

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 31ST AUGUST, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Christine Gregory,
Michael Healey, Maddie Hunter,
Rita Ighade, Peter Middleton and Roderic
Morgan

1 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

No items.

2 Late Items

There were no late items.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Olga Gailite and Jackie Worthington.

4 Minutes - 3rd August 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd August 2016 be approved as a correct record.

5 Chair's Update

The Chair explained that there was no meeting of the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board during August, however, he has met with Sharon Guy and her team to discuss the terms of reference for the upcoming inquiry and also the lettings standard inquiry.

The Chair explained he had written a statement for the Annual Tenants Report which described the work the board has carried out over the past year. This was read out to the Board.

The Chair explained he will be absent for the next meeting and in his capacity as Chair had delegated this role to CG, and asked that members give her the support shown to him.

6 East Leeds Responsive Repairs Service Terms of Reference

The Chair presented the terms of reference for the East Leeds repairs service. It was noted there are some gaps and that these would be filled in

once the Board had received evidence from the Head of Leeds Building Services. .

RESOLVED – The Board agreed with the terms of reference for the inquiry and any additions that would need to be made after evidence in today's meeting was received.

7 Scrutiny Inquiry - East Leeds Responsive Repair Service

The Chair introduced this item and Tony Butler, Head of Leeds Building Services.

TB gave a brief history of his experience and also the history of the Internal Service Provider and how it came to be. It was noted that at the point the ALMOs were merged back into the Council, there were two direct labour organisations – one doing work such as lifts, school repairs, libraries (referred to as Property Maintenance), whereas Construction Services deal with housing repairs and maintenance only. Given this meant there were two lots of overhead costs it was agreed to merge them into one Internal Service Provider from 1st August 2015.

The Chair asked about budget allocations and how this is calculated. TB explained that this is based on the stock numbers and stock condition information. As a follow up the Chair asked if this meant that poorer areas received more money for repairs and maintenance and TB confirmed this was generally the case. The Chair asked if budget information was available for the 3 areas as previously requested. It was confirmed it is available, SG to follow up.

The Chair asked if performance targets had not been met due to data inputting issues. TB explained bringing the two internal organisations together had meant there were some difficulties. TB explained Property Maintenance used a system called Total Mobile and Construction Services used Orchard Direct Works.

It was explained that Construction Services use PDA handheld devices which were liable to faults and there had been issues where work had been completed but the PDA had not picked this up. As a consequence of this a team is investigating completed work. They are also looking at sub-contractors who may complete a job early on in the month but then not invoice for the work until the end of the month which means jobs are not showing as completed within timescale when they had. This has been discussed with all sub-contractors. There is a pilot area where this is being done and that is showing improvements already.

Because of the issues with Direct Works, the contract for this is to be ended and the Internal Service Provider will use only Total Works in future.

TB explained that it is not just a technology issue that has caused problems; there are some human errors as well.

MH asked if it was possible to change to a tablet device. TB noted this is not seamless and the use of Total Mobile would be more effective at dealing with jobs. The Chair asked and it was confirmed if there was a training plan in place to help staff carry out their role effectively.

CG asked the evidence given so far suggests it is not just a system issue and could this be masking the issues? TB acknowledged staffing shortages of operatives to carry out work but there were also issues when it came to transferring location and also training issues with staff on the system.

A question was asked if all repair calls are dealt the same. TB confirmed this was the case and this is because the unique property reference number assigned to each property directs which contract a repair will go to. RI queried if the calls are dealt with the same then why is performance better in West and South Leeds? TB noted there have been issues with recruitment, especially with agency staff. Mears also have the advantage of a scheduling tool and handheld devices which LBS don't have.

A question was asked about the complaints process. TB confirmed that this is same process regardless of who the contractor is. As a follow up it was then queried how many go to the Ombudsman or a designated person and it was explained there were very few progressed to Ombudsman.

PM asked how many operatives the Internal Service Provider has. It was explained there are 396 operatives, and of this 44 are apprentices. However, it was noted that compared nationally with other internal service providers this is a large number but it should be noted that other ISPs do not do other work such as libraries, lifts, schools etc. The split of the 396 operatives is 200 on voids and day to day work and 196 on commercial works.

MH asked if there were any efficiencies to be made between services. TB explained LBS are a non-profit making organisation with any profits that are made returned to the Council.

It was then queried why not do everything in house? TB explained that Leeds is too large for one organisation to deal with. However the ISP may look to take on further work as time goes on, which will occur when contracts naturally expire but this is a decision that would have to be taken at a later date.

TB explained he has a three year improvement project plan. First year is to focus on harmonising terms and conditions of employees as there were differences between the two organisations upon merging. Delivery of training to up skill operatives to become multi skilled and ensure van stocks at appropriate levels so that jobs can be done first time rather than have to make repeat visits, which should improve customer service. It was queried why this is a three year plan and it was explained this is a complex project.

It was queried what work in East Leeds is contracted out and how much work is done in house. TB explained some of the main ones are specialist work such as; gas works, roofing, asbestos removal (though testing is done in-house), drainage. A question was asked if it would be cheaper to move some of these back in house. TB explained these are often specialist services and it reduces the risk to the Council by sub-contracting them out. An example was given about asbestos and if LBS did the removal then LBS would require a licence to do this which would have cost implications and so it is easier for the Council to contract this work out. In response to the amount of work done in house – this is around 90%.

A question was asked about repairs in multi storey blocks and costs of maintaining them. It was acknowledged that repairs to these types of properties are different to a house for example and they can be more expensive. SB asked about the approach to deal with serious leaks in high rise blocks.

The Chair asked other than software and technology what could be improved in repairs.

TB explained access is key – getting a repair done first time and ensuring that operatives have the right stocks on their van can help with this. Also trying to avoid two trades going to a job would help with performance as often this is where there are issues, and multi skilled operatives can help with this.

Right descriptions for jobs and looking at potentially introducing a repairs handbook so that tenants can do this more accurately when reporting repairs.

TB confirmed that both Mears and the Internal Service Provider compare best practice and performance with each other to ensure continuous improvement.

8 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 28th September 2016 at 1:30pm (pre meeting for all Board Members at 1:00pm)