



Tenants' Voice Scrutiny Panel

North Star's 3rd Customer Commitment Report 15th November 2023

Introduction

The Tenants' Voice Scrutiny Panel (TVSP) have made the following recommendations as a result of their review of North Star's 3rd Customer Commitment. (further details about the Customer Commitments can be found here: [Customer Commitments | North Star Housing Group Ltd \(northstarhg.co.uk\)](https://www.northstarhg.co.uk/customer-commitments))

'We will provide you with a safe home that is in good repair. If we don't, we will make it easy for you to tell us and make sure you understand how we will make it right.'

TVSP designed a survey to test if North Star is meeting this commitment, which was sent to all tenants via text and email. The survey received 406 responses. As a result of the feedback analysis, it was clear that a high percentage of tenants did not have **repairs completed first time** and that they did not have the next steps communicated to them. (More detail and analysis of the survey can be found in the process section on page 7)

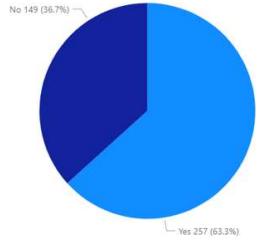
TVSP has made a series of recommendations for improvements shown below:

Recommendation 1

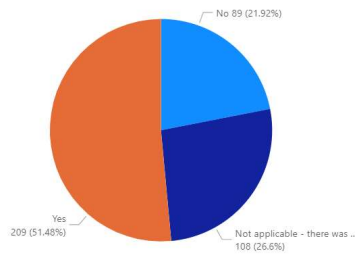
A process/ script to be created so that when a tenant calls into Customer Services, they are advised that the first visit may be an inspection to order parts, and that the repair maybe more likely on the 2nd visit. North Star should conduct research into which repairs are likely to be completed on the first visit, how often these repairs take place and amend their targets / approaches accordingly. Currently the Customer Service Standards state we will 'Prioritise right first time'. This should be replaced with specific, measurable targets.

Background:

- 63.3% (257) of respondents who have reported a repair advise that the issue was resolved on the first visit to their home.
- 36.7% (149) of respondents advised that it took more than one visit to have the issue resolved. (Targets for first time repairs are Ian Williams 80% and 0800 Repair 95%)



- 51.48% of respondents who reported a repair, and this was not resolved during the first visit, felt that the next steps were explained to them, and they were kept up to date.
- 26.6% of respondents who have reported a repair advised that they had no follow up needed.
- 21.92% of respondents advised that where they reported a repair and it wasn't resolved within the first visit, they did not feel that they had the next steps explained to them and they were not kept up to date.



In discussions, TVSP members felt that the percentage of customers who were not able to get a repair completed on the first visit was high. They were also concerned that nearly a fifth of respondents stated that they did not have follow on steps explained to them.

Furthermore, members who had also attended a Performance Group meeting on 27th September 2023, spoke about an example they had heard; in which a tenant had thought their tap would be replaced but, the operative was unable to complete it. A member of staff

informed the group that this was not unusual due to the high number of different tap types that would have to be kept on vans. The group felt that if North Star knew this, then tenants should as well.

Tenants on the group agreed that when reporting a repair, the language or intention was that a repair was booked, and their understanding was that this appointment was to complete the repair.

Method:

- TVSP designed and issued a survey to all North Star tenants via text and email (1,641 emails sent and 3,312 texts sent). They received 406 survey responses.

The survey included the following questions:

- If you have ever reported a repair, was the issue resolved on the first visit to your home?
- If you have ever reported a repair to North Star and it wasn't resolved during the first visit, was this explained to you and were you kept up to date with the next steps?

Following the survey findings, the group decided to ask the Property and Repairs Manager the following questions:

What does prioritise right first time mean?

What do Customer Services tell tenants when they report a repair that requires a visit?

Are there specific training documents or scripts that are used in Customer Services in relation to booking repairs?

How often to Customer Services receive refresher training?

Senior Management Team response:

Agreed and very helpful points.

- Analysis of works not completed at first visit is under way, to be completed in Dec 23
- New scripts and training is being rolled out in Customer Services, commencing mid Dec 23
- Individual targets based on complexity of job will be developed and monitored, with a focus on minimising

these so that messages and communication is clear with tenants.

