

# VOICE

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Melville Housing  
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Issue 58  
Spring 2024



New repairs contractor starts work

Show off your garden and win £100

Final Bilston homes completed



## Inside Your Spring Voice

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## £2.1m to be spent on homes

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Newsletter for tenants of Melville Housing Association  
The Corn Exchange • 200 High Street • Dalkeith • Midlothian • EH22 1AZ  
T: 0131 654 2733 • [info@melville.org.uk](mailto:info@melville.org.uk) • [www.melville.org.uk](http://www.melville.org.uk) • Scottish Charity SCO32755

## Rents increase to cover rising costs



Following another record consultation response, on 1 April Melville rents went up by 7%, or roughly £6.30 a week (based on the average monthly Melville rent).

# Increase of roughly £6.30 a week

It was only after a great deal of discussion that our Board reached this decision which they felt was necessary in order to continue to maintain homes and deliver the levels of service that we all expect. Our most important, and most expensive, service is repairs and the standard delivered by Novus has been getting worse since the pandemic. Unfortunately replacing them with R3, a company who will perform better, comes with a cost increase of more than 30%. We have also seen significant increases across many areas of the business which we have had to absorb.

Over recent years we have done everything we can to keep costs down in order that our rent increases are as low as possible and our rent consultation survey (the results of which you can find on our website) showed that 82% felt that our current rent and service charges are affordable. We've kept staff salary increases very low in recent years and that helped us deliver the lowest rent increase in Scotland in 2023 at just 2%. However we couldn't keep that up any longer.

Anyone who is struggling to pay their rent, for whatever reason, should contact their housing officer who will be able to provide help and support. Melville can provide welfare benefits and energy advice and signpost to other services. We might also be able to help with things like flooring (through our carpet tile project) and/or white goods.

## What you told us

This year's survey saw another fantastic response. The 400 replies we received is a record, surpassing by some distance the 354 we received last year, and continuing the trend of increasing returns in recent years. It represents a sample of almost 20% of our eligible tenancies.

Of the 400 replies that came back:

**82%**

say rents are  
affordable  
(75% last year)

**74%**

happy with  
Melville services  
(8% unhappy)

**66%**

say rent is value  
for money  
(9% poor value)

**50%**

receive no  
help to  
pay rent

**42%**

supported an  
increase. 58% against  
any of options

We also received more than 150 comments on a range of topics, not just rents. We replied to individual comments to investigate problems raised and to offer help and support. Some of the issues raised were:

- **Unhappiness with the performance of Novus (mentioned in a fifth of all comments)**
- **Problems with energy efficiency in homes and requests for:**
  - **New windows**
  - **Solar panels**
  - **Better insulation**
- **The shortage of new homes, particularly smaller properties such as bungalows appropriate for older people and to help encourage downsizing**



**Here are some of your comments (in red) and our responses (in blue)**

**All of the choices you give for rent increases are well above current and projected inflation. You saved money last year by reducing services, hence a below inflation 2023 rise.**

**I have reported dampness and mould over the years and the condition and age of the building. It never seems to get repaired properly. Don't agree with paying more for a property which has declined over the years.**

**Any savings we make go towards improving services but our costs have risen by a lot over the past couple of years. Our new repairs service alone is costing nearly a third more than the previous one and these rising costs are the reason the Board felt we had to increase rents significantly this year.**

**Damp and mould is a common problem in Scottish homes. There's a section on our website about things you can do to reduce condensation but if these don't work in your home then get in touch with our property team and we'll send someone out to have a look to see if there might be another cause.**

**Being on a pension, half of it goes towards my rent, heating system (hot air flow) is the worst I've seen. Windows need replaced as draughts are coming in, cladding on outside doesn't actually conserve heat within the property.**

**The 4-day working week whilst great for staff would be better if split across multiple days to allow the 5 day service for tenants. Considering increasing prices is ridiculous considering you haven't delivered anything of value to most homes since pre covid.**

**A lot of our homes are 60 or even 70 years old and improving the energy efficiency of some of these older properties is a real problem but we are always looking for solutions. Unfortunately, solutions aren't cheap which is why we have to increase rents every year. If you're really struggling with energy bills we might be able to help. Get in touch and we'll see what we can do.**

**We have been monitoring services and performance even more closely than usual since introducing the 4-day week and haven't seen any signs that standards have slipped because all staff are off on Fridays. Most services remain available even when we're closed but if you feel that service levels have dropped please let us know.**

