



Tenant Scrutiny Group

Review of Feedback in the Housing Services

Introduction

Purpose

We chose to review the current feedback mechanisms that the Council and Housing Services currently have in place for tenants. The scrutiny review is extremely important to help identify how tenants feel about the current feedback processes and to recognise areas for development and improvement.

Background

At the beginning of the review the complaints procedure was made up of four stages. Housing services captured a total of 53 complaints and 20 compliments during 2014/15. Compared to other social housing providers this figure is low.

We agreed that feedback throughout housing services had a low response rate and the complaints and compliments process was longer than necessary.

Aims

The main aims of the review: -

- To conduct a review that take into account the opinion of tenants and how they feel towards feedback
- Identify an improved way of working

Methodology

To ensure that we achieved our aims, we agreed we would undertake the following: -

- Research other social housing providers to gain a wider knowledge of the feedback processes they have in place
- Carry out staff interviews with the different heads of the departments to help identify knowledge and understanding of the process
- Conduct a tenant survey to understanding how tenants felt about the current feedback processes and ask how they think we should improve

Complaints and Compliments - Research

We recognise that the current procedure is corporate and applies to all departments across the Council and is not within the control of housing services. This meant that whilst we have some observations we accept that housing services cannot have a separate procedure.

During the review the Council undertook an internal review of the complaints process which resulted in a reduced number of stages the tenant must go through before they can contact the housing ombudsman. The process is clear but perhaps longer than some others we looked at.

We were impressed by the complaints process adopted by [Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council](#) which seemed clear and slightly shorter than the one currently in use within the Council. It presented a picture of a more user friendly online system but without testing the system we cannot be totally sure. However, we would urge the Council to consider a shorter two stage process for all formal complaints which we believe would improve the complainants experience by being more rapid.

We did notice that the online system for registering complaints was not user friendly. We discovered from trying to use the system that individual pages are not saved when they are completed and that any delay in completing the form led to the system timing out which took the user back to the start. This is a frustrating experience which could discourage people from using the on-line system as well as creating a bad impression of the Council. From experience in other sectors multi page web forms which save at the end of the each page do exist and we would recommend that the Council review this part of the process to improve the experience of users.

Staff Interviews

From our discussions with staff we feel there was a nervous attitude toward customer feedback and a sense that compliments were almost as difficult to deal with as complaints.

Compliments given by tenants on feedback forms used for repairs are not recorded as such and other service managers admitted they only advise the staff member involved in the compliment. We would recommend that the Department records all compliments, however they are given, and share them with staff and members on a monthly or weekly basis. Otherwise the forms are really complaints forms and not feedback forms and can present a negative image which may not be fair. The comment was made that staff are "embarrassed" by compliments and are unsure what to do with them.

Surveys

The most regular contact between tenants and housing services is in the area of repairs and maintenance so this is where the majority of feedback arises but our survey covered all areas and the recommendations apply across the service.

Please see Appendix A for Survey results.

Recommendations

The best way for housing services to quality check its services is to work with the people who are receiving the service. We have detailed below a list of recommendations we put forward to the

Landlord Services Committee to consider for approval.

Recommendation 1

Housing services currently issues feedback surveys for repairs to tenants when the order is placed. Long gaps between receiving the feedback survey and the repair being undertaken could result in a lower response rate.

We would recommend that housing services devise a system which seeks feedback much closer to the date on which the repair is undertaken. It may be necessary to experiment with different timescales related to the priority of repairs as we did not believe there was one best timescale.

Recommendation 2

Housing Services only issues feedback surveys on paper despite profile knowledge about tenants preferred method of communication. There is no one solution to improving the response rate but using tenants preferred method of communication should help.

We would recommend that an approach is adopted which seeks feedback from tenants according to their preference so that paper, text or email is used as appropriate. Whilst this may seem at odds with the views of the tenants Appendix A we would point out that the people who returned the forms were happy to deal with paper as they took part in a paper survey but this may not represent all tenants. We feel it would also be beneficial if housing services adopted a slim lined approach to surveys with a similar format so tenants became more familiar with completing surveys.

Recommendation 3

In the case of major works Contractors will issue their own feedback forms and systems as well as appoint a Tenant Liaison Officers. Whilst this is welcomed, it is clear that the relationship between this process and tenants leads to some confusion as the paperwork will carry not only the contractor's logo but also that of the Council. Tenants often believe that a complaint using this system is a complaint to the Council when in fact it is not.

