

**KANTAR PUBLIC**



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

# **Social Housing Quality Resident Panel – Repairs, Maintenance and Awaab’s Law**

## **Panel Member Report – Wave 2 Online Community**

Date: August 2023

Reference: 262400341



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# Introduction and Summary of Findings

## **Background to the Social Housing Quality Resident Panel**

The Social Housing Quality programme seeks to make long-lasting change to the social housing sector and improve the lives of social housing residents in England.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has established the Social Housing Quality Resident Panel. This panel brings together around 250 social housing residents from across England to share their views with the Government and ministers on improving the quality of social housing.

DLUHC is committed to listening to social housing residents, making sure residents have their voices heard, with policy makers reflecting and acting on what they hear. Kantar Public are running 3 waves of engagement with members of the Social Housing Quality Resident Panel. Each wave of engagement involves an online community and a series of focus groups. This report covers the findings for the Wave 2 online community on repairs, maintenance and Awaab's Law.

## **Background to Awaab's Law**

Two-year-old Awaab Ishak died in December 2020 due to the damp and mould in his social home. Following his death, the Manchester Evening News and Shelter, with the support of the Ishak family, campaigned for 'Awaab's Law'. The campaign proposed that social landlords should investigate the causes of damp and mould within 14 days of complaints being made and provide tenants with a report on the findings. They would be required to begin work to repair a property within 7 days if a medical professional believes there is a risk to tenant's health.

The Government is now in the process of introducing Awaab's Law. Awaab's Law will set timescales for landlords to investigate and repair hazards and if social landlords do not meet these timeframes, residents will be able to take them to court.

## **Background to the Online Community**

An online community is an online forum that brings together a group of people to share and discuss their thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a particular subject. The online community featured in this report was hosted on the online platform Recollective. It was open between 15 and 21 May 2023. All panel members were invited to participate, and 140 panel members accessed the community.

Panel members were able to complete activities within the online community at a time that suited them and were supported by experienced moderators. For some activities, panel members were able to engage in discussion with each other, including their views on how to enforce Awaab's Law and any key recommendations they had for improving DLUHC's proposals. Panel members were asked to think of a hazard as something that would be a risk to health and safety if it was left unrepaired.

The number of panel members that engaged with each activity varied. Figures throughout this report are based on panel members who completed the activity in question. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. This rounding effect means that in some cases, the data might be more or less than 100. The data is not statistically representative analysis for all social housing residents, capturing only those insights from panel members who participated in the online community.

For further information about online community activities, please refer to Appendix 1.

## **Summary of findings**

Most panel members had experience with requesting repairs, with two thirds (66%) reporting that they had asked their landlord to repair a hazard in their home in the last 5 years. Three in 5 (62%) of those who had requested a repair experienced barriers in getting hazards investigated or fixed.

Key barriers to requesting repairs that were spontaneously mentioned included:

- difficulties getting in touch with landlords
- a lack of communication about progress and logistics
- a lack of expertise among housing staff
- repairs not being made to sufficient quality
- a lack of consideration for accessibility needs throughout the process
- feeling unfairly blamed for the presence of a hazard
- feeling that a request for a hazard repair is not taken seriously

Panel members generally suggested that landlords should investigate hazards within 2 weeks of being reported – although investigating within the first week was most popular. When thinking about starting repairs, Panel members generally suggested that they should begin within 3 weeks of the hazard being reported, although around 2 weeks was the most popular suggestion.

Overall, this means that panel members tended to agree with the suggested timeframes proposed for Awaab’s Law, or that they thought the deadlines are too long. Panel members who thought that these deadlines would be too long were usually considering cases involving life-threatening hazards, or thinking about the impact of hazards on residents experiencing disability or those with additional needs.

The small number of panel members who believed that landlords should have more than a week to investigate a hazard, or more than 2 weeks to begin repairs were thinking about the time landlords might need to source and contract the appropriate services.

When given a list of possible hazards, panel members were most likely to say that the following 5 hazards should be covered under Awaab’s Law:

- damp and mould growth
- structural collapse and falling elements
- electrical hazards
- asbestos
- excess cold

Panel members engaged in a group discussion board about enforcing Awaab's Law, and the effectiveness of allowing residents to take a landlord to court if they fail to meet the deadlines. Panel members generally felt that taking a landlord to court was not likely to be effective in enforcing the law. Primary reasons for this included the fact that court action would:

- not prevent and resolve housing hazards
- not incentivise landlords to meet the deadlines
- place the burden of enforcement on residents, and that they would experience a number of barriers when taking a landlord to court

Based on the information provided to them during the online community, panel members were also asked whether they were confident that Awaab's Law would improve the safety of social homes. Overall, panel members were confident, with two thirds (65%) saying that they were very or somewhat confident. However, 35% were not very confident or not at all confident.

Overall, panel members welcomed Awaab's Law and felt it was a positive step in the right direction for the Government. They hoped that the proposed law would give landlords a clear guidance on what is expected of them. They believed that this would encourage landlords to be more proactive about maintaining the condition of their properties.

