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# THE SHARED LIVING SURVEY

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most, if not all of us, have rented our living space at one point or another. Yet, very few of us have had landlords who ever enquired as to how we feel about their property and its amenities, particularly in HMOs, houses of multiple occupancy. And if you're a landlord, it's doubtful you ever thought to ask your tenants about their experience and how your property impacts their lives.

The majority of landlords would likely agree that their intent is to create a nice, safe place that tenants are content to call home. After all, a happy tenant is a stable tenant, one who isn't anxious to move on.

Yet, the number of landlords who succeed in delivering on this concept is decidedly lower than of those who simply assume their tenants are content if they haven't received any unsolicited negative feedback. Further, landlords who continue to focus on their tenants' well-being after the purchase and initial refurbishment of the property are even fewer in number.





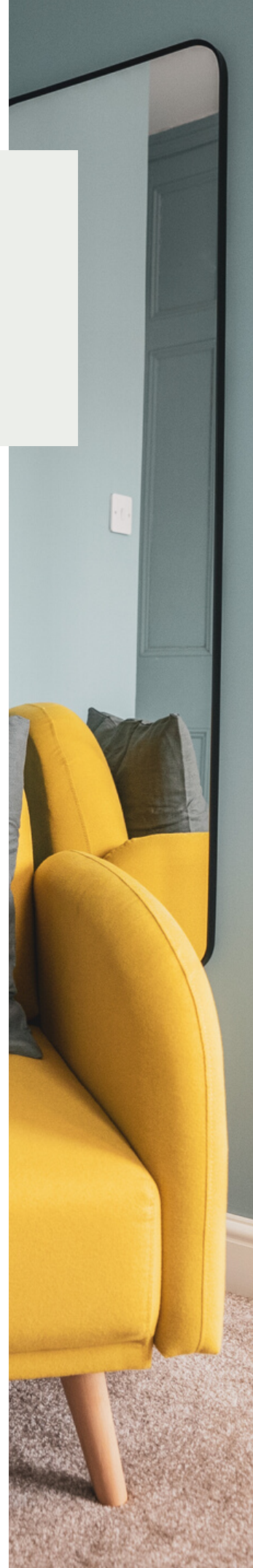
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most landlords see themselves as having invested in property, and not as being invested in their tenant(s). That's a decidedly limited, even one-sided view. And so we set out to find out more about the tenant experience to shed light on the types of features that most attract tenants.

We created a survey to identify various types of tenants, their experiences, and what they do and do not consider important when contemplating and residing in HMOs & shared-living properties. It focuses on:

- tenure
- habits
- location
- preferences

Our goal, by performing this survey, was to give landlords and property developers a better idea of how to improve their tenants' experience. Again, a happy tenant is a stable tenant. The happier they are, the more likely they will remain, thereby fundamentally improving the business operation of a shared living portfolio. Win-win.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a silver pen, poised to fill out a survey form. The form features several rows of checkboxes, some of which are already marked with blue ink. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light beige.

## OUR SURVEY METHOD

We focused our attention on the top 20 UK cities where tenants are more likely to share houses, reaching out to the shared living market in two ways:

- Directly to landlords, who shared the survey with their tenants
- Directly to tenants through social media marketing campaigns

