



Consultation Report

2021/22 Rent and Service Charge Consultation – Summary of Responses

Introduction

This year we followed a similar approach to our consultation on setting rent and service charges as we did in 2020/2021. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 we were unable to actually to form a working group to design the information leaflet, or to meet with our groups.

- The leaflet was based on previous year taking into account comments from tenants who wished further information to be made available. In addition, the leaflet and questionnaire were produced in Arial 16 instead of Arial 11 to assist those with sight impairment.
- Information leaflet and questionnaire sent to all tenants in December 2020. On the questionnaire, there was a link to submit responses online, via Survey Monkey.
- Information was put on Viewpoint website with link to questionnaire in Survey Monkey.
- All tenants received a reply paid envelope to return the questionnaire.
- The VTRG, Fife Viewpoint Tenants Group and Tenants Action Group Lothian were asked if they wished an online meeting to discuss this with the Director.

Rent and Service Charge Proposal

The proposal put to tenants was

Rents Proposal:

- To increase rents by 2%

Service Charges Proposal:

- Most service charges would increase by 2% except for landscape charges which would see no increase.

Responses

We received **228 responses**, a response rate of 17% of our tenants.

- **214** responses were received on the paper questionnaire
- **14** responses were completed online

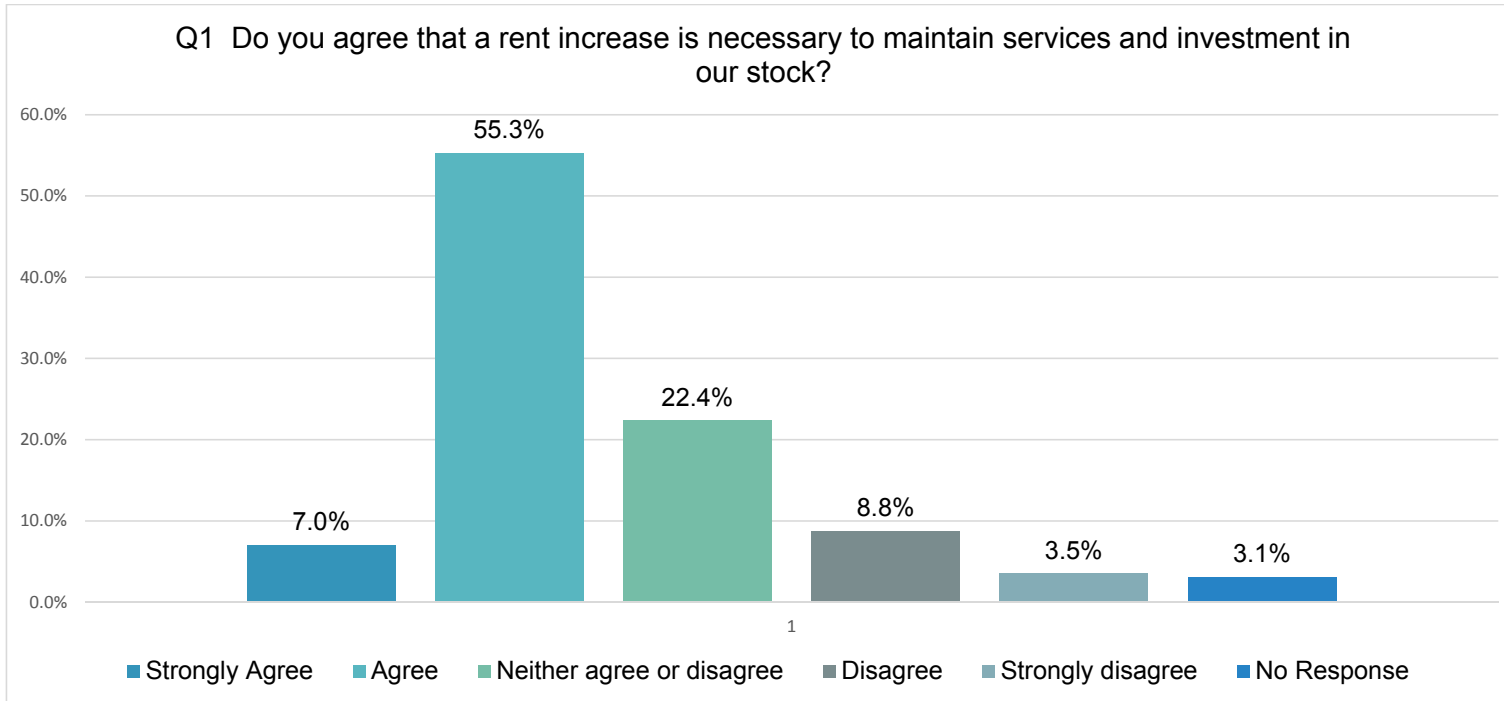
This is a slight decrease on last year's response rate, which was 21.1%, however it remains a good return. Some of the reasons for this decrease could be

- There were no ballot boxes on the staffed sites
- There was no promotion of the consultation through coffee mornings and quarterly meetings

The responses are broken down by type of housing in the table below.

