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Inside Your Winter Voice

Melville to Introduce 4-day Week

Melville to introduce 4-day week rather than hike rents



How does the cost-of-living crisis affect Melville?

Everyone is affected by the current cost-of-living crisis. Inflation (currently sitting at round 11%) means that costs for most things are rising dramatically. This affects us all including Melville staff. Other organisations are considering higher wage increases to ensure staff are protected, as much as possible, from the worst of these rises. However high wage increases have an impact on budgets and services. This is the challenge we face.

What's happening with rents?



Melville budgets, including tenant rents and staff salaries, are reviewed now with any increase applied from 1 April. Any increase in staff salaries in recent years has typically been linked to the annual rent increase.

Currently in Scotland rents are frozen until 31 March 2023. The Scottish Government took this decision in October. They will announce in the middle of January what their plans are for rents from 1 April.

What were the options to help staff?

We had 4 choices available to us



A much higher rent increase than normal (if the Scottish Government rent freeze ends) to pay staff in line with inflation

2

If rents remain frozen then we could have taken money out of the home improvement budget to fund a staff pay increase



Keep staff pay increase low and risk harm to staff morale and possible industrial action



Look at more creative solutions to help staff out

What are you proposing?



Even if allowed to we don't want to increase rents significantly as we know how difficult things are for everybody and we don't want to make them worse. At the same time we want to help staff, without having a significant impact on services, therefore we have been exploring more creative solutions.

To help staff out without having a big impact on Melville's finances, we will be moving to a 4-day working week for all staff on a trial basis. This means that Melville will be closed every Friday throughout 2023. Staff will continue to be paid their full salaries (and receive a 2% cost-of-living salary increase) but will work 32 hours a week spread across 4 days rather than the current working arrangements of 35 hours a week over 5 days. This has been approved by the Melville Board.

What impact will there be on services?



Many of our services are now available online and remain available even when we're closed. We will also be working to improve our digital services throughout the year.

When it comes to repairs, Fridays won't be the same as weekends. The normal repairs service (not the out of hours service) will continue to operate meaning you will still be able to arrange appointments and book in routine repairs.

Our opening hours will remain the same however we will extend our office opening hours one Wednesday a month to help those who can't contact us during normal working hours.

We don't expect there to be a negative impact on services and will measure performance over the course of the year. If there is a significant dip in performance, then it won't become permanent and we will go back to existing working arrangements.

Why Fridays and when will this start?



Fridays are typically the quietest day of the working week for many Melville staff and therefore the obvious choice. Similarly it made sense to begin the trial at the start of the new year so it will begin on 1 January 2023.



Have others tried this?



Yes, there are a growing number of organisations introducing a shorter working week. One **London-based housing** association, Causeway Irish, introduced it in **2017. We have** consulted them closely on how it has worked and they tell us it has been very positive, leading to benefits including increased productivity and reduced staff sickness.



Have you consulted tenants and how can we give feedback?

We consulted our tenant reps before the trial was approved by the Board. Feedback from the reps was largely positive and they recognised that Melville needs to approach things differently in the current challenging economic climate. We have also heard back from loads of you (more than 250 so far) as part of our ongoing rent consultation. 64% of you are in favour, and only 7% aren't keen on the idea. We will continue to encourage feedback during the 12-month trial and you can always get in touch in any of the usual ways.

Best small space prize shows reward for Adele's hard work





Adele Birkmyre from Mayfield has been rewarded for hours of hard work with the prize for best use of a small space in the 2022 Melville garden contest. Adele transformed a rather sad back drying green outside her Mayfield flat into a fabulous community space for her family and her neighbours to enjoy during lockdown. For her efforts Adele picked up gardening vouchers to the value of £35 at Melville's recent AGM. If you know of any similar projects, making the best use of a small space or encouraging a sense of community among Melville tenants, we'd love to hear about them. Get in touch in the usual ways.

