Scottish Housing Regulator

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users

2023-24 Report

Lead author: Chris Thornton

engage scotland

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SUMMARY FINDINGS

This report provides an overview of results from the 2023/24 programme of National Panel engagement commissioned by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Findings are based on a survey of all Panel members (54% response, 230 respondents) and qualitative engagement with a total of 84 individuals. This year's programme has produced a rich dataset illustrating the experience and views of a range of tenants and other service users across a range of issues. However, findings should not be seen as necessarily representative of the tenant and service user population more widely.

Key findings across the main themes for 2023/24 are summarised below.

Rents and value

Around half (49%) feel that their rent is good value for money, but around a third (35%) feel that their rent is poor value.

More than half (53%) have experienced difficulties affording their rent, including 29% in the last year. The majority (77%) were concerned about the future affordability of their rent, primarily due to the potential impact of future rent increases.

A large majority (87%) had recently received information from their landlord about annual rent increases. Most indicated that this set out different rent increase options, and information on what these options might mean for services.

Money and finances

Around a fifth (21%) were not managing well financially at the time of the survey. Financial worries affect a substantial proportion of respondents – 79% struggle with unexpected expenses and 30% often have to delay or miss paying a bill.

More than half feel their financial circumstances are worse now than 12 months ago, although this is a significant improvement since 2023. The majority (77%) were concerned about their financial circumstances over the next few years.

Heating your home

The majority (71%) had experienced difficulty heating their home, unchanged from the 2023 survey but there has been a significant decrease in the proportion having difficulties at the time of the survey since 2023.

Energy costs were the main factor contributing to respondents' difficulties heating their home – 88% mentioned this.

Communicating with your landlord

Around half of respondents were confident in how their landlord would deal with future issues, but around 2 in 5 were not confident in this.

A large majority had used digital options to contact their landlord, and nearly two thirds (64%) were interested in making more use of digital options.

Respondents generally felt that their landlord provides easy to understand information (48%) in a way that suits them (62%). Views were less positive around whether landlords are open with their tenants and service users.

Participation

A little less than half (45%) felt that their landlord seeks out tenant and service user views, but a third (33%) disagreed. Views were less positive on whether landlords take account of views (53% felt they do not) and whether tenants feel able to influence decisions (57% felt they cannot).

Most (61%) would like to be more involved in their landlord's decisions. A lack of confidence that their landlord would take views into account was the main barrier for respondents.

Users of homelessness services

Those with little experience and understanding of homelessness services told us this contributed to their initial anxiety about potential temporary accommodation options, although some had been focused on accessing accommodation quickly and were less concerned about quality or location.

Feedback highlighted the positive impact of clear information for service users on access to and the likely length of stay in temporary accommodation.

Some of those who had an initial shorter stay in a B&B or hotel were positive about the speed of access, but others had found this a challenging experience.

Location and quality/disrepair were the key considerations for participants in terms of the suitability of temporary accommodation. Location was highlighted in terms of access to services, support networks, and safety.

Access to support was also a key factor for participants' experience of temporary accommodation. Contact with support workers and service staff was especially important for those with limited informal support networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report sets out findings from the 2023/24 programme of engagement with the National Panel of Tenants and Service Users, commissioned by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

Background

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

1.3. Regular refreshment exercises and ongoing promotion seeks to maximise the level of engagement with Panel members, and improve representation of specific groups. Panel membership stood at 426 individuals at March 2024. A profile of the current Panel membership is provided as an Annex to this report

The 2023/24 programme

1.4. The 2023/24 Panel programme was developed to reflect current SHR priorities and track views over time on key issues such as rents, finances, heating the home and contributing to landlord decisions. In terms of the main themes addressed, this year we asked Panel members about:

- Rent affordability and value for money, and key performance indicators
- Wider financial circumstances
- Experience of rent consultation
- Heating their home
- Reporting issues to their landlord, and communication more widely
- Participating in landlord decision making
- Experience of homelessness services

1.5. A combined quantitative and qualitative research approach was used; a survey issued to all Panel members in January 2024, and in-depth qualitative engagement during February and March 2024. The survey included questions across most of the themes listed above. Qualitative engagement focused on (i) exploring views on rents, value and performance indicators, (ii) views on communication and participation with landlords, and (iii) views on temporary accommodation.

1.6. This report combines quantitative survey results with qualitative findings, based on responses to the full Panel survey (54% response, 230 respondents) and qualitative engagement (with 46 Panel members and 38 users of homelessness services). The 2023/24 programme has produced a rich dataset across the main themes noted above, illustrating the experience and views of a range of tenants and other service users. However, findings should not be seen as necessarily representative of the tenant population more widely.

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

2. RENTS AND VALUE

Around half (49%) feel that their rent is good value for money, but around a third (35%) feel that their rent is poor value.

More than half (53%) have experienced difficulties affording their rent, including 29% who have experienced difficulties in the last year. Respondents identified rent levels and heating costs as contributing to rent difficulties.

The majority (77%) were concerned about the future affordability of their rent, primarily due to the potential impact of future rent increases.

A large majority (87%) had received information from their landlord in the last six months about annual rent increases.

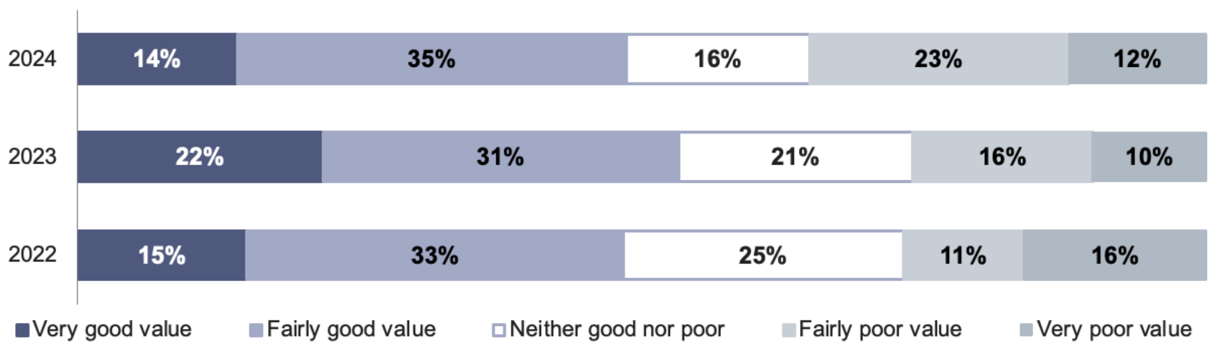
Most indicated that this information provided different rent increase options (69%), and information on what these options might mean for services (58%).

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, around half (49%) of respondents felt that their rent is good value for money while around a third (35%) felt their rent is poor value. This shows a reduction in the proportion who saw their rent as good value for money (a 4-point decrease from 53% in 2023) and an increase in those who saw their rent as poor value for money (a 9-point increase from 26%). Views were broadly consistent across key respondent groups although RTO members[1] were generally more positive than others about their rent being value for money.

Figure 1: Whether rent is value for money



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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

Factors influencing views on value for money

2.3. Qualitative feedback from Panel members identified a range of factors that inform their judgement around whether rents are value for money. Feedback indicates that views on value for money are primarily influenced by (i) the quality of an individual's home, (ii) the extent to which the landlord maintains the quality of the home, (iii) the effectiveness, efficiency and cost of heating, and (iv) how rent levels compare with other housing options.

2.4. Below we summarise the main value considerations mentioned by participants.

- **Home and heating**. Discussion of how value for money relates to their home and heating focused on the quality and condition of the home, how well the landlord maintains the condition of their home, and the effectiveness and cost of heating their home. Capital investment in the home appeared to be the main concern in terms of maintaining the quality of their home, with some noting that improvements to energy efficiency and "big ticket" items such as kitchens or bathrooms have the most direct impact on their quality of life. Participants also referred to the standard of repair work, and the potential cumulative impact of poor quality repairs on the fabric of their home. Cost of heating was also an important consideration, with participants focused on the quality of heating systems and insulation/heat retention and including some who compared the age and efficiency of their heating with other housing options. A small number also noted that recent reduction in heating costs had eased the wider affordability pressures that also affected views on value for money (see below under 'Rent levels and affordability').
- **Responsive services**. Repairs were the main priority for participants in terms of the responsiveness of services, including comments around the extent to which their landlord is delivering against service standards (e.g. around repair timescales and completion of regular maintenance). Participants also made reference to other services such as capital investment programmes (especially improving energy efficiency) and safety checks. In considering their landlord's services, some participants expressed scepticism around published performance information, and indicated that they prioritised their personal experience of services when judging value for money. Participants also considered how the standard of their service compares with other social landlords, and with other housing options such as private renting. Some referred specifically to the importance of emergency repairs, and how well landlords meet their needs "when they are really needed".
- **Rent levels and affordability**. Comments around rent levels and value for money were most commonly focused on how rents compare with other social landlords, but some also drew a comparison with the private rented sector. While most commented positively on how the rent compares with

private rents, a small number expressed concern that their rent is now similar to some private rented sector housing and this had clearly affected their perception of value. Participants also considered the scale of rent increases (in terms of how these compare with other landlords, and the cumulative rent increase since moving into their home) and rent affordability (including the proportion of their income being dedicated to rent).

- **Other considerations**. Participants mentioned a number of other considerations in the context of judging value for money, although these were generally seen as less significant than quality of home, responsive services and rent levels. Specific points made by participants included the landlord's general efficiency as an organisation and making best use of rental income, the landlord demonstrating an understanding and genuine interest in individuals' needs (e.g. through their communication and approach to participation), maintenance of the local area and quality of environment, dealing with neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour, and the security of lease for social tenants.

Value and Social Housing Charter Indicators

Background

2.5. In addition to the specific question of value for money, participants also considered the range of performance indicators set out under the Scottish Government's Social Housing Charter. The Charter came into force in April 2012 and sets out the standards and outcomes that:

- Tenants can expect from social landlords, in terms of the quality and value for money of the services they receive, the standard of their homes, and opportunities for communication and participation in the decisions that affect them.
- Homeless people can expect from social landlords in terms of access to help and advice, the quality of temporary accommodation, and continuing support to help homeless people access and keep a home.
- Owners can expect from the property management services they receive from social landlords.
- Gypsy / Travellers can expect in terms of the maintenance and management of sites.

2.6. It is the role of SHR to monitor, assess and report on landlords' performance against the Charter outcomes. Each year landlords send SHR information to show how they have performed against the standards and outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

2.7. When SHR published its recent review of its regulatory framework it said it would carry out a comprehensive review of the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) indicators. Panel members were asked to consider the range of performance indictors set out under the Charter along with the specific question of value for money.

Panel member views

2.8. Most participants expressed a general interest in having access to information on their landlord's performance, and specifically interest in the kind of information collected under the Charter. These individuals saw performance information as especially important in the context of the range of factors that inform their views on value for money.

2.9. However, it was clear that some participants were sceptical about the accuracy of their landlord's performance reporting, and this appeared to undermine their interest in Charter performance information. This included some who preferred to rely on their personal experience to judge the quality of services.

2.10. Feedback indicated a general view that Charter indicators cover the points that are most important to tenants and service users. For example, when invited for an initial response to the headline performance measures (used by the Regulator to summarise landlord performance) all respondents felt that these covered the key aspects of their landlord's services. This included a particular focus on indicators related to the quality of their home, the standard of repairs services, and rent levels.

2.11. Engagement further explored the aspects of landlord performance that most interested participants, and this focused on the following four main areas.

- **The quality of home** and the extent to which landlords invest in maintenance and improvements, was the most commonly referenced area. Discussion was particularly focused on energy efficiency improvements with participants highlighting improvements such as insulation, heating systems or upgraded windows as having had a significant impact on their ability to keep their home warm and dry, and on energy costs. There was also reference to new kitchens and bathrooms, and ensuring safety standards (e.g. around gas and electricity). Participants noted that these aspects of their home can have a significant impact on tenants' day to day lives: *"Those are the kinds of things that really affect your quality of life."*
- **Quality of landlord services** was primarily focused on the importance of landlord activities that maintain the quality of tenants' homes and ensure safety standards. Repairs services were generally seen as the top priority, especially for those who had experienced significant issues or delays in their repairs. Landlords' responsiveness to emergency repairs was also highlighted as a particularly important performance measure. In addition

to repairing and maintaining tenants' homes, participants were interested in performance across other services that were seen as having potential to significantly affect individuals' quality of life, especially more vulnerable tenants. This included reference to the response to antisocial behaviour or neighbour disputes, wider neighbourhood management including the quality of the local environment, adaptations and other services to help those with particular needs and onsite staffing and services for those in retirement or specialist housing.

