

Challenge for Change

Scrutiny Report
Customer Access

December 2019







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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Challenge for Change is a customer scrutiny panel that was set up to review different parts of the Council Housing Service. It is open to tenants, leaseholders and customers of the service. The group has carried out several reviews, produced a series of reports and recommendations for service improvement. Detailed information can be found by visiting <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/council-housing/scrutinising-housing-services.html>
- 1.2 This project was suggested by the group and has involved Jackie Taylor, Grace Collins, Carrie Hedderwick and Joe Clarke.

Acknowledgements are also made to Linda Moxon, Max Richardson and Rich Heaton who assisted at the start of the project.
- 1.3 This report is a summary of how effectively customers are able to access the housing service.
- 1.4 In this report, we have detailed our findings following investigations that have included:
 - Observational visits to neighbourhood housing offices in Sheffield
 - Review of existing leaflets and information available
 - Meeting with Tenants and Residents Association (TARA) representatives
 - Online survey
 - Sheffield City Council call centre visit
 - Meeting with Neighbourhood Support staff
 - Nottingham City Homes visit
- 1.5 We have made several judgements and recommendations based on our findings. These are detailed within the report and in a summary appendix which includes evidence and impacts.
- 1.6 The purpose of the project is to review the customer experience when contacting the Housing Service by telephone or visiting neighbourhood offices and to provide recommendations for improved access. The project predominately focuses on access to the service via telephone and face to face contact, however as a result of the evidence gathered and the transfer and encouragement by the Council to utilise online services, some recommendations relate to online and digital access.
- 1.7 The project excludes accessing the repairs service as this is currently in a process of transformation, however we think the repairs service would benefit from taking on board the findings of this project.
- 1.8 We acknowledge that the Council is under significant financial pressures and this can limit the resources it has to implement major changes. Never the less, as a result of undertaking this project, we believe that improvements can still be made in regard to accessing the service for housing customers.



2. Objectives

From our initial research and discussions, we have identified the following themes and objectives for this project:

2.1 Information

- What information is available to customers and how easy is it to locate?
- Is the information provided easy to understand?

2.2 Access

- How effective and efficient are the different ways customers use to access the service?
- What are the barriers to accessing the service?

2.3 Delivery

- How well does the service cope with demand?
- What work is being done to meet the changing ways in which customers want to contact the Housing Service?

2.4 Satisfaction

- How close does the customer experience match the 'Customer Services Promises Charter'?
- What reporting is in place to monitor service performance?
- How does the current accessibility match customers' needs?



3. Summary of reality checks

3.1 Observational Visits to Housing Offices

The Housing and Neighbourhoods Service currently has 13 public facing offices; we decided to visit 5 of these to make some observations.

Feedback from these visits was that there was generally good signage and leaflets displayed within the neighbourhood offices, however in some offices this information was not always up to date e.g. one office had out of date information on mutual exchanges.

The offices have different layouts, some offices are bigger than others and have adjoining services e.g. libraries, job centre etc. We observed that some of the offices felt spacious whereas others felt cramped and unsuitable.

There are rooms for private conversations to take place in the offices that were visited; however some of these were unsuitable as confidential conversations could be heard in the public areas. The same was observed for telephone conversations. The free phones were not located in a sufficiently private area as confidential conversations could be overheard.

Offices that had a shared space e.g. Chapelton with the Jobcentre, made it easy for staff within the housing office to re-direct customers for queries relating to benefits etc, whereas offices that didn't have this, did not have this benefit.

We observed that staff are polite when dealing with customers and apologetic if they had to wait to be seen. The reception desks are not permanently staffed and some offices had a bell to ring to be seen, although this was not consistent across all offices that we visited. This didn't create a very welcoming atmosphere and we felt this was an outdated way of doing things.

Some offices were also busier than others, for example the bigger offices attached to or close to other amenities such as shopping areas and libraries have greater footfall. For example from February 2018-February 2019, the neighbourhood office at Crystal Peaks had a total footfall of 9,780 compared with Lowedges neighbourhood office that had a total of 2,951.

To read more about our observational visits, please see appendix 1.

3.2 Review of Existing Leaflets and Information

The Housing and Neighbourhood Service produce a number of leaflets and information about the services provided. We reviewed a number of these leaflets that are currently available to see if this information was purposeful, understandable and accessible.

The key things we found were:-

- There are too many leaflets
- Many of the leaflets contained grammatical errors
- No information on the translation service
- No clear link to the policies that underpin the information contained in leaflets

3.3 Customer Care Promises Charter

We also looked at the Customer Care Promises Charter for the Housing and Neighbourhoods service to see if we thought these were being delivered. The promises set out what tenants should expect from the Housing and Neighbourhood Service when providing services and reflect what is important to customers.

The promises are:-

To ensure services are accessible, we will:

- make sure our customer service points are accessible to all and equipped to deal with a range of enquiries
- provide translation and interpretation services
- ensure that our call centres provide a prompt, courteous and efficient service

To provide good quality information and communications, we will:

- ensure all our leaflets and newsletters are easy to understand
- continue to improve and enhance our online services and regularly update our website
- deal with all enquiries confidentially and sensitively
- respond promptly to complaints and keep you informed as we deal with them
- publish facts and figures about complaints each year and tell you about any service changes we made as a result

We felt that whilst the promises were being delivered to an extent, improvements should be made to ensure these are being delivered more effectively.

3.4 Online Survey

In order to find out what tenants thought about accessing the housing service and to find out more about their experiences, we produced an online survey.

The survey was emailed out to around 22,885 subscribers of council housing news and alerts as well as subscribers of the Council Housing newsletter “Your Home, Your Neighbourhood”. The survey ran for 7 weeks with a total of 276 responses received. This is a reasonably representable sample and we have confidence that the results reflect the wider views of customers.

The survey asked tenants and customers of the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service how they currently accessed the housing service, preferences for accessing the service and their experiences of telephone and face to face contact.

Telephone Access

The survey showed that although the majority of people were satisfied when they accessed the service there was an overwhelming number of negative comments about the telephone. Comments were predominately about the length of time it took to get through to speak to a staff member, but there were also substantial comments made about lack of communication when calling e.g. not knowing where you were in the call queue, there not being a call back facility and lack of confidence about being put through to the right person.

When asked “What was your preferred method of accessing the service”, 163 respondents said telephone, with 62 of these answering yes to “is there anything stopping you from using your preferred method of contacting the Housing Service?”.

Out of these 62 respondents, 56 (90%) referenced the length of time it takes to get through to the service on the telephone as being the main barrier.

“Phone takes far too long to answer - 20 mins or more is usual. There is no clue as to how long a wait or queue might be”

“It takes forever for someone to answer the phone. It not a good experience”

“Depending on what time I ring I could be waiting too long to be put through and end up putting the phone down in frustration”

“Waiting time to speak to someone is ridiculous; usually have to give up after twenty minutes. Should have direct numbers for each housing office”.

Linked to the dissatisfaction of with the telephone service (lengthy wait), many responses suggested:-

- Recruiting more staff
- Better training to be provided for staff so they can resolve queries rather than passing through to other teams.
- Having direct numbers for departments

Face to Face

A small number of respondents (27) stated that they access the service by visiting the neighbourhood offices. Only 12 of these said visiting the office was their preferred way of contacting the service.

The survey found the main reason people visited the neighbourhood offices were:-

- To drop off documentation
- If passing by or in the area
- If they had been unable to get through via the telephone
- Prefer to speak to someone face to face as are able to explain themselves better.

“To drop documentation off and obtain signed receipt.”

“Would like to speak to someone on the phone, but end up going to our local office because after 3 days of trying to get through”.

“Because things get explained better and online is no good to older generation I am 62 and find online hard to get round and sometimes getting through on phone is hard due to busy phone lines”

“I visit an office if I need to ask staff how to fill in a form because I don't see very well I would also visit if I needed information about a local issue for example fly-tipping or vandalism the Chapeltown office are also very useful as they are connected with the DWP”.

Some comments from the survey suggest that customers mistakenly believe by visiting their neighbourhood office will give them easier access to the service.

“I visit for information and help but usually get told to phone department upstairs”

“I have tried numerous times, pressed the relevant numbers to direct my call to the correct person, only to be advised they are busy and to call back later..... very infuriating and not acceptable, especially as when you visit a housing office, all they can do is point you to their phones (which dial the same number)”.

Digital Access

Although the online survey was predominately focused on telephone and face to face access, the responses highlighted issues with contacting the service online. Examples of this include:

- The website being difficult to navigate meaning customers are unable to find out information this way.
- This then impacting on the telephone service, resulting in increased telephone calls to the service
- Better emailing system is needed

“The web site is difficult to navigate and I was unable to do what I wanted to do”.

“There is no email address to use so I have a copy/proof of what I have enquired or complained about”.

“I cannot get thru on the phone and your website is not fit for purpose. It is difficult to navigate and the links don’t work”.

“There often aren’t enough options on the website to get across your query/issue and therefore have to call up and the phone lines are always quite busy”

“The website is horrendously laid out, and the server frequently returns internal errors. Much of the telephone line information is outdated”.

“I like to use email as it gives both sides a written record of what is happening. Phone calls rely on my memory (imperfect) and my understanding of the person at the other end. Written communication is more reasoned and can be referred to later to ensure nothing is missed”.

“Difficulty finding e-mail addresses, poor response times”

The survey questions and responses summary can be found at appendix 2 and 3.

3.5 Meeting with Tenants and Residents Association Representatives

We invited representatives from TARAs to meet with us to discuss their experiences and views on accessing the housing service. The main comments from them included:-

- Long waiting times on the telephone
- At some of the First Points, some staff are ‘ignorant’.
- Response times too slow when using email
- Tenants can be impatient - they think that their problem is the absolute priority and are bad mannered.
- Staff need more patience if English is not a tenant’s first language
- Impressed with staff at the Call Centre - very friendly and dealt really well with awkward customers
- Lack of privacy in the neighbourhood offices especially when using the telephones as others can overhear private and confidential conversations

- Difficulties using the website and accessing the service to report repairs and being able to login generally with a pin number

Suggestions to help improve the service included:-

- To be told on the phone - "You are now number 3 in the queue". This would help as could then gauge whether to hang on or call back later
- Could do with more staff (in offices and in call centres)
- Possible direct numbers to departments
- A notice at the reception desk to ask customers to stand back while the person at the desk is explaining their issue
- Some Housing Associations use apps which can help speed up the process such as repairs reporting as can take photos of the problem etc

To read more about our meeting with TARA representatives, please see appendix 4.

3.6 Call Centre Visit

We visited the Sheffield City Council Call Centre to find out more about accessing the service via the telephone.

The call centre is split into 4 teams –

1. Council Housing Enquiries and Rents;
2. Council Housing Repairs and Gas Servicing;
3. Council Tax, Benefits and Universal Credit; and
4. Other Council Services (roads, parking, education etc).

The performance information that was presented related specifically to calls for housing and rent enquiries as well as for repairs and gas servicing. What we found most interesting was that the call centre was reporting waiting times of around 6.51 minutes (as the longest), with the shortest being 0.48mins. We found this surprising as call waiting times, from our personal experience and from the vast number of comments from the online survey, are a huge source of dissatisfaction it generally taking much longer than 6.51 minutes to get through.

As waiting times are seen as a big issue, the call centre team try to improve the situation in a number of ways such as:-

- A rolling recruitment team; (10 staff, 4 times a year)
- Training repairs staff to take calls on other housing areas e.g. rents and vice versa
- Re-routing calls to other staff in busier periods.

Housing related calls were the busiest Monday and Friday, with repairs calls busiest on a Monday. In terms of transferring calls to other departments, this was reported as happening when a query is more complex and needs more information/ expertise.

We sat in and listened to a number of live calls being taken by call centre operatives. We found this really interesting and were very impressed by the courteousness and the knowledge of the staff. As the staff are continuously on the phone, we had little opportunity to actually talk to the staff about their experiences of working in the call centre.

Typically the service recruits about 10 staff, 4 times a year, which we felt to be quite high as there seems to be a high turnover of staff and this will impact on the knowledge and experience levels of staff working in the call centre. Retention and recruitment seems to be an issue.

We were told about plans for improvements to the service and these included: –

- Call centre staff being able to see a complete view of the tenant's case/history
- Systems to be easier for call centre staff to access information
- Potentially being able to tell customers their place in the queue i.e. "you are now 4th in the queue" and/or the waiting time is 3, 5, 10 mins etc.
- Potential for a ring back option
- Web chat option
- Voice recognition, rather than 1-5 options, the customer states their required service

We welcome these improvements but would like to see some of these options trialled first. For example web chats and voice recognition.

To read more about our visit to the call centre, please see appendix 5.

3.7 Meetings with Staff

We met with Neighbourhood Support staff from each of the neighbourhood offices and a staff member from the Property Shop based at Howden House in order to gain their views on how tenants access housing services.

We first asked staff for their views on the neighbourhood offices, specifically the environment, facilities and accessibility. The second part of the meeting focused on views from staff on delivering an accessible service, such as the service they are able to provide to customers, potential barriers to customers accessing the service and training and support available for staff.

The main issues the staff identified within the offices included:-

- Computer access at the offices was poor as the computers were old and had limited web access
- Lack of privacy for confidential and sensitive conversations
- Poor layout issues in some offices and issues around accessibility for example wheelchair users as fixtures and fittings had been screwed down.
- Lack of security for both staff and customers

Staff stated a lot of queries they received were related to benefits which can be complex. Despite these being the most frequent types of enquiries, staff felt they were ill-equipped to deal with them. Some suggestions from staff included having a benefit specialist located in offices who had the training and knowledge to deal with these types of enquiries.

Staff did feel frustrated at not being able to deal with all enquires and some of this was linked to the information they had access to via the systems. Online forms across the service were also inconsistent and not user friendly – staff had difficulty using them as do customers.

