workshops and community facilities, as well as equipment for improving community gardens. Under the scheme community groups and charitable organisations can apply for awards ranging from £1000 to £10000 worth of B&Q products.

The closing date for applications will be 28 March 2008. In addition, each local B&Q store also has a limited budget to provide grants of between £50 and £500 to community groups under its Better Neighbour Grant Scheme.

Check out their website at www.diy.com for more information.

Ideas for group activities

Interested in taking your tenants' group on a trip? A new educational experience has opened at Edinburgh's largest Community Recycling Centre at Seafield. Community groups can visit the Waste Aware Education cabin to find out what happens to recycled waste and why it is important to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

The visit lasts about one and a half hours and includes a waste workshop, fun activities, a guided tour of the Recycling Centre and a chance to see compactor trucks crushing recycled waste.

Visits can be booked for groups of between 8 and 15 people. They can be arranged at various times throughout the week depending on the time of year.

To book a visit, contact the Community Education Officer for Waste Aware Edinburgh on 0131 469 5070 or email wasteaction@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Neighbourhood awards

Are you and your neighbours trying to make your area look more attractive? – do you need a goal to get started? Then the Neighbourhood Awards, run by Beautiful Scotland, might be the answer.

They are a non-competitive initiative designed to give support and recognition to community groups across Scotland. Groups just beginning to make local environment improvements, such as planting flowers, trees or shrubs, clearing up litter or making homes for wildlife, are invited to enter.

In August an assessor will come and look at the work your group has been doing. They will give you some helpful advice on the next steps the group might take to improve the area.

All entrants will receive either a Certificate of Improvement, Merit or Outstanding Achievement at an annual seminar in November.

For further information please contact Rachel Kerr, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Islay House, Livilands Lane, Stirling. FK8 2BG Tel: 01479 811477

Tenant Led Inspections get the green light

In January, the City of Edinburgh Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association gave formal approval to a pilot inspection to be carried out by tenants. A team of seven tenant inspectors are now undergoing training in order to conduct their first inspection, which will look at repairs reporting within both the Council and Dunedin Canmore.

Tenant led inspections – as the name suggests – are about tenants conducting formal inspections into

aspects of their landlords' services. In this instance, where we're looking at how repairs get reported, we'll be looking from a tenants' perspective at what works well, what doesn't work well and what improvements could be made. Part of our work will include talking to tenants to gather their views. Following our inspection we'll be preparing a report with recommendations that we would like the landlords to carry out. Both landlords in the pilot inspection have agreed to consider our recommendations seriously and to draw up an action plan for implementing them.

Preparing to be a tenant inspector is an intensive process. As well as a series of evening meetings where we've

established a framework for our work and negotiated with both landlords, we've now started a training programme to learn about the service we're going to inspect and about different ways we can measure its effectiveness. At one of our training sessions we carried out a mock inspection of the Hailesland Park concierge office, and we'd like to thank the concierge staff there for their cooperation.

We hope to carry out the inspection in the coming months and we'll keep you posted on our progress.

*David Thomson
Convener, Tenant Led Inspections group*

DCHA tenants have Dunmore but can do more still!

Tenants from Dunedin Canmore Housing Association have been busy over the past few weeks getting back into the swing of Tenant Participation activity.

The DCHA Tenants Forum, which meets quarterly and is open to any tenant to attend, met in January to discuss the Association's Rent Review and the new Choice based allocation system. DCHA, like Castle Rock Edinvar, Link and Viewpoint, who are already operating 'Choice,' and another dozen or more local RSLs (Registered Social Landlords) will go live with the new system in April. Applicants for a house in Edinburgh will have an even bigger choice from which to make bids for homes and although tenants had reservations about the system it's still seen as a preferred system to the former 'needs based' approach used in the past.

The Rent Review was also approved (with reservation) and the hope is that more time will be spent in discussing Rent Reviews earlier in the year in the future, as most RSLs (and some Councils) tend to do their consultation on rents just after the New Year when

RTOs and tenants groups have little time to meet and coordinate their views – a point made by the Hyvot & Moredun Tenants Association in their feedback to the DCHA Board.

