



Social

What next for the social housing sector's reputation?

A survey by Social and Inside Housing

CONDUCTED SEPTEMBER 2022

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FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, THE SOCIAL HOUSING SECTOR HAS COME UNDER INTENSE SCRUTINY FOLLOWING REVELATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE LIVING IN UNACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS.

National media has continued to shine a spotlight on cases of disrepair, damp and mould in social housing.

Some believe social landlords have become too far removed from their core purpose of helping those who cannot afford private rent or home ownership.

This comes as housing associations and councils must balance competing priorities such as building safety work, net zero targets and development of new homes.

To better understand how the sector views these challenges and the way it is perceived, Social and Inside Housing undertook a survey in September 2022 of individuals across the sector including several respondents from housing associations and local authorities.

Overall we had 159 responses, 66% of which work for a housing association or registered social landlord while a further 22% were from a local or combined authority.

Of the respondents, more than one in five were C-level, with 10% in regulation and governance and 7% in communications, marketing or PR.

159

OVERALL RESPONSES



CONCERNS FOR SECTOR REPUTATION

The findings reveal a consensus among respondents that the sector’s reputation is a key concern. In fact, 92% of respondents said they were either ‘very’ or ‘mildly’ concerned about the sector’s reputation.

How concerned are you about the sector’s reputation



9 in 10 worried about sector’s reputation

The most common suggestion to fix the sector’s reputation was to provide better services (69%). Other options backed by respondents were to focus more on social purpose and positive stories (48%) and to achieve greater resident involvement (47%).

What do you see as the key to improving the sector’s reputation?

Top 5

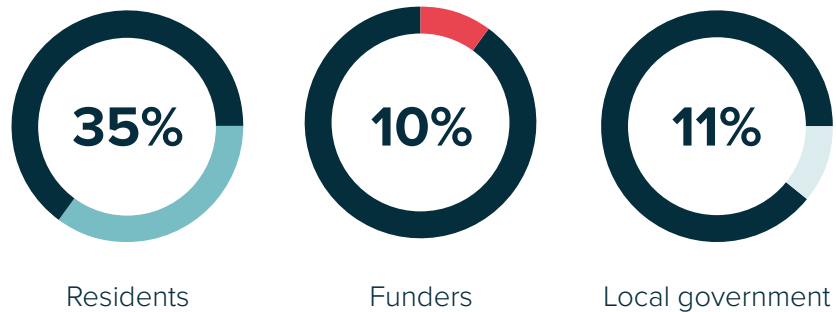


Encouragingly, these three solutions were also the top three solutions that respondents felt confident that they can address.

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As part of their attempts to restore the sector's reputation 35% of respondents said they intend to invest more to monitor how residents perceive them. Conversely, 10% of those surveyed said they would do the same to monitor their funders' perception.

Does your organisation plan to invest more into monitoring and understanding how stakeholders perceive you?



Significantly more spend

FEEDBACK FROM RESPONDENTS



Our reputation as a sector is under strain, which is difficult to digest given we're passionate about our purpose, we're largely stable in terms of assets, finances, well regarded by funders and highly regulated.

We're organisations that are resilient however consistency in quality of homes, service delivery, communication and complaints handling is an issue that means we're sometimes falling short of our own standards and customer expectations.

To address this at a basic level we need to be clear about our purpose, embrace the spirit of our sector (not just the letter of consumer regulation), live up to our standards and values, demonstrate transparency by addressing our performance challenges, showcase our ability as capable/willing partners and our positive impact on the successful lives of tenants."

**Lisa Nicholls, Executive Director of Operations
Rooftop Housing Group**



The customers and communities we serve need us to do just that - serve. That means being humble enough to listen when concerns are raised and honest enough to show up to deal with issues.

Most importantly we need to not use “not our responsibility” as the answer when empathy and whatever action we can do to support should be the default. For me that simple ideal covers everything from strategy to service delivery. If you can build new homes – then do, if you have the skills to deliver supported housing – then do – whatever our customers and communities need in terms of housing, our sector should be right in the thick of helping solutions – working with other agencies, charities and our customers.”

**Nathan Mallows, Director of Finance,
People and Change, Coastline Housing**



To tackle the sector reputation, we need to adopt different behaviours. You rebuild trust by building a relationship based on equality and honouring any commitments.

I’m willing to bet that there isn’t a single tenant in the whole of the UK whose first waking thought in the morning is ‘I must check what my landlord is saying on Twitter or Facebook’, yet we spend an inordinate amount of time there worrying about image or branding.

What’s required is going back to basics, forming relationships at a local level and delivering time after time on the things most important to people.”

**Paul Taylor, Innovation Coach,
Bromford**



The housing association sector is subject to competing pressures to deliver social value, public services and act commercially.

We need to make sure these factors are kept in balance and that we don’t lose sight of the importance of using our people, property and financial capacity to be a force for good by helping those in need, holding ourselves accountable and delivering quality services for our residents.

We should not see safety and sustainability as extra considerations but as part of our core purpose.”

**Bruce Moore, Chief Executive
of Housing21**



The social housing sector has a long way to go to improve the way in which it is perceived. To discuss the findings of this survey and any questions about how to tackle the issues mentioned, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the team at Social.

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www.social.co.uk/housing



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