

Note of meetings held 06 December and 10 December 2022

Subject: Rent Increase tenant focus groups (HYBRID)

Venue: Aberdeen office

People present: Judith Sutherland – Director of Housing
Rebecca Davidson – Customer Service Manager
Samantha Hough – Customer Participation Officer
KH – tenant, Stonehaven
RB – tenant, Aberdeen
TM – tenant, Buckie
LM – tenant, Buckie
KL – tenant, Aberdeen
BL – tenant, Aberdeen

Background

The purpose of the meetings was to open conversations with tenants about the rent increase 2023 and Scottish Governments new legislation to freeze rents until March 2023. We wanted to discuss our planning and considerations when we embark on the annual process of setting our rents and proposing a rent increase. Our agenda included:

- Budget reviewing and planning
- Affordability
- Tenant consultation process

Discussion points

The following table covers the main points raised at the meeting.

Item discussed	Notes
Process for review – budget preparation and income & expenditure	Discussion about how Langstane sets budgets and the use of industry specific tools to make sure rental charges are kept within affordability guidelines. Budget setting also considers maintenance and material costs. Tenants attending were shown projections for income and expenditure.
New legislation Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022	Discussion around the newly introduced legislation to provide a rent freeze across the social and private sectors. Tenants were advised that it wouldn't be till January until social landlords were informed if the cap would be extended after 31 March 2023. Tenants were also informed that the Scottish Government has advised social landlords to go ahead with a rent increase consultation with their tenants in the meantime, therefore

Item discussed	Notes
	our annual consultation will be released in January 2023.
Rent Increase examples	<p>It was discussed what a 5% increase would look like in real terms to provide a clearer guide on what a proposed increase would mean.</p> <p>Discussion with tenants about their concern that the rate of inflation is currently 11%. JS was able to provide reassurance that we would not be proposing an 11% increase and informed them of the proposed options which would be consulted on in January.</p>
Financial Help and the Benefit System	<p>Discussion around what help the Association is providing for tenants and other customers. This includes the award of £61,000 to help our tenants tackle fuel poverty. The award is from the Social Housing Fuel Support Fund which is funded by the Scottish Government. Also discussed was our new partnership with Scarf, AberNecessities and C-fine. We talked about the referral process and that all this extra help and support is to help our tenants during the ongoing cost of living crisis. Tenant asked if the Association had considered getting involved with benevolent funds. This was noted for consideration. Discussion also involved what help is being provided for disabled and elderly tenants in terms of coping with the cost of living crisis.</p>

Once the presentation was complete JS answered tenants questions on how the Association is handling income loss due to empty properties (voids). The response included a discussion on:

- using our housing list
- working with the local authorities to receive nominations
- use of void properties for refugees
- homeless accommodation issues with local authorities

There was also discussion concerning how the Association handles bad debt, former tenant debt, rent arrears along with income from mid-market properties, which is handled by our subsidiary; Langstane Property Ltd.