



# Rent Level Consultation

Each year, we write out to all our tenants to gather their views on their experience of the housing service and to present options for setting the next year's rent levels. This year we are consulting on a range of options and this fact sheet provides more information.

Currently we are consulting on the rent increase for next year only. After that, we will be looking at a longer-term rent policy and structure, which we expect to be ready by 2025.

We know the decisions we make about your rent and how we spend the money we collect is extremely important, particularly during these uncertain times. It is also extremely important for the council to be able to plan ahead and prepare for external changes that may impact on its budgets.

**Please complete the 2024/25 Rent Level Consultation Questionnaire** (pages 5 & 6).

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## How each £1 of rent money is spent

The money you pay in rent goes towards the cost of providing you with the services you receive as a council tenant.

### **Voids and bad debt**

For every £1 of rent, **4p** is spent on houses that are vacant (voids) or where bad debt (rent arrears) is uneconomical to recover. When a property remains empty, we receive no rent for it. We're working hard to turn our void properties around more quickly and are also looking at measures we can put in place to help reduce rent arrears.

### **Employee costs for staff and services**

For every £1 of rent you pay **9p** is used to pay for staff, including tenancy support and housing officers, and service delivery costs. This also includes training and equipment to allow staff to carry out their roles.

### **Operating costs**

For every £1 of rent, **19p** is spent on operating costs such as offices running costs, tenant participation and IT systems and equipment. Although energy costs are increasing, we're looking at a range of measures to maintain or reduce operating costs in the future.

### **Repairs and maintenance**

For every £1 of rent you pay, **33p** is spent on repairing and maintaining homes. Apart from paying rent, it is the main reason you get in touch with us,

so we're working hard to improve the service in terms of response times and satisfaction rates. In addition, we have recently improved our processes for dealing with damp, mould and condensation. We are also developing a new Housing Management IT system that will make it easier to report repairs and other matters, improve communication between housing teams and save the council money.

### **Loan charges for improvements and new build**

For every £1 of rent you pay, **35p** is spent to invest in your homes including building new homes. New homes are mainly funded by borrowing money through our Housing Revenue Account. These loans are then repaid by tenants' rent. Around a third of the cost of new builds is funded by the Scottish Government. We are improving the standard of homes by installing new kitchens and bathrooms so that we continue to meet national standards. We're also working hard to make homes easier and cheaper to heat by putting in new windows, doors and heating systems. However the Scottish Government is about to issue new guidance to meet higher standards which we welcome, but which will result in additional spending.

Over the last five years we have built **420** new homes for social rent across the county. All these homes are built to high standards of energy efficiency making them easier to heat and helping us meet government climate net zero carbon requirements.

## Investment Programmes

Costs continue to increase. Rising construction costs are affecting our maintenance and new build programmes. Increasing interest rates are affecting our borrowing costs and energy prices and pay increases for staff are impacting on our operating costs.

The 5% increase set last year and also included as an option for 2024/25 is still affordable but it is at a risk. This is because of the increasing costs, increasing national standards we have to maintain, and increasing demand on our services.

In 2022/23, the **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** spend was **£33m** with the main costs being **£11.6m** on repairs and maintenance, **£3m** on management and staff costs, and **£11m** on debt repayments. In addition we spent c.**£40m** on the **Housing Capital Improvement Programme** as set out below:

<b>Housing Capital Investment Programme</b>	<b>£</b>
Modernisation (existing houses, including extensions)	13,222,000
New council housing	25,383,000
Fees	1,568,000
Mortgage to Rent*	177,000
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<b>Total</b>	<b>40,350,000</b>
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\*The **Mortgage to Rent Scheme** is run by the Scottish Government.

*It aims to assist those whose homes are at risk of being repossessed to stay in their homes.*

## East Lothian Council rent levels

Our rent levels continue to be among the lowest in Scotland and are the lowest when compared to our neighbouring Local Authorities and Housing Associations. Whilst this means council rents are affordable, it puts extra pressure on the council to keep our homes in good repair and allow for new builds. The fact that our homes are in good condition and rent levels remain low, is appealing to residents and means an overall increase in demand for affordable housing.

# East Lothian Council's rent level 2024/25 consultation

The money you pay in rent keeps the housing service running and enables us to improve and invest in your houses and services. We want to make sure that rent charges remain affordable for tenants but we also need to continue to meet national standards.



We must make sure our properties meet certain standards and are well maintained. The standard, set by the Scottish Government, is called **The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)**.

