Scottish Housing Regulator

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users 2022/23

Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report provides an overview of findings from the 2022/23 programme of National Panel engagement commissioned by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Background

1.2. The National Panel was established in 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The Panel is used to gauge service user priorities and experiences, and findings help to shape SHR's focus in its role as regulator of social landlords.

1.3. The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of service users. Members include social tenants, people who have used homelessness services, residents of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and owners using social landlord factoring services.

1.4. A recent Panel recruitment drive sought to replace longer-standing Panel members and improve representation of specific groups. As a result, Panel membership stood at 476 individuals at March 2023 (see p.36). Ongoing promotion of the Panel will build on this figure, and seek to reach those who do not normally engage with social landlords. For example, more than three quarters of Panel members are not involved in Regional Tenants' Organisations (RTOs).

The 2022/23 programme

1.5. The 2022/23 Panel programme was developed to reflect current SHR priorities and track views over time on key issues such as rents, finances and heating the home. In terms of the main themes addressed, this year we asked Panel members about:

- Rent affordability and value for money, and their wider financial circumstances
- Experience of rent consultation
- Experience of heating their home
- Safety in the home
- Participation and communication with their landlord
- Experience of homeless services
- Views on the SHR website

1.6. A combined quantitative and qualitative research approach was used; a survey issued to all Panel members in January 2023, and in-depth qualitative engagement undertaken during February and March 2023. The survey included questions across most of the themes listed above. Qualitative engagement comprised three distinct strands focused on (i) exploring views on rents, safety and influencing landlord decisions, (ii) feedback on the SHR website, and (iii) experience of homelessness services and temporary accommodation.

1.7. This report combines quantitative survey results with qualitative findings, based on responses to the full Panel survey (56% response, 267 respondents) and qualitative engagement with 96 individuals. We refer to those taking part as 'respondents' where this was via the survey, and 'participants' where this was via qualitative methods. Direct quotes have been included from qualitative participants to illustrate key points. These have been lightly edited for brevity.

2. RENTS

A little more than half (53%) feel their rent is good value for money, but around a quarter (26%) feel their rent is poor value.

Nearly two thirds (63%) have experienced difficulties affording their rent, including 41% who have experienced difficulties in the last year (a 13-point increase since 2021/22). Feedback linked these difficulties to heating costs, rent levels and other living costs.

A large majority (83%) were concerned about the future affordability of their rent, a 12-point increase since 2021/22. These concerns were most commonly related to the potential impact of future rent increases.

A large majority (79%) had received information from their landlord in the last year about annual rent increases.
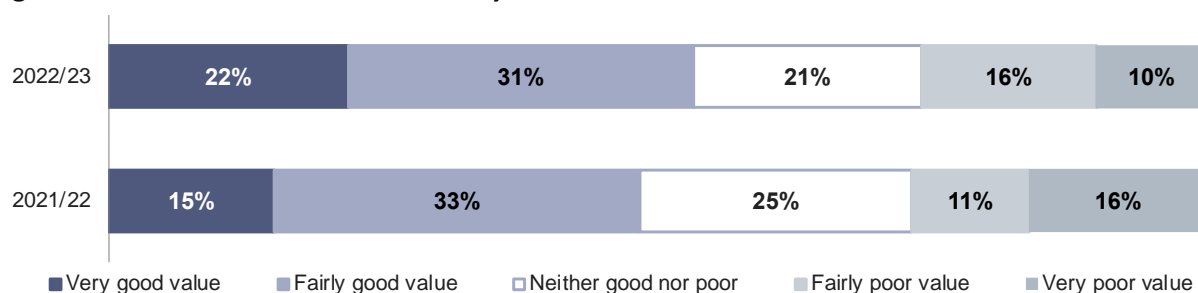
The majority indicated that their landlord provided different rent increase options (68%), information on what options might mean for services (59%), and asked for their views on proposed increases (75%).

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

Value for money

2.2. As Figure 1 shows, a little more than half (53%) of respondents felt that their rent is good value for money while around a quarter (26%) felt their rent is poor value for money. This was consistent with findings from the 2021/22 survey, which found that 48% of respondents saw their rent as good value for money. Views were also broadly consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 1: Whether rent is value for money

	Very good value	Fairly good value	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor value	Very poor value
2022/23	22%	31%	21%	16%	10%
2021/22	15%	33%	25%	11%	16%

Factors influencing views

2.3. Qualitative feedback from Panel members identified a range of considerations that influence views on whether rents are value for money. These primarily related to (i) the quality of Panel members' homes including how easy they are to heat, (ii) the

responsiveness of landlord services, especially repairs, and (iii) rent levels and how these compare with alternatives. Below we summarise the key points.

2.4. **Quality of home and ease of heating.** Reference to participants' homes in the context of value for money was most commonly focused on the quality and condition of their home and local environment, how well their landlord handles property repairs and maintenance, and any capital investment in their home. Reference to capital investment included how this compared with improvement of other properties in the area, and it was clear that participants whose property had been subject to recent improvement were more positive in their views on value for money. Some also referred to the type, size and location of their home and the extent to which this met their needs, including for those with mobility needs. Ease of heating was also mentioned by most of those who took account of the quality of their home in judging value for money of rent. This included a mix of positive and negative comments around the efficiency of their heating system, standard of insulation and quality of doors and windows – and the impact these had on whether participants could keep their home warm, and on their heating costs.

2.5. **Quality and responsiveness of landlord services.** Reference to the quality and responsiveness of services was most commonly in relation to repairs and maintenance. This included discussion around the speed of response to repairs requests, especially for emergency repairs, and the quality of completed work including whether multiple repairs were required to resolve an issue. As noted above, the standard of repair work was also highlighted in relation to the quality of participants' homes. Participants also referred to the responsiveness of landlord services more generally. This primarily related to the ease of accessing the landlord service they need, and how quickly and effectively services responded – including particular frustration where service users feel they have to make multiple service requests for an issue to be resolved. It was also evident that, in judging the standard of their landlord's services, some compared this with their level of rent. For example, there was some frustration from participants who felt that their rent compared favourably with other landlords, but who felt they were receiving a lower level of service.

2.6. **Rent levels and how these compare with other options**. Participants were generally less likely to refer to the level and affordability of their rent, for example compared with the quality of their home and standard of services. However, this remained a significant consideration for some, especially for those who had difficulty affording their rent. These participants referred to the impact of annual increases on the affordability of their rent, including whether they felt that their landlord had sought to minimise the size of rent increases. Some also considered how their rent compares with the cost of other housing options. This most commonly involved comparison with rents charged by their landlord for other property types (including comparison between new build and older properties), and rents across other social landlords. A small number also compared their rent levels with those in the private rented sector.

2.7. **Other considerations**. In addition to discussion of rent levels and how these relate to the quality of homes and services, participants identified a range of other considerations that influenced their value for money judgements. These included:
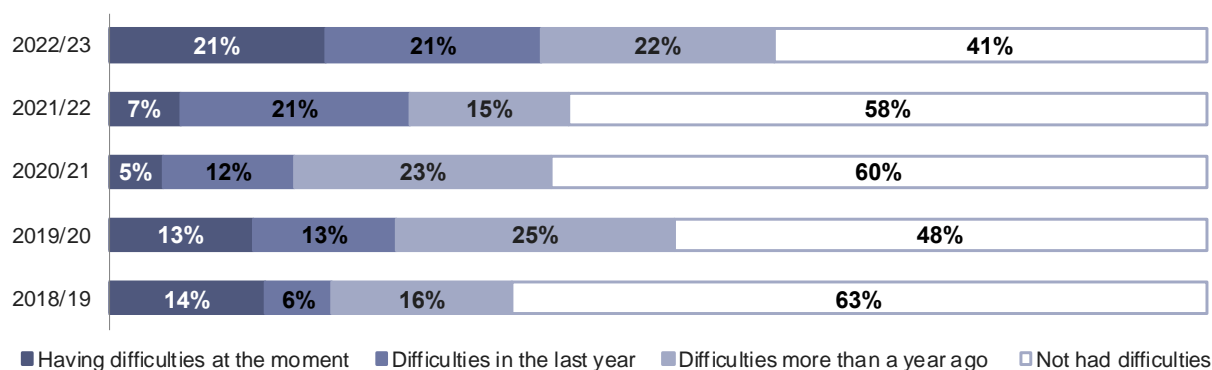
- How efficiently landlords use rental income

- Whether landlords treat tenants with respect, and demonstrate understanding of their needs and circumstances

- How landlords communicate with tenants, and whether participants feel their landlord is honest and transparent in its work

- Whether participants feel that their landlord genuinely takes account of tenant and service user views

- How landlords respond to issues such as antisocial behaviour and neighbour complaints

Experience of affordability difficulties

2.8. Figure 2 summarises respondent feedback on whether they have experienced difficulty affording their rent.

2.9. As this shows, nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents had experienced difficulties affording their rent, including 41% who had experienced difficulties in the last year, and 21% who are currently experiencing difficulties. This represents an increase from previous surveys; the proportion of respondents who had experienced difficulties in the last year increased by 13-points since the 2021/22 survey, and was the highest recorded over the last 5 surveys. Results also show some variation across key respondents groups, with Council tenants, those aged under 60 and non-RTO members more likely to have had difficulty affording their rent.

Figure 2: Whether experienced difficulty affording rent

	Having difficulties at the moment	Difficulties in the last year	Difficulties more than a year ago	Not had difficulties
2022/23	21%	21%	22%	41%
2021/22	7%	21%	15%	58%
2020/21	5%	12%	23%	60%
2019/20	13%	13%	25%	48%
2018/19	14%	6%	16%	63%

2.10. Figure 3 summarises feedback from those who have had difficulty affording their rent on the factors that have contributed to this. This indicates that the cost of heating their home was the most common factor contributing to rent affordability difficulties, mentioned by 64% of respondents and the most important factor for 32%. The level of rent was also a common issue; mentioned by 45% and the most important factor for 31%.

Figure 3: Factors contributing to difficulty affording rent

The level of rent	**31%** / 45%
Cost of heating your home	**32%** / 64%
Food costs	**5%** / 45%
Other living costs	**6%** / 49%
Reduction in pay	**10%** / 26%
Reduction in benefits	**5%** / 21%

■ Most important   □ Top 3
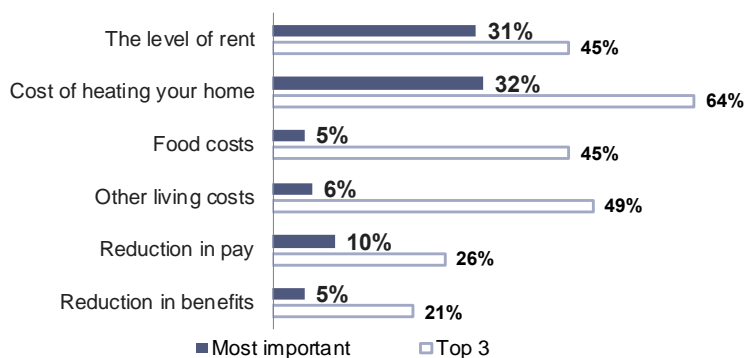
2.11. A substantial proportion of respondents mentioned other issues such as food costs (45%) and other living costs (49%), although these were less likely to be identified as the most important factor for rent affordability.

2.12. The overall mix of factors contributing to rent difficulties is broadly similar to that reported in previous surveys. There has been some year-to-year variation in the proportion of respondents mentioning specific factors, for example reference to rent levels decreased from the 2021/22 survey. However, heating the home and rent levels have remained the main factors contributing to rent difficulties.

