The Scottish Housing Regulator

The Priorities of Gypsies/Travellers and Factored Owners

Report

August 2012
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SUMMARY FINDINGS

The key objective for the study was to examine the priorities of Gypsies/Travellers on official sites, and owner occupiers who receive factoring or common repairs services, in relation to services provided by social landlords. The study comprised two key fieldwork elements; interview-based fieldwork with Gypsies/Travellers resident on official sites, and a combined focus group and interview approach with owners receiving a factoring or common repairs service from a social landlord. Study findings will help the Regulator to shape its future regulatory approach, and in this context both fieldwork strands were structured around key outcomes set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

Section four of this report discusses the common themes and priorities emerging through the study. The key findings identified in relation to Gypsies/Travellers and factored owners are highlighted separately below.

For **Gypsies/Travellers on official sites**, the key findings were:

- Awareness of tenancy agreements and related provisions was generally strong, but some lack of clarity was evident in relation to how site residents should engage with services, and what residents could expect from landlords.

- The kind of role and relationship that Gypsies/Travellers expect from landlords appeared to have a significant impact on the relative value ascribed to specific aspects of landlord services. Some were clear that they do not expect – or wish for – landlords to play a significant role in site residents’ lives, and most interviewees highlighted social make-up of sites and condition of accommodation as the key elements for the operation of their site. Participants certainly did not dismiss other aspects of landlord services as insignificant, but it was clear that Gypsies/Travellers’ priorities are focused to a significant extent on concerns around social mix and condition of accommodation.

- Gypsies/Travellers were varied in their views on the priority ascribed to specific aspects of landlords’ services, and indeed all seven of the listed service aspects were identified as a priority by one or more interviewees. Nevertheless, **being able to have a say on landlord services and decisions** emerged as the main priority. For most this appeared to be linked to a common and strongly held view that Gypsies/Travellers can make a valuable contribution to landlord decisions. This was highlighted particularly in relation to decisions on investment or upgrading to sites, and the need to ensure these are responsive to site residents’ preferences and needs.
• In terms of other service aspects, **speed of service response** was also commonly identified priorities, although fewer participants identified these as the single most important aspect of landlords’ services. Most interviewees saw speed of service response as “obviously important” for all aspects of site residents’ contact with landlords. However, specific reference was made to the importance of a rapid response to emergency repairs that can have an impact on residents’ safety or health, or where families include young children and/or people with health needs.

• **Being treated fairly and with respect** was also a significant priority in and of itself, and was also evident as a theme throughout discussion of other specific priorities. It was clear that, for Gypsies/Travellers, being treated with respect is a crucial element for a positive relationship between site residents and landlords, which was in turn highlighted as vital in the effective running of sites and individuals’ quality of life.

• Although mentioned by fewer participants overall, a substantial proportion of those who saw **value for money** as a priority also identified this as their top priority. This may suggest that value for money is a specific priority for fewer Gypsy/Travellers, but that where it is an issue this is likely to be a major concern for individuals.

For **owners receiving a factoring or common repairs service from a social landlord**, the key findings were:

• Awareness and understanding of factoring/common repairs services was highly variable across research participants. This ranged from those who had extensive experience and knowledge of what is provided by the service, to some who had not been aware of the services prior to the research. This variation appeared to be linked closely to the type of service received by owners; those using RSL factoring services typically had a better understanding of what the landlord provided, than users of local authority common repairs services.

• While a lack of awareness of service standards or procedures did not appear to be a top priority for many owners, it was clear that owners expected clarity on responsibilities in relation to common area maintenance and repairs. This was primarily an issue in relation to questions of when the factor or common owner has a role to play in repair and maintenance work, for example the “boundaries” between owners’ property and common elements.

• Research participants were also keen to describe the role they would prefer services to play, and here “control” over the appearance and condition of their home was a key principle. The importance of “genuine consultation” was evident in this context; owners value the opportunity to have input into how repair or maintenance work is carried out, and to what specification.
Owners were somewhat divided in the extent to which they expected landlords to have a significant role in the maintenance and repair of properties, and this appeared to underpin the relative priority attached to specific aspects of factoring and common repairs services. Broadly, those expecting landlords to play a stronger role in the maintenance of properties placed significant value on communication with owners, information and advice, and owners having a say on services these aspects of service. In contrast, those looking for an “unobtrusive” service were focused more exclusively on elements such as value for money and speed of response.

In terms of specific aspects of service, **value for money of services** was identified as the top priority for owners. The importance of landlords having a clear focus on achieving best value for owners was a particular priority in relation to higher cost one-off repairs or improvements; there was some concern that landlords could achieve better value for owners in these costs. However value for money was also raised as a priority in relation to regular maintenance or landscaping services, and this appeared to reflect a lack of awareness of how specific elements of the factoring charge relate to landlords’ activities.

Owners being **able to have a say on services** was also identified as an important aspect of factoring and common repairs services. This priority area appeared to be linked to the broader issue of owners having “control” over decisions affecting the condition and appearance of their property. Owners were clear in their view that being able to influence these decisions was fundamental to their experience of services, and it was in this context that reference was made to the importance of owners having a say on services.

**How effectively services resolve queries and repairs** was also a common priority area for owners. It is notable that this was ranked above speed of response for owners, and some were clear in their view that, notwithstanding any safety concerns, owners were less concerned about how quickly work was completed than ensuring that work was to an acceptable standard. This was also linked to the priority assigned to owners having a say on services, and in particular ensuring that completed works meet owners’ standards.
1. INTRODUCTION

Background and Objectives

1.1. The Scottish Housing Regulator has responsibility for the regulation of RSLs (including their factoring function), and of the landlord, homelessness and factoring functions of local authorities. Protecting the interests of tenants and other service users has been a consistent guiding principle for regulation and inspection in Scotland, reflected in the move over recent years to assessment of services against a range of outcomes, including outcomes impacting on tenants and the services they receive.

1.2. This focus on the interests of tenants and other service users - including owners receiving factoring services and Gypsies/Travellers on sites owned and/or managed by social landlord - has been formalised by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. The Act created the new Scottish Housing Regulator, and sets out the Regulator’s statutory objective to:

“Safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants of social landlords, people who are or may become homeless, and people who use housing services provided by registered social landlords (RSLs) and local authorities.”

1.3. In this context, it is vital that the Regulator’s work is based on an accurate understanding of the experiences and priorities of tenants, service users and others in relation to services provided by RSLs and local authorities. The key focus of this study was to examine the priorities of Gypsies/Travellers on official sites, and owner occupiers who receive factoring services, in relation to services provided by social landlords. Study findings will help the Regulator to shape its future regulatory approach in the context of the statutory objective highlighted above.

1.4. There are a number of recent and forthcoming changes to the legislative and policy environment which have a bearing on the SHR’s regulatory approach, and which highlight the place of Gypsies/Travellers and owners for regulation and inspection. The most notable of these are:

- The Scottish Government’s Social Housing Charter came into effect on 1 April 2012. The Charter will play a significant role in shaping the SHR’s future approach to regulation and inspection, and will set outcomes against which landlords’ progress will be assessed. These include outcomes relating to services provided by social landlords to Gypsies/Travellers and owners.

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2 The term ‘factoring’ is used to refer to a variety of organisational arrangements for the management of the maintenance and repairs of buildings with common areas.
• In relation to Gypsies/Travellers specifically there have been significant policy developments over recent years, including recognition of Gypsies/Travellers as a specific group for ethnic monitoring systems. There has also been a growing emphasis on Gypsies/Travellers in relation to the provision of accommodation (including recognition within LHS guidance) and services (specific recognition by previous Performance Standards has now been replaced by relevant outcomes within the Charter). It is also important to note that Performance standards also make direct reference to factoring services provided by local authorities and other social landlords.

Study Methodology

1.5. The fieldwork elements of the study involved two parallel strands of work; an interview-based approach with Gypsies/Travellers resident on sites managed by social landlords, and a combined focus group and interview approach with owners receiving a factoring or common repairs service from a social landlord. While there was some commonality in the fieldwork materials used – both strands being structured around key outcomes set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter – these were wholly separate fieldwork exercises. We summarise key elements of the fieldwork experience below.

1.6. The Gypsy/Traveller strand of the study fieldwork used a semi-structured survey interview approach, interviews with site residents being conducted during pre-arranged visits to sites:

• Our fieldwork team visited a total of nine official Gypsy/Traveller sites across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll & Bute, Edinburgh, Fife, North Ayrshire, Perth & Kinross and West Dunbartonshire.

• Sites were selected to provide a cross-section in terms of location (urban and rural), management (Council and RSL), and service model (on-site and off-site managers). Sites also varied considerably in terms of residents’ travel patterns, ranging from those where residents remained on the site throughout the year and travelled relatively little, to those used only as seasonal sites with residents using an alternative base during summer or winter. While the focus of the study was on Gypsy/Travellers’ priorities rather than service experience, the fieldwork approach sought to ensure that the study was sensitive to potential variations in priorities and values across different types of site.

• A total of 47 individuals were included in this fieldwork strand. The fieldwork approach was flexible to ensure the study was as accessible as possible to site residents – completed interviews were primarily with individuals, but included a numbers of group interviews where this was preferred by the residents.

1.7. A profile of interviewees is provided over the page.
1.8. Fieldwork with owners receiving a factoring or common repairs service from a social landlord involved a mix of discussion groups and semi-structured telephone interviews to maximise the “reach” of this fieldwork strand:

- A total of nine discussion groups and 12 telephone interviews were conducted with owners across Aberdeenshire, Dundee, East Lothian, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and Stirling. Social landlords providing services in these areas played an important part in the recruitment process. Craigforth worked with landlords in each area to identify potential participants and to collate a recruitment sample from as broad a range of services as possible; recruitment materials were subsequently issued direct from Craigforth or by landlords.

