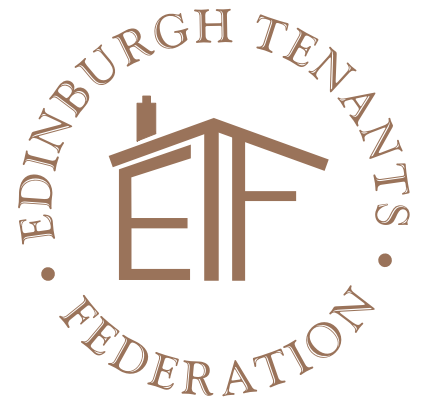


Tenants Voice



Issue 73: November 2009

Flats at Gracemount come crashing to an end



Sunday 25th October 2009 was the day that saw the three Gracemount blocks - Fala, Garvald and Soutra Courts - come crashing to the ground in a triple blow down. The Federation's Convenor, Betty Stevenson, and Outreach Worker, Justine Bradd, were present to watch this spectacular sight. Lucky poster competition winner Robert Millar from Kaimes Primary joined longest resident Margaret Jeffrey and Council Leader Jenny Dawe to push the button to bring the flats down.



The flats were demolished in a step towards building the first of the Council's 21st Century Council Housing. The site should be cleared by the end of 2009 with the building of the houses starting in Spring/Summer 2010.

The Gracemount Development Group has been working with the master planners for a while now discussing how the new buildings and surrounding open space will look in the future. Consultation with the surrounding area took place over the summer on the preferred master plan choice which has now received planning permission. The Development Group, which has a membership made up of representatives from Gracemount Action Residents Association, the Council's Regeneration Team, South Edinburgh Local Office,

Children and Families, Councillors, Lothian and Borders Police, the NHS and ETF, will continue to meet to oversee progress on the new build.

Contents

Page 2	The Man on the Bike
Page 3	Housing Advice for Edinburgh Residents
Page 4	Mental Health Update
Page 5	'Green Communities' Course
Page 6	Estate Inspections Training Day
Page 7	Regeneration Areas Update
Page 8	Repairs Developments
Page 9	Improving Mental Health
Page 10	In the Spotlight: Nikki Thomson
Page 11	From the Convenor
Page 12	Dates for Diaries

The Man on the Bike

Ten years ago, a small number of tenants got together to form a tenants' group. Having no idea of how to organise one they got in touch with him. To say he was an asset to us would be an understatement. From providing us with all the information, leaflets and ongoing support, he bent over backwards!

With his help we developed what is now a very successful tenants and residents group. Our first issue was to get premises and, what better than a derelict park pavilion which had lain empty for years? We approached the Council and whilst it appeared to be a somewhat large step to take, his backing made it possible. We now have a place to hold meetings, drop-in centre and a place which local groups or parents can use for kiddies parties.

We decided to broaden our horizons by taking on the issue of the lack of facilities for the community who use the park. From a kiddies play area to seating for the elderly, creating a wildlife path and promoting the only speed cycle track in Scotland we tackled it. In between all this we took the step of getting more involved with the issues of tenant participation. A bit of a large step when you don't know the meaning of the word! Myself, I felt out of place and, at times found things somewhat mind boggling. But, we still had the support of 'the man on the bike'.

Over the years, we were cajoled into taking bigger steps and being more active in the issues involving the relationship between tenant and landlord. Occasionally I got things wrong and went to see 'the bike man'. We would argue, curse and agree to differ but most importantly respected each others' views. This turned out to be a friendship that continues to this day.



In 2008 we took another step to turn what had been derelict land into a place where folk could meet, have

a barbecue, plant vegetables or flowers, organise an Open Day for the community...the uses are endless but the venture was unique. We were selected to host a party of Canadian Navy crew and held music nights for the community in the park. The measure of our success came in being selected as winners of the 2009 Edinburgh in Bloom Award. We've come a long way from the days with the 'man on the bike'. That man on the bike has retired and in writing this piece we want to thank him and the group he represented for the valuable support he gave us over the years.



