

Giroscope tenants' satisfaction study

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Giroscope is an award winning¹ community based housing organisation in West Hull² that buys and renovates empty properties to provide rental accommodation for people in housing need. Their current properties range from one-bedroom flats through to five-bedroom houses, but the vast majority are two or three bedroom terraced houses, which are typical of the area, located close to the centre of the city. As well as providing housing they offer work experience and training opportunities for a wide range of volunteers in the local community.

Giroscope was conceived by a group of students and unemployed people in 1985 in response to the problem of homelessness in Hull and established as a limited company and workers co-operative in 1986. Initially set up to provide accommodation for its founders only, Giroscope has since expanded and now lets 30 properties. It remained a workers' co-operative until January 2007 when it was converted to a registered charity.

On their website (www.giroscope.co.uk) Giroscope describe their policy of providing affordable housing for the local community, particularly those who are struggling to find accommodation in the traditional private rented sector and how they support community businesses by providing affordable retail and workshop space. They strive to be an

¹Giroscope won the Housing Associations Charitable Trust Award for Housing under the Community Enterprise Scheme 1989-90 (Society Guardian, 9th March 2005).

² Hull is ranked as the 9th most deprived local authority district out of 354 in England (Hull Trends 14A 2006) and as the 14th most living environment deprived local authority - a statistical construct combining an 'indoors' sub-domain based on estimates of housing in poor condition and an 'outdoors' sub-domain based on data on air quality and road traffic accidents (Hull Trends 9A 2006). Over half of its residents live in Super Output Areas in the most income deprived 20% in England (Hull Trends 1J 2006).

environmentally friendly organisation, incorporating energy efficient features into their properties and providing a sustainable and alternative housing management model.

Giroscope staff live in the neighbourhood and this provides them with important local knowledge and they feel that there is not the traditional gap between landlord and tenant as many staff members and directors have themselves experienced unemployment, homelessness, low wages, lone parenthood and can therefore empathise with many of the people they house (Giroscope 1997).

To support those in housing need, not charging deposits or asking for rent in advance is a cornerstone of Giroscope's housing policy. They charge what they consider to be a fair weekly rent for the area based on individual circumstances. They also offer an informal administrative support service to tenants who are entitled to benefits. The houses and flats are let with cookers, fridge freezers and beds. Some properties are let fully furnished and they often provide additional furniture to those in need of it.

Giroscope's properties are located in the inner city wards of Newington and St Andrews. Gateway, the Government's Market Renewal Pathfinders in Hull and East Riding has identified these wards for regeneration and some of Giroscope's properties are under threat of demolition. Giroscope actively contributes to all aspects of the housing debate both on a local and a national level and its members are currently campaigning against the demolition of some of the North's Victorian and Edwardian terraced housing. Their publication "*Last One Out Please Close the Gateway*" (Giroscope, 2004) highlights the problems of the area and makes a case for the renovation of properties rather than their demolition.

With a view to reviewing and improving the quality of their service Giroscope approached us in January 2007 and invited us to carry out an independent tenants' satisfaction survey. We were commissioned to undertake a comprehensive study of tenant satisfaction, with particular emphasis on the quality of the repairs and maintenance service, as this is an area in which Giroscope have recently been trying to make improvements.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Aims and objectives

The importance of supplementing structured questions in tenant surveys with in-depth interviews has been strongly emphasised (Popkin *et al* 1995). This study was therefore designed to have two distinct components: a quantitative survey of all current tenants and a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with a sample of current tenants.

The main aim of this research was to explore the views of current tenants of Giroscope. The specific objectives were: to conduct a user satisfaction survey with all currently listed Giroscope tenants; to conduct a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with a sub-sample of current Giroscope tenants, exploring their experience of and satisfaction with the service and to formulate a set of recommendations to aid Giroscope in the improvement of future services.

The user satisfaction survey

The survey had three specific objectives:

- To make initial contact with the tenants and to identify those willing to take part in subsequent in-depth qualitative interviews.
- To explore the views of the whole population of current tenants to inform Giroscope of particular strengths and weaknesses of their service.
- To identify areas of particular relevance or importance to them such that this information could be used to inform the development of the interview schedule.

The in-depth qualitative interviews

The aim of the in-depth qualitative interviews was to explore the experiences of a sample of Giroscope tenants in greater detail. A semi-structured interview schedule (or topic guide) was used to ensure further exploration of key issues initially investigated with the questionnaire, concentrating on those which appeared to be most important to the

tenants. Respondents were also encouraged to elaborate on any issues of particular importance or relevance to themselves.

2.2 Applying for ethical approval

An application was made on 4th April 2008 to the Research Ethics board at the University of Lincoln. This was approved on 23rd April 2008. Copies of both the application form and the approval letter are included at Appendix 1.

2.3 Designing the research instruments

2.3.1 The questionnaire

The first stage was to conduct an examination of the relevant literature to identify factors which had been shown to be important in influencing levels of tenant satisfaction. The Varady and Carrozza (2000) model was used as a starting point for the design of the questionnaire. They argue that tenant satisfaction is a complex attitude and encompasses four distinct types of satisfaction: (1) satisfaction with the dwelling unit (2) satisfaction with the services provided, including repair service (3) satisfaction with the whole package received for the rent (4) satisfaction with the neighbourhood or area. Their 4th category was considered largely beyond the control of Giroscope and therefore was not included in the questionnaire although it was later explored during the in-depth interviews. Some key issues identified by UN-Habitat (2003) as being particularly problematic for rental housing³ were also explored and used to inform the design of the questionnaire.

Secondly, to optimise the potential for comparability with previous data, questionnaires which had already been used in earlier evaluations of Giroscope were collected and where possible questions relating specifically to satisfaction of the services provided by Giroscope, were retained⁴.

³ The key issues identified by UN-Habitat included: landlord discrimination, high rent levels, housing affordability, perceived excessive landlord profits, inner city problems, quality of the rental housing stock, legal issues (such as informal contracts and inadequate judicial systems), mobility and eviction and landlord/tenant conflict (UN-Habitat 2003).

⁴ Previous tenant satisfaction surveys were conducted by Holdsworth, J and Mumby, R (1993) University of Humberside and two were conducted by Giroscope (1997 and 2004).

Thirdly, a draft of the questionnaire was sent to members of the advisory group for their expert input and comment on the specifics of the content, design and layout. The questionnaire was then modified on the basis of their feedback.

In the final stage, the questionnaire was sent to four previous Giroscope tenants and four other tenants known to the research team who were currently living in private rental accommodation. They were asked to complete it as a piloting exercise. The respondents were asked to identify any difficulties experienced whilst completing the questionnaire and their views on the extent to which it was comprehensive, intelligible and appropriate. The purpose of this exercise was to 'talk participants through' their responses to seek ways in which the design of the questionnaire might be improved. The questionnaire was then further modified on the basis of feedback from the pilot.

The areas explored in the questionnaire included: personal demographic information about the respondent; their views about their home; questions about the repairs and maintenance service offered by the landlord; questions about communication and the relationship with the landlord; questions about rent and affordability and questions about reasons for moving to, or intentions to move from, their current home.

