

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 15th June 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Baseline Tenant Satisfaction Measure Survey March 2023

Report summary:

The results of the March 2023 tenant satisfaction survey saw a significant decline in satisfaction across several aspects of the Housing Service. The housing leadership team have considered the findings in detail and a communication plan (worked up in conjunction with the corporate communications team) and an improvement plan is now being put together to address how we can improve tenant satisfaction.

This report also highlights how performance in some of our key areas is translating into lower levels of tenant satisfaction. With this in mind, ensuring we are getting the basics right across our service is an important step to improving the services for our tenants and hopefully improving tenant satisfaction.

The results have resonated strongly with the leadership team and have given us additional evidence to support the measures being put in place to improve particular areas of the service, such as the complaints process and aspects of the repairs service.

The Board should be aware that there is a requirement for all registered providers of social housing to run this survey annually from 2023/24. This recent survey provides us with a 'baseline' and when we next carry out the survey the results from that survey under the new arrangements will have to be submitted to the Social Housing Regulator as part of new legislation.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- 1) That the Housing Review Board consider and comment on the Baseline Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) Survey Report.
- 2) The Housing Review Board approve the facilitation of a series of focus groups to be held with tenants who have offered to provide further insight and information on their experiences with the housing service. Officers will then review and use these findings to further inform future improvements.
- 3) The Housing Review Board approve the further surveying of tenants over the coming months in order to monitor satisfaction levels more closely and more frequently and as a way of assessing whether levels of satisfaction are improving.

Reason for recommendation:

The results of this survey provides us with up-to-date information on tenant satisfaction which can help inform the decisions we make that are best for our tenants and service. The TSM survey provides statistical information about our housing service. This information is critical for

performance monitoring and service delivery improvement. Going forward into 2023/24 there will also be a statutory duty for these measures to be submitted to the Social Housing Regulator. As part of the survey questions, tenants were asked if they would be willing to share further information and a proportion of tenants said they would. It is now right to engage further with these tenants to help give us more insight into tenant's experiences. We want to track satisfaction more closely over the coming months and are considering ways to do this appropriately.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

A representative sample of tenants (approx. 3,700) tenants were invited to respond to the survey. We sent out a postal survey to all sheltered tenants having listened to feedback in the past that they still prefer to receive information by post and for our general needs tenants, where information available, an email and/or a SMS was sent asking tenants to complete an online survey.

Climate change Low Impact

Links to background information .

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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1.0 Background

1.1 From 2023/24 all registered providers of social housing are required to undertake an annual satisfaction survey and to submit the results to the regulator. This is part of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) regulation that has now been introduced. On a local level, surveying tenants in this way is very important to us to gauge how we are doing and we recognise that it has been several years since we last collected any satisfaction information in this way that relates to services across the board in housing.

1.2 From a technical perspective it was an opportunity to try out different survey methodologies, questionnaire length, format etc. to see what works well and what doesn't and to make sure we get the logistics right the next time we run the survey.

2.0 Technical Requirements

2.1 Although this was a 'baseline survey' we wanted to collect and process the information as specified by the Regulator to ensure we meet their requirements. By doing this we will be confident in using these results as a base and benchmark against future TSM survey results.

2.2 We were able to choose the methodology thinking this would be an opportunity to try out different survey formats to try and see what works best when considering value for money and response rate. In an attempt to get more returns from our general needs and younger tenants we decided to send out the survey by email and SMS. As we do not have this technology available we used a third party (Service Insights) to manage the survey for us.

2.3 All sheltered tenants received a postal survey (as in the past this is the preference we have heard) and for those with an email and/or mobile number we sent out an online survey. In total 3,766 tenant households were contacted and 831 responded. 295 respondents said they did not want their information matched to any demographic information. For the remaining respondents, 241 were sheltered and 239 were general need tenants. 454 replied by SMS, 105 by email and 272 by post.

