NATIONAL PANEL OF TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS

REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM YEAR 2

Research undertaken by Craigforth for the Scottish Housing Regulator

Chris Thornton, Craigforth
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SUMMARY FINDINGS

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

The National Panel is independently managed by Craigforth and is open to anyone who is a social housing tenant or uses social landlords' services. Panel members are volunteers and recruitment is continuous, standing at 430 members at March 2015.

This report brings together findings from the two main exercises conducted with the National Panel in its second year: (i) a full Panel survey addressing a broad range of topics relating to members' priorities and experiences, and (ii) subsequent qualitative research with c90 Panel members and c50 Gypsies/Travellers on social rented sites to explore a range of topics suited to a more in-depth discursive approach.

This second year of the panel builds on Year 1, looking at tenants' priorities around rents, affordability and value for money, as well as specific aspects of landlords' service delivery and tenants' understanding and awareness of SHR. Work in Year 2 also links to other aspects of SHR's work. The panel survey achieved a 62% response rate. The survey explores perceptions of "customer satisfaction" and links directly to the SHR analysis of landlords' performance in the first year of the Charter[1]. The qualitative work this year also looks in detail at specific areas of landlord service delivery, and links to the current SHR Thematic Inquiry Programme.[2]

"A Satisfied Customer"

This theme explores what it means for Panel members to be "a satisfied customer", and the key drivers of tenant satisfaction with landlord services. The theme also links directly to the SHR analysis and report on the first year of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Key points of note are:

- Quality of home, emergency repairs response and affordability are particularly important to individuals being "a satisfied customer". Speed of allocations, comparability of rents and overall rent arrears are least important

[1] For further details, please see the *National Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter: an analysis of landlords' 2013/14 annual returns*. SHR, March 2015.
[2] For further information on the SHR Thematic Programme, please see the SHR website.

- Quality of services provided and value for money are the two most important factors in customer satisfaction, although opportunities to participate in decisions are also seen as important.
- Service Standards are generally seen as of value to tenants, although some did not feel these were directly relevant to their experience as a tenant.

Value for Money, Affordable Rents

This theme considers views on what value for money means for users of social landlord services, and views/experiences in relation to affordability of rents and service charges. Key points of note are:

- Affordability, quality of service and capital investment are the most important drivers of whether individuals see their landlord's services as value for money.
- Comparability of social rents is rated as less important for individuals' sense of whether their landlord's services are value for money.
- Few respondents report significant affordability concerns at present, but nearly two thirds have concerns regarding the possibility of future rent increases causing them problems.

Communication and Performance Reporting

This theme considers Panel members' awareness and views on landlord performance reporting. This includes performance reporting by their own landlord, and SHR's recent work producing new Landlord Reports and an online landlord comparison tool. Key points of note are:

- Survey results suggest that the majority of tenants and service users feel reasonably well informed about how their landlord is performing.
- Tenants and service users are most interested in performance information on the quality of homes, response to antisocial behaviour, the size of annual rent increases, and speed of response to emergency repairs.
- The majority of respondents have seen information in the last year on their landlord's performance.
- Nearly half of respondents had seen the SHR Landlord Report for their landlord, a very encouraging result for the new reports. Most have a positive view of SHR producing the reports, and feel that this adds to current reporting of landlord performance.
- Survey respondents are less likely to have seen the SHR online Comparison Tool, than to have seen SHR landlord reports.

Feedback on the Tool is generally positive, although some improvement points were identified.

Residents of Gypsy/Traveller Sites

In depth engagement with Gypsies/Travellers living on social landlord sites was a key element of the qualitative work this year, and links closely to the SHR Thematic Inquiry Report on site services for Gypsies/Travellers. Key points of note in relation to the views and experiences of Gypsies/Travellers living on social landlord sites are:

- Awareness of landlord Service Standards is relatively low, although interviews suggest that residents are generally happy with the information they receive in relation to Standards.
- Views are divided on whether Service Standards are useful. Some participants feel that information on Standards would be useful, but others are happy with their current arrangement highlighting relevant Standards at the point of service contact.
- Awareness of, and to some extent interest in, landlord performance reporting is relatively limited. Relatively few participants have seen performance information from their landlord and views are mixed on the value of performance reporting.
- Few participants indicate that their landlord had specifically asked for their views on the service they receive, over and above unprompted feedback provided to site managers.
- Nearly all participants can recall having received notification of forthcoming rent increases, but only very few recall being asked for their views on alternate options for rent increases.

Users of Social Landlord Factoring Services

Qualitative fieldwork with Panel members who are owners in receipt of social landlord factoring or common repairs services focused on understanding of the service, service strengths/weaknesses, and making a complaint. Again, this is designed to feed into the SHR Thematic Inquiry on management and fees for services to factored owners. Key points of note are:

- Understanding of what the factoring service provides and any related charges is mixed amongst participants. It is clear that a lack of understanding is a significant concern for some, and has an impact on the extent to which individuals feel that the service was value for money.
- The areas which participants see as strengths for factoring service are primarily focused around the quality of maintenance and repair work delivered by landlords.

- Suggested improvement areas are related to service costs (and the extent to which these represent good value), and transparency/information provision.

Awareness of the Scottish Housing Regulator

The final strand of work with Panel members focused on awareness of the SHR's work over the last year. SHR has a fairly indirect relationship with tenants and service users. This theme focuses on assessing any change in awareness over the last 12 months, during which SHR has had a relatively high media profile. Key points of note are:

- More than 2 in 5 survey respondents have seen or heard about SHR's work in the last year, an encouraging finding in the context of SHR's indirect relationship with users of social landlord services.
- Respondents were most likely to mention having seen the new SHR Landlord Reports.
- The majority of respondents indicated that they understand SHR's role and how this helps service users.
- Survey responses suggest a generally positive trend in awareness of SHR and its work; more than 2 in 5 are more aware of SHR and its work. It is notable that, where participants' opinion of SHR had changed, this was overwhelmingly to a more positive view.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1. The National Panel was established in spring/summer 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The National Panel fits into SHR's wider approach to communication and engagement with users of social landlord services, and 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 Panel's value is as an accessible group of engaged individuals willing to participate. As such the focus for the Panel is on ensuring a good cross-section of tenants and other service users. A profile of the current Panel membership is appended to this report.

STRUCTURE FOR YEAR 2

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

1.4. The focus for this second year of the panel is to build on Year 1 findings, looking again at tenants' priorities around rents, affordability and value for money, as well as specific aspects of landlords' service delivery and tenants' understanding and awareness of SHR. Panel work in Year 2 also links to themes identified through other aspects of SHR's work as important to tenants. The panel survey explores perceptions of "customer satisfaction" and links directly to the SHR analysis of landlords' performance in the first year of the Charter[3]. The qualitative work this year also looks in detail at specific areas of landlord service delivery, and links to the current SHR Thematic Inquiry Programme[4]. Findings from the National Panel relating to both the SHR Charter analysis and the Thematic Programme will also be included in a series of individual SHR publications throughout 2015-16.

i. A full Panel survey conducted in early 2015 addressing a broad range of topics relating to Panel members' priorities and experiences;

ii. A "vox pop" SMS survey of Panel members, focused on rent consultation; and

iii. Subsequent qualitative research with 95 Panel members and 48 Gypsies/Travellers on social rented sites to explore themes suited to a more in-depth and discursive approach. This included discussion groups, telephone interviews, Gypsy/Traveller site visits, and a practical exercise around the SHR online landlord comparison tool.

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[3] For further details, please see the *National Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter: an analysis of landlords' 2013/14 annual returns*. SHR, March 2015.

[4] For further information on the SHR Thematic Programme, please see the SHR website.

1.5. This report integrates both quantitative results (i.e. statistical survey findings) and qualitative findings (i.e. from the discursive work with Panel members exploring their experiences, views and motivations in more detail) to provide a rounded view of members' priorities and experiences. The report structure reflects themes around which quantitative and qualitative work was based.

2. A SATISFIED CUSTOMER

2.1. The first part of the Panel survey sought to explore what it means for Panel members to be "a satisfied customer". This theme, and more specifically the key drivers of tenant satisfaction with landlord services, is also considered across qualitative strands. The theme is included this year to link directly to SHR analysis and reporting of the first year of the Scottish Social Housing Charter[5]. The SHR analysis identified the 12 Charter indicators most closely linked to reported tenant satisfaction levels. National Panel survey questions and discussion groups reflected these indicators, asking panel members to rate and discuss their relative importance and meaning. This section considers survey results and qualitative feedback on these indicators.

Key points of note in relation to "a satisfied customer" are:

- Quality of home, emergency repairs response and affordability are particularly important to individuals being "a satisfied customer". Speed of allocations, comparability of rents and overall rent arrears are least important
- Quality of services provided and value for money are the two most important factors in customer satisfaction, although opportunities to participate in decisions was also seen as important.
- Service Standards were generally seen as of value to tenants, although some did not feel these were directly relevant to their experience as a tenant.

Survey results

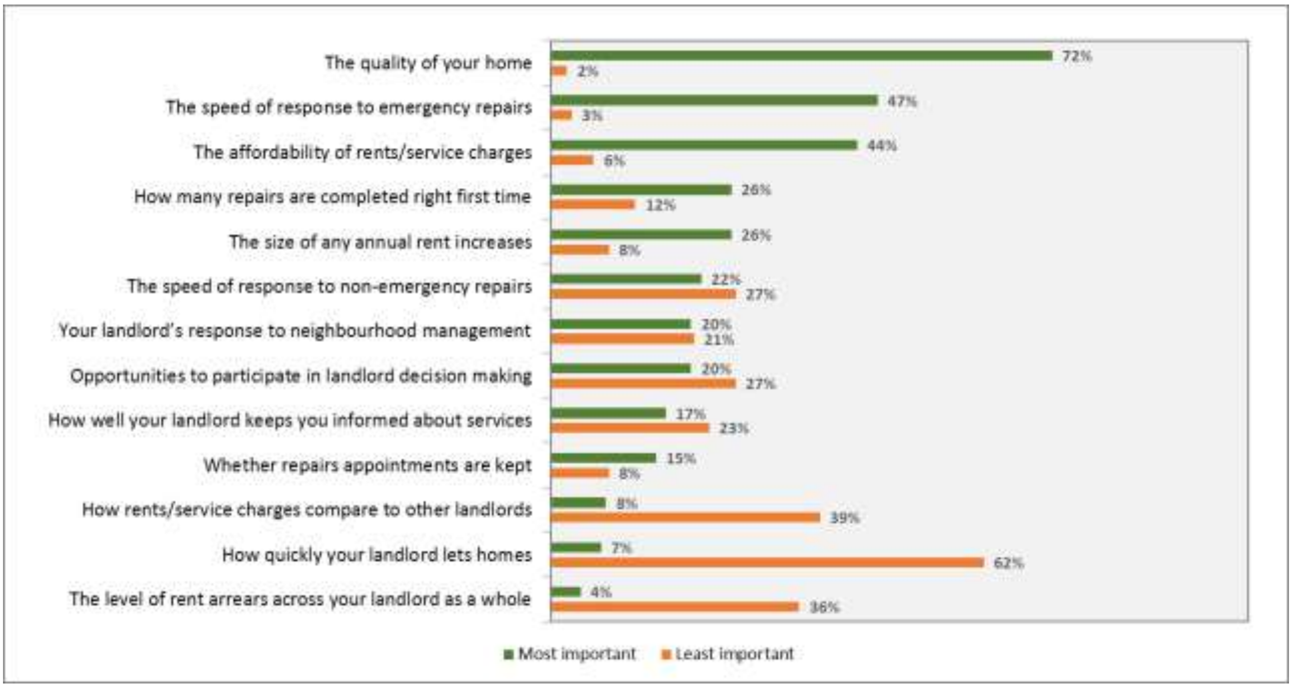
2.2. The survey listed a range of aspects of landlord services and asked Panel members to identify which of these were most important to whether they are "a satisfied customer", and which factors were least important. Respondents were able to select up to three factors as most important, and up to three as least important to their satisfaction with services.

2.3. ***Survey results indicate that quality of home, emergency repairs response and affordability are particularly important to individuals being "a satisfied customer".*** As Figure 1 indicates, *the quality of your home* was by some margin the most commonly cited satisfaction driver (by 72%). The *speed of emergency repairs response* and *affordability of rents/service charges* were also important for many respondents (47% and 44% respectively). Interestingly, the speed of emergency repairs response was cited as a key satisfaction driver for significantly more respondents, than speed of non-emergency repair response (47% and 22% respectively).

[5] For more information on the Charter and the SHR National Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter for 2013/14, please see the SHR website.

2.4. While all aspects of service were important satisfaction drivers for some respondents, survey results suggest that ***speed of allocations, comparability of rents to other landlords, and landlords' overall rent arrears are least important for individuals feeling like "a satisfied customer".*** Nearly two thirds of respondents rated speed of allocations as least important to their service satisfaction (62%), and nearly 2 in 5 rated comparability of rents and overall rent arrears as their least important satisfaction drivers (39% and 36% respectively).

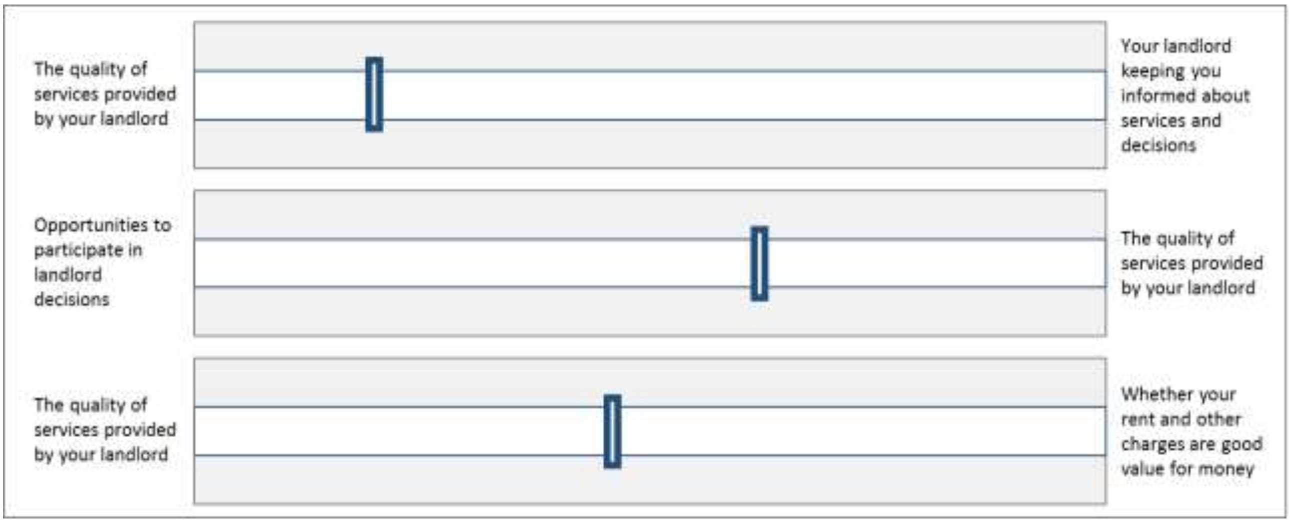
Figure 1: What is most/least important for whether you are "a satisfied customer"?



2.5. In addition to considering the importance of specific landlord services and activities for customer satisfaction, the survey also asked to compare the relative importance of broader aspects of how their landlord provides services. As Figure 2 shows, Panel members were asked to consider the relative importance of the *quality of service provided*, *landlords keeping service users informed*, *opportunities to participate in landlord decisions*, and *value for money* of rent/service charges.

2.6. Survey results suggest that ***quality of services provided and value for money are the two most important factors in customer satisfaction, although opportunities to participate in decisions was also seen as important***. Quality of services was rated as significantly more important than landlords keeping service users informed, and to a lesser extent more important than opportunities for service users to participate in landlord decisions. Views were more evenly balanced between quality of services and value for money, although quality of service was rated as the slightly more important.

Figure 2: How do the following pairs of options compare?



Qualitative feedback

2.7. Qualitative discussions also explored Panel members' views and experiences around what makes "a satisfied customer". This included discussion around landlord Service Standards, repairs services, and complaints processes. Findings from these discussion groups will also feed into separate SHR Thematic Inquiry reports on customer service standards, repairs and maintenance and complaints handling. Key findings from these discussions are set out below.

Service standards

2.8. Awareness of landlord Service Standards was relatively limited amongst research participants. Most understood that landlords work to a set of agreed Standards, but few could point to specific Standards and views on the relevance or value of these was somewhat varied:

> **Service standards**
>
> Most participants felt that there was some value in landlords identifying a clear set of Service Standards to which they should work. This was primarily from the perspective of ensuring greater transparency and enabling tenants to be clearer on what to expect from their landlord. A number of participants also specifically referred to the potential to empower tenants by enabling them to identify where landlords fail to meet required standards: *"it makes you bolder [if you know] what the service should do"*.

However, there was some disagreement about the extent to which Service Standards have genuine relevance to tenants' experience. A small number of participants suggested that specific Standards do not appear to have a significant bearing on their landlord's services, and that knowledge of specific repair timescales for example did not make a difference to tenants' everyday experience.

Participants' reference to specific Service Standards suggests that repair timescales are seen as the most important Standard for tenants. This was both in terms of repair timescales being relevant to a significant proportion of tenants, and also the negative impact that failure to meet these standards can have on tenants' quality of life.

Participants also referred to a number of other Service Standards as being of potential value to tenants. These were most commonly around response to neighbor disputes, protecting vulnerable people, transparency and communication with tenants.

Repairs services

2.9. As is indicated by survey results set out above, discussions with Panel members makes clear that repairs is seen as one of the key service priorities. Repairs service and repairs timescales were consistently amongst the most commonly referenced factors when Panel members considered the quality of their landlord.

2.10. Panel member discussion also made clear that some aspects of repairs services are particularly significant for tenants. To some extent these reflected participants' views on the key role of the repairs service, to minimise the impact of disrepair on the quality of homes, and on the quality of life for tenants (especially more vulnerable tenants).

Repairs services

Speed of repairs response was highlighted as a key element by nearly all participants. A number of positive experiences were cited of landlords responding well within repairs timescales, and these appeared to have a significant influence on individuals' overall view on their landlord's services.

Clarity on repairs timescales, and the extent to which landlords keep to these, was also highlighted by a number of participants. Participants referred to both positive and negative experiences here, including some as examples of the potential inconvenience and anxiety that can be caused by missing repair timescales.

> Responding to emergency repairs was emphasized as of significant value to tenants. This was in terms of the likely impact on the quality of the home (e.g. dampness, roof repairs) and on tenants' lives (e.g. lack of heating, running water). Participants were generally very positive about the response to emergency repairs, and saw this as a key priority for landlords.
>
> Participants also referred to the management and scheduling of repairs to minimize inconvenience to tenants, particularly in use of an effective appointments system. Some highlighted a lack of specific appointment times and missed appointments as causing significant inconvenience, particularly to vulnerable tenants. However participants were again generally positive about their experience.
>
> Treating tenants with respect was also cited as a key element of repairs services. Participants were almost universally positive on this, but it was clear that this was a significant factor in views of landlord repairs services, and a potential cause of significant frustration and dissatisfaction. This included one example of a tenant living in sheltered housing who felt that the landlord did not take their repair reports seriously, and were unwilling to accept the tenant's account of the nature of repair work required.

Complaints handling

2.11. Relatively few participants had experience of their landlord's complaints process, although most were comfortable that they would know how to raise a complaint, and that their landlord would respond appropriately. However, experiences described by research participants did highlight a number of relevant points.

> **Complaints handling**
>
> Participants described some negative experiences, and correspondingly negative views of the value of the complaints process. Issues here appeared to relate primarily to the extent to which individuals' felt that the landlord had listened to their experience and concerns. This included cases where the tenant felt that they had seen no action in response to their complaint, and where a promised response is not fulfilled.
>
> However, participants also described more positive experience of their landlord's complaints process. This included reference to action by landlords having a positive impact on tenants' quality of life – for example assisting a tenant to find alternative accommodation during capital improvements, where this was causing significant anxiety.

Participants' feedback makes clear that the extent to which a complaint is resolved is a key factor for tenants' perception of the process. It also highlighted the importance that tenants feel their landlord listens to and respects their input, and this was a concern for some: *"it feels like you have to fight to be heard"*. Some suggested that a perception that tenants have to struggle to have complaints heard could prevent some, and particularly more vulnerable people, from raising concerns.

3. VALUE FOR MONEY, AFFORDABLE RENTS

3.1. This section considers views on what value for money means for users of social landlord services and views/experiences in relation to affordability of rents and service charges, across survey results and qualitative feedback.