**Think with the cost of living and the fact that many people are struggling there should be a rent freeze for one year.**

**We know that any increase is tough but the reality is that our rents do need to go up every year as just one rent freeze would take several million pounds out of our budget over 30 years. This would significantly reduce investment in homes and restrict our ability to reach energy efficiency targets.**

## Help and advice at Mayfield Drop-in



If you're a Melville tenant in and around the Mayfield area and you need a bit of help or advice with any housing-related issues, then why not pop along to the Mayfield Pavilion between 11am and 1pm on Wednesday 29 May. We'll be hosting a drop-in sessions with our helpful team on hand to provide support and information on things like:

- ✓ help with any outstanding housing issues
- ✓ help and support with rent and Universal Credit
- ✓ help with the cost of living and energy crisis
- ✓ information on how you can get more involved

No need to book, you can just turn up on the day but if you do plan on coming it would be good to know. Let us know by email or call us on 0131 654 2733.

## Show off your garden for chance to win £100 first prize



We love to see your fantastic gardens and this year, once again, our Great Gardens contest will reward the hard work of three green-fingered Melville tenants.

Whether you have your own garden or not, this year is the perfect opportunity to enter because as well as the £100 first prize, we've also got a prize for the best use of a small space. This might be a balcony, a patio or simply hanging baskets at your front or back door.



To enter simply send an email to [dhughes@melville.org.uk](mailto:dhughes@melville.org.uk) (or phone 0131 561 6466) by 5pm Monday 12 August. Judging will take place throughout August and winners will be announced at our Annual General Meeting in September.

The Baxter Keiller Prize, named in honour of a keen Melville gardener who sadly passed away in 2014, is awarded each year to Melville's finest garden and last year was won by Mr and Mrs Pake of McLean Place, Gorebridge.

**£100  
first prize**

**£35  
runner up prize**

**£50 prize for best  
use of small space**

# Staff Spotlight

## Depute Chief Executive Kirsten Dean



### What attracted you to your current job at Melville?

My name's Kirsten and I've been with Melville for about 4 years now. I joined at a tricky time, just when the pandemic was hitting. What attracted me to the job was for the chance to do some good. I was really taken by Melville's values and was keen to join an organisation set up to help people rather than just make money.

### What does your average office day look like?

I don't think anyone is interested in hearing about the 8 hours a day I spend on spreadsheets!

### What do you feel is your biggest contribution to Melville and its tenants?

I'm very proud of how we coped during the pandemic and how we were able to help tenants without sacrificing any of our key improvement plans. I'm also proud of the work I put in coming up with the 4-day working week plan which last year resulted in the lowest rent increase in Scotland and which showed that Melville can think a bit differently in difficult situations.

### What do you like to do in your spare time?

With a 15-month old son I don't have a lot of spare time these days but I used to be a keen runner, enjoy live music and the theatre. Hopefully I'll have time for all these things again at some point in the future...

### Where's your dream holiday destination?

Somewhere on the Amalfi coast so I could practice my Italian while enjoying the occasional glass of limoncello.

### Who would be your 3 famous (living or dead) desert island companions?

Joe Wicks to keep the rest of us fit and motivated.

Sir Alex Ferguson mainly to find out the truth about David Beckham and that boot...

Absolute legend David Attenborough although may excuse him joining in with Joe's fitness sessions!



### Who would you least like to be trapped in a lift with?

90s radio 'personality' Sara Cox - she does my head in...



You can contact Kirsten by sending an email to [kdean@melville.org.uk](mailto:kdean@melville.org.uk)



## Focus on repairs and maintenance



To say it's been a busy few months for our repairs and maintenance team would be an understatement.

First of all I'd like to thank all customers for your patience while we addressed issues with the repairs service provided by Novus. The service given to tenants over the past couple of years hasn't been good enough. We tried to work with Novus to improve their performance but when it became clear that this wasn't working we instead looked at alternative contractors. I'm delighted that we have now appointed R3 and I have every confidence that tenants will see a much better level of service. We'd love to hear what you think so if you have a repair carried out by R3 get in touch and let us know how it went.

We also recently contacted customers to find out your priorities for investment in the coming years (as part of our rent consultation). You told us that improving homes and delivering energy efficiency measures should be our top priorities. That's why over the next 12 months we are investing over two million pounds not just in kitchens and bathrooms, but also in modern heating systems as well as new doors and windows for improved energy efficiency.