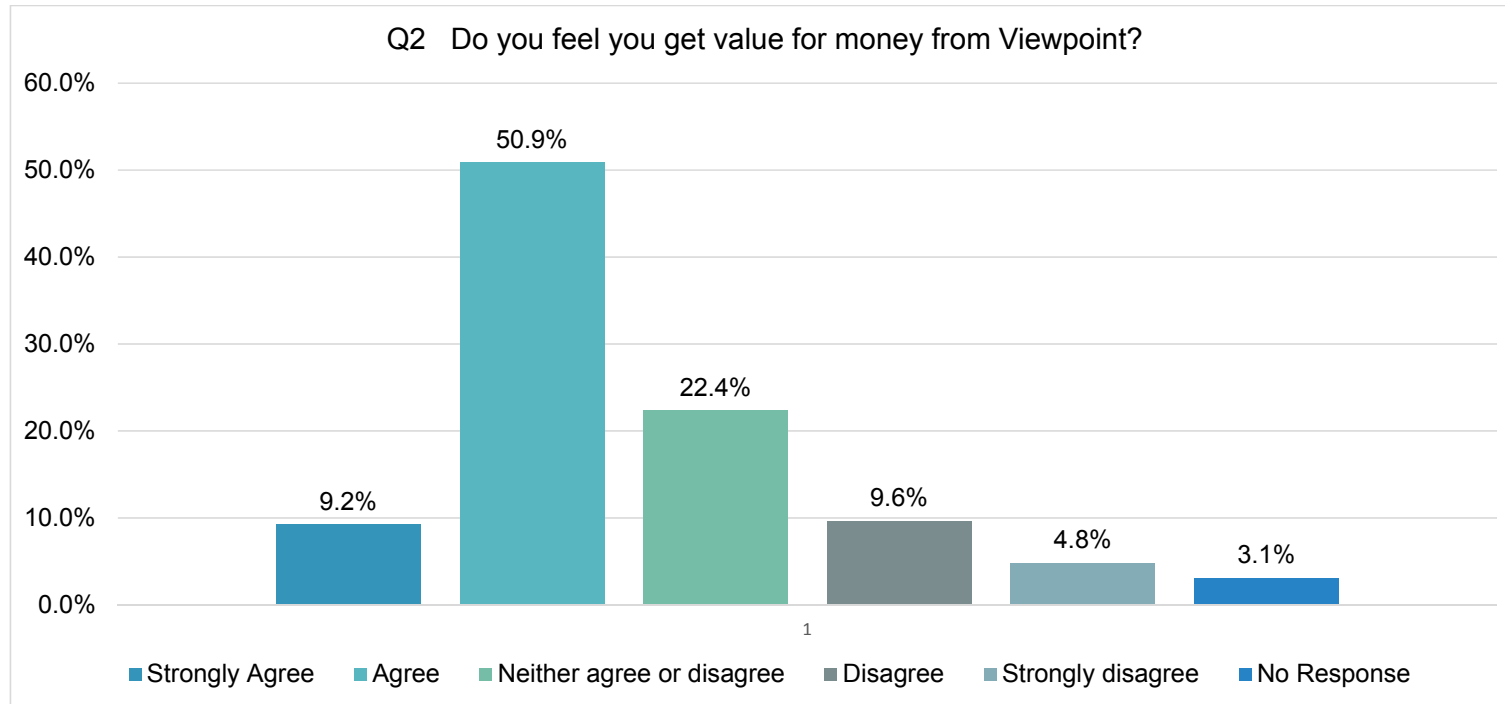
Type of Housing	Total Number of Responses	% of Total Responses i.e. 228
Enhanced Sheltered	22	9.6%
Sheltered	88	38.6%
Alarmed	46	20.2%
General Needs	21	9.2%
No response	51	22.4%
TOTALS	228	100%

Question 1:



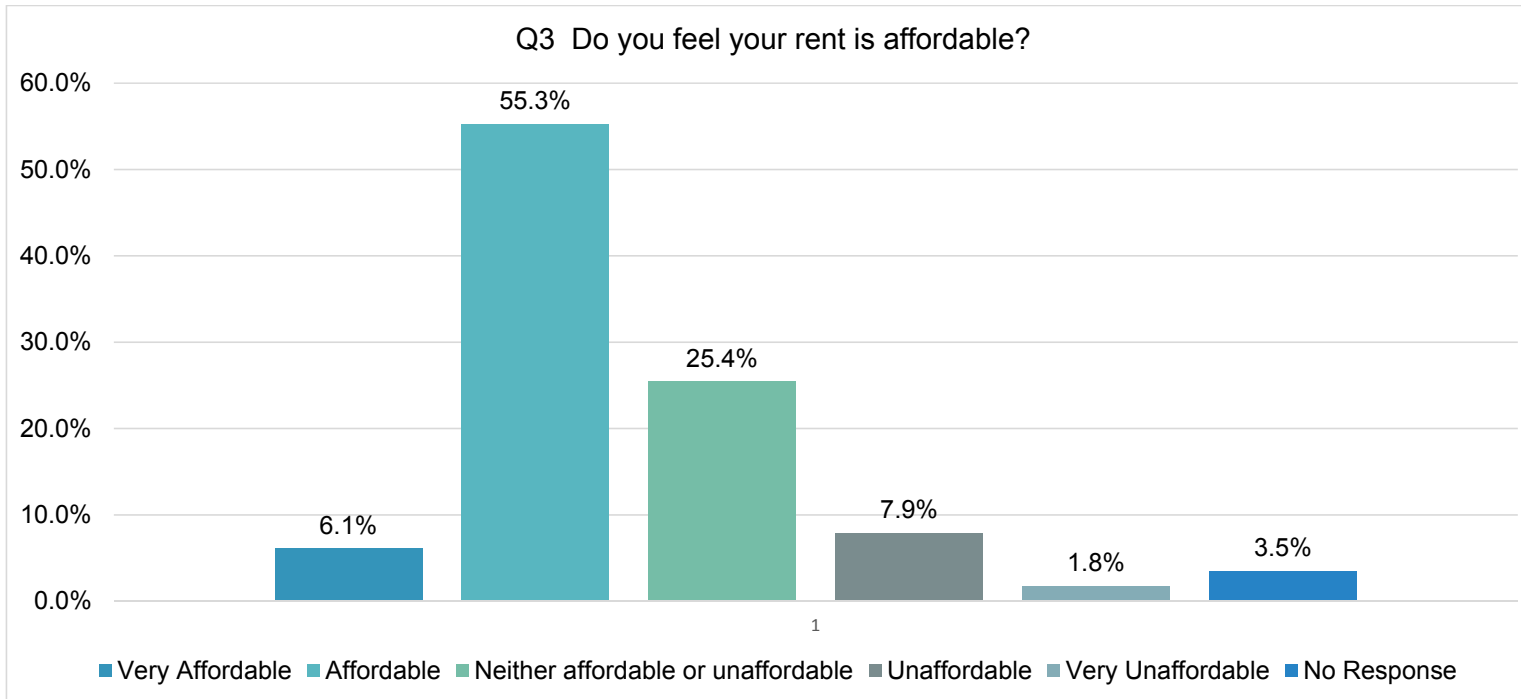
	Number	%
Strongly Agree	16	7%
Somewhat Agree	126	55.3%
Neutral/No comment	51	22.4%
Somewhat Disagree	20	8.8%
Strongly Disagree	8	3.5%
No Response	7	7%
Total	228	100%

