

**To:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 16 December 2021  
**Report of:** Head of Housing Services  
**Title of Report:** Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey 2021

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To update the Housing and Homelessness Panel on the results of the Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey 2021 and to provide an overview of planned improvements
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Deliver more affordable housing, Support thriving communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Corporate Plan
<b>Recommendation: That the Panel resolves to:</b>	
1. Note the report having agreed any recommendations to Cabinet arising from it.	

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A:	About STAR
Appendix B:	Full Survey Reports
Appendix C:	Resident Suggestions for Improvement

## Background

1. The Council, in common with other social housing landlords, carry out periodic surveys of tenants and leaseholders on how satisfied they are with the services provided which is then used to inform service improvement plans. The survey is commonly known as a STAR survey.
2. Following a procurement process that involved resident ambassadors evaluating tender submissions, Acuity Research and Practice were appointed to carry out the 2021 STAR survey with an option to extend the contract for up to a further three years. *See Appendix A for more information about previous surveys and STAR methodology.*
3. Given the length of time since the previous survey in 2015, it was agreed that a census of all tenants and leaseholders would take place, rather than a sample as before, such that a new baseline can be established. All tenants and leaseholders were invited to take part in the survey by post or online, in addition 925 tenants were telephoned. The survey ran from mid-May and closed on 5 July 2021. A total of 1,579 tenants (23%) and 84 leaseholders (12%) responded. A number of the questions from 2015 were included, together with new questions.

## Key results

4. The survey provides the Council with important baseline data, with the most positive feedback from tenants as follows:
  - 85% are satisfied with our customer service (new question)
  - 81% believe their rent is value for money (75% in 2015)
  - 80% feel safe and secure in their home (new question)
  - 76% are satisfied with the Council as a landlord (83% in 2015)
  - 76% are satisfied with the repairs service (77% in 2015)
  - 76% are satisfied with being kept informed about things that may affect them (74% in 2015)
5. While solid, the results are in the main not as strong as those in 2015, however they should be viewed against a backdrop of more than a year of COVID-19 related service restrictions, where for many months all non-emergency repairs and planned improvements were paused and significant backlogs occurred. Other visible services such as caretaking and cleaning were also impacted, as were face to face services previously provided by the Council.
6. The STAR survey compares favourably with LGA polling on nearly all metrics, most notably value for money – with 81% of Oxford council tenants agreeing that they get value for money, against 43% nationally. Oxford also scores higher than the national average on how the Council runs things, being kept well informed, trust and acting on concerns.
7. Societally, the six years since the last STAR survey have been disruptive and polarising, and the impact of this on people's satisfaction with their lives cannot be discounted, even if it cannot be disentangled. The Local Government Association (LGA) measures resident satisfaction with their councils every four months, and the October 2021 survey reports that only 56% of people are satisfied or very satisfied with how their local council runs things – the lowest level since polling began in 2012.
8. This is context, not excuses. Whatever the reasons, the overall trend since 2015 is in the main downwards. Oxford is not alone in this.
9. What is important is that the STAR survey provides the Council with a baseline for improvement and that work is already underway to address this. The most significant areas we need to address are:
  - overall satisfaction with the Council as a landlord (down 7%)
  - overall satisfaction with the quality of the home (down 12% to 67%)
  - tenants' views are listened to and acted upon (down 5% to 55%)
  - satisfaction with the outcome of an antisocial behaviour (ASB) complaint (down 11% to 49%)

*The full breakdown of STAR survey results is provided in Appendix B.*

10. In the next four years the Council plans to invest £51m in planned maintenance, refurbishments and estate improvements and a further £8.7m in improving energy efficiency in existing council homes.
11. Together with the ongoing delivery of a new generation of high quality, design-led and low carbon council homes by Oxford City Housing Ltd (OCHL), this should help to improve tenant satisfaction in the coming years.
12. The improvement plan and work identified and underway are considered in more detail below.

