

Private Rented Sector Consultation: Results

Introduction

Privately rented homes have become one of the most popular types of housing in the city, so it's important that as it grows, standards are maintained and the sector retains the trust of Manchester people.

The survey was intended to gather views and opinions from renters and landlords on what's working well, what isn't working and what should be improved.

Methodology

Manchester residents and landlords were invited to complete an online questionnaire which was prepared by officers in the Housing and Residential growth team and published on the Council's consultation page and open for entries from 28 October to 22 November 2019.

This was complemented by a series of drop-in sessions with resident and landlord groups to discuss the Private Rented Sector and views and opinions from those events are included in the results.

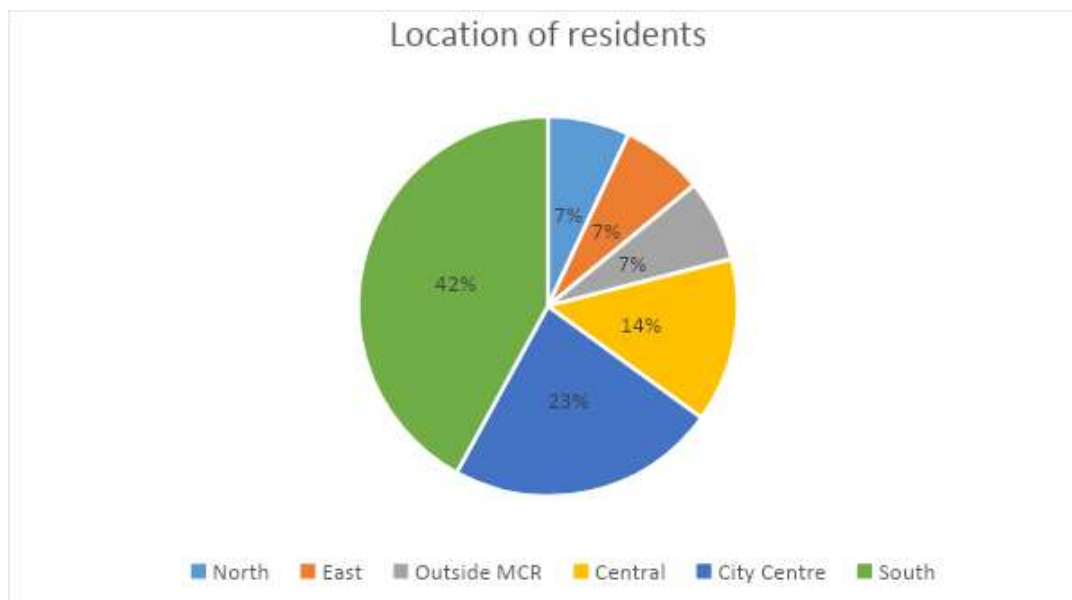
A total of 117 responses were received, 85 from residents and 32 from Landlords. As this survey was a self-selecting, and achieved a relatively low response rate it should be understood as a snapshot in time of residents and landlords' views who chose to answer the survey, rather than being used to draw any statistical conclusions about private tenants and landlords.

Residents Questionnaire

Profile of respondents:

There were no demographic questions in the survey other than residents were asked for their current housing tenure and their Post Code. 90% of those who completed the questionnaire were Private Rented sector tenants with a handful of others being in social rented or owner occupied housing.

The private rental market in Manchester is diverse and the majority of residents responding to the consultation lived in South Manchester or the City Centre. 40% of the questionnaires were from areas with a large student population and residents more likely to be paying average market rents or above (City Centre, Hulme, Fallowfield, Chorlton and Withington). Areas of the city with lower cost private rented housing such as Harpurhey, Gorton and Crumpsall are under-represented in the survey.



What's important when renting a property?



Residents were asked to pick from a list of options and say which were the most important to them when renting a property on a scale of 1 to 11. Location, Rent Levels and the condition of the property were the most important issues for residents, and many felt that having good transport nearby and security of tenure were very important to them. The response was more mixed in terms of how important the reputation of the landlord, what their neighbourhood was like and the type of property. Deposit requirements and the provision of furniture were least important to most respondents.



