

**STAR Focus Groups
Action Plan**

INFORMATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information currently received and how it is rated • What experiences lead to positive or negative perceptions? • What is the ideal and should this be expected? 		
Issue	Findings	Action
Open Door Magazine (tenants)	Considered informative, well presented and interesting by tenants. Request for more information on localities. Concern that editorial control makes it a 'marketing' device for the Council.	More features on specific areas/wards. Letters and suggestions pages. Interviews with non-involved tenants. More focus on the work of the Open Door panel.
Open Door Magazine (leaseholders)	Leaseholders less happy than tenants with Open Door. Not relevant to them. Suggestion of a dedicated section for leaseholders. Publication itself was not criticised, simply its relevance to leaseholders.	Once the leasehold email database is up-to-date, leaseholders could choose to either receive Open Door electronically.
Main sources of information (tenants)	'Open Door' is the primary source of information for tenants. A minority mentioned tenants meetings, meetings at day centres; noticeboards and councillors.	Make better use of Open Door as an advert for other ways of getting information. Build on Open Door's brand for helping other sources of information.
Main sources of information (leaseholders)	Several had attended leaseholder meetings but these were criticised for the lack of information, low attendance and the time of day they were held. Notice given for the meetings was also reported as being short, (two or three days prior).	Leaseholder consultation on programmed works could happen electronically as well as in person at meetings. An annual calendar of meeting planned works meetings should be set a year in advance based on the rolling programme. From Jan calendar of planned works will be sent out at beginning of year.
Raising queries (phone, in person, by	Messages are left and the council does not respond - though not a universal experience. Suggestion that the	New automated phone system will direct people to the right member of staff and will be able to see if relevant staff are at their desks - if not, caller will be directed to an alternative member of

email)	<p>systems for response are in place but are not always adhered to.</p> <p>Request for main telephone number not being a 0845 number as this is expensive for callers who only have a mobile phone</p>	<p>staff.</p> <p>Council does not use 0845 numbers, could be a contractor will be investigated.</p>
Contact through the website	Not generally known and the website was said to be not easy to navigate.	Better promotion of existing web contact system. Unique portal or app for tenant communication/reporting (already exists for repairs, but could be provided for other services)
Telephone calls	<p>The 'long wait' to be transferred to repairs was a common problem.</p> <p>Concern that advertising separate numbers in Open Door leads to customers having to repeat their needs, (i.e. assuming they have reached repairs because they have rung that number they then need to be transferred and to 'tell their story' again).</p> <p>Frustrations with the telephone system can lead to tenants visiting the housing offices where they feel they are more likely to be seen quickly and listened to more attentively.</p>	<p>This happens when people phone the 457000 switchboard number and have to transferred. This will be phased out in the future as the new phone system will use a single point of contact number then automatically redirect people to the service they need.</p> <p>As part of the digital transformation strategy, CSC is looking at apps and customer portals where they can manage, report and track their accounts/issues online.</p> <p>This needs to be made clear to tenants via sign-up packs, Open Door and the website.</p>
Keeping People Informed	Some participants clearly felt that they had been 'forgotten' when promised planned maintenance (e.g. loft insulation) with no timescales given. View that this was often due to contractor delays.	Participating tenants asked for letters, emails or even text messages to update/reassure them possibly on a quarterly basis. More 'two way' flow of information with more contact initiated by the Council in order to keep people informed.
Housing Officers	Perception of differing attitudes between housing officers - need to ensure consistency of service and	Request to know who their housing officers are and more info about their duties and responsibilities - via sign-up pack and Open

	attitude.	Door
Leaseholder communications	<p>Leaseholders preferred electronic communications.</p> <p>View that the Council is 'behind the times' in recording information, and communication skills</p> <p>Expect 24/7 access to information and services. Perception that customers should 'work to' the time frames set by the council rather than customers</p>	<p>The Leaseholder email database needs updating. Leaseholders also need the ability to update their contact details online. Mailchimp could be used as a tool for managing email communications.</p>
Leaseholders contact preferences	<p>Leaseholders had concerns about their preferences for contact not being adhered to by housing services which on occasions has led to them missing important information.</p>	<p>Review of how Leaseholders prefer to be contacted, up to date database process for making sure preferences are updated. Include web page allowing leaseholders to update their own contact details.</p>
Section 20 notices	<p>View that these are sent too close to the events to allow leaseholders to respond, it was alleged. Some felt that this was because their views were unlikely to change the course of events.</p>	<p>There is therefore a need to assure leaseholders that their comments and concerns will be taken into account in the decision making process. Only meaningful consultation is done at the earliest opportunity.</p>

VALUE FOR MONEY

- Value for money – what is ‘good’ and what is ‘poor’ value for money?
- What is reasonable to expect?

