



**Resident Satisfaction Surveys in Ontario**  
Report of Survey Consultation in March 2011

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*Prepared by: Margie Carlson  
Director, Research, Policy and Networks (RPN)  
Housing Services Corporation*

*Tim Leung  
Research Analyst, Research, Policy and Networks (RPN)  
Housing Services Corporation*

*Euan Ramsay  
Associate, Housemark UK*

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# 1 Introduction

The Housing Services Corporation (HSC), in its capacity as the organization responsible for performance measurement for Service Managers and housing providers in Ontario, has undertaken a recent extensive consultation exercise with key stakeholders in the social housing sector in the province, to discuss the possibility of developing and introducing a standard resident satisfaction survey for the sector.

The starting point for this exercise was the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy for Ontario, which notes:

- that the province and Service Managers would be required to report on progress in a number of areas, including the use of Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Surveys
- that the surveys will solicit residents' thoughts about their accommodation and inform housing providers, municipalities and the province on how 'we can do better'
- that the survey will be developed in consultation with the Ministry, Service Managers, housing providers, key stakeholders and residents.

This report describes the programme of consultation, which involved meetings and discussions with a wide range of stakeholders in the province, including social housing providers, municipal authorities, representative bodies and the provincial government itself. The report identifies the key issues raised in the consultation that relate to the possible introduction of a resident satisfaction survey system in Ontario, describes the lessons that might be learned from the current resident satisfaction system used in the United Kingdom. The report also suggests how a resident satisfaction survey system might be introduced into Ontario, taking account of the constraints and the lessons from the UK.

## 1.1 Background to the consultation programme

As stated, the key impetus for the consultation was the publication in 2010 of 'Building Foundations : Building Futures – Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy' by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). This document presented a clear approach

to simplifying the existing housing system and focusing on the needs of the community, and included a suggestion that Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Surveys would be introduced to collect the views of residents about their homes and services and that would require Service Managers to report on these views and other local performance measures.

The consultation was also driven by a recognition on the part of HSC that resident satisfaction surveys could play a significant role in the development of service standards amongst social housing providers, in ensuring that the views and expectations of residents are taken into account when designing and delivering housing services, which in turn would drive organisations forward in raising standards of service. HSC was keen to test through the consultation the extent to which the social housing sector in Ontario had the capacity to introduce and develop common service standards as part of the move towards conducting resident satisfaction surveys.

HSC was assisted throughout the consultation by Euan Ramsay, an Associate of HouseMark UK, an independent organisation providing benchmarking and consultancy services to social housing providers in the UK. Euan has extensive experience of conducting STATUS surveys in the UK, STATUS being a standardised tenant satisfaction survey that all social housing providers in England with more than 1000 homes have, until recently, been required to conduct on a regular basis amongst their customers. HSC was keen to understand the lessons from the STATUS (and the new STAR system) in developing a resident satisfaction system for Ontario.

## 1.2 Aims of the consultation programme

The consultation on the introduction of a resident satisfaction survey for social housing providers in Ontario had the following key aims:

- To inform social housing providers and other key stakeholders about how resident satisfaction surveys might work in their particular context, drawing on the experiences of the STATUS system in the UK
- To understand current practice amongst social housing providers in the province in respect of surveying resident satisfaction, and in particular, the extent to which the survey results fed into service improvements

- To test the extent to which social housing providers might wish to conduct resident satisfaction surveys and to establish the role of HSC in providing the possible infrastructure for a survey system
- To use the outcomes of the consultation (Stage 2 of the project) to develop a system of testing tenant satisfaction that had the support of all key stakeholders, including the providers, the tenants and the funding and regulatory bodies involved in the social housing sector.

### 1.3 The conduct of the Stage 1 consultation

The consultation programme involved a series of face to face meetings and web seminars with key stakeholders in the housing sector across Ontario, including Service Managers, municipalities, District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs), Local Housing Companies (LHCs), housing providers and sector organisations, including:

- City of Toronto and Toronto Community Housing
- Region of Peel and Peel Living
- City of Ottawa and Ottawa Community Housing
- Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)
- United Way of Greater Toronto
- Service Managers from Thunder Bay, Kenora, Rainy River and Haldimand-Norfolk
- Local housing providers from Thunder Bay, Kenora, Rainy River and Haldimand-Norfolk
- Service Managers from Sarnia, London, Windsor, Chatham-Kent and Huron
- Webinar with the Service Managers from the Seaway Group (Kingston, Cornwall, Lennox & Addington, Hastings, Leeds and Grenville, Lanark, Renfrew, Prescott & Russell)
- Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA)
- Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF)
- *Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)*

- *Service Manager Housing Network of Ontario ( SMHN)*
- Social Housing Research Committee ( SHRC)
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH).

The consultation took place across Ontario during March 2011. For HSC, the consultation was led by Margie Carlson, Director of Research, Policy and Networks (RPN), supported by Tim Leung, Research Analyst at HSC and Euan Ramsay, Associate at HouseMark UK.

## 2 The context

### 2.1 Social housing in Ontario

Social housing in Ontario is provided by a range of different providers, as Table 1 below shows. There are an estimated 260,703 units of social housing provided across the province, with around half provided by local housing companies.

