

**Tenant Scrutiny Panel**

**Report on Initial Project**

**Decent Homes Programme - Review of Effectiveness of Contractor Customer Surveys**

**February 2014**

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1. **Acknowledgements**
   * 1. We would like to thank those members of staff of North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) for assisting us in pulling together the key documents and information required to formulate our strategy as well as providing work shadowing opportunities and speed briefings. We would also like to thank the wider participants – particularly tenants - for supporting us at this important stage of the development of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

1.2 In addition we wish to thank those Officers of the Council who have played a key role in supporting the Tenant Scrutiny Panel throughout its first year of existence, providing guidance, advice and support to every member.

1.3 The Panel also wish to thank Karen Talbot of i 4 design who has produced a logo on behalf of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

1. **Executive Summary**

2.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was recruited in December 2012. Originally consisting of eight members, there are currently six people on the Panel – all tenants of NWLDC.

2.2 The Group came into existence as a result of Government recommendations that Local Authorities must appoint a group of tenants to scrutinise Council policy and procedures with a view to improving the delivery of services to tenants.

2.3 Initially the Group underwent extensive training to gain the skills necessary for its members to understand various areas – e.g.:

* Finding out About Tenant Scrutiny
* Benefits Changes (especially Under Occupation)
* Council Self Funding
* NWLDC Management Structure
* Attendance at Seminars
* NWLDC 30 Year Plan
* Interview Training
* Report Writing and Presentations
* Work Shadowing
* Observation of a full Council meeting

2.4 Training and Development of Tenant Scrutiny Panel members is ongoing as every individual has differing skills and knowledge and future projects will doubtless identify other training needs.

2.5 The first year has not been without its difficulties, as will normally be the case when several total strangers come together to start working together on a topic about which they have little or no knowledge. However, generally there is a good relationship between all members and every opinion and idea brought to the table is received with respect and considered on its merits.

2.6 In addition choosing the Decent Homes Improvement Programme (DHIP) as a first topic brought the Group into the realms of the biggest project the Council itself has undertaken. Isolating one small part to concentrate on wasn’t easy and, at times, it was difficult to keep the Group focussed on the area they had chosen.

1. **REPORT**
   1. **CHOICE OF TOPIC**

3.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was faced with the decision in the spring of 2013 as to what area to choose as its first project. The magnitude of the Decent Homes Works made it ideal as a topic. However it was apparent that the group would have to find one element to concentrate on and the contractor Satisfaction Surveys became an obvious choice.

3.2 The Group was able to gain a unique insight into the DHIP through comprehensive liaison with staff, Officers and senior managers who provided a great deal of detailed background information. Specifically, assurance, facilitation and guidance throughout was provided by Nick Jones, Amanda Harper, Tracey Ashe, Chris Lambert, Peter Oliver, Mark Tuff, and Steve Banbury with additional contributions from Steve Straw and Neil Stevenson.

3.3 The Group’s activities included

* pre-reading all documents provided in Respect of DHIP work undertaken
* attending presentations outlining Government legislation relating to tenant involvement (following abolition of the Audit Commission and Tenant Services Commission)
* Fortnightly meetings
* Extensive training and attending relevant seminars
* Attending a full Council meeting
* Work shadowing

3.4 Having made that decision the TSP then obtained information from NWLDC in respect of the results from contractor questionnaires to provide the basis from which to work – i.e. general satisfaction rates and other figures relating to Health & Safety, communications, quality of workmanship, meeting timelines etc.

3.5 The TSP discussed the results of these surveys and decided to compile their own questionnaire (See Appendix 1) to send out to approximately 800 homes, requesting tenants to complete this document and offering a £5 High Street voucher to the first 60 respondents. In addition one prize of £20 was to be awarded to one individual picked from the balance of the responses. This was won by Mr. Lawrence Wells and provided an ideal opportunity for the TSP to enjoy some positive PR – including an article and photograph in the ‘InTouch’ magazine.

3.6 The TSP survey included a question asking tenants if they would be prepared to talk to a TSP member in the tenant’s home. From the 224 affirmative responses the panel picked out 50 responses from across the NWLDC region, each of whom would be visited if they were still agreeable. Analysis rundown of tenant responses to the survey, question by question, is attached as Appendix 2 with Responses shown on Appendix 3.

3.7 The TSP subsequently split the 50 responses into three individual caseloads, arranged by sub-region, and allocated a caseload to TSP members (as 3 teams of 2 members with 2 x 17 cases and 1 x 18 cases). Each of the three teams was then responsible for scheduling interviews by telephone with allocated tenants and returning completed documents to Brian Kendrick for analysis.

3.8 The group compared those measurable results of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel questionnaire with those of the original contractors’ questionnaires, as detailed in Appendix 4.

* 1. **Aims of the Exercise:**

3.9 The aims and objectives of the Group for this particular project included:

* Formulating forward plans to keep the project on track
* Using the TSP survey responses to provide feedback and allow a fair comparison of results against contractor surveys
* Identifying areas where improvements could be made
* Presenting recommendations to improve DHIP processes/procedures in line with findings
  1. **Findings:**

3.10 The overriding issue identified as a result of the TSP survey was poor communication between NWLDC, contractors/sub-contractors and tenants.

