NATIONAL PANEL OF TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS

REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM YEAR 1

Research undertaken by Craigforth for the Scottish Housing Regulator

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SUMMARY FINDINGS

The National Panel was established in spring/summer 2013 as a new way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. This report brings together findings across the two main exercises conducted with the National Panel in its first year: (i) a full Panel survey and (ii) subsequent qualitative research with Panel members. The survey and qualitative strands covered a broad range of topics relating to Panel members' priorities and experience as users of social landlord services. Key findings across these strands are set out below.

Your Priorities: Specific Landlord Services

Key points of note in relation to priorities for specific landlord services are:

- All landlord services are seen as important by service users.
- Repairs and maintenance to the home, dealing with antisocial behaviour, and keeping buildings/entrances secure were rated as the most important for tenants and service users.
- Qualitative feedback suggest views on service priorities are driven to a significant extent by potential impact on individuals' quality of life. The importance of rapid response to urgent repairs and other issues for vulnerable people emerged as a significant priority in this context.

Your Priorities: How Landlords Provide Services

Key points of note in relation to priorities for how landlords provide services are:

- Value for money of rent was highlighted as the most important aspect of service for tenants and service users.
- Qualitative feedback suggests that views on value for money are influenced by a visible and tangible return on rent/service charge, affordability, and clarity on how charges relate to service provision.
- The importance of services being sympathetic and responsive to individuals needs was also highlighted by qualitative feedback.
- Communication was also an important theme across specific service areas, particularly in clarity of service information and setting realistic expectations.

Your Priorities: Tenant and Service User Concerns

Key points of note in relation to tenant and service user concerns are:

- Survey results suggest that a large majority of tenants and service users have at least one issue of concern at the moment, and most mentioned two or more concerns.
- In terms of specific concerns, it is notable that housing-related costs and condition issues were the most commonly mentioned issues for survey respondents with around three quarters of all respondents.

Information on Landlord Performance

Key points of note in relation to information on landlord performance are:

- The majority of survey respondents feel well informed about their landlord's performance – and most have seen performance information.
- There appears to be some strong interest in landlord performance information. In terms of specific services, there is some correlation with views on the importance of specific landlord services - repairs/maintenance and antisocial behaviour are those for which interest in performance information is strongest.

Complaints Handling

Key points of note in relation to complaints handling are:

- A relatively small proportion of respondents had received information on their landlord's complaints handling procedures in the last year.
- Most respondents felt that they would "definitely" know how to make a complaint to their landlord, although qualitative feedback suggests some lack of clarity on the distinction between a formal complaint and more "informal" feedback.

Welfare Reform

Key points of note in relation to Welfare Reform are:

- The majority of survey respondents indicated that their household had not been affected, although more than a quarter had been or expected to be affected by housing-related welfare changes.
- Most respondents had received information on housing-related benefit changes – but nearly half of all respondents indicated that there was information they would find useful, but that they had not yet received.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter

Key points of note in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter are:

- A little less than half of respondents had heard of the Charter prior to receiving the first Panel survey, most via information from their landlord.
- Qualitative feedback was positive about the principle of the Charter. This appeared to relate to the perceived value of a clear statement of what service users should expect from landlords, and ensuring equality of service across landlords (including potential to "empower" service users with information on what they should expect from their landlord).
- Nearly all respondents expressed interest in information on their landlord's performance against the charter, and comparison with other landlords. Some saw specific value in SHR's independence as reassuring service users as to the accuracy of performance information.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

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

1.2. As a mechanism for gathering the views of tenants and other service users, a significant element of the value in a Panel-type body is as an accessible group of engaged individuals willing to participate in consultation exercises. As such the focus for the Panel is on ensuring a good cross-section of tenants and other service users, rather than achieving an exact match to the socio-demographic profile of the wider population. Indeed some groups – such as those in rural areas – have been over-sampled to ensure sufficient volume of Panel members to support detailed analysis of survey results. Weighting of survey results is used to address the impact of this kind of over-sampling on the overall Panel membership. However, Panel surveys are required to provide robust results that are sensitive to potential variation in views across specific socio-demographic groups, but are not expected to produce results which meet the statistical reliability standards of a large scale survey.

2013/14 Consultation Programme

1.3. This report brings together findings across the two main exercises conducted with the National Panel in its first year:

i. A full Panel survey conducted shortly after initial recruitment, and addressing a broad range of topics relating to Panel members' priorities and experience as users of social landlord services; and

ii. Subsequent qualitative research with Panel members to explore in more depth some of the issues and priorities emerging through the survey, and other topics better suited to a more discursive approach. This included several strands of discussion groups and workshops, and a practical exercise to measure experience of the SHR website[1].

This report integrates both ***quantitative results*** (i.e. statistical survey findings) and ***qualitative findings*** (i.e. findings from the discursive work with Panel members exploring their experiences, views and motivations that have shaped survey findings) to provide a rounded view of members' priorities and experiences. The report structure reflects the themes around which the quantitative and qualitative exercises were based. These themes were

[1] Findings from the website exercise are covered in a separate report, along with a review of SHR Communications and Engagement materials.

shared to some extent across the programme of engagement with the panel; the table below provides an overview of how the quantitative and qualitative elements feed into these themes.

Theme	Input from…	
	Survey	Qualitative
YOUR PRIORITIES		
Landlord services	•	•
Tenant and service user concerns	•	•
LANDLORD PERFORMANCE		
Awareness	•	
Areas of interest	•	
COMPLAINTS HANDLING	•	
WELFARE REFORM	•	
THE SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER		
Awareness	•	•
Interest in landlord performance reporting	•	•
PRIORITIES FOR SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR	•	

1.4. This report sets out findings in relation to each of these themes in turn. A separate publication will outline findings in relation to panel members' awareness of and contact with the Scottish Housing Regulator, including a review of key publications and the SHR website.

2. YOUR PRIORITIES: SPECIFIC LANDLORD SERVICES

2.1. Service priorities was a common theme across both the Panel survey and qualitative discussion exercises, with qualitative feedback adding depth to the overall profile of priorities identified through the survey. This section considers survey results and qualitative feedback on specific landlord services.

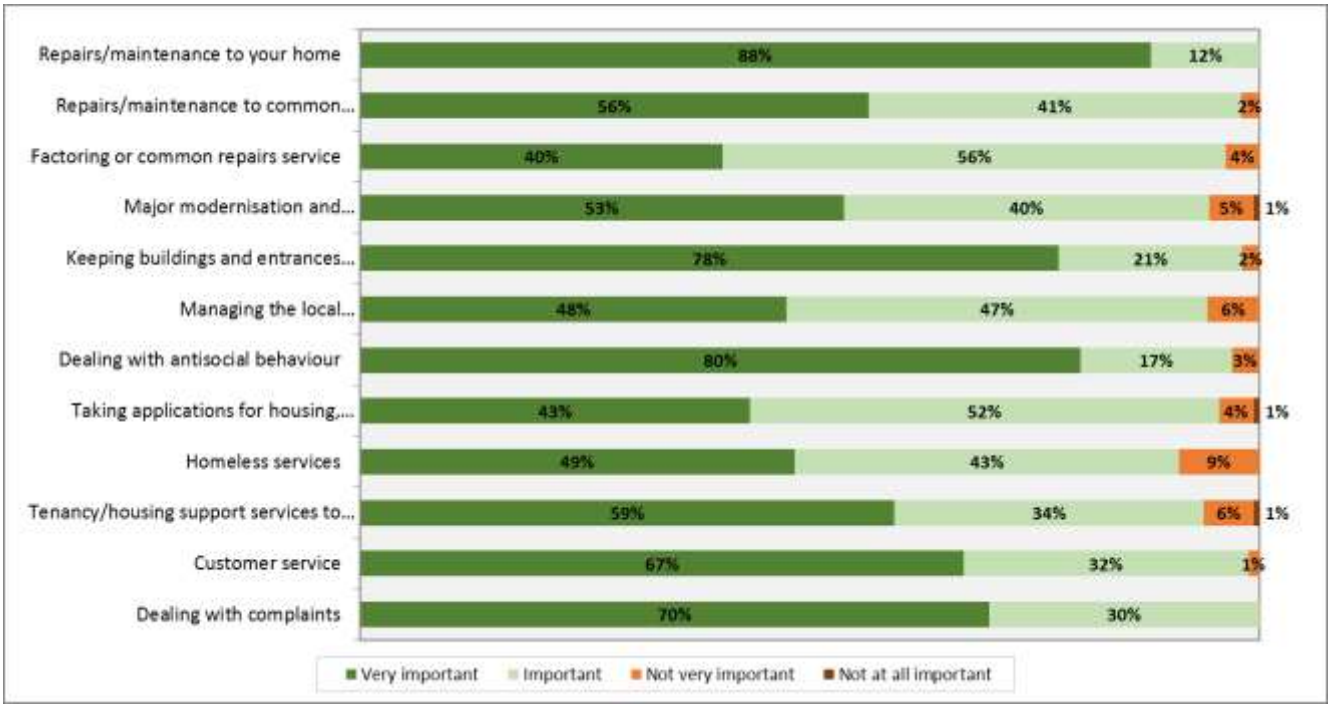
Key points of note in relation to priorities for specific landlord services are:

- All landlord services are seen as important by service users.
- Repairs and maintenance to the home, dealing with antisocial behaviour, and keeping buildings/entrances secure were rated as the most important for tenants and service users.
- Qualitative feedback suggest views on service priorities are driven to a significant extent by potential impact on individuals' quality of life. The importance of rapid response to urgent repairs and other issues for vulnerable people emerged as a significant priority in this context.

Survey results

2.2. In relation to specific services provided by their landlord, Panel members were asked to rate the importance of each service and also to identify which one service they see as most important. Ratings of specific services are presented at Figure 1, and views on the most important services are discussed over the following pages.

Figure 1: Views on importance of specific landlord services



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2.3. ***Survey results indicate that all landlord services are seen as important by tenants and other service users*** - as Figure 1 indicates, all services were rated as important by the great majority of survey respondents. Nevertheless, while few respondents rated any service as unimportant, there is considerable variation in the extent to which specific services were given the top "very important" rating. This suggests that some services are significantly more important than others for tenants and service users.

2.4. ***Repairs and maintenance to the home was rated as the most important landlord service***, with nearly 9 in 10 respondents rating this service as "very important" (88%). Dealing with antisocial behaviour and keeping buildings/entrances secure were also rated as particularly important for tenants and service users – around 4 in 5 respondents rated each of these as "very important" (80% and 78% respectively).

2.5. In contrast, the following services were rated as less important for tenants and service users: factoring and common repairs (40% rating as "very important"), taking applications for housing and managing the waiting list (43%), managing the local neighbourhood/estate (48%), and homeless services (49%). Notwithstanding the large majority of respondents who described these services as important to some degree, the proportion of respondents giving the top "very important" rating was significantly smaller than for services such as repairs or dealing with antisocial behaviour.

2.6. There are some striking similarities between the priorities summarised at Figure 1, and the results of previous research looking at the priorities of social tenants (*Identifying the Priorities of Tenants of Social Landlords*, Scottish Government 2009). Indeed the top three priorities identified by respondents to the current survey – repairs, dealing with antisocial behaviour, keeping buildings/entrances secure – were also the top priorities identified by the 2009 study.[2] The 2009 study is not directly comparable in terms of methodology and sample structure, but does provide some corroboration to the present survey in terms of giving an accurate picture of service users' priorities.

2.7. Survey data also suggests that views on the importance of specific services provided by landlords are broadly consistent across key socio-demographic groups. For example, repairs/maintenance to the home and dealing with antisocial behavior were generally rated as most important across all respondent groups. Variation in rating of specific services were relatively limited, with the only notable variation being that:

- Local authority tenants were generally more likely than RSL tenants to rate management of the local neighbourhood and estate as very important;

[2] Based on comparable service areas – the 2009 study also included "provision of good quality accommodation" as a service area.

