



East Lothian  
Council

# 2020-23 TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY



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*East Lothian Tenants & Residents Panel members*



*Spring into Action in East Lothian Event, March 2019*

# Welcome

Welcome to East Lothian Council's fifth Tenant Participation Strategy, which sets out how we plan to involve our tenants and make sure that they can influence and scrutinise the housing services that we deliver. We will continue to give tenants a menu of options to choose from so that they can get involved in a way that suits them.

We want to build on our recent achievements and continue to support tenants, working in partnership with them and East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel (ELTRP). In the last few years we have achieved Tenants Information Service (TIS) Gold Scrutiny Accreditation, our Tenant Scrutiny Group won the TIS Scrutiny Excellence Award in 2018 and ELTRP won the Tenants Group of the Year Award in 2019.

We realise the importance of involving tenants when we are developing and reviewing our policies. We always strive to work together to provide excellent housing services. We value our tenant volunteers and the work that they do with us every day. We hope this strategy reflects how much more we want to achieve and the steps we will be taking to involve tenants in the next three years.



**Jim Herron**  
Chair  
East Lothian Tenants  
& Residents Panel



**Jim Goodfellow**  
Councillor and  
Cabinet Spokesperson  
for Housing and  
Community Wellbeing



**Monica Patterson**  
Chief Executive  
East Lothian Council

# Our Vision

Our vision for tenant participation in East Lothian is to maximise our tenants' involvement in influencing and scrutinising our housing services. We share the same principles of tenant participation with our tenants, ELTRP and tenants and residents groups.

GOOD  
WORKING  
RELATIONSHIPS

SHARING  
INFORMATION  
IDEAS &  
POWER

AGENDA  
SETTING

TIME TO  
FULLY  
CONSIDER  
ISSUES

RESOURCES  
FOR TENANT  
ORGANISATIONS

TRUST  
RESPECT &  
PARTNERSHIP

DECISION  
MAKING

EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITIES

RECOGNITION  
FOR TENANT  
ORGANISATIONS

INVOLVING  
RURAL  
TENANTS



# Background

East Lothian Council's Tenant Participation Strategy comes from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 which introduced rights for tenants and placed duties on landlords. We have developed our strategy in partnership with East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel. We carried out a list of actions to review our last strategy and help us to develop this one.



# Legislation

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives tenants rights, and sets out duties for landlords.

Tenants have the right to:

- Form independent representative associations
- Access information about housing policies
- Be consulted on issues that affect them
- Participate in decisions that affect the services tenants receive and be given adequate time to fully consider proposals.

Key Landlord duties are to:

- Produce a Tenant Participation Strategy
- Make sure that our Tenant Participation Strategy complies with equal opportunities requirements
- Set up a register of tenant organisations in line with Scottish Government guidance
- Take into account representations made by individual tenants or tenants groups
- Inform tenants and Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) of proposals for housing management, standards of service and the Tenant Participation Strategy.



*Spring into Action in East Lothian Event, March 2019*

# Our Aims

We aim to encourage as many tenants as possible to get involved with us and will give them a range of options. We want tenants to get involved in a way that suits them and will agree timescales with tenants to make sure they can properly participate. We will make sure our tenant participation activities are accessible to all and will be responsive to tenants' individual needs. We will provide tenants with access to the services and resources they need to allow them to become fully involved. We have carried out an impact assessment of this strategy to make sure that we do not discriminate against anyone and uphold equal opportunities in all the work that we do.

We value all forms of tenant participation equally and will make sure that support is available to encourage participation. We will consult, inform, involve and work with our tenants as equal partners to make sure our services are tenant focussed and our scrutiny work is tenant led.

## Ways our tenants can get involved include

- as an individual
- through a tenants and residents group
- by getting involved with East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel

## We will involve tenants at different stages of our work

Co-production	Drawing on the skills, knowledge and experience of our tenants working with them as equal partners to plan and deliver our services.
Participation	Sharing information and giving tenants the opportunity to take part in decision-making and influence our housing services.
Consultation	Tenants are given the opportunity to comment on services, policies and procedures before they are finally agreed.
Information	Is where tenants are being asked to comment on changes in policy. They will be provided with information in good time to allow them to make informed decisions.

# Social Housing Charter

The Social Housing Charter (SHC) was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and sets out the standards and outcomes that social landlords should aim to achieve whilst performing their housing services.

