

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 21ST DECEMBER, 2016

PRESENT: John Gittos in the Chair

Olga Gailite, Michael Healey, Peter Middleton, Roderic Morgan and Jackie Worthington

37 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

38 Late Items

There were no late items.

39 Apologies for Absence

Rita Ighade, Sallie Bannatyne, Christine Gregory, Maddie Hunter

40 Minutes - 30th November 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2016 be approved as a correct record.

41 Chair's Update

The Chair explained that he was unable to attend the last meeting of the Environment and Housing Board due to being on holiday but the Chair discussed what was on their agenda.

Air Quality in Leeds

The Chair explained they received a detailed report from the Director of Housing on the progress being made by the Council in informing and communicating the issue of air pollution to the residents, businesses and schools around Leeds. Initiatives to get people out their cars onto public transport, giving us less cars on our roads will help reduce this. The Chair explained the Council's website has been updated with air quality information for businesses and residents.

Peckfield Landfill Site

The Chair explained a further discussion on the site at Micklefield took place and the Environment Agency submitted a report to the Board with regard to permit breaches recorded at the Peckfield site whilst under the management of Caird Peckfield Ltd. The Board had in September been disappointed the agency did not attend when invited, so they invited them to the last meeting in

December but it was explained to the Chair in a letter that although they value the work of Scrutiny Boards, because of limited resources they couldn't attend in person and so they submitted a detailed written report.

Meeting with Mandy Sawyer

At the last Tenant Scrutiny Board meeting members were informed that the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board had asked Mandy Sawyer to submit a report to them regarding Tenant Scrutiny Board governance arrangements and the relationship between the two boards, and a report will be submitted to their meeting in January. The Chair had a meeting with Mandy Sawyer on 1st December to discuss this. When the report is completed, the Chair will ensure the Board receives a copy and are able to discuss it at our meeting, most likely in March.

The Chair explained that due to personal circumstances Christine would not be attending meetings for the foreseeable future. The Chair thanked Christine for her work on the Board and members of the board passed on good wishes to her and hoped to see her again very soon.

In regard to the Lettable Standard report the Chair explained he would join the group in order to ensure the report was completed.

The Chair also explained that he has been in communications by email and telephone with Sharon and Lee with regard to the Boards work.

42 Update on Annual Home Visits Inquiry

The Chair invite Gerard Tinsdale to present the report on Annual Home Visits inquiry. The Chair noted that the recommendations have been updated with a new position, however there was only a requirement to vote on recommendations 1, 9 and 10. The remainder of the recommendations being achieved already.

Recommendation 1

GT explained that the visits can still be used to detect fraud but this is not their primary purpose. GT explained that whilst fraud detection was the factor when they were first introduced, this has evolved over time and we gain a lot of valuable knowledge about our tenants and any needs they may have from the visits.

RESOLVED The Board voted unanimously to agree to position status 2 - Achieved

Recommendation 2

GT noted that these visits are no longer referred to as Annual Tenancy Visits and reported the content of the visit was enhanced to give greater emphasis on considering additional support needs for the tenant.

The Chair noted that the change of name of the visit has helped remove the visits reputation as a 'snooper's charter'. GT noted that the change of name

has helped officers feel more comfortable carrying out the visits and helped tenants understand we are visiting to help assist them.

Recommendation 3

GT reported that the majority of Annual Home Visits are carried out with an appointment made with the tenant. The Chair noted that this was a recommendation the Board offered Housing Leeds and has been taken up by them with positive outcomes.

Recommendation 4

GT explained this has been looked into by Housing Leeds but it is felt important that all tenants receive an annual visit. The Chair asked if officers are meeting their targets for visits which was explained they are.

GT noted that officers attempt to carry out the visits in the first 9 months of the financial year so that a focus on rent can be done for the last 3 months.

MH reported that some tenants report being visited more than once a year and some tenants express a concern there is an issue and that is why they are visited twice. GT explained this can happen because visits are not done on a rolling year but by financial year but it is explained to officers to space visits out so that this is not a frequent occurrence.

MH asked if this would impact on performance where two visits are done, and GT explained that each property is only counted once, regardless if they were visited twice so this occurrence would not affect performance figures.