The 'man on the bike' was Raymond Pringle who literally dragged us into a more positive world that we have today. To the group he represented Edinburgh Tenants Federation. We owe a debt of gratitude for the guidance and work they have done to help get us where we are today.

What can we say to those who are thinking about doing something in their community? The same as we did....get in touch with ETF and find out how you can get organised.

PS Enjoy your retirement Raymond and pop in to see what we achieved with your help.

David Thomson

Redbraes Residents Association

Celebrating Gardens in Bloom

Once again John Fairgrieve, Eileen May and Maureen Miller from Restalrig House and Lochend House Residents Association entered their two hi-rise blocks for the Edinburgh in Bloom competition and the Beautiful Scotland competition.

We have worked really hard getting the gardens ready and have had help from a couple of residents when they have any spare time. We also get help from the Bonnington Group. Some residents with less time on their hands donate money for plants instead.



The first competition was Edinburgh in Bloom. Three judges came down to our area. They were David Drury, Vicki Ferguson and Sam Murray. Thankfully the weather was okay and we were

happy with our effort and hoped the judges were too.

The Beautiful Scotland competition was next and the two judges were Margaret and Bill Allen. Again the weather was really good which makes a difference, and the judges were very impressed.

Eileen and I went to Aberdeen on 21st September 2009 for the Beautiful Scotland Gardening Awards. The event was held at the Beach Ballroom in Aberdeen and was attended by entrants from all over Scotland. We had lunch before the actual awards and met up with the ladies from Hailesland Park who have been our inspiration and our rivals in this competition. This is our third year of entering the competition and have always come second as Hailesland Park have been winners for the last past four years. To our delight and surprise this year we won the silver cup and two awards in the High Flats category. Hailesland Park were second.



This has encouraged us to carry on for next year's competition.

Maureen Miller

Restalrig House and Lochend House Residents Association



Housing Advice for Edinburgh Residents

The Edinburgh Housing Advice Partnership (EHAP) is a new, city-wide, housing advice, information and representation service. The primary aim of the Partnership is to deliver advice and information to people in a range of settings to enable them to avoid homelessness and, in particular, a first episode of homelessness.

As a service delivery partnership comprising the Community Help and Advice Initiative (CHAI), Granton Information Centre (GIC), Four Square and Move On, EHAP

will build on existing services to deliver housing advice in a variety of neighbourhood locations to people in all tenure types (Council, Housing Association, private tenants and owner occupiers).

EHAP also provides specific homelessness prevention services to prisoners, those being received into or leaving care settings, people from an armed services background and young people leaving school or 'looked after' environments. Interpreters can be provided and all neighbourhood bases are wheelchair accessible.

Common problems that EHAP advisers can provide advice and assistance with include:

- Housing benefit problems/issues
- Rent/mortgage arrears
- Debts and money worries
- Difficulties with adaptations/repairs
- Problem landlords
- Re-housing due to relationship breakdown
- Anti-social behaviour
- Homelessness

The service is free, impartial and confidential and open to all Edinburgh residents. The Partnership is particularly interested in promoting its service to tenants in private rented accommodation and to owner-occupiers, as it is felt that clients in these tenure types have been hit hard by the current economic recession.

To make an appointment to see an adviser contact EHAP now on: 0845 302 4607. Alternatively it is possible to submit an electronic referral via the website: www.ehap.org.uk.

Regional Network: News from BEEM Region 5 (Borders, Edinburgh, East and Mid Lothian)

The meeting took place on the 5th October and after the formalities we discussed the progress in setting up our Newsletter, which should be appearing in the near future.

We also discussed the work on the Scottish Housing Bill and the recent meeting the Region Chairs had with Minister Alex Neil who expressed an interest in having these meetings quarterly.

We also discussed the ongoing work on Tenant Priorities Research details of which will be published at a later date.

