

VOICE



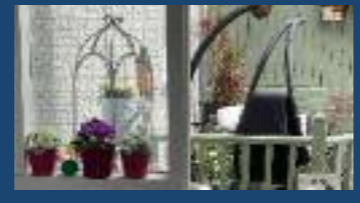
Issue 55 - Spring 2023



Rent increase is lowest in Scotland

£1.65m to be spent on homes

Great Gardens competition £100 first prize



Inside Your Spring Voice

Spotlight on our new housing team

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 • www.melville.org.uk • Scottish Charity SCO32755



4-day week trial begins – let us know what you think

On 1 January Melville became the first registered social landlord (RSL) in Scotland to adopt a 4-day working week for all staff. It's our partial solution to the cost-of-living crisis, rewarding staff with time off rather than inflated pay increases that would have an impact on rents and the quality of homes.

The plans, which were approved by Melville's Board and backed by 65% of tenants, see Melville staff no longer working on Fridays while retaining full pay. The switch to a 4-day week will initially be on a 12-month trial basis (ending on 31 December) but may become permanent as long as performance levels are maintained.

How have you found Melville's move to a 4-day week so far? Please let us know by email to dhughes@melville.org.uk or by phoning 0131 654 2733.

Positive results for global 4-day week trial

It was announced in February that the vast majority of companies taking part in the world's largest trial of a four-day week have opted to continue with it, in a result hailed as evidence that it could work across the UK economy.

Of the 61 companies that entered the six-month trial, 56 have extended the four-day week, including 18 who have made it permanent.

The benefits seen of a 32 hour 4-day week (down from a 35 hour 5-day week) include a better work-life balance, reduced stress levels, improved mental and physical health and a more sustainable lifestyle.



Record rent response leads to lowest increase in Scotland

Following another record consultation response, on 1 April Melville rents went up by 2%, or roughly £1.77 a week (based on an average monthly Melville rent of £379).

Almost two thirds (65%) of the 354 responses we received supported a rise of at least 2% with three out of four currently finding Melville's rents affordable.

We know that any increase can be tough but Melville's rent increase is the lowest in Scotland among mainstream RSLs, who, on average, are increasing their rents by almost 5.5%. 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 free money advice, welfare benefits and energy advice as well as tenancy support. We can also provide help with things like flooring (through our carpet tile project) and other equipment.

➔ 2%

What you told us

This year's survey saw an amazing response, particularly given the switch to digital returns only. The 354 replies we received is a record number, considerably more than the 251 we received last year, and continuing the trend of increasing returns in recent years. It represents a sample of more than 16% of our eligible tenancies.

Of the 354 replies that came back:

- 75% think Melville's rent and service charges are affordable (down slightly from 80% last year)
- 81% were happy with the services they receive from Melville (only 9% were unhappy)
- 65% were in favour of increasing rents. 35% were against any increase at all

For some of your comments (in red) and our responses (in blue) see over page.

Increase of roughly £1.77 a week

Money is extremely tight all around right now, I'm barely covering costs of bills and food but I appreciate that Melville seek feedback from tenants on rents. Have Melville considered creating their own repairs service rather than contracting the work out to other companies? It may be more financially sustainable in the longer term to have an in house service.

We know that any increase is tough for a lot of people which is why, against a backdrop of ever-increasing costs, we've done everything we can to deliver the lowest increase in Scotland. 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 ultimately lead to higher rent increases in future years if we want to keep them to the best standard possible.

We have looked at taking repairs in-house in the past and it may be something we look at again in the future, however at the moment, using an external contractor (such as Novus) is the most cost-effective method of delivering repairs. Repairs contractors are also unlikely to offer things like a 4-day week to their staff, which means that even when Melville are off, the repairs service can continue as normal.

Rents should be frozen for 2023, we never got a freeze during the pandemic while people were struggling and the current rent freeze has not benefitted Melville customers, we still got an increase April 22 and the rent freeze finishes March 23 so no benefit whatsoever to us.

