

HOUSING IN 2022

What matters to tenants, and how can Housing Associations make it happen?

A Social Media Study



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Foreword

A very warm welcome to **Housing in 2022**, created for and launched at the Housing 2022 conference. (I know: super-original title, we've been workshopping it for months...)

The aim of this report is to give you an understanding of the issues faced by Social Housing tenants, what they really feel about their homes, and crucially, the actions you can take to help them.

We are always struck, when we work with Housing Associations, by how seriously the professionals in this space take their responsibility.

The duty of care - not only legally but emotionally - that Housing Associations feel, combined with always-strained resources and ever-changing regulations, make Social Housing an incredibly challenging place to work.

When we started Wordnerds, our plan was to make the best text analysis platform in the world. We combined AI and linguistics, we brought together different ideas, we automated different methodologies, and we created a tool that can do things that nothing else can.

But here's the truth - the only way you can really judge a tool, is the problems it solves in the real world. And that, above all, is what we love about working with Housing Associations - we get to help you make a difference.

It's worth mentioning at this point - we're looking here at publicly available social media data only. This is obviously a limitation: for the amazing group of Housing Associations that we work with use their own data - surveys, emails, messages etc. - which allows us to go into way more depth, both in understanding problems and developing solutions.

We also chose not to focus on specific Housing Associations - that didn't feel appropriate. We have, however, broken comments down by region, so you can see how geography affects the challenges faced by tenants.

Thank you for all your work. We can't wait to meet you.



Pete Daykin
CEO, Wordnerds

So what the hell is Third Level Insight?



If you asked someone what pizza toppings they liked, and they said “meats and vegetables”, you’d think they were being monumentally unhelpful. Sadly this is what most text analysis tools on the market give you.

Wordnerds coined the phrase third level insight to describe the specific, actionable and measurable insight that a business requires to make the most of their text data.

First level insight is sentiment analysis. How people feel about the general idea of things. An absolutely vital part of understanding text, but useless by itself.

Second level insight is categorisation. An AI putting your data into a pre-arranged list of generic categories. It’s incredibly useful for tracking issues, but you need to know what you’re looking for, and training to find something new is time-consuming and expensive. Plus, it doesn’t give you actionable insight - specific things within those categories that you can actually do something about.

When it comes to finding insight in unstructured text, everyone focuses on levels one and two. From the biggest megacorp to the edgiest startup, you’re getting general feelings about general categories.

The Wordnerds platform uses first and second level analysis a lot. They’re both super-important. But we have the only tool on the market that offers **third level insight**. We break the data down into topics that allow you to easily understand what’s happening, and crucially, what you can do about it. These topics are completely unsupervised - no training, no waiting. It’s just there for you, from the first time you add your data to the platform.

This then allows us to categorise the data more effectively , allowing you to:

- Develop a full **customer segmentation** model, categorising customers by needs and emotions
- Track a **customer journey** from start to finish
- As we've done here in this report, a **root cause analysis**, showing not just what happened, but why.

And with that, we're off for a meat and vegetable pizza.

What we did

We fed over **30k** (public) tweets mentioning **13 UK Housing Associations** through our text analysis and insight platform.

18

Months

13

UK HAs

Over
33,000

Tweets

Over
594,000

Words

What we found



Community Activity

Is the most likely element to predict positivity in tenants



Poor Communication

Was the best predictor of escalated complaints



Service Charges

Cause the most general negativity



We saw an inverse correlation between the amount of community outreach in a region, and complaints about service charges. There were outliers, especially in London, where there was an above average proportion of both service charge and community discussion.



The new Social Housing (Regulation) Bill requires that, from a tenant perception perspective, Housing Associations focus on health & safety, damp & cold, and provision of information.



While sentiment is more based on the practical issues, escalations tend to occur based on how a tenant is made to feel in their dealings with a Housing Association.

Root Cause Analysis

The most important question faced by Housing Associations is not "what is happening", but "why is it happening?"





ROOT CAUSES OF POSITIVITY

While it can feel at times that social media is mainly used to complain, there was also recognition of the positive work done by Housing Associations. Wordnerds used their Root Cause Analysis methodology to examine why.



Theme	Volume	Volume %	Sentiment
Local Community	617	1.90%	70
Helping customers	2,329	7.18%	67
Authority figure	479	1.48%	47
Shared ownership	344	1.06%	46

The most universally positive theme within the social data was the local community initiatives that some Housing Associations deliver. We'll be hearing a lot about them in this report. "Authority Figure" references Housing Associations' work with respected community members.

25%

of all comments to Housing Associations were positive

Principal Causes of Positivity

- **Working with young people**, either through schools or by connecting them with elderly residents.
- **Community building initiatives** present the Housing Association with the opportunity to establish themselves as part of the community.
- **New developments**, especially with Shared Ownership elements.



CAUSES OF POSITIVITY

Key issue by topic



Really interesting to see that local community work is so positively received. Housing associations that collaborated with Councillors, Community Groups and Schools were particularly well regarded.