The full minutes of our meetings and other regions along with other details can be found at www.regionalnetworks.org.uk

Harry Sunderland
Region 5

Mental Health Update

At our AGM in June we gave an update to our membership of the work Betty Stevenson and Maureen Jarvis have been involved with regarding mental health issues generally, but in particular, suicide prevention.

Several years ago a tragic incident occurred in Muirhouse when a tenant in one of the multi-storey blocks attempted to commit suicide by hanging himself from his balcony. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the emergency services and the council staff involved, the tenant died later in hospital.

This incident highlighted significant gaps in the housing service; there was little information available to multi storey concierge staff, a lack of procedures or training for staff on how to deal with these traumatic situations and how to access help or support for staff or tenants who may have witnessed these distressing incidents.

With a few telephone calls to some of Betty's numerous contacts, we endeavoured to find out where to go, and who to contact to enable us to raise our concerns about the impact mental health issues have on our communities. This resulted in an invitation being extended to Edinburgh Tenants Federation to join the Edinburgh Choose Life Steering Group based in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. We have been active members ever since.

Furthermore, we attended our first conference in early January 2008 dedicated to exploring the newly created mental health and wellbeing legislation and coming up with some practical action points to help develop it. We were surrounded by mental health professionals, who at times seemed to speak a different language. However, we were not deterred. By the end of the conference, we had certainly made the other delegates aware of ETF and the benefits to be gained by all the agencies, National Health Service, local voluntary organisations and the charity sector working together to raise awareness of, and hopefully in time, reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. After all, if asked, most people could identify friends, relatives or just neighbours who have experienced some form of mental illness in their lives.

Then we approached the Housing Service. Initially, we wanted to explore ways to fill the gaps in their procedures but also to encourage the different departments to work together sharing both knowledge and resources.

It has always been acknowledged that some anti-social behaviour is in fact tenants with mental health issues not taking their medication, for whatever reason, or simply just not able to cope without sustained

support. A meeting was arranged with senior officers, representatives from each neighbourhood, the concierge service manager, the Edinburgh Choose Life steering group co-ordinator and us to discuss ways we could take this initiative forward. We all agreed, as a first move, that posters and leaflets offering advice and contact numbers for such organisations as the Samaritans should be displayed in the local offices. We had already visited The Samaritans' Edinburgh headquarters to talk with them and learn more about the valuable work they do, so had a ready supply of both. We also agreed that awareness training should be offered to all frontline council staff as soon as possible.

That all seems such a long time ago now. Training of frontline staff is well underway with consideration being given to training Edinburgh Building Services (EBS) operatives as well. The membership of the council housing group has expanded so much that we now meet in a much larger and grander location - the City Chambers. The new members of the group include representatives from the housing support teams, community nursing service, NHS specialist mental health teams, the Police and soon to join, we hope, a representative of the Social Work department

Meanwhile, we have continued to attend the meetings of the Choose Life Steering Group, becoming well known faces around the hospital. We have contributed to many discussions ranging from erecting nets under The Bridges, organisations offering support to troubled young people who self harm, delays in toxicology results (in the real world, not like CSI, it can take up to 6 months to determine if the overdose was deliberate or accidental). We have learned of new ways of working with mental health patients which aim to treat the patient at home rather than admit them into hospital. Careful assessments of the patient's condition is carried out by the Intensive Home Treatment Teams (IHTT) to ensure that they pose no threat to themselves or the rest of their community. This relatively new concept has many advantages for the patient, some of which are: staying in their own home surrounded by familiar things, childcare is easier to manage and the patient's whole situation can be considered as well. However, treatment is only available for a short time, about 6 weeks maximum, and only available to people over 16 and under 64. We are assured that the NHS is closely monitoring the new IHTT system. However, we both feel that there are still some issues related to this new way of managing acute mental illness that needs further research.

Betty has also taken part in and passed with flying colours an ASIST training course in Suicide awareness and prevention and also the Safe Talk package. This

course is designed mostly for health and social service professionals and lasts two days, so is fairly intensive and at times very harrowing as well as thought provoking. This training will enable Betty to assist someone who has suicidal feelings, but moreover it gave her a valuable insight into all the help that is available through different organisations. Maureen is still waiting for an opportunity to go on the same training course as unfortunately none are scheduled for Edinburgh at the moment.

