

Customer Inspectors

Voids Inspection



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Acknowledgements

This research project was conducted by Hannah Fitzhenry, Customer Insight Officer.

Tom Bate, Operations Manager, Neighbourhood Services conducted a Voids briefing along with a question and answer session for the Customer Inspectors.

A special thanks is given to all the Customer Inspectors who took the time to complete the Voids Mystery Shop

Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	2
Contents	3
Executive summary	4
Introduction	6
• Purpose	6
• Background	6
• About the Customer Inspectors	6
• Customer Excellence Strategy Diagram	7
• Mystery Shop of Voids	8
Aims and Objectives	8
Method and Sample	8
• Context	9
• Method	9
• Sample	9
Analysis – Voids Standards	11
The Customer Journey	24
• Decoration	11
• Cleanliness	12
Summary of properties	40
Customer Inspector Recommendations	41
Improvements to Future Inspections	42
Next Steps	42

Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarise and evaluate the results of the December 2010 mystery shop of voids

Aims

The aims of the Void mystery shop are:

- To develop an understanding of a customer's view of empty properties
- To assess areas for improvement with void properties
- To identify recommendations to make voids more customer focused

Sample

The Inspectors conducted eleven mystery shops between Thursday 11 November and Tuesday 14 December 2010.

Analysis

The analysis of void properties has been conducted in two parts this first is the analysis of the void standards to ascertain if Helena are meeting the set standards, alongside this the Customer Journey of each property has been analysed to identify how Helena can further improve the experience of visiting a void property.

Voids Standards

The following standards were failed in at least a third of the properties that were visited:

External Front:

- ✘ Stairs clean and in good repair (3 of 5)

Hallway

- ✘ Windows in good repair and open and close correctly (4 of 6)
- ✘ Door and door frame in good repair (6 of 11)
- ✘ Carpets and curtains in good condition (3 of 5)

Under stair storage

- ✓ All the standards for under stairs storage were satisfied in all applicable void properties

Living Room

- ✘ Windows in good repair and open and close correctly (7 of 11)
- ✘ Carpets and curtains in good condition (4 of 6)
- ✘ Floor in good repair (5 of 10)

Kitchen

- ✘ Cupboards and units clean and in good repair (7 of 11)

External Back

- ✘ Free from rubbish (2 of 6)
- ✘ Outhouse or shed safe and free from rubbish (1 of 3)
- ✘ Footpath clean and in good repair (2 of 6)
- ✘ Hedges, bushes and grassed areas (3 of 5)

Stairs and Landing

- ✘ Stairs in good repair (4 of 6)

Bathroom

- ✘ Carpets and curtains in good repair (1 of 3)

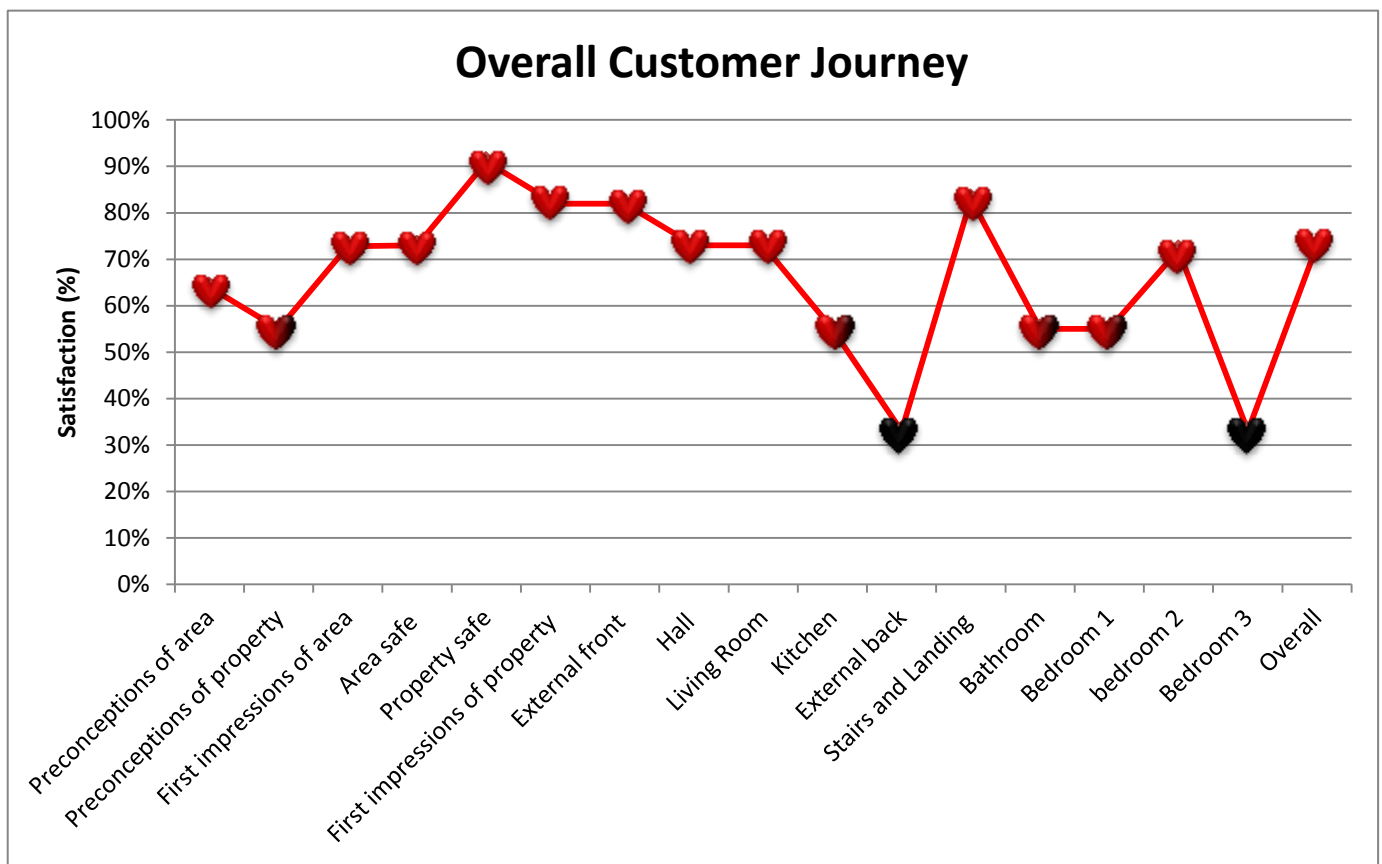
Bedrooms

- ✓ *Although some area failed to meet the standards in some of the bedrooms this was on a small number of occasions.*

Customer Journey

- Before visiting the properties located in Thatto Heath, Sutton and Four Acre the Inspectors thought these areas would be of a poor standard.
- The majority (8) of the properties that were visited were given a 'good' in terms of the first impressions of the area, (3 were very good).
- The Inspectors mainly rated the properties that were visited positively, eight of the properties visited were rated as 'good', (3, were very good).
- Only two properties were rated as 'fairly poor' no properties were considered to be 'very poor'.
- One property was given an overall rating of 'neither'.

To further highlight improvements to the void properties the journey of the Inspectors has been analysed and can be found in full detail on page 25. A combined journey of the eleven properties has been displayed below.



Voids Properties

A summary table of each of the different properties visited has been developed and is displayed on page 40.

Customer Inspectors Recommendations

The Customer Inspectors made a number of recommendations to how void properties can be improved, this can be found on page 41.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarise and evaluate the Customer Inspectors mystery shop of Helena Partnerships Void properties. The report analyses the information from the Voids Inspection checklists along with any additional comments made by the Customer Inspectors.

Background

Helena Partnerships want to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything we do. We want to demonstrate that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The Tenant Authority (TSA) expects housing associations to have a clear strategy for involving tenants and residents in influencing and monitoring service delivery.

Tenants should be clear on how they can be involved in managing their homes, and Helena must demonstrate how services have been modified in response to tenant views.

Over recent years there has been increased emphasis on tenant led regulation; ensuring housing associations are accountable to its customers.

“Making services and decisions accountable to, and contestable by, residents, and responding to the resident voice, are vital to achieving... excellence in housing.”
Chartered Institute of Housing, 2008

“We expect all housing associations to clearly show how their services have been commented on and influenced by the people living in their homes...We also expect housing associations to be able to show that responding to residents’ views is something that runs through all their activities as part of their culture and the way they deliver services.”
Housing Corporation, 2007

Helena has already made successful inroads to achieving this through its Customer Excellence and Resident Involvement Strategies, by providing greater opportunities for tenants to influence the decision-making process and shape the services that they receive. The Customer Inspector group is just one of a range of initiatives aimed at achieving this.

The Customer Excellence Strategy aims to ensure we deliver high quality services based on what matters most to tenants. We want to ensure that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The creation of the Customer Excellence Strategy has led to the development of Customer Inspectors.

The diagram on the following page identifies the different tenant groups within the Customer Excellence Strategy

About the Customer Inspectors

A Customer Inspector is a volunteer whose role is to test and feedback the level of service being provided from a customer perspective. They carry out mystery shopping or reality checks which provide feedback on actual service delivery.

Customer Inspectors have a key role within the Customer Excellence Strategy and will help to improve customer satisfaction with Helena services.

Helena Homes has a total of eight trained Customer Inspectors who are able to conduct a variety of overt and covert exercises.

The Customer Inspectors will continue to conduct reality checks on Helena Homes services throughout the upcoming year. Although a timetable has been developed this will remain a 'mystery' to ensure that the research remain a reality check.

The services identified to mystery shop have been identified by the priorities of the Customer Excellence Panel. The recommendations from the mystery shops will aid the Customer Excellence Panel in the full review of a specific service area.

Mystery shops will also be identified by specific service managers when there is a requirement to carry out a reality check of the service.

The checklists have been developed specifically for use by the trained Customer Inspectors and allow them to express their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the complaints service whilst giving them room to detail any additional comments and suggestions for improvements.

The results of these studies will provide feedback to service managers, which in turn will help to identify strengths and weaknesses with the services and will enable them to highlight areas for improvement.

The results of Mystery Shops and Inspectors are used to identify direct service improvements for the individual service manager. In addition to this the results will be a valuable piece of performance information to aid the Customer Excellence Panel in their review of a service area, which then fed back to Board.

The diagram below displays the groups involved within the Customer Excellence strategy.



Mystery Shop of Voids

The Voids mystery shop is the fifth Inspection to be carried out by the Customer Inspectors.

A Void is also known as an Empty Property. To ensure that Helena Homes properties are meeting the set void standards the Inspectors conducted 'spot checks' on a random sample of properties to identify if they are meeting the needs of customers.

It is beneficial to conduct a reality check to aid with improvements to Void Properties.

It is important that Helena ensures that all members of staff are following the same standards and that it is consistently being met.

In addition the Mystery Shop highlighted the customer's journey of visiting an empty property, this enable the journey of a new customer to be identified.

The mystery shop of voids will help to identify areas for improvement and in addition will seek recommendations from the Customer Inspectors to how the service can be improved from a customer's perspective.

Aims and Objectives

Aims

The aims of the Void mystery shop are:

- To develop an understanding of a customer's view of empty properties
- To assess areas for improvement with void properties
- To identify recommendations to make voids more customer focused

Objectives

To achieve the aims the mystery shop will focus around:

- First impressions of the external area
- First impressions of the internal area
- The five senses
- The Customer Journey
- The internal and external areas
- Additional comments made by the Customer Inspectors

Method and Sample

Context

Overall the Customer Inspectors conducted eleven mystery shops of Voids.

The mystery shop was conducted over a number of dates between Thursday 11 November and Tuesday 14 December 2010.

Unfortunately due to adverse weather conditions a number of arranged mystery shops were cancelled.

The table below gives details of the number of mystery shops that were carried out.

Number	Address	Number	Address
1	11 Millom Grove, Thatto Heath	7	9 Kerrysdale Close, Peasley Cross
2	3 Randon Grove, Town Centre	8	80 Carnegie, Sutton
3	6 Bracken Court, Four Acre	9	5 Pendlebury, Clock Face
4	1A Leyland, Haydock	10	27 Singleton Avenue, Haydock
5	32 Frederick Street, Sutton	11	25 Enfield Close, Thatto Heath
6	6A Albion Street, Town Centre		

Method

The voids checklist was developed considering the void service standards. In addition the Inspectors were asked to give feedback on their journey as a customer from first impressions of the area to their overall opinion of the property.

To ensure feedback was gathered on all elements of the property the Inspectors were asked to detail information about their senses, this included detailing what they could see, hear, smell, taste and touch.

The Inspectors checklists have been developed as a questionnaire using a variety of different scales. Instructions have also been developed on each checklist.

Similar to previous checklists space was provided throughout the checklists to encourage as many additional comments and suggestions to be made.

