



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

KANTAR PUBLIC

Social Housing Quality Resident Panel

Improving the complaints process and seeking information or advice

Panel Member Report – Wave 1 Online Community

Date: May 2023



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Introduction and summary of findings

Background to the Social Housing Quality Resident Panel

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

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

Government is committed to listening to social housing residents, making sure residents have their voices heard, with policy makers reflecting and acting on what they hear. Kantar Public are running three waves of engagement with members of the Social Housing Quality Resident Panel. Each wave of engagement involves an online community and a series of focus groups.

Background to the Online Community

An online community is an online forum that brings together a group of people to share and discuss their thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a particular subject. The online community was hosted on the online platform Recollective. It was open between 12 and 18 December 2022. All the Panel were invited to participate, and 200 panel members accessed the community. For further information about the Online Community activities, please refer to the Appendix 1. This report summarises the findings of the online community for the first wave of engagement. The topics of this online community were:

- searching for information and advice to address social housing quality
- experiences of the complaints process with landlords and the Housing Ombudsman

There were several activities to complete. The number of people that engaged with each activity varied. Figures throughout this report are based on the number of panel members who completed the activity in question. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. This rounding effect means that in some cases, the data provided will not add up to 100%.

Summary of findings

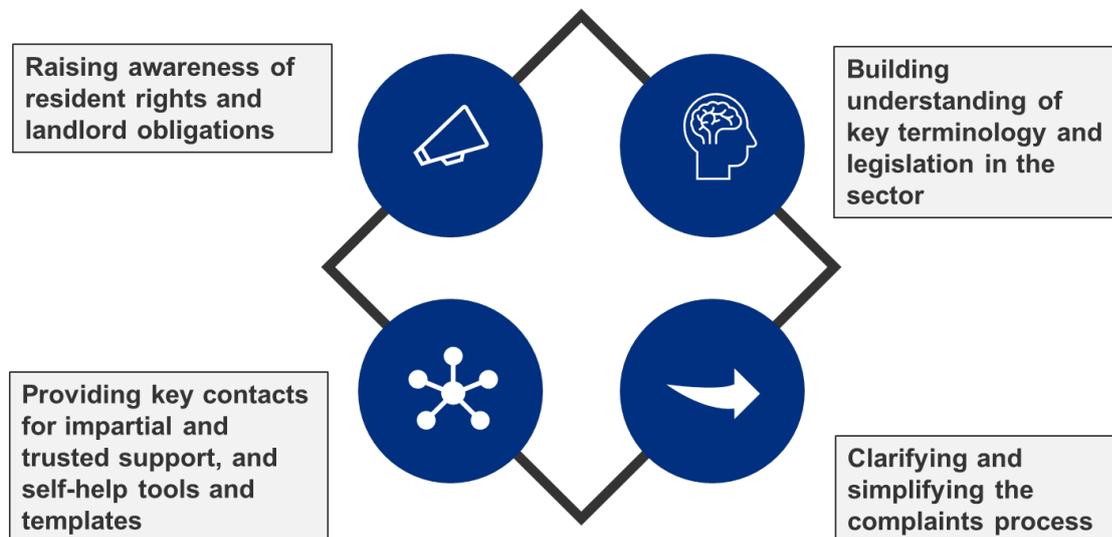
Most panel members (85%) told us that if they were experiencing an issue in their home such as damp or a leaking tap, they were most likely to turn to their landlord to resolve this. Some panel members would also try an online search engine (29%) or approach their local MP or councillor (29%).

When thinking about how they would like to receive information about the complaints process, panel members told us that it was important for information to be accessible to everyone.

This was about making sure information is provided in a variety of formats and that the content and language is clear and easy to understand. The importance of using both offline and online sources of information was highlighted, to ensure those without internet access could receive the same information. Information must also be provided in multiple languages and be accessible to those experiencing disability.

