

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 2018

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Roderic Morgan and
Jackie Worthington

65 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None.

66 Late Items

None.

67 Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Olga Gailite, Michael Healey, Peter Middleton, Maddie Hunter, Rita Ighade.

68 Minutes - 17th January 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2018 be approved as a correct record.

69 Chair's Update

The Chair updated members there would be a change to administration of the Board. The Chair explained he had spoken to other members not in attendance today for their views in advance of the meeting. The Chair expressed that he and the Board were disappointed that the changes are happening with immediate effect rather than waiting until the conclusion of the current inquiry.

The Board noted that when the previous changes to administration took place, a probationary period was agreed whereby the new arrangements were reviewed to see if they were working well.

The Chair noted in his meeting with the Head of Neighbourhood Services a commitment was made that support would continue to the Board and that their independence would remain in place. The Board felt assured by the fact they were told by the Head of Neighbourhood Services that a new Manager would be starting in the Tenant Engagement Team who could then assume the role of the outgoing Scrutiny Officer.

Members present also expressed that recruitment to the Board needed to take place before a new inquiry commences.

RESOLVED – That the Board agreed to the administration changes subject to a review in July 2018 to ensure it is working well.

The Chair on behalf of himself and the Board thanked Sharon Guy as Scrutiny Officer for her work with the Scrutiny Board over the past few years.

70 Update on East Leeds Recommendation Tracking

Rob Goor introduced himself as Responsive Repairs Service Manager and explained he was attending on behalf of Simon Costigan, Chief Officer who was unable to attend the meeting due to another commitment. RG went through the recommendations and gave feedback on progress so far.

Recommendation 1 – *That Housing Leeds provide dedicated repairs training for new staff as part of their induction and regularly review training needs of existing staff. In addition, that Housing Leeds supports the Contact Centre’s training programme.*

RG explained the service has invested heavily in training for frontline visiting staff which means that more complex repair types can be resolved better, for example for damp related repairs. Better repair equipment has also been provided to surveyors to diagnose problems.

Two Officers were also located at the Contact Centre from April to January to help train officers. Processes were developed which means that repairs are better dealt with and more efficiently.

It was asked by a member why they are not there now and what would happen because of the high turnover of staff at the Contact Centre – RG explained that the Officers who were taught would pass this knowledge on and also new guidance has been developed which means repairs can be ordered more effectively.

RG explained that the repairs ordering process now needs to be improved in other parts of the service which raise repair orders, for example the Housing Office or Community Hubs, as the Contact Centre only raise about 40% of the total number of repairs. RG noted that when benchmarking has been carried out as to the ways that tenants can report repairs, that Leeds has a lot more ways to report than other organisations which can be a good thing but a balance needs to be found to ensure consistency in quality.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved recommendation 1 is closed.

Recommendation 2 – *Implement and roll out the Total Works system.*

RG explained that Total Works became operational in July 2017 and all operatives are using the system which is reducing back office administration.

The Chair noted in his discussion with Officers that the system has a few issues, which RG said is an honest appraisal of the system but he acknowledged it's partly down to Total Works but also how it has been adapted to how East Leeds want. RG noted visits have been carried out to other organisations who are using Total Works to identify improvements.

It was asked by the Board if the number of repairs being carried out per day has increased since the system was introduced, as this was explained at the visit to Leeds Building Services as something which would occur with the new system. RG noted that he couldn't answer this with certainty, but processes still need to be improved to improve efficiency. During the inquiry members were informed the Total Works system would reduce the number of visits to stores. The Chair asked if this had occurred, and RG confirmed this was the case.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved Housing Leeds should provide an update in 12 months' time to report on progress.

Recommendation 3 – *Implement new working practices through Total Works, in relation to creating additional appointments, by reducing waiting times and increased tenant satisfaction.*

RG explained improvement in customer satisfaction has not yet impacted as expected. Communication through the repair process is cited as the main reason customers are dissatisfied. RG noted the scheduling system has not been rolled out alongside Total Works and so manual intervention is currently having to be carried out. It is hoped once the scheduling tool is rolled out this will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved Housing Leeds should provide an update in 12 months' time to report on progress.

Recommendation 4 – *Improve customer satisfaction by using and acting on learning from complaints. Improve the process and communication where follow on work is required including follow up work after accessing out of hours service. Take ownership of complaints and enquires and see through to conclusion.*

RG explained as with the previous recommendation where follow-up work is required that this is a cause of dissatisfaction. It was also noted complaint responses were previously not managed well across teams, and this has been pushed hard by management to improve quality of responses and meeting targets for response, and ensuring the officer dealing with the complaint takes ownership. The service have also been making use of the complaints to learn lessons from them.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved recommendation 4 is closed.

Recommendation 5 – *That Leeds Building Services, work with the Contact Centre, HUBs and local housing offices to ensure staff know how to identify*

key properties types such as heating type, to enable more accurate repair reporting. Ensure staff are adequately trained and information is readily available on systems to enable accurate reporting in relation to dual communal heating systems, for example; gas boiler but with electrical components in individual flats, to ensure the correct trade is allocated. Provide portable heating for tenants when repair is not possible.

RG noted that this comes back to the repairs reporting process. Currently RG view is there are too many people ordering repairs and this needs to be reviewed to identify a model that best suits Leeds and Leeds tenants.

RG noted that there should always be supply of portable heaters to provide to tenants where we cannot repair a heating system and assurance was sought by management that this was happening, through informing operatives they have a supply with them, though repairing the system this would be the first priority.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved recommendation 5 is closed.

