

HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE ADDENDUM Deputations

4.00PM, WEDNESDAY, 13 MARCH 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

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ADDENDUM

ITEM

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Brighton & Hove City Council

HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 59 (c)

Subject: Deputations

Date of Meeting: 13 March 2024

Report of: Executive Lead Officer for Strategy, Governance & Law

Contact Officer: Shaun Hughes
E-mail: shaun.hughes@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 To receive any questions submitted to Democratic Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.2 That the Committee responds to the deputation.

Deputation to Housing Committee on 13th March by Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove

This deputation is brought by Citizens Advice Brighton and Hove on behalf of our community and the increasing number of clients who are facing housing issues at the moment.

From October until January 2024, Brighton and Hove City Council was consulting on two proposed licensing schemes for private rented housing in the city:

- A citywide Additional Licensing Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- A Selective Licensing Scheme for other private rented homes (not HMOs)

A questionnaire for each scheme was conducted to better understand the community's needs and feelings about the schemes.

Housing issues and tenant-landlord problems are sadly nothing unheard of at Citizens Advice Brighton and Hove. In fact, our data shows that housing has become the top issue in Brighton and Hove alongside benefits in recent years (see Fig.1 appendix).

Given the Council consultation and the tangible issue of housing affecting our community, the Research and Campaigns team at Citizens Advice Brighton and Hove acted in a 2-step action plan. Firstly, the team raised awareness of the ongoing consultation and encouraged people to respond to it. We used internal and external official communication as well as social media posts to target our audience; to fill in any gaps, we also put together an explanatory, easy-to-read document on the reasons behind the consultation and what steps people needed to take to respond to it. Secondly, the team responded to the consultation with a

report for the Council, to provide solid evidence in support of the introduction of the proposed Licensing Schemes.

We conducted desktop research to paint a picture of the housing sector context at the moment; we then used our local office advice data and case studies to respond to the questions used in the questionnaire. Our research has found that the renting situation in Brighton and Hove is quite different compared to the national picture: in 2022-2023, a third of clients contacting our office presented housing issues, as opposed to only a fifth of national clients (England and Wales). Additionally, almost 60% of the clients with housing issues were renting privately¹.

It is undeniable that tenants' experience and their housing issues are varied in nature and degree of complexity. However, our research has managed to identify key housing issues related to health and safety, including disrepair involving dampness, mould and condensation, as well as instances of landlord harassment and lack of EPC rating. On top of that, our research has worryingly highlighted that tenants are often afraid to take any action due to retaliation from landlords.

Here are two examples that perfectly encapsulate the widespread housing issues and knock-on effects that tenants are experiencing daily in our community. These case studies are taken from our report; any personal details have been anonymised or removed.

"Tom has been given a section 21 notice by his landlord (no fault eviction). He believes he is being evicted because he requested repairs to be done as his flat had leaks and wiring issues, blocked fire exits and general disrepair. Tom also recalls being verbally harassed by the landlord. He also is under the impression that his landlord tends to rent his properties to vulnerable people. He phoned us to find out how to complain about his landlord's behaviour."

"Lydia lives with her daughter in a basement flat affected by blocked drains; due to this problem, they are unable to use all the rooms they rent. Considering the heavy rain, Lydia is seriously concerned about the health risks they are facing. Moreover, there is a pervasive mould in their bathroom. When informed about the issues, the landlord has taken very few steps to solve the problem. Lydia is also worried about the landlord who is intimidating, unstable and disrespectful of Lydia's space going as far as entering the flat without her notice. The landlord's erratic behaviour has increased Lydia's anxiety and vulnerability and worsened her mental health."

There is no doubt that our report paints a bleak picture of the renting sector in Brighton and Hove. Sadly, we are not the only stakeholders with similar data. The recent ACORN's community rallies in the city have highlighted that 79.8% of the people approached claimed that their health was negatively affected by renting, while 74.6% felt their safety was also at risk².

¹ Brighton and Hove Citizens Advice consultation response for the Selective and Additional Licensing Scheme
<https://www.cabrightonhove.org/campaigns/>

² ACORN's Licensing Scheme Campaign (slides available in the supporting material)

Citizens Advice Brighton and Hove agree with the Brighton and Hove City Council on the necessity of Licensing Schemes to enforce a resourced structure to tackle poorly managed and hazardous properties and encourage better landlord behaviour.