2.4 A valuable lesson we learnt from this was to ensure all tenants were aware of the survey in advance and if we are using a third party to ensure there is transparency for our tenants on all aspects of data protection. For reassurance, of course all data protection requirements were followed during this process and we worked with the Councils Data Protection Officer to ensure this was the case.

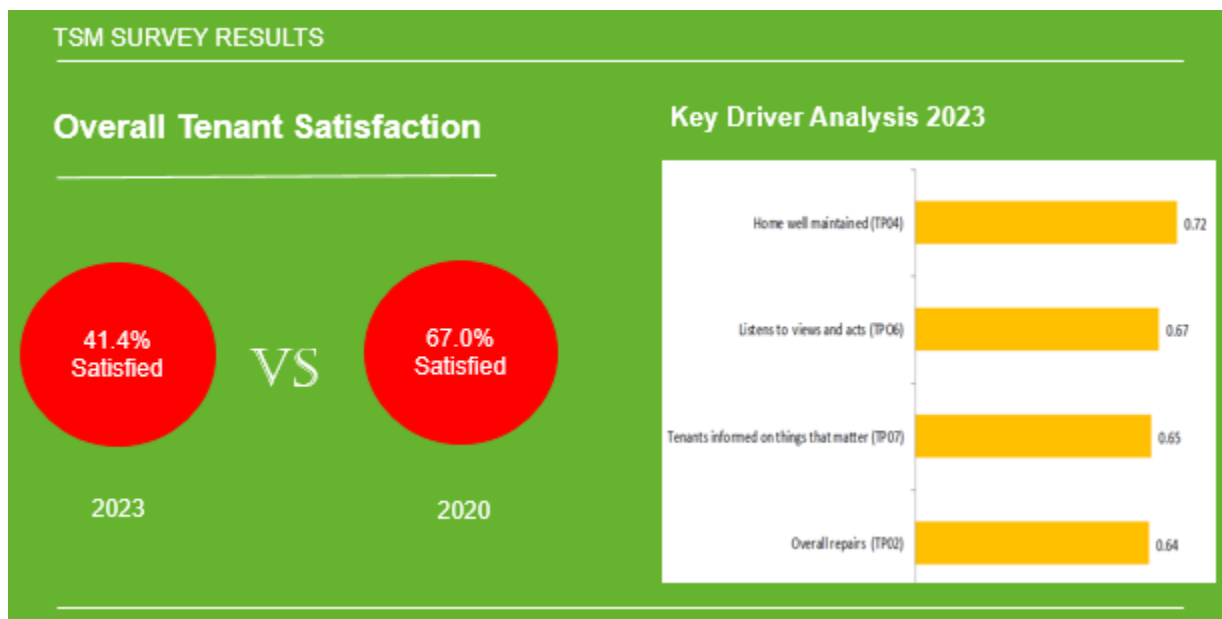
2.5 One of the stipulations of the survey is that we achieved a sample size of 522 where the estimate overall satisfaction was accurate to a margin of no more than +/- 4% at a 95% confidence level. With this level we can be 95% sure that – as long as the sample is representative the estimated level of satisfaction is right for the whole population. We had 831 responses so we can be 95% sure that + or – 3% satisfaction level is right for our whole tenant base.

2.4 However, when we got our responses back, we received a far greater number of responses from sheltered tenants and we are aware for instance that this group of tenants have on average higher satisfaction and so are over represented in the sample. In light of this we appropriately weighted the responses to ensure they were as representative as possible.

3.0 Results

3.1 The report attached written by Service Insights is a comprehensive presentation of the results. For the purposes of this covering report, a number of indicators have been picked out to highlight and discuss further, and where appropriate provide some further insight and/or deeper analysis.

