Understanding tenant participation and involvement

December 2022

Housing Executive

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

For many years the Housing Executive has been recognized as one of the most customer focused services in Northern Ireland, as evidenced by successful yearly independent Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessments. A key component to this success is the Housing Executive's proactive and committed approach to including tenants and customers in decision making, and seeking feedback to ensure continuous improvements for tenants and customers in an ever evolving society. The results of the Housing Executive's Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey reflects the importance of our engagement with tenants, showing there is generally a correlation between overall tenant satisfaction levels and how well our tenants feel informed, consulted and that their views are listened to and acted upon.
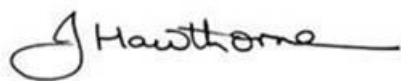
As part of this approach, the Housing Executive has recently carried out a number of pieces of work to assess and improve our customer engagement and participation. Our Community Involvement team delivered a survey with members of our Housing Community Network, our main tenant participation structure, to gain an understanding of customer views on, and satisfaction with, the Housing Executive's current Community Involvement structures, policies and procedures and any barriers to participation and engagement via the existing structures. Following this baseline survey, work is now progressing to deliver further surveys to assess our progress and support constant improvement in relation to customer involvement, engagement and participation.

This year, we also delivered a Customer Voice Audit, which looked at our customer involvement, engagement and participation. This returned a satisfactory result along with some useful recommendations for improvement in relation to governance and risk management. The audit noted many areas of good practice, highlighting our efforts to identify customer needs to ensure they are being met. Effective engagement with tenants was highlighted through the introduction of the Customer Portal providing customers with access to information; partnership working to boost engagement and the maintenance of a Customer Relation Management system by Supporting Communities on our behalf, which holds information on all of the community groups the Housing Executive engages with, updated annually with each group.

We commissioned this research from Perceptive Insight to survey our tenants and their representatives, in order to provide further insight into tenant engagement and participation that will help to shape our future work in this area. Key findings in this survey highlight that there are some demographic limitations in terms of those tenants who get involved, as well as barriers and lack of awareness of opportunities to get involved.

These findings have been incorporated into the development of our new Community Involvement Strategy, which outlines our future plans to support and encourage greater levels of tenant participation and overcome barriers to this. Solutions being explored include facilitating a hybrid approach between face-to face and digital attendance at meetings; the provision of training courses, information sessions and digital inclusion training through our partnership with Supporting Communities; a buddy system for those joining for the first time alone who are apprehensive about not knowing anyone else; working in partnership with other groups to make involvement relevant for a wider range of groups e.g. the Northern Ireland Youth Forum for young people, and the introduction of a range of low-level participation options, such as short surveys for those who want to become more involved but have other commitments. Our Community Involvement team will also be delivering a PR campaign as part of the launch of the new strategy to raise awareness with tenants of the opportunities to get involved and provide us with their views, and for tenants to understand how we are shaped by and act upon their views.

Additionally, work is ongoing within the Housing Executive to explore further measures to assess and understand tenant satisfaction. This will include exploring potential customer engagement and participation tools, and the potential for us to increase and develop these to gain quick feedback from customers on a proactive and reactive basis. This will provide customers with increased opportunities to have their voices heard, allowing them to challenge, shape and influence our services.

Jennifer Hawthorne

Director of Housing Services, NIHE

1. Key insights: summary of findings

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive commissioned Perceptive Insight to undertake a statistically robust survey with Housing Executive tenants to provide insight into tenant engagement. The findings from this study will help to shape the Housing Executive's tenancy engagement strategy and identify areas for improvement.

Methodology

The study consisted of three elements; a telephone survey of 650 tenants, secondary analysis of data collected from a survey of 211 members of the Housing Community Network (HCN), and two focus group discussions with 18 members of the HCN.

The telephone survey took place between November 2021 and February 2022, with each interview taking, on average, 12 minutes to complete. Interviewing was carried out in compliance with the GDPR and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. The survey data was then weighted to be representative of the Housing Executive's stock. This was followed by the two qualitative focus groups, which took place in April 2022. The focus groups were conducted with tenants in the Greater Belfast Area and tenants from elsewhere in Northern Ireland. The focus groups were conducted via Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic and in line with Public Health Agency guidance at the time. The Housing Executive has successfully utilised online surveys and virtual focus groups throughout the pandemic to collect research data.

Key findings and recommendations

Awareness and active participation

- Almost half of tenants (49%) were aware of a community group in their area and 3% of tenants mentioned they were involved in a community group. Awareness was higher among those located in urban areas (52%) compared to those in rural areas (35%)

- 14% were aware of the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Strategy, which aims to promote engagement, and 15% had heard of Supporting Communities NI, which helps to deliver this strategy. However, 41% of those who were aware were not sure whether Supporting Communities NI was active in their area.

- Between 83% and 97% of tenants were not aware of the various groups, panels and forums organised through the Housing Executive. Of these various groups etc, tenants were most likely to be aware of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (17%) and Disability Forum (13%). There was a similar lack of awareness for the provisions the Housing Executive makes to facilitate such groups and panels.

- In relation to active participation, members of the HCN, as part of the group discussions, described how their involvement on different panels encourages tenants to ask for

support with issues such as allocations and disability adaptions. They also spoke positively about the introduction of the Customer Portal and forums due to Covid-19, which they believe has further encouraged participation. However, findings from the tenant survey show there is still a low awareness of the Customer Portal, with 17% being aware of it, 39% of which had never used the portal.

■ In terms of the make-up of community groups, the findings from the HCN Baseline Survey suggest that there are a greater percentage of female tenants involved in community groups, with 57% of group members being female. Feedback from the discussions suggest that it is difficult to encourage young people to become involved, although analysis of HCN members from the survey show 20% of members are aged 18 to 25 years old.

Tenant interest in involvement and participation

■ While 3% are already a member, a further 14% of tenants said they would consider joining a local community group. However, the majority of tenants (76%) reported that they would not be interested in joining such a group. Younger tenants aged under 65 were more likely to express interest in joining a local group, as were those who hold qualifications.

■ Slightly more tenants (19%) confirmed that they would be interested in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum organised through the Housing Executive, with the Disability Forum (39%), Mystery Shopping exercises (33%) and the Area Housing Community Network (32%) being the most preferred groups that tenants would like to become involved in.

■ Almost one quarter (23%) said they would be interested in learning more about community funding opportunities and how they could get involved, while 24% would like to become involved in a Tenants Feedback Group.

■ In relation to the involvement of young people, members of the HCN provided insight into how they find it difficult to involve younger tenants in the panels and networks. They voiced the view that the Housing Executive could do more to nurture and involve young people. This was supported by findings from the HCN Baseline survey, in which 50% of groups had members aged 18-25, compared to 91% that had members aged between 41-60.

Preferred modes of engagement and participation

■ Telephone (35%) was the preferred method of keeping in contact about a community group, followed by a newsletter (14%) and email (13%). For open meetings, tenants were slightly more likely to prefer meeting in person (7%) rather than virtually or online (3%). Those aged 18 to 44 were more likely to prefer online methods including email (21% compared to 4% of those aged 65 and over) and Facebook (17% compared to 3%).

Views on current tenant involvement approaches

- The majority of respondents to the baseline survey (79%) thought that the information on, and access to support, resources and updates was one of the benefits of being a member of the HCN, while 60% thought the opportunity for networking, collaboration and building relationships was a key benefit. Members were generally satisfied with the organisational aspects of the HCN, with the suitability of the venue the more likely aspect respondents would be dissatisfied with (6%).

- Views gathered from the HCN members during the focus groups suggests that while the groups are seen as valuable and effective, occasionally there is frustration towards the Housing Executive when they feel that the views of tenants are not being adequately listened to, and this can hamper the group's effectiveness.

- Tenants who are aware of a local community group were asked if they were satisfied with the group. While over half (53%) reported that they were satisfied, 31% had no opinion and a further 9% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Just 7% expressed dissatisfaction.

- While one quarter (26%) of all respondents to the tenant survey were satisfied with the current opportunities for them to become involved or participate, 68% had no opinion (including those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) and 5% were dissatisfied.

- 19% were satisfied with the funding schemes provided by the HE (77% had no opinion, 3% dissatisfied). 17% were satisfied with the local facilities and support provided by the Housing Executive (78% had no opinion and 4% dissatisfied).

Barriers to involvement and participation

- Of those tenants who were not interested in joining a community group, 54% said this was because they would prefer not to get involved, while 30% had ill health which would prevent them from attending. Other commitments, including family (21%) and work (11%) were also mentioned as a barrier. These were also likely barriers for those who would not be interested in becoming involved in a group or panel or joining the Tenants Feedback Group.

- HCN members described several barriers to involvement that they have encountered, with a lack of confidence in becoming involved being the most common barrier. A need for increased visibility of Patch Managers in communities was expressed by some members as was the need for funding and a joined up approach between the various social housing associations and the Housing Executive. Members also noted how negative experiences with Housing Executive staff can impact perceptions and engagement.

Incentives to encourage participation

- Having the opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve the local area (23%) and to develop skills and confidence (21%) along with flexible meeting times (21%) were possible incentives tenants suggested could increase the likelihood of them becoming involved in their local community group.

- Similar results were also achieved when tenants were asked what would make them more likely to become involved in a group or panel, with the opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve their local area (21%), flexible meeting times (20%) and the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence (19%) all being possible incentives.

- HCN members suggested that the Housing Executive could increase its engagement across their communities as a way to encourage involvement in their community groups, as once tenants see greater commitment and relationship building, they will be more willing to share their opinion with Housing Executive staff. The members also thought there should be more opportunities provided for younger tenants, such as offering apprenticeships, while giving the tenant a purpose within the group would allow them to feel valued.

- The HCN members gave a number of suggestions on how best to implement these incentives. Having an increased presence of Housing Executive staff across the community would give a greater opportunity for tenants to share their views. Involving multiple agencies and statutory bodies in the meetings and groups would also increase the variety of issues and topics that could be discussed. Finally, providing a point of contact would give new tenants a basis to be introduced to and become involved with the groups and schemes in their community.

Conclusions

- It is clear from the findings that there is a large proportion of the tenant population who have little interest in becoming involved in a local community group, panels or forums organised by the Housing Executive (around three quarters). This is compounded by low levels of awareness of and interest in the various initiatives organised by the Housing Executive in local areas. However, there is little dissatisfaction (5%) with current opportunities to become involved or participate in communities and to feedback on services. Therefore, targeting this group with initiatives is unlikely to create much engagement.

- Just 3% are currently involved in a local community group and 14% would consider joining one. When asked about incentives to becoming involved, about one in five showed interest in each of the various initiatives.

- The findings would suggest that the Housing Executive should focus its main activities on encouraging these 'one in five' tenants, promoting opportunities to improve local areas and develop skills and confidence. It is likely face-to-face engagement with Housing Executive staff, with a constant point of contact, alongside flexible meeting times will help to facilitate tenants in becoming more involved.

- In terms of the more reticent wider tenant population, it is likely that a number of channels will be needed to keep them informed more generally. Verbal updates by telephone is

the preferred method, followed by a newsletter and email. The level of awareness (17%) and usage of the Customer Portal is low. Although it is hoped that this will increase with the passage of time. The opportunity to use this channel for engagement currently is limited to those who use it.

2. Introduction

Background

The Department for Communities published the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland for 2015-2020. The aim of the strategy is to encourage social landlords (the Housing Executive and Housing Associations) and social housing tenants to work together to improve services and to encourage tenant participation in decision making.

The Housing Executive's Community Involvement Strategy is implemented through the provision of tenant forums, groups and panels, including local residents' groups. The Housing Executive also provides funding to local communities to support local social enterprise and local community development.

In 2020 the Housing Executive launched the Customer Portal, which is an online account for tenants where they can check account balances, report repairs and send messages to their Patch Manager, including requesting services such as a transfer. The Customer Portal also has the potential to host online surveys, providing additional ways of online participation and engagement with tenants.

The Housing Executive, in August 2021, undertook a baseline survey of members of the Housing Community Network (HCN), which is the key forum for tenant and community engagement in Northern Ireland and which is comprised of over 500 community groups. The aim of this survey was to assess participation and satisfaction amongst groups currently involved in the network. In addition to this study, the Housing Executive commissioned Perceptive Insight to undertake research with their tenants to provide insight into tenant engagement.

Research aims & objectives

The terms of reference for the study were set out in the Housing Executive's tender documents as of August 2021. The overall aim of the research project was to provide insight that will shape the Housing Executive's tenancy engagement strategy and identify areas for improvement. The findings will also provide insight into potential consultative mechanisms through the use of online technology.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Establish a baseline of tenant involvement and participation, including awareness and active participation;

- Establish a baseline of potential tenant interest in involvement and participation activities;

- Identify demographic and location differences in current and prospective involvement and participation;

- Identify preferred modes of engagement/participation and demographic/interest differences amongst these (e.g.; online/remote vs in person/frequency, nature and duration of engagement preferred);

- Identify baseline views on current tenant involvement approaches and satisfaction with these amongst wider tenant base;

- Identify barriers to involvement and participation (e.g. time/access/location or timing of meetings/confidence);

- Identify incentives or nudge factors to encourage involvement and participation (e.g. personal and community benefits and potentially enhancing these e.g. acting as a reference/CV/providing development opportunities);

- Provide a comparison of Housing Executive tenant population to those currently involved in community involvement and tenant participation as measured in Community Baseline Survey.

Report structure

The report begins with an overview of the survey methodology and offers an analysis of respondents' demographic characteristics. The subsequent sections explore each of the research phases as follow:

- Findings from the tenant survey

    - Awareness of Community/Residents Associations

    - Community involvement

    - Facilitating Groups and Forum Panels

    - Awareness of the Customer Portal

- Findings from the HCN survey

    - Understanding of the HCN

    - Groups' services and support provisions

    - Information communication

- Findings from the focus groups

    - Experiences of HCN

    - Barriers

    - Encouraging involvement

    - Suggested improvements

- Conclusions and recommendations.

3. Methodology

This section provides an overview of the approach taken in the design and implementation of the study. The research was undertaken in three parts; a survey of tenants, analysis of a survey undertaken with HCN members and two focus groups with tenants.

Survey of tenants

In summary, a total of 650 telephone interviews were conducted with a stratified random sample of Housing Executive tenants.

The sampling frame for this study was all Housing Executive tenants. The Housing Executive project team randomly selected an initial sample of 3,120 contacts across the 13 Housing Areas. Due to an issue with duplication with another study, 1,853 of these contacts were used.

The Housing Executive required a minimum of 650 interviews to be completed from the full cohort of tenants, with 50 achieved interviews in each of the 13 Area Office geographies. The following table provides the number and percentage of tenancies in each area and the number of completed interviews per area. It should be noted that, before undertaking analysis, the dataset was weighted to be representative by Area.

Table 3.1: Number of tenancies by areas and achieved interviews

Housing Area	Number of tenancies	% of tenancies	Achieved number of interviews
North Belfast	5,742	7%	50
South East Belfast	9,328	11%	50
West Belfast	9,707	12%	50
Lisburn Castlereagh	5,106	6%	50
North Down Ards	6,117	7%	50
South Down	5,108	6%	50
South	7,221	9%	50
South West	3,514	4%	50
Mid Ulster	3,802	5%	50
South Antrim	6,125	7%	50
East	5,494	7%	50
West	8,526	10%	50
Causeway	6,448	8%	50
Total	*82,238*	*100%*	*650*

A draft questionnaire was provided by **The Housing Executive's** project team. It was scripted for CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) and a pilot survey was conducted with 20 tenants prior to finalising the questionnaire.

An advance letter was issued to the selected households, informing them of the study and requesting their participation.

The interviews were conducted by Perceptive Insight's team of researchers. Interviewing took place by telephone between December 2021 and March 2022. The following table provides an overview of the outcome of each call that was made. The response rate for the survey was 40%.

Table 3.2: Outcome of calls made

Outcome	Count	Percentage
Completed interview	650	35%
No response	851	46%
Refused	169	9%
Not in service	157	8%
Wrong number	26	1%
Total	*1,853*	*100%*
Total eligible contacts	1,670	
Response rate	650	40%

Analysis of HCN survey

The Housing Executive undertook a survey of HCN members during 2019 and 2020. The dataset of 211 respondents to this survey was provided to Perceptive Insight for analysis.

Qualitative focus groups

Two qualitative focus group discussions were conducted with existing HCN members to ascertain the barriers to and difficulties in encouraging wider participation and potential incentives that may help to overcome these barriers. 18 HCN members took part in the focus groups which were conducted via Zoom. One of the discussions took place with those located in the Greater Belfast Area and the other with those from elsewhere in Northern Ireland. The discussions were recorded and transcribed in preparation for analysis.

4. Findings from the tenant survey

In this section of the report, we present the findings from the survey of 650 tenants, which was conducted by telephone between December 2021 and March 2022. The section is structured under the following headings:

- Awareness of community/resident associations;
- Community involvement;
- Facilitating groups and forum panels; and
- Awareness of the Customer Portal.

Awareness of community/resident associations

Awareness of community/resident associations

Respondents were asked if they were aware of a local community group in their area. Just less than half (49%) confirmed that they were aware that there was a local group, one quarter (24%) stated that they were not aware of any groups and 27% were unsure.

Respondents living in urban areas (52%) were more likely than those in rural areas (35%) to be aware of a community group in their area.

Those who were aware of a local community group were asked if they felt it represents the local community as a whole. 61% felt that it did, one in ten (10%) thought that it did not and 29% were unsure.

Figure: 4.1: Awareness of local community groups

Local community groups

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Q2.1 Focusing on your local area, are you aware if your area has a local Community Group?
Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

- 49%
- 24%
- 27%

Q2.2 Do you feel the local Community Group is representative of the local community as a whole?
Base: 314/318. Those who are aware of local community group. Weighted data

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

- 61%
- 10%
- 29%

Q2.2

Table 4.1: Awareness of local community groups by location

		Yes	No	Not sure	*Total*
Overall	All *Base: 650/650*	49%	24%	27%	*100%*
Location	Urban *Base: 516/540*	52%	23%	25%	*100%*
	Rural *Base: 134/110*	35%	31%	33%	*100%*

Willingness to join

Respondents were asked whether they would consider joining a local community group. Only 14% indicated they would consider it, whereas a little over three quarters (76%) said they would not. 3% confirmed that they are already a part of their local community group and 6% said they were unsure about joining one.

Younger respondents aged between 18 and 44 (18%) were more likely to consider joining a local community group when compared with older respondents aged over 65 (6%). Those who had achieved a qualification[1] (19%) were also more likely to consider joining than those who had no qualifications (11%).

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[1] Those with a qualification refers to respondents whose highest level of qualification is GCSE/O Level (or equivalent) or above.

Figure 4.2: Willingness to join the local community groups

Would you consider joining a local Community Group?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Response	%
Yes	14
No	76
Already involved	3
Don't know	6

Q2.3
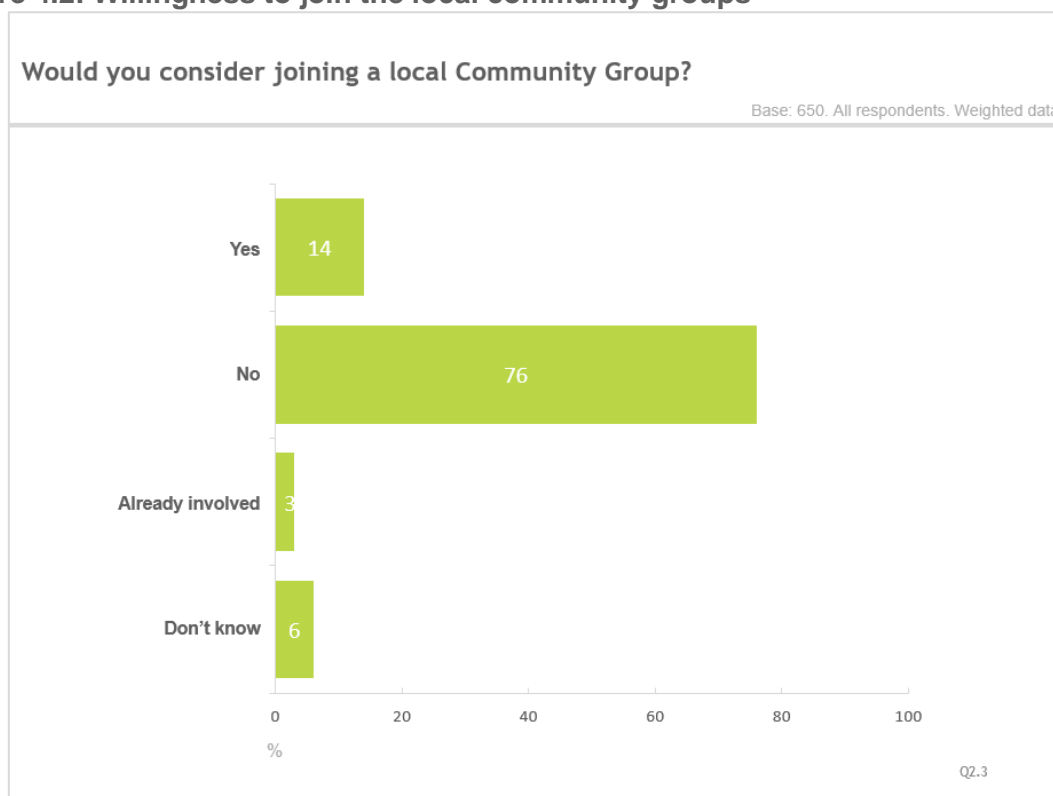
Table 4.2: Willingness to join the local community groups by age and education

		Yes	No	Already involved	Not sure	Total
Overall	All *Base: 650/650*	14%	76%	3%	6%	*100%*
Age	Under 45 *Base: 171/172*	18%	74%	3%	5%	*100%*
	45-64 *Base: 276/275*	17%	71%	4%	8%	*100%*
	65 plus *Base: 200/200*	6%	86%	3%	5%	*100%*
Education	Qualifications *Base: 266/266*	19%	69%	5%	7%	*100%*
	No qualifications *Base: 384/384*	11%	82%	2%	5%	*100%*

Those who confirmed that they would be interested in joining a community group were asked about the hours they would be willing to commit to this activity each month. The mode was 3 to 5 hours per month with 30% saying they would be willing to dedicate this amount of time. 18% said they would be prepared to give less than 3 hours per month to this activity and 30% stated they would commit more than 5 hours per month. It should also be noted that 22% were not sure how many hours they would be willing to commit to a community group.

Figure 4.3: Hours per month prepared to commit to a community group

If yes, how many hours per month would you be prepared to commit to a local Community Group?

Base: 101/93. Those who would consider joining a Community Group. Weighted data

Category	%
More than 30 hours	3
26-30 hours	2
21-25 hours	2
16-20 hours	3
11-15 hours	5
6-10 hours	15
3-5 hours	30
Less than 3 hours	18
Don't know	22

Q2.3a
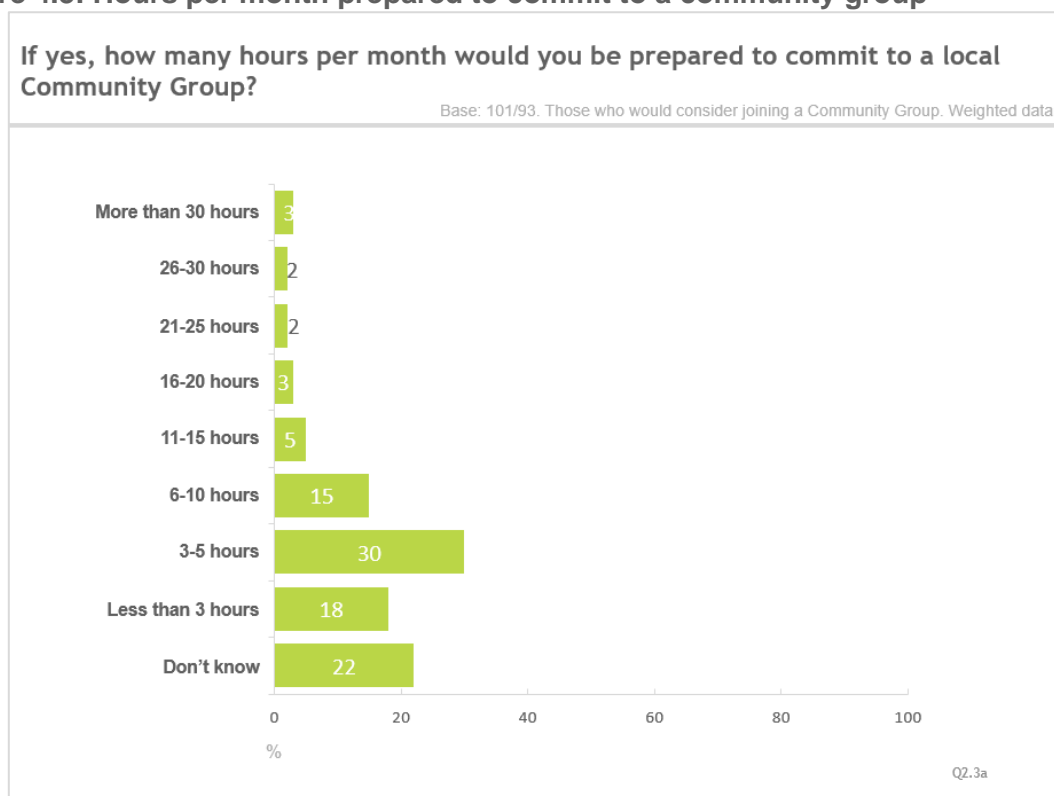
Over half (54%) of tenants who are not interested in joining a community group said this was because they preferred not to get involved, while 30% and 14% respectively mentioned having ill health or a physical disability that would prevent them from joining. 21% said they would not have sufficient free time due to family commitments, and 11% would be constrained by work commitments.