Future affordability

As

2.13. Figure 4 shows, a large majority (83%) of respondents expressed concerns about affording their rent over the next few years. This represents a 12-point increase on the 2021/22 survey (71% expressed concerns) and is the highest level recorded across the last 5 surveys. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who had experienced rent affordability problems were significantly more likely to express concerns about the future; more than 9 in 10 of those who had experienced difficulties in the last year also expressed concerns about the future.

2.14. Concerns about future rent affordability were most commonly related to rent increases; 59% expressed concerns about the impact of future rent increases on the affordability of their rent, an 18-point increase from 2021/22. This compares with 15% who were concerned about future changes to their income, and 9% about future benefit changes.

Figure 4: Whether concerned about affording rent over next few years
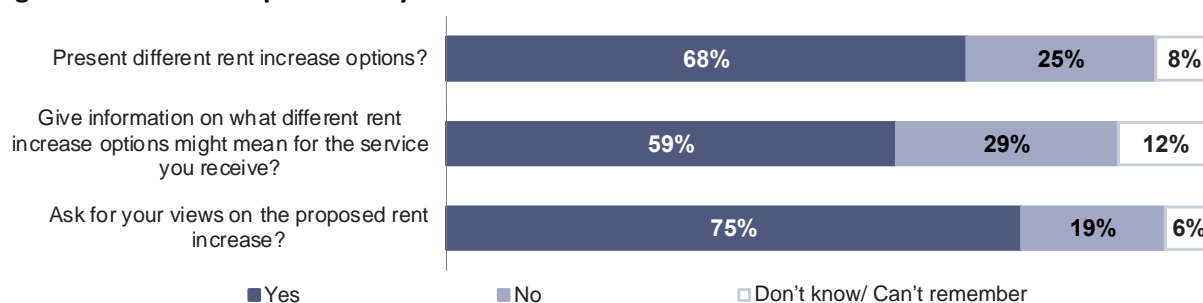
2022/23	9%	15%	59%	17%
2021/22	20%	10%	41%	29%
2020/21	17%	9%	39%	36%
2019/20	24%	7%	49%	20%
2018/19	24%	16%	38%	31%

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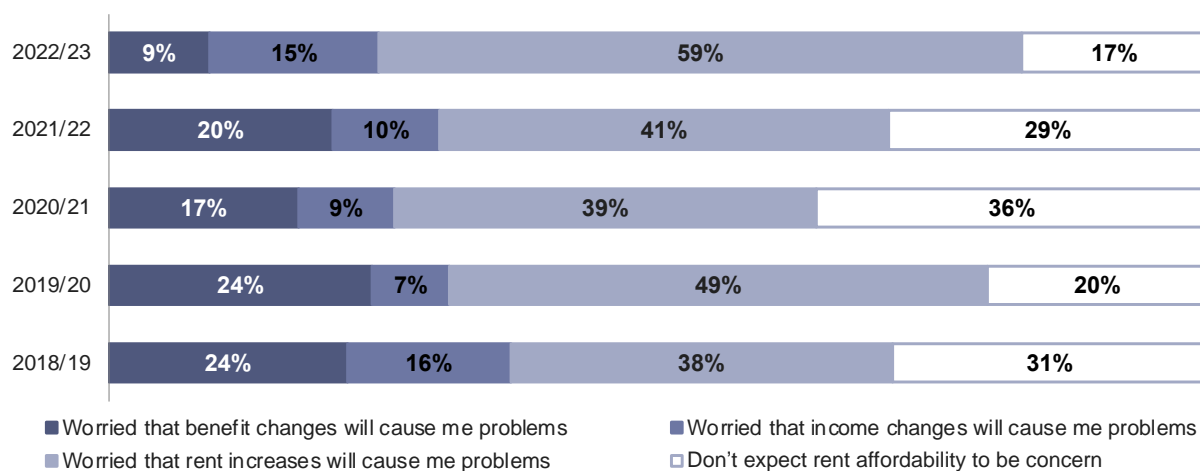
Rent consultation

2.15. A large majority of respondents (79%) had received information from their landlord in the last year about annual rent increases. This is consistent with findings across previous surveys, and the finding was also consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 5: Receipt of information from landlord about annual rent increases

2022/23	68%	15%	3%	14%
2019/20	68%	13%	5%	14%

■ Received in last few months   ■ Received in last year   ■ Received more than a year ago   □ Not received
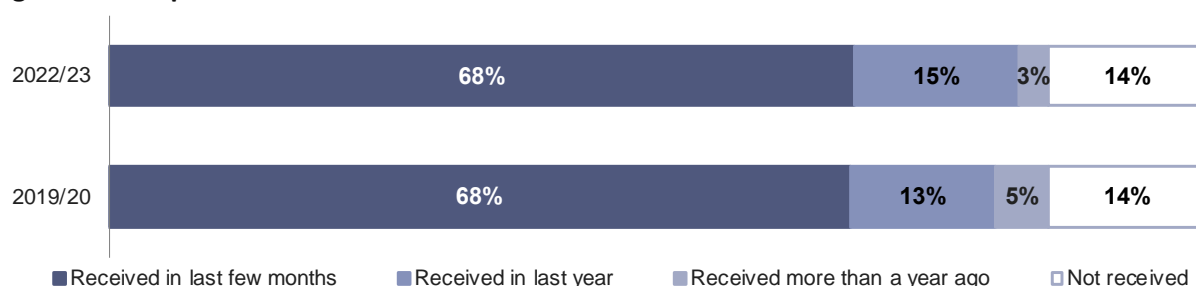
2.16. The majority of those who had received information from their landlord indicated that this presented different rent increase options (68%) and gave information on what these options might mean for services (59%). Most also indicated that information about annual rent increases asked for their views on the proposed increase (75%). These findings were broadly similar across housing sectors.

Figure 6: Information provided by landlords on rent increases

Present different rent increase options?	68%	25%	8%
Give information on what different rent increase options might mean for the service you receive?	59%	29%	12%
Ask for your views on the proposed rent increase?	75%	19%	6%

■ Yes   ■ No   □ Don't know/ Can't remember

2.17. Qualitative feedback provided further detail on the information that participants had received about rent increases, and any options provided to share their views. This is summarised below.

Information provided by landlords

2.18. Most participants indicated that their landlord had provided options for alternative rent increases, and in some cases options for service charges. Participants referred to a range of specific levels of rent increase, with some of the view that their landlord had proposed a relatively small percentage increase. Others expressed frustration where they felt that all of the rent increase options provided by their landlord were excessive, and could cause them affordability problems. Some indicated that communication from their landlord only informed tenants of the forthcoming rent increase, with no alternative options provided – again this prompted frustration from some.

2.19. Participants also referred to examples of landlords providing relatively detailed information on why the proposed rent increase was considered necessary, and/or on the potential implications of alternative rent increase options. This included some landlords highlighting the impact of inflation on the cost of landlord services. In terms of the implications of specific rent increase options, participants had seen information on impacts on service response times, capital investment in existing housing stock, and on future new build development. This included some who had taken part in workshops run by their landlord to explore rent increase options and model the potential impact of these. These participants had found such exercises enlightening and useful, even where they had resulted in larger rent increases that they would have liked.

2.20. Feedback on the information provided by landlords around rent increases suggest that tenant satisfaction is affected by the range of options provided by their landlord, and the quality of background information on the rationale and implications of a rent increase. For example, participants were more likely to express frustration or dissatisfaction where their landlord did not offer alternative options or did not provide a detailed rationale for the proposed increase. However, it was also clear that the size and potential affordability of rent increases also had a significant impact on tenant views. As such, dissatisfaction was especially acute where landlords had implemented an increase above that recommended through tenant feedback, or where the increase was substantially higher than previous years.

Options provided for tenants to give their views

2.21. Participants were mixed in terms of whether their landlord provided options to share their views on proposed rent increases. Some were clear in their view that their landlord had not provided any options for feedback, including examples of tenants not having been informed of specific consultation events being run by their landlord. However, others could not recall whether their landlord had provided any feedback options. This group included some who felt that their feedback would not influence the landlord's decision, and hence did not see any value in sharing their views.

2.22. A number of participants indicated that their landlord had provided options for feedback. This group referred to a range of specific methodologies including short surveys provided alongside the notification of proposed rent increases (a mix of printed and web-based), and landlords providing an email address or telephone numbers for tenants to share their views. Some also referred to more qualitative,

interactive approaches such as streamed video presentations, online workshops and in-person meetings – including sessions with RTOs.

2.23. Qualitative engagement indicated that participants were generally more positive where landlords had provided feedback options that allowed them to ask questions, raise points for clarification or request additional information. Views were more negative for those who felt they were not given an opportunity to share their views on proposed rent increases. Dissatisfaction was also evident where participants were unhappy with the options for providing a response, where their landlord had not provided enough background information to form an informed view, where they felt that their landlord was not genuine in tenant views, or where they felt that their landlord's eventual decision on rent increases had not given sufficient weight to feedback.

3. MONEY AND FINANCES

A quarter (25%) are not currently managing well financially, with 12% in financial difficulty.

Nearly three quarters (73%) struggle with unexpected expenses and more than a third (35%) often have to delay/miss paying a bill (a 14-point increase from the 2020/21 survey).

Around three quarters (76%) feel that their financial circumstances are worse now than 12 month ago, including more than a third (36%) who feel significantly worse off.

Increased food and energy costs were seen as the biggest contributors to financial difficulties – more than 7 in 10 felt these have had a "significant impact" for them.
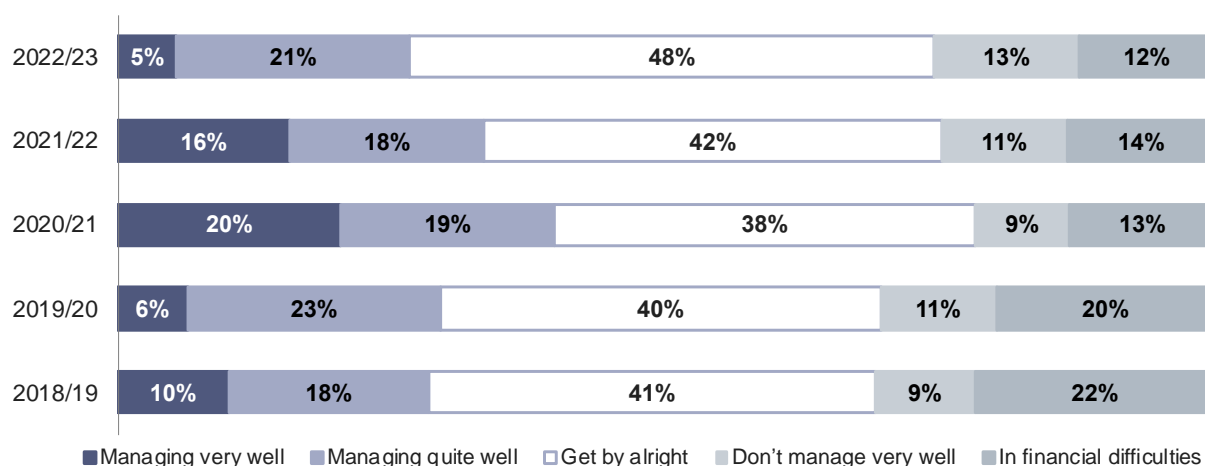
A large majority (82%) were concerned about their financial circumstances over the next few years, including around a third (33%) for whom this was a "major concern".

