

# **Social Housing Resident Panel – Effective and respectful landlord communication with residents**

## **Panel Member Report – Focus Groups**

Date: May 2025



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# 1. Introduction and summary of findings

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

In November 2022 the previous Government established the Social Housing Resident Panel, initially focusing on social housing quality reforms. In October 2024 this Government relaunched the panel with a broader scope across all social housing policy.

The panel brings together up to 250 social housing residents from across England to share their views with the Government and Ministers as policy is developed and reforms implemented.

The Department is committed to making sure social housing residents have their voices heard, with policy makers reflecting and acting on what they hear. Panel members take part in regular focus groups and online communities facilitated by Verian, as well as additional workshops and meetings organised by MHCLG.

## **Background to the focus groups**

This report summarises the main findings of the third wave focus groups. This report was commissioned by the previous administration, and it is being published for the purposes of transparency.

These focus groups explored panel members' experiences of effective and respectful landlord communications and how they would like to see landlords communicate with residents. This is an independent report, it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department and nor is it a statement of policy.

Two focus group workshops took place on Wednesday 31 January and Saturday 3 February 2024. They were conducted online via Zoom. The focus group workshops lasted 2 hours and in total 56 panel members attended.

Each focus group workshop involved 5-6 smaller break-out groups of up to 6 panel members. Each group was facilitated by a Verian moderator. Officials from the Department attended the workshops to observe the sessions. For further information about the focus groups and the demographic breakdown of panel members, please refer to Appendix 1.

## **Summary of findings**

Panel members reported that communication with their landlord takes place through a range of non-digital and digital channels. The number and types of channels available and used by panel members and landlords varied, with email, letter and phone calls being most frequently mentioned. Panel members also described the use of online portals, social media, texts, live online chat and video calls.

Some panel members felt their landlord was effective and respectful in their communication with residents. Those who shared positive experiences of their landlords' communications spoke about landlord staff being:

- easy to contact
- quick to respond and proactive in keeping residents informed until their query or issue had been resolved
- good at demonstrating soft skills, such as being polite, considerate and empathetic
- good at providing personalised and accessible communications.

However, many panel members expressed negative views about their landlords' communications, recalling experiences where communications had not been effective or respectful. These experiences included:

- difficulties contacting landlord staff
- receiving poor updates from landlord staff following an initial interaction
- communications failing to acknowledge the seriousness of residents' issues
- communications failing to accommodate individual and accessibility needs

- inaccurate and dishonest communication
- landlord staff not taking responsibility for poor communications and not offering apologies when appropriate
- landlord staff using inappropriate language and disrespectful tone in communications
- communications being one-way, generic and impersonal.

Some panel members found it difficult to assess the effectiveness and respectfulness of their landlord's communications. This is because their experiences had been very inconsistent and varied depending on which member of staff they were interacting with.

Several panel members felt landlord communication had improved and attributed this to new government policies being introduced following the Grenfell Tower fire and the death of Awaab Ishak.

Panel members described several factors they thought shaped their experiences of landlord communication and how effective and respectful they are. For example, many panel members felt there is a systemic stigma attached to being a social housing resident. They thought this can lead to poor communications from landlord staff whose views are informed by this stigma. Additionally, panel members felt that an overall decline in the use of non-digital channels and an increase in the use of digital channels was making landlord communications less personal, accessible and inclusive.

Panel members described key principles that they would like landlords to follow to ensure landlords communicate with residents in effective and respectful ways. Panel members wanted landlords to:

1. Provide easy access for residents to communicate with landlord staff
2. Be timely and responsive
3. Actively listen and communicate with empathy, compassion and care
4. Keep residents informed
5. Be accountable for providing a seamless and consistent communication experience
6. Make communications personal and individualised

7. Be clear and inclusive
8. Be transparent, accurate and honest
9. Engage with residents and ensure communications is two-way
10. Be proactive in communicating

To achieve several of these principles, panel members additionally suggested that landlords should:

- focus on improving the quality and consistency of communications by investing in senior management teams to implement effective communication planning, new technology and landlord staff training
- ensure all landlord staff spend time in the areas they provide housing to gain an understanding of the environments and challenges faced by residents. This would make them more empathetic, understanding and effective when communicating with residents.

Some also felt there should be a regulated, compulsory communication code of conduct for social housing landlords to adhere to.