A copy of the final version of the questionnaire is included at Appendix 2.

2.3.2 Topic guide for in-depth interview

The topic guide used in the qualitative interviews was designed to explore in more depth the key areas initially investigated in the questionnaire, with a particular emphasis on issues that had been highlighted as important in the participants' responses.

It was felt that qualitative interviews would be a useful method for exploring tenants' satisfaction with the neighbourhood or area, identified as important by Varady and Carrozza (2000) and UN-Habitat (2003). Some of the key areas identified as problematic issues in rental housing by UN-Habitat (2003) that were not covered by the questionnaire were included in the topic guide.

A copy of the topic guide is included at Appendix 3.

2.4 Collecting the data

2.4.1 The survey data

Giroscope staff wrote to each of their tenants to request consent for their personal details to be passed on to the researchers. All tenants provided this consent. The research team was then provided with the full list of current Giroscope tenants (n=30).

Two weeks after Giroscope's initial letter, on 27th June 2008, we sent a letter to all current Giroscope tenants. Due to the very small numbers, all, rather than a sample of households were written to individually with information about the research⁵.

The questionnaire and consent form were included in the letter along with contact details of the research team, should they require additional information or help with completing the questionnaire⁶. Included on the questionnaire was a question asking whether the participants would be willing to take part in a subsequent confidential in-depth interview. If so, they were asked to leave a contact telephone number⁷. The letter introduced them to the study and invited them to take part by returning a consent form and questionnaire in a stamped addressed envelope provided. The information sent emphasised strongly that any information provided by the tenants would be strictly confidential. Their identity would be known only to the research team and not to staff at Giroscope. All data was to be anonymised in the reporting and in any subsequent outputs from the research. The decision was taken to send only one questionnaire to each household, rather than one to each adult in every household, as it was felt that those sharing a property would be likely to have very similar experiences with the landlords. No direction was given regarding

⁵ Previous research has shown that higher response rates are likely to be achieved where participants have been contacted about the study, prior to the questionnaires being sent out, where correspondence is addressed specifically to named individuals and where hand-written envelopes and stamped rather than franked envelopes are used (Edwards *et al* 2002). These recommendations were followed in this study.

⁶ Copies of the information letter and consent form are included at Appendix 4.

⁷ The questionnaires were individually coded (the code known only to the research team and not to Giroscope staff) in order that non-responders could be identified and subsequently followed up. This removed the need for those who had responded being unnecessarily written to with reminder letters.

which member of the household should complete the questionnaire, although all correspondence was sent to the person named on the tenancy agreement.

In order to optimise the response rate⁸, entry into a prize draw (£50 cash provided by Giroscope) was offered as an incentive to take part in the research. If after three weeks (18th July) no response had been received, a second follow-up letter (which also included a further copy of the questionnaire and consent form) was sent out. Four weeks after the second mail out the prize draw was conducted and the winner was informed by Giroscope staff. No further questionnaires were received after this time.

The returned questionnaires were stored securely by the research team at the University of Lincoln. Data were entered into SPSS (version 14.0) and thoroughly checked and cleaned prior to the analysis.

2.4.2 The qualitative data

In August 2008, we attempted to make contact with all of those who declared themselves (during the quantitative stage of the study) willing to take part in a subsequent follow-up interview (n=10). Of these ten, we successfully interviewed five: four face to face and one via telephone, as all attempts to meet in person failed. Despite their initial agreement, two respondents subsequently withdrew, feeling that their English was not of a sufficiently high standard to be interviewed. A further two were not available when we attempted to conduct the interview (and further attempts to contact them to rearrange the interview failed), while all attempts to contact the remaining respondent failed.

The face-to-face interviews were all conducted in a place convenient to the respondent (which turned out to be their home in all cases). They were all tape-recorded with permission of the respondent and fully transcribed verbatim. Prior to the interview, each respondent was reminded of the anonymous and confidential nature of the study and was reassured that they could withdraw from the study at any point without having to

⁸ Research has shown that offering financial incentive in postal surveys can double the response rate (Edwards *et al* 2002).

give a reason. Those conducted in person signed the consent form. The respondent interviewed by telephone gave verbal consent to be interviewed.

No personal information appeared on any of the transcript tapes: only unique ID codes were used. The tapes were all locked in a filing cabinet at the University of Lincoln.

2.5 Analysing the data

2.5.1 Survey data

The statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS (version 14.0). Of the 30 people approached to be included in the study, 18 returned a completed questionnaire, giving a response rate of 60%. Where questionnaires were partially completed they were included in the calculation of the response rate but specific item non-response was accounted for in the analysis.

Given the small number in the total sample (n=18) only very basic descriptive analysis was performed. The sample size was simply too small to allow any further analytical statistical tests.

2.5.2 Qualitative data.

Interviews were analysed using the now well-established 'Framework' method of qualitative data analysis (Ritchie and Spencer 1994), which was developed by the then Social and Community Planning Research (now called the National Centre for Social Research).

3.0 Results

The results have been organised into three broad categories 1) Demographic profile of respondents 2) Satisfaction with housing and the local area 3) Attitudes toward Giroscope's service. Category 1 contains only quantitative data from the questionnaire and categories 2 and 3 contain quantitative and qualitative data from both the questionnaire and interviews.

3.1 Demographic profile of respondents

3.1.1. Age, gender, ethnicity and employment status

More women than men completed the questionnaire (table 1), and most respondents were between 35 and 44 years of age. Two-thirds of respondents described their ethnicity as 'white British', with 1 describing themselves as 'white Irish' and 5 as 'white other'. White (other) ethnic groups were: Polish (n=4) and Latvian (n=1).

Table 1 below shows the demographic make-up of the participants in the initial survey.

Table 1 Age, gender and ethnicity of the participants

| | Number | %* |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 5 | 28 |
| Female | 13 | 72 |
| Total | 18 | 100 |
| | | |
| Age | | |
| 16-24 | 2 | 11 |
| 25-34 | 2 | 11 |
| 35-44 | 11 | 61 |
| 45-54 | 3 | 17 |
| Total | 18 | 100 |
| | | |
| Ethnicity | | |
| White British | 12 | 67 |
| White Irish | 1 | 6 |
| White other | 5 | 28 |
| Total | 18 | 100 |

* Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Participants were asked about their country of birth and first language (table 2). Two-thirds had been born in the UK, with 1 born in Ireland, 1 in Latvia and 4 in Poland. The

language spoken reflected this: 13 speaking English as a first language, 1 speaking Latvian and 4 speaking Polish.

Table 2 Country of birth and first language

| | Number | %* |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Country of birth | | |
| UK | 12 | 67 |
| Ireland | 1 | 6 |
| Latvia | 1 | 6 |
| Poland | 4 | 22 |
| Total | 18 | 100 |
| | | |
| First language | | |
| English | 13 | 72 |
| Latvian | 1 | 6 |
| Polish | 4 | 22 |
| Total | 18 | 100 |

* Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Those who reported that English was not their first language were asked: '*If English is not your first language, how good would you say your spoken English is?*' Of those who responded, two said it was 'pretty good', one said 'okay' and one said 'not very good'.