Another key priority for panel members was providing residents with the types of information they need to empower them to make a complaint. They are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ways to empower social housing residents when providing information



Overall, the Panel's experiences of raising complaints in the past have been largely unsatisfactory. This has deterred some panel members from using the complaints process altogether. Key reasons given for negative experiences of the process are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Reasons for negative experiences of the complaints process



Key recommendations from residents for improving the complaints process are described in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Recommendations for improving the complaints process



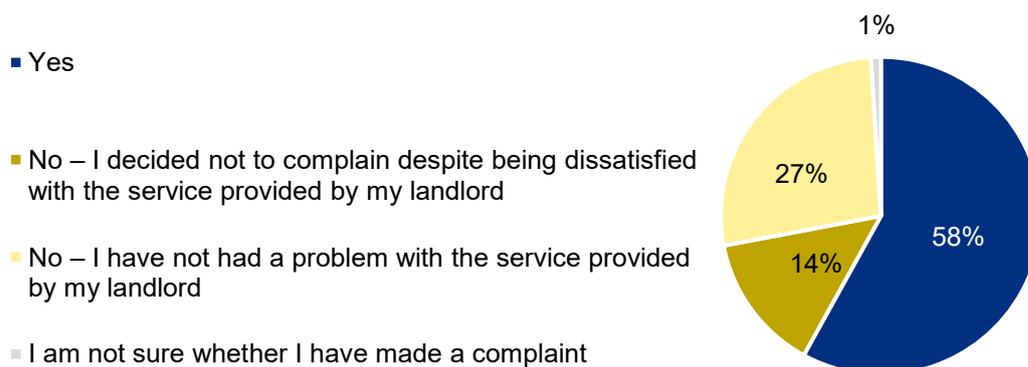
The complaints process

Making a complaint

Panel members were asked about their experiences of the complaints process. More than three quarters told us that they know how to make a complaint (80%). However, more than a quarter (28%) said that they didn't know where to find information about their landlord's complaints process.

Most panel members (58%) had raised a formal complaint with their landlord in the past 2 years. However, 14% had not raised an issue despite being dissatisfied with the service they had received.

Figure 4: Making a formal complaint in the last 2 years



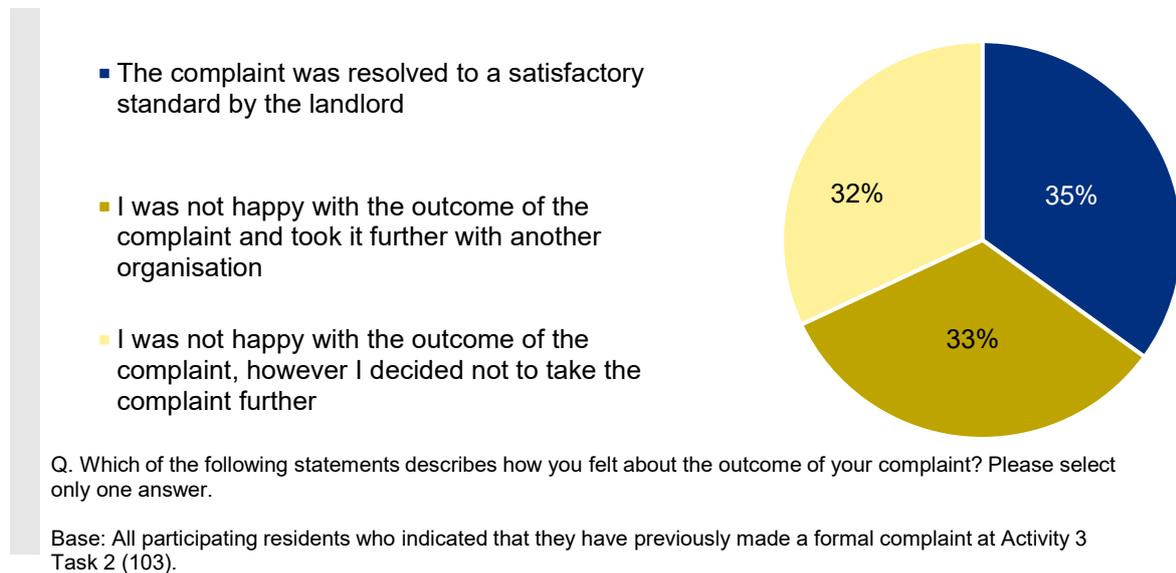
Q. In the past 2 years, have you made a formal complaint to your landlord about the service they provide? (For example, if your landlord has failed to resolve an issue that you've reported). Please select only one answer.
Base: All participating residents

Experiences of the complaints process

Overall, panel members were more likely to agree (45%) than disagree (29%) that their landlords complaints process was easy to use. However, of those that had made a formal complaint, most of them were dissatisfied with the outcome (65%).