Figure 4.4: Reasons for not joining a community group

Why would you not consider joining a local Community Group?

Base: 492/496. Those who would not consider joining a Community Group. Weighted data

Category	%
Family commitments	21
Work commitments	11
Ill health	30
Physical disability	14
Lack of suitable transport	
Location of meetings	
Don't feel I have the confidence to take part	4
Don't think my opinion matters	2
Don't think I would make a difference	1
Prefer not to get involved	54
Don't know enough about it	2
Other	2
Don't know	1

[1] Multiple choice question

Q2.4

Tenants were then asked what measures the Housing Executive could implement to increase the likelihood of them becoming involved in their local community group. The majority (>72%) stated that they would be unlikely to become involved irrespective of the measures proposed.

The opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve their local area (23% saying 'likely' or 'very likely') was the most common measure tenants said would be likely to encourage them to join, followed by the opportunity to develop skills and confidence (21%).

Respondents aged 18 to 44 and those with qualifications were more likely to say that these methods would encourage them to become involved in a community group than those aged 65 and over and those with no qualifications. The following significant differences were also observed in terms of the type of household a respondent lives in:

- 28% of lone parents said that online or remote access to meetings would increase the likelihood of them becoming involved, compared to 14% of lone adults. Lone parents would also be encouraged to participate if they were able to receive help with equipment to participate in online meetings (28%, compared to 13% of lone adults);

- Lone parents (32%) and those living in households with two or more adults with dependant children (29%) were more likely to suggest that having access to training would make them more likely to become involved when compared with those living in households with two or more adults with no dependants (15%) and lone adults (14%);

- Having access to conferences (26%) and to support (29%) would be more likely to increase the likelihood of lone parents joining their local community group (compared to 13% and 16% of lone adults respectively);

- One third (34%) of lone parents would be encouraged to join a community group if they had the opportunity to develop their skills, compared to 18% of those living in households with two or more adults and no dependants (18%) and lone adults (17%).

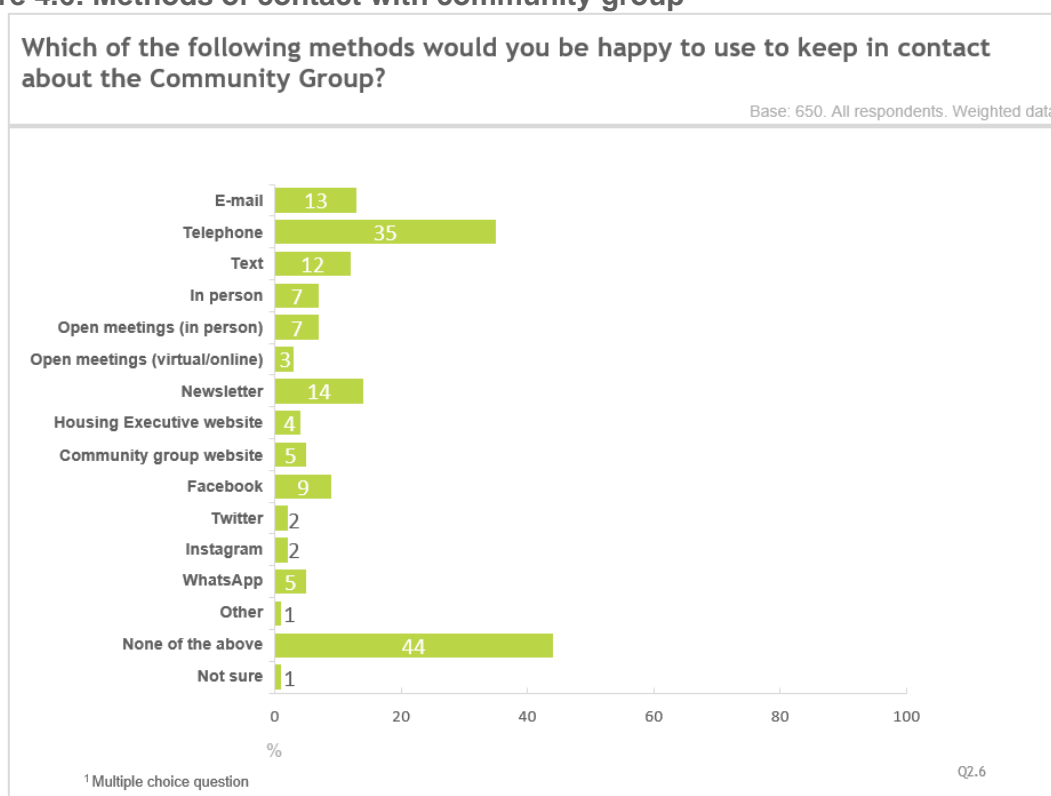**Figure 4.5: Methods of encouraging participation in a community group**
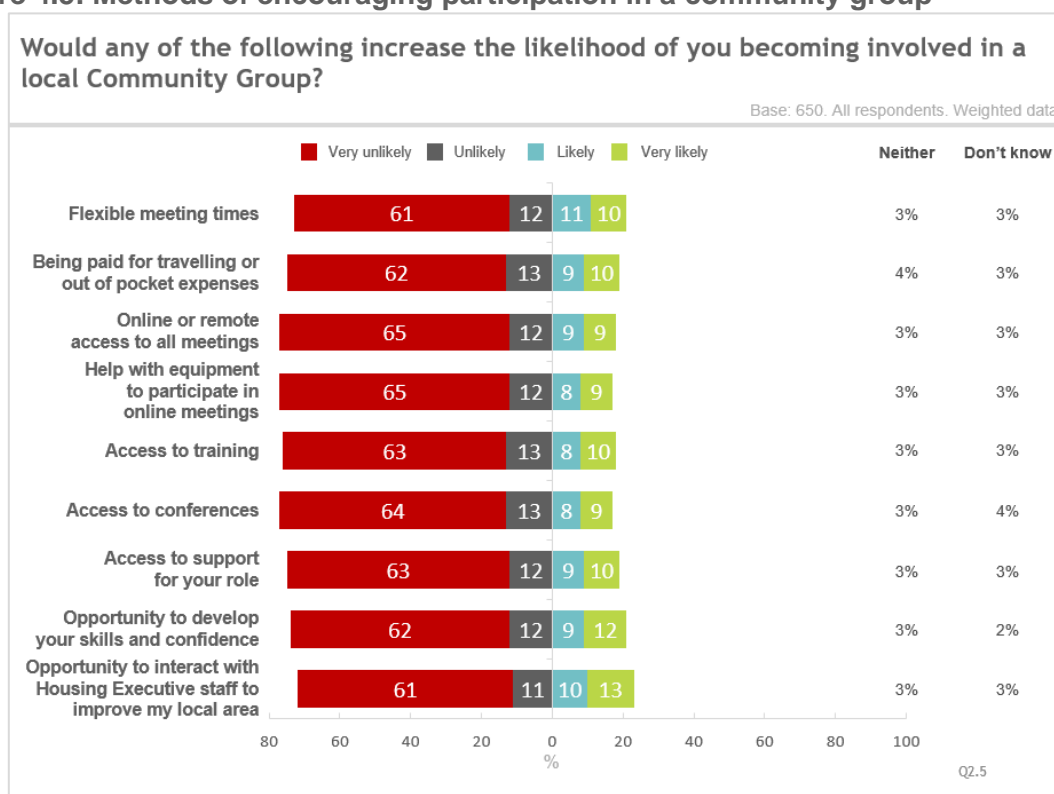
Contact with local community group

Tenants were asked which method they would be happy to use to keep in contact about their community group. The most preferred method was by telephone with over one third (35%) saying they would be happy to use this method. 14% stated that they would like to receive a newsletter, 13% would prefer an email, and 12% would be happy to receive a text about their local community group. 11% confirmed that they would be happy to use social media, with Facebook (9%) and WhatsApp (5%) the most preferred platforms. However, 44% reported that they were not interested in any of the proposed methods of being kept informed.

Those aged 18 to 44 were more likely to prefer online methods including email (21% compared to 4% of those aged 65 and over) and Facebook (17%, compared to 3%), while respondents aged 65 and over were more likely to say they would not want any contact with the community group (55%, compared to 38% of 18 to 44 year olds).

Figure 4.6: Methods of contact with community group

Which of the following methods would you be happy to use to keep in contact about the Community Group?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Method	%
E-mail	13
Telephone	35
Text	12
In person	7
Open meetings (in person)	7
Open meetings (virtual/online)	3
Newsletter	14
Housing Executive website	4
Community group website	5
Facebook	9
Twitter	2
Instagram	2
WhatsApp	5
Other	1
None of the above	44
Not sure	1

¹ Multiple choice question

Q2.6

Satisfaction with local community group

Those who were aware of a local community group in their area were asked whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the community group. Over a half (56%) have indicated they were satisfied (30% very satisfied and 26% fairly satisfied), compared to 5% who were dissatisfied (3% 'fairly' and 2% 'very dissatisfied'). A lack of communication, activity and representativeness were all given as reasons for dissatisfaction. 40% stated they do not hold an opinion or were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 4.7: Overall satisfaction with local community group

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local Community Group?

Base: 314/318. Those who are aware of a local Community Group. Weighted data

Category	%
Very satisfied	30
Fairly satisfied	26
Neither	9
Fairly dissatisfied	3
Very dissatisfied	2
No opinion	31

Q2.7
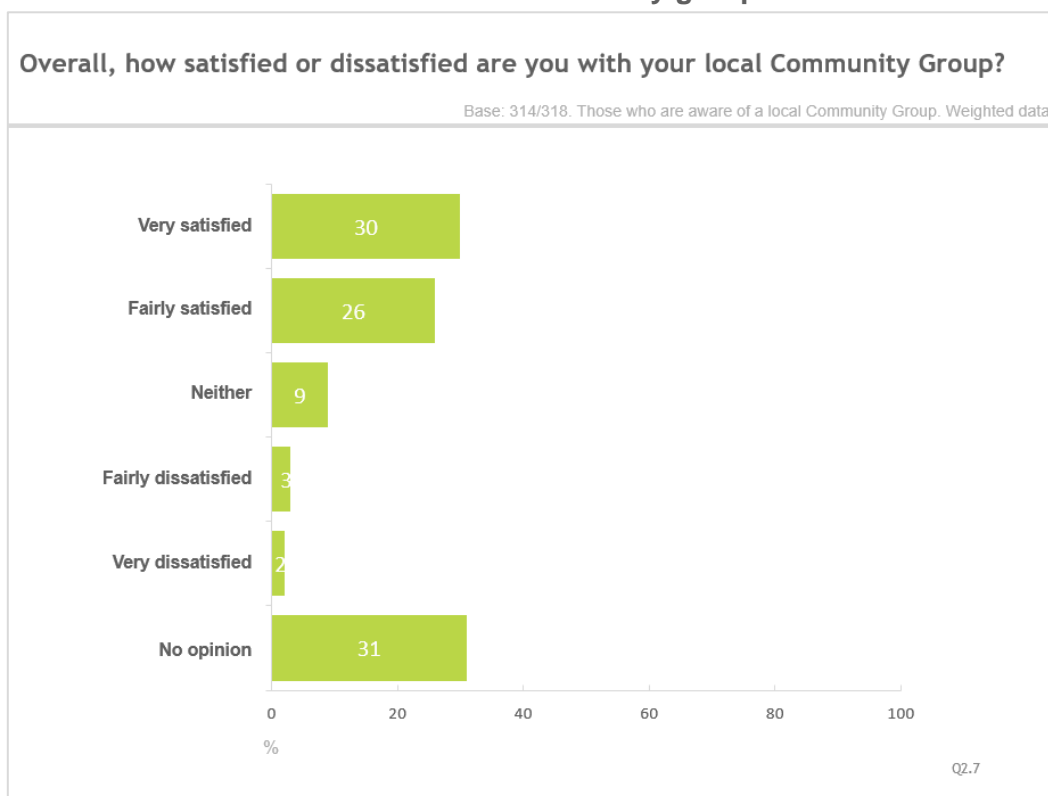
Community involvement

Awareness of Community Involvement Strategy

Those taking part in the survey were informed about the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Strategy, which aims to promote engagement with tenants to incorporate their views into the development of their community and the services provided. They were then asked whether they are aware of this strategy. 14% indicated they are aware compared to 86% who stated they are not aware of the Community Involvement Strategy.

Those individuals who said they were aware of the Community Involvement Strategy were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they feel about the strategy in place. More than a half (54%) said they were satisfied with the strategy in contrast to 9% who were dissatisfied. 26% held no opinion regarding the strategy and 11% felt neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 4.8: Community Involvement Strategy awareness and satisfaction
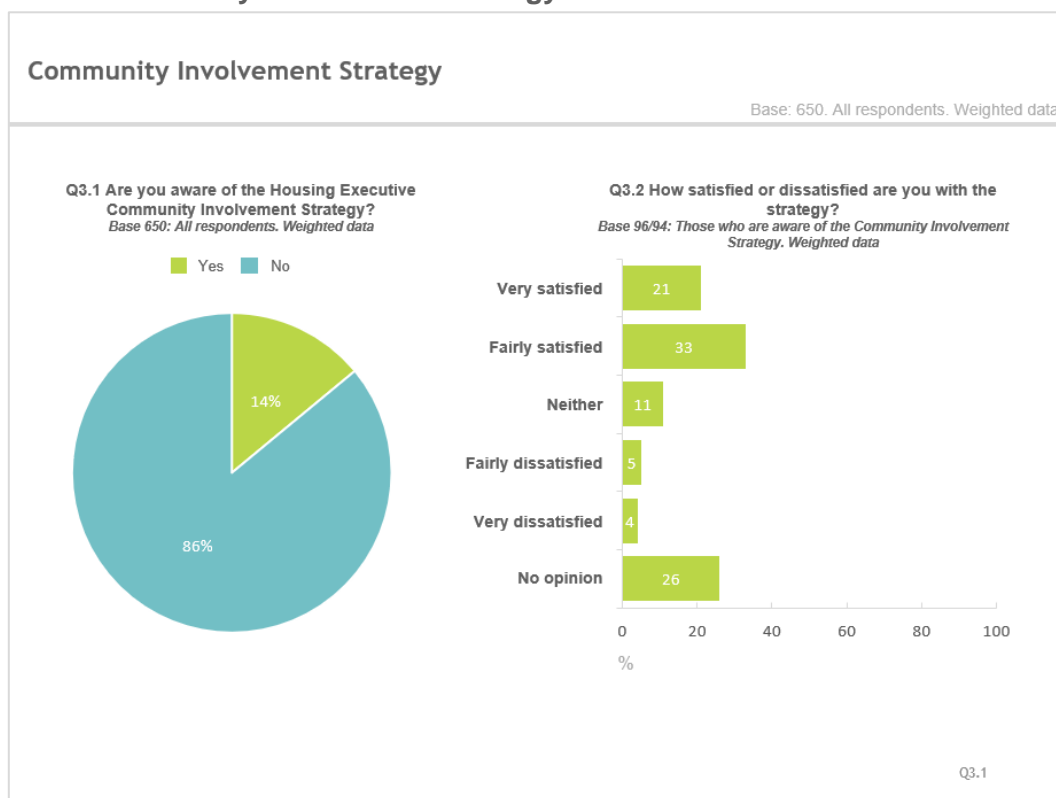
Awareness of Supporting Communities NI

Survey respondents were then informed that the Housing Executive works in partnership with Supporting Communities NI to help deliver the Community Involvement Strategy. Again, tenants were asked whether they were aware of Supporting Communities NI, with 15% saying they had heard of the organisation prior to participating in this survey. Respondents living in the South Region (22%) were more likely to be aware of Supporting Communities NI when compared with those in the North Region (11%).

Of those who were aware, 41% said that Supporting Communities NI were active in their area or community, compared to 18% who reported they were not active. It should also be noted that despite being aware of Supporting Communities NI, two in five (41%) did not know whether or not they operated in their local area.

Figure 4.9: Awareness of Supporting Communities NI

Supporting Communities NI

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Q3.4 Are you aware of Supporting Communities NI?
Base 650: All respondents. Weighted data

Yes   No   Don't know

1%
15%
84%

Q3.5 Are Supporting Communities NI active in your area or community?
Base 102/97: Those who are aware of Supporting Communities NI. Weighted data

Yes   No   Don't know

41%   41%
18%

Q3.4
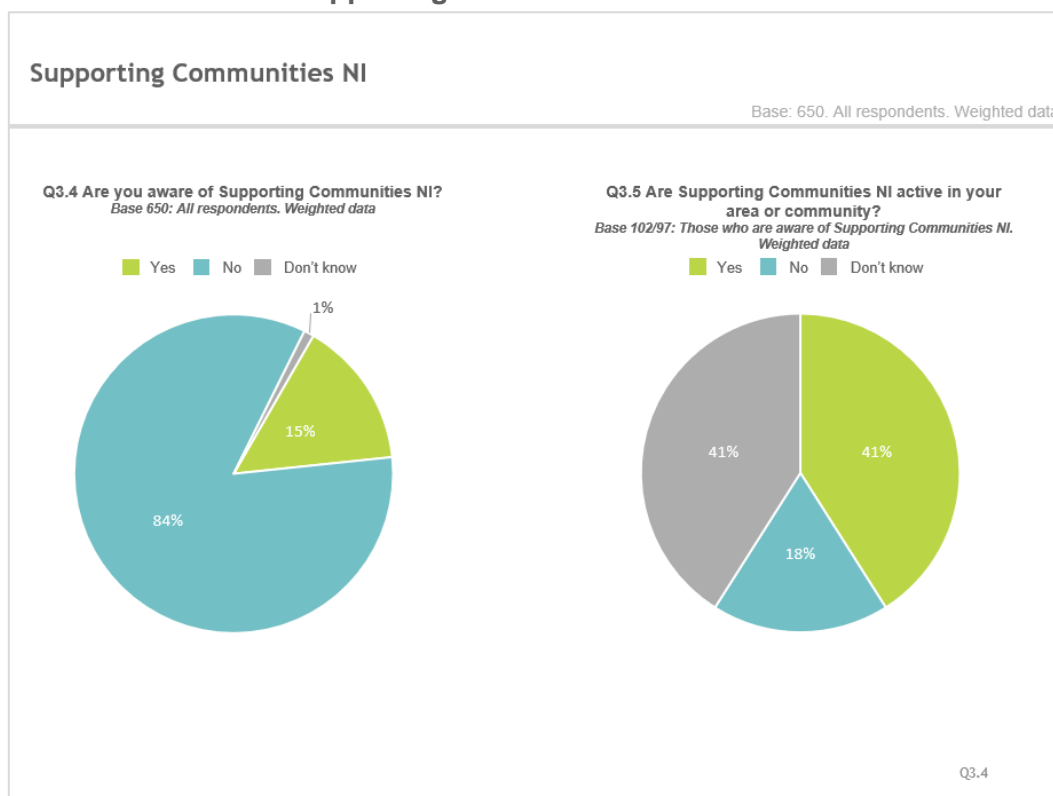
Table 4.3: Awareness of Supporting Communities NI by region

		Yes	No	Not sure	*Total*
Overall	All *Base: 650/650*	15%	84%	1%	*100%*
Region	Belfast Region *Base: 200/236*	13%	86%	2%	*100%*
	South Region *Base: 250/204*	22%	78%	0%	*100%*
	North Region *Base: 200/210*	11%	89%	1%	*100%*

Awareness of groups, panels and forums organised through the Housing Executive

Tenants were asked if they were involved in or aware of a number of the groups, panels and forums organised through the Housing Executive. The majority (>85%) were not aware of any of the specified groups, panels or forums, with awareness lowest for the Strategic Cohesion Forum (97% unaware) and the Tenant Security Panels (97% unaware), while awareness was greatest for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (17% aware) and the Mystery Shopping exercises (12% aware). Only one tenant confirmed that they were involved in the NI Youth Forum, or the Mystery Shopping exercises.

Figure 4.10: Awareness of groups, panels and forums

Are you aware of and have you been involved in any of the following groups, panels and forums organised through the Housing Executive in your local area?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Legend: ■ Not aware ■ Aware but not involved ■ Involved

Group	Not aware	Aware but not involved
Area Housing Community Networks	91	8
Belfast Regional Housing Community Network	95	5
Central Housing Forum	95	4
Disability Forum	86	13
Northern Ireland Youth Forum	83	17
Strategic Cohesion Forum	97	2
Tenant Scrutiny Panels	97	3
Mystery Shopping exercises	87	12
Any other groups, panels or forums	99	

¹ Due to rounding percentages add to 99%-101%

Q3.6

Interest in becoming involved in groups, panels, or forums

When asked whether they would be interested in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum which is organised through Housing Executive, two thirds (67%) indicated they would have no interest at all and a further 7% said they were 'not very interested' in becoming involved. One in five (19%) confirmed they would be either 'fairly' or 'very interested' in getting involved.

Those aged between 18 and 44 (25%) were more likely to be interested in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum when compared with respondents aged 65 and over (11%), as were those who have qualifications (26%) in comparison to those without (15%). Although those living in the South Region (68%) were not as likely to not be interested in becoming involved compared to those in the Belfast Region, there were no significant differences observed between those who said they would be interested.

