

## TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2022

**PRESENT:** John Gittos in the Chair  
Mary Farish  
Neil Battison  
Jackie Worthington  
Peter Middleton  
Dennis Moody

**GUESTS:** Ian Montgomery (Service Manager)  
Simon Baker (Housing Policy Officer)

**OFFICERS:** Emma Lomax  
Peter Greenwood

**APOLOGIES:** Rita Ighade  
Stanley Burton  
Sue Easton  
Sallie Bannatyne

### **1 Welcome Introductions and Apologies**

JG welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted for RI, SB, SE, and SB.

### **2 Exempt Items**

None.

### **3 Late Items**

None.

### **4 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes from the last meeting were approved as a true record.

### **5 Chair's Report**

JG – TSB Agenda and minutes have been put onto the Councils website (Modern Gov) and are now up to date. So, thank you to Emma for doing that.

Since our last meeting in July, I have had only one meeting on your behalf and that was with Ian and Peter. The meeting was held to resolve issues around general housekeeping of TSB. I also discussed the agenda for the coming months of TSB. I will speak more about this in item 8, the Forward Plan.

I have provisionally been invited to give an update on TSB work to the Environment, Housing and Communities board at their November meeting. I expect that in the coming weeks the working group looking at the Tenant Voice Panel who will report back to the board to be getting updates from Ian's team on its progress.

As you know I am a member of the Ombudsman Tenant Panel, and we will be having our first face to face meeting in Warrington on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October and I will report back.

## **6 Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Other Legislative Changes**

Simon introduces himself and talks through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures presentation which Board members have in front of them and presented on screen.

Full consultation published yesterday which was all approved. There could be minor changes to Tenant Satisfaction Measures when passed by the Government, but Simon will advise if anything is likely to change as he talks through presentation. Simon also advises that the Tenant Satisfaction Measure regarding complaints has been removed.

Discussion around the STAR survey which is now being sent out to tenants on a quarterly basis instead of every 2 years, data is being collected by a number of methods. 1/3 phone, paper, online.

IM – Referred to so far as Tenant Satisfaction Measures, but effectively that is the new STAR survey. We used to survey tenants every other year, and all landlords asked tenants the same questions. Government reviewed the set of questions and streamline into 22. The idea of making board aware is this is a key piece of information to help the Board take a view on what's going well and what's not going well. Much more real time data. In future when coming to board to decide new topics, across this range of measures you can see that this is how we're performing. This will be valuable information to view and will help the board to decide on what to review going forward.

SB - No confirmation yet on how many consumer standards there will be, but they will follow 6 themes. There will be a review once the act is passed and in force.

IM – On the consumer standards, at present they are relatively light touch. e.g., The standard that covers my service says you don't need a scrutiny board, but you need to give tenants a chance to scrutinise, how we do that is up to us.

In a post Grenfell environment that needs a stronger approach, like building safety, listening, and responding to tenant views and feedback. Had that

happened prior then Grenfell could have been a lesser scale of catastrophe or prevented. The new Tenant Voice Panel will help us review our performance against the new consumer standards. The Board will have access to reviewing some of these consumer standards and holding people like me to account, through helpful and respectful engagement, 'to agree you do X well but not sure about Y'. Tenant satisfaction information along with assessment critiqued by tenants will help the service.

JG – At Grenfell, the council weren't listening to what tenants were saying. Wouldn't you have thought this is how you engage with tenants?

IM – The government approach and emphasis has now gone the other way; the new consumer standards will be more descriptive and involve more expectation from landlords regarding communication with tenants. Building Safety Act is much clearer and not open for interpretation, for example by autumn next year we will have had to register all high-rise buildings in Leeds with the regulator.

SB – The Social Housing regulator will be making sure we are compliant, and we are preparing to be scrutinised by them a lot more. So, we're getting ready for that now with the STAR Surveys and re writing policy.

JG – I keep hearing this might change, or this might come along, is it a draft at present?

SB – The Tenant Satisfaction Measures are going to happen, with minor changes. Increased powers are coming for the regulator, but really, we don't know until the bill is passed in parliament what exactly it will look like.

IM – The Tenant Satisfaction Measures are set, and we've been collecting information against those for last 6 months before we are formally required to report on them from next year. With the consumer standards, we're not waiting for them to happen, but it is in the hands of the Government to implement. Senior Management are saying we know we will be tested more on this so let's self-assess now to understand where we are currently as a minimum.