2022 Winners

Winner (£100)
Runner-up (£25)
Best use of small space (£35)

Mrs Diane Wright, Woodburn Place, Woodburn Ms Liz Kelly, Woolmet Crescent, Danderhall Mrs Adele Birkmyre, Dougall Court, Mayfield



Diane Wright of Woodburn Place has gone one better than her runners-up prize from last year and picked up this year's 'Baxter Keiller Award' for outstanding Melville garden.

Commended by the judging panel for her lovely use of colour and the variety and vibrance of her garden, Piane won gardening vouchers worth £100, and finished ahead of last year's winner Liz Kelly.

Now in its 8th year, Melville's contest is named after a keen Mayfield gardener and Melville tenant who sadly passed away in 2014. If you have a garden or small outdoor space that you're proud of, make sure you put your name forward when next year's contest opens in the spring.

Staff Spotlight Pavid Todd



This issue the staff spotlight shines on the newest member of our team, new Property Manager David Todd. David, who's Fife born and bred, is responsible for the day-to-day management of repairs and planned improvements to homes and joined us recently from Kingdom Housing.



What attracted you to your current job at Melville?

I only joined Melville in October but it's clear that Melville is committed to delivering excellent service to tenants and I wanted to be part of that. It was also obvious that Melville looks after its staff which is really important as well.



What do you like to do in your spare time?

I like to watch football and have a season ticket at Raith Rovers. I drag my daughter along too although she tends to spend most of the game on her iPad! I also do a bit of jiu jitsu, training 3 times a week, and I've competed in the past. Pespite that I'm still not sure I'm much good. I'm also partial to a good box set and a bit of Masterchef.



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

Like everyone else I'll be judged on performance, but l like to get on with people so I really hope that in the coming months tenants notice an improvement not just in the way we deliver repairs and improvements but also in the consultation and communication from my team.



You're stranded on a desert island. Which three famous people (living or dead) would you most like for company?

John Lennon Billy Connolly Ricky Gervais



Any pets?

I have a Border Terrier called Skye and a Bengal cat called Jimmy. Both like to make occasional cameos in online meetings despite my best efforts to keep them away...



Where's your dream holiday destination?

I've always wanted to go to Canada and Australia. One day I'd love to scuba dive the Great Barrier Reef.



What does your average working day in the office look like?

Office days tend to be pretty full on, with a fair few meetings both with colleagues and contractors. It's also a chance to sort out various repairs jobs so I spend a lot of the time on the phone with customers and contractors. I'll spend a bit of time checking over invoices and also carry out inspections of things like heating, kitchen or bathroom installations, as well as everyday repairs.



Which one famous person (alive or dead) would you least like to be trapped in a lift with?

Katie Hopkins

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.



£400 winter fuel discount

Millions of households in Britain, including all Melville tenants, are getting £400 this winter to help with rising energy bills as part of the Government's Energy Bills Support Scheme. You should already have received your first monthly payments and these will continue until March next year.

How should I be getting my payment?

Monthly DD

Standard credit

Smart prepayment meter

Traditional prepayment meter

Either credited automatically to your bank account or reduction in DD

Credited automatically to your energy account

Credited automatically to your electricity/gas account

Voucher sent within 11 working days of the start of the month (via text, email or post) to be used on gas or electricity when topping up as normal - make sure supplier has your correct contact details

What should I do if I haven't got my payment?

Monthly DD

Standard credit

Smart prepayment meter

Traditional prepayment meter

If your direct debit fails, your supplier should try again later in the month. Occasionally, if there are problems, they may need you to move to a different payment method. If your direct debit comes out very late in the month, and you are due to receive the money directly to your bank account, you may not receive your payment in the same month as it can take a few days to hit your bank account. Don't worry, suppliers will still pay it.

There shouldn't be too much to go wrong here, as suppliers are simply adding the payment to your energy account each month. If you do have any problems, contact your provider.

The payment should be added to your account automatically, but in the small number of cases where this isn't possible, the supplier will make a second attempt to make the payment – either by trying to add it remotely again or by a different method, such as giving you a code you can enter on the meter.

