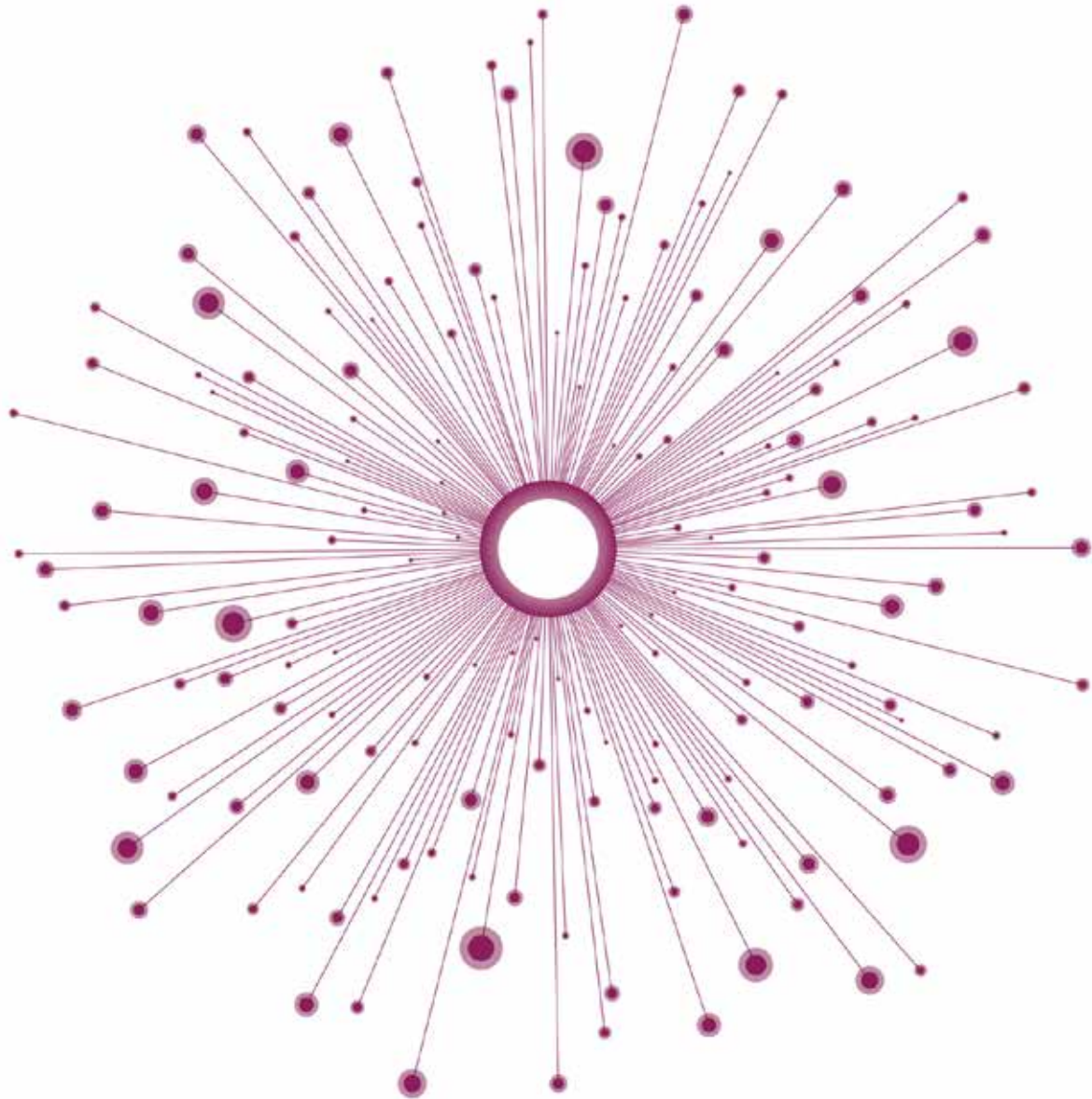


Blackpool Council: Selective Licensing Report

January 2024



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1. Executive Summary

The aim of the consultation was to gather feedback from tenants, landlords and letting agents, homeowners, businesses and community organisations, on the proposal to introduce a selective licensing scheme to cover eight of Blackpool's most deprived wards, namely Warbreck, Talbot, Brunswick, Claremont, Bloomfield, Tyldesley, Victoria and Waterloo on the criteria of current poor housing conditions and deprivation. This area would cover around 11,000 private rented properties, which accounts for around 70% of Blackpool's private rented sector.

A total of **270+** responses were received to this survey from tenants, landlords, homeowners, businesses and community organisations, business owners, landlords and letting agents in the area and also others who had another connection to Blackpool.

Two further lengthy submissions were emailed to the Infusion email inbox and will be attached to the report as separate items.

The survey went 'live' week commencing 30th October 2023 and closed on the week ending 7th January 2024, running for a total of ten weeks.

2. Key findings

270+ respondents contributed 359 comments to the survey

Key themes are as follows:

- Concern with perceived rent increases for tenants
- Concern with increased costs for landlords
- Concern centred on the cost of living crisis
- Feelings of unfairness towards 'good' landlords
- Potential of impact on rental availability and homelessness
- Lack of evidence that the scheme would be effective
- EPC ratings for older properties
- Disagreement with offering extra support
- This area is already sufficiently covered by existing and incoming legislation
- Concerns around tenant accountability & responsibilities
- Tenant damage

3. Background

Selective licensing focuses on the management of private rented properties within a designated area. A designation can be made if an area is suffering from one or more of the following: low demand for housing, poor property condition, high levels of anti-social behaviour, migration, deprivation or crime. The key aim is to improve landlords' management of properties and in doing so, help regenerate the area. Landlords operating in selective licensing areas are required to obtain a licence for each house. Those who let their property without a licence whilst a scheme is in force are committing a criminal offence with severe penalties.