Question 2:



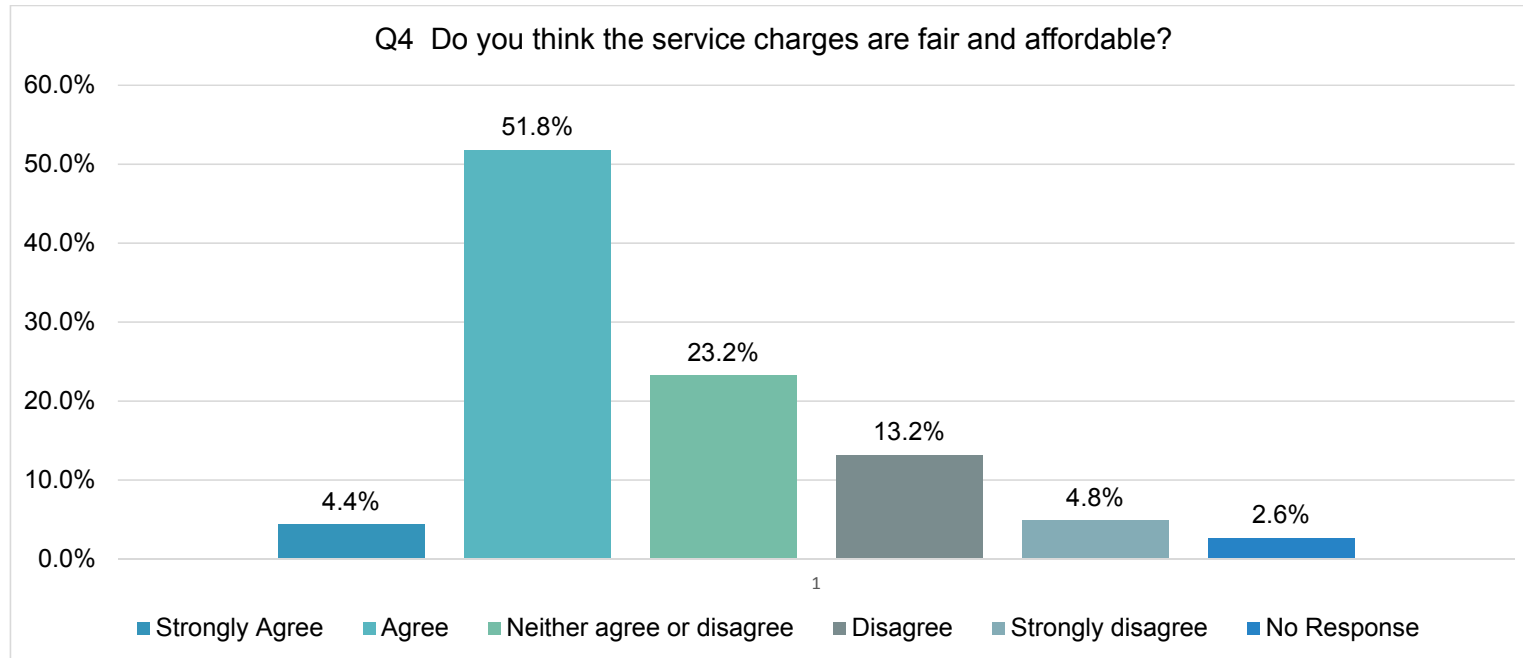
	Number	%
Strongly Agree	21	9.2%
Somewhat Agree	116	50.9%
Neither Agree or Disagree	51	22.4%
Somewhat Disagree	22	9.6%
Strongly Disagree	11	4.8%
No Response	7	3.1%
Totals	228	100%

Question 3:



	Number	%
Very Affordable	14	6.1%
Affordable	126	55.3%
Neutral	58	25.4%
Unaffordable	18	7.9%
Very Unaffordable	4	1.8%
No Response	8	3.5%
Total	228	100%

Question 4:



	Number	%
Strongly Agree	10	4.4%
Somewhat Agree	118	51.8%
Neither Agree or Disagree	53	23.2%
Somewhat Disagree	30	13.2%
Strongly Disagree	11	4.8%
No Response	6	2.6%
Total	228	100%

Question 5 : Opportunity to provide comments on the proposal

Comments received are set out below. The comments have been divided into negative and positive comments regarding the rent and service charge proposals. Any comment that could identify an individual has been anonymised but other comments have been quoted directly from the responses, with any reference to specific areas removed so that these remain anonymous. There are also comments that do not directly relate the proposal but are indirectly related as they are regarding services we provide. These are under the section headed 'Other'.

