

East Ayrshire Tenants & Residents Federation



Working Together to Achieve More



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EATRF Supported by the Tenants information Service and
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WELCOME BY

Bruce Cuthbertson, Chairperson



Hello and welcome to our latest Annual Report. Once again I am amazed at the amount and varied work we have completed this year. Within this year's Annual Report you will see some of the projects we have led or have influenced.

We have continued our Tenant Scrutiny work on Allocations and Voids and had some influence in the New Builds that are springing up all over East Ayrshire. The voids work although lengthy, has been fruitful and we expect to see improvements in this area very soon.

We welcomed visitors from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, both tenants and officers who came on a study visit to learn about our methods of Tenant Scrutiny, share ideas and skills. We visited the Risk Management Centre, the Gas Section within Housing Asset Services and our offices, as well as a tour of some of the Local Groups and Housing Investment Projects going on in East Ayrshire. We finished off the trip by showing off the talent of the pupils of St Joseph's Academy at a mini civic reception held in their school, Coldplay played on the bag pipes brilliant!

Our Annual Joint Conference and the Rent Restructure process is only a small taster of the other types of work carried out this year.

I am continually amazed by the quality of the work carried out by our members and the time they commit to their local communities, the Federation and to Tenant Scrutiny. We are leading the way in Tenant Scrutiny which has been recognised as good practice, not only by the Council, but by other organisations throughout Scotland – sometimes with an award or two.

If you feel you could contribute, even for an hour or two each month, please contact our office on 01563 524073 or email secretary.eatrf@yahoo.co.uk.

The Federation wishes to thank East Ayrshire Council's Housing Service, our local Councillors for their continued support and funding and the Tenants Information Service for the independent advice and development support.

On a personal note I would like to thank Provost Todd, Councillor Eoghann MacColl and all the various Council officers that give the Federation and local groups information and support and who make my job a lot easier especially the study visit, thanks guys.

Laura Campbell, the Federation treasurer had to step down due to work and family commitments and we take this opportunity to wish her well.

It is with a heavy heart we had to say farewell to the late Linda Thompson who was a founding member and secretary of the Federation for many years. Linda was very committed to Tenant Participation as well as other noble causes. It would be fair to say Linda suffered great pain most of her life due to her condition but she never stopped living her life to the maximum with her wee dog – Rest in Peace,

Yours sincerely
On behalf of EATRF
Bruce Cuthbertson, Chairperson

WARM WELCOMES & Fond Farewells

EATRF is delighted to extend a warm welcome to Katie Kelly, in her new post as head of Housing and Communities and Blair Millar, new Housing Services Manager. We look forward to working with both officers to build on tenant participation and scrutiny activities and ensure tenants are at the heart of decision making.



EATRF would like to extend a warm welcome to all new tenants both from near and afar. We would also like to invite all tenants to get involved in the work of the Federation, to find out more and to have an opportunity to win a fantastic prize courtesy of Home Energy Scotland please see **page 11** of this report and send us your contact details.



This year we bid a fond farewell to Gerry Darroch, Acting Head of Housing and Environment Services. Gerry was a firm supporter of the Federation and local tenants and residents groups, always more than willing to meet with us to discuss housing services, issues and concerns and was a reliable Guest Speaker at our conferences and events. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

TENANT SCRUTINY



The Federation continues to lead the way in the further development of tenant scrutiny, with members of the Federation, tenants and residents groups and individual tenants reviewing housing policies, services, standards and performance from a tenants' point of view. Our most recent scrutiny project was on void properties – empty homes.

As the majority of the money the Council receives to manage, repair, maintain and improve tenants homes, comes from rent money, it is vitally important that the timescale from a tenant moving out of a house to a new tenant moving in, is as short as possible to keep the rent money coming in. For new tenants and the Federation, it is also vitally important that houses are at a good standard before the new tenant moves in. This is known as the Lettable Standard.

The Void Scrutiny Sub Group worked with the Council's Housing Management Team and Housing Asset Services to examine the processes and procedures from a tenant advising they are moving out of a house to a new tenant moving in. During this work we looked at the Lettable Standard, inspected the void properties before and after they were ready for re-let and considered all paperwork and processes used.

During our visits to void properties, we noted that some houses come back to the Council in a better condition than others, meaning that some can be re-let quicker than others. The Housing Asset Services inspectors gave us an insight into the type and level of work that is carried out before houses can be re-let to a new tenant. This includes gas and electric safety checks, carrying out the repairs and maintenance required and assessing whether or not things like

kitchen and bathrooms need replaced to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

We also noted that some houses take longer to re-let than others, this can be due to a number of reasons such as the needs of applicants on the housing waiting list not matching the properties available in terms of size, type or location, along with access to facilities such as public transport, shops, schools and community facilities among others.

