

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Housing Options Service

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summary

November 2014

Introduction

This document is the summary of the results from our annual Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS), conducted in September 2014.

The CSS is our main method of mass service user consultation, being sent to over 1900 temporary accommodation tenants this year. With an incentive of entry into a £250 prize draw, we received 177 responses, equalling a response rate of 9% - our best yet - and another welcome improvement in service user engagement levels.

Communication

We generally communicate with service users by letter, telephone calls and by using information contained on our website – the related survey questions help to validate the effectiveness of each of these communication channels. We also produce two newsletters a year – InTouch – which is now available on our website (www.towerhamlets.gov.uk).

This survey showed that 75% of respondents preferred to be contacted via letter, which is a decrease from the 82% last year. From our findings more customers want to be contacted via text and emails than in previous years

We value our Tower Hamlets customer promise and when conducting this survey 64% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the time taken to answer the phone. This is a decrease from the previous year and reflects some dissatisfaction with the introduction of voicemail for some of our services, which has been necessary due to the amount of time some officers spend out of the office visiting our customers.

Overall 72% of our customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the way their call was dealt with which was around the same response from our 2013 findings.

51% of customers indicated that improvements could be made in the way we answer calls, an improvement on previous years. We will be analysing the comments submitted on this question to identify and implement the improvements that can be made.

Complaints

The majority of our feedback comes in the form of complaints, comments and compliments. To help capture these, we have put customer feedback cards in our reception area, in addition to the LBTH complaints forms occasionally received and correspondence received from service users.

When asked, 38% of respondents said that they were aware of the feedback cards in reception. We aim to increase this number when conducting our next survey through posters in our reception to advertise these comment cards. We will also be placing adverts in our newsletters.

We welcome complaints as an effective way of obtaining feedback about the service and identifying areas for improvement.

51% of our customers stated they were aware of the complaints procedure and 18% of respondents had made complaints about the service. Of these 50% were satisfied with the outcome, an improvement on last year's results.

We will continue to raise awareness of the complaints procedure through our newsletters, website and via our reception with posters on the walls of our reception.

InTouch Temporary Accommodation newsletter

Our In Touch newsletter has changed since the 2013 Survey was conducted, and is now only available online. It has also changed from being produced four times a year to just twice yearly.

55% of our customers found our InTouch customer newsletter useful. With only 12% stating "No" it was not useful while 33% stated they did not read it.

When asked how we can improve InTouch we had a very positive response and will be analysing the free hand comments to identify any improvements that can be made.

Our customers indicated they want information on jobs in the area. We aim in the future to put relevant articles so that our customers can access this information.

We printed a website link showing where the newsletter can now be found, in this current survey. When the 2015 Survey goes out we aim to see an increase in our customers who read our newsletter. To improve this figure we are going to look at ways of marketing our newsletter better, such as through the new computer kiosks in our reception area. We will also supply posters and publicity to other Council Offices including the One Stop Shops and Idea Stores.

Housing Management

Since our last survey it has been over 3 years since we have gone through an organisation review and as part of this process the generic Housing Management Team was formed by merging the functions previously carried out by the separate Customer Liaison, Income and Accommodation teams. This merger has improved the customer journey by reducing the number of officers they need to deal with in relation to their temporary accommodation from three to one.

82% of our customers stated they knew who their housing officer was. This was around the same mark as 2013.

49% of customers in temporary accommodation had been visited at least once by their housing officer in the previous 12 months. The service has changed its targets on home visits to ensure that all new customers are visited within two weeks of moving into their temporary accommodation. Inspections will in future be carried out on a more targeted basis.

68% of our customers in temporary accommodation knew who their Managing agent was and a further 52% of these customers had been visited by their managing agent at least once within the last year. This is a significant increase from the previous year's figures which were 60% who knew who their agent was and 38% who had been visited. We aim to keep improving these figures and to ensure that Managing Agents are meeting their contractual duties.

62% of customers said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the location of the temporary accommodation. This is around the same figure from the previous year, it reflects on the amount of placements placed out of the borough due to a reduced supply of in-borough accommodation.

49% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the repairs carried out in their property. It is a figure which we aim to improve but also reflects the success of work undertaken to set minimum property standards in all temporary accommodation. The Housing Options service will look to improved training for staff to improve expertise in maintenance and housing management.

Satisfaction with the Managing Agent, at 58% was on a par with the 2013 results.

Overall Satisfaction with Temporary accommodation was down 10% from 63% to 53%. We know that one of the main reasons for this is because of the difficulty of sourcing affordable temporary accommodation within the Borough. Over the last year some 90% of all new placements have been out of the borough, a complete reversal on the position only 3 years ago where the same number were being accommodated in-borough.

We have also had an increase in households being placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation because of the difficulties we have in procuring affordable accommodation.

As a service we very much regret these developments, which have been forced on us by a combination of an over-heated private rented sector which has seen rents rise far in excess of Local Housing Allowance so making properties

unaffordable for most people on low and moderate incomes. We are exploring a number of options to increase the supply of accommodation for our homeless households although sadly we do not anticipate a significant increase in the availability of properties within the Borough.

Overall satisfaction

53% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service they received, this is 10% lower from our 2013 results. Targets on customer satisfaction vary between teams.

We know that one of the reasons for this is the fact that a lot of our customers in temporary accommodation will have to be transferred to alternative properties, most likely out of the Borough because their landlords have asked for their properties back.

For many this will be an unpalatable choice, and we are taking steps to try to increase the number of homeless households who get permanent offers within the Council's Allocations policy. However demand is very high and most people will wait many years for a permanent offer.

What next?

The findings from the CSS will be fed back to our Management Team, along with copies to all teams for consideration at team meetings. Please look at these results and feedback to the Business Support Team with your comments. We want to know:

- What actions your team will be taking
- Any ideas you have that you can work on with the Business Support Team
- Any other comments on the Customer Satisfaction Survey