**Table 1: Social housing units in Ontario by type of provider**

Social housing provider	Providers	Units	Average unit size
Co-operative	256	20,941	82
Federal Co-operative	281	19,255	71
Federal	424	33,156	79
Independent	63	3,828	201
Local Housing Corporation	47	129,061	2,746
Municipal Non-Profit	97	11,849	122
Private Non-Profit	481	38,168	79
Supportive	249	4,445	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,898</b>	<b>260,703</b>	<b>153</b>

Source : Housing Services Corporation estimates, 2012-02

Table 2 below shows that the majority of social housing units are provided by only a small number of provider, with only 1.4% of providers managing 500 units or more and the largest 4 social providers accounting for about a third (33%) of all the units in management.

**Table 2: Social housing units in Ontario by provider size**

<b>Provider size (units)</b>	<b>No. of providers</b>	<b>Providers as % total</b>	<b>Cum % providers</b>
Under 50	757	39.9%	44.6%
50 to 99	500	26.3%	74.0%
100 to 499	395	20.8%	97.2%
500 to 999	27	1.4%	98.8%
1000 to 4999	16	0.8%	99.8%
5000 or more	4	0.2%	100.0%
Unknown	199	10.5%	
<b>ALL SIZES</b>	<b>1,898</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

*Source : Housing Services Corporation estimates, 2012-02*

Table 2 shows that almost half the social housing providers in the province (44.6%) manage 50 units or fewer and about 7 providers in every ten (74%) have fewer than 100 units in management.

In 2002, public housing in Ontario was decentralised and passed over to local municipalities, known as 'Service Managers'. The service managers are responsible for the strategic development of housing and for regulating the social housing in their area. Local housing companies are the main vehicles through which social housing in a municipality is managed, with a range of other providers also managing social housing units, as Table 1 shows.

The Housing Services Corporation (HSC) was established in 2002 at the time of decentralisation of public housing. The HSC is a non-profit corporation that provides the social housing sector with a range of value-added services that enable social housing providers to develop safe and affordable homes and vibrant communities, including energy management, investment, insurance, natural gas purchasing, training and research.

The consultation identified that a number of housing providers and service managers are conducting or have conducted surveys in their areas, but they are normally dependent on available resources/capacity. Province-wide comparability of survey results is currently not

possible, however, since there is either no uniform approach to the surveys in terms of questions asked or methodology used. As a consequence, there has been no systematic collection of resident satisfaction information for benchmarking purposes across the sector.

While it is true that the two main sector associations – ONPHA and CHF - have developed a standard resident satisfaction survey template for their members, based on the UK STATUS template, to date only a handful of the smaller providers have carried out these resident surveys. In the main, this is an issue of resources and, in part, because there is not an industry-wide move towards these surveys.

## 2.2 Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy

Late in 2010, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in Ontario published *'Building Foundations : Building Futures, Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy'*. This document followed a detailed consultation with the key stakeholders in the province about the future development of affordable housing. The document set out the vision for the strategy as follows:

*'To improve Ontarian's access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing, and provide a solid foundation on which to secure employment, raise families and build strong communities'*

The strategy is built on four key pillars, namely, putting people first, creating strong partnerships, supporting affordable options and accountability. The strategy has formed the basis of forthcoming legislation – the *Housing Services Act, 2011* – which is due to be enacted in January 2011 following final consultation.

The LTAHS document included a number of statements in relation to the possible development of resident satisfaction surveys in Ontario, specifically:

- *'Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Surveys will solicit housing residents' thoughts about their accommodation and inform housing providers, municipalities and the province how we can do better'*

- *'Local performance measures and the tenant satisfaction survey will be developed in consultation with Service managers, key stakeholders and tenants. Service Managers will begin collecting this information in 2012 and reporting on performance measures by 2013'.*

The Ontario Housing Policy Statement followed up the initial consultations with the social housing sector on the LTHAS document, and was published by MMAH in the summer of 2011. This set out the following in relation to resident satisfaction surveys and performance measurement:

- *'Under the Act, there are provincial interests in a system of housing and homelessness that... ensure appropriate accountability for public funding'*
- *'The LTHAS committed to a series of performance measures ..., as well as Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Surveys and local metrics, reported on by Service Managers in order to track progress on meeting local needs'*
- *'Service Managers will ensure that local housing and homelessness plans ... provide for public consultation, progress measuring and reporting'.*

The *Housing Services Act, 2011* (parts of which are due to be enacted in January 2012) contains a number of clauses that set out the wider provisions affecting resident satisfaction surveys, with the detail to be agreed and implemented at a later stage through published regulations. The key provisions of the Act are as follows:

### ***Housing and homelessness plans***

*Each service manager shall have a plan to address housing and homelessness (c.6, Sched.1, s.6 (1) [which] must include :*

- a) an assessment of current and future housing needs within the service manager's service area*
- b) objectives and targets relating to housing needs*
- c) a description of the measures proposed to meet the objectives and targets*
- d) a description of how progress towards meeting the objectives and targets will be measured*
- e) such other matters as may be prescribed (c.6, Sched.1, s.6 (2)).*

### **Periodic reports to Minister**

*At the prescribed times, a service manager shall give the Minister reports on the following:*

- (a) the implementation of its housing and homelessness plan*
- (b) the administration and funding of its transferred housing programs*
- (c) such other matters as may be prescribed (c.6, Sched.1, s.20 (1)) .*

*The reports required under subsection (1) must be given in the form and manner authorized by the Minister and must include the prescribed information and the prescribed documents(c.6, Sched.1, s.20 (2)) .*