Recommendation 2

Customer services staff should be skilled up to provide more detail on how long a repair will take to be completed. This will help manage tenant expectation of when a repair will be completed. North Star should look into an office cover rota so that a surveyor or other member of staff with sufficient technical knowledge to advise on more complex cases is always available.

Background:

The Customer Services Team currently ask the Property and Repairs Manager or the Surveyors any technical questions they receive during calls. If those staff aren't available, they aren't able to escalate issues.

Method:

TVSP interviewed the Property and Repairs Manager as part of their review. They were advised that at the moment, Customer Services rely on the technical knowledge of whoever is available in the office on the day. This is usually the Property and Repairs Manager or the Surveyors. It was felt that customer services staff could be skilled up to undertake this role.

Senior Management Team response:

It is agreed to analyse themes on timescales to complete repairs and where issues need to be escalated to the Property and Repairs Manager and Surveyors. Further training and support will be provided to frontline customer services staff. The Property and Repairs Manager will look at an office cover rota. This will guarantee customer services have access to a member of staff with the necessary technical knowledge should they come across a more complex repair issue. This will be implemented by January 2024.

Recommendation 3

Systems/ processes to be created that will allow tenants to send photos of repairs/ components to the contractors so that parts can be ordered in, and repairs completed first time.

Background:

This is not currently an option and there is a high percentage of tenants who do not have a repair completed during the first visit.

At the moment, one of the main reasons repairs cannot be completed first time is due to operatives not having the correct parts in their vans. Although steps are taken by the contractors to monitor stock in their vehicles, it is not possible to have every part for every repair available during the first visit.

Method:

TVSP interviewed the Property and Repairs Manager as part of their review. It was felt that more methods for improving the diagnosis of repairs would be useful. Specifically, it may help operatives understand the precise part required to complete a repair on the first visit.

Feedback of peoples' repairs experience from members of TVSP and Performance Group was also considered by the group.

Senior Management Team response:

Agreed, in conjunction with the repairs module on the new housing management system, to incorporate photographic and video functionality as part of logging repairs. This is due to be implemented by mid-August 2024.

Recommendation 4

North Star to look into the process for assigning priority services for vulnerable customers used by utility companies such as Northumbrian Water, Northern Powergrid etc.

Background:

It is not widely advertised that if a tenant declares a vulnerability to North Star, their repairs can be assessed and prioritised accordingly. The group were concerned that if tenants were vulnerable, the ability to complete a repair first time becomes more pressing.

The group have previously discussed that utility companies advertise widely that they have priority vulnerability registers. The group have asked why North Star can't do this as well? More info available here: [Get help from your supplier - Priority Services Register | Ofgem](#)

Method:

TVSP interviewed the Property and Repairs Manager as part of their review.

There is currently no advert in the tenant newsletters. The group looked at examples from utilities companies that included wide scale advertisement of their approach to working with vulnerable customers and giving them priority. The group felt it would be beneficial for North Star to explore this approach further. They would like to understand if this is something North Star could adopt.

Senior Management Team response:

Agreed to explore approaches implemented by utility companies and other best practice regarding the prioritisation of services to vulnerable customers. This will be completed by March 2024.

It is noted that the customer service team have the discretion, permission and the ability to prioritise repairs for tenants as necessary.

Recommendation 5

A process to be introduced so that when any Housing Officer/ Customer Services Team Member has contact with a tenant, they ask about any vulnerabilities that the tenant would like recording on North Star's system or ask about any changes to known vulnerabilities.

Background:

It is not widely advertised that if a tenant declares a vulnerability to North Star, their repairs can be assessed and prioritised accordingly.

Method:

TVSP interviewed the Property and Repairs Manager as part of their review.

Senior Management Team response:

Agreed and will form part of the strategy for collection of relevant customer data. Improved functionality will be available with the introduction of the new housing management system also. This is due to be implemented by mid-April 2024.

Process

The commitment TVSP used as the starting point for their review was:

'We will provide you with a safe home that is in good repair. If we don't, we will make it easy for you to tell us and make sure you understand how we will make it right.'

