

Report of Director of Environment and Housing

Report to: Housing Advisory Board

Date: 20/05/2015

Subject: STAR Survey 2014/15 – Headline Findings

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1 Summary of main issues

In December 2014, Housing Leeds conducted a satisfaction survey of its tenants. This report summarises the responses to the survey and compares it to a similar survey conducted in 2012.

In general the results showed a mixed picture, with some areas showing clear increases in customer satisfaction, and others reflecting decreases in satisfaction.

- The key question - overall satisfaction with services - remained at 77%
- Areas of increased satisfaction were:
 - Repairs & maintenance
 - Rent as value for money
 - Advice and support
- Areas of where further development is needed were:
 - Communications and engagement
 - Customer services

- There are distinct differences in satisfaction related to age, with younger tenants significantly less satisfied than older tenants.
- The survey also highlighted the rising importance of the neighbourhood and environment to tenants.

This report sets out some early actions which are proposed to address the findings.

2 Recommendations

That the Housing Advisory Board support:

- Changes to how customer services are delivered including Housing Officer patch working, the rationalisation of office opening hours and working with Contact Centre to ensure it is adequately resourced.
- Development of a Tenant Communications Plan to meet the needs of different audiences, and implementation of the new Tenant Involvement Framework.
- Allocation of £3m in funding for environmental improvement projects to cover interrelated issues around car parking, access and waste, and support changes to grounds maintenance contract monitoring to focus on smaller geographic areas.
- A feasibility exercise to determine a 10 year investment programme for multi-storey flats.
- Actions to help tenants in financial difficulty including the development of an enhanced offer for those affected by Welfare Reform, the establishment of a Welfare Reform Project Group, and the refocus of Annual Home Visits.

3 Purpose of this report

- 3.1 To provide headline findings from the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) 2014/15 survey and an analysis of key themes.
- 3.2 In addition to summarise service action points for 2015/16 arising as a consequence.

4 Background information

- 4.1 The survey was sent to almost 13,000 general needs tenants of Housing Leeds and Belle Isle TMO in November/December 2014. We received 3434 responses, which represents a 27% response rate.
- 4.2 The findings are accurate and representative at: City level to +/- 1.6%, Area level to +/- 3%, and at Ward level to +/- 10%.
- 4.3 The previous STAR survey took place two years previously in 2012. By using the same methodology and many of the same questions we are able to compare trends around the changing views of tenants.
- 4.4 At the time the survey was carried out the housing service was undergoing a substantial restructure. This followed the closure of the ALMOs earlier in the year and the service returning to Leeds City Council.
- 4.5 In the two years since the previous STAR survey many tenants will have been affected by changes to the welfare benefits they receive, including additional charges for under-occupation (removal of the spare room subsidy).
- 4.6 The Intelligence and Improvement team carried out the STAR survey entirely in house, using council resources including the Print and Mail Room, and completed the project at a cost of around £16K.

5 Key findings from STAR 2014 survey:

In general the results showed a mixed picture, with some areas showing clear increases in customer satisfaction, and others reflecting decreases in satisfaction.

The Intelligence and Improvement team have been meeting with services to help them to understand the findings and consider actions in response, to build into their service plans. This work is still ongoing, however where actions have been confirmed, these have been included with findings below.

- 5.1 **Overall satisfaction with services** - remained at 77%.

5.2 Differences in satisfaction across different age groups:

- Comparison across key questions in the survey for different demographic groups showed **younger tenants to be significantly less satisfied than older tenants**, with around 90% of tenants aged over 65 satisfied with the overall services provided, compared to only around 65% of tenants aged less than 35.

Further variation was seen for property related questions such as for satisfaction with the quality of the home and for repairs and maintenance. For example, 85% of tenants aged over 65 were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service, compared to only around 65% of tenants aged less than 35.

5.3 Successes:

- Tenants increasingly consider **rent to be good value**:
 - Satisfaction that your **rent provides value for money** has risen by 3% to 75%.
- Increased **satisfaction with repairs and maintenance** rising 2% to 71% and with most aspects of previous repair including:
 - **repair appointment kept** rising 8% to 88%,
 - **satisfaction with repairs service on last occasion** increasing 3% to 74%,
 - Particularly positive increases for WNW area with various aspects of the previous repair, including **repair appointment kept** rising 13% to 89%, bringing more consistency city-wide.
- A new question this year found three quarters of respondents, 76%, agreed that their landlord has **friendly and approachable staff**.
- Increases in satisfaction with various **advice and support services**, including for **moving home** and for **vulnerable people**. For example, satisfaction with advice and support with **managing your finances and paying rent** increased 3% to 63%.

5.4 Areas for further development:

- Responses indicate a need for further development of **customer services**:
 - 68% agreed that in general we provide an **effective and efficient** service.
 - 59% of respondents that made contact in the last 12 months, said it was **easy to get hold of the right person**.
 - Decrease of 6% to 68% in satisfaction that your **landlord treats you fairly**.

Actions to improve **customer services** include:

- The new service provides dedicated Housing Officers for small patches of less than 300 properties. The name and contact details of Housing Officers are well publicised to the tenants in each patch.

