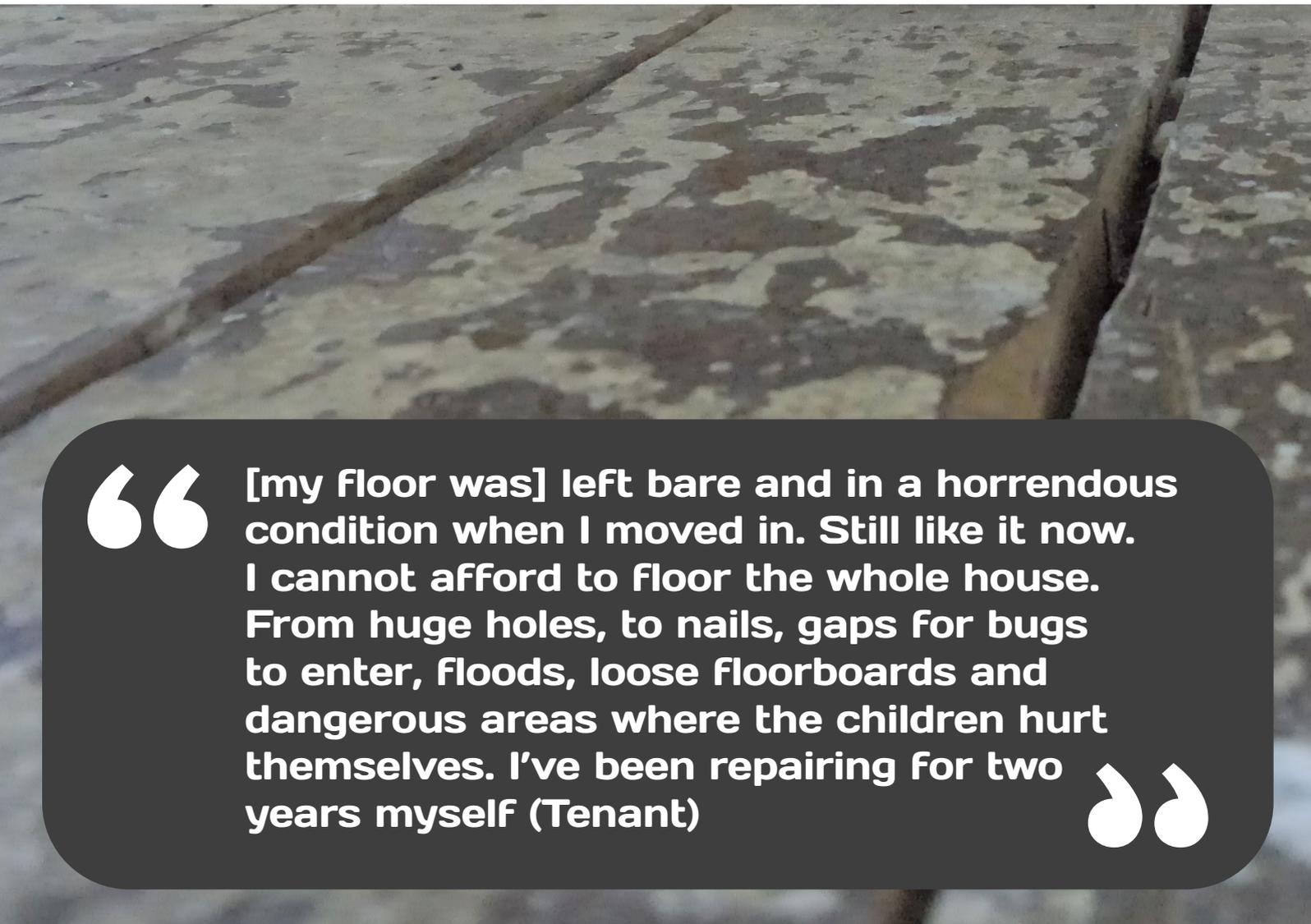




promoting equality in housing  
hybu cydraddoldeb ym maes tai



## Floored: Provision of appropriate flooring in social housing



“ [my floor was] left bare and in a horrendous condition when I moved in. Still like it now. I cannot afford to floor the whole house. From huge holes, to nails, gaps for bugs to enter, floods, loose floorboards and dangerous areas where the children hurt themselves. I've been repairing for two years myself (Tenant) ”

## Why we carried out this research?

I went to visit my mother who had recently moved into a social housing property and she had no flooring. Being extremely naive and new to the housing sector, I asked her when the landlord was coming to fit the carpet. She informed me that she would have to buy carpet as this wasn't provided to tenants by their landlord, unlike it is in the private rental sector. I couldn't believe that my mother, who had just lost her council house property she had purchased many years ago due to financial hardship was then expected to buy carpet. Being a new homeowner myself and having to buy flooring, I knew how expensive this was. I was able to get interest free credit for mine as I have a good credit rating, but this is not the case for my mother and I argue that this is not the case for many individuals living in social housing.