I feel a rent increase is most likely the correct way forward however a high increase could see more people falling further into poverty. Services like stair cleaning could be cut to counteract the higher rent. Maybe a discount on rent for people living in properties that are too small for their requirements.

We're reluctant to cut services like stair cleaning as tenants who live in flats would soon notice the difference if this was to stop or be reduced. We don't house people in homes that are too small for them (legally we're not allowed to) so it would be unfair to cut rent for some and not for others.

Unlike councils, who have money coming in from several sources, rent is our only real source of income (save for the occasional government grant) and it needs to go up every year to pay for improvements to homes. Back in the mid-1990s we also had to borrow the money to buy the properties we now own and we've had to gradually pay this money back. However in recent years we've worked hard to keep rent increases low and the gap between our rents and those charged by councils is not as big as it used to be.

I think your rents are high, council is not as high.



My name's Jane Burnett and I'm the Head of Housing at Melville. I've been with Melville for all my working life and worked across the whole organisation. I took on my current role as Head of Housing at the end of last year and have been looking at how the section is run. I decided we needed to make some changes and add to the team, taking on an extra Housing Officer, appointing a deputy to manage the new team of six and also to create a new allocations and tenancy sustainment team. My team is responsible for tenants and any issues you may have, but generally not the buildings and repairs side of things. If you have any issues that you want us to look at, get in touch.

jburnett@melville.org.uk

Housing team expands

Thanks to restructuring, we now have a team of six housing officers, managed by Assistant Housing Manager Nikki Ross. Nikki's team are responsible for the day-to-day management of tenancies, including resolving neighbour issues, ensuring that tenants can pay their rent and offering advice and assistance to those that can't. We've also made some changes to the patches covered by the team. We don't have the space in Voice to cover every street, however we've included a summary below. This doesn't include Mayfield (by far our largest area) which is shared out across all six Housing Officers. If you live in Mayfield, or if your area isn't covered here, you can find out who your Housing Officer is by using the 'My Housing Officer' tool on our website or by giving us a call.

Marlene Crawford	Bonnyrigg, Pathhead, Poltonhall
Simon Davies	Bilston, Loanhead
Linda Hay	Gorebridge (most)
Caroline Langton	Danderhall, Lanarkshire, Edinburgh and East Lothian, Newtongrange
Paul McMahon	Easthouses, Woodburn, Gorebridge (some)
Emma Shanks	Penicuik, Rosewell, Easter Langside

Spotlight on new allocations and tenancy sustainment team



Rachel Berry	Team Manager
Julie Bernard	Allocations Co-ordinator
Craig MacDonald	Housing Assistant
Katie Taylor	Housing Assistant
Blair Tickhill	Housing Assistant

Helping tenants stay in their homes is one of the most important things that we do at Melville and as part of the reorganisation of our housing section we have created a new five-person team responsible for everything to do with allocations and tenancy sustainment. Led by manager Rachel Berry, who joined us in February, the team is made up of three housing assistants and an allocations co-ordinator. As well as allocating properties, including transfers, and helping tenants stay in their homes, the team is also in charge of estate management. We had a little chat with the new team to find out what gets them out of bed in the morning.

What attracted you to your current job at Melville?

Rachel: To be able to help tenants in the community and work with the team to reduce homelessness.
 Craig: Helping people in the area where I grew up.
 Katie: Moving to a more personal organisation with a better work/life balance.
 Julie: The opportunity to work and help people within my own community.



Tell us about your average working day

Rachel: Not sure there is such a thing as an average day but I do like to start every day with a cup of tea, before checking in with the team and other colleagues. I can be pulled in all sorts of different directions in the office but a good part of my day is usually spent working my way through emails and helping those that need it.
 Blair: Dealing with low level rent arrears, taking calls and payments from tenants. Lots more which, as I'm new, includes pestering the rest of the team by asking lots of questions!
 Craig: I'm pretty much on the phone as soon as I get here, contacting tenants to talk about rent accounts and finding out if they need any help with their tenancy or benefits support.
 Julie: Very busy, juggling lots but really enjoy my working days.

