

## TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY, 24TH MAY, 2019

**PRESENT:** John Gittos in the Chair

Sallie Bannatyne, Stanley Burton, Mary Farish, Maddie Hunter, Stephen Ilee, Peter Middleton and Jackie Worthington

### 1 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

None

### 2 Late Items

None.

JG proposed to close the matter of the requested break down of high rise block service charges, as it seems there is no such breakdown available or to be produced. The board agreed the issue is closed.

### 3 Apologies for Absence

Rita Ighade, Roderic Morgan.

RI will be able to attend meetings again from September after her working pattern is changed.

JG updated the board that he has provided RM with a letter to inform the job centre of RM's commitment to the board, which may allow RM to attend if allowed by the job centre.

### 4 Chair's Update

#### Minutes – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**RESOLVED** – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 April 2019 were passed as a true record.

JG informed the board that he will be away following the meeting until Monday the 3rd of June, and if members have any queries regarding TSB matters they should contact KM or IP.

JG reminded the board that the next meeting will include the Chair election, so members have until the 7th of June to submit their expression of interest for the position to KM. KM added that the forms were given to all members at the previous meeting, but can be sent again electronically to those that would like another copy.

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting  
to be held on Friday, 28th June, 2019

## 5 TSB Review Workshop (Group discussion)

JG reminded members that the aim of the session was to plan the future working methods of the board, and not to criticise the way the board has previously conducted investigations.

KM explained that members had been encouraged to submit suggestions that would help to shape the development of the board and improve working practices. Comments received from SI had been included in the pack for members to read, along with comments/observations from Housing Leeds with the suggestion being the discussion centres around four themes;

1. How do we choose an inquiry?
2. How do we undertake an inquiry?
3. How do we run as a group?
4. How do we communicate and share more widely?

### 1. How do we choose an inquiry?

SBa questioned the necessity of changes to the board, as the board already has working practices that were set with previous scrutiny officers before KM took on the role of scrutiny officer. JG agreed, asking if the previous scrutiny officer had been consulted. KM confirmed that he had, and reiterated that the aim of the session wasn't to criticise current practice, but to develop new ways of working in keeping with national best practice. IM added that this meeting is a follow on from the meeting previously attended by MS, and that strategic input from the head of service is just one factor that can help shape the direction of the board.

SI commented that investigations and reports should be chosen based on available evidence. Lines of enquiry should be broken down by the area of complaint so more robust conclusions can be found, as the general findings of the STAR survey are consistent with previous surveys and changes are more evident on a finer level. SI further suggested the input of other tenants' groups/boards might divert the enquiry as each group has issues that are closer to them. JG disagreed stating that the board has always picked its line of enquiry independently of any input from other boards, for example it was VITAL that suggested the LASBT review, but the board has always voted on the next line of investigation fairly.

SBu suggested that the new members who had not yet taken part in an enquiry are not fully aware of the current practice of the board, JG agreed and proposed a further meeting with the newest members, SBu and MF to discuss the board's method and previous enquiries.

KM surmised that there were two distinct approaches that could be taken in defining an inquiry, top down (based on the views of the EHC Board/senior managers etc) or bottom up (Based on customer satisfaction, STAR surveys and complaints data etc), and suggested that both needed to be considered to ensure an ensuing inquiry made the most effective use of available resources.

MS agreed that the input of senior officers is important as they are the staff who know the council's processes and limitations that can also see the bigger picture regarding the service in question. In order for the scrutiny function to be improved, the insight of officers should be taken on board.

JG asked if the ultimate purpose was to save money for the council by improving the service. MS informed the board that the council's aim is to broaden engagement and achieve a better value for money, as the board requires disproportionately more resources and administration than other groups. SBa asked if a breakdown of the required staff time can be provided to the board as in her opinion it seems to be less than the board previously had, and suggested the chair is the person who spends the most time on board matters. JG agreed that the administration is more involved than for the other groups, for example, the retention of full minutes instead of action summaries. MS explained that the reduction of administration is a goal for all groups across the council.

IM asked how heavily the strategic perspective should impact the investigation, and how evidence such as complaints, KPIs, and other performance data is used. IM suggested that a two to three week window could be opened in which tenants are more actively engaged with and where they can submit their own suggestions for enquiry simultaneously generating ideas and increasing the profile of the board. JG agreed that this approach has been lacking from the board. SI stated that according to AHV data there are 8,000 tenants who expressed a desire to be involved, and the voice of these tenants can be utilised further. IM suggested the process can be implemented in stages, and that comparisons with other services and authorities can be used depending on the nature of the investigation. The board can be promoted through the existing network of community groups that are involved with the council, and spread even further beyond.

SBa questioned the approach towards the involvement of tenants, as past meetings were sometimes over-subscribed whereas now the opposite is true. MS explained that the attitude of tenants has seen the most change, as they tend to lead busier lives and avoid more formal means of engagement preferring instead to be consulted online in more dynamic ways. SI agreed that the tenants who declared an interest in the AHV data can be consulted based on their interests and so their input can be tailored to issues that impact them. JW suggested that TARAs are an appropriate forum to consult as there is a greater age diversity within those groups.

