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**Consultation on selective and
additional (HMO) housing
licensing in Sefton**

Sefton Council

Final Report

July 2017



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Project details and acknowledgements

Title	Consultation on selective and additional (HMO) housing licensing in Sefton
Client	Sefton Council
Project number	16191
Author	Karen Etheridge
Research Manager	Karen Etheridge

M·E·L Research would like to thank the council for their support with the consultation. We would also like to thank residents, tenants, landlords and agents in the borough and neighbouring boroughs for taking part in the consultation. Thanks also go to the stakeholders that contributed their views for the consultation.

M·E·L Research

2nd Floor, 1 Ashted Lock, Birmingham Science Park Aston, Birmingham. B7 4AZ

Email: info@melresearch.co.uk

Web: www.melresearch.co.uk

Tel: 0121 604 4664



Outline of the headline findings

This summary provides the headline findings from the consultation undertaken in Sefton on the proposal to introduce Selective Licensing in the Bootle area and Additional (HMO) Licensing in parts of Seaforth and Waterloo, Brighton-le-Sands and central Southport. In total 1,997 respondents took part in the survey, along with verbal feedback provided via other forums. The consultation period spanned 12-weeks, from the 1st April 2017 to the 24th June 2017. Opportunities to participate in the consultation were provided as follows:

- Online survey (129 respondents)
- Postal survey of householders in Bootle (765 respondents)
- Face to face residents survey across the whole of Sefton (1099 respondents)
- Six public meetings (approx. 45 attendees) and attendance at 2 other public events
- Stakeholders interviews (10 respondents)
- Online survey for neighbouring boroughs (4 respondents).

Key Headlines

Proposal for Selective Licensing in Bootle

Table 1: Responses on Selective Licensing in Bootle proposal (by respondent group)

	Overall	Landlords	PRS tenants	Residents
Support proposal for SL	85%	44%	78%	87%
Do not support SL	10%	52%	14%	8%
<i>Don't know</i>	5%	4%	7%	5%
Positive impact	71%	27%	65%	72%
Negative impact	8%	46%	12%	7%
No impact	12%	21%	11%	12%
Fees for SL reasonable	69%	22%	61%	71%
Fees for SL unreasonable	21%	77%	29%	19%
<i>Don't know</i>	10%	1%	11%	10%

Proposal for Additional (HMO) Licensing in parts of the borough

Table 2: Responses on Additional (HMO) Licensing proposal in parts of the borough (by respondent group)

	Overall	Landlords	PRS tenants	Residents
Support proposal for SL	84%	50%	76%	85%
Do not support SL	10%	40%	14%	9%
<i>Don't know</i>	6%	10%	11%	6%
Positive impact	67%	31%	63%	68%
Negative impact	9%	35%	13%	8%
No impact	15%	22%	11%	14%
Fees for SL reasonable	66%	23%	59%	68%
Fees for SL unreasonable	21%	66%	28%	20%
<i>Don't know</i>	12%	11%	13%	12%

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary provides the main findings from the consultation undertaken in Sefton on the proposals to introduce Selective Licensing in the Bootle area and Additional (HMO) Licensing in parts of Seaforth and Waterloo, Brighton-le-Sands and central Southport. The quantitative results shown below are derived from three key methods of consultation (the neighbouring boroughs survey is not included due to only 10 respondents) – a residents’ survey (face-to-face survey with a representative sample of 1,099 respondents across the borough), an online consultation (129 respondents) and postal survey received from 765 residents in Bootle (sent to 17,543 households). Qualitative feedback was recorded at the public meetings, via verbal and written responses given from interested parties.

The findings in this report have also taken into account views of other stakeholders, gathered from email correspondence, online forms, letters and semi-structured qualitative telephone interviews. This includes Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire and Rescue, a neighbouring borough council, associations representing landlords and managing agents, businesses and third sector organisations working within or interested in the private rented sector, along with Sefton’s public health team.

The results include support for and likely impact on respondents for a proposal that the council is considering introducing to improve the private rented sector:

- Implement a selective licensing scheme in Bootle
- Implement an additional licensing scheme in selected areas of the borough.

The consultation also looked at views on the proposed licensing costs, perceptions of the private rented sector in Sefton, privately renting tenants’ experiences of living in the Sefton, and landlords experiences of renting out property in Sefton.

Key findings

Introduce Selective Licensing in Bootle

- **85% of respondents support the proposal to introduce Selective Licensing in Bootle, whilst 10% do not (5% don’t know).**
 - Just over half of landlords (52%) do not support the proposal, whilst under half (44%) support it
 - Over three quarters of PRS tenants (78%) support the proposal, whilst 14% do not support it
 - Just under nine out of ten residents (87%) support the proposal, whilst 8% do not support it
 - Almost nine out of ten respondents to the postal survey in Bootle (88%), support the proposal. Only 5% do not support it.

- **Around seven out of ten respondents (71%) feel Selective Licensing will have a positive impact on them, whilst 8% feel it will be negative (12% it will have no impact).**
 - Just under half of landlords (46%) feel it will have a negative impact on them, whilst around a quarter (26%) feel it will have a positive impact. A fifth (21%) feel it will have no impact on them
 - Around two thirds of PRS tenants (65%) feel it will have a positive impact on them, whilst 12% feel it will be negative and 11% no impact
 - Just over seven out of ten residents (72%) feel it will have a positive impact on them, whilst only 7% feel it will be negative and 12% no impact
 - Almost seven out of ten respondents to the postal survey in Bootle (68%), feel it will have a positive impact on them. Only 5% feel it will have a negative impact.

- **69% of respondents feel the proposed Selective licensing fee is reasonable, whilst 21% feel it is unreasonable (10% don't know)**
 - Around three quarters of landlords (77%) feel the proposed fees are unreasonable, whilst around fifth (22%) feel they are reasonable
 - Around six out of ten PRS tenants (61%) feel the fees are reasonable, whilst 29% feel they are unreasonable
 - Just over seven out of ten residents (71%) feel the fees are reasonable, whilst 19% feel they are unreasonable
 - Around three quarters of respondents to the postal survey in Bootle (73%), feel the fees are reasonable, and 14% feel they are unreasonable.

Introduce Additional (HMO) Licensing in parts of Waterloo, Brighton-le-Sands/Seaforth and central Southport

- **84% of respondents support the proposal to introduce Additional Licensing whilst 10% do not (6% don't know)**
 - Half of landlords (50%) support the proposal, whilst four out of ten (40%) do not support it
 - Around three quarters of PRS tenants (76%) support the proposal, whilst 14% do not support it
 - 85% of residents support the proposal, whilst 9% do not support it.

- **Around two thirds of respondents (67%) feel Additional Licensing will have a positive impact on them, whilst 9% feel it will be negative (15% it will have no impact)**
 - Around a third of landlords (35%) feel it will have a negative impact on them, whilst three out of ten (31%) feel it will have a positive impact. Around a fifth (22%) feel it will have no impact
 - Around two thirds of PRS tenants (63%) feel it will have a positive impact on them, whilst 13% feel it will be negative and 11% no impact
 - Just over two thirds of residents (68%) feel it will have a positive impact on them, whilst only 8% feel it will be negative and 14% no impact.

- **66% of respondents feel the proposed Additional licensing fee is reasonable, whilst 21% feel it is unreasonable (12% don't know)**
 - Two thirds of landlords (66%) feel the proposed fees are unreasonable, whilst just under a quarter (23%) feel they are reasonable
 - Just under six out of ten PRS tenants (59%) feel the fees are reasonable, whilst 28% feel they are unreasonable
 - Just over two thirds of residents (68%) feel the fees are reasonable, whilst 20% feel they are unreasonable.

Keep things as they are

- **Only 27% of respondents support keeping things as they are, whilst 63% do not (10% don't know)**
 - Three quarters of landlords (76%) support keeping things as they are, whilst a fifth (19%) do not
 - Over a third of PRS tenants (36%) support the proposal, whilst over half (54%) do not
 - A quarter of residents (26%) support the proposal, whilst 65% do not.
- **Only 8% of respondents feel keeping things as they are will have a positive impact on them, whilst 49% feel it will be negative (29% it will have no impact)**
 - A third of landlords (33%) feel this will have a positive impact on them, whilst 12% feel it will have a negative impact. 45% feel it will have no impact
 - Only 12% of PRS tenants feel this will have a positive impact on them, whilst 43% feel it will be negative and 30% no impact
 - Only 8% of residents feel this will have a positive impact on them, whilst half (50%) feel it will be negative and 28% no impact.

Stakeholder views on licensing proposals

The main findings that came out of the stakeholder interviews are as follows:

- There is a need to tackle poor housing conditions in the Private rented sector in Sefton
- Landlords should be more accountable for the condition of their properties and the tenants they house in them
- There is a concern that vulnerable tenants may be more vulnerable if a licensing scheme is introduced
- Licensing should be used to help improve information sharing about bad landlords and bad tenants between agencies and others working in and around the PRS
- There is a concern that the costs from licensing fees will be passed onto tenants, many of whom are already suffering as a result of universal credit and their general economic status
- Concerns that the council already has powers at its disposal to deal with most of these issues, but is not using them
- Any schemes need to be monitored and enforced to have any effect at all
- Some question where the evidence is that licensing is working in areas where it has already been introduced

- Some are concerned about expectations being placed on landlords to deal with ASB, rubbish and other tenant issues are unreasonable
- There may be other ways to tackle the issues without resorting to licensing.

Views from the public meetings and other feedback on proposals

The main findings and queries that came out of the public meetings (mainly landlord issues and concerns) and other feedback provided via the consultation are as follows:

- What evidence is the proposed licensing schemes being built on (both evidence gathered on rogue landlords in Sefton, and evidence that licensing schemes work)?
- Calculation and payment of the costs and fees and what these cover
- Whether the funds from licensing can be used for enforcement, and how it will be enforced?
- What support is going to be provided for landlord and agents?
- Whether there is going to be an opportunity for landlords and agents to engage directly with decision makers?
- Whether the issue around rogue tenants and support needed by landlords is going to be tackled under licensing?
- Arrangements for payment of fees is unreasonable (5 years up front)
- Bad landlords should alone be targeted, not good landlords.

Perceptions of the Private Rented Sector in Sefton

Residents were asked a number of questions about their perceptions of the PRS and key findings are that:

ASB:

- A quarter (26%) have been affected by anti-social behaviour (ASB) and 27% have witnessed ASB
- This was much higher for Bootle postal survey respondents (50% affected by and 45% witnessed ASB).

PRS standards

- 47% feel that private rented properties in their area are maintained to a good standard, whilst 34% do not
- This was lower for Bootle postal survey respondents (56% not maintained to a good standard)
- A higher proportion of landlords feel they are maintained to a good standard (74%).

Landlords and letting agents

- 69% feel landlords and letting agents act responsibly in letting, managing and maintaining their properties
- 90% of landlords feel they act responsibly.

Landlord experiences in Sefton

Landlords were asked a number of questions about experiences of renting properties out in Sefton. The key findings are that:

- 75% of respondents have had problems with rent arrears, followed by damage to the property (49%) and not keeping it in good condition (48%)
- A poor perception of private landlords or properties is the biggest concern to landlords (mean score of 5 out of 10), followed by a poor perception of tenants (4.7) and a high turnover of tenants (3.9).

Privately renting tenant experiences in Sefton

PRS tenants were asked a number of questions about experiences of renting properties in Sefton. The key findings are that:

- 79% of respondents are satisfied with the overall quality of their home, and 73% with repairs and maintenance done on the property. Satisfaction with the cleanliness of shared communal areas (such as bathrooms, kitchens etc.) is slightly lower (65%)
- 'Other' issues, rubbish and litter, damp and mould, disrepair and poor management of properties all rate over 30% as a major/minor problem
- Respondents to the Bootle postal survey were more negative across the board, with 55% feeling rubbish and litter is a major/minor problem, followed by damp or mould (49%).

Introduction

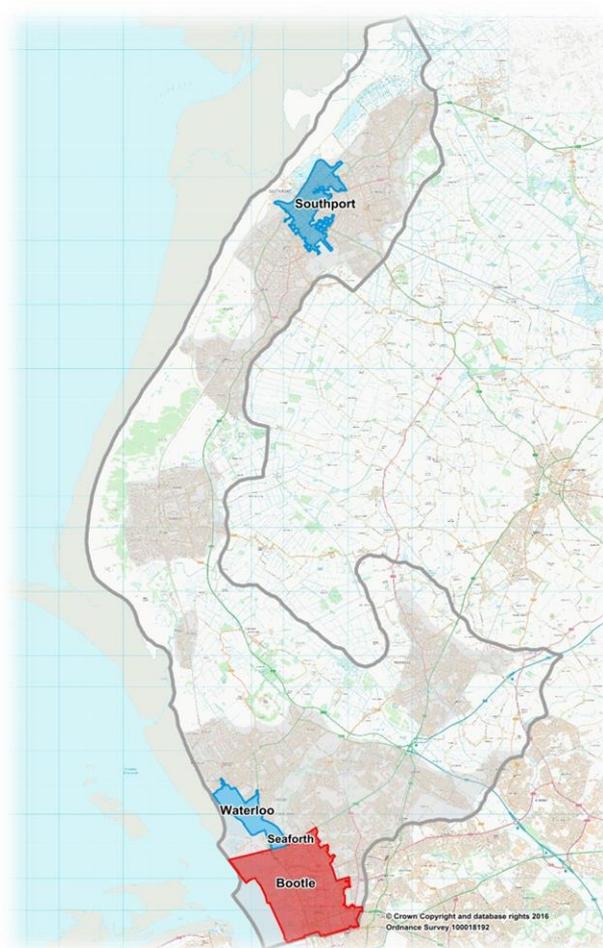
Background

Sefton's private rented sector (PRS) has increased by 64% between 2001 and 2011 and has continued to grow. Owner occupation fell from 86,669 to 83,801 over the same period. In six wards, located in Southport, Waterloo/Seaforth and Bootle, the PRS exceeds the national average [2011 census]. The PRS now accounts for 20% of all dwellings nationally, and this is likely to increase to 22-25% over the next decade. The nature of the sector is also changing with families constituting the most common household type renting privately.

Sefton Council believes that a well-managed PRS plays an important role in meeting their housing needs. However, there is concern around ASB issues and poor property condition, with the 2013 Sefton house condition survey finding that 24% of privately rented property failed to meet the decent homes standard, compared to 16% of all private housing in the borough.

Sefton Council is proposing to introduce both Selective and Additional (HMO) Licensing schemes for privately rented properties across selected areas of the Borough. The council believes that licensing will lead to an improvement of management and property conditions across the designated areas, and members of Sefton's Housing Standards Team will be available to offer advice and support to both landlord and tenant.

As part of the licensing considerations, Sefton Borough Council commissioned M·E·L Research, as an independent research organisation, in early 2017 to undertake a consultation on the proposal to introduce Selective Licensing and Additional Licensing in identified parts of the borough.



