

# **NATIONAL PANEL OF TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS**

## **REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM YEAR 1**

### **Report 2: Awareness of Scottish Housing Regulator Communications**

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.

The main [Year 1 Report](#) has already been published and brings together the main body of findings across the two 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.

This second report specifically covers findings in relation to SHR communications and engagement, looking at panel members' awareness of SHR, and their views on the SHR website and key SHR publications. Key findings are set out below.

### **Scottish Housing Regulator Communications and Engagement**

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

- Around a third of respondents had heard of SHR before joining the Panel, and around a quarter had contacted SHR and/or seen SHR publications.
- Respondents were generally very positive on SHR publications, particularly in terms of appearance and layout, and compared these favourably to other information produced for users of social landlord services. Specific improvement suggestions are detailed in the body of the report.
- Views were very positive on the SHR website, including in terms of ease of navigation, appearance and content. Qualitative feedback highlighted the importance of ensuring content is relevant to service users' interests and requirements, and is clearly signposted.
- The principle of SHR taking a coordinated approach to engagement was seen as a positive, although some were sceptical about the extent to which the wider tenant population may be willing to participate. In practical terms, providing a mix of opportunities for service users to contribute their views was seen as a key element of any effective approach.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background

- 1.1. 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.

### Methodology

- 1.2. This report brings together research findings in relation to SHR communications and engagement 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.

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 and views motivations in more detail, and examining the motivations that have shaped survey findings) to provide a rounded view of members' priorities and experiences.

- 1.3. Full details of the panel design, membership profile, methodology and participation are available in the Technical Appendix published with the main Year 1 report on the SHR Website.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Link to main Year 1 Report on the National Panel of Tenants and Service Users:  
<http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/national-panel-tenants-and-service-users-report-findings-year-one>

## 2. SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

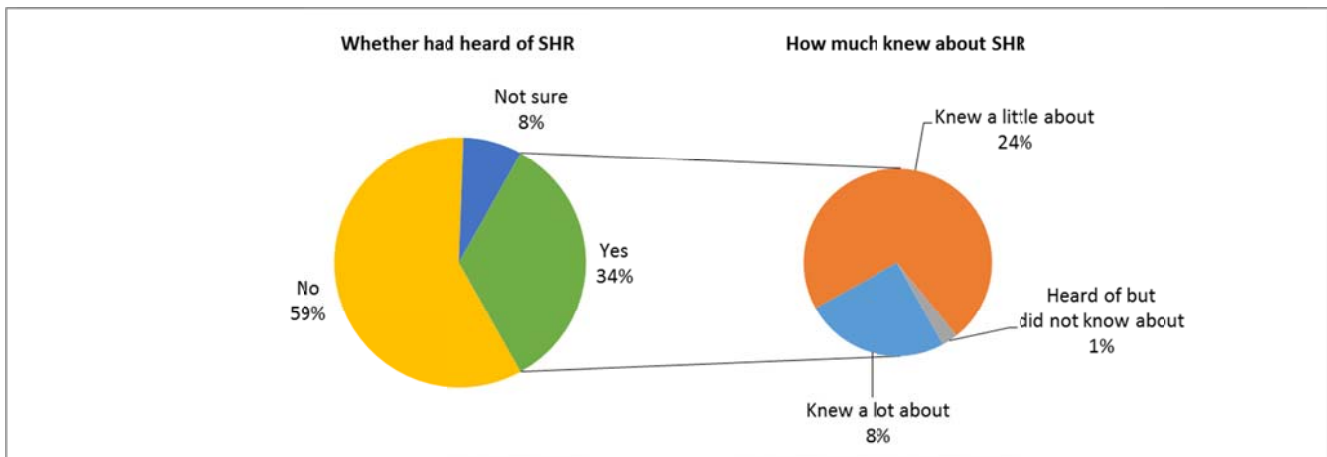
- 2.1. A key objective for the new National Panel is to provide the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) with a more direct relationship with tenants and other service users for consultation and engagement purposes. In this context, the first survey sought to assess the extent to which Panel members had been aware of SHR prior to joining the Panel, and the experience of those who had been in contact with SHR (directly or having seen SHR publications).
- 2.2. It was anticipated that a minority of Panel members may have made contact with SHR, such that it may not be possible to provide statistically robust results on their experience. This section of the survey therefore made greater use of respondents providing written comments on their experience of contacting SHR, alongside a limited number of “closed” questions. Responses are considered over the following pages.

