

Weslo launches garden service



As part of our ongoing review of services that we provide, we are delighted to announce that we have recently introduced a garden maintenance scheme in West Lothian; replacing the scheme previously provided on our behalf by West Lothian Council.

We aim to help those tenants who are unable to maintain their garden due to frailty, old age or disability. To benefit from the scheme applicants and all members of the household must be either:

- Aged 16 - 65 and in receipt of disability living allowance, or
- Aged 65 - 70 with the application form signed by a doctor, or
- Aged 70 years or over, or
- Registered blind.

We have recruited Alan Walker who has previously worked as a gardener and he is assisted by Billy Morgan to deliver the service which involves:

- regular grass cutting between April and October

- strimming small rough areas and edges
- pruning hedges twice a year.

Mr and Mrs Leslie of Falside were amongst the first tenants to have their garden tackled by Alan and Billy and above we see them having a chat about what the service will include. Mr Leslie, who is registered blind and has severe mobility problems, told us "In the past I have always enjoyed working in my garden but since we moved here 10 years ago my health has deteriorated and I am no longer able to do as much as I would like to. It does become a worry but having met Alan and Billy and seen how competent they are, I am happy with the service they are delivering."

Outwith the growing season and when time permits, the team will carry out additional duties including clearing out empty houses, removing rubbish and general tidy ups on the estates

Mike Bruce, Weslo's Chief Executive said "Gardens are supposed to be a source of pleasure but for tenants who are elderly or have a mobility problem they can become a terrible worry. We already have over 200 tenants in the scheme and I hope that they will find this service a real benefit."

If you think that you might qualify for the scheme please contact Christine Wood on 01506 639139 or email her on christine.wood@weslohm.co.uk.

Double trouble or what?

Readers may recall that Kevin Cairns joined us as ICT Manager in November 2008. Congratulations were in order recently when he and his wife became parents for the first time. Here he tells us how he has coped so far.

After my initial stunned query of "...there are how many heartbeats doc...!...", and the subsequent furore that goes along with being prospective parents of twins, the girls arrived on Boxing Day last year.

The last 6 months have been something of a haze (possibly due to the 2 hours sleep a night) but more likely due to the fact that every feed and nappy change is times 2, while you also contend with just about everyone you know wanting to "...just pop round quickly to see the twins...". Don't get me wrong, everybody has been great (as well as generous) and Jan and I are very grateful for the support that everyone has given us.

The girls themselves have been absolutely fantastic and we have been blessed with two very easy-going babies who both sleep through the night now and who's hobbies include smiling, giggling, and throwing up over daddy...!

They have certainly so far (and long may that continue...!) been very kind to two inexperienced "L-plated" parents, and Jan and I are looking forward to the years ahead with our beautiful girls.

Below we see proud parents Jan and Kevin with Katerina and Alicia



Regulator satisfied... but not as much as our tenants!

You may recall from the last issue that for the first time Weslo was subject to inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator. This process, involving a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of our housing service delivery, was conducted in December by the Regulator's seven strong Inspection Team which issued its report in June.



Mike Bruce - Weslo's Chief Executive

The Regulator said - "Weslo is a newly registered organisation and this is the Scottish Housing Regulator's first inspection of its services. While Weslo is a well established landlord, it only registered with us in February 2007. Our assessments and award of a C grade reflects a relatively good level of progress and achievement by Weslo within a short period of time." What happens now is that we will produce by the end of August an improvement plan stating what changes we intend to make to accommodate the recommendations made by the Regulator.

The recommendations are:

- improve our Business Plan and the processes used in its production;
- improve our awareness, monitoring and recording of Schedule 7; [of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001];
- improve our management around potential conflict of interests;
- improve our performance management framework;
- routinely test the efficiency and cost effectiveness of our services;
- put in place a formal asset management strategy;
- reduce our reliance on cloned stock condition survey information;
- comply with the Right to Repair legislation;
- do more to monitor people's access to our housing and improve the management, monitoring and reporting of our lettings;
- improve the management of our antisocial behaviour service;
- make our responsive repairs targets clear to tenants and accurately record and report our responsive repairs performance; and
- establish an annual performance evaluation for our Board.

Chief Executive Mike Bruce said – "We're glad to have come through such a labour intensive period relatively unscathed. I don't expect the procedural improvements we will introduce to impact too much on the service we provide. I'm very pleased that the Tenant Survey results reported elsewhere in this newsletter confirm our tenants ongoing high levels of satisfaction with our services. I can't pretend I'm happy for us to be rated only a "C" after 16 years in the business but frankly, I'd be more concerned if the opinion of the Regulator and our tenants were reversed."

The Scottish Housing Regulator's report can be viewed online at www.weslo-housing.org. If you cannot access the internet we will be glad to send you a copy. Please telephone Kate Hedges on 01506 634286 and she'll be happy to assist.

We would also like to hear any views you have on any aspect of the Regulator's report. If you'd like to comment on the recommendations or the report in general please drop us a line, for the attention of Kate Hedges, at Weslo Housing Management, 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, West Lothian, EH48 4PP or email us at enquiries@weslohm.co.uk.

Tenants give Weslo a vote of confidence

More tenants than ever before are happier with Weslo Housing Management as their landlord and happier with their homes, according to the most recent tenant satisfaction survey. The survey was carried out in May 2010 by independent consultants Knowledge Partnership and the preliminary report has just been received.

All 2138 tenants were given the opportunity to give their views on a wide range of issues including their homes, neighbourhoods, repairs service, contact with staff and any improvement work. Over 800 tenants (39%) completed and returned survey forms - a very similar number to those who responded in 2005.