The hard work of individual Housing Officers was regularly pointed to as cause for positivity.

The highest overall sentiment score was received by Southern Housing, mainly due to their investment in shared ownership properties.

Topic	Volume	Volume %	Sentiment
shared ownership	13	2.29%	75
new homes	10	1.76%	73

We're getting ready for our #biglunch tomorrow at @ourplacehackney on the #stamfordhillestate!

50 kids will be picnicking with us to celebrate the #PlatinumJubilee

Thank you so much to the volunteers for pitching in & @SHGroupUK for sponsoring the event!



ROOT CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

Negative sentiment was more prevalent in the dataset, with a Root Cause Analysis showing that practical concerns are more likely to affect the negative sentiment.



Theme	Volume	Volume %	Sentiment
Damp CX	209	0.64%	28
Hot Water	578	1.77%	30
Repairs	1,804	5.54%	31
Not informed	1,322	4.06%	31

Major practical issues (damp, hot water shortage, repair work) were most likely to receive a negative sentiment score, followed by issues around the provision of information.

37%

of all comments to Housing Associations were negative

Principal Causes of Negativity

- **Lack of hot water**, and the time it took for such issues to be addressed.
- **Communications**, especially the prompt delivery of information.
- **Antisocial behaviour** in shared and communal spaces.



CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

Key issue by topic



In the light of the cost of living crisis, it is unsurprising to see the service charge causing a lot of consternation among tenants. We shall examine the cost of living challenges further in the next section.

Antisocial behaviour in communal spaces, such as the bin stores and car parks, was regularly commented upon.

37% of all comments that were aimed at Housing Associations were judged by the Wordnerds sentiment engine to be negative or very negative. But that number rockets to 72% when the resident didn't feel that they had been communicated with on an issue.



"I am beginning to despair with you lot. You are an absolute disgrace, I am trying to report a repair, I DO NOT WISH TO LEAVE A MESSAGE. Get your act together or its solicitors and withholding rent next."



CAUSES OF ESCALATION

So far, we have looked at the root causes of positive and negative sentiment. This is a useful bellwether for understanding tenants, but it doesn't help to prioritise these issues, or understand where a big difference to outcomes can be made.

We therefore looked at where issues were most likely to develop into longer term problems for both tenant and Housing Association. To better understand this, we looked at signs that a problem was **escalating**, and then looked for the root causes of that escalation.

We examined three types of escalation:

- **Complaint:** An official complaint being lodged with the Housing Association, Housing Officer or local council.
- **Legal Action:** The tenant discusses lawsuits, suing or other legal recourse.
- **Ombudsman:** The tenant discusses the ombudsman, or copies in the ombudsman to the comment.

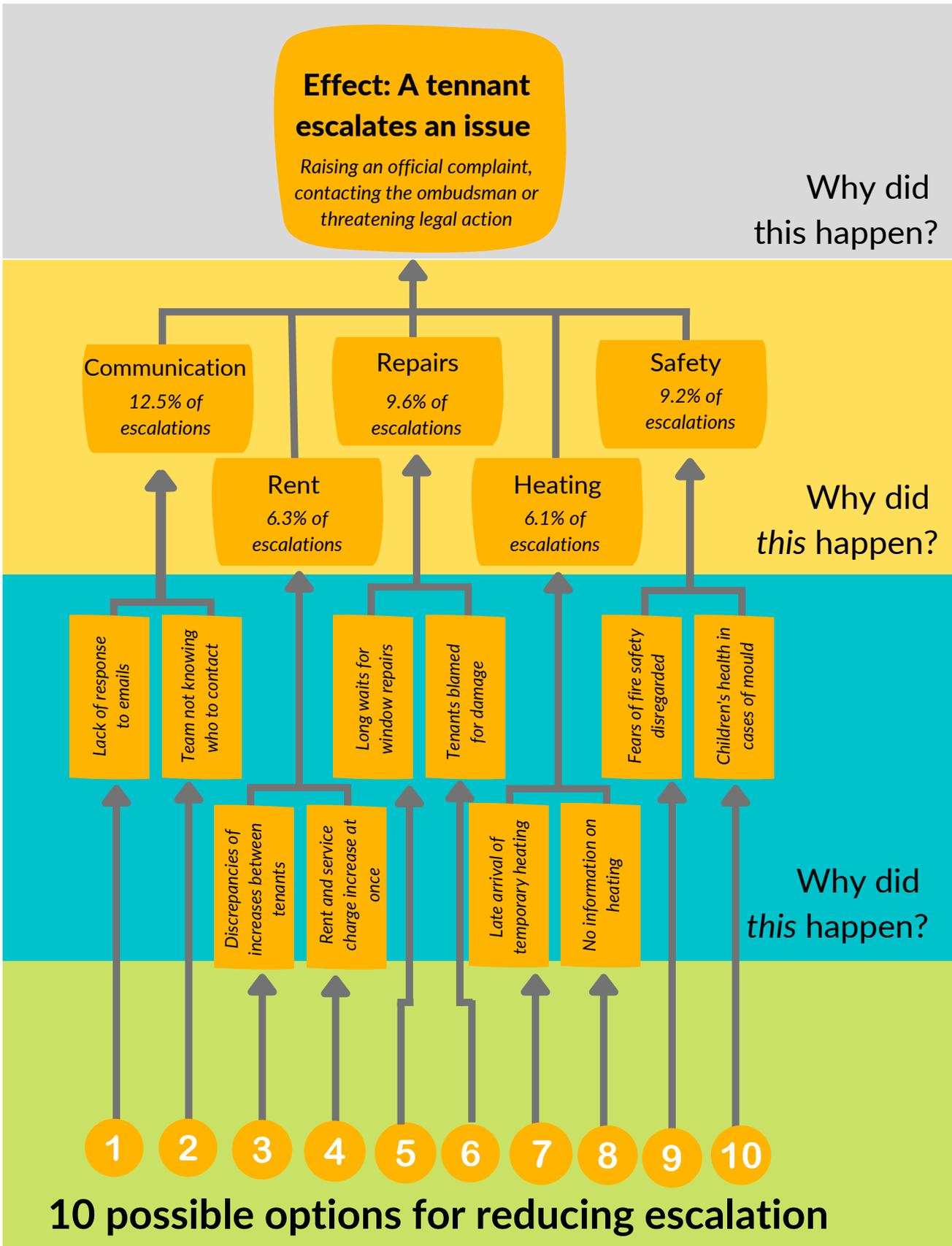
Focusing on the escalating issues highlights considerably more discussions on communication and information provision.



