



Your Voice Forum

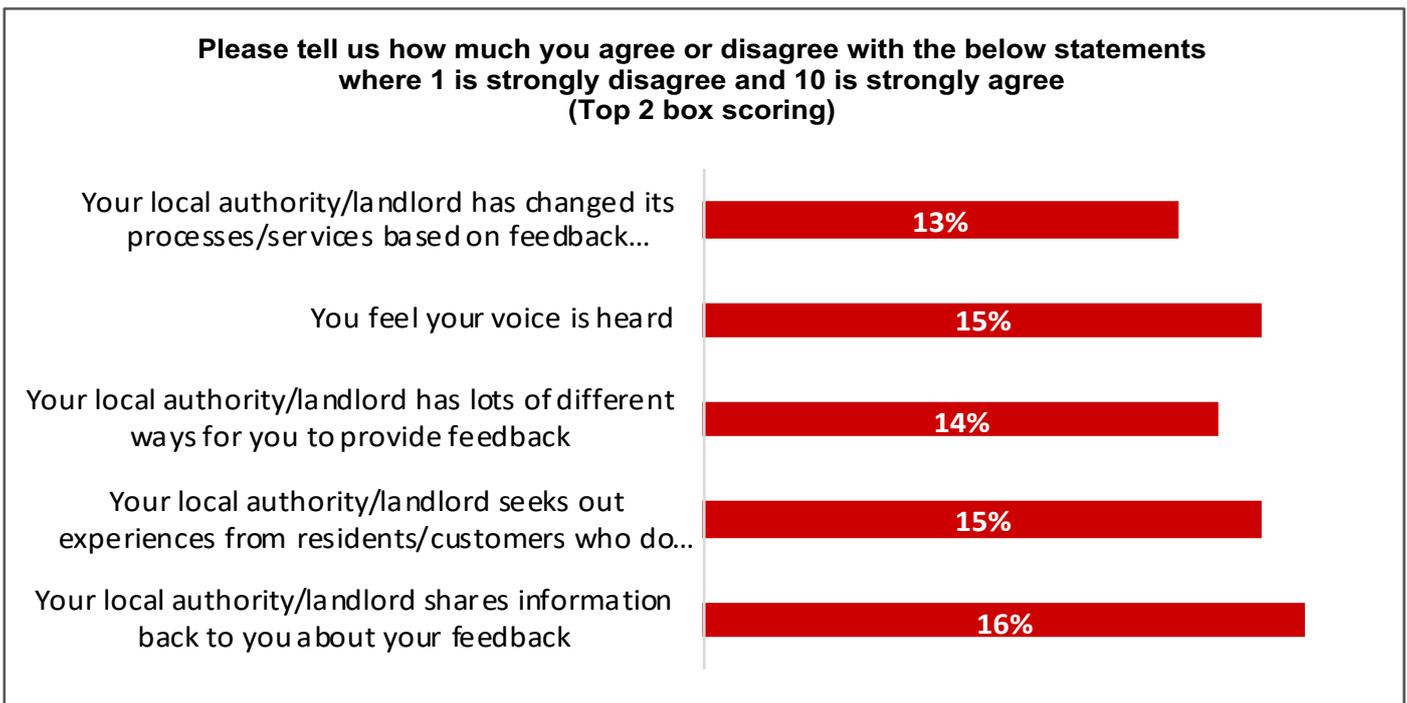
Making better use of Data and Insight Information
to ensure tenants are being heard



Matthew Williams, Head of Insight, Mears Group

As part of Mears' Your Voice Online Form, we sent a survey to our 1000 members to gather feedback on the subject of 'making use of better information to ensure tenants are being heard'. The survey is conducted on a top 2 box, 10-point scale.

Results Overview



The results to this question indicate that tenants feel unheard and demonstrates that processes/ services provided by local authority/landlord have not changed in reflection to feedback received.

To gain further insight, this question was broken down by score to determine those answers with the largest score. A third of those who responded to the survey advised that their local authority/landlord do not share information back regarding feedback provided.

A third of the responses also indicated that their local authority/landlord do not seek out experiences from residents/customers who do not regularly provide feedback. Therefore, this raises the question regarding whether we are only asking for feedback from tenant groups and from those who regularly provide feedback. The result indicates that improvement is required.

The survey results also showed that a third of people would prefer to get in touch with their local authority/landlord via email, face to face or telephone. From the feedback gathered, the frustration of not being listened to was the prominent message. It is also important to ensure that as well as digital communication methods, we continue with traditional methods also.

