

**Security of tenure and
community engagement**
– a comparative study



Camden

Federation of

Private Tenants

Tenant Research Findings **2004**

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Foreword

For most of us, a real home is a place that is safe, secure and sustainable, where we get to know our neighbours and feel part of the local community. When the only housing available to us is temporary or short-term, it becomes much more difficult to see our accommodation as a real home. A lack of security of tenure can have an unsettling and destabilising effect on individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities. Short-term housing comes at a price.

Most of us know this from our own experience. Shelter's advisers deal, on a daily basis, with the problems caused by insecure tenancies. Insecurity of tenure can deter people from enforcing their rights to decent housing, because to do so could result in retaliatory eviction. We know that standards in the private rented sector, where assured shorthold is now the main form of new letting, are the worst of the three main tenure types. We know that the end of an assured shorthold is the third biggest cause of homelessness. But further evidence to illustrate the impact of insecure housing on people's lives has been difficult to come by. When Shelter and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published the report of our Private Rented Sector Commission in 2001, we recommended that more research was needed into people's views on assured shorthold tenancies.

Shelter congratulates the Camden Federation of Private Tenants for undertaking this work. This research, amongst a well-mixed sample of Camden residents, gives a clear insight into the impact of short-term housing on local communities. Its findings are timely and important. Many local authorities, via their Homelessness Strategies, now acknowledge that private rented housing needs to play a key role in tackling homelessness. The best authorities have already recognised that, if private rented housing is to provide more than a stop-gap solution, it must offer at least two year tenancies. Yet, worryingly, the Law Commission continues to recommend the removal of the six-month 'moratorium' in its plans for housing tenure reform.

The findings of this research are strong evidence of the role that stable, secure and sustainable housing plays in community involvement. We hope that all those committed to ending social exclusion and building stronger and more sustainable communities will take note.



Adam Sampson
Director
Shelter

Introduction

Camden Federation of Private Tenants has been interested in carrying out research into the affects of security of tenure on community engagement for some time, originally as a critique of Assured Shorthold tenancies, introduced as the default tenancy by the 1996 Housing Act, the ending of which is now the third main cause of homelessness as recorded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

In 2001, as part of its business planning process, CFPT carried out a tenant survey which included a few questions on community engagement. As anticipated, it seemed clear from these results that there was a correlation between the two.

The Law Commission's proposals to do away with the six-month moratorium on current Assured Shorthold tenancies in its paper Renting Homes 284 galvanised CFPT to carry out further research.

At the same time we were lucky enough not just to secure funding for a research project from the University College London, but also to engage the efforts of eight UCL student volunteers, without whom the research could not have happened.

The following results represent a comparative study of community engagement by tenure type. 185 respondents took part through both random face-to-face interviews at a series of venues in Camden, and via targeted mailings. Of these, 57 were Assured Shorthold tenants, the remainder range from council tenant through licencees to freeholders.

Martino Cartella
Chairman, CFPT

185 **Respondents**

57 Assured shorthold tenants

7 Assured tenants

19 Council tenants and leaseholders

34 Private leaseholders and Freeholders

51 Regulated tenants

17 Other – including lodgers and licensees

KEY

Length of stay/residency

- 6 months or less
- 7-12 months
- more than 12 months

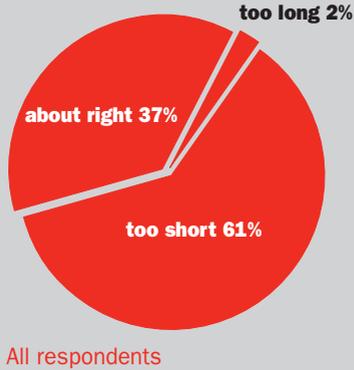
Type of tenancy

- Assured shorthold tenants (AST)
- Freeholder and private leaseholder (FH/PLH)
- Regulated tenants

Quantitative Findings

Figure 1a

A 6-month tenancy is ...?



Based on this result, we grouped the respondents according to their length of stay in their current premises. The first group are those who have lived in their current premises for 6-months or less, which is denoted by the □ bar in this chart. The second group are those who have lived in their current premises for 7–12 months, which is represented by the bar. The last group, which are denoted by the bar, are those who have stayed in their current premises for more than 12 months.

Views on tenancy length

We asked the respondents their views about 6-month tenancies.