An increase in rent will support our future investment plans by enabling us to focus on:

## Improving existing homes

- Continue to upgrade our homes, replacing our kitchens and bathrooms
- Establish a new window and door replacement programme
- Provide more accessible homes by delivering an adaptations programme to meet the needs of our growing older population
- Have a programme of works to make homes easier and cheaper to heat
- Meet the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver net zero carbon requirements

## Building new homes

- Build a further 650 new council homes by 2028
- Deliver regeneration projects identified through recent survey works

## Improving our services

- Continue development and implementation of our new *Housing Management System*, which will deliver both cost savings and service improvements for our tenants and staff
- Improve our repairs service to *get it right at first fix*
- Ensure services are more accessible to everyone

Please complete the 2024/25 Rent Level Consultation Questionnaire online at [eastlothianconsultations.co.uk](http://eastlothianconsultations.co.uk) or use the form on pages 5 & 6; detach and return using the prepaid envelope provided. Thank you.

## Additional Information

If you would like more information or would like to talk to someone about the council's rent proposals, please get in touch with our Service Development Team **before Friday 15th December 2023** by:

- calling freephone **0800 413 721**  
*(please leave your name and number, and a member of our team will call you back)*
- emailing [tenantconsultation@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tenantconsultation@eastlothian.gov.uk) or
- writing to us at:

**East Lothian Council Service Development Team  
Community Housing, Penston House  
Macmerry EH33 1EX**

## Financial concerns?

Paying your rent is the most important part of a tenancy agreement. It is important that rent is paid on time and in full. If however you find yourself struggling to manage this, don't let arrears build up – contact us straight away. Our Rent Income Officers are here to help and will discuss your concerns confidentially and sensitively and ensure you get any help and support that you need.

For help or advice with your rent payments, phone our helpline on **01620 827 528**  
email [rentincome@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:rentincome@eastlothian.gov.uk) or visit [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rent](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rent)

To find out more about other benefits please contact our Financial Inclusion Team who offer free, confidential information and advice on welfare rights and benefits.

The service is available to anyone in East Lothian. Email [financialinclusion@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:financialinclusion@eastlothian.gov.uk)

If you would like to speak to someone in the Benefits Section or Financial Inclusion Team, please telephone **01620 827 827** and ask for the service that you need.

## Feedback

To make a comment, suggestion, or complaint about a council service, download our feedback form online or pick one up at your local council office.

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/feedback](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/feedback)

# 2024/25 Rent Level Consultation Questionnaire

**Q.1 Please tell us what you think the annual rent increase should be next year.**

*Please tick only one box:* Option 1 (5%)  Option 2 (6%)  Option 3 (7%)

**Q.2 The money you pay in rent is used to pay for delivering the housing service, please tell us what services are most important to you.**

*Please prioritise the services 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important to you and 5 the least important:*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to deliver the housing service | <input type="checkbox"/> Modernisation Programme |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Council house repairs                   | <input type="checkbox"/> New Build Programme     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy efficiency measures              |  |

**Q.3 Are you satisfied with the level of consultation and information you get about the annual rent increase?**

Yes  No  *If no, please tell us why:*

**Q.4 Do you think the rent you pay is good value for money?**

Yes  No  *If no, please tell us why:*

**Q.5 Do you have any suggestions about how we can improve the housing service?**



# Equalities monitoring

Please complete the following questions **which will help us capture the views of as wide a range of tenants as possible to ensure we are meeting their housing needs.**

All responses are completely confidential.

**Are you:** Male  Female  Transgender  Prefer not to say

**Are you:**

16-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65-74  75+  Prefer not to say

**Do you have a health condition or disability which impacts on your day-to-day life?**

Visual impairment  Hearing impairment  Difficulties with mobility   
Mental health condition  Other  Prefer not to say

**What is your ethnic origin?**  White  African, Caribbean or Black  
 Mixed or multiple ethnic group  Other ethnic group  
 Asian, Asian Scottish, Asian British  Prefer not to say

**What is your religion, or belief (if any)**

**What area do you live in?**

Dunbar  Prestonpans   
North Berwick  Musselburgh   
Haddington  Tranent

**Are you currently:**

In work: Part-time  Full-time  Retired  Studying  Currently out of work

**Does your household currently receive benefit to help with your housing costs?** Yes  No   
*(e.g. Housing Benefit or Universal Credit)*

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

**Please return it in the prepaid envelope provided to:**

East Lothian Council Service Development Team  
Penston House, Macmerry EH33 1EX

**have your say**



If you are concerned about your bills, including rent and Council Tax, don't let arrears build up...

There are lots of ways we can help ensure you get what you're entitled to.

Find out more online at:

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/boost](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/boost)

scan the QR code, or talk to your local Housing or Tenancy Support Officer.

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/tenancy-support](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/tenancy-support)



**We're living through stressful times just now, and everyone's feeling it.**

Our staff are doing their best to assist local residents and businesses whilst delivering essential services.

**Please, be nice.**

*Thanks for your patience  
& politeness*



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone Customer Services if you require assistance on 01620 827199