Both our reports provide strong evidence for the proposed Selective Licencing Schemes to be introduced in the 4 wards as well as in the additional 13. We strongly believe that the schemes have the potential to improve the living standards and safety of people renting in the city and the evidence provided in our reports strongly supports the need for licensing.

That being said, whilst the Licensing Schemes are a step forward for safe and well-managed housing, they aren't a silver bullet for fixing all the issues tenants face. We therefore call on Brighton and Hove City Council to ensure that the schemes, if agreed, are implemented properly.

For these schemes to be effective it is critical that adequate staffing is put in place to ensure that it is clear how to report issues, and then that those issues reported are tackled promptly.

The council should ensure that clear tenant and landlord guidance be drafted and distributed both online and in print, and that these are available and accessible to all communities in Brighton and Hove, which means ensuring that translations and easy-to-read copies are also readily available.

Fees setting for the service should reflect a realistic staffing structure and communications plan to ensure that once in place the licensing scheme is truly effective for tenants.

Thank you for your consideration of our deputation.

Signed by:

Gaia Plozzer (Lead officer for this research) gaia.plozzer@cabrightonhove.org

J.Needham (Volunteer)

D.Cameron (Volunteer)

J.Carden (CEO)

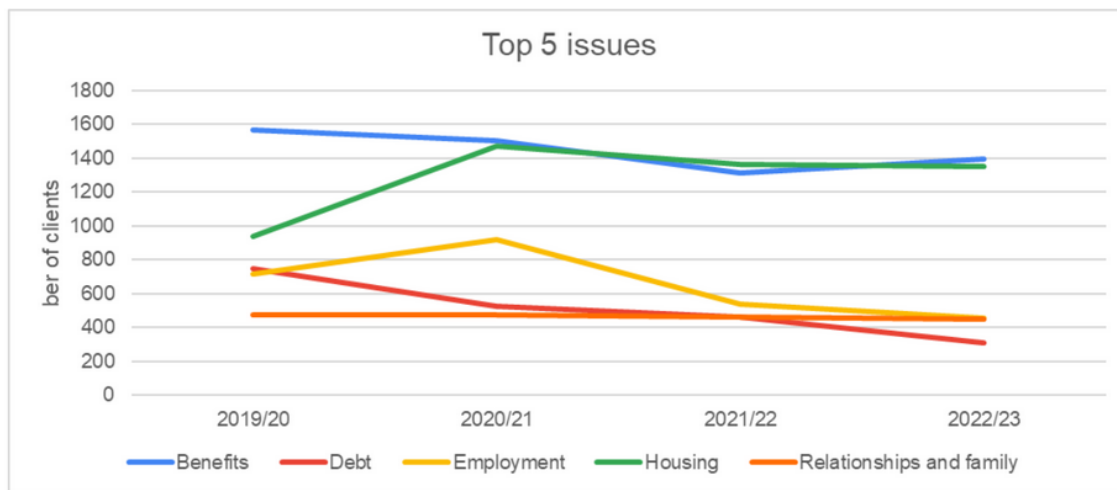
P.Kydd (Project Manager)

E.Daniel (Partnership Manager)

Address: Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove, Tisbury Road, Hove, BN3 3BQ

Appendix

Fig. 1 Top 5 issues



Source: Summary report C3A:for B&H LA all clients: count of clients

Summary from the Brighton & Hove Landlord Selective Licensing Response Reports

We strongly believe that the proposed Additional Licencing Scheme for HMOs and the Selective Licensing Scheme for 17 wards of the city has the potential to improve the living standards and safety of people renting in those areas. Our data and case studies support the need for licencing in these wards across the city has the potential to improve the living standards and safety of young people sharing houses and flats across the city. We believe that our case studies bring to life the problems that HMO tenants face in trying to get basic repairs and safety taken care of.

We also believe that these case studies illustrate the fear that tenants face in going to the council at present because they know that the landlord can simply evict them and get new tenants in.

Licensing means that the landlord could not retain a licence if they behaved in the way these landlords do and it would give confidence to the tenants to report the issues they face.