- This recruitment approach was structured to ensure a balance of participants in terms of location (urban and rural areas, more and less deprived areas), service type (RSL and local authority, full factoring and common repairs services) and property form and size. While it is unrealistic for a study of this kind to achieve a wholly representative spread of owners, this approach sought to ensure that the study was sensitive to potential variations in views across these categories.

- A total of 74 individuals were included in this fieldwork strand. A short survey pro forma was used through discussion groups and telephone interviews, asking individuals to score the importance of seven key aspects of services – a total of 60 completed forms were gathered.
1.9. The profile of participants is summarised below.

**Figure 2: Profile of research participants – Owners (total 74)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATURE OF INVOLVEMENT</th>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Stirling</td>
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<td>Council</td>
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2. PRIORITIES OF GYPSIES/TRAVELLERS ON OFFICIAL SITES

2.1. In this section we consider priorities for landlord services, as highlighted by Gypsy/Travellers through interview fieldwork.

2.2. Around 500 Gypsy/Traveller families use the services of 32 official residential sites provided by social landlords in Scotland. Official sites across Scotland vary in size and frequency of use, ranging from some having a very settled resident population which travels relatively little to sites with much higher turnover where residents may stay for relatively short periods while travelling in the area. However, sites do typically provide a “core” of amenities and services irrespective of the profile of use of the site. In its regulatory framework SHR is clear that it expects social landlords to work to understand the needs of their customers and to deliver services that meet these needs.

2.3. Interviewees were asked to consider their priorities across the full range of services provided by social landlords - including site provision and associated amenities – although in practice individuals tended to focus on service areas with which they were most familiar. Survey interviews were structured around seven key aspects of landlord services, adapted from outcomes set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. All interviewees were asked to rate the importance of these service aspects, and where possible to give some rationale for their rating. However, interviews were also flexible in enabling individuals to identify other important points, and we also discuss the main service priorities offered “unprompted” by interviewees. It should be noted that all interviews were carried out with Gypsy/Traveller families who were currently staying at a site. It was not possible to engage with or interview those waiting to access sites or travelling at the time of the study.

Awareness and Understanding of Landlord Services

2.4. Before considering the relative priority assigned by Gypsies/Travellers to specific aspects of landlord services, it is useful to consider the extent to which interviewees were aware of and had experience of those services. Interviews sought to gauge the extent of individuals’ awareness and understanding of landlord services, including the extent to which these had an impact on how interviewees rated the importance of service aspects.

2.5. Interviewees were generally aware of tenancy agreements, including some detailed knowledge of tenancy agreement provisions. Indeed some made specific reference to these provisions as a basis for ensuring that all site residents met their obligations. However, some lack of clarity was evident on how site residents should engage with services, and on what residents could expect from landlord services.
2.6. Residents were typically unclear on what to expect from landlords and/or what residents are entitled to. This was raised as a particular issue in relation to adaptations to residents’ homes, upgrading of pitches and amenities, and preparation of pitches for new tenants. Some interviewees also appeared to have some difficulty engaging with landlords as an organisation, with feedback highlighting a preference for single identified points of contact. This is also consistent with a preference expressed by most interviewees to use site managers as their primary means of engaging with their landlord. Indeed for many interviewees site managers were effectively the face of the landlord, and for some the only point of contact with the landlord.

2.7. A number of interviewees made reference to perceived differences in amenities and the level of service provided to Gypsy/Traveller sites across Scotland and the UK, and were unaware of the reasons for this difference. This was also linked to a limited understanding of the range of services and amenities that residents should receive from landlords, and on standards applying to those services. This included reference for example to repair timescales, how rent charges are structured, and how allocations systems are applied to identify prospective site residents. While some did not see this lack of awareness as a significant concern, issues such as rent charges and site amenities were identified as an important factor for Gypsies/Travellers’ choice of sites, and also the smooth running of sites.

2.8. Service standards applying to social landlords were clearly interviewees’ main point of concern in this regard. However it is also interesting to note that when prompted, very few interviewees had been aware of the Scottish Housing Regulator, and none understood the Regulator’s role and remit. None of the interviewees had head of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. However, some did express interest in the Charter particularly in the context of making clear what Gypsy/Travellers should expect from landlords.

2.9. There was also some lack of awareness of complaint procedures applying to landlord services. Most of those with a site manager present indicated that they would in practice use this as the first point of contact to raise any complaint. However, a more significant barrier to site residents raising any complaints with landlords appeared to be some significant concern about potential damage to residents’ relationship with the site manager and other landlord staff. For some this extended to a significant concern that raising complaints could “jeopardise their tenancy”. A number of interviewees suggested that there may be some generational change, with younger residents more willing to raise concerns and complaints, but suggested that limited understanding of how to effectively engage with landlords could still be an issue.
2.10. It is also important to consider rating of specific aspects of landlord services in the context of Gypsy/Traveller views on the relative priority of how social landlords deliver services, and other factors such as the social dynamic of sites. There was a clear sense from some interviewees that the mix of site residents, and relationships between residents was at least as high a priority, as how landlord services are delivered. This was illustrated by reference made by interviewees to problems with other site residents having been a significant factor in families choosing to move away from sites previously.

2.11. The relative value placed on how landlord services are provided also reflects a view amongst some interviewees that they do not expect – or wish for – landlords to play a significant role in their lives. The majority of interviewees highlighted the social make-up of sites and condition of site accommodation as the most important elements for the operation of their site, and this included some who were clear in their view that their primary concern was for landlords to provide adequate accommodation and amenities. That is not to dismiss other aspects of landlord services as insignificant; for example value for money was a priority for most. Nevertheless, the extent to which Gypsies/Travellers’ priorities are focused on concerns around social mix and condition of accommodation influences the importance assigned to other aspects of landlord services.

Prioritising Aspects of Landlord Services

2.12. The core focus for the research with Gypsies/Travellers was to gauge views on the specific aspects of landlord services that are most important to site residents. Discussion was structured around the seven key aspects of landlord services listed below, which were structured to be applicable to the range of different services that Gypsies/Travellers may have used. These service aspects have been adapted from Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes and standards, drawing out the elements most relevant to Gypsies/Travellers’ use of services:

- Ease of accessing the landlord if needed, communication with the landlord;
- Information and advice provided by landlord – unprompted, or in response to a query;
- Speed of response to queries or requests for a service;
- Resolving your queries, making sure that response is “right first time”;
- Value for money for your rent and other charges;
- That you are treated fairly/with respect, standard of landlords’ staff attitude and manner; and
- You’re able to have a say on the landlords’ decisions (inc give feedback, make a complaint).
2.13. The approach of structuring discussion around Housing Charter outcomes reflects the requirement for study findings to inform the Regulator’s approach to monitoring of landlords’ performance against Social Housing Charter Outcomes, but also sought to ensure that fieldwork gathered views across all aspects of landlord services. In this regard, interviews also gave Gypsies/Travellers an opportunity to highlight other specific elements of landlord services to which they assign particular value; we consider these later in this section.

2.14. Looking first at Gypsy/Traveller views on the seven specific aspects of landlord services, interviewees were here asked to rank their top three priorities. A small number of interviewees felt unable to give a clear view on these specific service aspects – although some of these residents did suggest other priority areas discussed later in this section – and the results presented at Figure 3 are based only on those identifying one or more priorities from the list of seven service aspects.

2.15. Gypsies/Travellers were varied in their views on priority areas, with all seven of the listed service aspects identified as a priority by one or more interviewees. **Being able to have a say on landlord services and decisions** emerged as the main priority; most of those giving a view identified this as one of their top three priority areas, and the number of interviewees identifying this service aspect as their top priority was more than twice that for other listed aspects. It should be noted that a substantial proportion of those top rankings came from residents on a single urban Gypsy/Traveller site, suggesting that at least part of the significant difference in top rankings assigned to service aspects could be due to concerns on a specific site. Nevertheless the ability to have input to services and decisions remained the most commonly mentioned service aspect, and was identified as a significant priority across all sites.

2.16. In terms of other service aspects, **speed of service response** and **being treated fairly and with respect** were the second and third most commonly identified priorities – although again the ranking of “treated fairly/with respect” was due in part to this being a particularly significant priority for residents on a single urban site. Despite their high overall ranking, a relatively small proportion of interviewees identified these service aspects as their top priority. For example only around a quarter of those mentioning speed of service response as a priority identified this as their top priority; this contrasts with **value for money** which was mentioned by fewer individuals but where more than half of those mentioning value for money identified this as their top priority. This may suggest that value for money is a specific priority for fewer Gypsy/Travellers, but where it is an issue this is likely to be a major concern for individuals.
2.17. In terms of areas less likely to be seen as a priority, ability to resolve requests and queries was the least commonly mentioned aspect. This is perhaps surprising in the context of the speed of service response being highly ranked as a priority area. It is difficult to get a clear rationale on the relative priority assigned to some service aspects, but as we discuss later in this section some interviewees seemed more likely to see delays in responding to requests as an indication of landlords assigning lesser importance to Gypsy/Travellers’ needs, while difficulties in resolving queries was more likely to be seen as an indication of a simple mistake or unavoidable delay in sourcing required materials (eg in relation to repair requests).

2.18. Ease of accessing the landlord was also assigned relatively low priority by interviewees as a whole. This appeared to be a reflection to some extent of most Gypsies/Travellers having access to site managers, and as is highlighted earlier in this section many site residents effectively saw site managers as the “face” of the landlord.