Some of the highlights of the recent survey show that:

- 94% of tenants said they were satisfied with Weslo as a landlord compared to 86% in 2005.
- 94% of tenants were satisfied with the services we deliver compared to 90% per cent in 2005.
- 91% of tenants were happy of the overall condition of their home compared to 87% in 2005.
- In 2010, 70% of tenants felt that we listened to tenants' views and opinions compared to 67% in 2005.
- More tenants than ever before (59%) believe that we are able to help resolve neighbour problems compared to 51% five years ago.

Weslo Chief Executive Mike Bruce welcomed the figures. He said "These high levels of satisfaction with our service are a great testament to the hard work and dedication put in by our staff. To maintain the high levels we achieved in 2005 would have been a tall order but to have improved in many key areas is just fantastic for all concerned. I'm absolutely delighted at the tenants' verdict on us and would like to record my thanks to all the tenants who took the time and trouble to complete the form: it's very much appreciated."

Commenting on the results, Knowledge Partnership's Director Alan Kennedy said "These are an excellent set of results and show improvement in many areas when compared with the last survey in 2005. The overall satisfaction level of 94.5% puts Weslo firmly amongst the top performing Landlords for tenant satisfaction"

We would like to thank all of you who took time to share your views by completing the survey. This information is vital in ensuring that we take your opinions into consideration while reviewing our priorities.

All the completed surveys were entered into a prize draw and the ten lucky respondents have received £25 each. They are:

Ms Barbara Ewart, Armadale
Mrs Janet Stelfox, Stoneyburn
Mrs Barbara Black, Blackburn
Miss W Lumsden, Polbeth
Mr D & Mrs L Muirhead, Broxburn

Mr A Hay, Bathgate
Mr Ian Fair, West Calder
Mrs Christine McKay, Bo'ness
Mr James Fisher, Whitburn
Ms E Stirling & Mr J Porter, Bathgate

Weslo needs your help

We are seeking your cooperation when our gas service engineers contact you to make arrangements to carry out gas safety compliance tests.

The gas annual service is a legal requirement in order to ensure gas systems are operating in a safe and efficient manner and I am sure you understand the importance of having this service carried out as soon as possible.

At the end of 2009 we reviewed our Gas Service Policy to ensure that we were doing all that we could to meet our legal obligations. There still remain a small number of cases where we do not get access and it has been necessary to force entry to disconnect the gas supply as a measure of last resort. This is not an action that we take lightly but we need to ensure compliance with the law and ensure health and safety standards are met.

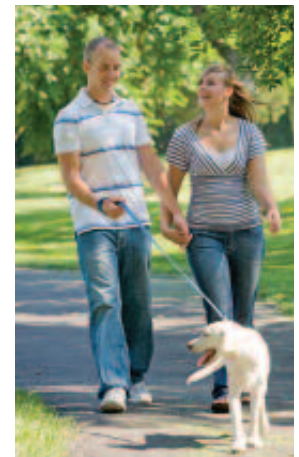
Mike Mitchell, Technical Manager said, "Weslo is responsible for guaranteeing the safety of the gas central heating appliances in all its properties. We would urge tenants to give our gas engineers access to carry out these inspections when required to ensure that there is no risk to themselves, their families or their neighbours".

Do you have pets in your home? Have you received permission from Weslo?

We do not withhold permission from anyone wishing to keep a pet provided that they are prepared to adhere to a few simple conditions.

In general these are that:

- You are responsible for the behaviour of any pets owned by you or anyone living with you, or brought on to the property by anyone visiting you.
- You must take all reasonable steps to supervise and keep pets under control.
- You must take all reasonable steps to prevent the pets causing nuisance, annoyance or danger to your neighbours. This includes fouling, noise or smell from them.



We recognise that the majority of dog owners are very responsible; they look after their dogs and make sure both the dog and members of the public are safe. However, the majority of complaints we receive in relation to pets are about dogs. If you have a dog, your pet is more likely to be out and about and you should ensure that you are a responsible owner by keeping your dog on a lead, clean up your dog's mess and ensuring that your dog is kept under control at all times. Failure to do so could result in you receiving a fixed penalty fine of £40, rising to £60 if not paid within 28 days. You may also be reported to the Procurator Fiscal and could be fined up to £500 if convicted. As a tenant you may also be subject to legal action that could lead to your tenancy being ended.

Weslo Staff donates £2000 to Baby Loss Charity SiMBA

Over the past 12 months staff have been holding a series of fundraisers to raise money for their nominated Charity of the Year. Last year staff chose to support SiMBA (Simpson's Memory Box Appeal), a charity that responds to the needs of those affected by the loss of a baby during pregnancy or close to the time of birth. They aim to provide the Memory Box and Family Room services in every maternity hospital throughout Scotland and provide a Tree of Tranquillity in each NHS district.

Staff raised £1,442 which Weslo augmented to a grand total of £2,000.

Mike Bruce, Weslo Chief Executive said "It's been great fun for us throughout the year enjoying the various fund raising activities, and the fact our efforts have resulted in a decent sum going to the charity has made it all the more satisfying".

On the right we see Charity Directors **Donna Hanley** and **Maria Roarty** receive the cheque for £2,000 from Mike Bruce, Chief Executive of Weslo Housing Management along with staff.

Staff have chosen HomeAid West Lothian as this years Charity of the Year. Homeaid is a not for profit voluntary organisation that exists to recycle used furniture and to support members of the West Lothian community who face social and economic exclusion. It provides essential furniture and white goods for people who have been homeless and are taking up tenancies.

Gordon Smith is on target to meet his aim to raise £10,000 in support of the Edinburgh Marie Curie Hospice. The challenge will take place in the Canadian Rockies between July 24 and 31 this year and involves cycling 249 miles in altitudes reaching 2,068 metres. It will begin at Banff National Park, taking in a circular loop of Lake Minnewana and will end five days later at Jasper. The journey includes passing Lake Louise, the Saskatchewan Crossing and the Columbia ice field and forms part of the route taken by Mark Beaumont for the recent BBC documentary – Cycling the Americas.