To summarise, people are keen to provide feedback and across different channels. It is important to relay feedback to them once gathered and imperative that we listen and do something with the feedback. The results conclude that work is still required.

Approach to Insight

At Mears, our customers are segmented into four categories – colleagues, community, our clients, and customers.

As part of the voice programmes – voice of colleague, voice of client, your voice and voice of customer, Mears actively ask for feedback on the services provided from customers. Our Voice of the Customer Solution is an automated feedback system that will collect and analyse customer feedback within minutes of any interaction with Mears. The feedback is then processed through a third-party provider, the data is then presented to key internal stakeholders within the business and monthly summaries are provided. This ensures feedback is resolved quickly and highlights key trends monthly or on a quarterly basis.

Shirley McNabney, Senior Client Relationship Director, Institute of Customer Service

Senior Client Relationship Director, Shirley McNabney, advised that her role with the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) is to look after organisations who have joined and have memberships with ICS.

The purpose of ICS is to raise standards of services across the UK, achieve greater customer satisfaction, and employee engagement which ultimately will have a positive effect on the UK. ICS provides memberships that organisations can tap into and provide them with insight, benchmarking and organise networking events to discuss hot topics and share ideas.

ICS is an organisational membership of 450, 80% private and 20% of public across a range of industries and sectors, working with high-profile organisations. ICS champion service with the Government, by trying to influence and collaboratively work with MPs and members to provide an opportunity to discuss and debate hot topics. As a result, key messages are taken back to Parliament to try and influence Government.

ICS are currently working on 'Services with Respect' campaign. At the start of the pandemic twelve months ago, customers were tolerant and understanding regarding customer service and employees. As time has progressed, the expectancy from customers is that organisations should be delivering good customer service, despite challenges. As a result, customers have become more frustrated and less empathetic. Currently, there are 150 organisations supporting the Services with Respect campaign.

Results Overview

UKCSI is a barometer of UK customer satisfaction published twice a year by ICS. Feedback is provided to panel following experiences with different organisations and sectors, an average is then calculated for the UK. The UKCSI for January 2021 is 76.8 (out of 100) which is the lowest level since 2015. The results indicated that 2021 had the highest number of customers experiencing a problem with 14.6%.

The results demonstrate that 30% of customers have made online purchases and thought more carefully about how they spend during the COVID-19 pandemic and are more likely than average to spend with companies they trust, or with ethical companies. In addition, at least 22% of customers say their financial or physical well-being has got worse and 18.8% advised that their mental well-being has deteriorated.

The results show:

- ▶ Public Services (National) has risen by 1.5 points. Banks & Building Societies, Tourism and Transport have fallen by at least 1 point
- ▶ The proportion of in person experiences has fallen, whilst email has grown
- ▶ Average customer satisfaction rose slightly for in person experiences but fell for email, App and Web chat experiences

Research indicates that regardless of sector, interaction and engagement is of the same level of importance to customers. Subconscious factors emerged in the results, for example, emotional connections and how trustworthy an organisation is. Ethics, reputation and being open and transparent also mattered to customers. Following the research, UKCSI questions were segmented into five key areas:

- ▶ Experience
- ▶ Complaint Handling
- ▶ Emotional Connection
- ▶ Customer Ethos
- ▶ Ethics

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, customer satisfaction fell and tolerant levels from customers declined. More than 30% of customers have made more online purchases and have thought more carefully about how they spend during the pandemic. 21.3% of customers predict they will be financially worse off in the next six months.

Following the results, ICS recommendations include:

1. Make it easy for customers to contact your organisation and access help
2. Communicate and engage proactively with your customers
3. Be responsive to customers' personal context
4. Prioritise and plan for the needs of vulnerable customers
5. Maintain a focus on delivery and logistics
6. Take care of employees' well-being
7. Develop a culture of agility and innovation
8. Assess your customers' changing priorities and needs
9. Focus on short and long-term risk and performance

Following the research, a trust model was created. The trust model is based on a sample of 2,053 customers identifying top 3 factors influencing trust across 36 attributes. It is important to look at it not only for the needs of a business but through the customer lens and design processes to meet the needs of customers.

ICS Summary - Mears' Considerations

1. How the pandemic has affected how people view their homes/the role of a landlord

- ▶ Will customers be more dependent on our help?
- ▶ Will customers look to local/central authority for more guidance in future?