NB – When will the 'accountable person' be appointed? Will there be checks done on each block? As there are a lot of blocks.

SB – Teams who currently look after the blocks will do it and will channel the information back to the accountable person.

NB – Will those people have the right training to identify problems?

IM – The Building Safety Act makes the governance of high risk buildings stronger; the accountable person isn't someone we'd recruit, it's likely to be a current Senior Management Team member. It will be a named senior officer, so not a new post. For all the new demands of Building Safety Act we are looking at how we make sure that all the information we collect, that all that is put in one place and to make sure it is up to date, and all records are robust. That information is captured in reports and sent on to residents, and everything is in one place for transparency. So, lots of data managed in one place, but then if the regulator asks what's going on in block A, we will have the information ready for them.

JG advises that SE submitted questions regarding this agenda item and IM confirms she will receive a written response to these questions as well as being noted in this meetings minutes.

SB – There is a lot of work going on behind the scenes to pull all this together and make us more transparent. You will see over the coming months the impact and the things you want to look at will be a lot easier to access.

JG – This isn't set in stone, and some of it the council are already doing and that's good. Can you explain the regulator?

IM – The regulator for Social Housing is being strengthened and will have increased powers to check how we're doing in a range of ways against these standards. The regulator will go pro actively looking for landlords who are not complying with the new measures, they will have powers to fine us, make public orders and decisions about us, and implement new management structures (like Ofsted). We are one of the largest social landlords in the country, so they are likely to come to us first.

JG – Like an audit?

IM – Not dissimilar.

JG – Tenant Voice Panel, Housing Advisory Panel, Tenant Scrutiny Board – these are 3 communications that Leeds City Council have now besides STAR surveys, how will this be conveyed to people in Tenant Voice Panel what you've just told us?

IM – There is more that happens at a local level, engagement can be informal as well as formal boards. We would self-assess against the new standards and if that takes too long then we would go Tenant Voice Panel and say we feel these are strengths and areas for improvement, do you agree/disagree? The outcome from Tenant Voice Panel shared with Tenant Scrutiny Board and Housing Advisory Panels. It will be an honest appraisal of where we are in this service.

JG – When will this be passed?

IM – We are on tenterhooks waiting for it to go through, we are preparing by self-assessing and launching Tenant Voice Panel, so we are ready for the standards when they are implemented.

SB – Hopefully soon but there is a new Government in place, so we are waiting for them to bed themselves in and for the wheels of Government to start turning again.

JG – Some of this information is from a previous administration, so there could be lots of changes?

SB – I would imagine this won't change much as this Government is always going to want to encourage transparency and openness post Grenfell. As Tenant Satisfaction Measures were approved yesterday, there shouldn't be too much change.

NB – Will you be setting a precedent or getting an idea from other councils?

IM – We are sharing a lot of information with core cities, Sheffield, Birmingham etc. Developing sharing documents and ideas, and this absolutely feels the right way to do things. We feel collectively that there

should be some degree of consistency across different Councils. When forming the Tenant Voice Panel, we had lots of contact with other councils to ensure we were following a similar trajectory.

DM – From 1<sup>st</sup> October, landlords have got to fit carbon monoxide detectors, does this include social landlords?

IM – We already do this, if you have a gas cooker you require a carbon monoxide detector. It will mainly impact private landlords.

## **7 Housing Advisory Panels**

Dennis Moody, Chair of the Outer South HAP discusses Housing Advisory Panels.

DM explained that each HAP can have up to 12 members and local councillors, there are currently 99 members throughout all the HAPs, so not all are full.

The number of councillors sitting on a HAP depends on how many wards there are in each area For example, 3 wards = 3 councillors.

Panels are mainly made up of housing tenants, they run the meetings and have the final say. HAP budget comes from council rents and is currently 405k per year, 202.5k is split evenly between 11 HAPs. Other 202.5k is split dependant on how many council dwellings in each area.

During 21/22 HAPs committed 396k over 193 bids throughout the whole of Leeds. Main criteria for any bid is it benefits council tenants.. HAPs give money to various groups, for example, Beeston in Bloom, Bramley Care Bears etc. When we are unable to approve the bid, we will encourage groups to go for alternative funding, such as Wellbeing Fund or similar. Bids can also be submitted by individuals.

