

## TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 2ND DECEMBER, 2015

**PRESENT:** John Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Olga Gailite, Christine Gregory, Michael Healey, Maddy Hunter, Peter Middleton, Roderic Morgan and Jackie Worthington

### **36 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no exempt items.

### **37 Late Items**

There were no late items.

### **38 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **39 Minutes - 4 November 2015**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2015 be approved as a correct record.

### **40 Chair's Update**

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which provided the Chair of Tenant Scrutiny Board with an opportunity to update Board Members on some of the areas of work and activity since the November meeting.

The Chair advised that he had attended Scrutiny Board (Environment & Housing) on 17 November 2015, at which landfill, waste strategy and housing lettings policy were discussed.

The Chair also reported that he had now received a formal response following issues raised by Mr Ilee. This had been circulated to Board Members. Housing Leeds were thanked for its quick response on this matter and agreed that no further work on this matter would take place.

Finally the Chair reported on a recent meeting held with the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development in relation to the future administrative support to the Tenant Scrutiny Board. This would be discussed at the Board's March 2016 meeting.

**RESOLVED** – That the above update be received.

#### **41 Scrutiny Inquiry - Environment of Estates**

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which presented information as part of the Board's Inquiry on the Environment of Estates. This included a summary of the responses received from Leeds City Councillors following a questionnaire sent by the Board in relation to estate walkabouts.

The following Councillors were in attendance:

- Councillor Adam Ogilvie, Beeston & Holbeck Ward
- Councillor Angela Gabriel, Beeston & Holbeck Ward
- Councillor Caroline Gruen, Bramley & Stanningley Ward
- Councillor Kevin Ritchie, Bramley & Stanningley Ward
- Councillor Sharon Hamilton, Moortown Ward

These Councillors represented those estates visited by the Tenant Scrutiny Board as part of its inquiry.

The following officers were in attendance:

- Sharon Guy, Housing Manager (Customer Relations, Tenant Scrutiny, Tenant Involvement and Equality)
- Lee Ward, Neighbourhood Services Officer.

By way of introduction, the Chair provided a summary of the purposes of the Inquiry and work undertaken to date. The Chair also outlined the draft timetable for completing the review.

The attending Councillors were invited to share in turn with the Board their own perspective of the issues facing estates, their particular frustrations and the frustration of tenants as relayed to them. This was followed by a broad discussion.

A number of common themes emerged from these discussions. Those being:

- A general consensus that one of the biggest issues on estates was the management of waste and general issues around litter.
- The standard a grass cutting.
- The speed of repairs and quality of work.
- The management of gardens and the understanding tenants have of their responsibilities under their tenancy agreement.
- Dog fouling and initiatives to improve deterrence.
- The importance of good relationships between local ward members and housing officers.
- The need for Housing Officers to be known by and be visible to tenants.

- The management of repair requests and other tenant service requests at the housing office front desk. It was suggested that consideration be given to the technical feasibility of introducing an on line tracking system so customers can track the progress of their repair/service request (in the same way that customers can track progress of on line shopping).
- To what extent the Council uses its enforcement powers.
- Whether Council officers are aware of the consequences of not getting it right first time.
- Whether tool banks could be rolled out across the City

Specifically in relation to estate 'walkabouts' and the feedback from Elected Members to the questionnaire, the following was noted:

- 32 Ward Councillors representing 25 out of the 33 wards responded
- 100% of Councillors had attended a walkabout , 98% in the last 12 months
- All stated that the process was useful.

Positive comments included

- Ideal way to develop relationships with housing officers
- Important for tenants to see that councillors and officers are interested and care
- Important to see estates for oneself
- Good way of identifying other 'personal' issues
- Good way to share perspectives and establish good practice
- Provides the opportunity for ward Councillors to set clear expectations and to set standards for the environment
- Provides opportunities to monitor the consistency in performance of housing officers

- Provides the opportunity to gather the intelligence needed to target resources

Negative comments included;

- lack of notice over times
- diary clashes
- poor communication over pending visits resulting in low tenant involvement

Some ward Councillors had fed back that they received the reports of walkabouts even if they had not attended, however this was not consistent across the city. Others stated that the walkabout should be used to identify and compliment those tenants who kept a tidy and pleasant environment and to start enforcement action on those in breach of their tenancies. A recurring theme was the importance of ensuring that actions agreed happened in a timely manner and the importance of 'joined up working' between the different agencies and council departments. It was also acknowledged that the process of picking up actions during walkabouts illustrated previous 'system failures'. It was suggested that at least once a year *all* appropriate agencies undertake a joint walkabout.

All ward Councillors stated that the estate walkabout was only one of a number of ways in which they gained knowledge and an understanding of their estates. Other methods cited included; street surgeries, casework, attendance at tenant/community group meetings, private walkabouts, correspondence and membership on HAP.

Concluding the discussion, the Chair outlined the next steps of the Inquiry which would include the distribution of a questionnaire to tenant groups (as agreed by the Board)

It was also agreed that Peter Middleton, Sallie Bannatyne and Olga Gailite would represent the Board in terms of the work being undertaken by Housing Leeds in relation to walkabouts. To assist, a summary of the Board's observations in this matter would be drafted for the Board's January 2016 meeting.

## **RESOLVED –**

- I. To thank the attend Councillors for their time and constructive contribution.
- II. That three Board Members contribute to the harmonising project in relation to walkabouts and that a summary of the Board's observations in this matter would be drafted for the Board's January 2016 meeting.

III. That the next steps in the Inquiry be noted.

**42 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Wednesday, 6 January 2016 at 1.30pm (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 1.00pm)

(The meeting concluded at 3.10pm)