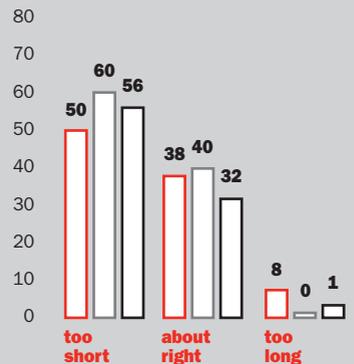
61%, a majority, think that a 6-month tenancy is too short. 31% think that it is about right and only 2% think that it is too long (Fig. 1a).

From this bar chart, we can see that the three groups of respondents consistently think that a 6-month tenancy is too short (Fig 1b)

We then used another grouping to look into the same question. Instead of the length of tenancy, we analysed the responses according to type of

Figure 1b

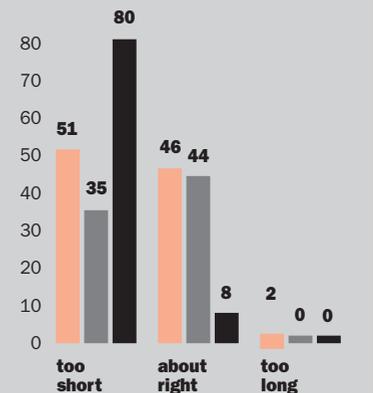
A 6-month tenancy is ...



Response by length of stay/residency

Figure 1c

A 6-month tenancy is ...



Response by type of tenancy

tenancy. The ■ bar represents assured shorthold tenants (AST), the ■ bar the freeholder and private leaseholder (FH/PLH), and the ■ bar the regulated tenants.

We can see that very few respondents think that a 6-month tenancy is too long.

Interestingly, a majority of AST and regulated tenants think that a 6-month tenancy is too short while a majority of the FH/PLH think that it is about right (Fig. 1c).

Figure 2

How long should the optimum minimum term be?

All respondents 12.85 months

AST 13 months

FH/PLH 8.88 months

Regulated 18.09 months

Response by type of tenancy

Ideal tenancy length

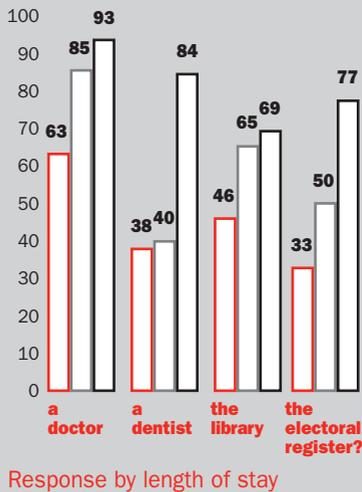
So if a 6-month tenancy is too short, how long should the minimum lease term be?

On average, all respondents feel that it should be 12.85 months. AST think that it should be 13 months, FH/PLH think that it should be 8.88 months and regulated tenants think that it should be 18.09 months (Fig. 2).

Registration with services

Following the questions about the length of tenure, we asked the respondents a number of further questions which show their level of community engagement.

Figure 3
Have you registered with ...



We first asked them whether they had registered with a doctor, a dentist, the library and on the electoral register.

Again we analysed the data according to how long the respondents have been in their current premises.

From this chart, we can see the longer the respondents have lived in their current premises, the greater number of them are registered with a doctor, dentist, the library and on the electoral register (Fig. 3).

Elections

Another factor which may show whether people are involved in the community is (if they were eligible to vote) whether they voted in the last local and general elections.

This chart clearly shows that over 60% of those who have lived in their current premises for more than 12 months used their vote, while less

KEY

Length of stay/ residency

- 6 months or less
- 7-12 months
- more than 12 months

Type of tenancy

- Assured shorthold tenants (AST)
- Freeholder and private leaseholder (FH/PLH)
- Regulated tenants

KEY

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- Regulated tenants

Figure 4a
Did you vote in ...



Figures 5a, 6a, 7a
Have you ...

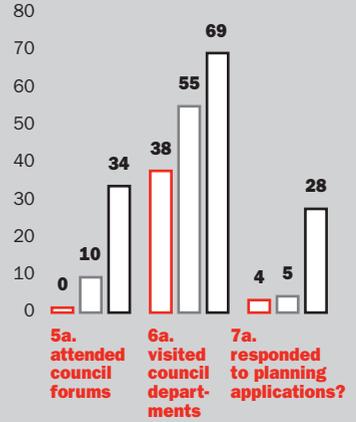
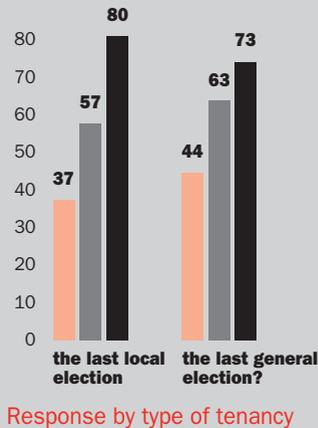


Figure 4b
Have you voted in ...



