



# TENANT VOICE ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND DECARBONISING HOMES

APRIL 2021

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TENANT VOICE SPONSOR

## Introduction

Climate change has progressively become an urgent priority, with the Welsh Government being one of the first in the world to announce a climate emergency in April 2019. The Environmental (Wales) Act 2016 set ambitious targets of reducing carbon emissions by 2050 to 80% less than their pre-1990 levels. In June 2019, the Welsh Government made the decision to adopt the upgraded reduction target of 95% and set a new ambition to achieve new zero carbon by 2050.

The reality of reaching this target is a significant challenge due to Wales having some of the oldest and least thermally efficient housing stock in the UK and Europe. 32% of Welsh Housing was built before 1919, when there were no construction standards in terms of thermal performance. Over the last 18 years, energy performance requirements have changed drastically, however, in that time, only 10% of Welsh homes were built.

These challenges have led to the creation of various professionals coming together to find the most effective and suitable methods to develop low/zero carbon homes and materials for retrofitting homes. Whilst the quality of housing in Wales has significantly improved due to the Welsh Housing Quality (WHQS) programme, there is still a significant amount of work to be done, not just technically, but in terms of the behaviours, attitudes and decisions of the people living in their homes.

This report explores the knowledge and awareness of tenants in Wales in relation to the environmental challenges. It investigates attitudes and perceptions of the transition to low carbon technologies, carbon conscious behaviours, trusted sources and engagement methods through summarising the responses to 16 questions.

## Research Methods

Using the Tenant Pulse platform through the Doopoll online survey tool, TPAS Cymru shared 16 questions (see appendix) to 1300 pulse members in January 2021. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, no postal surveys were sent out. Members from across Wales were asked about their thoughts and behaviours relating to climate change, as well as the type of engagement they would like in the future in relation to decarbonising homes. Respondents were only able to choose one option in the multiple-choice questions.

## Response summary

Three hundred and two tenants responded to this survey from all twenty-two Local Authority areas in Wales. Whilst we acknowledge that this is not representative of the whole tenant population, we are confident that the findings offer valuable insight.

The breakdown of the sector was as follows:

Local Authority Tenants	40
Housing Association Tenants	206
Private Sector Tenants	31
Supported Housing Tenants	7
Other	12

As with previous Tenant Pulse surveys, the vast majority of responses were from tenants living in housing associations (206). 40 Local Authorities, 31 private sector, 7 supported housing and 12 from other tenures. Since the previous survey, there has been an increase in responses from Ceredigion, three quarters of which are from Housing Association Tenants. Conwy responses have decreased but they remain in the top 5.

Highest responding areas	Lowest responding areas
1. Vale of Glamorgan	17. Gwynedd/Neath
2. Cardiff	18. Caerphilly/Torfaen
3. Swansea	19. Merthyr Tydfil
4. RCT	20. Wrexham
5. Powys/Conwy	21. Flintshire
6. Ceredigion	22. Ynys Mon

It is our hope that this report will serve as a basis to taking the initial steps towards engaging with tenants based on their level of understanding and expectations from Decarbonisation of Homes in Wales.

*Note: This research was conducted based off a UK report carried out by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy in January 2020.*

## Key Findings

- Housing Associations have the highest representation of tenants to have completed this survey. This is consistent with all our previous Tenant Pulse surveys.
- Tenants in part-time work and those that are retired, felt that their energy bills were more affordable than tenants in full-time work or those unemployed.
- Almost half of tenants in the private sector (49%) felt that their energy bills were unaffordable.
- Almost half of tenants (43%) were unsure if their heating system was environmentally friendly, with ages 18-30 feeling significantly more unsure than other age groups.
- Almost two thirds (60%) of tenants felt that climate change has been caused by human activity, with no significant differences across tenure, age or level of education.
- When considering new technology in homes, 61% of tenants felt that their most trusted source to relay that information was the system manufacturer, followed by landlord and a peer with experience of the system. This was consistent across tenures.
- Affordability was associated with higher levels of landlord trust.
- Face to face explanations of new technology, from the manufacturer was most preferable (47%), followed by 'jargon free' manuals (30%).
- Carbon conscious behaviours are prevalent amongst tenants across tenures, with some variation based on age and employment status.
  - 88% turn off lights in rooms not in use.
  - 65% keep rooms not in use at a cooler temperature.
  - 94% separate recyclable materials.
  - 64% consider the material of the items they purchase.

