

Carrying Out STATUS: Short Guidance

Full guidance is available in the National Housing Federation's "Guide to Running STATUS". A new, 2nd edition was published in April 2008.

"Housing association" should be read as applying only to those registered with the Housing Corporation (and otherwise known as registered social landlords or RSLs).

The RSR defines a tenant as 'someone who lives in a property belonging to the RSL and holds a tenancy, lease or licence'. Therefore licensees are expected to be included in the PI and hence the survey.

1 Introduction

The National Housing Federation was given Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice grant funding in 2007 to conduct a review of the STATUS tenant satisfaction methodology and to investigate the scope for extending the questionnaire to residents of sheltered and supported housing, and also to develop a STATUS survey for Home Owners.

The project has developed the "4" series¹ suite of questionnaires – reviewing the General Needs survey, and producing three additional versions – for Home Owners, Supported Housing tenants and Sheltered Housing tenants.

- 4NA: New standard General Needs tenant questionnaire
- 4NC: Standard Home Owner questionnaire
- 4ND: Standard Supported tenant questionnaire
- 4NE: Standard Sheltered tenant questionnaire

2 About the Questionnaires

2.1 General Needs Tenant Questionnaire

The previous 3NA questionnaire was scrutinised by an expert advisory group, and questions that had consistently low response rates were reviewed. A number of additional question sets were also developed, covering anti-social behaviour, future plans and equality and diversity measures.

It was also revised to incorporate the new Performance Indicators for housing associations.

2.2 Home Owner Questionnaire

The Housing Corporation funded the National Housing Federation through an Innovation and Good Practice Grant to produce a standardised satisfaction questionnaire that will assist landlords that provide various home ownership products to measure their performance in managing the properties and their standards of service.

¹ "4NB" has been reserved for a likely review of the Local Authority STATUS survey which is used to collect Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs).

The questionnaire covers the core areas of:

- Household information (including optional personal information)
- Housing management and service provision
- Neighbourhood
- Contact with the housing association
- Repairs and maintenance
- Communication and information
- Purchasing the property
- Household costs and affordability
- Future plans

2.3 Supported Tenant Questionnaire

With input from the review group and a range of other stakeholders, an analysis of other existing questionnaires and related questions was undertaken.

The issue of assessing satisfaction with support services as well as housing management services is not at all straightforward. There are complex issues to be resolved in cases where the support is not provided by the housing provider, and particularly where it is provided by a private organisation. We have tried to avoid any duplication of the Supporting People outcomes data collection exercise.

While some residents of supported housing will be capable of completing the General Needs (4NA) questionnaire, it is important to ask them specific questions about the support services they receive, and the Supported (4ND) questionnaire has been developed specifically to do this.

Questions were included that specifically gather information on:

- Support services (9 & 10)
- Support worker (11 – 13)
- Anti-social behaviour (27 – 29)

The 'household information' questions in the Supported Tenant (4ND) questionnaire about household size and the number of people living at the property were varied from the General Needs (4NA) questionnaire to reduce the number of questions being asked overall, and to avoid confusion for tenants of multiple occupancy properties (such as hostels).

2.3.1 Floating Support

Whether tenants who receive floating support should be sent the Supported (4ND) or General Needs (4NA) questionnaire will depend on the association's assessment of three things:

- how many tenants are in this category (and if it is worthwhile using a separate survey for what may be only a few tenants);
- whether the services are under the control (by contract or directly supplied) of the housing association and it is therefore appropriate to ask about satisfaction with the services; and
- whether good administrative data is available to identify these residents so they can be sent the questionnaire.

The housing association carrying out the survey can then choose whether to use the General Needs (4NA) or supported (4ND) version of STATUS.

2.3.2 Managing Agents

If properties aren't managed by the association they would not be included in the STATUS survey population. If an association is a managing agent they would carry out STATUS - and they may wish to share the results with the owning housing association.

Managing agents are not required to carry out STATUS unless they are registered with the Housing Corporation and have over 1000 units in management. This does not preclude managing agents from carrying out a survey with a methodology consistent with STATUS, but there is no regulatory requirement to do so.

2.4 Sheltered Tenant Questionnaire

The questionnaire for tenants of sheltered housing has been designed particularly for this group, and is in a larger typeface (and therefore longer at 12 pages) with specific questions relating to the services they receive.