We would recommend that the results of the contractors feedback systems should be reported to housing services and that the contractors feedback system makes no reference to Council either directly or indirectly by using the Council logo. The Council would need to provide a formal feedback system of its own as a check on the contractor's reports.

Recommendation 4

The Councils contractors all use their own feedback system which is not the same. We would recommend that the Council looks to impose a common system as part of the contract so that the experience of tenants is common whoever the contractor.

Recommendation 5

Repairs to communal areas are not subject to the feedback system. We would recommend that the tenant who reports a fault/problem in a communal area is approached for feedback on the work done to deal with the issue.

Recommendation 6

Where feedback forms are sent out by Property Services they consist of the statement that no reply will be treated as a sign of satisfaction with the work. Whilst this was originally discussed with active involved tenants we would recommend this statement is removed and encouraging wording is put in

its place to show people their views are important to develop the service. This will also reflect a true satisfaction level.

Recommendation 7

All sections should be encouraged to report all positive comments and these should be circulated and success celebrated.

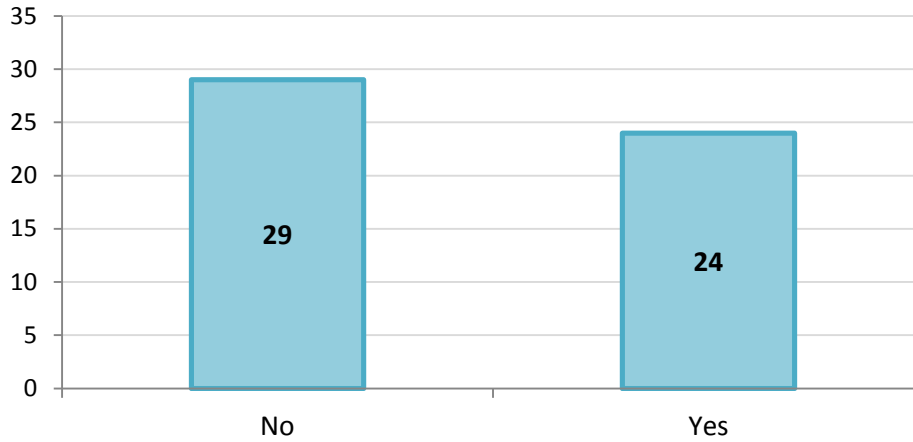
Recommendation 8

To improve the rate of feedback the Council could consider offering entrance to some sort of quarterly draw offering a prize to tenants who return forms.

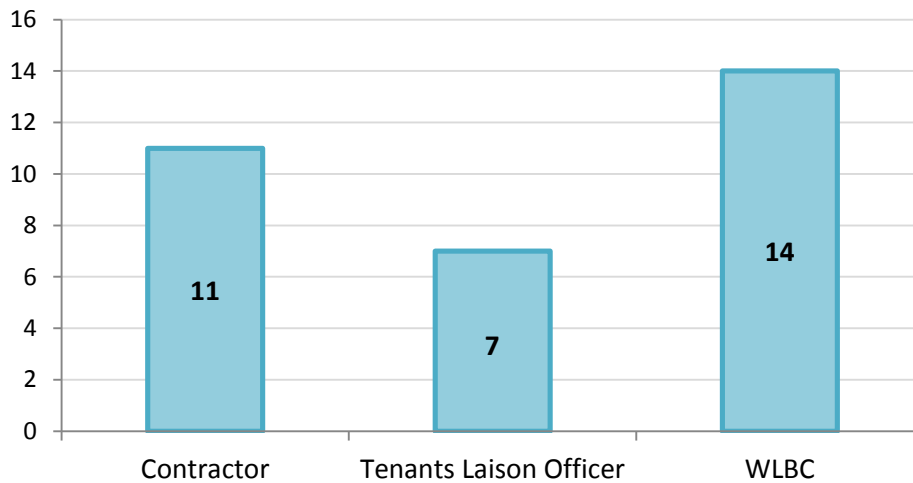
Property Services Survey Results

A total of 55 responses were received.

