

### **Plans to undertake a STAR survey of tenants and leaseholders (Housing, Andy Vincent)**

**Synopsis of report:**

**To inform Members of plans to undertake a Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) satisfaction survey**

**Recommendation:**

**That Members note the arrangements planned to undertake a STAR satisfaction survey, with further updates to be presented to this Committee.**

#### **1. Context and background**

- 1.1 The Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) is the nationally recognised industry standard satisfaction survey of tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.2 Members of this Committee, at the meeting in March 2022 approved the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2021 – 2025 and the Housing Business Centre Plan 2022 – 23, both of which includes a commitment to undertake a STAR survey in 2022.

#### **2. Plans to undertake a STAR survey**

- 2.1 The STAR survey follows a framework developed by HouseMark, a membership organisation who are recognised as the leading provider of social housing benchmarking services. STAR has been regularly carried out by over 300 social housing providers including local authorities and Housing Associations, with most landlords undertaking the survey either annually, or every two to three years to elicit tenants' views of their landlord's services and to benchmark with other social housing providers. A survey of this kind has not been carried out by the Council since 2007/08.
- 2.2 Using the STAR framework enables data-driven insights which can result in measurable improvements for housing providers. STAR was comprehensively revised in 2020 for both perception and transactional surveys. It will provide the necessary baseline assessment of our current performance in advance of regulatory changes to the Consumer Standard that will include a greater emphasis on listening to and demonstrating a response to customer feedback. The STAR framework includes a choice of questions that are resident focussed and provides social landlords with the means of comparing key satisfaction results – both benchmarking with others and trends over time.
- 2.3 Members will be aware that, as part of enhanced regulation, all social landlords will be required to report the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures to the Regulator from April 2023. Surveying tenants will require adherence to a consistent framework that enables comparison. Carrying out a STAR survey in 2022 is considered to be a vital preparation for this requirement.
- 2.4 The framework for HouseMark's STAR includes guidance to comply with the requirements for sample size, ensuring representative samples, weighting etc. Due

to the size and complexity of the project, Officers have completed a Sourcing Plan and Invitation to Tender with a view to procuring a consultant experienced in carrying out STAR surveys to complete the surveys, analyse the results and submit a detailed report on the findings. Officers will select the survey questions, select the survey methods based on current best practice and manage the project. It is anticipated that to achieve a representative sample, approximately 500 responses will be required. The survey will be open to all via the website and social media channels. Customers wishing to complete the survey without going online will have the option to request being contacted by telephone.

- 2.5 It is anticipated that the contract will cover annual surveys in 2022 and 2023 with an option to extend and/or break clause for a further 3 years to ensure value for money. Learning from the survey in 2022, and guidance to come from the Regulator, will inform the frequency of and detailed arrangements for future surveys.
- 2.6 While social tenants have less opportunity to switch providers this should not be used as an excuse for poor customer experience. STAR will give tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to have their say. Investing in our tenants and leaseholders' priorities will increase customer satisfaction and demonstrate our commitment to service improvement and regulatory compliance. The survey will serve to 'test the water' and provide a baseline assessment in advance of strengthening regulation on this issue. The survey will demonstrate that the Council is actively engaging with and listening to residents. It will also be another opportunity to collect contact and profiling data where this is currently incomplete.

### **3. Next Steps**

- 3.1 The survey findings will inform business decisions. Officers will select survey questions from those suggested in the HouseMark framework which will be most relevant to strategic and policy making in the coming years.
- 3.2 Officers currently anticipate selecting a consultant through an open tender process during July 2022. Fieldwork would be completed during September, with a draft report available by December. The final report would be presented to this Committee in January 2023, with feedback to tenants and leaseholders immediately thereafter.
- 3.3 Officers are also exploring the possibility of enhancing the survey by linking in with the three public online consultations to be funded via a recently awarded DLUHC grant of £90,000. The funding must be used to increase digital engagement and enable alternative routes to engagement on planning, development, estate regeneration and housing aspirations using innovative technology. Learning from the projects is to be shared to promote understanding of the barriers to be overcome to allow councils to adopt such tools at scale. The bid was predicated on consultation on the redevelopment of Addlestone 2, however officers understand there is also the potential to carry out additional consultation as part of this initiative before the end of December 2022. Such digital consultation would supplement the more traditional survey of tenants to ensure as wide a reach as possible.
- 3.4 Members will be updated on the arrangements for STAR, the potential additional consultation and the anticipated timeline at the next meeting of this Committee.

### **4. Policy framework implications**

- 4.1 The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2021 – 2051 and the Housing Business Centre Plan 2022/23 include a commitment to undertaking a STAR survey in 2022.

## **5. Resource implications/Value for Money**

- 5.1 The HRA estimates for 2022/23 approved by this Committee in January included budgetary provision of £15,000 for a STAR survey, which was based upon figures quoted to another Surrey authority. In addition, as detailed in the report the Council has already been awarded a grant of £90,000 for digital consultation and it may be possible to supplement the STAR survey from this fund.
- 5.2 As part of procuring consultancy services to undertake a STAR survey, officers will assess the best value for money in contracting for a one off, or recurring survey as it is expected that the Council will need to carry out further surveys in subsequent years to comply with the new regulatory requirements, and there will inevitably be a cost in carrying these out.

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 The procurement of a consultant to provide the services described in this report will be via an open tender process in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders and in compliance with all relevant legislation including the Public Contract Regulations 2015.
- 6.2 As the value of the potentially multi-year contract is likely to be above £25,000 including VAT, the opportunity would also be advertised on Contracts Finder in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

## **7. Equality implications**

- 7.1 Carrying out a STAR survey is an important way to gather the views of a statistically representative sample of tenants and leaseholders, many of whom may have no regular communication with the Council as their landlord or freeholder.
- 7.2 The contracted researcher will ensure statistically proportionate representation of tenants by age, gender, location and ethnicity. The survey methodology is also expected to ensure inclusive access to give feedback by phone or online.

## **8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 8.1 The survey findings will inform business decisions including asset management, with a potential for environmental and sustainability improvements to the housing stock.

## **9. Other implications**

- 9.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment will be completed for this project. The Contactor will be required to fully comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 9.2 A project plan, including risk assessment and communications plan have been prepared for this project to ensure it is effectively managed and secures value for money.

## **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 Members are invited to note the arrangements planned to undertake a satisfaction survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR). Further updates on the arrangements for undertaking the survey and subsequent results will be presented to this Committee.

(To resolve)

**Background papers**

None