For landlord licencing schemes to be effective, there needs to be adequate staffing to ensure that it is clear how to report issues, and that those issues are tackled promptly. We would recommend that councillors consider a dedicated telephone line, drop-in services and training for councillors on tackling poor private sector rented accommodation.

Further, we would recommend that clear tenant and landlord guides are published and distributed online and in print format (including in easy read format and a variety of languages) to ensure that all communities have the same access to help when they need it.

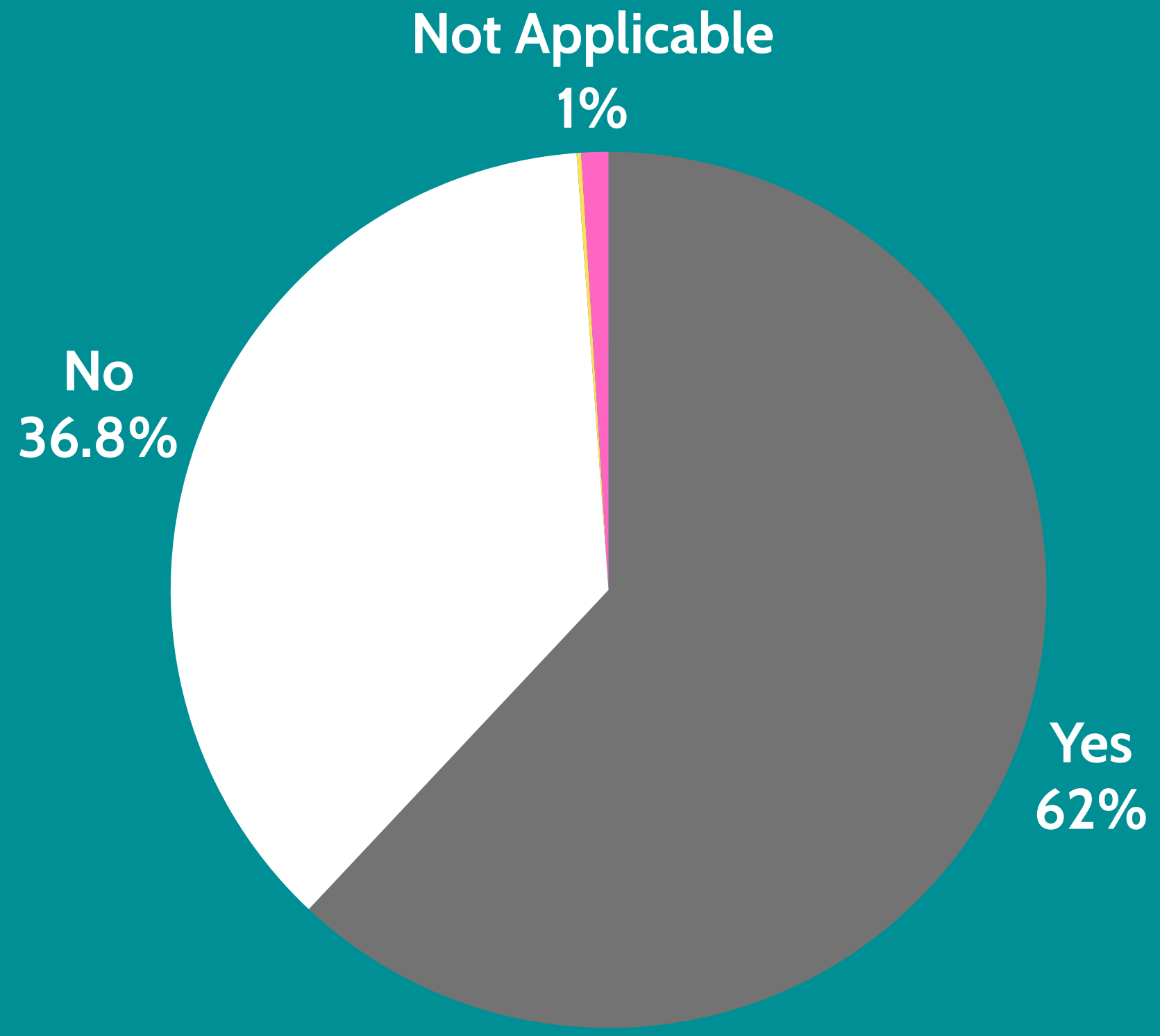
We would recommend that councillors seek assurances that the charging model will be adequate to ensure a truly effective and responsive service.