There are also comments from one tenants specifically in relation to landscaping charges and these have been added after 'Other' Comments.

Negative Comments

You're putting rent/service charges up but nothing is getting done to accommodation/ and the services: waste of money. Gardeners don't do what meant to do and window cleaners wash windows with just water, no soap etc., the rain dies that for nothing. The only service worth paying for is Pauline the building cleaner. Waste of time - nothing will get done - as long as Viewpoint get rent money

I know Covid has affected everything. I sent email with photos to repairs Feb 2020 and a reminder recently but I may as well hit my head against a brick wall

As we pay full rent (and council tax) this increase impacts on us, where those on benefits will not be affected. Also, how rigorous is Viewpoint in following up those with rent and charges arrears? Furthermore (even before covid) the level of coordinator cover paid for was often not matched by what was provided. Because of the seemingly frequent change of personnel in the property department, requests for improvements seem to get lost. What's the point - you only seem to listen to certain people!

The flats need new kitchens, new heating. They are far too dear plus we don't need all these charges

Rent increases every year but no refurbishments to flats over 11 yrs - kitchen radiator - bathroom windows - told every year they are on the list. Service charges are again increased - must be the only complex that has gone down in appearance rather than up. we no longer fit in to the area we live in. Tenants get to do what they like in the gardens and cant look after them. No point - only get told lies from housing officer.

With revenue reserves of £29,462,090 (millions) don't you think for a charity this is excessive, coupled to the fact the virus pandemic effect, is an increase justified

I would not like rent to be increased

I feel it would be unfair to raise rent again. Surely one very 2 years is enough. I can only afford it by working lots of overtime

Worse than last year

I feel the rent is expensive for the property I am in. When I was allocated the house three years ago the bathroom was so bad I had to replace it myself. The windows are a disgrace and the heating needs updated - fix the faults with the rent increase money.

I understand the need for Viewpoint to propose an increase as these times are extreme. However those of us on pensions will not yet know whether there will be a comfortable increase in their pensions next year- I still feel this increase in charges is manageable.

The 2% increase is above the rate of inflation which is more than the pension increase

The leaflet does not explain why a rent increase is required or how the figure of 2% was chosen. RPI is far below 2%. If a portion of the rent goes towards planned infrastructure upgrades such as windows/kitchens/bathrooms etc. and a majority of these upgrades die not happen this year due to coronavirus, then what happened to that money and why is a further increase required beyond that? Has the money not carried over? The rent already includes an amount for a sinking fund for upgrades. Why is an increase above this sinking fund for upgrades required. Also general needs do not use any services except gardening (which has not increased) so again why the flat rate increase to them for services they do not use? I'm not complaining about the increase per se but each year I have to ask and each year these things are never explained. More information would be greatly appreciated so people can make a proper judgement.

There are obviously exceptions to the saying "what comes up must come down"

I feel the rents are going up, but no home improvements

I feel the service charges are high especially window cleaning. I live in a top flat and the cleaners find it difficult to clean my windows and I feel they never get done properly.

I suggest consideration be given to impact of COVID (or similar exceptional circumstances) on access to/use of/ etc. any individual flats generally affected by works/other aspects of living in the building(s). Specifically review rent/service charges in light of these factors.

Dear Sirs, I pay already over £400 (1/3 of my pension) for the pleasure of the following: A loo that doesn't flush properly, A Water tank that when inspected was considered unsafe (legionnaires), Cracked sink, Vermin through the flat, Infestation of moths and bugs , A neighbour who creates at all hours of the day, A neighbour who has dealt drugs, A neighbour above who keeps the most unsociable hours and is banging/crashing into the early hours and is disturbing my sleep, An erratic washroom facility, An erratic TV reception (live on my own and TV is important) , Front door steps corroded, Gardening non-existent

Service charges can be affordable but poor value for money. The gardeners are a total disgrace. The window cleaning, the routine cleaner and the deep cleaners are not properly supervised and seem to often skive etc. etc. in need of supervision. Poor proofreading interest is 1% or 15%. Years of rent increases confusing 20, 19, 17, 18 or 20, 19, 18, 17. Why no plain English, Why 'remobilise'. Is 'Actual increase' proposed or actual

Due to the current situation which has not helped, I feel that it should be affordable for all and for what you charge is not value for money for the service that I receive.

Positive Comments

Costs rise, expenses also, but the two have to bear some relationship, which they do. No complaint.

Very happy with my accommodation and rent

I expect the rent to go up

Feel the rent increase is reasonable

As I am on pension credit my rent is paid for me otherwise I could not afford the rent. I do believe the charges are fair to keep in line with inflation.

Rent and service charges have to change as contractors put their prices up

Agree with charges however common areas such as seating and dining room have not been open during this past period. At times I have had to continually ask for repairs.