- Those living in urban areas were more likely than others to rate repairs to common areas as very important; and
- Those living in rural areas were less likely than others to rate major modernisation works as very important.

2.8. Respondents were also asked to identify the landlord service which they feel is most important, with the opportunity to make reference to one of the services listed at Figure 1 or to highlight another service area. The great majority identified one of the services listed at Figure 1, and the profile of services seen as most important is broadly in line with that discussed above. ***Repairs and maintenance of the home was by some margin the most commonly mentioned as the single most important landlord service*** (mentioned by 62 respondents), although dealing with antisocial behavior (mentioned by 22) was also ranked as particularly important. The specific services mentioned by respondents are detailed in the table below.

Service	**Number respondents**
Repairs/maintenance to your home. This included reference to a focus on dealing with faults before they become serious.	62
Dealing with antisocial behaviour. This included the need to deal with problems rapidly to minimise disruption to tenants and others.	22
Customer service. Respondents highlighted in this regard the importance for tenants of the first point of contact with service staff	12
Major modernisation and improvements.	11
Dealing with complaints. This included reference to the importance of dealing with complaints quickly and efficiently.	9
Keeping buildings and entrances secure. This was a particular concern in relation to sheltered accommodation.	6
Managing the local neighbourhood/estate.	4
Homeless services.	4
Tenancy and housing support services to help people live independently.	4
Taking applications for housing, managing the waiting list, transfers/exchanges. This included reference to considering the interests of existing tenants when allocating tenancies in flatted accommodation, and minimising void times.	3
Factoring or common repairs service.	1

Other service areas mentioned by respondents included: • Customer equality/treating everyone equally • Consulting tenants and improving opportunities for service users to be involved in decision making • High quality staff/board members • Ensuring all tenants and residents maintain their gardens and shared spaces. • Address housing shortages, development of more social housing. • Meeting the needs of individual tenants. • Prioritising the needs of older and disabled tenants.	10

Qualitative feedback

2.9. Strand 1 of the qualitative research with Panel members focused on the range of priorities identified through the survey, with a particular focus on providing further detail on the experiences and views that informed those priorities.

2.10. Feedback from qualitative participants was broadly consistent with survey findings in terms of the overall profile of priorities identified. In terms of specific services, repairs and maintenance, capital investment, and dealing with neighbor disputes/antisocial behaviour (ASB) were highlighted as the top priorities. This was evident in the number of participants highlighting these as priorities, but also the degree of importance ascribed to these services specifically. For many participants this was closely linked to their views on which services have the potential for a significant (positive or negative) impact on individuals' quality of life.

2.11. Discussions suggest that views on service priorities are driven to a significant extent by particular issues or problems experienced by individuals; certainly participants generally took specific examples as a starting point for discussing priority areas. This may be reflected in the extent to which qualitative discussions focused on the importance of delivering against service standards. For example, discussions around the quality of repair work, meeting repair timescales, resolving antisocial behaviour, and meeting the needs of those with health or care needs were informed by participants' own experience of what was seen as service failure.

2.12. Participants' views on service priorities were also closely linked to views on the issues which have the greatest impact on individuals' quality of life. This was evident in, for example, comments on the importance of aspects of repairs service and dealing with neighbor disputes, which were closely linked to views on the potential negative impact of these issues on quality of life.

2.13. In terms of specific services, research participants raised a broad range of points – these are summarized below.

2.14. ***Repairs and maintenance*** services were the most commonly cited as a priority for tenants and service users, and for many participants were also the services which had the most direct bearing on individuals' wellbeing and quality of life. Key points in relation to these services were:

- For a number of participants, the importance of repairs and maintenance services was specifically mentioned in relation to assisting tenants/service users in an emergency. Views here appeared to reflect the importance of maintaining the integrity of tenants' homes, and also the anxiety and inconvenience caused to tenants by emergencies such as failure of heating systems or leaks. In this regard, a number of participants made specific reference to the positive impact that a rapid response from landlords can have for individuals' quality of life. The particular importance of rapid response to emergencies for vulnerable households (related to health needs, households with small children, etc) was also mentioned.
- Repair work not being completed right first time, and the inconvenience (and wasted tradespersons' time) of repeat visits being required to complete the work. This included reference to examples of tradespersons arriving without the required tools/parts. Related to this issue, a small number of participants felt that service staff do not appear to trust tenants to report the correct repair; this was a particular concern for older tenants, and to some extent was seen as a failure to treat individuals with respect.
- Concerns regarding the quality of repair work. To some extent this was linked to repeat visits being required to complete poor quality work. However, a number of participants also highlighted longer-term problems caused by poor repair work and/or materials in terms of the condition of their home.
- Missed appointment slots, and the inconvenience caused - this being a particular concern for those in employment.
- A small number of participants made reference to poor experiences in relation to repair staff manner, most commonly related to tradespersons not clearing up after completing repair work. However, the majority of participants indicated that issues experienced in relation to repairs and maintenance very rarely related to staff manner. Indeed, this aspect of the service appeared to be rated as significantly less important than the rapid and effective completion of repair work.

- A small number of participants suggested that a lack of clarity on service standards can be a particular issue for repairs services, and that providing clearer information on what will be done (and not done) as part of a repair could help to avoid service user issues or complaints. This included for example clarity on timescales for different categories of repair, on the specific work to be completed as part of a repair, and on the extent to which re-decoration associated with a repair is the tenants' responsibility.
- A number of participants raised issues which related more to perceived inefficiencies and waste across repairs services, rather than service standards themselves. Most commonly this related to a view that landlords were undertaking repeated repairs to an appliance or aspect of participants' homes, when replacement would save money and inconvenience to tenants.

2.15. Much of the discussion around repairs and maintenance summarised above, was in the context of wider views on the importance of ***housing quality and condition – including capital investment and improvement work***. The general quality and condition of tenants' homes was highlighted as a priority for most participants, and this is evident in the level of priority associated with capital investment work (in addition to repairs services). Comments on the importance of housing quality and condition also made reference to a number of specific issues experienced by those living in what was seen as poorer condition housing. This included the affordability of heating costs for housing with poor insulation/energy efficiency, health problems associated with cold and/or poor condition homes, and the inconvenience of repeated repair work being required.

2.16. As noted above, ***dealing with neighbour disputes and ASB*** was consistently amongst the top priorities identified by survey respondents and qualitative participants. It is important to note some of the discussion here moved into areas that fall within the remit of the Police more than social landlord. However, participants were also clear in their view that this was a key priority specifically for landlord services.

2.17. These views appeared to reflect the extent to which neighbor disputes and ASB can have a negative impact on individuals' quality of life. A small number of participants made reference to aspects of landlords' handling of complaints, such as putting individuals at ease (in what are often difficult situations), and keeping those affected up to date on what is being done. However, comments were primarily focused on the extent to which landlords were able to resolve issues, and thus minimize impact on quality of life. Participants generally acknowledged that this can often require input from other agencies outwith the landlords' control, but nevertheless highlighted the extent to which resolution of the problem was vital to improve individuals' quality of life – and as such was the crucial element of the service response.

2.18. ***Accommodation and services for people with particular needs*** (including older people specifically) was highlighted by a small number of participants, but was clearly a significant priority for these individuals. This included comments relating to the importance of landlord services being responsive to service users' needs – again relating to staff sympathy and understanding of tenants' needs. However, participants also highlighted the importance of assisting individuals in negotiating what were seen as a potentially confusing set of accommodation and service options for those with particular needs. This included an example of one participant who benefited from a landlord working closely with them to consider several potential accommodation and service options to best suit their needs and preferences.

3. YOUR PRIORITIES: HOW LANDLORDS PROVIDE SERVICES

3.1. This section considers key priorities in relation to how landlords provide services, across survey results and qualitative feedback.

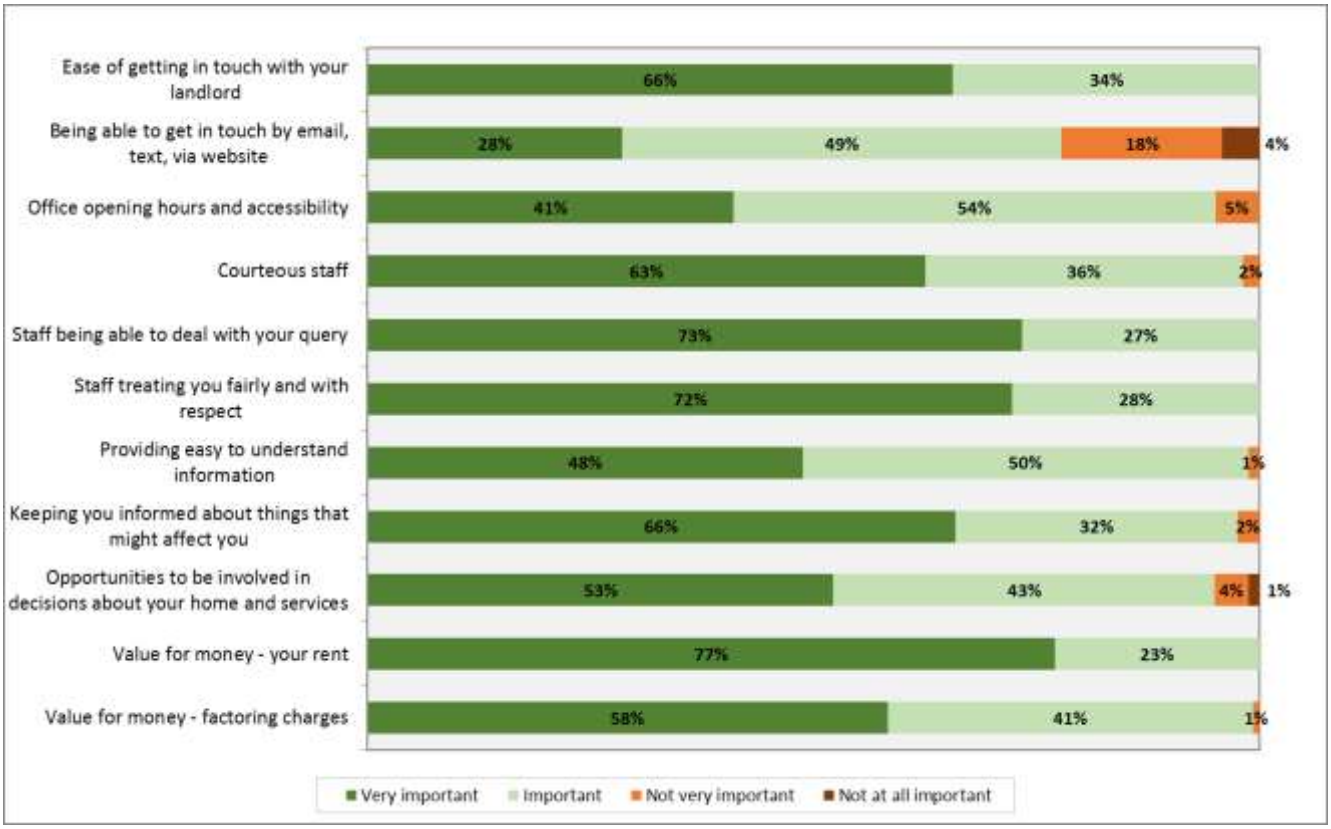
Key points of note in relation to priorities for how landlords provide services are:

- Value for money of rent was highlighted as the most important aspect of service for tenants and service users.
- Qualitative feedback suggests that views on value for money are influenced by a visible and tangible return on rent/service charge, affordability, and clarity on how charges relate to service provision.
- The importance of services being sympathetic and responsive to individuals needs was also highlighted by qualitative feedback.
- Communication was also an important theme across specific service areas, particularly in clarity of service information and setting realistic expectations.

Survey results

3.2. In addition to specific landlord services, the survey asked Panel members to rate the importance of various aspects of how landlords provide those services. Results are presented at Figure 2.

