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Document Title	Proposal to increase Council House Rents - Consultation Exercise

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Rent Level Consultation 2020/21

Report on outcome of consultation

Introduction

Every year the council consults with tenants, tenants and residents groups and East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel (ELTRP) on our proposals to increase rents.

In early October 2019, the council sent out a consultation questionnaire to all tenants which explained what their rent pays for and that a 5% increase for the financial year 2020/21 was being proposed. The information sent to tenants also included a Rent Table (ready reckoner) which showed the list of current fortnightly rents and this allowed tenants to see what a 5% rent increase would mean for them in pounds and pence. The consultation ended on Friday 15th November 2019.

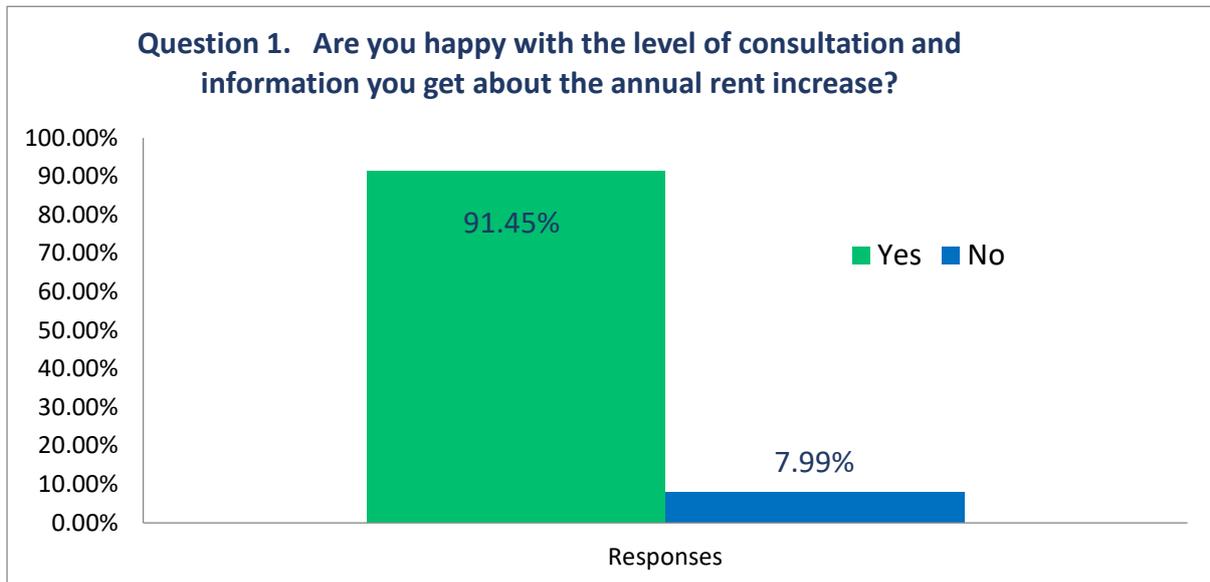
The questionnaire asked tenants if they agree with our approach to increase rents and also after each question, gave them the opportunity to make comments. The final question asked tenants if they have any suggestions about how we can improve the service.

Summary of responses

A total of 908 completed questionnaires were returned (three of those were from Tenants and Residents Associations). This represents a 10.5% return rate and shown below is a summary of all the responses received.