With a traditional prepayment meter you'll be sent the vouchers, so you must make sure your supplier has the right contact details for you. If there are problems, suppliers can re-issue vouchers – but you must claim before the scheme ends at 11.59pm on 30 June 2023. If you do have issues, and if you have given your provider plenty of time to make your payment, you will need to contact your supplier directly to sort it out.

Pon't fall for energy payments scams!

Some people have been receiving scam text messages inviting them to click on a link to apply for the £400 payment. This is a scam and should be ignored or reported. The £400 grant will be paid automatically.

New Winter Heating payment coming soon

A new, fairer payment to help people in Scotland on certain benefits heat their homes is coming this February (2023).

What is it?

The new Winter Heating payment, delivered by Social Security Scotland, is replacing the DWP's Cold Weather payment, with all eligible households receiving £50 every year. If you're eligible you don't need to do anything, you'll receive this automatically and it won't affect any other benefits you currently get from the DWP (including the Winter Fuel payment) or Social Security Scotland.

Will I get it?

Winter Heating payments will provide support to people on qualifying low-income benefits no matter the weather or temperature where they live. If you're currently eligible for a Cold Weather payment and your circumstances have not changed, you should receive a Winter Heating payment.

Help with energy bills

If you're struggling with your energy bills just now there may be help available. You can contact us, and we'll see if we can help, or you can check out organisations like Charis who hold lots of information about schemes to help vulnerable customers. Find out more about the help available at www.charisgrants.com



Lanarkshire drop-in event



Melville recently organised a drop-in event in Forth for our South Lanarkshire tenants offering help and advice on benefits, money, fire safety and general housing issues. If you need help with any of these things, or would like to get more involved in Melville's decision-making, get in touch in any of the usual ways.

Get in touch

If you need help and advice managing your money or coping with the changes to welfare benefits, please get in touch. Melville's Welfare Benefits Advisers are available to help all Melville tenants and members of their households. Call 0131 561 6481 or email jscott@melville.org.uk.

Warm hubs to help if you're struggling this winter



If you're looking for some warmth this winter but you can't afford to put the heating on at home, then a number of warm hubs are popping up around the country to help anyone who's struggling. Often located in local churches, many are also providing free wi-fi, hot drinks, food, newspapers and activities for kids. Here are details of the three (that we know about) in Midlothian but there could well be more that we're not aware of. If you need help finding one close to where you live, get in touch in the usual ways.

Penicuik

Food Fact Friends, 42 John Street, EH26 8AB

Monday to Friday: 10am to 3pm with free hot soup, something to eat, tea and coffee.

Saturday: 11am to 1pm with free tea and coffee and something to eat.

Bonnyrigg

Cockpen Church Hall, Dundas Street, EH19 3AT

Tuesdays from 10am until noon

Free hot drinks and snacks. If you bring a thermos, it can be filled for you to take home.

Posewell

Rosewell Church Hall, Carnethie Street, EH24 9DN

Wednesdays from 10am until noon

Free hot drinks and snacks. If you bring a thermos, it can be filled for you to take home.

Melville helps extend growing season in Mayfield



Melville has helped extend the growing season in a Midlothian community, making locally grown fruit and veg available all-year-round thanks to a newly installed Polycrub at the Mayfield and Easthouses Pavilion, run by Mayfield and Easthouses Development Trust.

Thanks to funding from Cycling Scotland's Social Housing Partnership Fund, Melville donated £3,500 to help build an innovative Polycrub, a sustainable polytunnel/greenhouse hybrid, designed in Shetland to withstand high wind speeds and the harshest of climates. Work was carried out by local company Johnstons Building and Maintenance, led by Nick Johnston and his team following the untimely death of his father Paul earlier this year.

"This has been very different from the type of work we would normally do," said Nick. "Dad agreed to take on the work shortly before he died and I wanted to complete the project in his memory. It wasn't an easy job as there aren't many of these Polycrubs around and it took three of us a week to complete but it's a bright spot at the end of what's been a really tough year. I think my Dad would have been proud."

