Leeds Tenant Scrutiny Board

Findings of a review into Housing Leeds approach to carrying out Home Surveys.

July 2025

Introduction

This report describes the work of the Tenant Scrutiny Board (TSB) and its review into how Housing Leeds manages and carries out home surveys, currently known as stock condition surveys.

This review took place between April and July 2025 and includes recommendations for improvement from the TSB to Housing Leeds.

The topic of stock condition surveys and specifically, the customer experience of stock condition surveys and how these are communicated was selected following the board's review of a range of performance and management information. This included the board reviewing the most recent 'Tenant Satisfaction Measures' and hearing from senior officers and the Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Jess Lennox about areas for improvement that could benefit from the board's work.

The board also heard the importance of landlords having up to date information about homes and how Housing Leeds had prioritised this to increase the information they hold and to strengthen their compliance with the 'Safety and Quality' Consumer Standard.

The scope of the board's review was to help ensure:

- The customer experience of stock condition surveys is a positive one with a clear customer journey that is sensitive to tenants needs.
- The service clearly communicates the purpose and benefit of undertaking stock condition surveys, so tenants are informed and wanting to work with us to help make them happen.
- 'No accesses' are kept to a minimum
- Tenants are easily able to engage with us about them at any point in the customer journey.

The TSB are a group of volunteer tenants who are supported to review any aspect of the service given by Housing Leeds. For this review, they were joined by members of the Tenant Voice Panel, strengthening the membership and tenant input into the review and allowing more tenants to take part in the process.

By undertaking this review, the Board seek to achieve:

- The efficient collection of stock condition data to help inform wider investment decisions

- Good levels of access to homes.
- An improved customer experience for residents.
- Having in place effective communications, so that residents are well-informed and easily able to engage in the process
- The ambition of holding up to date stock condition information for all our homes
- More awareness about the importance of why we need to know about the condition of people's homes to and to help manage the expectations for customers.

This report is focussed on the experience and services to Housing Leeds tenants, however, there is the potential to share the learning in this report with other council teams or services.

What the Board did and what we learnt:

At the start of the review the board met with the Investment Strategy Manager, who gave an initial overview about why Stock Condition Surveys were needed. The board learnt how the surveys looked at the inside and outside of residents homes and that different 'components' like the kitchen or bathroom were checked. The Investment Strategy Manager explained how the surveys were managed in terms of batches of addresses that were given to Technical Officers to inspect, and how we communicated to residents to let them know their homes were now due a 'stock condition' inspection.

The board heard how the results were input daily into the IT system and how the information is checked for accuracy. The board appreciated hearing about how this data is used, in that it informs future investment needs and helps determine the capital programme of major works to improve homes. The board understand that the service has committed to a programme of surveys that will see all homes be inspected over a 5-year period, roughly 10,000 homes a year. The board were also reminded of the importance of landlords keeping up to date information and how this was an essential part of the 'Safety and Quality Standard' from the Social Housing Regulator.

Shortly after starting the review, two tenant board members attended some stock condition survey visits with Technical Officers as an opportunity to observe the surveys being done and to speak to the officers and tenants directly. Another tenant board member was also selected to have a survey completed on their home during the review.

The board learnt from these visits that although officers had been provided with ‘over-shoes’, these often broke or split and that officers did not always carry these with them. Board members also noted that when visiting high-rise homes there were some inconsistencies in the checking of windows within all rooms. One high-rise window was also propped open with a tin can and, positively, this was challenged by the officer and advice given.

On one occasion a Technical Officer identified and dealt with a potential repair hazard (related to the electrical supply to the home) and reported this straight away. This gave the board confidence that any potentially dangerous outstanding repairs would be dealt with there and then. Whilst this was positive, the board also learnt that not all officers were aware of the ‘Tenant Portal’. As any non-urgent repairs discussed or highlighted during the visit were the responsibility of the tenant to report. This was a missed opportunity to make the resident aware of the different ways to report a repair that may be more convenient for them.

This experience and later activity of the board also highlighted the importance of giving a clear message to tenants about reporting any outstanding repairs i.e. how these should be requested in the normal way and as soon as possible and not be left un-reported until the date of the inspection.

