

LIVING IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR IN 2023

The Voice of the tenant survey

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Executive Summary

This report looks at the experience of living in the private rented sector in 2023 in England and Wales. It is based on findings from a continuous survey carried out with a representative sample of over 2000 tenants in March/April 2023. The findings show the experience of renting varies for different groups of tenants.

CHAPTER TWO | HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES

- There is a high proportion of families with dependent children living in the sector (38%) and a significant number of tenants (33%) are living with a physical or mental health condition. 25% of tenants are from minority ethnic groups.
- Whilst the income profile of tenants is diverse, many are on low incomes (20%) or are in receipt of benefits to help with their housing costs (24%).
- Most tenants are satisfied with their housing experience (60%) and enjoy positive relationships with their landlord/letting agent. 15% are dissatisfied.
- Most tenants would eventually like to buy their own home (67%) but many believe they are likely to rent a property for the rest of their lives (46%).

TENURE SECURITY AND ACCESS

- Over half of all households have been in their current tenancy for at least two years. 27% of households moved within the last twelve months.
- Moves are usually related to the changing needs of occupants. In 28% of cases, tenants moved because of disadvantages associated with their previous tenancy.

- 51% of tenants said it was difficult to find a new property, only 26% said they found it easy. A significantly higher proportion of Asian and British Asian households (75%) found it difficult.
- Finding an affordable property is the main challenge faced by tenants. Those moving in the past six months are more likely to face affordability pressures.
- 51% of tenants said they feel secure from eviction, 22% feel insecure.

AFFORDABILITY

- In the past six months, the cost of rent in England and Wales increased by 7%.
- Almost one in three tenants are finding it difficult to afford their rent, and around half are regularly cutting down on household essentials to meet their rental payments.
- Asian or British Asian households, tenants who are unemployed due to illness or disability, those receiving benefits and recent movers are experiencing the greatest strain.
- 16% of tenants are behind with the rent, in most cases by one month. Certain households are significantly more likely to be in rent arrears; almost 30% of single parents, those receiving benefits, and Asian and British Asian households are in arrears.
- 44% of all renters struggle to afford their utility bills, whilst for single parents this figure is significantly higher (61%). Families, people in receipt of benefits, and people living with a physical or mental health condition are also more likely to struggle to afford their bills.

HOUSING CONDITION

- Over half of all tenants rate the condition of their property as good or excellent, whilst approximately one-third deem it to be acceptable. 14% rated the condition as poor.
- People with a health condition, tenants in receipt of benefits, and households with children are more likely to be living in poor quality housing.
- Difficulties keeping properties warm, leaks/problems with plumbing and serious problems with damp and mould are the most common problems.
- Most tenants (87%) report issues to their landlord or letting agent. In most cases, problems are fully (33%) or partially addressed (50%).
- When issues are unaddressed tenants are very unlikely to escalate their complaint to their local authority or other redress scheme due to fear of jeopardising their tenancy.
- Nearly half of all tenants are struggling to pay for their energy bills and believe that the energy efficiency of their property could be improved. However, they are often reluctant to make requests to due fear of rent increases.

ACCESSING INFORMATION

- Confirmed possession of key official documentation is low. Only 36% reported receiving the How to Rent guide and approximately half of tenants said they had received the prescribed information, deposit protection and energy performance certificates.
- Only approximately one-third of tenants know where to go for information when they have a problem.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

- Managing and reducing the Local Housing Allowance gap would be an effective way for the Government to improve tenant's access to the sector.
- Both measures to improve the availability of affordable housing and reforms to housing benefit are needed to address affordability issues.
- A significant proportion of tenants who are in arrears may benefit from mediation or other forms of early intervention to help them avoid evictions.
- There are a range of factors that influence feelings of security and affect behaviour when tenants experience tenancy-related problems. The lack of affordable accommodation is key.
- Considering local authority capacity will be key to the UK Government's ambitions to drive up quality in the sector.
- When considering how to improve the energy efficiency of privately rented properties, it is essential that the Government considers the affordability concerns faced by tenants.
- An effective communication and education campaign will be key to ensuring tenants understand their new rights and responsibilities.

Introduction

In England and Wales, approximately five million households are private renting – equivalent to one in five households. The sector is characterised by significant diversity in the needs and characteristics of households, and in the condition of housing and approaches to property management. Capturing this diversity is key to ensuring that our understanding of the sector is sufficiently nuanced and that interventions to drive improvements are appropriately targeted.

It is also important to consider how tenants are experiencing an evolving housing market. Regulatory changes, supply and demand pressures and wider societal impacts such as the rise in cost-of-living, will influence tenants' experience of living and moving within the sector. The survey data presented in this report will be collected at six-monthly intervals to provide insight into how tenants' experiences are changing over time.

POLICY CONTEXT (ENGLAND)

In May 2023, the Renters (Reform) Bill was introduced to Parliament.^[1] It will legislate for reforms set out in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' White Paper "A Fairer Private Rented Sector" that was published in June 2022.^[2] The Renters (Reform) Bill will:

- Remove Section 21 and introduce a new tenancy structure where all tenancies are periodic.
- Introduce comprehensive possession grounds so landlords can still recover their property and make it easier to repossess where tenants are at fault.

- Introduce a new Ombudsman that all landlords must sign up to.
- Introduce a new Database to support the future digital Privately Rented Property Portal service to help landlords understand their legal obligations and demonstrate compliance.
- Give tenants the right to request a pet in the property, which the landlord cannot reasonably refuse. Landlords will be able to require tenants to take out pet insurance.

Legislation will also be introduced to:

- Apply the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector for the first time.
- Make it illegal for landlords and agents to have blanket bans on renting to tenants in receipt of benefits or with children.
- Strengthening local authorities' enforcement powers to tackle criminal landlords.

POLICY CONTEXT (WALES)

On 1 December 2022, the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 came into effect. The Act changes the way landlords in Wales rent their properties. Key changes include:

- Tenancy agreements are replaced by Occupation Contracts and must be provided in writing.
- Eviction notice periods have been increased from two months to six months as long as the contract isn't breached.
- All landlords must ensure homes are fit for human habitation and this includes working smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and electrical safety testing.

[1] DLUCH (2023) Government introduces landmark reforms to deliver fairer private rented sector for tenants and landlords (Accessed: 22/5/23)

[2] DLUCH (2022) Policy paper | A Fairer Private Rented Sector (Accessed: 2/5/23)

RESEARCH METHODS

The report is based on findings from an online survey carried out with 2001 tenants from across England and Wales, who rent from a letting agent or private landlord. Data collection and analysis was carried out by an external research company.

- All respondents were aged 18+ years
- Fieldwork ran from 22nd March – 2nd April 2023
- All respondents were unique to this wave and did not participate in wave 1 in September 2022
- Using data from the English Housing Survey 2020-2021 and syndicated sources, the final data is representative of rental households in terms of age, gender, region and monthly rental cost brackets.

The questions in this survey have been revised to explore how the profile and circumstance of different tenant segments impact on their experiences of the rental sector. Where possible like-for-like comparisons have been made with the previous wave carried out in 2022 but many of the questions are unique to this wave. 80% of the questions will be repeated every six months to explore how trends and experiences are changing over time. Each wave will include an additional new topical issue; this wave focuses on tenants' access to information.

When looking at how experiences vary, this report focuses mainly on statistically significant data. This means we can be reasonably confident that the findings are representative of the wider tenant population. In the discussion, statistics are rounded to the nearest whole number.



CHAPTER ONE

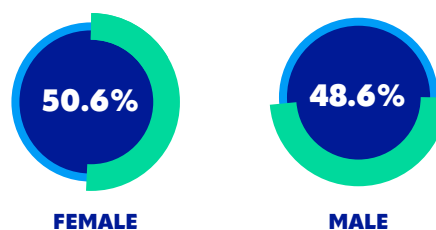
Household characteristics, satisfaction, and aspirations

SUMMARY

Whilst most tenants aspire to eventually buying their own home, the data suggests that renting privately is often a positive experience. Around two-thirds of tenants are satisfied with their tenancies and enjoy a good relationship with their landlord or letting agent. However, the sector accommodates a growing number of households who are more at risk of experiencing housing problems.^[3] There is a high proportion of families with dependent children living in the sector and many tenants report having a physical or mental health condition. Whilst the income profile of tenants is diverse, many are on the lowest incomes or in receipt of benefits to help with their housing costs. The remainder of this report explores how the experience of living in the private rented sector varies according to these different key characteristics and experiences.

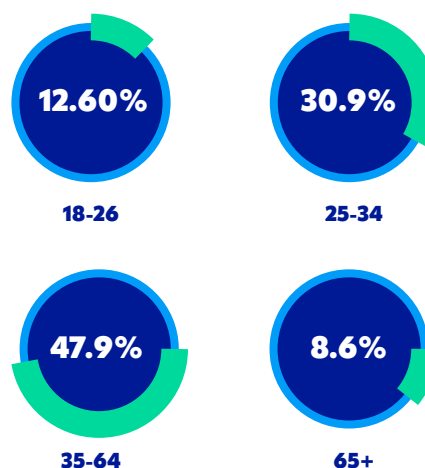
HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

Gender



Age

Private renting is no longer primarily occupied by young people. Over half of tenants are over the age of 35.

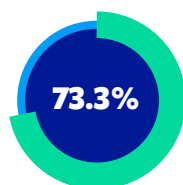


*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

[3] Rhodes, D and Rugg, J. (2018) Vulnerability in the UK Private Rented Sector (Accessed: 2/5/23)

Ethnicity

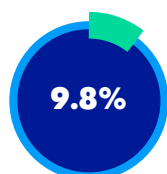
Over a quarter of all private rented sector tenants are from minority ethnic groups. Other data shows that compared to the white population, all ethnic minority groups are more likely to live in the private rented sector.^[4]



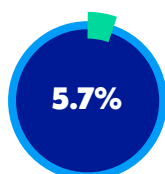
**WHITE/WHITE
BACKGROUND**



**ASIAN OR
BRITISH ASIAN**



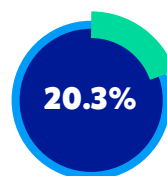
**BLACK,
AFRICAN,
CARIBBEAN OR
BLACK BRITISH**



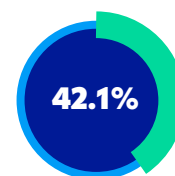
**MIXED OR
OTHER ETHNIC
GROUPS**

Income

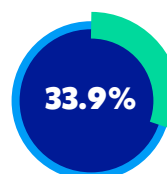
Whilst the income profile of tenants is diverse, many tenants are living on the lowest income.



**LOW INCOME:
UP TO £19,999**



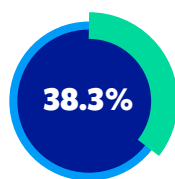
**MEDIUM INCOME:
£20,000 - £39,999**



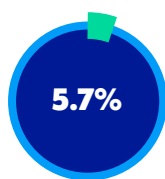
**HIGH INCOME:
£40,000+**

Children

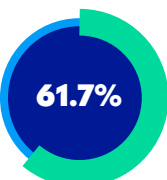
The private rented sector is now providing a home to many families with children.