Recommendation 5

GT noted that offices receive lists of gas checks which need to be carried out which allows Housing Officers to work with Property and Contracts to gain access and carry out the Annual Home Visit which is a more efficient use of officer time and also benefits tenants by having one day of visits rather than over a few days.

Recommendation 6

GT explained that this is something which has been ongoing for a number of years, through blitzes or multi agency action days which prove successful.

Recommendation 7

GT explained that visits are still carried out to those tenants living in Sheltered accommodation and that these are carried out by Scheme Support Officers as they are better equipped to deal with issues that may arise from tenants.

Recommendation 8

GT updated the Board that we continue to offer flexible appoints to arrange for multi team visits so that tenants can have visits from Housing Leeds teams all in one day.

Recommendation 9

GT referred to item 7 of this meeting's agenda which had been discussed prior to item 6 as the update for this recommendation.

GT noted that there may be some time before an update on a mobile solution can be provided however when this is known a further update will be provided to the Board.

RESOLVED The Board voted unanimously to agree to position status 4 – not fully implemented progress made acceptable – continue monitoring.

RESOLVED The Board resolved to receive an update on mobile working during the 2017/18 municipal year if appropriate and to add this to the yearly work plan.

Recommendation 10

GT explained that this links to being able to do Annual Home Visits through the mobile working solution and that because of the current situation this is not something we have been able to do as we would have liked. However it should be noted that the visits still pick up a large amount of information which is used to help drive improvements.

RESOLVED The Board voted unanimously to agree to position status 2 – Achieved, as this relates to the data rather than the mobile working solution.

43 Mobile Working Update

The Chair asked Gerard Tinsdale to present his report on mobile working.

GT explained on his previous visits to the Board that they have been shown tablets but since that they have been trialled and didn't provide an effective solution due to the operating system the Council was using. As such, Officers were issued with laptops so a mobile working solution could be provided, albeit not the most ideal one. GT noted that it may be of use to the Board to receive an update on mobile working once the procurement for the Housing Management system has been agreed.

GT explained that the laptops work using a small mobile device known as a MiFi unit which allows Officers to connect to the Council network.

A survey has also been carried out to Officers who are using the laptops if it helped them with doing their work. It was noted by Officers that the weight of the laptops they were carrying round was not ideal however it has allowed more efficient surgeries to be held in estates so answers to queries can be given more effectively.

GT also explained other teams within Housing Leeds such as the Enhanced Income Team have been using them to complete online forms in tenant's homes, which previously would have had to be done back at the office or ask the tenant to go to a local library where a computer and internet connection was available to complete.

GT that it was hoped that the mobile solution would have helped Officers to complete the forms associated with Annual Home Visits on the mobile units to save on completing paperwork, however disappointingly this has not occurred.

There is a belief that based on the usage so far of the MiFi units these can be reduced and a 'pool' formed within Housing Offices to reduce costs. The other MiFi units would be used by other Council departments.

GT noted that there is still more work to do until Housing Leeds can say they have a full mobile solution.

MH asked if the mobile solution would help Leeds Building Services. It was confirmed that it would.

The Chair raised concerns that the Council could end up in a situation where they have bought IT systems and products only to then find out it cannot do what it needs to. GT confirmed this wasn't the case and each part of the system, referred to as a module would be developed over the next 24 months. Officers from Housing Leeds would be called in to work on the system to ensure it is effective and fit for purpose. It was noted by GT there is a view to move towards e-forms to complete work

The Chair thanked GT for his attendance and update to the Board.

44 Contact Centre Calls and Leeds Building Services

The Chair introduced Rachael Murray of the Contact Centre. The Chair explained that the Board wished to carry out a visit to the Contact Centre however this was not possible and so requested attendance from Officers.

RM explained her role as being one of support to Customer Service Officers (CSO) who takes calls for Housing Leeds which can cover a variety of issues from housing applications, rent, ASB and repairs. Her role is to look at issues that get fed back to the Contact Centre where things have not been done correctly such as processes and to either correct them or liaise with the Customer Service Officer on training.

This can be where a CSO has raised a repair incorrectly, for example the wrong code or priority and RM can discuss why it was raised in that way. The Chair asked on this point, isn't Leeds Building Services better placed to correct these issues. RM clarified that if a CSO raises an order for a plumber instead of a joiner, LBS would correct this but then give feedback to the Contact Centre about the order so that this can be done correctly by the officer in future. However there have been some instances where LBS have returned a job raised incorrectly and asked Contact Centre to re-raise a job, however it was noted that this does not happen often.

