

2022/23 Rent setting consultation – public meeting via zoom on Thursday 11 November at 4pm.

List of those present at meeting:

Councillor Diane Docherty (Housing Convenor)- chaired meeting
Peter Barry (Chief Officer, Housing & Employability)
Frances McGonagle, Littleholm TRA
Fiona McClymont, Scrutiny Panel + Interested Tenant
Harry McCormack, Tullichewan TRA
Mary Paton, Willox Park TA
Georgia McCambley, Central Radnor Park TRA
Gavin & Angela Lawson, N&S Drumry TRA
Ruth Dickinson, Willox park TRA
June Todd, Interested tenant
Theresa Connolly, Sheltered Housing Forum
Janice Rainey (Finance Business Partner)
John Kerr (Housing Development and Homelessness Manager)
Jane Mack (Snr Housing Development Officer – Tenant Participation)
Stefan Kristmanns (Housing Development Co-ordinator)

1. Welcome and introductions.

Councillor Diane Docherty welcomed everyone to the rent setting consultation for 2022/23 and then handed over to Peter Barry.

2. Presentation from Peter Barry (Chief Officer. Housing & Employability)

Copy of presentation was shared on screen and copies are available from Tenant Participation staff.

Peter gave an update on what has been a difficult year but with some achievements and recognised the impact on staff of home working. The ongoing pandemic also increased the volume of work as more tenants needed support through homelessness and the repairs backlog. Draft budget has been put together to ensure that the Council continues to build much needed new homes as well as continuing to invest in current properties. Want to keep rents as low as possible and WDC rents are below Scottish and RSL averages but above average for Local authorities. In tenant satisfaction survey, 34.8% found their rent very or fairly easy to afford, 46%

just about affordable and 19.2% fairly or very difficult to afford. So need to balance affordability with need to still invest and improve properties.

Handed over to Janice Rainey, Finance Business Partner

Janice emphasised the ongoing tenant involvement in the Joint Rent Group and the focus on ensuring there was transparency around the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Her role is also to ensure the long-term affordability for the Housing Revenue Account over the 30 years of the Business Plan and that services are Value for Money.

At this stage in the financial year, estimates are used and the final budget amounts may need to be adjusted if there are changes to the financial assumptions in Business Plan. From the planned income and expenditure estimates, shows a 2% rent increase needed to balance the Housing Revenue Account. Breakdown of HRA costs show that loan charges are biggest portion, followed by staffing costs and then repairs. Staffing costs increased due to pay award. Labour and material shortages have also increased repair costs but some savings made on debt side as interest rates are low. Need to ensure that borrowing never goes above 50% as this will create problems for future tenants.

Peter then outlined the rent options. Need increase of 2% to deliver all current services that tenants receive, continue the New Build housing programme and deliver the outlined Capital programme. From discussions with WDTR know tenants concerned about any rent increase and focus has been on finding the lowest increase needed and not create increased options for the sake of having other options. Is flexibility on how the Tenant Priority Budget is spent and know this is a budget that tenants value and want to keep but there are options on how it could be spent. Focus been on energy efficiency and 2 of the options outline ways this could be increased via external wall insulation and also through providing energy efficient LED bulbs as legislation brought in a change that can now only buy the more expensive energy efficient bulbs.

Option 1. • retain a Tenant Priority Budget of £800,000.

Option 2. • retain a Tenant Priority Budget of £400,000,
• use the remaining £400,000 from the Tenant Priority Budget to accelerate the External Wall Insulation (EWI) programme, which would see an additional 32 properties being upgraded in 2022/23.

Option 3. • retain a Tenant Priority Budget of £274,000,
• use £400,000 from the Tenant Priority Budget to accelerate the EWI programme which would see an additional 32 properties being upgraded in 2022/23,

- and use £126,000 from the Tenant Priority Budget to provide all tenants with 6 energy efficient light bulbs.

Consultation process was outlined and all tenants will receive a copy of the information around the options and various ways to vote. The survey will be open until 20 January and the Council will agree the rent level on 9/3/22 with a discussion with tenants and the Housing Convener on 7/3/22.

End of presentation and meeting was then opened up to questions.

Q. Tenant in S Drumry promised insulation 4 years ago that their 4 in a block would get insulated but never been back.

A. Jane asked to raise query with Capital programme team and feedback response.

Q. Clarification asked if the option to use the Tenant priority Budget in this way for EWI and light bulbs was for one year only?

A. Yes was confirmed it was.

Q. Prior to lockdown the common room for the Westbridgend sheltered tenants was meant to be refurbished but nothing done so have no facilities and not fair to ask for any rent increase.

A. Jane asked to raise with Housing Operations and get update on position.

Concern raised about the amount of money proposed to be spent on light bulbs when many tenants could afford to buy their own. Support for the light bulb idea was voiced by other tenants and Councillor Docherty and also noted that idea is that all tenants get some benefit from the option. The EWI will benefit an extra 32 people but all tenants would get 6 light bulbs. Many not aware of the change in the legislation and shops will still have old cheaper bulbs in stock but they will run out and then need to buy the more expensive energy efficient bulbs – do last longer and cheaper to run but more expensive initially. Communication information about the rent options will be created to make this information as clear as possible.

Q. Number of close doors in S Drumry still broken but had been emailed to Councillor Docherty.

A. Councillor Docherty asked for the addresses to be emailed to her and she would chase up.

No further questions and all were thanked for their time.

