

Report of Chief Officer Housing Management

Report to Housing Advisory Board

Date: 21 November 2017

Subject: Future Governance Arrangements for Council Housing

Are specific electoral wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. In October 2017, Housing Advisory Board supported proposals to change the focus of the Board to become a Strategic Housing Board which coordinates a collaborative approach to the delivery of the Leeds Housing Strategy. In order to allow the Housing Advisory Board to refocus on its role as a Strategic Housing Board it was agreed that responsibility for monitoring areas of Council Housing activity in Leeds would be assigned to existing areas within the Council's governance framework.
2. Leeds City Council has an established governance framework across the organisation which covers all areas of Council activity, including Council Housing. In addition to this Council Housing has additional governance arrangements in place in order to ensure compliance with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) 2015 Regulatory Framework, via Tenant Scrutiny Board and the Strategic Tenant Body - Voice of Involved Tenants At Leeds (VITAL). These bodies ensure a co-regulatory approach to Council Housing activity.
3. Proposals are outlined in this report in relation to the future role of Housing Related Scrutiny Board, Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL in ensuring effective Council Housing governance.

Recommendations

Housing Advisory Board is invited to comment on and agree:

- proposals for the future governance of Council Housing and other Housing activity
- arrangements to wind down Housing Advisory Board in its current format.

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To outline proposals for the future governance of Council Housing services in Leeds.

1.2 To outline arrangements to formally wind down Housing Advisory Board.

2 Background information

2.1 When the Council Housing management service returned to the Council from the former ALMOs, the Housing Advisory Board was established in January 2014. The Board sought to replicate the involvement of tenants and independents in the oversight of Council housing management which had been provided through the ALMO Boards. In doing so the Board has enabled a smooth transition to the direct Council management of its own stock. The Board was not set up to cover other areas of housing including private sector housing or other the wider social housing sector.

2.2 A Housing Strategy was developed during early 2015, which was supported by Housing Advisory Board in May 2015, with a refreshed Housing Strategy supported in September 2016. It was agreed that progress in delivering the strategy would be reported to Housing Advisory Board every six months. However, while the strategy emphasises the importance of Leeds City Council working with its key partners to support the delivery of priorities and targets, the Board was not aligned as well as it could be to achieving a true partnership approach to owning and delivering the Housing Strategy.

2.3 The Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board undertook an enquiry of the Housing Leeds Tenant Involvement Framework during summer 2017. A key outcome of the enquiry was to highlight overlaps and gaps within the framework and for the need to develop stronger engagement between the Council's established governance framework – housing related scrutiny board, community committees - and housing specific governance arrangements - Housing Advisory Board, Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL.

2.4 A review was undertaken of the Housing Advisory Board during summer 2017. The review supported proposals to change the focus of the Board as follows:

- Develop the Board as a Strategic Housing Board to provide leadership to a collaborative approach in developing and delivering the Housing Strategy priorities.
- Assign responsibility for monitoring of Council Housing activity to existing bodies in the Council's governance framework.

2.5 This paper sets out proposals for the future monitoring of Council Housing activity. A separate paper on this agenda will consider proposals for the development of the Housing Advisory Board as a Strategic Housing Board.

3 Main issues

3.1 The Council has a robust governance framework in place to monitor and govern decisions about Council services. All Council related housing activity, including Council Housing but also private rented housing and housing options, is governed as part of this framework.

3.2 In addition to this Council Housing has additional governance arrangements in place in order to ensure compliance with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) 2015 Regulatory Framework, via Tenant Scrutiny Board and the Strategic Tenant Body - Voice of Involved Tenants At Leeds (VITAL). These bodies ensure a co-regulatory approach to Council Housing activity.

3.3 In most cases reporting into Housing Advisory Board duplicated reporting into the above governance frameworks, and so additional governance is not required. However, this review has created an opportunity for us to consider whether improvements can be made to the way that Council Housing activity is reported within the existing governance structure, to maximise compliance with the HCA Regulatory Framework, formalise reporting arrangements and to strengthen links between the Council's formal governance arrangements and the tenant focused governance arrangements.

