

# Housing Leeds Tenant Scrutiny Board – Discussion Paper

March 2019

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## Current position

When done well, we know that tenant scrutiny can be an effective vehicle for service improvement. The TSB have conducted four inquiries since 2014/5, each time publishing a report outlining the information it has considered and making appropriate recommendations. The service has considered and responded as positively as possible to these and many have been beneficial to the service – for example, the recent Noise Action Week was a specific recommendation of the board.

However, there are a number potential barriers that could impact on the effectiveness of the board identified by both the current board and Housing Leeds. These can be summarised as:

- a) The challenge of recruiting new members to the board has not been easy, not least the challenge of attracting younger working age members and the current board are fully aware that current representation doesn't reflect the diversity of the wider community.
- b) The board's current arrangements (meeting during working hours) and approach (mirroring Council scrutiny boards - inviting officers for questions) which may inhibit participation.
- c) Whether the current model represents good practice in the sector and how well connected scrutiny is to tenants as a whole for us to arrive at the best possible recommendations

Due to low attendance, the board decided in October 18 to defer starting a new inquiry during the remainder of 2018/19 until new members were recruited, and has since used its time to focus on their development and receive updates on the progress of any outstanding recommendations from previous inquiries.

## Recognising the potential to develop Tenant Scrutiny

Housing Leeds has an ambition to increase participation and broaden the diversity of involved tenants across the whole involvement framework but particularly within the tenant scrutiny process recognising that more meaningful engagement with a broader cross section of tenants could significantly help gather better evidence to determine scrutiny recommendations.

The TPAS changing world of scrutiny event<sup>1</sup> in 2018 gave officers and TSB members an opportunity to network with other housing providers to share best practice, particularly the emerging shift towards less formal scrutiny<sup>2</sup>. Even where organisations retain a scrutiny panel their processes are evolving to involve more tenants through more informal means with an emphasis on tenants having more access to the service, to frontline staff and to be able to speak to other tenants and for other tenants to participate in the process. Tenants are increasingly being invited to shadow staff, conduct website reviews, map out the customer journey, analyse service data and undertake comparisons with similar services on offer to identify best practice. Looking both inwards and outwards.

The Tenant Engagement Experts, TPAS, noted in their 'Scrutiny – Today and in the Future' report, the need for scrutiny to evolve to make sure it continues to demonstrate its relevance and value, suggesting changes are being driven by;

- The efficiency agenda; being able to show value for money
- The challenge to recruit and retain volunteers

- A reduction in staff time available to support scrutiny
- Channel shift and the availability of a wide range of new digital tools
- The need to evidence impacts and outcomes from all forms of engagement.

There is an opportunity to move towards a more informal process, and be more flexible in how and when our inquiries are conducted.

In practice, this could mean an inquiry in Leeds that would use:

- Star Surveys, other targeted online surveys to particular customer groups, social media quick polls and direct feedback from those with first-hand experience of receiving a service
- Pop up consultations in key areas using iPads to film, photo and capture ideas of residents and what they would like us to do differently
- Posting a short film or info graphic about what the inquiry is and how we'd welcome wider tenant views
- Adopting more informal workshop style evidence gathering events with a cross spectrum of staff and tenants
- Skyping and connecting with other tenant panels who may have done similar inquiries for ideas about recommendations.
- Connect and consult with any relevant equality hub, third sector group, carers' network etc to make sure a wide spectrum of evidence is gathered.

## **Moving forward**

We recognise there is a need to explore new ways of delivering scrutiny, whilst respecting existing relationships with EHC Scrutiny Board chair and working with the current TSB board to shape any proposals.

The preferred actions and next steps for the service are therefore to consult with the board to take on board their ideas, develop new ways of working that are open and accessible to others and outline a fresh approach with a view to trialling a new model during Quarter 2, 2019

<sup>1</sup> [TPAS 'Scrutiny – Today and in the Future'](#) report

<sup>2</sup> CIH ['New approaches to Tenant Scrutiny'](#)