

Tenants Voice

Issue 116 - September 2022



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

Edinburgh Tenants Federation celebrate move to new offices

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) recently relocated to new offices and held a small gathering to celebrate the move. Staff had been working hard over a number of weeks to set up the offices and everyone is delighted with the new premises. ETF are still based in the Norton Park Centre at Albion Road but have moved from the ground floor to new offices on the second floor; so only a short lift ride of a difference.



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The new ETF offices were officially opened by ETF's Convenor Betty Stone; with members of the Federation's Executive Committee (EC) and staff in attendance. Betty commented, *"It gave me great pleasure to open ETF's new offices and celebrate with members of ETF's EC and staff. I'm very impressed with the new office premises and I'm sure both volunteers and staff will enjoy working here."*

ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry commented, *"It's been a long time coming but it's great to finally move into the new offices. They're just so bright and spacious and I know we're really going to enjoy working here. It's the right move for ETF and it certainly is a new era for the Federation."*

Photos courtesy of Robyn Kane photography



ETF's Convenor Betty Stone officially opens the new offices

Annual General Meeting and Social Event



Friday 4th November 2022

7 p.m.

***Boroughmuir Rugby Club, Meggetland,
Meggetland Wynd, Edinburgh, EH14 1XN***

People can attend in-person or join the meeting online.

***Places must be booked in advance. To book a place please email
info@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 0131 475 2509.***

Assistance with transport may be available on request.

Papers for the meeting will be posted out this month and will include application forms for Tenants' and Residents' Groups to become members of ETF and tenants to become Non-Voting Individual Members. Member groups can also nominate a member of their group to join the Federation's Executive Committee who run ETF.

Application and EC nomination forms must be received in the Federation Office by **Friday 14th October 2022** for groups to be eligible to vote at the AGM on **Friday 4th November 2022** and for people to be considered for a place on the Executive Committee.

ETF's First Blended Members' Meeting

Edinburgh Quaker House in Victoria Terrace was the setting on what was a landmark day for ETF as the Federation held its first face-to-face Members' Meeting in nearly two and a half years. Adapting to a blended meeting approach, some delegates were present in the meeting room and others joined the meeting online.



The guest speakers were Debbie McLachlan, Senior Services Manager, Penumbra and Jacqueline Hay, Service Manager, Penumbra. Participants heard about the work that Penumbra carries out to help tenants, who suffer from mental health difficulties, with housing issues. There was also an update on the work that ETF has carried out over the past few months.

ETF's Convenor Betty Stone commented, "It was great to take part in some sort of face-to-face meeting after what has been a very difficult two and a half years. I was very impressed with the level of questions and discussions from attendees both in the room and online. It was good to hear about the excellent work that Penumbra is carrying out and being able to update our members on the work ETF is currently involved in."

ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry commented, "It was great to be able to have our first blended members' meeting. A lot of preparation had gone into planning this type of meeting, but we're delighted with the feedback we've received. We would very much like to thank the staff at the Quaker House for hosting our meeting."

Photos courtesy of Robyn Kane photography

Executive Committee Annual Review Day 2022

The Federation's EC members, along with ETF's Development Worker, Mark Henry, and Sharon Donohoe, Tenants Information Service (TIS) Development Director were delighted to get together at the Edinburgh Conference and Training Centre for their first in-person event since the country went into lockdown in March 2020.



The day allowed the EC to take stock of the challenges, achievements and successes of the last year and identify housing and related issues and priorities for the year ahead.

Using some fun, participative methods, including the "Tree of Life", "Accountability Chart" and "Who's Who on the Federation Bus", members recognised that although

face-to-face meetings have been on hold for some time, the Federation, its members, staff and the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) rose to the challenge and continued to deliver its service, tackle issues and priorities and come together to meet Council Officers, Elected Members and others, all through the online mediums of Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Key Federation successes include:

- A successful transition from in-person to online meetings and activities
- Increased digital skills for the EC and Federation Members
- Continued meetings to influence CEC Housing Services
- Participation in a review of Tenant Participation and Scrutiny with CEC and TIS
- Participation in the development of CEC's Annual Rent Setting paperwork sent to all Council tenants
- Continued communication with tenants, CEC Officers, Elected Members and the Scottish Parliament via newsletters, Annual Report, Annual General Meeting, Open Meetings, as well as digital engagement methods
- Participation in national housing consultations from the Scottish Government.

