

# Rent Review 2023/2024

## Consultation Feedback

This year's rent consultation has seen us take a different approach to that used in recent years. In the past we would send out a paper survey to all tenants with the Christmas issue of Voice, however over the past few years this method has shown diminishing returns (accounting for only slightly more than 10% of replies last year). In order to have initial findings back for December's Board meeting, this year's rent consultation has, for the first time, been almost entirely digital.

### Online survey

Because of the more complicated messaging required this year (Scottish Government rent freeze, cost-of-living crisis, 4-day week trial) we set out detailed information pages on our website and encouraged tenants to read these before completing the short online survey. The survey was then shared through:

1. Email to about 1,600 tenants that we have addresses for (2 emails)
2. SMS to about 1,700 tenants for whom we have mobile numbers (2 messages)
3. Facebook
4. Word of mouth from staff when talking to tenants as part of day-to-day work

Those unable to complete the online survey were given the option of passing on their views over the phone.

The survey explained options for rent levels in the coming financial year, with the consultation period lasting approximately four weeks. Every tenant that replied was also entered into a £50 prize draw.

### Returns

This year's survey has seen an amazing response, particularly given the switch to digital returns only, with 340 replies returned so far. This is a record number, surpassing by some distance the 251 we received last year, and continuing the trend of increasing returns in recent years. It represents a sample of more than 16% of our eligible tenancies (ie those not let to councils or other charities such as Women's Aid).

#### 1 **Headline findings**

- **81%** are happy with the services they receive from Melville (up from 75% last year). Dissatisfaction however has remained unchanged with 9% unhappy with the overall service they receive.
- **75%** of those who answered said they think Melville's current rent and service charges are affordable. This represents a slight fall from 80% last year and continues a trend over recent years.
- **71%** feel that their rent represents good value for money (compared to 70% last year). 8% feel it represents poor value (compared to 9% last year).
- Returns were very evenly split between those who receive some Government help to pay their rent and those that don't. **49%** of those that responded did not receive any Universal Credit (UC) or housing benefit to help pay their rent.
- **65%** of those that responded said they would support increasing rent by a minimum of 2%, a significant increase on the previous year when 48% backed an increase.
- **35%** were opposed to any of the three options presented.
- **65%** supported plans to move to a 4-day week. Only 6% were against the idea.

## 2 Breakdown of key findings

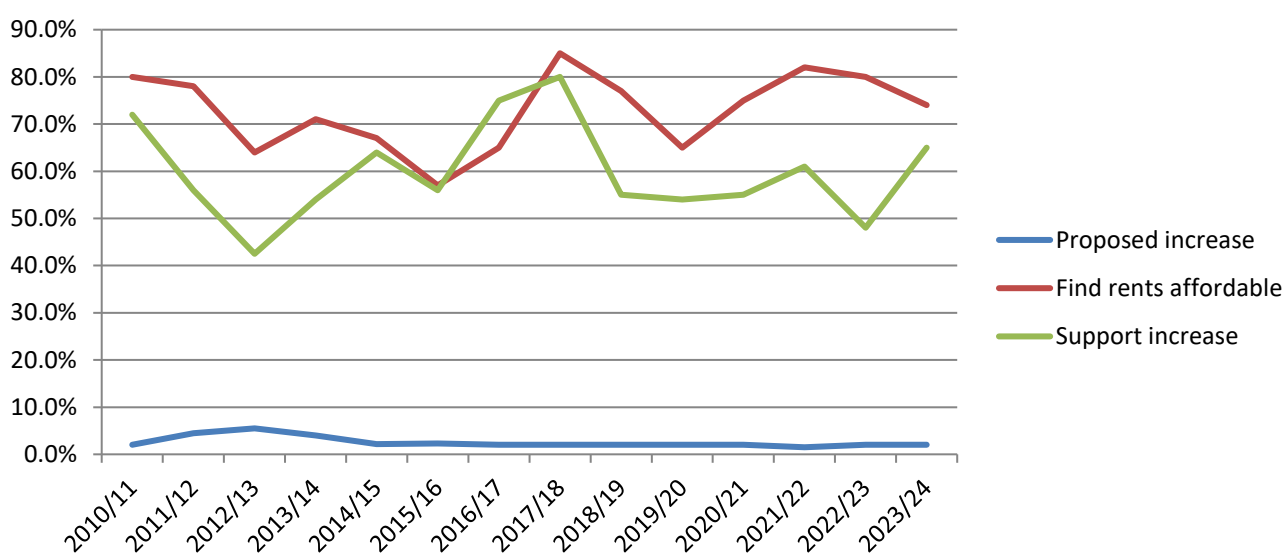
The key findings, broken down into how those receiving housing benefit/UC and those paying their rent themselves answered, show the following:

	Overall	UC/HB	Non HB
Satisfaction with overall service	81%	86%	76%
Find rent/service charges affordable	75%	76%	73%
Rent represents good value	71%	77%	66%
In favour of 2% increase	51%	50%	53%
In favour of 3.5% increase	7%	7%	5%
In favour of 5% increase	4%	4%	5%
In favour of higher increase	4%	5%	2%
Against any of the options	35%	34%	35%
Support for 4-day week trial	65%	66%	65%

In terms of support for the proposed increases, there is very little difference this year between those receiving housing benefit or Universal Credit (51% of respondents) and those paying rent entirely without Government help. The most marked difference between the two groups was in satisfaction with overall service and perceived value for money.

## 3 Comparison with previous years

The chart below illustrates how this year's main findings compare to those in previous years.



