

## TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 1ST MARCH, 2017

**PRESENT:** John Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Olga Gailite, Michael Healey, Maddie Hunter, Rita Ighade and Jackie Worthington

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

There were no exempt items.

### **48 Late Items**

There were no late items.

### **49 Apologies for Absence**

Peter Middleton, Roderic Morgan

### **50 Minutes - 21st December 2016**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 December 2016 be approved as a correct record.

### **51 Chair's Update**

The Chair gave his apologies for cancelling the previous meeting in February due to unforeseen circumstances.

The Chair has attended two Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board meetings. The Chair gave a brief overview – the January meeting had a discussion on the implications of the 2016 Housing and Planning Act, quality of the private rented sector housing, issues with right to buy and void turnaround times of Council properties. The Chair also noted a report by Mandy Sawyer around governance of Tenant Scrutiny Board and its relationship with the Environment & Housing Scrutiny Board. The Chair spoke to the board about work carried out since 2014 and the two reports published and outlined the improvements their work has had on tenants. The Chair noted that Environment & Housing Scrutiny Board are now setting up a working group, with a view to establishing a closer working relationship with Tenant Scrutiny.

Februarys Environment & Housing Scrutiny Board was around Anti-Social Behaviour, begging and the future of CCTV in the City and progress on

funding this in the future. There was also discussion around Pub Watch in the City.

The Chair reported he had met with Councillor Khan on 24<sup>th</sup> February which touched on the East Leeds repairs inquiry and also recruitment to the Board.

The Chair explained the process for recruitment to the Board. It was noted there was a number of formalities:-

- Interested parties sent an application form and information pack
- Checks are carried out to ensure no serious tenancy breaches are ongoing
- The applicant is invited to have an informal discussion about the Board through the Scrutiny Officer
- The applicant is invited to observe one of the Board's meetings and after that meeting a small group will meet to discuss the person and what they can offer to the Board.
- The Chair, Scrutiny Officer and one Board member would form part of the interview panel.

The Chair noted the key points the Board must consider during recruitment,

1. That it is fair, robust and hold up to challenge.
2. That recruitment addresses any imbalance in the make-up of the board in regard to equality characteristics and also the area of Leeds the tenant comes from. These must take preference in any recruitment so that the Board reflects the wider profile of the city.

## **52 Scrutiny Inquiry - East Leeds Repairs**

The Chair introduced Simon Costigan (SC), Chief Officer Property and Contracts. The Chair explained the background to how the Board decided on this inquiry and also the progress which has been made on it.

SC gave an overview of his role. He explained that he is responsible for the management and delivery of the repairs service across the whole city, delivery of the capital programme, PFI project management and also disrepair.

SC gave an account of Leeds Building Services. Construction Services originally sat within the East North East ALMO as an in house repairs service. When the ALMOs returned back to the Council this created a situation where there were two internal service providers, one being Construction Services providing an in house repairs service to their housing stock and Property Maintenance which had remained in the Council and did repairs to Councils assets across the city as well as delivery of some of the capital programme to housing stock. Because 70% of Property Maintenance's work was carried out to council housing a decision was made to bring both providers together and create one service, hence Leeds Building Services.

Currently the service is going through a reorganisation. Leeds Building Services employ 400 operatives and 120 management and support staff. As an internal provider they provide a repair and maintenance service through directly employing Council staff which generates a rate of return which helps the council deliver its own economic and financial structures, which means Leeds Building Services make a profit which then is reinvested into Council services.

The Chair thanked Simon for this information and noted that a series of questions would be asked.

**The Board has received performance information in last year which showed the responsive repair service in East Leeds was not meeting targets. Can you shed any light on this?**

SC explained when the two organisations were combined the repairs activity was below target. This was down to the different mechanisms for reporting performance. So Construction Services had one set of measures and Property Maintenance had another and when combined the average was low. SC explained that better measures have now been introduced which now means that the service is now meeting its targets on a number of indicators.

The Chair asked if there is a divide between the two former services as during the Board's visit to the Seacroft depot the two services work within the same office. SC explained part of the reorganisation is to bring the two services together with one management team being in place. This working is also because of the different work they have carried out previously and an example was given where an electrician within the former Property Maintenance team could come out to Civic and carry out repairs on certain pieces of specialist equipment which they have installed, where as an electrician going out to carry out repairs at a Council property would not be able to do this and so there is some work to do on training in order that the electrician can do the same as each other.

