

**REPORT TO:** East Lothian Council

**MEETING DATE:** 9 February 2016

**BY:** Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services)

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

---

## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To outline the results of the consultation exercise on the proposals to increase Council House Rents in 2016/17.
- 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 continued 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 long-standing Project Group comprising of Council staff from Community Housing, Revenues and Finance, the Cabinet Spokesperson for Housing & Environment, as well as members of ELTRP reconvened in September 2015 to discuss and agree the approach for the consultation on the 2016/17 proposed increase.

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. It was agreed that tenants would also have the opportunity to complete their questionnaire online. They could comment in other ways too, i.e. via free phone, email or by writing in
- designed a customer friendly consultation letter, which included key information to tenants on what their rent pays for and also on a proposal to consider a potential rent increase of 5%
- agreed the timeline for the consultation.

3.5 All of the above measures continue to build upon similar successful exercises over the last few years.

**Consultation Outcome**

3.6 The vast majority of the feedback was received through the questionnaire, 11 of which were completed online, one short of the online returns in the previous year.

3.7 A total of 1,192 completed questionnaires (including seven responses from local Tenants and Residents Groups) were received. This represents a return rate of 14% of all letters issued (compared to a 12.2% return rate last year). ELTRP also responded by providing a written report with their feedback.

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

- 95% of those who responded were happy with the level of consultation and information they get about the annual rent increase
- 93% said that they think the rent they pay is good value for money
- 79% said they think the Council are proposing a fair increase of 5%
- 93% agree with the Council's commitment to build new houses to help address the housing shortage in East Lothian

- 97% agree that the Council should continue to modernise its existing stock (e.g. new kitchens/bathrooms/rewiring/improving energy efficiency).
- 3.9 There was one further question where tenants were asked if they agree that their rent should pay for key areas such as (1) service delivery such as repairs and housing management, (2) modernisation of council houses, (3) delivery of new affordable houses, and (4) energy efficiency measures.
- 522 tenants made a comment, of which 454 supported all of these key areas. Some respondents gave emphasis to particular areas. For example, 26 stated modernisation, 18 stated repairs and housing management, 16 new affordable housing and 15 said energy efficiency.
- 3.10 Tenants were also given the opportunity to give any other comments at the end of the questionnaire. Most comments were about modernisation, positive comments about the Council, the repairs service and allocation of housing.
- 3.11 In addition East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel made a written response to the consultation after consulting and gathering the views of their Executive Committee Members who are Council tenants.
- 3.12 ELTRP EC members' views were broadly in line with the responses above. Some members did not think it was fair to raise rents by 5% as the proposed increase is not in line with increases in salaries and pensions. Reference was also made to welfare reform and the impacts on the most vulnerable tenants.
- 3.13 Some suggestions were made for future improvements to the consultation process and these will be considered and worked through with the project group.
- 3.14 A summary of all the responses received from tenants who completed the questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1.

## **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**

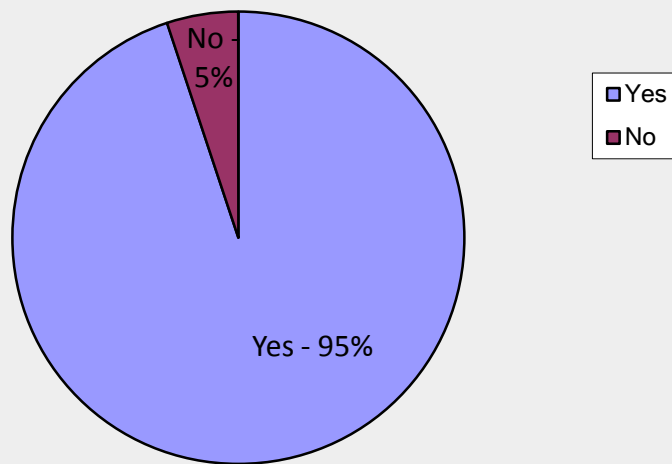
7.1 Appendix 1 – Summary of responses received during the Rent Increase Consultation Exercise 2016/17.