Weslo is also supporting this years **Bathgate Music Festival** which takes place between 12 and 18 September. The programme features a range of musical styles, profiles local music making, involves people of all ages, promotes high quality professional programmes and provides music education for young people. We are sponsoring a concert at the Regal Theatre in Bathgate on Sunday 12 September – Celtic Rock for the 21st Century - where **Skerryvore** (below) will perform with the West Lothian Schools Pipe Band. For more information check out www.bathgatemusicfestival.com or phone Visit West Lothian on 01506 777947.



Gordon recently lost a good friend, Stevie Inglis, to cancer and wanted to do something to help in his memory. Stevie was also a good friend of Mike Bruce who was happy to propose this venture to the community budget committee when contacted by Gordon. We wish him good luck in completing his challenge. Hopefully we will see a photo of Weslo's flag flying high in the Rockies when he gets back.



In April **David McLaren** attended the annual Unison Kinneil Band concert at Bo'ness Town Hall. It's not that David had developed a sudden interest in brass bands; David was there to represent Weslo who had donated three

instruments: a cornet, tenor horn and a trombone to Kinneil Youth Band. It is hoped that the additional instruments will help them satisfy the ever increasing numbers in the Youth Band. Below we see David (Centre) along with Youth Band Director - **David Frame** and Tutors - **Lauren Robb** and **Scott Gardner**.



Robyn Bridges and Louise Meechan from Blackburn will soon be heading off to participate in the Great Wall of China Trek to help raise money for Marie Curie Cancer Care. This charity provides free nursing care to cancer patients and those with other terminal illnesses in their own homes. Robyn said, "We have chosen this charity as we both had family members suffer from cancer and feel that the help, support and care from the Marie Curie nurses made a huge difference to the lives of the sufferers. My grandfather received a tremendous amount of care right up until the moment he passed away, and by doing the Great Wall of China Trek to raise money for this well deserving charity, we feel that this will be a way of thanking them for all of their support."

Louise, who lives with her Grandparents James and Margaret Meechan who have been Weslo tenants since 1998 told us, "This is a nine day trip but will include 5 days trekking over various sections of the Great Wall. I am sure it will be an unforgettable experience for everyone taking part but more importantly the money raised will be put to good use by Marie Curie Cancer Care".



So far Robyn and Louise have raised over £5,000 and are confident that they will meet their £6,000 target before setting off in September.

Weslo has continued to support many other local community groups including Bathgate Community Centre Playgroup, Lothian Running Club and Cairnpapple Hill Race to name but a few.

If you know of any group or worthy cause that might benefit from our assistance then please write to: Weslo Housing Management Community Budget Committee, 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP.

Working Together in the Community

In the December edition of Tenant News we told you about how staff work in partnership with various agencies in West Lothian to resolve problems in our estates. This time Susan Anderson, Estates Manager tells us how partnership working works in Bo'ness.

Eleven years ago when I was appointed Estates Manager, "working together in the community" would mean the community cop, PC Darren McVitie, popping into the Bo'ness Office to check if we had any problems in our estates. If we had, he would ensure that he walked more frequently in those areas until an issue was resolved.

In 2010 we have many partners and together we work to build a safer and cleaner community and to resolve anti-social problems in Bo'ness. Each month the Neighbourhood Action Group meets to discuss areas of concern in the town. Issues range from litter dropped by school children to rubbish dumping, dog fouling, vandalism and youth anti-social behaviour. The group includes Alan Christie from Falkirk Council's FIRST Team, Lorraine McGuckin, Housing Manager at Falkirk

Council's Bo'ness Office, local police, community wardens, an environmental health officer and local councillors. Together we discuss the issues raised by residents or identify areas experiencing increasing crime levels and discuss the best way forward to attempt to resolve them. Sometimes situations are resolved by the community wardens changing their routes or the police increasing patrols to particular estates in the town; the increased visibility can be all that is needed to make a difference. At the last meeting we invited a senior teacher from Bo'ness Academy to look at how we might resolve the lunch time litter problem. Time will tell if we are successful.

The community wardens regular walk around our estates and call into the office to speak to us if they identify a problem



Jason Candlish, Susan Anderson, Lorraine McGuckin, Isabel Weir, Lesley Hunter and David Purvis.

such as fly tipping or graffiti. Likewise, we can contact them directly to discuss issues as they crop up.

We maintain close ties with Central Scotland Police. PC's Craig Heron, Lesley Hunter and Gayle Hope are always keen to assist us. Gayle has recently gone on maternity leave and we await her return; her special talents were recognised when she won Scottish Constable of the Year in 2009. If you are experiencing problems in your estate why not give me a ring on 01506 639101 to discuss the matter or drop me a note at 15 North Street, Bo'ness, EH51 0AQ.

Weslo wanderers do Scotplod



In mid December 2009 an email arrived at Weslo inviting staff to form a team to participate in 'Scotplod' in June 2010. Promoted as "the ultimate endurance challenge", the 50km walk would begin at midnight in the hills around about Peebles in order to raise funds for Action Medical Research - a charity that carries out medical research into childhood illness and the Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue Team. Intrigued by the email and up for the challenge Susan Anderson roped in Kevin Cairns, Gillian McAllister and Arthur Davren and the Weslo Wanderers were born. The team would need looking after during the walk and soon recruited June Harper as support driver.

In the run up to the event each team member trained in their own way; Susan pounded the streets of Edinburgh taking in as many steep hills as possible, Kevin pushed the twin pram along the coastal paths of Dalgety Bay, Gillian took her dog on long brisk walks and Arthur played football and took his girls on long walks. Let Susan take up the story:

"On the evening of 4 June, 85 people (15 teams) met up at the Cardrona Hotel just outside Peebles and at midnight, with map and torches at the ready, we set off.