We have submitted a report on our findings and recommendations to the Council's Housing Service and hope that we can work together to improve void timescales and reduce void rent loss in future and see a continually improving standard of housing for all tenants in East Ayrshire.

The Federation would like to thank all Officers from Housing Management and Housing Asset Services who assisted us carry out this work and the Tenants Information Service for providing our independent information, advice and support.

This year we will be working with the Council to consider the development of a **Housing Asset Management Framework** and setting up scrutiny sub groups to look at **Estate Management** and **Housing Options (Homelessness)**. If you would like to get involved in any of these activities or to find out more, please give us a call on **01563 524073**.

John McKenzie,

EATRF Executive Committee Member

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL RENT RESTRUCTURE

Introduced 1st April 2016

As you know, previous Federation newsletters and annual reports have given updates on our joint work with Council Officers in the Rent Restructure Working Group and we are pleased to see that the implementation of the new structure has now started. Here's a quick reminder of what was involved:

- The Federation and the Council identified that rents for same size and type of houses were different across East Ayrshire
- Rents of some smaller houses were more than larger ones
- The rent levels charged for properties were not fair, open, transparent or easy to understand
- There were 320 different rent levels being charged across the Council's housing stock – this has now been reduced to 40



- Consultation with tenants agreed that rents for the same size and type of house should be charged at the same level across East Ayrshire

After a thorough examination of all the information, consideration of consultation feedback and to ensure tenants' rents did not increase by too much in one year, it was agreed that the new rent structure would be phased in over a seven year period from 1st April 2016.

For more information on the new rent structure or to request a copy of the Rent Restructure Guide for Tenants, please contact the Customer Liaison Officer by sending an email to housing@east-ayrshire.gov.uk or by telephone on 10563 554878.

Going forward we will be working with the Council to better understand how rent money is spent and to develop a rent strategy for the coming years. If you would like to get involved or find out more, please contact the Federation on 01563 524073.

ENERGY ADVICE

In these times of austerity, welfare reform and little or no pay increases and increasing fuel costs, every penny counts. The Federation is therefore pleased to promote the work on Home Energy Scotland, who may be able to assist you to save energy and therefore save some money.

Home Energy Scotland's expert advisors offer free, impartial advice to householders, community groups, private sector landlords, local authorities, housing associations and businesses across Scotland. Through our network of advice centres,

we offer relevant advice about energy saving, renewable energy, sustainable transport, waste prevention and more. You can call Home Energy Scotland for free on 0808 808 2282 or request a call back.





EATRF CELEBRATES SUCCESS IN 2015

Awards were coming our way this year, with the Council, in partnership with the Federation winning a Scrutiny Excellence Award at the Tenants Information Service National Excellence Award and Gauchalland East Tenants and Residents Association picking up first prize in the local group category on the same night. Winning two of the six categories certainly put a smile on our faces!

Nominations are now in for the 2016 National Excellence Awards – so wish us luck and all the best to the other nominees from across Scotland!

Would you like to get involved in improving social landlords a national level?

If so, here is an excellent opportunity for you with the Scottish Housing Regulator.....

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users

Help us to improve social landlords' services...

Who we are

The Scottish Housing Regulator's role is to protect the interests of tenants, homeless people and others who use the housing services of councils, housing associations, co-ops and other social landlords.

The National Panel: what it's for and why it's important

The National Panel is an important way for us to hear about your priorities and the services you receive. We use feedback to help make sure we're focusing on the important things.

Who can join?

You can join if you are a tenant of a social landlord, are homeless, a home owner receiving factoring or common repairs services from a social landlord, or a Gypsy/ Traveller who uses a social landlord site.

What's involved?

As a Panel member we will send occasional surveys asking for your views. Surveys are quick and easy to complete – we are running a survey at the moment that is open to new members. Panel members can also give feedback in other ways such as discussion groups or over the phone.

Every new member completing the survey will have the chance one of 4 x £20 prizes.



**Scottish Housing
Regulator**



ROLL-OUT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT HAS STARTED IN EAST AYRSHIRE –

Universal Credit (UC) is being introduced in East Ayrshire and may affect a number of tenants and residents as it is rolled out.

Universal Credit is part of the government's welfare reform and replaces the following six existing benefits:

- income support
- income based jobseeker's allowance
- housing benefit
- income related employment and support allowance
- working tax credit
- child tax credit

It will be paid as a single monthly payment direct to a bank account and is managed by the Department of Works and Pensions, not the Council.