Public consultation

The public consultation took place over a 12-week period (1st April 2017 to the 24th June 2017). A range of methods to consult with landlords, local residents, tenants, businesses and organisation in Sefton, local stakeholders and neighbouring local authority areas, were adopted for the consultation.

Proposals

The consultation focused on the degree to which respondents support the proposal being considered by the council, along with the likely impact they are to have on respondents around:

- Introducing a Selective Licensing scheme in Bootle
- Introducing an Additional (HMO) Licensing scheme in parts of parts of Seaforth and Waterloo, Brighton-le-Sands and central Southport.

The consultation also considered views on the proposed licensing costs, perceptions of the private rented sector in Sefton, privately renting tenants' experiences of living in the Sefton, and landlords' experiences of renting out property in Sefton.

Consultation methods and profile of respondents

Six main methods were used to gather responses for the consultation. These are detailed below, along with the responses rates received by survey method.

1. Residents survey across Sefton

A door-to-door, face-to-face survey was undertaken with 1,099 residents from across the borough and results are broadly representative by ward, gender and age. However, as response rates from younger residents were lower than we had targeted, the data is weighted by age. Based on a total estimated population (Census 2011) of 273,790 in the borough, the results provide a confidence interval of +/-3% based on a 50% statistic at the 95% confidence level. This means that if 50% of the sample supported any proposal then the real figure, had the whole borough been interviewed, lies somewhere between 47% and 53%. A breakdown by ward, age and gender is provided in the table overleaf. The figures were then weighted by age as there was a slightly under-representation by the younger age groups, and over-representation by the older age group.

Table 3: Breakdown of respondents to the residents survey by ward, gender and age (unweighted)

Counts Ward/ Respondents	Total	Age							Gender	
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	Prefer not to say	Male	Female
Ainsdale	52	2	2	7	12	7	22	-	26	26
Birkdale	50	4	8	10	5	9	14	-	24	26
Blundellsands	47	5	5	10	8	9	10	-	24	23
Cambridge	53	4	5	5	11	8	20	-	27	26
Church	49	5	8	9	9	10	8	-	25	24
Derby	47	1	10	6	4	7	19	-	28	19
Duke's	58	5	6	9	10	16	12	-	23	35
Ford	48	6	10	5	10	8	9	-	20	28
Harington	48	1	6	4	6	6	25	-	25	23
Kew	50	4	9	8	13	9	7	-	25	25
Linacre	48	4	10	6	9	7	12	-	23	25
Litherland	46	1	14	7	10	4	10	-	23	23
Manor	51	4	4	8	11	10	14	-	28	23
Meols	50	1	5	5	5	8	26	-	26	24
Molyneux	51	5	5	5	12	12	12	-	25	26
Netherton and Orrell	49	7	7	7	10	9	9	-	24	25
Norwood	57	5	12	11	11	5	12	1	29	28
Park	47	1	4	8	8	10	16	-	22	25
Ravenmeols	48	-	7	6	13	3	19	-	28	20
St Oswald	46	3	11	5	5	6	16	-	15	31
Sudell	51	2	5	7	7	13	17	-	21	30
Victoria	53	2	9	6	12	13	11	-	23	30
TOTAL	1099	72	162	154	201	189	320	1	534	565

Each respondent was asked whether they were a resident, and/or a landlord, and/or a managing agent and/or classified themselves in some other way. A breakdown of responses by type is provided in the table below:

Table 4: Respondent profile to the residents' survey

Respondent profile	Number	% of responses
A resident of Sefton	1095	99.64%
and/or a landlord with a property (or number of properties) in Sefton	24	2.18%
and/or a landlord with properties in neighbouring boroughs.	10	0.91%
and or/ an agent managing properties in Sefton	1	0.09%
and/or a business or organisation operating in Sefton	2	0.18%
and/or other	0	0%

(multiple answers possible)

2. Postal survey in Bootle

A postal survey was sent to 17,543 households in Bootle that may be affected by a selective licensing designation, using the council's Gazetteer file. This comprised of one mailing only, with no follow-up reminders. In total, 765 respondents returned a postal survey or completed it over the telephone (4% response rate).

Table 5: Respondent profile to the postal survey in Bootle

Respondent profile	Number	% of responses
A resident of Sefton	744	97.26%
and/or a landlord with a property (or number of properties) in Sefton	19	2.48%
and/or a landlord with properties in neighbouring boroughs.	6	0.78%
and or/ an agent managing properties in Sefton	1	0.13%
and/or a business or organisation operating in Sefton	9	1.18%
and/or other	7	0.92%

(multiple answers possible)

3. Online consultation

The online consultation was widely promoted by the council (see Appendix 2 for full details of all activities undertaken to promote the consultation) and encouraged landlords, agents, tenants, residents and other interested parties to participate. In total, 129 responses were received to the online consultation. A breakdown of responses by respondent type is provided in the table below:

Table 6: Respondent profile to the online survey

Respondent profile	Number	% of responses
A resident of Sefton	82	63.57%
and/or a landlord with a property (or number of properties) in Sefton	45	34.88%
and/or a landlord with properties in neighbouring boroughs.	13	10.08%
and or/ an agent managing properties in Sefton	6	4.65%
and/or a business or organisation operating in Sefton	6	4.65%
and/or other	7	5.43%

(multiple answers possible)

It should be noted that due to the relatively small number of respondents participating in the online survey and the fact that the survey was self-selection (i.e. biases can arise because individuals select to take part), the results are not representative of the borough as a whole.

4. Stakeholder consultation

Interviews with a number of stakeholders were undertaken by M·E·L Research staff, as part of the consultation. The council provided a list of potential stakeholders and although attempts were made to contact all organisations, only ten took part in the consultation - eight via telephone interviews and two via

written responses. Consultation was undertaken across a range of stakeholders, which included the Police, Fire and Rescue, a neighbouring council, third sector and other organisations working in the housing field in Sefton and public health. In addition, the National Landlords Association (NLA) and Residential Landlords Association (RLA) submitted written responses to the consultation. All written responses are included in the Appendices.

Table 7: Stakeholder profile

Respondent profile	No of stakeholders spoken to
Merseyside Police	2
Merseyside Fire and Rescue	1
Local third sector providers	3
Neighbouring local authority	1
Landlords associations/organisations	2
Public Health	1
TOTAL	10

5. Public meetings

A number of public meetings to introduce the proposal were run by M·E·L Research, which were kept independent from the council and no officers were present, so that honest and independent feedback could be gathered as part of the process. In total, seven meetings were advertised, with five being run in May and two in June due to additional interest in the Bootle area. Although the meetings required interested parties to sign up to give a steer on the numbers expected (for health and safety and logistical reasons), additional attendees turned out without booking, therefore we were unable to gather all names and final numbers. Although we had interest in both meetings in June, no attendees turned out to the first advertised meeting. The dates, times, venue and approximate number of attendees for the sessions that ran are presented below.

Table 8: Public meeting attendees

Date/time	Venue	Approx. no of attendees
Thursday 18th May 2017: 1pm - 2.30pm	Southport (Southport Community Centre)	11
Thursday 18th May 2017: 7pm - 8.30pm	Southport (Southport Community Centre)	8
Friday 19th May 2017: 12pm - 1.30pm	Bootle (Linacre Mission)	4
Friday 19th May 2017: 3pm - 4.30pm	Bootle (Linacre Mission)	21
Thursday 22 nd June 2017: 7pm - 8.30pm	Bootle (Linacre Mission)	1
TOTAL		45

In addition, M·E·L Research was present at the Cakes of the World open day in Southport on the 29th April 2017, where local residents from migrant communities attended. M·E·L Research also attended an 'Invest Sefton' breakfast business forum for local businesses in Bootle, on Friday 19th May 2017.

6. Online consultation with neighbouring borough councils

An online consultation with neighbouring boroughs was sent by the council and promoted by neighbouring councils, encouraging local residents, landlords, tenants and other interested parties to participate. In total, only ten responses were received. Due to there being such a small number, these have not been included within the main report. However, the results from this survey are provided in Appendix 4.

Reporting conventions

We have used the term 'landlord' in this report to collectively refer to both landlords and/or their managing agents.

Owing to the rounding of numbers, percentages displayed visually on graphs or charts in the report may not always add up to 100% and may differ slightly when compared with the text. The figures provided in the text should always be used. For some questions, respondents could give more than one response (multi choice). For these questions, the percentage for each response is calculated as a percentage of the total number of respondents and therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.

The consultation findings have been analysed overall, combining results by the different methods of consultation (Residents' survey, postal survey and online consultation), by method of consultation and by type of respondent (landlord/agent or tenant/resident).

Results

This section of the report presents the results from the consultation. Results from the online neighbouring borough consultation are not included in this section due to there being such a small number of responses (10). These are provided in Appendix 4.

Introduce selective licensing in Bootle

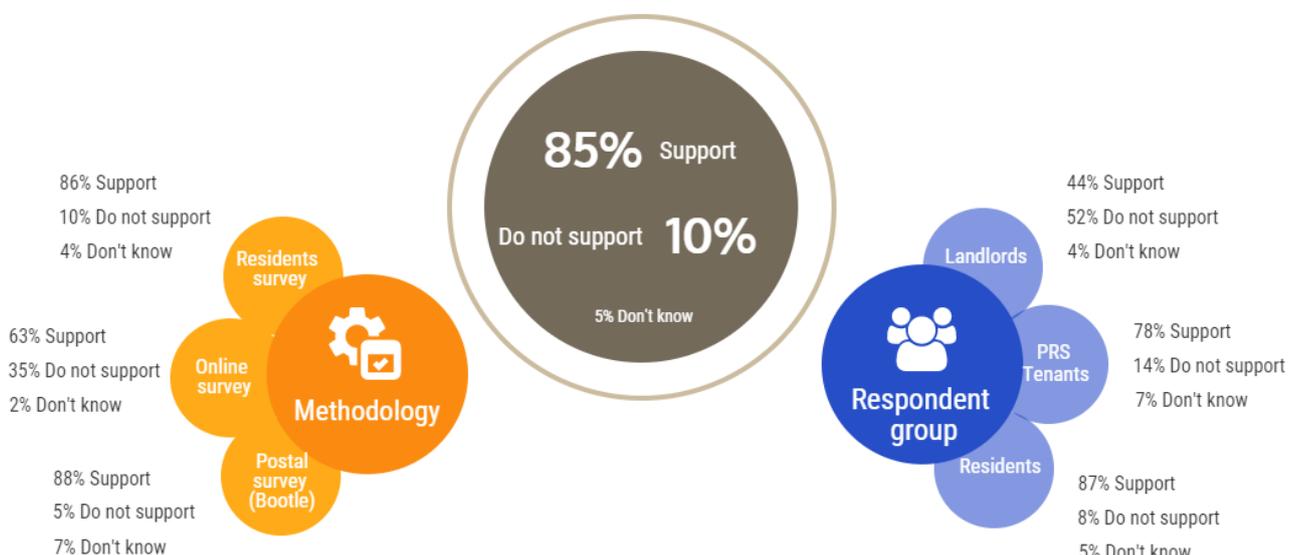
“This proposal would involve introducing a licensing scheme in Bootle which has been chosen based on evidence. All private sector landlords renting a property in the area would require a licence and have to meet the necessary criteria in order to hold a licence”.

Introducing a selective licensing scheme in Bootle is generally perceived to be a positive option for the council to pursue, with 85% in support overall, and only 10% who do not support it.

The chart below shows the differing levels of support or lack of support for the proposal by the different methodology adopted for the consultation (indicated in orange), and by the different respondent groups (indicated in blue). These show that support is highest amongst those who took part in the postal survey for Bootle (88% in support), followed by the residents survey (86% in support), and lowest amongst those who took part in the online survey (63% in support and 35% do not support).

Residents in Sefton are very positive, with 87% in support of selective licensing, and over three quarters (78%) of privately renting tenants also in support. Only 14% do not support selective licensing. Landlords are slightly more negative than positive, with 44% in support and 52% who do not support selective licensing.

Figure 1: Support for introducing Selective Licensing in Bootle (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)



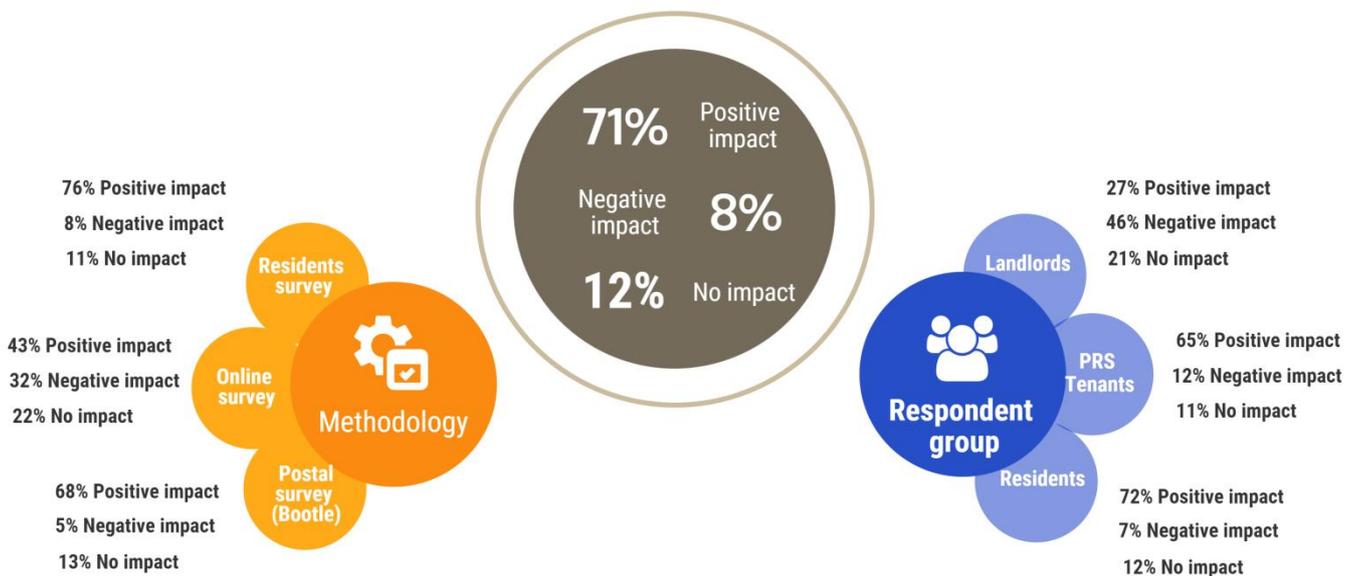
Likely impact on respondents

Respondents were then asked what impact, if any, introducing a selective licensing scheme would have on them. Seven out of ten respondents overall (71%) feel it will have a positive impact and only 8% feel it will have a negative impact. 12% feel it will have no impact (8% don't know what impact it will have on them).

