

COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 8 th March 2023
Report Subject	Results of the Tenants Survey and Developing our Customer Involvement Strategy
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing & Regeneration
Report Author	Chief Officer (Housing and Communities)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flintshire County Council's Housing Service is responsible for over 7,300 homes across the county comprising general needs and sheltered accommodation. To support the management of those homes it is important to us that our customers are given the opportunity to share their experiences of those services.

In 2022 a full census survey of all our tenants was undertaken to gauge their current opinions across the range of services Housing provide. This included asking them to rate their neighbourhood, the safety of their homes, our repairs and maintenance service, how they can get involved and have their say to digital use.

The survey received a 25% response rate. The key themes to note:

- 74% of respondents were satisfied with overall service.
- General perception that Housing staff are friendly and approachable.
- High levels of pride in their homes, slightly lower for their neighbourhoods.
- Lower satisfaction rates with repairs and maintenance and being listened to and getting involved.

The former Tenant Engagement Strategy expired in 2021 and we have been operating an interim strategy whilst the new draft strategy was being developed and the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) was concluded. This was to ensure the results of the STAR survey informed the development of a new strategy and it was aligned with the priorities and feedback from tenants

The draft strategy sets out our commitment to tenant engagement and highlights the work needed to improve our current position. Further work will be required to develop, finalise, and agree the full Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Community Housing & Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the report and provide comments on both the results of the STAR survey and the draft strategy aim and objectives.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE SURVEY RESULTS AND OUR DRAFT STRATEGY
1.01	Flintshire County Council's Housing Service is responsible for approximately 7300 homes across the county comprising general needs and sheltered accommodation. To support the management of those homes it is important our customers are given the opportunity to share their experiences of those services.
1.02	STAR Survey – Background A Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) was undertaken in 2022 to gauge the view of our tenants on the services provided to them by Housing. It is vital to capture feedback from our tenants on issues that are important to them. We need to know and understand what tenants think of our services so we can use the results to identify priorities and to inform service improvements. The data will also allow us to benchmark against other social landlords and track our improvements moving forward. It is good practice undertake some form of survey every 2 years and there is a requirement to provide figures for certain mandatory questions to Welsh Government.
1.03	How we did it – The approach Strategic Research and Insight were appointed to undertake the field work. A full census survey was conducted with an aim to make it as accessible as possible for our tenants. The survey was available for completion by our tenants in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online (accessed via either a web site address or a QR code on the postcode sent out to all).• Paper version with freepost return envelope was sent to all tenants• Via targeted telephone interviews. As it had been some time since our last survey a comprehensive questionnaire was developed which included the Welsh Government mandatory questions. In addition, it covered a whole range of services to tenants including questions on digital use.
1.04	What we were told – the results Our completion rate was a very respectable 25% which is an above average return rate for such surveys.

	<p>The headline results were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% satisfied with overall service • 73% agree they trust Flintshire County Council • 81% satisfied with the safety and security of their homes • 80% satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live • 60% satisfied with repairs and maintenance • Under 40% satisfied with the areas of opportunities to participate in decision making, having a say in how services are managed and opportunities to make views known • ¾ of respondents use the internet (mostly everyday) which is slightly lower than the national average • Key reasons for lack of pride in their neighbourhood were anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues and repairs and maintenance • Key problems identified in neighbourhoods were car parking issues, rubbish and litter and dog fouling • Key issues with repairs and maintenance were around communication such as being told when workers would call, being able to make an appointment and time taken before work starts <p>Overall our scores in most areas are average compared to other Local Authorities across Wales and we score well for trust, safety and security of homes and neighbourhoods. The areas where the results were below average when compared with other local areas are repairs and maintenance and tenant engagement.</p> <p>Perception of services are linked to age and property type with younger tenants (those between 35 - 44 particularly) and those in general needs properties being consistently less satisfied than older tenants and those in sheltered accommodation.</p> <p>The response rate demonstrates that tenants are keen and comfortable engaging with us and telling us what they think. Therefore more opportunities need to be provided to elicit tenant feedback, and this feedback needs to be listened to and responded to as appropriate.</p>
1.05	<p>Next Steps</p> <p>The feedback provided to us through this extensive piece of work will be used to improve what we do and make changes in our services. This will ensure future work will be informed by our tenants and focus on the areas where feedback indicates we need to improve.</p> <p>The first major piece of work to be informed by the survey results will be the development of an updated Customer Involvement Strategy.</p>
1.06	<p>Customer Involvement Strategy – Background</p> <p>The Housing Wales Act (2014) made it a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation. All landlords and local authorities must have a tenant participation strategy with the long-term goal of achieving continuous improvements in landlords performance in supporting and enabling tenants to participate</p>

