

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY 15TH OCTOBER 2021

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair
Sallie Bannatyne
Maddy Hunter
Rita Ighade
Jackie Worthington
Ian Parr
Peter Greenwood
Ian Montgomery
Yvonne Davies
Mandy Sawyer

66 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None.

67 Late Items

None.

68 Apologies for Absence

Stanley Burton (SBu), Mary Farish, Peter Middleton.

69 Minutes -

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

70 Chair's Update

Since the previous meeting in July, JG along with PG gave evidence to an intern from Manchester University who was compiling a report about Tenant Scrutiny for Camden council in north London.

JG met for the first time with Councillor Rafique, the new Executive Member for Environment, Housing and Communities, to give an update of the present review. Councillor Rafique is keen to introduce himself to the board and agreed to attend a meeting before the end of the year.

JG is unable to attend the Environment, Housing, and Communities Board next

Thursday due to a requirement to self-isolate, however JG will arrange a meeting with Councillor Barry Anderson to update him on the board's work.

71 Phase 1 recommendations

JG reminded board members of the recommendations that had previously been put forward to Tenant Engagement, and thanked IM, PG, and MS for the thorough responses that had been given. JG informed the panel that they would decide upon the board's position for each response, from six options in line with previous reviews conducted by the board.

The options determining the position are as follows:

1. Stop monitoring or determine whether any further action is required
2. Achieved
3. Not fully implemented (Obstacle)
4. Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
5. Not fully implemented (Progress made not acceptable. Continue monitoring)
6. Not for review this session

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.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM explained that the service has shared with the Board an outline of what a new single online tenant panel could look like, and more details will be shared during phase 2 of the boards' review. The service is keen for input from involved tenants in Leeds, examples from other landlords and input from sector professionals such as TPAS to help design an effective online tenant panel.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

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.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM agreed that engagement activity is strengthened when in-person and digital methods are used in combination. The engagement framework now takes a more mixed approach so that a broader range of tenants and residents can engage.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

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

Response – Recommendation accepted

The service is able to trial this type of engagement, with the initial suggestion to include senior officers in a webinar style panel meeting. This can be included as part of the forward plan of the new Tenant Voice Panel and at key points when consulting on the Housing Leeds Service Plan for the year ahead. The service would like to evaluate this activity and any lessons learned from other landlords that might help us develop further.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

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.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM confirmed that the service supports single issue discussion groups, and it is considered a good way to get feedback from tenants with recent experience of a specific service that we are needing to improve or change. The service would like to consider our approach to this as part of the boards phase 2 review, to help clarify how hot topics are selected, and the relationship between discussion groups and the new Tenants Voice Panel.

The board agreed on position 2 - Achieved

Recommendation 5 – Make connections with neighbouring local authorities and local Housing Associations scrutiny boards and share good practice and learning.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM told the board that the service currently has connections with other local authorities and housing associations, including TPAS which grants access to a staff online network where good practice is shared on all aspects of Tenant Engagement. The service attends 'Scrutiny.net', bi-monthly meetings at which officers from across the north of England share good practice with a focus on Tenant Scrutiny and also has connections with Gateshead Housing Scrutiny Board who have met with Leeds TSB.

The board agreed on position 2 – Achieved

Recommendation 6 – Continue and develop the user centred design approach. Using customer insight to design services tenants want.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM informed the board that the service is keen to progress and carry out further service improvement using more user centred design approaches. This is key to improving the overall customer experience of day-to-day services. Using user centred design to innovate and improve is within the Housing Leeds Service Plan for 2021/22.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

Recommendation 7 – Use automated surveys because anonymity results in more realistic scoring and more immediate results.

