

Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board - Review of wider tenant involvement groups (Housing Leeds Tenant Involvement Framework)

Summary Note of the Working Group Meeting held on Tuesday 25th April 2017

Introduction.

1. During its October 2016 meeting, the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board discussed the role of the Tenant Scrutiny Board and sought further clarification surrounding its governance and support arrangements. This information was provided to the Board at its January 2017 meeting.
2. In addition, the Board also received information regarding the Housing Leeds Tenant Involvement Framework which gives tenants the opportunity to take part in a range of formal groups, each with a particular theme or focus. Key parts of this framework included the strategic tenant body VITAL (Voice of Involved Tenants across Leeds) and the local Housing Advisory Panels. However, it was noted that the Tenant Scrutiny Board works independently to the rest of the involvement framework.
3. In consideration of this, the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board identified the need to ensure a more coordinated approach to wider tenant involvement and therefore expressed a wish to set up a working group meeting to review the role of wider tenant involvement groups, with specific reference to the Housing Leeds Tenant Involvement Framework.
4. At that stage, it was also reported that Housing Leeds was undertaking a review of the Tenant Involvement Framework with VITAL to enable the service to:
 - Engage with a greater number of tenants in more informal and local ways – for example using more pop up consultation on local issues or using the mobile office;
 - Having a streamlined 'formal' structure of meetings – that pull in more Customer Insight and focus on service improvement;
 - Supporting and working with others to do more local community projects, such as the Parenting Programme or focussing more on Digital Inclusion and all the benefits this can bring;
 - Closely link the work of tenant engagement, involvement and community investment to the themes of the housing strategy.
5. The Scrutiny Board held its working group meeting on 25th April 2017 and considered the role, membership and governance arrangements linked to the various Housing Leeds tenant involvement groups/forums. The working group also received an update following the Housing Leeds/Vital review which had led to a revised Tenant Engagement Framework.
6. The working group meeting was attended by the following individuals:
 - Councillor Alan Lamb, Chair of the Scrutiny Board
 - Councillor Jonathan Bentley, Member of the Scrutiny Board
 - Councillor Ann Blackburn, Member of the Scrutiny Board
 - Councillor Angela Gabriel, Member of the Scrutiny Board
 - Councillor Al Garthwaite, Member of the Scrutiny Board

- Councillor Dawn Collins, Member of the Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Pauleen Grahame, Member of the Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Mick Lyons, Member of the Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Kevin Ritchie, Member of the Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Gerald Wilkinson, Member of the Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Sharon Hamilton, Support Executive Member for Communities
- Angela Brogden, Principal Scrutiny Adviser
- Jill Wildman, Chief Officer Housing Management
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services
- Ian Montgomery, Housing Manager
- Martin Dean, Area Leader, Communities and Environment
- John Gittos, Chair of Tenant Scrutiny Board
- Sharon Guy, Housing Manager

7. This summary note sets out the key issues arising from the working group's discussion and also presents proposed recommendations for consideration by the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board.

Summary of key issues.

Ensuring compliance with the HCA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2012

8. The working group was informed of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, and specifically within this, the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2012. This Standard outlines the obligations for all social housing landlords in England to provide a wide range of opportunities for tenants to influence and be involved in:
 - formulation of the landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities;
 - making decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including setting of service standards;
 - scrutiny of the landlord's performance and making recommendations on how performance could be improved;
 - management of their homes or repairs and maintenance services.
9. Previously, the Council's arm's length management organisations (ALMOs) took responsibility for establishing appropriate tenant involvement frameworks to meet these statutory requirements. However, following the decision to bring the Council's housing responsibilities back in-house, the first Housing Leeds Tenant Involvement Framework was established in 2015. This sought to harmonise the previous ALMO involvement frameworks whilst still continuing to meet statutory obligations.
10. Linked to this, the working group acknowledged the establishment of a new strategic tenant body - VITAL (Voice of Involved Tenants At Leeds) – which was set up to assist in facilitating the involvement of tenants in influencing the formulation of housing related policy and strategic priorities in accordance with statutory requirements.
11. However, it was acknowledged that 3 other less formal citywide tenant and leaseholder groups were also established as consultative forums around planned changes to policies and procedures linked to particular service areas. These were the Voice of Older Leeds Tenants (VOLT); High Rise Advisory Group; and the Repairs and Investment Group. To aid co-ordination and information sharing of the

work undertaken by these specialist tenant and leaseholder groups, the working group was pleased to learn that the respective Chairs and Vice Chairs of these groups have continued to form part of the membership for VITAL.

