



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

13 November 2017

Title: Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel – Review of Customer Satisfaction Surveys

Report of: Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel (GHCSPP)

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to inform the committee of review The Gateshead Housing Company's (TGHC) approach to Customer Satisfaction Surveys and to make any recommendations that the panel consider will improve service delivery.

Background

2. Having completed six reviews, the panel chose to review Customer Satisfaction Surveys.
3. The criteria for this choice was mainly due to the volume of surveys completed, collating and identifying tangible outcomes and feeding back to customers how learning has been used to improve service delivery.
4. GHCSPP used the following tools to collect evidence and to produce this report:
 - Desktop research
 - Liaising with Service Improvement Group's (SIG's)
 - Service Manager focus group
 - Budget costs and Officer time allocation
 - Survey return rates
5. Overall, the review has highlighted three areas of positive practice.
6. There were also seven recommendations which if implemented could result in improved customer service, make the process of collecting, collating and learning from survey more efficient and effective for the company.
7. A copy of the panel's final report is attached as an Appendix to this report.

Link to values

8. This report relates to the following company values: -

- Fair
- Customer Focused
- Open and Honest
- Accountable
- Inclusive and Valuing diversity
- Innovative
- Passionate about what we do

Impact on tenants

9. The panel's focus has been to drive forward service improvements in this area of customer service delivery. It is envisaged that recommendations made will improve the link between customers and the company.
10. Tenants and leaseholders are likely to be more satisfied where they feel they have had the opportunity to influence service provision. Regular publicity will inform the wider tenant population of the company's willingness to progress and learn from the findings of the panel's review.

Risk Management Implications

11. A failure to consult customers on their views of service delivery will significantly decrease customer confidence in the company. The recommendations in the report look to mitigate this risk by encouraging customers to use other methods of contact and in the longer term the introduction of a self-serve facility that allows customers to interact online.

Financial Implications

12. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. Any financial implications implementing any of the recommendations will be identified by officers when formulating its response.

Equality and Diversity Implications

13. The panel's code of conduct includes specific expectations around equality and diversity. They have undertaken training to ensure that scrutiny activities conducted and recommendations made are accessible and inclusive to all.

Value for Money Implications

14. The panel has a remit to consider value for money within the scrutiny activities they conduct. Recommendations made will help improve customer satisfaction whilst encompassing the value for money regulatory standards.

Health Implications

15. There are no health implications directly arising from this report.

Environmental Implications

16. There are no direct environmental implications as a result of this review.

Consultation carried out

17. There has been consultation carried out with SIG's and Service Managers to gather valuable evidence for this review.

Recommendations

18. The committee is recommended to:
 - note the final report and in particular the recommendations attached and review positive practise;
 - request a subsequent to progress report to be delivered in May 2018.

Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel

Panel members involved in the review

David Hewitson (Chair)
Margaret Gale (Vice Chair)
Christ Sleight
David Chambers
Steve Carr
Pauline Hawkins
Clare Butterfield (Mentor)

Background

How was the scrutiny review identified?

In March 2017 the panel considered a number of possible areas to review including grounds maintenance, sheltered housing and customer satisfaction surveys. The panel discussed the above options and decided that their seventh scrutiny review should concentrate on customer satisfaction surveys.

The objective of the review was to review the company's approach to collecting and using customers satisfaction to achieve service improvement and secure Value for Money (VfM).

In April 2017 the Business, Performance and Customer Service Manager delivered a presentation to the panel which detailed:

- An overview of the current organisational approach to measuring customer satisfaction via surveys
- The types of surveys conducted. ie Biennial survey, quarterly themed and transactional surveys

The panel agreed to meet monthly with additional meetings taking place as and when required. The panel also agreed to use the following tools to conduct the review:

- Desktop research
- Liaising with Service Improvement Group's (SIG's)
- Service Manager focus group
- Budget costs and Officer time allocation
- Survey return rates

Details of the activities carried out

- **Desktop research**

Desktop research yielded significant best practise and knowledge that shaped the basis of the recommendations.

According to impactbnd.com over 36% of mobile subscribers use iPhones or ipads to read email and 34% of subscribers only use mobile devices to read emails. In addition 80% of internet users own a smartphone (Smart Insights). Also over 50% of smartphone users grab their smartphone immediately after waking up (Express

Pigeon 2014). According to emailmonday by, 2018, 8 in 10 email users will likely access their email accounts exclusively from their mobile devices.

Research from Queryz.com “people have a short attention span and because of that the creation of the micro survey was designed. A one to three survey question is definitely more effective than a well-structured but dauntingly overloaded survey questionnaire. With the use of these little survey gems, capturing small `bursts` of information has become more prevalent and far more beneficial. Especially with mobile users who embrace `short and sweet` online interactions.

