

## **TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD**

**FRIDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> November 2019**

**PRESENT:** John Gittos (Tenant Chair)

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

Officers: Michelle Honey (Housing Manager), Keith Mack (Scrutiny Officer), John Ogilvie (Area Manager), Ian Parr (Housing Assistant)

### **45 Exempt information**

None.

### **46 Late Items**

None.

### **47 Apologies for Absence**

Rita Ighade, Denise Linley

### **48 Minutes – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

**RESOLVED** – The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019 were passed as a true record.

### **49 Chair's Update**

JG expressed thanks on behalf of the board to Simon Costigan ahead of his retirement.

JG told the board that he will be attending the TPAS National Tenant Scrutiny Conference in Birmingham on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, and will provide an update at the next meeting.

The minutes of the Environment, Housing, and Communities board is included with the meeting pack, it is true that there was a rejected bid for funding to assist with the cost of sprinklers in high rise blocks, but the funding was for blocks that use the same cladding as Grenfell Tower, which blocks in Leeds do not use.

KM pointed out that a discussion was had about the procurement of repairs services for Leeds, noting these conversations are being held at the executive level also.

SB asked if the board can be provided with an update of which blocks are due to get sprinklers, JG replied that all blocks are eventually going to be fitted, with enhanced blocks being of a higher priority. SB asked if the board can be provided with an up to date list of the enhanced blocks as they can change over time. KM responded that he can produce a list for members. KM briefly explained the four models of high rise blocks – Enhanced, Standard, Retirement, and Family. The enhanced blocks are generally those which historically have had more issues with repairs and ASB. Retirement blocks are generally more adapted for use by older tenants, for example having storage areas for mobility scooters. MH told the board of her experience as a Housing Manager overseeing Retirement blocks, and added that properties are adaptable according to need such as lowered kitchens, and priority access for fire. Wardens visit the block daily to check in with the residents and report any issues. KM told the board that members of the High Rise Strategy Group had recently undertaken an inspection of one of the Retirement blocks and noted that it was of a very high standard.

## **50 Estate Walkabouts**

Area Manager John Ogilvie and Housing Manager Michelle Honey introduced themselves to the board ahead of the discussion regarding estate walkabouts.

JO explained that there has recently been an audit taken of estate walkabouts and the processes followed in carrying them out. The current processes were developed in 2014, and board previously made recommendations in 2016. According to the audit, most estate walkabouts were still carried out in line with the policies, however there were some inconsistencies highlighted. It was noted that councillors now had a relatively low attendance across walkabouts, and there was low input also from external partners, though with more than 800 walkabouts taking place across the city each year it is practically impossible for all to be attended by every relevant individual.

JO explained a further issue that IT systems that had previously been set up to communicate with each other no longer do, mainly because different departments had upgraded to new systems at different times rendering the systems incompatible, though there are developments in place to rectify this issue. JG commented that in previous recommendations the harmonisation of systems was raised as an issue to resolve, JO agreed but the systems are continuously changing and it can be hard to implement solutions. MH added that the IT issues primarily affect how problems raised on walkabouts are logged and raised and how that information is sent to tenants, however the offices have developed their own methods of solving this issue. This means tenants are not impacted as badly as they could be, but the different processes do impact the offices as they are not always following set procedure. Walkabout dates are booked quarterly and should be advertised in multiple places well in advance so tenants know about them, though there are times that walkabouts are booked during the average working day and are inaccessible to tenants that are working, and are only attended by the same individuals every time. Attendance at walkabouts is often driven by grievances, so

once an issue is fixed the tenants will stop turning up, and that can impact the numbers from event to event. MH suggested that to resolve the issue a full review with tenants' input would be required, along with an update to the systems that would allow for processes to be harmonised across all relevant departments. JG responded that across multiple reviews, the common point of complaint usually concerns IT systems. MH agreed that it is an issue, but that the processes also need reviewing as the two work hand-in-hand.

JG asked what the process is for officers following a walkabout, MH replied that the process should be to input the raised issues on Caseworks, which filters any issues and repairs to the appropriate person, however that system has been overtaken by 360 and there is no clear guidance. Some housing offices are emailing individuals directly instead, which leads to slower response times, as well as an increased possibility that repairs are missed. JO added that the three things that would be necessary to ensure work is done is that the systems could log a report for work and send it to the right person, provide updates on how far along the work is towards completion, and provide confirmation when work is completed. MH continued that the key issue is ensuring that all staff receive training on how to deal with repair reports and that everyone is following the same process to avoid confusion, which includes external partners.

JG asked if partners are expected to show up for all walkabouts, as it had previously been recommended that all parties attended to ensure cohesion. MH replied that tasking meetings take place to provide updates, and that at least quarterly there is one walkabout which all representatives attend for that reason. Walkabouts should not be for picking up all issues as the housing officers should be doing that on a daily basis, the walkabouts should only be to pick up what has been missed. JO added that tenants should not be led to think that environment teams are only showing up four times per year, and that environmental work is a 24/7 job across all of Leeds. The jobs can and will be sped up when IT systems are in place and appropriate modules are being pursued now, however the implementation of these may not take place for some time.

