

Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers- O&S 24 September 2024

Report Title: Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results 2023

Report Author(s): Lisa Barker – Head of Housing Health and Communities & Paul Smith – Business Development and Change Manager

Councillor R Dickson:

To help build more trust with tenants it would be useful to know how it's planned that the survey's findings and the Council's response will be shared with residents.

Response: We intend to:

- a) Clearly communicate the Tenant satisfaction results and publish the results alongside a summary of future actions on the website.
- b) As part of a creation of an improvement action plan involve tenants to better understand the context of their feedback and develop suggestions of how we can improve the satisfaction levels.

Also, in part because it's noted that no EIA has been completed, it would be useful to know what analysis of the research shows how satisfaction levels vary between different tenant types/demographics. It would be of particular concern, for example, if the satisfaction of our most vulnerable tenants was significantly lower than the average level.

Response: We are currently working on this analysis to be able to share with involved groups of tenants as set out above.

Councillor D Harrison:

1.3 2nd last line , maybe missing the word "and"

Response: Agreed the word 'and' is missing from the sentence. Thank you for raising the omission.

1.5 Only 73 out of 1573 responses were completed on-line. Presumably compiling the results is more efficient when they have been submitted on-line. Any reasons why the proportion of responses completed online was so low , and how could this be improved?

Response:

- a) Yes, compiling results is more efficient when they have been submitted on-line, it saves on charges for the returned prepaid envelopes and recording of the data from the submitted survey online can be automated.
- b) We don't know why the proportion of responses completed online was only 4.6% of the total of responders. Research has suggested that tenants are more familiar and trusting of the paper-based survey and feel they can complete it 'there and then' rather than having to go online and open up the survey.
- c) Increasing the number of responses could be improved, we believe by making the option more prominent on the introductory letter and explaining how it would be more cost effective for the Council if they were to return the survey online. We could also offer more support to tenants who would prefer to submit the survey online. There may be other ideas coming forward from the Resident Involvement Group which we could consider.

1.8 Summary of Results - across the board they look very favourable. However, do you know of any reasons why TP09 scores so low. I read later that this does not affect the overall satisfaction level significantly, but has there been thought given to how this figure could be improved. I noted in Section 3.6.1 of App.1 that a number of residents felt they had to chase-up. Is there any way Housing could pro-actively update residents on the fact that their issue has been noted and is moving "up the queue". I realise it's an admin burden, but there is nothing worse than having to chase up.

Response:

- a) TP09 – satisfaction with handling complaints will be driven by how promptly the complaints are resolved, the amount of contact made with the complainant by the person investigating the complaint and whether any agreed actions are fully implemented in a timely manner.
- b) In terms of improvements in complaints handling these are ongoing and started with Cabinet approving a new complaints policy in February 2024 and the subsequent improvements being introduced to ensure that the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code 2024 is complied with. This code became statutory on 1 April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements. The code aims to achieve best practice in complaints handling and ultimately to provide a better service to residents.

Improvements currently being delivered.

- Reviewing the last completed self-assessment which measures compliance with the code and identifies areas for improvement. This was published on the council's website in June 2024. [Housing complaints self-assessment June 2024 - Download - Warwick District Council. \(warwickdc.gov.uk\)](#)
- Addressing the areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment.

- Reviewing complaint information on the website ensuring Policy and processes are clear and residents can make complaints with ease.
- Briefing and training Housing, Health and Communities staff on the call handling code.
- Embedding a specialist team set up in Housing, Health and Communities to investigate complaints to ensure consistency and provide some independence from the service delivery teams
- Setting up processes to learn from complaints and make the necessary service adjustments or changes.

TP05 - covers the issue of safety , but this is very subjective and should not be allowed to distract from the other areas of safety that the residents will not be aware of , such as condition of gas boiler, electrical systems etc

Response: This is a prescribed question by the regulator and is intended to cover all aspects of safety for tenants in the home which certainly does include having a gas safe certificate, required electrical inspection certificate etc.

General comment - is there any way of presenting year on year changes to the individual measures, or is this not possible with the introduction of the new standardised TSMs ?

Response: Yes, 2023 was the first year that the survey and analysis of results was undertaken meeting the requirements of the Regulator. The approach to the survey for 2024 will be the same and therefore we will be able to compare the results formulated using the same regulated approach.

Report Title: Impact of Homelessness within Warwick District

Report Author(s): Kevin Tebbett – Housing Needs Manager

Councillor Armstong:

1. The high staff turnover is mentioned as one of the key challenges. Could you give a bit more detail on this?
Specifically: is it a recent issue or a long term one? What are the underlying reasons behind it, as far as we can tell?
Most importantly, are there any viable actions the Council could take to improve the situation?
2. On the second challenge, the availability of 1-bed accommodation. It seems planning policy has not managed to deliver this need. Do you think there is any scope for strengthening the requirement for 1-bed housing in our planning policy, or

is this already in place but non-functional for external reasons? I appreciate that's a complex question potentially crossing into a few areas of expertise but would be interested to get your opinion.

Response:

1. Since the adoption of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, the Homeless and Advice Team, have encountered difficulties with recruiting experienced Housing Options Officers (HOO). This is a national issue experienced by many local authorities, who therefore have to rely on agency staff to fill vacant posts. The use of agency staff has led to a relatively high turnover in Housing Options Officer positions. The Council has increased the level of salary for Housing Options Officers, and this has gone some way to helping the situation.