Response – Partially accepted

IM reminded the board of the January meeting regarding the automated satisfaction survey trials that were being used within the repairs service. Benefits include allowing tenants to respond by text about the experience of their recent repair, and giving the service access to quick and cost-effective feedback. This trial ran in parallel to existing voice telephone surveys, with the software trialled by Customer Services was known as 'Bright'. Since the time of reporting to the board the repairs service is now planning longer term on using software called 'SMART'. The service would like to trial a period of collecting customer satisfaction data using the 'SMART' software, in parallel to the traditional voice surveys. The partial accepting of this recommendation is because the software is still considered to be under trial, and that the feedback will be gathered over time before a full decision can be made regarding the efficacy of the software. The service also wish to understand more about the equality considerations in terms of how this is accessed by tenants.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

Recommendation 8 – Commission a web design consultant to work alongside tenants in redesigning Your Voice Leeds to modernise it and make more visually appealing.

Response – Recommendation partially accepted

IM explained that the software is owned and managed by a national supplier with an annual licence agreement, and so the service is unable to commission an external website design consultant to make changes to Your Voice Leeds. However, the Tenant Engagement Team benefits from regular consultations with 'Bang The Table' who are the suppliers of the Your Voice Leeds software. Bang The Table will provide an annual benchmarking' report

including quantitative information about the usage and activity of Your Voice Leeds compared to other comparable users, and also commentary and advice for how we can improve and develop the access, appearance and the overall quality of Your Voice Leeds in the future.

JG clarified that the intention of the design consultant was not to make software changes, but to provide advice on the look, layout, and potential content of the site to maximise engagement. IM replied that there are options currently available to alter the look of the site, and can consult with RI to establish if there are any preferable options for the site.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

Recommendation 9 – Establish a way a measuring the success of Your Voice Leeds to justify the decision to extend the 12 month pilot period if desired.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM explained that the service has access to a large range of usage data from within Your Voice Leeds, which can be used to understand how many people are visiting and actively participating in giving feedback for the site. This data will be used to evaluate the overall success of Your Voice Leeds. The user base continues to grow as more projects are added, and so justifies extending the licence for a second year.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

Recommendation 10 – 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.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM confirmed that the service is committed to using Your Voice Leeds to engage tenants on operational and strategic policy design in line with the Housing Leeds Service Plan. This would also supplement the local performance monitoring undertaken by local Housing Advisory Panels. Consultations are promoted and tenants are invited to take part through a number of means, including social media posts, targeted text messages and emails, updates to the Leeds.gov site, and through internal staff bulletins to raise awareness. The site will also be promoted with a range of hard copy materials including business cards, flyers and posters.

The board agreed on position 2 – Achieved

Recommendation 11 – Use a panel of tenants to proof/check language used.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM confirmed the service proposal that one of the functions of the new 'Tenant Voice Panel' is to act as an editorial panel to help give feedback on the presentation, accessibility, language etc of consultations and wider tenant communications prior to their launch.

The board agreed on position 2 – Achieved

Recommendation 12 – Make the translation facility more obvious.

Response – Recommendation rejected

IM explained that the council's web team has advised against the addition of Google Translate to the Your Voice Leeds website due to translations being not wholly reliable or accurate. Translation tools such as Google Translate can also interfere with other assisted technology such as screen readers which are able to convert text into other languages. Site users will have the ability to switch to different languages built into the functionality of their browser, for example, users of Chrome will be offered translations based on their chosen language settings.

The board agreed on position 6 - Not for review this session

Recommendation 13 – Consider alternative approaches to citywide projects. Currently tenants are mainly engaging with projects local to themselves.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM explained that at the time of the boards review into Your Voice Leeds consultations were mainly focussed on getting feedback from within specific communities, for example the online walkabouts in Burmantofts and Cottingley, and the Greener Gipton Campaign consultation. Since then there have been more consultations that are relevant to tenants citywide, including consulting tenants on the design of the rent statement and gathering tenants' views about managing their tenancy online to help influence the move to a new self-service portal. Your Voice Leeds will continue to be utilised for a mixture of local and citywide consultation so as many tenants as possible can give their views and influence the services we give.

The board agreed on position 2 – Achieved

Recommendation 14 – Tenant Scrutiny Board to promote the work of the board through Your Voice Leeds.