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

- Around a third of respondents had heard of SHR before joining the Panel, and around a quarter had contacted SHR and/or seen SHR publications.
- Respondents were generally very positive on SHR publications, particularly in terms of appearance and layout, and compared these favourably to other information produced for users of social landlord services. Specific improvement suggestions are detailed in the body of the report.
- Views were very positive on the SHR website, including in terms of ease of navigation, appearance and content. Qualitative feedback highlighted the importance of ensuring content is relevant to service users’ interests and requirements, and is clearly signposted.
- The principle of SHR taking a coordinated approach to engagement was seen as a positive, although some were sceptical about the extent to which the wider tenant population may be willing to participate. In practical terms, providing a mix of opportunities for service users to contribute their views was seen as a key element of any effective approach.

### **Awareness of Scottish Housing Regulator**

- 2.3. Looking first at awareness of the Scottish Housing Regulator, ***the majority of respondents had not heard of SHR before joining the Panel*** (Figure 1). Around 3 in 5 indicated this (59%). There remained ***around a third of respondents (34%) who had heard of SHR before joining the Panel***, although most of these only knew a little about SHR’s remit and the work it does (24% of all respondents).

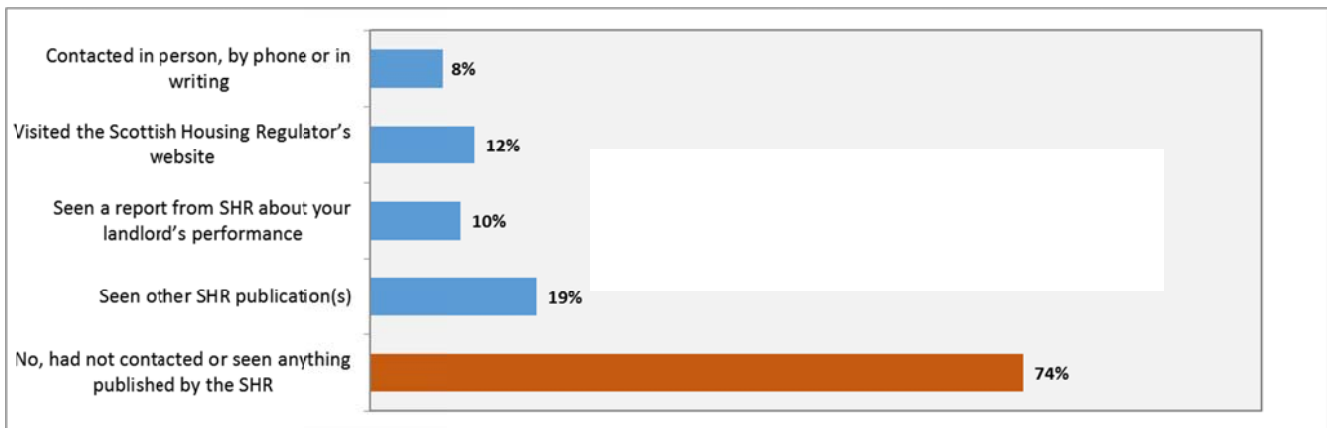
**Figure 1: Awareness of SHR before joining the Panel**