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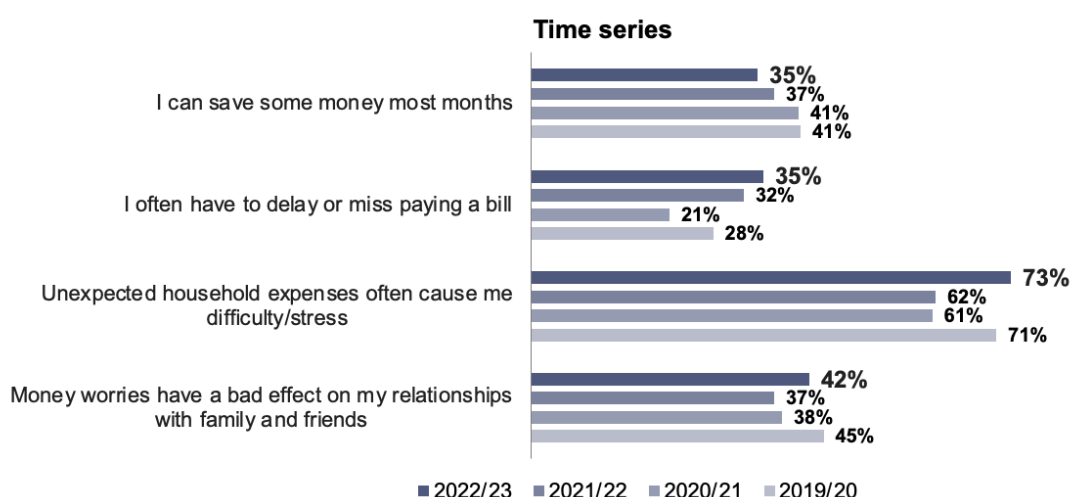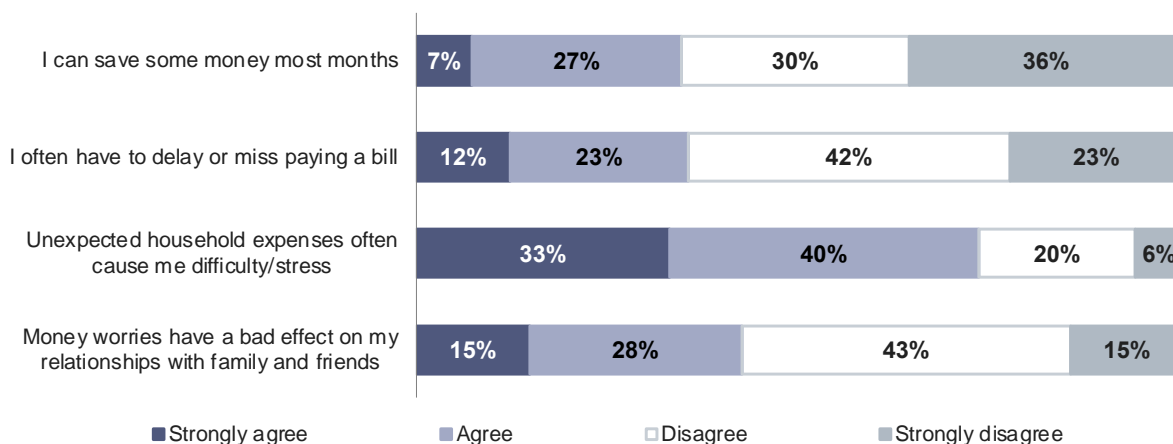
Views on current financial circumstances

3.2.   As Figure 7 shows, a quarter (25%) of respondents indicated that they are not managing well with their finances as a whole, including 12% who are in financial difficulties. This is broadly similar to the 2021/22 survey, although there has been a small reduction in the proportion of respondents who are managing well financially (26% compared with 32% in 2021/22).

3.3.   Findings were also broadly consistent across most respondent. However, under 60s were more likely than older respondents to be struggling financially; around 2 in 5 of those aged under 60 indicated that they were not managing well financially, compared with around 1 in 8 of those aged 60+.

Figure 7: How managing financially at the moment

	Managing very well	Managing quite well	Get by alright	Don't manage very well	In financial difficulties
2022/23	5%	21%	48%	13%	12%
2021/22	16%	18%	42%	11%	14%
2020/21	20%	19%	38%	9%	13%
2019/20	6%	23%	40%	11%	20%
2018/19	10%	18%	41%	9%	22%

3.4.   Figure 8 summarises views on specific aspects of respondents' current financial circumstances. Consistent with findings noted at Figure 7 above, results show that financial worries affect a relatively substantial proportion of respondents:

- More than a third (35%) of respondents often have to delay or miss paying a bill – a 14-point increase from the 2020/21 survey

- Around two thirds (65%) are not able to save money most months

- Unexpected household expenses often cause difficulty or stress for nearly three quarters (73%) of respondents

- Money worries have a bad effect on relationships for 42% of respondents

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

**Figure 8: Views on financial circumstances at the moment**

Time series

Financial circumstances over the last 12 months

3.6.   Figure 9 summarises views on how respondents' current financial circumstances compare with 12 months ago, and Figure 10 highlights the factors that have affected respondents' finances over this period.

3.7.   Around three quarters (76%) of respondents indicated that their financial circumstances are worse now than 12 months ago, including more than a third (36%) of all respondents who felt their finances are now "significantly worse". These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although under 60s were more likely than others to report "significantly worse" financial circumstances.

Figure 9: How current financial circumstances compare with 12 months ago

36%	40%	13%	9%	2%

■ Significantly worse   ■ Slightly worse   □ No real change   ■ Slightly better   ■ Significantly better
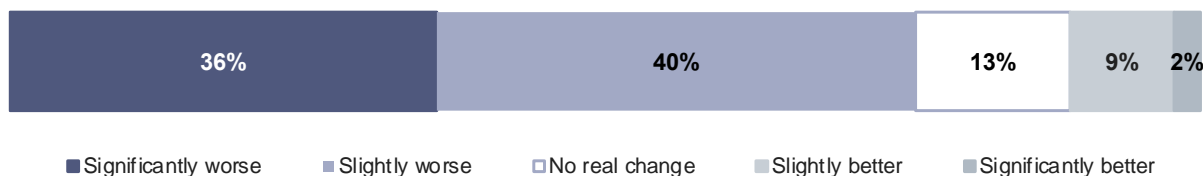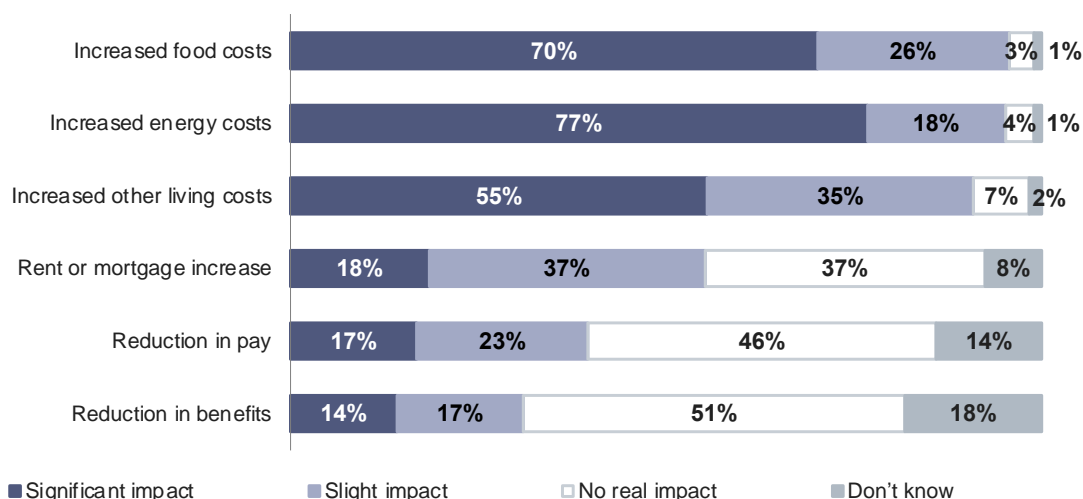
3.8.   As Figure 10 shows, increased food and energy costs were by some margin the most commonly mentioned factors affecting respondents' financial circumstances. The great majority of respondents mentioned one or both of these issues, including more than 7 in 10 who felt that these have had a "significant impact" on their finances (77% for energy costs, and 70% for food costs).

3.9.   The great majority of respondents mentioned increases in other living costs, although these were less likely to be described as having a "significant impact" on respondents' finances. A substantial proportion of respondents (55%) also referred to rent or mortgage increases having affected their financial circumstances, but respondents were less likely to refer to reduced pay or benefits.

3.10. Respondent feedback was consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 10: Factors affecting financial circumstances in the last 12 months
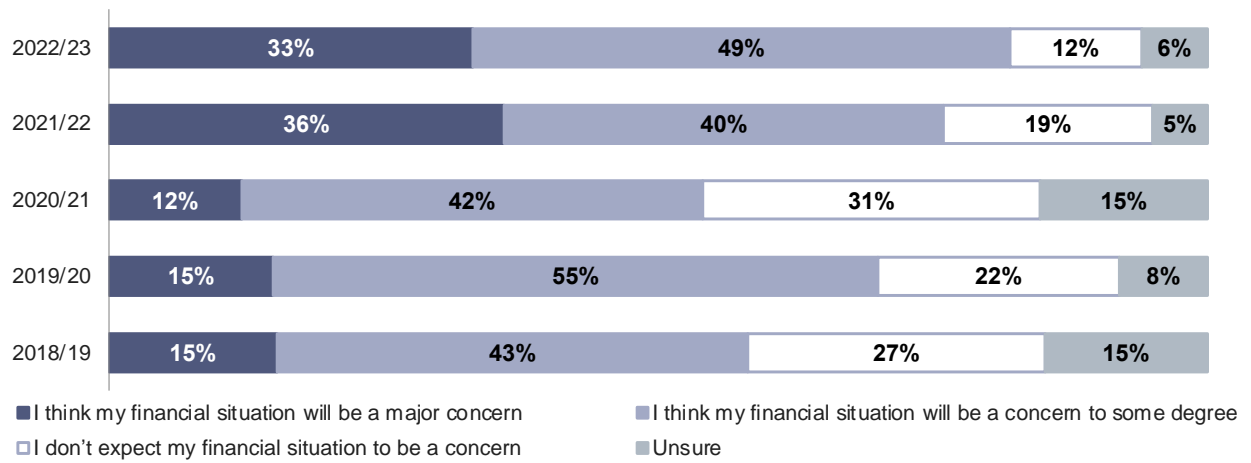
	Significant impact	Slight impact	No real impact	Don't know
Increased food costs	70%	26%	3%	1%
Increased energy costs	77%	18%	4%	1%
Increased other living costs	55%	35%	7%	2%
Rent or mortgage increase	18%	37%	37%	8%
Reduction in pay	17%	23%	46%	14%
Reduction in benefits	14%	17%	51%	18%

■ Significant impact   ■ Slight impact   □ No real impact   ■ Don't know

Views on future financial circumstances

3.11. As Figure 11 shows, a large majority (82%) of respondents expressed some concern about their financial circumstances over the next few years. This included around a third (33%) for whom their future financial situation was a "major concern". This was similar to findings of the 2021/22 survey, but represents a significant worsening since

2020/21; a nearly threefold increase in the proportion reporting that their future finances are a "major concern" over the last two years.

