

# Tenants Voice



Issue 72: July 2009

## Full House at Federation AGM

Nearly 100 people filled the function suite of the Edinburgh Capital Moathouse Hotel for the Federation's Annual General Meeting in June.

Convenor Betty Stevenson presided over the meeting and other Executive Committee members helped to present the Annual Report which was accepted unanimously. Maureen Jarvis and Sheila Rutherford-McCallum were re-elected onto the Executive Committee, while the meeting also voted to co-opt Alex Paton as an Executive Committee member. Our auditor presented our annual accounts and answered questions from the floor. There was no discussion required on the Workplan before it too was approved unanimously.

Betty thanked her fellow Executive Committee members, the staff and the membership for their hard work this year. From the floor Alex Paton also paid tribute to everyone and particularly to Betty Stevenson for her dedication.

At this point the tables were turned and presentations were made to Development



Co-ordinator Raymond Pringle and his partner to mark their forthcoming retirements. A further presentation was made to Raymond later in the evening on behalf of the Council by Councillor Norman Work.

Following a break for the buffet supper many took to the dance floor and danced the night away to live music provided by Martin and Duncan. Many people attending their first AGM said they'd enjoyed themselves: we hope to see them at events in the future.

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## TIS Conference Report



The Tenants Information Service (TIS) conference was, as usual, a very good conference, with a good few hundred people there. This year was a special year as TIS is twenty years old. At the opening session they played a DVD of the years gone by called 'TIS Is Your Life'. It was very interesting to watch all the old faces, including some who are no longer with us. Then came the Frances Nelson M.B.E Memorial Award. It was presented to the Glen Doe tenants group from Inverness for the work they have done in their neighbourhood.

We had plenty of choice over workshops. For Saturday's workshop I chose one on 'Keeping your Organisation Going', which seems to be one of the hardest things that any tenants' group has to do. We looked at a case study on the work of the Glenrothes Area Residents Federation. This federation was started in 1989 and we got a lot of tips and techniques.

On Sunday morning I went to a workshop on 'Getting your Message Across'. It discussed ways of getting information round all the residents - what works well in different areas. On Sunday afternoon the final workshop I went to was on 'Funding for Social Rented Houses'. The questions asked were: do we agree with the plans that the government has on investing in affordable housing? What is happening in our area? Do we feel the Scottish standard is high enough?

On the Saturday night after the evening meal there was a quiz then a disco, so there were quite a few sore heads and tired delegates the following morning! The raffle that was held on Saturday night raised about £500 towards the Macmillan Nurses in memory of Frances Nelson.

Lynne Tait  
Southhouse and Burdiehouse Residents Organisation

## Anti Social Behaviour Orders

A few years ago the introduction of the ASBO was seen as the answer to making communities a much better and safer environment. It was seen as a faster, more streamlined method to tackle the various issues from noisy neighbours, unsociable behaviour to a raft of issues which basically affected their right to a peaceful and safe environment.

People were encouraged to take a more prominent part in reporting acts which were alien to acceptable behaviour. Working with the police and the local authority, their contribution would provide the tools necessary to obtain a positive result in addressing the problem. Encouragement was given to fill in diaries of incidents and, where the police were involved, get an incident note.

Having supported residents where they were affected by anti social behaviour, I saw frustration and anger at the lack of communication, and understanding of the drawn out process of trying to get justice. Most felt that the paperwork was non-productive as, in most of the cases, they were told that the culprit got a 'slap on the wrist' by being let off with a warning or being referred to a social worker. It was seen as a soft option.

In some cases where there was a private landlord or other, the process could be more difficult because of lack of information or because the police found it difficult to get the details. This makes the problem worse. Complainants were under the impression that if the problem existed within a house where the tenant had less than six - nine months probationary period, they could lose the right of tenancy. What they thought and what is reality is totally different! Most worrying was the issue of confidentiality and assurance that complainants could remain anonymous. Would they be called as witnesses? What the system lacked was support and reassurance that they would be treated in confidence.

Another issue was the diary of incidents where the complainant keeps a note of all the incidents, dates, times and actions taken. This could go on for months and, when contact was made with the relevant department regarding the progress, they were either told their efforts were insufficient or to keep recording the incidents. This inevitably led to frustration and a feeling of defeat. The system has to change....

There has to be a more efficient method of communication. More support must be given to those who take the steps to report acts of anti social behaviour, and the law needs to take more positive action in dealing with the culprits.

How long will it take?

