

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2020

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair
Sallie Bannatyne
Mary Farish
Maddy Hunter
Jackie Worthington
Ian Parr
Peter Greenwood

11 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None.

12 Late Items

None.

13 Apologies for Absence

Peter Middleton, Stanley Burton (SBa), Rita Ighade

14 Welcome and Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves via the online Zoom meeting tool.

JG updated the board on his meeting with Cllr Coupar, and passed on her thanks to board members for continuing the review as they have and working through the challenges of recent months. JG asked her for any suggestions regarding where she thought the board might particularly look during the course of the review and she suggested it would be interesting to get feedback from her fellow councillors on how they interact with their constituents. JG told her elected members would also play a big part in giving evidence when the board gets to stage 3 of the review looking at the HAPs.

15 Minutes -

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 04 September 2020 were passed as a true record.

16 New Review - Stage 1 Wider tenant feedback and insight - Yvonne Davies

YD gave an overview of recent policy and legislative changes since the Grenfell Tower disaster, including the new building regulations, fire safety measures and the Hackett report, along with the new Housing Ombudsman complaints handling code.

The government is keen for all local authorities and housing associations to take more responsibility to engage with tenants making engagement as widely accessible as possible. The pending White Paper will also provide more detail on how landlords should engage with its tenants.

JG noted that councils are not currently guided on how to run a scrutiny board and there are a variety of ways that authorities carry out 'scrutiny'. JG asked if the same rules will apply to councils and housing associations, YD confirmed they will and it also includes ALMOs. SBa asked if the consumer regulator is a government department, YD confirmed it is but it is fairly limited at the present time as it can only inspect matters of rent and finance. The investigative powers being extended to councils will cover any element of customer service and so will be much further reaching in future.

It was reported that many tenants and residents, across all authorities, are already involved in giving their views, including on a national level with the National Tenant Voice, and most authorities have a scrutiny board or similar tenants' panel which provides tenant feedback linked to relevant council departments and councillors. It is key to the efficacy of the boards to engage as many tenants as possible in any review, and if needed engagement could take place online. JG questioned if online reviews make it easier to duplicate work, YD replied that it can, and that is why communication between panels is maintained and groups are aware of other reviews taking place.

JG noted that other authorities and housing associations have tenants that input on staff recruitment and asked if this may be a possibility for Leeds. YD answered that it should be possible as there are larger authorities than Leeds that already practice this, and it only needs a relatively small select group of tenants to be trained to have this kind of input. SB and JW confirmed they had similar experience of sitting on selection panels. KM told the board that the Adult Social Care service at Leeds City Council does already have tenant input on staff selection via an initial/pre-interview more informal meet the candidate's session. IM added that this input has been used in times when less formal interview formats have been conducted.

Customer satisfaction surveys are still widely used by various authorities, with the STAR survey acting as a key benchmark. YD noted that many councils often focus on improving low scores immediately while forgetting that moderate scores may still be just as important to address. More digital surveys will allow for a wider reach of tenants, and means that analysis of the responses can be carried out electronically to produce reports. Tenants who are not online can be identified and help provided for them to access digital services. JG noted that while the current need for digital sessions is evident, the issues raised by the coronavirus will not be around forever and there should be scope for face to face engagement in the future, YD agreed that not all tenants share their concerns in the same way but it is important that they are listened to when they do.

YD offered examples of engagement by other authorities including:

- Online question and answer sessions with housing directors

- Fully online tenant forums
- Single-issue discussion groups
- Rewarding tenants for their input on projects
- Cross-boundary work

Due to time constraints JG proposed collating a list of questions for YD to provide feedback. JG thanked YD for her presentation.

17 New Review - Stage 1 Wider Tenant Engagement within Housing Leeds - Ian Montgomery

IM explained the principles of user-centred design and how they are used to improve accessibility, to help inform the changes made to the website. This was achieved by working with approximately 1,000 tenants in various exercises and listening to feedback about what information they perceive as most important and how they would navigate to find it.

Research has been undertaken elsewhere across the council in the rent discovery project, working with staff and customer data and experiences to develop service responses and improve the customer experience. Similar research is also being utilised with the choice based lettings service with surveys sent to all new applicants about their experience and how it may be improved. Over 2,000 responses have been received so far, and further requests for feedback are made to those that wish to participate.

The STAR tenant satisfaction survey is undertaken citywide every two years, to track various aspects of satisfaction. The results are shared with tenants, for example as an insert in their rent statements, and are used to help shape the council's response to target areas of concern. The previous survey was sent to all high rise tenants in order to gain better insight into the perception of those living in high rise blocks. Due to the coronavirus, the STAR survey that was scheduled for 2020 has been delayed by one year.

IM explained how previous STAR survey data has been used to improve the contact centre which has seen a significant increase in the number of calls answered within 20 seconds. There are also automated lines that enable customers to pay rent or to be directed to the repairs line. The changes are contributing to an increase in satisfaction for users of the contact centre which can typically expect 30,000 calls every month.

One-off surveys are being employed for all new tenants within the first month of their tenancy, and their feedback is being used to help shape the service. The Retirement LIFE service is conducting surveys of residents about their experiences concerning the service response to coronavirus. Tenants who receive a repair to their home are sent a text or automated phone call survey about their experience, with all feedback taken on board and any compliments fed back to staff and contractors.

In terms of targeted communications, emails and texts are able to be sent quickly to selected blocks/streets in response to more urgent reports or

situations, including coronavirus safety reminders and details of repairs to water and electricity outages. Hard copy communications have also been used for targeted communications, recently for the high rise engagement sessions where a leaflet was designed with relevant information for each block.

Social media has been used to share key communications and updates from services as necessary. Posts can reach a wide audience and can be timed to be sent out during the evening and weekends. The 11 HAP panels each have a Facebook page on which local updates are shared and residents can share their ideas and views.

The ways which Leeds residents are engaging with the council are monitored so the most effective channels of communication can be utilised on a case by case basis and takes into account the feedback of tenants and staff members. The way complaints are categorised was also changed in April to improve how the council records and learns from them.

New tools are being added to the ones currently available, for example there have been trials of virtual walkabouts. There will also be a new platform named 'Your Voice Leeds' aiming for launch w/c 19th of October. This platform is being used by a growing number of councils and offers the ability to post consultations, surveys, maps, Q&A sessions, and many other features. IM offered to arrange a demonstration in a future session.

JG thanked IM for his presentation and reiterated the desire of the board to begin work on the review. JG suggested a meeting to inform the chairs of the other involved tenant forums on the plans the board has. IM responded that the consultation with the other forums would be for the second phase of the review, and that wider feedback is a part of the first phase. IM offered to collate a list of opportunities now in terms of who and how the board can engage with to begin gathering their own evidence – subject to the board selecting from this what their areas of interest were. KM added that consultation with Leeds Tenants Federation is possible, but as an independent body are not within scope of the review but the board may wish to share any insight and engage with them more generally.

JG questioned how important papers may be sent to board members without internet access, IM committed to supporting the provision of hard copy papers as best can.

IM confirmed there is an informal meeting on the 2nd of October for members of all the citywide groups. The meeting will allow group members to catch up with each other, and Housing Leeds to share an overview of its activity over the last six months in terms of support for residents and how services have adapted to Covid-19. IP will call any members not on email with details on how to dial in.

18 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next zoom meeting is scheduled for Friday 23rd of October at 12:45 for a 1.00pm start

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 2:00 PM