

Scottish Housing Regulator

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users

5th Year Report



Lead author: Chris Thornton
March 2018

CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| | SUMMARY FINDINGS..... | i |
| 1 | INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| | Background..... | 1 |
| | 2017/18 Programme..... | 1 |
| 2 | SAFETY OF TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS..... | 2 |
| | What tenant safety means to you..... | 2 |
| | Landlord communication on tenant safety..... | 3 |
| | Tenants' experience of safety issues..... | 5 |
| 3 | SHR REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION..... | 8 |
| | Awareness of and views on SHR reporting approach..... | 8 |
| | Feedback on SHR publications..... | 10 |
| | How prefer to engage with information..... | 11 |
| 4 | USING PERFORMANCE REPORTING..... | 13 |
| | Landlords' performance reporting..... | 13 |
| | Using performance reporting..... | 15 |
| 5 | RENT AFFORDABILITY..... | 18 |
| | Experience of difficulty paying rent..... | 18 |
| | Future affordability..... | 19 |
| 6 | USERS OF HOMELESS SERVICES..... | 20 |
| | Accessing and engaging with homeless services..... | 20 |
| | Temporary accommodation..... | 22 |
| | Settled accommodation..... | 23 |
| | Care experienced people..... | 24 |
| | APPENDIX: PANEL MEMBERSHIP..... | 26 |

SUMMARY FINDINGS

The National Panel was established in 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The Panel fits into SHR's wider approach to communication and engagement with users of social landlord services, and in this way helps to shape SHR's focus in its role as regulator of social landlords. Panel members are volunteers and the Panel remains open to new recruits on an ongoing basis, with membership standing at 422 at the time of reporting.

This report brings together findings across the main exercises conducted with the National Panel in its fifth year: (i) a full survey of Panel members, (ii) in-depth qualitative discussions with Panel members, and (iii) engagement with users of homeless services. These exercises were used to explore views around tenant safety, SHR reporting and communication, usefulness of landlord performance information, rent affordability, and experience of homeless services.



Tenant safety

This theme considered views on tenant safety in the home. This included key aspects of safety, information provided by landlords around tenant safety, and members' personal experience and awareness of tenant safety issues. Key points of note are:

- ❖ Fire, electrical and gas safety are the most important aspects of safety for tenants - a large majority of respondents rated each of these as important.
- ❖ Most respondents have received tenant safety information from their landlord in the last year; around a third have never received tenant safety information. The majority of respondents had found tenant safety information useful, particularly where this had been provided as part of a safety check or visit.
- ❖ Half of respondents identified safety issues where they would like more information from their landlord. Electrical, fire and gas safety were amongst the most commonly mentioned areas.
- ❖ A third of respondents had experienced safety problems or concerns in the last 2 years. Gas, electrical and fire safety concerns were the most common problems.
- ❖ Around a quarter of respondents have reported safety problems or concerns to their landlord, including a broad range of specific concerns.
- ❖ Survey respondents identified a number of potential barriers to tenants reporting safety problems or concerns – although most would report any future concerns.



SHR reporting and communication

This theme considered Panel members' awareness of views on the Regulator's approach to reporting and communication. Key points of note are:

- ❖ Two thirds of respondents have seen or used SHR publications, most commonly SHR landlord reports or the National Report on the Charter.
- ❖ Panel members see production of these publications as an important part of SHR's work. This is particularly the case for landlord reports. Qualitative feedback also highlighted SHR's impartiality as adding value to landlord performance reporting.
- ❖ Respondents expressed strong interest in SHR publishing information on RSL costs, particularly on RSL repair/maintenance and staffing costs.
- ❖ Panel members use a range of means of accessing information from other organisations, including a mix of printed and electronic options. Summary newsletters or written reports/articles are generally seen as the most engaging forms of publication.



Using performance information

This theme sought feedback on members' awareness and interest in landlord performance reporting, and examples of how individuals have used this performance information. Key points of note are:

- ❖ A large majority of respondents had received performance information from their landlord in the last 2 years – an increase on findings from the 2015/16 survey. Information on annual rent increases and speed of repairs response is the most common.
- ❖ Panel members show relatively broad interest in landlord performance information, particularly on rent increases, repairs response, response to antisocial behaviour, and how well landlords keep tenants informed.
- ❖ More than half of Panel members are satisfied with the quality and accuracy of their landlord's performance reporting, although there remains a fifth who are dissatisfied.
- ❖ A fifth of survey respondents had used performance information to help judge the quality of their landlord's services, or when discussing services with their landlord. Around three quarters of respondents would be interested in doing this in the future.



Rent affordability

This theme focused on Panel members' experience of rent affordability, and views on the likely future affordability of their rent. Key points of note are:

- ❖ Most respondents indicated that they have never had difficulties affording their rent, but there remained a third who had experienced problems.
- ❖ Two thirds of respondents expressed concerns around potential future affordability. This included concerns about future rent increases, changes to income, and benefit changes.
- ❖ The incidence of affordability concerns was similar across key respondent groups, but there was some variation linked to receipt of Housing Benefit in the source of concerns. Those in receipt of Housing Benefit were more likely to be concerned about benefit changes, and those not in receipt of Housing Benefit were more likely to be concerned about rent increases or income changes.



Users of homeless services

Qualitative fieldwork involved in-person individual interviews with 49 current and recent users of statutory homeless service users. This included those who had newly completed a homeless assessment, those in temporary accommodation, and those who had been re-housed through the homeless system. Key points of note are:

- ❖ Previous experience of homeless services had a significant impact on individuals' experience with services. This was in terms of understanding how to access services, but also clarity on how their application would progress. Participants were generally positive about their initial engagement with homeless services. The speed with which they were able to secure accommodation was a significant aspect in this positive experience. Clarity on how their homeless application would be processed is also important for the quality of participants' experience when accessing homeless services.
- ❖ The importance of service staff in helping participants to navigate homeless services was also highlighted by participants. This included a particular focus on support staff as a consistent point of contact throughout individuals' experience with homeless services
- ❖ Participants were varied in the time they had taken to access temporary accommodation. Few felt that their wait for temporary accommodation had been longer than expected, but uncertainty during this wait was highlighted as having a negative impact for individuals' emotional wellbeing. Participants referred to a range of challenges around adjusting to temporary accommodation – and to the role of practical and emotional support in overcoming these challenges.
- ❖ Individuals were generally positive on the extent to which they had been kept informed of their progress during their wait to access settled accommodation, although some had felt that the offer of accommodation had “come out of the blue”. Feedback highlighted the importance of the transition into settled accommodation, and the role of practical and emotional support for this transition and sustaining their tenancy over the longer term.

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 The National Panel was established in 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The National Panel fits into SHR's wider approach to communication and engagement with users of social landlord services, and is used to gauge priorities and experiences – and in this way helps to shape SHR's focus in its role as regulator of social landlords.
- 1.2 As a mechanism to gather the views of tenants and other service users, a significant element of the Panel's value is as an accessible group of engaged individuals willing to participate in Panel exercises. As such the focus for the Panel is on ensuring a good cross-section of tenants and other service users. This is a key element of ongoing promotion and recruitment work around the Panel which seeks to ensure the Panel has a broad reach in terms of the size of the membership, representation of specific population subgroups, and representation of tenants not involved in other participatory activities (more than three quarters of Panel members are not involved in RTOs).
- 1.3 Some members have stepped down from the Panel over the last year, and some new members recruited, such that there has been a small net loss of members during the year. Panel membership stands at 422 at the time of reporting. A profile of the current Panel membership is appended to this report.

2017/18 Programme

- 1.4 This report brings together findings across the main exercises conducted with the National Panel in its fifth year. The work programme this year included a mix of building on themes considered through previous years, and new topics currently being considered by the Regulator. This involved three main engagement strands:
- **A full Panel survey** issued in January 2018 and providing postal, web and telephone response options (overall response rate of 51%).
 - **In-depth qualitative engagement** with Panel members via a mix of telephone interview and discussion group approaches to explore themes emerging through the survey in more detail (involving a total of 80 members).
 - **Interview-based research with a total of 49 homeless service users** involved through visits to homeless service access points (39 interviews), interviews with 5 existing Panel members, and interviews with 5 care leavers with experience of homeless services arranged through Who Cares? Scotland. This included those who had newly completed a homeless assessment, those in dispersed temporary accommodation, those in supported accommodation, and those who had been rehoused through the homeless system.
- 1.5 This report integrates both quantitative (i.e. survey results) and qualitative findings (i.e. from in-depth engagement work) to provide a rounded view of participants' views and experiences.

2 SAFETY OF TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS

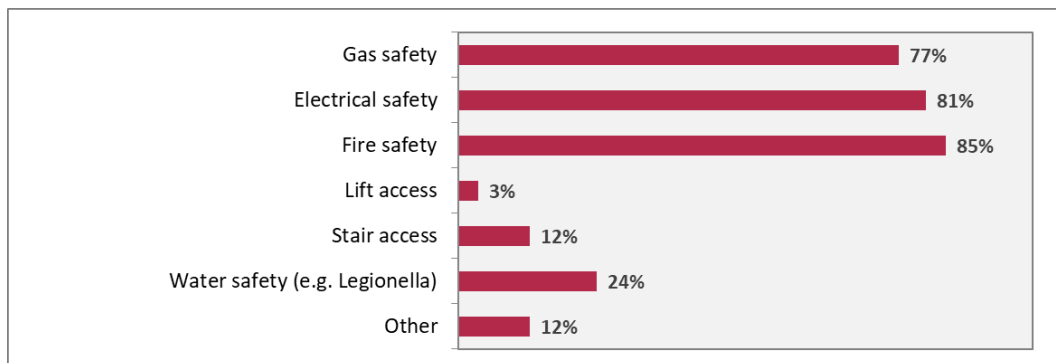
2.1 This section considers views on tenant safety in the home. This includes the key aspects of safety for tenants, information provided by landlords around tenant safety, and Panel members' personal experience and awareness of tenant safety issues. Findings presented in this section bring together survey results and detailed qualitative feedback.