Questions were included that specifically gather information on:

- Home help and care services (15 & 16)
- Emergency Call System (17 – 20)
- Scheme Manager (21 & 22)
- Anti-social behaviour (27 – 29)
- Formal complaints procedure (30)

It varies from the standard General Needs tenant survey (4NA) in that:

- Additional response options were included in the “services” questions to reflect the different services available to this group of tenants.
- The question about members of household under 16 was not included, and the household composition options were reduced to reflect the different demographic of this group.
- Questions on “Future plans” were not included after consideration of both their appropriateness for the group and for space considerations in the questionnaire design.

It is recommended that the Sheltered STATUS questionnaire (4NE) is used for this group.

The 4NE Sheltered tenant version should not be used for Leasehold Scheme for the Elderly (LSE) or Shared Ownership for the Elderly (SOE) residents; these residents should be sent the Home Owners version (4NC), although the leaseholding landlord may wish to include some of the standard sheltered questions in their home owner survey.

2.5 Importance of keeping the questionnaire standard

Specialist research advice should be sought before making any changes to the standard questionnaires.

2.5.1 Additional Questions

The questionnaire is already comprehensive, and has limited scope for the addition of questions. The number of additional questions that might be added will vary depending on the question and identifying an appropriate location in the questionnaire. Questions should generally be inserted towards the end of questionnaire sections. Any additional sections should be added at the end of the main questions and before the “any other comments” section.

2.5.2 Deleting questions

Questions should not be deleted. Some questions have a relationship with other questions that enable analysis to be done. By deleting questions, you may limit some of the analysis that could be carried out on the results, such as comparative benchmarking for specific questions.

2.5.3 Changes to wording

The wording of questions must never be changed as this will remove the ability to make comparisons with other landlords using STATUS. You can still personalise your questionnaire, for example “Housing association” to “Anon HA” and the titles of newsletters, etc.

Some of the questions are asked in order to provide performance indicator information and altering them may prevent the regulatory requirement being met.

3 Carrying out the survey

3.1 Introduction

General Needs (now 4NA) has been specified as a postal methodology since its inception. The creation of additional Supported (4ND) and Sheltered (4NE) questionnaires raised the question of what the appropriate fieldwork methods are for engaging with these groups, and then how the results should be combined to produce a single tenant satisfaction performance indicator.

3.2 Fieldwork

The General Needs (4NA) and Home Owner (4NC) surveys should continue to be conducted as a postal self-completion survey.

It is expected that postal self-completion questionnaires will be used for as many supported (4ND) and sheltered (4NE) tenants as possible.

The questionnaires have been designed and tested for use as postal self-completion surveys, and the evidence collected during the development process is that they are suitable for use with the great majority of these tenants. It is recommended that the first attempt for response is by a postal questionnaire, and that if alternative completion methods are to be offered that they are detailed in the covering letter.

The acceptable alternative methods would be:

- telephone completion, with the tenant phoning in to a call centre
- telephone completion, with the tenant being phoned at an agreed time
- face-to-face completion, with a trained researcher visiting the tenant at an agreed time

For these alternatives it is absolutely essential that the script for the interview survey absolutely follows the postal survey, and that the interview is done by a trained researcher. It is imperative that the quality of the survey is maintained so that the results can be compared with those collected through postal self-completion. Care must be taken to ensure that any bias that might be introduced through the use of differing methods is minimised.

Some tenants will be better approached using one of the interview methods detailed above rather than being sent a postal self-completion questionnaire. Examples are listed in section 6.1, and include tenants with dementia and learning difficulties.

3.3 Analysing the data

If survey responses have been collected using more than one fieldwork method, the most straightforward way of bringing them together for analysis is to collect it into a single data table that can then be interrogated in a standard and consistent way. An identifier as to how each line (returned survey) was completed would be useful and will permit analysis to check any variation in response patterns from different methods.

Simply put, responses collected through interview responses should be coded in the same way as the postal questionnaires, and included in the same data file for analysis.

4 Sampling

4.1 Working out who to survey

Sampling is a process that selects a proportion of tenants to be surveyed. If sampling is carried out according to set rules, you will be able to claim that the sample you have sent the questionnaire to is representative of your tenants as a whole. The greater the number of tenants in the sample that return questionnaires, the more confident you can be that the views of the sample are also representative of the views of all your tenants.

Returned questionnaires still need to be checked to ensure that they are representative of your tenants as a whole. This is done after the questionnaires are returned, by checking the breakdown of bedroom sizes, property types or other key data to ensure that they match your tenant and stock profile.

