

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY 16TH JULY 2021

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

57 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None.

58 Late Items

None.

59 Apologies for Absence

Stanley Burton (SBu), Peter Middleton

60 Election to Chair/Vice Chair

PG reminded the board of the agreement in the previous meeting to hold the election within the meeting if there were no new expressions of interest received within the two-week deadline since the June TSB meeting. PG confirmed there had been no new expressions of interest received and so the current Chair and Vice Chair would be standing for their present seats.

RESOLVED – The board members voted to confirm JG will remain as the Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board, and SBa will remain as the Vice Chair.

JG and SBa thanked the board members for their support for the year ahead.

61 Minutes -

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th June 2021 were approved as a true record.

62 Chair's Update

JG informed the board that he had attended the first meeting for the Housing Ombudsman panel, which laid out the ways the panel can assist with matters

for which the ombudsman becomes involved. The panel membership period will run for three years after which there will be new membership sought.

JG confirmed that cases that reach the ombudsman are relatively rare, but the figures for cases will be discussed in a future meeting. IM agreed that most complaints are resolved at stage one and the majority of those that reach stage 2 are resolved there, so there are very few cases each year that will be escalated to the ombudsman.

JG attended the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board meeting which featured a discussion with Safer Leeds about domestic violence. A summary of the discussion topics will be provided to the board with the next meeting notes when housing matters are discussed.

63 Phase 1 report

JG raised some initial concerns regarding the layout of the report, particularly that the numbering system of the points may mislead readers. PG offered to change the sub-list items to lettered points instead.

The board discussed each recommendation in turn, with all recommendations and discussion points presented in order below:

Recommendation 1 – The Board support an increased use of digital engagement and recommend an online tenant forum is set up but are concerned that tenants not online are not engaged with, therefore a digital forum should be an additional form of engagement not a replacement.

JG noted that there may be differing expectations from a “forum” as opposed to a “panel” and so suggested this wording is changed as well as to maintain consistency with previous language. The board members agreed.

Recommendation 2 – Housing Leeds need to ensure tenants not online have a means to being involved and engaged with. Combine digital with face to face for tenant engagement and scrutiny.

SB suggested that there should be more clarification that online engagement methods will be additional and an enhancement of the current offer, not a replacement of current offline methods. PG agreed to revise the wording.

Recommendation 3 – The Board recommend the introduction of online Question and Answer sessions with senior housing managers.

The board members discussed the perceived meanings of “Senior housing managers” and whether it would be too open regarding individuals, or too narrow to restrict to only managers within housing. IM recalled previous evidence from other housing associations presented to the board by Yvonne Davies which may be helpful to revisit. The board agreed a revision of the

recommendations to include the possibility of inviting relevant service managers as appropriate.

Recommendation 4 – Single issue discussion groups would be a useful way of gaining tenant opinion on any particular topic. Doing this online would allow many different voices to be heard and could lead into a larger consultation.

The board agreed no changes are necessary for recommendation 4.

Recommendation 5 – To provide added incentives to involvement with Housing Leeds should consider small rewards for tenants.

The board agreed that there may be some budget restraints which would make this recommendation unfeasible. Questions were raised about the kind of incentives that would be appropriate and how they are delegated. RI questioned if the incentives would be detrimental by encouraging engagement for the wrong reasons.

The board members agreed to remove recommendation 5 from the final report.

Recommendation 6 – Make connections with neighbouring local authorities and local Housing Associations scrutiny boards and share good practice and learning.

The board members discussed their previous interactions with their scrutiny counterparts in Gateshead and expressed their wish to continue that link and develop others alongside.

Recommendation 7 – Continue and develop the user centred design approach. Using customer insight to design services tenants want.

RI agreed it is important to continue to listen to the tenant voice and design services with tenant input for a more accessible and inclusive outcome.

Recommendation 8 – Use automated surveys because anonymity results in more realistic scoring and more immediate results.

Board members recalled the repairs survey discussed by Leonard Wright which concluded that anonymous surveys yield more realistic results and the automated nature gives a much faster turnaround time for surveys. Board members discussed the addition of wording to the recommendation to the effect of “More immediate results for the service to act upon”. Board members also discussed the potential for another recommendation regarding the provision of feedback for tenants.

Recommendation 9 – Commission a web design consultant to work alongside tenants in redesigning Your Voice Leeds to modernise it and make more visually appealing.

JG noted that Your Voice Leeds has been effective for attracting engagement regarding local issues, however on citywide issues including the TSB page it has been less effective. Consultation with a web-design expert could make a difference to creating a more attractive and engaging site which will boost interaction. Board members agreed to alter the wording to read “Commission a web design consultant to work alongside Tenant Engagement...” which by extension will include tenants. The Tenant Engagement Team are predominantly responsible for creating and updating all site content and so it would make sense that they receive any expert advice.

