

# Tenant Voice on Covid-19 Crisis



# Introduction

Considering the current Covid-19 situation, TPAS Cymru asked for tenants' views on their thoughts and feelings at this time. The influx of blogs and articles on social media has increased the difficulty of knowing how people are truly feeling about factors that are impacting their daily lives. Through engaging with our landlord members, we were able to collate questions that will help support landlords and wider policy makers to adapt their services to the needs of their tenants.

## Methodology agreed:

1. Tenant Pulse – online survey for Tenant Pulse members living in social housing, supported housing and the Private Rental Sector. The survey was issued on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and was open for 11 days.

The standard questions that were set out in the survey questionnaire were designed by TPAS Cymru with input from Community Housing Cymru, Swansea Council, Newport City Homes and Ateb.

1. Considering the current Covid-19 situation, how are you feeling about your tenancy?  
Concerned            Not concerned    (slider question)
2. If you are concerned, which of the following factors contribute to that:
  - *Ability to pay my rent*
  - *Threat of losing my job*
  - *Lack of access to shops (foods, clothes, medicine)*
  - *Becoming ill/illness in the family*
  - *Boredom and loneliness*
  - *I'm not concerned*
  - *Other (please add comment)*
3. Do you know what to do if you are unable to pay your rent?  
Yes                    No
4. Do you know what steps your landlord is taking to reduce loneliness?  
Yes                    No
5. Do you feel comfortable allowing access to tradespeople for maintenance (inc. annual safety checks) such as gas and electrical servicing? Is there anything that would make you feel more comfortable?  
Yes                    No            Please give comment
6. Do you think your landlord's communication relating to Covid-19 has been useful?  
Yes                    No            Please give comment

7. Where are you finding Covid -19 information?
  - *Friends and Family*
  - *Social media*
  - *Letters and email*
  - *TV/radio news*
  - *Prime Ministers daily announcements*
  - *Your landlord*
  - *Local council*
8. What digital resources would you like your landlord to provide during this period of social distancing?
  - *Phone call to help with online shopping*
  - *Information on community Facebook groups available*
  - *Phone call to help set up video calling*
  - *Information on paying my rent and organising repairs*
  - *Information on keeping fit and healthy*
  - *Other (add comment)*
9. If there is anything stopping, you from social distancing/ isolating effectively?
  - *Needing to care for family members/ friends*
  - *Need regular access to food*
  - *Need regular access to medical supplies*
  - *Work requirements*
  - *I want to meet with people*
  - *I have co-parenting responsibilities*
  - *Nothing, I can effectively self-isolate at present*
10. What is the most positive development or project you have seen in your community? (Open question)
11. What do you believe should be your landlord's priority for the near future? (Open question)

### **Response rates:**

In total 351 tenants completed the survey. Due to the time sensitive nature of this survey, this was sent out to email-only members of Tenant Pulse resulting in a response rate of 45%. This is a higher than average response rate, reflecting the gravity of this issue.

Note: During this period the sector was transferring to home working. We didn't have the physical equipment or staff resources send it out to our Pulse members who require printed versions with corresponding stamped envelopes.

### **The information gathered:**

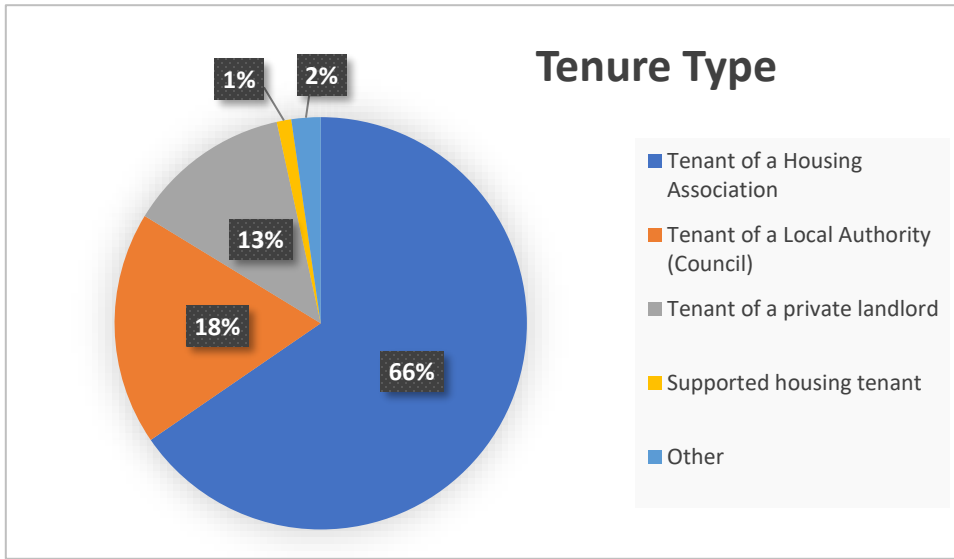
In April 2020, TPAS Cymru will share the findings from this survey with Registered Social Landlords, Local Authority Landlords, our reciprocal members and tenants from across the social housing sector. This document summarises the responses TPAS Cymru received from tenants.



