

TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Tenant feedback response
document



Hillhead Housing Association



Background

In Autumn 2024, our tri-annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey was carried out by professional market research company Knowledge Partnership. Some of the questions we ask in this survey are questions required by the Scottish Housing Regulator and other questions we ask to find out more about the service we are providing for our tenants.

Overall, the results were positive with an increase in satisfaction in five of the seven key questions we report to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Once we received all of the data, we looked at themes and suggestions and tried to understand how we can improve based on tenant feedback. Knowledge Partnership also hosted tenant workshops on our behalf so that the key themes and suggestions can be explained and explored fully.

We have prepared this document to provide responses to the main topics raised within the survey and the workshops as well as provide an action plan for improvements and recommendations.



Workshop Discussion Point: Property issues, heating the home and damp

Topic Raised: **Windows**

- Some issues remain with the fitting of windows in old and new properties.
- The issue of ill-fitting and draughty windows was again raised as a factor making it more difficult to heat the home.

Response: The issue is with the windows rather than the fitting. A considerable number of windows have been replaced and others repaired. Windows have been surveyed but appear to deteriorate through time. This is dependent on window style and orientation. We continue to monitor and respond to this.

Topic Raised: **Boilers**

- Some tenants expressed concern with older boilers that were thought to be inefficient and regularly broke down.
- One tenant asked why Hillhead Housing wasn't investing in new A class boilers.
- The lack (in some cases) of energy efficient boilers was seen as contributing to issues with the cost of heating tenants' homes.

Response: All boilers installed are A-rated, however some boilers are now nearing the end of their expected life span. We have an ongoing boiler replacement programme and boilers reported as uneconomical to repair are replaced as a one off. Boilers installed are A-rated, with annual service and checks. There is the potential that a power flush could be required or radiators may need bled and if tenants report issues with heating, this would be investigated. However, we understand rising energy costs continue to be a key issue for our tenants.

Topic Raised: **Contractor access to voids**

- Another tenant had experienced an issue with emergency repairs with the contractor saying that they did not have any means of accessing a void unit (which was flooding the tenant's home below). This tenant thought that there should be a way for contractors to access a void during an evening or weekend and was concerned that this problem could still re-occur, because (as far as they were aware) no mitigation had been put in place.

Response: The contractors have contact details for HHA staff, should an emergency occur out of hours. Key boxes are not permitted by certain insurers and providing a set of keys for each void to contractors (in case of emergency access being required) would be disproportionate to the limited incidents which occur.

Topic Raised: **Heating Homes - other factors**

- Insulation in older houses was viewed as 'non-existent' or 'inadequate'.
- The positioning and size of radiators could affect the level of heating in individual rooms and queries were raised about the possibility of replacing radiators with more effective and efficient ones.

Response: All our homes have cavity wall insulation, external wall insulation and loft insulation (where applicable). Should any issues or concerns be reported, appropriate investigation will be carried out, including surveys and/or remedial works.

Topic Raised: **Dampness & Mould**

- Some fears that tenants' concerns in this area are not taken seriously by the Association.
- "If the house was warmer there wouldn't be damp."
- The service related to tackling damp could be better if the Association would respond more quickly and if staff took the issue more seriously.

Response: We take all reports of damp and mould seriously and have developed a damp and mould strategy document. We ask tenants who visit the office and when we are on house visits, if they are experiencing any damp and mould issues. We have an ongoing boiler replacement programme. Adequate heating and ventilation are key aspects of condensation damp. Rising or penetrating damp is a building defect

We try to carry out an inspection of any damp issue reported as quickly as possible. Because of demand on service, specialist damp contractors may not be able to complete surveys/works at short notice.



Workshop Discussion Point: Rent & Value for Money

Topic Raised: Comparisons with Council rents & mortgages

- Tenants paying full rent felt that rent levels were too high when compared to the limited growth in wages over the past few years and also, when set against the lower rents for similar sized homes belonging to the Council.
- With some tenants likely to be paying more than £500/month for their rent, the point was made that this payment could secure them a mortgage.

Response: In our preparations for the rent increase consultation, we carry out benchmarking and use an affordability assessment tool to establish how our rents compare to other social landlords and if they are deemed as affordable within the scope of the Scottish Federation of Housing Association's (SFHA) tool, powered by Housemark. We have found that we have comparably lower rents than our registered social landlord 'peer group' organisations and the average of all registered social landlords across Scotland.

Local authorities do have cheaper rents but this can be attributed to a number of factors such as quality of housing stock, planned investment and economies of scale in having larger stock numbers.

In terms of comparisons with owner occupiers, each individual mortgage is based on a number of variables and so there are no figures which can be used to compare.

Additionally, Housing Association rents are the income utilised to provide a wide range of services to tenants that owner occupiers do not receive.

However, our rents are significantly lower than the average private rent for East Dunbartonshire. Provisional figures from the Office for National Statistics show the average private rent in East Dunbartonshire reached £1,084 per month in the year to October 2024 - up 6% from £1,025 a year prior.

