

# Rent Review 2024/2025

## Consultation Feedback

Following the success of last year's entirely digital survey, we have taken the same approach with this year's consultation which was carried out by email, SMS, Facebook and on our website. The survey ran for almost three weeks during the second half of January.

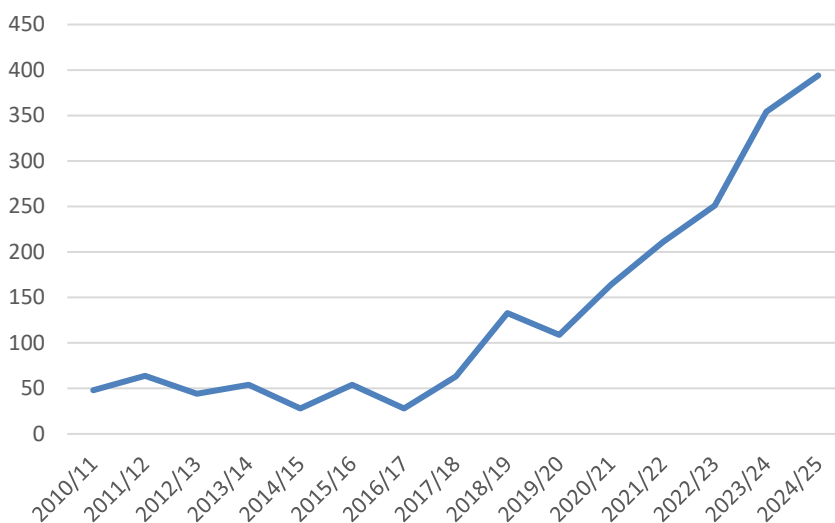
The survey was shared by:

1. Email to about 1,600 tenants that we have addresses for (3 emails)
2. SMS to about 1,900 tenants for whom we have mobile numbers (3 messages)
3. Facebook and Melville's website
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 or by having a paper survey sent to them. These alternatives were given in the Christmas issue of our Voice newsletter.

The survey explained options for rent levels in the coming financial year and every tenant that replied was also entered into a £50 prize draw.

### 1 Returns



This year's survey saw an excellent response, continuing to justify the switch to digital, with 398 replies returned. This is a record number, surpassing by some distance the 354 we received last year, and continuing the trend of increasing returns in recent years. It represents a sample of almost 20% of our eligible tenancies (ie those not let to councils or organisations such as Women's Aid).

### 2 Headline findings

- **74%** are happy with the services they receive from Melville (down from 81% last year). Dissatisfaction however remains low and has fallen very slightly with 8% (9% last year) unhappy with the overall service they receive.
- **82%** of those who answered said they think Melville's current rent and service charges are affordable. This represents an increase from 75% last year.
- **66%** feel that their rent represents good value for money (a fall from 71% last year). 9% feel it represents poor value (compared to 8% last year).
- Returns were evenly split between those who receive some Government help (Universal Credit or housing benefit) to pay their rent and those that don't.
- **42%** of those that responded said they would support increasing rent by a minimum of 6%.
- **58%** were opposed to any of the three options presented.

### 3 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	74%	86%	71%
Find rent/service charges affordable	82%	86%	78%
Rent represents good value	66%	71%	60%
In favour of 6% increase	21%	21%	22%
In favour of 7% increase	11%	13%	9%
In favour of higher increase	10%	15%	4%
Against any of the options	58%	50%	65%

In terms of the proposed increases, the main difference this year between those receiving housing benefit or Universal Credit and those paying rent entirely without Government help is the level of support for any higher increase than the two proposed. There was also a significant disparity between those against any of this year's options (half of those on UC/HB compared with two third of those receiving no help with rent). It's also worth noting the significant difference between the two groups when it comes to overall satisfaction.

