

## Repairs & Tenant Information Event

### Stonehouse Court Hotel

12<sup>th</sup> October 2021

#### Background

This tenant event was a follow up to the Tenants' Voice recruitment event in the Spring where SDC's new in-house repairs service, Property Care, was the dominant topic of conversation. This event was therefore an opportunity for tenants to meet Property Care's new Operations Manager, Adrian Erwood and hear how the council is addressing issues that had been raised.

For the Tenancy Management Team this 'follow up' event was also a chance to promote tenant participation roles, carry out mini consultations on the formats of the next Annual Report and 'Easy Read' Tenancy Agreement, as well as showcase work done over the year by the Estate Refurbishment & Planned Maintenance Team.



Staff sat at each table so that someone knowledgeable would be 'on hand' to answer questions about the Housing Service or clarify any misunderstandings in respect of policies/procedures and housing regulations.

Display boards were set out in a spacious corner of the room with information and consultation material about:

1. Sample documents in Easy Read
2. Sample formats of Annual Reports
3. Tenant involvement volunteer roles available:
  - Tenant Repairs Inspectors
  - Neighbourhood Ambassadors/Community Champions
  - Green Champions
  - Focus Group activities

## **The event**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the break periods, a looped powerpoint presentation was played of recent work carried out across the district by the Estate Refurbishment & Planned Maintenance Team. It illustrated estate regeneration work (external and internal refurbishment of properties of estates which included Paganhill (Stroud), Lower Berrycroft (Berkeley), Bearlands (Wotton under Edge), Kingshill (Dursley) and Park Road/Parade flats & shops (Stonehouse).

Refurbishment work on the Independent Living schemes across the district were also featured. In addition, highlights of work done with the council's new contractor MD Group were shown along with the new program of kitchen refurbishment options available to tenants.

The event started with an ice breaker, 'Whodunnit', which helped everyone relax and get to know each other on their table.

### **Property Care Presentation**

Property Care's new Operations Manager, Adrian Erwood, talked about the vision for the new in-house repairs service. He also talked about the immense challenges. The new service was launched just a week after Lockdown was imposed which meant that only emergency repairs could be carried out, leaving a backlog of non-urgent repairs. When Covid restrictions were eased, pressures on the new service were further exacerbated by shortages in materials, price rises and difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified personnel.

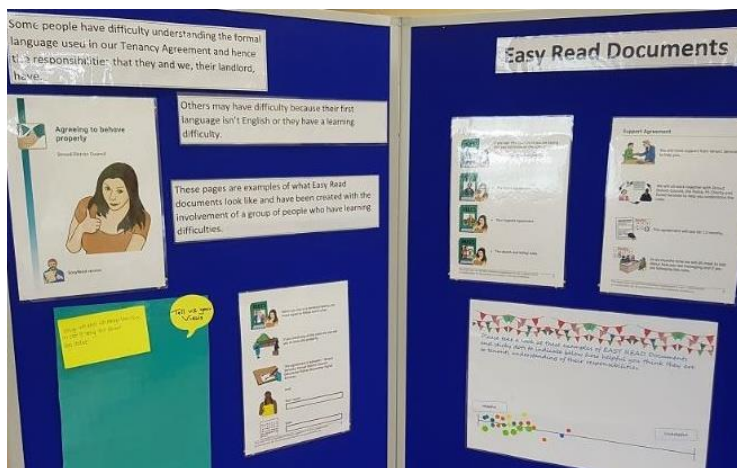
As part of plans for future Property Care work, Adrian talked about the introduction of a pilot scheme for a volunteer role with his team.

During the refreshment break that followed, each table had a ten-minute Q and A session with Adrian. Where time ran short, attendees were able to write down their queries and these were later fed back to Adrian for follow up.

