

Scottish Housing Regulator

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users 2018/19

Thematic Report: Rent Consultation

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of findings from the 2018/19 programme of National Panel engagement commissioned by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Background

- 1.2. 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 service users. The Panel is used to gauge the priorities and experiences of service users. This helps to shape SHR's focus in its role as regulator of social landlords.
- 1.3. The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. The current membership includes tenants, factored owners, tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and people who use homelessness services. A large-scale Panel refreshment exercise over the last year has involved the replacement of more than a third of the existing membership to maintain engagement levels. Recruitment to the Panel is ongoing to ensure that the Panel continues to reflect the views of all key groups of service users. The Panel is widely promoted through several channels to ensure that those not normally involved in engaging with social landlords are represented. For example, more than three quarters of Panel members are not involved in RTOs.
- 1.4. Panel membership stands at 425 at the time of reporting, although this number is expected to increase over the coming months as new members continue to join. A profile of the current Panel membership is appended to this report.

The 2018/19 programme

- 1.5. The work programme this year was based around several key themes, including:
- tenant participation;
 - digital access to services;
 - rent affordability;
 - Gypsy/Traveller site standards; and
 - the experience of people who use homelessness services.
- 1.6. Panel engagement across these themes incorporated four main engagement strands:
- A full Panel survey issued to all retained and new Panel members (overall response rate of 60%).
 - In-depth telephone interview engagement with Panel members to explore themes emerging through the survey in more detail (total of 41 interviews).
 - Interview-based research with homeless service users through visits to homeless service access points and telephone interviews. This included those currently in temporary accommodation (supported and dispersed), and those who had been re-housed through the homeless system. Total of 69 interviews across 8 local authority areas.

- Interview-based research with tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites through a mix of site visits and telephone interviews. Total of 55 interviews across 10 sites.
- 1.7. This report integrates quantitative survey results and qualitative findings to provide a rounded view of participants' views and experiences.

2. RENT AFFORDABILITY AND CONSULTATION

Key messages

More than a third have experienced difficulties affording their rent (37%).

More than two thirds were concerned about the future affordability of their rent (69%). Concerns most commonly related to rent increases, although some also mentioned the impact of future benefit changes or other changes to their income.

A substantial proportion have also experienced difficulties with their finances as a whole. Nearly a third felt they are not managing well with their finances, and more than half had concerns about their future financial circumstances.

A large majority recalled receiving information from their landlord on annual rent increases. Around half of these included different rent increase options, and a little more than half had been asked for their views on rent increases.

- 2.1. This section considers Panel members' experience around affordability of rent and other housing costs, and receipt of information from landlords around annual rent increases. Findings are based on Panel survey results.

Rents and affordability

- 2.2. A little more than a third of respondents (37%) had experienced difficulties affording their rent, including around 1 in 7 (14%) who are currently experiencing difficulties. This represents a small increase from previous surveys, primarily in the proportion of respondents currently experiencing difficulties affording their rent; a +6% increase since 2018, although this is not statistically significant.
- 2.3. Survey results also show some variation in experience of rent affordability linked to whether tenants receive help with their rent, and the proportion of income that tenants spend on their rent. In particular, those who do not receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit towards their rent, and those who spend 25% or more of their income on rent are most likely to experience difficulties.