Panel members did express concerns around Awaab's Law being enforced effectively. Key concerns on Awaab's Law included:

- its reliance on social housing residents' knowledge of the law and courts
- a lack of sanctions and policing to ensure landlords meet deadlines

Finally, panel members were asked to provide recommendations for improving Awaab's Law. They recommended that timeframes for investigations and repairs should depend on the severity of hazards and whether this would affect residents with additional needs.

Panel members also provided suggestions for general improvements to social housing quality. These recommendations were often preventative

measures and sought to complement Awaab's Law. Recommendations included:

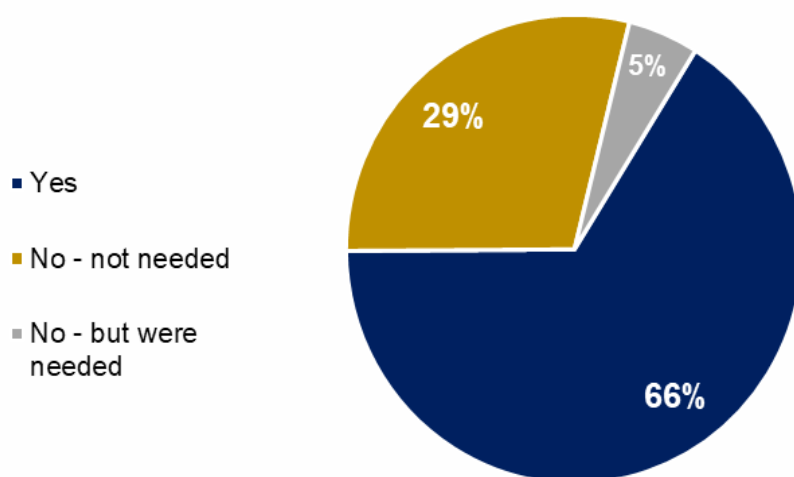
- better communications from landlords and contractors
- enhanced regulatory standards
- annual checks of hazards with systematic follow-up
- a focus on ongoing maintenance rather than repairs
- the use of programmes to train and encourage landlords to maintain good quality housing
- salary caps for housing chief executives

# Panel Members' Experience of Requesting Repairs

## Requesting hazard repairs

Most panel members had experience with requesting repairs, with two thirds (66%) of them having already asked their landlord to repair a hazard in their home in the last 5 years. A minority (5%) of panel members reported that they had not asked their landlord to repair a hazard even though they felt one was needed. Over a quarter (29%) of panel members did not ask their landlord to repair a hazard because it was not needed.

**Figure 1:** Whether panel members had asked their landlord to repair a hazard in the last 5 years



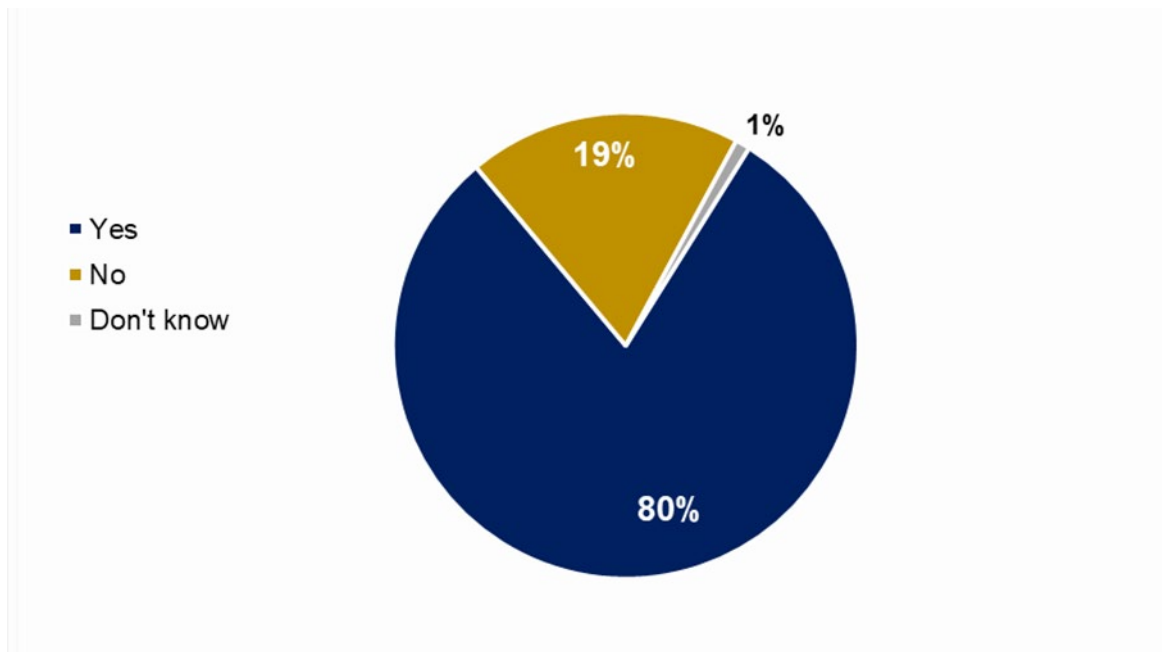
Q. In the past 5 years, have you asked your landlord to repair a hazard in your home? By hazard, we mean something that would be a risk to your health or safety if it was left unrepaired.

