

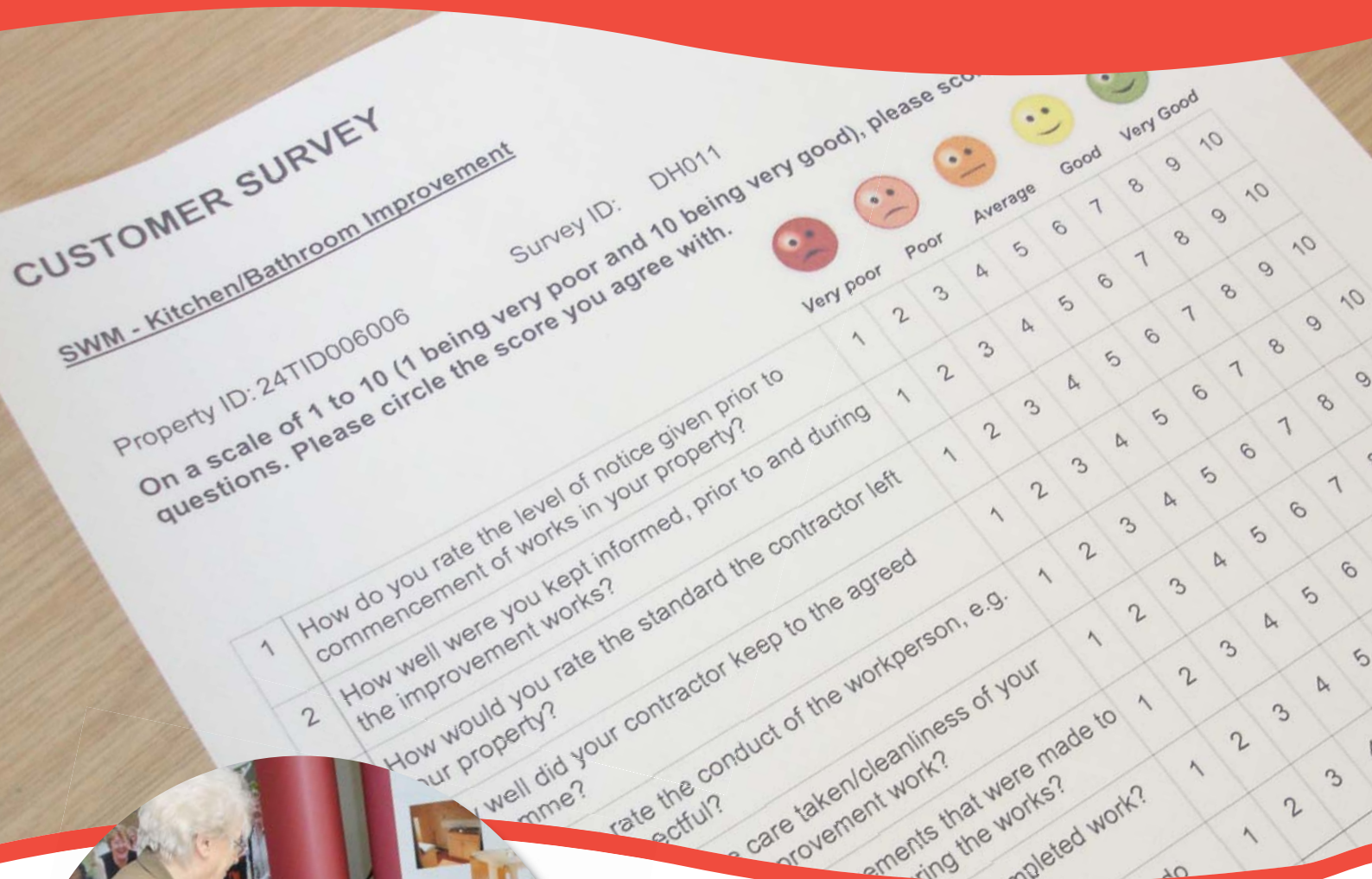
# The 'Secure Warm Modern' programme in Nottingham



**Nottingham City Homes**

Secure ♦ Warm ♦ Modern

Decent Homes impact study:  
The measurement of customer satisfaction through the Vision Management System



**NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY** 

**Knowledge Transfer Partnerships**





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# Executive summary

As part of the KTP project, an evaluation of the customer satisfaction measures for Decent Homes was undertaken. The aim of this was to verify that the system meets the needs (both strategic and operational) of the Decent Homes programme, to evidence its value to NCH and its contractor partners, and to ensure that it is being used to best effect.

## Measuring the performance of the Decent Homes programme

The main measures currently in place to monitor the progress and performance of the Decent Homes programme focus on cost, time and quality, including customer satisfaction as a measure of quality. This is currently collected through the Vision Management System (VMS), which collects customer satisfaction scores on a scale of 1 to 10 through regular surveying. Customer satisfaction with the Decent Homes work was seen by the majority of stakeholders interviewed from across the organisation and contractor partners as an important indicator of the success of the overall programme.

The VMS is used by NCH to collect information on customer satisfaction, and the scores from this are monitored at various levels throughout the organisation. At a strategic level, achieving an overall score of at least 8 out of 10 is included in the departmental and overall company performance framework; the cumulative score over the year is detailed in various reports to senior managers and the executive team. At an operational level, the VMS is used closely to monitor contractor performance and to identify areas for improvement, including achieving a contractual target of a minimum of 8 out of 10 over the year.

## Robustness and representativeness of VMS

Analysis of the strength of the data supplied from VMS shows that NCH can be confident in the VMS for measuring against the key performance indicators for both contractors and the company, as outlined above. The integrity of the surveys means that cumulative scores for the year overall, and by work stream and individual contractor specifically, demonstrate very small levels of error and are therefore likely to be representative of the tenant population as a whole. However, analysing the data in greater detail (for example, by contractor and by month) results in increasing margins of error.

The profile of those sent a survey is broadly representative of the overall tenant profile in terms of the six equality and diversity strands currently monitored. However, certain segments are less likely to respond, including younger tenants and those from BME groups. In addition, those who do respond from these groups indicate a slightly lower level of satisfaction. Overall, contrary to many stakeholders' expectations, those returning the surveys are more likely to award a high score (with the most common average score being 10 out of 10) than a low score; this would indicate that the VMS is not used merely as a medium for reporting problems and indicating dissatisfaction.

## Benefits and costs

The most widely stated benefit of the VMS system is its strength as a performance monitoring and improvement tool. The level of information provided has meant that the teams can identify particular problems and work to address these, as well as being able to benchmark performance against other delivery partners and, to some extent, against other housing providers. This has encouraged a culture of focusing on customer satisfaction, with contractors indicating that they have as a result become more customer service-driven.

Implementing the VMS system for the Decent Homes programme costs an estimated £9,000 per annum. This is set against the benefits outlined previously, providing the information for NCH to judge whether this represents value for money for NCH. Various options are outlined either to increase the benefits of the existing system or to reduce the current level of cost.

As NCH moves towards an outcomes-based performance management strategy, the VMS may play a role in providing performance information on customer satisfaction with the work; furthermore, the VMS may indicate broader outcomes measures, such as the impact of the work on tenants' satisfaction with their neighbourhood.

## Recommendations

**The following recommendations are therefore presented for further consideration:**

- Consider whether/how the VMS could contribute to supporting an 'outcome-based' approach for the Decent Homes programme, in measuring indicators of the wider social impact on tenants
- Consider whether any of the options presented for increasing benefits/reducing costs should be considered for implementation, e.g. whether the benefits could be increased by identifying any applicable learning that could advantageously be shared across other service areas
- Review some of the questions (e.g. Q1) to clarify meaning, and to consider making order of questions consistent across all streams
- Feedback issues raised with VMS template to the software developers e.g. the alignment of sad/happy faces along numerical scores; whether all of the information requested is in fact applicable
- Update NCH information regarding tenant diversity following the nine 'protected characteristics' of the Equality Act 2010. Also ensure that future data collection/categorisation is in line with the format of the 2011 national Census
- Consider whether a more pro-active form of engagement is needed with certain groups, for example distributing the survey in different languages where these are spoken by a large proportion of population in that area; or whether other means of surveying would be preferable (e.g. telephone or on-line)
- Further investigate the issue of non-response and lower satisfaction amongst BME groups, for example, by using Tenant Inspectors to telephone or visit a selection of non-respondents to establish whether their views differ from those who do respond; and sensitively to discover the reasons why non-respondents fail to complete and return the questionnaires
- Further investigate the relationship between applying a standard questionnaire among different groups (e.g. by age) to identify variations in approach to completing questionnaires, expectations regarding the improvements, and the way questions are understood – for instance, by conducting arranged interviews based on the same questionnaire in order to identify differences
- Further investigate to what degree tenants perceive Nottingham City Homes as distinct from Nottingham City Council, and how the VMS could contribute to boosting NCH's independent identity.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Vision Management System (VMS) and Decent Homes

NCH's ambition is "to be recognised as a best practice housing provider by delivering excellent services and delivering and maximising the impact of our Decent Homes Programme".<sup>1</sup>

### **NCH's five strategic priorities are:**

- to deliver excellent customer focused services
- to engage customers in influencing the shape and quality of housing services that we provide
- to be a key partner in the delivery of safe and sustainable neighbourhoods
- to be a key partner in the transformation of Nottingham's neighbourhoods
- to be an excellent organisation.

NCH measures customer satisfaction with a number of its service areas, including the Secure, Warm, Modern (SWM) programme, using the Vision Management System (VMS). The VMS measures satisfaction via regular surveying of customers following work to their homes, including a short questionnaire where tenants give a score out of 10 for each of ten questions covering satisfaction with communications, care taken, courtesy, and the quality of the work. The VMS system is used by a number of housing providers across the country, and is recommended by government organisations. It has a standard format (allowing for benchmarking across users), and can then be tailored by each user to reflect the service each is evaluating.

Customer satisfaction with each of the contractor partners delivering the SWM programme is measured by the VMS system, and this is included as one of their contractual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with a target of an average score of at least 8 out of 10.

The VMS process is managed by the Business Improvement and Development (BID) Team, which sits within the Strategy and Partnerships directorate of NCH. As such, it is separate from the day-to-day operations of the SWM programme, which falls under the Property Services directorate.