During the review the Board met with the Stock Condition Manager and a Technical Officer who carried out the surveys. They explained how they had been trialling new mobile technology, an iPad, so they can input data there and then and how this was incredibly useful to help make best use of their time. However, the feedback from the trial is that the iPads used were too large and heavy and that iPad mini’s would be easier to carry and use all day and still give the team the efficiencies they needed. The board are supportive of the Technical Officers being equipped with a mobile solution that meets their needs to help them work as smartly as possible.

In conversations with officers, it was explained how letters to residents had recently been updated with some frequently asked questions (or FAQ’s) and how this appears to be helping give more information to residents about the purpose of the survey and to help manage expectations. The service has also introduced reminder texts and emails, and it’s hoped these will also help prompt residents to come forward and make appointments with the team. Ideally text updates would cover not just confirmation of an appointment, or a reminder to make an appointment, but would also include something like ‘our

operative (Andy) will be with you in 10 mins to carry out your home survey' on the day of the appointment.

It was clarified that information about a tenants individual needs was used within LCC and shared with Rapleys so that both could respond to these – e.g. to visit in pairs or to knock loudly. Rapleys shared that they currently have no female surveyors working in the Leeds area that are able to work on the LCC contract. However, LCC has shared information with Rapleys on those residents who prefer a female worker and this is being responded to jointly by LCC and Rapleys and a female member of staff accompanying a male surveyor where this is requested.

Part of the boards review was to look at all the communications given to residents about the surveys. On reviewing the letters, calling card, satisfaction survey, email wording and text wording the board observed:

a) That a more user-friendly email address could be used, for example, changing from housing.leeds.scs.team@leeds.gov.uk to homesurvey@leeds.gov.uk
b) A no-access letter includes a mention of dogs. The board feel that all pets should be mentioned for safety, and how there should be consistency across all the letters used, as there was no mention of dogs or any pets in any other letters.
c) There is signposting to the 0800 Contact Centre number and the Tenant Portal to let residents know how they can report repairs. However, some residents may prefer to report repairs in person at their local Community Hub. Some may also prefer to contact using the 0113 local number depending on the phone they use.
d) The simplicity and clarity of the texts and email messages to residents was positive, and how reminders like this, and not relying on one method of communication was to be welcomed and encouraged.
e) The inclusion on the back of letters the offer of information in alternative formats and in different languages was positive, but the writing was quite small and may defeat the object of trying to make communications more accessible.
f) The example no-access letter shared from a Technical Officer described 'AM' and 'PM' appointments with no further information about when AM stops and starts and PM stop and starts. This could be confusing for residents and increase the risk of no-access appointments.
g) The satisfaction survey used by Rapleys appears useful, but the board aren't sure the questions are the right ones, and the wording and presentation of the survey could be improved.

The board were also presented with the results to a recent consultation that sought feedback on how the service best manages access to tenants homes and residents views about this. The survey was responded to by 229 residents. Of note to the board was the question 'giving access to my home would be easier if…'. The second highest answer given was 'if we offered more appointment choices.'

The board were made aware that LCC use a diary system to manage appointments, which are currently offered as AM or PM Monday to Friday, and these have some flexibility if a resident is away or has a school run commitment. Some Technical Officers also work later on a particular day (up to 6pm was the example) which helps respond to customers who are working during normal business hours. When Rapleys met with the board they explained that their standard appointment times are 8.30am to 5.30pm but individual surveyors, subject to their availability, could make appointments outside these times to help with access if it was mutually convenient to do so.

Towards the end of the review, the board looked at website content from Newcastle and Manchester City Councils, Thrive Homes and Southern Housing Trust as it was acknowledged by the service that Housing Leeds currently had no website content about the surveys.

The board would therefore like to see a 'home survey' page be created in Leeds that explained the purpose of the surveys, including content to let tenants know that Rapleys were working on the council's behalf and some useful FAQ's. More guidance from the board on what they would like to see included in a new web page is detailed in the recommendation list attached to this report.

Throughout the review the board heard how 'stock condition surveys' are being renamed 'home surveys' in any communication to residents. The board agreed this is easier for residents to understand and is more respectful to tenants as these are tenants homes, not 'stock'. The board very much support this change and ask this be the norm going forward.

As the boards review came to an end, they spoke with managers to help clarify some final questions. The board were able to have confirmed:

- Only 'category 1 hazards', i.e. things that would present a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety would be noted if observed in gardens whilst attempting to access a home.
- Lofts are not currently inspected by the council, but Rapleys have offered to do loft inspections which is useful for the service as a

whole. LCC have the intention to implement loft inspections when ready/able to do so.
- All windows should be inspected during all home surveys.
- Some LCC officers do take pictures, taking care not to take a photo of anything such as letters or family photos and there is intention to take more once Technical Officers have updated IT to help them do mobile working more efficiently. Rapleys are able and do take a photos of all rooms.

Whilst not connected to the scope of the boards review, the board would like to note that they received some positive feedback from residents when attending surveys with them. They were glad that fellow residents were taking an interest in this topic and how good it was that residents were involved in improving the service. The board also have some learning points that they have shared with officers supporting the board about the co-ordination and practicalities of arranging site visits to try and make this activity easier for board members in future.

Acknowledgements

The Tenant Scrutiny Board would like to thank:

- Rob Goor – Deputy Head of Asset Management
- Kat Curling – Investment Strategy Manager
- Andy Lund – Stock Condition Manager
- Charlotte Alexander – Technical Officer
- Richard Leonard – Technical Officer
- Martin Gladwin, Partner and Head of Housing Consultancy, Rapleys LLP.
- Holley Pullen – Customer Care and Insight Officer
- Various tenants who were happy to have a board member observe a home survey taking place at their home.
- Councillor Jessica Lennox, Executive Member for Housing
- Akbar Khan, Ian Montgomery, Trish Parker, Lorna Smith, Gaynor Lewis and Olaide Oduniyi from the Tenant Engagement Team who supported the review.

Recommendations

Tenant Scrutiny Board Recommendation	Response from Housing Leeds	'Accepted', 'Partially Accepted', 'Rejected' or 'Further Information requested'.
1. Over shoes – feedback was received about how easily these broke or split, and not all staff carry them with them for appointments. The board would like more durable/more robust alternatives to be explored and provided to all staff undertaking the full home survey visits.	The service agree that all staff should have access to and use over-shoes when undertaking the visits. The service will re-issue the instruction to staff to ensure over-shoes are used. The service will also trial the use of a more durable over-shoe with the team, seek feedback and keep the board updated. We will remind Rapley's of this requirement also.	Accepted
2. The board observed inconsistencies in the checking of windows within all rooms in high-rise homes. To ensure that all high-rise windows are checked, and any safety advice given if needed.	The service agrees the importance of checking all high-rise windows and thank the board for highlighting any inconsistency in our approach. We will reiterate the instruction that all high-rise windows be checked and remind Rapley's of this requirement also, so they are aware of the boards concern.	Accepted
3. To equip all Technical Officers carrying out the home surveys with a user-friendly mobile solution that enables them to carry out the surveys as efficiently as possible	We agree we want to make the collecting of information as user-friendly and efficient as possible for our Technical Officers. We are being supported by our IT service to provide iPad Minis for us to undertake the home surveys and aim to undertake further testing during October to December 2025 with a full solution for the whole team by the end of March 2026	Accepted

4. For the service to monitor the take up of outside of normal hours appointments, i.e. early evening and Saturday mornings. The Board support the services current approach but would like the service to be able to evidence if meeting demand going forward.	The service will put in place monitoring arrangements from September 2025 onwards and report volumes or requests and volumes of those undertaken for both early evening and Saturday mornings and report outcomes back to the board – suggest from January 2026 onwards to allow the service the time to collect three months of information.	Accepted
5. To improve awareness amongst officers of the Tenant Portal. All staff should be familiar with this so they can signpost how residents can order non-urgent repairs if needed.	The service will devote time in team meetings during September (after the peak leave period) to brief and remind the team of the Tenant Portal and the options this gives residents to report non-urgent repairs. The service will also make Rapley's aware of the Tenant Portal during it's regular liaison meeting.	Accepted
6. The board feel the message to tenants on the importance of reporting repairs as normal, and not waiting for a home survey is an important one. The board ask that this message be included in all current and future messages to tenants about the survey programme.	The service will check all existing communication, including new web content, to make sure this message is included. This applies to any new communication also.	Accepted
7. The board ask that a more user-friendly email address is created for customers, moving from to housing.leeds.scs.team@leeds.gov.uk to homesurvey@leeds.gov.uk	We have changed our team email address to homesurvey@leeds.gov.uk and we are in the process of changing our letter templates to reflect this.	Accepted
8. A letter viewed by the board from/introducing Rapleys does not include a warning about dogs. The board ask that all letters give the same information and all pets be considered, not just dogs, to help keep all staff and partners safe when visiting.	The service will check that our communication is giving a consistent message about dangerous pets. We appreciate the board considering the safety of staff when visiting.	Accepted

9. In communications to residents, there is signposting to the 0800 number and how residents can report repairs online. The board would like the option of reporting repairs in person at Community Hubs included and the availability of the 0113 local rate contact centre number added.	The board will review it's written communications and make these changes by no later than September 2025.	Accepted
10. The board welcome the simplicity of the texts and email messages to residents and support the continued use of digital communication as is cost-effective and useful for residents to receive reminders. The board ask that tools like texting and emailing reminders be included in any future service changes/improvements. Ideally the service would include a text that said *'our operative (their name) will be with you in 10 mins to carry out your home survey'* on the day of the appointment	The service accepts the principle that digital communication, especially giving updates by texts are a quick and accessible way of giving information, helping reassure residents we are committed to an appointment and to help build trust in the service. Whilst we have the same aspiration as the board, we will need to explore the technical viability of this recommendation as currently this is not possible. We will keep the board updated as to whether this is something we can deliver in future as systems develop. We will continue to send email and text reminders as per recent communication improvements.	Partially Accepted
11. The board welcome the inclusion on the back of letters the offer of the information in alternative formats and in different languages. The board ask this information in terms of font size be increased to make more reader friendly.	This has now been actioned and larger font information in the various community languages is now included in all our home survey related letters. The larger font version has also been applied to our Housing Leeds wide templates.	Accepted
12. The example no-access letter shared with the board describes 'AM' and 'PM' appointments. Can this be made clearer – when does AM stop and start and PM stop and start?	The service will review the no access letters and clarify this for residents by no later than the end of September 2025.	Accepted
13. The satisfaction survey used by Rapleys appears useful – but the board feel this could be improved in term of design,	We will share this feedback with Rapleys and seek tenant input into ensuring the	Accepted

formatting and the questions asked. The board ask that the approach to surveys be reviewed and tested with residents.	feedback process is as useful as possible. The service will seek to explore good practice from other landlords in this area to help inform any changes in Leeds. The service would like the opportunity to look at this in more detail and put in place an updated version by December 2026	
14. The board have identified there is no website content about stock condition surveys. The board request the service create a 'home survey' page and include within this: a. Using more friendly and personal language b. An introduction to Rapleys and their contact details, so if a tenant has been approached by them, their contact details are available. This also reassures Rapleys are working on behalf of LCC c. Contact information for the team d. FAQ's added – similar to the letter content already used with an additional question '*my neighbour has been contacted about a survey, but I have not – am I included?'* e. Break down into before, during and after and expected timescales	We are currently in the process of creating new content based on feedback from the board and will be able to share a new 'home survey' page shortly for comment. There may be advice from our website team about the formatting and ability to add certain features – but we will work with the board and develop workarounds to be able to meet the expectations of the board.	Accepted
15. The board support the change in language, so that public facing staff and communications refer 'stock condition surveys' as 'home surveys' to better reflect that these are surveys of people's homes and we should be respectful of this.	We support this change in language and thank the board for highlighting this. We have communicated this to staff in our internal bulletin 'Housing Leeds Matters' and will continue to refer to them as 'home surveys' in any customer contact.	Accepted
16. The board understand there are regular updates given by Rapleys to LCC on their activity and performance, this includes results to their satisfaction survey. The board would like a written update presented to the board in October, ideally by Rapleys and LCC on,	The service is happy to provide this. When the forward plan for the TSB has been confirmed for the Autumn and beyond please let the service know so we can	Accepted

a. Progress and feedback on the delivery of home surveys to date and examples of how LCC respond to the feedback from Rapleys. b. To clarify staff access to system alerts and if this can be improved.	make the request of Raleys and prepare for this.	