

Rent review 2019/2020

Consultation feedback

Following the success of last year's rent consultation, which saw a record number of replies, we adopted a similar approach this year, using a combination of traditional and digital methods to canvas opinion.

In early December 2018 we sent out a paper survey to all tenants, accompanying the Christmas issue of our Voice newsletter. 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 in a £50 prize draw.

Online survey

In addition to posting out hard copies of the survey we also encouraged tenants to complete the form online as well as promoting it through digital channels. This included:

1. An eye-catching Facebook post about the consultation, with a direct link to the questionnaire on the Survey Monkey website. A follow-up post a week before the consultation closed then generated additional responses.
2. Featuring the rent consultation as a news story on the homepage of our website. The news story then contained a link to the Survey Monkey questionnaire.
3. About half way through the consultation period sending a mass text message to the nearly 1,500 tenants we have mobile numbers for. The text highlighted the chance to win £50 and included a link to the online survey (which can easily be completed on a smart phone).

Returns

Following a breakthrough year in 2017/18 when we received a record 133 replies, 104 responses were returned this year by the 18 January deadline. Despite this fall, 104 replies is still more than in any year prior to 2017/18 and represents a sample of just over 5% of our eligible tenancies (ie those not let to councils or other charities such as Women's Aid). The majority of responses came digitally (55%) but we also had a significant percentage completing the paper form, with:

- 45% of tenants completing the paper survey, an improvement from 41% last year
- 27% of people completing the survey through Facebook, double the 13% who completed it through Facebook the previous year
- 27% completing it using the link in the text message. This was a big drop from the 47% who completed it following last year's text.

1 **Headline findings**

- **Over three quarters (78%)** are happy with the services they receive from Melville. This is down from 91% last year, however we are now collecting this information in the new five option format (in line with Housing Charter guidelines) rather than a straight yes/no answer. Only 7% were dissatisfied this year compared to 9% the year before
- **Almost 19 out of 20 (93%)** are happy with the information they receive from Melville. This is largely unchanged from the previous year
- A very slight majority (**51%**) of those that responded did not receive any Universal Credit or housing benefit to help pay their rent

- **Two thirds (66%)** who answered said they think Melville's current rent and service charges are affordable. This represents a fall from 75% last year
- **Just over half (54%)** of those that responded said they would support increasing rent by a minimum of 2%, compared to 55% the previous year
- **Slightly less than half (46%)** were opposed to any of the three options presented, compared to 45% the previous year

2 Breakdown of key findings

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

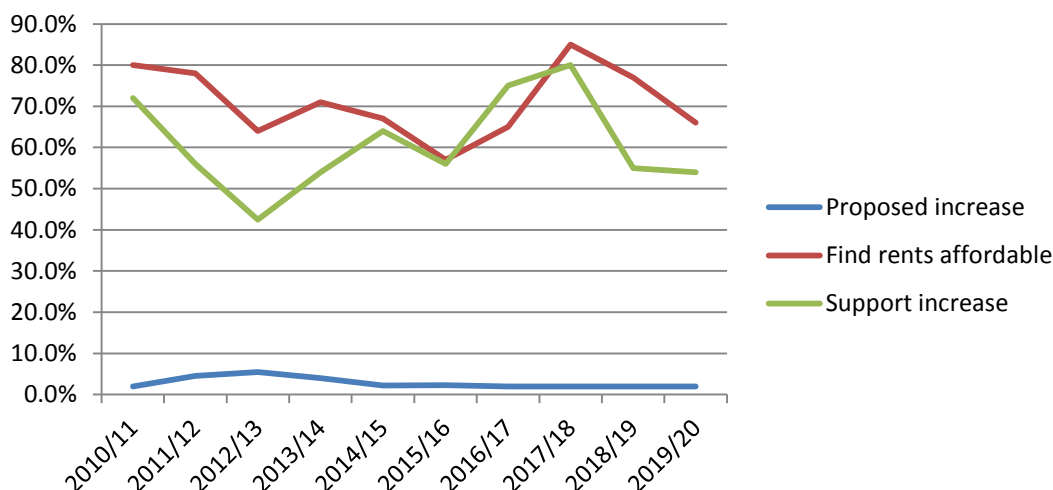
	Overall	UC/HB	Non HB
Satisfaction with overall service	78%	82%	73%
Find rent/service charges affordable	66%	75%	54%
In favour of 2% increase	40%	35%	42%
In favour of 2.5% increase	7%	10%	4%
In favour of 3% increase	8%	16%	0%
Against any of the options	46%	39%	54%

A very narrow majority of those that replied this year (51%) received no government help to pay their rent. Three quarters of those on housing benefit or Universal Credit find Melville's rent and service charges affordable compared to slightly more than half (54%) of those who pay rent themselves.

