

**Environment of Estates  
Tenant Scrutiny Board  
April 2016**



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# Desired Outcomes and Recommendations

**Desired Outcome** – Assurances that the ‘One Council’ approach is operating at estate level

**Recommendation 1** – That the Tenant Scrutiny Board review in September 2016 progress made towards service harmonisation and the implementation of the ‘one council approach’.

**Desired Outcome** – An improved walkabout process

**Recommendation 2** – That the following be considered as part of the current harmonisation project and that the results of the harmonisation project be reported back to Tenant Scrutiny Board

- Better communication of estate walkabouts with greater lead in time
- Proactive campaign to increase tenant participation both at walkabouts and in other associations
- That for some walkabouts specific agencies attend at the request of Housing Leeds to target particular issues.
- All ward councillors and those attending receive outcome reports following walkabouts
- All actions agreed happen within agreed timescales
- Uniform reporting template
- Use of compliment letters
- Consistent approach to enforcement

**Desired Outcome** – Cleaner estates

**Recommendation 3** – That the Council introduces the best waste collection solution for individual estates, even if that results in variations across the city.

**Desired Outcome** – Cleaner estates and better educated residents on the issue of waste

**Recommendation 4** – That the Council

- Provides more bins on estates
- Ensures the timely removal of full glass banks
- Introduces more clean up days
- Undertakes an education campaign to raise variations across the city.

**Desired Outcome** – Improved appearance of gardens

**Recommendation 5** – That appropriate enforcement action is taken to ensure tenants fulfil their tenancy agreement with regards to the upkeep of gardens.

**Desired Outcome** – Improved knowledge of tenants as to their responsibilities

**Recommendation 6** – That the responsibilities of tenants with regards their gardens are clearly communicated, particularly during pre-tenancy training.



# Desired Outcomes and Recommendations

**Desired Outcome** – Providing tenants with the tools to keep their gardens neat and tidy

**Recommendation 7** – That Housing Leeds encourages and facilitates the start-up of tool bank schemes.

**Desired Outcome** – A better understanding by tenants of what is achievable and within what timescales

**Recommendation 8** – That greater publicity be given to the constraints faced by the Council in terms of grounds maintenance.

**Desired Outcome** – Up to date map

**Recommendation 9** – That Parks and Countryside in liaison with Housing Leeds pro-actively identify those areas 'not on the map' and action accordingly

**Desired Outcome** – Improved garage policy

**Recommendation 10** – That Housing Leeds reports back to Tenant Scrutiny Board back on any recommendations and or proposed policy changes following its review of garages.

**Desired Outcome** – The development of tenant associations which can help deliver estate initiatives

**Recommendation 11** – That Housing Leeds pro-actively encourages and supports the development of tenant associations in those areas where such activity is low.



# Introduction and Scope

## Introduction

1. This is our second Inquiry report since the amalgamation of the scrutiny panels previously established under the three ALMOs.
2. Our first Inquiry report looked at Annual Home Visits. Ten recommendations were put forward to Housing Leeds nine of which were agreed. This second report focuses on the Environment of Estates.

## Scope of the Inquiry

3. The Board chose this topic as there was a strong belief that good housing and the welfare of tenants was not just about decent buildings but the 'whole environment' in which tenants lived. It was acknowledged that often the reputation of an area was determined by factors other than the state of the house. These included landscaping, gardens and the management of waste.
4. Terms of Reference for this Inquiry were agreed on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015 when we concluded that the purpose of the Inquiry would be to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

- Current policies
- Tenant involvement
- Co-ordination of services and agencies
- Developing and delivering standards

Performance measuring  
Customer satisfaction.

5. The Inquiry was conducted over six formal evidence gathering sessions which took place between September 2015 and February 2016.
6. Members of the Board also undertook extensive site visits, attending local 'estate walkabouts'. We also met with local ward members and conducted surveys with residents and tenant groups.
7. We would like to thank all those involved in this Inquiry. A full list of those who participated is detailed at the end of this report.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Partnership working and the harmonisation of Services

8. It is clear that Partnership Working – all council teams that contribute to the estates being kept clean and tidy, (Housing, Localities , Parks, Waste Services and Civic Enterprise Leeds) coming together at Team leader level is key to better estate environment.
9. It is crucial that these teams forge closer working relationships in order to develop and implement shared local Estate Improvement Plans and jointly problem solve local estate management issues.
10. We acknowledge the progress made in this regard, but by officers own admission there is more to do, particularly with regards the harmonisation of services and systems.
11. We are of the view that we will only be able to claim that partnership working has truly been achieved when the tenant experiences a seamless service and where officers talk in terms of working for Leeds City Council rather than their individual service areas.
12. The Tenant Scrutiny Board is very willing to offer input to the harmonisation of services and provide the tenants perspective.