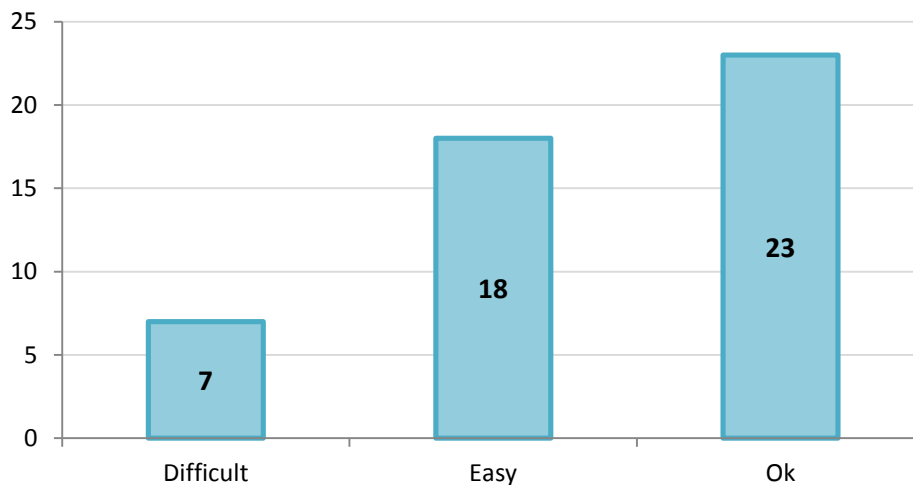
During your kitchen/bathroom replacement did you need to complain?



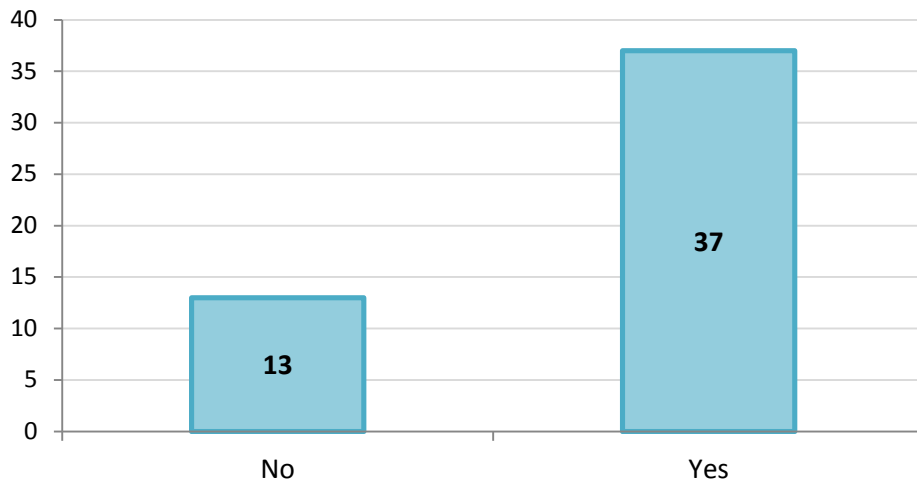
Who dealt with your complaint?



How easy did you find the process?

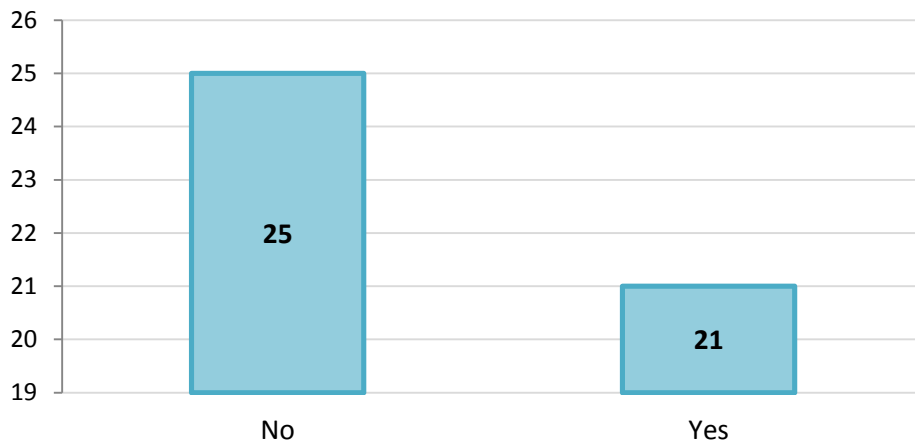


Did you complete the feedback survey?