The Chair asked if the budgets were combined or if they were separate. SC explained there is one trading account and we measure the totality of income and work within one budget. Because of funding streams, council housing repairs are paid out of the HRA whereas the other repairs to non-council housing, like Civic Hall would be paid out of the general fund. Further to this the chair asked if this would cloud the cost of East Leeds repairs? SC explained not so. There is a schedule of rates attached to any job that is irrespective of where the repair is carried out across the city. This means you can then assess the cost of the job across different areas of the city.

SB asked about lifts in high rise properties and also communal doors, would it be Property Maintenance staff who would come out to these? SC explained that on lifts they are all done by Property Maintenance as they have the expertise regardless if it's in a housing estate or a Council building like Civic Hall. SB asked where the funding would come from, and SC explained that the charge would come from the appropriate budget as noted previously.

**RESOLVED** That revised performance data is provided to the Board by SC.

**You have given us figures in regard to the percentage breakdown of the repairs budget for East, South and West areas. Can you explain how the budget is determined and how it has been allocated and why?**

SC explained that some of this is historical and that when the ALMOs moved back into the Council the budgets were kept the same, however work has been done to try and understand why the budget is calculated in this way and is it correct to do it in this way.

SC explained there is a formula in order to come to these budget figures. For example for multi storey flats it relates to the number of these in an area and as East Leeds has the most they get a larger proportion of this budget. Work is being done to try and equalise this over a period of time, the reason for not doing it in one go is it would be disproportionate to other areas.

**Can you explain how jobs are priced both at East Leeds and across the rest of the city and do you do comparisons, for example a job done by Mears and the same job done in house at East Leeds?**

A piece of work is being done to understand this. Currently this isn't the case and we need to make changes in order to make it more reflective. For example we pay more in West than South, and Mears compared to East we pay more in the East contract.

SC explained some of the differences in that within each contract would have a list of all the schedule of rates and each provider would be asked to price against each job. However for East Leeds because there is an internal market there is a need to build in a rate of return to the price and this is keeping people employed within the Council, whereas money spent on an external provider it leaves the Council and is money 'lost'.

**As part of the Boards current investigation, we consulted with Ward Members and Tenants. Feedback around jobs where follow on work is required and lack of communication from LBS was quoted. An example of this is reporting damp which required more than one visit, however the tenant was not kept informed about the repair and had to make numerous contacts. Can you explain the process which should happen for a job which requires more than one visit?**

SC explained:-

- the repair is received and we assess it and what is needed
- make an appointment with the customer so they know who is coming, when and what work is going to be carried out.
- The operative should ring ahead then to check the customer is in the property.
- If the operative cannot carry out the work on that visit they should then contact their supervisor who can then make a further appointment to complete the work at the customer's convenience.

SC acknowledged this isn't as robust as it should be but we are introducing performance management against the process to improve on this in the future.

The Chair asked about Total Works and that this would alleviate some of the problems. SC explained this is part of a wider rollout which is made of total works mobile and a scheduling tool. The scheduling tool will automate a lot of the processes and will help for that job which operative needs to complete it and where the nearest one is which will make the service more efficient and reduce travel time. SC explained this would be implemented around July/August 2017.

The Chair asked about the new system and how the workforce is receiving this and if he envisioned any problems. Currently there is negotiation with Trade Unions around this and there is some resistance to the new working practices. SC explained the system can make the workforce more efficient to do more jobs, and that a conservative estimate of 30 minutes per day more work could be gained from these new working practices.

SB asked about out of hours and would this change with the new system. SC explained the out of hours service is provided by both Mears and Leeds Building Services. We are looking at the service and if there is a better and more economically way of providing it, however the response times must remain as they are, even if the cost is higher. The Chair asked do Mears and Leeds Building Services stick to their contract areas on out of hours or do they move across to cover work where necessary? SC noted that practicalities mean that cross boundary work is done where it is required in order to meet out of hours response times.

The Chair asked how many subcontracts we use. SC couldn't give an exact number, it is not a large amount, but did note work is being done to reduce use of these as again this is money lost to the Council when an external contractor is used but due to peaks and troughs we have to call on them.

**We have learnt during our investigation that at times because of lack of certain trades, Leeds Building Services have to use outside contractors that obviously increases costs. Can you advise are salaries offered by East Leeds competitive enough to attract more specialised tradesmen and hence in the long term save money?**

The Chair explained during the visit to the depot that there understood that there is a shortfall of certain trades and this could be due to not being able to pay the 'market rate' and longer term would it not be better to pay them this rate to save money.

SC explained when the first phase was implemented we amalgamated salaries so everyone was on the same pay band which meant some people took a significant pay cut due to how some operatives were carrying out jobs. A benchmark was carried out to ensure we were paying the going rate for the various trades however there is an issue on bricklaying which is volatile due to the national picture, and if there is a lot of building going on then they will

move to where the money is and no council could compete with this. SC explained initially some operatives said they would leave because of the new pay structure however only two left and this showed that the total package for working for the Council were positive, such as leave, sickness pay and pension.

**During the Boards current investigation the Board have been presented with examples where communication between the Contact Centre taking the initial repair call from tenants which was felt to be lacking by a member of LBS. What's your view on this?**

SC explained the Contact Centre have pictures in order to help them order a repair accurately. Where an operatives arrives they can do work over and above what the job card says, for example rehang kitchen door but when they get there a drawer front needs repairing they can do this as it saves resources and they would just report back the work they carried out on return to the office.

SB explained the issue where a tenant cannot explain exactly what repair they require and they give incorrect information which means the Contact Centre can never get the repair accurate and is felt where this is the case that someone with more knowledge contact them and sort it out with them what is really wanted. SC explained this should happen now and where this cannot be worked out from the call they should then carry out a visit to identify the repair required.

The Chair explained in some cases information from the Contact Centre was not accurate and tenants are getting through to Seacroft depot by pressing the wrong buttons and instead of them taking a second call for a repair it's the first time and could this be improved by having staff taking these calls directly at the depot? SC explained this would have unintended consequences and staff resources would need to be increased and then this would have an impact on staff left at the contact centre. What needs to happen is improve the first point of contact, and recently we have created a single team taking repair calls in a team so they gain experience to ask the right questions. We are now encouraging staff go to the Contact Centre and vice versa so they build up a relationship.

The Chair inquired further that surely if this is how they work currently it is just a case of moving staff from one office to another. SC qualified his remarks by saying there is a Council desire for a 'golden number' and this is why it would need to remain as is.

**Can you explain how Housing Leeds ensures consistent delivery of service standards are applied between different contractors.**

SC explained that service standards need to be understood by both the contractor and they are applied the same and the customer knows what should be delivered to them as otherwise you cannot measure it correctly. SC noted that all standards have been revised and sent to contractors and tenants and we are currently measuring these under a performance management framework.

The Chair asked if because Leeds Building Services is in house provider, that due diligence is not carried out as much as it would be to an external contractor. SC noted he would agree with that and it needs to change. There is a robust framework being introduced to manage this like with external contractors and it is disappointing we are not there yet.

**During our visit to the Depot we were shown the Leeds Building Services part but also the Commercial Team who are also based in the same office. Are the Commercial Team totally separate from Leeds Building Services or do the sections share staff and resources in times of shortages?**

SC explained we are going through a staff re-alignment where we are presenting a final draft proposal which will deal with those issues which should help eliminate silo working and create a consistent and shared provision.

**You inherited when you became Chief Officer the structure that East Leeds repairs was in-house. If you were able to review this would you opt for the same system today if you had a choice?**

SC explained he would not. And went on to explain this is because we have had to reorganise the operatives who work there and carry out rationalisation. We are now working through the second phase which is the management side which we hope to introduce by 1<sup>st</sup> April. One of the ways a more robust management of the Leeds Building Services is to have a new set up for managing their contract as they are currently self managing, so now it has a client/contractor split within Property and Contracts. One manager will manage the service and another will monitor their performance.

The Chair asked if SC was satisfied with the quality of work being done by Leeds Building Services. For the majority yes he is but there are some complaints which mean we always need to keep improving.