Table 3 Employment status and household composition

| | Number | %* |
|---|-------------|------------|
| Employment status | | |
| Working full time | 6 | 35 |
| Working part time | 3 | 18 |
| Not working because of long term sickness or disability | 1 | 6 |
| At home/not seeking work (including looking after home or family) | 6 | 35 |
| A full-time student | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 17** | 100 |
| | | |
| Household composition | | |
| Single person | 3 | 17 |
| Couple with dependent children | 1 | 6 |
| Lone parent with dependent children | 9 | 50 |
| Lone parent with non-dependent children only | 2 | 11 |
| Other | 3 | 17 |
| Total | 18 | 100 |

* Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

** One respondent failed to answer

Participants were also asked about their employment status and household composition (Table 3).

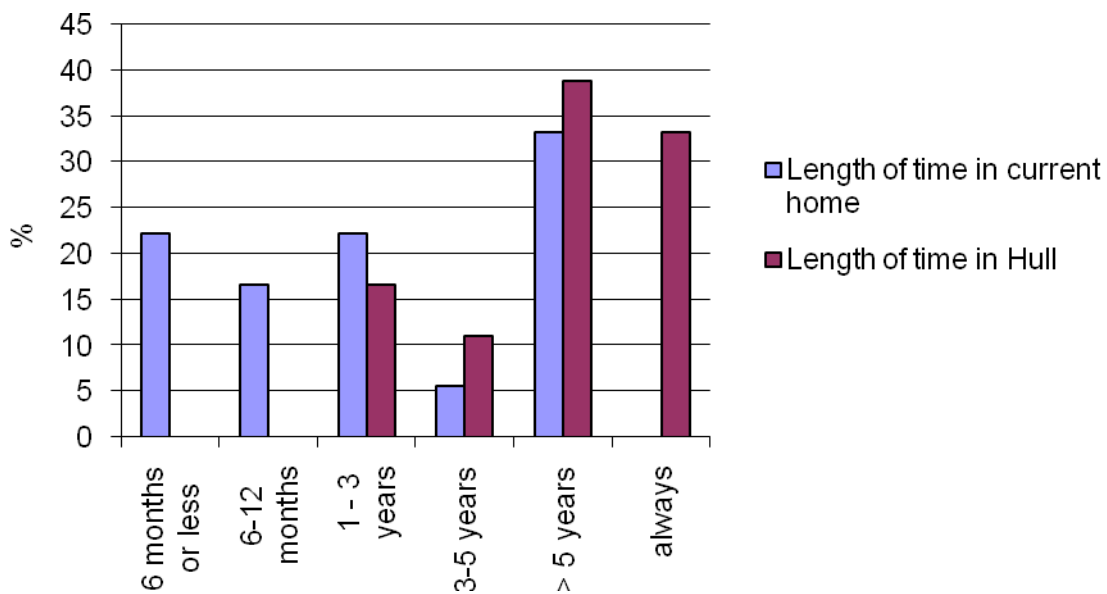
Of those who reported living with dependents under the age of 16, five reported living with one child four reported living with two.

3.1.2 Move to current home and previous housing situation

Respondents were asked to say from where they first found out about Giroscope. Most respondents had heard about Giroscope from informal sources, particularly friends, relatives and neighbours (94%, n=17). The only other reported source was from a newspaper (11%, n=2)⁹.

Respondents were asked how long they have lived in their current home, how long they have lived in Hull and about their previous housing situation. The results are shown below:

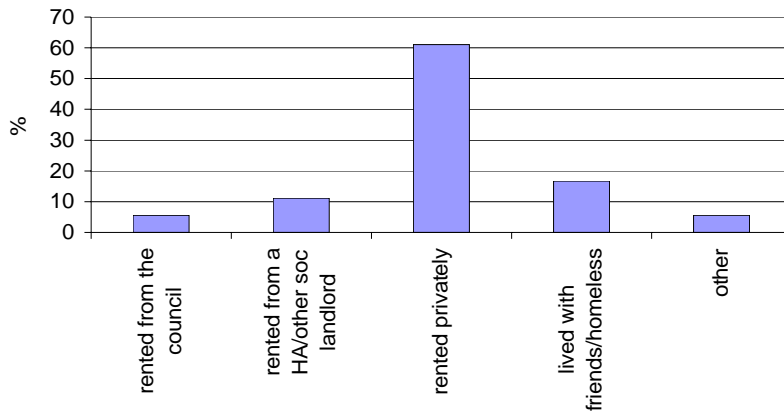
Figure 1 Length of time in Hull and in current home



All of the respondents had lived in the UK for at least or over three years.

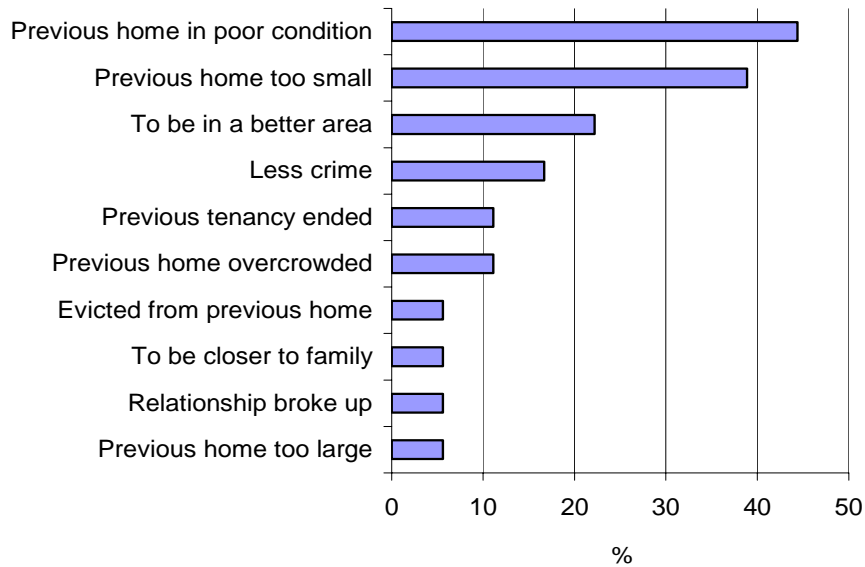
⁹ Categories not mutually exclusive as respondents were invited to tick all that applied.

Figure 2 Previous housing situation



The previous housing situation, directly before becoming a Gioscope tenant, is shown above. The majority previously rented privately. The two who reported 'other' included living with parents and always having been a Gioscope tenant.

Figure 3 Reason for leaving previous home



Respondents were asked to report why they left their previous accommodation and the results can be seen in Figure 3 above.

There was quite strong evidence indicating that respondents had moved as they were previously dissatisfied in some way with the standard of their home. 44% (n=8) reported that their previous home was in poor condition, 11% (n=2) reported that it was overcrowded, and 39% (n=7) reported that it was too small. 22% (n=4) reported that they wanted to move to a better area, or where there was less crime (17%; n= 3)¹⁰.