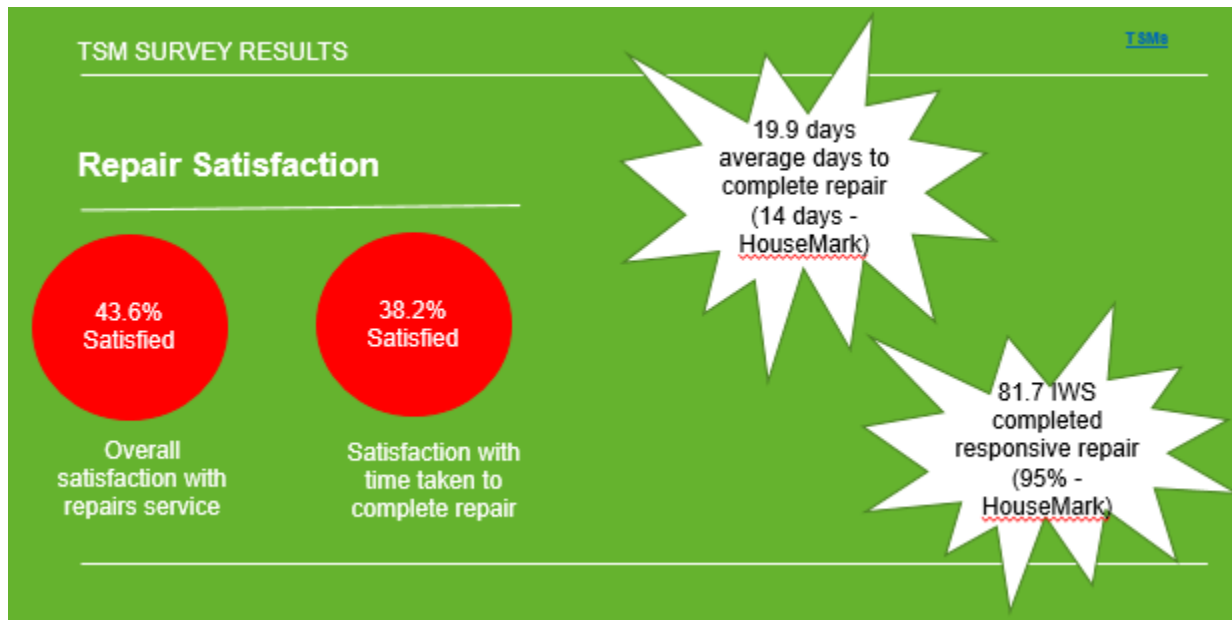
4.0 Overall Satisfaction



4.1 The image above shows a decrease of 25.6%. In a recent report by HouseMark they showed that on average overall tenant satisfaction has decreased by around 5% since 2020 to 79%.

4.2 Further analysis shows differences between different tenant groups. The survey has also showed that tenants who were found to be less satisfied were: Younger, general need tenant and a tenant for less than 5 years.

5.0 Satisfaction with repairs



5.1 The industry acknowledges that satisfaction with repairs is a critical contributor to overall satisfaction with a housing service. The majority of our tenants will have little or no contact with other departments which makes it even more important that we get this service right. Our performance information does show that we can link low performance with low satisfaction. We can also see that when comparing across the sector, 19.9 days to complete a repair puts us in Housemark's bottom quartile. Achieving above 95% for completing a responsive repair within target time would put us in the top quartile for this performance indicator, we are currently achieving 81.7%. It should however be noted that our current performance of 19.9 days does sit within our Contract KPIs (maximum 28 days for a non-urgent repair.)

5.2 In both TSM repair measures we are significantly behind the national picture. Housemark's 2023 report said that 8 in every 10 tenants say they are satisfied with repairs and 76% are satisfied with the time taken to complete the most recent repair. We have also seen a 29.4% decrease since 2020 when tenants were asked how satisfied they were with the repairs service.

