

# **Tenant Voice on Covid-19**

## **-Cracks starting to appear**



# Introduction

**Phase 1:** In the first 2 weeks of 'lockdown' (late March/early April 2020) we conducted a Wales-wide survey asking tenants for their initial thoughts & concerns regarding Covid-19 pandemic. The published report highlighted people's concerns about health, access to shopping supplies, where they got information from and what support they wanted from their landlord.

**Phase 2:** Seven weeks on, TPAS Cymru decided a further survey was required. Lockdown continues in Wales, but we are seeing phased removal of restrictions in England. We wanted to understand about how tenants in Wales were feeling and their current attitude & needs. The response to this survey was the highest we have received since Tenant Pulse began 3 years ago, and we will ensure their voice contained in this report is shared widely in housing sector so that people can act on the findings.

## Methodology agreed:

Online survey renters in Wales living in social housing, supported housing and the private rental sector (PRS). The survey was issued on 14<sup>th</sup> May 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 Welsh Government, 2 Local Authorities and 2 Housing Associations.

## Response rates:

We received over 500 online responses – the highest response we have had for a Tenant Pulse survey. Tenants want their voice heard during this period.

*Note: Due to home working restrictions, we were unable to send postal surveys to our digitally excluded panel members. Historically we receive over 100 paper responders when undertaking a survey, with over 60% of these being people over the age of 65. Our analysis of our digital returns show that we have gathered the views of a cross section of society, including responses from a number of people over 65s.*

*Given that people who are digitally excluded may well have different experiences of Covid-19 however, for example being at a greater risk of social isolation due to being unable to easily keep in touch with family and friends, this should be kept in mind when considering the results.*

## Sharing the information gathered:

TPAS Cymru will share the findings from this survey with Welsh Government, Registered Social Landlords, Local Authority Landlords, our partners and tenants from across the social housing sector. It will be promoted and freely available to all on our website at [www.tpas.cymru/pulse](http://www.tpas.cymru/pulse) thanks to our part funding from Welsh Government and our Tenant Voice sponsor: The Pobl Group.



## Final points

- 1) We have turned the analysis around in 48hours from the survey closing. We do not have the money nor the time to engage designers to create the professional look some other organisations utilise. We hope you appreciate the substance and forgive us for any style failings. This document is available in both languages as that is something we will not compromise on.
- 2) We would be very happy to discuss the findings with like-minded organisations and we will likely set up a webinar or online meeting to enable people to discuss and ask further questions.
- 3) We would like to thank the tenants of Wales who responded in such an enthusiastic manner. TPAS Cymru's strapline is **Ti'n Cyfri - You Matter**. This believe in the tenant voice is so important in this current period of uncertainty.

TPAS Cymru

[www.tpas.cymru](http://www.tpas.cymru)

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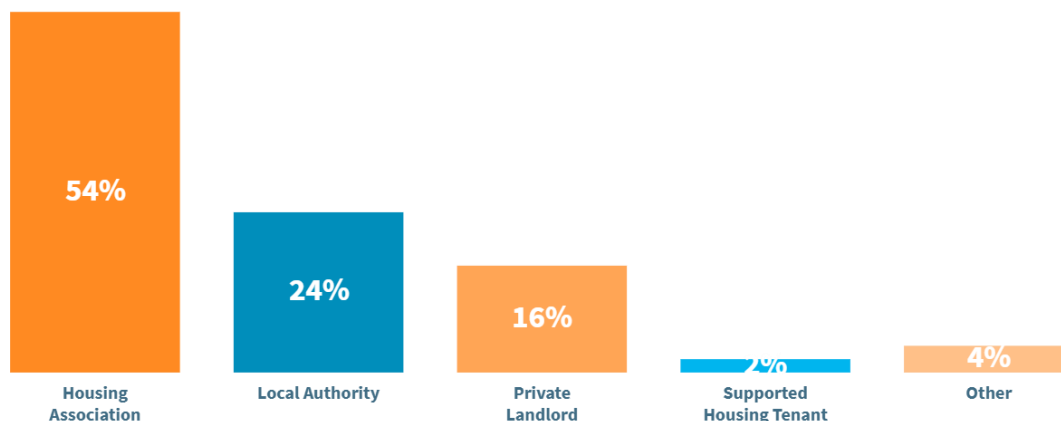


# Survey Results

## Setting the scene: Tenants living situation

Housing Association tenants continue to be the highest represented, reflecting the tenant engagement levels achieved in RSLs. However, as an overall % it is significantly down this time, due to a noticeable response from tenants in the private rental sector and local authorities.

What type of tenant are you?



## Q1. Which Local Authority area do you live in?

Cardiff is the largest response area which is expected given the sheer size of capital's rental population across all tenures. However, we have seen a significant increase in the Vale of Glamorgan which is reflective of the rise in responses from the Private Rental Sector.

Highest responding area	Lowest Responding Area
1. Cardiff	17) Blaenau Gwent
2. Vale of Glamorgan	18) Neath Port Talbot
3. Conwy	19) Torfaen
4. Swansea	20) Wrexham
5. Rhondda Cynon Taff	21) Ceredigion
6. Pembrokeshire	22) Ynys Mon

Going forward: Whilst Conwy features in the top 6 results, it is an exception for north Wales. Further outreach work is needed here and northern Gwent valleys.

Q2. Tenants were asked what concerns they had about the Covid-19 Pandemic. We asked them to select their three biggest concerns.