Figure 1: Experience of rent affordability difficulties

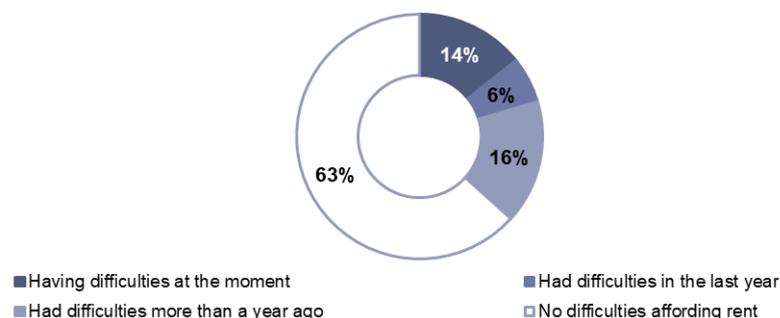
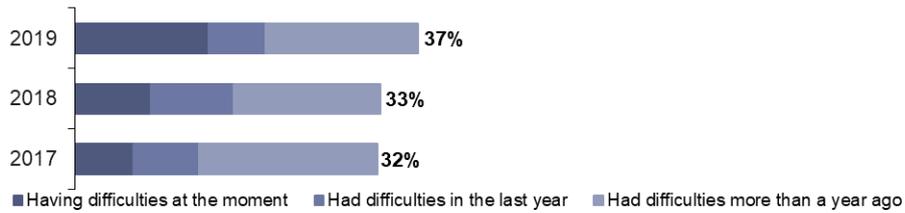
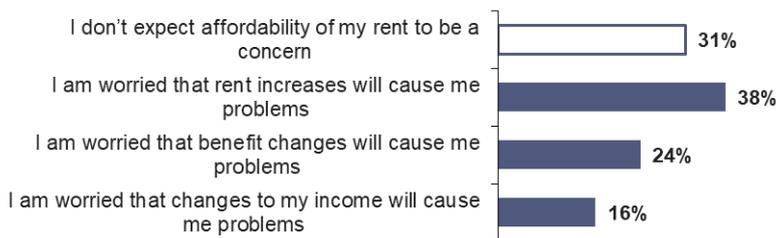


Figure 1: Experience of rent affordability difficulties



- 2.4. Respondents were more likely to have concerns around the future affordability of their rent, with 69% expressing concerns about the future comparing to 37% who had experienced difficulties. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who had experienced rent affordability problems were significantly more likely to express concerns about the future (87%, compared to 57% of those who had not experienced difficulties).
- 2.5. Concerns about future affordability were most commonly related to rent increases; 38% expressed concerns about the impact of future rent increases on the affordability of their rent. Around a quarter of respondents (24%) were concerned about the impact of future benefit changes, and around 1 in 6 (16%) about the impact of future changes to their income. The nature of future affordability concerns also varied across key groups; current benefit recipients were more likely to be concerned about future benefit changes, while those who do not receive help with their rent and who spend 25% or more of their income on rent were more likely to be concerned about future rent increases.

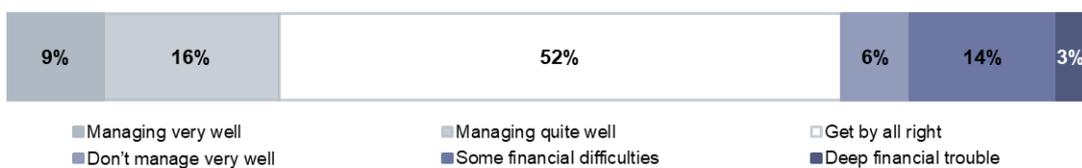
Figure 2: Views on future rent affordability