On the next page, Wordnerds uses a "why regression" methodology, working backwards from the effect (in this case, escalation) to the cause, and then the cause of the cause. This makes it significantly easier to pick out potential solutions to the problem of escalation.



ROOT CAUSES - ESCALATION





Ten possible options for reducing escalation

- 1 No-news responses are often helpful.** Even if there is no specific news, the most anger we see within complaints comes from tenants feeling forgotten.

"I have sent multiple emails to the CEO & so has a police officer and people from citizens advice, NO RESPONSE, I have raised a formal complaint & the date deadline has come and gone no response"

- 2 Ensure the team knows who to contact.** We saw this particularly in the context of the new service charge - parts of Housing Associations not being able to advise on who to talk to about the charge within their own organisations.

"...The highlight "or see if you have any JOY contacting the service charge team". Mind boggling that the official response from [Housing Association] seems to be "sue us"

- 3 Make cost increases consistent.** Rent increases are unavoidable, but there were likely to inspire complaints if not evenly applied across tenants.

"I'm seriously thinking about going down the legal route with [Housing Association]. They have continued to ignore all my request's to sort out correctly the service charge on my property. Also charging me double the service charge that my neighbour is paying seems like they are plucking figure"

- 4 Where possible, spread out price increases.** The simultaneous raise of rent and service charge caused complaints, and the legality was questioned.

"I'm pretty sure it's illegal to put up residents' rent & service charge without any prior notification/communion and while there's a dispute over previous years expenses."



Ten possible options for reducing escalation

5

Awareness of vulnerabilities when prioritising repairs. Complaints were more likely to come from families with young or vulnerable children, particularly mould and window issues.

"how can they keep you for so long in such despair. Hello the windows you're not fixing are windows of #autistic child room. Regardless this you shouldn't let anyone hanging like this waiting for repair. Your responsibility solely"

6

Don't play the blame game. Issues were more likely to escalate if blame was pushed back onto the tenant by the Housing Association. Even if the Housing Association is right to blame the tenant, it seems to enflame the situation.

"my neighbour has luckily been rehoused, she was top floor & when it rains the roof leaks, there's missing tiles that have been reported, but no one has attempted to scaffold & repair, they blame tenant for having a tumble drier."

7

Temporary heating is a positive outcome. Tenants appreciate it, but its urgency is often underestimated by Housing Associations.

"A resident in [area] has been without hot water and heating for 6 DAYS now.

I've been in contact with [Housing Association] by email and on the phone but only today has 'temporary heating' been offered. This isn't good enough!!"

8

Ensure heating engineers have the same information as you. We saw instances of heating issues being exacerbated by the Housing Association and the engineer giving contradictory information.

"[Housing Association] haven't kept any of the residents informed. Many calls to [Association] and [Engineering contractor] for false & contradictory info. Only today have [contractor] ordered new parts. And apparently our back up boiler has been out for a long time too. We're contacting an ombudsman."



Ten possible options for reducing escalation

9

Be seen to take fire safety seriously. For obvious reasons, fire safety is an area where all Housing Associations are being judged. Diminishing concerns is never productive.

"After complaining to customer services and property services regarding my faulty communal electrics and having customer services tell me I am basically making up that there is a fire risk, I am met with FOUR FIRE ENGINES and 15 FIREFIGHTERS outside my front door"

10

Communication is paramount to safety. Interesting to see claims being rewarded, not just for provision of safe places to live, but to how that safety is communicated.