In some areas, customers choose to come in to speak to staff due to language issues as have difficulties over the telephone. Also, customers would come in to speak to staff after not being able to get through on the telephone little realising that staff have to go through the same process.

Staff commented that using footfall as a way of planning services and monitoring trends is ineffective. For example it could be that offices only record 5 visits from customers but these could be complex enquiries that take a long time to deal with. "Footfall" doesn't take account of this.

Overall it appeared that at times staff were just as frustrated as customers.

To read more about our meeting with Neighbourhood Support staff, please see appendix 6.

3.8 Nottingham City Homes Visit

We visited Nottingham City Homes alongside a number of representatives from the Customer Access Focus Group.

Nottingham City Homes is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and manages the council housing on behalf of Nottingham City Homes are different to Sheffield for example as their call centre is only taking calls relating to council housing services as opposed to all council services which is the case in Sheffield.

In Nottingham we visited a multi-service centre, public access housing office and heard presentations from the digital and call centre teams.

The key differences that Nottingham City Homes had adopted in their approach to customer accessibility included:-

Housing Offices

- Four Multi-Service Centres that provide support for council wide services including housing. The centres also work in partnership with the NHS with GP surgeries located within the centres, as well as a library and pharmacy.
- One public facing housing office that can be accessed. This is located within one of the larger council estates and remains open as is used frequently by the local tenants.

Call Centre

- Direct telephone numbers for the most popular services e.g. repairs, rents and tenant services
- Surveys at the end of calls to help measure satisfaction and help with staff training and development
- Training days are used for call centre staff so they are taken off the phones for this. This can result in a reduced service however this was felt worthwhile in the longer term.

Digital

- A Digital Strategy and Plan have been developed and will help promote further digital access for customers
- An online portal is in development – Housing Online. This will help customers access what they need in one place e.g. access rent balance, report a repairs etc

Other

- Incorporate staff volunteer days and working within local communities.

To read more about our visit to Nottingham City Homes, please see appendix 7.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Information

The service must:

- R1 Ensure that the way it communicates information to tenants is efficient and effective so that they are kept up-to-date on service changes.
- R2 Rationalise its suite of printed material and on-line information to ensure it is accessible, useful and appropriate to customers' needs.
- R3 Ensure that all key policies are available to customers in an accessible format.



4.2 Access

The service must:

- R4 Radically improve the quality and accessibility of information on the website.
- R5 Review the future locations, layouts and standards of its housing offices.
- R6 Explore opportunities to deliver housing services alongside other organisations in shared buildings or spaces.
- R7 Have a clear plan for improving in-person, telephone and on-line access to its services.

4.3 Delivery

The service must:

- R8 Take urgent action to improve contact centre waiting times.
- R9 Invest in improved contact methods such as email, web chat and call back facilities to improve customer contact satisfaction.
- R10 Ensure the effectiveness of current arrangements for staff to support customers with high volume enquiries particularly repairs, benefits and rehousing.
- R11 Change the way that training is provided for its staff, avoiding reliance on email and electronic updates in favour of team briefings.
- R12 Find a better way for customers to get through to a named member of staff when returning telephone calls.

4.4 Satisfaction

The service must:

- R13 Update the current Customer Services Charter.
- R14 Clarify for customers the standards that they can expect when accessing services and ensure that they are met.
- R15 Regularly share information about satisfaction and performance in delivering customers' expectations.

4.5 Additional Recommendations

The service must:

R16 Consider ways in which its staff has a direct impact on local communities - for example through Housing & Neighbourhoods Service-led volunteer days or supporting local community events.

R17 Raise at the highest level, the impact that local and national policy decisions and budget cuts are having on services to customers and tell customers what impact this has had.

5. Budget

5.1 The following expenses were incurred as part of the project from March 2019 – November 2019:

- Refreshments £30
- C4C members expenses £72

6. Acknowledgements

6.1 The C4C group would like to give sincere thanks for their commitment to this process to Peter Brown and Louise Cassin and their input to the production of this report.

In addition we would like to thank those staff and TARA reps who met with us, who shared their thoughts, experiences and suggestions which are incorporated in this report.

APPENDIX 1 - NEIGHBOURHOOD OFFICE OBSERVATIONAL VISITS

Crystal Peaks Neighbourhood Office - Wednesday 8th May 2019, 11:30am

- Easily accessible attached to a large shopping centre
- The building includes a library and well used café, and additional space downstairs (accessed from the housing office) used for adult / children's services groups.
- Signage for each area, although signs to the group rooms to the rear could be more prominent to save people queuing to ask at reception during busy times.
- Clean and tidy
- Relatively quiet when we visited at 11.30am (approx. 7 people in 1 hour using reception), which may have been due to library being closed and half day opening at the housing office
- Visitors were dealt with efficiently and pleasantly and either dealt with immediately or only had a short waiting time (no more than 2 people waiting - less than 4 mins to clear the queue)
- Good selection of leaflets situated near the library entrance to maximise accessibility
- A range of posters on notice boards clearly marked community, library, financial safety and general
- Observed people looking at posters – located where there is good footfall
- Facilities included 2 freephone telephones to access other council services, 3 PC's to access SCC and the Council's property website, a small children's area located in one corner, disabled toilet. Over 20 chairs in waiting area.
- 2 areas to (presumably) conduct interviews with low-levels screens to partition. A clear sign visible to say there is a private interview room available on request.

Possible questions/thoughts.....

- Do we need further observation when it is busier? Do we know when that is?
- Freephone telephone – these are wall-mounted with a 'canopy' over the top – How much privacy do they give as they are on a wall in the middle of the waiting area? What happens when a tenant has a complex query, they are stood up holding the phone and have paperwork or they need to make notes? Telephones are quite high up for disabled customers to use – do they have provision for that?
- More prominent signs for other activities when they happen to signpost to the other area of the office (rather than at the back of the office 10m from the entrance)? Is this an issue?

Burngreave Neighbourhood Office - Wednesday 8th May 2019 11.30am

This is an area office that was formerly located across the road, Spital Hill, in a purpose built building with a front reception area and back offices. It is now located within Sorby House which contains Burngreave Library and various other services in the upstairs offices. There are several meeting rooms that are used by local groups.

You walk in off the street and there is a front desk for the whole building with a receptionist. On the right hand side of this is a receptionist dedicated to the Housing Service. There is a notice, Housing Services, on the desk but it is not immediately obvious, and the receptionist was hardly visible because of 1) the height of the desk and 2) a computer screen.

On this ground floor level and immediately accessible are – the Library to the left and a Housing Services area to the right. Opening hours are displayed on the glass doors.(Have several photos)

Spacious area – approx 10m x 7m. There are comfortable chairs in the centre, some play equipment for kids and 6 computers for use by customers. There are 2 semi private alcoves for private conversations at the far end of the room with seating and a table in each. There are 2 phones on the end wall for customers to ring staff. There are also 3 Interview rooms. One was in use when I was there.

There is plenty of information – both on the walls and copies of leaflets for people to take if they need them, covering all aspects of the housing service, and also related information of interest – e.g. about the Police, local TARAs, events, Councillors surgeries etc. There were some CAB leaflets about available help with Universal Credit and also a laminated sheet with a list of languages used, so that people can indicate if they need an interpreter.

There was one man at the computers – but he was a technician sorting out some IT problem. The computers are set up to only access the Property Shop i.e. for looking up possible properties to rent. There is no access to either other SCC services, or other information. This might be changing.

Another older man came in but he wanted help/ advice from the CAB which is further down the street, so was re-directed there.

Nobody was waiting. I had to go back out into the hall/ main reception area to talk to Housing staff. I was told that it can get busy, but as it was a rainy day, people were not out and about much. Also there are no staff available on Wednesday afternoons – although the area with the info and the computers is still open.

To visit again on a Monday to check if busier.

Burngreave Neighbourhood Office (2nd Visit) - Monday 13th May 2019

1. Spent about 40 mins sitting on one of chairs in the housing office area. The housing staff member is at the desk outside in the main reception area alongside the general receptionist for Sorby House.
2. 1 couple went into one of the 3 interview rooms; there was 1 other woman going thru the Property Shop screens on the PC. After 20 mins she finished and went to talk to the Housing receptionist in the hallway.
3. Older woman spoke to the Housing Reception and came in to use one of the phones to ring thru a repair. She came away after a minute or so, saying that it was the same recorded message that she got when she rang from home. She was not prepared to stand there for 40 mins waiting to actually speak to a person about her repair. She said that you could not put in a written request for a repair – it had to be by phone and this was hugely frustrating. She left and was going to try ringing again from her home.
4. In the main reception area, an older man came in to report a repair. He was somewhat confused and the general receptionist did not talk to him very respectfully. Hustled him round to the Housing officer who then sent him off with a number to ring. Language and understanding difficulties.
5. Young man and his mother came in – talked at housing reception, came and sat down on the PC and spent about 15 mins looking thru the screens. Then went and spoke again to the housing officer on reception and left.
6. A young couple with a baby came out of one of the interview rooms – had been in there for 25 mins approx – looked reasonably satisfied with whatever had been discussed.
7. Young woman came into reception and was directed to the phones. She must have spent about 5-10 mins until she got thru. Repair issue.
8. Young man with child at housing reception - 3 minute conversation then left.
9. Another older woman came in – spent a little time talking to housing officer.
10. A woman and small boy came into the housing area – knew the woman who was on the PC. Spent a little time but her son very active/ bit disruptive so she left
11. Another woman came in to use the phone – was waiting for 5- 10 mins. Still waiting when I left.
12. Older woman was waiting to see the housing officer in the main reception area.

It was a different housing officer from my previous visit who was on reception duty.

Of 15 people using the facilities, there were 12 people where English was not their first language.

Newfield Green Neighbourhood Office

- Arrived 10.33
- Clean tidy office, although struggled to find exact location.
- No staff visible, no means of calling anyone.
- Four tenants waiting unsure how to summon staff, eventually someone spots bell, but still wait for response. Whilst waiting can hear private conversation in individual rooms, discussing universal credit/debt etc
- When one staff arrived. Polite and apologetic.
- Leaflets on display.
- Other staff come out and interrupt, without apologies, when one visible staff is dealing directly with tenant.
- 3rd to see, about 12 minutes wait.
- Polite handling query, although far too much personal information given out in public space. Date of birth, name, address, email.
- Apologies when can't handle query.
- Asked about setting up online account.
- At first confused, then tried going through system and requesting account, but couldn't pull up promised log in details email. So have to call phone line!

My initial thoughts, based on past housing experience/interaction,

1. Would be nice to see name/be introduced hello I am how can I help you? Rather than "who's next?"
2. When you start needing to give personal information, be asked if you would like a private space. Imagine someone with hearing issues, you would be shouting over desk.
3. Waiting area seats are very close to desk, so again lack of privacy, yet it is a biggish room, maybe it could be rearranged.
4. There are so many notices, on walls/desk we didn't clearly see the bell that was there to be rung.
5. The leaflet display was in the area between seats, if more seats were taken/buggys were in it would have been hard to access. It was also a bit overlooked to browse and felt if by looking you could be seen a listening to what was going on.
6. I am guessing as a safety measure seats at counter are attached to floor, not ideal if you are disabled, need more room to move around.

7. Access may be difficult for those who struggle to walk yet don't use wheelchair as parking not directly outside. This may deter some from using?
8. There is no way I would use the phone, far too close to others waiting and at desk. Imagine you call up for a repair, give all your details and then make an appointment, saying when you are not available and why, anyone could be listening and know your property was empty at these times.

**Wordsworth Avenue (Parson Cross) Neighbourhood Office -
Wednesday 29th May 2019**

- Huge, new –ish building incorporating a library plus other amenities, with a large outdoor space to the front.. Across the road is ASDA, Chaucer school, and there are other shops nearby, so a busy well used area. However, the space occupied by the housing office within the building is very cramped.
- On turning right from the lobby of the building there is a short passageway to the housing office with 2 desks. Straight on from there are 4 interview rooms – so well out of the way and suitably private.
- The waiting area though is narrow, just over 2m wide. There is seating on either side but uncomfortable. And on one side the seating is right up against the wall where there are notices and booklets – so obstructive – to both those wanting to read the notices and to those using the seating. The furniture and carpet are a bit worn and dirty. On one wall there were a lot – 32 – mutual exchange notices – I don't think they were up-to-date.
- 3 men were waiting when I came in. They were seen fairly quickly. A mother and daughter came in for what looked like an arranged appointment and went to an interview room within 5 minutes. A young couple then came in and used the bell on the desk to summon staff. No staff are permanently on reception.
- There was a wall phone up by the desks but would have been hopelessly within earshot of anyone else in the office/ waiting area. At the other end of the waiting area – more like a corridor – was a 5th interview room. There was a computer but wasn't connected – and no table or desk for people who might use it.

Chapeltown Neighbourhood Office - Wednesday 29th May 2019

- The office is located just off the main roundabout. The building is shared with a Job Centre Plus. The building is quite old but is light , bright and seems well laid out. There are 4 reception desks – not permanently staffed. There is a clear, accessible wall with all housing and related topics leaflets/ booklets displayed. There are also A4 sheets explaining main policies – allocations etc. Behind the seats in the waiting area there were 2 (?) PCs. All the council departments are available on the computers. It did state that priority is given to those with housing enquiries.
- There was a wall phone – slightly further away from the seating area compared to Wordsworth office but still others would hear your conversation. However, there was a list of all department phone numbers by the phone.
- Not many people in – again when someone comes in, there is a bell to summon staff. There is also a security person who is present and moves about between the Job Centre and the Housing Office. It is easy I would think if there is a problem with Housing Benefit/ Universal Credit, Council Tax– to get it sorted with the DWP and housing office sharing the space.



Housing & Neighbourhoods Service - Customer Access

Overview



Sheffield's Council Housing Service has a customer led group - **Challenge for Change** which looks at different areas of the Housing Service with the aim of letting the Council know what it does well and what it can improve.