Dunedin Canmore is joining with other members of the Rowan Group (Link, Manor Estates, Margaret Blackwood, Prospect and Viewpoint HAS) to hold a Tenants Conference in September. The Conference will hopefully include all the above RSLs in the Group (all except Barony HA are expected to take part) to look at a range of topical subjects for tenants – decided by tenants and for tenants. Rent Setting and the Scottish Housing Quality Standard impact on rents and maintenance are only two of the subjects that will be discussed, with further details going out to all individual tenants from their own landlords in the summer.

DCHA's own RTOs are focusing on different agendas themselves. Where one new Tenants Association has been formed in Oxcgangs (the new 'Oxcgangs Lochan' group will take on local issues formerly addressed by the old Oxcgangs Hi-Rise TA), the former Gorgie Park Close and Slateford Green TA has dissolved and it's hoped that two new groups will be formed from the Committee members of the old group.

Down at Nichollfield in Leith, the local RTO is considering how to spend some 'windfall money' from the DCHA Group

member Malcolm Homes (the mid-rent organisation is part of the DC Group and all profits go back into the HA) for play equipment and other projects as part of DCHA's Neighbourhood Grants.

Finally, the TARGET/Findlays RTO, which comprises a true 'mixed tenure' RTO with Council, DCHA and Port of Leith tenants, and owners of former CEC and DCHA properties, is starting the year refocusing on the issues for local residents by launching their 3rd newsletter, inviting ideas and suggestions for community projects, and promoting the DCHA-funded 'Flowering Findlays' competition. There are also some vacancies on the Committee and new people are welcome to join.

DCHA tenants have all been invited to apply for a Neighbourhood Grant from the Association, which can see any community event, activity or improvement through funding on plants, shrubs, trips, etc spent in areas, irrespective of whether there is any RTO or tenants group in the area. Any DCHA tenant interested should contact Harry Woodward at Dunedin Canmore on 0131 624 5629 (e-mail tenant.view@dunedincanmore.org.uk) by early March (as funds must be awarded by the end of March).

*Harry Woodward
Dunedin Canmore Housing Association*

Fort House says "thank you"

When all three lifts at Fort House had to be taken out of service at the end of January following a safety check, residents on the top landings were concerned about how they'd manage with their shopping and prams on the stairs. At first nobody knew how long the lifts would be off for – the worst case scenario was that it could take more than a month to get the all-clear

to put them back on again.

Helen Phillips, chair of the Residents Association, rallied the troops, encouraging residents to look out for their neighbours. Meanwhile the concierge team volunteered to carry shopping upstairs and to help get prams up and down the stairs, while the block manager and EBS ensured that the stair lighting was fully operational twenty four hours a day.

Two of the lifts were put back on within a week, while the third was due to be

repaired as Tenants Voice went to press. With advice and support from Edinburgh Tenants Federation, Helen has been lobbying the politicians to ensure that improvements to Fort House's lifts – which regularly break down – will be included in next year's capital programme.

Helen paid tribute to everyone for their help in dealing with this emergency situation, particularly the concierge team for taking on a tougher keep-fit regime while the lifts were out.

H.A.T.S NEWS

What's new in Housing Associations?

Well it's the start of another year and what have we been up to? Last year we rounded off with the final report on Dunedin Canmore's tenant participation policy document and we await their comments.

Our hopes are that during this year we can offer our expertise to other housing association landlords in their efforts to promote tenant participation, which many seem to confuse with consultation. The aim of participation is that landlords should be asking tenants what they consider to be important improvements in services, environment and upgrading rather than telling tenants what has been decided and asking for their comments. By doing this it can only lead to happier tenants and less stress between landlords and their customers. This must surely lead to a win-win situation for both sides.

As far as tenants' abilities to influence landlords goes, we believe the best way is to organise groups of interested tenants with the ultimate aim of becoming a registered tenants organisation (R.T.O.). For more information on this please contact the office where staff will be only too happy to help or to pass you on to the H.A.T.S sub group to organise either an informal discussion or, with more organized groups, meetings to advise on such things as constitutions and registering with your landlord.

Any tenants wishing to be involved in the running of their landlords, but who do not wish to become part of a tenant group, can always become involved as tenant inspectors (please see Davie Thomson's article on tenant led inspections).