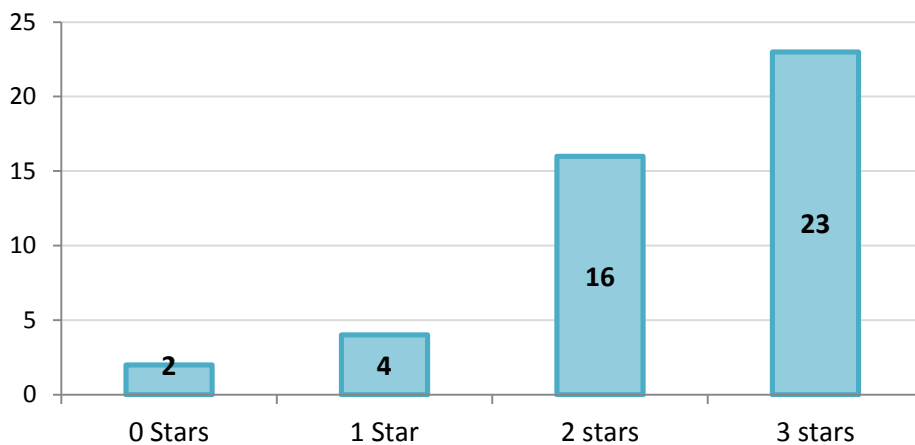


- 7 people claim they did not receive a feedback form
- 5 people claim the work took an excessive amount of time to complete

If feedback surveys were introduced in another format would you be more likely to complete them?



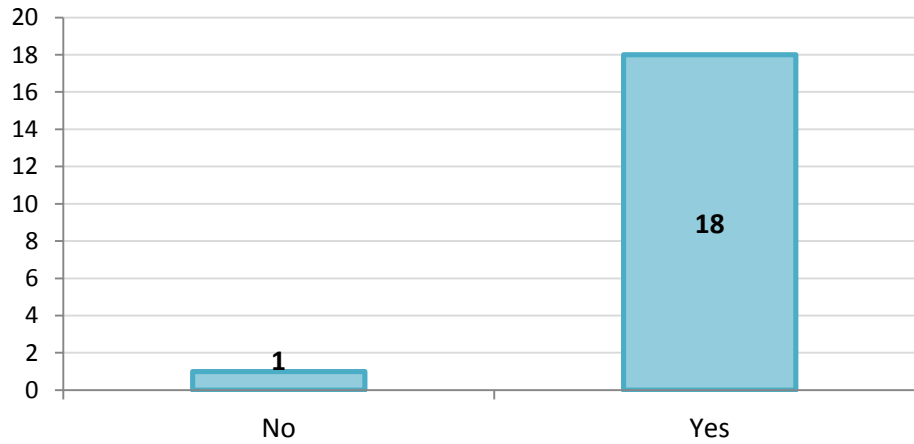
How many stars would you rate the level of communication you received?



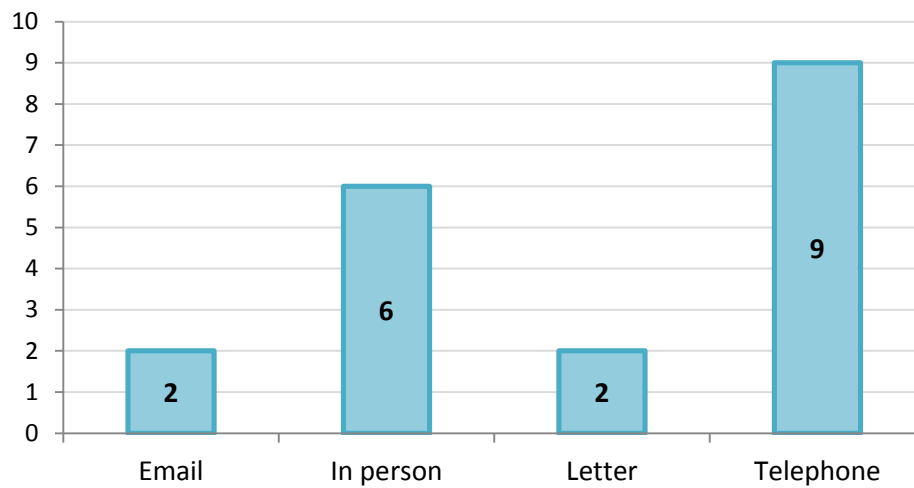
Survey to Random Tenants

A total of 20 responses were received.