We will continue with this work and are pleased to note that senior officers within the council are as keen as we are to try to tackle some of these challenging areas within the housing service as well as raising awareness of mental health generally within the community. Our main focus at the moment is on the high rise blocks.

Most of these have a 24 hour concierge on site or are linked to other blocks that do. We hope that the work that is ongoing now in the high rise blocks will help with developing a plan to tackle the often hidden problems in the low rise.

If you would like to know more you can call Breathing Space on 0800 83 85 87 or visit

www.chooselife.net

Maureen Jarvis and Betty Stevenson
Edinburgh Tenants Federation

Host a 'Green Communities' Training Course

This year the Energy Saving Trust Green Communities service (formally CAfE) is giving community groups the opportunity to host their own Green Communities course. By hosting a training, Green Communities will be able to provide your group with a bespoke course enabling you to improve your knowledge of energy and develop a community energy project. Best of all it's free of charge!

Green Communities courses can cover project planning and delivery of a community energy project; energy efficiency; sustainable energy use and renewable energy technologies; how to conduct energy audits for community buildings and old or listed buildings; funding a community energy project; and how to get involved with the local authority planning process.

Previous hosts have included local community and environmental groups, local authorities and parish councils who themselves host or are involved with local community energy projects.

On the day Green Communities will provide a trainer, the training resources and manuals. As hosts, all you have to find is a venue and the delegates. We can also provide up to £150 towards lunch and refreshments for your group.

Green Communities is looking to run courses throughout the country and are now keen to find new groups and locations to hold future events. To enquire about holding your own Green Communities Partnership Training course, please call to speak to one of our advisors on 0844 848 0077 or email greencommunities@est.org.uk www.est.org.uk/community

Tram Work – Effect on Housing Waiting Lists

Whether you are for or against the introduction of trams in Edinburgh, there comes a point where it must be admitted that the 'ripple in the pond' effect of these works reaches the housing waiting lists. It seems to me that little consideration has been made for those who have lost their jobs, and in many cases, their homes. Similarly, little thought appears to have been given to the access rights of disabled and elderly people during the trams works, but that's another article!

The ongoing, extended and behind schedule tram works have resulted in many small and not so small businesses closing shops or branches which were situated along the tram route. For the owners of these businesses this has come at a heavy cost. For those who were employed by these businesses this has meant that they have been forced to find alternative

employment. Some have been transferred to other branches and the lucky few have found alternative employment elsewhere.

As for the rest, many have now joined the already very lengthy waiting lists for council houses and other types of rented accommodation. A recent report in the Edinburgh Evening News echoed these concerns. With these waiting lists at an all time high, this is not good news. We are told that council house building will start again soon, but this is not soon enough for those in need now.

Although reports have suggested that the introduction of trams will, in the end, create jobs, this is little or no consolation for those who have recently lost their homes and jobs because of this project.

Tina Beattie
North Bughtlin Tenants Association

Estate Inspections Training Day

On 29 September tenant representatives from across the city took part in the first Estates Inspection Training Day. Organised by Edinburgh Tenants Federation and the Council's Services for Communities department the intention was to show tenants what to look for on estate inspections or walkabouts, and what happens to the information they collect.



After a short presentation, senior Property Officers accompanied the tenant participants on two mini-walkabouts (the rain intervened and cut them short). Over lunch the completed forms were put onto an Estates Inspection database that has recently been

launched. Everyone was then given a demonstration of the database and got a copy of their inspection report to take home.

Tenants had plenty of opportunity to give their views about estate walkabouts. All present could see their value and want them to happen regularly – at the moment some parts of the South West Neighbourhood only have official walkabouts every three months but tenants felt this was not frequently enough.



