

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY 28TH June 2019

PRESENT: John Gittos (Tenant Chair)

Tenants: Sallie Bannatyne (SBa), Stanley Burton (SBu), Mary Farish, Maddy Hunter, Peter Middleton, Jackie Worthington.

Officers: Keith Mack (Scrutiny Officer), Mandy Sawyer (Head of Neighbourhood Services), Ian Montgomery (Service Manager – Neighbourhood Services), Ian Parr (Housing Assistant).

8 Exempt information

None.

9 Late Items

None.

JG informed the board that the document handed out at the pre-meeting was a typed version of SBa's hand written expression of interest that had already been sent to members.

JG informed the board of Stephen Ilee's decision to step down from the board, and thanked him for his contributions.

JG also advised that Andrew Bates, who attended a recent meeting as an observer, would not be joining the board following discussions with Housing Leeds, and the process by which new members are recruited is being reviewed.

10 Apologies for Absence

Rita Ighade, Roderic Morgan.

11 Minutes – 24th May 2019

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 May 2019 were passed as a true record.

12 Chair's Update

The minutes of the latest Environment, Housing, and Communities Scrutiny board meeting are not yet available. JG questioned the necessity of including any irrelevant sections of the minutes with the pack, KM replied that he would review the

process of putting the packs together to see if the minutes could be cut down to only the relevant sections.

13 TSB Review Workshop

KM gave the board a brief overview of the topics covered in the previous session relating to 'How do we run an enquiry?' and 'How do we undertake an enquiry?'

KM introduced the next topic for discussion, explaining this would be an open discussion with key points recorded that could then, with previous comments be considered and hopefully put together to identify changes to the current way of working or produce a new coherent process that could be trialled by the board. JG noted the board's willingness to try new ways of working with the caveat that if they did not work the board could return to its current format.

KM reassured members that there is no question that the board should not remain independent and continue to be valued as such. He reminded members that there is no legislation defining the board's procedure and the current processes of the board do not reflect how the majority of other tenant's forums operate. KM asked the board 'How do we run as a group?' and posed the question as to whether the formality of the group is always beneficial or could it put off potential new members from joining?

The board were asked to consider whether a combination of formal and informal approaches could increase and maximise engagement from board members, council staff, and tenants. JG asked whether, given it has already been noted that the board requires a much higher level of administration, whether this would create more administration?

KM explained that the most cumbersome and time consuming part of the process was that by which the meeting packs/reports and publication of papers is undertaken and invited JG to witness the creation of a future pack so he might see exactly what the process involves. JG questioned if the time taken is due to KM having less familiarity with the software than previous scrutiny officers, however KM replied that the software itself is the main issue due to its slow processing and requirement to upload each agenda item update, invite list and associated documents one at a time (deconstructing minutes for example so the system can recreate what has already been created).

JG asked if a new system or the new website when it is updated will speed up the process. KM replied that it might, however the current site does not receive much user traffic, so new ways of working should be explored which would be of more benefit overall. As it stands there can be delays getting new material uploaded to the website, and not all tenants are able to engage with online material.

KM asked SBU and MF for their observations as new members on the board's working practices. SBU answered that he prefers the current location (Navigation

House) and format to the meetings at the Civic Hall, but a combined approach between formal and less formal locations would help the board cover a wider range of approaches. MF did not declare a preference for either setting. JG agreed that using formal and informal settings would benefit an enquiry, with the former better suited to querying senior officers and the latter for workshops and other forms of enquiry. JW noted that previous working groups did not use the Civic Hall at all, instead visiting officers in the workplace. KM surmised that the board clearly valued face to face interaction at all levels within the most suitable environment. Interviewing heads of service within the Civic Hall gives the board gravitas and is useful in projecting its independence.

MS pointed out that there is still a role for officers to provide guidance, as officers see every aspect of the job within the council and can support with best practice, and tenant scrutiny is wider than just the board. JG responded that he has always sought and valued advice when needed, for example asking previous scrutiny officers which heads of service would be the most appropriate to query. JG told the board he will continue to seek advice, and that officer discretion will ensure that nobody is invited to a meeting that will be unsuitable or uncomfortable speaking to the board.

IM suggested there can be periods when tenants are invited to suggest ideas for scrutiny to the board and have a say about issues that are impacting them. This would increase engagement, showing tenants that the board is able to effect change and is not isolated from tenants. MS agreed that there have been previous opportunities for change that have not been taken by the board. JG told the members he has recently attended a number of tenants meetings, and that some members of those panels felt as though the scrutiny board has become isolated from them, but that this does not need to be the case and the board can define some new working practices.

SBu expressed his desire to attend some of the other tenants meetings as an observer to see what issues their members are raising. KM agreed that this is a good idea for TSB members to get more involved with tenants. KM offered to meet with SBu and MF to help further explain the work of the board and of other groups in a separate meeting, which may also be attended by JG and SBa. SBa told of her previous experience on the High Rise Strategy Group, which in her opinion is more of an informative group rather than one which can enact change as the TSB does.

Regarding recruitment, KM suggested that JW has an ideal position to reach tenants due to her position on the Leeds Tenants' Federation. KM reminded the board of the previous recruitment drive from which MF and SBu were recruited. In response to comments that emails are impersonal, KM told the board there is an ongoing effort to contact tenants over the phone to find out which groups they might have an interest in joining. KM noted that the conversation was now moving onto the final topic agreed for the review, 'How do we communicate as a group and share more widely?' and asked what the TSB might be able to do for other groups, for example the production of some promotional leaflets. JG noted that there used

to be a fair with workshops that the board attended. SBa asked how many TARAs there are as their chairs or representatives can be contacted for potential new membership, IM answered that there are approximately 70 groups, of which some receive annual support grants from the council, and JW added that there are roughly 30 groups that are represented on LTF.