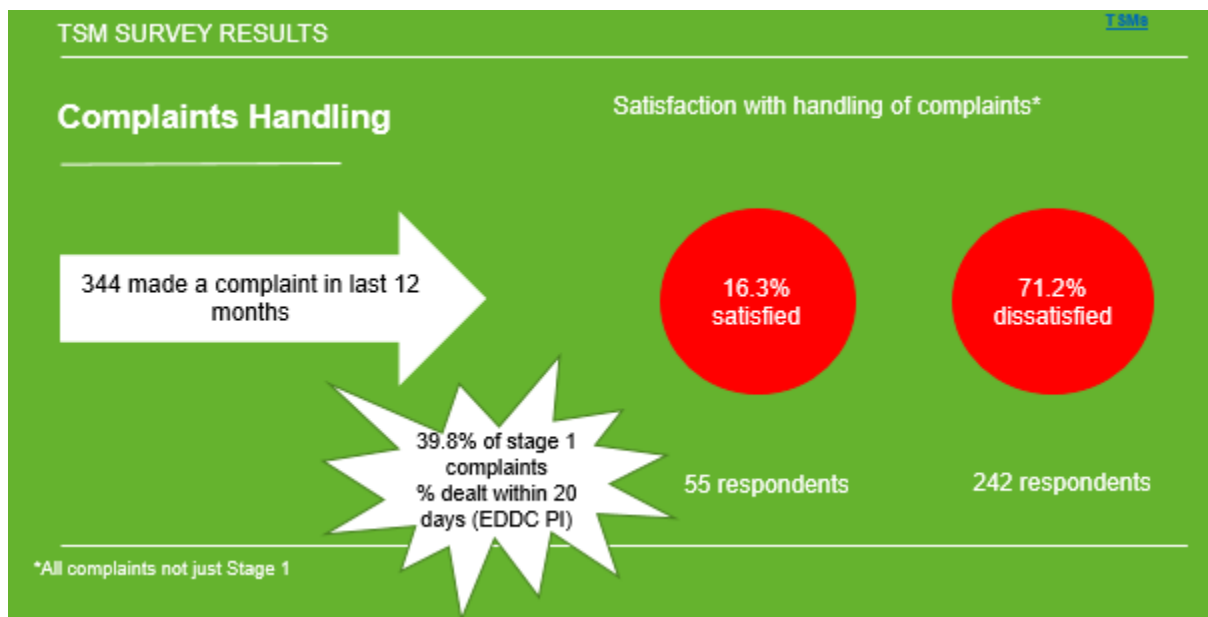
5.2 Although the TSMs ask 2 repair questions we added additional repair questions following feedback from our tenant groups. P23 of the report provides more details. One area to note is the low scores communication received eg. Keeping the informed throughout the process. This supports a lot of the discussion that was had with tenants when we were consulting on questions to include in the survey. These results will be extremely useful in many ways in how we work with our repairs contractors and certainly this chimes with some of the ongoing work underway that has formed our repairs improvement programme.