Figure 11: Whether concerned about finances over next few years

■ I think my financial situation will be a major concern ■ I think my financial situation will be a concern to some degree
□ I don't expect my financial situation to be a concern ■ Unsure
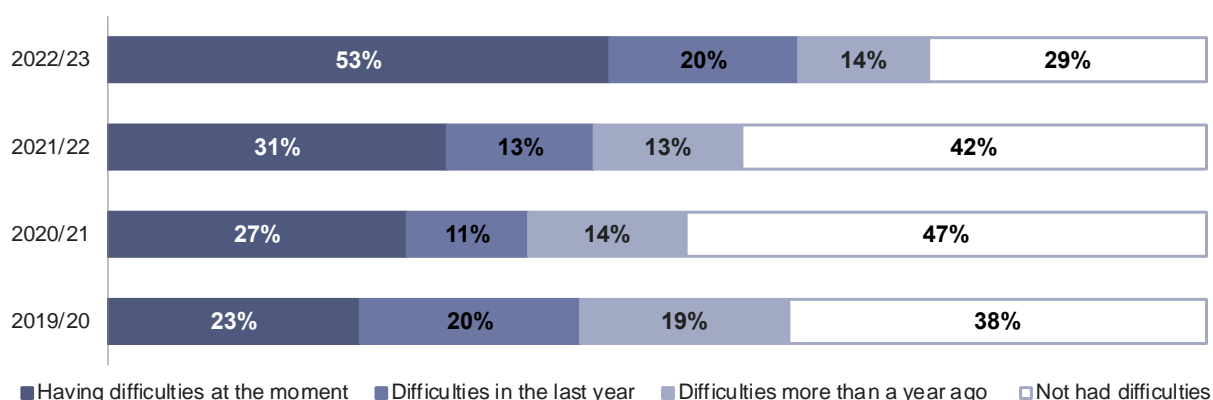
4. HEATING YOUR HOME

The majority (71%) had experienced difficulty heating their home, with more than half (53%) having difficulties at the time of the survey (a 22-point increase since 2021/22).

Those who had experienced difficulties affording their rent were significantly more likely than others to also have also had difficulty heating their home.

Energy costs were the main factor contributing to respondents' difficulties heating their home – 90% mentioned this, three times the proportion reported in the 2020/21 survey.

4.1.   In relation to heating their home, Panel members were asked whether they have had any difficulties heating their home (Figure 12) and about the factors that had contributed to any difficulties (Figure 13).

4.2.   The majority (71%) of respondents had experienced difficulty heating their home, including more than half (53%) who were having difficulties at the time of the survey. This represents a significant increase since the 2021/22 survey in the proportion of respondents who had experienced difficulty heating their home, including a 22-point increase in the proportion currently experiencing difficulties.

4.3.   Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who had experienced difficulties affording their rent were more likely to have difficulty heating their home. More than 9 in 10 of those who had difficulty affording their rent had also struggled to heat their home, compared to around a third of those who have not had difficulty affording their rent. Survey results also indicate that those aged under 60 were more likely than others to have experienced difficulties heating their home.

Figure 12: Whether had difficulty heating home

	Having difficulties at the moment	Difficulties in the last year	Difficulties more than a year ago	Not had difficulties
2022/23	53%	20%	14%	29%
2021/22	31%	13%	13%	42%
2020/21	27%	11%	14%	47%
2019/20	23%	20%	19%	38%

4.4. As Figure 13 shows, energy costs were the main issue contributing to respondents' difficulties heating their home. The great majority of respondents (90%) felt that energy costs had made it difficult for them to heat their home, including around three quarters (76%) who felt energy costs have had a "significant impact".

4.5. Other factors were significantly less commonly mentioned. For example, around a third of respondents indicated that poor heating, poor insulation and poor windows have had a significant impact on heating their home. However, qualitative feedback suggests that these can be significant issues for some tenants. While nearly all participants referred to difficulties associated with increasing energy costs, where individuals were also affected by poor heating systems and insulation, it was clear that this could have a significant impact on their ability to keep their home warm.

4.6. These findings are broadly similar to those reported by the 2021/22 survey. However, the proportion of respondents who felt that energy costs had made it difficult for them to heat their home is three times that reported in the 2020/21 survey.

Figure 13: Factors contributing to difficulty heating the home
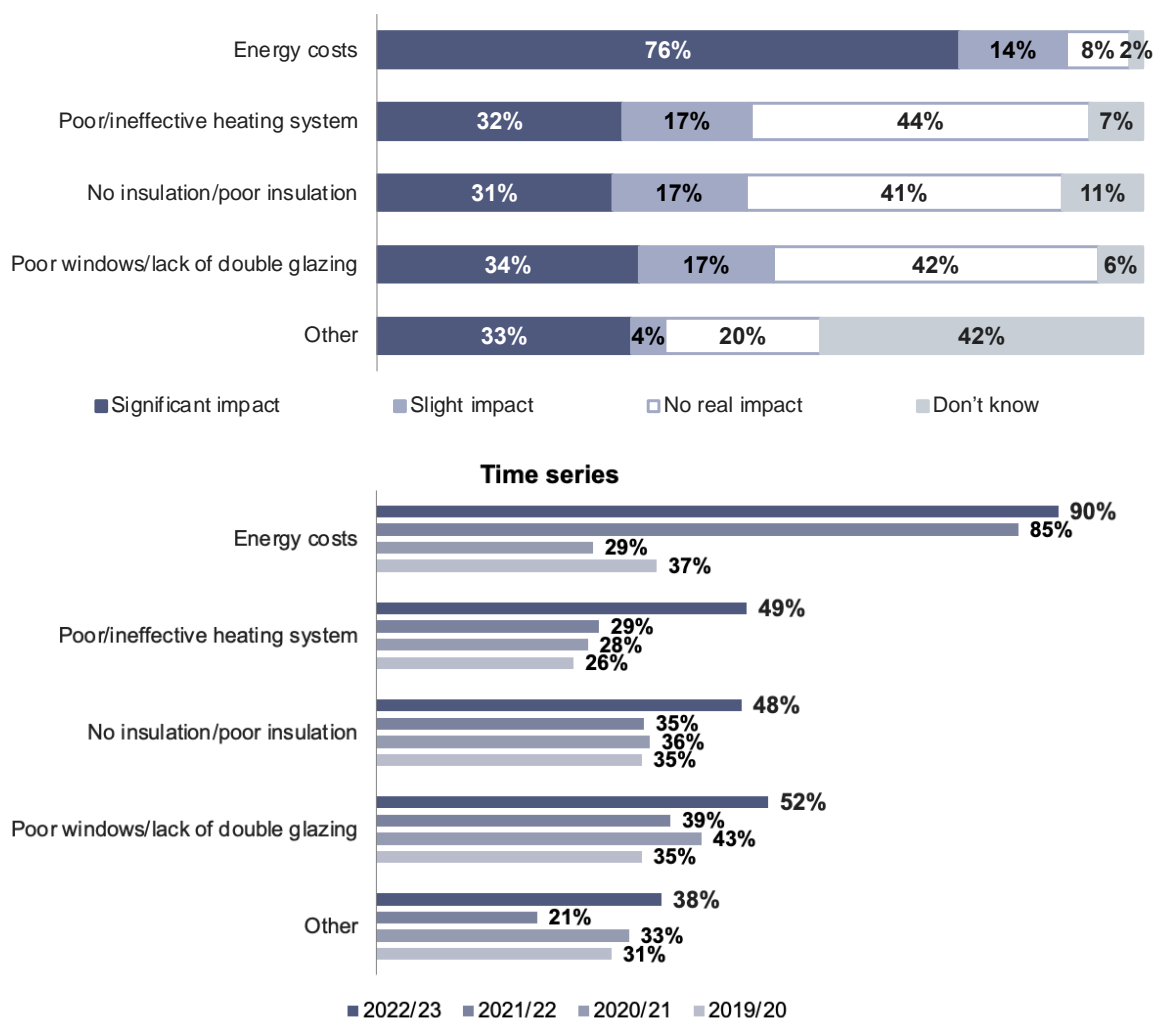
5. SAFETY OF TENANTS AND SERVICE USERS

More than half (59%) of respondents had experienced safety issues, with damp/mould the most commonly mentioned safety concern (a significant current concern for 1 in 10).

1 in 5 respondents (20%) have reported safety concerns to their landlord, including issues relating to damp/mould, fire safety, electrical safety and gas safety.

The great majority (90%) would know how to report any future safety concerns and most were confident their landlord would deal with this quickly (63%) and effectively (66%).

5.1.   This section considers views on tenant and service user safety in the home. This includes Panel members' personal experience of safety, and views on reporting safety concerns to their landlord. Findings presented in this section bring together survey results and more in-depth qualitative feedback.

Tenants' experience of safety issues

5.2.   More than half (59%) of respondents indicated that they had experienced safety issues, including nearly a quarter (23%) of all respondents who had significant current safety concerns. As Figure 14 shows, damp/mould was the most common safety concern, mentioned by 44% of respondents, including around 1 in 10 for whom damp/mould was a significant current concern.

5.3.   Around 1 in 6 respondents mentioned other safety concerns listed at Figure 14, including electrical safety, fire safety and stair access. Around 1 in 20 indicated that these were significant problems for them at the time of the survey.

5.4.   The incidence of safety concerns was broadly similar across most respondent groups. However, those aged under 60 were more likely to have current safety concerns, particularly in relation to damp/mould and electrical safety.

**Figure 14: Panel members' experience of safety problems or concerns**
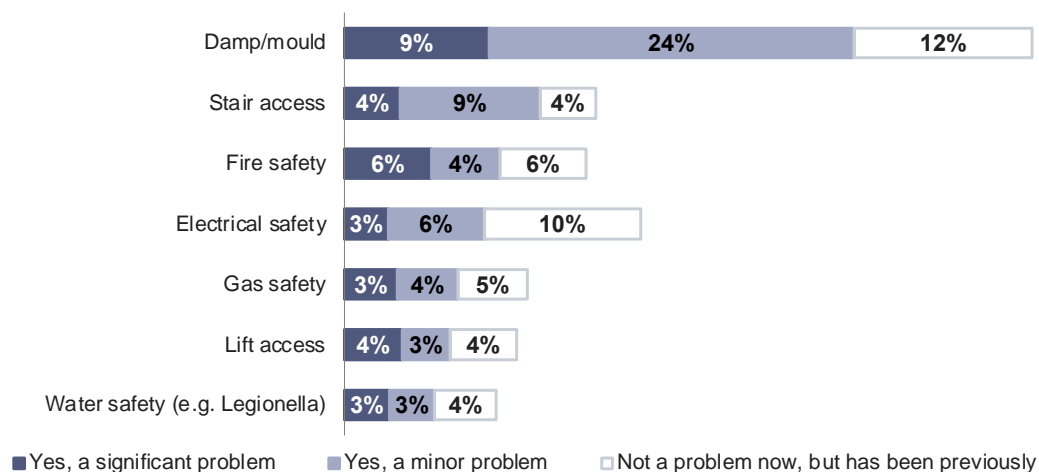
5.5.   A relatively small number of those giving qualitative feedback had experienced specific safety problems. Consistent with survey findings, these participants were most likely to refer to problems associated with dampness and mould; feedback suggested that this has been a long-standing issue for some, but that recent news coverage may have contributed to a particular awareness of this safety issue.

5.6.   Participants typically linked dampness and mould problems to difficulty heating their home (including poor insulation and inefficient heating systems) and poor ventilation. Mould problems were a particular concern for some, including those with long-term health conditions and/or those who referred to their home being affected by extensive and long-standing mould. Some noted that reporting the issue to their landlord had resolved the issue, but others indicated that they had been informed that this was their own responsibility. Several participants reported having tried to prevent the issue, for example through use of damp traps, having to open windows even during cold weather, and keeping their heating on for longer than usually required. Others were required to treat the issue on a regular basis using chemical cleaners. However, some noted that they had limited success in preventing dampness and/or had been unable to remove any mould that developed.