**Figure 3: Ranking of Key Service Aspects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Aspect</th>
<th>Ranked 1st</th>
<th>Ranked 2nd</th>
<th>Ranked 3rd</th>
<th>Ranked in Top 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’re able to have a say on the landlords’ decisions (inc give feedback, make a complaint)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed of response to queries or requests for a service</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That you are treated fairly/with respect, standard of landlords’ staff attitude and manner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and advice provided by landlord – unprompted, or in response to a query</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for money for your rent and other charges</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of accessing the landlord if needed, communication with the landlord</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to resolve requests/queries, making sure that response is “right first time”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents selecting each service aspects/ranking.

2.19. Interviews offered a broad range of “unprompted” suggestions in response to questions on what is most important about landlord services, and in addition to the rating of the seven specific service aspects listed at Figure 1 above. It is interesting to note that these suggestions highlighted the importance of specific services provided by landlords, more than how landlords provide their services.
2.20. In particular, comments here were primarily in relation to site condition, maintenance and amenities. This is consistent with views considered earlier under “Awareness and Understanding of Landlord Services”, which suggested that for many Gypsy/Travellers the key priority is availability of accommodation and amenities, and that quality and condition of these is a significant factor in families’ choice of sites. The main priority areas mentioned by interviewees are highlighted below, and are ranked in order of the number of interviewees raising each issue.

- **Repairs and maintenance, and the cleanliness/condition of sites.** Comments here related primarily to the importance to residents that the condition and cleanliness of sites is maintained, to the extent that for some, landlord services were seen as almost exclusively about maintenance and upkeep of sites and amenities. Most comments related to the importance of repairs and maintenance work being completed, including some highlighting the extent to which allowing sites to deteriorate could be interpreted as a lack of respect to site residents. However, there was also some reference to the importance of a rapid response to repairs where required, ensuring that completed work adequately resolves the reported issue, and involvement of site residents in decisions on any investment and upgrading of sites.

- **Site amenities.** In addition to general site condition and maintenance, a substantial number of interviewees made specific reference to the availability and condition of amenities. This included comments highlighting the significant impact of poor condition amenity blocks – particularly those affected by dampness - on families’ quality of life and living costs. Reference was also made to a preference for amenities such as indoor bathrooms, with specific reference to the importance for Gypsy/Travellers to feel that there is equality between site residents and other social landlords in terms of access to basic amenities.

- **Safety and environmental health issues on sites.** Comments here were primarily related to the importance of Gypsy/Travellers feeling that their families are safe and secure on sites. This included reference to the availability of safe play areas, availability of fire safety measures, site security and lighting, and an effective response to potentially significant environmental health issues raised by site residents.

- **Electricity and power** was referred to in relation to access to power cards out of office hours, and the cost of electricity on sites. However in terms of priorities for site residents, energy costs were by far the most significant of the two issues with reference made to high costs being unaffordable to families, and the importance of clearer information on unit energy costs.
• **Allocations system.** A number of comments highlighted the significance of the social dynamic between residents for the operation of sites, and in this context the importance of an effective allocations system. This reflects the extent to which site composition can be a significant factor in families’ travel and site choices; indeed this was a particular priority for households travelling more frequently, including those who stay away from the site for relatively long periods of time, but who still see the site as their home during summer or winter. These residents highlighted the importance for allocations to be sensitive to these travel patterns, while balancing this with a need for fairness.

• **Access to the landlord and importance of the site manager.** Interviewees typically indicated a preference for specific named contact(s) within the landlord, and highlighted the importance of residents’ relationship with site managers as a source of support and information, and as a point of communication. It was clear that most site residents used site managers as their primary means of contacting the landlord, although residents of sites without a dedicated on-site manager appeared to see this point of access as less important. Moreover, some interviewees specifically referred to the importance of landlord services being accessible to site residents, where direct contact is preferred by residents. In this context the availability of a named contact was the most commonly identified priority.

• **Equality of access to and standard of services.** Interviewees made reference to the importance of equality between site residents and other social landlords in relation to a range of issues. This included rent charges, energy costs, the speed of response to repairs, access to amenities, the attitude of some service staff, and privacy in relation to CCTV installed on some sites. Each of these areas were seen as priorities in their own right, but in addition there was a common view that it is vital that Gypsies/Travellers feel that they have the same rights and status as other social tenants.

• **Pitch provision.** Again reflecting the extent to which availability of accommodation and amenities is a core priority for Gypsies/Travellers, a number of interviewees identified pitch provision as their top priority for landlord services. This included reference to sufficient number of pitches on sites, pitch size and layout (particularly availability of single and twin pitches to accommodate all household members), and the cleanliness and condition of pitches.

2.21. We consider the specific issues and priorities raised by Gypsies/Travellers in relation to the seven core service aspects in turn below.
You’re able to have a say on the landlords’ decisions

2.22. The extent to which Gypsies/Travellers can have a say on landlord services and decisions was ranked as the highest priority amongst the seven service aspects listed at Figure 1. While this appeared to be a more significant priority for residents on some sites, this was consistently identified as an important aspect of landlord services across all sites. Indeed more than three quarters of interviewees placed having input to landlord decisions amongst their top three priorities.

2.23. For most this seemed to be linked to a common and strongly held view that Gypsies/Travellers can make a valuable contribution to landlord decisions. This was highlighted particularly in relation to any investment or upgrading to sites, with interviewees suggesting that it is important for landlords’ planning to be responsive to site residents’ preferences and needs:

“We know what is needed, but people who make the decisions have never been on the site, they don’t.”

“It is important for [the landlord] to listen and hear how travellers live”.

2.24. More widely, interviewees’ interest in consultation with landlords was typically focused on addressing specific issues – such as site maintenance or improvements - rather than ongoing consultation without a specific focus. Specific reference was made here to tenant associations which, although supported by some, were seen by others as ineffective means of gathering all site residents’ views.

2.25. Interviews also stressed the particular value placed by Gypsies/Travellers on any engagement or consultation with residents achieving some outcome. In addition to an opportunity to give their views, interviewees highlighted the importance of feeling that their views had a genuine impact on landlord’s decision making, whether through landlords choosing the option preferred by residents or in giving a clear account of the reasons for not choosing this option. Views here were also linked to the extent to which interviewees valued a willingness from landlords to consider proposed solutions put forward by residents, and where possible to work with site residents to realise these. This was typically highlighted in relation to potential improvements to sites and/or pitches such as upgrading of amenity blocks, adaptations and development of chalets, and in some cases was clearly related to frustration that previous site investment had not been focused on individual’s priorities.

“It would be really good to have a say, but I don’t think they’d take us seriously.”

“We had a meeting with [the landlord], but nothing’s come of it. We’ve not heard anything since.”
2.26. There was some perception from interviewees that, to an extent, site managers fill the role of identifying residents’ views and preferences, and communicating these to landlords. Indeed, for some interviewees the particular value assigned to the site manager role appeared to reflect at least in part a perception that site managers can advocate on behalf of residents. However, there was also a clear value placed on individual residents having the opportunity to have more direct input to landlord’s decisions. Tenant associations are in place for some sites, and there was some support for this approach. However, interviewees also highlighted the need for landlords to ensure that all site residents have an opportunity to have their voice heard, there were clear concerns that some residents feel that their “individual concerns can be missed if going through the association”.

“We do get to have a say, [the site manager] tells [the landlord] what we want.”

2.27. These concerns regarding tenant associations were also linked to comments emphasising the need for sensitivity to potential risk for consultation to lead to disagreement between site residents. This was seen as having the potential for a significant detrimental impact on the operation of Gypsy/Traveller sites, and reference was made by some to examples of disagreements on potential site modifications having caused friction between residents. In this context the option for residents to maintain their anonymity in giving feedback to landlords was seen as a real priority for some. However, this was also seen as a real challenge for smaller sites in particular.

**Speed of response to queries or requests for a service**

2.28. While relatively few identified landlords’ speed of response as their top priority for services, more than half of interviewees did mention this amongst their top three priorities. This is in contrast with the relatively small number of interviewees mentioning landlords’ ability to effectively resolve enquiries and requests. This may indicate that Gypsies/Travellers assign higher priority to the speed of initial service response than to the extent to which services resolve issues “right first time”.

2.29. Most interviewees saw the speed of service response as “obviously important” for all aspects of site residents’ contact with landlords. However, specific reference was made to the importance of a rapid response to emergency repairs that can have an impact on residents’ safety or health; for example emergencies relating to plumbing or power, or where families include young children and/or people with health needs likely to be affected by the issue. There was a common view that these cases should be prioritised over other repair and maintenance works.

“If it’s something like a leak it really needs to be sorted quickly...especially if there are young kids.”
2.30. Reference was also made to timescales for planned repairs and site improvements, and the extent to which these should be clearly stated to Gypsies/Travellers, and met in terms of overall timescales and specific appointments. In this regard Gypsies/Travellers highlighted the frustration caused by a lack of clarity on timescales and missing of appointments. Perhaps more significantly reference was made for the potential for these issues to have a detrimental impact on the relationship of trust between residents and the landlord. This was linked to some interviewees suggesting failure to meet agreed timescales could be interpreted by residents as an indication of a lack of value or respect ascribed to Gypsies/Travellers, and that Gypsies/Travellers were not receiving the standard of services provided to other social landlords. This is discussed further below, in relation to treated fairly and with respect.

“We should get repairs as quickly as Council tenants do...my mum is in a Council house and her repairs are done much quicker than ours.”

“Repairing it quickly shows respect, and that we’re being treated fairly.”

2.31. Finally in relation to the speed of service response, this was linked to the importance of clarity on service standards and what residents should expect from landlords. As is discussed earlier in this section there was some lack of awareness amongst Gypsies/Travellers of relevant service standards. It was suggested that more clarity on specific standards – such as repair timescales – could ensure that site residents maintain realistic expectations regarding speed of service response.