Figure 2: Views on importance of how landlords provide services



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3.3. ***Value for money of rent, and the ability and manner of staff emerge as the most important aspects of service for tenants and other service users***. A large majority of respondents rated these as "very important" aspects of how landlords provide services; 77% for value for money of rent, 73% for the ability of staff to deal with queries and 72% for staff treating individuals fairly and with respect. Keeping individuals informed about issues that might affect them (66%), ease of getting in touch with the landlord (66%) and courteousness of staff (63%) were also rated as important aspects of how landlords provide services.

3.4. In contrast, being able to get in touch with landlords electronically was by some margin the least important aspect of service for tenants and landlords. Fewer than 1 in 3 respondents rated this as "very important" (28%), and this was also the only aspect of service rated as unimportant by a substantial proportion of respondents (22%). This finding was consistent across respondent age groups and other key socio-demographic groups.

3.5. The overall balance of views on the importance of how landlord services are provided was broadly consistent across key socio-demographic groups, with value for money and staff manner/ability generally rated as most important. Nevertheless, some notable variation in rating of aspects of service was evident:

- Older respondents were generally more likely than others to rate value for money of rent and ease of getting in touch with their landlord as very important; and

- RSL tenants were more likely than local authority tenants to rate staff treating people fairly/with respect and keeping people informed as very important.

3.6. As was the case in relation to specific landlord services, respondents were asked to identify the one aspect of how landlords provide services which they feel is most important. The great majority of respondents identified one of the services listed at Figure 6, and the importance attached to specific aspects of service provision were in line with that discussed above. ***Value for money of rent was by some margin the most commonly mentioned as the single most important aspect of service provision*** (mentioned by 50 respondents). Staff ability and manner were also ranked as important aspects of service, mentioned by 22 and 18 respondents respectively. The specific services mentioned by respondents are detailed in the table over the page.

Aspect of Service	Number respondents
Value for money – your rent	50
Staff being able to deal with your query. This included specific reference to staff handling of complaints.	22
Staff treating you fairly and with respect	18
Keeping you informed about things that might affect you	14
Ease of getting in touch with your landlord	11
Opportunities to be involved in decisions about your home and landlord's services	9
Providing easy to understand information	4
Office opening hours and accessibility	3
Courteous staff	3
Value for money – factoring charges	2
Being able to get in touch by email, text or through a website	1
Other service areas mentioned by respondents included: • Overall focus on good customer service • Service staff resolving issues satisfactorily • Dealing with complaints • Practical changes to meet the needs of older and disabled tenants • High quality staff and board working in best interests of the organisation • Tenancy support • Improving property standards and condition	12

Qualitative feedback

3.7. Qualitative research with Panel members sought to add value to survey findings by exploring the range of priorities identified through the survey in further detail.

3.8. Feedback from qualitative participants was broadly consistent with survey findings in terms of the overall profile of priorities identified – both in terms of the number of participants highlighting these as priorities and the degree of importance ascribed to these services specifically.

3.9. Consistent with feedback in relation to specific landlord services, qualitative discussions suggest that views on service priorities are driven to a significant extent by particular issues or problems experienced by individuals. This may be reflected in the extent to which qualitative discussions focused on the importance of delivering against service standards. For example, discussions around the quality of repair work, meeting repair timescales, resolving antisocial behaviour, and meeting the needs of those with health or care needs were informed by participants' own experience of what was seen as service failure.

3.10. However, it is important to note that individuals' specific priorities were not based solely on the problems they had experienced, and there was evidence of some ranking of different aspects of landlord services. For example, staff attitude and manner was consistently identified as a less significant concern than for example speed of response to repairs or resolving antisocial behaviour – and this was also true for participants who reported poor experiences related to staff manner.

3.11. In terms of how landlord provide services, research participants raised the following points.

3.12. Consistent with survey findings, ***value for money*** was rated by qualitative participants as one of the most important aspects of their landlords services. In addition to the relative importance of value, qualitative discussions also asked individuals to consider in more detail, what constitutes value for individuals in the context of social landlord services, and how this factors into service users' perception of their landlord's services.

3.13. In terms of what value for money means for service users, feedback suggests that this is primarily associated with three key themes:

Value for money: a visible and tangible return on rent/service charge
The importance of a tangible return was evident in the extent to which individuals' comments on value for money made reference to capital investment to their home. This included for example new kitchens and bathrooms, work to improve energy efficiency and roof repairs; these kinds of investment appeared to have a particularly significant impact on some individuals' views on value for money.

It was also evident that participants' knowledge of rents and housing costs across other landlords and tenures also informed their views on value for money. Individuals' judgement of the relative value of different landlords' services also involved consideration of the extent of any rent differential against any perceived difference in service standards.

Value for money: affordability of rent/service charge
Level of rent increases and associated affordability concerns were also raised in relation to value for money. A substantial number of participants felt that the level of rent increases had a direct bearing on the extent to which their rent is value for money. This was generally mentioned in the context of household incomes not keeping pace with rent increases, and wider concerns regarding the affordability of social rents. Some participants were of the view that their landlord's rent levels were not consistent with their understanding of an "affordable rent".

Value for money: clarity of information on landlord charges
A small number of participants made reference to concerns regarding the extent to which landlord service charges represent value for money. This included reference to affordability of service charges for households and how charges compare to those levied by other landlords. However, the issue of clarity on how charges relate to specific landlord activities was also raised specifically in relation to service charges. These participants suggested that landlords providing clearer information on service charges would be of significant benefit in terms of service users' views on value for money.

3.14. ***Communication*** was an important theme cutting across specific service areas – most notably repairs/maintenance, dealing with antisocial behaviour, and management of the housing list. The key points raised here were:

- A number of participants offered examples of difficulties resulting from apparent failure of communication or information sharing between services. This was primarily related to repairs services; for example follow-up work not being completed where jobs have mistakenly been marked as complete, or appointments being missed when details have not been passed to tradespersons. A small number of those affected by these issues made reference to the frustration of being required to repeatedly follow-up an initial service request, and recount the issue at each point of contact.
- Also in relation to communication between landlords and service users, participants made reference to failure of landlords to return calls, or follow-up requests as promised. This was highlighted as a cause of significant frustration for a small number of respondents.

- Discussions also highlighted the importance of landlords ensuring that their communication with service users sets realistic expectations, most notably in terms of improvement works such as kitchen/bathroom upgrading or energy efficiency works. A number of examples were offered where tenants perceived that they had been "promised" improvement works to their home, which were not completed (or were not completed within the suggested timescale). These individuals noted that the failure to provide accurate information at the outset regarding the level and timing of planned capital investment, resulted in service dissatisfaction which could otherwise have been avoided.

3.15. Research participants raised a range of points in relation to ***accessing landlord services and staff***, s***ervice staff manner, and being treated with respect***. Qualitative discussions were generally consistent with survey findings in suggesting that these issues are seen as somewhat less significant than effective delivery of specific services. Nevertheless, feedback from participants makes clear that these remain important aspects of how landlords provide their services.

3.16. A range of positive comments referred to specific attributes or service standards addressed by the survey – including for example staff being polite and courteous, treating individuals with respect, and being able to resolve queries. However, the ***importance of staff being sympathetic to and understanding of service users' circumstances and needs*** also emerged as a significant theme for tenants and service users. To some extent this related to staff understanding and responding to individuals' health or care needs. However, there also appeared to be a more general view that staff being sympathetic to service user's needs is a vital element of their being able to deal with requests effectively, and also some personal experience of the anxiety that can be caused by services not understanding tenants' individual needs.

3.17. ***Access to identified individuals*** within landlords' service staff was also highlighted as a priority for a substantial number of participants, and this also appeared to be linked to the importance of staff understanding tenants' needs. A number of participants already took the approach of asking for a named individual when contacting their landlord. Comments here reflected some very positive experiences in dealing with service staff (and particularly dedicated Housing Officers), and it was clear that the majority of participants rated this aspect of their landlord's service highly. The value attached to having a named point of contact with their landlord also appeared to be based on a more general preference for establishing a relationship of trust with service staff. This included specific reference to enabling staff to better understand tenants' needs, tenants being more willing to report concerns or issues where they have established a relationship with staff, and the importance of staff having the required knowledge or training to deal with requests.

3.18. A number of comments made in relation to the above issues appeared to reflect some frustration with landlord procedures and service standards, in addition to staff manner and attitude. Specific (positive and negative) examples illustrated the importance of services and staff being responsive to their service users' needs:

Illustrating the importance of responsiveness to individuals' needs

Tenants within an amenity housing development taking on garden maintenance within the scheme, after feedback to the landlord highlighted concerns regarding the cost and quality of the garden maintenance service.

Services anticipating the anxiety experienced by tenants in poor health in relation to capital investment works – service staff contacted tenants prior to work commencing and following completion to ensure tenants understood the planned work and did not have any outstanding issues following completion of the investment programme. In contrast, one participant had found a capital investment programme difficult as they perceived that services did not take account of a household member's health needs.

Landlords not being prepared to engage in relation to repairs or improvements to their home. This included examples where participants' felt that services did not trust their judgement in identifying the required repair, and examples of tenants struggling to have input to decisions on investment to their home (including replacement of a coal fire and placement of a new boiler).

3.19. The majority of research participants were clear in their view that activities to support ***tenant participation and feedback*** were important aspects of landlord services. For many, this again appeared to be linked to views on the importance of services being more flexible in response to service users' needs and preferences – a view which also informed comments discussed earlier in relation to service users' interaction with service staff.

3.20. In terms of views specifically on the importance of opportunities for service users to contribute to their landlord's decision making, these appeared to be based in large part on experience of their own landlord's approach to tenant participation – including some RTO members but also non-RTO affiliated tenants:

- A number of participants felt that their landlord offered a good mix of opportunities for tenants to contribute their views, including a particularly positive view on the work of their Tenant Participation Officer(s). These participants appeared to see this aspect of their landlord's activities as less important, than for example more specific services such as repairs and maintenance.

- In contrast, those who ascribed greater priority to opportunities for tenants to participate tended to have a more negative view on their landlord's own approach. This included a small number of individuals – typically non-RTO affiliated - raising concerns regarding local tenant groups, and the extent to which these represented the full range of tenant/service user priorities.
- In addition to personal experience, views on the importance of opportunities for participation also appeared to reflect a relatively common view that most tenants and service users may not have a particular interest in contributing their views. In this context a number of participants suggested that current opportunities were sufficient to enable those with an interest in giving their views.

3.21. Research participants appeared to have very limited experience of landlords' ***formal complaints handling processes***. To some extent this appeared to reflect a lack of clarity for service users on the distinction between informal feedback, a formal complaint, and a service request (eg a report of ASB). For the few individuals who had submitted what they considered to be a formal complaint, comments highlighted several aspects of landlords' response:

- A perceived need for landlords to be more "proactive" in identifying issues as complaints – this included one participant who had experienced difficulty in having their issue recognised as a complaint by the landlord.
- Ensuring that complaints are acknowledged promptly, and that clear information is provided on the timeline for a response. This included some examples of service users having to make repeated contact to check on the progress of a complaint.
- A greater willingness amongst landlords to go beyond core service standards to resolve a complaint, including for example where service users felt that they had been misinformed regarding the service they would receive.
- In the context of these priorities (and participants' previous experiences), some concern was expressed regarding a perception that service users require perseverance and self-confidence to successfully pursue a complaint. These participants highlighted the importance of landlords ensuring that more vulnerable service users are able to raise (and have a response to) any grievances.

3.22. Participants also offered comments on their broader experience of providing feedback to their landlord. A common theme here was the importance of seeing some action or change in response to their feedback. This was clearly seen as the most important aspect of landlords' handling of feedback and complaints, and some explicitly suggested that other aspects such as staff manner and providing clear information were of limited importance if "nothing changes and nothing is done".