Response – Recommendation accepted

IM welcomed using Your Voice Leeds to help the board engage with tenants more widely, sharing the work of the board, and giving tenants more access to and understanding about board activity. The ability to use Your Voice to engage with residents on behalf of a tenant scrutiny function has attracted interest from other scrutiny boards and the service is keen to develop good practice in this area. It will also be beneficial to promote the activity of the board using social media and on Your Voice Leeds. Meeting minutes and documents will also be available via the Modern Gov platform.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

Recommendation 15 – Consider providing a Your Voice Leeds mobile phone app.

Response – Recommendation rejected

IM explained that Bang The Table have confirmed they no longer have plans to develop a separate app for mobile phone users. The commitment is that the software is designed so that it automatically resizes to any screen on which it is accessed. This makes the site more accessible to all users and eliminates the need for a separate app.

The board agreed on position 6 - Not for review this session

Recommendation 16 – Donate old IT equipment to engaged tenants who are not digitally connected.

Response – Recommendation rejected

IM explained that all Leeds City Council hardware which becomes unusable is sent back to the supplier for secure data wiping and safe hardware disposal. Many of these devices are not suitable for re-issue as they are old, cosmetically damaged, and commonly have major hardware faults. The reusable parts from old, faulty, or redundant devices are recycled, and some of the older devices and parts are sold by the supplier at minimal cost to various charities and good causes.

Leeds City Council is sensitive to tackling the issue of the lack of a device being a barrier for tenants, residents and families across Leeds, and the ICT service in conjunction with Childrens' Services gave over 1,800 laptops, 300 MiFi devices and 350 iPads during the pandemic to those who were digitally excluded. This is in addition to the work of 100% Digital Leeds.

The Tenant Engagement team has also loaned six tablets to tenants across different forums and groups to allow them to engage and participate in tenant

involvement activity more easily. Feedback from these residents has been positive, and we hope to widen the access to loaned tablets for tenants involved in formal tenant involvement in the year ahead.

The board agreed on position 6 - Not for review this session

Recommendation 17 – Provide online version of annual home visits via a video call.

Response – Recommendation deferred

IM informed the board that over the last year the annual home visit had become known as an 'annual tenancy check' which was now conducted in different ways include a home visit, a telephone call, or an online survey. The online survey has just been piloted and we are currently evaluating the success of this to inform how we move forward across this year and next. Careful consideration will need to be given on how any video contacts could work in practice, for example the video conferencing software used, the costs of the software, how staff and tenants would feel about this approach and in what circumstances it would be suitable for it to be offered. At this stage this recommendation is unable to be fully accepted or rejected. However, the service understands the ambition of the board to want to offer this type of contact to improve the customer experience for tenants who may prefer to be contacted in this way.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

Recommendation 18 – Continue to be innovative and take a User Centred Design approach to learning from complaints, virtual walkabouts and use an automated text service.

Response – Recommendation accepted.

IM confirmed that Housing Leeds will continue to innovate to seek to improve its approach to Tenant Engagement so with tenant input we can design the best possible services. The recent Social Housing White Paper sets out the need for landlords to continually improve the way they engage with social housing tenants. An innovative approach, using Your Voice Leeds for example, will help assure the Social Housing Regulator that we are meeting this expectation.

The board agreed on position 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

72 Phase 2 discussion

JG recalled the previous discussions surrounding the new Tenant Voice Panel, and the reasons shared previously by the service in order to create a sustainable and effective way to involve tenants. The new panel seeks to

create a more streamlined way of working, promote and increase membership, and provide a direct link to the Tenant Scrutiny Board. The opinions of the current citywide group members will be invited at the next meeting, and there will be invitations to speak with TPAS representatives who will be asked to provide expert insight.

IM gave a presentation with more detail about the Tenant Voice Panel, for example, outlining its proposed position to support the Strategic Housing Board, to provide editorial input into wider tenant communications, and to participate in consultations across a variety of topics. Members will be invited to attend and participate in regional and national forums held by TPAS and other relevant forums.

Membership of the new panel will be open to all of the existing citywide forum members including the TSB, Housing Advisory Panels, and Tenants and Residents Associations. Members may also be leaseholders as they also receive services from Housing Leeds. Two members from the panel will be asked to sit as tenant representatives on the strategic housing board.