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

Rachel: I feel that I have really good experience that I can use to build tenancy sustainment strategies but also improve services for tenants and those in our communities.
 Blair: My experience of working in social housing and always putting the tenants' best interests at heart.
 Craig: Funding applications. It's nice to help those that are struggling during tough times.
 Katie: My experience over the years not just in housing but also in customer services and my (hopefully) friendly/helpful attitude to tenants. I get it as I've been in most of their positions myself.

Any pets?

Blair: Wee Mario the cocker spaniel | Craig: Two cats called Oreo and Tilly
 Katie: Two cats called Vivi and Moshi | Julie: A dog and two cats



Dream holiday destination

Julie: North Coast 500 and Outer Hebrides is definitely on the bucket list.
 Katie: Love to go back to Florida Disneyland as I'm basically just a big kid!
 Everyone else: Anywhere with more sunshine than Scotland!

Three desert island companions

Rachel: Whitney Houston, Elvis and Princess Diana
 Craig: Dimitar Berbatov, Ray Mears and sport journalist Jonathon Wilson
 Katie: James McAvoy, Melissa McCarthy and Jamie Oliver
 Julie: Robin Williams, George Michael and anyone who can cook (but definitely not Jamie Oliver)



£1.65m to be spent improving homes this year



We'll be spending **£1.65 million** improving homes over the next 12 months (beginning 1 April 2023).

Investment in the new financial year, funded entirely from rental income, will see the replacement of 245 central heating systems, bathrooms and kitchens as well as paying for new roofs and doors.

"Despite rising costs caused by a number of factors, we are pleased with our home improvement programme for the coming year," said Rich Murdoch, Melville's Head of Asset Management. "Our investment plans are paid for through the money we receive from rents and this year's 2% increase, while in no way matching inflation, allows us to continue improving homes at a sustainable rate.

"Conditions continue to be challenging and are likely to remain so for some time to come, however sensible but at the same time ambitious plans will help us get through this tough period and continue to provide ever-improving homes at affordable rent levels."

A timetable of the 2023/24 planned maintenance work is currently being finalised. If you're due a home upgrade we will contact you closer to the time. Details are also now available online. Alternatively you can phone us on 0131 654 2733 (selecting option 2).



£513k on roofs



£322k on 80 heating systems (mostly in Gorebridge and Mayfield)

£317k on 79 bathrooms (mostly in Mayfield)



£300k on 86 kitchens (mostly in Gorebridge and Mayfield)

£194k on doors



£200 flooring for all new bathrooms



If you're due a new bathroom this year then you'll be part of a trial that will see the old £60 decoration allowance replaced with new flooring worth more than £200.

You'll have a choice of three different, high quality floor coverings that we will pay for and fit as part of the bathroom replacement. However once fitted the flooring becomes your responsibility. We won't repair any damage once the bathroom replacement is complete.

We'll be trialling this over the next 12 months and if it's a success we'll look at rolling it out further. We'd be happy to know what you think.

Air source heat pump option now available



One of the biggest areas of investment this year will be heating systems, with more than 80 older, less-efficient boilers due to be replaced. We've estimated that in the coming years more than £80million will be needed in order to meet our net zero (carbon reduction) obligations and we've made a start by putting aside funds for air source heat pumps. These greener alternatives to traditional gas boilers, which are gradually to be phased out by the Scottish Government, will be an option for any tenant who is having their heating replaced.

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 2% 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 2023 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.

Claiming UC hardship refund

If you've been forced to pay back a UC hardship payment in the past, then you may be able to apply for a refund from the DWP.