Selective licensing is a key component of the council's approach to address issues commonly occurring as a result of poor quality privately rented accommodation. This approach can improve the quality of management in privately rented homes and decrease levels of deprivation in the named wards, which are amongst the most deprived in England, and help improve the quality of life for local residents. It is consistent with the council's overall Housing Strategy and aligns with the Blackpool Council Plan. It is important that the council utilises all tools and powers available to them in tackling some of the worst housing conditions in some of the most deprived areas of England.

The belief is that selective licensing would be beneficial in identifying private rented properties and ensuring minimum standards. It would allow landlords who operate illegally to be identified and enable their properties to be targeted for inspection, which should help to improve conditions. It would provide a level playing field for legitimate landlords, reduce the risk of tenant exploitation and provide clear guidance for landlords on the expected standards for property conditions and management. It also clarifies ownership and responsibility, which the Council believes should lead to simpler, more effective enforcement.

The Council has considered several other courses of action to address the issues, but does not believe that they would be as effective in tackling deprivation and property conditions. Blackpool Council has designated previous schemes in the Central, South Beach and Claremont areas. Whilst area-based improvements were noticed, these were only short-term and it was evident that these improvements would not be sustained without further licensing over a longer period of time and this is an opportunity to take a more comprehensive approach.

The inspection programme in Claremont (2014-2019) led to thousands of property condition issues being identified and addressed. In Claremont **1,157** licences were issued, and **705** schedules of work were distributed. This equates to **61% of properties that required significant improvement** works in relation to poor property condition. The large majority of these would not have been identified and addressed without a licensing scheme. The landlords of **10** properties were prosecuted for failure to licence. In the Central area of Blackpool, which currently has a selective licensing scheme in place, we have been running a government funded Decent Homes Pilot, and we are finding that over **60%** of properties

inspected contains at least one serious defect, and on many occasions more than one serious defect.