"Thank you to @HousingOmbuds for again ruling that [Housing Association] need to pay me compensation & take actions to improve communication/the way they are dealing with our block when it comes to fire safety-related issues."

You've probably noticed some common themes in these ten root causes. And it's worth noting the differences between the root causes of sentiment, and of escalation. While sentiment is more based on the practical issues, escalations tend to occur based on how a tenant is made to feel in their dealings with a Housing Association.

The cost of living crisis

Can anything be done to help?

In a world of inflation, hikes in energy tariffs, global food shortages and the cost of living crisis, how can Housing Associations support their tenants?





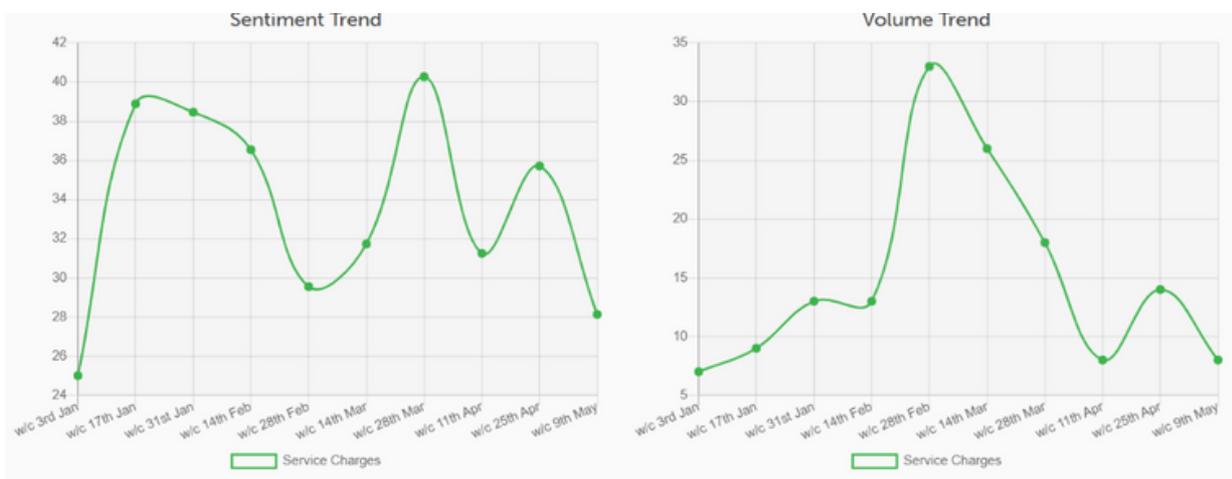
HOW DOES THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS AFFECT SOCIAL HOUSING TENANTS?

The cost of living is a challenge for everyone right now, and things are harder still for tenants in social housing. But as the costs pinch, and when Housing Associations' hands are often tied from a financial perspective, how do you help your tenants through this difficult time?

Service charge leads to value claims

It probably won't shock you to hear that what came out of the Viewpoint Rent and Service Charge Consultation Outcomes Report at the end of February was not popular with tenants.

Following announcements of rental increases by a minimum of 2.9% and a jump in services by at least 2% (effective from April), we noticed a spike in volume and a drop in sentiment as tenants voiced their frustration.

