

# **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 7 August 2012**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr David Stallan**

**Subject: Tenant Satisfaction Survey Report - 2012**

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## **Recommendations:**

- 1) That the headline findings of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey Report 2012, set out in the Executive Summary attached as an Appendix, be noted;**
- 2) That the Scrutiny Panel provides any comments on the findings to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing; and**
- 3) That a report be presented to the Scrutiny Panel later in the municipal year, once more members of the Housemark Benchmarking Club have undertaken their tenant satisfaction surveys, providing a more representative comparison of results with other registered providers of housing.**

## **Background**

1. Under the Government's previous Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) and National Indicator (NI) regime, it was a requirement for all registered providers of housing to undertake a Tenant Satisfaction Survey every two years (originally, every three years) and to then submit headline data to the Government through the BVPIs and NIs. All registered providers had to use a standard STATUS Survey Form, to ensure that they all asked the same questions to aid benchmarking.

2. However, there is no longer any requirement to undertake such surveys, or to be benchmarked with other landlords. Nevertheless, both members and officers consider it very important to understand the views of the Council's tenants, and to gauge their levels of satisfaction, on a periodic basis.

3. The Council's Housing Directorate has been a member of Housemark, a national housing benchmarking club, for many years. Following the demise of the previous tenant satisfaction reporting regime and the associated STATUS Survey Form, Housemark has devised a new standard Tenant Satisfaction Survey Form, called STAR, for its members to use, in order to continue to measure tenant satisfaction and benchmark with other registered providers if they wish. As with the previous STATUS survey form, in addition to the required standard questions, registered providers can also add a small number of bespoke questions of their choosing.

4. Accordingly, the Housing Directorate has once again commissioned Feedback Services - a well-experienced, independent satisfaction survey service for social landlords,

part-owned by the not-for-profit National Housing Federation - to undertake a Tenant Satisfaction Survey on behalf of the Council.

5. The survey has now been completed and Feedback Services has produced its report on the survey's findings. An Executive Summary of the report, also produced by Feedback Services, is attached as an Appendix for the Scrutiny Panel's information and consideration.

**6. The full report is also available to all members, but has not been printed with the agenda due to its length (46 pages). The full report has therefore been published as a Supplementary Agenda on the Council's Committee Management System, to enable any members to download a copy if they wish.**

7. The Council last undertook a Tenant Satisfaction Survey in 2008 (which was four years ago, due to the hiatus with the satisfaction methodology and reporting arrangements). However, due to a rule change by the Government at that time, unlike all previous satisfaction surveys, the 2008 survey could only include general needs tenants, and had to exclude all sheltered housing tenants. This had the effect of skewing the figures and caused problems, since it made it difficult to compare with the previous survey in 2006. However, the STAR survey covers both general needs **and** sheltered tenants, but also breaks down the satisfaction levels between these two groups of tenants.

## **Survey Methodology**

### *Fieldwork*

8. The questionnaire comprised 24 questions on four pages. The survey was planned to take place during a four-week period. Two individual mailings took place; Feedback Services carried out the administration of all mail-outs, the first of which was sent out on 12 March 2012. This consisted of a copy of the questionnaire, a covering letter written by the Council and a reply-paid envelope. All questionnaires were returned to Feedback Services. After two weeks, Feedback Services sent any tenant who had not responded a second, full survey pack. The survey was held open an extra week as completed questionnaires were still being returned and finally closed on 20 April 2012.

### *Response rates and accuracy*

9. Incentives were used to boost the response rate. Three questionnaires were drawn at random from those returned and winners won high street shopping vouchers of £100, £50 and £20.

10. The overall response from all tenants (general needs and sheltered combined) was very high at 49%, with 1,093 questionnaires returned from the 2,215 questionnaires sent out – representing around 17% of all tenants.

### *Sampling*

11. Both Feedback Services and HouseMark recommend that surveys of under 10,000 population (like the Council) should achieve a sampling error of at least +/- 4% at the 95% confidence level. This means that, for example, if 35% of tenants answered "Yes" to a particular question, there are 95 chances out of 100 that the correct figure for all tenants – including those who did not respond - would be between 31% and 39% (i.e. 4% above or below 35%).

12. The Council's sampling frame was designed by Feedback Services to achieve a **lower** sampling error (of +/- 3.0% at the 95% confidence interval) in order to produce very reliable survey results, well within the recommended sampling error of +/- 4.0%. A sample of

general needs and sheltered tenants was randomly selected by Feedback Services, based on estimated response rates of around 40% for general needs tenants and 50% for sheltered tenants.

13. For this Council, due to the high response rate, the accuracy is even better than planned, and is to within +/- 2.7% at the 95% confidence interval.

#### *Presentation of the findings in the Full Report*

14. The Full Report presents the findings of the survey for both general needs and sheltered housing tenants. The report focuses on the key findings of the survey and the results are analysed by:

- Tenure
- Age of tenant
- Gender of tenant
- Area
- Property type
- Number of bedrooms
- Comparison with previous surveys, and
- Comparison with the results from other landlords.

#### **Overall tenant satisfaction and comparison with other landlords**

15. Since the Executive Summary is attached, this covering report does not attempt to summarise the findings further. However, it is worth reporting here the overall level of tenant satisfaction – which is the main comparator that is reported and used to compare with other landlords – which, according to the Full Report produced by Feedback Services, is that:

*“ The vast majority of Epping Forest District Council’s tenants are satisfied with the services provided by the Council, and encouragingly the overall rating is amongst the highest in the survey (88%) – suggesting a high degree of customer loyalty towards the Council.*

*A higher percentage of sheltered tenants are highly satisfied with the Council’s services (93%), compared with general needs tenants (86%).*

*Encouragingly, the overall rating for services (88%) from all tenants is 3% higher than the rating awarded in 2006 (85%). The increase is a result of the higher rating from general needs tenants (up 2% since 2008) – while the rating for sheltered tenants remains identical to the one recorded in 2006 (93%) – when sheltered tenants were last surveyed.*

*The overall rating for landlord services is 3% higher than the average found in Feedback Services’ database (which is 85% - based on landlords who asked a similar question as part of a STATUS survey in the last two years) and matches the rating found in HouseMark’s benchmarking service (based on approximately 80 landlords who have submitted the results from STAR surveys in June 2012). “*

16. However, Feedback Services has advised that it is important to note that neither of the two comparative datasets referred to above are representative of the housing sector, and should not be taken as an indication of any national average. This is mainly because the Council has undertaken its survey much earlier than most other landlords. For this reason, and to avoid the Council being “penalised” for being an early surveyor, Feedback Services has agreed to provide the Council with a comparison report later in the year, for free, to provide a more representative comparison with other landlords, which will be reported to the

Housing Scrutiny Panel at that time.