*A service manager shall give the Minister :*

- (a) such reports as the regulations require*
- (b) such reports, documents and information as the Minister requests (c.6, Sched.1, s.21 (1)).*

### **General duty of housing provider**

*The housing provider shall ensure that the project is well managed, maintained in a satisfactory state of repair and fit for occupancy (c.6, Sched.1, s.69 (2)).*

### **Operating rules for projects**

*A housing provider shall operate a Part VII housing project and govern itself in accordance with :*

- (a) the prescribed provincial requirements*
- (b) the local standards made by the service manager (c.6, Sched.1, s.75 (1)).*

*A service manager may make local standards only with respect to the prescribed matters (c.6, Sched.1, s.75 (2)).*

The key elements of this strategy for Ontario are:

- First, that service managers will be required to produce plans for housing and homelessness in their areas, which include housing standards for housing providers and regular reports on the extent to which targets have been met
- Second, that the measurement of performance will be integral to the ongoing monitoring of the delivery of the plans, although the specific measures and the methodology to be used is not yet defined
- Third, that the views of residents will be one of the performance measures used.

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## 3 The UK experience – lessons from STATUS

### 3.1 The social housing context and STATUS

In the United Kingdom, social housing is provided by a mix of housing associations, and local authorities (including through Arms Length Management Companies (ALMOs)) who house almost 5 million households, 17% of all households.

Amongst the 325 local authorities in England, only 213 own social housing stock, with the remainder having disposed of their homes to housing associations. The average (mean) size of local authority stock in England is 8200 homes and the median size is 5400 homes. Amongst the 2500 housing associations in England, the majority (75%) have fewer than 500 homes and the largest association has some 60,000 homes.

The development of standard satisfaction survey for tenants has varied between the four countries in the United Kingdom, with the social housing sector in England taking the lead for the most part, and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland adopting variations of the practice in England in different ways.

In England, prior to 1999, the larger social housing providers – both housing associations and local authorities – undertook satisfaction surveys of their tenants on an occasional basis. There was no prescription on social housing providers to carry out such surveys and many of those conducted were individual to the organisations and no common set of questions was in use, except for a limited number of landlords, mainly local authorities. In this respect, the picture was similar to the current situation in Ontario.

In 1999, in line with a greater emphasis on resident involvement in housing management being promoted by the Housing Corporation in England, the National Housing Federation of Housing Associations (known now as the NHF), the umbrella body for housing associations, developed a template questionnaire for tenant surveys, termed STATUS. The aim of developing STATUS was to provide a standard platform and approach to surveying tenants and to provide key benchmarking information across the sector that would enable social housing providers to identify the improvements needed to their services.

The STATUS template offered a standard set of questions covering tenant satisfaction with the key services provided and that also collected key information on neighbourhood issues, service priorities and household and demographic information. The initial STATUS template was intended for surveys amongst general needs and sheltered tenants, and in due course, separate surveys were developed for tenants in sheltered housing, for tenants in supported housing and for home owners (leaseholders and shared owners).

STATUS became widely used by the social housing sector in England and by 2004, the Housing Corporation (now the Tenant Services Authority) had incorporated the STATUS survey into regulation and housing associations in England with more than 1000 tenanted homes in management were required to undertake a STATUS survey at least every three years, and to report the key results through the Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR) made on an annual basis. In addition, local authority housing departments and ALMOs in England were required by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to conduct a STATUS survey of their general needs and sheltered tenants every two years.

For housing associations, the STATUS requirement also extended to conducting surveys of home owners where 100 or more homes were managed.

While there was no requirement for STATUS surveys to be conducted in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the majority of social housing providers in Wales in particular undertook STATUS surveys on a regular basis.

STATUS this developed from an industry initiative into a regulatory requirement in England. While this was restricted as a requirement to the larger social housing providers, with more than 1000 rented homes and 100 home ownership homes in management, smaller social housing providers also conducted STATUS surveys, benefiting from the availability of benchmarking information and encouraged to develop a regular approach to testing the satisfaction of residents with their services.

## 3.2 Using STATUS results

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) had (until March 2012) required that three key STATUS results are reported by housing associations in England through the RSR, namely :

- Overall satisfaction with services
- Satisfaction that views are taken into account
- Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance service

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) also required that associations report annually to tenants on their performance, including results of STATUS and other feedback. This feedback has been used by the TSA (and the Housing Corporation before that) to identify whether individual housing associations are performing to an acceptable standard, with low or varying STATUS scores amongst other factors that would trigger an inspection of the organisation by the Audit Commission or a formal request for further information; inspections have also applied to local authorities.

Within social housing providers, STATUS results have been used as the main source of customer feedback and thus as the basis for improving service delivery. Practice in this respect varies, with some social housing providers content only to conduct a STATUS survey every two or three years, in order to comply with regulations; other social housing providers conduct STATUS on an annual basis, in order to ensure that they have a more up to date and reliable picture of service delivery, with a number also conducting a range of other service-specific surveys on a continuous or rolling basis to supplement STATUS information.