# Survey Results

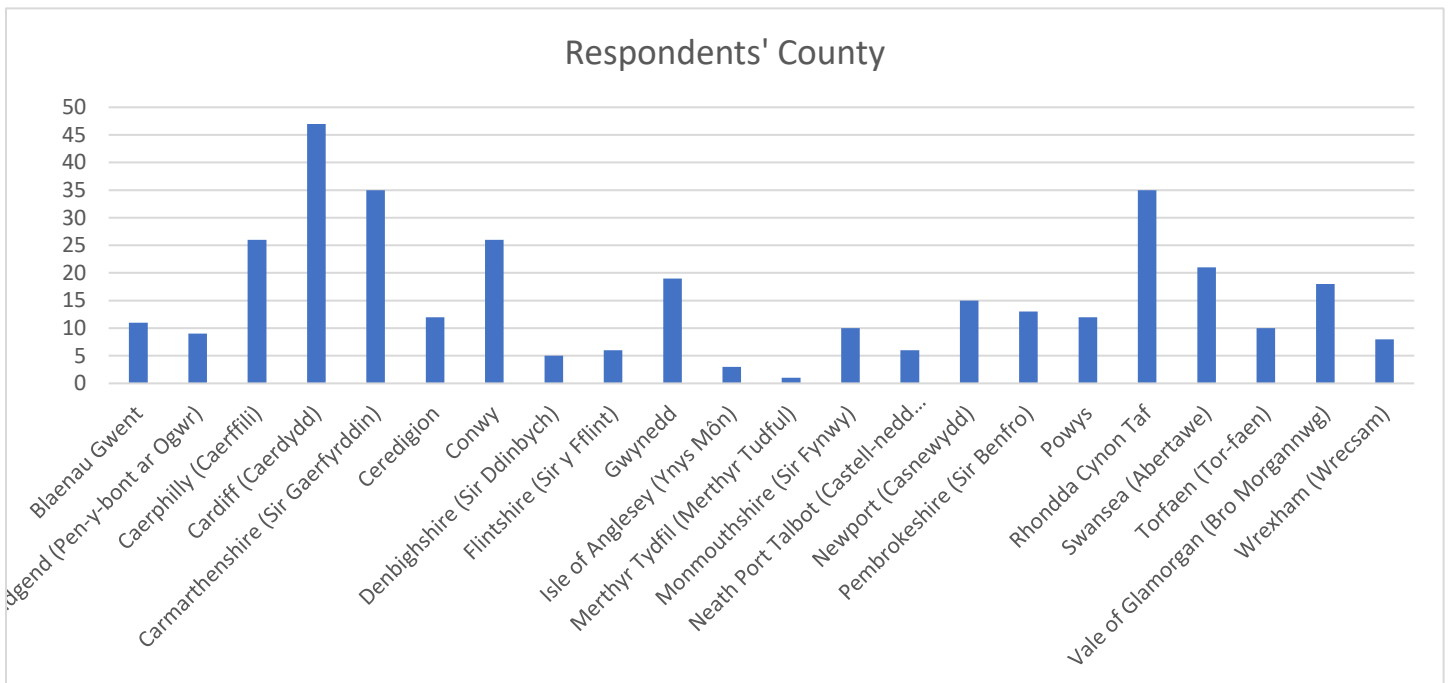
## Tenants living situation

In line with our previous surveys, housing association tenants remains the highest response rate, reflecting the profile of the Pulse panel. There was, however, a noticeable increase in the response from tenants in the private rental sector and from local authorities this time.