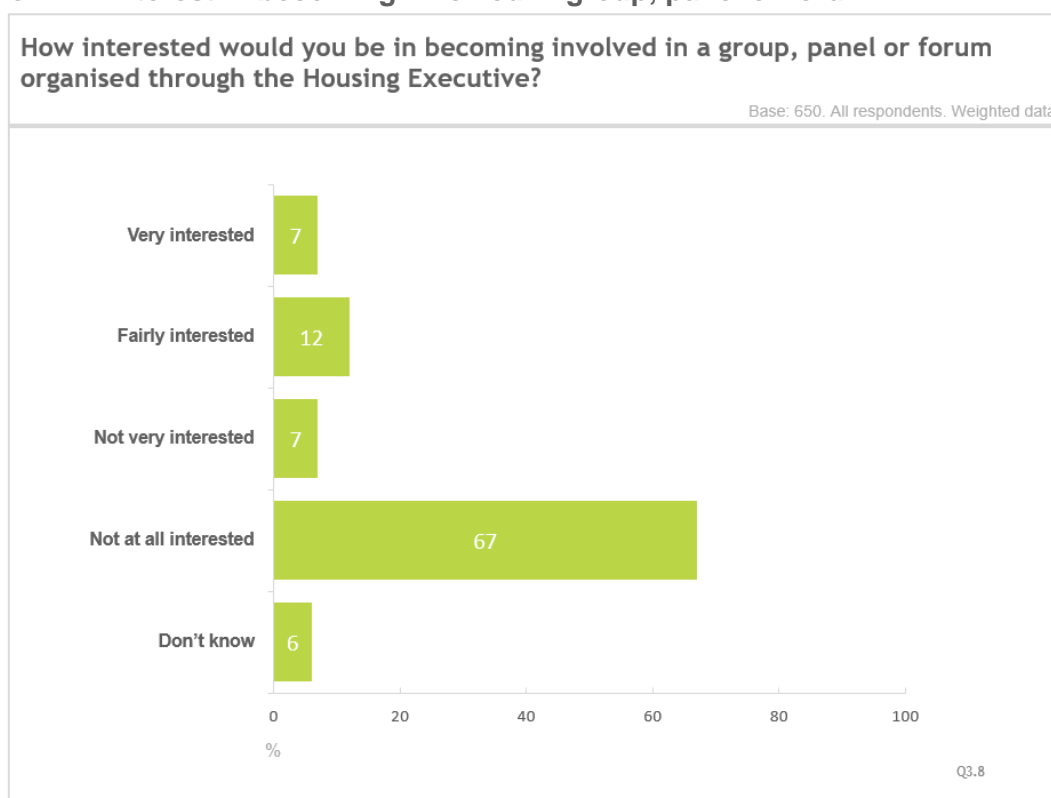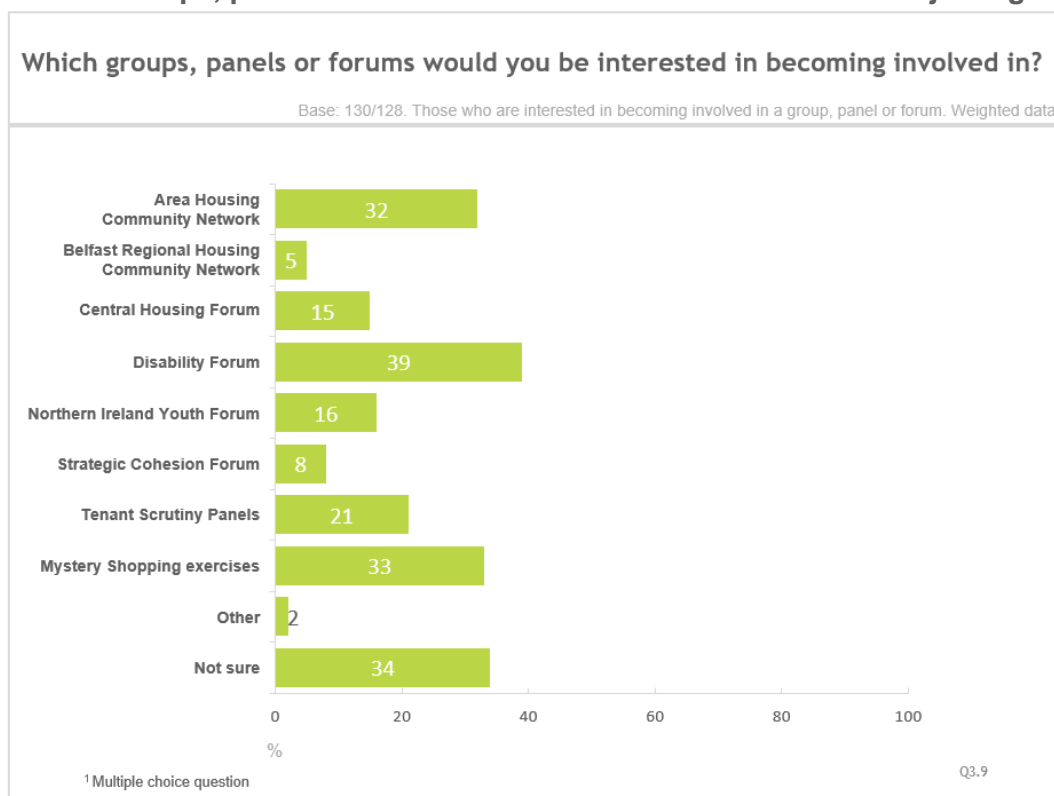**Figure 4.11: Interest in becoming involved in group, panel or forum**

How interested would you be in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum organised through the Housing Executive?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

- Very interested: 7
- Fairly interested: 12
- Not very interested: 7
- Not at all interested: 67
- Don't know: 6

%

Q3.8

Table 4.4: Interest in becoming involved in group, panel or forum by age, education and region

		Not interested	Interested	Not sure	Total
Overall	All Base: 650/650	74%	20%	6%	100%
Age	Under 45 Base: 171/172	64%	25%	10%	100%
	45-64 Base: 276/275	73%	22%	5%	100%
	65 plus Base: 200/200	86%	11%	3%	100%
Education	Qualifications Base: 637	67%	26%	8%	100%
	No qualifications Base: 1861	80%	15%	5%	100%
Region	Belfast Region Base: 200/236	80%	15%	6%	100%
	South Region Base: 250/204	68%	24%	7%	100%
	North Region Base: 200/210	74%	21%	5%	100%

Of those who expressed an interest in participating in a group, panel, or forum, two in five (39%) said they would consider becoming involved in the Disability Forum, while one third (33%) would like to take part in the Mystery Shopping exercises. 32% said they would be interested in the Area Housing Community Network. It should also be noted that one third (34%) were not sure which group, panel, or forum they would like to join, suggesting that they may lack knowledge of the various opportunities available to them to become involved.

Figure 4.12: Groups, panels and forums tenants would be interested in joining

Which groups, panels or forums would you be interested in becoming involved in?

Base: 130/128. Those who are interested in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum. Weighted data

Category	%
Area Housing Community Network	32
Belfast Regional Housing Community Network	5
Central Housing Forum	15
Disability Forum	39
Northern Ireland Youth Forum	16
Strategic Cohesion Forum	8
Tenant Scrutiny Panels	21
Mystery Shopping exercises	33
Other	2
Not sure	34

1 Multiple choice question

Q3.9

One third (32%) of those tenants who expressed an interest in becoming involved said they would be prepared to commit less than three hours per month to the group, panel, or forum. One in five (22%) would set aside 3 to 5 hours, and 13% would commit between 6 and 10 hours. 18% were not sure how many hours they would be willing to commit.

Figure 4.13: Commitment to a group, panel or forum

How many hours per month would be you prepared to commit to a group, panel or forum?

Base: 130/128. Those who are interested in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum. Weighted data

Category	%
More than 30 hours	4
26-30 hours	
21-25 hours	1
16-20 hours	5
11-15 hours	4
6-10 hours	13
3-5 hours	22
Less than 3 hours	32
Don't know	18

Q3.10
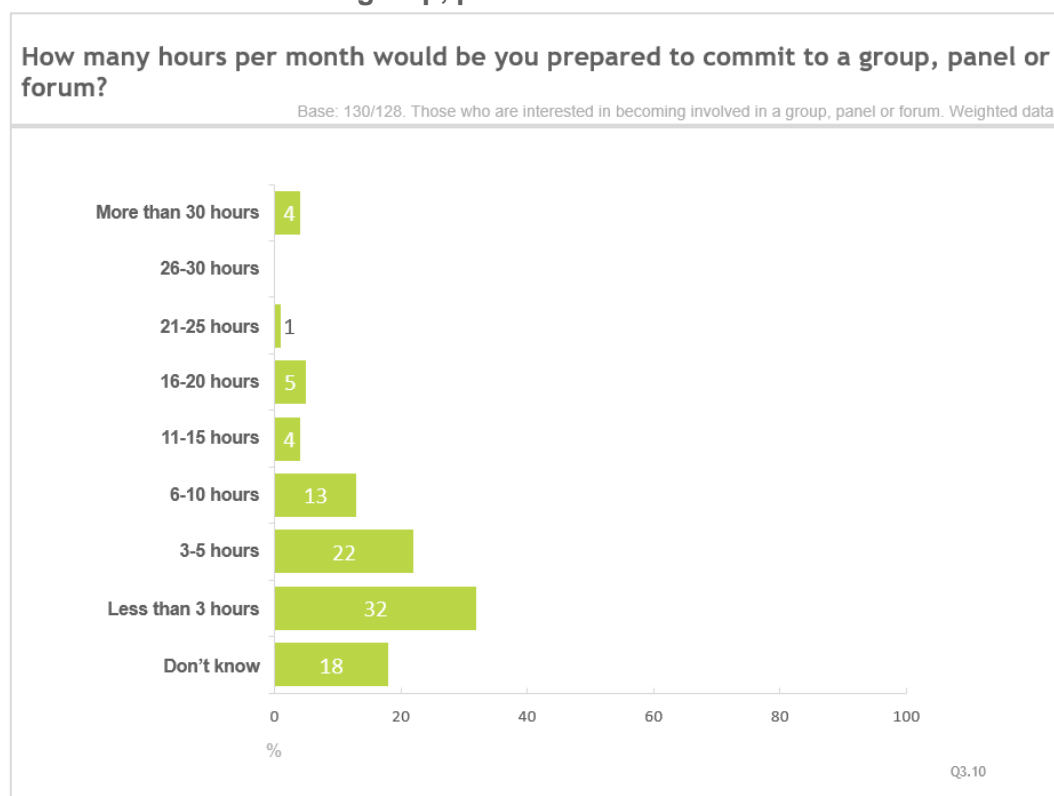
Those who were not interested in becoming involved in a group, panel or forum were asked about their reasons for saying this. 42% said it was their preference to not get involved, while one quarter (24%) mentioned they were in ill health and 6% had a physical disability which would prevent them from participating. 15% said they don't have the time to participate due to family commitments, and 8% mentioned having work commitments.
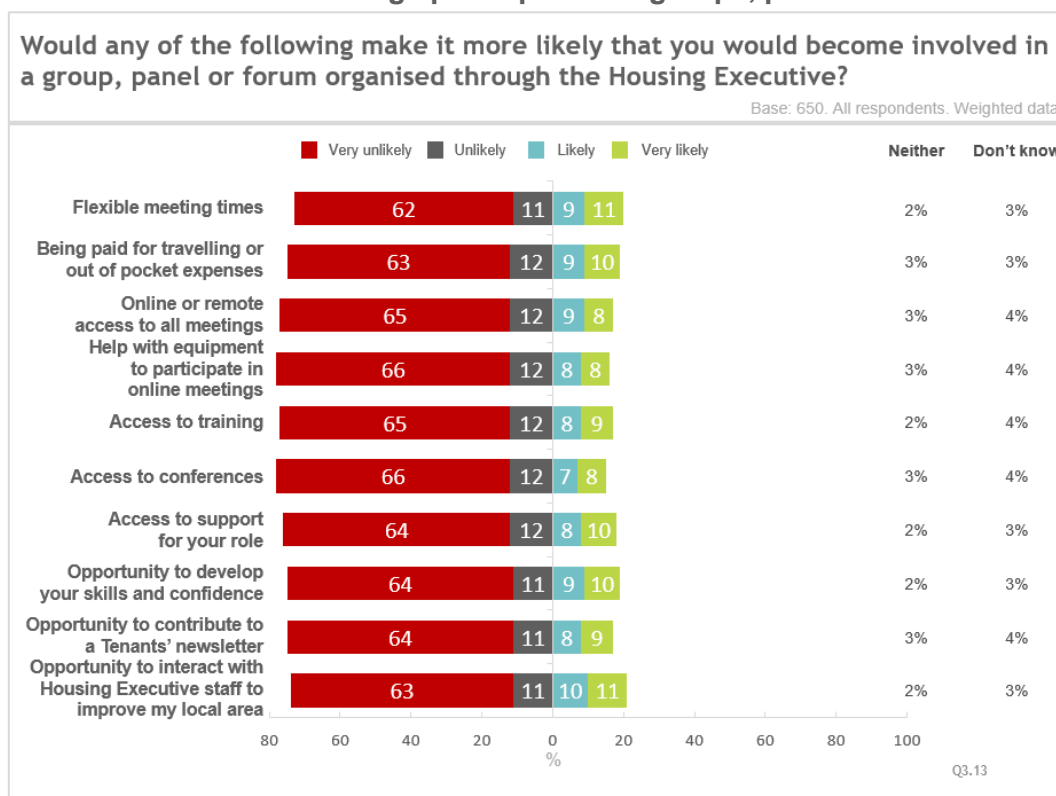
Figure 4.14: Reasons for not joining a group, panel or forum
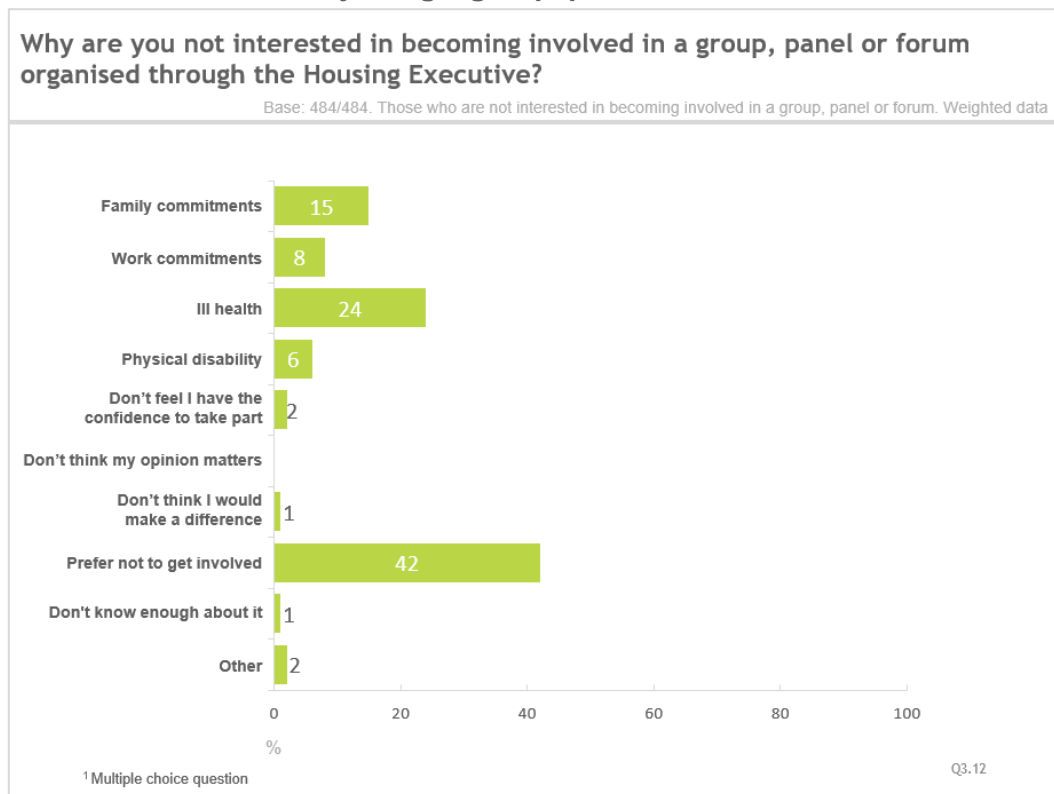
All tenants were then asked if there was anything the Housing Executive could do that would encourage them to become involved in a group, panel, or forum. Similar to the previous findings about community group involvement, tenants said they would be more likely to become involved if they had the opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve their local area (21%) and if there were flexible meeting times (20%). This was followed by 19% who would like the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence, while 19% would be 'likely' or 'very likely' to become involved if they were reimbursed for travelling or out of pocket expenses.

Respondents aged between 18 and 44 and those who have qualifications were more likely than those aged 65 and over and those without qualifications to say that each of these methods would encourage them to become involved in a group, panel or forum.

Figure 4.15: Methods to encourage participation in groups, panels and forums

Would any of the following make it more likely that you would become involved in a group, panel or forum organised through the Housing Executive?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very likely	Neither	Don't know
Flexible meeting times	62	11	9	11	2%	3%
Being paid for travelling or out of pocket expenses	63	12	9	10	3%	3%
Online or remote access to all meetings	65	12	9	8	3%	4%
Help with equipment to participate in online meetings	66	12	8	8	3%	4%
Access to training	65	12	8	9	2%	4%
Access to conferences	66	12	7	8	3%	4%
Access to support for your role	64	12	8	10	2%	3%
Opportunity to develop your skills and confidence	64	11	9	10	2%	3%
Opportunity to contribute to a Tenants' newsletter	64	11	8	9	3%	4%
Opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve my local area	63	11	10	11	2%	3%

Q3.13

Satisfaction with opportunities to become involved and provide feedback on services in the community

Tenants were asked how satisfied they were with the current opportunities available to them to become involved and participate in their community and provide feedback on services. Over half (55%) had no opinion on this matter, with one quarter (26%) saying they were 'fairly' or 'very satisfied' with the opportunities to participate. This is compared to 5% who said they were dissatisfied.

Figure 4.16: Satisfaction with opportunities to become involved or participate in communities
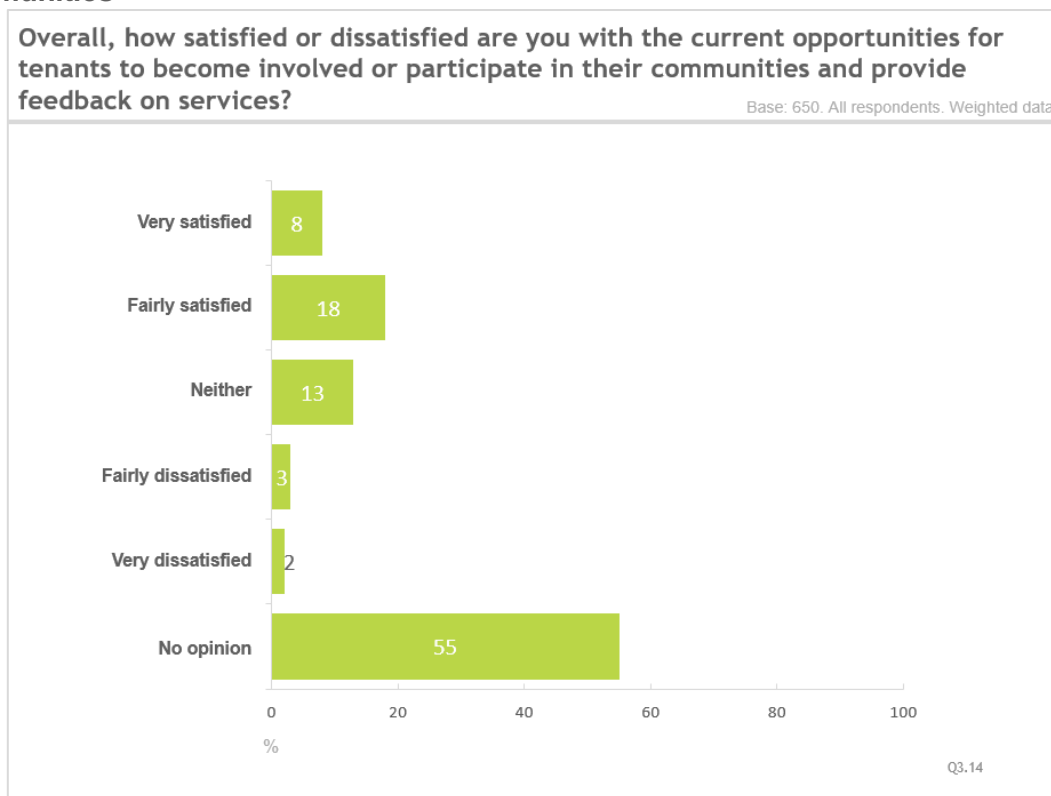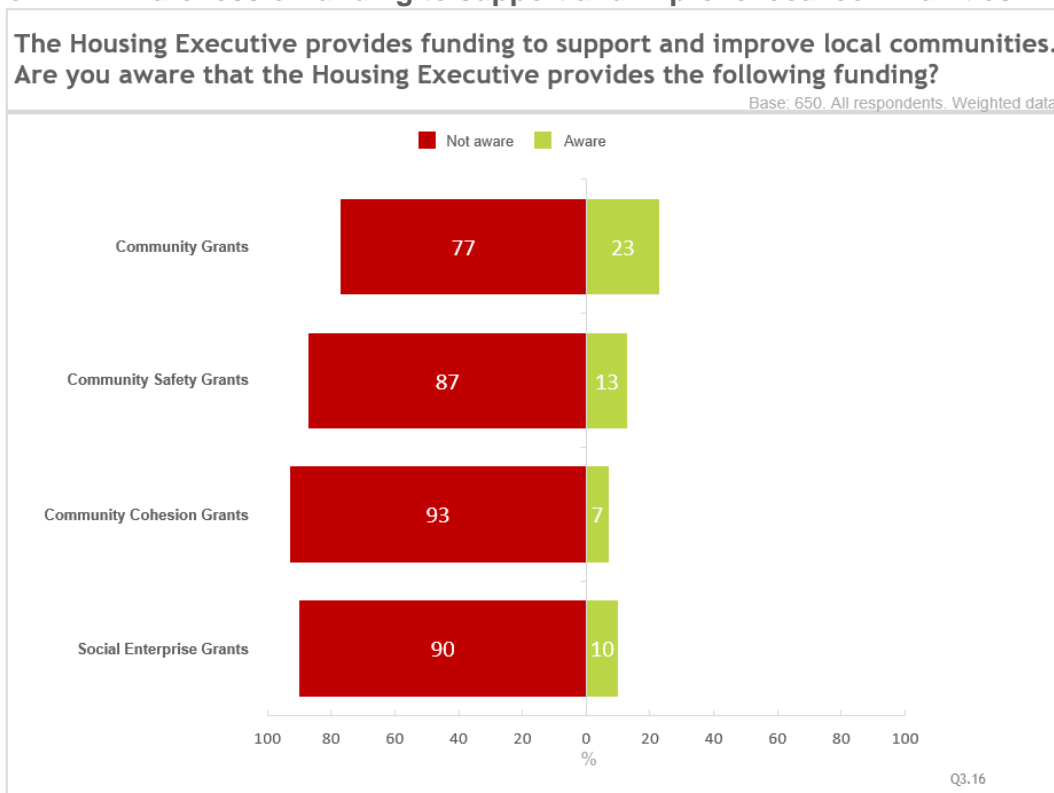

Community funding

Survey respondents were informed that the Housing Executive provides funding to support and improve local communities through the following grants:

- Community Grants;

- Community Safety Grants;

- Community Cohesion Grants; and

- Social Enterprise Grants.

Tenants were then asked whether they had heard of any of these grants. Awareness of the grants was low with less than one quarter (23%) aware of Community Grants and 13% aware of Community Safety Grants. One in ten (10%) had heard of Social Enterprise Grants, with awareness lowest for Community Cohesion Grants (7%).

Figure 4.17: Awareness of funding to support and improve local communities

The Housing Executive provides funding to support and improve local communities. Are you aware that the Housing Executive provides the following funding?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Not aware | Aware

	Not aware	Aware
Community Grants	77	23
Community Safety Grants	87	13
Community Cohesion Grants	93	7
Social Enterprise Grants	90	10

Q3.16

Under one quarter (23%) confirmed that they would be interested in learning more about community funding opportunities and how they can get involved. Those who were interested were then asked which schemes they would like to hear more about, with Community Grants (64%) and Community Safety Grants (52%) receiving the most interest from tenants.

One third (32%) of those aged 18 to 44 said that they would be interested in learning more about community funding opportunities, compared to 13% of respondents aged 65 and over. Those with qualifications (32%) were also more likely to be interested. Those in the South Region (31%) were more likely than those in the North Region (18%) to be interested in learning more.

