



feedback

Feedback - The tenant satisfaction
survey service for social landlords

Epping Forest District Council

DRAFT

Tenant Survey Report

November 2008

(Executive Summary)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey was a sample postal survey using the newly revised standard STATUS questionnaire plus the same additional questions used in the Council's previous survey in 2006. The fieldwork took place during August and September 2008. Questionnaires were sent to 1,563 general needs tenants and the findings are based on responses from 829 tenants; a valid response rate of 53.0%. This level of response meant that the survey findings are significantly more reliable than CLG and Housing Corporation guideline levels. The overall findings are reliable to within a statistical accuracy of a +/- 3.16% margin of error at the 95% confidence level.

1. Main Findings

84% of the survey respondents said they were satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council as their landlord and half of those that were satisfied said they were 'very satisfied'. This is an unusually high level of satisfaction although it actually represented a not significant 1% decrease compared to the 85% of general needs respondents that said they were satisfied with the Council's landlord service in its 2006 survey. The survey also recorded continuing high levels of tenant satisfaction with many specific aspects of their homes and Epping Forest DC's services:-

- 88% of respondents were satisfied with the overall quality of their homes – *unchanged¹ compared to the percentage that said they were satisfied with their accommodation in 2006*
- 82% were satisfied with the value for money for their rent – *unchanged compared to 2006*
- 82% were satisfied with the general condition of their homes – *up 1% compared to 2006*
- 83% were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live – *up 3% compared to 2006*

86% of respondents said that they were satisfied with the Council's repairs and maintenance service – *up 2% compared to 2006.*

¹ 'Unchanged' here means any recorded change that was less than 1 percentage point.

Of those tenants that said they had had repair work completed during the last 12 months:-

- 88% rated the information provided to them as to when workers would call as good – *unchanged compared to 2006*
- 86% rated the time taken for work to start as good – *up 3% compared to 2006*
- 92% said the speed with which work was completed was good – *unchanged compared to 2006*
- 93% rated the attitude of the workers as good – *down 2% compared to 2006*
- 91% were pleased with the way dirt and mess were kept to a minimum – *down 1% compared to 2006.*
- 88% said the overall quality of the work was good – *unchanged compared to 2006.*

79% of respondents (*down 5% compared to 2006*) said that Epping Forest DC was good at keeping them informed about things that affected them as tenants. Writing is by far the most popular method by which tenants would like the Council to consult with them.

62% of respondents said that they were satisfied that the Council took account of tenants' views and only 7% said they were dissatisfied.

When asked about 5 aspects of the Council's housing management services, tenants - as usually found by this question - recorded their highest levels of satisfaction with the two most commonly used services - 'advice on rent payments', (74% satisfied) and 'how enquiries are dealt with generally' (79% satisfied). Far fewer tenants, less than 45%, indicated that they were satisfied with the other 3 listed services (support for new tenants, support for vulnerable tenants, advice on moving home) but, importantly, 28~29% of respondents gave a 'no opinion' response to these 3 services and only 6~9% of said they were actually dissatisfied with them.

78% of the tenants that took part in the survey said that they had contacted the Council in the last 12 months; 82% had done this by phone and 63% of contacts were about repairs. Most tenants said they had been happy with the contact that they had had with the Council's staff, although, as usually found by STATUS surveys, they were slightly less likely to be satisfied with the outcome of their contact than with other aspects. The Council will be pleased to learn that the percentage of respondents that reported that they had been happy with their contact experience increased for all four contact indicators. An increase of 5% was recorded in the percentage that said that staff had been helpful and 6% more respondents than in 2006 said that it had been easy to get hold of the right person.

Chart 1 at the end of this summary compares Epping Forest DC's survey findings with the findings from its 2006 tenant survey.

2. Comparative Findings

The ability to make comparisons over time and with other landlords has been affected by the changes made to the standard STATUS questionnaire in 2007; some questions have been altered, some dropped and some new questions added. The details of these changes are outlined in appendix 2 of the report. The recent changes to the STATUS questionnaire mean that Feedback has not yet been able to build up a very large body of data from landlords that have completed surveys using the new STATUS questionnaire. In view of this, Epping Forest DC's findings have been compared not only with all the landlords in the Feedback database that have completed new STATUS surveys but also with all the landlords in the database that completed old style surveys in the 5 year period 2003 to 2007. In addition a comparison has been made for all the questions that have not changed with a 'peer group' of 9 landlords selected from the database that have completed surveys since 2004. The peers landlords that have been used were agreed with Epping Forest DC because they most closely resembled Epping Forest DC in terms of area of operation and the number and type of homes managed. Of the 9 peers, 1 is a local authority landlord, 5 are stock transfer landlords and 3 are standard housing associations.

The comparative analysis found that the overall satisfaction level of Epping Forest DC's tenants with the Council's landlord service is around 3-5% above national average levels. In addition the Council's tenants recorded satisfaction levels for specific service aspects that ranged from close to average to well above the average satisfaction levels recorded by other landlords. Most especially, the Council's tenants were noticeably more satisfied than is usually found by STATUS surveys with all aspects of the Council's repairs and maintenance service and also with all aspects of their contact with staff. Around 11% more Epping Forest DC tenants said they were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service than would be typical, around 12% more than usual said they found it easy to get hold of the right person when the contacted the Council, and around 12% more than usual said they had been satisfied with the outcome of their contact. The only service area where the survey recorded below average satisfaction levels concerned 'keeping tenants informed about things that affected them'; Epping Forest DC's tenants were a marginal 3% less satisfied with this one service aspect than might have been expected.

Chart 2 at the end of this summary details the overall comparative strength of Epping Forest DC's survey findings. It compares these with the peer group averages and with Feedback's new STATUS and 2003-07 national averages.

3. Other Findings

The Council's tenants recorded below average levels of concern about most neighbourhood problems. However, there was one exception; Epping Forest DC's tenants were much more likely to identify car parking as a problem than was typical of tenants elsewhere, 53% of the Council's respondents identified this as a problem compared to a new STATUS average of only 34%.

Tenants with transfer/exchange or neighbour/neighbourhood problems usually tend to be less satisfied with their contact experiences and especially with the final outcome than those with repair or rent/HB problems. The Epping Forest DC survey was true to this pattern with regard to transfer/exchanges and neighbours/neighbourhood issues but tenants who had contacted the Council about a garden or communal area problem also recorded similarly weak responses and this is not so often the case - although the small number of contacts about garden/communal areas means that this finding cannot be relied upon. Also the Council should note that the position with regard to transfers and exchanges has improved considerably and for neighbours/neighbourhood issues slightly compared to 2006.

Only 8% of the tenants that responded said that they had reported anti-social behaviour (ASB) to the Council during the last 12 months. The survey found that just under two-thirds of the respondents that had contacted Epping Forest DC about ASB said that it had been easy to get hold of the right person. A similar percentage said they had found that staff had been helpful. Slightly fewer (48%) said that staff had been able to deal with their problem. In response to the general question about how satisfied they were with how their report was dealt with, 55% said they were satisfied compared to 23% that said they were dissatisfied. In comparative terms this was a relatively strong finding.

In line with tenants nearly everywhere, Epping Forest DC's tenants identified the repairs and maintenance service as the single most important service and the overall quality of their homes as the second most important service from a standard range of 5 services. However, the Council's tenants were slightly more likely to identify the 'neighbourhood as a place to live' as important than tenants of other landlords.

Just as in 2006, around 4 out of 5 respondents rated Epping Forest DC's Tenants Handbook and newsletter 'Housing News' as good.

Only 12% of the survey respondents said that they had heard of Epping Forest DC's Tenant Participation Compact. This percentage was noticeably lower than the 27% recorded in 2006. 71% of those respondents that had heard of the Compact said they were satisfied with it and no respondents at all said they were dissatisfied with it.

35% of Epping Forest DC's tenant households now have access to the internet, up from 26% in 2006. There have been increases in access levels for all household types except 1-parent families with child/ren. Although they are still the least likely to have access to the internet, access amongst over 60 households has doubled over the last two years. On-line repairs reporting remains the internet service tenants would most like; 70% of respondents said they would like to use the internet to report repairs, which was exactly the same percentage as in 2006.

A little less than 7% of respondents to the survey said they had made a complaint to the Council during the last year, which was over 2% lower than the 9% that said they had made a complaint in the 12 months preceding the 2006 survey. 55% of respondents said they were satisfied with how their complaint had been dealt with, which was as much as 10% higher than in 2006. However, only 36% of respondents said they were satisfied with the final outcome from their complaint. This represented a step back from the position recorded in 2006 when 47% said they had been satisfied.

4. Demographic Findings

Despite the fact that the survey excluded sheltered tenants, it found that close to half (49%) of respondents were over 60 years old and as many as 22% were over 75. In contrast only 14% of tenants said they were under 35 years old.

41% of the Council's general needs households are single tenants and most of these are single tenants over 60 (30%). In addition, nearly a quarter (24%) of households consist of couples, with, once again, over 60s (17%) strongly outnumbering under 60s (6%). Only a quarter of households identified themselves as families with child/ren - although this was 3 percentage points up on the 2006 survey - and the survey recorded a very modest level of child density of just 0.5 children per household. This household mix means that the average (mean) size of Epping Forest DC's general needs households remains relatively small at only 2.2 persons.