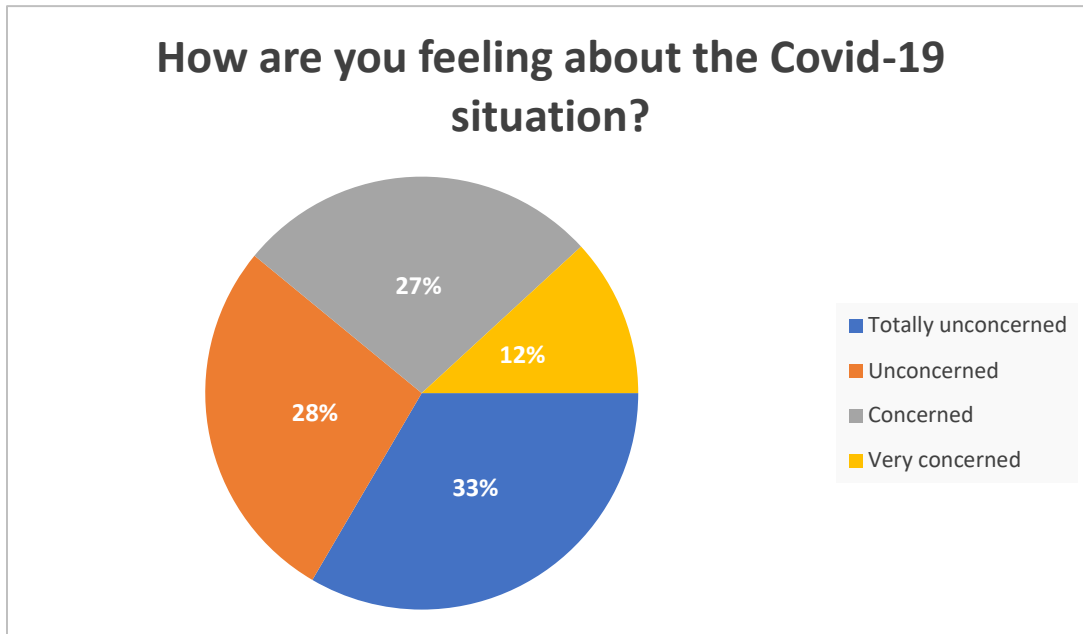
## Local authority area

Within this survey, we've seen a significant increase in tenant responses in Cardiff which is a result of our wider engagement with the private rental sector. We have also identified a significant increase in responses from Carmarthenshire and Caerphilly. RCT and Conwy have stayed on trend with their responses. The Merthyr borough remains our lowest response area.



**1. Tenants were asked how they were feeling about their tenancy considering the current Covid-19 situation.**

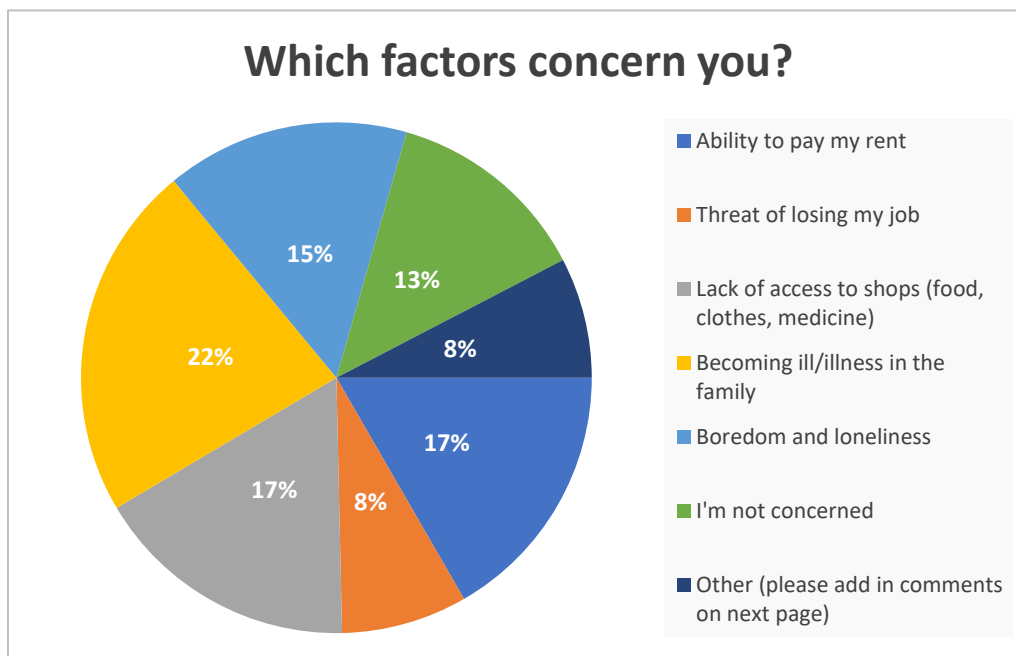
**Key finding:** Over 50% of tenants felt unconcerned about their tenancy despite of the current climate. This is a credit to the work that landlords and the wider sector have been doing to ensure their tenants are equipped with the information they need during such uncertain and difficult times. When analysing the data from the different local authority areas, the highest level of concern was in Cardiff, Caerphilly, Anglesey, Denbighshire and Blaenau Gwent. Social housing tenants were less concerned than private renters. The tenants with concerns highlighted some of the reasons why in the following question.



**2. Tenants were asked which factors concerned them**

Due to the speed of this survey, we had no opportunity to test options. Within this question, tenants were given the opportunity to choose all six factors.