Batches of survey packs are sent out by post every two weeks to different samples of tenants who have had work completed during that month<sup>2</sup>. Each survey pack contains a survey with the ten questions to score, space for comments, whether the contract workers showed their ID, and an option of completing information regarding equality and diversity on the reverse (an example of a VMS survey is shown in Appendix A). Also included are information on translation services, and a pre-paid addressed envelope to return the survey to NCH.

The surveys are collated and entered into the VMS software by the BID Team, who then create various reports. The team issues interim scores for each contractor based on the first two weeks' returns (including rectification notices to contractors to resolve issues raised in the surveys by tenants), then a full monthly report covering results from the month just completed. This provides an average score out of 10 per question and overall.

1. Achieving Excellence: NCH three-year Business Plan 2010-13

2. Other service areas are surveyed only monthly

## 1.2 KTP project – review of VMS for Decent Homes

This review has been undertaken as part of a KTP project<sup>3</sup> between NCH and Nottingham Business School, in consultation with key stakeholders in the project and the BID Team. The aim of the project was to verify that the system meets the needs (both strategic and operational) of the Decent Homes programme in particular, to evidence its value to NCH and its contractor partners, and to ensure that it is being used to best effect.

### The objectives are to:

- Evaluate how the success of the Decent Homes programme is currently measured, and make recommendations on measures if appropriate
- Provide evidence on the robustness of current monitoring systems
- Understand how the information supplied is currently used, then make recommendations and/or share good practice on increasing effective use
- Consider the benefits of the system against the costs, weighing options for efficiency savings if necessary.

This was achieved firstly through desk analysis; analysing how the VMS is used within NCH, reviewing survey methodology and best practice literature, analysing data produced from VMS, and collecting information on the costs of operating the system. Secondly, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders throughout the organisation and contractor partners. The interviews sought stakeholders' views on how the success and progress of the Decent Homes programme is and should be measured, how the information from VMS is used and whether it meets their needs, and the strengths and weaknesses of the current system. The following stakeholders were interviewed:

Table 1: List of interviewees

Directorate/organisation	Job title
Strategy and Partnerships	Director of S&P
	Business Improvement Manager
Property Services, SWM Team	Assistant Director Asset Management
	Head of Service, Decent Homes and Capital Programme
	Communications Officer
	SWM Project Managers
Contractors: FHM, Wates, Bullock, Vinshire, SPI	Various, e.g., Customer Care Manager, Project Manager, Residents' Liaison Officer

3. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) is a joint project between NCH and Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, to measure the social impact of the Decent Homes programme on residents and communities in Nottingham. The project is financed by TSB, ESRC, One Nottingham, and NCH.

## 2. Measuring the success of Decent Homes

### 2.1 Performance indicators for Decent Homes

The main themes emerging from the interviews as the measures of success for the Decent Homes programme were those of time, cost and quality, with customer satisfaction as an important indicator of the quality of the work. Clearly, delivering within budget and achieving best value are important measures of the success of the programme. The importance of delivering to timescales, both against the overall programme and the timescales set for work in each individual property, was also emphasised. However, there was a strong emphasis that these measures should be achieved while always maintaining quality, and that customer satisfaction is an essential part of this.

Currently, the progress of the Secure, Warm, Modern programme is measured against a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which broadly reflect the above themes. At a strategic level within NCH, the main measure reported upon is overall satisfaction with the Decent Homes programme, as indicated by achieving an average cumulative score of above 8 out of 10 on the VMS surveys. NCH also has to provide a financial return to the main external funding organisations, Nottingham City Council and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), on the progress of expenditure on the programme.

At an operational level, there are a number of management KPIs against which performance is monitored. The KPIs and their targets are shown in Table 2. These measures are monitored with contractors on a monthly basis, and are also reported to the Property Services Departmental Management Team (DMT). Any issues are raised by exception to the Executive Management Team.

At a strategic level, NCH is currently undertaking a performance management review, the main purpose of which is to move towards outcome-based performance management, rather than being output driven. This involves a move away from operationally-based output targets (an example in the case of the SWM programme would be the number of elements installed over a selected period) towards broader strategic outcome measures. These outcomes will be aligned with the overall aims of NCH and its role as a key strategic organisation within the city of Nottingham. The intention is that in setting broader outcome-orientated objectives for the organisation, it will become less 'top-down' driven, and will enable sections to review their progress and make changes reactively rather than waiting for management directives.





Table 2: Decent Homes management KPIs

KPI	Target
Progress against programme: predictability time	90%
Percentage of properties accepted at handover	90%
Percentage of defects resolved within 14 days	90%
Number of reportable and non-reportable accidents	None
Percentage of complaints responded to within target for Decent Homes repairs	97%
Overall combined VMS Customer Satisfaction measure	8 out of 10 (VMS)
Satisfaction measure of Contractors staff having ID badges present / shown while completing improvement work in properties	85%
Satisfaction measure of Contractor's staff treating residents politely and courteously	8 out of 10 (VMS)
Satisfaction measure of Contractor's staff taking care / cleanliness of property while completing improvement work	8 out of 10 (VMS)
Satisfaction measure of the quality of work completed by Contractors	8 out of 10 (VMS)
Satisfaction measure of how well residents were kept informed prior to and during the improvement works	8 out of 10 (VMS)

## 2.2 Importance of customer satisfaction

The stakeholder interviews made it clear that there is significant focus on the importance of customer satisfaction throughout all levels of the organisation. When asked what should be the key measures of success of the Decent Homes programme, nearly every respondent mentioned customer satisfaction in their answer, including responses such as “a completely satisfied customer”, “a happy tenant”, and “customer care is important”. At a strategic level, one of the key performance drivers has been the Audit Commission inspections, through which ALMOs are awarded a ‘star rating’. It was felt that the Audit Commission laid strong emphasis on customer satisfaction, which has therefore influenced the focus of the BID Team. For example, the Business Improvement Manager felt that customer satisfaction with the service should be a key driver, and that it gives meaning to the ‘harder’ measures such as time and cost.

One view was that with the impending closure of the Audit Commission, the gap left by the star ratings will increasingly be filled by direct customer satisfaction measures, such as those provided by the VMS scores, as an indicator of performance. It was felt that this would increasingly be the standard against which housing providers would be measured, and that it fits closely with the increasing focus on the localism agenda.

Within NCH, the Secure, Warm, Modern programme is seen as a customer-focused service, rather than being concerned merely with achieving the physical improvements in the properties. For example, tenants were consulted prior to the programme on their own priorities for their work, even down to the details of the choices of colours and designs of the elements fitted. This focus on tenants as customers, and the importance of maintaining their satisfaction, is filtered out to contractor partners as well, with one stating that “we need to have a look at ourselves as service providers, not just contractors”.

# 3. The Vision Management System

The Vision Management System (VMS) is a piece of software used by a number of housing organisations in the UK to process customer satisfaction information collected mainly through questionnaires. The way NCH uses the VMS will be summarised in the following sections.

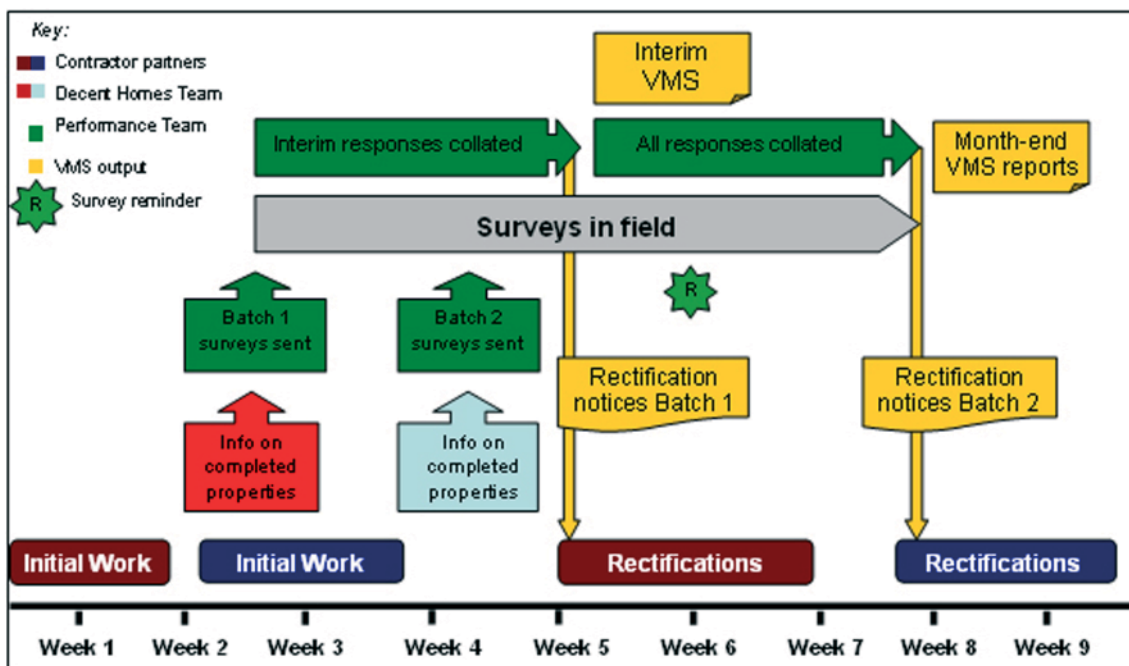
## 3.1 Survey packs

The process starts with mailing survey packs to a sample of tenants who have had work completed during that month. These packs are sent in batches every two weeks to various samples of tenants in order to minimise delays.<sup>4</sup> The pack contains a questionnaire, information on translation services, and a pre-paid addressed envelope in which to return the completed survey to NCH.

The questionnaire comprises ten questions to be scored from 1 to 10, and an additional question regarding whether the contract workers showed their ID when visiting the property. The questionnaire also provides a space for comments, an option of completing information regarding equality and diversity, and some basic information that allows the tenant to be contacted if required (an example of a VMS questionnaire is shown in Appendix A).

The returned questionnaires are collated and the responses entered into the VMS software by the Business Improvement and Development team (BID) to produce various reports. For example, the BID team issues interim scores (per question and overall) for each contractor based on the first batch's returns, and a full monthly report including the two batches. These reports include rectification notices to contractors to resolve any issues raised by tenants, as will be explained in the next section. See the figure below for a diagram of the process.