The checklist was signed off by Tom Bate, Operations Manager, Neighbourhood Service.

In addition the Inspectors supported their findings in the empty properties by taking photographs of elements they liked and disliked.

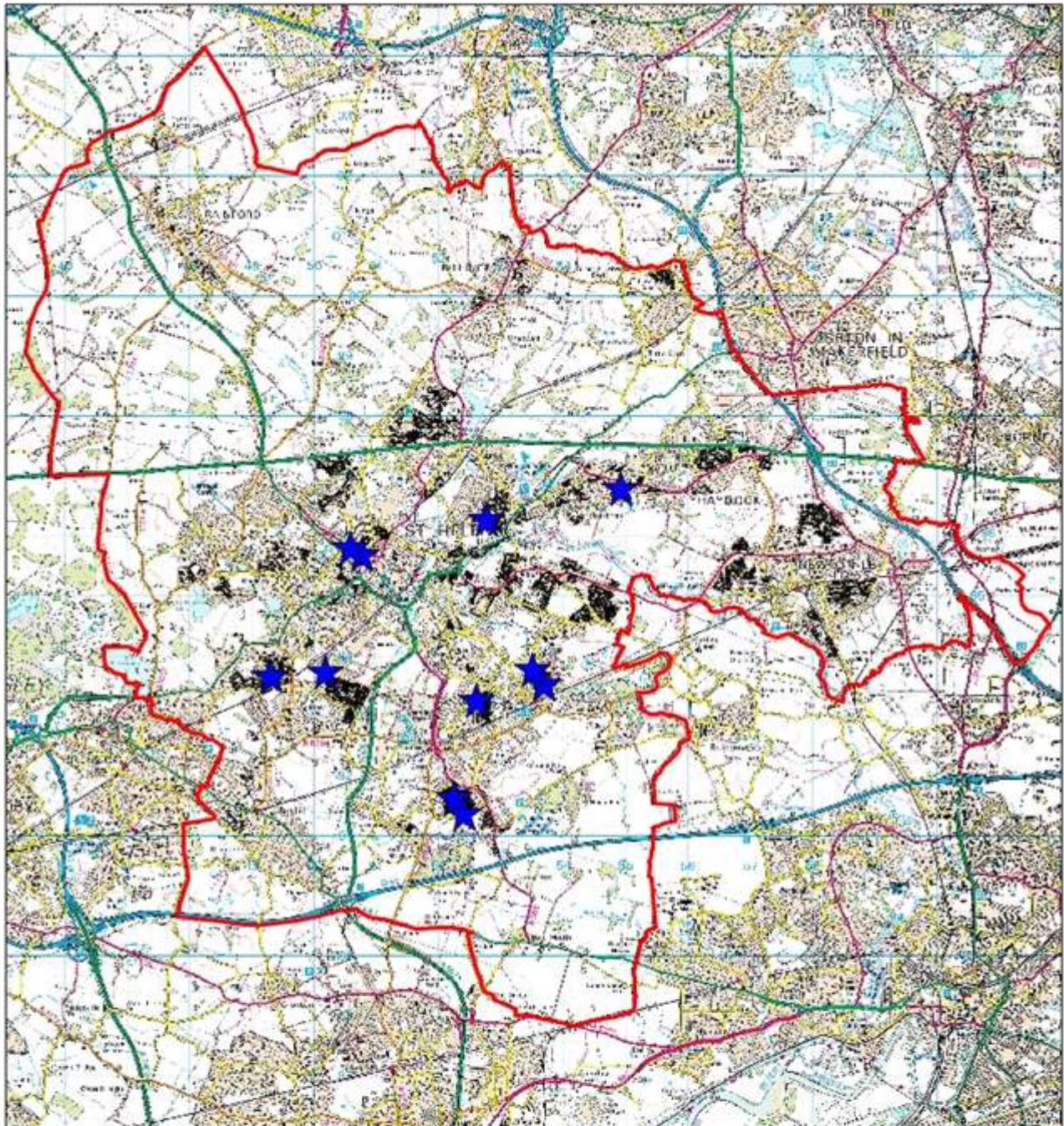
Sample

A random sample of mystery shops were conducted by the Inspectors, this method was chosen as it allowed the mystery shops to be carried out at a time that was convenient to the Inspectors.

Eleven mystery shops were conducted. Checklists were completed for all properties giving a response rate of 100%.




Five of the properties visited were houses, five were flats. One bungalow was visited. One property was Sheltered whilst the other ten were General Needs. Four properties had one bedroom, four had two bedrooms and three had three bedrooms.

Properties were visited in a variety of areas, the properties have been displayed in the map below.



VOID MYSTERY SHOP VISITS



KEY	
	Void Mystery Shop Visits
	St Helens Boundary
	Helena Stock

Scale: 1:85,000
Date: 16/12/2010
Drawn by: PIT-GIS
Client: PIT-HF



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Analysis – Void Standards



Void Standards

The analysis of void properties has been conducted in two parts the first is the analysis of the void standards to ascertain if Helena are meeting the set standards.

External Front

The majority of the properties visited (8) satisfied the standard in terms of being free from rubbish, 3 properties did not meet this standard.

Seven of the properties satisfied the standard for the 'fencing being safe', two properties were dissatisfied.

Eight properties satisfied the 'footpath clean and in good repair' three properties failed this standard and a 'dissatisfied' rating was given.

Almost all (9) properties considered the front door to be clean and in good repair, two properties did not meet this standard.

Three properties met the satisfied the standard for the stairs being clean and in good repair, two properties did not meet this standard. *(This element of the standard was not applicable to 6 of the properties visited)*

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 25 Enfield Close
- 6A Albion Street
- 32 Frederick Street
- 27 Singleton Avenue

Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 3 Randon Grove
- 5 Pendlebury Street

Unfortunately '6 Bracken Court' failed to meet any standard relevant to the external front of the property.

A selection of photographs taken of the external areas have been displayed below.



Above: 6 Bracken Court,
Four Acre



Above: 1A Leyland
Grove, Haydock



Above: 25 Enfield Close, Sutton

Hallway

Eight of the eleven properties met the standard for 'floor is in good repair', three properties failed to meet this standard.

Six properties had windows located in the hall, four of the windows were in good repair and opened and closed correctly, two properties failed the standard.

Just over half (6) of the properties met the standard for the door and door frame being in good repair, five properties failed to meet this standard.

Almost all (10) properties considered the light switches, light fittings and plug sockets to be in good repair, only one property did not meet this standard.

Carpets and curtains were in good condition and met the standard in three of the properties, one property failed to meet the standard. *(Six properties did not have carpets and curtains in the hallway)*

All properties met the standard for being 'free from rubbish'.

6A Albion Street satisfied all the standards for the Hallway, one of the Inspectors made the following comment:

"Little gem...good impression"

25 Enfield Close, 6A Albion Street, 80 Carnegie Crescent, 27 Singleton Avenue and 3 Millom Grove also satisfied all the standards for the Hallway.

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 3 Randon Grove
- 9 Kerrysdale Close

Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 5 Pendlebury Street
- 1A Leyland Grove
- 32 Frederick Street
- 6 Bracken Court

Decoration in the hallway

The decoration in the hallway received a mixed response whilst the majority (7) were happy with the decoration (two very satisfied), a further four properties were rated as dissatisfactory, (one very dissatisfied).

Cleanliness of the hallway

In terms of cleanliness the majority of hallways were rated as either 'very satisfied' (2) or 'fairly satisfied' (7). The cleanliness in two hallways was rated as 'fairly and very dissatisfied'.

A selection of photographs taken in hallways are displayed below.



Above: 11 Millom Grove, Thatto Heath



Above: 3 Randon, Town Centre

Under stairs storage

Five of the properties that were visited had 'Under Stairs Storage', it was rated according to three standards of 'floor in good repair', 'door in good repair' and 'free from rubbish'.

All the properties that had under stairs storage met all three standards.

Overall 'Under Stairs Storage' received all positive ratings for the cleanliness, this was either 'very or fairly satisfied'.

Living Room

A mixed response was received for the 'floor being in good repair', five properties satisfied the standard, whilst a further five didn't. This was not applicable to one property.

In the majority of properties (7) the standard for the windows being in good repair and opening and closing correctly was satisfied, four properties did not meet this standard.

The door and door frame in the Living Room met the standard in eight of the properties, three properties did not meet this standard.

Light switches, light fittings and plugs sockets met the standard of being in good repair on nine occasions, two properties failed to meet this standard.

All living rooms visited were considered to have an adequate supply of plug sockets.

Four properties satisfied the standard of carpets and curtain being of a good condition, two properties did not meet this standard. (*This standard was no applicable in five of the properties visited*).

All living rooms satisfied the standard of being free from rubbish.

27 Singleton Avenue, 9 Kerrysdale Close 3 Millom Grove and 6A Albion Street satisfied all the standards for the Living Room.

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 80 Carnegie Crescent
- 25 Enfield Close

Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 6 Bracken Court
- 32 Frederick Street
- 1A Leyland Grove
- 3 Randon Grove
- 5 Pendlebury Street

Decoration in the living room

Overall living room's received a mixed response in terms of their decoration, four were rated as 'very satisfied', two as 'fairly satisfied, one as neither, two as 'fairly dissatisfied' and two as 'very dissatisfied'.

Cleanliness in the living room

Similar to the decoration the cleanliness of the living rooms received a mixed response. The majority (6) were 'satisfied', three very satisfied. Two living room's were rated as 'fairly dissatisfied and a further two as 'very dissatisfied'.

A selection of photographs taken in the living room's are displayed below.



Above: 1A Leyland Grove, Haydock

Below: 6 Bracken Court, Four Acre



Left: 25 Enfield Close, Thatto Heath



Kitchen

Eight out of the eleven properties visited met the standard for the floor being in good repair, three properties did not meet this standard.

All but one (10) property met the standard for the windows being in good repair and opening and closing correctly.

The door and door frame is in good repair in ten of the eleven properties.

Light fittings, light switches and plugs sockets met the standard in ten of the eleven properties that were visited.

Ten properties satisfied the standard relating to there being a washing machine valve located in the kitchen, one property did not meet this standard.

Ten properties considered the sink to be of a good standard, one property did not meet this standard.

All but one property met the standard for there being a plug and chain, one property did not meet this standard.

The majority (7) of properties satisfied the standard for the kitchen cupboards and units being clean and in good repair, four properties did not meet this standard.

Nine out of the eleven properties met the standard relating to the kitchen worktops being clean and power washed, two properties did not meet this standard.

The tiling is in good repair in nine of the properties, two properties did not have tiles that were in good repair.

The sealant was in good repair in all but one of the properties visited.

Six of the kitchens in the properties visited had carpets and curtains that were in good repair, two properties failed to meet this standard. (*This standard was not applicable in three of the properties visited*).

Ten properties met the standard for the kitchen being free from rubbish, unfortunately one property did not meet this standard.

The following standards were satisfied in all eleven properties that were visited:

- Adequate supply of plug sockets
- Ventilation
- Taps are in good working order
- Cooker point

Decoration in the kitchen

The Inspectors were satisfied with the decoration in eight of the kitchens, (five very satisfied). Neither was selected for one kitchen. Two kitchens were given a negative rating for their decoration, one received 'fairly dissatisfied' and one 'very dissatisfied'.

Cleanliness in the kitchen

Nine of the eleven kitchens were considered to be either 'very satisfied' (5) or 'fairly satisfied' (4) for their cleanliness, a further two kitchens were rated as 'fairly dissatisfied'.

6A Albion Street, 25 Enfield Close and 3 Millom Grove satisfied all the standards for the Kitchen.

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 5 Pendlebury Street
- 1A Leyland Grove
- 6 Bracken Court
- 27 Singleton Avenue

Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 3 Randon Grove
- 80 Carnegie Crescent
- 9 Kerrysdale Close
- 32 Frederick Street

A selection of photographs taken in the kitchen are displayed below.



Above: 1A Leyland Grove, Haydock

Below: 6 Bracken Court, Four Acre



Red X: Ceiling not repainted after being plastered

Below: 3 Randon Grove, Town Centre



Red X: Dirty tiles



Red X: Poor flooring and kitchen units

Above: 9 Kerrysdale Grove

External back

Six of the properties that were visited had an external back garden.

Five of the properties met the standard for the back door being in good repair, one property had a security door making this standard not applicable.