The database was thought to be a good thing as long as everyone uses it. Overall the day was a success and will hopefully be repeated in other parts of the city.

in mind. The first is to show tenants who are new to the high rises what's involved in carrying out a block check and to encourage them to get involved in their own blocks. The second is to learn about updates to the marking scheme and act as a refresher course for those who regularly check their own blocks, as by checking different blocks with different people they may pick up on things they've overlooked before.

Block Walkabout Training Day

South Edinburgh was the destination for the latest Block Walkabout Training Day to be organised by the Federation's High Flats Group and the Council's Caretaking Service Improvement Forum. Some new faces joined block walkabout regulars – both tenants and staff – and all were involved in checking the Forteviot, Moncrieff Houses and Holyrood and Lochview Courts.

These events are organised with two main purposes

We welcome all interested tenants to come along to our High Flats Group meetings to learn more about what we do.

Tenant Led Inspections update



Have you ever wondered how landlords turn properties around between one tenant moving out and the next moving in? The Federation's

Tenant Led Inspection team is currently looking at what two landlords do in this regard. Ten tenants are in the process of exploring how the City of Edinburgh Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association handle what are technically termed as 'voids'.

The team came together earlier in the year after four new inspectors underwent a thorough training programme before joining the inspectors who carried out last year's pilot inspection on repairs reporting.

The team is learning about policies and procedures and then observing for themselves whether the two landlords follow their own procedures. Inspectors have been looking at empty homes both as soon as the outgoing tenant moves out and again once the repairs that the landlords have identified have been carried out.



Inspectors have interviewed staff within both landlord organisations to find out what they think of the service they



provide to tenants, and to collect ideas for how this work could be improved. They are also interviewing tenants who have recently moved in, again to find their views based on their experience, and their suggestions for how things could be improved.

Once the inspection is complete in early November, the team will produce written reports with recommendations on how the two landlords could improve their services. These reports will be made public by early January and the landlords have agreed to respond formally, with action plans on how they will take forward those recommendations that they accept. These responses will, like the inspectors' reports, be made public on the Federation's website at www.edinburghtenants.org.uk. They will also

be sent to individuals that request them.

Once this inspection is complete the team will start to plan future activity including recruitment and training for new volunteers who wish to join the inspection team. For more information please contact Nikki or Clare in the Federation's office.



Nikki Thomson
Development Worker

Update on the Regeneration areas

Earlier in the year the Health Social Care and Housing Committee approved that properties in Granton Medway and Crescent be taken out of the demolition programme and put into the refurbishment programme. A new tenants and residents association was set up and they have been working hard over the past few months to make sure that the work is being done. The Council will be replacing kitchens and bathrooms, rewiring and moving the water pipes that run along the living room walls up into the ceiling. The flat entrance doors will also be replaced once all the work inside the houses has been finished. Well done to the Granton, Royston and Wardieburn Residents Association for all the hard work they have been putting in.

The master planning in North Sighthill is now underway; extensive consultation events have been planned until mid January when the final master plan will be submitted for planning approval. Hermiston and Weir Courts are now completely empty and the rehousing in Glenalmond Court is progressing very well. Broomview House was demolished last year and the site was cleared; the North Sighthill Residents Association and Sighthill, Parkhead and Broomhouse Community Council discussed plans with the Council regarding what to do with the site. It was agreed that a path be laid from the underpass at Broomhouse Road to the front of the low rise housing, the ground re-seeded with grass, a fence be put in place through the gap in the wall where Broomview House once stood

and the area behind the community centre fenced off to deter any unwanted over night parking.

The master planning in Pennywell has also been moving on well. The Council recently submitted an application for £6.1 million to build new Council housing in the area; the result of which should be known in the next few months.

The Health Social Care and Housing Committee agreed in October 2009 to bring forward the rehousing of Fort House in Leith to start in 2010. The residents in Fort House were asked if they would like this to happen sooner and the majority agreed.