5.7.   Other safety issues were less commonly identified by participants but it was clear that, for the small number affected, concerns around fire and electrical safety had a significant impact on their quality of life. In relation to fire safety, participants referred to concerns regarding a lack of hard-wired smoke alarms, faulty smoke alarms, and concerns regarding fire exits and compartmentalisation. Electrical safety concerns included reference to faulty fuse boxes, exposed wiring, and concern that the electrical system in their home requires modernisation.

Reporting safety concerns

5.8.   As Figure 15 shows, around 1 in 5 respondents (20%) have reported safety problems or concerns to their landlord, including 12% who had done so in the last year. Survey results suggest that under 60s and non-RTO members were more likely than others to have reported safety concerns.

Figure 15: Whether Panel members have reported safety problems or concerns to their landlord

30%	22%	43%	9%

■ Yes, in the last year   ■ Yes, more than a year ago   □ No, never   ■ Don't know
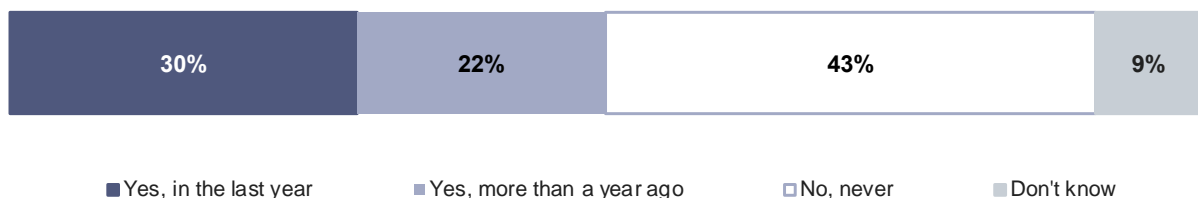
Experience of reporting safety concerns

5.9.   Those with experience of reporting safety concerns to their landlord referred to a wide range of specific safety issues. These were most commonly related to (i) damp and mould including flood damage and problems with ventilation, (ii) fire safety including issues with fire doors and compartmentalisation, and faulty smoke detectors, (iii) electrical safety including faulty electrical sockets and fuse boxes, and

(iv) gas safety including gas leaks and boiler faults. However, it is notable that a proportion of those who indicated that they had reported safety concerns to their landlord referred to issues that would be classified as community safety (e.g. antisocial behaviour) or repairs issues.

5.10. Of those who indicated that they had reported safety concerns to their landlord, around half indicated that their landlord had resolved the issue at least in part. This included around a quarter of those who had reported safety concerns who indicated that their landlord had resolved the issue "completely".

5.11. Nearly half of those who had reported safety concerns indicated that their landlord had not resolved the issue. This include some who had reported their concern recently, where the landlord was in the process of rectifying the issue. However, others indicated that their landlord's response had been inadequate, and that their safety concerns remained. This included several participants who had reported concerns around dampness and mould, and who expressed significant frustration around their landlord's response. Some indicated that their landlord had suggested behavioural changes (such as opening windows and/or keeping heating systems on) to address the issue. A small number indicated that their landlord had installed additional ventilation, but felt that this had been ineffective due to the poor standard of their heating system.

Reporting any future safety concerns

5.12. As Figure 16 shows, the great majority of respondents felt that they would know how to report any future safety concerns to their landlord; 90% indicated this, including 60% who "strongly agreed". Most respondents also indicated that they were confident that their landlord would deal with any safety concerns quickly (63%) and effectively (66%). However, there remained more than a quarter who were not confident about how their landlord would respond to future safety concerns.
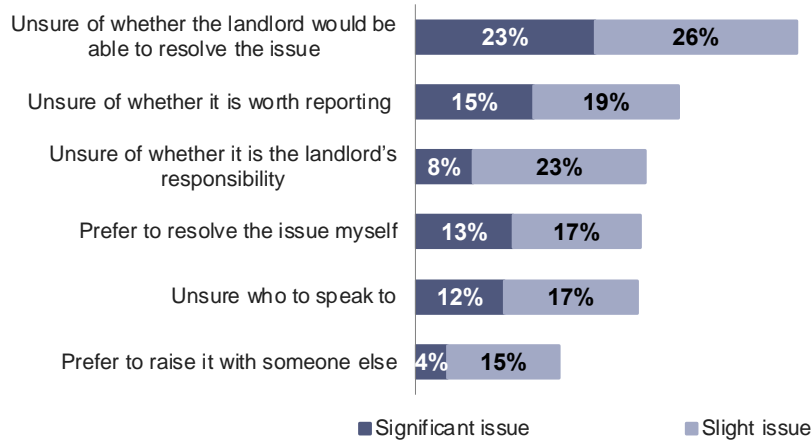
Figure 16: Views on reporting of any future safety problems or concerns
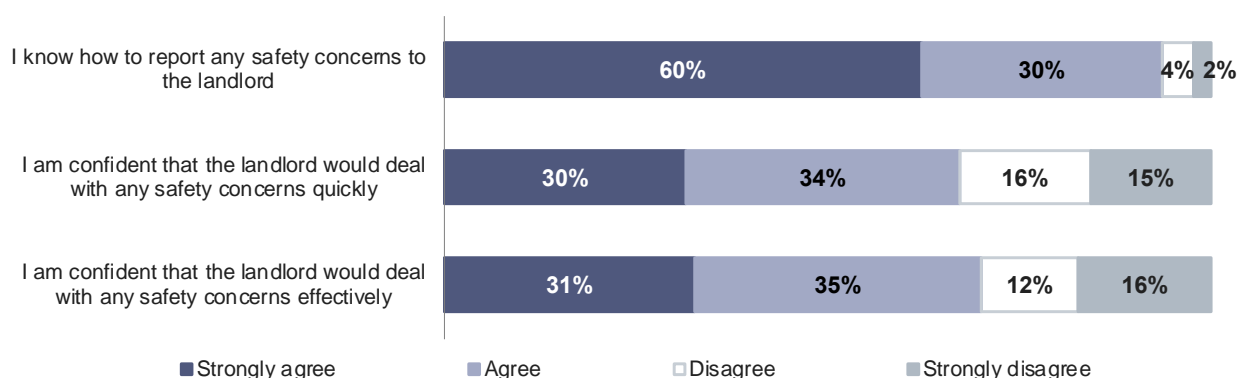
5.13. Although most respondents were confident about how their landlord would deal with any future safety concerns, survey responses did identify issues that could discourage tenants from reporting such concerns. As Figure 17 shows, this was most commonly related to concerns around whether the landlord would be able to resolve the issue; half (50%) of respondents indicated that this might prevent them from reporting concerns, including 23% for whom this was a "significant issue".

5.14. Other issues that could prevent respondents from reporting future safety concerns included being unsure of whether it is worth reporting (34%), unsure of whether it is the landlord's responsibility (30%), and preferring to resolve the issue themselves (29%).

Figure 17: Potential barriers to Panel members reporting safety problems or concerns

	Significant issue	Slight issue
Unsure of whether the landlord would be able to resolve the issue	23%	26%
Unsure of whether it is worth reporting	15%	19%
Unsure of whether it is the landlord's responsibility	8%	23%
Prefer to resolve the issue myself	13%	17%
Unsure who to speak to	12%	17%
Prefer to raise it with someone else	4%	15%

■ Significant issue   ■ Slight issue

6. PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION

The majority (67%) of respondents felt that their landlord seeks out tenant and service user views, and most (61%) would like to be more involved in their landlord's decisions.

Respondents were more mixed around whether landlords are open in their decision making (47% felt they are), and 30% felt able to influence their landlord's decisions.

Most respondents felt that their landlord provides easy to understand information (57%) in a way that suits them (62%). Views were less positive around whether landlords are open with their tenants and service users (51% think they are but 45% disagreed).

Around 2 in 5 (42%) had seen information from their landlord about Annual Assurance Statements. Most felt that these provided information that is relevant to them, and more than half were confident that their landlord's Annual Assurance Statement is accurate.
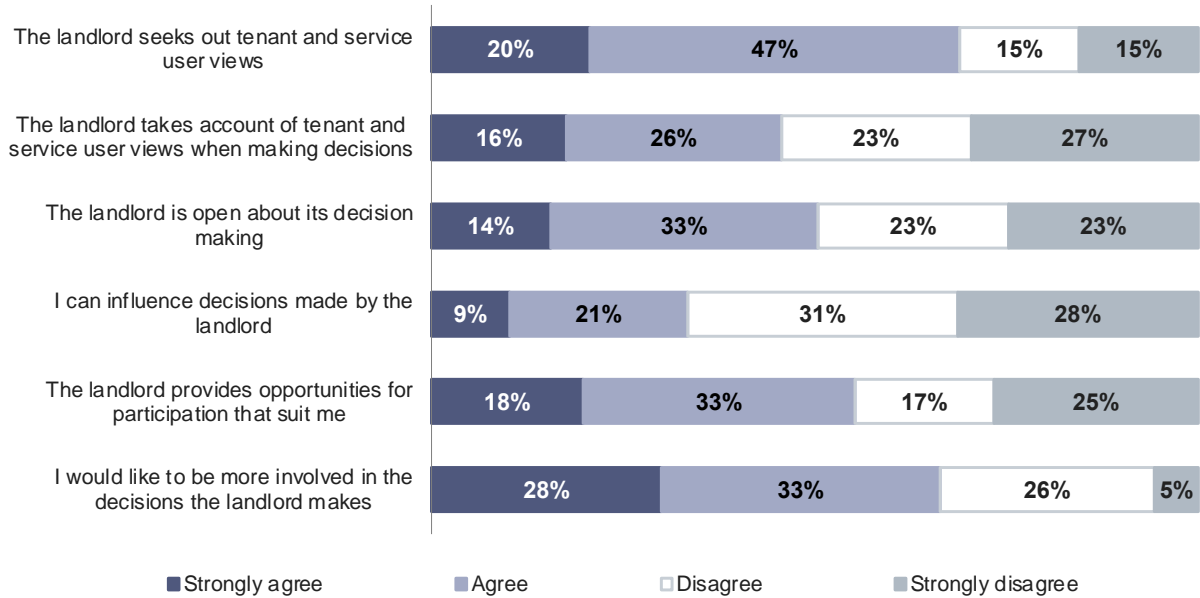
6.1. This section considers views on landlords' approach to engaging with tenants and service users, whether Panel members feel able to influence their landlord's decisions, and views on landlord's approach to communication.

Views on landlord approach to participation

6.2. Figure 18 summarises respondent views on how their landlord engages with tenants and service users. As this shows, the majority (67%) of respondents felt that their landlord seeks out tenant and service user views. A substantial proportion also felt that their landlord provides suitable opportunities for participation (51%, although 42% disagreed) and most (61%) would like to be more involved in their landlord's decisions.

6.3. Views were more mixed around whether landlords are open about their decision making (47% felt they are, but 46% disagreed), and whether landlords take account of tenant and service user views in their decision making (42 felt that they do, but 50% disagreed). Consistent with this mix of views, a minority (30%) of respondents felt that they can influence their landlord's decisions.

6.4. Survey results suggest some variation in experience across service user groups, with RTO members and, to a lesser extent, those aged 60+ generally being more positive about how their landlord involves tenants/service users in their decision making.