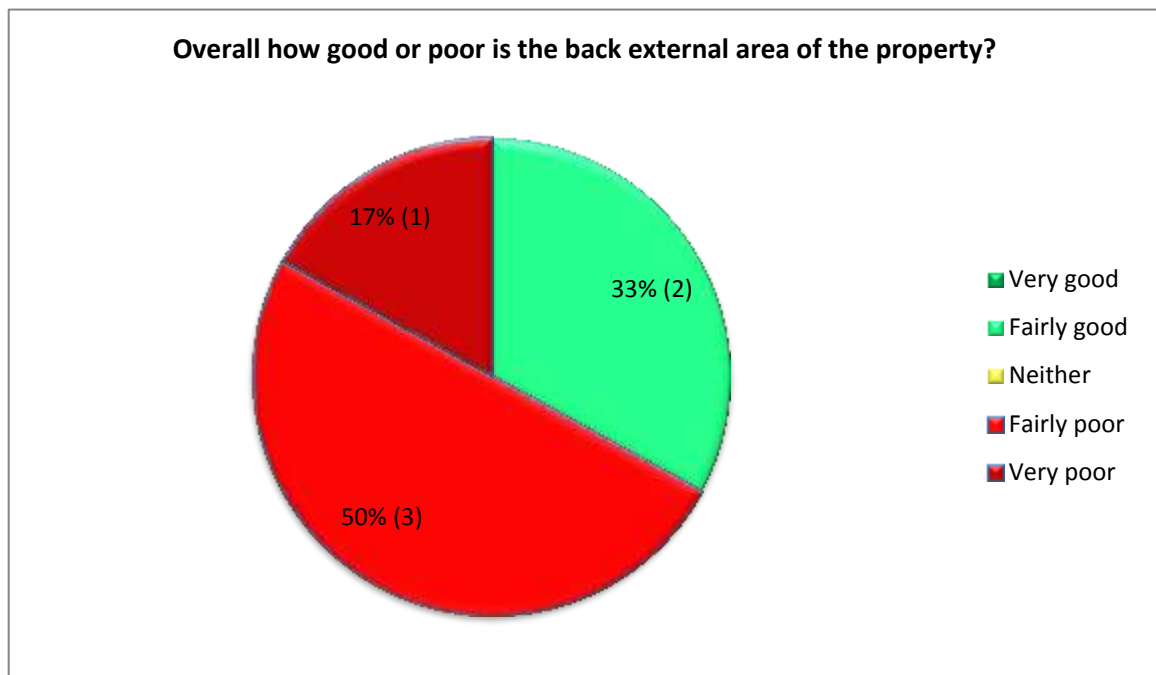
The majority (4) of the external areas in the property failed to satisfy the garden being free from rubbish. Two properties met this standard.

Of the three properties that had outhouses or a shed two were considered to be safe and useable and free from rubbish.

Two of the six external areas had footpaths that were in good repair and met the standard, four of the areas failed to meet this standard.

Hedges, bushes and grassed areas satisfied the standard in three of the external areas, two failed to meet

Overall the majority (4) of the external back gardens were rated poorly, the pie chart below displays the Inspectors overall ratings.



1A Leyland Grove was the only property to and satisfy all the standards for the External Back area.

Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 27 Singleton Avenue
- 6 Bracken Court
- 32 Frederick Street
- 9 Kerrysdale Close
- 3 Randon Grove

A selection of photographs taken in the external back areas are displayed below.



Below: 9 Kerrysdale Grove



Above and left : 3 Randon Grove, Town Centre



Stairs and Landing

Four of the six properties with stairs and a landing were in good repairs and satisfied the standard, two properties failed to meet this standard.

All properties (6) satisfied the standard of “a handrail is fitted and secure”.

In all applicable properties (6) light switches, light fittings and plug sockets were in good repair.

Two of the properties visited contained either carpets or curtains on the stairs and landing, both these properties satisfied this standard.

All stairs and landings (6) were free from rubbish.

Decoration on the stairs and landing

The Inspectors were satisfied with the decoration in four of the stairs and landings, (two very satisfied)

Neither was selected for one property and one was given a negative rating of ‘fairly dissatisfied’.

Cleanliness on the stairs and landing

The cleanliness of the stairs and landings in five of the six properties was rated as satisfied, (4 fairly satisfied). Only one property received a negative rating of ‘fairly dissatisfied’.

3 Randon Grove, 6A Albion Street, 32 Frederick Street and 6 Bracken Court satisfied all the standards for the stairs and landing.

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 9 Kerrysdale Close
- 27 Singleton Avenue

The photograph to the right displays the stairs in 6 Bracken Court, Four Acre.



Bathroom

Almost all bathrooms (9) satisfied the standard relating to the floor being in good repair, two did not meet this standard.

All eight bathrooms with windows met the standard for them opening and closing correctly. Three properties did not have windows in the bathroom.

The door and door frame of the bathroom was in good repair in ten of the eleven properties, one door was not in good repair.

Light switches, light fittings and plug sockets were in good repair in eight of the bathrooms, two were not in good repair.

The majority (9) if the bathroom has a bath, basin and toilet that was clean and in good repair, two bathrooms failed to meet this standard.

The bath panel was in good repair in eight of nine properties. Two properties did not have a bath fitted in the bathroom.

Five showers met the standard for being clean and in good repair, one shower failed to meet the standard. (*Five bathrooms did not contain a shower*)

Nine properties met the standard for the tiling being in good repair, two properties failed to meet this standard.

Similar to the previous standard nine properties met the standard for the sealant being in good repair, two properties failed to meet the standard.

Three bathrooms contained carpets and curtains, these were in good condition in two of the bathrooms.

The following standards were met in the bathrooms in all eleven properties that were visited:

- Ventilation
- Taps are in good working order
- Plug and chain are provided and are useable
- Free from rubbish

Decoration in the bathroom

The Inspectors were satisfied with the decoration in eight of the visited bathrooms, (seven very satisfied)

One bathroom was given a 'neither' for its decoration whilst two were rated as 'fairly dissatisfied'.

Cleanliness in the bathroom

On the majority (7) of occasions the Inspectors were very satisfied with the cleanliness of the bathroom, none were rated as 'fairly satisfied'.

One bathroom was rated as 'neither' for the overall cleanliness.

In three of the properties the bathroom was 'fairly dissatisfied' for its cleanliness, none were given 'very dissatisfied'.

9 Kerrysdale Close, 3 Millom Grove, 3 Randon Grove and 6A Albion Street satisfied all the standards for the Bathroom.

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 5 Pendlebury Street

Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 27 Singleton Avenue
- 6 Bracken Court
- 32 Frederick Street
- 80 Carnegie Crescent
- 1A Leyland Grove
- 25 Enfield Close

A selection of photographs taken in the bathrooms are displayed below

Below: 1A Leyland Grove, Haydock



Right: 3 Randon Grove, Town Centre



Above: 80 Carnegie Crescent, Sutton

Bedrooms

Please note the analysis of the bedrooms has been done by combining all the bedrooms in the eleven properties visited, this gives a total of twenty one bedrooms that were visited.

The majority (18) of the bedrooms satisfied the standard for the floor being in good repair, three bedrooms failed to meet this standard.

Eight bedrooms met the standard for the windows being in good repair and opening and closing correctly, three bedrooms did not meet this standard.

The door and door frame was in good repair in eighteen bedrooms, three bedrooms failed to meet the standard.

Nineteen of the bedrooms satisfied the standard for the light switches, light fittings and plug sockets being in good repair, two failed to meet the standard.

None of the twenty one bedrooms contained a fire surround and therefore met the standard.

Ten of the bedrooms contained either carpets or curtains, eight of these were considered to be in a good condition whilst two were of a dissatisfactory standard.

All twenty one bedrooms met the standard for being free from rubbish.

Decoration in the bedrooms

On the majority of occasions (13) the bedroom was rated positively in terms of its decoration, six were rated as 'very satisfied' and seven 'fairly satisfied'.

One bedroom was given 'neither' for its decoration.

Seven bedrooms were of a dissatisfactory standard regarding the decoration, six were rated as 'fairly dissatisfied' and one 'very dissatisfied'.

Cleanliness in the bedrooms

In terms of cleanliness, the majority (11) of bedrooms were rated as 'satisfied', five were very satisfied. Three of the bedrooms were rated as 'fairly dissatisfied' and a further two as 'very dissatisfied'.

Five bedrooms were rated as 'neither' for their cleanliness.

6A Albion Street, 25 Enfield Close, 3 Millom Grove, 6 Bracken Court and 27 Singleton Avenue and satisfied all the standards for the Bedroom.

Properties that failed to meet one of these standards include:

- 5 Pendlebury Street
- 1A Leyland Grove
- 80 Carnegie Crescent

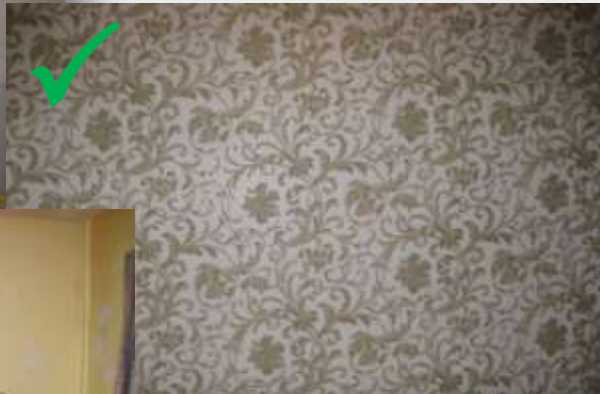
Properties that failed to meet two or more of the standards include:

- 3 Randon Grove
- 9 Kerrysdale Close
- 32 Frederick Street

A selection of photographs taken in the bedrooms are displayed below.



Below and left: 1A
Leyland Grove,



Above: 3 Randon Grove, Town Centre

Right: 5 Pendlebury Street



Above: 80 Carnegie Crescent, Sutton

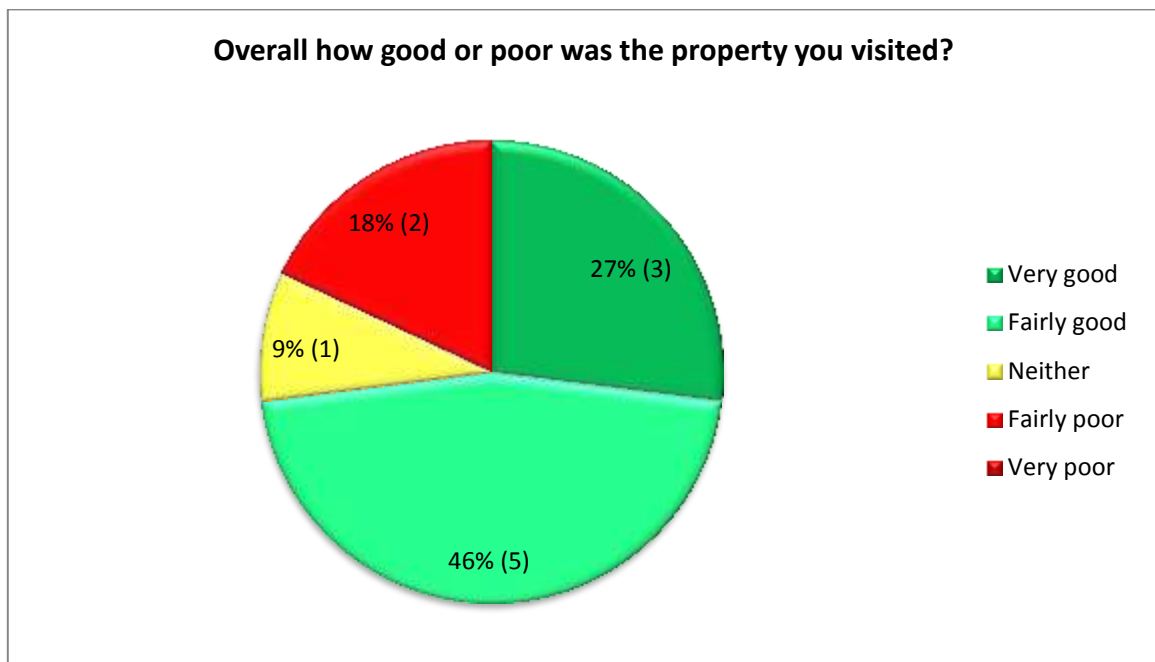
Additional Information

All eleven properties visited had a fire alarm, this standard was therefore met.

No properties that were visited had polyester tiles located anywhere in the property.

Overall Feedback

The graph below displays the overall rating of the property given by the Inspectors on completion of their empty property inspection.



The Customer Journey



What do you think?

The Inspectors rated each of the property before the visit; this was in terms of the area and the property. This was to identify any preconceptions of the areas acting as a barrier for the property being of greater demand.

- No areas were considered to be 'very good'
- Seven of the eleven areas visited were considered to be 'fairly good'
- One area was rated as 'neither', as the Inspector was unsure of the area
- One area was considered to be 'fairly poor'
- Two areas were given a 'very poor' rating before the visit to the property.

The areas considered to be 'fairly poor' or 'very poor' were given to the following areas:

- Thatto Heath
- Sutton
- Four Acre

The Inspectors detailed that these areas were given the rating based on the reputation of the area which was based on hearsay.