Evidence from surveygizmo.com states:

- *Survey Design: research has shown that surveys should take 5 minutes or less to complete. Although 6 – 10 minutes is acceptable, those that take longer than 11 minutes will likely result in lower response rates. On average respondents can complete 5 closed questions per minute and 2 open-ended questions per minute.*
 - *Provide Clear value: offer a copy of the final results to all those who completed the survey, and if appropriate consider offering an incentive. If you plan to take action based on the results of your survey, make those clear in your survey invitation. Remember, people will be more likely to respond if they understand how that time will be spent.*
 - *Send Reminders: As the close of your survey approaches, gently nudge those who haven't finished yet. Limit yourself to no more than two reminder emails, changing the time of day and the day of the week that you send them out so that you can reach as many different respondents as possible*
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- **Liaising with Service Improvement Group's (SIG's)**

The panel identified the need to work more closely with the SIG's, co-opt their expertise where necessary, provide the opportunity to join the panel for taster sessions or to take part in one off reviews and to ask for their opinions of customer satisfaction surveys.

Throughout the SIG's there appeared to be apathy to completing surveys as they were often too long, questions were repeated and there was little space for comments.

Customers considered on line surveys such as Survey Monkey would be a more effective method of collection. Where paper surveys are issued they should contain the minimum amount of questions and be included with other correspondence. Ie Rent statements and TGHC News.

Generally responses from the SIG members concentrated on:

- Rewarding customers for their involvement
- Surveying customers shortly after the service had been accessed
- Ensuring that when customers are consulted by survey feedback on outcomes are communicated promptly
- Survey distribution and collation should promote VfM.

- **Service Manager focus group**

Panel representatives met with Service Managers from throughout the business. Service Managers were identified by the Business Support Officer to ensure that a broad range of managers who collect surveys via various methods, within different timescales, using various methods of measurement. I.e Northgate, excel etc.

The Service Manager focus group agreed that:

- Distribution, collection and collating survey results is time consuming
- For services with high satisfaction levels there is little potential to identify service improvements or trends in performance results
- A mix of paper and electronic surveys need to be used to collect customer feedback and ensure customers without IT access or skills are not excluded
- Surveys should be supported by a range of methods to involve customers in service improvements. I.e SIG's, Focus Groups plus Task and Finish Groups.
- Survey responses of very satisfied, fairly satisfied etc have been maintained since the Audit Commission which was the sector regulator. This method is now too constrictive but should be retained where those survey results are used for HouseMark benchmarking
- Comments from customers don't often relate to the service distributing the survey
- Reporting survey outcomes to customer's needs to be improved

- Service Managers are keen to make better use of digital surveys and using 'real time' results to feedback to customers, make improvements and report performance

- **Budget costs and officer time allocation**

The Company are still using traditional methods of collection which is labour intensive manage with no practical outcomes for service delivery being identified and does not achieve VfM.

It is estimated by Managers that they have spent over 700 hours managing customer satisfaction survey process with an estimated cost of £9,000. When considering the VfM implications it has been identified by the panel and, using the feedback from the Service Manager focus group, that there are no beneficial outcomes from the time and cost spent collating information via the current methods in isolation.

- **Survey return rates**

As part of the review a selection of Service Managers were asked to provide the following information:

- Number of surveys conducted by service area.
- Type of surveys conducted by service area.
- What was the response rate to each survey? (in percentage and number if possible)

The company conduct an array of surveys and the number conducted depends upon the demand on the business at any particular time. As part of the review the panel

identified 14 surveys that were collected routinely and it was acknowledged that in any specific year this could increase for 'one off' surveys.

There were 4 types of surveys conducted and they included:

- Transactional – where a service has been accessed and survey issued
- Themed survey – Sent periodically during the financial year by specific service throughout the organisation
- Annual
- Biennial

There was also a variety of methods of surveys conducted:

- Face to face
- Telephone
- Postal/Paper
- Online
- PDA

Survey response rates varied depending upon the survey collection method. Those surveys that were collected face to face were labour intensive and expensive to collect however they yielded an enhanced return rate of over 95% depending upon the service.

For postal and telephone surveys there was no consistency across the company for return rates. In 2015/16 the return rate for satisfaction with Complaints survey was 37.6%. In 2016/17 the return rate was 31.4% although there had been no change in the method or process to collect surveys.

In August 2017 Leasehold services trialled an alternative survey method, embracing technology to help increase customer feedback. The number of survey questions was reduced to ask one specific question in relation to the service charge invoice and a further question asking whether leaseholder would like to speak to someone about the service they received, helping to identify service improvements.