- **How rent levels compare** with other social landlords and (less commonly) other housing options such as private renting or mortgage costs was a key focus in relation to landlord performance. This included discussion of the scale of rent increases, in terms of their impact on tenants' financial circumstances and how increases compare with other landlords – as noted earlier, this was also a key factor in views on value for money of services. A small number of participants identified how well their landlord uses rental income as a key aspect of performance – this included reference to how efficiently the landlord operates generally, levels of rent arrears, and whether the landlord ensures value for money in their procurement of materials and services.
- **Openness with tenants and service users** was seen as an important aspect of how landlords operate, in addition to rents and specific services as noted above. Participants referred to the approach to tenant participation in terms of available opportunities and efforts taken to ensure these are accessible. Some also discussed their landlord's wider attitude to tenant participation, for example the extent to which individuals feel their landlord is committed to the principle of including tenants in its decision making. Examples were cited of landlords being pro-active in seeking tenants' input to their decision making, and where they felt that tenants were able to have a genuine impact on decisions.

2.12. Discussion of openness and tenant engagement included several participants referring to their "relationship" with their landlord, and this was the only significant area where participants felt that Charter indicators could better represent landlord performance. These participants noted the importance of whether landlords value tenants' experience, and work to ensure they understand tenants' needs. This also appeared to feed into tenants feeling that they had a personal relationship with the landlord. Here there was discussion of whether tenants are treated with respect, and whether they feel listened to.

2.13. Participants acknowledged that concepts such as "respect" and "being listened to" are more difficult to measure than current Charter indicators such as rent levels or repairs timescales. However, feedback made clear that these are important factors for some tenants and how they perceive their landlord.

Several participants specifically expressed a preference for these more qualitative measures than what were described as “tick box” indicators.

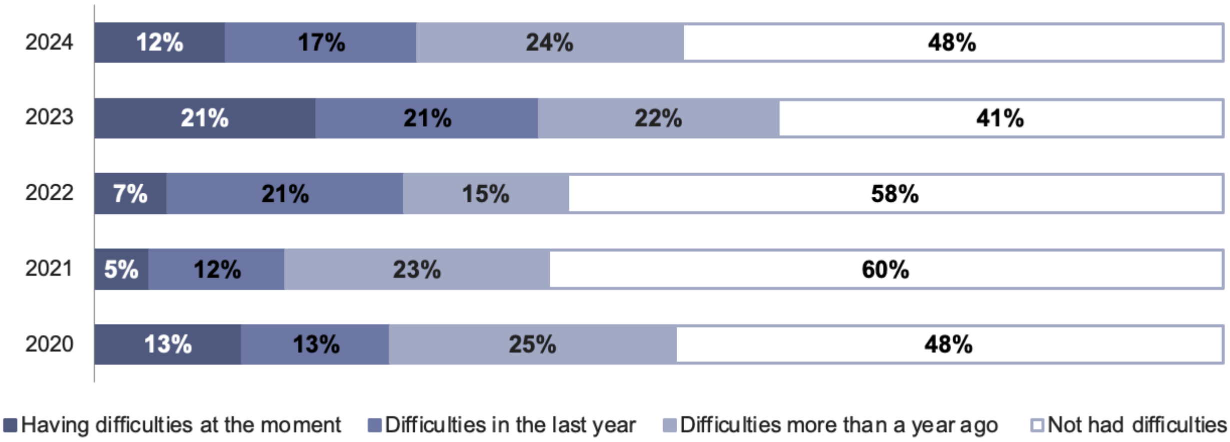
Rent affordability

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

2.15. As this shows, more than half (53%) of respondents had experienced difficulties affording their rent, including 29% who had experienced difficulties in the last year and 12% who are currently experiencing difficulties.

2.16. This represents a reduction in the incidence of rent affordability difficulties since 2023; a 12-point fall in those who were experiencing difficulties now or had experienced difficulties within the last year, and a 9-point fall in those experiencing difficulties at the time of the survey. Results indicate that experience of rent affordability difficulties is broadly consistent across key respondents groups.

Figure 2: Whether experienced difficulty affording rent

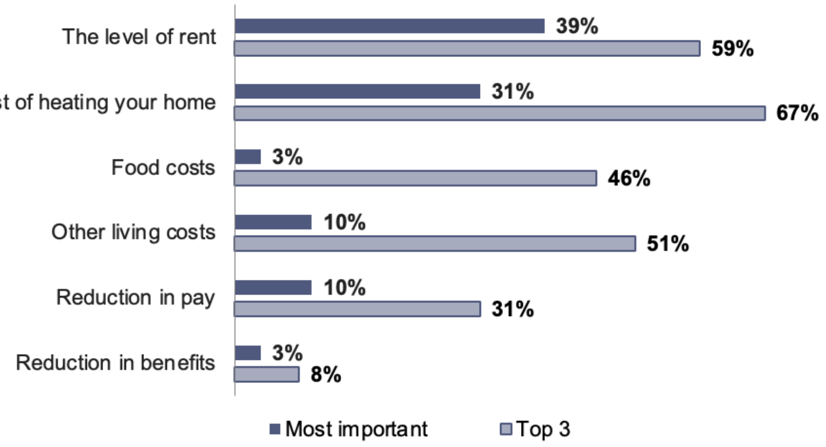


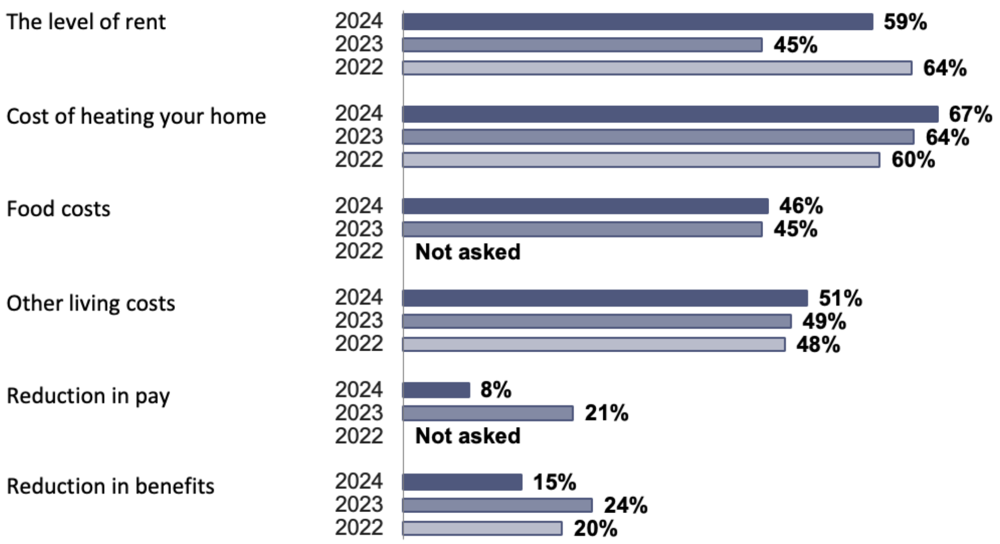
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

2.17. Figure 3 summarises feedback from those who have had difficulty affording their rent, about the factors that have contributed to this. This indicates that the most commonly mentioned factors contributing to rent affordability difficulties were the level of rent (mentioned by 59%, and the most important factor for 39%) and the cost of heating their home (mentioned by 67%, the most important for 31%).

2.18. The overall mix of factors contributing to respondents’ rent difficulties was 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 has increased from the 2023 survey. However, rent levels and heating the home have been consistently identified by previous surveys as the main factors contributing to rent difficulties.

Figure 3: Factors contributing to difficulty affording rent





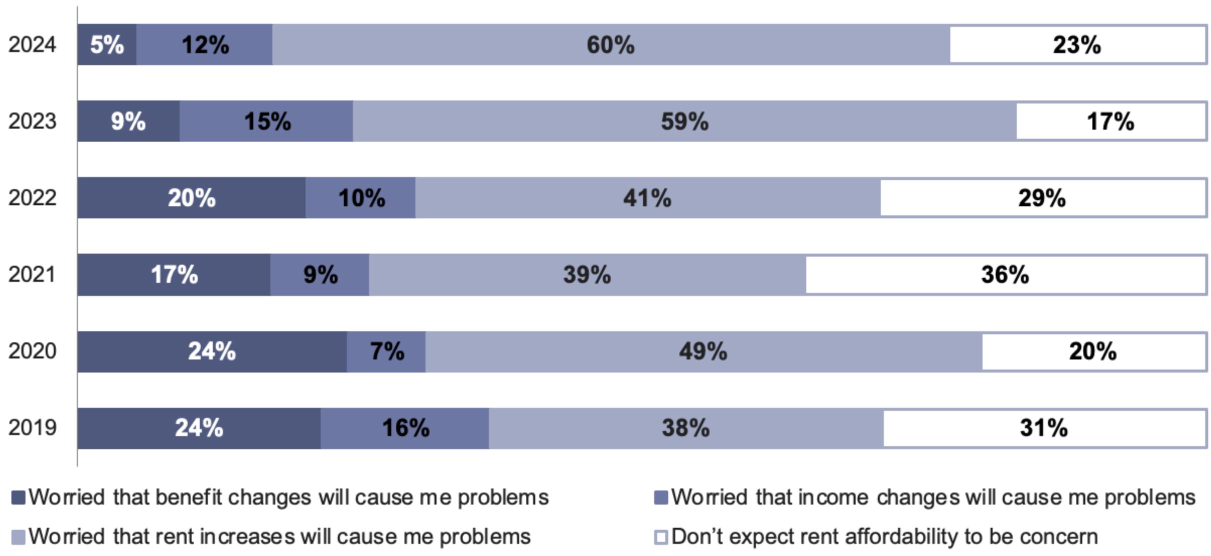
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Future affordability

2.19. As Figure 4 shows, the majority (77%) of respondents expressed concerns about affording their rent over the next few years. This represents a small (6-point) decrease since the 2023 survey but remains one of the highest levels recorded across the last 5 surveys. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who had experienced difficulty affording their rent 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.

2.20. In terms of the nature of respondents' concerns about future rent affordability, these were most commonly related to rent increases; 60% expressed concerns about the impact of future rent increases on the affordability of their rent, similar to 2023. This compares with 12% who were concerned about future changes to their income, and 5% about future benefit changes.

Figure 4: Whether concerned about affording rent over next few years



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Rent consultation

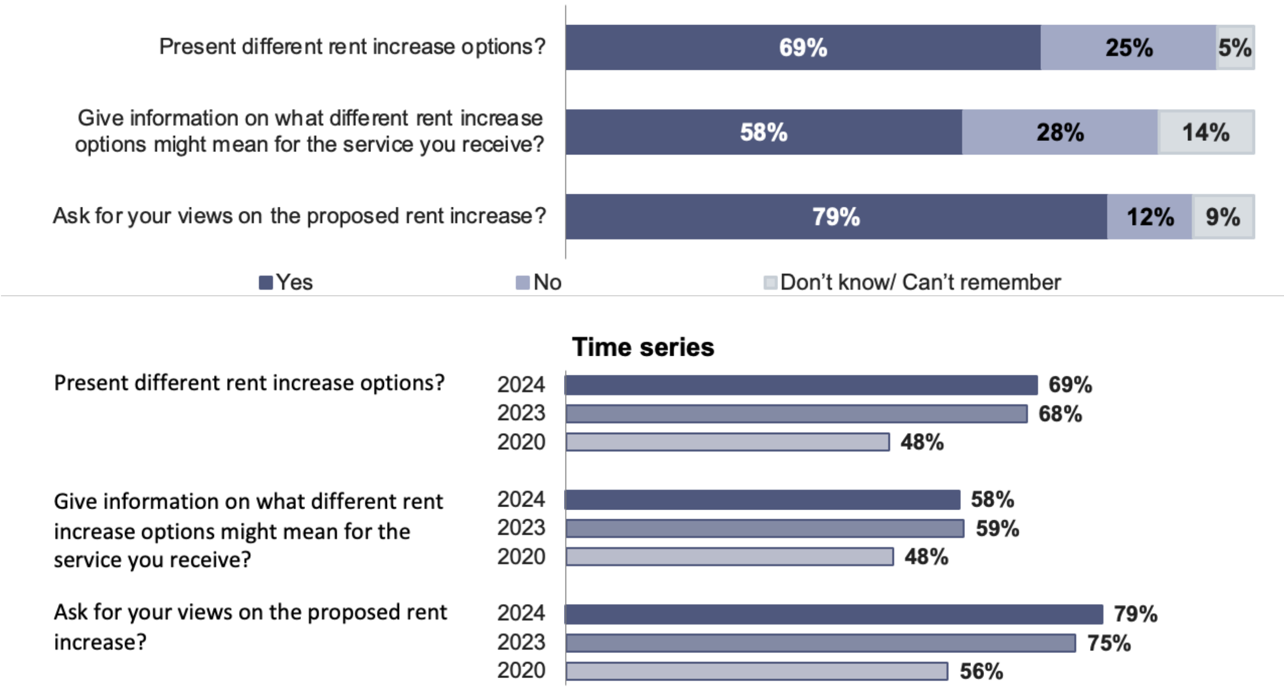
2.21. A large majority of respondents (87%) had received information from their landlord in the last six months about annual rent increases, with 73% having received information within the last three months. This is consistent with findings across previous surveys, and was also consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 5: When last received information from landlord about annual rent increases

Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

2.22. Most of those who had recently received information on rent increases indicated that this presented different rent increase options (69%) and gave information on what these options might mean for services (58%). Most also indicated that information about annual rent increases asked for their views on the proposed increase (79%). These findings are comparable with previous surveys and were broadly similar across housing sectors.

