

Report of **Neighbourhood Services - Tenant and Community Involvement Service**

Report to **Housing Advisory Board**

Date: **20 May 2015**

Subject: **Tenant Scrutiny Board Recommendations – Review of Annual Tenancy Visit Process**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The purpose of this report is to present details of the findings of Tenant Scrutiny Board's recent inquiry and subsequent recommendations made in relation to the Annual Tenancy Visit process.
2. Housing Management wish to appraise Board Members of key changes to the Annual Tenancy Visit process, including a change in name, the process is now known as the Annual Home Visit.

Recommendations

3. That Housing Advisory Board:
 - Note the key findings of Tenant Scrutiny Board's Inquiry and recommendations.
 - Consider the changes made to the Annual Home Visit policy and procedures which have been made following the inquiry.

3 Purpose of this report

- 3.12 To present details of Tenant Scrutiny Board's Inquiry and their recommendations to the Annual Home Visit process.
- 3.13 To update the Housing Advisory Board on recent changes made to the Annual Home Visit policy and procedure, following the inquiry.

4 Background information

- 4.1 Annual Tenancy Visits were first introduced by the former ALMOs in 2008 following a recommendation from an Audit Commission inspection. Initially a big focus of the visit was to identify tenancy fraud. However, the process has evolved in recent years with a greater focus being put on the customer, in relation to identifying tenancy management issues and support needs that may affect tenancy sustainability.
- 4.2 Annual Tenancy Visits support a key Housing Management principle of getting to know our tenants, to deliver customer focused services which are tailored to an individual's need.
- 4.3 Tenant Scrutiny Board selected Annual Tenancy Visits as an area for investigation because:
 - It was thought performance in this area would benefit from improvement; and
 - It was felt Annual Tenancy Visits are fundamental to tenants' experience of the Housing Management service.
- 4.4 The Inquiry involved a variety of methods of investigation, including a desktop review of relevant literature and a review of performance information, discussion and consultation with; tenants, Housing Officers, Housing Managers and benchmarking with other landlords including Wakefield District Housing. It is felt this approach adds validity to the Inquiry as the findings and resulting recommendations are based on empirical evidence and extensive consultation with stakeholders.
- 4.5 The level of commitment and scale of work undertaken by volunteer tenants on Tenant Scrutiny Board in this exercise has been considerable.

5 Main issues

Tenant Scrutiny Board have summarised the quality of the Annual Tenancy Visit process is determined by the consistency with which Housing Management are able to:

- Accurately record data
- Build on good tenant/landlord relations
- Communicate to tenants the purpose and benefits of the visit
- Ensure effective use of officer time, achieving a reduction in duplication of effort, increased service efficiencies and opportunities for savings

- Ensure data collected is correct and used to improve service outcomes for customers

- 5.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Board concluded that; the Annual Tenancy Visit process could deliver an improved service if their recommendations were implemented. The recommendations from Tenant Scrutiny Board which includes feedback form Housing Management can be found in Appendix 2.
- 5.2 On receipt of the Tenant Scrutiny Board Inquiry, Housing Management has reviewed its Annual Tenancy Visit policy and procedures and has incorporated many of the findings into the process. This updated process will be followed in completing visits for 2015/16.
- 5.3 The approved recommendations were implemented on Monday 20th April 2015.
- 5.4 Key changes made to the policy and procedure are as follows:
- The visits will be renamed 'Annual Home Visits', to reflect the change of focus towards being more tenant focused.
 - The main focus of the visits will now be on building good landlord / tenant relations – identifying tenancy management and sustainability issues which may need additional support.
 - Visits will be arranged by appointment, except where there is suspected tenancy fraud.
 - For sheltered tenants, Annual Home Visits will be combined with the Annual Support Review.
- 5.5 The only recommendation from the inquiry that was not incorporated into the updated policy was a recommendation that visits should be every 2 years for tenants identified as low risk. One of the principal ways of delivering a proactive tenancy management service is through the Annual Home Visit programme. The visit captures all of a tenant's issues and needs in one visit and assists Housing Management to deliver a holistic approach in tenancy management and customer service. Housing Leeds have therefore decided not to implement this recommendation at this time.
- 5.6 The review of the process in 2015 has allowed Housing Management to reflect on work undertaken and respond to customer and staff feedback. As a result, the majority of visits will now be by appointment, where appropriate. This enables Housing Management to promote positive and constructive relationships with tenants. It is recognised that early intervention and regular contact with tenants is key to achieving effective tenancy management. Where there are concerns or a suspicion of tenancy fraud, visits will continue to be unannounced.
- 5.7 As part of the process review, consideration was also given to the introduction of Universal Credit in Leeds during 2016. In preparation, additional questions have been added to the process in order to establish which tenants are likely to need support in making benefit claims.

5.8 Key objectives of the re-launched Annual Home Visit programme are to:

- Obtain up to date occupancy details and confirm identification
- Confirm emergency contact details
- Collect tenant profiling data, including preferred method of contact
- Identify tenant sustainability issues or support needs
- Discuss and arrange payment plan for outstanding arrears
- Identify potential subletting
- Identify abandoned properties
- Identify tenancy breaches
- Encourage tenant involvement
- Signpost tenants to full services of Housing Leeds and the Council
- Identify fire risks
- Arrange access for gas servicing

5.9 The visit consists of a thorough inspection of every room in the property and external conditions. This enables the Housing Officer to ensure that tenants comply with conditions of tenancy and where appropriate implement enforcement action to achieve resolution. Housing Management records the outcomes of Annual Home Visits and uses information to review and improve services for tenants. Housing Management have reviewed the process for inputting data and have been successful in removing duplicate inputting. This will reduce administrative work significantly for Housing Assistants, and has resulted in staffing efficiencies, which can be reinvested into front line customer service.

5.10 A key feature of the housing management function is partnership work with other agencies and stakeholders, including Adult Social Care and Children's Services. This supports Housing Management to achieve strategic objectives in delivery of joined up services, to increase the quality and range of support available, particularly to those who find sustaining a tenancy most difficult. It also supports Housing Management in delivery of the Safeguarding agenda.

5.11 **Table A sets out performance for 2014/15**

Nearly 84% of Housing Leeds tenants received an annual tenancy visits during 2014/15, an improvement from 73% in 2013/14. A target of 100% has been set for 2015/16.

Area	Property Stock	Not Visited	Visited	Complete
East and North East	17203	2593	14754	85.76%
South and South East	15952	3660	12486	78.27%
West and North West	20444	2918	17736	86.75%
City total (excluding BITMO)	53599	9188	44986	83.93%

3.12 Table B sets out outcome details for 2014/15

Area	Tenancy Support Required?	Internal Property Overview				External Property Overview				Abandoned Investigations	West Yorkshire Fire Safety Referrals	Internet Access Availability		
		Good	Fair	Poor	Follow Up	Good	Fair	Poor	Follow Up			Yes	No	Pending / Unknown
SOUTH AND SOUTH EAST REGION	97	8787	1563	200	21	7619	1780	221	40	12	156	5899	4645	184
EAST AND NORTH EAST REGION	56	7125	1662	242	22	5563	1542	246	25	15	132	5435	3839	954
WEST AND NORTH WEST REGION	82	5641	1304	149	17	3832	981	124	18	12	95	4169	3141	79
CITY	235	21553	4529	591	60	17014	4303	591	83	39	383	15503	11625	1217

- 3.13 Of the 383 referrals made to West Yorkshire Fire Service, 268 tenants have received a 10 year smoke detector, resulting in a reduced risk of fire.
- 5.14 Of the 645 referrals made for adaptations this has resulted in 402 tenants receiving adaptations in their home. The benefit of undertaking adaptations promotes independent living, provides an improved quality of life and a safe living environment for tenants. In addition, this may prevent the need for rehousing which avoids disruption for vulnerable tenants and may minimise void turn over and associated costs.
- 5.15 Contact through the home visit programme has resulted in the successful completion of 26 outstanding gas services. Housing Officers continue to work closely with the Mechanical and Electrical Team; this supports Housing Leeds to meet statutory gas servicing requirements.
- 5.16 Support needs are identified at the time of the visit, which has resulted in 235 referrals made for tenancy support, of which, 169 support packages are now in place which supports tenancy sustainment.
- 5.17 During 2014/15, 1789 tenancy breaches were identified resulting in early identification and appropriate intervention.

6 Corporate Considerations

Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Board is made up of tenants only. They have led on and directed the purpose of this Inquiry; from deciding what the Inquiry should be about, who to speak with and what information to request and review.
- 6.2 As part of the Inquiry into Annual Tenancy Visits there was wider consultation with tenants and officers through a survey. The inquiry also considered the approach of other landlords to undertaking Annual Tenancy Visits.
- 6.3 **Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**
- 6.3.1 The nature of a Tenant Scrutiny Board Inquiry is that tenants themselves identify how services can be improved by taking time to investigate a particular service area and then make recommendations for improvement.
- 6.3.2 An Equality Impact Assessment of the Annual Home Visit review has been undertaken in conjunction with tenants.
- 6.3.3 The following recommendations are examples of where the service is likely to advance equality of opportunity:
- By providing a quality and comprehensive Annual Home Visit this will enable Housing Management to provide a tailored and proactive housing service where interventions are put in place at an early stage to promote tenancy sustainment.
 - To provide effective sign posting to all of our services and the services of other agencies and partners and to promote tenant involvement.
- 6.4 **Council policies and City Priorities**
- 6.4.1 The Annual Home Visit supports the Best Council objective to 'ensure high quality public services, improving quality, efficiency and involving people in shaping their city.'
- 6.5 **Resources and value for money**
- 6.5.1 Value for Money is one of the key drivers for Tenant Scrutiny Board. The recommendations made and changes to the policy support the principle of; improved efficient and effective ways of working by removing duplication and providing efficient services.
- 6.6 **Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**
- 6.6.1 The engagement structure has been developed in line with The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing 2012. In particular; 'Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery'.
- 6.7 **Risk Management**

- 6.7.1 By delivering a quality, comprehensive Annual Home Visit this provides tailored support for vulnerable tenants, which enables the most vulnerable tenants to maintain a successful tenancy and promotes independent living.
- 6.7.2 Tenancy fraud is a key priority for Housing Management. The Annual Home Visit helps to identify and manage risks to tenants sub-letting their tenancies. It enables us to identify tenancy breaches and take early intervention.
- 6.7.3 Additionally, it enables Housing Management to deliver customer focused services, tailored for individual need which supports improvement in customer satisfaction. A key feature of the Annual Home Visit process is partnership working with other agencies, including Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 Housing Management wish to acknowledge the work of Tenant Scrutiny Board and their positive contribution to service improvement and delivering better outcomes for tenants.
- 7.2 Housing Advisory Board are asked to review and support the recommendations made by Tenant Scrutiny Board and Housing Management.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 That the Housing Advisory Board:
- Note the key findings of Tenant Scrutiny Board's Inquiry and recommendations.
 - Consider the changes made to the Annual Home Visit policy and procedures which have been made following the inquiry.

9 Background documents¹

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Tenant Scrutiny Board Report.

Appendix 2 – Tenant Scrutiny Board recommendations with feedback from Housing Management.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.