Fruit and veg grown in the new Polycrub will be used in the Pavilion café and also distributed to the local community through the Mayfield Pantry in Bogwood Court.

Find out more by visiting www.maedt.org.uk or find them on Facebook.

Festive wordsearch - just for fun

Q W E Y F S G N I Y U E I R O P P F	K C O T S D Z X C V M N B B Y
	M N B B Y
C A O D O U J K L	
F R T Y S X D V T	R C C V E
S D E D T A X O F	S G B H K
L K L C Y V Y L L	O H J J N
P O T I U D T O F	P S A X O
T U S I N K R L B	M H N B D
R E I W D A S E A	Z X C V B
S D M F C G T H J	K L M S N
A P O I U H Y I T	R E G W Q
M B V C L X H G V	F N D S A
R T Y E Y E U I U	I O U T I
A S H D F G O K K	P T G V G
W E S A J T V N N	L K Y Q W
M V T Y U L E I R	B A G D E

RUDOLPH
FROSTY
CAROLS
MISTLETOE
HOLLY
IVY
BETHLEHEM
NATIVITY
KINGS
GABRIEL
DONKEY
STOCKINGS
NOEL

No prizes this issue but just for a bit of fun see if you can find the 13 words hidden in the grid opposite.

More sustainable future drives new Board Chair Ponna



Melville has a new Chair heading up its Board. Ponna Bogdanovic, who lives in Newtongrange, has taken over from Caron Quinn who stood down at September's AGM following five successful years in the role.

With a background in town planning, economic development and social policy, Ponna has bags of experience to bring to the role and currently works as Head of Housing Strategy and Pevelopment with Scottish Borders Council. We spoke to her to find out a wee bit more about what gets her out of bed in the morning.

I've worked in housing for most of my career and I'm passionate about playing my part in building a sustainable society that has a place for everyone.

I put myself forward to succeed Caron as Chair because I want to do what I can to serve an area where I've lived for over 20 years and that I care deeply about. My motivation is to help ensure Melville has a sustainable strategy for the future; that we provide excellent value for money and, most of all, that our relationships with our customers are at the heart of everything we do.

Living locally I see for myself the issues that need addressing and the desperate need for high quality affordable homes. I've been on the Board for 5 years already and during that time I've been proud to play my part in helping Melville deliver, but we can do more going forward.

Helping define future plans for the organisation and see some of the best ideas come to life is also incredibly rewarding and I've found being involved with Melville really good for my own mental health and wellbeing.

I'm under no illusions about the challenges before us but I'm confident that thanks to the values of staff and Board, and their commitment to providing the best services possible, we are more than up to the task.

QUICKFIRE Q&A

What do you like to do in your spare time?

When I'm not working I spend as much time as possible with my family (I have 3 children so life is busy). My weekends are often spent at local football matches but I



enjoy binge watching a good to series when I can, and I'm also partial to a bit of Bake-off. I also like meeting up with friends for a nice cocktail.

What's your dream holiday destination?



I'd love to visit Borneo. As well as fantastic wildlife, stunning scenery and incredible food it also has some of the highest mountains in Malaysia which would be great for hiking. I also enjoy diving and I'd love the

opportunity to explore some of the marine life.



Name your top 3 desert island companions

Kevin Bridges for the banter lain Banks for some mind-blowing stories My mum as she's an amazing person and also a retired nurse so very handy to have around

Tenant involvement

Share your views by joining the National Panel

Add your voice to the National Panel of Tenants and Service Users! Join the Scottish Housing Regulator's National Panel and help improve social landlord services. Members receive surveys and can take part in other feedback exercises. Find out more by scanning the QR code or by calling 0800 433 7212.



What do you think of plans for a 4-day week?



Hi and welcome to our regular tenant rep column. My name's Eileen and I'm the rep for Woodburn and Panderhall.

We've had a couple of meetings since the last issue of Voice, the first to discuss Melville's performance over the past year (pretty good but some room for improvement particularly on repairs) and the second to discuss plans to move to a 4-day working week.