Davie Thomson  
Redbraes Residents Association

## National Network Meetings Update

Two important meetings of Network members have taken place recently. On 18th May the nine Regional Network Committees met at the Grosvenor Hotel in Edinburgh. The day got off to a good start with a large turnout from the committees of all of the nine regions that make up the National Network. It soon became apparent that ordinary committee members from all of the regions want to get together on a more frequent basis to discuss common issues as well as regional ones. The launch of the website today, (once it's content includes Minutes of Committee and Chair/Secretary Meetings), will go some way to ensuring that the regions can find out what each other are working on. Alex Neil, who has only been in post for three months as Minister for Housing and Communities, gave an interesting keynote address on the Housing Bill which was followed by an extended discussion session. Anne Cook, Tenant Participation Development Manager with the Scottish Government followed with an update of the Network's achievements during the previous year.

The Networking Opportunity after lunch was unfortunately, ill organized, and left little time for discussion between the representatives, which most committee members had thought was the main purpose of the day. The Workshops which followed produced several recommendations that all regions agreed on; the main one being the necessity for an urgent review of our communications methods, not only between regions but also between individual Chairs and their Committees.

It would be fair to say the day had been a success, because it highlighted what the Regions have done correctly during the past year, and what needs to be improved, and clearly indicated the direction that committees feel should be taken from now on. If the Networks' nine Regional Chairpersons implement the recommendations that were put forward by their committees today, the Network will be in a better position to go forward in a more constructive and effective way on behalf of the tenants and residents they represent.

The second meeting was the Region 5 (B.E.E.M.) Annual General Meeting which was held on Saturday 30th May, again at the Grosvenor Hotel in Edinburgh. All four areas that make up Region 5, the Borders, East Lothian, Edinburgh and Midlothian were well represented. After the Opening address by the Chairman Jim Maryniak, the Chairman and Treasurers reports were proposed and then seconded. The

Minute of last year's AGM was next on the Agenda and this was also adopted with no Matters Arising being raised. All of the proposed amendments to the Constitution were then proposed, discussed and amended where agreed, before being adopted. This was followed by the adoption of the Communications Strategy, and as there were no lodged amendments, this was adopted as presented.

Election of Committee Representatives then followed. The one nomination to fill the vacancy in the Borders went through unopposed and Mary Ferguson was duly welcomed to the Committee. The contested Edinburgh vacancy had been the subject of a postal vote. The result was a decisive win for Sheila Rutherford-McCallum of Ratho Station Residents Association who received 11 votes against James Bennett of Craigmillar/Peffermill Court Tenants Group who received 4 votes. Sheila was therefore welcomed as the new representative for Edinburgh. Both of the new Committee Members then signed the Committee Code of Conduct. This means that all four areas now have a full complement of three representatives again.

After an enjoyable lunch Tessa Brown, Policy Manager from the Scottish Government's Tenant Priorities Team gave a presentation on the Housing Bill, and answered questions from the floor. One of these questions was a query about just how much influence tenants have when responding to consultations, and whether or not their responses actually do change anything.

The final discussion of the day was on issues Region 5's members want their Committee to look into. Leading the list once again was improved communication; but now that the communications strategy has been adopted, this work can begin in earnest. The Committee was also asked to look into service charge differences across the various landlords, allocations policies variations and how accessible the Regions Committees were to special needs tenants.

With the Chairperson's thanks to the Committee for their work during the past year, and to all delegates for attending the AGM, the AGM closed at approximately 3pm.

Tina Beattie  
Region 5 Committee Member

## Discussion groups with tenants about the Government's new Housing Bill

In April this year the Scottish Government launched a consultation on a draft Housing Bill which focuses on reviewing the 'right to buy' legislation and modernising the regulation of the 'social housing' sector. The draft Bill poses various questions around the appropriateness of the term 'social landlord'.

I started to volunteer for Shelter in May and it was soon decided that this would be a good opportunity to ask tenants for their opinions the issues raised in the draft Bill. These included views on:

- the term 'social housing'
- the image of this type of housing
- how it is perceived by the wider population
- what can be done to improve perceptions and reduce stigma

The Government already has concerns that the terms 'social landlord' and 'social housing' may stigmatise council and RSL housing and those living in it. Ideally they would like to find terminology that reflects the potential of the 'social housing' sector in playing a full and equal part in meeting housing need alongside other tenures.

Shelter and Edinburgh Tenants Federation jointly organised two focus groups to discuss these issues. A good mix of tenants living in council housing and other housing association housing attended. As expected, some lively discussions soon got underway!