The properties were also given a rating before the actual visit was made, this is summarised below:

- No properties were given a 'very good' rating
- The majority (6) properties were predicted to be 'fairly good'
- Three properties were given a 'neither' as the Inspectors were unsure what the properties were going to be like
- Two properties were predicted to be 'fairly poor'
- No properties were considered to be 'very poor'

The properties predicted to be 'fairly poor' were in the areas of Sutton and the Town Centre. It was detailed by the Inspector that the reason for this rating was that they have seen other houses in the area.

Arrival to the void property

The majority (8) of the properties that were visited were given a 'good' in terms of the first impressions of the area, (3 very good). One Inspectors gave the first impressions of the area as 'neither' whilst a further two rated it as 'fairly poor'. No areas visited were given 'very poor' on terms of their first impression of the area.

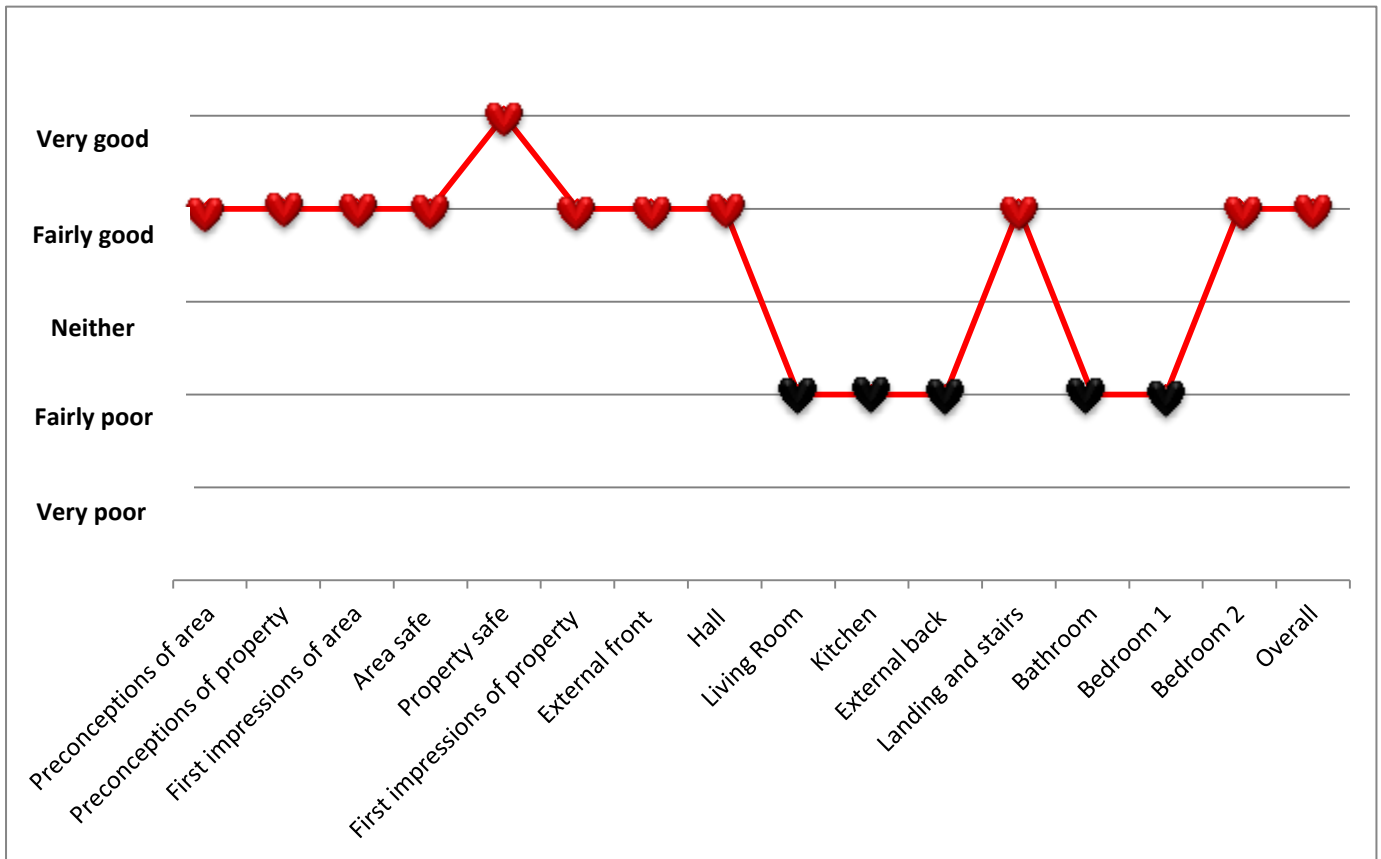
The properties to receive a poor rating for the firsts impression of the area was 1A Leyland Grove in Haydock and 6 Bracken Court in Four Acre.

The Inspectors rated eight out of the eleven areas visited as feeling safe, (2 'very safe'). The other three areas were rated as 'not safe'. These were the areas of Four Acre, Thatto Heath and Haydock.

In those areas that were rated as 'not safe' the following comments were received from the Inspectors:

- "...Fencing too high to see over to the open space..."
- "...next to an alley way..."
- "Front door and windows have been secured by Helena"

32 Frederick Street



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'fairly satisfied' with 32 Frederick Street, the majority of the different points along the customer journey were rated as 'fairly good'

- First impressions of the property were good with the Inspector making the following comments:

"...see a tidy garden..."

"...it's very quiet and the air is clean..."

"...a lovely open staircase..."

- The property was rated the most highly in terms of its safety, it received a 'very safe'
- Five points along the journey were rated as 'fairly poor', these are therefore areas for improvement and include the following:

- Living Room
- Kitchen
- External Back
- Bathroom
- Bedroom 1

- The Inspectors highlighted that in the Living Room the skirting boards were not up to standard and the fire surround was scruffy. The blinds and radiators were unclean.

- In the kitchen, the floor was highlighted to be in poor repair along with the radiator which required a clean. Dissatisfaction with the kitchen was also the result of damaged plaster work from security fittings and in the washer space. (See picture above)

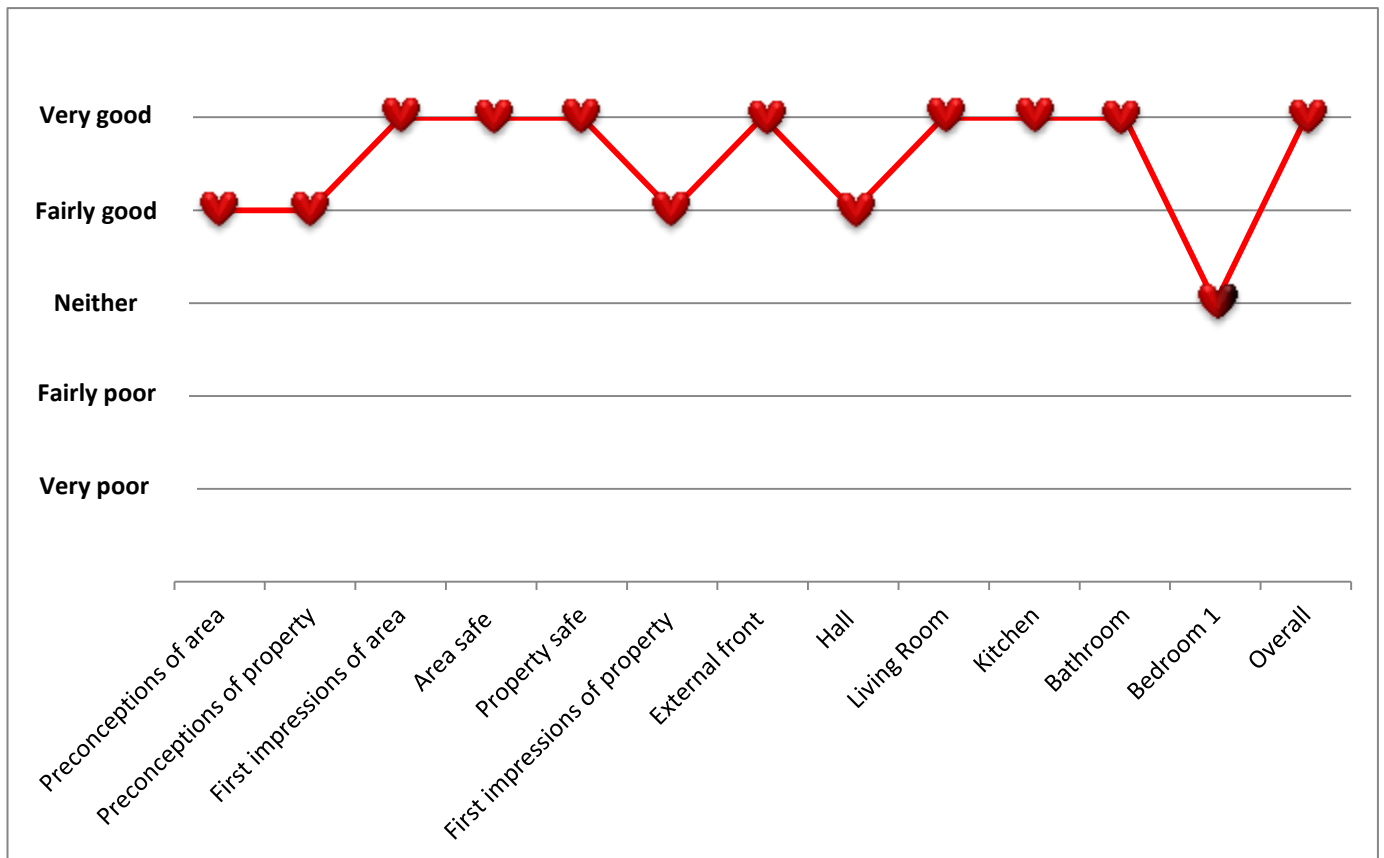


- The lack of a dividing fence had an impact on the Inspectors opinion of the external back garden.
- Dissatisfaction with the Bathroom was a result of it not being clean, the Inspector also highlighted the following:

“...cupboard in bathroom dirty and should have been removed...”

- The poor decoration in the bedroom led the Inspector to feel dissatisfied with bedroom 1. The light fittings, light switches and plug sockets were also of a poor standard and were dirty.
- The kitchen and garden were highlighted as the most need of improvement in this property.

5 Pendlebury Street



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'very satisfied' with 5 Pendlebury Street, almost all the points along the Customer Journey were rated as 'very good' or 'fairly good'.
- First impressions were rated as 'very good' with the Inspectors making the following comments:

“...good quality lawns and fences...”

“...traffic but not a problem...”

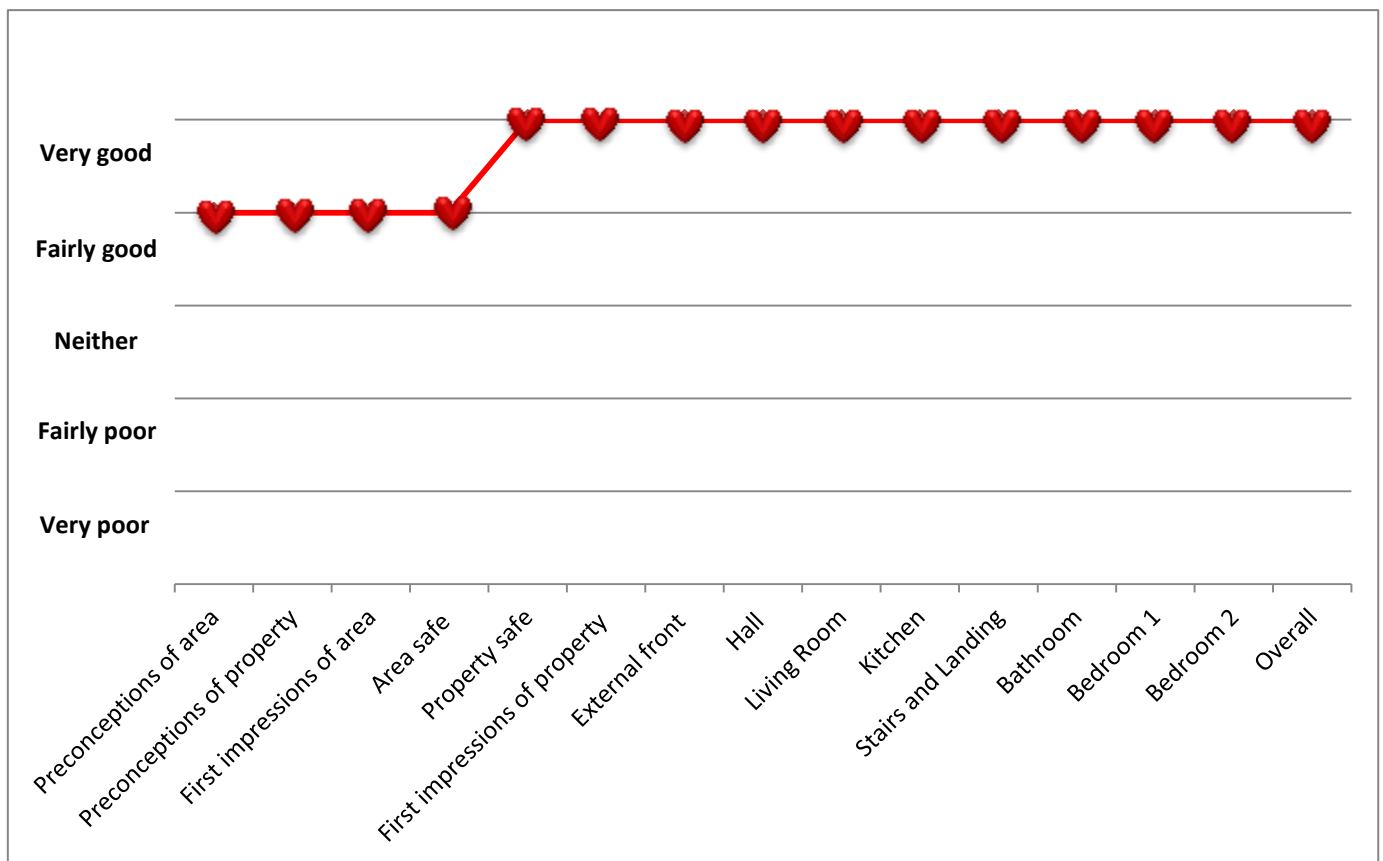
“...smell of cleaning products...”