### **Stronger Communities make Safer Communities**

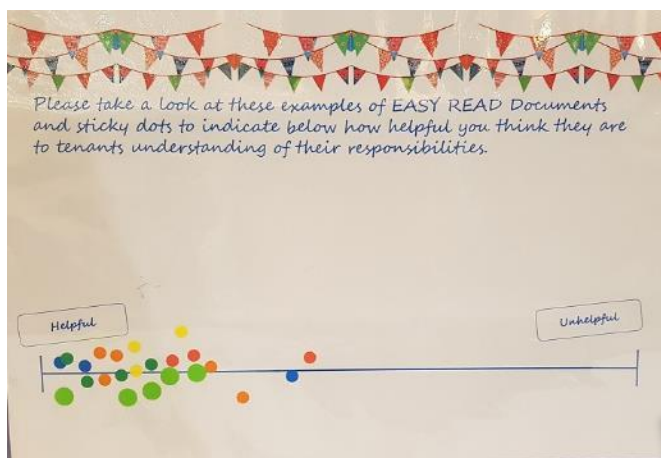
Michelle Elliott, Housing Manager, talked about how the Housing Service works with a variety of SDC Services and external partners to ensure safer estates. At any time during the week an estate or will often have someone from these teams/partners in any given area and a map illustrating this (see Appendix 1) shows how this collaborative approach helps bring about solutions to issues that arise. A copy of this map was one of the handouts given to all attendees.

Charlie Mosse, ASB and Enforcement Officer, then introduced the **Tenancy Agreement** and **'Good Behaviour Agreement'** documents which have been converted into **Easy Read**.

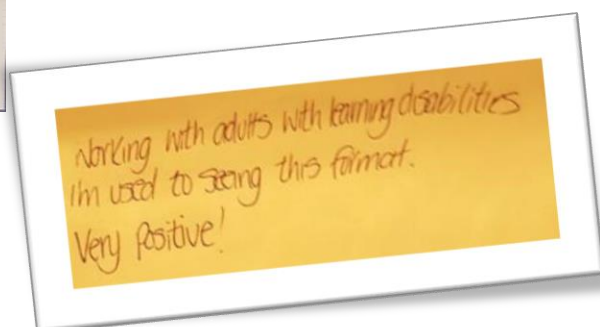


As part of a mini consultation attendees were able to view sample pages and place a sticky dot on a temperature chart (see below) to indicate how helpful they thought these documents are (see below).

### Easy Read Transcriptions



As can be seen from the 'temperature chart' on the left, measures taken to translate important agreements between us as a landlord and tenants, were well-received by the evening's attendees.

