

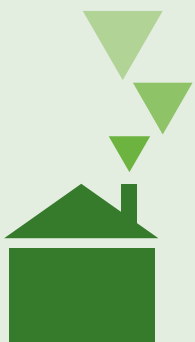
The Highland Council

# RENT CONSULTATION CO-CHOMHAIRLE MAIL



All tenants  
who reply to  
this consultation will be  
entered into a  
prize draw –  
you could win  
**£50** of high  
street vouchers!

2019  
2020





## The Highland Council

Dear Tenant

### Rent Consultation 2019-20

I am writing to ask you to take part in this year's Rent Consultation. This year, the rent consultation will run to **11 January 2019**. You will already have had an opportunity to attend a drop-in session in your area – you were sent details of these in September 2018. I hope you were able to attend and found the sessions useful. As well as the information and feedback form included in this leaflet, during the consultation period council staff will meet with tenants and residents groups (representatives of tenants like you) and try to contact as many of you as possible by telephone or visit.

This year we are asking our tenants and resident groups to select their preferred option for the rent increase for 2019/20. Details of our proposals can be found on page 6 of this consultation leaflet.

We will use the feedback received from you to prepare a report for the Care, Learning and Housing Committee on 24 January 2019. At this meeting, Councillors will consider the report and agree the level of rent and service charges for council tenants for the year 2019/20. This decision will then be agreed by all Councillors at the full meeting of Highland Council on 15 February 2019. If you want to follow the debates on this issue, you can see the committees on Webcast – go to [www.highland.gov.uk/webcasts](http://www.highland.gov.uk/webcasts).

Every Highland Council tenant pays rent, (even although some tenants are getting assistance to pay it through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit) so it is important to receive feedback from as many of you as possible. If you have any questions about the consultation please do get in touch us on 01349 886602 and asking for your Housing Officer or Tenant Participation Officer.

Yours sincerely,

David Goldie, Head of Housing & Building Maintenance

The rent you pay goes into an account called the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)– this money is only used for services that relate to Council housing, such as repairs to our houses – it does not pay for roads, street lights, refuse collection etc.

3

**Last year we were able to apply a very modest rent increase of 0.5%, mainly due to favourable loan charges and because we had extra income due to Council House Sales in the months before the Right to Buy was abolished. Our consultation with tenants found that the majority of people who responded said they would be happy with a slightly higher rent increase than required to “balance the books” if the extra income raised was spent on key services to tenants. This resulted in an additional £246,000 of income to the Housing Revenue Account, which was spent as follows:**

**Improvements to homes** – we said we would be able to spend an extra £200,000 bringing homes up to the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) – this aims to improve the energy efficiency of social housing in Scotland and help to reduce fuel bills;






**Improvements to estates** – we said we would spend a further £23,000 improving the areas around your homes;

**To give you more opportunities to get involved** – we said we would spend a further £23,000 to make sure tenants’ voices are heard.

## In 2018/19 we plan to:

### Improve the energy efficiency of 400 houses to meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH)

#### Replace or improve:

-  250 bathrooms;
-  280 kitchens;
-  340 windows/doors;
-  450 heating systems;
-  120 roofs

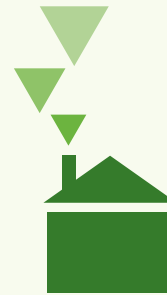
We have carried out **27** “Rate your Estate” events across Highland where joint estate inspections were carried out by tenants and Council Officers. This enabled tenants to highlight their priorities for estate improvements. We are planning more of these events.

We have employed **2** more Tenant Participation Officers and this has allowed us to:







- Organise and attend Rate your Estate events;
- Carry out housing support consultation;
- Hold “Safe, Well & Connected” senior citizen events across Highland;
- Run rent consultation drop in sessions;
- Set up new Inverness Tenants Forum;
- Support three new Residents and Tenants groups to form;
- Engage with over 40 new interested tenants.



We are very aware that a lot of tenants continue to face financial uncertainty due to rising prices, low wages, and changes to welfare benefits. No-one wants to pay more rent but it is vital we have enough income to meet the cost of delivering good quality accommodation and housing services – and it is your rent which pays for these. By being efficient, we have managed to keep rent increases as low as we can over the past few years– lower than the average across other local authorities in Scotland. For instance, last year our 0.5% increase was the lowest in Scotland.