**CHILDREN IN
HOUSEHOLD**



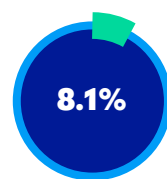
**SINGLE
PARENTS**



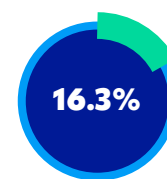
**NO CHILDREN
IN HOUSEHOLD**

In receipt of benefits

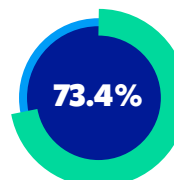
Nearly a quarter of all tenants receive benefits to help pay the rent.



**RENT COVERED IN FULL
BY UNIVERSAL CREDIT/
HOUSING BENEFIT**



**SOME BUT NOT ALL
RENT COVERED BY
UNIVERSAL CREDIT/
HOUSING BENEFIT**



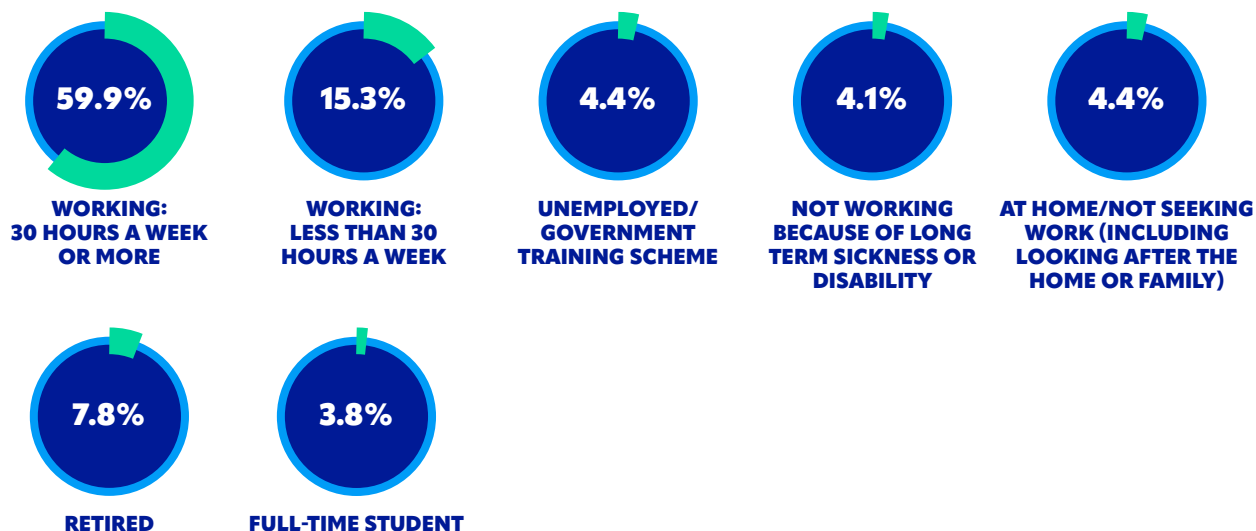
**NOT IN RECEIPT OF
BENEFITS TO HELP
WITH THE RENT**

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

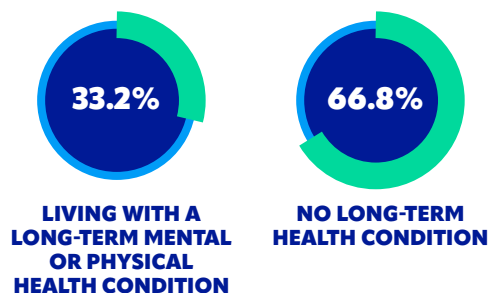
[4] Robinson, D., Preece, J. and Robbins, G. (2022) Race Equality in Housing (Accessed: 2/5/23) pg.8

Employment status

One-fifth of all tenants are not in employment.

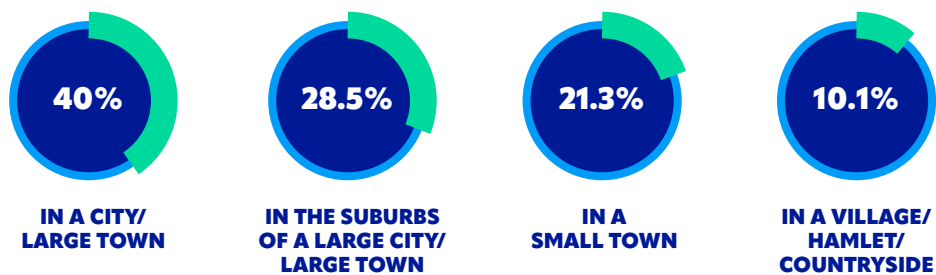


Health Status



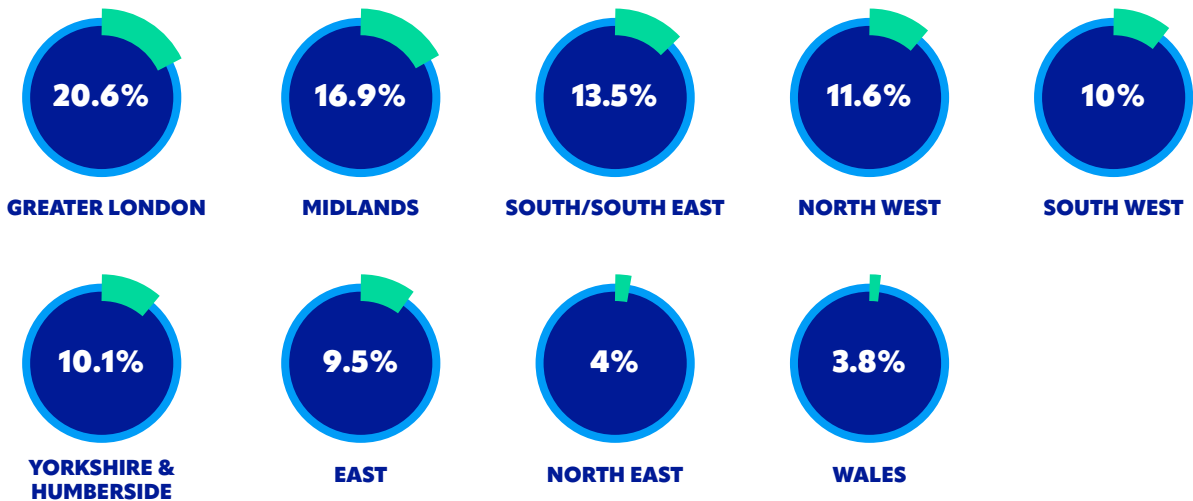
Location

The majority of tenants live in cities or large towns.



Geography

One fifth of all privately rented properties are in London.



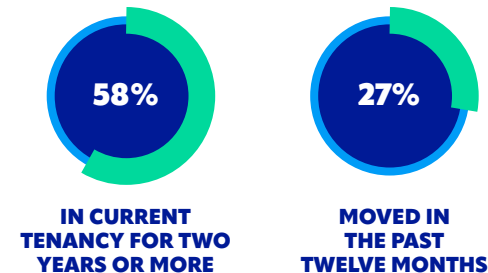
Renting via a landlord

Most tenants rent directly from a landlord.



Tenancy lengths

Most tenants have been in their tenancy for over two years. However, a significant proportion have moved in the past twelve months (see Chapter Two).



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

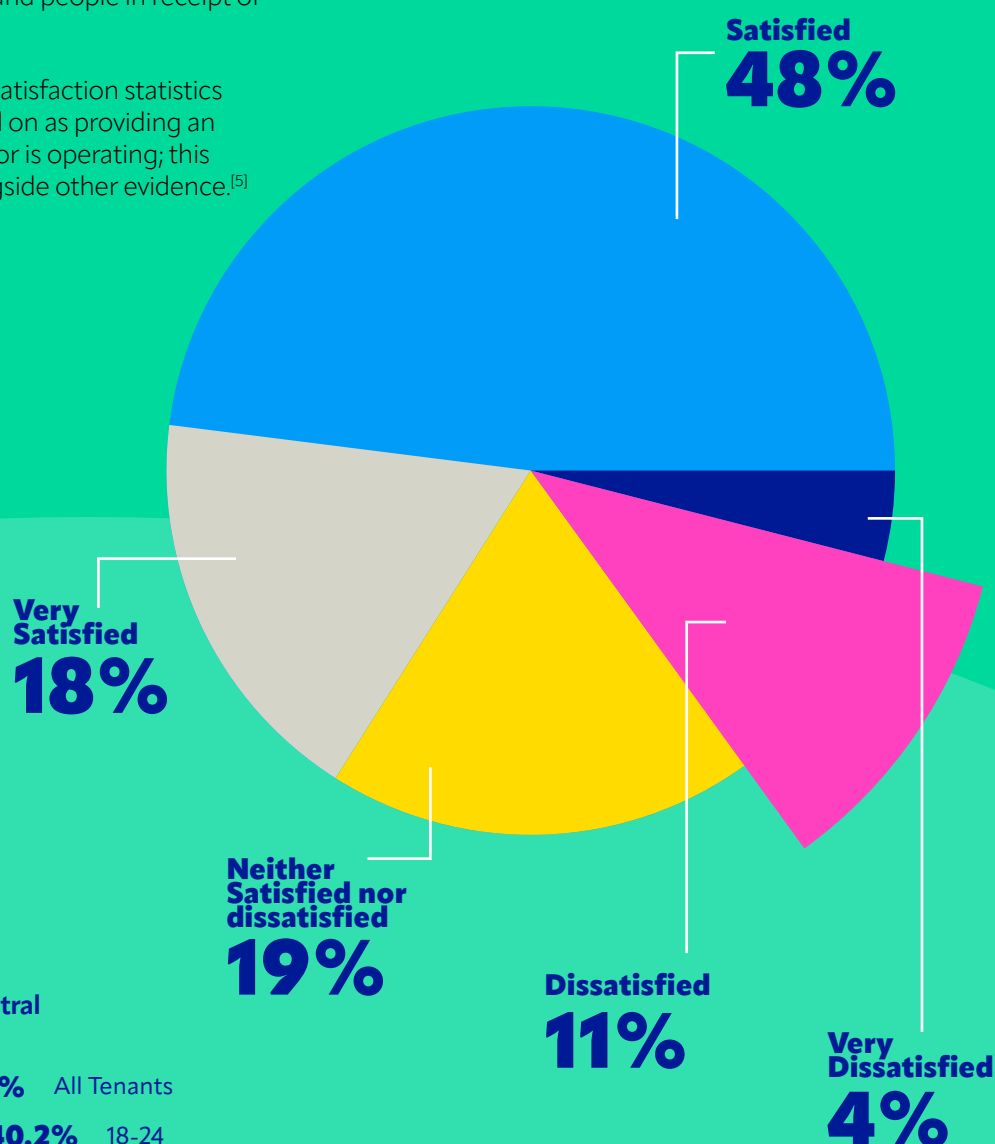
SATISFACTION STATISTICS

The majority of tenants report being satisfied with their housing experience; two-thirds of tenants said they were satisfied or very satisfied, whilst 15% said they were dissatisfied.