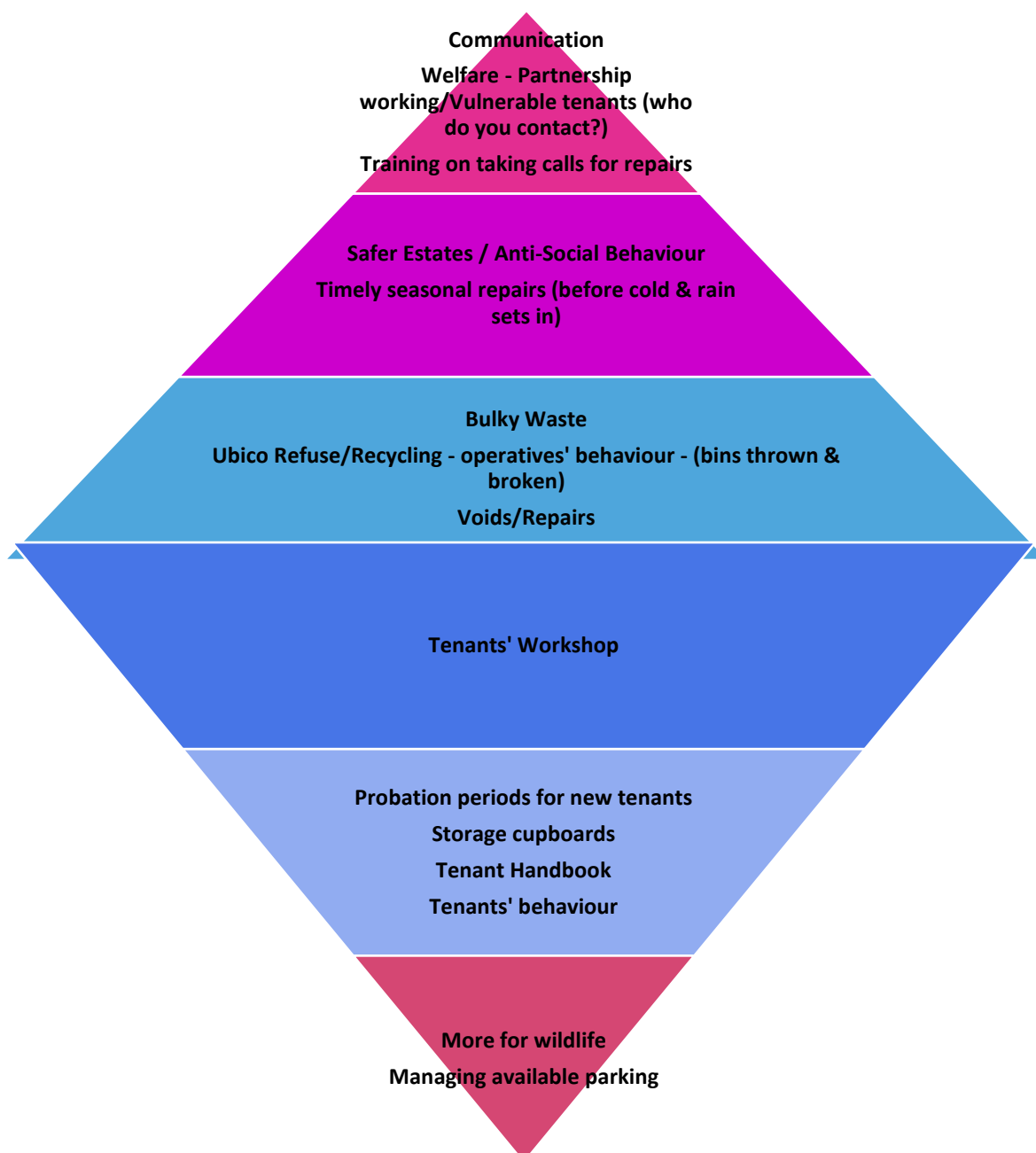


## 'Tenant Priorities' Diamond



Tenants on each table identified which aspects of the housing service were most important to them and then prioritised them according to their order of importance i.e., top, middle and low priority, thus forming a diamond shape (see diagram below).

These priorities help the council to see where areas of the service require improvement and will inform areas for scrutiny by tenant focus groups. **Focus Group Taster session**, planned for **May 2022**, will take account of this 'Tenant Priorities Diamond'.





There were many positive comments as can be seen in appendix 3. Responses made reference to how the event changed one's perspective positively; helped understanding of how things are planned and how to change things. It was also recognised that this type of event is an opportunity for more tenant involvement. In fact, one guest said of the event, "It made me feel more involved in my local community".

## Learning & Outcomes

The suggestions and concerns voiced at the event highlight the need for much further work and have made a significant contribution towards planned improvements in future tenant engagement and strategic plans/operational procedures.

### Key Outcomes:

- The positive amount of interest in volunteer roles.
  - **A Focus Group Taster\*** event run by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) took place in May 2022. This taster was an opportunity for those involved to choose their first topic for investigation based on the **Tenants' Priority Diamond**. This event will 'kickstart' a series of Focus Group activity where tenants will be able to participate in a Focus Group topic which of particular interest to them. Some tenants may wish to participate in a full series of Focus Groups and that is an option which is also 'on the table'
  - From July 2022 sessions are also planned for tenants who've expressed an interest in getting involved as **Neighbourhood Ambassador/Champion, Green Champion and Ready-to-Let Homes Inspectors** (as a precursor to Tenant Repairs Inspectors).
  - Future events will follow a template which facilitates meaningful discussion between staff, volunteers and tenants centred on theme. The first of these events was **Café Conversations** which took place in February 2022; focussing on **future tenant activity** and the **Tenant Handbook**

### Topics of Interest to Tenants

A number of tenants expressed concern about the welfare of their neighbours both in Independent Living schemes and in General Needs. Many were interested in how to manage situations requiring knowledge of health and social care services/professionals and finding out when and how they should make contact on a vulnerable neighbour's behalf. This topic and several others highlighted by tenants will be themes for future events such as Café Conversations.

