

Tenants Voice

Issue 114 - December 2021

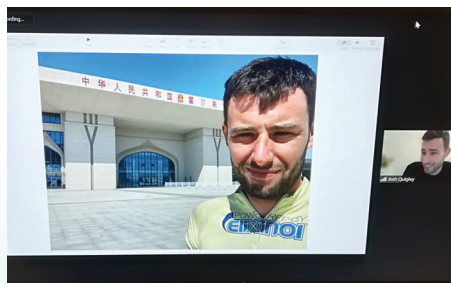


EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

Reflecting and celebrating at Edinburgh Tenants Federation's (ETF) Annual General Meeting (AGM)

ETF's second online AGM held on Friday 29th October 2021 promised to be a memorable event and it certainly didn't disappoint. Our AGM is always one of the highlights of our calendar as it allows our members to reflect on our work over the year. Some of the highlights from the AGM included:

- An inspiring and heart-warming presentation from special guest, Josh Quigley, who recently broke the Guinness World Record for cycling a distance of 2179.66 miles in seven days. An awesome achievement following a battle with his mental health as well as physical injuries received during his many cycling challenges
- 'A Year in the life of ETF' presentation
- Election of the 2021/22 Executive Committee, including the welcome addition of Terry Kirby
- A fun quiz to provide the final flourish to the proceedings.



ETF's Convenor Betty Stone commented, "We would like to thank everyone who attended our AGM. Josh's presentation was so inspiring and it's great that he is going into schools to teach children and young people about everything he's accomplished. We are delighted with the positive feedback received at the AGM, as it reflected on what has been a particularly challenging but rewarding year."

A copy of ETF's Annual Report is available to download at <https://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/etf-annual-report-2020-2021/>. If you would like to request a paper copy, please contact ETF's Office Manager Mary Callaghan by calling 0131 475 2509 or email mary@edinburghtenants.org.uk.

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All about the money: Tenant rents, services, and investments

The City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC's) Rent Consultation was the topic of conversation at a lively Federation Meeting held on Wednesday 22nd September 2021. This is always a very important subject for Edinburgh's tenants, with the event ensuring some interesting and honest discussions. Lisa Mallon, Enabling & Partnership Operations Manager, gave an overview of the consultation and what CEC is proposing. This was followed by a question-and-answer session which scrutinised CEC's plans in more detail. Breakout sessions enabled participants to discuss the key questions of:

- Do you feel the rent you pay is good value for money?
- Do you support CEC's overall investment plan?
- Would you support rents being set over the long term in Edinburgh?
- What are your priorities for investment?

These discussions helped formulate ETF's response to CEC's Rent Consultation. The meeting also provided a Progress Report on ETF's recent activities.

ETF's Convenor Betty Stone commented, "We would like to thank CEC staff for attending our meeting, along with all our members who came along and got involved as their views helped to shape ETF's response to the Rent Consultation. This is hugely important to the future of housing in Edinburgh, and we would ask as many CEC tenants as possible to respond to the consultation."

The Rent Consultation is open until Wednesday 8th December 2021 and respondents can complete the consultation using the following methods:

- Online at https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/2022-23-rent-consultation/consult_view/
- Email housing.research@edinburgh.gov.uk;
- Complete the paper copy of the survey contained in the Tenants' Courier.

You can download a copy of ETF's response to CEC's Rent Consultation at <https://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/etfs-response-to-city-of-edinburgh-councils-rent-consultation-november-2021/>. If you would like a paper copy, please contact ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry by calling 07918 742468 or email mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk.

ETF responds to CEC Short Term Lets Consultation

ETF recently held a Focus Group discussion to find out tenants' views on CEC's Short Term Lets Consultation and identified some key themes as shown below.



It was agreed that Edinburgh requires a re-organisation of its short term lets strategy. The current policy and guidance are confusing and there is uncertainty about how the forthcoming proposals would work in practice.

Many properties are taken out of the private rented sector available to local people, into Airbnb, meaning there is a shortage of homes available for rent in the city.

