

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY 4TH October 2019

PRESENT: John Gittos (Tenant Chair)

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

Officers: Keith Mack (Scrutiny Officer), Ian Parr (Housing Assistant), Simon Costigan (Chief Officer for Property and Contracts), Barry Anderson (Councillor and Chair of Environment Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board)

27 Exempt information

None.

28 Late Items

None.

29 Apologies for Absence

Peter Middleton, Roderic Morgan

30 Minutes – 19th July 2019

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19th July 2019 were passed as a true record.

31 Chair's Update

JG told the board that the latest minutes from the Environment, Housing, and Communities board (12th September 19) will be included with the next meeting pack.

JG informed the board that he will be attending the next EH&C Scrutiny meeting on 19th October regarding the Council's response to the Grenfell tragedy and will update the Board in the November meeting. JG will also be attending the Tpas National Tenant Scrutiny Conference in December, and will update following the conference.

32 Chief Officer update – Simon Costigan

Simon Costigan attended to provide an overview of the repairs service. SC told the board as chief officer of Property and Contracts, he is responsible for the management of Capital Works, responsive repairs, investment strategy, and for the PFI stock. Repairs is a high priority for most tenants, and there are changes to be implemented as a result of the STAR survey results. The STAR survey has shown which areas have seen a drop in satisfaction and which demographics are more or less satisfied than others, so steps can be taken to ensure satisfaction remains high. Many factors can impact satisfaction, and though not all of them can be addressed at once, it is important to target change that can satisfy as many people as possible. SC noted that there are differences in the performance between the contractors Mears and LBS, and many aspects between them are compared but they do not always work to the same benchmarks.

The repairs service currently has an asset based approach to works, for example replacing all roofs in one timeframe, followed by windows and so on. SC suggested that this approach is revisited, with an understanding that the council stock are people's homes, and there should be larger focus on the tenant's priorities. Addressing tenant concerns such as fencing and the environment among other things might mean delaying some larger planned maintenance, but would increase the satisfaction of the tenants or improve their quality of life. This goal is not achievable straight away and requires consultation with tenants to hear what their concerns are, and how the works might be planned moving forwards.

The 116 high rise blocks across the city also require maintenance, with new investment required to achieve all the current aims. Work has already begun on installing new sprinkler systems in all blocks. Some of the outdated heating systems require updating too as the storage heaters are not the most efficient compared with newer systems. There is a higher demand for electricity than when the blocks were first built and so the infrastructure also needs adapting to meet tenants' needs. All of these works should be delivered in the context of the current climate emergency, with improving energy efficiency a key factor in reducing carbon emissions in the city. Two blocks have been earmarked for demolition and rebuilding as this would be more cost-effective than carrying out all necessary infrastructure updates within the current building.

All property upgrades require the Property and Contracts team to be more IT literate, incorporating online bookings for repairs, advance notice of when a contractor will be attending a job, and live requests for stock/materials, made by contractors, to be delivered to the site where necessary. How the customers are engaged is an important part of the process, which SC will be discussing with VITAL in another meeting. SC finally told the board that the areas of the city covered by Mears and LBS is due for review before March 2021, and there is scope

to increase the work completed by council staff as it helps to keep money within the council.

JG raised that previous discussions with technology suppliers had given the impression that the implementation of technology might not be moving as quickly as desired and asked what is currently implemented. SC replied that the Total Mobile system is in place for LBS, with work currently issued to operatives on PDA devices and texts sent to tenants ahead of repair appointments, however there are still developments that can be implemented. Ordering supplies to larger jobs now works online but ordering to smaller jobs still requires some development. JG asked how this might be resolved, SC replied that van stocks are being reviewed so that operatives have more of the items that are used more frequently in their vans.

JG asked if there are now more repair jobs in East Leeds than there has been previously. SC replied that the amount of jobs and the areas they are completed in is being monitored, and performance in the areas can vary but that there is still some learning to be done from best practice.

SBa questioned how flats within high rise blocks require maintenance will be decided/prioritised. SC answered that currently a survey is undertaken on a number of properties in each block to determine if work should be carried out in all flats. As a part of the review, it may be better to survey each apartment and carry out any works based on the individual need of the property so that nobody has to have work completed that they didn't want or need. JG followed up asking if the date of previous works is logged so that nothing is renovated twice in a short space of time, SC replied that it does, but that not all systems that use the data currently communicate with each other, however this should improve when the IT systems are more fully developed.