4.1.1 Sample Frame

The “sample frame” is a listing of the names and addresses of all those properties with tenants whose views you want to explore. It is used as the base – or “background population” – from which to select an actual sample group who are to be sent questionnaires.

A sample frame is usually created as an electronic file from a housing management system. This file should exclude all tenants, residents and properties for whom the postal survey is not intended, such as:

- Leaseholders (for the tenant survey)
- Tenants (for the home owner survey)
- Empty properties that will not be filled during the survey period

- Commercial or non-residential properties
- Duplicate and 'dummy' entries
- People who have passed away (this error occurs particularly with joint tenants, and can be very upsetting)

The file should consist of a series of separate records, each including the full name of the tenant(s) and separate variables for each part of the property's address including the full postcode. (This should be rows for each tenant/property and columns for each variable). You must also include a unique reference number. This information on the tenant population is used to select the sample and to generate the mail out information.

You will want to incorporate additional information about properties into each record in the sample frame (or a linked file) at this stage. They might include:

- Housing management area office (so you can compare results for different teams)
- Local Authority area (if you operate across local authority borders)
- Property type (e.g. house or flat)
- Number of bedrooms
- Modernisation status (e.g. new build, re-improved, unimproved)
- Tenancy type (e.g. assured, secure)
- Rent and service charge amounts
- Start date of tenancy
- Sheltered schemes

4.1.2 Census or Sample?

A census is simply using the entire sample frame – in other words, instead of selecting some of the records for the mail out, you send it to all the tenants in the sample frame.

The general rule is that the smaller the stock size, the higher the percentage of returned questionnaires required so a census is more likely to be needed. As an indicator, housing associations with stock of 1,000 or less will require a census, while those with stock up to 1,500 are likely to need a census.

4.1.3 Sample Size

If a decision has been made to use a sample rather than undertake a census, you will need to decide the size of the sample. The starting point is to work out the number of completed questionnaires you need returned (based on an assumed response rate) for your entire stock.

This is important because:

- the larger the number of questionnaires returned, the more analysis you can do with 'sub-groups' (for example, tenants served by particular area offices, tenants in different age groups, tenants at different income levels)²;
- generally, the larger the number of questionnaires returned, the more reliable the results

² Sub-group margins of error have to be within +/-10 per cent

Samples sizes can be calculated using the online tool available at www.surveyz.com/university/samplesize.html.

If you have no sub groups the calculation is straightforward and based on a margin of error of +/- 4 per cent for the total stock.

If you have any sub-groups, these should be calculated separately with a margin of error of +/- 10 per cent or better, then check that the overall margin of error is at least +/- 4 per cent for the total stock.

Minimum number of returned questionnaires

To draw general conclusions about the opinions of your tenants as a whole, you will need to have enough returned questionnaires to give statistical validity to the results. To understand how this works, there are two statistical terms that you should know about:

- **Confidence level:** This describes how certain you can be that the results of your survey reflect the views of the whole of your tenant population, within a range of possible error. You will be working towards a 95 per cent confidence level – that is, all things being equal, there are 95 chances out of a 100 that the responses of the survey reflect your tenant population, within a margin of sampling error.
- **Sampling error:** Estimated bias which may occur with the use of a random sample. Usually referred to as the margin of error, this is expressed as plus or minus (+/-) a percentage figure. For STATUS you will be working towards a margin of error of +/-4 per cent.

To summarise, when quoting a result of 85 per cent satisfied from a survey using a confidence level of 95 per cent and a margin of error of +/-4 per cent, you would be saying that you are 95 per cent confident that the whole population's response would lie between 81 per cent and 89 per cent satisfied.

If you have a small tenant population and you are carrying out a census, you will not have to worry about calculating a sampling frame. However, you will still need to maximise your response rate in order to achieve the required confidence interval and sampling error, which will still need to be calculated. It is an unfortunate statistical anomaly that the smaller the overall population, the higher the return rate required to achieve the desired reliability. For example, if you had 500 tenants, you would need 273 responses to achieve the 95 per cent confidence level and +/-4 per cent sampling error required for STATUS, but for 1,000 tenants you need 375 responses (which is 54.6 and 37.5 per cent of tenants respectively).