## 2. How and why landlords and residents communicate

### **How and why residents and landlords typically communicate**

The panel members who attended the focus groups reported that communication with their landlord takes place through a range of non-digital and digital channels. The number and types of channels available and used by panel members and landlords varied.

Email, letter and phone calls were most frequently mentioned by panel members.

Panel members also reported in person communication with landlord staff through in person meetings (such as panel member meetings), landlord roadshows and contact with housing officers, builders/contractors, and gardeners.

Panel members also said that residents and landlords used online housing portals, social media (such as Facebook), texts, live online chat and video calls to communicate with each other.



“ I think apart from getting a WhatsApp message, there's absolutely everything...there's emails, letters, texts, socials, online account, SMS.

- Panel Member



Some panel members reported their landlords had given residents a choice of how they receive communications. For example, they allowed residents to choose if they prefer to receive emails or letters. Others had not had this opportunity but said they would like the option of selecting their preferred communication channels.

Landlords varied in the frequency and variety of communications they sent to residents. Some landlords were said to occasionally send basic information updates to residents, for example, concerning rent and service charges.

“ The two letters I'm guaranteed to get every year are, one, telling me about my rent increase...and if, for whatever reason I miss a rent payment...you get a letter within a week. Everything else, you probably don't get it.  
- Panel Member ”

Other landlords were said to be more proactive and frequently communicate with residents about a range of topics, such as:

- tips on how to keep energy bills down, benefit entitlements and how to prevent mould developing in homes
- planned roadshows for senior staff to visit and engage with residents
- short videos from senior staff to explain their role within the organisation and how residents can contact them
- informative communication about residents' housing rights, landlord engagement opportunities and the Four Million Homes programme.

### **Residents' awareness of their communication rights**

Panel members who attended the focus groups generally felt they had a good level of awareness of their communication rights as a resident. Panellists reflected that they were potentially more knowledgeable on this topic than most social housing residents because they were more proactive and engaged in resident panels.



Many who attended the focus groups were frequently involved in one or more resident and scrutiny panels and said that through these they had learnt about housing communication processes and policies.

Some panel members also described learning about their rights through other sources. These included their professional backgrounds, proactively conducting their own research and their landlord sharing information about it through newsletters.

### 3. Experiences and views of landlord communication

#### **Overall views of landlord communications**

The panel members who attended the focus groups had varied views on how effective and respectful their landlord is when communicating with residents.

Some panel members spoke very positively about their landlord and felt they were effective and respectful in their communication. Those who spoke the most highly of their landlord's communications often mentioned experiences of polite, proactive, and knowledgeable landlord staff. They also described staff who were very helpful, empathetic and would get issues resolved quickly.

Other panel members who had positive perceptions explained their landlord was actively taking steps to make improvements to communications. Some landlords were said to be engaging residents through resident panels to ask for feedback on communications and implement changes. A few had also introduced schemes where residents can highlight the efforts of good staff they have communicated with. These panel members said that while they may have experienced some communication issues, they broadly had good experiences and appreciated their landlords' efforts to make improvements.

In contrast, other panel members expressed very negative views about their landlords' communications, describing them as being ineffective, disrespectful and very inconsistent.

These perceptions tended to be based on poor experiences of trying to resolve important repair issues, such as fixing a lift to ensure wheelchair users could access their home. Panel members described long telephone wait times, rude, condescending and threatening landlord

staff. They also reported having to repeatedly chase landlords to communicate updates and get issues resolved.

“ Some staff just have a really, really, bad attitude and there's no getting around that... I used to pray I would get a certain lady when I phoned in because she would treat me like a normal human being. ”

- Panel Member

Some panel members found it difficult to assess the effectiveness and respectfulness of their landlord's communications as their experiences had been very inconsistent. These panel members explained that their experiences can depend on:

- the individual they communicate with
- the department they contact
- the seniority of the staff member
- whether the individual is in-house or a contractor
- the topic of communication
- the channel of communication.

It is important to note that during the focus groups, panel members spoke more generally about positive and negative communication experiences, rather than specifically about experiences of effective or respectful communications. This is because panelists could find it difficult to differentiate between the two and often described experiences that were seen as both effective and respectful or ineffective and disrespectful.

### **Change over time**

While the quality of landlord communications was found to vary, some panel members reported that they had noticed improvements to landlords' communications, particularly during the last few years.

Several panel members attributed this change to new government policies being introduced following the Grenfell Tower fire and death of Awaab Ishak. These were thought to be encouraging and compelling landlords to:

- improve the speed of their response if a resident reports a fire safety or mould issue
- improve how effective they are when communicating with residents, for example, by investing in new technology and staff training.