RI raised a concern that in her opinion the flats that are well maintained by their tenants do not get the same amount of improvements as the flats that are not well maintained. SC agreed that this is frequently raised as an issue, and that the new process will focus on what makes a difference to tenants when they move in which has commonly been regarded as new kitchens, however this is not always realistic and a kitchen does not need replacing each time a new tenant moves in. New benchmarks of what tenants might expect would be a good way to refresh the idea of repair works in void properties.

SC asked if the council is charged twice for repairs that are not completed correctly the first time and need to be completed again, and questioned if the council has the data for how many such cases there are. JG continued that previous investigations into repairs has revealed that Mears customers were given a card with a direct contact number and that the council would be unaware if a call was made. SC answered that the council is not charged twice, and that the data is available to the council. If there are instances where similar repairs are not completed first time or multiple within a similar area then an investigation into why that is the case can be

carried out. Regarding the number of cases SC told the board that he would have to find out the figure and relay it back to the board in a future meeting.

SBa told the board of a case she was aware of a void property which had been repaired and let to a new tenant with floors that hadn't been fully covered, for which the tenant was then told they were responsible for replacing. SC answered that it is difficult to comment on individual cases, and that the floor coverings vary based on the room in the property but in general kitchens and bathrooms are tiled and other rooms are not, however this property may have had underfloor heating which uses a different finish to other types of covering. SC offered to look into the case.

JG noted that comparing LBS and Mears is difficult due to the different recording metrics. SC answered that the comparison is made by the schedule of rates, which shows how long each job should take compared to how long it actually took, but the two companies have different schedules. Work is underway to have both companies use the same timing system so like for like jobs can be compared, eliminating this difference.

SBU asked if the council follow up on repairs after they are completed, SC replied that follow up surveys are given to a sample of customers, and that if any issues become apparent from the responses then work can be taken to address the problem.

JG asked how many high rise blocks have had new sprinklers installed, SC replied that it is a rolling program and though he was unsure of the current number he can return that figure to the board. There is still work to be completed and more investment required. JG asked if there had been any government funding for the installation, SC replied there had not been as the funding was only available for installation in blocks that had similar cladding to Grenfell Tower, but no block in Leeds has such cladding.

JG raised a previous issue regarding the ability to hire certain tradespeople due to salary competition from other jobs and businesses. SC replied that it is an issue as workers often prefer short term contracts, but there is a regular advertisement out for tradespeople and there are currently 40 electrical apprentices who are on their second of three years on the program. There are currently 42 vacancies to fill but there are rolling interviews so new workers can be employed relatively quickly to fill these positions.

JG questioned if the progress that has been made with Mears would revert if the contract was awarded to another company in 2021. SC replied that it is a risk as there would be with any new contract, but the council know their expectations and there would be a mobilisation period to ensure any new supplier would be up to speed if a new contractor was brought in.

JG asked if the boundaries of using Mears in East Leeds is set in stone or whether that is possible to change, SC replied that it is a legacy issue with the boundary

carried over from the ALMOs, but there is no set reason for it to continue that way. Any changes should be easy to understand and in line with ward and housing management boundaries to ensure customers know who should be dealing with their repair. JG asked if the two contractors work together on out of hours repairs, SC answered that both contractors still pick up the jobs in their respective areas on most occasions, with some jobs in East Leeds undertaken by LBS where appropriate.

JG thanked SC for his attendance and input.

33 Chair of Environments, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board update.

Councillor Barry Anderson introduced himself to the board members and began outlining some potential suggestions for the next area of scrutiny for the board. The suggestions for possible areas of scrutiny given were;

