

Welcome to a special edition of

# tenants news

This is a special edition of Tenants News to inform you of the beginning of the rent consultation process on a new rent increase starting in 2018. There is a separate rent survey card that we would like you to fill in and return so that you can tell us **'Which option is for you?'**

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## Rent Consultation starts

We are consulting on a five year strategy as this will provide certainty for long term planning for investment in our housing stock. Taking a long term view provides certainty for tenants. The consultation on a new proposed rent increase will begin on the 9th October 2017.

We are consulting for a two month period and this consultation will end on 8th December 2017. During the consultation period, council staff will meet with the Tenants Panel and Tenants Networks (representatives of our tenants like you). Staff will also be available to speak to tenants at specially arranged drop in sessions.

## The following drop in sessions have been arranged:\*

- **Bathgate Partnership Centre** – Tuesday 17th October, 11am to 12:30pm and 6pm to 7:30pm
  - **Strathbrock Partnership Centre, Broxburn** – Thursday 19th October, 11am to 12:30pm and 4:30pm to 6pm
  - **West Lothian Civic Centre, Livingston** – Wednesday 26th October, 11am to 12:30pm and 6pm to 7:30pm
  - **Whitburn Community Centre, Whitburn** - Tuesday 24th October, 11am to 12:30pm and 6pm to 7:30pm
- Drop in to any of the sessions above to discuss the consultation with us, or to find out more information.

*\*Further sessions can be arranged on request or will be put in place subject to demand.*

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

➤ [www.westlothian.gov.uk/rentconsultation2017](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/rentconsultation2017)

Your opinion is important to us, and will help shape our rent increase strategy for the next five years.

## Rent Levels

The average council house rent in West Lothian this year is £68.18 per week. You will see from the chart below that the rent levels in West Lothian fair well compared against other Scottish councils.

### Average weekly rent levels 2016/17

MORAY	54.94
EAST LoTHIAN	58.29
NORTH LANARKSHIRE	59.24
ANGUS	61.55
FALKIRK	61.85
SOUTH LANARKSHIRE	63.06
STIRLING	63.95
FIFE	65.58
PERTH & KINROSS	66.00
NORTH AYRSHIRE	66.52
HIGHLAND	66.74
<b>WEST LoTHIAN</b>	<b>68.18</b>
ABDERDEENSHIRE	68.19
EAST AYRSHIRE	68.61
MIDLoTHIAN	68.79
EAST DUMBARTONSHIRE	68.80
EAST RENFREWSHIRE	69.22
SOUTH AYRSHIRE	69.98
CLACKMANNANSHIRE	70.02
ABERDEEN CITY	70.11
DUNDEE	70.11
ORKNEY	73.38
SHETLAND	73.94
WEST DUMBARTONSHIRE	75.09
RENFREWSHIRE	75.14
EDINBURGH	94.65

Source: 2016/17 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Average weekly rent levels - based on a typical weekly rent. (52 weeks average for all stock)

## What your rent pays for

The rent we receive from council properties allows us to maintain and improve the council's housing stock, so it is very important that we make best use of the resources we have.

The pie chart shows just how your rent money was spent last year; you will see that over 70 pence in every pound collected is being spent on Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Investment work on tenants' homes.



### Repairs and Maintenance



In West Lothian, repairs to our housing stock are carried out by our own Building Services operatives. Between April 2016 and March 2017, they carried out **48,218** routine and emergency repairs on our council properties.

### Scottish Housing Quality Standard

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard was brought in to ensure all social housing sector homes meet a certain standard.

In West Lothian we have been working hard to bring our housing stock up to, and in many cases beyond, the required standard and we are delighted we have achieved this for **99.65%** of our properties.





## Planned Housing Investment

We are committed to improving and maintaining your homes to a good standard. In recent years, we have focussed on ensuring that our properties meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). We have also embarked on an ambitious new build council housing programme.