## The charter has 16 outcomes:

### The Customer / Landlord Relationship

1. **Equalities**
2. **Communication**
3. **Participation**

### Housing Quality and Maintenance

4. **Quality of Housing**
5. **Repairs, maintenance and improvements**

### Neighbourhood and Community

6. **Estate Management, antisocial behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes**

### Access to Housing and Support

7. **8. & 9. Housing Options**
10. **Access to social housing**
11. **Tenancy sustainment**
12. **Homeless people**

### Getting Good Value from Rents and Service Charges

13. **Value for money**
14. **& 15. Rent and Service charges**

### Other Customers

16. **Gypsy / Travellers**



## Annual Return on the Charter

The purpose of the Charter is to help improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords provide. We are required by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to submit an Annual Return on the Charter by the end of May each year. We then need to produce by October a Landlord's Report to explain to our tenants how we are performing as a service.

For more information and a copy of the Charter please go to:

[www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017](http://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017)

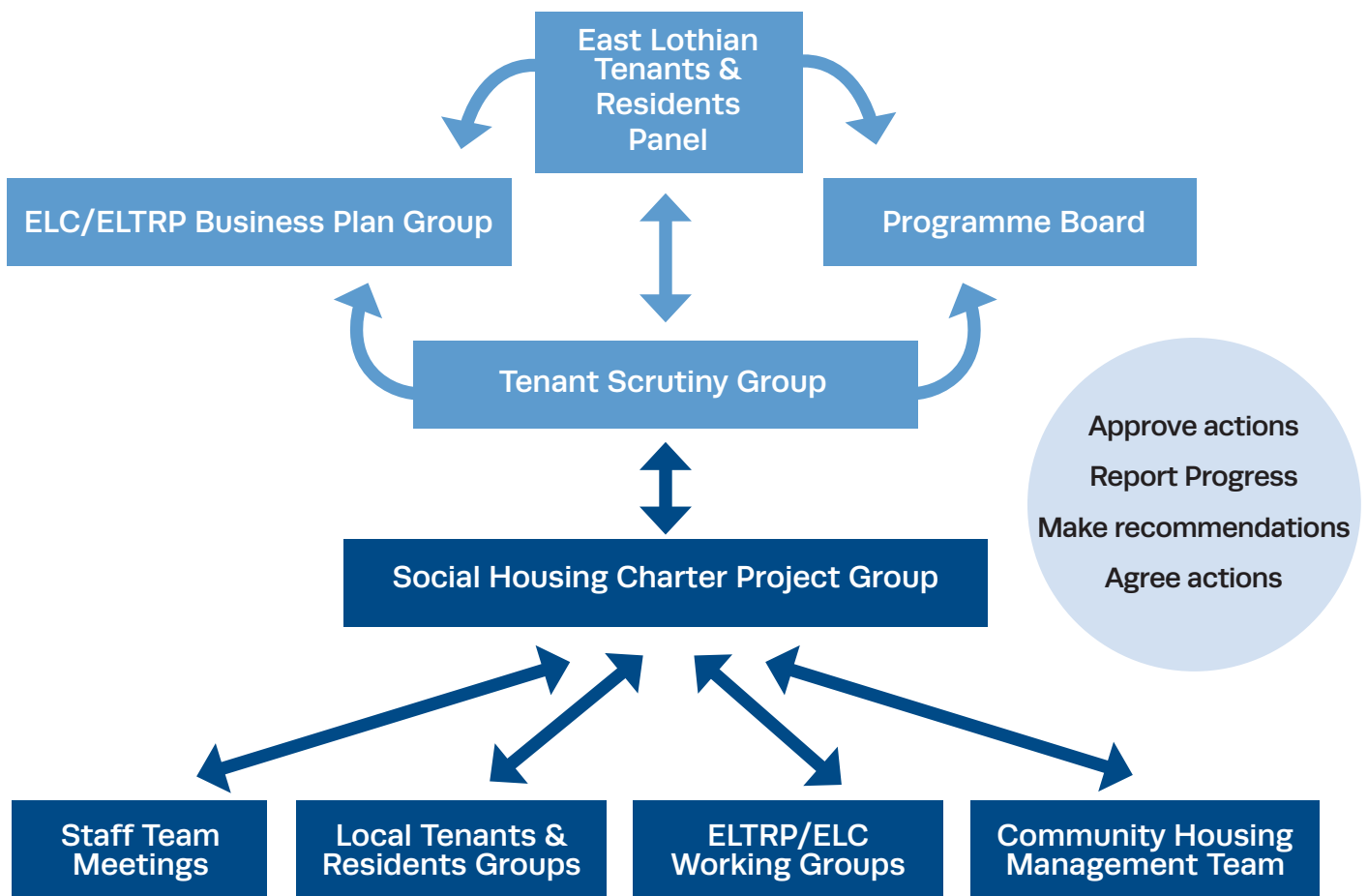


## Annual Assurance Statement

In October each year, we are also required to submit an Annual Assurance Statement to the SHR. [www.housingregulator.gov.scot](http://www.housingregulator.gov.scot) The council needs to confirm to the SHR that it is complying with all regulatory requirements and standards. If it is not meeting these requirements, ELC must advise the SHR and say what it is doing to address the issues. The council gathers evidence from various sources to assess overall compliance and this is monitored on an ongoing basis. A report is submitted to the council's Audit and Governance Committee for approval. Once it has been approved, the Statement is signed and submitted to the SHR and then made available publicly on the council's website. [www.eastlothian.gov.uk](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk) We continue to monitor our compliance throughout the year and should there be any issues where we are failing, we will inform the SHR and develop an action plan to address the issues.

## Tenant Scrutiny

Tenant scrutiny is a form of self-assessment which involves tenants working in partnership with their landlord. The **Scrutiny Framework** below which we have in place ensures the work we are doing is agreed by management and feeds into our group structure.



*The framework ensures that communication flows freely, recommendations for improvement are taken on board and progress is made to make sure we improve our services. We continue to develop tenant scrutiny in partnership with ELTRP and carry out scrutiny activities with our tenant volunteers, which are tenant-led.*



# Resources for tenant participation

We recognise that tenants need adequate time and proper resources to consider proposals and fully participate. The council and ELTRP work in partnership to make sure this is in place to support tenants, tenants groups and ELTRP.