Landlord Licensing Consultation

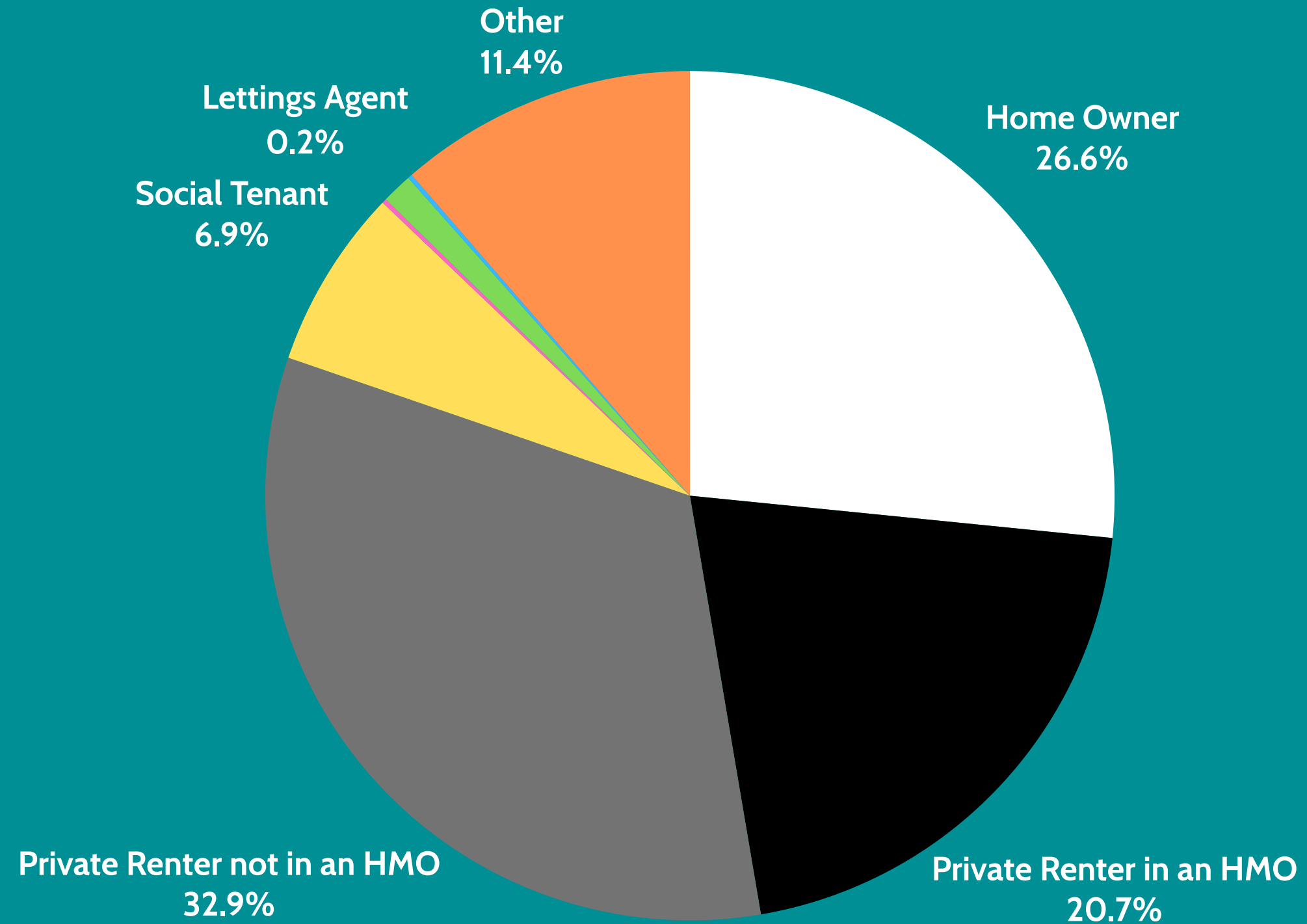
- 6 outreach days
- 3 meetings with the council
- 3 branch meetings

600 responses!