What tenant safety means to you

2.2 The survey first asked Panel members about what they think are the most important aspects of tenant safety in the home. Respondents were asked to select up to three priorities. As Figure 1 shows, some clear priorities emerged.

2.3 **Fire, electrical and gas safety are the most important aspects of safety for tenants;** a large majority of respondents selected each of these (77% to 85%). There was not significant difference in views across Council and RSL tenants, or linked to property type and age. However, some qualitative respondents noted that gas, fire and electrical safety may be more of a concern for those in older properties and specific property types (such as high-rise properties). In contrast, water safety was the next most commonly mentioned aspect of tenant safety and was selected by only a quarter of respondents (24%).

Figure 1: The most important aspects of tenant safety for Panel members



2.4 Survey respondents and qualitative participants also identified a number of “other” safety issues that are important for tenants. Some referred to specific aspects of the broader safety issues listed at Figure 1 above; for example carbon monoxide, fire access for tenants on upper floors, risk of scalding from the hot water supply, and problems with waste water and sewage. A small number of other home safety issues were also mentioned including pest control, lift and stair access (including wheelchair accessibility), and unstable external boundary walls. Several participants referred to safety for vulnerable tenants and those with mobility needs as a specific priority – including for example accessibility, risk of falls in the home, and the importance of secure access.

2.5 Most survey respondents and qualitative participants also referred to wider safety and security concerns such as crime and antisocial behaviour. These points were raised in addition to safety in the home, although some also referred to home security issues (such as secure entry systems, quality/maintenance of doors and external lighting) in the context of wider safety concerns. To some extent, the focus on these broader security issues appeared to be linked to concerns that there is scope for landlords to do more in relation to community safety. Indeed, community safety in their local neighbourhood was the first thing that some participants mentioned when asked to consider tenant safety. In contrast, most appeared to be satisfied with compliance with standards for home safety.

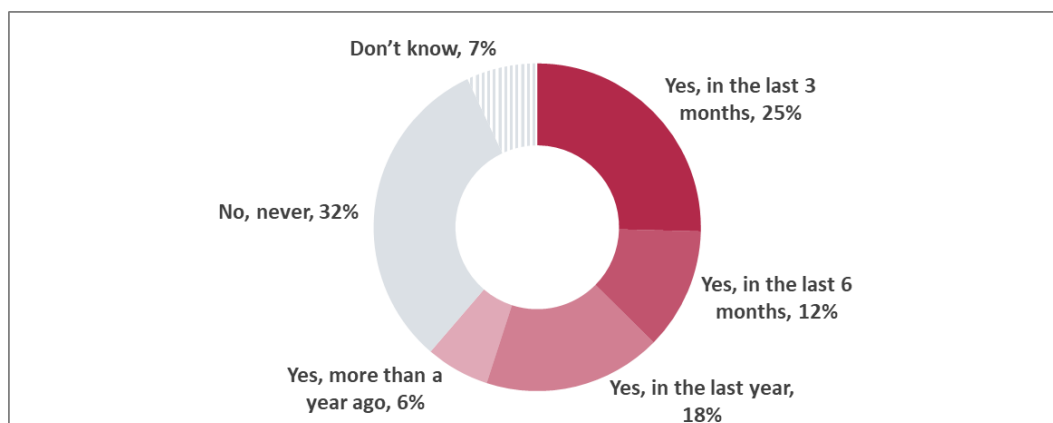
Landlord communication on tenant safety

2.6 Panel members were also asked about any information they have received from their landlord around tenant safety.

2.7 **Most respondents have received tenant safety information from their landlord;** as Figure 2 over the page shows, 61% indicated this and most of these had received information in the last year, and around a third have never received tenant safety information from their landlord.

2.8 Survey respondents and qualitative participants were also given the opportunity to provide more detail on the types of safety information they have received, and the extent to which they had found this useful. Key points of note from these respondents are highlighted below.

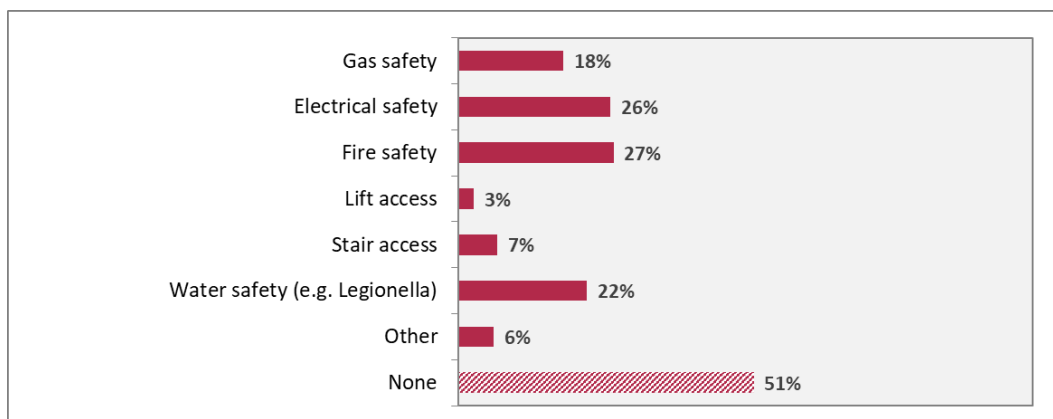
- Types of information received. Gas safety was the most commonly mentioned area of tenant safety - this included reference to annual boiler servicing, and provision and testing of carbon monoxide alarms. A number of respondents also mentioned receiving fire information including fire alarm checks and specific fire safety advice following the Grenfell Tower fire - some also referred to fire safety checks from the Fire & Rescue Service. A small number of respondents also mentioned electrical safety (primarily appliance testing), water safety (including water safety checks), and other safety information such as emergency contacts.
- Usefulness of tenant safety information. The majority of respondents providing comment had found tenant safety information useful. Views appeared to be particularly positive where information had been provided as part of a visit - for example gas servicing, electrical checks or fire safety visits. In relation to printed or other materials provided to tenants, some commented that information was “just common sense” but nevertheless appeared to support landlords providing safety information to tenants.

Figure 2: Whether had communication from landlord on tenant safety

2.9 **Half of respondents identified safety issues where they would like more information from their landlord.** Electrical, fire and gas safety were amongst the most commonly mentioned areas where respondents would like more information – as noted earlier, these are the areas for which where respondents are most likely to have received information. It is also notable that around a fifth of respondents would like more information on water safety.

2.10 Panel members were asked through the survey and qualitative discussions to provide more detail on the types of safety issues where they would like more information from their landlord. Key points of note are highlighted below.

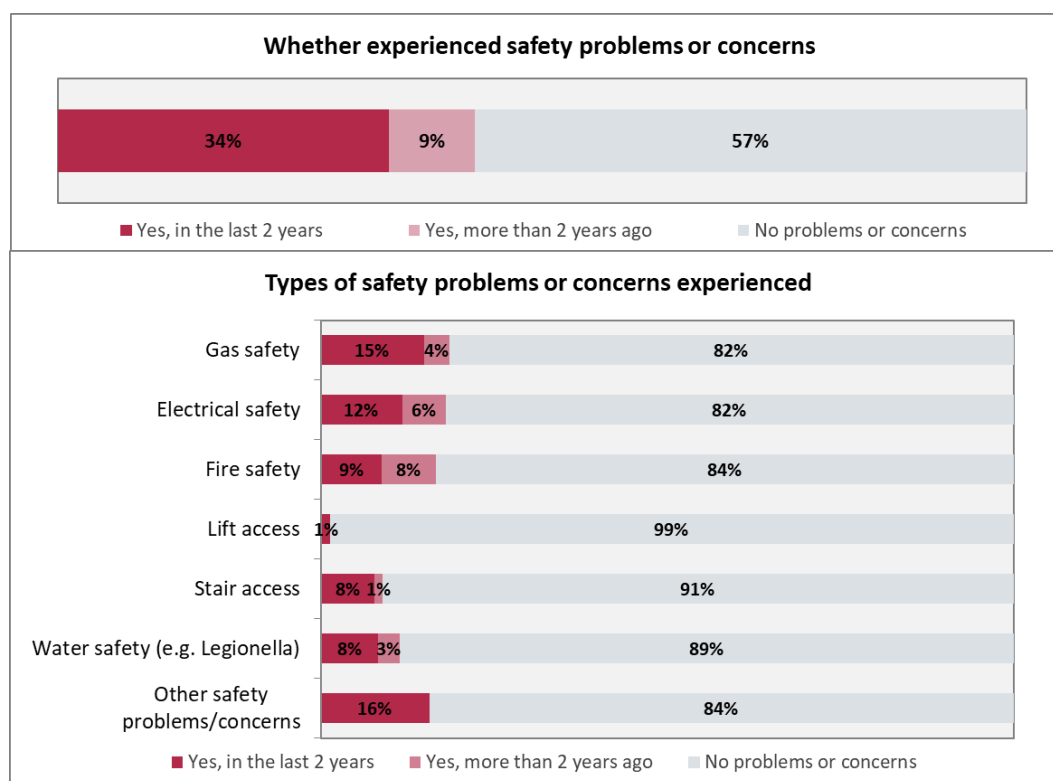
- Panel members referred to specific incidents or problems that influenced their interest in safety information. This included flooding incidents that raised electrical safety concerns, disrepair affecting the quality of water supply, and concerns regarding the age of electrical and heating systems.
- Panel members referred to other specific forms of tenant safety information, including information specific to those with physical disabilities or other particular needs, information on fire safety for those on upper floors, and contact details in the event of a home emergency.
- A number of participants referred to community safety-related information, including concerns around lighting to stairs.