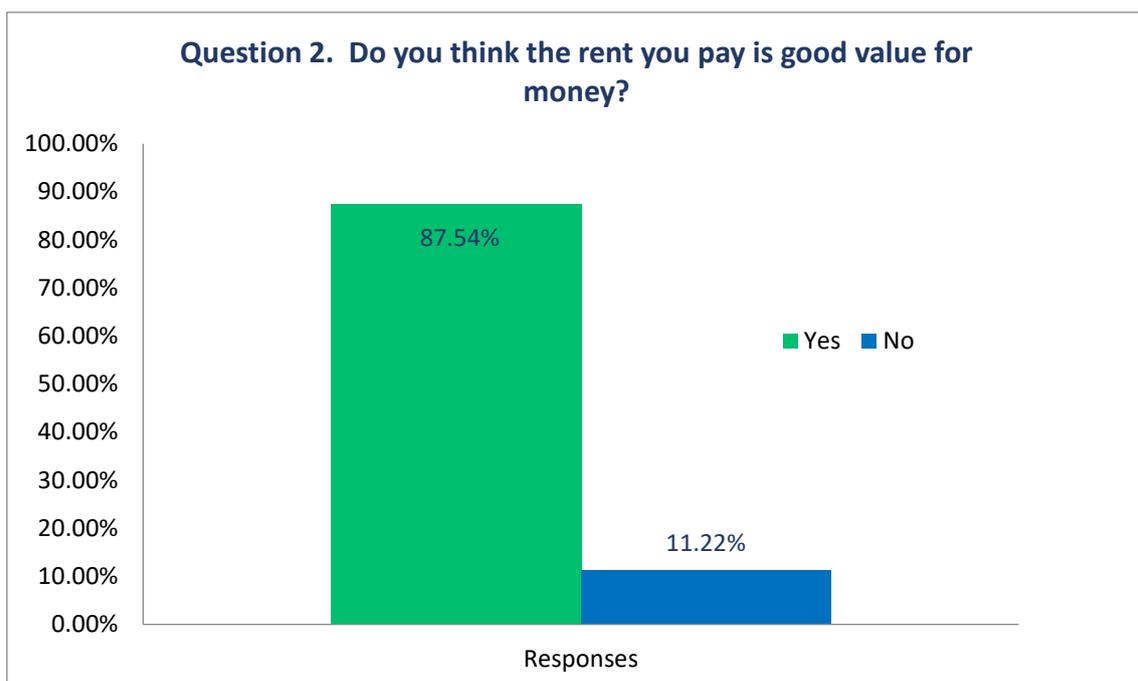
A total of six questions were asked, which tenants could choose to answer yes or no, if they said no, they then had the opportunity to give comments.

A summary of the responses received for each question are shown below (please note that some respondents skipped some questions and didn't answer them all)



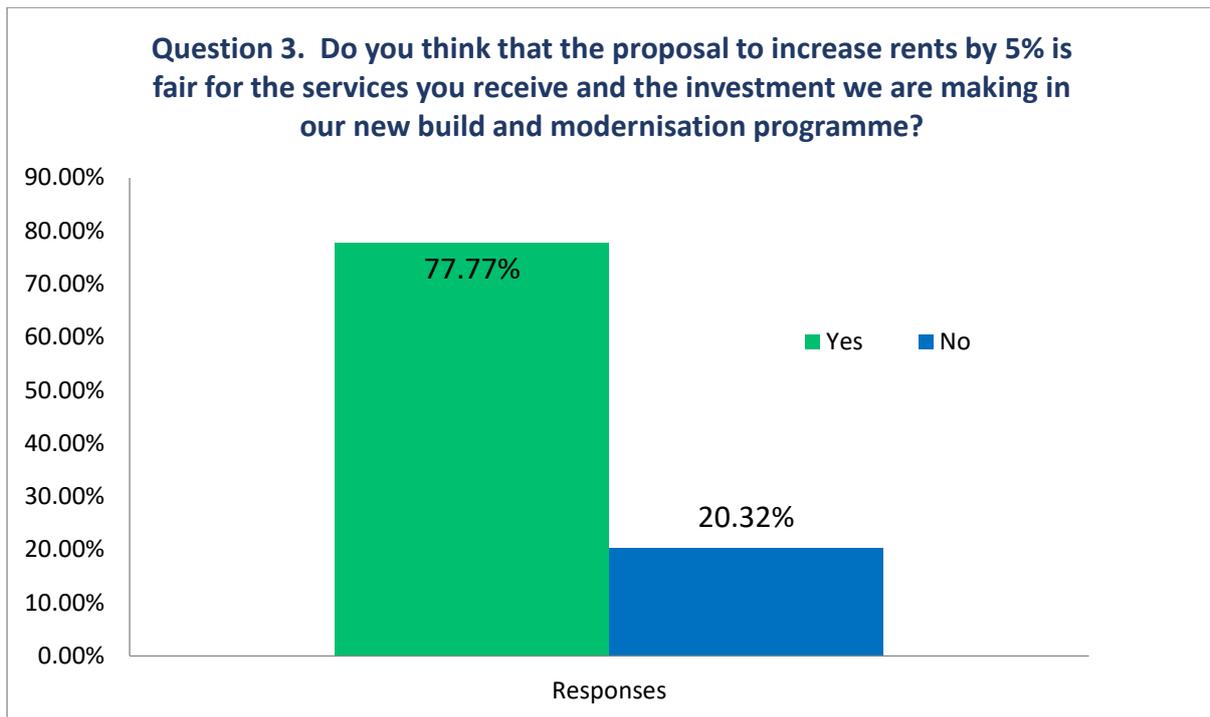
Consultation issues

A total of 71 tenants said that they were not happy with the level of consultation and information they receive. From the comments received, the top three were that rents would increase anyway (40%), comments about other issues (25%) and 19% said that they didn't feel that they were properly consulted.