- Only one point along the journey wasn't given a positive rating, this was Bedroom 1 which was rated as 'neither'.

- 🟡 It was detailed that the door and door frame to the bedroom was not in good repair or as clean as it could be. (See picture to the right)



6A Albion Street



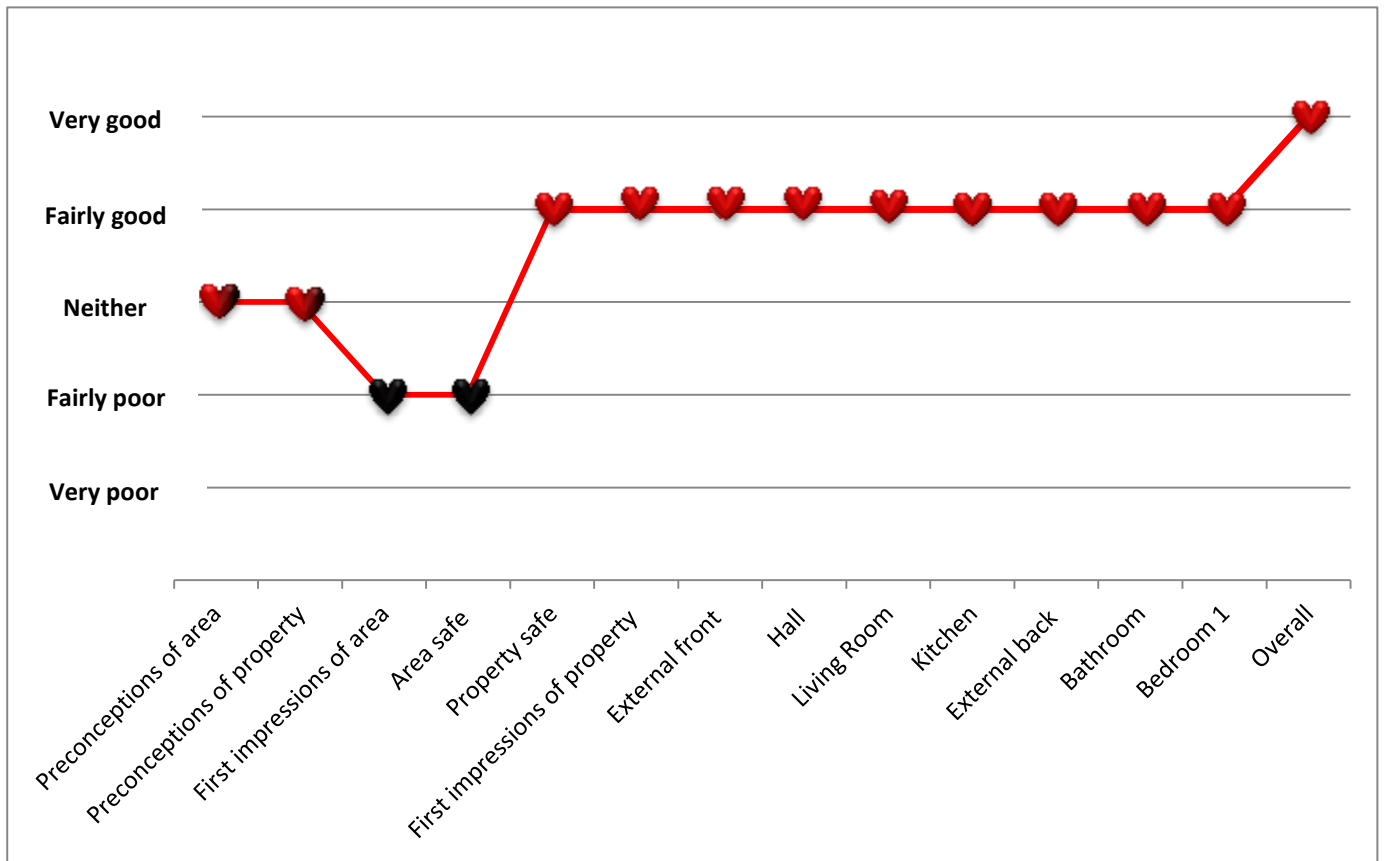
- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'Very satisfied' with 6A Albion Street. All the points along the customer journey were rated as either 'fairly good' or 'very good', and the property was considered to be of a high standard.
- The following comments were received from the Inspectors who visited this property:

"...little gem..."

"...wow...spot on..."

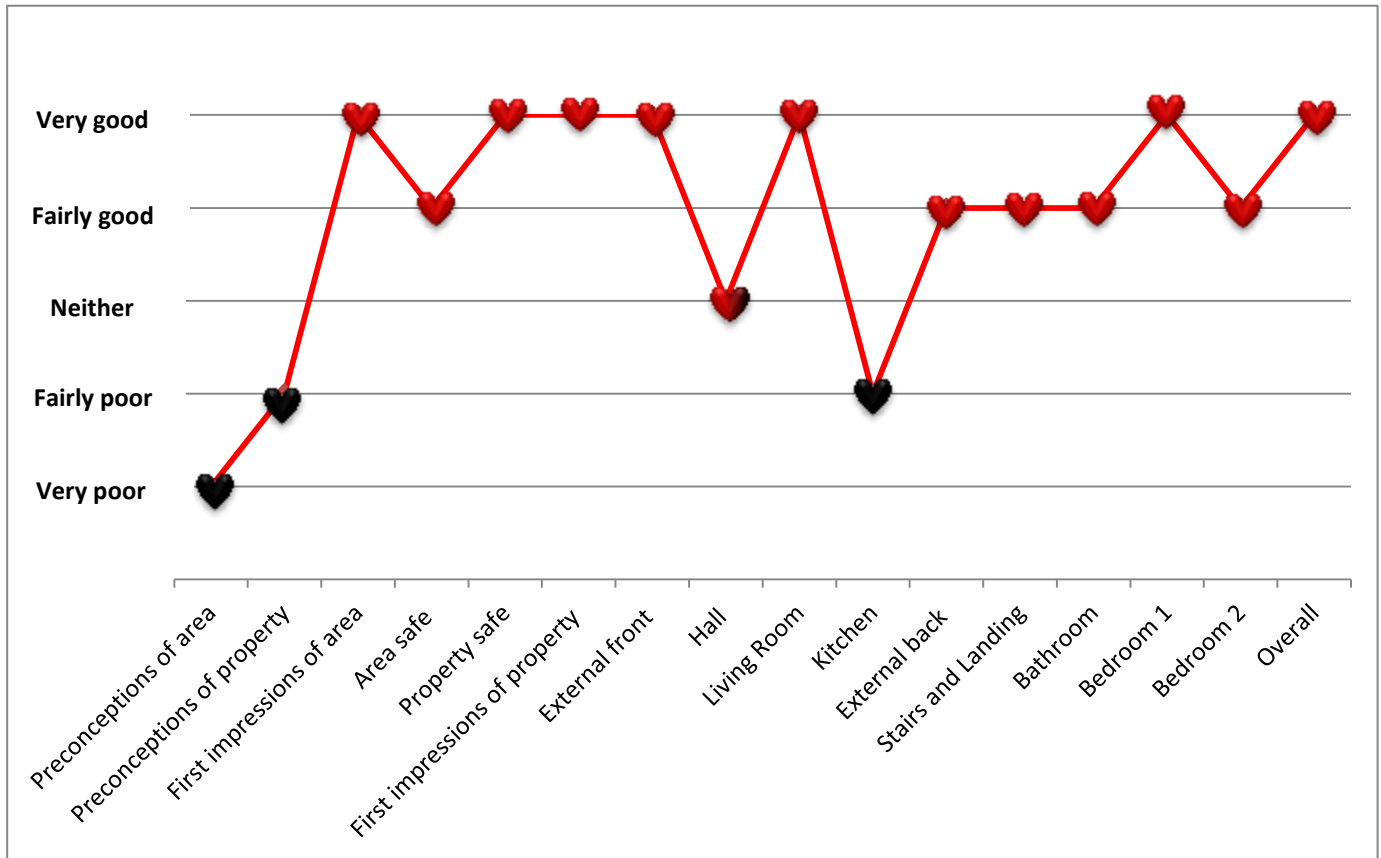
"...very clean well thought out space..."

1A Leyland Grove



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'very satisfied' with 1A Leyland Grove, the majority of the different points along the customer journey were rated as 'fairly good'.
- First impressions of the area were highlighted as in need of improvement with the Inspector rating this as 'Fairly poor'.
- The property was also rated as 'fairly poor' in terms of how safe the area felt.

9 Kerrysdale Close



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'very satisfied' with 9 Kerrysdale Close, the majority of the different points along the customer journey were rated positively.
- First impressions of the property were rated highly with the Inspector rating it as 'very good'. The Inspector made the following comments:

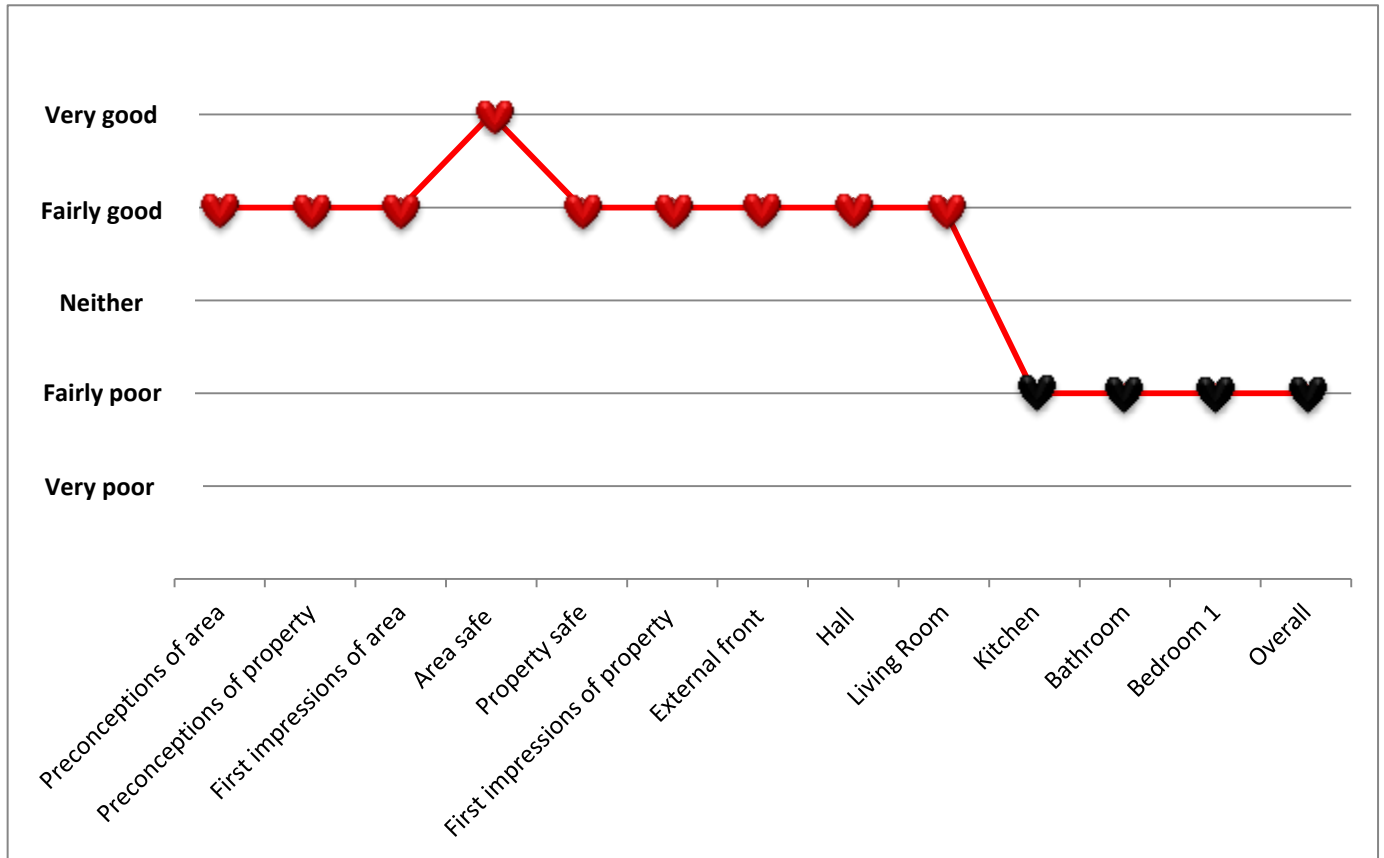
"...no graffiti, people walking dogs and fairly expensive cars in the drive..."

