

CUSTOMER CONSULTATION APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2018



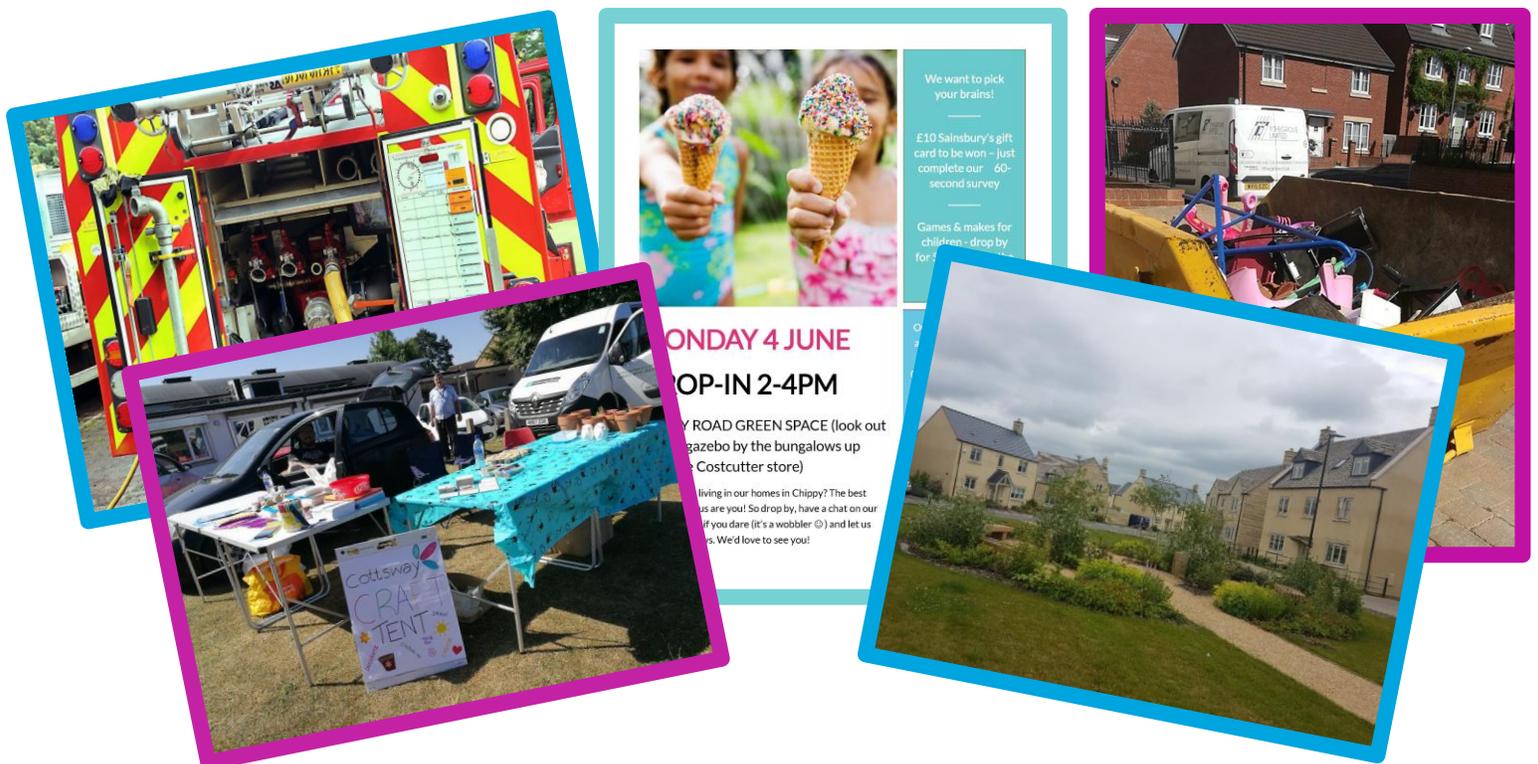
The Homes & Communities Agency's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (July 2017) places a specific expectation on registered providers (social landlords) to consult with tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving them in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.

LISTENING TO TENANTS

The Grenfell Tower fire and its aftermath brought the question of involving and listening to tenants into sharp focus. Tenants in the block had repeatedly warned of dangers in its design and maintenance but had not been listened to before the fire that claimed so many lives.

