



CONTINUOUS TENANT OMNIBUS SURVEY 2021

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Produced by the Research Unit

Housing
Executive

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Acknowledgement

The Housing Executive would like to thank everyone involved in this research. In particular our gratitude goes to all the tenants who took the time to participate and whose goodwill and co-operation made the Survey possible.

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What is the Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey?

The Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS) is the main way we collect information about what our tenants think about their tenancy, their home, the service they receive and about the neighbourhood they live in. It has been providing feedback from tenants for more than twenty years and this current report provides up to date views for 2021. Any change in tenants' opinions over time can be identified and used to inform local housing managers and central planning in order to improve the quality of our services.

Who takes part?

Throughout 2021 a total of 2600 tenant interviews were completed, randomly selected to represent households across our 13 Area Offices. Interviews were completed with either the household reference person (HRP) or their partner.

Findings

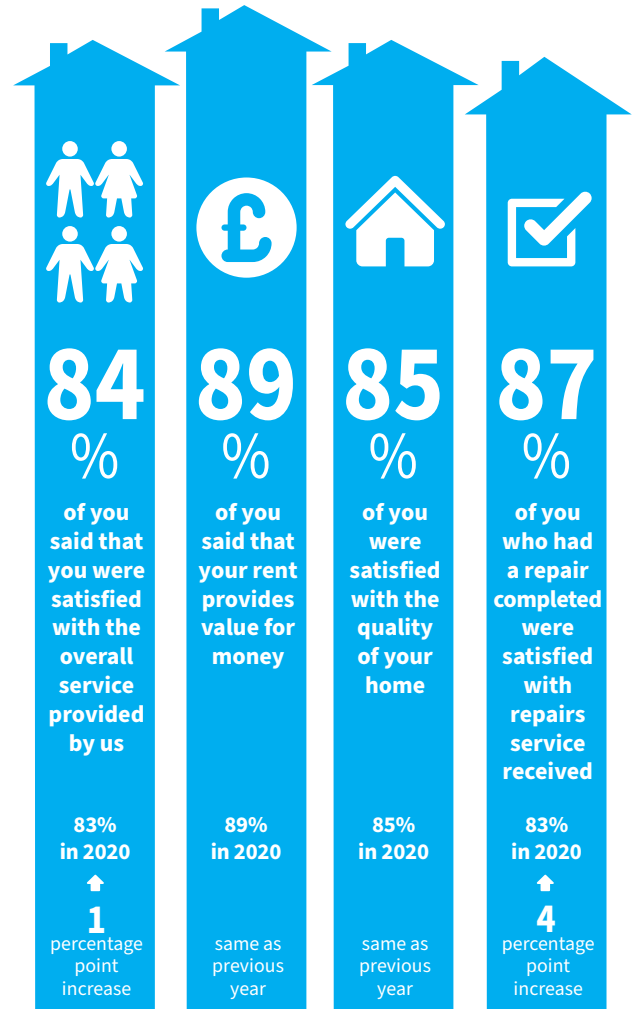
This report sets out feedback from you and relates to the following:

- Your home and neighbourhood
- Your views on some of our key services areas
- Your views on how we have consulted and communicated with you
- Your experience of contacting us

If you have any comments about the report please don't hesitate to get in touch with us by telephone (03448 920 900), email information@nihe.gov.uk or calling at your local Housing Executive Office.

To read the full report please go to the Landlord Services section at <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Working-With-Us/Research/Attitudes-to-landlord-services-under-Completed-Research>.

Here's what we found



Overall satisfaction & value for money in 2021



84%

of you said that you were satisfied with the overall service provided by us

83% in 2020

↑ **1** percentage point increase



89%

of you said that your rent provides value for money

89% in 2020

Same as previous year

What are we doing?