In terms of affordability, the only area which the SFHA tool highlights as an area for concern is where a household consists of one adult on minimum wage. All other household makeups pass the affordability test with proposed rent levels. Our affordability scores have been improving year upon year in recent years.

It is important to note that rent is determined entirely by the property size and amenity as per our **Rent Setting Policy**, rather than by the nature of the household which occupies the property.



Topic Raised: **Level of Increase & wider pressures**

- Many tenants were aggrieved by the level of rent increase over 2024/2025 and that proposed for 2025/2026.
- Most tenants said that the rent increase was compounded by other cost of living price rises including council tax, fuel and food.
- “For the next one [rent increase] they need to look wider at cost of living pressures and the fact that I’ll not be getting a pay rise this year”.
- Thinking about the recent and planned rent increases, there was a sense amongst tenants in older stock that they were being ‘penalised’ because the Association required additional monies for its newbuild programme.
- One tenant noted the perceptions around benefit increase levels (1.7%) versus the forthcoming rent increase (3.3%). Thus, whilst the amount of housing benefit will increase in line with rent, there is clearly a gap between the levels at which both items are increasing

Response: We do appreciate that the cost-of-living crisis has had a significant impact on our community and so our tenants will find any increase in costs difficult to manage. To this end we are committed to supporting our tenants if they are struggling:

- Rental income and appropriate increases to rent charges have allowed for the Welfare Rights Team to be a permanent service within Hillhead Housing Association and access to this service is available for all tenants and residents. Housing Associations do not have any legal or statutory obligations to provide tenants with benefit and money advice, but we recognise that this service supports a large number of our tenants and the wider community. In 2024/25 Morag, our Welfare Rights Officer, and Heather, our Income Maximisation Assistant, brought in £519,309.37 in financial gains for our tenants.
- Additionally, Morag and Heather apply for additional funding throughout the year in order to support our tenants with the expenses of fuel, food and household items. For example, in June 2024 they secured £20,000 of lottery funding which allowed us to issue food and fuel vouchers to tenants as well as hygiene packs containing key household necessities to help alleviate living costs for our tenants experiencing hardship.
- Rental Income also allows us to purchase a Tenancy Support Service from the Simon Community. This service is delivered by Angela Taylor. Angela provides vital support to tenants to make sure they are happy in their homes and able to continue in their tenancy when experiencing any issues. She helps with:
 - Setting up a new tenancy
 - Dealing with gas and electricity companies
 - Accessing essential furniture and carpets
 - Support during times of poor mental health and stress
 - Accessing local services and support groups



Workshop Discussion Point: Customer Service

Topic Raised: **Responses & timescales**

- Some experiences of staff not returning calls/getting back to tenants to answer their enquiries.
- Difficulties receiving confirmation or updates.
- Requests can get lost in the 'back-office' once an initial enquiry has been made at the front line.

Response: The overall survey results found that 91.3% of tenants say that it is easy to obtain a prompt call back and most tenants say that they find staff helpful (91.4%) so we are disappointed to learn that workshop participants had a poor experience in this area. If a tenant has not had a call or a query followed up, they should let us know and we will raise this as a service complaint. This will allow us to monitor how often this happens and look to improve the service we are delivering to tenants.



Topic Raised: **Escalation of complaints**

- Felt the Association had not treated them fairly and when an issue had not been properly escalated within the organisation.

Response: We have a complaints handling procedure which is in line with the SPSO standards and tenants can escalate any cause for concern using this procedure.



Workshop Discussion Point: Tenant Participation

Topic Raised: **Does it make a difference?**

- There's a need to show that tenant participation does impact the Association's decision making, as presently there is some concern that decisions have already been made even when tenants are being consulted, with the rent increase being a case in point.

Response: We want to reassure anyone who takes the time to respond to a consultation, that their views are carefully considered. All responses from the rent consultation are collated (anonymously) and shared with our management committee - there are a number of tenant members on our management committee. They consider a vast range of information in making their decision on whether or not to increase the rent, including the everyday costs to provide core services such as repairs, financial forecasting, planned investment in properties, the current economic climate, affordability and tenants' views from the consultation. They must balance all of that information and make what is often a very difficult decision. If rents are frozen or increased by less than what is in the business plan, there are serious consequences which could impact whether or not the Association could continue to deliver key services. Whilst the Management Committee may decide to increase rents, they will often make decisions to mitigate the impact on tenants - such as continuing to have a Tenancy Support service who can assist with fuel debt or committing to a permanent Welfare Rights team within the organisation.

Topic Raised: **Accessibility and facilitation of meetings**

- Tenants at the evening group suggested that more events, or meetings after 5pm might encourage more tenants to come along.
- Should incentives be provided to get tenants more prepared to either attend meetings or share their views in other ways?
- Perhaps working with tenants to set up groups that would enable tenants to give their views

Response: The Customer Care Working Group meetings are held after 5pm and any recent tenant consultations have included one late night drop-in with the opportunity to arrange individual appointments if required. We will continue to facilitate tenant involvement in a way that best suits them and will strive to advertise this more to encourage increased participation.

