

Scottish Housing Regulator

# **National Panel of Tenants and Service Users 2018/19**

## **Summary Report**

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# Key Findings 2018/19

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There is widespread awareness of and interest in tenant participation. Service users wish to see a diversity of opportunities to get involved.

A large majority would consider digital options to find service information, provide feedback or request a service from their landlord.

Nearly a quarter do not manage well with current housing costs and most are concerned about future rent affordability, primarily around rent increases.

Gypsy/Traveller Site Standards are seen as a positive in ensuring equity with other social tenants. Quality and condition of site facilities are the key Standards for tenants.

Suitable and safe temporary accommodation, support staff and minimising moves between units make the biggest positive difference for users of homeless services. Key challenges are feeling unsafe, poor condition, disruption for children, and financial difficulties.

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This report sets out findings from the 2018/19 programme of engagement with the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) National Panel.

## The National Panel

The National Panel is one of the ways in which SHR engages with tenants and other users of social landlord services, and fits into SHR's wider communication and engagement. The 6<sup>th</sup> year of Panel work involved a survey of all members and depth interviews with members, users of homeless services and Gypsy/Traveller site tenants. Key findings are set out below under the main themes for 2018/19.

## Tenant participation

Around 9 in 10 had heard of opportunities to participate in their landlord's decisions, most commonly surveys or tenant/resident forums.

More than three quarters had been involved in tenant participation. This was typically via surveys although a substantial proportion had been involved in service user events or forums.

Feedback highlighted a range of positives for these exercises. These included participants being more confident that their landlord was listening, feeling that they are helping to improve services, the enjoyment of sharing their experience with others, and improved confidence and communication skills. Some

frustrations were also evident, where participants felt that exercises had not involved a representative range of service users, where they felt unable to raise the issues that mattered to them, and where they had not seen a response from their landlord.

There appears to be widespread interest in tenant participation; 84% would like to be more involved. Tenant and resident forums, surveys, Tenant Scrutiny and service user events are the most popular options.



**84% want to be more involved in landlord decisions**

## Digital access to services

Digital options are the most popular ways for Panel members to receive information from landlords; 80% use email and/or their landlord's website. However, there remains 38% who prefer to receive information by post.

A large majority have or would consider using digital options to get in touch with their landlord (90%). Interest in digital options is most commonly related to finding information, providing feedback, contacting a service or making a complaint.



**90% have or would consider digital options to contact their landlord**

Factors that might deter use of digital options included not having access to or not feeling comfortable using digital services, not being aware of available services, and difficulty navigating landlord websites.

## Rent affordability

Nearly a quarter are not managing well with current housing costs (23%) and more than half find it difficult to heat their home (57%).

Difficulties are most common for those who spend 25% or more of their income on rent.

More than two thirds are concerned about the future affordability of their rent (69%). This was most commonly related to future rent increases (38%), although concerns also related to future benefit changes or changing income.



**69% are concerned about the affordability of their rent in the future**

## Gypsy/Traveller site tenants

Engagement with tenants on social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites focused on Site Standards published by the Scottish Government in 2015.

Several aspects of Gypsy/Traveller sites were highlighted as contributing to quality of life for tenants. Views were most positive on site location and proximity to local amenities, the sense of community on sites, the size of sites and pitches, and the site warden.

### In their words...

*"The site used to be OK but it has really gone downhill in the last few years."*



Concerns about sites most commonly related to condition and a perceived lack of investment in recent years, tenant safety on sites, and there being insufficient site provision to meet needs.

While awareness of Site Standards was limited (c1 in 10 interviewees), most felt that tenants would benefit from information on Standards. This was seen as important in enabling tenants to judge the quality of their site, and ensuring equity with other social tenants.

### In their words...

*"[Tenants] need to know if we're getting what we should."*



Views on the importance of specific Standards varied dependent on circumstances, but appeared to reflect views on what makes the biggest difference for tenants' quality of life. Standards around the quality and condition of pitches and site facilities were seen as most relevant.

Most had seen site improvement works in recent years, and some referred to planned works. These were generally seen as making a positive difference for tenants, particularly improvements to amenity blocks, playparks and provision of fences to pitches.

Tenants were also generally positive on landlords' management of improvement works. Most had received information in advance of works, and felt the process had been managed well. Views were particularly positive where tenants had the opportunity for input to the design process to ensure works met their needs. Frustrations primarily related to the time taken to complete works, including some where plans had not come to fruition.

## Users of homelessness services

The 2018/19 programme included interviews with current and recent users of homelessness services across 8 local authority areas.

The diversity of circumstances contributed to service users' needs. Anxiety and depression

were mentioned by most, especially those requiring emergency accommodation. Others felt able to wait for more suitable temporary accommodation, even if this meant remaining in significantly overcrowded circumstances. Previous experience of homelessness services was also an important factor; those without prior experience described anxiety around 'what will happen to me'.

Initial engagement with services had generally been very positive. Staff understanding of needs, putting service users at ease and clarity on entitlements were particularly important. Continuing support was also important for ongoing engagement with services. Service users feeling comfortable with support staff, and able to speak honestly about their needs, appear to have been key factors for those who have had positive outcomes.

A substantial proportion had stayed in multiple temporary units, typically an initial B&B stay before a more sustainable option. Some had been positive moves in response to the individual's needs. However, others referred to the disruption and distress caused by moving between multiple temporary units. This had been a particular challenge for those with children, several of whom noted how moves contributed to children feeling unsettled. Some children also had difficulty adjusting to new environments, particularly if parents struggled to make these feel 'homely'.

#### **In their words...**

*"Moving so much has been unsettling. My daughter was really stressed."*



Location was also an important factor. Some had concerns about the local area, including families who felt unable to allow their children out to play. Others noted that location was important for access to informal support networks and their children.

Most reported some challenges adjusting to temporary accommodation. For dispersed accommodation these were typically feelings of isolated. with some living alone for the first

time. Supported accommodation difficulties were most common for those without prior experience. These participants were anxious when first accessing accommodation, and took time to adjust to sharing facilities and 'house rules'. Bed and breakfast was typically the most challenging. Some felt this was a useful short-term option for them but most had significant difficulties, particularly for children.

#### **In their words...**

*"Support workers take the time to get to know you, I can talk to them about anything."*



Across these forms of accommodation, feedback highlighted the role of support in enabling individuals to settle in to temporary accommodation. In addition to practical assistance, this included emotional support and building relationships with support staff.

Most of those who had accessed settled accommodation felt this had been within the expected timescale. However, for some the length of wait had a negative impact on their wellbeing and mental health at the point of accessing settled accommodation. This was particularly following a period in temporary accommodation units where participants had felt unhappy or unsafe.

Transition into settled accommodation seems to have been important for tenancy sustainment. Support from homeless services and others had been crucial for many. This included accessing furniture and white goods, help with financial management, emotional support to build skills and confidence, and maintaining staff contact after the move.

The aspects of participants' experience that appear to have made the biggest positive difference were suitable and safe temporary accommodation, support staff, and minimising the number of moves between temporary units. The most commonly mentioned challenges were feeling unsafe in temporary accommodation, accommodation being in poor condition, disruption for households with children, and financial difficulties.

## WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

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

### Background

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

This report integrates quantitative survey results and qualitative findings to provide a rounded view of participants' views and experiences.

## 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.

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