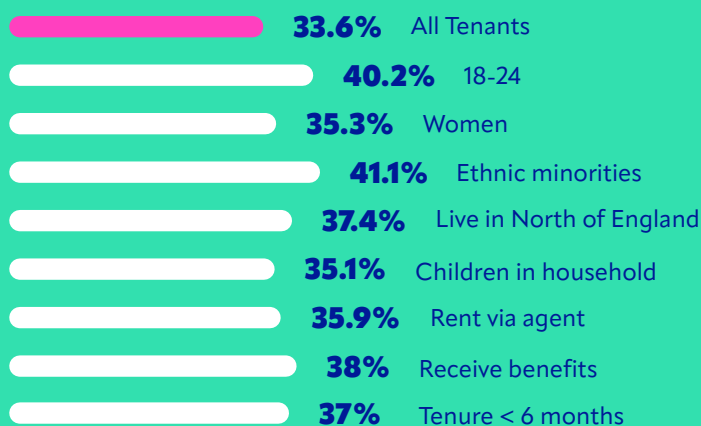
Some groups of tenants are slightly less likely to be positive about their experience of renting privately, including young people aged 18-24, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and people in receipt of benefits.

Other research suggests that satisfaction statistics should not be exclusively relied on as providing an indication of how well the sector is operating; this data must be considered alongside other evidence.^[5]

Overall satisfaction as a tenant



% who are dissatisfied or neutral



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

[5]Harris, J and McKee, K (2022) Health and wellbeing in the private rented sector | part 2 (2/5/23)

HOUSING ASPIRATIONS

Whilst most tenants are satisfied with their current tenancy, the majority would ultimately like to buy their own home (67%). This figure is slightly lower than September (70%) indicating a slight change in housing aspirations. Nearly half of all tenants believe they are likely to rent a property for the rest of their lives (46%). This suggests there is a gap between housing preferences and housing expectations.

Ultimately, I would like to buy my own property



Wave 1 | September 2022



Wave 2 | March 2023

Realistically, I'm likely to rent a property for the rest of my life



Wave 1 | September 2022



Wave 2 | March 2023

● Strongly Agree ● Somewhat Agree ● Neither Agree nor Disagree ● Somewhat Disagree ● Strongly Disagree

LANDLORD/TENANT RELATIONSHIPS

Most tenants enjoy good relationships with their landlord or letting agent. The proportion reporting a positive relationship is slightly higher for those renting directly from their landlord (72%) compared to those renting via a letting agent (64%).

Extent of agreement with statement "I have a good relationship with my landlord/letting agent"



Renter: Directly from a landlord



Renter: Through a letting agent

● Strongly Agree ● Somewhat Agree ● Neither Agree nor Disagree ● Somewhat Disagree ● Strongly Disagree

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

CHAPTER TWO

Tenure security and access

SUMMARY

Many households are relatively settled in their current tenancy, and when people leave their rental property, this is often associated with the changing needs of occupants. However, over a quarter of all tenants in England and Wales moved in the last twelve months, and a significant minority (28%) did so because of disadvantages associated with their previous tenancy. The data shows that finding a suitable rental property has become increasingly difficult and is now a common aspect of living or moving within the sector. Asian and British Asian households, young people, families with children and those receiving benefits face particular difficulties.

TENANCY LENGTH

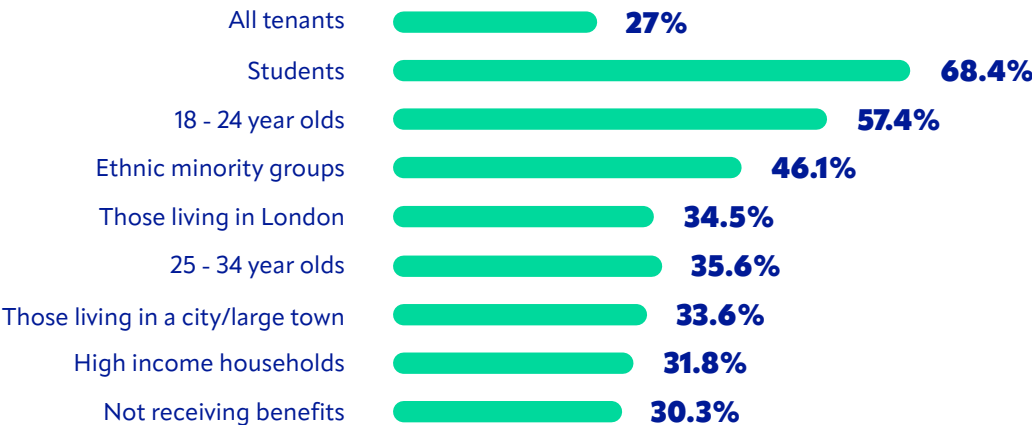
Over half of all households in the private rented sector have been in their tenancy for at least two years (58%), and 29% have been in the same tenancy for more than five years. In total 27% of households moved within the last 12 months, which is a slight increase from November 2022 (24%).

Length of current rental tenure: March 2023



Some groups of tenants are significantly more likely to have moved within the last twelve months, including students and young people.

Moved in the last 12 months*



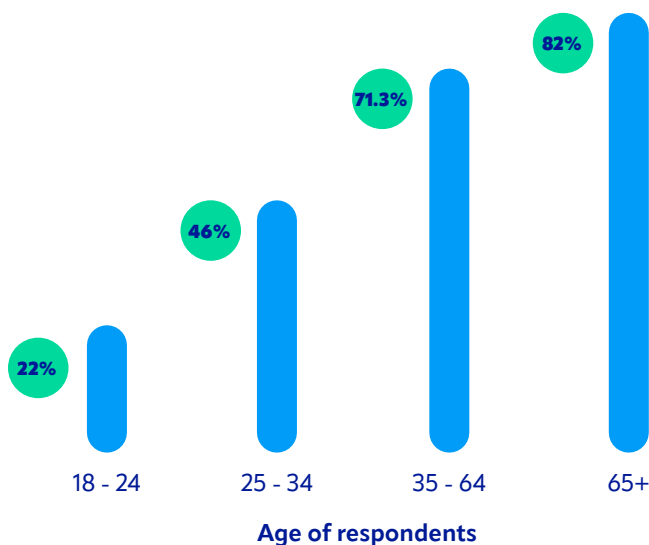
*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Tenancy length is closely related to age. The probability of living in the same rental property for more than two years significantly increases with age.

People in receipt of benefits were also more likely to have lived in their current tenancy for more than two years (68%*).

Tenants who are unemployed also more likely to remain in the property for more than two years compared to people who are in full or part-time employment.

In current tenancy for 2 years or more*



REASONS FOR MOVING

Most tenancies are ended by the tenant rather than the landlord. Only 12% of tenants who moved in the last twelve months did so because the landlord asked them to leave.

Moves in the rental sector are largely related to changing needs or preferences of occupants, such as requiring a larger or smaller home, or job-related reasons.

However, 28% of tenants who moved in the last twelve months did so because of disadvantages associated with their previous property including poor conditions, not being able to afford the rent or because the landlord asked them to leave.

Moved in the last 12 months*

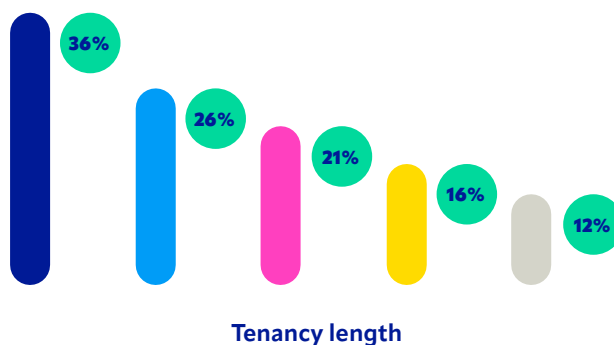


*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

NUMBER OF PROPERTIES VIEWED

The survey asked tenants how many properties they viewed when searching for their last rental property. There is an inverse relationship between the number of properties viewed and the length of tenancy; tenants are increasingly viewing more properties. 62%* of tenants who moved in the last twelve months reported viewing five properties or more, whilst 6%* viewed over 15 properties.

% of respondents viewing five properties or more, by tenancy length*

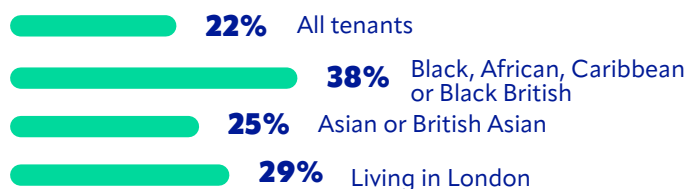


● Up to 6 months ● 7 - 12 months ● 2 years but less than 3 years
● 5 years but less than 10 years ● 10 years or more

Black, African, Caribbean and Black British households generally attend more viewings before finding a suitable property.

These statistics do not capture the activities carried out prior to attending a viewing, e.g. searching for properties online, or attempting to secure a viewing.

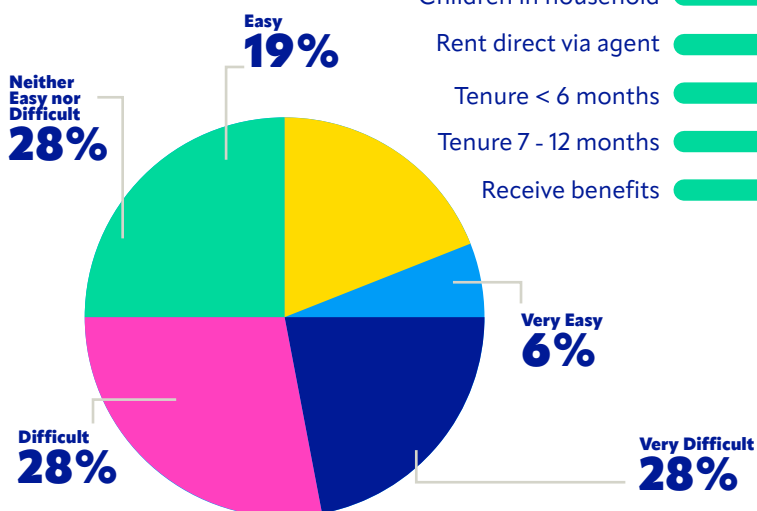
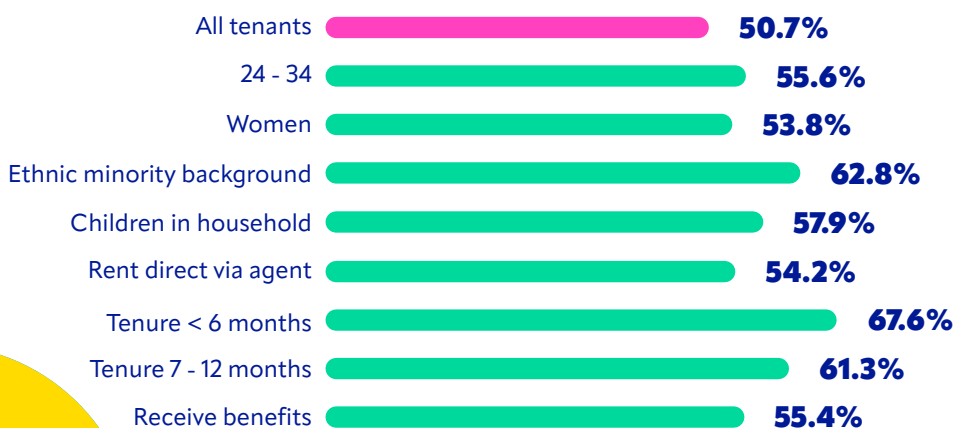
Viewed more than five properties*



EASE OF FINDING A NEW PROPERTY

Many tenants face difficulties when trying to find a new property. Only one in four said they found it easy whilst 51% found it difficult.