A high proportion of the Council's tenants, said that they had at least one household member with a long-term illness or disability which limited their daily activities, with 48% of households reporting that this was the case.

65% of all respondents said they were long term tenants who had been tenants of the Council for 11 years or more and as many as 44% said they had been tenants for 21 years or more. The survey data suggests that over the last 5 years or so, the Council has been able to consistently grant around 25-30% of its lettings to transfers.

As previously recorded by the Council's tenant surveys, the very great majority of Epping Forest DC tenants classified themselves as white-British. 95% of respondents classified themselves as white-British and a further 2% as white-Irish or white-other. Less than 4% of respondents said they were from an Asian, black or mixed ethnic origin.

In view of the relatively high proportion of tenants over 60 years old, it is perhaps hardly surprising that only a third of principal tenants said that they were working - although a noticeably higher 48% of tenants' partners said that they worked. 37% of respondents said that they were retired, 11% said they were permanently sick or disabled and 12% that they were at home/ looking after family. The survey found that although the incomes of most of Epping Forest DC's tenants remain modest, there has been an increase in income levels since 2006. 58% of households reported net household incomes of less than £200 per week but this was down 6% on the 21% of general needs households with this level of income two years ago.

As usually reported by tenant surveys, satisfaction levels were highest amongst older tenants and lowest amongst younger tenants. Tenants under 35 years of age were the least satisfied with all service aspects. They had significantly below average satisfaction levels with the quality and condition of their homes, and were much less likely than other tenants to feel that the Council kept them informed about things that affected them.

Families with child/ren also tended to be less satisfied than other tenants. This was most noticeably the case with satisfaction with the quality (13% below average) and condition of their homes (12% below average) and with the outcome of their contacts with the Housing Department (14% below average).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The Council and its staff have every right to be pleased to learn that overall tenant satisfaction with the landlord service that the Council provides remains high and significantly above that reported by most other landlords.

Key driver analysis showed that satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and satisfaction with the outcome of their contacts with staff have the greatest impact on overall tenant satisfaction.

Importantly, the survey identified that the Councils' repairs service and the customer service provided by its staff are both particularly strong aspects of the Council's overall service. The high level of tenant satisfaction with these two key services underpins the unusually high level of overall satisfaction amongst Epping Forest DC's tenants.

The level of tenant satisfaction with the Council's repairs service has improved further from the high level recorded by the 2006 survey and is now exceptionally high. The Council will also be pleased to learn that tenants now appear to find it even easier to contact the right person when they contact the Housing Department - building on a similar level of improvement recorded by the 2006 survey - and that higher percentages also report that staff are helpful and are satisfied with the outcome of their contacts.

No service areas were identified as particularly weak but the Council's tenants were marginally less likely than tenants elsewhere to feel that the Council was good at keeping them informed about things that affected them as tenants. In addition, unlike all other aspects of the Council's service, the trend line for this one service aspect appears to be downwards.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below have been provided to help Epping Forest DC use the survey findings to deliver further improvements to its housing services.

