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Loretto Housing

2023/24 Rent Setting – Engagement Focus Groups

Methodology and Sample

Focus groups were completed on the 15th and 28th November 2022, with a total of 16 Loretto Housing Association (“Loretto”) participants. Recruitment was managed by a Wheatley Group representative, using Loretto Customer Voices – tenants who have expressed an interest in participating in engagement activities –, which proved successful in engaging larger numbers of tenants than in previous years.

Date	Time	RSL	Platform	Number of Attendees
15 November 2022	10:00	Loretto	In person	8
15 November 2022	12:00	Loretto	In person	2
28 November 2022	10:30	Loretto	In person	6
Total		3 groups		16 participants

A topic guide for the discussions was designed which focused around understanding tenants’ views on the following:

- Draft rent increase options of 3.9%, 4.4% and 4.9% in Loretto, with the exception of those in ex Cube Housing Association homes where the draft options were 1% or over 1%
- Priorities for services and investment given the above increases
- Implications of a possible rent freeze or very low cap if the Scottish Government was to confirm that this would apply under the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act for 2023/24.

The discussion structure was loosely split into five parts: introduction of the topic; a presentation delivered by a senior housing staff member; discussion of the proposed rent increases; implications of and priorities for services and investment given the above increases; views on and implications of a possible rent freeze or very low cap.

Groups took place in person, moderated by a team of experienced qualitative researchers. Respondents were assured that all information provided would be treated in the strictest confidence; that BMG would not identify any individuals or disclose the personal details of those who took part; and that views stated would not be attributable to individuals. BMG’s independence and impartiality from Loretto and the wider Wheatley Group was also reiterated, to ensure confidence amongst participants when sharing their views.

Findings Summary

Preferred rent increase

Half of Loretto tenants in the focus groups opted for each of the two lower rent increases.

Option	3.9%	4.4%	4.9%	None-want a freeze
Figures*	7 (50.0%)	7 (50.0%)	0	0

* Some participants opted not to give a preferred rent option/decision on the rent freeze

The two ex-Cube tenants opted for their lower increase of 1%.

While tenants in the groups acknowledged affordability issues for some people, they understood that with inflation there has to be some additional money going in to services and would prefer this rather than see deterioration.

Tenants suggested that, to make an informed choice, they would require more information on exactly what additional money would be spent on rather than categories such as investment and the environment.

Rent Freeze

When discussing the potential for the Scottish Government to apply a freeze or cap on rent across the sector, most Loretto tenants thought that the rent freeze/cap would not be worth the loss of services. Just over a third did want the freeze.

Option	Freeze	Rise
Figures*	6 (37.5%)	10 (62.5%)

* Some participants opted not to give a preferred rent option/decision on the rent freeze

Those who would prefer a freeze/cap cited affordability as the key issue or had a perception that Loretto would be obliged to retain key services at existing levels.

Those who were against the freeze were generally accepting of the fact that inflation means prices will increase and that in order to improve or maintain services, they are happy to pay more.

Priorities

Priorities in the groups centred around a few key areas.

Repairs were a key issue, and while many are happy with the repairs service there are still elements that could be improved, including the quality of work and the communication surrounding issues.

Housing officers are cited as a key influence on tenants' communities and wellbeing, and therefore a service that should be prioritised. The call centre is also viewed as a priority due to its responsibility as 'the first point of contact'.

Anti-social behaviour is seen as a priority, either for some tenants currently experiencing it or because tenants know that if they did it could seriously impact their lives. They believe that Loretto should seek to do more to ensure behaviour like this doesn't arise in communities.

Home improvements that are considered priorities relate to issues like damp and improving heating systems rather than new kitchens/bathrooms, although the latter are still priorities amongst those still waiting.

Tenancy sustainment, advice and guidance, and employability support services are seen as low priority by most tenants. Essentially, this is because they are the least universally experienced ones. Kitchen and bathroom upgrades are also not considered a major priority.