% who found it difficult finding a property



Ease of finding a suitable property

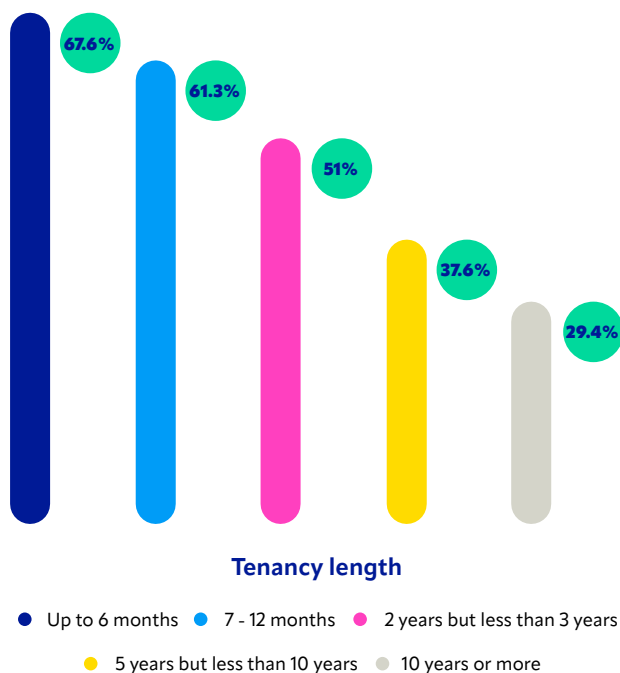
*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Some tenants are more likely to report difficulties in finding a suitable property including tenants from an ethnic minority background, young people, households with children and those in receipt of benefits.

The data suggests it has become increasingly difficult for tenants to find a suitable rental property.

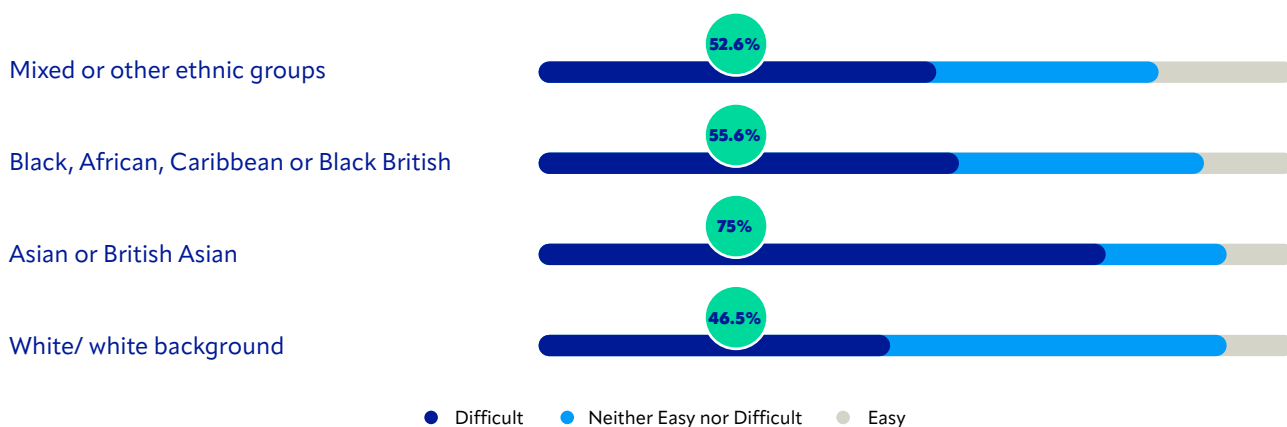
Over two-thirds of tenants who moved in the last six months said it was difficult to find a suitable property.

% of respondents stating it was difficult to find a suitable property, by time in current tenancy



Ethnicity also influences the likelihood that tenants will experience difficulties accessing the sector. 75% of Asian/ British Asian households said they found it difficult to find suitable housing.

% of respondents stating that it was difficult to find a suitable property, by ethnicity*



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

SPECIFIC ACCESS BARRIERS

The survey explored the types of challenges renters face when searching for a rental property. Only 31% said they did not face any difficulties. Finding an affordable property poses the greatest challenge; this was reported by over one-third of tenants.

A significant minority of tenants said they faced difficulties in affording a deposit (15%) and finding a landlord that would allow pets (14%). Landlords requesting rent in advance and having to move to a new area to find an affordable property are also key challenges.

People moving in the last six months were significantly more likely to struggle to find a new home. Over half of this cohort faced difficulties finding an affordable property, whilst a higher proportion reported difficulties affording a deposit, getting a UK-guarantor or being asked for rent in advance. This suggests that affordability is becoming an increasingly significant issue.

CHALLENGES WHEN LOOKING TO RENT	ALL TENANTS	TENURE < 6 MONTHS
I had difficulty in finding an affordable property	35.0%	52.1%*
Difficulty in affording a deposit	15.2%	22.0%*
I have pets and I had difficulty finding a landlord / letting agent that would allow pets	14.1%	9.7%*
Landlord/letting agent requested rent in advance	13.7%	18.3%*
Had to move to a new area due to a lack of affordable properties	12.0%	15.6%
Universal Credit / Housing Benefit / Local Housing Allowance would not cover the cost of the property that I wanted	7.4%	4.2%*
Having to accept a property that was smaller than I needed or of poor quality, to stay near my children's school or near my work	7.2%	8.6%
Landlord / letting agents didn't want to let to tenants on benefits	7.3%	5.9%
Lack of properties suitable for my physical needs / disabilities	6.1%	5.9%
Difficulty in getting a UK-based guarantor	7.4%	16.1%*
Landlord / letting agents didn't want to let to tenants with children	6.6%	12.6%*
Landlord / letting agent unwilling to let to me due to my race, gender or other personal characteristics	5.3%	9.4%*
Other	3.0%	2.2%
None of the above (I did not face any challenges)	30.5%	19.2%*

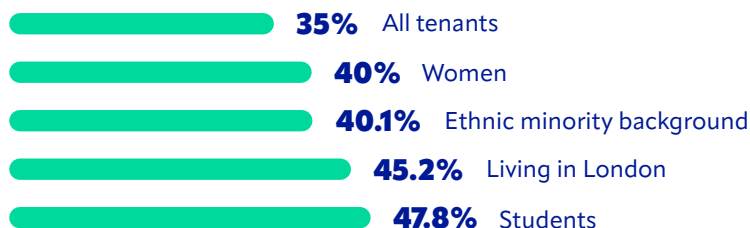
*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.



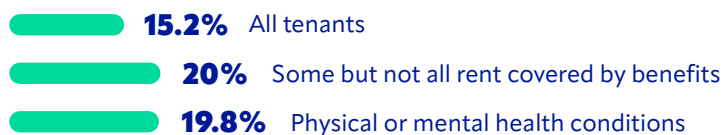
The top challenges renters faced were concentrated among certain groups of tenants. Students, tenants in London, and households from an ethnic minority background found it more difficult than others to

find an affordable property. Almost a quarter of all tenants living in the cheapest properties had to move to a different area to find an affordable property.

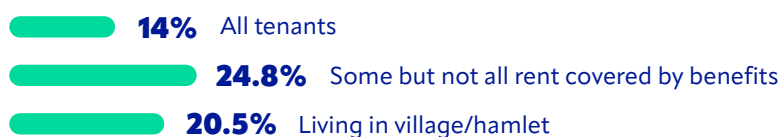
Difficulty finding an affordable property



Had difficulty in affording a deposit



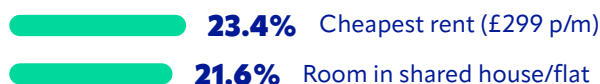
Finding a property that permits pets



Landlord requesting rent in advance

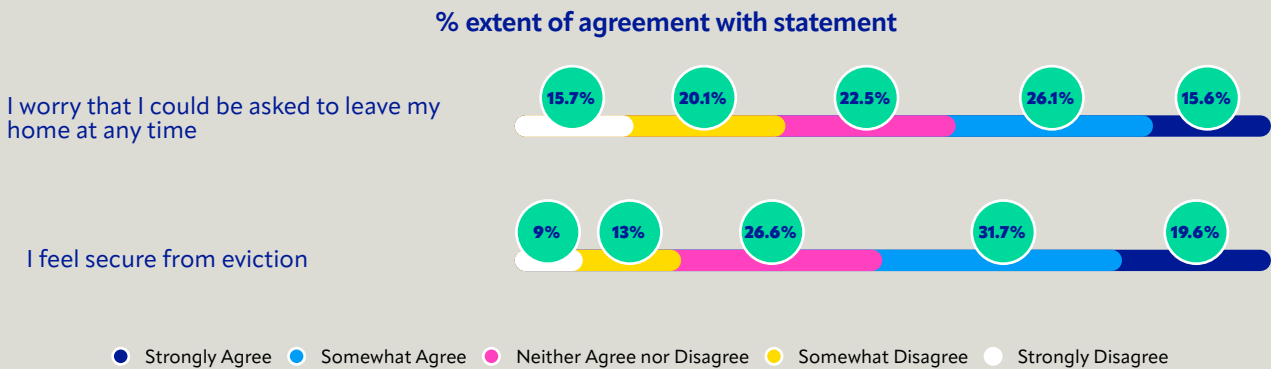


Had to move to a new area to afford rental property



TENANCY SECURITY

42% of tenants said they worried about being asked to leave their home at any time and 51% said they feel secure from eviction.



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

CHAPTER THREE

Affordability

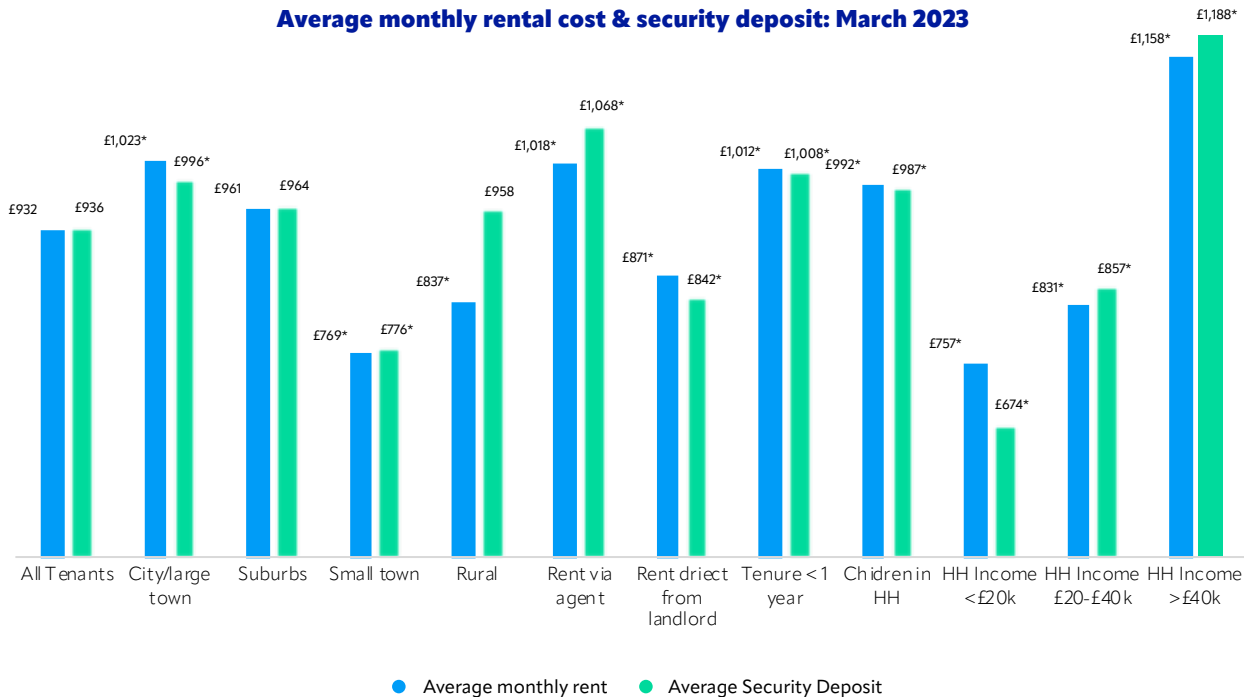
SUMMARY

The findings show that the affordability of rental accommodation is an area of major concern for many tenants, and the problem is worsening. Almost one in three tenants are finding it difficult to afford their rent, and around half are regularly cutting down on household essentials to meet their rental payments. Some groups of tenants are finding it particularly difficult including single parents and those in receipt of benefits.