The council has employed the Tenants Information Service (TIS) to provide independent support to ELTRP, tenants and local tenants and residents groups. The East Lothian Development Support Project employs three members of staff to provide a range of support, resources and training to help continue with the development of the tenants movement in East Lothian.

East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel (ELTRP) offers tenants and local groups the opportunity to get involved with them. ELTRP is the umbrella organisation for local tenants and residents groups throughout East Lothian and is run by an Executive Committee. The committee regularly consults with its members on relevant topics like rent levels and policy reviews. They organise events and support and encourage the development of tenant participation in East Lothian.

For more information about the panel visit [www.eltrp.co.uk](http://www.eltrp.co.uk)



*ELTRP TP Strategy Consultation Meeting– Burns Supper 2020*

We provide a budget for our tenant participation activities and shown in the table below is a list of some of the key items of expenditure. The Tenant Participation Budget for 2018/19 was £269,130.

<b>Budget</b>	<b>£</b>
Development Support Contract	112,000
Tenant Group Grants	850
TIS Annual Membership for Tenants and Residents Groups	120
Production of Tenants Newsletter (Homefront)	30,000
ELTRP Delegated Budget	22,000
ELTRP Office costs – i.e. rent, water rates	12,000
<b>Annual spend per tenant</b>	<b>£30.80</b>

**We also provide some in-kind support and resources including:**

- Free access to council venues for meetings
- Reimbursement of travel expenses
- Training for tenants and tenants and residents groups
- Access to photocopying and stationery supplies
- Transport on request for specific events
- A dedicated council officer with responsibility for tenant participation.

We will provide other resources on request to assist tenants who may be traditionally excluded or have particular needs.

We will always make sure that we keep our tenants informed through regular communication and make sure that they have enough time to consider our proposals when we are consulting with them. Giving feedback to tenants after consultations is something we always do. The methods of communication we will use to do this will be through Homefront, our tenants' newsletter, our website, social media, letters and we will provide information in other formats on request. (e.g. large print, Braille, in other languages).



*Spring into Action in East Lothian Event*

# Our Digital Participation Strategy

We want to make sure we offer tenants a range of different ways for them to get involved and at the same time we want to promote the use of digital channels of communication.

We work hard to increase our digital and online presence through the development of our website and use of social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter.

This is in line with some of our aims for tenant participation to make tenant participation accessible and inclusive, encourage engagement, build confidence and continue to build on our success.

## Making tenant participation accessible and inclusive

The COVID-19 pandemic required us to, find new and innovative ways of keeping in touch and engaging with our tenant representatives, ELTRP members and local tenants and residents groups.

In particular to make greater use of online communication channels.

