



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 21 JUNE 2016

SUBJECT: TENANT SURVEY 2015

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Communities Committee with a further analysis of the tenant survey 2015 and sets out an improvement plan for 2016/17 based on a number of service areas to be improved.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (F) (15) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to performance management for Housing Services.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Communities Committee:-

- (i) **considers and notes the further analysis relating to the tenant survey 2015; and**
- (ii) **agrees the areas of improvement as set out in section 6 of the report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 1 March 2016, this Committee considered the main findings from the tenant survey 2015 (paragraph 10 of the Minute refers).
- 3.2 The survey sought tenants' views on a range of themes relating to their home and the housing services they receive from the Council. This included:
- satisfaction with the housing service;
 - experience of contact with housing services;
 - satisfaction with the repairs service;
 - the ability of tenants to heat their home;
 - the quality of tenants' homes and neighbourhood;
 - the extent to which tenants feel their rent is good value for money;
 - how well the Council keeps tenants informed; and
 - does it give tenants opportunities to participate in decision making?

4. WHO RESPONDED

- 4.1 A total of 1,738 tenants (30%) responded to the survey with a 95% level of confidence and data accurate to +/- 1.9%. This compares more favourably to the 2012 survey at +/- 2.9%.
- 4.2 Of those who responded to the survey, 57% were female and 43% male. In terms of age, it was the older age groups who were more likely to respond with 65% of returns coming from those aged 55+. Fewer tenants in the younger age groups responded with 2% coming from those under 25 and 6% from those aged 25 to 35. Younger tenants showed lower levels of satisfaction which could imply that this demographic are more likely to respond if they have had a negative experience of the service.
- 4.3 Across Moray, Elgin had the highest response with 48%, followed by Buckie (19%), Forres (14%), Keith (11%) and Speyside (8%).
- 4.4 There were 1,383 separate comments made within the survey and whilst this identified many good areas of tenant satisfaction, it has also helped shape some of the improvement actions that the service will take forward in 2016/17.
- 4.5 A full copy of the tenant survey has been made available in the Members library.

5. **SURVEY RESULTS**

Satisfaction with the housing services

- 5.1 Overall satisfaction with the housing service (80%) has fallen by 8% from that reported in 2012. Less than 1 in 10 tenants (9%) expressed some form of dissatisfaction and an analysis of individual comments has identified issues not only in relation to housing services but also other Council services (i.e. condition of roads, paths, play areas, communal grassed areas, dog fouling, etc.). These comments have been shared with the respective Head of Service but given the Council's current budget position, it is not possible at this time to say whether some/all of these issues can be resolved in the foreseeable future.
- 5.2 Despite the fall in satisfaction, it is worth noting that the proportion of tenants giving housing services a very satisfied rating has increased by 6%.
- 5.3 During 2015/16, the number of complaints received by the service reduced from the previous year (157) to 139. Specific to the 2015 survey, 7 in 10 tenants were satisfied with how the housing service had handled their complaint with only 1 in 10 remaining dissatisfied.

Contact with housing services

- 5.4 The survey gathered views from tenants about making contact with the housing service. The percentage of tenants very or fairly satisfied was generally high for ease of getting in touch (91%), staff friendliness (90%) and staff helpfulness (88%). There are some areas where improvements could be made such as the time to answer phone calls (85%), staff knowledge (79%), staff understanding of the situation (77%) and the quality of information provided (78%). Most of the negative comments received relate to general customer service such as staff being unable to answer a query, staff not having the authority to make a decision and the length of time to return calls or to take action. It is intended to discuss this with the contact centre to consider script improvements, additional training and it might even support a position where more technical or complex queries are passed to staff with more specialist knowledge (i.e. repairs diagnosis).
- 5.5 The strongest satisfaction was however in relation to how staff dealt with general housing enquiries (86%). Only 1 in 20 expressed dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction with the repairs service

- 5.6 The repairs service was highlighted by 97% of tenants as one of the most important areas to tenants and the consultant highlighted this as one of the most likely to have the greatest influence in improving overall satisfaction. Of tenants who had one or more repairs carried out in their property, 79% were satisfied with their experience of the repairs service. This is below the local authority average of 87% as reported by the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2014/15. The main reasons for tenants expressing dissatisfaction (13%) were poor repairs scheduling, incorrectly diagnosis of heating system problems, quality of repairs; delays in capital works, rude and abrupt staff and poor communication with tenants. These are areas that the Building Services Management Team will seek to address as part of their service improvements in 2016/17.

