



## Wheatley Homes East

2023/24 Rent Setting – Engagement Focus Groups

## Methodology and Sample

Focus groups were completed between the 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022, with a total of 50 Wheatley Homes East (“WH-E”) participants. Recruitment was managed by a Wheatley Group representative, using WH-E Customer Voices – tenants who have expressed an interest in participating in engagement activities –, which proved successful in engaging larger numbers of tenants than in previous years.

Date	Time	RSL	Platform	Number of Attendees
23 November 2022	13:30	WH-E	In person	19
23 November 2022	18:00	WH-E	Online	10
24 November 2022	10:30	WH-E	In person	8
25 November 2022	10:30	WH-E	In person	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 groups</b>		<b>50 participants</b>	

A topic guide for the discussions was designed which focused around understanding tenants’ views on the following:

- Draft rent increase options of 2.5% or over 2.5% in WH-E
- Priorities for services and investment given the above increases
- Implications of a possible rent freeze or very low cap if the Scottish Government was to confirm that this would apply under the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act for 2023/24.

The discussion structure was loosely split into five parts: introduction of the topic; a presentation delivered by the Wheatley Group representative; discussion of the proposed rent increases; implications of and priorities for services and investment given the above increases; views on and implications of a possible rent freeze or very low cap.

Groups took place either in person or online over Zoom, and all groups were moderated by a team of experienced qualitative researchers. For both online and in person sessions, respondents were assured that all information provided would be treated in the strictest confidence; that BMG would not identify any individuals or disclose the personal details of those who took part; and that views stated would not be attributable to individuals. BMG’s independence and impartiality from WH-E and the wider Wheatley Group was also reiterated, to ensure confidence amongst participants when sharing their views.

## Findings Summary

### Preferred rent increase

Wheatley Homes East (“WH-E”) tenants were around twice as likely to opt for an increase of 2.5% than a larger increase.

Option	2.5%	Over 2.5%	None-want a freeze
Figures*	23 (47.9%)	12 (25.0%)	13 (27.1%)

*\* Some participants opted not to give a preferred rent option/decision on the rent freeze*

While many reported that WH-E should not need to charge more than the lower option to deliver the current service levels, some tenants agree that higher options would be better to ensure services perceived as good do not decline in the current climate of inflation and high costs.

Tenants suggested that higher options option would require more information on exactly what this additional money would be spent on rather than categories such as investment and the environment to help make an informed choice.

### Rent Freeze

When discussing the potential for the Scottish Government to apply a freeze or cap on rent across the sector, almost all tenants were against a rent freeze after hearing about the possible reductions in services.

Option	Freeze	Rise
Figures*	1 (2.4%)	41 (97.6%)

*\* Some participants opted not to give a preferred rent option/decision on the rent freeze*

Reasoning behind choices was similar to those around the rent options with decisions that a freeze would not be worth it centred around fears that services would deteriorate. Those that would prefer not to see a cap report that they want to see services maintained. They understand that it is inevitable due to inflation.

For the singular person who was certainly for a rent freeze, they explained that they would not be able to afford an increase.

### Priorities

Repairs are front and centre when it comes to tenant’s priorities. While people have had different experiences individually, as a whole they believe repairs should be a focus. In accordance with this, the call centre is considered very important and helpful in terms of helping resolve repairs, as well as other issues.

Housing Officers have also had differing impacts on residents. Either way, tenants value a ‘personal’ relationship with their housing officers and focusing on maintaining or approving this will have a large impact on tenants’ experiences.

Anti-social behaviour is seen as a priority, either for some tenants currently experiencing it or because tenants know that if they did it could seriously impact their lives. They believe that WH-E should seek to do more to ensure behaviour like this doesn’t arise in communities.

Home improvements that are considered priorities relate to issues like damp and improving heating systems rather than new kitchens/bathrooms, although the latter are still priorities amongst those still waiting.

Tenancy sustainment, advice and guidance, and employability support services are seen as low priority by most tenants. Essentially, this is because they are the least universally experienced ones. Kitchen and bathroom upgrades are also not considered a major priority.