Figure 3: Safety issues where Panel members would like more information from their landlord

Tenants' experience of safety issues

- 2.11 The survey also asked Panel members about their personal experience of safety issues. **Around 2 in 5 respondents had experienced safety problems or concerns (43%)**, including 34% who had experienced these in the last 2 years. This incidence of safety concerns was broadly similar across most respondent groups, and for example did not vary dependent on property type. However, those living on the first floor or higher, those aged 45+ and those without a physical disability appear more likely to have experienced safety concerns.
- 2.12 **Gas, electrical and fire safety concerns were the most common** – up to a fifth of respondents had experienced each of these (17-19%). In addition, around 1 in 10 had experienced concerns about water safety. Respondents also mentioned “other” safety problems or concerns, including concerns about step and stairway access, problems with waste water, pest control, and security access concerns.

Figure 4: Panel members' experience of safety problems or concerns

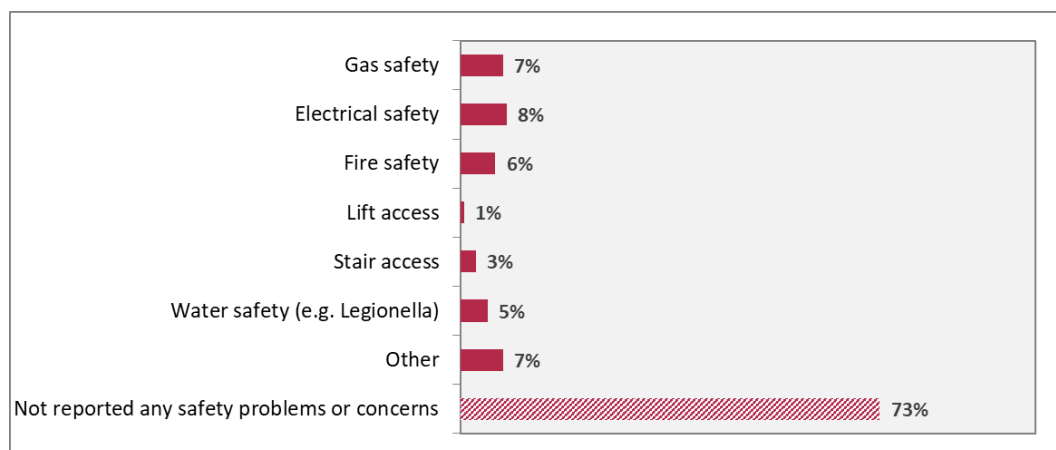


- 2.13 As Figure 5 over the page shows, **around a quarter of respondents have reported safety problems or concerns to their landlord (27%)**. The profile of safety concerns that respondents have reported to their landlord is broadly similar to the range of problems they have experienced (see Figure 4 above). For example, the safety concerns that respondents are most likely to have reported to their landlord relate to gas, electrical and/or fire safety – these are also the problems that respondents are most likely to have experienced.

2.14 In terms of the specific safety concerns mentioned by Panel members, these included:

- Gas safety concerns including gas leaks in tenants' home or the local area, concerns around unsafe gas meters, problems with gas boilers, and an out of date carbon monoxide monitor.
- Electrical safety concerns included damaged electrical sockets, tripping fuses, exposed wiring and electrical problems caused by water leaks.
- Fire safety concerns included a fire in a neighbour's home, and concern about fire escape from an upper floor property. The latter included some qualitative participants referring to the Grenfell Tower fire, although concerns appeared to relate primarily to escape from fire for multi-storey properties, rather than specifically to fire risks associated with cladding.
- Water safety concerns included problems with waste water and sewage, unsanitary plumbing, and risk of scalding from the hot water supply.
- Other safety concerns reported to landlords included pest control, broken lifts, problems with stair access, and unstable external boundary walls.

Figure 5: Whether Panel members have reported safety problems or concerns to their landlord

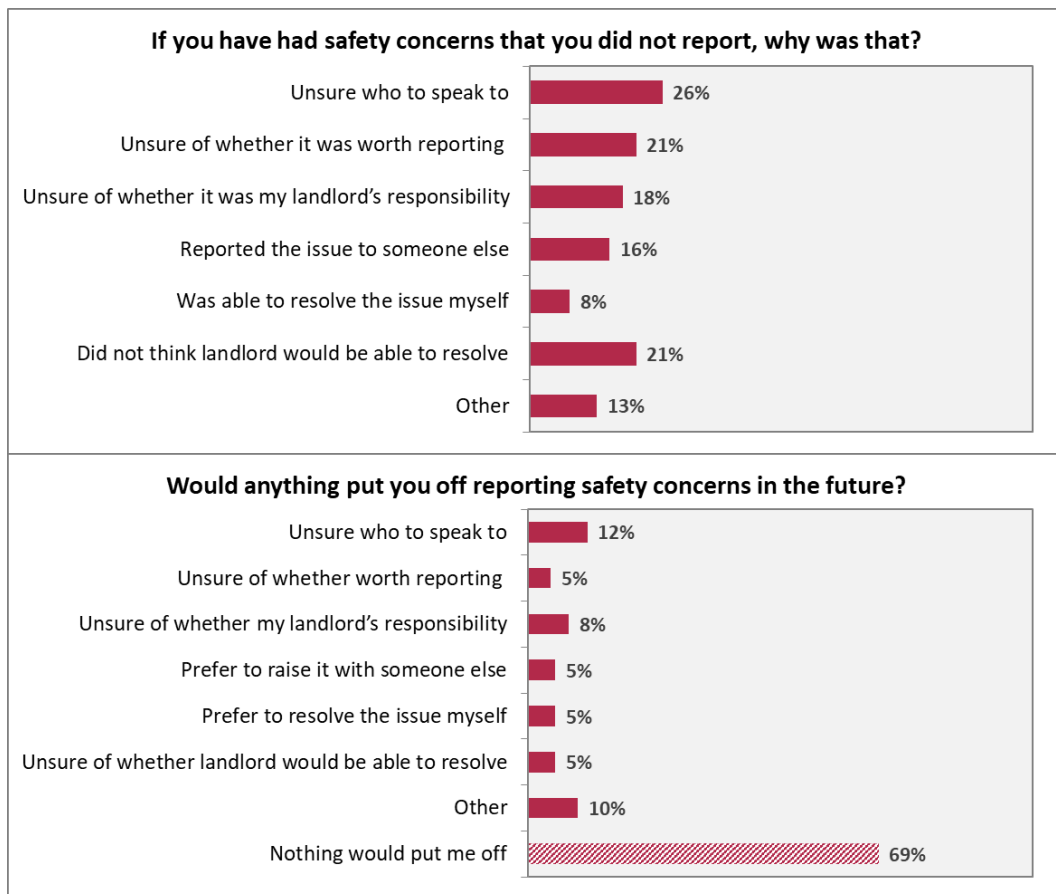


2.15 A small number of survey respondents provided further detail on their experience of reporting safety concerns to their landlord. Views expressed appeared to be closely linked to whether these respondents felt that the problem had been resolved. Some respondents described their landlord's response as being prompt and effective in resolving their safety concern, but most of those who felt that the problem was ongoing described their landlord's response as poor. These respondents included some who indicated that their landlord had yet to respond, some who felt that the initial response had not addressed the problem or had only provided a temporary fix, and some who felt the response had been delayed.

2.16 **Most survey respondents would report any future safety concerns to their landlord, but some potential barriers to tenants reporting concerns were identified.** As Figure 6 below indicates, some respondents had chosen not to report safety concerns to their landlord, while others may be put off reporting any future concerns:

- The small number of respondents who had chosen not to report safety concerns indicated that this was most likely to be related to a lack of clarity of how to do so, whether it was worth reporting, or whether it was the landlord's responsibility. Some respondents had also been unsure of whether their landlord would be able to resolve the issue, and/or had chosen to report the problem to someone else.
- Around a third of respondents might be put off reporting any future safety concerns to their landlord. These respondents referred to a range of potential barriers to reporting their concerns, the most common being a lack of clarity around who to speak to and who has responsibility for the issue.

Figure 6: Potential barriers to Panel members reporting safety problems or concerns



3 SHR REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION

3.1 This section considers Panel members' awareness of views on the Regulator's approach to reporting and communication. This included feedback on specific SHR publications, and wider preferences to accessing information.

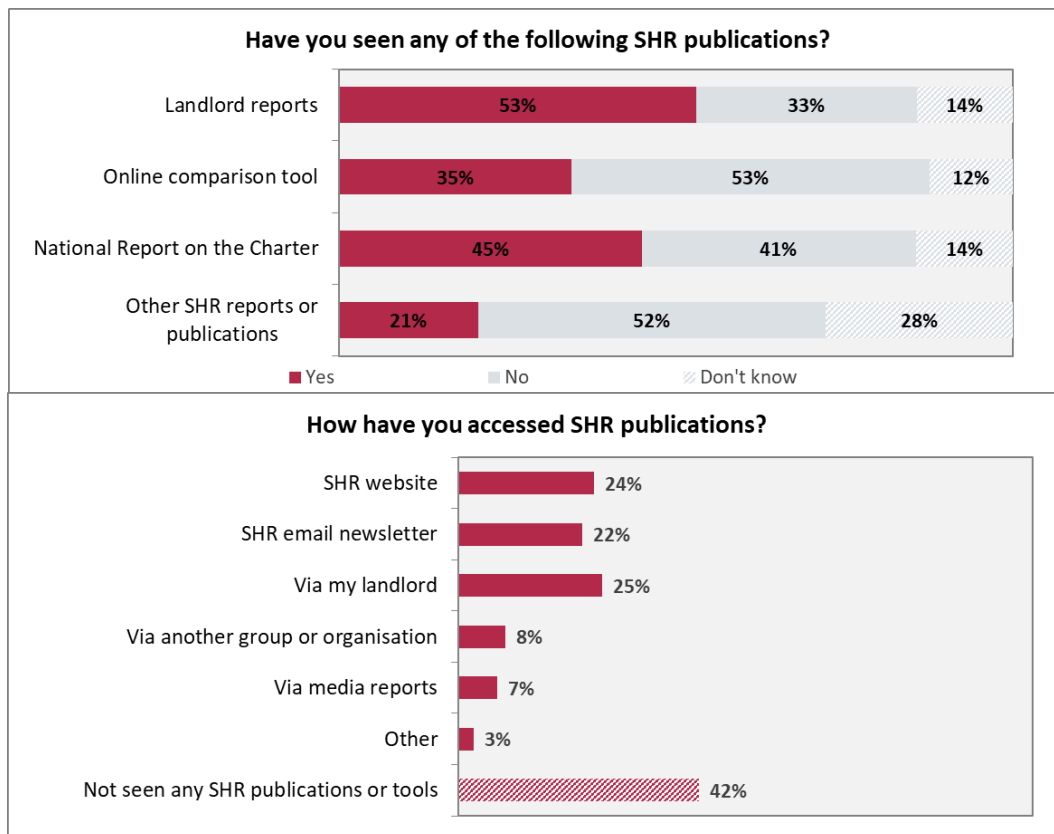
Awareness of and views on SHR reporting approach

3.2 **Two thirds of respondents have seen or used SHR publications (66%).** Awareness of publications was broadly similar across key respondent groups, although RSL tenants are somewhat more likely than Council tenants to have seen one or more publications.