Base: 189

- 2.4. Relatively little variation was evident across respondent groups in awareness of SHR. However, survey data suggests that awareness of SHR is somewhat higher amongst RSL tenants than others; more than 2 in 5 RSL respondents indicated that they had heard of SHR prior to joining the Panel, compared to around a third of local authority tenants and fewer than 1 in 5 owners (although the number of owners responding to the survey was small).
- 2.5. Survey data also suggests that members of Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) are somewhat more likely than others to have heard of SHR, although the difference is not statistically significant. More than 2 in 5 RTO members had heard of SHR prior to joining the Panel, compared to a little more than a quarter of others.
- 2.6. Those who had been aware of SHR were asked to indicate how they had first heard about SHR. Responses suggest that tenants and service users are most likely to have heard about SHR via their landlord (including reference to newsletters, Tenant Participation meetings and AGMs) and through the media (including local newspapers) and the internet.

### Contact with the Scottish Housing Regulator

- 2.7. As Figure 2 indicates, relatively few respondents had contacted SHR prior to joining the Panel; **around a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated that they had contacted SHR and/or seen SHR publications prior to joining.**
- 2.8. Respondents' contact with SHR was typically in reference to visiting the SHR website and/or having seen one or more SHR publications. A little more than 1 in 10 respondents had visited SHR website prior to joining the Panel (12% of all respondents), 1 in 10 had seen a report from SHR about their landlord's performance, and around 1 in 5 had seen other SHR publications (including the "How we regulate" guide, Consultation & Involvement Strategy, and recommended practice publications). Few respondents indicated that they had made direct contact with SHR (8%).

**Figure 2: Whether contacted or seen SHR publications prior to joining the Panel**

Base: 169

- 2.9. There was no significant variation in this finding across most key respondent groups. However, it is notable that RTO members were around twice as likely as other survey respondents to have contacted SHR and/or seen SHR publications – around 2 in 5 RTO members indicated this.
- 2.10. Feedback from the qualitative research strand is also broadly consistent with survey results in terms of individuals' awareness and contact with SHR. The majority of participants had seen SHR publications and/or visited the website, and one or two had contacted SHR directly. However, most had done so subsequent to joining the National Panel, including some who had been prompted by an invitation to join the Panel to find out more about SHR. Again it was notable that the minority of RTO members within the pool of qualitative participants were more likely than others to have seen SHR publications.

### Qualitative feedback on SHR publications

- 2.11. The second strand of qualitative research with Panel members included a specific focus on views on a range of SHR publications. Participants were asked to read several SHR documents ahead of the sessions – including *How we regulate: A guide for tenants and service users*, *SHR's Consultation & Involvement Strategy*, and *The newsletter produced on the first National Panel survey*.
- 2.12. Discussion across these and other SHR publications focused primarily on **appearance and layout**, **publication content**, and **ensuring individuals can access publications of interest**. We consider views on each of these themes in turn below.

- 2.13. Participants were generally positive – some very positive – on the appearance and layout of the documents considered. Indeed a number of individuals specifically reported being “pleasantly surprised” by the documents, and compared them favourably to other information produced for tenants and other users of social landlord services.

#### **SHR publications: appearance and layout**

Participants were generally positive – some very positive – on the appearance and layout of the documents considered. Indeed a number of individuals specifically reported being “pleasantly surprised” by the documents, and compared them favourably to other information produced for tenants and other users of social landlord services.

Most participants felt that the documents were *attractive* in their appearance. This included specific reference to the consistent branding and colour palette across documents, which were seen as contributing to the professional appearance.

Views were also positive on the accessibility of the documents. This is also considered later in relation to the document content, but specifically with regard to appearance and layout, participants highlighted the larger font size, plentiful white space around text, and avoiding use of coloured backgrounds to text.

Views were particularly positive on the use of specific elements to “break up” the text content – including charts, images, and boxed “points of interest”. Participants felt that these helped to make the documents more attractive, but were also effective in engaging tenants and service users by highlighting points of particular interest or relevance. Related to these views, most participants made specific reference to the value of summaries within documents. In addition to providing readers with an easily digestible summary of the document, some also suggested that summaries could be used to help readers navigate to the parts of the publication of most interest to them.

