

**HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**  
**7 JUNE 2021**

**HOUSING SERVICES CUSTOMER JOURNEY FEEDBACK**

**1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To inform Members of the customer journey insight project outcomes in relation to housing services.
- 1.2 To advise Members of the planned actions to improve services and the customer experience in light of this insight.

**2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 Housing services has surveyed customers for many years in the form of the annual STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and internal transactional surveys. Since 2016, this has been outsourced to Viewpoint.
- 2.2 The STAR replaced the former STATUS survey. Much like the residents survey, it aims to establish how satisfied Council tenants and leaseholders are with a range of measures relating to their Council home, tenancy, leasehold services and neighbourhood. Unlike STATUS, it is not mandatory to run the STAR survey annually, but there is value in running this survey on a regular frequency to identify key areas for improvement as this also includes customers who may not have contacted us for services within the previous 12 months.
- 2.3 Housing services has a range of standard transactional surveys for key services including repairs, gas servicing, lettings, ASB, Right to Buy, adaptations and major works.
- 2.4 As part of the consultation undertaken to bring housing services back into the Council, tenants were consulted on what services or improvements mattered most to them, the top three areas were Repairs and Maintenance, dealing with ASB and Value for Money. The Council has already brought the Grounds Maintenance Service back in house from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, as part of this commitment to improve services and deliver value for money. Our repairs categories have been extended so more repairs get addressed quicker and the priorities have been simplified to make the allocation of jobs more efficient and easier for the tenants to understand.
- 2.5 To complement the above feedback, a customer insight project was launched to understand how tenants felt about our services and identify key themes for improvement areas in relation to lettings / voids, repairs, ASB, rents, resident involvement and value for money. This work was also undertaken by Viewpoint on our behalf.

2.6 Details were provided to Viewpoint of tenants who had experienced the services within the previous two years and the numbers of those surveyed were as follows;

- Lettings / Voids - 200 surveys completed
- Repairs – 350 surveys completed
- Rents – 350 surveys completed
- Value for Money – 353 surveys completed
- Tenant Involvement – 580 surveys completed
- ASB – 30 surveys completed

### **3.0 Proposals**

3.1 This report takes account of the findings and outcomes of the transactional surveys and the customer insight journey project and, in consultation with Business Managers, makes a number of proposals which aim to drive service improvements and increase customer satisfaction with those services. The latest STAR survey results were not available at the time of writing this report, but will be presented in a dedicated report to the Homes and Communities Committee in September.

#### **3.2 Lettings / Voids**

3.2.1 Satisfaction with lettings has remained consistently high and for the most recent financial year 20/21, 93% of tenants were satisfied with the service.

3.2.2 Whilst taking into account that any improvements may show little movement on overall satisfaction levels, the feedback from 200 customers as part of the customer journey project gives some insight into areas for development; most notably perhaps that 19.5% said they did not find the bidding process helpful or supportive, 13.5% had issues with the speed of the process, 13% mentioned decoration, 18.5% mentioned a variety of quality issues and 10.5% mentioned certain major works not being carried out prior to moving in.

3.2.3 In prompt response to this, change has been implemented so that any property due for programmed major works within 12 months of the property being re let e.g. rewires and kitchen and bathroom replacement will have this work done at the void stage. This will ensure tenants do not have to delay decorating or have to redecorate following such works as well as endure the upheaval and disruption caused by major works.

3.2.4 In terms of the speed of the process, some of the comments related to how quickly tenants are expected to move after the sign up stage. Discussions with the Housing Choice Officers has revealed that whilst the process works well for the majority of customers, it can be difficult finding a balance as some customers get frustrated by the length of time they have to wait to move following a successful bid on a property which requires major works before it can be relet; others like to have the time to plan for a move. The point at which to advertise and let will form part of a Housing Choice review.

3.2.5 Much of the other improvement feedback, including decoration is being considered as part of a pilot of an enhanced lettable standard, approved at SLT on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Findings and recommendations will be reported to a future Committee.

3.2.6 Moving forward, a future development, post Covid restrictions is whether to start the viewing and sign up process before properties are ready to let, i.e. during the tenancy termination period or as soon as the property becomes void, which would allow new tenants to have a greater notice period. To complement this, the team have created a new post of Leaving Well Officer which will ensure that the property is in good order before transferring, minimise recharges and support the tenant to leave well. Hopefully this will also improve the void times and enable any major works to be ordered before the property becomes empty.

### 3.3 Repairs

3.3.1 Satisfaction with repairs has remained consistently high at on or above 90% for many years. As a result of the transactional survey feedback and Covid creating an opportunity to review and streamline the service, a decision was approved by Homes and Communities Committee during the previous financial year to move to a three repairs priority system from six. This is less confusing for the customer and gives more flexibility for the service provision. Early indications show satisfaction remains high.

3.3.2 Out of 350 respondents surveyed for the customer journey insight project, almost 90% were happy with the ease of reporting repairs. Improvement feedback ranged between 7% and 9% of customers; i.e. customers were confused by the repairs priorities and timescales (6.9%), repairs waiting times (8.9%) and communication / being kept updated / text reminders (8.3%). 13.4% gave negative feedback in terms of the repair being done first time; the team are doing a lot of work to ensure that we achieve high “right first visit” repairs through reviewing the stock levels, van stock, the materials required and quality of the original diagnosis.

3.3.3 Given that changes have already been made to repairs priorities, there are no proposals to carry out any additional improvements to the service outside of this year’s business plan, though more efficiencies will be achieved by improving our housing IT system and how it engages with tenants waiting for repairs.

### 3.4 Rents

3.4.1 The feedback on rents was overall positive with almost 90% of customers saying they were satisfied with the options available to pay their rent. What this has raised however, is whether we provide more options than is necessary and whether the impact of removing expensive options such as PayPoint, would deliver a saving for the Council, but have little impact on customer satisfaction. It is worth noting that the majority of customers using the more expensive methods are older tenants. The team are liaising with Revenues and Benefits to look at simplifying payment methods.

3.4.2 There was some improvement feedback relating to the provision and frequency of rent statements, with 22.9% of customers citing this as a waste of money and not required. As a social landlord we are obligated to provide four quarterly rent statements per year, but not necessarily in a hard copy. Being aware of this feedback will enable the service to promote online access to paperless statements as part of the transition to greater provision of online and digital services.

3.4.3 There was also some qualitative feedback in relation to new tenants having to sign up and move quickly and on occasion being liable for rent on two properties whilst still in a notice period. The Income Management team are now being notified of new tenant details immediately after viewing and sign up by Tenancy Officers, as opposed to when their details appear on the housing system, enabling the team to provide advice to new tenants much earlier regarding any potential benefit which can be claimed in the event of dual rent liability. It is hoped this will close the gap for those tenants.

### 3.5 Value for Money

3.5.1 There were over 350 customers surveyed regarding value for money. Unsurprisingly most (45.9%) valued the repairs service above all others. 87.2% of tenants felt that their rent provided value for money, however a small minority (8.4%) felt that the rent was too high for the size of the property. This is an interesting perception because the Council's social rent is lower than other registered providers both in the East Midlands and nationally.

3.5.2 This has highlighted that the housing service could benefit from publishing information relating to rents and what tenants receive for their rent in our annual tenant report and social media communications throughout the year. A document will also be created to show the "value" of a secure tenancy.

### 3.6 Tenant Involvement

3.6.1 Out of 580 customers surveyed, 36% have given feedback during the previous year. This is encouraging to know that a large proportion of customers have been able to let us know how we are doing and hopefully see value in this. Of these, 66% came from surveys, 16% came from complaints and 10% from compliments.

3.6.2 Interestingly 21.6% had an expectation that they would hear back from us regarding their feedback, prompting us to think about whether we should do more to let customers know how much we appreciate their feedback and how this has helped to improve services. Again, this is something we will include in the annual tenant report and social media communications. We may also opt to contact these customers directly, even if it was a sample of customers where their feedback has directly driven a service improvement.

3.6.3 It is pleasing that 54% of customers expressed an interest in being involved in shaping services and with their permission, their details have been shared with Tenant Engagement colleagues to begin to contact these customers to establish how and in what form they would like to be involved.