The current topic the Challenge for Change group is looking at is **customer access to the housing service** and would like to hear about your views and experiences!

The online survey focuses specifically around in-person and telephone contact with the service **excluding the repairs service**.

Please note, we will be unable to respond with individual queries as part of this online survey.

For further information about the Challenge for Change group, please click **here**
<<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/council-housing/scrutinising-housing-services>> .

Housing & Neighbourhoods Service - Customer Access

1 How do you usually contact the Housing Service?

Please select all that apply

- Telephone Office Visit Website Email Other

If other, please give details in the box below

2 Which is your preferred way to contact the Housing Service?

Please select only one item

- Telephone Office Visit Website Email Other

If other, please give details in the box below

3 If there is anything stopping you from using your preferred method of contacting the Housing Service, please provide details in the box below.

Please select only one item

- Yes No

Housing & Neighbourhoods Service - Customer Access

4 Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices?

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Very Rarely	Never
Crystal Peaks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hillsborough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Burngreave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wordsworth Avenue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Darnall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chapelton	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newfield Green	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stocksbridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lowedges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manor Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jordanthorpe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Firth Park	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Howden House	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 Why do you visit the housing office?

6 How satisfied are you with the following when visiting the housing office?

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Unsatisfactory
Ease of access <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcoming and pleasant environment <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The availability of leaflets and information <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your query is dealt with in a polite and professional manner <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The time taken to deal with your query on first contact <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7 How satisfied are you with the following when contacting the Housing Service (excluding the repairs service) by telephone?

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Unsatisfactory
The time taken to answer your call <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
That your call is handled in a polite and professional manner <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How your query is dealt with on first contact <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8 Is there anything that would improve your experience of contacting the Housing Service?

Please select only one item

- Yes No

If you answered yes, please provide further information in the box below.

9 What is your postcode?

10 Are you a

Please select only one item

- Council Tenant Leaseholder Private Rented Tenant
 Housing Association Tenant Home Owner Other

If other, please give details in the box below

8 Is there anything that would improve your experience of contacting the Housing Service?

Please select only one item

- Yes No

If you answered yes, please provide further information in the box below.

9 What is your postcode?

10 Are you a

Please select only one item

- Council Tenant Leaseholder Private Rented Tenant
 Housing Association Tenant Home Owner Other

If other, please give details in the box below



Housing & Neighbourhoods Service - Customer Access: Summary report

This report was created on Monday 12 August 2019 at 15:15.

The consultation ran from 17/06/2019 to 09/08/2019.

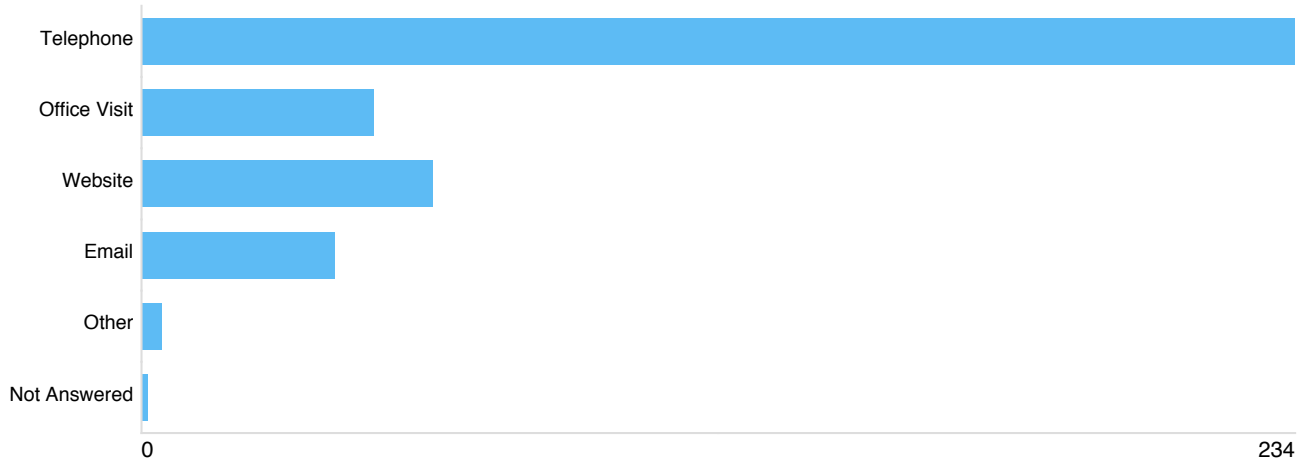
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Are you a	14
If other, please give details in the box below	15



Question 1: How do you usually contact the Housing Service?

How often do you usually contact the housing office?



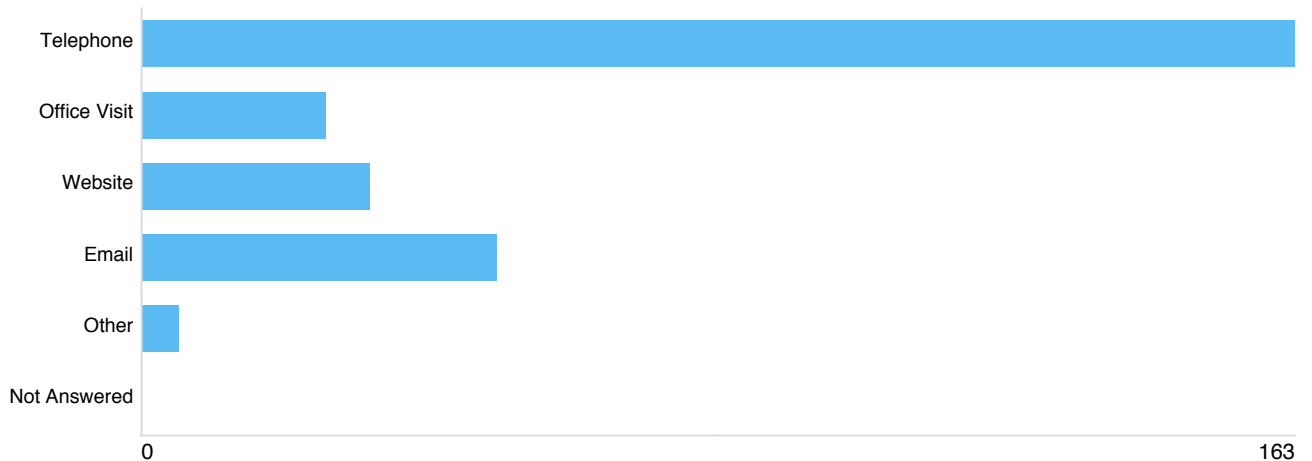
Option	Total	Percent
Telephone	234	84.78%
Office Visit	47	17.03%
Website	59	21.38%
Email	39	14.13%
Other	4	1.45%
Not Answered	1	0.36%

If other, please give details in the box below

There were 11 responses to this part of the question.

Question 2: Which is your preferred way to contact the Housing Service?

Which is your preferred way to contact the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service?



Option	Total	Percent
Telephone	163	59.06%
Office Visit	26	9.42%
Website	32	11.59%
Email	50	18.12%
Other	5	1.81%
Not Answered	0	0%

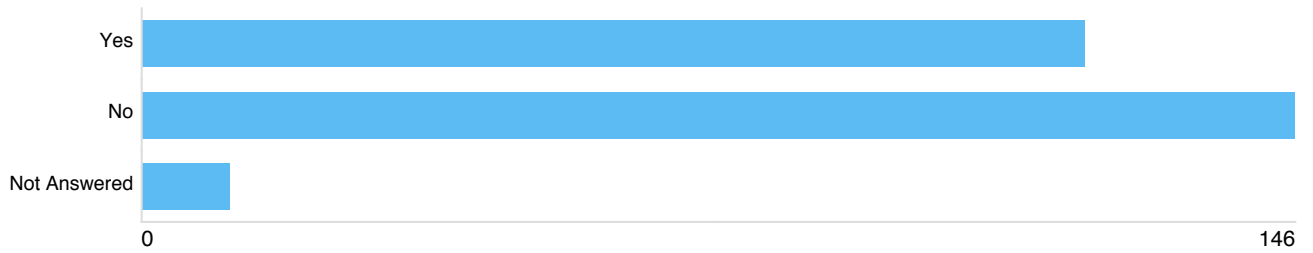
If other, please give details in the box below

There were 11 responses to this part of the question.



Question 3: If there is anything stopping you from using your preferred method of contacting the Housing Service, please provide details in the box below.

Is there anything stopping you from using your preferred method of contacting the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service?



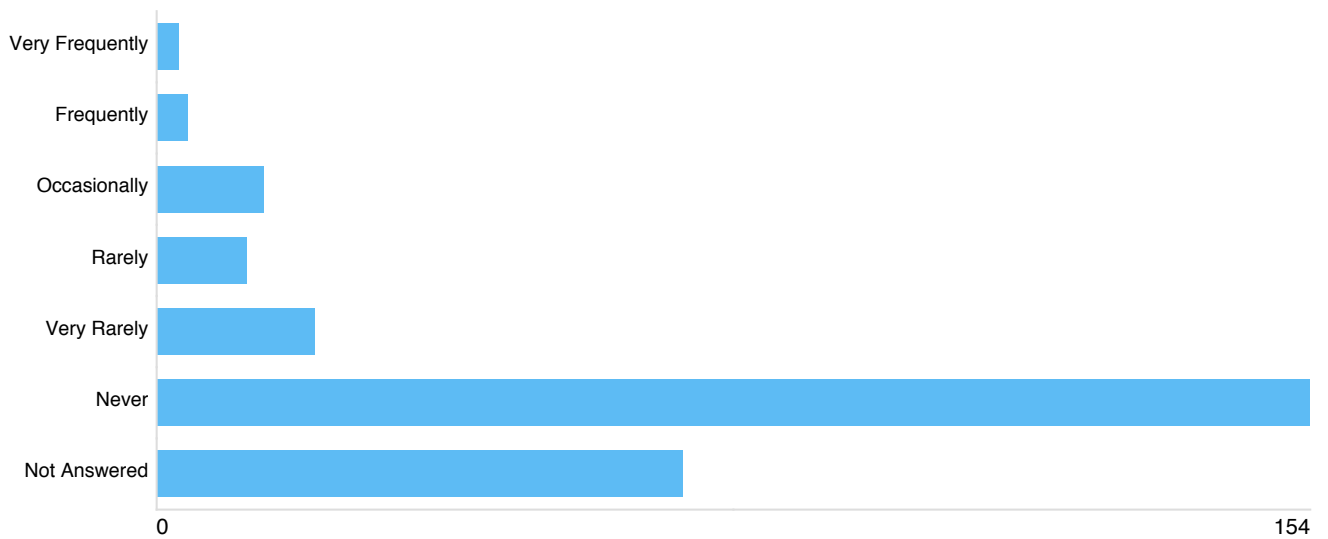
Option	Total	Percent
Yes	119	43.12%
No	146	52.90%
Not Answered	11	3.99%

If there is anything stopping you, please provide details in the box below

There were **128** responses to this part of the question.

Question 4: Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices?

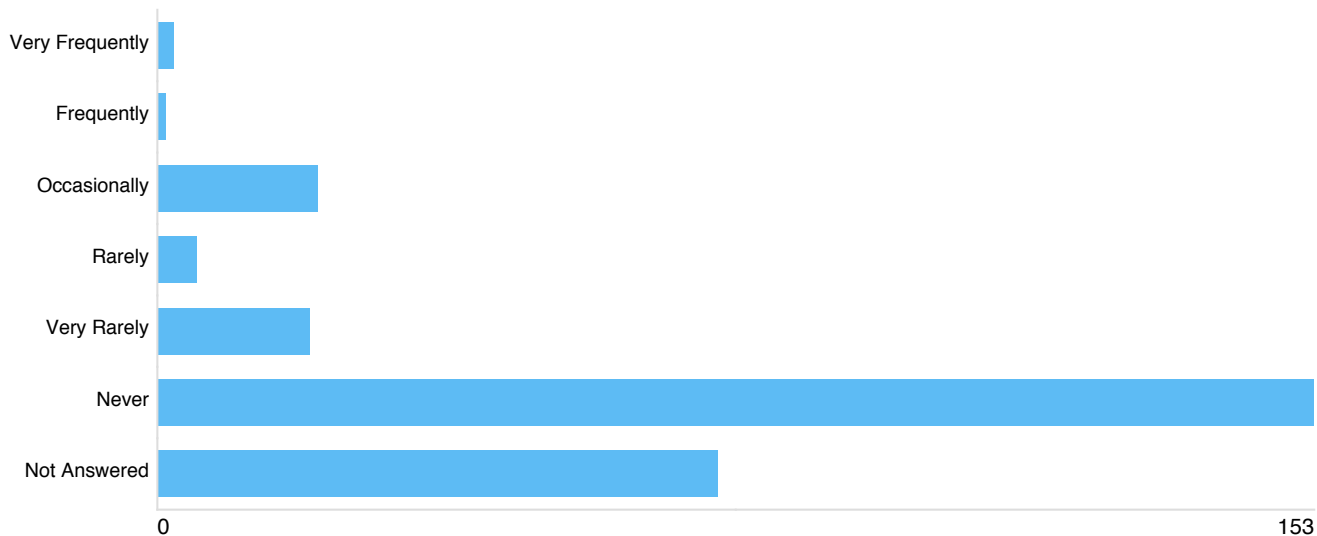
Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Crystal Peaks