## Findings

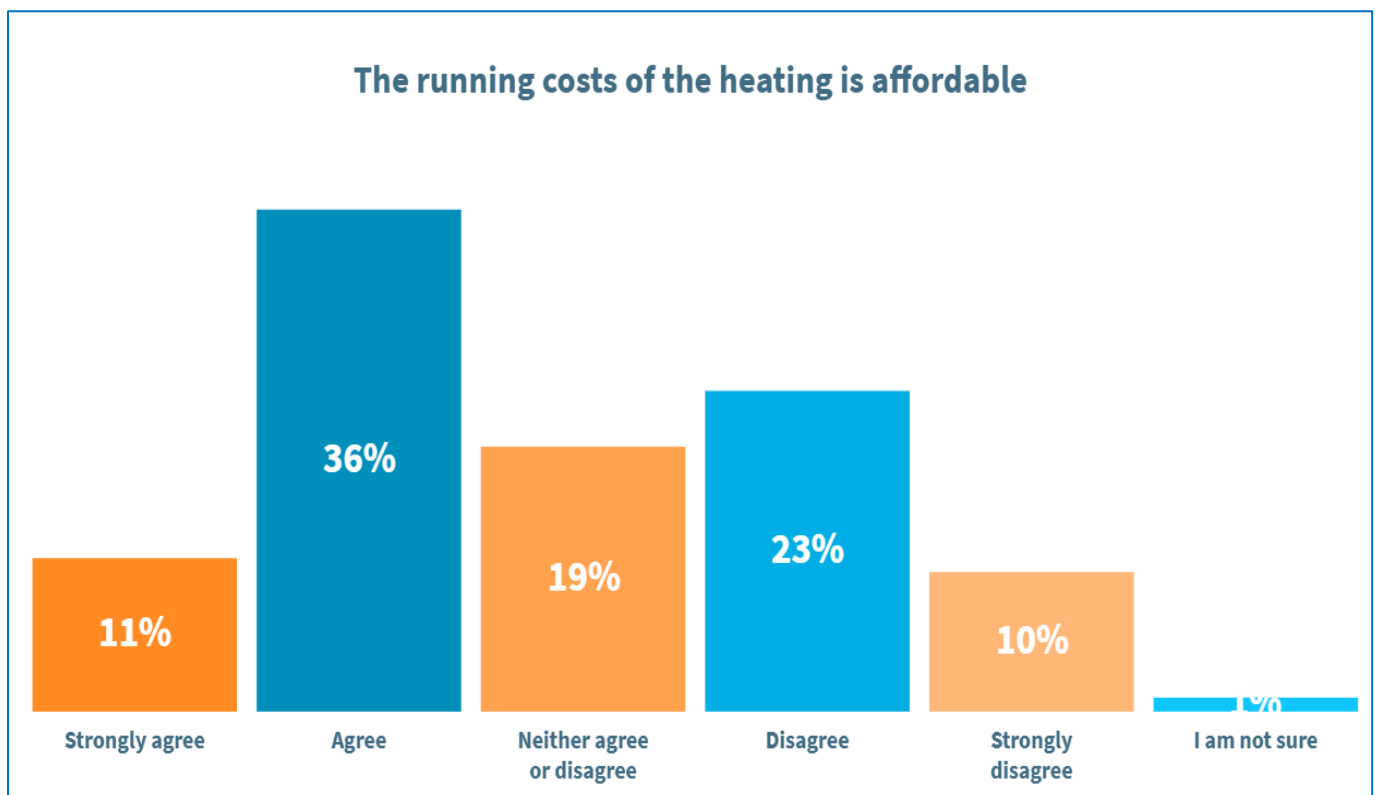
The findings are summarised in the following five themes:

1. Affordability of running current heating systems
2. Perceptions of the environmental impact of current heating systems
3. Perceptions of climate change
4. Trusted sources of information
5. Communication methods relating to decarbonising homes
6. Carbon conscious behaviour

### 1. Affordability of running current heating systems

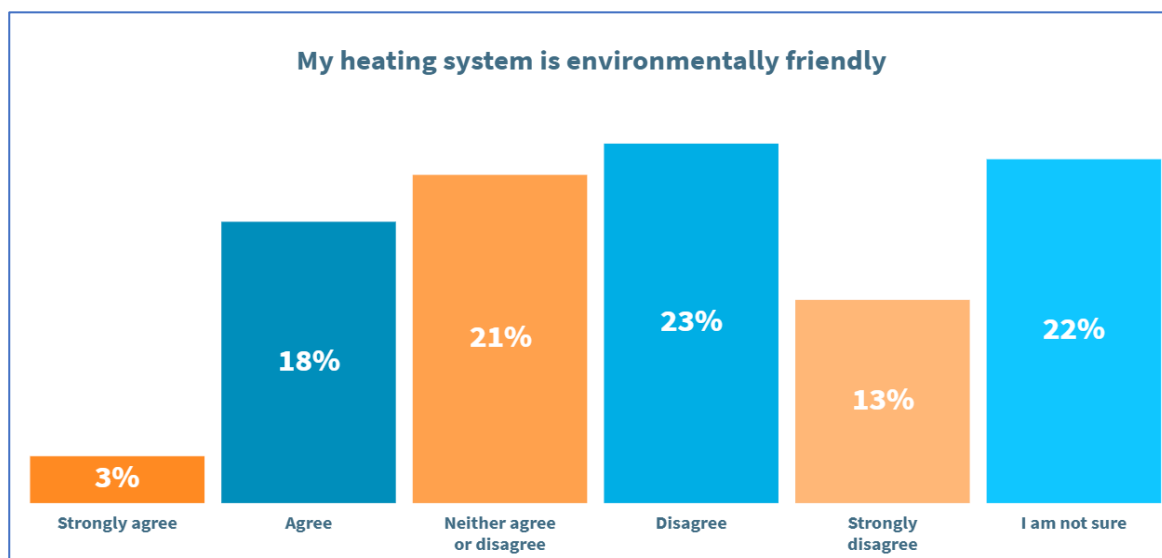
47% of tenants agree or strongly agree that their current heating system is affordable. There was a noticeable difference in perceived affordability, with tenants in part-time work and those that are retired feeling that their energy bills were more affordable than tenants in full-time work or unemployed.