A third (33%) of those involved were dissatisfied and had pursued further action, while a further third (32%) were dissatisfied but did not take it further.

Figure 5: Complaint outcomes



A key reason given for negative experiences of the complaints process was the time taken to make, process and address a complaint by housing providers. Panel members also reported feeling that during the process they were not listened to or treated with respect, and often felt blamed for housing issues.

“

”

“The time taken to handle the complaint exceeded the expected and agreed deadline at both stage 1 and stage 2. Plain English could have been used to make the outcome easier to understand for an individual who is not associated with the housing industry... I felt it was very difficult to represent myself and the issues being faced.”

- Female, 25-34, South West

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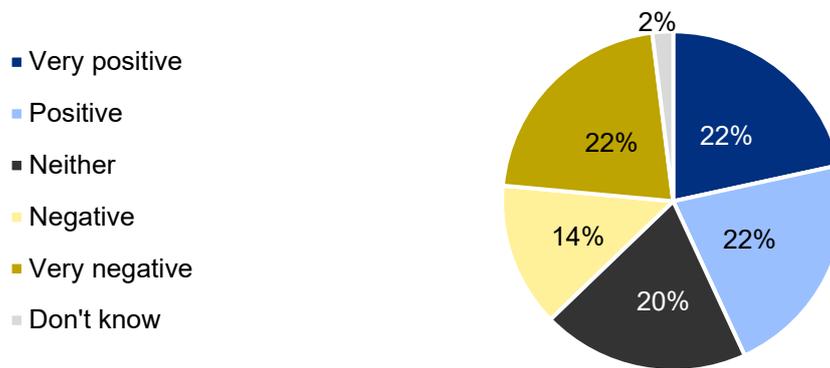
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“I was treated as a second class citizen and made to feel I was the problem. I really feel the way social housing tenants are treated and talked to needs vast improvement.”

- Male, 45-54, South East

Around a quarter (26%) of all participating residents had used the Housing Ombudsman service. The experiences of the Housing Ombudsman service were mixed; although panel members were slightly more likely to say that their experience was positive (44%) than negative (34%).

Figure 6: Experiences of the Housing Ombudsman



Q. If you have used the Housing Ombudsman, would you say that your experience was... Please select only one answer.

Base: All participating residents who have used the Housing Ombudsman Service that completed Activity 1 Task 3 (51).

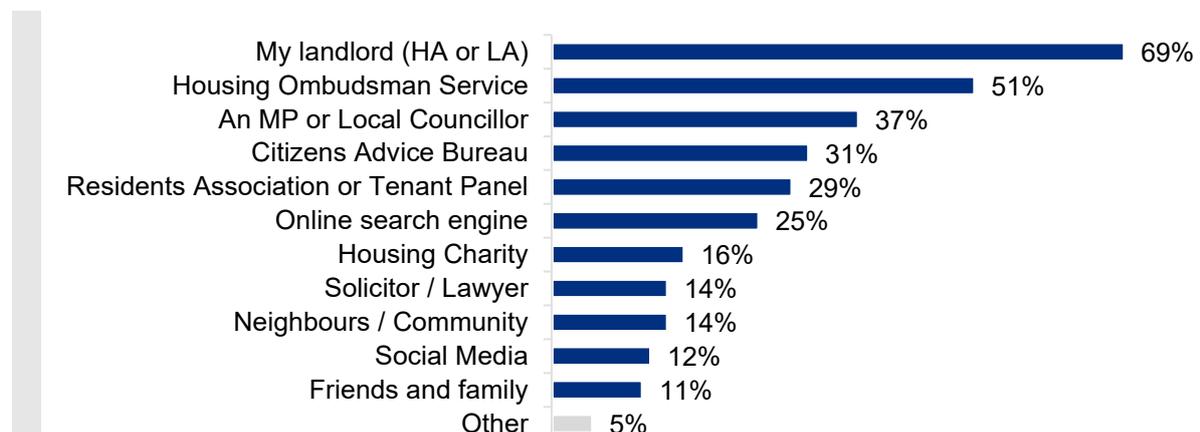
Sources for raising a complaint in the future

Panel members said they were most likely to go to their landlord for advice on how to raise a complaint about an issue in their home, or their landlord's services (69%).