Where appropriate and resource is available, more effort will be made to involve staff from other areas of the service at themed events so that there is greater opportunity for knowledge sharing.

## **Communication**

A major frustration which emerged was the perception that communication from the service as a whole was greatly lacking. This concern also came up at the February Café Conversations event. It's clearly evident therefore that tenants would like to see a regular newsletter informing them about other tenants, service performance and items about building and refurbishment work. We also noted the importance of 'closing the feedback loop' and making tenants aware of how their comments help to improve our services to them (giving specific examples). Consequently, the regular publication of Keynotes (tenants' newsletter) has become a priority.

## **Easy Read**

Following tenants' responses to the mini consultation, **Easy Read** versions of **The Tenancy Agreement**, together with new documents entitled, '**Good Neighbour Agreement**' and '**Acceptable Behaviour Agreement**' will be published in due course.

## **Annual Report**

This will be published with performance information in formats which were popular tenant choices.

## **Repairs and Maintenance**

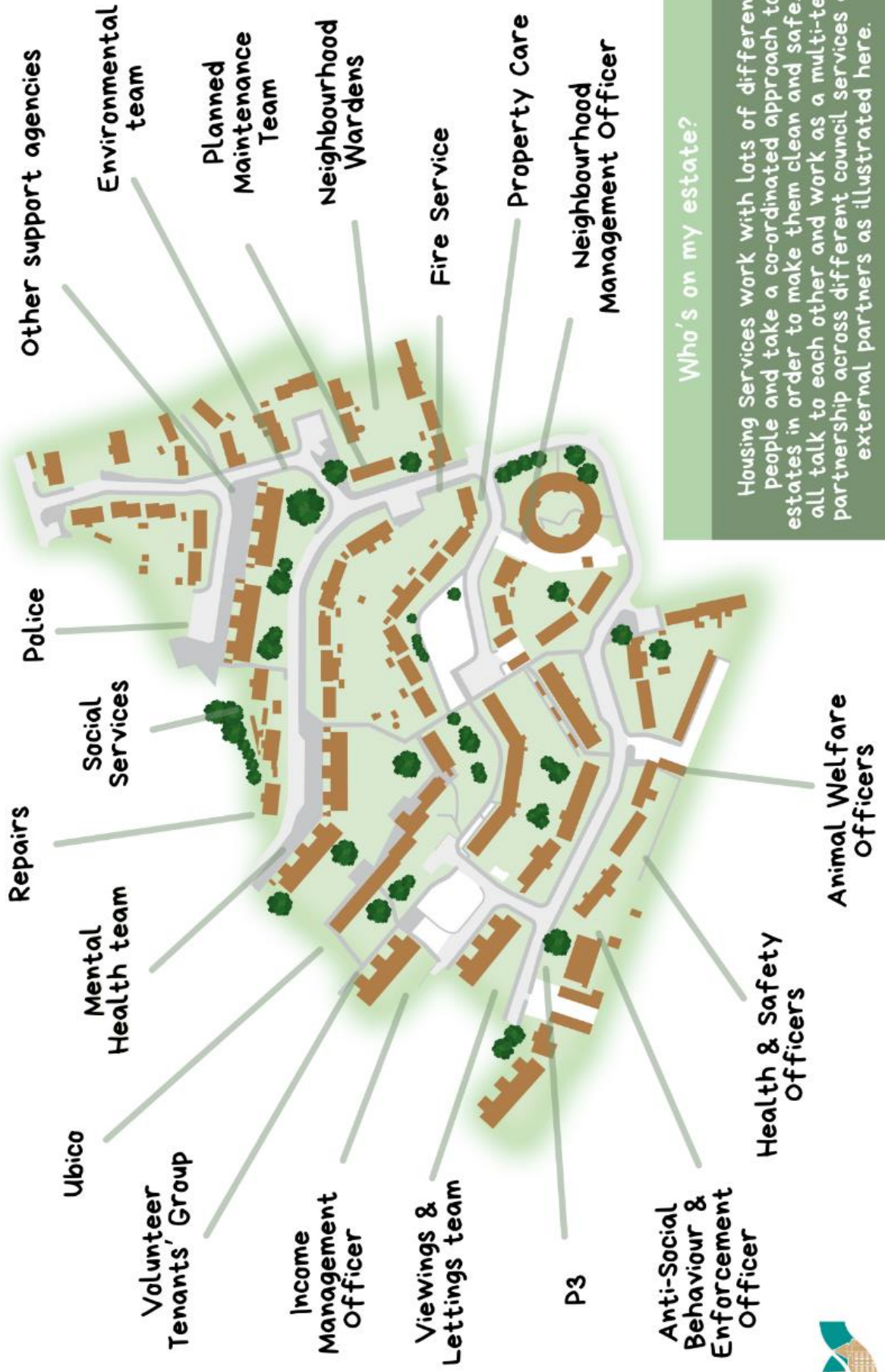
Staff training has since been implemented for the Repairs Call Centre

