

Tenants Voice

Issue 115 - April 2022



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

Remembering Maud Wylie

Everyone at Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) is still coming to terms with the passing of the Federation's Vice Convenor Maud Wylie. A dedicated community activist and an ETF stalwart, Maud always made sure that tenants had their say in decisions that affected them. Maud served on the Federation's Executive Committee (EC) for many years, firstly as an ordinary member, then as Secretary and most recently Vice Convenor.

She was one of the original Tenant Led Inspectors (TLIs), who's work has been recognised by the Scottish Housing Regulator 'as a method of good practice in tenant scrutiny'. Her knowledge of TLIs was invaluable and she eventually helped to train new inspectors. She was a regular attendee of the ETF High Flats Group Meetings and was a member of the Federation's Sheltered Housing Liaison Group.

Maud was also very actively involved in her local area of Wester Hailes, where she served as Chair of the Hailesland Park Neighbourhood Council and the South West Area Board. Maud played a huge role in ensuring various housing improvements were made for tenants living in the Wester Hailes and surrounding areas.

Maud was extremely kind, well liked and hugely respected by ETF members as well as City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) staff and Councillors. ETF's Convenor Betty Stone commented, *"My memories of Maud go back a long way as we worked very closely together for over twenty years not just as a colleague but as a very dear friend. I will personally miss her very much. To be able to talk to Maud two days before she passed will remain with me forever."*

Sam Reeves, Senior Housing Development Officer, CEC commented, *"I worked with Maud for many years, particularly on TLIs. She was very committed to improving housing conditions and services for tenants and spent much of her time working on tenants' behalf. During the TLIs, Maud kept us all in line as well as entertained and well looked after with endless cups of tea at the community flat in Hailesland Park. Condolences to all her family. She will be very sadly missed."*

Councillor Denis Dixon commented *"I have many fond memories of working with Maud during 2012-17 when Hailesland was part of my ward. She was a lovely lady. I was so sad to hear that Maud had passed on. She will be missed by many."*

Maud will be very sadly missed by everyone who has worked with her at ETF over the years.



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Update from ETF

As restrictions continue to ease, it's nice to be able to think about returning to some sort of normality over the coming weeks and months. However at present, the Federation's Office remains closed to ensure the ongoing safety of both service users and staff. Nonetheless, ETF continues to operate on a daily basis and staff can be contacted via phone on 0131 475 2509 or email info@edinburghtenants.org.uk. We will continue to take the necessary advice from the Scottish Government and the Albion Trust and we'll provide a further update soon on ETF's plans to return to the office.



Rent Freeze

ETF representatives are happy that CEC has agreed to a rent freeze for all Council tenants for the coming year. Due to the fact that a large number of tenants are struggling to pay their rent, this is definitely the correct decision and will provide a bit of respite for many tenants.



ETF's Convenor Betty Stone had previously met online with representatives from each of the political parties to explain the Federation's issues and concerns. Although ETF representatives are concerned about the impact that a 3% Council Tax increase will have, we are pleased that CEC has started to put measures in place to help tenants most in need. ETF will continue to work with CEC Officers and Officials to ensure that support is available and will look at different ways to provide the necessary assistance to tenants that are struggling.

ETF Members' Meeting

'An Update on City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC's) Repairs Service and future plans!' was the topic at ETF's Members' Meeting held on Wednesday 9th March 2022. Repairs is a very important topic for Edinburgh's tenants and as a result there were some interesting and honest discussions throughout the meeting.

Willie Gillhooly, Acting Housing Property Manager, CEC gave an update on the current work being carried out by CEC's Repairs Service, including future plans. This was followed by a question and answer session which allowed attendees to query CEC's plans in more detail.

ETF's Convenor Betty Stone commented, "We would like to thank Willie for attending the Federation Meeting and for giving an update on the proposed changes to CEC's Repairs Service. We would also like to thank CEC for introducing the new structures and ensuring there are designated staff who will be leading on the changes across each of the localities in Edinburgh. This is something that ETF has long campaigned for and I believe tenants will see changes for the better over the long term."



ETF - Its aims, success and how it has been achieved

Established in 1990 by CEC tenants, ETF has seen many changes over the years, including the quality and standard of housing within Edinburgh. A combination of more parks, open spaces, environmental changes and community support have enhanced the quality of life within the city. This has been achieved in part by setting up tenants' and residents' groups, which builds up a relationship between the tenant and the landlord. It was the start of 'Tenant Participation' and this initiative has increased not just here in Edinburgh, but throughout the country. ETF has won many awards throughout the years, which highlight the benefits of Tenant Participation.