You are treated fairly and with respect

2.32. Nearly half of interviewees made reference to being treated fairly and with respect amongst their top three priorities for landlord services, although most of these interviewees were residents of a single urban site. This theme was also evident throughout discussion of other priorities, the standard of site accommodation, responsiveness of landlords to residents’ service requests, and ensuring that residents feel landlords listen to their concerns and requirements.

2.33. It was clear that, for Gypsies/Travellers, being treated with respect is a crucial element for a positive relationship between site residents and landlords, which was in turn highlighted as vital in the effective running of sites. There were a number of common themes and principles raised in this context. Most significant for interviewees appeared to be:
• The attitude of service staff and site managers in dealing with Gypsies/Travellers. While this was not commonly identified as an issue on sites, interviewees highlighted the extent to which any concerns regarding staff attitude can have a significant impact on “atmosphere” on the site, and the extent to which residents feel they can raise concerns or issues with landlords.

• Equality concerns around the extent to which site residents feel that they are receiving a level of service equal to that received by other social tenants. This was most significant in relation to provision of site amenities, site maintenance and delays to repairs – “[the landlord] is fair with us, but the treatment of the site isn’t fair…it should be maintained like any Council house”. Interviews highlighted the potential for significant concerns in relation to these aspects of sites and services, could lead to a perception that site residents are seen as “like second class citizens”.

Information and advice provided by landlord

2.34. While few identified this as a top priority for landlord services, a substantial number of interviewees emphasised the importance of information and advice provided by landlords. This was typically linked to Gypsies/Travellers’ lack of awareness of varying rights, standards and issues linked to landlord services; as such, specific priorities for information and advice tended to reflect patterns of Gypsies/Travellers’ awareness.

2.35. Information on Gypsies/Travellers’ “rights and responsibilities” was perhaps the most common suggestion, and cut across a range of areas. The most significant were entitlement to grants or funding for works to improve sites, and information and advice to address concerns regarding CCTV on sites (and how CCTV images are used). However reference was also made to the value of information being available in plain English on Gypsies/Travellers’ obligations under tenancy agreements, and landlord’s service standards:

“It needs to say what we can expect from the [landlord], and what the [landlord] expects from tenants.”

2.36. On a more practical basis, information on plans or changes that may affect the site and/or residents was also highlighted as a particular priority - “what is going on with the site”. Specific priority areas raised by Gypsies/Travellers were planned repairs or improvements, households moving on or off sites, access to site managers, and changes to rents. Views here were linked to some extent to the priority assigned to Gypsies/Travellers having a say on landlord decisions; information and advice was seen as important for residents in raising awareness of factors that may impact on their lives, but also as an opportunity for residents to give their views if appropriate.

“It’s important that [site residents] know their rights, and what’s going on with the site.”
2.37. In terms of how information and advice is provided, Gypsies/Travellers’ main priority was ensuring that all tenants are reached, and that information and advice is accessible to all. The latter point was a particular issue for information provided in written form, and interviewees highlighted a need to use plain English and to be aware of potential literacy difficulties. Delivery of information and advice via written communication and/or site managers appeared to be the general preference here, with site managers highlighted as a valuable resource for site residents in answering queries and providing advice. Some reference was made to use of tenant associations as a means of communicating with site residents, and there was some support for this. However, significant concerns were also evident in terms of the extent to which tenant associations can be dominated by specific families, and the potential for other tenants to feel unable to raise their own issues or concerns through the association.

“They should write to us or go through [the site manager] to make sure everyone gets it…the tenant’s association only meets every 3 months, and it’s mostly the same family.”

Value for money for your rent and other charges

2.38. While value for money was ranked 5th in terms of the total number of interviewees mentioning this as a priority area, a relatively large proportion of individuals rated value for money as their top priority specifically. For example more than half of those mentioning value for money as a priority also rated this as their top priority. This suggests that where value for money is a priority for Gypsies/Travellers, it is a very significant priority.

2.39. In terms of specific issues and comments made in relation to value for money, there was a clear view that it is important that landlords achieve value for money, but also that landlords provide clear information to residents such that they can judge this. This was primarily raised as an issue in relation to a breakdown of rent charges, clearer information on electricity costs and more detailed information on the cost of improvement works. However, the majority of interviewees saw better information on electricity costs as their most significant priority.

“We’ve asked about the electricity charges...[the site manager] looked into it and told us it was OK, but we haven’t had any explanation of why the cost is so high.”

2.40. Consistency in the approach to charging across sites was also highlighted as a priority in relation to value for money. Many Gypsies/Travellers were aware of some significant variation in rent levels between sites, but were not clear on reasons for this. Variation in rent levels across sites was significant enough to influence interviewees’ travel patterns and how long households remain on specific sites, although it was not clear the extent to which a clearer rationale for discrepancy in rent levels would be sufficient to have an impact here.
2.41. Equality was highlighted as a significant priority and concern for Gypsies/Travellers in relation to variation in rent levels across sites, but appeared to be a more significant concern in relation to whether rent charges are good value for money when compared with rents for permanent social housing. In this regard, some interviewees suggested that it was important for differences in rent levels to reflect differences in accommodation provision and the level of service available.

“We should be able to get the same value as someone in a Council house...for the rent and electricity.”

“People in Council houses get a lot more for their money.”

**Ease of accessing the landlord if needed, communication with the landlord**

2.42. There appears to be some inconsistency between the relatively low ranking assigned to ease of access and communication with landlords, and comments from some interviewees. For example, a number of interviewees highlighted ease of access to their landlord as “vitally important”. Moreover there was a clear view across most interviewees – including those who did not rate this amongst their top three priorities - that effective communication between site residents and landlords is a significant benefit in the operation of the site. While most interviewees appeared to prefer communication with landlords to be linked to specific issues or service requests, it was clear that the accessibility of landlords was seen as valuable in ensuring effective communication when issues do arise.

“This is important, but it’s pretty easy at the moment.”

“We always go through [the site manager]...we can put across our point better that way.”

2.43. For some interviewees it was apparent that, although seen as an important service aspect, access to the landlord was not a higher priority than other aspects such as having a say on decisions and speed of service response. However, for others there appeared to be an extent that this was not seen as a priority area as they have clear channels of communication with landlords through site managers and other named contacts, and as such was rarely an issue for residents.

2.44. In terms of preferences for how access to and communication with landlords is handled, interviewees highlighted the following key points:

- Gypsies/Travellers expressed a clear preference for a named contact within landlord services, referring to the value of being clear on who to contact with a specific query, and a strong preference for consistency in member(s) of staff dealing with site residents.
There was also a strong preference for face to face contact with landlord services, with Gypsies/Travellers suggesting that this is a more effective way for individuals to be clear that landlords have heard their priorities and concerns.

Where available, site manager were clearly the preferred option for most Gypsies/Travellers as a named face to face contact – for many residents site managers are the primary means of accessing landlord services. This point of contact was valued by interviewees as being more accessible to residents (for example not requiring a pre-arranged appointment), and also a perception that site managers can advise residents on how best to deal with their issue, and act as an advocate through contact with landlords. Indeed some interviewees indicated that will wait to speak to the site manager even in the event of an out-of-hours emergency repair.

Notwithstanding the strong preference for contact via site managers, a number of interviewees highlighted the risk of residents relying almost exclusively on their site manager as a point of contact with their landlord. This reflected concerns about the limited availability of some site managers, and a suggestion that some residents may prefer to contact their landlord directly. In this regard, interviewees suggested that it was important for landlords to engage with tenants individually where this was the tenant’s choice, rather than referring tenants back to their site manager.

“Out of hours” emergency contacts were also highlighted as priority for site residents, particularly in relation to emergency repairs and access to power cards. A small number of interviewees expressed concerns that they were not aware of relevant emergency contact details, and also highlighted the potentially significant cost for Gypsies/Travellers accessing Freephone or other non-geographical contact numbers via mobile phone.

### Able to resolve requests and queries, response is “right first time”

2.45. Landlords’ ability to resolve requests and queries – ensuring that this response is “right first time” – was the least commonly mentioned priority area for interviewees. This appears to be at odds with the higher ranking of landlords’ speed of response, and the number of interviewees rating speed of response as a priority was more than three times that for ability to resolve requests.

2.46. This difference in relative ranking appears to be linked in part to a views amongst interviewees that delays or problems completing repairs or resolving other requests can be outwith landlords’ control. In this regard, the extent to which issues are resolved “right first time” is less likely to be seen by Gypsies/Travellers as an indication of a lack of value or respect ascribed to Gypsies/Travellers, than for example a slow response to service requests.
“It’s important, but sometimes they won’t have the parts... it’s fine if they have to come back again with the right parts.”

2.47. Nevertheless, a number of interviewees felt that resolving queries quickly and effectively is a priority across all landlord services. The greatest priority appeared to be assigned to response to repairs, with reference made to the inconvenience and anxiety caused by problems in response to repairs requests. Comments here also reflected views discussed earlier in this section that the key priority for Gypsies/Travellers is the provision of good condition pitch space and related amenities. Interviewees also suggested that, consistent with views on the speed of response from landlords, resolving issues effectively was a particular priority for families with children and others where repair issues can impact on health and quality of life.

“It is important...we wouldn’t report it if it wasn’t important and needing fixed.”

“If it’s something dangerous then they have to get it right first time, but it’s not so much of a problem otherwise.”

