

# Tenants Voice

December 2022 - Issue 117



EDINBURGH TENANTS  
FEDERATION

## **ETF's AGM – A celebration of the work of the Federation**

It had been a long time coming, but ETF's first face-to-face Annual General Meeting (AGM) since before lockdown, held on Friday 4th November 2022 at Boroughmuir Rugby Club has been hailed a huge success. Here's a flavour of what took place on a night to remember for ETF:

The Federation's Convenor Betty Stone was delighted to welcome members from across the city to the event. A huge welcome was given to guest speaker, City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC's) Lord Provost, Councillor Robert Aldridge.

The Lord Provost congratulated the Federation on all the great work it achieves on behalf of the city's tenants and shared his views on the importance of warm, safe, affordable housing in ensuring individuals and families alike have good quality lives and experiences. ETF presented a cheque for £1,000 to the Lord Provost for CEC's OneCity Trust.

Jaslin Bhagrath from ETF's Accountants, Henderson Loggie presented the annual audited accounts, once again giving the Federation a clean financial bill of health.

A presentation of the Federation's Annual Report, agreed changes to the constitution and election of the Executive Committee concluded the formal proceedings, with the evening finishing off with some lovely food, music and dancing.

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Thanks again to everyone who took part in ETF's AGM and we thoroughly enjoyed celebrating a momentous year for the Federation with you all.

### **Comments, compliments, complaints**

Please give us feedback on this publication. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints we would like to know. Just contact us at the ETF office.



*The Lord Provost spoke very highly of the work of ETF*



*ETF's Convenor Betty Stone presenting a cheque to the Lord Provost for CEC's OneCity Trust*



*ETF's Executive Committee Members with the Lord Provost*

## Getting to Know You

Would you like to meet with Edinburgh's Councillors to discuss issues important to tenants? ETF is pleased to invite our local Councillors to a "Getting To Know You" discussion with Federation Members as part of our 2023 calendar of member meetings and events. The discussion will take place on **Tuesday 24th January 2023, 7.00pm-9.00pm, European Room, City Chambers, Royal Mile**. Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm onwards.

We hope the session will provide an opportunity to share issues, views and ideas for housing across the city and increase awareness of the vital role ETF plays in supporting tenants to find out more about and influence housing service decision making.

Following our recent members' meeting, topics which will be discussed include:

- Rents and Value for Money
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Housing Investment Needs and Targets
- Voids and Allocations
- New Build Housing.

We would be grateful if you can confirm your attendance by **Tuesday 16th January 2023**. Please use public transport where possible. Assistance with transport and childcare may be available on request. For bookings contact 0131 475 2509 or email [info@edinburghtenants.org.uk](mailto:info@edinburghtenants.org.uk).



# Locality Teams and Local Group Updates

Here's a flavour of what ETF's EC members and local groups have been up to over the past few months.

## North West Locality Report - Birnies Court

Steady progress continues to be made with regards to the regeneration in the north area. I have been particularly impressed with Gunnet Court, which is now complete and is looking really good. The work on May Court will hopefully be finished soon and I'm looking forward to seeing the final result.

I still attend regular meetings with CEC Officers in Birnies Court Community Room and it's good to be kept up to date with what is happening.

I would like to give special praise to the Concierge staff for all their hard work over the last few months and we really appreciate everything they do.

**Betty Stone**



## Gateside Tenants and Residents Association



It certainly has been a busy few months here in Gateside. I recently held a meeting with my local MSP, Alex Cole-Hamilton, regarding the utility bills that residents are receiving. I expressed my concern that many residents simply can't afford to pay their bills and Alex agreed to take our concerns back to the Scottish Parliament.

A site meeting with the contractor regarding the construction of the Hub was held a couple of months ago. The work should start shortly, but will not be completed until after Christmas as Scottish Water has still to connect the supply.

Elsewhere, we have been working with CEC's Housing Service and others to address local housing and community issues.

One of our great achievements is the fun activities we organise for local children and young people to celebrate all events in the annual calendar.

**Paul Vaughan**

## South East Locality Report - Moredun Multis and Maisonettes Residents Association

It's been a busy and exciting few months for us here in Moredun. Work has started on improvements to our allotments and we have been working with landscape artists, a community artist, CEC Officers, Elected Members, ETF and TIS to seek ideas from the wider community on how the green space could look in the future and what equipment and activities it can be used for. The green space within Moredun is very important to the local community and it's great to see ongoing discussions taking place to try and retain our local green space.

We also continue to hold regular meetings with CEC Officers within Housing Service to ensure improvements take place within our flats and address repairs issues.