Figure 6: Information provided by landlords on rent increases



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding. This question was not included in the 2022 survey.

2.23. Qualitative feedback provided further detail on the information that participants had received about rent increases. This is summarised below.

Information provided to tenants by landlords

2.24. The majority of participants providing more detailed feedback indicated that their landlord had provided options for alternative rent increases as part of the rent consultation exercise. It was clear that this was appreciated by many participants. However, some described the information as "basic", for example noting that few options were provided and expressing particular frustration where tenants were not given any options at all. Some also reported that there was very little difference between the rent increase options offered, including negative comments where participants felt that all of the rent increase options provided by their landlord were excessive.

2.25. There was reference to examples of landlords providing relatively detailed information on the rationale for and implications of different rent increase options. It was notable that these participants were also generally more positive about the rent consultation exercise as a whole.

2.26. In terms of the specific information provided by landlords, this included:

- Accounts of why proposed rent increases were considered necessary, including reference to cost inflation and the need for service reduction if rents remain unchanged.

- The potential implications of alternative rent increase options, for example with reference to new build projects, capital investment in existing stock and debt repayments.

2.27. A number of participants expressed other frustrations, even where their landlord had provided relatively detailed information to support the rent consultation, if they felt that tenant views would not have an impact on their landlord's decision. Feedback included a perception of rent consultations as "tick box" exercises, with some suggesting that communication had been unclear about how feedback would inform the decision-making process, and others indicating that tenant views do not appear to have influenced the outcome of previous rent consultation exercises. These comments appeared to reflect some significant scepticism and consultation fatigue in relation to rent consultation.

Satisfaction with rent consultation

2.28. Qualitative engagement indicates that tenant satisfaction with rent consultation, and specifically with the information provided by landlords, takes account of several factors. Most obviously, participants were more positive in their views where they had received detailed information on the rationale for and implications of rent increase options. As noted above, a group of respondents who had received detailed information from their landlord expressed general satisfaction with the rent consultation process – in some cases despite disagreeing with the proposed rent increase.

2.29. It is also notable that dissatisfaction with rent consultations was linked to examples of landlords not providing any rent increase options, and a perception that tenants' views were not taken into account by landlords, even where multiple options were provided. Several participants also expressed dissatisfaction that tenants were not given an option to object to proposed rent increase(s), or to suggest alternatives.

2.30. In addition to procedural considerations and the information provided by their landlord, qualitative feedback also made clear that the size and potential affordability of rent increases has a significant impact on tenant views. This dissatisfaction was especially acute where proposed rent increases were substantially higher than previous years, or where tenants felt that rent increases were funding other landlord activities (such as stock acquisitions) that do not directly affect them.

3. MONEY AND FINANCES

Around a fifth (21%) of respondents were not managing well financially at the time of the survey, with 8% in financial difficulty.

Financial worries affect a substantial proportion of respondents – 79% struggle with unexpected expenses (up 18-points since 2021) and 30% often have to delay/miss paying a bill (up 9-points since 2021).

More than half (56%) of respondents feel their financial circumstances are worse now than 12 months ago, although this is a 20-point improvement since 2023.

Increased food and energy costs were identified as the biggest contributors to financial difficulties – the great majority felt these have had a 'significant impact'.

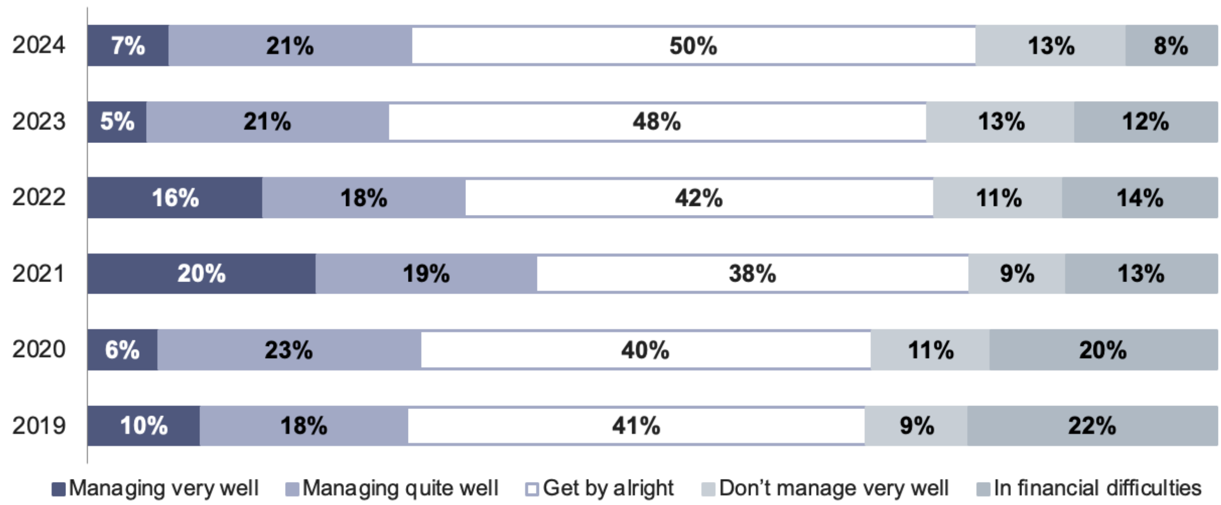
The majority (77%) were concerned about their financial circumstances over the next few years.

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

Views on current financial circumstances

3.2. As Figure 7 shows, around a fifth (21%) of respondents indicated that they are not managing well with their finances as a whole, including 8% who are in financial difficulties. These findings are broadly similar to the 2023 survey, and were broadly consistent across most respondent groups - although under 60s were more likely than older respondents to be struggling financially.

Figure 7: How managing financially at the moment



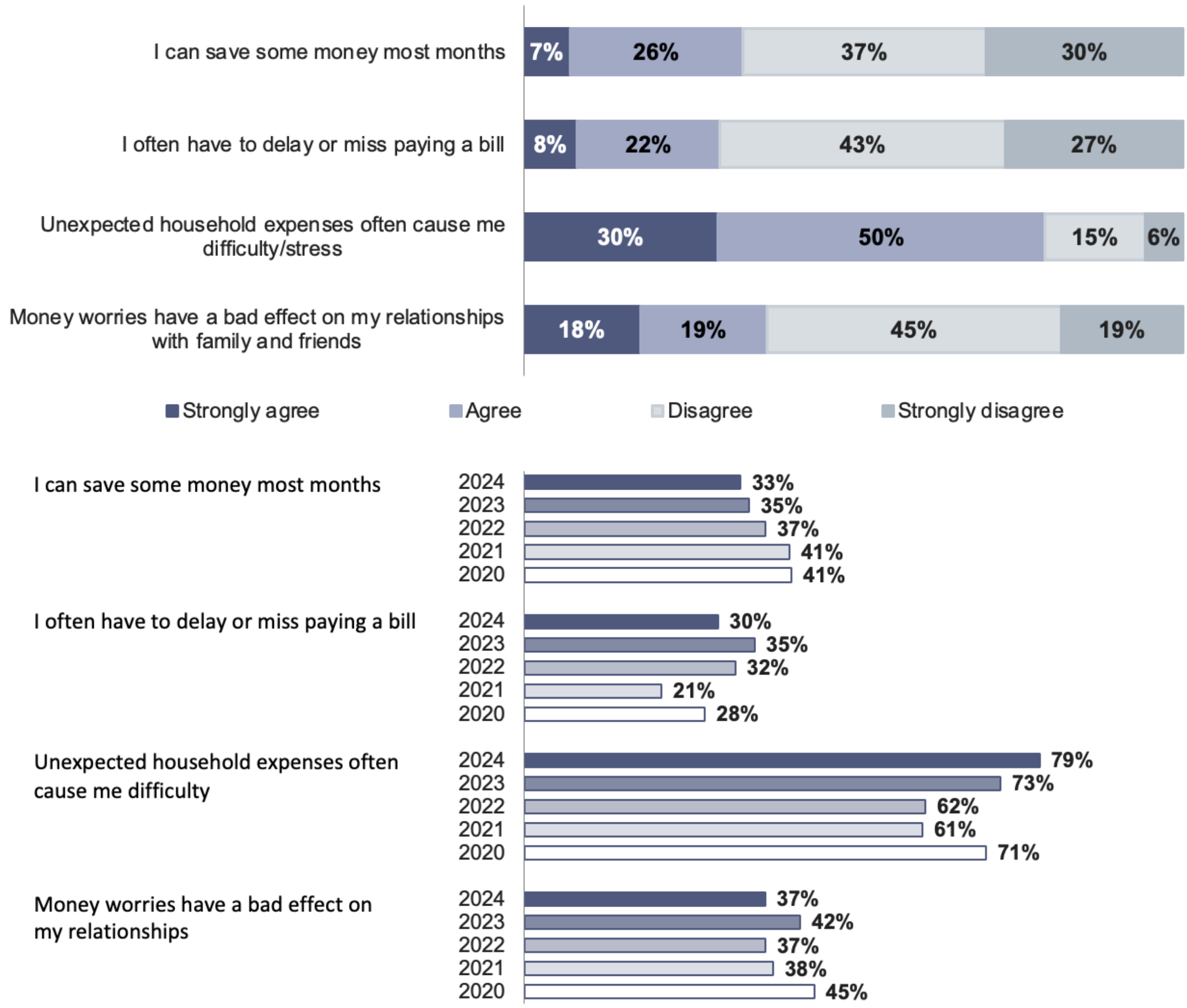
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

3.3. 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:

- Nearly a third (30%) of respondents often have to delay or miss paying a bill – a 9-point increase from the 2021 survey.
- Two thirds (67%) are not able to save money most months.
- Unexpected household expenses often cause difficulty or stress for more than three quarters (79%) of respondents – an 18-point increase since 2021.
- Money worries have a bad effect on relationships for more than a third (37%) of respondents.

3.4. Also consistent with findings noted earlier, younger respondents were most likely to have experienced financial worries. This was particularly so in relation to unexpected expenses causing difficulties, and not being able to save money most months.

