

HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
10 NOVEMBER 2020

TENANT CENSUS

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Bob Evans
Responsible Officer: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services / Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services

Reason for Report and Recommendations: To update Members of the Homes Policy Development Group on feedback from the tenant census which was recently undertaken in line with the specific expectations of the regulatory framework. The results of the survey will inform the direction of travel with regard to the future review of the strategy and policy relating to tenant involvement; and also proposals relating to internal changes to the structure of the landlord service.

Recommendation: Members are asked to comment upon and to note the report

Financial Implications: The activity of the Housing Service in its role as a landlord is accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is ring fenced and subject to specific financial controls.

Budget and Policy Framework: Policies agreed by the Homes Policy Development Group govern the work of the Housing Service. The Council has adopted a tenant involvement strategy and also a tenant involvement policy.

Legal Implications: The tenancy agreement defines the Council's relationship with tenants and sets out the rights and responsibilities of both parties. This takes account of legal and regulatory requirements. The Housing Act 1985 contains provisions relating to consultation with tenants; and the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard contains a number of required outcomes and specific expectations which registered providers of social housing (RPs) are expected to meet. One specific expectation is that RPs shall consult tenants at least once every 3 years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

Risk Assessment: The landlord service has approximately 3,000 homes in management which represents a huge investment. RPs are expected to involve tenants in decision-making and scrutiny activity in line with the regulatory framework and failure to do so could be addressed by the Regulator for Social Housing. During the pandemic, face to face contact with tenants must be avoided and therefore there must be inevitable changes to the strategy of the Housing Service as it relates to tenant engagement in order to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 infection.

Equality Impact Assessment: There is a suite of housing related policies. The use of these helps to ensure that service delivery is consistent and fair. The strategy and policy relating to tenant involvement were originally drafted to take account of equalities issues. As part of our commitment to meeting the provisions of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, the Council offers a menu of involvement which provides opportunities for tenants to get involved in service delivery. RPs are also supposed to tailor their service to meet the needs of the tenants

and the Housing Service requests diversity data from tenants to enable compliance to be monitored.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Homes and the environment are a priority for the Council and this includes supporting and growing active tenant engagement.

Impact on Climate Change: We recognise that the provision of sustainable communities is important. We offer tenants opportunities to get involved and to raise issues of concern and we also use social media to promote sustainability and to publish information relating to a variety of topics including fuel efficiency, recycling and healthy living. In recent months, engagement with our social media accounts has grown and the MDDC Housing Facebook page is used to promote tenant engagement, too. The use of this medium reduces the use of paper. A tenant focus group also receives email updates periodically.

With regard to the homes in our management, our repairs and improvements strategies are informed by the need to reduce carbon emissions; and the need to reduce fuel poverty is also a key consideration.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The regulatory framework for social housing operated by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), contains four consumer standards, and one of these is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. The provisions of the regulatory framework are applicable to all aspects of the work of the landlord service. In line with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, there is a specific expectation that registered providers of social housing (RPs) will consult with tenants at least once every three years. This consultation is to focus on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.
- 1.2 Leaseholders were also surveyed and, for the purposes of this report, the word: "tenant" should be taken to include both tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.3 The Housing Service procured the use of a contractor to undertake a survey of all tenants. Given the fact that all tenants were to be asked to complete a questionnaire, it was agreed that it was reasonable to call this project a tenant census. A third party was engaged to run the project, in line with good practice, in order to provide assurance because it was important to ensure that the collection of the data and the subsequent analysis of it was open and transparent.

2.0 Methodology Associated with the Collection of Data

- 2.1 The tenant survey was undertaken during the summer of 2020. The aim of the survey was to give tenants an opportunity to provide feedback on satisfaction with services and to identify future priorities.
- 2.2 All tenants received a postal census survey and to encourage take up, there were email invitations to those for whom the Housing Service held email addresses. There was an online version of the census available to all in order to increase the response rate and accessibility.

- 2.3 The Housing Service subscribes to HouseMark which is an organisation jointly owned by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation. HouseMark provides a benchmarking service which is based on the collection of relevant data from RPs. The organisation undertakes data analysis and provides insight which can be used to identify good performance and best practice and therefore used to inform the service improvements.
- 2.4 HouseMark has a product known as STAR which is used to standardise customer satisfaction research. The questionnaire used in the tenant census was designed in accordance with the STAR guidance and included a selection of STAR questions.
- 2.5 Work on the tenant census was delayed by the pandemic; it had been hoped that the survey would be dispatched at the beginning of this financial year in April 2020. This project had been originally been discussed with tenant representatives who were involved in the Tenant Together group, which is no longer in operation. These representatives had identified areas of specific interest which they felt should be covered in the questionnaire. The additional questions asked were informed by this consultation and engagement.
- 2.6 The questionnaire used contained only a limited number of questions. This was in line with good practice. The aim was to minimise the commitment needed in terms of time from those responding which, it was hoped, would encourage as many households as possible to return a completed survey.
- 2.7 Initially, all those households which had previously provided the Council with an email address were sent an email invitation to participate in the census using a unique login.
- 2.8 Subsequently, a postal questionnaire was dispatched to each household. This was sent with a covering note from our contractor together with a stamped addressed envelope to aid the return of the completed survey form.
- 2.9 Tenants were also encouraged to complete the survey online using a web-link and a unique login, and relevant information was included in the covering letter. The use of the unique login enabled the results to be reviewed and checked to prevent any multiple responses.
- 2.10 A further reminder was sent to those who had failed to respond in line with the HouseMark guidelines.