The route was split into six stages. The first two stages were exhausting as we climbed two of the highest peaks in the area and the teams were soon spread out. However, at 3:30am on the peak of the second hill we were rewarded by a beautiful dawn. We made good progress on the third stage which was relatively easy following the banks of the River Tweed, watching the fish and a flight of swans along the way. At this point Gillian had huge blisters on her heels and Kevin's left knee had popped and was heavily bandaged up. At the next checkpoint June greeted us enthusiastically with food, hot drinks and Ibuprofen at the ready. We couldn't hang about for long for fear of stiffening up, so with lots of encouragement, June soon had us on our way again.

More challenging hills met us in the next three stages but again we were rewarded by glorious weather and outstanding scenery to keep our spirits up. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after 16 hours of walking, we crossed the finish line, tired but elated that we had achieved our goal of walking 32 miles and collecting over £1,000 for charity."

"I'm so glad that we did this walk" said Susan. "It really stretched us physically and mentally but at the same time we raised much needed money for these two charitable organisations."

Kevin added "It was the most physically exhausting thing I have done in my life but somehow you find reserves of energy that you didn't know you had. I am very proud of the team and of the money we raised to help Action Medical Research and the Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue guys who do a fantastic job."

Arthur said, "This was the hardest physical challenge that I have ever done but would do it again with the same team but be much better prepared."

"Admittedly" says Gillian "when I first volunteered for the challenge I had no idea what was involved otherwise I would have trained seriously to ensure I was fit enough. Nevertheless, my team members were fabulous; supporting each other through the highs and lows of the challenge and yet we never considered giving up. I won't forget the experience, the breathtaking scenery or the sight of the sun rising as we stood on the peak of the hill we had just climbed. Also, I won't repeat the experience without being properly prepared."

"Although my role was not as involved or as physical as my team mates" said June "I was a bit jealous of not being able to view all that beautiful scenery. I tried to ensure that they were always welcomed with a smile and plenty of sustenance and left with a hug and lots of encouragement. After 33 hours of sleep deprivation it was a wonderful sight to spot them coming over the ridge heading towards the finish line with a smile on their faces. It was an honour to be part of a wonderful experience with such a wonderful team."

As a team we are grateful to Weslo for their support and thanks to Mr Ghulam Shabbir who donated water to keep us going – on such a hot day it was very welcome. Special thanks to our work colleagues, business contacts, families, tenants and friends who supported and sponsored us in our endeavour to raise over £1,000 for these two important causes.



World wide weslo

As part of our continuing enhancement of the Weslo website, the latest upgrade went live at the beginning of June. If you haven't yet seen it why not log on at www.weslo-housing.org.

If you are looking for an exchange you will now be able to search for a property and if you have a repair to report, you can do this online, you can even complete your Customer Repair Satisfaction Form online. We have added new location maps for our offices and if you are not sure how to find us then we have added a route planner to help you.

As always any comments or suggestions that you may have will be appreciated. So why not email kevin.cairns@weslohm.co.uk with your thoughts.



Looking out for our seniors



Did you know that an estimated £150 million in benefits goes unclaimed by older social housing tenants in Scotland every year and that official figures show that more than a fifth of Scottish pensioners live in relative poverty, with 8 percent in absolute poverty.

Weslo recognised the importance in making sure that tenants get all the welfare benefits they are entitled to and in 2008 we became involved with the Older Persons Advice Project (OPAP) which is operated by Linkwide Ltd, a subsidiary of the Link Group. The main aim of the project is to increase the household income of people aged 60 or over by maximising their benefit uptake. Advisors can also introduce tenants to a full range of services within their community; which range from accessing medical aids to providing information about social activities. All of these can lead to increased income and improved health and well-being among the client group, while reducing social isolation and fuel poverty.

Since we became involved in the project, 119 tenants have been assessed by OPAP staff and many of them have seen their income increase. Successful benefit claims have gained Weslo tenants an additional £191,774; this includes £19,720 in housing benefit. All of this is extra income that they didn't have before and we are confident that in today's challenging economic times it will have made a real difference to their lives. It is important that people claim the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled.

If you are over 60, you can make use of this service and it won't cost you a penny. We have provided Linkwide with a list of eligible tenants and in April 2010 tenants living in Whiteside, Winchburgh, Livingston, Fauldhouse and Uphall should have received a letter from OPAP inviting them to make contact. If you received a letter we would encourage you to give them a ring and arrange a visit. Their skilled advisors will check your benefits to ensure you are claiming everything that you are entitled to. They can also offer expert and impartial advice and assistance, in a friendly and confidential manner, on any other issue you may have.

Many of those who have used the free, confidential service were unaware of their full benefit entitlement before receiving OPAP's help and advice. If you are over 60 and feel that you would like a visit, you don't need to wait until you get a letter – just give your Housing Officer a ring and they can arrange to pass your details on to the OPAP team.



The team has grown to meet the demands of the service since we last wrote to you. Gael MacKenzie has been promoted to Project Assistant and two new staff recruited. Above we see from left to right Welfare Rights Officers (WRO) Gill Thomson, Audrey Anderson, Christine Morrison, Paula Salcedas, Senior WRO and Gael MacKenzie, Project Co-ordinator.

If you would like any further information please contact Gillian McAllister, Assistant Housing Manager, at our Bathgate office on 01506 639146.

Winter Wonderland – not if you have to drive!

Last winter we experienced some of most severe weather conditions in almost 50 years. With very challenging conditions including heavy snow, constant ice and temperatures struggling to get above freezing, not to mention the stranded vehicles, Weslo's tradesmen continued to deliver a responsive repair service. Inevitably there was some disruption to our services but the hire of a 4 x 4 vehicle over this period enabled the tradesmen get into the estates to complete emergency repairs.



Above we see Harry Mullholland, Gas Engineer and Jim Gardiner, Joiner alongside the hired vehicle.