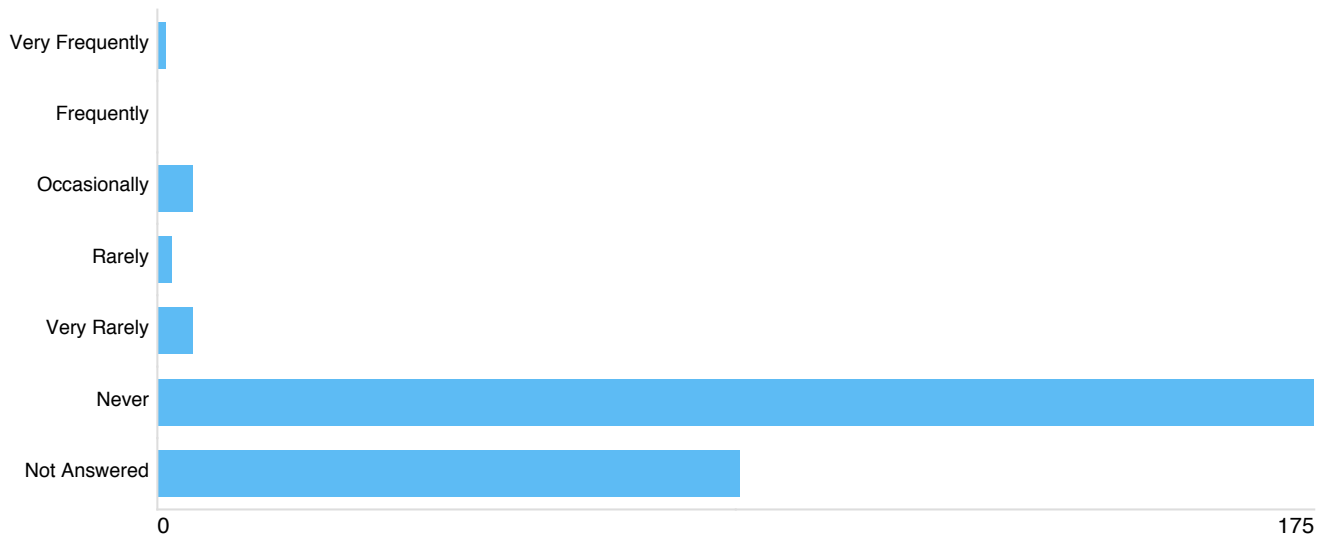
Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	3	1.09%
Frequently	4	1.45%
Occasionally	14	5.07%
Rarely	12	4.35%
Very Rarely	21	7.61%
Never	154	55.80%
Not Answered	70	25.36%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Hillsborough



Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	2	0.72%
Frequently	1	0.36%
Occasionally	21	7.61%
Rarely	5	1.81%
Very Rarely	20	7.25%
Never	153	55.43%
Not Answered	74	26.81%

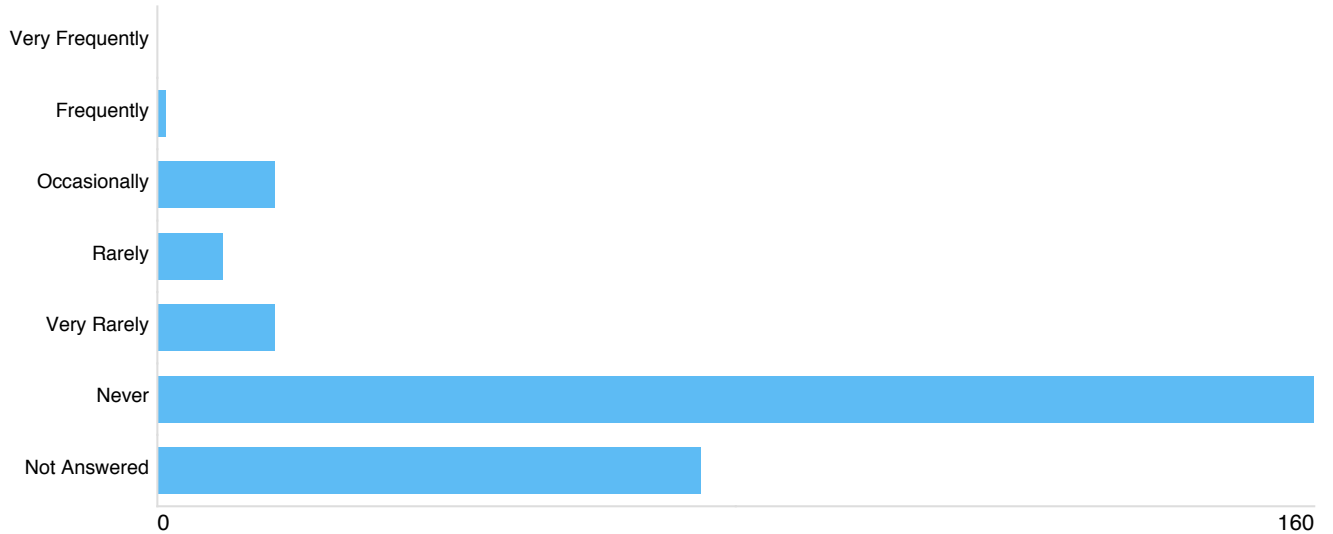
Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Burngreave





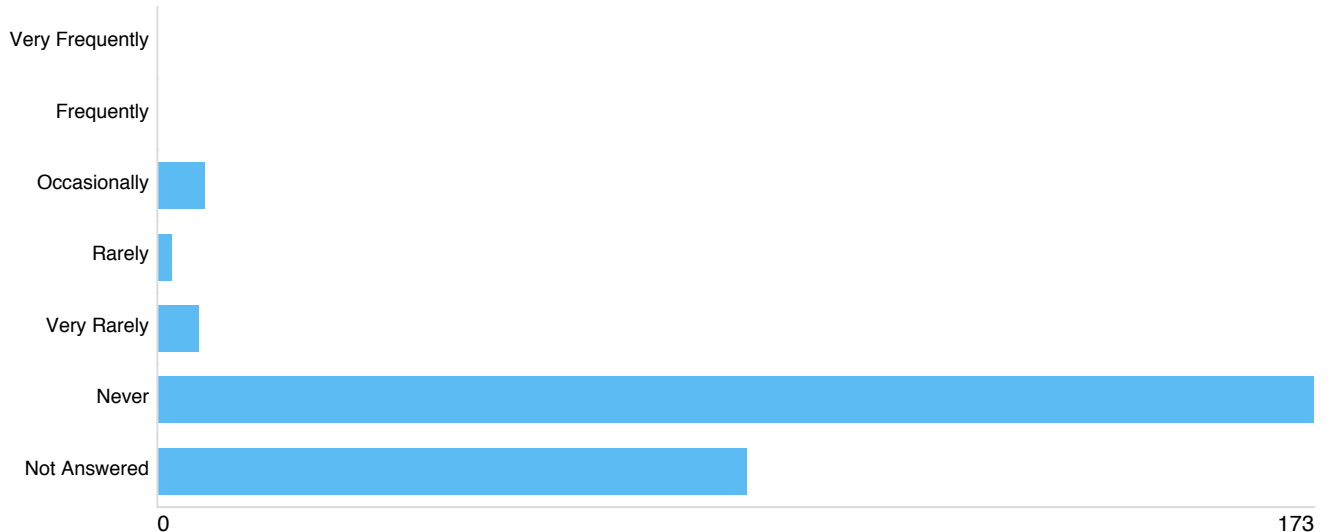
Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	1	0.36%
Frequently	0	0%
Occasionally	5	1.81%
Rarely	2	0.72%
Very Rarely	5	1.81%
Never	175	63.41%
Not Answered	88	31.88%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Wordsworth Avenue



Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	0	0%
Frequently	1	0.36%
Occasionally	16	5.80%
Rarely	9	3.26%
Very Rarely	16	5.80%
Never	160	57.97%
Not Answered	75	27.17%

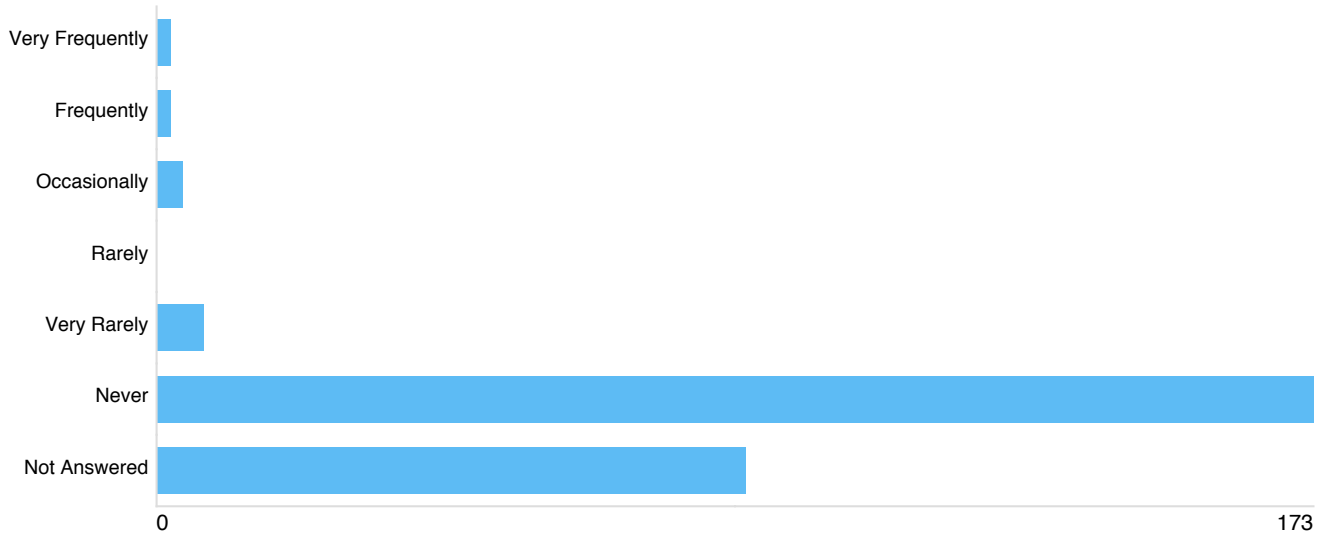
Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Darnall





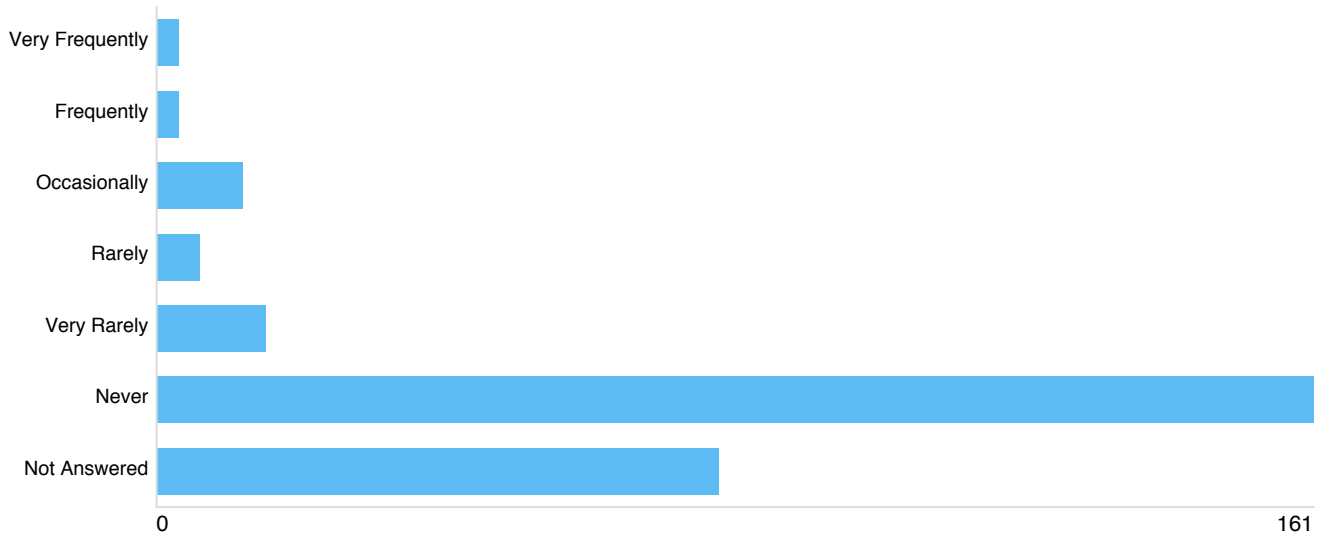
Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	0	0%
Frequently	0	0%
Occasionally	7	2.54%
Rarely	2	0.72%
Very Rarely	6	2.17%
Never	173	62.68%
Not Answered	88	31.88%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Chapeltown



Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	2	0.72%
Frequently	2	0.72%
Occasionally	4	1.45%
Rarely	0	0%
Very Rarely	7	2.54%
Never	173	62.68%
Not Answered	88	31.88%

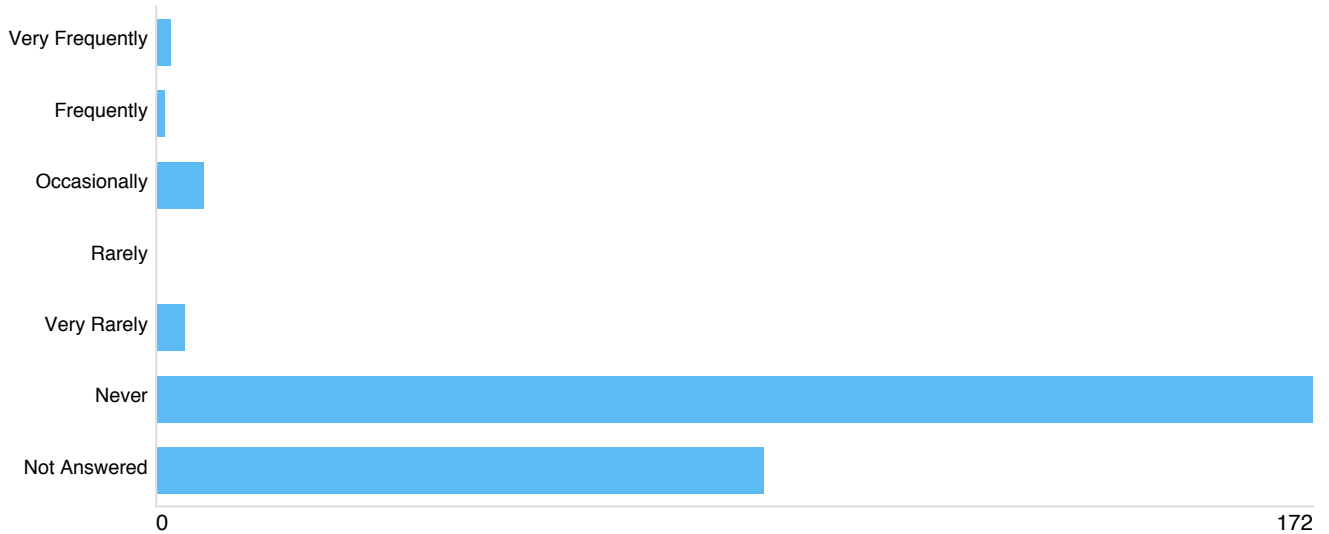
Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Newfield Green





