

**Plasnewydd Additional Licensing
Consultation Report
February 2020**

1. Methodology

1.1 Cardiff Council is keen to ensure that all tenants in the city live in properties that are well managed, dry, safe, warm and secure. Within the private rented sector, the Council has powers to ensure that shared houses meet certain standards and that landlords/agents comply with specific requirements.

1.2 The Council has powers to license certain types of properties known as HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) and has used these powers to extend the types of dwellings that can be licensed in the Plasnewydd Ward under an Additional Licensing Scheme. The current Scheme expired in 2019 and the Council is considering whether to re-declare the area for a further 5 years.

1.3 As part of a public consultation on the proposal, surveys were developed to gather the views of landlords and letting agents, tenants renting from a private landlord and other residents including home owners living in Plasnewydd.

1.4 The surveys were made available online via the Ask Cardiff website in English and Welsh, with paper copies available on request. Letters and/or emails were sent to 1,062 landlords and letting agents and 1,148 tenants and 277 members of the Cardiff Citizens Panel living in Plasnewydd inviting them to complete the surveys. A total of 94 responses were received – 41 from landlords/agents, 26 from private tenants and 27 from other residents.

1.5 Written submissions on the proposal were also sought from landlord and letting agent representative bodies and other stakeholders. Submissions from these groups are considered within a separate Schedule of Consultation Responses and are not included within the scope of this report.

2. Landlord and Letting Agent Findings

2.1 A total of 41 landlords/agents responded to the survey, 38 of which owned/managed 126 HMOs between them in Plasnewydd.

2.2 Landlords/agents were asked if they have had to make changes to their HMOs to meet Licensing conditions. 39 responded to this question, with the majority (59%) having been required to make changes. These included installing fire doors, fire blankets, boxing in meters/consumer units and smoke alarm systems, additional loft insulation and fitting thumbturn locks to front doors.

2.3 The landlords/agents were asked about their experiences of the Additional Licensing Scheme. 33 responded to this question. The responses varied with 57.58% citing negative aspects of the scheme, 24.24% stating positive experiences and 18.18% citing both positive and negative views. Of the views provided respondents felt the Scheme itself had some value in improving standards however there were concerns around the high fees charged for licensing, the work required to meet standards which was perceived as excessive, and a lack of enforcement of rogue landlords who do not apply for a licence and whose properties are non-compliant.

2.4 When asked if they thought the scheme had been beneficial, 31.6% of landlords/agents answered 'Yes', 50% answered 'No', and 18.4% responded 'Don't know'. Reasons for answering 'Yes' included "it has helped improve the overall standard of the private rental market; it has brought compliant landlords fully up to date with requirements; ensures safety standards are put in place and properties are habitable; health and safety of the properties has been improved; without it, the unscrupulous landlords will provide poor quality accommodation for vulnerable young people". Reasons for answering 'No' included "Increasing landlords costs which lead to increased rents; It seems to just be another way for the council to generate revenue; The responsible landlords were already trying to improve standards and now have to pay, the reckless ones just ignore the rules; Requirements are not easily met; Puts too much financial pressure on the landlords to comply; It has not lead to better waste management".

2.5 When asked whether the Scheme should be re-declared for a further 5 years, 60.5% of landlords/agents answered 'No', 28.9% answered 'Yes' and 10.5% responded 'Don't know'.

2.6 Landlords/agents were asked if there were things the Council should do differently if the Scheme was re-declared. 37 responded to the question, with the majority (73%) of landlord/agents answering 'Yes', 5.4% answering 'No' and 21.6% 'Don't know'. The following suggestions were made:

- Reduce the fees for existing Landlords that are already licensed. Charge maybe £20 for the re-inspection, with no extra charges or need for further administration if the house is deemed adequate. This should be assessed by someone independent from the council.
- Reduce charges, be more flexible and allow more time for landlords to adapt properties
- Understand that the properties are people's homes that they are individuals and they and their buildings are not just tick boxes on a form. A "one size fits all" approach does not work in many situations. Flexibility and sensitivity to the tenants' domestic needs should be taken into account when interpreting the HMO guidelines.
- Landlords who are registered and licensed through Rent Smart Wales should be exempt.
- Make all landlords comply.
- Have policy to deal with bad landlords, that way, we wouldn't need this tax on houses.
- Reduce fee
- Cover all 3 bed as part of the licence, include flats and houses with flats and properties above shops
- Fair rules for all.
- We think that the scheme should be extended to include smaller HMOs. Why is the health and safety of smaller HMOs less important than larger ones?
- Consider a different name, or different category for properties of a certain standard. I raise this as the introduction of the scheme made it near impossible (only one mortgage provider offered mortgages to properties designated HMOs - and at a much increased rate) for me to re-mortgage last time around. This lead me to seriously consider selling the flat. I think I am an

excellent landlord, this would have potentially have forced me out which would have been no benefit to anyone.

- Let landlords pay the licence fee annually over the 5 year period and not up front as a lump sum
- Far more information is required to landlords and letting agents of their responsibilities. Far too often we get conflicting information from the Council with regard licensing and responsibility. It should be made far clearer and informative of the requirements in the sector.
- Simpler / cheaper / quicker way to transfer HMO licences to new owners.
- Landlord fees
- Concentrate on non-compliant landlords
- Perhaps to ensure that student houses are only for students, that in one house cannot be a mix of students and non- students. This would ensure even better protection for young people renting for the first time.
- The cost should be subsidised
- Increase action against unlicensed landlords. Follow up on works required being completed. Take action against landlords whose tenants are not respecting the local area.
- Remember who they're actually trying to help when proposing unnecessary changes that will hike rents and potentially require tenants to leave
- Have separate teams for compliance.
- Charge a lot less. Having to pay hundreds and hundreds of pounds per property, just to get an hour long visit, is outrageous.
- That requirements they ask from landlords are consistent and employees are providing/requesting is the same information to all landlords. That if changes are requested that they carry out the correct checks to confirm and that it is recorded on your licence.
- Have some compromise on room size so if there is a large kitchen the lounge can be smaller.
- I believe the Council should produce a simple booklet which the Landlord can give to each tenant detailing the Council's regulations which the Landlord has to inform the tenants about
- Promote it to all landlords. We only found out by default. E.g. the local rental agencies were not aware!!

2.7 Finally, landlords/agents were asked if they had any other comments about the proposal to re-declare Plasnewydd as an Additional Licensing area. The main points raised are summarised below:

- Licensing seen as money making exercise for the Council
- Concentrate on addressing bad/ 'rogue' landlords, using existing powers
- Unnecessary bureaucracy and disproportionate to benefits
- Fees too high, with costs passed on to tenants
- Licensing impacts negatively on the lettings market – bad for business and housing supply
- Scheme overlaps with Rent Smart Wales.
- Apply the Scheme fairly and consistently
- Allow landlords who live outside Cardiff to use Council Waste facilities.

- Do not re-declare Scheme.