2. How the worsening financial position of many of our customers will affect the way customer engage with providers of service, including Mears.

- ▶ Will customers need more maintenance support? I.e. unable to pay for small things in home any longer
- ▶ Have expectations of service levels increased with online providers now leading

3. How the worsening of people's mental health will affect the way our customers engage with us.

- ▶ Do we need more training on how to deal with these issues?
- ▶ How do we plan for more 'vulnerable' customers?

Anna O'Halloran, National Consultancy Manager, Tpas

"There will be tenants who want to proactively engage with the policies of their landlord, and others who simply want to know that their landlord is thinking of them in the way it implements change and is keeping them informed." The Charter for Social Housing Resident 2020.

National Consultancy Manager, Anna O'Halloran, advised that many consultancy clients over the last year have started to reflect on how to understand residents' lived-in experiences if they aren't sharing feedback.

Recent campaigns such as those by Marcus Rashford for free school meals for children during school holidays, and that of Jo Wiley fronting a campaign to ensure those with learning disabilities were prioritised for Covid-19 vaccinations, are examples of real-life experiences, and highlights that we should listen and recognise people. Re-Engineering Engagement, a Tpas project, was designed to work with organisations to help them input processes to enable this to happen.

The project has four component features: framework development, co-creation techniques, strengths-based and inclusive. Tpas try to reduce the hierarchy between organisations and service users and do so by encouraging staff and residents to participate in the same workshop environment to find solutions together. Housing providers have been encouraged to analyse the data and to include those residents who have had several repairs, and those who are unengaged with their landlord. The approach is strength based and the goal is to influence service design and delivery.

The strengths-based approach is called the 'Appreciative Inquiry' and enables:

- ▶ An evidence-based approach
- ▶ Motivation through its strengths-based focus
- ▶ Equality of contribution through use of co-creation techniques
- ▶ Options for checking back with participants.

It is important to analyse the data and determine whether there are tenants not reporting repairs due to past bad experiences. Similarly, as a housing provider, it may be beneficial to target those who have experienced rent arrears to provide feedback. Subsequently, this insight can be transformational.

Repairs, 'red letters' and growth can affect the overall customer experience. If a tenant has reported a couple of repairs and the experience has been negative, this can impact the relationship disproportionately going forward. The impact of red letters can make a clear detrimental impact on the landlord-tenant relationship. In addition, the impact of growth is moving services more digitalised can also have an impact on the landlord-tenant relationship.

Trust is the bases of everything, and it is important to be able to measure trust. The project highlighted that there was a general lack of distrust with housing providers. To move forward and create better relationships, Tpas began to learn from behavioural science, which dismantles economists' views on what human beings are. In relation to social housing, there are many behavioural science principles which influence people. These principles include:

- ▶ Perceived fairness – this refers to the judgement of fairness that we make in relation to our experience of organisational processes or decisions. It is a powerful behavioural motivator since these judgements are deeply connected our feelings and sense of self-worth. Behavioural science research has shown that when individuals are treated fairly, they are more likely to accept decisions made by organisations, show greater compliance, and behave in a more cooperative manner.
- ▶ Control – The need for a sense of control is one of the most fundamental motivations we have. From an evolutionary perspective, our sense of a need for control stems for our drive for survival and without control, our brains signal that we are in danger placing us in the flight-freeze mode. To establish this sense of control, customers need to feel secure and have trust in and from their landlord.
- ▶ Availability Bias – The availability bias describes our tendency to use or remember information that comes to mind quickly or easily when making decisions or thinking about an experience. Information will be more memorable if it has happened recently, happened frequently or has an emotional component to it. We also have a general tendency to remove negative experiences more strongly and, in more detail, – even if we are the kind of person who has a positive outlook on life.

To conclude, it is important to use data to ensure you capture the non-vocalised experience, and target those who are repeatedly reporting repairs, those who aren't, and those experience rent arrears and encourage these groups to share their experiences. Empathy-mapping may be beneficial for organisations to 'step into the shoes' of the customer and helps understand how to use empathy.

It is important to identify what is working and what isn't, and ensuring formal structures are changed to ensure breadth of experience is included.

Lastly, it is important to build in change and ensure your organisation is structured to ensure you are challenging your perception of customers experience.

Ideas/Discussion - Performance Measures

Gillian Yeoman, Group Customer Development Manager, Mears Group: The session has been insightful, Christina Francis has recently joined the Mears Living Scrutiny Panel, she would have found this beneficial. As the Mears Living insight is being progressed, this session will be fed back for Mears Living improvements.