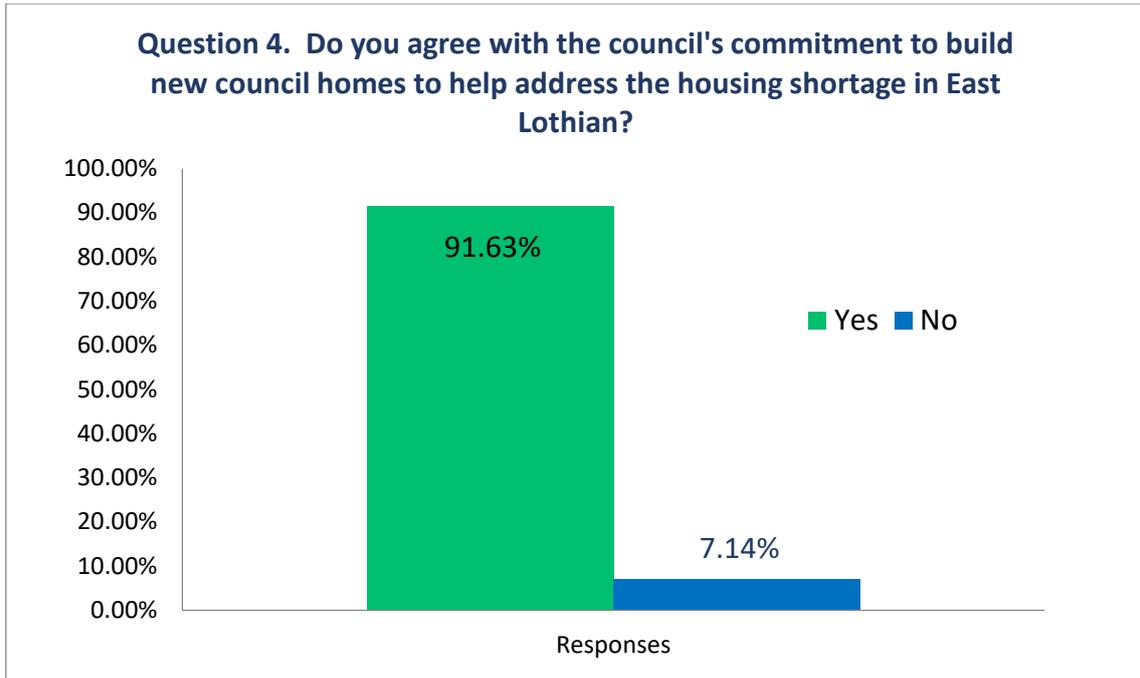
Value for money issues

Generally tenants think that the rent they pay is value for money, however 11% did not agree and 126 comments were received. More than half of those made general comments whilst other comments were about houses not being adequately maintained, the repairs service and modernisation programme.



