

ANNEX 1: OLDER PERSON'S CONSULTATION

Background

There are a number of areas where housing providers can make a contribution to improving health and well-being. For this reason Blackpool Council, in partnership with key stakeholders, is developing an older person's strategy – 'Blackpool Council's Housing Plan for the Ageing Population' to ensure a wide range of housing and services are provided which promotes the aspirations of older people.

As part of the development of the strategy, Blackpool Council wanted to get the views of older people in the borough to gain a better insight into their lives and support needs. The objectives of this consultation were:

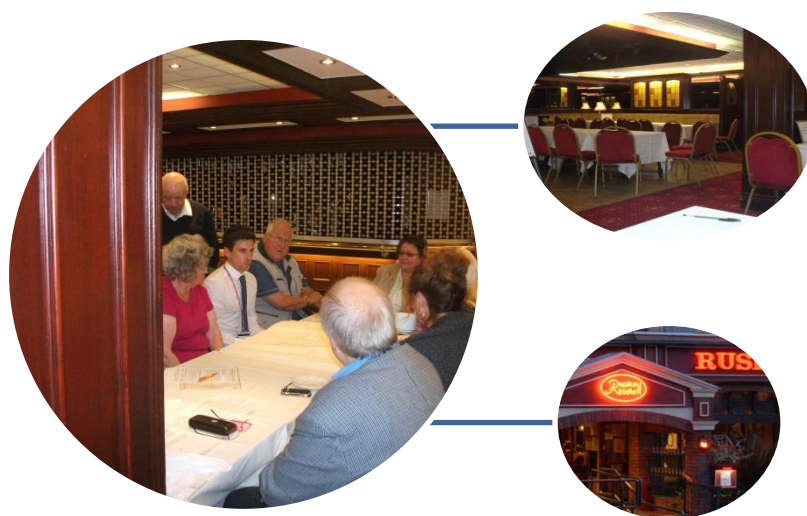
- To inform service re-design of older person's housing
- To understand how to support older people from dependence to independence
- To understand from an older person's perspective what would have the greatest impact on their housing needs
- To identify barriers to accessing housing that older people need
- To get feedback and insight on existing support services

Methodology

Consultation to inform the Older Person's Housing Strategy consisted of two separate qualitative events in September 2016, where residents and/ or stakeholders could have their say via a number of engaging activities and facilitated discussions. Experienced members of the Infusion research team led both events where they provided impartial and independent support to help explain any topics, ensure any discussions were balanced and open for all to get involved and to support any residents who had difficulty writing or were reluctant to write.

The first event centred around the Blackpool Gold Action Group. With established meetings regularly attended by more than 20 local residents, a one-off engagement event was held with them to get their views on housing and support needs in Blackpool. This comprised of two focus groups on different topics which ran simultaneously, with attendees selecting the group they felt was most relevant to them. One group focused on living in their own home and the support they need to stay there, while the other group discussed specialist housing accommodation in the borough. 10 local residents from the Gold Action Group took part in each focus group at the Ruskin Hotel on Monday 12 September 2016.

Figure 2.1: Focus group in action at the Ruskin Hotel



The second event was a half-day activity-led session at a popular local community centre, Ibbison Court, which is adjacent to a sheltered housing scheme. In the weeks leading up to the event a range of promotional activities were delivered to encourage local residents to attend. This included professional poster advertisements in local libraries, community centres and front-facing customer centres, proactive communication of the upcoming event from a number of key partners such as Age UK and Citizens Advice, as well as a range of council communication including Facebook and Twitter. 21 residents attended this drop-in consultation event over a three hour window on Wednesday 21 September 2016. The image below shows the set-up the event before it started.

Figure 2.2: The engagement event at Ibbison Court Community Centre



Across the two events more than 40 residents in the borough gave their views on housing for older people.

The findings within this report are based on independent thematic analysis of the comments and feedback received over the two events. As a piece of qualitative research, this is not intended to be representative of the views of all older people in the borough. Rather it gives an indication of some of the issues they face and some ideas and suggestions they have for future housing support. Moreover, any example comments highlighted are not necessarily representative of all residents involved at the events.

The reporting of findings is split into three themes which the consultation events were structured around: living in their own home, specialist housing for older people and accessing information and services.