<b>AUTHOR'S NAME</b>	Tom Shearer
<b>DESIGNATION</b>	Head of Communities and Partnerships
<b>CONTACT INFO</b>	James Coutts – Ext 7483.
<b>DATE</b>	4 February 2016

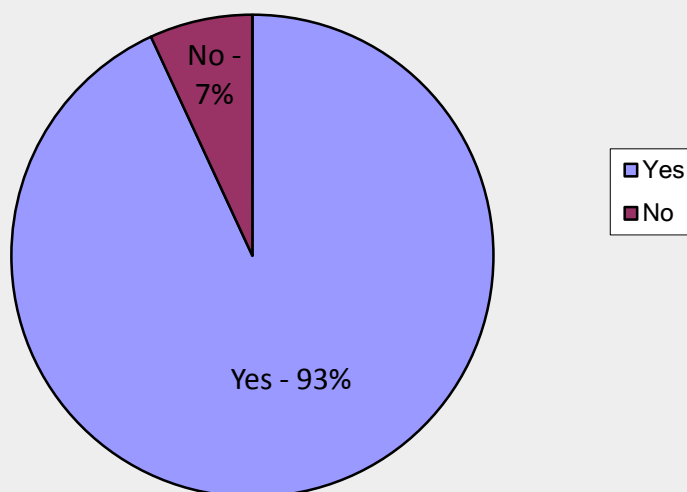
## Appendix 1 – Summary Report on Rent Consultation 2015

In November 2015 we wrote to all our tenants and sent them a consultation questionnaire. This gave tenants an opportunity to let us know their views on the rent consultation and also the proposed rent increase of 5%. Shown below is a summary of all the responses received from tenants.

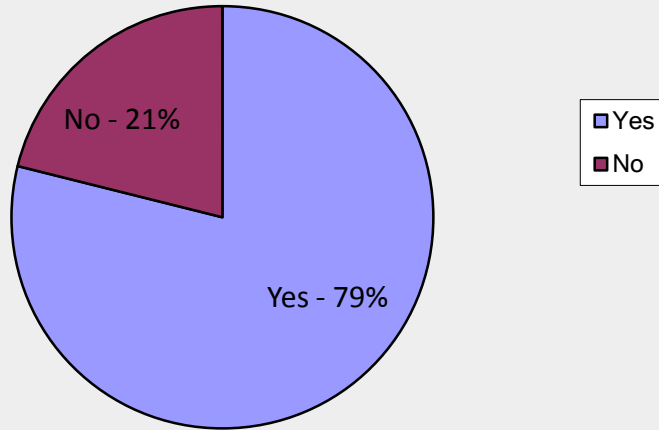
**Question 1. Are you happy with the level of consultation and information you get about the annual rent increase?**



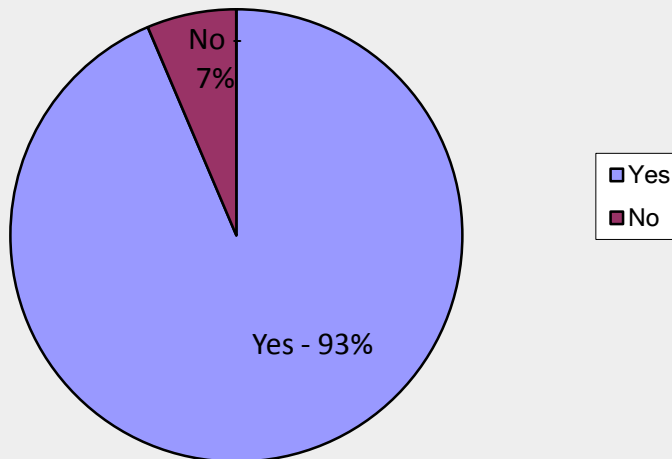
**Question 2. Do you think the rent you pay is good value for money?**



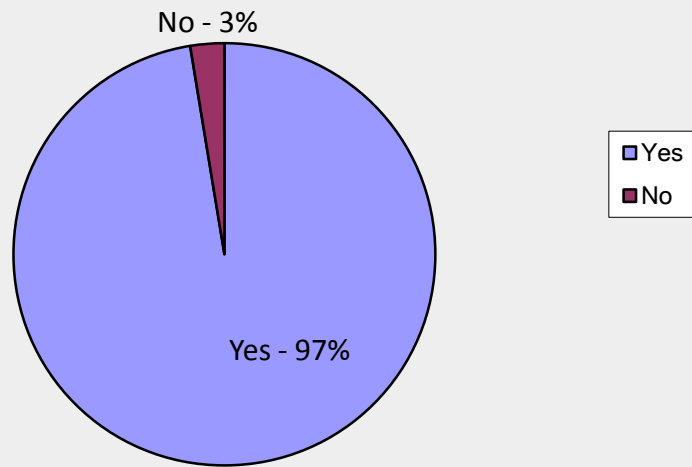
**Question 3. By increasing rent the Council continues to deliver existing services invest in our stock and deliver new houses. Do you think that the proposal to increase rents by 5% is fair?**



