

## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **WEDNESDAY, 8 JANUARY 2014**

**REPORT BY:** **DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**SUBJECT:** **TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS AND ACTION PLAN**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To report on the results of the independent tenant satisfaction survey and to present proposals for improvement to further raise satisfaction levels to achieve top quartile outcomes

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 A STAR survey (Survey of Tenants and Residents) is a voluntary survey for use by social housing providers. It provides social housing landlords with the means of benchmarking satisfaction results in relation to the services provided for customers. STAR was launched in July 2011 and has been endorsed by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).

2.02 The predecessor to STAR was STATUS, a survey which was carried out by Flintshire County Council in 2010. After English government departments and regulators signalled the ending of requirements to conduct the former standard (the STATUS survey), HouseMark received requests from its members to devise a standardised approach to measuring satisfaction that could replace STATUS on a voluntary, self-regulatory basis, and therefore STAR was developed.

2.03 Housemark is a national benchmarking organisation with circa 900 housing organisations as members, Flintshire County Council has recently joined and is starting to benchmark its performance with other similar landlords.

2.04 In order to be statistically valid, and allow us to have confidence in the results of the STAR survey, it was necessary to have a minimum of 550 responses

2.05 The Customer Involvement Strategy Group also wanted to maximise the opportunity of the survey, by having statistically relevant information across the three housing management areas of North, South and East, so that comparisons could be drawn. This information will be utilised to ensure consistent performance and

provide evidence as to whether the current housing management areas remain fit for purpose. Therefore a larger sample size of 3,630 addresses were randomly selected, 1,210 from each area.

2.06 A total of 1410 surveys were returned which constituted a 39% response rate overall. This means that the results can be said to be representative of customer views.

2.07 The survey was a postal survey and was sent out to tenants in June 2013. Reminders were sent out to each address 3 weeks later. The questionnaire was designed as a bilingual booklet in English and Welsh. None were returned using the Welsh part.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 The Survey asked a number of key questions which the Council has been able to benchmark with other organisations through Housemark's Benchmarking Groups.

3.02 Additional 'question sets' were also asked to provide the Council with more detailed information on customer views, and to aid service planning and improvements.

3.03 A copy of the full report of the STAR survey is annexed to this paper, however a summary of the main findings are as follows:

| <b>Core Question asked on survey</b>                   | <b>2010</b> | <b>2013</b> | <b>Welsh Housing Association comparison (Median quartile)</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|---|
| Satisfied with the housing service                     | 74%         | 81%         | 85%   |
| Satisfied with their neighbourhood                     | 86%         | 88%         | 83%   |
| Satisfied with the quality of your home                | 80%         | 83%         | 83%   |
| Feel rent provides value for money                     | 81%         | 84%         | 78%   |
| Satisfied with repairs and maintenance                 | 67%         | 71%         | 76%   |
| Satisfied that we listen to your views and act on them | 65%         | 63%         | 72%   |

3.04 81% of surveyed customers said that taking everything into account they were happy with Flintshire County Council's Housing Service. This is an increase since 2010 at which time 74% reported that they were happy with the service.

3.05 90% of respondents said that they felt safe in their homes and 88%

were happy with their neighbourhoods. This was consistent across the county with little difference in results across the three operating areas of North, South and East. Notably, 95% of respondents who were aged over 65 reported feeling safe in their home.

3.06 When asked about issues in their neighbourhoods, respondents identified issues such as dog fouling, car parking and litter as the main causes of concern. 81% said that in the last three years, their neighbourhood had either improved or stayed the same with 19% feeling that there had been a decline.

3.07 Only 8% of respondents said that they had reported any type of anti-social behaviour in the last year. Of those that had, they reported predominantly that staff were usually or always helpful and courteous, but there was a need for improvement in relation to how knowledgeable staff were and how responsive.

3.08 Overall customer satisfaction for the repairs and maintenance service has improved since 2010. Satisfaction levels have increased from 67% to 71%. However, the median quartile for Welsh Housing Associations is 76%, therefore Flintshire's Repairs and Maintenance service needs to further improve to meet this level, however it should be noted that many Associations will have newer and better quality housing stock than Flintshire does at present.

3.09 Satisfaction was significantly higher amongst the group that had received a repair in the last 12 months against those who were judging the service on historical performance. This coincides with the significant improvements in performance achieved within this service in that period. This figure was 79%, which sits above the median Welsh average.