Harry Sunderland
Convenor, Housing Association Tenants (HATS) group

High Flats Group update

The High Flats Group met in January and discussed a project that's being set up to increase the amount of recycling in multi-storey blocks. Over £170,000 each year is spent unblocking the chutes, and encouraging everyone to recycle more of their waste and put less big bags down the chutes will help us all.

The council has finally got round to putting multi-storey issues back on the agenda by the re-launch of the Multi-Storey Working Group which has now begun to meet again. We've had two meetings of the group now and it will continue to meet quarterly. Of equal importance has been the setting up of a sub-group for owners in multi-storeys so that issues of specific concern to them can finally get addressed. The group will report back to the Multi-Storey Working Group which will now be able to focus on strategic citywide issues.

The next meeting of the High Flats Group is in early April. If you would like more information please contact the Federation office.

Betty Stevenson
Convenor, High Flats Group

Repairs Group update

On 15th November a group of tenants took part in a study visit to Repairs Direct and Edinburgh Building Services. We were welcomed by the call centre manager at Chesser House and given a briefing on how Repairs Direct works. We were then given a chance to listen in on some of the repairs calls. In the afternoon we met staff at Murrayburn and learned about what happens after a tenant requests a repair in order that the right operative turns up to do the job. This was the first of a series of study visits we are organising in conjunction with Edinburgh Building Services.

Tenant representatives have continued to attend a variety of meetings with council officers to look at repairs issues. In February we met with Housing

Property Services to look at the new specifications for the kitchens and bathrooms programme and went to see what it looks like in reality. It looks very good – the test will be to see whether the council can improve houses on time and within the budget it has available.

The Federation's Repairs Group continues to meet regularly. Issues that we are currently looking at are the 'standard of let' – what state a house should be in when offered to a new tenant – and planned preventative maintenance. For more information on what we are doing, or details of our next meeting, please get in touch with us via the Federation office.

Maureen Jarvis
Convenor, Repairs Group

Gas Inspections: *your questions answered*

All Registered Social Landlords are required by law to check the gas supply in all their properties every year. While all tenants are informed of this each year – sometimes more than once – the Council and other RSLs in Edinburgh report that getting access can still be a problem and that they have to make too many forced entries on properties in order to carry out these routine checks.

The law says that the gas supply must be tested, and it's in tenants' own interests that this should happen on a regular basis to ensure their ongoing safety. In the interests of helping Tenants Voice readers to understand more about gas inspections, we asked Mike Wagner of the Council's Housing Property Services section the following questions about the Council's gas inspections:

Question 1: I've received a letter asking me to make an appointment. What appointments are available?

Answer: Appointments are available Monday to Friday. Morning appointments mean an engineer will arrive between 8am and 12.30pm. Afternoon appointments mean an engineer will arrive between 12.00 noon and 5:00pm. If you're flexible and in/available at any time of the day then you can book an all day appointment.

Question 2: What happens if I don't book an appointment as advised in your letter?

Answer: We will send you a reminder letter, or visit you on the day we have requested on the letter and put an arrival card through your door if you're not in. This will ask you to call us to make an appointment. If we don't hear

from you, we may visit you again and leave another arrival card. If you still don't get in touch with us, we will have no choice but to arrange a forced access visit to ensure we meet the statutory annual deadline.

Question 3: I've missed the deadline you've set out in your letter for me to make an appointment. What will happen? I don't want you to break into my house.

Answer: We want to be as flexible as we can in order to carry out inspections at your convenience wherever possible. If you contact us to request a new appointment we will honour this. However, we have a legal obligation to carry out an inspection every year, so if you don't get in touch to make an appointment we will have to make a forced entry in order to gain access.

Question 4: I can't take a whole day off work to wait for the engineer – can you give a more specific appointment time?

Answer: We can offer you mornings or afternoons and can request the engineer to try and make a specific time, but we cannot guarantee this – but we will do our best.

Question 5: You've given me an appointment that's no longer convenient. What should I do?

Answer: Phone the telephone number on the letter and ask for a new appointment for a more suitable time. Alternatively, if time permits, you can request an appointment date via the letter and post it back to us. The return address is noted on the letter.