However, members were divided on whether a future complaint made to their landlord would be taken seriously. Close to half of the panel members (46%) agreed that if they made a complaint, it would be taken seriously by their landlord, but just over a third (36%) disagreed with this.

Around half of panel members (51%) said that they would go to the Housing Ombudsman Service for advice on how to raise a complaint, and more than a third (37%) would reach out to their MP or local councillor.

Figure 7: Sources of advice for raising a complaint about an unresolved issue with home or landlord services



Q. If you needed advice about how to raise a complaint in the future about an unresolved issue with your home or the service provided by your landlord, which of the following would you go to for support? Please select all those that apply. Base: All participating residents that completed Activity 2 Task 3 (178).

Deciding not to raise a complaint

Just over a quarter (27%) of panel members told us that they have not raised a formal complaint in the last two years despite being dissatisfied with their landlord's services. We asked this group specifically why they decided not to complain.

A lack of confidence in the complaints process was a common theme, particularly among those who had complained in the past and found the experience difficult and ineffective. Others experiencing reoccurring issues, such as mould, said if they were continuously not addressed, this contributed to a lack of confidence in the process.

“I have absolutely no desire to enter into a burgeoning cumbersome process that involves valuable Ombudsman time, resources to investigate, make judgements, issue reports, attempt resolution and issue fines or slap on the wrist notifications...”

- Male, 55-64, North West

A lack of knowledge on how to raise a complaint, who to contact, what evidence they would need, or the various stages of the process was also given as a reason. Panel members mentioned that the process is too time consuming and demanding. A few panel members said they felt complaints would not be taken seriously, or there would be consequences for raising a complaint.

“I wasn't sure how to raise a formal complaint and if I did I don't think it would be taken seriously.”

- Male, 35-44, South East

“I am a resident of a very small landlord - 600 properties. People who utilise complaints can be viewed as 'troublemakers'.”

- Male, 45-54, North West

Improving the complaints process

We asked panel members about ways to make the complaints process better. A common recommendation was for the individuals handling complaints to take explicit and personal ownership and accountability for the complaint. Panel members suggested several specific ways to improve the processes:

1. Communication with the complainant

A dedicated single point of contact that can be reached quickly and easily and is accessible for those with additional needs. This would preferably be a person (not an automated system), and would provide regular updates, even where progress has stalled.

“ “Better communication. Currently we are encouraged to use an online reporting system- this is fine except that the "responses" from the council are automatically generated. This means that the complainant has to trust the system... and that can be difficult.”
- Male, 55-64, North West

The tone, clarity, and accuracy of communications between complaint handlers and complainants should be significantly improved. Panel members told us that to improve trust, complaints should be taken seriously and respectfully, without stigma or judgement and with accurate information.

This could be achieved via comprehensive training for landlord's staff that covers the latest policy developments on residents' rights, landlord's responsibilities, and interpersonal training. A "buddy" service or an impartial advocate that supports the resident throughout the complaints process was also suggested by some panel members.

“ “I believe the most important part of the complaint process is having a dedicated complaints team in place which has been and continues to have the latest training and knowledge.”
- Male, 55-64, North West

2. Timeframes and efficiency

Shorter timeframes for responding to and resolving the complaints, alongside adherence to agreed timeframes for repairs, would also significantly improve panel members' experiences. Some suggested a triage system based on the severity of the complaint could improve efficiency. Some suggested organising cases based on whether they are a request, an informal complaint or formal complaint.

“ Create some kind of triage system with time scales, where general repairs and maintenance issues go directly to that department- Male, 45-54, South East

3. Accountability and regulation of landlords

Panel members also told us that they would like to see greater accountability of landlords. This was raised in a variety of ways as described in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Panel members' suggestions for landlord accountability



4. Reducing resident burden

Panel members said that reducing the need to provide lots of details at different points in the complaints process, and a better understanding of what evidence would need to be provided in advance, could improve the complaints process.

In addition, they told us that they would like greater recognition and consideration of disability or language needs, through offering extra accessibility support or accessible materials where needed.