Additionally, there were visible differences between social tenants and private tenants, with 49% of private tenants feeling that their current heating system was unaffordable compared to 33% of social housing tenants. This may be related to the Welsh Government placing a responsibility on social housing landlords to meet Welsh Housing Quality Standards, which includes the necessity of adequate heating, fuel efficiency and insulation. This is not a necessary requirement for private landlords and may be the reason private tenants feel differently about their affordability when compared with social tenants.



## 2. Perceptions of the environmental impact of current heating systems

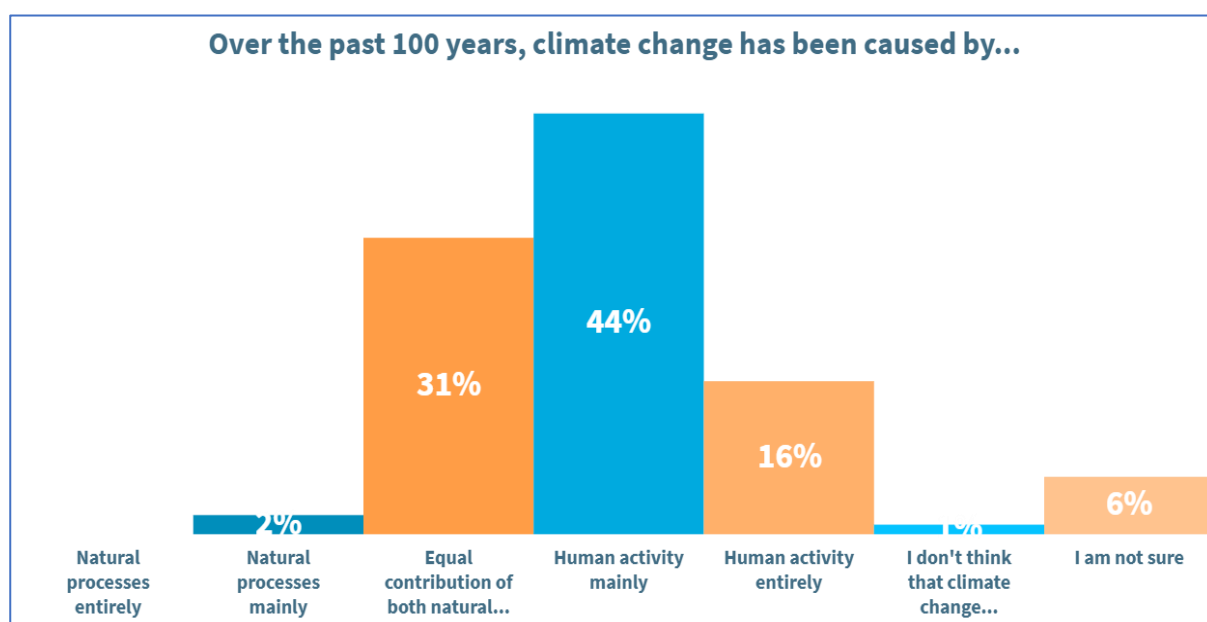
21% of tenants believe that their current heating system is environmentally friendly, 22% are unsure and 21% don't agree or disagree. This leaves only 36% of tenants who feel that their heating systems are negatively impacting the environment. Such results suggest a lack of understanding and awareness of the impact that housing has on the environment. There was significant variation in perceptions and understanding based on level of education. Those without a degree weren't sure if their heating system impacted the environment, whereas those with a degree were (32% - 11%).



## 3. Perceptions of climate change

44% of tenants felt that climate change has been a consequence of human behaviour mainly and 16% felt it was entirely a consequence of human behaviour. There was a slight variation in perception based on level of education. Almost half of those without a degree felt that climate change is caused by an equal contribution of both natural and human activity, whereas only a small percentage of those with a degree agreed (30% - 5%). The only age group who felt that climate change didn't exist were those aged 18-30. There were no noticeable differences in perceptions based on tenure or Local Authority area.

