| HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE | Agenda Item 60<br><br>Brighton & Hove City Council |
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| **Subject:** | | **STAR tenant satisfaction survey 2016** | |
| **Date of Meeting:** | | **18 January 2017** | |
| **Report of:** | | **Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities & Housing** | |
| **Contact Officer:** | **Name:** | **Ododo Dafe** | **Tel: 29-3201** |
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| **Ward(s) affected:** | | **All** | |

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 This report provides feedback from a satisfaction survey of a sample of council tenants carried out in June 2016.

1.2 The survey results provide an up-to-date and statistically significant indication of customer satisfaction on a range of council housing services.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Housing & New Homes Committee note and comment on the contents of this report.

## 3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Housemark, a national housing organisation, has consulted widely with social housing providers to produce a set of questions that organisations prefer and that enable comparison, but with the freedom for each organisation to add local questions as they wish. This survey is called STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and is undertaken by landlords on a voluntary basis. Housing last carried out a STAR survey of tenant satisfaction in 2014.

Housemark's recommended standard questions were adopted, along with some of our own. We will be in a position to compare ourselves against other housing providers as many of them undertake this survey and upload their results onto Housemark.

3.2 The survey was undertaken in June 2016, using a postal survey, with a randomly selected sample of 3,000 tenants, as recommended by Housemark. Tenants were also offered the opportunity to complete the survey online and an email reminder was sent to help boost responses. The survey achieved a response rate of 28% with 829 tenants taking part (up from 724 tenants or 24% in 2014). The majority of completions were in paper, but 12% of respondents took part online which is an increase from the 7% who took part online in 2014.

3.3 The results have been analysed by APR Research, an independent research company and their full report is available in the Members Room. The table below shows the results of key indicators in this survey compared with the STAR survey in 2014 and the comparison benchmarking ranking.

| | % satisfied 2014 | % satisfied 2016 | Trend | Benchmark position |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfied overall with the service from Housing | 78% | 81% | ⇧ | 2nd quartile |
| The overall quality of your home | 80% | 79% | ⇩ | 3rd quartile |
| Your neighbourhood as a place to live | 84% | 80% | ⇩ | 2nd quartile |
| Satisfaction with the last completed repair | 76% | 81% | ⇧ | 3rd quartile |
| That your rent provides value for money | 84% | 86% | ⇧ | 1st quartile |
| Standard of customer service | 81% | 85% | ⇧ | Not available |
| Listen to views and acts upon them | 64% | 70% | ⇧ | 1st quartile |

3.4. This benchmarking data is a comparison with our usual performance benchmarking group of nine other stock retained authorities with stock sizes of over 10,000 properties. It should be noted that these results have only recently become available so benchmarking data from 2014 was used in the full report.

**3.5 Overall satisfaction**

3.5.1 Overall satisfaction with Housing rose from 78% to 81%. This reversed the trend from 2014 where satisfaction had dropped by 5%.

3.5.2 Some of the positive reasons for this increase include satisfaction with the last completed repair (up from 76% to 81%), how Housing listens to and acts on residents views (up from 64% to 70%), and that rent provides value for money (up from 84% to 86%).

3.5.3 When analysing these results by equality strands there are no significant differences by sexuality and disability. However there was a significant difference in gender with males more satisfied than females (83% and 80% respectively). Older respondents were more satisfied than those that were younger (89% of over 65s, compared to 66% of those aged 34 or less). Whilst younger than average Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual tenants gave higher than average scores across most questions, which is the opposite of that reported in 2014. That said, care should be taken in interpreting results for this group due to the relatively small sample size.

### 3.6 Home and neighbourhood

3.6.1 Satisfaction with the quality of their home is 79% compared to 80% in 2014. Satisfaction varied with age, with older tenants significantly more satisfied than their younger peers - with 91% of over 65s satisfied, compared to 65% of those aged under 35.

Satisfaction also varied by property type, and was significantly higher for those in properties built between 1975 and 1990 (87%). In contrast, those living in properties built before 1945 were significantly less satisfied than average (73%).

We have undertaken further analysis on this to understand the correlation between older properties and the quality of the home, and identified areas of the city where satisfaction was lower. We are continuing with our investment programme across the city and work is planned in areas with lower satisfaction. For example windows replacement programmes are scheduled to take place in both Woodingdean and Hangleton. We have published our four-year provisional capital investment programme to enable this longer term information to be readily available to residents. Tenants have told us that we need to improve our communications on the planned work programme and we are taking steps to enhance the quality and timeliness of this information.