Using council services

If you engaged in your community, you might be interested in the things happening in the Council. We can see that the longer the respondents have lived in their current premises, the more they have attended council forums, visited council departments and responded to planning applications (Figs. 5a, 6a, 7a).

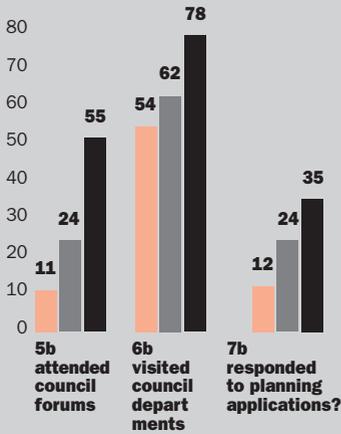
A similar relationship can be seen between AST, FH/PLH and regulated tenants. More regulated tenants, as compared to FH/PLH, and more FH/PLH in turn as compared to AST, have attended council forums, visited council departments and responded to planning applications (Figs. 5b, 6b, 7b).

than 20% of those in their current premises for less than 6-months voted in either election (Fig. 4a).

To look into this question from the type of tenancy, we can see that the % of respondents who voted in the two elections increases from AST to FH/PLH to Regulated (Fig. 4b).

Figures 5b, 6b, 7b

Have you ...



Response by type of tenancy

Community figures and organisations

Local councillors and MPs are representatives of the community. When we asked the respondents to name their councillors, no tenant who had lived in their current premises for 6 months or less was able to do so. And, when compared to FH/PLH, very few AST can name their councillors (Fig. 8).

Figure 8

Can you name your local councillors?

	Yes
6 months or less	0%
7-12 months	10%
More than 12 months	19%

Response by length of stay

	Yes
AST	7%
FH/PLH	15%
Regulated	31%

Response by type of tenancy

Figure 9

Can you name your MP?

	Yes
6 months or less	8%
7-12 months	30%
More than 12 months	65%

Response by length of stay

	Yes
AST	39%
FH/PLH	50%
Regulated	84%

Response by type of tenancy

Figure 10

Can you name a local organisation?

	Yes
6 months or less	29%
7-12 months	25%
More than 12 months	36%

Response by length of stay

	Yes
AST	25%
FH/PLH	44%
Regulated	47%

Response by type of tenancy

The same trend can be seen when the respondents were asked to name their MP and local organisations. The longer they have lived in their current premises and the more protected their tenancy, the more likely the respondents can name their MP and local organisations (Figs. 9 and 10).

KEY

Length of stay/residency

- 6 months or less
- 7-12 months
- more than 12 months

Type of tenancy

- Assured shorthold tenants (AST)
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- Regulated tenants

KEY

Length of stay/ residency

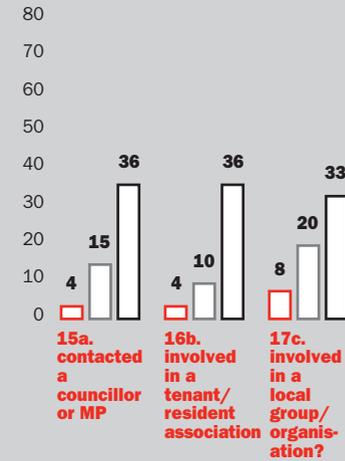
- 6 months or less
- 7-12 months
- more than 12 months

Type of tenancy

- Assured shorthold tenants (AST)
- Freeholder and private leaseholder (FH/PLH)
- Regulated tenants

Figures 11a, 12a, 13a

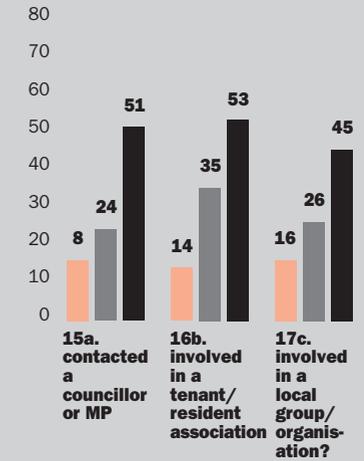
Have you / Are you ...



Response by length of stay

Figures 11b, 12b, 13b

Have you / Are you ...