Figure 1: VMS process flowchart



4. Other NCH service areas are surveyed only monthly

## 3.2 Rectification and Information Notices

A rectification notice is created where: an issue is raised in the comments section of the questionnaire; if the overall score given by the individual is below 5.5 out of 10; or if an individual question is scored 3 or below. The rectification notice is handed to the contractor, who is contractually obliged to re-contact the tenant and deal with the rectification within 10 working days. Where positive comments are made, these are also passed back to the contractor as 'information notices'.

## 3.3 Information Dissemination

Information from the monthly VMS reports is then disseminated throughout the organisation and to contractor partners in varying levels of detail. Table 3 (below) outlines how the dissemination of VMS scores occurs, including the format, audience and frequency of the various reports.

Table 3: Dissemination of VMS scores

Report title	Contents re VMS	Targets / measures	Sent to	Frequency
VMS reports	All individual VMS scores and comments. Average VMS scores per question, scatter graph of average scores. Information and rectification notices, comment frequencies. Average VMS scores by diversity groups.	Contractual target of 8 out of 10	Project Managers Contractors	Monthly
Customer Care Group Report	Monthly average score per question and overall, by contractor. Averages for last three months. Comments frequencies, information and rectification notices, by contractor. Survey response rates.	Contractual target of 8 out of 10	Customer Care Group (tenants, Project Managers, contractors)	Every two months
Improvement Clinics	VMS scores, comments by contractor	Contractual target of 8 out of 10	Improvement Group	Quarterly
Decent Homes Report	VMS (overall score and by KPIs opposite) by contractor, plus performance KPIs, finance, complaints, One in a Million. Commentary and corrective actions.	Decent Homes KPIs (see Table 1)	Property Services DMT	Monthly
Company Performance Report	Overall VMS score, average score for quality. Headline overall performance and actions to improve performance.	NCH three-year Business Plan Company KPIs- Balanced Scorecard: Overall satisfaction with Decent Homes (target 8 out of 10)	Performance Management Group. Support Services Heads Executive Management Team	Quarterly

### 3.3.1 Corporate information

The data provided by the VMS is filtered out to the organisation for various purposes and at varying level of detail. The headline measure is the average satisfaction overall score, included at a strategic level in NCH's Performance Management Framework and, for instance, reported in the quarterly Company Performance Report and recently developed Balanced Scorecard report. These reports are viewed by the Executive Management Team and the Board in order for them to monitor the overall progress of the programme as part of the company's stated objectives.

Further detail is provided to senior management within the Property Service directorate through the monthly Decent Homes report. This provides the latest month's scores against the KPIs listed in Table 1 above. This report is sent to Heads of Service, the Property Services Performance Departmental Management Team (DMT), and the overall Property Services Committee. The report gives a headline commentary on the scores and details any actions required to address poor performance. These groups are accountable for the progress of the Decent Homes programme; thus they use the information to monitor overall performance, and to highlight and address important issues.

### 3.3.2 Contractors

At an operational level, the VMS is used as a key performance management tool. SWM Project Managers receive the highest level of detail from the VMS scores, allowing the analysis of the data against the contracts being managed by them. The data provided allow intense examination of contractor performance against each of the questions within the VMS survey, to identify areas of poor performance and even to determine which contractor work-stream and individual team are linked to particularly low or high scores. Project Managers meet contractors monthly to discuss VMS scores and to put into place an action plan to address any areas of poor performance.

Contractors also make extensive use of the information from VMS. Following meetings with the Project Managers, the contractors report that they also examine the detail of the scores by question and by team, and incorporate any findings into 'toolbox talks' with the site teams. Several contractors explained that their monthly VMS scores are displayed on staff notice boards, to highlight issues as well as advertising positive scores and comments. The scores are used to motivate staff and to emphasise the importance of VMS and customer service. As well as sharing and discussing scores with those delivering the work, the scores are also monitored by the internal management of each contractor.

Contractors are very clear on the importance of VMS scores. Emergency steering group meetings with the contractor can be triggered if there are low VMS scores, which results in the implementation of action plans to resolve the issues. Contractors are also aware that VMS scores will be a factor in NCH's future investment decisions and the award of further contracts.

### 3.3.3 Customer Care Group

The monthly scores are also scrutinised and discussed at bi-monthly Customer Care Group meetings, attended by tenants, leaseholders, SWM Project Managers and Project Liaison Officers, and contractor representatives. The group inspects a report detailing each contractor's monthly score (overall, and for each of the 10 questions in the survey), comments received on the questionnaires, and the monthly response rate. The aim of the group is to maintain customer engagement in dealing with issues that may arise, and their views on how and what improvements could be made.

# 4. Evaluating the VMS

## 4.1 Robustness of the VMS

The aim of any survey is to collect the views of a sample of the population, and from this to be able to generalise about the views of the population of interest as a whole. The focus of the VMS is therefore to collect the views of a sample of customers on their satisfaction with the Decent Homes service they received, and from this be able to draw conclusions about the satisfaction of all tenants and therefore about the overall performance of the programme and its contractors.

The way in which survey information is collected affects the level of confidence that the information collected from a sample of the population accurately reflects the views of the population as a whole.

**Statistical theory indicates that the following issues could affect the validity and representativeness of the survey, and therefore the confidence that can be placed in generalising from its findings:**

- **Sample selection:** the way the sample is selected may affect the results of the findings. Selecting a random sample, where every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, allows for the calculation of the potential level of error in the sample results
- **Sample size:** the sample needs to be large enough for confidence that the results are statistically accurate. Statistical theory indicates that for a small population, a large percentage needs to be surveyed; as the population size increases, a smaller percentage of that population needs to be surveyed. The sample size affects the confidence in and error levels of the findings
- **Error and confidence level:** the 'error' is the estimated difference (plus or minus) between the survey results and the results that would be obtained if the whole population were surveyed. A common level for the 'error term' is +/- 5 per cent. The confidence level: a common confidence level is 95%, indicating that if the survey were repeated 100 times, 95 of those surveys would give the same result (within the margin of the error term)
- **Non-response:** a low response to the survey lowers the sample of results that can be used and therefore, too, the confidence in the survey's findings. It also introduces the possibility (but not necessarily in every case<sup>5</sup>) of response bias, i.e. that the views of people who do respond may be significantly different from those that don't respond, and therefore different to the population as a whole.

Consideration of these issues with regard to the VMS provides some basis for judgement on the robustness of the VMS in terms of providing an accurate insight into overall customer satisfaction. As previously illustrated, the VMS survey packs are sent to a sample of all customers who have received Decent Homes work in that month, using a random sampling technique.



5. A recent paper on non-response bias (Groves (2006), Non-response Rates and Non-response Bias in Household Surveys) finds that high levels of non-response do not automatically imply a response bias, and that even surveys with a high response rate may be subject to non-response bias. The author therefore concludes "There is no minimum response rate below which survey estimates are necessarily subject to bias". (p650).



Usually, a sample of at least 25% of those who have had Secure or Warm work is used; however, for the Modern stream the survey pack is sent to all customers who have had work done. The 100% sampling for Modern was introduced in November 2009, as it was felt that the Modern stream (kitchens and bathrooms) could cause greater disruption to tenants due to the length of time required for the improvements to be completed, and on NCH's budget as a proportion of the total expenditure for the overall programme. For these reasons it was felt that the Modern phase should be monitored closely.

The agreed target was to obtain a 30% response rate from those to whom the survey packs were sent. The target was set in consultation with the Customer Care Group, whose function is to scrutinise the VMS process and results. Tenants are given two weeks to reply from the questionnaire, after which the survey is closed. If the response rate is below 30% towards the end of this period, a reminder letter is sent to those who have not then replied, giving them an additional five days to complete and return the questionnaire.

On a cumulative basis, for example, taking a period of one calendar year, the population (all those who have received SWM work) is fairly large; for instance over the year September 2009–August 2010, work was completed in 12,624 properties. Over this period, survey packs were sent to on average 58% of these households, and 2,402 responses were received (19% of the total population). Based on this population size and number of responses, the error is +/- 1.8% at the 95% confidence level. This means that, for instance, if the questionnaires returned an average of 8 out of 10, we can be confident that if we surveyed the whole population, 95% of their responses would be between 7.86 and 8.14. This small margin of error indicates that we can be highly confident in the cumulative findings of the VMS results over a year, and that statistically this is likely to represent the views of the population as a whole.

It could also be of interest to examine sub-groups within the VMS data, such as the scores by month, by the three streams of work (Secure, Warm and Modern) and by the individual contractors. However, breaking down the data in this way results in the power of the data decreasing, i.e. there are increasing error margins as you look at each subgroup in isolation.<sup>6</sup> Looking at the data by month across all contractors (Table 4), the error margins again are larger than for the year as a whole, varying from +/- 5.2% to +/- 8.9 for each month. This means there is less confidence that the sample is representative of the population as a whole when broken down by month.



6. This is as a result of the smaller population size in a particular area of focus (e.g. results by month, or per contractor over the year); to maintain a small error term would require sampling a higher proportion of each sub-group.



Table 4: VMS surveys by month

	Properties completed	Surveys completed	% surveyed	Error (CL 95%)
<b>Sep 2009</b>	1119	239	21%	+/- 5.6%
<b>Oct 2009</b>	1155	117	10%	+/- 8.6%
<b>Nov 2009</b>	1062	166	16%	+/- 7.0%
<b>Dec 2009</b>	741	105	14%	+/- 8.9%
<b>Jan 2010</b>	934	202	22%	+/- 6.1%
<b>Feb 2010</b>	1243	210	17%	+/- 6.2%
<b>Mar 2010</b>	1332	263	20%	+/- 5.4%
<b>Apr 2010</b>	1135	211	19%	+/- 6.1%
<b>May 2010</b>	847	182	21%	+/- 6.4%
<b>Jun 2010</b>	1049	226	22%	+/- 5.2%
<b>Jul 2010</b>	1169	261	22%	+/- 5.3%
<b>Aug 2010</b>	838	220	26%	+/- 5.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,624</b>	<b>2,402</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>+/- 1.8%</b>

CL = Confidence Level

A key part of the analysis of the VMS findings is related to the performance of individual contractors throughout the year, as each has a contractual target of achieving an average (cumulative) annual score of 8 out of 10. From the cumulative scores over the year by individual contractor (Table 5) we can see that the error margins still fall within an acceptable level (mostly below +/- 5%) at this level of detail.<sup>7</sup> However, the same issue arises if the data is broken down even further, for instance, by month for each contractor, as this creates large error margins and thus reduces the confidence in the data at this level of detail. In other words, although the VMS scores at this level provide an indication of the views of those who responded to the survey, we cannot confidently claim (statistically speaking) that the results are definitely representative of the population as a whole.