3.3 **Respondents were most likely to have seen SHR landlord reports or the National Report on the Charter;** up to around half of respondents have seen each of these (53% and 45% respectively). Around a third have seen or used the online landlord performance comparison tool. Awareness of these aspects of SHR's reporting appears to have increased over recent years; for example, the proportion who had seen landlord reports was 33% in 2015/16.

3.4 Respondents are most likely to have accessed SHR publications via the SHR website and/or SHR email newsletters (each mentioned by a fifth to a quarter of respondents). In addition, 25% of respondents had become aware of SHR publications via their landlord.

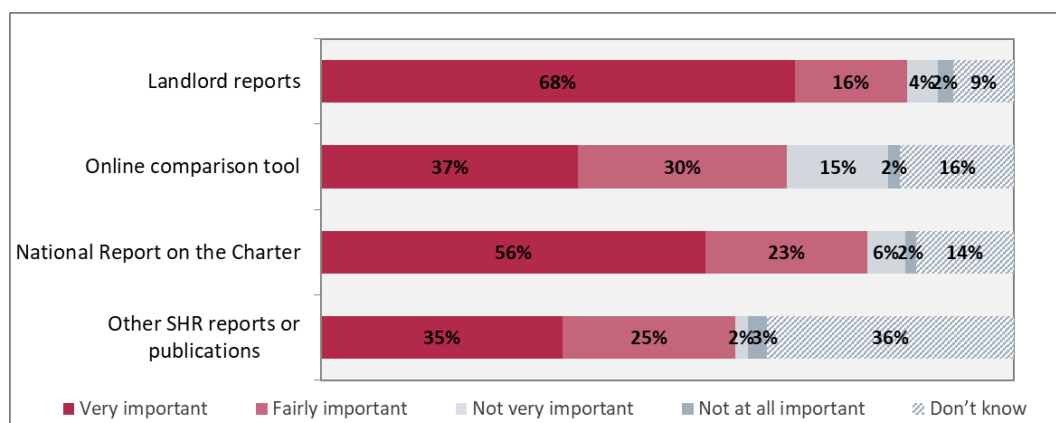
Figure 7: Whether seen or used SHR publications



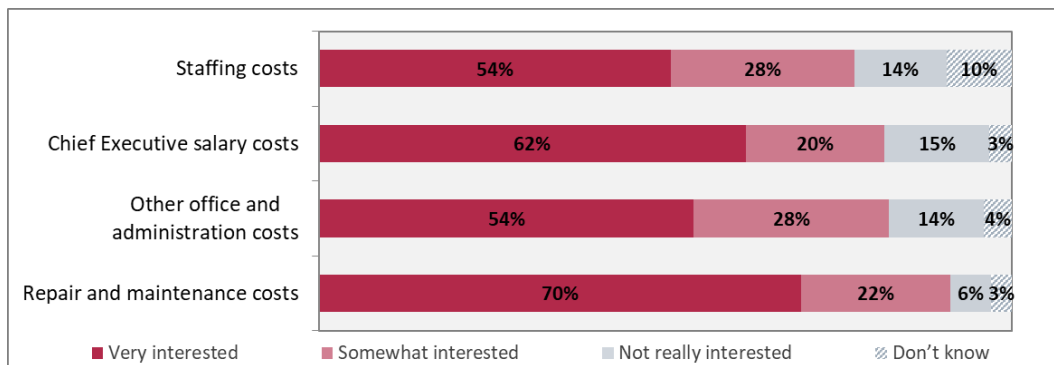
Note: "Not seen any SHR publications" includes non-respondents to the question.

- 3.5 **Panel members see production of these publications as an important part of SHR’s work.** This is particularly the case for landlord reports and the National Report on the Charter; a large majority of respondents described these as important (85% and 79%), and it is notable that these are also the publications that respondents are most likely to have seen. Respondents are somewhat less positive about the online comparison tool, although most described this as an important element of SHR’s work (67%).
- 3.6 This balance of views was also reflected in qualitative discussions. Participants saw SHR’s work in producing landlord performance information as adding significant value to landlords’ own reporting. This was particularly the case for production of standard landlord reports and enabling comparison of landlord performance – the latter was highlighted as a particular strength for the Regulator’s reporting. While survey respondents rated production of the National Report on the Charter as amongst the most important elements of SHR’s reporting, qualitative participants placed greater value on SHR’s reporting of the performance of individual landlords. Some also expressed an interest in the Regulator’s thematic reporting, and suggested there may be scope for publications focused on relevant issues to interest tenants who may not have a wider interest in landlord performance information.
- 3.7 This preference for SHR’s reporting on individual landlords appeared to be linked to a view that SHR’s impartiality is an important element in the value of its performance reporting. As is discussed at Section 4, a number of participants expressed concerns around the extent to which their own landlord’s reporting presents a fair account of their performance. These tenants saw SHR’s independence as adding significant value to landlord performance reporting, in terms of the Regulator’s credibility and as a potential “check” on the accuracy of landlords’ own reporting.

Figure 8: View on importance of SHR publications



- 3.8 The survey also sought to gauge Panel members’ potential interest in cost information currently held by SHR, but which is not included in its current landlord performance reporting. As Figure 9 over the page indicates, **respondents expressed strong interest in SHR publishing information on RSL costs.** Interest was strongest in relation to repair and maintenance costs (92% interested), but respondents also wished to see SHR publish information on staffing, Chief Executive and other office and administrative costs.

Figure 9: Potential interest in SHR-held information on RSLs

Feedback on SHR publications

- 3.9 Qualitative engagement with Panel members also sought feedback on examples of recent SHR publications. Participants were provided with a mix of publications including landlord reports, regulation plans, and broader reports such as thematic inquiries and reports on the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Views were sought in relation to design and appearance, use of language, and content. We summarise participants' feedback below.
- 3.10 **Feedback was very positive on the design of SHR publications.** These were commonly described as attractive in appearance, including reference to use of colours and images or icons as a means of engaging readers.
- 3.11 Participants also found the publications easy to engage with and use. Again this included particularly positive feedback on the use of colour, images and infographics to highlight key findings, and to enable readers to focus on the points of most interest to them. Feedback also noted the importance of using multiple approaches to communicating findings. Discussions highlighted the extent to which tenants are varied in their preferences for use of narrative text, colour and images – and several participants suggested that the wider readership is likely to be similarly diverse. Feedback praised the extent to which SHR publications provide multiple options to cater for these preferences.
- 3.12 **Participants were universally positive on the clarity of language across the example publications.** This included specific praise for the extent to which publications communicate information using plain English – “it’s refreshing to read something that doesn’t use jargon”. While participants recognised that publications varied in the volume of information being communicated, feedback suggests that publications strike the right balance between clear language and messages, while providing relevant detail. Some also felt that publications were generally pitched to a “layperson” audience, and reflected positively on the SHR achieving this without “patronising or condescending” to readers.

3.13 The majority of participants found content of interest to them across the publications.

This included reference to information on rent levels, comparison of landlord performance, the thematic repairs service report, and examples of SHR engaging with landlords to address issues. Participants noted that their specific areas of interest often relate to personal experience, and suggested that tenants are likely to be similarly varied in their interests. In this context, it was suggested that the SHR should continue to include a breadth of content across publications.

3.14 While feedback on SHR publications was generally very positive, participants also noted a number of **potential changes or improvements to the SHR's approach:**

- Landlord performance reporting could include more detail on data sources for interested tenants, including for example noting where results are based on management data or sample surveys (and the size of survey samples).
- Some publications may require more context to ensure tenants do not misinterpret performance information – including for example on why rent levels may vary significantly across landlords.
- The Regulator could be more explicit on problems or concerns identified by SHR – for example in regulation plans. Some also suggested that more detail could be provided where potential issues have been identified – such as the nature of complaints received.
- Some were concerned that the use of colour that helps to highlight key findings could cause difficulties for those with visual impairment or literacy difficulties.
- Landlord performance reporting could include a greater focus on trend information to identify any improvement or deterioration in performance.