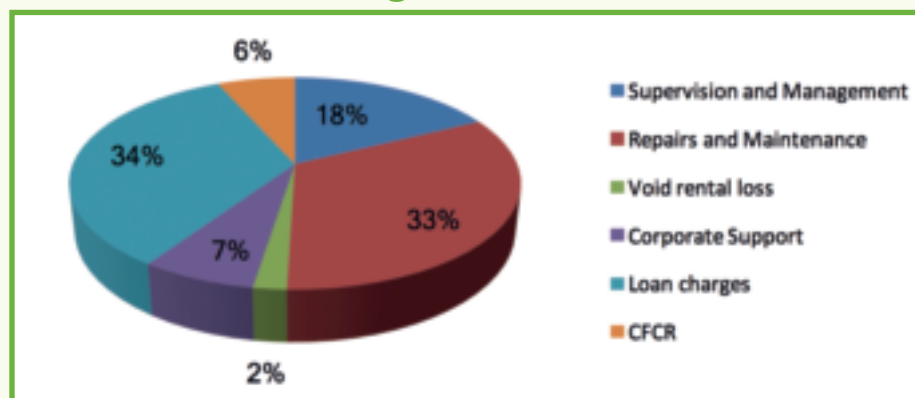


**Our rents compare well to other social housing providers in Highland – here are the average weekly rents in 2017/18 for each landlord, taken from the Scottish Housing Regulator’s annual return:**

					
Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association	<b>Highland Council</b>	Pentland Housing Association	Albyn Housing Society	Lochaber Housing Association	Cairn Housing Association
£74.85	<b>£75.20</b>	£79.78	£80.46	£84.93	£86.27

**This is how we budgeted your rent money in 2018/19:**

**Seo mar a bhuidseat sinn ur n-airgead màil ann an 2018/19**



### What do these headings mean?

- **Supervision and Management** – This is the cost of running the housing service - items such as staff wages, heating and lighting in offices, printing, postage etc. and includes our contribution to the funding of advice services which help tenants such as Citizens Advice Bureaux in Highland.
- **Repairs and Maintenance** – This is the cost of the day to day maintenance of council houses including grounds maintenance and work carried out on empty houses (voids).
- **Void** - This heading covers the rental loss from houses and other voids such as garages.
- **Corporate Support** – This heading covers the housing service contribution to corporate services we use such as legal services, IT services & business support.
- **Loan charges** – These are the loan charges related to money borrowed to improve council housing (new kitchens, heating systems etc.) as well as the historic cost of building council houses.
- **Contribution to the Capital Programme (CFCR)** – This heading covers money from the HRA which is identified to help pay for the big improvements such as new heating systems, kitchens, bathrooms etc. Councils can decide how much of a contribution can be made from rent income to fund this type of expenditure and this reduces the amount of money we need to borrow and pay back.

# Rent increase proposal for 2019/20

## Moladh àrdachadh màil airson 2019/20

5

There are a few challenges facing us in setting rent levels for next year. We no longer have income from Right to Buy sales, which have previously been used to reduce borrowing and loan charges. Staff costs are increasing due to pay inflation as is building inflation and construction costs, which all impact on the cost of the service.

We have additional income from rents from new Council house building, but we also have increasing loan charges as a result of borrowing money for investment in improvements to existing homes and building new homes. All of this means that we will need a higher rent increase than last year in order to maintain services, but we still hope that this can be below the level of inflation, which is currently 3.3% (according to the Consumer Price Index – October 2018)

In **2019/20** we want to spend more on:

**1. Improvements to your homes.** In 2019-20 we hope to invest £13.6m in our capital programme. This includes:

- £1m on adaptations such as walk-in showers, handrails
- £5.4m on upgrades/replacements which will include approximately 170 new bathrooms, 250 new kitchens and 400 new windows and doors
- £4.6m on energy efficiency works including over 450 new heating systems
- £2m on external fabric works such as harling and guttering and including 100 roofing up-grades.