Question 6: What does a gas inspection involve?

Answer: The gas inspection involves the engineer testing your gas installation and pipework for what's called 'Gas Tightness'. This means ensuring there is

no gas escaping from the pipes. The engineer will also carry out a number of safety checks and also service all council-owned gas appliances. This includes flue checks and ensures ventilation requirements are being met. If you own a gas appliance (excluding cookers – see Question/Answer 9), we can service this appliance if you are willing to sign an adoption form, which means that when you move from your current tenancy you'll leave the gas appliance there. If you don't do this, we will still carry out a visual check.

This service includes a check for any faults within your system. If any are found the engineer may be able to carry out a repair on the spot, otherwise he will book in an appointment for a repair while he is still in your property.

Question 7: How long does it take?

Answer: It normally takes somewhere between 35 and 90 minutes to complete a gas inspection.

Question 8: Will I need to do anything – like move my furniture?

Answer: Our engineer requires access to your gas meter and gas appliances. It is not the engineer's responsibility to move your personal belongings. However, if you need help to move heavy items within your home, mention this when you book an appointment and we'll do our best to help.

Question 9: I've got a gas cooker. Will you check that as well?

Answer: The gas cooker will only be part of the gas pipework tightness test. We will not service the cooker although we will carry out a visual check. If any problems are found, we are obliged to make your home safe by disconnecting the cooker. If this occurs we are not responsible for reconnecting the cooker bayonet fitting. It will be your responsibility to contact a CORGI registered installer to connect a safe appliance.

Question 10: I only have electric in my house. Why do you still need to check my gas?

Answer: Currently we are still legally obliged to check that you have had no gas meter or gas pipework installed since the last check a year previously. Tenants can and do sometimes arrange to have their own gas supplies fitted via the gas utility companies directly. If you've had any gas installed during the year we will carry out a gas safety check on the meter or pipework. If the gas supply has been completely removed from your house so that there is no pipework between your house and the street, we will update our records and we would hope that reduced checks can be carried out in the future.

One last note about forced entries - organising forced entries is always a last resort. It's expensive and reduces the amount of money in the repairs budget that can be spent on responsive repairs. Edinburgh Tenants Federation encourages all tenants to cooperate with their landlords over gas safety inspections and to book appointments when they receive notification. Nobody wants to see landlords resorting to making forced entries on tenants' homes as it can be upsetting for the tenants concerned.

If you have any other questions about gas inspections please contact your landlord or, for council tenants, contact the Council via Contact Central on 0131 200 2000. This will ensure all calls are properly logged and calls will be transferred to our gas maintainers (EBS) as necessary if additional information is required.



Tenant Participation Strategy Launched

The Council's second Tenant Participation Strategy was launched in Lothian Chambers on 17th January. This strategy, which runs from 2008 – 2011, was prepared by the Council and Edinburgh Tenants Federation and builds on the previous strategy.

Invited guests included tenant representatives, councillors, strategic partners and staff from Housing and Regeneration. Following a buffet, speeches were made by Councillor Norman Work – Vice-Convenor of the Council's Health, Social Care and Housing committee, Cathy King – Head of Housing and Regeneration, and Betty Stevenson – Convenor of Edinburgh Tenants Federation. Mark Turley, Director of Services for Communities, gave a presentation about the work of his department, complete with

excerpts from the BBC series "Life of Grime".

The formalities complete, guests were offered a glass of wine and invited to visit the various information stalls on offer. The stall about recycling and waste awareness proved very popular, suggesting that this is an issue tenants feel very strongly about.

Now that the new strategy has been launched, the onus is on everyone – council and tenants alike – to make sure that it is acted upon and that we continue to work together to find better ways of meaningfully involving tenants in decisions about their homes and neighbourhoods.

101 things to do with your rubbish!

Well not quite but there is more to rubbish than just throwing it away. You may have seen recent adverts on TV or on the side of buses running across Edinburgh and the message is clear: we all need to recycle more, throw away less and help reduce waste going to landfill.

Think recycling and most people will think about cans, bottles and newspapers but in Edinburgh the opportunities for tenants to recycle are growing daily – literally!

