

TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY, 22ND APRIL, 2022

- PRESENT:** John Gittos in the Chair
Stanley Burton
Mary Farish
Neil Battison
Sue Easton
Jackie Worthington
Sallie Bannatyne
Peter Middleton
Dennis Moody
- APOLOGIES:** Rita Ighade
Maddy Hunter
- GUESTS:** Ian Montgomery (Service Manager)
Gez Tinsdale (Chief Officer for Housing)
Adam Crampton
- OFFICERS:** Peter Greenwood
Emma Lomax
Trish Parker

1 Welcome Introductions and Apologies

JG opened the meeting and welcomed all in attendance. Everyone introduced themselves and apologies were noted. New board members Neil Battison, Dennis Moody.

2 Exempt Items

None

3 Late Items

None

4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Approved.

5 Chair's Update

Firstly, can I apologise to the board and our two guests for having to cancel the March meeting, this was due to the late notice we had that

taxi drivers around the city were striking and this left us little option. Regarding our review of the Tenant Engagement Service as you are aware we halted Stage 2 to get further clarification from the service regarding the "Voice Panel" and after speaking to Ian Montgomery before he went on leave, I was told his report is ready and I will talk further about this in Item 6 of today's agenda.

I had a meeting with Cllr Rafique the executive member for Environment and Housing and gave him an update of our Stage 2 review. We also discussed our meeting today. There will be a further meeting in early June.

I had a telephone conversation with Councillor Anderson, the Chair of Environment, Housing and Communities scrutiny board and gave him an

update of Stage 2 review. There will be further meetings in June that may or may not be with Cllr Anderson as we are at the period where they do sometimes change the Chairs of the other 5 Scrutiny boards. There is to be a day conference being held in Leeds on the 21st of June by Northern Housing Consortium, a body that has a membership of councils and housing associations from across the north of England. Ian Montgomery will attend with the Chair of TSB.

6 Housing Leeds

GT – As of March 2020 Housing Leeds were not allowed to enter homes and estates as before to undertake repairs/carry out tenancy visits and had to change ways of working. Had to work quickly to change policy and there were no annual visits being made.

Acknowledged that they got it wrong to start with but have since been tweaking policy as restrictions have been lifted. As office employees were brought back on a hybrid approach some officers are in 2/3 days a week. If this flexible approach doesn't continue to work for tenants moving forward it will be reviewed. Gerard advised there is a new Tenant Portal which should be fully implemented by Summer 2022.

The Everybody In initiative brought in by the Government meant that Housing Leeds had to find accommodation for everyone quickly and had up to 300 individuals in temporary accommodation. This led to a change in policy on how to engage with rough sleepers and victims of drug and/or alcohol abuse or victims fleeing domestic violence.

Housing Leeds have created a new Women's only hostel for victims fleeing Domestic Violence. Some tenancies which were created from the Everybody In initiative broke down due to several reasons including ASB. Housing Leeds are implementing new pathways to tenancy support for individuals, so they are completely ready for living alone and managing a tenancy agreement.

A further issue was delays with repairs because of the pandemic which caused a backlog of repairs. The backlog of cases was 9,000 which is now down to 4,000. GT advised this figure should be down to pre-pandemic levels within the next three months.

Covid 19 resulted in workforce shortages due to the self-isolation rules. Also Brexit has caused supply chain problems and an increase in

material costs. The waiting list for Leeds Social Housing is continually growing and currently has 27,000 people on it. It was 20,000 two years ago. 7,000 of these are classed as Band A with urgent need. On average it takes people on average 3 years to obtain a council property. It would take 3-4 years to house Band A waiting list alone. There is a supply issue with Social Housing stock – LCC used to turnover 4-4.5k properties per annum, this has dropped over the last 18 months and is now predicted to turnover 2k properties for the year. The Right to Buy scheme has impacted housing levels, a reduction from 95k to 54k properties.

Housing Leeds are helping more people get into private rented accommodation, this is currently around 50-60 tenants per month. Landlords are now pricing rent due to increased demand across the city to above what some people can pay – this is a challenge. On average 200 new properties are being built per annum.

Voids – There have been delays in repairs caused due to the pandemic. This was 0.7% prior to the pandemic, currently this is 1.5%.

There are more financial pressures faced – housing is funded by rents which is 240 mil PA. 80mil goes into capital programme, 45mil into repairs and maintenance. Expected to be 12mil pressure over the next 3 to 4 years which we are working hard to resolve. There is a slight rent increase to provide a buffer.

AC –During initial covid lockdown we went to essential services only offer, emergency repairs and priority works, non urgent were paused. Once we were able to access homes again, we needed to increase capacity, but this was finite and under severe demand. Working under covid safe working practises, meant social distancing. Pre Covid voids would have 5/6 workmen at one time now they were only able to have 2. There would usually have been 4 workmen in a van were now only allowed 2. With less workmen available the service was under pressure

We tried to control what we already had and maximise capacity but wasn't enough. New maintenance contracts have recently been instigated. Voids engaged 2 additional contractors for 6 months. Within next 3 months repairs backlog should be completed and voids completed in 6mths. We are to refocus service improvement plans which were there pre covid. A lot of prep work underway. Should be back at pre covid levels in 6 months. Then we will consider how to improve performance and would like to share these plans with TSB.

