Scottish Housing Regulator

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users

2024-25 Report

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This report sets out findings from the 2024/25 programme of engagement with the National Panel of Tenants and Service Users, commissioned by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

The Panel was established in 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The Panel is used to gauge service user priorities and experiences, and findings help to shape SHR's focus as regulator of social landlords. Members include social tenants, people who have used homelessness services, residents of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and owners using social landlord factoring services.

Regular refreshment exercises and ongoing promotion seek to maximise the level of engagement with Panel members, and improve representation of specific groups. Panel membership stood at 423 individuals as at March 2025. A profile of the current Panel membership is provided as an Annex to this report

The 2024/25 programme

The 2024/25 Panel programme was developed to reflect current SHR priorities and track views over time on key issues such as rents and finances. Across the programme, this year we asked Panel members about:

- Rent affordability, value for money and wider financial circumstances

- Damp or mould issues

- Heating and climate change

- Communication with landlords

- Awareness of SHR activities and feedback on the SHR website

- Experience of homelessness services

- Landlord engagement on Gypsy/Traveller sites

A combined quantitative and qualitative research approach comprised a survey issued to all Panel members in January 2025 followed by a more targeted web-testing exercise and in-depth qualitative engagement during February-March 2025. This report combines quantitative survey results with qualitative findings, based on responses to the full Panel survey (49% response, 206 respondents) and qualitative feedback. The qualitative engagement strand involved 29 Panel members, 39 users of homelessness services and 24 residents of Gypsy/Traveller sites.

The survey included questions across the first four themes listed above. Qualitative engagement focused on:

(i) A web-testing exercise for the SHR website – feedback is included at SHR WEBSITE AND INFORMATION.

(ii) Qualitive interviews with users of homelessness services and temporary accommodation – findings are reported at USERS OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES.

(iii) Survey interviews with residents of Gypsy/Traveller sites to explore experience of landlord engagement processes – findings are reported at GYPSY/TRAVELLER SITE RESIDENTS.

The 2024/25 programme has produced a rich dataset across the main themes noted above, illustrating the experience and views of a range of tenants and other service users. However, findings should not be seen as necessarily representative of the service user population more widely.

We refer to those taking part as 'respondents' where this was via the survey, and 'participants' where this was via qualitative methods. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number; for some questions this means that percentages may not sum to 100%. Similarly, aggregate figures cited in the text (e.g. the percentage of respondents answering 'strongly agree' or 'agree') may not sum to results presented in figures and tables. Illustrative quotes from qualitative participants may have been lightly edited for brevity.

RENTS AND VALUE

More than half (54%) feel that their rent is good value for money, but around a quarter (24%) feel that their rent is poor value.

A substantial proportion (46%) have experienced difficulties affording their rent – there has been a 9-point fall in experience of difficulties in the last year.

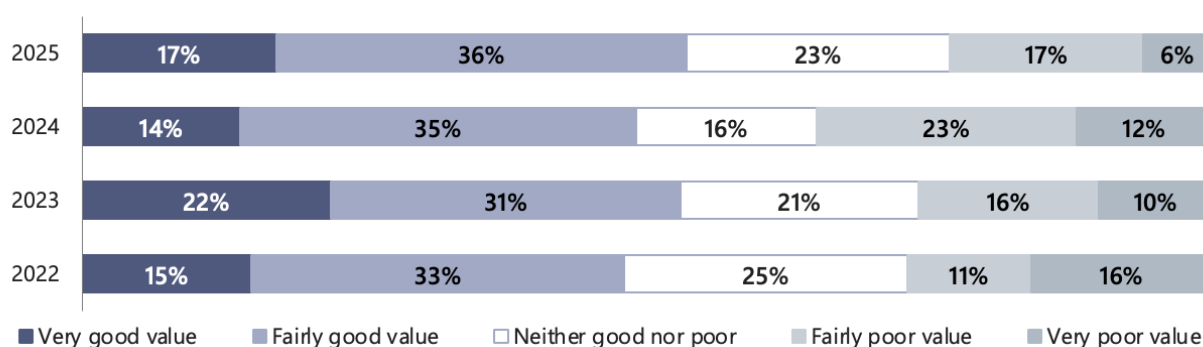The main causes of rent difficulties are rent levels, heating and other living costs.

The majority (74%) were concerned about the future affordability of their rent, most commonly linked to the potential impact of future rent increases.

This section considers views and experiences around rents, including whether respondents feel their rent is value for money, affordability difficulties, and any future affordability concerns.

Value for money

As Figure 1 shows, a little more than half of respondents (54%) felt that their rent is good value for money, while around a quarter (24%) felt their rent is poor value. The survey has shown some year-to-year variation in views on value for money, but this balance of views is broadly in line with findings across previous surveys. Views were broadly consistent across key respondent groups although RTO members[1] were generally more positive than others on value for money.

Figure 1: Whether rent is value for money

Year	Very good value	Fairly good value	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor value	Very poor value
2025	17%	36%	23%	17%	6%
2024	14%	35%	16%	23%	12%
2023	22%	31%	21%	16%	10%
2022	15%	33%	25%	11%	16%

[1] Regional Tenant Organisations (RTOs) are elected groups representing social tenants.

Factors influencing views on value for money

Panel members were asked about the factors that inform their judgement around whether rents are value for money. Written feedback from Panel members identified a range of considerations, primarily focused on (i) the quality of homes and ease of keeping the home warm, (ii) the quality and responsiveness of landlord services, and (iii) the affordability of rents and how rent levels compare with other housing options. Below we summarise the main points raised.

- Home and heating. The most commonly mentioned considerations related to the quality of respondents' home, how well the landlord maintains the condition of their home, the suitability of their home for their needs (including for disabled people and wheelchair users), the ease of keeping their home warm and the cost of heating their home. Comments on the quality of home also included specific reference to capital investment (such as upgrades to kitchens, bathrooms and doors/windows) as having a significant impact on perceptions around value for money. Investment was also mentioned in relation to upgrades to heating and energy efficiency. This reflected the importance of heating costs more generally – respondents referred to energy efficiency and heating system improvements as having a significant impact on their heating costs (and value for money judgements), while others highlighted inefficiencies or disrepair to their heating system as having a negative impact on their views.

- Service quality. The quality of landlord services was also a common consideration for respondents, with a number of respondents specifically weighing service quality against their level of rent. This included consideration of how service standards compared with other social landlords and private renting options. The responsiveness of repairs services was the most common focus of comments on service quality. This included reference to the impact of repairs and maintenance services on the quality of their home, including respondents highlighting the impact of persistent repairs issues on their quality of life. Respondents also specifically highlighted emergency repairs services, including positive examples of services responding well when most needed by tenants. Discussion of quality included specific consideration of whether landlord services meet service standards – for some this was a key factor in their value for money judgement.

- Affordability of rent. Respondents also referred to the affordability of their rent when judging value for money. Comments here included comparison of rent levels with other social landlords and the private rented sector, and reference to affordability in terms of the proportion of respondents' income spent on their rent. The cumulative impact of annual rent increases was also highlighted, again including reference to how recent increases compare with
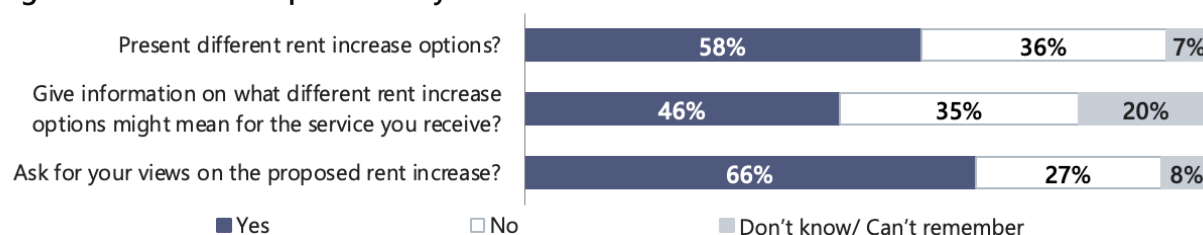
other landlords. A small number of respondents (including those in specialist housing) noted the affordability of service changes.

▪ <u>Engaging with and listening to tenants</u>. Several participants indicated that their landlord's approach to engagement affected how they judge value for money. This was linked to the importance of landlords demonstrating a genuine interest in tenants' needs, and "putting tenant interests first" in their decisions. Respondents also referred to specific aspects of engagement with tenants including transparency in how landlords' operate, the quality of information and engagement opportunities available to tenants, and treating tenants with respect.

As Figure 2 shows, most of those who had received information on rent increases indicated that this presented different rent increase options (59%), while a little less than half indicated that they were given information on what options might mean for services (46%). Most also indicated that information about annual rent increases asked for their views on the proposed increase (66%). These findings were broadly similar across key respondent groups, including different landlord types.

Survey data suggests a potential correlation between the information provided by landlords on rent increases, and views on value for money. In particular, those who had received information that gave information on how rent increase options might affect services, and/or asked for views on proposed increases, tended to be more positive about whether their rent is good value for money.

Figure 2: Information provided by landlords on rent increases

	Yes	No	Don't know/ Can't remember
Present different rent increase options?	58%	36%	7%
Give information on what different rent increase options might mean for the service you receive?	46%	35%	20%
Ask for your views on the proposed rent increase?	66%	27%	8%

Rent affordability

Figure 3 summarises respondent feedback on whether they have experienced difficulty affording their rent. As this shows, a substantial proportion (46%) had experienced difficulties affording their rent, including 32% who had experienced difficulties in the last year and 17% who are currently experiencing difficulties.

This represents a reduction in the incidence of rent affordability difficulties from a peak in 2023; a 9-point fall in those who had experienced difficulties within the year prior to the survey, and 4-point fall in those experiencing difficulties at the time of the survey. Results indicate that experience of rent affordability difficulties

is broadly consistent across key respondents groups, although those aged under 60 were more likely than others to have experienced difficulties.

Figure 3: Whether experienced difficulty affording rent

Year	Having difficulties at the moment	Difficulties in last year	Difficulties more than a year ago	Not had difficulties
2025	17%	15%	14%	54%
2024	12%	17%	24%	48%
2023	21%	21%	22%	41%
2022	7%	21%	15%	58%
2021	5%	12%	23%	60%

