

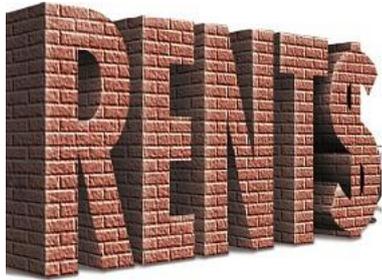


EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

ETF's response to City of Edinburgh Council's Rent Consultation 2022-2023



Edinburgh Tenants Federation Norton Park 57 Albion Road Edinburgh EH7 5QY

☎ 0131 475 2509 ✉ info@edinburghtenants.org.uk 🌐 www.edinburghtenants.org.uk

Edinburgh Tenants Federation is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) SC048236, regulated by the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)

1.0 Background

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in the city of Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO).

ETF's overall aim is to represent tenants throughout Edinburgh, ensuring tenant influence in housing policy and service decisions with the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) and the Scottish Government. ETF's primary objective is to improve housing conditions and standards, along with the quality of life of all CEC tenants.

2.0 Introduction

At our Federation Meeting, held on Wednesday 22nd September 2021, ETF members discussed City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC's) Rent Consultation, specifically:

- Value for money
- The overall investment plan
- Rent Affordability
- Rent Setting
- Prioritising investment.

Eleven delegates, including representatives of seven RTOs participated in a group discussion relating to CEC's Rent Consultation. The feedback has been grouped into themes where possible. Delegates were also given an added option of completing a Zoom poll with the rent consultation questions and this is included in Appendix 1 of the report.

3.0 ETF members' comments

3.1 Do you feel the rent you pay is good value for money?

Overall ETF members feel the rent they pay ranges from fairly poor to poor in terms of value for money.

Repairs

- Repairs service is poor and needs to be reviewed and improved urgently
- Many repairs are not being carried out, with only emergency or urgent repairs being carried out since COVID-19
- There is a lack of personnel, including Plumbers and Electricians available to carry out jobs
- The booking system for repairs needs to be reviewed and improved
- Timescales for repairs are too long
 - 18 months for new front door replacement
 - Condensation in home for over 12 months
 - Dampness in homes not being addressed
- Communications from CEC to tenants when repairs reported are poor as information is often not passed onto tenants

- Quality of repairs carried out is often poor
- Window replacement contract delayed.

Communication

- Officers often give poor advice to tenants when they call for advice, information or to report repairs
- There is a lack of clarity on work and projects being progressed and developed. This is largely due to COVID-19 but many tenants feel they do not receive enough information
- Very little communication between CEC departments.

Improvements to existing homes

- Building new homes should not be the priority, but rather bringing up current homes to high standard that meets the Scottish Government Guidance
- There are a lot of empty homes, particularly in mixed tenure blocks. These need to be brought up to standard and relet first to deal with the housing shortage in Edinburgh.

Tenant satisfaction

- Tenant satisfaction is lower in Edinburgh compared to other landlords and local authorities throughout Scotland.

3.2 Do you support the overall investment plan?

The Plan is ambitious; however, ETF members are not convinced it is being delivered currently or will be in the future. ETF members recognise the need for new council homes for rent and agree these should be built; however, there are concerns as outlined below.

Improvements to existing homes

- Investment in existing homes should be CEC's highest priority, both in terms of repairs and maintenance and improvements
- CEC needs to improve void turnaround timescales and bring long-term voids back into letting quickly and efficiently to increase rental income and availability of homes
- The investment priorities are not what is required to address current and emerging issues. CEC needs to bring current and empty homes up to standard first before building new homes.

Building new homes

- To date only 687 new build CEC homes for rent have been completed from the current plan; this seems quite low in terms of the overall target figure of 5,000
- CEC is building new homes to a Silver Standard, with some to a Gold Standard; ETF members consider all new homes should be built to a Gold Standard and to a Passivhaus Standard to help achieve zero net carbon targets and ensure their long-term viability.