Respondents via the residents survey are most positive, with around three quarters (76%), feeling it will have a positive impact, whilst only 8% feel it will be negative (6% don't know). Respondents to the postal survey are also positive, with just over two thirds (68%) saying it will have a positive impact and only 5% a negative impact (13% don't know). Respondents to the online survey are least positive, with 43% feeling it will have a positive impact and around a third (32%) saying it will have a negative impact. However, around a fifth (22%) says it will have no impact (3% don't know).

Residents in Sefton are again very positive, with over seven out of ten (72%) saying selective licensing will have a positive impact, and only 7% saying it will have a negative impact (9% don't know). Around two thirds (65%) of privately renting tenants feel it will have a positive impact, whilst 12% feel it will be negative (13% don't know). Landlords are again more negative, with 46% saying it will have a negative impact on them, although over a quarter (27%) say it will have a positive impact. Around a fifth of landlords (21%) feel it will have no impact on them (6% don't know).

Figure 2: Likely impact of introducing Selective Licensing in Bootle on respondents (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)

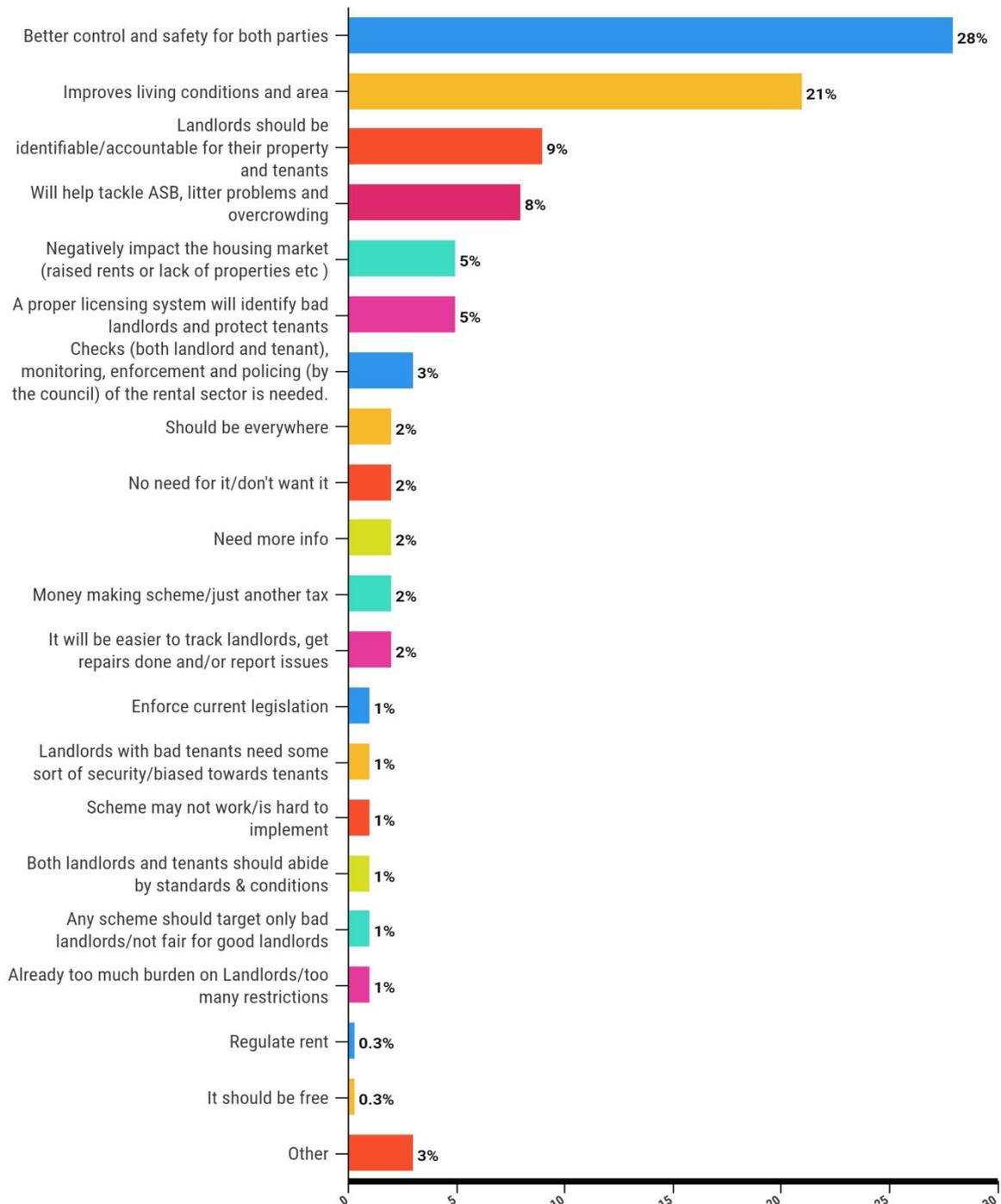


Respondent comments on selective licensing

Respondents were invited to add any further comments they may wish to add about selective licensing. These results have been grouped into themes, then analysed. In total, around 1,479 distinct comments were analysed.

The most common comment from respondents is that there will be better control and safety for both parties (i.e. landlords and tenants) (28% of comments). This was followed by comments that licensing will improve conditions and the area (21%).

Figure 3: Comments on Selective Licensing proposal for introduction in Bootle (overall)



Selective licensing fees

As part of the consultation, respondents were asked to comment on the proposed fees for the selective licensing scheme of £695 for a five year licence (excluding any discount or additional costs). Further information on how the fees have been calculated was provided within the consultation document.

Around seven out of ten (69%) respondents to the consultation feel that the proposed selective licensing fee is reasonable, with 40% saying it is totally reasonable and 29% fairly reasonable. Around a fifth (21%) feels it is unreasonable, with 8% saying it is fairly unreasonable and 13% very unreasonable.

Results from the postal survey in Bootle and residents survey are fairly similar, with 73% and 69% respectively feeling the cost is reasonable, although a higher proportion of postal survey respondents feel it is very reasonable (46% compared to 30%). In addition, fewer respondents to the postal survey in Bootle feel it is unreasonable than the residents survey respondents (14% and 21% respectively). Around half (51%) of respondents to the online survey feel the cost is unreasonable.

Landlords are significantly more negative about the proposed cost of the selective licence than other groups, with just over three quarters (77%) saying it is unreasonable, with 65% of those saying it is very unreasonable. Only a fifth (22%) feel it is reasonable. Around six out of ten (61%) privately renting tenants feel the cost is reasonable, whilst around three out of ten (29%) feel it is unreasonable. Residents are the most positive about the fee, with 71% saying it is reasonable.

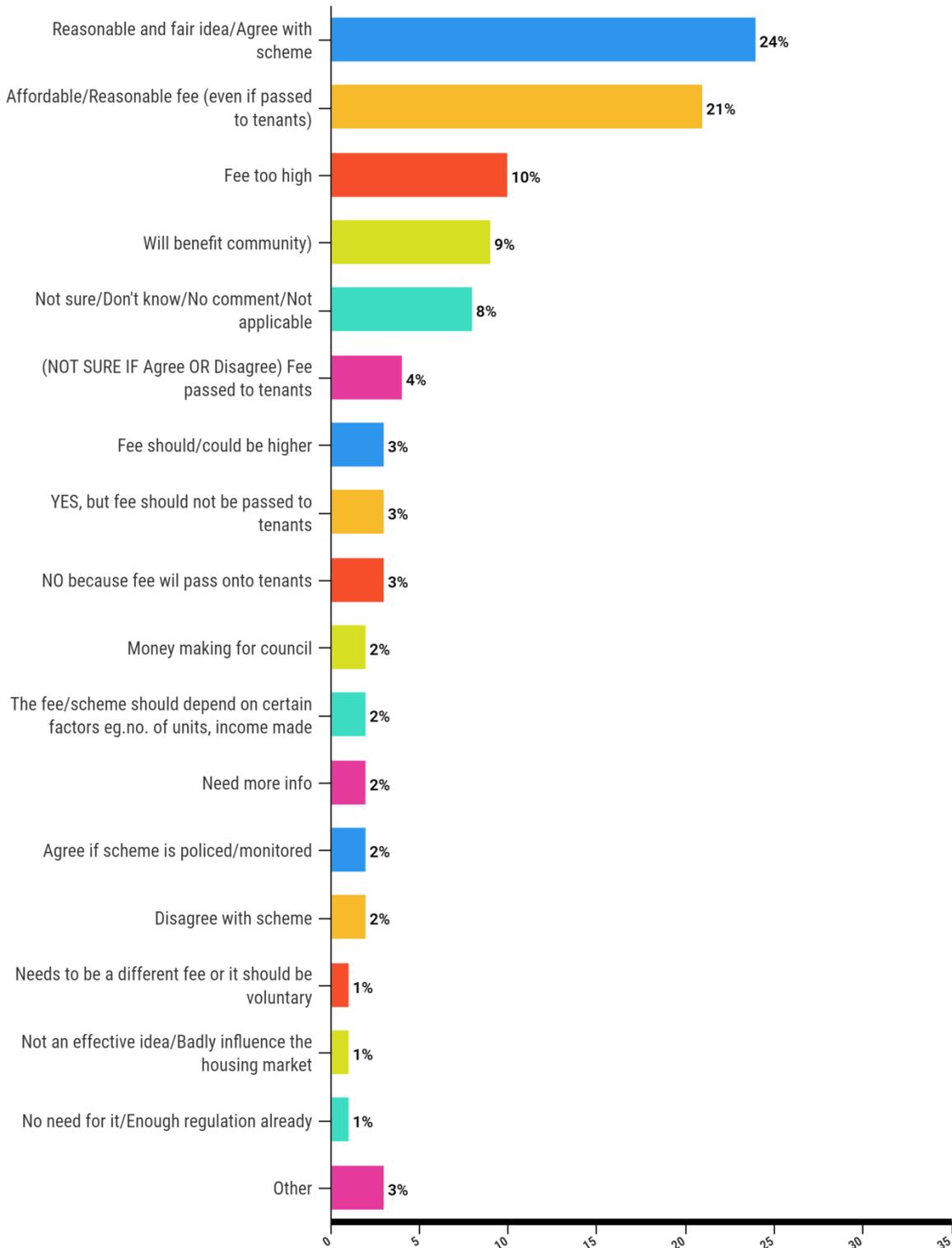
Figure 4: How reasonable is the proposed selective licensing fee (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)?



Comments on selective licensing fees

Around 1,838 comments were made by respondents around the selective licensing fees. These have been themed, grouped and presented in the graph below. The most common comments are that the fees are reasonable and a fair idea (24%), whilst an additional 21% of comments also said that they are reasonable even if the fee is passed onto tenants.

Figure 5: Comments on the selective licensing fee (overall)



Introduce additional (HMO) licensing scheme in parts of Waterloo, Brighton-le-Sands / Seaforth and central Southport

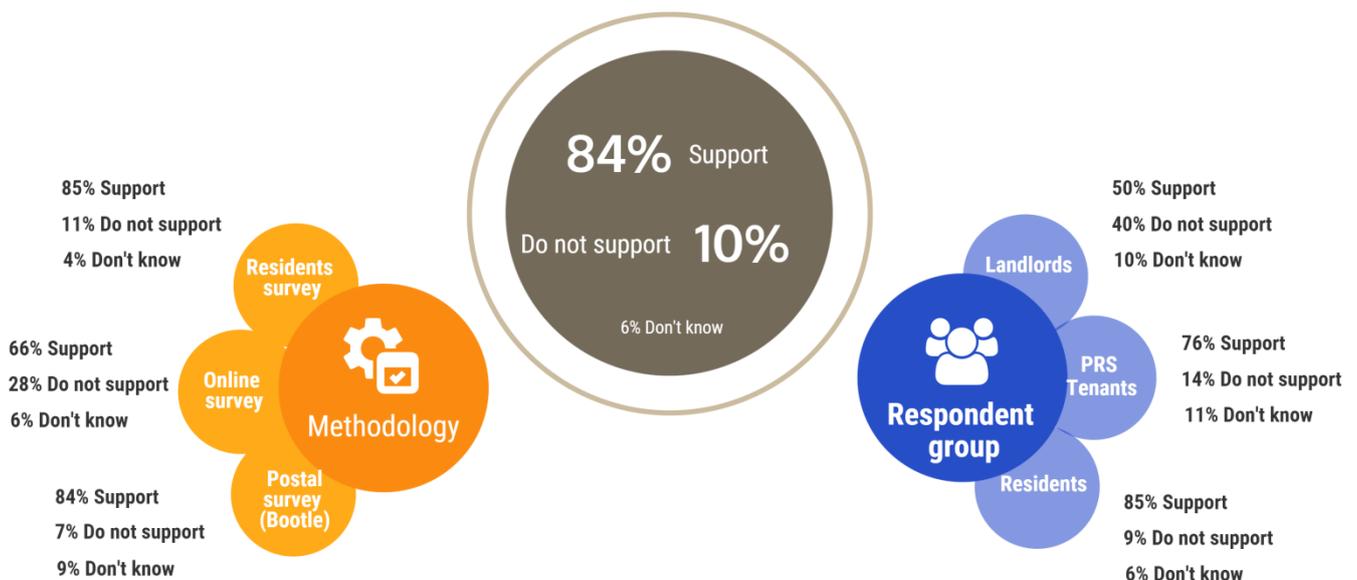
“This proposal would see the introduction of an additional licensing scheme in parts of Waterloo, Brighton-Le-Sands/Seaforth and central Southport. This would require all private sector landlords to hold a licence for each house in multiple occupation (HMO) and they would have to meet the necessary criteria in order to hold a licence. The council believes this will provide safe homes for tenants to live in and allow the Council to take action where there is non-compliance with licence conditions”.

Introducing an additional licensing scheme in parts of Waterloo, Brighton-Le-Sands / Seaforth and central Southport is supported by the majority of those who took part in the consultation, with 84% in support and only 10% who do not support it.

Support is high amongst those who took part in the residents survey (85%) and similarly with those who completed the postal survey in Bootle (84% in support). Support for additional licensing is lower amongst those who took part in the online survey (66% in support and 28% do not support).

Residents in Sefton are very positive, with 85% in support of additional licensing, whilst around three quarters of privately renting tenants (76%) are also in support. Only 14% do not support selective licensing. Landlords are slightly more positive than negative, with half (50%) in support and four out of ten (40%) who do not support introducing additional licensing.