■ Having difficulties at the moment ■ Difficulties in last year ■ Difficulties more than a year ago ☐ Not had difficulties
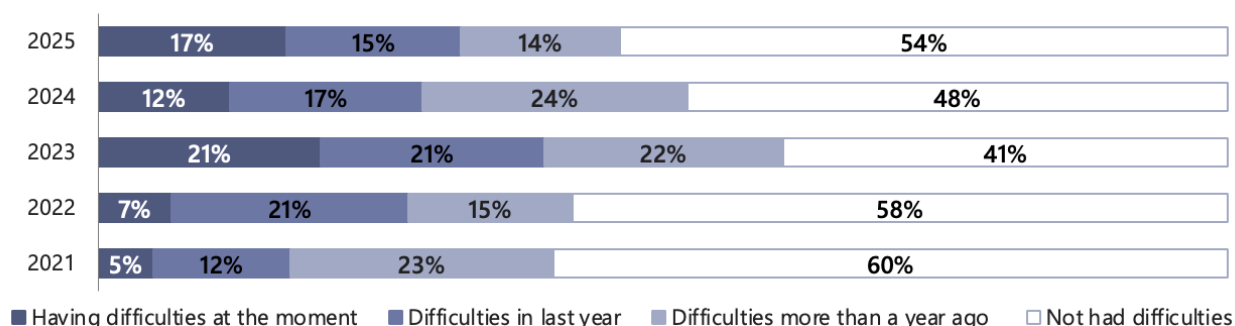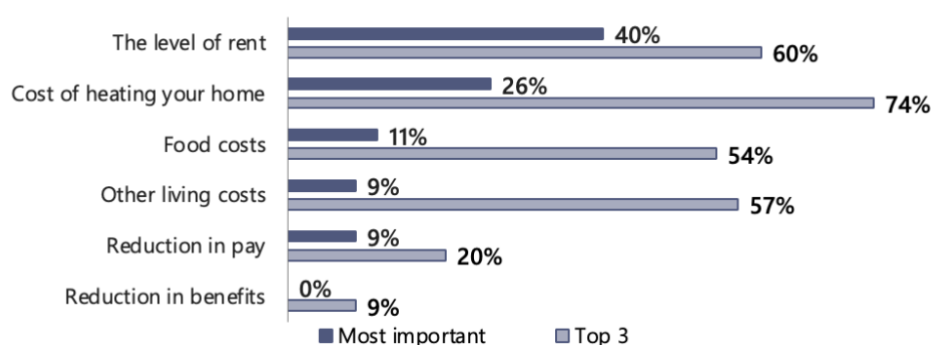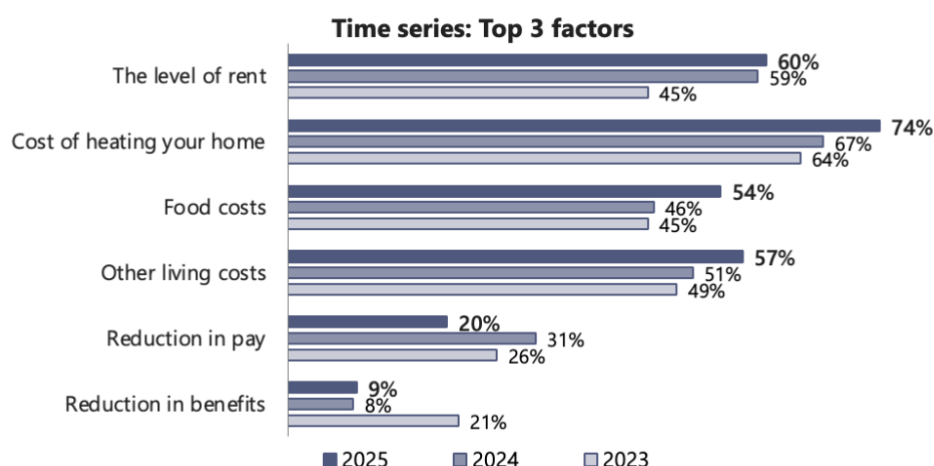
Figure 4 summarises feedback from those who have had difficulty affording their rent, about the factors that have contributed to this. This indicates that the most commonly mentioned factors contributing to rent affordability difficulties were the level of rent (mentioned by 60% and the most important factor for 40%) and cost of heating their home (mentioned by 74%, most important for 26%).

The overall mix of factors contributing to respondents' rent difficulties was broadly similar to that reported in previous surveys, with rent levels and heating the home consistently identified as the main factors contributing to rent difficulties. However, there has been some year-to-year variation in the proportion of respondents mentioning specific factors, for example reference to cost of heating the home has increased consistently since 2023.

Figure 4: Factors contributing to difficulty affording rent

Factor	Most important	Top 3
The level of rent	40%	60%
Cost of heating your home	26%	74%
Food costs	11%	54%
Other living costs	9%	57%
Reduction in pay	9%	20%
Reduction in benefits	0%	9%

■ Most important ☐ Top 3

Time series: Top 3 factors

The level of rent — 2025: 60%, 2024: 59%, 2023: 45%
Cost of heating your home — 2025: 74%, 2024: 67%, 2023: 64%
Food costs — 2025: 54%, 2024: 46%, 2023: 45%
Other living costs — 2025: 57%, 2024: 51%, 2023: 49%
Reduction in pay — 2025: 20%, 2024: 31%, 2023: 26%
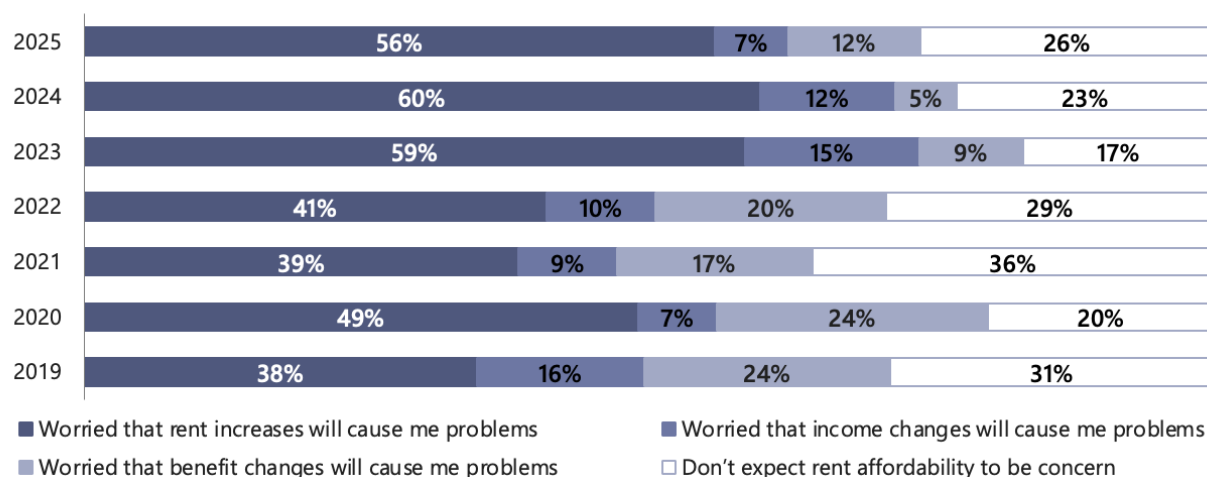Reduction in benefits — 2025: 9%, 2024: 8%, 2023: 21%

■ 2025 ■ 2024 □ 2023

Respondents were able to select multiple options.

Future affordability

As Figure 5 shows, the majority (74%) of respondents expressed concerns about affording their rent over the next few years. This represents a 9-point decrease from a peak in 2023, but remains above the levels recorded by surveys prior to 2023. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who had experienced difficulty affording their rent were significantly more likely to express concerns about the future; more than 8 in 10 of those who had experienced difficulties also expressed concerns about the future.

In terms of the nature of respondents' concerns about future rent affordability, these were most commonly related to rent increases. More than half of respondents (56%) expressed concerns about the impact of future rent increases on the affordability of their rent, similar to the 2023 survey. This compares with 7% who were concerned about future changes to their income, and 12% about future benefit changes.

Figure 5: Whether concerned about affording rent over next few years

Year	Worried that rent increases will cause me problems	Worried that income changes will cause me problems	Worried that benefit changes will cause me problems	Don't expect rent affordability to be concern
2025	56%	7%	12%	26%
2024	60%	12%	5%	23%
2023	59%	15%	9%	17%
2022	41%	10%	20%	29%
2021	39%	9%	17%	36%
2020	49%	7%	24%	20%
2019	38%	16%	24%	31%

■ Worried that rent increases will cause me problems ■ Worried that income changes will cause me problems
■ Worried that benefit changes will cause me problems □ Don't expect rent affordability to be concern

MONEY AND FINANCES

Around a fifth (18%) of respondents were not managing well financially at the time of the survey, with 4% in financial difficulty.

Financial worries affect a substantial proportion – 75% struggle with unexpected expenses (up 14-points since 2021) and 38% often have to delay or miss paying a bill (up 17-points since 2021).

Most feel their financial circumstances are worse now than 12 months ago (70%, a 14-point increase since 2024). Food and energy costs are seen as the biggest contributors to financial difficulties.

A large majority (88%) are concerned about their finances over the next few years.

This section considers respondent views and experiences around their financial circumstances, how these have changed in the last 12 months, and how respondents feel about their future finances.

Current financial circumstances

As Figure 6 shows, around a fifth (18%) of respondents indicated that they are not managing well with their finances as a whole, including 4% who are in financial difficulties. These findings are similar to the 2024 survey, and were broadly consistent across most respondent groups - although under 60s were more likely than older respondents to be struggling financially.

Figure 6: How managing financially at the moment

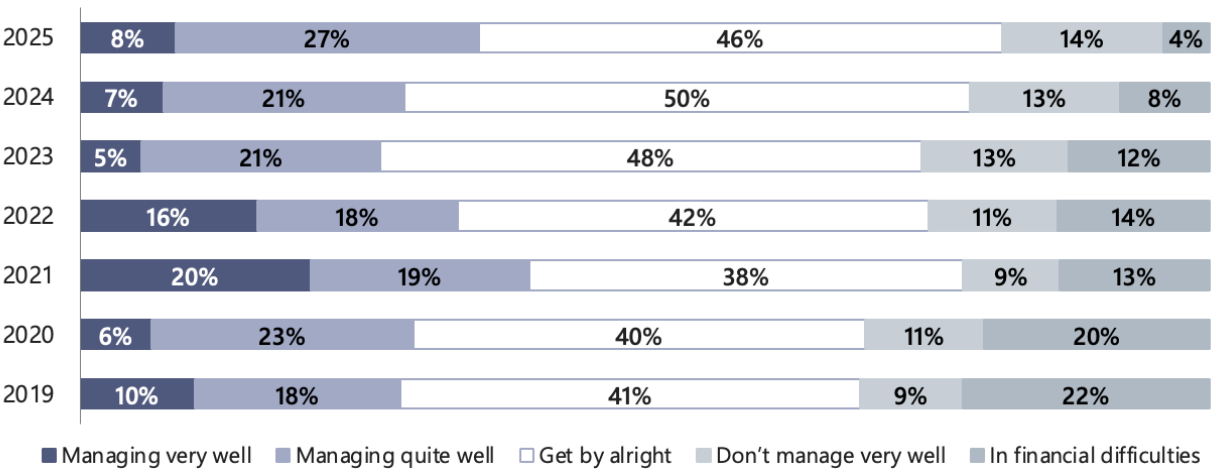| Year	Managing very well	Managing quite well	Get by alright	Don't manage very well	In financial difficulties
2025	8%	27%	46%	14%	4%
2024	7%	21%	50%	13%	8%
2023	5%	21%	48%	13%	12%
2022	16%	18%	42%	11%	14%
2021	20%	19%	38%	9%	13%
2020	6%	23%	40%	11%	20%
2019	10%	18%	41%	9%	22%

Figure 7 summarises views on specific aspects of respondents' current financial circumstances. Consistent with findings noted at Figure 6 above, results show that financial worries affect a relatively substantial proportion of respondents:

- More than a third of respondents (38%) often have to delay or miss paying a bill, the highest proportion recorded over the last five surveys.

- Three quarters (75%) are not able to save money most months.

- Unexpected household expenses often cause difficulty or stress for three quarters of respondents (75%).

- Money worries have a bad effect on relationships for more than 2 in 5 respondents (43%).

Also consistent with findings noted earlier, those aged under 60 were most likely to have experienced financial worries. This was particularly so in relation to often having to delay or miss bills, and money worries having a bad effect on relationships.

