

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 26TH OCTOBER, 2016

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Olga Gailite, Michael Healey, Peter Middleton, Roderic Morgan and Jackie Worthington

18 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

19 Late Items

There were no late items.

20 Apologies for Absence

Received from Christine Gregory, Rita Ighade, Maddie Hunter.

21 Minutes - 28th September 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

22 Chair's Update

The Chair reported he has met with Sharon Guy prior to the meeting to discuss the agenda items for this meeting.

Two Environment and Housing meetings have been held since the last meeting of the Board.

The Chair advised discussions had taken place about the Peckfield landfill site in Micklefield. Elected members wanted to know what the contingency plans were if the landfill site was abandoned. It was noted this was unlikely, but discussions were ongoing between planning officers and the Environment Agency to make sure adequate plans were in place if such circumstances were to happen. The Board wanted further communication with the Environment Agency.

The second meeting the Chair could not attend – however he explained there was discussion around the Lettings Policy Review Consultation and the report that will go for discussion to the Executive Board. There followed a discussion about housing related matters including the forthcoming Housing and Planning Act, Voids and Quality of Private Rented Sector Housing.

The Environment and Housing Board had a discussion around the recommendations and service responses linked to the recent Tenant Scrutiny Board inquiry into the environment of estates. They were also advised that the Tenant Scrutiny Board were in this municipal year undertaking an inquiry into the East Leeds Repairs Service, which is expected to conclude in March 2017 and a working group from the Board were also looking at Lettable Standards that should be able to report by January 2017.

The Chair presented the Housing Leeds annual report which the Chair noted the Board are prominent in it.

The Chair noted as part of the Boards review of our recommendations of Environments of Estates another walkabout has took place in Cottingley and along with the one that took place in Rothwell in September. The board will discuss at the November meeting the changes they have noticed since our report was acted upon.

The Chair also discussed the December 6th conference in Leeds City centre on Tenant Scrutiny. Members were given the details for this and asked to let Lee Ward know if they are wishing to attend before 14th November.

23 Scrutiny Inquiry - East Leeds Repairs

The Chair asked the Planners to explain their roles. They explained their role as responsive planners on a daily basis is to receive orders and appointments for operatives and go through, check UDCs that operatives will be safe or if any special requirements are needed, deal with emergencies and arranging plastering, bricklaying orders and also sub-contractors. Planners also take phone calls from operatives if jobs are bigger than planned, deal with Councillors and member enquiries, attend meetings and tenant forums.

The following questions were asked by the Board members

Are tenants ringing in via the Contact centre?

The Planners explained tenants can call direct as Leeds Building Services have a small telephone team to chase existing repairs or if repairs are not done correctly at the time, or where there has been a no access to the property and a tenant is calling to rebook.

The Chair asked if a tenant still has problems with a repair which has been reported and the operative has carried out the work can they call you after a repair, to which the Planners confirmed was correct.

The Planners also explained there is a recorded message at the Contact Centre which asks tenants if they are reporting a new repair or if they are calling about a repair already reported. This can mean tenants inadvertently coming through to the smaller telephone team and can mean tenants report first time repairs.

The Chair asked would the Contact Centre know you have raised the repair?
The planners replied that they would only know if they checked the system.

We are aware East Leeds has a high number of high rise flats. Does this make dealing with repairs more complex compared to the other areas?

The Planners responded by saying high rise properties do cause difficulties as a repair which is reported can affect more than one flat in the block.

How do you get communal repair reports?

It was explained that Cleaners, Housing Officers, operatives and also tenants themselves. Communal repairs are sometimes picked up from annual home visits.

When a tenant in East Leeds reports a repair via the contact centre does the system treat it in the same way as it would were the tenant in West or South Leeds?

Regardless of where the order is sent we still have the same priorities and policies and procedures regardless if Mears are carrying out a repair or Leeds Building Services.

Do you receive complaints about repairs and how do you deal with them?

We have a complaints team which are based at Navigation House. They administer them and send them out to officers for investigation. The timescales are 10 days for a stage 1 and 15 days for a stage 2 complaint.

If a complaint is received, Leeds Building Services will contact the tenant, and where the complaint relates to poor workmanship we arrange wherever possible try and resolve it there and then to prevent the complaint escalating to stage 2. We don't want complaints to Stage 2 or the Ombudsman and so it is important to resolve them as early as possible. Some complaints are informal which we try and resolve.

SJ explained if we are at fault we use it as a learning outcome but noted that sometimes tenants try to gain the system through complaints and we have to watch for this.

Do you get a large number of stage 2 complaints?