We look forward to growing our membership and sphere of influence with the Council, Scottish Government, and others in the year ahead.

Hope Award

Hi everyone, my name is Robyn Kane and I'm the current Chairperson of the Moredun Multis and Maisonettes Residents Association. During the week of 20th June 2022, I was awarded the Hope Award from the lovely Community Champions in Morrisons, Moredun.

As the Hope Award is a community-based vote, I am deeply grateful to have been recognised for my work! Receiving any award is an honour but this particular one means a great deal to me as it was voted on by the local Moredun community. I have lived and volunteered in the Moredun area for a large part of my life. Therefore, to be recognised by the local people for all my work is just heart-warming and I'm absolutely flattered to receive this award.

I do hope that I can keep up the momentum that has been building to ensure Moredun is a better place for the community to live in. This is also very personal for me as growing up in the area I watched my grandma and other residents fight to improve the lives and facilities for local people. I want to continue this in her memory and for the people of Moredun. There is a lot of very exciting work taking place in Moredun and I'm really excited to be part of



Robyn receiving her Hope Award from Morrisons

Communication, communication, communication

At present, many City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) tenants, living in the Drylaw area, including myself, have been experiencing ongoing communication problems with Council staff. I have had very little in the way of communication from housing staff and there is an inconsistent approach across the city. I have had tenants in my area come to me and say they've spent the best part of a day trying to phone CEC's Repairs Department to report a repair. Tenants are uncertain of the status of their repair and what is happening.

There are many issues facing tenants such as:

- Dampness in homes
- Stairs not being cleaned properly
- Fly Tipping
- Problems with Door Entry systems
- Dangerous parking.

However, trying to report these issues is challenging as many tenants simply don't know who to report them to and when they do report an issue, there is no response forthcoming. The service may work well in some areas in Edinburgh, but for others, it is challenging. Around 33% of tenants in Edinburgh suffer from literacy problems and they're not able to complete online forms to report any issues. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, many tenants are unable to afford to buy a tablet or an iPad for themselves.

I have been a CEC tenant for many years and I have experienced ongoing communication issues between the tenant and the Council. I can only hope that the new CEC administration will put communication with tenants at the very heart of their decision-making process. Now that offices are reopening and nearly all restrictions lifted, there needs to be more tenant participation after an incredibly difficult and challenging couple of years. Some areas have started local walkabouts, but it is not happening in other areas. Local walkabouts are a great example of a bottom-up approach, with tenants and CEC staff working together to address any issues. There are many ongoing and challenging issues for CEC tenants and better communication and seeing results is a good start.

James Galloway CEC Tenant, Easter Drylaw



Federation Meeting Roundtable discussions with City of Edinburgh Councillors

Edinburgh Tenants Federation is delighted to be hosting an informal Federation Meeting Roundtable discussion with City of Edinburgh Councillors on Wednesday 5th October 2022, 7.00pm-9.00pm, City Chambers, Royal Mile. Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm onwards. This is an opportunity for tenants to talk directly to elected members about the issues that are important to **YOU**, the Federation and your tenants' group.



Please use public transport where possible. Assistance with transport and childcare may be available on request. For bookings contact 07918742468 or email mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk. Bookings must be made by Friday 30th September 2022.

Locality Teams and Local Group Updates

Here's an update on what ETF's EC members and local groups have been up to over the past few months.

North West Locality Reports – Birnies Court

I recently had a meeting with CEC Officers and Contractors who are working on May and Gunnet Courts. I had some issues with them leaving items about after they had completed their shifts, but we managed to iron them out. The work is almost complete in Gunnet and will continue in May Court. There has been a leak from a pipe in Birnies Court which unfortunately is in the fabric of the building, so CEC Officers and Contractors are dealing with this. The building itself is fine and the Concierge are doing a great job and keeping it clean. I would like to thank the Concierge staff for all the work they have done, both before, during and after the pandemic.



Birnies Court

Betty Stone

Gateside Tenants and Residents Association

COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns has had many negative effects on us all and unfortunately our local group did not escape it.

We have been pushing as hard as we can to get the water and drainage going in the Hub, which had been closed for two years because of the pandemic. Although we are pleased we have been allowed to open recently, the delays meant we had to cancel our summer holiday programme. **BUT** look out for future events later in the year!