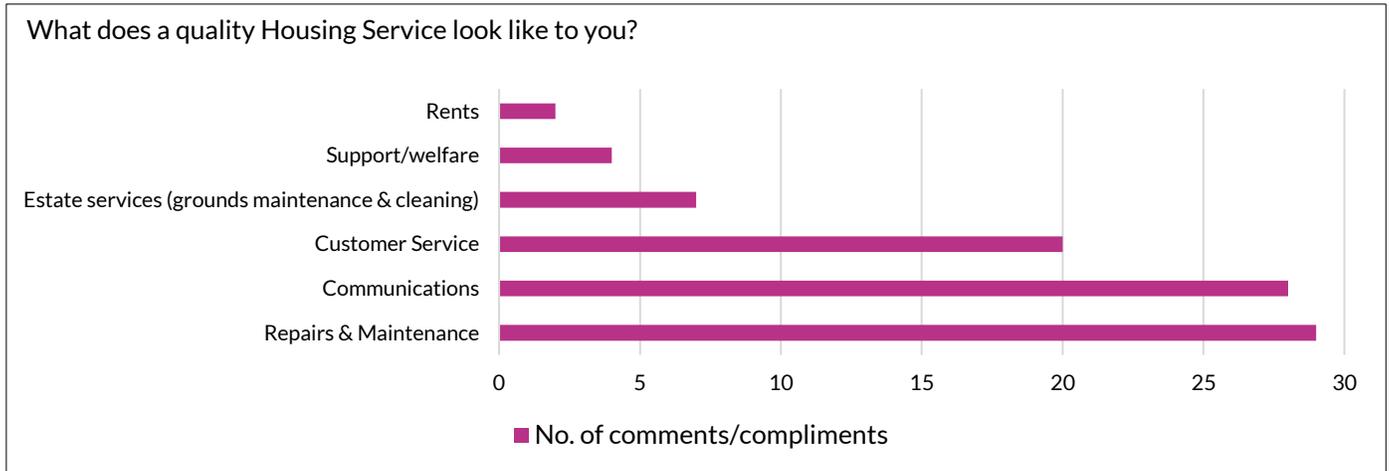
In the wake of this tragedy, the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government conducted a large consultation exercise in Autumn 2017, with the then Housing Minister, Alok Sharma, touring the country to talk to tenants and housing professionals. The same set of questions was asked at every event, about individual experiences and people's views on how to ensure the tenants' voice can be heard and listened to in future.

The Government was due to publish a green paper on social housing which took into account the feedback from the 2017 consultation, so Cottsway decided to ask the same questions of our own tenants to see how their views compared to tenants nationally. We also asked customers about their community priorities and whether they would like to be further involved in governance and scrutiny at Cottsway.