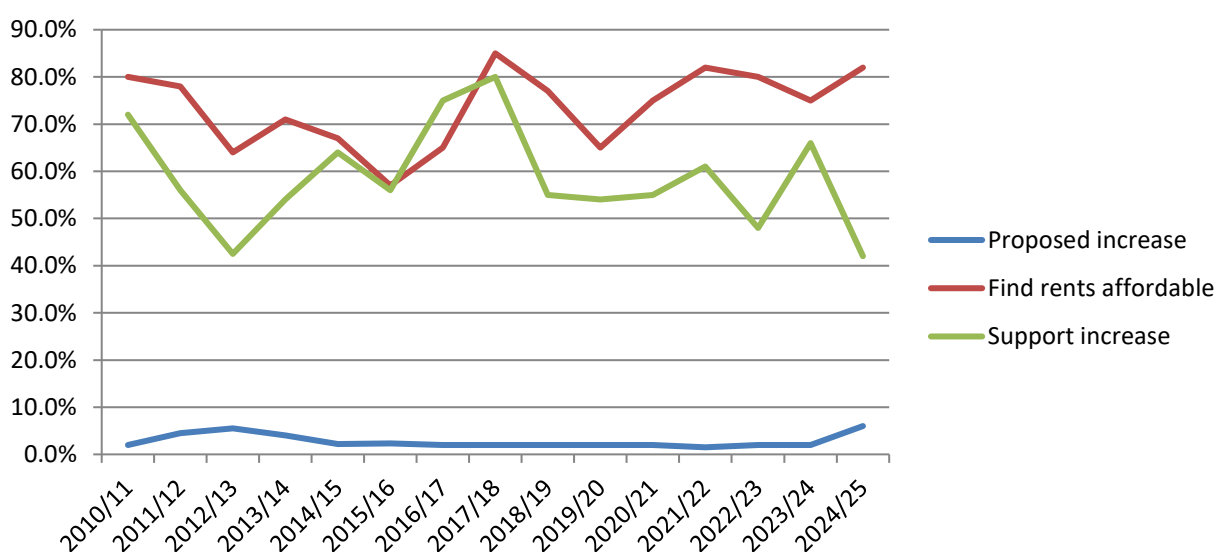
### 4 Top priorities for investment

When asked to rank (from 1 to 4) where they would like to see investment over the next five years, the priorities were:

1. Making existing homes more energy efficient
2. Improving existing housing services
3. Upgrading facilities (eg kitchens, bathrooms)
4. Building more homes

It is worth noting that building more homes was a very polarising option. While overall it came in fourth, 100 people had it as their first choice which put it in joint first place, with the same score as overall winner energy efficiency. However it came fourth because 138 saw it as the lowest priority. The next ranked lowest priority was upgrading facilities which was ranked fourth by 90 people.

### 5 Comparison with previous years



This chart illustrates how this year's main findings compare to those in previous years. Support for any of the increase options fell significantly due to the much higher proposed increase than in recent years. Conversely and more positively, there was a small but significant increase in perceived affordability. At almost 20% of the tenant population, this year's 398 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.

## 6 Comments and recurring themes

Surveys like this are an excellent opportunity to tease out wider issues affecting our customers and as well as very good quantitative data we also received more than 150 individual comments on a range of topics, not just rents. A selection are included here and, where appropriate, we have replied to individual comments to investigate issues raised and to offer help and support.

We can group comments into overall themes to look for patterns and significant and repeated issues raised were:

- Well known issues involving dissatisfaction with the current reactive repairs service (mentioned in a fifth of all comments)
- Problems with energy efficiency in homes and several requests for:
  - New windows
  - Solar panels
  - Better insulation
- Support for building new homes, particularly smaller properties such as bungalows appropriate for older people and to help encourage downsizing
- Queries over service charges (from tenants in recently built properties), what they pay for and how they are justified

The 4-day week was mentioned several times generally in the context of staff availability and cost savings.

