

ROTHERFED TENANT SCRUTINY



Report March 2017

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1. Background

Tenant Scrutiny provides an opportunity to build an effective partnership between Rotherham's tenants and the Council in the spirit of co-regulation, resulting in a joint-win for all. The process is used to challenge landlords' services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.

RotherFed Tenant Scrutiny was formed in April 2016 and this is a report detailing their first investigation to consider the engagement of young tenants in Rotherham Council housing. This topic was selected as it had been established that younger tenants, aged between 16 and 34, were on the whole more dissatisfied with their landlord's services.

As part of Rotherham's 2016 STAR survey (Survey of tenants and residents) 4500 surveys were circulated to tenants and residents living in Rotherham's council housing. 94 of the survey responses received were from younger tenants who were under 35 years of age, representing 1.3% of tenants in that age group. A comparison of the results for different ages found:

Category	Under 35s score	Average score of other age groups
Dissatisfied with overall housing services	24% (8% unsure)	11% (8% unsure)
Dissatisfied with repairs	31% (13% unsure)	17% (7% unsure)
Dissatisfied with the landlord listening to their views and acting on them	28% (21% unsure)	18% (23% unsure)
Dissatisfied with opportunities to make their views known	24% (30% unsure)	14.5% (33% unsure)
Dissatisfied with being kept informed by their landlord	18% (34% unsure)	16% (19% unsure)

Council officers reported to have tried numerous methods to engage younger tenants and inform them of procedures but they felt that there is a lack of desire by the younger tenants to contact the council. Officers reported particular problems for younger tenants to understand:

- Repairs and maintenance procedures
- Which issues the council could deal with and what was out of their control
- How reporting something to the council may not mean that the matter is closed.

During the investigation, young tenants were asked what were the best and worst things about having a tenancy:

Best thing:

- ✓ *Having my independence/freedom*
- ✓ *Not being homeless*
- ✓ *Having a home to myself and the sanity it provides*
- ✓ *Security*
- ✓ *Being able to decorate how I like (unlike with a private landlord)*

Worst thing:

- ✗ *Repairs - takes time dealing with call centres*
- ✗ *Affording the bills and remembering to pay bills as they are all paid at different times.*
- ✗ *Anti-social neighbours*
- ✗ *Jargon in letters*
- ✗ *Maintaining the flat above everything else*

2. The panel

The panel was made up of representatives of various Tenant and Resident Associations across Rotherham, along with younger tenant representatives:

David Ramsden (Chair)

Lilian Shears

Mary Jacques

Stuart Mayo

Ann Hitchens

Winnie Billups

Mohammed Ramzam

Sue Gray

Ella Webster

Robert Sheldon

Jade Mallett

Officer support was provided by:

Asim Munir, RMBC Tenant Involvement Coordinator

Steve Ruffle, Chief Executive Officer, RotherFed

Rebecca Morrison project solutions

3. Terms of reference

Aim: To consider how to improve engagement of young council tenants aged 16 to 35 years old in Rotherham.

Objectives:

To find out:

- Why younger tenants aren't engaging with their landlord
- How younger tenants would like to be engaged with housing services, if at all
- Why some younger tenants are dissatisfied with housing services

To suggest how to:

- Improve the engagement of younger tenants and their satisfaction with housing services.
- Shape the future tenant involvement offer for younger tenants.
- Potentially improve the STAR survey results for satisfaction of young tenants that their landlord:
 - listens to their views and acts upon them,
 - gives them opportunity to make their views known, and
 - keeps them informed.

Scope:

The panel considered whether to limit the scope either to younger single tenants or to young families, but without having started the investigation and assessed the workload a decision could not be made where to focus attention. As the investigation progressed, the panel felt able to continue with both groups.

4. Methodology

The panel's investigation took place between May 2016 and January 2017, with an interim report being submitted to the Improving Places Select Commission meeting in October 2016. The investigation consisted of:

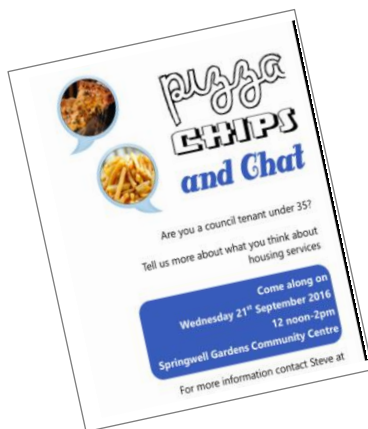
4.1 Meetings

The panel interviewed officers from Rotherham Council, Fortem (formally Wilmott Dixon), Mears, Rush House, St Leger homes and RotherFed. Officers were asked for their opinions on various issues of engaging with younger tenants, in particular:

- ? Why younger tenants are more dissatisfied than others
- ? What the barriers are to communication with younger people
- ? Any examples of how barriers can be broken down
- ? Examples of good practice in engaging younger tenants
- ? How plain language is used in housing documents
- ? How the website is made more attractive and easier to use for tenants
- ? If reception areas could be made more inviting to younger tenants
- ? The support available to young tenants during sign-up

Other panel meetings focussed on considering documents and information from Rotherham Council and other housing providers and collating information received from younger tenants.

4.2 Pizza, Chips and Chat event



Younger tenants were invited to come along and chat about ways of engaging them and their feelings about the services provided by Rotherham Council housing. There were different activities such as a website challenge, plain language tester followed by a focus group session over lunch. Attendance was low (six younger tenants) but as a result of this there was opportunity for deeper conversation.

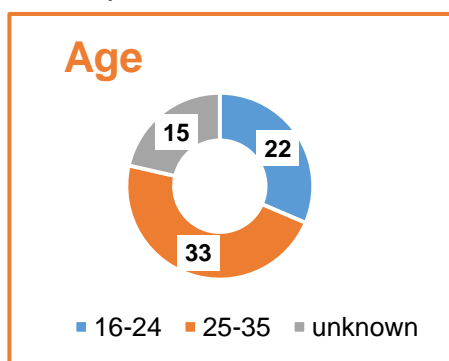


4.3 Surveys

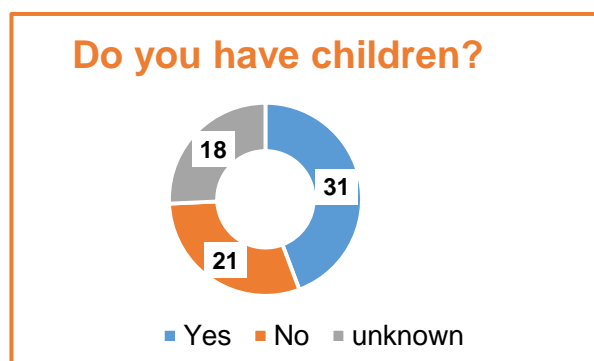


Two surveys were carried out as part of the investigation. One preliminary survey was used to get the views of younger people on whether they would like to have more of a say about housing services and if so, how they would prefer this to happen. Surveys were completed by people attending the Pizza, Chips and Chat event and a number of community events including Rotherham Pride in Clifton Park, Eastwood Village Funfest and Thurcroft Gala.

70 responses were received;

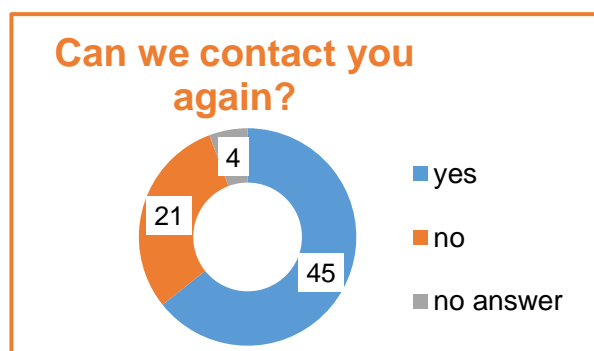


47% were aged 25-35



44% had children

64% of respondents were happy to be contacted again for further information:



The follow – up survey was designed by taking account of the responses from the preliminary survey and from the Pizza, Chips and Chat event along with national ideas on good engagement practice. More probing questions were asked about younger tenants' opinions on:

- Moving into their new home
- Experiences with housing staff
- Their motivation/barriers to getting more involved

A prize draw for a £50 shopping voucher was used to encourage more younger people to complete this quite detailed survey and there were nine respondents.



4.4 Benchmarking

The panel compared the services provided by Rotherham Council to other housing providers who were scoring higher in benchmarking and STAR surveys results. Further information was requested from some other areas, particularly:

- St Leger Homes, Doncaster
- Stockport Homes
- North Kesteven District Council
- Community Gateway Association, Preston
- Golden Gates Housing Trust, Warrington
- Maidenhead Housing Solutions
- Mosscares Housing Group, Manchester
- Ealing Council
- Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership
- Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing
- Stonham Warrington

Examples of good practice were discussed at panel meetings. It was noted that most of the other housing providers responded that they also found the engagement of younger tenants a challenge despite their positive STAR survey results.

National guidance from Shelter, TPAS Wales, and Chartered Institute of Housing (see references page 30) for engaging with younger tenants was also collated and considered. The panel discussed this guidance and used it to frame some of the questions for the surveys.

5. Thank yous

Panel members are grateful for the contributions made to their investigation by officers of the Council, their contractors, other housing providers and especially Rush House staff. In particular:

Fortem
Leigh Garbutt

Mears
Mick Lunn

Rush House
Sandra Jones
Sue Gray
Rachael Wilson

RotherFed
Tracy Highton
Diana Faid

St Leger Homes
Meryl Liddell
Stacey Lynn

**Rotherham Metropolitan
Borough Council**
Chris Gaynor

Dean Beesley
Hannah Upstone
Kath Brisland
Lynsey Mould
Mandy Ardron
Nicola Birks
Samantha Allen
Sandra Wardle
Steph Lowrie-Drury
Wendy Foster
William Padfield

They would also like to thank all the young people who took part in the Pizza, Chips and Chat event and who responded to the surveys.

6.1 Motivation to become more involved

The panel were keen to find out more about why younger tenants were less likely to become involved in shaping housing services and what would motivate them to change this.

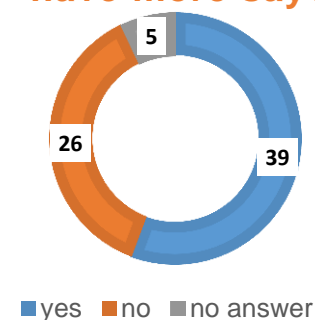
From the Pizza, Chips and Chat event, young people attending said that they would like to get involved to be able to:

- Solve local issues
- Resolve things for other people
- Get to know other people.

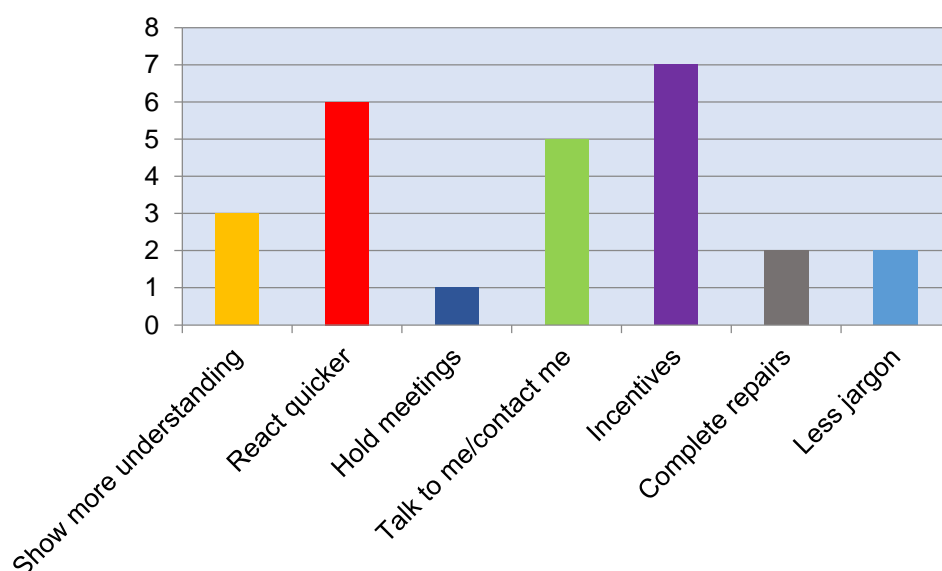
Housing officers and Rush House staff agreed that young tenants need to see action and results after engagement otherwise they lose faith and interest.

In the first survey younger people were asked if they would like to have more say about housing services. 56% of respondents said that they would. Respondents commented that incentives, quicker actions and talking/ listening to them properly would be the most likely ways to get them involved:

Would you like to have more say?