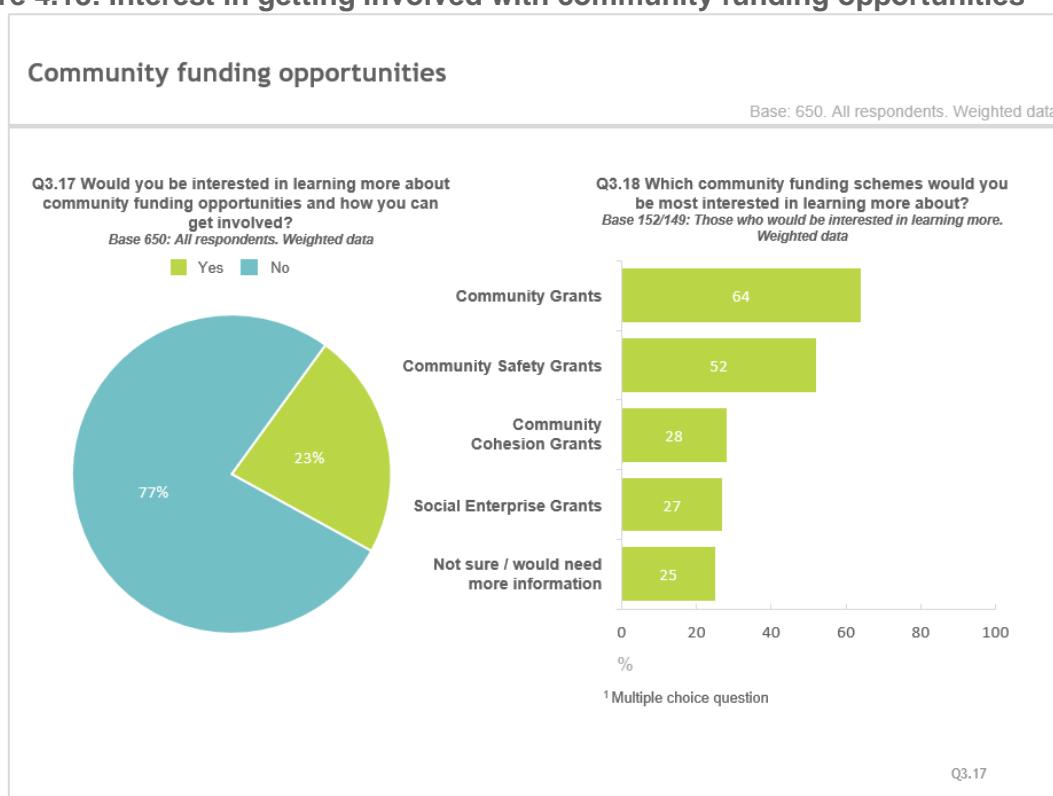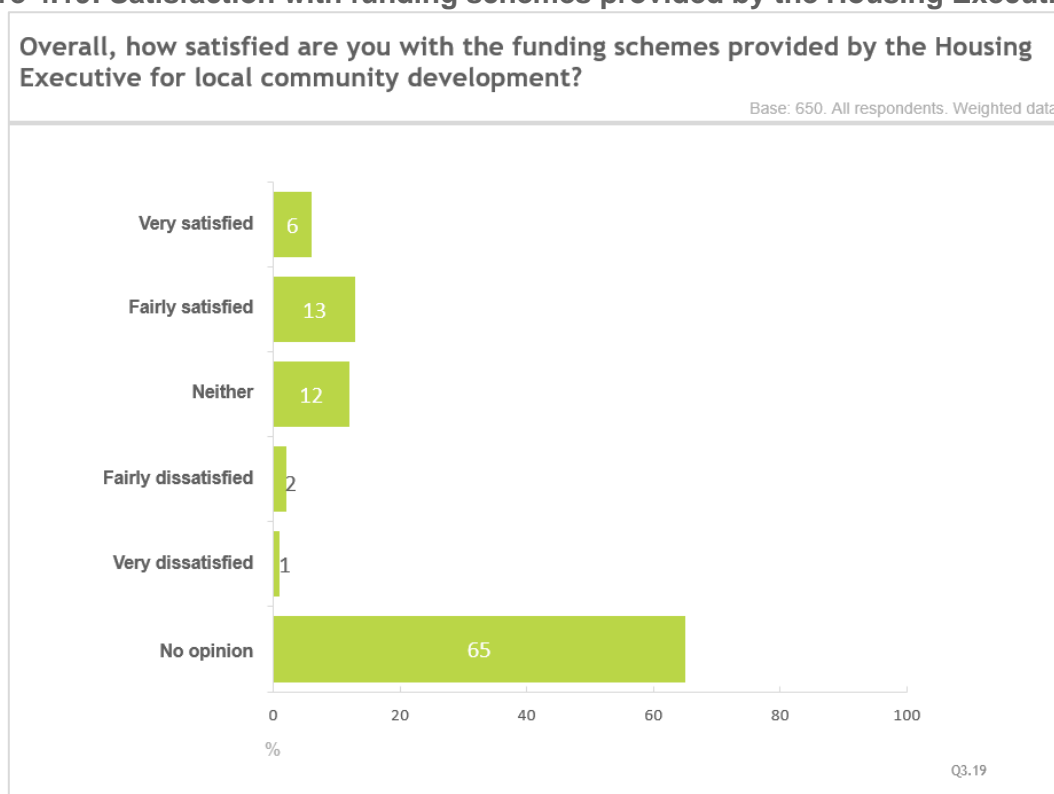**Figure 4.18: Interest in getting involved with community funding opportunities**

Table 4.5: Interest in learning more about community funding opportunities by age, education and region

		Yes	No	*Total*
Overall	All *Base: 650/650*	23%	77%	*100%*
Age	Under 45 *Base: 171/172*	32%	68%	*100%*
	45-64 *Base: 276/275*	25%	75%	*100%*
	65 plus *Base: 200/200*	13%	87%	*100%*
Education	Qualifications *Base: 637*	32%	68%	*100%*
	No qualifications *Base: 1861*	17%	83%	*100%*
Region	Belfast Region *Base: 200/236*	21%	79%	*100%*
	South Region *Base: 250/204*	31%	69%	*100%*
	North Region *Base: 200/210*	18%	82%	*100%*

Survey respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction of the funding schemes provided by the Housing Executive. Over three quarters (77%) indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied or had no opinion, while 19% said they were satisfied. This is compared to 3% who were 'fairly' or 'very dissatisfied'.

Figure 4.19: Satisfaction with funding schemes provided by the Housing Executive

Overall, how satisfied are you with the funding schemes provided by the Housing Executive for local community development?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Category	%
Very satisfied	6
Fairly satisfied	13
Neither	12
Fairly dissatisfied	2
Very dissatisfied	1
No opinion	65

Q3.19

Facilitating groups and forum panels

Awareness of Housing Executive community involvement provision

Survey respondents were informed that the Housing Executive provides local facilities and training to enable communities to become involved, and then asked whether they were aware of any of these schemes.

Almost one third (31%) were aware that the Housing Executive provides properties for community groups to use, and 13% were aware of access to training. One in ten (10%) were aware of the community development training, 8% had heard the Housing Executive provides access to networking events and conferences, and 7% knew that the Housing Executive gives support to participate in consultation exercises. Awareness that the Housing Executive provides out of pocket expenses (6%) and signposting to community funding streams (6%) was the lowest amongst the range of support provided.

Respondents who are in employment (40%) were more likely to be aware that the Housing Executive provides properties for community groups to use than those not in employment (28%). Those who have qualifications (41%) and those who live in urban areas (33%) were also more likely to be aware of this when compared with respondents who do not have qualifications (24%) and who live in rural areas (19%).

Figure 4.20: Awareness of the support and facilities the Housing Executive provides
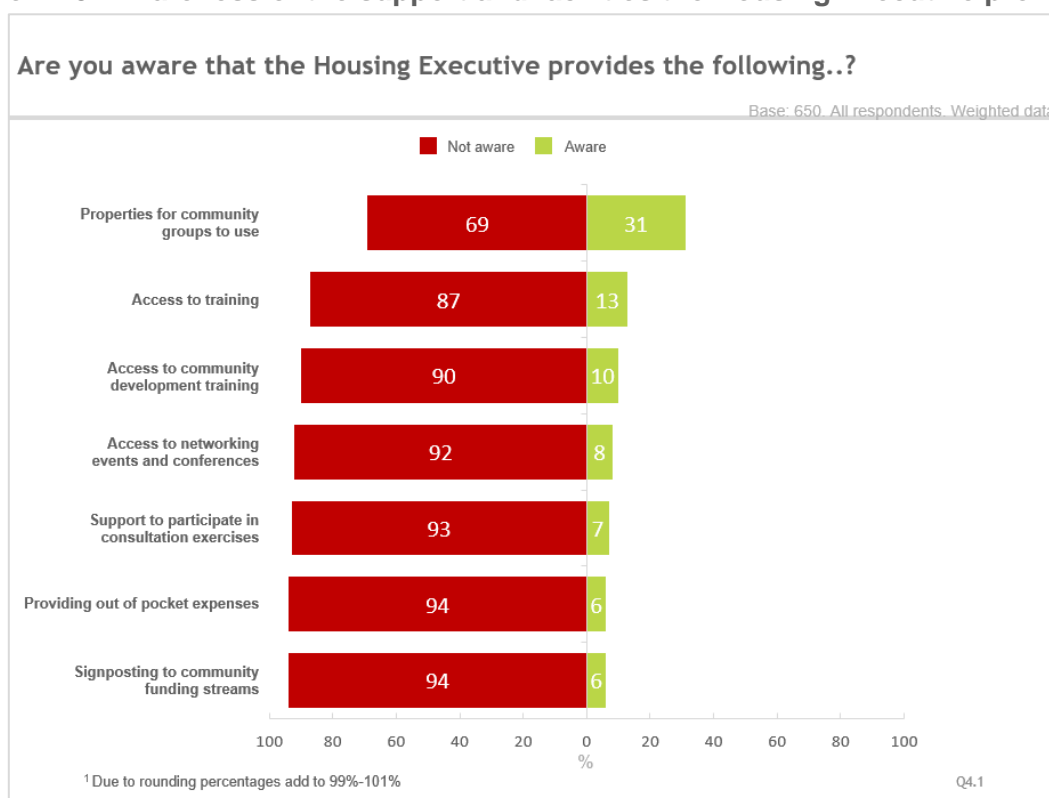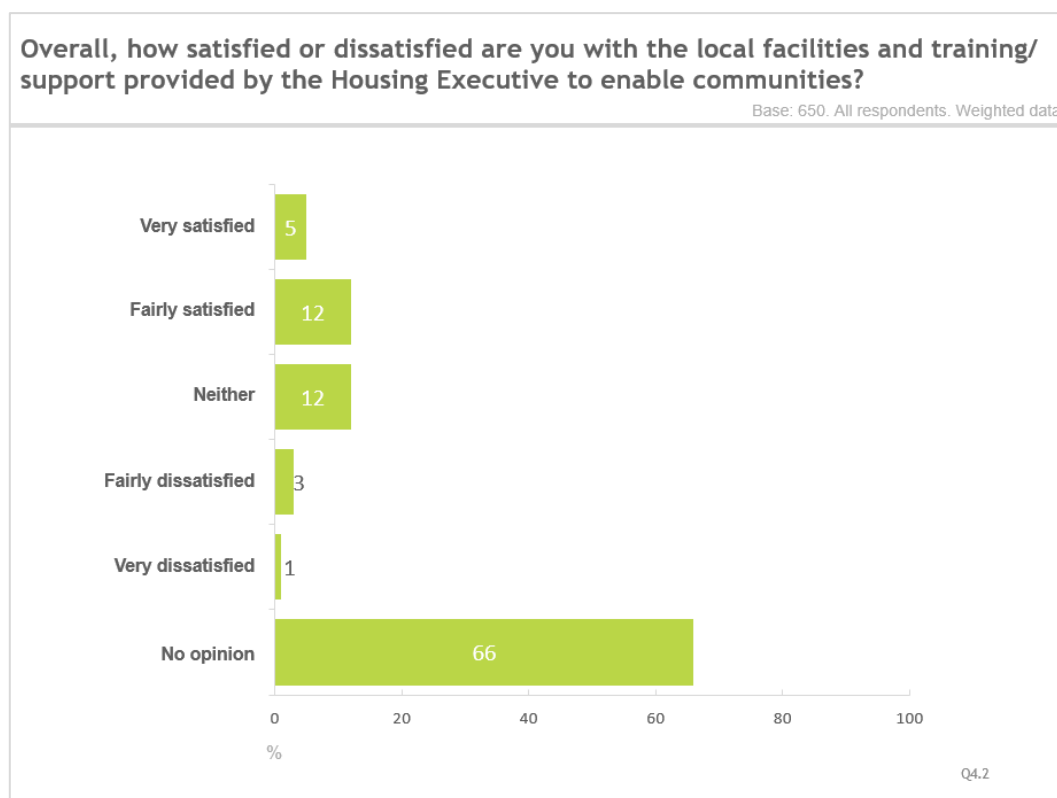

Are you aware that the Housing Executive provides the following..?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Legend: ■ Not aware ■ Aware

Category	Not aware	Aware
Properties for community groups to use	69	31
Access to training	87	13
Access to community development training	90	10
Access to networking events and conferences	92	8
Support to participate in consultation exercises	93	7
Providing out of pocket expenses	94	6
Signposting to community funding streams	94	6

[1] Due to rounding percentages add to 99%-101%

Q4.1

Figure 4.6: Awareness of 'properties for community groups to use' by education, employment and location

		Yes	No	Total
Overall	All Base: 650/650	31%	69%	100%
Education	Qualifications Base: 266/266	41%	59%	100%
	No qualifications Base: 384/384	24%	76%	100%
Employment	Employed Base: 142/134	40%	60%	100%
	Unemployed Base: 508/516	28%	72%	100%
Location	Urban Base: 516/540	33%	67%	100%
	Rural Base: 134/110	19%	81%	100%

Satisfaction with Housing Executive community involvement provision

Tenants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the local facilities, training and support provided by the Housing Executive to enable communities. Two thirds (66%) had no opinion or were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, compared to 17% who said they were satisfied and 4% who expressed dissatisfaction.

Figure 4.21: Satisfaction with the support and facilities the Housing Executive provides

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the local facilities and training/ support provided by the Housing Executive to enable communities?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Very satisfied	5
Fairly satisfied	12
Neither	12
Fairly dissatisfied	3
Very dissatisfied	1
No opinion	66

%

Q4.2

Awareness of the Customer Portal

Awareness of the Customer Portal

Survey respondents were informed of the Housing Executive's Customer Portal which allows tenants to log in and see details of their tenancies. Following this, they were asked whether they had heard of the Customer Portal, and, if so, how often they used it if at all. At the end of March 2022, 10,630 customers (12.68% of stock) were registered on the Customer Portal.

Under one in five (17%) tenants had heard of the Customer Portal prior to the research. Two in five (39%) of those who were aware of the Customer Portal reported that they had never used it. 14% stated that they used it at least once a week, 3% accessed it fortnightly, and 11% logged on once a month. One third (32%) use the Customer Portal less often than monthly.

The following groups were significantly more likely to have been aware of the Customer Portal:

- Over one third (35%) of respondents aged 18 to 44 had heard of the Customer Portal, compared to 4% of those aged 65 and over;

- Respondents with qualifications (39%) and who are employed (37%) were more likely to be aware of the Customer Portal than those without qualifications (8%) and who are not employed (11%);

- 36% of lone parents and 34% of those living in households with two or more adults and dependants had heard of the Customer Portal, compared to 13% of those living in households with two or more adults and no dependants and 10% of lone adults;

- Those living in the South Region (23%) were more likely to be aware of the Customer Portal than those in the North Region (11%).
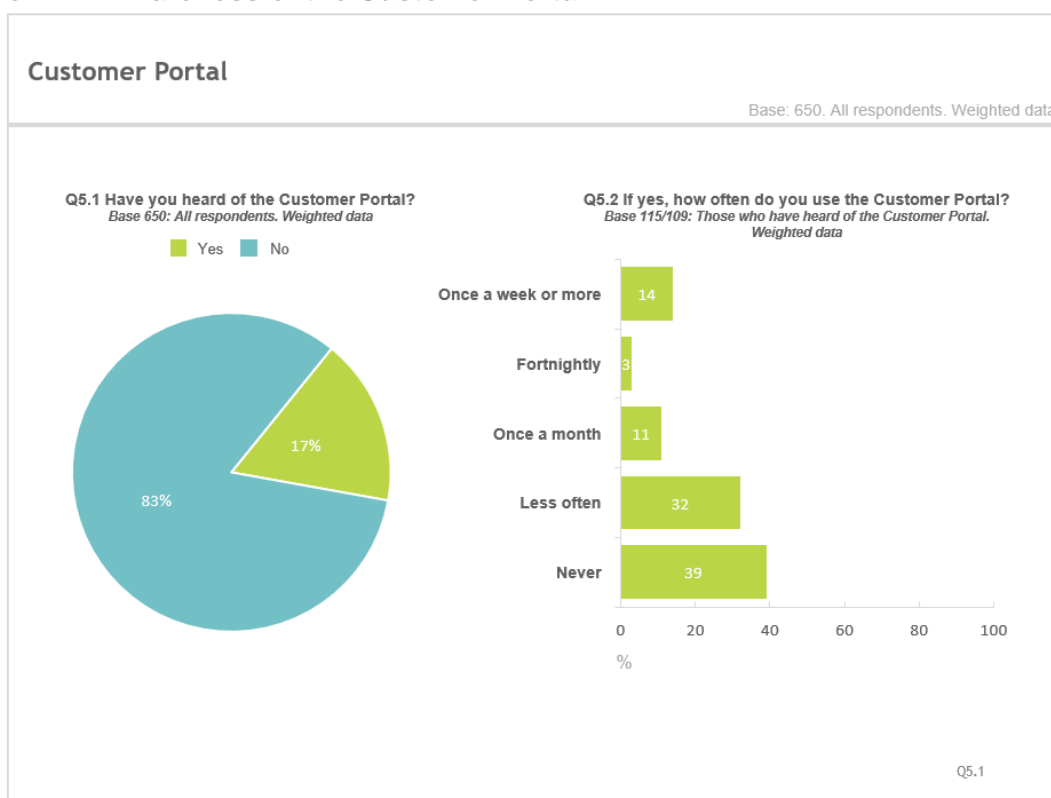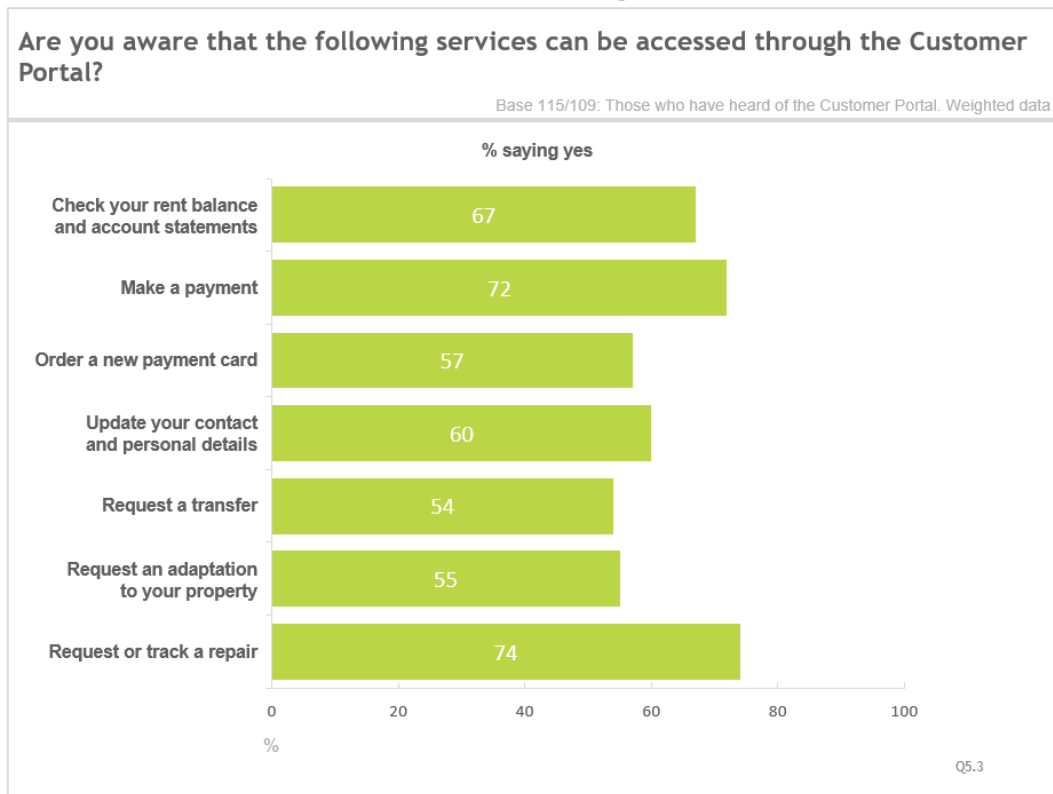
Figure 4.22: Awareness of the Customer Portal

Customer Portal

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Q5.1 Have you heard of the Customer Portal?
Base 650: All respondents. Weighted data

Yes   No

83%   17%

Q5.2 If yes, how often do you use the Customer Portal?
Base 115/109: Those who have heard of the Customer Portal. Weighted data

Category	Value
Once a week or more	14
Fortnightly	3
Once a month	11
Less often	32
Never	39

Q5.1

Table 4.6: Awareness of the Customer Portal by age, education, employment and household type

|		Yes	No	Total
Overall	All Base: 650/650	17%	83%	100%
Age	Under 45 Base: 171/172	35%	65%	100%
	45-64 Base: 276/275	15%	85%	100%
	65 plus Base: 200/200	4%	96%	100%
Education	Qualifications Base: 266/266	29%	71%	100%
	No qualifications Base: 384/384	8%	92%	100%
Employment	Employed Base: 142/134	37%	63%	100%
	Unemployed Base: 508/516	11%	89%	100%
Household type	Lone adult Base: 329/319	10%	90%	100%
	2+ adults, no dependant children Base: 168/173	13%	87%	100%
	Lone parent Base: 85/89	36%	64%	100%
	2+ adults with dependant children Base: 53/54	34%	66%	100%
Region	Belfast Region Base: 200/236	16%	84%	100%
	South Region Base: 250/204	23%	77%	100%
	North Region Base: 200/210	11%	89%	100%

The 17% of survey respondents who had heard of the Customer Portal were then asked if they had heard of the various services offered through it. Three quarters (74%) were aware of the ability to request or track a repair through the Customer Portal, and 72% and 67% knew of the option to make a payment and check their rent balance respectively. Three in five (60%) were aware of being able to update their contact and personal details, while 57% were familiar with the option to order a new payment card. Tenants were less likely to be aware that they could request an adaption to their property (55%) or request a transfer (54%) through the Customer Portal.

Figure 4.23: Awareness of services offered through the Customer Portal

The majority (89%) of tenants who were aware of the Customer Portal thought that the range of services offered was adequate, compared to 11% who would like to see more tenant services added.
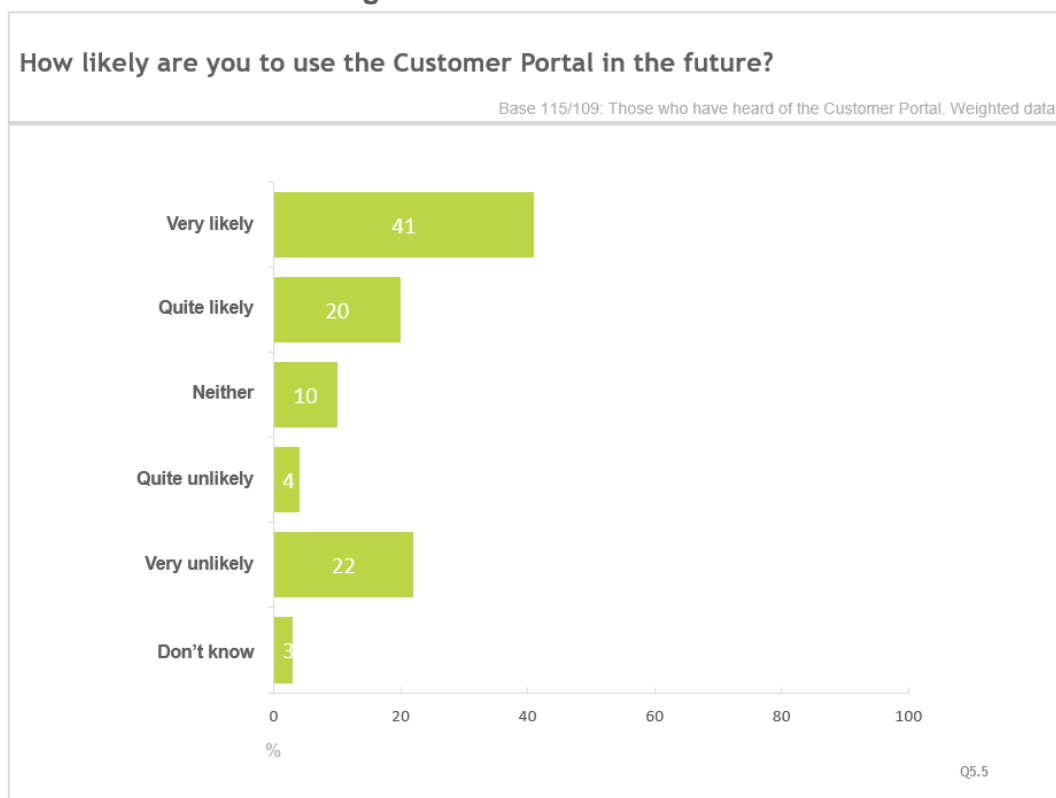
Figure 4.24: New services required in the Customer Portal

Are there any other tenant services you would like to be available via the Customer Portal?