A special thanks to all the Weslo staff who made it in to keep the service open to tenants.

How do you like you like your new look Weslo News? Why not let Margaret know your thoughts on it.

Write to her at 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate EH48 4PP or email margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk

WESLO Staff Changes

Gordon Raymond joined Weslo in December 2009 on a six month temporary contract as a plumber after completing a four year apprenticeship with a local West Calder plumbing company. During the past four years he has worked on a number of new build sites but has also gained experience working in occupied properties. In the past six months he has enjoyed working with Weslo and was delighted to accept the job on a permanent basis when this was offered to him in June. In his spare time Gordon enjoys spending time with his girlfriend, playing football and golf.



Scott Forrest is a roofer/slater who has worked for a number of local roofing companies in recent years. He has wide experience in construction and maintenance work having worked here and abroad. Scott who is married with three children doesn't have much spare time for hobbies; he prefers spending time with his family. Since joining Weslo in March, he has come to appreciate the terms and conditions of employment that Weslo offer. He pointed out how unusual it is in the construction industry to get two weeks paid holidays never mind 28 days paid leave and public holidays.

Elsewhere in this edition of Tenant News we tell you about the launch of the Garden Aid Scheme. In order to deliver this service we had to employ a gardener and Alan Walker, the successful applicant, started with us in February. Alan worked for himself as a landscape gardener until the recession hit and when work dried up he found work with a local drilling company. When he saw the job with Weslo advertised he knew that this was his chance to get back to doing what he enjoyed. Since starting in February he and Billy Morgan have been getting all the equipment set up and working hard getting round all the gardens. He is enjoying working with Weslo and meeting the tenants and is looking forward to seeing how the job might change during the winter. In his spare time Alan enjoys playing football and golf but I'm sure that will all change in October when he and his wife are expecting their first child.



Dorothy Snedden retired from Weslo at the end of June after almost 10 years. She joined Weslo in November 2000 as an Admin Assistant in our Glasgow Road offices providing admin support to our Technical staff, moving to our Bo'ness office in August 2006. Left we see her in her familiar role at the rent counter in Bo'ness. We would like to thank her for her contribution to the company and wish her a long and happy retirement.

Dorothy's replacement, Margaret Mochar, started in the middle of June. Mags, as she prefers to be known, joins us from Falkirk Council where she has worked for the past 18 years in various posts. Since her son was born nine years ago she has worked part time and moving to Weslo has given her the opportunity to go back to working full time. She actively pursues interests that involve her son and is Chair of Beancross Parent Council and, like most other parents out there, is involved in transporting and assisting at football, basketball and swimming clubs.



Weslo works

Work is already underway in our 2010/2011 Planned Maintenance Programme after Weslo's Board approved a programme of works in excess of £1.2million.



It is anticipated that we will continue to invest in excess of £1m annually, in accordance with our 30 year Business Plan. This year's programme of work includes:

- Roof replacement works ;
- Replacement of heating systems with more efficient boilers;
- External paintworks and upgrading of gutters and downpipes;
- Replacement of storm proof doors with UPVC composite doors;
- Replacement of roof flashings where necessary;
- Programme of minor works required to achieve full Scottish Housing Quality Standards compliance.

Details of the proposed work programme were included in the rent increase notification letter sent to you earlier this year and if your home is included you will already have received a letter advising you what work will be carried out.

In recent years we have undertaken a number of large scale roofing projects and this year we are investing over £0.5m to replace the roof coverings in our properties in Belvedere, Bathgate. Earlier painting contracts indicated that there may be some problems with the roofs on this estate and investigations confirmed that the roofing felt was showing signs of failing and the roof tiles were degrading on the 40 traditionally built properties still in our ownership. These roofs will be stripped and new felt and tiles applied. Above we can see one of the newly re-roofed buildings alongside a building with the original tiles.

On the same estate we have a number of Weir Phoenix properties where it was confirmed that there was a potential structural overload on the existing roof. Work is now underway to strengthen the roof timbers and retile the roofs using a light weight roof tile system. This work is being undertaken by Forster Roofing Specialists who are approved installers of the Decra roofing system being used and, as equally important, they have successfully carried out re-roofing works on our behalf in recent years.

On the right, we see two of the roofers shaping the new tiles.

For a detailed list of the planned maintenance programme please consult the table on the next page. If your home is included in any of the work detailed, you will already have received a letter advising you of the work.



Projects	Estate	Contractor
Renew roof coverings	Belvedere, Bathgate (40 brick properties)	Forster Roofing Specialists
Weir steel houses - remedial works and re-roofing	Belvedere, Bathgate (21 properties)	Forster Roofing Specialists
Replacement of inefficient Gas Fired Central Heating Systems	Various estates in West Lothian and Bo'ness (120 properties)	CCG (Scotland) Ltd
External paintworks and gutter cleaning	Various estates in West Lothian and Bo'ness (399 properties)	Bell Group
External paint and gutter repairs to 3 storey flats	Drumpark Avenue and Hadrian Way Bo'ness (42 flats)	William Swanson & Son Ltd
External Preservative Treatment to Timber Houses	Kirknewton & Whitburn (11 properties)	Mitie Property Services
Installation of UPVC Doors	Various estates in West Lothian (33 properties / 45 doors)	Permadoor
Repairs to common closes and door bell installation	Barbauchlaw, Armadale (21 closes)	John Cullen & Sons Ltd
General roof maintenance and replacement gutters	Various estates in West Lothian (126 properties)	Dunnigan Builders
Provision of replacement common bin stores	3 storey flats at Murraysgate, Whitburn (6 bin stores)	J. R. B. Construction Ltd.



Above we see (l – r) Keith Dodds and Steve Scott of Forsters Roofing along with Mike Mitchell - Weslo's Technical Manager, David Jordan - Repairs Supervisor and Gavin Wolfe – Assistant Technical Manager at the pre-start meeting where they take the opportunity to discuss the contract in detail and exchange information .

