

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Survey 2026

This briefing note is to inform the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning and our tenants on the changes we would like to recommend that are implemented to this year's TSM Survey.

Background

Previously the Council undertook the STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) annually to gauge tenants and residents' satisfaction on the services being provided to them. In April 2023 the Regulator of Social Housing introduced the mandatory TSM Survey which replaced the STAR Survey.

In 2023 the Council appointed Kwest Research to undertake their TSM Survey and following a tender exercise in 2024, ARP Research were appointed the contract and have been undertaking the Councils TSM Survey for years 2024/25 and 2025/26.

Upon introducing the TSM Survey, the Council continued to follow the same methodology that the STAR Survey did, this meant that three letter mailings were sent out to our tenants for the duration of the survey to encourage as much feedback as possible.

Previous Response Rates

In the 2023/24 survey we had a total response rate of 24.9%.

In the 2024/25 survey we had a slight increase to 34% total response rate; you can see the percentage of responses we had for each mailing in the table below.

2024/25	Count	%
Mailing 1	620	21%
Mailing 2	183	6%
Mailing 3	229	8%
Emails	11	0%

Last year in the 2025/26 survey we had a total response rate of 35%; you can see the percentage of responses we had for each mailing in the table below.

2025/26	Count	%
Mailing 1	594	20%
Mailing 2	104	4%
Mailing 3	206	7%
Emails	116	4%

Whilst these response rates have been helpful to use the data to drive change in our services we have decided this year to introduce a new methodology to see if it can improve our response rate overall.

Rationale for Change

Our rationale for change is driven by three main points:

1. Low response rates,
2. Recommendation from our survey provider on outdated methodology; and
3. High costs.

Although our response rates remain within the required 2/3 +/- % range for using the data in our TSMs, we are still missing the views of 65% of our tenants. Our methodology changes could considerably increase our response rates therefore making our data more concise of what tenants would like from their housing services, meaning we can make more detailed changes to their housing services.

In our recent annual meeting with our partner ARP Research, they expressed their concerns for us as we are using outdated methodology stemming from the STAR Survey. They also undertake the TSM Survey for other local authorities and shared that we are one of the few left still using this methodology. With these views in mind, we feel it is important to implement changes that have the potential to drive our response rates and we also have the luxury of using ARP Research to assist us with these changes as they have seen it proven to work for other authorities.

Lastly, whilst the charge with ARP Research has not increased as we are still within our three-year contract, the charges of postage have. Whilst exploring methodology options with ARP Research we have been able to see that with our recommended changes of dropping down to two mailings instead of three, we would save £2655.00.

As we remain within the current contract with ARP, the savings can be used to survey our leaseholders. This valuable addition to the TSM survey will provide

feedback on the services they receive and help us identify any further improvements needed.

Proposed Changes

Our proposed changes are the following:

- We will complete two mailings instead of three: the initial mailing to open the survey and a second mailing four weeks later, which will act as the only paper reminder.
- The mailings will continue to include a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey and how residents can take part. However, much of the key information will be presented in a new A4 colour flyer designed specifically to be more visually engaging and accessible. The flyer format allows important messages, deadlines and participation options to be highlighted more clearly than a traditional text-heavy letter. It can also be reused across a range of communication channels, including our website, social media platforms and as posters in sheltered housing schemes and communal areas of blocks of flats.
- The introduction of a more visually appealing flyer is intended to increase engagement and encourage higher response rates. Research and experience suggest that residents are more likely to read and respond to communications that are attractive, easy to navigate and clearly highlight the action required. A bright, concise and professionally designed flyer is expected to draw greater attention than a standard formal letter and make it easier for residents to understand how to participate.
- This approach is supported by our recent experience of a resident feedback exercise, where information was presented in the form of a colourful four-page booklet rather than a standard letter. That exercise generated significantly higher levels of resident feedback than previous comparable consultations, providing local evidence that a more engaging visual format can positively influence participation rates.
- We will continue to promote completion of the survey via email where residents have provided an email address. Email responses have grown significantly, increasing from 11 responses in 2024 to 116 responses in 2025. This improvement has been supported by a substantial increase in the number of tenants for whom we hold an email address, rising from 170 in 2024 to 1,224 in 2025. Through our ongoing tenancy check programme and the inclusion of email address collection as part of the tenancy sign-up process, we anticipate this figure increasing by at least a further 500 tenants this year. To put this into perspective we have just over 3000 homes meaning this year we will be able to deliver the survey via email to over half of our tenants. By providing a direct link to the survey, email communications make

participation quick and convenient, and we expect the expanded use of this channel to generate additional responses that may otherwise have been lost through the removal of the additional paper mailing. This approach also supports our aim of increasing digital engagement while maintaining opportunities for residents to respond by post if preferred.

Expected Benefits

The expected benefits from completing the survey with this methodology are that we will have more tenants represented in our results as it will improve our response rates. It will be better value for money; less money spent on postage and utilising the funds that we already have secured within our contract. We will therefore gain a greater insight into the tenant experiences as we will also be receiving data from our leaseholders, as well as tenants that may not have responded to our previous surveys.

Transitioning into two mailings instead of three, also brings us in line with the national desire to go paperless, by utilising the email addresses we have we are giving those who prefer that method of contact the option to respond that way whilst not singling out those in the older demographic that still would like to respond on paper.

Whilst we expect an increase in our response rates there are always risks to changing methodology, however by completing a comparison exercise after we have received our detailed report outlining the response rates in February 2027, we will be able to really understand whether the changes we implement this year will benefit us to continue them in future surveys.

As shown in the '*Previous Response Rates*' tables, dropping down to two mailings instead of three presents a low risk because the additional mailing only accounted for 4% of responses last year and 6% the year before. Updated promotional materials and email reminders should help offset any responses lost by removing this mailing.

Risks

Risk	Mitigation
Response rates fall lower than last year's response rates.	If response rates fall significantly, we can revert to our original methodology for future years and/or explore other methodology options by speaking directly with other local authorities.
Results are not comparable with previous year's results due to increased	As part of the comparison exercise in February 2027, we will analyse and

response rate from younger demographic.	report results by age group and compare like-for-like demographic groups with previous years and clearly explain any differences caused by the change in respondent profile. If findings are present, we could conduct a secondary small questionnaire about why one demographic had less respondents to help us make an informed decision for future methodology.
Reduced engagement with the flyer.	For those who are expecting the letter form informing them of the survey they could be confused or dismiss the flyer. Increase engagement via website and online ahead of survey to make tenants aware of the change in methodology, and publication of briefing note. Additionally, this will be published in the December Tendring Reports newsletter which will be delivered via post.

Next Steps

The next steps are to agree changes in methodology with our Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning, Cllr Andy Baker. Once changes have been agreed these will take place from this year's survey commencing in October 2026.

Recommendation

We recommend adopting the proposed methodology changes from 26 October 2026 to improve the representativeness, quality and efficiency of the TSM data collected in this year's survey while maintaining regulatory compliance. A comparison exercise should be undertaken in February 2027 and published alongside this briefing note to assess the impact of the changes on response rates and determine their effectiveness. This will help determine the future methodology of Tendring District Councils TSM Surveys.