- We will continue to ensure that tenants receive value for their rent payments through delivery of quality accommodation and services.
- In 2021 we raised our tenants' rents for the second time in six years. Making the most of our rental income is important to help ensure that we are able to invest in the required repairs and improvements in our properties.
- We continue to monitor our rents in comparison to other social housing providers in the UK, as well as other data in relation to our tenants, to ensure that our rents remain affordable.
- We will continue to identify and contact tenants experiencing difficulty paying their rent and make sure that they receive all of the expert advice and assistance they need.
- Our Financial Inclusion Strategy aims to improve the financial wellbeing of our tenants and ensure they have the ability to access the right financial help, support and services when needed. Our dedicated Financial Inclusion Managers work with our customers and this specialist service has significantly improved the financial wellbeing of numerous tenants within the last year.

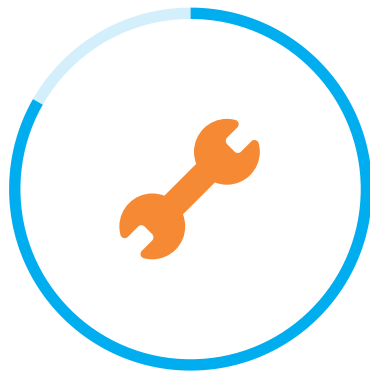
"We will make every  count."

Your home & neighbourhood in 2021



85%

of you were satisfied with the quality of your home
85% in 2020
Same as previous year



84%

of you said you were satisfied with the general condition of your property
83% in 2020
↑ 1 percentage point increase



84%

of you said you think your home is just the right size
80% in 2020
↑ 4 percentage point increase

In 2021
there were:

84,000

approx. occupied properties

159,000

approx. household members

Your home & neighbourhood in 2021



89%

of you were satisfied with your neighbourhood
89% in 2020
 Same as previous year



68%

of you were proud of the general image of your area
76% in 2020
 ↓ 8 percentage point decrease

5%

said you were ashamed of the general image of your area

6%

of you were dissatisfied with where you live, the main reason being the people/ neighbours and anti-social behaviour

What are we doing?

- In 2021 we launched our Sustaining Tenancies Funding Programme, which will invest £1.6 million in projects to foster happy, healthy and resilient tenancies and communities.
- Our community safety strategy works to address Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in our estates. In 2021/22 we responded to 1,617 reports of alleged ASB. We are committed to tackling ASB in all its forms, through investment in diversionary schemes and taking appropriate action against perpetrators.
- We continue to roll out Action Plans for our range of Community Strategies including our Involvement, Cohesion and Social Enterprise Strategies. These are designed to give residents a voice and help improve local neighbourhoods as places to live. We invest over £2 million each year through these.
- We will continue to work with Grounds Maintenance partners on environmental improvement schemes in our estates. In 2021/22 we planted over 11,245 native trees and whips.

Repair service in 2021



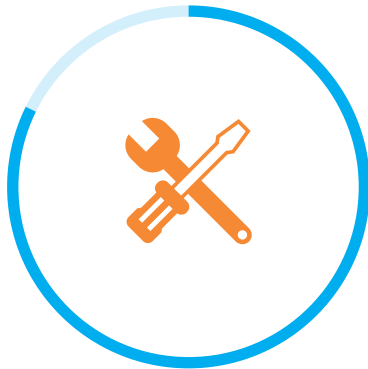
68%

of you reported a repair in the 12 months prior to being surveyed
67% in 2020 **↑ 1** percentage point increase



86%

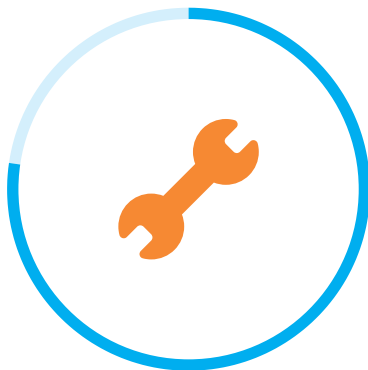
of you said the work was carried out within the timescale advised
81% in 2020 **↑ 5** percentage point increase



83%

of you who requested a repair had at least one repair **fully completed** in the 12 months prior to being surveyed
79% in 2020 **↑ 4** percentage point increase

*The following relates to those of you who had at least one repair **fully completed** in the 12 months prior to being surveyed:*



78%

of you said the repair was completed on the first visit
75% in 2020
↑ 3 percentage point increase