An increase of at least 2% was favoured by six out of ten (61%) of those receiving housing benefit but by less than half (46%) of those paying rent themselves. Following the pattern of previous years, a significant difference between the two groups was the number supporting higher increases. In the housing benefit group more than a quarter (26%) supported an increase higher than 2%, whilst only two of those that pay rent themselves supported a higher increase. Four out of ten (39%) of those on housing benefit supported none of the options compared to more than half (54%) of those paying rent themselves.

3 Comparison with previous years

The chart below illustrates how this year's findings compare to those in previous years. Support for the proposed increase is very similar to last year, hovering at slightly more than half of those that replied, with similar reasons given including rising living costs and stagnant wages. The continuing decline in perceived affordability is concerning, but given the great deal of work carried out around value-for-money in recent years, this is more likely to reflect wider concerns about benefit cuts and the cost of living, than Melville's rent levels. We also need to bear in mind that we are continuing to deal with a very limited sample size.



cost struggle happy rent high go rise work help house people
rent rent increase pay time year still think mine increase kitchen

Some of those who completed the survey also provided additional comments. The word cloud above highlights some of the most commonly used words and a selection of the comments are also included below.

Rent is only affordable if increases are kept at a reasonable level and in current climate 2% is in my opinion the maximum increase, if there has to be one.

Andrew and Jill from Melville saved our family... We had to sign up for UC and other benefits. It was a legal gauntlet made easy with Andrew's help. Jill helped as we waited that long for UC in the beginning I had to do a form of bankruptcy. This service you provide was so helpful. Really respect Melville as not only my landlord but as part of our community.

I struggle each month to pay mine and if rent increases I really don't know how I will manage. Rent goes up but unfortunately my wage doesn't.

Melville have looked after us over the years for which we are very grateful. The current system seems to be working very well.

As a pensioner (private) I don't get rises so no money to spare and it's getting more difficult with every thing going up. I need to work part time just to stay on top.

I am very happy in this house and I find the rent charged extremely reasonable.

I only receive a little HB and it think it's quite expensive for a single person with a child.

I wish I had a magic wand that would bring the rent down but as we all know even if there was a way it would still go up. I always put down the lowest rise because as usual your rise is bigger than mine.

Prioritising new heating systems would reduce the amount of call outs/charges to repair old inadequate ones. I would definitely find it a financial burden if rent was to increase for the 3rd consecutive year especially when wages don't increase. Applying for HB is not an option as I would be transferred on to UC which would financially destabilise my household.

I think another rent increase will make it harder for a lot of working families

I would support a little rent rise but as we are self employed and the cost of fuel has hit our business bad, I'd not be happy for any more. I'd understand the 3% if I was in a job where I earned more or had a wage rise but being tied into 3 year contracts this would be very tight on the purse.

Depending where you stay depends on how much your rent is. Mine is high so struggle to exchange with anyone which leave me in a hard situation. Should all rent be the same?

I would be happier paying the rent if I had a bigger house, currently in a 1 bed with a 1 year that never sleeps. She needs her own room.

I think it's a shame that perfectly good kitchens are being ripped out and replaced when it's not necessary (I declined because my kitchen is in excellent condition). If people owned their homes I'd wager they they'd not be replacing their kitchen. If people have abused the property (children swinging on doors etc) and the kitchen is no longer fit for purpose because of neglect, I think they

should be contributing to the cost of the upgrade. Surely unnecessary works ultimately increase rent?

Too expensive for a house with in coming gas problems which has been an ongoing issue. And now we have radon gas data loggers in place which is very unsettling.

Right now I'm getting a little help with rent but this changes often and I'm usually paying full rent.

The rent is high enough I think and any higher and I would struggle.

Melville have been great with all services and I can't fault them.

Our rent is high the rents should be on par with council.

I think this increase every year is ridiculous!

For people who pay full rent no benefits it doesn't match with income and cost of living also sick of increase as yes new houses get built however all the scum get put in them. Why not start giving houses to loyal tenants who would look after them!

Quick enough to put rents up and very much feel you have to agree to pay them or you are threatened with your house.

Very thankful for social housing.

I'm happy with my rent at this time because I work as does my husband I do think however a lot of people struggle at times. Maybe do it in a way like I pay my council tax? pay 10 months so you have 2 months of non payment that would help maybe especially for last 2 month's of the year?

I state I would support a 2% increase in rent, ideally I would be happy with no increase but as I live in the real world I know costs have to go up.

I work full time and find things getting harder, day by day.

I'd happily pay more rent if house upgrades were assessed on an individual basis, I do a lot of upgrades myself to my home and I'm very house proud... I've stayed in this same house since I was born and nobody can remember the bathroom being upgraded

Rent is too high personally. If we start to work we might struggle to pay it and have to go back to council housing although I don't want to.