Hardship payments are paid to people claiming UC when they are sanctioned and most of the time must be paid back. Usually the money is deducted from your monthly benefit payments. You may be able to claim a refund if:

1. **At the time you were paying back the hardship payment, you asked the DWP to stop the repayments; and**
2. **DWP refused the request and continued to take the repayments; and**
3. **You repaid the hardship payment.**

You'll need to complete and return a form, explaining (and providing evidence of) the impact the hardship payment recovery had on you. This might be showing that:

- **making the repayments affected your health or the health of a family member and/or**
- **making the repayments caused you financial problems.**

You **MUST** apply by 19 June 2023. If your application is refused, send an email to enquiries@publiclawproject.org.uk and they may be able to help.

New UC rules threaten benefit cuts

A major change to Universal Credit rules came into force in January, which could result in a cut in benefits for claimants. The change sees people moved from a 'light touch' work search group into the 'intensive work search' category.

This means people could be required to increase their hours at their existing job or look for better-paid work - or risk having their benefits cut. Under the old rules, those working up to 9 hours a week at the National Living Wage were in the 'intensive work search' group. This means they needed to go to the Jobcentre regularly and were required to increase their earnings. This has now been raised to those working under 15 hours a week for individuals, and 24 hours a week for couples.

Those affected by the change, expected to number around 120,000 across the UK, will be contacted by the Department for Work and Pensions through the online UC journal. Make sure you check yours regularly to avoid being hit with sanctions.

UK bereavement benefits extended

For the first time, if you have dependent children and raise them with a partner who you live with (but aren't married to), you can now claim bereavement support payment from the DWP should your partner die.

In usual circumstances you must claim within three months of your partner's death to receive the full amount however you can also make a claim if your partner died on or after 30 August 2018, but you must do so by February 2024.

Bereavement support payment will not affect any other benefits you receive and nor is it means-tested. This means what you earn or how much you have in savings won't be taken into account. It's usually paid as a one-off payment followed by up to 18 monthly payments. This may change depending on when you make your claim.

Find out more by visiting www.gov.uk and then searching for bereavement support payment. We can also help you claim, or let you know if you're eligible. Get in touch in the usual ways.

PIP update

Personal independence payments (PIP) are gradually moving across to Social Security Scotland where they become adult disability payments. This process is expected to be completed by summer 2024. If you're still receiving PIP then you'll need to carry on responding to requests from DWP like filling in a PIP review or renewal form.

If you're asked to complete a renewal form, make sure you do so and, to be safe, follow up with a phone call to make sure it arrived and they processed it. This is because 42,000 claimants lost their PIP award in 2021 because they allegedly failed to return their PIP review form. This is an unexplained increase of almost 300% in just two years...

Get in touch



If you need help and advice managing your money please get in touch. John Scott and Chloe Hamilton, 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) 0131 561 6481

Chloe Hamilton (chamilton@melville.org.uk) 0131 561 6482

Melville in the community

Tribute paid to former Board Chair



Everyone at Melville was very sad to hear of the death of our former Chair, Bob Anderson (pictured right), who died suddenly on 12 March aged 76. Andrew Noble, our former Chief Executive who worked closely with Bob, paid this tribute.

So well known was he in his local community, that Bob seemed like he must be a Midlothian man through and through. It came as a surprise to many of us to discover that he was, in fact, born and raised in Fife. But it was Newtongrange, where he spent much of his life, that he called home and that he did so much for.

Following a distinguished career in the NHS and Scottish Civil Service, Bob and Melville came together in 2004 when he applied to join our Board. He quickly took on more responsibility before being elected Chair in 2012.

When Bob joined us, I was Director of Finance and quickly got to know him through his work on our Audit Committee. From our first meeting it was clear that he had a keen eye for detail and was genuinely interested not only in what we were doing, but also in what lay behind the numbers. Above all though, Bob was interested in people.

When I took over as Chief Executive in 2005, Bob was there to help and guide me. As Chair, Bob met with me weekly. As well as a great sounding board for ongoing issues or new opportunities, Bob was always interested in what was going on outside work. Listening to people and getting to know them was one of his great strengths. When visiting the office he always took time to speak to staff though, as a Newtongrange man, he already knew quite a few local staff from his favourite watering hole, the Dean Tavern.