"...well maintained garden..."

"...can smell clean air..."

- Two points along the journey were rated as either 'fairly poor' or 'very poor', two areas were rated as 'neither'. These areas are highlighted for improvement and include the following:
 - Preconceptions of the area
 - Preconceptions of the property
 - Hallway
 - Kitchen
- 🔴 The Inspectors highlighted that the hallway in this property smelt of damp.
- 🔴 The mismatched units, dirty "grim" boiler and dirty sink had an impact on the Inspectors satisfaction with the Kitchen. The Inspector suggested that the property required a new kitchen.

80 Carnegie Crescent



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'fairly dissatisfied' with 80 Carnegie Crescent. Although a large proportion of the points along the customer journey were rated as 'very good' a four were rated as 'very poor' which has had an impact on the overall level of satisfaction.
- First impressions of the property were 'fairly good' with the Inspector making the following comments:

"...can smell clean air..."

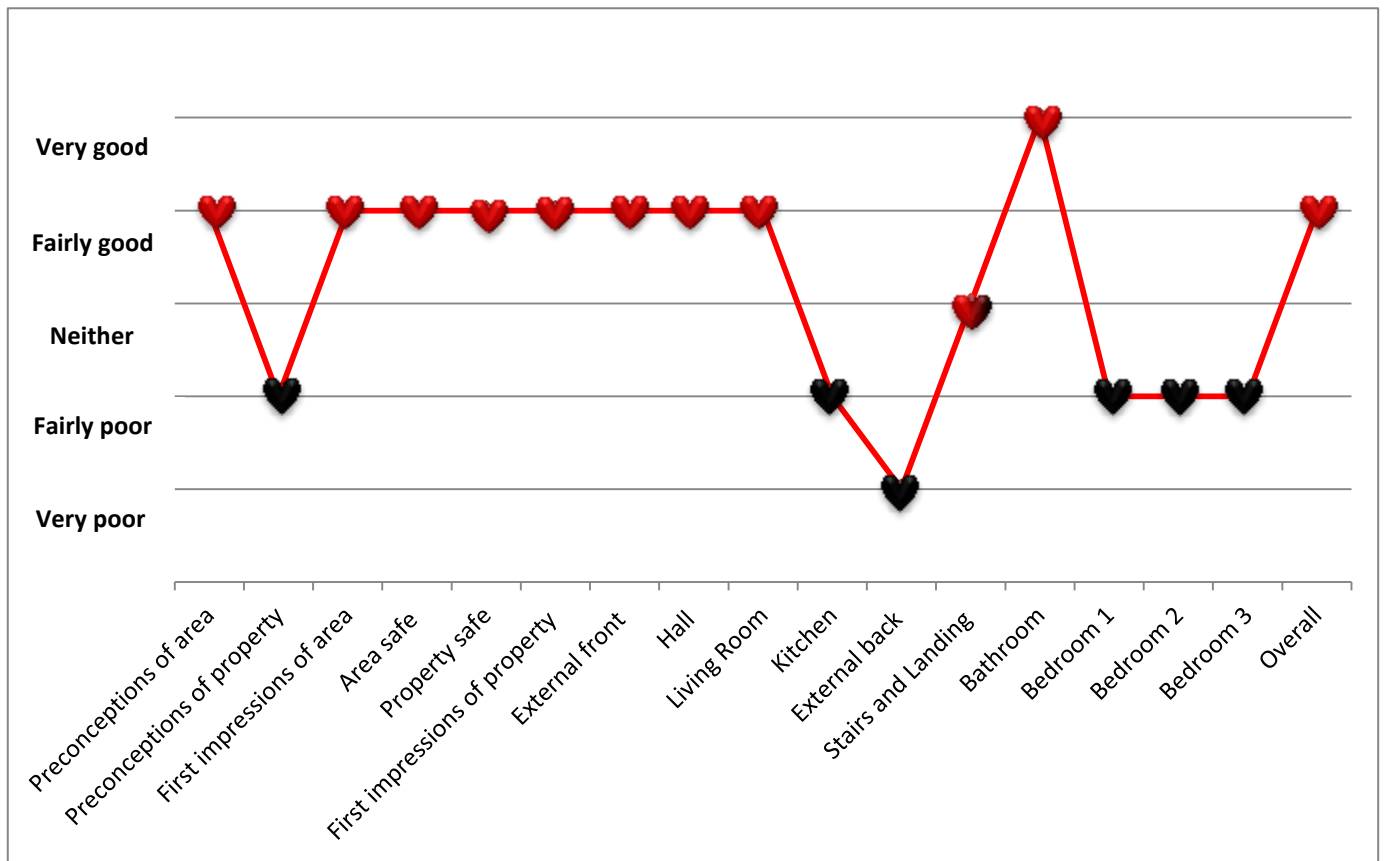
"...tidy..."
- The property was rated most highly in terms of its safety, it received a 'very safe'.
- Four points along the customer journey were rated as 'fairly poor', these are therefore areas for improvement and include the following:
 - Kitchen
 - Bathroom
 - Bedroom 1
 - Overall satisfaction
- 🟡 In the kitchen a number of areas failed to satisfy the Inspector, the cupboards were greasy, there was no valve or space for a washing machine and the carpets and curtains were not of good repair.

- The Inspectors highlighted that the bathroom was 'fairly poor', the light fittings, light switches and plug sockets were not considered to be clean and in good repair. In addition the decoration and cleanliness was 'fairly poor'. (See picture to the right). The Inspector suggested that the floor be replaced.
- Dissatisfaction with Bedroom 1 was a result of poor decoration and cleanliness, there was also a severe case of damp in the bedroom. (See picture below)



- The kitchen was highlighted as the area most need of improvement, along with the removal if the damp in the bedroom.

3 Randon Close



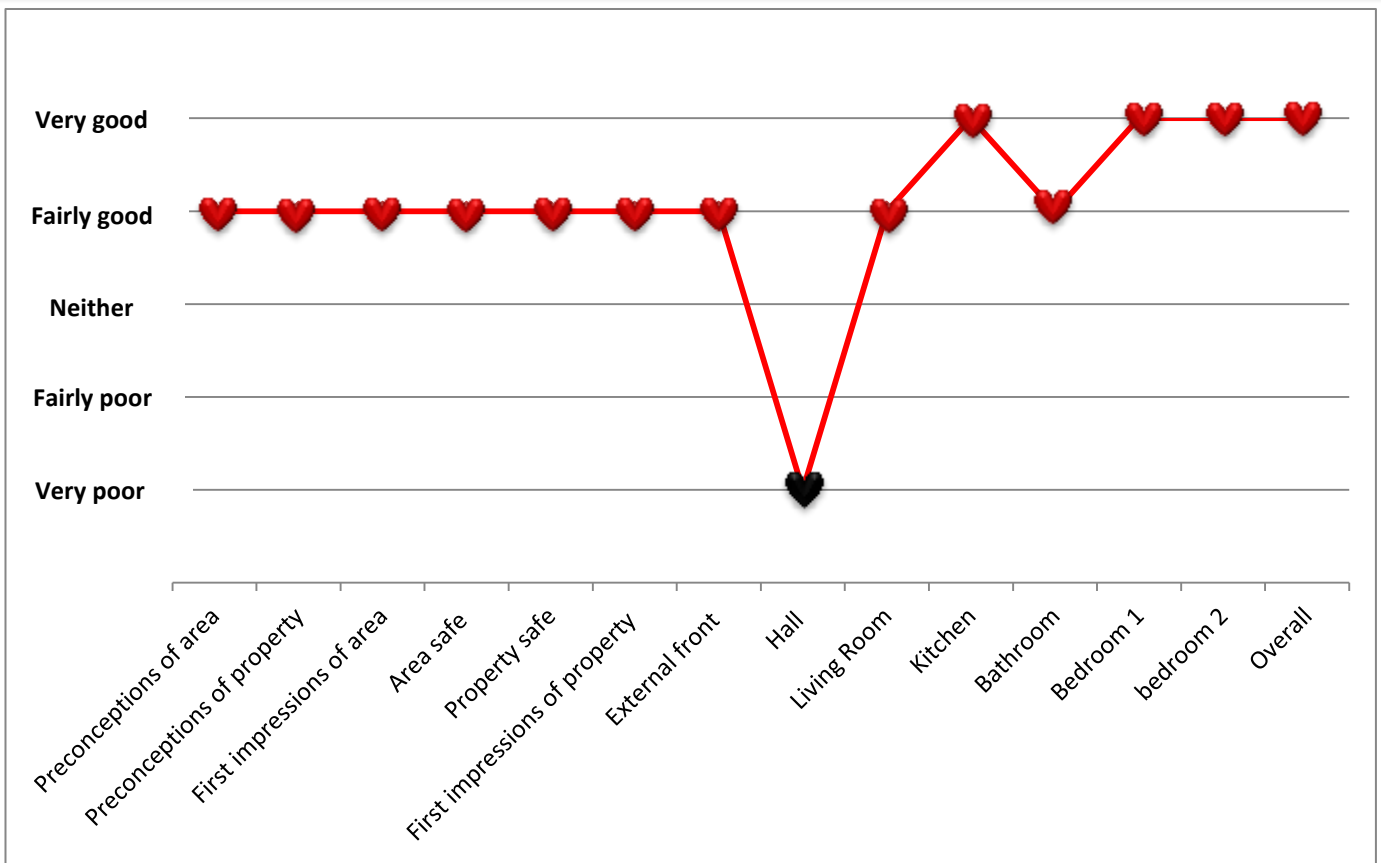
- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'fairly satisfied' with 3 Randon Close, the majority of the different points along the customer journey were rated as 'fairly good'.
- Preconceptions of the property were poor with a rating of 'fairly poor' being received, in comparison the overall outcome of 'fairly satisfied' highlights that the property was better than considered.
- The property was most highly rated for the bathroom which received a 'very good' rating.
- In total six points along the journey were rated as 'fairly or very poor', these are therefore areas for improvement and include the following:
 - Preconceptions of the area
 - Kitchen
 - External back
 - Bedroom 1
 - Bedroom 2
 - Bedroom 3
- 👉 In the kitchen, the floor was in poor repair along with the light switches, light fittings and sockets being dirty. The tiles were also considered to be in a poor condition.
- 👉 The poor rating for the external back of the property was due to the fencing being of a poor standard. The following comments was received from the Inspector:

"...fencing looks unsafe, the property was good until I saw the garden..."