Themes identified in ETF's response to the consultation

It was recognised that the city of Edinburgh's economy relies heavily on tourism, particularly at New Year and during the Festival. If there was a stricter regulation on short-term lets, it could affect the number of tourists that visit Edinburgh each year, as this could mean fewer types of accommodation available.

ETF representatives are concerned with the amount of Antisocial Behaviour, such as drinking alcohol and noise pollution that takes place in these properties. This is particularly evident in tenement properties. This can lead to the erosion of a sense of community and can change the character of neighbourhoods.

A copy of ETF's response can be downloaded at <https://www.edinburghtenants.org.uk/etf-response-to-city-of-edinburgh-council-short-term-lets-consultation-november-2021/>. If you would like a paper copy, please contact ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry by calling 07918 742468 or email mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk.

Locality Teams and Local Group Updates

Here's an update on what ETF's EC members and local groups have been up to over the past few months.

North West Locality Reports – Birnies Court

Here in Birnies Court we are all just trying our best to get on with what we can do. I count myself as one of the lucky ones as I still have lots of contact with tenants and CEC staff. Work is currently ongoing in Gunnet Court, which will include a full overhaul of the building. I recently went on a walkabout with senior housing staff and was able to see some of the work being done outside the buildings. There have been a number of issues with the lifts in the area and hopefully these will be resolved as soon as possible. I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank the Concierge staff as they have been out every day cleaning and making sure the blocks are kept up to scratch and not one shift has been missed, so well done to everyone involved.



Betty Stone



Gateside

For the last two years we have been struggling to get water and drainage into the community hub. Issues with planning permission and lengthy timescales have been a real challenge, however the committee have worked hard to push forward and are waiting on replies from and work to be carried out by Scottish Water and CEC. We hope all outstanding issues will be resolved before Christmas so the hub can operate to its full potential.



Community Garden Area

Installed four years ago, this area is now needing urgent repairs to the timber. A number of site meetings with CEC representatives and the builder, have not yet resulted in improvements as there isn't enough money in our repairs' budget. We will therefore have to go to capital funding for the extra money to complete this repair, so the repairs could now take until next year.

Ongoing works in Gateside

Repairs Direct

We have been noticing that there have been ongoing issues from calling Repairs Direct to report the repair through to the completion of the repair. We think the overall repairs process needs revamped as it's not just tenants in Gateside that have been experiencing problems, it's citywide. I'm aware CEC are looking to employ workers that can multitask. We consider it is important to try and make the repairs reporting process as simple as possible for tenants and I will be discussing this with my colleagues at ETF in the hope that we can influence and improve the service tenants receive.

Paul Vaughan

North East Locality Report

At present, the North East Locality Hubs are on a reduced service but the housing teams have been keeping up to date with issues of concern for tenants. As is the case with all the hubs throughout the city, there is the matter of ensuring the necessary repairs work is carried out. Unpredictable weather has increased issues with burst pipes and heating systems not working. Despite this, the local teams have performed well and hopefully after Christmas, the hubs will be able to re-open to the public.

One note of concern in my area is the number of tenants who have accumulated rent arrears through no fault of their own. This is not just restricted to the north-east locality, but is a city-wide issue.

We at ETF would encourage you to contact your Housing Officer if you're experiencing any problems. CEC has an Income Maximisation Team that can help tenants struggling to cope with debt or any related problems and can provide advice and support. They can be contacted on 0131 529 7905 or email IncomeMaximisation@edinburgh.gov.uk. Remember, you're not the only person who is struggling and support is available.



Leith Library

News from CEC

Councillor Kate Campbell, Convenor for Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, CEC

It's been a very difficult year for everyone, and I wanted to start by thanking tenants for your patience and understanding while your council services have been moving back towards 'normal service'.

As winter draws in, I know many tenants will be worried about heating your homes and would encourage you to seek advice from your housing officer and ask for a referral to Changeworks who can offer support to apply for a winter fuel payment, as well as other advice to help reduce bills.