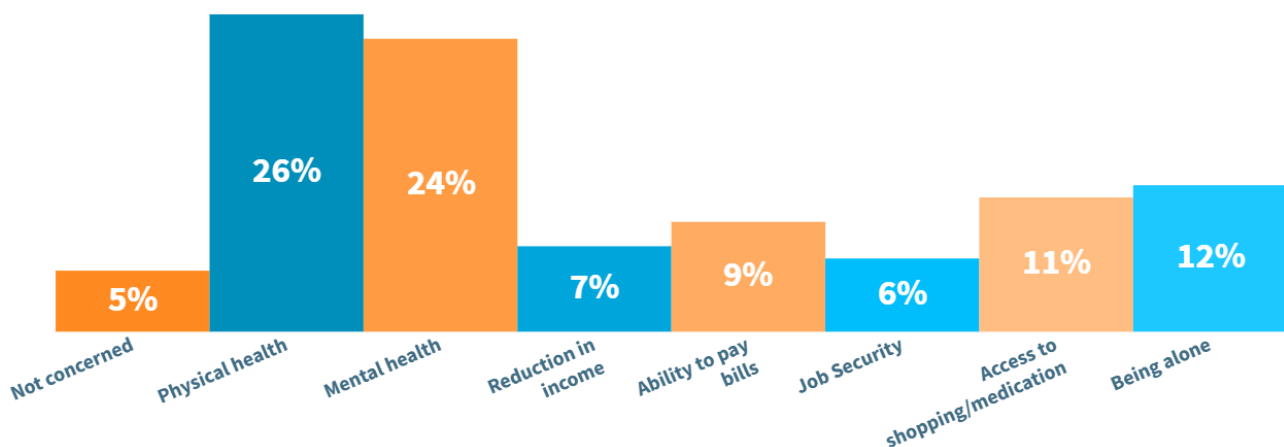
**Key finding:** 62% of the respondents are still primarily concerned about their physical and mental health. Is more support required for these tenants?

### What about financial concerns?

A first glance, lack of income, inability to pay rent / bills ranked low in the results, however 77% of tenant responders are not in full time employment. Therefore, many continue to rely on state benefits/student loans during this time and therefore have benefit of some certainty whether it is sufficient or not.

Private Renters registered much higher level of concerns about financial worries as there was a higher 'in work' population.

**What concerns do you currently have about the Covid-19? (select 3 biggest concerns)**



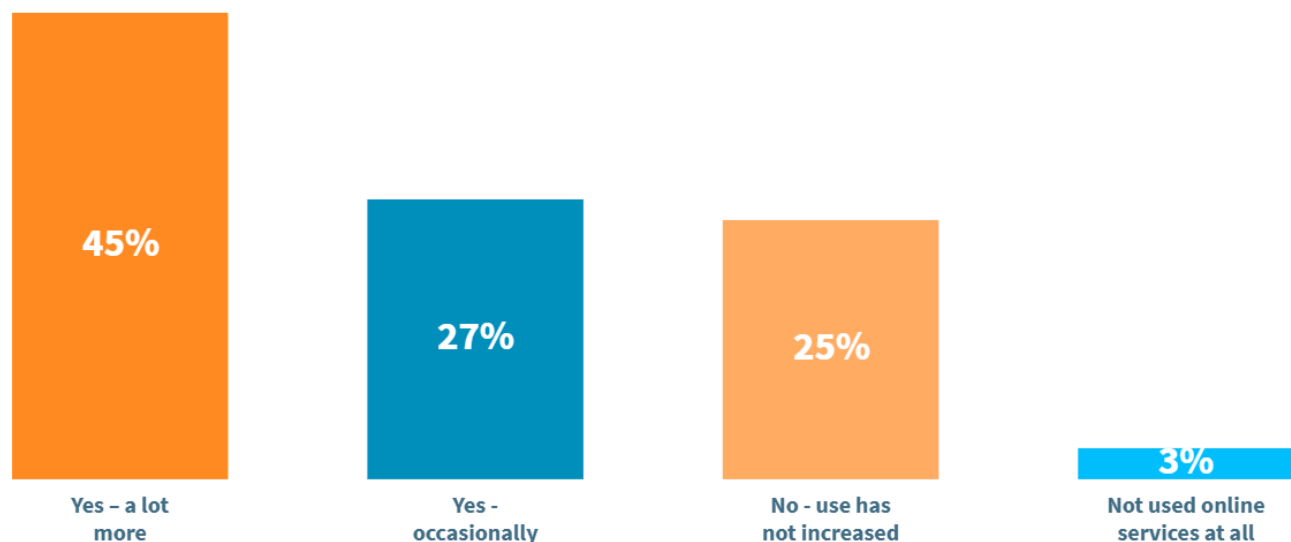
Q3. We asked tenants if their use of online services had increased since lockdown.

**Key Finding:** As expected there has been an increase in use of online services. It is particularly noticeable in the PRS sector. However, this contrasts with previous results of increases in mental health concerns and the feeling of being alone/isolation.

**To consider:** As society adjusts to online shopping, home working and Zoom are these less fulfilling? They might keep us active but not in a meaningful way.

**Action:** This increased use of online services is an opportunity for Landlords and Local Authorities to increase their efforts in communicating and engaging with tenants using their online platforms.

**Since the pandemic have you started to use online services more than you did previously?**



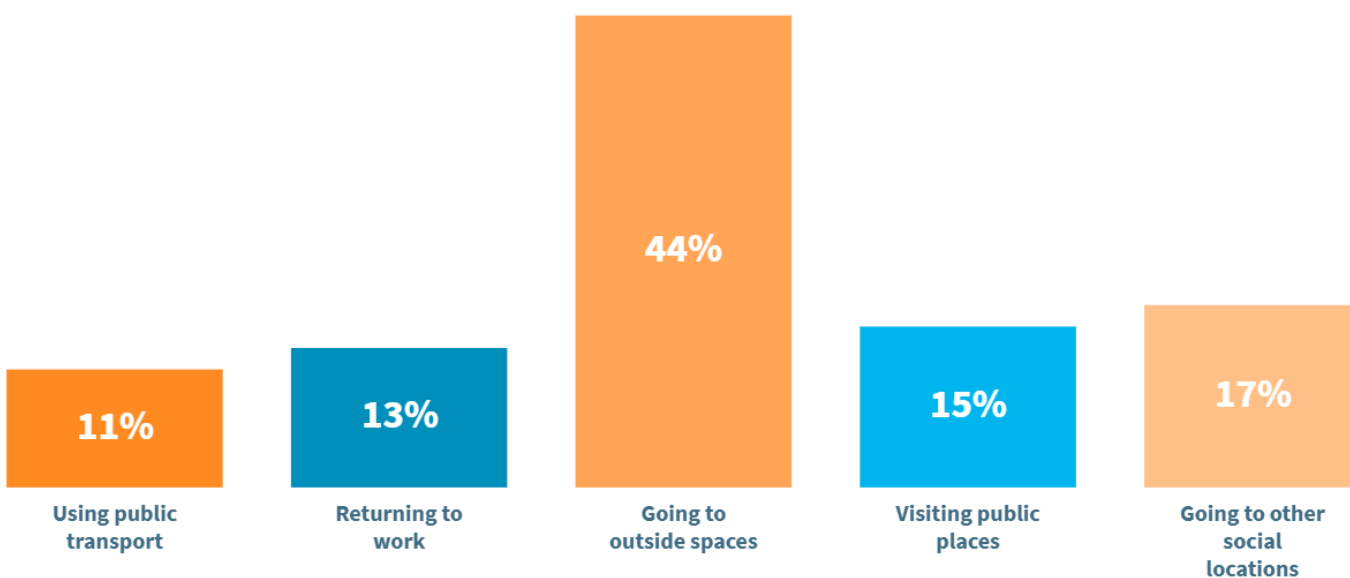
Q4. We asked tenants what they would be comfortable doing once lockdown is lifted.

