



## **REPORT TO Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board**

**From**

**The Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLSG)**

**Update on Activity 2024/25**

### **1. Purpose of the Paper**

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the activity of the Tenant and Leaseholder scrutiny group in 2024/25

### **2. TLSG Development**

In late 2023 and early 2024 an evaluation of the role of the TLSG was conducted by Tpas in late 2023 and early 2024. A number of recommendations were made covering, roles and responsibilities, processes, relationships, outcomes and impact and culture.

TLSG therefore spent a considerable period of time during 2024 reviewing how it should work going forward including how to work more collaboratively with SMBC officers and the Tenant Audit Group (TAG) who audit operational services from a tenant perspective.

As a result, new terms of reference for both TLSG and TAG have been developed and a new way of working for TLSG has been developed. These will be under regular review.

### **3. TLSG Activity**

Whilst development work was taking place in the background, TLSG were also actively involved monitoring the performance of the housing service and making recommendations for improvements.

- 3.1 The group decided this municipal year to focus on priority 3 in the Housing Strategy 2023-28, which is Quality Housing for All. The group's highest priority was to review the results of the stock condition survey to have a better understanding of the work needed to ensure tenants are living in homes that are fit for purpose.

The group has received regular updates on the progression of the surveys, but insufficient data has been available to date to have a true understanding of the quality of Sandwell's housing stock.

Due to the delays in getting sufficient data the group have focussed on Housing Disrepair Claims. This is an area of concern, as if tenants are better informed there is the potential to save considerable costs for the council in dealing with claims often instigated by no win no fee solicitors. There is also the financial risk to tenants if they wish to withdraw from a claim or lose their claim in court. This is even more concerning with the recent leaflet drop of council properties in the Tipton and Smethwick areas and potentially to other parts of the borough.

After first meeting with the manager of HDR in August 2024 TLSG have made a number of recommendations including:

- To encourage tenants to use SMBC's complaints procedure (if appropriate).
- For SMBC to use intelligence from previous cases to identify potentially systemic issues (which might be replicated across a building or estate) and feed into SMBC's long-term asset management strategy and/or proactive actions to prevent similar cases.
- A Disrepair Comprehensive Guide - To educate Tenants on SMBC complaints procedures and the processing of

Disrepair Litigation, before the Pre-Action Protocol Stage, for example, a comprehensive and user-friendly guide.

- 3.2 The group also had a stand at the tenant conference and took the opportunity to speak to tenants and leaseholders about the work of the group
- 3.3 TLSG has also provided feedback on the draft Good Neighbourhood Management policy. From the latest version of the group has provided comprehensive feedback and a number of queries including:
  - Further clarity of support to a wider range of tenants not just in relation to the reasonable adjustment requirements for those with disabilities
  - How will this work if it only applies to new tenants?
  - How does the concierge service assist in tackling Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and are tenants aware of this?
  - Need to clarify what is classed as ASB and what is not to prevent misunderstanding
  - How will this work on mixed tenure estates?
- 3.4 The group also met with the Income Management Team to discuss the proposed rent increase and amendment to service charges
- 3.5 The group, at short notice also provided feedback on the annual report to tenants again making some suggestions.
- 3.6 The group has also requested regular updates on how SMBC is addressing the issue of damp and mould in council properties.
- 3.7 The two leaseholder members of the group have also engaged with the home ownership team and TLSG have agreed that Leaseholder issues will be a standing item on their monthly meetings going forward.
- 3.8 The group have also provided feedback on the draft lift maintenance policy, tenancy fraud policy, tenancy sustainment policy, and the repairs policy.

- 3.9 Two members of the group along with two members from TAG have also been part of the recruitment process Heads of Service in Asset Management.
- 3.10 The group also regularly receives and reviews alongside senior officers, performance information related to the housing service including performance in terms of the Consumer Standards.
- 3.11 The group recently met with members of SNAC Board and are building a positive relationship with Board.

#### **4 Future Activity**

- Renew TLSG membership
- Continue to monitor the delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan from a tenant and leaseholder perspective
- Work with SMBC housing to agree what outcomes are expected from improvement activities
- To continue to monitor the Quality Homes for All agenda
- Develop a mutually agreed work programme for 2025/26 with TAG
- To track progress on the implementation of agreed recommendations made by TLSG and TAG
- To continue to challenge to ensure the voices of Sandwell council tenants and leaseholders across the borough are heard
- Receive regular updates on how Housing is engaging with tenants and leaseholders, particularly younger people
- Provide feedback on housing policies being developed

#### **Recommendations**

- That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Board work in partnership with the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group to evaluate the outcome of scrutiny work from the viewpoint of those affected i.e. residents/service users twice yearly.

- That co-learning is adopted i.e. sharing elements of training and other events to build mutual understanding and good practice with residents in scrutiny roles.