At the 4-day week meeting there

was general agreement that Melville has to look at things differently, as the last thing any of us want is to see rents going up by a lot but at the same time staff work hard and need help as well. There were some concerns that only being available 4 days a week would have an impact on service levels but I'm confident that Melville will be able to manage that.

On a personal level I totally support these plans and although it may be a bit controversial, I think some of the funding for staff pay increases could come from the home improvement budget because if something like a kitchen or bathroom is alright, I don't feel the whole thing needs to be changed. I recently had both my kitchen and bathroom replaced even though I didn't really feel there was much wrong with them. I just felt that I couldn't really say no. Just my view

though. Others may well disagree. If so, get in touch and let us know.

As well as performance and the 4-day week, we also looked at the new tenant report that is now up on Melville's website. I found it easy to follow and understand. If you haven't yet I would really recommend giving it a look.

Finally, now that winter has arrived, and with the price of everything going up and up, it's important we all take care of ourselves and our neighbours. If you're struggling, or if you know someone who is, then seek help, either from Melville or from elsewhere. Whatever you do, don't suffer alone.

Thanks for reading. Stay warm, stay safe and take care.

Eileen

Tenant rep
Position vacant
Steven Jamieson
Andrew Hiddleston, Gill Pennie, Liz Coyle and Janet Harvey
Belinda Maciver
Diane Gamrot
Lindsay Herriot-Masoka
Sandra Weston
Eileen McLaren
Position vacant

Property news

Preventing condensation and mould

A build up of condensation in your home can lead to mould and, if left untreated, mould can be bad for your health. But condensation is a fact of life in modern homes, caused by cooking, showering, drying clothes and even from breathing (particularly while you're sleeping).

Condensation is impossible to stop entirely but the best ways of preventing it from building up are by keeping your heating on all the time (but at a low level), using extractor fans and not drying clothes inside... but we live in Scotland where the weather is unpredictable and at a time when energy prices are rocketing so we appreciate that this advice isn't all that helpful. So what can you try instead?



- 1. Open windows as often as you can but especially first thing in the morning. This lets fresh air in and moist air out
- 2. If water builds up on your windows, wiping it away should avoid mould
- 3. When you're in the shower or bath, or when you're cooking, keep the door closed and either open a window of make sure you turn your extractor fan on (extractor fans use surprisingly little power)
- 4. When cooking, keep lids on pans to stop steam escaping
- 5. Dry your clothes outside whenever possible. If that's not an option then think about drying them in the bathroom or kitchen, with the window open/extractor fan on, and the doors closed
- 6. Make sure vented tumble dryers are ventilated outside
- 7. If you have a condenser dryer, make sure it's in a well-ventilated room and that you regularly empty the condensation tank
- 8. Make sure furniture is away from radiators and external walls as this stops air moving around your home
- 9. Use a mould cleaning product to remove mould as soon as it appears

Damp and mould are usually due to everyday living but sometimes they can be caused by an issue with your property. If you have tried our tips but it's not making a difference, please let us know. It could be that there's a problem that needs our attention.

Did you know?

Have a look at these everyday activities and how much moisture they produce

Activity

2 active people in 1 day

Cooking/using the kettle

Bathing/showering

Washing clothes

Drying clothes

Total amount of moisture in one day

Moisture produced in pints

PPP

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Looking after your home in cold weather



On top of everything else that's going on just now, the last thing you want is frozen or burst pipes added to your list of worries but they are one of the biggest dangers to your home over the winter. You can

avoid them by keeping your home at an even temperature and running taps frequently during cold spells. You should also turn the water off at the mains if you go away for more than a day. Contact Property

Services to find out where your stop valve is or to get more help and advice.

You should also make sure you have home contents insurance so that your carpets and possessions are protected in the event of flooding (or fire).

You choose which insurance company you want to use. For information the SFHA Diamond scheme, underwritten by Royal & Sun Alliance, has been designed especially for tenants and is delivered at a fair price.

To find out more, or to request an application form, contact your housing officer or visit www.sfha.co.uk/diamondinsurance.

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.