For many households the option to have blue and red recycling boxes is not practical yet, but a pilot project is being developed to close old-fashioned bin chutes on a small number of estates and instead put in modern recycling facilities to encourage recycling. Let's be honest, lots of modern day packaging and waste was not 'designed' for disposal down a narrow refuse chute.

For anyone living in tenement properties there should already be access to a range of banks and bins that take a range of paper and packaging materials such as cardboard and tins. If there isn't a facility near you, don't worry - we have just received a grant from the Scottish Government to extend those facilities to a further 20,000 tenement properties across the city bringing the total number of properties covered to 80,000 homes.



Picture courtesy of WRAP

One area we need to tackle in the future is food waste. Did you know that the average household throws away about a third of its weekly shop? That waste is likely to end up in landfill sites, creating methane gas and adding to the climate

change problem. Trials are under way across Scotland to look at the best ways of collecting food waste from all types of properties and we will be eagerly reading the results of the pilots to see how we can apply those experiences across the city.



If you have had to get rid of large or bulky items of furniture, electrical equipment or garden waste you may have visited one of our Community Recycling Centres, but did you know we now have a brand new facility at Sighthill? It opened in December and is now one of four similar facilities across the city at Braehead, Craigmillar and Seafield taking a wide range of items including car batteries, fridges, rubble, and scrap metal to name just a few.

Our Community Recycling Centres also have award winning Reuse Cabins for the donation of good quality second hand furniture which is passed on to people who are unable to afford to furnish their homes. This is one of a number of projects where we are working with organisations like the Edinburgh Furniture Initiative to encourage people to think reuse rather than rush to the shops to buy replacement furniture and other household items.

Some of you may be inspired enough to get active and become involved in our Waste Action Grant Programme where you can get directly involved in projects such as community composting, working in charity shops or running scrap art schemes.



Picture courtesy of LEEP

It's never too early to start recycling. Changeworks has been running a real nappy project in Edinburgh since 2003 to encourage families with young babies to stop using disposable nappies. Incentives may be available for those who wish to participate in nappy exchange schemes or to purchase their own real nappies.

The recycling story in Edinburgh is an exciting one and will continue for many years as we seek to increase the amounts we recycle in line with new government targets.

One thing we need to do is build relationships with the different communities that exist across the City. Experience proves that trying to impose recycling never really works so we need to get out and talk to local people about how best to support recycling in their area. If we can make it easier then more people are likely to participate.

There are also lots of examples of local people taking action themselves and we need to find out more about community-led projects so we can publicise and spread good practice. Recently the Scottish Government announced plans to fund new community recycling initiatives and it would be great if by working together we could increase the amount of funding coming into Edinburgh to improve a really important service.

Over the coming months we hope to launch a Recycling Champions network and we will be looking for volunteers to help spread the recycling message.

To find out more about how you can reduce, reuse or recycle your waste visit our dedicated website at: www.edinburgh.gov.uk/wasteaware or speak to one of our recycling advisors on: 0131 529 3030.

ETF responds to “Firm Foundations”

Edinburgh Tenants Federation responded to “Firm Foundations” the Scottish Government’s consultation on the future of housing. Our submission argued for additional investment in affordable rented housing and the abolition of the right-to-buy on new-build rented houses. We made the case that investment in affordable rented housing should be on the basis of need rather than deprivation – the government has invested heavily in the West while it is Edinburgh and the surrounding areas that has a dire shortage of housing to meet an ever-increasing demand. Affordable rented housing is needed in order to not only alleviate homelessness but to provide a greater range of

housing options rather than the prevailing attitude that private home ownership is the only option. We have since been informed that 20 percent of all responses to this consultation were from individual tenants and tenants’ groups.

We also complained about the timing of the consultation: the government allowed only twelve weeks for comments and this included the Christmas period when many tenants’ groups traditionally close down for a month. We feel the timing may have prevented many tenants and tenants’ groups from making their views known.

You can download a copy of our submission from our website at www.edinburghrental.org.uk. All responses received by the Scottish Government are now being analysed by consultants and a report is expected in due course.

Regional Network Steering Group Update

Over the last two years Registered Tenant Organisation representatives from across Scotland, with the assistance of the Communities Scotland tenant participation development team, have been working to develop a means of working with the Scottish Government on national policy issues.