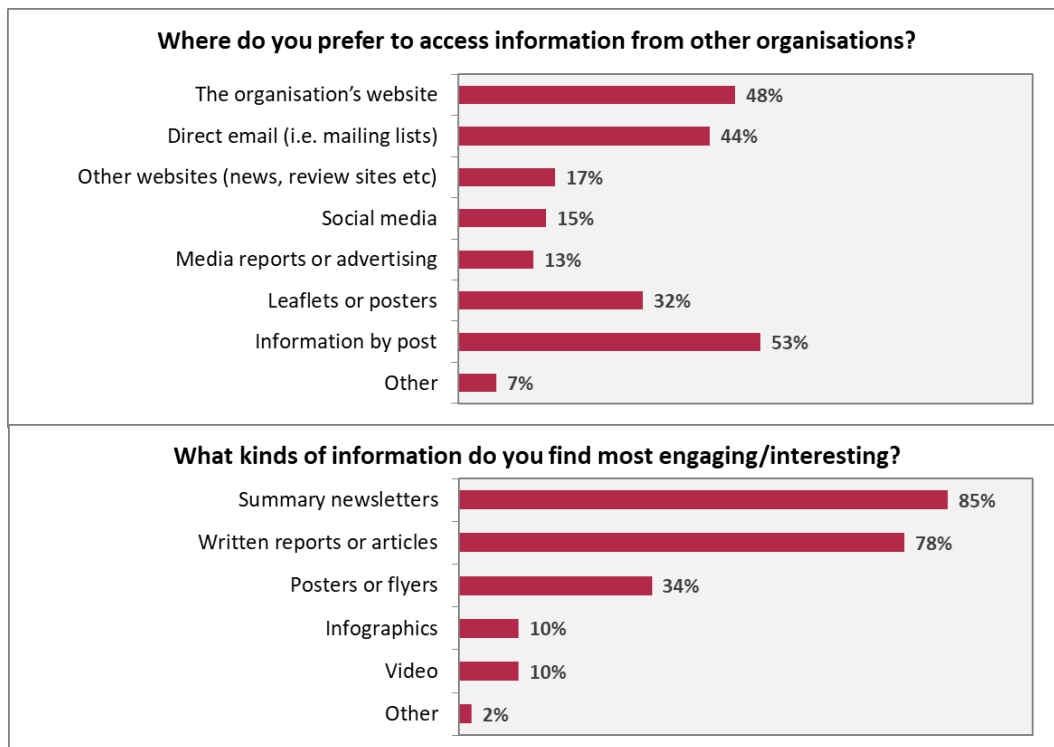
How prefer to engage with information

3.15 The final questions in relation to SHR reporting asked Panel members how they preferred to engage with information from other organisations – whether other public agencies or private companies. This included preferred means of accessing information, and preferences for specific kinds of publications or information (Figure 10 over the page).

3.16 Panel members use a range of means of accessing information from other organisations, including a mix of printed and electronic options. The most commonly used are information by post, websites and direct email; each of these are used by up to around half of respondents (53%, 48% and 44%). In addition, around a third of respondents get information via leaflets or posters (32%). By contrast, relatively few respondents indicated that they access information via social media (15%). Survey results indicate some variation in preferences across respondent groups, primarily in relation to landlord type and respondent age. For example, information by post is the top preference for Council tenants, while RSL tenants are most likely to prefer to access information via websites and email. In terms of respondent age, information by post is the top preference for those aged 60+, while information via website is the top preference for those aged under 45. Under 45s are also more likely than others to prefer information by social media.

3.17 Panel members generally find summary newsletters or written reports/articles the most engaging forms or publication (85% and 78% respectively). Relatively few respondents indicated that they prefer information via infographics or video. However, it should be noted that qualitative feedback suggested that individuals are varied in their preferences – and a number of participants specifically praised the use of multiple communication approaches in the Regulator’s reporting, including use of colour, images and infographics to highlight key messages.

Figure 10: How prefer to engage with information from other organisations



3.18 Survey and qualitative feedback from Panel members also identified a number of specific good practice examples which individuals felt SHR could learn from.

- Housing-related websites including reference to Minister for Housing, Chartered Institute of Housing (CiH), SFHA, Tenants Information Service and Tenants Participation and Advisory Service.
- Reference to landlord performance reporting and other publications.
- Information Commissioners Office.
- Office of the Public Guardian.
- Scottish Charity Regulator.
- Specific council newsletters and other publications.
- Disabled Persons Housing Service.
- EVH.
- Money Facts.
- Scottish Power.

4 USING PERFORMANCE REPORTING

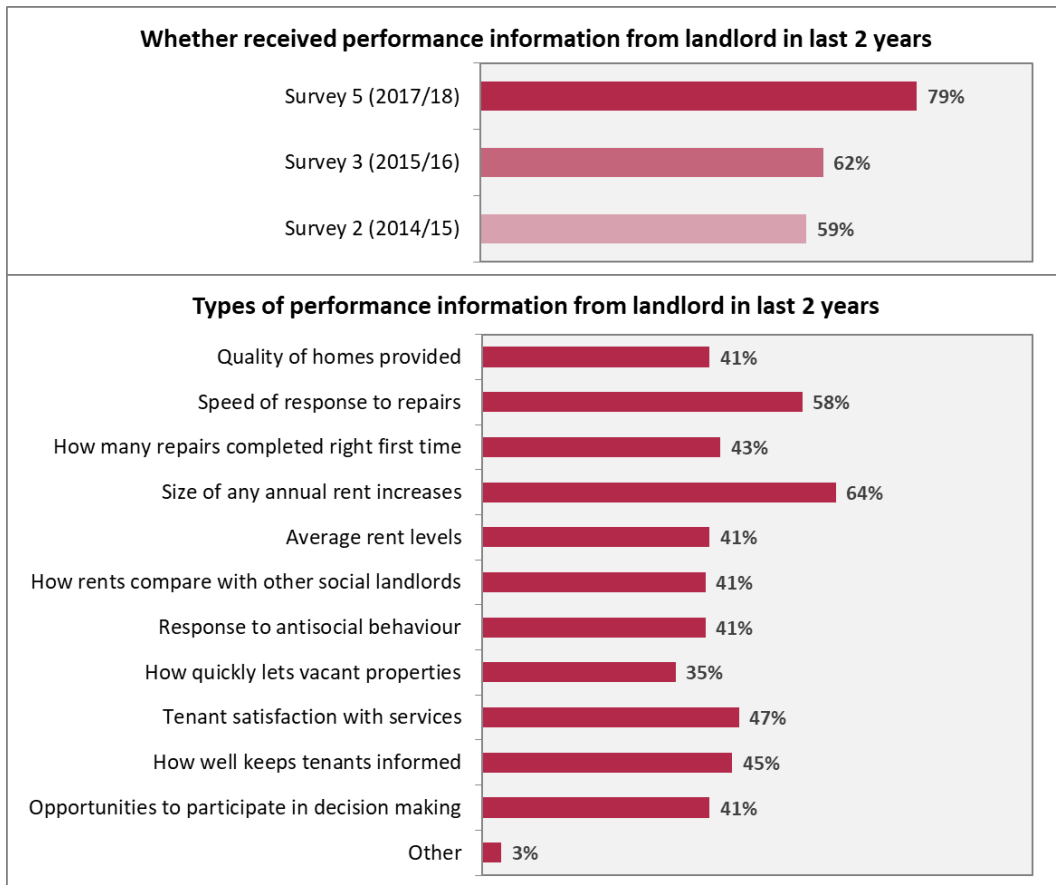
4.1 Panel members were also asked about their use of landlord performance information. This section summarises feedback on members’ awareness and interest in landlord performance reporting, and examples of how individuals have used this performance information.

Landlords’ performance reporting

4.2 **A large majority of respondents had received performance information from their landlord in the last 2 years (79%).** This represents an increase on the 62% of respondents to the 2015/16 survey who had received performance information.

4.3 **Respondents have received a broad range of performance information from their landlord.** Information on annual rent increases and the speed of response to repairs were the most commonly mentioned (by 64% and 58% respectively). In addition to repairs and rents, respondents had also received information on tenant satisfaction, how their landlord keeps tenants informed and involved, quality of homes, and response to antisocial behaviour. This is broadly in line with previous survey findings, which suggested that repairs and rent information were the most common amongst a broad range of performance information received by Panel members.

Figure 11: Whether received performance information from landlord in last 2 years



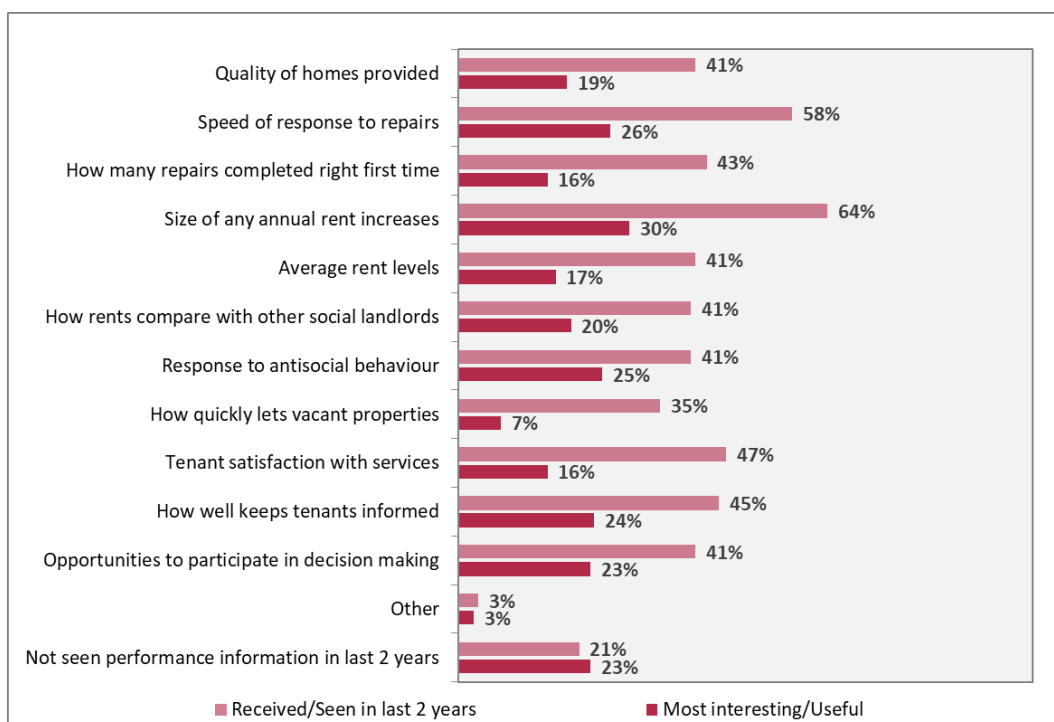
4.4 Panel members showed relatively broad interest in landlord performance information.