Recommendation 10 – Agree a way a measuring the success of Your Voice Leeds to justify the decision to extend the 12 month pilot period if desired.

The board discussed the potential ways that the success of Your Voice Leeds may be measured, including site engagements, subscriptions, views, and others. The board requested to alter “Agree a way...” to “Establish a way...” which will encourage more definite decisions and implementation.

Recommendation 11 – Use Your Voice Leeds for tenant approval of policy, service standards and monitor performance. Also develop projects derived from the “hot topic” and promote the engagement tool more widely.

The board discussed the wider issues with the lack of interaction with any survey and how to increase the engagement. RI suggested promoting Your Voice Leeds using other available social media platforms and providing regular updates to attract new site users. SB suggested targeting users for surveys based on their experiences, for example having a particular repair completed recently. IM agreed that tenant input is always important and taken into account, however there are always challenges to increasing engagement to surveys and there is no one approach that will work in all cases. The Tenant Engagement Team will use the most effective methods wherever possible and learn from the outcomes for future consultations.

Board members agreed to alter the recommendation to remove “tenant approval” in favour of wording to the effect of “gathering tenant feedback”.

Recommendation 12 – Use a panel of tenants to proof/check language used.

The board agreed with this recommendation to avoid updates coming across as too corporate and inaccessible for tenants.

Recommendation 13 – Make the translation facility more obvious.

Board members agreed it is important the site is as accessible as possible. Though Your Voice Leeds does not have direct translations, the board agreed that the in-built translation function of most web browsers will be adequate as long as it is made obvious the option is available.

Recommendation 14 – Consider alternative approaches to citywide projects. Currently tenants are mainly engaging with projects local to themselves.

Board members suggested that tenants are less interested in citywide matters or matters that are not local to them. IM suggested that there have been citywide consultations since the board had previously seen the numbers of feedback and that the engagement has been increasing over time. Lessons have been learned from previous consultations which is improving engagement with each project.

Board members agreed to keep recommendation 14 as it is.

Recommendation 15 – Tenant Scrutiny Board to promote the work of the board through Your Voice Leeds.

Board members agreed that Your Voice Leeds is achieving more users over time and so recommendation 15 does not require any changes.

Recommendation 16 – Consider providing a Your Voice Leeds mobile phone app.

The board discussed the importance of a mobile app for convenience as well as the broader appeal to younger demographics.

Recommendation 17 – Donate old IT equipment to engaged tenants who are not digitally connected.

JG recalled that a similar suggestion has previously been made by the board, but had been met with barriers relating to data protection and viability from the council. The board agreed that if possible, this recommendation would help tenants with accessing digital devices in an affordable way.

Recommendation 18 – Provide online version of annual home visits via a video call.

JG again noted a similar recommendation had been put forward by the TSB in previous years and was rejected, however changing circumstances due to Covid-19 has resulted in changes to the usual Annual Home Visit options. IM suggested the changes to the home visits are still relatively new, and so “trial” may be a better approach than “provide” just in case for any reason the video calls were not fit for use.

Recommendation 19 – Continue to be innovative and take a User Centred Design approach to learning from complaints, virtual walkabouts and use an automated text service.

The board members discussed previous examples of innovation such as online walkabouts and the automated text survey. There was some debate about what might constitute ‘innovation’ as it could look different between

various projects. Board members agreed with the general principle which encourages trialling and using any available means to provide the best possible service to tenants.

JG thanked the board members for their input and requested the board members' agreement to work with PG to implement the changes suggested at the meeting and to authorise the final version before the next meeting in September. Board members agreed with JG's suggestion.

64 Co-option of members

JG noted that there would be significant benefit of gathering evidence from the other citywide panel members during stage 2, but there needs to be a clear framework for how external members can join in with meetings and give evidence. Non-TSB members will not be able to vote but will be able to take part in relevant discussions and should otherwise feel as though they are welcome in meetings.

IM agreed that any contributor should be made to feel welcome in meetings but raised concerns that any formal co-option process could be off putting to many tenants and therefore discourage them from contributing. TSB meetings are and always have been open to observers and so there would be no issues with inviting a range of forum members with a focus on inclusivity. IM suggested that once the stage 1 report is finalised it can receive a response from the service which can be used as a springboard to encourage feedback from the other involved forums.

JG suggested that co-option would be the preferred term to retain the importance of guest contributions, however it would not have to come with any formal process for doing so. JG proposed that there would still need to be discussion regarding the topic and it would be an idea to include on future agendas and potentially for a whole meeting to resolve the issue. IM agreed and suggested that the forward plan be revised to work out when the discussions would be best to take place. IM offered to invite representatives from TPAS to discuss best practice with the board members.

65 Date and Time of Next Meeting

JG reminded the board members that there will be no meeting in August, and that he will be unavailable between the 7th and the 29th of August.

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday 17th of September at 12:45 for a 1.00pm start, venue to be confirmed or Zoom.