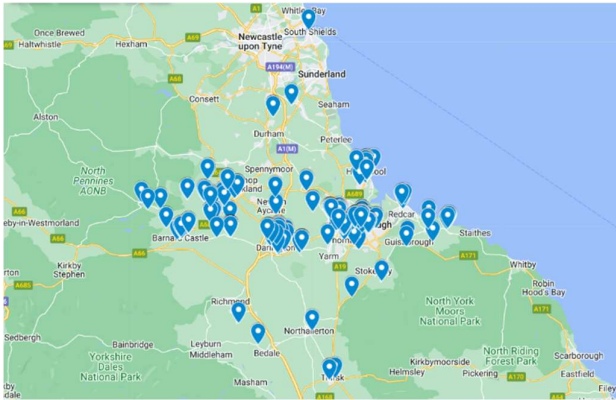
The survey was created by TVSP members and designed to explore tenants' experiences of the quality of their home, how safe they feel in their home and how easy it is to access the repairs service. There was acknowledgement that this commitment touches on complaints. However, it was felt that significant work has been done on complaints recently and further focus on this was not useful at this point. A full copy of the questions asked and responses is available here: [3rd Commitment Consultation Document Final Version.docx](#)

The survey was circulated by Email and text to all tenants with a registered Email address or mobile telephone number. There were 1,641 emails sent and 3,312 texts sent. The group recognised that in some supported housing schemes there were concentrations of accessibility needs (e.g. learning disability, limited IT access/ability etc.). Therefore, the group asked the Tenant Connector to forward the survey to Scheme Managers and Support Officers to complete with tenants one-to-one.

Responses received.

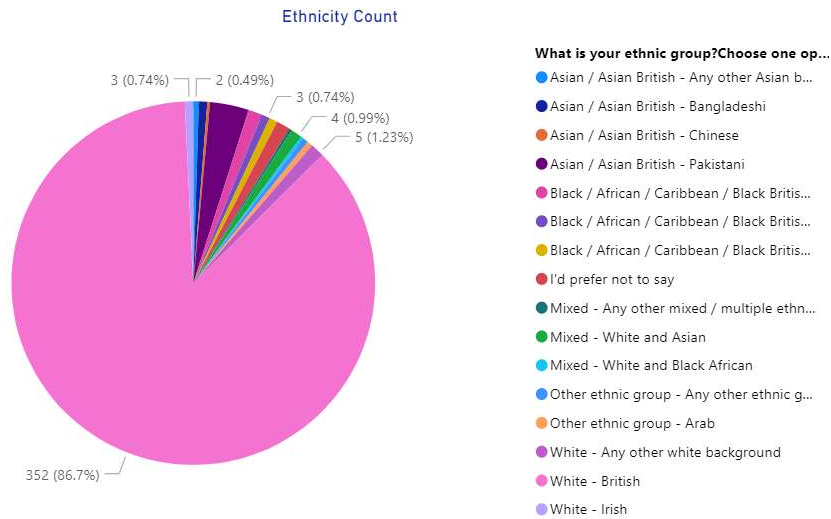
The survey received 406 responses in total which represents 11.18% of North Star households in total. The responses have been broken down into geographical location, ethnic background and age below. Overall, the responses provide a good representation of North Star households based on a comparison to overall data held.

Locations



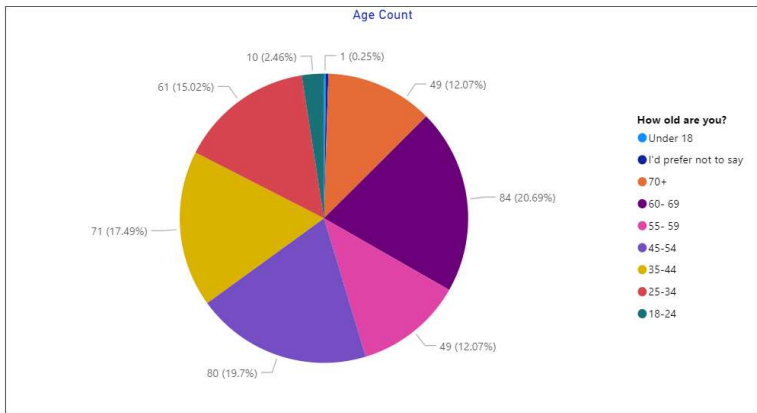
Ethnic Background

Below is breakdown of the ethnic backgrounds of the survey respondents. Broadly, the percentage of respondents that identified as White British was 86.7% versus 86% in North Star as a whole. The percentage of respondents who identified as being from any other ethnic background was 12% versus 12% in North Star as a whole. Only 1.2% of respondents did not disclose this information versus 2.4% in North Star as a whole.

