

## The Highland Council

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### TENANT RENT CONSULTATION

#### CO-CHOMHAIRLEMAIL 2025/2026

Every year we ask you for your views on the rent you will pay next year. We are still facing challenging times with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis still being widely felt. Last year it was agreed at Committee that an increase, 7.95%, was required to provide funds to reduce the backlog of 1,500 lower priority repairs (now under 600). This year we are asking you to consider three options and will explain how this will look for you and essential housing services in the year ahead.

It is so important to give us your feedback, even if you receive help with paying your rent through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, we want to hear your views. Completing the survey will help us understand your views and help us to balance rent affordability with having enough money to spend on improving homes and delivering services you value.

In addition to maintaining the homes that we already have, Highland Council are investing in building new homes as we continue to see demand for quality, affordable housing increase. We have also seen a significant increase in costs to maintain communal areas, meaning that some areas have received less attention than in previous years.

The November UK Budget announced a significant increase in national insurance contributions for employers, including in the public sector, and this, along with an increase in staffing costs due to pay awards and an increase in interest rates affecting borrowing costs, have influenced this year's consultation.



The rent consultation will run in Highland until **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December**. The consultation will be mainly digital, though there will be some local pop-up events taking place. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RC2526document>

Tenants also have the option to text their response and there is a dedicated number to call if you want to discuss the proposals in more detail; **07387 234107**. (Please note, this number is dedicated for the rent consultation. It will only be answered between 9am & 5pm Monday to Friday and will close after the consultation ends.)

If you have any questions, you can email us at [tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk) or call us on the number above.

## What happens next?

We will use the feedback received from tenants to prepare a report for the Council's Housing and Property Committee to consider when they set the level of rent and service charges on 29th January for 2025/26.

In addition to completing this survey, we urge you to contact your Local Councillor if you wish to discuss the rent consultation with them. Details can be found here:

[https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20003/committee\\_information/495/highland\\_council/5](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20003/committee_information/495/highland_council/5)

You can also find details of members on the Housing & Property Committee -

[https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20003/committee\\_information/872/housing\\_and\\_property\\_committee/4](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20003/committee_information/872/housing_and_property_committee/4)

We will write to you at least four weeks in advance to notify you of the new rent and service charges coming into effect for 2025/26.

## Rent proposals for 2025/26

### Moladhàrdachadh màil airson 2025/26

**Every tenant pays rent - even if you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to help you do so- and every tenant has a right to have a say about their rent.**

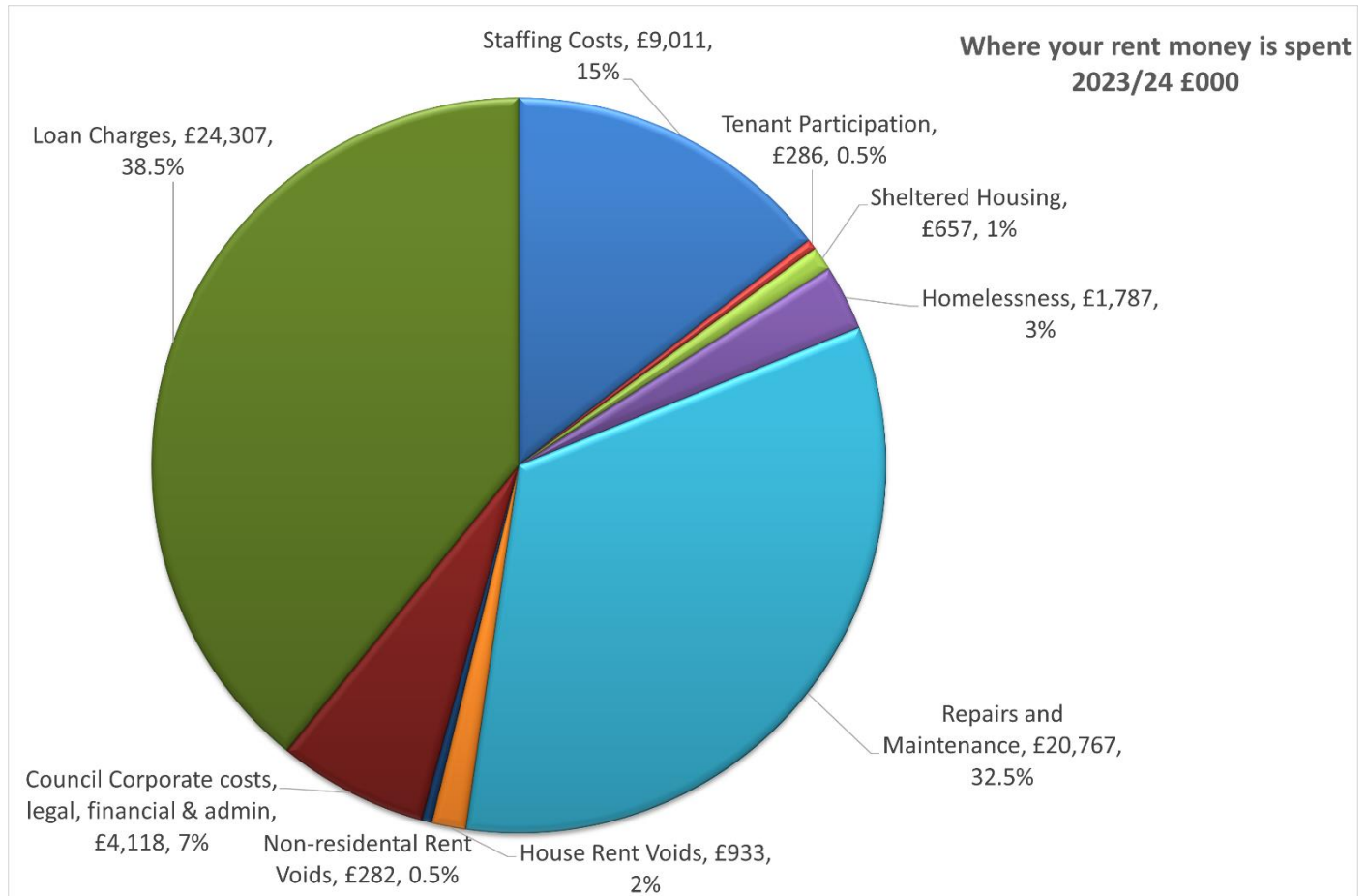
Your rent money pays for the housing services we provide such as day-to-day repairs and estate management. It also pays for loan charges on the borrowing which funds capital improvements such as new heating, insulation and other energy efficiency measures required to meet the Scottish Government's Net Zero targets. Like everything else, the cost of providing these services has increased.