How are we performing?

We monitor a number of key performance indicators in the management of void (empty properties), repairs and rent collection. These are reported in the annual statistical report to the Scottish Housing Regulator and in our annual accounts which will be published following our AGM in July. These figures are also used to compare our performance against other Registered Social Landlords.

As you can see in the table below there has been no significant change in the number of properties we own in recent years. The sale of homes to sitting tenants remains low but the number of properties acquired through the Government's Mortgage to Rent Scheme continues to increase. In 2010 we sold nine properties and acquired eleven through Mortgage to Rent.

Number of Properties	2007	2008	2009	2010
	2119	2112	2096	2138

We aim to minimise loss of rental income by prompt, effective recovery of rent arrears. Below you can see that we have achieved consistent performance over the last four years in respect of non technical arrears and technical arrears. Technical arrears are generally those due to outstanding housing benefit. We will continue to work hard to collect rent due with the implementation of a robust policy and tight procedures. Weslo's performance in this field compares favourably with similar landlords throughout the country.

Arrears	2007	2008	2009	2010
Current Tenants (technical)	0.48%	0.52%	0.70%	0.46%
Current Arrears (non technical)	1.62%	1.46%	1.86%	1.79%

Last year we saw a rise in the number of tenants claiming housing benefit to pay some, if not all of their rent. Housing benefit accounted for 48.13% of rent received last year. We continue to work with West Lothian and Falkirk Council Revenues Departments to ensure that benefit applications are processed as quickly as possible.

Housing Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010
Full	37.94%	36.17%	37.97%	40.60%
Partial	14.72%	14.91%	12.67%	12.82%
As a %age of gross rental income	48.53%	48.54%	46.86%	48.13%

We aim to manage our void process to minimise rent loss and make the property available for relet as soon as possible. In the last year we saw a 27% increase in the number of properties becoming void. As a result of the increased workload, we were unable to relet these properties as quickly as we would have wished. In the Christmas edition we advised that we were in the process of reviewing our void procedures to see how we might reduce these figures. Early indications are that the average void period is reducing.

Void	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of relets	115	96	100	127
Average void time	28	33	36	40

In the last year we carried out 10,720 reactive maintenance repairs: 83.7% of these were undertaken by Weslo's tradesmen with the balance being completed by various private contractors. Overall 99.91% of these jobs were completed within our published timescales. We carry out in-house surveys to measure tenant satisfaction with the repairs service. In January 2010 we introduced a telephone survey which, combined with postal returns, has increased the response rate from an average of 10% to 33%.

Your opinion of our service is important so, when you have work carried out, take the opportunity to let us know what you think. When you get your repair satisfaction card from our tradesman be sure to complete it and post it back to us – you don't even need a stamp - it couldn't be simpler! You can even log on to www.weslo-housing.org and complete a form online. If you don't get a card then phone David Jordan on 01506 639128 and he will arrange for one to be sent to you.

Remember, if you would like to be in for a chance to win £75 in the next draw in September, you need to send your card back. Mrs Nicol of Livingston and Mrs McKeown of Armadale did just that and each received £75 gift vouchers for a store of their choice.

Mrs Nicol told us, "I have always been happy with the services I have received from Weslo; staff are always polite and courteous. I was pleasantly surprised when I received the letter saying that my name had been drawn out. I am going on holiday soon and will enjoy spending my voucher in Marks & Spencer."

Mrs McKeown, who has been a tenant in Armadale for over 30 years, said "I have always found the tradesmen to be friendly and unobtrusive while carrying out work in my home - they even tidy up when they have finished. We chose to receive vouchers for Focus and intend to use them to buy decoration materials soon."

If you have any comment on the performance figures or would like to see information about other services please contact Margaret Walker on 01506 639121 or email her on margaret.walker@weslohm.co.uk.

Weslo launches new Tenant Handbook

A new tenant handbook has been prepared in consultation with Weslo's Tenant Participation Committee and will be launched over the summer.

The handbook sets out our responsibilities to you as your landlord and your responsibilities to us as a tenant. It also contains information such as:

- **how to contact Weslo**
- **how to pay your rent**
- **what to do if you have problems keeping up with rent payments**
- **what to do if you have problems with a neighbour**
- **how the repair service works**
- **how to get involved - how you can work with us to share ideas and information to improve services.**

The handbook is designed as a handy reference guide for anyone who wants to find out more about their tenancy or the services provided by Weslo.

Following discussions with the Tenant Participation Committee it was agreed that a wallet style folder would be more helpful and user friendly. It will be easier to update when required and allow you to store all the correspondence relating to your tenancy in one place.

Over the next few months, you will receive a copy of the handbook through the post and we suggest that after you have read through it you put it away in a safe but easily found place, so it is always on hand if you should need it.

An electronic copy will also be available on our website at www.weslo-housing.org.

Additional copies will be held in our offices and if you have special requirements copies can be made available in Braille, on tape, in large print and community languages. We would welcome any views that you have about the handbook or other information you would like to see included. Please write to Alison Dunsmore at 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP or email her on alison.dunsmore@weslohm.co.uk.

NEW EMERGENCY REPAIR NUMBERS

West Lothian Council recently changed their out of hours telephone number. Please make a note of the telephone numbers in the event of you needing to report an emergency repair. An emergency repair is classed as "one which cannot wait until the next working day without causing serious damage to the property, or causing a life threatening hazard to the occupants"

Only use these numbers in a REAL emergency – any other repairs should be reported to the office when we re-open.