6.0 Communication



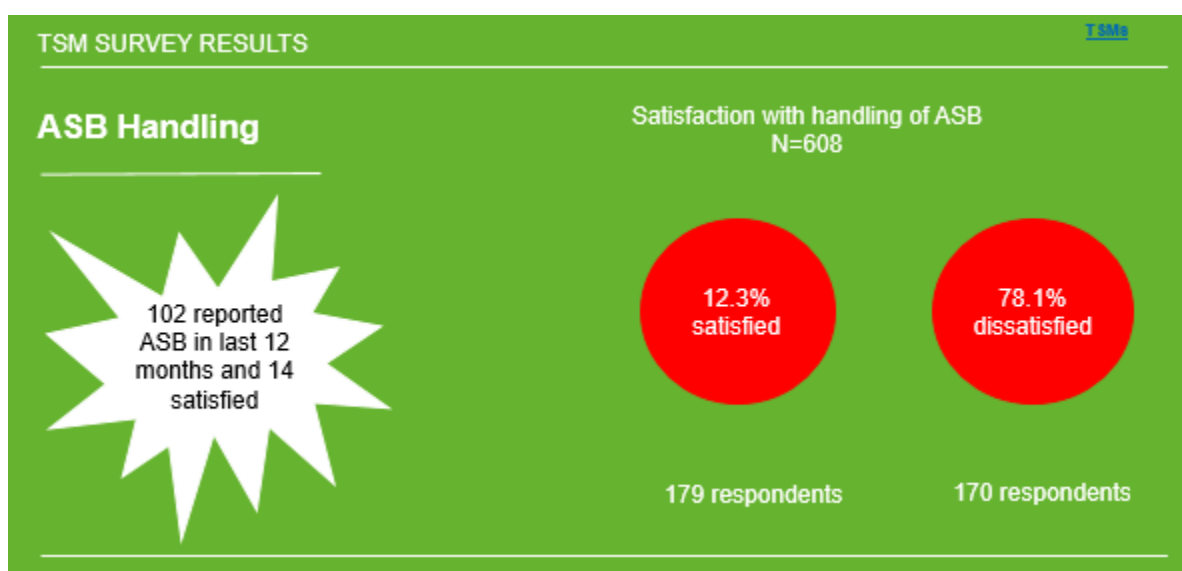
6.1 Pulling all the TSMs together which relate to communication was very interesting. It shows we need to do far more than we are currently doing. Critical to this is deciding what methods of communication we should be using moving forward. For instance, our younger tenants might prefer something through SMS or social media but our sheltered tenants might still have a preference for something paper based. It is not about substituting one for the other but using different communication channels in an effective way and, for our officers, in a consistent and efficient way to get the messages out there.

7.0 Complaints



7.1 Numerous reports have come to the Housing Review Board recently about complaints and so although these scores are disappointing they were unsurprising. However, what is striking is the number of respondents in the survey who said they had made a complaint in the last 12 months – nearly half of respondents reporting that they had made a complaint in the last 12 months. Of course it must be noted that people will determine what is meant by ‘complaint’ differently. This has reinforced the need for us to review our complaints process so we improve tenant satisfaction and our current low performance where by only 39.8% of stage 1 complaints are being dealt with within 20 days. For information 56% of tenants say they are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to handling complaints in the Housemark 2023 TSM report and a Housemark benchmarking reports the average days to deal with a complaint is 9.31 days.

8.0 ASB Handling



8.1 102 respondents said they had reported ASB in the last 12 months and of those only 14 said they were satisfied with the approach to handling to ASB. Our performance data shows we have had 38 ASB cases reported in 2022/23 and whilst 102 respondents have stated that they reported ASB in the last year, this could be attributed to what tenants are identifying as an ASB case and in some cases these are minor one off incidents

It is not unusual for satisfaction with ASB to be low and this is reflective in other providers

We are currently reviewing our ASB policy, procedure and recording systems to improve how incidents and ASB cases are recorded, monitored and dealt with. We will consult on the draft procedures with tenants.

We also now have an additional resource in place with a specialist ASB officer dealing with all high level cases to ensure that these are adequately resourced and progressed.

9.0 Cost of living and Tenant Wellbeing

9.1 The wellbeing of our tenants is of great importance to us as a service. In the last survey when we collected satisfaction data, we also asked about tenants' wellbeing and from that we recognised the important relationship between the service we provide and tenants wellbeing and how satisfied they are with the service. One of the outcomes of this was to employ a mental health Officer to work as part of our MSO team. The role of the Officer is to perform a brokerage/signposting role to specialist mental health services where this is required.

It was important that in this survey we continued to understand this relationship. We also wanted to ask tenants how they were coping with the cost of living crisis as this could be having a profound impact on how we deliver our service.

9.2 Nearly half of respondents said they were worried about being able to meet monthly living expenses. Further analysis reveals those under 50 are most likely to be worried about being able to meet their monthly living expenses

9.3 When asked how satisfied are you with your life nowadays, tenants scored a mean score of 7.00 out of 10. This is only 0.5 lower than the national average of 7.5 (Office of National Statistics, 2022)

9.4 However, when respondents were asked how anxious did they feel yesterday they scored a mean score of 6.05. This is significantly different to the 3.1 reported by the Office of National Statistics, 2022. Those respondents in age bands 35-44 years reported significantly higher levels of anxiety compared to other groups.