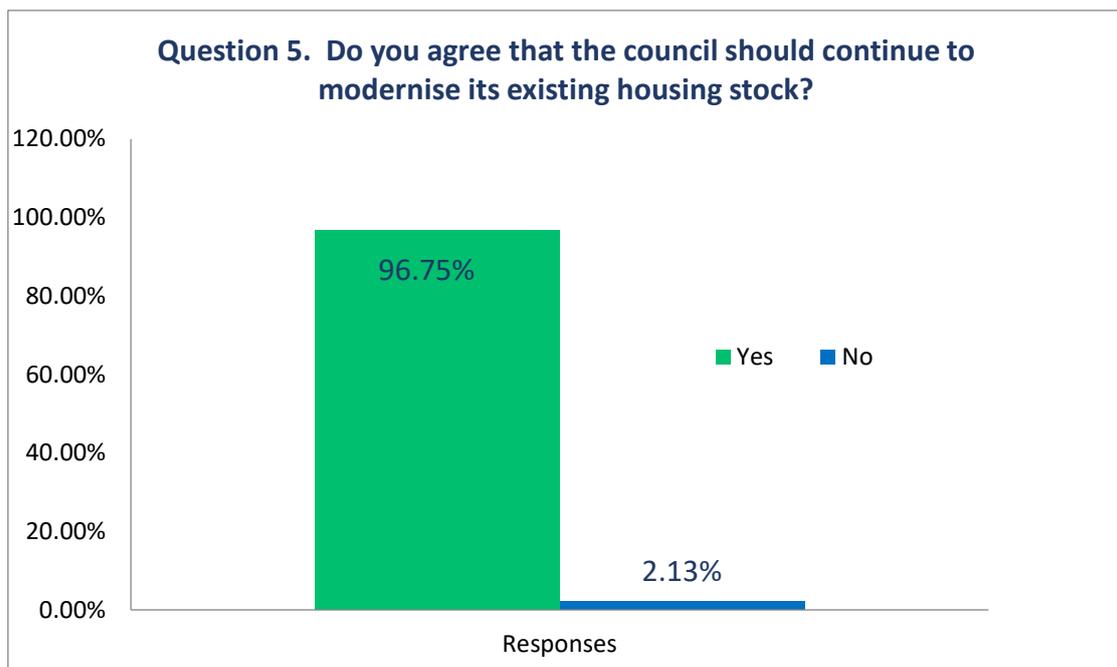
Fair increase

One hundred and ninety five comments were received and 38% of those felt the increase was not fair and it was not aligned with others. Other common themes were in relation to the modernisation programme and the increase being too high.



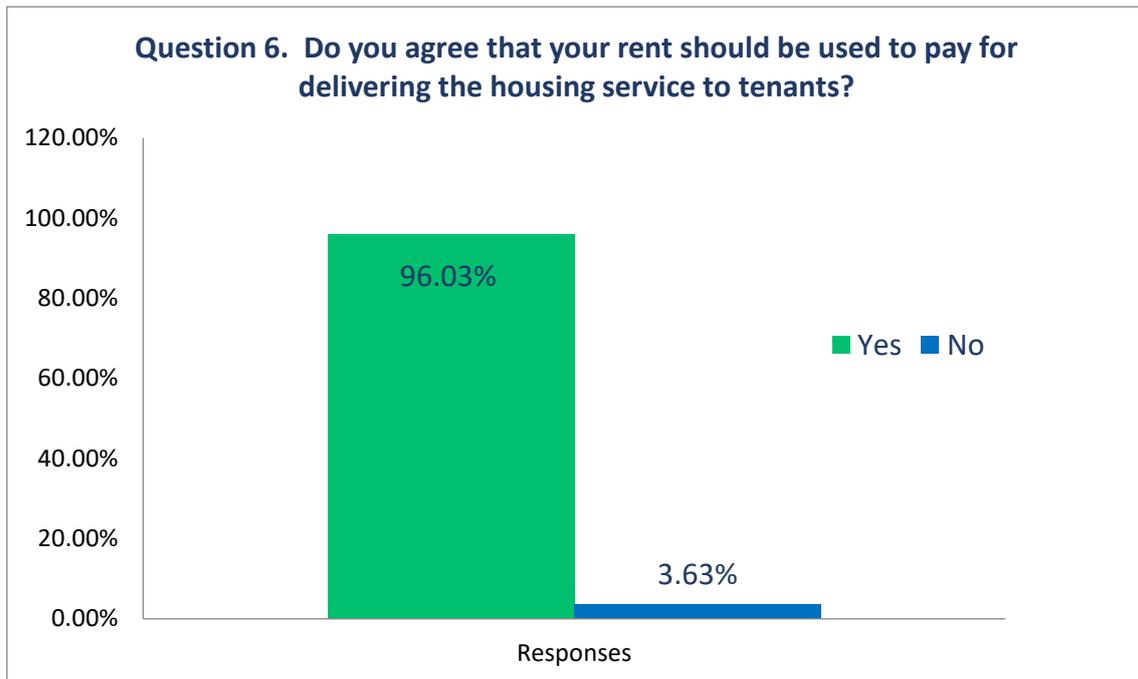
New build commitment

Out of the 115 comments made by tenants, 22 gave a yes response but with the caveat that it must be council houses that are built. 15 tenants made comments in relation to the Allocation Policy and 11 comments were about modernisation. Some of the *other* comments made were in relation to why build, when so many are empty, not sure where these new houses are and that more houses are needed of certain types (i.e. larger properties, one bedroom, bungalows etc.)