Recent demand for social housing in Edinburgh has outstripped supply, which has created issues such as homelessness and overcrowding. This was a problem before lockdown, but it has become even more of an issue and ETF has raised this with CEC Officers, Councillors, MSPs and organisations such as Shelter and the Poverty Alliance.

As we are beginning to emerge from lockdown, you can support ETF by becoming a member and/or set up a Tenants' and Residents' Group. There are experienced staff working at ETF who can provide the necessary support to do this. If you're interested, why not join our mailing list? The decision is yours but you will be joining a group of likeminded tenants and you can contribute your ideas. You can take part in walkabouts within your area and meet the team of officers dealing with the issues within your area. You can decide how much you wish to be involved. Our phone number is 0131 475 2509, our email address is info@edinburghtenants.org.uk and our website address is www.edinburghtenants.org.uk. You can also find out more on our social media channels Twitter and Facebook @EdinburghTenant.



Davie Thomson, Secretary ETF's EC

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.



Birnies Court

North West Locality Reports – Birnies Court

The work on the refurbishment of Gunnet and May Courts is ongoing which is terrific as it has been a long time coming. When the work has been completed in both buildings, it will be the turn of Oscars and Inchmickery Courts to be refurbished. The work in Fidra Court has been completed, which included the roof and the main water stacks in the building. Ongoing work is still taking place in Birnies Court with tenants being kept constantly informed of progress.

Betty Stone

Gateside

Gateside Tenants and Residents Association have been working hard to have the drains and fresh water supply installed in the community hub, but we are struggling to have this finalised. Scottish Water have been asking CEC Officers for information on plans for pipe sizes. However it has proven to be quite difficult to receive replies from CEC and as a result we don't know how near we are to having this completed.

CEC have now resumed completing repairs and are carrying out some general tidying up around the area. This includes cutting back overgrown shrubs and trimming back trees.

We now have a preservation order on seven fir trees within Gateside as residents in the private estate complained that the pine needles were making a mess in their gardens and wanted the trees removed. I had to intervene as I didn't think it was right to just cut down trees.

Paul Vaughan

Wharton Square Residents Group

Our affordable development consists of 176 units; an even mix of social rent and mid-market rent. Wharton Square Residents Group is a registered, constituted group recognised by our Registered Social Landlord (RSL) Hillcrest Homes. Since the development was built nine years ago, there have been two empty spaces for commercial let on the ground floor. As a community we asked for this to be used as a community area but were constantly refused. We have now learned that planning permission has been granted for two wheelchair adapted flats for social rent, with work to start in 2023. That is good news as long as they are allocated to wheelchair users.



Wharton Square

Also on the ground floor we have a children's nursery which has been empty since the beginning of the pandemic. We are led to believe that a new 10 year lease is about to be signed, but should that not come to fruition, we will be asking for the space to be used as a community area. Our RSL mission statement is "Helping people live better lives" with a vision "to contribute to building sustainable communities" and hopefully this will be put into practice.

The Committee are keen to investigate the possibility of acquiring a wall mounted Defibrillator for the common good of all tenants. This is an expensive item which will cost around £1500-£2000. If our RSL is unable to provide this piece of equipment, then we will have to raise funds. If anyone has any experience about fund raising, and is willing to advise the group, please contact me through ETF.

On a "Green Fingred" note our children's gardening club will meet once a month starting sometime in April, compost and tools are on site and vouchers for new plants are in hand.

Terry Kirby

Update from Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association



Willowbrae and Duddingston's summer house

We're very encouraged that work on Northfield Drive/Grove project should start this month, but we have no date for completion yet. We've been informed that part of the Neighbourhood Environmental Projects will involve funding for Defibrillators in the area, which are really needed.

Unfortunately due to the cold weather, the committee hasn't been able to use our summer house this year. However as the weather improves, we're looking forward to holding more events here as the months progress and the weather becomes milder.

Sue Taylor

News from CEC

CEC Budget Consultation

On 24th February 2022, CEC set its budget for the coming financial year, which runs from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. Many of you will already be aware that the rent increase for your home was confirmed at zero – a rent freeze – which had been requested with considerable force by ETF's Convenor Betty Stone. I certainly found her points persuasive this year. For many tenants, prices for almost everything have risen and you've had no opportunity yet to seek a pay rise that might go some way towards covering the higher cost of food, council tax and bills for gas and electricity. An increase in rent, even just 1.8% for investment in your homes, would be unaffordable.



Councillor Mandy Watt

We looked at the Housing Revenue and Housing Capital budgets again and made the difficult decision not to try to catch up immediately on the delays to building new homes that the pandemic caused. That decision means we can freeze rents this year.