The HAPs meet 6 times per year, owing to Covid 19 some HAPs do face to face meetings in summer and online in winter, so people aren't coming out in the cold. Application form is in depth, before it gets to HAPs, they are checked to make sure it has been completed correctly. Each HAP has a Tenant Engagement Officer who coordinates everything.

JG – So HAPs don't decide the criteria, as all are checked by Housing Leeds staff before being passed to your panel for consideration?

DM – If application is not filled out correctly, we will send back for clarification. We had one last night that was not clear enough, so we deferred until next meeting. Sometimes we want more detail.

JG – Does your HAP know what the criteria is?

IM – It can be difficult to plainly explain the criteria, if you look at a plan on a page for each area, they each have different priorities unique to the area, any application needs to demonstrate how it meets the criteria on the plan on a page. A Tenant Engagement Officer will check the application is meeting criteria before it is presented to the panel. HAP can and will still ask questions and defer for more information. These checks are in place before it gets to

HAP to mitigate time wasting at meetings and checklist might identify any holes in applications.

DM – For example, an application wanted a type of barrier on public footpath, and we're not allowed to use them, as have to make access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. The reason for the bid was wanting to stop quad bikes but can't use the type of barriers anymore which would prevent them.

PG – Another example is mushrooms on pavements, they are no longer used as the visually impaired can't see them.

JG – Those you can consider, do any HAP's ask how many have been turned down?

DM – I know myself, and the Chair of each panel should ask for that information.

IM – We don't turn down any application, we make sure it meets one of the criteria.

JG – So if the application for example is for a fence, is there a point where that money should come from council budget? Who comes to you and asks for that?

IM – The difficult position is that council budgets are very tight, and we have managed to protect the HAP budget, a discretionary pot of money to decide what needs to be invested in community projects, often at some HAP's there will be a debate we could spend £2,000 but the landlord should be paying for that directly. Housing Leeds don't disagree with that analysis, but the work can't be done at that time. We had an application for £4,000 to paint some railings on an estate – we said it's in our painting programme, but in 3 years' time, LCC painting budget isn't huge but will be done eventually, so it is taken to the HAP for the panel to decide if they want to fund the project to get it done earlier than the planned programme. Ultimately it is the same budget - the Housing Revenue Account..

IM – About half of the HAP fund goes to internal Council departments such as Parks & Countryside etc, the other half goes to community projects, organisations, food banks, residential groups, youth projects etc. Not that the HAP is doing things that landlord should do, HAPs are prioritising work and can make it happen faster.

JG – When a bid comes in, if this job can be done by council, does the bid consider labour, H&S, where fencing going, etc.?

DM – Yes. All of the contractors costs are met. Bids are rejected due to it being the responsibility of another council dept, housing or even the tenant to maintain ie gardens or communal grass areas.

JG – Has the project got to be completed in one go/financial year or can it be a split bid? For example, if my project is going to take 2 years?

DM – Bids can be split, has been done in the past.

NB – Do you find some wards have more bids more than others?

DM – We keep a track of all wards and defer bids when they have applied too much. All 3 wards get the quota.

NB – When certain areas don't get the same number of bids, are you asking why are you not bidding? The problems need identifying.

DM – if bids aren't coming in from certain areas, Councillors are aware and promote the fund and the Housing Officers are also asked to consider any improvements on their patch.

NB – Do you work with other outside agencies?

DM – Yes we work closely with Police and local Councillors.

DM – We also ask for feedback on applications and want evaluations to see how certain things have gone, has it stopped what it was supposed to? In certain areas full of snickets for example we can't block them off because it's a right of way, and there are back gardens leading on to snickets or the Council need access at back of properties so we can't block them off. We don't just look at the bid we look at what happens after the money is awarded does it solve the problem?

JG – What do you do as a panel when you have no money left?

PG – When funds have gone for the year there are other things the HAP discusses, they monitor local housing office performance, Housing Officers deliver performance reviews. Can spend time with Police regarding crime in the area and ASB levels.

IM – We would never ask for fly tipping to be removed by HAPs but what we do go to the HAP with is preventative.

JG – A lot of this money doesn't leave the council; how many do you turn down? A rough percentage?

DM – 1 turned down last night for example and a few others deferred for more information.

JG – Do you get influence from councillors?

DM – No.

JG – What is the average bid amount?

DM – Around £4,000.

NB – Now community payback is disbanded, did you get a good return on their work?