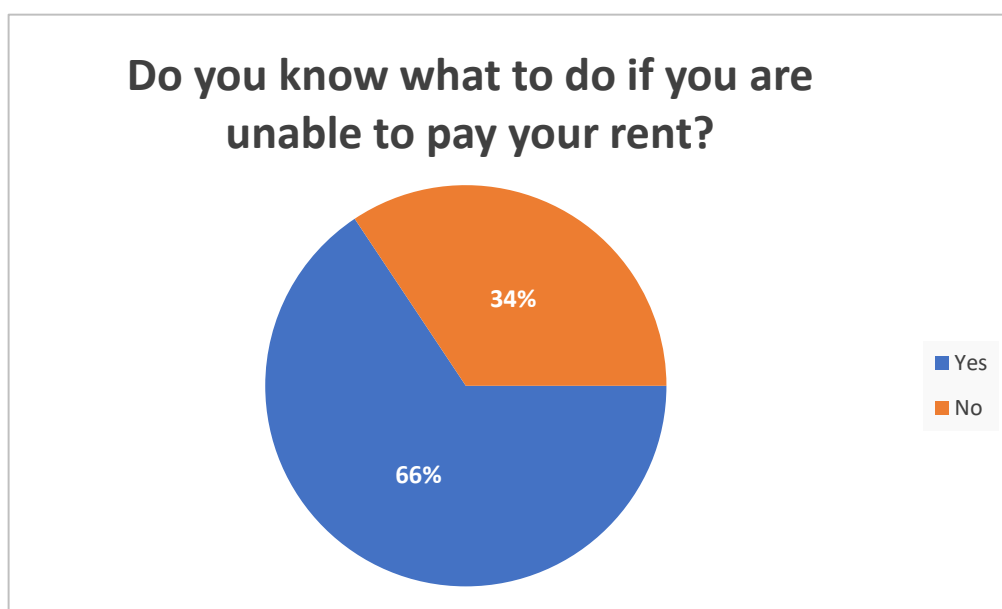
**Key Finding:** whilst 'Becoming ill' had the highest percentage, we can see from the comments that this relates strongly to the 'ability to afford their rent' under such circumstances. Many of the tenants had been furloughed and the salary decrease was a concern in terms of managing the cost of their rent. The older and more vulnerable tenants who were expected to stay home for 12 weeks were concerned about loss of household income and being unable to get food and medicine. Additional social factors identified include boredom and loneliness which is something we have identified with landlords as a potential concern. Single parents and people with disabilities were concerned about getting to the shops should they get sick or their children get sick.



### 3. Do you know what to do if you are unable to pay rent?

This shows that landlords' efforts to engage tenants are generally successful. In terms of local authority area, over 90% of tenants in Newport and Torfaen knew what they needed to do if they couldn't pay their rent. Over 80% in Gwynedd and Monmouth and almost 70% in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and RCT also knew what to do.

**Key finding:** Caerphilly area was the most concerning with over 50% of tenants not knowing what to do in these circumstances suggesting that landlords would benefit from wider engagement with their tenants.



#### 4. Do you know what your landlord is doing to reduce loneliness and isolation?

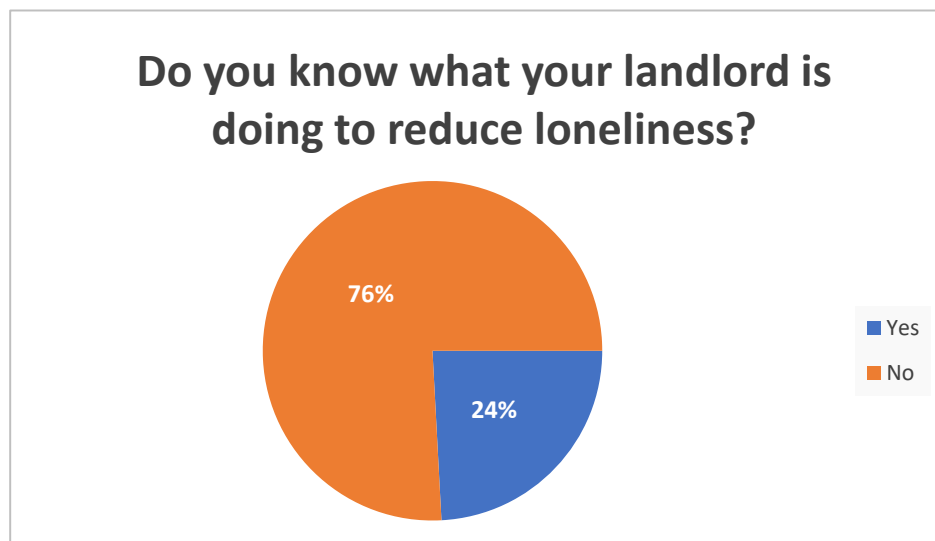
**Key finding:** 76% of tenants said no. A significant figure amongst the national tenant body. Such high figures relating to loneliness were unexpected based on the known work being carried out by landlords to minimise loneliness and social isolation, including the gathering of information about local support etc. It could simply be that tenants have not identified the phone calls they are receiving from their landlords as a means of minimising these factors.