Yes ■ No

11%

89%

Q5.4
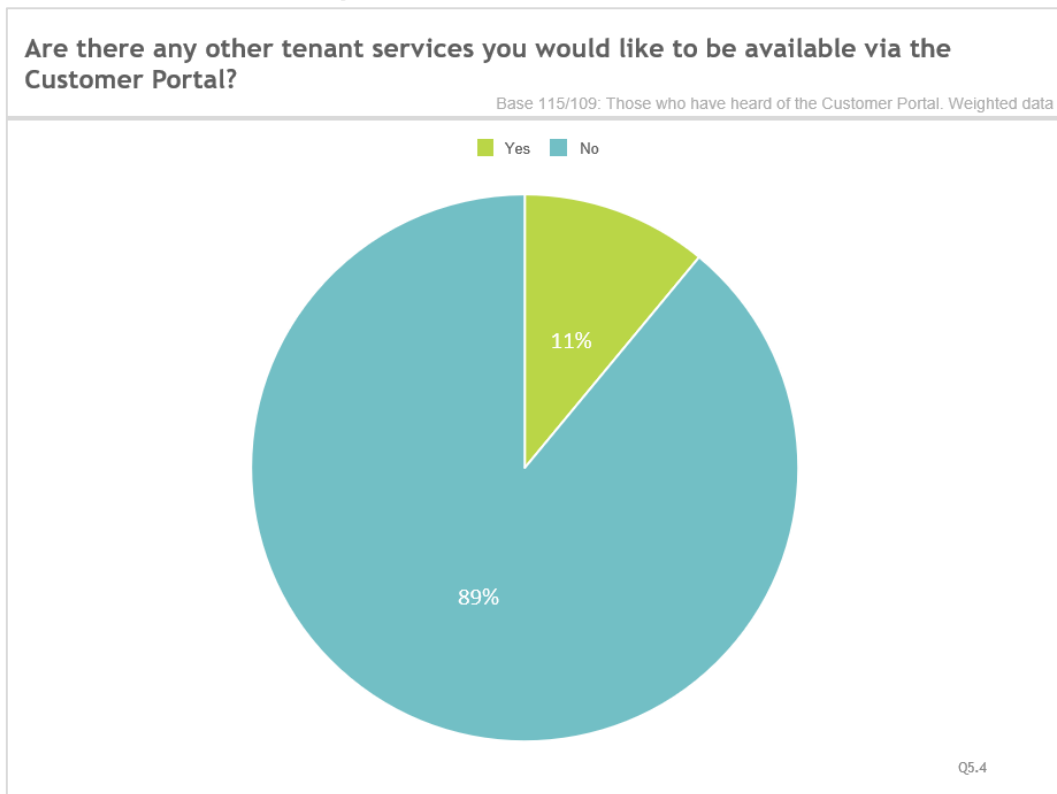
Usage of the Customer Portal in the future

Tenants who had heard of the Customer Portal were asked how likely they would be to use the service in the future. Three in five (61%) said that they would be 'quite' or 'very likely' to use the Customer Portal again, compared to one quarter (26%) who thought they would be unlikely to access the service in the future.

Figure 4.25: Likelihood of using the Customer Portal in future

How likely are you to use the Customer Portal in the future?

Base 115/109: Those who have heard of the Customer Portal. Weighted data

Response	%
Very likely	41
Quite likely	20
Neither	10
Quite unlikely	4
Very unlikely	22
Don't know	3

Q5.5

Tenants Feedback Group

Survey respondents were informed of the Tenant Feedback Group through which group members would answer short surveys on the Customer Portal. They were then asked whether or not they would be interested in joining this group. One quarter (24%) said that they would be interested in becoming involved in the Tenants Feedback Group, with respondents aged 18 to 44 (37%) and those with qualifications (33%) more likely to be interested than those aged 65 and over (10%) and who have no qualifications (18%).

Of those who would not be interested, 46% said they would prefer not to get involved, while 28% and 10% stated that they have ill health or a physical disability respectively. 17% have family commitments, and 10% would not have time due to work commitments. 12% of tenants do not have access to the internet, while 10% would not be confident with using the internet.
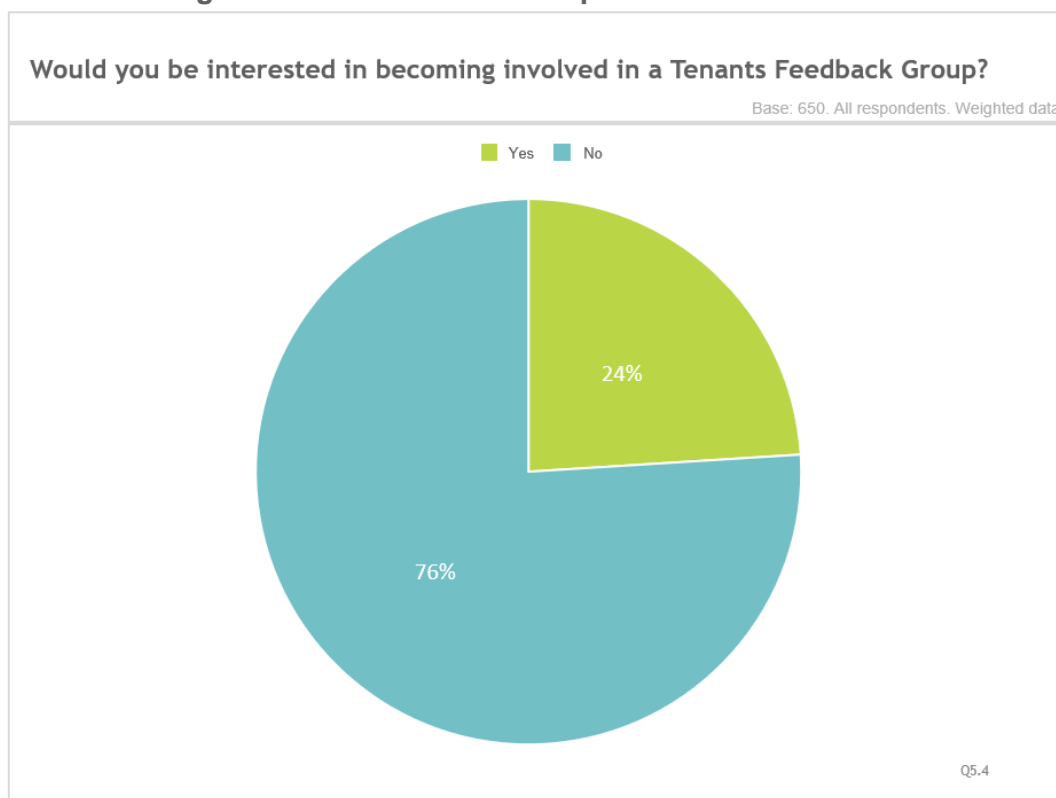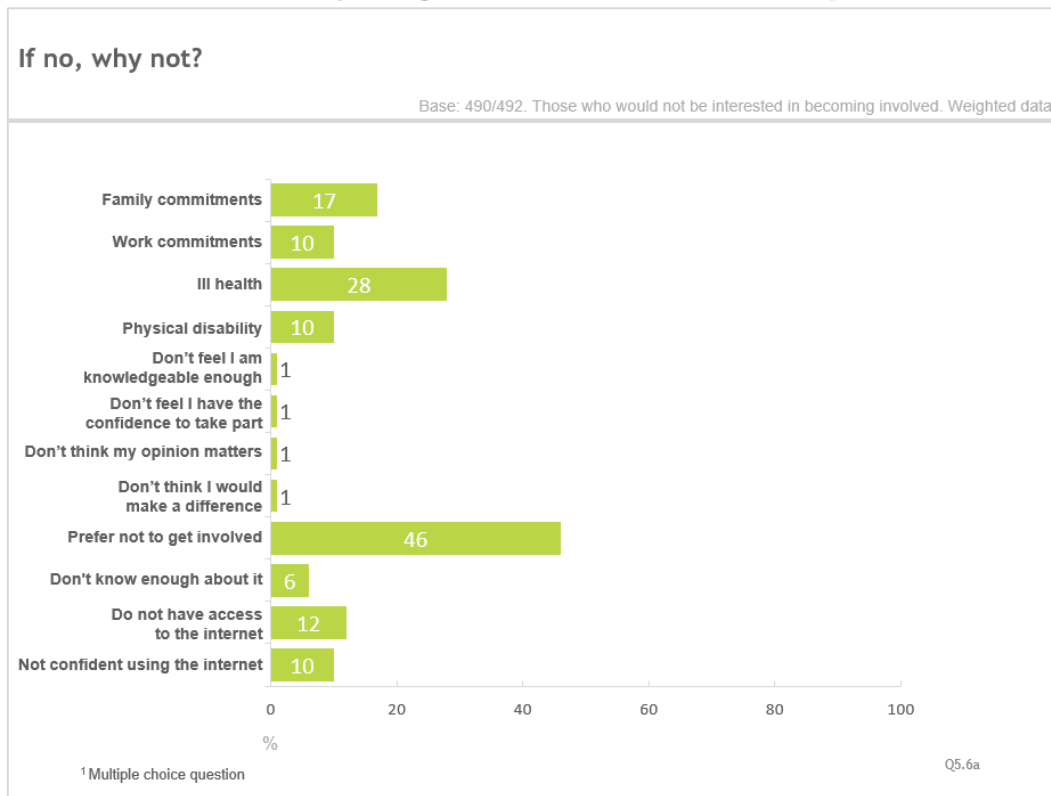
Figure 4.26: Joining a Tenants Feedback Group

Would you be interested in becoming involved in a Tenants Feedback Group?

Base: 650. All respondents. Weighted data

Yes ■ No ■

24%

76%

Q5.4

Table 4.7: Joining a Tenants Feedback Group by age and education

		Yes	No	Total
Overall	All Base: 650/650	24%	76%	100%
Age	Under 45 Base: 171/172	37%	63%	100%
	45-64 Base: 276/275	26%	74%	100%
	65 plus Base: 200/200	10%	90%	100%
Education	Qualifications Base: 637	33%	67%	100%
	No qualifications Base: 1861	18%	82%	100%

Figure 4.27: Reasons for not joining the Tenants Feedback Group

If no, why not?

Base: 490/492. Those who would not be interested in becoming involved. Weighted data

Reason	%
Family commitments	17
Work commitments	10
Ill health	28
Physical disability	10
Don't feel I am knowledgeable enough	1
Don't feel I have the confidence to take part	1
Don't think my opinion matters	1
Don't think I would make a difference	1
Prefer not to get involved	46
Don't know enough about it	6
Do not have access to the internet	12
Not confident using the internet	10

%

[1] Multiple choice question

Q5.6a

5. Findings from the HCN survey

Introduction to HCN survey

The Housing Community Network is the key forum for tenant and community engagement in Northern Ireland (NI). The network, established in 1982, is comprised of over 500 community groups across NI as well as representative tenant involvement panels in each of the Housing Executive Areas of housing management.

As part of the Community Involvement Strategy, between October 2019 and September 2020 the Housing Executive sought to obtain a baseline of the community's views and satisfaction levels with the current Community Involvement structures, policies, and procedures. Further, this baseline survey was also implemented to identify any barriers to participation as perceived by the associations' representatives. The findings from this survey will be used to help the Housing Executive improve services and build upon the existing HCN structures to continue giving communities the best possible service, which is a key part of the Community Involvement Strategy 2018-2023.

In order to fulfil these objectives, this section focuses on the analysis of the secondary HCN dataset supplied by the Housing Executive. In particular, the following subsections are structured as follows:

- **Understanding of the HCN** – this section seeks to understand the HCN in terms of the scale of the operation. Specifically, it examines the groups in terms of their individual membership, as well as how and when groups participate within the overall network;

- **Groups' services and support provisions** – this section seeks to understand groups in terms of both their inputs into the HCN as well as the service and support outputs. Specifically, it centres around the capacity and ability of groups to influence and shape the HCN and the services it provides, including identifying any barriers/issues that groups might face in this regard;

- **Information communication** – this section seeks to understand how well information flows within the HCN and to identify any barriers to this process. Specifically, it examines how communications filter down from the Central Housing Forum to groups and vice versa.

The survey was completed by 211 representatives of various residents/community groups and on behalf of the group, which provides an insight into the overall functioning of the HCN.

Understanding of the HCN

This section examines the characteristics of the HCN in terms of its scale and groups' operations. More specifically, groups' internal committee structures, types of community projects organised, observed issues in the local area and their impacts as well as satisfaction with organisational aspects of the HCN were all examined to create an overview of the sampled community groups.

Structure of the groups

With regards to the committee structure, 59% of the groups have between five and 10 members, and for 34% of groups there are 11 to 15 representatives (Figure 5.1). Just 1% reported having fewer than 5 members and 6% recorded more than 15 committee members.

In terms of split by gender, the results suggest that there are more females than males taking on committee member roles as shown in Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1: Committee members by gender**
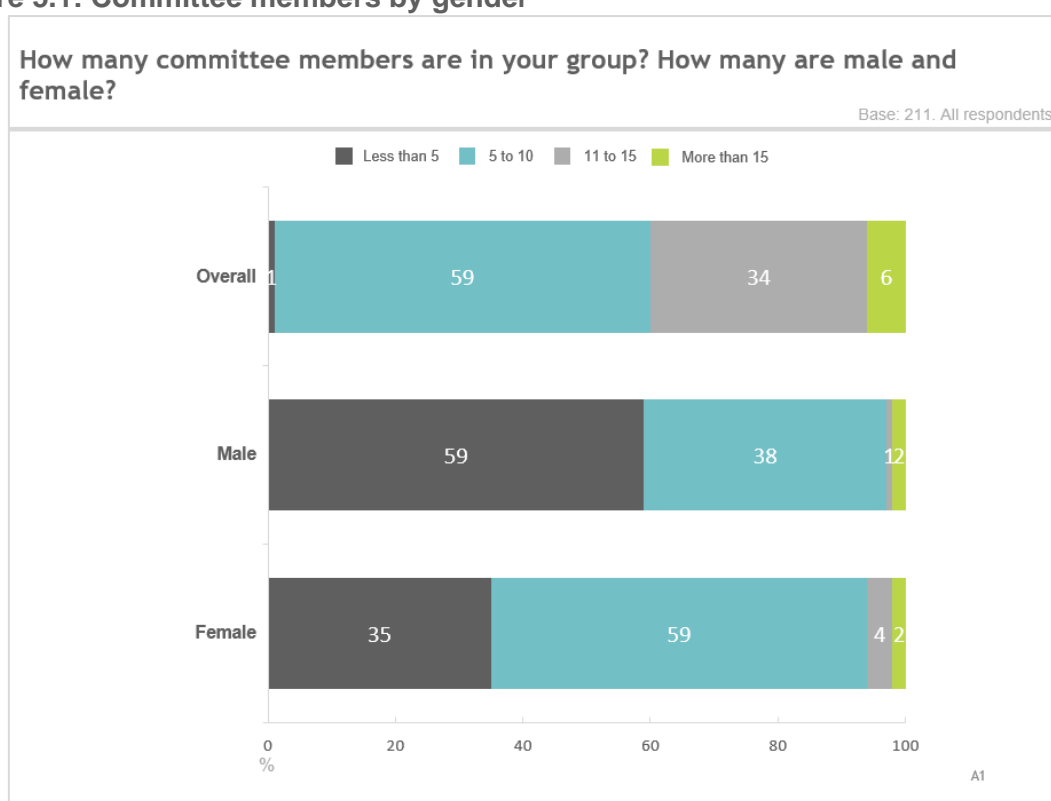
With respect to the size of the groups, while excluding the members of the committees, Figure 5.2 shows that, 68% of associations have fewer than 20 active members, and further 24% have between 20 and 50 members. About one in 12 groups (8%) have more than 50 active members.

Figure 5.2: Active members in community groups

How many active members are in your group (not including the committee)?

Base: 211. All respondents

A2
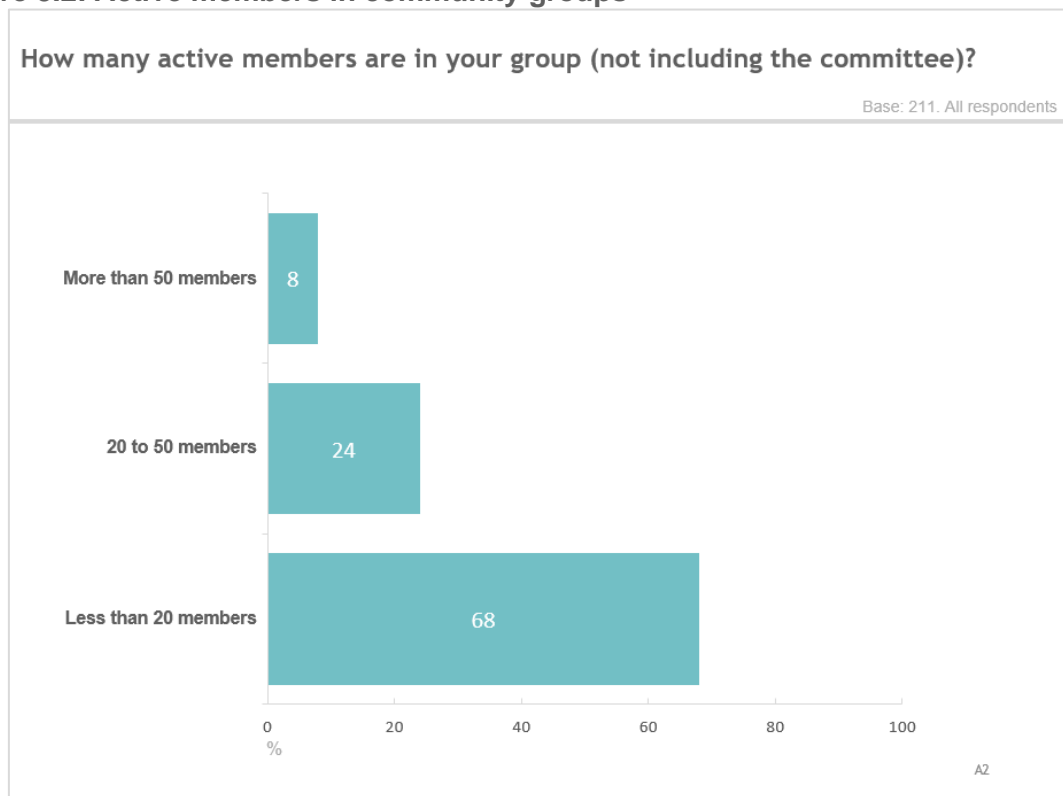
Subsequently, the frequency of the committee meetings was examined. As presented in Figure 5.3, two thirds (67%) of groups arrange their committee meetings on a monthly basis, a further 18% arrange the meetings to occur bimonthly and one in ten (10%) hold their meetings quarterly. Thus, for the majority of the community groups, the regular, at least once a month meeting seems to be the preferred frequency.

Figure 5.3: Frequency of committee meetings

How frequently do you meet as a committee?

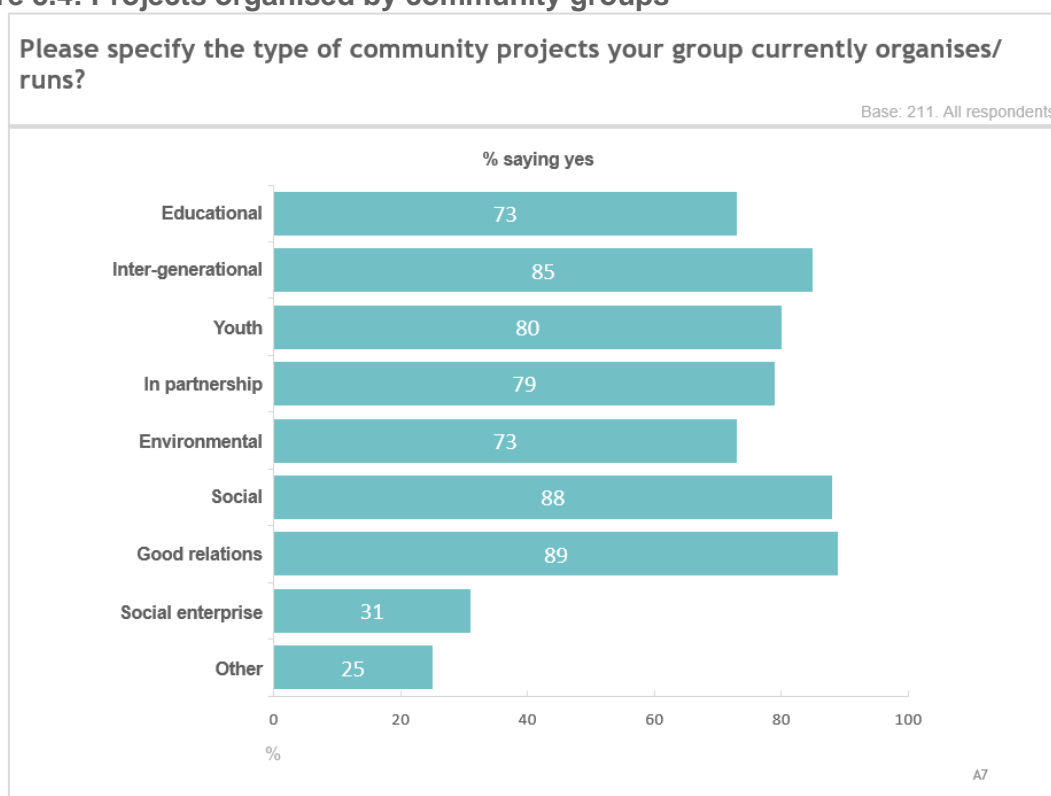Base: 211. All respondents

A6
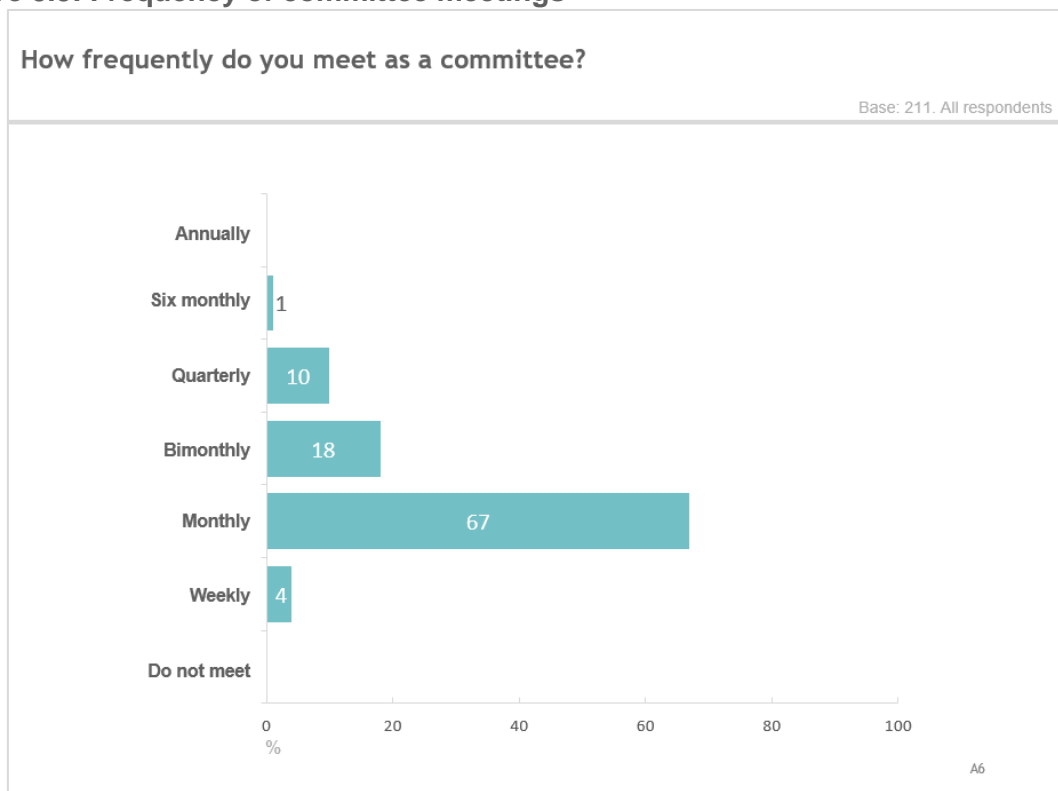
Issues & initiatives

Regarding the portfolio of projects organised by the community groups, various programmes are run in parallel and by the considerable majority of the associations. More specifically, as presented in Figure 5.4, Good Relations initiatives (89%) which promote respect, tolerance, and equality within communities, as well as social (88%), inter-generational (85%), and youth (80%) projects are among the core programmes organised by the majority of the HCN groups. Furthermore, almost three quarter of all associations in the sample implement environmental (74%) and educational (73%) projects as part of their community development.

