

## Note of meetings held 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**Subject:** Rent Increase tenant focus groups (HYBRID)

**Venue:** Aberdeen office

**People present:** (JS) Judith Sutherland – Director of Housing  
(RD) Rebecca Davidson – Customer Service Manager  
(SH) Samantha Hough – Customer Participation Officer  
(DC) David Campbell – Tenant Welfare Advisor  
KH - tenant, Stonehaven  
IT - tenant, Kemnay  
RB - tenant, Aberdeen  
KL - tenant, Aberdeen

### Background

The purpose of the meetings were to again open conversations with tenants about the rent increase 2025. 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
- Policy and Practice
- Affordability / Value for Money
- Rent Increase Examples
- Financial help and benefit system

### Discussion points

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

Item discussed	Notes
Process for review – budget preparation	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, staffing, legal fees, and inflation levels. Discussion also about tendering for compliance work within the Property Team.
Income and expenditure and affordability	Tenants attending were shown projections for income and expenditure. Tenants were also shown examples of what a proposed 3.9% (percentage was not confirmed at this point) would look like in real terms to provide a clearer guide on what a proposed increase would mean.  Also discussed rent setting policy and spoke about specially choosing a Consumer Price Index (CPI) percentage average over a year or selecting a month's CPI value.  JS touched on our knowledge of what our peers are consulting with their tenants on to highlight the comparison and show that we as an Association try always to keep our rent increases as low as possible. We were able to confirm the date our Board of Management was due to meet and decide upon this year's increase options and that we would be consulting with all Langstane tenants in January 2025.

	As with our tenant meetings in the past JS discussed the threshold for affordability and how the Association works to make sure rent levels do not increase beyond 30% of tenants income.
Financial Help and the Benefit System	<p>DC and RD provided an update to the group regarding help and support available to tenants who are struggling. This includes using the service DC offers in checking tenants are receiving all the benefits and support they are entitled to.</p> <p>RD made the group aware of the service provided by own Housing Support Service and our continuing partnerships with C-Fine, AberNecessities and Scarf.</p> <p>The referral process was discussed to make the group aware of how themselves and other tenants can access extra help and support if needed at specific times of personal crisis and during the ongoing cost of living crisis.</p>

Questions from tenants at the meeting and questions submitted via Survey Monkey by those interested in being part of the consultation process but we unable to attend a meeting, included:

- Do we consult on rent value, or both rent and service charges?
  - Only rent by legislation but are conscious of service charges i.e., stair lighting. Langstane introduced a cap to help tenants with increase of cost.
- Housing Benefit for those in and out of work i.e., zero hour contracts.
  - We are aware of these issues and provide information and support to those experiencing this.
- Are their grants to help with tenant safety i.e., CCTV and lighting?
  - There has been an increase of £50,000 in the budget for Housing Services towards CCTV to help tackle anti social behaviour. We do not receive help from the local authority or Police with this.
- Income from GREC (Grampian Regional Equality Council) – can this income be used against the rent increase to keep it lower?
  - Langstane has a formal licence with GREC and Aberlour Trust for the office space they rent which is charged at a going rate. All money earned from this goes into the running of the office i.e., heating, lighting etc.
- Timetable of consultation?
  - Full tenant consultation starts on 6<sup>th</sup> January ending 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025. The final report will be presented to the Board of Management in early February.
- Any word on the increase values – no confirmation yet. This is a Board of Management decision. Then there was discussion about the increase values of our peers in the North East of Scotland.
- Review CPI (Consumer Price Index) value – how do we select the CPI?
  - We choose (through our policy) an average figure.