2.48. Finally in relation to resolving issues and service requests, a number of interviewees highlighted the importance of giving Gypsies/Travellers the opportunity to give feedback on landlords’ service response. Literacy issues were identified as a potential barrier to standard feedback mechanisms, but it was suggested that site residents would value the chance to provide comment through written forms and/or site managers.
3. **PRIORITIES FOR FACTORING/COMMON REPAIRS SERVICES**

3.1. In this section we consider priorities for factoring and common repairs services provided by social landlords, as highlighted by owners through focus group and interview fieldwork. Research participants were asked to consider their experience and priorities across all aspects of factoring and common repairs services - including regular maintenance and landscaping work, and “ad hoc” common repairs – although in practice individuals tended to focus on the aspects of service with which they were most familiar.

3.2. Around 32% (730,000) of households in Scotland live in a flat. Of these around 30,000 are owner occupied, with this group including more than 140,000 flats previously in the private rented sector and sold under the Right-to-Buy. There are a variety of arrangements in place to manage the repairs and maintenance of properties with communal areas. Owners can hire a property manager or factor look after the property or they can organise repairs and maintenance themselves. For those who purchased under the Right-To-Buy, maintenance of communal areas often remained the responsibility of the social landlord. Untangling the rights and legal responsibilities of owners and landlords can be difficult and may reflect the title deeds of the property and the Bill of Sale.

3.3. The interviews we carried out with owners did not seek to identify or explore the various different legal and contractual arrangements which may be in place between landlords and owners. Instead they sought to identify key themes and priorities across all owners receiving factoring services.

3.4. Consultation with owners was structured around seven key aspects of factoring and common repairs services based on Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes, and similar to those used in the Gypsy/Traveller strand of the study. Participants were asked to consider their experience of and rate the importance of these service aspects, and where possible to give some rationale for their rating. However the consultation was also designed to allow owners to highlight other priorities. In this regard, a range of points relating to owners’ relationship with factoring and common repairs services emerged through the study, and which appeared to underpin owners’ ranking of specific service areas – we discuss these points later in this section.

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22 See *Property Managers in Scotland* (2009), The Office of Fair Trading for more information.
Awareness and Attitude Towards Services

3.5. The research sought to include owners across a range of circumstances and using a mix of services. This included a mix of service providers – eg RSLs, subsidiary companies, and local authorities – but also service models. Participants were in receipt of a broad range of service types and levels, including factoring services (typically provided by RSLs) providing regular maintenance/landscaping alongside repairs management and building insurances, “lighter” factoring services providing some landscaping only, and also common repairs services (provided by local authorities) which only manage repairs to common areas as these arise and do not include a maintenance component.

3.6. In this context, a key element of the research was to assess the extent of owners’ awareness, understanding and use of their services – including gauging the extent to which these may impact on owners’ ranking of specific aspects of services. Over the following pages we consider owners’ awareness and understanding of factoring and common repairs services. This includes owners’ attitude towards these services, and the role they expect social landlords to play.

Awareness and understanding of services

3.7. Awareness and understanding of factoring/common repairs services was highly variable across research participants. Indeed, this ranged from those who had extensive experience and knowledge of what is included in their service, to some who had not been aware of the services prior to the research. This variation appeared to be linked closely to the type of service received by owners; the points made by those using RSL factoring services were quite distinct from those raised by users of local authority common repairs services.

3.8. Most users of RSL factoring services were broadly aware of their service, and the detail of what it provides. This was typically through itemised annual or quarterly bills rather than specific information on service scope and standards, although some had received a specification of the service. However even amongst those with relatively good awareness of their service, there was some interest in greater clarity on service standards. This included specific reference for example to the frequency of maintenance items such as painting or gutter clearing, and to response times for repair requests. Reference was also made to the range of information provided to social tenants as a benchmark for the kind of information that owners may find useful. These owners also highlighted the extent to which services can evolve over time, and there was a perceived need for a service agreement or statement for owners which is updated over time.
3.9. The picture for those receiving common repairs services was somewhat different, and particularly for those who had bought their home on the open market (rather than those who had previously been social tenants). There was some lack of awareness of the detail of service procedures and standards amongst most owners, and this was both in terms of owners’ responsibility for shared parts of their building and the specific service standards and processes involved. Moreover, some indicated that they had not been clear at the point of purchase that the property was subject to common repairs or factoring arrangements – or that the building was mixed tenure. Indeed a small number of individuals were unaware of any such arrangements prior to the research. Reflecting this lack of awareness, several research participants had arranged and paid for repairs to common elements without being aware that the Council and other owners may be liable for a share of the cost – “I'd never even thought of the Council.”

3.10. While a lack of awareness of service standards or procedures did not appear to be a top priority for many owners, the research did highlight the importance for owners to have clarity on responsibilities in relation to common area maintenance and repairs. This was noted as a priority primarily in relation to questions of when the factor or common owner has a role to play in repair and maintenance work, for example the “boundaries” between owners’ property and common elements. A substantial proportion of owners made reference to issues or frustrations encountered due to a lack of clarity on the landlord’s role; this included querying factoring charges, concerns regarding the standard or frequency of landscaping, and reporting of specific repairs. Indeed there was a clear view from some that a statement of when the landlord has a role in repair or maintenance work was the most important aspect of information provided by landlords - rather than for example how to contact services, or even service standards such as anticipated response times.

3.11. There was some difference of opinion in terms of where the responsibility for ensuring owners are aware of services should sit. Perhaps the most common suggestion was that previous property owner or solicitor involved in the transaction should take responsibility for providing this information, and a number of participants had received their information on the service in this way. However there were also suggestions - primarily from those who had bought their property as a sitting tenant - that landlords should have some ongoing responsibility to inform owners of the service. This included a suggestion that the seller should be required to inform the landlord when the property is sold.
3.12. Consistent with this variable awareness of services, a substantial number of research participants had relatively little contact with factoring or common repairs services. Those with little or no contact with services did not anticipate significant difficulties in getting in touch with services, but some raised concerns regarding how that contact may be routed or dealt with by services. We discuss later in this section specific points raised in relation to accessing and communicating with services. However, it is worth noting here that specific concerns were raised in relation to raising complaints with factoring or common repairs services.

3.13. Several research participants expressed concern regarding how owners can raise complaints on factoring or common repairs services, reflecting a lack of clarity on owners’ right to make a complaint about specific service decisions and processes for raising complaints. Some reported previous experience of having raised complaints, and highlighted the importance of landlords being responsive to complaints in terms of staff attitude and seeking to resolve complaints – “you feel like you’re banging your head against a brick wall”. In terms of complaint processes participants also suggested a lack of clarity or consistency regarding escalation procedures. This was in the context of an owner having been informed that their complaint fell outside the SPSO remit where factoring services were provided by a subsidiary company.

The role of factoring/common repairs services

3.14. Owners’ awareness and use of services also appeared to have some impact on the importance ascribed to specific service aspects, including for example clarity on service standards and communication. However, research participants were also keen to describe the role they would prefer services to play, and this may have a more significant bearing on rating of specific service aspects.

3.15. “Control” was highlighted as a key principle for research participants. Owners made clear that a key motivation for their choosing to buy had been to gain control over its condition and appearance, and highlighted the extent to which decisions on the maintenance and repair of common areas can have a significant impact on individuals’ property. This included significant concerns regarding the potential for failure to tackle common repairs impacting on the condition of individual properties, but also to the appearance of common areas having an impact on individuals (eg those wishing to sell their property). A number of these owners expressed frustration that the factor or common repairs service retained the power to influence the condition and appearance of their property:

“We’re paying the mortgage and doing what we can...but it doesn’t feel like ours.”
3.16. These comments also highlight the importance that some owners place on maintaining a dialogue with landlords, and where possible having input to decisions on common area repair and maintenance. This point was a particular concern for owners in relation to higher cost works – including planned maintenance and capital investment – where owners stressed the importance of “genuine consultation” with owners. However, maintaining a dialogue with owners was also linked to owners having some degree of “control” over decisions affecting the condition or appearance of their property. While there was recognition of the landlord’s role in ensuring that required work is undertaken, there was also common feeling that owners value the opportunity to have input into how work is carried out (eg owners being permitted to arrange works if they feel they can achieve better value) and to what specification (eg having a say on paint finishes etc).

3.17. This principle of “control” also links to the kind relationship that owners expect to have with their factor or common repairs service, and here some difference of opinion was evident. A substantial proportion suggested this relationship should to be more “equal”, recognising that both owners and landlords have an interest in the appearance and condition of the building:

“It should be like two owners, not like a tenant and a landlord”

“[The landlord] should have respect for us as another concerned owner”

3.18. This was not a universal view, and other owners expected their relationship with the landlord to be closer to that of a landlord and tenant. This view was highlighted primarily in relation to the level of service received, including the range of maintenance and repairs covered by factoring or common repairs services. However, owners also made reference to how services communicate and deal with owners - “you get the impression you’re annoying them”. This latter point was a more common concern amongst those who had previously had experience of landlord services as a social tenant. Indeed some comments suggested a lack of understanding of the change in responsibilities involved in moving from a tenancy to ownership - “I approached them about the leak but they just told me to sort it myself”.