While the focus seems to centre around social and community cohesion initiatives, social enterprise projects are organised by less than one third of groups. In that regard, 31% of community groups offer business and socially oriented entrepreneurial training to their members.

In addition, just over a quarter of all groups indicated that they offer alternative projects that community members can avail of. Specifically, among the listed initiatives were:

- Housing advice and services;
- Bingo & Women in Politics;
- Arts & Drama; History & Heritage;
- Community Health & Wellbeing;
- Mental health & suicide awareness;
- Community Counselling Service;
- Community Safety & Crime;
- Drug addiction;
- Disability Youth Club;
- Family support;
- Young Volunteer Development;
- School Uniform Recycling;
- Fun days & events;
- Sports (GAA & keeping fit); and
- Senior Citizens.

Figure 5.4: Projects organised by community groups

Please specify the type of community projects your group currently organises/ runs?

Base: 211. All respondents

% saying yes

Category	%
Educational	73
Inter-generational	85
Youth	80
In partnership	79
Environmental	73
Social	88
Good relations	89
Social enterprise	31
Other	25

A7

Following from an overview of the HCN and the groups' structure, groups representatives were asked about the issues that impact their local area. They were asked to rate each possible problem on a scale of 1 to 8, with 1 being the most impactful, and 8, the least).[2]

The results show that the two categories of issues that were perceived as having the highest impacts on community groups were poverty and housing, with 42% and 41% of the groups rating the respective problems towards the high end of the scale (Table 5.1). Thereafter, unemployment and anti-social behaviour were cited as having a considerably high impact on 33% and 32% of community groups (respectively). In contrast, environmental and cross-community relations problems had high impacts on less than a fifth of the groups, and race relations were rated as highly impactful by 4% of groups.

Given that 17% of the associations also reported that other, not listed issues were affecting their communities and groups considerably, these were examined further. Collectively, the groups reported the following high impact issues:

- Apathy, isolation, loneliness;
- Community safety & crime; lack of policing;
- Drug & alcohol misuse;
- Paramilitary activities;
- Educational underachievement;
- Health & wellbeing; and

---

[2] Variable codes were initially reversed to denote 1-least impact and 8-most impact. To aid the analysis and interpretation of findings, the codes were thereafter grouped as follows: 1-3 (low impact), 4-6 (moderate impact), 7-8 (high impact).

- Lack of investments into the communities and of resources.

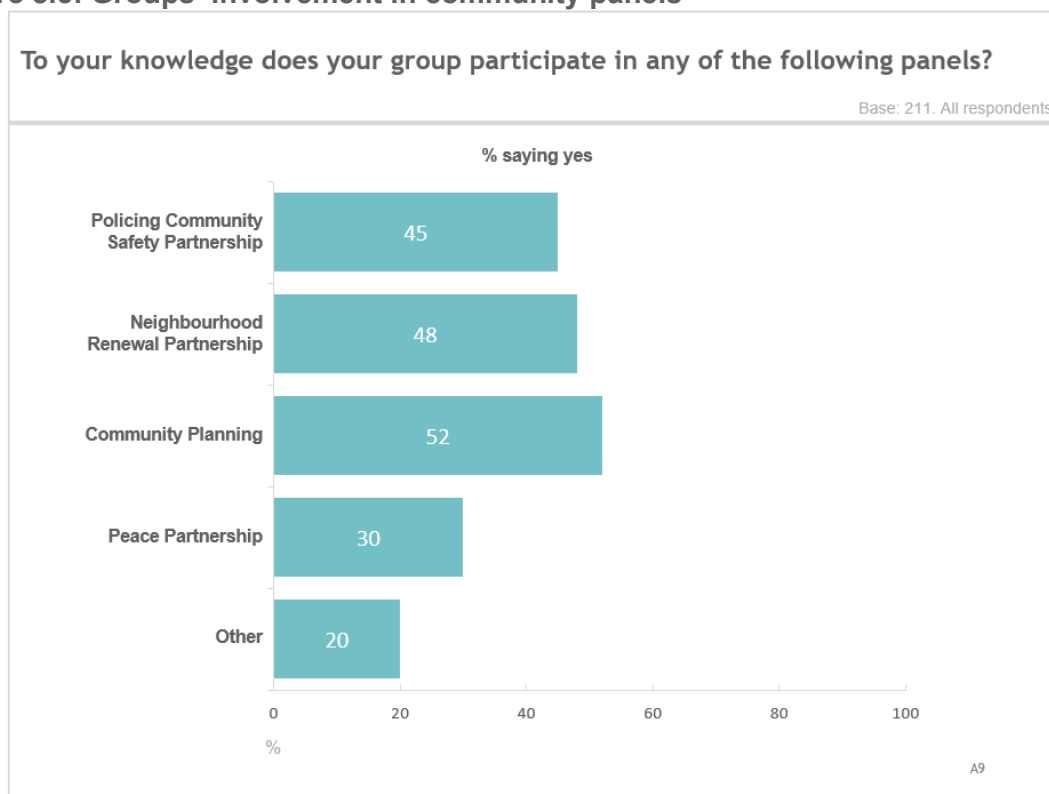**Table 5.1: The impacts of issues in local areas on community groups**

A8 Thinking about possible issues in your local area. Please rank the following items in terms of impact on your group.	Antisocial behaviour	Cross community relations	Race relations	Employment/ unemployment	Poverty	Environmental	Housing	Other
1 – Most impact	19%	7%	2%	15%	20%	4%	20%	12%
2	13%	9%	2%	18%	22%	10%	21%	5%
3	11%	8%	7%	20%	18%	14%	16%	5%
4	23%	15%	8%	18%	12%	9%	11%	3%
5	10%	18%	15%	11%	11%	14%	12%	7%
6	8%	16%	16%	11%	8%	26%	9%	7%
7	8%	17%	33%	6%	4%	15%	6%	11%
8 – Least impact	8%	9%	16%	2%	3%	7%	5%	50%

Analysis of groups' participation in independently organised panels revealed that, approximately half of the surveyed groups were engaged in Community Planning (52%), Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership (48%), and Policing Community Safety Partnership (46%) (Figure 5.5). In addition, 30% also acknowledged their involvement in the Peace Partnership. Just over a fifth (22%) participated in other panels, which included:

- Interagency;
- Local Community Growth Partnership;
- Local Area Network Programme;
- Age NI;
- Ageing Well;
- Arts & Culture Partnerships;
- Central Housing Forum;
- Community Restorative Justice;
- Community Safety & Support;
- Neighbourhood Health Improvement Project;
- NIHE Tenants Panel;
- Family Support Hub;
- Community Voluntary Sector Panel; and
- Public Health Agency.

Overall, this suggests that a considerable percentage of the HCN groups engage with external organisations in an effort to promote community cohesion, safety, health and wellbeing and cultural development.

Figure 5.5: Groups' involvement in community panels

To your knowledge does your group participate in any of the following panels?

Base: 211. All respondents

% saying yes

Panel	%
Policing Community Safety Partnership	45
Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership	48
Community Planning	52
Peace Partnership	30
Other	20

Benefits of the HCN membership

To complement the quantitative components of the baseline survey, the community groups' representatives were urged to list three key benefits of being a member of the HCN. Given that this was an open-ended question, the responses were examined in detail and thereafter categorised, meaning that all the emerging benefits were grouped into a number of broader but relevant themes to ease further analysis. The results from this exercise are subsequently outlined.

The most frequently cited benefit of HCN membership, reported by 79% of groups' representatives, was in relation to the information on and access to support, resources, and updates (Figure 5.6). More specifically, this category incorporated the following sub-components:
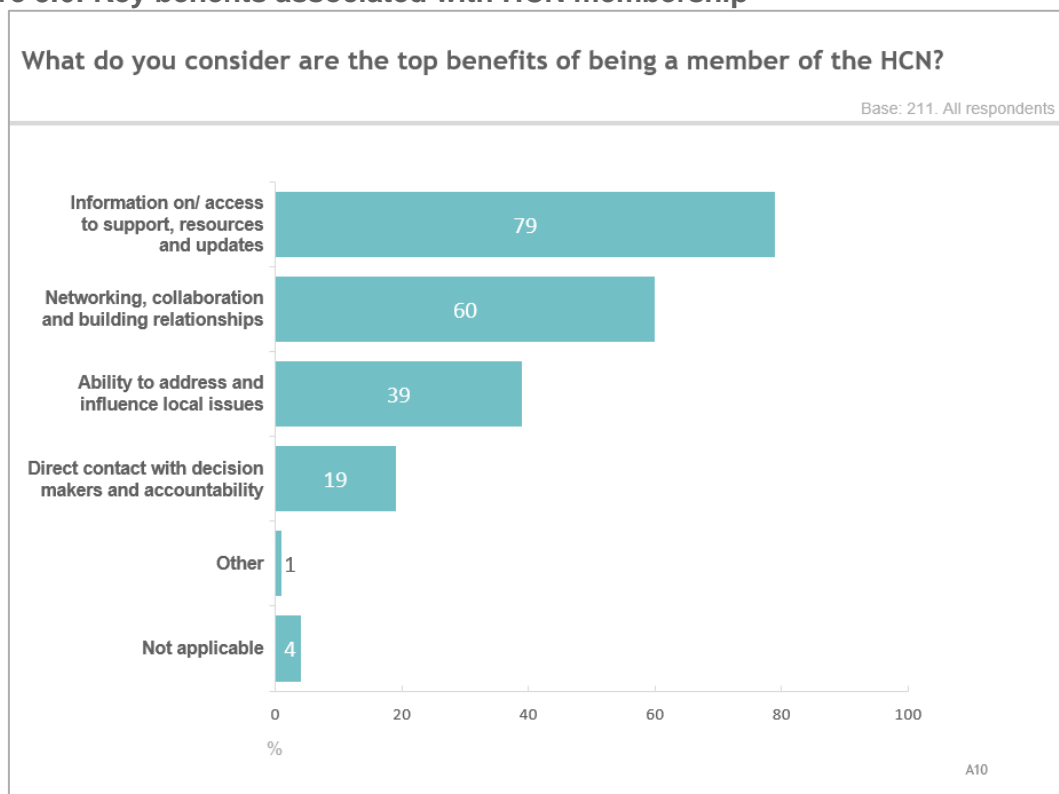
- Sharing information on available funding and best practice among groups;

- Learning about schemes, courses, and community initiatives;

- Providing practical support (for example with housing) for vulnerable individuals;

- Providing training opportunities for unemployed; and

- Keeping community up to date on relevant issues.

The second, most commonly recognised benefit, which 60% of the respondents acknowledged, was the capacity for networking, collaborations and building of relationships. In that regard, the respondents emphasised that they appreciated having the knowledge and understanding of how different organisations are structured and making connections with their

representatives. Further, engagement with other groups and the capability of developing collaborative partnerships were associated with this key benefit of HCN membership. Another element, cited by 39% of respondents, was the ability to address and influence local issues, meaning that the HCN membership allowed the residents to draw attention to the problems in their communities and to have an input in community planning and development. In addition, lobbying on behalf of the raised issues impacting the community and dealing with these concerns was identified as the benefit of the HCN.

Finally, for 19% of respondents, direct contact with decision makers and accountability were important benefits of being part of the HCN. This means that engagement with statutory bodies and local providers allowed the groups to seek accountability from the public officials in the public forum. Specifically, it was frequently highlighted that direct communication with Housing Executive representatives allowed for the housing issues such as repairs and rollout of schemes to be discussed and this facilitated the process of accountability of the housing authority.

Figure 5.6: Key benefits associated with HCN membership

What do you consider are the top benefits of being a member of the HCN?

Base: 211. All respondents

|	
Information on/ access to support, resources and updates	79
Networking, collaboration and building relationships	60
Ability to address and influence local issues	39
Direct contact with decision makers and accountability	19
Other	1
Not applicable	4

A10

Satisfaction with the HCN

A number of the organisational aspects of the HCN were subsequently examined. The results show that a considerable majority of the groups' representatives indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the selected components. More specifically, as presented in Figure 5.7, between 81% and 89% of respondents positively appraised the following organisational aspects of the HCN:

- The chairing of HCN meetings;
- Input into HCN agendas in advance of meetings;
- Suitability of venue;
- The time, frequency, and the duration of meetings;

- Timely circulation of minutes/agendas;

- The accuracy/reliability of minutes;

- The length of time a member serves; and

- Relevancy of issues discussed.

Although the overall dissatisfaction levels are considered low, the component which 6% of groups were displeased with related to the suitability of the venue. Further, 4% of groups were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the input into HCN agendas in advance of the meetings, the duration of the meetings, and the untimely circulation of minutes/agendas.

Figure 5.7: Groups' satisfaction with the organisational aspects of the HCN
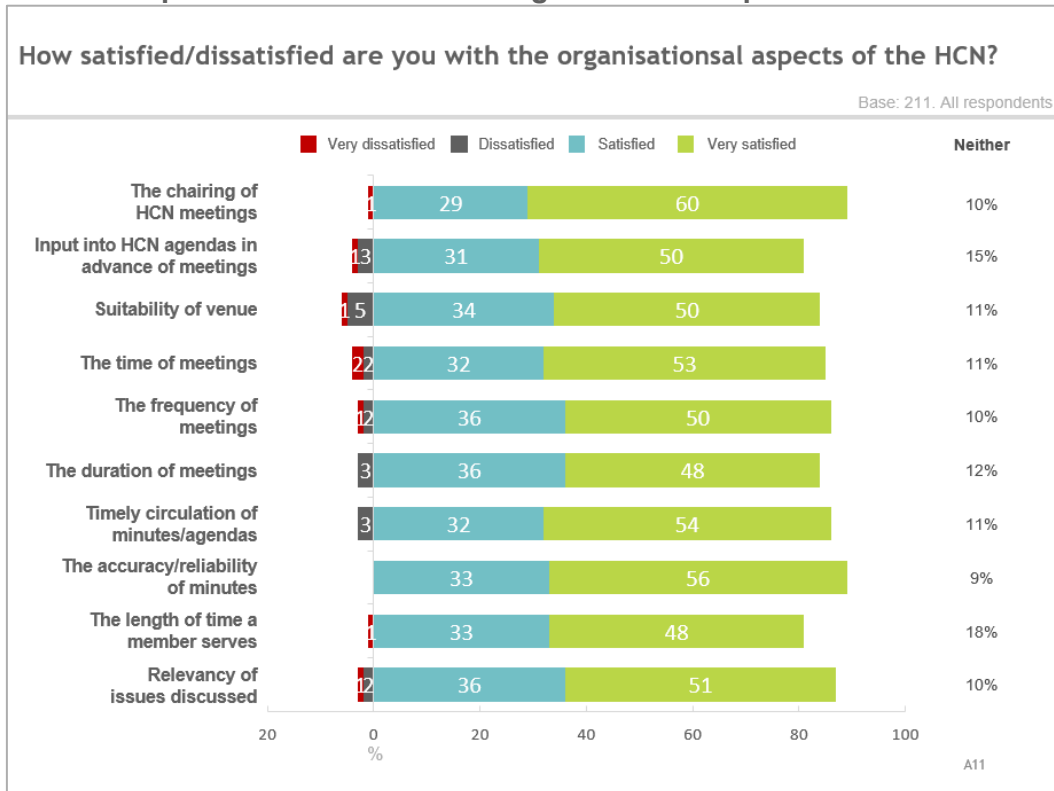
Meetings with the Housing Executive

The final component examined in this section was with regards to the frequency of meetings between community groups and the Housing Executive. For the most part, the results suggest that the community groups are in regular contact with the Housing Executive, whereby 16% meet weekly, 19% bimonthly and 27% monthly (Figure 5.8). Thereafter, 25% of groups arrange quarterly meetings, and further 5%, have less frequent arrangements. Importantly, 9% of all surveyed groups indicated they do not meet the Housing Executive.

Figure 5.8: Frequency of meeting with the Housing Executive
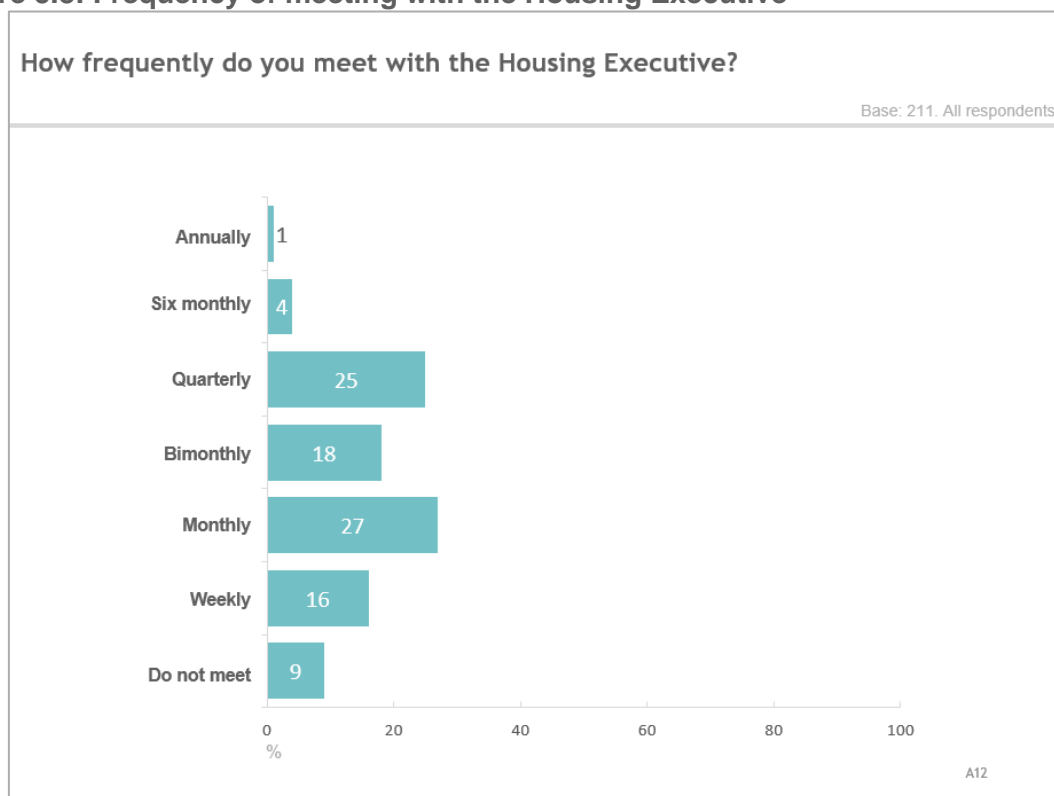
How frequently do you meet with the Housing Executive?

Base: 211. All respondents

| Category	%
Annually	1
Six monthly	4
Quarterly	25
Bimonthly	18
Monthly	27
Weekly	16
Do not meet	9

A12

Groups' services and support provisions

This section seeks to understand groups in terms of both their inputs into the HCN as well as the services and support received. Specifically, it examines the capacity and ability of groups to influence and shape the HCN and its services. Importantly, the section identifies any barriers and/or issues the groups may be confronted with.

With regards to the external support received from the Housing Executive, and in particular in relation to the community letting provided by the housing authority, less than one third (31%) of groups confirmed that they were availing of such provisions (Figure 5.9). In relation to Supporting Communities, an independent organisation that champions tenant and community participation by developing groups, supporting active citizenship, and building cohesive communities, 77% of respondents indicated they were indeed supported by this body.

Figure 5.9: External support to groups
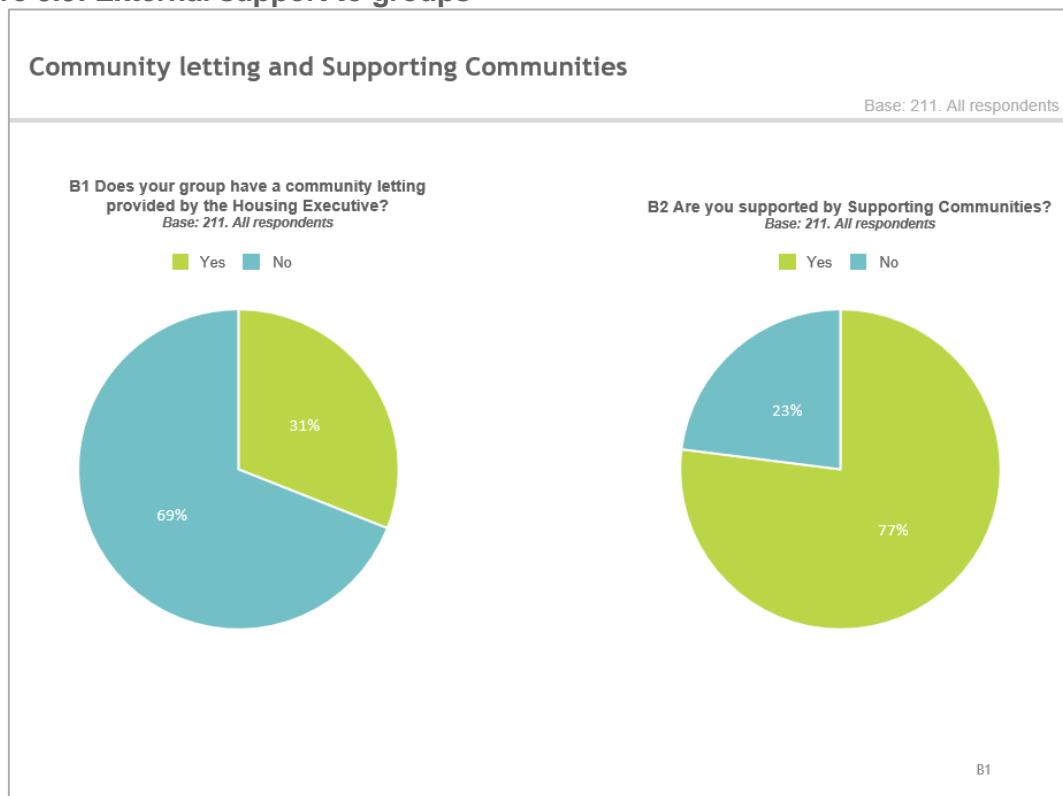
Given that the HCN is determined to shape their services to meet the needs of the groups, the survey subsequently examined the importance of the current Supporting Community services in terms of their priority to the members of the HCN. The findings are presented in Table 5.2.
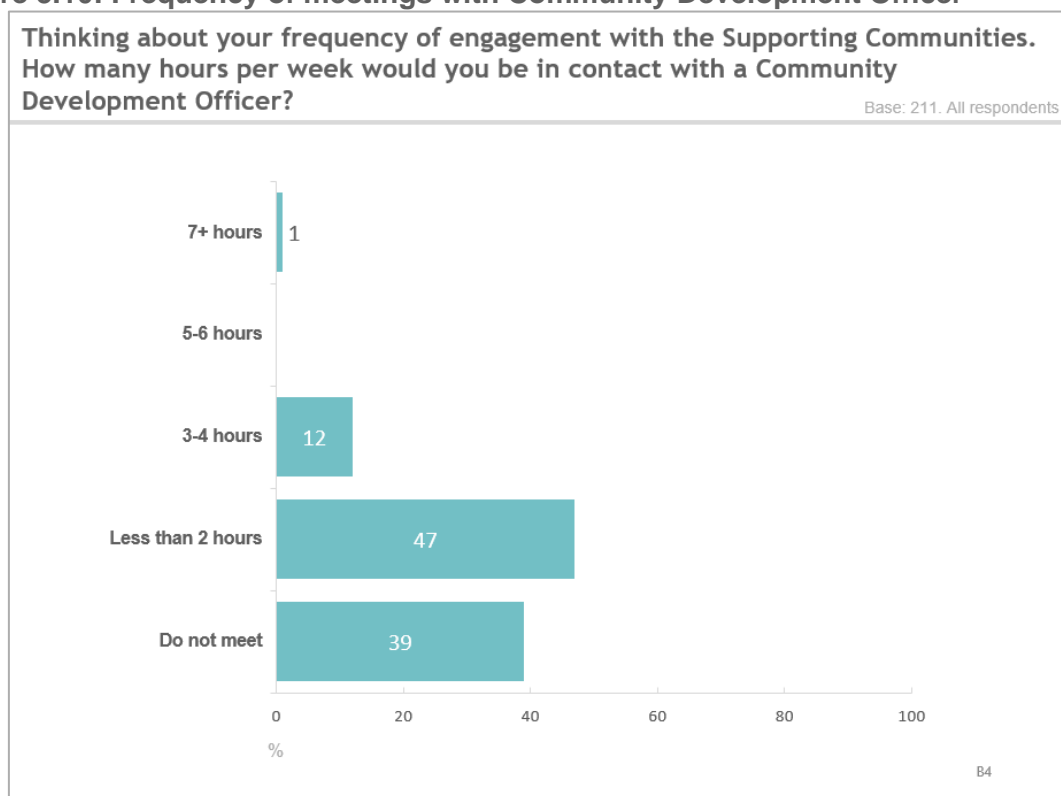
The two services ranked by respondents as the most important in terms of priority for their group included community development planning and funding support. In that regard, 54% and 52% respectively indicated that these services were ranked in their top three. Thereafter, support with governance (43%) and action planning (36%) were at ranked as top three priority.