3.11 The TSP survey threw up some interesting figures, i.e.:

* The overall rate of response to the TSP survey was 22% - well above the average. This compared to the contractors’ return rates of between 10% and 15%.
* The overall satisfaction rates from contractor surveys were between 90% (Lovell) and 96%(Kier), whereas the TSP survey overall satisfaction rate was 80% - a difference of 10% or 18% depending on the contractor area.

3.12 All completed TSP questionnaires were passed to NWLDC so any issues and complaints identified thereon could be picked up and passed to contractors with a request for immediate action and confirmation that any faults were rectified within a reasonably stated length of time.

3.13 Analysis showed that:

* 50% of tenant responses said they were unhappy with communication. The TSP suggests that Contractor Resident Liaison Officers ensure they introduce themselves to tenants, hands over an induction plan and explain their role, checking that full details of all relevant contact numbers are made available to tenants to improve the situation. **This is the procedure already outlined in the DHIP Manual the TSP recommend that NWLDC, along with its contractors, revisit the procedures agreed by both parties, reinforce those procedures with contractors and monitor the contracts more closely.** See Appendix 3.
* 60% of responses complained that work was not completed on time – see Appendix 3.
* Up to 34% of DHIP properties surveyed by TSP indicated that the property was not left in a clean and tidy condition whilst work was ongoing. It is obvious that more care needs to be taken by contactors to ensure happier tenants and avoid compensation payouts (which are the contractors’ responsibility). **Again, NWLDC needs to ensure that contactors adhere to the procedures contained in the DHIP Manual.**
* Tenant overall satisfaction responses from the TSP, question by question, are also illustrated in Appendix 5.
* It was noted during the face to face interviews a majority of the tenants commented how polite and friendly the contractors and sub-contractors were.
* 81% of responses of the survey results and face to face interviews indicted they were happy with the standard of works completed by Kier. See appendix
  1. **Recommendations:**

3.14 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has identified some areas where small changes to procedures could bring significant benefits for both tenants and the NWLDC. The Panel have made two recommendations to the Repairs and Investment team to date upon which the team have immediately taken action on, as follows.

3.15 **Recommendation 1** - One recommendation identified by the Panel related to Completion Inspection Certificate Forms, completed by Contract Supervisors responsible for inspecting and signing off work. Previously these forms were duplicate forms completed by the Contracts Supervisor, who would pass one copy to the contractor for confirmation of works completed or of outstanding /not to standard works for completion. The other copy would be retained in house. Following discussion between the Panel and Contract Supervisors it was suggested that the Council implement triplicate forms so that tenants could have a copy of the form for their own records to inform them with regards to status of works outstanding. The Repairs and Investment team immediately implemented this process.

3.16 **Recommendation 2** - It was suggested that to improve survey response rates the seven day prior letter be amended to include pre-notification of the survey. The Panel worded a paragraph to include that would be inserted in both the 7 and 21 day letters, which reads: “ Please be aware that on completion of the work you will be requested to complete a ‘Customer Satisfaction Survey’. Please take this opportunity to tell us if you are happy or not with the services that we have provided for you. This feedback will help us manage future delivery of similar projects.” The Repairs and Investment team immediately implemented this process.

3.17 **Recommendation 3** - To further improve perception of NWLDC the TSP recommend a letter is sent to each household receiving modifications under the DHIP when the work has been completed to demonstrate that NWLDC ‘takes ownership’ of the process. The letter could be worded as follows:

“We are delighted to hear that the Decent Homes work on your home has now been completed. We hope you are happy with the improvements and are feeling the benefits of this investment in your property.

Hopefully you have completed the Contractor Customer Survey and returned it to us but if you have any queries or comments relating to the works that you would like us to consider please complete the attached form and return it to us in the enclosed reply paid envelope.”

Enclosed form would show tenant name, address and telephone number, ask for details of works and leave several lines for comments.

3.18 **Recommendation 4** - t is recommended that Lovell are taken to task regarding the results of the face to face interviews on Question 5 (appendix). Lovell need to review their practices to improve tenant satisfaction. It is understood that Lovell have now started to process to address this.

3.19 **Recommendation 5** - The most prominent issue was identified as being lack of or poor communication relating to delivery of the works. Fifty percent of tenant responses said they were unhappy with communication for one reason or another. The TSP suggests that Contractor Resident Liaison Officers ensure they introduce themselves to tenants, hand over an induction plan and explain their role, checking that full details of all relevant contact numbers are made available to tenants to improve the situation. This is the procedure already outlined in the DHIP Manual; the TSP recommend that NWLDC, along with its contractors, revisit the procedures agreed by both parties, reinforce those procedures with contractors and monitor the contracts more closely to ensure compliance.

Janet Higgins, Chair, On behalf of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel

Documents/NWLDC Strategy Panel/2014 02 02