Fairly happy with proposed increases

Rent and service have to go up due to the rise in cost of living

These aspects are all fine however I have issues with the association's dealing with x 2 fellow residents anti social behaviour and sincerely hope that the empty property is filled sensitively. I'm aware it is being advertised in Edindex/Key to Choice System

Would have preferred an increased payment for gardening services. More input needed. Not enough time given for gardeners to do necessary work. Anything left to be done, also gets left at next visit from gardeners - same pre-lockdown-

I am pleased and satisfied of this questionnaire, for I myself still working although on a low income, very satisfied and grateful to have a low rent accommodation rather than homeless. Thank you

I can see that in order for essential maintenance repairs be done prices may have to increase slightly, however it must not impact in any way that people are priced out of Viewpoint and have to move to Council Housing where they could be ? And made more vulnerable

Am surprised at no landscaping increase as current contract under review. Term 'landscaping' is a joke as none has been done since Greenfingers lost the contract. The present lot are not gardeners, only groundsman. For things to improve a raised charge is expected. Indeed it is to be necessary.

I have always agreed on the Viewpoint method. I am happy with that. I have been here for 9 years and enjoying every minute. I have been a tenant in this building and made good friends. / I have always had the privilege of any personal or any other questions answered to my satisfaction. I feel Viewpoint has always been fair and honest with one in anything I do.

I'm surprised the increase in rent has not been higher because of the pandemic

I have no particular comments to make in regard to these rent/service charge increases. They are in line with the Consumer Price Index. Viewpoint HA has twice in the last four years imposed a service charge freeze, a similar actions should be considered for a future rent freeze.

Just affordable No information relating to rent increase for retirement properties

Other Comments

Gardeners not very good - only cut grass

In near future would like a kitchen update as mine has seen better days

But too much information to take in

We pay for gardeners but I have not seen them for months and we are still paying. I would rather not as you are ignored. That's the policy of Viewpoint.

Gardens not maintained properly, rodent problems, noisy street, roof still waiting to be fixed, cant hear internal intercom, damp in back room, no sound proofing, hear every with neighbours, and that's just normal living

Words seemed to have dropped out of some boxes. Figures given for rent and service charges don't appear to be correct. Enhanced flat studio is currently £479.11

C/h heating system inefficient, wastes money and heat unevenly distributed throughout flat - 1 very large radiator in living room + 1 med in bedroom. No heating in bathroom. Poor control of temperature

under Q7: this question should not be asked (*question about coronavirus and financial impact*)

I have no housing benefit - "no comment" on all other questions

The gardeners standard of work is very poor and they need replaced. At 10.12.20 and they still have not finished last months despite head office being requested to chase it up. Laundry equipment has fairly regular faults. Regular maintenance would be a much needed service.

Staff in the office in the building are generally good when called upon but maintenance and upkeep by the foliage at the ramp and circle seating area is very poor: daughter had to cut a lot back after three months of waiting! Also where is the new electric wheelchair store promised. Is ferns being replaced as it was great for us and still waiting on paintwork being fixed after a flood. No hot water in the kitchen.

I know that this year has been bad but I think some things need to be looked at. Parking at xx - it was to be painted again with no parking signs. This has so far not been done with ambulances having to park on Fennel and patients having to be carried/wheeled to there. Some repairs.

I am a fair rent tenant and pay monthly by my bank. I have my own washing machine. I pay for my own electricity.

Last year the service charge was reduced by moving heating and hot water, however claimants for housing benefit found that this was not included when seeking rent benefit. Not acceptable as it made the lower service charge false. Also outrageous to expect the tenant to cover the shortfall in rent due for unoccupied properties due to the pandemic.

My windows badly require to be replaced

We are not getting the service that was there when we signed our leases. We have been treated very unfairly in our complex. Our benches were removed but other complexes kept theirs. Some of our older residents suffered through this.

LOST

You did not specify if the services included our Co-ordinators. Please do not take them away. Leaflet was a bit complicated

I had to stop the gardeners doing my garden as they weren't doing a proper job. Not weeding, not cutting anything back, they killed my plants with weed killer - absolutely useless gardeners.

This being a difficult year services have not been the same. Somethings I understand but others are questionable. WHY no benches when other complexes have them on display- not much to ask for.

For starters last few years our grass has not been cut or looked after. Second some repairs not too important and don't get done. Several cracks in my flat and being told it building age. Our back gate taken long time to fix - I bought the new large hinges so it would get fixed. Now it's been 5 weeks since our stair light out got fixed ? days ago.

Level of service is poor. Waiting over a year for repairs. Coronavirus being used in some cases as an excuse.

Rock garden could do with plants being put in. Since volume of fire alarm has been reduced I can't hear it unless I am behind door - nothing wrong with my hearing.

My husband went into care home on 20 March. He is now there permanently and he is self funding - £6000 per month - should I not be paying single occupancy rent?

Viewpoint must inform tenants of their rent status at least twice a year. I have never (in ten years) received this information unless I request a printout from the office. This is definitely something we should be able to check on line.

I have not had my outside windows cleaned in the year 2020. I would like to speak to someone about not getting my outside windows cleaned.

Is it not time Buchan Gardens kitchens and bathrooms were updated

Having Wi-Fi installed in Mill House would be welcomed

.....no garden services for months....lights in stairwell has not been fixed

No comment, shouldn't permission be given for huts, alterations to garden etc.?

I thought there would have been a seat put in to the lift by now!. My shower is not very good either, too hot or too cold.