3.19. Reflecting this range of views on the relationship between owners and landlords, there also appeared to be some difference in preferences for the level of contact that owners are seeking from their factoring or common repairs service. As is noted above and discussed later (under “having a say on the service”), a substantial number of owners were looking to have relatively frequent dialogue with landlords, and significant input to how services are provided. However others clearly preferred factoring or common repairs services to be as “unobtrusive” as possible, and expected to have little contact with services – “we just want them to leave us alone...we’ll look after our own”. This view appeared to be somewhat more common for owners receiving a common repairs service, rather than those receiving a regular factoring service.
3.20. Much of the discussion around the role of factoring and common repairs services reflected principles of how responsibility for the condition and appearance of properties should be shared, including questions of owners having “control” over their property for example. However, views also appeared to have been shaped by owners’ specific experience of services. Reference was made here to significant frustration with landlord’s decisions on repairs and maintenance work, primarily around what were perceived to be “random” decisions to undertake works, often without owners’ permission or consultation, and in some cases where owners questioned the justification for works. Conversely, other expressed concerns in relation to repair or maintenance works which owners felt were required, but which were not undertaken by the landlord. This included specific reference to owners’ feeling that they have little influence over decisions on whether and when works are completed – “I would do it [decorate a common close] tomorrow, if I was allowed.”

3.21. Perhaps reflecting the concern and frustration expressed by some, a small number of participants suggested that owners would value a facility to “opt out” of the landlord’s factoring service - for example allowing owners to secure their own factoring arrangements where all properties in a block are privately owned. However this was a minority view with a number of owners raising concerns that allowing owners this kind of freedom could lead to a breakdown of factoring arrangements, and ultimately a deterioration in property condition. This was consistent with the value that many owners attached to the landlord’s role in ensuring agreement amongst owners regarding repairs and maintenance (this is discussed later in this section, including under “value for money”).

3.22. It is important to note the extent to which views on the landlord’s role in the condition and appearance of properties appeared to underpin views on the relative priority attached to specific aspects of factoring and common repairs services. This was particularly clear in relation to the importance of issues such as communication with owners, information and advice, and owners having a say on services. Broadly, those expecting landlords to play a stronger role in the maintenance of properties placed significant value on these aspects of service, while those looking for an “unobtrusive” service were focused more exclusively on elements such as value for money and speed of response.

3.23. We discuss owners’ views on the importance of specific aspects of factoring and common repairs services over the following pages.
Specific Aspects of Services

3.24. In gauging views on the relative importance of specific aspects of factoring and common repairs services, the study used a set of seven specific service aspects listed below. These are the same key service aspects used in the GT strand of the study and based on key Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes, reflecting the role of Social Housing Charter outcomes in the Regulator’s assessment of landlord’s performance.

- Ease of accessing the landlord if needed, communication with the landlord;
- Information and advice provided by landlord – unprompted, or in response to a query;
- Speed of response to queries or requests for a service;
- Resolving your queries, making sure that response is “right first time”;
- Value for money for your rent and other charges;
- That you are treated fairly/with respect, standard of landlords’ staff attitude and manner; and
- You’re able to have a say on the landlords’ decisions (inc give feedback, make a complaint).

3.25. Research participants were asked to score the importance of each aspect of factoring/common repairs services out of 7 (7 being most important), and also to identify which one service aspect they see as the most important. As Figure 4 over the page indicates, all seven service aspects were seen as highly important for owners; each was scored 6 or more out of 7 by the majority of participants, and as a result there is relatively little variation in average ratings (ranging from 5.7 to 6.7). Nevertheless, specific aspects of factoring and common repairs services were scored as more important than others, and this is consistent with comments discussed later in this section.

3.26. The **value for money of services** was identified as the top priority for owners. This showed the highest average score of 6.7, and 80% of participants gave value for money the top score of 7. In addition, value for money was by some margin the most likely to be identified as the single most important service aspect for. While value for money was an important issue for owners across all areas and service models, it is also notable that this tended to be a more important service aspect for those receiving factoring services from an RSL than for those receiving a local authority common repairs service. We discuss the specific points raised by owners in relation to value for money later in this section, but this does suggest that the value for money of regular factoring charges may be a significant factor for owners, in comparison to the cost of one-off common repairs.
3.27. Owners being able to have a say on services, and how effectively services resolve queries and repairs were also identified by research participants as important aspects of factoring and common repairs services. These showed average scores of 6.5 and 6.3 respectively, and more than half of participants gave the top score of 7. The ability to have a say on services appeared to be a particularly important area for those using RSL factoring services, being rated more highly than amongst those using local authority common repairs services. This is consistent with owners’ views on the kind of relationship and role they are looking from landlords, and in particular the extent to which those receiving a regular factoring service tended to be looking for more regular contact with landlords.

3.28. In terms of areas less likely to be rated as a top priority, information and advice, speed of response, and being treated with respect were rated lowest (5.7, 5.9 and 6.0 respectively). Indeed, these were the only service aspects which none of the research participants rated as the single most important. Again there are some interesting differences across different service models. In particular, being treated with respect was seen as more important for those using RSL factoring services – again consistent with a preference for more regular contact or engagement with landlords - while speed of response was more important for those using common repairs services.

**Figure 4: Rating of Key Service Aspects (average rating out of 7)**

3.29. Below we consider the specific issues raised by owners in relation to each of these service aspects.
**Value for money for your rent and other charges**

3.30. Value for money was identified as the top priority for owners. A large majority of participants gave this service aspect the top score of 7, and around a third identified value for money as the single most important aspect of factoring or common repairs services. Those receiving a factoring service from an RSL tended to rate value for money as somewhat more important than those receiving a local authority common repairs service, but value for money remains the top priority across all areas and service models.

3.31. The importance of landlords having a clear focus on achieving best value for owners was a particular concern for owners who had been required to pay very significant repair costs, including where the share of the total cost amounted to several thousand pounds. Some participants highlighted the “comfort” afforded by their landlord offering to come to an arrangement to pay substantial costs over a period of time, and indeed suggested that this had been as consideration when buying the property. However, owners were also clear about the anxiety caused when required to pay such significant costs, and suggested that a greater focus on best value by landlords could achieve very significant savings for owners in some instances. This included reference to examples of owners seeking alternative costs for repair work which had been significantly lower than the quote provided by the landlord.

3.32. While value for money appeared to cause the greatest anxiety for owners in the context of large one-off repair works, this was also highlighted as a key priority for those receiving regular maintenance or landscaping from their factor. For many of these owners made clear that their concerns regarding value for money were not necessarily a reflection of “unreasonable” factoring charges, but rather highlighted the importance of standards of maintenance and repair work in owners’ assessment of value for money. A number of owners expressed a clear view that their assessment of value for money of factoring charges related to the quality of work and frequency of maintenance, as much as the level of factoring charges:

> “I wouldn’t mind paying if I knew they were going to do a good job”.

3.33. This focus on the question of “what am I getting for that charge?” was also highlighted by some owners questioning the justification for elements of factoring charges. Again this was primarily a concern for those paying a regular charge, and in this context a number of participants highlighted administration or management charges levied by landlords as a particular value for money concern. This appeared to reflect some lack of awareness or understanding of how these elements of the factoring charge relate to their landlord’s activities, reflecting the importance of transparency for owners on the basis of factoring charges – “what are they doing for this money?”
3.34. Over and above these specific issues raised by owners across RSL and local authority services, the research identified a range of other considerations which impacted on owners’ assessment of value for money.

3.35. The extent to which owners value the role of a factor or landlord in arranging and managing repair work was a significant factor for many research participants. A substantial number of owners appeared to assess value for money of specific repair works solely on the basis of comparison with the price that owners could achieve if commissioning their own contractor. This view again appeared to be linked to comments discussed below on transparency and the importance of detailed information provided by landlords on costs. However other owners clearly placed a greater value on the role played by landlords in managing repair work, and this was a significant element in their assessment of value for money. This was linked in large part to a view that landlords have the capacity and expertise to appoint and manage specialist contractors, ensure that works are completed to an acceptable standard, and to ensure that all owners contribute to the cost of works. In this way research participants could express quite different views on the value for money of specific charges, based on differences in the importance they ascribe to the landlord’s role rather than any difference in the cost or service provided.

3.36. The extent to which landlords provide good quality information and advice to owners was also highlighted as a key factor in terms of owners’ assessing the value for money of services. This included comments highlighting the importance of landlords providing owners with advance notice of required works and estimated cost, and reference to the anxiety caused where works are completed without advance notice or consultation.

3.37. Moreover, there was a clear view that information provided by landlords on the cost of repairs should be sufficient to allow owners to make a judgement on the extent to which the quoted cost is good value for money. Reference was made here to providing an account of multiple cost estimates sought by the landlord, and the level of detail provided in relation to costs. While a range of points were made in terms of specific information that should be included in cost estimates, a common principle highlighted was that landlords provide the level of detail that owners would expect to receive if commissioning work themselves. This would include for example a breakdown of material costs, labour costs, etc:

“[the landlord] should give us the information we need so we can make a judgement on whether it is value for money”.

3.38. Owners raised a range of points in relation to the perceived “fairness” of specific charges, most notably in relation to cases of repair costs being shared equally across all owners irrespective of the relevance of the repair to individuals:
• This included reference to owners on the ground floor being required to pay an equal share for the cost of painting stairs on upper floors or repairs to refuse chutes on upper floors, and those living in a main door flatted property being required to pay a share towards repairs to door entry systems.

• These cases were a particular issue for owners where there was a perception that costs were incurred due to the negligence of others in the building – “you know you’ve not caused the damage, but you’re having to pay the bill”. Moreover, owners expressed specific concern that repairs were the result of actions by tenants who would incur no financial penalty - “we have to pay but they [social renters] do not have to pay”.

• A number of owners made reference to “historic accidents” influencing the level of factoring charges, including examples of owners paying towards the maintenance of common areas – often at some distance from their property – that had not been adopted by the local authority. Owners were concerned that landlords “have washed their hands of it” rather than engaging with such problems to achieve best value for owners.

