

# The Tenant Insight



March 2022

## Listening to tenants in Wales: the current key concerns of tenants heard by TPAS Cymru.

**As the national tenant engagement organisation in Wales, we listen to social housing tenants across Wales about what matters to them and what concerns them with regard to their homes and the communities they live in.**

We wanted to share the important insight we've heard from tenants recently to help shape and influence decision making to ensure that housing in Wales meets the needs, priorities, and aspirations of tenants.

From this tenant insight we have identified key themes detailed below. These provide a snapshot of the opinions and viewpoints on the main areas that are concerning tenants at this moment. These themes reflect the challenges tenants and the housing sector are currently facing.

This listening and learning forms part of our ongoing conversations with tenants and we'll continue to listen to and share their views.

### How we've listened:

During our support activities, we engage with and listen to a wide demographic of tenants living in Housing Association and Local Authority properties in all parts of Wales.

We have regular contact with tenants via various platforms:

- Monthly Wales wide Tenant Network events
- At our range of housing and community themed online events
- Engagement & Housing information support – emails and phone calls from tenants
- Our survey community 'Tenant Pulse'
- Insight from online tenant forums and chat sites

From this engagement we have heard a range of views and opinions. This invaluable insight which has helped us to identify seven key current themes which reflect tenants' key concerns and priorities.

# The current concerns of tenants:



## Affordability & cost of living

Affordability of rent & service charges alongside the current a cost living crisis, with the increasing costs for energy and food, is a real pressing issue for many tenants. Recent planned rent increases for many tenants are a worry, particularly for those tenants who are in receipt of low or irregular wages or who are in insecure employment. Tenants have also told us that rents are not always 'affordable' for them if they experience changes to their personal financial circumstances, such as relationship breakdown, sickness, unexpected bills or redundancy.

Some tenants have told us that there has either been insufficient, or no consultation carried out by their landlord on rent setting, this appears to be the same for service charges. In addition, tenants have spoken of a lack of transparency and openness by their landlord about how or why rents have been set or how rent incomes is spent.



## Changing needs of a home

How people live is evolving, such as through changing work patterns, lifestyle priorities and new technology. As a result, tenants have identified different needs in terms of their homes. These include:

- Space to work or study at home
- Sufficient space to store recycling materials, bicycles etc
- Space for families to eat together – often very little space for a family dining table
- Outside 'green' spaces for wellbeing and play
- Facilities to charge electric vehicles, now and in the future.

Tenants have told us that social landlords will need to adapt faster to society changes, for example on areas such as good broadband.



## Digital/online 'self-service'

Whilst many tenants have seen benefits in being able to manage their tenancy online there are a number of associated concerns relating to the increasing transformation of services to online 'self-service' platforms.

These include the following:

- Cyber security risks associated with sharing personal information
- Risk of excluding tenants without access to online services or those with low digital skills.
- Increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as 'chat bots' and their ability to recognise information or messages used, such as language e.g. dialect, local terminology, dual meanings of words, picking up potential safeguarding issues.
- Sense that tenants are being 'pushed' into using online services rather than phoning to speak to a member of staff. Some say they feel they're being thought of as a nuisance if they don't use the online facilities.



## Service charges: quality & information

For those tenants who pay charges to cover services provided such as communal gardening or cleaning, there is uncertainty about what 'standard of service' tenants should expect to receive.

Tenants have told us they would welcome more information about these services including: how often services should be provided; to what standard; how quality is monitored; and who the main landlord contact is should any issues arise. A desire to use local and trusted contractors is also a subject many tenants feel strongly about.



## Tenant engagement: an essential service

Tenant engagement is not always seen as a 'protected' housing service. Changes within organisations such as internal restructures, staff leaving, staff secondments, etc. often result in a gap in the Tenant Engagement service provided. Tenants express frustration at Tenant Engagement being seen as a low priority: as a result, they feel they're not being listened to.

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## Mould/condensation: support & information

Tenants have told us that they feel landlords too often dismiss their concerns about mould and condensation in their homes with the landlord's default being to focus on the tenant's 'lifestyle' being the cause rather than considering there may be a problem with the building itself. This leads to some tenants feeling like they are being 'blamed' for the problem, rather than a proactive willingness to inspect the property and discuss the situation with the tenant.

Tenants want access to better plain language information from landlords about this issue and want to feel their genuine concerns regarding the severity of the situation and impact on their health etc. are taken seriously by their landlord.

These concerns are similar to those identified in the ITV News investigations in England.



## Climate change & the environment

Tenants are increasingly aware of the challenges of climate change and the need to decarbonise existing homes, and want landlords to ensure their voices are at the forefront of this most challenging of transitions.

As social landlords scale up decarbonisation activities in terms of retrofitting existing homes, tenants are increasingly concerned about what this means to them; what retrofitting entails, what impact this will have on their homes and lifestyles and will their rent end up increasing to pay for it. Tenants want to know why retrofitting

is important, about the impact that it will have on them, and about the advantages it can bring. Tenants are also concerned about practical issues such as: how their home will be heated in the future, how easy new heating systems are to use and what happens with their existing appliances such as gas cookers, fires etc.

As retrofitting is all about changes to tenants' homes and behaviours so tenants also want to be involved in the retrofitting planning and process from the start.

Whether you are a tenant or work in housing, do you recognise any of these current concerns? Do they reflect some of the concerns your tenants' have at the present time? Let us know your views.

This listening and learning is part of our ongoing conversations with tenants, and we'll continue to listen to and share their views.

TPAS Cymru advise many landlords and tenant groups on best practice in tenant engagement and widening tenant voice. We are here to support our members.