“

“The complaints process shouldn't be onerous, and it shouldn't be difficult or confusing. It should be fair, and accessible to all.”

Female, 25-34, London

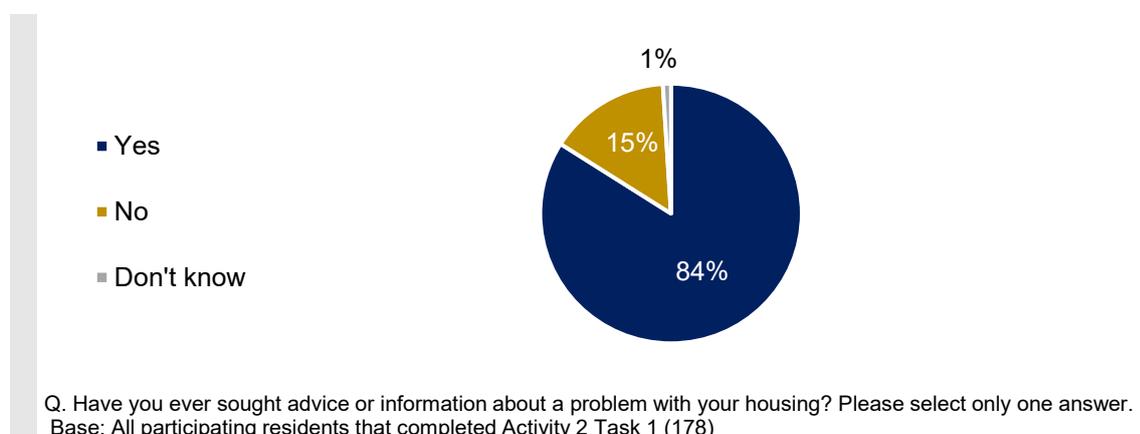
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Sharing and seeking information or advice

Previous experience of seeking information or advice

Most panel members had previously sought information or advice about a problem with their housing (84%). However, 15% had not previously sought information or advice.

Figure 9: History of seeking advice or information about a problem with housing



Most panel members (85%) told us that they would turn to their landlord for information or advice if they started experiencing an issue in their home, such as damp or a leaking tap. The next most common place they would go was an online search engine (29%) or their MP or local councillor (29%).

Figure 10: Sources of information or advice if panel members started experiencing an issue in their home that they needed support to resolve



Designing a campaign

We gave panel members the opportunity to design a communications campaign for social housing residents to raise awareness of the rights of social housing residents and clarify the complaints process. This was an optional activity (61 panel members completed it of). For examples of the campaign, please see the Appendix.

Source of information

Panel members told us that it was important to make sure that information given to social housing residents is as accessible as possible. This includes using both offline and online methods so that residents that cannot or prefer not to access the internet, are accounted for.

“I think a tv campaign in the form of adverts would attract more attention and many more would be aware of their rights. Additionally, many tenants refuse or are scared to go digital but most watch tv.”

- Female, 55-54, North West

Content

Empowering residents to raise complaints was a major theme. They said that overcoming stigma, establishing the feeling of a community, and building the confidence of residents were key to supporting residents to use the complaints process.

Furthermore, they told us that giving residents key information about their rights, how these rights are protected under legislation, and landlord's responsibilities, is important. Providing self-help tips and tools, and templates for communication would be useful and help residents to feel more empowered.

“A simple flow chart allowing any differences between landlord types and complaint processes would help e.g., identify your tenancy type...follow the flow chart to understand your rights, how to complain how to get assistance if your complaint is not resolved...”

- Male, 55-64, South East

Format

Panel members said that using plain English and keeping jargon to a minimum was crucial for communicating information effectively. They suggested that including visual aids like flow charts, road maps and other diagrams would help to make information clear.

Explaining key terms, concepts and phrases related to housing, plus a “jargon buster” would help empower residents by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the complaints process. Making sure that information is available in multiple languages and formats would help to cater for any accessibility and additional needs.

“ (Use) the right and appropriate simple vocabulary, visual and auditory aids (video clips, visualization summary of core information, audio blogs etc).”
- Male, 55-64, North West

Alternative views

Some panel members reported that systemic issues with the complaints process were a greater priority than raising awareness of resident’s rights or how to make a complaint.