We're still planning to invest £850million in existing homes. Energy efficiency measures will be a priority, resulting in warmer homes that are cheaper to heat. We'll continue with improvements inside your homes too and also spend money on communal and surrounding areas. We'll be investing in better bin stores, playparks, community growing spaces, benches, landscaping and planting. We're hoping these improvements will give residents the chance to enjoy outdoor spaces that are safe and welcoming.

Other Help for Households

For many tenants, the rent freeze won't be enough to prevent hardship caused by the cost of living crisis. So, in our General Budget, we made the following provisions:

- £100 payment per child to parents with a financial entitlement to free school meals. We are planning to include the payment with the Easter Free School Meals payment at the end of March. For most people, this will be paid directly into their bank account, with a small number receiving a paypoint electronic voucher that can be redeemed for cash.
- £150 payment will be made to approximately 33,000 households who are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. This will be paid directly into bank accounts. We hope to have this underway by the end of April but it may take a little longer because details will need to be checked.

There should be no need to make an application for these funds if CEC already has your details. We are also progressing a general Council Tax credit of £150. This is more complicated to set up because it will benefit around 130,000 households in Edinburgh. We are currently finalising arrangements and will announce the details when this work is completed. We hope to be able to contact residents about this by the end of March and to have information on CEC's website about all of these funds as soon as the details have been finalised.

We've also set aside around £450,000 for a crisis grant fund and £1,100,000 for other measures to provide food, help with managing gas and electricity bills and to give advice to people about how to maximise their income.

I hope you've found this budget update useful and that I've managed to explain all the support there will be in a helpful way. ETF will pass on to me any comments, concerns or 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, Vice Convenor, Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

Working to improve services – Housing Service Improvement Plan Update

Work is continuing to improve all areas of the housing service, from letting homes, looking after tenancies and improving neighbourhoods. The Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP) was created to deliver positive long-term change to our services, with key aims to improve performance, increase tenant satisfaction and ensure value for money. Current key areas of work include:

- Making our website easier to use by creating a new CEC tenant hub. This is bringing together all tenant related advice and the services you use into one place. This will make it quicker and easier to access the information you need;
- Speaking to tenants and other service users to identify how we can work together to improve services. Currently there is engagement with officers, tenants, elected members and community representatives on opportunities to improve the way local neighbourhood environment projects are delivered;
- Making it easier to tell us when things go wrong;
- A range of ICT improvements, including the development of a new Asset Management system to help us plan for future improvements to your home.

Work across the repairs service continues to be a key focus of the HSIP. We know this remains an important priority for tenants and some of the current areas of work on this include:

- Improving how tradespeople report and organise extra repair work when they are in your home;
- Improved online forms. Giving tenants the option to organise repairs quickly and easily online if they wish to do so;
- How we work with tenants who are experiencing issues with dampness, mould or condensation. We are focusing on improving the communications around this and making sure all issues are fully resolved;
- As part of the broader work on this, a pilot will be launched this summer with a sample of tenants across the city to install sensors in CEC homes. This will allow us to monitor for early signs of damp, mould and condensation. These sensors will help us to detect and fix problems early before they impact tenants and their homes.

Ways to report a repair issue:

Online: www.edinburgh.gov.uk/repairsdirect

Email: RepairsDirect@edinburgh.gov.uk

Phone: 0131 200 2345 / 0131 200 2000 (evenings, weekends and bank holidays)

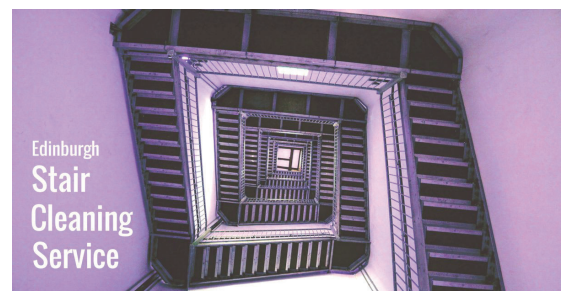
Phillip McAusland and Robyn Barrie, Project Managers, CEC

Your Stair Cleaning Service

A new contract has been put in place for stair cleaning in low rise Council tenements in Edinburgh. The contract started on 1st September 2021.

Please help us keep an eye on the service by providing feedback on the cleaning standard:

- Return the feedback form if you receive one through your door;
- Complete the online feedback form; <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/staircleanform>;
- Email stair.cleaning2@edinburgh.gov.uk;
- Call 0131 529 6695.



The stair cleaning service helps tenants and other residents to keep their common stairs clean and deals quickly with emergency cleans.