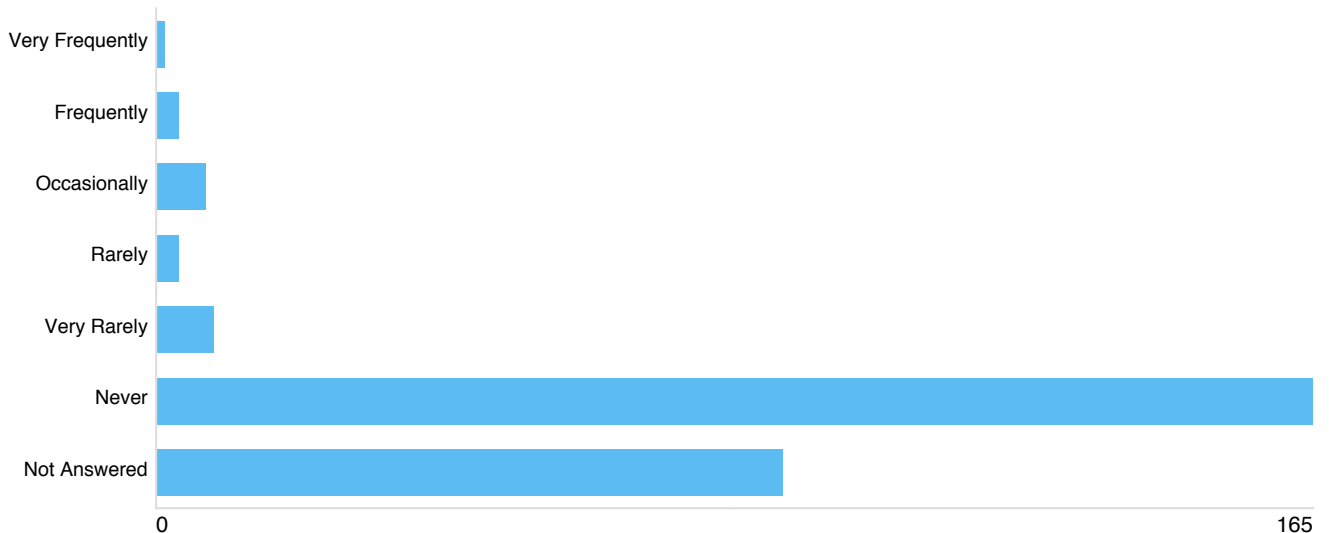
Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	3	1.09%
Frequently	3	1.09%
Occasionally	12	4.35%
Rarely	6	2.17%
Very Rarely	15	5.43%
Never	161	58.33%
Not Answered	78	28.26%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Stocksbridge



Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	2	0.72%
Frequently	1	0.36%
Occasionally	7	2.54%
Rarely	0	0%
Very Rarely	4	1.45%
Never	172	62.32%
Not Answered	90	32.61%

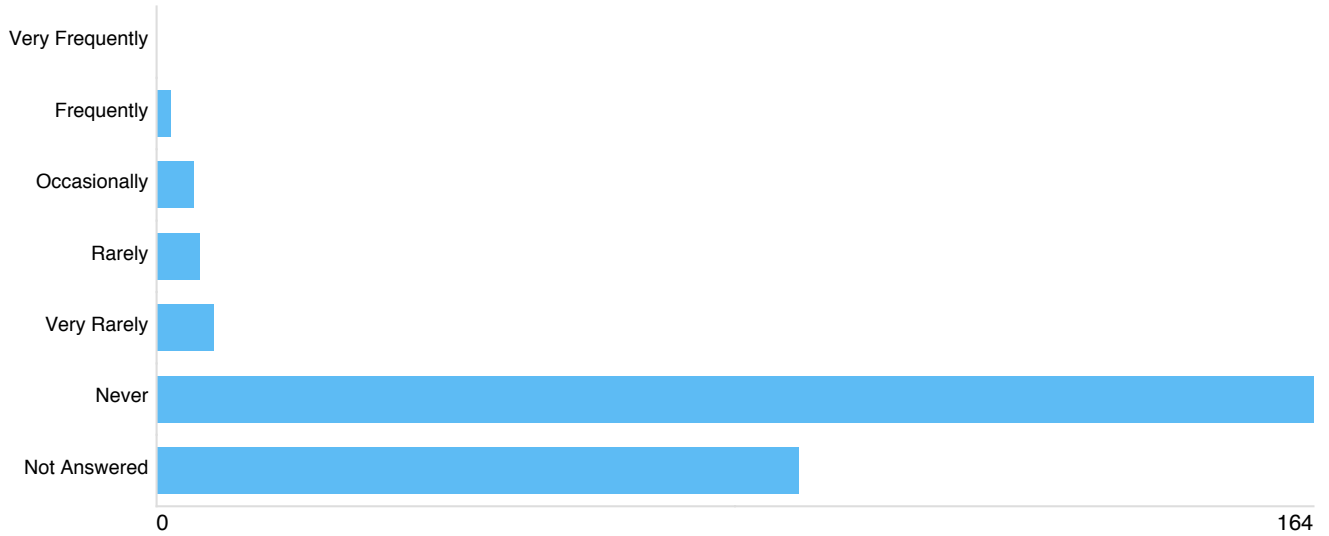
Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Lowedges





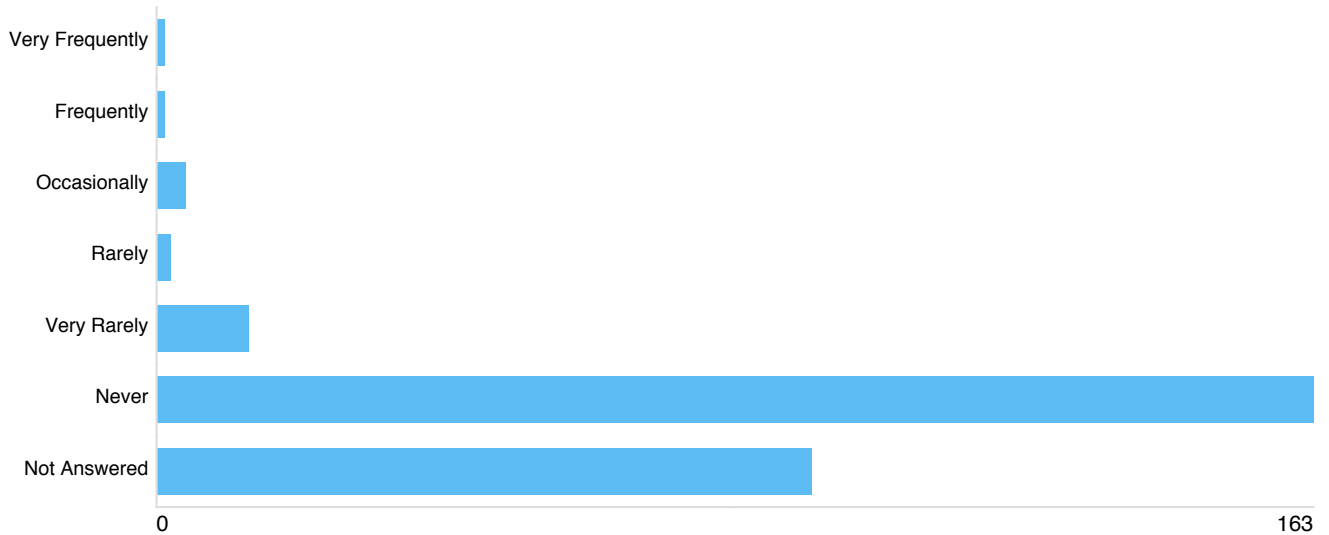
Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	1	0.36%
Frequently	3	1.09%
Occasionally	7	2.54%
Rarely	3	1.09%
Very Rarely	8	2.90%
Never	165	59.78%
Not Answered	89	32.25%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Manor Library



Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	0	0%
Frequently	2	0.72%
Occasionally	5	1.81%
Rarely	6	2.17%
Very Rarely	8	2.90%
Never	164	59.42%
Not Answered	91	32.97%

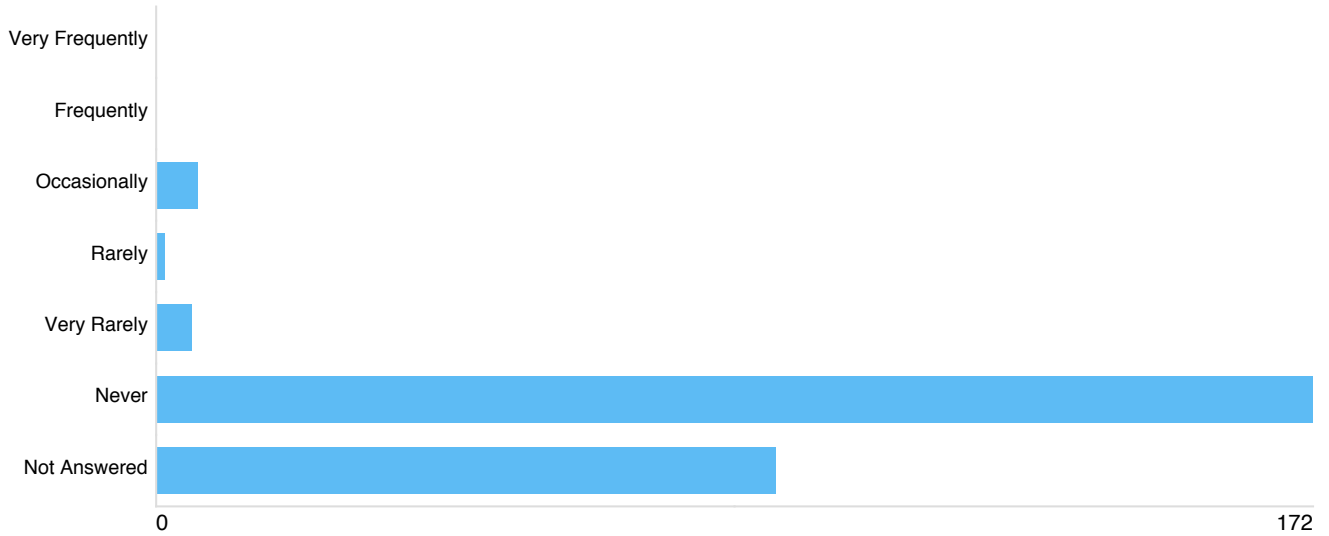
Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Jordanthorpe





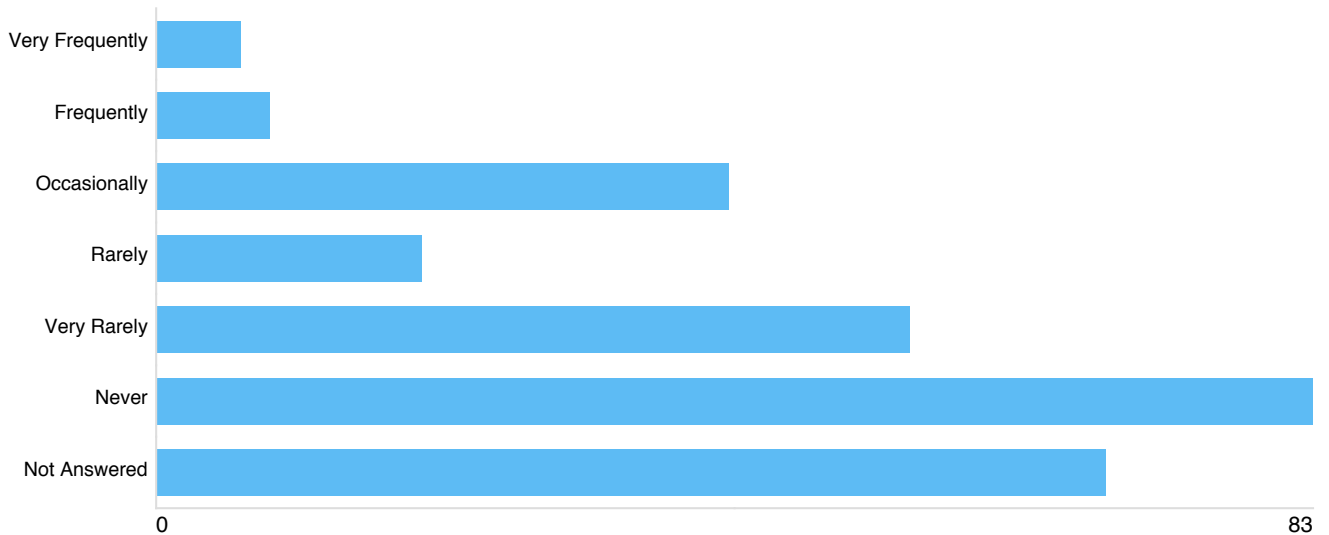
Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	1	0.36%
Frequently	1	0.36%
Occasionally	4	1.45%
Rarely	2	0.72%
Very Rarely	13	4.71%
Never	163	59.06%
Not Answered	92	33.33%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Firth Park



Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	0	0%
Frequently	0	0%
Occasionally	6	2.17%
Rarely	1	0.36%
Very Rarely	5	1.81%
Never	172	62.32%
Not Answered	92	33.33%

Do you ever visit any of the following housing offices? - Howden House





Option	Total	Percent
Very Frequently	6	2.17%
Frequently	8	2.90%
Occasionally	41	14.86%
Rarely	19	6.88%
Very Rarely	54	19.57%
Never	83	30.07%
Not Answered	68	24.64%

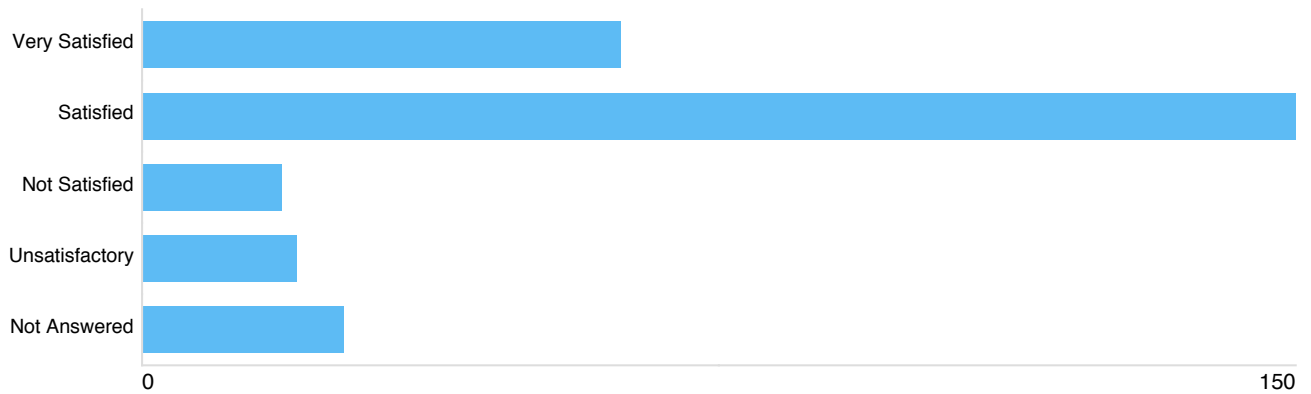
Question 5: Why do you visit the housing office?

Why do you visit the housing office

There were 198 responses to this part of the question.

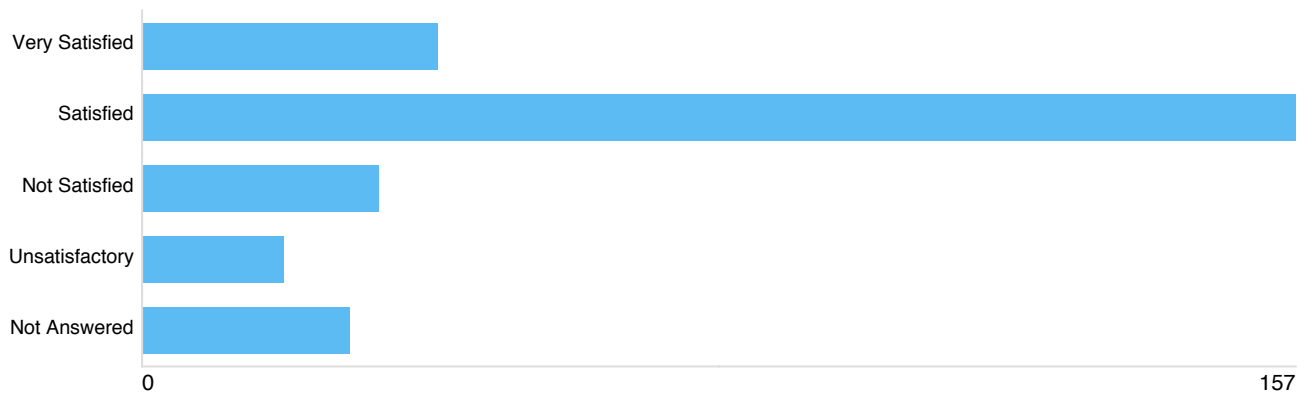
Question 6: How satisfied are you with the following when visiting the housing office?

How satisfied are you with the following - Ease of access



Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	62	22.46%
Satisfied	150	54.35%
Not Satisfied	18	6.52%
Unsatisfactory	20	7.25%
Not Answered	26	9.42%

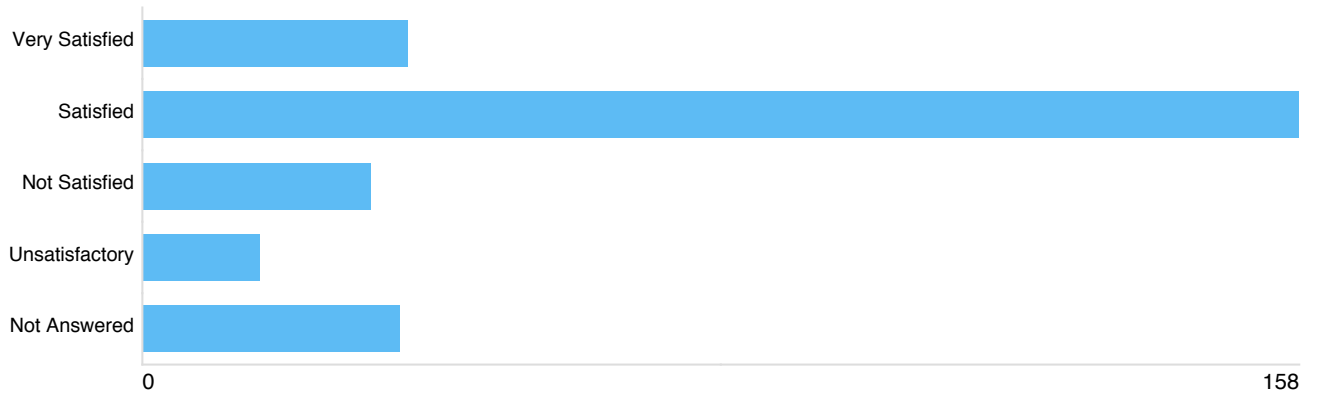
How satisfied are you with the following - Welcoming and pleasant environment





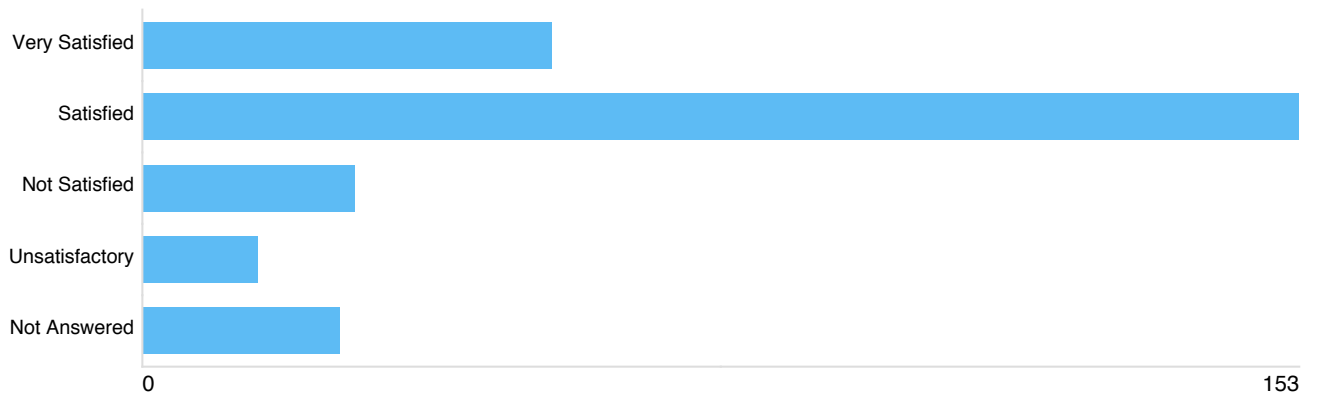
Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	40	14.49%
Satisfied	157	56.88%
Not Satisfied	32	11.59%
Unsatisfactory	19	6.88%
Not Answered	28	10.14%

How satisfied are you with the following - The availability of leaflets and information



Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	36	13.04%
Satisfied	158	57.25%
Not Satisfied	31	11.23%
Unsatisfactory	16	5.80%
Not Answered	35	12.68%

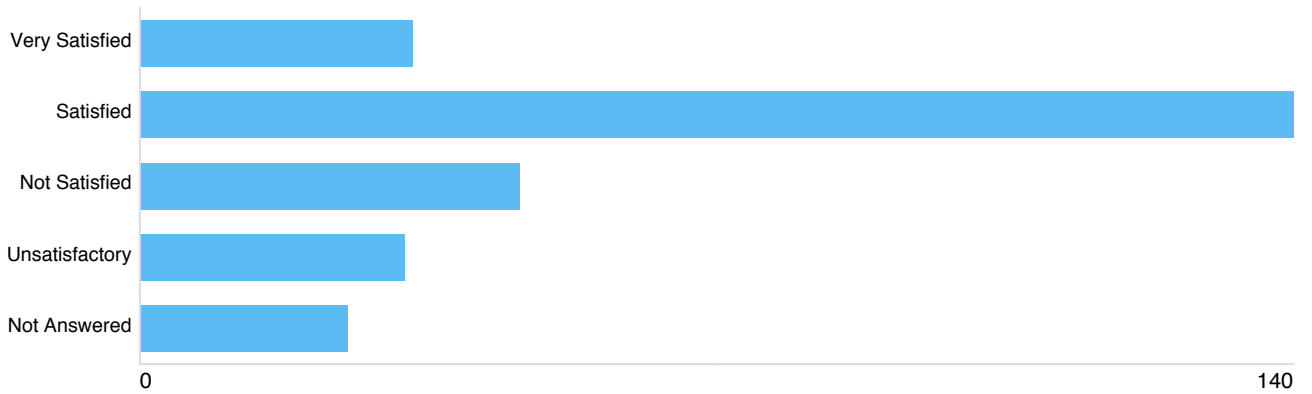
How satisfied are you with the following - Your query is dealt with in a polite and professional manner





Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	54	19.57%
Satisfied	153	55.43%
Not Satisfied	28	10.14%
Unsatisfactory	15	5.43%
Not Answered	26	9.42%

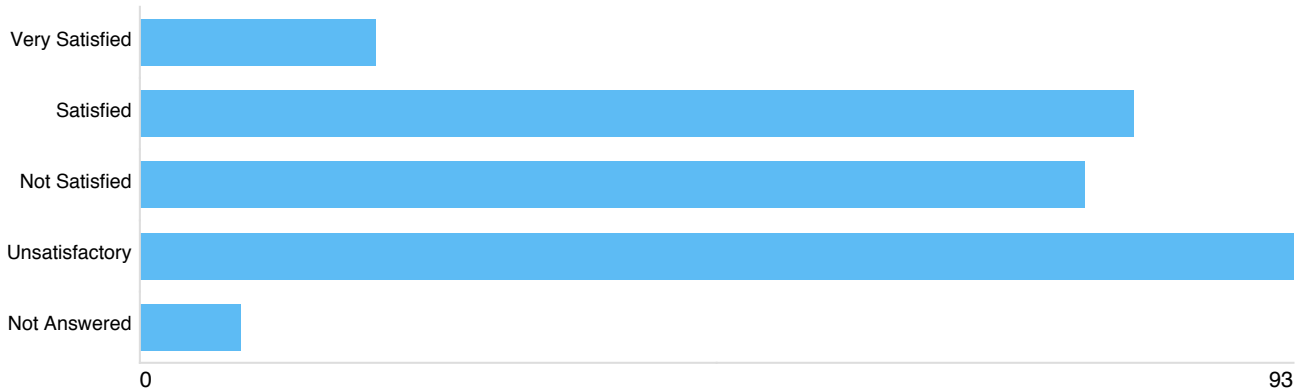
How satisfied are you with the following - The time taken to deal with your query on first contact



Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	33	11.96%
Satisfied	140	50.72%
Not Satisfied	46	16.67%
Unsatisfactory	32	11.59%
Not Answered	25	9.06%

Question 7: How satisfied are you with the following when contacting the Housing Service (excluding the repairs service) by telephone?