In 2023/24 the total income for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which is made up of tenant rent money and other rents, such as garages, was £62.921million. In the past year you will have seen the impact of increasing costs to deliver services. In this consultation, we will ask you to rate what is most important to you.

A considerable proportion of rent money is spent on repairs and maintenance of existing homes. The cost of delivering these services has significantly increased over the past 12 months. Grass cutting and weed control have been a challenge this summer, affected by increasing costs and recruitment challenges. We recognise that tenant feedback has indicated that we need to invest more in grounds maintenance and external/environmental works in our estates next year.

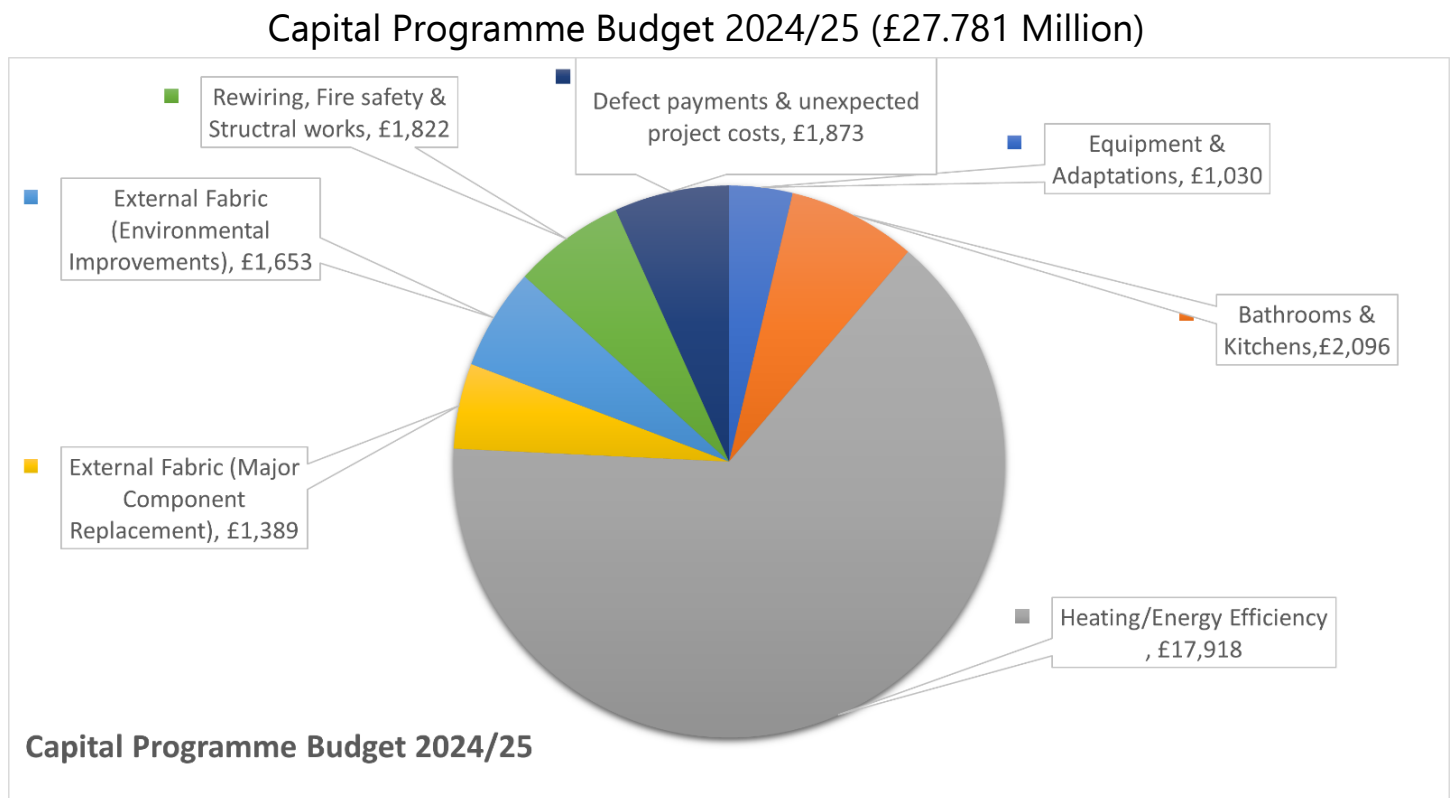
As we continue to bring some of our older homes up to more efficient, modern standards by installing new heating or improving insulation, Highland Council must increase borrowing to meet these costs. We recognise that tenant feedback has indicated that we need to upgrade existing houses with new windows, doors, and insulation next year.

We must also balance the increasing demand for housing across Highland with 8,931 (on 30 September 2024) applicants on the Highland Housing Register. Highland Council continues to build new homes funded partially by borrowing and grant funding from the Scottish Government.



## Capital Programme 2025/26

The Council has a 5-year Housing Revenue Account Capital Plan that sets out our level of investment on improvements. The Capital Programme budget for 2024/25 was set at £27.781 million which included £7.931 million carried forward from last year's budget to maximise some of the new external funding streams becoming available. The estimated budget for categories of improvements is shown below.



Although the capital programme has a strong focus on energy efficiency measures which are designed to improve the efficiency and comfort of our homes and to mitigate the impact of increasing fuel costs, please let us know if there are other priorities which you think the Council should focus on when it comes to capital investment.

### 5-Year Rent Strategy

The Housing & Property Committee have requested that a longer-term rent strategy be included in future consultations. This would provide greater clarity as to what level of income is required over that period to ensure we can continue to deliver our services and meet our duties.

## Your rent options for 2025/26

**Question 1 – Which of the following rent options do you prefer?** We have tried to balance the cost pressures facing the Housing Revenue Account with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on you as tenants. To find out your views we are consulting on 3 options, summarised below:

*\*Increases based on average weekly rate in 2024/25*

### **Option 1: 10% increase**      Average increase of £8.96 in rent per week

The housing budget would increase by £3.2 million over the next year. **This would provide:**

- £219,000 additional income for grounds maintenance. This will mean service standards for weed control and strimming will return to the level of previous summers.
- £289,000 additional income for cyclical maintenance such as external and environmental works (for example guttering and fencing) in our estates.

**Plus:** £2.019 million for additional investment in mainstream capital programmes to provide external wall insulation to an additional 75 houses and new windows and doors to an additional 120 houses, plus £0.673m investment in new build targeted to meet specific housing needs.

### **Option 2: 9% increase**      Average increase of £8.06 in rent per week

The housing budget would increase by £2.527 million over the next year. **This would provide:**

- £219,000 additional income for grounds maintenance. This will mean service standards for weed control and strimming will return to the level of previous summers.
- £289,000 additional income for cyclical maintenance such as external and environmental works (for example guttering and fencing) in our estates.

**Plus:** £2.019 million for additional investment in mainstream capital programmes to provide external wall insulation to an additional 75 houses and new windows and doors to an additional 120 houses.