Figure 6: Support for introducing Additional Licensing in specified areas of Sefton (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)



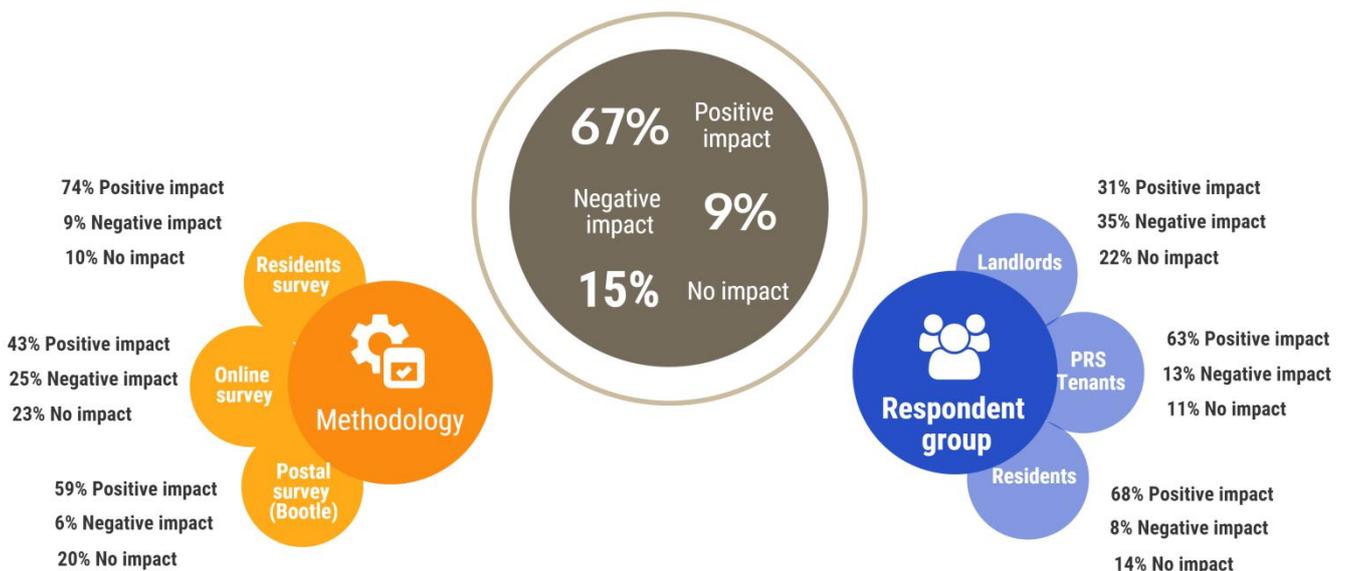
Likely impact on respondents

Around two thirds of respondents (67%) feel that introducing additional licensing in Sefton will have a positive impact on them, whilst only 9% feel it will have a negative impact. 15% feel it will have no impact (9% don't know what impact it will have on them).

Around three quarters of respondents (74%) to the residents survey feel it will have a positive impact, whilst only 9% feel it will be negative (6% don't know). Respondents to the postal survey are less positive about additional licensing, with just under six out of ten (59%) saying it will have a positive impact. However, a fifth (20%) says it will have no impact and only 6% a negative impact (15% don't know). Respondents to the online survey are again least positive, with 43% feeling it will have a positive impact and a quarter (25%) saying it will have a negative impact. However, just under a quarter (23%) say it will have no impact and 9% don't know.

Residents in Sefton are again positive, with just under seven out of ten (68%) saying additional licensing will have a positive impact, and only 8% saying it will have a negative impact (9% don't know). Results for privately rented tenants are similar to those for selective licensing, with 63% saying it will have a positive impact, whilst 13% feel it will be negative (13% don't know). Landlords are again more negative, although slightly less so than for selective licensing, with around a third (35%) saying it will have a negative impact on them, and around three out of ten (31%) saying it will have a positive impact. Again, around a fifth of landlords (22%) feel it will have no impact on them and 12% don't know.

Figure 7: Likely impact of introducing Additional Licensing on respondents (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)

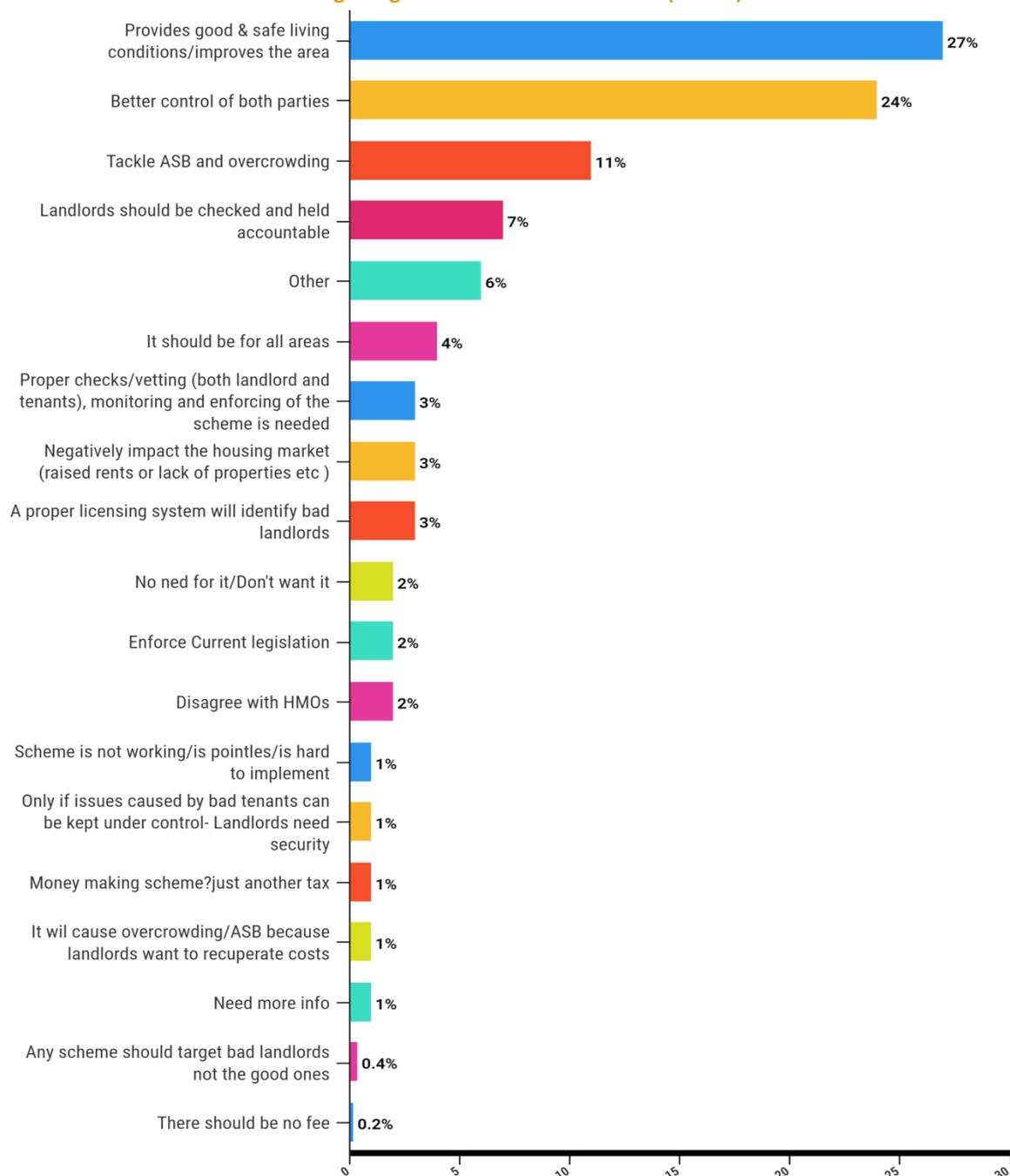


Respondent comments on additional licensing

Respondents were invited to add any further comments they may wish to add about additional licensing. These results have been grouped into themes, then analysed. In total, around 1,211 distinct comments were analysed. Often the previous comments given to the selective licensing scheme question were referred back to; therefore, there are many similar responses across the two schemes.

The most common comment from respondents is that licensing will provide good and safe living conditions and improve the area (27% of comments). This was followed by comments that it will ensure better control of both parties (landlords and tenants) (24%).

Figure 8: Comments on Additional Licensing being introduced in selected areas (overall)



Additional licensing fees

Two thirds (66%) of respondents to the consultation feel that the proposed additional licensing fee of £850 for a five year licence (excluding any discount or additional costs). is reasonable, with 39% saying it is totally reasonable and 28% fairly reasonable. Around a fifth (21%) feel it is unreasonable, with 8% saying it is fairly unreasonable and 13% very unreasonable.

Results from the residents survey and postal survey in Bootle are fairly similar, with 69% and 66% respectively feeling the cost is reasonable. Fewer respondents to the postal survey in Bootle feel it is unreasonable than residents survey respondents (17% and 21% respectively). An equal proportion of respondents to the online survey feel it is reasonable compared to unreasonable (45% each).

Landlords are significantly more negative about the proposed cost of the additional licence, with two thirds (66%) saying it is unreasonable, and 52% of these saying it is totally unreasonable. Just under a quarter (23%) feel it is reasonable. Around six out of ten (59%) privately renting tenants feel the cost is reasonable, whilst around three out of ten (28%) feel it is unreasonable. Residents are the most positive about the fee, with just under seven out of ten (68%) saying it is reasonable.

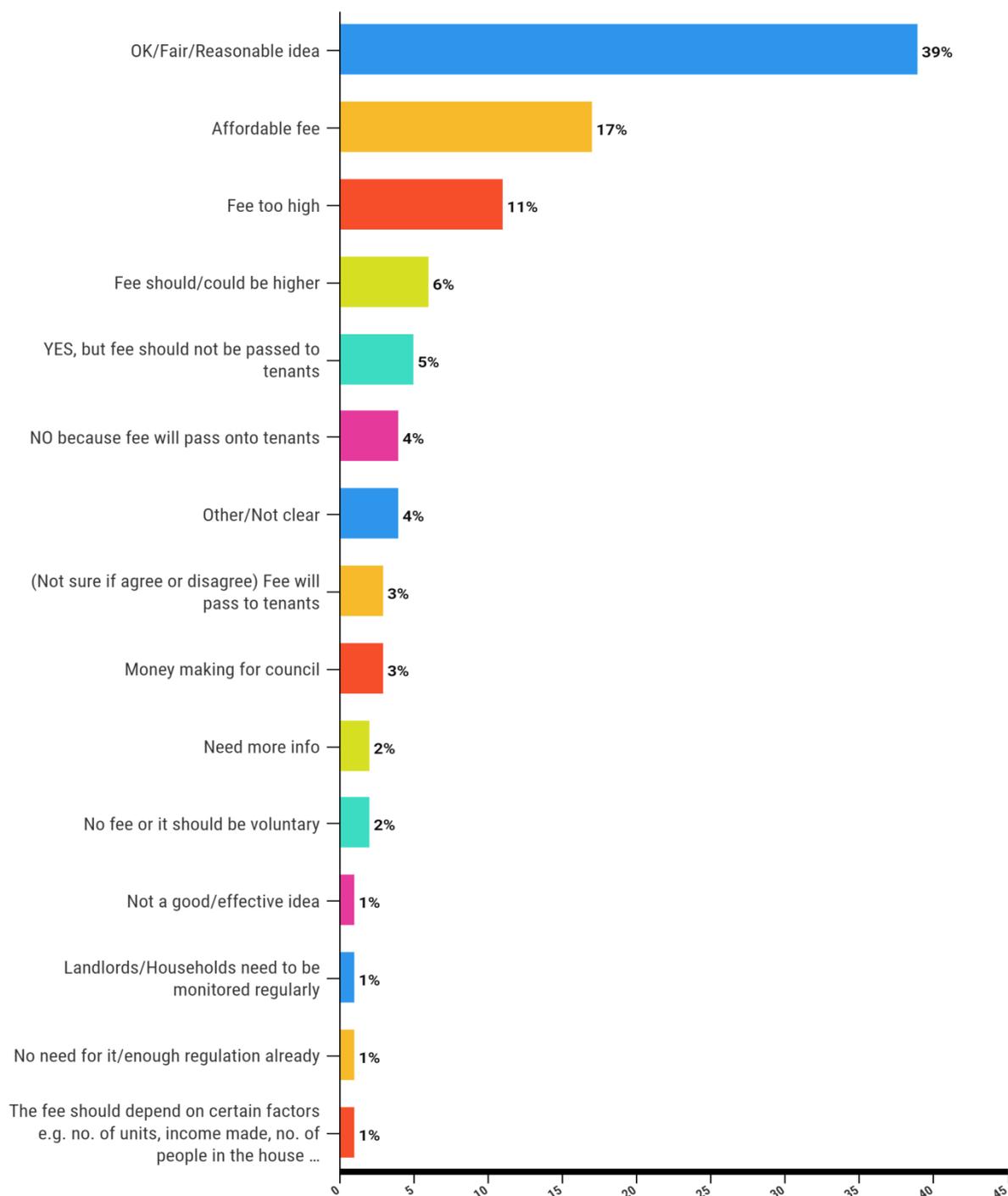
Figure 9: How reasonable is the proposed additional licensing fee (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)?



Comments on additional licensing fees

Around 1,379 comments were made by respondents on the selective licensing fees. These have been themed, grouped and presented in the graph below. The most common comments are that it is a fair/reasonable idea (39%), whilst 17% feel it is an affordable fee. The majority of comments are around the fees being passed on to tenants; however, there is a mixture of views around whether that is positive or negative.

Figure 10: Comments on the additional licensing fee (overall)



Keep things as they are

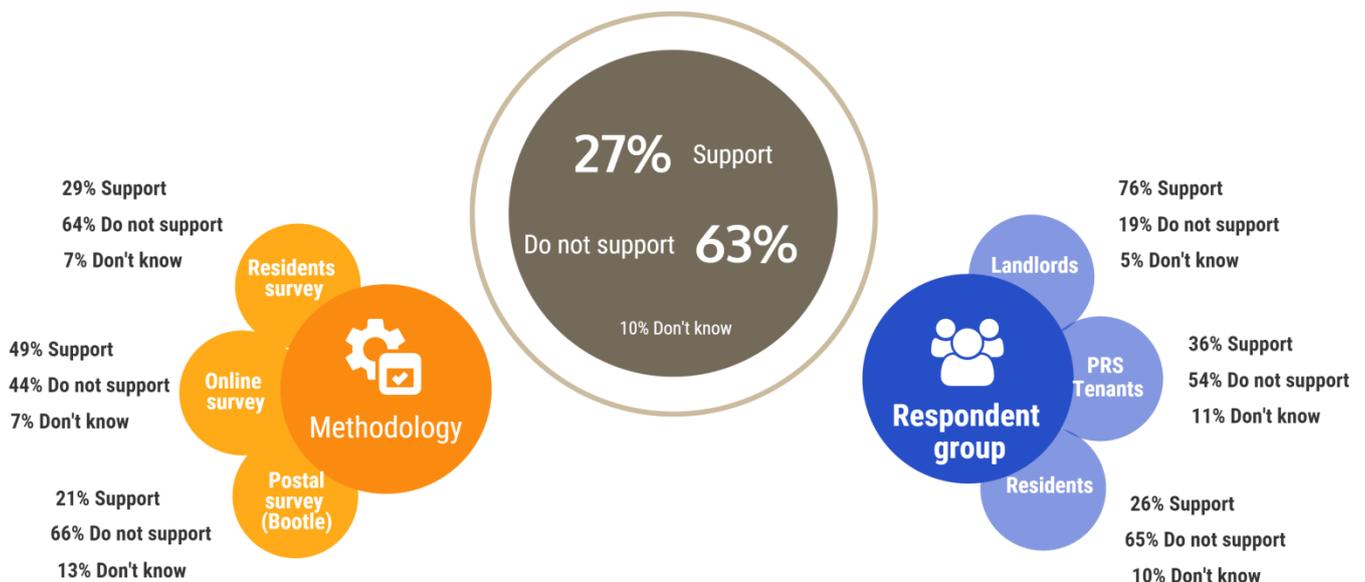
The consultation also provided respondents with the option of ‘keeping things as they are’, i.e. for the council to not make any changes to the way they currently operate. The same questions were asked as with the other options – to what extent respondents support the option for the council to keep things as they are, and what impact, if any, keeping things as they are will have on them.