For more information on both these important bits of news read on and as always, if you need more help and advice or have an issue with your home then please don't hesitate to get in touch.

## New repairs contractor starts work



**We are delighted to have this opportunity to work with Melville and deliver a first-class repairs service**

If you've ordered a repair in the past few weeks you will probably have noticed that we have a new repairs contractor delivering all of our day-to-day repairs. R3, who are based in East Lothian, took over from Novus at the start of April and are busy delivering on their promise to provide a new maintenance service with much higher levels of customer service.

The reasons for changing contractor probably don't need too much explaining. While feedback for our repairs service has generally been very positive, over the past couple of years performance has slipped and you've been letting us know that it was time for a change. R3 is a forward-looking company that is promising a different approach and we were particularly impressed by their focus on getting repairs right first time, a priority that we share.

We had a quick chat with R3's Director Charlie Cooley on a recent visit to the office. He explained a little bit about the new approach, "Having delivered repairs and maintenance service to registered social landlords for almost 14 years, we understand what's important to customers. We ensure that it's easy to contact our team to report repairs, and that we provide adequate and suitable appointment availability. Communication with customers is key on the repairs journey. Our skilled operatives have great knowledge and carry varied stock to ensure a high level of first-time fix repairs."

Just because we now have a new repairs contractor it doesn't mean that you need to do anything differently. You can continue reporting all repairs (including those considered an emergency outside office hours) by phoning Melville on 0131 654 2733 or by visiting [www.melville.org.uk](http://www.melville.org.uk).

**R3 Repairs Limited (Respond, Repair, Rebuild) was set up in 2010 as a subsidiary of East Lothian Housing Association. Based in Haddington it provides services to both the social housing and commercial sectors. ELHA is a non-profit making, locally based charitable organisation so any profits made by R3 Repairs go back into the local economy, they do not go to shareholders or company directors. Find out more at [www.r3repairs.co.uk](http://www.r3repairs.co.uk).**

## £2.1m to be spent improving homes this year

£498k on roofs



£519k on 143 heating systems (mostly in Gorebridge, Penicuik and Mayfield)

£312k on 76 bathrooms (mostly in Mayfield and Penicuik)



£289k on 76 kitchens (mostly in Penicuik and Dalkeith)

£431k on 204 doors and windows



We'll be spending £2.1 million improving homes over the next 12 months with a particular focus on replacing almost 150 older less efficient heating systems. These older systems cost more to run and are more likely to break down, frustrating for those that have them and taking up more repairs time.

As well as replacing heating systems we'll also be installing 76 bathrooms and the same number of kitchens, carrying out 33 roof replacements and fitting 204 new doors and windows.

### Home improvement details available online

Whilst all Melville tenants due a home upgrade between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 will be contacted closer to the time if you want to find out sooner you can also do so by signing up the Tenant Zone portal on our website.

These home upgrades are paid for by your rent money so it's important that we prioritise the right areas. In a recent survey you ranked the following investment areas from one to four to give us an idea of where we should be focussing our attention:

#### You said

Making existing homes more energy efficient

Improving existing housing services

Upgrading facilities (eg kitchens, bathrooms)

Building more homes

#### We did

Prioritising heating replacements this year. Also replacing roofs, doors and windows.

Replacing Novus with an improved repairs service delivered by R3.

This year we will be replacing over 150 kitchens and bathrooms.

As long as the funding is available, we will continue to build new homes as we have a responsibility to those on our waiting list as well as to existing tenants. New homes are funded by grants and loans (against future additional rental income generated), not by rent money.

#### Need help?

If you need help with any of the issues raised here or with anything to do with your home, please get in touch. The contact details for our Property team are:

0131 654 2733 (selecting option 2) [propertyservicesgroup@melville.org.uk](mailto:propertyservicesgroup@melville.org.uk)

# Help and advice

**Make sure you don't miss out on the latest benefits news. To get up-to-date information, including breaking news on benefit changes, visit our website or 'like' our Facebook page.**

## YOU must tell Universal Credit about your rent increase



All Melville rents went up by 7% at the start of April (see article on page 2 for more details). If you're on Universal Credit (UC) and you haven't already done so, you **MUST** tell them about this change. This applies even if your rent is paid directly to Melville.

You can tell them about the change using your online UC account. They'll need to know that your rent increased from 1 April 2024 and how much you're now paying. You should then receive the new amount in your next payment.