\*A Focus Group for tenants in Independent Living (only requiring two meetings) took place over a six period in the autumn of 2021. Its purpose was to investigate the best way forward for Independent Living schemes, in line with the Older Persons Strategy. This was run by an independent advisor from TPAS.

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# STRONGER COMMUNITIES ARE SAFER COMMUNITIES



## Who's on my estate?

Housing Services work with lots of different people and take a co-ordinated approach to estates in order to make them clean and safe. We all talk to each other and work as a multi-team partnership across different council services and external partners as illustrated here.



# Appendix 2

## Annual Report Format Consultation

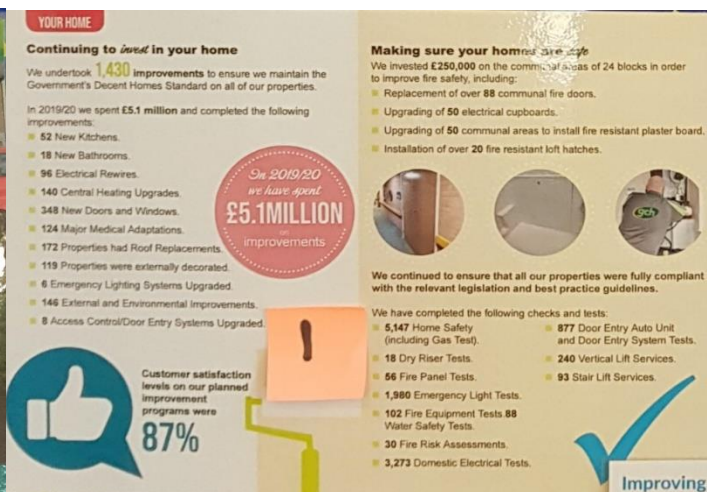
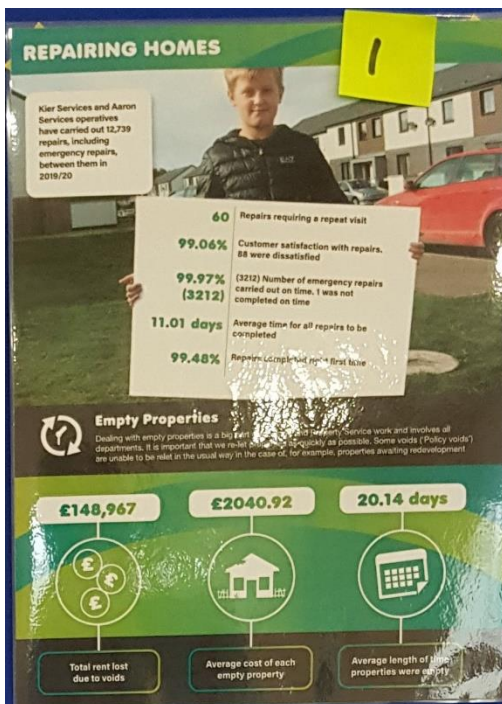
Samples of different types of Annual Report format used by social registered providers of a similar size to Stroud District Council were put on display. Attendees used 'Option' slips to vote on their preferences as set out under the following headings. This feedback will inform the 'look' of our next Annual Report.