Views somewhat mixed on the use of blank pages (including full page imagery) through the documents. Some felt that this made the documents more attractive and appealing to readers. However, others suggested that these “filler pages” made the documents feel longer – and as such may discourage tenants or service from reading them.

A small number of participants did not favour what were described as somewhat abstract images and patterns. However, participants did suggest that this was an issue of personal taste, and views were generally positive on the use of colour and imagery through the documents.



**SHR publications: content**

The *documents were generally seen as accessible and easy to understand*. Specific reference was made to use of short sentences, written in plain English, and also a good balance in limiting the amount of text on each page, and use of charts or diagrams to present content where appropriate.

Participants generally felt that the publications provided the right level of detail for tenants and service users. While recognising that personal preference may vary, most felt that the publications struck the right balance between providing sufficient detail and ensuring content was accessible. This again included positive reference to use of summaries/contents to help readers find the information they want.

Although views were generally very positive on language use throughout the documents, a small number of participants had more difficulty engaging with the content. These individuals suggested that the documents relied on terminology which “the average tenant” may not understand, and it was suggested that a glossary of terms or abbreviations may help those who do not have prior knowledge of SHR’s work.

A number of participants felt that the document content was *relevant and of interest* to them, and that the topics covered would be of interest to tenants and service users more widely. In this context, a small number of participants suggested that forthcoming publication of information on landlord performance against the Social Housing Charter (see Section 7) would be likely to broaden interest in SHR publications.

Despite these comments, some participants were skeptical about the extent to which information presented across the documents would be relevant or of interest to the wider population of tenants and service users. This was primarily raised as a concern in relation to a view that tenants are generally focused on information on their own landlord’s services and investment plans.

### **SHR publications: appearance and layout improvement suggestions**

Including a short summary at the beginning of each document, cross-referenced to direct readers to the relevant page numbers for get more detail (eg a page reference alongside each bullet point).

A standard paragraph at the front of each publication – and particularly those aimed at tenants and service users – explaining SHR’s role, and what their work involves.

Providing clearer references at end of documents on how to find out more about the topics covered – for example SHR’s remit, Tenant Scrutiny, landlord performance information.

Where relevant, include information to emphasise the relevance of SHR’s activities and publications. This included for example feedback on how tenant input and performance reporting etc is helping to improve service provision.

### **Ensuring tenants and service users can access SHR publications**

Access to and awareness of SHR publications was a common theme across qualitative discussions. There was a broad view amongst participants that more work was required to promote SHR documents more widely, such that those who may find publications of interest know that they are available (and how to access them).

A small number of participants felt reasonably well informed on availability of SHR publications, but these were individuals with some degree of prior involvement with local tenant organisations and/or tenant scrutiny. These participants agreed with other suggestions, that there was a need to raise awareness of SHR publications (and indeed SHR as an organisation) across users of social landlord services.

Specific suggestions for further promotion of SHR publications focused primarily on encouraging landlords to highlight the availability of publications of relevance to their tenants. It was suggested that this could form part of wider work to raise awareness of SHR’s role, or to promote opportunities for tenant participation. Approaches related specifically to promoting SHR publications included use of landlord newsletters and service access points to promote or display publications, using local officers to act as information providers or for signposting to other information sources, providing publication lists to members of the National Panel, RTOs and a mailing list of interested tenants.

## Feedback on the SHR website

- 2.14. Consistent with the approach taken in relation to SHR publications, the Panel survey included a limited number of questions to gauge experience and views of SHR publications and qualitative engagement explored these views in more detail. We consider this feedback in turn below.