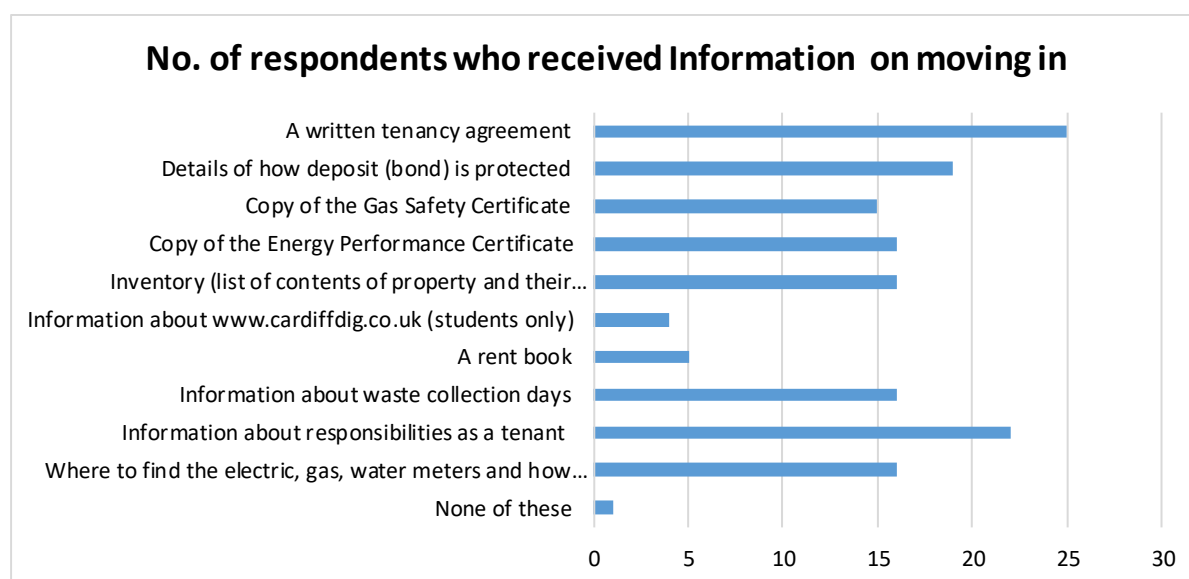
3. Tenants Renting from a Private Landlord Findings

3.1 A total of 26 private tenant surveys were received. 9 lived in shared houses (sharing a bathroom and/or kitchen), 3 lived in a house (one household), 7 lived in a flat/maisonette (one household), 4 respondents lived in a shared flat/maisonette (sharing a bathroom and/or kitchen) and 3 respondents lived in a bedsit.

3.2 The 9 shared houses were over either 2 or 3 floors and occupied by between 3 and 8 tenants. Of the 14 who responded as living in a flat/maisonette/bedsit 11 identified that these were part of a converted house of 2, 3 and 4 floors.

3.3 Of the 26 respondents, 11 had lived in Plasnewydd for over 5 years, 9 between 3-5 years and 6 between 1-2 years.

3.4 Respondents were asked about the information provided by their landlord/agent when they moved into the property. All but one tenant 96.2% had received a written tenancy agreement and 84.6% received information about their responsibilities as a tenant. The numbers who had received other types of information varied considerably as detailed below:

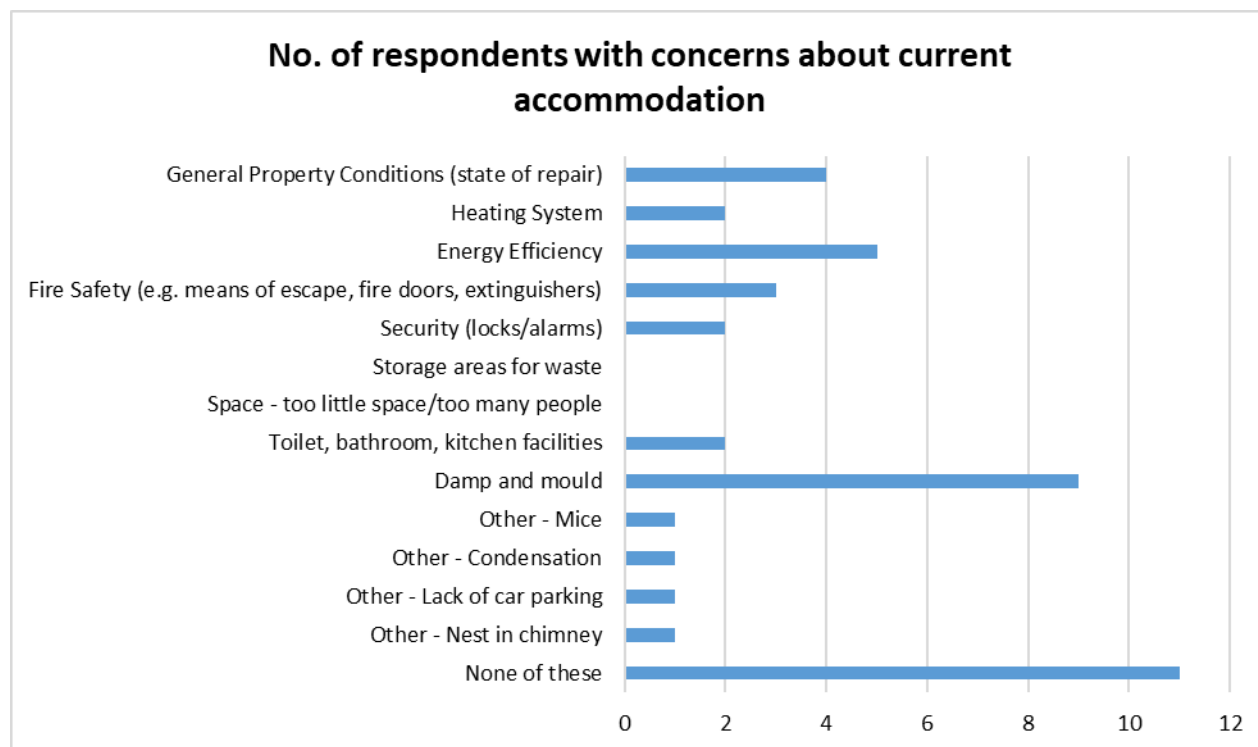


3.5 The majority of tenants 76.9% of respondents felt that their landlord managed their accommodation well. Concerns expressed by those who felt their landlord did not manage their accommodation well included:

- Damp in the communal areas and being ignored when problems are reported.
- Slow response to requests to fix issues.
- Damp walls
- No problems with letting agency but the landlady does minimum repairs.
- Landlord not complying with an improvement notice from 2017, windows not secure and no effective heating.

- Minimal upkeep of accommodation and concerns over protection of deposit once landlord changed and lack of communication around this transaction.

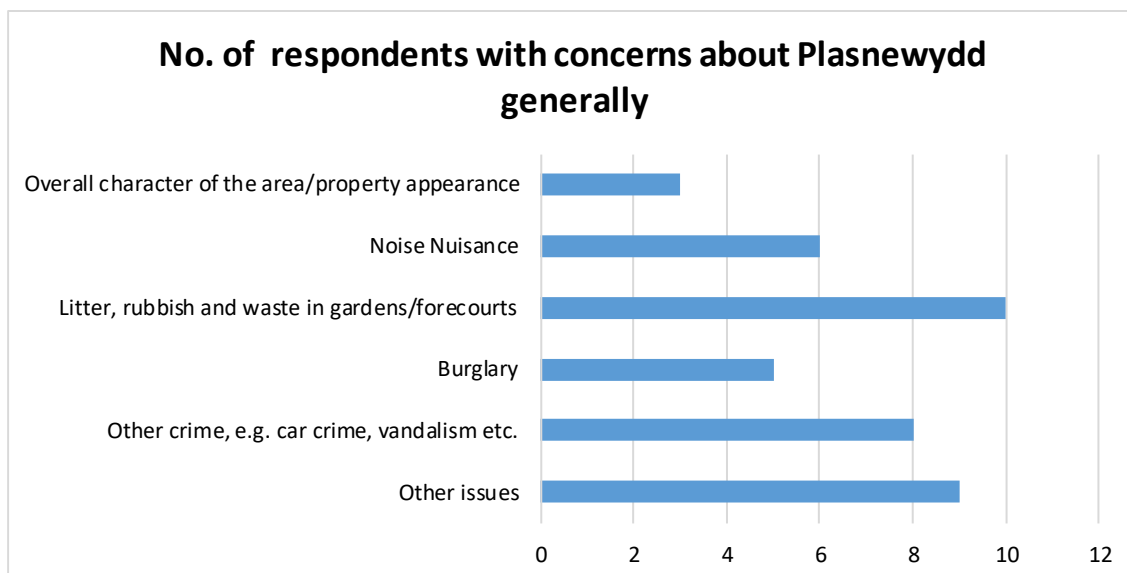
3.6 When asked about concerns with their accommodation, respondents noted the following:



3.7 Only 38.5% of respondents had informed their landlords about their concerns, with only 30% of these landlords then taking steps to put things right. The reasons for not contacting the landlord/agent included:

- I have only recently discovered the problem (1)
- I am concerned that I could be evicted if I raise issues (1);
- Probably not a concern for the landlord (1)

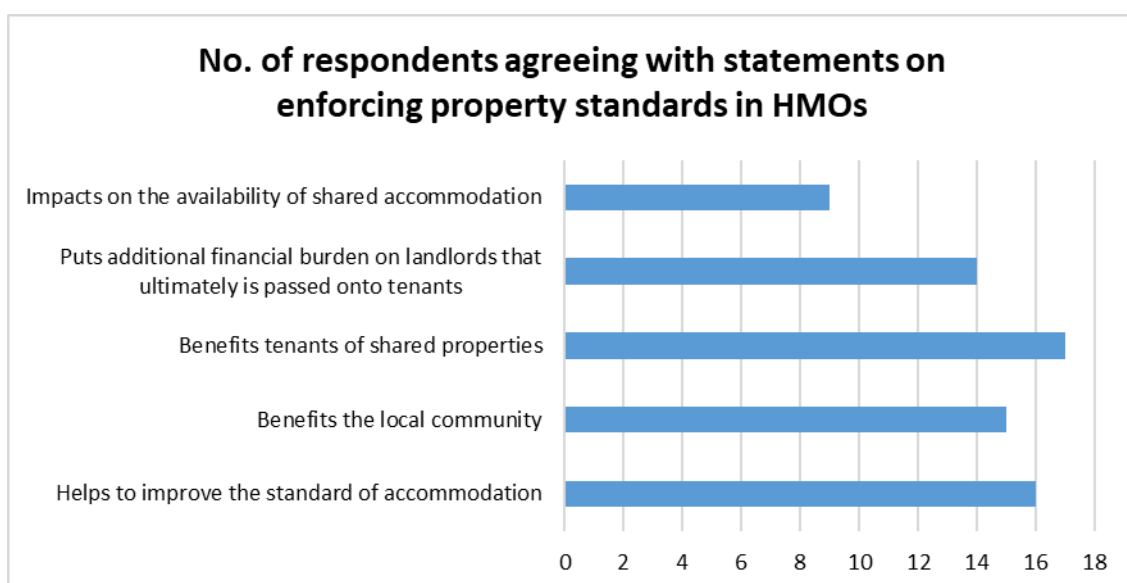
3.8 The private tenants were asked about their concerns with Plasnewydd generally and gave the following responses:



Other issues included

- Damp and mould and exploitative landlords/letting agencies. Bonfires producing toxic smoke (1)
- Parks closing early (1)
- Binge drinking from pubs (1)
- Bus routes and cycle lanes (1)
- Lack of CCTV to combat organised crime gangs (1)
- Rats and pests (1)
- Too much parking issues (1)
- None of the above. (1)

3.9 Generally, the private tenants responding to the survey were positive about enforcing property standards on HMOs, however over half felt that it puts additional financial burden on landlords that ultimately is passed onto tenants:



3.10 Notwithstanding the above results, only 19.2% felt the Scheme had been beneficial in improving property standards in Plasnewydd over the past 5 years, with 42.3% feeling it had not and the remainder 38.5% being unsure. Those respondents who responded positively commented that “the accommodation I have lived in more recently has been noticeably drier than the property of years ago; I was lucky to use the service and although I still have issues it was a lot worse; Houses in the area look more ‘cared for’ than before; It has ensured that all households in the area are subject to the same set of requirements”. Those that responded negatively however commented “I have not seen any change or improvement; Increased rents; Less properties available; Parking places for one house; Nothing done to core issues which is problems finding designated car parking space; Concerned about the increase of rats running around street; I was forced to move because landlord found the scheme uneconomical and stressful, and now have to share with more people”.

