



Tenant Scrutiny Panel Inspection Report on:

Estate Management

November 2018

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1. **Acknowledgements**

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) gratefully acknowledges the support, guidance and assistance provided by the members of the Housing Team, including Glynn Jones, Amanda Harper, Andy Wallace and the Resident Involvement team – Justin O'Brien, Peter Warren and Laura Smythe and Cllr Roger Bayliss.

2. **Strengths:**

- 2.1. The TSP consists of a group of volunteers who are also tenants of NWLDC, each of whom has different skill sets and seeks to improve their skills and value to the group by identifying development needs and attending relevant training.
- 2.2. Each TSP member knows the importance of keeping an open mind and adopting a flexible attitude. Our members also display a high level of commitment to their voluntary involvement in working with NWLDC to improve and streamline Housing services to tenants.
- 2.3. The TSP mission is to be a “critical friend” to the Council, facilitating service improvements for Council tenants. This can only be done through developing a mutual relationship based on trust and respect.
- 2.4. The TSP uses different methodologies to inform their work – including data analysis through desktop reviews, collecting and reviewing evidence, meetings with NWLDC officers etc., TSP working meetings, tenant surveys, etc. Ultimately we report on our findings and outcomes and make recommendations to NWLDC to enable changes and improvements to be implemented.

3. **Vision and Strategy:**

The TSP long term strategy is to build an even stronger relationship with NWLDC and continue to inspect areas where it is evidenced that services are not performing to targets. This will fulfil our vision – improved Housing services achieved by tenants for tenants and in partnership with NWLDC.

4. **Report**

The TSP has reported on its findings as factually as possible and without any bias. Our inspection has, on occasion, increased awareness of the complexity of the work done by NWLDC and other agencies. However our findings and subsequent recommendations have led us to be critical of certain parts of the process of reporting/investigating Estate Management and the fundamental policies and procedures in place.

5. **Choice of Topic**

This particular topic was initially chosen as a result of TSP identifying that customer satisfaction levels in respect of Estate Management, as recorded in the STAR Survey (appendix 1), were lower than anticipated. This prompted discussions with relevant managers and analysis of NWLDC policy, procedures and other documentary evidence.

6. Methodology

- 7.1 Desktop Review of relevant documents
 - a. Star survey report
 - b. Service Level Agreements (appendix 2)
 - c. Parking Strategy (appendix 3)
 - d. Tenancy agreement (appendix 4)
 - e. Neighbourhood and Community Standard (appendix 5)
- 7.2 Meeting with Amanda Harper and Andy Wallace
- 7.3 Meeting with Holly Bryan (Housing Officer) to discuss the role of HO's with regard to Estate Management
- 7.4 Tenant Surveys sent to all households across three areas - Greenhill (Coalville), Riverview (Measham) and Westfields (Ashby de la Zouch). (appendix 6)
- 7.5 Analysis of tenant responses.
- 7.6 Examine relevant budgets. (appendix 7)
- 7.7 Walkabouts on each of these estates were undertaken. In the case of Measham this was done in conjunction with Colin Manifold of Measham Parish Council as Riverview seems to prompt negativity about the look of the estate and Colin knows the area and people particularly well.
- 7.8 Discussion with Andy Wallace in respect of split of responsibilities between Leicestershire District Council and NWLDC, including relevant budgets.
- 7.9 Review of budget allocations between Housing Management and Asset Management to check the budget for Estate Management was sufficient to make noticeable improvements.
- 7.10 Review of NWLDC 5 Year Parking Strategy and its plans to tackle lack of parking across the district.

7. Aim of the Exercise

To investigate why customers were reporting low satisfaction levels in respect of Estate Management Services and present recommendations to improve how NWLDC deal with the particular services that make up delivery of the various elements provided – i.e.