### Tenants' views on the terms 'social' and 'affordable'

The vast majority of participants at both groups felt very strongly that they did not like the terms 'social housing' or 'social landlord'. A whole range of reasons were given, predominantly relating to very negative stereotypical images which respondents felt the term 'social' conveys. In both groups it was mentioned that the term immediately gives the impression that all tenants in social housing are living off the state. One participant commented:

*"It's derogatory and demoralising."*

The term 'affordable housing' was also disliked by many tenants consulted. It was argued that it is inappropriate, patronising and fairly meaningless because it is a relative term:

*"What is affordable to one person might not be to another."*

A large number of those participating said that they thought the Government should stop attempting to group council housing and other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) under an umbrella term. The image of 'social housing'

It was agreed that the image of council and housing association properties (and their tenants) has worsened over the past few decades. All respondents felt that this stigma has real consequences for all tenants in terms of discrimination:

*"People already make assumptions based on your address."*

Participants discussed some of the very negative views of the wider population and the day-to-day problems faced by tenants (and the underlying causes of these such as lack of investment, the Right to Buy and the lack of meaningful consultation of residents).

The role of the media was also mentioned as having worsened things for tenants in council and RSL housing.

### Suggested solutions

Suggestions were made to improve communications from the Government to educate the general public about what this type of housing is for, and who lives there. Others felt that the Government and Local Authorities should work more closely with the media to reduce negative and inaccurate stories and the reliance on stereotypes.

In relation to tackling underlying housing problems, participants suggested the following points: Better planning and investment in the housing stock;

*"Keep it [investment] going, don't let them get run down."*

More consultation of tenants – "from the word go"; Inclusion of tenants' organisations in Neighbourhood Partnerships; Improving relations between all residents; Developing areas of mixed tenure, rather than large areas of just one type of housing; Ensuring designated housing stock is not sold to individuals or private companies:

*"Don't pump millions in and then sell it to a private investor, so the tenants don't benefit from it."*

### Your thoughts?

Do you have any views on these issues? Or perhaps you have a suggestion of an alternative term for 'social housing'? The Government consultation period runs until August, so please contact Raymond Pringle at the Federation on 0131 475 2509 and let us know your views. Edinburgh Tenants Federation is keen to gather the views of as many tenants as possible to include in their response.

Many thanks to all the tenants that took part in the discussion groups. I hope you found it as interesting as I did!

Kate Sankey  
Shelter

## Consultation on the Draft Housing (Scotland) Bill

The Scottish Government published a draft Housing (Scotland) Bill in April 2009 which outlines a set of proposals on the Right to Buy and on the regulation of affordable rented housing. It is now consulting on its proposals before introducing a Housing (Scotland) Bill before Parliament early in 2010.

Specifically, the Scottish Government's proposals concern:

- Reforms to the Right to Buy for both council and housing association tenants
- Changing the name of 'social housing' to something that will not have the stigma that is attached to the current term
- Establishing a Scottish Social Housing Charter to introduce a legally enforceable set of standards and requirements

- Changes to Housing Regulation to make the Scottish Housing Regulator independent of government.

It's important that as many tenants' and residents' groups as possible comment on the proposals before 14th August 2009, when the consultation ends. To this end the Federation has circulated to its members a briefing paper prepared by the Tenants Information Service and a draft response. These are also available to download from the Federation's website at [www.edinburghtenants.org.uk](http://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk). We are organising a meeting on 5th August to discuss and finalise the Federation's response and hope that many of our members will attend to give their views.

To give your views or obtain further information please contact Raymond Pringle in the Federation office on 0131 475 2509 or email [raymond@edinburghtenants.org.uk](mailto:raymond@edinburghtenants.org.uk)

### Tenant Led Inspections Update

The Federation welcomed four new inspectors to the team in May when Marilyn Agnew, Anne Langford, Ron Bain and Tom Kelly completed their training. The whole team is now preparing for an inspection in the autumn where we will be looking at empty homes and the standard at which they are let to new tenants. We will again be comparing the Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association to see what differences there are between the two landlords.

We have again been invited to talk to landlords' staff and tenants over the past few months. In April, Alex Paton and Maud Wylie gave a workshop at a tenants' conference in Tillicoultry while Harry Sunderland and Sandy Cruickshank gave a presentation to staff at a meeting of Edinburgh's Affordable Housing Partnership. Then in May, Harry and Maud were guest speakers at the Edinburgh and Lothians Tenant

Participation Workers' Forum and led a lively discussion.

Finally in June the team that inspected the Council's repairs reporting process last summer met

with service managers to review progress on the action plan that the Council had drawn up in response to our inspection. Some of our recommendations have been implemented already while others are still to be acted on, and we have agreed to meet again towards the end of the year.