- Working with the Contact Centre to ensure it is adequately resourced with trained staff to meet Housing Leeds customer promise and standards - answering the phone within 3 minutes (on average) and aiming to resolve most queries through a single telephone call.
- Office opening hours have been rationalised throughout the city and are now consistent across the city, making it easier to access services.
- Development of a new Leeds Homes website, with further details around prospective properties and additional functionality.
- Responses indicate a need to consider how we **communicate** and **engage** with tenants:
 - 6% decrease in satisfaction that **the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them**, falling to 56%.
 - 5% decrease in respondents reporting that the landlord is good at **keeping tenants informed**, falling to 63%.
 - 4% decrease in satisfaction that **the landlord gives tenants the opportunity to make their views known**, falling to 58%.
 - Reputation of the landlord - agreement that the landlord has a **good reputation** decreased 3% to 60%.
 - Satisfaction **varied significantly by age**, with around 90% of tenants aged over 65 satisfied with overall services provided, compared to only around 65% of tenants aged less than 35.

Actions to improve **communications** and **tenant engagement**, including to address varying levels of satisfaction for different age groups:

- Development of a Tenant Communication Plan to include a review of newsletter and housing web pages, customer service standards, and all methods of communication, including social media, to meet the needs of different audiences.
- Embed the new Tenant Involvement Framework across the city, which includes setting up new tenant forums for older, younger, disabled and high rise occupants, enabling further opportunities to get involved. All forums to be coordinated and overseen by a new singular Strategic Tenant's Body.
- Developed a monthly E-bulletin 'In the Loop', which is sent to all involved tenants, and includes news and opportunities to get involved in local events

5.5 Other findings of note:

- Rising importance of neighbourhood and environment.
 - **Your neighbourhood as a place to live**, has risen 6% to become the third highest priority for tenants.
 - **Satisfaction with grounds maintenance, such as grass cutting** decreased 3% to 66%.
 - **3 environmental indicators** in top 5 major issues – Dog fouling, rubbish or litter, and overgrown trees/shrubs or grass.

Actions to address the rising importance of **neighbourhood** and **environmental** factors:

- Allocation of £3m in funding for environmental projects to address interrelated issues including schemes to: improve car parking, improve footpaths and play areas, improve security and security, and resolve some historical waste and recycling collection issues by improving access.
 - Implement changes to grounds maintenance contract monitoring to enable a focus on smaller geographic areas and improve links with local housing management staff and contractors.
- **Heating and energy** questions included for the first time.
 - 39% said they found it difficult to afford their energy bills.
 - 35% said their heating and insulation are poor at keeping their home warm.

Actions to continue to build on improved satisfaction with the **repairs and maintenance** service, and improve **heating and insulation** include:

- Carry out a feasibility exercise to determine a 10 year investment programme for multi-story flats, with a key focus on central heating and insulation.
- Current **financial position**:
 - A third, 33%, described their current financial situation as fairly of very difficult.
 - Just over a quarter, 27%, of tenants said welfare reform has had large impact on them.

Actions to continue to build on improved satisfaction with **rent as value for money**, and to support tenants in **financial difficulty** include:

- Developing an enhanced offer to all tenants affected by welfare reform, using the learning from the MSF DHP Project, to help them access benefits, employment advice and budgeting skills.

- Establishing a Welfare Reform Project group to co-ordinate the service's preparations for the implementation of Universal Credit.
- Refocus of Annual Home Visits on money advice and support need, for all tenants city wide to ensure all customers are able to access services.
- Tenants were asked what they liked about living in a Housing Leeds home. The word cloud below shows key words identified in the responses. These include: **repairs, area, home, neighbours, rent, safe, secure:**



- **Key drivers** identified that affected overall tenant satisfaction were:
 - Quality of home, repairs and maintenance,
 - Dealing with enquiries, effective and efficient service,
 - Being treated fairly, trusts landlord, listening and acting on views

The key tenant demographic drivers for satisfaction were:

- Current financial position (with those finding it difficult influencing lower satisfaction)
- Age of lead tenant (with younger tenants influencing lower satisfaction)

6 Corporate Considerations

6.6 Consultation and Engagement

- The STAR survey is a key consultation tool, which collects tenant feedback around services provided and consults on their priorities.
- Tenants were asked if they want to get involved – and engagement teams are contacting interested tenants.

6.7 **Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- The survey findings combined with what we already know about tenants have been used to identify variations in the opinions and priorities of different social and demographic groups, which can be used to support future service development.

6.8 **Council policies and City Priorities**

- The Best Council Plan includes the objective of ensuring high quality public services, with a focus on improving customer satisfaction. The STAR survey is a key tool for assessing whether this best council objective has been met.

6.9 **Resources and value for money**

- The STAR survey was carried out using internal print, data entry and mail services and final costs are expected to be around £16K.

6.10 **Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- The STAR survey is a confidential survey, subject to data protection laws around the use of market research.

7 **Conclusions**

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9 Background documents¹

9.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.