

**REPORT TO:** East Lothian Council

**MEETING DATE:** 12 February 2013

**BY:** Executive Director (Services for Communities)

**SUBJECT:** Proposals to Increase Council House Rents –  
Consultation Exercise

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To outline the results of the Consultation Exercise on the proposals to increase Council House Rents in 2013/14.
- 1.2 To outline the key aspects of the consultation process.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Council is asked to note the results of the Consultation Exercise.
- 2.2 Council is asked to note the Consultation process and that this will be further improved and consolidated on in future years.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory obligation under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to consult with all tenants when making any proposals to increase rents. In doing so the Council must:
  - Consult all tenants affected by the proposal, and
  - Have regard to the views expressed during the consultation exercise.

### **Consultation Approach**

- 3.2 With the aim of improving on the approach to consulting on rent proposals adopted in previous years, the Council undertook to continue to work with and agree a robust approach in conjunction with East Lothian Tenants & Residents Panel (ELTRP).

3.3 The Project Group originally set up in June 2008, comprising of Council staff from Community Housing and Finance as well as members of ELTRP reconvened in November 2012 to discuss and agree the approach for 2013/14.

3.4 **The Project Group:**

- designed, agreed and implemented the consultation approach for the rent proposals, which gave tenants the opportunity to complete a consultation questionnaire to give their views on the rent consultation and proposed rent increase. Tenants also had the opportunity to comment in other ways (i.e. via free phone, email or by writing in).
- designed an improved more customer friendly consultation letter, which included key information to tenants to allow them to understand how their rent money is spent and the key services it pays for. A ready reckoner was also included which showed tenants what effect the potential rent increase will have on their current fortnightly rent.
- agreed the timeline for the consultation.

3.5 All of the above measures continue to build upon the improved approach introduced in previous years.

**Consultation Outcome**

3.6 Whilst the consultation process itself has continued to improve, there was also a slight increase in the number of responses from individuals again this year. In addition most of the feedback was related to the proposals, and much of the feedback was received through the questionnaire, with only a few responses by telephone and in writing.

3.7 A total of 973 completed questionnaires were returned along with four telephone calls and one written response representing a return rate of 11.5% of all letters issued.

3.8 The results of all the feedback received from tenants who completed the consultation questionnaire are shown below.

- 95.1% of those who responded were happy with the level of consultation and information they get about the annual rent increase. This represents an increase of 2.5% on last year's figure.
- 90% said that they think the rent they pay is good value for money. This is an increase on last year's figure of 3.3%.
- 85.3% think the Council is proposing a fair rent increase of 4.3%. This represents a 0.7% increase on last year's figure.

- 95% agree with the Council's commitment to build new houses, to help address the housing situation in East Lothian. This is an increase of 2.3%.
  - 95.6% agree that the Council should continue to modernise its existing stock, e.g. kitchen and bathroom replacement. This is more or less the same as last year with a very slight decrease of 0.1%.
  - 94.5% agree that their rent should be used to pay for the following key areas – service delivery, modernisation of council houses and delivery of new affordable homes. (new question for this year's consultation)
- 3.9 A summary of responses received from tenants who completed the consultation questionnaire during the consultation exercise is attached in Appendix 1.
- 3.10 The Rent Increase Consultation Register (Appendix 2) is lodged in the Members' Library.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The improved consultation process underlines the Council's commitment to its Tenant Participation Strategy.

#### **5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial – None.
- 6.2 Personnel – None.
- 6.3 Other – None.

#### **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Summary of responses received during the Rent Increase Consultation Exercise 2013/14.
- 7.2 Appendix 2 – Rent Increase Consultation Register lodged in the Members' Library.

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<b>DATE</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> January 2013

# Rent Consultation Questionnaire

**We want to hear your views on the rent consultation and proposed rent increase for 2013-14. Please take a few minutes to fill in this form.**

**Q1 Are you happy with the level of consultation and information you get about the annual rent increase? If no, please tell us why?**

Yes..... 95.1%  
 No..... 4.0%  
 Comments ..... 4.2%

**Q5 Do you agree that the Council should continue to modernise its existing stock (for example new kitchens, bathrooms etc.) If no, please tell us why?**

Yes ..... 95.6%  
 No..... 2.8%  
 Comments ..... 9.0%

**Q2 Do you think the rent you pay is good value for money? If no, please tell us why?**

Yes..... 90.0%  
 No..... 8.2%  
 Comments ..... 9.1%

**Q6 Do you agree that your rent should be used to pay for the following key areas? Service delivery, modernisation of council houses and delivery of new affordable houses. If no, please state what is not important or what you think is missing?**

Yes ..... 94.5%  
 No ..... 3.2%  
 Comments ..... 6.1%

**Q3 By increasing rent the Council continues to deliver existing services, invest in our stock and deliver new houses. Do you think the Council is proposing a fair rent increase? If no, please tell us why?**

Yes..... 85.3%  
 No..... 12.1%  
 Comments ..... 12.0%

**Q7 Do you have any other comments you would like to make?**

Comments ..... 30.7%  
 (see below)

**Q4 Do you agree with the Council's commitment to build new houses to help address the housing situation in East Lothian? If no, please tell us why?**

Yes..... 95.0%  
 No ..... 4.2%  
 Comments ..... 7.7%

Comments received during Rent Consultation 2013/14.

General summary of responses received.

**Question 1 - Are you happy with the level of consultation and information you get about the annual rent increase? If no, please tell us why?**

Of those who commented, some felt that they weren't consulted, or that more information could be provided. Others felt that no matter what was said rents would go up anyway.

**Question 2 - Do you think the rent you pay is good value for money? If no, please tell us why?**

Comments generally related to modernisation work with some tenants saying that they are still waiting on a new kitchen or bathroom. Others commented that their house was poorly maintained and that they had to wait a long time to get repairs done.

**Question 3 - By increasing rent the Council continues to deliver existing services, invest in our stock and delivery new houses. Do you think the Council is proposing a fair rent increase? If no, please tell us why?**

Of those who responded to this question, 12% said no and made comments and a lot of those who commented felt that they thought the increase was unfair in the current economic climate and others felt because their house is not modernised, well maintained or repaired.

**Question 4 - Do you agree with the Council's commitment to build new houses to help address the housing situation in East Lothian? If no, please tell us why?**

A lot of the comments made related to how houses are allocated.

**Question 5 - Do you agree that the Council should continue to modernise its existing stock (for example new kitchens, bathrooms etc.)? If no, please tell us why?**

Almost half of those who commented agreed but wanted to know when they would be getting their new kitchen or bathroom and others commented that these upgrades should only be done in the houses that needed them.

**Question 6 - Do you agree that your rent should be used to pay for the following key areas?**

**1) Service delivery e.g. repairs, housing management etc. 2) Modernisation of council houses  
3) Delivery of new affordable houses. If no, please state what is not important or what you think is missing?**

Although a lot of comments related again to the modernisation of houses, others commented on the delivery of new homes and not all felt that the Council or their rent should pay for the building new houses.

**Question 7 – Do you have any other comments you would like to make?**

The top four categories tenants commented on (with the most common first) were modernisation, positive comments, the rent increase and the repairs service.

In terms of the comments made relating to modernisation most of them were from tenants wondering when they would get their new kitchen or bathroom although other improvement work was also referred to. Tenants also commented on the repairs service and in particular these were comments and concerns about the length of time it takes to get repairs done. There were comments about the rent increase itself and also some positive comments not only about the Council but about the services it provides.

**Deborah Piner  
Service Development Officer  
22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013**