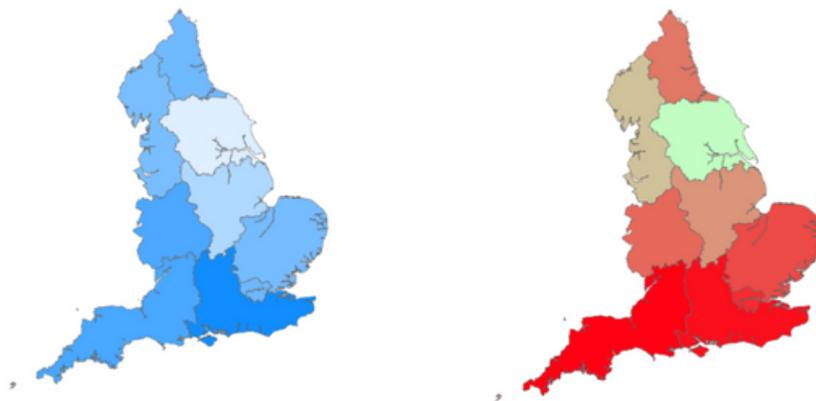


Sentiment and volume of service charge discussion since the start of 2022



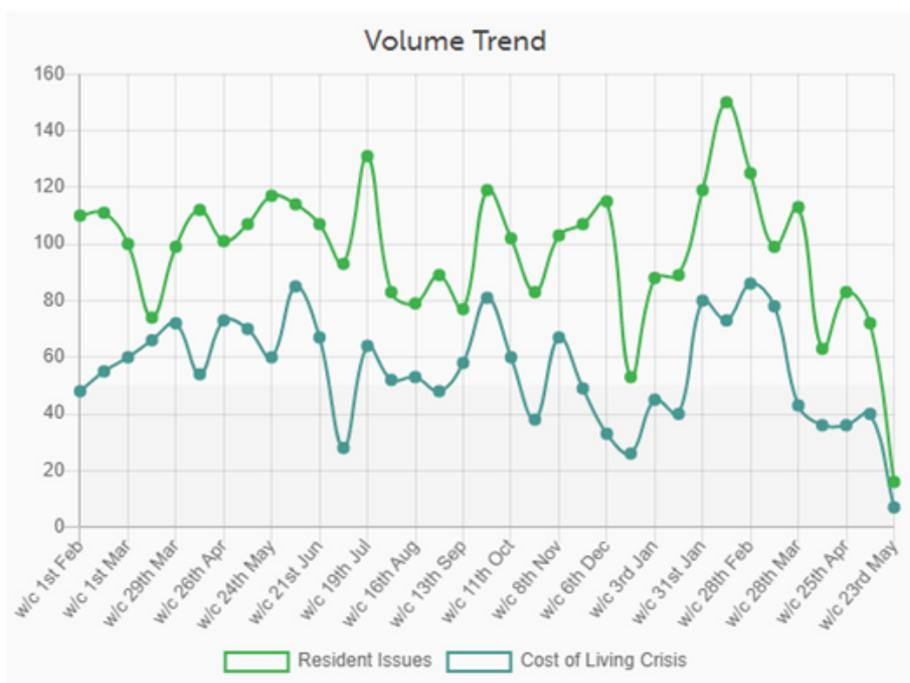
Service Charge & Value Claims

The trend of service charge frustration was also visible regionally - the regions with the highest rate of conversation about service charges (the South East, South West and North West) also had the lowest overall sentiment across all posts.



Sentiment and volume of service charge discussion by region since the start of 2022

So far, so predictable. But there was a really interesting corollary to the reaction to the service charge increase: **it led to an increase in other complaints.** We saw a direct correlation between the increase in discussions on service charge, and complaints about other issues - including fire safety, hot water, repairs and hygiene.





Service Charge & Value Claims

The data suggests an increase in expectations of a Housing Association when the charge goes up. Many users discussed this correlation directly.

Sent a letter the other day regarding an extra charge for cleaning the grounds on the grounds where the public (even non tenants) are using as their dog toilet. Is this right? You keep charging maintenance fees and my window had not even been cleaned for a year!

Something needs to be done about residents fly-tipping in our communal bin store. I can't use my own recycling bin and my service charge has increased to pay for their bulky waste collections.

It's therefore useful, in situations where prices must rise, to prepare for an **increase in other complaints**. Any raise in charges will also raise other issues. It's a great time to bring in extra support measures, even for a short period.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

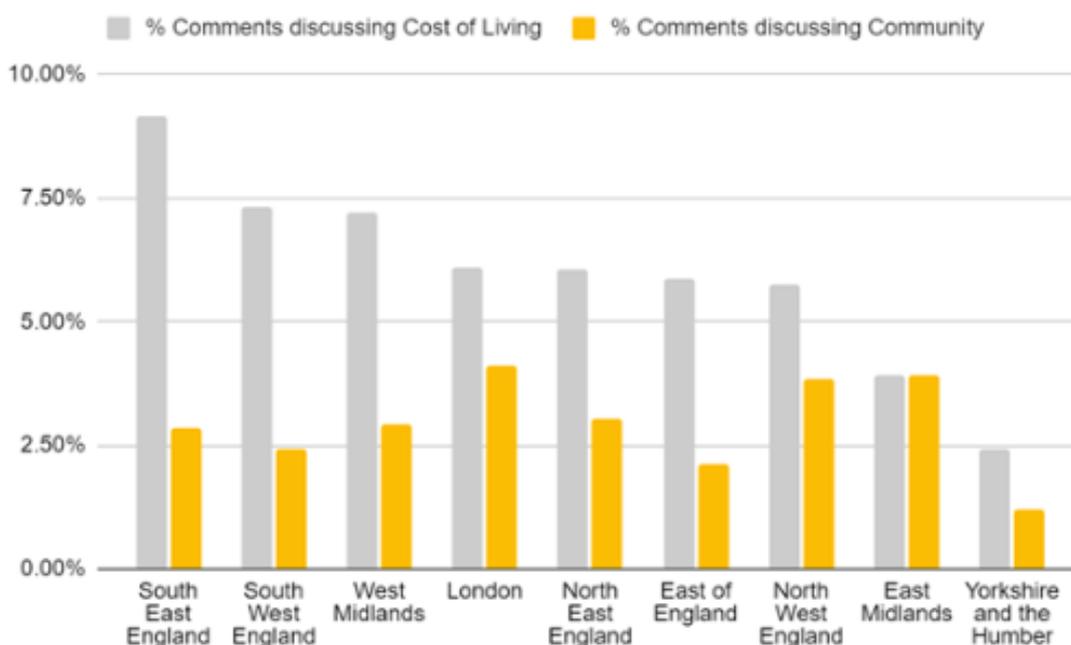
So when costs begin to spiral, and the charges are impossible for the Housing Association to reduce, is there anything that a Housing Association team can do to help?

