



REGION TWO



SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND REGIONAL NETWORK

bringing tenants,
residents and the
Scottish Government
together

WINTER 20/12/2020

South East Scotland Regional Network

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EAST LOTHAIN COUNCIL RENT PROPOSALS

East Lothain Council sent three proposals for future rent rises to all of it's tenants. Included were details about the number of new builds, replacement kitchens and bathrms. and increased amenities which would be available from the differnt rises.

Tenants who replied went for the highest but figures published did not include the percentages of replies returned.

TENANT GROUPS

None of the twenty six groups have been able to work as normal since the start of Covid-19. Many A.G.M however groups have worked with zoom, and kept in touch by telephone and when possible met in gardens as permitted.

Two groups Tranent and Haddington capitals were short listed for most inspiring group at the TIS zoom awards. Tranent won the mental health peer support group supported by Hadington. East TRA continues to support it's members by phone texts and planned one to one meetings with all members weekly.

Eastate inspections have not occured but will resume as soon as Covid-19 permits. The 21/2 paid TIS staff have remained in post working from home, by letter, text, phone, and zoom meetings to support groups in whatever way they can

Alan Dunton

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) hosts a Special Budget Consultation Meeting with City of Edinburgh Council (CEC)

ETF's Executive Committee, group and individual members met via zoom on 11th November to discuss and give views on the CEC's 2021 / 22 budget consultation, focussing on prioritising improvements, investment in local areas and rents. ETF members informed CEC that tenants want to see improvements to ensure tenants homes have:

- An efficient and high - quality repairs and maintenance service;
- The required internal improvements such as modern kitchens, bathrooms, heating, fire and smoke alarms;
- Safe, secure and modern stairwells;
- Energy efficient insulation and high – quality exteriors.

In addition to investment in tenants' homes, ETF members agreed that investment and improvements to the wider community are important, and as such, tenants and residents should influence decisions on wider Council budget expenditure such as roads, outdoor, parks, cleansing and environmental services. ETF members agree this would have the overall aim of ensuring all budget expenditure link together to improve housing and communities as a whole.

In terms of rents, and proposed rent increases, members expressed real concern that rents in Edinburgh are the highest in Scotland and among the highest in the UK.

The Fair Rents Bill

The proposed Fair Rents Bill introduced By Pauline McNeill; Scottish Labour MSP for Glasgow is intended to strengthen the position of Scottish Tenants.

The Bill if passed will limit rent increases to rate of inflation based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus one per cent every year with Local Authorities and Ministers able to set a cap.

Rents in Edinburgh and Glasgow for a two-bedroom property have skyrocketed by 45.9% and 40.9% respectively since 2010 higher than the cumulative inflation rise of 21.5%.

Earnings have stagnated below the inflation rate over the same period.

Tenants will be able to apply to have rent reviewed if they think it is too high and an independent tribunal will be able to lower – but not increase rents.

Private landlords will have to enter the monthly rent and other detailed information into Scottish Landlord Register.

Rents in Scotland are out of control and measures are needed to limit them, after the failure of the Scottish Governments Rent Pressure Zones.

The Fair Rents Bill is an important step towards ensuring tenants have a safe, secure and affordable place to live.

It is important that the new measures must ensure genuine affordability for tenants and not create loopholes for landlords to exploit, such as lifting the cap on rent increases in between tenancies.

200 responses were received when the consultation closed on 7th December.

My own group's response follows.



Wharton Square Response

1. The Member in Charge thinks there is a need to make private rents fairer for tenants and to create a better balance of power between private landlords and tenants. Do you agree with this overall policy aim? If so, do you think the Bill will help achieve this outcome

Wharton Square Residents' Group agrees emphatically with this policy aim, and we believe that this Bill represents an important first step in redressing the balance of power between private landlords and tenants to the benefit of tenants.

The PRT goes some way to protect tenants, but we are concerned that "open market rent" is determined by tribunal in a dispute. We would like to see a points-based system based on quality and amenities of property **NOT** the market rate which can fluctuate considerably. The "Rent Pressure Zone" aspect of the 2016 Act is flawed, 4 years on they are yet to be implemented because there is no comprehensive survey of rent level data available in Scotland. We also agree that Scottish Government (SG) should have power to vary any cap by order.

2. Section 1 of the Bill it prevents a landlord of a private residential tenancy from increasing rent in any year by more than the Consumer Price Index plus 1%? Do you agree with this? Section 1 also gives the Scottish Government a power to vary the cap by order. Do you agree with this?

Wharton Square Residents' group supports the proposal's intention to make rent more affordable, but allowing rents to rise at CPI+1% still leaves significant affordability problems, particularly for the 34% of households living in poverty in the Private Rental Sector.

If rent increases were to be capped at CPI+1%, we believe that this should be applied to all tenures, social housing, MMR, shared housing, co-operative housing, council housing and PRS. In last 10 years 2010-2020 cumulative CPI has been 21.5%. However cumulative total for 2 bed flat in Lothian since 2010 has been 45.9% and in Greater Glasgow 40.9%. Earnings have stagnated below inflation over the same period.

3. Section 2 allows a tenant in a private residential tenancy to apply to have a "fair open market rent" determined by a Rent Officer. Do you agree with section 2?

In any answer to this question, the Committee also welcomes your views on—

- a. *The right set out in section 2 to appeal a Rent Officer's determination to the First-tier Tribunal*
- b. *The matters set out in section 2 that must be taken into account in determining what is a "fair open market rent"*

We agree with the right for a tenant to apply for a fair rent but **NOT** at "fair market rent" as this fluctuates so much. We would like to see rent based on a base rent, property size, region and property type (Flat or House). This we think would be a fair and just approach. A Berlin model could be looked at and possibly adopted.