Respondents were asked whether they were more or less satisfied with where they live now compared to their previous housing situation. A large majority (83%; n=15) reported being more satisfied now, 11% (n=2) less satisfied now and 6% (n=1) neither more nor less satisfied. The two who reported being 'less satisfied now' gave no elaboration on this.

They were asked also if they were intending to move from their current home, only one respondent reported an intention to move, but said that this would not be for another year and for personal career reasons, rather than reasons relating to dissatisfaction with the landlords.

3.2 Satisfaction with housing and the local area

3.2.1 Quality of rental housing stock

Participants were asked about the general condition of the inside and outside of their home. They were asked to rate their responses as shown in table 4 below.

The majority (82%, n=14) of respondents considered the condition of the inside of their home to be either very good or good; only one respondent considered it to be poor and no respondents considered it to be very poor. With respect to the condition of the outside of their home the majority (73%; n=11) considered it to be very either very good or good and no respondents considered it to be poor or very poor.

¹⁰ Response options were not mutually exclusive.

Table 4 Participants views about their home

| | Number | %* |
|---|-------------|------------|
| How would you rate the general condition of your home? | | |
| Inside | | |
| Very good | 6 | 35 |
| Good | 8 | 47 |
| Neutral | 2 | 12 |
| Poor | 1 | 6 |
| Very poor | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 17** | 100 |
| | | |
| Outside | | |
| Very good | 6 | 40 |
| Good | 5 | 33 |
| Neutral | 4 | 27 |
| Poor | 0 | 0 |
| Very poor | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 15 | 100 |

* Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

** One respondent failed to answer

The qualitative data mirrored these findings and the majority of the interviewees were generally satisfied with the condition of their homes:

I'm very satisfied generally with the size and condition.

(Interviewee B)

I really like the house, I've got a sound house..... They changed the garage into a front room, and I am happy with that.....They paint the window frames on a regular basis.

(Interviewee C)

However one respondent was dissatisfied with several aspects of their home:

It has not been done up for 10 years. Things need updated.....There are lots of things I don't like..... there is paint all over the sockets, the tiles are wonky, the banister is wonky and the carpet is coming up.....They get it done so you can live here rather than it's a nice place to live.

(Interviewee D)

However, they did go on to say that they understood that the budget was limited and therefore one could not expect a luxury home.

Respondents were also asked to rate particular aspects of their home as detailed in Figures 4 and 5 below. In all categories the majority of respondents rated their home as either very good or good. The most positive aspect was the size of the property with over 70% (n=13) reporting this to be very good. Other positive aspects were general layout, the heating system and décor with 94% (n=17) 83% (n=15) and 77% (n=14) of respondents respectively reporting these to be either very good or good.

Figure 4 Participant rating of aspects of their home (1)

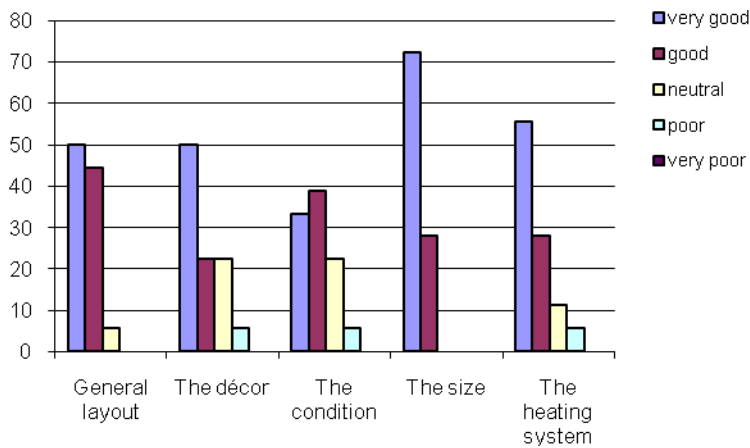
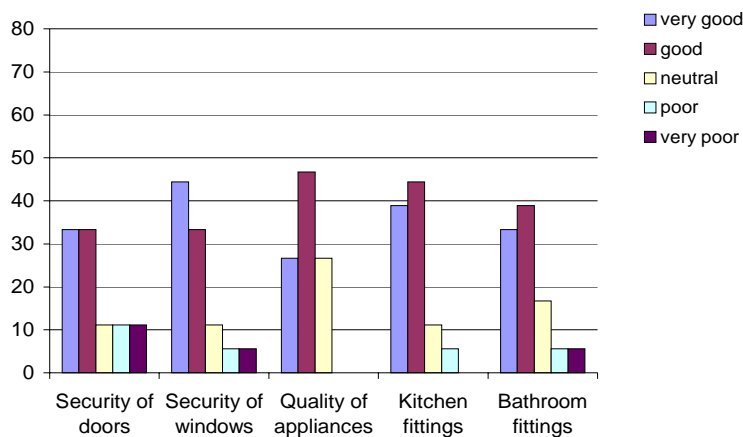


Figure 5 Participant rating of aspects of their home (2)



The most negative results related to security: 22% (n=4) felt the security of doors to be either poor or very poor and 17% (n=3) said the same about security of their windows. Two respondents also felt the quality of their bathroom fittings to be either poor or very poor.

3.2.2 Repairs and maintenance

Respondents were asked how they informed Giroscope that their home is in need of repair or maintenance work. They were invited to tick more than one response option so categories are not mutually exclusive. Making a telephone call was by far the most popular choice (95%, n=17) followed 'popping round' to the office (33%, n=6), sending a text message (28%, n=5) or email (6%, n=1). No one reported that they wrote a letter.

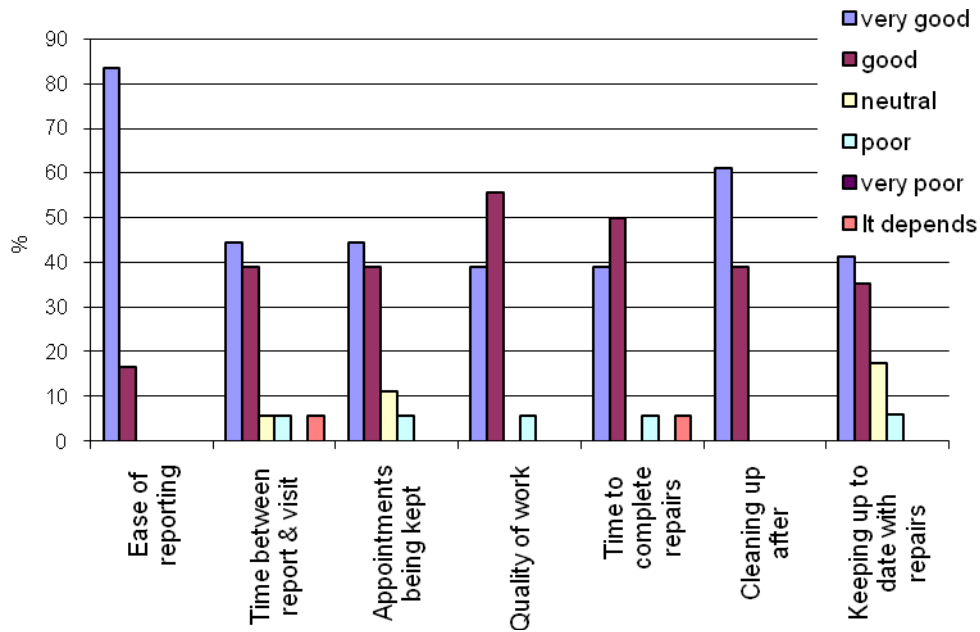
Tenants were also asked about the number of repairs reported to Giroscope over the last twelve months. Responses were: one (11%), two (17%), three to five (39%) and six to ten (33%). All 18 respondents reported that they usually receive a helpful response from Giroscope when they report a repair.