About the older people who attended

At both consultation events a self-completion monitoring form was used, encouraging attendees to provide some basic information about themselves to better understand the people who took part in the consultation. Not all 41 residents at the two events completed all parts of the monitoring form.

More than half of attendees (18 of 35) live in the FY1 postcode area, whilst 8 of the 35 live in FY4.

Just less than half (16 of 35) own their property outright or with a mortgage, whilst two in five rent either from a private landlord, a housing association or local authority. 4 attendees live in either sheltered or retirement housing.

More than twice as many females than males attended the two consultation events.

A range of age groups were covered, with close to half in the 65 to 74 year old grouping:

- 4 residents aged between 45 and 59
- 4 residents aged between 60 and 64
- 17 attendees aged 65 to 74
- 10 people aged 75 to 84
- 4 were aged 85 or over

Just over half of attendees (19 of 37) indicated that they have a long-standing illness or disability which limits their daily activities.

28 older people live alone, while 8 live with a partner (including husband or wife).

10 of 35 attendees use the internet regularly, with a further 9 using it now and again, whilst 16 do not use the internet at all.

Living in their own home

The first section of this report looks at the feedback received from residents on what it is like to live in their own home and what support older people might need to continue living in their own home.

Most valued aspects of living in their own home

Residents were asked about what they valued most about living in their own home. The main point which came across was the attachment older people have for the area they live in. They are familiar with their surroundings, in many cases have built up strong relationships with neighbours and the community and for that reason are driven to stay in their own home. However, there were a number of concerns and comments about how the area they live “isn’t how it used to be” and the reasons for this will be explored further on in the report when areas for improvement are reviewed.

In addition to the general sense that they “like where they live”, many of the older people who engaged in the consultation have lived in their home for a significant period time, and as such valued this familiarity and the benefits it brings, including the memories their home holds and a feeling of safety.

Privacy and freedom to make their own choices was also a key reason for valuing living in their own home. The consensus amongst those older people living in their own home was that it retained their independence and offers them the freedom to make their own choices about all aspects of their lives, including any housing support they might need.

Many of the residents involved in the consultation have their own garden and they talked about how much they value it and the positive impact it has on their lives. This includes having something to do to keep them active, a general sense of wellbeing that having a nice garden to look at and enjoy offers them, as well as the indirect social benefit of interacting with neighbours and passers-by whilst “pottering in the garden”. However, although some felt able to maintain their gardens in the short-term, a number of people shared the view that it can be difficult to manage and support might be needed as they get older. Indeed one lady commented that her neighbour had reported her to the council because “her garden was a mess”.

What they would improve

Older people focused on the area surrounding their home when it came to identifying improvements which were needed, as much they did on the home itself. A number of contributors during the consultation explained that some street areas were “untidy and unkempt” and there was frustration with the state of some of the housing around, with a negative perception of private landlords who they thought were often absent and therefore not contactable to deal with issues caused by their properties and tenants. They also explained that when properties were empty it impacted on their heating costs as living next door to an empty house with no heating on resulted in their homes being colder. There was also some concern with parking on pavements outside houses which was causing access issues for them.

A number of older residents do not want to move from their own homes or the areas that they live in but also expressed concerns that they were beginning to find some aspects of living in their current homes a struggle at times. The main struggles expressed by consultation respondents were:

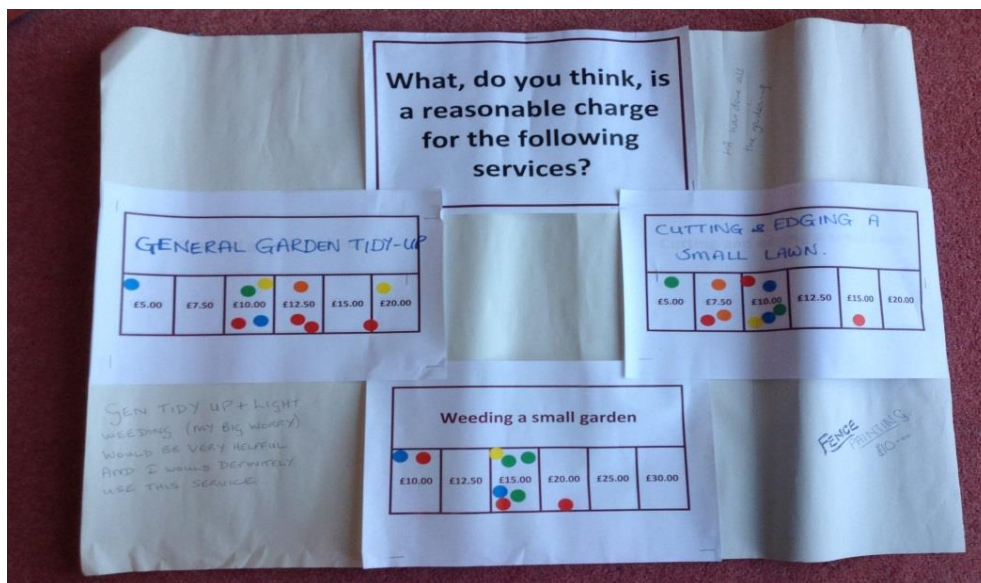
- Homes beginning to feel “too big” presenting a challenge to keep them maintained, clean and heated, both in terms of the time and energy it demands but also the cost impact when some older people are trying to live on modest incomes/ pensions
- Some older people feel unable to undertake some basic maintenance in their home, such as replacing lightbulbs, because of their health and frailty. Whilst they may seem small tasks, a couple of consultees commented that these “small things are often the big things” for them

Figure 3.1: Comment on their own home from one older resident

I was born in that house and I don't want to leave it but I can't manage and it's too big for me. Young families would like it. I haven't spoken to anyone about my choices.

Another area of support emerging from the consultation which would help older people to stay in their own home is assistance to maintain their gardens. It is an aspect of their home that many people value but maintaining it can be time and energy intensive. During the second session residents were given the opportunity to indicate a reasonable cost for a range of specific gardening services. Several people commented that they would definitely like and use such a service, if offered, as their gardens could cause them distress if they couldn't get out to weed them and add flowers. The board below shows that the majority of older people who took part in the consultation event would pay between £10 and £12.50 for a general tidy up of their garden, around £15 for weeding a small garden and between £7.50 and £10 for cutting and edging a small garden.

Figure 3.2: Cost exercise for older people who would like to access a gardening service



Additional support to remain in their own home

Residents were asked what support and which services they think they would need to stay in their own homes. Primarily the responses from older people focused on adaptations for their homes on varying scales, ranging from hand rails in bathrooms to stair lifts. A handful of consultation attendees referred to the possibility of needing more significant adaptations in the future such as

adapting the home so that they can live on one level. However, some anecdotal comments were made during the consultation about how difficult it can be for some older people to access the necessary finance for significant home improvements/ adaptations. In particular, they can find that a lack of credit history because they own their home outright and do not have any credit cards results in being refused for loans when they do need them. One focus group during the consultation briefly discussed the Credit Union but they were indifferent about the service it provides and the general view was that they would be unlikely to “get much from them”. One consultation attendee suggested that the council could look at how it could support a home improvement/ adaptations loan or grant scheme for older people, but they did not go into any great detail about how this could work.

Of the services that older people feel would offer them the additional support they might need in the future, the majority covered everyday tasks including:

- Gardening (already covered)
- A ready meal delivery service
- One-off help and support when they fall ill, particularly for those who live on their own
- Transport services to help older people get to hospitals and doctors, ensuring they remain as healthy as possible
- Other support services to help older people live their lives, such as helping to maintain their personal hygiene or support undertaking everyday tasks like shopping

A number of residents who took part in the consultation events commented that ultimately it is difficult to understand the additional support they might need as health issues can be unpredictable and are hard to prepare for. Instead their additional support needs are often reactive.

Care and Repair service

Lots of views and opinions were expressed on the Care and Repair service and everyone was aware of the service but there was not always clarity on what the service offered or the approach to pricing.

Good, reliable contractors who kept residents well informed at every stage of the process were key requirements of the service and it was clear that residents became anxious and worried if they didn't have those elements of the service. Indeed, small jobs around the house like changing a lightbulb appear important to older people but many felt reluctant to approach contractors for such small jobs or were worried about finding the right contractor “who wouldn't rip them off”.