The Scottish Government put in place Energy Efficiency Standards in Social Housing, also known as EESSH1 which made it a legal requirement for social housing providers – the council and housing associations – to have better energy efficiency standards than private sector homes by December 2020. This has been followed by a second phase, EESSH2, which means by 2032 all social housing must meet Energy Efficiency Band B, which sits alongside CEC's own commitment to make Edinburgh a net zero carbon city by 2030 – something brought into sharp focus by COP26, which took place last month. Improving energy efficiency is so important because it will benefit tenants, making homes warmer and reducing the cost of heating bills. It will also help us to meet the ambitious climate targets set to save the planet.

With around 20,000 Council homes in the city, there's a lot of work to do. Making homes more energy efficient means looking at insulation, roofs, doors and windows, among others. CEC has identified a number of 'archetypes' – properties in the council's stock which have been built in a very similar way, across the city. We're looking at developing what is called a 'whole house retrofit' pilot for these. This will allow us to learn how best to improve energy efficiency in each type of home, and then can use that learning to deliver the same work across all similar homes.

The first two multi-storey blocks to have the work done to meet the new EESSH2 standards are May and Gunnet Courts in Muirhouse. Work is starting on Gunnet Court as I write.



Councillor Kate Campbell

We're also taking a new approach to investment in CEC's homes. Previously we've focussed on rolling programmes for things like kitchens and bathrooms, windows, and doors etc. But now we're moving to what they call a 'place-based' approach, looking at the blocks and areas that need the most investment and doing a number of things together – so improving the inside of tenants' homes alongside work to improve the whole block and looking at the wider estate. This is what tenants have told us they want us to do when we've consulted you.

Another area of focus for us is obviously on building new CEC homes. There is so much need within the city for affordable housing, partly driven as Edinburgh is the most expensive place in Scotland to buy or rent a home, and partly driven by the loss of around 40,000 CEC homes through the Right to Buy.

CEC is building homes across the city and you may have seen information about projects at Meadowbank, Fountainbridge, Powderhall, Pennywell and Craigmillar which are some of our main projects, with Granton being the biggest.

So far in Granton, CEC, along with partners including Edinburgh College, Scottish Futures Trust, National Galleries and Museums Scotland and the Scottish Government have invested over £250 million.

The development will see around 3,500 new net zero carbon homes; a creative arts, culture and leisure space; Europe's largest coastal park; and quality services including a school and health centre.

Importantly, the development plans for Granton have been led by the people who live there. Residents have shaped the plans – because the people that live in an area know best what it needs, and also what's important from its past and the history that needs to be preserved.

Which is why I'm really pleased that renovation work has already begun on the former Granton Station – it will open next year as a cultural and historical hub, delivering around 40 jobs.

But we also have to meet the climate challenge in the new homes we're building, as well as work on our existing homes. So, it's great news that Scotland's largest net zero housing development is underway at Western Villages which will provide 444 new one, two and three bedroom homes, including ground floor properties with wheelchair access and a focus on walking and cycling in the community. These will be extremely energy efficient, low-carbon and part of a gas-free strategy to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

All of this is part of our strategy to make sure that we're investing in building new homes, but also making existing homes better.



A property in Wester Hailes before and after the whole house retrofit



Properties in Craigmillar



A visual for Western Villages as part of the new Granton Waterfront development

National News

ETF responds to Review of Scottish Social Housing Charter

ETF held a Focus Group to find out tenants' views on the Scottish Government's review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Some of the key themes we identified are included below.



The Scottish Social Housing Charter
April 2017

The Charter aims to put tenants at the forefront of discussions and decisions and different ways to hold landlords to account, through tenant scrutiny. However, there are inconsistencies with regards to approaches to tenant scrutiny.

In Edinburgh there seems to be a lot of emphasis on building mid-market rent which many tenants can't afford to live in rather than social housing.

Themes identified in ETF's response to the consultation

There is an assumption that people have access to and can use a computer, with advice to refer to websites and some surveys online. This means some people will not be able to access information.

There should be more tenant involvement in designing the Charter and evaluating standards and results.

