TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD

FRIDAY 25TH October 2019

PRESENT: John Gittos (Tenant Chair)

Tenants: Sallie Bannatyne (SBa), Stanley Burton (SBu), Mary Farish, Maddy Hunter, Rita Ighade, Denise Linley, Peter Middleton, Jackie Worthington,

Officers: Keith Mack (Scrutiny Officer), Ian Parr (Housing Assistant)

36 Exempt information

None.

37 Late Items

JG notified the board of his intention to add an additional item to the list of potential scrutiny topics – the 'out of hours repairs service'.

38 Apologies for Absence

Roderic Morgan

JG proposed that RM, having not attended any scrutiny meetings for a number of months, should have his membership of the board discontinued. The board were in agreement, and KM offered to contact RM and inform him of the decision.

39 Minutes – 4th October 2019

RESOLVED – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th October 2019 were passed as a true record.

40 Chair's Update

JG informed the board that he had attended the VITAL meeting on the 9th of October to provide an update about the board prior to the beginning of the next investigation. Following previous advice that the TSB should remain independent from VITAL, it has been realised that having representation on the VITAL board would allow for closer working between the groups and will help to increase engagement with the board. The groups can also be advertised more to tenants as they can be promoted simultaneously as part of a developing communications plan for VITAL. JG proposed that it should not just be the Chair and/or Vice Chair of the TSB that attend, and that attendance can be opened up to all board members to rotate between. The board agreed that this should be implemented moving forward.

KM provided an explanation of VITAL and its place within the wider tenant engagement framework for the benefit of new board members.

JG introduced DL as a full member of the board, DL told the board about some of her previous experience on similar panels.

KM offered to meet with DL, SBu and SBa to explain more about the work and history of the TSB. SBa enquired what her role will be, KM explained it is to add input to his induction overview from the perspective of a long standing board member and as the Vice Chair of the board. KM to contact SBa, SBu, and DL to arrange meeting before the 29th of November.

41 Consideration of new enquiry

JG suggested that each item on the suggested enquiry topics is read through in turn and discussed, and put to a vote once members had formed their own opinions following discussion. The board agreed.

1. Effectiveness of the HAPs

JG reminded the board that should this topic be chosen it might include a lot of work with other tenant volunteers who might be sensitive about the work that they do. It would also be unwise to suggest an increase in funding as it could potentially be asking for something outside of the control of Housing Leeds. KM explained that the money for HAPs comes from the housing revenue account (HRA), and the intention is that funding is primarily allocated to benefit tenants and in turn the wider community. KM noted that applications for HAP funding are approved and therefore also allocated by tenants. Tit was understood that the total HAP budget has decreased over time, to which KM commented that extra funding is often sought from other internal and external partners to match fund a bid and help the money go further. KM reminded the board that Cllr. Anderson's suggestion was not how much money the HAPs have, but how effectively what they have, is spent, JG agreed that he has previously seen HAPs supporting bids that in his opinion should be the remit of existing council departments. KM replied that each bid is different, and where JG's point was a concern, funding is often allocated for projects which might go above and beyond what the council can offer for a particular service.

KM was asked to explain the makeup of HAP's and advised members that membership is dictated by the number of wards represented by each of the 11 HAP's. Areas with one or two wards can have 10 tenant members and 2 councillors; two wards can have 11 tenants and 3 councillors; and four wards can have 12 tenants and four councillors. Applications to the HAPs can come from any source, but all applications are checked and approved prior to being presented to the HAP to ensure they comply with the HAP criteria. JG asked if it is true that money cannot be allocated for bids that last for more than one year, KM confirmed that each bid must fall within the same financial year, but that it does not stop repeat bids for funding being made by an applicant each year. It was noted however that repeat bids should be discouraged to encourage applicants develop and seek

additional funding instead of relying on the HAP each time. KM noted however that it is up to the HAP to determine what can be funded, and that each HAP has its own priorities which may change year on year as they are revised. The budget within a HAP area is based on the number of council homes, which can fluctuate if homes are bought under the right to buy scheme or new homes are built or boundary changes are imposed.

MH suggested if this was chosen then Ian Montgomery would be a good guest to invite to speak to the board, JG added that this area would also support many of the TSB's proposed new ways of working.

2. Repairs Strategy

KM recalled Simon Costigan's attendance at the previous Board meeting, where he explained that changes are due as a part of the 'rethinking repairs' strategy, and handed over to thoughts from board members as tenants who have experience of the repairs service. JG reminded the board of Simon's note that the contract with Mears is due to be renegotiated in the coming years and so any recommendations might not be as impactful if the contractor is to change. KM noted that the board might conduct an inquiry only to inadvertently make recommendations for processes that would already be subject to change anyway.

3. Estate Walkabouts

KM explained that estate walkabouts involve tenants, housing officers, and councillors conducting a visit to ascertain any on the ground issues within a specified area/estate. A question was raised in the previous meeting about how they are promoted to tenants and if more could be done. JG recalled that the walkabout process was reviewed by the board in 2015 and had many of the recommendations made to improve walkabouts accepted. Issues have resurfaced including councillors and tenants' attendance, and the attitude of officers conducting the walkabout. JG suggested that alternatively to conducting a new enquiry, it might be possible to revisit the old recommendations and question some of the managers about how and why standards may have fallen over time.

KM explained that there is an online tool in development that will allow tenants to view the details of their nearest walkabouts online, however at the moment the project is in its infancy. Dates are still being advertised in the housing offices and by officers in the usual ways.

SBa raised that the attendance for walkabouts has been a concern since the ALMOs, and that there is frequently a shortage of housing staff to conduct the walkabouts. JG responded that similar to what the board had previously been told about the contact centre, there is regular staff movement to new roles and recruitment is an ongoing effort to fill vacant positions. There is a timetable of dates available online but JG questioned if it is suitably signposted for tenants.