Each time the cleaners attend they should:

- Sweep and remove dust and litter from hard floor surfaces;
- Use a spray to clean and disinfect;
- Wet scrub stairs, landings and deck access areas when required;
- Wipe down the handrails and window ledges;
- Sweep / wash the front and back steps.



Please note walls, windows and the stair spindles are not included in the clean.

All residents have a responsibility to keep their common areas clean and tidy. Private owners in stairs where CEC tenants receive the service are also able to join the service - the more properties there are in the service in your stair, the more frequent the cleaning.

If you have any queries, please contact the Stair Cleaning Team using the contact details above.

Please help us to improve the stair cleaning service by giving us your answers to the questions below

Email: StairCleaning2@edinburgh.gov.uk;

Call: 0131 529 6695 or;

Write to:

Freepost Plus RRJT RUGR HHZB, Stair Cleaning Services, The City of Edinburgh Council, G5 Waverley Court, 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh. EH8 8BG (you do not need a stamp)

1) *The last time the cleaning company cleaned your stair did they:*

Lift the mats	Yes/No	Sweep down the stair	Yes/No
Dispose of dust/debris	Yes/No	Clean the stairway	Yes/No
Mop dry the stair	Yes/No	Wipe down the handrails	Yes/No
Sweep & mop front and back stairs	Yes/No	Wipe down window ledges	Yes/No

2) *How satisfied were you with the last clean carried out by the stair cleaning service?*

Very satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

3) *Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the stair cleaning service?*

Thank you for providing your feedback, which will help shape future service improvements.

If you would like to be entered into a prize draw for a chance to win £40 of shopping vouchers, please provide us with your contact details (you must be a Council tenant)

We will need the following details: Name, Address, Contact number (optional), Email (optional)

We will only use your personal data for the purpose of providing the stair cleaning service. Learn more about the City of Edinburgh Council data protection arrangements at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/privacy.

Sam Reeves, Senior Housing Development Officer, City of Edinburgh Council

National News

A word with Patrick Harvie, MSP



Patrick Harvie, MSP

Since I took up my role as Minister for Tenants' Rights last year, I have hugely enjoyed meeting with tenants and residents and learning more about the work going on to improve and enhance housing and communities. As we continue to move out of the pandemic and look forward, it is as vital as ever – perhaps even more so – that tenants and residents are at the forefront of shaping the future of housing in Scotland.

Housing to 2040, published in March last year, set out a vision for housing in Scotland to 2040 and a route map to deliver the Scottish Government's ambition for everyone to have a safe, good quality and affordable home that meets their needs in the place they want to be. It also committed to delivering a new Rented Sector Strategy – informed by the views of tenants – to improve accessibility, affordability and standards across the whole of the rented sector in Scotland.

Building on this, last August's shared policy programme agreed between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party set out a commitment to establish a new deal for tenants in Scotland. Learning from the impact of the pandemic, the aim of the new deal is for tenants, whether they rent from a council, a housing association or a private landlord, to have the freedom to turn a house into a home, to be better protected from eviction, to challenge excessive rents and to protect their rights to housing.

The Scottish Government's proposals are set out in the A New Deal for Tenants – draft strategy <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-deal-tenants-draft-strategy-consultation-paper/> which was published for public consultation on 20 December 2021. The consultation will run until Friday 15th April 2022, and I am keen to hear the views of anyone with an interest in the strategy consultation paper – particularly tenants and landlords.

I hope as many of you as possible will share your views and suggestions and would encourage people to respond to the consultation, which is available on the Scottish Government website. Comments received in response to the consultation will inform the development of the final version of the strategy which the Scottish Government aims to publish by the end of 2022.

The pandemic has also shown us just how essential a good quality home is and the Scottish Social Housing Charter supports this by setting out the outcomes and standards social landlords should be achieving. When the Charter was first developed in 2012 it was an important milestone for social housing policy in that it set out in clear and plain language the outcomes and standards that all social landlords should be achieving in their housing activities for their tenants and other customers.

We consulted on a revised Charter last year and I would like to thank ETF for responding to this. The general feedback has been that the Charter continues to be of relevance and value. Parliament is currently considering the revised Charter and after it has been approved we will be promoting the new Charter to tenants and landlords.

I hope this gives a flavour of the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring tenants and residents have a real say and stake in the national issues that affect them and their communities.

Patrick Harvie, Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights

Open Letter to Rishi Sunak, MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer

Last month, ETF supported the Poverty Alliance by joining more than 100 organisations from across the UK in writing to Chancellor @RishiSunak urging him to use his Spring Statement to scrap the unjust benefit cap. We must #ScrapTheCap to #MeetTheNeed.