The strange thing about community projects

We already talked about working with the local community in this report. And sure, community initiatives are great, but it's not like they actually help with complaints about charges, right?

Well, amazingly, we did see an inverse correlation between the amount of community outreach in a region, and complaints about service charges. There were outliers, especially in London, where there was an above average proportion of both service charge and community discussion.

But overall, the more likely an association was to be seen to be working with the community, the less likely they were to receive complaints about cost of living.



Social Housing Area by discussions on Cost of Living and Community Projects



OUTSIDE HOUSING: WATER

Housing is not, of course, the only key sector where the cost of living strikes. We thought it might be interesting to examine other sectors, and get an understanding of how they approach cost-of-living support.

We looked at the social media output from all of the UK water suppliers, to understand their response to the cost of living crisis.

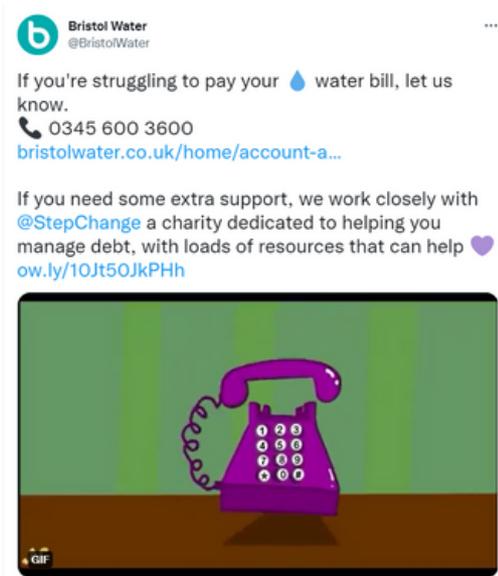
An interesting mix here of general purpose ideas (spreading costs through payments plans, and ideas specific to water (water meters).

We know many people are feeling the strain of soaring energy bills and other rising costs. 🧑‍🦳

We're here to help, spread the cost of your water bill by setting up a payment plan. ❤️

affinitywater.co.uk/paymentplan

#costofliving #costoflivingcrisis #wateraffordability



Lessons from Water

- **Close work with Charities** is popular, with Bristol Water promoting a link with Step Change.
- **Payment plans** are being offered by all the Water companies we examined.
- Installing a **Water Meter** was the most regularly discussed money saving advice. Could installing Water Meters allow you to save on building costs, and pass that saving on to tenants?

Social Housing **(Regulation) Bill**

In a world of inflation, hikes in energy tariffs, global food shortages and the cost of living crisis, how can Housing Associations Support their tenants?





HEALTH & SAFETY/ ELECTRICAL SAFETY

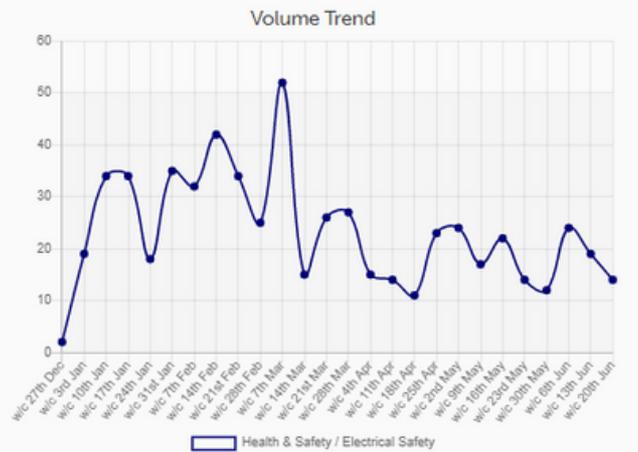
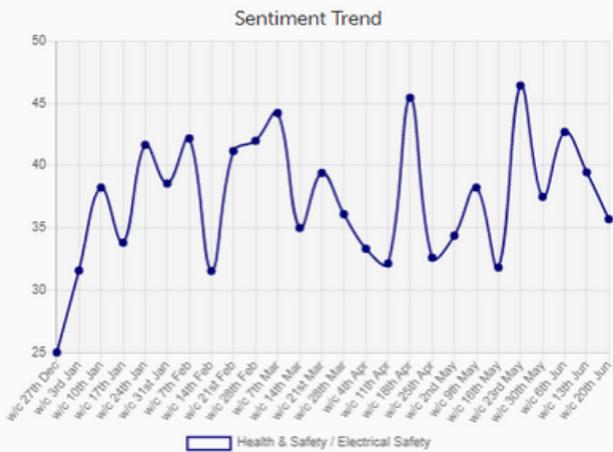


Current sentiment
breakdown of this issue

What the Legislation says

- A registered provider must designate an individual as Health & Safety Lead.
- If the Health & Safety Lead is not appointed, or does not carry out their duties, the provider can be fined.

