

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 14TH MARCH, 2018

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Michael Healey,
Rita Ighade, Roderic Morgan and Jackie
Worthington

75 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None.

76 Late Items

None.

77 Apologies for Absence

Olga Gailite, Peter Middleton, Maddie Hunter.

78 Minutes - 14 February 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2018 be approved as a correct record.

The Chair explained the administration changes to Tenant Scrutiny Board, following on from the previous Board meeting discussion. Keith Mack was introduced to the Board and explained, given his previous role, he would not be involved with this current inquiry into Anti-Social Behaviour and was attending as an observer and to learn the overall scrutiny process. The Chair explained Ian Montgomery would be the lead support officer the remainder of this inquiry.

79 Environment Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board Minutes

Draft minutes of this Scrutiny Board for information only.

80 Clarification of East Leeds Recommendation

The Chair explained at the last meeting the recommendations for East Leeds were presented to the Board and a number of them were closed as had been completed to the Board's satisfaction. The Chair noted that on reflection, recommendation 8 wasn't explained in the way the Board wished the recommendation to be read. The Chair sought authorisation from the Board to write to the responsible officer and provide written clarification to the Board on the matter.

RESOLVED – The Board agreed to re-open recommendation 8 and write to the responsible officer for clarification.

81 Survey Update

In opening this item the Chair noted that he had been advised by Officers the survey was not sent out to Councillors as there were time related problems around this and the Chair noted that in future this would be better placed to send out future surveys earlier, perhaps in November.

The Scrutiny Officer gave an update to the survey for Anti-Social Behaviour which was distributed to involved tenants with Housing Leeds, which included Chairs of Tenant Associations, Citywide groups and Service Improvement Volunteers.

It was explained the results are provided as is, and Board members should consider that although the returns were 30%, this is a small sample and so conclusions should not be drawn completely from the survey, but regarded as a useful guide to the views of respondents.

82 Senior Management Discussion

The Chair introduced Harvinder Saimbhi and Jeff Clarke back before the Board. The Chair gave a brief update explaining what has been carried out during the current inquiry.

He then went and asked if there have been any work carried out since their previous appearance which may be of use for the Board to know.

HS explained there had been changes in staffing. A supervisor in the West area of Leeds and a Service Delivery Manager working across the three areas of Leeds have been recruited. Enhanced CCTV in some blocks have provided better imagery, and patrols of some of the blocks has reduced incidents within them through having a visual presence.

The Chair asked how many staff are working in the team. HS replied there was 86, which includes partners such as Victim Support and the Police. It was noted by a Board member that the survey and officer evidence revealed frustration around the length of time for support agencies to provide support before further action could be taken by LASBT. JC explained there was some delays and this was down to the number of inquiries the various support agencies are receiving. However, in these instances, dialogue should be taking place between the Case Officer with the customer to make them aware of the current status and activity.

JC explained training has been carried out since meeting the Board previously. This training was explained as important given the natural turnover of staff and in response to the STAR satisfaction survey. 189 staff were trained in total and further training was provided in November when a number

of new recruits were inducted into the service. JC explained as background that in the past new recruits may not have received training on ASB for a long period when coming into post and having to pick a lot of it up while on the job.

A question was asked about when things change in ASB how quickly is this relayed as training to staff? JC explained this is an ongoing debate as to whether training is annually or more frequent, as it has a significant impact to the service to take 200 staff out into training. HS spoke about training can give confidence to some staff to help them deal with cases better. Case audits are carried out by Housing Managers to ensure that cases are being processed correctly.

A question was asked by a Board Member around the length of time to contact a complainant – JC explained this is 20 days as a minimum but this can vary depending on the individual circumstances and is only a guide. The standard is 10 days for a LASBT case and this is because usually these would be more serious cases. A question was asked around the length of time to contact a complainant and if this wasn't achieved could this be down to the Housing Officer having too much to do? JC noted that this is a difficult question to answer because in some cases an issue can be dealt with immediately because the Officer is out on the estate, has the local knowledge and may know the history and context to the complaint. This needs to be balanced against the fact that Housing Officers do undertake a range of duties and there are competing demands on their time.

A question was asked where there have been multiple instances of ASB carried out which normally would be deemed low level should these not be referred to LASBT to pick up? JC explained this can happen if appropriate and also the Officer can ask LASBT for further advice in order to resolve the issue.

The Chair asked if Housing Officers were trained to spot where mediation could be successful? JC explained that whilst they can look out for where it might work, they are not trained mediators and wouldn't act directly. The Chair asked if mediation is not taken up because they are not aware of the service available. JC explained it can be difficult getting parties to come round a table to discuss and this is something we cannot force on people to do. HS explained that in some cases the issue has gone on too long for this to be a viable solution.

A question was asked about complainants being moved away as a solution to ASB. JC explained this is seen as a failure and not something we would want to do, however in some cases, such as hate crime it may be an appropriate option if a person feels they can no longer live in the area.

SB asked about security in blocks, especially those without adequate CCTV. An example was given about non-residents being able to enter tower blocks, these were sometimes especially in the blocks nearer the City Centre and tended to be homeless people seeking shelter.

