

REPORT TITLE: TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY (TSS) RESULTS

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REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Chris Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

Tenant satisfaction surveys are an important tool to find out what's important to tenants and what they think about the service. The council has carried out these surveys for over 20 years under a mix of statutory and discretionary regimes.

This report presents the results from the first survey conducted under the new regulatory Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) format. This format has been introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing (the regulator); to standardise the questions asked and make it possible to compare the performance of housing providers on issues that matter to tenants.

There are 12 TSMs which housing providers are required by the regulator to collect through an annual tenant satisfaction survey. This report also provides results where comparison has been possible with previous years as the text of questions remains unchanged.

There was a 46% response rate to the survey. The council's results mirror the sector wide trend of reduced satisfaction levels across the indicators. The results for most of the TSMs are broadly in line with the average ARP Research (the organisation commissioned to carry out the survey on the council's behalf) benchmark median of other landlords for whom they have conducted surveys with TSM questions over the last 18 months.

The report makes service improvement recommendations based on what tenants have said. The development of the service improvement plans will take place with the new tenant engagement structures to be considered later this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The survey results are noted.
2. That the recommendations for service improvement and actions in section 12.5 be approved.
  - a) Repairs & maintenance – actions to address outstanding repairs and improve performance in relation to listening to views
  - b) Examine how the housing service can improve its approach to anti-social behaviour
  - c) Investment in customer excellence training
  - d) New engagement model to appeal to under 35 year olds
  - e) Investigate differences in satisfaction levels across the different district areas through community engagement activities
  - f) Improve complaints handling performance

## IMPLICATIONS:

### 2 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

#### 2.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District

- a) The council commissioned a housing research organisation to conduct the survey. The procurement process included the requirement for tenderers to outline how the approach they would take would contribute to the council's carbon reduction targets. The commissioned provider, ARP Research, included in their response details of maximising the use of digital processes (where permitted within the regulator's requirements for the survey), use of recycled and environmentally friendly products for printed materials, and how their operating model aims to keep transportation to a minimum.
- b) The survey provided the opportunity for tenants to provide additional feedback in their own words. Improving heating and energy was the most raised topic.

#### 2.2 Homes for all

- a) The survey provides data on the key issues for tenants when providing homes. Housing provision can be improved by listening to tenant views on what's important to them and their housing.
- b) One of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) is how well-maintained tenants feel their home is.

#### 2.3 Vibrant Local Economy

- a) None

#### 2.4 Living Well

- a) Survey questions include opportunities for tenants to feedback to the council on matters relating to living well. In addition to how well maintained their home is; tenants were asked about how safe they feel in their homes, satisfaction with how the council deals with reports of anti-social behaviour along with the opportunity to provide feedback on subjects of their choice. The majority of responses to the open text question were positive in nature including how some tenants felt the council provides good support.
- b) The Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) includes a performance measure on whether tenants feel the council makes a positive contribution to the area. This is the first time this topic has been tested but will provide an opportunity to see how the council compares with other housing providers.

## 2.5 Your Services, Your Voice

- a) The survey is the key statistically robust engagement activity undertaken by the housing service. It provides the bedrock information on which to build service improvements and determine service priorities.
- b) Feeding back effectively the actions taken in response to what tenants have told us through the survey will be critical in achieving this council priority.

## 3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

### 3.1 The following actions proposed in response to what tenants said have financial implications:-

- a) Development of digital capabilities and access – while initially this task will be to explore the options and opportunities available within current systems and resources; investigations may find limitations with the existing provision which can only be addressed through investment and so provision will be recommended for inclusion in the HRA business plan 2024/5.
- b) Training – investment in external customer service experts is an effective approach to embedding a culture of customer excellence. This can be covered by the existing training budget provision if maintained at the current level.
- c) Staff costs – see details in 5.1 below.

## 4 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

### 4.1 The procurement of a contractor to provide the repair and maintenance service when the current contract ends will be an opportunity to work with tenants to design a specification that addresses the issues raised in the survey.

## 5 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 The 2024/5 HRA business plan includes identification of the need for annual revenue savings which include savings from staff resources. Implementation of the work programme will be assessed in the light of any changes in staff resources.