**Robyn Kane**



*The green space is very important to the people of Moredun.*



## Wharton Square Residents Group

We are very pleased to report that we successfully applied for £8,500 from the Hillcrest Foundation to lease, insure and maintain a wall mounted Defibrillator. A contribution of £500 from our group funds will support training for some of our tenants on how to use it.

The children's gardening club was delighted with its first harvest of beetroot and as a result they plan to plant more vegetables. This was all made possible by a grant from Hillcrest Therapeutic Gardeners and we would like to thank them for their very generous donation.

Terry Kirby



## News from CEC

### Introducing Sarah Burns

Thank you to our colleagues at ETF for the opportunity to introduce myself in this issue of *Tenants' Voice*. I was appointed to the role of Head of Housing Operations within CEC in February 2022 and I'm responsible for the management, repair and maintenance of around 20,000 council homes.



Since starting this job it's become very clear to me just how important it is that we communicate well with our tenants and that we respond appropriately when you have a question or need to report a repair or an issue. I know we don't always get this right but I'm absolutely committed to working with our teams to improve the service we provide, and on the occasions when things do go wrong, that we work hard to put it right.

Our tenants consistently tell us that our repairs service is one of the key areas that really matters to them, that they want to be able to report a repair easily and that we respond promptly. Many of our tenants want to be able to do this over the phone to our Repairs Direct team or face-to-face with a CEC Officer. Others however, would prefer to report repairs online and we've been working hard to make it easier to report problems on our website. Our tenants, or someone on their behalf, can now report a repair 24/7, select an appointment time that suits them and then track, change or cancel the appointment. While we know this is not for everyone, more tenants using our online reporting service frees up the telephone lines to Repairs Direct, so the team there can help those who either don't have online access or prefer to speak to someone. Remember too that you can always walk into any of our Locality Offices (contacts below), or if you live in a multi storey, speak to the Concierge team through your intercom and our team will be happy to help.

Another priority for our service is to get our estate walkabouts going again and we'd love to see more local tenants getting involved. Walkabouts were suspended during the pandemic, but we've been working to get them restarted and we're really keen to have more tenants involved than ever before. It's a great way for you to provide feedback to your local Housing Officer on the environment where you live, to develop ideas for any improvements we could explore and also to meet other tenants that live in your area. If you're interested in getting involved, please contact your local Housing Officer or your Locality Office.

As we head towards the end of 2022 and find ourselves deep in the winter months, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that this is undoubtedly one of the most challenging times that we have all lived through and I know our tenants are feeling the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. CEC's website has a lot of helpful information on where you can find advice and support and there is also information specifically for Council tenants. If you're worried about paying your rent, please seek advice or make contact with your Housing Officer as early as you can. The more outstanding rent builds up the more difficult it is to get back on top of the payments.

That leaves me to wish you well for the festive period and for the year ahead and I hope you are able to enjoy a peaceful time with loved ones.

**Sarah Burns, Head of Housing Operations, CEC**

## Locality Office contacts:

### North East locality office

101 Niddrie Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH16 4DS  
Telephone: 0131 529 3111  
Email: [northeast.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:northeast.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk)

### South West locality office

10 Westside Plaza, Edinburgh, EH14 2ST  
Telephone: 0131 527 3800  
Email: [southwest.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:southwest.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk)

### North West locality office

8 West Pilton Gardens, Edinburgh, EH4 4DP  
Telephone: 0131 529 5050  
Email: [northwest.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:northwest.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk)

### South East locality office

40 Captain's Road, Edinburgh, EH17 8QF  
Telephone: 0131 529 5151  
Email: [southeast.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:southeast.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Links to useful websites:

**Cost of living advice and support** - [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/costofliving)

**Report a repair** - [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/councilhouserepairs](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/councilhouserepairs) or call 0131 200 2345

## Councillor Jane Meagher

As the winter months draw nearer, many Edinburgh residents will rightly be concerned about the cost-of-living crisis and the effect this will have on their lives. For our tenants we recognise that these worries have a real and lasting impact.

We have just launched our annual Tenants' Budget Consultation at <https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/2023-2024-council-housing-survey/> which will guide how CEC spends the money it raises from rental income. In addition to the typical questions on housing, this consultation will also further enquire into the financial challenges facing tenants and the ways in which CEC can best help. The consultation will run until Friday 23rd December 2022.

Rents have been frozen for the last two years due to the impacts of the pandemic. The Scottish Government has recently announced that council rents will remain frozen across Scotland until at least March 2023. At present we do not have clarity on whether this freeze will be extended beyond the Spring.