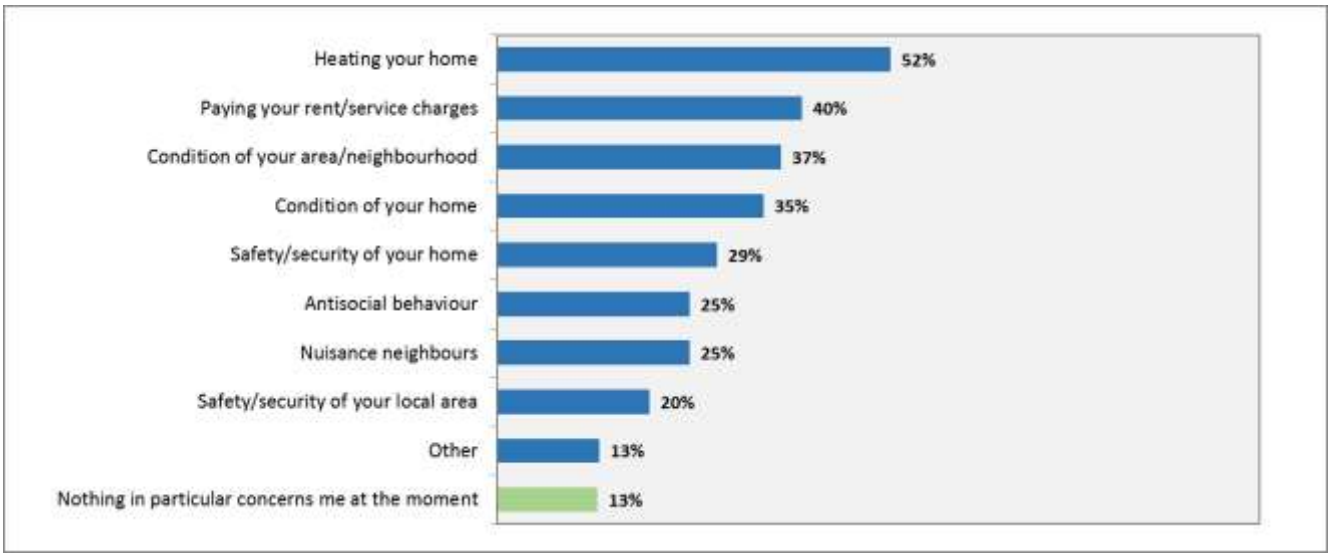
4. YOUR PRIORITIES: TENANT AND SERVICE USER CONCERNS

4.1. The final section of the survey relating to Panel members' priorities, asked individuals about issues that may be concerning them at present. Results are presented at Figure 3 below.

4.2. ***Survey results suggest that a large majority of tenants and service users have at least one issue of concern at the moment***; nearly 9 in 10 respondents mentioned one or more concern (87%) and most respondents mentioned two or more concerns (65%). In terms of specific concerns, it is notable that housing-related costs and condition issues were the most commonly mentioned issues for survey respondents with around three quarters of all respondents (77%) mentioning one or more of the following issues and concerns:

- Heating your home (52%) – and this appeared to be a particular concern for older respondents
- Paying your rent/service charges (40%)
- Condition of your area/neighbourhood (37%) – and this appeared to be a particular concern for older respondents
- Condition of your home (35%)

Figure 3: Current concerns for tenants and service users



Base: 187

4.3. In addition to the specific issues listed in the survey form, 13% of respondents also mentioned a range of "other" concerns. This included a number of the issues listed at Figure 7 such as concerns about affordability of rent and other housing costs (including benefit changes), condition of home and local area (including difficulties getting work done, parking issues and dog fouling), antisocial behavior (including noise disturbance) and safety in the local area (including reference to street lighting). Other issues mentioned by a small number of respondents included:

- Availability of smaller properties, to allow for bedroom-tax related downsizing;
- Wider impact of welfare changes, such as cuts to local services;
- A lack of on-site warden when problems occur;
- Inability to influence the duties performed by Sheltered Housing Officer;
- Concern regarding the level of communication from landlord staff (this was in regard to a particular initiative);
- Higher rent levels in RSL properties; and
- Lack of activities for children/young people.

4.4. There was very little variation in the profile of issues mentioned by respondents across key socio-demographic groups. Indeed the only notable variation was across age groups, with older respondents (aged 60+) more likely than others to mention heating their home and condition of the local area/neighbourhood as a current concern.

5. INFORMATION ON LANDLORD PERFORMANCE

5.1. This section considers survey results on Panel members' awareness of and interest in information on their landlord's performance. This includes the extent to which individuals felt informed about their landlord's performance, whether they had seen performance information relating to specific landlord services, and their interest in seeing more performance information on specific services.

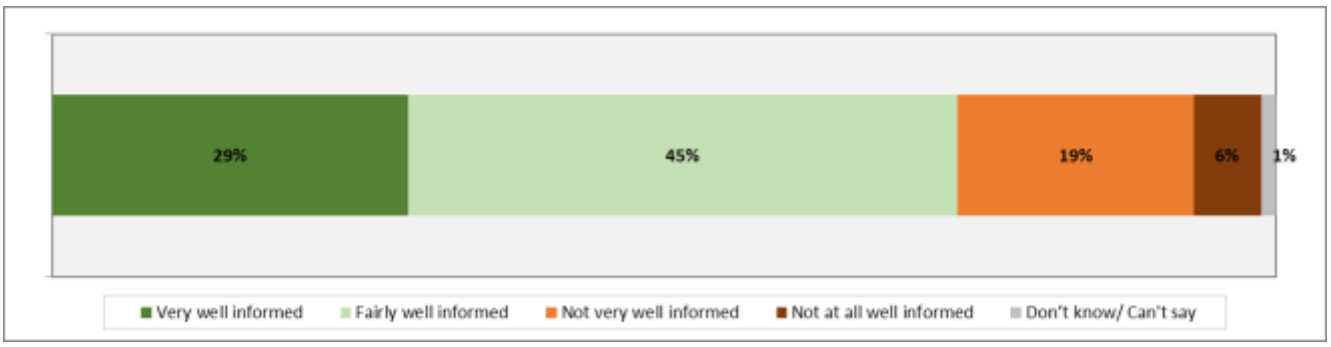
Key points of note in relation to information on landlord performance are:

- The majority of survey respondents feel well informed about their landlord's performance – and most has seen performance information.
- There appears to be some strong interest in landlord performance information. In terms of specific services, there is some correlation with views on the importance of specific landlord services - repairs/maintenance and antisocial behaviour are those for which interest in performance information is strongest.

Awareness of information on landlord performance

5.2. ***Survey results indicate that the majority of tenants and service users feel well informed about their landlord's performance*** (Figure 4), and this was consistent across key respondent groups. Around three quarters of survey respondents indicated that they feel well informed about their landlord's performance (74%), including around 3 in 10 who feel "very well informed" (29%). Nevertheless there remained a substantial proportion of respondents who do not feel well informed about their landlord's performance; a quarter of respondents indicated this (25%).

Figure 4: Extent to which feel informed about landlord performance

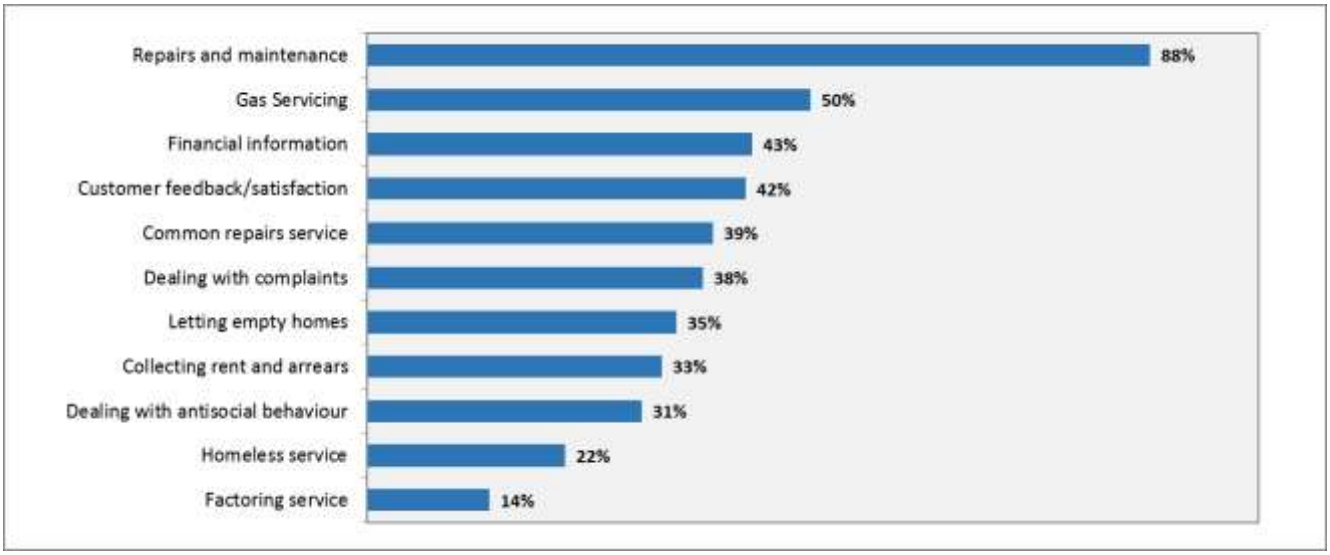


Base: 187

5.3. ***The great majority of survey respondents had seen information on their landlord's performance in relation to specific services***. Around 4 in 5 indicated that they had seen performance information on at least one of the services listed at Figure 5.

5.4. In terms of specific service areas, ***repairs and maintenance was by some margin the service for which respondents were most likely to have seen landlord performance information***; nearly 9 in 10 of those who had seen performance information indicated that they had seen information on repairs and maintenance services (88%). Respondents were significantly less likely to have seen information on other specific services, with gas servicing services (50% having seen performance information), financial information (43%) and customer feedback information (42%) being the most commonly mentioned. Respondents were least likely to have seen performance information on homeless services (22%) and factoring services (14%) – and this is consistent with these also being rated as the least important landlord services (see section 2).

Figure 5: Whether seen information on landlord performance for specific services

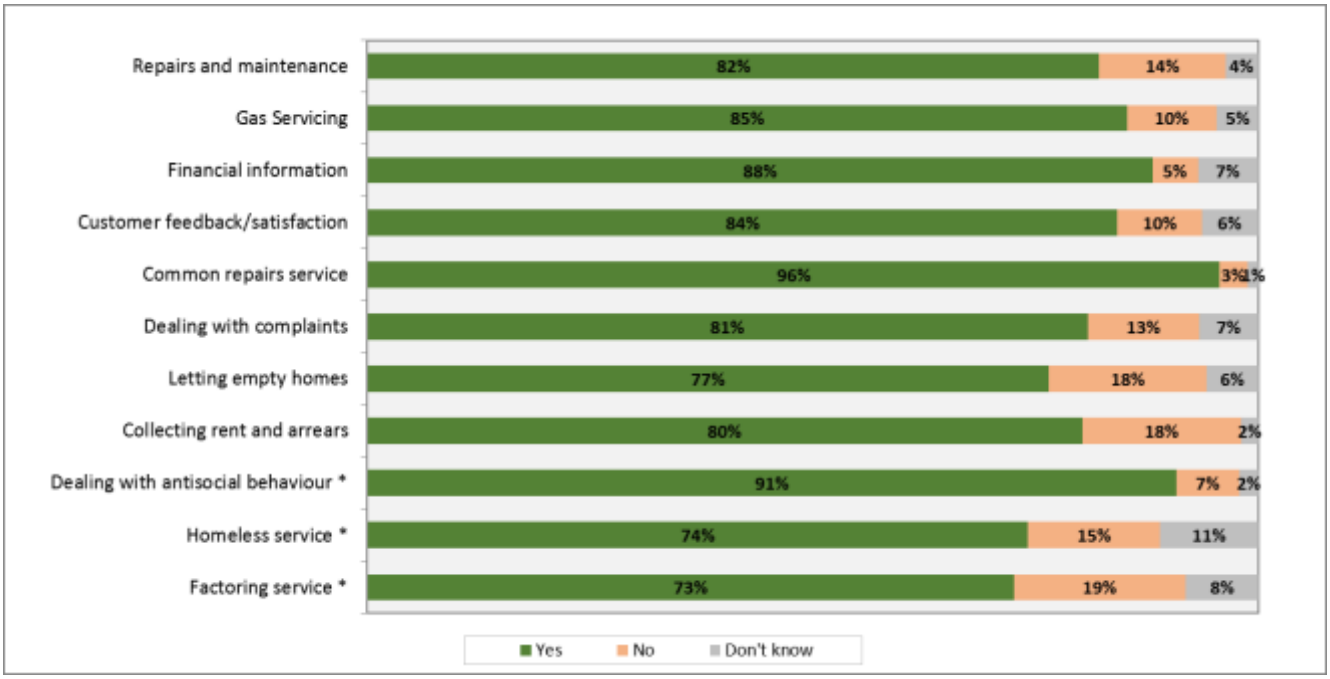


Base: 151

5.5. Perhaps unsurprisingly, respondents who feel well informed about their landlord's performance were more likely than others to have seen performance information on specific services, although most of those who fell uninformed on their landlord's performance had seen performance information in relation to some services. Survey data also suggests that there is some limited variation across local authority and RSL tenants in awareness of performance information on specific services. In particular, local authority tenants were more likely to have seen performance information on collecting rent and arrears, and on dealing with antisocial behaviour.