Modernisation Issues

The majority of tenants agreed with our commitment to modernisation our properties. Some of the comments (70 comments were received in total) were about the time it takes for upgrades to be done, that there should be a fair system and that only those properties that need it, are upgraded.

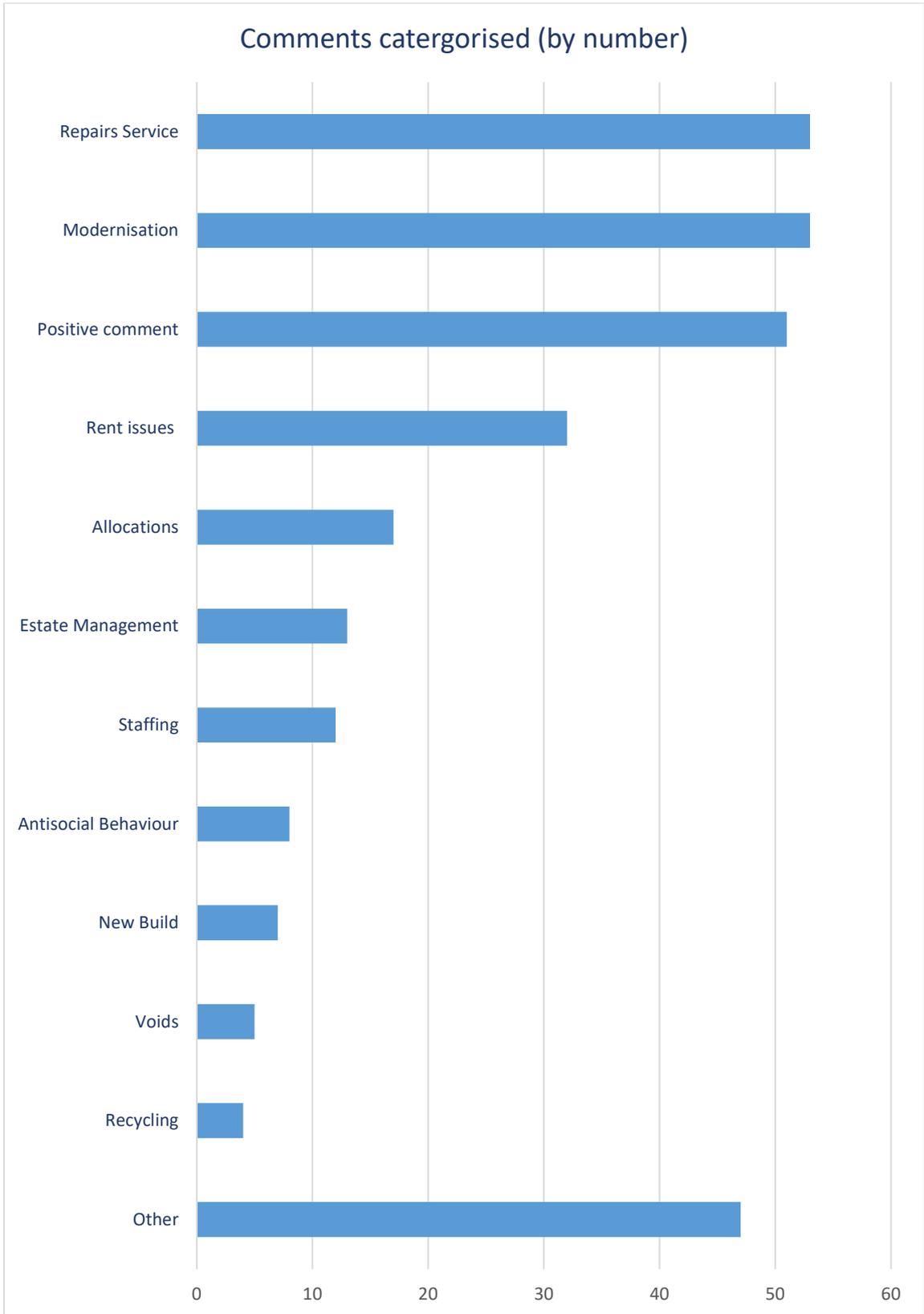


Delivering the housing service

There was a large majority in support of rents paying for the housing service. With the least number of comments being made (47) they mostly related to the service delivery and modernisation programme.