**Recommendation 1** – That the Tenant Scrutiny Board review in September 2016 progress made towards service harmonisation and the implementation of the ‘one council approach’.

## Estate Walkabouts

13. One such harmonisation project is the harmonisation of estate walkabouts. During the course of our Inquiry we undertook seven walkabouts on estates in Bramley, Moortown, Armley and Beeston and Holbeck. These were followed with discussions with the relevant Housing Officers and local ward Councillors. Our findings have already been submitted to officers undertaking the harmonisation project; however we share them again here. Our input is intended to act as a helpful contribution by putting forward a series of observations and recommendations.

### Observations

#### Feedback from Tenant attendance at Walkabouts

14. A number of common themes emerged from these discussions. Those being:
  - The lack of tenant involvement in walkabouts
  - The role of local ward members in the walkabouts
  - A discussion on the best people to attend walkabouts. There was a



# Conclusions and Recommendations

general consensus that there would be no added value for a PCSO to attend, but a close relationship with housing officers was required. A concern expressed by the Board was the regular movement of PCSOs between estates often resulting in residents not knowing who their local PCSO officer was. The Board acknowledges that operational duties will, on occasions, require the movement of PCSOs; however the goal should be to have a consistent and known presence. The Board also emphasised the value of CCTV and acknowledges that the use of CCTV on estates would help against anti social behaviour and requested that when the budget allows more cameras should be considered in areas where they would serve as a deterrent. There was further consensus that whilst desirable, it was unrealistic to have a member of the locality team on the walkabouts due to limited resources. This therefore should be compensated by a close working relationship between the locality team and housing office. However in conceding that there were not enough locality officers to attend all walkabouts, this did, raise the question in as to whether there were enough locality managers in post generally to deal with the numerous issues identified by the walkabouts.

- How owner occupiers on estates are integrated into the activities and community of estates
- The general need for agencies to manage tenants expectations by being clear as to what services and be provided and in what time scales
- The need for Housing Managers and Team Leaders to be aware of issues

so as to be able to target the appropriate resources to deal with recurring issues

## Feedback from Member questionnaire

15. As part of our evidence gathering methodology we sent a questionnaire, specifically in relation to estate 'walkabouts' to all 99 ward Councillors. (Shown as appendix 1). The following was noted:

- 32 Ward Councillors representing 25 out of the 33 wards responded
- 100% of Councillors had attended a walkabout , 98% in the last 12 months
- All stated that the process was useful

## Positive comments included

- Ideal way to develop relationships with housing officers
- Important for tenants to see that councillors and officers are interested and care
- Important to see estates for oneself
- Good way of identifying other 'personal' issues
- Good way to share perspectives and establish good practice
- Provides the opportunity for ward Councillors to set clear expectations and to set standards for the environment
- Provides opportunities to monitor the consistency in performance of housing officers



# Conclusions and Recommendations

- Provides the opportunity to gather the intelligence needed to target resources

Negative comments included;

- lack of notice over times
- diary clashes
- poor communication over pending visits resulting in low tenant involvement

## Comments from Ward Councillors of estates visited

16. Some ward Councillors had fed back that they received the reports of walkabouts even if they had not attended, however this was not consistent across the city. Others stated that the walkabout should be used to identify and compliment those tenants who kept a tidy and pleasant environment and to start enforcement action on those in breach of their tenancies.

17. A recurring theme was the importance of ensuring that actions agreed happened in a timely manner and the importance of 'joined up working' between the different agencies and council departments. It was also acknowledged that the process of picking up actions during walkabouts illustrated previous 'system failures'. It was suggested that at least once a year *all* appropriate agencies undertake a joint walkabout.

18. All ward Councillors stated that the estate walkabout was only one of a number of ways in which they gained knowledge and an understanding of their estates. Other methods cited

included; street surgeries, casework, attendance at tenant/community group meetings, private walkabouts, correspondence and membership on HAP.

19. The Tenant Scrutiny Board would make the following recommendations.

**Recommendation 2** – That the following be considered as part of the current harmonisation project and that the results of the harmonisation project be reported back to Tenant Scrutiny Board

- Better communication of estate walkabouts with greater lead in time
- Proactive campaign to increase tenant participation both at walkabouts and in other associations
- That for some walkabouts specific agencies (particularly locality officers) attend at the request of Housing Leeds to target particular issues
- All ward councillors and those attending to receive outcome reports following walkabouts
- All actions agreed happen within agreed timescales
- Uniform reporting template
- Use of compliment letters
- Consistent approach to enforcement

## Waste Management

20. The biggest issue we found on estates from the perspective of tenants, officers





# Conclusions and Recommendations

and elected members was waste management and general issues around litter.