## 3.3 The development of STAR

Since April 2012, STATUS is no longer a requirement amongst social housing providers, and the TSA itself is due to be scrapped by the end of March 2013. In response to requests from the social housing sector for the continuation of a standard system for measuring resident satisfaction, HouseMark UK has developed the STAR system (Satisfaction of Tenants and Residents). This updates and replaces STATUS and has the following key features:

- ◆ Social housing providers build their own questionnaires from the STAR library of standard questions
  - There is a range of ‘core’ questions for all surveys, covering satisfaction with:
    - the overall landlord service
    - the overall quality of the home
    - the neighbourhood as a place to live
    - rent and service charges as value for money
    - the repairs and maintenance service
    - how far landlord listens to residents’ views and acts on them
  - The STAR system includes a questionnaire library with a range of standard optional questions for particular services and tenure groups
  - Different survey methods can be used, including postal self-completion, telephone interview and face to face interview surveys
  - STAR surveys are recommended at least every two years
  - The STAR system is voluntary but recommended as good practice
  - HouseMark provides a detailed benchmarking facility.

In addition to STATUS / STAR surveys, wide range of other exercises that collect customer feedback are also conducted by social housing providers in the UK, including:

- Continuous monitoring surveys of key services (‘tracker surveys)
- Qualitative exercises, such as focus groups
- Resident inspector exercises to test key services and to develop better approaches to service delivery.

### 3.4 The lessons from STATUS / STAR for the Ontario context

The development of STATUS and now STAR offers an example for the Ontario social housing context in demonstrating that the social housing industry can take the initiative in developing a standard approach to consulting with residents and to seeking their views of the services provided, in order to improve how these are delivered.

The key advantages of STATUS / STAR include the following:

- Provides a standard template for all social housing providers to test customer feedback
- Requires activation at least every two or three years, enabling changes in satisfaction with key services to be tracked
- Provides benchmarking information across the sector
- Can be run in-house at lower cost using postal self-completion questionnaires

The key disadvantages of STATUS / STAR include the following:

- The postal self-completion survey method can introduce response bias, particularly amongst social housing residents – elderly White tenants (the ‘loyal’) are more likely to complete surveys than busy, younger families from minority ethnic groups
- That social housing providers only conduct a STAR survey every two or three years to test the extent to which their services are meeting the expectations of their customers; this approach may not provide a sufficiently regular picture of service delivery
- The STATUS survey template questionnaires tended to be long, not well laid out or worded and not conducive to responding – response rates on average were 40% for general needs, 50% for sheltered, 30% for supported and 25% for home owners; the new STAR template, with its short suite of core questions, aims to remedy this
- STATUS and STAR surveys are intended to generate sufficient responses to meet the requirement of being accurate to within a sampling error of  $\pm 4\%$  at the 95% confidence level overall; at the sub-level – such as the individual neighbourhood, for example – results will be less accurate but may be interpreted as accurate by some social housing providers who are not fully aware of accuracy issues generally
- There are currently no mandatory requirements on social housing providers to conduct regular satisfaction surveys, although there are still a range of other checks on performance, not least from resident inspectors
- There are issues of capacity and resources for smaller social housing providers (under 250 homes) in running surveys
- There is a general lack of technical know-how amongst housing managers in social housing providers about survey methods, sample design, accuracy, etc.

On balance, however, a culture has now developed in the UK social housing sector of involving residents in decisions about service delivery and of putting their views at the heart of business improvement. In addition, this has contributed to an agreed set of common service standards being developed across the sector against which social housing providers can track their performance over time and drive up their standards of service delivery. This means that residents have the confidence to hold their landlords to account and in general, social housing providers are customer-focused and do act to improve services that residents are not happy with.

In summary, the requirement to engage and consult tenants and home owners in the management and delivery of the services provided by social housing providers has been a key component of the regulation of the social housing sector in England, and STATUS has been one of the tools to ensure a more customer driven service.

## 4 The Stage 1 Consultation Exercise

### 4.1 General response to the concept

The response from social housing providers and other key stakeholders in the consultation conducted amongst key stakeholders in Ontario on the idea of introducing a standard resident satisfaction survey was primarily very positive, to the extent that those involved recognised the value of collecting this information in a standardised form as an essential step in developing common standards for managing social housing in the province. While there were understandable concerns about the impact on social housing providers in a resident satisfaction survey system being a requirement - primarily concerns about how this might be resourced – there was strong support for the concept of a voluntary program in the first instance, with a number of providers expressing their willingness to take part in a pilot survey.

The consultation also identified a number of key issues and constraints in introducing a resident satisfaction survey system to the social housing sector in Ontario, and these are summarised in the following section.

### 4.2 Key issues and constraints emerging

#### ***Creating shared value for all stakeholders is critical to buy-in***

Articulating the benefit of conducting resident surveys across Ontario was a concern throughout the consultations. Whose performance are we measuring? The particular concern with service managers was about their responsibility for and their ability to obtain resident survey results from housing providers in their area. Housing providers themselves were concerned about comparability, particularly when fewer units were managed (in relation to larger providers) or when their housing stock is older (in relation to providers with newer buildings in their portfolio).

Both service managers and housing providers were also unclear of the provincial role and its objectives with respect to the survey. There was, however, a general consensus that it would be beneficial if a system could be developed that would measure results over time, and be comparable across the province.

***Funding and resources might restrict the ability to conduct surveys***

All stakeholders, including service managers and housing providers, were concerned that there is a lack of easily accessible funding and resources within their organisations to conduct resident satisfaction surveys.