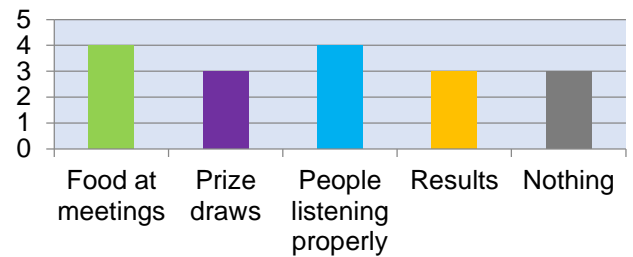


What other things can the Council do to get you more involved?

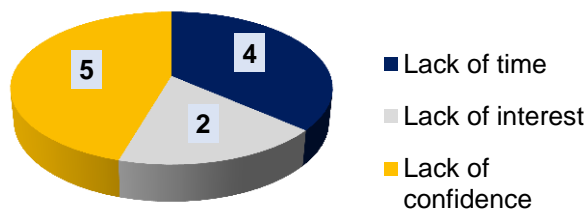


The results from the follow-up survey confirmed the ways of motivating younger people to get involved. People listening properly and incentives were again the most popular motivations:

Motivation to get involved



If nothing will get you involved, why is this?



A lack of confidence and time were the main reasons for not getting involved.

Younger tenants were asked to give their top tips for people trying to get their ideas. In order of preference these were:

1. Listen

2 Patience, perseverance and time

3. Meetings with rewards

4. Engage

5. Personal service

6. Surveys

7. Letters

TPAS Wales¹ advises landlords to bear in mind that not everyone wants to be involved and to recognise that younger people like to shape their own participation. They also recommend using **incentives as motivators**. A word of caution was that young people do not like to wait for bureaucracy; they need swiftly delivered results.

Shelter² recommends that landlords avoid tokenism and don't raise false expectations. Consultation must lead to results and there must be clarity about **what people can and can't influence**. Tailoring existing successful interventions is a good option for getting more people involved.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel were pleased that 56% of first survey respondents wanted to have more say about housing services. It was also impressed that the reasons for getting more involved were to resolve issues for other people and the local area.
 - ✎ There was a feeling that there is a real need to boost the confidence of young people to help them to get more involved.
 - ✎ It was clear that the key motivator for getting more young people involved was to make sure that they were listened to properly.
-

Recommendations

- Provide suitable training for all council staff coming into contact with younger tenants, particularly in the need to show mutual respect and empathy.
- Explore enhancing links with children's centres to monitor the number of council tenants who are engaging with services and how they are signposted to services.

6.2 Rewards schemes

Other housing providers have introduced rewards schemes to encourage their tenants to become more engaged with housing services:

- **Stockport Homes** - points are awarded for attending meetings, completing surveys, taking part in estate walkabouts and being community network champions. Every six months, the points are added up and exchanged for Love2Shop vouchers. Taking part in two activities usually result in a £5 voucher. The average amount claimed is £15. The voucher scheme costs approximately £1400 per year.
- **St Leger** – run a very similar scheme with points for involvement in surveys, consultations, mystery shopping and checking empty properties for the lettable standard.

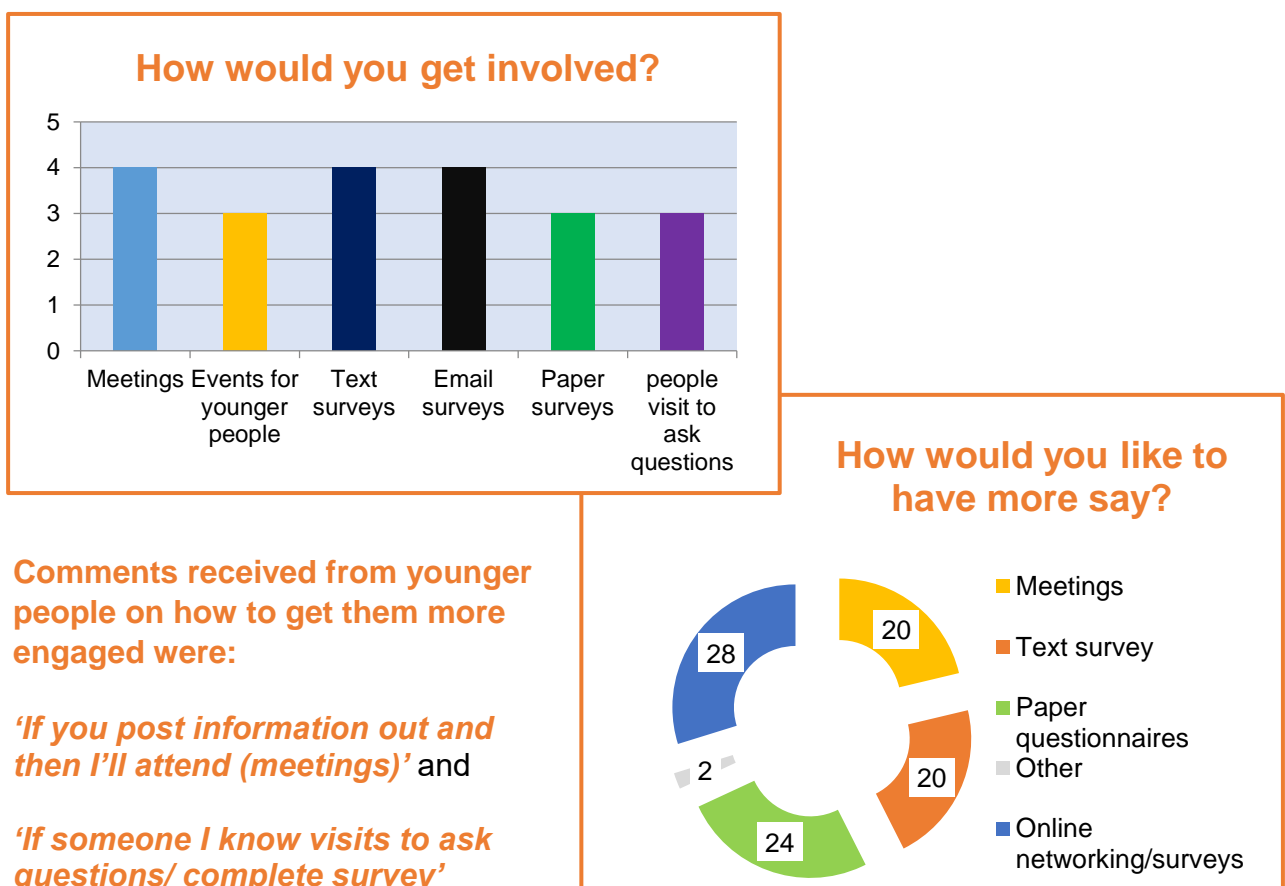
The follow-up survey asked young people if a rewards scheme would make them more likely to engage more with housing services. **56%** of respondents said that rewards would make them more likely to engage.