JG proposed that the next board meeting continues the topic as there is not currently much on the workplan and the conversation would be better to spread over two sessions.

## 2. How do we undertake an inquiry?

KM noted that the current process of an enquiry, begins with the most senior member of staff being interviewed by the Board with further interviews conducted with managers and officers cascading downwards through the service. Whilst this allows the board to understand that there is a golden

thread of understanding that runs through the service it doesn't always capture the reality of tenant experiences.

KM explained that one option to consider was whether whilst retaining the formal introduction to an inquiry, interviewing the most senior responsible manager or head of service, the investigation and evidence gathering part on an inquiry might be strengthened if undertaken via a workshop/series of workshops with members of staff at multiple levels and tenants. This would allow for more open discussions with board members able to hear the debate between service users and providers.

This could mean investigation periods can be shortened and the workshops and other forms of consultation taking place over a period of weeks rather than spread over many months. Collated evidence can then be fed back to senior managers in a formal setting as they are now. This could mean that more than one investigation might be undertaken in the course of a year and both productivity and value for money increased. JG agreed that this approach would be less restrictive than the current format which is less agile and takes a longer time to complete.

SBa questioned the limitations of engaging with staff in a workshop, suggesting that the board could work in groups and visit the workplace to see the daily activity of the staff. MS agreed that this approach could also achieve better results, and board members can be upskilled to make the most of the opportunity. JG questioned if onsite visits such as this would be more resource-intensive, MS responded that it would help to maximise the value of the research conducted by the board.

JG suggested that the current members of the board might be restricted in their ability to attend workplaces, and that it might be something to consider for the future. IM suggested this is why the workshop approach is positive, as multiple staff can attend at one time if a smaller group of board members wanted to attend, meanwhile other board members can visit the workplace and report back to the larger group. MS added that the workshop allows for dialogue whereas formal meetings are more restrictive, however JG disagreed with that point.

JW noted that when lettings was being investigated, the council let board members pick and choose the staff members to speak to, JG added that in a workshop or a meeting senior staff members were asking their managers what to say, and that the board might not be able to tell if what staff are saying is true or false. IM offered that he and KM will help support the board members and the investigation process can be made more robust.

JG raised the issue that previous enquiries have faced obstacles such as not being allowed to see all of the data due to GDPR restrictions. KM reassured JG that tenant scrutiny across many authorities is changing, and many organisations are now looking to incorporate more publicly available data and benchmark against other services.

It was suggested that there could also be opportunities to shadow an officer, review website content, and speak to other services etc but JG questioned if shadowing an officer would be possible as he was aware that things don't always happen even if promised beforehand. MS clarified that she had spoken to councillor Coupar and Jill Wildman, and that members will be supported and any feedback escalated. The main issue that has recently come to light is access to data under GDPR, however workarounds can be put in place, such as anonymised data or recordings rather than live calls.

JG reiterated that previous tenant surveys about services were only given to involved tenants, but IM assured the board that the aim is to retrieve wider tenant feedback, for example it should be possible to obtain contact details for tenants that have used a specific repairs service in the last six months to approach them for feedback. KM added that the broader engagement will increase the profile of the board, and so more people with more diverse skills can be recruited.

KM noted that website traffic data showed that in the last six months there were only 75 visits to the Tenant Scrutiny Board page. JG asked if the chair of the board should be able to post social media content to the board page, as he had previously been told he was not allowed. IM suggested it was a previous restriction but there should not be an issue with posting content, and that Housing Leeds already has multiple accounts with thousands of followers. An example flow chart for a model process can be developed and shown at the next meeting.

JG suggested the next meeting be held on a different date because IM and MS would be unable to attend as it currently stands.

JG questioned a passage of the meeting documentation suggesting officers spend too much time managing member relationships, and asked for clarification. KM replied that there had been a number of concerns raised directly with him outside of the meeting by different members about other members of the board. IM added that members each have individual takes on meeting outcomes that sometimes differ from the others and raise their issues outside of the meeting. JG asked why he was not made aware of these issues, but KM replied that the issues aren't always for him to reveal if it is not what the member wants, and would exercise his judgement about doing so when issues are raised.

## **6 Work Plan for Tenant Scrutiny Board**

Members agreed that the next meeting should be utilised to continue today's conversation (themes 3 and 4) and continue to move towards agreeing the future direction of the board.

Also noted as referred to under 95, that the next meeting will include the Chair election. JG informed the board that he will be standing as a candidate for the chair election.

## **7 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The June meeting will again take place at Navigation House, time and date to be confirmed. The June meeting will again take place at Navigation House on Friday the 28th of June, 2pm - 4pm.

**THE MEETING CLOSED AT 3:00 PM**