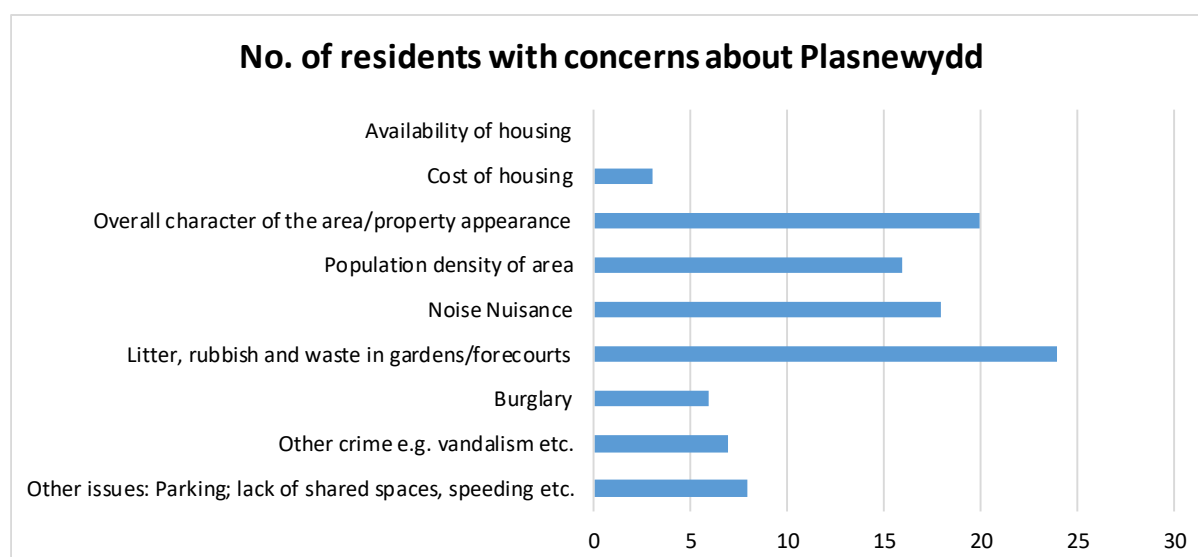
3.11 The majority (48%) of the private tenants who responded to the survey believed the Scheme should be re-declared. Suggestions for future priorities included:

- Increasing the number of licensed properties which are up to standard as soon as possible.
- Health and Safety.
- Mould and damp issues.
- Fair rent
- Double glazing or secondary glazing and wall insulation
- Security, energy performance
- Reduce pests
- Litter and waste and cleaning up front gardens and keeping the streets clean.
- Barriers to reporting issues (including costs being passed onto tenants or evictions).
- Landlords overcrowding properties.
- Visits from the Council to question tenants about the Scheme.