Issue	Findings	Action
Affordability	Affordability of property of primary importance in respect of VFM, both in terms of rent, cost of running the property and access to local amenities	More to promote local amenities at sign-up Promote the value of council properties relative to other types of accommodation.
Managing Expectations	Housing service was noted as ‘good value’ - providing a service over and above the expectations of customers. Specific examples: supporting people with disabilities, speed of response, quality of homes	Informing residents about what they can expect and keeping to that promise via sign up, One Door and ongoing communications
Right First Time and Quality of the Work	Quality of repair work/right first time’ are key aspects of perceptions of value.	Participants felt the Council always chose the ‘cheapest’ price for work and this in itself led to poor value due to the need to repeat the work. (possible hangover from Apollo - current feedback on TSG more positive) This view needs to be countered by providing better transparency on how contractors are selected and how much budget is allocated to repairs and contractors
Difference between tenants and leaseholders	Leaseholders felt that their ‘slightly different’ (to tenants) needs were not always taken into account by the Council.	Example: The changing of doors in one block saw all tenants being provided with new doors. These were not offered to leaseholders who said they would have paid to have them provided and fitted. Including these options for leaseholders could improve their opinion of the service. (dependent on contractor and

		costs)
Being listened to by staff	Some felt they were not actively listened to by staff.	Example: Perception that 'troublesome' tenants (i.e. making complaints or chasing up on non-completions), are treated differently to other tenants. CSC training could address this but needs to be discussed - reviewed training and listening back to calls plus govmetric.
Tenant/Landlord Relationship	View that tenants did not demand highly from the Council because they are currently not paying for the property, (i.e. in receipt of housing benefit). Below market rents also contribute to this view.	Better publicity on promoting the value of council housing and the tenant community.
Keeping Promises and Completing Work	Promised work not started - in some cases started but not completed. Particularly frustrating for leaseholders when work has been charged for already	Text or email alert system giving auto-updates on job progress Current am/pm appointments could be improved by offering 2hr appt slots through the day
Supervision and Monitoring	Project management, monitoring of work and supervision of contractors could be improved	Example: Unchecked and unsafe kitchen units, confusion about repairs requested and the adherence to the contract requirements by workers on site. This is particularly galling for leaseholders who are asked to pay for a service which they then do not receive. Now offering pre/post kitchen/bathroom inspections
Keeping Customers Informed/Management Systems	Understanding where their particular job is would assist in reducing frustration and increasing understanding of expectations This would apply even if work was held up as explanations for this would reduce the frustration of not	Digital transformation strategy is looking at a new customer portal for making service requests and tracking them in real time.

	knowing.	
	Expectation that the system would easily identify the person calling and the most recent request for service would be available without the customer having to repeat it.	Review how current CRM system in Customer Services records and access to Orchard data
	The balance between the Council and the customer is weighted towards the Council	Example: if a tenant needs to cancel an appointment they are 'automatically sent to the bottom of the list'. However when appointments are cancelled by the Council it was asserted that sometimes the customer is not even told.
Leaseholder Consultation	Leaseholders strongly argued for more consultation on works to be carried out and the decision process on the services received.	More proactive planning for consultation on leasehold planned works, to include both early communications and reasonable timeframe for meetings.
Leaseholder payments	Some leaseholders feel Council forces payments for works that have not been completed.	This may in part be due to the split between finance and the ordering and monitoring of the work - may be £70 asked for in advance of works but is always reimbursed.
Leaseholder Complaints	No way issues could be escalated Complaints were simply relayed back to the people who had 'failed' them in the first instance.	Review how leaseholder complaints are handled, promoting the independent complaints investigator and ombudsman as additional options at the leaseholder's disposal
Leaseholders/Landlord Relationship	Leaseholders view relationship with the Council primarily as a business relationship.	Drill-down follow-up work on Leaseholders/Landlord relationship, perhaps focus group

	One leaseholder feeling they were not treated 'like a human being'.	
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WELFARE REFORM		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of Welfare Reform • Preparedness for welfare reform 		
Issue	Findings	Action
Awareness of welfare reform	Groups demonstrated lack of awareness to welfare reform	(see later actions)
Preparedness for welfare reform	A number of participants would not be affected due to not being in receipt of benefits - this was the case for all in the leaseholder group - who assumed only tenants might be affected.	<p>Example: Some were worried about the future, others assumed that because nothing had affected them to date little would change. Some said they were going to 'worry about it when it happened'</p> <p>More promotion of welfare reform details and implications in all communications channels.</p>
Council welfare reform support	<p>View that support and funding is currently or should be available from the Council and advisors who can assist</p> <p>Participants asked for information in Open Door - despite the fact that articles had already appeared</p> <p>Several participants felt that they would have no idea how to seek assistance should they require it</p>	<p>Case studies in Open Door demonstrating potential outcomes for individuals</p> <p>Guidelines for how and where residents can get advice on welfare reform</p>
Housing Benefit	Participants were disturbed about the effects of direct	Participants suggested the Council should identify individuals who

direct payments	housing benefit payments to tenants Worry that many people would find themselves in financial difficulties	they feel may fall into arrears as early as possible to support them prior to problems. Though this does happen, it has not been widely publicised to other tenants.
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