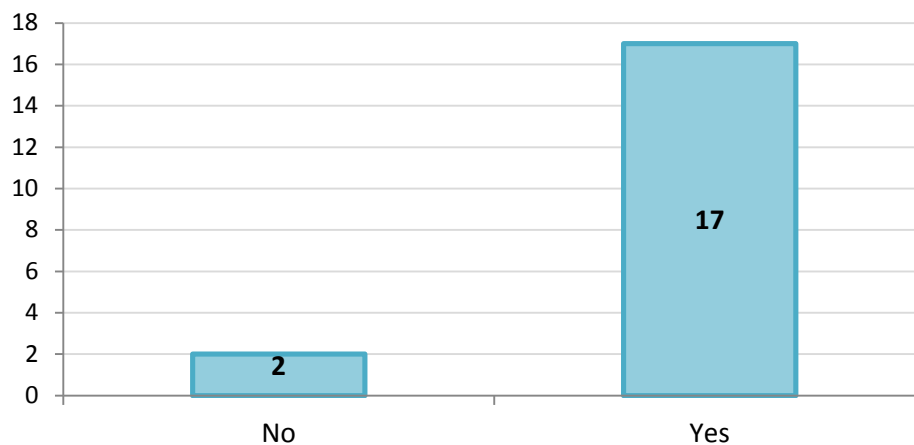
If you received a dissatisfaction service would you be likely to complain?



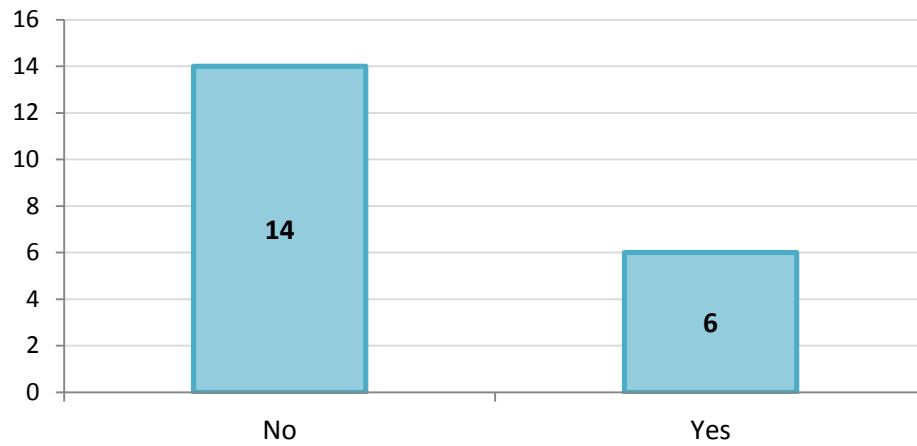
If so, what method would you use?



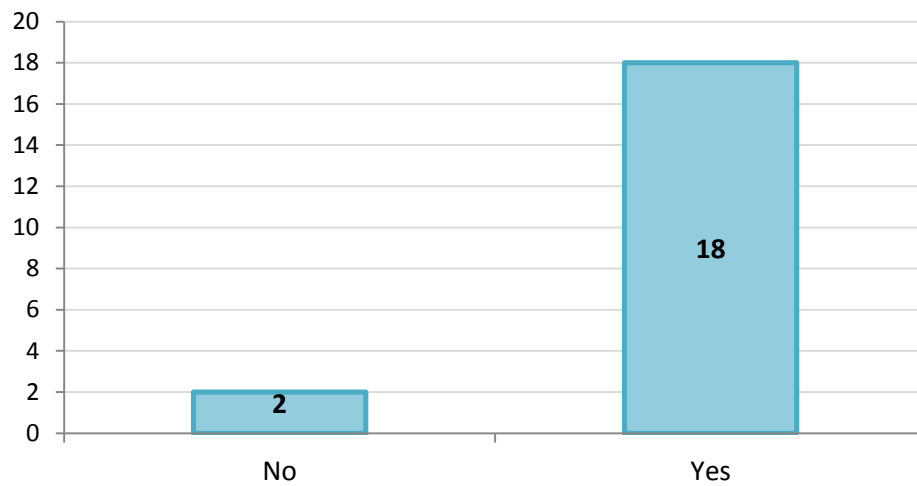
If you received a feedback survey would you be likely to complete it?



If feedback surveys were introduced in another format would you be more likely to complete them?



Do you feel Housing Services listen?



When asked how you think Housing Services could improve these were the main comments:

- Improve the website – make it easier to navigate around
- Happy with Housing Services as a whole
- Provide more information to tenants on what you are planning to do

The question also highlighted that tenants don't see housing as a separate service provided by the council. The answers also mentioned the call centre and street services.

Complaints Survey

A complaints feedback survey was sent to everyone who had complained in the last 12 months and only 1 person responded to this. This has an extremely low response rate but we are assured that the current survey that is sent to tenants after their complaint is completed also has a low response rate.