4. Methodology

The consultation survey went 'live' week commencing 30th October 2023 and closed on the week ending 7th January 2024, running for a total of ten weeks.

Information regarding the consultation was shared on Blackpool Council's social media pages having a reach of over 44,000, all the Decent Homes Officers had the link to the consultation on their email signatures, and paper copies with reply-paid envelopes were left at libraries, front facing council offices and at the offices of Positive Steps, a free council service to help get unemployed people back into work. A short piece explaining selective licensing, including an access link, was included in the YourBlackpool magazine, which is distributed to over 71,000 households across Blackpool and repeated again in the e-version. 1,300 paper copies with reply-paid envelopes, were hand delivered to randomly selected rental houses and flats, and businesses/organisations within the designated 8 wards. Two separate pieces were also published in the Blackpool Gazette newspaper.

A total of 270+ responses were received through an open access online survey from tenants, residents, business owners, landlords and letting agents in the area and also others who had another connection to Blackpool.

The numbers in this report have been rounded to one decimal place. As a result some totals will not equal to 100%. Respondents to the survey were given the choice whether or not to answer each question, as a result the base numbers to each question may not equal the total response rate to the survey.

5. Results

5.1 Respondent Profile

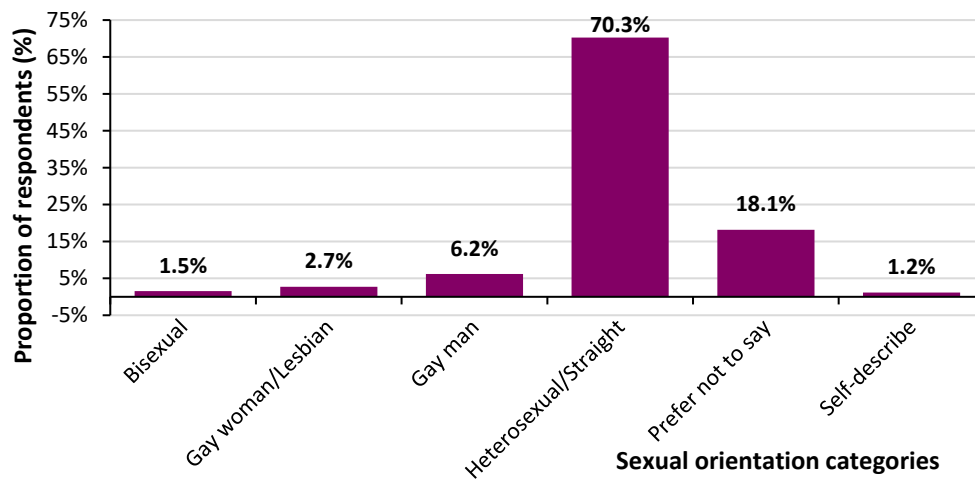
Respondents were asked a series of demographic questions which enabled us to ensure we were capturing responses from a broad cross-section of the community.

5.1.1 What best describes your gender? [Q14 on survey] (Base = 263)

44.9% (118) of responses were from male respondents. 42.2% (111) were from female respondents and 3 respondents were stated they were non-binary with 1 respondent preferring to self-describe. 30 respondents preferred not to say.