We were interested in the quality of a range of other aspects of the repair and maintenance service as shown in figure 6 below. The majority of responses to all of the categories in Figure 6 were very good and good. The best result was in relation to the ease of communicating a repair (83%; n=15 felt this to be very good). Respondents were happy also with the way in which Giroscope clean up after repairs with 61% (n=11) and 39% (n=7) reporting this service to the very good and good respectively. However, there was some dissatisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and although numbers were small, five categories received a poor response.

2 people out of the 18 (11%) reported that in the past they had been dissatisfied with a repair and the one of those who elaborated explained that this was because the problem still exists.

When asked how satisfied they were overall with the repairs and maintenance service offered by Giroscope, 50% (n=9) reported being very satisfied, 44% (n=8) satisfied and 6% (n=1) dissatisfied. The respondent who was dissatisfied reported that to be because: *'they never finish a job properly'*.

Figure 6 Participant perceptions of quality of various aspects of repair and maintenance service



Five people said they could suggest ways in which the repairs and maintenance service could be improved. Their suggestions were that the landlords should: *‘Finish a job properly’* and *‘come when they say they will’* and *‘get them done quicker’*. One respondent suggested that an improved maintenance service would reduce the need for frequent repairs and one reported inconsistency in the time taken to complete repairs. However, they did not distinguish between urgent and non-urgent repairs.

We were interested in the extent to which the repairs service offered by Giroscope had improved in recent months. Over the last 12 months 41% (n=7) reported that it had improved whilst 59% (n=10) felt it had stayed the same. No-one reported any deterioration in the quality of the service.

The qualitative data mirrored these findings and interviewees were generally happy with the repairs and maintenance service that Giroscope provided:

When I ring with a problem they come out straight away, sometimes the same day if not the next. They have always been good with repairs since I lived here.

(Interviewee A)

They have always been good at coming round and repairing especially water and electrics. The other day they were round in ten minutes. They are a lot better now than 10 yrs ago. The quality of the work is better now.

(Interviewee B)

We are very happy. If we have any problems they are always ready to come and check if we need anything. If there is an emergency it's not a problem.

(Interviewee E).

Although interviewees were generally satisfied, one respondent noted that sometimes they had to wait for things to be updated:

Everything we asked and they promised they did.....it was just a matter of timing. We had to wait for the new bathroom, there was nothing wrong but it was old and leaky but not too bad and it's done now and they did it in one day. We were very surprised.

(Interviewee E)

However, all of the interviewees noted that with urgent matters a very quick response is usually received:

It's a small staff so you may not get a problem fixed immediately but you accept it and you are not paying for someone to come out straight away but with urgent things they come out within an hour.

(Interviewee D)

They are pretty good with repairs and maintenance, they always get around to doing it, I understand they have a lot of work on and sometimes it can take a while but I understand that. But if it's something like the boiler they come around the same day or next day they are pretty good when it is essential stuff. They didn't used to be great at cleaning up but that was a while ago but now they are pretty good.....They are good with painting and stuff. I'm generally quiet happy with the repairs and maintenance service.

(Interviewee C).

3.2.3 Views on the area

Within the interview sample there was a difference of opinion regarding the characteristics of the area, which may possibly be explained by the heterogeneity of the geographical patch in which Giroscope owns properties.

All of interviewees felt the transport links to the city centre were good and although one interviewee was currently less happy with the shopping facilities compared to when they previously lived in a different Giroscope house, the majority were happy with the shopping facilities in their particular local area:

Our street is very quiet, it's nice, around the corner we have a busy street with shops with everything that we need and we are happy with the schools.

(Interviewee D)

It's on the edge of (xxxx Road¹¹) which is one of the last proper shopping areas.....everything is easy to get to here. It's 15 to 20 min walk to the city centre and has good transport links.

(Interviewee C)

There was some concern regarding crime, drug problems and anti social behaviour among two of the interviewees, although one was very attached the street where they lived and felt safe and secure there and they also described a strong community spirit:

There is trouble sometimes, very occasionally I've been here that long that I've got to know people and everyone on the street knows me and everyone seems to know everyone else.....I've never had any trouble. In the first 3 months a window got smashed but that was cos they didn't know me, but I've had no trouble after that.....I feel completely safe...there are a lot of bad things in the street with drugs and crime but they don't affect people as much as the council think. It's not as bad as people say. It has improved since I moved here, it has quietened down.....I like the community and nothing is too much trouble for anyone, there is a lot of banter.....I would rather live here and know people than

¹¹ Anonymised to maintain confidentiality.

live somewhere and not know anyone and be far from everything, everything is easy to get to here.

(Interviewee D)

One interviewee mentioned very occasional low level anti-social behaviour among the children but felt that the problem was less significant for them, as they knew many of the people in the street. The sense of community was also alluded to:

It goes through phases, the kids have all grown up and the next generation are coming through, they play footy and kick the ball at cars sometimes and things like that, but you can ask them to move and they won't give you loads of grief cos we know where their parents live.....It's a good area, they all look out for you....you feel like there is a sense of community.

(Interviewee B)

Among the other interviewees, views regarding the sense of community in the area were mixed. One felt there was no community spirit in their area, whilst others did not mention the word community but did describe how their neighbours were friendly. The mixed views among the sample highlight how the experience of living in different streets within the same local area can vary widely.

Views regarding the demolition of some properties in the area under the Market Renewal Pathfinders programme were also mixed. There was support for demolition from one interviewee as they felt this would bring improvement to the area:

With the crime and the state of the houses I think it's a good idea for the area to be pulled down. I've been the victim of crime and my car was smashed up. The crime may improve with nice new houses with front gardens and you can see people coming, not terraced houses straight onto the streets.

(Interviewee A)

The other interviewees were against any demolition and felt instead that the area could be improved by renovating the properties:

I'm against demolition and more for renovation. Giroscope is trying to get people involved. They are very passionate about keeping the area as a community and I like that. They are always trying to let you know when things are happening. There are lots of here that say don't knock us down. This is no reason for this street to come down it, everyone knows everyone, there are lots of families, there are four generations of one family living next door to each other. We are one of the last communities like that, one of the last streets like that, it's a shame to break them up cos there is good and bad stuff.