**Key Finding:** There is little appetite for lifting current restrictions straight away

- 15% said straight away, they not prepared to consider any of the suggestions. They do not want to see any immediate easing of lockdown.
- Tenants are NOT ready to return to normal life; pubs, public transport, libraries leisure centers etc. Even those who would consider lifting some categories, it never went above 17% approval (apart from parks at 45%).
- If we want to avoid a return to car culture, the perception of public transport safety need to be addresses as it scored lowest in all tenures, getting down to as little as 5% approval with PRS renters As people have spent so much time self-isolation, sometime alone and not seeing another human being for at least 10weeks will they have increased anxiety about returning to society and the 'normal life'

*Data considerations: As 77% of the respondents are either not in full time employment or chose to not answer their status, we need to use caution with the return to work category*

**As lock down is lifted would you be comfortable doing the following:**



## Additional points to consider:

As people have spent so much time self-isolation, sometime alone and not seeing another human being for at least 10weeks will they have increased anxiety about returning to society and the 'normal life'

*"It seems to me that the risks will not diminish soon. The virus is not going to go into voluntary lock-down"*

*"I would only be comfortable going to places where I have some form of control over my surroundings. At the moment I would not get a bus or train"*

*"I think lockdown has to be lifted very slowly to prevent a second wave, but we also have to prevent a mental health epidemic (depression) which could be caused by extended lockdown and job losses"*

*"Open spaces seem a safer option than confined ones. I think it's important to mental health for people to maintain (or begin to receive) some form of face to face socialisation but I do not believe indoor spaces can currently be considered safe"*



Q5. We asked which, if any, of the following online communication methods?

**Key Finding:** Whilst nearly all respondents use some form of online communications platform they are used in different ways.

- WhatsApp & Facebook (and basic Skype) are well established pre-Covid communications and are used more for 1:1 communication and keeping in touch with friends and family.
- Zoom is viewed very favourably for community-based groups to meet.
- We also saw evidence of Zoom being used for tenant groups and several people mentioned the time and money saving of using Zoom compared to traditional meetings
- Houseparty was not rated highly outside of a simple hangout for young people
- Usage was far higher in urban areas (and PRS) compared to more rural areas where decent broadband/telephone signal can be an issue for some.

**‘Zoom for group meetings with friends and university tutorials.**

**WhatsApp for correspondence with family. Both have been useful’**

**‘We participate in Zoom meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses’**

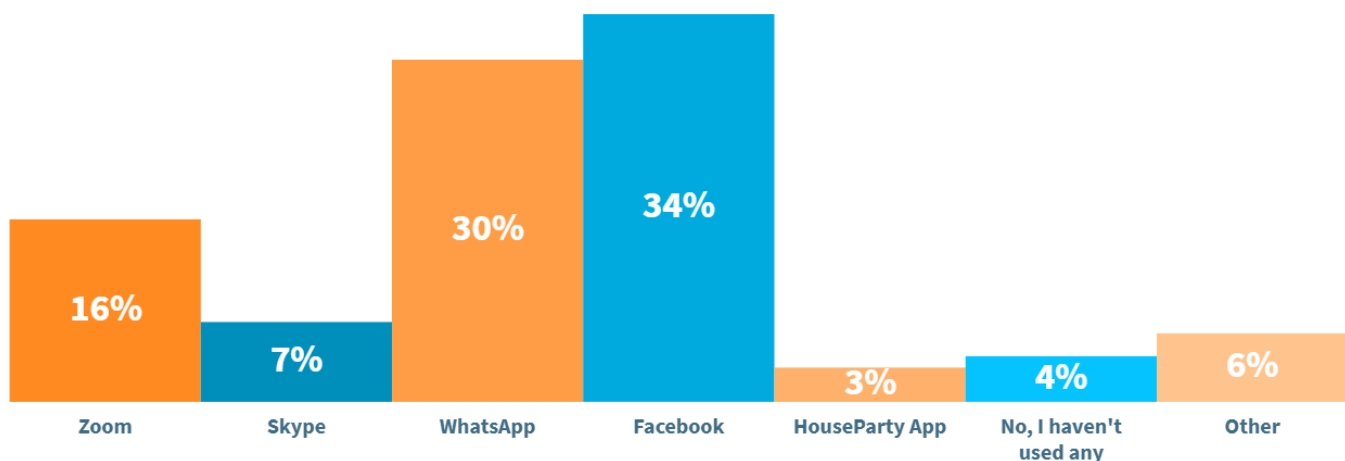
**‘Zoom has enabled me to "meet" with community group which were held in the library, staying in touch’**

**‘Using zoom for Church sessions and meetings’**

**“I use zoom for many different organisations/groups as it is simple to use”**

**“Use Facebook regularly and it's how I often keep in contact with family, friends and contact with the outside world. Catch up on local news etc”**

**Have you been using any of the following online communication methods? (please tick those which you have used and let us know how you have got on in the comments box)**



**What about MS Teams?** MS Teams was not included as it is primarily a business to business tool and financially out of the reach of tenants for everyday use. There were a couple of mentions in the comments but in context of tenants involved in Boards/School Governors etc where it is supplied under license costs to the tenant. We are aware Microsoft are looking to make guest access easier but for this research it falls into B2B platforms.