During his time as Chair, Bob oversaw a period of substantial growth for Melville. He took a lot of pleasure in seeing sites progress from muddy fields to new homes and enjoyed marking completions with delighted tenants and sometimes even happy politicians.

One of his proudest moments came in July 2016 when he welcomed HRH the Duke of Gloucester to formally open the restored and renovated Dalkeith Corn Exchange. Bob had been passionate about the refurbishment project, saving one of Midlothian's iconic buildings, and most importantly retaining it for the community.

Bob was also passionate about Midlothian's industrial heritage and spent many years on the Board of the National Mining Museum Scotland.

His contribution to Melville, Midlothian and beyond over so many years was enormous, but first and foremost he was a real gentleman and we will miss him. Our thoughts go to his wife, Linda, and to all his family and friends.

Andrew Noble

Garden contest returns with £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.

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 (or phone 0131 561 6466) by

5pm Friday 11 August. Judging will take place in late August (but you can also send us earlier photos of your garden in full bloom) 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 Mrs Diane Wright of Woodburn Place, Dalkeith.

**£100
first prize**

**£25
runner up prize**

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

Latest from our tenant reps

Hi and welcome to our regular tenant rep column.



We had a positive meeting in March, our first of the year, focusing pretty heavily on repairs and maintenance. It was good to introduce Rich and David, the new guys in charge of the Property team. They talked us through the latest news from main repairs provider Novus as well as providing information about the home improvement programme for the coming year, explaining about a new information pack setting out what tenants can expect when getting an upgrade. Plans to replace the bathroom decoration allowance with flooring instead went down well and we look forward to seeing what others think.

Our repairs service isn't perfect and we know there have been more issues than usual with Novus, however it was good to hear from one of our reps that she appreciated the recent replacement of her toilet seat, something that Midlothian Council wouldn't now do, as they no longer carry out minor repairs.

The group backed plans to increase support for struggling tenants. We are hoping to get hold of some new carpet tiles shortly and are also looking into help with white goods like fridges and air fryers.

Finally we asked for feedback on how reps felt the 4-day week trial was going so far. The feeling was that so far there has been no negative impact on service levels.

As always, if you have any feedback for us on the 4-day week or about anything else, 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	Position vacant
Penicuik, Bilston, Loanhead	Steven Jamieson
Bonnyrigg, Poltonhall, Rosewell	Andrew Hiddleston, Gill Pennie, Liz Coyle and Janet Harvey
Mayfield	Belinda Maciver
Westhouses (Mayfield), Pathhead	Diane Gamrot
Easthouses	Lindsay Herriot-Masoka
Dalkeith	Sandra Weston
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 or call 0131 561 6466.

Steph's story



My name's Steph (not my real name) and I've lived in a Melville house in Midlothian for over 20 years. I wanted to share my addiction story to help other people who might think there's no one they can speak to or have nowhere to turn.

2022 was a tough year for me and my family and although it's difficult to admit, it was brought on by me. I developed an online gambling addiction playing virtual slots. What began as a bit of 'harmless' fun during lockdown, very soon took over my life. I was staying up all night gambling, I wasn't eating and I started to miss rent payments, had to juggle bills, and pretty quickly lost our savings. I felt so guilty and totally alone as things rapidly spiralled out of control.

It wasn't until my husband asked me why we had no money that I came clean...

He encouraged me to get help but it wasn't that easy. I didn't know where to turn. It wasn't something I felt I could go to my GP about and despite really trying, I struggled to find people who provided the type of support I needed. There are no local support groups or anything like that. Just now I looked at Melville's advice page which has loads of good stuff but nothing there for help with gambling.

The gambling companies will tell you they have safeguards in place to help people who are spiralling but people and systems are very easy to manipulate for anyone

determined to carry on. There's only ever one winner in these situations and it's not going to be you.

