

# The Tenant Insight



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## 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 regarding 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 now. 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 five key current themes which reflect tenants' key concerns and priorities.

# The current concerns of tenants:



## Cost of Living & Affordability

The cost of living crisis is still a huge concern for tenants: it's affecting energy bills and other household costs such as food. Tenants are now telling us about their need to use of food banks alongside other support and emergency initiatives to make sure their basic needs are met. Tenants have also mentioned that the unpredictable rise in cost of living has become a worry, especially for those who are in receipt of low or irregular wages or are in insecure employment.

In addition, tenants are growing increasingly anxious about possible further increases in rents and service charges and what impact this will have on them.

This is accompanied by tenants beginning to ask whether it is right that social landlords continue to make substantial financial surpluses, primarily from rental income, at a time when tenants are facing likely further rent increases and many are struggling financially to make ends meet.



## Digital Services Transformation

Through our meetings and conversations with tenants, many have expressed concern over the ongoing digital transformation of services by landlords.

Tenants have expressed disappointment at the lack of consultation by some landlords before services are moved online. Also, concerns around landlords introducing online services without them being shaped, developed, and tested by tenants, to ensure they meet tenants' needs before being launched. For many tenants, this lack of consultation has built a concern that the resulting digital services will not be accessible.

Overall, the feedback on this topic has been mixed, with some tenants expressing disappointment and concern and some expressing excitement as services become more digitalised and accessible beyond standard office hours.



## Face-to-face & Community Presence

Many social landlords have recently returned to having a greater presence out in communities such as through estate walkabouts, door knocking activities and community outreach consultation events. These local engagement approaches have been welcomed by tenants with positive feedback about this return to a face-to-face approach and community presence. It is seen by tenants as helping to build trust and to re-establish and strengthen relationships between tenants and their landlord.

Tenants have also welcomed the time and care taken by landlords to ensure that face-to-face and hybrid engagement opportunities have been developed in-line with tenant demands and needs. Overall, tenants have commented that this hybrid approach has been providing a more accessible service as more tenants have been able to engage and ensure their voices are heard.



## Tenant Engagement Cuts

Tenants of some landlords are concerned about significant cuts to tenant engagement budgets at a time when tenant engagement should be seen as an investment not a cost. Tenant engagement can help landlords ensure they provide value for money across their services. Cuts also risk making tenant engagement less inclusive as limited budgets restrict options to reach out wider to hear diverse voices and limit time and capacity to build and develop a trusting relationship with tenants, particularly those who are seldom heard.

Many organisations are currently undergoing a restructuring of their tenant engagement provision, which is resulting in the streamlining or merging of tenant groups. Tenants have expressed worry at this limiting tenant's ability to delve deeper into bigger issues and form resolutions together as landlord and tenant.



## Decarbonisation / Retrofit

Tenants remain increasingly aware of the challenges of climate change and the need to decarbonise existing homes. Tenants want landlords to ensure their voices are at the forefront of this most challenging of transitions as many landlords now move into the second phase of their decarbonisation strategies.

Many tenants have expressed their concern around feeling like 'guinea pigs' regarding the testing of Retrofit in social housing. Retrofit and the decarbonisation of homes is potentially a very technical area and tenants are intimidated by the language associated when it is not clearly explained. This has been especially noted by those tenants whose homes are due to be included in the upcoming phases of transforming stock.

Tenants whose homes have already been Retrofitted have expressed the need for ongoing and consistent practical support as they learn to live with their new homes. This support could be regarding the changing of their lifestyle and habits to work with the new technology, or as mentioned above – simply a listening ear and someone to explain how the new technology works.

There is much conflicting information regarding Retrofit and the decarbonisation of homes for tenants, and tenants have consistently expressed their concern on this. Feedback regarding how the technology will affect their cost of living and finances has been a re-occurring theme, as there are currently no guarantees for tenants on saving money with the new technology.

**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.**