**Question 4. Do you agree with the Council's commitment to build new houses to help address the housing shortage in East Lothian?**



**Question 5. Do you agree that the council should continue to modernise its existing stock (e.g. new kitchens/bathrooms/rewiring/improving energy efficiency)?**

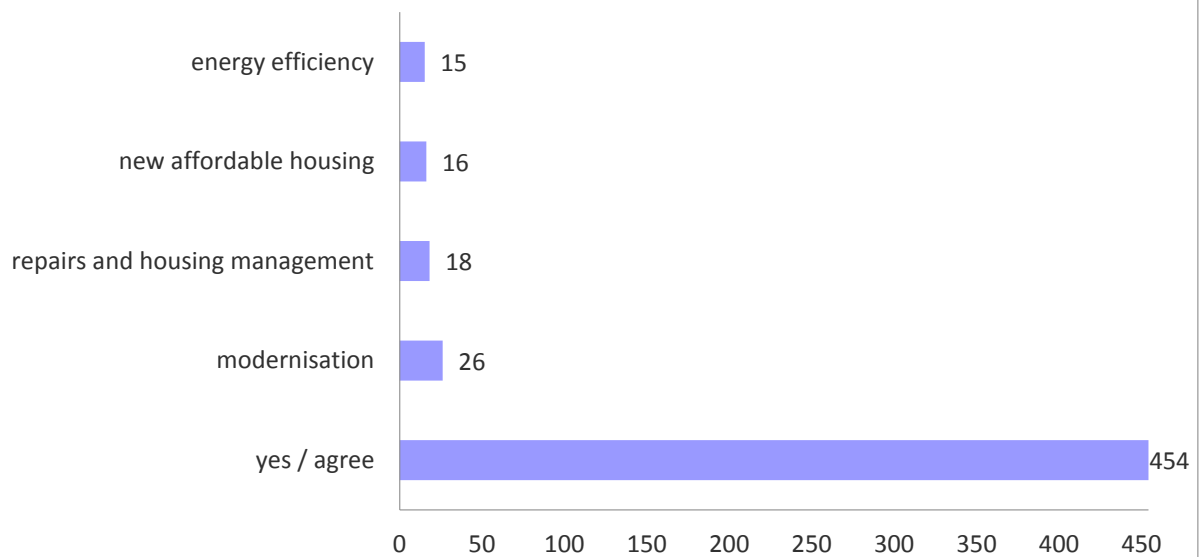


**Question 6**

We asked tenants if they agreed that their rent should be used to pay for the following key areas: 1) service delivery such as repairs and housing management 2) modernisation of council houses 3) delivery of new affordable houses 4) energy efficiency measures.

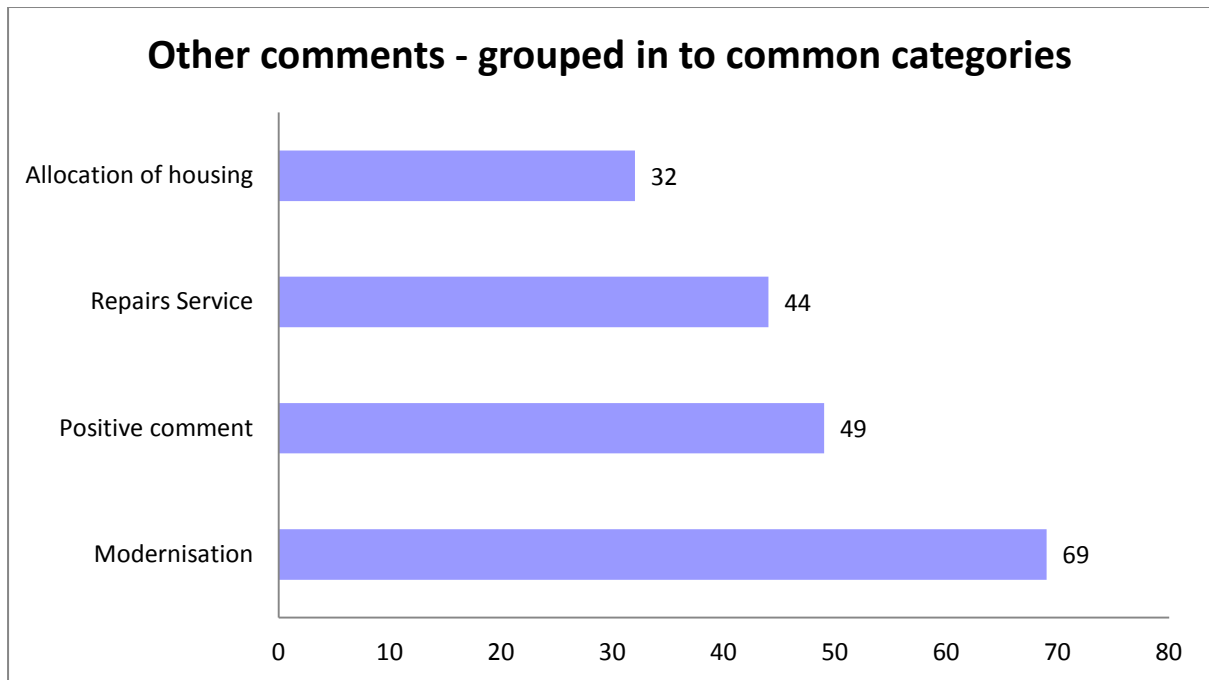
If they did not agree, we gave them the opportunity to tell us what they thought is not important or what they thought was missing. Below is summary of the comments that were made.