**2. Improvements to housing estates.** We have set a budget in 2018/19 of £630,091 to improve housing estates (e.g. new fencing, works to garage areas), but we continue to receive feedback that tenants want further improvements to the environment around their homes. We would like your views on whether we should increase the amount of money we spend in estates improvements.



## 6

## We are proposing:

A choice of rent increase for 2019-20 of:

**2%, 2.5% or 3%**

The minimum rent increase required in order to continue with current levels of service, and deliver the agreed level of capital investment is: **2%**. This would mean an average rent increase of **£1.50** per week and your rent would be:

Type/Size	Bedsit	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Flat/Maisonette	£53.28	£61.94	£70.58	£79.25	£87.89	£96.54
House/bungalow	£57.91	£66.56	£75.20	£83.85	£92.50	£101.15



A rent increase of **2.5%** would allow us to spend an extra **£256,000** in environmental / other estate improvements. That would mean an average rent increase of **£1.88** per week and your rent would be:

Type/Size	Bedsit	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Flat/Maisonette	£53.55	£62.25	£70.93	£79.64	£88.32	£97.02
House/bungalow	£58.19	£66.88	£75.57	£84.27	£92.96	£101.65



A rent increase of **3%**, still below inflation, would allow us to spend an extra **£510,000** on environmental / other estate improvements. That would mean an average rent increase of **£2.26** per week and your rent would be:

Type/Size	Bedsit	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Flat/Maisonette	£53.81	£62.55	£71.28	£80.03	£88.76	£97.49
House/bungalow	£58.47	£67.21	£75.94	£84.68	£93.41	£102.15



**Please note:** If you live in a new build property you will currently pay up to **£10.44** a week more than the rent figures quoted above, and any percentage rent increase would be slightly higher than the averages quoted. Also, you may still be on a “transitional” rent, moving in stages towards the structured rent charge – if you are in any doubt about the amount of rent you are paying, please contact us on **01349 886602**.



***I would like to get more involved in the decisions made about how my rent is spent and managed – who should I contact?***



**Mandy Macleman, Principal Tenant & Customer Engagement Officer**

 **01463 702683**

 **mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk**

 **Community Services - Housing Team**  
The Highland Council  
Glenurquhart Road  
Inverness  
IV3 5NX

**How to get help...** if you are worried about paying your rent or you are in debt, help is also available from the agencies below. If you want to use the websites listed below but do not have a computer in your home, ask the staff in your local library how you can use the computers there for no charge?

**Highland Council's Welfare Support Team**

Ring **0800 090 1004** or email [welfare.support@highland.gov.uk](mailto:welfare.support@highland.gov.uk)

**Citizens Advice Bureau**

Use the website [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) to find your local CAB office or you can get their details from your local Service Point or from our Service Centre on **01349 886602**

**Shelter**

Ring **0808 800 4444** or use their website [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk) to get online assistance

**National Debtline**

Free on: **0808 808 4000**

**Protect your home contents and belongings against fire, theft, storm, flood and much more this winter.**

Highland Council has a special home contents insurance scheme available and all tenants are eligible to apply.

Contact Highland Council

**01463 702417**

You can view the consultation on our website, and complete the rent survey online via:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/7ZZPDMH>

If you would like to respond via the online survey but do not have internet access, why not use a computer in either your local Service Point or local library? You can also discuss the consultation by contacting us on **01349 886602** and asking for your housing officer or Tenant Participation Officer. Please complete the tear off slip below and return to:

**Community Services Housing Team**  
**Freepost RTSB-EBHT-JZTJ**  
**The Highland Council**  
**Glenurquhart Road**  
**INVERNESS**  
**IV3 5NX**



## Rent Consultation 2019/20

### Co-chomhairle Màil 2019/20

**\*Name:** .....

**Address:** .....

**Telephone number/email:** .....

Do you think your rent is good value for money?

Yes/No

Do you get help to pay your rent by claiming Housing Benefit or UC?

Yes/No

Do you think we should increase the amount of money we spend on estates improvements?

Yes/No



**Please tick which rent increase amount you would prefer for 2019/20**

2% rent increase

Comments:

2.5% rent increase

3% rent increase

\*You only need to give us your details if you want to be entered into the draw for £50 shopping vouchers – that is all we will use the information for.