In 2021 at least 9 in 10

of you were satisfied with repair work done and with those who carried out the work in terms of: **Speed, Quality of work, Quality of materials, Tidiness, Politeness, Friendliness**

Repair service in 2021



93%

of you were satisfied with how we had managed the repair

90% in 2020

↑ 3 percentage point increase

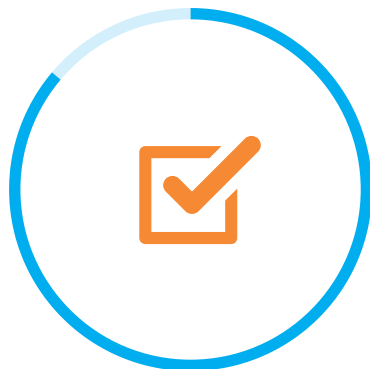


93%

of you were satisfied with how the contractor had carried out the work

89% in 2020

↑ 4 percentage point increase



87%

of you who had a repair completed in the 12 months prior to being surveyed were satisfied with the repairs service

83% in 2020

↑ 4 percentage point increase

Overall

11%

of you were dissatisfied with our repair service.

The main reasons were:

- Repairs not completed on time
- Poor workmanship or repairs not done properly/repairs take too long

What are we doing?

- In 2021/22 we invested £117 million in stock investment and adaptations. We also spent over £79 million on response maintenance, the largest amount since 2007/8.
- We are working in partnership with our contractors to help manage increasing material costs and other pressures evident in the construction industry.
- We completed procurement and training for our new response maintenance contracts.
- We progressed our DLO 'Evolve' Project to ensure a focused, efficient, and effective service planned and response maintenance service.
- We continue to increase options for our customers to make appointments that suit them.

Tenant consultation & communication in 2021



73%

of you said you were satisfied that we listen to your views and act upon them

74% in 2020

↓ **1** percentage point decrease



75%

of you said you had been well consulted by the Housing Executive

76% in 2020

↓ **1** percentage point decrease



78%

of you felt the Housing Executive was good at keeping you informed about things that might affect you as a tenant

80% in 2020

↓ **2** percentage point decrease

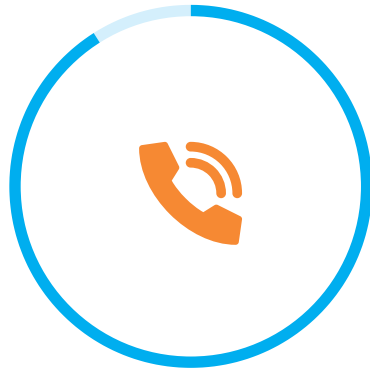
13%

of you said you had been poorly consulted due to lack of communication or no consultation at all.

What are we doing?

- We conducted research with our tenants and community groups to identify areas for improvement for tenant participation and communication, which will shape how we communicate and consult with customers.
- We piloted the use of broadcast messaging through our Customer Portal as a means of keeping customers informed.
- We developed our online Collaboration Portal to support our community representatives to engage with us digitally.
- Our Housing Community Network continues to be a key source of reflecting customer views on matters such as strategy development, contract procurement, service delivery and customer communication.
- We worked with our Central Housing Forum customer representatives on a number of new Working Groups and Task and Finish Groups in relation to Succession of Tenancies, Climate Change and Disabled Adaptations.
- We continued to meet and work with our Rural Resident's Forum.

Contacting us in 2021



69% of you had contacted us by telephone in the 12 months prior to interview

91%

of you were satisfied with the telephone contact

89% in 2020

↑ **2** percentage point increase



3% of you visited a local office in the 12 months prior to interview

90%

of you were satisfied with the visit

91% in 2020

↓ **1** percentage point decrease



30% of you had received a home visit by a member of staff in the 12 months prior to interview

86%

of you were satisfied with the home visit

81% in 2020

↑ **5** percentage point increase

What we are doing?

- We continue to invest in our telephony infrastructure to handle up to 90,000 calls per month and ensure customers get the best possible service.
- Following the easing of COVID restrictions we are monitoring service delivery arrangements and carrying out more home visits, as well as operating appointments systems for customers to visit our offices.