Laundry charges - when laundry cannot be used for logistic purposes / landscaping - an extremely poor service / heating and services of corridors - when I do not live within the main complex

There have been problems this year with the heating, hot water, tv aerial; dishwasher, frequent changes in coordinator

Landscaping? What landscaping? The only things I have ever seen is gardeners cutting grass, a short back and sides. Coupled with this is some necessary weeding. Nothing more, nothing less. / Service charge paid by self. No point. Tenants views ignored, unless they, as individuals, take action if and when necessary

Roof needs looked at and definitely new windows are needed, they are a fire hazard and practically non escapable, also heating is escaping out the windows, costs more for heating. Also the new shower that was put in in January has caused flooding and endless problems because the floor underneath is too shallow between the neighbours ceiling below and the pump is useless.

I believe I have been paying rent on the understanding I have been occupying a 1 bedroomed apt. I have drawn this to the attention of VP on a few occasions but I have not been in receipt of confirmation I have been in the correct category: I have a rent agreement which does not confirm my apt size. I would appreciate a response./ With red to Q6 I would like to have a response to the matter. Thank you

Heating off in corridors - No joy in later years

I feel we should be provided with comfortable common room facilities, to meet, have coffee, sit and read. Until this is met I will not agree with the charges levied. Please do not send out questionnaires over a holiday period - residents need holidays too

Donna Phillips is excellent as Co-ordinator And other roles she fulfils. Give her a raise.

I have no comment on the financial aspects. I would change bedsit to studio. Studio is what appears on edindex and it is a more inviting term that bedsit which implies there is only one room involved - no kitchen or bathroom!

We received excellent service from the maintenance service during lockdown. 1. Shower going on fire. 2. Heating breaking down on an earlier day. 3. Clearing of blockage in ? Pipe outside. Also thank you to Hanover careline staff who handled the call outs.

I have found the maintenance and housing service to be poor with Viewpoint. My experience with Link Housing was much better.

Having requested many times starting in February 2020 for a repair to the continuously spreading area of damp on my bedroom wall, I was given start dates of 1st and 14th December 2020, but still no repair work has taken place. I am very disappointed at this poor service.

We do not receive any services apart from grass cutting. Would appreciate bushes being trimmed regularly and not when a request is made. We would also appreciate maintenance on the exterior of the property. COVID 19 is not an excuse for this not being carried out.

There was also a telephone discussion and email correspondence with one tenant specifically in relation to landscape charges

1. This email received by the Director of Finance and Assets and the issues relating to the rent consultation have been copied from this.

Re literature received today on rent and associated charges. Could there be rejigging of gas/landscaping charges for the following reasons.

Presumably central heating is to continue on a 24 hour cycle during summer as well as winter.

Is this not extreme? As surely 24 hrs daily ,during summer could be reduced to 18/20hrs, say from end April to end September, and the monies saved on a slightly lower gas charge be transferred to an increased landscaping charge, without affecting the overall charge.

As I have mentioned before ,the standard of gardening is diabolical ,but if Viewpoint continue to pay buttons they get what they deserve. At some point in time the chickens will come home to roost!.

So, the above money is transferred for that reason, with a new contractor and better supervision. Anything else unfortunately else is head in the sand stuff.!

2. This email was received as part of the consultation on the landscaping specification but is included here as it is also relevant to the rent and service charge consultation.

Gardeners are not up to any sort of standard but the fact that tenant's are only paying just under £3 monthly as opposed to £8.65 way back in years 16/17, speaks volumes. Don't see how a half decent contractor would take this on as the monthly charge is actually less than window cleaners. Viewpoint shot themselves in the foot from there on. Somebody got it very wrong. There is no way tenant's would pay that now, unless other charges were somehow rejigged.

Commented [HJ1]:

3. And finally the comments below were part of a follow up call to the tenant and these comments are relevant to the rent and service charge consultation

Suggested that one way of being able to get the finances to improve these services without upsetting people would be to reduce the hours that the heating is on - does not need to be on 24 hours per day, especially in the summer.

