

Devon County Farms Estate Questionnaire 2023

Executive Summary

During May – June 2023 a questionnaire was shared with 70 Devon County Farms Tenants to obtain feedback on their experience.

Participation was low with 26% of tenants responding to the survey.

Overall results were positive, however key areas for improvement/ further investigation centre on:

- The end-to-end repairs process.
- Access to offer feedback (compliment or complaint).

With potential to:

- Improve support for new tenants.
- Look into alternative contact methods to increase participation in 2024 survey.

Recommended actions are detailed later within the report and will be updated via the Farms Estate newsletter.

Introduction

Through agreement with Farms Committee leads Cllr Yabsley and Cllr Brook and with consultation on content with the Farms Agents and Farms Tenant Representative, a questionnaire for tenants of the Devon County Council Farms Estate was devised (as attached in Appendix 1).

The online questionnaire was issued to 70 tenants via email (and post to tenants with no email address recorded) during early May 2023 and ran until end June 2023. Two reminders were issued via email to encourage tenants to participate in the survey. The results were anonymous with an option for further contact if required.

26% (18) responses were received online / via post. It is unclear why the response rate was low – this would be interesting to understand with tenants. It is important however to listen to the valuable feedback from those that did engage and ensure any improvements benefit all tenants across the estate.

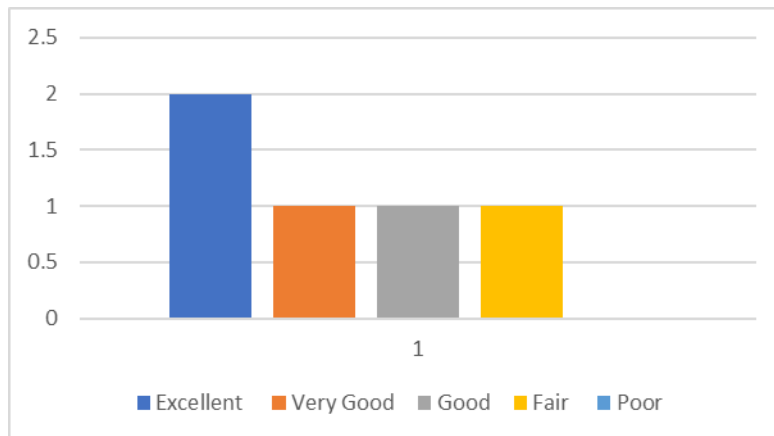
Results

18 responses were received.

Question 1

If you have joined the Farms Estate as a new tenant within the last 12 - 18 months, how would you rate the application and award process?

5 responded with a rating to this question 80% felt the process was good or better.



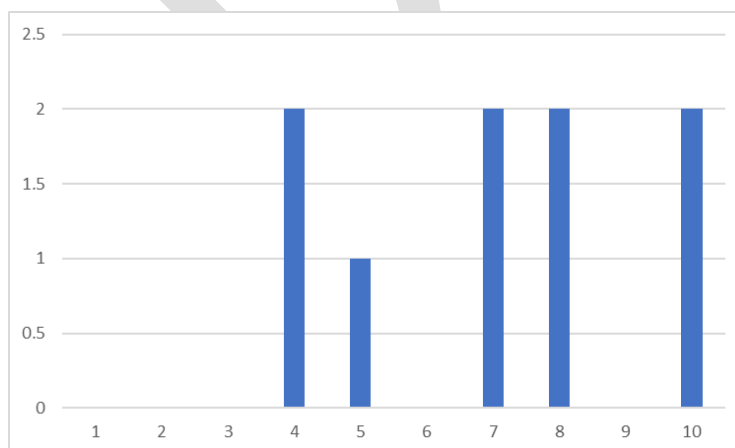
Comments included:

'To ascertain the ingoing valuation, to ensure the incoming tenant can afford this commitment from the outset.'

Question 2

How would you rate the new entrants guide (on a scale 1 to 10)?