Table 5: VMS surveys by contractor (cumulative over year)

Stream	Contractor	Properties completed	Surveys completed	% surveyed	Error (CL 95%)
<b>Secure</b>	<b>Nationwide</b>	3901	454	12%	+/- 4.3%
	<b>DLO</b>	1847	310	20%	+/- 5.1%
<b>Warm</b>	<b>Vinshire</b>	1835	363	20%	+/- 4.6%
	<b>SPI</b>	1302	245	22%	+/- 5.6%
	<b>DLO</b>	542	130	23%	+/- 7.5%
<b>Modern</b>	<b>FHM</b>	2457	640	26%	+/- 3.3%
	<b>Wates</b>	619	214	35%	+/- 5.4%
	<b>Bullock</b>	121	46	38%	+/- 11.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>12,624</b>	<b>2,402</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>+/- 1.8%</b>

7. An exception to this is the error for Bullock; this is because Bullock was delivering only for two months of that year, and therefore has a small population size. Wates had also been delivering for only the last seven months of the year. The error for the DLO in the Warm stream is due to the small number of properties completed each month.





The final issue to consider is that of non-response. So far this financial year (2010/11), 37% of tenants surveyed have responded, an increase from the last financial year (2009/10) when the overall response rate was 31%. However, this does mean that the views of the majority of those surveyed are not recorded. The response rate matters only if the views of those who do respond are likely to be significantly different to the views of those who fail to respond, as is explored more fully below.

## 4.2 Detailed analysis of data from VMS

VMS data from the previous (2009/10) and current (2010/11) financial years were analysed to explore the response patterns and representativeness of data.

### 4.2.1 Sample and general respondent characteristics

Firstly, the characteristics (in terms of the six equality and diversity strands) of those who were surveyed and those who returned the surveys in the last financial year (April 2009-March 2010) were analysed, then compared against the make-up of NCH tenants overall<sup>8</sup>. As previously explained, the survey is currently sent to a completely random sample<sup>9</sup> of tenants who have had work done under SWM. However, the results show that the random sampling technique has achieved a reasonable spread in terms of the diversity strands, i.e., that the proportion of those from each diversity group who are sent a survey differs only slightly from the proportion of that group in the overall population (see Appendix C for details). No group is significantly under-sampled, and there is only a slight over-sampling of some groups, including for example non-BME, Christian and heterosexual tenants; however, this is not a significant level of over-sampling<sup>10</sup>.

Viewing those who return surveys, some groups appear less responsive to the surveys, resulting in a smaller proportion of completed surveys for them than for the overall tenant profile. This includes tenants aged 41-59, those from BME groups and those without a disability (see Appendix C). For example, tenants aged 41-59 have a fairly low response rate (26% responded to the survey), yet represent a large proportion of the overall tenant population; as a result, the proportion of surveys returned from this age group is smaller than the overall proportion of this group in the tenant profile. This is similar for those from BME groups, where the response rate is 22% compared to the average response rate of 36% over this period. It also appears that those with a disability are more likely to return a survey than those without a disability.

8. These six strands will be updated to the nine “protected characteristics” according to the Equality Act 2010.

9. A random sample is selected from the spreadsheet of all tenants who have had work that month, using the random sample selector in Excel.

10. However, variations in the completeness of the data across the different equality and diversity strands need to be highlighted.





However, the sample size of those aged 41-59 and those without a disability is large enough for there to be confidence in the data for these groups (error margin of lower than 5% at the 95% confidence level). The only groups that may need to be monitored are those from within BME groups, as currently the number of responses is relatively low in comparison with the overall population. However, these results will need to be revised after the processing of all of the completed questionnaires to arrive throughout the year.

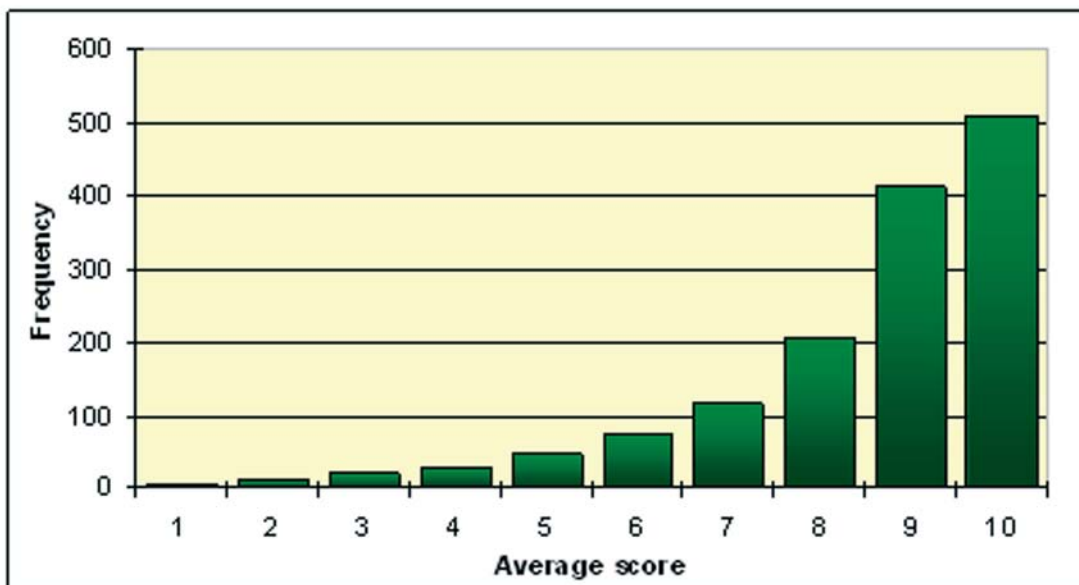
It therefore appears that the random sampling technique currently used achieves a representative sample in terms of the six equality and diversity strands. However, lower response rates from certain groups, in particular BME tenants, means that these groups are slightly under-represented in the final sample of surveys that are returned. The results provided by the different groups are analysed in the next section.

#### 4.2.2 Analysis of specific data patterns

The histogram below shows the spread of average scores given over the last six months. In the graph, the average scores are placed in categories (for instance, the category '8' includes all average scores between 8 and 8.99), and indicates the number of times a score is given in that category.

A common perception among contractors and the SWM team is that only those tenants who have an issue or complaint make the effort to return a survey. However, this graph shows that the most common average score is 10 out of 10, followed by 9 and 8 out of 10. In contrast with the above perception, many more surveys are returned with highly positive scores than with low scores. Over the last six months (i.e., until October 2010), 1318 surveys were returned with an average score of between 6 and 10, compared to 114 surveys with average scores of between 1 and 5. This misconception may be due to the fact that dealing with rectification notices from negative responses takes up far more resource than where there is a positive response, which requires no further action. Therefore contractors spend more time and resource dealing with issues raised through VMS, rather than the positive scores.

Figure 2: Histogram of average VMS scores, April- September 2010

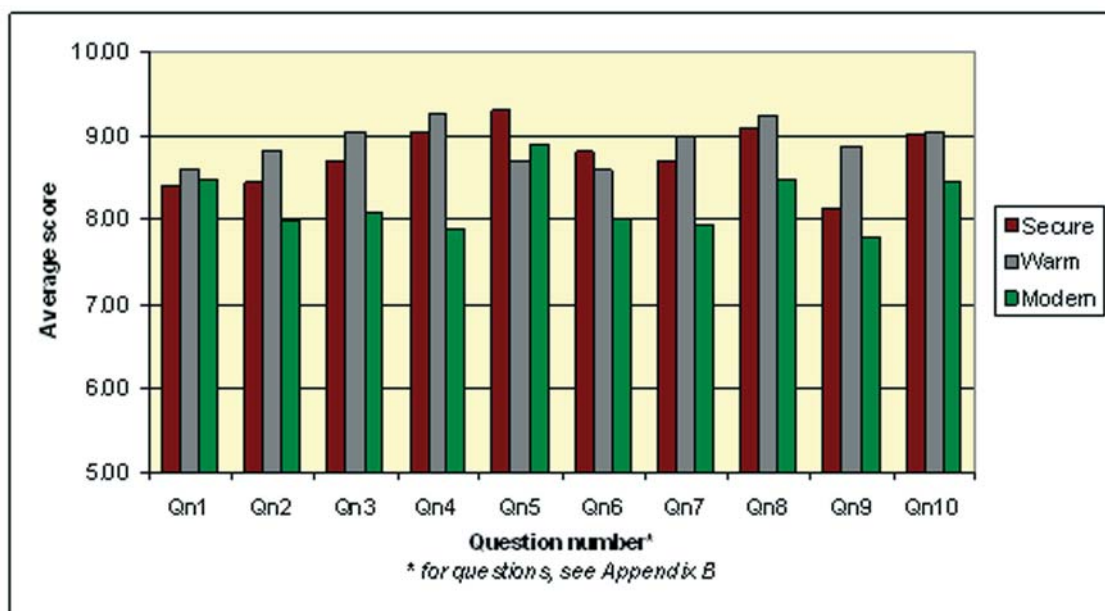




The data was also analysed to show the average score per question for each stream<sup>11</sup>. This shows that over the last six months, the Secure and Warm streams have generally been scored higher for most questions, compared to the Modern stream. Such a finding could support the views stated by the contractors and the Project Managers: that the work carried out under the Modern stream is by its nature more disruptive to the tenant. For example, to replace entire kitchens and bathrooms the contractors are in the property for longer (reflected in the low score for Question 4), there is more mess created by the scale of the work, and tenants' core facilities are put out of use for the duration. In addition, the upgraded central heating and windows (using standard gas boilers and white radiators) make little visible difference to the internals of the house, while the successful upgrading of kitchens and bathrooms is a considerable change, which not all tenants may regard as favourable e.g. if their own modifications (such as additional cupboard space in the kitchen) are removed. However, the difference between the Modern and other streams is not significant (the majority remain within one point of difference), and the average score is above the contractual target of 8.

There is also little difference across the 10 questions, with the majority of average scores between 8 and 9. There appear to be no particular areas for concern, with contractors scoring well in the areas of contractor conduct, care and cleanliness, quality of work, and communications.

Figure 3: Average score per question, April- September 2010



11. It was necessary to break this down by stream, as the topic of each question varies by stream. The questions for each stream are shown in Appendix B.





