

To: The Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: 7th July 2016

Report of: Head of Housing and Property

Title of Report: Tenant Satisfaction

Summary

Purpose of report: To provide a briefing on tenant satisfaction and measures for improvement.

Key decision: No

Executive lead member: Councillor Mike Rowley

Report author: Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Corporate Priorities:

Meeting Housing Need
Strong and Active Communities
A Clean and Green Oxford
An Effective and Efficient Council

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Satisfaction Measured in Service Areas

Appendix 2 – Service Area Initiatives to Improve Customer Satisfaction

Appendix 3 – STAR Survey 2015 - Full Report

Appendix 4 – STAR Survey 2015 - Key Findings

Introduction

1. This report provides a briefing to Members on satisfaction monitoring that is carried out by teams across the Council relating to the Council's activities as a landlord.
2. This report provides details of the 2015 STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) survey results.
3. This report provides details of initiatives taking place across service areas to better understand what factors influence satisfaction and what service improvements need to be carried out to deliver improved satisfaction.

Background

4. Service areas across the Council provide services to the Council's tenants in the capacity as Landlord.
5. These include:

Directorate	Services Provided
Regeneration & Housing	Tenancy Management Tenancy Sustainment Tenant Involvement Housing Options Planned Maintenance Programming Regeneration
Organisational Development and Corporate Services	Contact Centre Rents Rent & Service Charge Setting Welfare Reform Housing Benefit Sundry Debt Collection
Community Services	ASBIT Community Response Communities Day to Day Repairs Planned Maintenance Works Streetscene Estates Services Grounds Maintenance Refuse & Recycling

6. The various teams employ a variety of methods for collecting satisfaction performance with their work.

7. The methods and the most recent results are set out in Appendix 1 – Satisfaction Measured in Service Areas.
8. The different service areas have developed a range of initiatives and measures specifically to understand and improve customer satisfaction. These initiatives and measures are set out in Appendix 2 – Service Area Initiatives to Improve Customer Satisfaction
9. The STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) methodology was developed by the housing benchmarking group, Housemark, to measure satisfaction across a range of landlord related activities in the housing sector. It also provides social housing landlords with an effective means of benchmarking satisfaction results. Landlords generally undertake a STAR survey every 3-5 years. The Council has carried out a STAR survey each year since 2012.
10. The STAR Survey Results for 2015 are set out in Appendix 3 – STAR Survey 2015 – Full Report.
11. The Key Findings of the STAR Survey are set out in Appendix 4 – STAR Survey 2015 – Key Findings.

In-house Performance Measurement

12. Historically, measuring satisfaction in-house was generally carried out on key areas, such as day to day repairs. There are a number of methods available to collect satisfaction data in-house.
13. The Gov-metric system is a simple electronic measurement used on the website and in Customer Service Centres but the information is not personalised.
14. Satisfaction forms are generally left with customers who have just had a service provided but are dependent on staff ensuring that they are given out. There is a risk that if staff are aware that the service was not up to normal standards or was overdue, that the forms may not be given out. In cases where service has not been carried out at all, e.g. missed appointments, no satisfaction forms would be given out. These issues can skew results towards more favourable satisfaction results.
15. Probably the most insightful part of the survey forms is provided when customers leave comments on their experience and what could be improved.
16. The work being carried out by teams across the Council has in part been inspired by the STAR results from 2014 and driven further by the Customer Service Excellence accreditation which has focused teams on working more closely with customers, asking their views and measuring satisfaction levels at a very local level, using exit surveys and Appreciative Inquiries.

17. In the case of Appreciative Inquiries, these can be extremely useful in finding out exactly what went well or not on the customer journey, enabling staff to make sometimes even minor changes that make a big difference. Understanding the views of recent service users and in particular, complainants, gives an entirely fresh perspective.
18. The various in-house measures in place to gather satisfaction data and improve customer experience, set out in Appendices 1 & 2, demonstrate the great efforts being made across service areas.