Figure 8: Views on financial circumstances at the moment



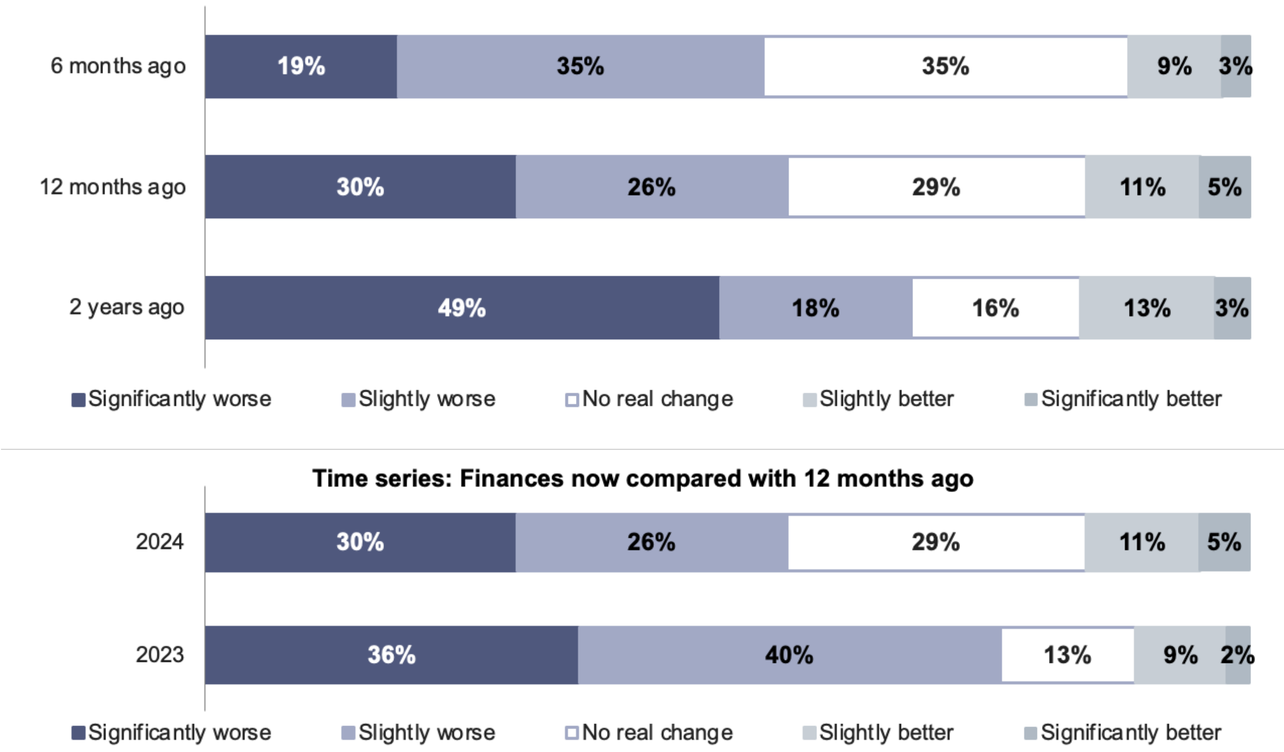
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Financial circumstances over the last 12 months

3.5. Figure 9 summarises views on how respondents' current financial circumstances compare with the last 2 years. This shows that more than half of respondents felt that their financial circumstances are worse now than 6-12 months ago (53% are worse than 6 months ago and 56% worse than 12 months ago). However, this represents a significant improvement since the 2023 survey, with a 20-point fall in the proportion of respondents who feel worse off than a year ago.

3.6. These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although under 60s were more likely than others to report their finances being worse now than over the last 2 years.

Figure 9: How current financial circumstances compare with 6, 12 and 24 months ago



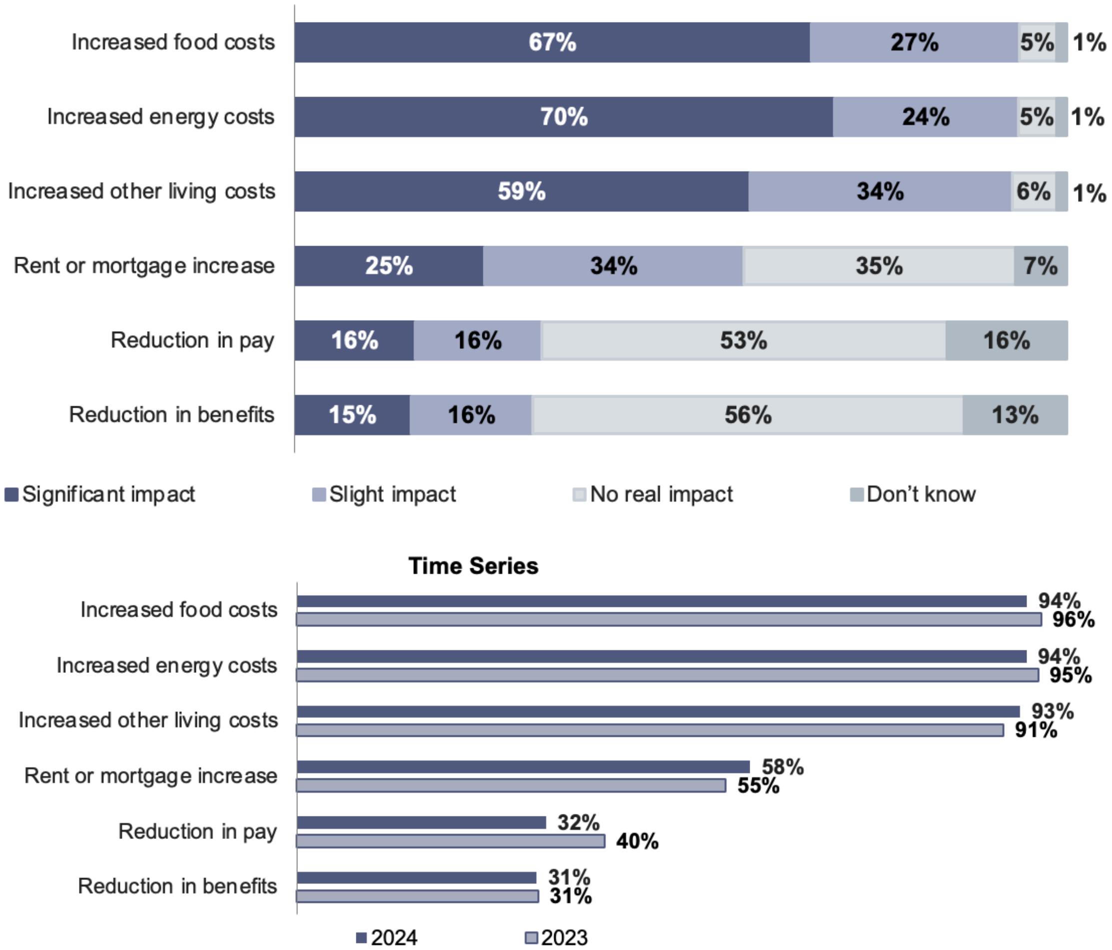
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

3.7. Figure 10 highlights the factors that have affected respondents' finances over the last 2 years.

3.8. This shows that food and energy costs were the most commonly mentioned factors affecting respondents' financial circumstances. The great majority of respondents mentioned one or both of these issues, including more than two thirds who felt that these have had a "significant impact" on their finances (70% for energy costs, 67% for food costs). A substantial proportion of respondents (59%) also indicated that increases in other living costs have had a "significant impact" on respondents' finances.

3.9. Respondent feedback was broadly unchanged since the 2023 survey, and was consistent across key respondent groups.

Figure 10: Factors affecting financial circumstances in the last 12 months

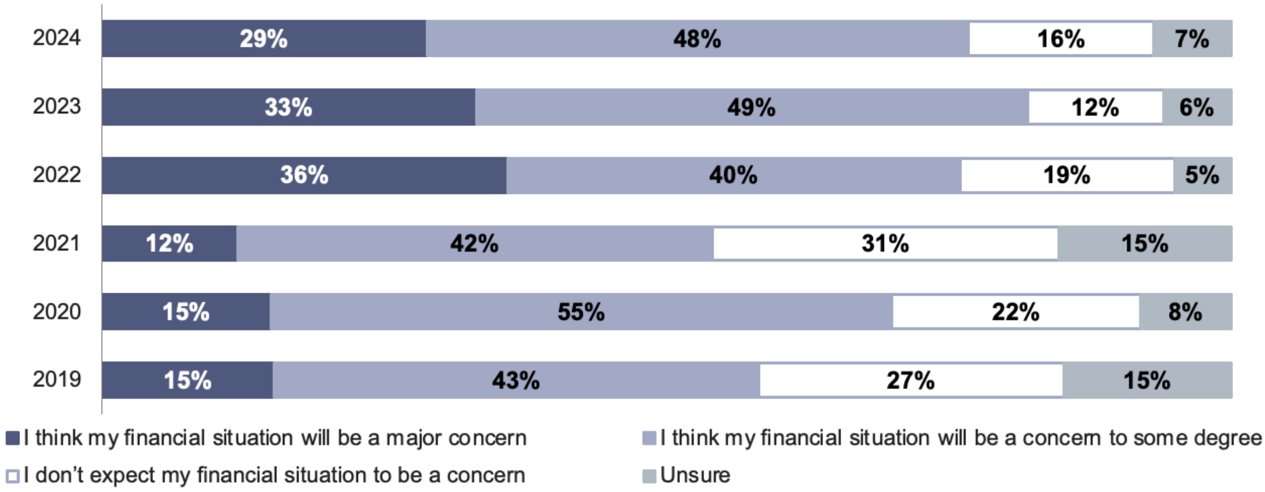


Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Views on future financial circumstances

3.10. As Figure 11 shows, the majority (77%) of respondents expressed some concern about their financial circumstances over the next few years. This included 29% for whom their future financial situation was a "major concern". This was broadly similar to findings of the 2023 and 2022 surveys, but still represents a significant worsening since 2021.

Figure 11: Whether concerned about finances over next few years



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

4. HEATING YOUR HOME

The majority (71%) had experienced difficulty heating their home, unchanged from the 2023 survey but there has been an 18-point decrease in the proportion having difficulties at the time of the survey (35% compared with 53% in 2023).

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

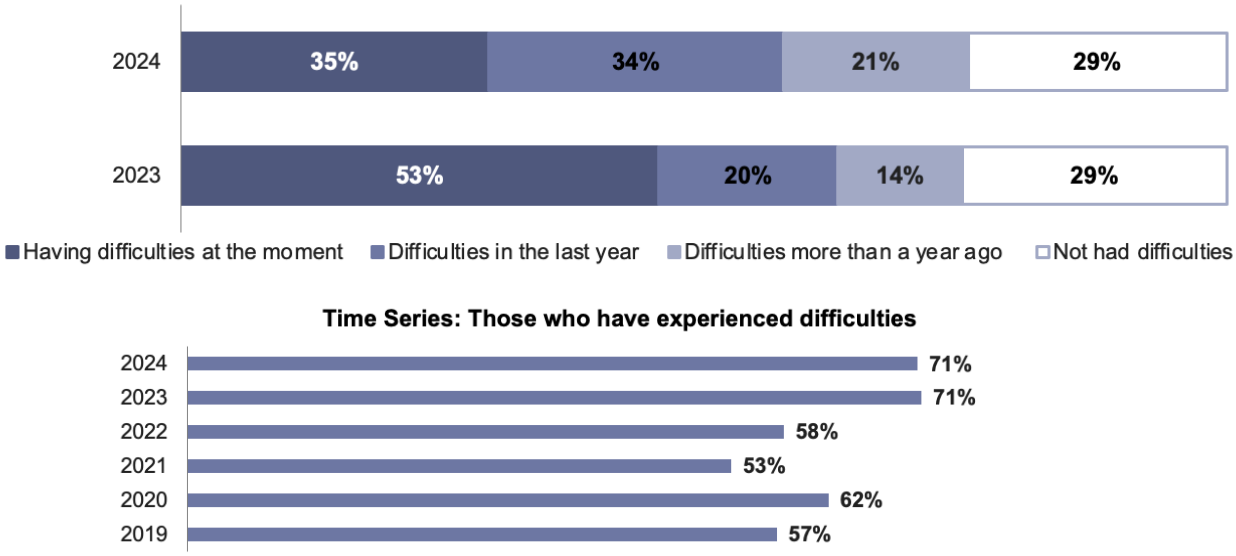
Energy costs were the main factor contributing to respondents' difficulties heating their home – 88% mentioned this.

4.1. 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 a third (35%) who were having difficulties at the time of the survey. The overall proportion of respondents who had experienced difficulty heating their home has remained unchanged since the 2023 survey, but there has been an 18-point decrease 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 in the last year had also struggled to heat their home.