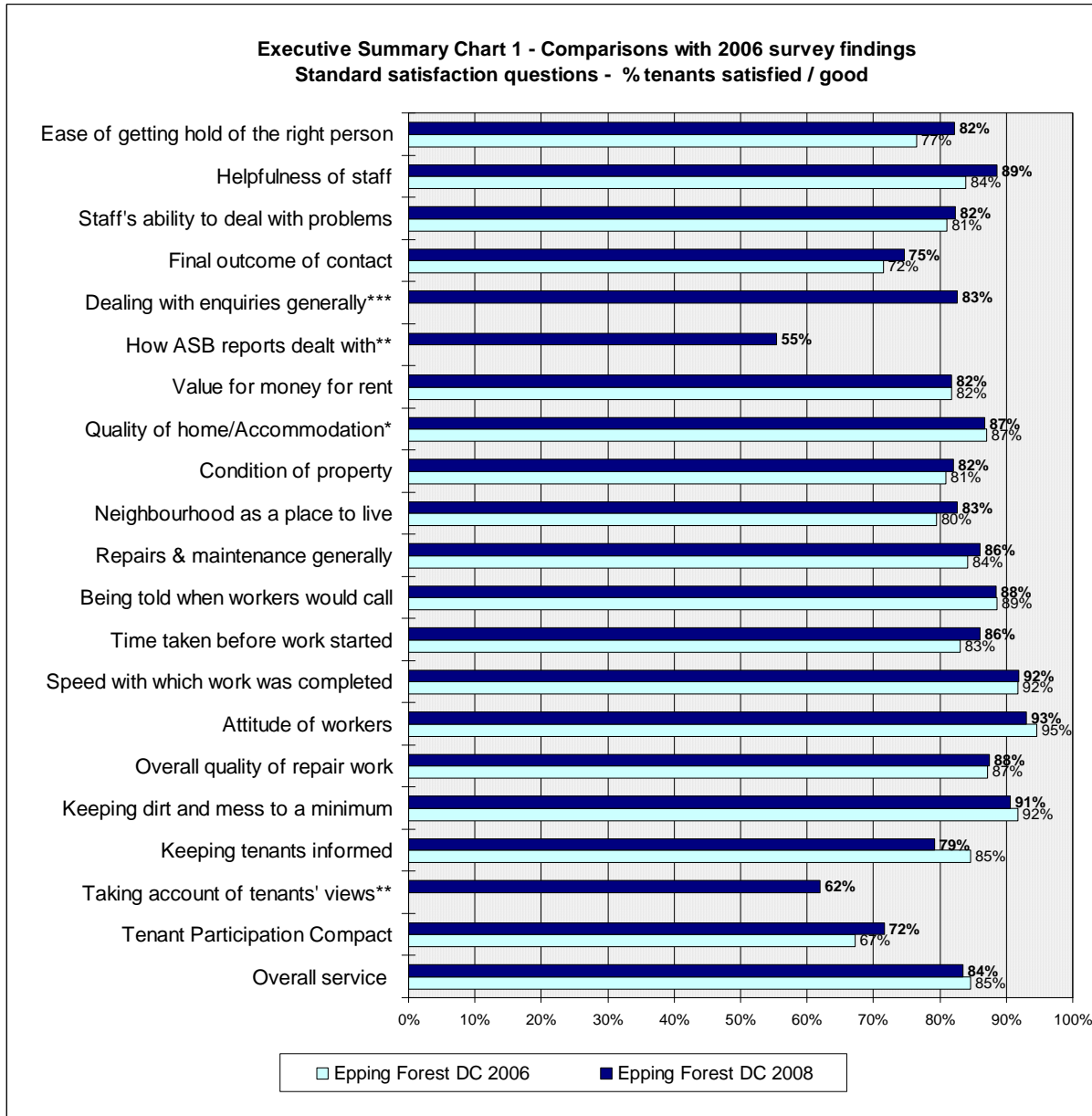
Providing information to its tenants was the one service area where Epping Forest DC's service showed up as relatively weak. The Council is therefore recommended to consult with its tenants through its tenant participation structures to try and discover why an increasing number of tenants do not appear to feel that the Council keeps them adequately informed.

Seventy percent of tenants with internet access said they would like to report repair requests on-line. Feedback understands that Epping Forest DC has offered an internet repairs reporting service to tenants for a number of years but, oddly in the light of this survey finding, relatively few tenants make use it – although it is understood that a larger number of tenants e-mail repair requests. It is recommended that the Council consults with its tenants groups to see if it can discover why the internet repairs service is not commonly used – for example there may be issues concerning ease of use or reliability. It is also understood that the Council is setting up a number of tenant talk back groups and one of these will be focussing on maintenance and repairs; this would make a good early topic for this group to give its views on.

Only a little over a quarter of the Council's tenants seem to be aware of the Council's tenants compact, which is a lower percentage than is usually found to be the case. It is understood that the Council is currently reviewing the compact. This process alone may increase the percentage of tenants that know about the compact. More importantly though, once this review has been completed, the Council is recommended to make sure that it re-launches the revised compact with maximum publicity to tenants.

The Council will probably be pleased to note that the survey findings suggested that the number of tenants making complaints is falling. Moreover, the percentage of tenants satisfied with how their complaint was dealt with appears to have risen since the Council's last survey in 2006. However, conversely, the percentage of tenants that said they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint has fallen back to just 36% from 48% in 2006. It is recommended that the Council carries out a desktop analysis of the last year's complaints to see if it can discover the reasons behind this change – for example it may be found that a lower proportion of complaints are being upheld for one reason or another.

An unusually high percentage, over half of the survey respondents, said that car parking was a problem in their neighbourhoods. Feedback understands that the Council is aware that this is a cause of concern for a number of its tenants and has recently agreed a budget for a number of off-street parking schemes and improvements as well as making a decision to relax cross-over regulations so that more residents can adapt their front gardens for car parking use. These measures are clearly welcome but it is recommended that the Council also considers whether it can improve car parking control at estates with serious problems, such as where there are high levels of commuter parking, through additional security measures such as barriers or wheel clamping.