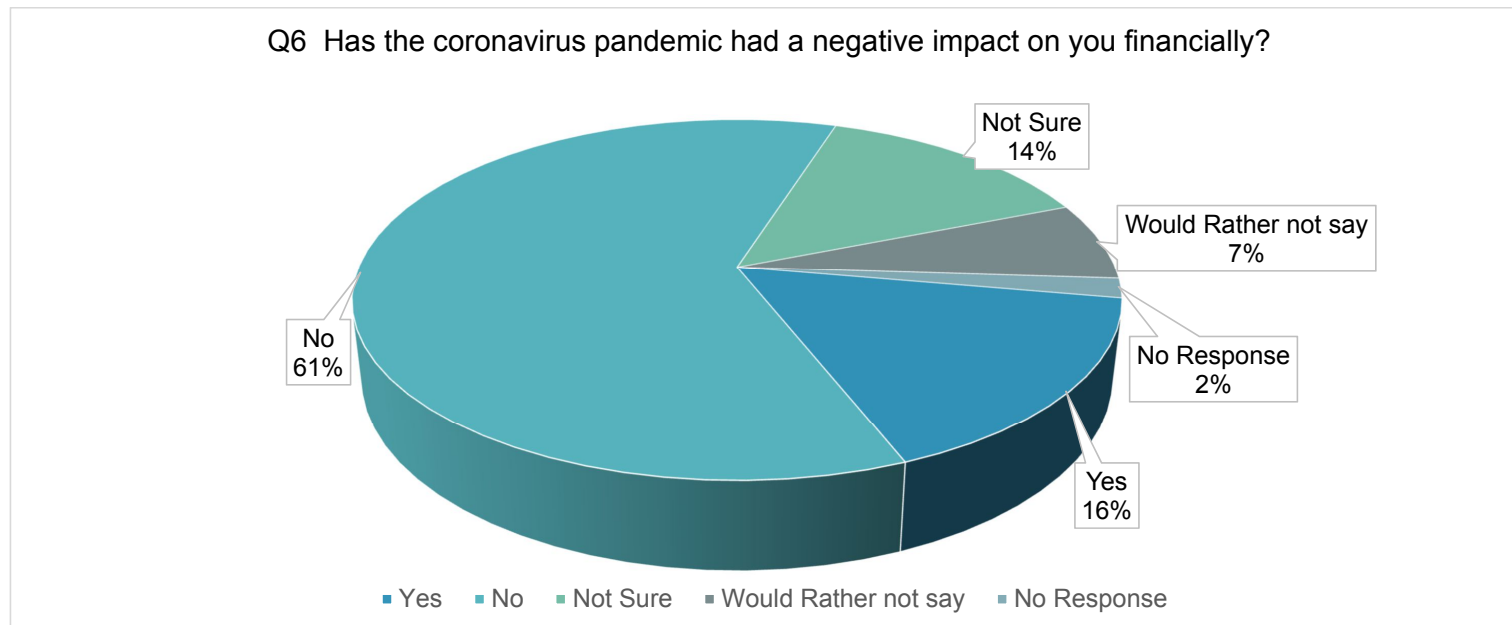
Our rent and service charge consultation this year says there is no change to landscape charges in the coming year. This means that these charges will be at the lowest ever - at the end of the day you get what you pay for.

Consultation with Viewpoint Tenants and Residents Group, Fife Viewpoint Tenants Group and Tenants Action Group Lothian

Unfortunately, we were unable to meet with the groups this year. An online meeting was not possible due to availability of WI-Fi, IT equipment and confidence and knowledge in using this. Individual comments were received from some of the members of these groups.

Question 6 :

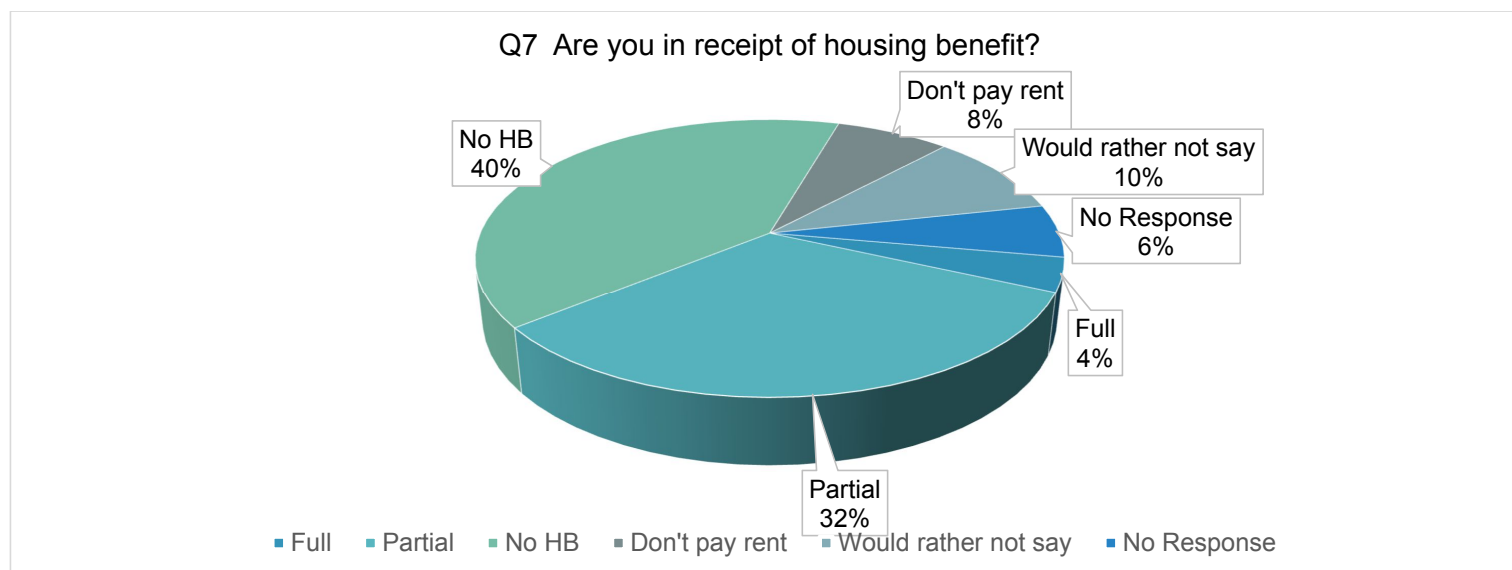
Given the current ongoing situation with the pandemic we felt it was prudent to find out how many of our tenants felt they had been financially impacted by the pandemic, and also take the opportunity to make the tenants who were affected aware of the Welfare Rights service that we have.