Figure 12: Whether had difficulty heating home



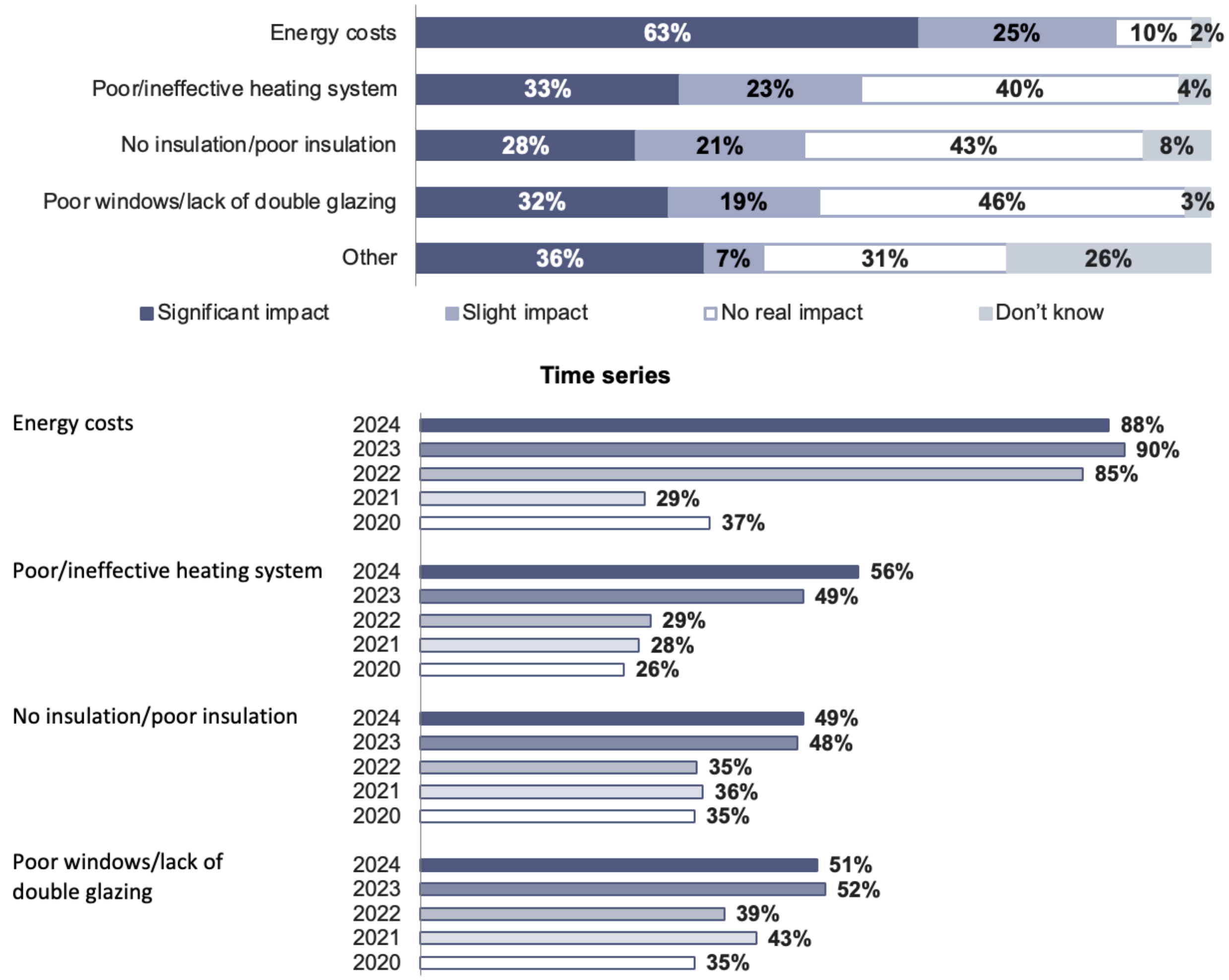
Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options.

4.4. As Figure 13 shows, energy costs were the main issue contributing to difficulties heating the home. A large majority of respondents (88%) felt that energy costs had made it difficult for them to heat their home, including nearly two thirds (63%) 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 or inefficient heating systems, poor insulation and poor windows have had a significant impact on heating their home. Qualitative feedback from participants also indicates that individuals have particular difficulty heating their home where high energy costs are compounded with other problems with their heating system and/or home. Participants highlighted the impact of poor heat retention and inefficient heating systems on their energy costs, including examples where individuals had to go without heating for periods of time. This was identified as a particular problem for those with disability or health conditions.

4.6. These findings are broadly similar to previous surveys. However, the proportion of respondents who felt that energy costs had made it difficult for them to heat their home is nearly three times that reported in the 2021 survey.

Figure 13: Factors contributing to difficulty heating the home



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

5. COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LANDLORD

Around three quarters (74%) had reported issues to their landlord in the last year, most commonly repairs.

Around half were confident in how their landlord would deal with future issues, but around 2 in 5 were not confident in this.

A large majority had used digital options to contact their landlord, most commonly via their website (74%) or email (80%). Nearly two thirds (64%) were interested in making more use of digital options.

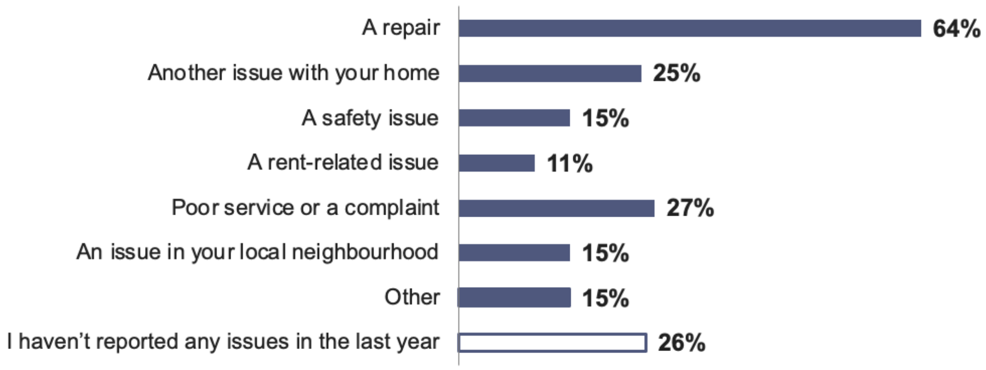
Respondents generally felt that their landlord provides easy to understand information (48%) in a way that suits them (62%). Views were less positive around whether landlords are open with their tenants and service users (43% think they are but 40% disagreed).

5.1. This section considers Panel members' views on communicating with their landlord, including specific experience of reporting any concerns and issues. Findings presented in this section bring together survey results and more in-depth qualitative feedback.

Experience of reporting issues

5.2. Around three quarters (74%) of respondents indicated that they had reported one or more issues to their landlord in the last year. As Figure 14 shows, repairs were by far the most common issue mentioned by respondents; 64% had reported a repair in the last year. Other issues reported by respondents included poor service or a complaint (27%), or another issue with their home (25%).

Figure 14: Whether reported any issues to landlord in the last year



Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options.

Landlords' response

5.3. Panel members were asked to provide further detail around how their landlord responded to their reporting of issues, and the extent to which these issues had been resolved.

5.4. Consistent with the profile of issues shown at Figure 14, participants most commonly discussed the scheduling and completion of repair work. These commonly were primarily focused on the speed of service response and whether the repair was completed first time. However, some also described more complex cases for example where there was disagreement over who was responsible for a repair, or where multiple visits were required to resolve an issue.

5.5. In more complex cases, participants were still focused primarily on how quickly repairs were completed and issues resolved. This was evident in praise for landlord services where repairs had been completed quickly, and in frustration being expressed where repair work had taken longer than expected. This frustration was especially acute where participants saw this as the fault of the landlord; for example due to missed appointments or where participants felt they had to chase up repair requests. This latter point was mentioned by a number of participants, linked to a view from some that "being persistent" and "shouting loudest" was necessary to ensure repairs are progressed.

5.6. Others suggested that their landlord had not taken their reporting of repairs seriously, including a small number who expressed wider concerns around the extent to which landlord services demonstrate trust and respect for their tenants and service users. The demonstration of respect was also highlighted as an issue in relation to other issues reported to landlords. For example, some those reporting poor service and/or wishing to make a complaint indicated that these had been prompted by staff interactions which were felt to be rude or disrespectful.

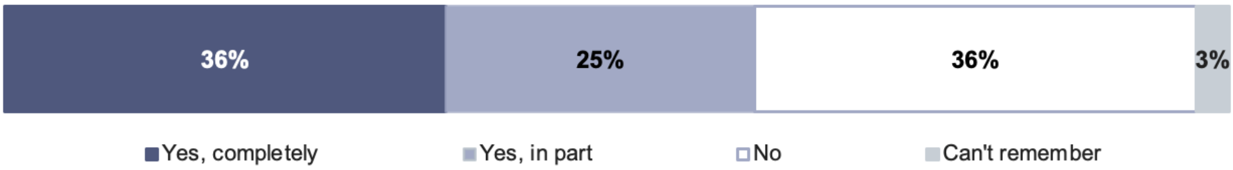
5.7. Participants also referred to trust and respect more generally in their landlord's response to reported issues. This included participants who questioned whether service staff had taken them seriously, for example when reporting neighbourhood issues or antisocial behaviour. The way in which their landlord communicated with them in response to a reported issue, and in particular whether they were kept up to date with progress, were identified as key factors in whether individuals felt that their concerns were being taken seriously.

Resolving issues

5.8. As Figure 15 shows, 61% of those who had reported an issue to their landlord indicated that their landlord had been able to resolve the issue – although a minority (36%) felt the issue had been not completely resolved. Survey results suggest that RTO members were more likely than others to feel that their landlord had completely resolved their issue.

5.9. Some of those with unresolved issues were still waiting for a response from their landlord at the time of the survey, but most indicated that their landlord's response had been insufficient. This included several who had reported antisocial behaviour, neighbour disputes and issues with the local environment. While some of these acknowledged the challenges for landlords investigating and resolving these issues, comments also indicated frustration and concern that their landlord had not taken their reports seriously. This also appeared to be a source of significant dissatisfaction for other tenants, where individuals had felt that staff had not taken them seriously when they reported issues.

Figure 15: Whether landlord resolved issue



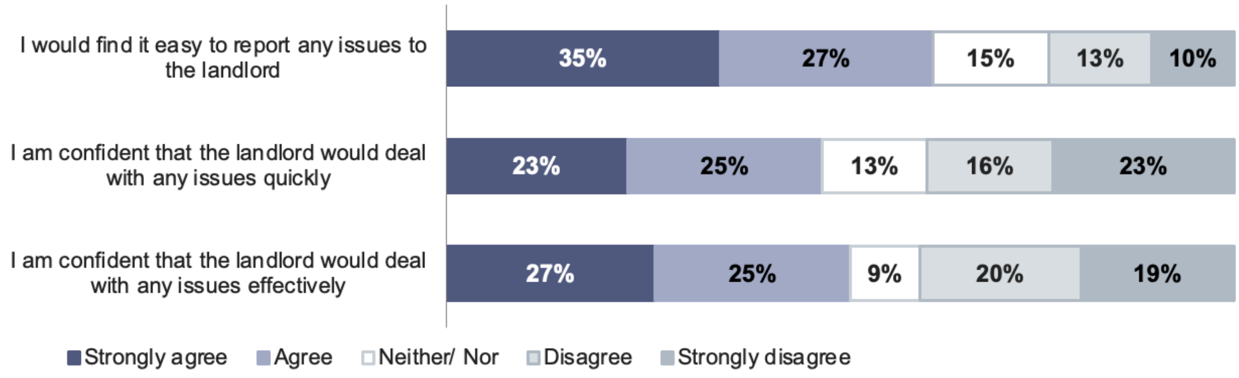
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Reporting issues in the future

5.10. As Figure 16 shows, the majority of respondents (62%) felt that they would know how to report any future issues to their landlord. Around half of respondents also indicated that they were confident that their landlord would deal with any safety concerns quickly (48%) and effectively (51%). However, there remained around 2 in 5 respondents who were not confident about how their landlord would respond to future issues.

5.11. Qualitative feedback from those who were not confident in reporting any future issues suggests that this is most commonly linked to previous experience of significant delays in repairs being completed or issues being resolved. These participants highlighted a range of factors that were seen as having contributed to previous delays, such as repair work not being completed properly. Other participants felt that their landlord had demonstrated a lack of understanding of their needs, or for example the extent to which neighbour disputes or antisocial behaviour can affect their wellbeing. This appeared to have undermined individuals' confidence in how their landlord will respond to future issues, if participants feel that they will not be listened to.

Figure 16: Views on reporting any future issues



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Using different contact options

5.12. Panel members were asked about their experience of the different contact methods they use to get in touch with their landlord, and any difficulties or issues they have encountered. Feedback on issues specific to the main contact options used by participants is summarised below.

5.13. Participants indicated that they usually find it easy to get hold of their landlord via telephone, and commented positively on the friendly manner of staff. There was also some positive feedback on the ease with which participants were able to resolve their query over the phone, including around their landlord's efficiency in arranging and keeping appointments. However, this is also where participants experienced the most significant issues. Although it was easy to get in touch with their landlord via telephone, participants did report frustration where staff could not help with their query, where they were unable to speak to the right person, and/or where calls were not returned. It is notable that these experiences tended to relate to less typical or more complex requests. This may be significant as several participants indicated that they preferred to use telephone contact specifically for more involved or complex issue that may be difficult to put in writing.

