

Rent review 2018/2019

Consultation feedback

In early December 2017 we sent out a two page rent consultation survey to all tenants, accompanying the Christmas issue of our Voice newsletter. For the survey form we used a bright and eye-catching design as well as highlighting the annual £50 prize draw. Every consultation survey was also sent out with a reply-paid envelope.

The survey explained options for rent levels in the coming financial year, with the consultation period lasting approximately five weeks.

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) as well as the option to request another paper copy for anyone that had misplaced the original.

Digital breakthrough

The more effective use of digital communication this year helped us to achieve a greater return than in previous years. There were 133 responses to this year's survey, this is more than double the 65 returns we received the previous year. This increase was largely driven by the text message survey.

- 54 people completed the paper survey
- 17 people completed the survey through the link posted on Facebook or the Melville website
- 62 people completed it through the link sent out in a text message

1 Headline findings

- **133 survey forms were returned.** This represents a sample of just under **7%** of our eligible tenancies (ie those not let to councils or other charities such as Women's Aid). It also represents the best response we have ever had to a rent consultation.
- **9 out of 10 (91%)** are happy with the services they receive from Melville
- **19 out of 20 (97%)** are happy with the information they receive from Melville
- The majority (**58%**) of those that responded did not receive any housing benefit to help pay their rent.
- **75%** who answered said they think Melville's current rent and service charges are affordable. This is a very positive figure but does represent a fall from last year when 85% said they found rents affordable.



- **More than half (55%)** of those that responded said they would support increasing rent by a minimum of 2%.
- **Slightly less than half (45%)** were opposed to any of the three options presented.

2 Breakdown of key findings

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

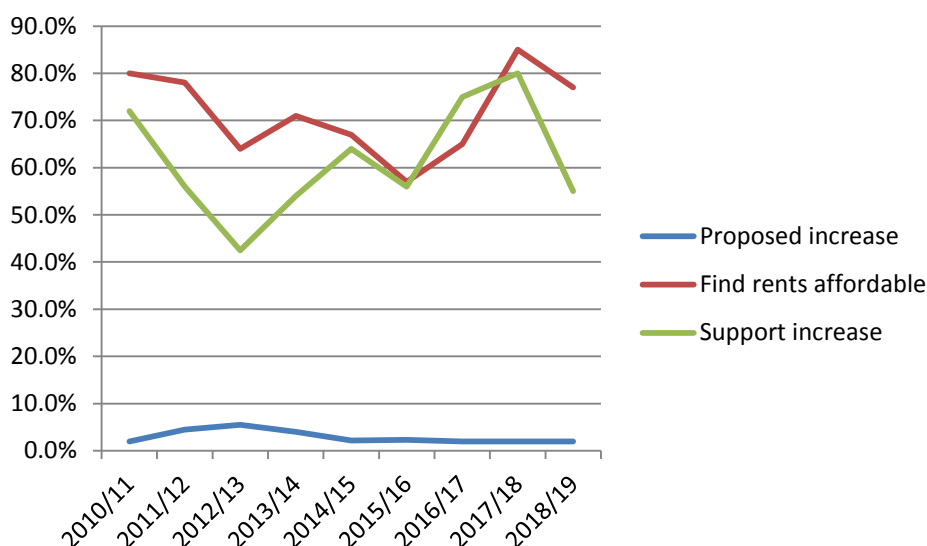
	Overall	HB	Non HB
Find rent/service charges affordable	77%	83%	68%
In favour of 2% increase	41%	43%	39%
In favour of 2.5% increase	8%	13%	4%
In favour of 3% increase	6%	11%	3%
Against any of the options	45%	33%	54%

The majority of those that replied this year (58%) received no government help to pay their rent. This change from last year, when 58% of those that responded received at least some housing benefit to help pay their rent, would partly explain the drop in perceived affordability of Melville rents. Most of those on housing benefit (83%) find Melville's rent and service charges affordable compared to two thirds of those who pay rent themselves (68%).

An increase of at least 2% was favoured by two thirds of those receiving housing benefit but by slightly less than half (47%) 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 one in four (24%) supported an increase higher than 2%, while in those that pay rent themselves this figure was less than one in ten (7%). A third of those on housing benefit (33%) 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. Although there has been a dip in perceived affordability, at 77% this figure remains much higher in recent years (with the exception of 2017). Support for the proposed increase has, however, fallen significantly with reasons given including rising living costs and stagnant wages. Despite the improved response rate this year, it should still be remembered that we are dealing with a very limited sample size.