3.4 The HCA Regulatory Framework requires organisations to monitor their own performance, using a co-regulatory approach, in delivering the four Consumer Standards – Tenant and Involvement Standard, Home Standard, Tenancy Standard, Neighbourhood and Community Standard. Performance against these standards is then reported back to tenants via the Annual Tenants Report.

3.5 While the Council complies fully with the HCA Regulatory Framework, the current performance framework could be improved to more closely align it to the ongoing reporting of compliance against the Consumer Standards.

3.6 Proposals for the strengthening the governance of Council Housing activity within the current governance framework are outlined below. This includes proposals relating to the housing related Scrutiny Board, Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL.

Housing Related Scrutiny Board

3.7 Housing related activity is already reported into the housing related Scrutiny Board on a six monthly basis, usually in July and January each year. Under the revised framework, the frequency of reporting will remain as is, but it is proposed that there are some changes are made to the reporting framework, as follows:

- A general update is provided on the development of major policy and strategic developments relating to housing activity, in order for the Board to identify areas where they may wish to scrutinise further.

- An update on delivery of the HRA revenue and capital budget as part of the HRA Business Plan.
- A revised performance framework is developed which captures key performance indicators which measure compliance with the HCA Consumer Standards, key business plan indicators and customer satisfaction indicators.
- An update on work of and priorities being identified by the Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL.

3.8 These six monthly reports will help the Board to identify areas where it wishes to undertake additional scrutiny throughout the year.

3.9 In order to strengthen the tenant voice into the housing related Scrutiny Board, it has been proposed that the Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board attends Housing Related Scrutiny Board for housing related matters, to contribute towards scrutiny discussions and to ensure a collaborative approach to both Scrutiny Boards' work. The Housing Related Scrutiny Board may also invite the involvement of VITAL into particular scrutiny enquiries, as seen recently with the invitation of members of the High Rise Advisory Group into the recent Fire Safety in High Rise Scrutiny enquiry.

3.10 A revised reporting framework will be reported to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board in January 2018.

Tenant Scrutiny Board

3.11 The Tenant Scrutiny Board will continue to undertake its tenant scrutiny activity as it does now, undertaking enquiries of particular service areas where there are concerns highlighted by customer feedback or performance.

3.12 In order to strengthen the links with the Housing Related Scrutiny Board, the Housing Related Scrutiny Board will be invited to contribute towards each Tenant Scrutiny Board enquiry, usually via the Chair attending the Tenant Scrutiny Board. The Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board will also provide regular feedback to the Tenant Scrutiny Board on housing related items which are discussed at the Housing Related Scrutiny Board.

3.13 It is important that the Tenant Scrutiny Board remains independent of the wider tenant engagement framework in order to ensure its ability to scrutinise all areas of housing related activity, including potentially the tenant engagement framework. However, it is also important that there is a connection between Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL, to ensure there is mutual understanding of each other's work areas. In order to achieve this the following has been put in place:

- A regular update is provided into VITAL on Tenant Scrutiny Board and the Housing Related Scrutiny Board enquiries.
- VITAL is invited to put forward its proposals for future Tenant Scrutiny Board enquiries.

- Periodic attendance of the Chair of Tenant Scrutiny Board at VITAL in order for VITAL to share issues and priorities arising from strategic and policy development.

3.14 The terms of reference for the Tenant Scrutiny Board will be updated to reflect this strengthened relationship, and to include other changes around chair selection process, code of conduct and Board support.