RENTAL COSTS AND DEPOSIT

In March, the average cost of renting a home in the private rented sector in England and Wales was £932 and the average deposit was £936. The cost of rent varies according to location and tenants' circumstances. Tenants in large towns or cities, those who have taken on a tenancy in the last 12 months and those renting via a letting agent rather than direct from a landlord can expect to pay above average rents.

Average monthly rental cost & security deposit: March 2023



The findings show that the cost of rent is continuing to increase across England and Wales; rents across England and Wales have risen by 6.8% in the past six months, whilst in London rents have increased by 13%.

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

For those renting via a letting agent, this increase has been more substantial (10%), compared to those renting directly from a landlord (5%).

Women have also experienced a higher increase in the cost of rent.

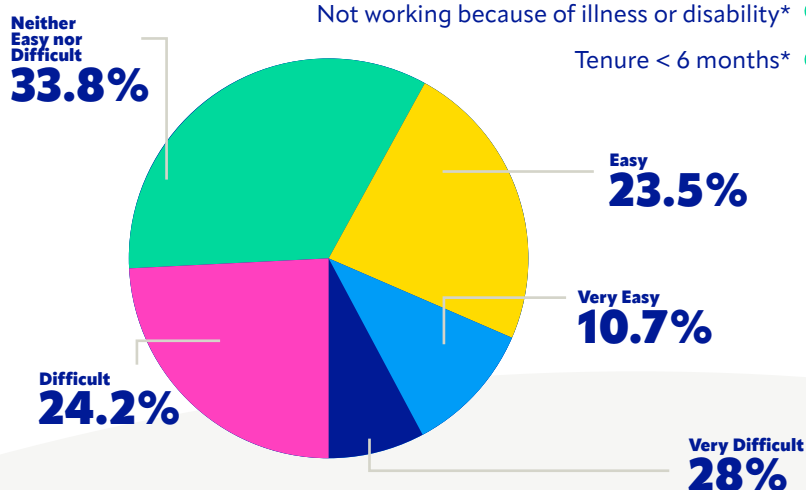
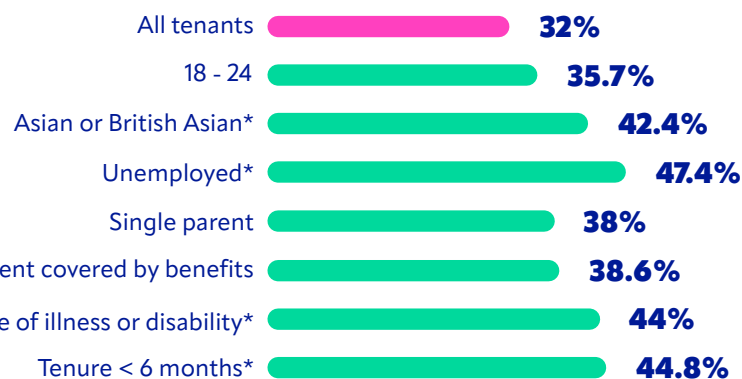
AVERAGE RENTAL COSTS	SEPTEMBER 2022	MARCH 2023	% CHANGE
All Tenants	£873	£932	+6.8%
Rent via agent	£927	£1,018	+9.8%
Rent directly from landlord	£833	£871	+4.6%

AVERAGE RENTAL COSTS	SEPTEMBER 2022	MARCH 2023	% CHANGE
Women	£897	£975	+8.7%
Men	£837	£891	+6.5%
Greater London	£1,313	£1,484	+13.0%

MEETING MONTHLY RENTAL COSTS

In February 2023, almost one in three tenants struggled to afford the rent. This was significantly higher for households who had recently moved into a new rental property. Almost half of all tenants who moved in the past six months are struggling to afford their monthly rent.

% who found it difficult to pay monthly rent last month



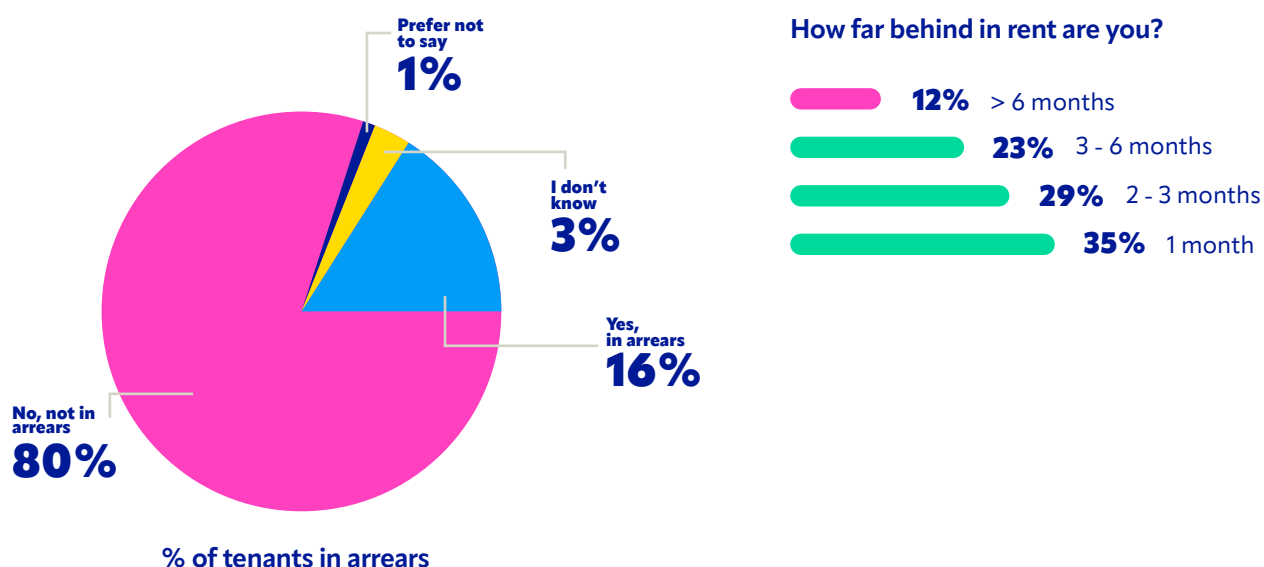
How easy or difficult was it to afford the rent last month (March 2023)

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Asian or British Asian tenants, tenants who are unemployed or not working because of illness or disability and households in receipt of benefits to cover some but not all of their rent, are disproportionately affected. Almost half of all tenants from these cohorts are struggling to pay their rent.

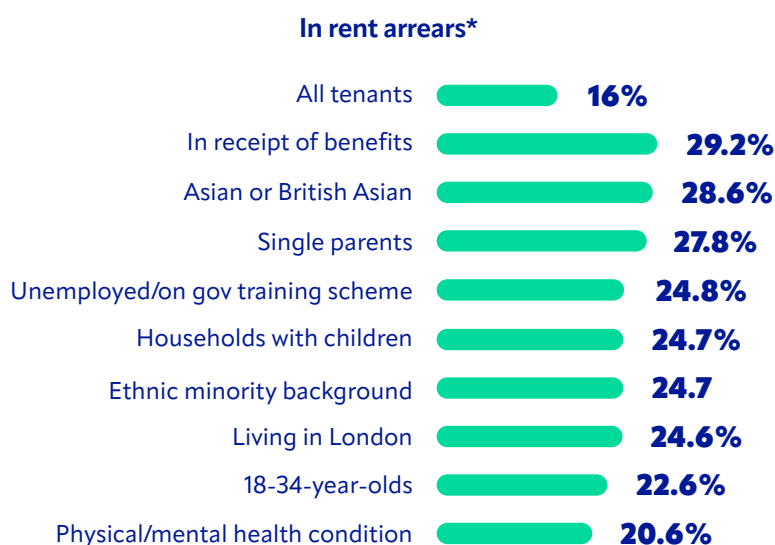
ARREARS

Most tenants are not behind with their monthly rent (80%). However, 16% of respondents are in arrears of one month or more. In most cases, the duration of arrears is relatively short; most tenants are one month behind.



Certain households are significantly more likely to be in rent arrears. Almost 30% of single parents, tenants in receipt of benefits, and Asian and British Asian households are in arrears.

Almost a quarter of all families with children, renters in London and households who are unemployed are also behind with their rent.