The Chair then asked if something is raised incorrectly, do LBS ask the Contact Centre to call the tenant. RM explained that it depends on the issue and situation however in the majority of cases LBS do this but it can happen.

The Chair asked how often errors happens. RM explained this can happen to newer CSOs as there is a lot of information to take in about processes across the City and there are sometimes different procedures, for example repairs depending on the area depends on how the order is raised.

OG asked about the procedure used to record a repair on the system. RM explained data protection questions are asked then the tenant is questioned about their repair. They would then go onto the system and book the repair accordingly on the system. (As if it is a property in East it's different to South and West. Then would then give the customer the appointment time and the contractor details and reference number and any guarantee period on the repair and if there is a recall they would then contact the contractor.

The Chair asked if the CSO has enough information in front of them without having to seek clarification from elsewhere, for example on types of heating at a property. RM confirmed there is information available on the system for the CSO to use without needing to ask the tenant, and it was clarified this is covered in CSO training.

RM asked if the procedure for reporting the repair the same for East Leeds as it is for other areas of the city. RM explained the way it is recorded on the system is the same but the way the repair appointment is booked is different. RM explained it is a bit tricky to explain since members have not seen the system but explained that for South and West they have pictures to click on representing individual repairs and what is needed to be done, but for East Leeds there is a drop down menu to select a job from, i.e. plumbing and it will bring up different options relating to plumbing jobs. The Chair asked which is the best one to use, pictures or a drop down menu. RM explained when you are new the pictures are easiest as some jobs could be a plumber or another trade, but as you get more experienced the easier it is and so the drop down menu isn't as tricky as first seen.

The Chair asked if some mistakes are caused therefore on the East Leeds area because they are the drop down rather than the pictures and RM agreed this could be the cause of some of the errors, but acknowledged that some East Leeds orders are not done on the drop down system, for example drainage on high rise properties, which you have to use the picture system for.

The Chair asked if the system could be made a bit easier for East Leeds? RM explained it would be better if it was all the same for all areas but wasn't sure for the reason it is different, as the system selects the contractor for you.

MH asked that the Board is aware East Leeds has a large number of high rise flats and does this make dealing with those repairs more complex compared to other areas? RM explained that multi storey flats have a wide variety of

heating systems which can make them more difficult to deal with, but also we have to take into consideration leaks which would have an effect on other properties if not dealt with quickly.

MH asked how do you identify the correct heating source when a tenant reports a fault in their heating system? RM explained this information is held on the system but CSOs have a handbook which they can use which has the heating types in, for example district heating. RM explained part of her role is when information is passed on to the Contact Centre they would then add this to the handbook. The Chair noted that the reason for asking this question is because within his block jobs have been raised to the wrong trade.

PM asked if there been instances where Leeds Building Services have come back to you or your colleagues because the information passed onto them was not enough to enable them to move forward with the repair? RM explained CSOs add as much information as is given by the tenant as the system allows them to add extra text onto the order but there is only so much the Contact Centre can add. The Chair added isn't this where the Contact Centre need to ask the right questions to prevent the incorrect operative going out because this has a knock on effect for planners who cannot meet the customers' expectations. RM agreed this is an issue and this is where the feedback can be used to improve questioning techniques.

JW asked if RM can think of any improvements, when taking and recording the initial repair call, which means the level of information passed to Leeds Building Services helps them ensure the most appropriate operative is sent to carry out the work quickly and efficiently? RM explained they have a series of questions to help identify what the issue is and so RM couldn't think of anything that could be used to improve as there is a lot of support and information which CSOs can use already.

OG asked if you can tell us what involvement if any in reporting repairs online/by email and how are they handled and by whom? RM explained the Contact Centre don't have any involvement with this area of work as it is done by the responsive repairs team by Housing Leeds. RM noted if the tenant calls in about their repair to the Contact Centre then they would then deal with that.

The Chair thanked RM for her attendance and invited Debra Harding to join the meeting.

The Chair introduced Debra Harding, Operations Manager of the Contact Centre and explained that there is currently an inquiry on East Leeds repairs being carried out by the Board and this is the reason for requesting attendance as they have a role to play in Leeds Building Services work by taking calls on repairs.