Once I realised this, and accepted that the type of local support I needed just wasn't available, I decided that I was the only person who could get me out of this hole, after all it was me that dug it. I came up with my own system, with my own motivation and my own incentives:

- 1 I started off by getting my grown-up daughter (who has her own place) to change passwords so that I didn't have access to accounts.
- 2 When I got the urge I took time to remember how horrible the gambling, and also the dishonesty, made me feel and the impact it had on my health.
- 3 I wrote down every debt that had built up and started putting money towards them. Rather than spending £10 a day on gambling I put this money into a savings account so that I could pay the debts off. The satisfaction of seeing the money in the account grow started to replace the feeling I used to get from the gambling.
- 4 Once I paid off the debts I started to save for more positive things like Christmas and then a summer holiday.

I'm now more than six months gambling free. Looking back on it I can't believe I let this take over my life but I can honestly say that I no longer have even the slightest desire to go back to what I was doing. Nothing about it was ever worth the sneaking around, the dishonesty and the stress it caused to me and those I love.

Looking for help with problem gambling?

Around half of adults in Britain take part in some form of gambling, and for most it's not a big deal. But for some people, like Steph, gambling is a serious issue. Gambling takes up to 500 lives every year across the UK so it has wide-reaching consequences that can destroy families and lives.

If you're like Steph, then you can now get local help from Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) who provide the Gambling

Support Service (GSS). Funded by GambleAware, the project runs until March 2025, and delivers support across Scotland to those who need it as well as training to frontline workers helping them recognise when people are at risk of, or experiencing, harmful gambling.

Some people may be unaware they are affected by harmful gambling, or they may know but not want to tell anyone, not even their family. A key part of the work of GSS is to

normalise talking about the harm gambling can cause and reduce the shame and stigma attached, encouraging more people to receive the help they need.

To find out more about the harm out of control gambling can do, or to understand the impact it can have on individuals and their families, there's a short online film called One Last Spin which really brings it home. Just Google 'one last spin' to find out more.

Feeling the Pinch? Come to us for money help and advice



We're not here to tell you how to spend your money, that's your business, but if you're finding things tough just now, and feeling the pressure as the price of everything just keeps rising, then we can help.

We have an independent Money Advice service, provided by CHAI, that is FREE to tenants and member of their households and that can help you:

- deal with those you owe money to
- put all your debts, large or small, in one place
- with budgeting... even when money is extremely tight
- with sequestration (the Scottish equivalent of bankruptcy)

Although CHAI are paid by Melville to provide money advice, the service is impartial and confidential and will not be discussed with Melville staff unless you want that to happen.

The service is aimed at helping you become financially stable and allowing you to plan for times in the year when pressure on your finances is particularly severe, like Christmas and family occasions.

None of us want to waste money on unnecessary credit card or loan interest or even worse - door step loans. Speak to us and we can help you avoid these at all costs!

If you think this service might help you, please contact a member of the housing team or feel free to get in touch using the online form on the money advice page of our website.

Find out more

You can read more about the Gambling Support Service on the CAS website at:

www.cas.org.uk/spotlight/gambling-support-service

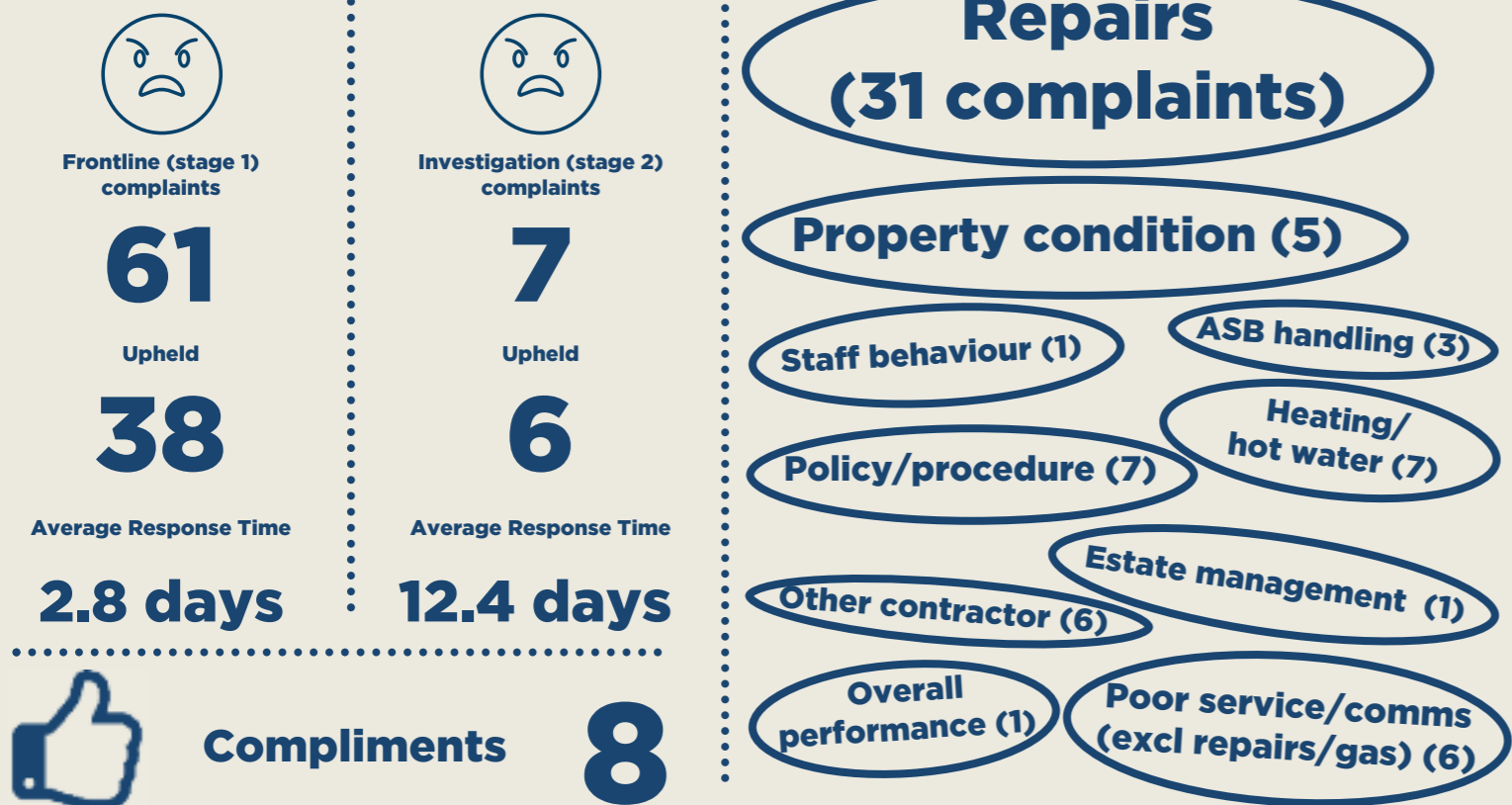
Help is also available from the National Gambling Helpline by calling 0808 8020 133, or using the Live Chat service at www.begambleaware.org

Over to you...

Over the past few months we've continued to see high numbers of complaints, both about the performance of contractors, and about services delivered directly by Melville staff. We are continuing to address the issues raised, and the reasons behind the increased complaints numbers.

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

On the 4-day week

“Tenants will be paying more, but getting less. The cost of living crisis is affecting everyone, not just staff. Why should tenants have to struggle to pay more rent but lose the staffing hours.”

“I understand that you are looking after you staff welfare needs and as long as customer service is not affected by the reduced hours I would support this.”

“4 day week is an idea whose time has come.”

“As long as managed appropriately, a 4 day week is a brilliant way forward.”

On rents

“Rents still cheaper than the private sector. I have a permanent tenancy. My home is in a great condition. I'm one of the lucky ones.”