In addition to highlighting the importance of value for money, owners raised some significant concern that landlords were not placing sufficient emphasis on achieving best value for owners. This was a particular concern in relation to preferred contractor type arrangements, and highlighted the importance of transparency for any substantial works in terms of the tendering process and costs. However, some owners also expressed scepticism regarding the extent to which landlords are well placed to achieve good value from contractors. This view was expressed primarily in relation to local authorities, with a number of participants suggesting that contractors are likely to increase charges to large organisations like local authorities:

“It often seems that these jobs [for the Council] are priced higher, because contractors feel they can get away with that”.

Finally in relation to value for money, some participants questioned the extent to which there is an incentive for landlords to focus on achieving best value for regular factoring charges in particular, when owners are limited in their capacity to opt out of the service – “they can charge what they want, we have to pay”. This was a concern for a minority of participants, and relatively few suggested that regular factoring charges were excessive. Nevertheless, this point does highlight the importance that owners place on having flexibility to secure alternative quotes for repair work. This was a key priority for a substantial number of participants, of the view that private owners may be better placed to achieve best value from contractors.
You’re able to have a say on the service

3.41. The ability of owners to have a say on the factoring or common repairs service was ranked as the second most important aspects of services for owners, with more than half giving this the top score of 7 out of 7. However, discussion with research participants suggests that this covers a range of ways in which owners can engage with services under the term “having a say”. Some made reference to landlords encouraging feedback from owners, but this was not the main priority for owners. Certainly for those rating “having a say” as the most important service aspect, comments tended to refer to the importance of engaging owners in decision making processes rather than only giving feedback on their experience of completed works.

3.42. For these owners, this area linked to the broader issue of owners having “control” over decisions affecting the condition and appearance of their property. As is highlighted earlier in this section, the extent to which owners can influence decisions affecting their property and common areas was a key principle for many research participants in terms of the kind of relationship they expect to have with landlords. Many participants were clear in their view that this value was fundamental to their experience of services, and it was in this context that reference was made to the importance of owners having a say on services:

“If they had a dialogue with us...we would all be happier [with the service]”.

3.43. Owners were clear that this focus on engaging with owners should be built into all aspects of services, including decisions on whether specific works are undertaken but also decisions on how works are completed. This latter point was a particular priority for those receiving a regular maintenance and landscaping service, and included reference to owners influencing the frequency of specific maintenance and landscaping works, having input to finishes for decorating work, choosing sustainable materials where possible, and ensuring that maintenance or improvement programmes prioritise elements of most importance for owners.

3.44. It is important to note, however, that consultation was also seen as vital for one-off repair works, and in particular more substantial high cost works. Owners highlighted the value of “genuine” detailed consultation with owners, to provide information on planned works and allow owners to have input to decisions in terms of discussing options where relevant and considering the quoted cost of work.
3.45. There was little consensus amongst owners in terms of the most effective mechanisms for landlords to engage with owners, and this seemed to reflect in part the range of priorities mentioned by owners in the context of “having a say” on services. In relation to landlords engaging with owners on specific repair works or in response to specific queries on regular maintenance, the key issue for owners was ensuring that owners are aware that they can approach landlords on an individual basis to raise queries – and that landlords are receptive to these approaches. In contrast, participants made reference to the potential benefits of ongoing engagement with owners in the context of giving feedback on services and consulting on planned maintenance or improvement programmes. This included specific interest in owners’ groups or forums as a potentially effective mechanism for ongoing engagement, although some with experience of these expressed concerns about the extent to which these mechanisms could have a genuine impact on services – “it was always the same people...nothing ever changed”.

**Able to resolve request, response is “right first time”, standard of work**

3.46. Rated as the third most important of the seven service aspects overall, the extent to which landlords resolve owners’ requests and the standard of completed work was the highest ranked of the service aspects relating to the practicalities of how factoring and common repairs services are provided. In particular, it is interesting that the resolving requests and the standard of work was rated as more important than the speed of landlords’ response to requests (ranked 6th out of the 7 service aspects). Indeed a number of research participants explicitly indicated that, notwithstanding any safety concerns, they were less concerned about how quickly work was completed than ensuring that work was to an acceptable standard.

3.47. This latter point was also reflected in comments highlighting their anxiety and frustration felt by owners where they perceive that the standard of repair or maintenance work is not consistent with owners’ own standards. For these owners, this issue was the most significant priority in terms of the standard of work and again reflected the value placed on owners being able to have influence on the appearance and condition of their property. Moreover, discussion through the research suggests that these concerns related to the standard of completed repair and maintenance work failing to meet owners’ expectations, rather than work falling short of specific service standards:

“It might be to their standard, but it isn’t to my standard”.

“You would like to think [the landlord] cares about the building and surroundings as much as I do.”
3.48. To an extent this was linked to the importance placed on clear information on service standards being provided to owners – “we need to know what we’re paying for, and then for [the service] to meet that”. However, there was also a common view that owners would value the opportunity to influence service standards to ensure that landlords focus on maintenance works which are most important for owners.

**Ease of accessing the landlord if needed, communication with the landlord**

3.49. Ease of access to and communication with services was rated as the fourth most important of the seven service aspects, and comments from participants suggest that this rating may reflect the fact that relatively few owners had experienced difficulties in accessing factoring or common repairs services. However, communication was highlighted as a key issue for a number of owners particularly in relation to other aspects of factoring and common repairs services such as value for money, resolving queries and having a say on the service.

3.50. Indeed it is interesting the extent to which communication was discussed in relation to the importance of other aspects of the service, rather than as a concern or priority in and of itself. This was most notable in relation to value for money and having a say on the service – the two highest ranked aspects of service – and the wider issue of owners having some degree of “control” over common repairs and maintenance. This included for example reference to provision of sufficiently detailed information to enable owners to assess the value for money of specific repair costs, providing owners with a clear statement of service standards against which completed works can be measured, and using effective communication to build a stronger relationship or dialogue with owners. The high ranking of these specific aspects of service suggest that owners do see communication as a real priority for factoring and common repairs services.

3.51. Access to services and communications was rated as a relatively important area across all geographies and service models, communication appeared to be more specific to those receiving factoring services involving regular maintenance and/or landscaping works. This appeared to reflect at least in part views on the kind of relationship that owners are seeking with factoring and common repairs services. As is discussed earlier in this section, those receiving a regular factoring service typically expressed a preference for more regular communication with the landlord, and were somewhat more likely to prioritise issues such as having a clear statement of service standards, effective ongoing communication and scope for owners to engage with and influence the service. In contrast, those receiving a common repairs services tended to be looking for much less contact with landlords, and focused more specifically on issues such as standard of work, value for money and speed of response more than communication.
3.52. Owners’ comments in relation to accessing services and communication also reflected a range of issues experienced by owners when making contact with services. The most significant related to a perceived lack of awareness amongst local authority services of the common repairs service, or of the local authority’s obligation as a common owner in mixed tenure blocks. In terms of access to and communication with services, this included reference to difficulties trying to reach the right service or individuals with a common repairs query. While owners made clear that accessing local authorities was not an issue for most, comments did highlight the importance of having a clearly identified and accessible service responsible for common repairs – “You get passed to this number...and then the next...and the next.”

3.53. Owners also highlighted the importance of consistency in communication with landlords, with this issue discussed across factoring and common repairs services. The key priority for owners here was that landlords provide consistent information and advice to owners, and a number of participants emphasised the frustration and anxiety caused by inconsistent messages from landlords. This included reference to information provided on scheduling of specific elements of the planned maintenance programme, on owners’ rights or responsibilities (e.g., the extent to which owners can decorate common areas, permissions required when making changes to their home such as fitting new windows) and on the status of repair requests.

“You say “yes, we’ll sort that”, but still nothing happens...you get tired of chasing things up”.

“A lot of vagueness, you don’t get a clear enough explanation.”

You are treated fairly and with respect

3.54. Owners being treated fairly and with respect was ranked fifth out of the seven specific service aspects. Although a large majority of participants score this at least 6 out of 7, it is interesting to note that owners had relatively little to say about this as a potential priority for factoring or common repairs services. While there was a clear view amongst most participants that landlords should treat owners fairly and with respect, there was a general view that this is less important aspect of services than elements more directly related to repair and maintenance works (for example value for money and the standard of work).

3.55. The points that owners did raise in relation to being treated fairly and with respect were typically framed in terms of the kind of relationship that owners are seeking with landlords. As is discussed earlier in this section, there was some variation in owners’ views on this issue, with those receiving a factoring service with regular maintenance/landscaping generally looking for a more involved relationship with factoring services including opportunities to influence service decisions.
3.56. In this context, owners highlighted the importance of ensuring that owners are treated with respect, such that they feel that landlords are willing to engage with and take owners’ views into account. Moreover, some owners suggested that there should be greater “equality” between owners and factoring services, recognising that both have a vested interest in the repair and maintenance of the building. While these points may not have direct implications in terms of how services should engage with owners, research participants clearly felt that these should be considerations for landlords in determining how they should deal with owners.

3.57. A different range of issues were raised by other owners – particularly those who had previously been social tenants - who were concerned that landlords ensure there is no difference in how services deal with social tenants and owners. This was not a point about the level of service provided, but rather was linked to a perception that there was a qualitative difference in the manner of landlords’ staff when dealing with owners and social tenants:

“You get the impression you’re annoying them.”

3.58. This appeared to be a concern for those with prior experience of landlord services as a social tenant. While owners’ comments did relate specifically to the way in which they are dealt with by service staff, this was often linked to frustrations with the change in level of service provided to owners such as the range of repairs that the landlord could deal with. It was difficult to identify the extent to which these frustrations regarding the level of service were influencing individuals’ views on how landlords dealt with owners.