We have organised ourselves into regional groups. We are in Region 5 which includes the Scottish Borders, East Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh. Our regional Steering Group, made up of 12 tenant representatives, 3 from each of the 4 local authority areas, meets regularly to develop plans for our region as part of the wider national tenant engagement process.

A final version of the Draft Constitution has now been agreed and a timetable worked out for the final meetings of the Steering Group. The electoral process

and timeline for the AGM have been drafted and we hope that the election of a full committee will take place at the inaugural AGM in early May 2008. The electoral process and timeline for the AGM have been drafted and we hope that the election of a full committee will take place at the inaugural AGM on 10th May. Consultation packs have been sent out and these contain all of the relevant papers.

Nominations to the committee will have to be returned by 11th April, so it is time to start thinking about who you want to represent your area. There will be 12 places for committee members, 3 each from Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and the Scottish Borders, and these 12 will elect the office bearers from within the elected committee.

*Tina Beattie
North Bughtlin Tenants Association*

Tenants Voice: Your input wanted!

You may have noticed something different about the last issue of Tenants Voice – we printed four pages in full colour. We decided to try it as an experiment as we had so many colourful photos we wanted to share with you.

What did you think? Did it make an impact? Is this something you’d like to see happen more often? We can’t guarantee to include colour in every issue because of the cost involved, but if you think it’s worth doing sometimes, let us know.

Making Tenants Voice an interesting and informative (and colourful!) read every three months is the responsibility of the Federation’s Information and Publicity sub-group. However, they also need a regular supply of articles, ideas and photos from our members and readers. We’re always happy to help turn your news item into an article for publication. Please send your contributions to the Federation office – Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, Edinburgh EH7 5QY, email nikki@edinburghtenants.org.uk or call Nikki on 0131 475 2509 for a chat.

Planning Communities: *Learning from Nature*

In my local tenants' newsletter I write a column about wildlife and birds in our area. Recently I did a series of articles bemoaning the loss of natural habitat for birds, leading to a decline in small garden birds locally. Little did I realise that this would be mirrored in the closure of our local supermarket for redevelopment into housing. With that in mind I wrote a small article for my local newsletter and having written this realised that this was not just a local issue but citywide – indeed nationwide.

To explain. It seems that our own environment and way of life is now under attack by the same forces that effect wild life with little regard to anything other than profit and the pursuit of the fast buck. An area that had a reasonable - although it could be better - community spirit has now had what is left of its guts ripped out by the closure of its community "supermarket" for development into housing.

Now being actively involved in housing I fail to see the logic in taking the heart out of a community for "affordable housing" – usually meaning housing for sale rather than for rental. Surely there is a better way of doing this? So far over the past few years we have had to suffer the loss of a bus service, the closure of our post office (which we fought hard to preserve) and now the closure of our local shop. However our area is not the only one being affected in this way. Communities that have existed for many years and have supported each other are now being "developed" out of existence. It seems sad that the needs of these communities are being sacrificed for "housing for sale" rather than keeping these communities together and

keeping the balance of rented/owned properties. Vast areas of our cities, especially around the rural edges, are being developed into this affordable housing. However, large areas of these same cities in their centres have brown-field sites that could be developed to fill this need, but are instead being built into office blocks and serviced apartments for executives rather than housing for families who instead are forced further out to the edges. This seems to create a 'doughnut' effect with cities ever expanding whilst becoming hollow in the middle, losing all the life from the city centre in the form of small businesses, schools and leisure facilities.

City planning seems to me to now work on the 'box' principle, i.e. one box for shops, one box for offices, one box for housing, whereas cities and areas that seem to work effectively are more based on the old-fashioned ideas of housing and businesses being dependent on each other. This would seem to me to prevent the peculiarities of building large shopping areas and business parks on the outskirts of cities and then having to build an expensive tram/transport system to service them in a supposed green attempt to keep cars off the road. Surely if housing and business was more integrated then greener forms of transport i.e. cycle/feet etc would be more practical and therefore more likely to be used? In a world threatened by environmental meltdown it seems very strange that architects and designers are busy creating environmentally friendly buildings for business and then building them in an area that takes private transport or major re-routing of public transport to service them. Surely this defeats the purpose?