RM asked have you any vacancies in your department and is there a large turnover of staff? DH explained there are fits and starts and that because we are the entry level staff build up knowledge and then are promoted to a higher

grade and so there is a natural turnover. However a higher graded post was created and this has led to fewer loss of staff.

The Chair asked if DH is aware that some tenants bypass the Contact Centre and go direct to Leeds Building Services which are not repair contacts which are not ongoing. DH noted this depends on the number that is called by the tenant and clarified that the line asks is this a first time call on this repair.

The Chair asked how many agents at the Contact Centre handle repairs? DH explained 49 FTE deal with all Environment and Housing calls, however staff can be trained on repairs and 22 FTE deal with mainly housing repairs and this is monitored constantly to ensure there is appropriate number of staff to deal with demand as required.

OG asked can you explain the training that is given to agents that deal with repairs? DH explained they have a general induction into Leeds City Council and then have classroom based training which can take between two to three weeks to get to know the different systems and processes. CSOs then have consolidation training which is where they take calls but under full support. They then move to a nursery bank where they take calls but continue to have support and only when ready they then move onto a team, which still has a helpdesk facility, should they need it.

The Chair asked about number of calls coming through to the Contact Centre. DH explained they can give overall statistics from April – November which was 233,340 calls, of which the number that came through as a first time repair is 87,766. Unfortunately the telephony system cannot break down the calls by area. The Chair noted that as a job number is given for each repair, if a prefix was put before this to identify the area would this be helpful? From a Contact Centre point of view this wouldn't be of use, but it may be useful as the overall picture for services.

PM asked can you explain from the start the procedure agents in the Contact Centre follow to record a repair? DH explained the call would be routed through to a CSO, who would greet them and ask data protection questions. They would then ask what type of repair the tenant wanted and would use different techniques to identify this and use systems, diagrams and procedures as appropriate. The Chair asked if the procedure is the same across Leeds? DH explained it is a standard question technique regardless, but depending on the area, the contractor may be different.

The Chair asked if there is any benefit to using a picture system rather than a drop down menu especially for new staff. DH responded that visual aids can be good but it is often down to personal preferences, and there isn't always a suitable picture for every situation that can be encountered.

The Chair asked are out of hours staff trained and also can they provide as good a service because there is no helpdesk function on an evening. DH confirmed there is no helpdesk but the training is different as they deal purely with emergencies and the criteria for raising a repair is much stricter out of

hours. The Chair asked where does the repair go, is there a planner out of hours? DH explained it will go through to whichever contractor is on duty.

MH asked can you think of any improvements, when operatives are taking and recording the initial repair call, which means the level of information passed to Leeds Building Services helps them ensure the most appropriate operative is sent to carry out the work quickly and efficiently? DH explained it is difficult to answer as the member of staff can only take something on face value from the customer. The Chair noted that this is down to questioning and DH explained that questioning technique training is given.

JW asked if you can tell us what involvement if any in reporting repairs online/by email and how are they handled and by whom? DH noted that this isn't done by the Contact Centre and this is dealt with by the responsive repairs team and so the Contact Centre do not raise these repairs.

The Chair asked if there would be any advantage in East Leeds having a bespoke Contact Centre taking their own repairs rather than the main contact centre. DH said there are both pros and cons to this however there is a major issue with staffing issues and the value for money considerations on the number of calls received. The Contact Centre is currently looking in future at a 'go to' person who is specialised from within the service which can help with calls and this is being looked into with Housing Leeds.

The Chair thanked RM and DH for their attendance and answering the Boards questions.

45 Scrutiny Conference Update

LW gave an update on the Scrutiny Conference which was attended by OG, SB and PM. LW explained that the conference had been productive and gave an insight into how other organisations worked. It was felt by all that attended that the way the Tenant Scrutiny Board work is positive.

LW explained there were various workshops which could be attended by delegates and we chose which ones would be best considering the position in Leeds. LW explained the attendance and presentations were done by both Councils and Housing Associations.

WORKSHOP 1 - New co-regulation Community Trust Panel and our Tenant Inspectors, by Incommunities (a Social Housing Provider from Bradford)

Incommunities is a Housing Association made up of Bradford Council stock transfer and Sadeh Lok. Involvement pre 2016 was made up of four local management trusts (made up of independent people and tenants), a combination of scrutiny and neighbourhood work, a centrally located involvement team, customer inspectors.