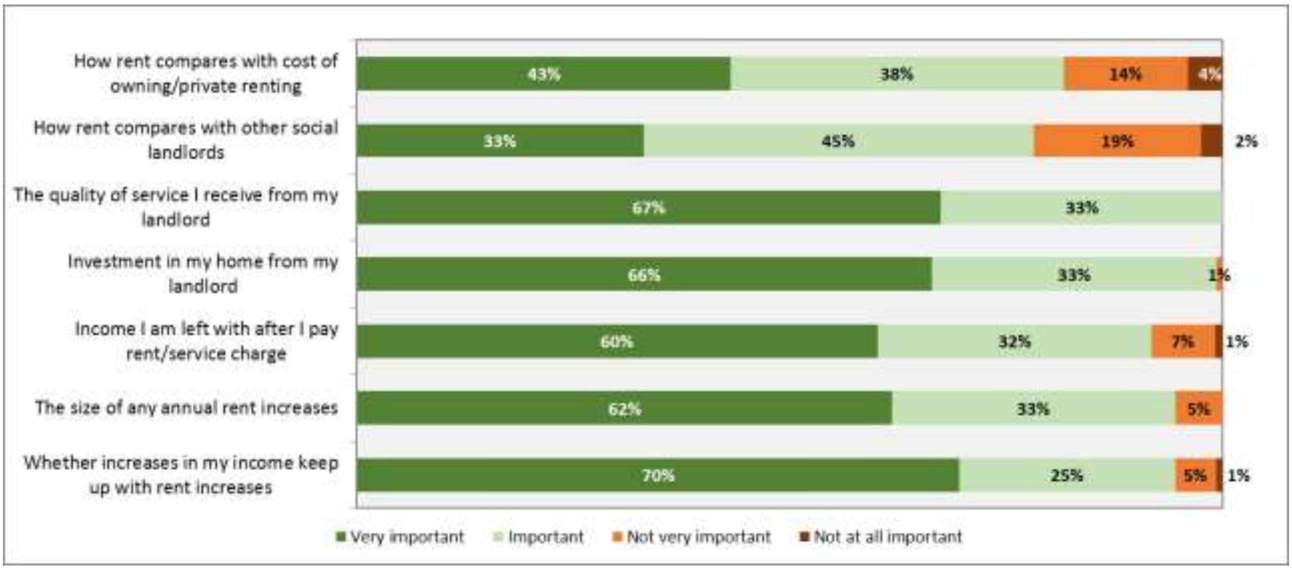
Key points of note in relation to value for money and affordable rents are:

- Affordability, quality of service and capital investment are the most important drivers of whether individuals see their landlord's services as value for money.
- Comparability of social rents was rated as less important for individuals' sense of whether their landlord's services are value for money.
- Few respondents reported significant affordability concerns at present, but nearly two thirds expressed concerns regarding the possibility of future rent increases causing them problems.

Survey results

3.2. The survey first asked Panel members to rate the importance of a range of factors for their sense of whether their landlord's services are value for money. Results are presented at Figure 3.

Figure 3: How important are the following for your sense of whether landlord services are "value for money"?



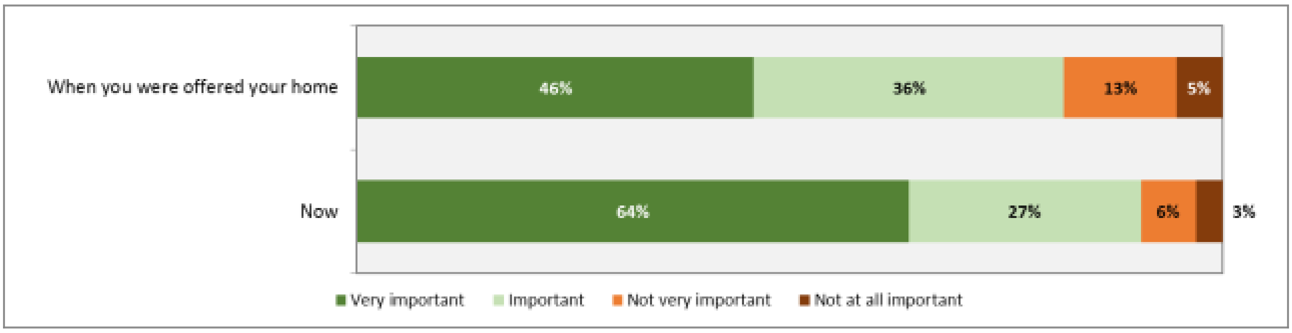
3.3. Survey results suggest that ***affordability, quality of service and capital investment are the most important drivers of whether individuals see their landlord's services as value for money***. A large majority of respondents rated these as "very important" for their sense of value for money; 70% for whether income keeps up with rent increases, 67% for quality of service, and 66% for investment in tenants' home. Other rent and affordability factors were also significant drivers of respondents' sense of value for money. In particular, 62% rated the size of annual rent increases as very important, and 60% rated residual income after rent/service charges as very important.

3.4. ***Comparability of social rents was rated as less important for individuals' sense of whether their landlord's services are value for money***. Respondents were significantly less likely to rate comparability of rent with other social landlords, or comparability with owning or private renting as very important to their sense of value for money.

3.5. Consistent with its importance as a driver of respondents' views on value for money (Figure 3), ***a large majority of respondents rated affordability of their rent and service charges as important to them***. More than 9 in 10 respondents indicated that affordability of rent/service charge is important to them at the moment (91%), including nearly two thirds who rated this as "very important" (64%).

3.6. Survey results suggest that, for a proportion of respondents, affordability of rent/service charge is more important now than was the case at the time of being offered their home. Fewer than half of respondents indicated that affordability had been "very important" for them when they were offered their home (46%), and around a fifth of respondents indicated that affordability is more important now than when they were first offered their home.

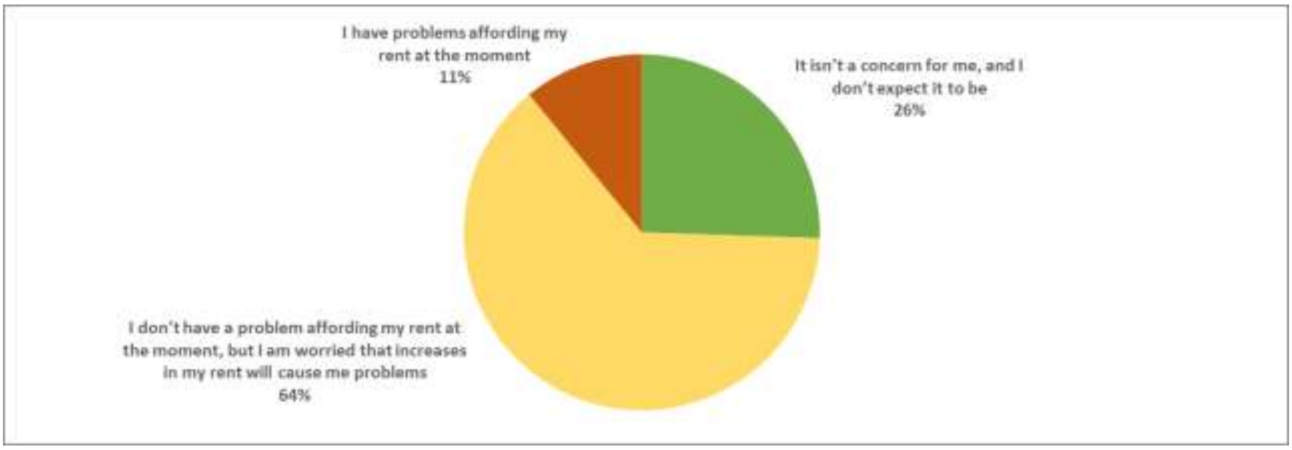
Figure 4: How important was affordability of rent/service charges when you were offered home, and now?

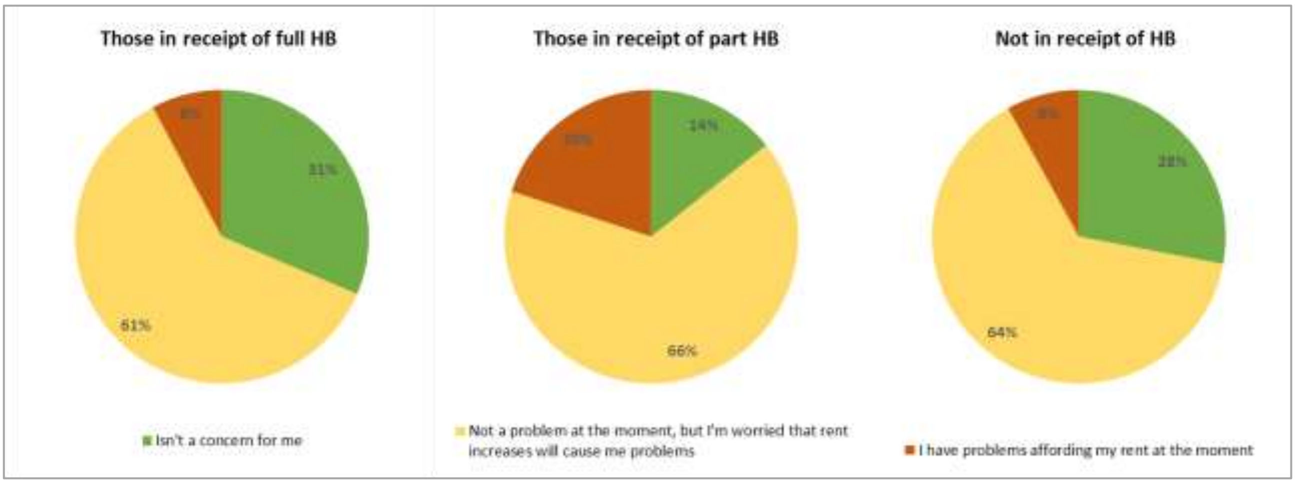


3.7. The survey also asked Panel members the extent to which they are having difficulty affording their rent at the moment. As Figure 5 shows, ***a large majority indicated that they do not have any rent affordability concerns at the moment (89%), but nearly two thirds expressed concerns regarding the possibility of future rent increases causing them problems (64%)***. A further 11% of respondents indicated that they have problems affording their rent at the moment.

3.8. Survey results suggest some variation in views on the rent affordability dependent on whether households are currently in receipt of Housing Benefit. In particular, those in receipt of partial Housing Benefit were more likely than others to indicate that they are having problems affording their rent. Views on affordability were broadly similar across those in receipt of full Housing Benefit, and those not in receipt of any Housing Benefit.

Figure 5: Which of these best describes your views on affordability of your rent?





Qualitative feedback

3.9. Qualitative research with Panel members also included discussion group and interview based consideration of views and experiences in relation to value for money and affordable rents. This included discussion around perceptions of value for money and what drives these, affordability of rents, and experience of rent consultation. Key findings from these discussions are set out below.

Value and affordability

3.10. Consistent with the findings reported at Figure 3 earlier, discussions with Panel members identified a broad range of factors as influencing views on the extent to which their landlord offers good value for money. While it was clear that the key factors in a value for money assessment varied from tenant to tenant, a number of key themes emerged:

Value for money

Feedback from participants suggests that value for money perceptions are primarily driven by:

- The quality of tenants' home;
- How rent levels compare with other housing options; and
- How rent increases compare with any increase in household income.

The quality of their home was highlighted by most participants as a crucial factor in whether their landlord's services are good value for money. This was both in terms of the fabric of the building (including for example reference to older buildings with recurring repair issues), and the level of investment (particularly capital investment in improvements such as kitchens, windows and heating systems).

How rent levels compare with other options focused primarily on other social landlords and private renting. A number of participants were aware of how rent levels compared, including some with a quite detailed knowledge of relative housing costs. This was a key factor in perceived value for money for these tenants.

Most of those aware of the scale of any recent rent increases, indicated that these had outstripped changes in their income over recent years. Few suggested that they had experienced significant affordability difficulties as a result, but some expressed concerns about the potential for continued rent increases to lead to difficulties affording housing costs. Moreover, the relationship between rent increases and changes in household income had a clear influence on their perceptions of value for money.

Rent consultation

3.11. Discussion groups and interviews sought to gauge Panel members' awareness of and views on annual rent increases, and in particular their landlord's consultation on rent increases.[6] All qualitative research participants were aware of annual rent increases implemented by their landlord, including some with a detailed knowledge of the scale of any increases. Awareness of consultation on alternative rent increase options was more limited, and only few were able to describe specific rent consultations that asked tenants' views on different rent increase options.