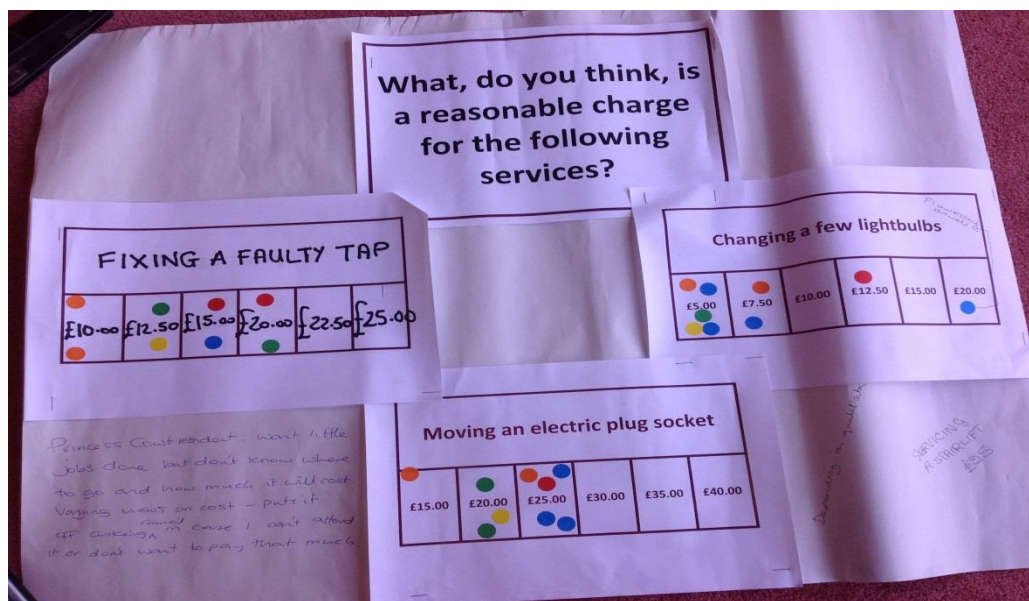
The general feeling was that the Care and Repair service was not always reliable in communicating information from marketing and advertising the service activities to providing a clear and understandable pricing structure. There were lots of positive discussions though based on activities on individual tables at the consultation events, and helpful advice was exchanged between residents on the best way of accessing services and which options were available.

As referred to in the previous section, some older residents struggle to obtain loans to support them in accessing additional adaptations and there appears to be scepticism of organisations such as Credit Unions in terms of rates and loan amounts. Some older residents explained during the

consultation events that they would like to see the council take a guiding role in signposting or advising for this service as a “trusted friend”. Essential services that residents want to adjust or alter were access to stair rails, bathroom adaptations and changing the position of sockets.

Again a pricing activity generated interest with residents highlighting additional ideas for small repairs that they found difficult to deal with including changing lightbulbs and fluorescent bulbs which was a comment made by nearly every attendee. Older residents appear mixed in their view on what it should cost to fix a faulty tap, but feel changing a lightbulb should cost around £5 and moving an electric plug socket should cost between £20 and £25.

Figure 3.3: Cost exercise for older people on reasonable charges for repairs



Other comments were focussed on benefit claimants being perceived as getting quicker access to these services than the average resident. Additional conversations during the public session gave rise to the suggestion that vulnerable residents were being ignored. This is based on anecdotal evidence and no specific examples were given. Overall comments, mainly derived from the public session, stated that where Care and Repair have been used people are generally satisfied with the service.

Adaptations service

The knowledge and awareness of any adaptations service offered by the council appears to be mixed with some confusion about what it is and what support it offers. This same message was received from both consultation events. Whilst awareness is generally high for other housing support services in Blackpool such as Care and Repair and Vitaline, the same cannot be said for the adaptations service.

For those older residents who could see themselves needing to use the service, many are concerned that they will be means tested and therefore ineligible for any support. Indeed it was clear that there was confusion about financial eligibility when it comes to accessing housing and support services. Also, some older people clearly feel worn down by the number of assessments from different support services across the public sector, with some consultation participants suggesting that these

could be streamlined or systems put in place to reduce the duplication. Generally the older people consulted have a negative perception of the various assessments feeding into means-testing policies, believing the main function is to prevent people accessing services at a reduced cost and only those on the lowest incomes are benefiting.

