

Queries from Leeds Tenants Federation AGM, Saturday 24th September 2016

- **Why is Housing Leeds hiding behind budget cuts when the HRA is protected? (in relation to withdrawing some funding and some support from LTF)**

Annual 1% rent reductions in line with government policy does mean budget pressures for Housing Leeds, and just like other council services we are looking at where income can be generated and where we can achieve better value for money. Welfare Reform and changes to benefits over recent years such as under occupancy charges and the introduction of Universal Credit have impacted on rental income which presents constant challenges for the housing services, whilst it continues to significantly invest in responsive repairs and capital improvement programmes.

- **We never get invited to high rise group and we never hear back when we are involved in events relating to high rise. We don't hear about what they are doing and what they are working on**

At the moment there are no vacancies on the Leeds High Rise Advisory Group however as and when vacancies become available we will advertise it on our [website](#), and on our social media pages.

In terms of communications to high rise tenants and leaseholders, Housing Leeds will start to produce a high rise based newsletter early November 2016, starting with details of the strategy for high rise.

- **Officers are just taking things away from us in our communal areas in high rise for so-called fire safety this seems unfair, especially as it doesn't seem to happen consistently across the city. Also can each block see its fire risk assessment and is it done independently from the council**

Housing officers follow a procedure known as "Clear Area Policy (Zero Tolerance) to Fire Risk Approach and Managed Use Approach" and have to make decisions about any items that obstruct means of escape or are deemed a fire risk. However Housing Officers would always seek to notify the residents of this wherever possible. This policy was raised as a result of several serious fires across the city involving furniture left out in communal areas. Each block will vary slightly due to design, layout, level of anti-social behaviour etc. which is why it may seem inconsistent from time to time, but ultimately it's about putting the safety of the residents first.

Fire risk assessments were carried out prior to April 2013 by external consultants. After April 2013 they were carried out by a newly formed internal fire safety team made up of qualified fire officers. This team follow national guidelines and standards and Housing Leeds believe have raised the standard of the previous fire risk assessments. The fire risk assessments have been subject to scrutiny by internal audit and by West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service enforcement authorities and have always been found to be suitable and sufficient as required by legislation. Tenants and leaseholders may request to see the significant findings

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from a fire risk assessment for their block by contacting ABCLfiresafety@leeds.gov.uk

- **Why have we withdrawn so much officer support from LTF and why is there website now none existent**

Housing Leeds continues to work closely with Leeds Tenants Federation, financially supporting LTF to provide support to council tenants and community groups. However LTF is an independent limited company, which means that whilst we continue to resource the TARA Panel and project work, we are encouraging LTF directors and volunteers to develop the skills they need to run the company on a daily basis. This approach is working well on both parts.

Regarding the website, LTF is in the process of updating the content of its existing website which going forward features as a webpage alongside other involvement groups on the Housing Leeds website. You can find the website [here](#).

- **ASB in High Rise- why has responsibility for monitoring CCTV moved from local housing office to Leeds Watch?**

Data from CCTV footage is stored locally and can be accessed where there is a need through Leeds Watch as was the case previously. There is no charge for housing officers accessing CCTV footage, but there is a standardised process in place to ensure data protection rules are adhered to.

- **How are we checking and holding our repairs contractors to account. They don't appear to be doing things right first time but are probably still charging us for each visit- what checks are we doing to make sure jobs are done effectively**

We have contract management plans (CMP's) in place for all our contracts. This is a requirement of the Councils Contract Procedure Rules. These plans set out how we will manage the contracts properly and what controls we have in place, such as level of post inspections, how we manage costs, performance reporting, frequency of progress meetings etc. We have a performance management framework in place with Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that allows us to monitor performance and benchmark against other contractors. For some contracts, performance relates directly to financial deductions for poor performance. The performance framework includes a robust procedure for collecting, recording, reporting and analysing customer satisfaction which is recognised as the most important performance indicator. The CMP's also set out how we will manage poor performance and what tools we have within the remits of the contracts to address performance issues. As part of our day to day management procedures we undertake post inspections and assess the accuracy and appropriateness of charges and take action to recover any overcharged amounts. Our commercial teams undertake a quarterly and yearly audit on the accounts of external contractors and this includes testing of charges to ensure appropriateness and transparency. Internal Auditors carry out regular testing to ensure appropriate compliance with contracts, fair charging, robust procedures etc. Overall performance is reported monthly/quarterly/annually and is fed up to local members etc.

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- **Funding streams linked to HCA whereby new council tenants would be subject to higher rents?**

A key aim of the funding criteria for any properties delivered through the Homes and Communities Agency's 2015-18 Affordable Housing Programme, is that they must be made available for affordable rent in line with government regulations for new-build properties. Affordable rent was introduced by the Government in 2012 to allow social housing providers, to charge up to 80% of the local market rent. These rents are higher than what the Council have charged in the past so the extra income can be used to build new homes in light of the reductions which have been made to government grant in recent years.

- **What do we do to ensure that where there are ASB issues with introductory tenants that these don't go on to become secure tenancies- there are some examples**

There are various steps we can take on Introductory tenancies. Low level ASB /noise nuisance etc. is dealt with as a tenancy management issue by the Housing Office. If this isn't resolved and escalates into something more serious the case is then referred to Leeds Anti-Social Behaviour Team (LASBT) to take on. Hopefully the ASB is then dealt with and resolved quite quickly. However, if it continues to be an issue Housing Leeds can either add an extension of a further 6 months to an introductory tenancy giving a tenant a chance to improve their behaviour and continually monitor this (making the total period before they become secure 18 months) or we can take the decision to terminate. This is done by LASBT but Team Leaders also work alongside and are kept informed along the way. If you have any specific concerns relating to this you should make your local housing office aware.

- **How do Mears follow up on satisfaction questionnaires, and what about the longer term follow up, e.g. it may be a few months before the tenant knows if the repair has been successful Rob Goor**

Leeds City Council controls the repairs satisfaction process to ensure impartiality. All contractors are required to respond to the quarterly satisfaction reports (including specific feedback) and this is a standard agenda item at performance meetings. Mears are very proactive in analysing and developing a positive response to poor customer satisfaction and it should be noted that it is a KPI within the contract so it is directly related to the financial deduction model in their contract where performance is unacceptable. All repairs have a guarantee period and where a defect is latent, a contractor will be required to recall at no cost to the Council if it is appropriate. i.e. a damp problem reoccurs after dampproofing works during winter months. Where the contact centre undertake a repair survey and the customer reports a problem, they will recall the contractor at an appropriate priority to the defect.

- **Queries regarding the Housing and Planning Act-** please visit the website www.leeds.gov.uk/HPA2016

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- **Please note that there is one query for which we are still looking into and will provide a response shortly.**

“Regarding the 388 PFI new build- has there been a net loss in properties overall in this regen area in terms of council homes demolished or taken out of use and new ones being let?”