The scores were further analysed by the equality and diversity strands, to determine whether there are any differences in the average scores given by different groups. The charts below show the average score by gender, ethnicity, disability and age,<sup>12</sup> compared to the overall average (shown by the red line in each chart).

The results show that gender has minimal impact on the score given, with both males and females awarding very similar average scores. Results were similar with disability: both disabled and able-bodied respondents gave similar scores on average, with the score given by disabled tenants being marginally higher.

Satisfaction with the Decent Homes work appears to increase with age, with older tenants giving higher scores than those in younger age brackets. The highest average score is given by tenants aged over 85, with an average score of over 9 out of 10. The average scores given by tenants aged 18-24 and 25-44 is below the target of 8 out of 10, at 7.37 and 7.95 respectively. As approximately one third of NCH tenants falls into these age brackets, further investigation into why the results seem to be so consistent within certain age groups and remarkably different across age groups may be worthwhile. Furthermore, analysis of the combined 18-24 and 25-44 groups shows low scores (and therefore potential areas of focus) for the Modern stream, particularly for Questions 4, 6 and 9, and for Question 4 in the Secure stream (time taken to complete work).

The average scores by ethnicity show that satisfaction amongst BME groups is below the overall average, and lower than that of non-BME groups. In particular, satisfaction amongst mixed ethnicity, Asian and Chinese tenants is below the target of 8. However, it should be noted that these findings are based on a fairly small sample size for these groups.<sup>13</sup> The situation should be monitored through the rest of the financial year to check whether this is a significant finding. In addition, it may be beneficial to undertake further modelling to understand the interaction of various factors on satisfaction scores e.g. whether the age profile of BME groups plays a significant role in determining scores, over ethnicity.

12. It was not viable to analyse by religion and sexuality, due to the small numbers of tenants supplying these details.

13. Analysis across all VMS surveys for the 14 service areas (therefore much larger sample size) shows that the profile of tenants returning the surveys is very similar to the overall tenant profile.



Figure 4: Average score by gender, April- Sept 2010

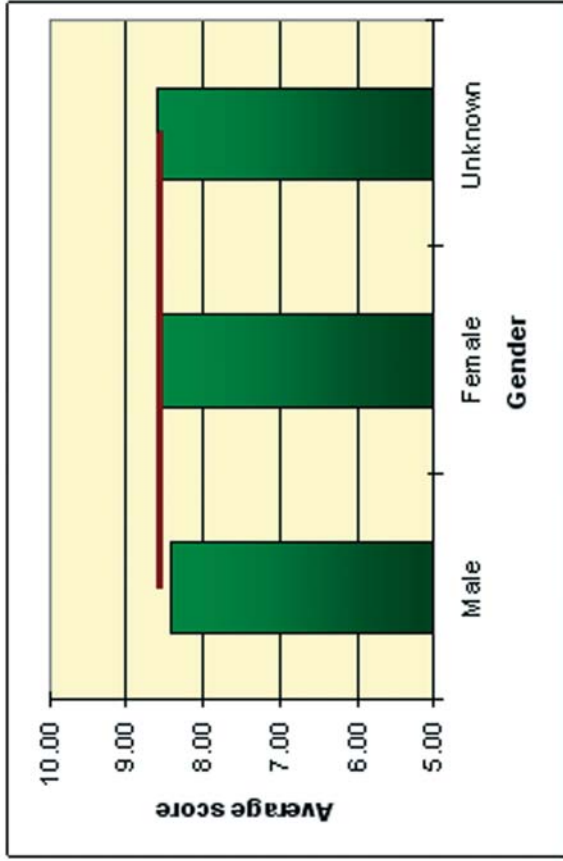


Figure 5: Average score by ethnicity, April- Sept 2010

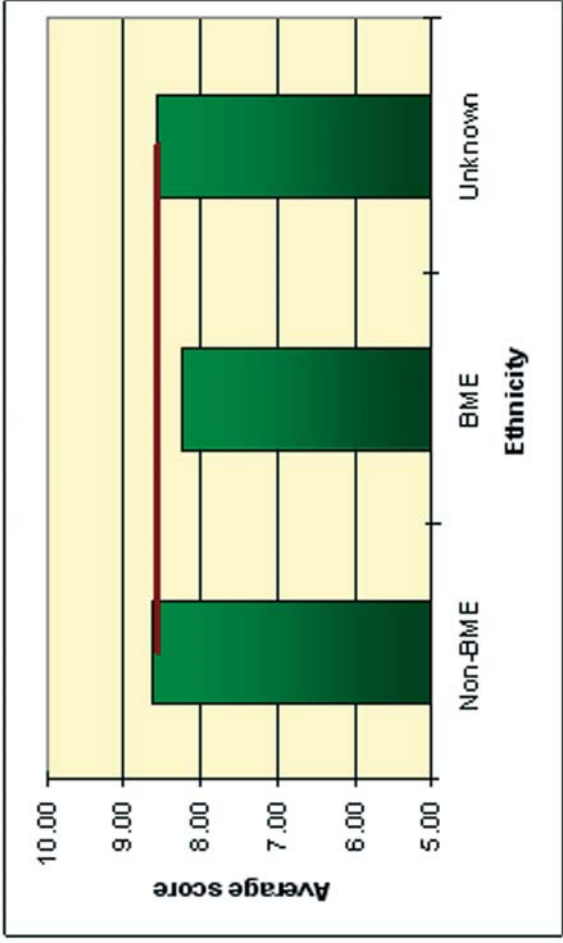


Figure 6: Average score by disability, April- Sept 2010

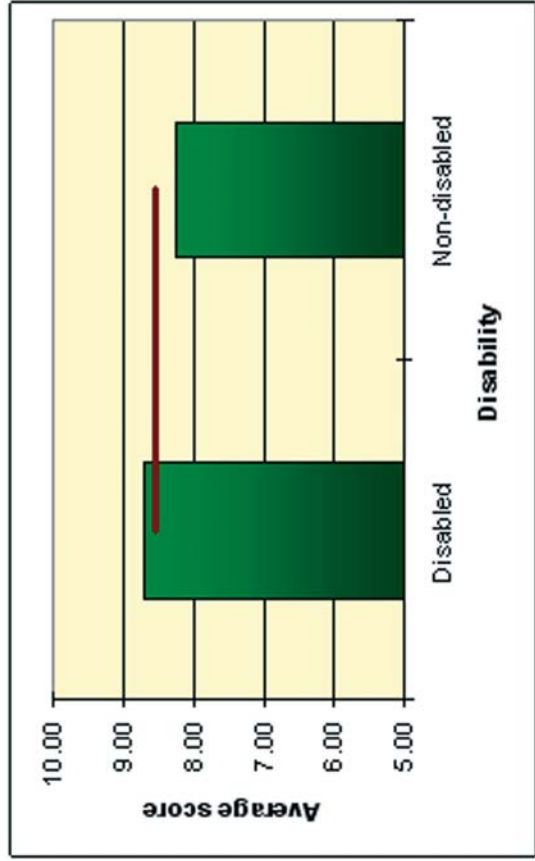
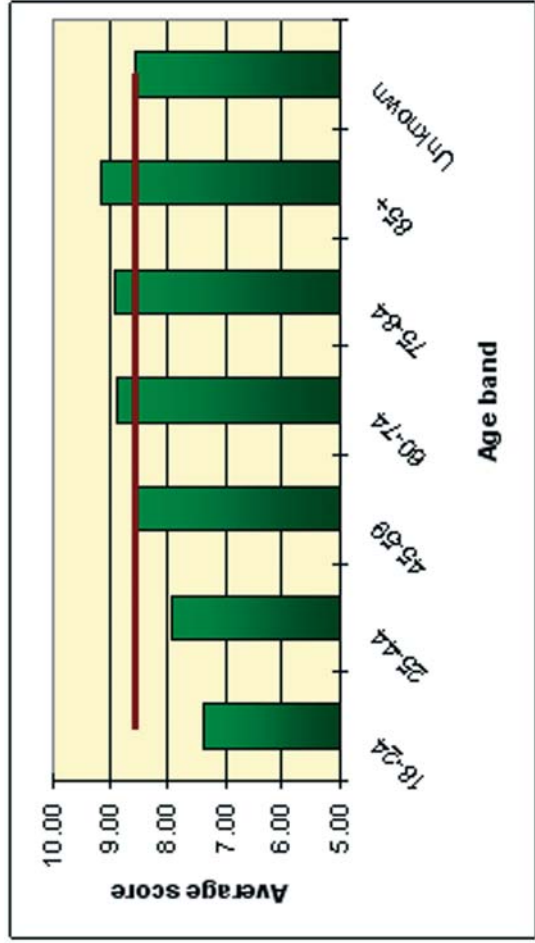


Figure 7: Average score by age, April- Sept 2010



- Overall average score



## 4.5 Benefits of the VMS

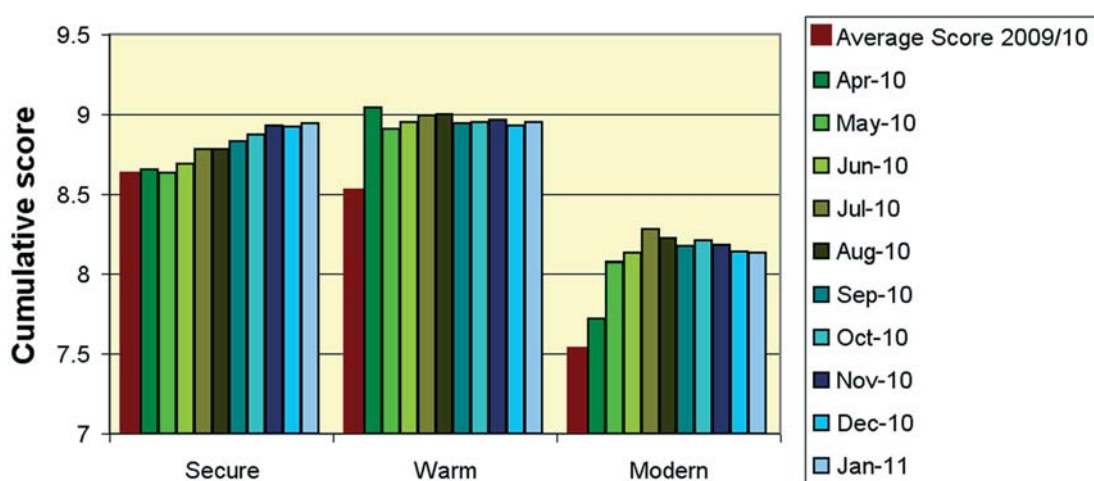
### 4.5.1 Performance management and improvement tool

The most widely cited benefit of the VMS amongst stakeholders is its use as a performance management and improvement tool. The conclusion is as a result of the ability to track performance and drill down into specific issues from the information supplied from VMS. Thus, it can be used to monitor the overall performance of the programme, as well as that of individual contractors and their teams. It allows managers to track whether certain patterns are raising the scores or comments, focusing on the cause of issues such as whether they concern communications, cleanliness, etc.