Recommendation 6 – *Administration on repairs performance is improved – so that orders are closed down in a timely manner on systems, including sub-contractor orders. This will ensure that performance reporting is not adversely affected.*

Leeds Building Services are currently ensuring that sub-contractor invoicing is dealt with more efficiently as it is money which is leaving the Council. A member asked why we employ sub-contractors and couldn't the Council employ these trades to cover work needed, however RG noted whilst the Council could do this, some types of work comes in peaks and troughs and there could be a situation where some operatives would not have enough work so using sub-contractors enables the direct workforce to be maintained at an optimum level.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved Housing Leeds should provide an update in 12 months' time to report on progress.

Recommendation 7 – *Make repair raising more accessible online. Whilst this is currently available, it is not actively promoted or widely utilised. Ensure that systems are user friendly, use Plain English and make use of photographs. Utilise involved tenants to critique the service and ensure all follow up enquiries are dealt with promptly.*

RG explained the new Civica Housing Management system would improve this, however the system is still being implemented and this improvement which will be delivered within phase two of the project would likely not be available until at least the end of this year.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved recommendation 7 is closed.

Recommendation 8 – *That there is a named contact at Leeds Building Service for new and existing staff to reference complex repair enquiries, including support with communal repairs.*

RG explained that doing this would not be a viable solution as problems can occur where a member of staff isn't in work, for example on leave or on sick, and also with staff moving positions. The service is committed to improve and offer more resources – so for example the call handling team has increased from 2 to 3 staff and a manager is being recruited and a recent report has shown this has had a positive improvement in performance.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved recommendation 8 is closed.

Recommendation 9 – *Where a trade has a shortfall in operative numbers, Leeds Building Services consider apprenticeships in these trades and continues to work to upskill operatives in multi skilled trades.*

RG reported that 25 apprentices are working with Leeds Building Services. They have been recruited based on the needs of the business. It was explained that they would have a principal trade and be multi skilled in other trades. For the future, Leeds Building Services would be taking on an additional 65 operatives to help with the expansion of the business.

In closing a member asked about how they had found previously there was a split between the housing side and the non-housing side of the LBS business which focused on other Council assets and has this been resolved? RG confirmed it has improved and is now operating more as one business.

RESOLVED - The Board resolved recommendation 9 is closed.

The Chair asked how the report had been taken in Leeds Building Services. RG noted that it had been welcomed as an opportunity to improve.

The Chair thanked RG for his attendance and updates to the Board.

71 Surveys Update

The Scrutiny Officer gave an update on the survey which was sent to involved tenants and residents groups across Leeds by email. It was noted that we are still receiving replies through the post.

In summary, the feedback presented was mixed, with some comments stating the time to deal with the ASB complaint was poor.

A final update on the survey will be presented to the Board at March's meeting.

72 Update on Leeds response to Grenfell Tower

The Chair gave an overview of the Environment, Communities and Housing Scrutiny Board inquiry into the Leeds response to the fire at Grenfell Tower. It was noted that the report is contained in the meeting pack. He explained that both Chief Officers of Housing Leeds attended the working group, along with a member from VITAL (Voice of Involved Tenants Across Leeds) and the Leeds High Rise Strategy group.

The Chair updated the Board on the areas of the report based on his attendance at those meetings.

Fire checks were explained as being done by the cleaners which they received extra training on fire safety. It was noted checks form part of their existing workload. The checks are done daily, including weekends with forms to complete. In enhanced blocks this is done twice a day. However, some tenants had been told by cleaning teams they don't have enough time and so there was some concerns around this.

The Scrutiny Officer gave a definition on Enhanced Blocks, explaining these blocks have a more intensive housing management approach to them. A query was asked as to how we know these checks are being done. One suggestion was using hand held technology – currently cleaners are filling in paper forms means this can lead to delays on getting information to Housing Offices, and technology would help mean this is done more efficiently and quicker. An example could also include having barcodes on the wall of each floor which could be scanned which would record the date and time of the check.

Another issue was the possibility of getting tenants more involved in fire safety and cleaning checks. However, the working group felt this should not be in place of Council staff.

Parking was an issue in some blocks especially at night which means emergency services cannot get close enough to the block. Chutes were discussed as sometimes being too small or inadequate and checks were being done on these.

Bulky waste was raised as an issue during the inquiry, but it was noted that this was also picked up in Tenant Scrutiny Inquiry of Environment of Estates inquiry. Some blocks have areas where bulky items can be kept however this is not the case in all blocks, and some blocks have had increased collections to help alleviate this problem. The Council is carrying out a project to look at this area of work.

The Chair gave an update about sprinklers, and that work in sheltered high rise blocks to install these have been completed. Work has now begun on other high rise blocks in the City, beginning with Cottingley Heights and Towers.

There will be another meeting in July to give a further update on progress for this report by that Board.

73 Mobile Working Update

The Scrutiny Officer gave an update to mobile working, which came out of the Annual Home Visit inquiry. The update informed members that a new Housing Management system is being introduced which has meant that further development on the current mobile working system is suspended until the new system is introduced.

The current mobile working will continue as usual where it has already been implemented.

It was explained the service bought more MiFi units than were needed and these have been distributed to other areas of the Council, including Sheltered Housing Officers so they can conduct mobile working at schemes. This has created a saving in the budget for this as other areas of the Council have made a contribution to the ongoing costs.

74 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 14th March 2018 at 1:15pm
(Pre meeting for all Board members at 1:00pm)

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 3:00 PM