

# Tenant Voice Summary Report

Over the past 12 months TPAS Cymru has been gathering views of tenants living in social housing across Wales. To gather the views we have used our survey community; Tenant Pulse and general feedback from tenants during our TPAS Cymru regional events and networks. The views gathered, which have been on a range of subjects, have been shared with key housing policy and decisions makers. These have included the following:

- Welsh Government - Housing is devolved to Wales. The Welsh Government therefore takes a number of decisions that directly affect the lives of tenants living in social housing in Wales.
- National Assembly for Wales – With housing devolved to Wales, the power to enact new legislation on housing matters lies with the National Assembly. The Assembly also plays an important role in scrutinising the decisions of the Welsh Government. This work is often undertaken by Committees of Assembly Members who focus on specific issues in detail.
- Regulatory Board for Wales – Housing associations in Wales are regulated by the Welsh Government. The Regulatory Board for Wales has been established to oversee this work, providing independent challenge and to seek new ideas to promote and develop regulation.
- Housing Associations and Local Authorities – Housing associations and local authorities provide homes for thousands of tenants across Wales, with the decisions they make having a direct impact on tenants' lives.
- Third Sector Organisations – A number of charities and membership organisations work across Wales to develop policies that have a direct impact on tenants' lives. These include bodies such as Community Housing Cymru, the Chartered Institute of Housing and Shelter Cymru.
- Tenants – Tenants across Wales can have a direct impact on the service they receive from their landlords by engaging in tenant participation.

Amongst the subject areas in which TPAS Cymru has gathered the views of tenants in Wales have been:

- Fire Safety: Responding to an emergency – Tenant perspectives on fire safety and other emergency situations after the Grenfell Tower disaster
- The Abolition of the Right to Buy: Draft 'Information for tenants of social landlords' document – Tenant perspectives on a document developed by Welsh Government to communicate the abolition of the right to buy
- General Tenant Satisfaction: Tenant Concerns and Perspectives – Tenant perspectives on their general satisfaction with the standard of housing in Wales and the services they receive
- Value for money – Tenant perspectives on what their priorities are concerning value for money.

This document will summarise some of the main findings of each of these surveys and will set out what TPAS Cymru did with the information that our Pulse community gave us.

## **Fire Safety: Responding to an emergency**

In the summer of 2017, the National Assembly's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee held an inquiry on fire safety in high rise blocks in Wales, following the Grenfell Tower disaster. TPAS Cymru was invited to give evidence to the inquiry. To inform our evidence we asked the members of Tenant Pulse about their views.

Through the surveys we learned that landlords in Wales had used a variety of different techniques to communicate with tenants on fire safety issues after the Grenfell disaster. These had ranged from door to door visits, open meetings, letters, information in the tenant newsletter and online, amongst many others. A majority of tenants felt that these methods had been used effectively with 55% of Pulse

members feeling that the communication methods used by their landlord had been effective or very effective, compared with 27% who did not feel this was the case.

In addition to asking tenants about how effective they felt that their landlord had communicated with them on fire safety issues, the Tenant Pulse survey also asked tenants how confident they felt that they would know what to do in the event of an emergency. Interestingly, whilst 91% of tenants who lived in flats felt confident that they would know what to do in the event of an emergency, only 66% of tenants who lived in houses felt the same way. A possible explanation for this was that tenants who lived in flats had been provided with more information than tenants to live in houses about what they should do in the event of a fire in the days after the Grenfell disaster.

This survey also highlighted that there was a broad spectrum in terms of how landlords had been consulting with their tenants on fire safety prior to the Grenfell fire. Whilst some tenants reported that they had no opportunities to get involved with any consultation, others reported having meetings with fire service staff and regular discussions at their tenant panels and meetings.

David Wilton, the Director of TPAS Cymru was able to draw on this information as he gave evidence to the Inquiry. This meant that the evidence given by the members of Tenant Pulse was presented to, and considered by the Committee as they considered how fire safety in Wales could be improved.

#### Information Shared with:

- National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
- Regulatory Board for Wales
- Housing Associations and Local Authorities
- Third Sector Organizations
- Tenants

### **The Abolition of the Right to Buy: Draft 'Information for tenants of social landlords' document**

In January 2018 the National Assembly enacted the Abolition of the Right to Buy and Associated Rights (Wales) Act 2018. The Act abolishes the right to buy and right to acquire, giving tenants in Wales, living in areas where the right has not already been suspended, 12 months to exercise the right to buy before it is abolished in January 2019. In the summer of 2017 TPAS Cymru were contacted by the Welsh Government, who were working on a document that would give social housing tenants in Wales information about what the abolition of the right to buy would mean to them. The Welsh Government were eager to gather the views of tenants as to how accessible the document was, and whether it provided them with the necessary information, and wanted TPAS Cymru's support to achieve this.