Response by type of tenancy

Using the same grouping these two charts show if people have contacted their MPs, are involved in a tenant/residents association, or in a local organisation. People who have lived in their current premises for more than 12 months are more likely to have contacted a MP than those who have lived there for 7-12 months, 6 months or less (Figs. 11a, 12a, 13a).

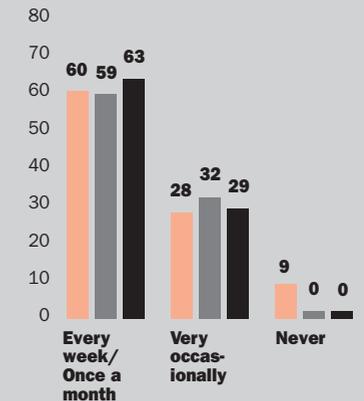
And regulated tenants are more likely to do these than FH/PLH and AST (Figs. 11b, 12b, 13b).

Local news

When asked if they read local newspapers, a similar percentage of Assured Shorthold tenants say they read it every week/once a month and very occasionally. However, it is only among AST that there are people who have *never* read a local newspaper (Fig. 14).

Figure 14

Do you read local newspapers?



Response by type of tenancy

Figure 15

Can you name your neighbours?

	Yes
6 months or less	29%
7-12 months	55%
More than 12 months	76%

Response by length of stay

	Yes
AST	60%
FH/PLH	76%
Regulated	75%

Response by type of tenancy

Figure 16

Do you talk to your neighbours?

	Yes
6 months or less	38%
7-12 months	50%
More than 12 months	59%

Response by length of stay

	Yes
AST	47%
FH/PLH	56%
Regulated	65%

Response by type of tenancy

Figure 17

Your sense of community ...
(rate from 1–10)

	Yes
6 months or less	4.1%
7-12 months	4.4%
More than 12 months	5.1%

Response by length of stay

	Yes
AST	4.6%
FH/PLH	4.9%
Regulated	5.5%

Response by type of tenancy

KEY

Length of stay/residency

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- 7-12 months
- more than 12 months

Type of tenancy

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- Regulated tenants

Contact with neighbours

Having contact with your neighbours is an element of community engagement. From these tables, we can see that the longer the people have stayed in their current premises and the more secure their tenancy, the more they talk to and can name their neighbours (Figs. 15 and 16).

Sense of community

Lastly, we asked respondents about their sense of community. Once again our results clearly show that a sense of community increases with both the longer term tenancy agreements and security of tenure (Fig. 17).

KEY

AST Assured shorthold tenants

AT Assured tenants

PLH Private Leaseholder

FH Freeholder

CT Council Tenant

DK Don't Know

Tenant Research Findings 2004

Qualitative Responses

CFPT invited comments on two issues: length of tenure, and its effect on community engagement.

Would you say a 6-month tenancy is:

- too short?
- about right?
- too long ?

Of the 170 respondents to this question, 61% thought 6 months was too short, 37% about right and only 2% thought it too long.

When asked what the optimum minimum term should be, the mean average for Assured Shorthold (AST) tenants was 13 months, for Regulated tenants it was 18.09 months, but for Freeholders (FH) and Private Leaseholders (PLH) it was only 8.88 months. However, that figure is still higher than the current 6-month minimum, with most respondents showing a preference for either six or 12 months.

The comments on, or reasoning behind the responses, were fairly similar regardless of type of tenure or residency, although there was a slight bias toward longer tenancies for those with the greatest security, e.g. Regulated tenants.

Of the 52 who responded to the prompt *Please comment ...* 10 said that it depended on the individual circumstances. This feeling was reiterated in a number of responses including:

... for me as a single person without ties it was fine, but if I had a family it would have been too insecure ...

PLH on six-month tenancy

... only viable for temporary use – e.g. students, otherwise not time to be a part of community ...

Regulated on six-month tenancy

... not good for sustainable communities but suits some people ...

CT on six-month tenancy

... depends on circumstance, too short for a permanent home ...

FH on 12-month tenancy

... it depends e.g. could be too long if no contract for work, if you have a family, too short ...

AST on six-month tenancy

... there should be different tenancies. One for people who want to move on (students), one for people who want to stay put for years.

Don't Know (DK)

... if it's a flat share you may not get on with the others, otherwise it is too short.

Licensee on six-month tenancy

Several responses, however, emphasised the lack of security inherent in current six-month tenancies:

... tenants need better protection and better information – agreements should include advice about where to take a complaint, or where to seek advice if asked to leave

AST

You can't make a flat or a house into a home if you are only going to be there for a few months

AST

... it takes six months to settle in a place and make it your home – moving often is extremely stressful and [sic] hard to find decent properties ...