If you do not tell them about the increase in your rent, you will not be paid the full amount leaving you with rent arrears.

## UC and fitness to work



If you have a health condition or disability which prevents you from working, or limits the amount of work you can do, Universal Credit can help through Limited capability for work (LCW) or Limited capability for work and work related activities (LCWRA).

If you're new to UC then, when you apply you should be asked if you have a health condition or disability that affects your capability for work. If you do, you'll be asked for medical evidence (usually a fit note) which you must provide.

If your health condition or disability continues for four weeks or more, you will be referred for a Work capability assessment (WCA). These can take place face-to-face, by telephone or by video. Following your WCA, someone at Universal Credit will decide:

1. You have limited capability for work (LCW). This means that although you may not be able to look for work now, you can prepare for work with the aim of working at some time in the future. Your work coach will discuss your situation and agree next steps to help you start preparing for work. For example, by writing a CV.
2. You have limited capability for work and work-related activity (LCWRA). This means you will not be asked to look for work, or to prepare for work. You may get extra money as well as your standard allowance.
3. You are fit for work. This means you will be expected to prepare for work, look for work, and take up work. You will get the standard allowance of Universal Credit based on your circumstances.

Being awarded LCW or LCWRA can have implications for other benefits. For example, if you get LCW or LCWRA it may mean you can get disability premiums or additional help with things like housing costs. However this can have an impact on other benefits so you should also speak to an expert to find out how any additional income might affect your overall situation.

If you think you should be on LCW or LCWRA but were never assessed then you should contact our Welfare Benefits Advice team and they'll be able to help.



## Could you be due up to £500 a year to pay for fresh food?



If you're pregnant or have young children then you could be one of the 20,000 people across Scotland who might now be able to get help from Best start food grants. The grants, paid every four weeks by Social Security Scotland, can be worth up to £500 a year, and have to be used to pay for fresh food.

The amount is £19.80 every four weeks during pregnancy and for any children between one and three years old. This payment increases to £39.60 for any child under one.

Money is available through a pre-paid chip and pin card which can be used to buy milk, first infant formula and healthy food including eggs, fruit and vegetables.

### How to apply

If you think you might be able to get this funding then apply at [mygov.scot/beststartfoods](https://mygov.scot/beststartfoods) or by calling Social Security Scotland free on **0800 182 2222**.

## Welfare Advice service delivers

I had a great service from your welfare officer John Scott he went over and beyond to help me due to my health condition

Mr and Mrs P are pension age and struggling due to health issues and changes to their benefits. At the time they got in touch, Mr P was in hospital and once discharged was expected to move into full-time care. This was causing them both considerable distress and worry.

Our adviser sat down with Mrs P to get a clear idea of the couple's circumstances. He looked into their benefit situation, helping to make claims for housing benefit, council tax reduction and pension credit. He also helped her become the benefits appointee for her husband and provided advice on ways to meet the costs of a care home.

It took a great deal of work to support Mrs P at a time of extreme stress and upset. Her life was changing and she was worried not just about her husband's health but also about how she would afford to live by herself. The benefit claims on behalf of her husband were far from straightforward, leading to delays and then requiring appeals and complaints.

Once Mr P had recovered enough to move to a care home, and with the help of Melville's welfare benefits advice service, the claims were finally sorted. Mrs P's financial worries, built up over months of uncertainty, lifted thanks to payments totalling almost £15,000 per year, plus a backdated one-off payment of £3,674.

## Get in touch



If you need any advice on benefits, or if you have energy debts or are struggling with money, please get in touch. John Scott and Barry Smith, Melville's two dedicated Welfare Benefits Advisers, are available to help all Melville tenants and members of their households. Help is also available from independent organisations such as Citizens Advice.

John Scott ([jscott@melville.org.uk](mailto:jscott@melville.org.uk)) 0131 561 6481

Barry Smith ([bsmith@melville.org.uk](mailto:bsmith@melville.org.uk)) 0131 561 6482

# Consultation and Getting Involved

## Tell us what you think

Our housing team are currently updating Melville's Estate management policy and want to hear what you think about proposed changes.