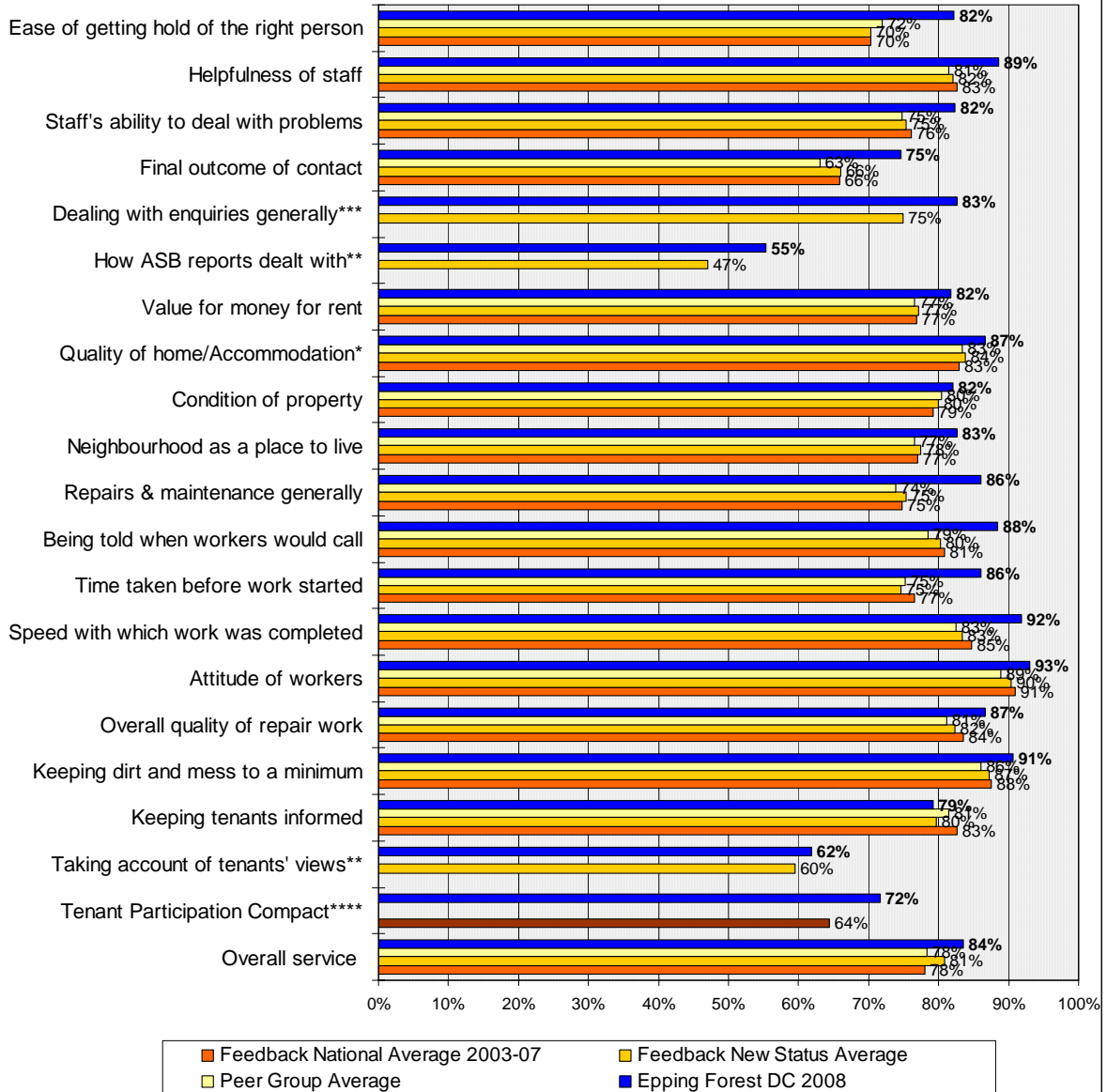
NOTES

*Wording of question significantly changed compared to the previous version of STATUS

**Question not included in previous version of STATUS

***Percentage rebased to exclude no opinion responses and not included in previous version of STATUS

Executive Summary Chart 2 - Comparisons with other landlords
Standard satisfaction questions - % tenants satisfied / good



NOTES

*Wording of question significantly changed compared to the previous version of STATUS

**Question not included in previous version of STATUS

***Percentage rebased to exclude no opinion responses and not included in previous version of STATUS

****Comparison is with Feedback 2006 LA average *not* 2003-07 average