Davie Thomson  
Convenor, TLI Group



### Housing Association Tenants Sub Committee

Since our last report which dealt with the consultation on Investing in Affordable Housing there has been a response that indicates that the Scottish Government has decided not to impose the organising of lead developers or the seven 'super regions'. This is a decision that HATS and ETF welcome.

In recent weeks HATS has successfully negotiated a work plan and funding from Dunedin Canmore and I have attended a meeting of their RTO group to

explain our developing relationship and will also be attending their tenants' forum in July and doing some area visits along with their travelling office.

Other work we have been working on is the draft Housing Bill and how this will affect HATS members. ETF have put together a proposal and this will be sent to all groups for their responses. This is important and I hope you will all take time to read and respond to it.

Harry Sunderland  
Convenor, HATS Sub-Committee

## Edinburgh Council’s Community Safety Teams

The Council employs a dedicated team of Community Safety Officers to investigate and tackle antisocial behaviour in Edinburgh. There are six Community Safety Teams, each based in their local neighbourhood office located throughout Edinburgh. They work closely with Lothian and Borders Police and other partner agencies to address antisocial behaviour issues such as noise complaints, drug dealing, harassment and complaints regarding youth behaviour.

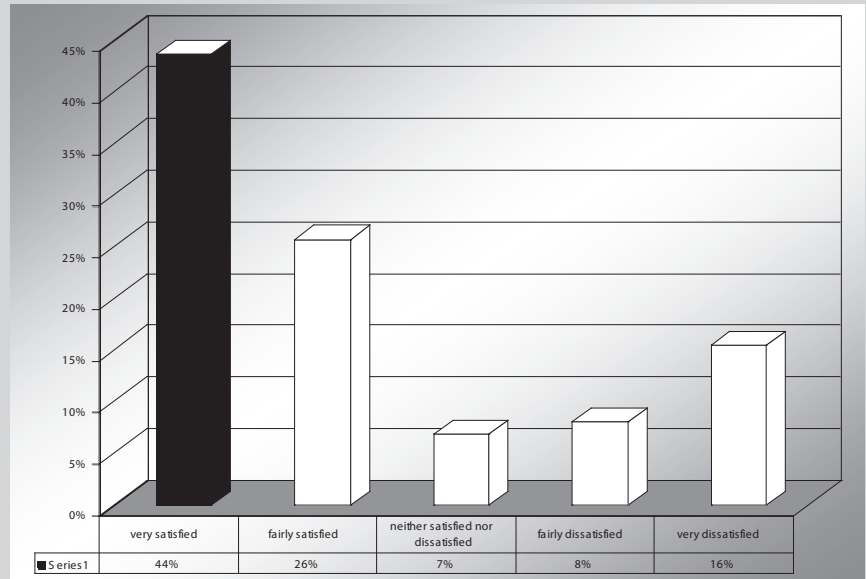
Community Safety Officers gather evidence from witness statements, CCTV and police to pursue action against offenders. This may include issuing warning letters to perpetrators or for more serious cases, pursuing legal action through the courts under the Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004. The Teams

also refer suitable neighbour disputes to Edinburgh Community Mediation Service which can help parties find workable solutions to their differences. Additionally, the Teams work closely with support services to encourage responsible behaviour within communities and help Council tenants sustain their tenancies. The Teams support intervention work and diversionary projects throughout Edinburgh to help prevent young people becoming involved in antisocial behaviour.

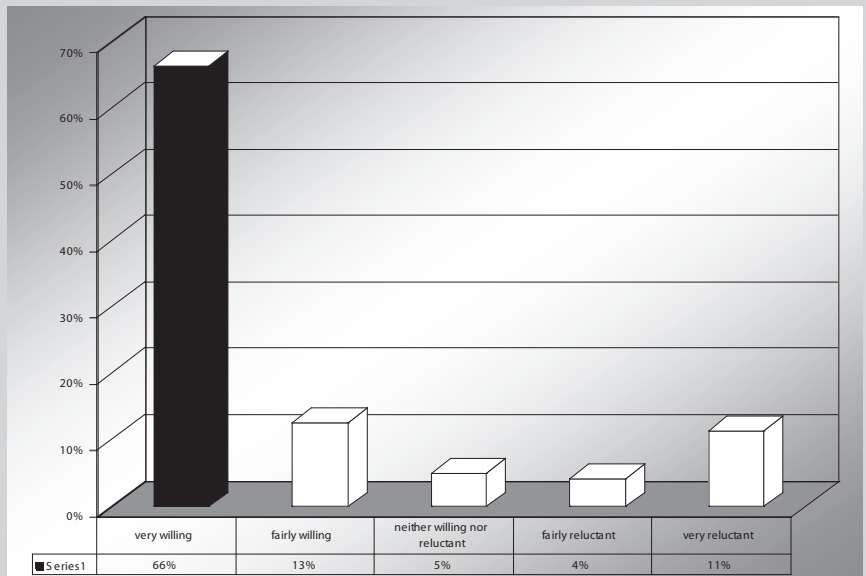
The Community Safety Teams may also deal with tenancy management issues such as abandonment of Council tenancies, property neglect and graffiti.