##### We recommend:

- Landlords should further communicate the steps you are taking to minimise loneliness and isolation and share as widely as possible.
- There were tenants who identified as vulnerable and were yet to be contacted by their landlord
- Many tenants completing this survey felt stressed and anxious about not being able to leave their home, particularly though with a disability and children and pets to take care of.
- Many tenants stated they were someone who were already struggling with their mental health and that they felt this would get worse because of loneliness and isolation.
- Some were concerned that they were unable to book online supermarket delivery as they are booked so far in advance and they had no one to contact to help them.

As noted in our methodology, we were unable to send out postal surveys which is predominantly an older demographic and therefore more vulnerable. We highly recommend that where possible, such tenants matching similar profiles receive postal information on what landlords are doing to minimise loneliness and isolation.

In terms of local authority area, there were no areas significantly more aware than others.



**5. Do you feel comfortable allowing access to tradespeople and maintenance and is there anything that would make you feel more comfortable?**

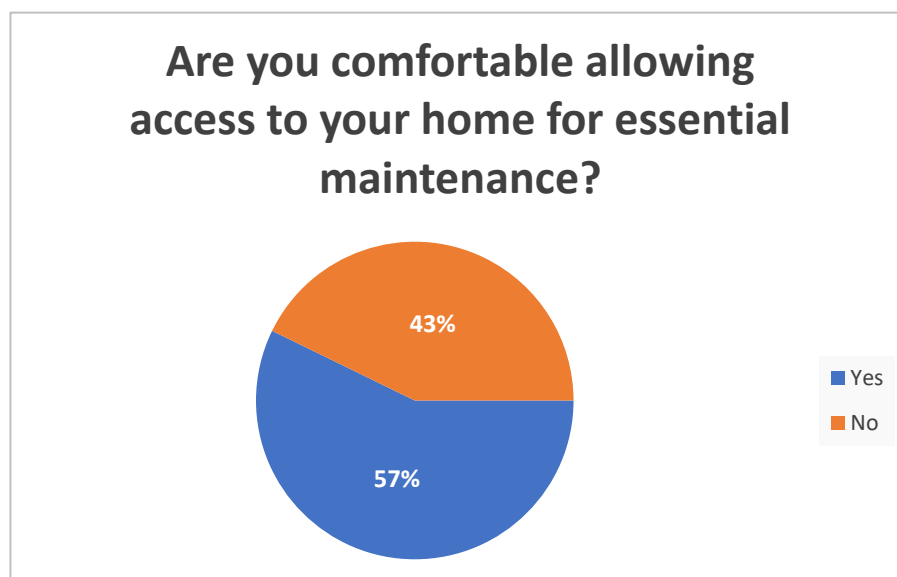
**Key finding:** 57% were comfortable subject to conditions, however the other 43% were not happy to give any access. Based on feedback from landlords, we expected a higher percentage of tenants to feel uncomfortable with allowing access.

Findings included:

- The majority of tenants who answered yes, emphasised that they would feel comfortable if the tradesman wore PPE and kept the required level of social distance during the visit.
- Tenants felt that they would like to receive a letter, text or email in preparation for their arrival and that landlords should use this opportunity to ask tenants how they are coping so that this can be fed back.
- A number of female tenants felt that they would prefer a female tradesperson during a time where they were already feeling highly vulnerable.
- Several tenants felt that only emergency maintenance should be carried out at this time.

We're aware that landlords generally inform tenants of such visits in advance. However, there were repeated comments that tenants were unaware that tradespeople/maintenance staff would be visiting until they actually arrive on the doorstep. This has increased anxiety levels in tenants who are identifying as vulnerable.

There was noticeable variation in areas; Anglesey, Caerphilly, Denbighshire and the Vale of Glamorgan feel strongly about not allowing access, whereas Carmarthenshire Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, RCT and Torfaen were open to allowing access based on the factors mentioned above.





