

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY 21ST MAY 2021

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

60 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None.

61 Late Items

None.

62 Apologies for Absence

Stanley Burton (SBu), Peter Middleton

63 Minutes -

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th April 2021 were passed as a true record.

64 Chair's Update

JG updated the board that due to the recent local elections the next meeting of the Housing, Environment, and Communities board will take place in July. JG as Chair of the TSB has been invited to attend future meetings.

JG informed board members that Councillor Coupar will move within the council to a new portfolio to be Executive Member for Resources. JG expressed his thanks on behalf of himself and the board for the support Councillor Coupar has always given to the Tenant Scrutiny Board. Councillor Mary Harland will take over Councillor Coupar's role as Executive Member for Communities. Councillor Mohammed Rafique will now become Executive member for Environment and Housing. The Tenant Scrutiny Board look forward to working with the new Executive Members.

JG had meeting on the 15/05/2021 with Mandy Sawyer, Ian Montgomery and Andrea Purdy (Chair of VITAL). MS and IM provided an update regarding the present and future of the Tenant Engagement service. A Zoom meeting will

be held on the 14th June to convey that same information to all involved tenants including TSB members. The involved tenants of the citywide forums will receive a call from Ian Montgomery's team regarding this meeting, which the Chair encourages all members to attend if possible.

65 Stage 1 findings - Key themes and content for inclusion in stage 1 report.

JG noted that this is the first time that recommendations for a review would be discussed within the context of a meeting so could be a positive experience to take forward to future reviews.

TSB recapped the content of the previous meetings comprising stage 1, and the importance of capturing the positive and/or negative feelings of the board for each topic discussed.

The meeting of the 25th September covered a broad range of engagement offers from other housing providers around the country and invited opinions from the present members. The online question and answer sessions were met with agreement according to the September meeting minutes, but questions were raised regarding the context of such sessions. YD clarified there does not necessarily need to be a context as the meetings can be an open forum or may have a pre-designated topic to cover. JG asked what the appropriate equivalent council officer level would be to attend the session, YD answered that officers of Mandy Sawyer's level and area housing managers would be similar to positions held within existing housing suppliers that run these sessions. Board members agreed these sessions would be useful if carried out by Leeds City Council.

Online tenant forums are utilised by other housing suppliers to varying levels of success, and since the September meeting 'Your Voice Leeds' has begun to expand to perform a similar role. Board members agreed that Your Voice Leeds has the potential to be similar but does not yet fulfil that purpose, with RI adding that improvements are needed across the platform before it could be considered successful as an online forum. Regarding single-issue discussion groups – where residents are consulted on topics based upon their interests for example issues within a single area or a specific type of repair – Board members were in agreement that Your Voice Leeds currently performs this function to an extent when there are projects in a geographic area of Leeds, however it does not target non-local issues in the same way.

Regarding incentivising input, board members were in agreement that it would positively affect the number of people seeking to get involved, but concerns were raised that it would attract people for the wrong reasons and that a balance is needed if it is going to be implemented successfully.

There has already been some cross-boundary work for the TSB in their joint meetings with Gateshead ALMO which at the time of the present meeting would have become a part of the council. Recounting the experience the board agreed that as well as larger scale sharing of ideas is also possible to

work on specific issues with other authorities and to look at each other's individual services and that the experience with Gateshead had been positive and would like to try it again if possible.

User-centred design has already been implemented by the Council to improve some of their services, which Ian Montgomery covered in one of his presentations. User-centred design is a broad descriptor and covers a variety of approaches and topics, but often has positive outcomes compared to approaches where users are not involved. Board members agreed that the approach is beneficial, however Covid-19 has moved a lot of engagement online and concerns were raised that engagement should not exclude people who are not online wherever possible. PG noted that in the case of the council, phone calls have been used to engage if there was no online method.

