



BMG
success decoded

Wheatley Homes South

2023/24 Rent Setting – Engagement Focus Groups

Methodology and Sample

Focus groups were completed between the 21st to 24th November 2022, with a total of 93 Wheatley Homes South (“WH-S”) participants. Recruitment was managed by a Wheatley Group representative, using WH-S 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
21 November 2022	10:00	WH-S	Online	8
21 November 2022	12:30	WH-S	Online	10
21 November 2022	18:00	WH-S	Online	10
22 November 2022	11:00	WH-S	In person	16
22 November 2022	13:00	WH-S	In person	14
24 November 2022	10:00	WH-S	In person	11
24 November 2022	13:30	WH-S	In person	14
24 November 2022	18:00	WH-S	Online	10
Total		8 groups		93 participants

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

- Draft rent increase options of 3.9%, 4.4% and 4.9% in WH-S
- 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-S and the wider Wheatley Group was also reiterated, to ensure confidence amongst participants when sharing their views.

Findings Summary

Preferred rent increase

Around a third of Wheatley Homes South (“WH-S”) tenants spoken to in focus groups opted for the lower increase of 3.9%. In contrast, over half opted for one of the higher options.

Option	3.90%	4.40%	4.90%	None-want a freeze
Figures*	27 (32.5%)	38 (45.8%)	9 (10.8%)	9 (10.8%)

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

Reasons around choosing the lower option mainly referenced concern about their ability to pay, either on behalf of themselves or others they know.

Those opting for a higher increase explained that having better services would be of greater value than an extra few percent on their rent, and therefore an increase would be worth it. This applies both to those who want existing services to be maintained and those who believe there needs to be improvement.

Rent Freeze

When discussing the potential for the Scottish Government to apply a freeze or cap on rent across the sector, the vast majority of WH-S tenants would prefer not to see a rent freeze.

Option	Freeze	Rise
Figures*	14 (17.5%)	66 (82.5%)

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

Reasoning behind choices was similar to those seen around the rent options. Those who would prefer a freeze/cap cited affordability as the key issue, voicing concern for those who pay rent through their wages.

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.

Priorities

WH-S tenants see improving repairs as a key priority, in particular the communications around this. Tenants want to see WH-S prioritise improvements in these communications such that they only need to make one call to log their repair (to either the Call Centre or housing officer), for them to be informed when the repair will be undertaken and by whom, and for the correct person to turn up at the correct time.

The Call Centre is widely viewed as a high priority, referred to as ‘the first point of contact’, ‘where you get the ball rolling’, and therefore critical, especially for emergency repair and for those who find it difficult to contact their housing officer.

Housing Officers are also widely prioritised because tenants see them as the interface when they *really* need to get something done – which is why it is felt to be so important that they are ‘visible’ and visit tenants in their own homes. Tenants value a ‘personal’ relationship with their housing officers.

Additionally, other priorities revolved around managing Anti-social behaviour and dealing with major home issues.

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-S 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.

Employability and advice services were considered as areas where WH-S should invest less as there are other places to go for such services, and higher priority areas that WH-S should focus money on.