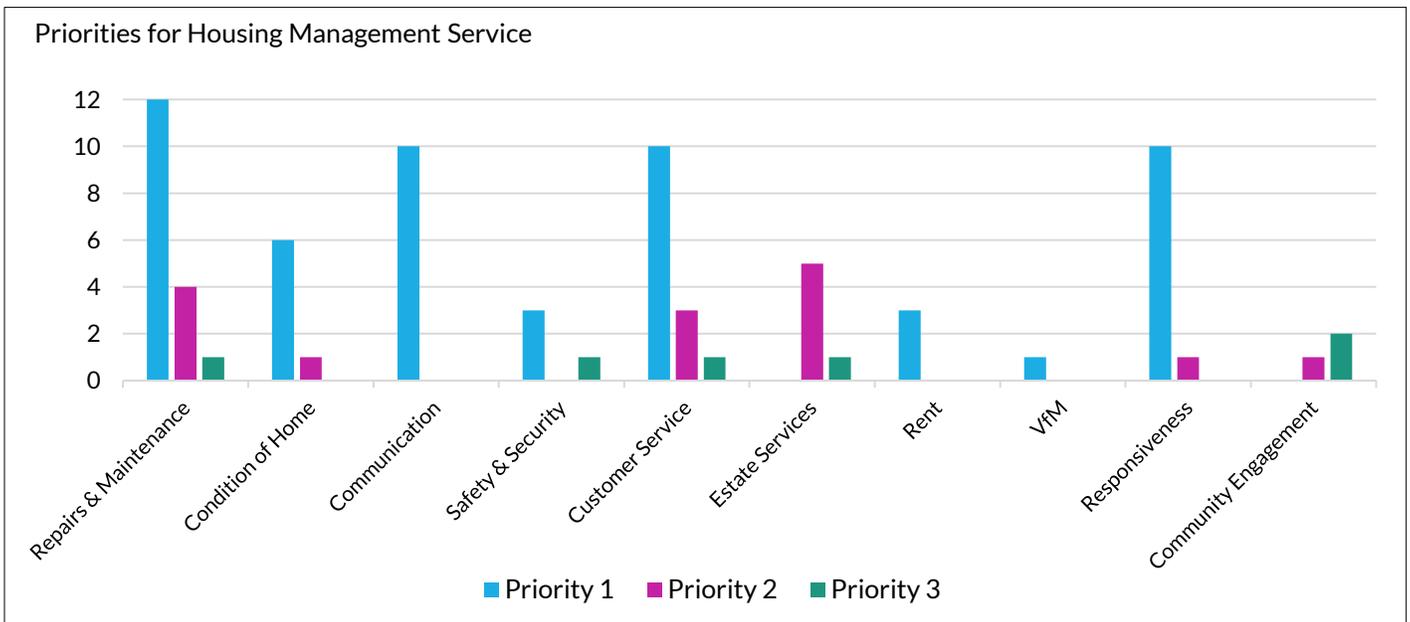


WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT OUR HOUSING SERVICE

When asked *'What does a quality service from Cottsway look like to you?'* customers mentioned Repairs & Maintenance (and related compliments) closely followed by Communications and Customer Service (also including related compliments).



We then asked: *'What are your main priorities for a quality housing service?'* The same themes were evident in the responses:



Finally, we asked customers *'How can we address these priorities together?'* Overwhelmingly the response focused on **communication**. Many residents from our independent living schemes told us that they would like **regular meetings**, with more time and face-to-face contact with staff, especially their neighbourhood housing officer, and more estate inspections. Others advised that we provide **more information** to customers and **customer service training** for staff. There were also calls to consider requests on an individual basis and an observation that making services available on line would not necessarily mean quicker repairs.

GOVERNANCE & SCRUTINY

The main reason for consulting with our customers was to find out what you thought about the opportunities we offer for getting involved in governance and scrutiny at Cottsway. This is currently offered through membership of the Resident Scrutiny Panel. So we asked: **'How effective do you think the panel are in scrutinising Cottsway and the services we provide?'** Your responses fell into three groups:

- Don't know (10)
- Not very effective (4)
- Effective (1)

Nearly a third of respondents (28) were unaware of the panel, which may explain why nearly half did not answer this question.

"Speak to us!! Come to meet us!!

"Have more meetings like this. Ideally every two months."

Online - especially for working people. I can't attend in person because of work - I need notice to take part in meetings. I would do online."

We then asked: **'How can we help Customer Voices to be heard?'**

There were very clear responses to this question.

Overwhelming you told us that you want more **personal contact** with us and opportunities **to talk and be listened to**. Many customers living in schemes would like **regular local meetings** or visits (14). There was more of an appetite for **online communication** using email, social media or forums amongst younger customers living in our general needs homes (12). There was also a group of customers who still prefer to receive information by post (6). It was good to hear that nearly 10% of you were **happy to complete surveys** but we noted that one customer felt excluded due to a mobility impairment and not having access to the internet.

There was a mixed response to our final question in this section. We asked: **'How can we involve you in the governance and scrutiny of your housing service?'** Although a few people mentioned door-knocking and phone calls, more of you preferred to be kept informed by **post or email** or to join group chats online to discuss issues. One customer suggested scrutiny panels for each area and others suggested that the Resident Scrutiny Panel should be **more visible out in the community**.

It was clear that **some people were unsure** what getting involved might mean, and that **some lacked the confidence** to take on this role. We were pleased that nearly half of you (44) said that you were interested in becoming involved in governance and scrutiny in some way.