Cities, towns, villages and rural areas are all about the people who exist in them, rather than their structure. You could have the most beautiful building in the world but if it were occupied by some of history's less desirable characters it would rapidly lose its charm. We seem to be verging on this

in cities especially, where the historically inhabited centres are now being turned into shopping malls or office blocks. This surely is counter-productive. If cities were more evenly mixed then there would be a more attractive reason for living in them.

Those looking to develop our neighbourhoods should look closely at the local infrastructure and take into account the number of residents that are elderly, disabled (both in care homes and in the community) and those on low incomes. It would then – in the case of East Craigs – have become obvious that they have little access to other outlets unless they have their own transport. Unless we're fit and healthy enough to cope with a long walk, to get to our nearest Tesco requires a bus and a long walk; the Gyle is a two-bus journey – as are our local shops on the Drum Brae.

Unfortunately this isn't an isolated issue – like the wildlife we need a varied environment to survive. If you take forestry as a parallel example, during the 1970's it was all the rage to plant large areas of fast growing evergreens for the timber and paper industries and whilst this earned quick profits it soon became apparent that the local wildlife and environment was suffering. If you ever walk into one of these large plantations it soon becomes apparent that there is a lack of birdsong or movement by small animals. Fortunately the error has now been realised and mixed plantations are being planted to reverse the trend.

Should we not also be doing this in our towns and cities? If the trend continues we can only suffer a loss of people and wildlife in these places and the surrounds also suffer under the housing blight. Isn't it time that we started to sort this out?

*Harry Sunderland
North Bughtlin Tenants Association*

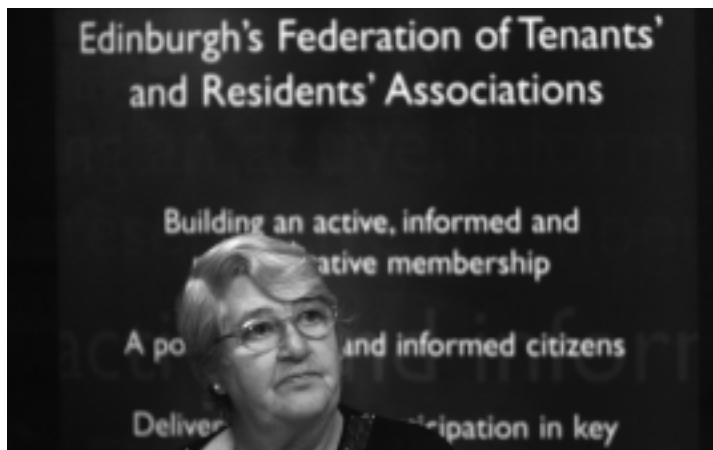
From the Convenor

This has been a busy time for Federation reps and myself. A number of new pieces of work have been started and we've seen the resumption of other areas of activity.

It was good to see so many people at the Quiz Night in November, and at our Burns Night in January. We know many of our members enjoy having a chance to network with each other and exchange ideas without formal business getting in the way.

I continue to work hard to promote more joined-up action to protect and support tenants with mental health problems. Before Christmas Maureen Jarvis and I met with the Head of Mental Health at NHS Lothian and with the Director of the council's Health and Social Care department. We were able to provide a perspective on services that they hadn't previously considered. As a result we were invited to take part in a conference on mental health and wellbeing, held at Dynamic Earth in January. In a meeting with very few community reps and lots of professionals from health and social work, we held our own and made sure everyone understood the need for more joined-up services. We continue to work on this in relevant meetings with the Council.

Although the Federation is primarily concerned with housing issues, waste collection is something that affects us all. I was invited to a meeting to learn more about the council's waste strategy and how it plans to encourage more recycling and reuse in order to reduce the amount of rubbish having to go to landfill sites. I was able to tell them about a new project that's just being launched to encourage more recycling in the high rises. This is still in the early stages but the Federation is involved and we will have more to tell you about this in the future.