For 2015-18 there was a commitment to review the Involvement strategy. No Councillors are now involved as they were generally only interested in their own local wards and cost efficiencies.

The drivers for a new scrutiny approach were due to

- Waste, cost and duplication,
- Unclear decision making roles
- Legacy of former approaches
- Evidence of true co-regulation
- Future proofing the organisation

Their 2015 July budget brought a 1% rent cut, staff restructuring and voluntary redundancies, reduced involvement resource but scrutiny, inspectors and equality groups were retained.

The organisation now has a functional split of Community Trust and Neighbourhood groups, both focusing on different areas. The Community Trust focuses on more strategic matters, whereas the neighbourhood groups focus on local issues. All areas of the service have work plans and this is the link to all parts of the involvement service.

LW explained that training needs of tenants was done in house and all members of the Board went on training even if they had been on it before to ensure a level playing field. Board members were also required to have a review and the Chairs review was done last so that things which were raised at the other members reviews could be linked in to the Chairs as appropriate.

LW explained that Incommunities approach is to use customer intelligence to identify customer expectations and by focusing on common issues which are occurring rather than focusing on one offs.

Customer assurance can be done through

- Involving customers in development – not just at sign off
- Agile training programme
- Issues are logged
- Sound agenda planning linked to organisational and customer priorities

Workshop 2 - Modernising your Tenant Panel Methodology (Yvonne Davies, Scrutiny and Empowerment Partners Ltd)

LW noted that from this presentation a key theme was that it is important to do what suits the organisation, and gave an example that whilst digital approaches can work they are not always for all situations.

LW explained that the presentation focused that good practice is to move away from standard meetings. A key consideration should be meeting people who have recently experienced the policy in action and how it can be improved. LW explained that the following were good method of gathering evidence and it can be seen the Board are already doing some of this work.

- Task and finish groups

- Consultative panels
- Online commentary (Facebook)
- Online discussion forums
- Use of transactional data such as incoming calls, reception etc

LW noted that from the presentation it was important that performance should be on the website and any newsletters for tenants to see. Where documents are only provided online then a few copies should still be made available in the office. Where performance has slipped then task and finish groups should be set up to look into this, both available at home (online) or in person.

Timely responses to scrutiny are important, and a move away should be planned from service specific groups. It is important that tenants are involved in procurement exercises. LW noted that the Tenant Scrutiny Board have this already with their structured approach to responses to their work from Housing Leeds.

Training and support is important in order to build tenants capacity to be more effectively involved.

LW noted that an online presence is important, given that this helps get a wider opinion on matters and this is something which could be developed for this Board. OG agreed with this to enable wider audiences to be involved with the work of the Board.

Workshop 3 - Northumberland County Council and Tenants Voice

Northumberland had to think about how they engage with tenants after the bringing back of the ALMO into Council control.

This meant that their framework had to be changed, along with ways of thinking, and look at what we had what we needed to change to fit in with our new regime. The solution had to suit as many as was feasible and meet the requirements of the national framework. They also had to revisit our tenants training needs.

The Tenants Forum looked at what was working well previously and take those parts and incorporate into the new ways of working.

A Tenants Forum (known as Tenants Voice) was established with representatives meeting every two months with representatives from Councils Cabinet Advisory Group. Tenants Voice has six Councillors who are also members of the forum. There were many tricky conversations, historical issues, learning from each other and also a need to move forward. The forum met with officers of the Council to understand how they work and had training session to ensure all were able to carry out the role on the forum effectively.

There have been two projects the forum have worked on, one about the proposed integration of Council and Housing Customer Services teams. On this a service development group was formed to ensure this is done in a logical way and tenants can have their say in the work. The second project

was about the merger of Council and Housing income management teams. The forum had concerns about support for tenants who were in genuine arrears and giving a tenant perspective has meant the Council have paused this merger until more work is done on it to ensure it works for everyone.

Because of this it was felt important to tell everyone what the forum are doing and hear what other people have to say. LW explained that this has been done in Leeds by having the work done by the Board in the annual report to tenants.

46 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 1st February 2017 at 1:30pm (pre meeting for all Board Members at 1:00pm)

The meeting was closed at 3:45pm