

Midlothian Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey & Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy

Report by Eibhlin McHugh, Joint Director, Health and Social Care

1. Purpose of the Report

This Report conveys the key findings of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey which was undertaken during 2016/17. The Survey data forms part of the submission requirements for the Annual Return of the Charter, which is provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator and made available for all tenants. A sample of council tenants were interviewed to obtain their views on the housing service they receive.

These survey results are also compared with that of previous years and benchmarked against other local authority landlord results. The survey results also assist in the identification of areas where the Housing Service could be further improved.

This Report also recommends the Consultative Draft of Midlothian Council's Tenant Participation Strategy 2017 – 2020 for publication and consultation. This Strategy identifies outcomes which will improve the way the Housing Service engages with tenants and other service users.

2. Background

Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2016/17

2.1 Methodology:

All Registered Social Landlords in Scotland need to ask tenants some specific questions the results of which are reported on an annual basis as part of the Annual Return on the Social Housing Charter. This enables comparison between Registered Social Landlords on a range of indicators of performance. The survey was carried out by Knowledge Partnership - an experienced research company who have undertaken Tenant Satisfaction Surveys for a significant number of Scottish Councils and Registered Social Landlords. In previous years the Survey method used was a postal/online survey form which was sent to all Midlothian Council tenants. However, recent research undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Housing Regulator suggests that face to face surveys are the most appropriate method of obtaining information about tenant satisfaction. In total 617 interviews were conducted; approximately a 10% sample of Midlothian Council tenants. The sample was drawn to be representative of the number of council properties in each area.

2.2 About the household

Of the 617 respondents, 257 (42%) indicated that they had a disability or health condition which limited their daily activities or the work they could do. Older people were more likely to have a disability or health condition. Most households (71%) indicated that they did not have any children aged 16 or less compared to 29% of households with children. Overall, 56% of all respondents stated that no household member received any Housing Benefit. In terms of the economic status of tenants, 36% of tenants were employed either full or part time and 35% of tenants were retired.

2.3 Home and neighbourhood

Respondents were asked of how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the quality of their home. Most respondents (85%) said they were satisfied compared to 9% who were dissatisfied. All respondents were asked if they could easily afford to heat their home: (78%) of the respondents stated they could easily afford to heat their home while 135 (22%) said they could not. In addition, 86% of those surveyed said they were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

A similar proportion (83%) was satisfied with the Council's management of the neighbourhood. Respondents were asked if they thought the rent they paid provided good value for money. A total of 82% of respondents thought their rent provided good value for money. 10% of respondents felt that the rent they paid was not good value for money.

2.4 Repairs and Maintenance

Around half of total respondents (52%) said they had a repair or maintenance carried out in the last 12 months prior to the survey. The majority of respondents (81%) were satisfied with the repair or maintenance service they had received. The highest satisfaction with an element of the repairs service was the attitude of the workers, with 91%.

The lowest level of satisfaction with an element of the repairs service was with the speed of the completion of work (83%), although it is still a relatively high level of satisfaction. In general, older people expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the repairs service and satisfaction levels varied by area – for example it was high in the Mayfield area (89%) and low in the Penicuik area (65%). However, geographical variances should be treated with caution due to the low number of respondents interviewed in each area which may affect the results.

2.5 Getting in touch with the Council

Most tenants contacted the housing service by telephone, with smaller numbers visiting the housing office or contact by letter/email. Those surveyed were asked if they felt they were given opportunities to participate in the decision-making process of the Housing Service – 80% of respondents were

satisfied they were given opportunities to participate. Also, 83% of tenants surveyed were happy that they were kept informed about the housing service through things like the Tenant Newsletter and the Council website.

2.6 Housing Priorities and overall Satisfaction with the Housing Service

Tenants were asked what they considered as the most important housing priorities for the Council. The three highest priorities were: Maintain affordable rents, build more affordable housing and improve the existing housing stock. In terms of the overall satisfaction with the Housing Service provided by Midlothian Council, a total of 83% expressed satisfaction with these services.

The previous Survey in 2014/15 showed satisfaction levels at 79%. The Table below also shows that satisfaction levels with some of the key questions asked have also increased. For example it shows an 18% increase in satisfaction with management of the neighbourhood and opportunities to participate.

Table 1: Satisfaction Levels for Key Questions, 2012, 2014/15 and 2016/17

Measure	MLC 2012	MLC 2014/15	MLC 2016/17	Difference between 2014/15 & 2016/17
Satisfaction with Management of Neighbourhood	79%	67%	85%	18%
Satisfaction with Rent providing Value for Money	N/A	73%	82%	9%
Satisfaction with Repairs Service	74%	79%	81%	2%
Satisfaction with Quality of Home	85%	85%	85%	0%
Satisfaction with Keeping Tenants Informed	75%	82%	84%	2%
Satisfaction with Opportunities to Participate	67%	62%	80%	18%

2.7 Comparison with other Councils

Table 2, below, compares Midlothian satisfaction levels with other local authority landlords in Scotland. It also shows the satisfaction results for the highest and lowest satisfaction levels in each category available for comparison. It shows that respondents in Midlothian had similar levels of overall satisfaction with the Housing Service to that of tenants of other local authority landlords in Scotland – 83% of respondents stated they were satisfied which was the average level of satisfaction for Scottish local authority landlords.