A redesign of the service is currently underway. A consultant has undertaken a review of the Housing Advice & Allocations service and has made several recommendations some of which relate to recruitment and retention of staff.

The review itself highlights those lessons learnt from other Councils; that in the current recruitment market, experienced HOOs are almost impossible to find. Therefore, an innovative approach to recruitment will be needed with an emphasis on transferrable skills as opposed to recruitment based on local authority experience as well as "grow your own" by investing and recruiting from existing assistant roles.

A recently revised recruitment exercise resulted in the successful recruitment of two out of the three vacant permanent HOO roles. This involved an assessment centre for candidates with existing HOOs in attendance who played a key role in the recruitment exercise by providing that opportunity to talk through the role in detail and answer questions about the role.

An implementation plan is currently being developed and will include several recommendations identified in the report relating to recruitment of these posts.

My colleague from Housing Strategy has kindly provided the response to your second question

2. New housing developments within the district are expected to provide 40% affordable housing in accordance with the local plan. The Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides guidance to developers on the types of homes The Council expects to make up that 40% including the proportion of different sized affordable homes for both rented and low-cost home ownership tenures. However, the SPD seeks three times more 2 bedroom rented homes than 1 bedroom because, at the time the SPD was written, these were felt to offer more flexibility for tenants.

We understand that this isn't consistent with our current need and are working with developers on new sites to increase the number 1 bed rental units, but it will take time for these units to go through the planning system and be built. Developments that have been built recently or are currently under construction were based around the older size mix, with fewer 1 bed units. Larger housing sites can take many years to be fully built out and so the situation will only improve slowly.

When working on the size mix for new developments we must also be mindful of the need to create mixed and balanced communities. Building large numbers of 1 bed rental units in one place can work contrary to this aim and create challenges managing developments in the long term. This can make Registered Providers reluctant to buy units if they feel there are too many 1 bed. For these reasons, whilst over 60% of households on our waiting list have a one-bedroom need, it would not be practical to seek this proportion on new developments.

Instead, we are currently encouraging 40% of rented homes as 1 bed. This is based on the recommendations of the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), prepared for the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan, and significantly increases the number of 1 bed units compared to the SPD whilst also providing a range of other house sizes to create balanced communities.

So far, we have found developers receptive to using the mix from the HEDNA, however we could explore either revising the SPD or preparing some interim guidance to strengthen our position. This would though be dependent on available resources in the Planning Policy team and how this might interact with work on the new Local Plan.

Councillor R Dickson:

It's noted that the definition of homelessness includes those residents who are dealing with their situation informally and that this can be hard to measure. If the data from English Housing Survey, which shows 3% of private renters had someone living with them who would otherwise have been homeless, how many more people would be presenting as homeless in Warwick district?

Also, how many asylum seekers are there in Warwick district living in either initial contingency and dispersal accommodation or, if different, in properties funded through the LAHF?

Response: It is difficult to estimate the number of hidden households given the lack of available information.

However, based on the information you have provided from the English Household survey which suggests that 3% of private renters have someone living with them who would otherwise have been other homeless it could equate to approximately 350 individuals if limited to one individual per household. But please be advised this is a very general estimate only.

This is based on the fact that the private rented sector represents 19% of the housing stock in Warwick and the recent census information indicated 62,618 households.

Finally, many individuals in such circumstances choose not to approach the local authority for assistance, they may also search and find their own housing solutions, and some may not even identify themselves as homeless.

There are 81 individuals and 25 households living in the Warwick district.

Councillor Payne:

1. Once the local authority discharges its statutory duty to an individual, can they reapply for assistance...meaning the same individual might appear twice in the statistics?
2. At 1.4.4, is there a rough estimate available please for how many people in the District are dealing with their circumstances informally, and not appearing in the data at all?
3. 1.8.1 mentions the Homelessness budget. Elsewhere in the report, it states Warwick is performing well compared to the rest of the England. Are we spending extra to achieve this better performance, or are we doing well despite spending less? Is there a way to statistically control for spending when comparing performance?

Response:

1. An individual can make a fresh homeless application even after a duty under a previous homelessness application has been discharged. There is no time limit period following a negative decision. The individual will need to make a fresh application due to a change in circumstances or a new instance of homelessness.

The individual can present as a repeat homeless case and if in the same year may be counted twice, however, the numbers are anecdotally relatively small.

2. This is difficult to estimate given the lack of available information around the hidden homelessness and the fact that individuals are dealing with their circumstances informally.
3. Despite the pressures faced by the service, performance outcomes have been positive as referred to in 1.5.7. In relation to the outcomes achieved through ending prevention and relief duties positively, this is largely due to the use of our own stock with only a small number housed in the private rented sector. We do need to invest more to access the private rented sector. We also need to reduce the number of applicants who have to move to another property by increasing the opportunities to remain in their own home where it is safe to do so by the introduction of a range of prevention pathways.

Unfortunately, it would not be possible to statistically control spending when comparing performance due to the lack of information available.

Councillor Syson:

Thanks for this very useful summary of the situation. I note in the final paragraph the costs and the grants that WDC has been allocated in 2024/25 ,which still left a substantial shortfall.

Congratulations on securing this funding this year, and I think in previous years, but more worryingly how likely are we to receive similar grants in future years, and is there a plan if we don't?

Response:

I can advise that the figure provided of £1,751, 500 is the total of the established budgets for delivering the service which includes a mixture of General Fund and grant provision.

I apologise if this was not made clear within the report.