



Newark & Sherwood District Council

INDEPENDENT TENANTS ADVISOR

Test of Opinion





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ABOUT OPEN COMMUNITIES

Open Communities is a leading Government approved, accredited, independent training and advisory agency which specialises in developing resident involvement within social housing and regeneration proposals. Our company was formed in June 2005 and has offices in Liverpool and London.

We have extensive experience of providing ballot and Test of Opinion projects for the purposes of statutory Tenant Management Organisation continuation ballots. We have worked as Independent Tenants and Community Advisors on projects ranging from Decent Homes Standards Option Appraisal, Housing Revenue Account Private Finance Initiatives, Arms Length Management Organisations, Tenant Management Organisations and on Tenant Led Stock Options Appraisal projects.

We have extensive testimonials for the work we have delivered on behalf of our growing list of clients. We take pride in taking a hands on approach to our consultation exercises. We are an organisation steeped in community involvement in the social housing sector, working in partnership and alongside social tenants. This gives us an insight into the concerns of residents and enables us to communicate the implications of all potential outcomes.



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BACKGROUND

In November 2018, the Council's Policy & Finance Committee agreed to initiate a review of the housing management arrangements for the Council's housing stock. It tasked the Strategic Housing Liaison Panel (SHLP) to undertake the review work looking at two options, either to:

- Retain the current arrangements by which Newark and Sherwood Homes Ltd (NSH) manage and maintain the Council's housing stock
- Re-integrate the housing landlord service into the Council.

The SHLP undertaking the review work consisted of six Council representatives (councillors) and five NSH board members. To assist SHLP in its work the Council engaged specialist housing consultancy support (Savills) to assess and advise on the optimal way forward taking into account the Council's objectives for the review. Savills have estimated that a minimum of £0.95m annually could be realised through the discontinuation of NSH and through the reintegration of landlord and the associated support services into the Council

Open Communities were asked to undertake a confidential test of opinion with all tenants and leaseholders across the District. The Council is currently undertaking a review of its housing management arrangements. The review is focussing on two options - retaining delivery through Newark and Sherwood Homes Ltd, or the provision of in-house management services by the Council. The Council has appointed a working party, which consists of representatives from both the Council and Newark and Sherwood Homes, to conduct the review and report back to its Policy and Finance Committee with recommendations.



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THE BRIEF

Newark & Sherwood District Council commissioned Open Communities as an independent consultancy, specialising in resident engagement. Once the wording of the questionnaire was agreed (see appendix 1), an 8 week consultation period commenced on 26th June and ended on 21st August. The consultation programme was designed to offer residents the options of

- retaining the Status Quo with Newark and Sherwood Homes continuing to manage the properties under its agreement with the council
- Bring the housing service back in-house, to be managed by the council
- No view either way.

All residents received the questionnaire along with a cover letter (see appendix 2) and a pre-paid envelope to return their views. Residents were also offered the opportunity to vote via Open Communities web-site on a dedicated Newark & Sherwood page. Open Communities provided a freephone number to all residents to call and ask questions about the consultation process. All questionnaires were coded to ensure residents voted once.

OUTREACH WORK

Newark & Sherwood District Council arranged a number of drop-in sessions across the district to allow residents to ask questions and find out more about why the council were seeking the views of residents. These sessions were attended by Open Communities as an independent voice in the process. The table below highlights where and when they took place and how well or otherwise they were attended.



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Date	Venue	time	Attended
16 th July	De Lacey Court Community Centre - Ollerton	4pm – 7pm	13
25 th July	The Green Community Centre - Bilsthorpe	10.30am – 12.30pm	2
25 th July	Cambridge Close Community Centre - Rainworth	2pm – 5pm	5
26 th July	Kings Court Southwell	10.30am – 1pm	12
26 th July	The Bridge Community Centre - Newark	4pm – 7pm	3
30 th July	Cleveland Square Community Centre – Hawtonville	10am – 12 noon	8
30 th July	The Lleys - Lowdham	2pm – 3.30pm	6
30 th July	Castle House - Newark	4pm – 7pm	0

The drop-in sessions were attended by staff of Newark and Sherwood Homes, Newark and District Council, a representative from the Tenants Forum and Open Communities.



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Feedback from the drop-in sessions was generally supportive of bringing the management of the homes back within the council. One piece of anecdotal information is that most residents did not know what the service was like prior to the ALMO taking over management as most had moved into council accommodation after the ALMO was set up.

The drop-in sessions were used by residents to report general housing and estate management issues.

TEST OF OPINION FEEDBACK

In our experience this is a very positive return in terms of number of completed and returned questionnaires. It is highly unusual for a questionnaire to achieve over 20% return rate when methods of returns are by conventional post and via our web site.

The question about which services residents would like to see the Council invest in, if the management of the housing stock is taken back in-house, directed tenants to choose their first three options from a set list. However a lot of residents took the option of numbering their choices from one through to eight. This accounts for the high numbers in the bar chart below. The top three responses were;

- Repairs and Maintenance
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Value for money

The next placed option, only a handful behind number three was to build more council homes.



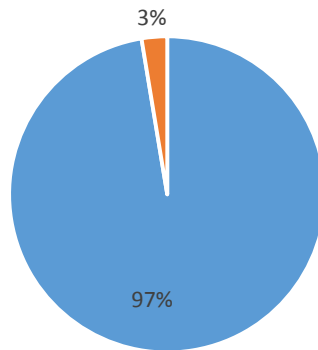
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Questionnaires sent out	6998	
Returns	1457	20.8%
Returns by tenants	1419	97.4%
Returns by leaseholders	38	2.6%
In favour of bringing the housing service in-house	1172	80.4%
Not in favour of bringing the housing service in-house	59	4%
No view either way	181	12.4%
No vote	45	3%
Method of returns		
Via pre-paid envelope	1406	96.5%
Via Open Communities web site	39	2.7%
Via drop in session	12	0.8%
Resident Involvement		
Would like to be involved	437	30%
Would like to be entered into prize draw	957	65.7%



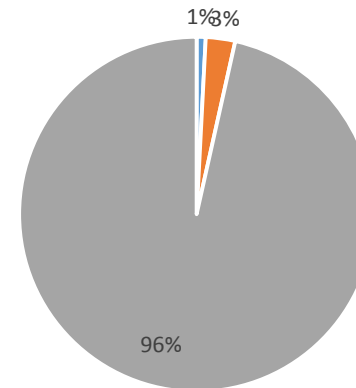
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Tenure



■ tenant ■ leaseholders

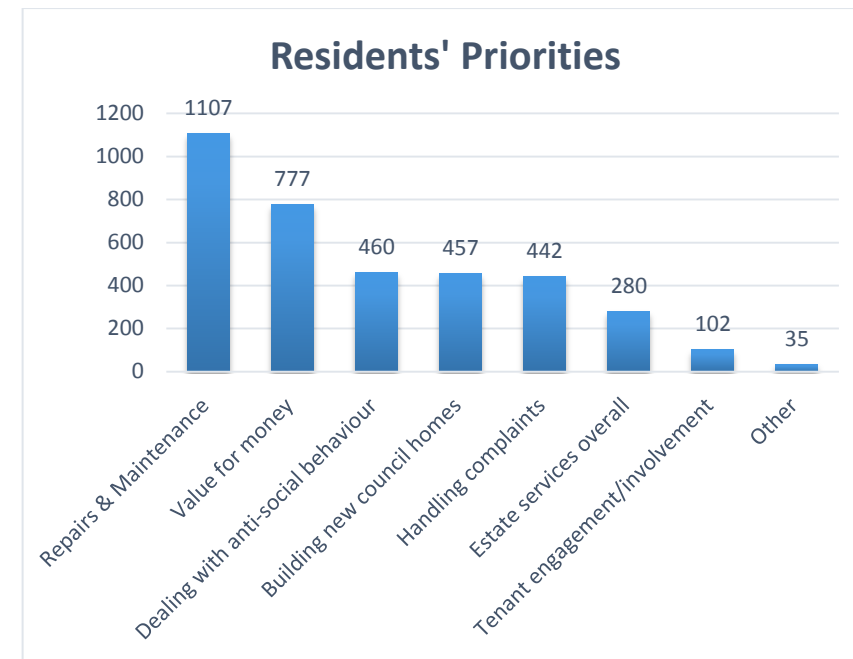
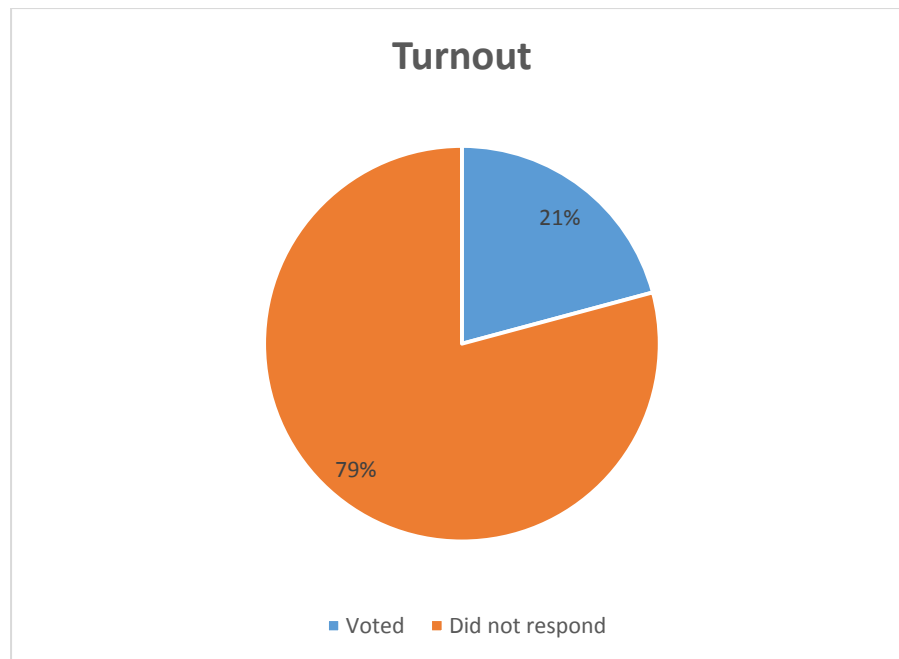
Method of return



■ drop in session ■ website ■ postal



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This report by Open Communities was produced on the 22nd August 2019, on completion of the consultation programme. Open communities will retain the Test of Opinion information for 12 months before securely destroying it.

FUTURE CONSULTATION

Open Communities would advise residents are contacted and thanked for taking part in the Test of Opinion and that they played a part in how their homes and communities are managed – regardless of the decision taken by the council.



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Nearly one in three respondents said they would be interested in finding out how they could play a part in how their homes and communities are managed. Again, this is a very positive outcome. Open Communities, again, would recommend further targeted consultation with these residents to follow up on their views

If you have any queries or questions relating to this test of opinion and how it was facilitated, or if we can help in any other way, please get in touch.

- Freephone 0800 073 1051
- enquiries@opencommunities.org