

RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE CONSULTATION FEEDBACK 2024

Thanks to all our tenants who responded to our consultation this year.

This year was our highest number of responses yet with 294 tenants responding to give their views which is 24.43% of our tenants.

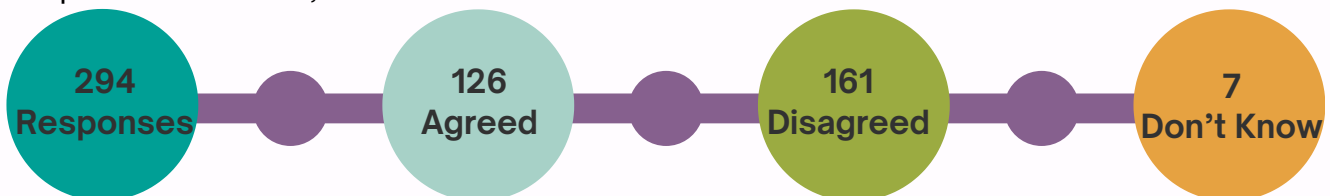
We received responses from tenants;

- Across all areas of our stock
- From different property sizes & types
- Who live in properties that have reached our standard rent levels (also known as target rent) as per our rent restructure, and those who are still in our phased rents programme
- Who receive help with their rent payments from Universal Credit or Housing Benefit and those who do not
- Different ethnicities and household types

If you asked us a specific question relating to your individual circumstances you should have received contact from one of our staff. If you had a query and haven't had any contact yet, please let us know. You can do this by emailing admin@paisleyha.org.uk or by telephoning us on 0141 889 7105 (select option 0)

CONSULTATION ON RENT CHARGE - WHAT YOU SAID

When asked 'Do you agree / disagree with the proposed rent increase for 2024/25, those who responded advised;



Of those tenants who responded that they disagreed with our rent proposal, some gave multiple reasons, the main ones being;

- Cost of Living/affordability
- Improvement required to property

OUR BOARD'S DECISION ON RENT CHARGES

Our Board met on 19th February 2024 to decide on the rent and service charges for 2024/25 and took account of;

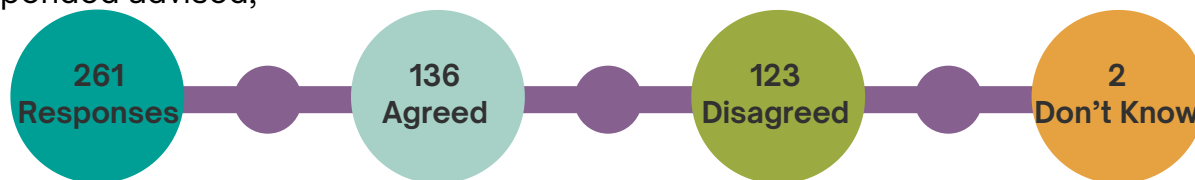
- The income required to deliver the Association's services and investment in our properties
- Feedback from our tenants

Taking the above into account, our Board voted and agreed to the rent increase of 5.5% (based on properties at our standard rent. For properties still in our rent harmonisation project, they will see a slightly higher increase as they move towards the standard rate)

We would like to let you know what we are doing about the concerns and questions that have been raised, you will find details about this on page 3 and 4 of this enclosure.

CONSULTATION ON SERVICE CHARGES - WHAT YOU SAID

When asked 'Do you agree / disagree with the proposed service charges for 2024/25, those who responded advised;



Comments included;

- Why do we have a monthly bulk charge rather than just pay when we use it?
- Services provided are not good quality
- Services are expensive

OUR BOARD'S DECISION ON SERVICE CHARGES

Our Board approved the charges for our services for 2024/25.

These charges are based solely on the costs we incur from contractors to deliver these services. We do not generate any profit from these services. They are provided solely to ensure minimum standards are maintained for our properties.

As well as our Board considering your views, we would like to let you know what we are doing about the concerns and questions that have been raised regarding service charges and you will find information about this on page 3 and 4 of this enclosure.

PLANNED & CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE 2024/25 FEEDBACK

This year as part of our consultation we only gave broad details of larger planned projects, not specific addresses, for 2024/2025. This is in case of any possible changes we have to make to our draft 5 year programme e.g. to slot in work for any new legislation or new immediate priorities.

In 2023/24 we continued to face the challenges of construction sector labour shortages, rising fuel, energy and inflation increases. This impacted the delivery of planned investment works and as a result a scaled back immediate priority programme was put in place.

We are glad to see the situation improving recently and there has been gradual shift back to somewhat of a 'normal situation'. This coming year, 2024/25, will see the Association aiming to significantly increase its planned maintenance across our stock with new bathrooms, gas boilers, windows, kitchens and roof replacements. This takes into account the tenant feedback received recently, but also over the last couple of years.

Our cyclical programme of works continues to ensure properties receive regular maintenance, such as gutter cleaning and common area painting.