Gracemount is the regeneration area that is the furthest along. The Gracemount flats were demolished in a triple blowdown in October 2009 and it is expected that the site will be cleared by Christmas. The Council successfully received £1.67 million to help build new Council housing on the area. It was decided that the site would be built in two phases the first being the affordable housing. 67 will be for rent, 20 mid-market rent and 12 available for shared equity. The second phase will contain more shared equity houses with the rest being available for sale by a private developer. The Gracemount Action Residents Association has been heavily involved in the process of master planning for the area.

Justine Bradd
Outreach Worker

Repairs Developments

This is a summary of repairs developments that Federation representatives have been working on lately. A report on the results of a survey the Repairs Group put out in early August was presented at the Repairs Group in September. Thank you to those of you who responded – we are now discussing how to act on your recommendations.

At August's Repairs Strategy Group meeting representatives queried how EBS calculates its customer satisfaction levels. Apparently this is done by aggregating the scores tenants give for how polite and helpful the staff were, rather than on whether the job was completed satisfactorily!

We also asked why reported performance levels were so much higher in multi-storeys than in low-rise properties – they don't know the answer but will explore further. This was information we had received through the Multi-Storey Working Group which has also been discussing repairs.

We have continued to meet regularly with Housing Property Services (HPS) to receive updates on the capital programme works, including visiting a 'show flat' in the Calders which has been set up to enable Calders tenants to see what their new kitchen and bathroom will look like and see for real what the different options of wall and floor coverings look like. We chased up progress on HPS making their correspondence more tenant-friendly.

Earlier this year we were involved in negotiating revisions for the Repairs Policy – as it had to be reprinted both the Federation's representatives and Edinburgh Building Services felt it would be worthwhile updating it. From our side we wanted to make sure that all the information was accurate and up to date, while Edinburgh Building Services wanted to change some aspects – hence the negotiation! The final document has not yet been published but the last time we saw it very little had been changed in terms of the service specifications and timescales, but more has gone into the book about things like gas servicing and safety.

Gas servicing has been a major item under consideration over the past year or so. The Council is in the process of pulling together a strategy for

ensuring that the annual gas servicing process runs smoothly in future. We have been in discussions about this and have given our opinion – calling for clearer letters, generated in-house, and a shorter period between the first letter and the threat of a force-of-law entry because at the moment it can take up to a year. We expect to see this report very soon.

We will shortly be putting a survey onto the Federation's website because we want to hear about your experiences of getting repairs done. There will be a few short questions to answer – and it doesn't matter who your landlord is because we're interested to know what happened and to read any suggestions you have for how they could improve. The Repairs Group will take up your suggestions with the Council, while the Housing Association Tenants Group will take up suggestions with other landlords.

Finally, if you're interested in repairs and our work in this regard, do come along to our Repairs Group meetings. The next one will be in February, with further details to be announced early in the new year.

Maureen Jarvis
Convenor, Repairs Group



Improving Mental Health

We know that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem at some time during their life. Three quarters of us know someone with a mental health problem. Anyone can experience mental ill health – it can affect people of all ages and from all backgrounds, both male and female.

Sadly, despite the fact that mental health problems are fairly common, stigma and discrimination remains. Some people still find it difficult to talk about problems they may be experiencing even to friends and family.

The national campaign ‘See me’ is working to change the way the general public thinks about and behaves towards people with mental health problems and the Council signed the ‘See me’ pledge earlier this year.

One area where talking can really help is in preventing suicide. The key message for suicide prevention week (7-13 September) was ‘Suicide. Don’t hide it. Talk about it’. Sadly many people feel that they can’t discuss their suicidal thoughts or by asking someone if they are feeling suicidal this will somehow put the idea in their head. In fact nothing could be further than the truth – talking about emotions can help prevent everyday problems from becoming overwhelming.

The Council is working to improve mental health awareness. For example, general mental health training sessions have been provided to over 200 concierge and frontline staff working in neighbourhood teams and the intention is now to identify local champions from each team or service to receive a more specialist training. Useful information such as helpline numbers

and information about mental health is also now being displayed in council premises, including all multi-storey blocks.