JG asked if officers at one stop centres are aware of the board as in his last annual home visit the officer didn't know what the board does, and if the officers don't know about the board they would not be able to recommend it. MS agreed that the staff knowledge of the board can be improved, and some content in the Housing Leeds Matters staff bulletin is one way this awareness can be improved, which KM offered to follow up on. IM suggested sharing the good news stories of TSB and being more vocal about staff that are involved can highlight the success and make the board something that officers and tenants would like to be a part of.

MS recalled a previous suggestion that more young people could be attracted to the board if it were to offer some skills development. There could be links formed with young people attending college or seeking work, with the experience on the board helping towards beginning a career. IM suggested following up with some of those people that were recently involved in an NHS recruitment program in Burmantofts but that were not offered a position. Other avenues such as consulting tenants who have recently had a repair if it relates to an investigation, or inviting them to a workshop might be explored. Workshops do not have to be attended by every TSB member, and might appeal to those that attend who could then become involved with the board. JG agreed, putting forward that as many new ways of working as possible should be implemented in the next inquiry to get a feel for what does and does not work. IM agreed, reminding the board that the process can be reviewed after each enquiry and can constantly develop to suit the investigation.

JG asked what role social media can have in promoting the board, as posts about the board could only be made by council staff on the official council accounts. KM responded that the key is sharing as widely as possible, and that the council already has a number of pages and accounts that can be utilised quickly. IM added that the main pages have thousands of followers, and posts could be 'branded' from the TSB which would show the board is independent but not isolated from the council. Board members might not be able to post directly, however they could comment and share posts through their own accounts, and these would reach all followers plus all the people the posts are shared with. JG suggested featuring short interviews with board members, and also asking tenants for their preference for upcoming investigations by picking from a shortlist.

JG asked if the production and maintenance of social media posts would create more work for the team, but KM clarified that there is a separate communications team who mostly oversee the social media accounts and that the work can be shared between the team rather than falling on one person, and would in turn raise the board's profile among staff.

KM offered to get in touch with the board members about an article for Housing Leeds Matters. Posts about the board can be shared by the Tenant Engagement Officers to be seen by tenants in their areas. A new process map can be created to show the direction taken by the board for each enquiry, which can then be shared with board members. The map can show in simple terms what the board does and the structure of the investigation and help people to engage with the board's activity. The more people that are engaged the more the board will grow in membership and diversity.

Following a conversation with Councillor Anderson, JG queried if the TSB is too closely connected with the Environment, Housing and Communities board. JG noted that it does give the board a seat on the Housing Matters board. Since the TSB mirrors the other board's structure, many of the processes have been adopted from them, although this does not necessarily need to be the case. MS agreed that the connection between the boards lends gravitas to the TSB, but there would be no issue if the board wished to deviate. JG informed the board that the chair of the Environment, Housing, and Communities board is asked to suggest enquiry topics at the beginning of the year, and once an enquiry is concluded the chair goes to their meeting to report.

IM asked where the board currently stands in the process of an enquiry, JG replied that the next meeting taking place at the Civic Hall will include a discussion on what the next shorter enquiry should be, and that there should be as short a delay as possible until the next enquiry starts. MS pointed out that if the board wants to attract new members it should decide on the next enquiry as the topic can then be advertised to tenants. JG agreed, and though there is no meeting in August, the board can decide the topic in the coming meetings and preferably by October.

JG asked if Jill Wildman could be invited to attend a meeting to ask for her input, MS replied that she could, however Jill primarily deals with the housing management side of things whereas Simon Costigan covers the properties and so he might be more suitable to consult.

IM suggested laying out a timeline of actions for the board, but JG raised concerns that the plans of the board might change depending on information that arises during an investigation. IM assured the board that the timeline would only cover the expected timescales and not set the ways of working.

JG thanked IP for his usual high standard of minutes from the previous meeting, and asked IP if holding meetings at the Civic Hall is beneficial due to the recording equipment in place. IP replied that recordings are helpful and a strong backup in case anything was missed in the minutes or if a lot of data is presented that is important to be recorded accurately, but any minutes produced will be comprehensive and accurate with or without a recording. There is the option of recording meetings that take place outside of the Civic Hall by use of a Dictaphone or alternative recording devices. KM noted that as well as the accurate recording of data, the recordings are able to resolve disputes with the minutes if necessary, and

there was at least one occasion in which the recording was used to settle a query about the minutes from a member.

14 TSB Work plan

KM advised the board that the consideration of a new enquiry is approaching on the work plan, and that the next enquiry will utilise as many of the newly-agreed approaches as possible as a trial for the adoption for future enquiries. KM will enquire with Jackie Fox and Frank Perrins for their availability to present the STAR survey data.

15 Elections of Chair and Vice Chair

KM informed the board that only one expression of interest for the Chair position was received from JG, and asked all members in favour to vote by show of hands. The vote was passed unanimously.

One of the two candidates for the vice chair position wished to pull out of the vote prior to the meeting, leaving SBa as the only candidate. KM asked all members to vote by show of hands, and the vote was passed unanimously.

JG has been confirmed as Chair, and SBa has been confirmed as Vice Chair.

16 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The June meeting will again take place at the Civic Hall on Friday the 19th of July, 2pm - 4pm.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 2:40 PM