	Number	%
Yes	37	16.2%
No	139	61%
Not sure	32	14%
Would Rather not Say	16	7%
No response	4	1.8%
Total	228	100%

Question 7:

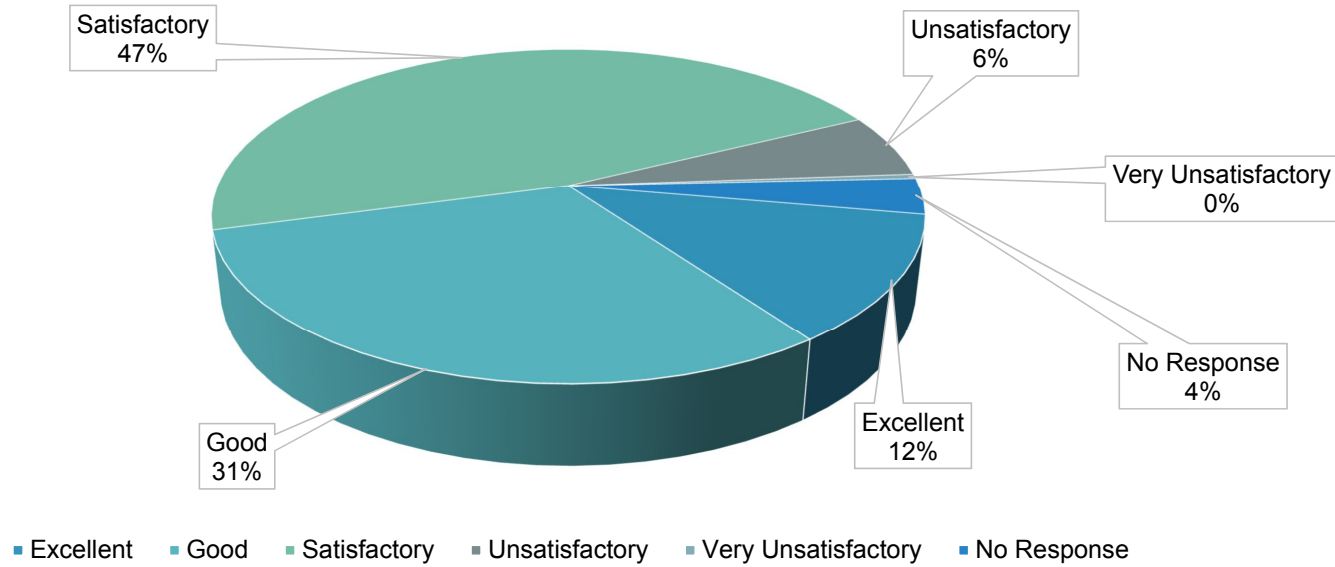
Tenants were asked if they were in receipt of full, partial or no housing benefit/housing support. This question was to assist in putting the question of affordability into context. Those not in receipt of any housing benefit or housing support are most likely to be affected by the rent proposal. Unfortunately, due to an error in the questionnaire there was no box to indicate whether the tenant was on full housing benefit/housing support and therefore some of the statistics are inaccurate.



	Number	%
No Housing Benefit	92	40.4%
Partial Housing Benefit	74	32.5%
Would Rather Not Say	22	9.6%
Don't Pay Rent	17	7.5%
No Response	14	6.1%
Full Housing Benefit	9	3.9%
Total	228	100%

Question 8:

Q8 How would you rate the information in the rent and service charge proposal leaflet?



	Number	%
Excellent	23	12.3%
Good	70	30.7%
Satisfactory	107	46.9%
Unsatisfactory	14	6.1%
Very Unsatisfactory	1	0.4%
No Response	8	3.5%
Total	228	100%

At the end of the survey tenants were asked to add their name and telephone number if they wished a call from a member of staff to discuss their feedback.

18 of the 228 responses requested a call back.

4 of these were passed to Assets to contact

2 were tenancy issues and passed to Housing Services

2 were compliments, which were recorded

10 were contacted as requested and any additional comments have been added in at question 6.

Finally in the tables below you will see the responses to the 5 main questions broken down into property type?.

	Q1 Do you agree that a rent increase is necessary to maintain service and investment in our stock?					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Alarmed	4	28	11	2	0	1
Enhanced	2	15	4	0	0	1
General	2	11	4	2	2	0
Sheltered	7	45	23	11	2	0
Blanks	1	27	9	5	4	5
Total	16	126	51	20	8	7

	Q2 Do you feel you get value for money from Viewpoint?					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Alarmed	5	24	12	5	0	0
Enhanced	1	15	3	1	1	1
General	2	10	4	4	1	0
Sheltered	8	49	18	8	5	0
Blanks	5	18	14	4	4	6
Total	21	116	51	22	11	7

Q3 Do you feel your rent is affordable						
	Very Affordable	Affordable	Neither Affordable or Unaffordable	Unaffordable	Very Unaffordable	No Response
Alarmed	3	31	9	3	0	0
Enhanced	3	9	8	1	1	0
General	2	10	8	1	0	0
Sheltered	3	47	23	10	2	3
Blanks	3	29	10	3	1	5
Total	14	126	58	18	4	8

Q5 Do you think the service charges are fair and affordable?						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Alarmed	4	26	7	9	0	1
Enhanced	1	14	5	2	0	0
General	2	10	5	3	1	0
Sheltered	3	42	22	12	6	3
Blanks	1	26	14	4	4	2
Total	11	118	53	30	11	6

	Q7 Has the coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on you financially?				
	Yes	No	Unsure	Would rather not say	No Response
Alarmed	7	30	7	2	0
Enhanced	4	16	2	0	0
General	5	12	2	2	0
Sheltered	15	55	13	5	0
Blanks	6	26	8	7	4
Total	37	139	32	16	4