Budgets

- CEC needs to demonstrate to tenants how savings and efficiencies are made and used to offset the need for higher rent increases
- The Scottish Government needs to increase funding to Councils and Housing Associations to meet the zero net carbon targets
- Councillors should be leading the charge at Holyrood to demand more money for Edinburgh, as the local authority's budget has constantly been lowered.

Contributions from owners

- Tenants are subsidising owners in many parts of the city, i.e. where owners do not pay their share of repairs and Stair Cleaning etc.

3.3 To deliver the investment plan, the Council is considering five options for rent increase. Please select the option you prefer:

Proposed rent increase 2022/23	Average fortnightly rent increase	Make all homes net zero carbon
1.8%	+£3.68	By 2038 – eight years longer than original timescale
2%	+£4.08	By 2037 – seven years longer than original timescale
3%	+£6.13	By 2035 – five years longer than original timescale
4%	+£8.17	By 2032 – two years longer than original timescale
5%	+£10.21	By the original timescale of 2030

Rent Affordability

- ETF members consider there should be a zero% rent increase for 2022 / 23 as:
 - CEC rents are already highest Council rents in Scotland
 - Tenants are already struggling to pay rent
 - Other costs are increasing, such as food, fuel etc
 - 64% of tenants receive housing benefit. It is unclear how CEC takes account of the financial circumstances of the other 36% in terms of the increases proposed
 - There has been a significant increase in use and need for food banks, which is a disgrace in the 21st Century.

Energy Efficiency

- ETF members need additional information on CEC's plans for zero net carbon by 2030, 15 years ahead of Scottish Government targets
 - How this will be achieved?
 - How much of it will be achieved via improvements to Council housing?
 - How much tenants will be expected to pay to achieve this?

- Will tenants be paying for it twice through rent and Council Tax payments?
- Who will enforce zero net carbon on private owners and other businesses?

3.4 Some Councils set long term plans for rent charges, which means their rent increases go up by the same percentage every year for an agreed number of years. A longer term strategy can give tenants more certainty and help officers plan services and investments better. Would you support rents being set over the long term in Edinburgh?

Overall ETF representatives believe CEC should not consider a long term rent strategy as we are currently living in volatile financial times. Circumstances could change all of a sudden as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2007, CEC introduced a long term rent strategy to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. However this strategy lasted for a number of years and rents for many CEC tenants became unaffordable.

Setting rents in the short term will mean more dialogue between CEC staff and tenants. ETF representatives believe tenants should be consulted annually and CEC should demonstrate:

- What rents have paid for?
- What savings and efficiencies have been made?
- What targets have been achieved and not achieved?
- Additional grant funding achieved to deliver improvements etc?

3.5 Where do you think we should be prioritising investment?

Priority	No. agree
Repairs and investment	2
Building new Council homes	5
Improvements to existing homes	1
Neighbourhood improvements	3
Other	4

It was felt that initiatives such as ensuring there are more parking spaces and improvements to roads should not come out of the Housing Revenue Account Budget, but rather the General Fund.

4.0 Conclusion

ETF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to CEC's Rent Consultation. This paper will be shared with the Federation's Executive Committee, thereafter the paper will be shared with CEC staff as part of the overall Rent Consultation. ETF looks forward to working with CEC representatives to address the issues raised in the paper.

Appendix 1 Zoom Survey

- 1) Do you feel the rent you pay is good value for money? Is it...**
- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Very Good | 0 |
| Fairly Good | 1 |
| Neither Good nor poor | 0 |
| Fairly Poor | 3 |
| Very Poor | 6 |
- 2) Do you support the overall investment plan?**
- | | |
|------------|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 7 |
| Don't Know | 2 |
- 3) To deliver the investment plan, the Council is considering five options for rent increase. Please select the option you prefer**
- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1.8% | 1 |
| 2% | 0 |
| 3% | 0 |
| 4% | 0 |
| 5% | 0 |
| Other (0% rent increase option) | 9 |
- 4) Would you support rents being set over the long term in Edinburgh?**
- | | |
|------------|---|
| Yes | 0 |
| No | 9 |
| Don't Know | 1 |