JG suggested that instead of considering walkabouts for a new area of enquiry, that a follow-up to the previous enquiry be conducted when time allows. MH added that

the board should revisit the list of previous recommendations and enquire why they have not all been followed. The board were in agreement.

4. Fly Tipping

KM referred to the suggestion made by Cllr Anderson that issues of fly tipping and its causes be considered for inquiry and asked whether the underlying cause had been the suggestion that the bulky waste collection service was being made available free to some tenants but not all. Members felt the service isn't being advertised well enough to tenants, and especially to those that can access the service for free. There is also concern that the rate of fly tipping has increased since charges for waste collection were introduced. JW agreed that some larger items are left in the hope that metal collectors will remove it, however this is often not the case and items are left indefinitely. JG added that the issue was discussed during the estate environments enquiry, but that efforts to increase surveillance of problem areas have not seemed to lessen the issue. JG asked if free collection was available to all tenants, JW responded that some high rise tenants do have free collection, however it is not all tenants. SBa added that it is not always tenants that report the issue but the cleaners sometimes do. KM confirmed that the issue is considered differently around high rise blocks as rubbish can be considered a fire risk if left outside or blocking chutes or communal entry ways. SB added that high rise tenants do pay a service charge which may contribute to subsidising a free collection.

DL told the board that there are issues with fly tipping in her local area that has increased since charges for collection were implemented. MH replied that there was a notice that anyone on housing benefit would be eligible for a free waste collection. DL noted that council tax and other charges are rising however in her opinion there no increase or improvement in the service that is offered.

5. Car Parking on estates

KM noted the issues raised about car parking on estates, primarily that there is not enough space to meet demand, and that HAP funding is often insufficient to create additional parking, which can be expensive, even though they receive many bids asking for more parking. KM elaborated that the issue around high rise blocks is that they were designed and built at a time when car ownership was much lower than in the present day. Car ownership has increased significantly with many families now owning two or more cars and there simply isn't the space around some buildings to create additional parking.

MH told the board that the council had tried to implement a permit scheme around retirement life properties, but the process can cost thousands depending on the area. SBa added that she had attended a meeting covering the same issue in which possible solutions as selling problem land or redeveloping it to have more space for parking, however nothing has come of it since the then. JG responded that an enquiry into car parking could easily raise issues that extend beyond Housing Leeds and that could not realistically be resolved. KM agreed that beside from Traffic Regulation Orders or more warden monitoring there might not be much left

that the board can recommend. KM also noted that this topic is being covered by the Environment, Housing, and Communities Board, and so if it were to be chosen they should inform Councillor Anderson of the scope.

6. Contact Centre

KM explained that his understanding of the issues that were raised about the contact centre, were mainly the time it takes to answer the calls, and the service provided by the operative over the phone. JG noted that when calling the centre the operatives now ask a list of questions, the purpose of which is to confirm the caller's identity. KM added that this will be to ensure that GDPR rules are observed and the data of the caller is protected. JW noted that organisations such as the NHS use predetermined passwords to verify the callers' identity over the phone.

SBu told the board he does not call the contact centre because of issues with wait times, preferring to report repairs to his housing office. JG replied that explaining repairs over the phone can be difficult, and that in his opinion the process would go much more smoothly if operatives were to take ownership of individual reports.

7. Out of hours repairs

KM read the issues pertaining to this late item, referring to a previous meeting with council managers where it was explained that the out of hours service will deal with the immediate emergency repairs, but do not perform any clean up, or cosmetic repair. This often requires a separate call out to the regular repairs service who might not have the details of the emergency repair. KM also understood from previous discussions there is some crossover between the areas covered by Mears and LBS in the out of hours' service, and at the moment it is unclear how the OOH service will be affected by the rethinking repairs changes.

JG told the board that Rob Goor could not see any issues with the service. JG questioned what might be classed as an emergency repair and that tenants are made aware, as there have been cases where the issue was not deemed an emergency and the tenant had been given the bill. There is the issue of unfinished work, and further issues in that there is an hour long period between the night and day service where the service cannot be contacted.

MF commented that there had been an emergency issue a high rise block in which there was a leak behind a locked door. The operative attended the repair but discovered they had no access key and eventually the fire service had to be called to open the door and resolve the issue which turned out to be with the sprinkler system. JG replied that there could be a review of how long an unoccupied residence is left if it is causing damage to other properties.

KM suggested prior to voting that due to raised concerns that some of the inquiry topics would not be fully open for scrutiny, already scheduled for change, or beyond the scope of the board to recommend for change, that the repairs strategy, estate walkabouts, and car parking topics not be considered by the board for enquiry. The board were in agreement.

RESOLVED - Following a vote of members, the next area of scrutiny was decided to be the out of hours' repairs service.

JG told the board that the next steps will be for himself to meet with KM and SBa to formulate a work plan for the next enquiry before the next TSB meeting. JG explained if the new enquiry is finished ahead of schedule there may be time to look into the fly tipping/bulky waste situation which was tied before the casting vote was made. The board were in agreement.

KM reminded the board that there are good opportunities to utilise some of the new ways of working in this enquiry, and can consult with Ian Montgomery about how to do this most effectively. JG will inform the Environment, Housing, and Communities Board of the decided investigation.

42 TSB Work Plan

SBa and MF agreed to attend the next VITAL meeting on the 13th of November, IP to contact before the meeting.

JG reminded board members that he will be uncontactable from the 8th to the 25th of November so members should contact KM or IP with any issues.

44 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place at the Civic Hall on Friday the 29th of November, from 1pm - 3pm.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 3:00 PM