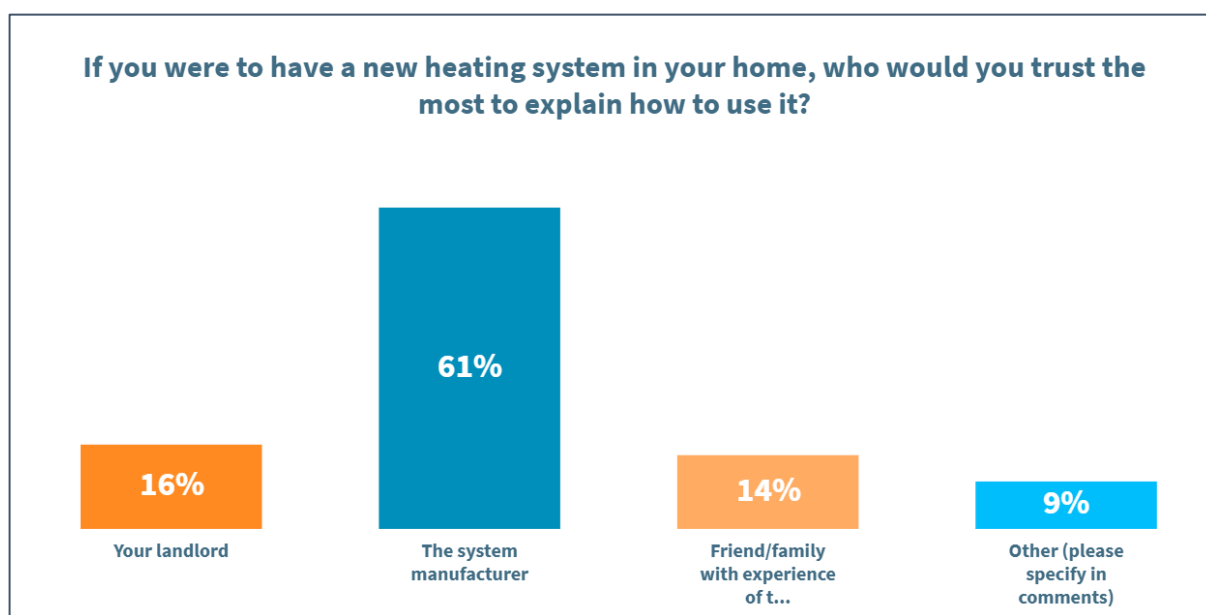
As might be expected, the tenants who felt that their heating systems were environmentally friendly in the previous question, were amongst those who were unsure if climate change was real, or that it was an equal contribution of both natural and human activity.



## 4. Trusted sources of information

Overall, the most trusted source of advice and guidance around the use of new heating systems was the system manufacturer (61%). Tenants in the private sector were less likely to trust their landlord than those in the social sector (3% - 20%) and tenants in supported accommodation were more likely to trust their friend or family than those local authority general needs housing (29% - 5%). The age group most likely to trust their landlord was 45-60 (17%) compared with those aged 18-30 (12%), with 95% of this age group living in housing association homes. There were no noticeable differences in levels of education as an indicator for trust, nor was employment.

Interestingly, those that felt that their current heating systems were affordable had higher levels of trust in their landlord than those that didn't (26% - 11%).



Tenants were given the option to specify any other potential sources in their comments.

There were four common recurring themes which included:

- Justification of choosing the system manufacturer over other sources
- Level of qualification of those providing the service
- Self learning
- Perceptions of landlords and trust

Many centred around the 'why', explaining their reasoning for choosing the manufacturer:

*"It would be the manufacturer that I would expect to know how environmentally friendly and economical (the system is) to me"*

*"I expect the manufacturer to know their products more fully than anyone else including simple problem solving solutions"*

*"The manufacturer would know the most efficient way to use the system"*

*"The manufacturing company will be able to answer any questions, rather than waiting for a landlord to come back to you"*

Others focussed on level of qualification and alternative options:

*"someone who has proof of training in that system"*

*"The installer if they can provide evidence that they have the training"*

*"I would want them to be independent, not my landlord, but I would trust my friends and family if they had used it"*

*"I assume a trained heating engineer would have the best knowledge"*

*"Someone trusted with previous experience would be the best option for me"*

There were also common themes around self-learning:

*"I would do my own research"*

*"I just want a simple explanation, or something that is easy to understand so that I can learn about it in my own time"*

*"I would always do some research on YouTube or google myself"*

*"I read my own instructions, not someone else's interpretation"*

Finally, there were mixed feelings around trust and perceptions of landlords:

*"I would need to see written evidence"*

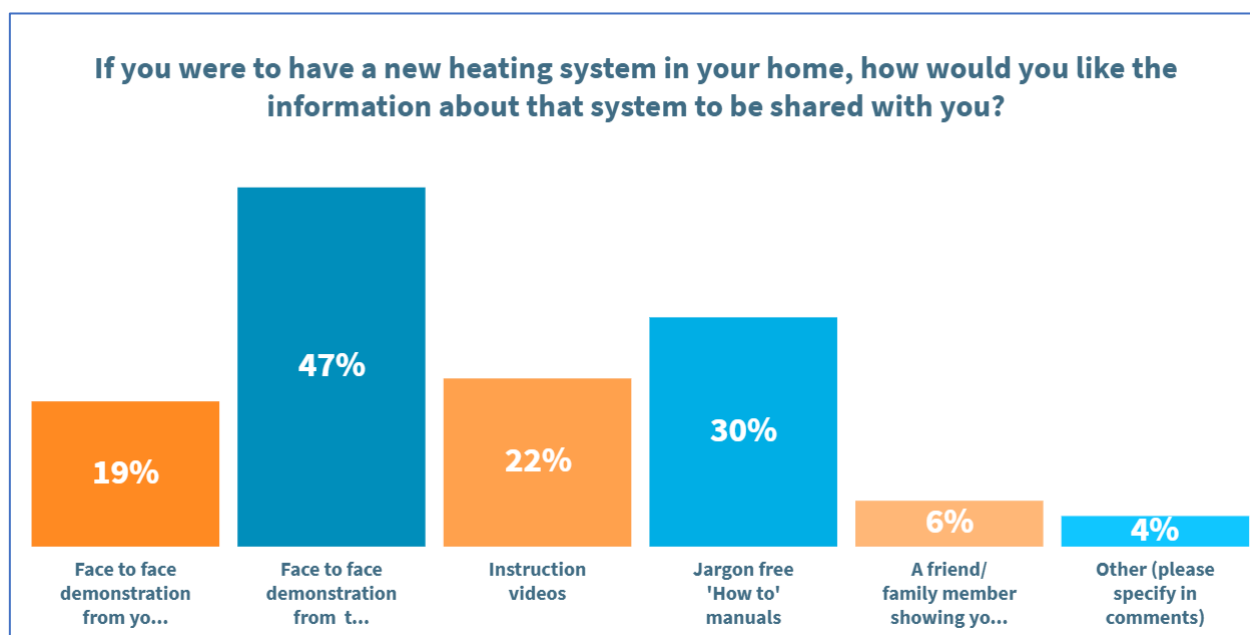
*"I have found that landlords are mainly biased towards the costs of the systems, and not taken into account the environmental impact information"*

*"I sit with the heating on and a blanket on, its expensive, the council doesn't care so of course I wouldn't trust them"*

## **5. Communication methods relating to decarbonising homes**

When considering how we will engage tenants in the future, we wanted to understand specific method preferences. Face to face demonstration by the manufacturer was the most selected choice (47%) followed by jargon free 'how to' manuals (30%). There was a slight variation, based on the age of respondents, with those aged 18-30 selecting jargon-free manuals slightly more than face to face (35% - 29%). Face to face demonstration was most important to those aged 30-45 (54%), closely followed by 60+ (47%) and 40-60 (45%).

There were no noticeable differences in selection based on levels of education or employment status. However, there was a clear difference in responses based on tenure. Those living in social housing were more inclined to have landlord face to face demonstration than those living in private housing. Amongst the housing association respondents, 21% selected the 'face to face landlord demonstration' 31% of Local Authority respondents and 0% of private tenants. (see chart overleaf)



## 6. Carbon conscious behaviours

Within this section of the survey, we asked tenants four questions which centred around carbon conscious behaviours, including:

1. How often, if at all, do you switch off the lights in the room not in use?
2. How often, if at all, do you keep rooms not in use at a cooler temperature?
3. How often, if at all, do you separate rubbish into items that can be recycled?
4. When buying items, how often do you consider how easy it is to recycle the packaging?

### Switching off the lights

There was a clear indication that tenants are engaging in climate conscious behaviours. 88% of tenants switch off the lights in rooms not in use. When considering tenure, tenants in supported housing were less likely to switch off their lights than other tenures (64% - 94%). There was no noticeable difference in levels of education, age or employment status.

### Keeping rooms not in use at a cooler temperature

The overall response was that 65% of tenants kept their rooms at a cooler temperature when they weren't using them. There were no noticeable differences in tenure or level of education, however, those that were retired or not working were more likely to than full-time workers to do this (Retired 72%, Not working 67%, Full-time work 52%). There was also a significant difference in age, respondents aged 18-30 and 30-45 were much less likely to engage in this than those aged 45-60 and 60+ (54% - 75%).

### Separation of recycled items

94% of tenants separated rubbish to recycle. This was consistent across level of education, age and employment status. There was however a slight variation in tenure, with those in supported housing being more likely to recycle than others (79% - 57%).

### Consideration of recycled packaging when purchasing:

64% of the overall responses considered how easy it is to recycle packaging before purchasing, with no noticeable differences in tenure or education level. Employment status seemingly contributed to decision making, with those not working, retired or working part-time were more likely than those that are working full-time (65% - 54%) to take these considerations. Age was also a contributing factor, with those aged 18-30

being much more likely to consider this than those aged 30-45 (70% - 52%). This correlated with the fact that those aged 30-45 were amongst the full-time working group.

## **Conclusion**

This report explores the knowledge and awareness of tenants in Wales in relation to the environmental challenges. It investigates attitudes and perceptions of the transition to low carbon technologies and carbon conscious behaviours. Overall, whilst tenants are engaging in carbon conscious behaviours, their perceptions of climate change were inconsistent. Less than half of tenants felt that their current heating system was affordable and there are clear differences based on employment status and tenure, with those in the private sector deeming it more unaffordable than those in the social sector.