A few panel members reported that they had also noticed changes since the Covid-19 pandemic and the start of the current cost of living crisis. Due to the financial and emotional difficulties caused by these events, some landlords were said to have become more empathetic in the way they communicate with residents. For example, one panel member explained that their landlord had become more patient in instances where a resident may need more time to pay rent.

“ [Because of the cost of living crisis] there's more of an emphasis, at the moment, on offering people help and support - that was never the case before.

- Panel Member

However, some panel members believed that their landlord's communications had gotten worse since the Covid-19 pandemic. They explained that Covid-19 restrictions had contributed to less face-to-face communication and a greater reliance on digital channels, which can be less inclusive and effective for all residents.

“ You don't tend to see housing officers now. They seem to be non-existent.

- Panel Member

### Positive experiences



Panel members described a range of positive experiences they had of landlord communications and how their landlord had communicated with them in effective and respectful ways.

### **1. Landlord staff being easy to contact**

Panel members appreciated being able to easily get in contact with landlord staff who could help them when they had a query. This was particularly valued when the matter they wanted to discuss was urgent, such as a home repair issue.

Positive experiences described by panel members included:

- short telephone wait times or a call back option when the waiting time is long
- efficient triage processes that quickly diverted their query to the relevant staff
- having a separate telephone line or portal dedicated to the reporting of repair issues
- having a single point of contact, such as a housing officer, or the direct email addresses of relevant landlord staff
- housing officers being on-site to talk to.

### **2. Landlord staff being quick to respond**

Panel member's described landlord staff being quick to acknowledge and respond to a resident's enquiry or issue when they contacted their landlord. Efficiently communicating with residents was said to be effective because it meant queries and issues were resolved quickly. It was also seen as respectful as a fast response is considerate of the stress and inconvenience residents experience when they face issues.

Panel members described:

- receiving a fast response to their emails and enquiries sent through an online portal
- sending an email and receiving a prompt follow-up call to discuss the query
- reporting a repair issue and receiving a communication notifying them that a maintenance worker would be reviewing the issue.

### **3. Landlord staff proactively keeping residents informed**

When an issue or query could not be immediately addressed, panel members described landlord staff proactively keeping them informed of

the progress being made to resolve it. This was said to be respectful of residents and effective as it allowed residents to know what was being done to resolve their issue or query.

Panel members described:

- receiving a text after speaking to customer service with the date and time that a repair would take place
- receiving texts updating them about a maintenance worker's name, estimated time of arrival and/or any delays.

Some panel members described landlord staff being proactive and transparent in keeping them informed of important information. This was felt to be respectful and contributed to residents feeling valued by landlords. Panel members described being updated on:

- resident panel activities and outcomes
- how their housing association had allocated annual funds
- the number and types of complaints their housing association had received, the outcomes of these and steps taken to make improvements.

“ It is actually very good [a landlord's rent update newsletter]. It's plain English, it tells you what the rent's going up by, the reasons why, what we've spent money on in the past two years. ”

- Panel Member

#### **4. Landlord staff demonstrating good soft skills**

Panel members spoke about customer service staff who had good soft skills. This was an important aspect of ensuring communications are respectful and residents have positive communications experiences.

Staff with good soft skills were seen as being polite, active listeners, who demonstrated understanding and empathy towards residents.

A few panel members also voiced their appreciation when landlord staff acknowledged when communication had been poor and offered an apology. Panel members felt that this approach was respectful and helped to reduce their frustration.

“ In the communications [customer service] center, you speak to a person, and they are brilliant at being respectful.  
- Panel Member ”

## **5. Personalised and accessible communication**

Panel members described landlord staff personalising their communication with residents. These experiences were appreciated for making communications feel more respectful and making residents feel valued by their landlord. Examples of this included:

- residents being on first name terms with key individuals, such as the CEO and their housing officer and having a direct line of communication
- residents being asked what their preferred channel of communication is and landlords tailoring it to their preference
- landlords making the effort to communicate with residents in person by conducting in-home visits or arranging community meetings
- online portals providing information and updates that are personal to the individual, for example, in relation to their rent.

Several panel members also described landlord communications that were tailored to their personal accessibility needs or the needs of other residents. They said this was important to ensure residents can easily understand the communications. Examples included landlords:

- translating communications into the language of non-English speaking residents so they can read the content
- offering digital training for older residents so they can learn how to communicate with their landlord online
- customer service staff taking the time to listen and explain information in different ways when communicating with residents with specific learning difficulties.



## Negative experiences



During the focus groups, many panel members recalled negative experiences of landlord communications, where communications had not been effective or respectful.

### 1. Difficulties contacting landlord staff

Panel members described experiences where it had been hard for them to get in touch with landlord staff. These experiences were said to be disrespectful as residents had to spend substantial amounts of time trying to contact someone.

Panel members described:

- long telephone wait times
- central telephone lines that made it difficult to access a specific department or person
- sending emails and letters that did not receive a response
- spending time contacting their landlord through multiple different channels to receive a response
- difficulties getting in touch with their housing officer because they are too busy or are unaware of their name and contact details.

Some panel members had found workarounds to avoid these issues. For example, some mentioned contacting a senior executive as a faster way to communicate their query and receive a response. Additionally, some panel members said they had remembered the email addresses of specific staff that work for the landlord organisation who had been helpful in the past. They had contacted these individuals directly when they had issues rather than using the general triaging processes.

### 2. Poor updates from landlord staff

Many panel members described receiving poor updates from landlord staff following an initial interaction.

Panel members described landlord staff:

- promising to pass on a resident's query to the relevant person/department but not doing so and/or the resident not receiving a response
- not keeping residents updated on the steps being taken and progress being made to resolve issues (such as a repair issues)
- confirming next steps to resolve an issue, but not getting in touch with residents when the situation changes to explain the reason why and offer an alternative solution.

“ Once that [a query] gets passed onto the department, you're lucky to hear anything, and then you're phoning up again. ”  
- Panel Member

“ Things they [customer service staff] say they're going to get done never get done. ”  
- Panel Member

These experiences were said to result in:

- residents feeling frustrated as they must recontact their landlord multiple times about the same issue
- issues not being resolved, which can ultimately negatively impact residents' mental and physical health
- a breakdown of trust due to promises not being kept

Several panel members also reported that landlord staff did not always proactively inform residents of situations that will impact them. For example, when maintenance workers will visit their home or the outcomes of resident satisfaction survey.

### **3. Communications failing to acknowledge the seriousness resident's issues**

Some panel members reported that when they raise an issue, the response they receive from landlords does not always acknowledge the seriousness of a problem. As a result, problems are not responded to with an appropriate level of consideration and staff do not act with

urgency. Panel members felt that these experiences showed a lack of empathy for residents, making them feel unheard and undervalued.

Panel members described:

- calling customer service to report a leak in their property and it not being classified as urgent despite being an electrical safety risk
- landlord's staff dismissing a resident's request for his home to be prioritised when conducting a damp review due to a serious mould allergy.

#### **4. Communications failing to accommodate individual and accessibility needs**

Some panel members reported that their landlord did not adequately acknowledge their individual needs and tailor communication appropriately. Panel members often raised the issue of letters being too long, complicated, and containing jargon. As a result, letters can be ineffective as they are hard to understand, particularly for those who are elderly or have specific learning difficulties or for whom English is a second language. They were also seen as disrespectful as the content is not accessible and clear for all residents. Examples of this included:

- communications not being translated into different languages, preventing non-English speaking residents from understanding them
- disabled residents with specific learning conditions having to remind staff of their disability so staff adapt their language to use plain English
- landlords not being considerate of digitally excluded residents.

“ I find it [the online portal] fine, but everybody else around the area uses me as their online portal if they want anything reporting, because they're elderly. ”

- Panel Member

## **5. Inaccurate and dishonest communication**

Some panel members felt that their landlord is sometimes deliberately inaccurate and dishonest in their communications, which is disrespectful to residents.

For example, one panel member described receiving a letter from their landlord implying that they had proactively capped rent increases out of consideration for residents, rather than being transparent and explaining that this rent cap had been enforced by the government.

Another resident said they had received an inaccurate annual financial report of their landlord's spending that suggested all the annual budget had been spent, whereas they knew that this was inaccurate.

“ It is very degrading to be treated like a fool. ”  
- Panel Member

## **6. Landlord staff not taking accountability and acknowledging poor communications**

Another source of negative experiences stemmed from landlords not taking responsibility for poor communications and offering apologies when appropriate. Panel members felt that their landlord's lack of accountability showed they did not respect residents and care enough about their wellbeing. Examples panel members shared included:

- landlords not adhering to their own policies and the timeframe in which they should respond to residents, and not acknowledging when they breach these
- issues being “passed around” landlord staff, rather than staff taking ownership of communicating with residents and providing follow up communications to resolve the issue
- landlord staff not apologising when a resident has had to contact them multiple times about the same issue because no action has been taken by the landlord.

“ When their own policies and procedures say if you do X then in four days we will do Y, and then they just totally ignore it...that really frustrates me.  
- Panel Member ”

## **7. Landlord staff using inappropriate language and disrespectful tone in communications**

Panel members frequently highlighted that landlord communications could have a condescending, rude and sometimes threatening tone. This could be conveyed through the way in which letters and emails are written, and the attitude and language used by landlord staff when speaking to residents. Panel members explained that this form of communication was upsetting and felt to be stigmatising of those living in social housing.

“ One particular housing officer was, I would describe as, nasty. She would...go to people and say ‘if you don't do as I say, you're going to be in trouble, and we can terminate your tenancy’.  
- Panel Member ”

A few panel members also reported that some landlord staff are not respectful of residents' protected characteristics when communicating with them. Participants gave examples of residents being discriminated against due to their religion, nationality, age and gender.

## **8. Communications being one-way and directive**

Some panel members said landlord communications could be very demanding and directive, rather than providing the opportunity for residents to respond. Panel members felt this was a disrespectful way for landlords to communicate.

This negative experience was often due to residents receiving letters from their landlord that contained directive statements telling them

something was going to happen, rather than involving them in the decision and taking a conversational, two-way approach.

A common scenario was panel members receiving a letter that stated the date and time that maintenance workers will access their home, without asking if the time slot was suitable for residents. This was felt to be particularly disrespectful as it implied that landlords assume all social housing residents are unemployed and always available.

“ We had to make an official complaint because the way they spoke to us was appalling; 'we will be attending your home, we will do it at this date and this time'. It's very offensive... We complained: 'you're talking down to us as if we're nothing to you, except an inconvenience and a nuisance'.

- Panel Member

## **9. Generic and impersonal communications**

When talking about negative experiences, panel members often mentioned generic communications that are sent to all residents. These communications can feel impersonal and often contain information that is not relevant to them.

Some panel members also disliked it when communications address them in an impersonal way as it felt less respectful, such as referring to a resident as a 'tenant' rather than by their name.

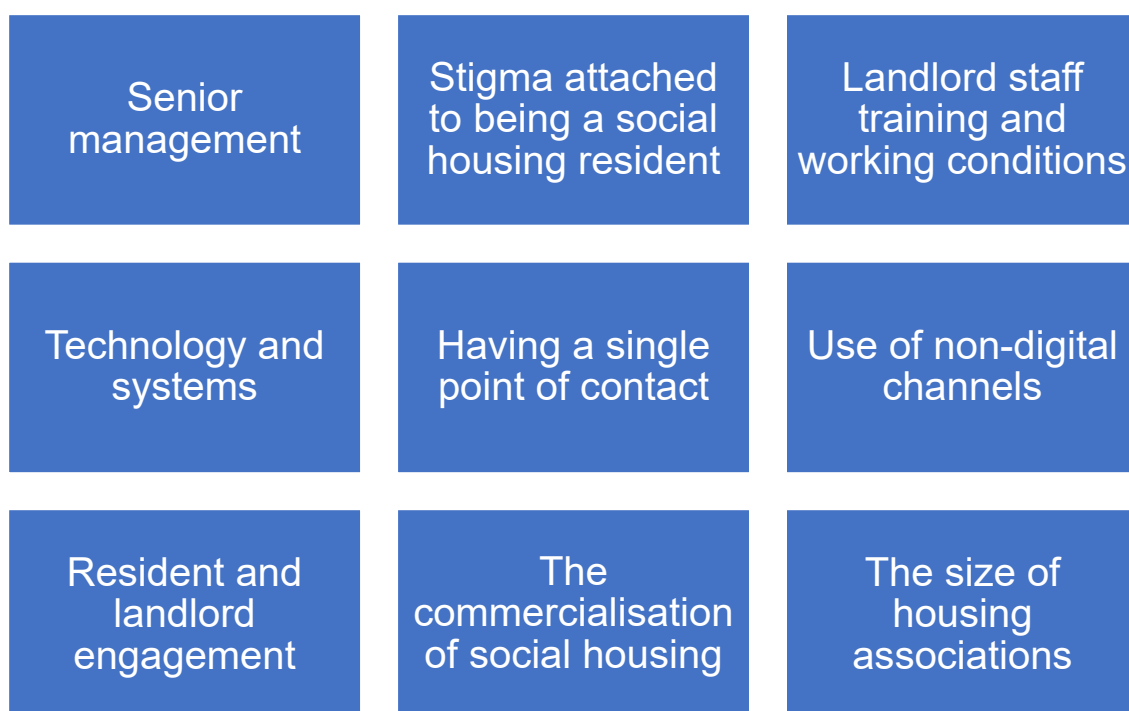
## 4. Factors influencing experiences of landlord communications

### Factors influencing experiences of landlord communications

Panel members described several factors they thought shaped their experiences of landlord communication and how effective and respectful they are. The following factors were most frequently mentioned:

**Figure 4.1 shows the factors influencing experiences of landlord communications:** senior management, stigma attached, landlord staff training and working conditions, technology and systems, having a single point of contact, use of non-digital channels, resident and landlord engagement, the commercialisation of social housing, the size of housing associations.

**Figure 4.1**





## **1. Senior management**

Feedback from panel members during the focus groups indicated that a landlord's senior management team can have a significant impact on residents' communication experiences. Those who viewed their landlord as respectful and effective at communicating often described their senior management team as:

- being easily accessible to talk to, in person in resident meetings, or via email or phone
- being very engaged with residents and good at listening, such as attending meetings with residents to share updates and receive feedback
- investing in strategies to improve their communications such as new technology.

Those who had negative experiences sometimes felt that senior management were primarily focused on the financial aspects of their role and are less concerned with improving the experiences of social housing residents.

## **2. Stigma attached to being a social housing resident**

Many panel members felt there is a systemic stigma attached to being a social housing resident. They thought this can lead to poor communications from landlord staff whose views are informed by this stigma. Panel members said that this is why some landlord staff are rude and condescending to residents and do not take their complaints seriously.

Some panel members also believed that landlords send residents letters demanding access to their home during the day, for example, to conduct a gas check, without discussing if the time is convenient for them, as they assume that social housing residents do not work.

“ We, the social tenant, are just a number...we're not real people, we don't get treated like that. In fact, sometimes we're treated as second class citizens.

- Panel Member

“ It’s a flaw in UK social housing, no matter where you live in England you seem to be treated like you are completely stupid, it makes me angry.  
- Panel Member ”

### **3. Landlord staff training and working conditions**

Panel members often attributed their positive or negative experiences to the quality of staff training. Poor staff training was thought to result in landlord staff not having the required knowledge and soft skills needed to engage with resident successfully.

Some panel members also believed landlord staff had poor working conditions, such as high workloads and low pay. They felt this contributed to poor staff attitudes and a high staff turnover, which leads to a lack of experienced staff.

“ Sometimes you call them [landlord staff] and it's like they're already fed up of talking to you, they've already come with an attitude that they just don't want to deal with [things]. ”

- Panel Member

### **4. Technology and systems**

The quality of a landlord’s technology and infrastructure was felt to play a role in whether panel members had positive or negative communication experiences. Examples of good technology systems included:

- centralised systems that assign a resident’s query to an individual staff member, log all resident communications and ensure someone responds if the staff member handling the enquiry is away
- online applications and portals that provide resident-specific information and updates, providing a more personalised and consistent service

- live chat functions that enabled residents to communicate with a member of staff and resolve an issue without calling the central phone line
- call back option for a customer services telephone line if the wait is going to be long.

“ We have a flagging systems... It has our disabilities stored ”  
on the system so it is good not always having to explain it each time  
you speak to someone.

- Panel Member

## **5. Having a single point of contact**

Whether panel members had access to a single point of contact within their landlord's organisation was said to be a driver of both positive and negative communication experiences.

For some, having a single point of contact led to good communication. This was because the member of staff was easy to contact as residents had their individual phone number and email address. It also meant that their point of contact got to know individual residents and their circumstances. This meant they were better able to help residents and provide a personalised service. Residents also felt it meant staff were more likely to take ownership of answering residents' questions and resolving any issues.

Further, having to deal with multiple contacts who were not familiar with residents' individual circumstances or needs meant they had to explain their circumstance multiple times to different staff. This was time consuming and frustrating for residents.