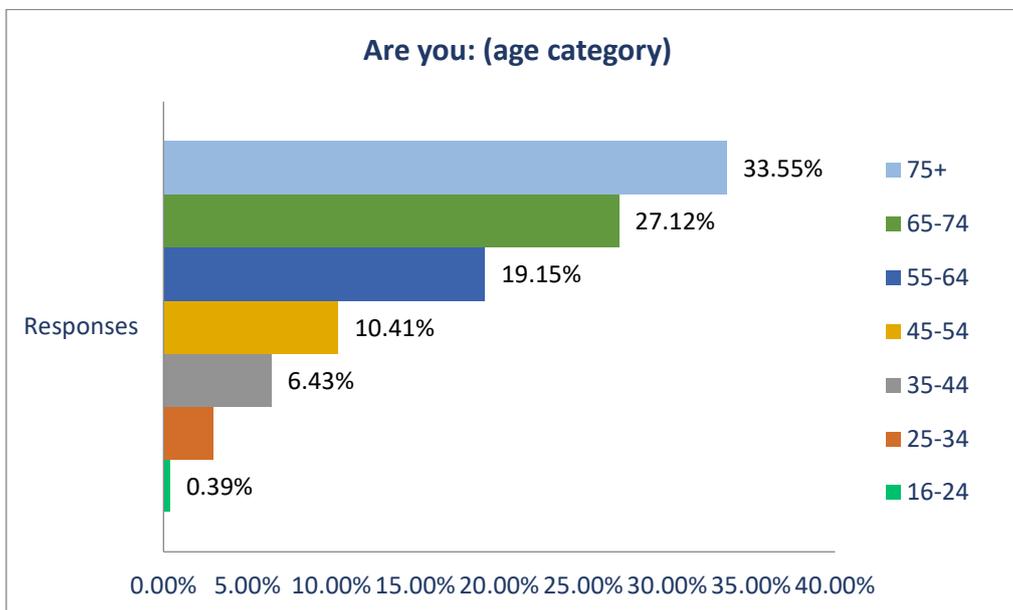
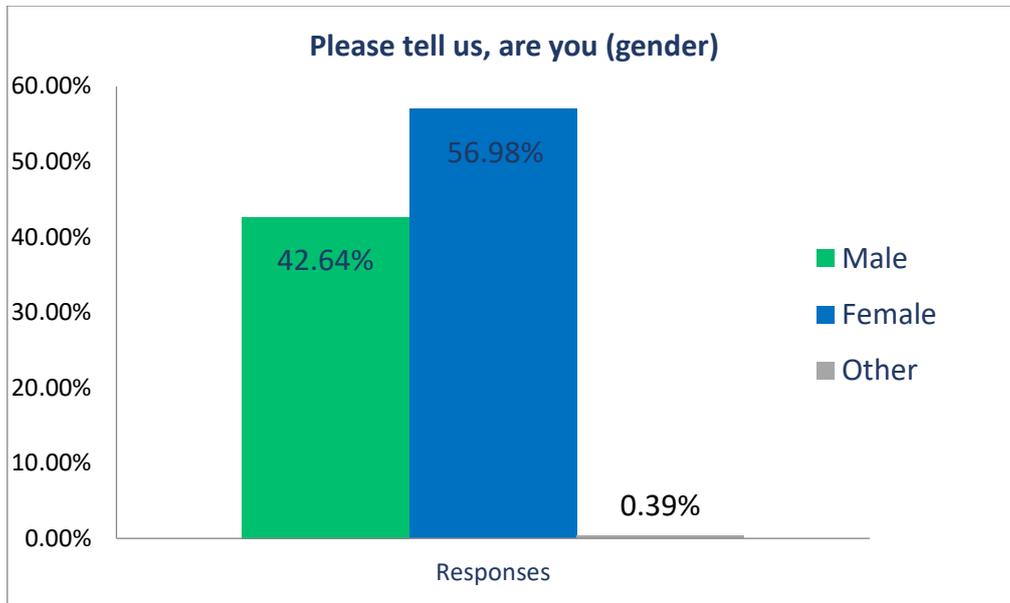
Question 7

The final question asked tenants to tell us how they thought we could improve the service and just over a third of tenants made a comment. These ranged from positive comments about the service, to comments about repairs, modernisation, rent issues and allocations etc. The table below shows a summary:

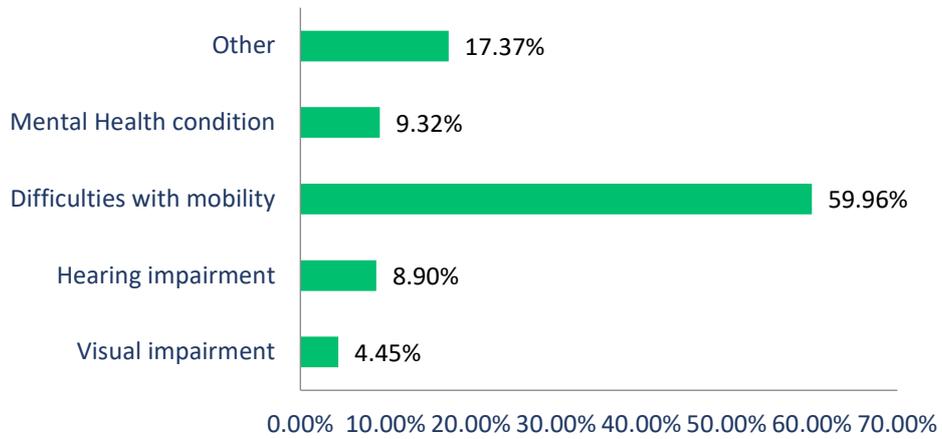


Equalities Monitoring

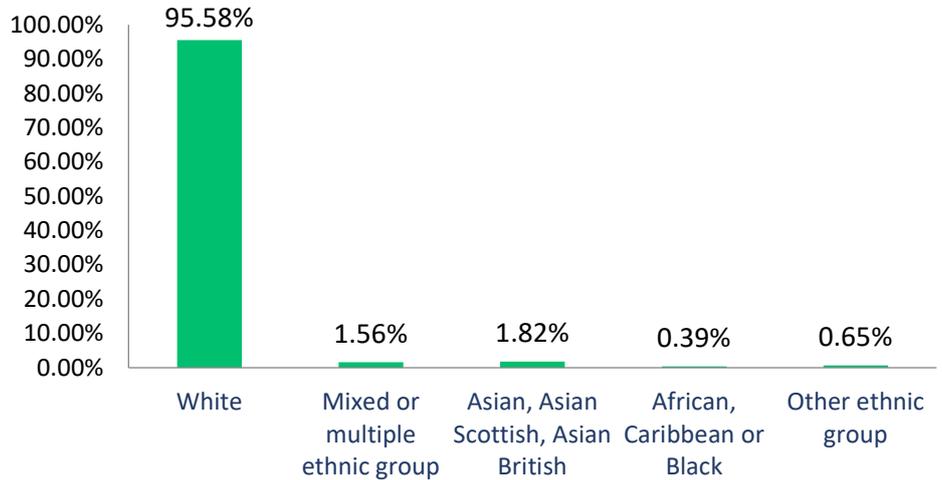
We asked tenants if they could provide us with some information about themselves to help us make sure we are capturing the views of a wide range of tenants and are meeting their needs.



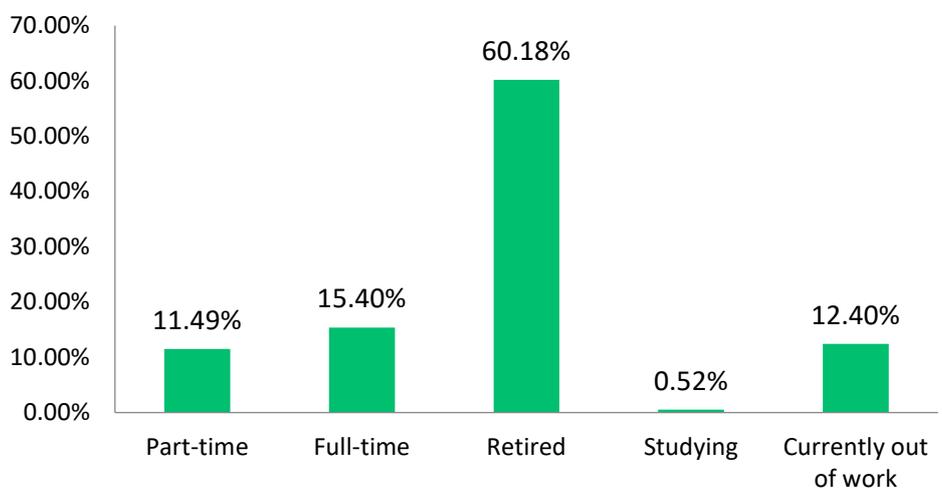
Do you have a health condition or disability which impacts on your day-to-day life?