### Tenancy & Estate Management

Top choice was option 4, closely followed by option 2



### Repairs and Planned Maintenance



Option 1 was the most popular choice for both Repairs and Planned Maintenance

## How Rents Are Spent

Option 3 was the top choice



**Tenant Involvement** - Option 2 was the most popular choice

**TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT**

## get involved!

THERE ARE LOTS OF WAYS TO GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND WITH US...

We would love to speak to you about what might suit you best. If you would like more information or to speak with our Community Investment Team about the opportunities listed below please get in touch.

- Tenant Board Members
- Tenant Panel
- Challenge and Change Reviews
- Tenant and Resident Groups
- Neighbourhood Walkabouts
- Tenant Digital Champions
- Community Events
- Junior Wardens
- Shine Employment and Training Support
- Join a Community Group

**2**

**SIGN UP TODAY!**

If you want to be part of the Tenant Panel and make your voice heard, simply complete the form online at: [www.gch.co.uk/tenantpanel/](http://www.gch.co.uk/tenantpanel/) or contact us on: [tenantpanel@gch.co.uk](mailto:tenantpanel@gch.co.uk) or call Tori on: 01452 833200

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**  
One of our team will contact you to discuss the new Tenant Panel and any other opportunities to get involved that you may be interested in.

For full details about the new Tenant Panel, visit: [www.gch.co.uk/TenantPanel](http://www.gch.co.uk/TenantPanel)

Contact us on 01452 424344 or email [getinvolved@gch.co.uk](mailto:getinvolved@gch.co.uk)

## Complaints Handling – You Said We Did

We asked tenants to tell us what they thought of the format sample below. The range of comments were:

“It’s clear”

“It’s fine”

“Phone numbers could be clearer”

“It would be useful to know what your targets were”

“Too much text”

“Needs simplifying”

Further suggestions for improvement were, “It would also be good to have it in an easy-read format for residents with a learning disability.”

CUSTOMER SERVICE

### Your feedback & COMPLAINTS

At GCH we welcome feedback, both positive and negative, from our customers to help us improve the services we deliver. We have signed up to the new Housing Ombudsman complaint code and we are working in partnership with Tenant Panel to monitor learning from the feedback we gain from complaints.

Our Tenant Panel receive a detailed monthly report regarding complaints and play an active role in addressing any issues raised.


Complaints and compliments can be made using the method of contact that best suits our customers.

During the year of 2019-2020 we received **90 complaints** and **44 compliments**. We responded to 94.4% of complaints within our target. As the months progressed we saw the number of complaints steadily decrease.

*The complaints were related to...*

Income	10
PropertyCare	27
Property Services	24
Tenancy Services	19
Anti-Social Behaviour	7
Independent Living	3

Overall we upheld 58% of these complaints.



**9**  
ESCALATED TO  
STAGE 2

**5**  
RESOLVED AT  
STAGE 2

**4**  
ESCALATED TO  
STAGE 3

**2**  
RESOLVED AT  
STAGE 3

**2**  
REFERRED TO  
OMBUDSMAN

Regarding the 2 complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman, no further action was required by GCH.

### You said - we did!

**You said** - You were unhappy with the lack of communication from some contractors and the fact you could not identify them.

*We did* - We have standardised the process contractors must follow and worked with them to ensure letter drops to tenants are completed in the agreed timescale and ID badges are worn by contractors at all times.