Support for ‘keeping things as they are’ is not very strong, with just over a quarter of all respondents (27%) in support. Just under two thirds (63%) say they do not support keeping things as they are.

Respondents to the online survey are significantly more supportive of keeping things as they are (49%) than those who took part in other consultation methods. Respondents to the postal survey in Bootle are significantly less positive about keeping things as they are, with two thirds (66%) not in support and one in five (21%) in support. Support is also significantly lower amongst those who took part in the residents survey (29% in support and 64% do not support).

Around three quarters of landlords (76%) are in support of keeping things as they are, significantly more than other respondents, whilst just under a fifth do not support it (19%). Residents in Sefton are least positive, with a quarter (26%) in support, whilst two thirds are against (65%). Just over half of privately renting tenants (54%) do not support keeping things as they are, whilst over a third (36%) are in support.

Figure 11: Support for keeping things as they are i.e. no changes (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)



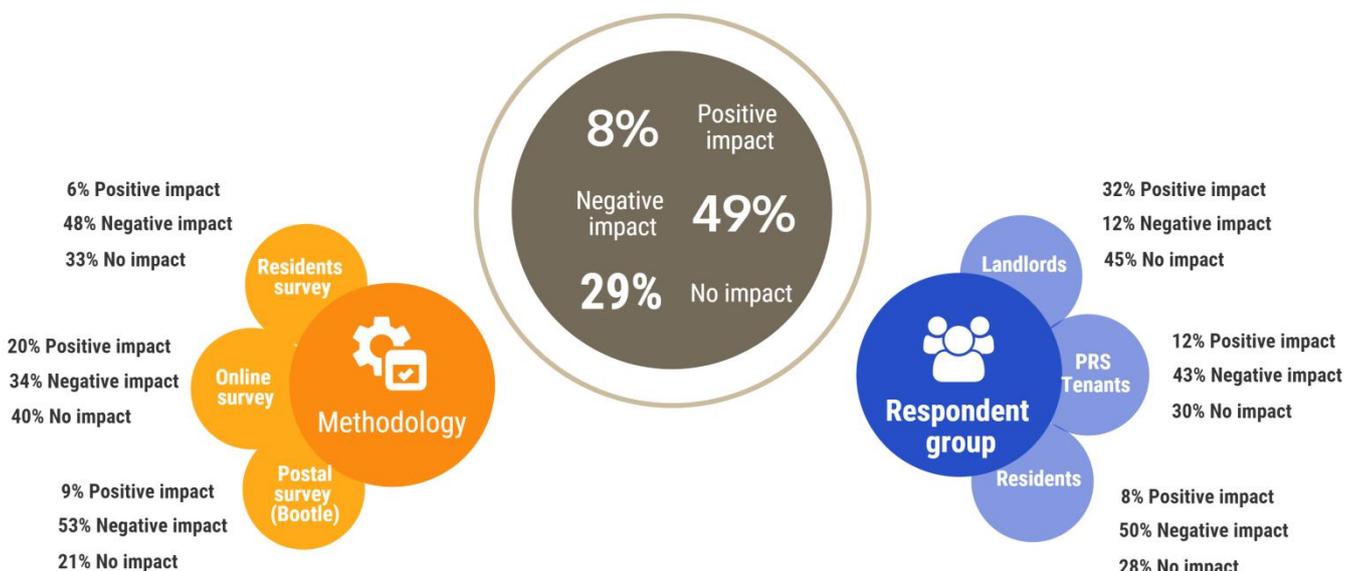
Likely impact on respondents

Around half of respondents (49%) feel that keeping things as they are will have a negative impact on them, whilst only 8% feel it will have a positive impact. Around three out of ten (29%) feel it will have no impact and 14% don't know what impact it will have on them.

Just over half of respondents (53%) to the postal survey in Bootle feel that keeping things as they are will have a negative impact, whilst only 9% feel it will be positive (17% don't know). Similarly, only 6% of respondents to the residents survey feel it will have a positive impact, whilst just under half (48%) say it will have a negative impact (13% don't know). A slightly lower proportion of respondents to the online survey feel it will have a negative impact (34%), although only 20% feel it will have a positive impact. However, four out of ten (40%) also say it will have no impact and 6% don't know.

Landlords are more positive than other respondent groups about keeping things as they are, with a third (32%) saying it would have a positive impact. However, just under half (45%) feel it will have no impact on them, whilst 12% feel it will have a negative impact (11% don't know). Residents in Sefton are more negative about keeping things as they are, with half (50%) saying that it would have a negative impact on them, and only 8% saying it would have a positive impact (14% don't know). Results for privately rented tenants show them to also be more negative than positive, with 43% saying it will have a negative impact, 30% no impact and only 12% feel it will be positive (15% don't know).

Figure 12: Likely impact of keeping things as they are on respondents (overall, and by key methods and respondent types)

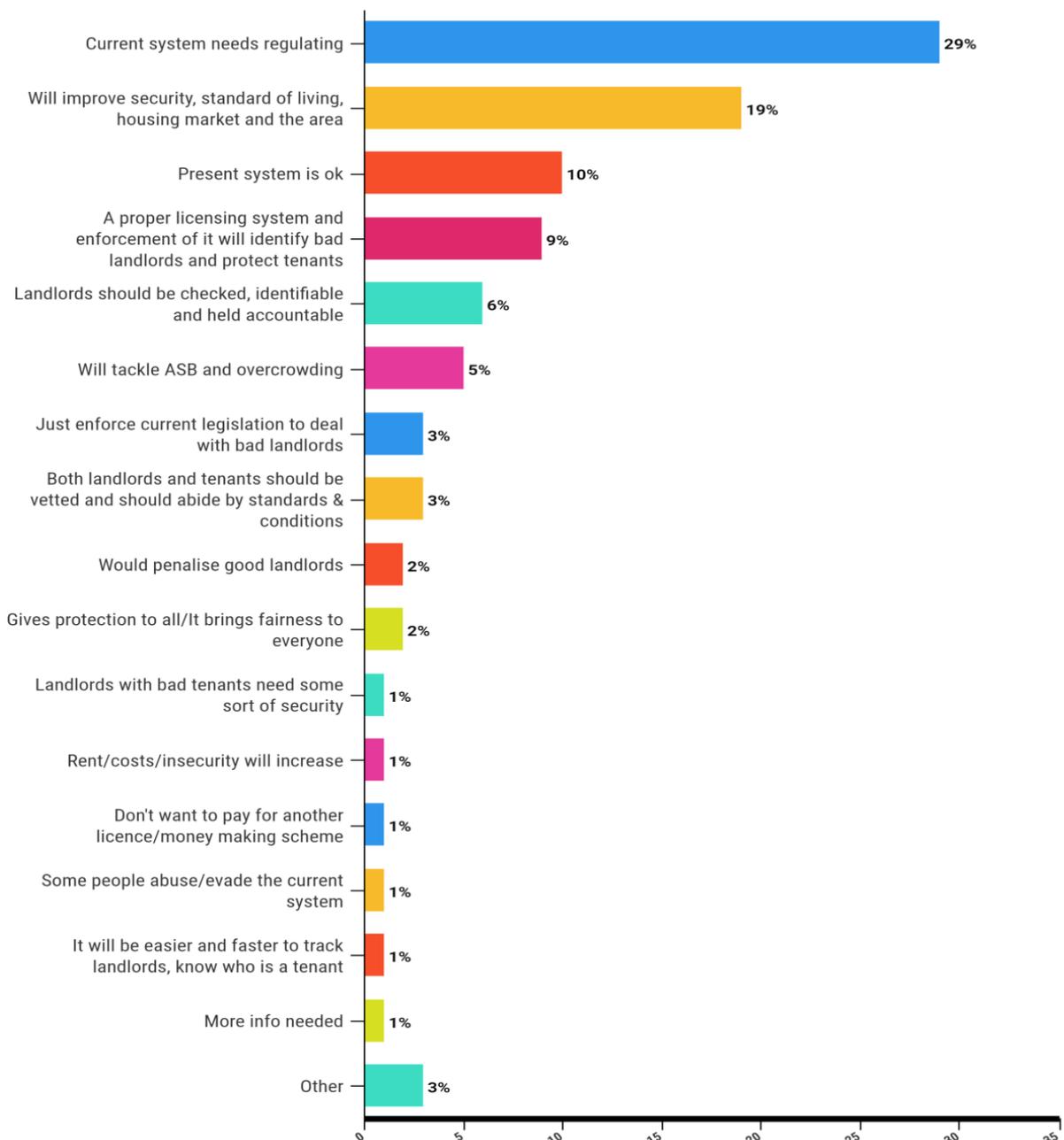


Respondent comments on keeping things as they are

Respondents were invited to add any further comments they may wish to add about keeping things as they are. These results have been grouped into themes, then analysed.

In total, there were 1272 separate comments that were analysed. Themes that had less than 10 comments have been removed (due to the large number of these). The most common comment from respondents is around keeping things as they are is that the current system needs regulating and therefore they are opposed to keeping the status quo (29%). This is followed by 19% of comments against keeping things as they as licensing will improve security, standards of living, the housing market and the area.

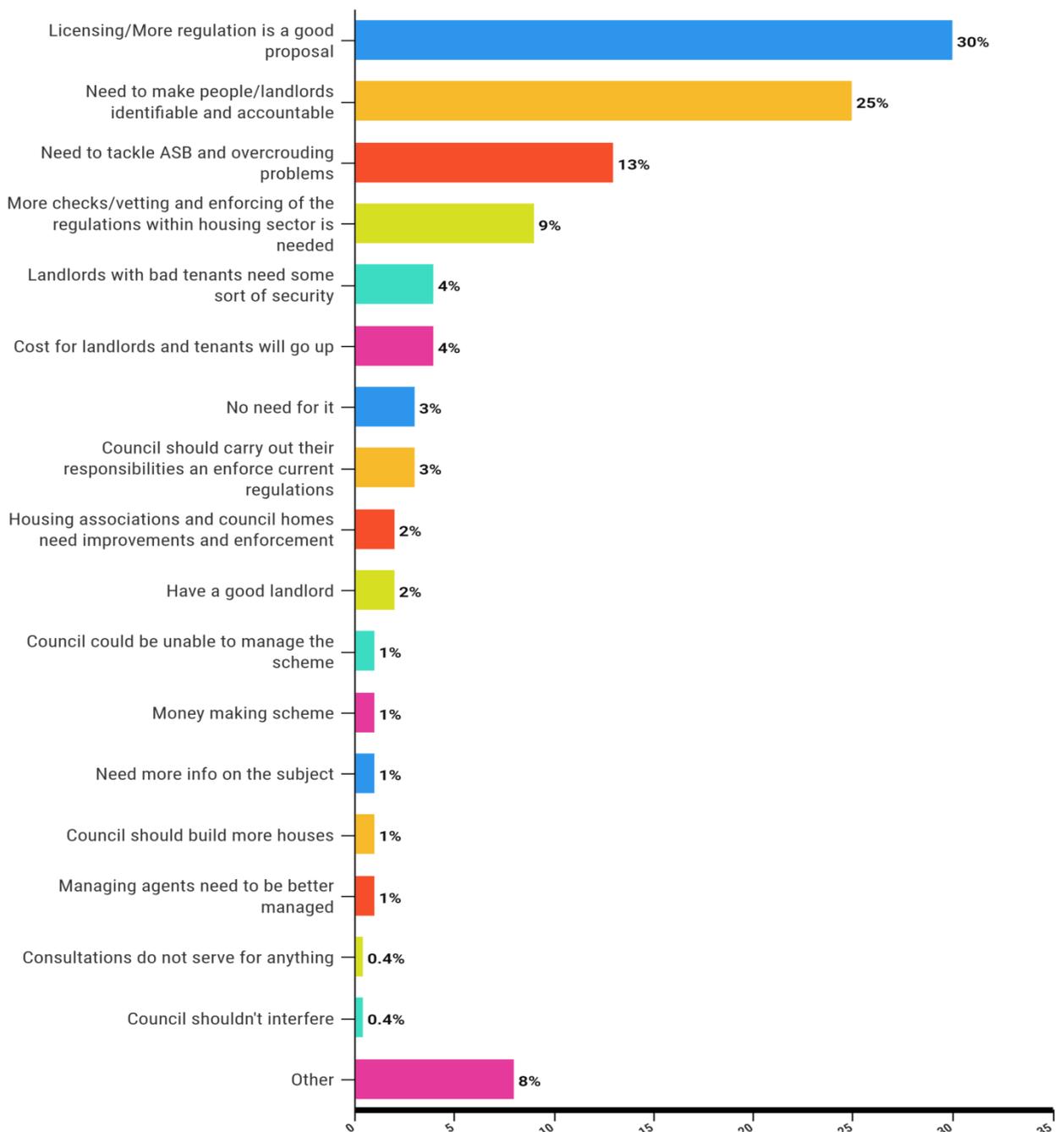
Figure 13: Comments on keeping things as they are (overall)



Other comments/suggestions

Respondents were then invited to add any further thoughts they had on either the consultation as a whole of any ideas on what else the council may want to consider. In total, 562 distinct comments were analysed. The most common response is that licensing and more regulation of the private rented sector is a good idea (30% of comments), followed by 25% saying that there is a need to make people and landlords more identifiable and accountable for their property. A full breakdown of individual responses has been provided to the council. Please note that many of the responses simply say ‘refer to my previous point’ and have been repeated across a number of the freetext sections, therefore there is repetition.

Figure 14: Further comments on the consultation or ideas that the council could consider (overall)



Stakeholder views on licensing schemes proposal

This section draws together the headline findings from the Stakeholder interviews. In total, 10 Stakeholders responded to the consultation invitation, either via telephone interviews or via a written response. The views were often applied across the two different licensing schemes, with some small differences by scheme, which have been pulled out where applicable.

There is generally a divide in support for the proposal. Landlords Associations such as the NLA and RLA do not support licensing schemes, whilst almost all other stakeholders interviewed feel that something is needed in Sefton. Many see licensing schemes in general as a positive step, which should have a positive impact on improving the private rented sector in Bootle. Some of the key themes from the semi-structured stakeholder interviews are shown below.