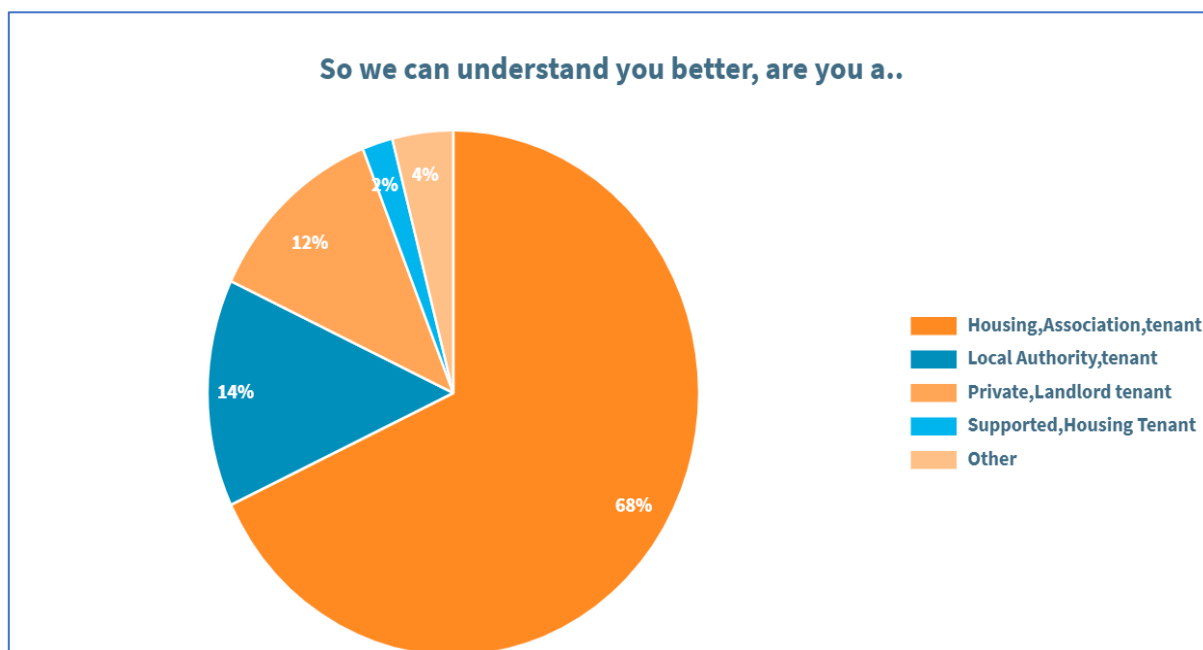
Perceptions of the environmental impact of current heating systems was extremely inconsistent and varied significantly based on level of education. These findings are consistent with the previous report carried out by the UK Government Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. There was consistency in perceptions around the belief that climate change was real and those that felt their heating systems were environmentally friendly. Despite the announcement of the climate emergency, there was an evident lack of clarity amongst the respondents as to whether it is a consequence of human or natural activity.

When asked about trusted sources of information for the inputting of new heating systems in the home, the system manufacturer was the most selected, significantly outweighing landlord and family/friends with experience of the system. There was a clear association between affordability and trust. Tenants who felt that their heating was affordable were more likely to choose their landlord as a trusted source. Employment status or educational level didn't seem to impact this, however tenure and age did. Tenants living in the private sector were more likely not to trust their landlord and those aged 45-60 were the most likely to. There was also a highlighted importance of the need for any source to have ample training and qualifications and for it to be evidenced.

It became clear that a mixed method approach to engaging with tenants in further discussions about climate change and the decarbonisation agenda is preferred. When respondents provided further information on trusted sources, there was a clear focus on self-learning. As was expected from the choice of trusted source, respondents wanted face to face demonstrations from landlords as the preferred engagement method. This was closely followed by the jargon free manuals, instruction videos, landlord face to face demonstration, then friends and family. As may have been expected, there were significant differences based on tenure, with none of the respondents in the private sector wanting engagement with their landlord on this matter.

Some carbon conscious behaviours were more prevalent than others. For instance, switching off lights and recycling were extremely common, whereas keeping rooms not in use at a cooler temperature and consideration of recycled packaging when purchasing was less so. There were differences based on tenures and age range across each section, with those not in employment and retired being more likely to keep rooms cool when not in use. Also, with the youngest age group being the most likely to consider packaging recyclability before purchasing.