Current discussion of the issue

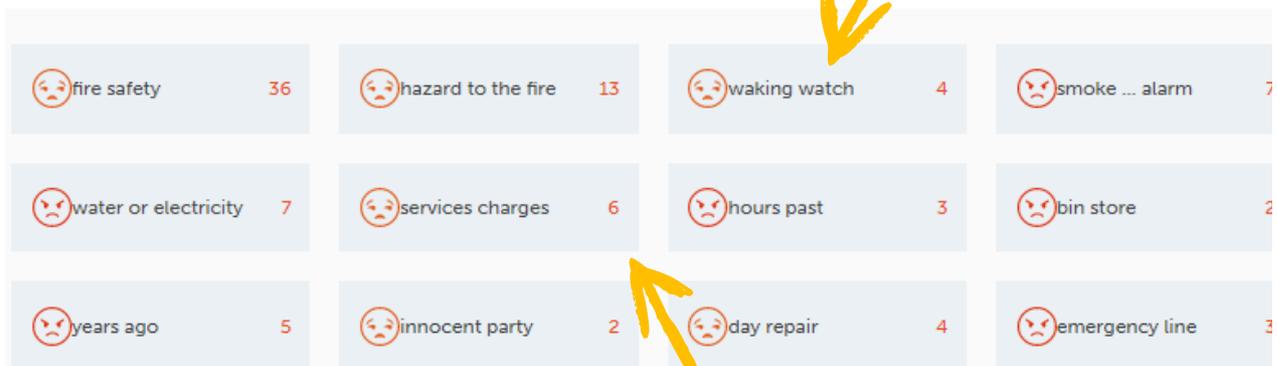




HEALTH & SAFETY/ ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Current challenges

Interesting split on Waking Watch, between tenants in areas that don't have access to the service requesting it, and those that do have it questioning its value.

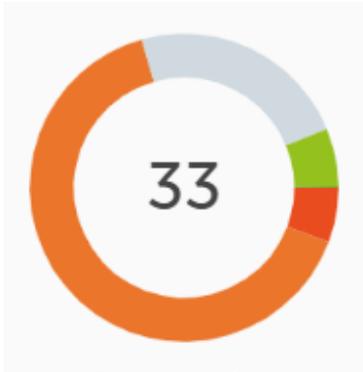


Service charges are present again here, due to the fact that fire safety costs are often part of the service charge fee. Many tenants believe that the cost of fire safety should be the responsibility of the Housing Association.

"[Housing Association] making residents pay for 'waking watch fire safety wombles' who did nothing except tick a huge expensive box while (overbudget, over schedule) re-cladding work was being carried out. The HAs are really not designed to help residents at all."



DAMP, COLD & REPAIRS

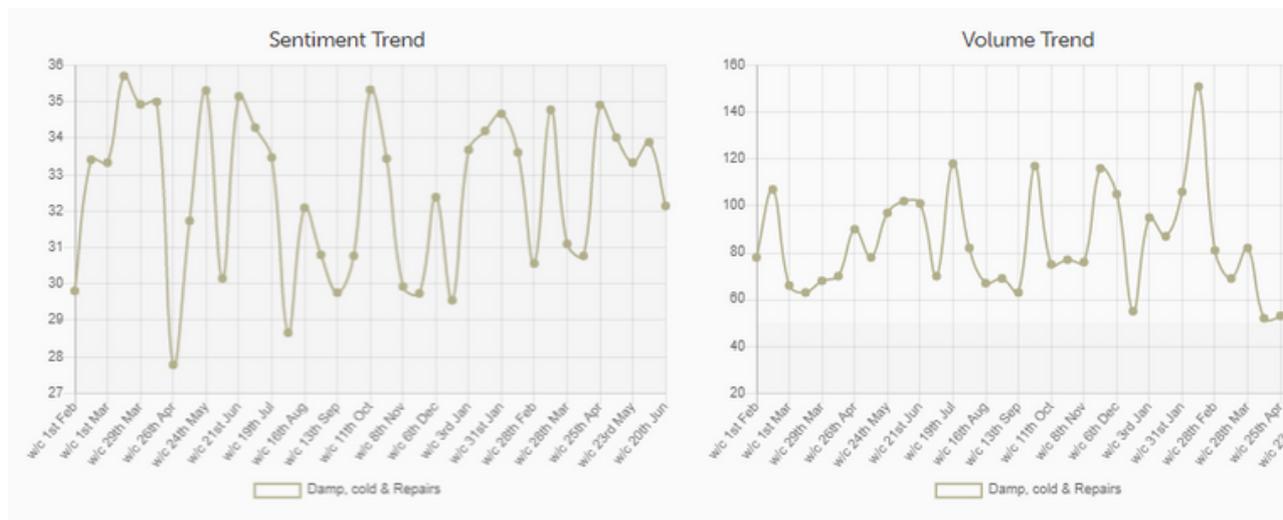


Current sentiment breakdown of this issue

What the Legislation says

- The Bill aims to tackle damp and cold living conditions.
- Social landlords may be subject to Ofsted-style inspections.