5.14. A number of participants indicated a preference for contacting their landlord via email or webchat. Some simply expressed a general preference for written communication, while others found email or webchat more convenient than telephone (e.g. not being confined to office hours) and highlighted that it avoided the cost of a phone call. It was also noted that written communication can better suit those who experience anxiety around using the phone, and those for whom English is not a first language.

5.15. Some had seen significant improvements in the functionality of their landlord's website, including wider access to online reporting of repairs or other issues. However, those who make use of these options generally felt that their landlord was less responsive to email or online requests than for other communication methods. For example, several indicated that their preference is to use email but that they often have to use telephone contact to get a response: *"calling is a more reliable way of getting them to do something. I prefer email… but that isn't a good way of getting a response."* Privacy concerns were also raised where email requests are perceived to go into a single shared mailbox.

5.16. Few participants indicated that they usually use in-person contact to get in touch with their landlord - indeed some were unaware of the opening hours for local offices or arrangements for accessing services in-person. However, a small number of individuals indicated that they regularly use nearby local offices, especially for more difficult issues such as antisocial behaviour or neighbour disputes.

5.17. When asked to reflect on their overall experience of contacting their landlord, participants cited a range of positive examples of contact methods working well. This positive feedback was generally focused on the responsiveness of services in terms of arranging and completing required works, providing requested information or otherwise resolving requests. Some noted that they had built up a relationship over time with service staff, such as those handling calls, and found that this helped to ensure that their landlord understood their particular needs and circumstances. This included tenants with on-site staff who were typically the first point of contact to report a repair or raise issues relating to their accommodation – *"the manager here makes a huge difference…she's always available and takes time to listen and understand."*

5.18. Most participants cited examples where services had not been as easy to contact or as responsive as they would have liked. Some mentioned issues when trying to contact services (such as telephone queues), but highlighted more significant concerns where they had experienced delays or difficulties resolving issues. This included examples of participants feeling that they have to "chase up" service requests, and of persistent scheduling issues including difficulty finding a suitable date/time and difficulty rescheduling if appointments are not kept. Feedback was generally positive on the manner and helpfulness of landlord staff, including those carrying out repair work, but some reported cases of what was seen as poor communication between their landlord and the contractor undertaking works.

5.19. Participants also reported feeling "dismissed" or not taken seriously by their landlord, and of a lack of transparency for example where they were not kept up to date with progress regarding their request. Some of these examples related to potentially more complex or difficult to resolve requests such as antisocial behaviour/neighbour disputes, querying service charges and requests for flexibility to accommodate particular needs or circumstances. These participants acknowledged that some issues can take longer to resolve, but felt that the way in which the landlord dealt with their requests did not demonstrate understanding or empathy. There was also reference to landlord staff carrying out visual checks on repair requests before they are actioned as being dismissive of tenants.

5.20. For some, the above examples appeared to be linked to a wider concern that access to landlord services may be more difficult for those with particular needs or vulnerabilities. This included specific reference to potential barriers for those with learning difficulties or language barriers, such as landlords being less able to accommodate advocates or other third parties in communication. There was also more general concern that "less assertive" tenants may struggle to ensure that their needs are recognised – *"I'm able to make sure staff understand my needs, that's my personality"*.

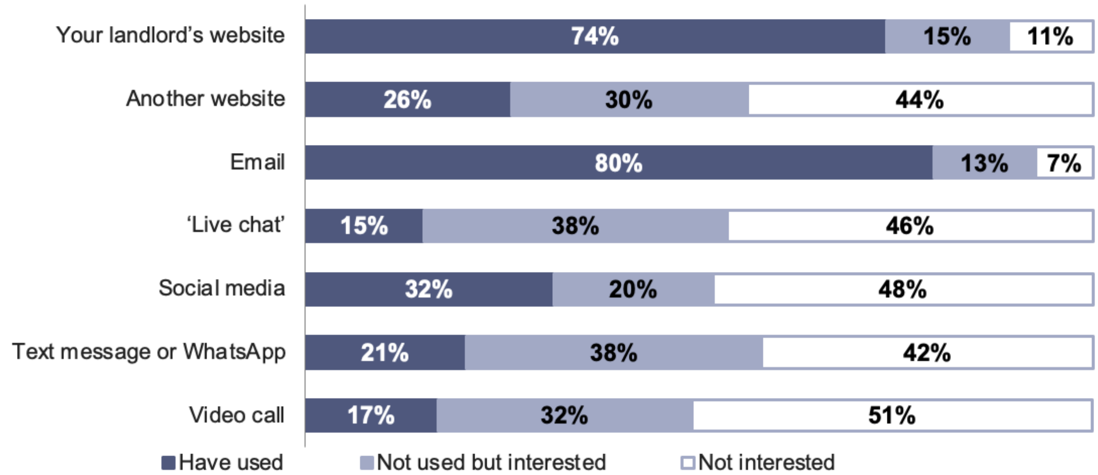
Digital options

5.21. As Figure 17 shows, the majority of respondents had used one or more digital communication options to contact their landlord. This was primarily via their landlord's website (74% have done this) or email (80% have done this).

5.22. Other digital options were less commonly used. For example, around a third (32%) had contacted their landlord via social media, a quarter (26%) by another website, and around a fifth (21%) by SMS or WhatsApp. However, survey results suggest there is a substantial proportion of respondents who are interested in expanding their use of digital options to contact their landlord. Overall, nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents expressed an interest in using one or more digital options that they do not currently use. Interest was most widespread in relation to SMS/WhatsApp (38%) and 'live chat' (38%).

5.23. Interest in digital options showed little significant variation across key respondent groups, although those aged under 60 and female respondents were more likely than others to wish to use SMS or WhatsApp.

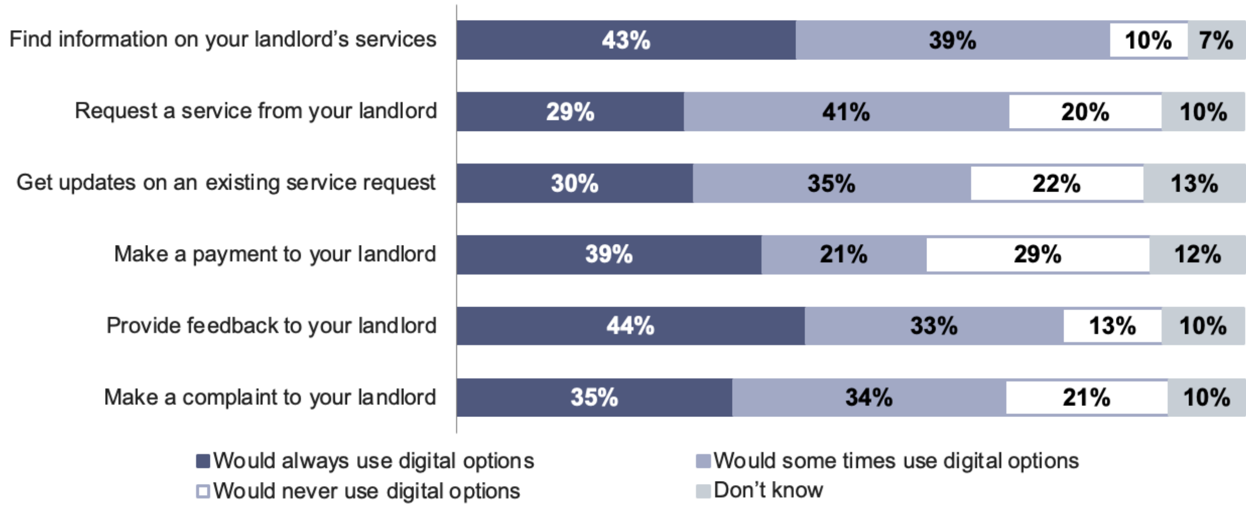
Figure 17: Whether used or interested in digital options to communicate with landlord



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

5.24. Panel members were also asked about the tasks where they would be most likely to use a digital option to contact their landlord. As Figure 18 shows, respondents were most likely to use digital options to find information on their landlord's services (83% would sometimes use digital options for this) and providing feedback to their landlord (77%). However, it is notable that, for all of the tasks listed at Figure 18, most respondents would use digital options at least some of the time. Indeed, 9 in 10 respondents (90%) indicated that they would sometimes use digital options for one or more of these tasks.

Figure 18: Likelihood of using digital options for specific purposes



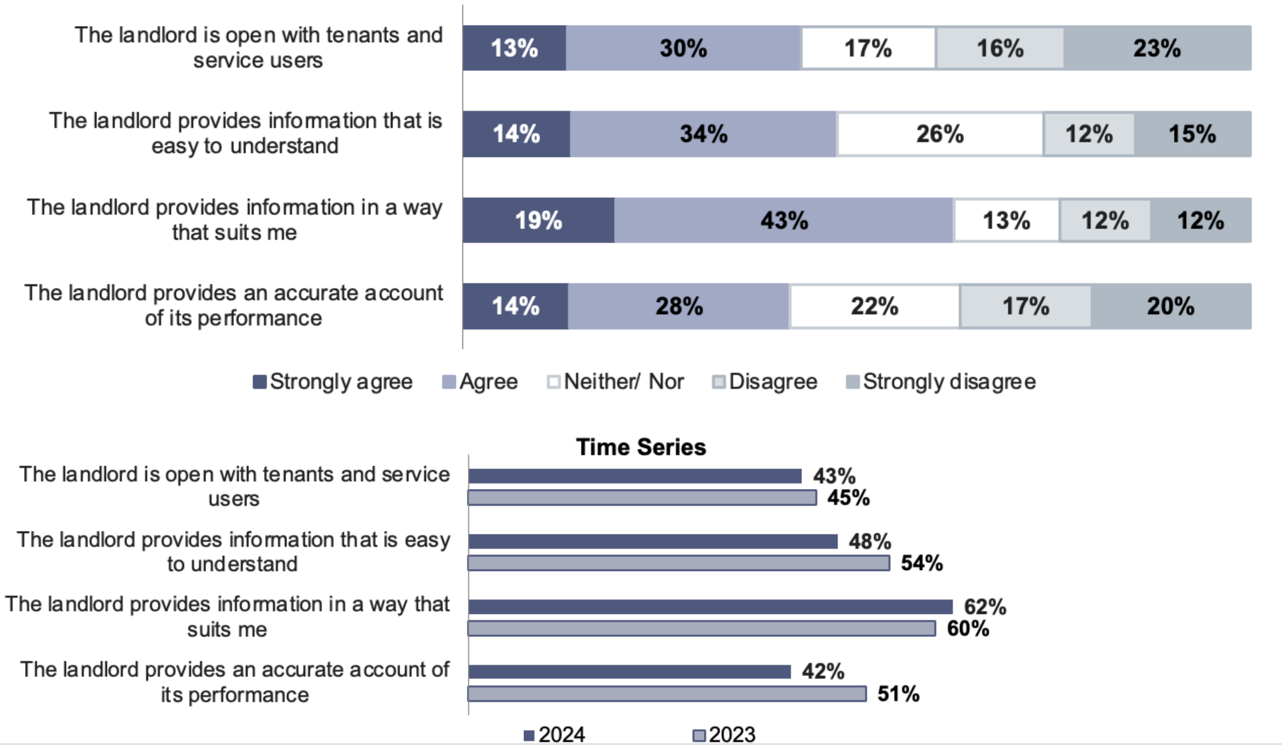
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Views on landlord approach to communication

5.25. Figure 19 summarises views on how landlords communicate with tenants and service users.

5.26. This shows that respondents generally felt that their landlord provides information that is easy to understand (48%), and in a way that suits them (62%). However, views were divided on whether their landlord is open with tenants/service users (43% felt that they are but 40% disagreed) and whether they provide an accurate account of their performance (42% agree but 37% disagree). Survey results indicate some variation in views across key respondent groups. In particular, RTO members and those aged 60+ were generally more positive about their landlord being open with tenants, and providing accurate performance information.