Lothians' Improving the Cancer Journey Service

If you are living in Edinburgh and the Lothians and have been affected by cancer, Improving the Cancer Journey Service is here to help you live as well as possible. The service can meet with you to discuss what matters to you and help you get the right support.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be overwhelming and many people don't know where to go for support. Here are some of the aspects the service can help with:

- Money or housing worries;
- Work;
- Caring responsibilities;
- Physical concerns;
- Emotional Concerns;
- Other types of support.



To find out more about how the service can help, please contact 07977 307 286/07929 784 315 or email loth.icj@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk.

Utilita

Utilita is a pay as you go energy provider that works with social landlords across the UK. As part of its work with CEC, Utilita is providing funding to help support community-based projects. One of the first projects included planting trees in a green space at Firrhill Crescent, in South West Edinburgh. Three beautiful birch trees and three cherry trees were bought and planted by CEC to benefit future generations.



Plans are also underway to provide new computers to sheltered housing residents and community event equipment to a community group in North East Edinburgh. What about your area? Do you have ideas for a community project that would benefit tenants? If so, please phone 0131 529 7805 or email tenant.panel@edinburgh.gov.uk.

A New Deal for Tenants

The Scottish Government has published a consultation paper on a new deal for tenants which aims to deliver stronger tenants' rights, greater protection against eviction and access to higher quality, more affordable and greener housing.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

The new policies, outlined in the Draft Rented Sector Strategy, are intended to help shape a fairer rented sector that meets the needs of tenants and welcomes responsible landlords.

The proposals, which form part of the Housing to 2040 strategy published in March 2021, include:

- Increasing penalties for illegal evictions and stronger enforcement;
- Restricting evictions during winter;
- Giving tenants greater flexibility to personalise their homes and keep pets;
- Developing a national system of rent controls for the private rented sector;
- Introducing a new Housing Standard, applicable to all homes;
- Introducing a private rented sector regulator to uphold these standards and ensure the system is fair for both landlords and tenants;
- Setting minimum standards for energy efficiency to make homes cheaper to heat while contributing to Scotland's climate change targets.

You can download a copy of the consultation at <https://www.gov.scot/news/a-new-deal-for-tenants/> and the closing date for responses is **Friday 15th April 2022**.

Convenor's Report

Welcome to my first Convenors' Report of 2022. It's been a particularly sad start to 2022 with the passing of ETF's Vice Convenor Maud Wylie. We also lost Jean McNamee who was another tenant activist from Hailesland Park. She and Maud worked hard for the tenants in Wester Hailes and I particularly enjoyed welcoming them to the ETF High Flats Meetings held in Birnies Court. They will both be very sadly missed by everyone at ETF.



I want to thank all political parties in Edinburgh for agreeing with the rent freeze for another year. In previous years, I have taken a deputation to full Council, but due to current circumstances, this was not possible. I'm grateful to each of the parties for allowing me to speak with them before they set their respective budgets. However I'm disappointed that the Council Tax increased by 3% as it will leave many tenants worse off, especially the most vulnerable.

As we come out of lockdown, we will shortly begin to make plans to hold face to face meetings again. It's been very difficult during these past two years and we're looking forward to seeing you all again. We will continue to take advice from the Scottish Government as well as the Albion Trust about ensuring the right safety measures are in place. Whilst we have missed face to face meetings, our main priority has been the health and safety of our staff and volunteers.

As we prepare for what is hopefully better days ahead, there's a lot of people I would like to thank - our members for all your hard work and support and the EC who give up a lot of their time for the Federation, ETF staff for all their hard work and CEC for the funding to do our work. I'm still very proud of all the work we've been able to do online and we will continue to represent tenants in Edinburgh and ensure they're getting value for money from CEC.

Winner of ETF Christmas wordsearch

Congratulations to Harry Guntley who received a £30 shopping voucher for being the winner of our Christmas wordsearch competition.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

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 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. Some useful hints and tips for writing blogs can be found at <http://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/draft-blog/>.



Dates for your diary

Deadline for responses to the Scottish Government New Deal for Tenants Consultation – Friday 15th April 2022

The Federation Office will be closed for the following Public Holidays:

Good Friday – Friday 15th April 2022

Easter Monday – Monday 18th April 2022

May Day – Monday 2nd May 2022

Queens Jubilee Celebration – Thursday 2nd June and Friday 3rd June 2022

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 for our August edition, please do so by **Monday 18th July 2022**.



Thoughtful Quotes

'When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around' - Willie Nelson

'Anyone who has never made a mistake, has never tried anything new'
- Albert Einstein

'A very interesting theory makes no sense at all' - Groucho Marx

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



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