Larger surveys such as STAR are already used by many councils including Leeds to obtain feedback and benchmark their successes and areas of improvement against other authorities. Due to Covid-19 the 2020 survey had been delayed to 2021, but previous surveys had resulted in positive outcomes for tenants. JG recalled that the board members had previously been show some of the feedback to assess potential responses.

The repairs survey had conducted similar larger surveys, and board members were reminded of Leonard Wright's presentation on the project known as the Bright survey. The survey is conducted via text and is sent to all tenants who had received a repair to ask for their feedback. Board members agreed there was significant benefit to the reduced cost effectiveness of the survey when compared with human telephone calls, as well as the immediate results which do not require as much collation. As discussed in the presentation, this survey had some drawbacks that it is conducted using an external platform which may not be trusted by all recipients, and that the reported satisfaction is lower which may be due to the automated nature of the survey.

Virtual walkabouts are conducted by other authorities, including for estates and samples of void properties that are ready to let. JG confirmed that Your Voice Leeds has conducted similar virtual walkabout projects since the meeting in which this was first discussed, and suggested requesting feedback regarding the engagement with this topic. PG added that these projects were advertised through local social media channels including the specific Housing Advisory Panel Facebook pages which has been effective in increasing interaction. Panel members agreed that an update would be useful and that the social media method of engagement has proven to be effective.

Regarding Your Voice Leeds, board members agreed that the platform is still in its infancy and as a result has many ways to develop and become more effective. Issues were raised concerning the relatively low engagement from users of the platform and questioned what numbers would be considered 'successful' for such a platform after one year of use. It was suggested that the platform is not as immediately engaging as similar offers from other providers, and that the site could benefit from consulting with an expert on website design to maximise engagement. Concerns were also raised about

the need for approval of site content, and that the process is often slow resulting in a more corporate feel when the site should be more engaging for tenants. Responses sometimes go through the same process, PG replied that the administrator of any given project is notified of all comments on the project which are usually responded to as a matter of urgency, however some queries require an answer from specific individuals who are not always available. Site users are always made aware that their query has been received and given an estimate for when they should receive a response. Questions were also raised about the ability of the site to be translated to languages for all tenants across Leeds, IP explained that a translation feature is certainly built into Google browsers and similar should exist for other browsers so a direct translation should not be necessary.

JG noted that 'engagement' is a broad term and has different meanings for different people, and Covid-19 has change the way engagement is conducted to more online means. JG highlighted the feelings of the board that no tenants should be excluded by not being online and asked if there are any resources such as old council laptops or phones that can be given to tenants to allow them to access online services. PG responded that similar questions have been raised in the past but there are information governance rules that have blocked this practice from being implemented.

Annual home visits have been conducted online since the Covid-19 lockdowns, and have been successful for the most part. JG recalled that previous suggestions raised by the board included querying the need for a face to face annual home visit each year but had previously been rejected. Approaches are now being reviewed to consider continuing online-only visits or approaches based on the needs of individual tenants. JW noted she as a Retirement Life tenant has recently been contacted regarding her preferred means of contact. PG added there are different processes for Retirement Life and general needs tenants but the consultations are taking place to be decided by housing management. JG suggested that the final decision should be able to communicate with tenants in a way that is right for everyone, and that there needs to be a mix of online and face to face approaches whenever the options are available to do so.

As a final suggestion, board members suggested a phone application for Your Voice Leeds might help to increase the engagement with the platform. PG informed the board members that an app is possible to roll out, and could be explored if the board suggest it.

JG informed the board that the report will be written in conjunction with PG and YD ahead of the June meeting, where a draft version will be presented for approval by the members. The report should have a response from the council by August, however since the board do not meet in August it will be discussed at the September meeting. In the meantime JG suggested inviting guests from previous enquiries to provide updates on their progress. Inviting Councillor Harland may also be a good idea to introduce herself to the board and discuss ideas.

66 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next zoom meeting is scheduled for Friday 18th of June at 12:45 for a 1.00pm start