***Most housing providers lack the capacity to administer surveys***

The size of most providers are a challenge in terms of their having the capacity to administer the satisfaction surveys amongst their residents; there is also a lack of technical expertise amongst most providers about survey methodology (and sample design and sampling error in particular) and about the analysis, reporting and use of survey results.

***Respecting respondents' privacy and protecting personal information is paramount***

Information about the residents who live in social housing – such as telephone numbers, names and addresses and other personal information – would not be easily passed across by providers to service managers, let alone to HSC or other independent parties, although unit addresses should be accessible.

***Survey independence matters***

There was a general concern about who would administer the survey, particularly when the other party could influence formal decisions onto the other (i.e. Service manager vs. housing providers; housing providers vs. residents).

***Possible low response rates and survey fatigue can decrease the quality of results***

For those organisations who have conducted resident surveys to date, response rates have generally been low (20% is the norm, although there are exceptions to this), despite the use of incentives and other approaches.

### ***Possible constraints in representing the smaller population***

The sector is dominated by smaller providers (99% of providers manage fewer than 500 units and 74% manage fewer than 100 units); there is a significant difficulty amongst these providers of achieving sufficient responses to a survey for the results to be statistically robust.

We illustrate this in **Table 3** below. This shows the numbers of interviews / responses that would be required for each different size of provider in order to achieve the recommended accuracy levels (expressed as sampling error at the 95% confidence level) shown in the final column in the Table.

**Table 3: Achieved interviews needed to achieve accuracy levels by provider size**

<b>Provider size (units)</b>	<b>Interviews / responses needed to achieve</b>	<b>As % of population</b>	<b>Recommended accuracy levels (±)</b>
50	42	84%	± 6%
75	59	79%	± 6%
100	73	73%	± 6%
125	85	68%	± 6%
150	96	64%	± 6%
175	106	61%	± 6%
200	115	58%	± 6%
250	130	52%	± 6%
300	142	47%	± 6%
400	160	40%	± 6%
500	218	44%	± 5%
600	235	39%	± 5%
700	250	36%	± 5%
800	260	33%	± 5%
900	270	30%	± 5%
1000	375	38%	± 4%
1250	410	33%	± 4%

Provider size (units)	Interviews / responses needed to achieve	As % of population	Recommended accuracy levels (±)
1500	430	29%	± 4%
1750	450	26%	± 4%
2000	465	23%	± 4%
2500	485	19%	± 4%
3000	500	17%	± 4%
4000	525	13%	± 4%
5000	900	18%	± 3%
7500	935	12%	± 3%
10000	1000	10%	± 3%
15000	1025	7%	± 3%
58000	1050	2%	± 3%

For example, for a housing provider with 100 units in management, a survey would have to achieve 73 responses (73% of the resident population) in order to achieve survey results that are accurate to within a sampling error of  $\pm 6\%$  at the 95% confidence level in order for the survey results to be considered sufficiently representative of the wider resident population.

That level of response would be difficult to achieve using a postal self-completion questionnaire without significant pre-publicity and post-mailing intervention (such as door-to-door collection of completed forms, for example). Even with a face to face survey, which would be labour-intensive and costly, 73% is probably the maximum response rate that could be achieved.

For housing providers with fewer units in management, **Table 3** shows that even higher levels of response would be needed in order to achieve reasonable levels of accuracy. This is the situation for all housing providers with 400 units or fewer in management, assuming standard levels of accuracy, since a response rate of at least 40% would be required for organisations up to this size. As **Table 2** above shows, some 99% of housing providers in Ontario have fewer than 500 units in management, so this is an issue affecting the majority of housing providers in the province.

There is some scope for making it easier for the smaller housing providers to conduct surveys of their residents that produce representative and sufficiently accurate results. One option would be to reduce the required level of accuracy for the smaller housing providers; there is an argument in any case that for small populations, the important indicator of accuracy and representativeness is not sampling error (which is designed for sample survey amongst 'infinite' populations – that is, larger than 5000) but the percentage of the population that take part. The required response rate for these smaller populations could be set at 30% as a minimum, although 40% would be better, and this would reduce the costs and resources needed to achieve unrealistic levels of response. This will be tested further in the pilot survey.

### ***Lack of performance culture amongst social housing providers***

There is not currently a commonly agreed set of service standards across the sector, nor a culture of performance measurement of management practices; there is also not a developed culture of engaging residents in how their services are provided to meet their needs and aspirations. The survey might raise resident expectations that their provider would address the key issues identified and work to improve standards of service delivery, when they may not have the capacity to do this. Moreover, the survey may not be testing resident's views to a common set of service expectations and the results would therefore not be comparable between different providers. The key idea here is about how there needs to be the capacity, and perhaps a plan of action, prior to measuring results. It was seen as important to have the ability to do something meaningful with the results.

### ***There are a range of methodological issues to address***

For a postal self-completion survey method, the key methodological issues are:

- possible response bias towards 'seniors' and a lower level of responses from younger households with families or working adults
- literacy, language and accessibility (i.e. compliance with AODA) issues reducing responses
- postal deliveries not being 100% reliable, particularly in small rural communities.

For a telephone survey method, this would require the availability of valid telephone numbers; even if available, confidentiality issues may prevent them from being provided; telephone

surveys would have a direct costs, since we would advise that these are commissioned from external agencies in order to prevent possible interference in the survey by staff.