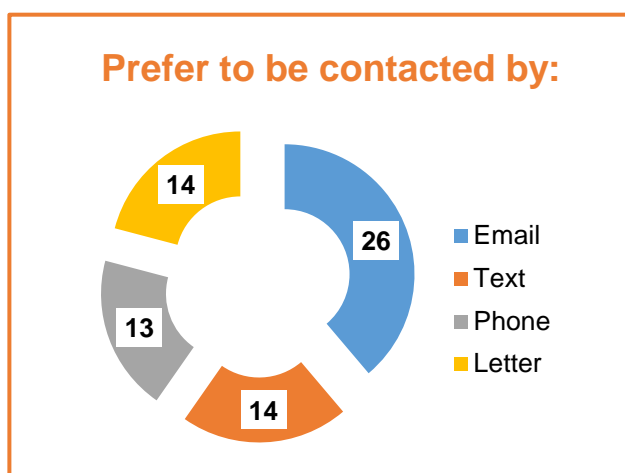
PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel were keen to explore the rewards schemes operating in other areas. However, after discussion, it felt that improvements in engagement following such schemes had not as yet been fully evaluated. It was agreed that such a scheme would not be a suitable option for Rotherham at this time.
- ✎ Travel expenses being paid and food being provided (for early evening/lunchtime meetings) were agreed as being appropriate rewards for attendance.

6.3 Range of engagement opportunities

Commonly, engagement policies targeting younger people focus on the use of social media. However both surveys revealed that young people prefer a wider range of engagement opportunities; there is not one approach that will work for everyone:





Preference for a range of engagement methods was also demonstrated in those young people saying that they would be happy to be contacted again following completion of the surveys.

Email was the clear first preference for contact (39%) but all other methods were equally popular.

A tenancy verification exercise is underway in Rotherham which is being used to check contact details for tenants and help to clarify preferences on how each tenant wants to be kept in touch. There is a four- year cycle for this exercise for all properties to be contacted.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel agreed that the tenancy verification exercise will be very useful to confirm contact details and preferences for all tenants.
- ✎ It was agreed that there needs to be a full range of opportunities available for younger tenants to become engaged with housing services and their communities.

Recommendations

- Develop a menu of involvement opportunities for younger tenants and share this with both council staff and tenants.

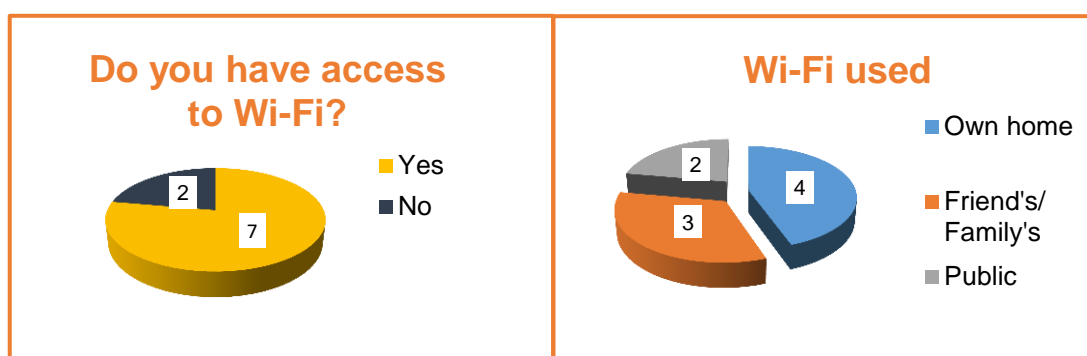
6.4 Internet access

Nationally there is a move to encourage citizens to use online services. Local councils are supporting this by developing their own digital services, working with communities and users. Posting information out to residents is a costly process and with cuts to the funding of local councils there is an evident need to be smarter about the way in which residents are kept informed/ engaged.

At the beginning of this investigation it became clear that there was an assumption that all younger tenants have electronic devices and access to the internet. However officers confirmed that **20%** of tenants in Rotherham do not have access to an email account. Younger tenants confirmed that the cost of home internet restricts them from using digital services as much as they would like.

At the Pizza, Chips and Chat event, all but one person had access to phones, laptops and iPads. However two out of the six attendees did not have access to Wi-Fi at home. One young person requested that any consultations are not only displayed online but are also sent through the post for those without internet access.

The follow-up survey asked if young people had access to Wi-Fi:



Two of the respondents (22%) did not have access to Wi-Fi and only four of the other respondents had Wi-Fi at home (44%).

There was a concern that the jargon and small print used by internet providers is hard to understand and may not be helpful in letting tenants know whether they are getting value for money or not.

Rotherham Council do offer free Wi-Fi in some public buildings such as community centres, libraries, RotherFed and also in some sheltered housing schemes. It would be too expensive to extend this to other areas. It was also noted that most estates have a mixture of council tenants and homeowners, so provision of free Wi-Fi would not be appropriate.

There are digital champions at RotherFed who are able to help if residents need to develop their digital skills and if they are looking for internet deals. A RotherFed scheme '*Taking Financial Control*' (funded by '*Awards for All*') may also be able to provide some support in due course.

PANEL VIEWS:

- It was felt that digital development programmes should be cautious not to exclude those tenants who prefer other contact methods.
-

6.5 The website

At the Pizza, Chips and Chat event, young people were asked what they thought of the Rotherham Council website in terms of:

- **Look**– whether it looks good and if the home page is interesting
- **Accessibility** – whether there are any problems reading or understanding the website, and
- **Speed of information** – how many clicks it takes to get to the information needed



Young people were asked to try out the Rotherham Council website to see how easy it was to;

- Apply for a Council house
- Report a repair
- Give their views on public consultations
- Let someone know that they're moving.