JG asked what the process is when there is no access to computer systems. MH replied that the forms are filled out on site, though some officers log them on caseworks and some on 360, with the differences causing issues such as lost or duplicated reports. The reports should ideally be input into one main system which then delegates the job appropriately. JO told the board that as part of the audit, all offices will be sent a questionnaire regarding the current processes that are followed so that a bigger picture can be drawn, and the decisions made on how best to unify them.

JG asked if the movement of officers from one area to another affects the processes, MH replied that it should not, however because of the variance in reporting methods this can lead to learning another method. The actual process for conducting a walkabout is the same regardless of location.

SBa asked how it might be possible to get more involvement from tenants and councillors, because if a housing officer conducts a walkabout on their own then nobody will know the outcomes. JG added that in 2016 only 2% of councillors said that they do not attend walkabouts, however in reality this figure seems like it would be much larger. JO responded that councillors cannot be expected to attend every single walkabout as there are a large number of them, but councillors do hold surgeries where tenants can drop in and raise any concerns there that are then passed to the housing office as appropriate. MH added that each area is different and attendance can vary according to a number of factors, but despite the numbers the walkabout will always take place even if only the officer attends, and then feedback should be sent to all tenants in attendance. JW raised that she had never seen any feedback from a walkabout in her area but that surgeries have been ongoing for a long time. PM raised an issue that he had previously received a list of walkabout dates for his area, however when he had attended there were no officers or councillors present. MH apologised and told PM that walkabouts should be covered if an officer is unable to attend due to sickness or another reason, and this issue should have been handled by a manager at the time. KM asked if there could potentially have been a change of date which was not communicated well enough, MH replied that changes are usually advertised well in advance, but any future changes to the process would ensure they are always advertised more robustly.

JG proposed that having councillors attending walkabouts would be a draw for tenants, and that reminding them of this might encourage higher attendance. JO replied that the offices do what they can to encourage attendance from councillors and tenants, but even tenants who communicate they would like to be involved often simply don't turn up to physical events and prefer online engagement. JG raised that the issue with engagement might be an interesting area of investigation, and asked for clarification on letters being sent to tenants. MH responded that letters are sent to tenants with untidy gardens which encourage the occupant to clean or neaten up the standard to match neighbouring properties. If work is not completed to improve it or the tenant is unable, then support can be given and steps taken to help resolve the issue. If the property is privately owned it is more difficult to enforce, however the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Team can still become involved to resolve the issue. Officers also engage with tenants face to face and there is a vulnerable garden scheme for those that require it.

JG asked if private residents are invited to walkabouts and if it is appropriate for them to attend, JO answered that they are welcome to attend and do in some areas, and that it is no different to a TARA which does not require every member to be a council tenant. JO shared his thought that TARAs are a strong way of building community cohesion and encouraging tenants to be more involved with their communities and with the council.

SBa questioned how tenant involvement is affected by a fast turnover of housing officers in areas all around Leeds. MH agreed that there is a high turnover due to many factors including staff being promoted and sickness, but there is a rolling recruitment to fill vacancies as quickly as they can be whilst putting quality

individuals in the post. MH agreed that it does take time for relationships to be formed, however the movement of staff cannot be controlled to keep them in the role if they wish to move elsewhere. Any new officers to the role receive training to instil good habits and to ensure any transitions for both staff and tenants are as smooth as possible.

JG asked how far along the timeline the review process is. JO replied that the audit has been completed and issues picked up, and the staff questionnaire regarding the housing office processes is due to be sent out soon. The IT procurement is ongoing, but JO assured the board that once a solution is found, many of the issues would fall much more easily into place. JO told the board that the resolution of neighbourhood issues is a daily job and not something that is done only on walkabouts.

JG noted that there had been some interesting points raised by JO and MH, and that some of the same issues highlighted in a previous review were still present, and suggested it is possible that estate walkabouts could be chosen as an investigation topic, where more recommendations could be made. KM agreed that whilst recommendations could be made while a review is ongoing, there were other topics to consider and a consultation with the wider tenant base for their opinions should still be undertaken as a part of the new ways of working for the board. JO agreed to include the previous review and actions in the review which can help to inform the actions taken as a result.

JG thanked JO and MH for their attendance.

## **51 TSB Work Plan**

**JG reminded board members that** the investigation topic has not yet been confirmed as there was an agreement with VITAL that they would be consulted before a decision was made. JG asked if VITAL could be informed that if a member had any suggestions, to let Peter Greenwood know by the 15<sup>th</sup> of December. SBa and SBu agreed to attend the next VITAL meeting as TSB representatives.

## **52 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place at the Civic Hall on Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, from 1pm - 3pm.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 3:00 PM