## 5 Piloting a working model for Ontario

### 5.1 The pilot concept

Throughout the recent HSC consultation with the social housing sector in Ontario, the general consensus of both service managers and providers has been that the introduction of a resident satisfaction survey system to Ontario would be of long-term benefit in raising standards of housing management across the sector and in developing a dialogue with customers and placing them at the heart of service improvement. The key issue of concern have been the impact this might have on already stretched resources. There have been a small number of stakeholders who have felt that any new system might push them to breaking point, but the principle of introducing best practice into the industry has had almost universal support.

In order to build on the expressed willingness of key players in the social housing sector in Ontario to develop a system of resident satisfaction surveys for the sector, we are proposing a pilot survey program.

The pilot survey program would seek to address the key issues and constraints identified in the preliminary consultation with stakeholders in the social housing sector, with the key aim of developing a robust resident satisfaction survey system that could be taken up as required by the sector. The expectation would be that this system, once developed, would gain momentum within the sector and form the platform for the further development of performance management and common service standards across the sector.

### 5.2 Role of HSC

A key issue that emerged from the consultation was the concern that social housing providers would not have the necessary resources or technical expertise to conduct resident satisfaction surveys, and that this would prove a major barrier to introducing a satisfaction survey system.

Knowing what happened and why it happened are no longer adequate. The social housing sector needs to know what is happening now, what is likely to happen next and, what actions they should take for optimal results.

In order to address a large part of this key concern directly, and to resolve a number of the other concerns raised, the Housing Services Corporation (HSC) is proposing to play a key role in supporting the sector in the first instance by providing Fulfilment, Analytics and Optimization services for the pilot, including, for example:

- Establishing the Pilot Survey Working Group (PSWG)
- Leading the development of the pilot survey program
- Developing and producing the agreed indicators and measures, and questionnaire template
- Fulfilment – Providing the postage paid reply envelopes included in postal self-completion pilot survey packs so that completed forms are sent back to HSC
- Carrying out the data processing and analysis of pilot survey results
- Maintaining a database of pilot survey results to enable further analysis and benchmarking
- Developing and producing standard reports for each social housing provider involved in the pilot program
- Posting pilot survey results to the web to enable individual providers and service managers to generate standard reports for their own use and to interrogate the pilot survey results themselves
- Providing technical support to optimize surveys and results, including advice on sample design, survey methodology and survey outputs

The proposed role of HSC would be developed more fully during the pilot survey program, and the suggested approach outlined here would be subject to change, particularly in relation to the likely costs of setting up and maintaining this platform. Service managers would report the core indicators / measures as required.

## 5.3 Establishing a Pilot Survey Working Group

The first step in developing the pilot survey would be to set up a Pilot Survey Working Group (PSWG) that consists of members that are representative of the social housing sector, which includes service managers, housing providers, stakeholders and resident groups, with HSC managing and administering the process. HSC would provide the administrative support for the group.

Recruitment to the PSWG would draw on the interest expressed during the consultation and would need to take into account issues of size of organisation, location, types of residents housed and in-house expertise, amongst other issues.

The following is the proposed Working Group Composition and Structure, Mechanics, and Responsibilities of the PSWG:

- Co-Chairs:
  - 1 member selected by HSC
  - 1 member appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- 3 members selected jointly by the service managers vis-à-vis Service Manager Housing Network (SMHN) / Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), with one member representing a local housing corporation (LHC)
- 1 member selected by the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)
- 1 member selected jointly by the DSSAB service managers vis-à-vis NOSDA
- 1 member selected by the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF Canada)
- 1 housing provider member selected by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA)
- 1 member selected by the United Way of Canada

### ***Working Group Selection Process***

The working groups operate under the purview of the HSC Board and MMAH. Working group members are individuals with a strong knowledge of the social housing sector's resources and management issues, performance measurement / survey methodology, and who also have the ability to understand and respect diverse points of view.

Member staff with specific knowledge, or who can provide logistical support, will also sit on the working groups. Additionally, both HSC staff and members may have nominated experts from the community to participate in the working groups.

### ***Alternates***

Owing to the short duration of the working groups, there will be no alternates (substitute members) for working group members. All working group members have the responsibility to attend working group meetings. A member of the public may attend and observe, but not participate, in working group meetings.

### ***HSC's Role in the Working Group***

HSC staff will provide logistical support to the working group including contacting technical advisors, arranging conference calls, supplying background information and tracking down additional information as needed. A HSC staff person will also play the facilitator/leader role. Additionally, HSC will participate in the working group as a stakeholder. As a stakeholder, the HSC representative will forward the PSWG's point of view, provide advice on PSWG's authority and define the range of acceptable outcomes for PSWG.

### ***Technical Advisors***

The working group may choose to invite other individuals with special knowledge and expertise related to the priority issue to attend meetings to provide information and/or advice. Advisors will be encouraged to participate in discussions but shall not participate in the decision-making of the working groups.

### ***Constituent Involvement***

Working group members serve as conduits for two-way information exchange with their constituencies. Constituents wanting to provide input to the process are encouraged to channel their concerns and suggestions through individual members of the working group who they feel could represent their interests. Working group members will make a concerted outreach effort to communicate regularly with their agencies or constituencies to keep them informed about the process and the issues under discussion.