**Final point:** Whilst not a communication option, the following is typical of what appears in the open comments section far too many times!

**“I've also got addicted to TikTok”** (something many at TPAS Cymru can identify with!)

**Q6.** We asked what concerns tenants had relating to their home during the pandemic?

**Key Finding 1:** Paying their rents, service charges and household bills were not as high as expected. Tenants were a lot less concerned about being evicted which demonstrates the work Landlords/Local Authorities/Welsh Government are putting in to reassure tenants that they are safe.

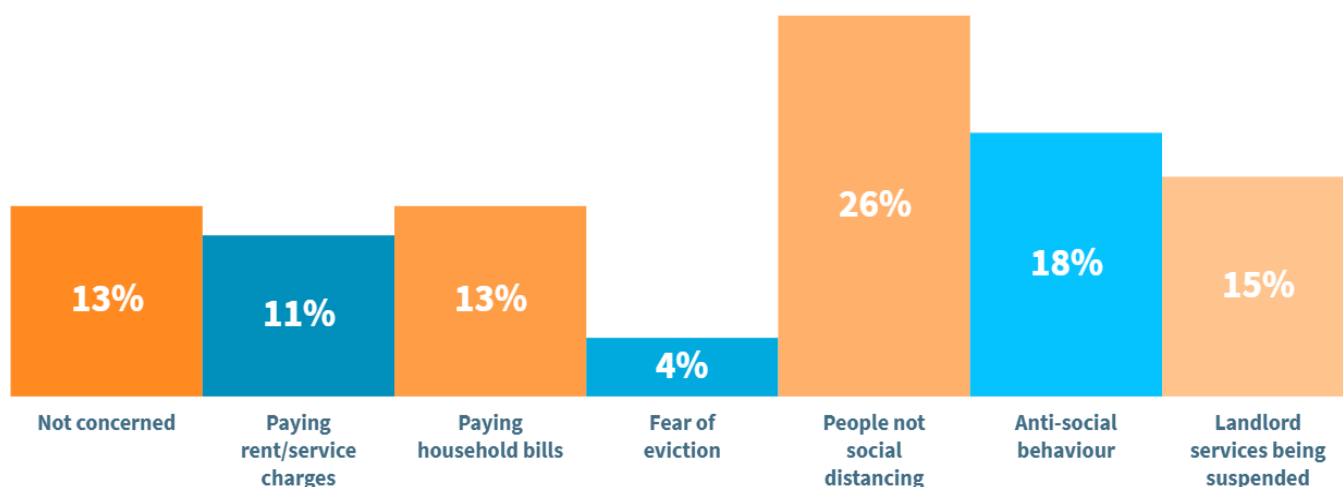
**Key finding 2:** Tenants are worried about landlord services, such as repairs, being suspended at present– clearer communication from landlords is required to ensure tenants are updated on changes to or reintroduction of services.

**Key Finding 3:** People not social distancing and anti-social behaviour (ASB) ranked the highest. Many respondents expressed concern about neighbours not adhering to social distancing rules, particularly when in communal areas, corridors etc or concern about visitors to neighbouring properties.

A number of concerns relating to ASB are likely to be linked to all tenants and neighbours being at home much more during lockdown and so experience increased levels of noise etc.

**Note:** We recently held a webinar with housing officers regarding anti-social behaviour and many complaints received were noise pollution during the day and the smell of cannabis – this was likely to be the case pre-Covid but the tenants/neighbours were not always at home at same time to experience it.

### What concerns do you currently have about the Covid-19 pandemic relating to your home?



Q7. We asked what information you would like to receive from their Landlords?

**Key Finding:** The most useful information for tenants would be how repairs will be done safely, this was endorsed by many of the comments. *"I need to know that anyone coming into my home knows how to keep themselves and myself safe."* As repairs services resume this should be a key communication topic or landlords to focus on to reassure tenants and deliver the service as safely as possible

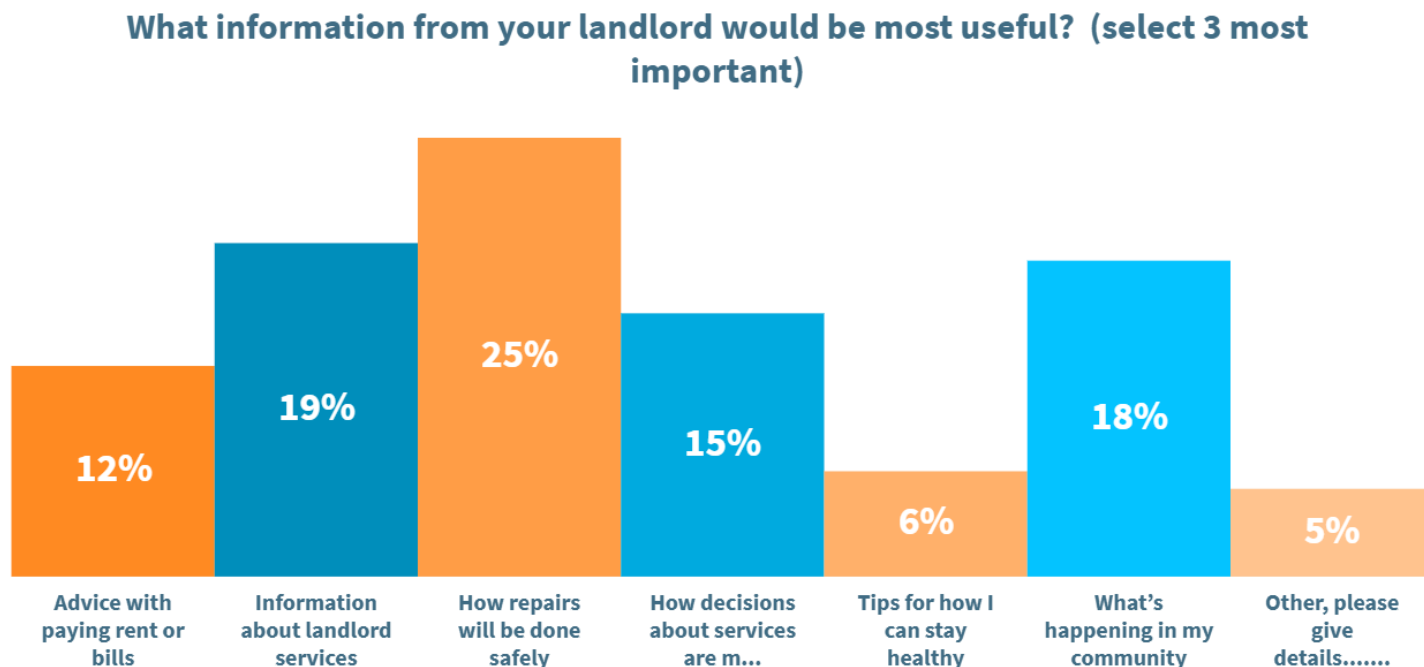
#### Other points to consider:

- 1) A number of comments about landlord services focused on information needed about how landlords are addressing anti-social behavior, particularly non-observance of social distancing guidelines by neighbours and visitors to communal areas as well as noise nuisance.
- 2) Information about what's is happening in the community would be useful for a large number of tenants, with comments suggesting more localised information to their community would be most useful such as; local shops doing deliveries, how to get medicines delivered and support organisations tenants can contact.
- 3) Knowing what and how decisions are made by their landlord would be useful for tenants. This indicates that tenants want their landlord to be more open and transparent about how they reach decisions which impact on tenants' lives.

Consideration as to how information is provided and communicated so that it meets tenants' needs should also be considered as suggested by many comments including this one.

“Apparently some information is posted on the main notice board but that doesn't help tenants like myself who are shielding- how are we supposed to know what is posted”

Within the 'Other' category, comments received indicate that information about how and when landlords will restart services would be useful.



**Private Renters observation:** the responses showed that PRS tenants want more information on the practical side of the relationship with landlord rather than more general information about what is happening in the community/mental health support etc.

This may suggest that these tenants do not expect to receive this type of information from a PRS landlord or do not value it.

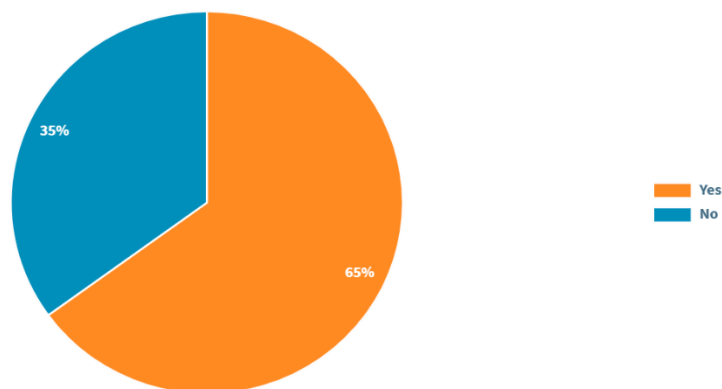
(i.e., advice on paying bills was double that of social housing tenants, how repairs will be done a third higher yet 'what's happening in your community' and 'staying healthy' were both half the response of social housing.

**Question** - Social housing does a great deal on community news/staying healthy. How do we assess value for money/outcomes of this work? i.e., retention? tenant satisfaction? and if can demonstrate value should PRS landlords consider it?

Q8. We asked if Tenants knew what to do if they were struggling to pay the rent?

**Key Finding:** there is a big difference between social housing and private renters  
This first graph shows the combined over-all figure as two-thirds which is positive.

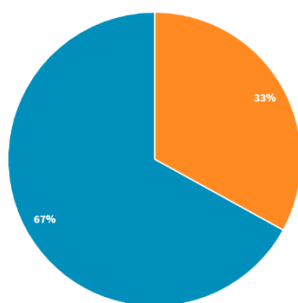
Do you know what to do if you are unable to pay your rent?



However, if you compare private renters to social tenants (RSLs and Council there is a big difference. Knowing what to do is only 33% for private renters which can lead to problems building up.

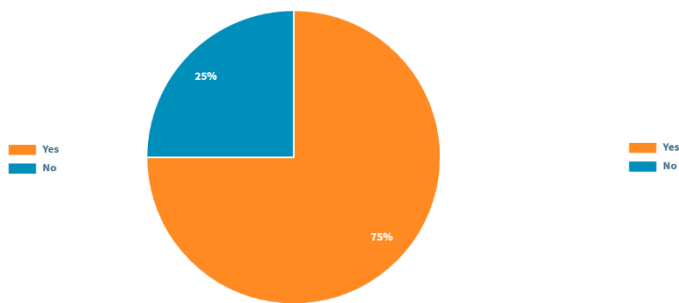
### Private renters

Do you know what to do if you are unable to pay your rent?



### Social Housing

Do you know what to do if you are unable to pay your rent?