3.12. A short SMS "vox pop" survey in spring 2015 was also used to test Panel members' awareness of rent consultation, and findings were broadly consistent with qualitative findings. A little more than half of those taking part in the SMS "vox pop" survey could recall their landlord having asked about rent increases in the last 6 months. Again fewer respondents could recall being presented with different options on proposed rent increases, and the implications of each option for service delivery; only around a quarter of respondents indicated this.[7]

3.13. Although awareness of recent rent consultation was variable, participants across the qualitative and "vox pop" survey engagement were able to highlight a number of priorities or concerns:

Rent consultation

Panel members exhibited some lack of clarity regarding rent consultation. All participants referred to being informed about rent increases, and some suggested that this may have included an option for tenants to give their views. However, only some were able to recall specific rent consultation exercises:

- Some referred to letters asking for feedback on alternate rent increase options, including detail on how these compared to increases across other landlords and potential service implications for each option. This included feedback from one participant who was unhappy with the options presented as these did not include an option for no rent increase, and who felt that comparing percentage rent increases across landlords was misleading where the base rent was significantly lower for some landlords.

[6] These National Panel findings on rent consultation will be included in a separate SHR Thematic Inquiry report.

[7] The Vox Pop survey included up to four questions on whether panel members had been asked by their landlord about proposed annual rent increases, if yes whether this included different options on proposed rent increases and/or what proposed increases would mean for services, and if no whether their landlord had asked for their views on rent increases in previous years.

- Participants also referred to a tenant newsletter including options for proposed rent increases (again including potential impact on service provision), and with a response form. Some of these respondents suggested that this approach had received a poor level of response, and questioned the validity of the consultation.
- One participant referred to their landlord arranging a meeting for tenants to give feedback on options for proposed rent increases. This participant noted that the meeting was poorly attended, and also questioned whether this could be a meaningful consultation.

Most participants had a good awareness of the size of their rent increases over recent years, including a small number who referred to how these compared (both positively and negatively) with rent increases across other landlords. It was clear that, for these participants, the relative size of rent increases is a significant factor in perceptions of whether their landlord provides good value for money.

The extent to which tenants felt that their input to rent consultations had been listened to was also an important factor in views on the value of consultation exercises. Some participants felt consultations had not influenced landlords' decisions on the size of rent increase. This included some reference to a perceived lack of transparency in this decision making process, including rent increase notifications not making any reference to the results of any rent consultation.

A small number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with their landlord's approach to rent consultation as part of a wider concern around the extent to which their landlord sought, and listened to, tenants' views. For example some "vox pop" participants suggested a need for more meaningful rent consultation, which involved a broader spectrum of tenants and provided better information to enable tenants to make informed decisions.

4. COMMUNICATION AND PERFORMANCE REPORTING

4.1. This section considers Panel members' awareness and views on landlord performance reporting. This includes performance reporting by their own landlord, and SHR's recent work producing landlord reports and an online landlord comparison tool.

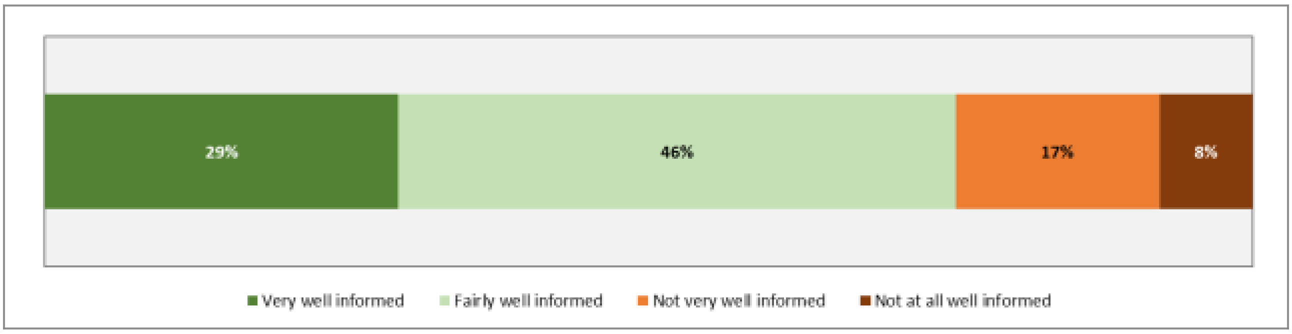
Key points of note in relation to communication and performance reporting are:

- Survey results suggest that the majority of tenants and service users feel reasonably well informed about how their landlord is performing.
- Tenants and service users are most interested in performance information on the quality of homes, response to antisocial behaviour, the size of annual rent increases, and speed of response to emergency repairs.
- The majority of respondents have seen information in the last year on their landlord's performance.
- Nearly half of respondents had seen the SHR Landlord Report for their landlord, a very encouraging result for the new reports. Most have a positive view of SHR producing the reports, and feel that this adds to current reporting of landlord performance.
- Survey respondents are less likely to have seen the SHR online Comparison Tool, than to have seen SHR landlord reports. Feedback on the Tool is generally positive, although some improvement points were identified.

Landlord's performance information

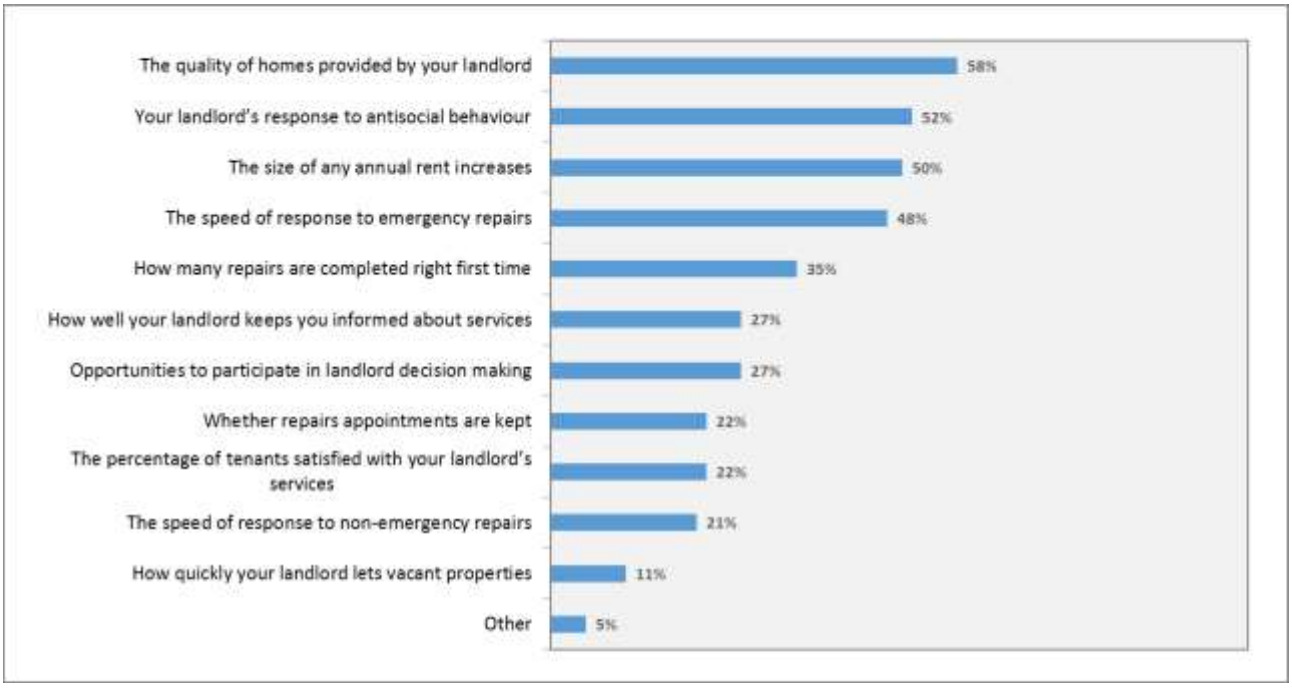
4.2. ***Survey results suggest that the majority of tenants and service users feel reasonably well informed about how their landlord is performing.*** Three quarters of respondents indicated this (75%), including 29% who feel "very well informed" about how their landlord is performing. Nevertheless, there remained a quarter of respondents who do not feel well informed about how their landlord is performing. This profile was broadly consistent across landlord types, and is also very similar to that reported through last year's survey.

Figure 6: How informed do you feel about how your landlord is performing?



4.3. Survey results suggest that ***tenants and service users are most interested in performance information on the quality of homes, response to antisocial behaviour, the size of annual rent increases, and speed of response to emergency repairs.*** Interest was strongest in relation to the quality of homes (58% expressed interest in this), but around half of respondents showed interest in information on each of response to antisocial behavior (52%), annual rent increases (50%), and speed of response to emergency repairs (50%). Consistent with findings reported at Figure 1, these views suggest that speed of response to emergency repairs is significantly more important for tenants and service users, than response to non-emergency repairs.

Figure 7: Which types of performance information are you most interested in?



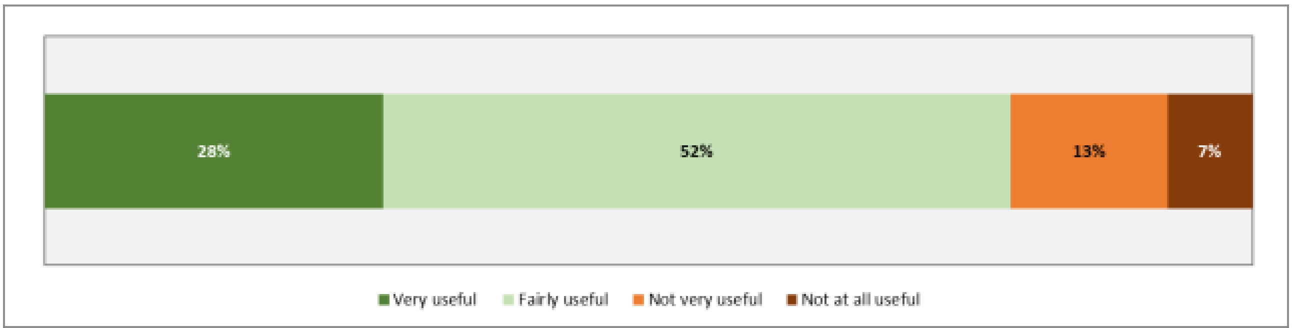
Note: respondents were able to select up to 4 types of information.

4.4. ***The majority of respondents had seen information in the last year on their landlord's performance***; around three quarters indicated this (74%) and this is similar to findings from the first Panel survey.

4.5. Most of these respondents had seen information produced by their landlord (59% of all respondents), but a fifth of all respondents had seen landlord performance information through SHR website or reports. ***Most respondents found landlord performance information useful***. Of those who had seen landlord performance information in the last year, 80% found this very or fairly useful. Again this is very similar to findings of the first Panel survey.

Figure 8: Have you seen information in the last year on your landlord's performance? How useful was this information?