I felt extremely passionate about this and couldn't understand why carpet or flooring of any sort was not being provided. So, I began to delve deeper into the law to find that the Fitness for Human Habitation standards highlight that you only need flooring in the bathroom and toilet. I then began asking a group of Single Parents in Wales about their experiences of social housing and found so many upsetting realities. [Here is the blog I wrote as a result.](#)

The blog gained interest from the sector and it made me realise that this was huge issue that needed to be addressed. Tenants should not be expected to provide their own flooring when social housing by definition is to provide housing for people on low incomes. A low-income household will struggle significantly to purchase flooring.

I then went to volunteer for a small social enterprise in RCT called Greensteam Flooring. They provide recycled carpet tiles to people for a small cost. They get the tiles from huge corporate organisations so that they don't simply go into landfill, which links to the decarbonisation agenda. One day a month, they host a giveaway day where they give away the tiles that no one wants. This is the day I volunteered, and I couldn't believe my eyes. There were young families, older people, working people, non-working people etc; all queuing to get free carpet tiles. I began to ask them why they were there, [here is the blog I wrote as a result.](#)

As you can see in this blog, I went and spoke to various social housing providers to find out why they weren't providing flooring.

I worked with Tai Pawb due to the equality and social justice aspect. Together, we developed some questions to send out to landlords and tenants.

**(Elizabeth – TPAS Cymru)**



# Background



**Social housing tenants are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Wales.**

For many, being able to afford basic furnishings at the start of tenancy is extremely hard or simply unachievable. Despite this, it is common practice for social new let's not to provide them – with the most basic one being carpets or flooring. Consequently, some social tenants end up living without carpets or appropriate flooring for many years, which, in many cases, can have a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of adults and children.

The aim of this report is to consider the practice related to voids and flooring amongst social landlords in Wales as well as to explore the experiences of and impact on social tenants.

It is our hope that this report will serve as the basis for a constructive approach to working together to explore and improve the lettings practice in Wales.

## The Social Housing Penalty



**Evidence suggests that out of all tenures, social housing tenants are the least likely to be able to afford carpets or flooring. In social housing however, for many reasons, it is common practice for newly let homes not to have carpets or appropriate flooring.**

Social housing tenants or their families are at greater risk of deprivation. In 2016 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation <sup>1</sup> reported that 43% of social renters across the UK were in poverty, compared to 36% of private renters and 11% of owner-occupiers.

**Social housing tenants in Wales are at higher risk (compared to persons living in other forms of tenure) of:**

- **working in lower paid occupations**
- **being lone parents**
- **being economically inactive**

These are all factors linked to a risk of relative poverty. They are also less likely to have a car or van which could provide better access to employment opportunities. Social housing tenants struggle to heat their homes, with cost being cited as the main barrier and 9% of households living in social housing in Wales reported they were experiencing fuel poverty in 2018. The negative effects of fuel poverty include poorer physical and mental health, education attainment and economic well-being.

This means that social housing tenants are less likely to have a level of disposable income to purchase carpets or other suitable flooring when they move into social housing or move home. On average, a standard range carpet laid in an average four by five metre room (16m<sup>2</sup>) would cost approximately £267.

<sup>1</sup> All reports or data used in this report is are fully referenced in the full report. This Executive Summary presents an overview of findings.

# Methodology



## Two online surveys were carried out during 2019:

Housing Associations and Local Authorities were asked about their policies and practices related to flooring or carpeting when properties are let in a survey carried out by Tai Pawb. There were 41 responses covering 3 local authorities and 38 housing associations.

Tenants were asked about their experiences in an online survey carried out by TPAS Cymru, with 57 responses received.

None of the above samples are representative of either the social housing providers (lack of local authorities) or social tenants in Wales, nevertheless, the results present a valuable insight into this area.