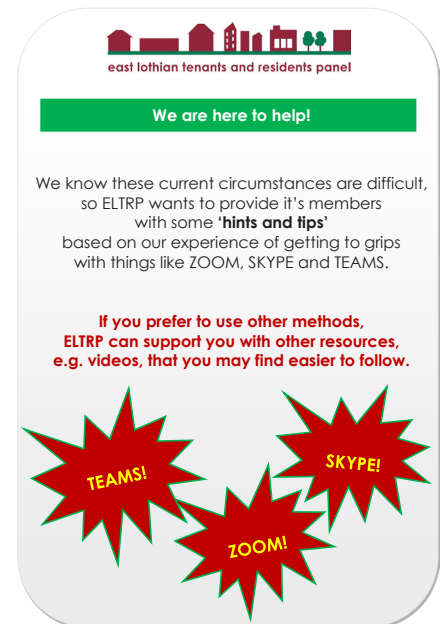
We did a number of things to change the way we worked. We:

- kept in touch with tenants by email and phone
- provided support to enable tenants to attend online meetings with us
- gave one-to-one and group support to help tenants to attend online meetings on Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.



We worked in partnership with ELTRP who:

- were successful in obtaining funding for IT equipment to get more tenants online
- produced a 'Hints and Tips' guide to getting online
- introduced a fortnightly newsletter
- held online quizzes to engage with tenants in a less formal way
- attended regular online meetings to carry on the business of ELTRP with the council
- provided an online Mental Health Awareness Training Session.



We see this as a great opportunity to continue to work with ELTRP to:

- support more tenants to get online and participate with us
- provide resources to make equipment available to those who need it
- upskill our staff and ELTRP so they can provide training and support
- continue to use informal ways to encourage tenants and tenants groups to meet online
- regularly engage in innovative ways to increase online tenant participation
- increase the number of online meetings in the future and provide this an option for tenants to get involved.



# Working together

We aim to work in partnership with our tenants, ELTRP, colleagues in other council departments and key organisations.

It is essential that tenant participation links into other council policies and strategies, for example:

- *East Lothian Council Plan 2017–2022*
- *East Lothian Plan 2017–2027*
- *Local Housing Strategy 2018–2023*
- *East Lothian Equality Plan 2017–2021*
- *Community Housing & Homelessness Service Plan 2020–21*



We also work hard to make sure that our strategy for tenant participation feeds into other service improvement activities and groups like:

- **How Good Is Our Service (HGIOS)**
- **Social Housing Charter Project Group**
- **Community Housing Communications Group**

## Monitoring & review

We will review our strategy every three years through our Tenant Participation Strategy Group. We will also regularly monitor and evaluate our tenant participation activities.

We will do this in a number of different ways by gathering quantitative and qualitative information. This work may involve carrying out impact assessments to make sure that the work we are doing is effective and is working well. Impact assessments help us to show what some of the benefits of getting involved can be, for example increasing skills, knowledge and confidence. Measuring the impact will also allow us to see how our activities are having an impact on our communities.

# Celebrating success

We are proud of our tenant participation structures and work hard to support them and have achieved a number of successes since our last strategy was written. We want to continue to build on these and become even more successful.



# Registered Tenant Organisations

A Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) is an independent organisation which is set up to represent tenants' interests on housing and related issues. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives tenants groups a statutory right to register with their landlords as a RTO.

Some tenants groups may want to become registered and there is a criteria which requires the group to be democratically elected, have an appropriate constitution and a defined area. The benefits of being a registered tenant organisation can include:

- **A right to be consulted over proposed changes to housing services**
- **It places a duty on the council to consult with RTOs on issues that affect them**
- **In addition, the council is required to take notice of representations made by RTOs within a reasonable timescale (these timescales will be agreed with tenants)**
- **An opportunity for RTOs to get involved in the regional networks which operate across Scotland.**