**Comments made - grouped in to common categories**



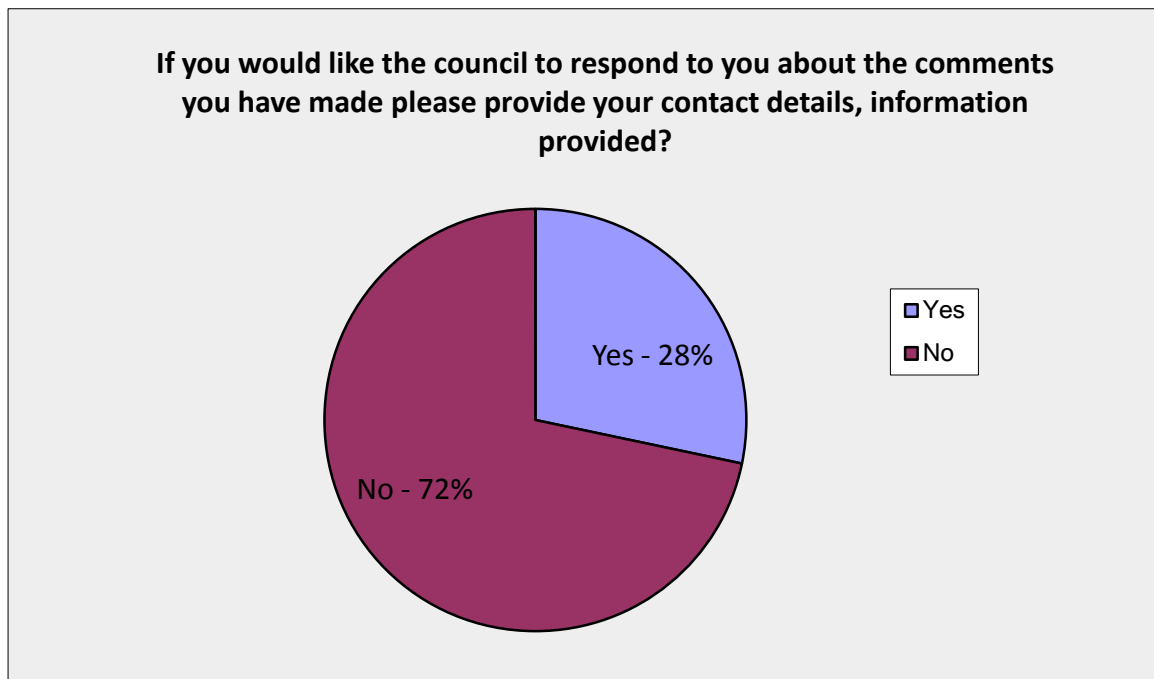
### Question 7

We also gave tenants the opportunity to make any other comments and we have summarised these below. A total of 454 comments were made with the top four categories shown below.