We also fund a dedicated post to support suicide prevention work across the City, the first local authority to do so.



I’m aware that there is a whole range of services provided by Council staff to help support people with mental health problems and to promote mental well-being on a daily basis – thank you for your efforts in providing these vital services. And I would like to end by making a plea that everyone, no matter what area you work in, takes a few minutes to find out more about mental health issues or to reflect on the message from suicide prevention week. If you want to find out more, check out www.edspace.org.uk – Edinburgh’s mental health website.

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

Housing Association Tenants Subcommittee (HATS)

We had our latest meeting on Thursday 1st October at which we welcomed Clare MacGillivray, the new Development Coordinator at ETF.

We had an interesting presentation from John Fanning, Secretary of the newly formed Viewpoint Tenants Representative Group, outlining the process they went through to set up this group. He also outlined some of their successes, such as improvements to garden areas, complaints process and abandoned properties. I would like to take this opportunity to thank John and wish his group continued success.

In a future meeting we hope to have input from Link Housing on similar topics. We are also starting a process to look at service charges across all Housing Association landlords as some tenants have raised concerns about the differences and lack of clarity on what these are for. Later on we hope to publish our findings.

Any tenants interested in the work of this group or would like to come to a meeting please contact the office staff at ETF.

Harry Sunderland
Convenor, HATS Group

In the Spotlight: Nikki Thomson

Q: Who are you?

A: My name is Nikki Thomson and I'm ETF's Development Worker. In particular I'm responsible for most of our publicity work – for instance Tenants Voice, Federation Matters and the website. I support the work of the Repairs Group and the High Flats Group and am currently supporting the Tenant Led Inspections Group.

Q: What attracted you to work with ETF?

A: I had been working in England developing young people's participation and wanted to move back to my childhood home of Edinburgh: making the transition to tenant participation was very easy. Both are about helping people get their views heard.

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

A: The variety – there's always so much going on. At the moment I'm coordinating the tenant-led inspection, making sure everyone is where they should be at the right time and with the materials and information they need – it's very challenging but the early results are very interesting.

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

A: The fact that there's always so much going on! The organisation's workload is getting heavier all the time and our staff and volunteers are getting ever more thinly stretched. None of us seem to be any good at saying 'no'.

I cope by being quite organised in the office and by trying to prioritise my workload. And I try to forget about work once I leave the office each evening – though that's easier said than done.

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

A: I think we need to recognise how much we've achieved already – we forget that too often!

I think we also need to recognise that the profile of Edinburgh's tenants is changing and that the Federation needs to adapt to that. The Council is no longer the only landlord in Edinburgh, and although we have started to work constructively



with some of the city's Housing Associations, there is much more work that we need to do in this regard.

Another challenge for us is to find new ways of working. Younger tenants, for instance, are less likely to join a tenants' group, and there are large areas of the city where there are only a few tenants, widely dispersed, and so setting up a tenants' group would be impractical. Yet all tenants have the right to have their opinions heard, so we need to find ways of making that happen.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

A: Spare time - what's that?! I recently completed a Masters degree which for three years took up all my spare time; now that I'm not doing that I generally keep quite busy anyway. Music is a passion of mine, and I sing in the Edinburgh Festival Chorus. I'm involved in organising the Meadows Festival and I'm a member of my local community council. When I'm not doing all that I'm into all things arty and crafty, particularly photography and needlework. I also read a lot, and am currently re-reading The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series.

Q: What's your favourite joke?

A: I prefer comedy sketches to individual jokes, though I like wordplay and am sometimes guilty of some atrocious puns. In that regard, this one tickled me recently.

Someone keeps texting me four letter words. The last one read "BNAG". I reckon that was bang out of order.

From the Convenor

I'd like to start by apologising for the late publication of this issue of Tenants Voice. It's been a very busy few months at the Federation, and unfortunately Tenants Voice fell victim to there not being enough time to get everything done.

Raymond Pringle retired in August and Clare MacGillivray joined the staff team as Development Coordinator in September. She's now getting settled in so do say hello when you're calling or visiting the office. Better still, come along to our Quiz Night on 20th November.

Maureen Jarvis and Councillor Work have both written articles about the mental health work that we've been involved in, so my piece this issue is about the tenant led inspections that a team of tenants are currently undertaking. At the time of writing, ten tenants from different parts of Edinburgh and from different landlords are in the middle of an inspection looking at the standard of let – that is the condition which houses are in when they're rented to new tenants. The team is comparing the Council with Dunedin Canmore Housing Association. The inspectors are looking at both landlords' policies and procedures and have also been interviewing staff and tenants to get their experience and opinions.

It's a very intensive piece of work that has taken six months of planning and preparation before the inspection could take place. New inspectors were recruited and trained, then there were discussions with service managers from both the Council and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association before the team put their inspection plan together. This plan then had to be agreed with both landlords. Meanwhile the inspectors were also drawing up lists of questions to ask people, studying policy documents and getting an in depth knowledge of the processes involved.

At the end of the inspection the team will produce a report containing their findings and recommendations for both landlords on how they could improve their tenants' experiences. I look forward to learning what they have to say.

Elsewhere we have been involved in two successful training days – one for the high rises and one for the low rise estates. Our representatives were involved in organising both these events alongside



the Council in order that more tenants are given the opportunity to share their views about where they live, and in order that staff from the Council get the opportunity to hear these views. Events like these and activities like the tenant led inspection are excellent examples of tenant participation and of the difference that involving tenants can make.

Finally I would like to ask for your help. Next year is the Federation's 20th year and we want to celebrate. We're currently coming up with lots of ideas about how we could celebrate all that we've achieved over the past 20 years but would love to hear from all of you – our members, friends and supporters – about what you think would be a fitting way to mark our anniversary. Please send, phone or email your ideas to the office.

Betty Stevenson
Convenor, Edinburgh Tenants Federation

Wanted!

Tenants Voice needs your stories and news about your groups, your letters and photos.

If you've an idea for an article, we can help you turn that into a story that's shared with around 4000 other tenants, staff and decision-makers.

Contact Nikki on 0131 475 2509 or email nikki@edinburghtenants.org.uk to talk about what your group's up to.

Dates for Your Diaries

20 November

Annual Quiz Night:

Minto Hotel, Minto Street, 7pm

Call the Federation Office on 0131 475 2509 to book a place

30 November

High Flats Group: Birnies Court, 7pm

4 December

Shakti Women's Aid AGM & Seminar: Pollock Halls, Edinburgh, 9am – 4.30pm

More details from Shakti, telephone 0131 475 2399 or email info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk

2010

27 January

Repairs Group: Norton Park, 7pm

1 February

Federation Meeting: venue to be confirmed, 7pm

15 February

High Flats Group: Birnies Court, 7pm

3 March

Repairs Group: Norton Park, 7pm

For details of any of these meetings please contact the Federation Office

Join us on Facebook

There are apparently 300,000 people along the M8 corridor who have joined the social networking site Facebook. Edinburgh Tenants Federation has a page there too, so if you're on Facebook why don't you come and join us? Either look us up on Facebook via the 'search' tool or go to the front

page of our website at www.edinburghtenants.org.uk and click the button there.

It's still early days, but over time this page will include our events and activities, there's a wall for posting messages, and discussion boards where you can swap ideas with other users. Why not come and take a look?



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 18 December 2009.

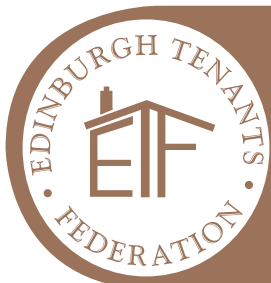
Something to think about

“When someone says “That’s a good question” you can be sure it’s a lot better than the answer you’re going to get.”

Anonymous

“You may never know what results come of your action, but if you do nothing there will be no result”

Mahatma Gandhi



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

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of ETF.