12. Reference was also made to the Housing Advisory Panels, known as HAPs, which were established as tenant led groups. There are currently 11 panels across Leeds that monitor the performance of local housing services and also have budgets to fund environmental improvements and activities that benefit tenants and the local community. However, in discussing the membership and accountability arrangements in place for the HAPs, the working group had raised a number of issues, which have been highlighted separately within this summary note.
13. To ensure tenant representation at a higher strategic level, it was reported that 3 members of VITAL and the Chairs of the Housing Advisory Panels are also represented on the Council's Housing Advisory Board.
14. The working group also discussed the role and membership of the Tenant Scrutiny Board, which was formally established to comply with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard in terms of tenants being able to influence and be involved in 'the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved'.
15. It was noted that Housing Leeds had worked in conjunction with Corporate Governance to develop the Terms of Reference and Procedure Rules for the Tenant Scrutiny Board and that these were formally agreed with the Tenant Scrutiny Board in 2014. The working group also acknowledged that the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board had already received details of this during its January 2017 meeting.
16. Whilst appreciating the independence of the Tenant Scrutiny Board outside of the Tenant Involvement Framework, the working group welcomed the Board's ongoing commitment to engage widely with other tenant groups in helping to inform its own work programme. It was also acknowledged that the Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board regularly attends the Housing Advisory Board to provide updates on the work undertaken by the Board and to formally report on the findings of any specific inquiries.

Strengthening links between the Council's housing related Scrutiny Board and other established housing related bodies.

17. Whilst acknowledging that the remits of the Council's Scrutiny Boards generally cover a wide range of service areas, the working group recognised the need to strengthen links between the Council's housing related Scrutiny Board and other established housing related bodies, with particular reference made to the Tenant Scrutiny Board, VITAL and the Housing Advisory Board.
18. The working group acknowledged the commitment already demonstrated by the current Tenant Scrutiny Board Chair in regularly attending and observing meetings of the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board and then formally providing feedback to his Board colleagues.
19. In relation to the Housing Advisory Board, the working group also acknowledged that the Executive Board Member for Communities, who currently Chairs the Housing Advisory Board, also commits to attending meetings of the Scrutiny Board when discussing housing related matters.

20. Moving forward, the working group discussed various approaches to help aid information sharing and effective engagement between the Council's housing related Scrutiny Board and the other established housing related bodies that could be adopted as good working practice. These included:
- Mutual sharing of formal minutes of meetings;
 - Better co-ordination of meeting schedules between the relevant Scrutiny Board and Tenant Scrutiny Board, particularly if the Scrutiny Board adopts a service themed approach to its meetings;
 - A mutual agreement between the relevant Scrutiny Board and Tenant Scrutiny Board to undertake proactive engagement at the start of a municipal year to share ideas around potential areas for scrutiny and also avoid duplication of work;
 - A mutual agreement between the relevant Scrutiny Board and Tenant Scrutiny Board to introduce dedicated meeting agenda items to facilitate regular updates. Linked to this, an invitation should also be extended to the respective Chairs to present their Board's update;
 - Mutual agreements for the Chairs of the relevant Scrutiny Board and VITAL to undertake proactive engagement, particularly at the start of a municipal year, to raise awareness of their respective functions and also share ideas around potential areas of work.

A recognised need to refocus engagement with all tenants.

21. The working group acknowledged that Housing Leeds had already recognised the need to evaluate the Tenant Involvement Framework following its first year in operation. In conjunction with VITAL, Housing Leeds had set out to review the successes and outcomes of the existing framework, but was also keen to explore further opportunities to engage with a greater number of tenants in more informal and local ways. Linked to this, particular consideration was given to streamlining the 'formal' structure of meetings whilst promoting a greater emphasis around pulling in more customer insight and focus on service improvement.
22. The working group therefore discussed the findings of this evaluation, which had led to a revised Tenant Engagement Framework (see Appendix 1) being adopted from 1st April 2017.
23. In recognition of the added value gained through tenant engagement when developing service improvement measures, the working group welcomed this revised engagement framework. In particular, whilst acknowledging that VITAL remained central to the overall framework, recognition was given to the Council's drive towards strengthening digital engagement opportunities with local tenants via the Council's website and also through social media.

The need for Community Committees to have greater awareness and engagement with the various tenant involvement groups within their localities, including VITAL.

24. The working group received a copy of the latest tenant involvement leaflet which promotes the various engagement forums and activities available to tenants (see appendix 2). However, the working group emphasised the need to also ensure that Elected Members are kept fully informed and also engaged with the various tenant involvement groups within their localities, as well as the work being undertaken by the strategic tenant body - VITAL. It was felt that this would be best achieved via the Community Committee frameworks.

Ensuring that Housing Advisory Panels remain fit for purpose.