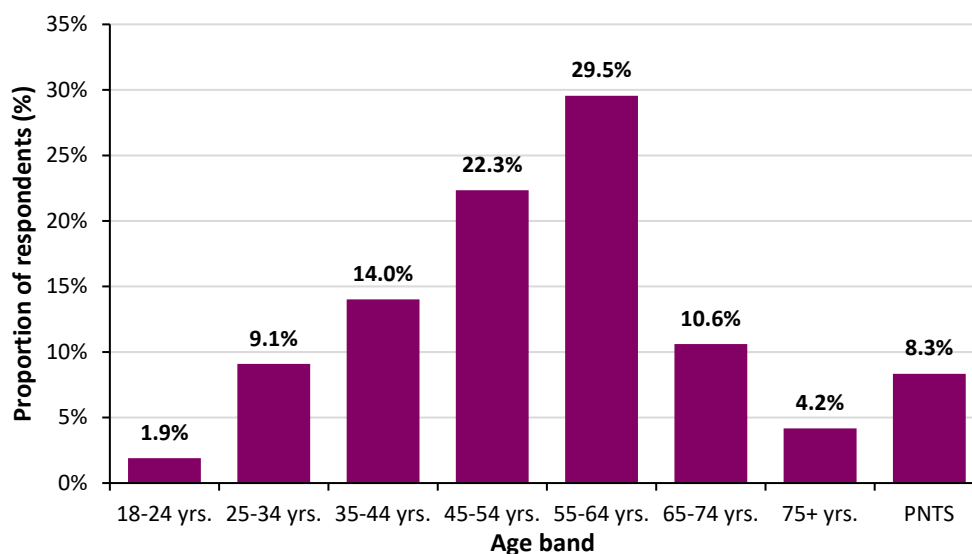
5.1.2 What best describes your sexual orientation? [Q15 on survey] (Base = 259)

The full responses are shown in the following chart.



5.1.3 Which age group do you belong to? [Q16 on survey] (Base = 264)

The full responses are shown in the following chart.



5.1.4 Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? [Q17 on survey] (Base = 260)

70.8% (184) of respondents reported having no health problem or disability which has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months, whilst **29.2%** (76) of respondents reported having a health problem or disability which has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months.

The following table shows the breakdown of responses by disability status.

Disability	No of responses	% of responses
No disability	184	70.8%
Yes, limited a lot by disability	37	14.2%
Yes, limited a little by disability	39	15%
Total	260	100%

5.1.5 What is your ethnic origin? [Q18 on survey] (Base = 259)

The majority of respondents – (**86.1%**) – reported their ethnicity as White, which includes English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British Irish Gypsy or Irish Traveller, and any other White background.

The following table shows the breakdown of responses by ethnicity.

Ethnicity	No of responses	% of responses
White	223	86.1%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	7	2.7%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1	0.4%
Asian/Asian British	1	0.4%
Other ethnic group	2	0.8%
Prefer not to say	25	9.7%
Total	259	100%

6. Main Survey Results

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council’s proposal to introduce selective licensing across the eight named wards in Blackpool? [Q2 on survey] (Base = 267)

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the council’s proposal to introduce selective licensing across the eight named wards in Blackpool. **54.3%** (145) of respondents said they ‘strongly agreed or tended to agree’ with council’s proposal to introduce selective licensing, **3.7%** (10) of respondents said they ‘neither agreed or disagreed’ and **42%** (112) of respondents said they ‘strongly disagreed or tended to disagree’ with the council’s proposal to introduce selective licensing.

Response	No of responses (All)	% of responses (All)	Responses from tenants	Responses from landlords/ agents	Responses from 3 rd sector/ charities
Strongly agree	126	47.2%	49.3%	11.5%	85.7%
Tend to agree	19	7.1%	11.9%	7.3%	-
Neither agree nor disagree	10	3.7%	3%	4.2%	-
Tend to disagree	13	4.9%	6%	4.2%	-
Strongly disagree	99	37.1%	29.9% ¹	72.9%	14.3%
Total	267	100%	100%	100%	100%

¹ When exploring responses from these respondents an overwhelming theme was the potential raising of rents if selective licensing was introduced, however the content and tone of some of the comments contained more uniformity than would be expected. This comment is based on my experience of conducting consultations and surveys across many years.

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to provide comments if they disagreed with the proposals, or if they had alternative ideas.

There were 101 comments in response to the above question, which have been categorised and are listed in the table below. Many comments covered more than one topic.