3.0 Survey Responses

- 3.1 In total, 1276 responses were received which is a 42% response rate. Our contractor advised that this was good when compared to other similar surveys which they had coordinated.
- 3.2 The tenants most likely to respond were those who fell into the older age groups. In our survey, 63% of respondents were aged 65 or more. This corresponds with other research undertaken by RPs. Those living in bungalows were more like to respond, which was not unexpected given the high response rate amongst older people, with 53% of those who returned a survey living in such a property.

- 3.3 The majority of responses were sent using the postal system, although 9% of the surveys were completed online. 34% of those aged 18-34 who responded did so online, which made up the largest group of people who went online to complete the census survey form.
- 3.4 The results of the tenant census show that the majority of tenants find that the home and services provided by the Housing Service in its landlord role generally meet their needs. This was evidenced by the high levels of satisfaction, as demonstrated by responses to questions in the survey:
- 90% are satisfied with the value for money of their rent
 - 88% are satisfied that Mid Devon provides a home that is safe and secure
 - 87% are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live
 - 87% of residents are satisfied with overall landlord service
 - 85% are satisfied with the quality of homes
 - 84% are satisfied with their last repair
 - 81% are satisfied that Mid Devon is easy to deal with
 - 75% are satisfied with the way Mid Devon deals with improvement works
 - 67% are satisfied that Mid Devon gives the opportunity to make views known
 - 65% are satisfied with the Value for Money from their Service Charge
 - 64% are satisfied that Mid Devon listens to resident's views and acts upon them

4.0 Identifying Service Priorities

- 4.1 Tenants were also asked to identify which services should be given priority going forward and the outcomes arising from this part of the survey is similar to what would be expected, given what other landlords have reported.
- 4.2 77% of those who responded identified repairs as a top priority and 63% said that home quality was a key priority for them.
- 4.3 The other priorities identified were only important to 33% of those who responded with the following being specified (the percentage of respondents who identified each is shown in brackets):
- Neighbourhood as a place to live (33%)
 - Value for money for rent (and service charges) (33%)
 - Dealing with anti-social behaviour (30%)
 - Listening to resident's view and acting upon them (23%)
 - Keeping residents informed (22%)
 - Support and advice on claiming welfare benefits and paying rent (14%)

- 4.4 The contractor was able to provide an analysis of the findings which showed which cohorts of tenants had identified which priorities; this was broken down into dwelling type and age and this analysis will inform the work relating to our review of our approach to tenant engagement. Members will recall that increasing this is a corporate priority. Information was also collected on income

source and there has been some analysis to understand the results in light of this.

- 4.5 The contractor also requested information relating to the diversity of those who responded. Factors such as the profile of the household, respondent age, illness and other factors need to be analysed alongside the responses received to the other questions in order to identify any trends which may cause concern. If any such trends are detected, they can be further investigated and an action plan agreed to reduce the negative impact experienced by any particular group of tenants.

5.0 Benchmarking the Results of the Tenant Census

- 5.1 The tenant census included six HouseMark questions. Comparing the responses from these with those of other housing providers can help to identify any areas of improvement required.
- 5.2 When reviewing the comparison data, it should be noted that the characteristics of each group of tenants surveyed may not be an exact match and that no one group is likely to have the same feelings regarding satisfaction as any other.
- 5.3 The HouseMark data used for comparative purposes in this case was derived from the responses to surveys undertaken by all social housing landlords which submitted data to HouseMark in 2016 to 2017. The results included below do not include leaseholder results.
- 5.4 It is reassuring to note that in most areas, the Housing Service performs well in comparison with other housing organisations with the following results when compared to the responses from all landlords who reported results for surveys involving their tenants living in homes designed for both general needs and older people.
- 5.5 The results below show the outcome of the tenant census and the quartile (Q) position:
- Satisfaction with value for money for rent 90.86% (Q1)
 - Overall satisfaction with services provided by landlord 87.75% (Q2)
 - Satisfaction with area as a place to live 86.75% (Q2)
 - Satisfaction with overall quality of home 85.74% (Q2)
 - Satisfaction with service charge value for money 65.53% (Q3)
 - Satisfaction with taking listening to view and acting upon them 64.61% (Q3)
- 5.6 It should be noted that results which equate to a quartile one position are good.

6.0 Next Steps

- 6.1 Taking on board the pledge contained within the Corporate Plan to “Support and grow active tenant engagement”, one of the first projects to be undertaken to deliver this will be to analyse the results of the tenant census (to be completed by the end of November 2020). The following milestones have been identified within this project:

- Identify trends
- Discuss key priorities with Cabinet Member, Building Services and tenant focus group
- Identify budget for any potential service improvements
- Formulate an action plan

6.2 There will be further updates in due course on progress with regard to this project. In addition, there will be updates on how the results of the tenant census will be used to inform a refresh of our approach to tenant engagement in light of low interest from the wider tenant community. The need to move away from face to face interaction during the pandemic is also a key concern.

7.0 Recommendation

7.1 Members are asked to comment upon and to note the report.

Contact for more Information: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services, telephone: 01884 255255, email: cfry@middevon.gov.uk or Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services/Corporate Management Team email: snewcombe@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report:

Members of the Housing PDG
Cllr Bob Evans, Cabinet Member for Homes
Leadership Team
Corporate Management Team and other Group/Interim Service Managers
Legal Services

List of Background Papers:

The Regulatory framework for social housing:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-framework-requirements>