On a more personal note, we were all deeply saddened to lose our very valued friend Elizabeth McNeil who died whilst on holiday in Australia.

Liz was the group's Treasurer and a dear friend, who was constantly on the go with ideas for the Hub, especially at Christmas time. She enjoyed all that she did in the group, and at her "normal" job, everyone had only good things to say about her.

A group member for four years, Liz did an excellent job and will be sadly missed by us all.

Paul Vaughan

North East Locality Report - Redbraes

After a difficult past couple of years and now that restrictions have been lifted, Redbraes Residents Association was able to arrange a walkabout. We were joined by CEC staff, including Jenifer Lavery, Housing Team Leader, Sam Reeves, Senior Housing Development Officer and Paddy O'Shea, Housing Officer, who were able to see the great work carried out by the residents living in Redbraes. Firstly, they visited the Community Garden which was established around 15 years ago. They then saw what the residents in 19 Redbraes Place built to accommodate their privacy and take advantage of the good weather. The residents reconstructed the drying area to the rear of the building into what is a stunning addition to the old-fashioned drying green. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to visit the original front garden of numbers 12 and 13 Redbraes Grove (pictured above). However, it was still a very interesting walkabout and it was good for CEC staff to see first-hand, all the work the residents have done. Why don't your group take part in walkabouts? It's a first-class way of getting to know your local housing team and it builds good partnership working between tenants and CEC staff.



Davie Thomson

News from Moredun



The green space in Moredun

Two years ago, CEC were in the process of planning to build 188 homes on the beloved Moredunvale green space. This is a very special piece of land for the people living in Moredun and residents decided to take action. After a peaceful protest and a lot of meetings between CEC and the local residents' association Moredun Multis and Maisonettes Residents Association (MMMRA), CEC shelved plans to build homes on the greenspace. Ongoing discussions have been taking place between CEC and MMMRA to decide the best use for the greenspace. It was agreed to hire a community artist from Waveparticle.

During the week beginning 20th June the Waveparticle artist began the process of community engagement by speaking to the residents to see what they wanted and needed from the green space. This was done by setting up a gazebo in a different place each day, chatting with passers-by and making flags to highlight the key areas in the space. At the end of the week the community artist put on a spontaneous flag march. This was a huge success and we are looking forward to seeing what comes next from this work.



The flag march through Moredun

Robyn Kane

Wharton Square Residents Group



All 178 properties at Wharton Square (Hillcrest Homes) are due for inspection by a qualified electrician checking on the property's electrical system. At the same time they will check that the fire protection system complies with the new Scottish Government regulations and is in full working order. Any additional detectors needed or out of date equipment will be fitted or replaced. Hillcrest are on the ball!

Terry Kirby

Update from Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association

On Friday 3rd June the pensioners of Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association held a Jubilee Barbeque at their summer house. It was very well attended and the Association's former Chairperson, Peter Craig was head chef and ensured all the food was cooked properly. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves and it was good to be in each other's company again after what has been a very difficult past two and a half years. We look forward to making more use of the summer house over the next couple of months.

Sue Taylor



Everyone enjoying themselves at the Jubilee Barbeque

News from CEC Craigmillar Week of Action

From Monday 27th June to Friday 1st July 2022, local residents joined partners from Places for People, Manor Estates, Kier Construction, Morrison Construction, Skanska, Ross Quality Surveyors and a range of colleagues from Housing, Waste and Cleansing, and Grounds Maintenance in a Craigmillar Week of Action.

Everyone worked together to give Craigmillar Town Centre, Niddrie House and Greendykes a good summer clean and tidy up with fly tipping removal, litter picking and weeding to community growing areas.

Three commercial skips were filled and numerous trips to the recycling centre made by Council and partner vehicles.

The week ended with a breakfast event hosted by Places for People where volunteers came together to enjoy some food and hot drinks.

Residents looked back on the week saying it was a 'wonderful initiative' and highlighted what can be achieved in a short period of time when everyone lends a helping hand.

Thank you so much to everybody involved.

George Norval, Project Manager, CEC



We were very pleased with the results of the Craigmillar Week of Action

Do you live in High flats?

Blocked waste chutes are a risk to fire safety, it also costs significant amounts of money to have choked chutes cleared by contractors.

In the 12 months to April 2022, the Council spent almost £40k clearing bin chutes throughout the city, money that could be better spent in building repairs or upgrades.