Gas Central Heating

All tenants contact West Lothian Council

01506 775000

For other emergency repairs

Bo'ness Tenants only - Falkirk Council

01324 503050

West Lothian Tenants - West Lothian Council

01506 775000

For Gas & Electricity supply problems

Gas leaks - National Grid

0800 111 999

Electricity supply for faults and emergencies - Scottish Power

0845 272 7999

Tenant Directors Re-elected

Weslo has four places constitutionally reserved on its Board for tenant representatives and at the Annual General Meeting this month, tenant directors Eileen Stirling and Janette Wallace will retire. Earlier this year Mike Crozier, Weslo's Operations Director, wrote out to you inviting any interested party to get in touch with him. Both Eileen and Janette indicated that they wished to stand for re-election and Hugh Ruck, who has in the past served as a tenant director, intimated his interest in standing as a candidate. The resultant ballot, supervised by the Electoral Reform Service, ended on 7 June. The result of the ballot, in which 18.6% of tenants voted, saw Eileen and Janette re-elected for another term.

Eileen has been a Weslo tenant in Bathgate since 2005 and is actively involved with poverty issues and the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum.

She has been a member of Weslo's Tenant Participation Committee for over four years, is a member of Weslo's Equality Action Group and has served on Weslo's Board for the past 2 years. Eileen is delighted that she has been re-elected and is looking forward to working with the Board to ensure that tenants well being and needs are met.



Janette has lived in her present home in Stoneyburn since it was built over 50 years ago. She is active in her local community and has been a member of Weslo's Tenant Participation Committee for over seven years, is a member of Weslo's Equality Action Group and

has been a tenant director for over three years. She is looking forward to building on her experience as a Board member and to representing the views and needs of all Weslo tenants.

Tenant directors have an equal say in approving the budgets and policies of the company and some of these issues directly affect you and the service Weslo provides. Matters overseen by the Board include the annual rent increase and budget, planned maintenance programme, Business Plan and Weslo's Annual Accounts. If you would like to know more about the issues your representatives will be involved in, the minutes of recent meetings are available on our website at www.weslo-housing.org. If you are interested in being more involved in influencing how Weslo operates, please contact Kate Hedges for more information on 01506 634286 or e-mail her at kate.hedges@weslohm.co.uk.

We would like to thank all of you who took time to cast your vote and look forward to seeing Eileen and Janette at the AGM in July and Hugh at the next Tenant Participation Committee meeting. We would also like to thank Hugh for standing for election and making a competition of it. Hugh's work on the Tenant Participation Committee is very much appreciated and perhaps he'll have better luck next time.

All about Gosia



In June last year we told you a little about Gosia Figurska, a Polish national, who had joined us for 4 weeks on a Student Placement Programme. Gosia and her family moved to Scotland in 2005 and over the last 3 years she has been studying at Stevenson College, firstly to improve her English and, secondly, to undertake a basic accounting course which led her to study an HNC in Accounting. Weslo is currently introducing an electronic filing system that will replace the huge volume of paper documentation held in almost 2,000 house files. When complete we will have a more manageable storage facility that will be more secure and accessible to staff. However, it does mean that we have to scan every document and file them electronically into a computer system; this is a huge task that takes lots of staff time. As there were no staff to assist Vicky McIlduff we were able to offer Gosia a part-time job on a temporary basis that she fits around her studying.

We asked Gosia to tell us a little about her reasons for coming to Scotland and how she is settling in.

My husband Tomasz and I lived in Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski, a small town about 100 miles south of Warsaw, with our two children Lukasz and Natalia. After the fall of communism in 1989 and the move towards a capitalist economy, we were able to set up our own business; unfortunately, rising unemployment and uncertainty about the future meant that we were unable to sustain it. When Poland joined the European Union in 2004, many people left to find work in other EU countries and in 2005 we took the opportunity to come to work and live in West Lothian where some of our friends had already found work.

We were very fortunate to be offered a house in Bathgate from Weslo and we have settled in very well. At first there were lots of language difficulties. Going to the doctors was very frustrating; finding the right words to describe an illness was very difficult and this pushed me on to learn English. We have lots of friends still living in West Lothian and Tomasz works alongside many of them. This means that when we socialise with them, we speak Polish and my husband does not feel the need to learn English, but I am working on him. Natalia has settled into a local primary school; she speaks English well and has been known to make fun of my efforts. We haven't allowed her to forget her heritage though and she attends a Polish school on Saturday mornings where she learns about Polish language, history and culture.

Our son Lukasz did not settle so well and last year he moved back to Poland temporarily to complete his education.

It has been a challenge moving to a new country with a different language and culture. Working with Weslo has allowed me to improve my English, although sometimes people speak very quickly and it is difficult to pick up what they are saying, but this is getting less of a problem. I have a better understanding of the different type of work undertaken in the various departments within the company. As an employee and a tenant I am impressed by the commitment to providing high standards of customer care.

I am very appreciative of the opportunity Weslo has given me and would like to thank everyone for all the help and support I have received.

Getting to know you

As a Registered Social Landlord we are required by law to take account of equality and diversity when we carry out our duties. This means that we have to know our tenants' ethnicity, age and details of any disabilities they have. For over two years we have been finding out more about our tenants from the census returns which ask about any specific requirements they have, which in turn enables us to ensure that they are living in a suitable environment and that we are delivering services appropriate to their needs.

Weslo's Equalities Action Group arranged to send out letters to all tenants who notified us on the Census form that they or a family member had a disability. This resulted in 637 tenants being lettered in April 2010 asking if they needed any advice that might lead to their getting help to cope with their disabilities.

We have had over 100 enquiries and so far we have taken action on 63 - these include referrals to the Occupational Therapist for adaptations such as wet floor showers and handrails, garden aid requests, disability blue badge requests, downsizing to a smaller property and welfare benefit enquiries. We even had telephone calls from tenants who do not need any help, thanking us for getting in touch with them.