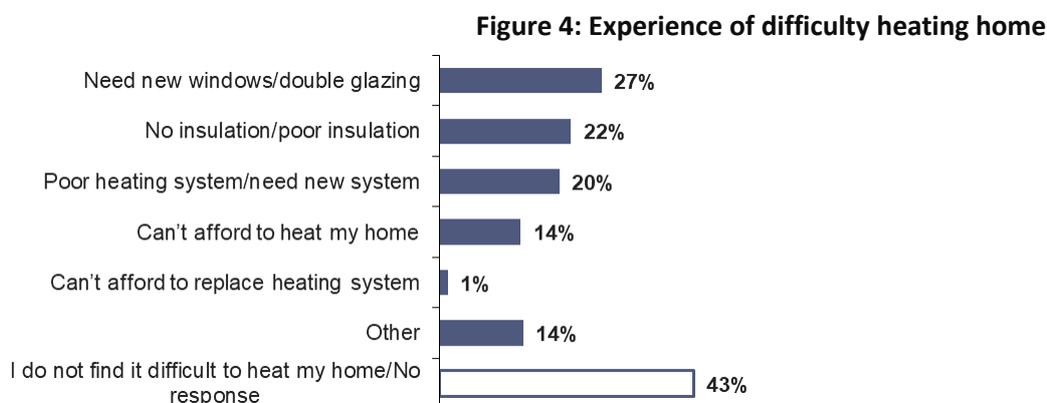
Housing costs and household finances

- 2.6. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) indicated that they are not managing well with their current housing costs (including rent, energy bills and other costs). This includes around 1 in 6 who are having financial difficulties or are in deep financial trouble (17%). Those in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit were more likely than others to indicate that they are not managing well with their housing costs (26% compared to 13% of others), although those not in receipt of benefits who spend 25% of their income on rent were more likely to report affordability problems.

Figure 3: How managing to afford housing costs

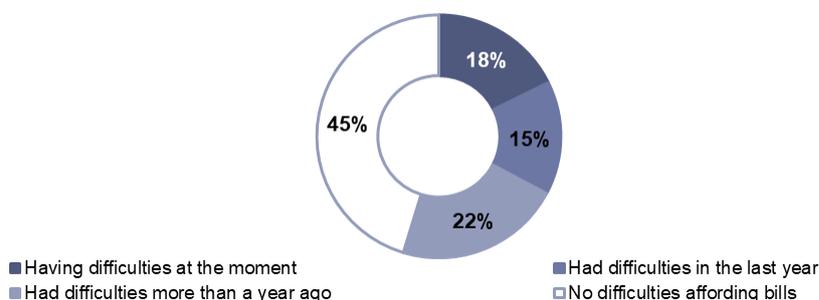


2.7. More than half of respondents (57%) indicated that they find it difficult to heat their home. There was some variation in results across key service user groups, with difficulties heating their home most common for RSL tenants (66%), under 60s (66%), and those who spent 25% or more of their income (76%).



2.8. More than half of respondents (55%) indicated that they had experienced difficulties with other, non-housing costs. This included a third of respondents (33%) who had experienced difficulties in the last year. Consistent with findings in relation to housing and heating costs, difficulties with non-housing bills appear to be most prevalent for those in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, those who spend 25% or more of their income on rent, and those aged under 45.

Figure 5: How managing to afford non-housing costs



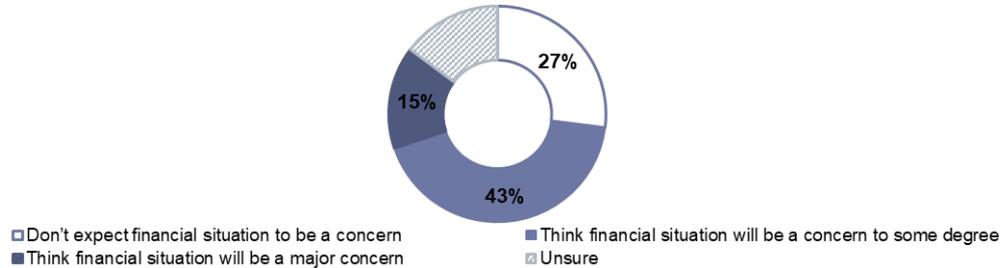
2.9. Nearly a third of respondents (31%) indicated that they are not managing well with their finances as a whole, including more than 1 in 5 who are having financial difficulties or are in deep financial trouble (22%). Consistent with findings in relation to housing costs, those in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit were more likely than others to indicate that they are not managing well (37% compared to 21% of others), although those not in receipt of benefits who spend 25% of their income on rent were more likely to report affordability problems.

2.10. Around 3 in 5 respondents (58%) expressed some concern about their future financial circumstances, including 15% for whom their future financial situation was a major concern. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who are not managing well at present were significantly more likely to express concerns about the future (83%, compared to 49% of those who not having difficulty at present).