Table 5.2: Ranking of the Supporting Community services

B3 Please rank the following Supporting Community services in terms of priority for your group.	Community development planning	Governance planning	Action planning	Digital inclusion	Admin services	Training services	Funding support	Information services	Business and social enterprise support	Other
1 – Most important	29%	15%	0%	3%	7%	4%	24%	8%	5%	5%
2	15%	19%	10%	3%	9%	11%	15%	11%	5%	1%
3	10%	9%	26%	7%	9%	9%	13%	11%	5%	0%
4	10%	13%	15%	14%	10%	13%	10%	8%	3%	2%
5	6%	9%	15%	13%	16%	15%	9%	12%	4%	1%
6	9%	9%	10%	10%	12%	23%	6%	9%	8%	3%
7	3%	9%	9%	14%	12%	13%	13%	12%	10%	4%
8	5%	8%	8%	18%	13%	9%	6%	21%	10%	3%
9	5%	8%	4%	11%	10%	2%	3%	7%	44%	5%
10 – Least important	7%	2%	2%	6%	2%	0%	1%	0%	5%	73%

With respect to the frequency of meetings with Supporting Communities, 48% of respondents indicated they spent less than 2 hours per week engaging with a Development Officer, whereas for 12%, the weekly meetings extended over 3 to 4 hours (Figure 5.10). Overall, only 2% of the groups spent more than 5 hours per week on these meetings, and 39% did not meet at all.

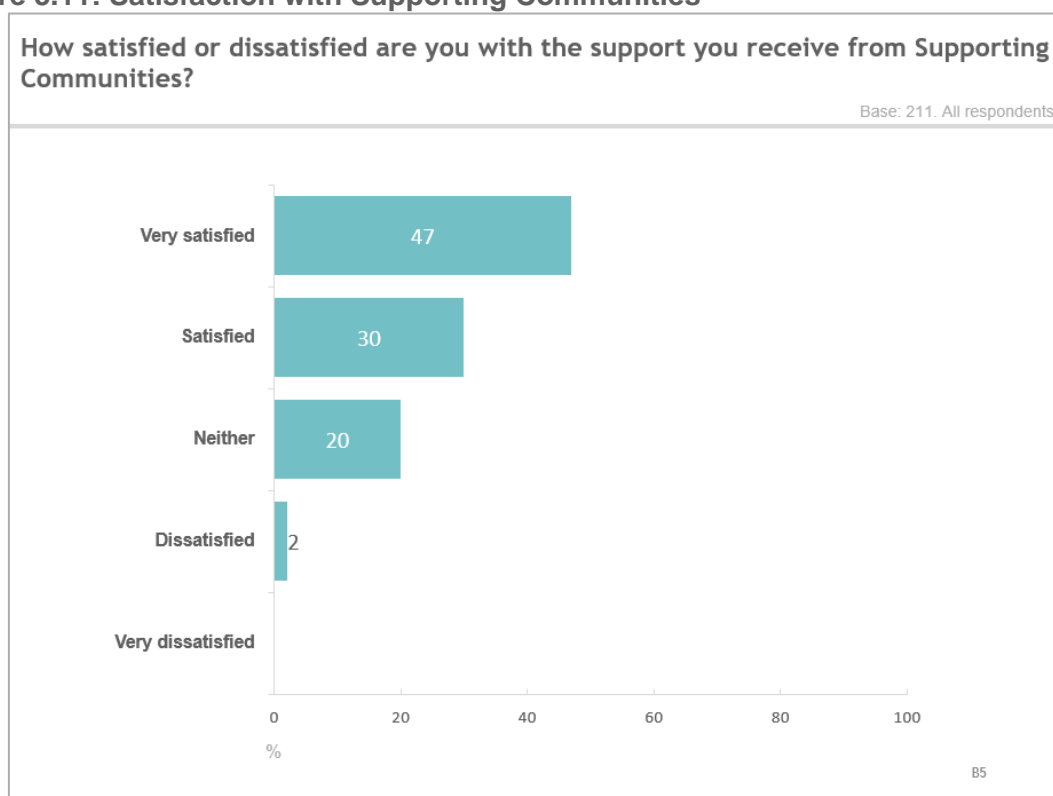**Figure 5.10: Frequency of meetings with Community Development Officer**

Thinking about your frequency of engagement with the Supporting Communities. How many hours per week would you be in contact with a Community Development Officer?

Base: 211. All respondents

- 7+ hours: 1
- 5-6 hours:
- 3-4 hours: 12
- Less than 2 hours: 47
- Do not meet: 39

B4

Analysis of the groups' satisfaction levels with the support received from Supporting Communities revealed that over three quarters of the representatives were either satisfied (30%) or very satisfied (48%) overall, as seen in Figure 5.11. More specifically, the elements which the respondents were satisfied with and commented on, included the following:

- Prompt response to queries;
- Available for meetings and informative;
- Provide practical advice, guidance, and support;
- Knowledgeable, helpful, and approachable individuals;
- Deliver highly effective and beneficial support;
- Accommodate and tailor the request, where possible;
- Reliable and regular communication; and
- Fully supportive and dedicated to developing communities.

Although dissatisfaction levels were very low, the issues raised included:

- Basic admin support only; and
- Staff changes.

Figure 5.11: Satisfaction with Supporting Communities

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the support you receive from Supporting Communities?

Base: 211. All respondents

- Very satisfied: 47
- Satisfied: 30
- Neither: 20
- Dissatisfied: 2
- Very dissatisfied:

B5

Subsequently, the analysis centred around the perceptions of the changes in the effectiveness of groups' operations stemming from their involvement with the HCN. To assess this, the groups were encouraged to rate their satisfaction with a number of HCN-related elements.

Overall, the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the items listed in Figure 5.12. More precisely, between 78% and 89% of the respondents indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the how the HCN increased the effectiveness of the community groups. The overall levels of dissatisfaction were low, with no more than 3% expressing this.

With regards to the representatives who rated alternative, not listed elements, only a limited number elaborated further on the specific areas of their satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The sources of satisfaction included:

- Good practice visits;
- Health needs in the community;
- Education needs in the community;
- Assistance with the Community Letting;
- Community engagement; and
- Building group capacity.

Only one issue was highlighted, which referred to the HCN being ineffective in addressing the needs of the most deprived villages.

Figure 5.12: Perception of groups' increased effectiveness from being involved in HCN

Has your Community Group's involvement in the Housing Community Network increased the effectiveness of your community group / residents you represent in relation to the following?

Base: 211. All respondents

Legend: ■ Very dissatisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Very satisfied   **Neither**

Category	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Neither
Sharing information/resources within your community	41	47	11%
Working successfully with partnerships /agencies/ other	40	49	11%
Completing projects within your community	37	45	16%
Working with organisations outside your community	41	44	15%
Participation in Good Relations network/groups	39	39	20%
Participating in Interagency networks/groups	38	46	14%
Increasing the group's ability to lobby collectively	40	39	19%
Identifying best practice	42	42	15%
Identifying new ideas/ solutions to benefit community	42	40	15%
Implementing new ideas/ solutions that benefit community	41	38	18%
Other	22	27	45%

B7

In addition, the groups were asked to rate their satisfaction with the items included in Figure 5.13. In relation to the 'opportunities to express views on how the HCN is organised and run', 81% of the respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their ability to do so. Regarding respondents' ability to participate in performance monitoring, over three quarters (76%) indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with how this operates.

Figure 5.13: HCN satisfaction

How satisfied/dissatisfied are you with…?

Base: 211. All respondents

Legend: Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Satisfied | Very satisfied | **Neither**

Opportunities to express your views on how the HCN is organised and run: 1 | 35 | 46 | 17%

Your ability to participate in performance monitoring e.g. repairs: 3 | 37 | 39 | 20%
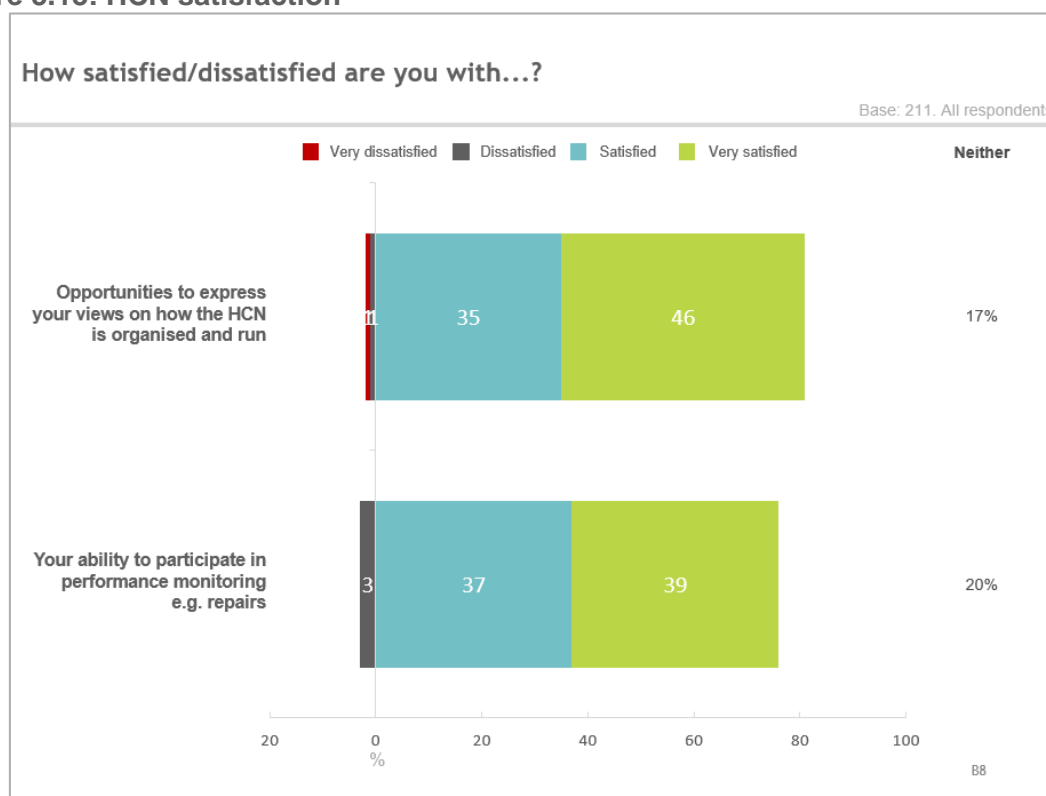
In the last component of this subsection, additional comments were made by 35% of respondents pertaining to influencing and shaping the HCN. As already indicated, the overall perception of how the HCN operates was positive and the respondents praised the organisation for the work it undertakes and for their commitments and efforts. The respondents also took this opportunity to highlight the areas which could be enhanced further to aid the organisational operations and overall functioning. Although the comments were somewhat limited, the following suggestions were the key issues put forward for the HCN's consideration (in the order of times mentioned):

- Improve flow of information between various departments as well as to and from the HCN members; clear communication would facilitate better discussions and promote work to a wider audience;

- To have a wider diversity of partnering organisations and speakers including from education and health departments;

- To improve the schedule of meetings including time and frequency to facilitate better turnout;

- To provide further opportunities to discuss wider issues and to have an input and influence over the matters;

- To arrange a formal structure to raising issues;

- To provide information regarding additional funding streams; and

- To improve digital functionality.

Information communication

This subsection sought to understand the flow of information within the HCN and to identify any barriers preventing effective communication. Specifically, it examined respondents' perception of information filtering down form the Central Housing Forum (CHF) to individual groups as well as this process in the opposite direction.

Overall, high satisfaction levels were found with respect to the communication and feedback received from the CHF to the groups and vice versa (Figure 5.14). More precisely, satisfaction with the transfer of information from the CHF to the groups (64%) was somewhat higher than the communication flow from the groups to the CHF (70%). Dissatisfaction levels were limited to 5% for both components, and despite having the opportunity to elaborate on the source of this discontent, none of the respondents offered further insights.

Figure 5.14: Satisfaction levels with levels of communication
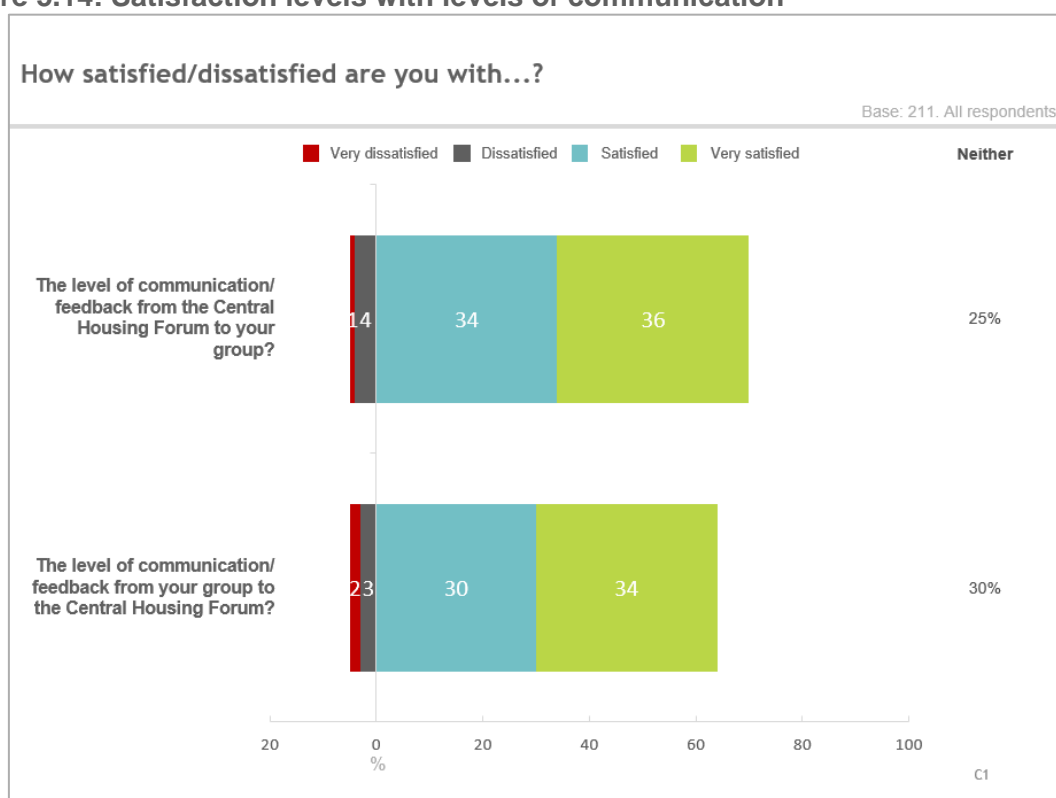
Following from this, the survey examined specific methods of communication utilised by the HCN members to interact with the community groups, and to complement this, the frequency with which the listed methods were adopted, was also assessed. Among the most frequently used channels, verbal communication with community associations members was identified as the method implemented on a monthly basis by 63% of the groups, followed by social media platforms (56%), and thereafter face-to-face discussions with individuals in the HCN (44%) (Figure 5.15). Seemingly, the direct and personal approaches are favoured and adopted with higher frequency, whereas communication via informative materials is implemented more sporadically.

The results also highlighted the extent to which the methods of communication are underutilised. Specifically, more than two thirds of respondents (68%) indicated that their groups did not receive updates via information packs, more than half (56%) were not updated through other groups' agenda, and approximately half of all representatives (51%) stated the
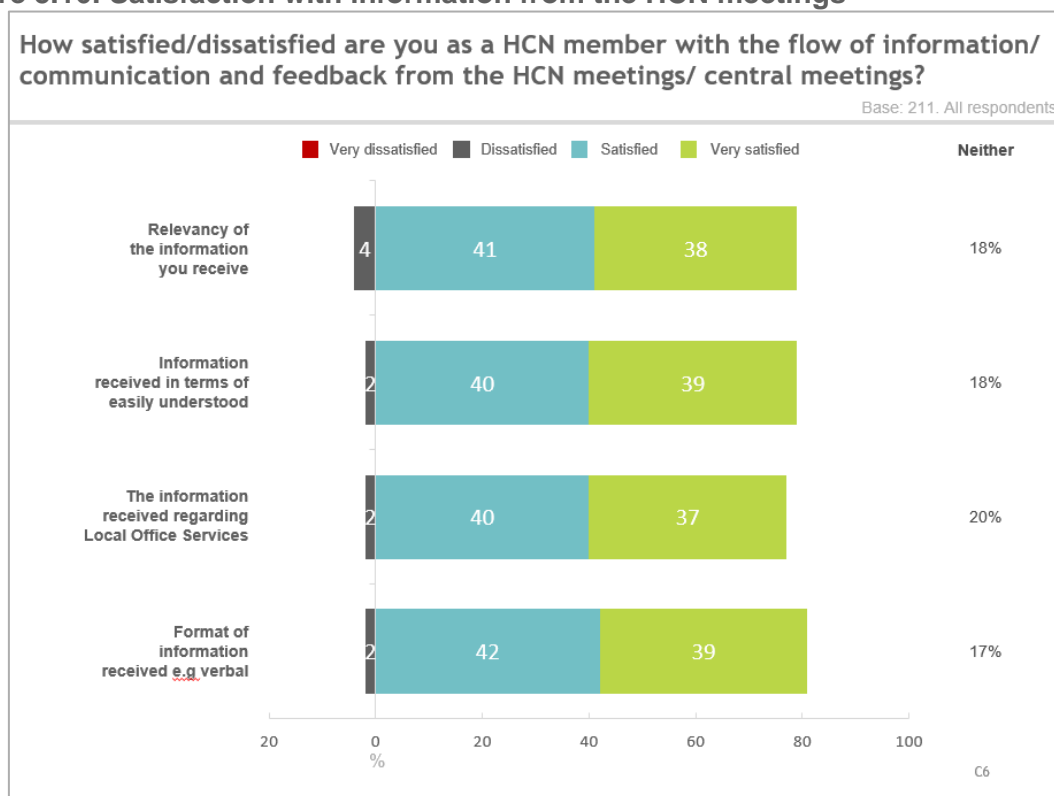
groups did not receive minutes of meetings. Overall, these findings suggest that communication and information sharing could be improved by implementing several methods and/or by increasing the frequency of circulating messages.

Figure 5.15: Communication methods

Has your Community Group's involvement in the Housing Community Network increased the effectiveness of your community group / residents you represent in relation to the following?

Base: 211. All respondents

Legend: Monthly, Bimonthly, Quarterly, 6 monthly, Annually

	Monthly	Bimonthly	Quarterly	6 monthly	Annually	Does not occur
Information pack	11	5	12		13	68%
Minutes of meetings	22	10	14		21	51%
Community Newsletter	11	6	24	6	9	45%
Verbally to your community association	63	12	10		1	13%
Public Meetings with residents	8	6	8	7	27	45%
Put on the agenda of other groups	14	12	12	3	3	56%
Face to face discussions with individuals in your HCN	44	16	15		21	22%
Social media	56	5	6		12	30%
Other	10		6		1	83%

Subsequently, the levels of satisfaction with the flow of information/communication and feedback from the HCN meetings as reported by the HCN members was analysed. In that regard, the levels of satisfaction are broadly similar across all four components listed in Figure 5.16. Between 77% and 81% of all respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the information, communication and feedback received from the central meetings. More specifically, this means that for the most part, community groups' representatives believed that the information they received contained relevant content, was easy to understand and distributed in the preferred format.

Figure 5.16: Satisfaction with information from the HCN meetings

How satisfied/dissatisfied are you as a HCN member with the flow of information/ communication and feedback from the HCN meetings/ central meetings?

Base: 211. All respondents

Legend: Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Satisfied | Very satisfied | Neither

	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Neither
Relevancy of the information you receive	4	41	38	18%
Information received in terms of easily understood	2	40	39	18%
The information received regarding Local Office Services	2	40	37	20%
Format of information received e.g verbal	2	42	39	17%

C6

The final aspect of communications that was examined related to respondents' satisfaction with transfer of information by the Housing Executive. In that regard, five specific components were individually assessed, as presented in Figure 5.17. Overall, the results show that the highest satisfaction rates were associated with the Housing Executive's response to groups' views (77%), the feedback received from the organisation (76%), and the relevance of Housing Executive's communication (76%). The two categories that received somewhat lower levels of approval related to the timing of communication (73%) as well as the quality of the published materials the groups received (71%), suggesting that actions could be taken towards improving these in particular.

In addition, the respondents who expressed their dissatisfaction with the Housing Executive's communications had the opportunity to elaborate on their views and experiences and to make suggestions on possible solutions to improve these services. Issues raised by these 9% included timing concerns and clarity on reporting.

Figure 5.17: Satisfaction with the Housing Executive's communication
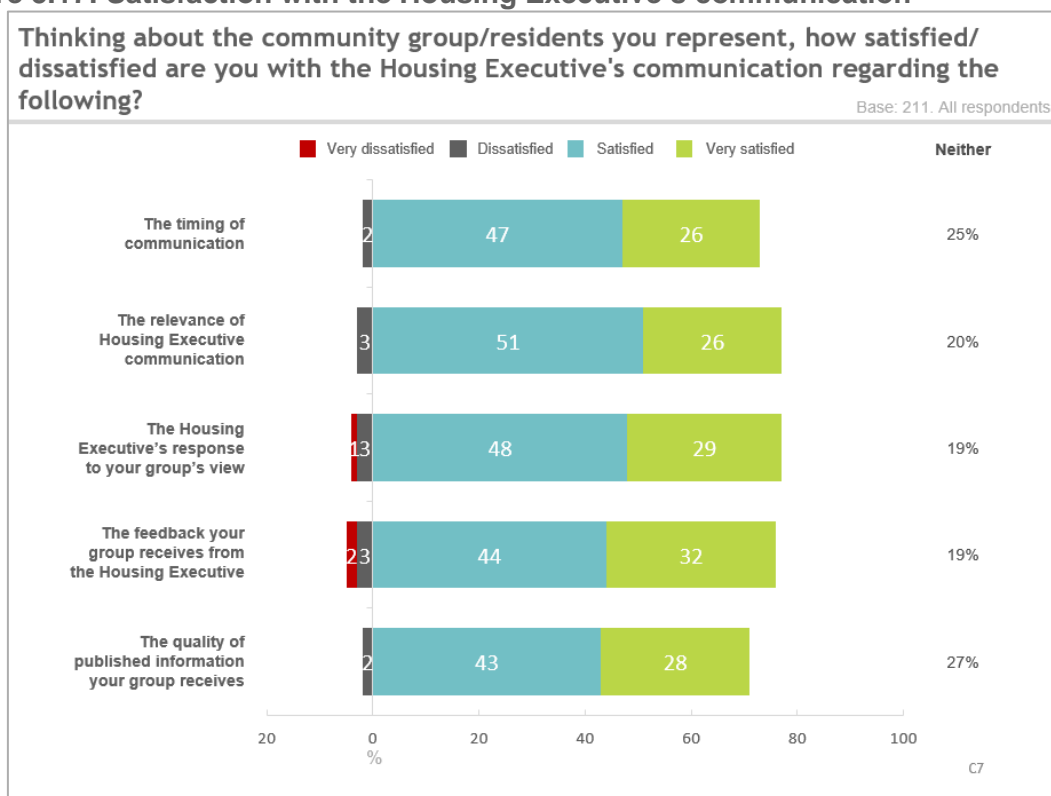
In the concluding comments concerning general operations of the HCN and in addition to the points already raised through an extensive analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, the respondents highlighted the following:

- Engagement with next generation to encourage interest in social and housing issues among young adults is important;

- Updates on schemes start dates and unexpected delays should be communicated more effectively;

- It would be useful to increase the frequency of estate inspections; and

- Communication via WhatsApp group should be considered going forward.