A copy of ETF's response can be downloaded at <https://www.edinburghrental.org.uk/etf-response-to-review-of-scottish-social-housing-charter-september-2021/>. If you would like a paper copy, please contact ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry by calling 07918 742468 or email mark@edinburghrental.org.uk.

TIS National Housing Conference 2021 hailed a virtual success



Tenants Information Service (TIS) held its first ever virtual conference for tenants and housing professionals across Scotland on Tuesday 5th – Thursday 7th October 2021.

The opening session welcomed an address from Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Shona Robison MSP who manifested the key themes of the event and outlined the Scottish Government's ambitious Housing to 2040 Vision.

A greatly anticipated highlight of the gathering included a live panel discussion chaired by journalist Pennie Taylor and panellists Professor Ken Gibb, Director at UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence; Shaheena Din, National Project Manager at Empty Homes Partnership; Janelle Couper, Tenant Service Improvement Group at Maryhill Housing Association; Aaron Hill, Director of Policy and Membership at SFHA; and Wendy McGuire, Service Manager for Housing Strategy and Development at East Lothian Council.

Interactive workshops explored ensuring value for money from rents and service charges, living well with dementia, exploring Scotland's 20-minute neighbourhoods and the impact of COVID-19 on the social housing sector, facilitated by HouseMark Scotland.

Each day ended with truly vibrant and uplifting sessions finding out about the inspirational journeys of: The Space, who enable families to live flourishing lives in thriving communities; Hamiltonhill Claypits Local Nature Reserve, an important green space for the surrounding communities to explore nature by walking, wheeling, or cycling; and CentreStage, who build energetic, inclusive communities with arts at the heart.

Sharon Donohoe, TIS Development Director

Kirsty Wells: How social landlords can help to combat climate change: building sustainable foundations



Kirsty Wells

Kirsty Wells, Head of Housemark Scotland, highlights how social landlords can play a significant part in combating climate change.

Climate change is a serious threat to lives, from the very real risk of water shortages and food production becoming difficult, to heat waves, violent storms and downpours that will grow in intensity and threaten lives and livelihoods. Animal species are also at risk due to this period of rapid climate change, as they're more likely to become extinct because of the significant change in their environments.

It's our actions now that will inevitably decide the fate of the planet. With some of the damage already done and irreversible, the UK government has set a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. We all have a responsibility to play our part and the housing sector has been tasked with making some significant changes which will play a vital role in tackling climate change. The government wants the social housing sector to lead the way in the transition to zero emission buildings.

Scottish Housing Day on 15th September 2021, put the climate emergency under the spotlight, with the sector being encouraged to think about how to overcome the challenges of becoming net zero carbon, share advice and to think about how to begin making these changes. This is also reiterated in the 2021 United Nations COP26 Climate Change Conference which took place in Glasgow last month, where countries, companies and society came together to set out how to combat climate change.

What the government requires from social landlords

Scottish social landlords have all been set the target of ensuring all their stock has a minimum energy performance certificate (EPC) rating of B where possible by 2032. By 2045, over two million homes will need to transition from fossil fuel-based systems to low and zero-emissions systems such as heat pumps, heat networks and other technologies.

What are the challenges in becoming net zero carbon?

Despite the best intentions, landlords are faced with a range of challenges when trying to achieve net zero carbon for their buildings. Scottish landlords are having to tackle climate change while continuing to provide more homes to support the government's ambition to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032.

It is recognised by the Scottish Government and social landlords that any increased running costs of decarbonised heating should not exacerbate fuel poverty or result in greater child or rent poverty.

What can landlords do to begin making a change?

Funding initiatives are being created to help social landlords on the path to net zero carbon. In Scotland there's a **£20m Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund**

<http://www.gov.scot/publications/social-housing-net-zero-heat-fund-overview/> that can be accessed which is designed to speed up the rollout of energy efficient and low carbon heat provision across social housing projects in Scotland.

Changeworks Warm Home Discount

Are you interested in getting £140 discount off your electricity bill, or £140 credit to your prepayment meter? The Warm Home Discount is not widely advertised, so you may not have heard of it. Many householders who are eligible for this discount have no idea it exists and Changeworks are trying to spread the word about it. You can find out more about the Warm Home Discount and whether you're eligible to apply for it at <https://www.changeworks.org.uk/resources/warm-home-discount> or call 0800 808 2282.