Need to deal with poor housing conditions in the PRS

Almost all stakeholders feel that there is a need for something to be done to address the issue of landlords who neglect their properties and do not address the poor conditions that tenants have to live in. The links between poor health, poor life choices and negative lifestyle choices are stated as having a link with poor housing conditions. Many reference first-hand experience of seeing very poor conditions that some tenants are living in, with landlords not making improvements when requested.

“...we’ve had quite a few incidents with unsafe properties [in Southport]...People were living in very poor conditions; dangerous conditions...”

A number of stakeholders feel that tenants living in poor housing conditions generally do not look after the properties at all, or they become run down quickly because of the high turnover of tenants renting the properties, and therefore the state of these properties gets worse and worse over time.

“There’s a bigger turnover [of tenants in PRS housing] and therefore people don’t take care of the houses as much because they are transient and that has a knock on effect for the whole neighbourhood and the other people living in the road”.

HMO properties, particularly those that may fall under Selective Licensing in parts of the borough, are frequently cited as being in particularly bad condition and therefore something that some support the council in tackling.

“We know some dreadful buildings where they are being charged £100 a week plus bills on top and they are living in appalling conditions. Which I know is not the most expensive of rents, but it is expensive if you are being asked to live in a hovel”.

Landlords need to be more accountable for properties and tenants they rent to

Many Stakeholders feel that there is a need to make landlords more accountable in general, both for the property conditions and for the tenants that they accept to live in their properties, who may not be vetted in any way. Some feel that having licensing in place will put more accountability on the shoulders of landlords, who may not be rigorous in screening their tenants.

“I think it would have a positive impact on what tenants you would get in the properties. I think if it’s not run properly, obviously you can get tenants who aren’t going to look after the property as well, and probably impact more on the police with crime levels or what business they operate out of the premises. I think if it was all licensed, landlords would have a greater responsibility of what tenants they put in there as well”.

Some feel that landlords may not currently be aware of the state of the properties, particularly if they are more ‘absentee’ landlords who have lettings/managing agents look after their properties in their absence.

“...I think it’s about the landlords actually being seen to be taking responsibility for the buildings that they actually have. Whereas, and I think that certainly the public perception is that, they’re just left and anybody could move in and they’re handed over to an agency or a lettings agency or something and they’re just told to just fill them all the time. And that does happen... Maybe this is one of the ways that landlords might actually get a bit more of a frontline view as to what is actually going on in their properties and the standards that are expected”.

Others feel that some of the licensing conditions will help to enforce some of what are already legal requirements for landlords to meet, but as there is no official regulator overseeing compliance in the sector, these conditions are not monitored or enforced. These are only checked when properties are let via responsible agents or fall under mandatory licensing. However, there is recognition that most landlords do adhere to these standards, although not all.

“What we would like to see is... maintenance of smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, it is appropriate to have them installed. So we would encourage landlords to be responsible.”

Others feel that landlords often do not use their powers to manage their properties properly, often through ignorance; therefore, the council should actually work to help and educate landlords rather than introduce something like licensing.

“...some landlords, most often due to ignorance rather than criminal intent, do not use their powers to manage their properties effectively. A more appropriate response therefore would be to identify issues and to assist landlords”.

Vulnerable tenants may become more vulnerable

A number of stakeholders feel that the types of people living in the properties that the council are most wanting to tackle are often the most vulnerable in society, with people looking to take advantage of those vulnerabilities. Therefore, they express concern as to what effect licensing may actually have on them and that it may not perhaps be positive, particularly if they are renting from less favourable landlords.

“If you are not able to afford your own home and depending on some of the challenges you have faced in your life, for example, a young carer, someone coming out of prison... If you end up in a private rented property, if you had low level mental health issues, then there is a potential that you become more vulnerable by an increased fee.”

Others feel that the potential to pass on the licensing costs to particularly vulnerable groups could have quite serious implications.

“...if licensing costs are passed on to tenants in the form of rent increases, then some tenants may struggle, particularly those on benefits, affected by welfare reform and frozen housing allowances”.

Tenants living in HMO properties are often cited as being the ‘most’ vulnerable of those renting in the private rented sector, and those exploited the most and often don’t shout about the problems they encounter because they don’t know how to, even under the current mandatory licensing scheme.

“They’re vulnerable from a sense of – point of view. They don’t know how to navigate the system to get what they want so they end up at the bottom of the pile all the time.”

“By virtue of the types of tenants you have in an HMO they tend to be migrants. They tend to be a very transient community and they tend to be living in poor conditions and those poor conditions should be identified under the existing licensing scheme and also checked, ad that isn’t happening...”

Improving information sharing about bad landlords and bad tenants between agencies

A number of Stakeholders feel that licensing may result in the Local Authority having much better data on who/where landlords are, which should be shared amongst agencies and organisations working in and around the PRS (such as the Local Authority, Police, Fire and Rescue, Social Services, Lettings agents), as well as landlords and tenants alike. It is felt that if there is more intelligence and data that could be shared on problem tenants and landlords, then it may prevent some of them being able to rent properties in the area.

“...once that family have been moved out of their address after a court order, they’ve gone and gotten another property round the corner, not too far away. Now, if there is some sort of database, or information share in that instance, when they go to the house, the landlord can say ‘Look, these people have applied to come to my house’ and they say ‘This is their background, if anything happens it’d be on your own head, you’d be get the costs of any court fees’”.

“More of a vetting really. You can obviously do more checks on people who are likely to be landlords. The one particular one I’m referring to did have a known history so he probably wouldn’t have been granted a licence I wouldn’t have thought under the schemes”

Costs of licensing passed onto tenants

As previously stated, most stakeholders are concerned about who would ‘foot the bill’ for licence fees and that these may just increase the rents for already struggling tenants.

“I just hope that the cost wouldn’t be passed on to the tenants”.

“I have some nervousness around the scheme in a sense that...where do they offset the costs of that/ For example, if the fee is set at £300 a property, is the landlord likely to take that off their bottom line or are they likely to discharge that back on to the tenant”.

Another felt that this could push some tenants into renting from the bad landlords that the council is trying to address via licensing and put them in a worse position than they would otherwise have been.

“The risk of introducing licensing is likely to increase the costs for those renting, along with not resolving the problems that the councils wishes to resolve, and likely moving the issue around the Borough”.

However, another local authority said that they have seen little evidence of this having a bit impact on rents.

“I am not dismissing it [costs being passed onto tenants] but I am not sure it has had a massive impact on affordability and I think also landlords are operating in a competitive market so if I am renting out a house and I am going to pass on the cost to tenants but next door has decided to absorb that cost and keep the rent at the same level, there can be a commercial pressure, so I think it is probably the way it is playing out...”

Council already has powers to address issues in the PRS

A number of Stakeholders say that the council already has powers to tackle many of the issues, and perhaps are not using these as fully as they can do. The Landlords Associations in particular feel that the council has a raft of powers at their disposal including Criminal Behaviour Orders, Interim Management Orders, issuing improvement notices to homes that don't meet the decent homes standard, litter abatement notices, fixed penalty notices (for noise disturbance) etc.... Therefore they do not see what licensing may do that the current powers cannot already do.

“The council already has the necessary tools to tackle poor housing management and conditions in the PRS. Rather than introduce a bureaucratic licensing scheme that will see scarce resources waste processing applications, it should continue to direct these limited resources at effective enforcement activity”.

“I think something needs to be done, but I am not sure if this is the right vehicle to do it. That is not that I am saying that we shouldn't do it... I think my understanding is, there is legislation that exists at the moment. The problem is, it is just not being enforced.”

Schemes need to be monitored and enforced to be effective

Although many are in support of licensing, some feel it will be 'toothless' without the enforcement side, and would just be a paper exercise with little impact.

“...if the legislation will mean that landlords have to take responsibility and if they don't then there will be some sort of penalty to them, whether that be financial, or whether that building has to be closed down which means they can no longer take any financial gain, I don't know. But the landlords need to be accountable and if the scheme can make that happen, then that is fine”.

Some also feel that enforcement is a costly and lengthy process, which may dilute the impact of any scheme.

“...the other aspect of it [licensing] has to be back to the capacity of the local authority to enforce the scheme. So, is it simply a mailshot ...? ...enforcement can be expensive and legal costs can be expensive... So there is a bit around as much as the possibility of raising a bit of income, that can be very quickly soaked up in lengthy court cases and lengthy enforcement challenges when they are trying to enforce regulation.”

A couple of stakeholders reference the intended inspection regime of only one inspection across 5 years as not being enough.

“If a scheme like that is going to work, it [inspection] needs to be every 6 months, in the same way agents have to inspect tenants every 6 months. It must absolutely be nearer that... A lot can happen in 6 months, a huge amount can happen in two years, three years, four years whatever.”

There is also a question mark about the resources that may go into the scheme and whether it is enough to run the scheme, as it will only be successful if there is enough manpower and support to deliver it effectively.

“My understanding is that there are only 8 inspectors for the whole of the region... so there are just not enough people to go round and enough to go round and identify problems and then deal and resolve them as well or escalate them...The scheme in isolation is no point without the support mechanisms and support processes around them”.

However, some feel that enforcement approaches need to be appropriate to the issue:

“...it’s a fine line from ensuring that they adhere to coming down like a ton of bricks on them and making them just say ‘I’m not bothering’ or putting the rents up ridiculously”.

Evidence that licensing works

A number of stakeholders query whether licensing has been proven to work in other areas , therefore whether it is likely to have any impact at all.

“...having spoken to some colleagues who are in the industry in terms of letting agents and so on, that xxx region rolled out a licensing fee some time ago and they have seen no benefits whatsoever in terms of raised levels of standards and unfortunately the processes that fit behind that i.e. for evictions and so on, are all the same things so it hasn’t improved anything”.

Others question whether licensing only tends to attract law abiding landlords, who are being forced to pay more money when they are already complying, whilst those who are causing the problems will continue to evade the system regardless of any new schemes in place.

“Licensing schemes rarely meet their objectives. Good landlords will apply for licences... whilst the worst landlords – the criminal operators – will simply ignore the scheme, as they do many other regulations.”

Others feel that the scheme itself just focuses on the 'processing of applications and issuing licences, and doesn't go much further than that.

“There is little evidence that licensing schemes improve housing standards. The focus of staff becomes the processing and issue of licences, while prosecutions centre on whether a property is licensed or not, rather than management and property standards”.

However, a local authority comments that the first stage of the scheme is always going to be about processing and issuing licences and then will move onto the compliance phase and identifying those who aren't complaint and dealing with them in an appropriate way.

“In the early days of the scheme the focus was on the application process to get people to apply for licensing and having some enforcement measures around people who hadn't applied. The compliance side of the process is starting to kick in so that will result in a tip over for the next couple of years”.

They feel that licensing gives councils a way to make landlords comply and therefore those that don't comply, where the matter is serious, can then be passed to the enforcement team to deal with, which may not be picked up otherwise through the current systems.

“I think it gives us a foot in the door. For the 1,000 or so where we have done compliance, we have done 40 referrals to the housing enforcement team where there have been significant concerns about properties in disrepair. This shows us how licensing can be a useful tool in picking up those things”.

Landlords have no control over tenant behaviour

A number of stakeholders feel that it is unreasonable for the council to expect landlords to manage tenants behaviour, particularly around issues like ASB or even more so, where tenants may have a mental health issue. Their only powers may be to evict and that will not necessarily work to the advantage of tenants who may need help.

“In relation to ASB reduction and the authority a landlord has to tackle such activity within their properties, it should be pointed out that landlords and agents can only enforce a contract. They cannot manage behaviour (ref: House of Commons briefing note SN/SP 264, paragraph 1.1).”

“Tenant problems such as anti-social behaviour are impossible for the landlord to address alone and landlords will not wish to risk a breach of licensing conditions that may affect their ability to let properties elsewhere. Some may seek to evict already challenging tenants. This could mean additional costs to other council services, as they pick up the pieces created by the disruption to the lives of already vulnerable tenants”.

Another issue is around the expectation in the licence conditions around waste and rubbish, as landlords in smaller properties in particular can do little to influence how tenants dispose of/store their rubbish.

“It is unfair to expect the landlord to control or monitor tenant behaviour. The landlord can only be responsible for ensuring tenants are aware of refuse collections and to encourage tenants to be responsible when disposing of waste...we would like to remind them [the council] that it is the tenants’s responsibility to dispose of their own rubbish and the local authority’s responsibility to provide adequate (e.g. wheelie bins, civic amenity sites) and regular (e.g. weekly bin collection) means to do so. It is the responsibility and duty of the Local Authority to respond positively to tenants requests for more rubbish facilities.”

Other ways to improve PRS other than licensing

Some Stakeholders feel that although something needs to be done, they aren’t convinced that licensing is the best way to achieve improvements. Landlord’s Associations feel that councils have other options in both identifying and tackling criminal landlords, which are shown below.

“If Sefton were to take a more erudite approach with regard to nuisance issues and developed a separate policy to tackle criminal landlords, this would be more applicable and more likely to result in resolving the issues”.

“Adopting a targeted approach on a street-by-street approach, targeting the specific issues and working in a joined up fashion with other relevant agencies, such as the Council, community groups, tenants and landlords, would have a much greater impact.”

“There are other alternatives to licensing. The RLA supports a system of self-regulation whereby compliant landlords join a co-regulation scheme which deals with standards and complaints in the first instance, while those outside the scheme remain under the scope of local authority enforcement”.

“We also support the use of the council tax registration process to identify private rented properties and landlords. Unlike licensing this does not require self-identification by landlords, making it harder for so-called rogues to operate under the radar”.

HMO properties and the control of these at the planning stages is also cited as a potential way for the council to get a better grip on the problems in the PRS.

“...if we didn’t give planning permission for these [HMOs] to go ahead in the first place, we wouldn’t have a need to introduce licensing and all the additional things that manage them...There are restrictions in part of the borough on the Wirral where it is no more than 20% can be HMO high density flats or buildings with any certain area. For me, it is stopping at the first hurdle.”

Feedback from public meetings & other responses

As part of the consultation, M·E·L Research ran a number of public meetings in Bootle and Southport, where any interested parties could attend. In total, 6 meetings were held. In addition, an email address and telephone number were provided for anyone wishing to provide a written or verbal response.

General feedback and comments from the public meetings and written responses includes the following:

Where is the evidence?

- What evidence is there that licensing works?
- Has the council reviewed other schemes up and down the country to see how effective they have been? If not, why not?
“I did get an e-mail from Wirral Council to say: we’re two years into the scheme, thank you for your involvement, thank you for your support, blah, blah, blah. Here’s a list below what we’ve seen improved in the area so far. Do you know what it was? It was less wheelie bins on the streets.”
- How many landlords are there in Sefton? How many in the proposed areas?
- How many rogue landlords are there? What percent of landlords are rogue? What estimates have the council made in their decision to propose licensing and therefore the need for enforcement?
- Why can the council not enforce standards under its existing powers? If it simply a lack of resources, why do good landlords have to pay the bill?