10.0 Wider context

10.1 The housing sector is working within a much tougher operating environment than ever before with a number of factors linking into this. As we are all aware the pandemic brought nationwide challenges and our post pandemic world has seen us fall into a cost of living crisis with the most vulnerable in our society most effected – our tenants included - as the survey has shown.

10.2 The housing sector nationally is under increasing pressure in a number of areas. Some examples of this have been the focus on damp and mould, ageing stock that is leading to a tsunami of legal disrepair challenges, difficulties in staff retention across the whole sector and an inability to attract the right people into the right roles. Another factor is rising numbers of tenants who are suffering from serious mental health issues, this translates into significant additional time to manage caseloads for housing officers and this impacts in a variety of ways.

10.3 The recent renewed focus by the Ombudsman and the Social Housing Regulator is positive and we welcome the refreshed recognition of the importance of social housing and the need to drive up standards. The preparation required to prepare for these changes and the new regulation is requiring a considerable amount of focus and additional resource to ensure we are prepared.

10.2 We are not alone in the impact this context is having on service satisfaction scores, and the trend amongst other registered providers is a showing a decline in tenant satisfaction across all service measures.

11.0 Conclusion and way forward

11.1 The results of this survey highlight low levels of satisfaction with the housing service across the board and given the response rates we are satisfied that this is representative of our tenants. As part of our recovery plan from Covid we have been particularly keen to gauge tenants satisfaction by way of a survey as we have recognised that face to face contact has been limited over the past 2/3 years. There is a recognised need to get the basics right and utilise Systems Thinking methodology to ensure that we are focused on what matters to tenants, reduce waste work and ensure that tenants issues are dealt with at the first point of contact wherever possible.

11.2 As a starting point, the survey has confirmed the need for us to much improve visibility and accessibility for tenants and ensure every contact with tenant's counts. Being visible and 'present' with tenants out on our Estates/in our communities is a key focus for us currently and we are ramping this up in a number of ways including annual tenancy reviews, continuation of the 'hub' initiatives and a regime of Estate Inspections.

The survey links in directly with the current consultation that is underway to renew our resident involvement strategy, extensive consultation is underway on this with the focus on ensuring we hear how tenants wish to be involved with the service moving forward. Ensuring we get this right will lead to better quality involvement of tenants moving forward. We are determined through the refresh of the resident involvement strategy to cement and create a robust partnership with tenants that can help us to better deliver our service in the future. If we better embed this in our day to day work, tenants will be helping us to drive the improvements required. We are already seeing some good work and increased levels of engagement from tenants as a result of the work of the Communities team and we will continue to build on this to give us a greater understanding of what the demographics are of our tenants and what their specific wants and needs are.

11.3 Included in the survey was a question that asked if the tenant would be willing to further talk to us about how they answered the survey, the idea being that this could be an opportunity to gain further insight and understanding from tenants about their own experiences. We had a significant number of tenants tell us that they would be happy to do this and it is proposed that we set up some specific focus groups and invite these tenants along to continue these discussions. This will further help us shape and inform improvements we need to make moving forward.

11.4 The survey has highlighted and provided further evidence that supports tenant dissatisfaction with the repairs service, this chimes with other evidence we have such as rising complaints and general views from Members that suggest there is generally dissatisfaction with the service being delivered. Over the past 18 months we have presented many reports to the Board highlighting some of the challenges in this area, we have been working closely with our partner contractors to look at improvements and the report presented to you today sets some context around factors that are linking into challenges in this area. Given the ongoing challenges and the feedback that this survey has given us from tenants, we are carefully assessing the way forward with the need to consider if a more radical change is now required.