Board members were then asked for questions.

JG – You mentioned playing catch up. Is it difficult to plan next financial year?

GT- with additional support will recover. Further national restrictions due to Covid will impact. Not certain about financial pressure on households and the affects this will have on rent collection rate which

was 96% end of March. Could be a challenge for service. Recession could impact service.

JG – Mears renewal – was this considered?

AC – We didn't renew, contract came to an end, did a full competitive procurement exercise. Not a continuation, new contract with new standards. A lot tighter contract in place now. KPI's did start to focus on numbers rather than quality, this has been tightened up now.

SE – building safety bill - how do you manage and track safety compliance in high rises?

AC – AC confirmed the buildings safety bill now in place including legislation which encompasses fire safety and full life cycle of the building including demolition.

Analysis on how to deliver work considering compliance, electrical safety. A key element of the bill is tenant engagement, giving tenant stronger voice.

SE – Need to be open and transparent

AC – Available to tenants, key requirement is it's available on demand.

NB asked about financial aspect of right to buy.

GT confirmed right to buy does have impact on housing stock.

Additional fundings from govt (80million) have been secured and Government have released phase 2 which allows the authority to bid for further funds.

Building new houses – there is a plan to build 1500 new houses over next 5 years, also buyback programme from ex right to buy which increases housing stock, approx. 200 over last 5 years. GT recently met with local MP to discuss a resident's concern over right to buy. -

DM asked if there were plans for Housing Officers to catch up with home visits.

GT - From 1st April the priority will be to visit vulnerable residents including those experiencing financial hardship. All other tenants will be put on a 3 year rolling programme. GT advised the time taken to visit every resident can be challenging due to staffing levels

SE raised a point about annual home visits - if these do not happen how do the authority understand what residents are doing with their properties?

GT advised the purpose of the visits was to understand if subletting was taking place and also engaging with vulnerable residents. When a Housing Officer visits a property, they are trained to identify any potential issues.

AC said it is evolving picture and they are looking at factoring in the vulnerability of the property as part of these visits.

Chair asked about loss of staff due to early leavers initiative.

GT advised this was not his decision –these decisions were taken staff more senior than him though he acknowledged a lot of experience had been lost.

NB asked if housing work with other agencies i.e., police when anti-social behaviour takes place.

GT confirmed they do engage with police, fire service and other subgroups. An example of this was working in partnership and sharing information on bonfire night. ASB teams will refer cases to police where anti-social behaviour hotspots are identified.

JG – Why are you changing housing officers as much as we are on the estates? Every 3 months, some on long term sick leave and haven't been replaced. Do we have enough and if not why?

GT – We will never have enough for my liking, can only afford so much. 80 staff lost due to ELI, 12 of which were HO. So new ones needed to fill vacancies. 22 HO's appointed last month.

People change jobs to increase their experience and sometimes promoted. This should be encouraged.

JG raised concerns with leaflets being distributed by companies purporting to be undertaking disrepair claims for tenants. These companies are also cold calling at residents' doors. It was felt the presence of these companies needs to be communicated better with residents especially those who are vulnerable. SB advised he had received two phone calls claiming to be from LCC disrepair team. It was felt greater awareness was needed regarding these claims' companies.

AC was aware of the issue of 'claims farmers'. Legal proceedings had already been issued against company using LCC logo. There are hotspots where these companies operate, and the authority are dealing with as robustly and expediently as they can in this regard.

Chair asked whether HL still had enhanced blocks ?

GT confirmed they did and asked if Highrise strategy was on agenda for this group. PG – Answered no. GT – suggested they consider the strategy at a future meeting.

Chair asked are sprinklers still being fitted in all High Rise?

GT confirmed.

JG thanked GT and AC and suggested more engagement with senior management in the future. GT and AC agreed to return at a future date.

GT suggested TSB consider STAR survey data when surveys completed. This may inform future reviews.

7 Phase 1

Tenant Scrutiny Board considered the phase 1 recommendations that were still being tracked. Ten in total. The board then updated their position.

See separate tracking document.

8 Forward Plan

Ian Montgomery will be at the next meeting, John advised his report will arrive with the meeting agenda at least 7 days before the next meeting. Board to question Ian on what Your Voice Leeds is about and where it is going. Stage 2 review will end after the next meeting

9 Election of Chair and Vice Chair

PG advised election due for Chair and Vice Chair and gave overview of the process. Contact PG if anyone is interested in these roles. Closing date for expressions of interest 13/5/22.

10 Date and Time of Next Meeting

20th May 2022, 12:00 – 14:00. Civic Hall Committee rooms 6/7 and MS Teams