"You have a Scrutiny Panel but we don't hear from them.... They need to be more visible..."

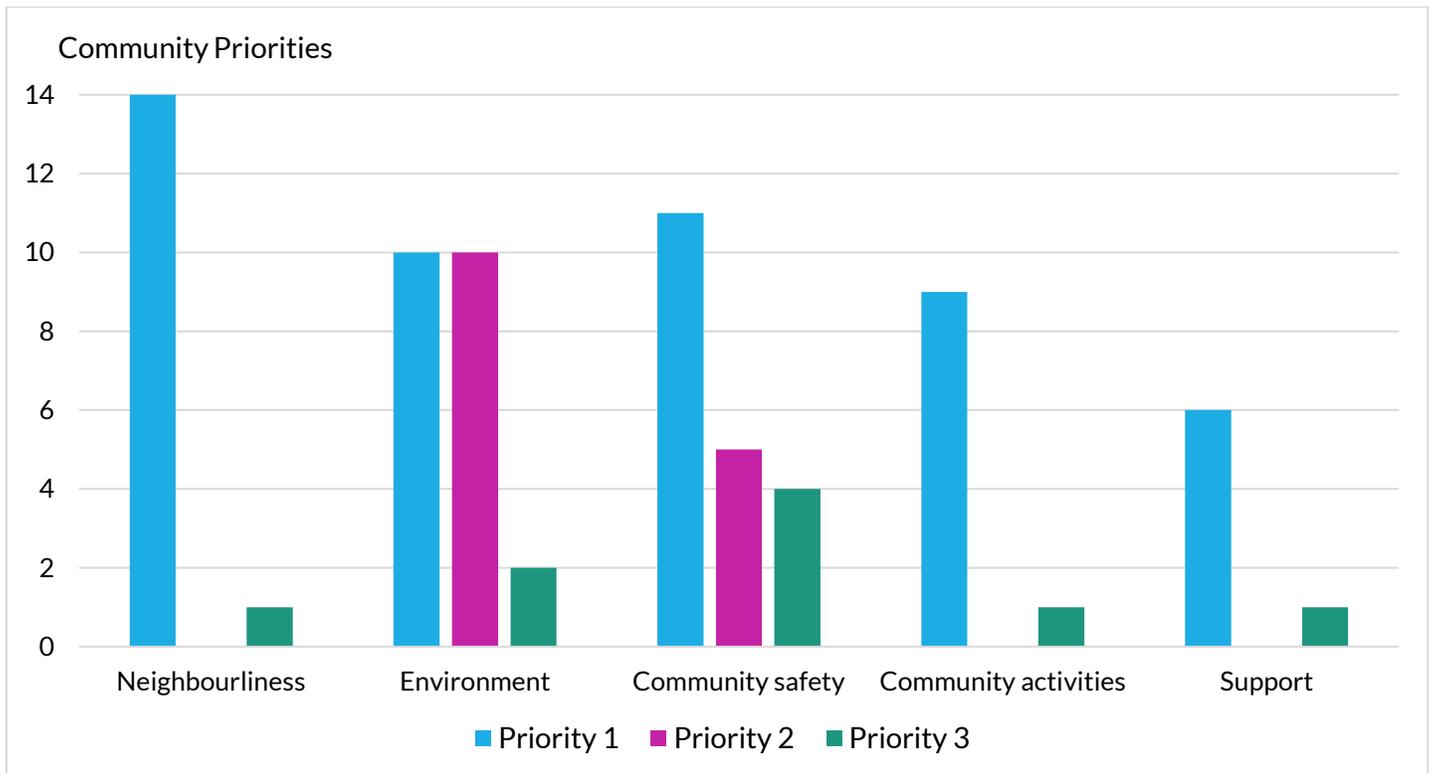
"It would be nice to have a member of the scrutiny panel to come along to us and have an informed meeting!"

"Haven't heard from them but would like to."