Figure 6: View on current financial situation overall



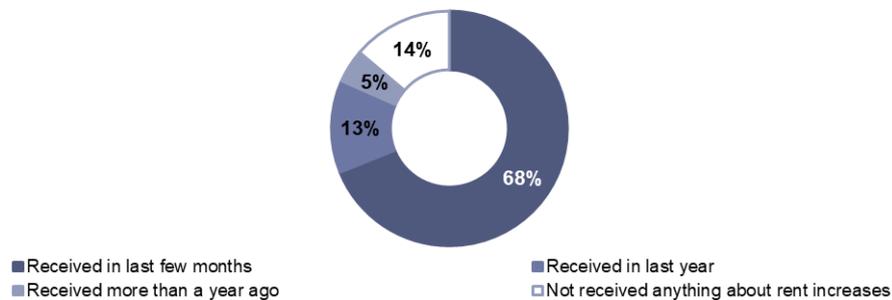
Figure 7: View on future financial situation



Rent consultation

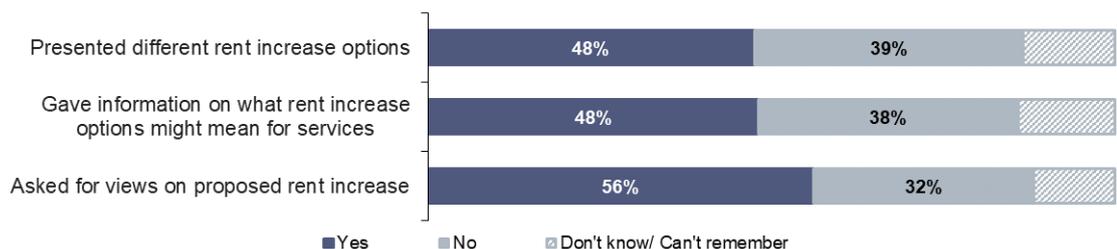
2.11. A large majority of respondents had received information from their landlord about annual rent increases; 85% indicated this, with nearly all of these having received information in the last year. Survey results indicate that RSL tenants are more likely to recall receiving information from their landlord about rent increases (89% compared to 70% of Council tenants).

Figure 8: Receipt of information from landlord about annual rent increases



2.12. Around half of respondents indicated that landlords presented different rent increase options (48%), and gave information on what these options might mean for services (48%). A little more than half of respondents (56%) indicated that information about annual rent increases asked for their views on the proposed increase. These findings were broadly similar across housing sectors.

Figure 9: Information provided by landlords on rent increases



PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. The current membership includes tenants, factored owners, tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and people who use homelessness services. In terms of the wider Panel profile, the focus is on ensuring membership includes representation across all socio-demographic groups, 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 for more focused engagement within these groups.

Ensuring a balanced Panel membership is also a key element of 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. A Panel refreshment exercise has been undertaken during 2018 and 2019 to replace the longest-standing members and maintain engagement levels. This has involved replacing more than a third of the total membership through recruitment of 191 new members at the time of reporting. As a result the total membership currently stands at 425, although this number is expected to increase over the coming months as new members continue to join.

The current Panel profile suggests a number of areas where further expanding Panel membership would improve representation. As noted above, the aim of ongoing recruitment and promotion work should 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, factored owners and potential those aged under 35.

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

Current membership		425
Age		
Under 35		14%
35-44		16%
45-59		29%
60-74		29%
75+		10%
Unknown		2%
How would you describe your gender?		
Woman		53%
Man		46%
In another way		1%
Housing Tenure		
Council tenant		41%
RSL tenant		44%
Owner		6%
Gypsy/ Traveller site resident		7%
Unknown		3%
Have used homelessness services		
Yes		4%
No		96%
Ethnicity		
White Scottish, British or Irish		87%
White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller)		9%
Black Minority Ethnic		2%
Unknown		1%
Disability		
1 or more disabilities		39%
No disability		48%
Unknown		13%
RTO membership		
Member of RTO		24%
Not a member of RTO		76%