5.6. As Figure 6 below indicates, ***tenants and service users generally find landlord performance information useful***; more than 7 in 10 respondents found performance information on each of the specific services useful. Survey results suggests limited variation in the extent to which respondents find information on some specific services more useful than for others. For example respondents were most positive in relation to information on common repairs services and dealing with antisocial behaviour. However, the relatively small number of individuals having seen information on non-repairs services means that these variations are not statistically significant.

Figure 6: Whether landlord performance information for specific services was useful



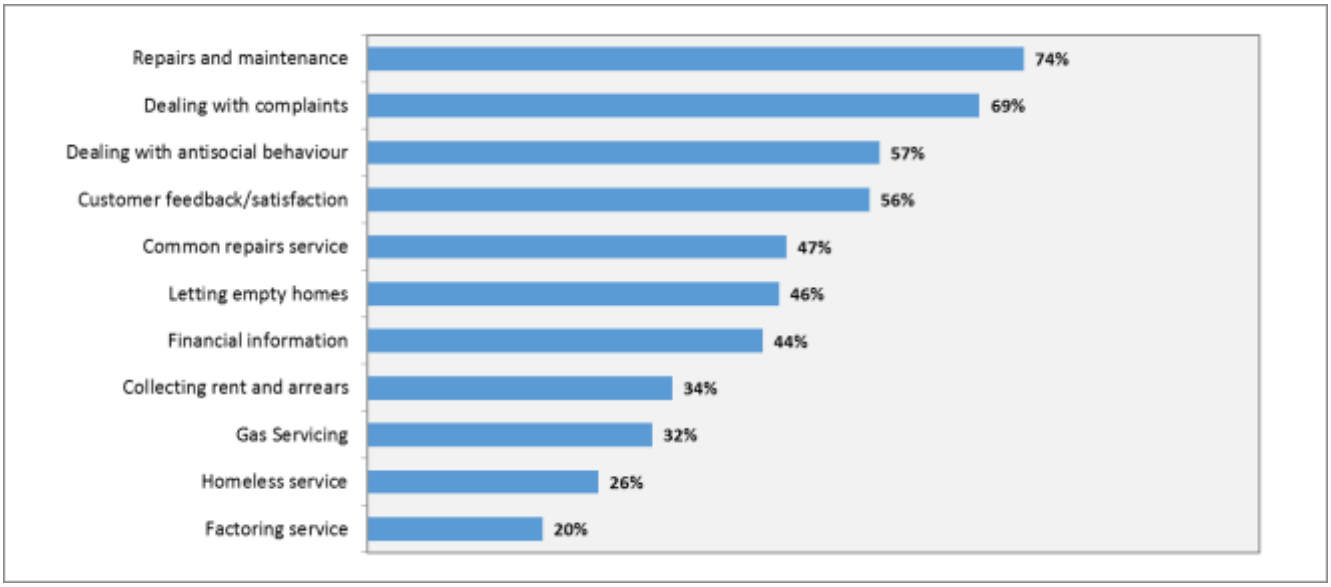
Base: 126 (repairs and maintenance), 19 - 67 (others). * denotes results based on fewer than 50 responses.

Interest in landlord performance information

5.7. Finally in relation to landlord performance, the survey asked Panel members to indicate the service areas for which they would be most interested in seeing landlord performance information. Figure 7 overleaf summarises responses.

5.8. This indicates some correlation between interest in landlord performance information and views on the importance of specific landlord services. In particular, repairs/maintenance and dealing with antisocial behaviour are notable for being the services rated as most important by respondents, and are also amongst those for which interest in performance information is strongest. Similarly, it is notable that homeless services and factoring services were rated as the least important services and are also those for which there is least interest in performance information.

Figure 7: Interested in landlord performance information on specific services



Base: 179

6. COMPLAINTS HANDLING

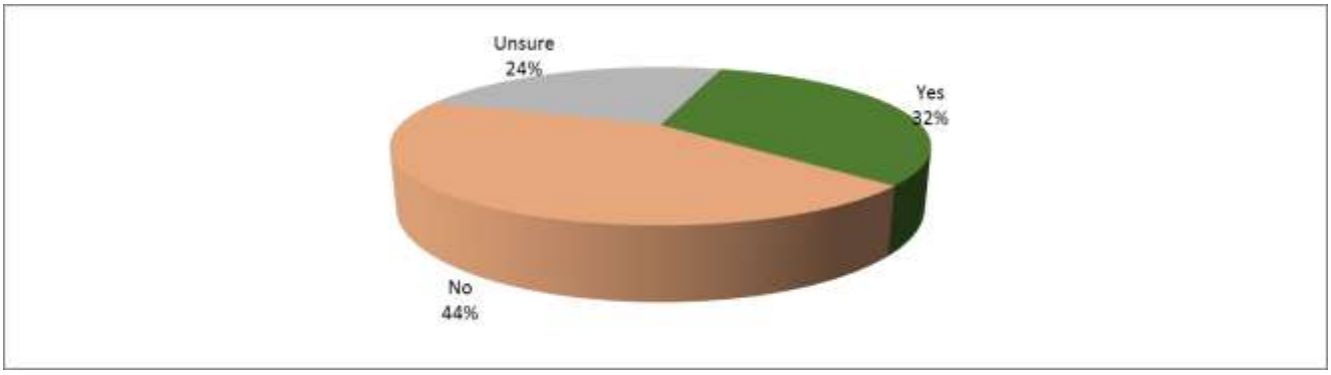
6.1. The survey next asked Panel members about their awareness of their landlord's complaints handling procedure. This section was included in the survey in part to monitor views and experience in the context of the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman's new model complaint procedure for the local government sector. The survey sought to assess whether individuals had received information in the last year about their landlord's complaints procedures (Figure 8), and whether individuals would know how to make a complaint (Figure 9) and where to go if they were unhappy with their landlord's response to the complaint (Figure 10).

Key points of note in relation to complaints handling are:

- A relatively small proportion of respondents had received information on their landlord's complaints handling procedures in the last year.
- Most respondents felt that they would "definitely" know how to make a complaint to their landlord, although qualitative feedback suggests some lack of clarity on the distinction between a formal complaint and more "informal" feedback.

6.2. ***Survey responses indicate that a relatively small proportion of respondents had received information on their landlord's complaints handling procedures in the last year***. Around a third of respondents (32%) indicated that they had received information in the last year, although a further quarter of respondents were unsure of whether they had received information on complaints procedures (24%). A little less than a half of all respondents (44%) indicated that they had not received information in the last year about their landlord's complaint handling procedures.

Figure 8: Whether received information in the last year about landlord's complaints handling procedures



Base: 186

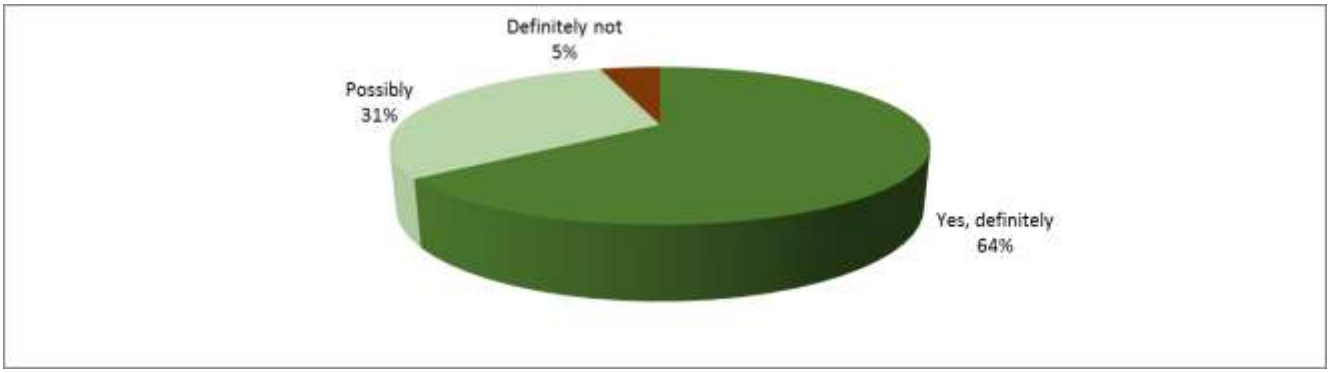
6.3. It is interesting to note that there is no significant variation across the main respondent groups on whether individuals had received information about their landlord's complaints handling procedures. The only significant variation was in local authority respondents being more likely than RSL respondents to indicate that they had not received information on complaints procedures – however this variation is primarily due to a significantly larger proportion of RSL respondents being unsure on whether they had received such information. There was no significant variation in the proportion of local authority and RSL respondents indicating that they had received information on complaints procedures.

6.4. Notwithstanding the relatively small proportion of respondents who had received information on complaints procedures***, the majority of respondents indicated that they would "definitely" know how to make a complaint to their landlord*** (64%, see Figure 9). A further 31% indicated that they would "possibly" know how to make a complaint, and only 1 in 20 respondents felt that they would definitely not know how to make a complaint (5%).

6.5. However, it is important to consider these responses alongside feedback from qualitative participants which suggests some lack of clarity on the distinction between a formal complaint and more informal feedback. In this context, some caution may be required in interpreting survey respondents' stated confidence in their understanding of how to make a formal complaint – as opposed to for example knowledge of how to give feedback more generally.