### ***Participation and Observation by Members of the Public***

Resident participation and views are anticipated to be represented by at least 1 member of the working group (i.e. vis-à-vis United Way of Canada). All working group meeting minutes will be made available to the public and comments are welcome. Meetings of the working group are meant to be working meetings focused on collaboratively developing a recommendation to the HSC Board and to MMAH (proposed) regarding their specific issue. As such, the working group meetings are not designed to be opportunities for soliciting input from the general public. However, members of the public are encouraged to raise their concerns with working group members in a number of planned focus groups, to help ensure that all issues of significant concern to the public are considered in the working group's deliberations, and subsequently directed to the HSC Board and to MMAH (proposed).

### ***Additions to the Working Group***

During the course of its deliberations, the working group may determine that it's in the best interest of achieving a quality and informed outcome to add additional members with different perspectives to the working group. Such new members may be added by consensus of the working group.

### ***Replacement of Working Group Members***

In the unlikely event that a member of the working group is not able to serve, given the short duration of the working groups, no replacement will be found.

### ***Working Group Meeting Mechanics***

The working group will initially meet approximately once a month. The time and location of all working group meetings will be publicized in advance and the public is invited to attend. The development of meeting schedules will take into consideration the special needs of its members so as to maximize attendance. Members agree to place a high priority on participation in the working group process and to make a good faith best effort to attend all meetings.

Draft meeting agendas along with support materials will be provided to the working group at an agreed upon date in advance of the meetings. The facilitator will produce draft products or summaries following each meeting that identify major discussions or actions. However, the focus of the working group will be working toward producing draft strategies and activities that

eventually will comprise Pilot Implementation Plan that address the respective issue or problem. Summaries will represent the work toward that goal characterizing points of agreement via an evolving draft document and outlining areas in need of resolution. Staff will distribute draft summaries or products from the meetings as part of the subsequent meeting agenda packet for participant review. These draft products or summaries will also be posted on the HSC website for the issue.

### ***Roles and Responsibilities of the Working Group Members***

The goal of the working group is to reach consensus. The rationale behind the drafting of these Roles and Responsibilities is to begin planning for potential dynamics of participation from diverse interest groups (i.e. MAH, service managers, housing providers, sector stakeholders, residents, and members of the public). Thus, each working group member will be expected to:

- make the best effort possible to reach consensus
- share the responsibility of ensuring the success of the process and the quality of the outcome
- keep the working group informed regarding constraints on your decision making authority on behalf of your agency or constituency
- keep your agency or constituency informed about the perspectives, concerns and interests of the working group
- actively participate in discussions
- bring concerns to other members or facilitators
- share the airtime with others
- have respect for different points of view and be attentive when others speak
- ask questions of each other for clarification and mutual understanding
- verify assumptions when necessary
- avoid characterizing the motives of others
- acknowledge and try to understand other's perspectives
- deal with differences as problems to be solved, not battles to be won
- stay focused on the task at hand
- refrain from distracting others through side conversations
- silence all cell phones during meetings
- concentrate on the content of the discussions and allow the facilitator to focus on how to promote productive discussion

## 5.4 Indicative timing of the pilot survey program

The pilot would need to be sufficiently complex to enable the majority of key issues to be tested adequately, but not so complex that it takes too long and involves too wide a range of stakeholders. Momentum needs to be maintained, reliance on a small number of stakeholders needs to be minimised and brevity in all things would be the watchword.

We envisage that the pilot survey program would commence in late 2011 with the recruitment and convening of the Pilot Survey Working Group, and the Pilot Working Group draft report completed by late 2012. The planning process for the full launch of the resident satisfaction survey program is estimated to commence in Q1 2013 and implementation anticipated to occur no sooner than Q4 2013.

## 5.5 Testing the key elements of the survey system

The aim of the pilot program would be to test all elements of the survey process and to identify the key constraints to establishing a fully developed survey system. The key elements of the system to be tested in the pilot include the following:

- **Reach** – how easy would it be to administer the survey amongst the smaller housing providers in particular? A number of service managers are keen to run the survey amongst all their housing providers, regardless of size, and some smaller providers would also like to take part in their own right.
- **Tenure groups** – who should be included - RGI tenants, market rent tenants, tenants on rent supplement, others?
- **Location and density of stock** – does it make it more difficult if units are spread across a wide area, with individual homes rather than clustered in one place; is the rural vs. urban location also a factor?
- **Response rates** – to what extent are these affected by pre-survey publicity, use of incentives, length of questionnaire, reminders, etc., and what are the average response rates likely to be?
- **Survey method** – is a postal self-completion survey the most cost effective solution, compared with telephone interviews; does a ‘lobby intervention’ approach work for

- single scheme sites (perhaps using a Voxy interactive screen); is hand-delivery better than the postal system for achieving responses for the rural providers in particular?
- **Sample design** – while this is not an issue necessarily at the pilot stage, since we are not aiming in the pilot to achieve results that are representative of the wider resident population for any single provider, the key principles of sample design would need to be tested out so that appropriate advice and guidance can be developed for future use.
  - **Customer database and sample listings** – what information is available on residents, how easy is it to produce, how accurate, what additional information can be provided e.g. RGI status, rent supplement status, etc.?
  - **Role of residents in the pilot** – we would wish to include residents in the planning and testing of questionnaires in particular, but we also need their input on other design elements, such as the most appropriate survey approaches, the use of incentives, etc.
  - **Questionnaire** – there are a number of issues to address here, including:
    - design and approach – should there be a set of core questions that form the basis of a short version of the questionnaire, with a set of additional optional questions selected by the providers themselves?
    - what are the most effective and relevant core and optional questions?
    - the length, format and layout of survey questionnaire, particularly whether forms are designed to be scanned in when completed (software and design implications) or for manual coding
    - the ease of inserting bar codes or other identifiers
    - the use of HSC logo, or that of the housing providers or service managers, or all these
    - mail merging to personalise the survey pack, or ‘Dear resident household’
    - reminder mailings
    - instructions for completion and Frequently Asked Questions
    - French and English versions and the use of translation sheets.
  - **Confidentiality and data protection** – are providers able or willing to supply information to service managers, to what level and on what basis?; will the raw survey data be sent back in anonymous format to service managers, providers, others?