1	All of the choices you give for rent increases are well above current inflation, and far above projected inflation of Q4 2024. You saved money last year by reducing services, hence a below inflation 2023 rise. About 4% for the coming year would probably even out over the 12 months.
2	Although I'd love to see Melville build new homes cause I was lucky enough to move into a new build. Living alone and no cost of living increase in my wage I would struggle with a rent increase especially as there is only one income coming into the home.
3	As we are going through a cost of living crisis at the moment, I'm personally worried about rent increases this year. I was thinking with staff now doing 4 day week would be saving on services.
4	At this present time a rise in rents are going to hurt residents very hard with the cost of living. Many people I know don't even use their heating. I have to sit with a blanket and hot water bottle for most of the day. I can only afford to put my heating on for an hour in the morning and the same in the evening I have a disability and can't stand being cold.
5	Being on a pension, half of it goes towards my rent, heating system (hot air flow) is the worst I've seen, Windows need replaced as draughts are coming in, cladding on outside doesn't actually conserve heat within the property.
6	Having lived in private rents for a lot of years I find Melville properties really good value for money. Repairs are always done quickly and my flat is a good size with its own outside space.
7	I don't agree with another rent increase I have stayed in this property for years and the condition of my flat has got worse every year. I have reported dampness mould over the years and the condition and age of the building it never seems to get repaired properly. Don't agree with paying more for a property which has declined over the years.
8	I don't have any issues other than its harder to pay things due to the cost of living being do high I always pay in full on time and never miss payment but if you raise the rent then it's going to affect us. My kids will eat less and heating would need to become a treat rather than a necessity which would kill me if I can't feed my kids or keep them warm.
9	I feel rent is high compared to council housing and could get a mortgage for less probably.
10	I will say I'm very satisfied with the service I have been receiving from Melville. I've come from a council property and the difference is honestly jaw dropping. Things get done more swiftly by Melville and to a higher standard.
11	I think Melville provide a great service and have had really good interactions with them in the two years I have been a tenant. Our home is definitely needing upgrades to bathroom and doors (for more energy efficiency) so it would be great to have a clearer view of when these might be

	updated. However I cannot fault the staff at Melville in any way. They are always polite and professional.
12	I think the rent represents great value for money. I find Melville staff and representatives very helpful all around a very good housing association. I think having a (Melville) APP on your phone would make it much easier to log repairs etc would make it much easier than having to do everything through your page that exists just now.
13	I've found myself on hard times recently due to cost of living, and Melville housing are one of the only people that helped me and my children, not one other charity or organisation were willing to help me, so I thank Melville for being there when I was in need. Keep up the good work.
14	I've lived in my house since 1988 and have always been happy with Melville housing.
15	My rent reflects exceptional value for money and has remained affordable when other costs of living have soared. On occasion the workmanship carried out during repairs/upgrades has definitely been below standard. However, on balance Melville are a good tenant centred organisation/landlord and rents are exceptionally reasonable.
16	The average Melville rent is now above £90 per week. That said there service has been generally good. I believe that even 5 percent would be putting people into some poverty. The rent increase should be stable at no more than 3% as you have said inflation has come down to 4% from 11%. I don't think that the increase should be substantial. I don't think that people would favour a high increase right now and feel they're still paying back debts from previous inflation rises.
17	Overall, Melville make the effort to balance affordability with forward planning. It is appreciated. Though I would prefer the lowest increase on rent prices, I am happy to pay a few pounds extra to contribute to stock upgrades that we all benefit from.
18	Rent is becoming expensive. I am genuinely scared for the future.
19	Rents are fair, I've never had any problems with the services you provide. Any issues have been resolved quickly. My only issue is the amount of homes (specifically 3 beds) that are under occupied when so many people are needing larger properties.
20	Rents have to be increased annually to provide the services needed but everything else seems to be increasing at the same time.
21	Think with the cost of living and the fact that many people are struggling there should be a rent freeze for one year.
22	Very reasonable. I am thankful that I am not private letting. Rent is manageable.
23	Whilst I think the rent is reasonable. Repairs are always done in a reasonable time. However, I think the service charge is bizarre. It's paid monthly yet I no idea where the money goes.
24	Think you should take into consideration people who aren't on benefits. Like myself and husband we work full time. Our wages don't increase as fast as everything else. We are on the minimum wage with no help.
25	The rents are starting to affect working families the ones on benefits couldn't care less they get rent paid for them.
26	Really disappointed to see all council tenants have their windows, doors replaced and solar panels added whilst we pay more and receive less. The only time Melville get in touch is if rent is a day late, then you are bombarded! The four day working week whilst great for staff would be better if split across multiple days to allow the 5 day service for tenants. Considering increasing prices is ridiculous considering you haven't delivered anything of value to most homes since pre covid.
27	I've had excellent help from the welfare/benefits team this year...so helpful with my worries about my energy bills.
28	I think in the present climate people are really struggling to keep up with all increases. The insane power increase and I think a rent increase of over £6.00 is too much maybe £3.00 would be more realistic.