Please help keep your chutes safe and reliable by only disposing of small bags or items of household waste down the chutes. For larger items, please place these directly into the communal bins. With your help, we can keep residents safe and reduce costs. Thank you!



George Norval, Project Manager, CEC

Councillor Mandy Watt

You may already be aware that there have been a few changes at the Council since the last time I wrote for *Tenants' Voice*.



Councillor Mandy Watt

There's a new Convenor of the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, Councillor Jane Meagher and I'll be working with her to take forward the housing policies that tenants have said they want.

Building new CEC owned homes is a priority, with a big increase to previous plans that will see 25,000 more CEC homes over the next ten years. We'll make more of these homes three and four bedroom to meet the needs of families.

We'll look again at how tenancies are allocated and, when new homes become available, priority that should be given to Council tenants who are overcrowded or need an accessible home.

The new homes will be designed to be energy efficient to help keep bills for hot water and heating as low as possible. We'll upgrade existing homes as quickly as possible, to help reduce tenants' energy bills.

Improving the Repairs Service is a challenge that we'll get started on right away. Too many repairs are contracted out, which means that our tenants don't get a joined-up service. Our plan is to have a dedicated internal repair team with qualified tradespeople, apprentices, call handlers and surveyors. We won't be able to transform the service immediately, but we'll keep improving it until it's one of the best in the country.



Councillor Jane Meagher

Despite our ambitious plans for new CEC homes, we need more homes now. So, we'll press ahead with plans to make Edinburgh a short-term let control zone. This will bring hundreds of houses being used for tourists back to being homes for residents. There are lots of hotels in our city, so there will still be plenty of places for visitors to stay.

I hope that you've found this update interesting. ETF will pass on to me any comments, concerns and questions that you have, so please don't hesitate to get in touch and I'll do my best to reply as quickly as I can.

Councillor Mandy Watt, Deputy Leader, CEC

National News

ETF's Convenor gives evidence to Scottish Parliament Committee

ETF's Convenor Betty Stone recently gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee at the Scottish Parliament. The evidence session looked at low income and debt problems with representatives from other organisations such as Shelter Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland and Aberlour also present.

ETF's Convenor Betty Stone commented *"I was more than happy to speak at the Social Justice and Social Security Committee meeting. I have seen first-hand the impact that debt has had on tenants across Edinburgh, particularly over the last few years due to the pandemic and the increased cost of living. By highlighting these issues, I hope that more support will be made available to tenants who are struggling, not just in Edinburgh but across the whole country. I am proud of the work that ETF has done to help tenants in Edinburgh, who are struggling with debt problems and we will continue to work with the City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Parliament to address these issues."*



ETF's Betty Stone giving evidence



Scottish Housing Day

Scottish Housing Day will take place on Wednesday 14th September 2022 and this year's topic will be on sustainable housing. ETF will be hosting a Coffee Morning on **Wednesday 14th September 2022, 10.00am-12.00pm, Norton Park Conference Centre, Centre, 57 Albion Road**. There will be a discussion about the role of sustainable housing over the coming years. If you would be interested in attending, please email ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry at mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 07918 742468.

You can find out more about Scottish Housing Day 2022 at <http://www.scottishhousingday.co.uk/>.

ETF response to a New deal for Tenants consultation



ETF recently responded to the Scottish Government's consultation, 'A New Deal for Tenants'. You can download a copy of the response at <https://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/etf-response-to-a-new-deal-for-tenants-consultation-april-2022/>.

If you would like a paper copy of ETF's response, please contact ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry at mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 07918742468.

The Private Rented Sector and Poverty

Housing for most people is the largest expense in each month. It's an expense so important that we calculate poverty levels based on before and after the cost of our homes.



Scotland has lower poverty rates compared to the rest of the UK after housing costs in part due to our greater provision of social housing. Despite this, Joseph Rowntree Foundation have estimated that 50,000 children in Scotland are in poverty due to the cost of housing alone. A large part of this is the lack of availability of affordable social housing. Therefore, when policy makers and indeed many third sector organisations talk about the role that housing plays in solving poverty, we focus on ensuring that we build more social homes. However, until a substantial provision of social housing is built, with the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy detailing this, we are left with limited social housing stock and an over-reliance on an expensive and comparatively unregulated private rented sector (PRS).