Update from ETF

Although restrictions are continuing to ease and the Norton Park Centre is now open, the Federation's Office remains closed to ensure the continued protection of both staff and service users. ETF continues to operate on a daily basis and staff can be contacted at info@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 0131 475 2509. A further update will be provided on ETF's plans to return to the office in the New Year.



Continued restrictions mean it is likely that we will continue to work online for the foreseeable future. Digital working, training and participation are therefore priorities for the Federation and ETF staff can offer you support. If you have a computer, smartphone or tablet and would like to take part or know more, please contact ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry by calling 07918 742468 or email mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk.

Fire Safety – 12 Steps to a Safe Christmas

Christmas is a very special time of year, but it can also be dangerous as well if fire safety measures are not adhered to. Here are 12 steps you should take to ensure you and your family stay safe in your home this Christmas.

Step 1 - Check your Christmas tree lights conform to the British Standard.

Step 2 - Never place candles near your Christmas tree or furnishings and don't leave them burning unattended.

Step 3 - Make a fire escape plan – just in case you have an emergency during the festive period.

Step 4 - Decorations can burn easily - don't attach them to lights or heaters.

Step 5 - Always switch Christmas lights off and unplug them before you go to bed.

Step 6 - Remember! After drinking alcohol, the risk of accidents in the kitchen is greater.

Step 7 - Most fires start in the kitchen, so don't leave cooking unattended.

Step 8 - Drive safely this Christmas.

Step 9 - If you smoke, make sure that your smoking material is extinguished before you go to bed.

Step 10 - Use Christmas as a reminder to clean your smoke alarm to remove dust.

Step 11 - Don't overload plug sockets.

Step 12 - Check on elderly relatives and neighbours - make sure they are fire safe.



Providing support to the elderly and vulnerable this Christmas

Do you know an older or vulnerable person whose home feels cold when you visit? Winter is drawing in and fuel prices are rising. Many people may be worried about the cost of heating their homes. They may feel unable to ask for help or not realise that support is available. You can support them to get in touch with Home Energy Scotland at <https://www.homeenergyscotland.org/warmer-winter> or phone 0800 808 2282 for advice on ways to reduce fuel bills.



Cold houses can be very harmful to people and cause them to become physically ill, including with respiratory problems. Cold homes affect mobility and can increase falls and accidents. In cold homes, symptoms of arthritis become worse and strength and dexterity decreases, increasing the risk of falls in older people. Mental health can also be affected which can have a long term impact on wellbeing. Cold homes can cause death through illness or hypothermia. Signs of hypothermia include shivering, pale and dry skin, slurred speech, confusion and slower breathing.

If you have concerns that someone may be at risk of harm because their home is too cold, contact Social Care Direct on 0131 200 2324. If you have concerns that someone is showing signs of hypothermia call 999.



Christmas Wordsearch

S	I	U	O	C	H	N	A	S	D	R	I	E	R	H	E	C	T	R	U
Q	U	P	E	Q	E	O	E	L	V	C	E	R	N	Q	O	T	G	T	R
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- AULD LANG SYNE
- BLACK BUN
- BLOW THE FEATHER
- CEILIDH
- CELEBRATION
- FIREWORKS
- FIRST FOOTING
- HOGMANAY
- LOONY DOOK
- NEW YEAR RESOLUTION
- REDDING THE HOOSE
- SAINING
- SHORTBREAD
- STREET PARTY
- THE BELLS
- TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION

Send your solution to:

Edinburgh Tenants Federation, Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, Edinburgh, EH7 5QY
 by **Monday 17th January 2022** for the chance to win a £30 shopping voucher.

Name

Address

..... Telephone number

Tenant Grant Fund



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

The Scottish Government has provided funding to Scottish Local Authorities to supplement the work they are doing to prevent homelessness by creating a Tenant Grant Fund. This fund is being administered in line with the Scottish Government guidelines. The overall aim of this fund is to support homelessness prevention, however, the amount of funding that has been allocated to the Council is limited and will only be available for payment up until **31st March 2022**.