A recent survey which included those questions below was sent to members of the public who used the services offered by the Community Safety Teams. It provided the following results:

**Q. Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your complaint was dealt with?**



**Q. How willing would you be to report antisocial behaviour to us in the future?**



If you would like to contact the Community Safety Teams, you can visit in person, telephone or email at the following:

**Community Safety Team Leader  
Simon Porteous**  
Central Team  
1 Cockburn Street  
Edinburgh  
EH1 1BJ  
0131 529 7061  
centralteam@edinburgh.gov.uk

**Community Safety Team Leader  
Kirsty Rodger**  
North Team  
8 West Pilton Gardens  
Edinburgh  
EH4 4DP  
0131 529 5050  
northteam@edinburgh.gov.uk

**Community Safety Team Leader  
Zoe Bonthron**  
East Team  
86 Niddrie Mains Road  
Edinburgh  
EH16 4DT  
0131 529 3111  
eastteam@edinburgh.gov.uk

**Community Safety Team Leader  
Grieg Henderson**  
South Team  
40 Captain's Road  
Edinburgh  
EH17 8QF  
0131 529 5151  
southteam@edinburgh.gov.uk

**Community Safety Team Leader  
Raymond Rickis**  
South West Team  
10 Westside Plaza  
Edinburgh  
EH14 2ET  
0131 527 3800  
southwestteam@edinburgh.gov.uk

**Community Safety Team Leader  
Susan Carson**  
West Team  
Chesser House, 500 Gorgie Road  
Edinburgh  
EH11 3YJ  
0131 529 7440  
westteam@edinburgh.gov.uk

**There is also a general email address and 24 hour helpline for members of the public to contact us for advice or to complain about antisocial behaviour: Email: [asb@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:asb@edinburgh.gov.uk) Telephone: 0131 529 7070**

## New Work Plan Approved

The Federation's work plan for the coming year was presented for approval at the Annual General Meeting. The Executive Committee has outlined three priority areas of work for the coming year.

We will continue to develop on-going work. We are committed to continuing the substantial body of work that we are already engaged in, and to continue to work with partner organisations on new areas of work as they arise. Our work with the City of Edinburgh Council on, for instance, repairs and high flats issues, will continue to be supported by the Repairs and High Flats groups, while our work on housing association issues will continue to be developed by the Housing Association Tenants sub-committee. Plans and priorities within each area of our ongoing work will be set and reviewed by the relevant group.

Building on the work that has already been done with Dunedin Canmore Housing Association, over the coming year we will carry out the projects that have been identified, and by publicising the benefits of this work we will continue to build relationships with other Registered Social Landlords. We will carry out a further Tenant Led Inspection and, having publicised our findings, will offer opportunities for more tenants

to be trained as inspectors.

A new priority is to support our members in strengthening tenant participation locally and at Neighbourhood Partnership level. In recent years much work has been done to bring our members together centrally to strengthen the Federation and to discuss and influence citywide policies. Feedback from the recent joint City of Edinburgh Council/Edinburgh Tenants Federation tenants' conference and our annual survey suggests that more now needs to be done to help our members work more effectively in their local area, particularly in terms of influencing local decision-making.

Our third priority is to improve our communications with tenants and more widely. As a Federation we do a lot of very good work but too much of it currently goes unnoticed. Members and tenants generally are often unaware of the work that we do and the difference that we make on their behalf. We need to be more proactive in publicising what we do, and in encouraging others to give us their views and to get involved.

We will of course continue to report on our progress through quarterly progress reports and through Tenants Voice.

## New Tenant Handbook

The Council is in the process of developing a new tenants handbook and would like your feedback!

At the moment draft copies of the handbook are being given to new tenants at sign-up. Copies will be available for existing tenants from late August and details of how to get hold of these will be circulated.

The draft is already available to consult – and comment on – online by clicking on [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/tenanthandbook](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/tenanthandbook). A couple of questions are linked to each page you visit in order to collect your first impressions and more considered feedback.

Your views will help shape the final draft of the handbook, so please get involved with this important piece of work.