25. There are currently 11 Housing Advisory Panels (HAPs) across Leeds and each panel is made up of between 10 and 12 council tenants and also include Councillor representatives from within the HAP area. The HAPs were established to monitor the performance of local housing services but also have budgets to fund environmental improvements and activities that benefit tenants and the local community.
26. It was noted that the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all HAPs also regularly meet as a HAP Chairs Group to help develop how HAPs work and share ideas and case studies of projects that have worked well that could also work in other parts of the city.
27. However, a number of issues were raised by the working group around the decision making processes of the HAPs, particularly when determining some funding applications for projects. It was also felt that the strategic direction of the work being undertaken by HAPs was being pre-determined by the HAP Chairs Group without formal consultation with other HAP members. As such, the working group recognised a need to evaluate the role and governance arrangements associated with HAPs to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.
28. Linked to this, it was reported that Housing Leeds is already committed to undertake a review of Housing Advisory Panels in terms of influencing local service delivery and priorities and had waited until the Council's new directorate structures had been formalised before scoping and conducting this review. As such, the working group emphasised the importance of ensuring that Scrutiny is also engaged in this review, particularly in light of the issues that have already been raised by the working group at this stage.

Acknowledging recognised service priorities for 2017/18 around tenant engagement

29. As well as the pending review of Housing Advisory Panels, the working group acknowledged and discussed other service priorities that had been identified by Housing Leeds in relation to tenant engagement for 2017/18. These involved:
 - Using the survey of tenants and residents (STAR) outcomes to drive service improvement priorities via STAR Action Plan;
 - Further embedding other customer insight to inform customer issues / priorities;
 - Strengthening digital engagement opportunities via website / social media;
 - Targeted recruitment of underrepresented groups to tenant forums, including young people, BME groups;
 - Assisting to increase mutual awareness of Tenant Scrutiny Board, VITAL and Council Scrutiny Boards;
 - Use learning from the Environment and Communities Directorate to enhance the community engagement offer of Housing Leeds.
30. In addition to these, it was also acknowledged that further work would be undertaken to develop good practice across the city linked to service feedback to tenants and Elected Members. This was considered a particular priority in Estate Management, which had already been flagged by Tenant Scrutiny Board following an earlier inquiry. It was therefore noted that the Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board would be following this up again with his Board.

31. However, it was suggested that the successor Scrutiny Board maintains a watching brief of all the tenant engagement priorities set by Housing Leeds for 2017/18.

Proposed recommendations.

32. Reflecting on the above key issues, the following recommendations are proposed for the consideration and agreement of the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board.

Desired Outcome – That effective arrangements are in place to aid information sharing and effective engagement between the Council’s housing related Scrutiny Board and other established housing related bodies, with particular focus around Tenant Scrutiny Board, VITAL and Housing Advisory Board.

Recommendation 1 – That the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support supports the Director of Resources and Housing in developing arrangements to aid information sharing and effective engagement between the Council’s housing related Scrutiny Board and other established housing related bodies, with particular focus around Tenant Scrutiny Board, VITAL and Housing Advisory Board.

Such arrangements should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Mutual sharing of formal minutes of meetings;
- Better co-ordination of meeting schedules between the relevant Scrutiny Board and Tenant Scrutiny Board, particularly if the Scrutiny Board adopts a service themed approach to its meetings;
- A mutual agreement between the relevant Scrutiny Board and Tenant Scrutiny Board to undertake proactive engagement at the start of a municipal year to share ideas around potential areas for scrutiny and also avoid duplication of work;
- A mutual agreement between the relevant Scrutiny Board and Tenant Scrutiny Board to introduce dedicated meeting agenda items to facilitate regular updates. Linked to this, an invitation should also be extended to the respective Chairs to present their Board’s update;
- Mutual agreements for the Chairs of the relevant Scrutiny Board and VITAL to undertake proactive engagement, particularly at the start of a municipal year, to raise awareness of their respective functions and also share ideas around potential areas of work.

Desired Outcome – That appropriate mechanisms are in place across Community Committees to aid their awareness and engagement with the various tenant involvement groups within their localities, as well as the strategic tenant body - VITAL.

Recommendation 2 – That the Director of Resources and Housing works with the Director of Communities and Environment to develop and adopt appropriate mechanisms across Community Committees that will aid their awareness and engagement with the various tenant involvement groups within their localities, as well as the strategic tenant body - VITAL.

Desired Outcome – That the Council’s review of Housing Advisory Panels includes the views of Scrutiny.

Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Resources and Housing ensures that Scrutiny is actively engaged in the Council’s review of Housing Advisory Panels.

Updated Tenant Engagement Framework