As Figure 12 shows, interest is most widespread for information on rent increases, speed of repairs response, response to antisocial behaviour, and how well landlords keep tenants informed. These are also amongst the areas where Panel members are most likely to have seen information recently.

4.5 Panel members were also asked to suggest other performance information they would like to see for their landlord. The main suggestions were:

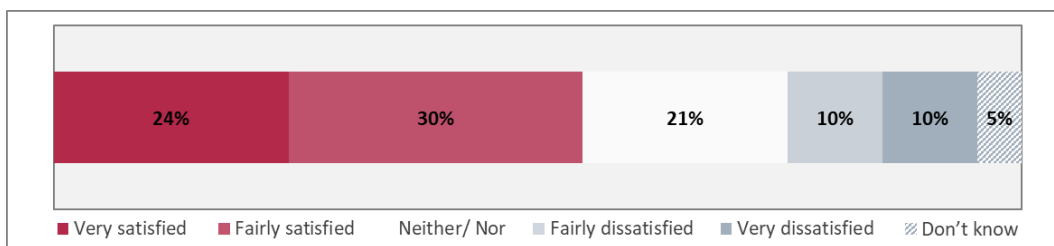
- Information on handling and response to complaints;
- More detailed financial and staffing information, including borrowing;
- Planned capital investment – and the extent to which planned works are delivered on time;
- Planned affordable housing development;
- Information on allocations performance and the number of empty properties;
- Information on the quality of care and support services, for example to those in sheltered and very sheltered properties; and
- More detailed information on how performance information is produced, including for example where results are based on small numbers of tenants.

Figure 12: Interest in landlord performance information



- 4.6 **More than half of Panel members are satisfied with the quality and accuracy of their landlord’s performance reporting (55%), although there remains a fifth who are dissatisfied (20%).** A further fifth gave a neutral view (21%). This balance of views is consistent across respondent groups, although those aged 60+ were generally more positive than others about their landlord’s performance reporting.
- 4.7 This balance of views on the quality of landlord performance information was also reflected in the mix of wider comments from Panel members. This included comments from around a quarter of survey respondents, and a range of qualitative participants. Some referred positively to the range and quality of their landlord’s performance reporting, and noted the importance of performance reporting in landlords being transparent with, and accountable to, tenants. Others expressed little knowledge or interest in this aspect of their landlord’s activity. However, most of those providing comments raised concerns or issues which affected how they perceive their landlord’s performance reporting.
- 4.8 These were most commonly related to concerns about the accuracy of performance reporting, and the extent to which information is “spun to look good”. These concerns were raised by a mix of participants, including for example across different landlord types. This included some who felt unable to judge the accuracy of their landlord’s performance reporting, and some specific scepticism around the robustness of tenant satisfaction statistics - and for example, the number of responses on which results are based. Some of these concerns appeared to reflect the extent to which (positive) performance information is not consistent with individuals’ (negative) personal experience. For several participants, these views also appeared to be influenced by concerns around the robustness of wider tenant participation and scrutiny arrangements.

Figure 13: Views on the quality and accuracy of landlord performance reporting

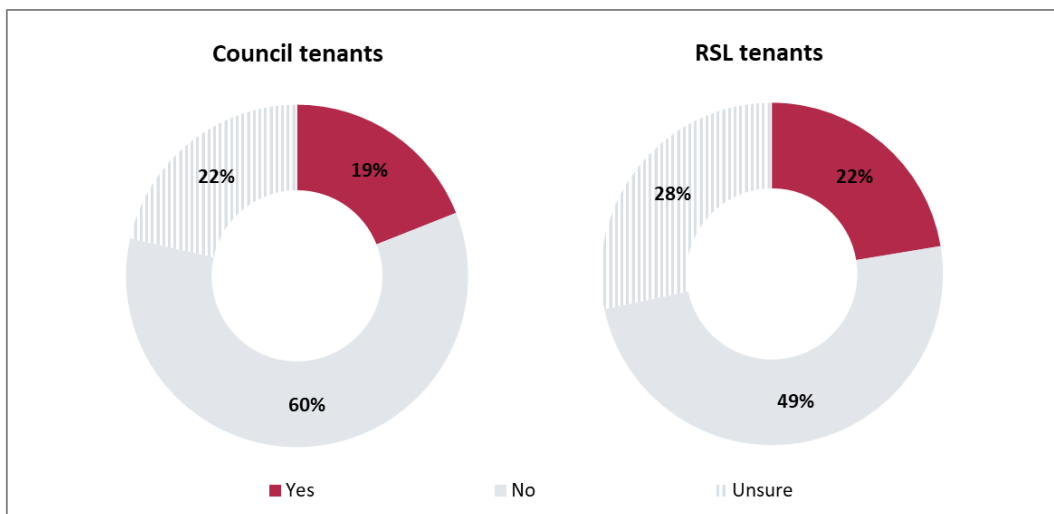


Using performance reporting

- 4.9 **A fifth of survey respondents had used performance information to help judge the quality of their landlord’s services, or when discussing services with their landlord (20%).** This finding was broadly consistent across key respondent groups, including Council and RSL tenants. Relatively few participants gave specific examples of how they had used performance information – the most common examples are summarised below:
- When judging the quality of their landlord’s services, and the extent to which tenants feel they receive value for money – comparison of rent levels and performance across social landlords was seen as particularly useful here.

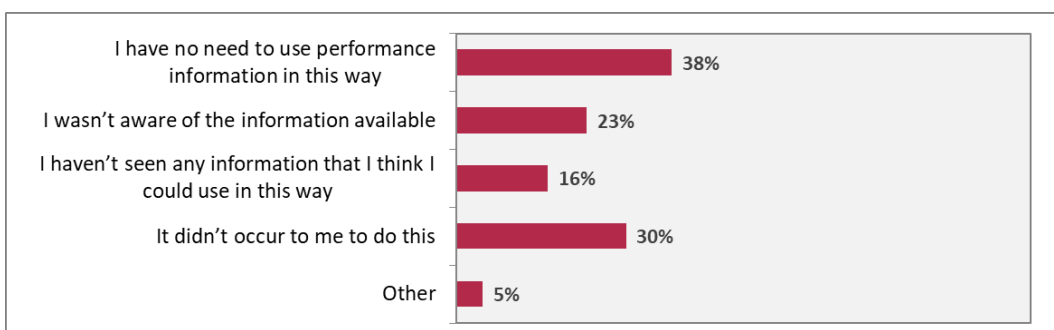
- Several Panel members noted that performance information helps to put their own experience in context – although some explicitly noted that personal experience has the greatest bearing on their perception of their landlord.
- A small number of participants had used performance information when raising an issue or making a complaint to their landlord – this was most commonly mentioned around proposed annual rent increases.
- Those involved in tenant participation or scrutiny referred to having used landlord and SHR produced information in this capacity – including for example comparison of their landlord’s performance with others.

Figure 14: Whether used performance information to judge or discuss services with landlord



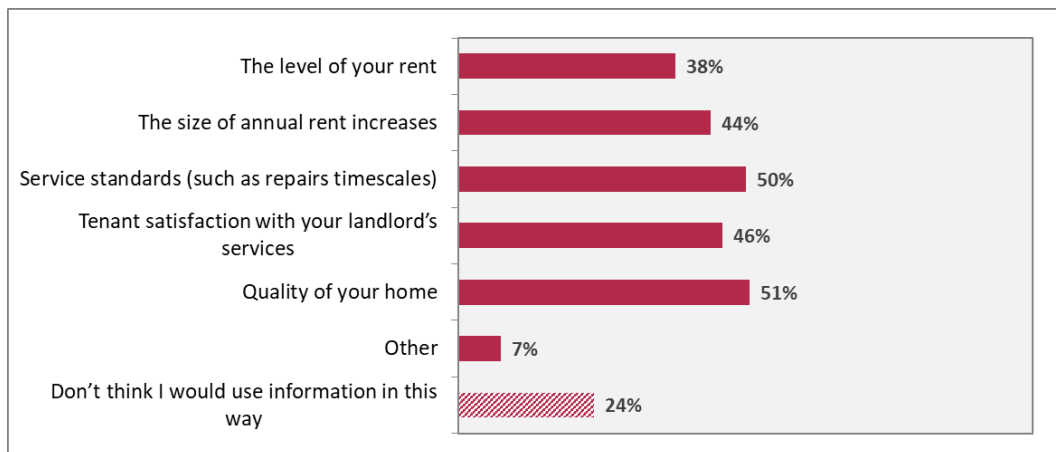
4.10 **For those who have not used landlord performance information, this was most commonly because they had not felt the need to (38%), or because it had not occurred to them to do so (30%).** Panel members also referred to not being aware of available performance information (23%), and some felt that they could use information if it was available (16%).

Figure 15: Reasons that have not used landlord performance information



4.11 **Most respondents expressed interest in using performance information in the future when raising issues with their landlord;** 76% would be interested in doing so, and this was consistent across respondent groups. These respondents saw potential to use performance information in a range of circumstances including when raising issues around the quality of their home, service standards such as repair timescales, tenant satisfaction, and the size of annual rent increases.