Figure 7: Views on current financial circumstances
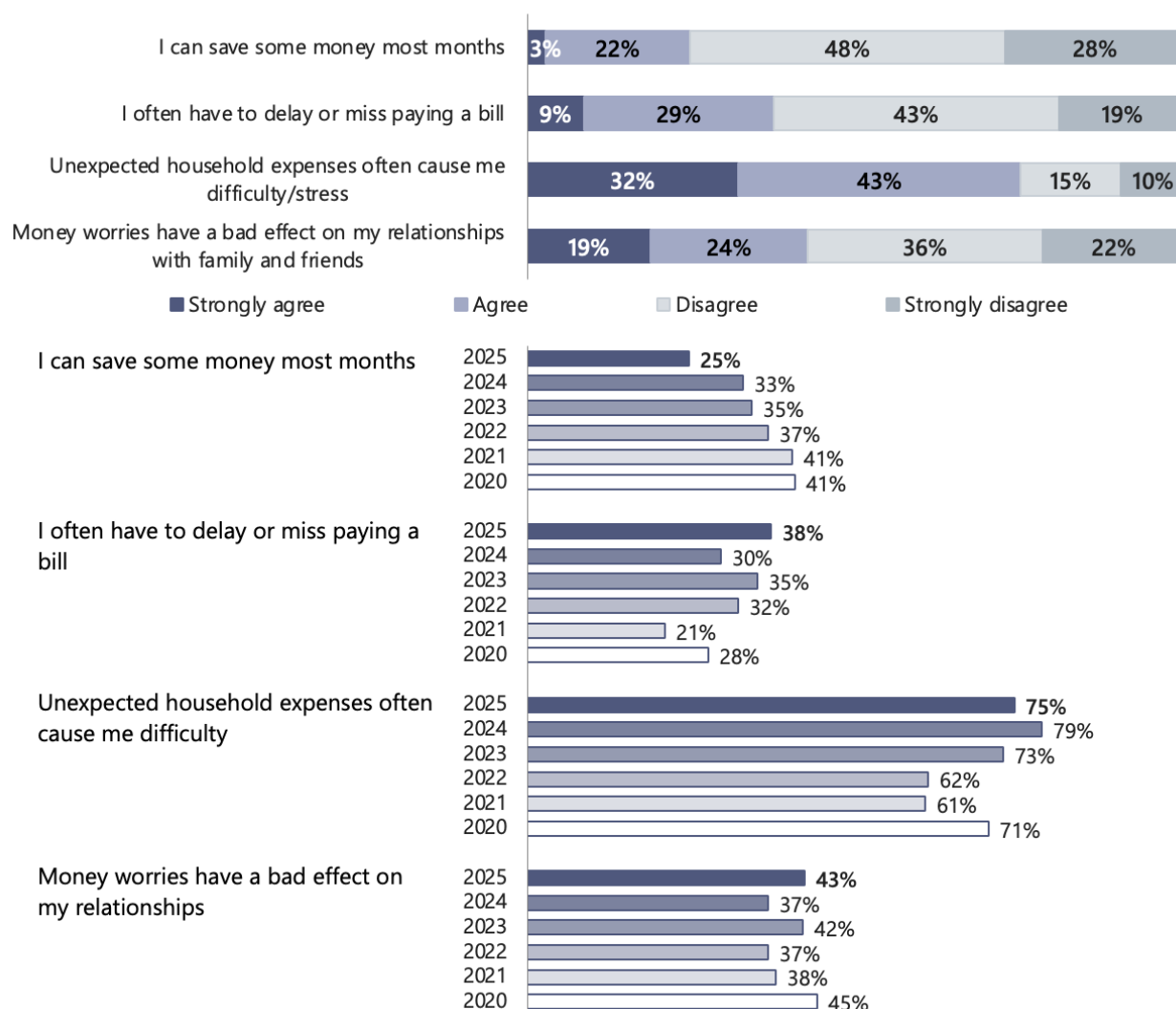
Financial circumstances over the last 12 months

Figure 8 summarises views on how respondents' current financial circumstances compare with the last 2 years. This shows that more than half of respondents felt that their financial circumstances are worse now than 6-12 months ago (64% feel they are worse than 6 months ago and 70% worse than 12 months ago).

This represents a 14-point increase since 2024 in the proportion of respondents who feel worse off than a year ago, although this remains below the level reported in the 2023 survey. Findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although under 60s were more likely than others to report their finances being worse now than over the last 2 years.

Figure 8: How current financial circumstances compare with 6, 12 and 24 months ago

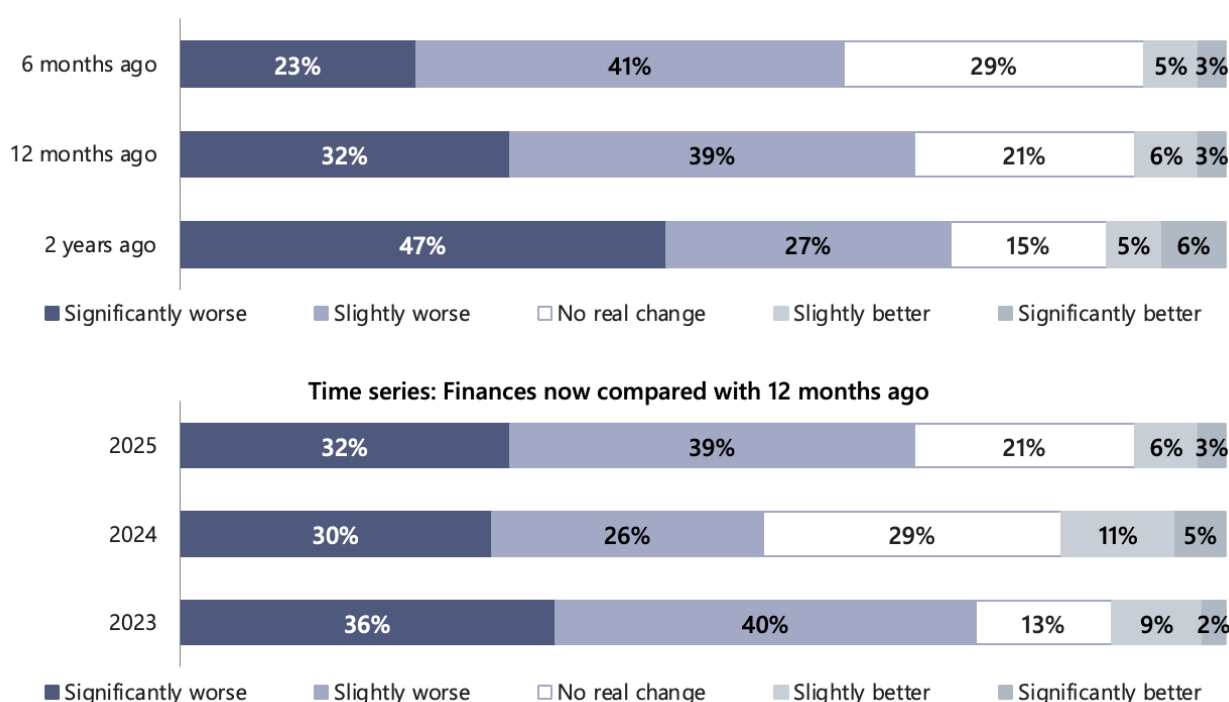Time series: Finances now compared with 12 months ago

Figure 9 highlights the factors that have affected respondents' finances over the last 2 years.

This shows that food and energy costs were the most commonly mentioned factors affecting respondents' financial circumstances. The great majority of respondents mentioned at least one of these issues, including a majority who felt that these have had a "significant impact" on their finances (63% for food costs and 65% for energy costs). A substantial proportion of respondents (51%) also indicated that increases in other living costs have had a "significant impact" on their finances.

Results were broadly similar to previous surveys, although it is notable that there has been a gradual decline since 2023 in the proportion of respondents who felt that increased food and energy costs had "significantly" affected their financial circumstances.
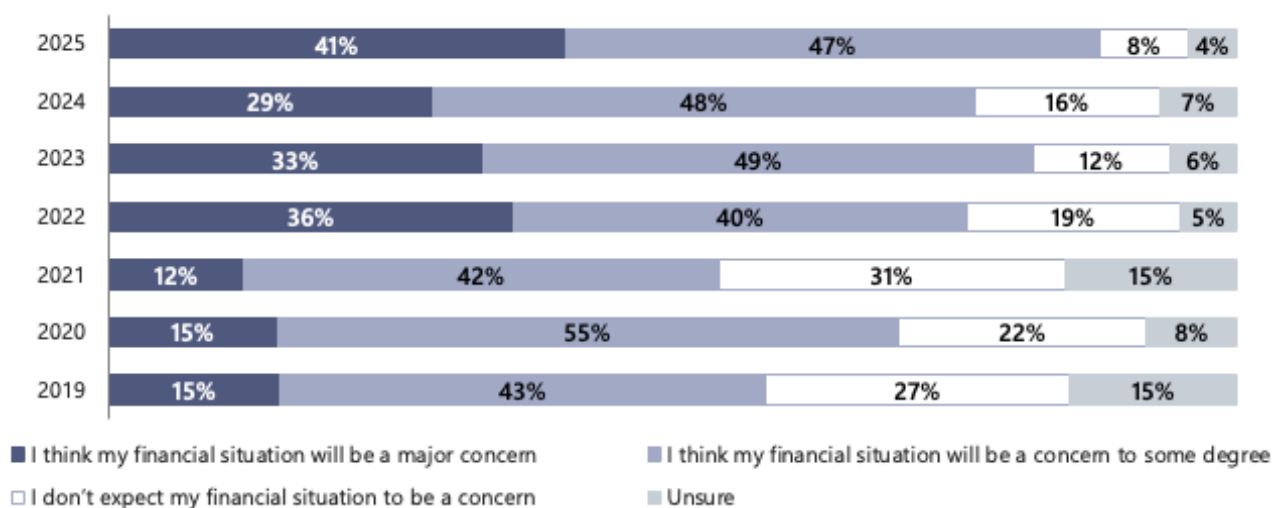
Figure 9: Factors affecting financial circumstances in the last 12 months
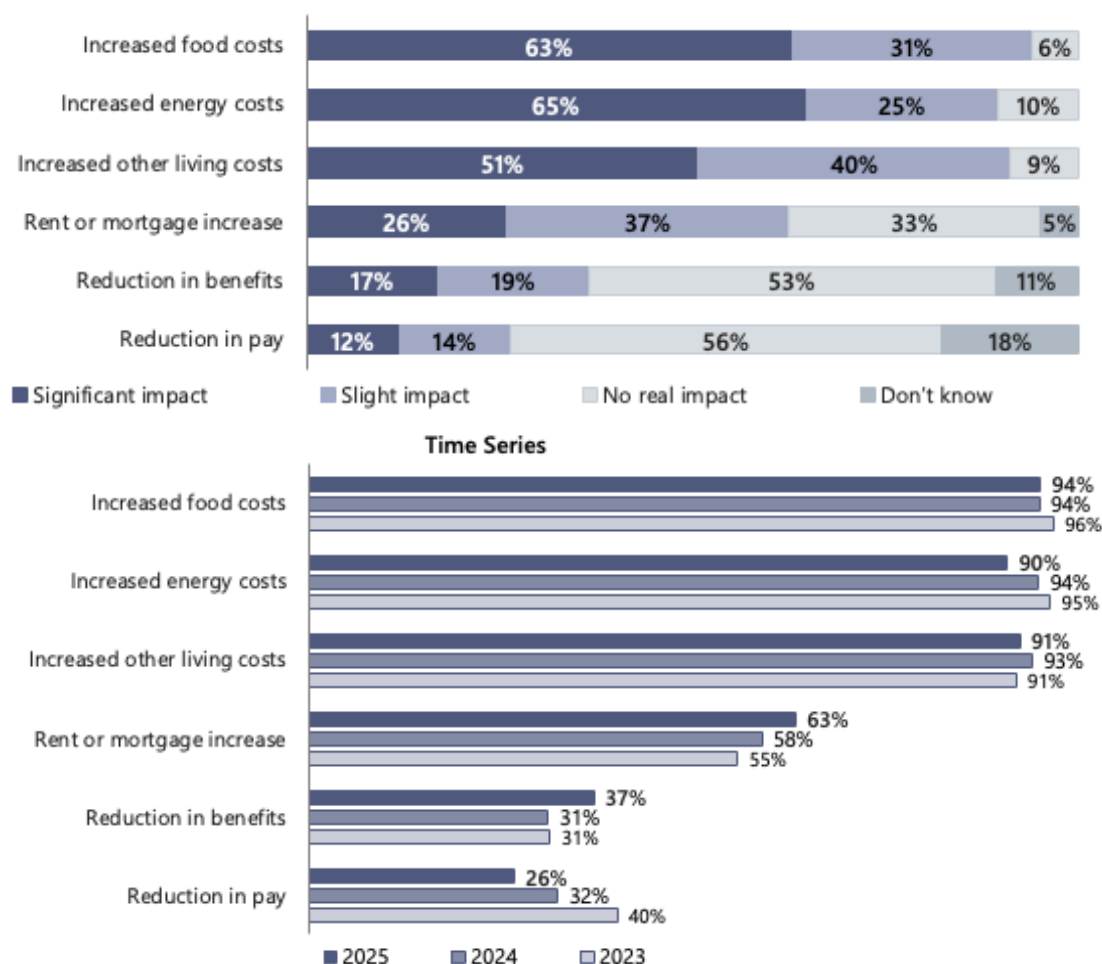
Views on future financial circumstances

As Figure 10 shows, a large majority of respondents (88%) expressed some concern about their financial circumstances over the next few years. This included 41% for whom their future financial situation was a "major concern". This represents an 11-point increase since 2023 in the proportion of respondents who are concerned about their future financial circumstances.