Current discussion of the issue





DAMP, COLD & REPAIRS

Current challenges

Emergency repair hotline only being open during the working week, or with no response after hours, are common complaints in this area.

hot water 79	emergency repair 22	leaving ... heating 18	broken ... door 17
charges ... service 17	housing association 16	flat ... leaking 15	problems ... fixed 13
waited ... month 12	year old 12	repair ... raised 10	damp and mould 10

The effect of mould on both physical and mental health was commented upon.

Boiling water pouring from the ceiling and no one answering the out of hours emergency repair line! And when I did get through, the call ended abruptly.

Here's another common cause of damp and mould in new-builds: HAs' failure to service mechanical electrical ventilation systems (MEVs).



PROVISION OF INFORMATION

Current challenges

Hot water, refers to users ' requests for repairs not being heeded. Interesting that hot water is so prevalent in this category - perhaps because it poses less of a threat to the tenants health, communication on this issue is deprioritised.



hot water 21	customer service 23	communal areas 7	weeks ago 13
paying random charge 9	housing association 8	raw sewage 4	housing officer 7
minutes on hold 5	fire safety 7	washing machine 3	management pack 4



Management Pack refers to the provision of information for tenants looking to buy their property.

"An elderly lady with no heating or hot water has been calling your number for over 2 hours but there is no answer. No response to the online form submitted either. Disgraceful!"

CASE STUDY | SOVEREIGN HOUSING

When the stakes are as high as they are in housing, it was essential that every bit of Sovereign's huge volumes of feedback received were heard.

Sovereign Housing provides homes for more than 130,000 residents across the south and south west of England. They make it their mission to ensure they are creating great places to live.

Of course, accomplishing that goal requires interrogating huge amounts of tenant feedback across all sorts of channels. To help them tackle difficult areas such as resident trust and root cause analysis, Wordnerds has been placed in the breach to listen to tenants across everything from STAR surveys to live chat conversations.

Within a month of using Wordnerds, Sovereign had introduced changes to their Repairs service off the back of insights surfaced - and they have been driving ongoing change since then.

To start with, Sovereign linked up their existing STAR surveys to our platform to analyse key trends and surface unknown unknowns.

As team expertise and understanding of the platform grew, more and more departments were found to benefit from automation and large-scale, in-depth text data analysis.

Ad hoc projects such as their Communities and Neighbourhoods research, complaints surveys, and other tenant voice pieces were rolled into their use of the platform. Live chat conversations were later included as well.



CASE STUDY | SOVEREIGN'S ROI

Wordnerds automated topics and contextual analysis of live chat conversations save 2 hours of manual tagging every day!

Analysis conducted by the platform is output to their BI tool to allow for ease of internal reporting.

Customer sentiment is now tracked as a key metric across a range of themes to consistently benchmark service improvement in different areas of the business.

"Working with Wordnerds is a pleasure - not only are colleagues there knowledgeable, they demonstrate true partnership working - always happy to go above and beyond what has been asked to ensure I get the outputs I need."

Howard Jones
**Head of Customer Feedback,
Insights and Complaints**
Sovereign Housing



FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the things that need to happen in housing are long term, complex and expensive. We totally understand that advice like, “improve all social housing”, requires a huge amount of infrastructure change. We should all be aiming for it, but it’s not something that will happen overnight.

So we have selected some key ideas and solutions from the access community that are relatively simple to implement and could make a huge difference.



Communicate changes. You'll notice this has come up a lot. That's because it's the most important advice. Get ahead of any change, make sure that tenants are informed, and you'll find that they are actually pretty understanding.

Prepare for an increase in other complaints when raising charges. Any raise in charges will also raise other issues. It's a great time to bring on extra support measures, even for a short period.



Reach out into the community. Talk to councillors, community groups, schools. Being seen to be a part of the community will help when you need to ask something of them. Partnerships with charities may also be able to help with tenants' cost of living challenges.

Get the message consistent. Both inside your organisation, and for outsourced maintenance workers. If a single source of truth isn't feasible, a directory of who to talk to on an issue might be useful.



Ensure you understand how your tenants feel. The emails, messages, posts and complaints from tenants can often be overwhelming, especially when something big like the charge increase happens. But you can now access tools that can codify, categorise and collate the issues, allowing you to prioritise the most important and understand how things are changing.

All this from a sample of Twitter data only.

What could you achieve with a **layered view of social, survey, reporting and complaint data?**



Discover the stories behind the data

Wordnerds gives you real-time, actionable insight to:

Improve tenant satisfaction

Track and monitor changing tenant expectations and shifts in priorities. Understand how seismic shifts in public opinion are impacting CX and what you can do to improve.

Better strategic decision-making

Chart progress against strategic objectives. Then improve it.

Reduce contact to complaints teams

Sovereign Housing already save two working hours every day.

Stay ahead of the Bill

Wordnerds is a simple way of demonstrating that you are giving every single tenant and equal voice in your decision making.

Does your insights team have the tools to make **real change** in your organisation?

Power up your existing CX tools with Wordnerds text
analytics and **3rd Level Insight**



[Book a call](#)



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