We have seen the re-launch of the Tenant Participation Working Group and the Multi-Storey Working Group under the Council's new political administration. Both groups had been put on hold for most of 2007 while the new councillors got to grip with their positions. We have also seen the launch of a new group for multi-storey owners, which will be a sub-group of the Multi-Storey Working Group. This is something the Federation has long been lobbying for, because the owners need somewhere to get their particular problems, such as billing, resolved while the Multi-Storey Working Group can look at more strategic issues that affect everyone living or working in the high rises.

January also saw the launch of the council's new Tenant Participation Strategy in Lothian Chambers. While the turnout was not as good as I would have hoped, it was good that we had the opportunity to mark the progress we in Edinburgh have made in terms of tenant participation.

The Federation has responded to the Scottish Government's discussion paper, "Firm Foundations", arguing the case for additional investment in affordable rented housing for Edinburgh and its neighbours. I know some of our members sent in their own responses, which is very good to know. Hopefully in future the Government will think twice before launching such an important consultation over the Christmas period.

Elsewhere in Tenants Voice you'll find an article about the council's forthcoming consultation on a new rent structure. I very much hope that all tenants will participate in this very important consultation. Our

current rent structure is unfair, overly complicated and illogical and for many years the Federation has been keen to see an overhaul of the current system. There are currently over 2000 different rents charged to council tenants in Edinburgh. We've worked with the council to put together a proposal that reduces the number of different rents to just nine. Under the proposal, for instance, everyone who lives in a two bedroomed flat will pay the same rent, regardless of whereabouts in the city the flat is. The proposal will mean that most people's rent level will change, but more people will see a reduction than an increase, and tenants on Housing Benefit should not find themselves any worse off. The council has discussed changing the system three times now, but on the previous two occasions the politicians have shied away at the last minute. We hope that third time around that both you and they will support the plans.

Finally, for this issue of Tenants Voice, I'm delighted to report that the Federation is leaving Blackfriars Street towards the end of March to take up a tenancy in Norton Park. We outgrew our current premises some time ago and have been looking for new offices for the past few years. Norton Park is an old school that's been converted into workspaces for a number of charities and voluntary organisations, and we'll have a lot more space.

Betty Stevenson
Convenor,
Edinburgh Tenants Federation

Dates for Your Diaries

14th March 2008

ETF office closes in preparation for move

31st March 2008

ETF's new office opens at Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, Edinburgh EH7 5QY

7th April 2008

High Flats Group, Birnies Court, Muirhouse Parkway, 7pm. All welcome

9th April 2008

Repairs Group, venue to be confirmed, 7pm. All welcome

12th April 2008

Finance and bookkeeping workshop, Southside Community Centre, 10am – 3pm. Contact the Federation office to book a place.

22nd April 2008

Federation Meeting, City Chambers Business Centre, 7pm. All welcome

21st June 2008

Federation Annual General Meeting, details to be confirmed

We're moving!

After almost fifteen years in Blackfriars Street, Edinburgh Tenants Federation is on the move. We're moving into Norton Park, just off Easter Road. The new offices are larger, in a disabled-friendly building shared with other voluntary organisations.

The Blackfriars Street office will close on 14th March to enable us to pack up and move, and we plan to be fully operational in our new office by 31st March. Anyone needing to contact us after 19th March should call us on 0131 475 2509 or drop us an email.

Our new address is:

**Edinburgh Tenants Federation
Norton Park, 57 Albion Road
Edinburgh EH7 5QY**

Our new phone number is: 0131 475 2509

Our email addresses and website address are unchanged.

Something to think about:

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
Helen Keller

"Don't go around saying the world owes you a living; the world owes you nothing; it was here first."
Mark Twain



Copy Deadline

Tenants Voice is published four times a year and is distributed to tenants, residents, decision-makers and other interested individuals throughout Edinburgh. We always welcome contributions from our readers, though we stress that material included in Tenants Voice does not always represent the opinions of Edinburgh Tenants Federation. Articles and photos, etc for inclusion in the next issue of Tenants Voice should be sent to the Federation office by 30th April 2008.



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Tel: 0131 475 2509 Email: info@edinburghtenants.org.uk

Print and Design by Graphic Impressions, Unit 27/2 Hardengreen Industrial Estate, Eskbank, Dalkeith EH22 3NX
Tel: 0131 654 0521 Fax: 0131 454 0301 Email: graphicimpressions@btconnect.com

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