Applying for a new home was by far the easiest transaction to complete. The worst transaction to navigate was to report that you were moving home. Very few people could find anything helpful for this query.

Transaction	Average rating (out of five stars)
Apply for a council house	4.5
Report a repair	2
Public consultations	1
Moving Out	1

Other comments received were:

- 😊 People found the new website easier and clearer to use.
- 😊 People preferred to use the phone to report a repair, but said that if they were to use the website, this option needed to be higher up the menu.
- 😊 To give their views on a public consultation people preferred to have a link available to be able to view and share on social media.
- 😞 Asking for information via the council's website is very slow. It normally takes a few weeks for a reply.

Officers were unable to provide any statistics on how many younger people were accessing social media pages.

Websites from other housing providers were compared to the Rotherham Council website. Many others were found to be easier to navigate and clearer/ more attractive. The best websites viewed were:

- 🏠 Stockport Homes
- 🏠 St Leger Homes
- 🏠 Mosscares Housing Group
- 🏠 Golden Gates Housing Trust
- 🏠 Maidenhead Housing Solutions, and
- 🏠 North Kesteven District Council

PANEL VIEWS:

- 👤 Panel members were keen to feedback comments on the Rotherham website to officers so that improvements could be made.
-

Recommendations





- Improve the council website by making:
 - The website more accessible and attractive to younger people.
 - The Home Matters magazine available on the website.
- Review the social media used for engaging with tenants, introducing ways of developing tenant consultations and keeping in touch through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

6.6 Plain language

At the Pizza, Chips and Chat event young people were asked to look at four council documents to check for plain language and to say:

- ? what they thought of the documents;
- ? how they could be improved; and
- ? how they rated them.

The results were:

Document	Average Rating (out of five stars)	Comments:
Tenancy Agreement		<p>☹️ There were too many statistics in three of the documents and they needed to be shortened (all except tenancy agreement).</p> <p>😊 The tenancy agreement was the best document for everyone.</p> <p>😊 The layout and pictures in the annual report were good.</p>
Homelessness Strategy		
Local Lettings Policy		
Annual Report		

Officers reported that a plain language standard is used for all reports and that jargon should not be present in any public documents.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍️ Panel members would like to have seen plain language in all publications, perhaps checked by young people during drafting.
-

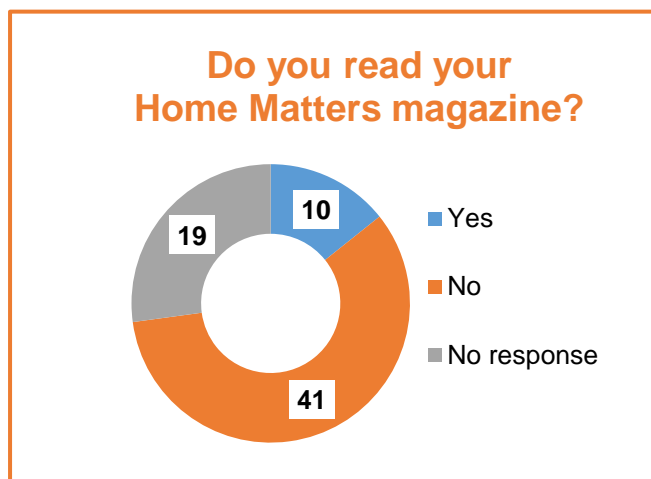
Recommendations

- Review all council documents, in particular those produced by housing services, to make them easier to understand for younger tenants. These should be tested out by young volunteers.

6.7 The Home Matters magazine

The magazine is produced on a quarterly basis and circulated to all tenants. The majority are sent by post with a smaller number being circulated by email to those requesting electronic information at sign-up.

It was highlighted during the course of the investigation that some residents were not receiving the magazine. It was also found that the magazine did not appear on the Rotherham Council website but was available on the RotherFed website.



From the first survey it was found that **59%** of respondents did **not** read Home Matters.

Comments received at the Pizza, Chips and Chat event included that the magazine was too brief and that they wanted to see more stories about younger people, local communities and events.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel was concerned that many tenants, including younger people, may not be receiving the magazine.
- ✎ They were keen to see an electronic version of the magazine being made available on the council website.
- ✎ Panel members would like communications officers to try to include more stories that are relevant to younger tenants or to consider developing a magazine specifically for people under 35 years of age.

Recommendations

- Develop the Home Matters newsletter to make it more 'young person' friendly by incorporating a young tenants section or similar.

6.8 Meetings

Currently there is minimal involvement of younger tenants in some Tenant and Resident Association (TARA) meetings across Rotherham.

Shelter² suggests that younger tenant involvement is more successful if you can tailor existing successful interventions or if you use a **forum specifically for younger people**. To connect with young families, consideration should be given to family – friendly activities or focussing on existing school events.

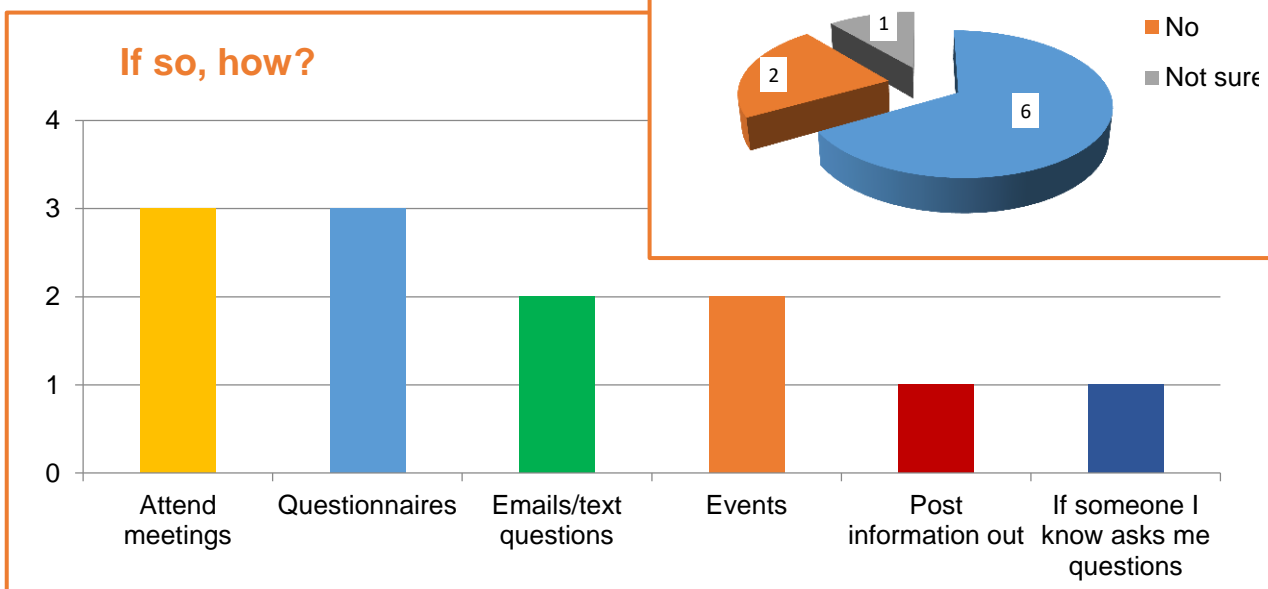
TPAS Wales¹ advises that meetings should be more participative and should **use existing groups**.

CIH³ states that ‘**co-creation**’ principles should be adopted so that tenants are involved directly in the design and development of their own services.

When housing officers were interviewed they felt that younger tenants would become more involved if groups were created around engaging activities specifically for younger people. Meetings with incentives such as food and free transport encouraged involvement. The creation of a younger people’s forum was considered to be a good idea.

- **St Leger homes** is currently developing a young people’s engagement board under their commitment to ‘*provide opportunities for young people to influence services*’. At the time of discussing the proposal with St Leger (November 2016) there were only three young people’s board members; however there was some optimism that this would expand fairly swiftly.

The follow-up survey asked if there would be any interest in a forum specifically for younger council tenants and how they would like to be involved if so:



PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel had experienced younger people coming along to meetings, but not returning as there were no other people of a similar age there.
 - ✎ It was suggested that a younger people's forum could be explored with support from RotherFed; perhaps by focussing on Rush House first where there is already some interest.
 - ✎ Panel members were keen to ensure that progress was made swiftly so that survey respondents did not lose interest in developing a younger person's forum. Any forum should consider both organising meetings and questionnaires/ consultations to maximise opportunities for young people to get involved.
-

Recommendations

- Provide support to RotherFed in the development of a forum for younger tenants.

6.9 Experiences of contacting council officers

The Pizza, Chips and Chat event found that five out of six people had recently called into the council offices or telephoned the council. They all found the experience poor due to waiting times, screens not working, and being unable to hear properly. On the whole staff were found to be polite but two people felt patronised and had a problem with staff looking at their screens instead of them. One person said ***'It's as if we're inferior, like we should know things without being told.'*** The experience left most people feeling angry.

As we saw from the follow-on survey results in section 6.1, one of the most important things for young people when considering an increase in their involvement is to feel that they are being ***listened to***.

Housing staff were in agreement that they had difficulty contacting younger tenants on the whole. Quite often, repairs would not get completed as the tenants had not waited in for the repairs team to visit, despite making appointments. There felt to be a lack of understanding of procedures. One officer commented that ***'You are more blunt with young people'***.

There were also issues with mobile phone numbers for younger people tending to change more often, again leading to contact difficulties.

Shelter² advises that residents should be encouraged to **value and respect** each other. Staff should be suitably qualified in working with young people and be flexible (be available outside office hours). Advice and support officers specifically for younger people should be provided.

TPAS Wales¹ also states that young people's opinions and values should be respected. They go on to say that young people are results orientated and will not wait for bureaucracy.

Expectations



The follow – up survey found that the majority of young people expected to be called back on the same day if they called the council offices.

Barriers

Officers were asked if they had any examples of how barriers with younger tenants could be broken down:

‘Face to face contact with tenants is the most important asset we have to engage with younger tenants’.

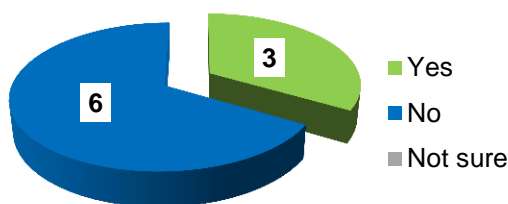
‘Rush House staff holding a drop-in for 16-24 year old tenants at Riverside is helping to break-down barriers’.

‘Training for reception staff and floor - walkers at Riverside House is needed to help them to know how to speak to younger tenants’.

‘To build rapport and confidence it would be better if younger tenants saw the same person (currently they can have to speak to three different housing officers during their tenancy)’.

Rotherham Council offers a Tenancy Support team to help new and existing tenants to manage and sustain their tenancies. They provide assistance to tenants to ensure that their income is maximised and expenses are kept to a minimum.

Do you know who your housing officer is?



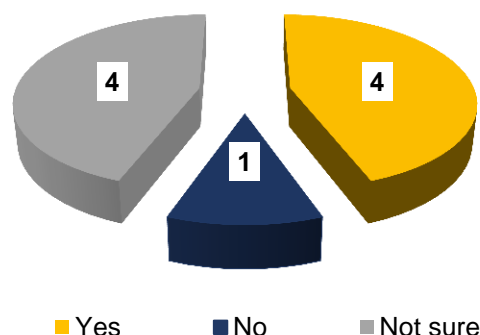
From the follow-up survey, a third of respondents did not know who their housing officer was.

However nearly half of respondents said that their experience with housing staff was positive and some commented:

'My housing officers (JR and DC) are the most caring and informative people ever. They deserve credit!'

'They helped me to fill out forms when I signed for my property because I am dyslexic'.

Has your experience with housing staff been positive?



- **St Leger homes** - has employed a dedicated Young People's engagement officer to try to overcome the issue of younger tenants not being involved with housing services. It is estimated that this approach will be at a cost of £25-35k per annum. STAR survey results for St Leger are not yet available to confirm that this approach is working.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel felt that it was reasonable to expect a call-back within a day, if this was to just acknowledge receipt of the enquiry and/or respond to a voicemail.
- ✎ It was felt that all staff coming into contact with people should be well- trained in customer care and avoid judgmental behaviour.
- ✎ A dedicated young people's team would be ideal but the panel was aware that this may be difficult.

- ✎ The panel were pleased that a team was available to support people with their new tenancies, but felt that not enough people were aware of this.
 - ✎ Panel members did however feel that it was important for all tenants to know who their housing officer was as a first point of contact. This would particularly be useful to build confidence in younger tenants.
-

Recommendations

- Ensure that the tenancy support team approach is working well and increase awareness of this service by making it clear what the benefits of the service are to younger/new tenants.
- Make sure that all younger tenants know who their housing officer is and how to contact them, by:
 - Including points of contact for relevant teams in the new tenant packs and explaining the services they provide.
 - Introducing a system of notifying tenants of any changes to their neighbourhood housing officer, ideally through the newsletter or mail system.

6.10 Consultations/ surveys

Guidance on engaging young tenants through consultations includes:


TPAS Wales¹ found that younger people preferred to take part in consultations and market research.

CIH³ suggests having a database of **interested tenants** who are prepared to be consulted as and when required. They also suggest using online consultations.

Other housing providers use these methods to engage with their tenants:

- **Dumfries and Galloway** - has an interested tenants list for consultations.
- **North Lincolnshire Homes (Ongo)** – uses its website to carry out quick surveys and consultations.
- **Stockport Homes** – runs discussion threads on the website, where questions asked by residents are displayed with open relevant responses from the housing provider and the public.

PANEL VIEWS:

 The panel felt that the responses from the surveys showed that there would be many younger tenants interested in other consultations and surveys.

6.11 Sign up process

It was agreed that a good way of getting young tenants engaged earlier is through the sign-up process.

Shelter² recommends using a **young tenants' starter pack** with information on local activities and services that are relevant to them.

Officers felt that getting into your new home can be a very quick process. People are desperate to get a home and don't tend to read the contract in detail. However it takes much more time to acquire the skills to manage it.

Responses from officers also revealed that there may be a lack of understanding on roles and responsibilities in the tenancy agreement which leads to young people being dissatisfied with services such as repairs. It was clear that younger tenants need more help to understand the terms and conditions before signing up to the tenancy agreement so that they have a better understanding of responsibility and financial pressure that they are agreeing to.

A tenancy agreement DVD is used at some sign-ups and is a useful way of confirming the responsibilities of tenants. Support can also be provided with housing benefit claims and a support team is available for this purpose.

A follow up visit to new tenants may take place within eight weeks of a new tenancy (with transfers it is not always necessary). Other than this visit, housing officers use their professional expertise to provide tenancy support and will make contact if there are problems with a tenancy. They have not got enough time to visit everyone and also don't want visits to be interpreted as 'harassment' (some new tenants just want to be left alone).

Sign – up options

The panel considered how sign-up could be improved to help with the engagement of tenants and to build their confidence in a new tenancy:

New tenants' courses

Shelter² suggests that housing providers run **pre-tenancy courses** including rights and responsibilities, policies and tenancy conditions, communication, confidence and skills.

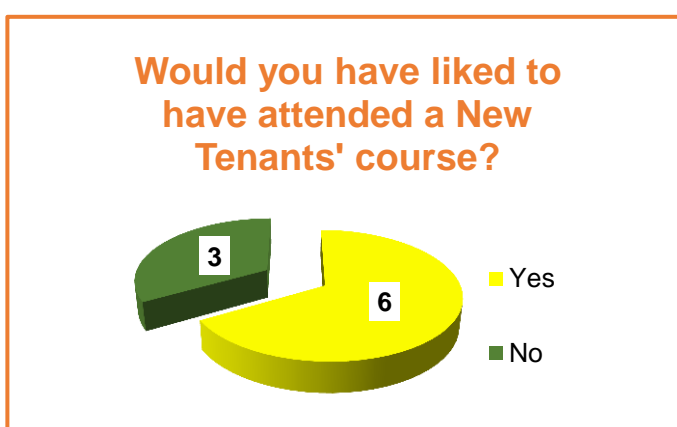
An early panel meeting found that Rush House offer 'moving-on' interviews where young people can assess their 'readiness' for living independently, assess the financial pressures that they may face, and be offered support to find the right home for them.

Considering other areas the panel also found that:

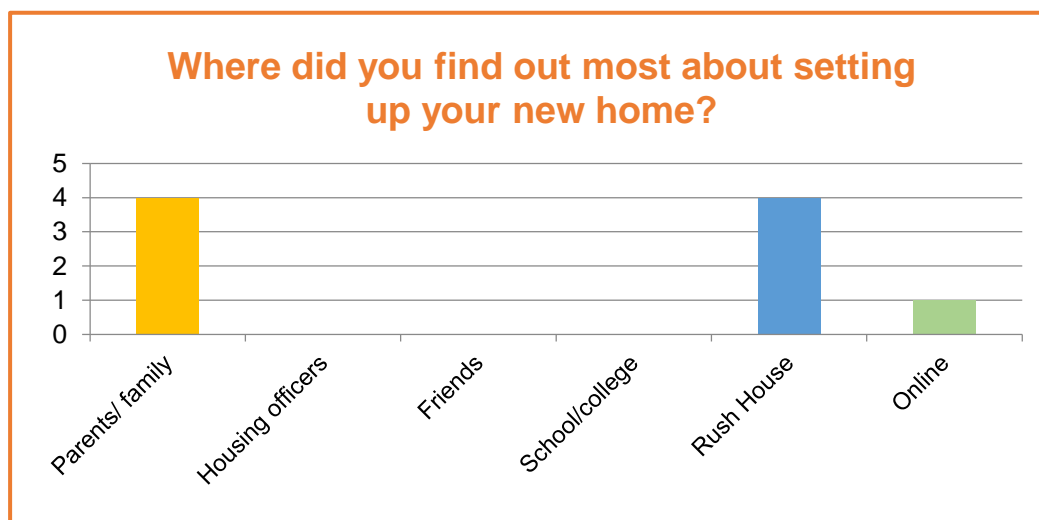
- **Stockport Homes** - run a similar scheme 'Steps to independent living' which supports 17-25 year olds who are thinking of getting their own place for the first time or have recently moved in.
- **Stonham Warrington** - holds pre- tenancy courses as a prerequisite for all new tenants who are under 35 or are vulnerable.

During the course of the investigation, it was proposed by housing services that a pre-application course would be developed for potential new tenants in Rotherham. Weekly sessions are proposed from April 2017 to introduce people thinking of applying for a council home to housing officers and RotherFed, with a view to:

- ☑ Checking the financial sustainability of potential new tenancies
- ☑ Flagging up if people are unlikely to cope with a tenancy
- ☑ Making people aware of the requirements of the tenancy agreement
- ☑ Introducing key contacts for new tenants, both at the council and RotherFed.