### *Survey findings*

- 2.15. Survey respondents who had visited the SHR website were asked to provide further detail on the reason for their visit, the extent to which they found what they were looking for, and any specific improvement suggestions. The main points raised by these respondents are noted below:
- The most common ***reason for respondents' visiting the SHR website*** was general interest or curiosity, including some prompted by the invitation to join the Panel. However, a number of respondents made reference to visiting the website to access information on a specific issue or concern. This included individuals looking for information on issues such as benefit changes, tenants' rights and minimum space standards, and also those looking for information about a specific issue or problem with their landlord such as performance information on their landlord. This latter group included a small number of individuals who had visited the SHR website looking to make a complaint about their landlord.
  - Most of those visiting the SHR website indicated that they had ***found what they were looking for***. Nevertheless, there remained around a fifth of those commenting who found little relevant information or who were not able to answer their query fully.
  - The majority of those who had visited the SHR website indicated that they did not have any ***improvement suggestions***, including reference to having found the website easy to use. The small number of respondents (around 10) offering specific improvement suggestions made reference to the following improvements and additions:
    - Public documents being easier to find, including reference to standards/regulations that landlords are expected to meet;
    - A forum/online chat function for individuals wishing to make complaints about landlords;
    - A league table on landlord performance;
    - An easy to find contact list for staff who can deal with specific enquiries; and
    - A reference to a lack of response to an enquiry through the online form.

### ***Qualitative feedback***

- 2.16. The third strand of the qualitative engagement with Panel members focused exclusively on gathering more detailed feedback on the SHR website. Panel members were asked to browse the SHR website, and to complete the 3 specific tasks (finding performance information on their landlord, accessing the *How we regulate* leaflet, and finding out what to do if they have a complaint about their landlord) as a means of testing ease of navigation and use of the site. The use of a mix of tasks was particularly important in gathering meaningful feedback from Panel members, as the great majority of participants indicated that they had not previously visited the SHR website.
- 2.17. The of tasks were also selected to reflect the range of reasons for tenants and service users to use the SHR website. Consistent with survey findings, participants who had visited the site indicated that this was primarily to:
- Find out more about the Regulator - most in response to hearing about the National Panel;
  - To find information on their landlord; and
  - To find out what to do if they have a grievance or complaint.
- 2.18. Key themes emerging through participants' feedback is highlighted below.

#### **SHR website: structure and ease of navigation**

Views were generally positive on the site structure and ease of navigation. Most participants suggested they were able to navigate the site relatively easily, and felt reasonably confident that they would be able to find what looking for:

Most felt that the site structure made it quick and easy to get to what they were looking for – this appeared to be linked primarily to the number of steps required to access information, and a small number of participants commented specifically on only requiring 1 or 2 clicks to get to most of the information they were looking for.

A number of participants made positive reference to sections and headings on the homepage that fit well with the main reasons for their use of the site. This included for example, “find and compare landlords” and “are you a tenant or service user?” It was suggested this could be extended (for example to include making a complaint).

It was also suggested that the site seemed to include structural elements (eg specific headings or sections) that were similar to other sites used by participants. This use of “standard” elements was also seen as aiding navigation of the site.

The site was compared favourably to participants' experience of landlord sites, in terms of structure/navigation and appearance.

### **Difficulties using and navigating the site**

Most participants gave positive feedback on their use of the SHR website. However, some did report difficulty in using and navigating the site – including a specific view that the site may be better suited to those who have a reasonable understanding of SHR’s role.

Difficulties or concerns appeared to be primarily related to a view that the homepage was “a little busy”. This was suggested with reference to the range of information included on the homepage, and that the homepage includes what some felt was too much text (eg rather than short headings that users can click through to read more). This group also included some of those who managed to navigate the site without problem, but who felt the homepage could be off-putting for some tenants and service users. In particular, it was suggested that the volume of information on the homepage may suit landlords or individuals looking for something specific, but that it may not engage more “casual” visitors to the site (and especially those less confident in use of the internet).

A small number of participants suggested that the information of most relevance to tenants and service users may be “lost” amongst other information likely to be of greater interest to landlords and housing professionals. The wide range of information provided through the site was seen as a particular strength, but participants felt that this emphasised the need to distinguish more clearly the information of interest to tenants and service users.

