

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Homeless & Housing Advice Service

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summary

June 2008

Introduction

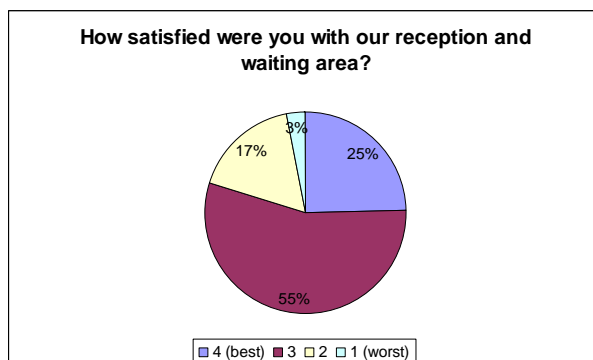
This is the summary of our third annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, conducted in June 2008. The survey is the Homeless & Housing Advice Service's main method of user consultation, as it is sent to everyone living in temporary accommodation, giving everyone the opportunity to help shape our future.

The Homeless & Housing Advice Service has just launched a Service development programme entitled 'From Great to Excellent', which will focus on a number of projects designed to improve our customer service performance and implement some of the actions identified from the Customer Satisfaction Survey and our recently-published Homelessness Strategy for 2008 – 2013.

We sent out 2,650 surveys and received 300 responses which gave us a response rate of just over 11%, our best performance yet, in terms of engaging with our users.

When you visit us

The previous survey was conducted as we moved from Millharbour to our current location at Albert Jacob House, on Roman Road, so these results show how users feel about our newly-designed reception and waiting area.



25% of respondents rated our reception and waiting area as 'best' with another 55% giving it a rating of '3', so 80% were satisfied with the improvements we have made, including vending machines, an area for eating and a children's play area.

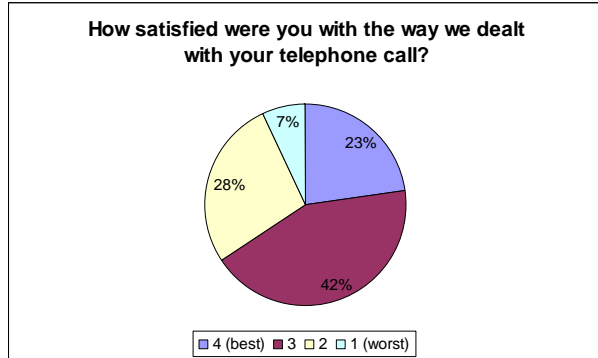
When asked "Were you treated in a polite and friendly way?" 89% of respondents answered positively, confirming the customer-focused attitude of staff. We have recently introduced a new computer system called Contact Manager, which displays the name of users as they are called for interview, and should reduce waiting times.

When you telephone us

We have been implementing measures to improve satisfaction with telephone calls, and recently conducted a telephone mystery shop exercise, with selected users calling various teams and assessing the standard of response.

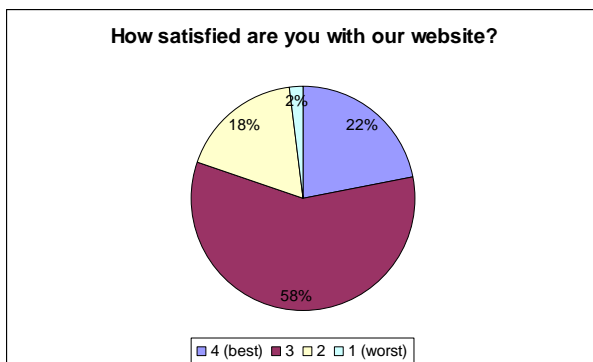
While we are still learning lessons from the results of the telephone mystery shop, we achieved a survey satisfaction rate of 65% for the way our officers deal with telephone calls.

We also asked if your telephone calls were handled in a polite and helpful way, with 39% responding positively, 31% saying officers were just polite and 16% saying officers were just helpful. We recognise that we need to continue to improve on the way we deal with telephone calls and have put measures in place, including refresher telephone training and more telephone mystery shop exercises, to monitor any improvement.



Our website

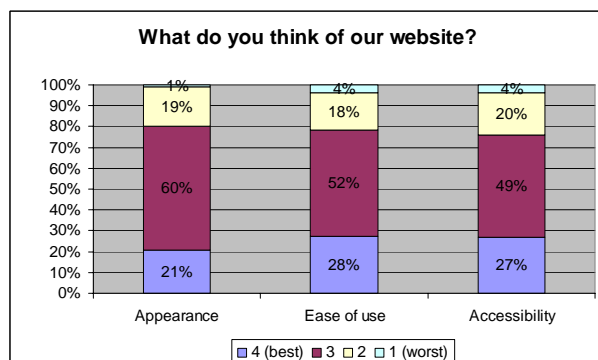
With increasing numbers of people having internet access and 49% of respondents placing their bids over the internet, we realise the importance of having a clear and easy-to-use website.



When asked about the appearance, 81% of respondents liked the look of the Homeless Service web pages. 80% of respondents said that the website was easy to use and 76% said that it was easy to find information they wanted to know.

We have been looking at ways to further improve our website, and we are going to change the layout slightly to make certain aspects clearer, including more information shown on the front page of the website.