### **Resident comments and suggestions for improvement**

13. The survey provided an option for tenants and leaseholders to comment on service areas and areas for improvement. Overall, 1,683 comments were provided by tenants and 98 comments were provided by leaseholders. The survey also asked respondents who were dissatisfied to indicate the reason for their dissatisfaction across a range of issues. Combined with the comments, this has provided an invaluable insight into how services can be improved and importantly where we need to concentrate our efforts.
14. Comments and suggestions have been shared with relevant teams responsible for specific services, who have been putting in place a range of initiatives and action plans to help drive improvement. It is also worth noting that 373 comments made were positive ones.
15. The Tenant Involvement Team have also been contacting customers who indicated that they wanted to be involved in developing and improving services and these are adding to the growing ranks of resident ambassadors.
16. The Tenant Involvement Team have been making contact with dissatisfied respondents willing to be contacted about their responses, in order to see:
  - whether or not the issue has now been fully resolved
  - what sits behind their comments – is it a systemic problem or a single failure?
17. The learnings from these contacts will feed into service improvement plans. Not unsurprisingly, the three most commented on areas were:
  - the repairs service
  - customer care/service
  - communications and information

*A full breakdown of residents' suggestions for improvement is provided in Appendix C.*

## **Improvement planning**

18. Taking a whole Council approach key work streams have already been put in train as part of establishing an overall comprehensive improvement plan. Key headlines and work already underway are included in the sections below. Progress against the plan will be presented to the portfolio holder and February Housing Panel with regular updates provided to subsequent meetings.

## **Repairs service**

19. Across all social landlords, the biggest driver for tenant dissatisfaction is the day to day repairs service and 20% of the suggestions for improvements relate to repairs.

20. A range of measures have been or are being put in place by ODS to improve satisfaction with repairs. These include:

- SMS messages to cover the confirmation of appointments, day before reminders, operative on the way notifications and post-work satisfaction surveys
- live dashboards to deal immediately with less than satisfactory customer responses
- use of DRS (dynamic resource scheduling) for operatives to improve responsiveness to customers
- Grafton stock contract with on demand stock deliveries for fixed right first time repairs
- use of QL First Touch solution enables operatives to book follow up calls with customers whilst on site
- the QL Portal when implemented will enable tenants to report, view and track repairs
- proactive programme to revisit cases where damp and mould have been reported in the past to review whether measures taken have worked or not
- trialling IoT (internet of things) monitoring with smart sensors to measure humidity and temperature in homes
- customer care training for all staff centred on communication, behaviours and delivering a right first time service

21. ODS is implementing a new customer services strategy, encompassing customer experience, journey mapping, sentiment and real time transactional performance management. This will provide insight into training and development needs and opportunities for ODS staff. ODS colleagues are working with Tenant Involvement and resident ambassadors to develop the survey questions and using customer feedback to learn what is important and what needs to change.

## **Quality of the home and the neighbourhood – planned maintenance**

22. Although the Council has maintained its homes to the Decent Homes standard, a significantly increased £51m investment programme has been included in the HRA business plan as part of the next four year medium term financial plan.
23. These programmes are targeted to accelerate the replacement of key asset management items, namely:
- doors and windows
  - re-roofing
  - structural repairs
  - lifts and door phone entry systems
  - cyclical repairs and decoration
  - internal communal area improvements
24. Investment continues to be made through the Great Estates programme for flat block improvements and parking. The expectations set out in the social housing White Paper are that the Decent Homes standard will be extended to include external communal areas of blocks and the overall condition of the wider estates.
25. There is however still a lower level of satisfaction with the condition of the home and the draft budget includes provision for a full stock condition survey to assess what work is needed over and above Decent Homes in future. The current void property re-let standard is also being reviewed.
26. An £8.7m investment programme to improve the energy efficiency of homes and reduce carbon is already underway.

## **Communications and engagement**

27. There are a number of emerging areas where increasing the effectiveness of engagement with tenants is vital, including:
- building safety
  - personal fire safety
  - the carbon reduction agenda
  - digital channel shift
  - the need to capture accurately tenants' personal data, contact details, data preferences and protected characteristic information so that reasonable adjustments to services can be made where necessary.
28. There is a clear message that a significant proportion of tenants who do not consider that their views are being listened to and acted upon. Listening and engaging with tenants on an individual basis is a key feature of the social housing White Paper and will be a key theme under the new regulatory regime.

29. While as a proportion they are much smaller in number, tenants aged under 25 are significantly less satisfied than older tenants – particularly those aged over 60. Improving our digital offer will be vital in delivering improved communications to and engagement with younger age groups.

30. The draft budget contains proposals to provide the organisation capacity to carry out this important engagement activity and reconnect with our tenants to find out their views and what is important to them. Assuming the budget is approved, home visits will be carried out during 2022 and 2023. A multi-layered targeted approach is being worked on which will need to cater for:

- a concentration on those vulnerable households where tenancy sustainment is an issue
- those where there are fire and other health and safety considerations
- engagement with our carbon reduction planning, which will be driven by property type data
- engagement with the age group with lowest satisfaction levels to better understand their needs and expectations

31. A communications and engagement campaign has been devised to support the decarbonisation agenda and the retrofitting of council homes with energy efficient improvements. This campaign is complimentary to the engagement activity generally.