Quality of homes and neighbourhoods

- 5.7 There were high levels of satisfaction (86%) with the quality of tenants' homes but tenants did raise a number of perceived problems including repairs, improvements to bathrooms, kitchens and heating systems. The Housing Investment Plan 2016/17 reviewed its property upgrade programme to take in the views of this survey and this Committee approved the plan on 1 March 2016 (paragraph 5 of the Minute refers).
- 5.8 Tenants expressed less satisfaction in relation to the neighbourhood that they live in. As stated earlier in the report, the reasons for dissatisfaction are broader than simply "housing" and therefore options to improve neighbourhoods will not rest exclusively with one service. Maintenance of local areas was the highest reason for dissatisfaction. In light of these comments, it has been agreed that the Capital Programmes Team will carry out neighbourhood audits during the early part of this year with the aim of identifying neighbourhood improvement priorities to inform the 2017/18 housing investment programme.

- 5.9 Tenants reported lower satisfaction levels in relation to housing services dealing with antisocial behaviour, with around 6 in 10 satisfied. The lower satisfaction level was primarily due to a larger proportion of respondents giving a neutral “neither/nor” response. Around 1 in 7 respondents expressed dissatisfaction (15%). In considering this particular outcome, it is worth noting that the tenant survey 2015 overlapped with the Housing Services Change Management Plan which proposed to move the handling of ASB complaints from the housing service to the community safety team to improve customer service in this specific area. The Communities Committee approved the plan on 31 March 2015 (paragraph 12 of the Minute refers) and the change was implemented from 5 October 2015.

Heating homes

- 5.10 The majority of tenants (63%) indicated that it was very or fairly easy to keep their home warm during the winter. However, 27% did report some difficulty with this and nearly 1 in 10 continue to find it very difficult. Although this is similar to the findings reported in the 2012 survey, it is important that the service continues to improve its housing stock where possible in order to comply with the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) by 2020. The causes of fuel poverty involve three main components; the condition of properties, the income of the householder and the cost of fuel levied on the customer by the energy companies. The only aspect that the housing service can influence in terms of addressing fuel poverty is the improvement of tenants’ homes which the service remains committed to achieve.

Rents and value for money

- 5.11 84% of tenants feel that the rent for their property represents good value for money. This is a 6% increase when compared to 2012. Older tenants were more positive about rents offering value, with 9 in 10 of those aged 65+ expressing this view. Only 7 in 10 of those aged under 35 took a similar view.

Communication and participation

- 5.12 Tenants reported positive views in relation to keeping tenants informed about services and decisions. Nearly 4 in 5 tenants described this as very or fairly good (78%) but this is still a reduction when compared with 2012 (86%). Those aged 65+ were significantly more likely than others to describe the Council as good at keeping tenants informed (85%) compared to those aged under 45 (62%).
- 5.13 Less positive views from tenants relate to staff understanding of tenants’ situation (77%), the quality of information provided (78%) and staff knowledge (79%). It is proposed that further work is done to review these findings using some of the individual comments received from tenants to consider existing practices.
- 5.14 The Council offers a wide range of options for tenants to become involved in its decision making process. Tenants can participate within the Moray Tenants Forum, they participate in surveys about our different services, there is information in every tenant newsletter informing them how they can participate, there is a register of interested tenants for those who cannot

commit time to attend meetings and tenants can attend estate walkabouts in order to improve their areas. The tenant survey 2015 would suggest that despite these options, only 60% of tenants are satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in the Council's decision making processes. A third of those who responded to the survey did not give a clear view.

- 5.15 The Housing Service is taking part in "Stepping Up to Scrutiny", a training programme delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Housemark. Tenant scrutiny gives tenants more power to hold their landlord to account for its performance, decisions and conduct.
- 5.16 The newly established Service Improvement Panel (SIP) has completed the first stage of the scrutiny training and are now preparing for their first live exercise. The SIP have chosen outcome 3 of the Charter which relates to tenant participation and focuses on social landlords managing their business so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions. The outcome also covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants, how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants and other customers to become more capable of involvement.
- 5.17 The SIP will start their exercise by looking at how we gather the views of our tenants by assessing a range of satisfaction surveys sent on a regular basis. They will then consider how the feedback is used to guide future service developments. The panel will also look at the ways in which we communicate with our tenants about service changes by assessing the methods we use for this purpose, for example, the Tenants' Voice newsletter and the annual performance report to tenants and other customers. The Council are hopeful that this exercise will help us to improve the perception of how we keep our tenants informed and the opportunities we give our tenants to participate in our decision making and service development processes.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- 6.1 A number of actions will now be taken forward to address the findings from the 2015 survey. It is intended to report progress back to this Committee in March 2017. The actions are summarised below under the relevant housing themes:

The customer/landlord relationship

- 6.2 Many of the comments received in the survey relate to the Council's wider remit (condition of roads, paths, play areas, communal grassed areas, dog fouling, etc.). The Housing Service will work in partnership with other services to identify cost effective options to improve tenant concerns but given the Council's current budget position, it is not clear at this time whether some/all of these issues can be addressed.
- 6.3 While tenants' experiences of the contact centre are generally positive, there is evidence to suggest improvements could be made in terms of handling queries more effectively and efficiently. A working group will review and

consider improvements to scripts, assess training needs and identify options to deal with more complex enquiries such as repairs.

- 6.4 A proportion of tenants indicated that they do not always feel like they are kept informed about services and decisions or that they are given opportunities to participate in the decision making process. Officers will review how the service engages with its tenants and identify options to improve communication (i.e. use of social media) and tenant participation. The quality of information provided will also be reviewed.
- 6.5 The service will consider the full range of tenants' comments to identify potential improvements to help achieve a better understanding of the tenants' situation. Officers will be appraised of these findings as part of team meetings and it will be stressed the importance of "listening" rather than simply reacting.

Housing quality and maintenance

- 6.6 The Building Services Management Team will seek to address the repairs and maintenance issues identified in the tenant survey. A number of working groups have already been set up to look at improving repairs appointments, repairs completed first time, communication and tenant feedback. This will be reported back to Committee as part of the DLO budget monitoring report which will include new sections to update Committee on service improvements.
- 6.7 The three main priorities for planned maintenance identified in the tenant survey (heating and insulation, new bathrooms/showers and window replacements) have all been included in the Housing Investment Plan 2016/17 and budgets have been amended to reflect these priorities.

Neighbourhood and community

- 6.8 A review of the Council's antisocial behaviour policy will take place during the year to ensure that appropriate timescales are agreed to reflect the multi-agency approach now taken by the Council to address this issue. Any changes to the current policy will be reported back to a future Committee and will also be the subject of a wider consultation process with our tenants and other customers.
- 6.9 Neighbourhood audits will be completed by the Capital Programmes Team by 30 September 2016 to help inform the housing investment programme for 2017/18.

Access to housing and support

- 6.10 The Housing Need and Demand Assessment will draw on the results from the 2015 tenant survey to identify whether there is an unmet need for disabled adaptations within the Council's housing stock. The findings will be reflected within the 2018 update of the Local Housing Strategy.

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2023: A Plan for the Future/Service Plan/Health and Social Care Integration

Moray 2023 identifies that customer engagement is a priority to improve service quality. This is also reflected within the Housing and Property Service Plan.

(b) Policy and Legal

There is a requirement to carry out regular satisfaction surveys under the Scottish Housing Regulator's performance framework and to comply with the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes.

(c) Financial implications

The tenant survey was finally settled at a cost of £12k which was £3k less than budgeted. Any costs associated with implementing improvements will be met from within existing budgets.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no risk implications associated with this report.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications associated with this report.

(g) Equalities

There are no equalities implications arising from this report. Any equalities implications arising from improvement actions to be developed as a result of the tenant survey will be considered when actions are proposed.

(h) Consultations

Consultation on this report has been carried out with senior managers in the Housing and Property Service, Senior Solicitor (Paul Nevin), the Head of Direct Services, the Principal Accountant (Deborah O'Shea), the Chair of the Moray Tenants Forum (Katy Holmes) and the Committee Services Clerk (Lissa Rowan) who agree with this report.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This report provides more information in relation to the tenant survey 2015. It sets out performance in relation to customer satisfaction and identifies areas for improvement. It is proposed to present a further report to this Committee in March 2017 outlining progress achieved in terms of the improvement actions set out in Section 6 of this report.**

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Background Papers: Held by author
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