Those who participate in consultations, satisfaction surveys and tenants meetings (such as the Welfare Rights newsletter group & Customer Care Working Group) are entered into a prize draw where winners have been issued gift vouchers, appliances, etc. and winners are shown in our newsletters (if they give permission).

We will facilitate the setting up of any tenants' group and have a budget to assist with the resourcing of this also which can include training, travel costs, childcare costs, etc. See our **Tenant Participation Strategy** for more info.

Workshop Discussion Point: Neighbourhood and community projects

Topic Raised: **Anti-social Behaviour**

- Anti-social behaviour being a problem that Hillhead Housing would need to deal with.

Response: We have a policy and process in place for dealing with anti-social behaviour. We also work closely with Police Scotland and EDC Health and Social Care Partnership to try to resolve anti-social behaviour issues.

Topic Raised: **Working with EDC**

- Concerns were expressed over the proposed changes to council refuse collections and whether Hillhead Housing could play a role in the collection of tenants' bulk items to reduce the amount of fly tipping and litter.
- Hillhead Housing should look at working with EDC so that tenants' concerns relating to bins, roads, the utilisation of buildings etc could be addressed jointly.

Response: If Hillhead is to play a role in collection of bulk uplift, this would have a financial implication (both for the resource to collect items and dumping costs). Tenants have expressed their desire to keep rents as low as possible, however introduction of additional services such as this would require increased income and so higher rent increases. We currently work closely with EDC on a number of issues and have two EDC councillors who sit on our management committee. Should any tenants' group or individual wish us to address a specific issue with EDC, please get in touch so we can consider this further.



Topic Raised: **Estates & maintaining the area**

- Some tenants felt that the area could be tidied up a bit, e.g. removing fly tipping.
- One tenant noted that more close painting would be beneficial for improving certain areas.

Response: As above, if Hillhead is to play a role in such additional services there would be financial implications and the cost of this would have to be covered through increased rents.

Close painting is on a cyclical maintenance programme and will be carried out when due in the programme.

Topic Raised: **Community Projects & Visibility**

- In terms of community projects, most tenants felt that the Association could be more involved in supporting the local community.
- Having housing officers more visible in the community e.g. by operating a surgery in the community centre, or by staff being more 'out and about' than they are at the moment. This would include making officers more visible through the use of lanyards, uniforms or high-viz jackets.
- Publishing photographs of housing and estate officer staff on the website and in the newsletter.
- Some discussion took place about the possibility of estate staff or housing staff knocking on tenants' doors whilst they were in the schemes to introduce themselves and provide assistance

Response: We are keen to be involved in the local community and have an ongoing 'Wider Role' sub-committee who meet regularly to discuss projects we could become involved in. If you know of a community project which could benefit from our/ our tenants' input, please let us know and we can look into this further.

We recently organised a drop-in event at the community centre but unfortunately had very low attendance. We feel that this is because our office is in the heart of the community and staff are accessible to our tenants and the wider community. We also have a presence at our local foodbank.

All staff have lanyards which are worn whilst on visits and wear high-vis clothing when required. Uniforms would come at a regular cost to the Association, and again we must consider whether that is a worthwhile use of tenants' rent money.

We have recently had a photographer come to the office to create a catalogue of photos which we will use on our website and in our newsletter.

We are also beginning a programme of Housing Officer visits to tenants and hopefully this allows for more tenants to get to know our staff.

ACTION PLAN

The below tables notes key actions Hillhead Housing Association will take forward following the Tenant Satisfaction Survey and workshops and the timescales associated with these actions.

Action	Timescale
Monitoring reported window repairs, with a process in place for repairs/replacement works as required.	Ongoing
Annual gas safety inspections being carried out in every property.	Ongoing
Active boiler replacement programme, replacing boilers at the end of their lifespan. Individual boiler replacements outside of the planned programme will be replaced if deemed 'uneconomical to repair' - i.e. it is more efficient to replace the boiler than to continue repairing it.	Ongoing
Continue to review damp & mould reports and response times in order to identify any areas of improvement.	Ongoing
Continue to publicise our complaints handling procedure, in a way that is easily accessible for tenants, to ensure tenants are confident in reporting any issues with the service they receive.	Regularly via website news, social media and newsletters.
Continue partnership working with EDC and Police Scotland and if there are particular issues within Hillhead, support tenants' groups to also engage with EDC and Police Scotland.	As required
Close Painting Programme to commence	2025/26
Housing Officer programme of visits to commence.	Full programmed timetable in place by end of 2025.
Continued roll out of our Tenant Participation Action Plan as part of our Tenant Participation Strategy, including a tenant-led scrutiny exercise.	Preparation for Scrutiny exercise will begin in August 2025.