However, some panel members reported that their assigned point of contact was a source of negative communication experiences. They described these individuals as being difficult to contact, unresponsive, unhelpful and (in some circumstances) rude. Residents' issues could also go unresolved if their point of contact was away and their enquiry had not been assigned to another staff member.

Panel members who did not have a single point of contact had differing views on if they wanted a single point of contact. Some wanted to be assigned an individual staff member to communicate with, in order to avoid being “passed around” different staff and repeating their enquiries. However, other panel members did not think this was a practical solution and felt that good technology systems and case note management were most important.

## **6. Use of non-digital channels**

Panel member reported that while landlords tend to offer a range of communication channels, there has been an overall decline in the use of non-digital channels and increased digital channels. This was thought to be making landlord communications less personal, accessible and inclusive.

Panel members described several examples of this trend:

- in person communication with housing officers being less readily available
- landlords sending fewer physical letters and instead communicating updates through email, their website and digital newsletters
- landlords encouraging residents to report repairs through online portals rather than calling customer services.

## **7. Resident and landlord engagement**

The level of engagement between residents and landlords was felt to be a key factor in determining residents’ experiences of landlord communication. Panel members often reported that the feedback they had provided to their landlord through resident engagement initiatives, such as scrutiny panels, had positively impacted the effectiveness and respectfulness of their landlords’ communications.

In comparison, some panel members who experienced poor landlord communications attributed this to a lack of resident engagement. For

example, panel members described their landlord not being willing to listen to residents and benefit from their knowledge.

Panel members also described landlords engaging with residents but not taking their feedback onboard. One panel member's tenant group reviewed multiple letters and suggested changes to the language and content, but only a few of these were implemented.

“ I think there's a lack of real desire to action what we communicate.  
- Panel Member ”

## **8. The commercialisation of social housing**

Some panel members felt that the commercialisation of social housing, particularly seen in housing associations, negatively impacted landlords' communications with residents. Panel members believed that a commercial focus caused landlords to prioritise profits over residents' needs and not sufficiently invest in systems and training needed to improve communications.

## **9. The size of housing associations**

A few attributed poor landlord communications to the size of their housing association, with some residents having experienced changes as their housing association has gone through mergers. Those who were residents of the largest associations felt that the large size contributed to:

- difficulties in accessing the right member of landlord staff to speak to due to the number of staff and residents only having access to a generic email address and centralised telephone line
- not receiving a response to their enquiries due to the high volume of enquires made by residents which means some are overlooked or are “lost” in the system
- disjointed communication across different members of staff and departments

- generic communication and a lack of personalisation as a generic approach is thought to be more cost efficient when communicating with large numbers of residents.

“ It used to be that you'd have a phone number and you could ”  
phone someone up and discuss an issue, whereas now it's just this  
centralised head office...my neighbour has a problem and she can't get  
hold of anyone.

- Panel Member

## 5. What residents would like to see from landlord communications

### **Effective and respectful communication principles**

Panel members described key principles that they would like landlords to follow to ensure landlords communicate with residents in effective and respectful ways. Below is a list of the key principles for effective and respectful landlord communication:

- 1) Provide easy access channels for residents to communicate with landlord staff
- 2) Be timely and responsive when residents get in contact
- 3) Actively listen and communicate with empathy, compassion and care
- 4) Keeps residents informed
- 5) Take ownership of resolving residents' issues/queries and accountability when mistakes are made
- 6) Make communication personal and individualised
- 7) Use clear language and be inclusive
- 8) Be transparent, accurate and honest
- 9) Engage with residents and ensure communication is two-way
- 10) Be proactive in communicating

To achieve several of these principles, panel members additionally suggested that landlords should:

- focus on improving the quality and consistency of communications by investing in senior management teams to implement effective



communication planning, new technology and landlord staff training

- ensure all landlord staff spend time in the areas they provide housing to gain an understanding of the environments and challenges faced by residents. This would make them more empathetic, understanding and effective when communicating with residents.

### **Likelihood of landlords following residents' suggested principles**

Some panel members felt that their landlord already follows these suggested principles. However, many panel members felt their landlord would not abide by these communication principles unless there were consequences for not doing so.

For this reason, some participants suggested that there should be a regulated, compulsory code of conduct for social housing landlords. Residents also felt the complaints process needs to be more efficient for residents to flag any misconduct around poor landlord communication conduct. Some felt the current process was slow and did not often resolve issues.