In order to gather the views of tenants, TPAS Cymru issued a survey to its Tenant Pulse members and organised 5 regional events across Wales. Through this process TPAS Cymru gathered extremely useful feedback that it was able to share with the Welsh Government. For example, the original draft contained a flowchart. The information that we gathered from the Tenant Pulse community and through the focus group sessions suggested that tenants found this to be confusing, and did not assist their understanding of the issue. Following this feedback, the Welsh Government removed the flow chart from the final draft of the document.

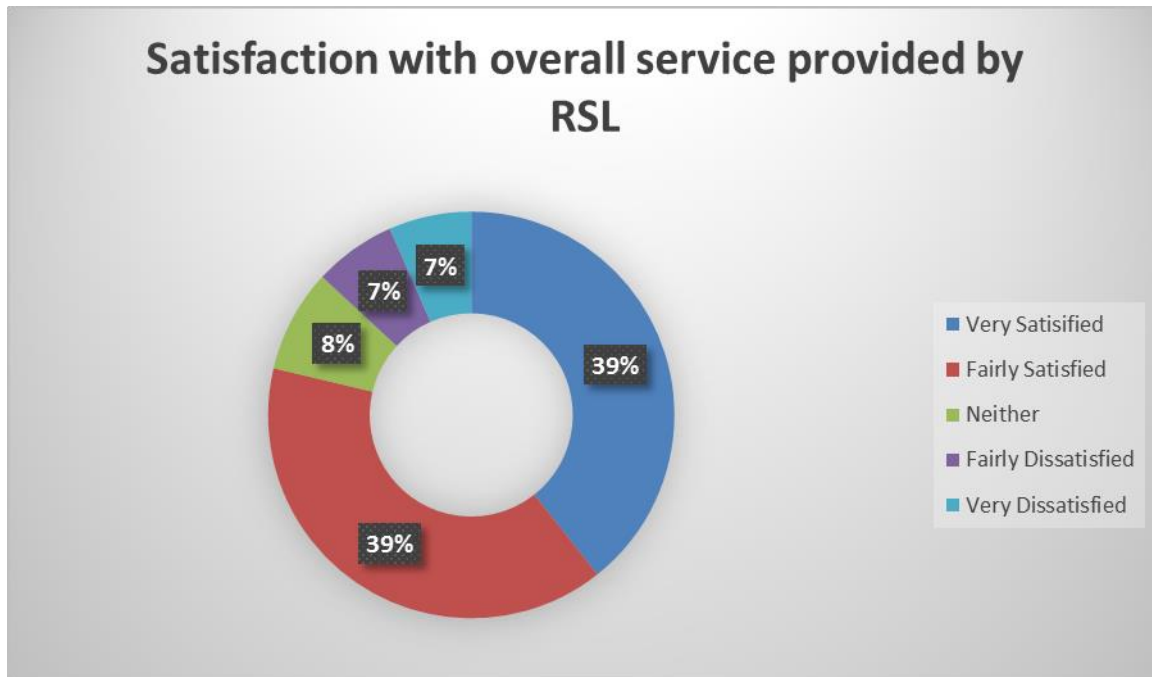
#### Information Shared with:

- Welsh Government

## General Tenant Satisfaction: Tenant Concerns and Perspectives

In the autumn of 2017 TPAS Cymru sent a third survey to the members of Tenant Pulse. This survey focused on the views of tenants of housing associations and contained a number of questions that asked the Pulse community about their general satisfaction with their landlord and the communities they lived in. The information gathered from the Pulse community was further supported by information gathered from tenants at TPAS Cymru's bi-annual tenant networks.

On the whole, the responses to the survey questions suggested that tenants are broadly satisfied with their landlords. A clear majority of tenants were either very satisfied or satisfied with the overall service provided by their landlord.



Other areas where tenants were either mostly satisfied or very satisfied with included:

- The overall quality of home (86%)
- The neighbourhood as a place to live (79%)
- The value of money provided by rent (78%)
- The levels of trust between tenants and the landlord (67%)
- The service provided meets tenants and residents expectations (62%)
- The fact that tenants and residents' views are listened to and acted upon (59%)

Despite the fact that tenants are generally satisfied, only 49% were very satisfied or satisfied with the way their landlord dealt with anti-social behaviour.