- The bedrooms in this property were all rated poorly this was due to the cleanliness and the decoration. (See pictures below)



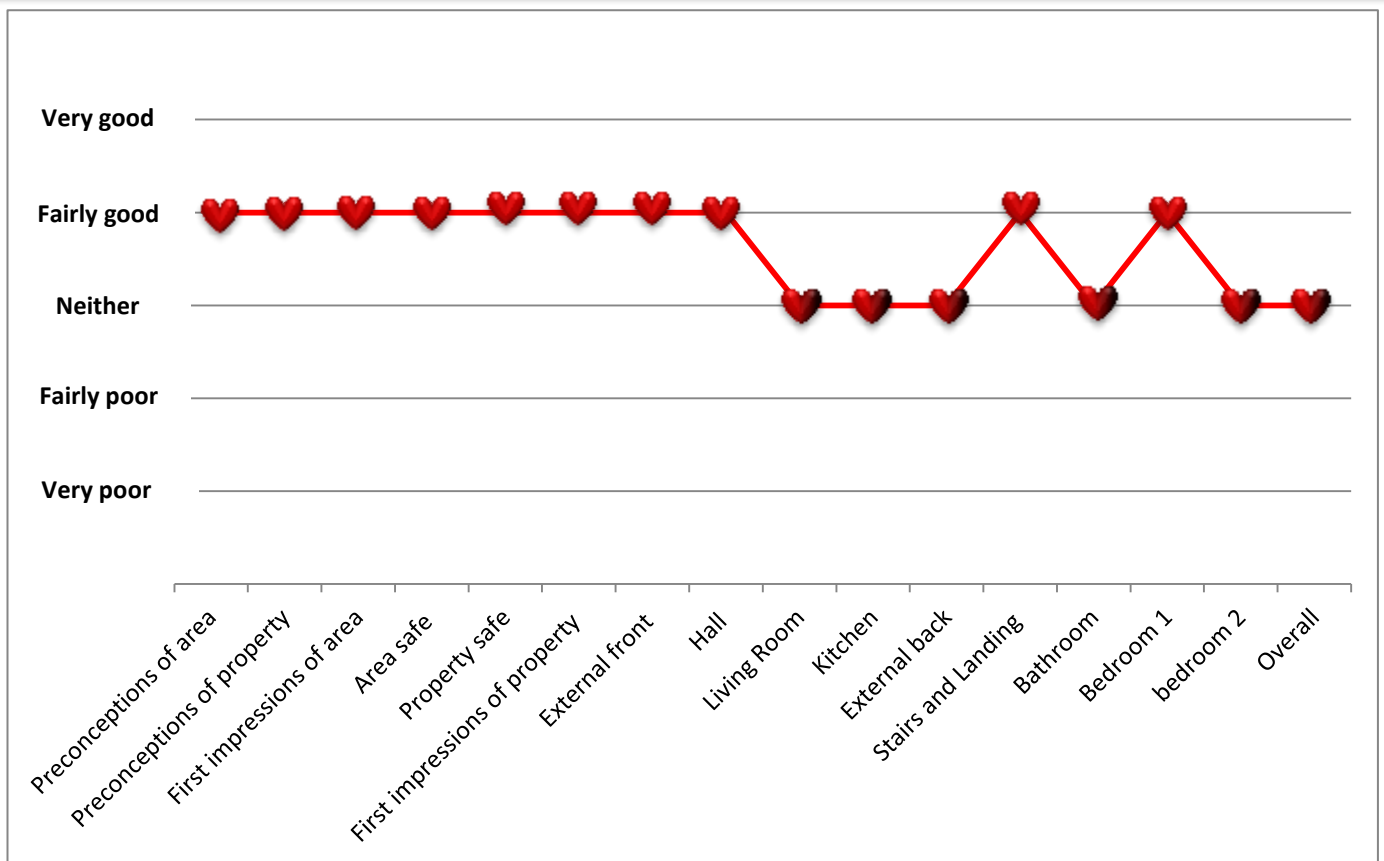
3 Millom Close



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'very satisfied' with 3 Millom Close, all but one of the different points along the customer journey were rated as 'very or fairly good'.
- The Kitchen, Bedroom 1 and 2 were all rated the most positively and received a 'very good' rating.
- Only one point along the customer journey was rated negatively, this was the 'hallway', this is therefore an area for improvement.
- 🟡 The hallway was rated poorly due to a number of elements, the Inspector highlighted that there was a bad smell which is off putting on first entry to the property. In addition the decoration and cleanliness was poor. *(These comments relate to the communal hallway rather than the hallway of the property)* (See picture to the right)
- The smell in the communal hallway was highlighted as the most need of improvement in this property.

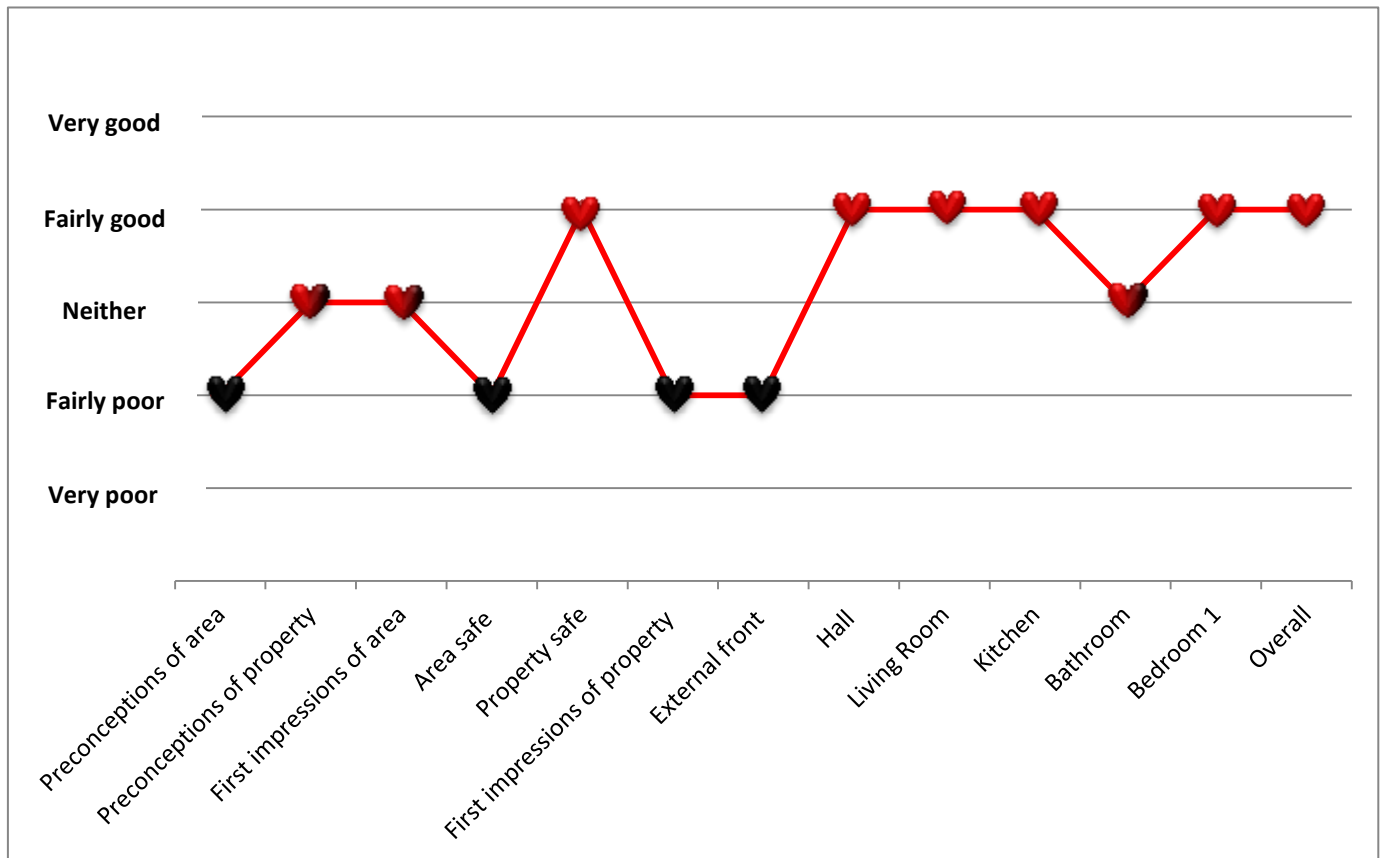


27 Singleton Avenue



- Overall the Customer Inspectors rated 27 Singleton Avenue as 'neither'. The majority of the different points along the customer journey were 'fairly good'. No points were detailed negatively.
- To improve the property the Inspector suggested improvement works should take place on the external back area of the property.

25 Enfield Close



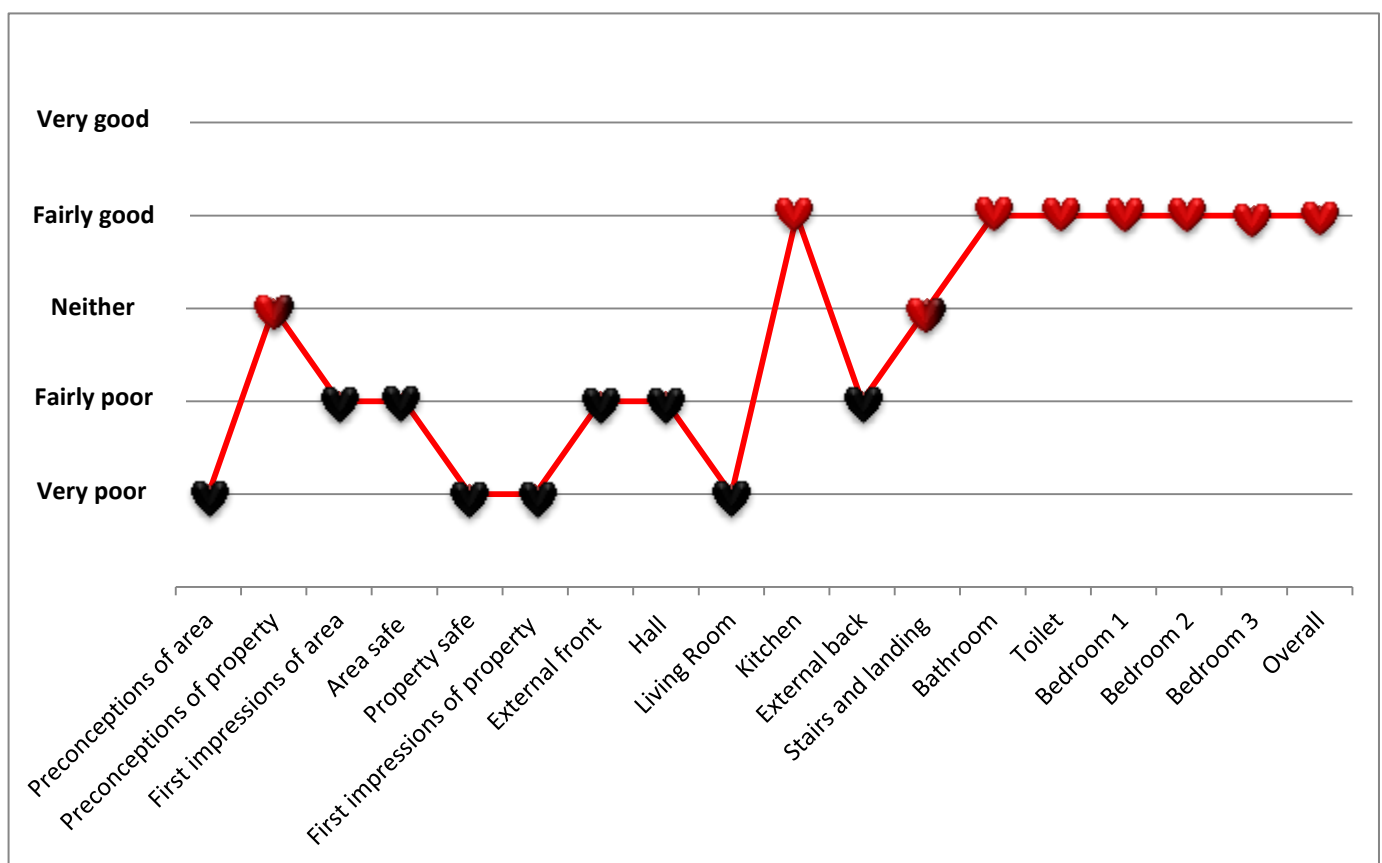
- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'fairly satisfied' with 25 Enfield Close, although the points across the journey demonstrate some areas for improvement the property all in all was considered to be good.
- The property was rated most highly in terms of its safety, the hallway, kitchen and also the living room.
- Preconceptions of the property were poor with a rating of 'fairly poor' being received, in comparison the overall outcome of 'fairly satisfied' highlights that the property was better than considered.
- The Inspectors who visited this property made some comments about the first impressions:

"...the front of the house is fairly tidy but the alley way is off putting..."



- Four points along the journey were rated as 'fairly poor' these are therefore areas for improvement and include the following:
 - Preconceptions of the area
 - Area safety
 - First impressions of the property
 - External front
- 👉 The safety of the area was an issue for the Inspectors, this was a result of the property having a large fence at the front of the property along with being situated in an alley way, this also had an impact on the Inspectors first impressions of the property. (See picture above)
- 👉 The external front of the property was rated poorly, this was due to the fact the gate was broken, there was rubbish in the garden and the footpath was of poor repair.
- The Inspectors suggested that improvements be made to the kitchen, attached to the kitchen is an outside store. It was suggested that this could be used to extend the kitchen and ensure all the necessary appliances could be located within the kitchen.