94%

of those who visited a local office were seen in less than 15 minutes (82 respondents)

96%

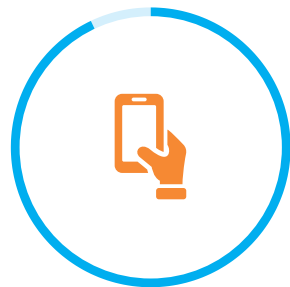
of you felt that staff dealt with you in a courteous manner when phoning the Housing Executive

Digital inclusion in 2021



72%

of you had access to the internet
70% in 2020
↑ **2** percentage point increase



93%

of you owned a mobile phone
92% in 2020
↑ **1** percentage point increase



76%

of households with no members with long term illness or disability had access to the internet



71%

of households with at least one member with long term illness or disability had access to the internet



76%

of households with **adults** had access to the internet



95%

of households with **children** had access to the internet



47%

of households with **older** tenants had access to the internet

70% mainly access the internet via a smartphone

What we are doing?

- We participate in a number of programmes to enable digital inclusion amongst our customers and community including PEACE IV and ONSIDE projects.
- We continued to work with our Digital Inclusion Working Group as part of our Housing Community Network partnership. This identifies key actions and information to increase our digital capacity and engagement with customers.
- We developed our online Collaboration Portal so that community groups could engage with us digitally.
- Our Social media team continues to play an important role in providing up to date information for customers.
- As more and more of our customers become digitally enabled we:
 - are reviewing the content of our website to ensure it remains relevant and accessible for our customers.
 - continue to encourage uptake and use of our Customer Portal as a key method to allow customers to engage with us 24/7, at a time that suits them. We have developed our Customer Portal services to meet customer's needs and supported performance improvements to ensure a quality service.

Client response to survey

The annual CTOS provides the Housing Executive with a comprehensive socio- economic profile of our tenants and their views and attitudes about the services we provide. The Survey is invaluable in providing management with a measurement of customer satisfaction across various areas of our business. This can be tracked over time and used to assess the quality of services and identify good practice or areas for improvement.

The Survey provides a wealth of information which ensures we can monitor the profile and needs of our tenants on an ongoing basis. This allows us to identify priorities and develop and tailor our services to those needs. The Survey also allows us to gather data where we identify emerging evidence needs.

Overall Satisfaction levels:

Overall levels of satisfaction with service provided by the Housing Executive remained high at 84%, an increase from 83% in 2020. This is a positive result given the challenges experienced as we emerged from the COVID pandemic.

2021 was a challenging year in terms of customer service delivery, as we adjusted to changes in working practices and customer behaviour following the COVID pandemic, with higher levels of telephone and digital contact and ongoing work to deal with the impacts of the pandemic. Whilst services continued to be delivered to a very high standard, we recognise that re-establishment of face-to-face contact is important for some services and customers.

The most significant impact was on our repairs service, as for periods of 2020 repairs were restricted to emergencies only, which left us dealing with significant backlogs in 2021 as restrictions eased.

The situation was compounded by contractor issues in sourcing labour and materials. Despite these challenges, satisfaction increased to 87% (83% in 2020) for customers who had a repair completed.

It is also pleasing to note that we maintained high levels of tenant satisfaction with the quality of their home (85%, the same as in 2020).

Satisfaction that rent offered value for money remained steady at 89% (89% in 2020), despite the challenges with repairs. 2021 saw the highest level of investment in our homes since 2007. Overall, it remains very positive to see that the vast majority of our tenants feel that their rent provides value for money and see the value of the ongoing investment in their homes and communities.

In relation to tenants' views on the size of their property, the vast majority of respondents (84%) felt their home was just the right size, compared to 80% in 2020. Twelve per cent (15% in 2020) felt their home was too small, while only 4% (5% in 2020) felt their home was too big. This contrasts with our own estimate that around one-third of our tenants would face a shortfall in their rental income should Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC) mitigation end. We

therefore welcome the ongoing continuation of mitigation measures in Northern Ireland to assist tenants in sustaining tenancies and meeting their rental charges.

Tenants continued to move to Universal Credit throughout 2021/22 with 5,276 doing so, bringing the caseload to 24,822 at the end of March 2022. We have continued to carry out significant work to prepare our tenants and staff for Universal Credit and the Survey provides valuable information to shape this work. With the move to Universal Credit, we continue to focus on ensuring our tenants are prepared and to support them with a focus on budgeting, banking and being online. The dedicated Welfare Benefits Unit within Housing Services continues to support tenants and staff. We are witnessing the significant impact of our Financial Inclusion Managers and the benefits they bring to customers. They received 2,605 referrals from front-line staff in 2021/22, and between September 2021 and March 2022 were able to generate additional potential benefit entitlement of approximately £1 million for customers. For low-income families such interventions can make a substantial difference. We continue to promote usage of our Benefit and Budgeting calculator by staff and customers. This indicates benefits which a customer may be entitled to and helps them to create a household budget.

Access to the internet has increased in the last year with 72% of all households (70% in 2020) having access to the internet. Whilst this remains low compared to the NISRA 2021/22 Northern Ireland figure of 89%, it is useful to note that the majority of younger households are enabled, with 95% of households with children having internet access. 100% of households with an HRP aged between 16 and 25 have internet access with 91% of those with an HRP between 25 and 44 and 78% of those with an HRP between 45 and 59 being internet enabled. These differences are important to note as welfare changes, including the shift to digital delivery, primarily affect those of working age.

Questions were also included to capture respondents' ownership of an email address; more than half (55%) had an email address, a 1 percentage point increase from 2020 and 11% increase from 2019. Email usage was highest among households with a HRP aged between 16-44 years, with around 84% in this cohort having an address.

Apart from a small 1% decrease amongst households with children, overall access to the internet and email increased across all cohorts of tenants. This evidence is useful in shaping and targeting our approach with tenants while also preparing for future needs. We will continue to monitor these figures as Universal Credit rolls out and use them to understand and shape our approach to digital services, including the ongoing roll-out of our new Customer Portal.

Financial Inclusion Insights:

The Survey asked if tenants had any difficulty making their rent payment during the 12 months before the interview. Around three-fifths of respondents (61%) reported they were in receipt of full Housing Benefit or full Universal Credit Housing Costs and therefore were not subject to rent payments, and a further third (33%) indicated that they had not experienced any difficulty in paying their rent during the previous year (31% in 2020, 30% in 2019). The proportion of all tenants who said they had experienced difficulty in paying their rent in the past 12 months remains relatively small at 6%. This represents a small decrease from the previous year's figure of 7%. Given the changing economic environment, we will continue to monitor this closely and factor this into considerations of affordability and support offered to tenants.

When we separate out those who did pay rent, in addition to or instead of benefit coverage, the figure who experienced difficulty is 14% (4 percentage point decrease). This indicates particular challenges in relation to tenancy sustainment, financial inclusion and maximisation of rental collection for this group. We will monitor the situation and develop appropriate responses as it evolves.

These findings do highlight the importance of the continued role of services such as Making Your Money Work, Financial Inclusion Officers and the Benefit and Budgeting calculator and the investment we make in them.

Of those who reported difficulty in paying their rent, 34% reported that the reason for this was a change in personal circumstances, which included the impact of COVID-19, and a further 15% reported furlough as the reason. The Northern Ireland economy witnessed strong growth following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, which appears to have helped our tenants who are in employment. We will monitor the situation and ensure that support is available to those customers who need it, through the range of services highlighted above.

Tenant Involvement & Consultation insights:

The Survey also provides important insight into the area of tenant involvement, consultation, and communication. Three-quarters of respondents (75%) felt they were well consulted by the Housing Executive, and almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) were satisfied that the Housing Executive listens to their views and acts upon them. Again, as we adjust to new working practices and customer behaviour, it is encouraging to see similar levels of satisfaction with standards of contact and consultation with customers. This reflects organisational and staff commitment to prioritising customer focus throughout the organisation.