Figure 19: Views on how landlord communicates with tenants and service users



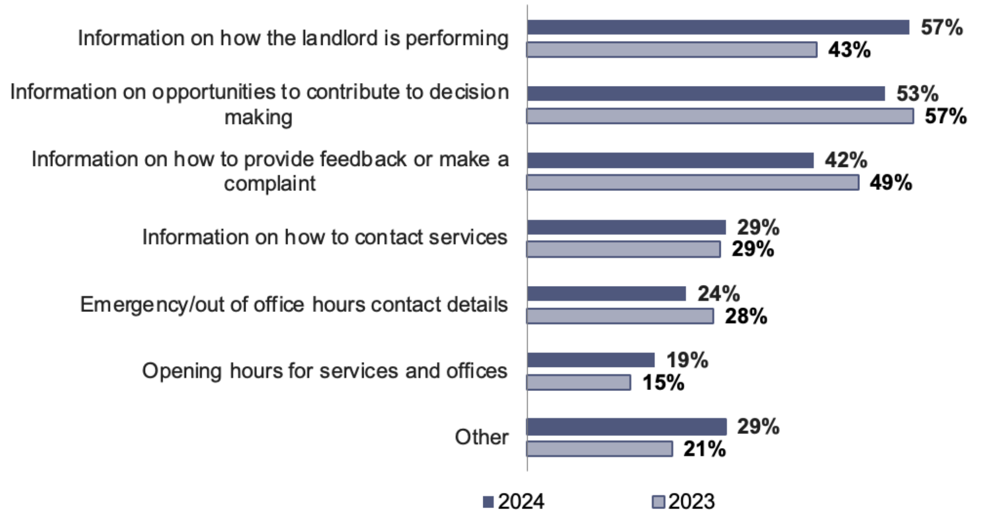
Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

5.27. Panel members were also asked about any information that they would like to see, but that their landlord does not currently provide. Figure 20 summarises respondent views.

5.28. As this shows, respondents were most likely to mention information on how their landlord is performing (57% would like this) and on opportunities to get involved in decisions (53% would like this). A substantial proportion of respondents also mentioned information on how to provide feedback or make a complaint (42%). These views were broadly similar to those reported in 2023, although there has been a 14-point increase in the proportion who are interested in landlord performance information.

5.29. There was also some variation across key respondent groups. For example, under 60s were more likely than older respondents to show interest in information on how to contact services, opening hours and emergency/out of hours contacts, and on how their landlord is performing.

Figure 20: Information not currently provided by landlord, that members would like



Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options.

5.30. Further comments from respondents included a number of suggestions for areas where landlords could improve communication with service users. These are summarised below.

- Being more accessible including easier to contact by phone and more reliable in responding to tenants making contact, especially by phone and email.
- Ensuring service users have access to a variety of communication options, including digital, telephone and in-person options. This included calls for better maintenance of website and social media information to ensure it is current.
- Being more flexible and responsive to individual needs when communication with vulnerable service users or those with additional support needs (for example, communication via advocates, recommendations for sensitivity training, etc).
- Making sure that service users feel listened to, and that landlords take their concerns and reports of problems seriously.
- A more transparent and robust complaints process.

6. PARTICIPATION

A little less than half (45%) felt that their landlord seeks out tenant and service user views, but a third (33%) disagreed.

Views were less positive on whether landlords take account of tenant and service user views (25% felt that they do but 53% disagreed) and whether tenants feel able to influence decisions (18% felt they can but 57% disagreed).

Most (61%) would like to be more involved in their landlord's decisions. A lack of confidence that their landlord would take views into account was the main barrier for respondents (a concern for 42%).

6.1. This section considers views and experience of landlords' approach to engaging with tenants and service users, and whether Panel members feel able to influence their landlord's decisions.

Views on landlord approach to participation

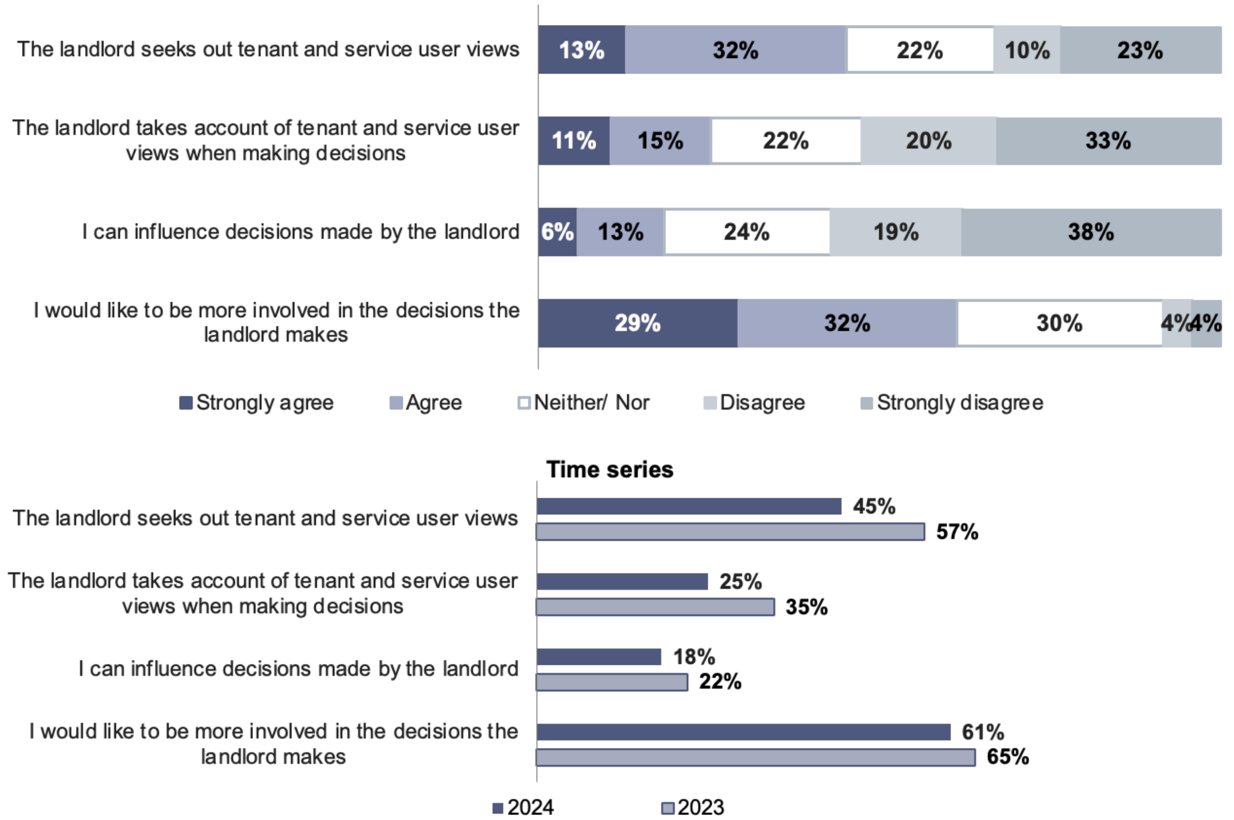
6.2. Figure 21 summarises respondent views on how their landlord engages with tenants and service users. As this shows, a little less than half (45%) of respondents felt that their landlord seeks out tenant and service user views, although a third (33%) disagreed.

6.3. Respondents were less likely to have felt that their landlord takes account of tenant and service user views in their decision making (25% felt that they do but 53% disagreed) and that they can influence their landlord's decisions (18% felt that they can but 57% disagreed).

6.4. While views are mixed on the extent to which their landlord takes account of tenant and service user views, most respondents (61%) would like to be more involved in their landlord's decisions.

6.5. Survey results suggest some variation from the 2023 survey, with a fall in the proportion of respondents who feel that their landlord seeks out views (a 12-point reduction) and takes account of views (a 10-point reduction). Results also indicate some variation in views across key respondent groups, with RTO members generally being more positive about whether their landlord takes account of views, and whether they feel able to influence their landlord's decisions.

Figure 21: Views on how landlord engages with tenants and service users

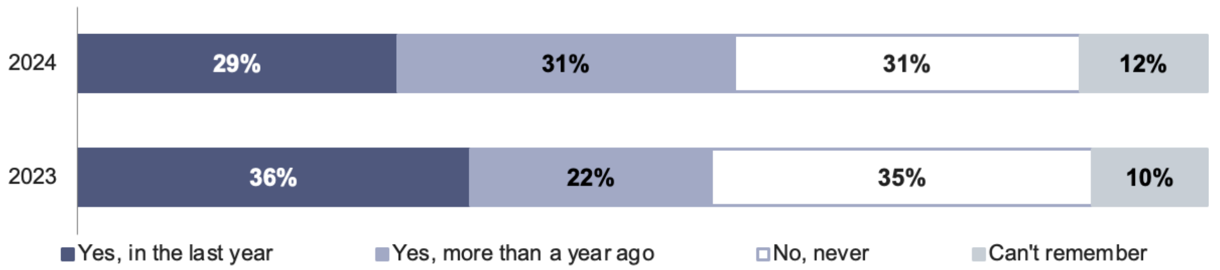


Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Getting involved

6.6. As Figure 22 shows, more than half (57%) of respondents had been involved in opportunities to influence their landlord's decisions, including 29% who had been involved in the last year. This is very similar to the 2023 survey. However, results suggest that RTO members, those aged 60+ and male respondents were most likely to have participated in opportunities to influence decision making.

Figure 22: Whether been involved in opportunities to influence landlord decisions



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Experience of contributing to landlord decision-making

6.7. Qualitative feedback indicates that Panel members have been involved in a range of opportunities to influence their landlord's decisions. This included reference to participation in one-off exercises such as surveys or time-limited consultations, and to involvement in longer-standing mechanisms such as board membership and scrutiny panels.

6.8. Many participants describing their experience highlighted the value of these exercises and mechanisms, including their sense of pride at having helped to improve their landlord's services. Feedback also made clear how interesting and enjoyable individuals had found the experience. This included examples of participants being able to contribute specific knowledge and skills to their landlord.

6.9. There was reference to a range of issues and frustrations around participants' experience of contributing to landlord decisions. In relation to surveys and discrete consultation exercises these concerns were most commonly related to how specific questions were formulated, and whether participants felt able to give an accurate account of their views and experience.

6.10. Frustrations were also highlighted by those who had contributed to longer-standing mechanisms. The most significant related to descriptions of personality clashes and behaviours which were seen as patronising and/or bullying. Participants also cited examples where they felt that there was insufficient support from the landlord, and/or where staff turnover had limited the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

6.11. A number of wider concerns were raised which did not relate to the approach to particular engagement mechanisms, but rather questioned whether their landlord is genuine in their overall approach to seeking tenant and service user input. These participants were sceptical about whether participation exercises can have a significant impact on landlord decisions, especially for one-off exercises such as surveys but also more generally for tenant scrutiny and other longer-standing mechanisms.

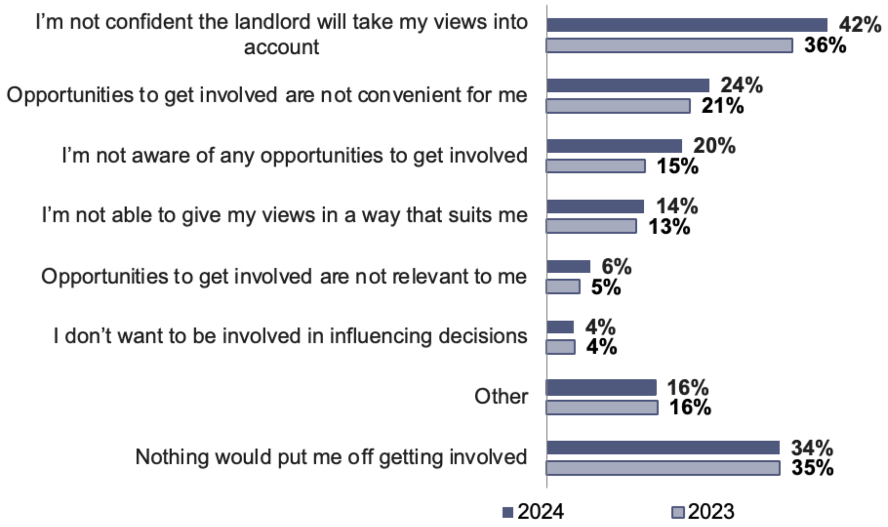
Barriers to getting involved

6.12. Figure 23 summarises views on what that might prevent respondents from getting involved in their landlord's decision making.

6.13. As this shows, the majority of respondents (66%) identified one or more factors that might prevent them from getting involved. The most commonly cited was a lack of confidence that their landlord would take their views into account; 42% mentioned this, a 6-point increase from 2023. Respondents also suggested that they might be put off by opportunities not being at convenient times and locations (24% mentioned this), not being aware of opportunities

(20%), and not being able to give their views in a way that suits their preferences (14%). These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although non-RTO members were more likely to identify potential barriers to their getting involved in decision making.

Figure 23: Factors that might prevent members getting involved in influencing landlord decisions



Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options.