Midlothian Council Tenants Panel

The Tenant Panel have had a busy year and been invited to attend many meetings covering a range of various topics. The meetings are all held virtually and a few members have also received paper copies of these meetings who do not use technology so no one is left out and can give the council their valuable feedback. Over this year we have received a draft copy of the Tenant Participation Strategy and invited to join a group before the Local Housing Strategy is finalised for our comments and to gain our response to these new important strategies.

There was a meeting in October which we attended with housing staff regarding the Assurance Statement that Midlothian Council were hoping to submit to the Scottish Housing Regulator. Prior to this meeting all Tenant Panel members received a copy of this draft document and we were actively invited at the meeting to ask any questions if we needed further clarification on any issue mentioned in this document. The housing staff at this meeting also asked Tenant Panel members present if they would like to take part in other groups regarding complaint handling and scrutiny which some of us were interested in.

The Annual Performance meeting was held in November and Mr Pogson from Scotland's Housing Network reviewed Midlothian Council's performance results. The Tenant Panel were invited to this event which had many council staff attending and we were invited to ask any questions during this presentation. After the event Tenant Panel members were asked for our feedback in the new design and contents of the Performance Report for this year.

Going forward we were given an insight in some of the areas the council would like the Tenant Panel members to take part in and for our feedback. The council realise some of the information given to tenants needs to be updated and one of the main updates needed is the Tenants Handbook which our group will give feedback on design and content.



**Consultation on indicators for the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing 2:
Consultation questions**

We welcome your general feedback on our proposals as well as answers to the specific questions we have raised. Please do not feel you have to answer every question unless you wish to do so.

Send your completed questionnaire to us by **15 January 2021**.

By email @: shr@shr.gov.scot

Or post to: Scottish Housing Regulator
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow, G4 0HF

Name/organisation name

RTO Regional Networks – Region 2 – South East Scotland

Address

c/o Mrs L Reid
Acting Secretary
40 Eldindean Road
Bonnyrigg
EH19 2HJ

How you would like your response to be handled

To help make this a transparent process we intend to publish on our website the responses we receive, as we receive them. Please let us know how you would like us to handle your response. If you are responding as an individual, we will not publish your contact details.

Are you happy for your response to be published on our website?

Yes

If you are responding as an individual ...

□□□

Please tell us how you would like your response to be published.

Pick 1

Publish my full response, including my name

Please publish my response, but not my name

1. Is there anything not covered by the proposed indicators? (if yes, please explain)

The second EESSH milestone to be met is proposed as December 2032, and the committee agreed that wherever possible landlords should be encouraged and indeed supported to meet this milestone sooner. The EESSH is of huge importance to tenants in the social rented sector because of its implications for energy efficiency, fuel poverty and income maximisation so all progress to swiftly improve outcomes in this area is welcome

2. Are there any indicators that you feel are not appropriate and, if so, why?

The indicators are appropriate and the committee can understand that.

3. Is there any information we ask for that you feel does not need to be included or that we have been missed?

Given the important implications of EESSH for tenants in the social rented sector and the technical nature of some of the terms included in the consultation document and indicators it would be helpful if SHR could consider specific targeted communication on EESSH for tenants, for example through webinars or video presentation sessions

4: Would you like to make any other comments or suggestions about our proposed indicators?

No – no more comments on this.

Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback!

JEANETTE BOYD - TENANT PARTICIPATION 1997 – 2020

As a member of Windsor Park Tenants' and Residents' Association, Musselburgh, Jeanette represented East Lothian on Region 2 Network.

She worked tirelessly for the Tenants Movement and represented tenants' on a number of committees for e.g.

- Tenants' Talking to Tenants' which involved visiting Tenants' in other cities in Scotland.
- Scottish Housing Regulator
- Meeting with Housing Minister/Scottish Parliament
- Locally she was involved in a number of Housing meetings with East Lothian Council and
- East Lothian Tenants' Panel.
- Director on the Board of The Tenants Information Service (TIS)

Prior to her early retirement Jeanette worked in the Housing Department of Edinburgh Council for twenty-eight years.

Jeanette worked tirelessly for tenants across the whole of Scotland. Her passing was such a sad loss and was felt throughout all four Regional Networks Area's. She will be missed personally by many, not just as a colleague but also as a dear friend.

JEANETTE LEGACY IS FAR REACHING AND WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN

Jeanette joined the Windsor Park Tenants and Residents Group in 1997 and took up the position of Secretary in September 1998 a position she held until 2018.

With the increase of Tenants' and Residents' Associations in East Lothian, East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel was formed and Jeanette played a vital role as Secretary. Jeanette wore many hats within the Tenants' movement such as Director on the Tenants' Information Service, consulting with Tenants' on Stock Transfer, She met with Tenants' throughout Scotland on Tenants' talking to Tenants' (a Scottish Government initiative). She was also Treasurer for the Regional Network BEEM which represented TRAS' in the Borders, Edinburgh, East Lothian and Midlothian. Jeanette worked tirelessly on many sub committees with the staff of East Lothian Council.

Jeanette's legacy is far reaching and will never be forgotten. She worked tirelessly on many projects over the years, helping build important pathways and opening dialogue with numerous agencies, which in turn has allowed us to better represent our fellow tenants across Scotland ensuring that tenants' voices are heard and represented at all levels.