3.6.2 Satisfaction with the neighbourhood as a place to live has fallen to 80% (down from 84%). This is the first fall since 2008 and is likely to be related to a reduction in satisfaction with the grounds maintenance service, which at 64% is down five percentage points from 2014 and down ten percentage points from our result in 2011.

3.6.3 This is an area of concern and to address this we have started a review of our grounds maintenance contract with the Business & Value for Money service improvement group. Key outcomes from this will be a revised service level agreement, introduction of key performance indicators, improved contract management, and new initiatives to improve the local environment - including a pilot to introduce resident ‘green champions’. The recent redesign of Tenancy Services and the new area based teams will also help ensure we have a renewed focus on the environment and improvements we can make on our estates.

3.6.4 Satisfaction with the ability to move or swap homes has increased slightly (46% up from 42%). Since the last survey we have made a number of changes to support this, including the introduction of a mutual exchange incentive scheme and running the popular Swap Shops which have resulted in 50 moves for council tenants since 2014. The majority of responses were of an ambivalent nature with around a third selecting the ‘neither’ option (35%). This, along with a lack of response to this question, indicates this is an area that the majority of tenants have little or no experience of.

3.6.5 93% of respondents from Seniors housing were satisfied with the Seniors housing service up from 90% in 2014.

3.6.6 There has been a slight improvement in how tenants feel Housing Services deal with anti-social behaviour (63%, up from 62%). However, it should also be highlighted that 135 tenants in the sample chose not to answer this question which most likely indicates a lack of contact with this service.

## 3.7 Repairs and maintenance

3.7.1 Just over three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the repairs service as a whole (77%), half of whom were 'very satisfied' (39%).

It is also positive to find increased satisfaction with the last completed repair (81% up from 76% in 2014), a result which is a significant improvement. Customer comments were mixed, ranging from *' Keep up the good work', 'I'm very happy with the service I received I have no complaints'* to *'Sometimes the standard/quality of works carried out is not great'* and *'Things seem to drag on forever with nothing ever being properly finished and leaving mess for us to clear up'.*

93% of tenants were very satisfied with how easy it was to report their repair, which is indicative of the work that has taken place with the repairs helpdesk to reduce call waiting times. The customer experience of reporting repairs will be further enhanced with the introduction of online repairs reporting which we plan to introduce in 2017.

3.7.2 Further work we will undertake to improve the customer's experience of the service include making sure tenants are kept informed about progress of repairs and that delays are minimised especially for repairs that require more than one visit. We have worked with Mears to improve tracking of these repairs. We are also reviewing the Contractors Code of Conduct with the Home service improvement group so we have clear standards in place.

3.7.3 Four out of five respondents who had received some planned maintenance work were satisfied with it (81% down from 85% in 2014).

3.7.4 Respondents who had some planned work completed were asked if there was anything else that could be done to improve the process. Comments included *'We need better communication, we were not informed about planned works', 'We need more advice about preparing for works'* and *'Keep tenants informed of delays and changes'* .

## 3.8 Value for money

3.8.1 There was a slight increase in satisfaction with the value for money for rent (86% from 84%), the majority of whom were 'very satisfied' (49%). It is also encouraging that 74% of tenants were satisfied with their service charge (up from 71% in 2014).

3.8.2 When respondents were asked to give their views on the help and support Housing services provide, nearly four out of five respondents were satisfied with the advice and information they received on managing their finances including rent payments (78%).

3.8.3 Individual comments acknowledged the positive work that was undertaken to support tenants but other comments included *'Help people with low income so they can eat and live'* and *'BHCC website is very clunky, would be good to pay directly on an app rather than being taken to the payment site that doesn't have your account number'.* The council's online payments system is under review due to the difficulties customers report in easily making a payment.

**3.9 Customer Service**

3.9.1 85% of respondents said the standard of customer service they receive is good (up from 81% in 2014), alongside a slight increase of tenants being satisfied with how enquiries are dealt with generally (81%) and 86% being satisfied with ease of accessing services (up from 84%)

3.9.2 Individual comments on the service we provide and what we could do to improve included *'Listen and act and stop passing me from one person to another', 'When someone contacts you about a problem, a response would be nice'* and *'All the services are well organised and the staff are attentive and polite. Well done'.*

3.9.3 Our focus on simplifying access to the service and dealing with the majority of enquiries at the first point of contact will be reasons for the improvement. The changes we have made have helped us to reduce handoffs between officers; and introducing case management across Tenancy Services will ensure we are more accountable to tenants.