Since February 2016, single people in East Ayrshire, who are out of work or on a low income and making a new claim, have been receiving Universal Credit directly from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Where Universal Credit includes a housing element, housing benefit will no longer be paid by the Council.

To find out more about Universal Credit, eligibility criteria - and what it might mean for you - visit the Government's website:

<https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

You can also download a helpful leaflet here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/403734/universal-credit-an-introduction.pdf

Alternatively, you can call the Universal Credit Helpline: **0345 600 0723**.

The Department of Works and Pensions also has two Jobcentres in East Ayrshire (Cumnock and Kilmarnock) and they will be involved in the administration of Universal Credit alongside a Universal Credit Service Centre. Jobcentres in South Ayrshire may also be involved in the administration of Universal Credit for some residents residing in southern areas of East Ayrshire.

For further information, advice and support, you can also get in touch with East Ayrshire Money.....

We're here to offer you a helping hand...

East Ayrshire Money is a new partnership of local agencies offering information, advice and support services relating to employment skills, benefits, financial and money issues for residents of East Ayrshire.

The service also offers advice and guidance on other money matters, such as opening a bank account, affordable credit, insurance, financial planning and budgeting.

It's also free and completely confidential

Visit **www.eamoney.co.uk** or call **0800 389 7750** and let us offer you a helping hand.



EATRF ENSURING TENANT INFLUENCE

In addition to our award winning tenant scrutiny work, the Federation also works with the Council to ensure tenant influence in local services and standards and to ensure that information to tenants is clear concise and user friendly. Over 2015–2016, we have worked with the Council to review and improve the Council's Tenants Handbook, the Communication Code of Practice, the Tenants and Residents Associations Handbook and communication to tenants regarding the Council's Housing Improvement Programme.

We are also involved in jointly monitoring the implementation of the Tenant Participation Strategy with Council Officers and the Tenants Information Service (TIS), we regularly participate in Housing Management Performance Meetings with Senior Officers to find out more about service performance and assist in the production of the Annual Performance Report to tenants.

Through our Open Meetings we ensure we are kept up to date with East Ayrshire wide services and developments, along with other topics. During the past year, this has included: understanding housing finance, the provision of housing for Syrian Refugee Families, the Council's Rent Restructure and Ayrshire Roads Alliance.

The Federation and members of local tenants and

residents groups continue to work together to get our message across at local, East Ayrshire wide and national levels. As members of the Regional Networks of Tenants and Residents Organisations we regularly meet tenants' representatives from **Region 6**, which includes East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway to discuss housing policy, standards and consultations with the Scottish Government. This gives us an opportunity to see that tenants' views are reflected in housing legislation and guidance that landlords then implement in our cities, towns and villages.

Through the Regional Networks, of which there are 9 across Scotland, we also take the opportunity to meet the **Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)** to discuss landlord performance and ensure that tenants' views are listened to. The SHR regulates to protect the interests of tenants, homeless people and others who use the services provided by social landlords. To do this they focus on securing good outcomes for tenants and other service users, help tenants to hold their landlords to account and drive improvement in the provision of social housing. The SHR's regulation of social landlords is tenant-focused, intelligent and proportionate. To find out more about the SHR or read their landlord performance reports see

www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk.

FIRE SAFETY UPDATE

Did you know that every hour of every day there's a house fire in Scotland? Do you want to make sure you are doing all you can to protect your home and your family? Of course you do – so please read on....

Fire Safety Update from Scottish Fire and Rescue Service - Fire Can Happen to Anyone!

But it is our job to help make sure your home is as safe from fire as it can be. That is why we provide free Home Fire Safety Visits. Our staff can help you spot a possible fire hazard, offer advice and guidance and fit smoke alarms free of charge if your home requires them.

A Home Fire Safety Visit only takes around 20 minutes, and that 20 minutes may just save your life!

Visits Are Easy to Arrange!

A Home Fire Safety Visit can be organised at a time that suits you, day or night. The Service would also like community members to think about anyone they know who could be at risk from fire. It could be a relative, friend or neighbour. To book a free Home Fire Safety Visit for you or someone you know:

CALL 0800 0731 999 or visit www.firescotland.gov.uk

Always ask for official identification – all employees of Scottish Fire and Rescue will be happy to produce this on request.



**SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Working together for a safer Scotland

NATIONAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS – Changes coming your way!

The Federation continues to give tenants views on national housing policy developments and report this to the Scottish Government. This year will see aspects of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 being introduced.