SJ explained that he and other managers deal with stage 2 complaints and on average receive 4 a month. SJ explained that in the context of 1000 repairs a week this seems a good number. SJ explained any learning outcomes go into service improvement plans.

SJ gave an example of a complaint of a leak going from one property into another. Often where access is difficult operatives have to attend out of hours in order to catch tenants especially if they are working. SJ explained even doing this it still can be difficult to gain access and where this is the case we have to do a 24 hour forced entry and this is time consuming, and tenants want a quick resolution especially in multi storey flats.

What areas have the most complaints?

SJ explained this is a difficult question. One issue is bricklaying as it is difficult to recruit staff as our salary rates are not as competitive as the open market and complaints come through as timescales for jobs elapse. However there is a wide variety of complaints and Simon Jarman offered complaints across Leeds Building Services from the Complaints Team for the next meeting.

How do you assess and determine resource levels, for example materials and operative time allocation required in order to deliver repairs?

Each appointed job is given half hour slot so Leeds Building Services are looking to increase this to 45 mins or an hour. This causes problems as it is clear they cannot do some appointment in that timescale. Leeds Building Services use general SOR codes whereas Mears use a specific SOR code which has a specific time allocated to the job.

The Chair asked if an operative go outs to a job, and sees the job will take more than half an hour, does the operative has to report this back to the office. SJ noted this was correct and it links back to authorisation levels and possible recharges to tenants. It was explained that officers can only raise basic repairs to an allotted amount. Where an operative cannot do a job in the allocated time then Leeds Building Services will look into it to identify that the repair was not down to wear and tear.

A discussion was held around orders that come through being incorrect. The Planners confirmed that some officers raise orders to the incorrect code to bring the order forward quicker. This is further complicated because on the system the description for a job is only two lines. This then causes conflict when an operative attends a job as tenants expect it to be completed there and then when it can't be.

Question asked about what training is being done

SJ liaises with the client side and others who attend Contact Centre meetings but high turnover of contact centre staff causes issues. Other issues are housing office staff especially new starters as they are not given any formal training and given immediate access to the order raising system. To try and help Housing Office staff Leeds Building Services have a dedicated line for Housing Officers to ring if they need advice.

Question asked about different heating system in properties.

An instance was given where tenant says explains to the call centre operative the property has gas but this is only into the building in the boiler house. The contact centre doesn't know what heating system every block in the city has and so do they have and so do they have information to help guide them? The Planners explained they do have this information n on the system via UDCs but they are not looking for this information.

SJ spoke about having a dedicated team to deal with Leeds Building Services repairs and that Housing officers would not be able to raise orders. However

any option will have an impact on service users, but this is an option that has already been looked at.

JG asked what the team do if they are not taking repeat calls. Often the team get no access calls and so are dealing with this but also deal with any calls about recalled jobs.

Shouldn't operatives call ahead before arriving at a job?

SJ explained this has been discussed with operatives and is something that is encouraged. There is an issue where the Contact Centre and Housing Officers don't put the correct telephone numbers on the system or don't update them which causes problems but it was acknowledged some tenants don't pass new telephone numbers on. Planners try to avoid this by double checking with tenants their up to date contact number when raising or discussing a repair with the tenant.

How easy is it for you to plan and distribute work to operatives and sub-contractors in order to ensure service targets are met?

On paper it is quite easy to do this as all jobs are divided into 30 minute slots. However, emergencies come in which mean this then becomes more difficult as this has to be factored in. However responsive maintenance means unexpected things happen.

JG asked how much is done in house compared to having to sub contract? Roughly 30% of work is sent to sub-contractors at the moment but all sub-contractors have to go through a procurement exercise which covers both cost and quality. Random post inspections are carried out on 10% of jobs and also on high value jobs.

How do you deal with customers on who have specific requirements related to individual tenants needs?

Planners explained they check UDCs for various notes such as tenants being bed bound so they have a key safe location, or knock loudly on door, language barriers. JG asked if this information has been input already. The Planners confirmed it is and a Planner would only add further requirements onto the system if they are told. However there are some instances where tenant requirements are logged against the property rather than on the person which causes issues if a tenant moves onto another property as these notes do not move with them.

Is there anything in place within systems to monitor and proactively report on outstanding repairs?

Planners explained they can search for outstanding repairs or ones which will hit target in a number of days but as much as possible we try to make appointments. Bricklaying and plastering are the only jobs we don't appoint as these have 60 day appointments.

How do you find using the IT systems impacts or benefits your day to day role? Can you think of any improvements?

SJ explained at present a system used is called SVS which is no longer supported by the company which created, however the service is looking towards using Direct Works. In last few weeks the team have been doing a lot of PDA training so that when this new system is rolled out we can remove inputting of timesheets manually.