Some noted that it had taken a few minutes for them to adjust to the site structure. This included reference to the drop-down menus along the top of site being “hidden”, and that more prominence could be given to the search function. However, as noted above, few felt that they were unable to navigate the site effectively after they had “got to grips” with the structure.

Although most felt that the site content was easy to understand, a small number suggested that some of the language use may be difficult for tenants/service users to understand.

It was also suggested that the site more generally could take a more informal, “softer” style – and that this may provide more accessible for tenants and service users. Participants felt that some of those visiting the site (eg those seeking to make a complaint) could be feeling anxious or emotional - and that this may make it more difficult for them to navigate the site.

It may be useful to note that one of the participants who had difficulty navigating the site (and who struggled to complete the specific tasks noted below) were accessing the site via a mobile device – and indeed this was the only individual using a mobile device for the study.

- 2.19. In support of experience navigating the SHR website, 14 out of 21 participants managed **all three website tasks** that participants were asked to complete. Feedback was most positive on finding landlord performance information, and a number of participants made reference to having used the “Find and Compare Landlords” link from the homepage. In contrast, participants were most likely to experience difficulty finding complaints information and the “How We Regulate” leaflet.
- 2.20. Feedback specific to each of the three tasks included:
- Most found the first task (**finding performance information on their landlord**) straightforward. This is significant in the context of participants also suggesting this is likely to be a particularly common reason for visits to the SHR website. A small number indicated they had not managed to, or had significant difficulty finding information on their landlord - including a suggestion that the “find and compare landlords” link could make more explicit reference to performance information, and that “Performance Matters” could provide links to performance information.
  - Some participants were disappointed with the range of information presented on their landlord. This appeared to reflect difficulties navigating the page on their landlord – for example some participants (one using a mobile) who could only find general organisational information. Related to this point, one participant indicated that they were expecting to click through to a page with headline performance indicators, charts, etc – but felt that the page was a “dry” set of links to download.
  - A small number of participants had difficulty finding the **“How We Regulate” leaflet**. These participants also suggested that the leaflet was likely to be of particular interest to those looking to find more about the Regulator’s role, and should perhaps be more prominently advertised.
  - Participants reported most difficulty in relation to finding information on **what to do if they have a complaint about their landlord**. Several participants suggested that it had taken too many steps to find the information, and some indicated that they had “stumbled” on the information while looking for something else. This was related to comments that the homepage could more explicitly refer to complaints handling.
  - It is notable that a number of participants suggested this was likely to be one of the main reasons for tenants and service users to visit the SHR website. This included a small number of participants who had spoken to other tenants about this topic. While feedback was positive on the content provided through the SHR website, these participants suggested that the information was too difficult to find.

**SHR website: appearance and style**

Almost all participants were positive in their views on the appearance and style of the SHR website. The site was rated as attractive and eye catching, with a number of participants commenting the consistent “professional” identity across the website and publications. This was compared favourably with other sites used by participants, including landlord sites.

The clarity of text layout was praised; participants suggested that the larger font size for the site and publications was helpful in this regard, and this included some with visual impairment.

Content was felt to be easy for tenants and service users to understand, written in plain English and making good use of graphics and colours to highlight information of particular interest. It is notable that these comments reflect some of the principles applied in Panel members’ assessment of SHR publications.

**SHR website: content**

Most participants felt website content was comprehensive, covering most of the areas likely to be of interest to tenants and service users. The only suggestion in terms of potential content gaps was scope for more information for tenants on how they can contribute to SHR’s work (for example details on the operation of Scrutiny Panels).

Website content was generally seen as accessible and easy to understand for tenants and service users. This included reference to the function to print specific pages in a readable format as particularly useful for longer form information or documents.

Views were mixed on the relevance of content and whether this is likely to be of interest to individuals. Most were positive on the range of information available, and some specifically indicated that the site had exceeded their expectations here. Specific reference was made here to information on landlord performance as of particular interest to tenants and service users, including reference to participants having greater trust in information presented by the Regulator (and some scepticism regarding information published by landlords).