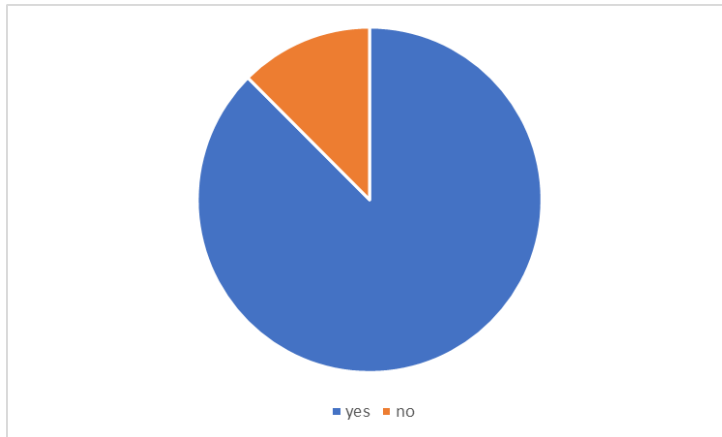
9 responded with a rating to this question, with an average rating of 7.



Question 3

If you have renewed, reviewed, or received a new lease agreement within the last 12-18 months, was the lease agreement clear and comprehensive?

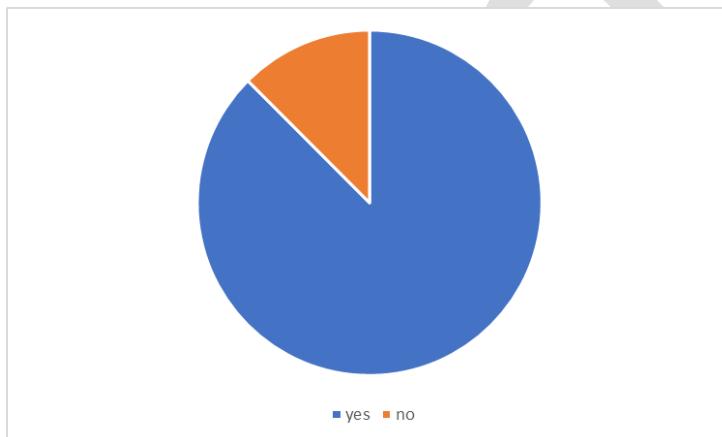
8 responded with a rating to this question. 87.5% agreed the lease agreement clear and comprehensive.



Question 4

Was this process clear, fair, open & transparent?

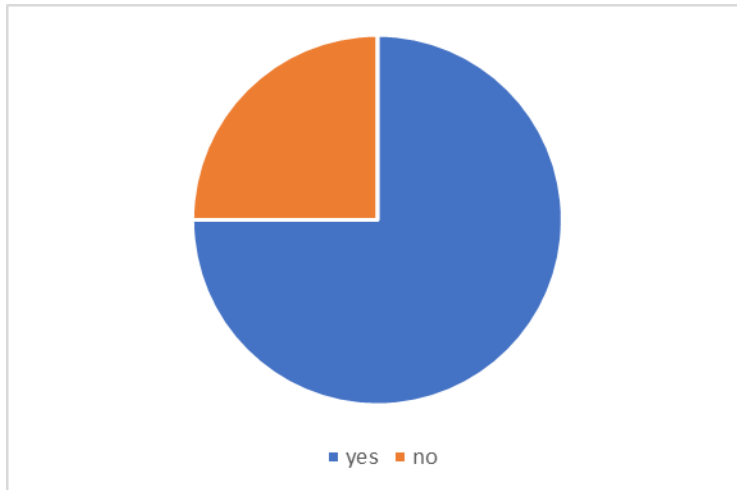
8 responded with a rating to this question. 87.5% agreed the process was clear, fair, open & transparent.



Question 5

Was the lease/renewal process managed in a timely manner and did you receive regular updates/communications during the transition?

8 responded with a rating to this question. 75% agreed the lease was complete in a timely manner and regular communications were received.



Question 6

Within the last 12 - 18 months how would you rate the level of support received (if required) from the Land Agents during this time?

17 responded with a rating to this question. 59% felt the support was good or better.



Comments included:

'It always comes back to lack of funds, Dan does his best though'

'When I joined the estate there were at least 1-2 staff dealing with queries. Claudia's workload is clearly too much, the Norse support staff are useless and nothing is dealt with in a timely fashion. Meeting cancelled with very short notice.'