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

We also took the opportunity whilst speaking to customers to find out your priorities for the communities where you live. This will help inform our new Community Engagement Strategy. We asked: **'What are your main priorities for your community?'**

The most important thing overall was the local **environment** – you value **cleanliness**, tidiness and well-maintained paths and roads with green space and **play areas for children** that are looked after and safe to use. However, the issue that most people put as their top priority was a sense of **neighbourliness** – sharing your community with **good neighbours** who are friendly and helpful. **Safety** was also important – you want neighbourhoods with little or **no ASB**, where crime is dealt with and it's **a safe place for your children** to grow up. A lack of community venues and activities is an issue experienced by several of you (10). A small but significant proportion of people also wanted to see **support** for those who need it – people suffering from **loneliness or isolation** – and some were prepared to help with this themselves.



Finally, we asked you: **'How can we address these priorities together?'** There were a range of responses covering both ways that Cottsway can work with customers and ways that we can work with other partners such as local councils, the police and developers. Some of you felt that more **meetings and face-to-face contact** would help us to **work together** (8). Almost as many of you felt that Cottsway should engage more with the local council, police, developers, Neighbourhood Watch and local events to **promote better facilities for children and young people, safer neighbourhoods** and **a community voice on planning issues**.

OUTCOMES

Your feedback during this consultation told us that we need to address issues around repairs and maintenance, communication and customer service. It also underlined that, whilst customers would like our Resident Scrutiny Panel to go out into the community, we must also provide more accessible ways for people to get involved in governance and scrutiny at a time and place convenient to them.

In communities, you want us to be more visible, working together with partners to promote safer neighbourhoods, better community facilities and a community voice.

We will use your feedback to ensure that we provide responsive services that do what matters most to our customers and to review how we involve you in governance and scrutiny. It will also inform the development of our new Community Strategy 2019-2022, in particular the themes of *understanding our customers*, *empowering our customers*, and *enabling communities to thrive*.

We were pleased to see an increase in customer satisfaction with '*listening to views and acting on them*' during Q2 (July – September) of **9%**. We believe this confirms the positive responses we received from customers who welcomed the chance to talk to us in person and make their views known.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The Green Paper on Social Housing was eventually published on 14 August 2018. The Executive Summary said that ministers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had met and talked with almost 1000 residents of social housing during their consultation and that more than 7,000 had contributed their views online. These views have informed the Government's vision for social housing which focuses on five key areas:

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

Cottsway customers have highlighted some of these areas in response to our own consultation - for example, ensuring your homes are warm and well maintained, how customers' voices can be heard and how we can support you to make your communities clean, safe and happy places to live. Other areas, such as tackling stigma around social housing and building new homes, weren't raised so we need to consider why that is and whether further research is required.

We will discuss the results of the consultation at meetings in our independent living schemes, in focus groups and online. Thank you to everyone who took part, your feedback has been invaluable. Please let us know if you would like to participate in the follow up meetings.

FACTS & FIGURES

Community events were held at:

April:

- Caroline Court, Woodstock
- Queen Emma's Dyke, Witney
- Edington House, Witney

May:

- Shakenoak, North Leigh
- St Mary's Court, Witney
- Midwinter estate, Cheltenham
- Eynsham Scout Hall
- Bampton Fire Station

June:

- Chipping Norton – Hailey Avenue
- Charlbury Community Centre
- Rye Grass, Woodstock
- Yells Way, Fairford
- Carterton Play & Activity Day
- Westfield Road, Witney
- Blakes Avenue, Witney

July:

- Cloatley Crescent, Royal Wootton Bassett
- Verda Place, Badgeworth



The questionnaire was also made available online via Survey Monkey 17 August – 6 September 2018

103 customers attended one of our community events or completed a survey online. 93 completed a questionnaire – 84 in person, 3 by post and 6 online. 72 customers completed our Top 3 Priorities survey.

The breakdown of customers who completed our survey was:

18-35:	2% female / 2.5% male
36-59:	22% female / 2.5% male
60+:	48% female / 22% male
Not known:	1% female
Total:	74% female / 27% male

9 staff and 2 resident scrutiny panel members helped to facilitate at different events. It took 168 hours of staff time to plan and deliver the consultation.

Most events took place on Cottsway property (except in Bampton where Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service kindly allowed us to use their station). This was cost-free but we spent an additional £79 on venue hire using community venues in Charlbury and Eynsham,.

For more information, please contact the Communities Team on Tel: 01993 890000 or email: contact@cottsway.co.uk.

Find us at www.cottsway.co.uk or



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