STAR Survey Methodology

19. The STAR survey involved BMG writing to 3,500 Council tenants, including a reminder and despite this, only 656 tenants responded, representing 19% of all tenants. Although this gives a maximum confidence interval of $\pm 3.7\%$ at the 95% confidence level, the response rate is very low. BMG would generally expect to have received between 25% - 35% on a survey of this type.
20. In common with other surveys, an incentive prize draw was provided but the numbers remain low. There may be an element of survey fatigue, as the Council has surveyed its tenants in this way in each of the last 3 years, it could be that the survey was longer than most people would want to spend time on, or a combination of each.
21. Carrying out postal surveys is not the only method of obtaining STAR results but it is the most common. Other methods include door to door surveys and telephone surveys and although more expensive, they would still take a length of time to carry out.
22. The STAR survey results enable comparison with Housemark's national benchmarking facility. There are some issues with using Housemark data as the majority of contributors are Housing Associations, rather than Councils and the comparator data is always a year behind as it is not published quickly. The 2015 results from Housemark are not yet available so comparators can only be made from 2014 results.
23. STAR survey results are anonymous and the Council cannot see individual responses, so it is not able to contact tenants to undertake further work to understand satisfaction and dissatisfaction.
24. With any type of large survey which covers a number of service areas and themes, there is a risk that a dissatisfied customer will be dissatisfied whatever the question because of one experience.
25. External factors will also influence satisfaction, even if they have been implemented nationally and are not Council initiatives. This includes welfare reforms, such as the Spare Room Subsidy (Bedroom Tax) and the Benefit Cap which will undoubtedly have had an effect, particularly with value for money issues.

26. Looking forward, the outlook for satisfaction levels in future years is bleak. The Housing & Planning Act 2016 introduces some key pieces of legislation, which will undoubtedly impact on satisfaction, particularly the Rents for High Income Social Tenants (Pay to Stay) legislation where tenants' rents will be increased towards market rents depending on the tenant household income. The end of lifetime tenancies and the introduction of flexible tenancies will also have an impact.
27. Other more general political or economic issues may also be an influencing factor in the next few years and austerity measures that have been taken by other organisations that affect our tenants will also have had an effect on perceptions.

STAR Survey Results

28. The key finding from the 2015 STAR survey is that overall, satisfaction is stable at 83%. Although this is a 1% drop from the 2014 survey, there is a confidence interval of $\pm 3.7\%$. There was a drop of 1% overall satisfied but equally 1% less were dissatisfied.
29. The main areas of movement from the 2014 results are satisfaction with the value for money for service charges, which dropped from 68% to 62% and with satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service, which dropped from 83% to 77%. Dissatisfaction with the Repairs and Maintenance Service is unchanged at 13%
30. The two main priority areas for tenants are repairs and maintenance and the overall quality of their home.
31. The two key drivers for overall satisfaction are "Satisfaction with the way the Council deals with repairs and maintenance" and "Satisfaction that the Council listens to your views and acts on them".
32. Satisfaction with most of the elements of the repairs process has remained stable or slightly increased, with the lowest satisfaction rating given for the repair being done "right first time" (79%) and the time taken before work started (76%), albeit both saw a 2% improvement from 2014.
33. The time taken for work to start is thought to be low as a direct result of the work backlogs which occurred in 2014 and 2015, primarily caused by weather related repairs, in particular fencing and roof work.
34. Despite repairs and maintenance being the main priority; being the overall key driver; and with satisfaction with repairs and maintenance dropping, overall satisfaction remained stable when a fall may have been expected.
35. Overall satisfaction in different Council wards varies significantly. The most satisfied wards are Headington (97%), Churchill (89%) and Rose Hill & Iffley (89%), whereas Blackbird Leys (76%), Iffley Fields (75%) and Littlemore (75%) were least satisfied.

36. Perceptions of whether the estate has improved over the last year are generally positive, with 41% believing their estate has improved, compared to 19% who believe it has declined. The ward where most tenants believe the estate has improved is Barton and Sandhills (61%) with only 28% of Littlemore tenants thinking likewise.

Summary

37. Teams across the Council have adopted a large number of initiatives to involve tenants in redesigning services and improving the customer experience. The focus on smaller scale, service specific satisfaction surveys allows staff to work with tenants to understand what really matters.

38. Although overall, the STAR survey results are stable, there has been a drop in satisfaction with repairs and maintenance and value for money with service charges.

39. The extremely low rate of return would indicate that there may be an element of survey fatigue. Most landlords undertake STAR surveys every 3-5 years and by surveying three years in a row, this may have had an impact.

40. There are increasing external influences which will unduly and negatively affect satisfaction results, regardless of the Council's performance. This will lead to local measurement of service specific satisfaction, involving tenants in service development, playing an even greater role in accurately measuring satisfaction in the future.

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