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

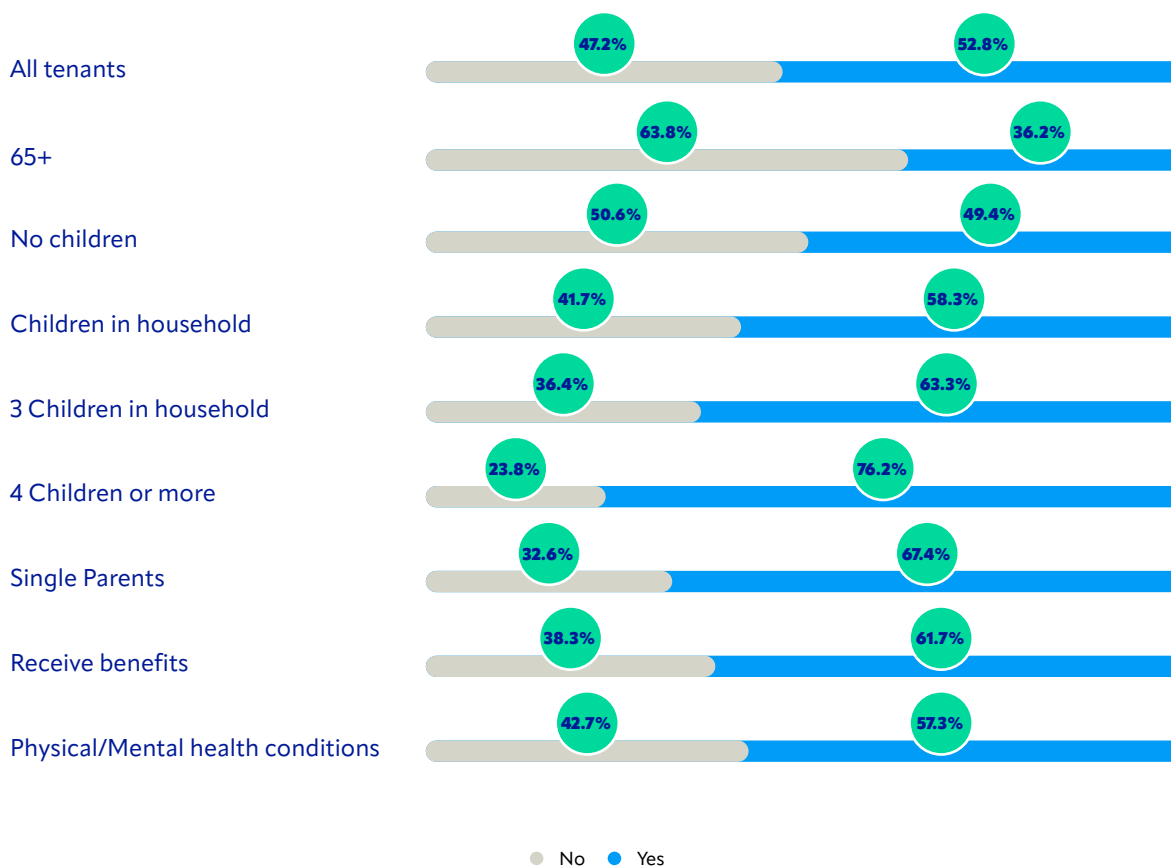
CUTTING ON HOUSEHOLD ESSENTIALS

Over half of all tenants said they regularly cut on household essentials such as food, heating and clothing in order to pay the rent. This proportion is higher among single parents (67%) and tenants in receipt of benefits (62%). Larger families were also significantly more likely to cut back on household essentials to pay the rent.

Do you regularly cut on household essentials such as food, heating and clothing in order to pay the rent?



Do you regularly cut on household items to pay rent?*

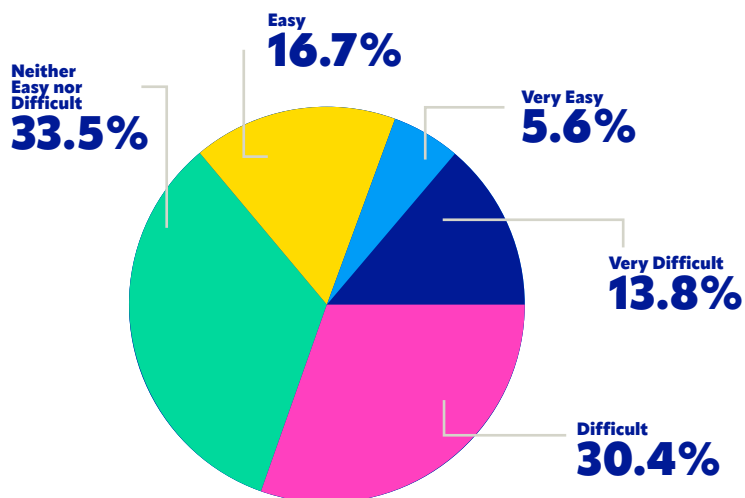
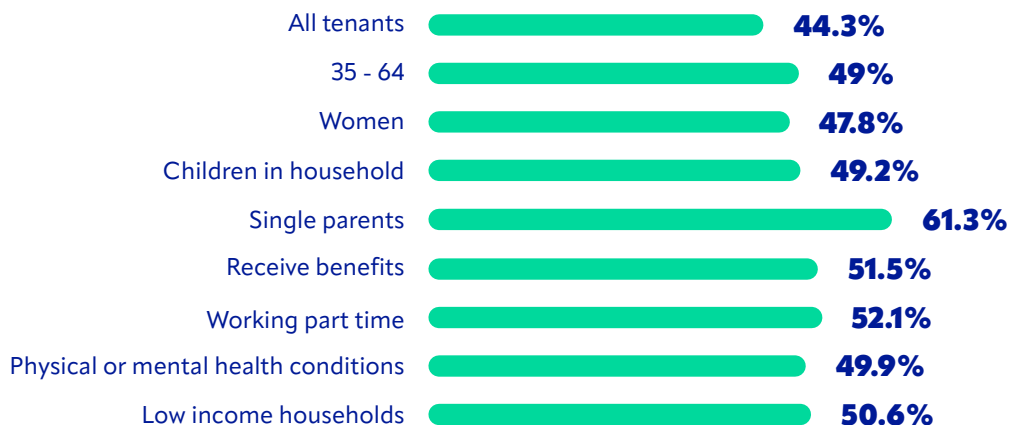


*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

UTILITY BILLS

The findings show that private renters are particularly vulnerable to the energy crisis. 44% of all renters struggled to afford their utility bills in February/March 2023, whilst for single parents this figure was significantly higher (61%)

% who found it difficult to afford the energy bills



How easy or difficult was it to afford the energy bills last month (March 2023)



CHAPTER FOUR

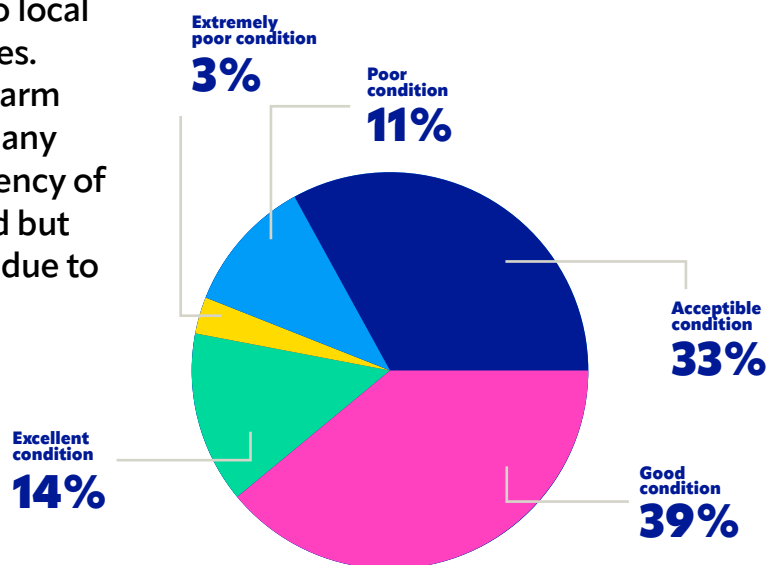
Housing conditions and requesting repairs

SUMMARY

Most tenants in the private rented sector report living in housing of good or acceptable quality. However, a sizable minority live in housing that is in poor condition. Two-thirds of tenants experienced a problem with their property in the last six months. Whilst most tenants will report these issues to the landlord or letting agent, they are unlikely to escalate complaints to local authorities or other redress bodies. Difficulties keeping properties warm is the most common problem. Many tenants believe the energy efficiency of their property could be improved but are reluctant to ask for this work due to concerns about rent increases.

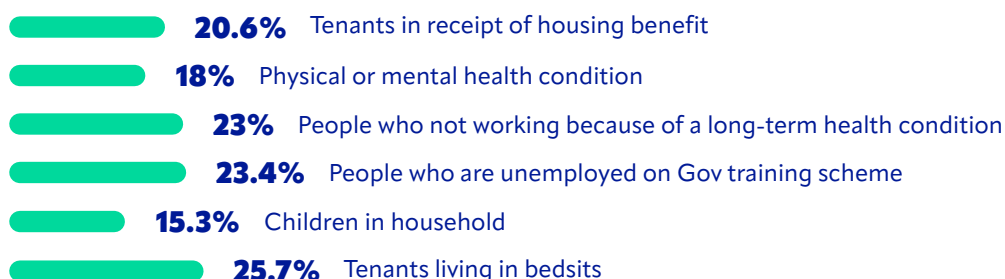
CONDITION OF PROPERTIES

Over half of all tenants rate the condition of their property as good or excellent, whilst approximately one-third deem it to be acceptable. A total of 14% of respondents rated the condition of their property as poor or very poor. With recent estimates showing that there are approximately 5 million households living in the private rented sector in England and Wales, these findings suggest that a high number (approx. 700,000) of households are living in poor quality accommodation.



How would you rate the condition of your property?

% of tenants rating condition of their property as poor



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

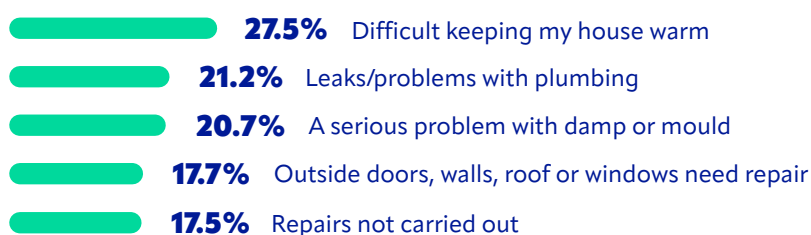
HOUSING MAINTENANCE

Almost two-thirds of tenants experienced a problem with the quality or condition of their property in the past six months. Difficulties in keeping properties' warm was the most common problem; this was reported by over one-quarter of tenants. Whilst a need for repairs and maintenance will be inevitable on any property, repairs not being carried out was one of the main problems reported.

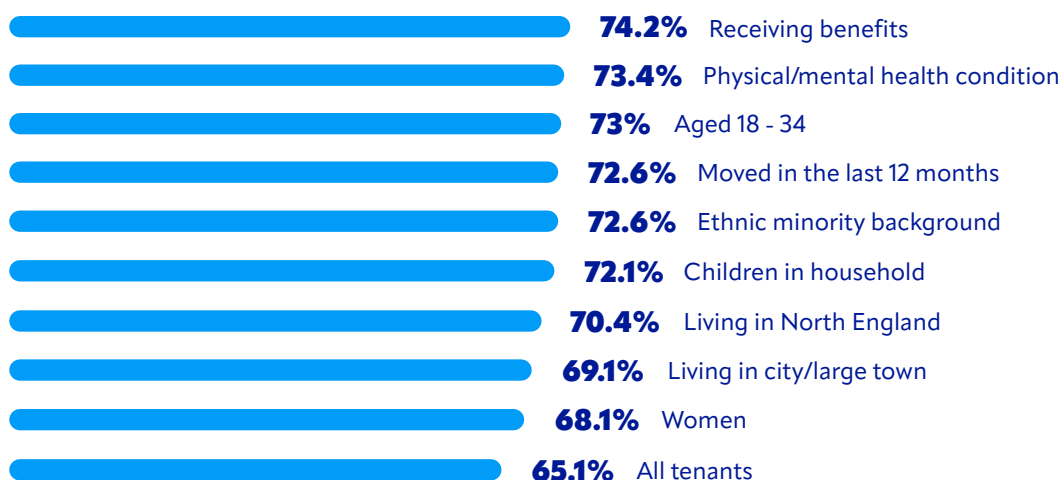
Problems are concentrated among certain households, including families with children, young people and those in receipt of benefits. Properties in urban areas and in the North of England are also more likely to have problems.

The findings demonstrate an association between housing condition and health; tenants living with a physical or mental health problem are more likely to live in a property in poor condition and are more likely to have experienced one or more problems in the last six months.