11.5 As reported to the Board, we have had considerable challenges in the Property and Asset team in relation to resources and this we know has led to frontline failures, particularly through the winter months of 22/23 when our Officers were considerably stretched and we dealt with significantly higher numbers of repair requests. Our HR colleagues have been

closely supporting managers in the team and we recognise more broadly the additional pressures in this team that have led us to consider whether the current structure is right. We need to ensure the team are set up to achieve with the right level of resources in place in all areas. The review of the current structure is currently underway.

- 11.6 In addition to repairs and maintenance, the results of the survey have highlighted a number of areas that we know require improvement and this will help us accelerate work that is already underway, this includes;
- A review of how we are managing formal complaints to ensure we meet the timescales required. An internal monitoring group is currently meeting to work through changes required, it is proposed that we consult closely with the tenant complaints panel on the role they can play in helping us move this forward.
 - A review of our Anti-social behaviour policies and procedures to ensure effectiveness.
 - The appointment of a Housing Operations Manager to instil a focus on operational delivery and support a more joined up approach across the housing service.
 - A focus across frontline teams on getting the basics right and raising our profile with tenants.
 - A focus on ensuring communication is effective, we are currently looking closely at data that relates to how quickly we answer calls, we are looking at what improvements can be made.
 - Greater emphasis and focus on key KPIs in housing to track and manage performance using a KPI Dashboard. There is a direct correlation with what the survey is telling us and our own results of performance in some key areas, this is helpful and confirms the importance of the need for constant monitoring in these areas by managers at all levels.
- 11.7 Although very early in implementation, we have now also re-introduced Estate Walkabouts across the whole of the District as well as annual tenancy reviews. As recommended by the Board at the March meeting, annual tenancy reviews will now be carried out by our Estate Management team in order to make pro-active contact with every tenant in order to address any matters they may wish to raise with us. This will also include property inspections where the condition of the property can be assessed. We believe this will be a very positive step forward in improving tenant engagement generally, it will give tenants the opportunity to raise any issues they wish to and the Officer carrying out the visit will then follow through on this.
- 11.8 The completion of the stock condition survey is another important step forward and is important in the context of this survey due to the need for the results of the survey to drive forward the investment strategy for the stock. The pause on planned works as a result of the pandemic, have undoubtedly had a negative impact on tenant experiences of their home. We know that planned work programmes such as kitchen and bathroom programmes drive increased satisfaction and due to the age of our stock, tenants have the right to know how we are delivering investment in their homes.
- 11.9 We are working with the Corporate Communications team to consider how we communicate with tenants on the results of this survey. We want to ensure we instil confidence and offer reassurance that we are listening to tenants and show them the changes that are underway in order to help us move forward.

- 11.10 We are also considering how we will further sample tenants to be able to track and monitor satisfaction levels moving forward and what this looks like. There is the opportunity to undertake sampling surveys on smaller groups of tenants to be able to measure the impact of changes being made and we are currently taking advice to consider the best way of doing this. We are also exploring a tracker methodology to continuously sample tenant opinion and collate this into a comprehensive report. We are aware of the risk of 'survey fatigue' amongst tenants if we don't approach this carefully so a number of options are being explored.
- 11.11 The Housing Leadership team are using the results of this survey to feed into a wider Service Improvement Plan. The survey has provided us with strong evidence that further reiterates the areas of the service that we know have been struggling and require improvement and a more comprehensive approach is being taken to pull together a much wider plan that the Leadership team will retain responsibility and ownership of moving forward. We intend to present this plan to the Board once it is finalised.
- 11.12 The results of the HouseMark report that you will also receive today provide a useful measure on our performance compared to other housing providers. There is some interesting data that indicates in some areas our costs have been low and this has resulted in good performance. However there are similar themes around failures in complaint handling and void management that chime with areas that are already under review and are consistent with what some of the data from this survey has told us.
- 11.12 Our Information and Analysis Officer will be present at the meeting to answer any questions regarding how the survey was carried out, they will also be able to answer any questions directly linked to any information in the analysis report attached to this report. We welcome comments and input from the Board regarding this important piece of work and invite suggestions on how we can all work together to move this forward.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications.