

In the autumn edition of Housing Leeds, the Tenant Scrutiny Board asked for comments about tenants' experiences regarding annual tenancy visits.

The following comments were received:

We had an annual tenancy visit in February 2014 so my wife was surprised when a man turned up unannounced and unexpectedly in September claiming to be doing "an annual inspection". We have certainly had no notice of this, written or otherwise. He came straight into the house and seemed keen to have a good look round. He did not give his name or show any ID and my wife found his attitude to be condescending and rude, eager to pick fault with the smallest details. Visitors we have most often sit in the kitchen (the first room one comes to) to talk or chat and in the past any council representative has done so as well. This did not seem to be good enough on this occasion however and the man left without asking any more questions but threatening to come back to "have a good look round" in case we "weren't looking after the house properly".

I am sure there must be a code of practice for Tenancy Visits though I admit I have not seen one but the incident this week left my wife upset and angry at its intrusiveness. And I repeat that we had no notice of it, written or otherwise. I myself work for Leeds Council - in Adult Social Care and I am sure that if I walked into a client's house with such an attitude I would rightly be hauled over the coals subsequently. (I would also be required to give my name and show my ID) It is a shame that all this seems to have taken place at exactly the time that the Tenant Scrutiny Board was meeting because I believe this is relevant to the scrutiny inquiry. If this attitude is widespread, especially when applied to more vulnerable tenants, then I am afraid that it does not bode well.

I have just read in the Housing Leeds Magazine that you are seeking feedback from tenants regarding the visits.

I have been a tenant for 11 years and noticed that over the last few years you have visited my home, without an appointment, for the purpose of inspecting my home.

My rent is paid on time. My garden is tidy and well kept. As is my home. You will have received no reports that I am sub-letting, since I am not and there is nothing to indicate that I need 'support' because I do not claim benefit nor have I asked for any adaptations to my home because of a disability.

So what is the reason for the visit?

You, as Leeds City Council staff, have access to lots of information, databases. You can check Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support records. You can check Council Tax records. You can check voters roll. The vast amount of data you have access to should allow you to use 'intelligence' to target your visits to the tenants who might actually need 'support' or might be subletting or who might have mental health or other health issues. Instead, you visit every single tenant, this strikes me as a massive waste of your limited resources.

I know your officer feels daft asking me if I need 'support'. I would feel like I was patronising a person asking this, when there was zero evidence that 'support' was required. And what does 'support' mean? It's just a buzz word really isn't it, it doesn't really mean anything.

So, my feedback is, don't visit every tenant, it's so wasteful. Target those who do need your help. And instead of asking 'do you need support' look at all the information you have and ask meaningful questions:

tenants in rent arrears: do you need debt advice? can we direct you to an agency do you need welfare advice? can we send a benefit assessor?

tenants with mental health issue: what medical help can you direct these tenants to?

tenants with disabilities: what benefits may they be able to get? who could you direct them to? what charities might help? how can their home be adapted to help them remain at home?

older tenants who might be lonely: what social activities are available locally?

It has taken me five minutes to think of the above. If you get your thinking caps on your should be able to think this through so you actually offer a helpful service to those in need. Asking 'do you need support' is basically lazy.