3.10 Satisfaction levels ranged from 68% to 91% on specific questions relating to the repairs and maintenance service. 91% of customers were satisfied with the attitude of the repairs and maintenance service workers with 85% being satisfied with the overall quality of the work. The lower satisfaction levels were around time taken for work to be carried out and the ability to make an appointment for repairs to be completed with results of 68% and 70% respectively.

### 3.11 **ANALYSIS**

3.11.1 The results tell us that that overall, tenants are more satisfied with services than they were three years ago. This is encouraging as the service has been striving to continuously improve and these results provide evidence that the impact of these improvements is now being felt by tenants. However by benchmarking these results through the Housemark Benchmarking Service, it is evident that there is still work to do in some areas to be able to reach upper quartile performance.

- 3.11.2 There were high levels of satisfaction with the Disabled Adaptations process and also with services linked to Sheltered Housing, with older tenants reporting higher satisfaction levels across the whole range of question sets. 84% of customer's feel their rent provides value for money compared with only 78% of Welsh Housing Association tenants.
- 3.11.3 The survey results provide valuable and detailed information in relation to the areas where the service needs to improve. This information is being used to help the service to make informed decisions.
- 3.11.4 In terms of customer engagement, only 63% of customers are satisfied that the Council listens to their views and acts on them compared to 72% across Welsh Housing Associations. This is a gap which will be a focus of activity over the next few years. There is much work to do in terms of engaging with all tenants. The Housing team will be seeking the support of the Flintshire Tenants and Residents Federation to try and achieve this.
- 3.11.5 In addition there was a commitment within the Housing Ballot Choices document to provide a greater people resource in this area. A new post of Customer Involvement Assistant has been created specifically to engage with hard to reach customer groups, including younger customers in order to gain more representative involvement. A strategy including the uses of new forms of communication including Facebook, Twitter and other social media will be developed to utilise new ways of opening up a dialogue with customers.
- 3.11.6 It is not clear whether customers who have completed the survey have responded to this question thinking of the Council's formal and informal involvement activities, or whether satisfaction is influenced more by how the Council responds when complaints are raised.
- 3.11.7 The results of the specific question set in relation to complaints would suggest it was the latter, with only 38% of customers being satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. Further exploration of this result is required to understand whether this is due to levels of expectation that are beyond the level of financial resources available. Further improvements to the repairs and maintenance service and potential changes to the delivery WHQS investment programme are likely to have a positive impact on this. In addition the revised structure for Housing Asset Management, has changed the way in which complaints are now handled. This has allowed for significant improvements to be made in terms of the quality and timeliness of the response.
- 3.11.8 Only 62% were satisfied with the standard of cleaning services provided by the Council. This service is therefore under review so that the standard of the service offered to tenants is greatly improved,

whilst providing the Council with an opportunity to look at how the service can be delivered in a way which provides greater value for money.

- 3.11.9 54% of customers surveyed said that dog fouling was an issue in their neighbourhoods, and in response the Neighbourhood Housing Team are developing a Responsible Pet Ownership Policy with associated initiatives to reduce pet related nuisance.
- 3.11.10 There is opportunity for significant improvement around the Council's management of reported anti-social behaviour, (ASB), although it is worth noting that this survey was completed just as the new ASB policy went live and significant improvements to the service have recently been made, including the appointment of an additional 2 officers and the introduction of an IT backed case management system for reported incidents. There is now a witness support line operated out of office hours to ensure victims are better supported.
- 3.11.11 For the repair and maintenance service, a number of measures have been implemented which will contribute to improving satisfaction levels in the areas of required improvement: -
- 3.11.12 The historic backlog of repairs has been addressed and performance, particularly in the non-urgent repair category, has seen significant improvement as repairs are being attended to considerably quicker. This improvement continues each quarter as more repairs are being completed within the target times. In November, the average time taken to complete a non-urgent repair was 17 days against a target of 32 days. This is the best ever performance in this category and importantly 86% of repairs were fully completed in the target time. Both Emergency and Urgent repairs performances are within set targets and again the percentage of repairs completed within target continues to improve each quarter.
- 3.11.13 The number of repairs carried out by appointment has also increased month on month and through the extended hours project appointments are being offered to customers up until 6pm.
- 3.11.14 A review of van stock management is currently being undertaken to ensure that each trades person carries a fit for purpose stock of materials suitable for the work they undertake. This will enable more repairs to be completed on the first visit with a reduction in the required journeys to collect materials. There is also a reduction in the number of inspections being undertaken with the move to trades persons attending site and conducting their own inspections. This will again reduce the end to end times of repair completion and also mean a reduction in visits to customer homes.
- 3.11.15 Flintshire County Council have agreed a revised business plan to meet Welsh Housing Quality Standards by 2020. As part of the

revised business plan a new 7 year delivery model will be developed which will provide tenants with definitive investment programmes and timescales and provide clarity around improvements to Flintshire homes.