VITAL

3.15 VITAL will continue to act as the consultative body for Housing Leeds - providing a tenant perspective into the monitoring of Council Housing activity and strategic and policy development. However, some changes are proposed in order to formalise and strengthen VITAL's role as follows:

- Reporting performance against key performance indicators which measure compliance with the HCA Consumer Standards and customer satisfaction indicators.
- Sharing wider customer insight e.g. learning from complaints, customer surveys, service outcomes in order to enable VITAL to influence strategic and policy development based on evidence from a wider tenant base.
- Receiving strategic and policy development proposals at an earlier stage in order to enable tenants to genuinely influence policy development.
- Ensuring that a wider range of senior officers are in attendance at VITAL meetings in order to respond to issues raised by tenants.
- Reviewing membership to ensure that membership reflects the make up of the wider tenant population and represents the views of hard to reach groups.
- Developing a workshop approach to meetings which is tenant focused and where there is greater opportunity for discussion.

3.16 In order to ensure that VITAL retains the opportunity to influence policy development and strategic decision making at the highest level it is proposed that either the Chief Officer of Housing Management or the Chief Officer of Property and Contracts is in attendance at VITAL meetings, and that the Director of Resources and Housing or Executive Member attend two meetings each year.

3.17 A training and development plan will be agreed with VITAL which will support members to undertake this strengthened role in Council Housing governance.

Winding Up of Housing Advisory Board

3.18 It was agreed at the October Housing Advisory Board meeting that the November Board meeting would focus on finishing off the current work programme and developing proposals for both the future governance of Council Housing and the development of the Strategic Housing Board. It was also agreed that November would be the last formal Housing Advisory Board meeting.

- 3.19 The Housing Advisory Board is currently a formal committee sitting within the Council's Constitution. A revised schedule of committees will not be reconsidered by Council at the Annual Council Meeting until the start of the new Municipal year in 2018. It is proposed that Housing Advisory Board is removed from the schedule of committees from 2018. Until then the Board will continue to exist, but no further meetings will be arranged.

4 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.2 Following October Housing Advisory Board initial engagement has taken place with the Chair of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board, the Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL in developing the proposals of the future governance of Council Housing activity.
- 4.3 Further engagement will continue to take place with the three bodies to develop the detailed arrangements.

5 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 5.1 Consideration is given to equality and diversity / cohesion and integration as part of all areas of policy development and Council governance, via Equality Impact Assessments. When reporting Council Housing activity into the Tenant Scrutiny Board and VITAL equality and diversity impacts will be discussed and considered on a case by case basis.
- 5.2 The Tenant Engagement Framework seeks to engage with all tenants, including tenants who are difficult to reach. The membership of VITAL is currently being reviewed in order to increase representation from some tenant groups, e.g. young tenants, BAME tenants, LGBT tenants. Stronger connections are also being made into the citywide Equality Hubs to ensure that tenants are connected into wider equality issues, and to ensure a link back into housing policy development.

6 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

- 6.1 The effective management of Council Housing contributes towards a number of Best Council Plan priorities – Building resilient communities, supporting health and wellbeing and better lives.
- 6.2 The proposal also supports the Council's ambition to be an efficient and enterprising organisation by eliminating duplication of Council Housing governance which is currently in place via the HAB.

7 Resources and value for money

- 7.1 The proposal helps to eliminate duplication within the current governance framework, and so helps to achieve better use of resources and better value for money.

8 Legal Implications, access to information and call In

8.1 The report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

9 Risk management

9.1 There are robust arrangements already in place to ensure that Council Housing risks are managed robustly, via the Council's corporate risk management framework. Any significant organisational risks are included within the Council's risk register.

10 Conclusions

10.1 The Council already has an established governance framework in place to ensure the effective management of Council Housing and other housing activity, and in most cases Housing Advisory Board duplicated these reporting arrangements. Proposals outlined in this paper will help to eliminate duplication and ensure closer working between different bodies within the governance framework.

10.2 It is proposed that the last meeting of the Housing Advisory Board takes place on 21 November and that no further meetings are held for the remainder of the 2017/18 Municipal year.

11 Recommendations

11.1 Housing Advisory Board is invited to comment on and agree:

- proposals for the future governance of Council Housing and other Housing activity
- arrangements to wind down Housing Advisory Board in its current format.

12 Background documents¹

12.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.