Despite these views, some of those praising the depth of site content, also questioned how much of the information would be of interest to the majority of tenants and service users. Some suggested that most tenants resolve queries with their landlord without recourse to SHR, and others that interest in the site is likely to focus on making a complaint, performance information and finding out more on SHR’s work. Some felt that key information of most interest to service users could be “lost” amongst other content of more interest to landlords and housing professionals.

### SHR website: improvement suggestions

Reflecting the above feedback, following improvement suggestions were made in relation to SHR website **structure, appearance and content**:

It was suggested that more could be done to make the homepage simpler and more engaging for tenants and service users. This included reducing the range of information and volume of text on the homepage, clearer “signposting” for tenants looking for specific information (focused on the topics likely to be of greatest interest to site visitors), and scope for a function to enable tenants to click through to a section designed more specifically for their interests (and with a more “informal” style).

Pages on each landlord that are more engaging, and giving more prominence to performance information. This could include a function to compare performance results across landlords.

A function for visitors to sign up for email notifications on news or publications.

The facility to provide feedback to the Regulator on the site, including a function at the bottom of each page for visitors who may be struggling to find what they are looking for.

Suggestion that adaptation to suit mobile devices is likely to be increasingly important – including reference to more housing staff using mobiles/tablets when visiting tenants/service users. This included one participant who questioned whether there may be value in development of a mobile app.

A number of participants suggested that, rather than the site structure, appearance or content, a more pressing issue is **ensuring that more tenants/service users are aware of the site and what it has to offer**. Several participants were of the view that the majority of tenants and service users aware of the site were already involved in local tenant organisations and/or scrutiny activities. These respondents suggested that more should be done to encourage “ordinary tenants/service users” to use the site.

For some this was part of a need to raise awareness of the Regulator more generally, but it was also suggested that many of those who are aware of the Regulator, may not appreciate that the website could be useful or of interest to them. It was suggested that the focus in promoting the site should be on how it is relevant or useful for tenants and service users, including use of local tenant networks and groups, and landlord newsletters.



## SHR Consultation & Involvement Strategy

- 2.21. SHR has produced a Consultation and Involvement Strategy that sets out priorities for engaging with users of social landlord services – in getting a better understanding of their priorities and opinions, by giving opportunities to contribute to SHR and help shape their approach to regulating landlords, and involving service users in scrutiny of landlords. The second strand of the **qualitative engagement**, in addition to views on SHR publications, considered views on the ways that SHR might most effectively engage with tenants and service users.
- 2.22. In terms of **the principle of the Consultation & Involvement Strategy**, participants generally saw a coordinated approach as a positive. Participants felt it was important to have clarity on the purpose of any engagement, and also supported the principle of SHR having a “more direct” relationship with service users. Some suggested there is scope to develop a relationship of trust with individuals. This was raised with reference to the Regulator’s role in protecting the interests of service users. The independence of the Regulator was also highlighted as a potential strength for service users who may have concerns that providing negative feedback to their landlord could have repercussions in terms of future service delivery.
- 2.23. Support for direct consultation or engagement between the Regulator and tenants/service users was also related to a view expressed by some, that there is a need to ensure that engagement reaches those who may not currently be contributing to landlords’ service user participation. This support was expressed by some who perceived current tenant organisations as failing to represent the full range of tenant views and interests. A small number of participants expressed concerns regarding the extent to which the current network of RTOs are genuinely “open” to all tenants, including perceived links between some RTOs and local political parties.
- 2.24. A number of participants were **skeptical about the extent to which the wider tenant population may be willing to participate** in tenant engagement activities, over and above that required to resolve specific problems or concerns with their landlord. It was suggested that a more coordinated approach to consultation and engagement could have more success in involving a broad range of tenants, but that SHR should also be realistic about the likely level of participation.
- 2.25. A small number of participants suggested that the Strategy could be clearer on the **purpose** of SHR’s engagement with tenants and service users, and specifically being clear that this is not focused on addressing individual cases or complaints. To some extent this was based on individual’s experience of tenant participation at a local level, including examples of this being easily dominated by individual complaints. In relation to SHR’s Strategy, this point also reflected a perception that many tenants/service users may see SHR’s role as being focused on dealing with individual complaints.