Yes, from my landlord	59%
Yes, from the SHR website/reports	20%
Yes, elsewhere	7%
No	18%
Don't know	8%

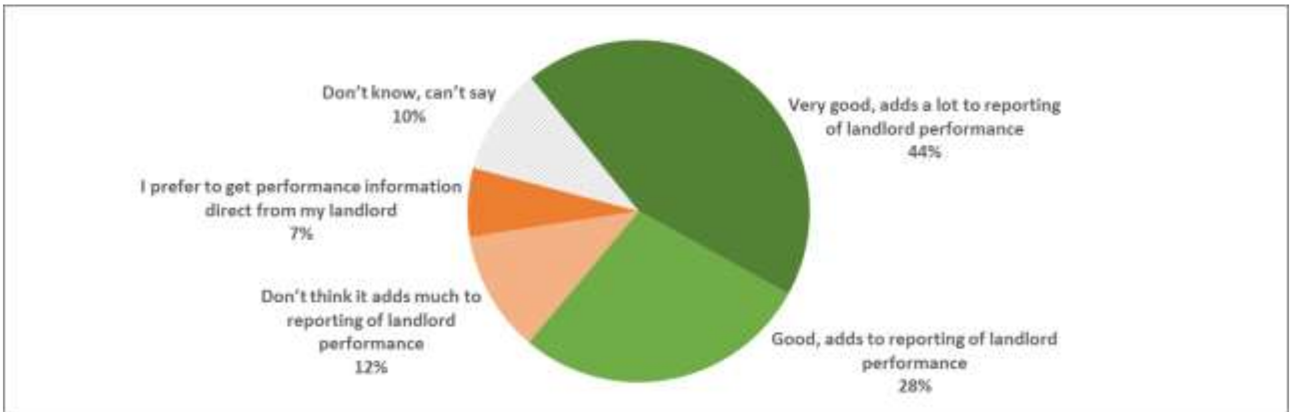


SHR's landlord reports

4.6. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has started producing Landlord Reports and online performance information in the last year, using information supplied by social landlords through the Annual Return on the Charter. The survey asked for Panel members' views on this approach, and whether members had seen or used any of this information.

4.7. ***Survey results suggest that the majority of tenants and service users took a positive view of SHR producing landlord performance information reports, and felt that this adds to current reporting of landlord performance.*** Nearly three quarters described the SHR approach positively (72%), including more than 2 in 5 who felt that this "adds a lot to reporting of landlord performance" (44%). A little less than a fifth of respondents did not think that this approach adds significantly to landlord performance reporting.

Figure 9: Views on SHR producing landlord performance information reports



4.8. ***Nearly half of survey respondents had seen the SHR landlord reports for their landlord***; 45% had seen one or more reports and 43% had definitely not seen any reports. This is a very encouraging result, suggesting that SHR's Landlord Reports are reaching a substantial number of tenants and service users, particularly in the context of SHR having no direct relationship with tenants. In terms of how panel members had accessed the landlord reports, this included a mix of those whose landlord had provided copiers of SHR landlord reports (27%), and those who had accessed reports from SHR directly (22%).[8]

4.9. ***A large majority of those who had seen SHR landlord reports found these useful***. More than 4 in 5 of those who had seen the reports felt they were useful (83%), including 46% who described the reports as "very useful". Again this is an encouraging result, suggesting that the large majority of tenants see the SHR Landlord Reports as adding value to performance reporting.

Figure 10: Have you seen any of the SHR landlord reports for your landlord?

Yes, from my landlord	27%
Yes, from the SHR website/reports	22%
Yes, elsewhere	5%
No	43%
Don't know	12%

Note: Multiple choice question, percentages sum to more than 100%.

Figure 11: Did you find the SHR landlord reports useful?

Very useful	46%
Fairly useful	37%
Not very useful	16%
Not at all useful	0%
Don't know/Can't say	2%

Note: Only those who had seen landlord reports, base=63.

Qualitative feedback on Landlord Reports

4.10. Qualitative discussions with Panel members were also used to gain further insight into views of SHR's approach to reporting of landlord performance. A limited number of those taking part in discussions groups and interviews had seen examples of the SHR Landlord Reports. Nevertheless, discussions highlighted a number of key points in relation to the value of this approach.

[8] There is some overlap between these groups.

SHR Landlord Reports

The Landlord Reports were seen as a positive step for SHR to take, in terms of adding value to existing landlord performance reporting. This was particularly the case for those with concerns about the robustness of their landlord's own performance reporting.

A number of participants highlighted the independence of the SHR as an important element in adding credence to the Landlord Reports. It was also suggested that this approach could ultimately help to improve standards in landlords' collation and reporting of performance information.

SHR online comparison tool

4.11. ***Survey respondents were less likely to have seen or heard about the SHR online tool for comparing landlord performance, than to have seen SHR landlord reports.*** A little less than a third of respondents had heard of the online comparison tool (31%), and only around 1 in 7 respondents had used the online tool (14%).

4.12. Respondents were most likely to have heard of the comparison tool from tenant participation or other landlord staff (42% indicated this), or when visiting SHR's website for something else (37%). Respondents also mentioned hearing about the comparison tool through material provided by their landlord (24%).

Figure 12: Were you aware of the new online comparison tool?

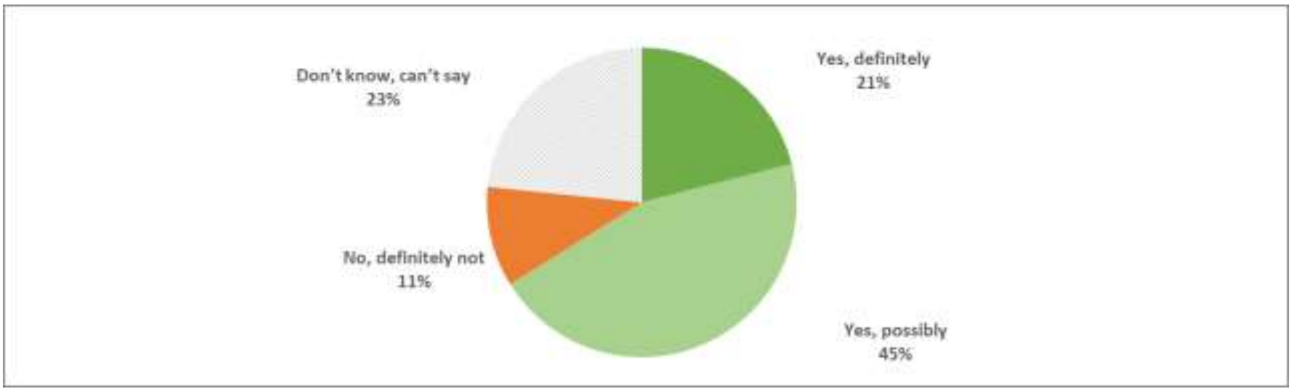
Have used the online comparison tool	14%
Have heard of, but haven't yet used the comparison tool	17%
Have not heard of the online comparison tool	57%
Don't know, can't say	13%

Figure 13: If yes, how did you hear about this?

Through material provided by my landlord	24%
From tenant participation or other landlord service staff	42%
From reports in the local or national press	8%
When visiting SHR's website for something else	37%
Other	11%

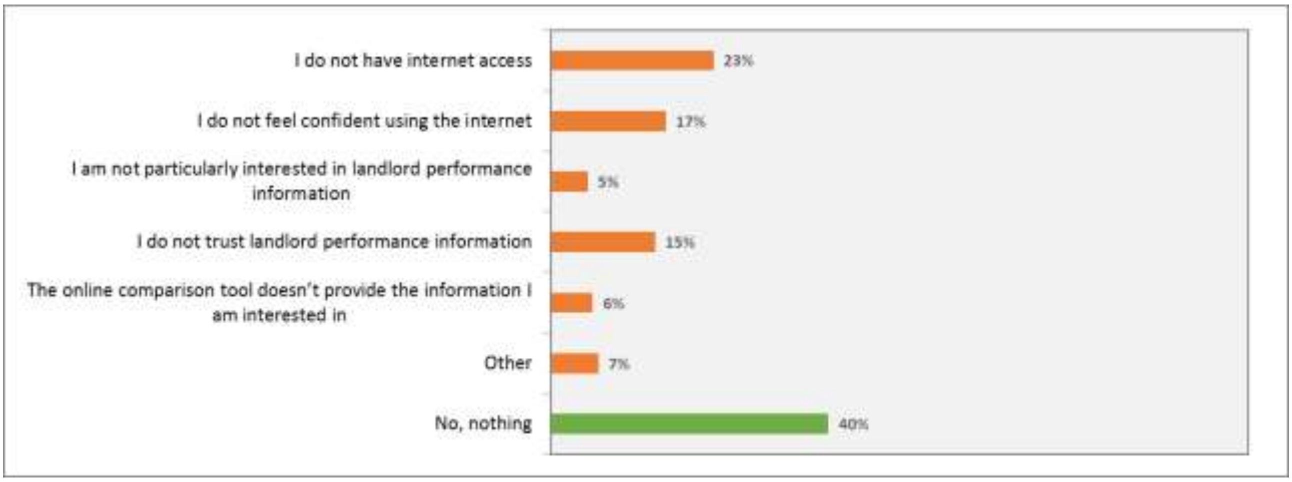
4.13. ***Although a large majority of respondents had not used the tool, most felt that they may find the online comparison tool useful.*** Two thirds of those who had not used the tool felt that they may find the tool useful (66%). A further 23% of respondents were unsure, and only around 1 in 10 of those who had not used the online comparison tool felt that they would not find this useful.

Figure 14: Do you think you would find the SHR online comparison tool useful?



4.14. ***While the majority of respondents felt that they may find the online comparison tool useful, more than half of respondents mentioned one or more concerns or issues that might stop them using the tool.*** Respondents identified a range of issues, primarily relating to difficulties accessing or using the tool, and a lack of confidence in the data supplied by landlords; 23% mentioned a lack of internet access, 23% a lack of confidence using the internet (most of whom had internet access), and 15% not trusting landlord performance information. Only around 1 in 20 respondents indicated a lack of interest in the information provided by the online comparison tool.

Figure 15: Is there anything that might stop you from using the online comparison tool?



Qualitative feedback on Comparison Tool

4.15. In addition to survey feedback, qualitative interviews with Panel members were used to provide further detail on Panel members' experience of and views on the Comparison Tool. Participants were asked to view the SHR website and complete a number of tasks through the Comparison Tool immediately prior to completing the interview, to ensure they were able to provide meaningful feedback. This was particularly important given the relatively small proportion of Panel members who had used the Comparison Tool (Figure 12).

4.16. The interviews sought to reflect the range of ways in which tenants may approach the Comparison Tool. In this regard Panel members were selected with a mix of internet capability and confidence, and the fieldwork also ensured a variation in how tenants accessed the website – including PC, laptop, tablet and smartphone.

4.17. Key points highlighted by interviewees are detailed below.

Comparison Tool: finding the tool, general site navigation

The majority of participants were able to find Comparison Tool easily, whether they navigated through the SHR homepage or used a search engine. This also included some who followed instructions set out in the SHR's introductory video to the Comparison Tool.