## Key Findings - Tenants



- **The majority of tenants who responded to the survey did not have carpets or suitable flooring throughout their home (which might have been their reason for completing the survey).**
- **In the overwhelming majority of cases this was due to the cost of purchasing suitable flooring linked to low income/lack of available funds.**
- **Although over a third of tenants said there had been flooring in the property when they viewed their prospective home, in most cases this had been removed prior to occupation, despite requesting, in many cases, that it be left.**

## Impact on tenants

Most tenants said that living without flooring affected their wellbeing and mentioned problems such as:

- Issues such as lack of warmth, safety, sound
- Splinters
- Heat loss resulting in tenants being cold or in pain
- Risk to children crawling on concrete and hard wood floors
- Not feeling able to welcome visitors
- Health issues such as breathing difficulties and adverse effects for existing health conditions such as asthma
- Depression

## Effects on children

- A lack of suitable flooring or carpeting posed particular challenges for social housing tenants with children, with half saying it had affected their children's health and wellbeing.
- Most tenants with children had at least one child aged under 5, arguably at the highest risk of health and safety issues, particularly when playing on hard concrete floors or wooden flooring with splinters
- Tenants said that not having suitable flooring resulted in: Physical, mental or psychological affects
- Not being able to play on the floor
- Adults and children not feeling able to invite friends to visit, increasing isolation and loneliness.

# Key Findings – Landlords



- **Social housing rarely has any flooring or carpeting fitted when new tenants take up occupation, other than non-slip flooring in kitchens and bathrooms which is part of Welsh Housing Quality standards.**
- **Few social housing providers offer flooring to tenants as standard practice unless a need is identified by an occupational therapy assessment or another process**
- **The majority of social housing providers remove any flooring or carpets left by the previous occupant in a void property due to it being deemed unsafe. This is because it poses a trip hazard or may harbour other health risks such as needles or dirty pets.**
- **A minority of social housing providers leave existing flooring if its removal is not deemed necessary for health and safety or hygiene reasons and the new tenant requests it be retained. In such cases the flooring would be gifted to the new tenant. There could be a range of benefits for social housing providers that leave flooring that is in a suitable condition for new tenants including a higher void specification, shorter void periods, tenants being more likely to stay longer, living happier and healthier lives and possible decreasing rent arrears.**
- **Some social landlords work with organisations such as Greenstream Flooring CIC to help tenants secure safe and free or affordable flooring.**
- **Social housing providers should conduct an analysis and further consider the effect on tenants of living without the basic warmth and insulation of appropriate flooring.**

## Recommendations



1. Social housing providers should consider using their community funds or own budget to provide grants to tenants who cannot afford suitable flooring or carpets. Particularly those at higher risk of fuel poverty such as pensioners, economically inactive or unemployed, families with young children or disabled persons or tenants in receipt of means tested benefits.
2. Social housing providers should engage with their tenants and look to provide new tenants with a disclaimer form that provides the option of retaining former flooring and furniture when relevant. This can be added to the supplementary terms of the new Renting Homes (Wales) Act, 2016 contracts.
3. Social housing providers in Wales have a unique opportunity to support social enterprise and low-income tenants in Wales by actively choosing to use low cost, otherwise landfilled re-used/ second life carpet from organisations such as Welsh-base social enterprise Greenstream Flooring CIC.
4. Welsh Government should look to review Welsh Housing Quality Survey (WHQS) standards to include provision of appropriate flooring as per this report.
5. Welsh Government should look to review the terms of the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) and or other crisis funds, to include provision of appropriate flooring as per this report.
6. Social housing providers together with Welsh Government should consider introducing a national void standard or void principles to include appropriate flooring. The standard should provide tenants with a choice of keeping previous carpet/floor.
7. As a starting point – homes for those in most need/vulnerable – for example under Housing First schemes, should include carpets and/or appropriate flooring

8. Social housing providers to consider how best practice in providing flooring in all new lets could be replicated across Wales
9. Social housing providers should consider how they can move towards providing carpets/appropriate flooring in all new lets going forward, following the example of some housing associations in Wales.
10. Housing providers should work closely with TPAS Cymru, Tai Pawb, Welsh Government, tenants' and other relevant stakeholders to take forward the recommendations

**11. Full report [here](#)**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Greenstream CIC for their continuous inspiration, dedication and support through the process of gathering evidence and writing this report.

We are extremely grateful to all tenants and landlords who completed their surveys and shared broader information with us. As well as Community Housing Cymru and The Bevan Foundation for their support and assistance.

We would also like to thank Karen Wontner who supported us in pulling the report together and who donated her fees to **Habitat for Humanity**, a not for profit housing organisation working to empower people in the world's poorest communities to overcome the chronic lack of decent housing.



For further information or discussions on how we can support your organisation, please contact Elizabeth Taylor: Project Lead – TPAS Cymru