Response categories	No of topic comments
Increased rents and passed on costs to tenants	44
Additional costs to landlords	24
Reduced rental properties and increase homelessness	18
Failure of previous selective licensing schemes	15
Alternative monitoring systems/ enforcement	12
Use existing legislation and statutory powers rather than Selective Licensing	15
Individual landlord licensing only	8
Impact of social issues that has led to deprivation of areas	6
Tenant accountability/ responsibilities	6
Additional costs to landlords & easy way for council to increase its income	6
Selective licensing of all areas (not just those proposed)	5
Selective licensing not required	4
Less viable to invest/ cost of living issues	3
Unfair to 'good' landlords	3
Direct Housing Benefit payments to landlords	3
Council resources (required) to manage selective licensing system and data	2
Current laws/ legislation which prevents repeat selective licensing	2
Other	9
Total	185

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council's proposal to offer discounts to landlords? [Q4 on survey] (Base = 265)

61.5% (163) of respondents said they 'strongly agreed or tended to agree' with council's proposal to offer discounts to landlords, **12.1%** (32) of respondents said they 'neither agreed or disagreed' and **21.8%** (58) of respondents said they 'strongly disagreed or tended to disagree' with the council's proposal to offer discounts to landlords. Twelve respondents responded with 'don't know/not sure'.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the suggested discount categories? [Q5 on survey] (Base = 259)

49.4% (128) of respondents said they 'strongly agreed or tended to agree' with the suggested discount categories, **18.5%** (48) of respondents said they 'neither agreed or disagreed' and

25.8% (67) of respondents said they ‘strongly disagreed or tended to disagree’ with the suggested discount categories. Sixteen respondents responded with ‘don’t know/not sure’.

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to provide comments if they disagreed with either of the two proposals above, or if they had alternative ideas.

There were 93 comments in response to the above question, which have been categorised and are listed in the table below. Many comments covered more than one topic.

Response categories	No of topic comments
Selective licensing is not required	27
Increased rents and passed on costs to tenants	16
Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings/ cost of improving EPC for older properties	16
Increase the discounts	13
More enforcement against 'rogue' landlords	10
Additional costs to landlords/ easy way for council to increase its income	9
Selective licensing fees are too high	7
No discounts should be available	6
Alternative monitoring systems/ enforcement	5
Option of instalment payments	3
Reduced rental properties and increase homelessness	3
Total	115

6.1 Extra support proposal

“The eight named ward areas contain some of most vulnerable residents across Blackpool, and landlords don’t always have the skills or knowledge to manage issues related to this cohort, or know where to go for help for their tenants, and so we are proposing to use a small proportion of the fees on support to tenants in these areas.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council’s proposal to fund additional support to vulnerable tenants in the eight named wards? [Q7 on survey] (Base = 265)

52.8% (140) of respondents said they ‘strongly agreed or tended to agree’ with the council’s proposal to fund additional support to vulnerable tenants in the eight named wards, **11.7%** (31) of respondents said they ‘neither agreed or disagreed’ and **30.9%** (82) of respondents said they ‘strongly disagreed or tended to disagree’ with the council’s proposal to fund additional support to vulnerable tenants in the eight named wards. Twelve respondents responded with ‘don’t know/not sure’.

There were 105 comments in response to the above question, which have been categorised and are listed in the table below. Many comments covered more than one topic.

Response categories	No of topic comments
Do not agree with extra support/ not required	30
Enough support already in place	17
Agree with extra support for the vulnerable	15
Council/ government's responsibility to support cost of support services	14
Support for landlords working with probation services/ other specialist services when housing vulnerable residents	9
Increased rents and passed on costs to tenants	6
Neglect to properties by tenants	5
Determining if support is required	3
Out of area placements/ residents that have relocated to Blackpool	2
Rent Cap	2
Stricter rules for landlords working with probation services/ other specialist services when housing vulnerable residents	2
Other	11
Total	116

To

what extent do you agree or disagree with the council's proposed selective licensing conditions? [Q9 on survey] **(Base = 263)**

54% (142) of respondents said they 'agreed' with all or most of the conditions with regard to the council's proposed selective licensing conditions, **14.4%** (38) of respondents said they 'agreed' with some of the conditions and **22.1%** (58) of respondents said they 'disagreed' with the conditions. Seventeen respondents responded by choosing the option 'No opinion/not relevant'.

Please tell us which of the conditions you do not agree with and why you do not agree with them, providing examples where possible. [Q10 on survey]

There were 80 comments in response to the above question, which have been categorised and are listed in the table below. Many comments covered more than one topic.

Response categories	No of topic comments
Already covered by existing/incoming legislation	19
Tenant accountability & responsibilities/ tenant damage	11
Don't agree with the scheme or any of the conditions	9
Reduced rental properties and increase homelessness	8
Drugs/ anti-social behaviour/ social issues	8
Additional costs to landlords/ easy way for council to increase its income	6
More enforcement against 'rogue' landlords	5
Scheme does not work/ does not support good landlords	5
Increased rents and passed on costs to tenants	4
Age of the properties that require work/ impact of the coastal environment on properties	3
Selective licensing should be compulsory/ a requirement	3
Support for landlords dealing with difficult tenants	3
Blackpool Standards (space, certifications, management & property conditions)	3
My landlord already meets standards/ penalising of responsible landlords	2
EPC RATINGS: older properties unable to meet A-C rating (don't qualify for discount)	2
Other	4
Total	95

6.2 Your Area

Respondents were asked to what extent they believed the following to be a problem in the area in which they lived? Respondents were asked not to offer a response to this question if they did not live in the area. [Q11 on survey]

Responses from 'all tenants' were broadly the same percentages as the responses from 'all respondents' as expected. However responses from a small section of respondents, as highlighted earlier in the report, were significantly different and did not follow the expected pattern.

Crime (Base=215) 68% of all respondents said they thought crime was a 'very big or fairly big problem' in their area. In comparison 47.4% of tenants who 'strongly disagreed' with the introduction of the selective licensing scheme said they thought crime was a 'very big or fairly big problem'.

Deprivation (Base=213) 70.4% of all respondents said they thought deprivation was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’ in their area. In comparison 43.8% of tenants who ‘strongly disagreed’ with the introduction of the selective licensing scheme said they thought deprivation was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’.

Property (Base=211) 70.4% of all respondents said they thought property was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’ in their area. In comparison 43.8% of tenants who ‘strongly disagreed’ with the introduction of the selective licensing scheme said they thought property was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’.

Anti-social behaviour (Base=211) 67.7% of all respondents said they thought anti-social behaviour was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’ in their area. In comparison 50% of tenants who ‘strongly disagreed’ with the introduction of the selective licensing scheme said they thought anti-social behaviour was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’.

Homelessness and rough sleeping (Base=208) 49.1% of all respondents said they thought homelessness and rough sleeping was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’ in their area. In comparison 50% of tenants who ‘strongly disagreed’ with the introduction of the selective licensing scheme said they thought homelessness and rough sleeping was a ‘very big or fairly big problem’.

A further 54 comments were submitted which focussed on concerns about social issues including crimes, drugs, anti-social behaviour and shared experiences about the broader look and feel of the wards in which they lived and worked.

Respondents were asked how many properties they currently rented out? [Q13 on survey] (Base = 96)

How many properties do you rent out	% of responses
0-5 properties	62
6-10 properties	15
11-20 properties	5
21 -50 properties	7
51+ properties	7
Total	96

Respondents were asked to provide their home postcode? Q19 on survey] (Base = 208)

The numbers in brackets are postcodes of tenants who responded.

Postcode	No. of responses	% of responses
FY1	105 (37)	51%
FY2	19 (3)	9.2%
FY3	26 (12)	12.6%
FY4	28 (6)	13.6%
FY5	12	5.8%
FY6	4	2%
Outside of this area	12 (1)	5.8%
Total	206 (59)	100%