Response rates and sample size

The other major factor you need to take into account when working out your sample size is the expected response rate. For general needs tenants, you should calculate the sampling on 40 per cent of surveys being returned so that you know that once you reach 40 per cent returns that the survey is in the boundaries of +/-4 per cent. For leaseholders the presumed response rate should be 30 per cent.

In any survey, some questionnaires will not be returned. The greater the number and proportion of responses, the lower the sampling error and the more reliable the results may be expected to be.

With a postal survey, it is reasonable to aim to achieve a response rate of 50 per cent for tenants, and around 40 per cent for home owners. This will most likely require a reminder card and a second mailing of the questionnaire to non-respondents, following the STATUS methodology.

Example

Acme HA has 5610 properties.

A sample without any subgroups means that 542 completed questionnaires need to be returned to achieve a +/- 4 per cent margin of error and a 95% confidence level. Assuming a response rate of 40 per cent, you need to send out 1,355 questionnaires.

To calculate for their five management areas, based on a 10 percent confidence interval (for sub-groups), the sample and mailing sizes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Area	Total stock	Sample number (10% CI)	Questionnaires to be sent (on 40% RR)
North Area	712	85	213
South Area	685	84	210
East Area	680	84	210
West Area	525	81	203
Central Area	3008	93	233
TOTAL	5610	427	1068

This, however, does not provide enough returns to satisfy the overall +/- 4 per cent confidence interval. You would then increase the numbers in each area until the total number in the sample meets or exceeds the overall required response rate – in this case 542 questionnaires – as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Area	Total Stock	Sample number	Questionnaires to be sent (on 40% RR)	Actual Confidence Interval
North Area	712	110	275	8.42
South Area	685	110	275	8.39
East Area	680	110	275	8.39
West Area	525	100	250	8.65
Central Area	3008	115	288	8.78
TOTAL	5610	545	1363	3.91

5 Weighting the data

Weighting is the application of correction factors to a final set of data or results, to ensure it is representative of the make-up of the survey population. Weighting helps to minimise the affects of over- and under- representation of certain groups of respondents.

Whether you have carried out a census or used a sample, you will need to check if the distribution of responses is representative of your tenants as a whole. If the responses are not representative they will need to be weighted. It should be stressed that weighting is not an alternative to making every effort to maximise response rate. A poor response rate cannot be fully compensated for by weighting.

Weighting is used in two main ways in this type of survey:

- to adjust for the effects of 'over-sampling' sub-groups; and
- to help correct survey bias.

5.1 Correcting for an unrepresentative response

To check if you need to weight your responses you should examine the information you have for your stock as a whole. If you included information on property attributes in your sample files, you will now be able to compare the characteristics of the respondents' homes with those of your stock as a whole.

You could compare:

- type of property (house, maisonette, flat);
- number of bedrooms (as a surrogate for household type/size); and
- housing management areas.

If the comparison shows that tenants who responded are significantly different from tenants in the sample frame, a weighting formula needs to be applied to the data.

Calculating the weighting factor

For example, if the proportion of 3-bedroom houses in your stock is 40 per cent, but the proportion of questionnaires returned from tenants in 3-bedroom houses was only 20 per cent, then:

$$\text{Weight} = \frac{\text{percentage of 3-beds in your overall sample frame (40)}}{\text{percentage of 3-beds in returned questionnaires (20)}}$$

$$\text{Weight} = \frac{40}{20} = \text{weighting factor of 2}$$

The example below, based on the example of Acme HA from above, shows how information on responses by management areas can be used to weight the responses.

In this example (Table 3) it is assumed that there are variations in the amount of stock in different management areas. However, it can be seen that when the questionnaires were returned, this was not reflected in the make-up of responding tenants. Normal practice is to ignore weighting if all the weighting factors are between 0.8 and 1.2. However, in this example all the weighting factors are outside those limits, so they should be used. This is a simplified example. You may want to incorporate other categories, such as number of bedrooms or property type.

Table 3: Example weighting factors

Stock type	Proportion of whole stock (%)	Proportion of all questionnaires returned (%)	Weighting factor
North Area	13	9	1.41
South Area	12	16	0.76
East Area	12	18	0.67
West Area	9	15	0.62
Central Area	54	42	1.28

6 Performance Indicators

6.1 Who should be surveyed?

6.1.1 General Needs (4NA)

The 4NA survey should be sent to:

- Tenants of general needs housing

The 4NA survey should not be sent to:

- Tenants with care and support needs
- Tenants in sheltered accommodation

6.1.2 Home Owners (4NC)

Surveys should exclude home owners who do not have access to any of the services provided by an association apart from rent administration.