Base: all panel members that completed Activity 2 Task 2 (122).



Of the group that requested repairs, around 4 in 5 (80%) reported that a repair (or the most recent repair) had taken place.

**Figure 2:** Whether the requested hazard repair took place



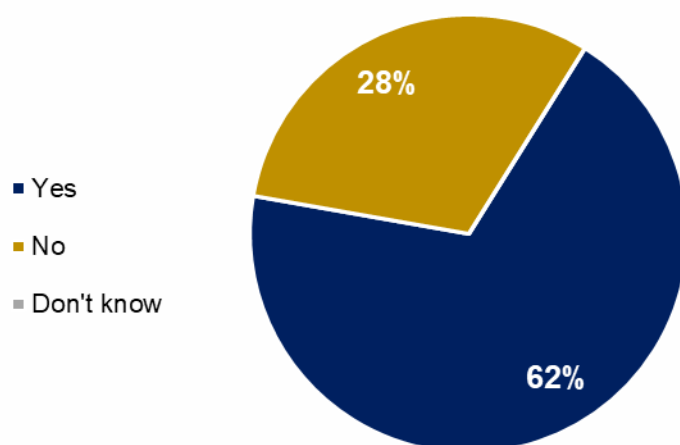
Q. Did this repair take place? (If you have made multiple requests for repair, please think about your most recent one).

Base: all panel members who reported that they had requested a repair in the last 5 years (Activity 2 Task 2) and completed Activity 2 Task 3 (81).

## Barriers to requesting hazard repairs

More than 3 in 5 (62%) of panel members who requested a hazard repair had experienced barriers or difficulties in getting it investigated or fixed.

**Figure 3:** Whether panel members experienced barriers when getting a hazard investigated or fixed



Q. Did you experience any barriers or difficulties getting the hazard investigated and/or fixed ?

Base: all panel members who reported that they had requested a repair in the last 5 years (Activity 2 Task 2) and completed Activity 2 Task 3 (81).

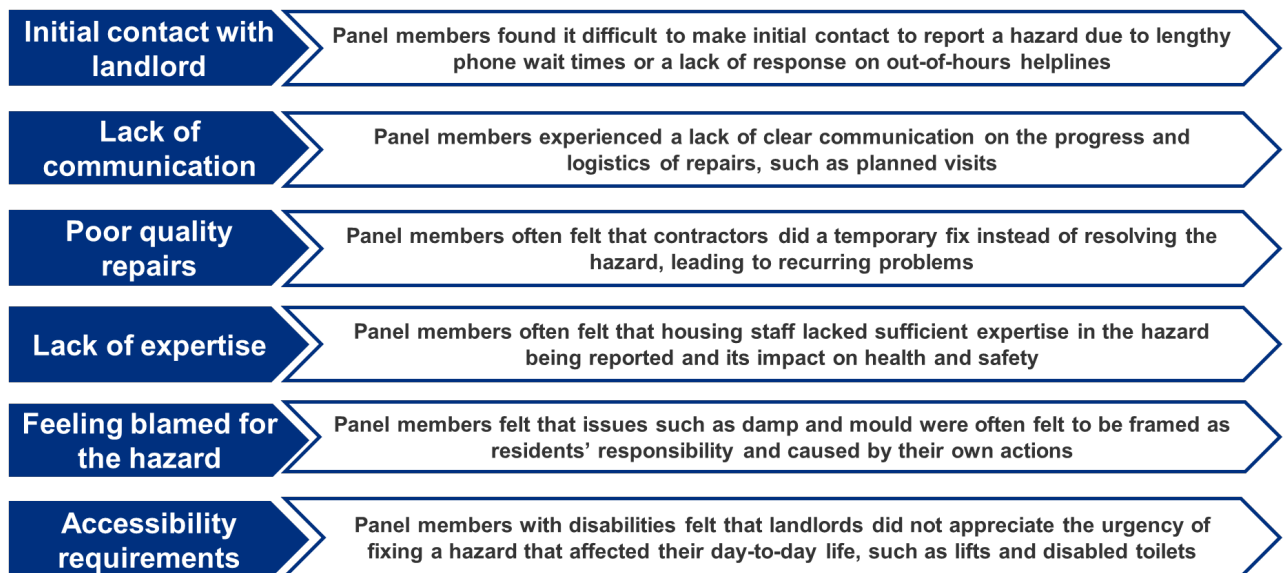
Panel members reported a range of barriers when trying to get a hazard investigated or fixed. Key barriers included making initial contact with the landlord, a lack of communication on progress, poor quality repairs, a lack of expertise among housing staff and feeling blamed for the hazard. Panel members also felt that there was a lack of consideration for the accessibility needs of those with disabilities, a lack of resources or access to resources from the landlord, and that their requests were often dismissed by their landlord. These barriers are likely to be related to the

fact that of those panel members who had a repair fixed in the past 5 years, more than 2 in 5 (45%) told us that their hazards were not repaired within a reasonable timeframe.

“ The event occurred on a Sunday morning and [landlord]’s emergency phone number was not answered during several hours in the morning. I had to contact the police and fire brigade myself later in the morning.