**You said** - You were unhappy with the level of noise from one of our contractors and there were no working barriers in place/no warning signs around the area.

*We did* - We take the Health and Safety of our tenants very seriously and we stopped working with the contractor for future work.

**You said** - You found rent statements misleading as they may not include housing benefits, Direct Debits or payments which are in progress.

*We did* - We have amended the rent statement to a) Clearly show the "balance as at" date (and state it in 2 places) and b) Ensure that statements are produced as quickly as possible once the data is available to minimise the amount of transactions not shown.

**You said** - You felt engineers attitudes didn't always meet customer service standards, they didn't always attend booked appointments/gave late notice if not attending and they sometimes didn't have the required parts available owing to a shortfall in communication between them and the office.

*We did* - We ran team briefing sessions for all engineers reminding them of our telephone policy, the importance of body language and the GCH customer service requirements. We removed an engineer from the call out rota, monitored performance and timescales.

## Appendix 3

### Feedback forms

26 attendees responded with the following comments.

#### What did you like most?

Adrian's presentation and the Ice Breaker activity

- The informal atmosphere and camaraderie
- Opportunity to meet other tenants, the interaction and hearing others' views
- Liked it all - Very interested in challenges for Property Care - new ways of working - I would like to be involved in that. I have a lot of business experience in working remotely. Also in conceiving systems offline.
- Having direct access to council workers to hear their aspect on things.
- Being able to speak to various representatives (staff and volunteers)
- The event was well planned and run
- The food
- Being able to talk face to face with Adrian

#### And least...

- Would have rather get to point earlier regarding maintenance. Adrian Erwood's life story seemed irrelevant! Does not concern tenants!
- Negative - Speakers too reliant on powerpoint - not engaging enough with audience

**Another commented.....**It appeared there were many areas of property care that needed review, whilst I understand this, the lack of communication is frustrating.

#### How would you rate the overall experience?

Score out of 10	No. of participants
10	4
9	5
8	9
7	3
6	1
No score	1

#### Would you recommend it? - why/why not?

Much of the feedback indicated that attendees would recommend this type of event to other tenants. Some of the reasons given were:

- It changes your perspective positively. Adrian Elwood has a commitment I really admire.
- To understand how things are planned and how to change things
- To meet others
- To use as an opportunity to discuss points
- To use as an opportunity to get more involvement

- It made me feel more involved in my local community
- It can be informative and it's nice to put faces to names
- It's important to get a 2-way communication channel so both sides can learn from each other
- It's a chance for people to have their say and get their point across
- It's surprising how many other tenants have the same issues as yourself
- I'm interested in finding out what the council does and how it should do things
- I think tenants' voice should be in all areas of the SDC – would highlight ideas
- I think tenant groups need to meet regularly to keep in touch and up-to-date

### **Additional feedback**

- Include more housing service department members / site managers at events like this so that they are available for questions
- Engage with the audience more with interactive activities whilst giving Powerpoint presentation.
- Give more answers less reasons for it not happening.
- There seems to be more concern with council staffing issues than actual community needs
- If you need skilled workers. Manual jobs etc. Then give an enhanced access for courses and pay for their opportunities so there isn't a lack of trades.
- The council have wonderful intentions - it takes a long time to put them into effect. I'm glad that SDC are committed to social housing, and to improving their properties. Conclusion - needs more work.
- I have concerns re: my neighbours. How they live and come to me and my husband to help. Two have passed away which we ended up being involved in (who is involved SDC for how they live, state of property or social services)
- Joint with Social Care - Support packages, Cost etc.

### **Tenant Involvement roles**

From attendees' feedback the following numbers expressed their interest in these volunteer roles

<b>Tenant Involvement Roles</b>	<b>No. of expressions of interest</b>
Tenant Repairs Inspectors (Ready-to-Let Properties)	8
Neighbourhood Ambassadors/Community Champions	4
Green Champions	8
Focus Group activities	13