## The Crisis in Private Rented Housing

The Federation has been campaigning for many years for additional investment in affordable rented housing. Our council and the city's housing associations are working hard to build as many new homes for rent as they can afford, but demand by far outstrips supply. The shortage of affordable rented housing in cities like Edinburgh has until now been made less acute by the large private rented sector, but this too could change as the current recession bites hard.

A recent report by homelessness charity Shelter reveals the severity of the credit crunch and its impact on mortgages sold to private landlords. The buy-to-let market – where people buy flats and houses as investments to rent out to private tenants – is in crisis as credit becomes harder and more expensive to obtain. The collapse in house prices throughout the United Kingdom has meant that some of these private landlords have found themselves with negative equity. Their debt is greater than the value of their property and the rental income isn't enough to cover the mortgage repayments. Finding themselves in an impossible situation, more and more private landlords are seeing their properties being repossessed by their mortgage lenders.

The casualties of all this are the tenants that rent from the private landlords – they have no protection from being evicted as part of the repossession. It doesn't matter whether they pay full rent or qualify for Housing Benefit – there is no responsibility on the mortgage lender to offer alternative accommodation to tenants evicted due to the repossession. So far, across the UK there have been 27,000 evictions from private rented accommodation, according to Shelter.

With more people from private rented housing being made homeless through no fault of their own putting additional pressure on council waiting lists, and a historic lack of investment by successive governments in affordable rented accommodation, this makes the problem all the more difficult to solve.

Meanwhile a survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Housing shows a huge drop in the numbers of people viewing home ownership as their preferred means of housing, and an increase in those, particularly amongst the young, feeling that renting is a cheaper and safer option than homeownership at this time. Landlords are reporting an increased demand for rented accommodation, and for debt advice and counselling services as the CIH survey

suggests that over the next 12 months a quarter of adults in the UK expect to face financial difficulties paying their housing costs.

The problem is that we don't have enough houses across all tenures. During times of economic stability more people opt for home ownership as it provides them with more choices. But as we are seeing, when the economy goes bad and house prices fall, people want more security and home ownership becomes a less viable option for many. Newly built houses are lying empty, unable to secure a buyer, while at the same time more people are applying for council and housing association accommodation as they lose their homes in either the bought or private rented sectors. And the councils and housing associations don't have enough houses to accommodate everyone in need. So we have empty houses and long waiting lists because of the mismatch between supply and demand.

This is not a new phenomenon and both central and local government have looked to the private rented sector to plug the gap between supply and demand, and there is to be a consultation on the role of the private rented sector in the near future. The Federation's longstanding position on the private rented sector is that it has an important role to play but requires regulation on several fronts in order to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Tenants in the private rented sector enjoy none of the protections that those of us in the affordable rented sector enjoy. There needs to be regulation to set standards regarding security of tenure, the quality of rented accommodation and the services provided by landlords.

Looking at the overall problem, is there a solution? The reality is that the politicians should never have let us get into this mess by promoting home ownership at the expense of the rented sector. We should have continued to build affordable rented housing over the past 30 years rather than seeing this supply eroded through right-to-buy. Councils and landlords need a major injection of capital so they can either buy up currently empty homes from the private sector or build new homes in large enough numbers to restore the balance between supply and demand and ensure that everyone has access to a roof over their head.

Nikki Thomson  
 Edinburgh Tenants Federation

## Multi Storey Recycling Project

Anyone living in a multi storey, or having lived in one, will know that it can be a nightmare trying to recycle your rubbish.

At the Council, we are well aware of these problems and know that the majority of tenants – especially the kids with all their eco clubs at schools – are keen to recycle as much as possible.

Our Housing Property Services Team has been working closely with ETF and local residents to modernise refuse services in multi storey blocks. You may already be involved in a pilot scheme we are running in Lochend and Restalrig Houses, Birnies Court and Dunsyre House. If so, thanks for all your efforts.

We have used the pilot scheme to introduce and trial a number of alternatives to the refuse chutes which are the bane of residents' lives when they clog up.

After speaking to residents, running various foyer events and giving out leaflets to explain what the options were, we are now offering residents the chance to use recycling facilities which are in convenient locations next to the block entrances. So far, the feedback to the Council and ETF has been very positive.

For example of the one in five residents who responded to our short questionnaire:

- 94% said they were aware of the new recycling choices
- 91% had used the new recycling facilities
- 72% said that they were now using the refuse chutes less than before.

I think you will agree, this sounds like the sort of success that we should roll out to the other multi storeys as soon as possible. It also shows how by working together, in partnership, we can bring improvements about for every one of our tenants and help the environment at the same time.