This is an improvement since the 2014 Survey when the satisfaction level with the overall service in Midlothian was slightly lower than for other local authority landlords.

Table 2: Benchmarking Satisfaction Scores with Other Landlords in Scotland¹

Measure	MLC 2016/17	Council Average 2015/16	Difference between MLC & Council Average	Highest Council	Lowest Council
Satisfaction with Management of Neighbourhood	85%	81%	4%	93%	67%
Satisfaction with Rent providing Value for Money	82%	79%	3%	89%	67%
Satisfaction with Repairs Service	81%	88%	-7%	97%	79%
Satisfaction with Quality of Home	85%	84%	1%	90%	69%
Satisfaction with Keeping Tenants Informed	84%	82%	2%	91%	63%
Satisfaction with Opportunities to Participate	80%	71%	9%	87%	46%
Satisfaction with the Housing Service Overall	83%	83%	0%	91%	74%

In addition, specific service areas in Midlothian had higher than local authority average satisfaction levels, such as satisfaction with tenants being given the opportunity participate (80% compared to 71%) and satisfaction with management of the neighbourhood (85% compared to 81%). Satisfaction with the repairs service was the only service area with a lower level of satisfaction in Midlothian compared with other local authorities (81% compared to 88%).

Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2017 – 2020

2.8 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities to have a Tenant Participation Strategy for promoting the participation of their tenants in the development of proposals relating to housing management and services. Tenant Participation is about tenants taking part in decision-making processes and influencing decisions. Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, councillors and housing officers working towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.

2.9 It is also recognised that it is important to involve all service users in the way we engage and consult on our services. Who we should consider as part of our plans includes:

- People who are already tenants.
- Applicants on our Housing List.
- Homeless People.
- People who use the housing service such as gypsy/travellers.

The Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter which sets standards and outcomes that all social landlords (including Councils) should aim to achieve when performing housing activities. The Charter states that:

¹ Information on 26 out of 32 local authorities was available for this comparison. One housing association, Glasgow Housing Association, was included in the comparison.

“Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.”

2.10 The three proposed outcomes that the Strategy aims to deliver are:

- Information on the housing service and ways to get involved with the Housing Service have been **promoted** to tenants and service users.
- The Housing Service has ensured the **participation** of Tenants and Service Users in the decision making and operation of the Service.
- The Housing Service listens to the views of tenants and service users to improve the **performance** of the services being provided.

We have considered activities which will enable us to achieve these key aims:

- Providing a range of different options for tenants to get involved.
- Involving tenants at all levels of decision making.
- Working with tenant groups.
- Involving individual tenants.
- Involving under-represented service users.
- Providing good information and feedback to tenants.
- Removing barriers to participation.
- Providing support and resources for tenant scrutiny.

2.11 Prior to finalising the Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy the Housing Service intends to consult with tenants and service users to ensure their views are being taken into account when considering how best to involve them in the decision-making process of the Housing Service. Once implemented it is anticipated that the Strategy will further support the continued improvement in tenant satisfaction among Midlothian Council tenants.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no resource implications within this Report.

3.2 Risk

It is a statutory requirement that Midlothian Council undertake Tenant Satisfaction Surveys to monitor the level of satisfaction with Services. It is also a requirement that a Strategy to foster Tenant Participation is in place.

3.3 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:

- Reducing the gap in learning outcomes
- Reducing the gap in health outcomes
- Reducing the gap in economic circumstances

The themes addressed in this report impact on the delivery of the Single Midlothian Plan outcome measures in homelessness and stable and balanced communities. Early intervention and tackling inequalities are key priorities for Midlothian Council and the Community Planning Partnership and these proposals meet those objectives.

- x Community safety
- x Adult health, care and housing
- x Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- x Sustainable growth
- x Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

3.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

This Report has a positive impact as it demonstrates improved satisfaction levels among Midlothian Council tenants and identifies potential for further improvements to the Housing Service.

3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

High levels of tenant satisfaction will ensure that the Council's estates are sustainable communities and will assist in reducing complaints to the Housing Service.

3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Face to face interviews were carried out with 10% of Midlothian Council tenants and the Housing Service intends to publicise the findings of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey in a range of formats. Consultation regarding the format of the Survey was discussed with Midlothian Tenant Panel. In terms of the Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy, the consultative document sets out various methods to ensure tenants and service users are participating in the decision-making process of the Housing Service.

3.7 Ensuring Equalities

The Tenant Satisfaction Survey provides useful information in relation to equality groups in order to assist in the development of future policies and procedures. The Consultative Draft Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy is subject to Equality Impact Assessment in accordance with the Council's Equalities Schemes to ensure equality of opportunity.

3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not Applicable

3.9 IT Issues

Not Applicable

4 Recommendation

It is recommended that Council:

- a) Note the contents and recommendations of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey Report.
- b) Agree for the Consultative Draft Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy to be published for consultation with tenants and service users.

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Background Papers:

Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2016/17 Report

**Consultative Draft Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy
2017 - 2020**