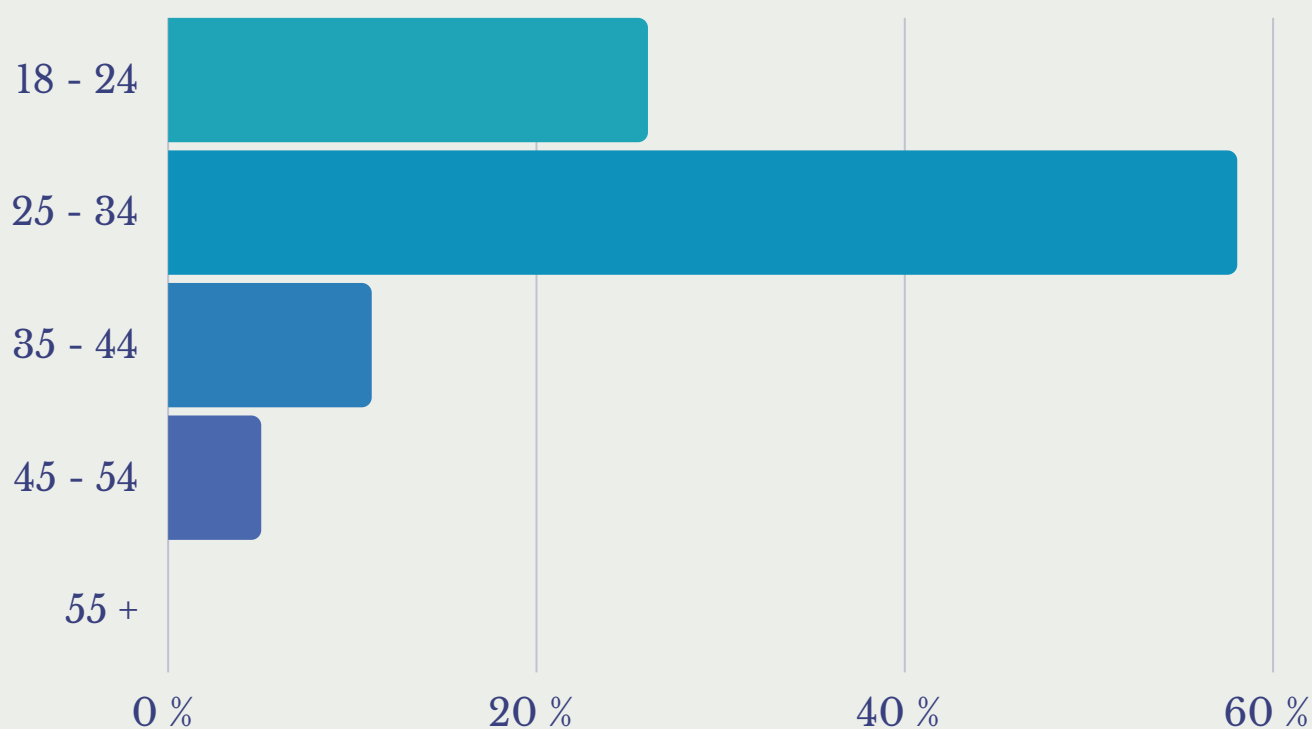
Respondents were asked 20 questions about their experiences and preferences when living in shared accommodation.

*NB: This survey was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.*



# RESPONDENTS

All respondents identified themselves as working professionals based in England and fell within the following age brackets:





# FINDINGS

The first thing we looked at was whether, as is often assumed, there is frequent, short-term turnover among HMO tenants. That did not prove to be the case among respondents. The majority of tenants surveyed viewed no more than three (3) properties before making a decision, with over half of these tenants taking the first room they saw. Respondents indicated they tend to stay for at least six (6) months, and with most staying longer than a year.

When asked, 66% of tenants said they like to socialise with fellow tenants, but the comfort and convenience of their private space and facilities took precedence over those of communal spaces. That told us that their relationship with fellow tenants (again, pre-pandemic) proved less important than we had assumed.

Location also proved a priority for tenants. A large majority of tenants surveyed want to live within 30 minutes of their place of work, regardless of their mode of transport. Quality of internet access (WiFi) also ranks high on the list of most important features offered, with 95% of respondents stating that it ranges from important to very important in their choice of home.

What ranked lowest? The availability of cycle storage. A majority of tenants surveyed own cars and drive to work, with the remainder taking public transport. None indicated they cycle to work, even in the most congested cities.



# CONCLUSION

Landlords would do well to prioritise the facilities provided in private tenant spaces, such as the provision of en-suites and spacious rooms.

Second to that is to assess the property and create spaces and opportunities conducive to tenants socialising. While the majority of tenants surveyed indicate they do socialise with the other tenants in their house, they don't rank the amenities found in the communal spaces above those found in their private space.

Does this mean a sense of community is formed more effectively outside of the house?

The survey does not indicate the answer to that, but we can infer that giving people space to socialise is still important. The ability to socialise with one's fellow tenants is proportional to longer tenancies, so it is indeed in the interests of both the landlord and tenant to create the sense of community.





# CONCLUSION

Can the landlord do anything to support this? Perhaps. Facilitating social events, in and out of the house, such as movie nights, quiz nights, pizza and beer events, dinner out, etc.

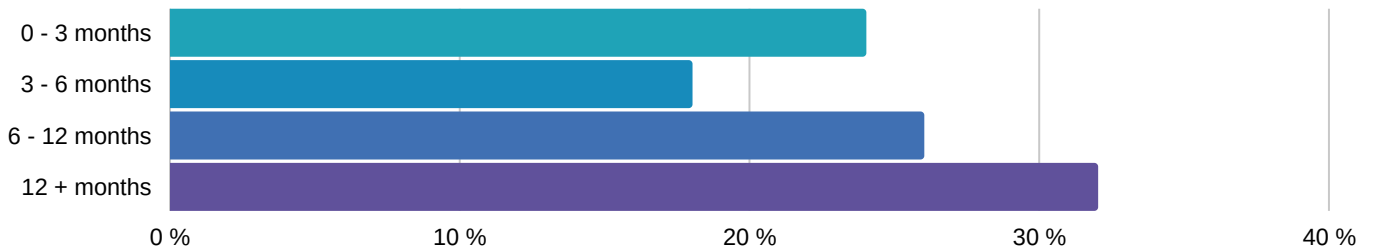
Since 95% of tenants surveyed indicated that the quality of internet access/WiFi is an important factor, we propose that landlords include WiFi speed in their adverts, as evidenced by online speed test results, to demonstrate that their property's WiFi is superior. Up-spec the router given by the internet service provider and install wireless access points (WAPs). Do not rely on signal boosters to provide a good quality service.

