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BLOCK MANAGEMENT

Do you know what your residents think of you?

Howard Morgan explains why surveying residents can be good for business

THE UK'S LARGEST BLOCK

management specialists are jockeying to build their reputations and become the "manager of choice" in the eyes of leaseholders and developers.

Increasingly leaseholders are being seen as "customers". But are UK managers measuring satisfaction and using the results to enhance their own brand and that of the projects they manage?

The picture is mixed – most block managers are not in the habit of surveying residents for their views on the levels of service that they receive... but arguably they should be. Some see resident surveys as costly, time-consuming and often inconclusive. Even worse, they fear a risk of creating unrealistic expectations. After all, what's wrong with attending a residents' association meeting as a way of gauging sentiment?

In contrast, those who have conducted resident surveys have found that they provide an objective way to

1. gauge how well property management is performing
2. capture resident feedback on what is important and needs attention
3. set an objective and measurable baseline for improvement

Advocates of this approach say that where opinion is invariably fragmented and it's often a case of 'who shouts loudest gets heard', a survey gives everyone a chance to have their say and identifies where the true consensus lies.

Customer feedback enhances transparency and supports brand building. Looking outside our industry, on-line businesses like Amazon, Ebay and TripAdvisor enable the customer to make an informed decision based on customer feedback and satisfaction

scores. It's ironic that it is easier to find information about the service you will receive at a bed and breakfast hotel in Australia, than it is to find out the likely professionalism of the manager of a block of flats in your home town.

Residential property management company Chainbow began conducting on-line surveys of its leaseholders (now totalling around 4,500) four years ago. Managing Director, Roger Southam, says the benefits are huge.

"We find that the survey demonstrates to our leaseholders that we care about their needs and are listening to them. The feedback tells us about their expectations, requirements and needs so that we can tailor our services and benchmark our performance accordingly."

Roger adds: "My feeling is that you can't bury your head

in the sand. We publish the results to our leaseholders and let them know what actions we've taken and how we propose to change and adapt our systems accordingly.

If a survey is conducted independently and professionally and with the active engagement of the residents' association – good levels of response and insight can be gained. This has the potential to create even closer alignment between resident priorities and service charge expenditure.

One final thought, resident surveys provide a controlled means of obtaining feedback – it's far better to get warts and all feedback directly than to risk finding your companies name being dragged through the mud in the social media.

Howard Morgan is Managing Director of Real Estate Customer Service Specialist Real Service