Figure 18: Views on how landlord engages with tenants and service users

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The landlord seeks out tenant and service user views	20%	47%	15%	15%
The landlord takes account of tenant and service user views when making decisions	16%	26%	23%	27%
The landlord is open about its decision making	14%	33%	23%	23%
I can influence decisions made by the landlord	9%	21%	31%	28%
The landlord provides opportunities for participation that suit me	18%	33%	17%	25%
I would like to be more involved in the decisions the landlord makes	28%	33%	26%	5%

Getting involved

6.5.   As Figure 19 shows, more than half (58%) of respondents had been involved in opportunities to influence their landlord's decisions, including more than a third (36%) who had been involved in the last year. Survey results suggest that RTO members and those aged 60+ were most likely to have participated in opportunities to influence decision making.

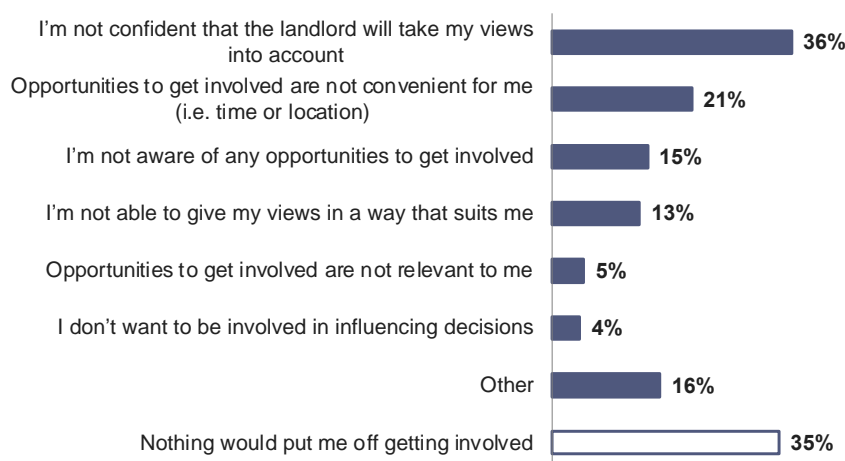**Figure 19: Whether been involved in opportunities to influence landlord decisions**

Yes, in the last year	Yes, more than a year ago	No, never	Can't remember
36%	22%	35%	10%
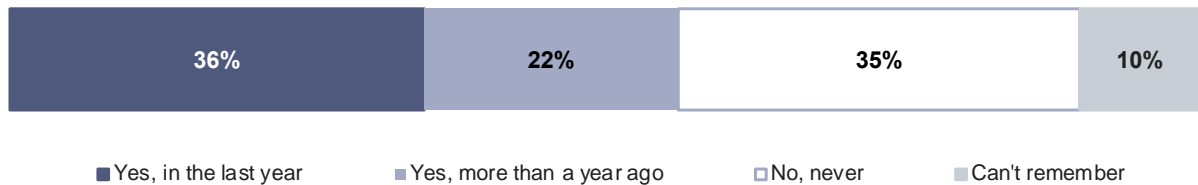
Experience of contributing to landlord decision-making

6.6.   Qualitative feedback indicates that Panel members have been involved in a range of opportunities to influence their landlord's decisions.

6.7.   This included reference to participation in **specific engagement exercises** such as tenant surveys, consultation around proposed service changes or improvement works, and rent consultation. Participants gave some positive feedback around their experience of exercises, especially where they could cite examples of service user feedback appearing to have influenced landlord decisions. This was consistent with comments around the extent to which motivation for contributing to these exercises is focused on improving landlord decisions, although a number of participants also noted that they found the exercises interesting – '[the exercise] was both interesting and rewarding. Hopefully some of my suggestions were taken on board.'

6.8. A number of participants raised concerns or expressed frustration around their experience of contributing to engagement exercises. This included comments on the approach to participation events and the extent to which this was inclusive of all service users – for example some noted issues such as the timing of events not suiting those with young children or who work during office hours.

6.9. Some suggested that their landlord had not been fully transparent with service users in the information they had shared with service users, and where the landlord did not provide feedback on the results of the exercise or how service users feedback had been used. These frustrations appeared to have contributed to some scepticism around the extent to which participation exercises have an impact on landlord decisions – 'I believe it's only a paper exercise'.

6.10. Several participants also referred to having contributed to **RTOs, scrutiny groups and other longer-standing mechanisms** to contribute to landlord decisions. This included reference to being asked to review and provide feedback on draft policies etc, contribute to scrutiny activities, site visits and void inspections, and supporting their landlord's engagement and participation activities.

6.11. Again, some gave positive feedback around their experience of these mechanisms. For example, comments highlighted positive relationships with other service users and landlord staff involved in these processes, appreciation for the support that landlords provided to enable service users to contribute effectively, and the extent to which senior management engage with this process. However, some issues and concerns were also raised. Several participants reported that scrutiny panels and other participation mechanisms had not fully returned following disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included reference to landlords choosing to use individual Tenant Advisors rather than standing groups or panels. Concerns were also raised around how much influence these mechanisms were able to have. For some, this appeared to reflect an expectation that formal groups and engagement processes would have more impact on landlord decisions.

Barriers to getting involved

6.12. Figure 20 summarises respondent views on what that might put them off getting involved in their landlord's decision making.

6.13. As this shows, the majority of respondents (65%) identified one or more factors that might prevent them from getting involved. The most commonly cited concern was a lack of confidence that their landlord would take their views into account; 36% mentioned this. Respondents also suggested that they might be put off by opportunities not being at convenient times and locations (21% mentioned this), not being aware of opportunities (15%), and not being able to give their views in a way that suits their preferences (13%). These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although non-RTO members were less likely to identify potential barriers to their getting involved in decision making.

Figure 20: Factors that might prevent members getting involved in influencing landlord decisions

I'm not confident that the landlord will take my views into account	36%
Opportunities to get involved are not convenient for me (i.e. time or location)	21%
I'm not aware of any opportunities to get involved	15%
I'm not able to give my views in a way that suits me	13%
Opportunities to get involved are not relevant to me	5%
I don't want to be involved in influencing decisions	4%
Other	16%
Nothing would put me off getting involved	35%

Encouraging more people to get involved

6.14. Qualitative feedback indicated that, for some participants, there is little that landlords or others could do to help them get more involved in decision making. This included some who felt that they could not dedicate the necessary time and energy, and others who felt that such engagement is not worthwhile. However, some participants identified ways in which their landlord could help more tenants and service users to get involved in their decision making. These are summarised below.

- More effective promotion of available opportunities.

- More flexible approaches to engagement and participation, where possible enabling individuals to contribute in a way that suits their needs and preferences. This included specific reference to more flexible times for working tenants, options for those who struggle to attend in-person events, and support for those with health or disability needs. Some also felt that landlords could be more open to ad hoc feedback and suggestions from individual tenants and service users.

- Better recognition of the knowledge and skills that tenants can offer, and a more proactive approach to drawing on these capacities in decision making processes.

- Landlords doing more to encourage and facilitate the establishment of tenant representative groups.

- Ensuring engagement exercises have a specific focus on issues that are relevant to tenants and service users.

- Greater transparency, including more effective communication around how landlord decision making has taken account of tenant and service user views.

Views on landlord approach to communication

6.15. Figure 21 summarises views on how landlords communicate with tenants and service users.

6.16. As this shows, most respondents felt that their landlord provides information that is easy to understand (57%), and in a way that suits them (62%). Respondents also generally felt that their landlord provides an accurate account of their performance

(55% agree with this). Views were more mixed around whether landlords are open with their tenants and service users; 51% felt that they are, but 45% disagreed. These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups.

**Figure 21: Views on how landlord communicates with tenants and service users**
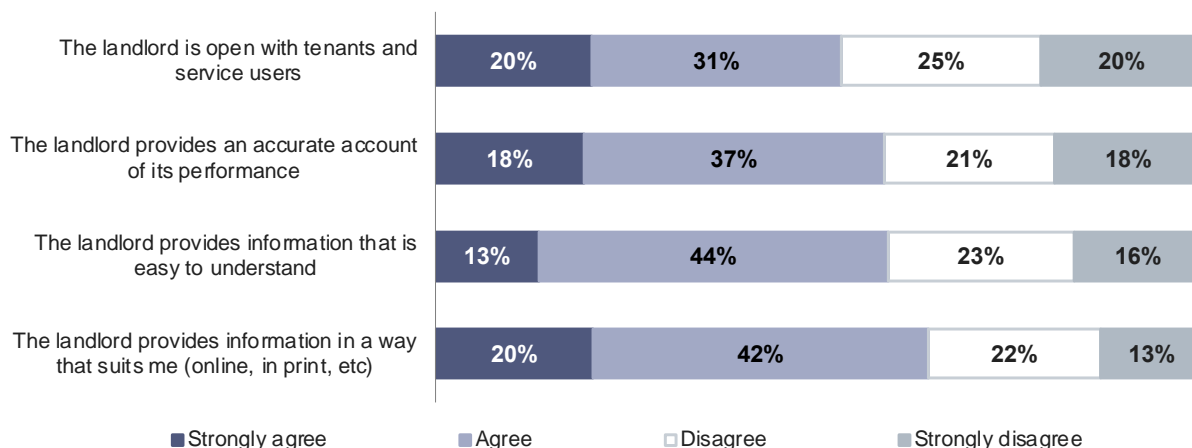
6.17. Panel members were also asked about any information that they would like to see, but that their landlord does not currently provide. Figure 22 summarises respondent views.

6.18. As this shows, respondents were most likely to mention information on opportunities to get involved in decisions; 57% would like this information. A substantial proportion of respondents also mentioned information on how to provide feedback or make a complaint (49%), and on how their landlord is performing (43%).

6.19. There was some variation across key respondent groups. For example, under 60s were more likely than older respondents to show interest in information on how to provide feedback, and on how their landlord is performing. Female respondents were more likely than others to be interested in information on opportunities to get involved in decisions.

Figure 22: Information not currently provided by landlord, that Panel members would like
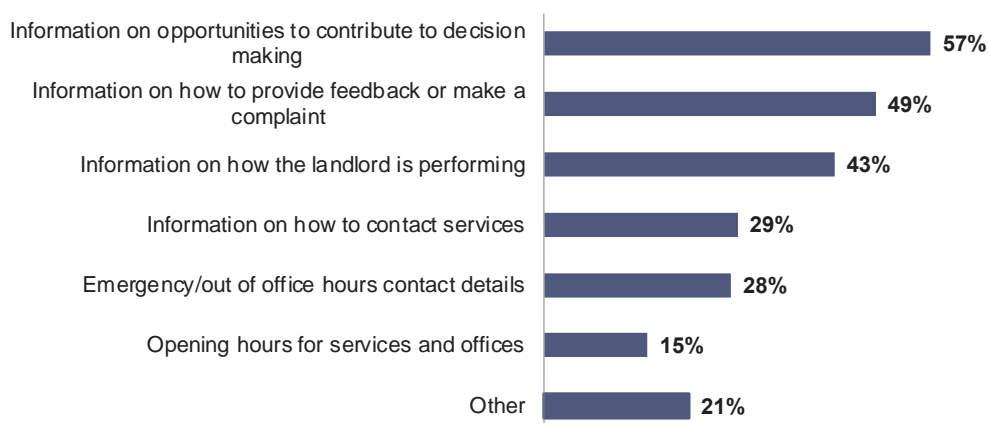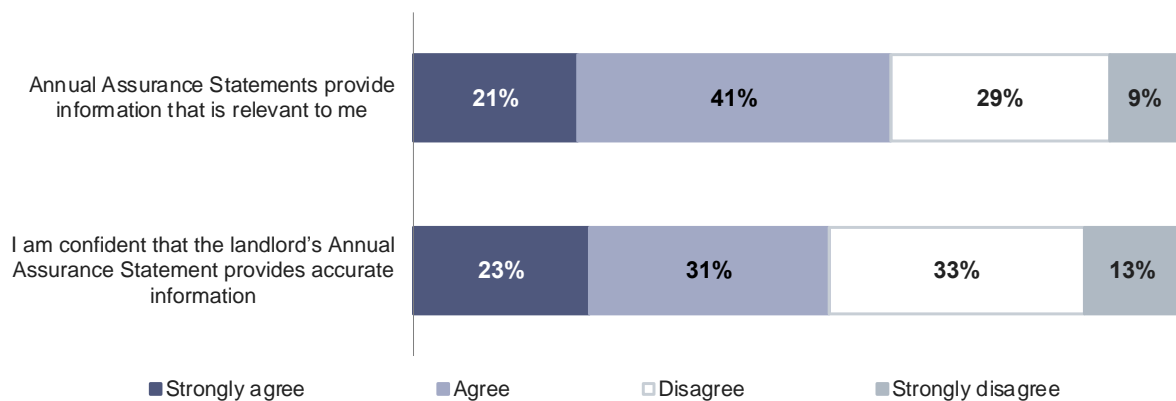
Annual Assurance Statements

6.20. The final survey questions asked Panel members about any information they had received about Annual Assurance Statements. These are a requirement on social landlords to provide assurance that the landlord is meeting the standards and requirements set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

6.21. As Figure 23 shows, around 2 in 5 (42%) of respondents had seen information from their landlord about Annual Assurance Statements. A further 31% had not seen any such information, and 28% were unsure. This represents a 12-point increase since the 2020/21 survey, which found that 30% of respondents had seen information on Annual Assurance Statements. It is also notable that RTO members were more likely than others to have seen such information.