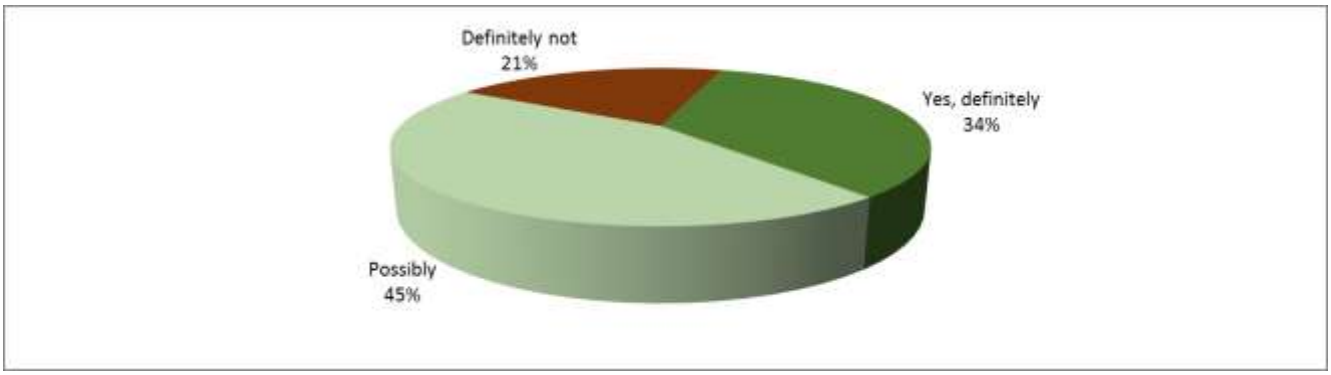
6.6. Respondents were less clear on where to go if they were not happy with their landlord's response to a complaint (Figure 10). ***Only around a third of respondents (34%) felt that they would know where to go if they were not happy with the response to a complaint***, although a further 45% felt that they would "possibly" know where to go. Around a fifth of respondents (21%) would not know where to go if they were unhappy with their landlord's response to a complaint, and this was consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 9: Whether would know how to make a complaint to landlord



Base: 189

Figure 10: Whether would know where to go if weren't happy with landlord's response to a complaint



Base: 188

7. WELFARE REFORM

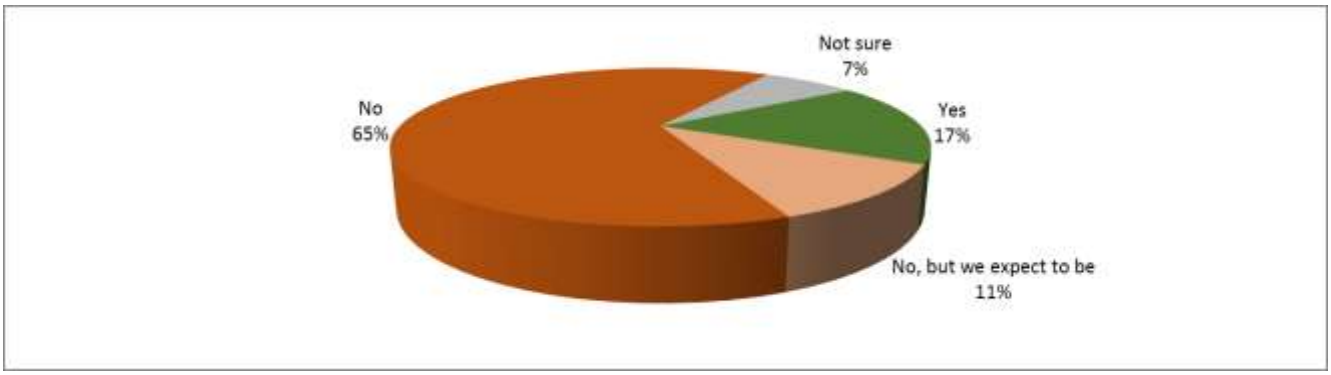
7.1. The survey included a series of questions relating to the housing-related welfare changes being introduced as part of wider welfare reform. These sought to gauge how Panel members had been affected by housing-related welfare changes to date (Figures 11), and whether Panel members had received information on welfare changes (Figure 12). It is important to note the timing of the survey in considering Panel members' responses to these questions – fieldwork over summer 2013 means that the survey would be expected to consider only the very early impacts of Welfare Reforms.

Key points of note in relation to Welfare Reform are:

- The majority of survey respondents indicated that their household had not been affected, although more than a quarter had been or expected to be affected by housing-related welfare changes.
- Most respondents had received information on housing-related benefit changes – but nearly half of all respondents indicated that there was information they would find useful, but that they had not yet received.
- Findings reflect only very early impacts, with small numbers of participants

7.2. ***The majority of survey respondents indicated that their household had not been affected by housing-related welfare changes to date***; around three quarters of all respondents indicated this (76%), although this included around 1 in 10 (11%) who expected to be affected by welfare changes in the future. Around 1 in 6 respondents (17%) indicated that they had been affected by housing-related welfare changes to date. This suggests that in total, ***more than a quarter of respondents have been or expect to be affected by housing-related welfare changes*** (28%). This finding was broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although unsurprisingly those of working age were significantly more likely than others to have been affected by housing-related welfare changes.

Figure 11: Whether household been affected by housing-related welfare changes



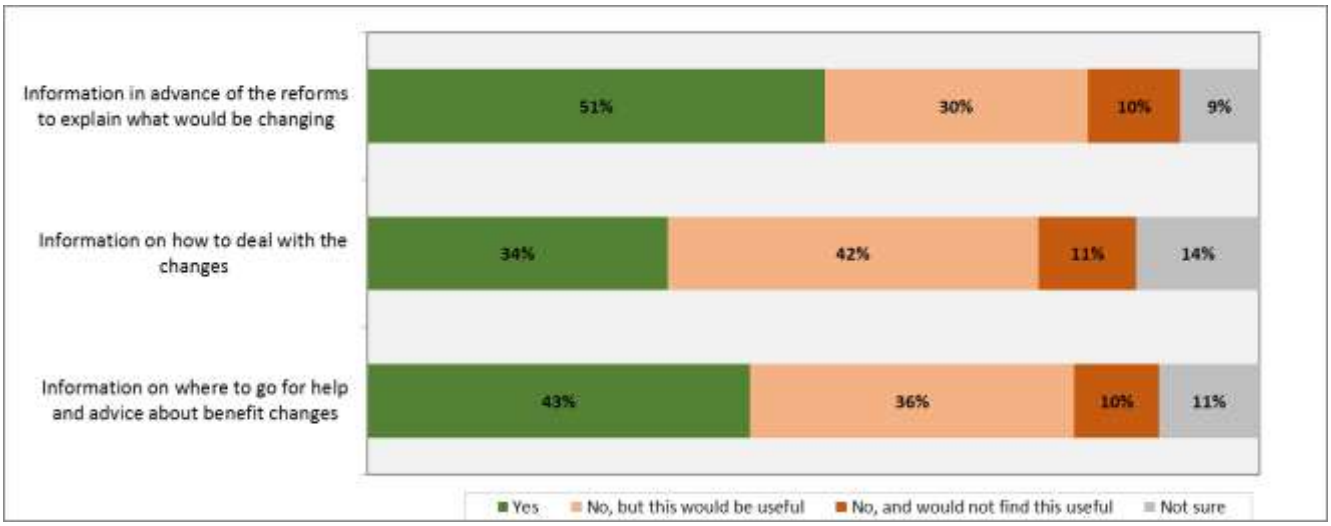
Base: 188

7.3. Those affected by welfare changes to date were also asked to indicate what had changed for their household. Numbers of respondents affected to date are relatively small and results are indicative only, but nevertheless indicate some points of interest. In particular, finding it more difficult to pay rent, service charges and other bills was by some margin the most common change mentioned by respondents. More than two thirds of those affected by welfare changes to date indicated that they were finding it more difficult to pay rent, service charge and/or to pay other bills. Moreover, around a third of those affected by welfare changes indicated that they were considering moving home as a result of benefit changes.

7.4. A small number of respondents mentioned "other" ways in which their household had been affected by housing-related welfare changes. This most commonly included reference to a range of specific concerns regarding the financial impact of the changes including reference to the impact of adult children living away from home or planning to move out of the family home, respondents having to wait on decisions on discretionary housing payments, and the financial (and other) impact on individuals with health needs. A number of these respondents expressed concern that they would be required to move home, and in this context a lack of suitable accommodation for downsizing was highlighted as an issue.

7.5. Finally in relation to welfare changes, ***the majority of survey respondents had received information on housing-related benefit changes***; around 3 in 5 respondents (58%) had received one or more of the types of information listed at Figure 16 below. Nevertheless, there remained around a third of all respondents (32%) who indicated that they had not received any information about housing-related welfare reforms. It is notable that this profile was consistent across the main respondent groups.

Figure 12: Whether received information about housing-related welfare changes (all respondents)



Base: 168, 150, 158

7.6. In terms of the kinds of information that respondents had received, the most common was information in advance of welfare reforms to explain what would be changing; half of respondents had received this (51%). A substantial proportion of respondents had also received information on where to go for help and advice (43%) and on how to deal with benefit changes (34%).

7.7. ***Nearly half of all respondents (48%) indicated that there was information that they would find useful in relation to housing-related welfare reforms, but that they had not yet received.*** This rises to around two thirds of those who had been or were expecting to be affected by welfare reforms, although this is based on a relatively small number of individuals.

7.8. In terms of specific types of information, interest was widest in relation to information on how to deal with benefit changes (41% of respondents would find this useful), although there was also considerable interest in information on where to go for help and advice (36% interested in this) and information on what would be changing (30%).

8. THE SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER

8.1. This section considers survey results and qualitative findings on Panel members' awareness and interest in the Scottish Social Housing Charter, in the context of the Charter forming a core element of the standards and targets against which SHR monitors and reports landlords' progress.

8.2. The following pages consider findings across the survey and qualitative work with Panel members. Survey questions sought to gauge whether and how Panel members had heard of the Charter (Figures 13 and 14), and the extent of Panel members' interest in information on their landlord's performance against the Charter (Figures 15 and 16). Qualitative discussions focused primarily on exploring participants' interest in reporting of landlords' performance against the Charter.

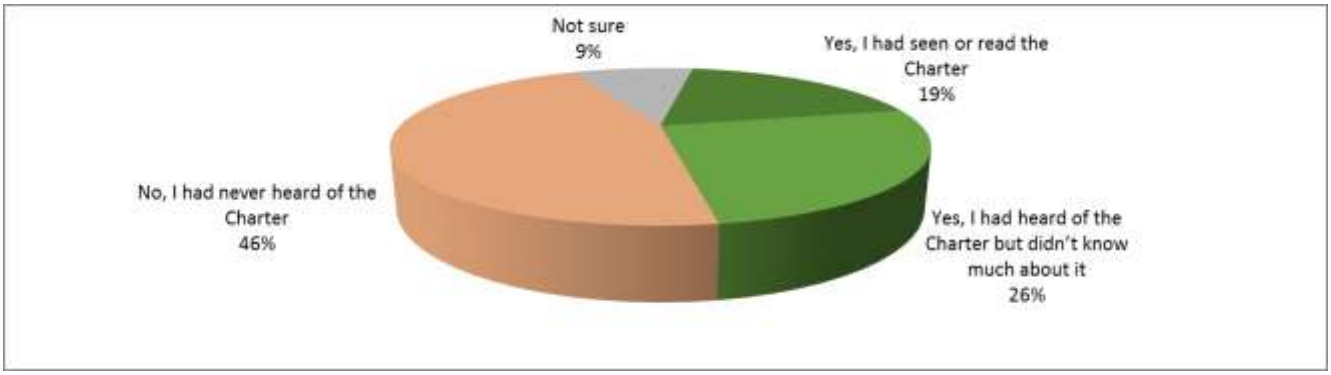
Key points of note in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter are:

- A little less than half of respondents had heard of the Charter prior to receiving the first Panel survey, most via information from their landlord.
- Qualitative feedback was positive about the principle of the Charter. This appeared to relate to the perceived value of a clear statement of what service users should expect from landlords, and ensuring equality of service across landlords (including potential to "empower" service users with information on what they should expect from their landlord).
- Nearly all respondents expressed interest in information on their landlord's performance against the charter, and comparison with other landlords. Some saw specific value in SHR's independence as reassuring service users as to the accuracy of performance information.

Awareness of the Scottish Social Housing Charter

8.3. ***A little less than half of all respondents (45%) had heard of the Scottish Social Housing Charter prior to receiving the first Panel survey***, suggesting relatively broad awareness of the Charter amongst tenants and service users. However, most of those who had been aware of the Charter indicated that they "did not know much about" the Charter (26% of all respondents), and there remained a substantial proportion who had never heard of the Charter (46%).

Figure 13: Whether heard of Scottish Social Housing Charter before joining Panel

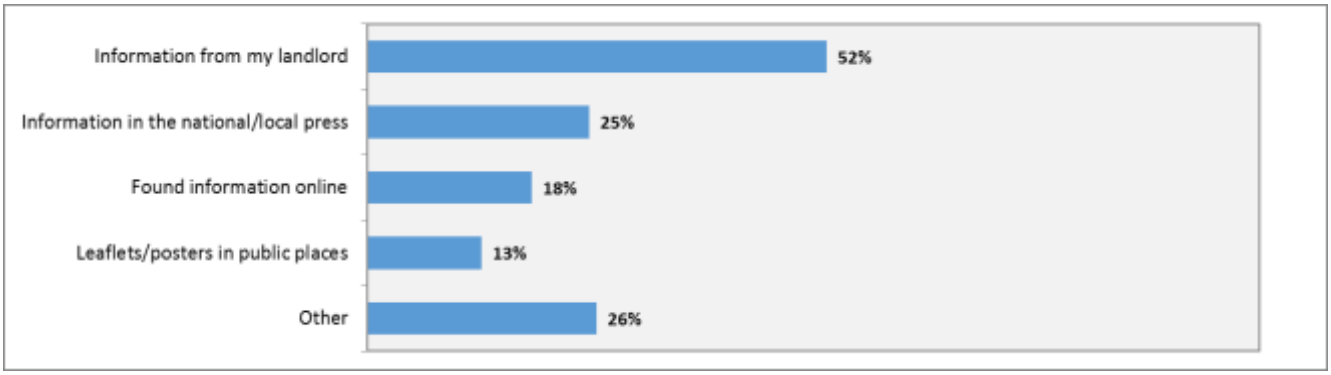


Base: 186

8.4. Survey data suggests no significant variation across local authority and RSL tenants in respondents' awareness of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Nevertheless, it is notable that those aged under 45 and those living in rural areas were somewhat less likely than others to have heard of the Charter. RTO members were also somewhat more likely than others to have heard of the Charter, although this difference is not statistically significant.

8.5. ***Information provided by landlords was by far the most common way in which respondents had heard about the Charter***; half of those who had heard of the Charter had seen information provided by their landlord (52%, see Figure 14 below). Respondents also made reference to having seen information on the Charter in the national/local press (25%), having found information online (18%) and having seen leaflets or posters in public places (13%). Around a quarter of those who had heard of the Charter mentioned other ways in which they had found out about it, with these most commonly being via a tenant or resident group (including Tenant Federations and RTOs), through contact with SHR and taking part in Scottish Social Housing Charter related meetings, and through their workplace.

Figure 14: How heard about the Scottish Social Housing Charter



Base: 75

8.6. ***Feedback from qualitative participants*** on the Social Housing Charter was broadly consistent with these findings. Most participants had heard of the Social Housing Charter this had generally been subsequent to joining the National Panel. In terms of how participants had first heard of the Charter, this was most commonly through tenant forums or federations, information from landlords, involvement in tenant scrutiny, and the national press.

8.7. Qualitative participants were also generally positive on the principle of the Social Housing Charter:

- This positive view appeared to be related primarily to the perceived value of a clear statement of what tenants and service users should expect from their landlord, and ensuring equality of service across all social landlords (including specifically between local authority and RSL service users). This included some suggestion that the Charter could help to "empower" tenants and service users with information on what they should expect from their landlord. Participants saw this as having particular value for individuals with concerns regarding the standard of their landlord's services. However, there also appeared to be a more general concern amongst participants that service users may not receive the level of service to which they are entitled, and an interest in the Charter's potential to address this.
- Notwithstanding this generally positive view, a number of those who expressed strong support for the principle of the Charter, also suggested that the value of the Charter is dependent on its effective implementation and monitoring. Reference was made here to the importance of ensuring landlords deliver real progress against Charter outcomes, and to need for tenants to be involved in monitoring that progress.

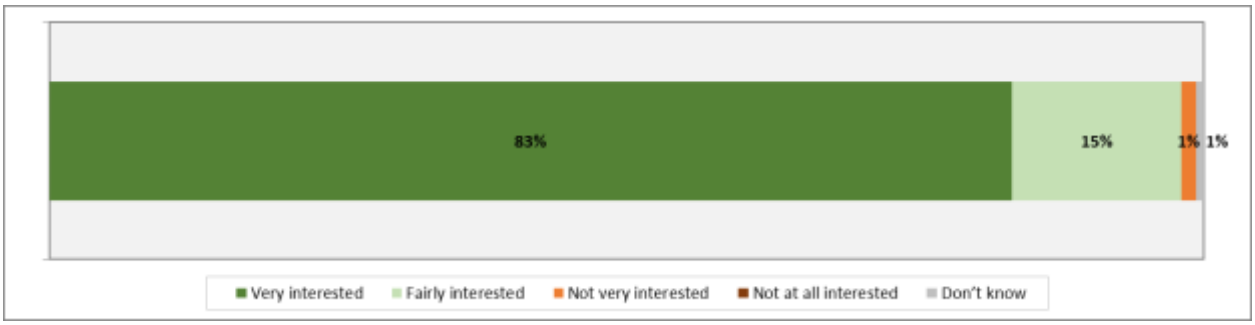
Level of interest in information on landlord performance against Charter

8.8. The survey also sought to gauge the extent to which Panel members are interested in accessing information on their landlord's performance against the Charter. Survey results suggest widespread interest in accessing this information, and this was consistent across the key respondent groups.

8.9. ***Nearly all respondents indicated that they would be interested in seeing information about their landlord's performance against the charter***. As Figure 15 indicates, 98% of all respondents expressed interest in accessing this kind of information, with most of these "very interested" (83%).

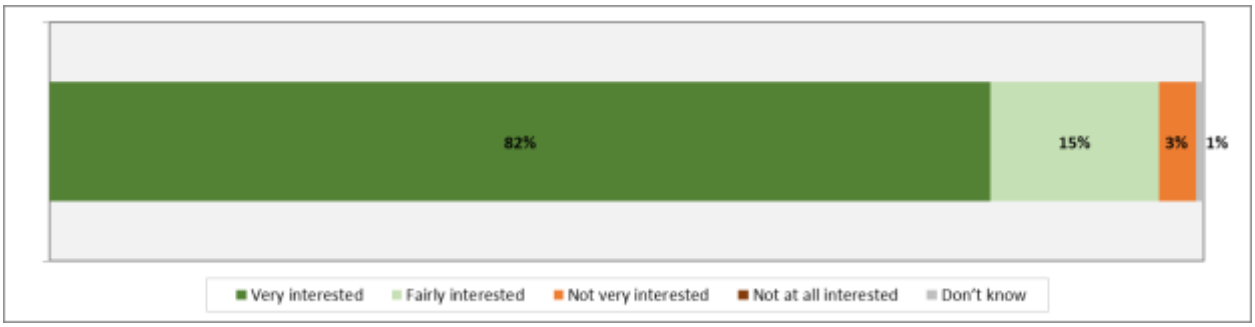
8.10. ***Respondents also indicated very strong interest in information on how their landlords' performance against the Charter compared with other landlords*** (Figure 16). Again, nearly all respondents expressed interest in this kind of information (97%), including 82% who were "very interested".

Figure 15: Interest in information about landlord's performance against the Charter



Base: 90

Figure 16: Interest in comparing landlord's performance with other landlords



Base: 89

Qualitative feedback on reporting landlord performance against Charter

8.11. Discussions with qualitative research participants identified ***broad interest in information on landlords' performance against the Social Housing Charter***. This included an interest in this information for individual's own landlord, but it was evident that comparison of performance across landlords was a particular point of interest. To some extent this appeared to reflect the fact that most participants already received performance information from their landlord (and that SHR reporting may not add significantly to this). However, there also appeared to be a view that comparison across landlords helps to put performance information in context. This included a number of participants who had moved between social landlords and found the comparison in service standards useful.

8.12. In terms of other ***views on specific aspects of performance reporting***, the following points are of note:

- A number of participants highlighted the value of tracking trends over time in landlord performance, particularly in measuring progress against the Charter.

- For some, interest was specifically predicated on SHR collating and reporting performance information. This was linked to a view that SHR's independence may reassure tenants and service users about the accuracy of performance information, particularly in the context of some individuals expressing a view that information published by landlords may not always provide a "fair and balanced" account of landlord performance. Some of these participants made specific reference to a need for SHR to check information provided for accuracy.
- Some participants questioned the potential for performance reporting to have an impact on landlord services. A number of participants felt that SHR's publication of performance information could help service users, for example by providing information to backup more specific improvement suggestions. In addition, it was suggested that this may engender some level of "competition" between landlords which could help to improve services. However, others were of the view that, while performance information was interesting, it was unlikely to result in a change in the standard of services being provided. For example, it was suggested that many individuals do not have a meaningful choice in the landlord they use, and that as such "competition" was not a meaningful concept for the majority of users of social landlord services.
- A small number of participants highlighted the importance of understanding the ***reasons*** for any service user dissatisfaction and/or poorer service standards, over and above published statistical information. These participants support an approach where performance information is used as a starting point for more detailed consideration of service performance and service users' experience.
- A small number of participants suggested that their experience of tenant response to performance information provided by landlords indicated a level of "apathy" towards performance reporting. Some felt that SHR could address this, by for example presenting a more focused set of information, easy to read and presented in a more engaging way, and highlighting the relevance to individuals.

8.13. Participants generally supported the ***range of indicators*** for which performance information will be provided, and felt that these were focused on the things that matter most to tenants and service users. As is discussed at section 2 of this report, in terms of specific landlord services repairs/maintenance, property condition and antisocial behaviour were highlighted as being of greatest importance for tenants and service users.

8.14. Within the overall support for the range of proposed indicators, interest was most significant in the services seen as most important for service users – i.e. relation to repairs and maintenance, housing quality more generally, and dealing with complaints:

- Interest was most widespread in relation to information on repairs service performance. To some extent this appears to reflect experience of specific issues or concerns, although some also made reference to the scope for poor repairs service performance to cause inconvenience or anxiety. Participants also expressed specific support for the focus on performance in relation to getting repairs right first time and average repair times (and particularly for emergency repairs). These were consistently identified as the key aspects of repairs and maintenance services.
- Housing quality more generally was also identified as a focus for performance reporting. This was most commonly mentioned in relation to repairs, but also included an interest in information on capital investment, and the quality of housing stock more broadly (including energy efficiency).
- Participants also showed interest in information on the number of complaints reported and resolved, with this focused primarily on comparing rates across landlords.

8.15. Qualitative discussions also identified a number of ***suggestions for additional indicators*** that participants would like to see included in future performance reporting. These included:

- Broad interest in information on rents and value for money. Participants recognised the challenge of presenting comparable information on, for example, average rent levels – however, it was suggested that this kind of information could be of greater interest than many of the other indicators currently presented. Specific suggestions included average rent for a specific property size (including participants who had previously contacted numerous landlords to compare the rent of a 2 bed flatted property), and % rent increase for each landlord.
- Indicators relating to the impact of welfare changes, including a suggestion of information on the proportion of tenants affected by the change to Housing Benefit under-occupancy criteria.
- Suggestion of broader indicators related to service users' views and experience – not just percentage satisfaction ratings, but also more qualitative feedback.

8.16. Participants had very limited awareness or experience of ***landlord activities to involve tenants in assessing their performance against the Charter***, and only one or two individuals had seen information on their landlord's intended approach to this. Nevertheless, a number of relevant points were raised in relation to landlords involving tenants in the process:

- A small number of participants made reference to specific examples of landlords seeking views on performance reporting against the Charter. This included an open day organised by one landlord, a survey conducted with tenants to gather satisfaction information that also included a small number of questions on the approach to performance reporting, and reference to information on the landlord's plans being provided through local tenant federations.
- Perhaps linked to this limited experience or contact with landlords, a small number of participants expressed concern that landlords may not be doing enough to ensure that service user involvement extends beyond RTOs and other existing tenant networks.
- Of particular relevance to the measurement of performance against the Charter, this included concern regarding the extent to which landlords' measurement of tenant satisfaction was representative. Some participants appeared to see a "disconnect" between their own experience and published survey results, but also made reference to methodological concerns such as timing over Christmas holidays, and short response periods.
- In terms of service user engagement more generally, some felt that there were a good mix of opportunities for those interested in taking part, including reference to local tenant groups, tenant scrutiny and occasional consultation exercises. Participants also highlighted the extent to which the manner of service staff could have a significant bearing of service users' willingness to contribute their views. There were a number of comments here on service staff being approachable for tenants with specific feedback or concerns, and also to role of Tenant Participation Officers in encouraging service user engagement.

