**Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group**

**Saturday 1st April 2023, 9:00am-1.30pm**

**Sandwell Council House**

**Chair – Phillippe Brown**

**Minutes**

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| **Attendance:**  **Scrutiny Members** |  |  |
| Alison Allen  Anthony Averis  Phillippe Brown  **Sandwell MBC**  Nigel Collumbell | Aynols Reid  Delroy Thomas    Manny Sehmbi  Sarah Ager | Shefa Nessa  Sue Smith |
| Marianne Monro (Support Officer) | Yvonne Willetts  (Minute Taker) | Ellen Fenton  (SNAC Chair) |
| **Apologies:**  Shenalee Brown  Ahmed Abdulrahman |  |  |

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| **Items for Discussion** | | |
| 1. | Introduction to Formal Meeting   * Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Formal introductions were made * There were apologies from Shenalee Brown and Ahmed Abdulrahman * Chair ran through the agenda | Chair |
| 2. | Declaration of Interest   * Sue Smith declared that she is a member of a tenants and residents' group and may be involved with tenant complaints. Manny Sehmbi confirmed that there was no conflict. | Supporting Officer MM |
| 3.  3.2 | Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM)/ dashboard   * NC presented the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM)/ dashboard and explained the background * The Regulators of Social Housing issued a set of indicators for tenant satisfaction that all social housing landlords will need to report against * This will be effective from 1st April and results will be published * In preparation for this SMBC produced a dashboard and included two extra measures * There are two versions and NC asked the group to decide which should be published on the website * Hard copies are to be circulated to the group * NC talked through some of the measures * The first set of indicators are taken form the results of Satisfaction Survey of last year and were used to get a baseline * There is a column comparing SMBC with peer group i.e., large associations with over 10,000 properties * Not all landlords published the perception survey, so the comparison pool is small * In Sandwell, the overall satisfaction was 68% last November. This was relatively low compared to the peer group 78% and the national average of 80% * The level of satisfaction for the indicators around listening and communicating with tenants are low. Although there has been engagement with residents through the establishment of groups like TLSG, SMBC are not communicating with the wider tenant population * Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints SMBC 31% - peer group 47% and the national average was 54% * SMBC receive fewer complaints this may be due to residents not complaining as they do not think that any action will be taken * The approach to complaints – investigation and response is being changed   Repairs   * Once data is published everything will be transparent. * SMBC can be benchmarked and compared with other landlords and have a baseline to work from. * If any further details or conversations are needed, they can be held in this forum * TA – Comparisons with other Local Authorities and housing associations will give better perspective * NC – there are three additional question in the perception survey that are not prescribed by the Regulators * Energy efficiency in homes in view of the rising cost of living? – 69% were relatively happy * How easy are we to access post covid?   + - * SMBC 66%       * Peer group 69%       * National average 78% * Online services?   + - * SMBC 67% * Data on the Big 6 safety indicators was also presented – details to be circulated to the group * The group asked when the data would be available? * NC - House mark have provided benchmarking data but there is no legal requirement to publish the data as yet * The group asked if a traffic light system could be used to make the figures easier to read * NC – Not all figures would benefit from being displayed in this way, but it will be considered * SA - The KPIs for Asset Management, once fully developed, will be shared and can be RAG rated * The group asked if there is any KPI data from previous years? * NC – There is some perception data from five years ago but the questions were different, so it is not a true comparison. There would be data around the number of complaints * MM asked what SA and NC thought the group should look at * Complaints was suggested.   - Are SMBC listening?  - How is customer feedback used to improve services?   * TLSG would like details of things that are not going well to be included in the annual report – to give a true reflection of the situation. If only positive details are published it leads to scepticism * Chair – Communication is key. People are more likely to be receptive and understanding if the Council are clear and transparent and admit to mistakes. * SA – Work is needed to shift the culture in Asset Management and Improvements – be honest, transparent and communicate. There are nationwide issues with labour and costs, and this should be communicated better * NC acknowledges that Housing is not yet the finished article – this group will help to keep SMBC in check * NC asked the group to indicate how often they would like to see dashboard updates * Timings would need to be considered so that the findings from the Annual report can be captured * This was put to the vote and twice a year was agreed. * Delroy – Information is not currently given to any occupants besides the person named on the tenancy agreement   Does the tenant need to be present for work to be done?   * There is a contractual relationship with the tenant and any legal changes have to be communicated to them * If all occupants are on the database for an address would this resolve the issue? * This question has been raised when the group have worked on other topics – this is an issue because the response is not consistent * In long term tenancies there is normally only one person on the agreement * NC – there should already be details of all occupants on the database - personal details are requested to verify identity.   There is a process to add another tenant to the agreement  Action: NC to take this query offline | Nigel Collumbell / Sarah Ager |
| 4 | Service Standards   * Work is about to begin on the new service standards. * Repairs standard is fully developed, and details are on the website * Housing Management is still being worked on * NC asked if there were any particular areas that the tenants base would like included in the Service Standards * Chair   Repairs – How are they reported and timescales regarding response and when work will be done.   * Chair – Communications are needed to make residents aware of how to report repairs. Written correspondence as well as the internet as not everyone has internet access * The main findings of a discussion in terms of Service Standards * Repairs appears to be a key issue – affects a lot of people * There is a need to set out clearly people’s rights and responsibilities * Access to services – digital inclusion and other platforms. Clearly set out all of the different ways that the council can be contacted. * This is information will be used to help mould and model new service standards which will be brought to a future meeting   Digital Inclusion   * Digital inclusion is poor but is currently under review.   People may not want to access information digitally.  Home checks have been carried out to gather data from tenants who have not made recent contact  Data show that tenants are not accessing the internet and need other forms of communication   * Chair would like the question to be asked regarding internet connection/ usage if the Council contact a resident, and this should be recorded on the system. * There is data from some years ago as part of work by the Digital Transformation team and internet usage. The data is not detailed but highlights hot spots of lower connectivity. * A figure of 30% digital deprivation in Sandwell * EF thought it was more likely 70% deprivation and 30% uptake   Action: Manny to check this with her team and send details to Marianne for circulation   * Digital inclusion data is being looked in conjunction with the voluntary sector and charities work is ongoing. Equipment is donated and they are trying to support people to become more confident. Need to be mindful of the requirements of different communities. * Details of the demographic for digital usage was requested – data may be available for the Tenant Satisfaction Survey * SCIPS have £340,000 funds available for the digital agenda * AR – If anyone needs digital training or equipment there are companies through the NHS that will lend equipment and give training for three months. If anyone knows of someone that would benefit, they should refer them through SCIPs * Chair – There are great facilities in the borough libraries so residents can be signposted to them * Nigel is also in conversation with Virgin Media regarding promoting their social tariff * NC – 20% of repairs are reported on-line. Overall digital contact is 35%. SMBC have higher than average digital transactions * It is recognised that not everyone can or wants to use the online offering, but it needs to work efficiently for those who wish to use it | Nigel Collumbell |
| 5 | Annual Report   * The group provided feedback for last year’s Annual Report * Were people happy with the content of last year’s report * Did the key messages come across? * Last year the editorial panel included a tenant * The process for this year has now started * Would the TLSG want to be involved - the report could be seen more from the tenant perspective * How did the group want to contribute or be represented? * Did anyone from the group want to be on the editorial panel * Conversations around the Tenant Satisfaction Measures can be included * Work done by the TLSG and the Tenant Auditors could be highlighted in the report * Chair – Overall the report was easy to read, it was bold and concise with a good layout. * More transparency is needed and comparisons with other authorities * For the next one could there be different tenant voices with better representation of the community * The diversity of the community should be presented * Contact details for other organisations would have been useful if the publication is available to all residents * The report is not sent to all residents, it was published online, and hard copies could be requested * It was decided that the report was not the right place to publish useful contacts, but this year could include links to relevant organisations * The group would like to make a collective statement and include comment from the Tenant Auditors and SNAC * The report is being launched at the Tenant Conference in July and the group would like to see a draft before it is launched * If a member of the group joined the editorial panel, they could ask questions around current data and be better informed to comment * The time commitment would be about three hours per??? * No one was available to be on the panel at present * The group will review the first draft when it is brought back for review at the May meeting | Nigel Collumbell |
| 6. | Damp and Mould   * The death of a child instigated the review, by social landlords, of damp and mould in their properties last November * SMBC did a full review and self-referred in December * 1000 properties of 28,000 stock were surveyed and 125 had damp and mould issues * There are 40 properties in Cat1 (Extreme mould – risk of death) * No property has been left as a Cat 1 – treatment has been done to resolve the issue * Work with residents will continue to help prevent the problem from re-occurring * There are 85 properties in Cat 2 (Severe mould) * Categories are defined by the severity of the mould - taking into account which rooms in the house are affected eg bedroom and the number of rooms affected. The occupant’s health weas also considered. * The definitions are published on the website * The reviews were carried out by experienced HHSRS qualified surveyors * The numbers were collated based on four years reports of damp and mould * The stock condition surveys – to be carried out on 50% of the stock – will give a clearer picture * Following the survey there will be a rolling programme and data will feed into the Asset Management Strategy * Input from residents needed to help understand their priorities * The Government are committed to a review of the Decent Homes Standards by the end of the year * A virtual damp and mould team has been established * Damp and mould will be included in the Annual Report * The data will cover a wide area and may help to inform the TLSG programme * The contracts for the survey work are currently out to tender * There have been instances when officers have shown lack of sensitivity when cases of damp and mould have been reported * NC to review customer service regarding damp and mould, focussing on how the message is delivered * Home checks may help to develop a rapport and build trust * The number of damp and mould reports were high in January but have reduced and are more stable now * High energy cost may have had an impact and lead to an increase of damp and mould * Plans are being put in place to mitigate the issue recurring next winter * A more proactive approach is being taken with a focus on the hard to access properties * Properties with potential issues can be identified early with regular inspections and the use of technology * Pressurisers could be used to circulate air, but these are run on electricity so incur additional cost | Sarah Ager |
| 7.  7.2  7.3  7.4  7.5  7.6  7.7  7.8  7.9 | Housing Community involvement update  Manny Sehmbi presented a paper giving a snapshot of activities  Tenant Audit Programme   * The first tenant audit has been completed and is in the process of being finalised * The group have received some training and are happy with their development * SCIPS have been brought in to provide additional support and guidance to the group   Building Safety Working Group   * The Auditors Group are carrying out an audit of ‘Fire Safety in high rise blocks’ * The Fire Safety Resident Engagement officers are undertaking workshops in the six towns to gather information * Once the workshops are complete consultations will be rolled out to all high-rise blocks * Inspections by the Building Regulator and Social housing regulator are likely to start in 2024   Youth Involvement   * Discussions have taken place with Children’s Trust * Work is ongoing with colleagues to prepare care leavers for moving into their own properties * The group are looking at the stigma attached to care leavers to ensure that staff have a better understanding of different communities and vulnerable groups   It was asked when the awareness sessions for young people would be rolled out to schools   * Town based staff already have connections with schools. We need to explore what has been used previously by colleagues in Housing   Task & Finish Groups   * The groups look at very specific tasks * 10 tenants were involved in consultations around the Tenant Conference * A group also met to discuss the draft Housing Strategy   Tenant Complaints and Satisfaction   * A brief summary was given: * Stage 1 complaints 905 * Stage 2 complaints 80 * Compliments 203 * The Tenants Complaints Panel was disbanded to remove barriers and speed up the overall process   Action: Manny will ask Customer Services Team to provide some context around the numbers  Cllr Fenton mentioned that she had information in a report around the Customer Journey  Action: Cllr Fenton to send to Marianne to circulate to the group  Tenant Conference   * Sandwell tenant Conference will take place on Saturday 1st July 2023 * The agenda has been drafted but is not yet finalised * A group of tenants were consulted prior to scoping the event * Guest speakers have been invited to discuss tenant issues from a national perspective including T-PAS * There will be a big launch of the event * It will be an opportunity to highlight the positive work of TLSG and Tenant Auditors * It was pointed out that leaseholders have not been involved so far * The event will be open to leaseholders, but they have not been targeted. A separate event may be arranged around leaseholders.   Action: Manny Sehmbi to feedback the comment and look at what format a leaseholder event might take.  