Figure 23: Whether seen anything from landlord about Annual Assurance Statements
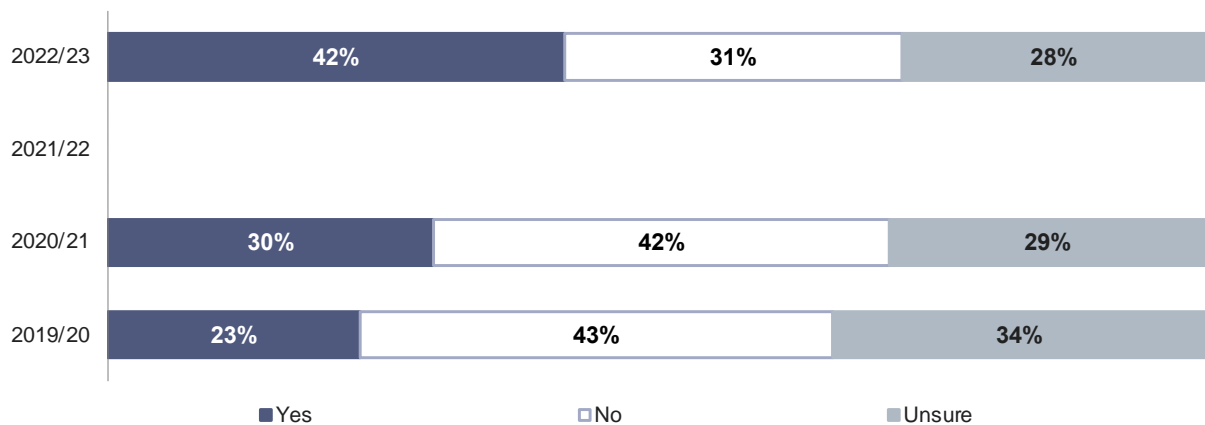
6.22. Figure 24 summarises views on the information provided through Annual Assurance Statements. This indicates that most respondents felt that the Statements provide information that is relevant to them; 62% indicated this. More than half were also confident that their landlord's Annual Assurance Statement is accurate (54%), although a substantial proportion of respondents (46%) disagreed. These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 24: Views on Annual Assurance Statements

6.23. Qualitative feedback identified a number of participants who had not seen any examples of Annual Assurance Statements, and some were of the view that the Statements are not widely known to tenants. Several wished to see this addressed through better promotion.

6.24. Amongst those who were more familiar with Annual Assurance Statements, some were positive about their role in enabling tenants and service users to monitor how landlords are maintaining their performance. These participants saw Annual Assurance Statements as one of a number of means by which landlords can share information on their performance. This included some who felt that the Statements were no substitute for more landlords providing more detailed performance information.

6.25. Other participants were less positive about Annual Assurance Statements. There were suggestions that the statements are not relevant to the day-to-day experience of tenants and service users. This included some who indicated that they did not understand the full range of landlord responsibilities addressed by AAS, concerns that the language used could be more accessible, and suggestions that the statements were not relevant for non-tenants such as factored owners.

6.26. Some also expressed scepticism around the extent to which Annual Assurance Statements provided a fair representation of their landlord's performance. This included several participants referred to specific perceived inaccuracies in their landlord's Annual Assurance Statements. There was also some wider concern that they can be a "box ticking" exercise, rather than a means for landlords to provide meaningful assurance to tenants and service users.

7. SHR WEBSITE TESTING

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

7.2. The website testing exercise involved 19 Panel members, selected to include a cross-section of individuals in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability/health needs and landlord type. Each participant was asked to use the SHR website to complete three tasks – two from the selection of tasks listed below, plus finding information on how to get in contact with SHR.

- Find information on their landlord's performance, and comparing this with another landlord

- Find out how to make a complaint about a landlord

- Find information on how SHR regulates

- Find out how to get involved in SHR's work

7.3. Specific tasks were allocated to participants to ensure that each task was attempted by a mix of individuals, and that participants were varied in terms of the combination of tasks they were asked to complete. Participants were also selected to ensure the SHR website was tested across different types of device (i.e. laptop/PC, smartphone and tablet).

Completing the tasks

7.4. Overall, the 19 participants completed a total of 57 tasks. Feedback indicated that all tasks were completed to some degree, with 56 of the 57 completed fully – clearly a very positive finding. For the case which was only partially completed, feedback indicates that the participant was able to locate the page providing performance information for their landlord, but felt that this only provided a summary (rather than more detailed) performance report.

7.5. Participants were also asked to indicate **how easy or difficult** they found each task. For 52 of the 57 tasks, participants had found it easy to find the required information, including 40 who found the information "very easily". Of the five cases where participants found the tasks difficult, four related to finding information on how the SHR regulates. These participants indicated that they had tried to access this information via the website search function, but found that the term "how the SHR regulates" did not return any results. One participant discovered that the search term "how **we** regulate" returned the required information, but noted that they were required to click through multiple links to access the required information.

7.6. The ease with which most tasks were completed is also reflected in the **time spent by participants** on each task; half of all tasks were completed within two minutes, including some who indicated that they had found the required information in less

than a minute. Again this is a very positive finding for the SHR website, particularly in terms of ease of navigation.

7.7. Participants' experience suggests that more time is likely to be required to access information on landlord performance and how to get involved in the SHR's work, than for other tasks. Most participants required five minutes of more to complete these tasks. In relation to information on landlord performance, this appeared to reflect the additional steps required to select a specific landlord (and comparator), and to read through performance report. These participants described this process as "very easy", despite the task requiring more time. Similarly, most participants described the process of finding information on how to get involved in the SHR's work as "very easy". While a small number of participants indicated that they had tried multiple routes before finding the required information, others indicated that the additional time was spent digesting the information provided on how individuals can get involved.

Information provided by the SHR website

7.8. Participants were also asked for their views on the quality of information that they accessed through the SHR website.

7.9. Again, **feedback was very positive** with participants describing the information as "very good" or "fairly good" in 52 of 57 cases. These participants referred to the use of clear, plain language across the website, and praised content for avoiding use of "jargon". Feedback also referred to site content as providing concise but comprehensive information, with sufficient detail to engage participants. This included specific praise for the inclusion of external links for those who may want to access more detailed information, and for benchmarking of landlord performance against the Scottish average.

7.10. Feedback also highlighted the range of options offered for those who wished to contact the SHR. This included reference to the option to contact via BSL as a particular positive, although one participant also wished to see the option of text to speech for those with visual impairment.

7.11. The small number of participants who were less positive about the information provided by the SHR website included some who felt that landlord performance reporting did not include sufficient detail. It was suggested that the information provided was not sufficient for a meaningful comparison of different landlords.

Overall views on the SHR website

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

7.13. Consistent with the positive findings reported above, participants were generally very positive about the website. For example, 18 of the 19 participants felt that the site design and appearance was good, while 16 of 19 described the ease of navigation as good, and 15 described use of images and videos as good.

7.14. Feedback from these participants highlighted several aspects of the SHR website that were seen as positives. These included:

- A clean design, using a simple colour scheme and with well-spaced content – "not too busy". It was also suggested that the site has good contrast legibility.

- Easy to navigate, with multiple navigation options including a search function. This included positive comments from some who indicated that they are less confident using digital technology.

- Use of plain language aids understanding – "language not overly technical, clear and accessible."

- Use of video in some sections – "a good way of communicating".

7.15. A relatively small number of participants suggested potential changes to the SHR site on the basis of their experience completing the specific tasks. These are summarised below.

- Suggestions relating to site structure and layout included calls for more prominent information and links for those seeking to contact the SHR, and more use of visuals, especially images. Some also referred to "trial and error" in using navigation tabs across the top of the homepage. It was suggested that these could benefit from drop down menus to illustrate the range of information available under each tab.

- In terms of accessibility, it was suggested that the homepage should include links to alternative language options, including specific reference to Gaelic, middle eastern and Asian languages. One participant wished to see text to speech for those with visual impairment.

- Some saw a need for more contextual information to help readers understand the information provided via the website – for example around some of the terminology and methodology that underpins landlord performance reporting.

- It was suggested that information on how to make a complaint should highlight all routes available to tenants and service users, in addition to the SPSO.

8. USERS OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

8.1. The third qualitative research strand involved engagement with people with experience of homelessness services. This focused on their experience of accessing services, any experience of temporary accommodation, and of accessing and sustaining a tenancy of their own. Findings are based on qualitative interviews with 43 households with experience of homelessness services across 7 local authority areas.

Accessing homelessness services

8.2. Participants were diverse in terms of their circumstances prior to accessing homelessness services, and the factors that had contributed to their presenting as homeless. These included relationship breakdown (with partners or other family members), leaving the family home for the first time, and having lost their previous tenancy. Participants also described a range of specific needs that had affected their housing circumstances, such as mobility and physical health issues, mental health and trauma-related needs, and addiction issues. This also included a mix of single households of varying ages, couples, those with children (including parents with shared custody) and pregnancies.

8.3. Qualitative feedback highlighted the extent to which these circumstances and needs affected their specific experience of accessing homelessness services. This was particularly the case where households had required emergency accommodation at the time of presenting as homeless. A number of participants noted that their reluctance to approach the homelessness service had resulted in waiting until they were at crisis point before presenting as homeless, often after an extended period spent moving between insecure accommodation. Quick access to accommodation was their primary concern in these circumstances, and often these participants' main recollection around the initial contact with services was focused on expected timescales for accessing temporary accommodation. Feedback also indicates that these participants were generally less focused on the quality of temporary accommodation options, and less concerned about the need for an initial stay in supported accommodation until something suitable could be found.

8.4. Others, for example where they were able to access accommodation for a short period, were able to approach services in a more planned way. Feedback from these participants was typically more focused on their engagement with service staff and information on the overall process through temporary accommodation and access to their own tenancy. This feedback was generally very positive, with staff described as demonstrating care and understanding of their needs. Many noted that this initial interaction had been crucial in reducing their level of anxiety around their circumstances, and the kind of accommodation options available to them.