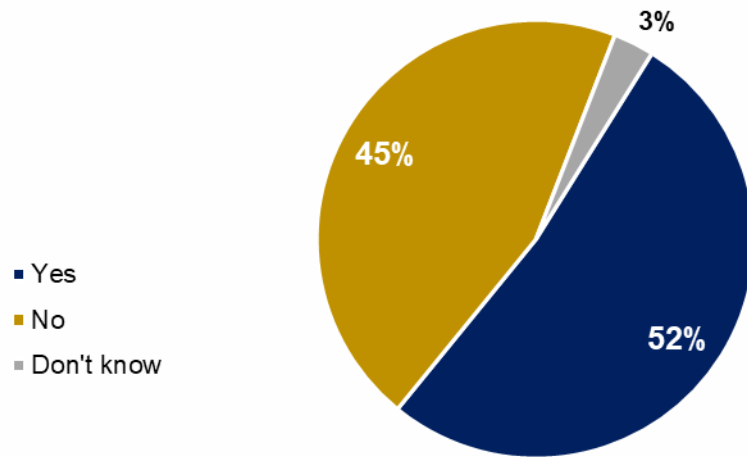
**Male, 55 to 64, London**

**Figure 4:** Panel members reported barriers in getting a hazard investigated or fixed



Though panel members reported various barriers to getting a hazard fixed, just over half (52%) felt that the repair took place in a timeframe they considered reasonable.

**Figure 5:** Whether panel members felt the timeframes of their hazard repair were reasonable



Q. If the repair did take place, did it take place in a timeframe that you considered reasonable?

Base: all panel members who reported that they had requested a repair in the last 5 years (Activity 2 Task 2) and answered that a repair took place in Activity 2 Task 3 (71). Answers exclude 'Not Applicable' responses.

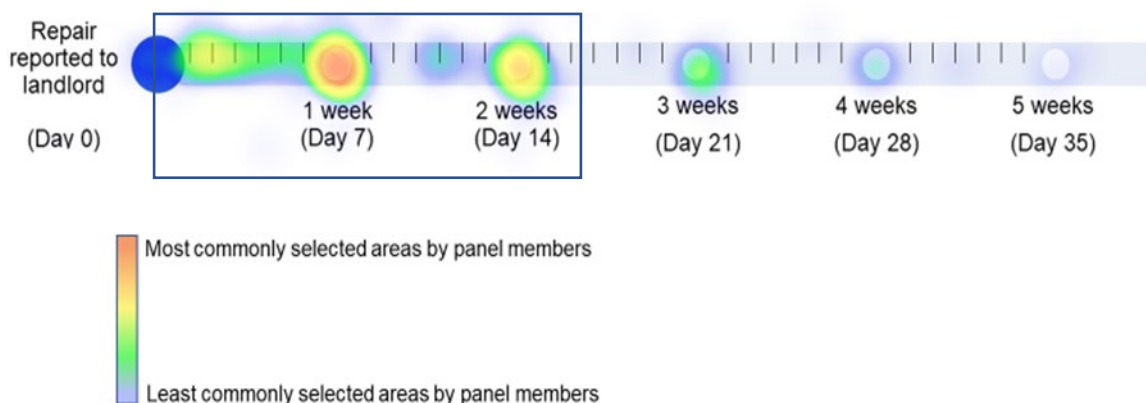
# Awaab's Law: Timeframes

## Preferred timeframes

Panel members were shown a timeline and asked how long social landlords should have to investigate and begin repairs on hazards. Panel members could select a time, ranging from Day 0, when the repair was reported to the landlord, to 5 weeks later (Day 35).

Panel members generally reported that the deadline for investigation should be 2 weeks or less; although a deadline within the first week was most popular. Panel members generally reported that the deadline for repairs to begin should be between one and 3 weeks from it being reported, with 2 weeks the most popular suggestion. This suggests that generally panel members either agreed with the timeframes proposed by Awaab's Law, or thought they were too long.

**Figure 6a:** Panel members' views on when landlords should begin investigating a hazard

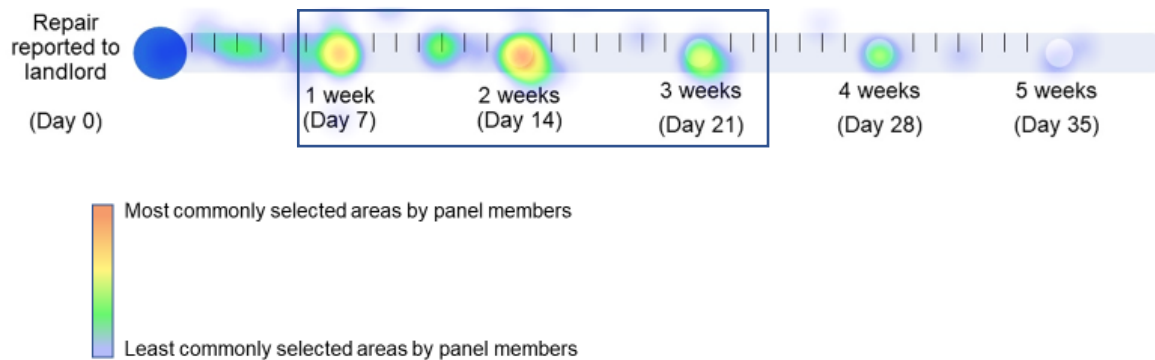


Q. We would like to find out how long you think social landlords should have to investigate and make repairs on hazards. (By hazard, we mean something that would be a risk to health or safety if it was left unrepaired.)