'Tends to only be one point of contact'

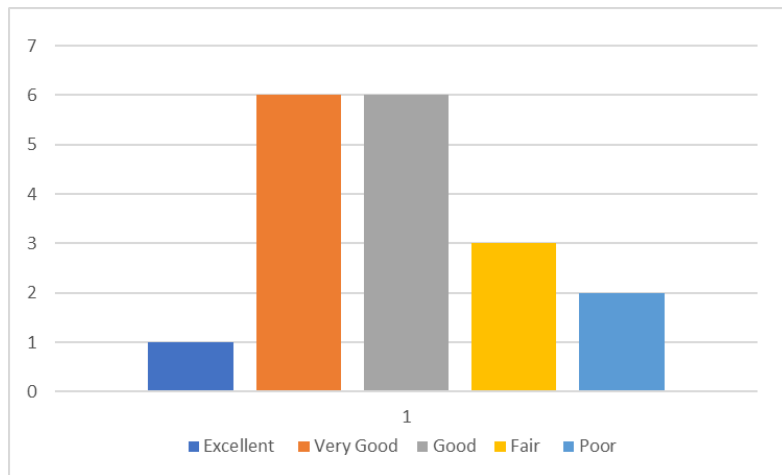
'Always on end of phone or email if needed'

'Needs to be easier to contact agent by phone'

Question 7

If you lease a farmhouse, how would you rate this property?

18 responded with a rating to this question. 72% felt the property was good or better.



Comments included:

'Kitchen poor, driveway poor. Damp in the house. Not energy efficient.'

'Windows need replacing. New smoke alarms required. New front door required. Mould and damp issues on all interior outer walls. One window that is screwed shut should have been replaced in 2015!'

'Even though it has had a lot of investment before we came here there are still some damp issues. Also, repairs are taking ages and are still not done after 2.5 years.'

'Little bit of damp in property! But being sorted.'

'Post renovation, this property is significantly improved from when I moved in. The rollercoaster of a renovations process is well documented and resulted in compensation, as a direct result of the contract being awarded to the cheapest quote.'

'Despite a large renovation project, damp is still quite an issue.'

'Still waiting for works to be finished.'

'We live in a lovely old property that has had a lot of work done when we moved in. I can not say that the work was to the highest standard and unfortunately, I think DCC were ripped off. Waterproofing works have not been done to a high enough standard to resolve problems. We are in prime weather to do the work, but it will be left until it rains again.'

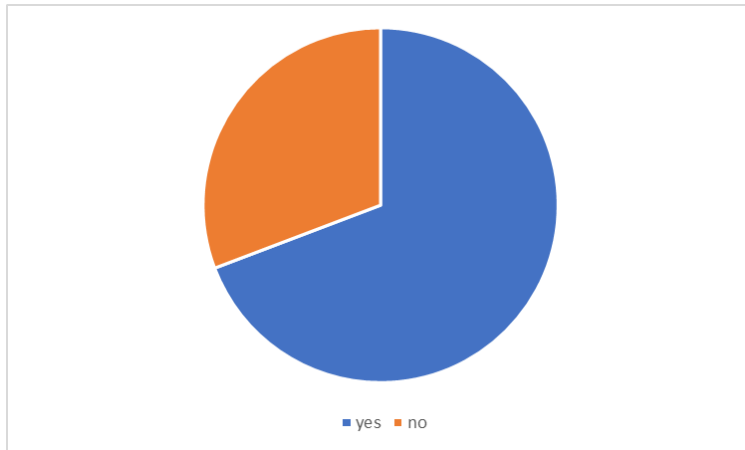
'The property was empty for 18 months, and works could have been completed, however work is taking place during our tenancy.'

'Could do with an out of hours number for emergencies e.g. water leak, electric fault etc'

Question 8

If you have required any property maintenance on your farm in the last 12-18 months that is the responsibility of the landlord, did you find this easy to report?

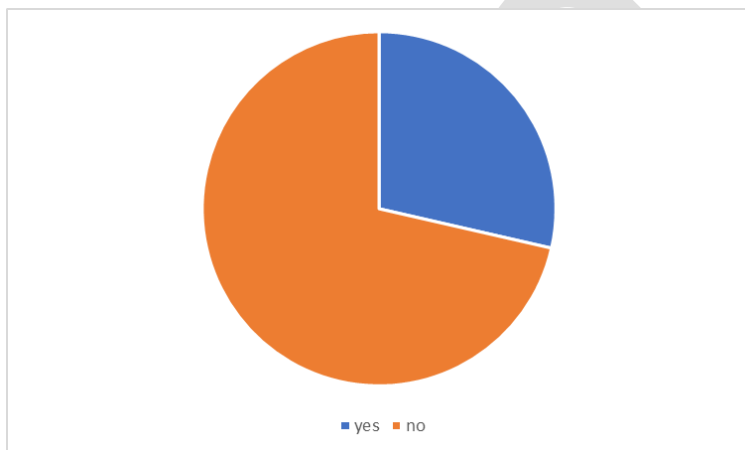
13 responded with a rating to this question. 69% agreed property maintenance was easy to report.