Now that we know that recycling in multistories is wanted by residents, and that the majority are keen to see this happen, we are rolling out the model across the city over the next 12 months. The cost of doing this will be absorbed within our existing budgets and Waste Aware money that the Council has already gratefully received from the Scottish Government.

I would ask for your continued support with this roll out and if there are any problems contact me on 529 3272 and ask for Norman Work, I'm always here to help!

And finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Raymond for the huge amount of work he has undertaken on behalf of the tenants. I had the pleasure of presenting a small gift of appreciation on behalf of the council at your recent AGM.

Although we have only worked together for three years, it has been a pleasure to deal with someone as fair, balanced and committed to fighting on behalf of the tenants and I wish him all the best for the future.

Councillor Norman Work  
Vice-Convenor, Health, Social Care and Housing

## House Swappers do it Online!

Tenants of social landlords and Edinburgh City Council looking to exchange properties have the chance to do it online for the first time.

The council is managing the scheme on behalf of social landlords in the city and tenants simply have to log on to try the free service.

EdIndex, Edinburgh's common housing register, recently introduced the free, online service called Edinburgh House Exchange. This move comes in response to demand from tenants across the city for an efficient service to help them swap their homes.

Tenants simply log their details and that of their property

then state the type of property they wish to move to. Their landlord, either the council or a registered social landlord, will then check their details and if approved they will be free to search other properties available online.

Councillor Paul Edie, Housing Leader, said: "People swap houses for all sorts of reasons from needing more space to wanting to be closer to work or family. This is a useful tool as it allows people to make a mutually beneficial swap. In addition, it means we are potentially easing some of the strain on an already extremely busy system, which sees an average of 150 bids on every property which becomes available."

To try the service go to [www.edinburgh.houseexchange.org.uk](http://www.edinburgh.houseexchange.org.uk).

## Annual Survey Results

Thank you to everyone who took part in this year's annual survey. We had our most positive feedback to date which was most heartening. This year we put our survey online and were pleased to receive some responses via the website.

Attendance at Federation activities and events has generally increased over the year 2008-09, with the High Flats group being the best attended group and this year's Burns Night being reported as the most attended event.

In the future, as well as continuing to place more emphasis on housing association issues, you've told us that you'd still like help and support to influence decision-makers locally

and at Neighbourhood Partnership level. You'd like to see new tenants' groups being formed throughout the city, and you'd like us to find ways of reaching out to groups that are currently under-represented.

Individual final comments included "The leadership of the Federation need to be active in meeting tenants, going to them", "Overall the work is good" and "Keep up the good work, Tenants United will never be defeated."

The Executive Committee looked at all your recommendations to help them put together the Federation's Work Plan for the coming year. This was then debated and approved at the Annual General Meeting on 19th June.

### In the Spotlight: Sheila Rutherford-McCallum

**Q:** Who are you?

**A:** My name is Sheila Rutherford-McCallum. I am currently treasurer for ETF and secretary for Ratho Station Residents Association. I have been an executive member of ETF for about 5 years.

**Q:** What attracted you to work with ETF?

**A:** Ratho Station Residents Association received very valuable help from ETF when we as a community needed it. I felt that I needed to return that help, as well as my strong belief that every person in Edinburgh is entitled to a decent affordable home in a safe, attractive environment.

**Q:** What's the most interesting aspect of working with ETF?

**A:** The different people I get a chance to meet. I get a chance to contribute.

**Q:** What's the most challenging aspect of working with ETF and how do you cope with it?

**A:** Realising you are not superwoman. Don't be tempted to spread yourself too thin. You have to accept that the views of others are just as valid as yours. ETF is a democracy - if you can remember that you won't go far wrong.

**Q:** What would you like to see the Federation doing in the future?

**A:** I would like to see ETF expanding their contacts with other regional federations throughout Scotland in order to exchange ideas and best practice.



I would like to see ETF being more proactive in reaching out to our member groups.

I would like to see ETF carrying on doing what they do so well – acting for their members and striving to give tenants' and residents' groups throughout Edinburgh a genuine voice in the city council.

**Q:** What do you do in your spare time?

**A:** I recently retired. I intend to spend some time on my garden which is currently sporting an unflattering jungle theme. I like to read biographies. I thought Kate Adie's 'The Kindness of Strangers' was an incredible book. I really enjoy meeting new people.

**Q:** What's your favourite joke?

**A:** I have a tendency to forget the punch lines, so I am pretty awful at telling jokes.

My favourite sketch however was Monty Python's 'Dead Parrot Sketch'. I also think the various sketches from the Two Ronnies were priceless, especially the fork handles (4 candles) sketch.