How quickly do you think social landlords should have to **investigate** potential hazards after they have been reported? Let us know by clicking on the timeline below.

Base: All panel members that completed Activity 3 Task 2 (120)

**Figure 6b:** Panel members' views on when landlords should begin repairs



Q. We would like to find out how long you think social landlords should have to investigate and make repairs on hazards. (By hazard, we mean something that would be a risk to health or safety if it was left unrepaired.)

How quickly do you think social landlords should have to begin repairs, after the investigation has confirmed there is a hazard? Let us know by clicking on the timeline below.

Base: All panel members that completed Activity 3 Task 2 (120)

### Proposed timeframes under Awaab's Law

Panel members were asked for reasons behind their views on the timelines suggested under Awaab's Law.

The major viewpoints are summarised in Figure 7.

**Figure 7:** Whether panel members agreed with the timeframes proposed under Awaab's Law



### **Proposed timeframes under Awaab's Law: Too long**

Panel members were most likely to suggest that both timeframes were too long. They were most likely to say that investigations should occur within one week from a report, and repairs should begin within 2 weeks. These panel members often had in mind the most serious, urgent or life-threatening hazards and residents with disabilities for whom a repair is more urgent. They felt that in these cases, the deadlines should be sooner than those proposed by the campaign for Awaab's Law.

Some panel members believed that the timeframes needed for investigating and repairing hazards depended on the risk to life and how this affected vulnerable residents. Panel members understood vulnerable residents to mean older people, families with young children, or residents with disabilities.

Examples of situations that would need a quicker response included the following:

- a broken lift that affects a wheelchair user
- a broken bathroom handrail that affects a resident with mobility issues
- flooding

“

If say, there is a serious leak this needs investigating and fixing quickly. If the hazard is one that can be lived with temporarily then a few days before it is investigated, whilst not ideal isn't so bad.

”

**Female, 65+, South East**

### **Proposed timeframes under Awaab's Law: About right**

Some panel members thought the proposed timeframes under Awaab's law were about right. Many of these panel members saw the proposal as a positive change to the current circumstances, where they had to wait months or years for hazard repairs. For example, one panel member claimed that severe damp and mould issues have been ignored for months. Another argued that their damp and mould issue took 2 months to be resolved and only because of the support of the head of their local resident board.

### **Proposed timeframes under Awaab's Law: Too short**

A small number of panel members felt that deadlines for investigations should be after 2 weeks, or that repairs should begin after 3 weeks. This group thought that in some cases, landlords might need the time to source and contract the appropriate services or materials. They thought that landlords might need to arrange for the correct type and number of tradesmen, and time to assess the costs of the repair.

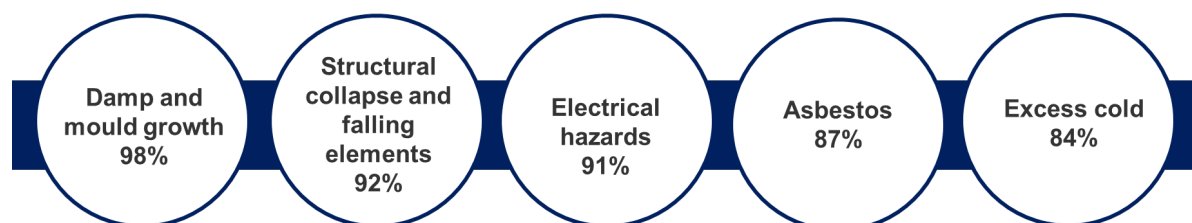


# Awaab's Law: Scope and Enforcement

## The scope of Awaab's Law

Panel members were given a list of possible hazards and asked to determine which ones should be covered under Awaab's Law; which ones should not be covered; and any they were not sure about. Some of these possible hazards are covered under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and some are not classed as hazards. The 5 most common hazard types selected by panel members were damp and mould growth, structural collapse and falling elements, electrical hazards, asbestos and excess cold.

**Figure 8:** Top 5 possible hazards that panel members thought should be covered under Awaab's Law



Q. Which of the following types of hazards do you think should be covered under Awaab's Law?

Note: Panel members given the options of 'Should be covered under Awaab's Law', 'Should not be covered under Awaab's Law' and 'Don't know'. The image only shows the top 5 hazards grouped into 'should be covered under Awaab's Law' out of a list of 13.

Base: All panel members that completed Activity 4 Task 2 (118)

## Enforcement

Panel members were informed that under Awaab's Law, residents would be able to take their landlord to court if they failed to abide by the timeframes for investigating and fixing hazards. In a group discussion, panel members shared their thoughts about how effective this would be.