Question 9

If you have required any property maintenance on your farm within the last 12-18 months that is the responsibility of the landlord, was this resolved swiftly and/or were you kept informed regarding the status of the repair?

14 responded with a rating to this question. 29% agreed the repair was resolved swiftly and they were kept informed re the status.



Comments included:

'It has taken some time to resolve maintenance issues, though it seems to be contractors that hold things up.'

'Bedroom window is screwed closed...by previous tenants....this was reported in 2015.

Smoke alarms required for dining room as the house is so drafty that the smoke gets pulled up and past the current smoke alarm! This was reported 3 years ago.'

'Shorten the process, too much form filling and time wasted.'

'It's easy to report if Dan or Claudia pick up the phone but that is where any easiness ends.

Storm damage caused by the major storms in February 2022 took more than 12 months to fix. The shed was only fixed when I threatened to reduce my rent payment. Leaking roof had to wait until March to be replaced, internal damp issues still outstanding.

This pattern is constantly recurring, outstanding reports on safety issues and further collapsing sheds are yet to be viewed by a surveyor despite multiple reports.'

'I have a non-functioning cesspit which is overflowing and running down a cow track and into a stream. This has been surveyed, I was told tenders would be completed for the job.

No one has been out, and another month has passed with raw sewage running on top of the track into a water course. This was reported approximately 2 years ago.'

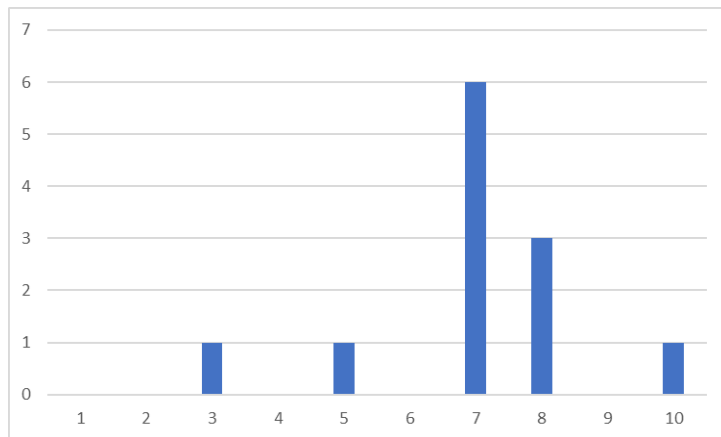
'Always chasing and no progression.'

'Needs to be easier to get repairs done.'

Question 10

If any property maintenance on your farm within the last 12-18 months, arranged by the landlord, how would you rate the quality of work undertaken? (where 1 is 'poor' and 10 is excellent).

12 responded with a rating to this question with an average rating of 7.



Comments included:

'Just more timely.'

'Some work is to a perfectly suitable standard but some of that is fixing previous work that was done to a terrible standard. Due to budget issues, many of the works carried out are as effective as putting a plaster on a water leak. One major issue is the quality of surveyors that Norse seem to employ. Honestly, I wouldn't trust any of them to organise taking the bins out, let alone a job of any importance.'

'Some contractors seem to be better than others.'

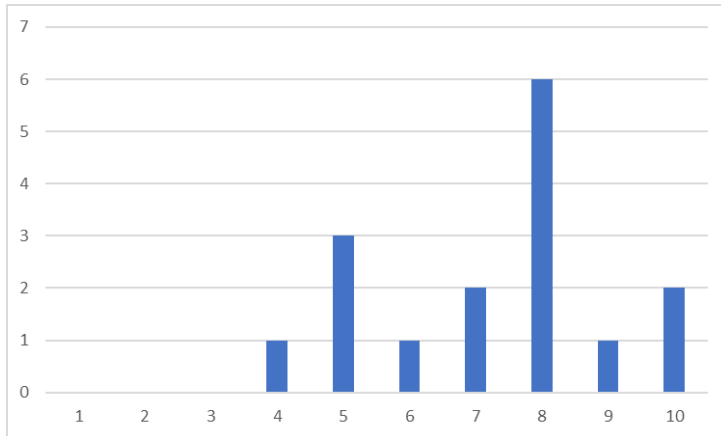
'The contractor wasn't very good and the project management was poor.'