6 Bracken Court



- Overall the Customer Inspectors were 'fairly satisfied' with 6 Bracken Court, a mixed response was received over the customer's journey of visiting the property.
- Preconceptions of the property were poor with a rating of 'fairly poor' being received, in comparison the overall outcome of 'fairly satisfied' highlights that the property was better than considered.

- First impressions of the property were ‘fairly poor’ along with how safe the area and property felt, the Inspectors made the following comment:

“...very dense, not attractive boring looking overall...”

- The property was rated most highly in terms of the kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms 1,2 and 3.
- Nine points along the journey were rated as ‘fairly or very poor’, these are therefore areas for improvement and include the following:
 - Perceptions of the area
 - First impressions of the area
 - Area safe
 - Property safe
 - First impressions of the property
 - External front
 - Hallway
 - Living Room
 - External back

- ☹️ The Inspectors highlighted that the External front of the property was poor, this was due to the broken fencing and rubbish in the garden of the property. In addition the footpath was in poor repair and the step to the property was not clean.



- ☹️ In the hallway, the walls were considered to be “untidy and uneven” along with a damp musty smell. The doors and windows were dirty and in poor repair. (See picture above)

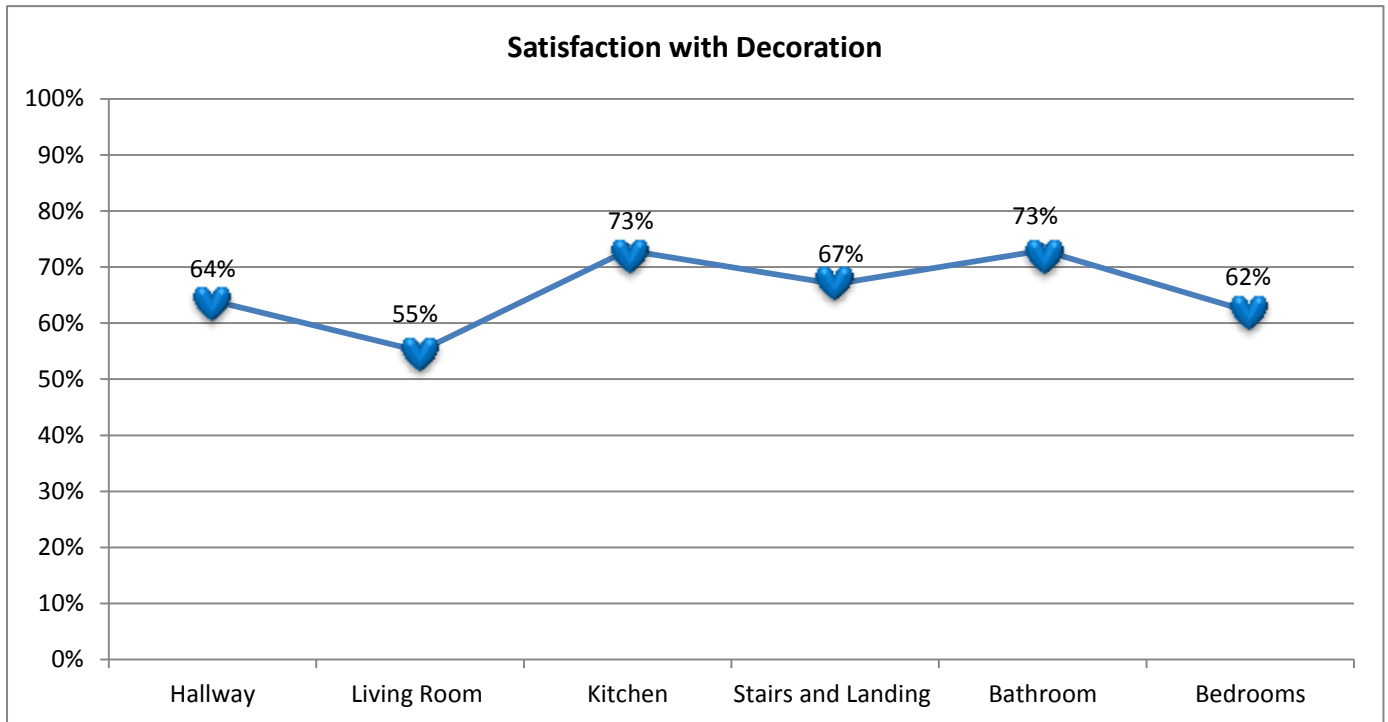
- ☹️ The floors, the door and door frame and the windows in the Living Room were not in good repair. In addition the Inspectors were dissatisfied with the decoration and cleanliness of the Living Room. (See picture to the left)



- ☹️ The External Back of the property was considered to be in poor repair, it contained rubbish and the Inspector highlighted that it did not look attractive.

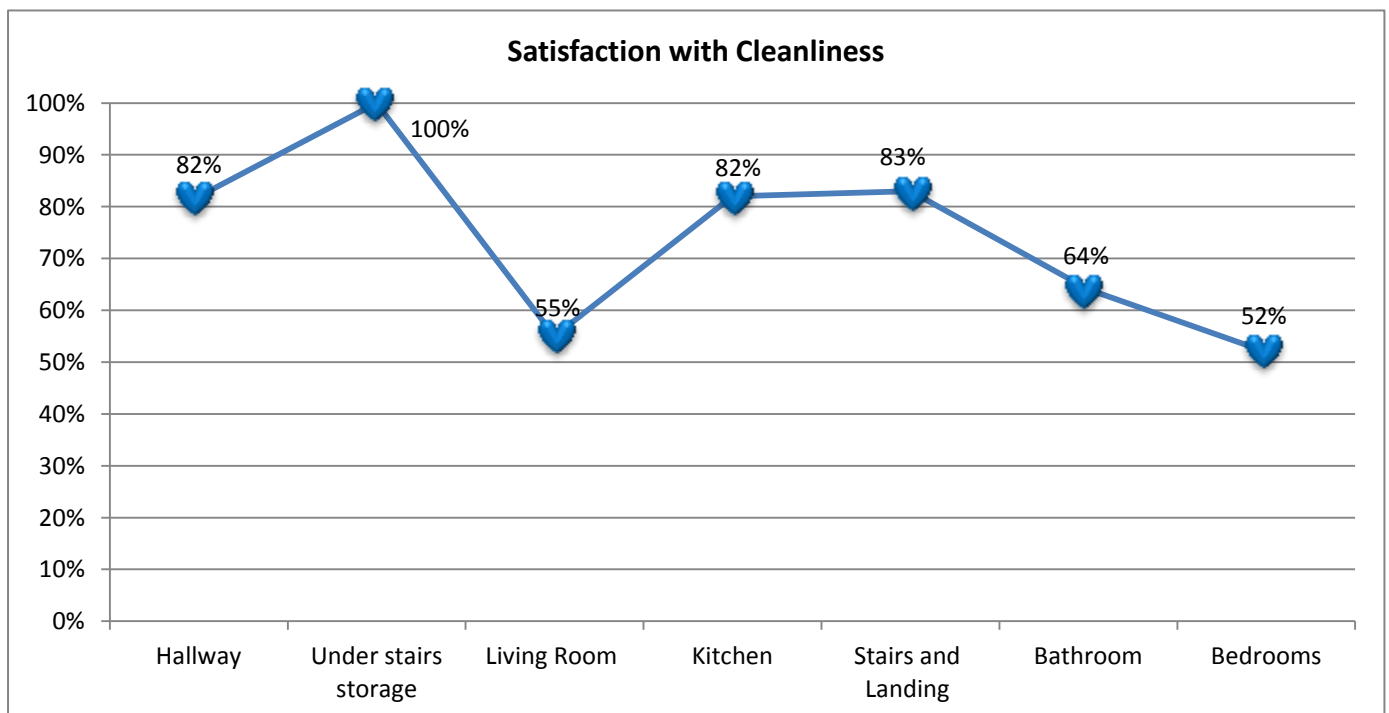
Decoration

The graph below displays the Customer Inspectors overall satisfaction with the decoration of the properties that were visited. It has been displayed as a customer journey as the Inspectors looked in each room in the properties.



Cleanliness

The graph below displays the Customer Inspectors overall satisfaction with the cleanliness of the properties that were visited. It has been displayed as a customer journey as the Inspectors looked in each room in the properties.



The table below displays the summary information from each of the Inspectors visits to the empty properties.

Address	Expectatio n of Area	Area after visit	Expectatio n of Property	Property after visit	Overall Cleanliness	Overall Decoration	Offer of the property	Overall satisfaction	Suggested Improveme nt	Decoration Voucher
11 Millom Grove, Thatto Heath	Fairly good	Better	Fairly good	Better	Fairly satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Very good	Smell in communal hall	Yes (only painting)
3 Randon Grove, Town Centre	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly poor	Better	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Fairly good	Garden fencing	Yes
6 Bracken Court, Four Acre	Very poor	About the same	Neither	Better	Fairly satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Fairly good	Hallway	Yes
1A Leyland, Haydock	Neither	Worse	Neither	Worse	Very dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Fairly poor	Bad smell	Yes
32 Frederick Street, Sutton	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Fairly good	Kitchen/ Garden	Yes
6A Albion Street, Town Centre	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly good	Better	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very good	Nothing	Yes (carpets only)
9 Kerrysdale Close, Peasley Cross	Very poor	Better	Fairly poor	Better	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very good	Nothing	No
80 Carnegie, Sutton	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly good	Worse	Fairly satisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Fairly poor	Kitchen/ Damp	Yes
5 Pendlebury, Clock Face	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly good	Better	Very satisfied	Neither	Fairly satisfied	Fairly good	Nothing	Yes
27 Singleton Avenue, Haydock	Fairly good	About the same	Fairly good	About the same	Neither	Neither	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Garden	Yes
25 Enfield Close, Thatto Heath	Fairly poor	About the same	Neither	Better	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Fairly good	Attach store to kitchen	No

Customer Inspector Recommendations

The Inspectors took part in a break out session to discuss areas of the form that require improvements. The diagram below display the recommendations that have been made by the Customer Inspectors.

External Area

- Tall fencing at the front of a property can look appresive and also makes it look like the back of a property
- The metal security doors dont give the best first impression of a property
- Ensure fencing is of a good standard
- Nice front door fitted with a number gives a good first impression
- Security lights f fitted in external back of some properties tp improve safety
- Tidy gardens free from rubbish and in a good condition

Internal

- Any carpet that has been left should be in a good condition.
- Light switches, light fittings adn plug sockets should be replaced if they are not clean. They often stand out to be dirty when the rest of the room has been cleaned.
- Replace full length of skirting board rather than a piece
- When decoration is dark a coat of magnolia would be beneficial
- Radiators tend to let down the roos they were often dirty and stained, care should be taken to clean them properly
- When fitting security windows care should be taken not to cause damage to the window
- Paint walls and woodwork before moving in, it gives it a fresh feel along with reducing the need to distribute vouchers. (Not everyone can see past the decoration) It may encourage the tenant to maintain the property.
- Bedrooms often have greasy marks where beds have been, a quick lick of paint would remove this and make it look clean

Kitchen

- Ensure builders dust is always removed from the sink
- More considerate layout of kitchens, especially in small kitchens when space needs to be used effectively.
- Layout of kitchens should be considered for practicality
- Ensure all appliances (fridge, freezer, washing machine and cooker) can be located in the kitchen.
- Consider the best location when fitting a new boiler, in small kitchens they can have a large impact on the space.

Bathroom

- Cleanliness of bathrooms needs improving
- Tiles should be cleaner
- Ensure the toilet is flushed
- Separate toilets should be fitted with a small basin

Decoration Vouchers

- Never given money always vouchers to ensure they are used to improve the property
- Help with carpet as a preference
- Easier if the work has been varried out and the property is ready, if this was the case there would be no need to give decoration vouchers
- House should be ready to move in

Improvements to Future Inspections

The current empty property checklist was redesigned to incorporate more elements of the journey of when a customer visits an empty property.

Although the form was comprehensive in ascertaining large amounts of feedback, the form took a long time to complete. Before the next mystery shop of Helena Homes Empty Properties the checklist will be reviewed to ensure the required feedback is gathered whilst ensuring time constraints.

In addition the mystery shop was carried out during November and December 2010, unfortunately due to weather conditions a number of arranged shops were cancelled to ensure Health and Safety was considered.

To enable the maximum number of Inspections to be completed it would be beneficial to conduct the mystery shop during spring and summer months.

Next steps

Findings from this report along with the recommendations from the Customer Inspectors will be presented to the Customer Excellence Panel by the Customer Inspectors. The managers from the service area will attend the Customer Excellence Panel meeting to hear their feedback.

Tom Bate, Operations Manager, Neighbourhood Services will ensure recommendations agreed by the Customer Excellence Panel are taken forward and are implemented.