Some of the main themes were:

### 1. **Not preventative**

Many felt that this enforcement mechanism would not help to prevent the occurrence of hazards. They believed that the lack of sanctions for failing to repair hazards within 21 days would not act as an incentive to comply.

### 2. **Places burden on residents**

Panel members strongly felt that this method of enforcement placed the burden on residents to ensure that hazard repairs take place. They felt it was not residents' responsibility to hold landlords to account. Additionally, some panel members mentioned that residents routinely felt stigmatised due to living in social housing which can affect residents' self-esteem and impact their motivation to challenge bad services.

### 3. **Affordability**

Panel members associated going to court with high costs and saw it as a lengthy and intimidating process requiring the support of a legal professional. There was uncertainty regarding whether residents would need to cover their own legal costs or be eligible for legal aid.

### 4. **Stress, and lack of time or resources**

Panel members also believed it would not be appropriate to expect residents to take a well-resourced organisation to court. They would already be experiencing the stress caused by the continued disrepair of their home, in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities. Taking their landlord to court would only increase their burdens.

“ I want to say that the responsibility for achieving these proposed safety standards should rest with the landlord/organisation. They have staff, executive and non-executive boards, who are paid well to do a job of work which should automatically include responsibility for building safety standards. ”

**Female, 55 to 64, East of England**

## 5. **Lack of confidence in the court system**

Some believed a legal route would not be effective from a practical perspective due to a lack of capacity in the legal system. Panel members commented that the courts are already overburdened with cases and would struggle to deal with extra cases brought by social housing residents. This would result in landlords not being penalised which ultimately would not offer sufficient incentive for them to improve their current practices.

## 6. **Reprisal or retaliation**

Some panel members reported that they were hesitant to take their landlord to court due to fear of reprisals, such as eviction or increased rent. Fears over losing their homes could result in some residents settling out of court or failing to initiate court proceedings at all.

“ Tenants may be hesitant to take social landlords to court due to fear of retaliation....Such persons may become visible if legal action is taken against the employer, which could lead to a range of negative consequences, including eviction and exclusion from repairs and services. ”

**Male, 45 to 54, London**

## **Supporting residents to take social landlords to court**

Panel members suggested 2 key solutions to remove these barriers to legal recourse and support residents to take their landlord to court.

The first suggestion was to empower residents through providing them with information on their rights and on the legal process via handbooks or website information pages. Clarifying timelines for legal proceedings to all residents and offering them help and support on all the stages covered under Awaab's Law was seen as being particularly important.

This support could be provided via third parties, such as the Citizen Advice, the TAROE Trust, Shelter or even an independent national body for social residents. It was noted that stigma experienced by residents could affect the extent to which they are empowered to take landlords to court or hold them otherwise accountable.

The second suggestion was for the provision of practical support for residents to engage in court proceedings. Giving financial support, such as legal aid, to residents was really important to panel members.

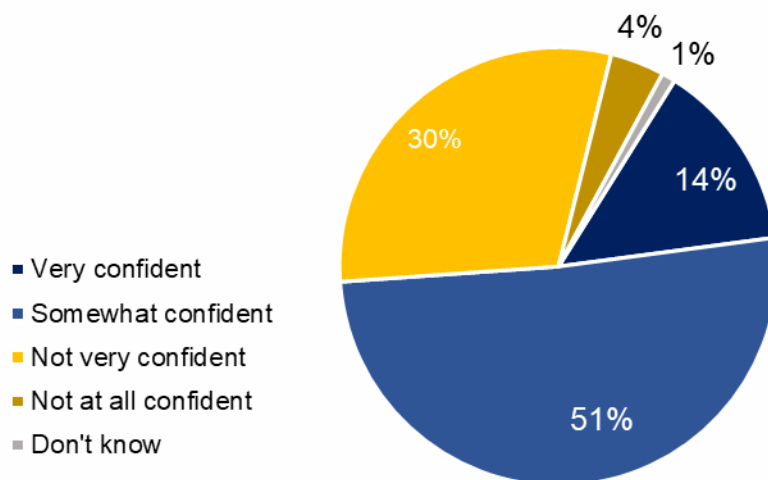
More marginalised residents, such as those with additional needs, disabilities or language barriers, were felt to need extra practical support to address the additional barriers they may face in taking their landlords to court.

# Awaab's Law: Confidence in Awaab's Law and Recommendations

## Confidence that Awaab's Law will improve safety of social homes

Overall, panel members were confident that Awaab's Law will improve the safety of social homes, with two thirds (65%) saying that they were very or somewhat confident. However, 35% were not very confident or not at all confident.

**Figure 9:** Panel members' confidence in Awaab's Law



Q. Given everything we have told you about Awaab's Law so far, how confident are you that it will improve the safety of social homes?

Base: all panel members that completed Activity 5 Task 3 (93).

The key reason for feeling confident was the clearer expectations on timeframes for repairs. Panel members felt that landlords would be more aware and therefore more proactive about improving the condition of their housing.

Despite their optimism in the impact of the new law, panel members also expressed concerns that impacted their overall confidence.

They were concerned that Awaab's Law could only be enforced through residents taking action through the courts. This would rely on residents understanding the legal system as well as their rights and duties as social housing residents.