We will continue to develop our Community Involvement framework and work with over 300 community groups across Northern Ireland through our Housing Community Network, ensuring they have a real voice at every level of our organisation. We continue to invest in

our Housing Community Network to give tenants a voice and to help shape our services, strategies and plans. For example, our Central Housing Forum plays a crucial role at the heart of policy development and decision making at organisational level. At local level, Area Housing Community Networks work closely with local offices to scrutinise performance and service delivery standards.

A number of the questions reveal a particular challenge in awareness levels and engagement with young people and families. Younger household groups showed slightly lower satisfaction that the Housing Executive listens to their views - approximately 68% in the 16-44 age bracket compared to over 82% of those aged 60 and over. As part of our Tenant Participation research we are asking questions around how people would like to engage. This includes the possibility of online forums and digital consumer panels as potential ways of increasing connectivity with younger groups.

Key to this is allowing people to engage in ways which suit them, including the possibility of using online surveys on our Customer Portal. We are aiming to make involvement as quick and easy as possible for people who wish to engage in these ways.

We continue to encourage tenants and their representatives to become actively involved and participate in decisions about our housing services through the ongoing delivery of the Community Involvement Strategy. We continue to make engagement as wide and as representative as possible through our partnerships with the Disability Forum, Youth Forum, Rural Forum, and our Strategic Cohesion Group.

Tenant Communication & Digital Inclusion insights:

Almost eight in ten (78%; 80% in 2020) of respondents felt the Housing Executive was good at keeping them informed about things that might affect them as a tenant. The main method by which respondents wanted to be kept informed and get in touch with the Housing Executive remains by telephone (91% of respondents, 89% in 2020) and we continue to invest in improving our telephony service. Improvements include the introduction of Caller Telephony Integration, which identifies and routes customers correctly based on their phone number, making service delivery quicker. Satisfaction with telephone contact remains very high at 91% (89% in 2020).

Interest in other methods of contact is growing and we will continue to consider service delivery in light of this. A quarter of tenants (25%) would be happy to be kept informed by email (26% in 2020 and 11% in 2019). To embrace this increased willingness for email contact both the Housing Executive and our customers can now send and track electronic messages through our Tenant Portal.

In 2021, more than two-thirds (72%, 70% in 2020) of all households had access to the internet, an increase of 2 percentage points. This indicates that the gap between Housing Executive tenants and wider society is narrowing (the NI figure of 89% decreased by 2 percentage points between 2020 and 2021). We will help narrow this gap further by continuing to support our tenants to become more digitally included by developing their

confidence, skills and knowledge to access and use online services. We will make our own digital services as easy and efficient to use as possible. We will also continue to increase the engagement of hard-to-reach groups by providing digital support through our various programmes including the ONSIDE project and our Central Housing Forum Digital Inclusion Working Group. This work gives participants the opportunity to gain new skills and to engage at a pace that suits them. We will continue to support our 'HCN membership' who provide a key service in supporting tenants, residents and leaseholders to develop their digital skills.


We are developing the online delivery of advice and services for customers who prefer to make use of digital services, particularly thinking of the higher numbers of younger household groups with internet access who may wish to use this service channel. The Housing Executive invested in a new, mobile friendly website which launched in 2019, to reflect that mobile/ smartphone was still respondents' main method of accessing the internet (70%, the same as in 2020). Ongoing website development is demonstrative of our commitment to enabling online transactions and improving digital communications with tenants, where they wish to do so. The number of respondents who had accessed services through the website remained fairly steady, with almost one quarter of all respondents having done so (23%, 24% in 2020).

User and transaction numbers on the Customer Portal continue to grow with around 10,700 users by the end of March 2022. The Customer Portal is an important service development to empower tenants who wish to carry out transactions online including self-servicing rent accounts, reporting repairs, updating their details and sending a message. We are continuing to explore ways to increase usage and experience when using the Customer Portal including publicity videos and delivery of outgoing messaging. We have also developed internal standards of service for responding to Customer Portal transactions, to ensure continued delivery of a high quality service.

Overall access to the internet and email increased across all cohorts of tenants, with the exception of a small 1 percentage point decrease from 96% to 95% for households with children. We will continue to reflect these societal changes in the way we offer our services.

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