HS explained some of the measures such as injunctions are used to try and stop this happening in blocks, but HS explained that by 2020 all CCTV cameras will be updated. The Chair noted that during the inquiry it was noted that fibre would be one option to connect the cameras to the main base, but would be expensive, compared to using signals from the top of tower block roofs to accomplish the same task, and could the signals type of set-up be used as an interim measure until fibre can be used. HS explained this is a complex issue – and that the service has to be more cost effective and this will be used by having one fibre link into a block but this can then be linked up to other cameras in the area which is the most efficient solution in the long term for the quality of coverage received.

A question was asked about hate crime, and given it seemed this was something which is under reported could be the reason for that especially where the victim is an asylum seeker and would this affect their chances of remaining in the UK. HS explained that this wouldn't and perhaps communication by LASBT needs to be better to provide reassurance to them.

Noise has been an issue throughout the inquiry and a question was asked if there is enough being discussed on the Annual Home Visit, around flooring especially given the situation when children are being rehoused in blocks? JC noted that this is something which could be discussed further at the visit, and at the new home visit where the tenant is new into the property. Simple advice such as requesting to put down rugs etc could be given.

The inquiry has also discovered issues with the IT system being used for ASB and that it is often 'clunky' and inflexible. A member explained that the Board were also told the system does not distinguish between private and council owned properties. JC explained the system was introduced initially as a temporary measure but over time has been adapted to meet our needs. However the new Housing Management system which is currently being introduced has a module for ASB which should be more flexible to use. Staff are being involved in the development of this system and the service looks forward to its adoption.

In closing, the Chair on behalf of the Board wanted to thank HS and JC for their attendance today and also for their help in arranging Officers to attend the Board previously and information that was provided throughout the inquiry. The Chair explained that at the next TSB meeting there would be a draft of the report for approval by the Board, which will then be passed to Housing Leeds for reply, and it was hoped the ASB team would find the report useful.

83 Recruitment to Board

Ian Montgomery explained the reason for his report is around the reduction in membership of the Board and the need to recruit new members. He noted that the report contains a number of measures which the Tenant Engagement Team want to use in order to do this.

IM explained that recruitment has previously been carried out in isolation, and this needs to be more linked up, as one Tenant Engagement team all officers within the team should be aware of vacancies in other groups and also signpost people who exhibit interest and qualities that may be useful and having further discussions from it.

IM explained that this Board is not unusual in difficulties in finding and keeping tenants to be involved. IM noted that all members are volunteers and it is important that we support them to be involved. IM explained one way to do this could be via an event which occurred for recruitment to the Council, something similar to a 'job fair' for tenants to volunteer in roles such as tenant scrutiny and what the benefits for the people volunteering are.

It was proposed that the May meeting be cancelled and an informal meeting of the Board be held to discuss the issue of recruitment, for officers to update with progress about this and to use this time to reflect on the wider workings of the scrutiny board. As an informal meeting the Chair noted this would be a meeting which would be officer led.

RESOLVED – That the May 2018 Tenant Scrutiny Board meeting be cancelled from the calendar, and replaced with an informal meeting to be held away from Civic Hall to discuss recruitment and training and development only.

84 Update on Estate Standards

The Scrutiny Officer provided an update to the Estate Standards outstanding recommendations. The Board were explained the two outstanding recommendations with the following update.

Recommendation 3 – That the Council introduces the best waste collection solution for individual estates, even if that results in variations across the city.

Housing Leeds continues to work closely with Waste Services to improve waste collection services especially where residents are not able to access a wheeled bin service. Specific waste issues identified by Tenant Scrutiny Board at the Wortley High Rise blocks in Armley where a temporary external waste storage facility has been provided has now been resolved. Exterior concrete repair work which caused the closure of the chutes and bin rooms has now been completed and the chutes and bin room are back in operation. As part of the High Rise action plan Housing Leeds are working with Waste Services to improve waste management at a small number of high rise blocks where problems have been experienced with collection.

Recommendation 10 – That Housing Leeds reports back to Tenant Scrutiny Board back on any recommendations and or proposed policy changes following its review of garages.

Garages are included in Investment Strategy and Housing Leeds are developing a 3 to 5 year programme of refurbishment and demolition of low demand garages.

Works carried out in 2017/18 are:-

- 180 garages will have been demolished by 31st March 2018
- 52 plots will have been cleared
- 25 garages fully refurbished

General improvements to land around garage sites / car parking facilitated by demolition of garages and improvements to access roads and forecourts / vegetation cut back and rubbish cleared / improved lighting to site to encourage use. A number of sites have been identified as suitable for redevelopment for housing.

Various marketing initiatives being undertaken to encourage demand and re-let vacant garages. Garage rents will not increase in 2018/19 to assist with letting. The number of empty garages is reducing.

The Scrutiny Officer asked if there were any questions around these recommendations.

Recommendation 3 –

- Are target days for clean-ups still being done and if so are tenants given enough notice of the dates so they know where they'll be etc?
Any examples of this being done recently?

Recommendation 10 –

- Are all garages the same price regardless of area?
- If garages are hard to let why Housing Leeds don't reduce the weekly rental price rather than not collect any rent on them at all?
- Are there any plans for demolished garages to be replaced with new garages?

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Officer ask these questions to the responsible officer to provide a written response to the Board.

RESOLVED – That the two outstanding recommendations above be marked as carry on monitoring by the Board.

85 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 18th April 2018 at 1:15pm
(Pre meeting for all Board members at 1:00pm)

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 3:00 PM