We are facing extremely challenging times, with rising costs affecting CEC's ability to maintain and invest in housing. Should we have to take the difficult decision to raise rents for council tenants this would be to make homes more energy efficient and consequently help tenants save money, as well as improving the landlord service that we provide.

However, we also recognise that even a small rise could have disastrous consequences for some of our tenants. There can be no doubt that Edinburgh has an affordable housing crisis and that the Scottish Government needs to step in to increase funding so that the Council can provide the warm and affordable homes our tenants deserve.

I would urge anyone who is worried about paying rent to seek advice and make contact with a Housing Officer as early as possible. The Council also has a dedicated 'Cost of Living' webpage at <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cost-living> where you can find advice and support on a wide variety of issues.

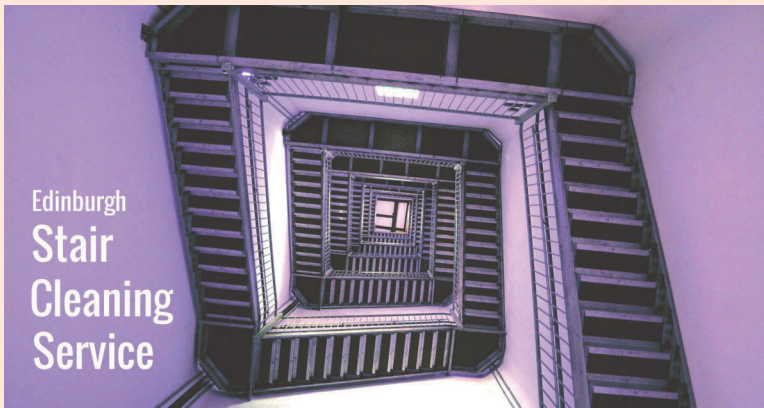
In terms of residents' energy costs there is also significant pressure. One option we're actively looking into is the provision of 'Warm and Welcoming spaces' across the city. A report on this issue was recently passed at CEC's Policy & Sustainability Committee.

Council and other venues such as libraries, museums, churches and galleries will offer free activities for a variety of age groups, providing spaces where people can feel safe, warm and at ease, while being able to access support and advice to help alleviate food and fuel poverty. As soon as we have further details, we'll advertise them as widely as possible.

**Councillor Jane Meagher, Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee Convenor**



## CEC's Stair Cleaning Service



Stair cleaning is provided in most blocks where CEC owns a number of homes. The frequency stairs are cleaned depends on the number of tenants in the stair. For example, if all homes in the stair are Council tenanted the stair is cleaned weekly, if 50% tenants, the stair is cleaned fortnightly, etc. As we head in to winter the service will continue but in very cold weather, stairs will only be swept and not wet mopped to ensure the safety of all residents. If bad weather prevents the stair cleaning teams from getting to your area, the stairs will be cleaned

as soon as possible once the cold snap has passed. When the weather prevents the teams from cleaning, they help in other ways, such as clearing snow and salting paths.

### 'O' on the rota

'O' means that it's the owners' week to clean. Owners – please call or email us if you would like to join the service.

### Back steps

Please make sure you unlock your back door on the day the cleaners attend, if you want the back steps cleaned.

### Service quality or missed cleans

It's important that you tell us as soon as possible on the day of the clean if you're concerned about the quality of the clean carried out or your stair has been missed.

For further information or to make a comment, complaint or suggestion about the Stair Cleaning Service, please call 0131 529 7827 or email [stair.cleaning2@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:stair.cleaning2@edinburgh.gov.uk).

**Sam Reeves, Senior Housing Development Officer, CEC**



## Money Advice

Are you worried about money this winter? Many of us are worried about rent, bills, energy costs, debt and more this winter. These worries can have a knock-on effect on our mental health and wellbeing - including on those around us. So, it's important to know that there's help and advice out there.

CEC has created webpages to help anyone who is struggling access the advice and support they need:

- Debt advice
- Grants and benefit payments
- Help with school costs and nursery fees
- Housing support
- How to save on your energy bills and make your home warmer
- Grants to upgrade your heating and discounts from energy suppliers
- Community cafes, food banks and pantries.



You can find more information on CEC's website at [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/costofliving) or call 0131 200 2360.

**Cori Burnett, Senior Communications Officer, CEC**



# National News

## Update from Shelter Scotland

Everyone is anxious about this winter and how could you not be? The price of electricity, gas and staple foods has increased beyond many people's ability to pay. In that context we were happy to see the Scottish Government take positive action to protect tenants by guiding the emergency Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) Scotland Bill through Holyrood.