The two main items that will affect tenants in East Ayrshire and across Scotland in the coming months are:

● **The End of the Right to Buy!**

As of 1st August 2016, tenants will no longer have the Right to Buy Council or Housing Association Homes. To find out more about this, please contact your local housing office or call East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation on 01563 524073.

● **Changes to Housing Allocation Policies and Practices!**

The Act identifies that some changes will be required to Housing Allocation Policies, therefore East Ayrshire Council, alongside the Common Housing Register partners, (Atrium Homes, Cunninghame Housing Association, Irvine Housing Association and Shire Housing) will be reviewing the Common Allocation Policy in the coming months.

To register your interest and be part of the review please contact the Federation by telephone on **01563 524073** or e-mail secretary.eatrf@yahoo.co.uk.

THE FEDERATION OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Sees us out and about across East Ayrshire providing information and chatting to tenants and residents at Gala Days and Community & Voluntary Organisation Events. In 2015 we visited Auchinleck, Bellsbank, Cumnock, Crookedholm, Galston, Hurlford, Kay Park, New Farm Loch, Newmilns, Shortlees, as well as Kilmarnock & Cumnock Town Centre Festivals, the East Ayrshire Community Council's Conference, Cunninghame Housing Association's Tenants Conference and the Tenants Information Service Annual National Tenants Conference held in Glasgow. We also attend the East Ayrshire Equalities Forum to keep up to date with other groups, organisations and developments.



Rain or shine – we are always delighted to attend events, meet friends old and new and hear what's going on in our local communities. If you are holding a gala day, fun day, event or conference, the Federation would love to come along and meet you and your neighbours, find out about your community and see if there's anything we can do to assist you and let you know more about our work.

So why not give us a call on 01563 524073.....

Russell Murdoch, Secretary

EATRF & EAC JOINT TENANTS CONFERENCE 2015 – Another hit with tenants and residents.

Over 100 delegates from across East Ayrshire had a great day at our Annual Conference held on 12th September in the St. Joseph's Campus, Kilmarnock. Opened by Provost Todd, an avid supporter of the work of the Federation and local tenants and residents groups, the conference treated delegates to Guest Speaker inputs, drama performances by Centre Stage, workshops, study visit and informative market place.

Guest Speakers, Gerry Darroch and David Stewart from the Council's Housing Service gave a presentation on the proposed new rent structure, with delegates then given the opportunity to ask questions and give their views.

Delegates then chose their next activities, either a study visit to see local housing investment projects, new build Council Housing and Tenants and Residents Association community projects or workshops on the new Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing known as EESSH, Housing Finance – where the money comes from and how it is spent, Repairs and Maintenance and Universal Credit.

The day concluded with a Market Place of over 20 stalls from local Council and Voluntary Organisations and Raffle,

which raised £170 for Provost Todd's chosen charity, the Samaritans.

The Federation was also delighted that all delegates brought along donations for the East Ayrshire Food Bank and clothes, toys and toiletries for the Moldova Appeal.

We would like to thank Provost Todd, local Councillors, Council staff, TIS and Centre Stage, as well as all the delegates for helping us to make this another very successful event.

Look out for news of our 2016 Conference which will be held later this year. We hope to see you there.

Fran Milligan, EATRF Treasurer



East Ayrshire Tenants & Residents Federation

Please complete your details to **GET INVOLVED** with:
Consultations | Information Events | Tenant Scrutiny
And much more!

☐ YES, I WOULD LIKE TO **GET INVOLVED**

Print Name

Address

Postcode

Tel No.

Email

Return completed postcards to EATRF for your chance to be entered to our FREE prize draw at our Tenants and Residents Conference. Prize sponsored by Home Energy Scotland.

☆☆☆ Coming ☆☆☆ ATTRACTIONS

Scottish Social Housing Charter Consultation

Date: Tuesday 5th July 2016
Time: 11am – 3pm
Venue: WG13, 13 West George Street,
KILMARNOCK, KA1 1DH

TO BOOK A PLACE PLEASE SEE OR CALL
0141 242 5448 or 0141 242 5426

Common Allocation Policy Review

To register your interest and be part of the review, please email your details to housing@east-ayrshire.gov.uk or call the Customer Liaison Team on 01563 554878.

Estate Management Tenant Scrutiny Project

To find out more and register your interest, call EATRF on 01563 524073

Housing Options Tenant Scrutiny Project

To find out more and register your interest, call EATRF on 01563 524073



East Ayrshire Tenants & Residents Federation

Working Together for
Better Communities



Supporting Tenant Participation Throughout East Ayrshire

19 Portland Road, Kilmarnock, KA1 2BT t: 01563 524073

w: www.eatrf.org.uk



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