4 Comments

Some of those who completed the survey also provided additional comments. A selection of these are included here.

No rise in rent as wages are not going up. Food, heating all up, surely we can have at least 1 year at no increase or are Melville staff waiting to see how much of a wage rise they get...

Rent rates are reasonable. Melville has always been quick and efficient at responding to enquiries or repairs required. Melville have also been good at keeping us informed of times and dates of inspections/building maintenance as well as rent rates and meetings.

I don't understand how council rents are much cheaper than MHA! And how visits and repairs are always during the working week, when everyone is at work!

I feel I receive a good service from Melville they are always trying to upgrade the property. I do understand there has to be responsible rent increases. I do not always have a yearly pay increase so if Melville can keep this in mind when reviewing all rents I will be very happy.

I find it totally unacceptable to keep increasing the rent every year. I pay full rent every month. I don't receive any benefits so my money is always tight. I'd be very annoyed if the rent went up. It's okay for people who don't pay anything but I'd be struggling.

Wage increase over the last 10 years has been minimal and rent increase has been well above wage increase. Struggling to pay rent already. A further high increase will not be acceptable.

If rents have to go up then 2% should be the absolute maximum. Perhaps some years you could make it a 1% rise to give tenants a breather.

An increase of 2% is probably what we will have to pay but again my wages don't go up by 2% - so again I'll have less money next year. As I live in a flat with a property that has an owner in it, it means we have to fight for every upgrade but still have to pay the same rent.

I am sorry that I am only supporting a 2% increase but I am on low wages and pay full rent.

I work and get a 1% increase every year but rents go up by 2%, Council Tax by 3%, gas and electricity by god knows how much. Starting to get unaffordable. I'd like to know how many people reply back to this and how many of them are not working and on benefits who get their rent paid for them.

I feel like we are paying for what we get. I hate that others in our shared areas don't look after things. I feel as if I was to pay more rent I would want more done for us ie fixing the rusted balcony railings or painting balcony/outside of flat to make it look better. There's not enough space in kitchen. More cupboards would have been better and more sockets in the property.

You can't keep on increasing rent each year when most, if not all, of us haven't had a pay increase for years and years.

I would be happy to pay a slight increase and would love a new kitchen and new heating. I am of the mind set that people like myself who work hard, pay bills and save to buy things get little or no help and people who don't appreciate the lovely new kitchens or new homes seem to get things handed to them. So my views are that people who pay rent should get their kitchens and upgrades done first as they are more likely to look after and appreciate them.

Unfortunately I do realise that rent must increase year on year, however most workers have not had a pay increase for the last 5/6 years. For that reason only, I would opt for the 2% increase. Overall I'm happy with the services that we receive.

The service is brilliant that I receive but find it hard some months paying rent and that was with myself working part time and my partner working full time, I've recently had to take up full time work to ease the burden of rent and bills.

I find the rent enough. I pay weekly at around £80 and anymore and I would struggle. I have 4 kids.

Stop building new houses and then giving them to junkies or antisocial people. I don't see why I should have to keep paying extra on rent for these kind of people to get the houses. My daughter in a 2 bedroom with 3 kids and can't get a bigger house from you. So no don't support increase to house people that don't deserve it.

I feel that increasing rent will put a strain on me as I am not financially in a good place at the moment. Besides I only got my keys in December 2016 and after a few months rent was raised so raising it again so soon is simply not fair. Rent increase should take into account the quality and location of the property rather than a blanket increase.

I would pay the higher increase if my heating was changed... My energy costs are £235 per month. I'd pay extra if it could be more efficient/affordable.

As an NHS worker we have not had a pay rise for a few years and although I pay full rent I feel a rent rise does not come into line with my own circumstances

I can't afford any more than 2 percent. Struggling as it is.

I do feel there can be a difficulty for some lone parents to afford rent, for those who are earning slightly above the amount that would allow them entitlement to housing benefit. Rent is just affordable... On a very positive note, I find staff very kind and supportive to speak with. Thank you.