DM – Yes, one ward got a great return from community payback. When a job is completed, we will go and have a look to ensure work is to a good standard.

JG closes for questions on Housing Advisory Panels.

## **8 Forward Plan**

JG discusses ideas for future meetings to help the board decide on the next review.

October – Speak with 4 Housing Officers about their daily/weekly work and priorities.

November – Speak with 4 Housing Managers about their daily/weekly work and priorities.

December – STAR survey analysis

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting  
to be held on Date Not Specified

November/December 2022 meetings will take place online.

## 9 Date and Time of Next Meeting

21<sup>st</sup> October 2022, 12:00 – 14:00.

Civic Hall Committee room 1 and on MS Teams

## 10 Sue Easton Questions and Written Responses

Rearranged Tenant Scrutiny Board Meeting now 23 September 2022.

Please accept my apologies I am unable to attend the meeting but have prepared questions which hopefully can be responded to during the meeting.

### The Creation of a 'Golden Thread'

The Government has confirmed that **the “Golden Thread of compliance with Building Safety Regulations must be captured and maintained digitally for the entire lifecycle of the building”** If the TSM's are intended to improve Building Safety and strengthen Social Housing Tenants rights to better quality and safer homes access to relevant information to support compliance must be provided to them. **Is there going to be investment in improved software** to accommodate evidence of compliance, continually updated and following the lifecycle of a building as it not only needs to meet the increased scrutiny of the Housing Ombudsman and of the Regulator but also Residents, Emergency services, contractors etc who at times may be trying to obtain necessary data/documents answers to queries under pressure. How is Leeds addressing the challenge of resourcing all the additional financial and administrative burden of data management and access to this information.

*We have a dedicated project team assigned to scoping the requirements of the 'golden thread', who will investigate a digital IT solution that will enable the necessary people to access data about the buildings when they need it (including residents). The project team will look into whether the Council can produce something internally as well as looking at external companies to produce an IT solution.*

### Electrical Safety in High Rise Buildings (Electrical Safety Bill still only at Committee stage)

**BS Maintaining Building Safety** (satisfaction that the Home is well maintained and safe to live in – To be Safe in Your Home –( this links to TSM's - Fire/Building Safety, Transparency, Engagement, Accountability, Repairs/Maintenance, Complaints)

**\*Electrical Safety** It is astonishing that even after 2009 Lakenal House 2016 Shepherds Court to name just two and now a full five years on after the tragedy of Grenfell Towers all with loss of lives and all with links to electrical sources of ignition that Social Housing Residents in High Rise Buildings are



still having to wait for an Act to be passed to ensure that the deficiencies of existing regulations are addressed and there is coherence, consistency and monitoring of electrical safety management in High Rise Buildings. Both the Fire Service and the Electrical Profession have repeatedly voiced that “one of the most important Fire/Harm Reduction preventative actions that can be taken is by improved electrical safety” Dame Judith Hackett had in her Enquiry into Grenfell and again in February 2022 called for a complete overhaul of managing electrical systems in High Rise Buildings and she had also appealed for “**action now**” rather than wait for regulations. Actions to stop the spread of fire is given prominence (sprinkler systems/compartimentation etc) but preventative measures to stop them in the first place is vital too.

### **How is Leeds responding/ acting upon this?**

*Electrical Service Manager, Russell Brown:*

*We test, inspect, maintain and repair in line in line with current British standards and regulatory statute as appropriate whilst also maintaining robust records.*

*We currently have:*

- A capital investment programmes for High Rise building Electrical Infrastructures, Lifts, Controlled door entry systems, CCTV, Sprinklers ad more..... to continually drive and improve safety and compliance to legislative requirements.*
- Maintenance regimes – We service and maintain Electrical infrastructures to current legislation and guidance both domestically and communally.*
- Repairs – A robust 24 Hr repair service and service team dedicated to assuring continued safety for all.*
- Stock Condition –a stock condition department who undertake assessments to our assets*
- Housing Management –dedicated teams who manage residents needs and wellbeing*
- Voids Team – who assure that any property is fit for human habitation before let.*
- Adaptations team – who assure residents can live safely where specialist needs are required*

*All information is collated and stored on LCC software systems and Directorates/Service teams liaise where necessary. At this stage we are operating in line with all legislative safety standards and direct resident needs.*

**Thank you C . Sue Easton (TSB member)**