Top five problems reported by tenants

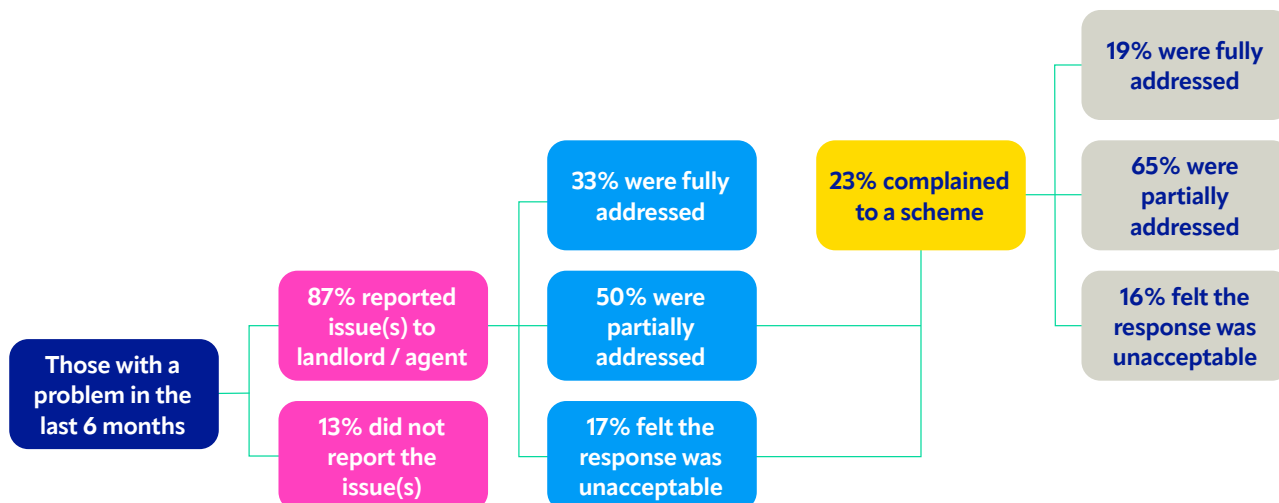


Experienced at least one issue in the last 6 months



REPORTING ISSUES

The large majority of tenants are reporting these problems to their landlord or letting agent (87%) and in most cases, the issue is being fully or partly addressed. However, when issues are unaddressed, only a minority of tenants will escalate their complaint to their local authority or another redress scheme.



The survey explored the reasons which might prevent tenants from reporting their issues and escalating complaints. Apathy, self-help and fear of causing problems are key reasons for not reporting issues to landlords or agents. Some tenants said they want to be seen as a "good tenant" (17%) and will carry out repairs or maintenance themselves (22%).

Fear of retaliatory eviction or retaliatory rent increases are key reasons preventing tenants from escalating complaints. Concerns about finding another rental property, inability to afford an alternative property, apathy and lack of awareness of schemes also operate as deterrents to escalating complaints.

Households that were significantly less likely to report issues include young people aged 18-34 (39%) and households without children (70%).

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

REASONS FOR NOT REPORTING THE ISSUE(S) TO LANDLORD OR AGENT	
Didn't think anything would be done about it	20.4%
I decided to fix the problem myself	21.9%
Too much hassle	23.2%
I have a good relationship with my landlord, I don't want to bother them	19.5%
I want to be seen as a "good tenant"	16.5%
I am worried the landlord might increase the rent	19.2%
I am worried the landlord might ask me to leave	12.4%
I'm worried about finding another suitable rental property	13.6%
I can't afford the rent in another property	9.2%
I know my landlord doesn't have the money to improve the property	4.6%
Other	12.9%

REASONS FOR NOT COMPLAINING TO ONE OF THE SCHEMES	
I am worried the landlord might ask me to leave	34.7%
Too much hassle	24.5%
I am worried the landlord might increase the rent	29.6%
I want to be seen as a "good tenant"	27.4%
I'm worried about finding another suitable rental property	26.9%
Didn't think anything would be done about it	22.0%
I can't afford the rent in another property	20.9%
I didn't know they existed	17.6%
I didn't understand how they could help	15.5%
I decided to fix the problem myself	13.8%
Other	6.2%

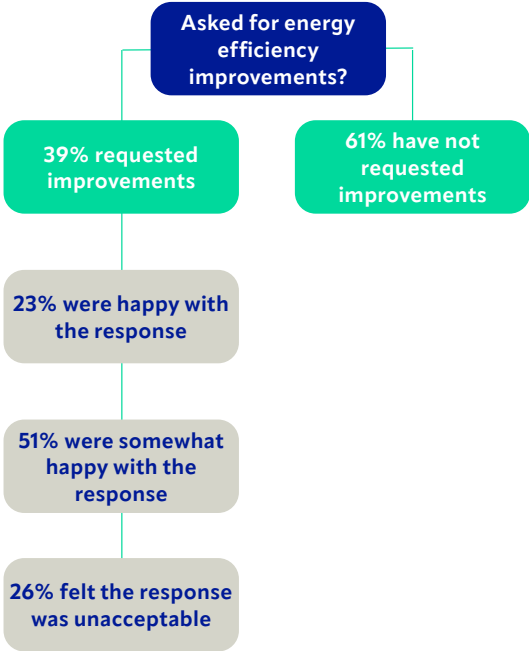
REQUESTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY UPGRADES

Half of all tenants felt there was potential to improve the energy efficiency of their property, whilst over a third didn't know. The open-text responses suggest that many tenants are looking for landlords to replace windows and improve insulation.

In your opinion, could the landlord / letting agent improve the energy efficiency of your current rental property?



Around four in ten tenants have asked for energy efficiency upgrades. The results suggest that requests from tenants can prompt landlord action; 74% of tenants said they were happy or somewhat happy with the landlords’ response. However, for many tenants, apathy or fear of rent increases is preventing them from requesting improvements.



REASONS FOR NOT ASKING FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS	
I did not think anything would be done about it	34.6%
I am worried the landlord might increase the rent	38.4%
Too much hassle	24.7%
I am worried the landlord might ask me to leave	25.4%
I have a good relationship with my landlord, I don't want to bother them	21.5%
I want to be seen as a "good tenant"	22.8%
I'm worried about finding another suitable rental property	18.2%
I can't afford the rent in another property	16.1%
I know my landlord doesn't have the money to improve the property	8.7%
I decided to fix the problem myself	3.1%
Other	5.6%

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

CHAPTER FIVE

Accessing information

SUMMARY

Our 2022 survey showed that 86% of tenants had not heard about the UK Government's plans for reforming the sector or knew anything about what they are proposing. This wave explored how tenants obtain information. Tenants' awareness of key official documentation was low; only 36% reported receiving the How to Rent guide. Only around one-third of tenants know where to go for information when they have a problem.

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION

Whilst most tenants said they have been provided with a tenancy agreement (86%), only a minority said they had been issued with the Government's How to Rent Guide (36%).

Confirmed possession of other key pieces of documentation were also low; only approximately half of tenants said they had received the prescribed information, deposit protection or energy performance certificate.

These figures are likely to represent tenants' awareness of these documents rather than the frequency in which they are issued.

The Gas Safety Certificate must be issued every year but less than two-thirds of tenants report seeing this document.

Confirmed possession of official documentation is slightly higher for tenants renting via a letting agent.

% CLAIM YES, I HAVE BEEN GIVEN / SENT THIS DOCUMENT

	All tenants	Rent via agent	Rent direct from landlord
Government's How to Rent Guide	35.8%	41.4%*	31.5%*
Prescribed Information about to reclaim your deposit	47.0%	50.3%*	44.6%*
Deposit Protection Certificate	56.5%	62.3%*	52.4%*
Energy Performance Certificate	54.5%	61.1%*	49.9%*
Gas Safety Certificate	62.6%	64.6%	61.2%
Tenancy Agreement	85.8%	88.2%*	84.1%*

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

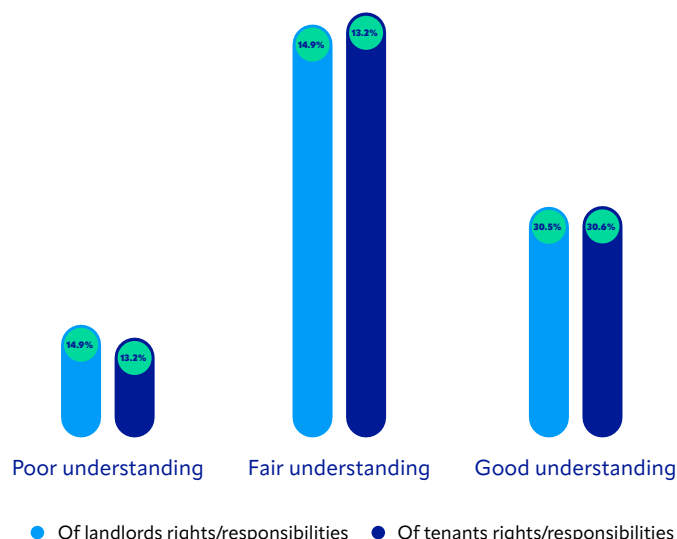
UNDERSTANDING OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The survey explored tenants' understanding of their own and landlords' rights and responsibilities at different stages of a tenancy: when starting a tenancy, when there's a problem, and when ending the tenancy. The data showed no significant differences in tenants' understanding at these different stages.

Most tenants felt they had a fair understanding of their rights and responsibilities, whilst a minority felt their understanding was poor.

Understanding is inherently subjective. People can often over-estimate their own knowledge.^[6] Reports have suggested that tenants' lack adequate understanding of their rights and responsibilities.^[7]

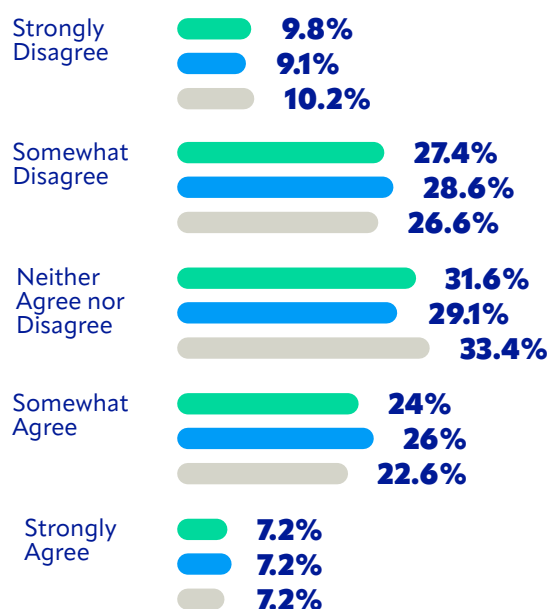
Understanding of rights/responsibilities when there's a problem with tenancy



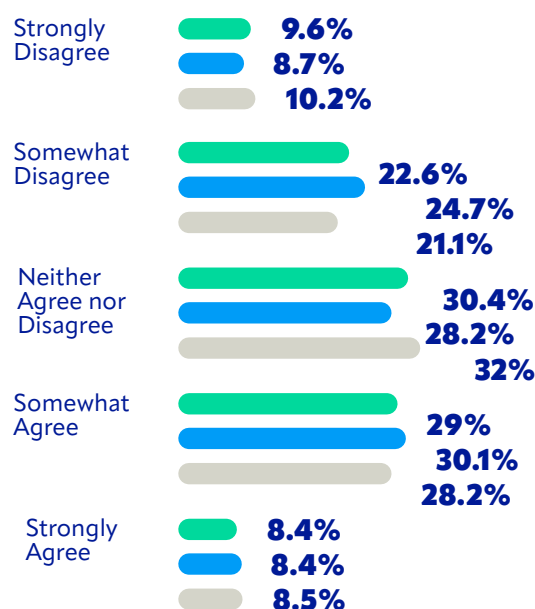
LOCATING INFORMATION

The survey sought to explore tenant's views on the availability of information, and their access to and use of different sources. Approximately one-third of tenants agreed that when they had a problem with their tenancy it is difficult to find information whilst a slightly higher proportion felt there isn't a direct place you can go for information.