(Interviewee D)

I'm gutted. They knocked the kids schools down and have done nothing with the ground. It just seems like a waste of time, it costs more to knock down and rebuild than to do them up, probably up to 90% are fine.

(Interviewee B)

Interviewee B was also felt that the layout of terraced streets fostered community spirit and this potentially could be lost if they were replaced by houses built in cul-de-sacs creating small clusters of people which may result in limited interaction.

Another interviewee was strongly opposed demolition in principle but felt that some areas that had been earmarked for demolition had become so blighted that alternative strategies were limited:

They should have got their backsides into gear and done them up. My old house has had been knocked down, there were loads of little terraces and it was real nice. You could have made the area alright in the first place and done up the houses. They are sound houses, there is nothing wrong with them... Terraces are much nicer to live in than the box things they build in their place. They let the area run down on purpose so they have an excuse to flatten it...I could not see the point...They are good houses but they have let them get rundown. It's got to the point now where you kind of do agree with the demolition cos I've got friends that are stuck where they are doing demolitions but have not got around to theirs and they are desperate to get out, half the housing is missing the crap with the kids and loads of derelict houses that just need to come down. They really want

to move on now, they own and will get some money. It's pointless to knock down perfectly good houses and build ones that are not as good but once they start they have to finish...There are empty houses and kids are setting fire to them...It's cheaper to do the area up.

(Interviewee C)

3.3 Attitudes toward Giroscope service

3.3.1 Communication and consultation with Giroscope

We were interested in tenants' preference for mode of communication when their landlords needed to contact them about a certain issue. By far the most popular option was by telephone or text message (83%; n=15) followed by face-to-face contact (39%; n=7). Less popular were contact by e-mail (6%; n=1) or letter (11%; n=2)¹². All respondents reported that they find the letters, leaflets and other information sent to them by the Giroscope easy to understand. We asked how satisfied tenants were overall with the way in which Giroscope involves and consults tenants. 39% (n=7) reported feeling very satisfied, 44% (n=8) satisfied 11% (n=2) neither satisfied not dissatisfied and only 6% (one respondent) dissatisfied. The reason cited for this was: *'not being consulted about changes made to the outside of my home – which I did not agree to'*.

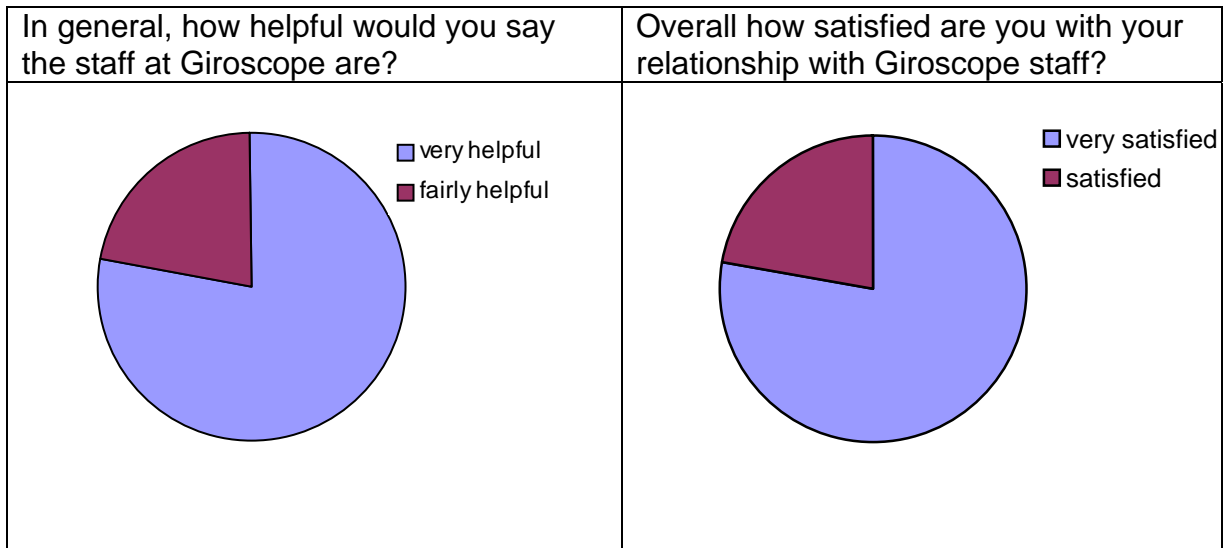
3.3.2 Relationship with Giroscope Staff

We were interested in the relationship between tenants and staff at Giroscope and how satisfied respondents were with this. The results are shown in Figure 7 below.

All participants in the survey reported that they felt Giroscope staff were either very helpful or fairly helpful and all were either very satisfied or satisfied with their relationship with them.

¹² Categories were not mutually exclusive as respondents were asked to tick all responses that were appropriate.

Figure 7 Satisfaction with Giroscope staff



Similarly, all of the interviewees had very positive views regarding their relationship with the Giroscope staff. The consensus was that they are helpful and approachable and there was a feeling that they are more than just landlords:

They really care about our family, our relationship is like friends not like landlord and tenant.

(Interviewee E)

They are our mates as well.

(Interviewee B)

Several of the interviewees were acquainted with the Giroscope staff on a personal level and had known with them before they became tenants and two had previously worked for the organisation. Landlord and tenant relationships were longstanding with the average length of a tenancy being 8.5 years and two interviewees were very longstanding tenants (15 and 20 years) and there was a strong feeling that mutual trust had developed over time:

I'm happy with them and they are happy with me. I have proved myself to be a good tenant.

(Interviewee A)

We are very happy and we don't have any problems.

(Interviewee E)

We are very satisfied here, it's a nice house.... They trust us.

(Interviewee B)

Overall Giroscope are pretty good, I'm generally quiet happy. I have no plans to move, I would like to move out of Hull at some point but there is no point in moving while I'm in Hull as I would not get somewhere this big at this price.

(Interviewee C)

One tenant, who had expressed some dissatisfaction with the condition of their property, expressed a high level of satisfaction with Giroscope as a landlord.

We were interested in levels of satisfaction with Giroscope compared with previous landlords. One of the interviewees did not have any experience with previous landlords but all of the remaining interviewees described negative experiences with previous landlords in the private rented sector and were more satisfied with their current housing situation:

I rented privately from a company, I found them atrociousthey were terrible with anything I asked to be done. As far as landlords go I would say Giroscope are one of the best companies to rent from.

(Interviewee A)

They are always ready to help and that is important to us before we was feeling by ourselves with all the problems.....it was a horrible time and the house was very poor condition but they tried to blame us.

(Interviewee E)

It emerged that Giroscope provided a range of services beyond those that would normally be expected from a landlord. They offered assistance to tenants applying for

Local Housing Allowance and helped one tenant apply for a disability grant from the council to build an extra bedroom and bathroom.