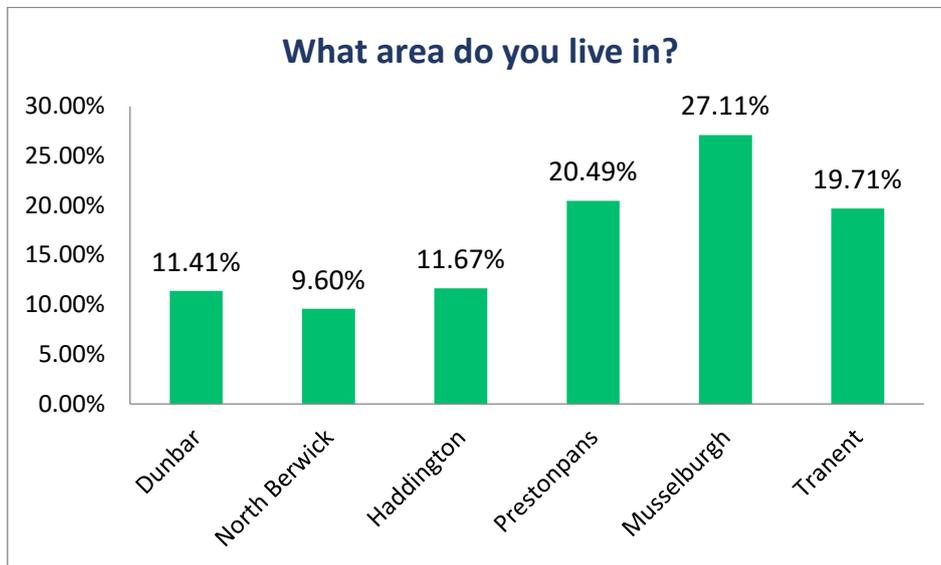
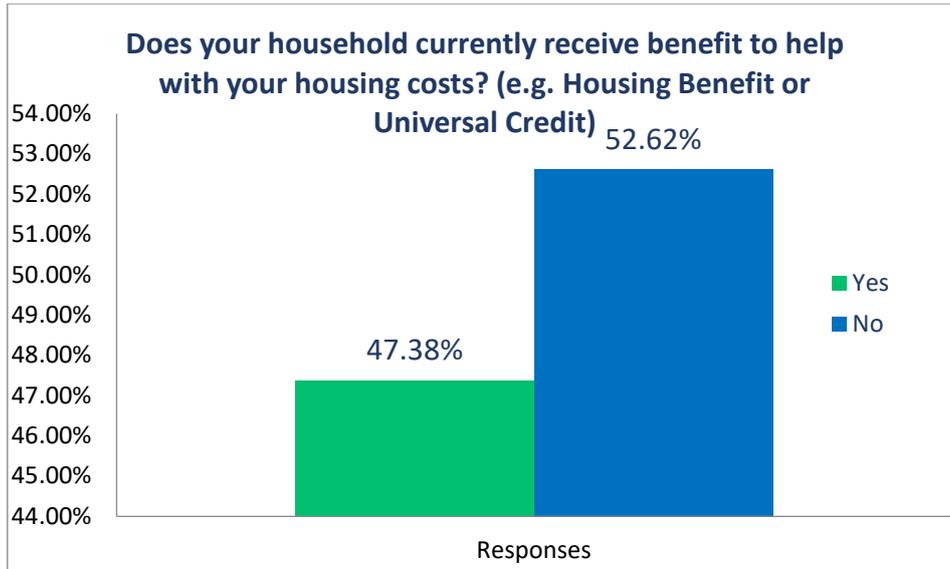


What is your ethnic origin?



Are you currently, in work....





Conclusion

This year's consultation asking tenants for their views on our rent proposals shows that of those who responded, the majority are in favour. Although the overall response rate is slightly down on last year, tenants are still showing their support. They agree that our proposal to increase rents by 5% is fair (78%) and there is also support for our commitment to our new build (92%) and modernisation programmes (97%).

A consultation register will be published as will the integrated impact assessment which was carried out earlier this year and the decision to increase rents will be taken at the council budget meeting in February 2020.