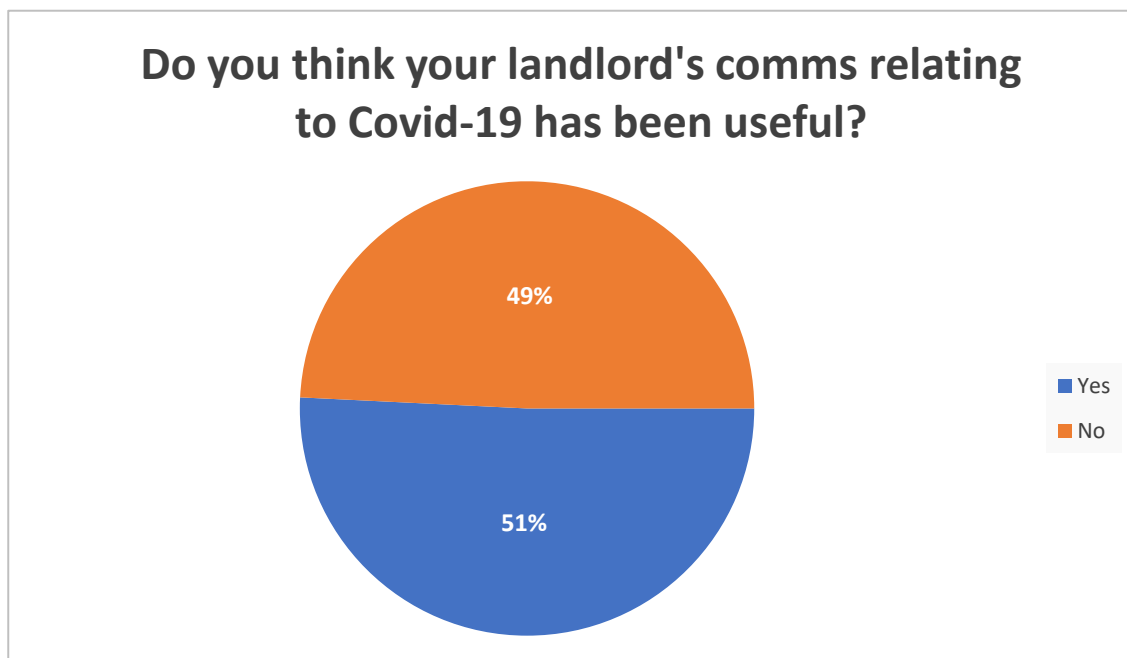
## 6. Do you think landlords' communication relating to Covid-19 has been useful?

**Key finding:** Tenants responding no, was simply due to them not receiving any communication from their landlords, with only the minority being unhappy with the communication they had received.

Those that responded yes felt that the communication had been invaluable with the majority mentioning phone calls they had received which reassured them in such uncertain times.

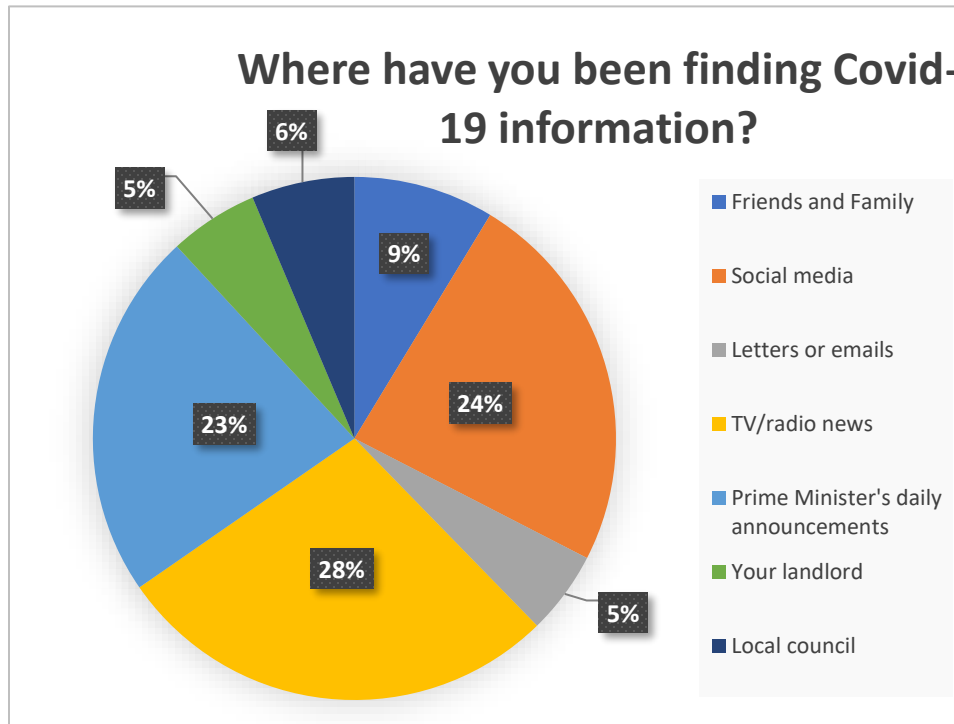
It was clear that those who had responded yes, had been accessing landlord websites and social media and were therefore more digitally able. It is important that communication is still being shared through multiple methods of engagement to ensure tenants have an accurate, clear and concise message.

The local authority areas with a considerable number of tenants in the 'no' category were Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Powys. Opposingly, the areas with a significant number of tenants feeling the communication from landlords had been helpful were, Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Cardigan, Conwy, Gwynedd, Anglesey, Neath and Wrexham.