From the comments received, many users believe that the Homeseekers bidding website is part of the Homeless Service, which is not the case. We will forward all comments to the Homeseekers web team, and hope that they share the same commitment to improving service levels.



Consulting and informing you

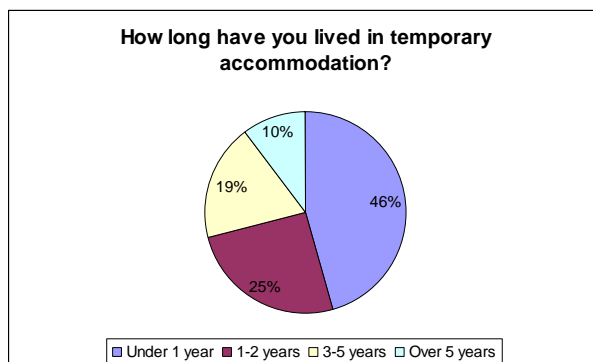
In addition to the annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, we hold quarterly Homeless Service User Panel (HSUP) meetings, where we discuss service improvement ideas with people in temporary accommodation and ask their opinion on changes we want to make.

We were very surprised to discover that only 17% of users had heard of the User Panel, despite the high profile that is given to it in 'In Touch', our publication for people in temporary accommodation. We have reviewed our engagement strategy for Service Users, and are focusing on raising the profile of the panel and expanding the scope to include our Letter Audit project, where Service Users look at our standard letters and highlight any hard-to-understand wording.

Other issues addressed by HSUP include pre-production leaflet checking, discussions on improving processes and assisting with quality control exercises, like the Telephone Mystery Shop. Despite the lack of received publicity around the User Panel, it was pleasing to see that 53% of respondents wanted to receive an invite to the next meeting, and these will be sent out in the near future.

Bidding and temporary accommodation

Tower Hamlets has a very limited number of properties available for our priority need homeless users and we asked "How long have you lived in temporary accommodation?" to gauge the length of time users are waiting for permanent accommodation.

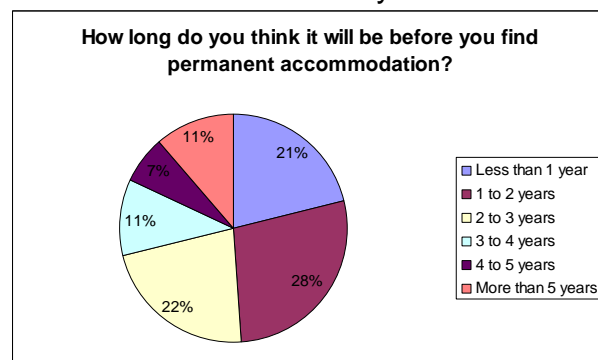


Nearly 75% of respondents had lived in temporary accommodation for less than two years – the length of time spent in temporary accommodation is also dependent on how often they are bidding for permanent properties and the size of property bid for.

15% of respondents said that they did not know how to bid, which is of some concern – users need to know

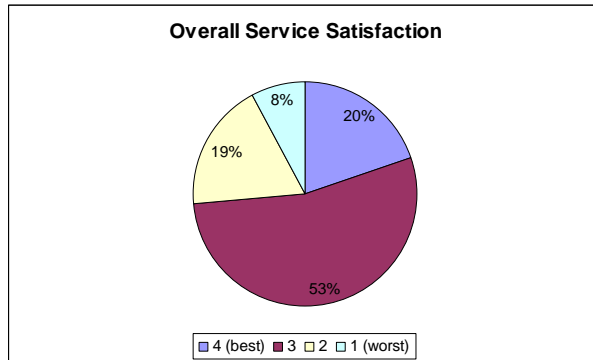
that they cannot be offered permanent accommodation unless they bid.

Bearing in mind that 53% of respondents didn't know that there are approximately 22,000 people on the Common Housing Register, it appears that some respondents may have slightly unrealistic views of how long it takes to successfully bid for a permanent property.



Overall Satisfaction

At the end of the survey we asked “How satisfied are you with the Homeless & Housing Advice Service?” In previous years, we used a five-point sliding scale from ‘very good’ to ‘very poor’, but it meant that many respondents ticked the middle box. This year we used a four-point scale which meant that all responses were either positive or negative, preventing ‘fence-sitting’.



From the chart, (left), we can see that satisfaction with the Homeless & Housing Advice Service is now at 73%, which is an excellent result for us.

Compared to last year's results, where we achieved 64%, and 2006, when we got 66% positive feedback, it appears that our efforts to engage our service users and implement

service improvements that benefit them are starting to work. We obviously want to continue to better our overall satisfaction rating, but we are glad that satisfaction levels have improved.

What is next?

After analysing the survey responses, there are a number of issues that we need to focus on, and we have an action plan to make sure we do so.

We will:

- Develop and organise Customer Service training for all staff
- Conduct refresher telephone training, monitored by further telephone mystery shop exercises carried out by Service users
- Continue to implement the Contact Manager reception software package, which will help reduce waiting times in reception
- Ensure that the 'In Touch' newsletter is sent out to everyone in temporary accommodation
- Forward all suggestions to the Homeseekers website team, to improve the online bidding experience and provide details of successful bids
- Send out details for all the services that users identified in the survey

We will continue to prioritise the improvement of customer services, and if you have any suggestions or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Quality Team on **020 7364 7474**.