The PRS has grown exponentially in the past 20 years accounting for 14% of housing tenure in 2019 compared to 5% in 1999. Whilst it has grown, it has also become increasingly more expensive with rents in Scotland increasing by 25% since 2010, 1.5% above inflation, with areas such as the Lothians and Greater Glasgow witnessing rent increases by as much as 41.7% and 41.4% for a two bed property respectively. Wages in contrast are estimated to be the same value in real terms in 2026 as they were in 2008 evidencing two decades of real wage stagnation and benefits face a similar year upon year freeze equating to real term cuts. In short, more and more of people's income is being swept up by rent, pulling more and more people into poverty. In the context of the current cost of living crisis, this issue is becoming more pressing and demands addressing.

In the long term the solution is to build more affordable houses, particular in the social sector. The Scottish Government have committed to this in their ambitious Housing to 2040 strategy by committing to building at least 70,000 social homes by 2030. However, housing costs are driving people into poverty now, particularly in the private sector, and this requires action in the interim.

In order to begin to make rents affordable the Scottish Government must speed up the provision of social housing and expand criteria and provision for discretionary housing payments. During the process of designing the co-agreement's promised system of rent controls by 2025, it must ensure that whichever system considers income levels of tenants in the local area in both wages and social security payments. Reform to housing must link into the wider work around a minimum income guarantee, and prominently.

In order to solve poverty, we need all sectors to work together to bring down costs and boost incomes. It isn't enough to simply be doing 'better than England' regarding poverty rates after housing. The Scottish Government need to ensure that our homes provide security and safety, not pull people further into poverty.

1 Delivering for families? JRF and Save the Children's response to Best Start, Bright Futures the Scottish Government's second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children. 2022.

2 Tenure of household by year (Scotland). Scottish Household Survey. 2019.

3 Private Sector Rent Statistics, Scotland, 2010-2021. Scottish Government. 2021.

4 Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021. Institute for Fiscal Studies. 2021.

5 Housing to 2040. Scottish Government. 2021.

Ashley McLean, Policy and Parliamentary Officer, Poverty Alliance

Convenor's Report

I was delighted to open our new office in Norton Park recently. It has a lovely bright outlook and the staff and volunteers are more than happy with it. We have been particularly busy taking part in blended meetings, including EC Meetings and the recent Members' Meeting which took place at Edinburgh Quaker House. You have the option of taking part in future meetings either face-to-face or joining online if that is your preference.



The Federation would like to congratulate EC member Robyn Kane on her award from Morrisons. It's a thoroughly deserved award and well-done Robyn. Although more Tenants' and Residents' groups are holding meetings, a priority for us in the coming year will be to set up more groups and revitalise our existing ones.

We are in the process of planning our forthcoming AGM and you will find more details about the event elsewhere in Tenants Voice. I would like to remind the groups to fill in their membership renewal forms when they receive them and any other groups out there that wish to become members, please get in touch. We hope to see you at our AGM.

I would like to congratulate all the new Councillors who have been elected to sit on the Council and we look forward to working with each of the political parties within the Council in the coming year. I would also like to congratulate the new Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant of the City of Edinburgh, Councillor Robert Aldridge. It's very well deserved.

Dates for your diary

ETF Scottish Housing Day Coffee Morning

Wednesday 14th September 2022, 10.00am-12.00pm, Norton Park Conference Centre, 57 Albion Road.

Public Holiday – Federation Office Closed

Monday 19th September 2022

Federation Meeting

Wednesday 5th October 2022, 7.00pm, City Chambers, Royal Mile.

Annual General Meeting important dates – to be confirmed before publiciation

Friday 14th October 2022 - Deadline for membership and EC applications

Friday 4th November 2022, 7 p.m. Annual General Meeting and social event, Boroughmuir Rugby Club, Meggetland, Meggetland Wynd, Edinburgh, EH14 1XN



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 for more information

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.

Copy deadline

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: **November 2022 edition** - Monday 17th October 2022.

Thoughtful Quotes

'The world is changed by your example not by your opinion.'
- Paul Coelho

'Never be ashamed to say, I'm worn out, I've had enough, I need some time to myself. That isn't being selfish, that isn't being weak, that's being human.'
- Topher Kearby

'Today I want you to think about all that you are instead of all that you are not.' - Unknown

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



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