## From the Convenor

Much of what I would normally want to say in my piece is already covered elsewhere in Tenants Voice. Everyone has been working extremely hard over the past few months and reports on some of their work are included here, as well as in our annual report.

Over the last three months, along with other representatives and staff, I have been lobbying each of the parties in the Scottish Parliament over the need for additional funding to build more affordable rented housing in Edinburgh, the need for the residual housing debt to be written off, and the need for more joined-up thinking and action to help tenants with mental health problems. We've had a good reception from everyone though nobody's made any promises to change things. Warm words are all very well but we need action and we need it urgently if we're to meet government targets to end homelessness by 2012 and reduce our waiting lists.

Before everyone winds down for the summer, I would urge you to look at the Scottish Government's consultation on the new Housing Bill. The Tenants Information Service has produced a briefing which the Federation has sent to all member groups along with a note outlining our draft response. Please let us have any feedback on this response by the end of July, or better still come along to the meeting we are organising on 5th August to finalise our response. You can, of course, submit your own response to the Scottish Government – in which case you have until 14th August to do so. Please send us a copy of any response you make.

I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who attended the Federation's AGM on 19th June. I enjoyed getting the chance to chat to many of you and I think we can all agree that we were well entertained by Martin and Duncan. Our annual general meeting is an important event as it's where the members hold the Federation's Executive Committee to account and set our priorities for the coming year. It's therefore very important for us that as many of our members as possible attend the meeting. Congratulations to everyone elected or re-elected to the Executive Committee – I look forward to working with you.

This year's AGM was particularly special as we made a presentation to Raymond Pringle, our Development Coordinator. Raymond has decided



to take early retirement at the end of August so this seemed a suitable time to pay tribute to his thirteen years of service to the Federation. We will miss him and he will be a hard act to follow, as was evidenced by the tribute paid by Councillor Work on behalf of the Council. Raymond, we wish you a very happy retirement but hope you'll keep in touch with us all.

I also want to congratulate a former Executive Committee member, Phyllis Herriot on being awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to the community. Phyllis has been a tireless campaigner for many, many years. A former councillor, she is now a leading figure in the Scottish Pensions Association and chair of Moira Park Tenants Association. I'm delighted that Phyllis is getting this very well-deserved recognition.

Finally I would like to thank everyone – Executive Committee members, staff, our members and supporters – for all your hard work over the past year. It is with your help and support that we are able to do all that we do.

Betty Stevenson  
Convenor

# Dates for Your Diaries

## 27th July

Housing Association Tenants sub-committee, Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, 11am

## 30th July (tbc)

Estates Walkabout Training Day, contact John Langton on 0131 529 7859 for more information.

## 5th August

Housing Bill consultation, Leask Hall, South Leith Parish Church, 6 Henderson Street, 7pm

## 7th September

High Flats Group Post Office Social Club, Restalrig Drive, 7pm

## 23rd September

Repairs Group, Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, 7pm

## 26th October

Federation Meeting, Leask Hall, South Leith Parish Church, 6 Henderson Street, 7pm

## 20th November

Annual Quiz Night, venue and times to be confirmed

## ETF's 20th Anniversary

Next year marks the 20th anniversary of the Federation's foundation and we think this is worth celebrating. The Executive Committee has set up a working group to plan events and activities for our anniversary year, which will culminate in a big party in October 2010.

We're currently investigating the possibility of combining our 2010 Annual General Meeting with a tenants' conference to give us a chance to review the last 20 years and look ahead

and set our priorities for the next 20. We are planning a special edition of Tenants Voice and additional publicity throughout the year to promote the Federation and its work.

We welcome members' suggestions too – if there's anything you'd like to see the Federation doing to mark its 20th anniversary please contact me via the Federation office.

Sheila Rutherford-McCallum  
Convenor, 20th Anniversary Working Group



## Copy Deadline

Tenants Voice is usually published four times a year and is distributed to over 3500 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 14 August 2009.

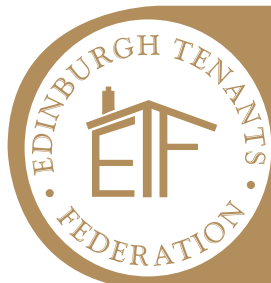
## Something to think about

“He who asks is a fool for five minutes, but he who does not ask remains a fool forever”.

**Chinese Proverb**

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”

**C.S. Lewis**



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Print and Design by Graphic Impressions, Unit 27/2 Hardengreen Industrial Estate, Eskbank, Dalkeith EH22 3NX  
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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of ETF.