## 6 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 74% of tenants responded that they were satisfied that their homes are well maintained. This and the tenant experience of the repairs service are two of the key drivers most closely associated with overall satisfaction.

6.2 At the end of the survey tenants were asked to provide any additional feedback in their own words. A fifth of respondents raised issues with the repairs and maintenance service. Their answers were focused on outstanding repairs and the information and communication around that.

6.3 Section 9.2 of the TSS report presents the property issues that were raised; heating and energy efficiency being the most common.

## 7 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

7.1 The Regulator of Social Housing sets out the details of how housing providers are required to conduct tenant perception surveys to generate the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) data. As the questions can't be changed; action centred around communication.

7.2 TACT was briefed about the survey at its meeting on 23 March 2023. The briefing outlined how the 2023 survey would be undertaken and explained that this survey will be the first to collect the new TSMs data required by the Regulator of Social Housing. TACT was asked to work with the council to promote the survey and encourage tenants to complete it.

7.3 The survey was promoted through posters displayed across the district and social media posts. Housing officers were asked to add banners promoting the survey to their email signatures. The webpage was updated and gave access to Frequently Asked Questions along with a helpline to contact if they had further queries. Elected members were made aware of the survey through the Democratic Services Update.

7.4 The results will be posted on the tenant satisfaction survey webpage and included in the Housing Annual Report as well as being used to work in collaboration with TACT and the Service Delivery Groups when considering priorities for service improvements.

## 8 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 At the end of the survey tenants were asked to provide any additional feedback in their own words. A fifth of respondents raised issues with the repairs and maintenance service; heating and energy efficiency being the most common.

8.2 A programme of work in relation to providing Energy Saving Homes is already underway (and the subject of separate committee reports) supported by a resident engagement strategy.

## 9 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

9.1 An equality impact assessment was completed in October 2022 to inform the brief for commissioning a consultant to conduct the survey on the council's behalf. The survey brief included a dedicated section on meeting communication and engagement needs.

- 9.2 It was noted that the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) had itself completed an impact assessment as the survey is a statutory requirement for all housing providers. The survey guidance produced by the regulator set out the expectations around meeting communication needs and for households who are less likely to engage.
- 9.3 While the survey questions could not be altered; the covering letters were checked with the Readers Panel.
- 9.4 Tenants had the option to either complete the survey online or in paper form (73% were postal completions, 27% were completed online). They were made aware of the survey through letters, emails and text messages. Specific measures were taken for households known to need a bespoke approach to ensure they were able to complete the survey if they wished to. This included:
- The option of completing the survey online or in paper form
  - Large print versions were sent to households which have requested written communication in this form. The response rate for these households was 44% (the average overall response rate being 46%)
  - Housing officers making contact by telephone or home visit to support as required. The response rate for these households was 58% - above the average response rate for the survey
  - The survey was structured so that advocates that support households were automatically sent the survey to be able to assist the tenant to complete. The response rate for these households was 38%
  - For tenants living in extra care accommodation or other supported living schemes - housing officers and support workers were given guidance on how to respond to queries and help tenants complete the survey.

## 10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 A data impact assessment was undertaken for this project given the level of personal and sensitive data being collected and transferred. The impact assessment informed the content of the Request to quote, the approach taken to the survey and the Consultancy agreement. This ensured that the appropriate arrangements were in place to keep data protected and secure throughout all the collection and transfer elements of the survey.

## 11 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 11.1 The council is required to conduct the survey in accordance with the regulator survey requirements. The main risk was not collecting the data in accordance with these requirements and in time for submission deadline. The survey was conducted in good time to allow for supplementary actions to be taken.

- 11.2 Few other risks are associated with the results other than ensuring that tenants receive feedback and see change in response to the views that they have taken the time to provide to mitigate against reputational risk.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Financial Exposure	Procurement exercise was conducted with the support of the Procurement team, to commission the survey and ensure VFM	
Exposure to challenge		
Innovation		
Reputation		
Fail to collect the data and meet the REGULATOR's requirements i.e. representation, confidence levels	Commission a provider with experience in running statutory surveys of this nature with the appropriate professional memberships	
Achievement of outcome Outcome required is - the survey collects the data in the prescribed form required for submission by the Regulator for social Housing	As above	
Property	None	
Community Support	None	
Timescales		
Data required for 31.03.24	The survey was conducted in good time to allow for supplementary actions to be taken if the data collected failed to meet the REGULATOR requirements.	
Project capacity	Resources and structure required plus the impact on other housing specialists and housing teams raised at Housing Departmental Managers Team in good time.	

Other		
Data breach/loss	Transfer of personalised data through a secure channel.	
Ensure tenants are aware of the results and how they will be used.	Feedback to formal tenant meetings and informal means such as newsletters and the website.	
Tenants don't feel listened to	Apply the resources and structure required to deliver the agreed actions.	

## 12 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

### 12.1 Introduction

The council, along with other housing providers have for many years conducted tenant satisfaction surveys to find out what tenants think about the services provided by their landlord and use what they say to inform business planning priorities.

The government's 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper', proposed standardising the approach across all providers so it would be possible to compare performance by bringing in a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) on issues that matter to tenants that providers would be required to collect annually.

This report presents the results of the council's first TSMs Tenant Satisfaction Survey. There are 12 TSMs collected through this survey; the aim of which is to allow tenants to have their say about their home, the services they receive and how these could be improved in the future.

The survey response rate was 46% (with an error margin of +/- 2.9% which comfortably exceeds the TSM target error margin of +/- 4%). When benchmarked against other clients of ARP Research the council were either in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile for all indicators. The results will be submitted to the regulator in March 2024 and benchmarked against all housing providers.

A copy of the full report is provided in Appendix 1.

### 12.2 Summary of results

The council's results across most of the TSMs are broadly in line with the average ARP Research benchmark median of other landlords that have completed surveys with TSM questions over the last 18 months.

The main positive exceptions being higher than average results for listening to tenants and the timeliness of repairs.

Conversely the greatest shortfalls relative to benchmark targets are in the approaches to handling anti-social behaviour and complaints more generally.

### 12.3 Headline results

Listed below are the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the percentage of the respondents that were **satisfied** for each measure:-

- With service overall – 78%
- That their home is safe - 79%
- That their home is well maintained - 74%
- That communal areas are clean and maintained - 64%
- With the time taken to complete their last repair – 78%
- That the council listens to views and acts on them – 67%
- That they were being kept informed – 72%
- Were treated fairly and with respect – 79%
- With the approach to handling complaints – 47%
- That a positive contribution is made to the area – 59%
- With the approach to handling anti-social behaviour – 48%

Tenants who came along to the summer 2022 'Listening to views' focus groups said that they preferred to hear which areas had the highest levels of **dissatisfaction**. Listed below are those that scored a combined (very and fairly) 15% or more dissatisfaction: -

- With the approach to handling complaints – 39%
- That communal areas are clean and maintained - 25%
- With the approach to handling anti-social behaviour – 17%
- Listens to views and acts on them – 16%
- That their home is well maintained - 15%

The lowest level of dissatisfaction was with - being treated fairly and with respect at 7%.

#### 12.4 Comments on the results

- a) The council's results mirror the sector wide trend of reduced satisfaction levels
- b) The most influential demographic category in most tenant surveys is age group, with similar patterns across most results. Overall satisfaction is highest amongst retirement age tenants (88%, over 65s) and significantly lower amongst the under 35s (65%)
- c) Satisfaction is much higher in sheltered/extra care housing than in general needs stock. It is also higher in the rural districts than in the city districts
- d) There's a pattern throughout the survey of the small group of BAME respondents being significantly more satisfied than White British tenants (86% compared to 78%)
- e) There's been a sharp fall in satisfaction with tenants in Weeke – 74% from 91% for overall service satisfaction
- f) There was a strong repairs and maintenance theme within the results and feedback. One in ten of the comments made at the end of the survey were requests to complete repairs and maintenance jobs that remain outstanding, followed by 7% that asked for better information and communication on when repairs would be completed
- g) The text of a few of the questions remains unchanged from previous surveys and therefore comparisons are possible for example:
  - (i) Fewer tenants than in 2019 feel that they are kept informed about things that are important to them (72% v 81%), albeit still consistent with the average score amongst other landlords.
  - (ii) The extent to which the council listens to and acts upon the views of tenants is one area in which the council compares favourably against both its own 2019 score (was 65%) and the wider sector benchmark (63%). Listening better is a key priority for the council and recent engagement activities around this include, the consultation around the development of an engagement plan, the 'Listening to views' focus groups, visits to sheltered and extra care households by the 'Wellbeing and Inclusion Officer, and engagement around energy saving homes work programme
- h) Just under half of the sample are satisfied with the council's approach to handling anti-social behaviour (ASB) (48%), compared to 17% that

are dissatisfied. This is below the benchmark average of 53% and has also fallen by 11% since 2019

- i) Complainants satisfied (47%) with the council's approach to the handling of their complaint, is below the benchmark median of 53%. As noted in the report; many respondents that claim to have made a complaint will not have used the formal complaints system. This result should therefore be viewed as comments on how the council generally deals with issues or problems that arise

## 12.5 Areas for improvement

Working with our tenants and within the constraints of the HRA Business Plan our ambition is to deliver services at a standard that is the best possible. We will develop a 5 year plan to review services and aim for the best possible levels of customer satisfaction. Focus will be on the following areas for improvement:

- Repairs & maintenance – outstanding repairs and listening to views -
  - Digital offer - the Property Services service plan includes reviewing the digital service offer to improve options for reporting repairs and providing feedback, getting information on planned and cyclic maintenance programmes and for officers being able to book repairs on site during home visits
  - Performance indicators - Agree with tenants through formal tenant engagement groups meaningful areas of repairs service performance to monitor
  - Improving contractor customer excellence - work with tenants to design the service expectations of the main repairs and maintenance contract when this is next retendered
- Anti-social behaviour –
  - a scrutiny exercise will examine the council's approach to handling complaints about anti-social behaviour (for information: a housing scrutiny exercise is where tenants look at a specific service function and examine the basis for how and why a landlord delivers the service in the way it does along with any performance data. The outcome should be recommendations that result in change and improvement).
  - The team have already started looking at their approach and invested in officer training to communicate and manage expectations effectively

- Customer Service Excellence – investment in a training programme for all housing staff delivered by external providers expert in embedding a culture of customer excellence
- Engagement with the under 35s –
  - an independent review has been commissioned to review the approach to tenant engagement against the requirements of the regulator. This reported that improvement was required to the representativeness of the current approach
  - The council has drafted a menu of possible options for improvement and presented these to Business and Housing Policy committee in Feb 2023 and has started conversations with involved tenants through the existing formal structure
  - This menu of options is being tested to find out which are most attractive to those tenants who are not currently heard. The engagement plan will be finalised based on the results of the testing with a focus on reaching the under 35s
- Communal areas are clean and maintained – improvements are being made to monitoring frequency and ease of feedback with a new service provider
- Area variances – the new community engagement officers will use pop up community hub engagement opportunities to drill down into area based results to get an understanding of the reasons for dissatisfaction to design improvement actions
- Complaints – The formal complaints process has been comprehensively reviewed and the approach to monitoring improved; the expectation is that the actions above should improve tenants service experience and reduce complaints

### 13 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 13.1 Listening and engaging with our residents is a key priority for the council and we do this in many ways, through day-to-day services, TACT and formal surveys. Our existing survey approach has been reviewed to allow careful and rigorous comparison in the sector and although the questions are specified the method of delivery is not.
- 13.2 Consideration was given to a quarterly survey conducted on a rolling programme i.e. surveying a proportion of all tenants each quarter. An annual survey was considered the most effective and time efficient approach. It removed both the burden of analysing the results several times throughout the year and the consideration that would be required in respect of possible seasonal fluctuations. It was decided that one annual survey would be the most efficient way to map trends and inform business planning.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

BHP40 – Draft Housing Tenant Engagement and Communication Plan – 28 February 2023

BHP Presentation – Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results – 7 Oct 2019

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Survey 2023