When I have a problem with my tenancy, it is difficult to find information to help me



As a renter, there isn't a direct place you can go for information



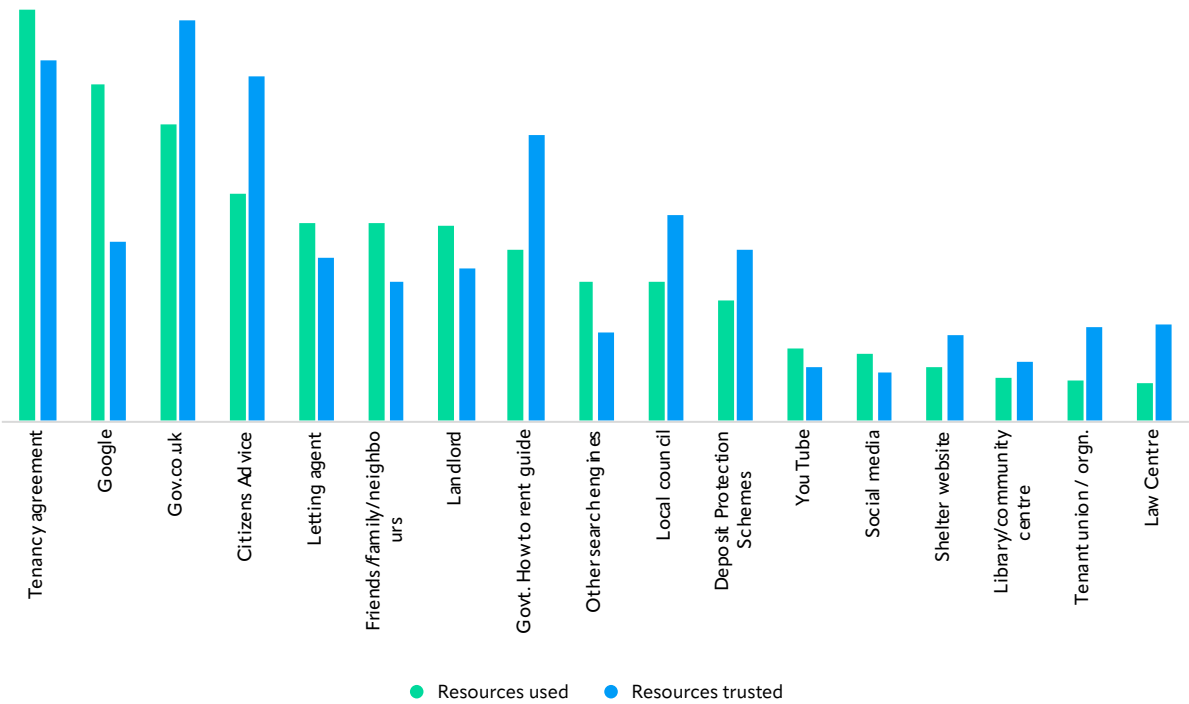
● All tenants ● Rent via agent ● Rent direct from landlord

Around a third were unable to comment on the availability of information; this group may not have sought information or had a problem with their tenancy and so feel unable to comment. Or, they could be uncertain about the availability of information, which would be a problem should an information-need arise. Only approximately one-third of tenants know where to go for information when they have a problem.

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

[6] <https://www.verywellmind.com/an-overview-of-the-dunning-kruger-effect-4160740>

[7] Rugg, J. and Rhodes, D. (2018) The Evolving Private Rented Sector: Its Contribution and Potential. Research Report Centre for Housing Policy, York;



*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Conclusion and discussion

The findings from this survey show that for many tenants, living in the private rented sector in England and Wales is a positive experience. Most tenants report being satisfied and enjoy positive relationships with their landlord or letting agent. The majority also live in properties that are in good or acceptable condition and leave tenancies of their own accord when their housing needs change.

However, there is a significant minority of tenants who are less positive about their experience of renting privately and who are living in poor quality housing. The findings also suggest that issues related to affordability, accessing the sector and energy efficiency are experienced by a high proportion of tenants. Certain groups are disproportionately affected by these housing challenges including families with children, people in receipt of benefits, young people, those living with long-term health issues and minority ethnic communities. This chapter provides a short discussion of the findings of the survey and discusses what needs to change.

ACCESSING THE SECTOR

The findings show that it is becoming increasingly difficult to access privately rented housing. Data from the English Household Survey suggests that the reduction in private rented sector housing that occurred since 2016 may have now stabilised.^[8] However, supply has not kept pace with demand and competition for properties remains high. The increasing mismatch between supply and demand is illustrated within this study; whilst ten years ago 29% found it difficult to secure a suitable property, in the past six months 68% found it difficult. Some groups find it more difficult than others to find a suitable property, including Asian/British Asian households, young people, families and benefit claimants.

Many of the challenges tenants face relate to affordability concerns, which are discussed further below. There are many schemes operating across England and Wales that are attempting to improve access to good quality, affordable homes in the private rented sector. For example, the evaluation of the Private Rented Sector Leasing Scheme in Wales (2020-2027) has shown promising signs of achieving good outcomes for tenants.^[9] However, the gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and the financing and running of these schemes is becoming an increasingly significant challenge. Managing and reducing the LHA gap would be an effective way for the Government to support tenant's access to the sector.

AFFORDABILITY

The findings show that the affordability of rental properties is a key issue and rents are continuing to increase. Almost one-in-three tenants are finding it difficult to meet rental payments and over half are cutting down on household essentials to pay the rent. Recent movers face particularly high pressures; over two-thirds of tenants who moved in the past six months struggled to find an affordable property. Other groups of tenants that are more affected by affordability issues include single parents, larger households, and those in receipt of benefits.

The affordability of rental accommodation is, however, largely absent from the UK Government's plans for reforming the private rented sector in England. Research suggests that to maximise the effectiveness of plans to make the private rented sector fairer, consideration must be given to improving supply of housing stock across all sector.^[10] A recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that rising rents is not only a supply issue – although this is important – but is also linked to the decreased generosity of welfare subsidies offered to the lowest income households. Many commentators and key organisations have suggested that to improve the experience of renting in the private sector, policy makers should end the LHA freeze and re-link rates to the 30th percentile of local rents. In summary, both measures to address the availability of affordable housing and reforms to housing benefit are needed to improve affordability issues faced by tenants.

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

[8] The English Household Survey (Accessed: 3/5/23)

[9] Welsh Government (2021) *Evaluation of the Private Rented Sector Leasing Scheme* (Accessed: 3/5/23).

[10] Morton, A. and Dunkley, E. (2023) *The case for housebuilding* (Accessed 3/5/23)

RENT ARREARS

Despite Government efforts to provide household support during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey responses suggest that a high proportion of households are currently in arrears (16%). A major and increasing reason for landlords seeking to end tenancies is for rent arrears and this trend is likely to continue within the context of the current cost-of-living crisis. Some groups of tenants are significantly more likely to be in arrears including families, single parents, benefit recipients, Asian/British Asian households and tenants living in London.

In most cases the duration of arrears is relatively short; usually three months or less. Anecdotal evidence suggests that mediation is most effective in preventing evictions when arrears have only accrued over a relatively short period of time. The findings from this survey therefore suggest that a significant proportion of tenants who are in arrears could benefit from mediation and/or other forms of early intervention to help them avoid evictions and sustain their tenancies. It is important that these services are designed and targeted according to the needs and views of people who are more likely to be arrears and therefore more likely to need these services.

IMPROVING SECURITY

The UK Government has recognised the continuing insecurity faced by tenants living in the private rented sector in England, as also demonstrated in the results from this survey. The Government hopes that the removal of Section 21 will increase feelings of security and therefore tenants' willingness to complain to local authorities or other redress bodies (new or existing). However, the results from this survey show there are other significant issues at play which are largely linked to the wide gap between demand and supply as discussed above. The shortage of accommodation in the rented sector market and the increasing cost of rent means that tenants are fearful of losing their tenancy or rent increases. The results show that concerns about endangering tenancies when there is currently such a lack of affordable accommodation influences tenants' willingness to escalate complaints and request energy efficiency upgrades. As a result, there is a risk that even with the removal of Section 21 tenants will be reluctant to raise complaints and the new Landlord Ombudsman will receive a low number of complaints. We therefore invite the Government to think more expansively about the range of factors that influence feelings of security and avoid assuming that tenancy law is the main or only driver of tenant behaviour.

IMPROVING HOUSING CONDITIONS

In this survey, 14% of tenants rated the condition of their property as poor, and this figure is higher

for certain groups of tenants, including benefit recipients (21%) and those living with a long-term health condition (18%). Improving housing conditions is a cornerstone of the UK Government's plans for reforming the sector in England through the introduction of a new Decent Housing Standard and enhanced enforcement powers for local authorities. Research shows there is significant variation in local authority enforcement and regulation.^[11] It is now generally acknowledged that resources are a key factor influencing enforcement, not just funds but also the availability of staff with the necessary skills. We would encourage the Government to carry out the new burdens assessment outlined in the White Paper to assess the impact of the new regulations on local authorities, and where necessary, fully fund the net additional cost of all new burdens.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The findings from this research also show that a significant number of tenants are struggling to pay their energy bills, and many believe that the energy efficiency of their property could be improved. The findings suggest that when tenants make requests for energy efficiency improvements this can often prompt landlord action, but many are reluctant to ask for works due to fears of rent increases. When considering how to improve the energy efficiency of privately rented properties, it is therefore essential that the Government considers the affordability concerns faced by tenants as discussed above.^[12]

IMPROVING TENANT UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS

Our previous survey showed that 86% of tenants in England had not heard of the Government's plans for reforming the sector or knew anything about the proposals. An effective communication and education campaign will therefore be key to ensuring tenants understand their new rights and responsibilities. The Select Committee's recommendation that the Government updates the How to Rent guide as a means of educating tenants and landlords is unlikely to provide a satisfactory solution.^[13] Only 36% of tenants confirmed they had received/were aware of the How to Rent guide and only 16% will refer to it for information about their rights and responsibilities. It is important that the Government thinks more expansively about the different sources tenants' access for information, and make better use of existing interfaces and interactions by considering the role of those organisations that already provide information and advice to tenants. Consideration of the wider advice and support landscape will also be key to ensuring tenants in England access the new Ombudsman and, where necessary, are provided with assistance to access and sustain tenancies.

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

[11] Harris, J., Cowan, D. and Marsh, A. (2020) [Improving compliance and enforcement in the private rented sector](#) (Accessed: 3/5/23)

[12] We are currently awaiting the Government's response to their consultation on improving the energy performance of privately rented homes carried out in 2020-21.

[13] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmcomloc/624/report.html> (Accessed: 3/5/23)



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