## 7. Where are you finding Covid-19 information?

**Key Finding:** Specific landlord communications didn't feature very highly when looking at the wider context of getting information.



### Conclusions:

- People are getting messages from a wide range of sources and there were often conflicting comments
- TV/Radio narrowly exceeded social media for information
- At the start of this survey- the Prime Minister's announcements were very popular due to the importance of his statements? These numbers declined as time went on: possibly due to people settling into self-isolation and home working etc?
- Private Renters looked to their local council for news and updates compared to others (nearly double that of HA and Council tenants). Getting information from their landlord was near 0%.
- Letters can take time to disseminate. The letter from the UK Government arrived on most people's doorsteps the day we closed our survey.

## 8. What digital resources would you like help with?

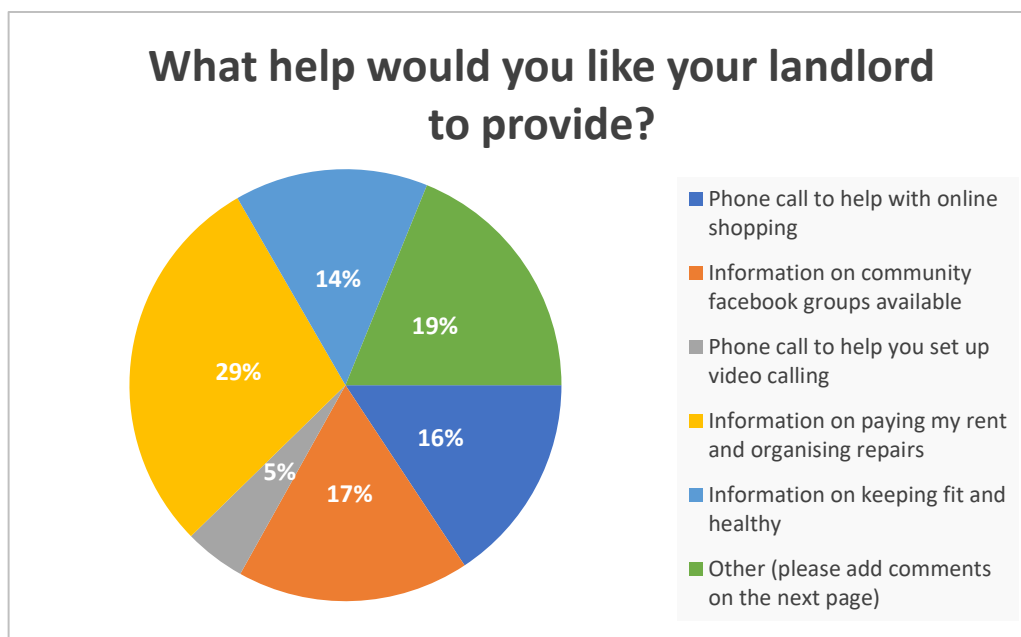
**Background:** Over the recent weeks, we have engaged with landlords who felt unsure what role tenants would like them to play during the current crisis.

**Key finding:** Whilst tenants would like information on a range of areas, the most important information they are looking for is 1) paying rent and 2) organising repairs.

Interestingly, a number of tenants felt that it wasn't their landlord's responsibility to help with anything other than rent and maintenance and that they should be focussing on providing rent holidays. There were, however, tenants emphasising that they would value a phone call and information on keeping fit and healthy to ensure they can manage their own mental health. Tenants commented often on their struggles with their mental health and how such phone calls could help to reduce these symptoms.

In terms of the 19% who chose 'other', the majority stated that they didn't want anything from their landlord. Others spoke of having food parcels delivered due to online waiting times and wanting information from landlords on companies or people who will deliver medicine.

When exploring this further, there was a clear distinction between social housing tenants and tenants in the PRS. The majority of tenants who stated they wanted 'nothing' were living in private accommodation and are possibly likely to have lower expectations of their landlord.