	Important										Not Important	
Location	30%	19%	10%	6%	10%	5%	3%	1%	4%	8%	5%	
Rent levels	32%	15%	13%	10%	7%	0%	4%	2%	4%	9%	5%	
Condition of property	23%	17%	21%	7%	7%	6%	4%	6%	1%	2%	6%	
Nearby transport	10%	6%	15%	16%	9%	13%	9%	9%	0%	6%	8%	
Security of tenancy	21%	10%	6%	6%	12%	6%	9%	10%	6%	7%	7%	
Landlord or Managing Agent reputation	14%	6%	10%	15%	4%	9%	5%	13%	5%	11%	9%	
Neighbourhood	5%	8%	10%	13%	13%	4%	15%	9%	13%	5%	8%	
Property type	6%	17%	6%	6%	13%	3%	6%	5%	14%	10%	14%	
Crime levels	5%	6%	7%	5%	14%	14%	12%	12%	10%	11%	4%	
Deposit requirements	13%	4%	6%	3%	8%	13%	10%	16%	11%	11%	6%	
Furniture	11%	1%	3%	5%	6%	8%	8%	5%	9%	9%	35%	

Tenancy Agreements

Residents were asked about Assured Shorthold Tenancies and how they felt about the government's proposals for more flexible tenancies or fixed-term contracts. 80% felt this would give them more confidence in the security of tenancies.



77% felt they would be more likely to search for private rented property if tenancies were more flexible.

4. Would this give you more confidence in the security of the tenancy?			Response Percent
1	Yes		79.52%
2	No		20.48%

5. Would you be more likely to search for a private rented property if the tenancy agreement was more flexible?			Response Percent
1	Yes		76.19%
2	No		23.81%

Issues and problems with Private Renting

Residents were asked a series of questions about their experiences of living in private rented housing. 28% said they been harassed or threatened with eviction although fewer had lost a tenancy and been made homeless. 68% had reported problems to their landlord or managing agent in the past 6 months with the most common problems being Damp and Leaks, heating, problems with doors and windows and drainage. Other issues reported included problems with fixtures and fittings and problems with noise and anti-social behaviour. 58% said the issue wasn't dealt with to their satisfaction although very few said they had resorted to legal action.

6. Have you ever been harassed by a landlord or threatened with unlawful eviction?			Response Percent
1	Yes		27.59%
2	No		72.41%

7. Have you ever been made homeless from a private rented tenancy?



		Response Percent
1	Yes	11.29%
2	No	88.71%



8. Have you reported any problems with your property in the last six months?

		Response Percent
1	Yes	67.82%
2	No	32.18%

9. Select any problems you have reported in the past six months








		Response Percent
1	Damp and leaks	65.52%
2	Heating and hot water	41.38%
3	Doors and windows	41.38%
4	Structural issues	17.24%
5	Gas and Electrical safety	13.79%
6	Fire safety	3.45%
7	Drainage	22.41%
8	Pests	18.97%



10. Did your landlord or managing agent address the problems to your satisfaction?			Response Percent
1	Yes		41.38%
2	No		58.62%

11. Have you ever taken legal action against your landlord or managing agent?			Response Percent
1	Yes		2.38%
2	No		97.62%

Being a Good Tenant

Residents were asked how they found out about their rights and responsibilities. Although the council website scored highly, residents said they used a range of sources –including ACORN (the renters union) and Shelter websites and 35% got support from family or friends. Several respondents also said they used the Citizens Advice Bureau or a general search online for housing advice. There was strong support for the idea of tenant training or coaching with over 85% saying this would be useful.