JG asked about PDAs – how do they get feedback on a repair? SJ explained that at present we don't do questionnaire whilst the operative on site, however after 4pm the repeat call team then do random sampling and call tenants to obtain feedback. This feedback then goes into internal meetings and service improvements. SJ stressed that PDAs are predominately used for operatives to gain work so they don't have to come into the office to get work, meaning they can start immediately on site. JG asked can the operative then ring in and then say off to next job. SJ confirmed this is the case and will then send the operative on the most eco-friendly route which will also alert the tenant to the fact the operative is on the way to their property.

Are there any barriers that prevent you from doing your work effectively?

SJ noted an issue is poor order raising. If appointments are booked up some staff abuse the emergency system. Also orders are raised to the wrong trade. Planners were also in agreement to this and if the quality of orders could be improved then this would save a lot of time and improve customer service.

Other Comments

SJ explained after 5pm an Out of Hours team come into action. This team deems repairs which come through if they are an emergency or not. If it is we have 2 plumbers and 2 joiners and also electricians who can go out to jobs. They also have a backup supervisor if needed to go out to properties. SJ explained that most orders during the night are fairly simple. All operatives have van stocks so that this helps complete jobs and in some cases operatives do return on a Saturday rather than wait until following Monday if a call comes in late on a Friday. However in some cases emergency orders then have no one at the property to allow access, however the majority of orders raised out of hours are legitimate.

The current system which is being used shows that jobs look to be failing their target but this is not the case because data was not input onto the system. SJ explained that since the summer he has implemented new ways of inputting to make sure target dates are input and work is marked as completed. However this has had a knock on effect of creating more work, whereas if we have the Total Works system this wouldn't be an issue.

The Chair thought if all the Board could attend the demonstration of Total Works would help. SJ also offered to the Board the opportunity of visiting Leeds Building Services which may be useful after visiting the contact centre. JG asked SG to work on the location of where the demonstration could be carried out.

The Chair enquired if any feedback had been received from Simon Costigan in relation to budget allocation. SG is liaising with Housing Leeds to see if it can be provided to the Board.

24 Lettings Policy Review - Draft Feedback

The Chair explained that various Scrutiny Boards are sending in their submissions in response to the Lettings Policy review, and this was Tenant Scrutiny Boards opportunity to give their comments. The report was presented to the Board for their consideration.

The Chair said the Board must be aware of changes that may arise after the publication of the Housing and Planning Act and that a caveat should be put in place as this may change some of the comments.

The Chair suggested that a link is kept between the Council and Housing Associations and that this should be included in the report as the Board feel this is important.

RESOLVED The Board agreed with the content of the report subject to the addition of a caveat around the Housing and Planning Act and the Council/Housing Association link and resolved that the Board give the Chair permission to review this once the additions included and then formally submit as part of the review.

25 Administration of Tenant Scrutiny Board

The Chair introduced this item and explained that at the time when Sharon Guy and Lee Ward replaced Democratic Services, it was agreed there would be a review in six months' time.

The Chair noted that some Board members were absent but explained there could be potential disruption to the Boards work if a decision was not reached. The Chair stated that in his experience since the administrative changes there had not been an impact on the Boards independent status. The Chair also reminded Board Members of the need to consider value for money in all elements of the Boards work, including the use of officer time. It was noted that there had previously been 4 officers supporting the Board which didn't represent good value for money. Board Members agreed this was not appropriate.

The Chair discussed the report in detail and asked Board Members for feedback on the proposed changes. The Board noted some anxiety around the writing of the final report. The Chair gave an example of the Boards independence where he writes his report based on his own notes which are made after each meeting and would gather them together towards the end of the inquiry and this is how the Boards report recommendations are created. Everything is done through the Chair. The Chair assured the Board the report is not done by Housing Leeds. The Chair also suggested there could be a small group that work on the report this time.

The Chair explained the Board would be supported by the Tenant Involvement team and not Housing Leeds.

In his closing remarks the Chair informed the Board of his need to remain neutral on this matter and sought feedback on the report.

RESOLVED The Board resolved unanimously to make a decision at this meeting rather than wait until March but the Chair noted in this instance to prevent any accusation of leading Board Members, he would not advise members how to vote. The Chair noted that the Board was quorate and could make the decision today.

RESOLVED The Board resolved by vote to retain support from the Tenant Involvement Team rather than return to Democratic Services.

RESOLVED The Terms of Reference to be revised and reissued to Board Members to take into account the formal change to arrangements.

26 Date and Time of Next Meeting

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