Contractors could then take report to their teams and use the conclusion to drive through improvements. The VMS means that those responsible for the work are also held accountable for its quality, and through the rectifications process have to address any problems arising as a result of their work. Because the VMS results in actions and plans to improve identified areas, it is seen as part of a “journey of improvement”. It therefore provides more than mere retrospective monitoring of performance; it also enables the proactive management of the delivery of the programme.

This is supported by trends in the VMS cumulative scores (see Figure 8), which show scores improving year on year and generally showing an upward trend over time in the monthly cumulative score. This provides additional evidence of the effectiveness of the VMS as an improvement tool.

Figure 8: Trend in VMS scores



### 4.5.2 Benchmarking

It also drives improvement through benchmarking, particularly across the contractors delivering within the programme. Several respondents stated that it introduces an element of competition between contractors to achieve the best score, with this factor used to motivate the teams. The prominence of the VMS scores within the Decent Homes team, and the scrutiny that contractors are subjected to by Project Managers and the Customer Care Group, ensures that the importance of customer care is always emphasised – and again ensures accountability for this.

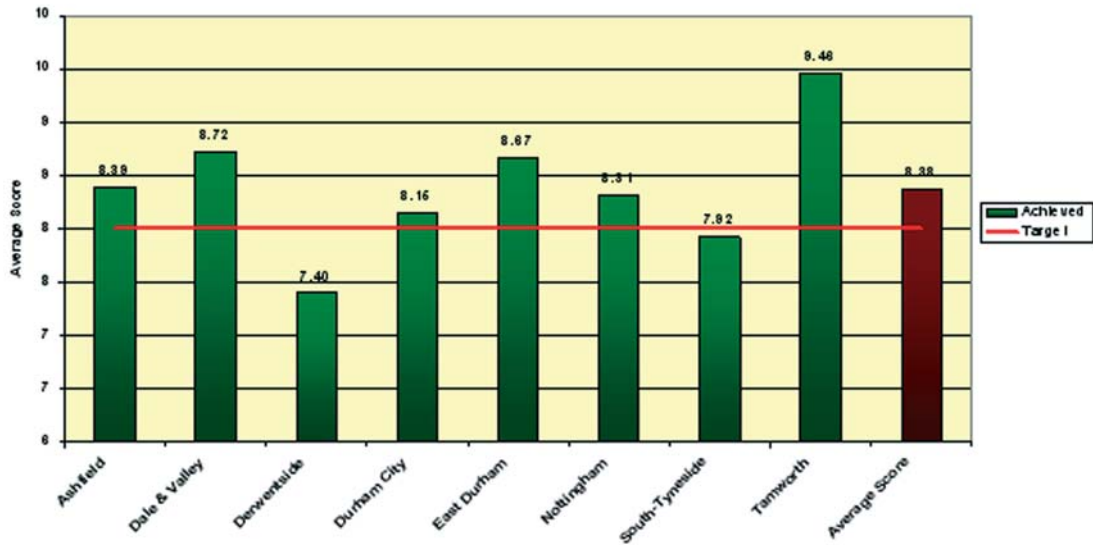
It allows NCH to benchmark against other housing providers who also use the VMS to monitor the performance of their respective Decent Homes programmes. This shows that Nottingham’s average score placed them fifth out of the eight ALMOs taking part in the benchmarking in 2009/10, and that Nottingham’s average score is only 0.08 points below the overall average of the group<sup>14</sup> (see Table 9, opposite).

14. Although these organisations are using the same basic VMS template, there may be some differences in the survey methodology, approach to the programme (whole house vs. streaming approach), and question wording.





Figure 9: Benchmarking for overall VMS score on Decent Homes 2009/10



### 4.5.3 Detail of information

The VMS may be applied in this way because of the level and clarity of the information it provides. One contractor stated that “it is the clearest system we use”, and that it is “a really robust way of getting all the information”. The detail and accumulation of the information also means that it gives contractors “something to interrogate”.

Such a level of detail, and tailoring the information to specific needs, is possible because the system is managed within NCH by its own BID Team. Since VMS has been operating, stakeholders have seen a closer working relationship develop between the BID Team and the Decent Homes team, facilitating improved use of the information. For instance, following feedback about the time lag between the completion of the work and VMS reports, the BID Team has now implemented two-weekly surveying and interim reports, therefore reducing the time lag; in turn, it means that problems can be identified more rapidly and dealt with without delay.

### 4.5.4 Independence

In addition, the fact that the VMS is controlled by a separate team from that running the day-to-day operations of the Decent Homes programme means that the VMS is seen as being independent and verifiable, with no opportunity for the scores to be influenced. This is also enhanced by the fact that the surveys are delivered by post and completed in the tenant’s own time, rather than being handed out or asked directly by contractors, which may discourage tenants from answering honestly.





#### 4.5.5 Improving customer relationships

Several stakeholders felt that the VMS is a means of improving relationships with tenants.

The fact that any issues mentioned are followed up and addressed means that tenants have greater confidence that they are being listened to and actually heard. Contractors commented how, in other contractual relations, they are not given the contact details for them to follow up with issues raised, therefore there is no opportunity to address individual issues satisfactorily.

As a result, stakeholders felt that the VMS has driven real improvements in the service, throughout the programme delivery. A Project Manager stated that the VMS “forces you to look at the service we’re delivering, to improve, to work in partnership”. As a result, focus on quality and customer satisfaction has been embedded throughout the programme; for example, one contractor stated that as a result of the VMS the contractor has become “a lot more service driven here”.

### 4.6 Issues raised with VMS

#### 4.6.1 Outside influences on scores

A few themes emerged around common issues with the current VMS system. The most common issue noted was largely raised by contractor partners, and reflected in the comments of the Project Managers. It concerned the score given on VMS surveys: this may be influenced by factors outside the control of the contractor, yet are then included in the total scores used to reflect on contractor performance. The most common examples of these types of issues are, firstly, where the tenant is unhappy as a result of the decision of the Asset Management team regarding the level and type of work to which they are entitled in their home. An example given of this type of problem is a tenant who has had a kitchen fitted, but is unhappy that they will not be having a bathroom fitted as well; as a result, the tenant may give a lower score that does not actually reflect the quality of work completed on their kitchen. Another outside influence is where a tenant has received a poor standard of work from another service area (such as repairs, gas services or other SWM contractors) and this experience has an influence on the score or comments given for the most recent work completed in their home.

It is also important to highlight that some tenants (especially pre-2004 tenants) may perceive Nottingham City Homes (NCH) to be a department within Nottingham City Council rather than as an independent organisation. This perception could give them the impression that they are evaluating a City Council service, which could in turn influence their answers. Recent experiences with services provided by the City Council could have the same effect. It may be advisable from a marketing perspective, therefore, to conduct further research into tenants’ perceptions of the relationship (and perceived difference) between NCH and the City Council.





The issue of influence is the predominant concern of the contractor partners with the VMS system. It constitutes a cause for concern as, firstly, the scores are included in the overall performance scores against which contractor partners are judged. Contractor partners are very aware of NCH's emphasis on the importance of VMS scores, and that these will be used as the basis for decisions on the awarding of future contracts. Secondly, possible influence increases the resource burden on contractors, as they have to follow up every rectification notice. Where this is unrelated to their service, they have then to ensure (usually through the Project Manager) that the issue is passed for treatment to the relevant service area.

However, an alternative perspective noted was that the issue of influence may be balanced out by tenants who have a positive experience with other service areas, and that it influences in a positive direction the scores awarded for the latest work. While the comments and rectification processes make it easier to identify the negative influences, the system is unable easily to identify such potential balancing positive influences.

To investigate this further, analysis was conducted of the responses from two Quarters (April – September 2010). The comments were manually assessed to see if they were directly related to the contractor that delivered the work that was the subject of the survey, and those that were thought to be related to issues outside of that contractor's control were highlighted. In total, 25 such comments were identified out of the 1450 surveys returned over that period. The majority were related to Asset Management decisions e.g. where the tenant is appealing against decisions made about what other work will or won't be done to the property; or related to outstanding requests for decoration vouchers following the work. The average score for these 25 surveys was 7.63 (slightly lower than the average score); but the effect of these surveys on the overall average was insignificant, reducing it by only 0.02%. This exercise indicated that: it is difficult (and resource intensive) to identify the comments given about other issues, and difficult to tell whether this affects the scores given for the work; there are only a marginal number of surveys where comments are unrelated to the service area; and these surveys have an insignificant effect on the overall score.

#### 4.6.2 Postal delivery method and response rates

The second most prevalent issue raised with the VMS is the postal delivery of the survey and the concern that it leads to a lower response rate. Several stakeholders felt that delivering the survey by post meant that tenants were given no additional encouragement to reply. Several alternatives were proposed, such as contractor partners' hand-delivering surveys or surveying over the telephone, both of which were expected to capture more numerous responses from tenants. The conclusion reflects the common feeling that higher response levels provide a more accurate picture of the overall service. However, most of those who raised this as an issue also noted that one benefit of the postal delivery method is that it enhances the independence and transparency of the surveying, minimising the chance of tenants' being influenced by the presence of contractors when responding.





### 4.6.3 Timeliness of reports

There have been concerns in the past about the timeliness of the VMS reports, as previously the reports could be circulated up to 6-8 weeks after the work was completed. This has since been improved by introducing two-weekly surveying, which means that VMS reports are issued no longer than 2½ weeks after the work has been completed. Rectifications are now passed on to contractors every two weeks, meaning that they can be dealt with more quickly. However, some stakeholders stated that even with scores being reported within a month, this may mean that bodies responsible for scrutiny at a higher level could discuss issues that have already been resolved and are therefore no longer relevant.