Focusing on these provisions to tenants will lead to fewer complaints and longer tenancy durations.

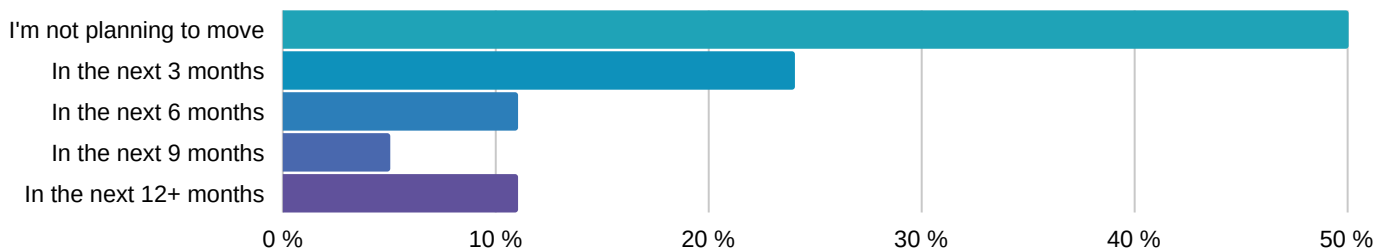


# TENANCY DURATION

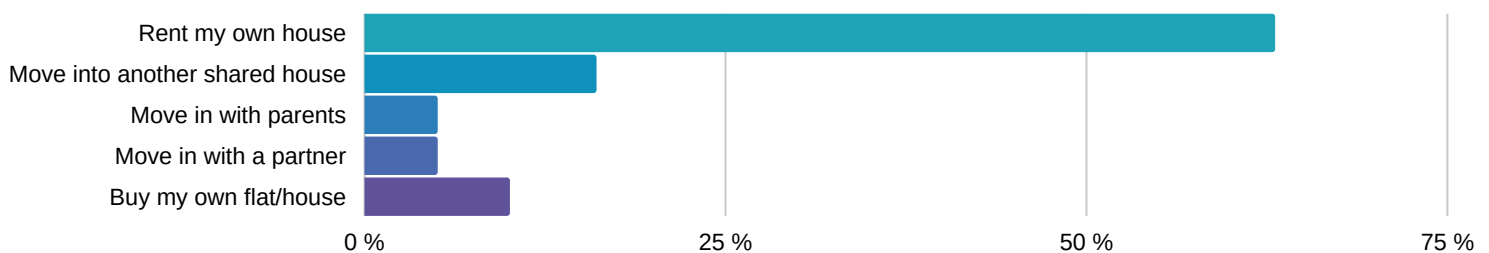
## How long have you lived in your current shared house?



## Are you planning to move?



## When you move, where are you planning to live?



Fifty-eight per cent of tenants surveyed have lived in their current shared house for at least six (6) months, with the largest proportion (32%) having lived in the property for at least a year.

Coupled with the fact that 50% of respondents say they are not planning to move, and another 11% stating they have no plans to move for at least a year, shared accommodation appears to be viewed with a more long-term expectation by tenants. This can be seen as 75% of tenants surveyed saying they do not intend to relocate in the next three months.

While 73% of tenants surveyed ultimately hope to rent or purchase a flat or house some day in which they (and possibly any future family) are the sole occupants, the assumption that HMO tenancy is viewed by tenants as a mere interim, transient housing option is not supported by the result of this survey.

# TENANT HABITS

**66%** of tenants

like to spend time with their housemates

**58%** of tenants

do not want to share a bathroom

**53%** of tenants

do not own a car

**66%** of tenants

are not willing to share a kitchen with more than  
2 - 3 people

**53%** of tenants

prefer to report maintenance problems by  
text message

When it comes to tenant habits, about two thirds of tenants surveyed indicated they welcome socialising with their housemates. That means that good-sized, good-quality shared space is a must if an HMO is to be viewed favourably by the majority of tenants surveyed.





As much as tenants like to socialise, they prefer not to share bathrooms, making en-suite rooms far more attractive and more likely to command a premium rent.

