

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Monday 29 January 2024 at 6.00pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair),
Councillors K Allcock, Dhatt, Fisher, Lewis, Maycock
and Webb.

In Attendance: Sue Smith (Sandwell Tenants and Leaseholders
Scrutiny Group).

Officers: Nigel Collumbell (Assistant Director – Housing
Management), Tom Hogan (Head of Customer
Experience) and Alex Goddard (Scrutiny Lead Officer).

9/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Khan, Shaeen and Younis and from Ms Brown (co-opted member).

10/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

11/24 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey Outcomes

The Board received the outcomes of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey. These surveys were an annual requirement by the Regulator for Social Housing. The Regulator determines the questions and their wording, however the Council was able, and had chosen, to include additional questions to better understand tenant satisfaction in Sandwell. The results of the survey had to be submitted to the Regulator who compiled the national data.

Sandwell had conducted a trial survey last year to provide a baseline. The latest results were largely unchanged from the previous year other than overall satisfaction which had increased from 68% to 74%. Compared to other landlords taking part in the survey Sandwell's results were average and compared with landlords with larger portfolios of properties Sandwell compared favourably against landlords with larger portfolios of properties.

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

- The research had been conducted by a specialist consultant, who also worked with other housing providers.
- The Council was on an improvement journey and tenant satisfaction was part of that.
- The Regulator had confirmed that they would not just be considering the statistics but would look at how the Council would address issues that arose from the survey.
- It was acknowledged that Housing Directorate was going through a period of culture change around accepting learning from mistakes and making better use of customer data – not just from the survey, but also from complaints and enquiries from elected representatives.

- There was no holistic software system that captured information on assets such as components or when they would be due for renewal. This was instead held on various databases that could be difficult to access and analyse.
- An independent complaints resolution team was being assembled. This would be independent from other housing service areas to investigate complaints and what led to them being made whilst acting to champion the tenant and their needs. The team would also gather learning from complaints to determine what needed to be done differently in the future. This approach had been developed through discussions with landlords whose customers were happier with their complaints process.
- Waiting times for repairs was a key area. Delays were caused by various factors including availability of materials or staff resources.
- It was important to recognise that complaints were not a negative thing as low numbers of complaints could suggest the Council was not open to listening and learning from its tenants.
- Increased complaints around gas checks was due to a contractor failure, however this had been addressed.
- There was an increasing demand for social housing with more presentations for homelessness and increasing numbers of households on the housing register.
- All proposals for additional services had been included in the proposed Housing Revenue Account budget for 2024-25.
- Repair works had incurred delays since the Covid-19 pandemic, with the ability to catch up being impaired by availability of labour and some materials. Procurement processes were being reviewed and refreshed.

- A rolling five-year programme of stock condition surveys was underway in line with the Regulator's expectations that the Council knows and understands its housing stock.
- A proactive programme of home check visits had been introduced which provided an opportunity to meet with tenants, discuss areas of concern or issues they might have and undertake a visual check of the property. At the time of the meeting over 20% of tenants had received a home check visit.
- The Housing Hub provided additional capacity to the contact centre, with housing related queries able to be routed to the Hub to resolve them in a more timely way.
- The Council would be implementing a refreshed telephony system which would further help to improve the service provided by the Contact Centre and the Housing Hub.
- The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group had carried out a review of the Housing Hub and made several recommendations, some were still outstanding but there had been an improvement in call abandonment rates and average call wait times.
- The difference in satisfaction between Tipton and Wednesbury compared to other towns had been replicated in other Council services. Work was being carried out to investigate this to identify causes and what can be done to address it.

Members thanked officers for attending the meeting and answering questions.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director of Housing ensure that when reviewing and procuring an Asset Management System it links with other systems including procurement and operational systems to help build intelligence;

- (2) that the following topics be included on the work programme for the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:-
 - (a) response plan to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey;
 - (b) transformational Plan for Housing;
 - (c) the differences between performance and satisfaction in different towns;
 - (d) the Housing Hub.

- (3) that the Director of Housing provide an update on stock condition surveys and any issues experienced around them to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

13/24 **Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Action Tracker**

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made. Outstanding actions would be chased, and further updates would be reported to future meetings of the Board.

14/24 **Work Programme 2023 - 24 and Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2023 - 24 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Members indicated that they wished to scrutinise the proposals for the New Archives Centre for the Borough.

Meeting ended at 7:51pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk