

Subject:	Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) 2016 - detailed response to tenant feedback		
Date of Meeting:	20 September 2017		
Report of:	Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities & Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Ododo Dafe	Tel: 29- 3201
	Email:	ododo.dafe@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report provides a detailed account from Housing on actions arising from the customer feedback responses to the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) satisfaction survey carried out in June 2016. The survey achieved a response rate of 28% with 829 tenants taking part. The survey result, and the council's immediate response to them, was reported to Housing & New Homes Committee on 18 January 2017.
- 1.2 The actions detailed in this report are designed to improve the areas of service tenants were most concerned about as expressed in their free-text responses to six open-ended questions. Alongside that, there were two main areas where satisfaction levels have gone down slightly against the previous STAR survey carried out in 2014 - 'your neighbourhood as a place to live' and 'the overall quality of your home'.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Housing & New Homes Committee note and comment on the contents of this report.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 A thorough analysis has been carried out into each of the 778 responses from the six open-ended questions residents were asked in the survey. The questions essentially asked what could be done to improve the following:-

- customer experience
- access to services
- advice and support regarding rent and income
- repairs
- planned works
- Homing in

3.2 Despite the questions being framed to gather suggestions for improvement, there were many positive comments commending the service, and teams have noted these in terms of what tenants would like to see Housing continue to do, or do more of. However, for the purpose of improvement, attention has been focussed on the main areas where tenants comments were critical, and on the suggestions they made. The information detailed below includes current and planned actions, and in some cases potential actions for the future. The actions are also summarised in the table found at Appendix 1.

3.3 The questions in the survey relating to neighbourhoods and quality of home did not offer free-text responses, but this report details actions being taken on these topics.

3.4 Customer experience

3.4.1 The survey question asked 'Is there anything we could do to make your customer experience better? From the 186 responses received the main concerns for tenants centred on the following:

3.4.1 *Communication* - tenants felt that more understanding, politeness and getting through to the right person would help improve their experience, alongside speeding up call waiting times and responding to emails.

"When dealing with a tenant's query that requires more investigation keep the tenant informed (Even if you do not have an answer but are still looking into it)."

3.4.2 While the Housing Customer Service Team usually responds to tenants' initial contact, the service as a whole has responsibility for communication. To this end, we propose to increase the number of officers who receive customer service training, training on complaints management, and equalities and diversity training - which will all support improved communications.

3.4.3 *Choice* – tenants' requests included more flexibility with opening times, more local offices, and changes to the type of music played whilst waiting on the phone.

"More flexibility with appointments when people work"

3.4.4 Housing is looking to increase the ways in which services are provided and increase the times at which they are available to customers and residents by improving what is offered online. Extending opening hours or opening more local offices requires an intensity of staffing resources and therefore is not being considered at the current time.

We are very much aware that not all tenants have access to the internet, and we really want to make sure we can continue to provide excellent services to those people. For those tenants who do not currently have access to a computer, but want this, the city libraries have computers which people can use for free. The council is doing a range of things to support residents increase their digital capabilities, mostly because of the many everyday life benefits that can be gained from doing this.

Digital Brighton and Hove can support people with whatever they want to know to get online. They offer their services from a range of locations in the city, or in people's homes if they are unable to get to a Digital Brighton and Hove centre, for example The Bridge, The Whitehawk Inn and The Hangleton and Knoll Project.

The music played has been removed from call waiting and replaced with messages about services that are hopefully of interest to residents.

- 3.4.5 *Check work* - tenants highlighted that they would like jobs completed on the first visit, rather than repeated visits, that we check that work has been completed to a decent standard, and when things go wrong that we take ownership and resolve the problem.

"Get someone to check the work after it's done"

- 3.4.6 The council is working with our contractors to improve the percentage of jobs completed in one visit. In addition, we will be introducing a new process for staff around who to contact when issues arise and logging issues for future discussion with contractors.

3.5 **Access to services**

- 3.5.1 The survey asked 'Is there anything we could do to make our services easier to access?' Three main themes emerged from the 106 responses:

- providing more face-to-face contact

"Having direct access to the Housing Officer assigned to your area would make contact easier"

- improving website and internet access

"automated services or payments should send receipts to my email address and give you a balance"

- increasing options for people with disabilities

"I am disabled I have to drive to Lavender Street if I need face to face"

- 3.5.1 The Seniors Housing Team have reviewed their web page to ensure online information is up to date, as well as being committed to Scheme Managers.

- 3.5.2 As our use of technology improves within the council, Housing continuously look at how services can be made more easy for tenants to access, use and get what they require from them. Additional improvements will be seen by 2019 when Housing will have a new customer focused housing management computer system.

- 3.5.3 All housing offices comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Housing Officers regularly visit tenants homes, as do surveyors and staff in other

housing teams. Housing is looking to have some videos made available on-line to help make information more accessible for those who may struggle with reading long texts or who generally find it off-putting.

3.6 Advice and support regarding rent and income

3.6.1 The survey question asked 'What could be more helpful?' and this was linked to the question 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the advice and support you receive from the Housing department with managing your finances and paying your rent and service charges?'. From the 102 responses, issues emerged around lack of information, not knowing that help is out there, improving access (whether this is online or talking to people), increasing help with rent and housing benefit, and making letters easier to understand.

"Offer to help review rent and income on the possibility of making payment easier"

"Documentation i.e. Bills should be easier to understand and not several pages long"

3.6.2 All tenants receive a 'rent change notification letter' every year containing information of any changes to their rent and service charges and a breakdown to show each tenant what they need to pay each week. There is a contact phone number and email address if a tenant has any queries. In addition, the Housing Income Management Team (HIMT) send out quarterly rent statements during the year so tenants can keep a record of the balance on their rent account.

3.6.3 Tenants can sign up to the Customer Online Service (COS) so they are able to see their rent account anytime; details are on the council web site. Housing staff are very mindful of financial difficulties facing tenants, particularly those who currently are on, or who will be claiming, Universal Credit. Therefore a range of ways of communicating information about council and voluntary services are used e.g. Homing In and the council website. Consideration is being given to improving communication using videos and publicity information on the telephone waiting lines.

3.6.4 Staff visiting tenants' homes are able to refer residents to sources of support, or bring their enquiries back to the office. As we improve our use of technology and replace our existing housing management IT system, visiting officers will be able to adopt mobile working and will have a range of information readily available.

3.6.5 The Housing Income Management Team regularly makes referrals for tenants to Money Advice Plus if they have any problems with debts or budgeting. The SHINE project run by Housing involves an officer visiting over 200 tenants to help them heat their homes in more affordable ways and save money on fuel bills, as well as helping the environment.

3.6.6 In the future Housing aims to provide face-to-face support for all tenants making new Universal Credit claims to ensure they are managing their money as well as possible. Alongside this, an online "Better Start Guide" is being developed for

applicants on the housing waiting list, to help prepare themselves for their new tenancies.

- 3.6.6 There are instances when tenants contact us about Housing Benefit or Council Tax. These calls are directed to the Benefits or Council Tax lines (and tenants are provided with the correct numbers for them to call directly in future).

3.7 Repairs

- 3.7.1 The survey question asked 'Is there anything we could do to improve our repairs service? Breaking down the 202 responses revealed that tenants' main focus was on the following four areas:

3.7.2 *Response times* – focussed on delays such as waiting for a contractor to turn up either on a fixed date and time or just waiting for an appointment, as well as delays between assessing a job and then coming back to fix it.

3.7.3 Tenants' frustration with waiting coupled with an apparent lack of information is understood. Both Housing staff and Mears are dedicated to minimising waiting times and to improving customer communications to keep tenants up to date with what is happening, especially where unforeseen delays occur.

3.7.4 *Communication* – tenants would like to see improved communication between staff and contractors and tenants, as well as between teams within Housing. They see the poor communication resulting in delays, confusion, missed appointments, and not knowing who will do what, and when.

“Inform neighbours when noisy work will take place at a nearby property.”

3.7.5 A number of improvements are being made to how the council communicates with residents, particularly in engaging with residents ahead of larger planned works and updating residents when programmes are delayed or change. This is already underway for a number of projects and the Property & Investment Team is looking at further improvements to support this.

