

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Thursday 17 December 2020 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors Akhter, Bawa, Bostan, Edwards and M Gill;
Mr J Cash (Co-opted member).

Officers: Sean Russell (Customer Feedback Coordinator).

31/20 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P M Hughes and Sandars.

32/20 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests made at the meeting.

33/20 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

34/20 Additional Item of Business

There were no additional items of business to be considered at the meeting.



Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The Scrutiny Board received a presentation on the Council's work to date in relation to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The Code provided the future framework for complaint handling by Local authorities and social landlords and aimed to introduce greater consistency across landlords' complaint procedures as well as make it easier for tenants to make complaints about their landlords.

The Council, as a landlord, was required to self-assess against the Code and publish its findings by the end of December 2020. To do this, work had been carried out including the establishment of a working group and virtual meetings with Sandwell Community Information Participation service (SCIPS) to get residents' feedback and ideas.

It was confirmed that no policies or procedures were being amended, but that elements were being brought together in one place, which would make things easier for residents.

From the comments and questions raised by members of the Scrutiny Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- The Board highlighted the importance of learning from complaints and enquiries it received, not just for housing, but all of its services.
- The Tenant Review Panel had not been consulted on the self-assessment, but the Chair of the Panel invited further aspects of this work to be brought to that group for consultation and discussion.
- The feedback received from residents through SCIPS had been included in the self-assessment and the refreshed Customer Feedback Guide.
- Due to the restrictions in place throughout 2020 due to COVID-19 it had not been possible to engage as widely as would have been the case in normal circumstances. The Council was committed to engaging with as wide a range of groups and communities as possible and it was hoped that when restrictions were lifted engagement could be strengthened.

- The Customer Feedback Guide included a section on how to get an advocate to help those residents who would benefit from such a service. It was acknowledged that the Guide needed to be in formats that were accessible, including in Braille. The Guide would also be checked to ensure compliance with the principles of Plain English prior to being published.
- Previously there had been two different systems for logging customer feedback, this would be changed to a single system making it more streamlined and efficient.
- MySandwell did not currently have the facility for people, including councillors, to log complaints.
- It was acknowledged that Sandwell had high levels of digital poverty and it was confirmed that there was no intention for complaints to be transferred to only be dealt with online.
- Councillors requested clarification over wording around Data Protection within the Guide.

Resolved that the Executive Director - Neighbourhoods:-

- (1) consult and engage with the Tenant Review Panel on the Customer Feedback Guide and associated processes;
- (2) consult widely with a wide range of community groups, including those which may be digitally excluded across Sandwell on the Customer Feedback Guide and associated processes;
- (3) seek clarification on the wording relating to Data Protection within the Customer Feedback Guide and provide this to the Scrutiny Board;
- (4) submit a further report on customer feedback, enquiries and timeliness of responses to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

Festive Wishes

The Chair thanked officers and members for their support and hard work during the year and wished all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

In return, the Board thanked the Chair for how he had chaired meetings throughout 2020.

Meeting ended at 6.38pm

[Click here to watch a recording of the meeting](#)