Figure 16: Potential interest in using landlord performance information



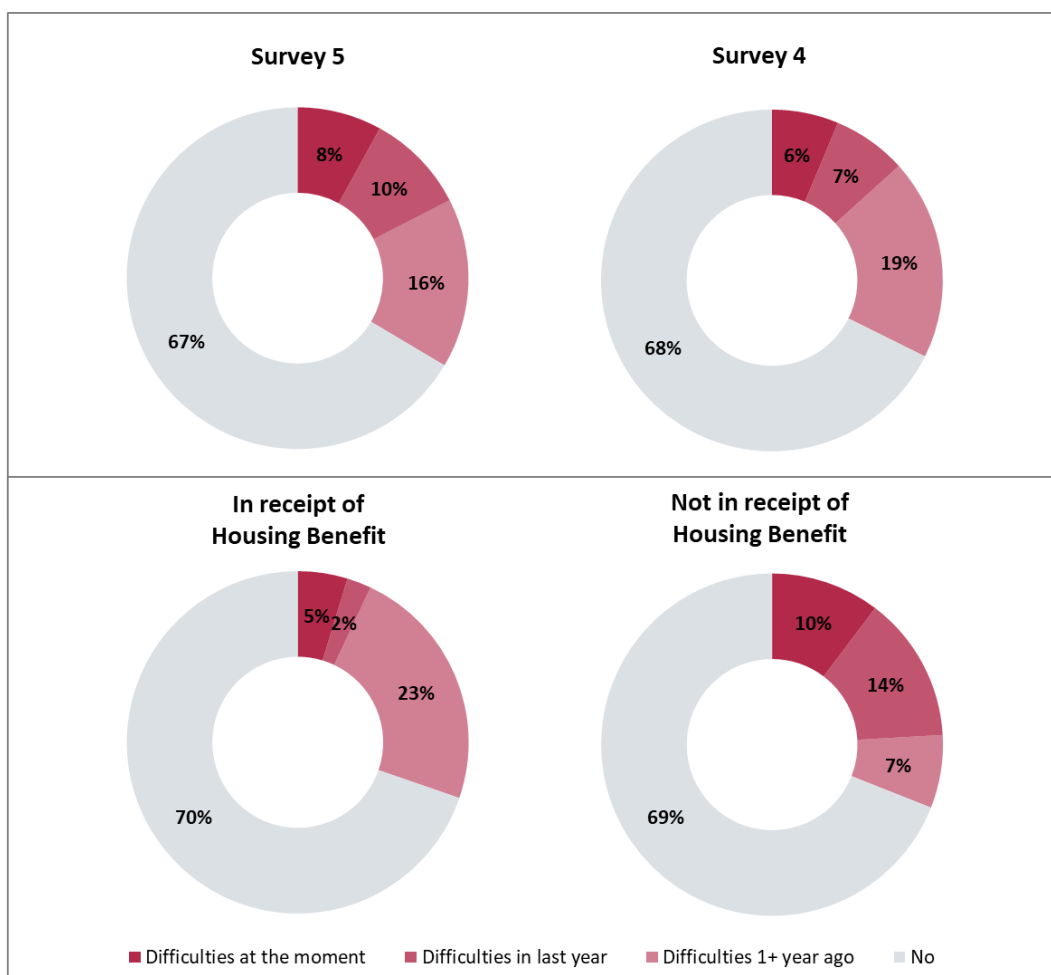
5 RENT AFFORDABILITY

5.1 The final theme explored through the survey focused on Panel members' experience of rent affordability problems, and views on the likely future affordability of their rent.

Experience of difficulty paying rent

5.2 **Most respondents indicated that they have never had difficulties affording their rent (67%), very similar to the 2016/17 survey (68%).** However there remained a third who had experienced rent affordability problems (33%), including 17% who had experienced difficulties in the last year. Survey results show no significant difference in experience of affordability difficulties linked to receipt of Housing Benefit; 30% of those in receipt of Housing Benefit had experienced difficulties, compared to 31% of others.

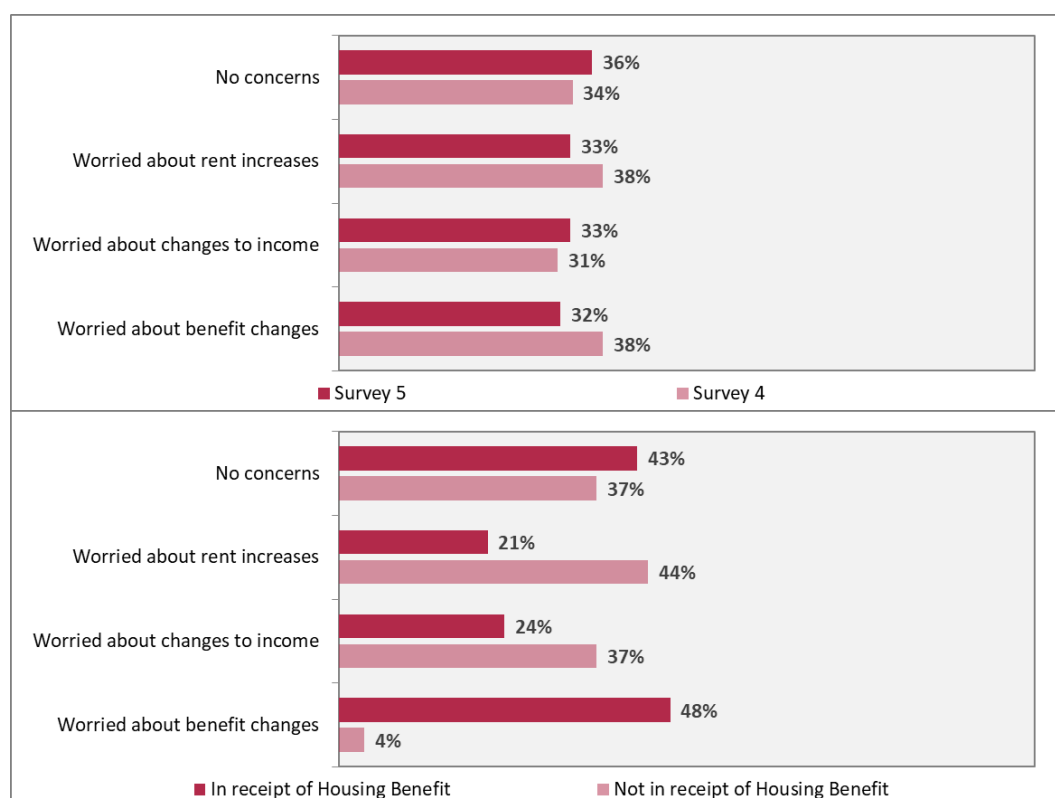
Figure 17: Whether had difficulty affording rent



Future affordability

- 5.3 While those with recent experience of affordability difficulties remain a minority, a **substantial proportion of survey respondents and other participants expressed concerns around potential future affordability.**
- 5.4 As Figure 19 shows, two thirds of respondents expressed concerns around potential future rent affordability problems (64%). This is consistent with findings of the 2016/17 survey (66%). Respondents gave various reasons for these concerns, with similar numbers mentioning each of future rent increases (33% concerned about this), future changes to income (33%), and future benefit changes (32%).
- 5.5 The incidence of affordability concerns was similar across key respondent groups, but there was some variation in the source of respondents' affordability concerns linked to receipt of Housing Benefit. Those in receipt of Housing Benefit were significantly more likely than others to express concerns about the impact of benefit changes, while those not in receipt of Housing Benefit were more likely to be concerned about the impact of rent increases or changes to income.

Figure 18: Views on future affordability of rent



6 USERS OF HOMELESS SERVICES

- 6.1 As outlined at Section 1, the qualitative fieldwork involved individual interviews with current and recent users of statutory homeless service users. The standing Panel membership includes a number of social tenants with experience of homeless services, and these were included in this strand of the work programme. Fieldwork also extended beyond current Panel members through visits to homeless service units (interviews with 39 households), and interviews with care experienced people arranged through Who Cares? Scotland (5 households).
- 6.2 Findings presented over the following pages are based on feedback from a total of 49 participants, using homeless services across seven local authority areas. This included individuals in a range of living circumstances, and at varying stages of the homeless system; those currently in dispersed temporary accommodation, those in supported temporary accommodation, and those who had accessed a social tenancy via the homeless service.
- 6.3 Qualitative engagement focused on several of broad areas of experience:
- Experience of accessing and moving through homeless services, including clarity of expectations and information provided at the initial stages, and experience of engagement and information sharing across services;
 - Aspects of their experience which make the greatest difference to individuals' circumstances and experience;
 - Experience of temporary accommodation; and
 - Experience of accessing settled accommodation including support from landlords or others to adjust to settled accommodation, and factors that have helped individuals to sustain their tenancy.
- 6.4 We consider the main points emerging across each of these themes over the following pages.

Accessing and engaging with homeless services

- 6.5 As noted above, participants included a mix of first time homeless service users, and individuals with prior experience of services. While some common themes were raised across these participants, feedback also highlighted the extent to which experience of services can vary dependent on prior experience. Key points of note are summarised below.
- **Previous experience of homeless services had a significant impact on individuals' experience of accessing services.** This was in terms of understanding how to access services, but also (and for some, more importantly) clarity on how their application would progress and where/how they were likely to be accommodated.
 - **Around half of participants had no prior experience of homeless services,** and most of these households had made an initial approach to

the local Council office or one stop shop. This included some who had been “sofa surfing” and who had been directed by family or friends to a specific homeless service access point.

- **Participants were generally positive about their initial engagement with homeless services.** This included a mix of those who had presented as homeless requiring immediate accommodation, those who had somewhere to stay for a short time, and those who had made a more planned move (for example where leaving an institution). The speed with which services were able to secure accommodation appeared to be a significant aspect in this positive experience.
- **Clarity on how their homeless application would be processed is important for the quality of participants’ experience when accessing homeless services.** Again this was particularly so for those without prior experience of services, several of whom noted that their initial anxiety around contacting the homeless service was linked to a lack of clarity on how and where they would be accommodated. Most participants felt that service staff had been clear about their rights and how their application would be handled, and this was seen as helping to ease individuals’ anxiety when first accessing services. However, the volume of information provided at this stage can be overwhelming for individuals, and only some could recall being provided with printed information.
- **Access to support and practical assistance also appear to be important for the quality of participants’ experience.** This included reference to Council homeless and support services, and a small number who had also received support from other organisations (including care leavers and those with refugee status). In terms of practical assistance, participants referred to the positive impact of referrals to food banks, clothing banks, assistance completing application forms (for example for those with literacy difficulties or a lack of internet access), and advocacy support around engagement with homeless services. Participants also highlighted the value of emotional support around their initial engagement with homeless services, and at key points such as transition into temporary or settled accommodation. Many interviewees noted the degree of anxiety they had experienced around this engagement, and praised the extent to which services had a significant positive impact.
- **The importance of service staff in helping participants to navigate homeless services was also highlighted by participants.** This included a particular focus on support staff as a consistent point of contact throughout individuals’ experience with homeless services. This was highlighted as helping individuals to engage with different services without having to “retell my story”, but also in developing trust with support staff. Some noted that their anxiety around accessing settled accommodation was linked to the potential of having to engage with a different support officer.