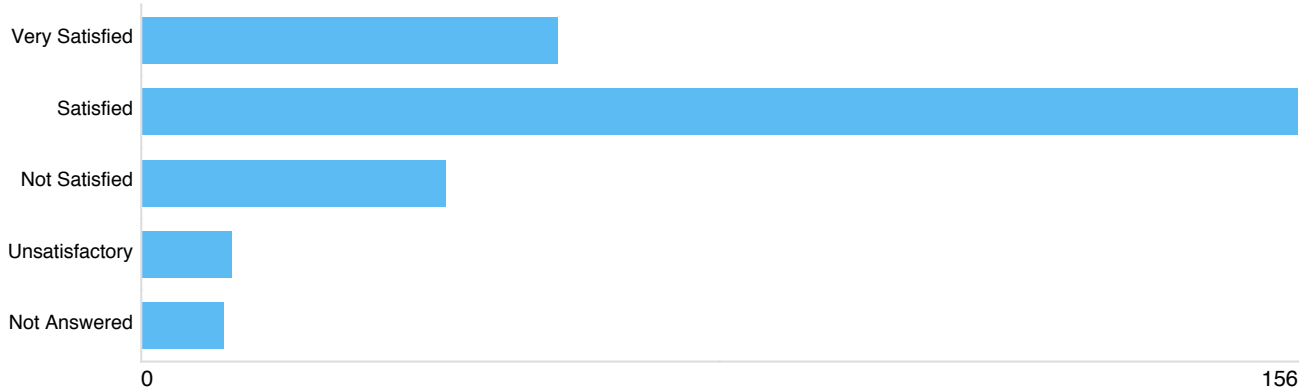
How satisfied are you when contacting the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service by telephone:- - The time taken to answer your call





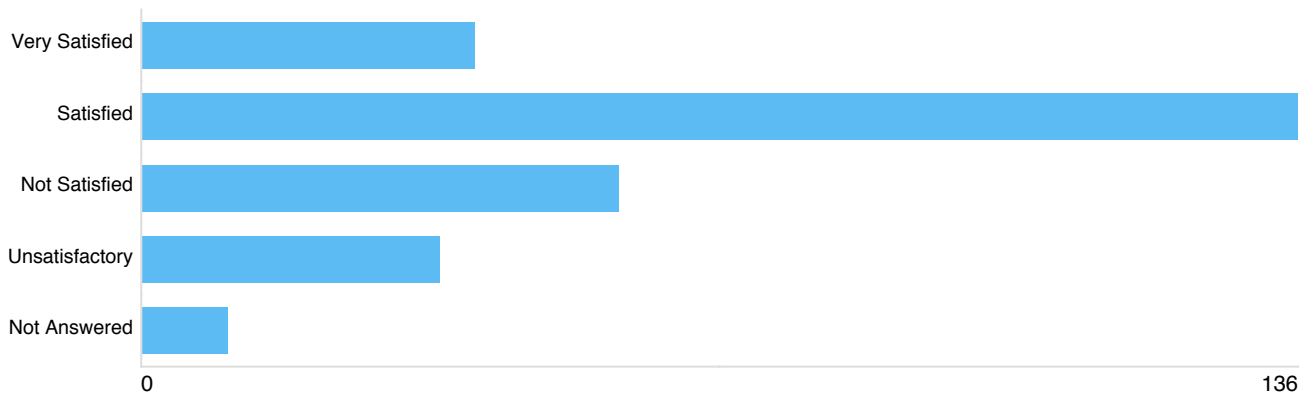
Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	19	6.88%
Satisfied	80	28.99%
Not Satisfied	76	27.54%
Unsatisfactory	93	33.70%
Not Answered	8	2.90%

How satisfied are you when contacting the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service by telephone:- - That your call is handled in a polite and professional manner



Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	56	20.29%
Satisfied	156	56.52%
Not Satisfied	41	14.86%
Unsatisfactory	12	4.35%
Not Answered	11	3.99%

How satisfied are you when contacting the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service by telephone:- - How your query is dealt with on first contact

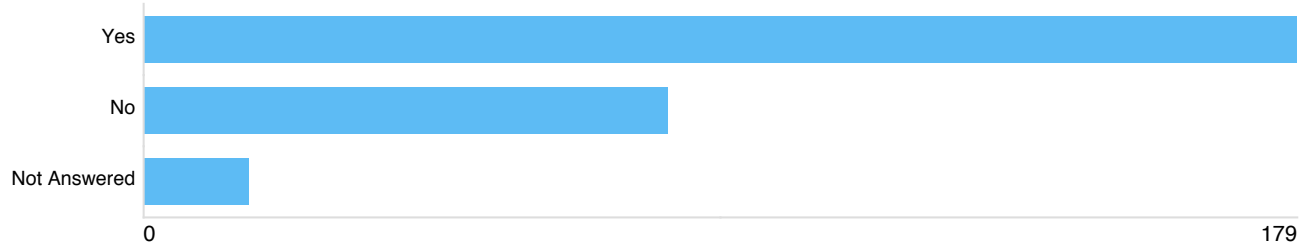




Option	Total	Percent
Very Satisfied	39	14.13%
Satisfied	136	49.28%
Not Satisfied	56	20.29%
Unsatisfactory	35	12.68%
Not Answered	10	3.62%

Question 8: Is there anything that would improve your experience of contacting the Housing Service?

Is there anything that would improve your experience of contacting the Housing and Neighbourhood Service?



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	179	64.86%
No	81	29.35%
Not Answered	16	5.80%

If you answered yes, please provide further information in the box below.

There were 179 responses to this part of the question.

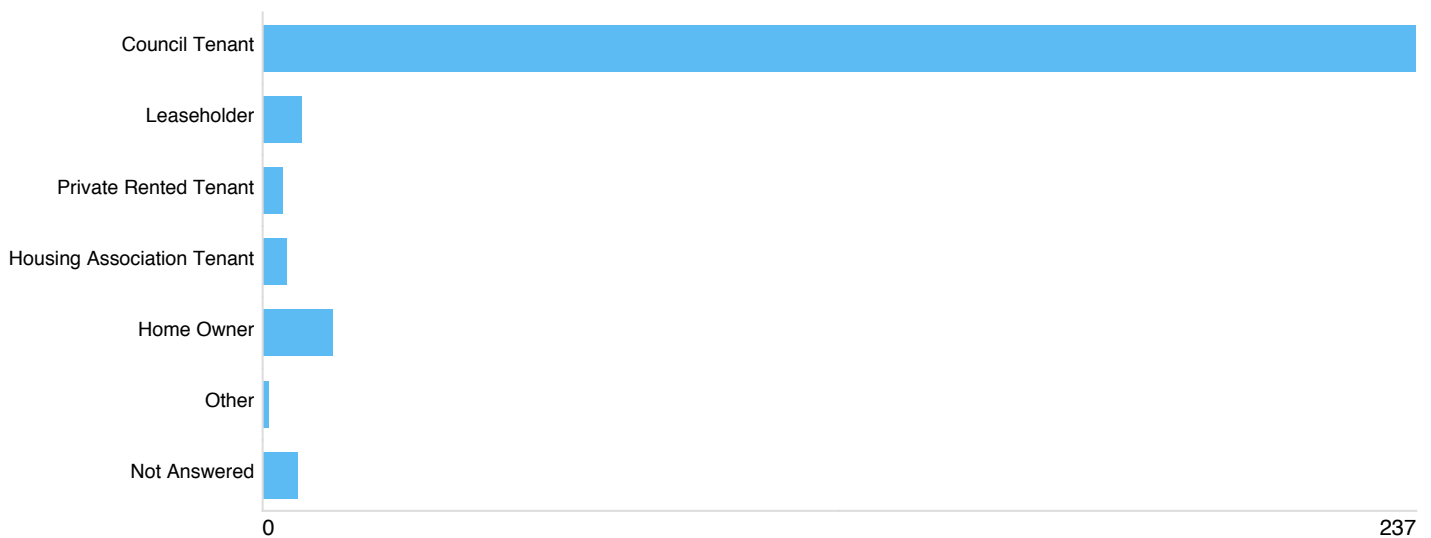
Question 9: What is your postcode?

Please provide your full postcode in the box below

There were 267 responses to this part of the question.

Question 10: Are you a

Are you a





Option	Total	Percent
Council Tenant	237	85.87%
Leaseholder	8	2.90%
Private Rented Tenant	4	1.45%
Housing Association Tenant	5	1.81%
Home Owner	14	5.07%
Other	1	0.36%
Not Answered	7	2.54%

If other, please give details in the box below

There were **4** responses to this part of the question.

APPENDIX 4 - MEETING WITH TARAS

10th July 2019

1. Introductions

Explained the make- up of C4C and how from the previous project that the group had been involved in, on anti social behaviour, they had been pulled up because they had not consulted with the TARAs. Rightly so – so this was the rationale of holding this meeting. The topic of this consultation and report was decided as a result of findings in the previous project. The group realised that tenants had difficulties accessing/ contacting Housing Services. The project is not about accessing the Repairs service.

2. General Comments

TARA rep - I go to lots of meetings and there are serious problems about accessing the Housing Service. Some of these are: -

- long waiting times on the phone
- at some of the First Points, some staff are 'ignorant'.
- if you use email to report a problem – the response time is too slow.
- tenants too can be impatient – they think that their problem is the absolute priority and are bad mannered.
- staff need more patience if English is not a tenant's first language
- the frontline staff are not the people responsible for the carrying out of whatever task/ problem needs sorting out.
- TARA rep had been on the phone recently for 45 minutes.
- She has also had to wait two and a half hours at Howden House
- Other tenants report similar issues.
- Suggestion – to be told on the phone – “You are now number 3 in the queue.” would help as could then gauge whether to hang on or not.
- C4C Member - I email my problems thru - to the relevant housing officer. If not dealt with promptly, she complains to the local councillor.
- TARA Rep - the response and action from the Refuse Dept is good
- TARA Rep - visited the Call Centre and was impressed with how staff were very friendly and dealt really well with awkward customers.
- Could do with more staff (in offices and in call centres?)

- I only use phone to report repairs – and use options **1** and **2**. That is **new** or **existing** reporting of a repairing problem
- Bit of a debate as to whether it would be easier if there were separate numbers for all the different jobs/ functions of council services. This was done at one point, however this was seen by staff as too complicated and not universally easy – hence the one number and then the Call centre routing the call to the relevant department. So there are now numbered options. Debated whether it would be good if some of us tried both – so ringing directly a department that we know, and contrasting that with going thru the Call Centre – to check if there is a time difference.
- C4C Member reported that she found that the phones in housing offices were far too public – others could overhear name, address, times when at home, and not at home etc – all should be confidential.
- Crystal Peaks office could use the current children’s play space to allow for more of a distance between waiting tenants and people who are on the phone and do not want to be overheard.
- You could put – Stand back a bit’ type notices as they do in Post Offices - but definite need for improvement.
- C4C asked if many tenants use the council website to source info.
- TARA Rep - No, very rarely – as can’t get onto Property Shop home page.
- TARA Rep - does use the website. (She is younger)
- Spoke of login/ password/ PIN number to access the rent account. And repairs – but quite often, does not work. Mentioned that Woodhouse office is only open 2 days a week. (Is not on the list of housing offices that the group has).
- C4C Member - In Bristol where she lived previously, the HA used an App – for the Repairs Service. Helped to speed up the process – as the tenant can take photos of the problem – so in some cases, this might cut out the need for an Inspector to come out first.
- TARA Rep - had paid a visit to the Call Centre. Told how teams are dedicated to answering calls on – either repairs, rent, other housing issues. Wanted to know how flexible this was – e.g if there was a slack period with few calls in the repairs section , could they then pick up on some of the call coming thru for the other team?
- queried whether the Crystal Peaks office could adjust its hours – so it corresponded to the library opening times, and could maybe stay open on Saturday mornings, and late evenings on some days.
- C4C & TARA reps were to visit the Call Centre at Howden House on 23 July to see at first hand how the system/ service works.

APPENDIX 5 – CALL CENTRE VISIT

Some notes from our visit to the Call Centre at Howden House.

We attended a session with another tenants' focus group – were welcomed and taken up to a side room of the call centre and given an over view of how the Call Centre works.

Main points were –

1. There are 4 teams working during the day– Council housing enquiries and rents; Council housing repairs and gas servicing; Council Tax, benefits and Universal Credit; and all other council services (roads, parking, pests, education etc)
2. There is an out of hours team that deal with urgent and lift repairs; Adult & Children's social care; Homeless queries
3. Typically the service recruits about 10 staff, 4 times a year. The training includes -
 - Induction; listening in; classroom training on service knowledge, telephone systems
 - Meeting with workers in the various teams that they are referring calls through to
 - Service knowledge is learnt and scripted and listed in a directory.
 - Response – speed, and quality of calls are assessed monthly - have 90% most times
4. We then looked at charts measuring performance in 2019 – this was from Jan to June. The Housing & rent enquiries – 125, 063 calls (highest in the first quarter i.e winter months. The Repairs & Gas servicing enquiries totalled 142, 241. Again higher in the winter months. Waiting times - longest 6.51 mins; shortest 00.48 min. This we all found surprising – as call waiting times are usually a huge source of dissatisfaction.
5. Then went on to outline what impacted on performance – and this is where it became clearer what leads to dissatisfaction –
 - Back office/ client services
 - Opening times not the same as the Call Centre
 - Staffing vacancies
 - Time tenants are put on hold
 - Staff availability (away from their desks due to team meetings, training, holidays etc)
6. As waiting times are seen as a big issue, the team try to improve the situation thru –
 - a rolling recruitment team
 - train Repairs staff to take housing rent calls

- Train the Housing staff likewise to handle new repairs enquiries and those on gas servicing.
 - So everybody knows more about other sectors!
 - Re-route calls to other staff if they are not busy.
7. Pattern of call activity - Housing lines busiest Monday and Friday; Repairs lines busiest Monday after the weekend!
 8. A few examples then given of why calls would be transferred – basically, if the query is more complex and needs more information/ expertise.
 9. On a recent survey, the scoring was on average 87% for repairs calls, 83% for Housing calls, 93% for Out of Hours service.
 10. We were then told about plans for improvements. These included –
 - call centre staff being able to see a complete view of the tenant’s case/ history
 - systems to be easier for call centre staff to access information
 - Potentially being able to tell customers their place in the queue i.e you are now 4th in the queue and/or the waiting time is 3, 5, 10 mins or whatever.
 - Potential for a ring back option.
 - Introduce a staff resource/ rota management module ??
 - web chat option for the website???Handle 3 queries at once(don’t understand and sounds fearsome!)
 - Voice recognition, rather than 1-5 options-the customer states their required service

We were then allocated to different staff in the call centre and for 15 mins or so had an earphone and could listen in to calls. This session was really interesting and I think that most of the tenants in our group were very impressed by the courteousness, the knowledge of the staff.

As the staff are continuously on the phone, we had little opportunity to actually talk ourselves to the staff. The woman I was with had worked for years in a call centre in a commercial setting so was well used to managing ‘telephony’ services.

Concerns –

1. The call centre staff seemed to be extremely able, but the work is pretty relentless and many of us noted that the coded system, that records their time away from their desk and phone, seems severe. So – a separate code for – a toilet break, a lunch break, holidays, team meetings, training etc - had to be used. And toilet and food

breaks were closely monitored. And staff were pulled up if they 'exceeded' the allotted time. Who decides what is a reasonable amount of time for toilet breaks? My staff member said she often did not have time to eat her lunch or take a break away from the office. The woman on the next desk had some kind of leg injury/ condition and had to take a break regularly to stretch/ walk around to ease the ache/ pain. It is very important that staff talk to the unions to ensure that their conditions are reasonable. As there is a high turnover of staff this could be down to 'burnout' and therefore impacts on both the staff and the customers – always somebody new who doesn't know the ropes. And management having to keep retraining staff.