**3.10 Resident involvement**

3.10.1 The proportion of tenants who say we listen to their views and act on them has increased significantly since 2014 (up from 64% to 70%). Indeed, satisfaction has steadily improved with every successive survey from a base of 60% in 2008.

3.10.2 However younger residents are less satisfied with opportunities to get involved, with 45% of under 35s satisfied compared to 74% of over 65s. Engagement with younger residents is recognised as an area for improvement in the Resident Involvement Review with the proposal to focus on increasing methods of engagement and involvement.

**3.11 Health & wellbeing**

3.11.1 This is a new section in the STAR survey which asks a group of questions about various aspects of tenants' health and general wellbeing, specifically the affordability of essentials such as food. Results revealed that 21% of respondents had skipped a meal or reduced portion size because they couldn't afford to buy enough food (37% of under 35s, compared to 8% of over 65s). When asked if they would have enough money to meet basic living costs, only 52% of respondents agreed.

3.11.2 We have used the survey this time around to get a better understanding of the position for tenants, and will hope to use this question next time so that we can monitor change over time.

3.11.3 We will continue to support action plans against food poverty and have started to use Homing In to share ideas for healthy recipes at affordable cost. We also use one-to-one conversations with tenants who are struggling to pay their rent to advise them about sources of support in the city in relation to food poverty.

3.11.4 We are also developing a ‘Better Start’ guide or pre tenancy package that helps tenants prepare for the financial and other aspects of managing a tenancy and budgeting.

### 3.12 Information and communication

3.12.1 Of all respondents to this survey, 66% indicated that they had access to the internet (up from 58% in 2014). We will continue to provide support to residents who do want to get online. We have rolled out digital champions training to Housing staff and have an action plan in place in support of the Digital Brighton & Hove partnership. Valuable feedback was also received on our website and the changes that need to be made to improve the customer experience of it.

3.12.2 Tenants also reminded us to *‘…stop thinking that everyone has access to the internet’*. We will continue to provide alternative ways to contact the service. We know that the telephone is still the most popular method to be kept informed (preferred by 74%) and Housing Customer Services will continue to remain the first point of contact.

3.12.3 Three quarters of tenants (76%) said Housing is good at keeping them informed about things that may affect them, remaining the same as 2014. 89% of respondents said that they read the magazine ‘Homing In’, and those that did felt significantly more informed.

## 4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

4.1 The report was presented to Area Panels in November/December 2016. All panels noted the contents of the report and the results. They discussed and fed back the following:

- Confirmation of some dissatisfaction with ‘your neighbourhood as a place to live’ and how improvements could be made to neighbourhoods.
- Query regarding higher satisfaction scores compared to the last survey for the ‘standard of customer care’, when a tenant has experienced delays contacting someone in Housing, and when some people have not had a response to their queries.

4.2 The findings have been subject to discussions with service managers and our repairs partner, Mears, and these discussions will continue. Future actions to address increased resident satisfaction with Housing services will feature in service business plans. The results also provide a platform for further engagement of residents in service improvement.

4.3 A full copy of the report will be made available on the council’s website, and the results will be included in the spring 2017 edition of Homing In.

## 5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations in this report. The cost of the star survey and the actions/reviews contained in paragraph 3 will be met within existing Housing Revenue Account Budgets

*Finance Officer Consulted Name: Susie Allen Date: 07/12/16*

Legal Implications:

5.2 Although there is no legal obligation on the council to undertake the STAR tenant satisfaction survey, the council's wide powers under the Housing Act 1985 to manage its housing stock provide sufficient authority for carrying out the same.

*Lawyer Consulted: Name Liz Woodley Date: 23/11/16*

Equalities Implications:

5.3 Equalities implications have been considered throughout the report. Most groups within equalities strands are well represented within the survey respondent group and there are some variations in levels of satisfaction that we now need to consider how to address.

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 Greater use of the consultation portal to complete the survey (12% compared to 7% last time) is a welcome change this time. Moving increasingly to this approach will offer a long term saving in paper, printing and postage costs.

Any Other Significant Implications:

5.5 None

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

**Appendices:**

None

**Documents in Members' Rooms**

1. STAR Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2016 report

**Background Documents**

None