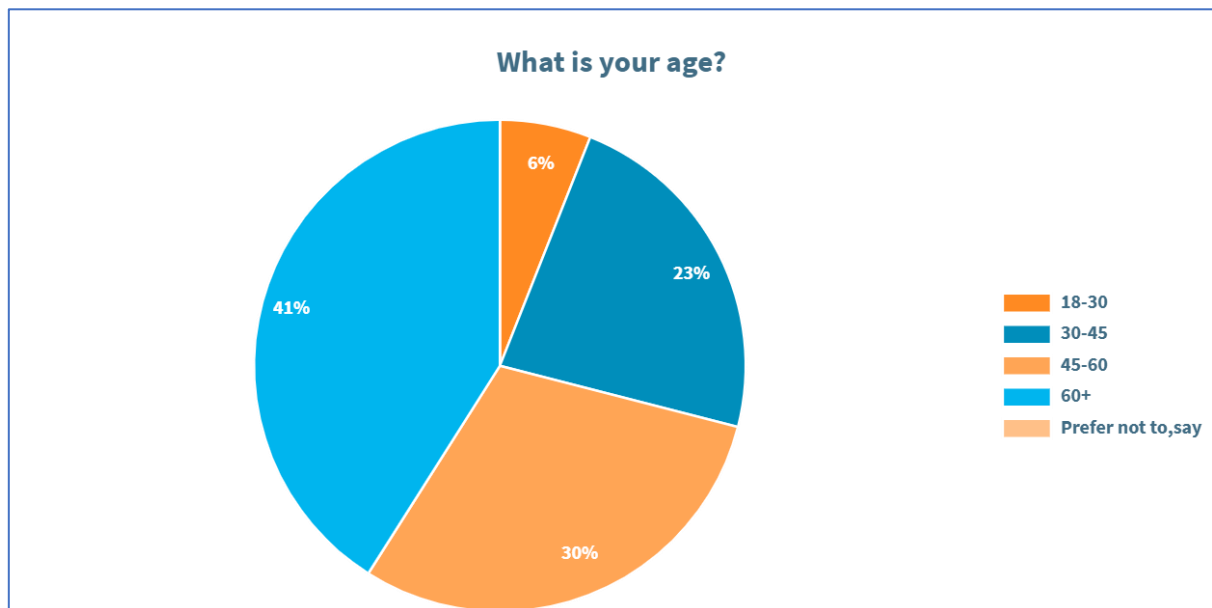
## Appendix 1: Tenure



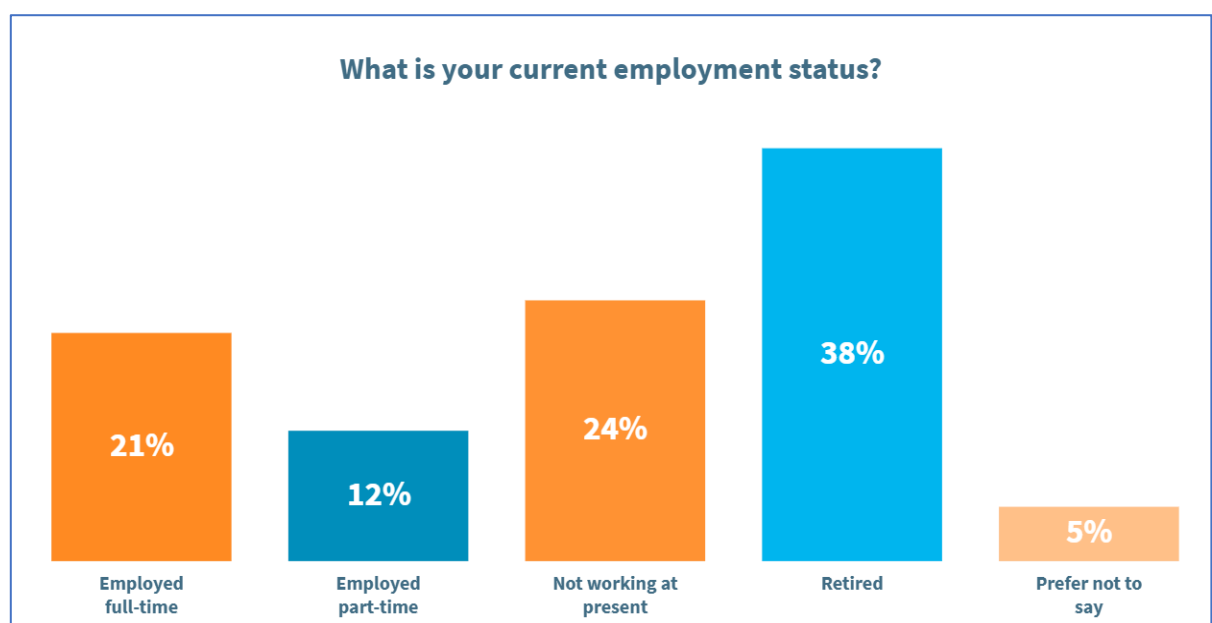
## Appendix 2: Local Authority



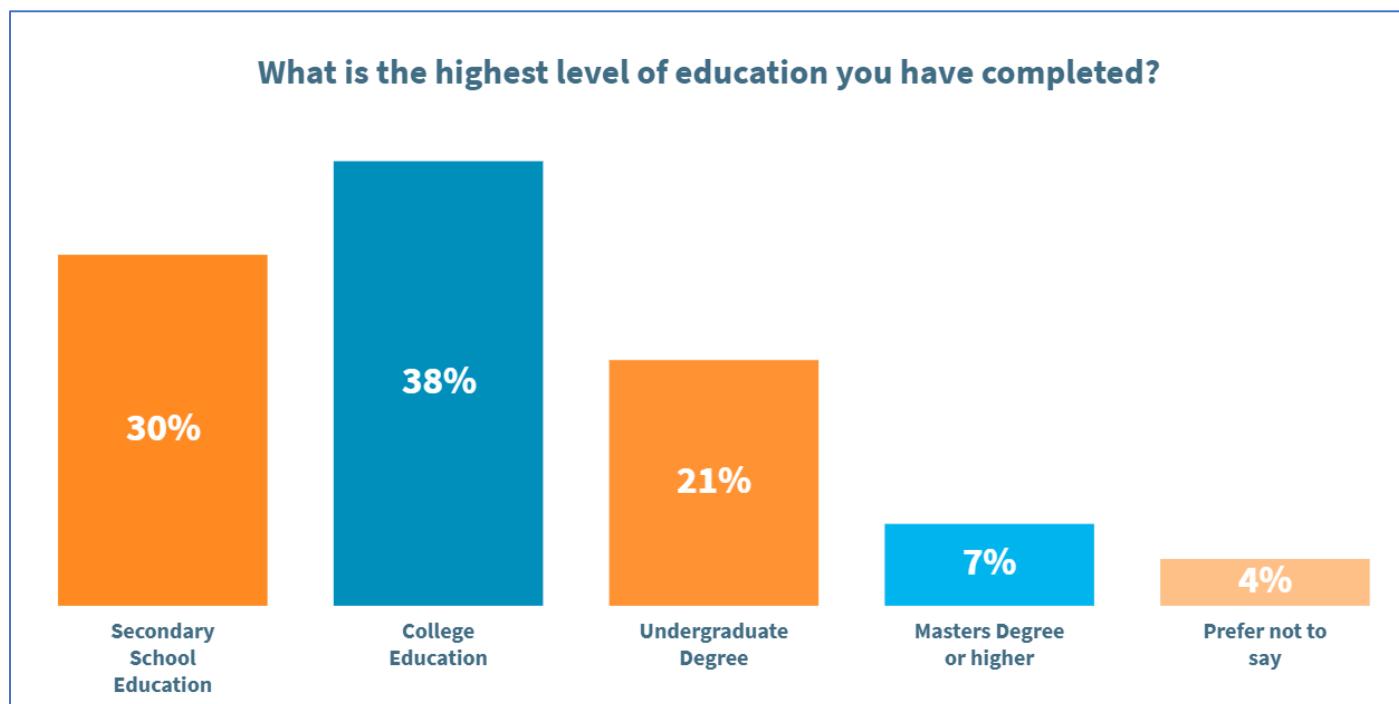
### Appendix 3: Age



### Appendix 4: Employment status



## Appendix 5: Level of Education



## Appendix 6: Questions

1. So we can understand you better, are you a..	Housing Association tenant Local Authority tenant Private Landlord tenant Supported Housing Tenant
2. Which Local Authority Area do you live in?	
3. What is your age?	18-30 30-45 45-60 60+ Prefer not to say
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Secondary School Education College Education Undergraduate Degree Masters Degree or higher Prefer not to say
5. What is your current employment status?	Employed full-time Employed part-time Not working at present Retired Prefer not to say
6. Thinking about the heating system in your home, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The heating system in my house meets the needs of my household...</li> </ul>	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The running costs of the heating is affordable...</li> </ul>	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree I am not sure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My heating system is environmentally friendly...</li> </ul>	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree I am not sure
7. Over the past 100 years, climate change has been caused by...	Natural processes entirely Natural processes mainly Equal contribution of both natural processes and human activity Human activity mainly Human activity entirely I don't think that climate change is real I am not sure

8. How concerned are you about climate change?	Not at all concerned Extremely concerned
9. If you were to have a new heating system in your home, who would you trust the most to explain how to use it?	My landlord The system manufacturer Friend/family with experience of the system Other (please specify in comments)
10. If you were to have a new heating system in your home, how would you like the information about that system to be shared with you?	Face to face demonstration from your landlord Face to face demonstration from the manufacturer Instruction videos Jargon free 'How to' manuals A friend/ family member showing you after they have used it Other (please specify in comments)
11. How often, if at all, do you switch off the lights in rooms not in use?	Never Always
12. How often, if at all, do you keep rooms not in use at a cooler temperature?	Never Always
13. How often, if at all, do you separate rubbish into items that can be recycled?	Never Always
14. When buying items, how often do you consider how easy it is to recycle the packaging?	Never Always

## Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our Tenant Pulse panel for their continuous inspiration and commitment to taking part in our surveys. Your input is truly valued and helps to shape the future of housing.

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.

## 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.

To meet one of our team to discuss the points raised, please contact: Elizabeth Taylor on [Elizabeth@tpas.cymru](mailto:Elizabeth@tpas.cymru)