### 3.7 ASB

3.7.1 Numbers for ASB cases and therefore customers surveyed are relatively low, both for transactional surveys and the customer journey project. Just 30 customers were surveyed as part of the latter. However, there were strong alignments of themes in both surveys.

3.7.2 Customers indicated they are dissatisfied with the level of support and are also unhappy with the length of time taken to resolve an issue and how long issues persist before action is taken. Of those surveyed, 50% of cases involved the Police.

3.7.3 It has been recognised that an improvement that could result in improvement across our ASB response (particularly where there is multi agency involvement) would be setting out and managing expectations from the outset, in particular setting out the action the Council is able to take and provide regular updates and call backs where requested. This is the standard process, but it appears from the feedback there is room for improvement operationally and perhaps an opportunity to refresh training for all Tenancy Officers. As ASB was one of the key service areas highlighted for improvement on bringing housing services back into the Council, this feedback and the process will be fully reviewed in consultation with involved tenants next financial year.

### 3.8 Notable Business Plan Actions to Improve the Customer Journey and Satisfaction

3.8.1 Resource within Tenancy and Estates have been increased by 1 x Senior Housing Officer and 3 x Tenancy Officers. This enables the team to undertake “Getting to Know You” visits which is essentially a proactive Tenancy Audit Programme, which will enable us to understand more about the tenants in our homes, get early warning of property and tenancy failures as well as better understanding the current and future needs of our tenants.

3.8.2 Walkabouts have resumed on 12<sup>th</sup> April since Covid restrictions allowed. Tenancy and Estates is working with Environmental Services and Street Scene to create a holistic approach to managing the public realm and providing a programme of walkabouts / days of action to achieve a seamless approach to Council owned and maintained land.

3.8.3 In 2022/23 there will be a review of the Decent Homes standard at a national level and future local consultation piece.

3.8.4 Work is underway to create more synergy between repairs and investment, whereby repeat and high value repairs are reviewed and added to the investment programme where appropriate to give better value for money.

3.8.5 In relation to gas repairs and servicing, there are three separate services, two of which are outsourced to external contractors. It will be proposed via SLT to amalgamate heating repairs, servicing and renewal into one seamless service to deliver value for money savings and improve the service for customers.

3.8.6 In relation to customer feedback and complaints, there will be an exercise involve tenants looking at kitchen and bathroom replacement programme.

### 4.0 Equalities Implications

4.1 During any potential review of rent payment options, consideration will be given to whether the removal of certain methods will adversely impact certain tenants.

4.2 As part of the digital transformation and provision of online services, consideration will be given to whether tenants without access to online services will be adversely impacted. 59.7% (209) of tenants surveyed stated an online statement would not meet their needs and just over half of those said that was because they did not go online.

## **5.0 Digital Implications**

5.1 There are none specifically arising from this report as the proposal to provide online rent statements as a long term aim will feed into the wider digital transformation of services project.

5.2 There is significant improvements that can be achieved across all services through improvements with Housing ICT and the Directorate are working with ICT, having created a high level plan of system improvements.

## **6.0 Financial Implications – FIN21-22/5888**

6.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. Where expenditure is required, it is anticipated this will be secured from the efficiency savings pot to improve services.

## **7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives**

7.1 This report supports two objectives in the Community Plan - Create more and better quality homes through our roles as landlord, developer and planning authority and to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, and increase feelings of safety in our communities.

## **8.0 Comments of Director**

8.1 This paper was presented to SLT on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021 who support all recommendations and ask for regular updates on progress against related actions to be reported to this Committee and tenant forums.

8.2 This data will be presented to our involved tenants once STAR feedback is available as well as being published in our Tenant Annual Report.

## **9.0**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Members note the contents of this report and notes the;**

- 1. Overall positive responses to housing services provided by the Council.**
- 2. Identified work streams and proposals highlighted within section 3, which will form an action plan for regular monitoring and reporting until implementation.**

### **Reason for Recommendations**

To act up feedback and take positive steps to improve the customer journey and customer experience with housing services and maintain the high levels of satisfaction and improve this where possible.

**Background Papers**

Nil

For further information please contact Nicola Priest, Project Research officer on 01636 655526.

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