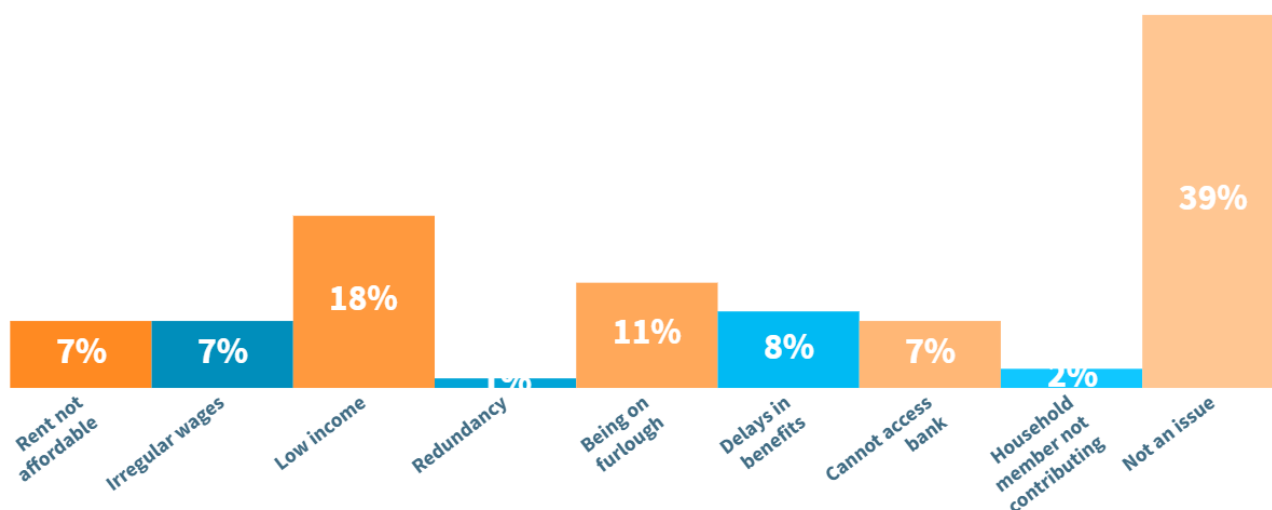


## Q9. We asked what was causing tenants to struggle to pay rent / bills?

Key Findings – The reasons are typical of people who rent - far too many in non-secure low income.

- The additional challenge the pandemic brings compared to normal poverty struggle is furlough and access to banks
- A significant amount (40%) of the tenants that stated rent was not affordable were based in Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan. They were also mainly PRS.
- Household members not contributing was all Private Renters which is where shared households have dissolved at beginning on lock down.

### If you are struggling to pay rent/bills what is causing this?



Q10. Tenants were asked if they would feel comfortable allowing repairs and maintenance to be carried out in their home during the lifting of lockdown?

**Key Finding 1:** This survey had already identified a frustration of tenants waiting for repairs and maintenance. Therefore, it was not surprising that 82% were positive about work being carried out.

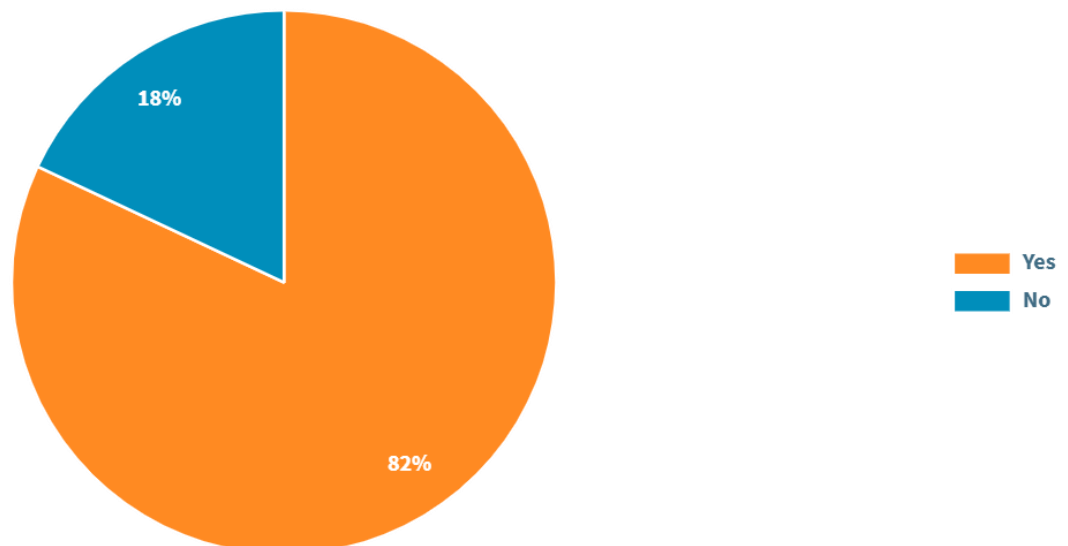
**Key Finding 2:** When we look at the those who didn't feel comfortable a key statistic jumped out: 90% of the respondents uncomfortable are female.

**To consider:** Do females feel more vulnerable about having repairs and maintenance completed in their property. What can landlords do to allay those fears?

Looking at this demographic further there was a slight bias towards local authority and private renters in particular students in the 18-25 age bracket

TPAS Cymru note: we have discussed this finding with a major student letting agency and they believe it could be due to some landlords making assumptions people are at home, so not giving the correct 48hr notice. In normal circumstances, the notice period gives enough time for vulnerable females to arrange a friend to be present. Short (illegal notice) and lack of 3<sup>rd</sup> party mobility might be the cause of this anxiety. That letting agency were making it very clear to those landlords it was totally unacceptable and could result in action from Rent Smart Wales.

**As lock down is lifted, will you be comfortable allowing general repairs and maintenance to be carried out inside your home?**



## **Q 11. We asked what do YOU believe should be your landlord's priorities in the near future?**

This was an open text box. An analysis of the 500+ comments received indicated there are 6 clear themes for landlords to prioritise and focus on.

### 1. Protecting the health & safety of tenants, staff and contractors.

"Proper PPE for anyone entering my home for repairs"

"Emergency services only until coronavirus problems have drastically improved."

"Continue to remind people about social distancing and hand washing. Make sure shared buildings are kept sanitised."

"Keeping everyone safe above all else. Workers of the housing association and their tenants. New rules should be introduced and enforced if necessary."

### 2. Listening to and involving tenants.

"Actively encouraging tenant participation to discuss how services can be delivered"

"involving tenants to find out how services can be reintroduced."

"Listen to tenants concerns such as through a survey like this"

"I'm an involved tenant but have not been asked to get involved recently"

### 3. Being kind and fair

"services for all those who may be vulnerable, not just the elderly or disabled, single parents of families are also finding it hard."

"Take care of tenants, get to know your tenants more so you are able to help"

"Respecting the wishes of those tenants who will continue to need to shield and to deal with them patiently and respectfully".

"Ensuring all staff are trained and have an understanding of residents wants and needs and the fact they may be very nervous about contact"

### 4. Providing an effective and safe repairs service

"Making sure usual services such as repairs are being done promptly and safely"

"Emergency repairs services only until coronavirus problems have drastically improved."

"Making plans so repairs can still go ahead and explaining what repairs will be first when service restarts."

"Catching up on repairs backlog to keep homes to a good standard".