	<p>The former Tenant Engagement Strategy expired in 2021 and we have been operating an interim strategy whilst the new draft strategy was being developed and the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) was concluded. This was to ensure the results of the STAR survey informed the development of a new strategy and it was aligned with the priorities and feedback from tenants</p>
1.07	<p>Using the survey results to inform our work</p> <p>The aim is to use the results of the STAR survey alongside working directly with our tenants to develop our Customer Involvement Strategy and associated action plan moving forward.</p> <p>The draft strategy will outline our intentions to develop and improve customer involvement throughout the Housing Service. It is acknowledged that much more can be done to involve and engage with our tenants and leaseholders and it is now timely to move forward with these plans</p>
1.08	<p>Our approach to developing our full strategy</p> <p>The overall aim of our Customer Involvement Strategy is to ensure there are robust involvement opportunities, developed with our tenants, to ensure we are providing a quality housing service that meets their needs and the needs of the community.</p> <p>We wish to embrace new ways of working, the opportunities presented by increased use of digital technologies and explore new methods of engagement; understanding and recognising a need to provide a number of opportunities and methods for tenants to engage if services are truly going to reflect the views of our diverse base of tenants. However we need to ensure that our ideas meet the expectations and needs of our tenants.</p> <p>The next phase will involve further consultation with our tenants, testing with them our understanding of what they have told us in the survey, what they would like to see in the Customer Involvement Strategy and how they would like to be engaged and informed in future by their Housing service.</p> <p>In order to achieve this we aim to establish a focus group of tenants to work with us on the development of the strategy. The group will act as a sounding board and work closely with our Customer Involvement Officer to develop ideas into a full strategy and delivery plan. Consultation and engagement will also be undertaken with our wider body of tenants through a series of drop-in sessions across our community rooms and attending Tenants and Residents Association meetings.</p> <p>This information will all inform our final strategy and associated action plan, developing clear SMART actions and outlining the desired outcomes for customer involvement.</p>
1.09	<p>Who we will involve</p> <p>It is our intention to work closely with a wide range of our tenants across the County to develop our customer involvement plans. This is in addition to</p>

	<p>going out and speaking to groups such as our Tenants Federation and local resident's associations in order to formulate our plans longer term.</p> <p>We will engage with staff across the Housing Service to generate ideas on how they think better customer involvement can improve service provision and drive positive change.</p> <p>We also value the opinions of our Elected Members, partner organisations and internal colleagues and we are committed to working with them, where appropriate, to strive for our tenants to be more engaged in services and for our communities to be sustainable and vibrant places to live.</p>
1.10	<p>The proposed aim of the Customer Involvement Strategy is:</p> <p>'To ensure we have in place robust involvement opportunities, developed with our tenants, to ensure we are providing a quality housing service that meets their needs and the needs of the community'.</p>
1.11	<p>The proposed objectives to meet this aim are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and provide a range of involvement opportunities for our tenants • Ensure our tenants are at the heart of driving service improvements and can work with us to shape our services • Improve and extend communication methods to ensure tenants are informed and engaged • Improve skills and confidence of our tenants so they feel able to participate in a meaningful way that meets their needs • Increase participation of our tenants in issues affecting their local community to see positive changes to our estates and communities. <p>Following feedback on the proposed aim and objectives from Elected Members it is intended that these are used to frame our future consultation activity and development of the delivery plan.</p>
1.12	<p>The strategy will outline how we plan to measure progress. This will include analysis of future tenant surveys which will be undertaken on a bi-annual basis as per good practice.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	This is being drafted and will remain live throughout the consultation period.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>This report presents the key findings of the Tenants and Residents Survey (STAR).</p> <p>Within this report are the proposed aim and objectives of the Customer Involvement Strategy for comment. These will inform a series of consultation exercises involving our tenants and other partners and continue throughout the entire strategy development process to ensure it is a document that meets everyone's needs.</p> <p>A timetable for consultation through to final draft for adoption is currently being drafted.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	<p>Appendix 1 – Final Report Flintshire STAR 2022</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Survey Presentation</p>

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICERS DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officers: Jen Griffiths, Service Manager, Housing Welfare and Communities Telephone: 01352 702929</p> <p>E-mail: Jen.griffiths@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>STAR – Survey of Tenants and Residents is a recognised best practice customer satisfaction framework for the UK housing sector developed by Housemark. The survey includes 12 mandatory questions as requested by Welsh Government.</p>
8.02	<p>Tenants Federation - The Flintshire Federation of Tenant and Resident Groups is an umbrella organisation for groups of tenant and resident associations and local panels coming together to form an area or landlord-wide federation with written terms of reference. Individual tenants can also join. The Federation meet each month to discuss topical issues, engage in consultation regarding budget setting, priorities for change and policy issues. The group also provides support for each of the member groups.</p>

	<p>The Federation is supported by Housing services and receives an annual grant to assist with day to day running costs and training.</p>
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