# Appendix 1: Methodology and further information

## **Recruitment and method**

The focus group workshops sought to understand:

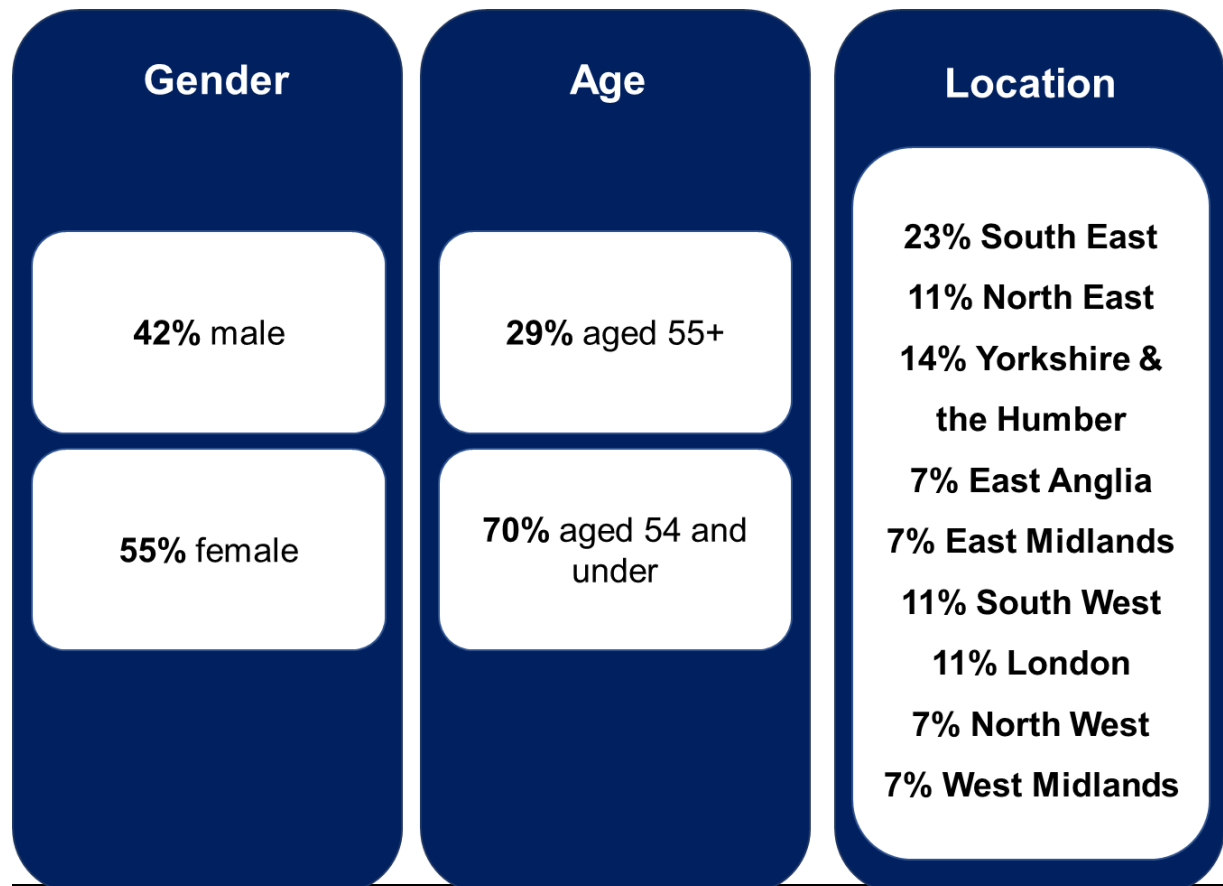
- communication channels/methods landlords typically use to communicate with residents and channels/methods residents typically use to communicate with landlords
- overall views of landlord communication (if it is effective and/or respectful)
- experiences of effective and/or respectful landlord communications
- what residents think effective and/or respectful landlord communications should be like and how they would like to see landlords communicate with residents.

## **Sample composition and segmentations**

This section summarises the demographic sample of all 56 panel members who attended focus group workshops.

**Figure A1.1 shows the demographic information of panel members who attended the focus group workshops.** Gender: 42% were male and 55% female. Age: 29% aged 55+ and 70% aged 54 and under. Location: 23% South East, 11% North East, 14% Yorkshire and The Humber, 7% East Anglia, 7% East Midlands, 11% South West, 11% London, 7% North West, 7% West Midlands.

**Figure A1.1**



Q. Please tell us your gender

Q. What is your age group?

Q. Where do you live?