"Keeping us up to date with what's happening about the improvements to our homes"

## 5. Affordability of rents

"Ensuring those who are struggling to pay rent are still able to live there"

"If tenants are getting into debt as the rent has become unaffordable due to furlough, may be actually consider getting less rent is better than not getting rent at all?"

"Not to put the rent up right now"

"not evicting people if their money has been affected by the pandemic"

"Reducing rent for not having services provided e.g. gardening, communal cleaning"

## 6. Tackling anti-social behaviour.

"Explaining what action the landlord can take and what it is doing"

"Being seen to take action"

"Making sure that all tenants follow lockdown rules and social distancing measures."

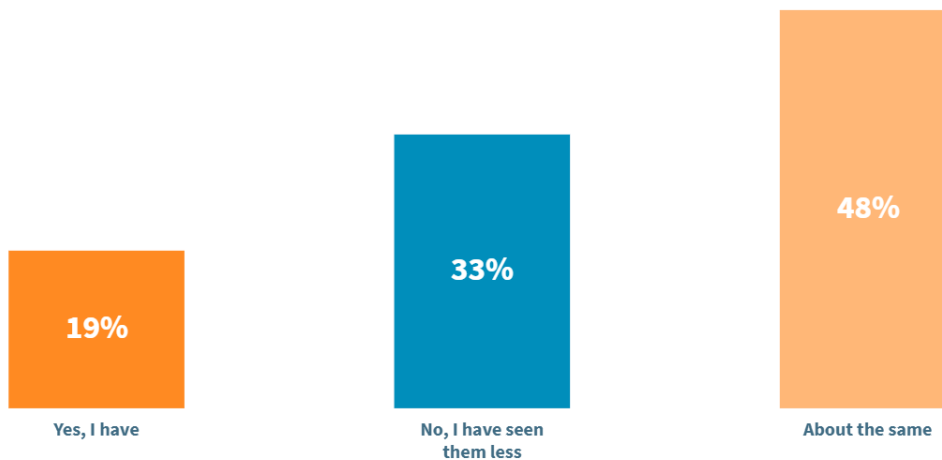
"Helping tenants manage noisy neighbours better and informing people more forcefully about the tenancy rules regarding behaviour".

Q12. We asked if tenants had gotten to know their neighbours more during lockdown?

**Key Finding:** The 'war time spirit' of togetherness and reigniting the community that the media have strongly reported may not exist.

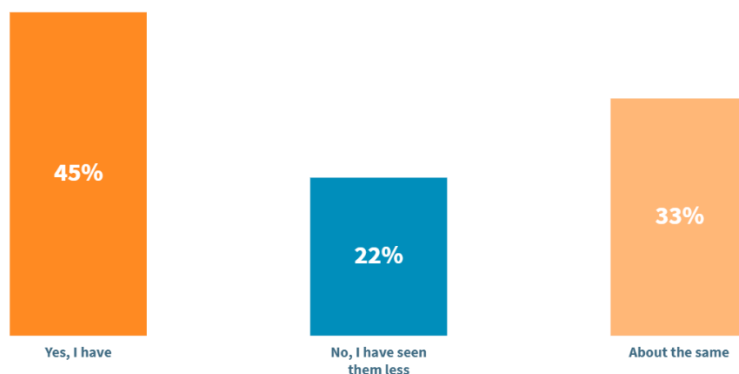
- Over 33% had seen their neighbours less – has this led to an increased feeling of isolation? This could increase any existing mental health issues?

**Since the lock down have you got to know your neighbours / community more?**



**Notable Statistical difference - Supported Housing:** On the face of it, there was a much more positive increase in getting to know their neighbours more at 45% - however this we felt was still low, as one of the main benefits of supported housing is to create an environment to enable tenants to co-operate in an immediate community environment?

**Since the lock down have you got to know your neighbours / community more?**





Q13. Does your tenancy agreement prevent you from accessing your property on certain days?

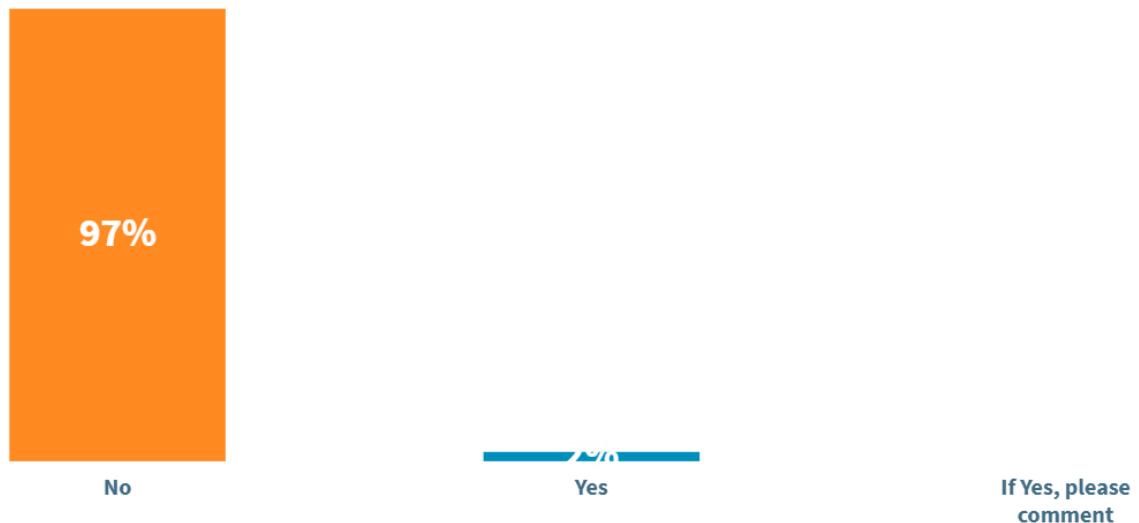
**Key Finding:** This question was mis-interpreted with tenants mainly commenting on loss of communal facilities. Whilst important this was not what the WG requested question was seeking to look at.

*"Our Community Room has been closed for over 2 months now. "*

*We are unable to socialise even with staying 2 metres apart in our lounge, detrimental for our mental ability"*

*"Yes. We are to stay in our rooms"*

**Does your tenancy agreement prevent you from accessing the property on certain days or other periods? E.g. only Monday- Friday**



Q14. We asked if they do share their property with people other than their family, what facilities did they share and how has access been affected?