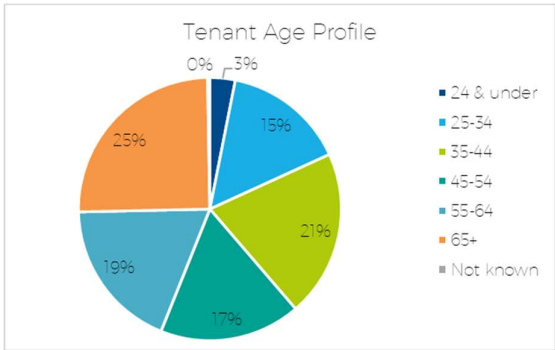


Age profile

Survey respondents:



North Star as a whole:



The categories of age data held centrally differ slightly to the survey question asked. This has been amended for future surveys to provide more easily understandable comparisons. However, both diagrams show a spread of ages with a smaller proportion of people aged under 24.

Overview of the analysis of the survey responses.

- Overall respondent feedback on North Stars repair service is positive. 85.94% of respondents rated the service excellent, good or very good with 82.5% also stating their home is currently in good repair. Where issues with the repair of the home were identified, they were sent to the relevant manager/member of staff.
- 89.65% of respondents feel it is very easy/ easy to contact North Star and 97.04% of respondents know how to report a repair.
- 91.63% of respondents feel very safe or somewhat safe in their homes. Comments from respondents who advised that they feel somewhat unsafe or very unsafe in their homes detailed information about the local area being unsafe, anti-social behaviour or fear of their home being broken into. Where tenants indicated that they did not feel safe

in their homes, the specific details were investigated and discussed with housing and supported housing staff. All issues were found to have been dealt with appropriately by staff.

- 87.19% of respondents would recommend North Star to their friends and family. 9.36% said they would maybe recommend North Star.
- When respondents were asked, 'Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the services you receive from North Star?' 7 out of 17 comments were positive. The remaining 10 were mixed feedback ranging from complaints about North Star's Repairs Service, to feedback on communal areas. Where tenants indicated they have had issues they have been passed to the relevant manager/member of staff.

The topic that was chosen and why.

Of particular interest to the group were responses to the question 'Was (your repair) completed on the first visit to your home? 36.7% of respondents answered 'no'. The group felt this was high given that North Star states that it 'prioritises right first-time repairs'. In addition, the following question 'If you have ever reported a repair to North Star and it wasn't resolved during the first visit, was this explained to you and were you kept up to date with the next steps?'. 21.9% responded 'no'. The group felt that this pointed to a potential communication solution.

The group also considered some feedback from performance group around repairs that could not be completed first time and how North Star made tenants aware of this.

Finally, the group felt that if tenants were vulnerable, the priority of completing a repair on the first visit could, in a lot of cases need to be increased.

The group felt they needed to investigate how North Star could improve the likelihood of being able to complete repairs first time and also, help tenants understand whether a right first-time repair was likely or not.

What investigations were carried out?

The group interviewed Adam Pearce, Property and Repairs Manager.

The group reviewed the previous 3 months of North Star's performance dashboard.

The group reviewed the Customer Service Standards document.
<https://www.northstarhg.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Service-Standards-Final-for-Web-2-1-1.pdf>

Findings

A full version of the survey findings can be found using the link below.

https://northstarhg.sharepoint.com/:w/s/Communities/EaJLW343TdZCunSEteuUfgoBpdkmJ3FIPR_Ux3lwqFJDQ?e=IIXfTU

Conclusion

As a result of the investigations, TVSP have made 5 recommendations to North Star. In summary, these recommendations focus on understanding the nature of the repairs we offer, how well we understand whether they can be completed first time and also how we share that information with tenants. The group felt that, if tenants know that a repair may not be completed on the first visit, they are more likely to have a better experience of the service if that happens.

This report has been agreed by TVSP and comments on the recommendations have been provided by Emma Speight, Executive Director of Assets and Growth.

The group will present this report, with Emma's comments, to The Board during their next Board meeting on 11th December at North Star's Head Office.