Support for an increase is significantly higher than last year, despite a fall in perceived affordability. At over 16% of the tenant population, this year's 340 replies provides a robust cross section of opinions however we do need to bear in mind that we are continuing to deal with a still limited, and self-selecting, sample.

A selection of tenants' comments are included over the page. Where appropriate, we have replied to individual comments to investigate issues raised and to offer help and support.

4 Comments



On rents

I know rents have to go up but with the financial crisis at the moment I would opt for the least rise until we all can recover from these terrible times and maybe next year put the rents up a little higher.
I feel a rent increase is most likely the correct way forward however a high increase could see more people falling further into poverty. Services like stair cleaning could be cut to counteract the higher rent. Maybe a discount on rent for people living in properties that are too small for their requirements.
Have never had any issues with services. Have lived in the same Melville house for 50 years and think they are a great landlord.
Rents still cheaper than the private sector. I have a permanent tenancy. My home is in a great condition. I'm one of the lucky ones.
Increase the band where working people on their own and working get some help with their rent, unfair people on benefits receiving more than a take home pay in some cases and don't pay any rent. People who are working find this increasing climate very difficult and need more help.
It's time for landlords to acknowledge the loyalty of their tenants, as a gesture of gratitude from the landlord, a 1 year rent freeze would be much appreciated, enabling them to cover the worsening cost of living crisis.
I think it's high, council is not as high.
I know you have to increase the rents but maybe 1% or 1.5% as everyone struggling and because I work full time I'm not entitled to any help at all as I live on my own.
Wages are not increasing so the thought of rent rises is alarming in 11 years been in my house I have had no improvements so can't imagine why my rent would rise.
Rents should be frozen for 2023, we never got a freeze during the pandemic while people were struggling and the current rent freeze has not benefitted Melville customers, we still got an increase April 22 and the rent freeze finishes March 23 so no benefit what so ever to us.
The costs could be lowered considerably by investing in a good company other than Novus. The amount of call outs and unfinished work, and wasting everyone's time in general we would all be financially better off without them.
One month free rent would be great to help those who are finding things financially hard like myself or allow for the rent to be paid at end of month in arrears to help with costs.
Any rent increase at the moment is going to have an adverse nature on the financial balance of households. As you have stated, employers are not in a position to give staff a cost of living wage increase in-line with inflation. As such it is not appropriate to pass on these costs to your customers. I will not receive a 10 or 11% wage rise this year, but I am finding that my utility bills, food, petrol, etc have all increased by 10 or 11%. To find my rent increasing also is going to cause more undue stress and anxiety when it comes to managing household finances.

I am a pensioner with disabilities, and for me, Melville have helped me in anything that is required! A walk in shower wet room, a godsend to me, and my kitchen, fabulous ! so I cant thank Melville enough for what they have done for me over the years !!!
Rents are at a level I think are reasonable. I fully understand the predicament everyone is finding themselves in. A £20 a month increase is about all we can afford, which is why I've selected that option. Any more and we would be severely struggling.
For someone not receiving any benefits & no additional assistance from my employer (this includes no pay rise) I physically cannot afford an increase in my rent. As benefits & pensions are increasing in line I think those should have a slight increase in their fees.
There's families like mine where it's a one wage family but earns enough not to get extra financial support, and while everything goes up, in my husband's case his wages aren't and been told they won't be. I'm sure we aren't the only family like this that ever little helps and a 2% seems fair and reasonable and hopefully still helps with the tenants needs.
Rents for Melville is far higher than council and the services lately have dramatically decreased. Any increase on rent right now would be unjustified until services are improved.
Nobody wants any increase in rent as times are hard for everyone but the rent we pay compared to Edinburgh is great.
Help us consistently instead of helping us then taking the money off elsewhere.
Melville provide a fair service although I feel a small increase at the moment would be more justified.
I am more that satisfied with services provided by Melville. The service from Melville before I moved to my current house was amazing and the effort that Melville made in order for myself and my family to move to a house that was more suitable for our needs. They worked hard to ensure we could be where we are now and we will forever be grateful for all their hard work and the way that they cared for us and our situation at the time. I wouldn't want to be with any other housing service so thank you to every member of staff working for Melville.
Money is extremely tight all around right now, I'm barely covering costs of bills and food but I appreciate that Melville seek feedback from tenants on rents. Have Melville considered creating their own repairs service rather than contracting the work out to other companies? It may be more financially sustainable in the longer term to have an in house service.
An increase is necessary to support good services.
Again maybe put the rents up higher next year when we are hopefully out of this financial crisis.

### On 4-day week proposal

As long as managed appropriately, a 4 day week is a brilliant way forward.
If staff were happy with this option. However salaries not increasing with inflation doesn't pay bills.
Well its unlikely I'm getting a pay rise and working on minimum wage. So your employees should be grateful for what there getting.
Tenants will be paying more, but getting less. The cost of living crisis is effecting everyone, not just staff. Why should tenants have to struggle to pay more rent but lose the staffing hours.
You have to provide a service to customers however in order to successfully do that you need to have staff that are happy in their role so that they can provide good customer relations. You need to put your employees health and well being first and think with that plan you would be ensuring their health and well being needs are being met as well as your clients/customers.
Only if this doesn't result in the staff having to overcompensate on these days.
I understand that you are looking after you staff welfare needs and as long as customer service is not affected by the reduced hours I would support this.
To be honest we have to live with COVID now adays if you want to pay your staff full wages for 4 day that down to you and shouldn't make public pay for this with rent increase.
Loyalty deserves recognition.
A four day week could impact services for tenants.
4 day week is an idea whose time has come.
I feel it will impact on my rent services.