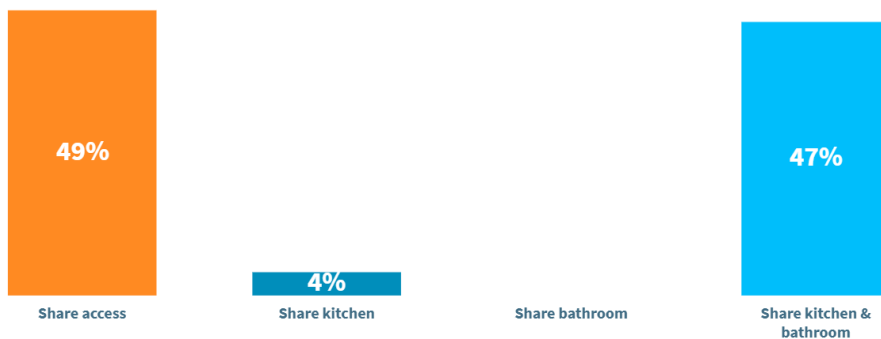
Q15. We then went on to ask if they found it difficult to self-isolate.

**Key Finding:** 100% of those responding to this question were unhappy about other residents not social distancing.

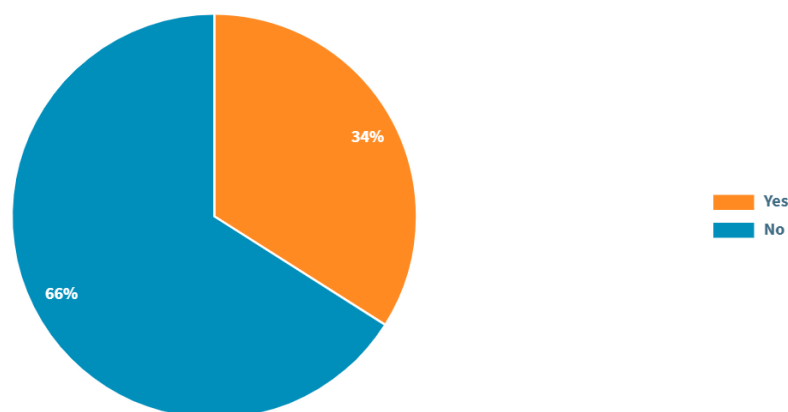
The majority of these were student accommodation where they shared bathrooms, kitchens, communal lounges etc.

**To consider:** Did messages about social distancing not filter down to this community?  
Did universities and private landlords / agencies do enough to support these tenants?

**If you live in a house shared with other people, OTHER THAN YOUR FAMILY, please complete the next question: (if not, press skip) Do you share your house with others? If so, what do you share?**



**If you answered Yes to shared facilities - are you finding it difficult to self isolate / social distance?**



Q16. Final question, we asked if Tenants had seen any **positive** difference in your community since the lock down? (*open text box of 500+ answers*)

**Key Finding:** This split people down the middle nearly 50/50. Whilst there have been community gains, it is clear that tensions are now building between those who follow the rules and those who don't.

(*Note the last 4 days of this 11 day survey window included peak 'Dominic Cummings and his Durham visits' anger*)

Those who have not seen a positive gain

*it's got worse with the antisocial activity on street*

*people still smoking weed and meeting up having parties*

*NO STILL TO MANY DRUGGIES ON THE ESTATE CAUSEING HAVOC AND NOBODY CARES A JOKE*

*The drug dealers are still delivering door to door*

*The residents are happier now that the warden is not there*

*People are helping each other. Except the axxxxxxxs with 2nd homes who insist on breaking the law. The fines should be increased to £1,000.*

*Initially I thought people were friendlier but I think it's becoming the opposite now - tempers becoming frayed, people breaking the 'rules', causing contention, social media is the worst so I try and avoid this.*

*Criminal damage to property has increased*

*The lockdown is a farce here as it has progressed.*

Those who do see a positive gain

*"Been contacted by Pobl on a number of actions about my health and wellbeing"*

*"Tolerance, let's hope everyone continues it after lockdown. Gratitude"*

*"Some people have become more friendly and empathetic to each other in lockdown and are reaching out more to people around them, which is really good. The community understanding of the effects that work has on our mental health (both positive and negative) has been really good too, and people are looking at their local environment more and trying to care for it"*

*"People appear to be more generous and caring of their neighbours"*

*"More people walking cycling and far less driving which improves the environment and atmosphere in the area"*

*"Lots of pros. Agencies and council working together for the community. Excellent"*

Question for policy makers: How long will this any feeling continue last.....

*"Initially I thought people were friendlier, but I think it's becoming the opposite now - tempers becoming frayed, people breaking the 'rules', causing contention, social media is the worst, so I try and avoid this"*

## Conclusion

We are at a key stage of this pandemic response. We about to see easing of restrictions but many people are not ready.

- 1) Much of the community good will and spirit is disappearing
- 2) Tensions are now building between those who follow the rules and those who don't.
- 3) There is little appetite for lifting current restrictions. Some of levels of acceptance to return to certain activities is very low.
- 4) There is a significant rise in perceived anti-social behavior, but much of it wouldn't fit the current stricter, more serious definition that many agencies work to. That doesn't mean it doesn't impact people.
- 5) People want repairs and maintenance but only in a safe environment
- 6) Private renters have greater financial concerns and are unsure how to get advice. This is part due to a higher working population and a lower engagement level with their landlord.
- 7) Solutions like Zoom are being used by community groups with people recognising the time and money saving compared to traditional meetings. This is an opportunity to widen tenant participation and tenant voice

Note: 7 weeks ago one of primary concerns of tenants was the need for support to secure food supplies. This did not feature this time.

## 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. [www.tpas.cymru/pulse](http://www.tpas.cymru/pulse).

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.

## Tenant Voice sponsor



Tenant Pulse is part of program of a work looking to amplifying the voice of tenants. We are very grateful for Pobl Group who sponsor this work.

We would also like to thank Welsh Government for part funding TPAS Cymru as an organisation and to Wales & West for the year-round lead sponsorship.

28<sup>th</sup> May 2020