Temporary accommodation

6.6 Around 40% of participants had accessed settled accommodation at the time of the research, but most had some experience of temporary accommodation. This was primarily in dispersed or supported accommodation, although a small number also had experience of bed and breakfast accommodation. Key points of note are summarised below.

- **The majority of participants were positive about their experience of accessing temporary accommodation.** This was particularly the case for those with no prior experience of homeless services, a number of whom recalled anxiety at the time of the initial assessment around “where I might end up”. Many of these participants described the speed with which they had accessed temporary accommodation, and the standard of accommodation, as key elements in their positive experience of the service.
- **Participants were varied in the time they had taken to access temporary accommodation** – some had done so within 24 hours of their initial contact with services, while others had stayed with family or friends while waiting to a temporary unit to become available. Few participants felt that their wait for temporary accommodation had been longer than expected. However, uncertainty during this wait was highlighted as having a negative impact for individuals’ emotional wellbeing. This was in terms of how long individuals may have to remain in insecure accommodation, and where they may be allocated temporary accommodation.
- **Participants referred to a range of challenges around adjusting to temporary accommodation – and to the role of practical and emotional support in overcoming these challenges.** These difficulties were primarily focused around benefits and other financial concerns, such as dealing with any rent arrears, budgeting and setting up bank accounts. Several participants referred to delays in benefit payments associated with a move to Universal Credit as having caused them difficulties.
 - **Difficulties or concerns with dispersed accommodation** were primarily related to uncertainty around the likely length of stay. This appeared to be a particular concern for those without local support networks, and some indicated that they had felt isolated and “in limbo” during long stays in dispersed accommodation. However, most of these participants also noted that their ongoing contact with homeless services had made clear that their housing application was progressing. A small number referred to problems with disrepair or faulty appliances in temporary accommodation.
 - **Difficulties adjusting to supported accommodation** were mentioned by a number of participants, including a small number of those in supported accommodation who had no prior homeless experience. Difficulties were primarily related

to the mix of ages and needs within the accommodation, sharing of facilities, noise, and “house rules” around visitors and curfew times.

- Several participants noted that their employment circumstances meant that **the cost of temporary accommodation was a concern for them** – although most of these individuals noted that they had been rehoused before this became a significant issue.
- A small number of participants had **experience of temporary stays in bed and breakfast accommodation**. These participants referred to some initial anxiety around this form of accommodation, and a need for support from food banks during their time in the accommodation. However, this was not seen as a particularly negative option for these individuals – although it should be noted that their length of stay was relatively short.

Settled accommodation

6.7 Around 40% of participants were in settled accommodation at the time of engaging with the research, and some of those in temporary accommodation also had previous experience of accessing a tenancy via homeless services. Key points of note for these participants are summarised below.

- **Individuals were varied in terms of their length of wait to access settled accommodation**, from several weeks to more than a year. Views were **generally positive on the extent to which they had been kept informed of their progress** during this time – particularly for those with regular contact with support staff. However, **some had felt that they had to be persistent in their contact with services** to secure their accommodation, and others indicated that the offer of housing had “come out of the blue”.
- **Most felt that they had accessed settled accommodation within the time they had expected** – including some who were surprised at how quickly they had secured accommodation. Several participants suggested that expanding housing preferences had facilitated their access to settled accommodation.
- **Feedback highlighted the importance of the transition into settled accommodation**, and the process of “settling in”. This included a particular focus on the role of support from homeless services and wider support networks around this process. Participants referred to practical assistance such as accessing funding for furniture and white goods, setting up financial arrangements, and ongoing budgeting.
- **Participants also referred to the role of wider support in enabling them to access and sustain their own tenancy**. Some noted the role of support in building confidence to manage their own tenancy, and in encouraging them to face elements of the move (such as making financial arrangements) that they found challenging. Access to ongoing

support (through services and/or family and friends) was also seen as significant for individuals' sustaining their tenancy. This was particularly important for those were living independently for the first time, or following a prolonged period of supported living.

Care experienced people

- 6.8 As noted earlier, fieldwork with users of homeless services included interviews with care experienced people arranged through Who Cares? Scotland. These interviews covered similar topics to those with other service users, and it was notable that many of the key themes outlined above were also raised by care experienced people. This included for example the importance of effective relationships with support workers and other staff, difficulties for those with limited experience of the homeless system, and challenges adjusting to temporary or settled accommodation.
- 6.9 However, interviews also highlighted the extent to which care leavers' experience of homeless services is informed by their specific circumstances, including their care experience. The key themes raised by care experienced interviewees are summarised below:
- Participants highlighted the importance of a meaningful relationship with support worker(s) throughout individuals' experience of the homeless system. This included reference to the extent to which their experience of approaching and engaging with homeless services was dependent on access to an effective support network – for example access to a trusted advocate. In the context of access to this support, some referred to having been asked to return to homeless services outwith working hours, but found that use of out of hours services could limit access to support from social care services.
 - The importance of services being sensitive to the specific needs of care experienced people was also highlighted – and experience was varied here. This included some who felt that this sensitivity can be “down to luck” in terms of whether service staff have experience of working with care leavers, and an understanding of the support they may require.
 - Services being welcoming and non-judgemental to care experienced people was also seen as vital for individuals' experience. Several participants noted the importance of trust and respect between care experienced people and staff – in enabling individuals to engage with and move through the system, and in maximising the likelihood of sustaining settled accommodation.
 - Feedback highlighted a range of challenges for care experienced people in adjusting to changes in their living settings across temporary and settled accommodation. This included for example difficulties establishing relationships with staff and other residents, again with reference to difficulties for some care experienced people in establishing meaningful relationships with staff and residents. In this context, participants referred to the potential for care experienced people to feel isolated and lonely (in temporary or settled

accommodation), and some had not felt safe in their accommodation. This included those with experience of supported and bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Some participants noted that individuals' care experience can have an impact on their response to temporary accommodation options – “they didn't realise that [moving into residential supported accommodation] would feel like a huge backwards step for me”. Others highlighted the importance of support for those moving to settled accommodation, and felt that support had reduced after this move – “you're just treated as any other tenant once you're in the house, it feels like support gets forgotten”.
- Participants also emphasised the extent to which care experience can impact on individuals' life skills. This included reference to difficulties with domestic tasks, maintaining their home, and sustaining a tenancy. Some felt that service staff are often unaware of this, and individuals can feel reluctant to ask for help with tasks which they feel they are expected to manage.
- Discussion of challenges adjusting to the homeless system and changes in accommodation, included a strong emphasis on the potential for this experience to have a negative impact on mental health. Again this included reference to risks of social isolation, and to anxiety around insecurity of circumstances.
- Reflecting the potential for individuals' mental health to be impacted, participants also highlighted the importance of emotional support to help individuals through the process of moving to independent living. Participants noted that this can take time for some care experienced people, and suggested that some may require a longer period of time to develop the practical and emotional capacities required to make a successful move to settled accommodation.

APPENDIX: PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The National Panel was established in 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The National Panel fits into SHR's wider approach to communication and engagement with users of social landlord services, and is used to gauge priorities and experiences – and in this way help to shape SHR's focus in its role as regulator of social landlords.

As a mechanism for gathering the views of tenants and other service users, a significant element of the Panel's value is as an accessible group of engaged individuals willing to participate in consultation exercises. As such the focus for the Panel is on ensuring a good cross-section of tenants and other service users, rather than achieving an exact match to the wider service user population. In this context, some groups such as those in rural areas have been over-sampled to ensure sufficient volume of members to support more focused engagement.

Ensuring a balanced Panel membership is also a key element of our ongoing promotion and recruitment work. This seeks to expand the reach of the Panel in terms of the size of the membership and representation of specific population subgroups.

There has been some change in Panel membership over the last year. A small number of new members have joined the Panel over this period, and some have chosen to resign from the Panel. This has resulted in a net loss of 42 members during the year with the overall Panel membership standing at 422 at the time of reporting.

The current Panel profile suggests a number of areas where further expanding the Panel membership would improve representation. As noted above, the aim of any further expansion in membership will be on ensuring a sufficient number of members within specific groups, rather than an exact match with the wider population. In this context, the current Panel profile suggests recruitment should seek to boost numbers of black and minority ethnic members, and factored owners.

A profile of the current Panel membership is provided over the page.

| | |
|--|------------|
| Total current membership | 422 |
| Age | |
| Under 35 | 18% |
| 35-44 | 16% |
| 45-59 | 27% |
| 60-74 | 28% |
| 75+ | 7% |
| Unknown | 5% |
| Gender | |
| Female | 50% |
| Male | 50% |
| Housing Tenure | |
| Council tenant | 53% |
| RSL tenant | 34% |
| Owner | 6% |
| Gypsy/ Traveller site resident | 5% |
| Unknown | 2% |
| Have used homeless services | |
| Yes | 3% |
| No | 97% |
| Ethnicity | |
| White Scottish, British or Irish | 88% |
| White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller) | 8% |
| Black Minority Ethnic | 2% |
| Unknown | 3% |
| Disability | |
| 1 or more disabilities | 36% |
| No disability | 45% |
| Unknown | 19% |
| RTO membership | |
| Member of RTO | 23% |
| Not a member of RTO | 77% |