Estate management is a vital part of our role as a landlord and plays an important part in promoting safe, secure, sustainable and attractive communities. The main changes we're making to the way we deal with estate management are:

- **Taking stronger action when tenancy conditions are breached. This may start with a meeting, followed by a tenancy warning and then possible legal action.**
- **Recharges. We've always had the option of recharging tenants when we have to clear up mess made by others however going forward we plan on being stricter and will take legal action if necessary.**
- **Trampolines are not allowed in shared gardens or common areas. This is for the health and safety of all residents and is made clear in the new policy.**

To read the new policy please visit our website or give us a call and we'll send you a copy. To let us know what you think about the proposed changes please get in touch in the usual ways.

## Midlothian Council agrees changes to how it allocates homes

In other policy news, Midlothian Council has agreed changes to its Housing allocations policy following a recent consultation. This is significant for Melville because we share a common housing register with the Council with the majority of our empty homes allocated through the Council's waiting list.

Based on the findings of the survey the council has decided to:

- **Retain the current system where housing applicants are given points depending on their circumstances**
- **Develop an online housing application form and portal so applicants can update their own details**
- **Increase points for applicants in certain situations such as victims of domestic abuse**
- **Retain letting targets as they are - 60% for homeless households and 40% for general needs applicants**
- **Review the suspension policy in line with legislation**

These are just some of the changes the Council intends to make when the new policy comes into effect later this year. You can find out more at [www.midlothian.gov.uk](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk).

## Communication and your involvement



We want to hear your views on our communication and the opportunities you have to participate in Melville's decision making.

We've set up a short online survey that you

can access through our website (using a link to the online platform Survey Monkey). It should only take a few minutes to complete but we really want to know what you think as it will help shape the direction our communication takes in the years ahead.

In the survey we're asking questions like:

- **Should we stop printing paper copies of our Voice newsletter?**
- **What tools you would like to see on a new Melville website**
- **Whether you'd be interested in becoming a tenant rep or Board member**

Your views are crucial in how we take things forward so please let us know what you think. Everyone who completes the survey will be entered into a prize draw for the chance to win a £50 shopping voucher.

## Why Survey Monkey?



Most people who respond to our communication and participation survey will do so through Survey Monkey. This is an online platform that we use for all our surveys and that has seen our response rate rocket since we started using it. This is important as it means we're finding out the views of far more customers than we ever did before.

We use digital surveys because they are quick, inexpensive and easy to use and Survey Monkey is one of the biggest and most secure providers in the market. In

the ten years we've been using Survey Monkey we've never had an issue with data security and while no system is 100% secure, we're confident that their security (which has ISO 27001 certification) is as good as it can be.

Visit [www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/security](http://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/security) to find out more about how they store your personal data or information on their wider data security.

## Looking after your garden



With spring now here and wildlife going into overdrive as we leave the cold and wet winter months behind, Melville customers lucky enough to have their own garden should now be starting to think about the work needed to get their outdoor spaces in shape. Unfortunately Melville doesn't have a gardening service, however if you don't have the tools to look after your garden then we can help.

We can lend you a lawn mower or strimmer from our office free of charge, but on payment of a refundable deposit (£10 for the lawn mower or £5 for the strimmer). Visit our website to find out more, or to use our online booking form. You can also give us a call to check availability.

Remember, if you have a garden you must:

Keep it tidy and free of rubbish

Make sure that shrubs and hedges do not become a nuisance to neighbours

Cut back trees when they need it

## Latest from our tenant reps

Hi and welcome to our regular column bringing you the latest news from Melville's tenant rep group.



The first few months of the year have been busy as ever for our tenant reps. We met up in January to discuss the proposed rent increase and to see Melville's spending priorities for the coming 12 months. The meeting, which was open to all tenants, heard feedback from this year's consultation which received 400 responses. At 7% this year's increase is much higher than in recent years, however our reps understood why this was necessary, allowing Melville to continue delivering services and home upgrades against a backdrop of rising costs.

At the meeting we explained that one of the main reasons for the higher increase was to deliver a better repairs service and in March several of the group came along to meet staff from R3, and to hear about their plans as our new repairs contractor. The group felt strongly that an improved repairs service was key as Melville plays such a vital role for many people.

The group continues to play an important role in coming up with suggestions for supporting struggling tenants. We are due a new batch of around 1,000 carpet tiles shortly and are also continuing to explore opportunities to provide white goods like fridges and air fryers.

The next meeting of the group, made up of tenants from across Midlothian, will take place in the summer. As always, if you have any feedback for us, or if you would like to put yourself forward as a tenant rep, please get in touch in the usual ways.

Dan

### Area

### Tenant rep

Gorebridge, Newtongrange

Ellie Cairns

Penicuik, Bilston, Loanhead

Steven Jamieson

Bonnyrigg, Poltonhall, Rosewell

Andrew Hiddleston, Gill Pennie, Liz Coyle and Janet Harvey

Mayfield, Easthouses

Belinda Maciver and Barbara Shearer

Westhouses (Mayfield), Pathhead

Diane Gamrot

Pathhead

Position vacant

Dalkeith, Woodburn, Danderhall

Eileen McLaren

Lanarkshire, Edinburgh, East Lothian

Position vacant

Fancy becoming a rep and getting £20 for every meeting you come to? Email [mytenantrep@melville.org.uk](mailto:mytenantrep@melville.org.uk) or call 0131 561 6466



# Focus on Forth

## Resource Centre is Forth's hidden gem

Forth's Community Resource Centre, found on Hawkwood Terrace, is a hidden gem that provides a lifeline to many in the local area. Used as a hub for a wide range of services from IT to training to a warm place to go in the winter you may be surprised about some of the things they offer:



- **IT and computer skills**
  - 1-to-1 appointments and group internet café sessions. Just bring along your own laptop, tablet, ipad or mobile
  - welfare enquiries when people are told to 'do-it-online' and need help with things like blue badge applications, online banking, shopping, form filling
- **Work clubs and training to help with job hunting**
  - including CV writing, interview skills, personal development and digital job searching
  - certified qualifications including first aid, food hygiene and health and safety
- **Distributing SIM cards to people over 18 who are struggling to afford mobile data**
- **Reconnect activity cafes bringing people aged 50 and over together to learn new skills and have fun, including IT, craft, gentle exercise, get-togethers, relaxation, practical energy saving tips, budgeting advice, appointments and group sessions**

## Forth activity programme – open and FREE to all

### What

Circle dancing – gentle exercise to music

Strength and balance class

Help with technology

Internet Café - help with computers and Internet

Crochet - all levels welcome

Bite and blether

Help with welfare benefits

CAB drop-in

Armchair exercises

### When

**Mondays 11am – 12noon**

**Tuesdays 12.30pm – 2.30pm**

**Tuesdays 12.30pm – 2.30pm**

**Wednesdays 10am – 12noon**

**Wednesdays 12.30pm – 2.30pm**

**Thursdays 10am – 12noon**

**Thursdays 10am – 12noon**

**Thursdays 10am – 12noon**

**Every Friday 11am – 1pm**

### Where

**Forth Willie Waddle Sports & Community Centre**

**Bank Hall**

**Bank Hall**

**Forth Community Resource Centre**

**Forth Community Resource Centre**

**Forth Community Resource Centre**

**Forth Community Resource Centre**

**Forth Community Resource Centre**

**Bank Hall**

## Funding for Air Source Heat Pumps



13 Melville homes in Forth, South Lanarkshire, will be fitted with air source heat pumps (ASHPs) and receive top ups to their loft insulation this year. The work, which will be carried out by sustainable energy specialists Everwarm, has been made possible thanks to funding of £92k from the Scottish Government's Net Zero Heat Fund.

The village of Forth is off the gas grid making it more difficult to modernise homes before the arrival of ASHPs, however anybody in a Melville home who has been notified they're to get a new heating system can request an ASHP rather a new gas boiler.

We've estimated that in the coming years more than £80million will be needed in order to meet our carbon reduction targets. We've made a start by putting aside funds for ASHPs, a greener alternative to traditional boilers, which are gradually to be phased out by the Scottish Government.

## Final Bilston homes completed



Melville has celebrated the completion and handover of 56 affordable homes and apartments in Bilston, the latest in a long-standing partnership with Taylor Wimpey East Scotland.

Located at Taylor Wimpey's Pentland Green development, the mix of two and three bedroom homes, as well as one and two bedroom apartments, are now fully occupied. Phase One of the development is also home to 49 properties. All properties are energy efficient and fitted with solar PV panels to help tenant's finances and the planet.

It's an exciting time when you have the opportunity to move into a new home and the last few tenants were very happy to pick up their keys.

"Being told we were getting a brand-new home in



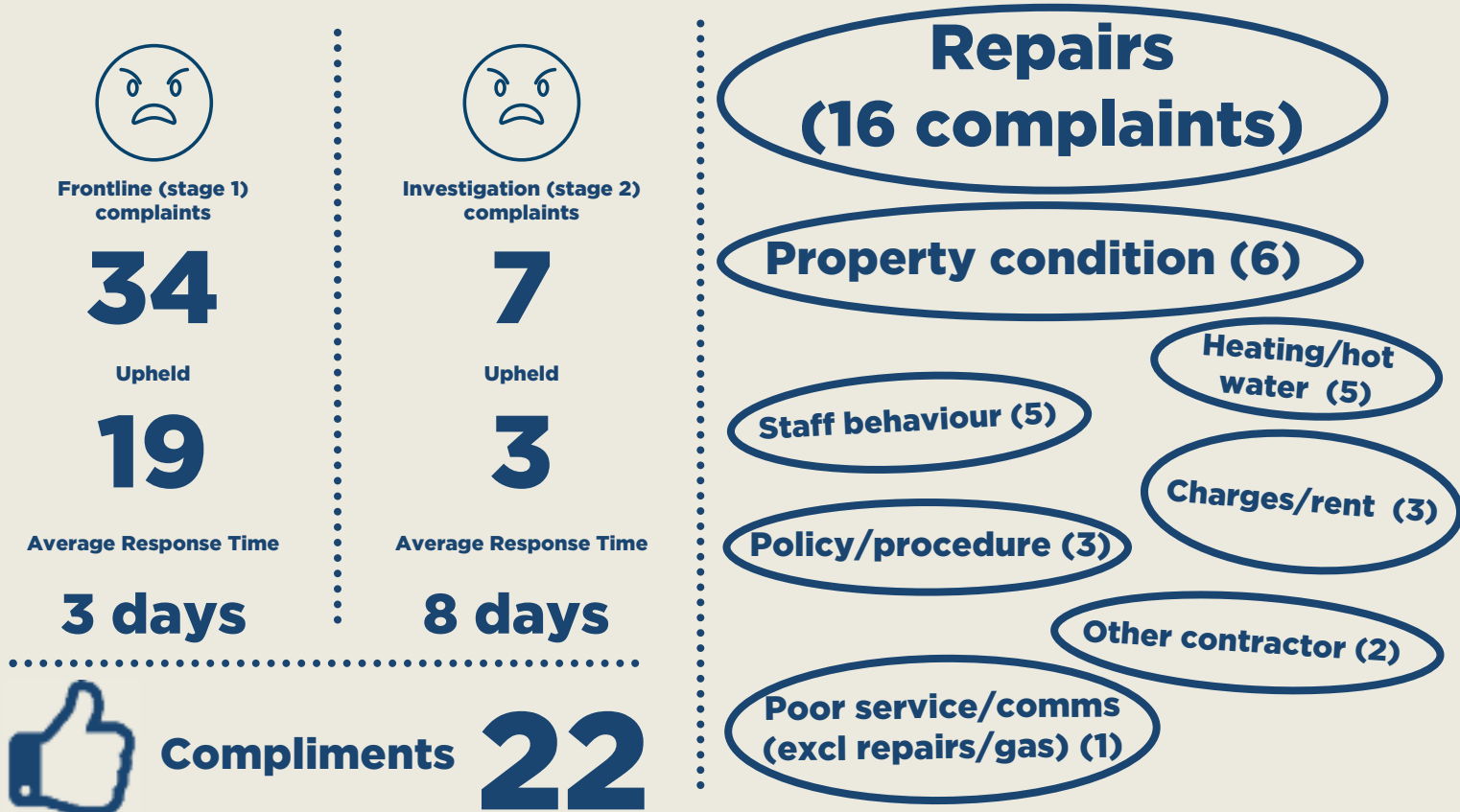
Bilston was the best news we could have asked for," said Susan and David Crawford, who were amongst the final Melville tenants to move into their new homes at Pentland Green. "We're delighted with our house and any issues we've had have been resolved quickly. We'd just like to thank everyone involved from both Melville and Taylor Wimpey. We really couldn't be happier."

The completion of this development also marks a key milestone for Melville. When we began working with Taylor Wimpey at Bilston in 2015, we had just 26 homes in the local area. Eight years later we have 110, and that's an additional 84 families that now have a modern, secure and affordable home thanks to this partnership made possible with the help of the Scottish Government and Midlothian Council.

# Over to you...

Here's a round up of the feedback, good and bad, you've given us over the past few months. We don't have room to give a response to your comments and complaints here but as long as contact details have been provided we always reply directly when issues are raised.

## November to February complaints



## What you told us

“ Although I'd love to see Melville build new homes cause I was lucky enough to move into a new build. Living alone and no cost of living increase in my wage I would struggle with a rent increase especially as there is only one income coming into the home. ”

“ Absolutely wonderful staff they know what I been through and are amazing at their job. ”

“ The personal service from staff is spot on couldn't fault it. ”

“ Communication is very poor. ”



“As we are going through a cost of living crisis at the moment, I'm personally worried about rent increases this year. I was thinking with staff now doing 4 day week would be saving on services.”

“Many people I know don't even use their heating. I have to sit with a blanket and hot water bottle for most of the day. I can only afford to put my heating on for an hour in the morning and the same in the evening I have a disability and can't stand being cold.”

“I feel rent is high compared to council housing and could get a mortgage for less probably.”

“Having lived in private rents for a lot of years I find Melville properties really good value for money. Repairs are always done quickly and my flat is a good size with its own outside space.”

“I will say I'm very satisfied with the service I have been receiving from Melville. I've come from a council property and the difference is honestly jaw dropping.”

“I don't have any issues other than its harder to pay things due to the cost of living being do high My kids will eat less and heating would need to become a treat rather than a necessity which would kill me if I can't feed my kids or keep them warm.”

“Rents are fair, I've never had any problems with the services you provide. Any issues have been resolved quickly. My only issue is the amount of homes (specifically 3 beds) that are under occupied when so many people are needing larger properties.”

“I think Melville provide a great service and have had really good interactions with them in the two years I have been a tenant. I cannot fault the staff at Melville in any way. They are always polite and professional.”

“I've found myself on hard times recently due to cost of living, and Melville housing are one of the only people that helped me and my children, not one other charity or organisation were willing to help me, so I thank Melville for being there when I was in need. Keep up the good work.”

“My rent reflects exceptional value for money and has remained affordable when other costs of living have soared.”

“Rents have to be increased annually to provide the services needed but everything else seems to be increasing at the same time.”

“Very reasonable. I am thankful that I am not private letting. Rent is manageable.”

“The rents are starting to affect working families the ones on benefits couldn't care less they get rent paid for them.”

## News in Brief

### CHAI service winds down as Margaret says farewell



If you've used our tenancy support service over the past few years then chances are you've received help from CHAI's Margaret Morrison. After working with Melville tenants for ten years, Margaret has now decided it's time to call it a day and is heading off to a well-deserved retirement. CHAI will continue to provide support to Melville tenants until August at which point we are going to put the contract on hold in order to look at our options for delivering this service in the future.

### Staff make donation to Pantry



Melville staff have made the latest donation to their nominated charity for the year, the Mayfield Pantry run by Sharon Hill and her excellent team at MAEPT. Following a raffle and the sale of home baking at Christmas time staff raised £14796. The money is going to a very deserving cause and we know that Sharon and the team will put it to good use.

### Rent holidays

Every now and then we are approached about rent holidays. These were more common in the days before most people paid rent monthly by direct debit. But even if you do pay by direct debit this is something we would consider. You would still need to pay your rent for the full 52 weeks of the year, but the amount could instead be spread over 10 months.

For instance if you currently pay £400 a month every month of the year then you might take a two month rent holiday in December and January. This would leave you with £480 a month to pay but only for 10 months, helping you to budget and to pay for Christmas. If you'd like to discuss this, please speak to a member of our housing team.

### Prize draw winners

Well done to Andrew Black of New Hunterfield, Gorebridge who won our rent consultation prize draw. Andrew picked up a £50 Tesco voucher for letting us know his thoughts. Thanks to everyone who took part.

Congratulations also to Kelly Tait of Argyle Place, Bonnyrigg, winner of our quarterly satisfaction survey draw. Kelly picked up a £50 voucher just for replying to our satisfaction survey text and completing a short online form. Remember, almost all Melville feedback is now done digitally so to be in with a chance of winning make sure you let us know how we're doing after you've used any of our services.

### Join us on Facebook



Join our growing Facebook community. We currently have more than 2,000 people following us on Facebook but we're always keen to find more. By joining us on Facebook you get to hear the latest Melville and community news first, tell us what you think of us, and even enter prize competitions. Visit us at [www.facebook.com/melvillehousing](http://www.facebook.com/melvillehousing).

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