'I think on any work/job that takes place on a DCC property an independent person who does not work for the company doing the work. There should be site manager to oversee and make sure the work is done to an acceptable standard and no corners are cut.'

Question 11

If you read the County Farms Newsletter, please advise how useful and informative you rate this (where 1 is 'poor' and 10 is 'excellent').

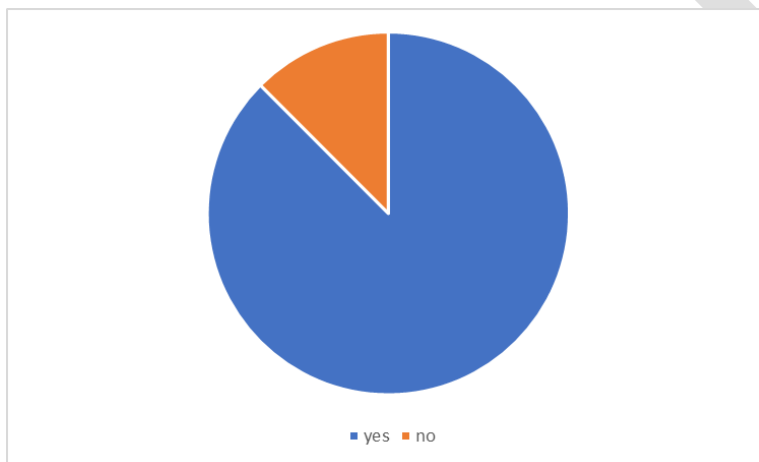
16 responded with a rating to this question with an average rating of 8.



Question 12

If you have needed to contact the Land Agents within the last 12 months, have you been able to make contact easily?

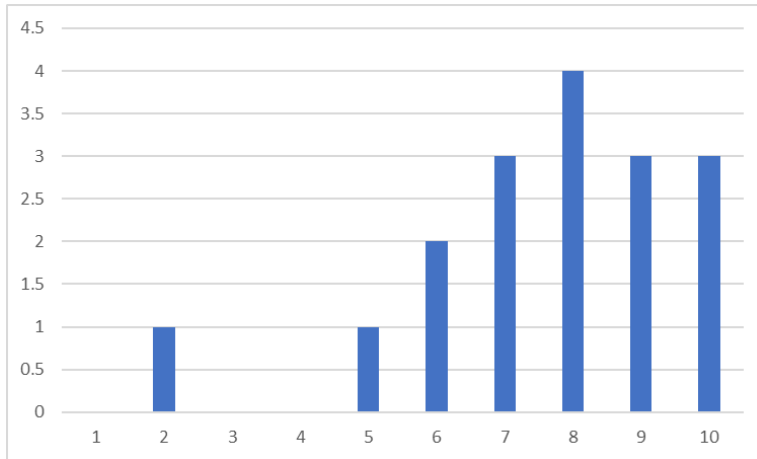
16 responded with a rating to this question. 87.5% stated they were able to contact the land agent easily.



Question 13

When contacting the Land Agents how would you rate the level of service? (where 1 is 'poor' and 10 is 'excellent').

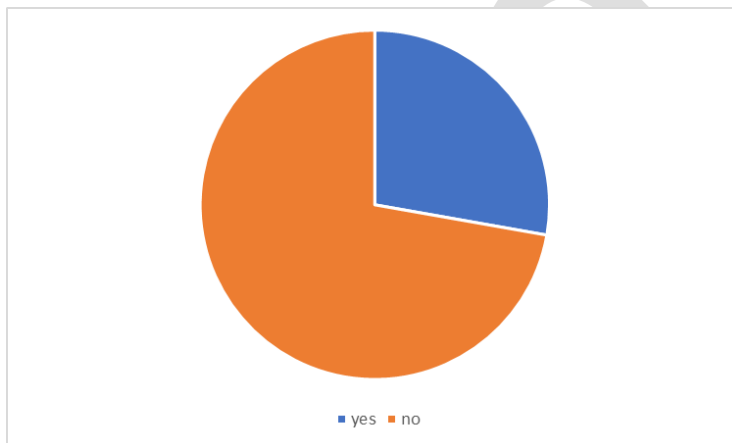
17 responded with a rating to this question with an average rating of 7.5.