There are also new investment priorities for the housing stock in relation to energy efficiency and net zero requirements. This will focus initially on the properties with electric heating, which, we appreciate is expensive to run. In looking towards future years, you will see works being carried out to meet the energy efficiency standard being required in most homes.

Thank you again for your feedback and questions, we hope this information will be of assistance to you. If you contacted us with a specific question or about any repair or service, we will respond to you directly.

WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT THE CONCERNS YOU RAISED?

AFFORDABILITY AND COST OF LIVING

We know that there is a continued financial strain with the cost of living. Although we must increase our charges to cover our costs, we continue to look at ways we can help our tenants with the cost of living increases we have all been experiencing.

In the last year we supported our tenants through our advice team dealing with 1050 separate and distinct issues for our tenants, covering benefits, energy and money advice. We also provided Tenancy Support to 116 households

In addition, we have secured funding for the next year to provide £25,000 of direct assistance to households struggling with their energy,

All funding is via grants our staff locate and apply to - any direct assistance provided is at no cost to tenants through their rents.

For the coming year we will continue to assist our tenants maximise their income and meet essential bills by:

- Maximising income through the use of benefit checks and supporting tenants to make their claims and challenge unfair or incorrect decisions.
- Providing tenants with energy advice to assist them to afford their energy bills, this includes promoting small energy saving measures and maximising available grants towards energy use.
- Accessing grants towards emergency fuel top ups to those on prepayment meters.
- Accessing grants towards crisis payments to those in need, subject to available funding.
- Providing basic money advice to minimise outgoings.
- Supporting tenants to apply for charitable grants where they are in crisis
- We will continue to look for additional funding to provide support for our tenants
- Providing additional support to those at risk of eviction through our Tenancy Support Service

WHY DO WE HAVE A MONTHLY BULK CHARGE RATHER THAN JUST PAY WHEN WE USE IT?

We introduced our bulk service many years ago in response to areas being blighted by dumped bulk and unfortunately not all tenants taking responsibility for reporting their own items.

Even now with our service in place, not all tenants take responsibility to report their bulk items for uplift and items are left in backcourts. If we did not have the service we would not be able to effectively deal with this issue creating unsightly areas, having the service allows us to deal with the issue more effectively.

We think our bulk service remains good value for money. If you were using Renfrewshire Council's uplift service (2023/24 prices) you would pay £37.15 for each uplift of 1-20 items (over 20 items starts at £88) with white & upholstered goods being separate between £37.15 - £45 per item.

To try to keep costs down we encourage everyone to try to recycle what they can before putting it out as bulk uplift.

There are a number of ways to recycle and if we all did our bit, we can help the environment and keep bulk costs down. For example going online to sites like Renfrewshire Helping Those In Need or Freecycle to give it away for free.

We are pleased that for 2024/25 we are able to limit the increase of our bulk service to less than £1 per month.

DON'T THINK SERVICES PROVIDED ARE GOOD QUALITY

We would ask that if you have any issues with the standard of our services let us know as soon as it is an issue so we can respond to this right away and have it dealt with.

We carry out regular inspections to ensure contractors are providing the level of service expected. In 2023/24 we introduced an email/text alert to let you know when we have inspected a service in your close and our findings. We want this to encourage tenants to give us their feedback promptly so we can ensure that our contractors are providing a high standard.

SERVICES ARE EXPENSIVE

As with repair contractors, our contractors delivering our services have also had the same cost of living increases which they cannot absorb without a price increase.

We regularly review our service contracts to ensure they are the best value for our tenants. We have been able to significantly reduce our Heating Charge this year due to reducing costs.

Our service contracts for close cleaning, bulk uplift and garden maintenance have recently been tendered for 2024/25 and we will be announcing who the contractors are very soon.

WHY HAS THE GARDEN MAINTENANCE CHARGE CHANGED?

We have now appointed a permanent Garden Maintenance Contractor (M squared), the new contractor calculates the cost of their service in a different way which means that the cost of the service may have changed quite a bit for some tenants.

WILL I GET COMPENSATION FOR THE REDUCED GARDEN SERVICE IN 2023?

As previously advised, we recognise that a reduced garden maintenance service was in place in 2023 while we tried to secure a long term contractor.

Despite the interim service costing more, as previously confirmed, we will be making the goodwill payments of 50% of the garden maintenance charge in 2023/24. These will be paid to the rent accounts of affected tenants in March 2024.

WHY IS THE RENT CHARGE REVIEWED EVERY YEAR?

Each year, our Board must consider how much income it will need to provide its housing services to our tenants and investment in our properties both in the short and longer term.

We consider the costs for items such as materials, labour, utilities, loan interest payments and our own staffing to determine what income we will need. We strive to be efficient in how we purchase and deliver our services and investment programmes, to ensure best value.

As many of those who responded commented, the cost of living has increased. This also affects the costs incurred by the Association. All these things cost the Association more money and are unavoidable for us.

The Association is a not-for-profit organisation. Our Board are unpaid volunteers made up of tenants and private individuals. We don't have any shareholders who make profit. Any funds after paying our costs are invested in our properties to allow us to provide quality accommodation.