The survey was issued to the e-mail addresses of 422 leaseholders and a further 445 via post. 140 (16%) leaseholders responded to the survey compared to 60 (7%) in 2015. 91 responses were received via survey monkey and 49 from the paper survey.

In May 2017 the HomeRepairs service conducted their survey via PDA which was offered to customers after a repair had been completed. In that month 2,074 customers were asked if they wanted to participate in a satisfaction survey. Of those surveys offered 701 were completed with a return rate of 34%. There was no comparative information for the previous year.

Positive Practise

There were three areas of positive practise identified by the panel.

- It has become apparent from the panel's discussion with Service Manager's that there is an appetite for change and improvement in this area and a keenness to adopt E engagement
- Service Managers are keen to use enhanced customer feedback to improve service delivery to meet customer needs and aspirations

- Throughout the organisation Service Managers are enthusiastic about changing the methods of collecting and collating the opinions of customers in real time to allow for quicker implementation of service improvements and feedback to customers, SIG's, Committee's and Board.

Recommendations

- 1. Reduce paper surveys to customers and work towards replacing them with `online surveys`, sent to smartphones, tablets and PC's. Retain paper surveys for those without PC access or IT skills.**

Evidence:

 - a. According to impactbnd.com over 36% of mobile subscribers use iPhones or I pads to read email and 34% of subscribers only use mobile devices to read emails. In addition 80% of internet users own a smartphone (Smart Insights). Also over 50% of smartphone users grab their smartphone immediately after waking up (Express Pigeon 2014). According to email Monday by, 2018, 8 in 10 email users will likely access their email accounts exclusively from their mobile devices.*
- 2. Use IT more effectively to enable real time surveys ensuring the appropriate IT support, infrastructure and output methods are in place. Where possible ensure that surveys sent online are appealing and can be viewed in a user friendly format.**
- 3. When developing surveys ensure they are compatible when distributed via email, sent to smart phones or available online .**
- 4. Introduce, where appropriate, `micro-surveys` (2 or 3 questions).**
 - a. Ensure micro surveys focus less on processes or procedures and more on outcomes for the customer
 - b. Ask customers what their priorities are for the service
- 5. Define a Company approach to increase survey response rates using the good practise identified by the panel.**
- 6. Introduce the concept of `armchair panels` (remote customer consultation group)**
 - a. Encourage more tenants to be involved in conducting surveys. The armchair panel may be consulted on issues from time to time by completing surveys at home.
- 7. Seek a consistent companywide approach to survey monitoring via:**
 - a. Re-establishment of Survey monitoring group
 - b. Revisit service standards/Management Performance indicators where necessary
 - c. Conduct survey/questionnaires as close as possible to the point the service was accessed
 - d. Maintain benchmarking question response style for KPI reporting to HouseMark. I.e Very satisfied, very dissatisfied etc. Trial different question responses to those that best fits the service or survey. I.e Yes, no, agree, disagree
 - e. Follow up customer dissatisfaction where requested and within timescales to be agreed by involved customers and Service Managers

- f. Develop surveys that will focus on identifying outcomes for improved service delivery. If outcomes can't be identified are the right questions being asked?
- g. Report outcomes to customers from every survey in a timely manner using the most appropriate communication channels
- h. Report survey results and outcomes to the appropriate service Committee from every survey in a timely manner or as part of an six-monthly/annual service update report

Conclusion

Common themes were identified from desktop research, feedback received from SIG consultation, the Service Manager focus group, the review of budget costs, officer time allocation and survey return rates:

- The current process of collecting and collating customer feedback via traditional methods of customer satisfaction surveys is not efficient and effective and does not lead to demonstrate-able outcomes for the customer or organisation
- Through life cycle of collecting and collating customer satisfaction there are few themes, trends and service improvements identified across all services
- Furthermore where surveys do inform improvements this information isn't routinely shared with customers to show with how their opinions are valued.

Action Plan

The Panel request the Business, Performance and Customer Service Manager to produce an Action Plan responding to the recommendations made in this report within one calendar month of receiving this report. If it is not practical for a recommendation to be implemented reasons should be given in the action plan and discussed with the panel

The action plan will be presented to Customers and Communities Committee in May 2018.

The panel and the Customers and Communities Committee will monitor the action plan report via the six monthly update report produced by the Business Support Officer.

Acknowledgement

The panel would like to thank the Customer and Communities Committee and the Chair of the Committee for the continuing support they receive.

Thanks also go to Martin Poulter who presented the panel with an overview on the customer satisfaction survey process, and to Service Managers for taking part in a focus group.

The panel would also like to acknowledge the support given to them by Clare Butterfield (Mentor).