21. Our immediate thoughts on this brought us to the conclusion that one size cannot fit all. We are aware of the on-going work between services as part of the High Rise Project to review waste management in high rise blocks. We also acknowledge that development is on-going of a pilot scheme in Lincoln Green to provide a bulky waste collection service, improve recycling and reduce fly tipping in and around blocks.
22. We are aware that many households cannot have wheeled bins. This is usually where it is not safe to wheel the bin to the kerbside for collection. In lots of situations this does mean that households have a bag collection service. In a few areas there are communal waste facilities where residents take their bagged waste to a large bin away from the property. A large proportion of these are high rise properties.
23. We are also aware that in parts of Headingley, green bins have been withdrawn and an 'opt in' service introduced.
24. It is with these varying arrangements in mind that lead us to conclude that estates need bespoke arrangements as far as is practically possible and consideration should be given to such an approach.

**Recommendation 3** – That the Council introduces the best waste collection solution for individual estates, even if that results in variations across the city.

25. On a practical level we are of the view that more general bins and dog waste bins should be located on estates. A common complaint from residents is that the lack of such bins can encourage littering. Also glass bins are often left full encouraging residents to leave bottles nearby.
26. We also recommend the greater use of 'clean up days' with skips strategically placed around estates.
27. Our final comment in relation to waste is the need to better educate residents on the waste arrangements in their particular estates.

## **Recommendation 4** – That the Council

- Provides more bins on estates
- Ensures the timely removal of full glass banks
- Introduces more clean up days
- Undertakes an education campaign to raise variations across the city.

## Garden and Common Land Management

28. It was clear from our walkabouts that a common frustration amongst residents and officers was the unkempt nature of some gardens and common land. In the majority of cases unkempt gardens are the result of tenants not fulfilling their tenancy agreement. It is our view that in such circumstances appropriate enforcement should be taken. This should be consistent across the city.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

**Recommendation 5** – That appropriate enforcement action is taken to ensure tenants fulfil their tenancy agreement with regards to the upkeep of gardens.

29. On other occasions unkempt gardens can be the result of lack of knowledge regarding responsibilities. For example some hedges are part of the boundary to tenanted properties so would fall to the occupant to maintain as part of a tenancy agreement. This is not always understood or accepted by the tenant and needs intervention from local housing staff. We understand that Housing Leeds is considering introducing pre tenancy training. We would recommend that garden maintenance figures highly in that training

**Recommendation 6** – That the responsibilities of tenants with regards their gardens are clearly communicated, particularly during pre-tenancy training.

30. We would also invite Housing officers to review their working practices in relation to enforcement. We learnt that some officers would deal with issues via a 'letter through the door'. Others would adopt the approach of knocking on doors and speaking to tenants.

31. Our recent inquiry into home visits emphasised the need for housing officers to have a relationship with their

tenants. We think this is better achieved by face to face relationships rather than by letters.

32. We are also aware that the other side of enforcement is the acknowledgement of responsible behaviour. We would therefore encourage the Council to look at how it might reward such behaviour, whether that is through material award or through the lettings policy,

33. We are aware of an initiative in Middleton around 'tool banks'. This is a scheme whereby small garden tools may be hired/loaned out to those who may not otherwise have access to such equipment thus helping people who may struggle maintaining their gardens. Lack of money to purchase the necessary equipment and the means to store it is often an issue for tenants. The idea of the scheme is not only to help tenants keep nice gardens, but also to improve how neighborhoods look.

34. The Scheme in Middleton is supported financially by local ward Members and the Community Committee. However it is not run by the Council. We acknowledge that there is a view expressed by some officers that such schemes would achieve better success if not Council managed and to a certain extent we agree with that view. However, it must be recognised that not all areas have the strong community organisations required to start and run such a scheme. We therefore recommend that Housing Leeds encourages and facilitates the start-up



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of tool bank schemes in other areas and where appropriate encourage local management.