Tenants are, however, generally willing to share a kitchen with up to three (3) other people. Does this mean that the ideal HMO will feature multiple kitchens to accommodate up to four tenants apiece? Probably not. But the way kitchens are designed can make a difference, such as featuring a second, smaller cooking space to accommodate additional users.

Fifty-three per cent of tenants surveyed said they did not own a car. Our initial assumption was that there would be even fewer car owners, given that a touted feature of HMOs is their typical convenient positioning close to public transport. The survey results indicate that parking availability needs to be considered for at least half the occupants of a house, on average.

More than half of tenants indicated a preference for communicating with landlords via phone, specifically by text message. While not surprising in this day and age, it demonstrates the attraction of technology driving landlord/agent/tenant communication.

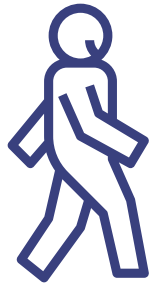


# TRAVEL TO WORK

Main modes of travel to work:



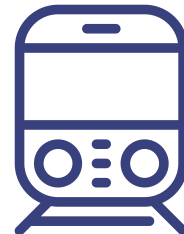
58%



16%



16%



8%

68%

of tenants

live within  
30 min. of workplace

84%

of tenants

are happy  
with their commute

Of those surveyed, the majority use a car to get to work; the remainder walk or use public transport. (Again, this survey was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so a number of tenants may have found themselves unexpectedly having to work from home, with some perhaps having this become a permanent or semi-permanent situation.) The fact that more than half commute to work by car was surprising given that most HMOs are located near public transport.

A key factor appears to be the time it takes to get to work. Over two thirds of those surveyed chose residences they knew to be within 30 minutes of their workplace, with 84% indicating they were content with how long it takes them to get to work.





# PRIORITIES WHEN CHOOSING A ROOM

	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Very Important
Number of Occupants	11 %	29 %	26 %	18 %	16 %
Housemate Relationships	21 %	21 %	21 %	24 %	13 %
En Suite Bathroom	16 %	29 %	3 %	18 %	34 %
Travel Time to Work	8 %	3 %	39 %	18 %	32 %
Distance from Local Shops	13 %	32 %	11 %	18 %	26 %
Parking Space	34 %	13 %	18 %	16 %	18 %
Cycle Storage	63 %	16 %	13 %	3 %	5 %
Bathroom Location	11 %	34 %	35 %	3 %	18 %
Kitchen Size	5 %	39 %	25 %	13 %	18 %
Lounge Size	18 %	39 %	19 %	16 %	8 %
Bedroom Size	0 %	18 %	37 %	16 %	29 %
Private Cooking Facilities	34 %	26 %	21 %	11 %	8 %
Personal Storage Space	3 %	8 %	47 %	24 %	18 %
Personal Desk Space	29 %	34 %	13 %	13 %	11 %
WIFI Speed	5 %	0 %	26 %	37 %	32 %

Here, we can see that the following are important to the majority of housemates:

- En suites
- Reasonable travel time to work
- Bedroom size
- The amount of personal storage space
- WiFi speed



The following did not rank as important to the majority of housemates:

- The number of occupants
- The location of the bedroom
- Kitchen size
- Private cooking facilities
- Designated parking space
- Cycle storage
- Lounge size
- Relationships with housemates
- Personal desk space

One point, the distance from local shops, was more evenly split, with 45% indicating it had little to no importance in their decision as to where to rent, and 44% indicating it was fairly to very important.

These points generally indicate that the majority of housemates are more concerned about themselves than the community they live in. When given a choice, they prefer a large room that features an en-suite over a smaller room in a home with lots of communal living area. This makes sense when you consider that when a prospective tenant does not know anyone else in the house, they will prioritise their individual needs and comfort over group-orientated features.



In conclusion, we found these survey results to be enlightening, helping to dispel such myths as that HMO landlords tend to experience high turnover among their tenants, and highlighting thus how important first impressions are when presenting a property.

When you consider that more than three out of four prospective tenants view no more than three houses, and virtually half of all prospective tenants make their minds up to rent on the spot when the features and conveniences they desire most, such as quality internet, sufficient personal space, complete with en suite bathrooms, and a relatively convenient commute, are present, it's evident that sufficient forethought and planning in the design of the space within the house gives a landlord a significant edge in maintaining full occupancy.

It's important to emphasise that this survey was carried out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent surveys of tenants in the near future may reflect some or even substantive changes in the priorities and expectations of tenants, such as in-house desk/work spaces. Landlords who anticipate such changes may find themselves in a stronger position to rent rooms successfully.