Initial membership is proposed for up to one hundred individuals so that all members have a chance to be involved, but this number will be under review as the panel grows over time. There will be a focus on recruiting a diverse membership including geographically. Members who are inactive will be consulted on an annual basis to be asked if they still wish to be a member.

There will be no chair or vice chair of the panel, instead the panel will be supported by Tenant Engagement and led by an appropriate officer or expert depending on the topic. Activity will mostly take place digitally using Your Voice Leeds, with meetings largely held via Zoom, but there will be some opportunities for face-to-face meetings. Members will also have a space to communicate and share ideas with each other using the platform.

Customer satisfaction will be a key driver of debate, with six-monthly STAR surveys carried out and the results shared with the panel. The survey results can be used to encourage debate and generate ideas over several weeks, with a conclusion meeting arranged to share service feedback and responses taken. The outcomes will also be shared more widely via social media, internal and external email bulletins, and in annual reports.

The Tenant Scrutiny Board will remain a separate board with a standing chair. The proposal is to retain six regular TSB members, with up to ten members invited from the Tenant Voice Panel for individual reviews, all of whom will have equal voting rights as TSB members. Proposed reviews will take a more bite-sized approach with a mixture of formal and informal methods which will allow for more dynamic and engaging work and faster overall outcomes. The Tenant Engagement Framework has been updated to reflect the new makeup of the tenant forums, identifying individual, local, and strategic branches that all feed into the larger structure. The new framework improves upon the previous version by being more effective at receiving feedback, more accessible to all users, and more cost-effective overall.

The Tenant Voice Panel will be promoted through a variety of means, including updated web content; social media posts; new team flyers; business cards; sharing with staff in 'Housing Leeds Matters'; and regular email updates to tenants, residents and community groups.

The next steps will be to invite TPAS to take an appraisal of this approach, and to clarify how the wider service improvement group members will be invited to the November TSB meeting. The new promotional content will be designed so that it is ready to be utilised as soon as possible. IM opened the floor to any questions or comments.

YD informed the panel that the outlined approach is consistent with the direction being taken within the sector, including by the ombudsman. The housing white paper clearly obliges authorities to conduct tenant engagement as widely and as effectively as possible, and this approach creates a 'funnel' of feedback that captures all voices and allows the feedback to be used for service improvement. Since the feedback will reach the TSB and Strategic Housing Board this will also allow for strategic involvement.

MS agreed that the new framework provides a more effective method to gather feedback than the previous model, and forges stronger links between the TSB and the other forums by reducing duplication across multiple panels and creating a more seamless line of communication between all of the involved members.

SBa asked how staff will be notified of the changes to the engagement framework and how they will be involved. IM responded that the framework will be shared with all staff through internal updates and team meetings, and the forward plan includes briefing partners and contractors about the updates so they are also aware.

JG asked for more clarification about the role and membership of the Strategic Housing Board. MS answered that the Strategic Housing Board was set up in 2018 and is made up of six elected members, one independent member, and two tenant or leaseholder members. The board oversees the Leeds Housing Strategy which includes private and housing association properties, and reviews themes including neighbourhoods, housing for older people, and health and housing. The meeting schedule has fluctuated over the lockdown period but the previous meeting was towards the end of September 2021. IM clarified that the tenant representatives on the board will be selected in the same way as present, through an expression of interest followed by an interview to determine suitability.

JG questioned the need for a new members code of conduct for the Tenant Voice Panel, IM replied it is not quite as formal as the old requirement, however it would be beneficial to refresh the expectations for behaviour and interactions and is happy to consult with YD for best practice in this area.

73 Forward plan

JG informed the board of the intention to invite the current members of the citywide forums to provide their feedback at November's TSB meeting. The members will be provided with the minutes and presentation from the present meeting so they are fully informed. IM confirmed that discussions will be held with YD to decide on the best way to reach out and invite as many opinions as possible.

74 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday 19th of November at 12:45 for a 1.00pm start, venue to be confirmed or Zoom