Helping tenants and service users to have more say

6.14. Qualitative feedback highlighted that some barriers to participation are more difficult to address. For example, several participants questioned how their landlord could help them to overcome a lack of time available to contribute to decision making, or a lack of confidence that their input would make a difference. It was acknowledged that more flexible engagement approaches may help those with limited time, and better communication around decision making could improve confidence in engagement processes, but these participants suggested that there is a limit to how much their landlord can do to address these issues. There was also a view that a reduction in landlord staff had limited approaches to participation and made this accessible to fewer service users.

6.15. However, participants also expressed an interest in getting more involved in their landlord's decision making and other participation opportunities such as tenant scrutiny. There was reference to a range of practical ways in which landlords could help more tenants and service users to get involved in their decision making. These are summarised below.

- **Greater flexibility in engagement approaches** used by landlords to ensure exercises are as accessible as possible. This was primarily with reference to the scheduling of meetings or events (e.g. to include evening and/or weekend options) and use of a variety of methodologies (e.g.

including remote options for those who are unable to attend in-person events). Some suggested that the availability of remote video options has reduced in recent years, after more widespread use during the COVID pandemic. Remote attendance was seen as having benefits in reaching those unable to regularly attend due to health issues, lack of transport, work or family commitments, and especially those in more dispersed rural. Participants also discussed scope for better selection of location and venue, including support for those with limited mobility, to make exercises more accessible.

- **Better communication** to demonstrate a commitment to the value of engagement, and to make clear how landlord decisions have taken account of tenant and service user views. Even those who have been able to take part in participation opportunities referred to examples where it was felt that their concerns had not been listened to, and there was frustration at a perceived lack of influence on decisions affecting the appearance or amenity of their home. Some wished to see a wider change of culture to be more aware of and receptive to individuals' needs, and to improve transparency.
- **Ensuring engagement opportunities are more visible** to prospective participants, including calls for landlords to provide more opportunities for tenants to be represented on boards and committees.

7. USERS OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Those with little experience and understanding of homelessness services told us this contributed to their initial anxiety about potential temporary accommodation options, although some had been focused on accessing accommodation quickly and were less concerned about quality or location.

Feedback highlighted the positive impact of clear information for service users on access to and the likely length of stay in temporary accommodation.

Those who had an initial shorter stay in a B&B or hotel included some positive views on the speed of access, but others had found this more challenging especially where this had been a more extended stay in a B&B or hotel. The safety of accommodation had also been a particular concern for those with children.

Location and quality/disrepair were the key considerations for participants in terms of the suitability of temporary accommodation. Location was highlighted in terms of access to services and support networks, and safety.

Access to support was also a key factor for participants' experience of temporary accommodation. Contact with support workers and service staff was especially important for those with limited informal support networks.

7.1. The third qualitative strand of the 2023/24 National Panel programme comprised engagement with people with experience of homelessness services and temporary accommodation, including a focus on those with children. Findings in this section are based on qualitative feedback from 38 households with experience of homelessness services across 6 local authority areas.

Accessing temporary accommodation

7.2. All those involved in the engagement exercise had been able to access temporary accommodation. While some had prior experience of homeless services, it was clear that participants generally had little understanding at the time of presenting as homeless around the process for accessing temporary accommodation, nor what this accommodation would be like.

7.3. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this uncertainty contributed to some significant concern around the type of accommodation that participants might be provided, particularly location and safety, and maintaining contact with support networks. These concerns were especially acute for those with younger children, with the safety of the local area and access to schools identified as key priorities. Some participants also referred to safety concerns specifically in the context of fleeing domestic violence, or the potential to be placed in accommodation close to others who may pose a risk to their safety.

7.4. Other participants indicated that their sole focus had been on securing quick access to accommodation, for example where they had reached a crisis point and had nowhere else to go. Some of these participants suggested that their urgent need for accommodation had over-ridden any apprehension around the location or quality of temporary accommodation that might be available: *"I had no idea what to expect, but I just needed a roof over my head."*

7.5. Feedback highlighted the benefit of information provided by services during their initial presentation as homeless, in terms of providing clarity around how access to accommodation would work, and the length of time they might expect to stay in temporary accommodation prior to accessing their own tenancy. This included reference to services, the process for applying for settled accommodation, and the extent to which their housing needs and preferences may impact how long they may have to wait for a permanent offer.

7.6. Participants noted that staff had taken the time to ensure they were clear about what to expect, and found this information useful even where the likely length of stay was relatively long. Feedback highlighted the value of services minimising uncertainty, and enabling households to adapt to a stay in temporary accommodation. However, it was notable that some participants remained uncertain around the operation of temporary accommodation, expressing concern around potential time limits on their stay in temporary accommodation and the consequences of refusing an unsuitable accommodation offer.

Experience of temporary accommodation

7.7. Quick access to accommodation was the primary concern for a number of participants at the point of presenting as homeless, and some indicated that their accommodation requirements had been relatively basic at the time. However, discussion identified a number of factors that affected participants' experience of their time in temporary accommodation.

7.8. Those who had an initial shorter stay in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation (prior to being moved to other temporary accommodation) expressed some very positive views around the ability of homelessness services to provide quick access to accommodation. This included some who had been fleeing unsafe circumstances. Participants generally indicated that they found their initial stay in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation manageable, especially where this had been for a short period. There was also reference to homelessness services maintaining regular contact with households; feedback indicated that this had helped households to feel safe, and that they "hadn't been forgotten about".

7.9. Others had found their initial stay in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation more challenging, especially households with children and those with health issues or other vulnerabilities. Feedback from these participants primarily focused on whether they felt safe in the accommodation, with some indicating that they had found these intimidating places to stay. These concerns typically related to the mix of other residents, including reference to noise disturbance and evidence of drug use.

7.10. Participants with children had been particularly affected by safety concerns while in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation, and this was the primary focus of their feedback. Families also referred to children being affected by the disruption of multiple moves between different accommodation within a short period, although for some their urgent need for accommodation had outweighed such considerations. Others who had found their time in bed and breakfast and hotel accommodation more challenging included those with health conditions that limited their mobility and resilience. These participants referred to the general discomfort of the accommodation, and specific issues such as difficulty managing stairs. Some also reported poor experience of on-site staff for bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation, and felt that staff had not been understanding or supporting of their needs.

7.11. A small number of participants had been required to spend a more extended period in bed and breakfast and hotel accommodation, and it was clear that this had added to the challenges noted above. These participants indicated that they had found their time in the accommodation very challenging, and noted that feeling unsafe and lacking privacy for a longer period had a significant negative impact on their mental health. This included some who had felt the need to adapt their schedule to minimise the time they spent in the bed and breakfast or hotel each day, such that they were rarely in the accommodation during the day. It was noted that this could cause difficulties in accessing homelessness service staff, for example where staff "dropped in" to the accommodation at unpredictable times. Those with shared custody of children also indicated that their stay in bed and breakfast accommodation had affected their ability to see their children: *"It was just out of the question letting them stay over, it wasn't safe for them at all."* This had become a significant issue for participants whose stay in the accommodation had been longer.

7.12. Feedback on the suitability of temporary accommodation was primarily focused on location and accommodation quality or disrepair. This is summarised below.

- Comments on the location of their accommodation included a focus on access to shops and services (especially access to health services for those who were pregnant or with young children), proximity or good transport links, and access to family/friends and informal support networks. This included examples of participants, especially those in more rural areas and those without private transport, who had been required to make relatively long journeys to access essential services or to maintain contact with family and friends.

- Safety of the local area was a key concern for some, including those fleeing unsafe circumstances where the safety of their location was a critical concern. Several participants reported having felt that they had little choice but to accept an offer of temporary accommodation in unsuitable locations, where they did not feel safe. This included cases where participants felt that an unsuitable location was still better than a longer stay in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation. Nevertheless, these participants made clear that the location had made their stay in temporary accommodation very difficult. Specific difficulties included adverse impact on mental health and quality of life, especially where individuals had felt unable to go out in the local area. These issues were particularly acute for those with young children.
- The type and size of their temporary accommodation had not been a concern for most participants, with some noting that they were able to manage a stay in less suitable accommodation where they knew that this was only for a limited time: *"This place is ok for temporary, but not as somewhere for me to stay for any length of time."* This included larger families who had been required to stay in overcrowded accommodation for an extended period.
- When asked to consider the quality of temporary accommodation, some indicated that they had appreciated having access to a safe place and did not have a strong view on the quality of the home. Others generally felt that the standard of accommodation was reasonable, especially where properties had been recently redecorated. Some referred to support with appliances and furnishings as important in making the accommodation feel homely, especially for those with few furnishings or belongings. There was also positive comments on accommodation with secure entry systems in terms of helping participants feel safe in unfamiliar accommodation. The most significant quality or disrepair issues for participants appeared to be difficulty heating the home including poor insulation, draughts from doors and windows, and poor heating systems. Several also indicated that the accommodation had been affected by significant dampness, linked to difficulties keeping the home warm.

7.13. While feedback was primarily focused on the location and quality of temporary accommodation, it was also clear that access to support was important for households' experience. Contact with support workers and service staff was highlighted as a particular positive, especially for those with limited informal support networks. The attitude of staff and willingness to act on participants' behalf had helped individuals to build a trusting relationship with services, and to feel comfortable asking questions and raising concerns.

7.14. Participants also cited examples of service staff facilitating access to more specialist support, including counselling and mental health services. It was noted that this kind of support was especially important after the initial practicalities of a move into temporary accommodation had been dealt with, with some having clearly struggled to settle in and adapt to the uncertainty of a stay in temporary accommodation: *"There was a huge feeling of relief when I first got here, but then I needed to think about what to do next."*

7.15. Some of those who felt they had been placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation indicated that they had contacted services to request an alternative. These participants indicate that insufficient supply had meant that they were unable to move to more suitable accommodation, including some who had been concerned around the potential for moving temporary accommodation to delay access to settled accommodation.

7.16. It was evident that these participants had been frustrated by the lack of access to more suitable accommodation, and the experience of contacting services to request a move had also been difficult for some. Participants referred to having to contact services on multiple occasions (some maintaining regular contact throughout their stay in temporary accommodation), often dealing with different service staff, and there was a perception that communication between staff is not consistent. It was suggested that these difficulties had added significantly to their anxiety around a stay in unsuitable accommodation.

7.17. Other participants who felt that their temporary accommodation had been unsuitable indicated that this had still been a better option than another disruptive move. This was a particular concern for those with children, where some had preferred to stay in overcrowded accommodation in a good location rather than consider a move to alternative accommodation, especially if his risked a move to a less safe location: *"Once we were settled I wouldn't have wanted another move - it's just more disruption when we were really waiting for something settled. Even though we were cramped, the location was good and we felt safe."*

7.18. As has been noted above, aspects of a stay in temporary accommodation were especially challenging for those with children. The key concerns highlighted by these participants are summarised below.

- Having children exacerbates the anxiety of a stay in temporary accommodation, with some indicating that safety concerns around temporary accommodation were primarily focused on their children. Participants also highlighted their efforts to shield children from uncertainty and to minimise the disruption (including to education). While some felt that they had managed this relatively well, it was also clear that doing so had added to the challenges of a stay in temporary accommodation.

- Uncertainty was particularly difficult for families to manage during their time in temporary accommodation. Participants cited examples of accommodation offers being withdrawn, where they had arranged school placements that could not be taken up. It was noted that children find this kind of uncertainty especially unsettling.
- There were particular challenges for those with shared custody of their children. This included where participants felt unable to bring their children to bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation, and where children were reluctant to visit temporary accommodation if this was in a poor location.
- Participants also cited pregnancy as having caused significant anxiety while in temporary accommodation, including concern around whether they would be able to access settled accommodation before giving birth. Pregnancy had also meant that participants were more reliant on regular contact with services, but had made travelling more difficult: *"long bus rides with no toilets were really difficult."*

ANNEX: PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. Current members include social tenants, people who have used homelessness services, 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. Total Panel membership stood at 426 at March 2024. The current Panel profile suggests that the priorities for further improving representation should be on black and minority ethnic members and younger people (those aged under 35).

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

Current membership	426
Age	
Under 35	14%
35-44	11%
45-59	28%
60-74	29%
75+	14%
Unknown	4%
Gender	
Woman	56%
Man	42%
In another way	1%
Unknown	1%
Housing tenure	
Council tenant	38%
RSL tenant	46%
Owner	8%
Gypsy/ Traveller site resident	8%
Unknown	<0.5%
Ethnicity	
White Scottish, British or Irish	82%
White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller)	11%
Black Minority Ethnic	4%
Unknown	4%
Disability	
1 or more disabilities	40%
No disability	46%
Unknown	14%
RTO membership	
Member of RTO	23%
Not a member of RTO	73%
Unknown	4%

Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.