### 4.6.4 Format of survey

A few issues were raised in relation to the format of the questionnaires for the VMS. The first issue relates to the positioning of the 'smiley faces', provided as an indication of the interpretation of the numerical score between 1 and 10 (see Appendix A for an example). The key concern is that the categorisation of the scores is inconsistent with contractual targets. On the survey, the smiley face for 'good' sits over the scores of 7 and 8, when the contractual target for 'good' performance is 8 or above. A few stakeholders therefore felt that this meant that tenants who were happy with the service were more likely to give a score of 7, rather than 8 or above as defined in the contract. At present, this format is set by the Vision Management System, i.e., cannot be changed by NCH. However, issues such as this should be fed back to the central VMS developers for future consideration.

Secondly, some stakeholders felt that format was not particularly accessible to certain tenants, such as those with visual impairments and those for whom English is not their first language. Although some attempt has been made to address this (for instance, a telephone number is given in large print as an alternative to completing the paper form, and a language translation sheet is included), some felt that more could be done pro-actively to encourage responses from minority groups. For example, a suggestion was made regarding areas with a large population of a particular language group: the survey could be sent out in the language of that group (using information from NCH's information systems to identify to whom this would be relevant).

A small number of concerns were raised regarding the wording of some of the questions. These have previously been discussed by the SWM and BID teams, and tailored for each stream. However, the outstanding concern was around the wording of the question on the level of notice ('How do you rate the level of notice given prior to commencement of works in your property?'). It fails to clarify whether the question is asking about the level of notice for the entirety of the programme, i.e., starting from the Asset Management survey and initial letter stating what work will be completed; about the roadshows given in each area as the work begins; about the arrival of the contractors to complete the work in the property; or whether this is primarily asking about the level of notice given by the contractors, i.e., the 21-day and seven-day advance notice letters. The interpretation of the question is left to the discretion of the tenant, and may therefore result in inconsistency in scoring.

Finally, there is some level of variation in the wording and ordering of questions among the three streams. To some extent it results from the tailoring of the surveys for each stream; in some cases, though, it appears to be unnecessary and makes it more difficult to easily benchmark across the streams. Appendix B sets out the questions for each of the streams and highlights the main similarities and differences.

## 4.7 Cost of VMS

The following section sets out the estimated costs of running the VMS for the SWM programme, to be evaluated against the benefits set out above. The licence for the Vision Management System itself amounts to £5,000 per annum; however, the VMS is used across fourteen service areas within NCH, of which only three relate to the SWM programme. Therefore, dividing the overall cost at this proportion (3:14) indicates that the licence cost only for the SWM programme is £1,071 p.a.

The largest proportion of costs are accounted for by resources costs, including stationery, postage and pre-paid return postage. This costs £84.90 per 100 surveys, and with 7,355 surveys sent out over the last year for SWM (September 2009 – August 2010), amounts to a cost of £6,244.40.

Finally, basic administration costs (sending surveys, entering and sorting responses) are estimated at £24.90 per 100 surveys, making a total cost of £1,831.40 over the last year.

These give a total estimated basic cost of around £9,000 per annum. This works out at around £1.24 per survey sent out. The cost of measuring customer satisfaction of the Decent Homes programme should also be considered against the scale of the overall programme, which will amount to a total spend of £74m by April 2011.

Table 6: Estimated annual costs of VMS for SWM programme

Item	Unit cost	Annual cost
VMS licence	£5,000 (14 service areas)	£1071 (Three service areas)
Stationery and postage	£84.90 per 100	£6,244.40
Administration time	£24.90 per 100	£1,831.40
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£9,146.80</b>

Added to these basic costs is additional management time for communication of VMS results (e.g., reporting, meetings). For instance, a BID team member spends one day a month at Beechdale Court (operations base for the SWM programme) to work through the results of VMS with Project Managers, as well as attending the bi-monthly Customer Care Groups and quarterly Improvement Clinics with the Business Improvement Manager.

# 5. Conclusions and recommendations

## 5.1 Success measures for Decent Homes

As NCH moves towards an outcome-based performance management approach, and with the impending closure of the Audit Commission and its star-rating system, consideration needs to be given to the most suitable outcomes against which to measure the progress and success of the Decent Homes programme.

### **The relevant criteria include:**

- To fit with NCH's objectives for the SWM programme and overall company objectives, linking in with the city's strategic direction (for example, as set out the Sustainable Communities Strategy, 'The Nottingham Plan to 2020'<sup>15</sup>)
- To reflect the type of information that key stakeholders require (such as funding bodies)
- To assess the potential to provide information for benchmarking against other providers
- To be assessed against indicators that are measurable.

The current performance measures focus on time, cost and quality (as measured by customer satisfaction with the service and work completed). Emphasis on customer satisfaction partially succeeds in moving towards a broader measure of success, yet still focuses on the output of the programme (i.e., the quality of the Decent Homes work) rather than outcome – the impact or change – in which the work has resulted for the tenant.

For example, one potential outcome of the Decent Homes programme to be considered could be the change that the tenant feels this has made to the neighbourhood, in line with NCH's company objective 'to be a key partner in the transformation of Nottingham's neighbourhoods'. This factor also integrates with the city's aim within the SCS to raise resident satisfaction with their respective neighbourhoods.

In the past, tenants have been asked about their satisfaction with their neighbourhoods through the annual STATUS survey. The survey is, however, currently under review as the Department for Communities and Local Government has announced the survey will neither be compulsory nor funded nationally. In this context, the role of the VMS in providing additional types of information of its kind should be considered, such as whether a question could be included to capture a broader outcome measure for the Decent Homes programme.

15. For example, the most relevant target within the SCS is within the 'Neighbourhood Nottingham' strand, which sets out to raise resident satisfaction with their neighbourhood (across the city) to the highest of all Core Cities in England (baseline 2008: 69%, target 80%), with satisfaction with every neighbourhood to be no more than 5% below the city average.

## 5.2 Robustness and level of representation of VMS

The analysis shows that NCH may be confident in the information that the VMS provides in the context of its key company and contractual KPIs, which are:

- Company KPI: Overall satisfaction with Decent Homes work and quality of work for the whole programme (cumulative annual score, target of at least 8 out of 10)
- Contractual KPI: Overall satisfaction with Decent Homes work and contractor conduct, care and cleanliness, quality of work, communications for each contractor (cumulative annual score, target of at least 8 out of 10).

The number of surveys returned is considered sufficient over the year confidently to assume that the scores given reflect the views of the tenants as a whole.

However, it should be noted that breaking down the data any further than this, e.g., by month for each by contractor, reduces significantly the confidence in the survey data. Information at this level should be seen as indicative only, with the emphasis remaining on the annual cumulative figures.

The target of achieving a response rate of at least 30%, although it gives a focus on the importance of maintaining the number of responses, is a fairly arbitrary target since it depends on the number of properties completed each month and the number of people who are sent a survey.

**The strength of the data actually depends on the proportion of those who have had work completed who actually return a complete survey:**

i.e., the response rate (as currently measured) =  $\frac{\text{number of surveys returned}}{\text{number of surveys sent}}$

whereas actually of importance is the proportion of the population surveyed

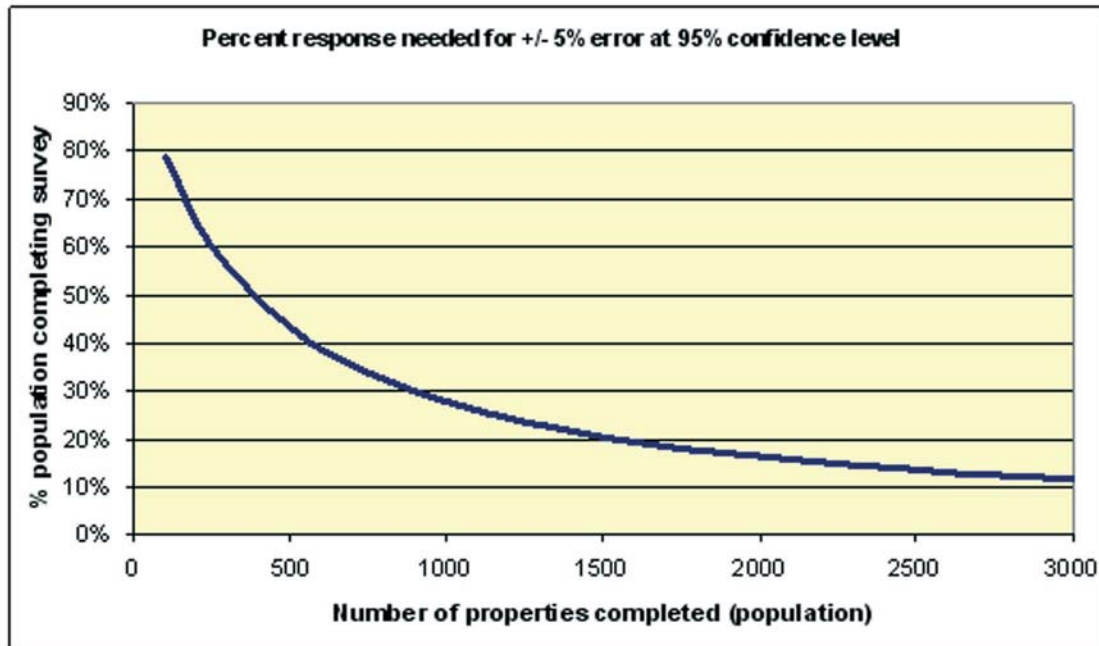
i.e., proportion of population surveyed =  $\frac{\text{number of surveys returned}}{\text{number of properties completed}}$

As noted earlier, in general the proportion to be surveyed increases as the population size (i.e., number of properties where work has been completed) decreases. This relationship is shown in the following figure where the percentage of the population that needs to complete a survey for varying population sizes in order for the maintenance of a reasonable level of confidence in the accuracy of the data (i.e., +/-5% at a 95% confidence level) is given.





Figure 10: Sample proportion against population size for +/-5% error at 95% confidence level



While the VMS sends surveys to a representative (in terms of equality and diversity strands) sample of tenants, tenants from some groups are less likely to respond. The findings that tenants from BME groups are less likely to respond, and that those who do respond are less satisfied with the Decent Homes work, indicate that further investigation may be worthwhile to explore what could be done to encourage these tenants to respond to the survey; also, whether there are currently any barriers such as language that prevent them from responding, and how to express an increase in satisfaction with the work carried out in their homes.