8.5. It is important to note that this does not mean that engagement with service and support staff was not an important factor for all participants – including those who required emergency accommodation. Qualitative feedback made clear that contact with service staff and access to support were crucial to participants' experience of accessing homelessness services. Staff taking the time to understand their circumstances and ease their anxiety were identified as key positives around this initial contact with services. Participants also referred to staff ensuring they were

clear on what to expect from the service, including discussion of accommodation options (and which might best suit their needs) and the process for applying or bidding for settled accommodation. Again, this was highlighted as helping to reassure participants and reduce their anxiety – for example to reassure that suitable options were available, and that the service was working in their interests.

8.6. The extent to which participants' feedback focused on the initial engagement with service staff appears to reflect the circumstances from which some had presented as homeless. For example, for those leaving the family home for the first time or experiencing relationship breakdown, and those with mental health and trauma-related needs, discussion reflected their emotional distress at the time of accessing homelessness services. This included distress (and in some cases shame) associated with their circumstances, and anxiety regarding the accommodation that might be available to them. In these circumstances, the ability of staff to understand their needs and ease their anxiety was key to their initial engagement with the service.

8.7. Participants also highlighted the importance of access to formal and informal support for their experience of accessing homelessness services. Again this was especially significant for those with mental health or trauma-related needs, several of whom noted that engaging with new people and dealing with 'official' processes were particularly difficult for them. Access to support was seen as crucial for these participants' experience: 'having my support worker was the biggest help, I'm not sure I would have managed without her. It really helped having someone I was comfortable talking to.'

8.8. Access to informal support networks was also seen as a key factor for participants' experience of homelessness services. In addition to the importance of maintaining contact with family and friends, the differing experiences of single people and couples or families also highlighted the role of a partner in supporting their experience of homelessness. This was highlighted as especially important where individuals felt less able to approach service staff or support workers: 'I'm not good at asking for help. I don't think I would have coped without [my partner] – he's been a massive help.'

Experience of temporary accommodation

8.9. Most participants had been able to access temporary accommodation within the time they expected, whether they required emergency accommodation or were able to wait a short period for suitable accommodation.

8.10. As noted above, rapid access to temporary accommodation was the overwhelming concern for some of those requiring emergency accommodation, and these participants were very positive in their feedback. This was primarily focused on how quickly services were able to provide accommodation, but feedback was also generally positive around the quality and location of the accommodation offered. Several of those who had been placed in short-term emergency accommodation had felt apprehensive about the offer, especially where they had no prior experience of this kind of accommodation. However, most indicated that their time in emergency accommodation had been more positive than expected – although it should be noted that these participants had not been required to stay longer than a week.

8.11. There were also some examples of apprehension around the temporary accommodation being offered. This was primarily related to location, in terms of the quality and safety of the area, and distance from support networks. A small number of participants had refused initial offers of emergency or other temporary accommodation due to concerns around maintaining contact with support networks, but had later accepted after failing to find a suitable alternative. However, these participants generally indicated that their experience of temporary accommodation was better than they had expected. This included examples where individuals had been able to maintain a consistent support worker while being in temporary accommodation out with their local area, and others who felt they had benefited from a short period away from the difficulties that had contributed to their presenting as homeless.

8.12. This experience was also reflected more generally in feedback from participants. Although a small number highlighted challenges with their temporary accommodation, most indicated that their experience was better than they had expected. For some, this appeared to be linked to their appreciation for having more settled accommodation, often after an extended period of insecurity – 'after my sofa surfing, it was just good to have my own space and a bed.'

8.13. Feedback on the quality of temporary accommodation indicated that this generally met participants' needs. Discussion around individuals' experience of temporary accommodation was primarily focused on keeping the accommodation warm, the extent to which they had access to the furnishings and amenities they required, and the quality of the immediate neighbourhood (including any safety concerns). While views on these factors were generally positive, some specific issues were raised around participants' time in temporary accommodation:

   ▪ Location of accommodation being too far from support networks, including examples of participants being required to make relatively lengthy journeys to access family and/or support networks (especially for those without private transport). This was a significant issue for only a small number of participants, and typically for a relatively short period. However, for these individuals the location of accommodation had contributed to their feeling isolated and lonely.

   ▪ Poor quality neighbourhood local environment, with concerns primarily focused on safety in the local area.

   ▪ Accommodation in need of repair and/or redecoration, a particular concern for those with children.

   ▪ Problems with heating systems were a particular concern for those with health needs, although these participants were positive around the speed with which any repairs were made.

8.14. In addition to the above practical considerations, participants also highlighted the importance of access to advice and support during their time in temporary accommodation. Experience of support workers and service staff was generally very positive here – a number of participants suggested that access to a consistent point of contact during their time in temporary accommodation had been a major positive for their time with the service. While this included some who had required practical support (for example around benefits entitlement and support applying or bidding for

settled accommodation), access to emotional support had been vital for these individuals. This was also evident where participants had not felt they could access practical or emotional support, for example where they had struggled to develop trust with a support worker or service staff. For those without access to informal support through family or friends, this had made their time in temporary accommodation (and adjusting to settled accommodation) very challenging.

8.15. The role of formal and informal support was also highlighted in relation to how participants managed with the uncertainty around their potential length of stay in temporary accommodation. Participants were generally positive in their feedback on their length of stay. However, feedback suggests that, where participants felt that the accommodation did not suit their needs, even a relatively short stay in temporary accommodation could have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Again, this was a particular issue for those with less access to support from services or family/friends.

Accessing settled accommodation

8.16. Feedback suggests that participants generally felt that they had not been required to wait longer than expected to access settled accommodation. Indeed, some indicated that their stay in temporary accommodation had been significantly shorter than expected, including examples of prior experience of homelessness services having involved a lengthy stay in temporary accommodation. Some indicated that they had been in temporary accommodation for longer than they had expected, several of whom had experienced offers of accommodation falling through and/or had refused several offers before suitable accommodation was found.

8.17. Participants noted that regular updates and maintaining contact with service staff had been important for their experience of waiting to access settled accommodation. This included in terms of being kept up to date on progress, but also in providing some reassurance that settled accommodation would be available. For example, several of those in areas using Choice-Based Lettings highlighted frustration where their bids for properties had not been successful: 'I had a couple of places come up that I thought I was getting, and both fell through. That was really difficult.' These respondents noted that service staff had helped to put them at ease, and referred to the role of staff in supporting them through this process: 'I struggled with the bidding, but the housing officer has been great helping with that and she kept in touch so I didn't feel forgotten about.' Participants also indicated that they had been able to use this contact with staff to review their area preferences and help to shorten their wait for settled accommodation.

8.18. A small number of participants reported some difficulties with the process of accessing settled accommodation where they were in areas without Council accommodation. These participants referred to challenges where this required them to maintain contact with multiple services, including concern that some RSL staff may have been less understanding of their circumstances and needs than homelessness service staff. Again, this feedback included a particular focus on the value of a consistent point of contact in helping them to negotiate the system.

8.19. Participants also highlighted the importance of how the transition to settled accommodation is managed. A small number had been required to move into their

accommodation within a short timescale; accessing settled accommodation was a significant relief to these participants, but some felt that the 'sudden' move had caused them practical difficulties. In contrast, others commented positively where they had been given additional time (from several days to a week) to plan their move to settled accommodation. This was described as a significant benefit, reducing their anxiety around the move and allowing time to address practical issues such as access to furniture, repairs/redecoration, and setting up bills.

8.20. Feedback identified a number of other challenges around the process of accessing settled accommodation. Maintaining access to mental health and addiction support was a key concern for some participants, who noted that this had been an added factor in their move to settled accommodation. Dealing with paperwork and administrative processes was also a significant challenge for some, including those with mental health needs and those accessing their own tenancy for the first time. These participants noted that they had found the process very stressful to navigate, and would have appreciated more support with this – 'the landlord just sent the agreements over, I had never had to deal with anything like that before.'

8.21. This feedback also emphasised the wider importance of support from homelessness services, landlords and others around the process of a move to settled accommodation. Many participants referred to having received support to access furniture and white goods, and with any redecoration required. Some also highlighted the role of support from family, friends and local third sector organisations, both in terms of practical help and more emotional support. This included some who had used their time in temporary accommodation to prepare for a move to settled accommodation, for example through acquiring small appliances and other furnishings from family or friends.

8.22. Views were generally positive around the suitability of their settled accommodation, with particular reference to the quality of the local area, access to support networks, and property condition. Participants' expectations for their settled accommodation also appeared to have informed feedback on suitability and quality. For example, some noted that they had expected to be offered accommodation in poor condition and/or in undesirable areas, but had been pleasantly surprised: 'I was nervous about what I would get, but I really like the place. The bungalow suits and the location is really good – safe, good neighbours and only 20 mins from my carer. I've struck gold here.'

8.23. A small number of participants reported concern about the suitability of their settled accommodation, most commonly related to poor repair or need for redecoration. This included examples of participants being affected by significant disruption in the weeks or months following a move to settled accommodation, for example where substantial repairs were required.

8.24. Several participants noted that, beyond the initial process of moving to settled accommodation, they had found the process of adjusting to having their own tenancy difficult. This was especially the case for those who were living independently for the first time and/or those with mental health or trauma-related needs: 'I had to go from a pretty wild chaotic life, to having my own place – that was the biggest challenge.'

8.25. These participants acknowledged how far they had progressed since first contacting homelessness services, but also made clear that this had been a challenging process. Again, access to formal and informal support was described as having been crucial in enabling participants to adjust to and sustain their tenancy. For those with partners or close family/friends, this support had been important in managing the transition to their own tenancy, and in providing some stability as they adjusted to new circumstances. For those with less access to informal support networks, participants repeated earlier praise for the role of support workers in providing a stable point of contact, alongside practical support to sustain their tenancy.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. Current members include social tenants, people who have used homelessness services, tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and owners using social landlord factoring services. In terms of the wider Panel profile, the focus is on ensuring membership includes representation across all socio-demographic groups, rather than achieving an exact match to the wider service user population. In this context, some groups such as those in rural areas have been over-sampled to ensure sufficient volume for more focused engagement within these groups.

Ensuring a balanced Panel membership is also a key element of ongoing promotion and recruitment work. This seeks to expand the reach of the Panel in terms of the size of the membership and representation of specific population subgroups.

A recent Panel recruitment drive sought to replace longer-standing Panel members and improve representation of specific groups - total Panel membership stood at 476 at March 2023. Ongoing promotion will build on this figure, and seek to reach those who do not normally engage with social landlords.

The current Panel profile suggests several areas where further expanding Panel membership would improve representation. The aim of ongoing promotion work and future recruitment exercises should be on ensuring a sufficient number of members within specific groups, rather than an exact match with the wider population. In this context, the current Panel profile suggests the focus should be on continuing to boost numbers of black and minority ethnic members and potentially those aged under 35.

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

Current membership	476
Age	
Under 35	13%
35-44	11%
45-59	26%
60-74	28%
75+	11%
Unknown	12%
Gender	
Woman	57%
Man	41%
In another way	1%
Unknown	2%
Housing tenure	
Council tenant	33%
RSL tenant	46%
Owner	8%
Gypsy/ Traveller site resident	7%
Unknown	6%
Ethnicity	
White Scottish, British or Irish	84%
White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller)	8%
Black Minority Ethnic	4%
Unknown	4%
Disability	
1 or more disabilities	44%
No disability	45%
Unknown	12%
RTO membership	
Member of RTO	25%
Not a member of RTO	70%
Unknown	5%