Encouragingly, participants' experience appears to have been consistent across devices. Rating of the ease of navigation were broadly similar across those who had used a PC, tablet or smartphone to access the Comparison Tool.

A small number of participants had some difficulty navigating to the Comparison Tool, although all were able to access the Tool. Some of those who had no problem accessing the Tool suggested that tenants who were less experienced using the internet may have difficulty with the site navigation. It was suggested that the Comparison Tool could be prominently/obviously signposted on the SHR home page.

Comparison Tool: ease of use and appearance

Participants were positive about the ease of use of the Comparison Tool. This included some who noted that they were not particularly experienced with computers, but had found the Comparison Tool straightforward to use.

Views were also positive about the appearance and design of the Tool. This was rated as attractive and, most importantly for participants, easy to use in comparing landlords: *"very professional"*, *"simple to read and easy to understand"*. One participant suggested that the layout could perhaps do more to visually highlight differences across landlords selected for comparison.

While views were positive on the presentation and layout of the Comparison Tool online, one participant had difficulty printing the content in an easy to read layout to pass on to other interested tenants. Several participants suggested development of a function to download content to a Word or similar format.

Comparison Tool: range of information, value

Participants were positive about the range of information provided, and the value that this added. This included some very favourable views: *"I did not know that anything like this existed, the information is second to none"*. Of particular importance, the Tool was seen as focusing on the most important issues while ensuring the volume of information is accessible.

While participants were generally very positive about the value of the Comparison Tool, there was some scepticism about whether there is likely to be widespread interest amongst tenants. Participants were clear that, for those interested in landlord performance, the Comparison Tool added significant value. It was suggested that the SHR could do more to promote the Comparison Tool, to ensure those with an interest in performance information are aware of the facility.

The ability to compare landlords was seen as a key part of the Tool's value, particularly when compared with existing landlord performance reporting. Most participants were able to use the comparison function, but a small number did not manage this without assistance. More significantly, a number struggled to identify which landlords would provide a meaningful comparison. Where participants had selected other landlords for comparison this was typically based on knowledge of landlords in their local area, but some suggested that the Tool could do more to assist with this.

Comparison Tool: improvement suggestions

A number of improvement suggestions emerged through participants' experience of using the Comparison Tool:

- Signpost the Comparison Tool more obviously on the SHR homepage, including a clearer explanation of the requirement to navigate via the relevant landlord page.
- Make the comparison function of the Tool more prominent, including instructions within the Tool itself.
- Ensure the layout is suitable for those with visual impairment, including for example clearer distinction between columns.
- Provide more guidance to help tenants make landlord comparisons that are meaningful – e.g. grouping landlords into peer groups, location, etc.
- Allow tenants to filter information for specific housing or customer types (e.g. sheltered housing).
- Provide an option to download the content to an MS Word or similar format for offline reading.

Qualitative feedback: Communication and performance reporting

4.18. In addition to the survey content discussed earlier in this section, qualitative engagement sought to further explore Panel members' experiences in communication with their landlord. These topics were incorporated into the discussion group and interview engagement strands to add further depth to survey results and to provide direct feedback from tenants and service users to include in an SHR Thematic Inquiry report on the openness and transparency of landlords' communications. Key points highlighted by Panel member discussions are set out below.

Communication and access to information

Participants expressed a range of preferences for how they contact and communicate with their landlord. The ability of their landlord to respond effectively to a range of communication methods was highlighted as of significant value. This was a particular concern for those preferring to use email for service requests. Discussions referred to some positive experiences of landlord's flexibility in use of communication methods, and these appeared to contribute to tenants' perception of their landlord as open and responsive to tenants' needs.

Performance reporting

Most participants were aware of their landlord's current performance reporting, but relatively few had read their landlord's performance reporting in any detail.

This appeared to reflect a lack of interest in performance information rather than for example failure of landlords to adequately promote performance information. A substantial number of participants expressed an at best limited interest in landlord performance reporting, including some who received regular performance information (e.g. via newsletter).

Those who had read their landlord's performance information were reasonably positive about the range of content, and saw performance reporting as an important function. However, some expressed concern that the performance reporting they had seen did not give a balanced view of their landlord's performance: *"it feels like PR"*. These concerns appeared to be related to the effectiveness of the approach to performance measuring (e.g. poor response to tenant surveys), and also whether reporting of performance information is fair and balanced. For some participants, this negative perception undermined their interest in performance reporting.

People with disabilities, ethnic minorities, those for whom English is a second language

4.19. Interviews with Panel members were also used to specifically consider the experiences of those with disability or limiting illness, and ethnic minorities or those for whom English is not their first language. This will again be reflected in separate reports from the SHR Thematic Programme. Below we consider the key points emerging in relation to these two specific groups.

<u>People with disability and/or long-term illness</u>

4.20. Research participants had a range of disabilities and conditions. All indicated that they had some level of mobility difficulties, including a small number of wheelchair users. A small number of participants also reported other long-term health conditions that affected their day to day lives.

4.21. Few of these participants indicated that their disability/condition caused difficulty for them in communicating with their landlord. This was in part due to individuals choosing communication options that suited their needs, using telephone and/or email contact as their primary means of communication. A number of participants commented positively on their landlord's flexibility in enabling tenants to use different communication methods. This included participants who chose different methods over time (e.g. dependent on health at the time) and who placed particular value on their landlord ensuring speed of response is equivalent across communication methods.

4.22. Disability was more likely to have an impact on participants' ability to get to, or get around, their landlord's offices. Nearly half of interviewees indicated this was the case. Difficulties cited ranged from a small number who were unable to get to the offices at all, some who found this difficult but who had done so if necessary, and others whose disability did not cause significant difficulties in accessing their landlord's offices.

4.23. Participants were more likely to cite difficulty getting to landlord offices rather than getting around the office buildings; indeed some specifically noted that their landlord offices was accessible for people with mobility difficulties. Those who struggled to get to their landlord's offices indicated that they had changed their use of communication options to take account of these difficulties. However some of these participants still experienced challenges, including difficulty making appointments where their health can vary considerably from day to day, and in some cases having to judge whether a query is 'worth' the difficulty of getting to the office.

4.24. The majority of participants with a disability or long-term condition indicated that they preferred to communicate with their landlord from home, i.e. by email or phone. This included those who did not experience significant difficulties getting to their landlord's offices. However, interviews also highlighted a preference for face-to-face contact for more complex service requests. In these cases, those with more restrictive disabilities placed a premium on their landlord offering home visits, and a willingness to offer this was seen as an important element of landlords being sensitive to tenants' needs.

4.25. Interview participants did not express significant concerns about the extent to which their landlord takes their disability into account when communicating. Some specifically praised their landlord for providing and responding to multiple communication options, and allowing tenants to avoid having to visit offices if this is difficult for them. It was clear that this kind of sympathetic response to tenants' disability or health needs can have a significant positive impact on quality of life.

4.26. However, some did cite examples where they felt that their landlord could have done more to take account of disability or health-related needs, and made suggestions for how landlords could improve their response to these needs.

Examples where participants felt that their landlord could have done more to accommodate their needs included:

- A perception that landlord staff had been unwilling to visit tenants who cannot get to offices, and/or were restrictive on when a home visit could be made.
- Centralising services meaning that people with mobility difficulties may be required to travel further to access some landlord services.
- Highlighting difficulties experienced by people with disabilities where they do not have internet access. This appeared to be part of a wider concern for some that a focus on digital communication can disadvantage some tenants.

Suggestions for how landlords could better support communication with people with disabilities or health needs included:

- Better routing of email communication to the relevant contact – one participant suggested that email replies were not always from someone able to properly deal with their query.
- Providing tenants with information on the landlord staff they communicate with as a way of reinforcing their relationship with staff, particularly where this may be entirely based on 'remote' email or telephone contact.
- Being more willing to provide home visits to those with disabilities, and/or more flexible on when these are available.
- Providing more information direct to tenants, rather than for example using notice boards which those with disabilities may be less likely to see.
- Provide more information on information available in alternative formats such as audio recording or braille, although few participants who needed these alternatives indicated that they were not aware of them.

Ethnic minorities and people for whom English is a second language

4.27. Panel members taking part in this strand of the research were varied in profile. This included a mix of minority ethnic groups, and others for whom English is not their native language. Most of these participants had been with their landlord for some time (from 2 to 10+ years) and had improved their English fluency over this time. As a result some of the feedback provided related to experience of communicating with their landlord early in their tenancy, and some to more recent communication where language use was less of an issue.

4.28. Views were generally positive about the extent to which landlords are sensitive to participants' cultural background and language use. Few participants suggested that their language or ethnic background had caused any difficulty for them in communicating with their landlord, with most of the issues identified appearing to have been a number of years ago.

4.29. Most participants indicated that they had been asked about any language or other communication needs when first applying for housing. This included examples of assistance from service staff in completing the application form. Moreover, nearly all participants were aware of how to access information from their landlord in other languages or formats, and the one interviewee who was unsure of this indicated that they had not required this service for a number of years.

4.30. Issues or concerns mentioned by participants related to language use, rather than cultural or ethnic background. Indeed none of the research participants suggested that they felt that their ethnic or cultural background caused difficulty when communicating with their landlord.

- One participant noted that at the point of requiring language assistance when first applying for housing, they had been reliant on someone within the landlord being proficient in their native language. However this tenant did note that their landlord's provision of materials in other languages did appear to have improved since then.

- Some participants cited difficulties with verbal communication for tenants with limited use of English. This included difficulty understanding service staff when communicating in person or by phone, and some suggested that verbal communication can be a particular difficulty (as opposed to written information).

4.31. Some participants suggested that they had seen significant improvements over recent years in provision of alternative language information. It was also noted that in some cases tenants will become less reliant on these options over time as their English improves. Nevertheless, participants were generally happy with measures taken by their landlords to ensure that tenants know how to access alternative languages and formats if required.

Participants were particularly appreciative of the landlord communications now including reference to alternative formats and languages as standard.

4.32. Although participants were generally positive about landlord's approach to cultural background and language, feedback did identify some priorities and improvement areas.

Suggestions for how landlords could better support communication with people from ethnic minorities and those for whom English is not a first language included:

- Ensuring that all tenants are clear on how to access materials in other languages was highlighted as a priority, and participants supported the approach of providing this information on all communications as standard practice.
- Participants highlighted the importance of using multiple communication options, particularly for those who are not fluent with English. This included some who found it easier to use email communication.
- Staff training to improve awareness of how best to accommodate tenants' language needs – including simple points such as speaking more slowly.

5. RESIDENTS OF GYPSY/TRAVELLER SITES

5.1. As outlined at Section 1, one of the key strands of the qualitative fieldwork involved in-person individual and paired interviews with Gypsy/Traveller residents of social landlord sites. This work links closely to the SHR Thematic Inquiry Report on site services for Gypsies/Travellers.

