

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY, 3RD JULY, 2020

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair
Sallie Bannatyne
Stanley Burton
Mary Farish
Maddy Hunter
Rita Ighade
Jackie Worthington

62 Apologies for Absence

63 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public
None.

64 Late Items
None.

65 Minutes -

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 February 2020 were passed as a true record.

66 Welcome and introductions

Everyone introduced themselves via the online Zoom meeting tool.

67 Service presentation (Tenant Engagement inquiry)

Mandy Sawyer presented an overview of the Tenant Engagement Service as a whole – explaining the wider activity of her service in terms of tenant involvement, tenant engagement and support for communities, along with the priorities in terms of how we'd like to see the service developed e.g. adopting broader digital approaches.

Mandy reiterated the services commitment to creating a 'customer first' culture by involving tenants, understanding what best practice looks like working with tenants to design a better service.

Mandy noted the need to work within the context of the social housing regulator and adhere to the 'tenant involvement and empowerment standard', as well as being mindful of the pending Housing White Paper.

When explaining the activity related to Tenant Involvement Mandy spoke of how our formal groups have a focus on service improvement using a 'co-

design' principle as well as a sounding board for wider activity – talking through the many ways in which tenants more widely are engaged and how communities are supported through our local networks e.g. the 11 HAP's and TARA's etc.

JG thanked Mandy for the presentation and invited questions from the board.

68 Questions from the Board

JG asked whether the HAP budget was held separately to other housing budgets and is it subject to change.

MS described that all housing budgets come from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget. This year the budget has been impacted by Covid-19 with lowered income from rent and resources needed for extra services to minimise the impact on tenants. A review of all council budgets will take place to identify ways to resolve the pressures caused by the unexpected change in spending and income for the HRA and the council as a whole.

RI enquired as to how many Housing officers are there across the city.

MS reported there are approximately 200 housing officers, each covering a 'patch' of between 300 - 400 individual homes. The patch size in Leeds tends to be smaller than most other authorities and this is intentionally so to help the services provide high quality interaction and support for tenants. It is important to note that engagement with tenants happens between all customer-facing officers via a variety of means and is not exclusive to the Tenant Engagement Team.

SB asked if the board could be given a chart with the number of staff in the service and how they are distributed within different teams including the Tenant Engagement Team. MS is happy for this information to be shared.

Action: Share the organisational structure chart for Housing/Tenant Engagement with TSB members

JG noted that Covid-19 has impacted the way all teams are operating and asked if other forums have been able to meet like the Tenant Scrutiny Board has been doing during the pandemic?

IM confirmed that the HAPs are now meeting digitally using skype. Citywide forums such as VITAL or the High Rise Strategy Group have currently not met since February.

JG referred to some concerns having been raised previously that bids are approved by managers before being presented to the panel, and that makes it appear that the council are acting as 'judge and jury' on bids.

MS clarified that applications for funding are reviewed because all council expenditure is subject to scrutiny, and the process ensures that the money is

being spent wisely and for the benefit of tenants. The process allows for issues to be raised and explored which tenant panel members may not be aware of or able to investigate themselves. The process was agreed in consultation with the HAP chairs so it has been developed with tenants, and is about making sure the HAP have all the information they need to allow them to make their decisions.

JG also noted that work on some projects, especially environmental projects, are often limited by requiring in-house services to complete the work and can mean some projects are not completed quickly, does that always have to be the case?

MS explained that using internal service providers helps to maintain transparency on how the money is spent, and there are much clearer channels of communication between all departments involved when they are internal to the council. Their use also helps to keep money within the council at a time when the council's finances need to be reviewed.

JG commented that in order to move forward with this investigation it would be useful to be able to co-opt members of the other tenant forums onto the board, and asked if this would be supported by Housing?

MS said she would absolutely encourage bringing in members of other forums to inform any evidence gathering.

JG thanked Mandy for her presentation.

69 Date and Time of Next Meeting

JG noted that a further zoom meeting was already scheduled for Friday 17th July at 12:45 for a 1.00pm start

JG commented that given the board do not normally meet during August, it was important that the board could meet again at the end of July (31st) prior to the August break.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 2:00 PM