TPAS Cymru produced a report containing these findings which was sent to the Regulatory Board for Wales. These findings have been used to shape the Board's work and could impact on the future focus of the work of the Welsh Government's social housing regulation team.

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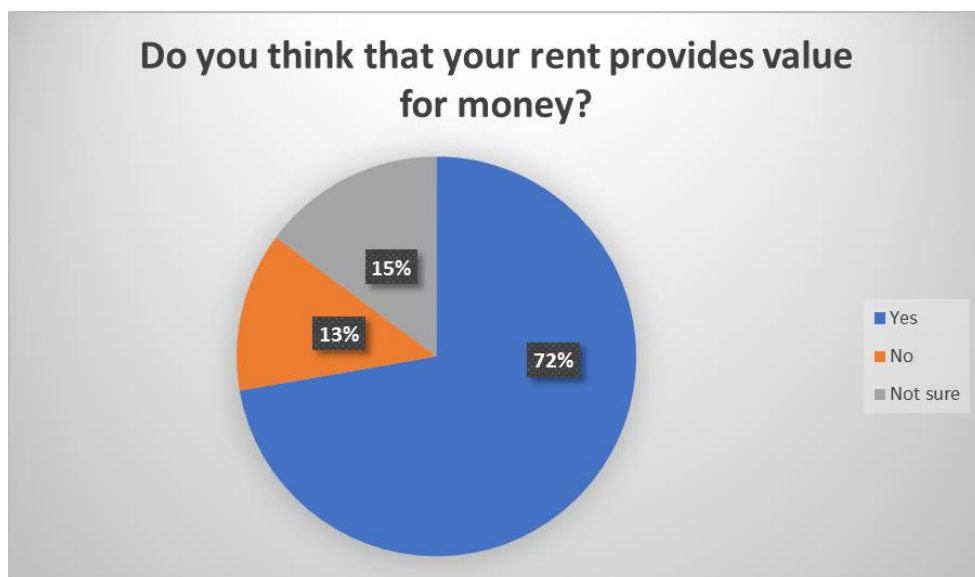
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### Value for Money

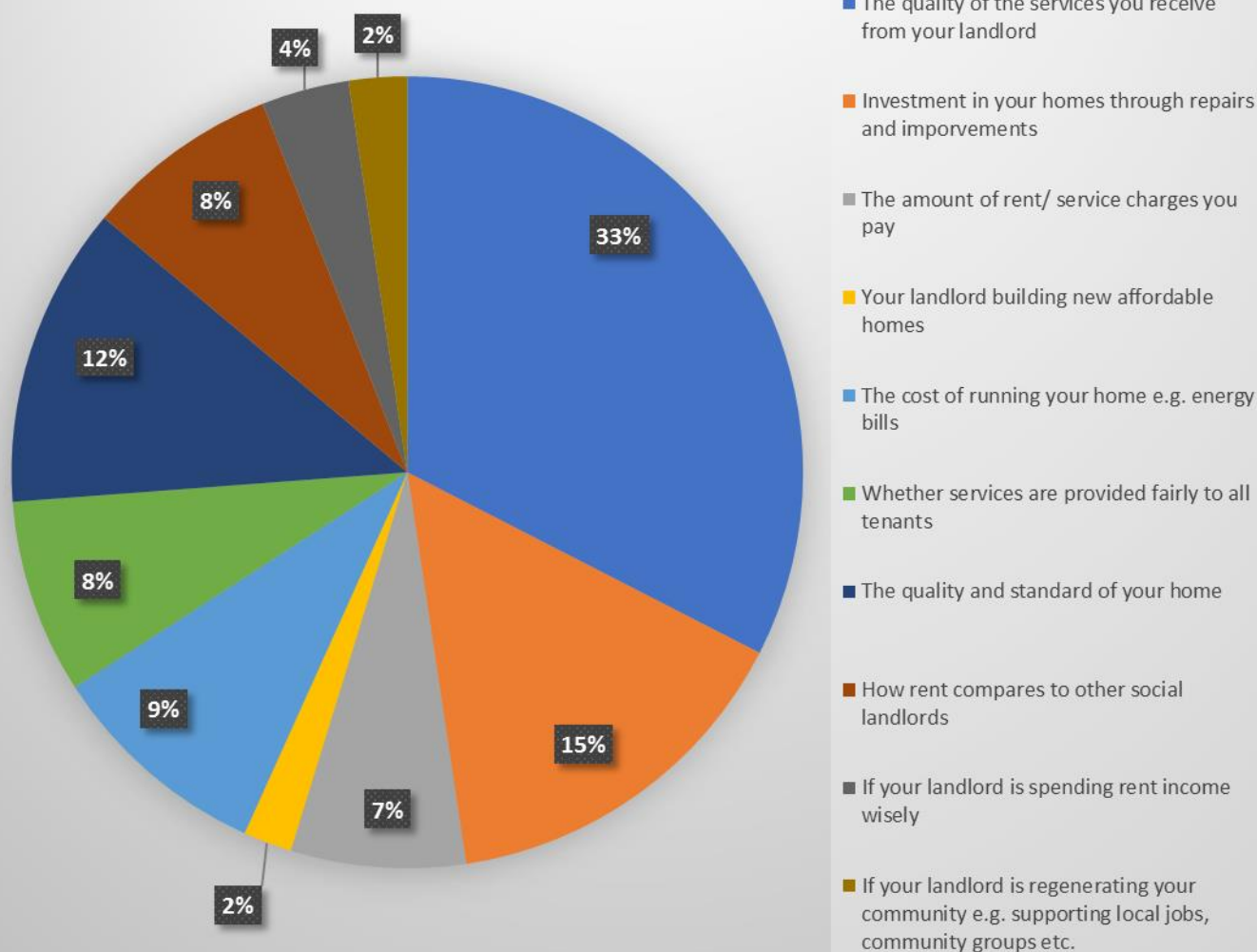
The Regulatory Board for Wales has taken a very keen interest in developing how value for money is delivered within the social housing sector in Wales. In order to assist the Regulatory Board for Wales in this work TPAS Cymru issued a survey to the Tenant Pulse community to gather their views on what are their priorities when considering whether they are getting value for money for their rents. TPAS Cymru decided to open out the survey to all tenants as we felt that this information would be of interest to the Welsh Government, housing associations, local authorities, private landlords and other stakeholders.

The survey results showed that a clear majority of tenants felt that their rents provided value for money.



It also highlighted that value for money perspectives are influenced by a broad range of factors (see pie chart on next page).

## Which aspects do you think about when considering if your rent provides value for money?



Interestingly, when Pulse members were asked about priorities for value for money in the future the results differed slightly. Survey results suggest keeping rents/services affordable whilst maintaining homes to a good standard and delivering quality services are important to tenants. Many respondents also mentioned the importance of ensuring services are provided fairly to all tenants and good information as a key for landlords to consider.

A further question that was asked in the survey was what could landlords do to provide better value for money for their tenants. The Pulse community offered several responses. These included –

- Helping to reduce the running costs of a home - Reducing heating costs through improved insulation, energy efficient boilers & heating systems, installing showers where there's demand as cheaper to run
- Provision of effective & efficient repair and maintenance service - work completed to a high standard to avoid needing work to be repeated; checking on quality of repairs completed by contractors; responding early to repair problems to avoid issues becoming worse.

- Keeping rents and service charges low by involving tenants in shaping the service so that rent income is focussed on meeting tenants needs and priorities.
- Regular monitoring and inspecting of services paid for through service charges in terms of quality and standards delivered
- Reviewing landlord's wider spending activity on internal costs such as new landlord offices, marketing/ publications; AGM venues. This spending should also be demonstrating a commitment to value for money when spending restrictions on services to tenants and investment in homes are in place.
- Recognising the importance of tenant involvement: listening to tenant's views to shape and prioritise services and budgets; ensuring genuine involvement that informs service provision and how money is spent.

71% of the tenants who responded to the survey also revealed that they would be interested in having information from their landlords on how it provides value for money. Tenants also felt that they could be effectively involved in ensuring that their rents provide value for money. They felt that they could make a contribution in a number of ways including:

- Enabling tenants to challenge VFM, for example through Tenant Scrutiny, Tenant Assessors.
- More transparency and information about service charges so that tenants can monitor and report where service are providing poor VFM .
- Make better use of questionnaires and on-line surveys to ask what is important to tenants and how tenants think budgets should be prioritised and how money should be spent.
- By being open and transparent with tenants about how rent and service charge income is spent, prioritised and why.
- Tenant groups/ forums/ meetings and networks to talk to tenants about VFM and identify what is important to them.

Having analysed this information TPAS Cymru prepared two reports. The first of these was prepared for the Regulatory Board of Wales so that our findings could be considered as part of their ongoing work on value for money. The second was developed for broader housing sector.

#### Information Shared with:

- Welsh Government
- Regulatory Board for Wales
- Housing Associations and Local Authorities
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