9. PRIORITIES FOR THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

9.1. The final section of the survey gave Panel members the opportunity to suggest priorities for the Scottish Housing Regulator, in the context of SHR's role in protecting the interests of tenants and other service users. Respondents were invited to suggest the top three things that they would like SHR to focus on in protecting the interests of tenants and other services users. The main priorities and themes emerging through comments are summarised in the table below.

9.2. Respondents raised a broad range of priorities and issues in their comments here, and it is interesting that these mirror to a large extent findings considered in earlier sections of this report on the importance which individuals attach to specific landlord services. In particular it is notable that repairs services, rents and antisocial behaviour feature prominently in the issues set out in the table below – and were also amongst the most important aspects of landlord services identified by respondents at section 2 of this report.

9.3. Comments also reflect varying views on and awareness of SHR's role in regulating social landlords. A minority of those commenting made reference to specific regulatory activities on which they wished to see SHR focus – for example a stronger role for SHR was the third most commonly suggested priority – but most focused their comments on the issues or services which are of greatest concern to them, and which they wished SHR to seek to address.

Priority	**Number of respondents N=149**
<u>Repairs services</u> Respondents primarily made reference to a desire to see SHR focus on improving landlords' repairs services, including specifically in relation to repair timescales and the standard of work.	39
<u>Rents</u> Many of these were references rent levels in very general terms, including concern regarding fairness of rents, affordability, and a desire to see SHR focus on limiting rent increases.	38
<u>Stronger and more direct role for SHR in regulating landlord services</u> Respondents made a broad range of comments reflecting a desire to see SHR take a closer and more direct role in monitoring and improving respondents' landlords' services. This included reference to SHR undertaking "spot checks", mystery shopping, and publicising services which do not meet standards.	29

Priority	Number of respondents N=149
More openness and transparency with tenants and service users This reflected concern amongst respondents that landlords provide tenants and other service users with more comprehensive information on service activities. This included reference to performance standards, but also being more transparent in relation to financial information on services.	25
Major improvements and capital investment A number of respondents wished to see SHR work to ensure that required improvement and capital investment works are undertaken.	24
Antisocial behaviour Comments here reflected the importance that respondents place on an effective response to antisocial behaviour, although some comments implied a concern amongst individuals that their landlord does not place sufficient emphasis on tackling antisocial behaviour.	24
Overall standard of customer service A range of comments reflected the value placed on good customer service, including reference to ensuring that landlords focus on staff ability and manner when dealing with tenants and other service users, and reference to accessibility and opening hours.	22
The impact of welfare changes Comments here again reflected in large part the extent of some respondents' concern regarding the impact of welfare changes, and specifically the "bedroom tax". However, reference was also made to the potential for SHR to act in preventing evictions as a result of welfare changes.	20
Tenant participation Respondents suggested that SHR could focus on ensuring that landlords promote and improve tenant participation opportunities, including more and better consultation with tenants and service users, the standard of Tenant Participation services, and clarity on the role of RTOs.	20
Safety and security A subset of respondents expressed significant concerns regarding safety and security in their local area, particularly older respondents and sheltered housing residents.	16
Allocations A range of comments made reference to social housing allocations, including reference to a need for (and ensuring an appropriate approach to) review of allocations policies, and views on specific needs groups for allocations.	15

Priority	Number of respondents N=149
Quality of local area and neighbourhood Comments again reflected the importance that respondents place on the quality of their local area and neighbourhood, including some wishing to see their landlord place greater emphasis on improving this.	10
More social housing Respondents made reference to unmet need for social housing, and a desire to see more development of new social housing in their area.	9
Homelessness A small number of respondents made reference to homelessness as a priority in quite broad terms, reflecting a view that homeless households should be a key priority group for allocations.	7

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APPENDIX: RESEARCH DESIGN , METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSE

This report provides an overview of the findings across the two main exercises conducted with the National Panel in its first year: (i) a full Panel survey addressing a broad range of topics, and (ii) subsequent qualitative research with Panel members, involving more detailed discussion around a more narrow set of topics. The remainder of this section provides an overview of the approach taken in, and response achieved by the two exercises.

Survey 1

This first survey of the National Panel was undertaken shortly after the initial Panel recruitment and membership stood at 315 at the time of the survey, although the Panel remains open to new members throughout the year and membership increased further during and since survey fieldwork. This first survey sought to assess Panel members' priorities and experience as a user of social landlord services, across the following main topics:

- Your priorities;
- Information on landlord performance;
- Complaints handling;
- Welfare reform;
- The Scottish Housing Regulator[3];
- The Scottish Social Housing Charter; and
- Priorities for SHR.

Panel membership is open to social tenants, current or previous users of homeless services, owners in receipt of a factoring or common repairs service from a social landlord, and Gypsy/Travellers residing on social landlord-owned residential sites. Given the varied Panel membership the survey sought to focus on services and priorities which were likely to be relevant to all Panel members. The survey also made reference to "your landlord", making clear that for those who are not social tenants this referred to the landlord whose services Panel members use or have used. "Landlord" is also used in this way throughout the report.

Survey fieldwork was undertaken from June to August 2013. Self-completion survey packs were issued to all 315 Panel members in mid-June, via email or post dependent on individuals' preference indicated at the time of joining the Panel. All Panel members were offered the option of completing the survey by post, online or over the telephone irrespective of how they had initially received the survey pack. Craigforth provided a Freephone telephone number and email contact to address any queries from Panel members, or for those wishing to complete the survey by telephone.

[3] Findings reported separately.

A further reminder notice was issued by email 2-3 weeks into the survey fieldwork period, and a second reminder notice issued by post and email at the end of July.

By survey close a total of 196 responses had been received. This represents an **overall response rate of 62%**, a very strong level of response to any postal survey, and indicative of a strong level of engagement from new Panel members. The level of survey response achieved is also sufficient to produce robust overall survey results, and to permit more detailed analysis of results within specific respondent groups – in particular local authority and RSL tenants, broad age bands, rural and urban geographies.

The majority of responses were received by post, although around a third of respondents completed the websurvey and a small number made their response via telephone. Figure A1 below summarises the availability and response of the three survey strands.

Figure A1: Overview of Survey Strands

Postal survey	Postal survey packs issued to Panel members indicating a preference for postal survey completion, where email survey issue was returned undelivered, or where individuals requested a hard copy survey form. **Total postal survey packs issued: 181**	**Total returns via post: 116** **Equivalent response rate: 64%**
Websurvey	Emails issued to Panel members indicating a preference for online survey completion and for whom a valid email address was held. Web address for the survey also provided to Panel members receiving postal survey packs. **Total survey emails issued: 134**	**Total returns via websurvey: 68** **Equivalent response rate: 51%**
Telephone survey	The option of completing the survey via Craigforth's Freephone number was made available to all Panel members.	**Total returns via telephone: 12** **Equivalent response rate: n/a**

A detailed profile of survey respondents, and of the Panel as a whole at the time of the survey, is provided at Figure A2 below. This indicates that the profile of respondents to the current survey is broadly in line with the Panel membership as a whole, reflecting the strong survey response achieved across socio-demographic groups within the Panel membership.

Figure A2: Profile of survey respondents (unweighted)[4]

	Survey respondents (n=196)	All Panel members (n=315)
GENDER		
Female	52%	48%
Male	48%	52%
Base	151	312
AGE		
Under 35	4%	8%
35-44	14%	17%
45-59	35%	32%
60-74	37%	34%
75+	10%	10%
Base	148	298
TENURE		
Council tenant	61%	63%
RSL tenant	35%	31%
Owner	4%	6%
Base	145	298
LOCATION		
Rural	31%	27%
Small Town	15%	15%
Urban	54%	57%
Base	153	314
DISABILITY		
1+ Disability	46%	45%
Mobility problems/wheelchair	20%	20%
Other disability	34%	25%
No disability	54%	55%
Base	141	290
ETHNICITY		
White - Scottish, British or Irish	75%	86%
White - other	5%	5%
Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	1%	1%
Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British	1%	0.3%
African, Caribbean or Black	-	-
Other ethnic group	-	-
Unknown	19%	8%
Base	190	315
RTO membership		
Member of RTO	30%	28%
Not a member of RTO	70%	72%
Base	151	290

[4] Note this the profile of Panel members is based on the membership at the time of survey fieldwork. Bases for specific variables differ from the overall volume of survey responses/Panel membership due to question non-response, and a number of survey respondents who did not provide a reference number with their response (and hence for whom profile data could not be linked to the survey response).

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was undertaken with Panel members following completion of the first Panel survey. The overall objective for the qualitative engagement was providing further detail on some of the issues and priorities that had been identified through survey findings, and to address other topics that were better suited to a more discursive approach. To balance the range of topics to be addressed, and enable a mix of methodologies to be used, the qualitative work was conducted as three parallel research strands. Figure A3 provides further detail.[5]

Figure A3: Overview of Qualitative Research Strands

Strand 1	**Importance of landlord services/activities** Exploring in more detail Panel members' views and experiences relating to the importance of specific landlord services and how those services are provided.	**Mix of discussion groups/ interviews** **Total 46 participants**
Strand 2	**Social Housing Charter, SHR publications & engagement** Exploring Panel members' awareness and views on the Scottish Social Housing Charter (including monitoring of landlord performance against the Charter), SHR publications, and SHR's approach to service user engagement.	**Mix of discussion groups/ interviews** **Total 45 participants**
Strand 3	**SHR website** Exploring views on the SHR website through Panel members' experience of completing a set of tasks through the website.	**Short website exercise, immediately followed by interview to gather feedback** **Total 21 participants**

The qualitative exercise was conducted during February and March 2014, with participants recruited from respondents to the first survey, Panel members who had not responded to the first survey, and members who joined the Panel subsequent to the first survey. A total of 112 individuals took part across the three research strands. Figure A4 over the page provides an overview of the profile of these participants.

[5] Findings from Research Strands 2 and 3 (excluding the Scottish Housing Charter) are reported in a separate publication.

Figure A4: Summary profile of qualitative research participants

	Strand 1 (n=46)	Strand 2 (n=45)	Strand 3 (n=21)
GENDER			
Female	19	21	12
Male	27	24	9
AGE			
Under 35	3	4	3
35-44	5	6	5
45-59	10	14	8
60-74	22	11	5
75+	5	9	0
TENURE			
Council tenant	29	23	9
RSL tenant	14	19	12
Owner	3	3	0
LOCATION			
Rural	11	16	7
Small Town	6	2	1
Urban	29	27	13

Analysis and Reporting

Survey responses were verified and cleaned, and the final survey dataset weighted against the age and tenure profile of social tenants more widely (using Scottish Household Survey data). This sought to minimise the impact of any imbalance in the profile of survey responses, and to ensure that results are as representative as possible of the wider population (in this case social tenants). The number of non-social tenants responding (8 non tenants responded to the survey) was insufficient to permit detailed weighting, and each case was included unweighted in the final dataset.

This report presents frequency results for each of "closed" questions asked in the survey, and consideration of themes emerging through written responses to "open" survey questions. In some cases analysis has excluded "don't know" responses from the percentage base to give a more accurate indication of views amongst Panel members with experience of relevant services. We round percentages up or down to the nearest whole number; for some questions this means that percentages may not sum to 100%. It should also be noted that respondents may not have answered all parts of the survey and the "base" for each question varies as a result of non-response. Survey results on service priorities exclude "don't know/doesn't apply" responses to ensure that rating of each service is based on tenants and others with experience of the service

In addition to overall frequency results, survey analysis also sought to identify variation in views and experiences across key socio-demographic groups – including in relation to respondent age, tenure (local authority or

RSL tenant), location and RTO membership. We highlight any significant variation in survey results across these groups in the body of the report.