Two thirds of respondents in the follow-up survey would have liked to attend a New Tenants' course.



Most people received support from their families and from Rush House when setting up their home.

Tell us once

National Government has introduced a scheme whereby the council's bereavement services can prevent family members from having to notify lots of different agencies when a loved one has passed away.

It was discussed during meetings with officers whether it would be appropriate for a similar system to be developed to simplify processes for people moving into a new council home.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel liked the tenancy agreement DVD and agreed that it should be used at every opportunity to remind people of their responsibilities.
 - ✎ It was agreed that the development of pre-application courses for new tenants was a major step forward. Panel members welcomed this approach and were keen for the course to be evaluated and adapted as necessary as it was progressed.
 - ✎ Panel members felt that there is a need for bringing services together to be able to sign - post younger tenants and make the sign-up process clearer and easier. A similar system to the 'tell us once' service would be ideal.
 - ✎ It was felt that visits to new tenants were important for housing officers to start building trust and rapport with younger people.
-

- Evaluate the new tenant workshops being introduced in April 2017 with younger tenants and make improvements as necessary to the format and content.
- Develop a 'Tell Us Once' service for new council tenants, whereby they only have to inform one agency of their move. This information should then be shared with Council Tax, Benefits and Housing offices as appropriate.

6.12 Other ideas for engaging with younger tenants

The panel were able to consider other methods to engage with younger tenants which are used by various housing providers or recommended by national guidance:

Training in schools

Shelter² recommend that housing providers run **training sessions in high schools** for training potential young tenants, for example in assessing housing expectations, causes of homelessness, leaving home, and skills needed to live independently.

TPAS Wales¹ advises that links should be made to **youth structures**.

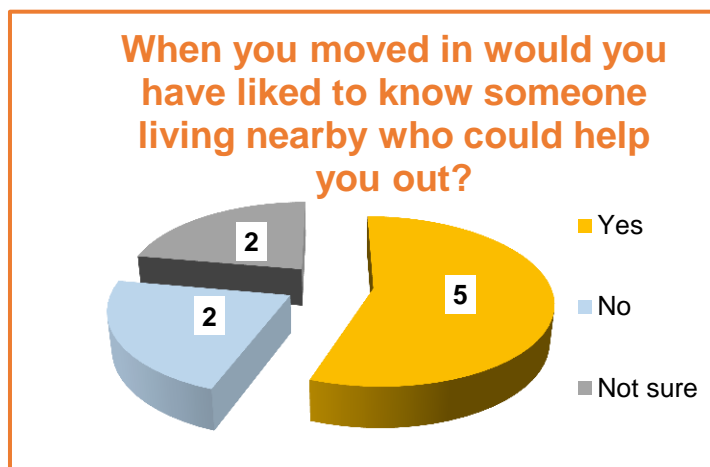
There are numerous other housing providers that run schemes in schools:

- Both **West Kent** and **Stockport** have education officers who deliver sessions in schools and in the community to encourage young people to make positive choices and develop key life skills.
- **Dumfries and Galloway** offer similar sessions for school leavers.
- **Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing** run two - day sessions in eight junior schools (year six) alongside partner agencies such as banks to talk about future housing ambitions and life skills.

Peer mentoring

Shelter² asks housing providers to consider using peers and mentors who live in the area as **informal advisers**.

Over half of respondents would have liked to have known someone in the area to help them out.



The follow-up survey did find that young people would appreciate having a contact in the area of their new home (see 6.11); however the panel did not find any examples of where peer mentoring schemes had been used successfully in other areas.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel felt that younger people would be more engaged if they had received training/ information at an earlier age to help them to become a responsible tenant.
- ✎ Peer mentoring was thought to be a nice idea but perhaps a bit ambitious for this time.

Recommendations

- Consider the use of training sessions in schools to raise awareness of the implications of renting your own home, including responsibilities and financial awareness.

7. Recommendations

Recommendations (in order of priority)		
Priority ranking	Recommendation	Page Number
A	Provide support to RotherFed in the development of a forum for younger tenants.	21
B	Provide suitable training for all council staff coming into contact with younger tenants, particularly in the need to show mutual respect and empathy.	12
C	Develop a menu of involvement opportunities for younger tenants and share this with both council staff and tenants.	14
D	Review all council documents, in particular those produced by housing services, to make them easier to understand for younger tenants. These should be tested out by young volunteers.	18
E	Evaluate the new tenant workshops being introduced in April 2017 with younger tenants and make improvements as necessary to the format and content.	27
F	Ensure that the tenancy support team approach is working well and increase awareness of this service by making it clear what the benefits of the service are to younger/new tenants.	24
G	<p>Make sure that all younger tenants know who their housing officer is and how to contact them, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Including points of contact for relevant teams in the new tenant packs and explaining the services they provide. (ii) Introducing a system of notifying tenants of any changes to their neighbourhood housing officer, ideally through the newsletter or mail system. 	24
H	Consider the use of training sessions in schools to raise awareness of the implications of renting your own home, including responsibilities and financial awareness.	29
I	Develop the Home Matters newsletter to make it more 'young person' friendly by incorporating a young tenants section or similar.	19

Recommendations (in order of priority)		
Priority ranking	Recommendation	Page Number
J	<p>Improve the council website by making:</p> <p>(i) The website more accessible and attractive to younger people.</p> <p>(ii) The Home Matters magazine available on the website.</p>	17
K	Review the social media used for engaging with tenants, introducing ways of developing tenant consultations and keeping in touch through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.	17
L	Develop a 'Tell Us Once' service for new council tenants, whereby they only have to inform one agency of their move. This information should then be shared with Council Tax, Benefits and Housing officers as appropriate.	27
M	Explore enhancing links with children's centres to monitor the number of council tenants who are engaging with services and how they are signposted to services.	12
Suggestion		
1.	Make sure that all Jobcentre Plus staff know how to refer homeless young people through to housing services.	

8. References

1. **TPAS Wales** *'Are You Being Equal? Encouraging Equal Tenant Participation in Social Landlords in Wales'* 2009
2. **Shelter** *'How registered social landlords can work with young people. A good practice guide.'* 2006
3. **CIH** *'Working together to challenge the future of tenant involvement'* 2016

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