**Recommendation 7** – That Housing Leeds encourages and facilitates the start-up of tool bank schemes.

35. The management of the Grounds Maintenance contract is undertaken by Parks and Countryside with works including the cutting of grass plots within housing areas and highway verges along with the pruning and weeding of planted areas such as shrub and rose beds. The works are undertaken by an external contractor, Continental Landscapes Ltd within a contract that commenced in 2012.
36. As a result of our Inquiry the Board has a much better understanding of some of the constraints faced by Parks and Countryside in the management of common land. For example hedges that don't fall within the responsibility of tenants this are maintained as part of the grounds contract with Continental.
37. There is legislation that prevents the Council cutting hedges during the bird nesting season unless there is a clear risk to safety. The season is accepted as being March to August and whilst it is not impossible to cut back hedges in this window it is normal practice not to do so.
38. This does sometimes lead to complaints from residents that the council is failing but the penalties (and reputational damage to Leeds City Council) should a nest be disturbed and a prosecution brought, are not insignificant.

39. Similarly, we now better understand issues around weed killing and the legislative restrictions on chemicals that can be used.

40. Given the above, we are of the view that better publicity around the constraints faced by the Council would help considerably to reduce tenant's expectations and therefore complaints.

**Recommendation 8** – That greater publicity be given to the constraints faced by the Council in terms of grounds maintenance.

41. Another type of complaint we heard from residents was that often they were told that common land was not been managed as it was 'not on the map'. We were advised that Continental Landscapes Ltd work to an electronic 'map'. Therefore if an area had not been highlighted for inclusion on the map by the former ALMOs it was not included in the data base for works and would be referred to as 'not on the map'. We were told that these areas were being corrected as and when identified.

**Recommendation 9** – That Parks and Countryside in liaison with Housing Leeds pro-actively identify those areas 'not on the map' and action accordingly.

## Garages

42. The Board briefly discussed the issue of garages. We are aware that not all



# Conclusions and Recommendations

garages are in a good condition. Empty ones are often vandalised and many are of poor design. We welcome therefore the proposed review of this area by Housing Leeds and would be pleased to make any relevant contribution to the review.

**Recommendation 10** – That Housing Leeds reports back to Tenant Scrutiny Board on any recommendations and or proposed policy changes following its review of garages.

## Resident Associations

43. It is our view that the success of many estate initiatives rely on the presence of strong tenant associations. We are aware that in some areas association activity is limited or non-existent. We recommend that Housing Leeds pro-actively encourage the establishment of tenant associations in those areas where participation is low.

**Recommendation 11** – That Housing Leeds pro-actively encourages and supports the development of tenant associations in those areas where such activity is low.



# Evidence and Witnesses

## Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

## Reports and Publications Submitted

- Terms of Reference for the Board's inquiry into Environment of estates
- Estate Inspection/Walkabout questionnaire and responses to tenants and tenant groups
- Estate Inspection/Walkabout questionnaire and responses to Elected Members
- Report of Board members in relation to site visits and walkabouts

## Witnesses Heard

- Susan Upton, Chief Officer (Waste Management)
- Jill Wildman, Interim Chief Officer Housing Management
- Jason Singh, Locality Manager
- Simon Frosdick, Business Development manager, Parks and Countryside
- Sharon Guy, Housing Manager (Customer Relations, tenant Scrutiny, tenant Involvement and Equality)
- Sgt. Jon Glennon, Safer Leeds/West Yorkshire Police
- David Longthorpe, Head of Housing management
- Judith Wray, Housing Manager
- Lynn Richards, Housing Manager
- Baldev Dass, Housing manager
- Rebecca Smith, Housing Manager
- Akhwan Ali, Housing Manager
- Sam Costigan, Housing Manager
- Peter Wajdner, Team Leader
- Councillor Adam Ogilvie
- Councillor Angela Gabriel
- Councillor Caroline Gruen
- Councillor Kevin Ritchie
- Councillor Sharon Hamilton
- Debra Harding, Operations Manager, (Contact Centre.)



# Evidence and Witnesses

## Dates of Scrutiny

Tenant Scrutiny Board meetings on:

- 2 September 2015
- 7 October 2015
- 4 November 2015
- 2 December 2015
- 6 January 2016
- 3 February 2016
- 2 March 2016
- 6 April 2016

Site Visits/walkabouts

- 8 October 2015 - Armley Ward, Cedars and surrounding areas
- 8 October 2015 – Moortown Ward, Brackenwoods, Larkhills, Lincombes
- 13 October 2015 – Bramley Ward, Church Hills, Britannia's and Stanningley Ct
- 13 October 2015 – Beeston & Holbeck, Cottingley Drive
- 13 October 2015 - Beeston & Holbeck Ward, Cottingley, Cottingley Heights
- 21 October 2015 – Bramley Ward, Fairfields
- 21 October 2015 – Moortown Ward, Leafields

Tenant Scrutiny Board  
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