5.2. Due to the limited number of Gypsies/Travellers across the National Panel membership this fieldwork strand extended beyond current members. This also reflected the preference expressed by a number of site residents for engagement to be focused on specific topics of relevance to their experience, rather than for example signing up to a standing membership of a representative group.[9]

5.3. The fieldwork with Gypsies/Travellers involved visits to a number of permanent social rented sites across Scotland. Site residents were given the option of participating through an individual or paired interview. Findings presented below are based on feedback from a total of 48 participants currently resident across five social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites.

Key points of note in relation to the views and experiences of Gypsies/Travellers living on social landlord sites are:

- Awareness of landlord Service Standards is relatively low, although participants are generally happy with the information they receive on Standards.
- Views are divided on whether Service Standards are useful. Some feel that information on Standards would be useful, but others are happy with their current arrangement highlighting Standards at the point of service contact.
- Awareness of, and to some extent interest in, landlord performance reporting is relatively limited. Relatively few participants have seen performance information from their landlord and views are mixed on the value of this.
- Few participants indicate that their landlord had specifically asked for their views on the service they receive, over and above unprompted feedback provided to site managers.

Service standards

5.4. ***Awareness of landlord Service Standards was relatively low*** amongst site residents; most participants had not heard of specific Service Standards for their landlord. Only around 1 in 10 participants had definitely seen information on Standards, primarily in relation to repairs timescales. These participants referred to information provided at the time of sign-up to their occupancy agreement.

[9] Although a substantial proportion of research participants did sign up to receive future National Panel surveys and other communications.

5.5. However, interviews suggest that ***participants were generally happy with the information they receive in relation to Standards***. It was clear that most participants – including those who had not heard of Service Standards – received timescale information at the point of making specific repair requests, generally from their site warden. Through this they had accumulated a good understanding of timescales and other Standards of relevance to their experience and did not feel that written information on Service Standards would necessarily add to this. Indeed, a number of participants were explicit in their view that they preferred to receive information on timescales and other Service Standards at the point of requesting a service.

5.6. This view was also reflected in the extent to which participants were divided on whether Service Standards are useful. ***Around half of participants felt that they would find information on Service Standards useful***. This was primarily related to providing site residents with clarity on what they should expect from their landlord, including timescales for response to issues raised and information to signal whether landlords' services are meeting relevant standards. These issues were also related to a concern that all Gypsy/Traveller sites should receive an equal standard of service.

5.7. ***Around half of participants did not see significant value in Service Standards***. Most of these were happy with being advised of relevant Standards at the point of each service contact. The role of the site warden was important here, not just in providing timescale and other information when services were requested by site residents, but also in answering any queries that may relate to Service Standards. A small number of participants were skeptical as to whether written Service Standards would be sufficient to ensure landlords' "meet their promises".

Performance reporting and communication

5.8. Interviews suggest that ***awareness of,*** and to some extent interest in, landlord performance reporting is relatively limited amongst Gypsies/Travellers on social landlord sites.

5.9. A ***relatively small proportion of participants had seen performance information from their landlord***; around 1 in 5 could point to examples of performance information. This was most commonly resident newsletters, but participants also referred to verbal feedback from site wardens and Tenant Participation officers. Some also appeared to be referring to information on proposed site improvements, in addition to performance reporting, and it is clear that some residents have a greater interest in site improvement or refurbishment than in ongoing landlord performance.

5.10. A small number of participants were aware of newsletters and similar performance feedback being produced by their landlord, but had not read the information. This included some reference to literacy difficulties, but also a view that the performance information provided was not relevant to their experience as a site resident.

5.11. ***Views on the usefulness of landlord performance information were also mixed*** amongst participants. Around half felt that performance information was of some relevance and value to site residents. Interest was strongest in relation to information on site investment, repairs services (particularly timescales), and how site rental income is spent. Some participants also expressed interest in planned changes or works to sites, in addition to information on their landlord's service performance.

5.12. Amongst those who did not see significant value in performance information, this also included a view that landlord-level, aggregate performance information could never reflect the experience of the relatively small pool of site residents. Participants also suggested that the nature of life on Gypsy/Traveller sites means that tenants typically have a good awareness of the quality of service on the site; *"we already know what things are like on site"*. As such published performance information was seen by these participants as adding little value.

5.13. A small number of participants also expressed a view that aggregate performance information may be of limited to interest to site residents, even if the information was representative of their own site. These participants suggested that performance information was of significantly less relevance than that they received a good level of service; *"as long as things are getting done, I'm happy."*

Asking for your views

5.14. ***Few participants indicated that landlords had specifically asked for their views on the service they receive***, over and above unprompted feedback provided to site managers. Those who had been asked for their views mentioned a number of examples:

- Discussions around potential site improvement priorities, and/or specific re-development plans were the most common examples. This included examples of site meetings and one-to-one discussions (with the site manager or others).
- A small number of participants referred to their landlord asking for feedback after repair work had been completed – including verbal feedback to the site manager, and SMS surveys.
- A suggestion box was provided at one site, with a number of site residents specifically referring to this positively.

5.15. For those who had been involved in landlord engagement, there was a general view that their views had been listened to, and a clear appreciation of their landlord having sought out their input. This view was especially positive where the landlord (via the site warden) had provided feedback on the result of specific engagement exercises.

5.16. However, a small number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with engagement exercises, and questioning the extent to which residents' views were given sufficient weight. This was particularly the case where engagement processes had not resulted in any change to the site.

5.17. Amongst those who could not recall their landlord asking for their views, some felt this suggested that their landlord did not valuing site residents' input. A small number of participants also suggested that their landlord does not appear to understand or respect residents' priorities, or Gypsy/Traveller culture more widely. These participants generally would prefer for their landlord to engage more, and more meaningfully, with site residents, although there was a clear view that this should be around specific issues such as site improvements and not engagement *"just for the sake of it"*.

5.18. Others were happy to have relatively little contact with their landlord and were not seeking regular engagement. These participants highlighted their positive relationship with the site warden as providing a means to raise specific concerns, and suggested that this kind of feedback should be used by landlords to identify where further engagement would be worthwhile.

5.19. In addition to asking about site residents' general experience of landlord engagement, interviews also asked specifically about rent consultation.

5.20. ***Nearly all participants could recall having received notification of forthcoming rent increases***, and there was generally good awareness of the size of rent increases. For a number of participants this also extended to an awareness of how pitch rents compare with other housing options – most notably permanent social rented housing. Many participants volunteered views on the extent to which their rent was value for money, and while views were mixed it was clear that comparability with the cost of permanent housing was a key factor in views here.

5.21. Despite the good awareness of the size of recent rent increases, ***only a very small number indicated that they had been asked for their views on alternate options for rent increases***. None of these examples were recent, and participants were not able to provide further detail on the rent consultation – nor offer a clear view on the quality of the consultation.

Complaints

5.22. ***Nearly half of participants indicated that they had made a complaint to their landlord***. However fieldwork made clear that participants typically did not make a clear distinction between formal complaints and more informal feedback or service requests. For example, some of those who indicated that they made a complaint appear to have been referring to reporting of site disrepair and issues such as antisocial behaviour.

5.23. Complaints mentioned by participants were varied in nature. The most common were in relation to safety on and around sites (including violence and antisocial behaviour between site residents) and environmental health issues. Participants also referred to having made a complaint as a result of slow repairs, including examples of consequential damage and injury, and a case of a household having to move out of their accommodation due to difficulties resolving poor condition issues that went beyond isolated repairs.

5.24. ***Nearly all of those mentioning examples of having made a complaint, had done so via their site manager***. Moreover, nearly all participants were clear that this would be their preferred means of making a complaint.

5.25. Experience and understanding were relatively limited in relation to the complaints process after the initial reporting. A small number of participants referred to having received progress updates, via site managers and/or in written form. However some expressed a view that their landlord did not appear to take complaints from site residents seriously. In part this appeared to reflect a failure to resolve the cause of the complaint, but participants also referred to what was seen as a dismissive attitude from staff.

5.26. ***In views on how well landlords handle complaints, participants had a clear focus on the nature of any action taken in response to the complaint*** – and ultimately the extent to which the issue was resolved. It was clear that participants viewed the complaints process more positively where their landlord had taken some action in response to the complaint, even if this had not resolved the underlying issue. Similarly, views of the complaints process were negative where there was a perception that the landlord had not taken any, or insufficient, action in response to the complaint.

5.27. A small number of participants expressed reservations about making a complaint, including some who had previously had grievances which they had not reported to their landlord. This was primarily related to a perception that the complaint would not be resolved - *"it wouldn't make any difference"* - but some also suggested that they did not wish to be labelled as a "difficult" resident. However, these concerns did not appear to be widespread.

6. USERS OF SOCIAL LANDLORD FACTORING SERVICES

6.1. As outlined at Section 1, one of the key strands of the qualitative fieldwork involved telephone interviews with Panel members who are owners in receipt of social landlord factoring or common repairs services. Again, this work with the National Panel is designed to feed into the SHR Thematic Inquiry on management and fees for services to factored owners.

6.2. Representation of this group within the Panel membership is more limited than is the case for social tenants. Nevertheless, the fieldwork was able to secure participation from 14 factored owners in a range of circumstances. This included multiple local authority areas, RSL and Council-provided services, most paying a regular factoring fee but some paying only as common repairs are completed, and a small number of owners who had previously been a tenant of the landlord providing their factoring service.

6.3. Interview fieldwork with owners focused on a number of key aspects of their service experience; understanding of and information provided on the service, strengths and weaknesses of the service, and how to make a complaint about the service. Over the following pages we highlight key points identified by interviewees in relation to each of these themes.

Understanding of service, information provided

Understanding of what the factoring service provides, and particularly what any regular charge covers, was mixed amongst participants. It was clear that a lack of understanding of the factoring service was a significant concern for some and had an impact on the extent to which individuals felt that the service was value for money.

A small number of participants had a detailed knowledge of the service elements covered by the factoring fee, but others were unclear on how the fee relates to the service they receive. Some expressed ignorance as to the basis for the regular charge: *"I have no idea what they do"*.

Consistent with this variation in understanding, feedback was also varied in the degree of information provided by landlords on the factoring service and how this relates to any regular charge:

- A small number of participants referred to having received detailed information at the point of first taking up the service. However, some of those who had been in their home for a number of years noted that they could not recall what, if any, information had been provided at this time.
- Some referred to landlords providing quarterly statements detailing repair works completed during the year, and the associated costs.

- One participant referred to having received information on procedures for arranging and billing for common repairs, and received invoices as work is completed.
- Most respondents referred to receiving regular newsletters from the landlord providing the service, some detailing planned improvement works for the coming year.

In terms of the quality of information provided by landlords, those who could recall having received information when first taking up the service were positive about the detail provided and the extent to which this provided them with an understanding of what the factoring charge covers. Similarly participants who receive quarterly statements detailing work completed were generally happy with the information, and the transparency this provided.

Others were less positive about information provided on their factoring service, and the extent to which this provides them with an understanding of what the factoring charge covers. This included some who felt that the information provided was not clear about how the factoring charge is spent, and a small number who indicated that they do not receive any information on their factoring service.