Question 14

If you felt the need to offer feedback a compliment or a complaint - would you know how to access this process?

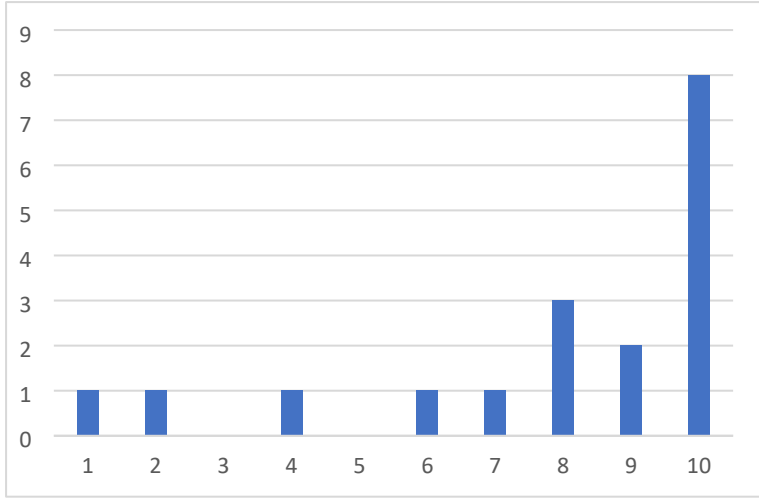
18 responded with a rating to this question. 27% stated they would know how to access a feedback process.



Question 15

Finally, based on your experience over the last 12-18 months, please advise if you would recommend leasing a DCC farm to friends or family (where 1 is 'never' and 10 is 'definitely').

18 responded with a rating to this question with an average rating of 7.8 and a Net Promotor Score of +33.



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Conclusions

Whilst the volume of responses from the farms tenants is low with only 26% of the tenants contacted responding to the survey the following highlight the key themes.

- Overall, the new tenant process and support was viewed positively.
- Overall, the lease / lease renewal process was viewed positively.
- Overall, the process to obtain a repair requires improvement.
- Overall, communications were viewed positively, however there was a clear need to share the feedback process.
- Overall, the majority would recommend the Devon County Farms Estate.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Activity
Investigate potential for further support/communications for new tenants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of further mentor support across estate. • Ensure contact details and 'service level' response is clear to manage expectations.
Review potential to increase communications/updates regarding new/renew of lease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure contact details and 'service level' response is clear to manage expectations. • Ensure regular updates regarding lease by agreement, so expectations are managed and contact point clear.
Review end to end repair process, with the potential for standards to ensure expectations clear, potential for a named contact, improved communications, managed timelines and formal work sign off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known issues with end-to-end process – potential changes to investigate; • Sharing 24/7 Helpdesk contact and definition of emergency repairs to speed up this process. • Communications with tenant re where are in the process and enable a named contact when passed from Dan/Claudia to the repairs team, with clear escalation point if no contact. • Written specification of repairs within scope and comms regarding likely start/completion time to ensure expectations clearly managed by all parties. • Review process / introduce training to ensure internal escalation of issues with contractors to review and remove from database/future bidding for repairs work. • Access to DCC feedback process if dispute regarding completion of works that is not being resolved.
<p>Briefing to tenants to ensure aware of access to provide Devon County Council direct feedback process.</p> <p>Annual reminder to tenants to enable feedback (compliments and complaints) through the Devon County process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition into winter newsletter. • Briefing to new tenants via new tenants' pack. • Reminder annually in newsletter of following information <p>Customer feedback procedure - Have Your Say (devon.gov.uk).</p> <p>Contacting us</p> <p>Should you wish to provide feedback or make a complaint, please contact:</p> <p>Customer Relations Team Room 120 County Hall Topsham Road Exeter, EX2 4QD</p>

	Tel: 0800 212 783 (free from landlines) Email: customer.relations@devon.gov.uk
Repeat questionnaire May-June 2024 to compare results with this baseline but investigate alternative method on contacting tenants to increase participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publicise in newsletter.• Maintain anonymity of respondents.• Issue questionnaire via email and hard copy.

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