Christine Francis, Mears Living Scrutiny Panel and Tenant: I have worked previously with those with disabilities, post 16 and I am an Inclusion Officer for Northampton Scouting. It is extremely important to approach the most vulnerable. Within the establishment I am working in, the over 55's feel they are not being listened to. I have questioned why and have been advised that their concerns aren't followed up, but also there is a fear that they will lose their homes if they do. It is important to build the trust with them, so they understand that this isn't the case. As part of the Scrutiny Panel, I want to visit every flat with an anonymous paper to ask if there are any issues/and or positive feedback. In terms of building, is there anyone in the team that has experience with people with disabilities or those over the age of 55? There are a lot of things which have been neglected which may be due to lack of experience in disability.

Anna O'Halloran, National Consultancy Manager, Tpas: Tpas conducted a project 18 months regarding behavioural science theories in engagement. Part of the project was regarding the understanding of barriers to engagement in formal structures. One of the barriers was fear and being considered a troublemaker. It is important to understand why residents feel that way and what could be done to dismantle that experience.

Tracey Lyth, Group Head of Customer Success, Mears Group: It is important to have the behavioural aspect in place whilst delivering services and ability to understand what is important to customers. Regarding disability, it is important to influence and connect with these people via our engagement channels, as well as ensuring training is delivered to our staff.

Peter Baldwin, Managing Director, Mears Group: I agree regarding shaping services for individuals. However, there is an issue with GDPR and the fear of profiling and storing useful information. When dealing with 10,000 properties and an individual has not engaged for 1-2 years, it is important to get to a position of trust with the information. As a contractor, we need to also share our difficulties to enable us to empathise with each other. We need this critical information to ensure it is inclusive for everyone.

Anna O'Halloran, National Consultancy Manager, Tpas: This is something that organisations are worried about and again, this worry is perception rather than reality. Another barrier for a contractor is the landlord. From a landlord perspective, the data they hold is transactional i.e. a tenant number. The transactional data will be enough to open some of these cans, you will be able to identify 1,000 have not had any repairs, this will raise some red flags.

Mark Dale, Exeter City Response & Voids Lead, Exeter City Council: Do we need to contact tenants on a regular basis and provide them with more gentle reminders rather than red letters?

Peter Baldwin, Managing Director, Mears Group: Regarding re-thinking contact, we have found through Covid-19 that a customer will receive an SMS message with confirmation of their repairs appointment and then no contact is provided until an operative is on route. This has generated a lot of avoidable contact regarding customers telephoning and asking if an appointment is still going ahead. We have spoken about transitioning to digital and keeping things on phone/face to face – it is important to engage with customers and communicate which parts are faceless and ask which parts they are comfortable receiving over a digital platform. Our dashboard highlights jobs which haven't been touched for several days, therefore staff started to call and speak to residents to confirm the booking. The feedback from the outbound calls was very positive. It is important to understand what processes we can change to digital.

Recommendations

- ▶ Need to ride on the digital wave and make sure our services are more geared towards online “purchase” culture
- ▶ Need to re-affirm our customer's priorities post-pandemic - what do they need from us? Speed? Quality? Etc
- ▶ Increase the breadth of those providing feedback by opening more channels and creating a reason to get in touch.

Attendees

Speakers

Tracey Lyth, Group Head of Customer Success, Mears Group
Matthew Williams, Head of Insight, Mears Group
Jenny Osbourne, Chief Executive Officer, Tpas
Anna O'Halloran, National Consultancy Manager, Tpas
Shirley McNabney, Senior Client Relationship Director, Institute of Customer Service

Rosalind Badder, Tenant
Carmel Grant, Tenant
Claudette Byfield, Tenant
Greta Kendall, Tenant
Jessica Smith, Tenant
Mervyn Cowdell, Tenant
Christine Francis, Mears Living Scrutiny Panel and Tenant
Peter Baldwin, Managing Director, Mears Group
Gillian Yeoman, Group Customer Development Manager, Mears Group

Forum Guests

Gavin Short, Celtic Horizons
Corinne Croome, Assistant Director, Octavia Housing
Peter Walkinshaw, Resident Involvement Manager, Octavia Housing
Mark Dale, Exeter City Response & Voids Lead, Exeter City Council
Mavis King, Your Voice Board Member
Sue Smith, Your Voice Board Member
Darren Wise, Tenant
Ann Harrington, Tenant

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