Another theme to emerge from the interviews was Giroscope's willingness to give tenants control over their housing environment and enable them to make alterations and decorate to suit their own needs and tastes, allowing them to treat the property as a home rather than a rented property:

They are very good with painting and stuff....they are quiet happy for me to go out and buy the paint and they will refund me.....I like they fact they completely leave me alone. I've knocked walls down. I like doing my own decorating. I've pretty much got a free range.....It's the closest I will ever get to owning my own gaffe, I can basically do what I want.

(Interviewee C)

You can do what you want as long as you don't change the structure, paint, decorate, even take down walls if it's done properly. I put in two fireplaces and put that wall back in here.

(Interviewee B)

You can get them to decorate or do it yourself. I would rather do it myself. If they have the paint in the colours you want, it's free. If you want another colour then you pay half. You can do what you want, they are very flexible.

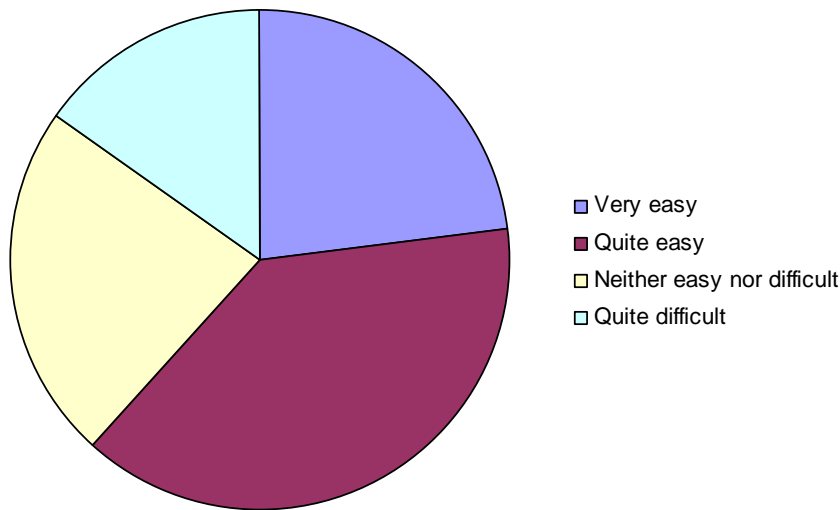
(Interviewee D)

3.3.3 Housing affordability and landlord profits

Respondents were asked about the affordability of their housing and were asked: *'How easy do you find it to afford your rent?'*

50% (n=9) of the respondents were currently in receipt of Local Housing Allowance, of these, five received support for all of their rent. Excluding these five, the majority (62%, n=8) found it very easy (n=3) or quite easy (n=5) to afford the rent. 3 found it neither easy nor difficult and 2 found it quite difficult to afford their rent.

Figure 8 **Affordability of housing**



Eight respondents had recently completed Housing Benefit Renewal Forms and all them had received help from Giroscope staff in doing so, 7 were very satisfied with this service and 1 was satisfied.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the rent they paid represented good value for money. Value for money is dependent on several variables so when formulating the question we added the caveat: *'Bearing in mind the age, size and location of your home, do you think that your rent represents good value for money?'* Although 11% (n=2) of respondents reported that they found it quite difficult to afford the rent all respondents reported that they thought the rent they paid did represent good value for money. The majority of the interviewees also felt that the rent was good value for money:

We were surprised: the house is so big and this price was very good.
(Interviewee E)

The rent is good value and always will be as that is one of the policies they had from the start. Low rents that people can afford is their motto.
(Interviewee B)

However, one interviewee felt that a recent increase had brought Giroscope's rent levels more into alignment with that of other properties in the area:

The rent went up recently but didn't for 10 years. It's now probably more in tune with other properties now, it's probably average now before it was quite a bit lower. The same properties in this street would be a bit more not massively.

(Interviewee C)

There was evidence of Giroscope's flexibility when fixing the rent level. There were reports of rents sometimes being lowered in accordance with the amount received in Local Housing Allowance. In terms of affordability two tenants found the rent affordable as Local Housing Allowance covered all the cost, of the other two, one found it easy to afford and the other was very happy with rent level.

Giroscope's policy of not charging a deposit also clearly helped with affordability for some of the interviewees:

I didn't have to pay a deposit, I was really shocked..... it is handy to have a bit of extra money to get yourself sorted.

(Interviewee A)

Giroscope also assisted with affordability in other ways. One interviewee was offered an interest free loan on moving into the property and described how Giroscope had also been flexible with payment dates for electricity charges. Another tenant got into arrears due to a banking error and Giroscope responded by offering a very flexible repayment plan.

Interviewees generally knew that Giroscope is a charity and not a profit driven organisation:

They are very moral. I like that. They are not in it for profit. They buy a property that is dilapidated and do it up so someone can live in it. It does not have to be spectacular but liveable, not ultra modern.

(Interviewee D)

3.3.4 Security of tenure

Giroscope require tenants to sign an Assured Short hold Tenancy for an initial six months with an agreement that after this period the conditions of tenure remain in the form of a statutory tenancy and subject to abiding by the rules, tenants can stay indefinitely. Due to the nature of this contract all of the interviewees expressed feeling secure with their tenure:

They said we could stay as long as we want. We feel safe and happy.

(Interviewee E)

It's a 6 month contract and then unless you break the rules it is automatically renewed. They wont kick you out they might put the rent up but I think that's only fair. I know of them lowering the rent when you don't have enough money.

(Interviewee D)

They're not going to evict you if the benefit is paid late, they will wait..... You would have to try really hard to get kicked out of one of their places you would really have to try.

(Interviewee C)

There was a feeling among several of the interviewees that the property felt like their own home rather than a rented property:

It's more our house than a rented house. We feel very secure, we feel more or less like it is our own home rather than rented accommodation.

(Interviewee B)

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Limitations of the study

Given that the total number of properties currently being rented out by Giroscope is only thirty, we were inevitably limited to a small sample size in this study. Consequently the quantitative component was restricted to very simple analysis of frequencies as any more complex analysis would not have been meaningful.

The response rate achieved was 60%, which although respectable for a postal survey, is still unlikely to have fully represented the views of all current tenants.

There may have been some inconsistency in the quality of the interview data given that one had to be conducted over the telephone whilst the others were done face to face.

Given the close relationship Giroscope has with their tenants, there may have been some compromise in data quality. For example, despite assurances of anonymity, the study may have been prone to some response bias so as not to jeopardise the relationship with their landlord.

Due to financial and time limitations the sample size of the qualitative component was small which will inevitably have had implications for the generalisability of the results. With more time, we may have been able to pursue more of the respondents who initially indicated their willingness to take part in an in-depth interview.

Tenant satisfaction is a complex phenomenon influenced by a wide range of personal and situational factors many of them not connected to the landlord's performance (Satsangi and Kearns 1992) and generalised satisfaction levels are difficult to interpret since they are likely to be tied to expectations and may not present an absolute measure of landlords behaviour (Rugg and Rhodes 2008). This provides challenges for the researcher trying to measure it at a given point and comparing it over time. Furthermore, despite our efforts to incorporate existing questions into the questionnaire, this did not work out very well in practise resulting in limited comparability with previous evaluations of Giroscope.