Other suggestions for improving access to adaptation services included:

- More favourable “sliding scales of financial support” to ensure wider access for Blackpool’s older people, with a couple of residents noting the positive impact this would have on preventing future health issues which would then burden a range of health services
- A simpler and clearer assessment process which does not put off older people from enquiring and pursuing, noting comments made about how confusing these types of assessments can be which can then result in some older people “not bothering”
- Generally a need to create a clearer offer for the adaptations service and raise awareness amongst older people in the borough, with awareness higher for other support services in Blackpool
- Frontline public service workers coming into contact with older people, including social care and housing services, could do more to signpost and direct towards the adaptations service, with the majority of older people who have accessed any services saying that they did it off their own back

Some older people already have adaptations in their own home and some feedback was received about what can be done with adaptations once they are no longer needed, for example if they were installed to support someone in the household who is no longer with them. A couple of consultees commented that these unused adaptations can become a hazard in the home, particularly if they have nowhere to store them, meaning they can cause trips and falls. One experience was shared where they could not get any public services to collect their used adaptations, citing health and safety reasons. But the general consensus amongst the group was that these adaptations were being wasted and could be recycled and put to good use for older people who need them and are struggling to afford the adaptations required.

Specialist housing for older people

The consultation also sought the views of older people on a range of specialist housing provision and needs, including retirement housing, sheltered accommodation, Extra Care and supported housing. Across the two events there were fewer attendees interested in giving their views on these compared to issues relating to their own homes, but this section summarises the main points that did emerge.

Retirement homes

Retirement homes were described to consultees as permanent accommodation where they have their own rooms and semi-independence, but additionally there are communal rooms and can include a range of additional facilities such as health and social needs.

Views on retirement housing were limited as attendees presumed the housing provision available to be privately owned and generally commented that the accommodation is significantly more

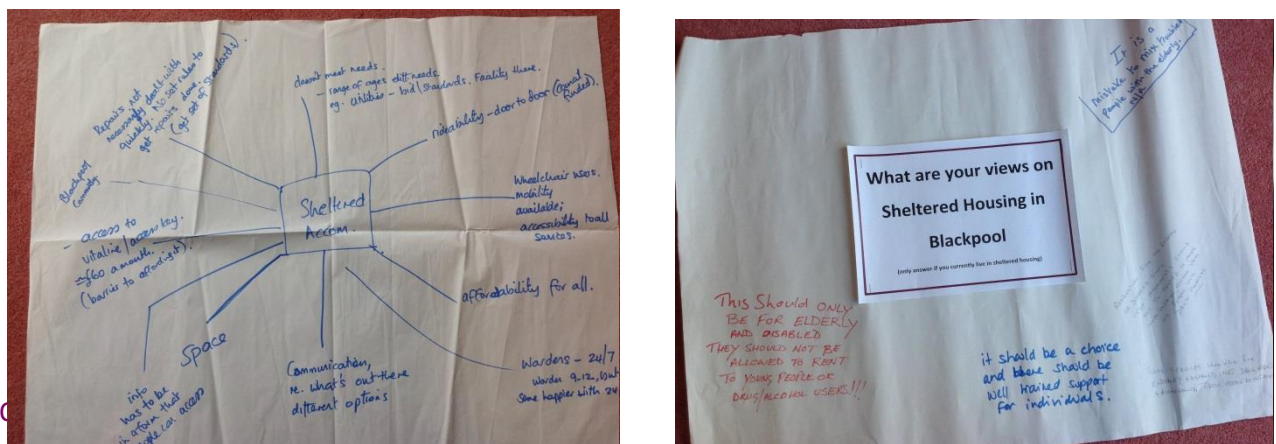
expensive when compared to their own housing needs and therefore not an option that they realistically consider. Comments from the Gold Action Group were focused on these perceived costs with specific remarks including “they are £500 or £600 per week”, “some places are more” and “they are not worth the money for what you get” made during the conversation. Written comments from the Ibbison Court attendees however focused on the lack of information and provision for retirement homes in the borough, with one resident not even sure if there were any retirement homes in Blackpool.

Sheltered accommodation

The consultation highlighted some perceived gaps in provision, personal concerns and areas that needed improving. Concern centred on communication of the benefits that sheltered housing afforded, the options available and the affordability of those different options. Comments were captured around the concerns attendees had with regard to who could access sheltered housing with some feeling that sheltered accommodation should be restricted to elderly/ disabled residents. More specific practical concerns focused on the different standards towards the availability of wardens, accessing repair services and accessibility of wheelchair users in the accommodation and transportation.

There were some positive and constructive conversations amongst attendees at Ibbison Court though, with those who live in sheltered accommodation inviting others to come along and see the accommodation.