- 3.11.16 Customers need to feel more involved in policy development. This process can take some time, and may not be very visible to tenants. Currently, views are sought following articles in housing publications, or through face to face discussions in a community setting. It is vital that we keep customers informed throughout this process to demonstrate that the final documents produced do take account of tenant's comments and suggestions.
- 3.11.17 Potential actions being considered are highly visible notice boards in estate areas, along with a poster campaign in community venues showing the 'Outcomes' of customer consultation. A 'You said – We did' approach is also being utilised through tenant conferences. On a more local level, when any customer gives us their views either at a community event, formal consultation activity, or whilst attending an externally organised event, they are recorded, so the Service can track how customer involvement impacts on policy/procedural development and a response to customers can be made within an appropriate timescale.

### 3.12 **REALITY CHECKERS**

#### **Background**

- 3.12.1 The Reality Checker group was developed to allow tenants to be more involved in assessing service quality. It consists of 5 Tenant representatives chosen from amongst the membership of the Flintshire Federation of Tenant and Resident Groups, with support from the Customer Involvement Officer and administration services.
- 3.12.2 Within the umbrella of the reality checker group, volunteers from across the county were recruited and received training as 'Tenant Auditors' to undertake telephone surveys, mystery shopping exercises, and undertake face to face customer satisfaction interviews with tenants who had received planned kitchen renewal. This recruitment and training is ongoing for any tenant who wishes to become involved.

#### **Work to date**

- 3.12.3 The reality checker group has undertaken two service reviews to date, one on the customer perspective when reporting and receiving a repair and one for customer advice available on ASB, (with the report on the latter due early in 2014).
- 3.12.4 Outcomes from the first review on repairs identified learning

opportunities for staff on customer care practices, with two main weaknesses identified from tenant feedback. The first on giving tenants timescales for their repairs to be completed, and the second on a need for improved communication throughout the process. Tenants surveyed were very positive on the professionalism of staff who undertook their repairs.

- 3.12.5 Feedback on the positive outcomes as well as the learning opportunities were given to staff through 'tool box talks', at team meetings and through 121's.
- 3.12.6 The action plan drawn at the end of the review identifies the improvements that need to be made following the review, and is further monitored after six months to ensure implementation of the improvements has taken place, and to identify any further work.
- 3.12.7 Tenants who have been surveyed were delighted at being asked to participate to make service improvements and it is felt that they spoke more openly to other tenants who had received training, than they may have either to staff or on a form.

### **Conclusion**

- 3.12.8 It is pleasing to receive independent verification from tenants that the Housing Service is continuing to improve. However the areas where further improvements are needed will continue to be a focus for the service plan over the next few years. These include continued improvement in the repair and maintenance service, further work with customers to develop involvement and then to communicate better that their views are taken into account, In addition work is already underway to improve cleaning and estate management services and the new ASB policy will provide a much improved service to complainants.
- 3.12.9 A further satisfaction survey will be undertaken in 2015.

### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 401 Scrutiny committee are asked to note the outcomes from the survey and to support the areas for continued improvement.

### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 The survey was funded from the 2013 HRA budget. Any improvement actions with a financial implication will be considered as part of the annual budget setting exercise.

### **6.00 ANTI-POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 No issues arising from this report.

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 Work to improve the estate management service will further improve tenant satisfaction with their neighbourhoods.

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 Older tenants and those living in sheltered housing report the highest levels of satisfaction.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 There are none arising from this report.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 Further consultation work to be carried out targeting harder to reach customers.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 The design of the survey and the question sets used were selected by the Customer Involvement Strategy which consists of both elected members and customers.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 Flintshire Standard Tenants and Residents (STAR) Survey

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS AND APPENDICES**

None

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