12. How do you, or how would you find out about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant?			Response Percent
1	Council website		43.90%
2	Tenants Union		18.29%
3	Shelter		41.46%
4	ACORN		31.71%
5	Landlord		15.85%
6	Friends or family		35.37%
7	Other (please specify):		23.17%

13. Do you think that tenant training or coaching would be useful? (e.g. understanding rights, budgeting etc)			Response Percent
1	Yes		85.37%
2	No		14.63%

Open Text questions

The questionnaire included open text questions to give respondents the opportunity to write in their own words what further assistance they thought would help tenants, and what they liked or disliked about private renting. They are analysed by identifying the key themes which arise from the comments and the counting number of times they occur per entry

Respondents were asked to write in suggestions of other assistance or initiatives that would help tenants. The most frequently mentioned suggestions were an end to Section 21 evictions (ending an Assured Shorthold Tenancy), Rent controls and many felt that their needed to be better information available about the rights of tenants, and in particular how to make sure their landlord or agent resolved problems with their property or tenancy. Many respondents also supported Landlord Licensing, more control and regulation of the sector and minimum energy efficiency ratings for private rented homes.

14. What further assistance or initiatives would help tenants?	
Comment	Responses
End to Section 21 Evictions / Unfair evictions	14
Rent control / Rent Caps	14
Better advice / information for tenants to get help with issues	14
Landlord Licensing	13
Prosecute bad landlords/Enforcement and regulation	9
Minimum Energy Efficiency ratings	8
More Affordable / Social Housing	4
Better working relationship with Acorn and the Council	4
Training for landlord or managing agents	3
Help with deposits	3

Other comments:

- Better legal rights for tenants
- Abolish private ownership

- End right to rent and Social Security checks on tenants
- Right to buy for private tenants
- Penalties for Empty Homes
- Regulate Airbnb/Short Term Leases
- A forum for Landlords to meet Tenants

The last part of the survey asked residents what they liked, and didn't like about private rented housing. There were far fewer positive comments than negative comments although respondents frequently mentioned the choice of property area and the flexibility allowed by private renting, it being more affordable and not having to be responsible for repairs and maintenance to the property.

Half of the respondents to the survey made a comment about rents being too high and rents increasing and being unregulated. Many made comments to the effect they felt that the balance of power was weighted against tenants and that they should have more rights to tackle problems with their tenancy. Many comments mentioned the lack of security of tenure and generally mentioned problems with landlords delaying, or not responding to issues with disrepair and the condition of properties. Many expressed a sentiment that they felt landlords and agents put profit before the wellbeing of their tenants, concerns about threats of eviction and deposits either not being returned in full or not at all.

15 (a) What do you like about the Private Rented Sector?	
Comment	Responses
Choice of property and area	20
Flexibility	18
Nothing	16
Affordability	8
Not having to be responsible for repairs and maintenance	6
Good landlord / managing agent	5

Other comments:

- Faster/easier to find a tenancy
- Having my independence
- Privacy

15 (b) What don't you like about the Private Rented Sector?	
Comment	Responses
High Rents/Rent increases / No Rent regulation	42
Lack of tenants' rights/weighted against the tenant	17
Insecurity of tenure	16
Landlords/agents not fixing issues or repairs	16
Property condition	14
Bad landlords/agents	12
Landlords care more about profit than tenants	11
Evictions/Threat of Eviction	9
Cost of deposits	9
Contracts not flexible	7
Deposits not returned	6
Can't make decorate or improve the property	6
Lack of licensing/regulation of landlords	5

Other comments:

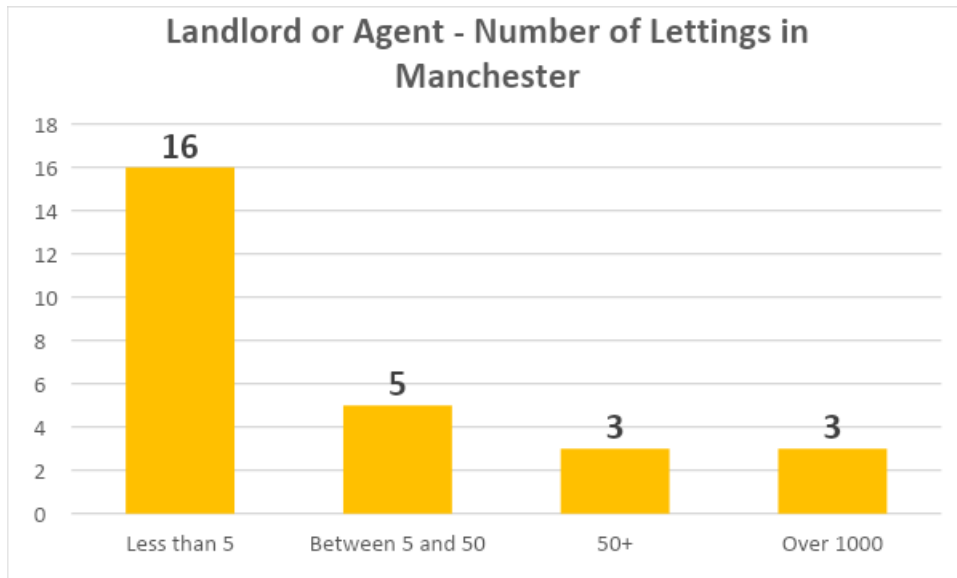
- Bad for my health
- Neighbour problems
- Don't feel connected to local community
- Lack of Affordable / Social Housing
- Discrimination against low income/benefit households
- Agency Fees
- Landlord not vetting tenants who share property

Landlords Questionnaire

Landlords were provided with a different set of questions to answer regarding tenancies, dealing with property issues, landlord accreditation, improvement works and low carbon measures. 32 responses were received of which 24 Landlords and 6 were Managing Agents (2 declined to answer).

The majority of respondents had 5 or fewer properties being let in Manchester, but landlords/agents with larger portfolios also responded including 3 with over 1000 lettings in the city.

A response was also received from one of the larger professional bodies on behalf of their members. They invited 18 of their member letting agents who manage properties in Manchester to take part in an online focus group. The members in the focus group manage a total of 6759 properties across Manchester.



What's important when considering a tenant?



Landlords and agents were asked to rank the following in order of importance when considering a tenant to let a property to.

	Most Important					Least Important	
Ability to pay rent on time	56%	26%	4%	0%	0%	0%	15%
References	30%	19%	11%	15%	11%	4%	11%
Ability to pay the deposit	31%	8%	15%	19%	12%	4%	12%
Legal status	36%	8%	16%	8%	12%	12%	8%
Working	26%	11%	15%	11%	11%	7%	19%
Length of time they want to occupy the property.	12%	12%	12%	15%	12%	27%	12%
Unemployed	21%	8%	0%	4%	4%	13%	50%

By far the most important issue was the ability of the tenant to pay the rent on time, although references, deposit and legal status were also given a high level of importance. There was a very mixed response to the question of how long the tenure would be. The least important issue was whether the tenant was unemployed.



Tenancies

Landlords and agents were asked the same question as residents with regard the proposals to offer more open ended or longer fixed term contracts. 18 (60%) of those who responded did not agree.

5. Would you welcome the opportunity to offer more flexible tenancies?			Response Percent
1	Yes		37.93%
2	No		62.07%

Letting to Homeless households

58% of those who responded said they would let a property to a household which had been homeless.

6. Would you let a property to a household who has been homeless?			Response Percent
1	Yes		57.69%
2	No		42.31%

Landlords and agents who said they wouldn't let to Homeless households gave the following reasons. The most frequently mentioned concerned was that the household would be more likely to default on the rent and concerns about delays in processing Benefit and Universal credit claims. Several of the landlords also only let Student homes.

Why landlords wouldn't let to Households who had been homeless

The most frequently mentioned issues were:

- Default on the Rent
- Properties only suitable for Students
- Housing Benefit / UC Delays









Other issues raised were:

- Damage to property
- Too long to get Bond paid
- Too difficult to manage tenancy
- ASB/Behaviour



Dealing with Issues

Respondents were asked to indicate whether any of the following issues had been reported in the past 6 months. The most commonly reported issue was Heating and Hot Water and Damps and Leaks, Drainage and pests. A small number also mentioned they were asked to deal with smaller repairs that should be the tenant's responsibility.

Of the 16 landlords who answered the question, 100% said their tenants were satisfied with the result.