Mrs Mary Allan from Bo'ness, pictured right with Susan Anderson, was one such tenant who asked for a home visit to discuss her situation. Susan Anderson, Estates Manager, tells us what she found when she went along to meet her. "Mrs Allan is a very sprightly lady in her mid-eighties with a strong independent streak. She keeps in good health and puts this down to an active lifestyle when she was younger when she did ballet and modern dancing. She has a beautiful garden that she looks after herself, does her own housework and some light shopping. Her four children keep in touch regularly and visit frequently. However, Mrs Allan feels she is slowing down and recognises that in the near future she may need more help. This issue has been on her mind for some time but having the opportunity to talk to someone has brought her some peace of mind."



Mrs Allan said, "I didn't know who to turn to and didn't want to worry my family but this talk has put my mind at ease. I know now that I can contact Weslo whenever I feel that I need more support and they will advise me."

If you feel that you are in a similar situation to Mrs Allan or develop a disability that means that you need extra support or help at home, please contact your Housing Officer who will be able to talk things through with you discuss the options available. By telling us what you need, we are able to review, improve, develop and deliver services that will make things better for you.

Scottish Secure Tenancy – Almost There

Since Weslo became a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in 2007 we have been contacting tenants to have a new Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement (SST) signed. With over 2,100 agreements to be signed this has been a huge undertaking. The number of tenants still to sign currently stands at 186 but we are confident that these will be complete by the end of this year.

With the end of the process clearly in sight we will soon be inviting those 186 tenants into the office. If this is not convenient we can arrange for a Housing Officer to call at your home.

In the meantime if you have reason to contact us, by phone or in person, and have yet to sign your SST, please ask to speak to a member of the Estates staff who can make arrangements to complete the paperwork - it only takes a few minutes.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of you who have already signed your SST for your cooperation and would encourage those of you who have still to complete the process to contact us when you read this article or respond to any letter we send.

Help is at hand for owners in danger of losing their home

Weslo has participated in the national Mortgage to Rent scheme (MTR) since its inception in 2003. The scheme is designed to prevent owners having their homes repossessed and becoming homeless as a result.

In order to qualify applicants must be in mortgage difficulty and also in danger of having their home repossessed. This is a condition of the scheme. It is also quite common for applicants to have other debt or indeed multiple debts. In many cases applicants are found to have had other secured loans on the property for a variety of purposes, for example, to start a new business, to carry out home improvements, to consolidate existing loans or to lend money to other family members. Sometimes debt is triggered by a major change in individual or family circumstances. For example, the failure of a business, loss of employment, a reduction in working hours and salary, long-term ill health problems, accident or disability or a relationship breakdown.

So far Weslo has received 74 applications. Of these 43 have successfully settled, 14 have been withdrawn and 17 are currently in progress. The 43 transactions have settled at a value of nearly £4 million using nearly £3 million of Grant from the Scottish Government.

To be considered for this scheme you must have:

- failed to reach agreement with your lender(s) on how to manage your arrears or have a trustee appointed to your estate and your trustee is looking to force the sale of your property; and
- obtained independent advice about your financial situation from a Citizens Advice Bureau, Money Advice outlet, local authority advice centre, or other approved adviser.

For more information on the scheme contact:

The Home Owners' Support Fund Team, The Scottish Government, Highlander House, 58 Waterloo Street, Glasgow G2 7DA.

Telephone No: 0845 279 9999,

or email:

homeownerssupportfund@scotlandgsi.gov.uk.

Competition corner

Enter our Competition and you could win a £25 Gift Voucher.

Are you hooked on Sudoku or, like me, do you find it hard to make time to do these addictive puzzles in your busy life?

Send your entry to Margaret Walker at 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP by Friday 30 July 2010 - please remember to add your name and address at the bottom.

Good luck!

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Name:

Address:

Reviewing how we allocate houses in West Lothian

In March 2004 the Scottish Government invited local authorities who were prepared to work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords like Weslo to set up a Common Housing Register (CHR). Following discussions between Weslo, West Lothian Council and Almond Housing Association, who collectively own around 90% of the social rented housing in West Lothian, it was agreed to form a partnership to collaborate on the development of a CHR. This led to the West Lothian Common Housing Register being established in September 2007.

The main aim of the West Lothian Housing Register (WLHR) is to provide a simpler and fairer access to housing by the creation of a single application form on which anyone aged 16 years or over can register their need and apply for housing to a group of landlords.

Weslo's principal objectives for participating in the WLHR were to embrace the concept of a single application form, speed up the process, and simplify the method of applying for housing for applicants.

Having recently carried out a review of our participation in the WLHR, we are happy to continue as a partner as we feel that the principal objectives are being met.

In tandem with a review of the WLHR we are also currently reviewing the Allocation Policy and as part of this review we propose to make a few changes to the way our houses are allocated. Here are the main points that we intend to introduce:

Let 50% of vacant houses via a group quota system and 50% through WLC nominations - in order to create mixed and sustainable estates we will be adopting a group quota system. The groups and quotas could be as follows:

Group	Quota (% of annual lets)
Social or Harassment	2%
Medical (anyone with an urgent or high priority)	5%
General	8%
Existing tenants	10%
Independent living	10%
Homeless or threatened with homelessness	15%

Hold our own transfer waiting list - Weslo tenants applying to transfer would be considered for a vacant property before any other applicant.

We anticipate that the Allocation Policy review will be complete over the next 6 to 9 months. A further update on how the review of the Allocation Policy is progressing will be posted in the Winter edition of our newsletter.

Should you wish to make any comments about the proposed changes to our Allocation Policy or put forward your own suggestions, please write to David McLaren, Housing Manager, 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP.

FOR YOUR DIARY

The Bathgate and Bo'ness Offices will be closed on the following dates:-

Friday p.m. only	17 September 2010
Monday	20 September 2010
Monday	27 December 2010
Tuesday	28 December 2010
Monday	3 January 2010
Tuesday	4 January 2010

Please note that our offices will close at 3pm on Friday 24 and 31 December 2010.