Figure 4.1: Comments made on sheltered accommodation at the Gold Action Group (left) and Ibbison Court (right)



The provision of more Extra Care housing in Blackpool was the key focus of the comments gathered from the attendees with one response highlighting that a more joined up approach with the NHS would support the provision of services through joint funding and research whilst another felt Extra Care was “very neglected and underfunded”.

There were further comments on the provision of permanent residential care housing in Blackpool with residents suggesting that this area of housing was completely neglected and had been an easy target for cuts. Consultees thought that more and different options of housing should be provided for those older people that required more specialist supported housing.

Accessing information and services

A cross-cutting topic covered across the consultation events was communication and information relating to housing services and options for older people.

How residents access services and information

An emerging theme across the two consultation events was the lack of knowledge amongst older people for the housing services available to support them and a lack of awareness for how to access them.

Based on feedback from the consultation events, older people tend to find out information through friendship circles or groups they attend such as luncheon clubs, bingo sessions and more established groups like the Gold Action Group. However, even amongst the Gold Action Group the knowledge of services and how to access them was mixed with some members highly knowledgeable whilst others had little or no knowledge of Blackpool's housing services.

Moreover, generally the older people involved in the consultation were more likely to pick up information on housing support and services through the places they already visit, such as community centres, supermarkets, GP surgeries and other public buildings. Many prefer information in paper format so they have something to hand for future reference, but the monitoring forms indicate that around two thirds of consultation participants do not access the internet very often or at all.

There were some interesting comments and discussions relating to online information services. Many of the older residents indicated that they do not want to access information online, but at the same time there is a demand for relevant information in one place that older residents can access easily. When an Infusion researcher suggested that online might be the solution to this and asked the question if they would go online if it meant getting what they wanted, one attendee initially opposed to online access responded positively to the idea.

In terms of the information itself, it was clear that even if the older people consulted could find relevant information, they found it hard to understand both in terms of the language ("too complicated") and format ("not always easy to read") it was presented in. There were suggestions for any information on housing services to be clear and to the point.

Information about housing choices

When asked where would they go if they wanted to look for other housing choices, the instinctive response from residents tended to be "the council". When this was explored, it seems older people are not clear which departments to approach for the different types of housing services and support, so opt to approach the council's general customer service team instead. There were some consultees who felt they did not always get the signposting they required from the contact centre. There was some awareness of Blackpool Coastal Housing as a service to approach when requiring housing support.

Reflecting the preferences referred to earlier for accessing information in person, one consultation attendee indicated that they “walk around to all the different places” where they think they would find information, but they did not know where to go for particular services.

Other suggestions on finding information and accessing services

Residents feel that there should be different ways that information should be shared. One suggestion that received general support was to use GP surgeries as information hubs as many people spend time waiting for medical care, particularly as they get older. There were also suggestions that better use could be made of empty buildings in the town, possibly by the third sector or community groups, to provide information and community information points on support services for residents.

Generally, the older people involved in the consultation seemed ready and willing to engage with housing services, but did not always feel that there are opportunities to do so or don't know where to go to find them.

Finally, the consultation sought ideas and suggestions on any future housing models in Blackpool which should be looked at. A number of residents struggled to put their views into written words for this part of the consultation and preferred to talk about it to the Infusion researchers. Overall, older people want to feel safe, to know that they can rely on people and services when they fall ill and they want to input into housing options at the development stage and see their views taken on board. An example was given about how the positioning of sockets had not been considered in some housing developments aimed at older people, something which could have been avoided if there was better communication and opportunities to feed in. Some wanted to have assurances that “what is agreed this year does not change next year and beyond” based on the experiences of a number of consultees.

Some of the older people involved in the consultation feel they have the experience and will to work together to support each other and the council, but would require some support and leadership from the council for this approach to work. Based on those who attended the consultation events there are residents and groups out there who want to input and support services but perhaps lack the help and guidance needed to do this.

More info needed.

Not catering
for vulnerable people.

Choice of housing
feedback into
the design

What type of housing
models would you like
to see in the future?

WHEN WE WERE
ASKED OUR VIEWS
WERE NOT TAKEN
INTO CONSIDERATION

NOT ALL THE
SAME,
DONT LIKE UNIFORMITY
WE LIKE CHARACTER
INSIDE X OUT

Feedback is not
representative

More effective ways of
engaging before being built