### **Option 3: 8% increase**      Average increase of £7.17 in rent per week

The housing budget would increase by £1.854 million over the next year. **This would provide:**

- £219,000 additional income for grounds maintenance. This will mean service standards for weed control and strimming will return to the level of previous summers.
- £289,000 additional income for cyclical maintenance such as external and environmental works (for example guttering and fencing) in our estates.

**Plus:** £1.346 million for additional investment in mainstream capital programmes to provide external wall insulation to an additional 50 houses and new windows and doors to an additional 80 houses.

## What will these increases look like?

Size of Property	Current average weekly rent	Option 1 10%	Difference +	Option 2 9%	Difference +	Option 3 8%	Difference +
<b>Bedsit</b>	<b>£66.87</b>	£73.56	£6.69	£72.89	£6.02	£72.22	£5.35
<b>1 Bedroom</b>	<b>£77.30</b>	£85.03	£7.73	£84.26	£6.96	£83.48	£6.18
<b>2 Bedroom</b>	<b>£87.69</b>	£96.46	£8.77	£95.58	£7.89	£94.70	£7.01
<b>3 Bedroom</b>	<b>£98.10</b>	£107.91	£9.81	£106.92	£8.82	£105.95	£7.85
<b>4+ Bedrooms</b>	<b>£118.91</b>	£130.80	£11.89	£129.61	£10.70	£128.42	£9.51

## Question 2 – Your Priorities.

Having considered all the services and home improvements your rent money contributes towards we would like to know what are the most important to you. Choose your top 3:

- Reactive repairs, completed to time scales
- Improving the energy efficiency, heating upgrades, insulation
- Replacing windows & doors
- Upgrading kitchens and bathrooms
- Building new homes to meet continued demand
- Cyclical maintenance, such as external painting & gutter clearing
- Aids & Adaptations to enable you to remain in your home
- Grass cutting and maintaining communal spaces
- Other (please specify)

## Question 3 – Overall, do you feel that your rent is good value for money?

Size of Property	Bedsit	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4+ Bed
<b>HC current average weekly rent</b>	<b>£66.87</b>	<b>£77.30</b>	<b>£87.69</b>	<b>£98.10</b>	<b>£118.91</b>
<b>Scottish National average</b>	<b>£87.17</b>	<b>£93.14</b>	<b>£95.70</b>	<b>£104.19</b>	<b>£114.78</b>

Rents for Highland Council homes remain lower than the national average. Do you think that the rent you pay represents good 'value for money'?

- a. Very good
- b. Quite good
- c. Neither good nor poor
- d. Quite poor
- e. Very poor

You can visit the Scottish Housing Regulators website to compare rents with other social landlords across Scotland. <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/comparison-tool/?landlord=3145>

### **Do you want to get more involved?**

Council tenants, Tenant Value for Money Group, council officers and local councillors work together to consult on and set your rent; Council officers carry out financial planning to set out a balanced budget; tenants indicate their preferences in the rent consultation, and Local councillors agree the budget at the Housing & Property Committee in January 2025. Feedback really lets us know how you feel about the service you receive and identifies areas for improvement. Getting involved in this process is open to any tenant and we always welcome new members to the Value for Money group. Contact the Tenant Participation Team if you would like to find out the different ways you can get involved, email [tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk)

### **Are you struggling to pay your rent?**

If you are having difficulties paying your rent, we can help you. In the first instance please contact your housing officer.

The Welfare Support Team can advise you on your current circumstances and help you to maximise your income contact **Telephone:** [0800 090 1004](tel:0800 090 1004)

**Email:** [welfare.support@highland.gov.uk](mailto:welfare.support@highland.gov.uk)

## Your Views Matter

We want to know three things:

1. Which rent increase do you prefer?
2. Your priorities for how your rent is spent.
3. Are the rents charged by Highland Council value for money?



## Have Your Say



**We want to hear what you think.**

**You can tell us using one of the methods below**

- **Online:** by following the Survey Monkey Link below or use the QR code <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RC2526document>
- **By Text: Q1: Option 1 or Option 2 or Option 3**  
**Q2: a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h or i (specify other)** selecting your top 3 choices from the list  
**Q3: Option a, b, c, d, or e** to "Do you think the rent you pay is good value for money?"  
to **07387 234107**
- **By email:** [tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk)

Please send us your response by **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December**

- **If you are unable to respond using any of these options, please call 07387 234107 to speak to someone about the Rent Consultation.** (This number will be open for the duration of the consultation and will only be answered between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday. If the line is busy, please leave your details and we will get back to you.)

**As a thank you for participating in this consultation you will be entered into a prize draw to win a £50 shopping voucher!**