32. There are a growing number of resident ambassadors, both tenants and leaseholders. Work is underway with them to set up a broad group of advocates/champions and assist with engagement activities, promoting the benefits of effective engagement.

### **Antisocial behaviour**

33. Satisfaction with antisocial behaviour and the outcomes is typically low. Often, the victim wants far more draconian and punitive sanctions put in place to deal with a perpetrator rather than the behaviours simply stopping. While the number of tenant interactions with the ASB service is low when compared to other main services, the satisfaction level with case work outcome is low.

34. The Community Safety service is giving consideration to how to carry out case reviews with those respondents who indicated that they were unhappy with how various elements of their cases were handled and will be contacting those tenants to find out how the service can be improved.

35. The Council has also recently agreed an updated antisocial behaviour policy which focuses on the support and protection of victims of antisocial behaviour and has a positive impact on people with protected characteristics. For those suspected of causing antisocial behaviour, mental health is often a feature and the revised policy requires that officers identify support needs of perpetrators and work with them to engage with support organisations.

## **Service Integration Project**

36. The service integration project linking Housing, Communities and Community Safety aims to further improve how we bring our teams, our customers and our partners together to deliver joined up services to residents of Oxford, including our tenants.
37. The main objective is to create locality teams made up of people from relevant services, who will work closely with our communities and partners to deliver cross-team solutions for customers in need.
38. Through two pilot areas at Barton and Blackbird Leys, staff have been testing a number of approaches to more collaborative work with:
  - multi-team locality working and case management
  - a more co-ordinated pathway for customers with a number of different needs
  - working more closely with partners to find community solutions
  - training and knowledge sharing within multi-disciplinary teams

## **Customer experience change programme**

39. The Council's corporate change programme is centred on how we deliver more streamlined and effective services to customers overall. This will include improved use of technology and efficient self-serve, releasing specialist resources for more preventative work and support for those customers in greatest need at a local level.
40. The new QL IT system presents a significant opportunity for greater efficiency and enhanced customer service.
41. A range of teams across the Council have interactions with our tenants and leaseholders, with ODS, the contact centre and the Incomes Team (rents) having the most contact. Planned improvements to our customer journey will have maximum impact on satisfaction levels.

## **Service delivery review**

42. Although not featuring heavily in the STAR survey, frontline housing management services have been under pressure for a significant period, including Tenancy Management, Tenancy Sustainment and Allocations. This has impacted on case work resources. Additional resources are planned for this area of activity.
43. Our services to tenants and leaseholders are provided by a range of teams across the council and providing a seamless service presents a challenge. The new council structure and the service integration project presents an opportunity to deliver improvement to meet this challenge.
44. An external review of how the council delivers its services to tenants as a landlord has been commissioned to inform our thinking.

## Survey results publication

45. The full report will be published on the council's website in December 2021, in parallel with this summary report being considered by Housing Panel on 16 December 2021.

## Conclusion

46. Overall, most tenants and leaseholders are satisfied or very satisfied with the customer service they receive. More than four fifths (81%) of tenants perceive the rent they pay to be good value for money, and this supports the case for social housing contained in the OCHL development programme and other affordable housing schemes.

47. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a backdrop of increased dissatisfaction with council services nationwide cloud the picture somewhat, the survey results provide a sound evidence base and a starting point for improvement in a post-lockdown world.

48. Nevertheless there are a number of clear areas for improvement. Taking a whole council approach, Landlord Services is working with ODS and relevant service teams to identify and deliver the necessary improvement plans.

49. Crucially, these will be underpinned by the £51m of planned maintenance, refurbishments and estate improvements and a further £8.7m in improving energy efficiency in existing council homes over the next four years, together with the ongoing delivery of a new generation of high quality, design-led and low carbon council homes by OCHL.

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## **Appendix A – About STAR**

The STAR acronym stands for Survey of Tenants and Residents, and it is a framework designed for social landlords to collect tenant and resident satisfaction feedback in a consistent, measurable way. Introduced in 2011, STAR surveys were developed by Housemark, the housing benchmarking organisation, in conjunction with a number of industry bodies and tenant groups.

Although generally carried out every three years by landlords, Oxford City Council carried out STAR surveys each year from 2012 to 2015, at which point, with dwindling response levels reducing to 17% it was decided to extend the period between surveys.

It was planned to restart the survey in 2018. However, Housemark announced that it was overhauling the STAR survey methodology and question base to include transactional as well as perception based questions and to include a greater focus on safety, the home and the estate. This is in line with the themes introduced in the social housing Green Paper – A New Deal for Social Housing.

As a result, the council decided to wait until the revised measures were published rather than spending money on a survey which would have limited use in terms of comparability. Housemark's revised measures were finally published in February 2020. It was then not considered appropriate to carry out the survey in 2020 given the overriding need to respond to the COVID-19 emergency.

The decision to proceed with the survey in 2021 was made in recognition that the social housing White Paper, published in November 2020, set out a series of landlord performance and satisfaction indicators that were to be consulted on and that landlords would be expected to measure and publish.

### **Benchmarking**

STAR survey results would ordinarily be initially compared with the sector as a whole and then peer groups of stock holding local authorities with similar numbers of properties and challenges. As few, if any, landlords would have carried out a STAR survey in 2020, the only data comparisons that could be made would be against surveys carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. This would not provide a meaningful comparison. Many councils have also moved away from annual surveys, but this is likely to change as the new regulatory inspection regime comes in.

## Appendix B – Full survey results

The percentages shown below relate to “satisfied” and “very satisfied” responses and do not include “neither”, “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

Question theme	2021	2015*
Overall satisfaction with the council as a landlord	76%	83%
Overall quality of the home	67%	79%
Condition of home	66%	
Safe and secure home	80%	
Communal areas safe and clean	75%	
Value for money (rent)	81%	75%
Value for money (service charges)	68%	
Neighbourhood as a place to live	75%	
Overall appearance of the neighbourhood	73%	
Overall repairs and maintenance service	76%	77%
Repairs right first time	76%	
Last repair carried out	79%	
OCC is easy to deal with	77%	
Customer service they receive	85%	
Being kept informed about things that might affect them	76%	74%
Having a say in how services are managed	63%	
Tenants views being listened to and acted upon	55%	60%
Support received when dealing with ASB case	53%	
Speed of the ASB case	53%	
Final outcome of the ASB case	49%	60%
The way a complaint was handled	49%	
The final outcome of a complaint	33%	

\* 2015 figures shown where available

Perception of neighbourhood over the last three years		
Got better	Stayed the same	Got worse
17%	60%	23%

### Perceptions

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
OCC takes health and safety concerns seriously	69%	19%	12%
OCC treats tenants fairly	73%	17%	10%
OCC is open and transparent	63%	24%	13%
OCC cares about their customers	66%	20%	14%
OCC has friendly and approachable staff	81%	13%	6%
OCC keeps its promises	56%	25%	19%
I feel valued by OCC	58%	23%	20%
OCC treats me with respect	73%	17%	10%
I trust OCC	66%	19%	15%

## Demographics

	Age		
	Under 25	25 - 59	60+
Overall satisfaction	58%	70%	85%
Quality of home	42%	57%	81%
Repairs and maintenance	63%	71%	84%

## Leaseholder results

Leaseholders were not surveyed in previous STAR surveys.

The percentages shown below relate to “satisfied” and “very satisfied” responses and do not include “neither”, “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

Question theme	2021
Overall satisfaction with the council as a landlord	33%
Overall quality of the home	60%
Condition of home	52%
Safe and secure home	58%
Communal areas safe and clean	42%
Value for money (rent)	64%
Value for money (service charges)	22%
Neighbourhood as a place to live	58%
Overall appearance of the neighbourhood	39%
Overall repairs and maintenance service	34%
Repairs right first time	31%
Last repair carried out	37%
OCC is easy to deal with	35%
Customer service they receive	43%
Being kept informed about things that might affect them	53%
Having a say in how services are managed	33%
Tenants views being listened to and acted upon	24%
Support received when dealing with ASB case	24%
Speed of the ASB case	18%
Final outcome of the ASB case	23%
The way a complaint was handled	23%
The final outcome of a complaint	23%

Perception of neighbourhood over the last three years		
Got better	Stayed the same	Got worse
14%	56%	30%

## Perceptions

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
OCC takes health and safety concerns seriously	35%	38%	27%
OCC treats tenants fairly	32%	32%	37%

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
OCC is open and transparent	42%	26%	42%
OCC cares about their customers	32%	24%	45%
OCC has friendly and approachable staff	53%	25%	22%
OCC keeps its promises	47%	27%	47%
I feel valued by OCC	22%	26%	51%
OCC treats me with respect	43%	27%	31%
I trust OCC	45%	18%	45%

## Appendix C – Resident suggestions for improvement

<b>Positive comments</b>	<b>22% of total</b>
Generally happy, no problems	278
Repairs service/workforce	26
Attitude of staff	25
Good communications and contactable	11
Good overall service	9
Happy living here	6
Settled, lived here a long time	5
Like my home (type, size, condition)	4
Neighbourhood/good location	4
Communal cleaning & maintenance	3
Feel safe and secure	1
Good value for money	1

<b>Day-to-day repairs</b>	<b>20% of total</b>
Repairs service generally	79
Timescales to complete repairs	55
Appointments	54
Quality of work	37
Outstanding / forgotten repairs	28
Communication about repair (before work started)	14
Quality checking	13
Treatment of resident / home	13
Ease of reporting repair	7
Keep informed of repair progress	6
Right first time	6
Repairs covered in service level	6
Contractor	5
Internal communications (repairs)	3
Job details given to contractor	3
Replace not repair	1
Out of hours service	1

<b>Customer contact</b>	<b>11% of total</b>
Customer care, customer service	70
Return call / email	26
Keep promises	14
Staff knowledge / turnover	13
Time taken to resolve enquiry	11
Resolving problems	11
Answering phones	11
Call handling	10
Contact information	7
Keep informed of progress	6
Complaints handling	6
Automated system	5
Internal communications	2
Opening hours	1

<b>Communications and information</b>	<b>10% of total</b>
Communications (in general)	59
Listen carefully, take interest	39
Keep tenants up to date	15
More visits	13
Website and online services	11
Act on views and give feedback	10
Transparent in decision-making	7
Consult or inform before acting	4
Information on service standards	3
More events, meetings	3

<b>Grounds maintenance</b>	<b>5% of total</b>
Grounds maintenance generally	25
Grass cutting	14
Fences and gates	11
Bushes & hedges - maintenance / weeding	8
Tree maintenance	7
Rubbish	5
Paths and driveways	4
Drainage/flooding issues	2
Flower beds - maintenance / weeding	2
Overgrown/neglected gardens	1
Landscaping	1
Removal of garden waste	1

<b>Neighbourhood problems</b>	<b>4% of total</b>
Car parking, signage and garage areas	23
Anti-social behaviour (dealing with)	16
Drug related issues	9
Neighbours - noise, alcohol	8
Neighbours gardens	4
Litter, graffiti and vandalism	3
Pest/vermin issues	3
Noise from children, ball games	2
Dogs - noise or fouling	1

<b>Property condition</b>	<b>4% of total</b>
Damp / mould / condensation	16
Regular inspections	13
External property maintenance	13
Condition of the property	12
Condition of property at letting	5
Flooring	3
Insulation	2
Sound proofing	1
Pest/vermin control	1

<b>Tenant services and management</b>	<b>3% of total</b>
Help for older residents/health issues	21
Value for money (rent/service charge)	9
Move, transfer	8
Decorating /handyman service	5
Financial difficulties	5
Enforcement of tenancy agreement	4
Warden service	2
Purchase property	1
Overcrowding	1
Rent issues, arrears, HB	1

<b>Home improvements</b>	<b>3% of total</b>
General home improvements	14
Property adaptations	14
New kitchen, bathroom	9
New doors or windows	7
Heating system	3

<b>Safety and security</b>	<b>2% of total</b>
Health & safety (general)	10
Security measures (general)	5
CCTV/cameras needed	4
Fire alarm information or testing	2
Lighting (car park, communal)	2
People on site not residents	1
Do not feel safe	1
Door or window security	1
Door security in communal areas	1
Property theft (parcels)	1
Asbestos	1

<b>Communal areas</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Rubbish	7
Frequency of cleaning service	6
Rubbish storage areas	3
Maintenance of communal areas	2
Storage areas - mobility scooter, bikes	2
Lifts	1
Caretaker customer service	1

<b>Council, other agencies</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Council refuse collection	8
Fly-tipping	4
Road repairs	3
Traffic - speed or noise	3
Lighting, street lighting	2

<b>Organisational policies</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Energy efficient, environmentally friendly	8
Too financially focused	2
Mix of tenants or tenures	2
Service generally / declined	1
Bedroom tax	1
Build more homes	1
Senior Management	1

<b>Moving</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Need larger property	6
Health issues require a move	4
Need a smaller property	1
Do not like the neighbourhood, move to better area	1
Move away from neighbours, noisy	1



<b>Local area services</b>	<b>0% of total</b>
Local transport	3
Youth facilities/centres	2
Play areas for children	1
Local facilities (shops etc.)	1

<b>Other</b>	<b>12% of total</b>
No comment/suggestions	142
Other	26
Don't know	14
General negative comment	8
Neutral comment	4
Already commented in earlier question	1

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