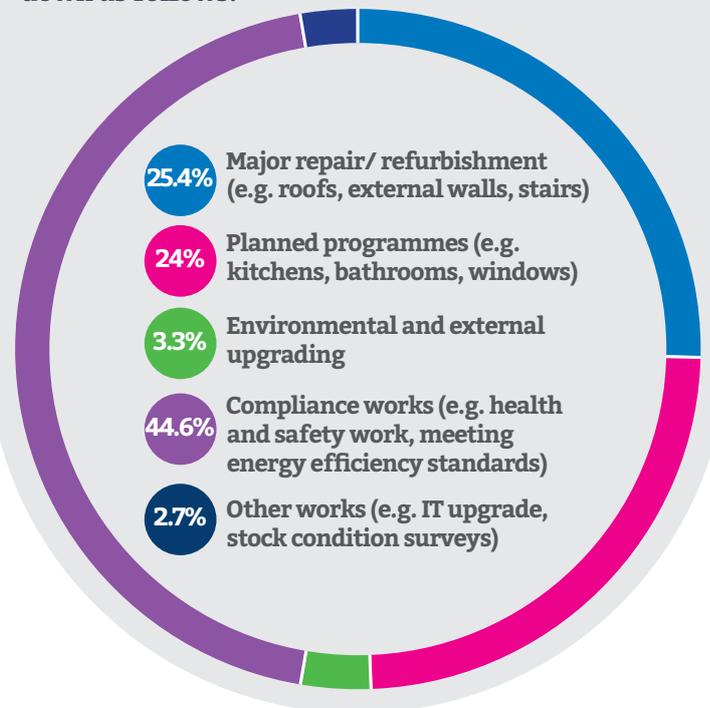
For the five year period covered by the new rent strategy, we will need to focus on works to ensure that all our properties meet standards laid down by the Scottish Government for energy efficient homes.

These works will vary across the housing stock but could include replacing existing boilers with more energy efficient boilers; installing external wall insulation or installing solar PV panels.

Our planned investment programme aims to ensure that all our properties meet the new standard for energy efficient homes by December 2020.

An average rent increase of 2.25% per year would be required to maintain current levels of services and maintain and improve our housing stock.

To maintain and improve our housing stock to an appropriate standard, through the housing capital programme we will need to invest around £75 million over the five years to 2023. This is broken down as follows:



**Given the demand for social rented housing in West Lothian, with 9,406 applicants on the Common Housing Register, it is considered that there is a strong case for adding to the supply of council houses over the next five years. We are therefore consulting on rent increase options of 3% and 4% per year as both options will support an increase in the supply of council houses. We would also like your views on whether or not we should add to the supply of council houses to meet the needs of a growing population. Questions and options are included within the enclosed survey rent card.**



## Rent Increase Options

There is a separate rent survey card included in this special edition of Tenants News. You are encouraged to fill it in and return it to us so that you can tell us ‘Which option is for you?’ The rent increase options on your card are outlined below:

### Option 1 Annual increase of 3% per year over five years\*

This option would allow us to invest the required amount in our existing housing stock and allow us to **increase the supply of council houses by a minimum of 320**. The illustration right shows how this would impact on average weekly rent in West Lothian.

Year	Average weekly increase (£)	Existing stock investment contribution (£)	New housing supply contribution (£)
2018/19	£2.05	£1.54	£0.51
2019/20	£2.11	£1.58	£0.53
2020/21	£2.17	£1.63	£0.54
2021/22	£2.24	£1.68	£0.56
2022/23	£2.30	£1.72	£0.58

### Option 2 Annual increase of 4% per year over five years\*

This option would enable the council to maintain the required investment in our existing stock over the next five years.

The extra 1% annual increase compared against option 1 would allow the council to **increase the supply of council houses by a minimum of 500 houses**. The illustration right shows how this would impact on rent.

Year	Average weekly increase (£)	Existing stock investment contribution (£)	New housing supply contribution (£)
2018/19	£2.73	£1.54	£1.19
2019/20	£2.84	£1.58	£1.26
2020/21	£2.95	£1.63	£1.32
2021/22	£3.07	£1.68	£1.39
2022/23	£3.19	£1.72	£1.47

*\*Based on 52 week average rent*

## Affordability

Recognising the difficulties our tenants face in the current economic climate, when preparing each of the two options for consultation the council completed a detailed affordability review to ensure that the rent levels are suitable for our tenants now and for the future. These options all fell within acceptable levels of affordability through that review.

We are offering two proposals for the new rent strategy. Both options will enable us to focus on investing in our current council homes as well as continue investment in adding to supply of council houses for the future.

**Please complete and return the rent survey card by 8th December to let us know your views.**