Costs and fees

- Where can we find the detailed financial information and assumptions on how the fees have been calculated?
- Why do landlords have to pay a lump sum for all five years in one go?
- Why is there no staged payment option?
- What happens to the interest earned on the licensing fees?
- What happens if the money collected is more than is needed to run the scheme – do landlords get a refund?
- What happens to the money raised through fines?
- How will the fees be calculated where one unit in a HMO property is managed by an Agent and the proportion of owner occupied units is not known?
- What is the cost for Accreditation via Sefton’s Accreditation Scheme? What other schemes are recognised, e.g. Rent Smart Wales?
- Has the council considered how Letting Agent redress schemes could assist in regulating the areas, rather than licensing for those landlords that use accredited letting agents?

“As a letting agent we have to be part of a property redress scheme and we have to pay a fee for that every year, so why don’t the council tie in with that, with that scheme to letting agents and get registration or get registered landlords from there? There’s absolutely no need for the amount of fees or the level of fees, but if they could work well with the property redress scheme, because we get fined if we’re not part of that scheme.”

“The licence should be affordable so as not to cause rent increases and relaxed enough so as not to chase perspective or current landlords away from the market place as it has done in Liverpool.”

Enforcement

- Can the scheme fees be used to fund enforcement activity? NLA report suggests that this is not possible?
- Where are the details of how the funds raised will be used to enforce the scheme? How many administration staff will be recruited? How many enforcement officers will there be?
- How will rogue landlords be identified? Will it still rely on the community to identify and report rogue activity? What pro-active action will the council take to identify rogue landlords?
- What are the targets for enforcement and how will these be monitored and reported?

“There is no structure in Liverpool, post-paying your fees and registration. There is no policing, there is no staff. Even then, the staff you get through to admit that they haven’t got any staff, there’s only one or two phones. There’s nobody, it doesn’t exist.”

- Has the council considered how those tenants currently being housed by the said ‘rogue’ landlords will be affected? Rents are likely to increase due to licensing - where will these people go? How will this impact on social housing provision?
- What about enforcement against bad tenants who don’t pay their rent – at the moment they have to be evicted and landlords are left significantly out of pocket. There are many that leave properties in a terrible state and cost landlords significant amounts to get the properties back into a rentable state. Licensing does not seem to address these, just landlords.

Support to landlords/agents

- What specifically is the extra support that will be provided by the council to landlords and agents to assist them in dealing with ASB?
- Has the council considered creating a voluntary register (at a modest fee) of landlords and then using powers to fine landlords (whether registered or not) that are found to breach standards? Why not?

“What I thought they should have done is say “right, you’ve got six months to register your properties, just say, nominal fee, £20, you’ve got six months to do that” so all the landlords there’s going to be a registration fee, £20 per property, six months to do it. Then if you don’t get that £400 or whatever, that is getting all your good landlords all on the register, and then after that you can target the bad landlords. It’s just the right approach.”

- How will the council ensure that Sefton’s scheme is properly managed unlike the Liverpool scheme? Has the council reviewed and taken any learning from how badly the Liverpool scheme was introduced?
- Why is the default position to blame landlords for poor tenant behaviour? Some of this tenant behaviour is related to wider underlying social problems that licensing will not be able to tackle. What service will the council be providing to assist with this?

“Why can’t the council come to the private sector and say we want to work in partnership with the private sector, why can’t they say, right, we’re going to take a fee off you but we’re going to offer you something in return; we’re going to be a joint partnership to improve the housing stock. You’re going to register, the good landlords are all going to register, but you’ve got to be accredited, you’ve got to be to a standard, you’re going to sign on that dotted. But in return, we’re going to offer you, I don’t know, say, a portal, like Liverpool Student Homes has in Liverpool where all of the students, that is the ‘go to’ portal if you’re a student landlord, you’ve got to sign their code of conduct, so when students go to advertise a portal, it’s student homes, in conjunction with the university. So they know it’s a trusted site, so you’d have trusted tenants and trusted landlords, but you’re offering something in return, and you’d make the landlords a lot more appreciative of paying the fee, you’re going to get something in return; that’s proper working in partnership and that would make improvements too. One, we know that they’re decent tenants, and they’d know that we were a trusted partner of the council.”

- How will the council ensure that other departments are also supporting landlords who take action on rogue tenants and deal with ASB. Landlord action takes a lot of time and at a high cost. When a notice is served and the tenant approaches the council for homelessness support, why does the council tell the tenant to stay put until they are evicted by bailiffs?

“A licensed landlord has to abide by a set of rules or they will be held to account and fined. But what about a tenant who doesn't abide by the rules? What about the tenant in a licensed property who decides not to pay forward their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to pay their rent? Where does that leave the landlord? How do they pay the mortgage? How do they pay for the repairs at the property?”

Engagement with decision makers

- Are there any plans for councillors to meet and discuss the proposals with landlords and agents? If no, why not?

“Following this consultation and following all the other consultations that you have, will there be an opportunity for all of us as a committee or whatever body we want to form, to be able to put our representations towards the council directly before they make the decision?”

Other queries/comments

- Will resources be in place to run the scheme, as they were not in Liverpool which took a huge amount of time to get off the ground and it still isn't fully operational.
- With the recent legislative changes on tax breaks for landlords, many landlords will not find property management to be a worthwhile investment and may sell up. If this happens, there could be a knock on effect for tenants looking for properties to rent and may mean less housing to go around. Has the council considered this factor?
- Has the council undertaken any modelling on the impact of a loss of housing stock if landlords decide to sell up? What contingency plans are there should licensing reduce the available PRS stock? It is a possibility that those landlords with large portfolios will no longer invest in an area while one property landlords may simply sell up.

“If they go and then try and prosecute or try and licence the single fellows who are not making much money anyway after they pay the mortgage, and then they go and licence them when the new tax laws come out, the first thing that people are going to do is sell the house; kick the tenants out and flog it. What happens there when the council then says, bloody hell, we’ve got all these tenants that need houses? We can’t licence... We can’t rent homes because no-one will take on anyone because no-one wants to be a private landlord.”

“As well as the government from today 06/04/17 restricting interest on mortgage payments meaning Landlords will now be heavenly taxed I think the council have got a major problem on their hands as many Landlords are looking to sell and leave the market because it just isn't worth it no more with all these extra charges and increase in tax bills”.

“Landlords are at breaking point, with the new tax change and everything; how much more can a landlord take? Like I said before, tenants are walking around scot free.”

“I think all these landlords with just one property will just think, “I’ve had enough, I’m out” and then the council have got the massive problem of housing these people. They just don’t have the homes; they need us more than we need them. I hope that is all reported and that will go into the document which is sent to the council.”

Much of this feedback was passed back to the council during the consultation period to allow them to address some of the queries. Subsequently, the Council produced an additional list of ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ to address some of the queries that were brought up.

Written and key points from verbal responses to the consultation are provided in Appendix 5.

Perceptions of the private rented sector in Sefton

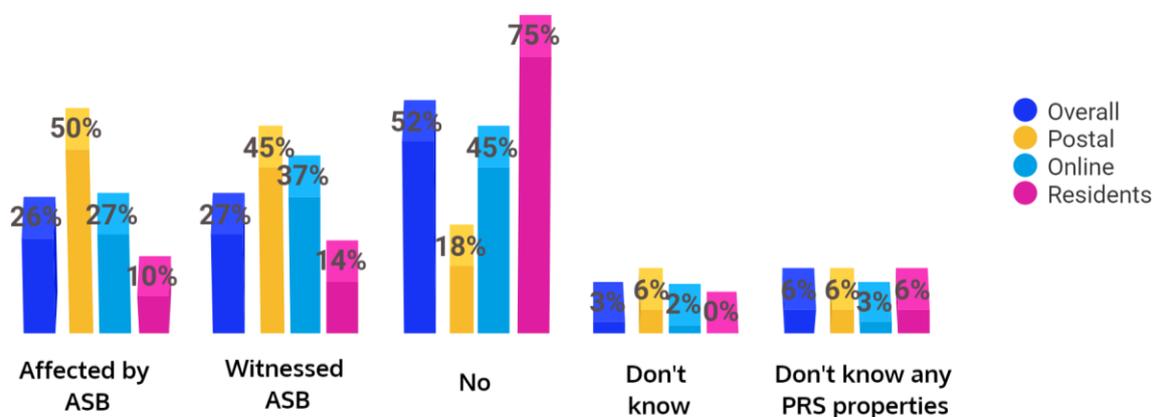
As part of the consultation, respondents were asked about their perceptions and experiences of the private rented sector in their area.

When asked to think about privately rented properties in the area, around a quarter (26%) of respondents say they have been affected by anti-social behaviour, whilst a similar proportion (27%) says they have witnessed anti-social behaviour. Around half (51%) say that they have not been affected by or witnessed anti-social behaviour. Only 6% say that they are unaware of private rented properties in their area.

A much higher proportion of respondents to the postal survey in Bootle said they have both been affected by (50%) and witnessed (45%) anti-social behaviour, compared to the other methods of consultation. Only around a fifth (18%) of respondents to the postal survey said they have not witnessed/been affected by anti-social behaviour. A much higher proportion of respondents to the residents survey say they have neither been affected by or witnessed anti-social behaviour (75%).

Results by landlord, resident and privately rented tenant are largely similar.

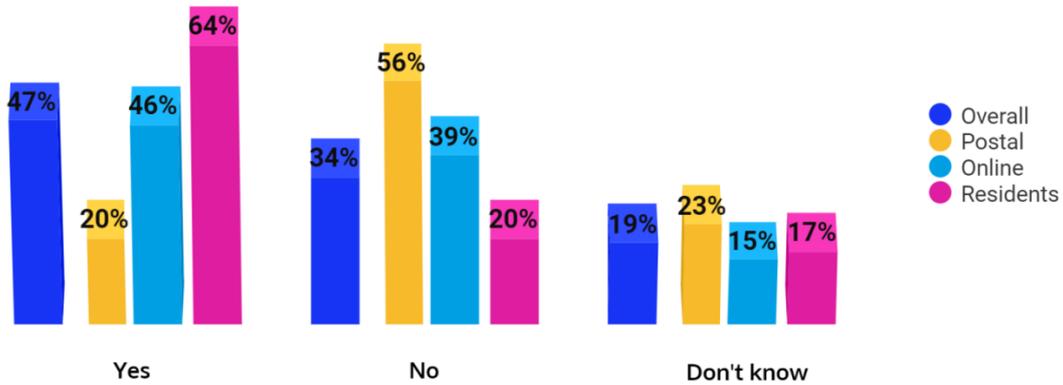
Figure 15: % who have been affected by/witnessed ASB (by consultation method)



Views on private rented property standards

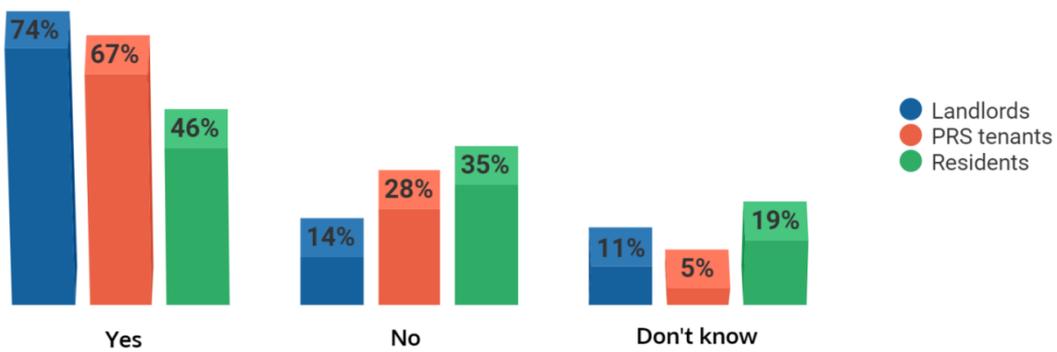
Respondents were asked if the privately rented properties they know of in their area are maintained to a good standard. Just under half (47%) say it is, whilst around a third (34%) says it is not. Around a fifth say they don't know (19%). Similar to the first question, respondents to the postal survey are more negative than the other forms of consultation, with over half (56%) saying it is not maintained to a good standard.

Figure 16: % who feels PRS properties are maintained to a good standard (by consultation method)



A higher proportion of landlords feel that PRS properties in their area are maintained to a good standard (74%), compared to residents (46%), although almost a fifth of residents do not know (19%).

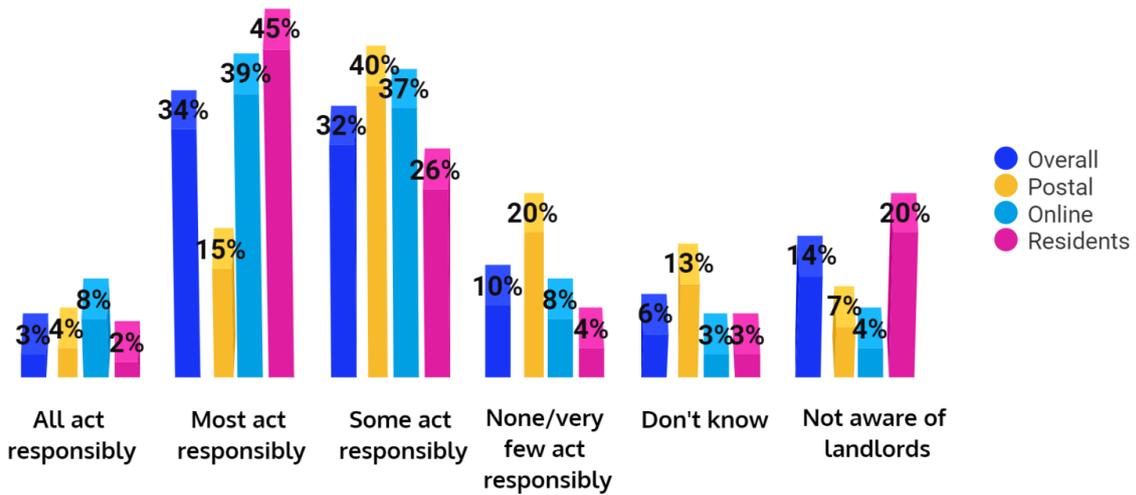
Figure 17: % who feels PRS properties are maintained to a good standard (by respondent type)



Views on landlords and letting agents standards in managing and maintaining properties

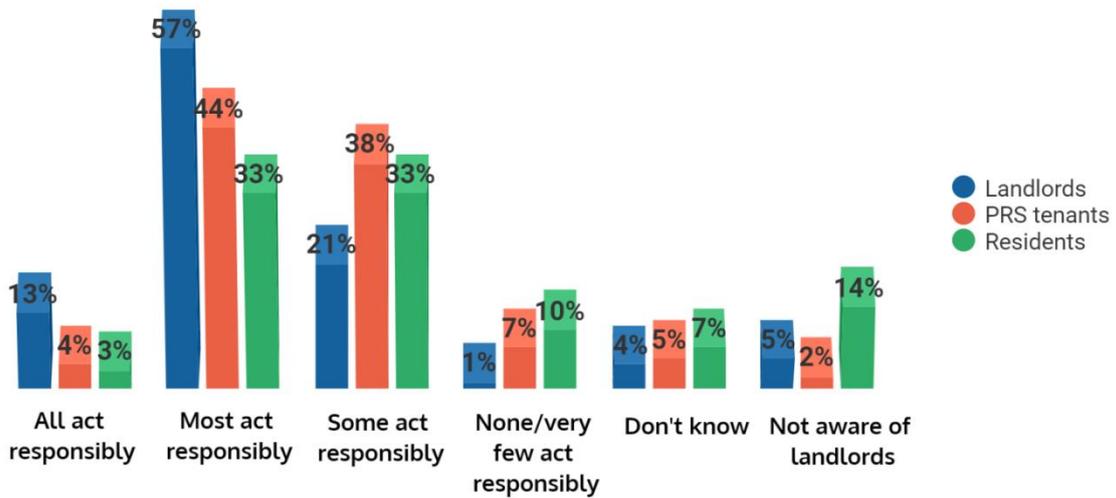
Respondents were asked whether they think private landlords or their agents act responsibly in letting, managing and maintaining their properties. Overall, around seven out of ten (69%) feel they are responsible, with similar figures for ‘most’ (34%) and ‘some’ (32%) act responsibly. A lower proportion of respondents to the postal survey feel landlords/agents act responsibly, with 60% saying they act responsibly and a fifth (20%) that none act responsibly

Figure 18: % who feels PRS landlords/agents act responsibly (by methodology)



Landlords are the most positive, with nine out of ten (90%) saying that landlords/agents act responsibly in their area. Residents seem less positive (69% feel they act responsibly), although 14% say they don't know any landlords/agents in their area.