Panel members believed that Awaab's Law lacked sufficient sanctions to encourage landlords to adhere to the timeframes. Specifically, they felt it lacked penalties that personally affected senior executives and board members in housing associations or councils.

Finally, panel members also believed that Awaab's Law would not address the issue of empowering residents or changing what they perceived to be stigma around living in social housing. They believed the proposed law did not address the culture shift needed for landlords to see social housing repairs as a priority. They believed the stigma around social housing residents has led to landlords and contractors providing a poor level of service. Empowering residents was seen as critical for supporting them to raise complaints, start court cases, and take other actions to hold landlords accountable.

Panel members expected landlords to use loopholes in the legal system to avoid compliance and doubted whether Awaab's Law would succeed in holding landlords to account.

“

I don't feel Councils will ever listen to tenants or either take accountability [for] their actions. They are constantly misleading tenants, always [making] excuses.

”

**Male, 35 to 44, North East**

## **Recommendations for improving Awaab's Law**

Panel members called for additional measures to encourage landlords to provide good quality social housing, as well as ensuring that Awaab's Law is accessible to all social housing residents, including those with additional needs. These additional measures included:

1. Implementing preventative measures to avoid the need for legal interventions. This would involve better training on preventing hazards occurring for social housing staff and surveyors, and funding for programmes to improve existing housing and build new homes.
2. Focusing on ongoing maintenance, through the use of annual checks, with systematic follow up and data collection. Housing inspectors should thoroughly check all social housing properties once a year in conjunction with residents. Landlords would have to act on any repair and maintenance needed or face penalties.
3. Some panel members were not confident that Awaab's Law considered the needs of residents with additional needs, such as those living with a disability or multiple disabilities, and those that are uncomfortable with digital processes. They believed that regulation would need to be co-produced with residents to ensure their needs are taken into account. They suggested the establishment of an independent social tenant advocacy group, that would represent the views of residents, and ensure their needs are taken into account when drafting legislation.
4. Finally, panel members suggested that Awaab's Law should be advertised clearly on Government web pages, landlords' housing websites, and shared in multiple formats. This would ensure that all social housing residents have access to it and can draw on it.

# Thank You

## **Further information**

If you have further questions, you can get in touch with us at:

### **DLUHC**

Email: [residentpanel@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:residentpanel@levellingup.gov.uk)

### **Kantar Public**

Website: <https://www.kantar.com/uki/contact>



# Appendix 1: Technical notes

## **Recruitment and method**

An online community is an online forum that brings together a group of people to share and discuss their thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a particular subject. The online community was hosted on the online platform Recollective. It was open between 15 and 21 May 2023. All panel members were invited to participate, and 140 panel members accessed the community. The topics of this online community were:

- exploring the Panel's experience of requesting repairs
- panel members' views on Awaab's Law

Panel members were invited to complete a range of activities such as poll questions, discussion boards, and open-ended questions. These activities were designed to take about 15 minutes. Panel members could complete these activities any time over the 7 days the community was open, and were supported by experienced moderators.

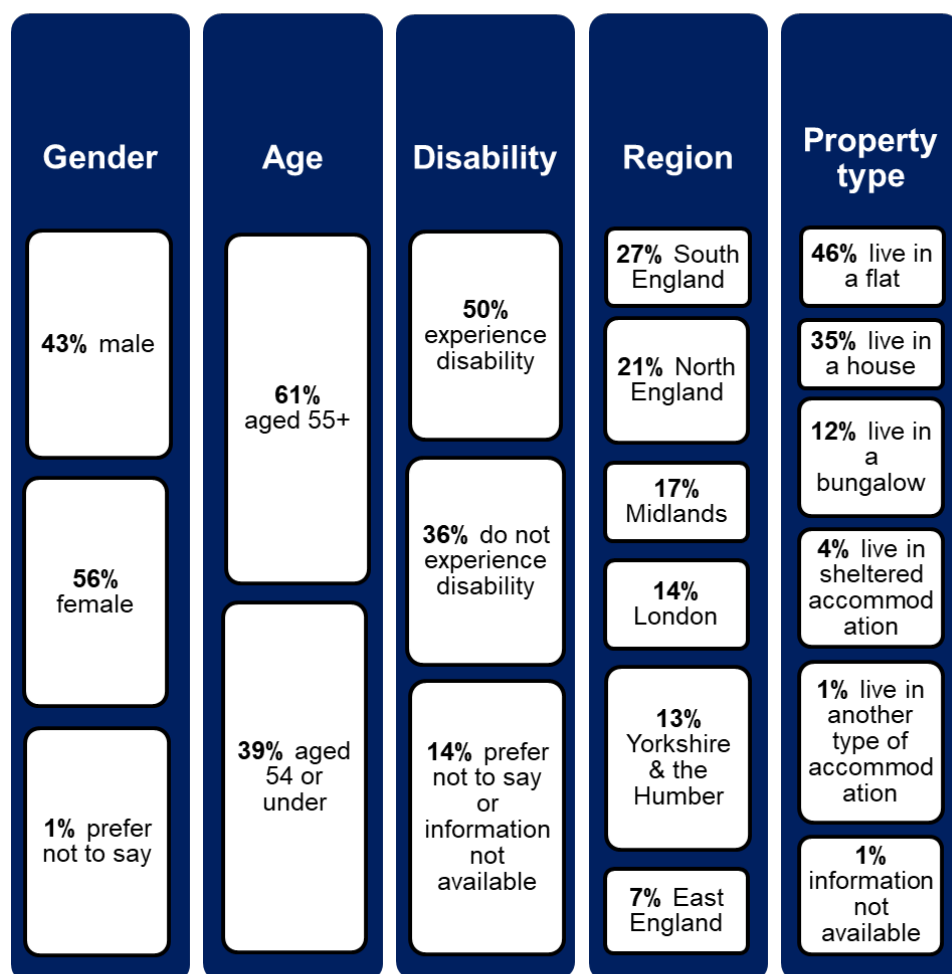
The activities included questions about the following themes:

- awareness of and interest in the Decent Homes Standard and the Housing Health and Safety Rating system
- experiences of requesting hazard repairs from social landlords
- views on Awaab's Law's timeframes, scope and enforcement
- recommendations for improving Awaab's Law

## Sample composition and segmentations

This section summarises the demographic sample of all 140 panel members.

**Figure 10:** Demographic information about panel members collected at recruitment



Q. Please tell us your gender.

Q. What is your age group?

Q. Do you consider yourself to have a disability ?

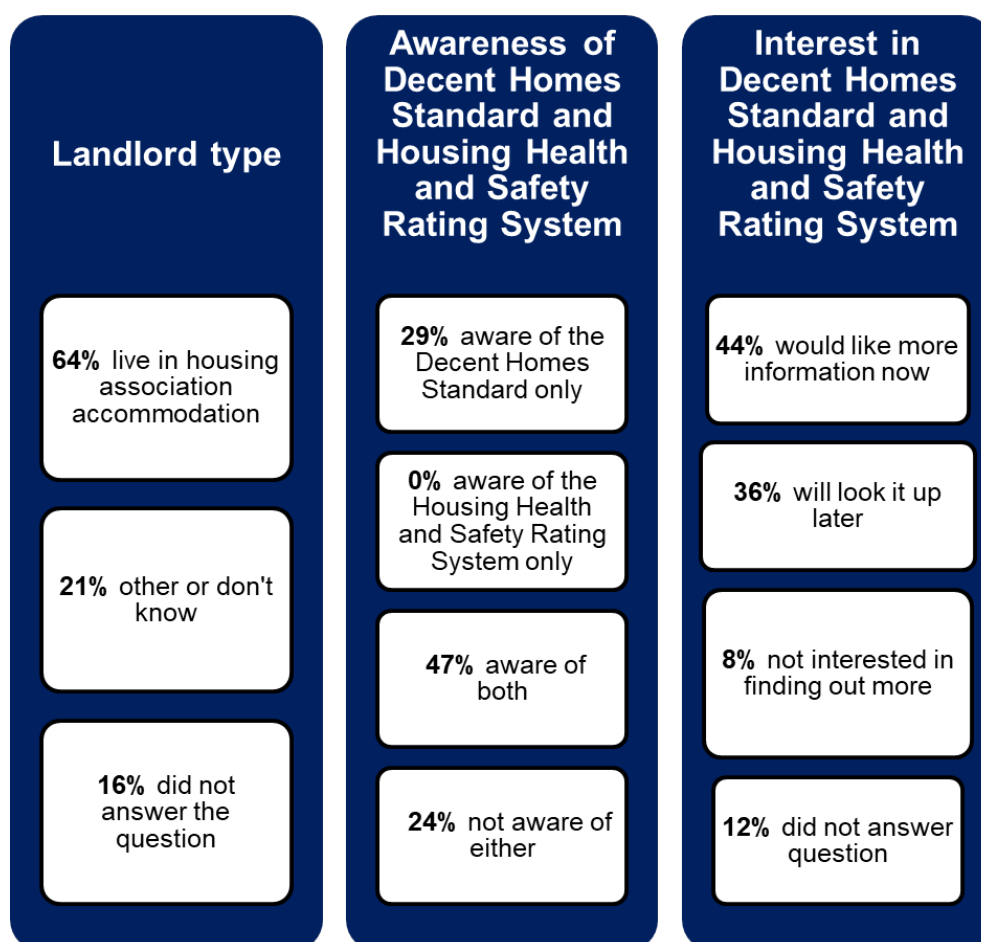
Q. What region of the country do you live in?

Q. Please select the type of property you live in?

Base: All panel members that accessed the online community (140)

Note: This data was collected at recruitment stage for the panel by DLUHC.

**Figure 11:** Information about panel members collected during the online community



Q. Who is the landlord of your home?

Base: All panel members who accessed the online community (140)

Note: Collected at Activity 3 Task 1 of Wave 1 online community

Q. We would like to ask you some questions about the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Have you ever heard of the DHS and the HHSRS before?

Q. We would like to ask you some questions about the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Would you like to find out more about the DHS or the HHSRS?

Base: All who completed Activity 1 Task 3 (123) of Wave 2 online community