3.7.6 *Quality of work and checking work* – suggested improvements were mainly about ensuring jobs have been started, that jobs are completed to a satisfactory standard, and addressing the issues of contractors leaving a mess, not finishing work and or causing damage.

“Clean up after yourselves”

3.7.7 Residents on the Home Service Improvement Group have agreed a contractor's code of conduct, which has been shared with Housing contractors. In addition, the council will shortly be reviewing the processes for checking repairs work.

3.7.8 *More choice* – tenants would like contact details for the company and person dealing with their repair, 2-hour time slots as it is not easy to stay in for half a day, being able to make appointments after four o'clock for workers, and to have an on-line instant message service, as well as better quality products.

“Appointments that enable people that work to have appointments at a suitable time so we don't have to take a morning or afternoon off work & lose money”

- 3.7.9 These suggestions are particularly welcomed for the future, and can be looked into alongside both our existing contracts and future procurements. We will review some of these options with the forthcoming resident Task and Finish Group as well as the Home Improvement Group.

3.8 Planned work

- 3.8.1 The survey asked ‘Is there anything we could do to improve our planned work?’ From the 56 responses, tenants highlighted four main areas of concern: communication, response times, quality of work and checking work. Tenants suggested advising tenants when work will start, more information about the process (what is expected from both tenants and contractors), being informed about delay, and removing scaffolding quickly once work is complete.

“Better organisation - more communication with tenants regarding the work, once again listen to what the tenants would like to see and have done.”

“When scaffolding is up, do the job quicker and remove the scaffold quicker.”

- 3.8.2 Housing staff appreciate the importance of improved communication around planned works. Recently coffee mornings have been held with tenants to advise them about major works, as well as sending out regular updates of planned works.
- 3.8.3 Works programmes, including scaffolding, are being reviewed aiming to reduce delays. Working practices and the contractor’s quality assurance processes are also being looked at to ensure quality is better. When surveyors visit sites, contractor’s tidiness and cleanliness is being monitored, and if any issues are found, they are raised with the site agent as well as being logged for future discussions with contractors.

3.9 Homing in

- 3.9.1 The question asked ‘Is there anything we could do to improve Homing In?’ From the 126 responses the majority of people are satisfied with the magazine, however there were several suggestions for improvement which centred on more tenant contributions such as writing more articles, people’s stories from all areas, improving accessibility either on-line or in alternative formats (such as an App), and more information about local events and local jobs.

“Better to be on an app.”

“By getting tenants to write articles.”

“More frequency announcing forthcoming events we could participate in.”

3.9.2 We can discuss some of the suggestions at our regular meetings with the Neighbourhood Service Improvement Group, and with the tenants Homing In Editorial Board. Tenants' and residents' associations provide regular articles about what they are doing across the city and we are currently promoting Seniors Housing in all editions on issues around positive and active ageing. Homing In is provided online on the council website, however, the survey results reveal that tenants might be unaware that they can opt to receive it in this format, therefore we will promote this further.

3.10 Neighbourhoods

3.10.1 Housing is currently developing an action plan to encompass a range of actions for improving council housing public areas and general quality of life on estates.. This will be done in consultation with a Task and Finish resident group. Some of these actions include:

- a review of estates inspections (which include the capital works programme and the Estates Development Budget (EDB)).
- a pilot for city clean to collect bulk waste on Housing land
- a review of the grounds maintenance contract
- gardening and fencing schemes
- untidy gardens

3.10.2 Housing also carry out a range of activities which help to improve neighbourhoods, these include:

- Tenancy visits
- Response to fly tipping
- Response to repairs
- Estate inspections
- Cleaning of communal areas

3.10.3 Alongside the above actions, officers regularly engage with Tenant and resident associations to utilise the Estate Development Budget to improve outside areas and common ways. For example at Clarendon and Ellen 14 reclaimed wooden planters have been purchased (two for each garden) and in North Moulsecoomb fencing repairs and painting have been bid for. In Hollingdean picnic benches have been provided for grassed areas, and at Penhurst Place walls and steps have been jet washed outside both blocks.

3.10.4 Seniors Housing holds regular meetings with NVIRO, the contracted cleaners for seniors housing schemes. They publish performance results, which have a cleaning standard response rate of over 95%.

3.10.5 The Estate Services Team currently carry out various tasks to improve neighbourhoods which include:

- Weeding car parks on Housing land according to program of works
- Weeding outside blocks as and when reported by the cleaners
- Clearing of all items in communal ways following the Grenfell Tower fire

3.10.6 The Estate Services Team is considering offering a 'menu of services' for residents and asking what improvements could be made, or if there are tasks that are not currently carried out which the team could implement. If suggestions are within the team's capacity these would be positive additions to neighbourhood improvement.

3.11 Quality of home

3.11.1 Some of the Star survey results highlighted that the overall satisfaction with Housing had risen, but residents in older homes were significantly less satisfied. Some of the reasons that older homes might be less desirable are:

- The components within older properties may be older, characterised by poorer design standards, such as smaller internal rooms and less well planned internal layouts. Bathrooms, for example are not always where you would expect them to be, and kitchens can be relatively small.
- The fabric energy performance can sometimes be poorer, despite all the improvements that have been introduced.

3.11.2 Housing quality has been improved through long-term investment commitments. 100% of homes were brought up to the Government's Decent Homes Standards before the target of 31 December 2013. This work continues with an ongoing capital programme supporting investment in kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, roofs, re-wiring, efficient boilers, external repairs, and decorations.

3.11.3 Residents have been assisted in reducing their fuel use, and costs, through the installation of over 6,000 high efficiency condensing boilers and modern controls.

3.11.4 The new Brighton & Hove Property Standard was implemented in April 2014 and has the following key aims:

- To maintain 100% achievement of properties meeting the government's Decent Homes Standard and our local Brighton & Hove Standard over the medium term (initially the next five years)
- To ensure that all homes are as suitable as practicable for the needs of its occupants, in line with council policy
- To continue working closely with residents to help increase levels of resident satisfaction with the quality of their home

3.12 Housing staff are looking forward to continuing to work with residents to improve satisfaction with their housing service.

Table 1

STAR survey action plan							
	Customer experience	Customer access	Financial support	Repairs	Planned works	Homing-In	Neighbourhoods
1	<p>More staff training - customer service standards</p> <p>Equalities training</p>	<p>Review website</p> <p>Create housing app</p>	<p>Improve self-service options for making payments</p>	<p>Improvements made to communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ahead of larger planned works • updating residents when programmes are delayed or change 	<p>Provide a standard information sheet for tenants prior to works starting</p>	<p>Create an app version</p>	<p>Action plan:</p> <p>Estate inspection review</p> <p>Grounds Maintenance Review</p> <p>Bulk Waste Service Level Agreement with CityClean</p> <p>Capital Programme and EDB</p> <p>Review of discretionary gardening and fencing schemes</p> <p>Untidy gardens</p>
2	<p>Explore why repairs not carried out to customer satisfaction</p>	<p>Take a more robust approach to equalities when thinking about customer care</p>	<p>Improve direct debit system proposal to increase the number of direct debit runs to four from two but costs and resource restrictions may put this on hold until the implementation of a new housing database</p>	<p>Increase post inspections</p> <p>Create post inspections procedure</p>	<p>Provide more information online to highlight completed works programmes</p>	<p>Ask tenants to opt in to get the printed version rather than opt out</p>	<p>With more resources, we could extend block-cleaning routes to areas surrounding blocks, 'see it clean it'</p>
3		<p>Check Ohms information to make sure we know the needs of our tenants</p>		<p>2-hour slot times extended to new contract</p>	<p>5 year improvement plan for every property</p>	<p>Raise awareness about online accessibility</p>	<p>Link works programme into estates inspections results and RIO EDB processes</p>
4		<p>Link with existing community services/events to</p>		<p>On line tracking of repairs</p>	<p>Review kitchens and bathrooms every 5/10/15/20</p>		<p>Decorate deteriorated paint work rather than clean it</p>

		provide more face to face advice i.e. such as children's centres, with health visitors, at libraries -signpost to community services					
5				Increase post inspections by BHCC staff to 20-25% however requires more staff			Utilise EDB estates roadshow where no tenant resident associations-link in with estate inspections

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