Figure 19: % who feels PRS landlords/agents act responsibly (by respondent type)



Landlord experiences in Sefton

As part of the consultation, landlords who took part were asked a series of questions about their views and experiences of being a landlord/agent in Sefton. Results commented on in this section are from the overall combined figures for landlords, across the different consultation methods, as those broken down by method are often too small to draw meaningful conclusions from.

Recognised landlord body

Of the 114 landlords who responded to the consultation, only 45 responded to a question about memberships.

Membership of landlords associations is relatively low, shown on the chart below. 26 of the 45 who responded (58%) say they do not belong to any association or accredited scheme. 9 landlords in total are members of the Residential Landlords Association, 7 members of the National Landlords Association. Only 3 are members of the Sefton Property Accreditation.

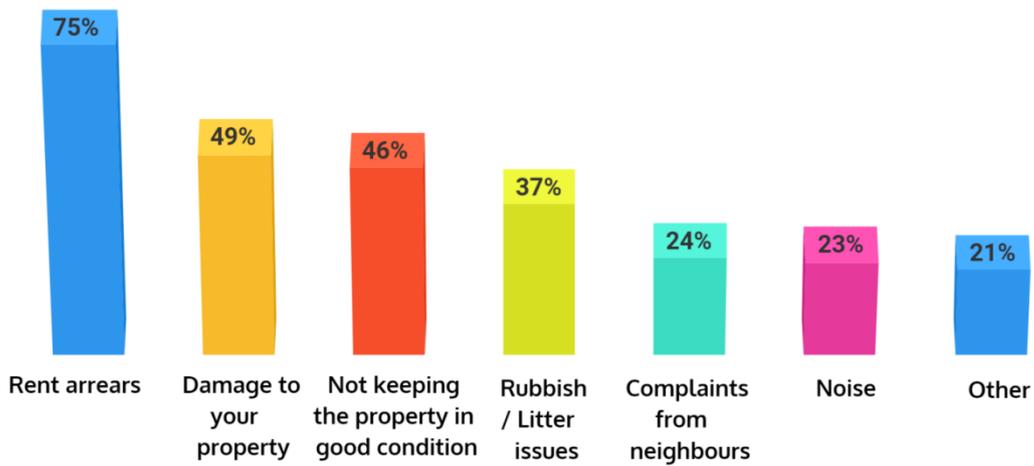
Figure 20: Membership or landlord accreditation (landlords only – numbers of respondents only)



Problems experienced with tenants

Landlords were then asked whether they had experienced any issues with tenants, from a list of common issues provided. The most common response is rent arrears (75%), followed by damage to your property (49%) and not keeping the property in good condition (48%).

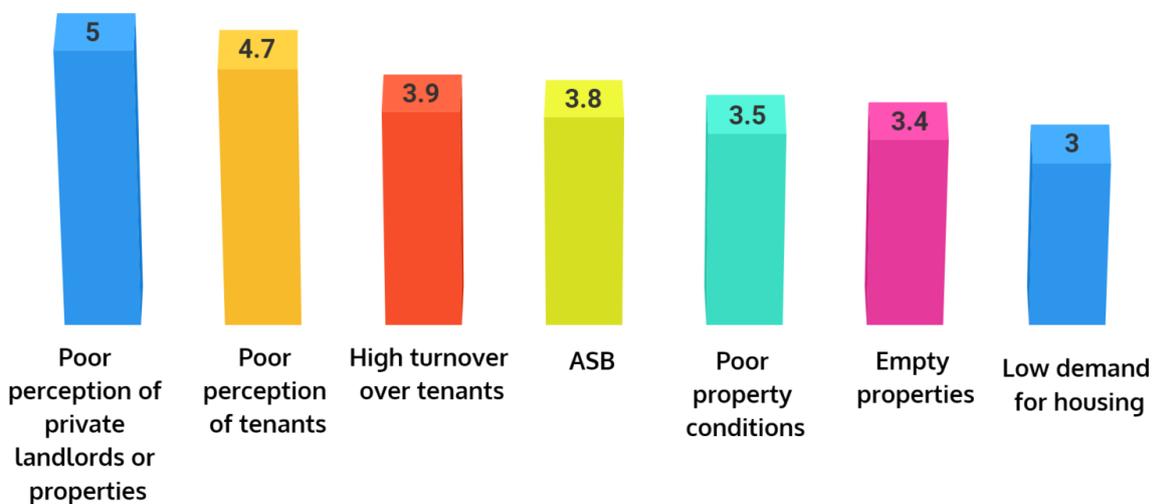
Figure 21: % of tenant problems experienced by landlords (landlords only)



Problems affecting landlords

The last question in the section asked landlords to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not a problem at all and 10 is a major problem, to what extent they believe each of the issues to be in the areas of Sefton where licensing is proposed. A mean score for each option has been calculated. Results are presented in the chart below. The most common problem felt by landlords is the poor perception of private landlords/agents or properties, with a mean score of 5.0. This is closely followed by a poor perception of tenants, with a mean score of 4.7. The third most common issue in this category is a high turnover of tenants, with a mean score of 3.9. Low demand for housing is bottom of the list, with a mean score of 3.0.

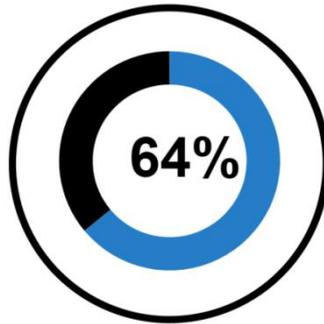
Figure 22: % of tenant problems (landlords only)



Licensing conditions

The last question asked landlords whether they had read the licensing conditions, which they would need to be complied with should any licensing scheme be implemented. Just under two thirds (64%) say they have read the licensing conditions, whilst over a third (35%) say they have not. If any licensing scheme were to be implemented, then landlords would need to comply with the conditions of the licence.

Figure 23: % of landlords who have read the licensing conditions (landlords only – from total consultation)



Respondents were then given the opportunity to add any comments that they wanted to add about the licensing conditions. These are presented below in the form of a word cloud. The size of the text varies according to the number of comments that were made about that particular issue – the larger the text, the more common they are mentioned. The most common comments are around landlords already doing what would be required of them in the conditions, so charging a fee is unreasonable. Other comments are around legislation already existing for many of the licensing conditions, so querying why licensing is necessary and who is responsible for determining whether landlords pass some of these conditions.

Figure 24: Word cloud – free text comments around the licensing conditions



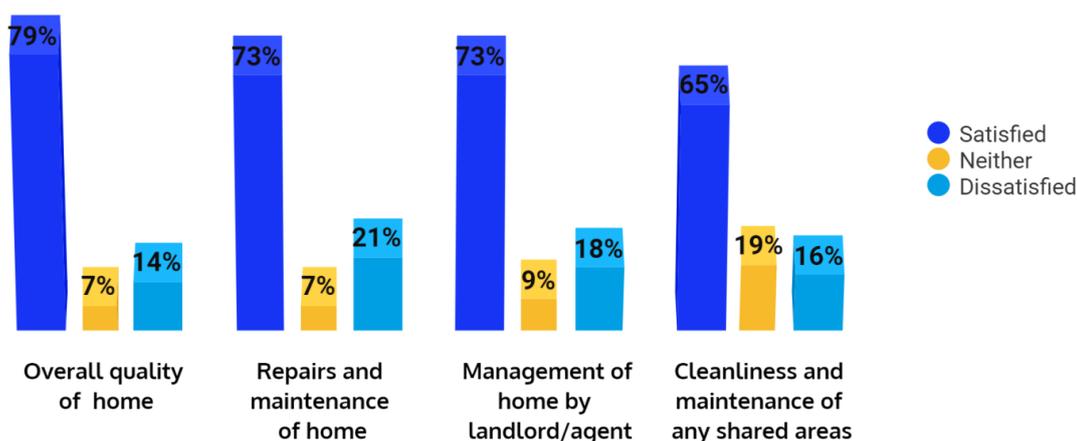
Privately renting tenant experiences in Sefton

As part of the consultation, respondents who say they are privately renting tenants in the borough were asked a series of questions around their experiences.

Satisfaction with aspects of the home

Respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with various aspects of their home in the last 12 months. Around eight out of ten (79%) are satisfied with the overall quality of their home, followed by just under three quarters (73%) who are satisfied with both the repairs and maintenance to their home and the management of their home. Satisfaction with the cleanliness of shared areas (such as kitchens, bathrooms etc....) is slightly lower, with around two thirds satisfied (65%).

Figure 25: Satisfaction with aspects of the home (privately renting tenants only)



When we look at results by the method of consultation, those who responded via the online survey are generally less satisfied than those who took part in other consultation methods, whilst those who responded via the residents survey are more satisfied. However, dissatisfaction with the repairs and maintenance tenants receive is similarly high for both the online and postal survey respondents (31% and 32% respectively).

Table 9: Satisfaction with aspects of the home (privately renting tenants only, by method of consultation)

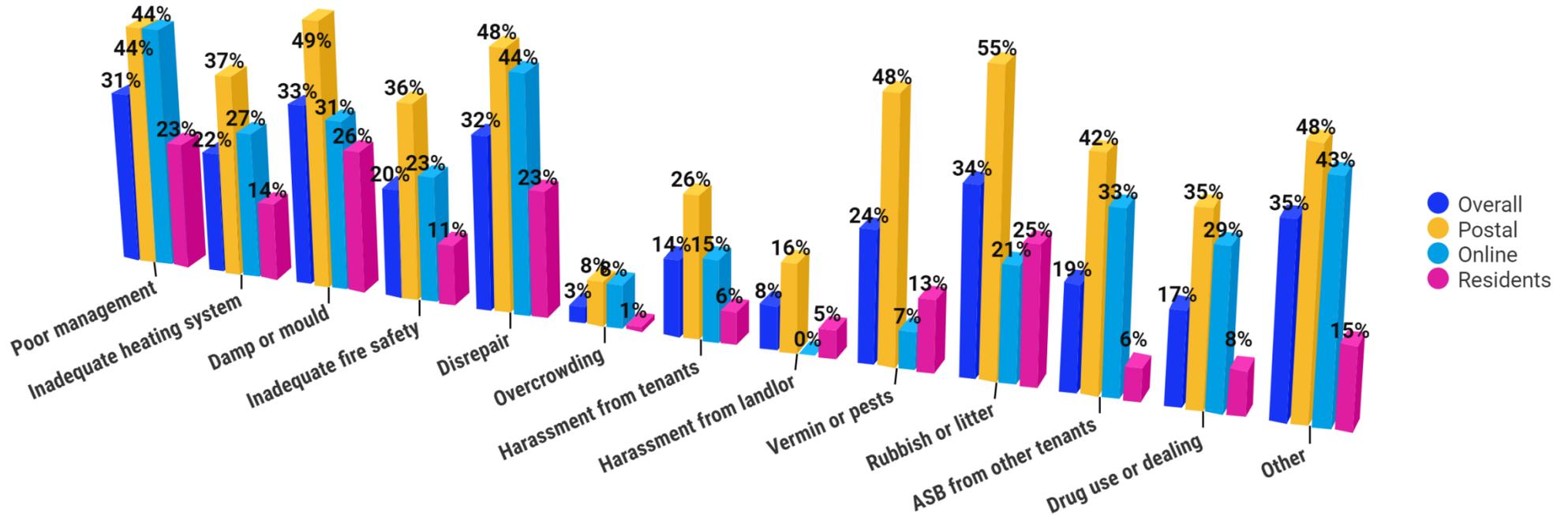
Issues	Residents' survey		Online survey		Postal survey	
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
The overall quality of your home	84%	11%	75%	25%	71%	18%
The overall repairs and maintenance of your home	79%	13%	56%	31%	65%	32%
The management of your home by your landlord or letting agent	80%	11%	50%	25%	65%	27%
The cleanliness of shared areas kitchen, toilet, bathroom	79%	8%	50%	7%	55%	24%

Issues affecting tenants

Respondents were asked to what extent a variety of issues had affected them as a tenant in the last 12 months. 'Other' issues, rubbish or litter, damp or mould, disrepair and the poor management of properties all score over 30% of respondents rating these are a major or minor problem (combined). Harassment from your landlord and overcrowding has the lowest ratings (8% and 3% respectively).

Respondents to the postal survey are more negative across the board, with rubbish or litter (55%), damp or mould (49%), disrepair, vermin and 'other' issues (48% for each) rated to be the biggest issues. Disrepair and poor management (44% each) are the biggest issues for respondents to the online survey. There are also the biggest issues for respondents to the residents survey, but at a much lower figure (23% each).

Figure 26: Minor/major issues experienced in the last 12 months by privately renting tenants only (by methodology)



Appendices

Appendix 1: Consultation document

Appendix 2: Coverage of consultation

Appendix 3: Survey (online version)

Appendix 4: Neighbouring borough results

Appendix 5: Written responses to consultation

Appendix 6: Residential Landlords Association response

Appendix 7: National Landlords Association response

Appendix 8: Home Safe Scheme response



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