Marianne to feedback  Tenant& Resident/Community Groups – Delivered by SCIPS   * SCIPS supports existing TRAs and have been in discussions with groups in West Bromwich and Smethwick regarding setting up formal Tenant/Resident Associations * SCIPS recently secured funding for a project to help residents in high rise blocks develop their digital skills * Community rooms in the blocks would be used for training   The removal of bus services without evident consultation was discussed   * Combined Authorities are responsible for public transport * Consultation did take place but was online and was not widely advertised * Several campaigns have taken place to bring back services, but this has not always been viable   It was asked whether the Warm Spaces programme had ended   * Funding from SCVO (Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations) finished at the end of March * Some partners will continue providing spaces during April – using their own funds * Some groups could not access the Warm Space funds as the scheme was an open-door policy, and this presented safeguarding issues for certain groups – e.g., blind, or visually impaired   Action: TLSG have asked for feedback on Warm Homes  Marianne to feed back at the meeting  Neighbourhood Partnership Team   * The team is managed by Marcia Sandel-Massey * The Team have supported groups to access funding through SCVO * The team are also supporting resident engagement in communal spaces in high rise blocks – these also support measures to prevent isolation and provide warm spaces | Manny Sehmbi |
| 8. | TLSG: Update on recruitment of TLSG member   * Recruitment s currently taking place for a new TLSG member * Members of the panel are Delroy, Ahmed, Sue and Shenalee * Shenalee has agreed to be the mentor for the new member * Following an exercise, the type of candidate required was identified * Four meetings have been held and the applications were issued * Ten applications were received and have been shortlisted to eight * Interviews are to take place 15th April between 9am and 6pm * Decisions will be made immediately after the interviews * The new member will have an induction and will be invited to the meeting 29th April * Chair thanked the panel for their hard work. It has been a good learning curve; two members of the panel have never interviewed before | Delroy Thomas |
| 9. | Updates from 24th March SNAC meeting   * Meeting on 24th March was the last one of the municipal year * Chair was made welcome at the SNAC meeting * The group would like to build on the relationship that has developed with the Council * There was a major review of Homeless and Rough Sleepers strategy – this will be looked at again in six months * The Lead gave feedback on the Community Safety Strategy. A new officer is being recruited to concentrate on neighbourhood policing   Home checks report   * Chair thanked the group for their hard work on the Home Checks Report * The recommendations will be implemented and the TLSG will monitor progress * All recommendations have been accepted by the board and have been put on the SNAC tracker * SNAC made no additions to the recommendations | Chair |
| 10. | Update on work area – complex and long standing repairs   * Chair met Mark Sheldon to discuss complex and long standing repairs work area – how would TLSG measure and arrive at recommendations * The systems are complex and time costly * Chair asked if there was any point continuing with this if the Council are already aware and making improvements * The decision was put to the vote and the result was unanimously against proceeding * Most of the issues are already covered in the Improvement Plan * The topic will be looked again in six months’ time | Chair |
| 11. | AOB  Next Year’s Work Programme   * Covering Anti-Social Behaviour as a topic was discussed * There is a specialist team for Anti-Social Behaviour that is HRA funded and sits within Borough Economy * Regardless of where responsibility lies within the Council, the group should expect an outcome * As part of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey it was identified as an area that residents are not happy with although as a council SMBC benchmark fairly well * The Government has launched an ASB action plan and SMBC will be able to compare how ASB issues are handled against the expectations the government have set out * Are officers responding effectively? * Is restorative action considered – eg painting over graffiti * The group asked the opinion of officers regarding scrutinising this area – would they have an impact? * ASB is a broad topic - It was suggested that perhaps the group could look at specific aspects of ASB * Noise nuisance has been the subject of a report from the Housing Ombudsman * Housing are now looking at this and this may be an area that the group could explore and make an informed decision * The prioritisation list was discussed * Several areas are already in the Performance Plan or cross into another directorate * The item was deferred and will be discussed at the meeting 29th April   Saturday 1 July – Sandwell Tenant Conference – TLSG involvement   * Tenant Conference is to take place 1st July * The item is to be added to the agenda for the meeting 29th April * The role of the group will be discussed at that meeting * Further details will be circulated as received   Members updates   * The Government recently announced proposed legislation that all Housing officers needed to have attained a certain level of professional qualification * The group asked if SMBC officers were at the required level and if not were there any measures in place for them to achieve this * The level of qualification has not yet been set * There is a definition of what a manager is * The Regulators will be managing this * It is envisaged that many members of staff will be attending courses as part of continued professional development * National grid updates to the Council House during May, could affect traffic access * The next group meeting is 29th April * The next formal meeting is 17th June | All |
|  | **Date of next meeting: - 17th June 2023** |  |