### 5.3 Cost-benefit comparison

This report presents the benefits stated as found by stakeholders across the organisation, although it has not quantified the benefits. It is therefore up to the judgement of NCH management to decide whether the benefits outlined are of significant value to justify the annual cost of at least £9,000 for operating the VMS for the SWM programme.

There are various options to improve the cost-benefit balance that could be considered for the future. The options involve either increasing the benefits or decreasing the costs; they are shown in the following table:





Table 7: Options for improving cost-benefit balance

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Increase the benefits</b>		
Use VMS to measure chosen strategic outcome measures for SWM programme, e.g. satisfaction with neighbourhood	Use existing system (little additional resource needed) to measure additional strategic information	Modification to existing survey: may decrease operational value, e.g. by replacing an existing qn; format/context may not be suitable for this wider purpose
Share good practice across other sections within NCH	Share practices that have driven customer-focused service within SWM to other sections. Increase benefits in relation to fixed costs of VMS	Additional resources required, e.g. resource from BID Team to collate materials/run workshops.
<b>Decrease the costs</b>		
Reduce the frequency of surveying, e.g. quarterly	Reduce resource costs (stationery, postage and admin time). Decreases possible 'survey fatigue' amongst tenants	Less information and increased delay from time work completed- less useful as improvement tool (move more to simply monitoring)
Cumulative annual surveying (send out surveys regularly, feeding responses into cumulative score across year), with monthly reports	Large sample size due to accumulation of responses - fewer surveys need to be sent each month.	In-month scores unavailable, only cumulative over the year.
Reduce the number of surveys, e.g. by calculating number required to meet confidence levels, rather than fixed % sample	Could decrease additional surveys that add little value to results, e.g. as number of Modern completions increases, may be unnecessary to survey 100%	More complicated calculations to establish sample size, not easily explained e.g. to Customer Care Group. May result in more surveys being sent where small amounts of work have been completed.

## 5.4 Recommendations

**This project concludes with a number of recommendations to be discussed by the various stakeholders in the VMS:**

- Consider whether/how the VMS could contribute to supporting an 'outcome-based' approach for the Decent Homes programme, in measuring indicators of the wider social impact on tenants
- Consider whether any of the options presented for increasing benefits/reducing costs should be considered for implementation, e.g. whether the benefits could be increased by identifying any applicable learning that could advantageously be shared across other service areas
- Review some of the questions (e.g. Q1) to clarify meaning, and to consider making such clarity consistent across all streams
- Feedback issues raised with VMS template to the software developers e.g. the alignment of sad/happy faces along numerical scores; whether all of the information requested is in fact applicable
- Update NCH information regarding tenant diversity following the nine 'protected characteristics' of the Equality Act 2010. Also ensure that future data collection/categorisation is in line with the format of the 2011 national Census
- Consider whether a more pro-active form of engagement is needed with certain groups, e.g. distributing the survey in different languages where these are spoken by a large proportion of population in that area; or whether other means of surveying would be preferable (e.g. telephone or on-line)
- Further investigate the issue of non-response and lower satisfaction amongst BME groups, for example, by using Tenant Inspectors to telephone or visit a selection of non-respondents to establish whether their views differ from those who do respond; and sensitively to discover the reasons why non-respondents fail to complete and return the questionnaires
- Further investigate the relationship between applying a standard questionnaire among different groups (e.g. by age) to identify variations in approach to completing questionnaires, expectations regarding the improvements, and the way questions are understood – for instance, by conducting arranged interviews based on the same questionnaire in order to identify differences
- Further investigate to what degree tenants perceive Nottingham City Homes as distinct from Nottingham City Council, and how the VMS could contribute to boosting NCH's independent identity.

## Appendix A: Example VMS survey (Modern)

### CUSTOMER SURVEY

#### SWM - Kitchen/Bathroom Improvement



Property ID: 24SIM001001

Survey ID: DH005B

July 2010

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very poor and 10 being very good), please score following questions. Please circle the score you agree with.



		Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good					
1	How do you rate the level of notice given prior to commencement of works in your property?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	How well were you kept informed, prior to and during the improvement works?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	How would you rate the standard the contractor left your property?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	How well did your contractor keep to the agreed programme?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	How do you rate the conduct of the workperson, e.g. polite and respectful?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	How do you rate the care taken/cleanliness of your property during the improvement work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	How do you rate the arrangements that were made to minimise the inconvenience during the works?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	How do you rate the quality of the completed work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	If a fault occurred as a result of the works, how do you rate the contractor's response?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	Overall how well was this service delivered?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*(Please turn over if you wish to provide comments about the service you have received)*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix B: VMS questions for Secure, Warm, Modern

The following table shows all ten questions for each of the surveys for the Secure, Warm and Modern streams. Questions covering similar topics (allowing for some tailoring of wording to the type of work carried out) are highlighted in the same colours.

From this, the main points to note are:

- The Warm survey is considerably different from the Secure and Modern surveys, which essentially follow the same outline
- The Warm survey does not include a question on the level of notice given before starting the work, and is the only survey to include a question on the effectiveness of the new appliance
- There are slight differences in wording to some questions covering the same topic, e.g., Qs 8 and 10

Table 8: Map of VMS questions by SWM stream

Secure	Warm	Modern
1. How do you rate the level of notice given prior to commencement of works in your property	1. How would you rate the arrangements made for the new heating appliance installation	1. How do you rate the level of notice given prior to commencement of works in your property
2. How well were you informed in how to operate your windows and doors	2. How close to the agreed timescale was the work carried out	2. How well were you kept informed, prior to and during the improvement works
3. How would you rate the standard the contractor left your property	3. How well did the engineer respond to your queries	3. How would you rate the standard the contractor left your property
4. How do you rate the time taken to complete the work on your property	4. How do you rate the conduct of the engineer e.g. polite and respectful	4. How do you rate the time taken to complete the work on your property
5. How do you rate the conduct of the workperson e.g. polite and respectful	5. How do you rate the care taken to protect your property during the installation	5. How do you rate the conduct of the workperson e.g. polite and respectful
6. How do you rate the care / cleanliness of your property during the improvement work	6. How do you rate the way your home was left after the installation was complete	6. How do you rate the care / cleanliness of your property during the improvement work
7. How do you rate the arrangements that were made to minimise the inconvenience during the work	7. How do you rate the quality of the work	7. How do you rate the arrangements that were made to minimise the inconvenience during the work
8. How do you rate the quality of the completed work	8. How do you rate the effectiveness of the new boiler / heating installation	8. How do you rate the quality of the completed work
9. If a fault occurred as a result of the window replacement, how do you rate the contractor's response	9. If a fault occurred as a result of the new installation, how do you rate the contractor's response	9. If a fault occurred as a result of the works, how do you rate the contractor's response
10. Overall how well was this service delivered	10. How would you rate the service offered overall	10. Overall how well was this service delivered

## Appendix C: Sample and response by equality and diversity strands

The following table shows the proportion of each group in the overall tenant profile, and compares this with the proportion of surveys sent to each group, and the proportion of each group returning a survey. Figures in blue indicate where the proportion is above that of the overall profile, and figures in red show where it is below the overall profile.

Tenant profile	Surveyed VMS				Responding VMS		
	%	%	Number	Difference %	%	Number	Difference %
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	41.74%	43.13%	3087	1.39%	42.64%	991	0.9%
Female	57.45%	53.42%	3823	-4.03%	54.3%	1262	-3.15%
Unknown	0.81%	3.45%	247	2.64%	3.06%	71	2.25%
<b>Age group</b>							
16 - 24	7.5%	8.12%	581	0.62%	4.6%	107	-2.9%
25 - 40	26.11%	28.55%	2043	2.44%	25.09%	583	-1.02%
41 - 59	28.62%	27.02%	1934	-1.6%	21.51%	500	-7.11%
60 - 79	18.18%	16.56%	1185	-1.62%	20.44%	475	2.26%
80+	7.25%	9.08%	650	1.83%	17.56%	408	10.31%
Unknown	12.33%	10.67%	764	-1.66%	10.8%	251	-1.53%
<b>Ethnic group</b>							
BME	17.21%	15.19%	1087	-2.02%	10.5%	244	-6.71%
Non-BME	63.78%	70.81%	5068	7.03%	78.92%	1834	15.14%
Unknown	19.01%	14%	1002	-5.01%	10.59%	246	-8.42%
<b>Religion</b>							
All other religions	1.5%	1.41%	101	-0.09%	1.51%	35	0.01%
Buddhist	0.16%	0.1%	7	-0.06%	0.13%	3	-0.03%
Christian	22.21%	25.04%	1792	2.83%	33.65%	782	11.44%
Hindu	0.07%	0.03%	2	-0.04%	0%	0	-0.07%
Jewish	0.07%	0.06%	4	-0.01%	0.04%	1	-0.03%
Muslim	2.26%	1.55%	111	-0.71%	0.9%	21	-1.36%
No religion	14.12%	21.73%	1555	7.61%	19.41%	451	5.29%
Prefer not to say	8.77%	8.91%	638	0.14%	8.78%	204	0.01%
Sikh	0.12%	0.06%	4	-0.06%	0.13%	3	0.01%
Unknown	50.72%	41.11%	2942	-9.61%	35.46%	824	-15.26%





Tenant profile		Surveyed VMS			Responding VMS		
	%	%	Number	Difference %	%	Number	Difference %
<b>Sexuality</b>							
<b>Bi-sexual</b>	0.21%	0.31%	22	0.1%	0.17%	4	-0.04%
<b>Gay man</b>	0.27%	0.18%	13	-0.09%	0.26%	6	-0.01%
<b>Hetrosexual</b>	27.26%	37.63%	2693	10.37%	42.86%	996	15.6%
<b>Lesbian</b>	0.13%	0.14%	10	0.01%	0.3%	7	0.17%
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	6.29%	5.66%	405	-0.63%	10.97%	255	4.68%
<b>Unknown</b>	65.75%	55.99%	4007	-9.76%	45.27%	1052	-20.48%
<b>Unsure</b>	0.1%	0.08%	6	-0.02%	0.17%	4	0.07%
<b>Disability</b>							
<b>Yes</b>	9.09%	10.38%	743	1.29%	16.35%	380	7.26%
<b>No</b>	90.63%	85.96%	6152	-4.67%	80.25%	1865	-10.38%
<b>Unknown</b>	28%	3.65%	261	-24.35%	3.4%	79	-24.6%



**Nottingham  
City Homes**

Secure ♦ Warm ♦ Modern

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