We are continuing to see high numbers of complaints about our main repairs contractor Novus. One measure we've taken in an effort to improve performance is reducing their workload by appointing a different contractor to carry out

work on empty properties, allowing Novus to focus only on repairs in occupied homes. We hope that this, alongside other measures we're currently taking, will see things improve.

Satisfaction figures - 1 July to 31 October 2022



Frontline (stage 1)

60

Upheld

47

Average Response Time

2.2 days



Investigation (stage 2) complaints

5

Upheld

2

Average Response Time

12.4 days



Compliments

3

Repairs (29 complaints)

Property condition (3)

ASB handling (2)

Policy/procedure (3)

Other contractor (3)

Estate Management (2)

Staff behaviour (3)

Heating/ hot water (8)

Poor service/comms
(excl repairs/gas) (6)

Charges (1)

What you told us

"

l am always happy with the speed that repairs are done. You hear horror stories of other landlords who make their tenants wait a very long time.

"

Staff were amazing when I lost my dad last year, he done a lot of voluntary work for Melville & the cards & flowers were appreciated.

"

I think Melville offer so much more than a roof over your head. There's so much support from them and loads of handy services.

61

The staff are very friendly and helpful if you need help regarding your tenancy.

"

All staff have been amazing! Still currently supporting me in every way possible. Been very helpful. Thank you.

Just wish that the people who come to do work did the job properly in the 1st place and we wouldn't of had 28 workman and 57 visits in 14 months.

Some staff are OK but I'm still disappointed in the overall performance from Melville as of late.

Not always had the best experience dealing directly with Saltire lengineers not turning up or refusing to come out) but property services team have been amazing at sorting these problems out.

Get rid of the contract with Novus shambles of a company.

I feel Melville is good at communication and represents its tenants well. Help is always at hand when needed and there benefits advisory system is very good.

I think gardens in area should be better kept as it's unfair when it grows into peoples that do care for theirs and sending a letter out once a year to warn them isn't enough.

Very satisfied at how fast my repair got fixed after having to phone Melville about the issues I was having with Novus. Just want to thank you for helping sort it out.

Communication is good with Melville.
People are well mannered, polite and good at jobs.

"

Get new contractors Novus is a joke.

7.

Very good service. Staff are very helpful. Had a blocked drain and had the plumber out within 2 hours great job. Had a new bathroom put in turned out beautifully great workmen.

Helping out



Join us on Facebook

Join our growing Facebook community. We currently have more than 1,900 people following us 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.

Prize draw winner

Well done to Sharon Carrigan from Penicuik, winner of our latest quarterly prize draw. Sharon 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.

Tenant Report now available to download

This year's Tenant Report, produced with the help of our Tenant Rep group, is now available to download from our website. The report shows how we've performed over the past year and is based on figures supplied

to the Housing Regulator in our Annual Return on the Charter.

If you'd like a paper copy of the report, an audio version, or translated into a language other than English, please get in touch in the usual ways.



New community pantry in Woodburn

A new community food pantry, providing access to low-cost food, has opened in the MARC building, 10 Woodburn Road.

Available to residents of Woodburn and central Palkeith, the pantry is open between 1.30pm and 5.30pm every Friday afternoon. It's free to join but a weekly shop will cost you £3.50. For this you can choose long life food worth over £10 plus free fruit, yeg and bread (when available).

FREE stuff

We're always keen to do more for our tenants but unfortunately, due to phenomenal demand, we're currently out of carpet tiles and paint. We're doing our best to get hold of more of both and in the meantime we're adding names to a waiting list so you can still get in touch if you're interested. We do still have a small number of Vodafone SIM cards (worth around £120) left though, so if you'd like one just get in touch in the usual ways.

Want to hear from us differently or have difficulty reading Voice?

If you have problems reading Voice, we can provide it in large print, as an online audio version or in a language other than English. And if you want us to stop posting you a paper copy we can take you off the mailing list and send it to you electronically instead. Just let us know by email to dhughes@melville.org.uk or give us a call on the usual number.