“I am a pensioner with disabilities, Melville have helped me in anything that is required! A walk in shower wet room, a godsend to me, and my kitchen, fabulous! so I can't thank Melville enough for what they have done for me over the years!”

“There's families like mine where it's a one wage family but earns enough not to get extra financial support, and while everything goes up, in my husband's case his wages aren't and won't be. I'm sure we aren't the only family like this. 2% seems fair and reasonable and hopefully still helps with the tenants needs.”

“I know rents have to go up but with the financial crisis at the moment I would opt for the least rise until we all can recover from these terrible times and maybe next year put the rents up a little higher.”

“Nobody wants any increase in rent as times are hard for everyone but the rent we pay compared to Edinburgh is great.”

Other feedback

“I'm so fortunate and blessed to have had such a great team at Melville over the last 28 years and I did say when Jacquie Mather retired I'd never get another welfare officer as great again. I'm happy to say you proved me so wrong. Thank you for everything John - I can't thank you enough and I am indebted to you. You are indeed a star.”

“The neighbours need to take more pride in their streets especially dog owners. Pavements are a disgrace.”

“The repair service was fantastic used it last week. A man came out within 2 days and fixed the issue I had. He even went to the merchant to pick up the part needed and came straight back and fixed it. Was very impressed.”

“I consider Melville to be one of the best social housing associations. Repairs attended to quickly and also a lovely new bathroom installed. I am very lucky!”

“My housing officer provides a person centred quality service, this is a rare value generally in my opinion.”

“I am extremely happy with Melville. I honestly think you are better than other housing. My sister has a terrible time with repairs with hers.”

“I find dealing with Novus difficult. There seems a disconnect between the office and people on the job. Timings are almost always wrong. Irritating when I have changed plans to be sure someone is in, and then they don't show.”

News in Brief

Staff say goodbye to long-serving colleagues



Melville staff have said goodbye to two long-serving team members who between them have given over 50 years service to social housing in Midlothian.

Amelia Murdoch and Mary Monteith said farewell at the turn of the year.

Amelia has been with Melville from the very start, joining Scottish Homes in 1989 and then in 1995 transferring to Melville along with the housing stock. She has been helping tenants as part of the housing team ever since. Mary joined as PA to the Chief Executive in 2001, spending just over 20 years providing invaluable service to three different Chief Executives, five Chairs of the Board and too many Board members to count.

Amelia and Mary will be sorely missed by the whole team and we wish them both all the very best for a long and happy retirement!

SHR looking for new panel members

Fancy helping to improve council and housing association services across Scotland?

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is looking for tenants to join its National Panel which provides insight and feedback on various issues affecting social landlord services. Panel members can win £50 in occasional surveys and will also receive invites to take part in other feedback exercises.

If you have any questions about the Panel, or if you need information in other languages or large print, please contact Engage Scotland on 0800 433 7212 or by email to natpan@engagescotland.co.uk.

Voice - feedback and recycling

Thanks to everyone who's got in touch about the new look Voice. Feedback has been positive although we have had a couple of people tell us that they found some of the articles tricky to read due to the colours (mainly where red or green were used). We've taken this on board for the new issue.



Voice is also now more sustainable since we switched to an uncoated (non-glossy) paper. So make sure you put it in your paper recycling once you're finished with it.

Competition winners

Well done to Eileen McLaren of Woodburn Place, Dalkeith who won our rent consultation prize draw. Eileen picked up a £50 Tesco voucher for letting us know her thoughts. Thanks to everyone who took part.

Congratulations also to Helen Baeck of Laurelbank Road, Mayfield, winner of our quarterly satisfaction survey draw. Helen 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.



Christmas hamper

A massive thank you to fire safety experts Vetro Group for their very kind donation of a Christmas food parcel at the end of last year. Gary Ritchie dropped the parcel off at our office in December, just in time for a pre-Christmas delivery to an extremely grateful Midlothian tenant.

Join us on Facebook



Join our growing Facebook community. We currently have more than 1,700 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

Want to hear from us differently?

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.