- 2.26. Participants highlighted a range of points related to the ***means by which SHR may engage with tenants and service users***. These are summarized below.

**SHR Consultation & Involvement: views on potential methods**

Providing a mix of opportunities for service users to contribute their views was seen as a key element of any effective consultation and engagement approach. The most common preference amongst participants was for in-person engagement, but comments also highlighted the importance of other approaches such as postal, web-based and telephone to maximise the “reach” of any engagement activities.

The role of the National Panel was specifically referenced as being part of a mixed approach to engagement, including specifically in relation to a view that it is important for engagement to reach those who may not be contributing to landlords’ current mechanisms for service user participation. A small number of participants expressed concerns regarding the extent to which the current network of RTOs are genuinely “open” to all tenants, and participants also supported use of approaches which require less time input (alongside in-person engagement) as a means of reaching a wider range of service users.

The majority of those with a particular view indicated a preference for meetings to discuss service user’s priorities. To some extent this reflected previous experience of meetings as part of local tenant organisations and/or scrutiny activities. However, the majority of participants indicated that they had not attended such meetings previously, but felt that meetings would be the best forum for tenants to highlight (and compare) priorities. In the context of this enthusiasm for “in person” engagement, a number of participants highlighted practical points in ensuring the effectiveness of these approaches. Many of the comments received here appeared to reflect prior experience of tenant participation, and included reference to use of local and well known venues, providing sufficient notice to prospective participants, being clear on the purpose of each event/meeting.

More generally, discussions also highlighted the importance of providing feedback to participants` on the result of specific engagement exercises.

- 2.27. Some of the views expressed by participants related to the *likely preferences of specific groups*, and had implications for the potential “fit” between the method of engagement and the purpose or focus of the engagement exercise. For example:
- Comments on the needs of specific groups focused primarily on those with mobility and/or health needs (telephone cited as a potentially effective approach), and younger people and those in employment (suggested focus on written/web approaches).
  - A small number of participants also suggested that larger scale survey-type approaches are a useful way of monitoring trends in views on key issues, and as such should have a place in SHR’s Strategy. However, participants also emphasised the importance of more in depth engagement in adding value to survey-type engagement – for example to enable individuals to raise new concerns or issues, or consider options to resolve identified issues.
  - A number of participants highlighted the range of knowledge and skills that tenants and service users have to offer, and the importance of engagement making best use of this. This included reference to potential for specific topics to make use of individuals with relevant experience or knowledge, for example those with experience of specific services such as capital investment or antisocial behaviour.
- 2.28. The final element of discussions on the Consultation & Involvement Strategy focused on potential interest in *electronic engagement* such as email, text and social media. Participants’ experience of these forms of engagement with their landlord was very limited, although some were aware of opportunities that they had not taken up.
- 2.29. Nevertheless, a number of participants expressed some personal interest in engaging with landlords and/or SHR via electronic communication. Moreover, while some suggested that landlord’s use of social media had not been particularly effective in engaging tenants and service users, there was a common view that these options should have a place in any engagement strategy. This appeared to be based on a view that electronic means of engagement was likely to be of interest across a substantial (and growing) proportion of tenants and service users – and was also consistent with the focus on maximizing the “reach” of engagement approaches.
- 2.30. In terms of the potential role of electronic means of engagement, a number of participants suggested that specific communication channels may be better suited to specific purposes. This included for example, use of Twitter and email lists for dissemination of information, while other social media options such as Facebook was seen as having scope to support a community of individuals interested in sharing their views and experience.