Licensee

... flexibility desirable, downside eviction...

AST

... difficult as no tenancy is secure and where I live rents are ridiculously high, while a short-term tenancy gives freedom to the tenant to give notice as well as the landlord. It is insecure ...

AST

... no security is provided with 6-month contracts

AST

Others believed that tenancies should be longer:

... because need [sic] 12 months for university

AST

... need longer to establish yourself to build a sense of community, although London is difficult to do that unless living in an already close-knit community, e.g. through growing up with them

AST

... because [sic] want something more permanent

AST

... not enough time to settle in and get to know the area/ neighbourhood

Assured

... it takes weeks to find a property, arrange logistics of moving and expenses

PLH

... not practical to move twice a year

CT

... 12 months gives you time to think what to do

CT

... by the time unpacked/cleaned need to be looking for new home, plus permanently unsettled

Regulated

Two of those who argued for the flexibility of 6-month tenancies added caveats stating:

... some people require only short leases – 12 months may be too long a commitment. A breaking clause would suffice

AST

... if it gives the option to extend – doesn't hold you too long this way

PLH

KEY

AST Assured shorthold tenants

AT Assured tenants

PLH Private Leaseholder

FH Freeholder

CT Council Tenant

DK Don't Know

Tenant
Research
Findings
2004

KEY

AST Assured
shorthold
tenants

AT Assured
tenants

PLH Private
Leaseholder

FH Freeholder

CT Council
Tenant

DK Don't Know

Two out of the four who thought that six-month tenancies were too long gave no comment, but two did:

... tenants cannot guarantee ability to pay rent to the landlord for 6 months due to job hunting

Licensee

... any longer than six months is impractical. It is up to the landlord to find a tenant that's right for the property

AST

It is clear however, that the majority of respondents, irrespective of tenure or residency, at the very least believe that less than 6 months is too short a tenancy term.

Do you think length of tenancy/ residency affects your level of community engagement?

Of the 73 responses to this question 22 were from Assured Shorthold tenants.

11 respondents overall believed that length or security of tenure had little or no influence on community involvement; four of these were Council tenants who thought that personality or neighbours had a greater impact. Other comments included:

... length of tenancy does not affect sense of community

AST

... probably wouldn't make a difference if longer

AST

... some people are more outgoing and more likely to get involved regardless how long they have been in the community

Assured

That left 62 respondents believing that there is a clear relationship between length or security of tenure and community engagement.

... unless you have some security of accommodation it is difficult to get involved in activities, since it is likely to be meaningless if you have to move

Regulated

... it is difficult to become part of a community when you are moving every year

Licensee

... longer stay [sic] somewhere – more inclined to know people and make more of an effort

AST

... the longer you spend somewhere, the more you care about the community

Staff Accommodation

... too short a length – need at least a year to settle down anywhere

AST

... the longer you stay the more you can be bothered

AST

... I am inconvenienced by the lack of opportunities for contact with other residents, most of whom are transient

Regulated

Conclusion

To reiterate, our findings clearly establish a direct link between length and security of tenure and levels of community engagement, and also that the majority of our respondents believe that a six-month tenancy is too short.

Short-term tenancies, which create a high turnover of tenants, are detrimental to both individuals and communities – note the lament of the regulated tenant who can't get to know his neighbours because they are so transient.

CFPT's experience is that those who are most likely to be involved at a meaningful and proactive level in their communities and environs are those who have the greatest security, and who have lived in their homes longest: regulated or Rent Act protected tenants.

Being one of a mere handful of private tenant organisations left in the UK, is testament in itself to the difficulties in organising or involving tenants since the reduction in security for private tenants, as witnessed in a succession of Housing Acts.

Removing the last vestiges of security for assured shorthold type tenancies, whilst providing flexibility for the few who might want it, will merely serve to exacerbate those problems already inherent in short-term tenancies.

The cost to communities, society and the individual will be far greater than any perceived benefits to landlords and a fairly limited number of tenants wanting shorter terms.

With thanks to:



Lily Kwong

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- Bean & Cup Café
- Channel 22 Videos
- Eclipse Hair Salon
- Liberties Bar
- Crowndale Centre
- Swiss Cottage Library
- Chalk Farm Library
- Kentish Town Library
- Camden Housing Advice Service
- Shelter
- UCL

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*Community
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For further copies or a sample questionnaire contact:

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