- The effectiveness of the Housing Advisory Panels (HAP's) in delivering local priorities, and whether more funding is required to allow them to do so. BA suggested that an inquiry could establish how could HAPs accomplish more, and which bids are appropriate. Suggesting that some bids might be funding works that other funds should be paying for so the board might want to consider if the HAP project criteria currently sets the right expectations?
- Whether the repairs strategy meets the needs of local communities, and how the repairs service has, or could better respond to the council climate emergency? How much value for money there is in the responsive repairs service, and looking into how many appointments are missed or cancelled by the service?
- The effectiveness of estate walkabouts, questioning whether officers and councillors are regularly attending and how they are being advertised and promoted to local tenants to ensure they are aware of the estate walkabouts taking place, how to take part and if they understand how they can contribute.
- An inquiry into fly-tipping and its causes, are tenants being made aware of the council collections for bulky waste effectively. BA noted that some tenants have a free bulky collection service but this wasn't available to all.
- How the issue of adequate car parking on estates can be resolved noting there has been a long standing problem of car parking at some locations but noting that this was an expensive problem to resolve and had resulted in bids being made to the HAP's who could not justify such expenditure.
- Whether tenants are happy with the service when contacting housing via the corporate contact centre and whether calls could be answered more quickly, avoiding the need for repeated calls.

JG asked if BA could explain the HAPs to those that may not be familiar. BA explained that the HAPs are local tenant and councillors groups who represent their area and are able to fund community projects in their area, with Housing revenue account funds allocated on the basis of on the number of council tenants in the HAP area. The HAPs follow a similar framework but each of the 11 HAPs have different funding priorities, BA, by way of example explained that the Outer North West HAP had one priority to increase their work with schools and young people in the area. HAP spending is monitored and tracked, with the meetings open to anyone who might wish to observe. BA suggested that the HAPs should be more closely linked with the community committees, but some tenants are of the opinion that the committees have differing views and have become disengaged. BA suggested that there is scope for having fewer HAP areas, and that more match funding or other outside contributions will help the HAP money go much further. BA also commented that the average age of HAP members is high, and more could be done to encourage younger people to take part?

JG told the board he has attended some HAP meetings and felt that some of the projects being funded should have been for the council to fund, and noted that it isn't possible to fund projects over multiple years as the budget is managed through each financial year. JG stated that some projects seem to be rejected before they make it to vote by the members, to which KM advised that all projects are assessed by the Tenant Engagement Officers against the HAP criteria and require approval before being presented, and these checks can often highlight projects which are unlikely to be passed, inappropriate, or are able to be funded elsewhere.

JG asked if there was still an issue of councillors not receiving feedback from estate walkabouts, BA replied that many are getting feedback but there are some cases in which they are not, and there is not always an explanation why. Some issues are raised on multiple walkabouts but do not get addressed and tenants are not getting a response either. Some larger walkabouts might benefit from being split into multiple smaller walkabouts to increase the focus in the area. BA questioned who has the authority to ensure jobs are completed, as they will just continue to be raised until they are resolved.

JG noted that previous recommendations highlighted that officers conducting walkabouts can vary and that they should be the ones with local knowledge, and that some councillors are not attending either. JG recognised it is difficult to ensure consistency across all areas, and BA replied that despite any hurdles, he believes that the current housing officers are now much better placed and equipped than they have previously been. JG commented that some areas swap officers to increase the local knowledge, and asked if this was a regular occurrence.

JG asked if BA had any updates on bin collections across Leeds. BA replied that it was recently raised as a potential topic for scrutiny by the Environment Housing and Communities board as many people have had an issue with parked cars blocking the refuse bins from making any pickups. Some areas do not have bins at all and leave bags out for collection, and there has been discussions on changing the

collection routes and guidelines for tenants and refuse collectors. Traffic Regulation Orders are being implemented to alleviate the issues of parking affecting collections. JW noted that there have been occasions where brown bins haven't been collected when they should have been, BA replied that these bins are not currently on an official collection route, and the one vehicle that collects from these bins can become full and so collection is disrupted.

JG thanked BA for his attendance and input.

34 TSB Work Plan

JG informed the board that due to officer availability the meeting dates have been altered, so the next meeting of this board will be held on the 25th of October, and the following meeting will be held on the 29th of November.

JG informed the board of his intention to begin the new investigation in November, so members should submit their ideas for enquiry to KM or IP within 10 days (by Monday 14th of October). The ideas can then be collated and a decision made.

JG will be attending VITAL to seek their input. KM explained to members who may be unaware the make-up and function of VITAL as a tenant board.

35 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place at the Civic Hall on Friday the 25th of October, from 1pm - 3pm.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 3:00 PM