“The people who need to be reached via campaigns are those who work in "social" housing It would be good to start with Asset Based Community Development, person-centred listening, personalisation, or how to shift from patronage to co-production.”
- Female, 65+, London

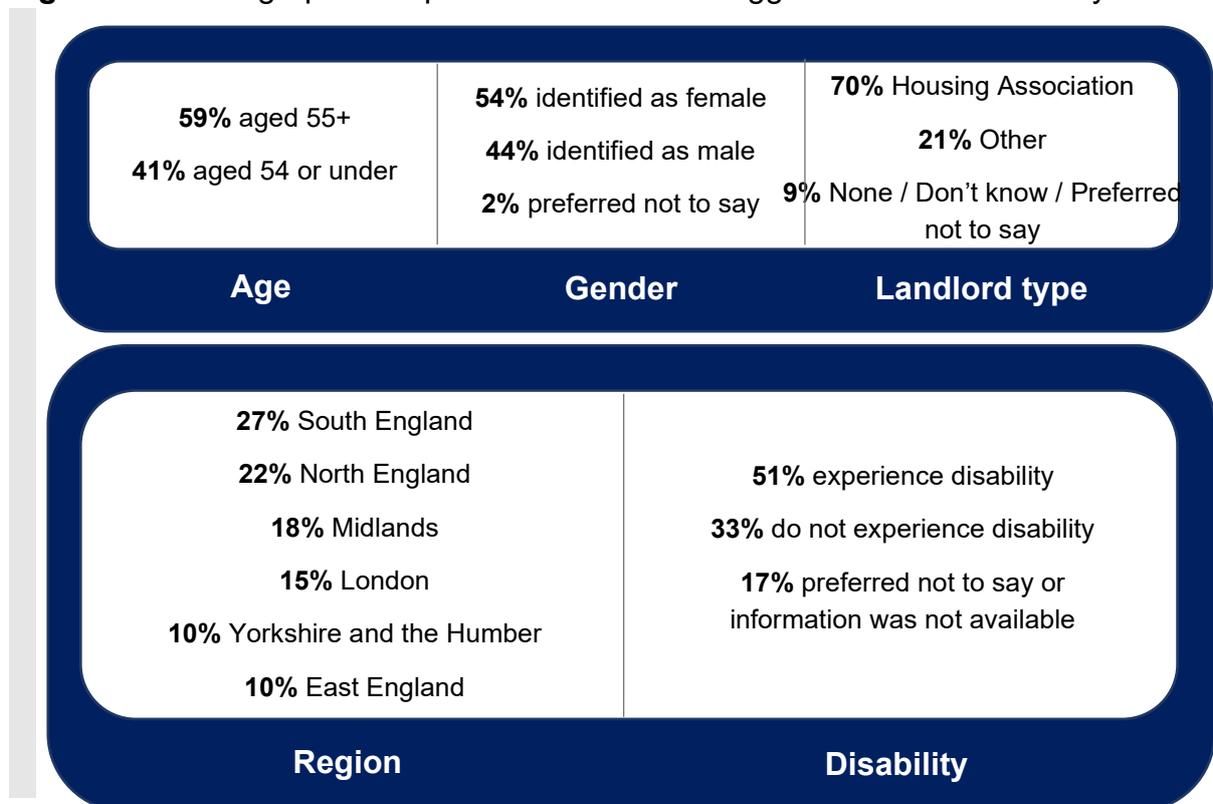
Appendix: Methodology and further information

Methodology

Panel members were able to complete activities within the online community at a time that suited them and were supported by experienced moderators throughout. The activities included questions about their experience of the social housing complaints process and how this could be improved, and where they access information on social housing issues.

For some activities, panel members were able to engage in discussion with each other, including the design of informational campaigns and key recommendations for improving the complaints process.

Figure 13: Demographics of panel members who logged in to the community



Designing a campaign

Figure 11: Campaign designed by a panel member (Female, 45-54, Yorkshire and the Humber)

Languages

Our area has a number of different languages. Create content in different languages.



In Person Meetings

Community meetings which enable the empowerment of tenants to complain as well as bringing together communities to resolve community issues.