4.2 Discussion

Previous research has cited the quality of housing stock as a significant problem in the rental housing sector (UN-Habitat 2003). However in this survey of Giroscope tenants there was a high level of satisfaction with the condition of the properties (inside and out). When we examined various aspects of the properties, in all categories the majority responses were either good or very good. The most positive responses were reported for size of property, general layout, heating system and decor. The most negative results were reported for security of doors and windows. In the interviews the majority view was that tenants were generally satisfied with the condition of their home.

In terms of satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service the responses were in the majority positive. However, there was a minority view that “time to complete repairs” and “keeping up with repairs and maintenance” could be improved upon. These findings were mirrored in the interview data. However, the majority of tenants were happy with the repairs and maintenance service and all noted that with urgent repairs they receive a very fast response. Giroscope is trying to improve this service and these efforts have been noted by some of their tenants: 41% said the repairs and maintenance service had improved in the last 12 months.

The small levels of dissatisfaction registered with the quality of the housing stock and the repairs and maintenance service demonstrate that there is room for improvement in these areas. Operating within workforce and budget constraints make it difficult to keep on top of repair and maintenance work and a constant re-evaluation of priorities when assigning limited resources is necessary to maximise tenant satisfaction.

UN-Habitat (2003) have identified landlord/ tenant conflict as an issue in rental housing. In contrast, all of the survey respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with their relationship with the Giroscope staff. Similarly, the interviews found high levels of satisfaction in this area, Giroscope staff were found to be very helpful, approachable and friendly. The interviews also revealed a feeling that the Giroscope staff cared about tenants' welfare and were committed to helping them. In some cases they were described as more like friends rather than a landlord. High levels satisfaction were also found with the way Giroscope consults and involves tenants, with only one survey respondent saying they were dissatisfied in this area.

UN-Habitat (2003) have also identified rent levels and affordability as problematic issues in rental housing. However, Giroscope aim to provide affordable accommodation and on the whole they are achieving this aim. Two tenants reported that they found it quite difficult to afford their rent but the vast majority said they found it either very easy or easy to afford and all of the respondents felt that the rent they paid represented good value for money. Giroscope's other policies such as not charging deposits, collecting rents weekly and providing help with Local Housing Allowance forms also assisted with affordability.

The interviews also found evidence that Giroscope were sometimes flexible on fixing rent levels based on individual circumstances. However, given that a small number of tenants reported that they found it difficult to afford the rent Giroscope could consider re-assessing all rent levels on an individual basis, although there is only a certain amount of flexibility given budget constraints.

Previous research has highlighted examples of tenants and their associations arguing that rents are too high and that landlords are often accused of making excessive profits (UN-Habitat 2003). We did not explore this issue in the survey but the interviewees were generally aware that Giroscope is a charity and therefore profit was not a key priority. Clearly, due to the general feeling amongst the respondents that the properties were good value for money and that rent levels were not too high, there is no evidence in this study of exploitation by landlords in this context.

UN-Habitat (2003) have identified legal issues and threat of eviction as problems in rental housing. Giroscope requires tenants to sign an Assured Short hold Tenancy for an initial six months with an agreement that after this fixed period the conditions of tenure remain in the form of a statutory tenancy. As Giroscope do not intend to either occupy the property themselves, or sell it, tenants are not under threat of eviction and can stay indefinitely, subject to abiding by the rules of the tenancy. It emerged from the interviews that this arrangement provided tenants with security of tenure and they therefore felt able to treat the property as their home as it provided a long term housing option.

UN-Habitat (2003) identified problems with inner city areas as a problem in rental housing. Among the interviewees there were mixed views regarding the area: some voiced concerns regarding crime and anti-social behaviour. However views varied greatly depending on the particular street that the interviewee lived in, highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the area. Although the area is largely beyond the control of Giroscope it does contribute its regeneration by renovating dilapidated properties and bringing them back into use. It also supports the community by providing retail space for local businesses and offering work experience for local people. Giroscope is opposing plans to demolish some of the properties in the area, in their publication "*Last One Out Please Close The Gateway*" (2004b) they propose alternative strategies to regenerate the area and the majority of the interviewees were also opposed to the demolition of properties in the area.

UN-Habitat (2003) identified discrimination against some tenants as a problem in rental housing. Giroscope (2004a) states that it is primarily a landlord and not always able to deal with specific social problems, however, they welcome lone parents, homeless people and people who are unemployed or on low wages as many of the directors and staff have faced similar situations. The data from the survey supports this, 50% of the respondents were lone parents, 6% were not working because of long-term sickness or disability and 35% were at home/ not seeking work (including looking after children or family).

The research has highlighted a small degree of dissatisfaction in some areas, however, in the main Giroscope provide a very good quality service. They take a holistic approach and provide services that go beyond the usual remit of a landlord such as offering Housing Benefit (LHA) advice and being flexible with rent arrangements. As a people-focused organisation they are responsive to individual needs and by allowing tenants control over their living environment they enable them to make their property a home. By providing good quality, affordable accommodation and security of tenure they offer a long term housing option to members of the local community and are an important housing provider in the area offering an alternative to the private rented sector and social housing.

The high levels of satisfaction among Giroscope 's tenants is evidenced in the fact that only one respondent reported intentions of moving but this was for career reasons rather than due to any dissatisfaction with being a Giroscope tenant. Many reported bad experiences with previous landlords in the Private Rented Sector and a large majority reported being more satisfied now than with their previous housing situation. All of the survey respondents reported that they would recommend Giroscope as landlords to others.

In conclusion, Giroscope operate a very successful alternative housing management model and are an important community resource.

4.3 Recommendations

This study revealed some small level of dissatisfaction with housing conditions (e.g. heating; décor; bathroom and kitchen fittings) and some dissatisfaction with the security of windows and doors. Giroscope should continue to work towards improving these key areas. However, the cost implications of this need to be balanced against the rent levels for the properties in question. For some tenants, affordability is of a greater priority than the overall standard of the accommodation. As such Giroscope should continue to work closely with individual tenants to identify and work towards individual needs and priorities.

We also revealed some dissatisfaction with aspects of the repairs and maintenance service. Obviously Giroscope work within a limited budget and are faced with difficult decisions when identifying priorities in the maintenance of their properties, but there is a need to continuously re-evaluate priorities when allocating the budget to maximise tenant satisfaction and ensure consistency in the quality of service between tenants.

There was some evidence of tenants finding it difficult to afford their rent. Although already done to some extent, Giroscope could further explore the possibility of setting rent levels based on the individual's circumstances with frequent and on-going monitoring of this. This said the majority felt that their rent was affordable and did represent good value for money.

As there was little opportunity for comparing data over a period of time (as previous studies were sporadic and not very comprehensive) we suggest that Giroscope commission independent evaluations on a regular basis in the future. Utilising a similar design and the same questionnaire as this current study would generate trend data with which Giroscope could monitor their progress over time.

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