### Question 8

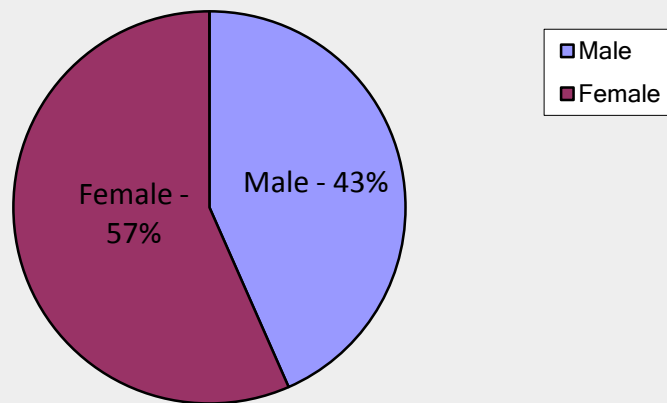
As part of improving the consultation process we also asked tenants if they wanted us to respond to them direct about comments they had made on their consultation questionnaire. Shown below is the percentage of tenants who wanted some feedback and we are in the process of making contact with these tenants.



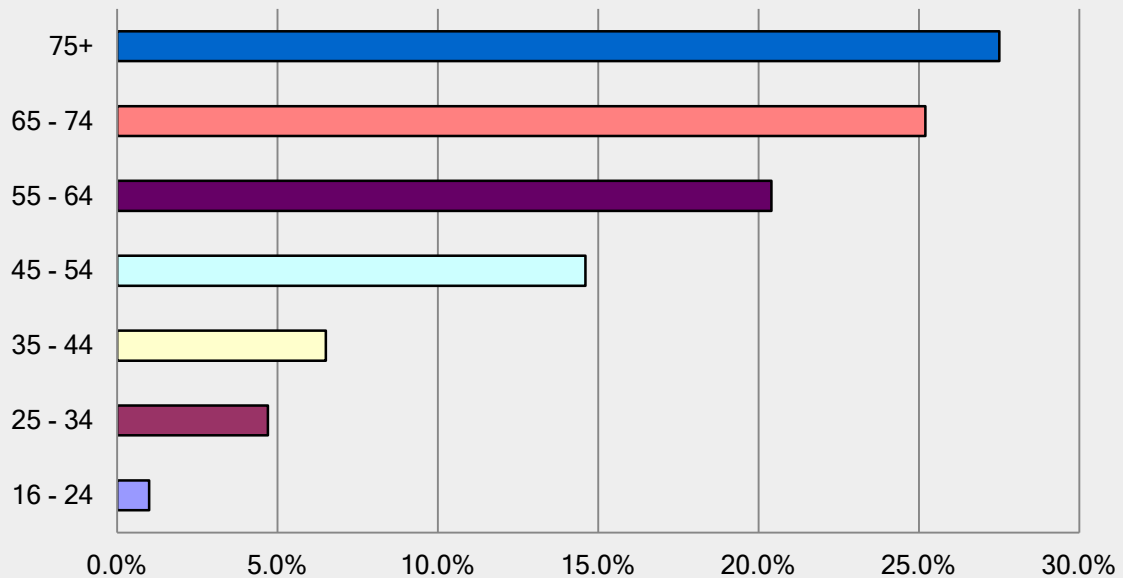


To help us ensure that we capture as wide a range of views as possible from customers and comply with the council's equality monitoring requirements we asked tenants a number of questions.

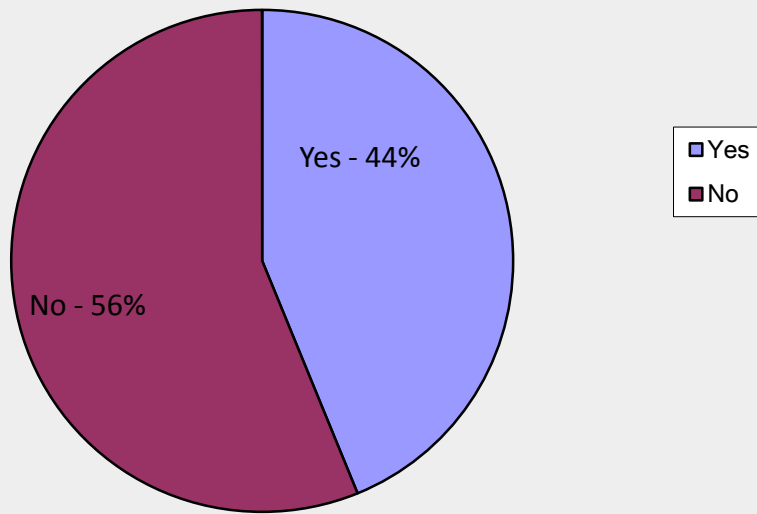
**Question 9. To help us ensure we capture as wide a range of views as possible from customers and comply with the council's equality monitoring requirements please complete the following questions. Are you?**



**Question 10. Please tell us what age category you are in**



**Question 11. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?**



**Question 12. Please tell us what your Ethnic Origin is?**