6. Findings from the focus groups

Two focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 18 Housing Community Network (HCN) members who offered to participate. The focus of the discussions held with HCN members was to ascertain the existing barriers and difficulties in encouraging wider participation and the potential incentives that may help overcome these barriers. It should be noted that the views of the 18 HCN members who took part in the focus group sessions are not representative of all HCN members or Housing Executive tenants in general. The focus groups provided an opportunity to explore the perceived barriers and issues that impact participation with a small number of HCN members.

The discussions commenced with members sharing their experiences of being a part of the HCN. This was followed by a debate in relation to the barriers tenants face in becoming involved. Furthermore, the HCN members shared ideas that could encourage increased engagement along with suggestions for future improvements that could influence a greater proportion of tenant involvement. .

Experience of the HCN

Involvement in the HCN
- There was a wide range of experience among those that we spoke to, from those who had been part of HCN for a number of months to those who had been members for a number of years. As well as being members of resident associations, some were members of other forums including the Central Housing Forum and the Rural Residents' Forum.

- Members of HCN indicated that their involvement was one of primarily being a representative for local residents and communities; in this role they are responsible for highlighting community issues around housing. They additionally clarified that they act as a central point of contact for situations such as anti-social behaviour, neighbourhood disputes, expulsion threats, drug use and alcohol misuse. They also communicate with the Housing Executive and make them aware of the key issues of concern occurring across their community.

- The representatives also highlighted how they provide support to people with vulnerabilities, people with disabilities as well as the elderly. The members also provide wider support by way of communicating any community information, updates, or issues.

Relationship building with statutory bodies
- In addition to working with conflicts and disputes across their communities, the members also indicated that they engage with a range of statutory bodies. This includes working alongside the PSNI community team to develop and build good relations. The relationship building is aimed at local people, to develop and grow greater confidence in the statutory bodies and encourage positive engagement. They viewed this positive relationship building as good practice, in which the people from

communities can meet the local statutory bodies, Housing Executive patch managers and other housing officers and talk about the issues that impact tenants.

Levels of involvement
- The representatives of the panels described how they are also involved in various boards that focus on supporting the tenants. They explained that their involvement on these panels helps to encourage tenants to ask for support.

- The members shared how they support tenants with allocations, disability adaptations, and other issues that can be resolved through discussion and compromise. They report that the support and assistance they provide for their community is positively perceived by the tenants.

- The mutual approach between members and housing officers or patch managers to resolving community disputes or individual problems is perceived as very encouraging and effective when both sides can prove effectual teamwork.

- Some participants also indicated they became involved with the HCN because the network keeps individuals and communities up to date with everything that is happening in terms of Housing Executive housing jobs, proposals, or schemes.

We have an opportunity to be listened to. When we are at the centre, sitting with housing officers, patch managers and even directors and discuss the community issues, I believe they do listen to us.

I was involved in new Housing Executive contracts, and we could not find proper social clauses or values within the contract. We went to work in groups, done a lot of consultations with community representatives and we managed to get social clauses and value, and all are in the contracts now. It was good to work together with the Housing Executive and the

- The network members also discussed the positive modifications that the Housing Executive has made for their tenants, especially the forums and portals that were introduced during Covid-19, which were viewed as an effective way to communicate with the Housing Executive when social contact restrictions were still in place. The introduction of the Customer Portal was perceived as being helpful and efficient in encouraging the interaction between tenants and housing related matters.

Thousands of tenants have signed up to forums or portals, this is a good way to check notifications, way of paying for your rent or to communicate with the Housing Executive.

Opportunities to put views and ideas forward
- Additionally, those we spoke to said that one of the reasons for becoming involved with the network was because it provides people and communities with the opportunity to have their voices and concerns heard. The networks work on a range of community issues and advise the Housing Executive about the things that could be done or that

they should think about in order to move forward and to deal with different problems within the community.

> *We're there to make change. We want to be there together to work with them, to make a difference.*

> *I would say mainly in relation to community issues and making people aware, making Housing Executive aware of the key issues; obviously social behaviour and the issues around drug and alcohol abuse… making them aware of what's really going on, and how do we deal with those issues and people who are most vulnerable.*

Levels of satisfaction

- Most of those who took part in the discussions perceived being a member of the HCN as beneficial, valuable, and effective when working with the Housing Executive on range of issues.

> *We might sit around the table and work in a partnership but we're still the critical friend that's sitting there.*

> *We established our resident association in November…and the Executive have been brilliant with us. They've been out and done and estate inspection. They've got a lot of work all cleared up for us.*

- A small number of focus group participants felt that they weren't always listened to by Housing Executive staff which made it harder to address issues and encourage engagement.

Barriers

As part of the discussion, we asked the 18 HCN members for their views on the possible barriers that either discourage or prevent tenants and communities from becoming involved in the resident or community groups, panels, or forums.

Lack of confidence

- The most common barrier, which recurred throughout the focus group discussions, related to tenants not having enough confidence in becoming involved, being a part of a panel or speak out on behalf of the community and residents. The lack of confidence was perceived as a major barrier for people coming forward and participating in the meetings.

> *I suppose for people who come from areas of high levels of deprivation, they sometimes feel almost in awe when they sit in an office type environment. It's almost like you're taking them back to their childhood days, where they sat and had a lecture from the headmaster.*

Confidence building is a big one to handle for somebody to come forward to participate in a meeting; even to get some of the tenants, because they're backward in coming forward. They might have plenty to say, but at the same time they think, no, I can't say that. And then after the meeting saying I wish I'd spoke up.

- In addition, it was highlighted that some communities lack the support needed to help increase confidence levels amongst tenants and residents. Some participants suggested that the Housing Executive could do more to encourage participation by focusing on what could be done to overcome the barrier of low self-confidence. One participant recalled how they became involved initially in a community garden, and from that 'light touch' experience they gradually built up both their confidence and their network of contacts within the community.

Funding
- Participants identified issues relating to the funding of networks and how this plays a role in promoting and involving people into the residential groups or panels. The participants indicated there used to be more flexibility in terms of acquiring funding for communities. This flexibility allowed more autonomy over how end objectives were achieved, which was viewed as beneficial when trying to address the needs of hard-to-reach communities. As the approach to funding has changed, the restructure seems to be more complex and more difficult for communities to acquire for situations that are not simply black and white.

We work with deprived areas, with eclectic mix of people and we need the flexibility within the programme so that we can encourage more people to become involved

Lack of presence
- Some of the members felt that there was a lack of visibility of Patch Managers in their area. In their experience, they would see the patch manager only when there is a local meeting.

- The participants suggested that Patch Managers should visit communities regularly, to find out what is happening within the communities and if there are any problems or any potential problems. They felt that this would encourage residents to be more involved and engaged in their community.

As a part of the managers' role, they should be here more often, asking questions, becoming aware of the problems, and listening to the tenants and resolving any disputes.

Communication between Social Housing Communities (Housing Association/Housing Executive)
- Participants expressed their concern towards the potential barriers that relate to integrating social housing communities. It was highlighted that, as housing from different housing associations is developed across the Housing Executive areas and communities, engagement and communication with the various providers becomes

very difficult and problematic. This was described as challenging especially when trying to develop and build relationships with different organisations and tenants.

- This problem was labelled as a major barrier to encouraging more tenants to become involved within the network, as there is no mutual or joined approach across the different associations and the Housing Executive.

One area is housing association and other is NIHE, the same things and issues may occur in the areas, but there is no joined up process with the Housing Association in dealing with communal matters, and that is a major problem.

Encouraging involvement

During the focus groups, members of the networks discussed possible ways to encourage more tenants to become involved within their community and the HCN. There were a range of ideas shared across the groups, however most focused on ensuring housing staff, such as patch managers, become more involved within the communities and ensuring tenants are able to see the results of their efforts. The most common responses regarding encouraging greater engagement included:

- More involvement from Housing Executive with the local communities and groups;
- Building greater relationships between patch managers and the most marginalised within the communities;
- Making community visitation a part of Housing Executive staff daily work; and
- Housing Executive to involve and recruit young, local people in community schemes and apprenticeships.

The need for greater involvement from Housing Executive staff within the communities was considered as the most effective approach towards encouraging better engagement and commitment from the tenants and communities in the local networks. The participants described how the local community groups know the issues in their communities, they know the most vulnerable families and know the battles or conflicts, whereas the patch managers or housing officers often do not.

Greater staff engagement was described as a way to potentially increase the awareness and knowledge of situations, conflicts, and people within each community area. Participants were of the view that increased staff engagement would lead to greater respect towards communities and their issues, and by providing support on the ground, this could lead to better relationships with the tenants and communities. In turn, this could possibly result in more tenants willing to become involved and have a meaningful role within their community.

There is not enough support for community groups. There is no staff coming to communities, engaging with people. There is no rapping on the doors ensuring everything is okay. HE needs to build a relationship with the communities and the most marginalised to get more people involved in the HCN.

Increased engagement with young tenants

Some participants shared that they find it difficult to involve younger tenants in community groups, panels and networks. They also expressed the view that, as new young tenants, some can cause issues in their communities, and therefore need additional support so that they are nurtured and helped to grow in maturity to become responsible tenants.

It was suggested that these young tenants should be assigned an individual from the Housing Executive who would check up regularly, ensuring that they are coping and adjusting well in their new environment. The visitations could also be a way of informing young tenants of any community initiatives in which they could become involved.

This approach was favoured by the members of the network as it would provide young tenants with an individual who they can reach out to in case of any difficult situations. This was also referenced as a way of building trust and positive relationships from the very beginning of the tenancy, which could positively result in young people being keener to become involved with their community.

Furthermore, the participants commented on how the Housing Executive is missing an opportunity in involving young people in their local community works, especially in relation to planned upgrades. It was suggested that the Housing Executive could build clauses into their contracts with maintenance contractors to ensure that local apprentices are used for the upgrade schemes.

If HE wants to build the relationships, they are missing a trick. To build the effective relationship with communities, get young people, offer apprenticeships, schemes and give the young people the opportunity to come and work in their own communities.

Providing a purpose

Participants suggested that to ensure more people are willing to get involved in their community, there must be a purpose or a reason for them to become involved. The common denominator for tenants to engage is the awareness that there is something of value that they can add.

One participant expressed the view that it is important to allow tenants to become involved, beginning with something small and meaningful for their estate and the community. She recounted how she was first introduced to her community through the development of a communal garden, which some of the tenants came together in preparing and creating. This led to creating a sense of belonging and a feeling of contributing to their community.

By feeding the residents gently and let their taste buds evolve to something that Housing Executive has to offer, they may develop the sense of being needed to make a change in their communities. This is how the Housing Executive could ensure people get involved in the local networks.

The above method of gradual and ongoing encouragement in involvement was labelled as essential in order to keep the memberships of housing networks, panels, and groups fresh and continuous within the communities.

One of the participants stated that they are seeking new people to manage meetings and reports and to have a meaningful role within their community. However, as it has been mentioned above, in order for tenants to develop into more responsible roles, there needs to be a gradual transition, otherwise they may become overwhelmed by the duties and responsibilities.

Suggested improvements

Participants discussed the improvements that the Housing Executive could adapt in order to create greater engagement within communities, networks and panels. The members shared several suggestions, the majority of which refer back to what was highlighted previously within the discussions. Some of the suggestions included:

- More visitation from patch managers;
- Patch managers introducing an open door setting in the communities;
- More face-to-face contact;
- A point of contact;
- Multiagency approach.

Increased presence of Housing Executive staff across the community
Most of the focus groups participants again suggested that patch managers should be more visible and attendant within community areas and show greater interest in the issues or matters that the communities are dealing with.

Furthermore, some individuals felt that Housing Executive staff should more actively engage with and listen to the people they already have across the communities. They observed that the Housing Executive asks for the support of community representatives to help resolve difficult cases, and that those approached are often in non-paid positions and therefore provide this support in a voluntary capacity. It was stated the patch managers should be in contact with these representatives on a more regular basis and not just at times of crises or dispute. However, the members indicated they are often only contacted by patch managers when there is a dispute in the community. Therefore, the need for greater involvement and presence of the patch managers has been labelled to be one of the most important suggestions in order to make progress and create engagement across the communities.

It was suggested that it would be a good idea for patch managers to have open door sessions with their communities. Participants felt it would be important to ensure the session is well advertised, certify that the patch manager will be there, and encourage the residents to engage. This would allow tenants to share their concerns and discuss any housing related matters that are important for the community.

Point of contact
The participants have also discussed that it could be beneficial for the Housing Executive to introduce a point of contact for new tenants that are leasing the housing. They explained that individuals coming into the housing estate could be assigned a point of contact in case of any concerns, queries or questions they may have. Such point of contact could introduce the new tenant to the community schemes, programmes, or networks.

Lastly, one of the participants have indicated that it is vital not to neglect the current digital point of contact that has been widely used during the pandemic when face-to-face interactions have been suspended. For some this method of being involved could be more practical and feasible than attending physical meetings.

8. Summary profiles

In order for the Housing Executive to effectively target tenants who would be more likely to want to become involved in their community, it is important to look at those who are already involved. This section presents a summary of the profiles of a HCN member, and of tenants who would be more likely to become involved in their local community.

Summary profile of tenants interested in engagement

The following characteristics were most commonly observed in tenants who indicated they would be interested in engaging with their community:

- Aged 45 or under

- Have achieved at least a GCSE level qualification

- Live in the Housing Executive's Belfast Region

- Employed

- Lone parent

Summary profile of a HCN member

Based on the details provided by HCN members in the baseline survey, a person who is involved in a HCN group is more likely to be:

- A tenant of the Housing Executive

- Aged between 26 and 60

- White

From a Protestant background

9. Conclusions & recommendations

Conclusions

The findings of the tenant's survey reflect low levels of awareness among tenants of the Housing Executives engagement activities in their communities. Higher levels of awareness were found in urban areas (52%) suggesting rural areas (35%), in particular, require targeted engagement support/promotion.

In relation to active participation, members of the HCN, as part of the group discussions, described how their involvement on different panels encourages tenants to ask for support with issues such as allocations and disability adaptions. They also spoke positively about the introduction of the Customer Portal and forums due to Covid-19, which they believe has further encouraged participation. However, findings from the tenant survey show there is still a low awareness of the Customer Portal, with 17% being aware of it, 39% of which had never used the portal.

Feedback from the HCN focus group sessions suggest that it is difficult to encourage young people to become involved, although analysis of HCN members from the survey show 20% of members are aged 18 to 25 years old.

Fourteen per cent of tenants surveyed said they would consider joining a local community group. However, the majority of tenants (76%) reported that they would not be interested in joining such a group. Younger tenants aged under 65 were more likely to express interest in joining a local group, as were those who hold qualifications suggesting age and educational attainment are barriers to participation.

Of those tenants who were not interested in joining a community group, 54% said this was because they would prefer not to get involved, while 30% had ill health which would prevent them from attending. Other commitments, including family (21%) and work (11%) were also mentioned as a barrier. These were also likely barriers for those who would not be interested in becoming involved in a group or panel or joining the Tenants' Feedback Group. The findings suggest that there is a need to offer flexible means of engagement with online meetings and meetings held at times that suit people with caring responsibilities or work to attend.

HCN members who took part in the focus groups described several barriers to involvement that they have encountered, with a lack of confidence in becoming involved being the most common barrier. A need for increased visibility of Patch Managers in communities was expressed by some members, as was the need for funding and a joined up approach between the various housing associations and the Housing Executive. Members also noted how negative experiences with Housing Executive staff can impact perceptions and engagement.

Having the opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve the local area (23%) and to develop skills and confidence (21%) along with flexible meeting times (21%) were possible incentives tenants suggested could increase the likelihood of them becoming involved in their local community group. Similar results were also achieved when tenants were

asked what would make them more likely to become involved in a group or panel, with the opportunity to interact with Housing Executive staff to improve their local area (21%), flexible meeting times (20%) and the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence (19%) all being possible incentives.

Overall the findings highlight the need to support and develop tenant's confidence and self-esteem through targeted interventions and engagement activities and indeed it is clear that tenants are aware of the positive outcomes/ benefits of community engagement in this regard.

Tenants surveyed expressed preferences as to how community groups could keep in contact with local tenants. Telephone (35%) was the preferred method of keeping in contact, followed by a newsletter (14%) and email (13%). Findings from the baseline survey demonstrated that HCN members were more likely to update their group verbally (87% saying this occurs), with these discussions most likely to happen on a monthly basis (63%). Social media is also widely used (70%), with 56% publishing updates on a monthly basis. There may be a need to improve consistency in communication methods, utilising community newsletters and email/online notifications on a regular monthly basis to update tenants.

Views gathered from the HCN members during the focus groups suggests that the groups are seen as valuable and effective. This is further reflected in the HCN baseline survey responses where high proportions of members surveyed thought that the information on, and access to support, resources and updates was one of the benefits of being a member of the HCN (79%), while 60% thought the opportunity for networking, collaboration and building relationships was a key benefit. HCN focus group participants expressed occasional frustration towards the Housing Executive when they feel that the views of tenants are not being adequately listened to, and this can hamper the group's effectiveness.

It is clear from the findings that there is a large proportion of the tenant population who have little interest in becoming involved in a local community group, panels or forums organised by the Housing Executive. This is compounded by low levels of awareness of and interest in the various initiatives organised by the Housing Executive in local areas. However, there is also low dissatisfaction (5%) with current opportunities to become involved or participate in communities and to feedback on services. Therefore, targeting this group with initiatives is unlikely to create much engagement.

When asked about incentives to becoming involved, about one in five tenants surveyed showed interest in each of the various initiatives. The findings would suggest that the Housing Executive should focus its main activities on encouraging these 'one in five' tenants, promoting opportunities to improve local areas and develop skills and confidence. It is likely face-to-face engagement with Housing Executive staff, with a constant point of contact, alongside flexible meeting times will help to facilitate tenants in becoming more involved.

In terms of the more reticent wider tenant population, it is likely that a number of channels will be needed to keep them informed more generally. Verbal updates by telephone is the preferred method, followed by a newsletter and email. The level of awareness (17%) and usage of the Customer Portal is low, although it is hoped that this will increase with the passage of time. The opportunity to use this channel for engagement currently is limited to those who use it.

Recommendations

The overall aim of this research was to provide insight that will shape the Housing Executive's tenancy engagement strategy and identify areas for improvement. The findings will also provide insight into potential consultative mechanisms through the use of online technology. This section, therefore, draws the findings together and presents a set of recommendations on how tenant engagement can be encouraged.

'Light touch' initiatives

During the focus groups one participant mentioned how they had become involved in a 'community garden which had allowed them to build their confidence and expand their network of contacts within that community. Such 'light touch' approaches to participation may therefore provide an opportunity to spread involvement throughout communities while also improving the quality of life for those living there, therefore providing a purpose for residents to become involved.

An evaluation of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's[3] work with 20 neighbourhoods across Britain described a number of 'light touch' approaches to supporting community groups and involvement, including:

- **Celebratory events** which increased the awareness of the organisation while also bridging generational divides.

- **Local community buildings,** such as shops or cafes, provided a focal point for community groups.

- **Open space** similarly provides a visible focus for the community. This involved clearing local parks to provide safe spaces for people in the community to gather.

- **Street representatives** that provide a link between the association and those living in the community.

- **Community newsletters** not only provide a method for disseminating information to community members, but can also be used as a local social enterprise to generate jobs and income for the community.

- **Youth forums** offer engagement opportunities for younger members of the community which can in turn allow them to improve their organisational and leadership skills.

As the Housing Executive currently offers several of these initiatives, it is important to ensure that residents are both made aware of and given the opportunity to take part in them.

Providing access to training and support for lone parents

The tenant survey identified lone parents as a potential key group to target for encouraging community involvement. These tenants were more likely to be encouraged to join their community group if they were given the opportunity to access training and support to develop their skills, while also being able to access community meetings remotely online. Lone parents were more likely to be aware of the Customer Portal, and so there may be an opportunity to provide access to or signpost training and support through this service.

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[3] https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/changing-neighbourhoods-impact-light-touch-support-20-communities

Opportunities for younger tenants

While awareness of community groups operating in their area was low across all age groups, the desire to join a community group or Tenants Feedback Group was highest amongst younger tenants aged under 45. These tenants were also more likely to be interested in learning more about community funding opportunities, which suggests that younger tenants have a desire to improve their community. As demonstrated by the baseline survey, the majority of HCN groups organise and run intergenerational and youth projects in their community, and so ensuring these are promoted in the community is essential to encouraging involvement. The further introduction of youth forums in communities would also give the opportunity for residents to become involved in their community from a young age. The Customer Portal would again provide an effective method for advertising these schemes, with tenants aged under 45 more likely to be aware of the service.

Promoting the benefits of engagement to those without qualifications

One specific group that might benefit from additional focus, due to their low desire to become involved in their community, is those tenants who do not hold any qualifications. Such tenants were less likely to be willing to join their local community group or Tenant Feedback Group, or to become involved in a group, panel or forum. They were also less likely to be interested in learning more about community funding opportunities. However, the tenant survey also illustrated how tenants without a qualification were less likely to be aware of the various types of support offered by the Housing Executive. Accessing this support could provide these tenants with the skills necessary to give them confidence to become involved in their community.

Connecting rural tenants

Similarly, tenants living in rural areas were less likely to be aware of there being a community group in their area, while also being less likely to be aware that the Housing Executive provides properties for community groups to use. As these tenants are more likely to be isolated from where community groups meet, being able to access these meetings online, assuming they have sufficient broadband access, would provide the best opportunity for them to feel involved in the community.

Training for Housing Executive Staff

Patch managers may benefit from training on community involvement/engagement to develop their understanding of the techniques and approaches they could employ in their local area to encourage engagement. Optimising Patch Managers and NIHE staff visibility in the local area is important as this demonstrates to tenants the level of commitment the Housing Executive have to local communities and increases opportunities for tenants/members of the community to interact with staff.

Raising Awareness of Engagement Activities

It is clear that there is a lack of awareness of the various initiatives organised by the Housing Executive in local areas. The Housing Executive could collaborate with the Housing Community Network to enhance marketing of events and initiatives to increase awareness. Similarly, the Customers Portal may benefit from enhanced marketing. Optimising the flexibility of meeting times and highlighting the development of skills and confidence are important

benefits of participation that should be highlighted in marketing to tenants. Utilising community newsletters and email/online notifications on a regular monthly basis to update tenants would also be beneficial.

Appendix 1. HCN survey additional data tables

Table 1.1: Gender of group members

	Percent
Male	43%
Female	57%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.2: Tenure of group members

	Percent
HE tenants	53%
HA tenants	16%
Private renting tenants	11%
Owner occupiers	20%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.3: Age of group members

	Percent
18-25	20%
26-40	28%
41-60	30%
61+	21%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.4: Ethnicity of group members

	Percentage
White	87%
Chinese	0%
Irish Travellers	0%
Indian	1%
Pakistani	0%
Bangladeshi	-
Black Caribbean	0%
Black African	0%
Mixed Ethnic	10%
Black Other	0%
Other Ethnic	1%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.5: Disability status and type

	Percentage
Overall	48%
Mental	35%
Learning	19%
Physical	46%

Table 1.6: Members belonging to LGBT community

	Percentage
Yes	23%
No	77%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.7: Groups' community background

	Percent
Predominantly Protestant	40%
Predominantly Catholic	27%
Mixed (Protestant & Catholic)	29%
Other	1%
Prefer not to answer	3%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.8: Housing Executive's region of the groups

	Percent
Belfast Region	25%
North Region	38%
South Region	37%
Total	*100%*

Table 1.9: HCN membership based in the Housing Executive area

	Percent
Causeway Area	11%
Lisburn/ Castlereagh Area	5%
Mid & East Antrim Area	10%
Mid Ulster Area	7%
North Belfast Area	9%
North Down & Ards Area	5%
South & East Belfast Area	12%
South Antrim Area	4%
South Area	11%
South Down Area	7%
South West Area	4%
West Area	10%
West Belfast Area	5%
Total	*100%*

This report can be found on the Housing Executive website nihe.gov.uk

For any information on the report:
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