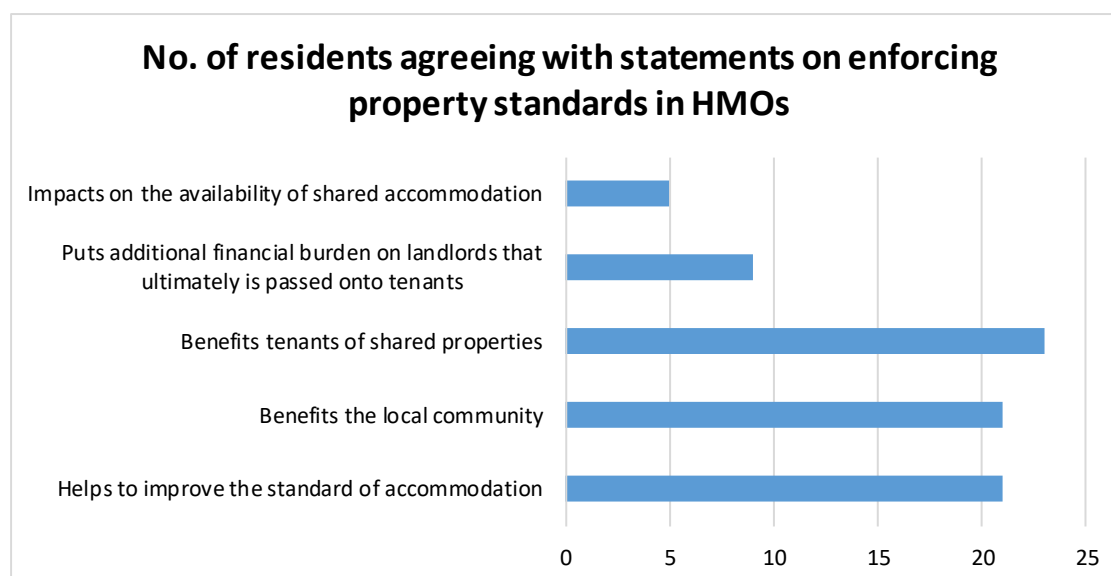
4. Other Residents Findings

4.1 A total of 27 ‘other’ residents of Plasnewydd completed the survey. 26 were home owners and one was a social housing tenant. Of the 27 respondents, the majority (69.2%) had lived in Plasnewydd for over 5 years.

4.2 The residents were asked about their concerns with Plasnewydd generally. The biggest concern surrounded litter, rubbish and waste with 92% of respondents indicating this as a concern.



4.3 Generally, the residents responding to the survey were positive about the enforcement of property standards on HMOs:



4.4 However, only 22.2% felt the Scheme had been beneficial in improving property standards over the last 5 years, with 14.8% feeling it had not and the remainder (63%) unsure. Positive views included “Increased standards in properties; Sounds positive however there is still a lot of work to do in terms of litter; I have not noticed very obvious changes as a resident living in the area, I believe landlords should be more accountable for maintaining properties; Simply in the extra numbers caught by the scheme; Get rid of poor landlords. Many houses back to family use”. Comments made by those that did not think the scheme had been beneficial included “Shared properties are not well maintained by landlords or tenants; Too many student flat share houses with rubbish piling up in the front yard; Reduces the

amount of shared accommodation available; The Scheme has meant that landlords have concentrated HMOs in Plasnewydd to the detriment of settled residents; It doesn't change the quality of the properties in regards decoration, furniture and damp; Not sure about property standards; Council should be settling a limit on the number of HMOs/multiple occupancy properties in Plasnewydd”.

4.5 A total of 77.8% of residents who responded to the survey believed the Scheme should be re-declared, and suggestions for future priorities included:

- Ensuring landlords maintain properties and tenants respect the area. Rubbish stored correctly, presented properly and regularly cleared.
- Housing that is safe, efficient, affordable and well maintained.
- Ensuring that the area is restricted to a % of HMOs
- All properties that are rented should be part of the scheme
- Restrict number of parking permits to two plus one visitors permit per property.
- Make nuisance landlords clean up their act with regards to their properties and to enforce noise pollution controls
- Fly tipping/Waste/Energy efficiency
- State of the living and working environment in the roads and streets
- Soundproofing where you have living rooms of flats next to bedrooms of houses in a terrace.
- Speeding in the area
- Noise nuisance enforced
- Saturation points for multi occupation houses
- Better regulation over tenant application selection process. Priority should be given to families and individuals who can contribute positively to the local community.
- Parking problems.

4.6 Finally, residents were asked for any other comments about the proposal to re-designate Plasnewydd as an Additional Licensing area. The responses received included:

- More effort needed to ensure landlords and tenants are accountable for refuse.
- Parking difficulties need addressing
- Provide more bins/collect them more regularly
- Greater enforcement on clean front yards
- Discourage the spread of students from Cathays to Plasnewydd.
- Any HMOs drag an area down.
- Further work needs to be done on end of tenancy waste issues
- We're full to busting point here in Plasnewydd. Any more cars in one household and it causes a problem. We're the residents and pay our Council Tax – please listen to us.