- ***Developing the role of HSC*** – the pilot would test the proposed approach whereby HSC might continue to provide the administrative and technical support platform for the full resident satisfaction survey program, including:
- ***Software requirements for the pilot*** - these will also need to be scoped and resourced, and would probably, as a minimum, involve purchasing licenses for data collection (i.e. SPSS Data Collection) and analysis (i.e. SPSS Statistics), our recommendation as the most appropriate software analysis tool for this system; for OCR / design software to enable the survey forms to be formatted to be scanned when completed and the data automatically produced in electronic form as an Excel-readable file; for software that enables interactive online access to the survey results.
- ***Future needs*** - in addition, HSC will need to give thought to the longer term management and maintenance of the database and identify the appropriate software and hardware requirements for this.
- ***Collation and coding of completed survey forms*** – HSC would need a prepaid postage reply address and there is a resource issue on coding the forms and preparing the raw data.
- ***Analysis and reporting of results*** – designing standard reports in both tabular and graphic formats and agreeing the relevant units of analysis to slice the data; benchmarking possibilities; making use of the results
- ***Resources*** – who contributes what to the process, what are the actual costs and other resource implications, particularly for the HSC team. One suggestion is that housing providers would not themselves be involved in the administration of the survey, except in providing lists of their units under management / lists of residents; the lists would be provided to service managers, who would be responsible for printing the questionnaires and fulfilling the surveys (i.e. mail merging as appropriate, stuffing envelopes and posting); this approach also needs testing.

## 5.6 Suggested pilot survey design

The full design of the pilot survey program would be discussed and agreed by the Pilot Survey Working Group once this has been convened. We provide some suggestions below for organisations that might be included in the pilot here to ensure that the specific issues outline above could be tested in detail.

### ***Rural Service Manager with fewer than 500 homes managed by LHC***

This Service Manager (SM) would be encouraged to include both the LHC residents and those of the non-profit and co-op providers (as appropriate) in their area. We would conduct a census of all the Local Housing Company (LHC) homes and of the other providers for this service manager, and ideally have a focus group / discussion meeting with a small number of residents at the end of the fieldwork. We would be looking for an LHC that houses a mix of different tenure groups.

This pilot would test response rates, customer database and sample listings, SM resources, degree of co-operation between SM and providers, the difficulties of administering the survey in a rural location with dispersed properties, as well as other key issues. We would also want to pilot in this location the use of a Voxy (lobby intervention survey approach) as a medium for conducting satisfaction surveys.

### ***Urban Service Manager with large LHC***

This SM would be encouraged to include a sample of residents of their LHC, perhaps concentrated on a specific location or building, and to also conduct a survey amongst one of their providers (either a co-op or non-profit) with 100 units or fewer. The LHC might have a predominantly RGI tenant population, with a mix of languages and tenants with other more complex needs; the other provider would ideally have a contracted-out property manager.

This pilot site would aim to test a wide range of issues and bring in the urban dimension, language and diversity issues and the issue of property manager vs. services provided by the landlord directly. If a co-op is included as the small provider, this would also enable us to hold a session with the board to discuss the value and impact of the survey from their perspective.

We would also look to find a provider (LHC or other provider) that also manages rent supplement tenants.

We might also wish to test the effectiveness of a telephone interview approach, probably amongst tenants of the LHC. If this pilot site is in the East of the province, we could also test an English and French version of the survey form.

***Other proposed approaches to the pilot***

- Use of control groups
- Free (basic questionnaire and analysis provided by HSC) and the possibility of a paid premium component (localized questions and administrative data linking)
- Mixed method to capture the full continuum
- Paper instrument via postal reply
- Telephone instrument
- Video component
- Mixed delivery to ensure local ownership and sustainability (the use of resident champions for assisting with planning and implementation)

## 5.7 The next steps

This report summarizes the main points of our consultation and will be circulated to all the stakeholders that participated in the March consultation.

We are now recommending a Stage 2 pilot exercise to test all the key elements of the resident satisfaction survey system, including:

- Establishing a pilot working group of service managers and other stakeholders, including residents
- Developing the survey questionnaire(s)
- Identifying the most appropriate pilot sites - e.g. large LHC, small provider, rural vs. urban, etc.,
- Testing the logistics and processes involved at all stages of the survey
- Conducting the fieldwork for the pilot
- Processing, analysing and reporting the pilot survey results
- Defining the key indicators that the Ministry might wish to use
- Defining the level at which providers might be required to conduct surveys
- Drafting the outline of a guidance manual
- Reviewing the pilot and making recommendations for a sector roll-out, including funding and resource issues and possible solutions in particular.