The 4NC survey should generally be sent to:

- Leasehold Scheme for the Elderly (LSE)
- Shared Ownership for the Elderly (SHOE or SOFTE)
- Conventional Shared Ownership (CSO)
- Rural Shared Ownership
- Right to Buy
- Right to Acquire
- Social HomeBuy
- New Build HomeBuy
- Do-It-Yourself-Shared Ownership (DIYSO)
- First Time Buyers Initiative

The 4NC survey should generally not be sent to:

- Improvement for Sale (IFS)
- HomeBuy (before November 2006)
- Open Market Homebuy

6.1.3 Supported Housing tenants (4ND)

The 4ND survey should generally be sent to:

- Tenants who are able to complete a postal questionnaire, including:
 - Supported housing schemes
 - Residents of hostels

The 4ND survey may be sent to:

- Tenants who receive floating support

A version based on 4ND but using a different field methodology may be used with:

- Any tenant that is unable to complete a postal questionnaire, including:
 - Tenants with learning difficulties
 - Tenants with cognitive impairment
 - Tenants with visual or aural impairment

6.1.4 Sheltered Housing tenants (4NE)

The 4NE survey should generally be sent to:

- Tenants who are able to complete a postal questionnaire, including:
 - Tenants of sheltered housing schemes
 - Tenants of extra care schemes
 - Tenants in receipt of home help or care in their own home

The 4NE survey should not be sent to:

- Residents of SOE or LSE schemes (who should be sent 4NC)

A version based on 4NE but using a different field methodology may be used with:

- Any tenant that is unable to complete a postal questionnaire, including:
 - Tenants with cognitive impairment (including dementia)
 - Tenants with visual or aural impairment

6.2 Calculating Satisfaction PIs for the RSR

The calculation of the performance indicators must be based on all valid responses received:

- Examples of invalid responses are if a respondent did not check any of the boxes, checked more than one box, wrote in a comment instead of checking a box, etc. These must be **excluded** for the denominator.
- Neutral responses (i.e. 'Don't know/No opinion') are valid. These must be **included** in the denominator.

$$\frac{\text{Number of 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' responses}}{\text{Total number of responses}} \times 100$$

6.2.1 All tenants

These performance indicators are required to be reported in the RSR by all housing associations with over 1000 properties in management.

Satisfaction with services

Percentage of tenants satisfied with landlord's services
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General Needs	4NA	Q 10
Supported Housing	4ND	Q 4
Sheltered Housing	4NE	Q 10

Repairs and Maintenance

Percentage of tenants very satisfied or satisfied with the way their landlord deals with repairs and maintenance
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General Needs	4NA	Q 22
Supported Housing	4ND	Q 21
Sheltered Housing	4NE	Q 31

Views taken into account

Percentage of tenants satisfied that their views are being taken into account

General Needs	4NA	Q 26
Supported Housing	4ND	Q 25
Sheltered Housing	4NE	Q 35

6.2.2 Shared Ownership

These performance indicators are required to be reported in the RSR by all housing associations with over 100 shared ownership properties in management.

Satisfaction of shared owners with the overall service provided by the association (4NC – Q8)

↑ This performance indicator should be collected for all leaseholders, and reported in the RSR as figures for “all shared owners” and “all other leaseholders”.

Percentage of shared ownership purchasers satisfied with sales process (4NC – Q36)

↑ This performance indicator should only be collected for shared owners who have bought through the housing association in the last 3 years, and exclude those who have bought the freehold.

7 Further Reading

<http://www.statisticshell.com/>

An entertaining site by Dr Andy Field, Reader in Experimental Psychopathology at Sussex University – and self-confessed “Statistics Geek”.

<http://stattrek.com/Default.aspx>

Free statistics tutorials cover the central ideas of basic statistics: probability, distributions, sampling theory, estimation, hypothesis testing, and survey sampling – all explained in plain English. An online statistics glossary takes the mystery out of statistical jargon.

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/>

This website is for people involved in applied social research and evaluation. You'll find lots of resources and links to other locations on the Web that deal in applied social research methods.

<http://www.statsoft.com/textbook/stbasic.html>

<http://www.surveyz.com/university.html>

Survey University contains online information to help you design and build your survey, collect your data and analyse your results