However, we know this Bill isn't perfect. We expressed serious concerns about the level of arrears at which social tenants can face eviction proceedings. By setting the level so low, too many social tenants will still be exposed to the risk of losing their home this winter. Social tenants will also be painfully aware that the initial rent freeze ends on the 31st March 2023, the day before social rents would normally increase.

Despite these issues the Bill was an important emergency step in an urgent situation. But the fact remains, there are many people who this Bill won't help and so much more needs to be done. Earlier this year it emerged that 8,635 children in Scotland are stuck in temporary accommodation. That's a record number. To put it in some context, there are more children in Scotland stuck in temporary accommodation than there are primary school pupils in Stirling.

Too often these children are finding themselves stuck in places which are completely unsuitable. We know that spending time in temporary accommodation can have serious negative consequences for children. It affects their physical and mental health while also seriously disrupting their education. Fundamentally they are being denied their right to somewhere safe and secure to call home.

The word "temporary" is also often misleading. We're not talking about a period of a few days or even weeks. On average across Scotland a child will be in temporary accommodation for 289 days. In parts of the country that figure is much higher. Here in Edinburgh, it's 678 days.

Indeed, the overall average time spent in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh is among the highest in Scotland at 449 days. Only Midlothian is higher at 524 days.

The only viable long-term solution to ending Scotland's housing emergency is to urgently increase the supply of social homes. Decades of underinvestment in social housing is what has driven us to this point and led directly to the disgraceful number of children in Scotland with nowhere permanent to call home.

Shelter Scotland will continue to urge the Scottish Government to use all available options to tackle our failing housing and homelessness system by spearheading a new Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan. We're calling on the plan to be focused on three key priorities which have been identified as critical: buy and build 38,500 social homes by 2026, fully fund local authority homelessness services and guarantee the right to a permanent home for everyone who becomes homeless.

Soon acting Finance Secretary John Swinney will publish the Scottish Government's budget for the coming year. He will do so in challenging economic circumstances, but housing must be made a priority.

We've waited too long, seen too many people suffer at the hands of an unfair and unjust housing system to accept any excuse for further delay or deferment. The Deputy First Minister has a chance to make social housing the cornerstone of Scotland's quest for social justice. He absolutely must take it. There is no time for tinkering round the edges, only long-term systemic change can provide the homes and security that Scotland needs.

**Alison Watson, Director of Shelter Scotland**



## Home Energy Scotland

The Scottish Government's national fuel poverty programme, Warmer Homes Scotland, offers energy saving home improvements worth on average £5,000.

Warmer Homes Scotland is for homeowners and private sector tenants struggling to heat their homes and who meet the eligibility requirements. Over 29,000 households have already benefitted since the programme launched, and now, with eligibility criteria recently extended, an additional 110,000 households could benefit.

You can find out more by visiting the Home Energy Scotland website at <https://www.homeenergyscotland.org/> or phone **0808 808 2282**.



## Providing support to the elderly and vulnerable this Christmas



At this time of year many people are looking forward to Christmas, however for others, it brings a sense of anxiety and worry. With rising fuel prices, many people are worried about the costs of heating their home. Support is available through Home Energy Scotland and you can find out more at <https://www.homeenergyscotland.org.uk> or phone 0800 808 2282.

## Feeling overwhelmed?

Anxiety and low mood can impact your social life. Ithrive Edinburgh has mental health and well-being self-help apps, services, activities and advice in one place to help with:

- Anxiety and low moods
- Feelings of loneliness or isolation
- Mindfulness
- Stress
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Healthy eating.



You can find out more at [www.ithriveedinburgh.org.uk](http://www.ithriveedinburgh.org.uk) or call Breathing Space on 0800 83 8587.





# Christmas Quiz

So for a bit of fun and a £30 shopping voucher, why not have a try at our Christmas Quiz. Send your answers in to ETF, Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, Edinburgh EH7 5QY.



1. Which country started the tradition of putting up a Christmas tree?

.....

2. How many ghosts show up in A Christmas Carol? And can you name them?

.....  
.....

3. How many gifts were given in total in 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' song?

.....

4. In which Christmas movie does Tom Hanks play six of the characters? And can you name them?

.....  
.....

5. In which country is it traditional to eat KFC for Christmas dinner?

.....

6. In the movie Love Actually, which character sang 'Christmas Is All Around'? and who played this character?

.....

7. What colour are mistletoe berries?

.....

8. Miracle On 34th Street centres on what real-life department store?

.....

9. Which Christmassy song plays at the end of the 1988 film Die Hard?

.....

10. According to tradition, when should you have your Christmas decorations down by?

.....

11. Traditionally, when should you start making a Christmas pudding?

.....

12. What is the name of the Grinch's dog?

.....