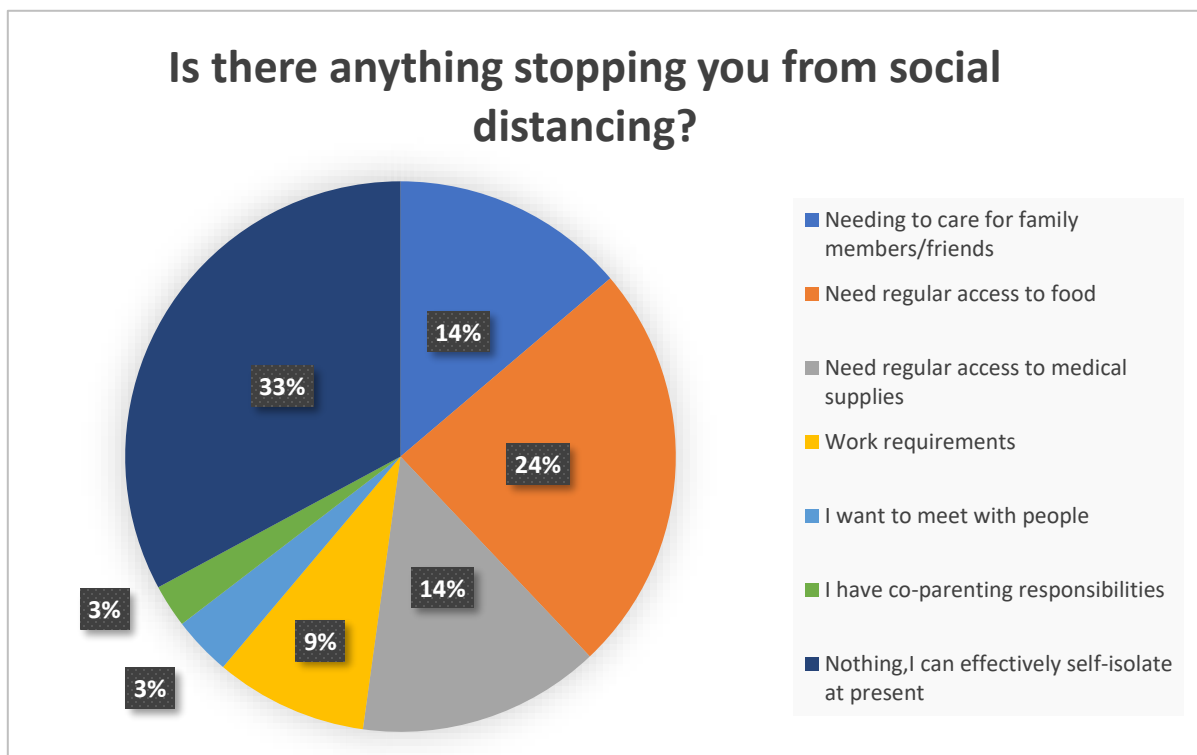
## 9. Is there anything stopping you from social distancing?

**Key finding:** Fortunately, the largest proportion of tenants are able to socially distance effectively.

As expected, access to food led to almost 25% of tenants putting themselves and their families at risk.

This theme has been consistent throughout this report, with waiting times as long as a month for food deliveries from supermarkets. Perhaps this is an avenue that needs further exploration?

Whilst people working within the housing sector are currently unable to carry out their usual roles, could we support tenants through engaging with local food providers and supermarkets to support with delivering food to those that are vulnerable, such as the elderly, those with disabilities but also to those with no support network in the area? We are aware that there is a lot of great practice happening in terms of delivering food parcels across the sector, but this clearly needs expansion.



## 10. What is the most positive development you have seen in your community? (Open question)

### Key findings:

- There are a wide range of activities happening
- People were overall positive response to this question
- They are noticing this initiative but not all had interacted with these services

A considerable number of tenants mentioned local community Facebook groups being set up to offer support for the elderly, shopping for the vulnerable and sharing of activities for children to do at home. There was a clear sense of 'community feeling' amongst respondents with a number of them emphasising the positive change in their community in terms of caring for one another.

## 11. What do you believe should be your landlords' priority for the near future?

### Key finding:

As expected, the consistent theme throughout the responses was the need to offer two things:

- 1) Rent holidays during the Covid-19 crisis
- 2) Support and no eviction if unable to pay rent

There was a clear understanding from tenants that nobody knows how long this situation is going to last and they would simply like reassurance that they will still have their home at the end of it.

We highly recommend that landlords keep sharing the recent letter from the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Julie James AM to reassure them at this time.



## Conclusion

Whilst we understand that these are uncertain times for everyone and that we are all adapting our services, the results of this survey highlight the need for minor adaptations to enable tenants to feel supported and landlords to still offer a service.

There were key themes throughout highlighting the need for:

- 1) More information around rents and maintenance using a variety of methods of engagement
- 2) The importance of a phone call to support tenants with their mental health and wellbeing
- 3) The need for support to secure food supplies
- 4) Private Renters do not look to their landlord for advice and support but need to see the same offer from their landlord regarding rent flexibility options.

## About TPAS Cymru



TPAS Cymru has supported tenants and landlords in Wales for over 30 years developing effective tenant and community participation through training, support, practical projects and policy development. Locally we support community empowerment through practical advice, support, training and project work.

At Government level, we contribute to policy changes by working with partner organisations to ensure the tenant voice influences decision making.



Tenant Pulse is the voice of tenants in Wales. It's been created by TPAS Cymru and is supported by Welsh Government. We aim to:

- i) Find out what matters most to tenants
- ii) Release regular surveys
- iii) Hold prize draws to reward people who take part

The results of our surveys are used by decision makers to create housing policy which works for tenants, and which helps make housing in Wales safer and fairer.