Service strengths and weaknesses, value for money

Participants identified a number of specific areas which they saw as particular strengths of the factoring service. These were primarily focused around the quality of maintenance and repair work delivered by landlords:

- Undertaking frequent maintenance of communal areas, and ensuring these areas are clean and attractive.
- The frequency and quality of landscaping and gardening.
- The extent to which the landlord keeps owners informed of service activity and forthcoming costs.
- Good quality repair work.

Participants also noted several service areas where they felt improvement was required. These tended to be related to service costs (and the extent to which these represent good value), and transparency/information provision:

- Improving service efficiency and reducing costs. This included for example being more flexible about the range of tasks that estate-based handypersons can complete.

- Greater transparency about factoring charges and/or common repairs costs, for example providing service users with a full breakdown of costs.
- More control for owners, and/or more input to how the factoring service is provided. This included for example enabling owners to provide feedback on the quality of service (although some referred to examples of this) and the option to change provider.
- More, and more regular, information for owners on service activity and planned works. This included a suggestion that owners would appreciate more regular contact from the service.

As is noted above, value for money was a concern for some participants and views were somewhat divided on the extent to which the factoring fee was good value. This was influenced to some degree by owners' views on the quality of works completed. However, information provided by landlords and the extent to which individuals are clear on what the factoring fee covers were also important for owners' sense of value for money.

Dealing with problems, making a complaint

None of the research participants had made a complaint about their factoring or common repairs service. However, a number of points were raised in relation to owners' understanding of the process, and previous experience of providing feedback to their service provided:

- A small number of participants could recall having been provided with information on how to make a complaint about their service. However, other participants were comfortable that they would know how to contact the landlord with a complaint.
- A more significant point for participants was how they felt the landlord would handle any problem or complaint. Most saw their landlord as "approachable" and suggested that they would not have any concerns about a complaint being dealt with effectively.
- A small number were concerned that complaints or problems would not be effectively dealt with by the landlord, and suggested that complaints or feedback had not been acted upon in the past. This appeared to contribute to a perception of the landlord as being uninterested in owners receiving their services.
- None of the participants had heard of the Home Ownership Housing Panel as a means of resolving complaints between owners and factoring services.

7. AWARENESS OF THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

7.1. The final section of the survey seeks to gauge Panel members' awareness of SHR's work over the last year, and the extent to which members' views on SHR had changed over this time.

7.2. Given SHR's indirect relationship with tenants and service users, awareness levels around SHR's work are not expected to be comparable to that for social landlord services. Rather, the primary focus in exploring this theme with panel members was to gauge any change in awareness over the last 12 months - a period during which SHR has published a range of tenant-focused reports, other research on stakeholder engagement, and had a relatively high media profile.

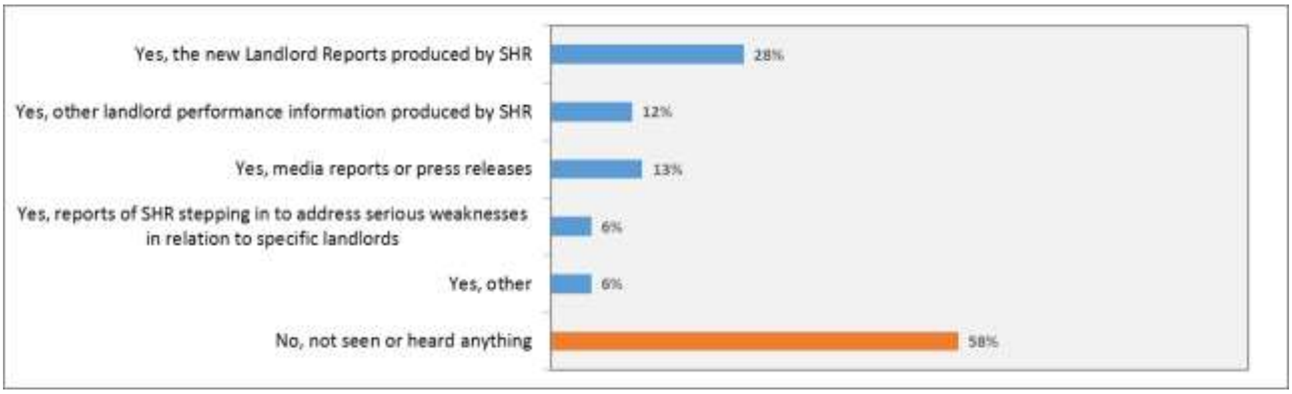
Key points of note in relation to the Scottish Housing Regulator are:

- More than 2 in 5 survey respondents have seen or heard about SHR's work in the last year, an encouraging finding in the context of SHR's indirect relationship with users of social landlord services.
- Respondents were most likely to mention having seen the new SHR Landlord Reports.
- The majority of respondents indicated that they understand SHR's role and how this helps service users.
- Survey responses suggest a generally positive trend in awareness of SHR and its work; more than 2 in 5 are more aware of SHR and its work. It is notable that, where participants' opinion of SHR had changed, this was overwhelmingly to a more positive view.

Survey results

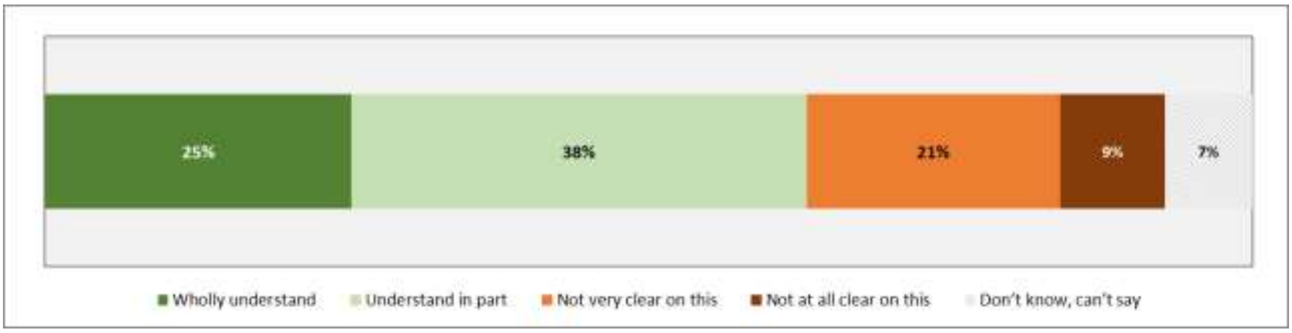
7.3. ***More than 2 in 5 survey respondents had seen or heard about SHR's work in the last year***; 42% of respondents indicated this. This is an encouraging finding in the context of SHR's indirect relationship with tenants, and is consistent with SHR's relatively high level of public activity and media profile in the last year. It is also notable that panel members were most likely to mention having seen the new Landlord Reports (28%). The new Landlord Reports have been a significant element of SHR's tenant-focused publications over the last year and, as is discussed at Section 4, survey results suggest that the reports have reached a relatively large number of tenants and service users. Respondents also mentioned having seen media reports or press releases (13%) and other landlord performance information produced by SHR (12%).

Figure 16: Have you seen anything in the last year about SHR's work?



7.4. ***Most respondents indicated that they understand SHR's role and how this helps service users.*** Nearly two thirds of respondents reported this (63%), although only a quarter of respondents felt that they "wholly understand" (25%). There remained 3 in 10 respondents who were not clear on SHR's role and how this helps service users (30%). In the context of the SHR's lack of a direct relationship with tenants and service users, this represents relatively strong levels of awareness.

Figure 17: Do you feel you understand SHR's role and how this helps service users?

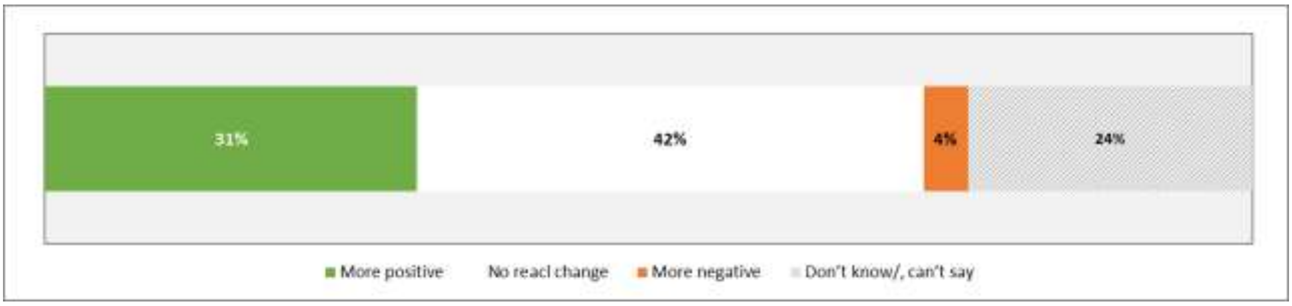


7.5. ***Survey responses suggest a generally positive trend in awareness of SHR and its work.*** More than 2 in 5 respondents indicated that they were more aware of SHR and its work than a year ago (43%). This is consistent with respondents' relatively strong awareness of SHR's work in the last year. A further 34% indicated no change in their awareness of SHR.

7.6. Respondents were less likely to report a change in their opinion of SHR; 42% indicated that this had not changed in the last year. However, it is notable that where respondents did report a change in their opinion of SHR, this was overwhelmingly a positive change (31%).

Figure 18: Has your awareness of SHR and its work changed over the last year?

Figure 19: Has your opinion on SHR and its work changed in the last year?



APPENDIX: PROFILE OF CURRENT PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The National Panel was established in spring/summer 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The National Panel fits into SHR's wider approach to communication and engagement with users of social landlord services, and 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.

As a mechanism for gathering the views of tenants and other service users, a significant element of the Panel's value is as an accessible group of engaged individuals willing to participate in engagement exercises. As such the focus for the Panel is on ensuring a good cross-section of tenants and other service users, rather than achieving an exact match to the wider service user population. Indeed some groups – such as those in rural areas – have been over-sampled to ensure sufficient volume of members to support more focused engagement. Weighting of survey results is used to address the impact of this kind of over-sampling. However, while Panel surveys are required to provide results that are sensitive to potential variations across specific socio-demographic groups, they are not expected to meet the statistical reliability standards of a large scale survey.

A profile of the current Panel membership is provided below.

Total current membership	**430**
Age	
Under 35	15%
35-44	17%
45-59	27%
60-74	28%
75+	8%
Unknown	5%
Gender	
Female	50%
Male	50%
Housing Tenure	
Council tenant	52%
RSL tenant	34%
Owner	6%
Gypsy/Traveller site resident	4%
Unknown	2%
Ethnicity	
White Scottish, British or Irish	90%
White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller)	7%
Black Minority Ethnic	1%
Unknown	2%

Disability	
1 or more disabilities	39%
Mobility problems/wheelchair user	16%
Other disability	24%
No disability	61%
Time in current home (survey respondents only)	
Up to 2 years	12%
3-4 years	18%
5-9 years	22%
10+ years	48%
Unsure	1%
Home internet access (survey respondents only)	
Yes	71%
No	27%
Unsure	1%
Housing Benefit (survey respondents only)	
Full HB	36%
Part HB	25%
Not in receipt of HB	37%
Unsure	2%
RTO membership	
Member of RTO	27%
Not a member of RTO	73%