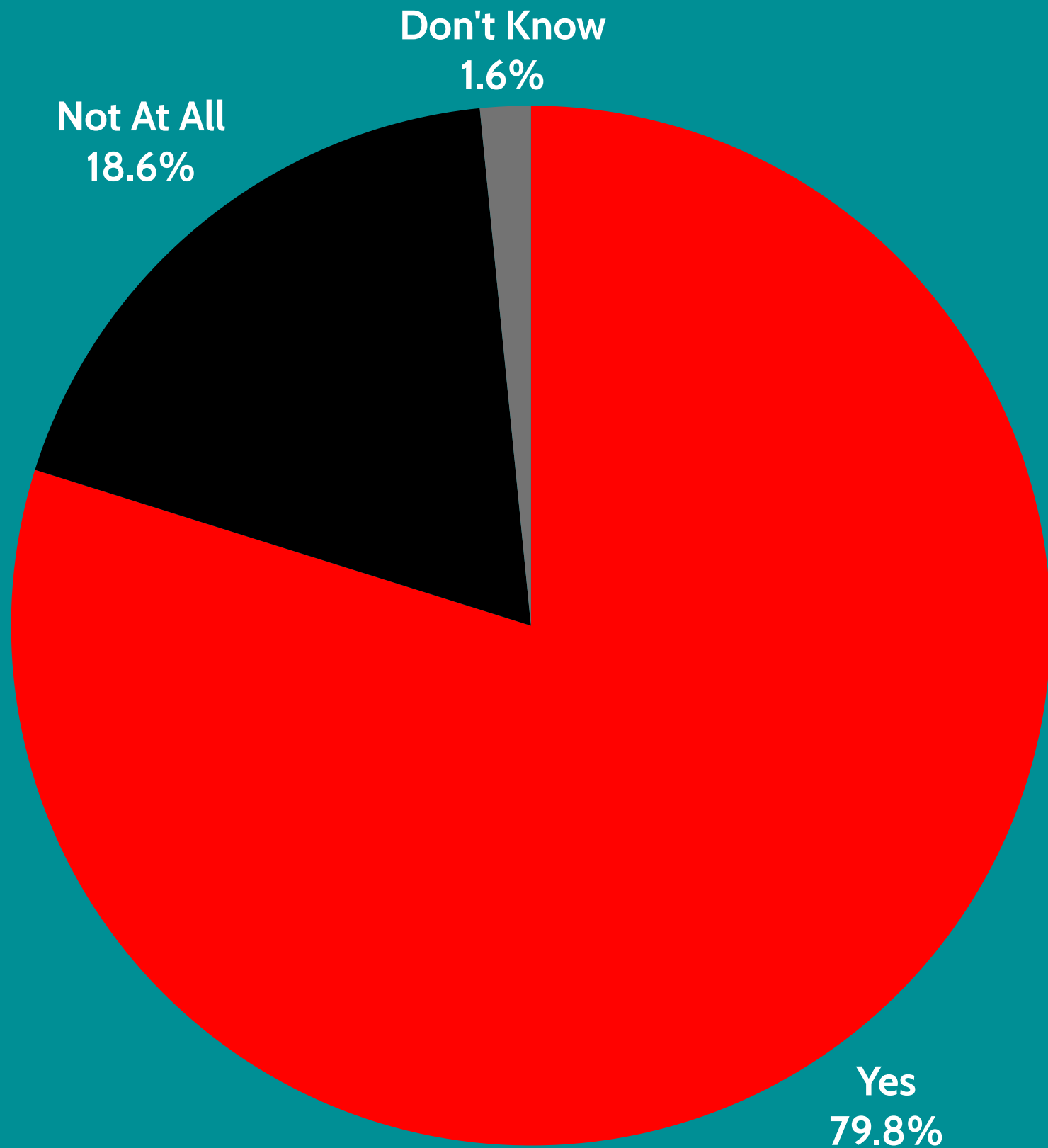
Have you lived in private rented accommodation in the last 12 months?



