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Cornwall Council Rent and Business Plan consultation November 23/24

Summary

123 residents participated in our survey. 10 of these residents joined an online discussion group to discuss the issues and feedback in more detail, and they were joined by a member of the Tenants Forum.

The survey results show that residents' main priorities are repairs and maintenance, tackling damp and mould, and new or more homes. The majority of those who took part in the survey (76%) support selling costly to repair homes, and would sell when the cost reached £75k plus. Many residents had comments about selling homes, and wanted reassurances that the money would go into social housing and that they would be good quality.

In the online discussion group, there was a consensus to sell when a home was too costly to repair, but not about who to or how much for. More engagement is needed to develop a policy on selling homes, especially with regards to sitting tenants. Residents want us to focus on investing in damp, mould, and condensation, as there are many homes that suffer from this. But, they also want us to support a lot of investment and focus on repairs and maintenance.

Introduction

Each year Cornwall Housing/Cornwall Council consult with residents on the Council rent setting and business plan. Over recent years we have worked towards asking a wider range of customers for their views to widen our reach.

This year's Cornwall Council rent and business plan consultation was a two-stage process. Firstly, residents were invited to take part in a survey. The second part was an online discussion group with residents who completed the survey, Su Spence (SS), Managing Director for Cornwall Housing (CHL), and Mike Owen (MO), Landlord Services Manager for Cornwall Council (CC).

We developed a range of supporting information for the consultation this year, including:

- Online information video and leaflet with a link to a Let's Talk online survey
- Postal information leaflet with a survey

We invited over 2000 residents to take part:

- 158 tenants who said they wanted to be more involved in rents from the Better Connections survey were invited by email and post.
- 2011 emails were sent to residents that receive the Customer Magazine by email, sent twice.
- To all tenants on our website and Facebook posts.

This year, the consultation questions and supporting information focused on how a tenant would spend a £100 of their rent. After looking at how their rent was divided up last year, we asked what would their priorities be. We also asked for views on Cornwall Council selling a council house if it needed a lot of work and would cost a lot of money to put it right.

123 residents completed the survey

11 residents attended the online chat (including a member of the Tenants Forum)

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Tenants' feedback to the survey

Question 1 – Out of £100 we receive, where should we spend it?

- Housing management - £15.50
- Damp and mould - £26.90
- New social homes - £27.80
- Repairs/ maintenance - £29.80

Some tenants allocated £100 to their top priority (mostly tackling damp and mould or new homes). Most tenants only allocated £10 or £20 of their £100 to housing management services.

Question 2 - Is it ok to sell homes that cost a lot to repair?

76% of customers said yes they would sell the properties if they were to cost too much to put right.

There were some conditions and concerns raised to selling homes (for the full feedback see Appendix A). The main themes were:

- Keep up the maintenance on existing homes
- Replace with social housing (replace what with social housing?)
- Invest in existing homes – especially putting more money into tackling damp and mould
- Concerns about moving people out of their homes. If you need to, make sure it's to somewhere suitable

Question 3 – What would be the level at which to consider selling?

- 48% said they would sell if the cost were between £50k-£75k,
- 27% said they would sell when it reached £75 – 100k.
- 25% would not sell until it was £100k or more.
 - So, in total 75% said they would sell if the cost were between, £75k-£100k.

Tenants' feedback in the online discussion group

At the online group, Mike explained that the standard of homes has been impacted by rent freezes by the Government. This impacted the spend that the Council had available. The Council is in a situation where it has need for more money than it has available. So, whilst the Government rent cap decisions are awaited, it is likely that the Council will need to set rents as high as the Government will allow. Mike also explained that whilst tenants are suffering from a lack of investment in the maintenance of their homes, some homes were not designed for modern safety standards. This is why they are too costly to repair.

During the introduction to the online meeting, tenants shared their concerns about the standard of empty homes and the quality and time taken to undertake repairs. Su provided assurances that Cornwall Housing has started the work to improve the repairs and maintenance service. However, there is much more work to do and the standards are not where they need to be yet. There was also a concern raised about the standard of temporary accommodation, which usually comes under a different budget to Council housing, so is in Mike's remit and not Su's.

The group split into two discussion groups, one on expenditure and the other about selling homes for re-investment.

Discussion outcomes:

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- **Priorities for expenditure in council homes and services** - the priority was to keep supporting repairs and maintenance, but specifically to keep a focus on damp, mould, and condensation. To support a damp and mould team who work to identify individual solutions to each home that reports these issues.
- **Selling costly to repair homes** - all agreed that some properties are beyond repair and that they will need to be sold. The group did not reach an agreement on how much to sell them for, or who to. The group were also unable to reach a consensus as to what to do if the property was occupied and the residents needed to move out for works to take place, or to sell. Mike said he would give this more thought before developing a policy.

Next steps

Tenants' views from this consultation will feed into the report sent to the Council Cabinet in January, which will discuss rent setting and the housing business plan. The expected rent cap from the Government will guide the rent level.

Appendix A – comments in full available on request