The Chair asked if it were possible would he consider going back to all having external contractors or has too much time passed that it would be too costly to do this now? SC explained it is always an option but it would be a retrograde step as you would have to make 520 people redundant or move them into a new organisational structure which wouldn't have the same terms and conditions and also there would be a loss to council funding. However it was stressed there needs to be value for money and continually challenging ourselves to improve.

The Chair asked if one large repair contract or smaller contracts are best way to deliver a repairs service. SC explained there can be positives and negatives for both options.

The Chair thanked Simon for his attendance and time to answer the Boards questions.

## **53 Surveys Update**

LW explained at November's meeting it was agreed the Board would consult with Councillors and involved tenants living in East Leeds by means of an online survey. Further to this an update was provided on the responses received.

## **COUNCILLOR RESPONSES**

Key themes arising from the responses include:

- Mixture of both positive and negative feedback
- Too long to carry out some types of repairs was a common theme.
- The number of repeat contacts required with some type of repairs was a concern, and perceived lack of communication between Leeds Building Services and the tenant was poor which lengthened the time taken to complete the repair.

Other comments from Councillors included:

- Poor communications
- Worse since coming back from the ALMOs
- Lack of respect for tenants
- Example of a tenant with damp who had numerous visits by officers and maintenance staff and the damp is still there
- A comment that if a private company was given this job by a private customer and they carried out to the standard of some of LBS repairs you would not pay them

## **TENANT REPRESENTATIVE RESPONSES**

- Majority of tenants who responded had received a repair in the last 12 months
- Majority of tenants who responded stated they were satisfied with the overall quality of their home
- Majority of tenants were satisfied with the way Housing Leeds deals with their repairs, however of the remainder was split equally between neither or dissatisfied responses.
- Ease of reporting a repair was split between majority being satisfied but a third were dissatisfied
- Majority of tenants were satisfied in the accuracy of the repair ordered.
- Speed of completion of work was split between satisfied and dissatisfied
- Half of those who responded were happy with the quality of work, but a quarter were not satisfied and a quarter gave no opinion on this
- Around half were satisfied their repair was done right first time but just under half felt dissatisfied
- On the question of insulation and how good it is at keeping the property warm, 52% stated it was good, 29% thought it was poor and the remainder felt it was neither.

Comments from the tenant representatives survey were:-



- The main issue is reporting a repair but this has improved
- Outside paintwork has been hanging off the fascia boards for the past 14 years at least.
- Reporting online repairs is easier than waiting to get through on the phone
- I have reported mould in my house a long time ago and up to now nothing has been done regarding this.
- How silly it's getting now with the repair side when they have make three time trip for repair and three month it takes
- I was concerned when my wet floor shower would not drain. An electrician followed by a plumber followed by another electrician followed by a plumber who told me it needed drain experts. Three weeks later the flat drains became blocked again a plumber attended who asked for a drain expert to be called. The problem turned out to be a problem with the stack in the block which have not been cleared and cleaned for a while
- Not had any big repairs done in the last year, I am happy with items corrected and work better
- Online repair service needs to allow a photo option to upload along with the order.
- Repairs seem to be done to a minimum standard to save money. It would be nice to repair to a good or high standard. I appreciate costs would be higher, but you expect standards from your tenants, we should be able to expect the same from you.
- It's long time waiting for repair to carry out
- More communication. Need to be kept informed when the work would be done.
- Satisfied with home repairs, but extremely disappointed with repairs to communal areas and other communal problems.

## **54 Election Process for Chair**

At this point in the meeting the Chair stood down from this position within Tenant Scrutiny Board and the Scrutiny Officer took lead for this item.

SG explained as part of governance of the Board there was a requirement each year to hold an election for Chair. Each member had been provided with a letter in their agenda packs prior to the meeting explaining the situation and offering them an opportunity to stand for Chair if they wished. SG asked members to confirm that they had received this which was confirmed by all in attendance.

SG explained one expression of interest for the Chair role has been received and asked if there was anyone else who wished to put their names forward for the Chair role to do so now. No other members came forward and it was announced that John Gittos has expressed interest and so a vote was required to elect him to Chair.

**RESOLVED** The Board voted by show of hands unanimously 6-0 to elect John Gittos to the role of Chair for a further 12 months.

**55 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017 at 1:30pm (pre meeting for all Board Members at 1:00pm)

**THE MEETING WAS CLOSED AT 3:15PM**