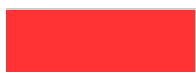

8. Select any problems that have been reported to you in the past six months			Response Percent
1	Damp and leaks		75.00%
2	Heating and hot water		81.25%
3	Doors and windows		43.75%
4	Structural issues		37.50%
5	Gas and Electrical safety		37.50%
6	Fire safety		31.25%
7	Drainage		56.25%
8	Pests		62.50%



The response to whether landlords had ever taken legal action against a tenant was exactly 50/50 split.

10. Have you ever taken legal action against your tenant?			Response Percent
1	Yes		50.00%
2	No		50.00%

Being a Good Landlord

Landlords and agents were asked about training and accreditation. The majority responded positively to both these suggestions, with particularly strong support for training for managing agents.

11. Do you think training for landlords or managing agents is a good idea?			Response Percent
1	Yes		85.71%
2	No		14.29%

12. Do you think landlord accreditation or other similar schemes help to improve the standard of property conditions and property management?			Response Percent
1	Yes		78.57%
2	No		21.43%

A small number of open text responses were received for this question – too few for an analysis but comments included:

“whether they know the legalities or not who intend to be 'good landlords' will always maintain to a good level, those who think they know better do not always”






“If you are a good landlord you will work hard to maintain high standards”

“..beating a landlord with a stick will eventually push them out of the PRS....then fewer properties in the PRS”

“..more regulation and accreditation will push out those landlords and agents with good intentions as the business becomes harder and harder to stay compliant and eventually becomes unviable”

“local authorities should adopt collaborative approaches to tackling issues within the private rented sector rather than introducing licensing schemes”.

The most frequently mentioned place landlords or agents went for advice were professional bodies such as the NLA, RLA, & ARLA. Several also used Manchester Student Homes and the Council Website. Others said they found advice on internet forums, through training events and from housing charities

14. If you need advice and information about being a landlord or managing agent, where would you generally go for this?			
			Response Percent
1	Council website		33.33%
2	National Landlords Association (NLA)		40.74%
3	Residential Landlords Association (RLA)		55.56%
4	Manchester Student Homes (MSH)		33.33%
5	ARLA/Propertymark		14.81%

Landlords were asked to comment on any further assistance or initiatives they thought would help. The most frequently messaged was having a better relationship with the council and better advice or training. Some suggested a tenant referencing service or a database of tenants.

15. What further assistance or initiatives would help landlords or managing agents?

The most frequently mentioned comments were:

- Better dialogue / support from the Council
- Better information / Advice / Training
- Tenant referencing service



- Able to evict bad tenants more quickly
- Landlord Forum

Other comments:

- Tax Relief/Incentives for compliant Landlords
- Clamp down on rogue landlords
- Different markets need different tenancy types
- Mediation services with landlords and tenants
- Rent guarantee scheme
- Less regulation
- Fixed term tenancies for students If s.21 is abolished
- Statutory and industry bodies work closely on enforcement and sector regulation to improve the supply of good quality private rented homes

Improvement Works

The majority of respondents had planned programmes of repairs to their properties. Respondents mentioned a wide range of routine repairs and planned maintenance as well as decorating between tenancies, certifying appliances and safety certificates, major works such as re-roofing and rewiring, kitchen and bathroom replacements and energy efficiency work.

16. Do you regularly plan a programme of improvement works or repairs to your properties?			Response Percent
1	Yes		85.71%
2	No		14.29%

Zero-carbon

Landlords and agents we e asked what measures they were considering to assist with the city’s target for zero-carbon by 2038. The following is a summary of the open-text responses to this question:

18. As a landlord or letting agent what energy efficiency/low carbon measures are you considering?

Comment	Responses
Insulation	11
Efficient boilers	9
Window replacement	6
Smart meters	5
LED Lights/Low Energy Bulbs	5
Energy efficient appliances	3

Other responses:

Too expensive to retrofit old houses, consider external rendering, disposing of portfolio, Travel by bike/public transport, encourage tenants to switch off lights/appliances, Thermal curtains, Solar Panels, Meeting legal energy efficiency targets, promote use of renewable energy suppliers.