The award of any grant and the amount is discretionary and criteria has been set and will be applied consistently across what is expected to be a large volume of requests. Any grant award will be a one-off payment.

You can find out more about the Tenant Grant Fund at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/tenantgrantfund or phone 0131 200 2360.

Lothians' Improving the Cancer Journey Service

If you are living in Edinburgh and the Lothians and have been affected by cancer, Improving the Cancer Journey Service is here to help you live as well as possible. The service can meet with you to discuss what matters to you and help you get the right support.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be overwhelming and many people don't know where to go for support. Here are some of the aspects the service can help with:

- Money or housing worries;
- Work;
- Caring responsibilities;
- Physical concerns;
- Emotional Concerns;
- Other types of support.



To find out more about how the service can help, please contact 07977 307 286/07929 784 315 or email loth.icj@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk.

Utilita

Utilita is a pay as you go energy provider that works with social landlords across the UK. As part of its work with CEC, Utilita is providing funding to help support community-based projects. One of the first projects included planting trees in a green space at Firrhill Crescent, in South West Edinburgh. Three beautiful birch trees and three cherry trees were bought and planted by CEC to benefit future generations.



Plans are also underway to provide new computers to sheltered housing residents and community event equipment to a community group in North East Edinburgh. What about your area? Do you have ideas for a community project that would benefit tenants? If so, please phone 0131 529 7805 or email tenant.panel@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Convenor's Report



I would like to start my Convenor's Report by thanking everyone who attended our AGM in October. It was a fantastic event and we're really pleased with the positive feedback we've received. Josh's presentation was incredible and it's truly remarkable to hear about everything he's accomplished. I was particularly impressed with the fact that he's been visiting schools to educate children. I'm delighted to welcome Terry Kirby onto the EC and we look forward to working with him. I enjoyed the quiz as well, even though I ended up on the losing team!

Looking back on 2021, it has been another challenging but productive year for ETF. I'm very pleased with everything we've accomplished from lobbying for a rent and council tax freeze for CEC tenants which was agreed by Councillors; to working with Officers to agree the rent consultation. We've continued to represent tenants at all the meetings we've attended with the Council and we will continue to help make a positive difference in tenants' lives. 2021 has also brought us lots of opportunities to learn new ways to work digitally and we have lots of things we plan to do in the year ahead.

As this is my final Convenor's Report of 2021, there's a lot of people I would like to thank. The ETF staff for all their hard work, our members for all the work you do in your communities, CEC for the funding to do our work, and the EC who give up a lot of their time to ETF. Whilst we have missed face to face meetings, our main priority has been the health and safety of our staff and volunteers. We will continue to take advice as to when it is safe to hold face to face meetings again.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and very best wishes for 2022. Please stay safe and take care.

Dates for your diary

Deadline for completing CEC's Rent Consultation

Wednesday 8th December 2021

The Federation Office will be closed for the Festive Period from 4 p.m. on Friday 17th December 2021 and reopen on Wednesday 5th January 2022.

About Edinburgh Tenants Federation

Edinburgh Tenants Federation is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation. Tenants' and residents' groups can become members of ETF and individuals can become Associate Members. Just contact the ETF office on 0131 475 2509 or email info@edinburghtenants.org.uk for more information.

Copy deadline

Tenants Voice is usually published three times a year and is distributed to nearly 3,000 tenants, residents, decision makers and other interested individuals throughout Edinburgh. We always welcome contributions from our readers, though we stress that material included in *Tenants Voice* does not always represent the opinions of Edinburgh Tenants Federation. If you would like to contribute an article for inclusion in our next edition, please do so by the following deadline:

April 2022 edition : Monday 7th March 2022



Thoughtful Quotes

'It is better to walk alone, than with a crowd going in the wrong direction.'
- Herman Siu

'We can't change our yesterdays, but we can change our tomorrows'
- Anthony Douglas Williams

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of ETF.



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