**Speed of response to queries or requests for a service**

3.59. A substantial proportion of research participants rated speed of service response as an important aspect of factoring and common repairs services; nearly half gave this the top score of 7. This was particularly the case for those receiving a common repairs service from a local authority, with these owners somewhat more likely to see speed of response as a priority. However, relative to other service aspects, speed of response was generally seen as a less important area for owners.

3.60. This point was made explicit by a number of owners, who suggested that speed of response is not the key aspect of how repair and maintenance works are completed. This included direct comparison of speed of response with other issues seen as more of a priority for owners; most notably value for money and the standard of completed work:

“I would rather things took a little longer, but were done right.”
3.61. While speed of response was generally seen as somewhat less important than whether and how works are completed, owners nevertheless highlighted a number of specific priorities in relation to speed of response from factoring and common repairs services. In terms of how quickly landlords respond to queries or repair requests, owner’s comments related primarily to ensuring that services prioritise repairs or issues that can have an impact on the fabric of a building and/or owners’ own homes. This included experience of significant problems in owners’ own homes as a result of water ingress from common areas.

3.62. Notwithstanding these specific experiences, owners did not appear to be of the view that current response times were a major cause for concern. However, some reference was made to standards applying to repairs to social rented properties as a potential starting point for speed of response to common repairs or maintenance. For some this was in the context of concern that owners feel that there is some equality in the service standards applying to social tenants and factored owners.

3.63. Finally in relation to speed of response, owners highlighted the importance of clear communication regarding timescales. This related to a lack of information for owners on service standards in terms of response times, but the most significant factor for owners appeared to be the extent to which landlords keep owners informed if there are delays to repair or maintenance work. It was clear from owners’ comments that a lack of explanation for delays in the service response can cause real frustration, even where the delay itself may not be a significant concern for owners:

“It’s when there’s no communication or explanation on why something isn’t forthcoming, that’s when people get frustrated”.

**Information and advice provided by the service**

3.64. Information and advice was the lowest ranked of the seven specific service aspects, with an average score of 5.7 out of 7 and none of the research participants identifying this as the most important service aspect. Nevertheless, most participants scored this as an important aspect of their services, and provision of information has been highlighted as a priority in relation to a number of other service aspects, most significantly for value for money and clarity on service standards and responsibilities.
3.65. The detail and timing of information provided by landlords was identified as a key factor in terms of owners’ assessment of value for money. This included the importance of landlords providing advance notice of repair works, and owners highlighted the concern caused where works are completed without advance notice. Perhaps even more important for owners, was that information provided on the cost of works should be equivalent to that provided if owners were commissioning works from a private contractor. In this regard the key motivating factor for owners appeared to be that information is sufficiently detailed to support a judgment on value for money (eg compared to other contractors).

3.66. Perhaps the area where information provided by landlords has the most direct link, is around clarity on services. This was highlighted in relation to specific service standards such as maintenance schedules and response times, but was a particularly significant issue for owners in terms of being clear on the circumstances in which the landlord has a responsibility to undertake common repairs.

3.67. In this context, research participants highlighted the anxiety caused by differences of opinion between owners and landlords, most notably in relation to whether repair or maintenance work was required. Owners recounted a range of experiences here, with the most significant issues being around cases where landlords did not agree with owners regarding the need for or timing of specific repairs or maintenance work. There was a view that these disagreements should be avoidable if information were provided on service standards, and the circumstances where landlords are responsible for common repairs.

“I would like a contract saying exactly what [the landlord’s] obligations are”.

3.68. Finally on information and advice, participants highlighted a need for clarity on the extent to which owners can influence decisions that affect the appearance and condition of their property. In particular, relatively few owners appeared clear about the extent to which owners can undertake or arrange maintenance and repair work themselves; indeed there seemed to have been some quite different experiences for owners with some having undertaken minor works with their factor’s permission, and others having been frustrated that they are not able to complete decorating or maintenance work if the landlord is not willing to do so. Again in this context the importance of clear information and guidelines was highlighted, as a means of providing “ground-rules” for the relationship between owners and landlords.
4. COMMON THEMES

4.1. The study has examined the views and priorities in relation to social landlord services across two distinct groups; Gypsies/Travellers on official sites, and owner occupiers in receipt of factoring or common repairs services. The study was wide-ranging in terms of the service aspects and issues being considered. However, this was framed by the key research objective of informing the Regulator’s future regulatory approach in relation to social landlord services, and in this regard consultation work was structured around seven specific aspects of landlord services:

- Ease of accessing the landlord if needed, communication with the landlord;
- Information and advice provided by landlord – unprompted, or in response to a query;
- Speed of response to queries or requests for a service;
- Resolving your queries, making sure that response is “right first time”;
- Value for money for your rent and other charges;
- That you are treated fairly/with respect, standard of landlords’ staff attitude and manner; and
- You’re able to have a say on the landlords’ decisions (inc give feedback, make a complaint).

4.2. In the context of future regulatory approach it is important to recognise the extent to which views on key priority areas can vary even within these two distinct service user groups – although it should also be recognised that very few participants saw any aspect of landlord services as “unimportant”. It is clear that views on the most significant aspects of services reflect a range of factors, most notably individuals’ specific experience of services, their awareness and understanding of services, and expectations of the role and relationship landlords should have with their customers. For example owners in receipt of regular maintenance/landscaping services typically placed greater emphasis on landlords engaging with and consulting owners, while others were more likely to focus on value for money and speed of response as priority areas.

4.3. These factors can combine in a variety of ways, and it is clear that there are some significant differences between Gypsies/Travellers and factored owners in terms of experience of services and the role that individuals are looking for landlords to play. Consistent with this, some variation was evident between the two groups in the priority attached to specific service aspects. Indeed service aspects rated amongst the top three priorities for owners – value for money and resolving queries – were amongst the lowest ranked priorities for Gypsies/Travellers.
4.4. For Gypsies/Travellers, **being able to have a say on landlord services and decisions, speed of service response** and **being treated fairly and with respect** emerged as the most common priority areas. In addition value for money was identified as a priority area by fewer participants, but was often the most significant concern for these individuals.

4.5. The research suggests some inter-connections between priorities identified by Gypsies/Travellers. In particular the value of being treated fairly and with respect appeared to underpin other priorities to some extent. This included the importance of specific service standards - such as speed of response – where participants highlighted the importance of ensuring equality of service standards between Gypsy/Traveller site residents and other social tenants. In addition there appeared to be a link between the priority ascribed to being treated with respect, and a common view that landlords should recognise the contribution that site residents can make in informing repairs and maintenance or improvement works (also reflected in the high priority attached to having a say on landlord decisions).

4.6. For owners, **value for money of services** was identified as the most significant priority area. This was most commonly highlighted by owners paying a regular factoring fee, and this appeared to reflect a lack of clarity on the activities covered by this fee. In addition the research identified specific priorities in terms of value for money of large common repair works, including ensuring landlords have a strong focus on achieving the best price for works, and allowing owners to secure alternative quotes.

4.7. In addition, **having a say on landlord services and decisions, and how effectively services resolve queries and repairs** were also identified as important service aspects for owners. Both priority areas appeared to be linked to a common principle raised by owners that they are allowed some control over decisions affecting their own property, both in terms of which repair or maintenance work is undertaken but also specific standards for those works.

4.8. Notwithstanding these differences in specific priority areas identified by Gypsies/Travellers and owners, there was some commonality in the experiences and issues raised. The following common themes emerged in terms of key priority areas for landlord services:

- The research identified some lack of clarity across both Gypsies/Travellers and owners in terms of what individuals should expect from their respective landlord services, and how to interact with those services. There were clear differences in how the two groups preferred to access and interact with services, for example Gypsies/Travellers overwhelmingly preferred face to face contact with services. Nevertheless, there was a common focus on the importance of good quality information on services, to provide individuals with clarity on what to expect of services.
• A substantial proportion of participants across both groups indicated a preference for landlord services to be relatively “unobtrusive”. This reflected somewhat different priorities or reasoning across Gypsies/Travellers and owners, but appeared to reflect a common view that individuals do not expect significant contact with landlords beyond a need to resolve repairs or other issues as they arise:
  o For some owners – and particularly those in receipt of common repairs services - there was a clear expectation that they would have relatively little contact with services, and this appeared in part to reflect a common view that individuals should retain a significant degree of control over the appearance and condition of their home (including common areas): “we just want them to leave us alone...we’ll look after our own”.
  o For Gypsies/Travellers, there was a similarly clear view from some that they expected little contact with landlord services, beyond the provision of adequate site accommodation and amenities. Indeed most felt that factors such as the social make-up and relationships between site residents were at least as high a priority, as how landlord services are provided.

• In terms of the specific service aspects addressed by the study, being able to have a say on landlord services and decisions was the only common priority for both owners and Gypsies/Travellers. For owners this primarily reflected a desire for owners to have some influence over decisions on repairs and maintenance – and thus to have a degree of control over decisions affecting their property – rather than for example to give feedback on completed works. The importance of “control” was also a factor for Gypsies/Travellers, but for this group the value attached to having a say on landlord decisions was based more on the view that site residents have particular insight into what is required to maintain or improve sites.

• Linked to the priority ascribed to having a say on services, there was a common view that service provision should be consistent with individuals’ expectations, and in particular meet individuals’ standards in terms of repair and maintenance/landscaping activities. This reflected a wider view that services should recognise individuals’ position as owner of their home, and focus on balancing the landlords’ role as service provider with a need to allow individuals a degree of control over their home and surroundings. For Gypsies/Travellers this was based on a view that site residents are in many cases the best judges of priorities in terms of managing and maintaining sites – “we know what is needed”. For owners the focus was more on the potential conflict between landlords’ service standards in terms of common repairs and maintenance, and owners’ views on what is required to maintain their homes to the standard they wish.