2. I recognise that there have to be targets but when numbers are continually flashing up on screens – showing numbers of calls, numbers of people waiting – it becomes pretty stressful
3. Re training – it appears that a lot of 'new' info about a range of issues is just emailed through so a staff member has to read this and try to act on it. I think – from this brief visit – that there should be more proper training and team building
4. I think that possibly the IT systems are not top quality. As this came out in a session we later had with housing office staff. There needs to be decent and yes, expensive, investment in the best quality IT systems in order to deliver a good service and enable staff to perform at their best.

APPENDIX 6 – MEETING WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT STAFF

Notes - from the meeting on 7 August

Group 1

1. Staff represented a good cross section of the neighbourhood offices – Southey, the Property Shop; Crystal Peaks (2); Hillsborough (2); Chapeltown; Lowedges (2); Norfolk Park; East Area Call centre)
2. Staff having to deal with people queuing for long periods – can result in aggressive behaviour
3. Crystal Peaks – No air conditioning – very hot for both staff and customers
4. We don't have a minute to spare. – If not doing front line, having a lot of back office work following up cases.
5. Front desk – have to deal with queries across a huge range of subjects – benefits, Universal Credit, when customers come to a First Point office – they expect answers to everything. Office staff cannot resolve all problems – often having to signpost or put thru to someone else. But they get the blame as they are the visible member of staff. Better when there were dedicated Benefits Advisors on hand.
6. Repairs – several staff said that the service was no better despite being brought back in house.
7. Lot of people off sick with stress – inevitably puts strain on remaining staff.
8. Specific Housing officers are responsible for 300/400 properties each.
9. Several officers said that they felt they were not able to give customers the service that they need as they are pushed for time.
10. 2016 – everything changed – used to be separate Housing officers alongside dedicated Customer Service Advisors
11. A lot of lone worker working – although customers' files on the data base can be coded (to indicate problems, dangers) very often the systems are not up dated and officers can be walking into a very risky situation.
12. ALL the cases are COMPLEX
13. Work related stress impacts on others and on workers' family lives.(Stated several times)
14. Feel quite exposed – with low desks, no partitions/ screens, no security staff around (Chapeltown shares their office with the Job Centre. they DO have a security staff member but he has to stick to the Job Centre section of the office.)
15. There is a rota whereby staff every ???have to do phone cover from 8.30 – 9am and also 5 to 5.30.

16. Some staff thought that the previous system of having separate numbers for customers to use for the different services – council tax, environment, traffic issues etc – worked better.
17. Sometimes on certain phone calls – to Benefits I think especially, the phone rings and rings and then just cuts off.
18. There are NO notices saying - Customers will be asked to leave the office if they behave aggressively towards the staff. Should be!
19. There is a lot of miscommunication – from management to staff and therefore passed on to customers – a lot of this is due to changes by the week. Especially in regard to what paperwork/ ID that customers need to bring in for various applications/ registration/ sign ups etc..
20. And because of data protection – data cannot be transferred to a safe site unless all the necessary documentation is presented. So if only half the correct papers are brought in, they cannot be retained and records of having seen them have to be shredded!
21. Dealing with just ONE customer can take up to 25 minutes but this only counts as 1'Footfall'
22. The information on CRM is 'terrible'. 'Un-useable'
23. When new procedures are brought in – instructions on how to use them are just emailed to staff, rather than any proper training being given
24. IT systems currently in use – DO NOT WORK
25. Since Sheffield Homes came back in house – a lot of the work is not functioning properly. 'Just winging it..!'
26. The majority of queries are to do with Council Tax, Benefits. and Registration
27. Can't make up the shortfall in staff. Unison are not perceived as being helpful
28. Shortly Capita services are to come back in-house BUT what is needed, what is really essential is USER -FRIENDLY I. T.SYSTEMS . Tech 2020 ???
29. View expressed – Council want services to fail in order to justify closing offices.!
30. When asked, no member of staff knew who the Councillor is who is responsible for Housing.
31. Problem with vacant properties – often when th keys are handed in to the office – turns out that the property is not fit to live in.
32. View expressed (and agreed by most) that Right to Buy should be cancelled as houses disappearing fast and not being replaced

Group 2

- Telephone Placement – lack of confidentiality
- Sensitive reporting eg. Death – activities in cafe can negatively impact eg singalong
- Accessible (no stairs), library brings people in, staff are flexible
- No air conditioning
- 3rd parties beginning to use office for meetings/info sharing
- 1 person on reception but additional staff will assist to reduce queue
- No facility for copying – customers can use library PC but cost?? Time??
- Customers with queries on Housing Benefit/Council Tax unable to get through to service on phone ..come into office where reception staff have to use same phone number
- Small offices have only one member of staff on duty. Can call for back up if a queue but time delay in staff arriving.
- Different opening hours at small offices causes confusion and queues when customers certain of opening hours
- No standard opening hours across service.
- Most contentious issues are registration for housing/re-housing and Council Tax – conflicting information re supporting info and evidence. GDPR actively works against smooth service delivery. Manner in which info updates circulated within service actively works against smooth service delivery in some/many cases.
- If SCC encouraging online contact more public pcs need to be provided and the website needs overhauling/scrapping/renewing
- Have a pc dedicated to repairs reporting in each office
- Norfolk Park/Manor Top/Darnall offices dark, cold, do not provide confidential areas
- Provide a Benefits Officer on site or give staff basic Benefits training
- Registration for re-housing/Benefits/Council Tax issues are most important but least standard.
- Footfall: Complex Queries – can footfall be weighted to show time spent on complex cases?

Group 3

- Staffing levels an issue
- Systems not fit for purpose
- Staff not trained on benefits – main face to face enquiry we get.
- Property shop – easier to re-direct/sign-post as based in Howden House amongst other Council services
- A benefit officer in each housing office would help
- People struggle with digital options – unable to use
- Not got the staff to help people with the digital options
- Inconsistencies with online forms
- A property shop app would be good
- Some staff not happy not been able to help with all the enquiries received
- More staff in the call centre needed
- Reception areas use a bell, however customers don't always que and expect a staff member to see them straight away
- Issues at Firth Park office is that customers don't realise it is back open and lack of signage doesn't help. People think the reception area is for the library only.
- Public access computers are old and limited to what the customer can access / browsers outdated – internet explorer not compatible with online forms
- Lack of CCTV and security – Chapeltown office has a security guard as part of the job centre office however they can't get involved if incidents relate to housing office. Fixtures and fittings screwed to floor as precautions
- A dedicated computer in each office for reporting repairs would be good
- Discussion around information to bring in for ID verification – knowing what to bring in and how this communicated. Staff do tell them but customers do not always bring in all or correct documents
- System issues in terms of what information staff can provided and discussion around how visits are recorded – not recorded on a timed basis
- GDPR makes things harder as have to shred any ID a customer brings in if they've not brought in all correct ID
- Some issues around communications to staff about changes in processes
- Digital access – needs to be user friendly and simple

APPENDIX 7 - Nottingham Homes Visit

Wednesday 25th September

St Ann's Centre – Multi Service Centre

- Multi-service centre – linked with other services e.g. library, NHS
- Modern building – open planned. Library, pharmacy, main reception, seating area, interview rooms, meeting rooms on ground floor with GP surgery on upper floor.
- Lifts available for accessibility
- Police are over the road
- Housing Patch Officers are based here covering around 6,000 properties
- 3 of these multi-service centres – one in the North of the City, one central (St Ann's) and one in the South of the city
- Tenants can come in for a number of different services
- Duty officer to deal with face to face enquiries if required
- Interview rooms
- Information/leaflets about various of services

Bestwood Housing Office

- Met with Dan Richard (Patch Manager)
- Only customer facing office open
- Housing Patch Officers are based here
- Rent Officers are based here including Universal Credit team
- Tenancy Sustainment team based here
- Helps to have some specialist teams based here – can help with vulnerable tenants
- Patch teams based here manage 4,502 properties
- Footfall levels into the office 30-40 people per day
- 2 officers on the front desk
- Get a wide range of housing enquiries as well as benefit enquiries – try and signpost these

- Have volunteer days where staff volunteer within the local community e.g. the local church providing meals to the local community
- Tenant Academy – which provides free courses for tenants. Managed by the Tenant Involvement Team
- Street & Block Champions for estates/areas – they can escalate estate issues – a bit like our TARA reps.
- Reception area – seated area, kids zone, computer desks (can access internet – not just limited to the main webpage etc).
- Leaflets and information displayed
- Quite spacious
- Public toilets

Loxley House – Nottingham Homes HQ

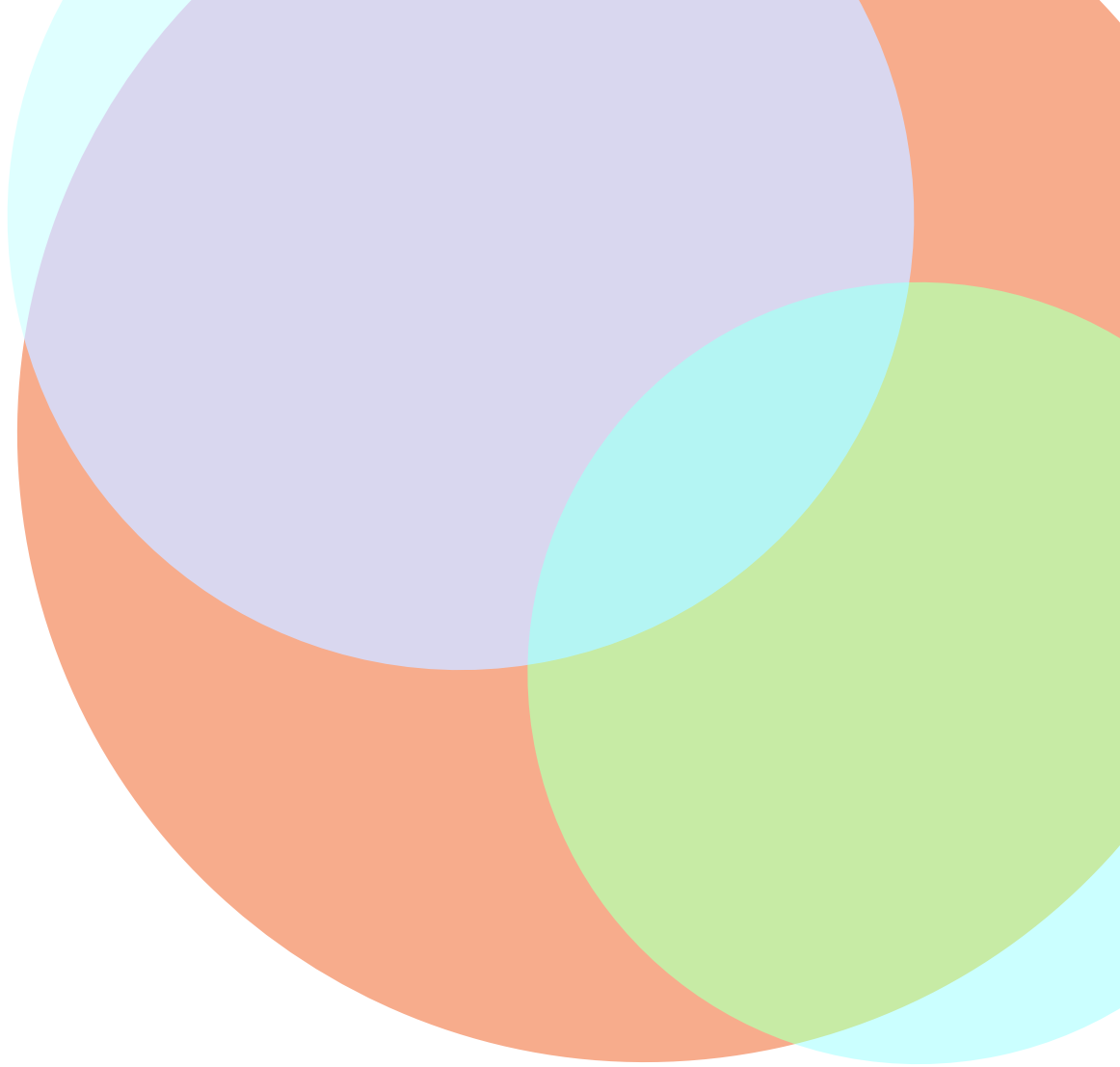
Digital – Online Offer

- Working towards a housing portal – “Housing Online” – so customers can access everything in one place e.g. report a repair, see rent balance etc
- Account Number to login
- Still developing this
- Will have a Digital Strategy – this will help to promote the online offer, however want to get this in place first
- Housing registrations and bidding on properties is the most complicated for the system
- Also re-working the website and trying to incorporate partner websites so that everything is all in one place.

Contact Centre

- 3 strands to the service (1.Repairs 2. Rents 3. Tenancy & Estates)
- They have separate numbers for each of the 3 strands
- 50-55 staff
- Don't use “press 1 for x” options

- These are local rate numbers
- Staff are multi-skilled so can deal with enquires across all strands
- 75% of repairs calls are answered in around 20 seconds
- Use the hold message to play key messages
- Receive around 30,000 calls per month
- 18-19,000 of these are for repairs, with 5-6,000 for rents
- Have 24/7 out of hours service for repairs (Nottingham On Call)
- Only just started to measure customer satisfaction
- Have put a survey at the end of each call for callers to rate the call and advisor – using this to improve and coach/develop staff
- Soon to have a housing staff within the contact centre to help on any specialist queries
- Prefer to resolve the call at the call centre rather than pass on
- Diverse staff means have a number of staff that can speak different languages which can help with language barriers from callers.



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