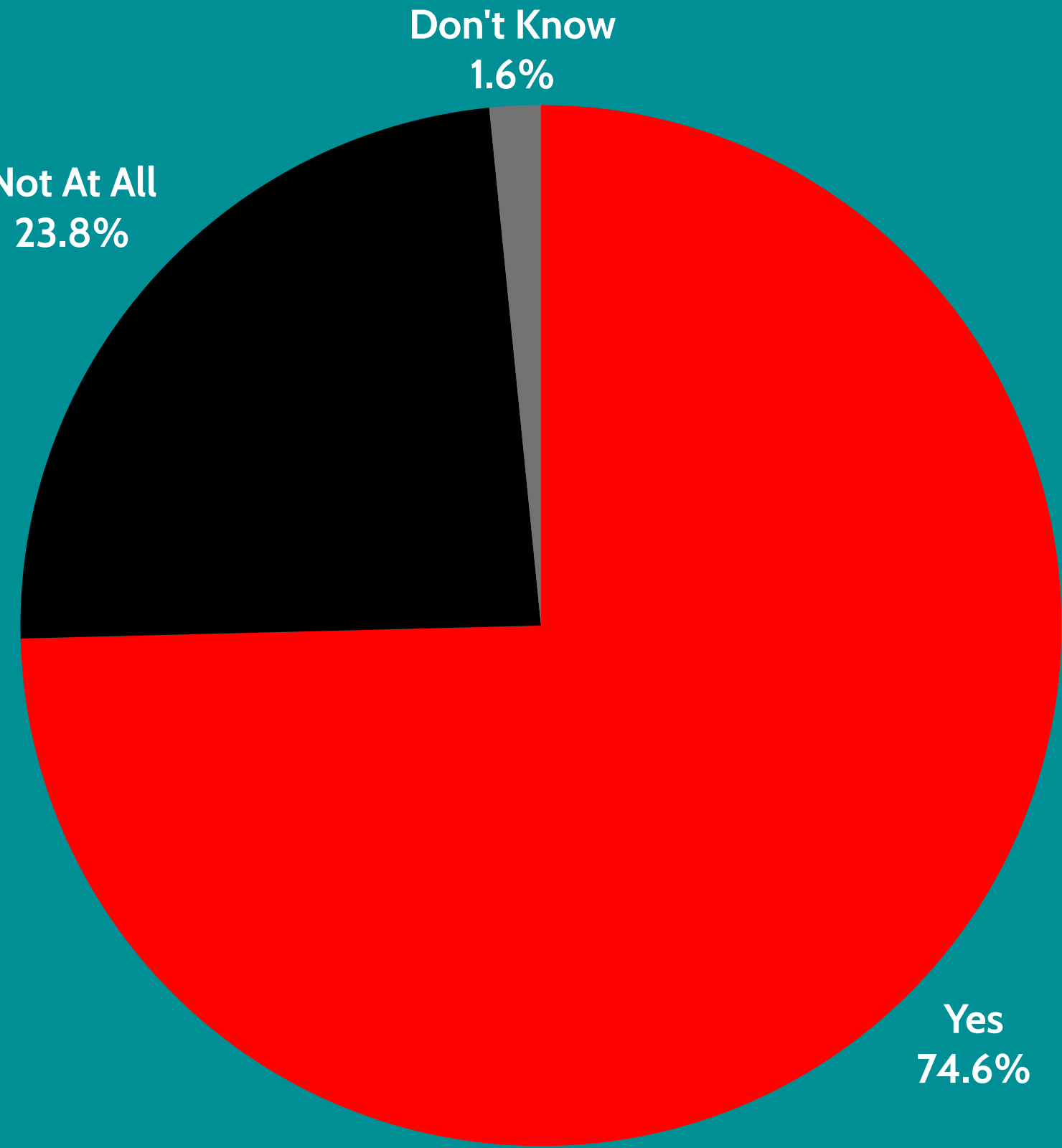
Are you responding to this questionnaire as:



Has your health been affected by renting?



Has your safety been affected by renting?



Testimonies

-Without winter heating for 6 months then a gas leak

-Severe and recurring black mould in the bedroom and bathroom, black mould discovered behind kitchen cabinets - definitely affects my sinuses

-Large levels of black mould, complained and landlord just painted over it

-Infant son developed a lung infection from black mould