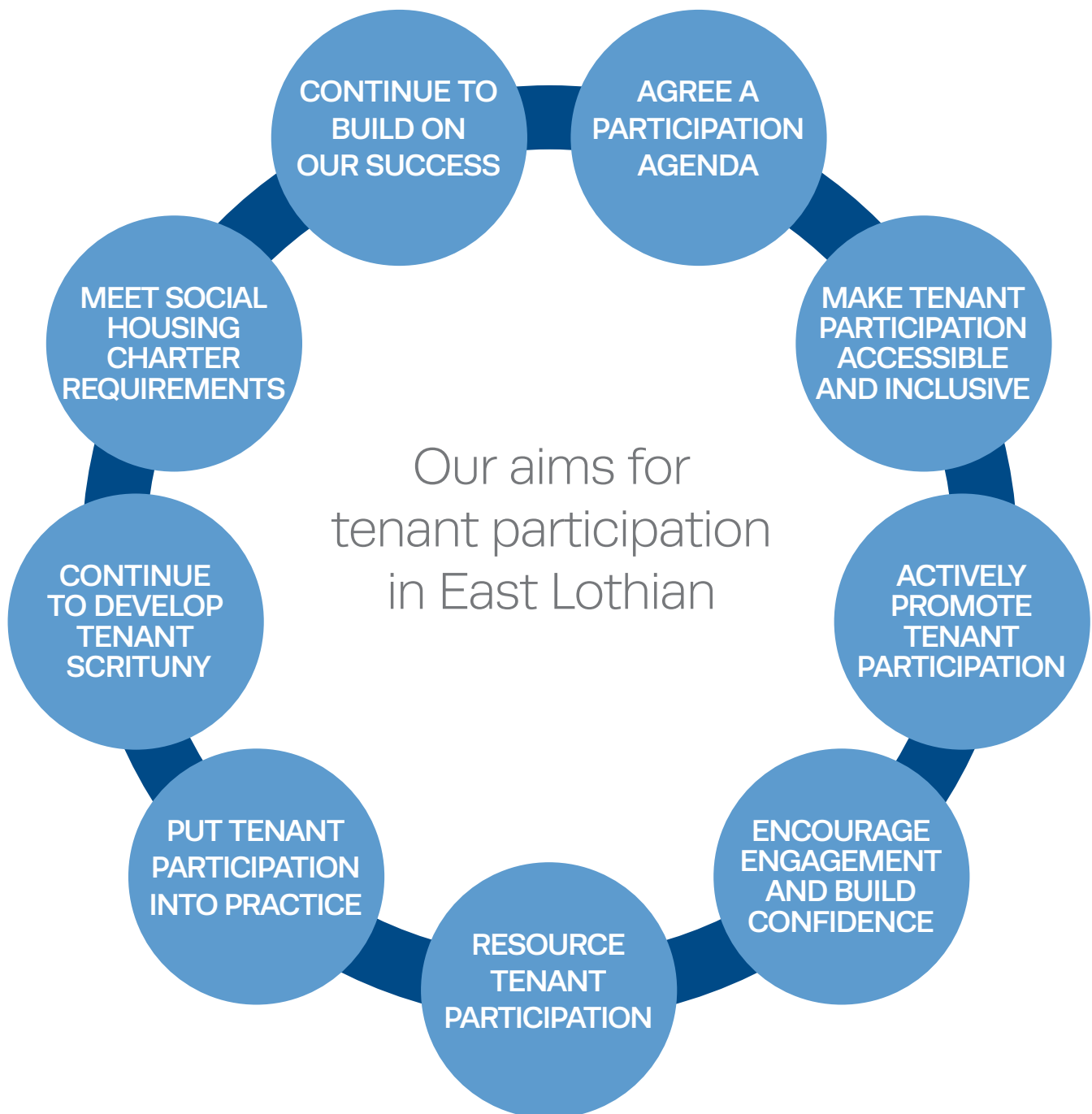
East Lothian Council set up and maintain the register of RTOs in East Lothian on behalf of the council, East Lothian Housing Association and Homes for Life Housing Partnership. The council has a duty to provide and maintain the register and it is updated annually. The register is on public display in our offices. More information about registered tenant organisations and a copy of the register can be found on the council website [www.eastlothian.gov.uk](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk)





# Action Plan

We have specific aims for tenant participation activities in East Lothian. The purpose of these is to make sure that tenant participation is inclusive and accessible. We will regularly look at the tasks we need to complete and the timescale for doing this will be for the life of this strategy. The Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by our Tenant Participation Strategy Group and will help us achieve our aims and plan for a successful future in tenant participation.



# Contact us

## Email

tenantconsultation@eastlothian.gov.uk

## Write

East Lothian Council  
Community Housing Service  
Service Development Team  
Penston House  
Macmerry EH33 1EX

## Call

East Lothian Council Tenant Consultation Line	0800 413 721
East Lothian Tenants And Residents Panel	0131 665 9304
East Lothian Council Contact Centre	01620 827827

## Visit

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk) [www.eltrp.co.uk](http://www.eltrp.co.uk) [www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk)



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone Customer Services if you require assistance on 01620 827199

## Data Protection

East Lothian Council uses the personal data you provide for purposes associated with the delivery of our services. For more information go to: [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/communityhousingpn](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/communityhousingpn)

Personal data will be retained in line with East Lothian Council retention policies. Data Protection Officer, East Lothian Council, John Muir House Haddington, EH41 3HA. Email: [dpo@eastlothain.gov.uk](mailto:dpo@eastlothain.gov.uk)