Figure 10: Expectations for finances over next few years

Legend:
- I think my financial situation will be a major concern
- I think my financial situation will be a concern to some degree
- I don't expect my financial situation to be a concern
- Unsure

YOUR HOME – DAMP AND MOULD

Around half of respondents (49%) had received information from their landlord about reporting damp or mould.

A large majority (83%) feel they would know how to report damp or mould concerns, and 27% had done so previously.

Views were more divided about how landlords would deal with concerns – nearly half (47%) were confident they would be dealt with quickly (but 29% disagreed) and 41% were confident that they would be dealt with effectively (but 34% disagreed).

This section summarises views and experiences in relation to damp or mould in their home. Panel members were first asked whether they had received information from their landlord about reporting damp or mould (Figure 11), and whether they had reported any damp or mould to their landlord (Figure 12).
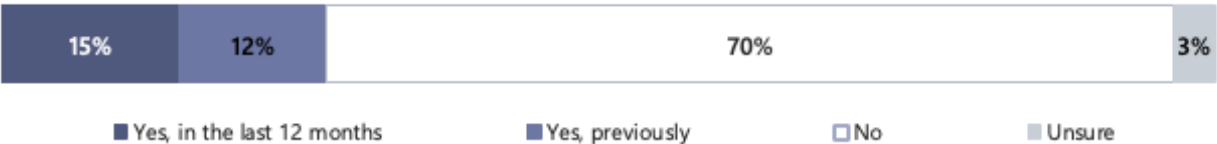
Around half of respondents (49%) indicated that they had received information about reporting damp or mould. This finding was consistent across most respondent groups, although RTO members were more likely than others to have seen information on damp or mould.

Around a quarter of respondents (27%) had reported damp or mould to their landlord, including 15% who had done so in the last year. This finding was consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 11: Whether received information from landlord about reporting damp or mould

| 28% | 21% | 43% | 8% |

■ Yes, in the last 12 months   ■ Yes, previously   ☐ No   ■ Unsure

Figure 12: Whether reported damp or mould to landlord

| 15% | 12% | 70% | 3% |

■ Yes, in the last 12 months   ■ Yes, previously   ☐ No   ■ Unsure

If you had to report damp or mould...

As Figure 13 shows, a large majority of respondents (83%) feel that they know how to report damp or mould concerns, and this finding is consistent across respondent groups.

Views were more divided on how landlords would deal with concerns. Nearly half (47%) were confident that their landlord would deal with these quickly, but 29% were not confident about this. Similarly, 41% were confident that the landlord would deal with concerns effectively but 34% were not confident about this. It is also notable that RSL tenants and RTO members were more confident than others in how their landlord would deal with damp or mould concerns.

Figure 13: Confidence in having to report damp or mould

Figure 13: Confidence in having to report damp or mould
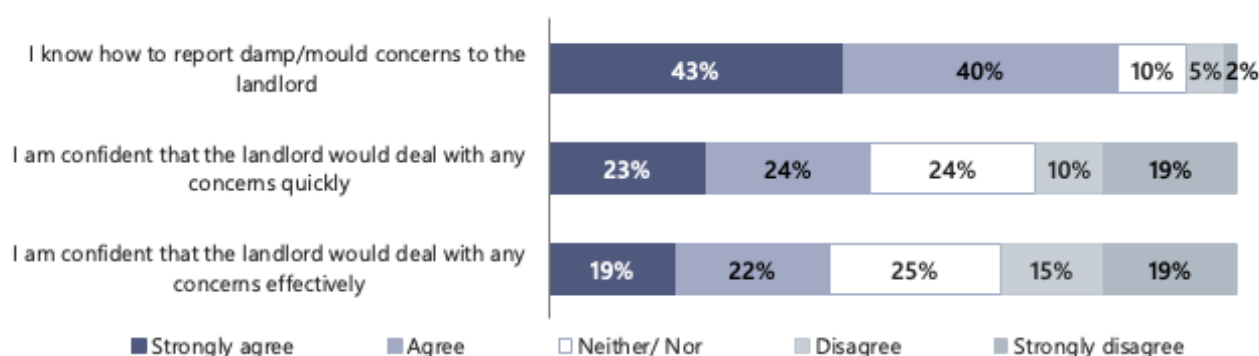
Respondents were also asked about anything that might prevent them from reporting damp or mould to their landlord (Figure 14). Around half of respondents mentioned potential barriers to reporting concerns, with these typically relating to the potential value of reporting damp or mould, rather than a lack of clarity around how to do so. For example, the most commonly mentioned issues were a lack of confidence that the landlord would be able to resolve the issue (29%), and being unsure whether it is worth reporting (18%). In contrast, relatively few were unsure of who to speak to (8%) or whether it is the landlord's responsibility (5%).

Figure 14: Potential barriers to reporting damp or mould
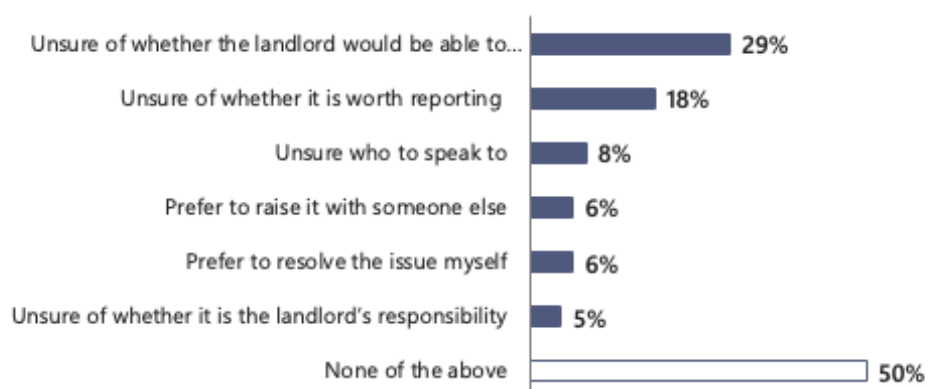
Respondents were able to select multiple options.

The survey asked respondents to suggest anything that their landlord could do differently on damp and mould. Written feedback included some noting that they had been affected by damp or mould, and reference to contributing factors such as poor ventilation and difficulty keeping their home warm. Some also highlighted the importance of resolving the issue quickly. This appeared to be linked to a wider point that tenants wished to ensure repairs are resolved first time.

It was also suggested that landlords can seek to unfairly blame tenants for damp/mould issues, and a view that this deflects the need to address underlying issues such as ventilation. There were calls for landlords to be more pro-active in identifying and addressing damp and mould issues, rather than relying on tenants or others to identify problems. This included a perceived need for further investment in properties to improve ventilation and heating/insulation. It was proposed that more landlords should take active steps to ensure all tenants are aware of their policy on damp and mould, and of how to report concerns.

HEATING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A large majority of respondents (91%) have heard of national 'net zero' targets, including 81% who know at least a little about this.

Awareness is more limited for landlords' plans for zero emission heating – 37% know at least a little about this.
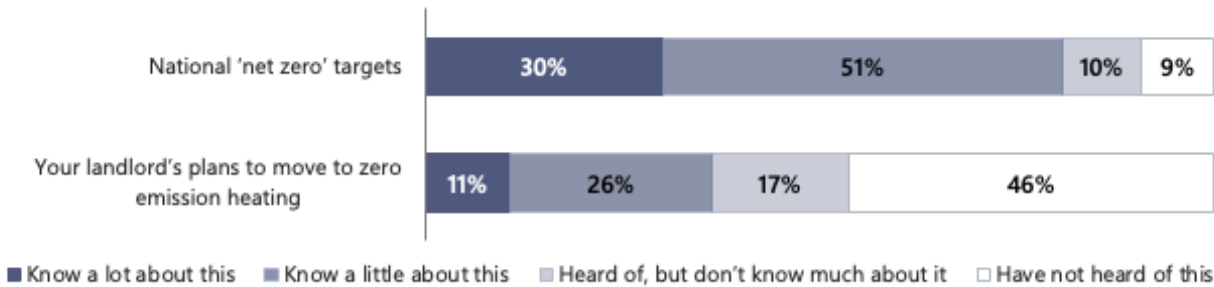
A large majority (81%) are interested in information on landlord plans for zero emission heating, but less than half (47%) know how to find this information.

This section considers Panel members' awareness and experience of issues around heating and climate policy.

As Figure 15 shows, a large majority of respondents (91%) had heard of national 'net zero' targets, including 81% who felt that they knew at least a little about this. Awareness was less common around landlord plans to move to zero emission heating; 37% indicated that they knew a little about their landlord's plans for this.

Findings were consistent across most respondent groups. However, it is notable that RTO members were significantly more likely than others to have heard about their landlord's plans to move to zero emission heating.

Figure 15: Awareness of climate change policies

Around a third of respondents (32%) indicated that they had seen information about their landlord's plans for zero emission heating, including 14% who had received information from their landlord (
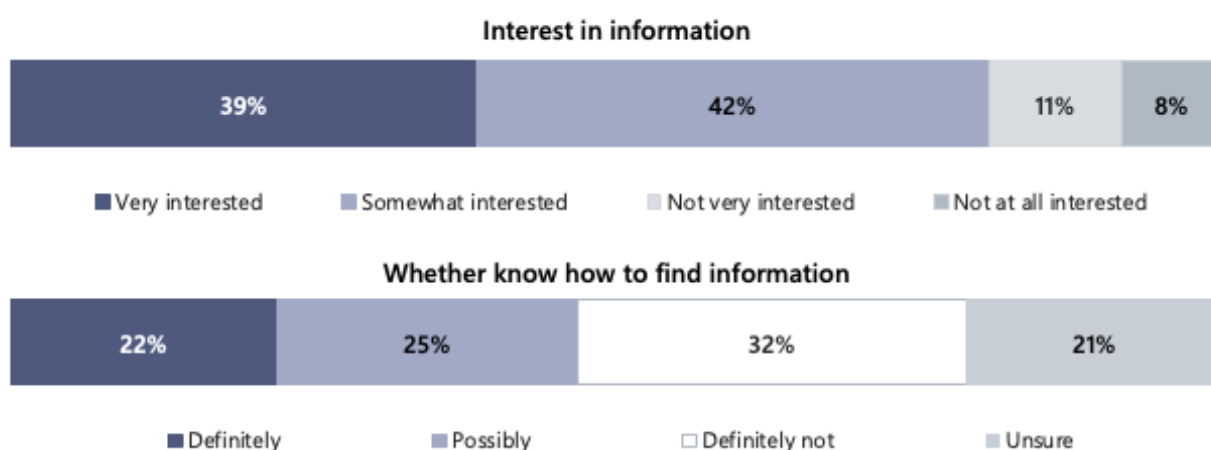
Figure 16). There remained more than half (53%) who had not seen or heard anything about this. Again it is notable that RTO members were significantly more likely to have seen or heard this information.

Figure 16: Whether received information from landlord about zero emission heating

14%	18%	53%	14%

■ Yes, have received information ■ Not received information from landlord, but seen/heard this
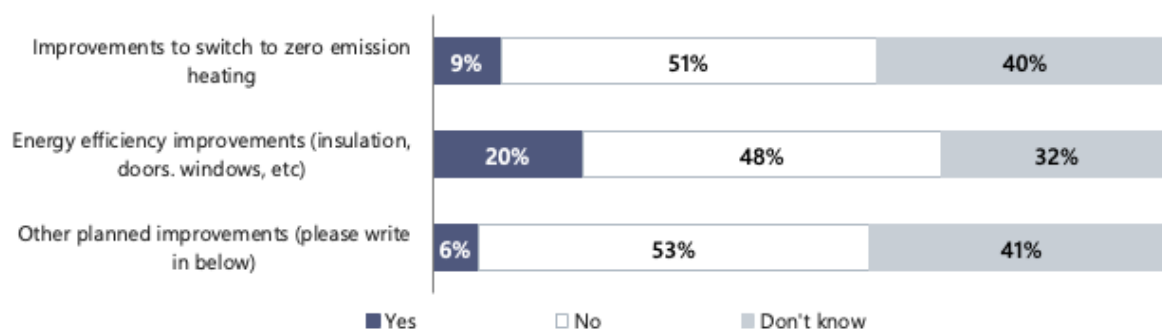☐ Not seen or heard anything about this ■ Unsure
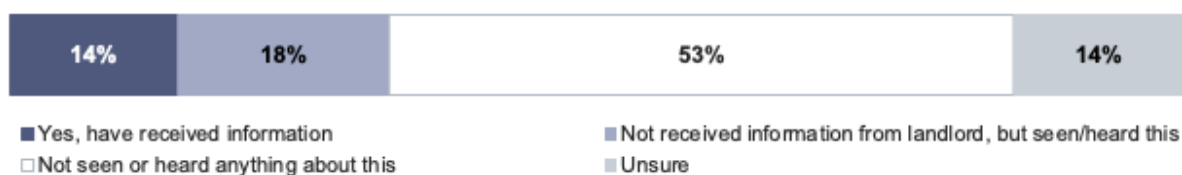
As Figure 17 shows, a large majority of respondents (81%) are interested in information on landlord plans for zero emission heating, including 39% who are "very interested". However, less than half (47%) felt that they know how to find this information. Survey responses suggest that RTO members are significantly more likely to know how to access information on their landlord's plans.

Figure 17: Interest in information on landlord plans for zero emission heating

Interest in information

39%	42%	11%	8%

■ Very interested   ■ Somewhat interested   ☐ Not very interested   ■ Not at all interested

Whether know how to find information

22%	25%	32%	21%

■ Definitely   ■ Possibly   ☐ Definitely not   ■ Unsure

Relatively few respondents were aware of any planned improvements to their home (Figure 18). Around 1 in 10 (9%) were aware of planned improvements to switch to zero emission heating, while 1 in 5 (20%) were aware of energy efficiency improvements. This was consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 18: Awareness of planned improvements to home

	Yes	No	Don't know
Improvements to switch to zero emission heating	9%	51%	40%
Energy efficiency improvements (insulation, doors. windows, etc)	20%	48%	32%
Other planned improvements (please write in below)	6%	53%	41%

■ Yes   ☐ No   ■ Don't know

GETTING INFORMATION

The majority (60%) have received performance and regulatory information from their landlord, including Annual Assurance Statements (46%), SHR Landlord Report (45%) and information on raising serious concerns with the Regulator (43%).

Around a third (33%) have seen or heard about SHR in the last year, most commonly via the SHR website.

A large majority would use the SHR website in the future, most commonly to learn more about SHR or to access information on their landlord's performance.

Most respondents would prefer to receive information about the SHR via newsletters (63%) and/or via the SHR website (62%).

This section considers views and experience of landlord communication, and awareness of the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Landlord communication and performance information

The survey first asked about how Panel members prefer to access information about their landlord. As Figure 19 shows, the landlord website was the most commonly preferred option; two thirds of respondents (67%) would choose this option, with 52% selecting this as their top choice for accessing information on their landlord. Other commonly mentioned options included an email request to the landlord (mentioned by 67%) and telephone request (50%), but these were less likely to be selected as the top choice.
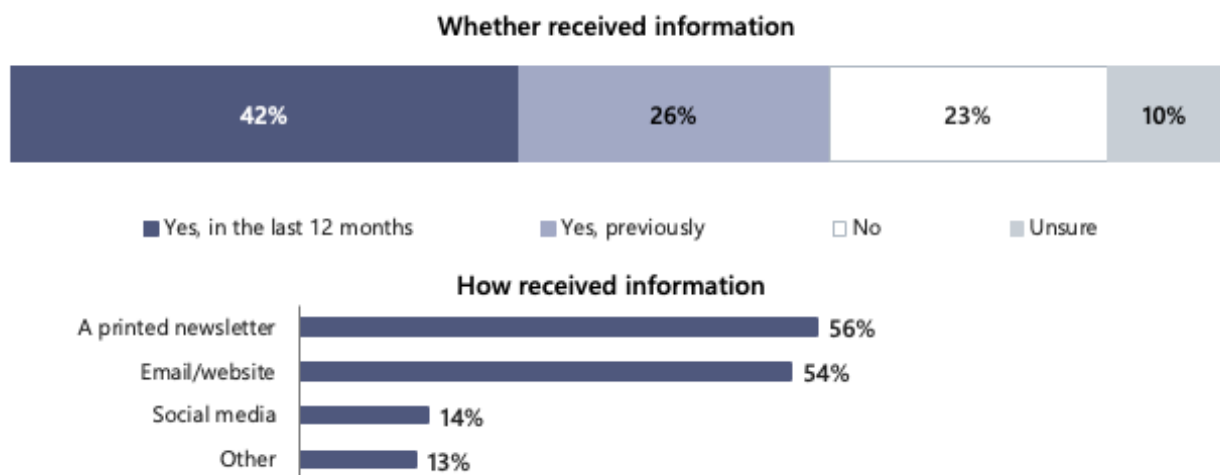
Figure 19: How would prefer to get information on landlord
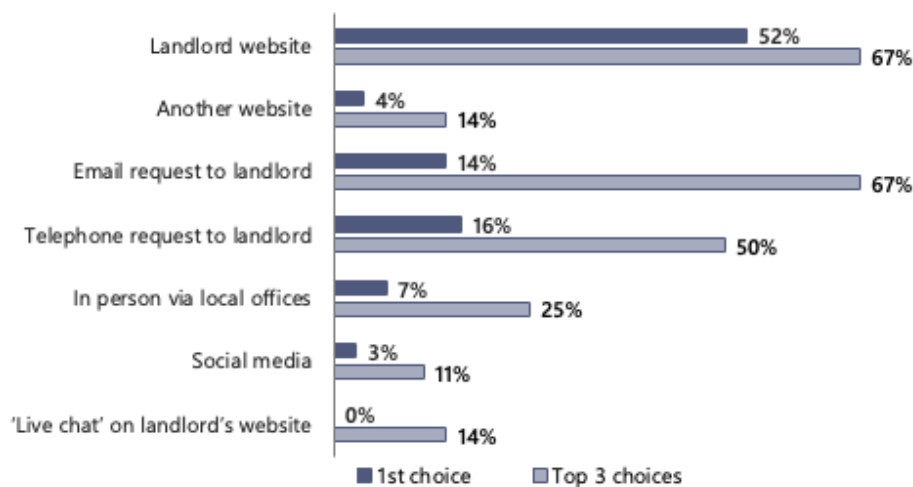
Respondents were able to select multiple options.

The majority of respondents (68%) had received performance information from their landlord (Figure 20), including 42% who had received information in the last year. RTO members were significantly more likely than others to have received performance information. Respondents were most likely to have received performance information via a printed newsletter (mentioned by 56%) and email or website (54%).
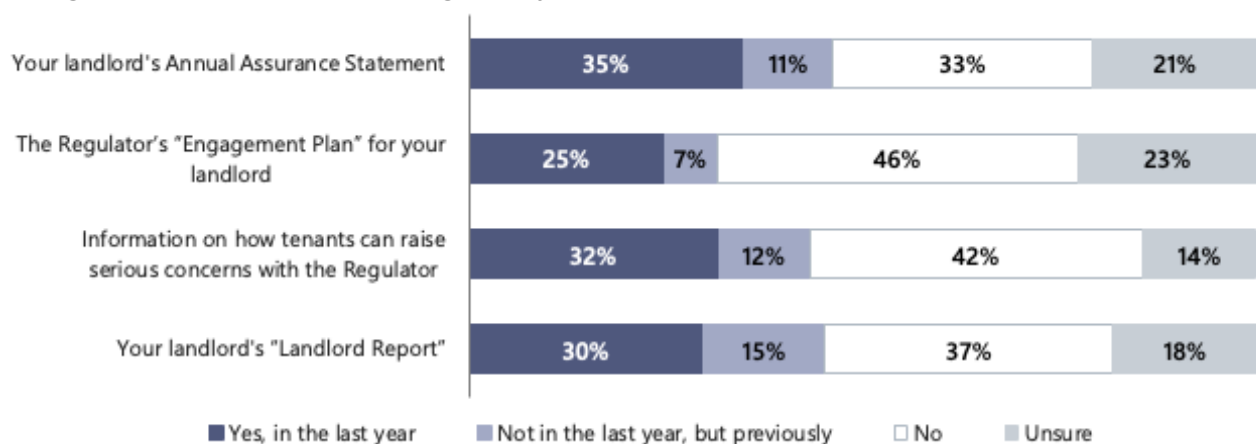
Figure 20: Whether received performance information from landlord

Whether received information

42%	26%	23%	10%

■ Yes, in the last 12 months ■ Yes, previously □ No ■ Unsure

How received information

A printed newsletter	56%
Email/website	54%
Social media	14%
Other	13%

Respondents were able to select multiple options.

The majority of respondents (60%) indicated that they had received performance and regulatory information from their landlord (Figure 21). Respondents were most likely to have received their landlord's Annual Assurance Statement (46%), their landlord's SHR Landlord Report (45%) and information on how tenants can raise serious concerns with the Regulator (43%). Consistent with results noted above, RTO members were more likely than others to have received each of the documents and information listed at Figure 21.

Figure 21: Performance and regulatory information received from landlord

	Yes, in the last year	Not in the last year, but previously	No	Unsure
Your landlord's Annual Assurance Statement	35%	11%	33%	21%
The Regulator's "Engagement Plan" for your landlord	25%	7%	46%	23%
Information on how tenants can raise serious concerns with the Regulator	32%	12%	42%	14%
Your landlord's "Landlord Report"	30%	15%	37%	18%

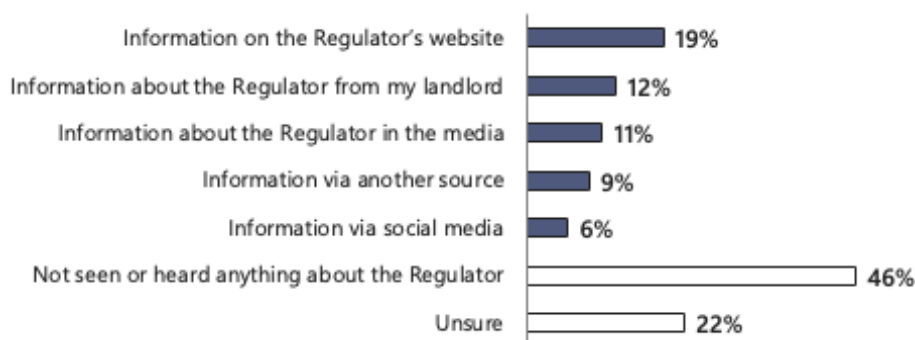■ Yes, in the last year ■ Not in the last year, but previously □ No ■ Unsure

Awareness of the Scottish Housing Regulator

Around a third of respondents (33%) indicated that they had seen or heard about SHR in the last year. As Figure 22 shows, respondents referred to a range of information sources including the Regulator's website (19%), information from their landlord (12%) and in the media (11%). RTO members were more likely than others to have seen information on the Regulator.

Written feedback from those who had recently seen information about SHR indicates that this was most commonly related to performance reporting, including reference to Landlord Reports and Scottish Social Housing Charter reporting. Respondents also referred to having seen information about SHR's role and activities, engagement with their landlord and thematic publications.

Figure 22: Whether seen/heard anything about SHR in the last year

Information on the Regulator's website — 19%
Information about the Regulator from my landlord — 12%
Information about the Regulator in the media — 11%
Information via another source — 9%
Information via social media — 6%
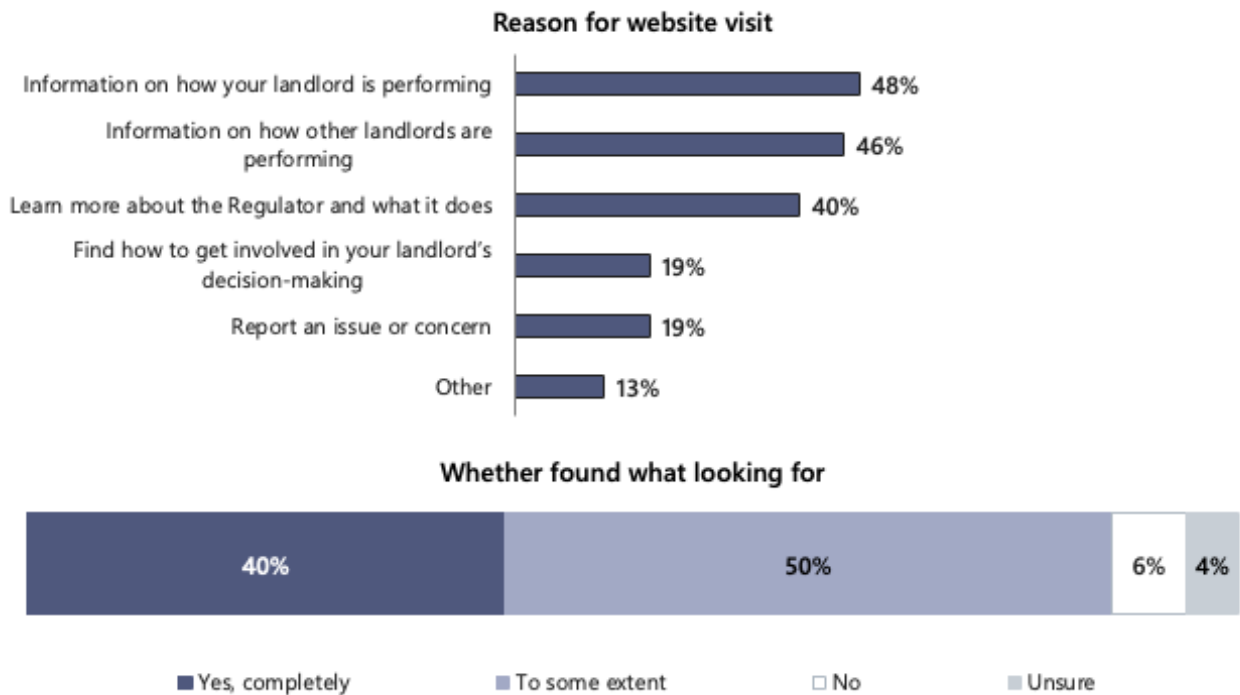Not seen or heard anything about the Regulator — 46%
Unsure — 22%

Respondents were able to select multiple options.

Around a third of respondents (36%) indicated that they have visited the SHR website, including 21% who have done so in the last year.

The survey asked about respondents' most recent visit to the SHR website. As Figure 23 shows, respondents were most likely to have used the website to access information on their landlord's performance (48%), how other landlords are performing (46%) and to learn more about the Regulator (40%). The great majority of respondents (90%) indicated that they had found what they were looking for to some degree.

A small number of respondents suggested potential improvements to the SHR website. These included offering an email newsletter for tenants and service users, weekly or daily updates summarising recent reports and upcoming events, and more information on how the Regulator assures the accuracy of landlord data.
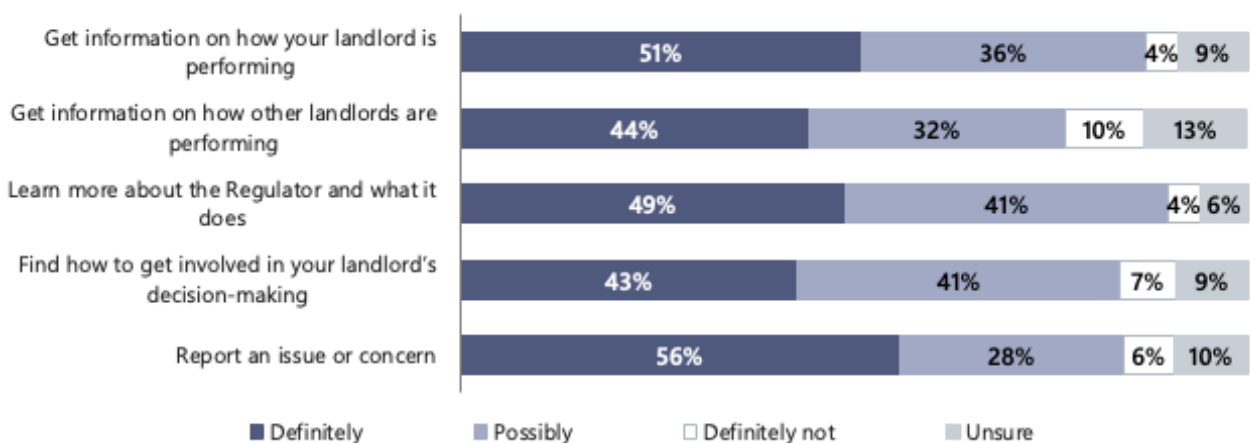
Figure 23: Most recent use of SHR website

Reason for website visit

Information on how your landlord is performing	48%
Information on how other landlords are performing	46%
Learn more about the Regulator and what it does	40%
Find how to get involved in your landlord's decision-making	19%
Report an issue or concern	19%
Other	13%

Whether found what looking for

Yes, completely	To some extent	No	Unsure
40%	50%	6%	4%

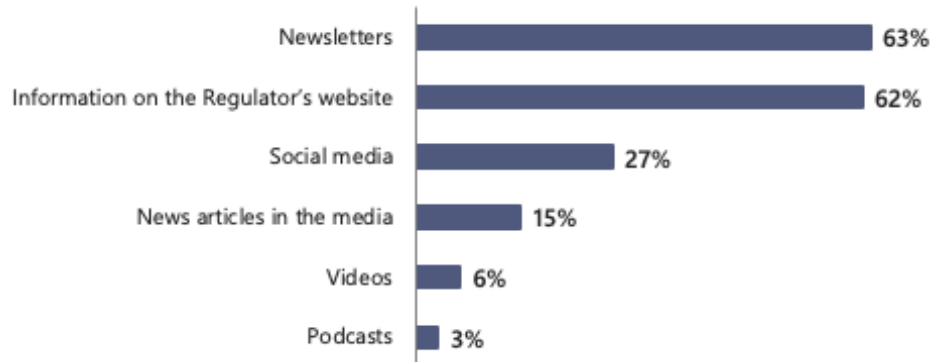Respondents were able to select multiple options.

A large majority of respondents indicated that they would be interested in using the Regulator's website for one or more of the reasons listed at Figure 24. Interest was most widespread in relation to learning more about the Regulator (90% would use the website for this) and getting information on their landlord's performance (87%). A large majority would also consider using the website to report an issue of concern (84%) or to find out how to get involved in their landlord's decision-making (84%). The small number of respondents who indicated that they would not use the SHR website included individuals who do not use the internet, who feel the Regulator is not relevant to them, or who questioned the accuracy of information published on the website.

Figure 24: Interest in using SHR website in the future

	Definitely	Possibly	Definitely not	Unsure
Get information on how your landlord is performing	51%	36%	4%	9%
Get information on how other landlords are performing	44%	32%	10%	13%
Learn more about the Regulator and what it does	49%	41%	4%	6%
Find how to get involved in your landlord's decision-making	43%	41%	7%	9%
Report an issue or concern	56%	28%	6%	10%

Respondents would generally prefer to receive information about the SHR via newsletters (63% mentioned this) and/or via the Regulator's website (62%, see Figure 25). In terms of other options, 27% would like to receive information via social media and 15% via news articles in the media. Relatively few would prefer to receive information via videos or podcasts (6% and 3% respectively).

Figure 25: How prefer to receive information about the SHR

Respondents were able to select multiple options.

SHR WEBSITE AND INFORMATION

Nearly all website tasks (79 of 81) were completed to some degree, and most of those providing feedback (57 of 61) had found the task 'very' or 'fairly' easy.

Views were very positive on the quality of the SHR website, and the information provided. Participants referred to site accessibility, use of clear language, and information that is easy to understand and relevant for users of landlord services.

Positives identified for the website included an effective search function and clear page headings, while a small number had difficulties finding information and found the volume of information provided challenging.

As noted at section 1 of this report, one of the three strands of qualitative engagement with the National Panel this year focused on the SHR website. The purpose of this strand was to gather feedback from a selection of Panel members through a series of exercises testing their experience of trying to access specific information through the website.

The website testing exercise involved 29 Panel members, selected to include a cross-section of individuals. Each participant was asked to use the SHR website to complete three tasks; two from the 'information' tasks below, and one from the 'read and review' tasks.

Information sourcing tasks

1: How to make a complaint about a landlord

2: How SHR includes tenants and service users in its work

3: The latest performance information for your landlord

Read and review tasks

1: Factsheet on complaints and serious concerns

2: Guide on how SHR regulates

3: Information on how SHR includes tenants and service users

Specific tasks were allocated to participants to ensure that each task was attempted by a mix of individuals, and that participants were varied in terms of the combination of tasks they were asked to complete. Participants were also selected to ensure that tasks were completed using various types of device including laptops/PCs, smartphones and tablets.

Navigating the SHR website

The 29 participants completed a total of 81 tasks as part of the exercise. Feedback was gathered on participants' experience of completing the tasks and key points are summarised below:

- Nearly all tasks (79 of 81) were completed to some degree, with 70 of these 79 tasks completed fully. Participant feedback indicates that incomplete tasks included those who were unable to find information on their landlord, and who had difficulty with the volume of material included in the exercise.

- Most of the tasks were completed within 10 minutes (45 of the 78 where this data was provided). Completion time varied dependent on task, and was typically longer for sourcing of performance information and "read and review" tasks. For example, the majority of information sourcing tasks were completed within 5 minutes (including some within 1-2 minutes) while read/review tasks typically required 10 minutes of more.

- For the 61 cases where participants provided feedback on how easy or difficult they found the task, 57 rated this as "very" or "fairly" easy. Comments highlighted particular positives around effectiveness of the search function in providing quick access to information, and clear page headings and navigation links.

- Two of the three cases where participants found the task difficult related to finding performance information – comments indicated that some struggled to search for their landlord, and/or struggled with the volume of information provided. A small number of participants also reported encountering several aborted attempts to find the required information, including taking time to notice the "for tenants" tab.

Information provided

Participants were also asked for their views on the quality of information that they accessed through the SHR website. This data was provided for 60 of the tasks completed.

Feedback was very positive, with participants describing the information as "very good" or "fairly good" in 58 of 60 cases. Key points made by participants are summarised below:

- Website content was described as clear in its use of language, and minimal use of technical terminology or "jargon". Some drew favourable comparisons with other websites and publications, and there was appreciation for performance information being presented in a fair and balanced way.

- Information was also generally seen as easy to understand, including reference to clear structuring of information. Participants noted that landlord reports include a significant volume of data and some found this overwhelming, but it was also suggested that information is presented in a way that makes it more accessible to tenants and service users. However, a small number would have liked to see more background information to aid interpretation of performance information, including on how the accuracy of data is verified.

- The majority of those providing comment felt that the information presented was relevant to the experience of tenants and service users. This included specific reference to information on landlord performance and regulation as being of value to tenants, with several participants specifically noting that they had gained a better understanding of SHR's role and how this relates to their own experience. Some also noted that they had not been aware of the range of available performance information, and commented positively on the landlord comparison function in particular. There was also positive reference to external links to other agencies or information sources that may be relevant for individuals.

Overall views on the SHR website

In addition to experience of completing specific tasks, participants were also asked for their views on the SHR website as a whole.

Consistent with the positive findings reported above, participants were generally very positive about the website. This was particularly the case in relation to ease of navigating the site (24 of 25 rated this positively, including 17 rating as "very good") and the relevance of site content (all rating this positively, 17 as "very good").

Feedback from these participants highlighted specific positives around accessibility for those with sensory impairment and/or potential literacy barriers. This included reference to the "clean" page layout and design, with good use of white space and limited use of colour. Respondents also reiterated previous comments around the ease of site navigation, plain language, and use of external links to other potential sources of interest.

Only four participants gave any aspect of the SHR website a poor rating, with two of these primarily concerned that SHR does not do enough to ensure tenants are aware of its work. A small number of participants, including some who rated the website positively, suggested potential improvements based on their experience. These are summarised below.

- A link to a "jargon buster" for those who are less familiar with terminology around social landlord performance.

- Links to alternative language options, and text to speech for those with visual impairment.

- A potential need for larger font sizes for those with visual impairment.

USERS OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Clarity on accommodation options and support was key to participants' initial engagement with services, especially for those experiencing homelessness for the first time, those with particular support needs, or with a limited support network.

Immediate access to accommodation was the overwhelming concern for some and there were examples of services being unable to provide this. Some also made clear that a stay in hostel, hotel or B&B accommodation had been difficult experience.

Making the transition to other types of longer term temporary accommodation was a key challenge, especially where this followed a prolonged stay in supported or institutional accommodation - although some saw this move as a significant positive step in stabilising their living circumstances and accessing support.

Location, quality and access to support networks were the key considerations for participants in terms of the suitability of temporary accommodation.

A permanent home was a positive outcome for many participants, but managing this transition had been a real challenge for some - especially Care Experienced people and others who had not lived independently for some time. Access to practical and emotional support was an important success factor.

The second qualitative engagement strand involved people with experience of homelessness services. This focused on their experience of accessing services, any experience of the various types of temporary accommodation, and of accessing a permanent home of their own. Findings are based on qualitative interviews with 39 households with experience across 10 local authority homelessness services, including 8 individuals with care experience recruited via Who Cares? Scotland. This set of interviews has provided valuable feedback on the experience and views of service users, but findings should be treated as illustrative rather than representative of the wider population.

Accessing services and information

Engagement with users of homelessness services first looked at individuals' experience of accessing services.

Feedback made clear that the extent of any prior experience of homelessness services was a key factor in participants' experience. Those who had not previously engaged with homelessness services included several with some understanding of services from the experience of family or friends. However, most had very little understanding at the point of presenting as homeless of how services operated or

the help that might be available to them. This uncertainty – especially around the accommodation options likely to be available - contributed to the significant anxiety experienced by many participants around their initial engagement with services. This appeared to be a particular issue for those with children, several of whom reported that their main concern when presenting as homeless had been the safety of available accommodation for their children.

"I found it really daunting not knowing what to expect, it felt like there was no light at the end of the tunnel at the time."

Participants also referred to their circumstance at the time as having a significant impact on their priorities when first engaging with homelessness services. For example, quick access to accommodation was the primary concern at the time of presenting for those requiring immediate housing. This was reflected in feedback on initial contact with services from these participants, which was often focused on the extent to which they could access accommodation quickly, and less likely to consider the likely length of stay.

Where participants did not require immediate accommodation, feedback tended to be more focused on engagement with service staff and the information provided. This included positive references to initial service engagement with staff having taken the time to understand their circumstances and specific needs, demonstrated care and empathy, and provided clarity around the accommodation and support available to them. The extent to which staff demonstrated understanding and were able to provide clear information on available accommodation and services was highlighted as especially important in reducing participants' anxiety at the time.

"You're at a low point when you have to contact the service – they were sympathetic, understanding, that made a massive difference."

A number of participants raised other aspects of their circumstances as having a significant impact on their initial engagement with services, and specifically on their accommodation needs. This included reference to responsibilities for providing care or support to family members including children and elderly parents, and breakdown of partner or family relationships adding to emotional distress - and in some cases reducing their available support network. It was clear that these issues could have a very significant negative impact on individuals' ability to cope with their accommodation circumstances, and to engage constructively with homelessness services. However, it was also clear that the availability of suitable accommodation remained a key driver of how these participants reflected on their experience. Feedback emphasised the significant negative impact of unsuitable temporary accommodation on individuals' mental health, and in some cases on their safety.

The importance of the initial engagement with services was also reflected in feedback from those who had a negative experience. A small number of participants cited examples of services being unable to find them temporary accommodation. In addition to these individuals having to remain in unsuitable circumstances, participants also highlighted the feelings of helplessness and despair that these encounters caused. Some had felt unwilling to re-engage with homelessness services after this experience. Other participants reported that, while they had been able to access temporary accommodation, the manner of service staff had left them feeling uncared for or unimportant.

Temporary accommodation

Managing the transition to longer-term temporary accommodation was identified as a key challenge for some participants. This included those moving from shorter stays in hostel, hotel or B&B accommodation. Key issues included:

- The speed of the move to longer term temporary accommodation including for those moving from a hostel, hotel or B&B. Feedback included several examples of individuals being required to be ready to move within a matter of hours following a stay of several weeks or months.

- Access to transport was an issue for a number of participants, especially those without access to a private car and/or very limited finances, those with children and/or a larger number of personal belongings to transport. Some indicated that these difficulties had been compounded by the short time available to make their way to the accommodation, including individuals who were in crisis at the time of presenting as homeless.

- Access to practical assistance with the move was primarily via family and friends. Again this was reported as a particular difficulty for those with a limited support network.

Notwithstanding the challenges noted above, some felt that the move to longer term temporary accommodation had been a positive step in terms of stabilising their living circumstances and progressing towards permanent housing. This included participants moving from hostel, hotel or B&B accommodation who saw the move as a particularly positive step.

In terms of ongoing experience of temporary accommodation, feedback highlighted several key factors. These were primarily linked to the location and condition of properties:

"I was worried about the area, but it was a secure place of my own and I knew I was on the track to something permanent. I didn't feel like I was on track while in the supported accommodation."

- <u>Location</u> was a key issue for some, including those who had been accommodated away from support networks. Examples were provided of participants having relatively lengthy journeys to maintain contact with family and/or support networks. While this was a significant issue for a minority of participants, these individuals reported that the location of temporary accommodation had contributed to their feeling isolated, and an associated deterioration in their mental health. Some also referred to being placed in poor quality neighbourhoods, with safety and security a major concern for some.

- Feedback on the <u>quality of temporary accommodation</u> was varied, and included reference to accommodation having been in need of sometimes significant repair and redecoration. This was a particular concern for those with children, with participants reporting instances of having refused offers due to the unacceptable condition of temporary accommodation. Other quality concerns included a lack of furniture or appliances/amenities, problems with heating systems and damage to doors and windows.

- <u>The cost of temporary accommodation</u> was also raised by a small number of participants who had been in work or ineligible for welfare support. There were examples of individuals having "gambled" that they would be able to access a permanent home before temporary accommodation became unaffordable for them, and others who felt they had to remain in unsuitable circumstances because they could not afford the cost of temporary accommodation. The latter group included examples of individuals later reaching crisis point (such as eviction) and re-presenting as homeless in a less planned way.

Those who had spent an extended time without stable accommodation – including Care Experienced people, those with addiction issues and offenders leaving prison – had experienced particular challenges making the transition to temporary accommodation. These participants referred to practicalities around managing a home such as household bills and property repairs. It was also clear that the transition to temporary accommodation had a wider emotional impact for some. Participants referred to experiencing significant anxiety linked to factors such as having responsibility for a home and engaging with neighbours, and feelings of loneliness while adjusting to their new living circumstances. Those moving from prison appeared to be particularly affected by these issues, and there were examples of individuals requiring several "attempts" at the move to living independently.

Experience of hostel, hotel and B&B accommodation

As noted above, emergency access to temporary accommodation was the overwhelming concern for some of those requiring immediate accommodation.

Feedback from these participants primarily focused on how quickly services were able to provide accommodation, although most of those requiring immediate housing reported having been apprehensive about the prospect of being placed in hostel, hotel or B&B accommodation. This was primarily linked to concerns around drug use and safety, including from those with prior experience of this kind of temporary accommodation. Some also noted that hostel, hotel or B&B accommodation could mean a move away from family and friends.

Participants' experience of hostel, hotel and B&B accommodation reinforced some of these concerns. Feedback was characterised by difficulties with noise and disturbances contributing to anxiety and sleepless nights, feeling overwhelmed and in some cases fearing for their safety. This was especially acute for young people and female participants, and those with experience of trauma. Some reporting having coped reasonably well in their accommodation, but most felt that this had been a very challenging experience.

"The staff were really helpful if I needed anything but I'll be honest, it [my time in the hostel] was really hard."

Several participants noted that access to support while in hostel, hotel and B&B accommodation had been vital. This included reference to building positive relationships with on-site support staff, with these described as especially important in reassuring individuals that staff were invested in their wellbeing and working to improve things for them. Participants also highlighted the value of being able to maintain existing engagement with external support services, and finding accommodation close to support from family and friends.

Access to support whilst in temporary accommodation

As noted earlier in relation to initial engagement with homelessness services, contact with service staff and support workers was an important element for many participants' experience in temporary accommodation. Indeed, this was identified by some as a key positive aspect of the service. Participants referred here to practical support (for example around benefits entitlement and support applying/bidding for settled accommodation), but for many it was emotional support that appeared to have had the biggest impact.

Some noted that service staff were their main point of social contact while in temporary accommodation, and saw this as essential in enabling them to progress to permanent accommodation. In addition to social contact, staff and support services helped participants to feel that they had advocates "looking out for my needs" and who were committed to helping them access and sustain their own home. Some noted that

"I don't always find it easy to ask for help - working with the same worker all the way through has made it much easier, they've been brilliant."

this kind of support is especially important where homeless households have limited access to informal support – "people tend to become homeless because they don't have much of a network".

Examples were also reported where individuals felt that insufficient support was available to meet their needs. This included some who felt that services lacked the staffing resources to support the number of people accessing homelessness services. However, others suggested that services had not been able to understand or address their needs and circumstances. This was a particular concern for some Care Experienced participants who felt that understanding could vary significantly across service staff, and saw a need for a more consistent approach by homelessness services to support for Care Experienced people (see *The impact of particular needs and circumstances* later in this section for more detail).

Accessing permanent accommodation

A substantial proportion of participants had accessed permanent accommodation at the time of fieldwork. Reflecting on their experience, being kept up to date with progress towards permanent accommodation was highlighted as particularly important. Where regular updates had been provided, these participants felt that this had helped them to maintain hope for the prospect of a move to better circumstances, and had been crucial in supporting their mental wellbeing.

Progress updates were seen as especially important for those who had to stay in unsuitable or challenging accommodation for an extended period, including those in hostel, hotel or B&B accommodation. These participants emphasised the impact of uncertainty on their mental health during this time, both in terms of the likely length of wait for permanent accommodation, and whether accommodation would meet their needs. Several indicated that a lack of regular updates on their progress contributed to their sense of uncertainty and feeling "stuck" in temporary accommodation. However, others suggested that their time in temporary accommodation had allowed them to be more prepared to sustain their own home, even where they had experienced difficulties with temporary accommodation.

Making the transition to permanent accommodation

In terms of being allocated permanent accommodation, a substantial number of participants felt that the "sudden" move had caused them practical difficulties. As noted earlier in relation to temporary accommodation, this was a particular challenge for those without private transport or the financial resources to arrange transport. These participants

"Having to move so quick was really difficult – even a day or two would have made a big difference."

suggested that a more planned move would have been more manageable and helped them to make the transition to permanent accommodation.

There was also reference to the importance of how the transition to permanent accommodation is managed more widely. A number of participants made clear that accessing permanent accommodation had been a very positive outcome for them, highlighting improvement in their wellbeing, sense of safety and security, mental health and family relationships. However, some had found the transition to be the most difficult part of their experience of homelessness services. It was noted that this move can be quite a different challenge to adjusting to temporary accommodation, where some were still dealing with significant distress and trauma around the circumstances that contributed to their homelessness.

"The biggest positive is the house really. Not just having a roof over my head, but the quality of the house and the area – it makes me feel worth it, that they thought I deserved a decent place to live."

Discussion of challenges around the move to permanent accommodation included a need for practical assistance setting up bills etc, especially for those living independently for the first time or following a prolonged period without permanent accommodation. Several participants noted that dealing with paperwork and administrative processes was a significant challenge for them, including reference to mental health needs and literacy difficulties. There were examples of these difficulties resulting in individuals missing out on available financial support for the move to permanent accommodation.

Those living alone for the first time or after a lengthy stay in supported accommodation could feel overwhelmed by managing a home. Financial difficulties and a lack of available financial support had added to these challenges for some participants, including those still lacking "basics" such as flooring, furniture or appliances some months after the move. There were calls for better access to practical and financial support for individuals in these circumstances. Participants reported examples of administrative delays affecting their access to available financial support, and being faced with the challenge of funding their move to permanent accommodation.

"It has been quite depressing since I moved in, not really being able to make any progress – it still feels like an empty shell, walking on bare floorboards after months."

Participants also highlighted the emotional impact of the transition to permanent accommodation. Loneliness had been a significant challenge for some, especially those with limited informal support networks or who had been required to move away from family/friends.

Reflecting on these issues, several participants made clear that the progress they had made since first contacting homelessness services had been a very challenging process. Some felt able to consider aspects of their experience of homelessness services which had helped them to make this progress – most commonly service staff providing practical and emotional support to rebuild individuals' resilience and capacities. However, others clearly felt there was nothing positive that they could take from their experience, other than having been able to put it behind them. "there has been nothing positive at all really, it was an awful time".

The impact of particular needs and circumstances

Feedback across all stages of individuals' experience of homelessness services identified a range of specific needs and circumstances that appeared to have had a significant impact – both in terms of participants' experience of services, and in some cases the outcome achieved. These factors were primarily related to trauma and emotional distress, addiction issues, specific mental health needs, and Care Experienced people (the fieldwork approach included several Care Experienced people recruited with assistance from Who Cares? Scotland). We summarise key themes below.

As noted above, participant feedback emphasised the emotional impact of their experience of homelessness. This included comments emphasising the degree of distress and shame associated with participants' circumstances at the time of engaging with services, including those with experience of trauma. It was clear that these emotional impacts affected how some individuals engaged with services.

A common focus for distress and anxiety was uncertainty around "what might happen to me" and the accommodation that is likely to be available. This was a particular concern for households with children; these participants referred to anxiety around the safety and wellbeing of their children, maintaining schooling and access to family/friends and support services.

Uncertainty around potential accommodation options was also highlighted as a significant issue for individuals with experience of trauma and/or addiction issues. This reflected the extent to which these factors affected participants' specific accommodation needs. For example, particular concerns were raised regarding potential for placement in shared hostel accommodation, even where participants recognised a need for the support available in hostels. The location of accommodation was also a key issue for some, and there were examples of individuals feeling unable to take accommodation in locations associated with prior trauma and/or safety risks. The extent to which services were able to work

with individuals to mitigate these issues was seen by some as a key factor in their experience.

Those with significant mental health needs also emphasised the difficulty they experienced engaging with services. Individuals had experienced particular challenges "facing up to" their circumstances, engaging with services and coping with the transition to temporary accommodation. This included participants commenting on the significant time and effort required to recover from their experience - in terms of stabilising their living circumstances (and resolving rental debt accumulated while homeless), improved mental health, repairing relationships with family and friends, and returning to work.

Care Experienced people

People with care experience are those who are currently in care, or have been for any length of time regardless of their age. This care may have been provided in many different settings including kinship care; looked after at home with the help of social work; residential care; foster care; secure care; or adoption.

Care Experienced participants and those affected by prior trauma highlighted a range of ways in which this could impact their engagement with homelessness services. Particular challenges were referenced around adapting to independent living, both in terms of the practical "life skills" required to manage a home and the emotional experience of living alone for the first time. Participants also referred to a reduction in the level of support available when moving from temporary to permanent accommodation, and suggested that this could be an especially challenging transition for Care Experienced people.

"The support drops off when you're left to cope often in a new place with neighbours etc...it can be a really anxious time."

Access to support was a key theme, with some suggesting that those with care experience often lack the informal support network that others may be able to rely on. Feedback highlighted the value of access to support services in helping individuals to navigate homelessness services, including support workers taking an advocacy role for example to ensure services recognise their particular housing needs. Some Care Experienced people indicated that difficulties engaging with available support services had added to these challenges. This included reference to literacy challenges for some, but also "a fear of services" and feeling that engaging with services would be "a backwards step". Feedback included examples of individuals missing their benefit entitlement and accruing significant rental debt due to their reluctance or inability to engage with services.

A genuine understanding of the specific needs of Care Experienced people and those affected by trauma was seen as crucial for homelessness service staff to

effectively engage with individuals, and to appreciate how these needs can affect accommodation requirements. This included reference to what was seen as variation across service staff in understanding of the rights of Care Experienced people.

Access to support

The importance of access to formal and informal support was emphasised by respondents across these specific groups. This was identified as especially significant for those with mental health or trauma-related needs, who saw access to support as crucial to their experience and ability to engage with services.

Feedback included a particular focus on development of trusting relationships with support staff. Several participants noted the challenges they had in "opening up" to support services, including where this was linked to prior trauma or care experience. Some noted that placement in suitable temporary accommodation had allowed them the time to engage more effectively with services, and felt that this had been a key step in their being ready to manage their own home. However, others felt that support services were insufficiently flexible for those with particular needs or circumstances. This included reference to mental health or other needs affecting individuals' ability to engage with services, and examples of difficulties coordinating availability of support services with work or family commitments.

GYPSY/TRAVELLER SITE RESIDENTS

Views were clear on the importance of residents being able to influence decisions affecting them – this was seen as a demonstration that landlords value residents' experience, and recognise the contribution they can make to decision-making.

Participants emphasised the importance of enabling residents to share genuine feedback and making sure that they feel "listened to".

Ensuring that exercises are accessible was seen as a priority – in-person engagement was generally preferred and there was support for both meeting-based and one-to-one engagement.

While effective engagement was seen as a key positive for landlords, perceptions were affected by the outcome of exercises - there was significant frustration where proposed improvements were not taken forward.

The third qualitative engagement strand sought the views of residents of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites. This focused on experience of landlord engagement and views on their landlord's approach to engagement with residents. Findings are based on survey interviews with 24 residents with experience of social rented sites across six Local Authority areas. This strand of work has provided valuable feedback on the experience and views of site residents, but findings should be treated as illustrative rather than representative of the wider population.

Influencing landlord decisions

Participants were clear in their views on the importance of site residents being able to influence decisions that affect them, including from those who have not taken part in available opportunities. Comments were primarily focused on the extent to which decisions on site improvements can have a significant impact on residents' day to day lives, and the positive contribution that resident input can have to the design of improvements. There was also reference more generally to residents feeling "valued" where landlords make a genuine effort to engage with them.

In this context, feedback emphasised the importance of enabling residents to share genuine feedback and making sure that participants feel "listened to". It was suggested that "travelling people really just want a good home, the same as everyone else". However, participants also noted that Gypsy/Traveller site residents can have very specific priorities or concerns. Landlords making the effort to understand those priorities – and thus demonstrating respect for site residents - was seen as a benefit of resident engagement. This was both in terms of

landlords taking the time to engage with residents, and also in ensuring engagement exercises are accessible and suit residents' preferences.

The manner of staff running engagement exercises was seen as important in demonstrating the landlord's genuine interest in resident views, and in ensuring participants feel able to share honest feedback. Several participants specifically highlighted the role of site managers or liaison officers in engagement exercises, and there was a view that these officers can play an advocacy for site residents – "they can speak up for people and make sure all of the points get across". There were also examples of third-party agencies such as Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP) supporting engagement exercises. In addition to facilitating the exercise, landlords taking the time to engage a third party was also seen as demonstrating a genuine commitment to hearing resident views.

Experience of landlord engagement

Most participants had taken part in some form of landlord engagement in recent years, including a mix of defined engagement exercises and more informal engagement with site managers or liaison officers.

Reference to specific engagement exercises included small group discussion or regular engagement meetings either on-site or in a nearby venue. These exercises had been primarily focused on specific planned site improvements such as pitch upgrades and proposals for chalet-style accommodation. For example, participants had attended meetings to gather views on potential improvement priorities, to involve residents in decisions on specific design aspects, and to share information on progress around planning of improvement works. For larger-scale works, there were also examples of meetings being used to discuss need for decant accommodation.

In terms of accessibility, feedback was generally positive around meeting-based approaches, with residents appearing to find meetings relatively easy to engage with in terms of choice of venue and scheduling. This included examples of meetings conducted on-site, and others in nearby off-site locations.

Some participants expressed a general preference for meeting-based engagement. This appeared to reflect a view that meetings enable a dialogue between residents and the landlord, as an opportunity to request clarification (i.e. where residents may not initially understand the information presented) or to ask further questions (i.e. where residents feel the landlord has not provided enough information). It was also noted that meetings can ensure that all participants receive the same information from the landlord. Some supported meeting-based approaches as a means of sharing views between residents, although several participants felt less comfortable speaking up in front of other residents.

Feedback on meeting-based engagement also included several participants who take part in regular site meetings. This was seen as a positive approach in terms of providing additional opportunities for residents to participate, and helping to build trust with landlord staff so that residents feel able to share genuine feedback.

Other forms of engagement included one-to-one surveys, for example to gather feedback on individuals' experience of the site and views on the local area. Some also referred to survey approaches having been used to identify priorities for site improvements. This kind of one-to-one engagement was specifically preferred by several participants. Comments described these approaches as accessible to a wider range of residents, including for those who may feel more comfortable sharing their views without concern around potential for negative response in a group setting.

Alongside more 'formal' or planned engagement exercises, participants considered their contact with their site manager or liaison officers as a form of engagement with the landlord. This contact included a particular focus on reporting repairs or other specific issues. However, participants also indicated that they had developed a positive and trusting relationship with their site manager, such that they were able to discuss priorities for site improvements or other more general issues to be raised with the landlord.

Some participants indicated that they preferred not to participate in engagement opportunities. This included examples where meetings or events had not been at a convenient time for residents, but in some cases non-participation appeared to reflect a reluctance to provide feedback to the landlord. Participants referred to a lack of confidence speaking in a public meeting, and concerns around upsetting other residents on the site such that they did not feel able to share honest feedback. Some also questioned the value of participation, including reference to prior experience of proposed site improvements not being taken forward after a resident engagement exercise. This appeared to contribute to a sense of disillusionment for some, and a choice to limit engagement with the landlord to specific repairs or other issues.

Landlords' engagement approach

In addition to experience of specific engagement exercises, feedback from site residents also reflected views on their landlord's overall approach to engagement.

As noted earlier, landlords' commitment to engaging with residents appeared to be seen by some as an important indication of the landlord's care and respect for residents. This was reflected in feedback from those who had taken part in engagement exercises, which included a focus on whether the landlord's overall

approach demonstrated a genuine interest in and understanding of residents' experiences.

For example, comments on participants' experience of exercises included a focus on the purpose of engagement. This was most obviously the case for engagement around site improvements. In these examples, participants appeared to see their landlord's commitment to improving the site as demonstrating an interest in resident wellbeing, and in this context the engagement exercises were more likely to be seen as a genuine effort to seek resident input.

As noted above, specific examples cited by participants included opportunities for residents to influence the design and planning of specific improvement works. In some cases, participants indicated that improvement works had not yet been taken forward and expressed frustration around this. These participants were aware of improvements undertaken to other Gypsy/Traveller sites, and some felt that failure to improve their site was a sign that they were less valued by their landlord. However, despite often significant frustration, feedback still identified the landlord's efforts to engage with residents as a positive, including as an indication of understanding of residents' needs.

The value that participants placed on their landlord's approach to engagement was also evident in feedback where residents did not have the opportunity for input to improvement works. Even where planned works had been completed, there were negative comments around the lack of resident involvement and some suggestions that the design of completed works could have been improved.

In addition to the role of resident engagement exercises, participants also referred to their landlord's wider communication as a key element in improvement works. There were positive examples of landlords ensuring that residents understand planned improvements and are kept up to date with how these are progressing, including in the management of any decant process during major improvement works. Again this communication was seen as demonstrating a commitment to the wellbeing of residents, and in ensuring that completed works deliver the expected benefits. Similarly, there was negative feedback from participants who felt that their landlord had not been effective in their communication.

ANNEX: PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. Current members include social tenants, people who have used homelessness services, residents of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and owners using social landlord factoring 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. Total Panel membership stood at 423 at March 2025.

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

Current membership	423
Age	
Under 35	12%
35-44	14%
45-59	28%
60-74	27%
75+	16%
Unknown	4%
Gender	
Woman	56%
Man	42%
In another way	1%
Unknown	1%
Housing tenure	
Council tenant	34%
RSL tenant	50%
Owner	8%
Gypsy/ Traveller site resident	8%
Unknown	<0.5%
Ethnicity	
White Scottish, British or Irish	82%
White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller)	11%
Black Minority Ethnic	4%
Unknown	1%
Disability	
1 or more disabilities	40%
No disability	46%
Unknown	14%
RTO membership	
Member of RTO	23%
Not a member of RTO	73%
Unknown	4%

Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.