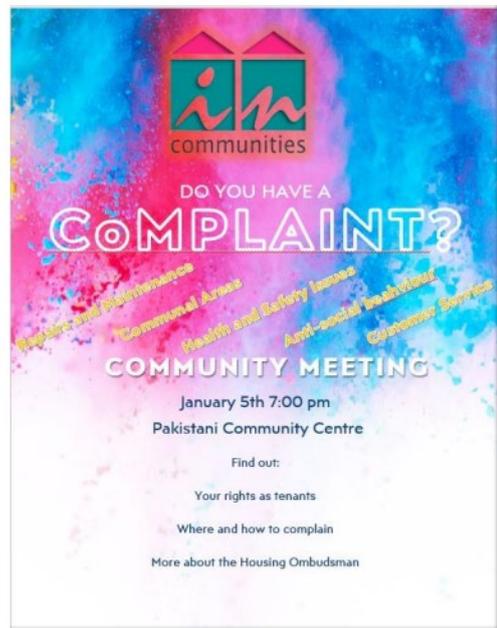
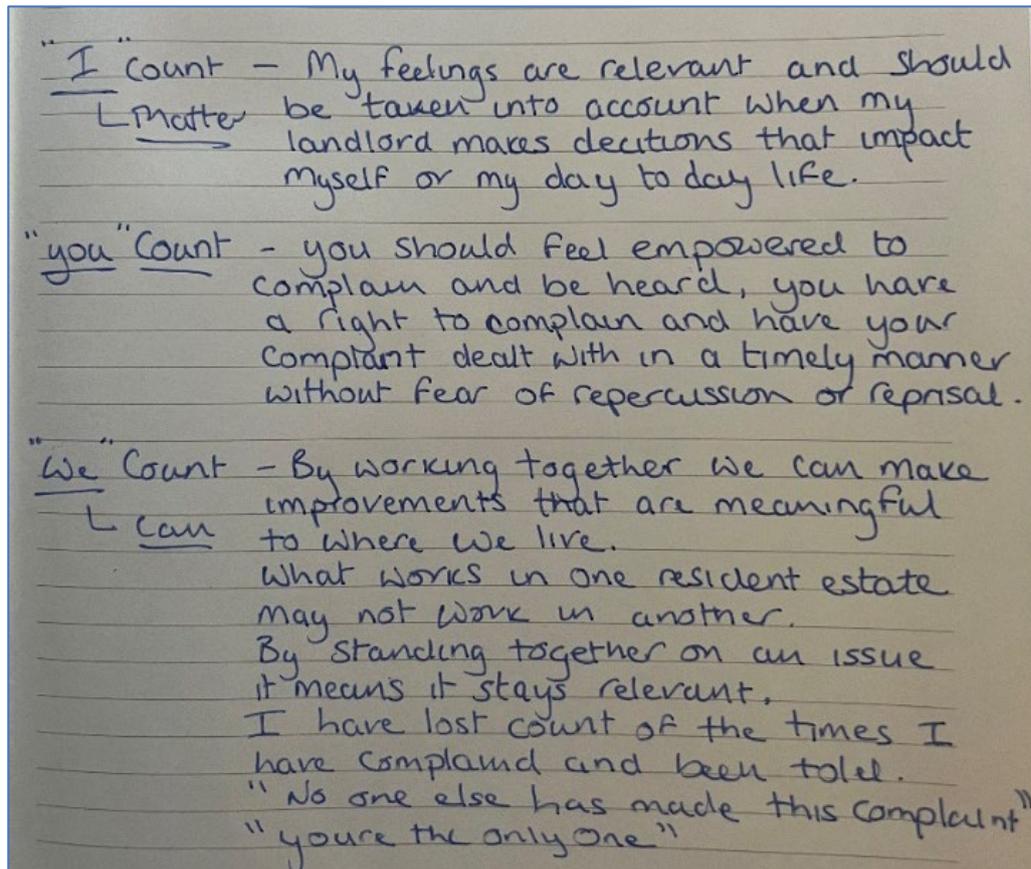


Figure 12: Campaign designed by a panel member (Male, 35-44, North West)



Further information

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

DLUHC

Email: residentpanel@levellingup.gov.uk

Kantar Public

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



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