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REPORT TO:	COMMUNITY & HOUSING SERVICES	AGENDA ITEM:
DATE OF MEETING:	26 <sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2004	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	BOB LEDGER, HOUSING MANAGER	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	DAVE WHITELEY	DOC:
SUBJECT:	CUSTOMER SURVEY RESULTS	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

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### **1.0 Recommendations**

1.1 To note survey findings and actions proposed for service improvement.

### **2.0 Purpose of Report**

2.1 Information for members.

### **3.0 Main Findings**

3.1 During March 2004, Housing Services undertook a large-scale customer feedback exercise receiving responses from 1,447 households. This return rate produces a sample of approximately 45% of all possible respondents. Please note, that occupants of sheltered as opposed to general purpose housing are disproportionately represented due to higher return rates.

3.2 From an analysis of the responses, a general picture emerges of a very stable tenant group, three quarters of whom have lived in their current homes more than a decade. What also presents it is an impression of a solitary, older and often frail group of people who are strongly reliant upon statutory financial support and who hold understandable but perhaps overstated worries about crime and disorder. These findings will contribute to our planning for the introduction of new and innovative technologies, known as Telecare, during the coming year.

3.3 The feedback provides invaluable information for managers in the Housing Services section and will be used to drive forward improvements in a focused way.

## 4.0 Detail

- 4.1 Overall, the tenant satisfaction survey was a significant achievement in customer relations. Findings of satisfaction are good.
- 4.2 Nearly 52% of the respondents to the survey were over 65 years of age (a statistic that reflects the prevalence of Sheltered Housing within the locally managed housing stock), consequently may be some disproportionate representation of the experience and expectations of retired persons within the findings. Background data indicates that the percentage of all tenants aged 65 years or older may be only 37% (data is incomplete), while in South Derbyshire as a whole, retired persons comprise 14.5% of the total population – according to the 2001 Census.
- 4.3 Although respondents who saw racial harassment as an issue in their neighbourhood stood at just over 5%, the ethnic breakdown of the sample was overwhelmingly white. Only 0.6% of respondents identified themselves as being from a visible ethnic minority, contrasting with a figure of 2.7% for minority presence within the local population. Research carried out separately by Beverly Wagstaff, the Housing Strategy Manager, earlier in the year would indicate that people from minority backgrounds who live locally are most strongly concentrated in the north of the district with community links toward Derby. This group, it was found, principally occupy private owned or rented accommodation.
- 4.4 Slightly more than 9% of white respondents in our survey identified themselves as being culturally Irish.
- 4.5 Nearly 54% of respondents live alone and eight out of ten of these are over 60. The corollary seems to be high levels of frailty and reduced mobility. Almost 66% of respondents declared some recurrent illness and although the sample sizes do not match exactly, it is reasonable to conjecture that potentially 80% of those who reported ill-health find their activities impaired as a result. Roughly 12 percent of households surveyed contained a wheelchair user.
- 4.6 Approximately one in ten of respondents were new to their home and were within their Introductory Tenancy period. About the same number had been in their home between one and two years. Half of respondents had been in their home for over 10 years and most (29.4% of the total number) of these had been in their home for over twenty years or more.
- 4.7 There is evidence of pressure building within multi-occupancy households. One in ten of respondents in the survey stated that they had too few rooms to meet their needs. Given that the sample may under-represent persons in general purpose accommodation, it may be that issues of overcrowding are more prevalent than these figures indicate. Only 2% of households surveyed had excess space.
- 4.8 Responses to issues of environmental and social issues of concern showed vandalism to be considered a problem in 55% by responders, graffiti by 30%, dog nuisance by 49%, litter by 60%, neighbours by 23%, noise from other people by 25% and from traffic by 25%. These results will help focus our estate management work.

- 4.9 Concerns about criminal behaviour seem to represent the fear of crime rather than the local reality. This is common in attitude surveys. The collated responses indicate that damage being caused to properties was a concern in 13% of cases, drug dealing in 25% (a serious problem for 10%) and other crime in 35%. Discussion with Michelle Collins at the Crime and Disorder Support Team indicate that these responses are at odds with both police statistics and contemporary research carried out by the CDST itself.
- 4.10 Almost 53% of tenants (and 39% of partners or spouses) in the survey were already retired and 14.5% of tenants (16% of partners or spouses) are permanently disabled. Only 17% of the tenants (and 20% of partners or spouses - probably the same households) wholly or partly could rely upon earned income. It is apparent that most tenanted households rely upon pensions or statutory benefits, often from several overlapping sources. Income among council tenants is meagre compared to national averages, with 58% of households, reporting in this sample, accruing less than £8,400 per annum.
- 4.11 Housing benefit was received in 64% of the tenanted homes sampled and only 3.5% of respondents expressed any dissatisfaction with rent levels.
- 4.12 Roughly 64% of those surveyed had been in contact with Housing Services within the previous 12 months. In three-quarters of cases, the method of contact was by telephone, with the majority of the remainder plumping for a visit to the Civic Offices. Written correspondence was used by only 3% of those sampled, while e-mail was used on only one occasion.
- 4.13 Three-quarters of respondents stated that their last contact with their landlord related to repairs, while only a tenth had needed to make housing benefit or rent enquiries. We will need to consider that 14% of respondents stated that it was difficult to contact someone able to assist them with their enquiry. This will include how we operate duty officer arrangements and how we use the corporate call centre.
- 4.14 The overall level of satisfaction with our customer care is high and 86% of respondents found our staff helpful in handling their enquiry and, to a slightly smaller percentage, competent to assist them. Whilst three quarters of interactions left the respondent satisfied with the actual outcome there may be some room for improvement here although inevitably, given our enforcement role, some of interactions will not meet with the approval of the customer. Training to promote customer care and improve the level of satisfaction further has already commenced and more is planned.
- 4.15 83% of respondents are satisfied with the repair service provided by Housing Services (with a notable 45.5% stating themselves to be very satisfied) but it is noted that almost 10% of the sample were not. The highest levels of dissatisfaction with repairs seem to fall in the areas of appointment keeping (11% poor or worse) and speed of response (12% poor or worse) and it is clear that our planned improvements in these areas, being delivered with the aid of the new computer system, are needed. However, in practical areas such as speed of completion (89% satisfied), keeping dirt to a minimum (90% satisfied) and the overall quality of work undertaken (88% satisfied), satisfaction rates are consistent or exceed the general level.

4.16 The relationship or repair staff as perceived by the public in their daily interactions with them, is exceptional, with 93.5% of respondents expressing satisfaction.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

5.1 None.

## **6.0 Corporate Implications**

6.1 Indications of need for increased cross departmental working.

## **7.0 Community Implications**

7.1 Implications for the Crime and Disorder Partnership.

## **8.0 Conclusions**

8.1 The Housing Services can take heart in high levels of satisfaction with its provision as a landlord with 86.6% of respondents offering positive feedback overall. However, with 5.1% of respondents reporting themselves as fairly or very dissatisfied there continues to be scope for improvement. The reasons for dissatisfaction seem to be influenced as much by other factors as by negative experiences of our landlord services, suggesting a need for both additional research and improved partnership working at a community level.

8.2 Overall, the findings of the exercise show that council tenants retain high levels of satisfaction in Housing Services as both their landlord and repair service and much useful feedback has been elicited from which managers can act to assure improvement, most notably in customer care.

8.3 These findings will be considered and implications and targets will be incorporated into management action plans.

## **9.0 Background Papers**

9.1 None