Name: .....

Address: .....



## Keeping safe this Christmas

Christmas is a very special time of year, but it is also full of risks. Candles are a particular danger to the safety of the elderly and they need your help in reducing the number of incidents involving these items. Try and look after your elderly neighbour by being that little bit more vigilant during the cold and severe weather. There has been talk about possible blackouts in the run up to Christmas as a result of gas shortages which only increases the dangers for the elderly in our community.



Even blowing out a candle can be dangerous and there have been instances where someone has bent over to blow out a candle and their long hair has caught fire. It sounds drastic but it's true. What I suggest, is go down to your local bargain store and buy some fake candles and a pack of batteries. There are various types of fake candles, some of which light only when you are near to them, and it's a much safer option than candles.

Another example is to give you neighbour a coloured card and tell them to put it in their window if they need help. Every little bit helps.

Have a great Christmas and New Year and keep safe.

**Davie Thomson, ETF EC member**



## ETF Annual Report

All groups should have received a copy of the Federation's Annual Report for 2021/2022 and is available on our website

<https://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/etf-annual-report-2020-2021/>. If you would like to request an extra copy, or provide feedback on the Annual Report, please email [info@edinburghtenants.org.uk](mailto:info@edinburghtenants.org.uk) or phone 0131 475 2509.

## ETF Membership Renewals

ETF is still accepting both Member Group and Non-Voting Individual applications. If you would like an application form, please contact ETF's Office Manager Mary Callaghan by emailing [mary@edinburghtenants.org.uk](mailto:mary@edinburghtenants.org.uk) or phone 07918 660726.



## ETF Blog

Are you a tenant, employed in the housing sector, enthusiastic about where you live or interested in community development, then why not become a guest blogger? If you're interested in contributing a blog or would like more information, please contact the Federation office on 0131 475 2509 or email [info@edinburghtenants.org.uk](mailto:info@edinburghtenants.org.uk). Some useful hints and tips for writing blogs can be found at <http://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/draft-blog/>.

## Convenor's Report



Welcome to my last Convenor's Report of 2022. It certainly has been a very busy few months with various meetings taking place and it's nice that the majority of meetings are now either blended or face-to-face. Let me first of all start by thanking everyone who attended our AGM at Boroughmuir Rugby Club at the beginning of November. It was great to see so many of you in person and I enjoyed speaking to you all. We're delighted with the very positive feedback we've received from the AGM as well. I would like to thank in particular the guest speaker, the Lord Provost Councillor Robert Aldridge for attending.

As you will have read elsewhere in *Tenants Voice*, CEC is currently consulting on its Annual Budget. This is an extremely important consultation, and I would like to encourage as many CEC tenants as possible to complete it as the responses will help the Council to set its priorities for the coming year and the more responses the better. ETF will also be submitting a response to the consultation.

We also had a motion at the City Chambers on another rent freeze and we sent a letter to the Scottish Parliament on the matter as well. I am hoping I will be meeting Councillors and MSPs to discuss this soon. I hope politicians bear in mind the current cost-of-living crisis when it comes to making their final decisions.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and very best wishes for 2023. I would especially like to thank our Executive Committee and staff for all their hard work over what has been a particularly busy but productive year. I hope everyone has a relaxing time over the festive period and we look forward to seeing you again in 2023.

## Dates for your diary

### **Federation Office Closed for Festive Period:**

The Federation Office closes at 5 p.m. on Tuesday 20th December 2022 and reopens at 9 a.m. on Wednesday 4th January 2023.

### **Deadline for responses to CEC's Budget Consultation**

Friday 23rd December 2022.

### **Federation Meeting – Getting to Know You discussion with CEC Councillors**

Tuesday 24th January 2023, 7.00pm, City Chambers, Royal Mile.

### **About Edinburgh Tenants Federation**

Edinburgh Tenants Federation is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation. Tenants' and residents' groups can become members of ETF and individuals can become Associate Members. Just contact the ETF office on 0131 475 2509 or email [info@edinburghtenants.org.uk](mailto:info@edinburghtenants.org.uk) for more information.

*Tenants Voice* is usually published three times a year and is distributed to nearly 3,000 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. If you would like to contribute an article, please do so by the following deadline:

**April 2023 edition - Monday 13th March 2022**





## Thoughtful Quotes

*'Working hard, and being thoughtful, and generous, and smart; it's a path to a better life.'* - Ashton Kutcher

*'The kinder and more thoughtful a person is, the more kindness they can find in other people.'* - Leo Tolstoy

*'A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.'* - Lao-Tzu

Produced by Edinburgh Tenants Federation,  
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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of ETF.



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