- a) Parking
- b) Litter
- c) Refuse Collection
- d) Grass Cutting
- e) Fly Tipping
- f) Anti-Social Behaviour
- g) Footpaths (majority of pavements are maintained by Leicestershire County Council but NWLDC is responsible for some local public footpaths on housing estates)

8. Findings

The following findings were common to all three areas surveyed (Riverview, Measham / Greenhill, Coalville and Westfields, Ashby).

a) Parking:

- i. The biggest single concern to tenants from all areas is lack of sufficient parking spaces. In general this means that tenants have no other option but to part on the road or, as mentioned by tenants responding to the TSP questionnaire, on the grass verges or other grass areas.
- ii. There is concern that roadside parking will inevitably result in accidents. This could be damage to vehicles (e.g. broken wing mirrors or sideswiping) or – much worse – injuries that could even be fatal to people emerging from between vehicles.
- iii. Some tenants and residents have provided their own dropped kerbs and parking spaces on their property. However, this is expensive and therefore not an option that every tenant can afford.
- iv. On the positive side responses to the question “What three things do you like about the area where you live” brought forth similar responses – i.e.:
 - i. Affordable rents
 - ii. Not much crime or ASB
 - iii. Nice green spaces and trees
 - iv. Good neighbours
 - v. Good local amenities

b) Litter:

- i. Without exception, lack of public waste bins was raised as an issue by tenants.
- ii. There are also insufficient receptacles for dog waste.
- iii. There were also areas where there was a need for additional waste receptacles to take larger household items.

c) Refuse Collections:

- i. Tenants’ views indicated that there was generally some litter left after each collection. In some cases this may have been because of high winds blowing items out of red bins or simply that some refuse falls out of them when they are being emptied.
- ii. Whatever is blown out of containers or falls during bin emptying is just left, which makes estates look a mess.

d) Grass cutting:

- i. When the grass on NWLDC housing estates is cut there is no collection of the cut grass. Obviously the grass dies in situ once cut and adds to the opinion that the estate looks a mess.
- ii. It would appear that the housing service has no contract management procedure in place to ensure that grass is cut on housing land in line with the Service Agreement.

e) Fly Tipping: Generally all three estates are viewed by tenants as being reasonable places to live with good local amenities, low crime and ASB rates. Fly tipping does not appear to be much of a problem in any of the areas under scrutiny.

f) Anti-Social Behaviour: Again, there does not appear to be too much concern over antisocial behaviour and this particular topic has only recently been the topic of a TSP inspection.

g) Footpaths: Some of the footpaths in the areas visited do appear to require some work.

h) Riverview: seemed to be viewed as not such a nice place to live and the number of responses to questionnaires was very low. During a walkabout accompanied by Colin Manifold, the TSP noticed the following:

- i. When turning into Widgeon Drive the houses on the left hand side (which are now mainly privately owned) still retain the original open plan to the front gardens, which are well kept and very pleasant to look at. This was obviously how the state was originally meant to be maintained.
 - ii. Many of the other properties are now fenced both front and back, mainly to a height of 6 ft or more, mainly with solid wooden fencing of no standard type. Gardens are not visible at many of the homes and this makes the whole estate look messy and unwelcoming with roads appearing more like wide alleys between the properties and giving a 'ghetto' like appearance.
 - iii. Many of these houses have larger front than back gardens, which may be the reason for fencing both areas in this way.
 - iv. Quite a number of these homes have access gates for vehicles to be parked on the properties.
- i) Estate Inspections:** No existing formal estate inspections have been undertaken in recent years, although these were previously the responsibility of Housing Officers. However the TSP are aware that a new initiative of Tenant Estate Evaluators has been developed by the housing service, which in our opinion is a good way to reinstate regular inspections and improve the local environment.
- j) The Neighbourhood and Community Standard (2012):** The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has reviewed this standard and congratulates NWLDC on actively working towards the expectations of items 2, 2.1 and 2.2
- k) Budgets:** Having examined 2018/19 budgets the TSP finds that some of these are woefully underspent to date, for example:

	2018/19 Budget	Actual Spend to Period 5	Variance
Painting (cyclical)	275,680	1,680	-112,730
Environmental repairs and improvements	60,000	47,435	-21,945
Non-reactive repairs	50,000	2,910	-18,240
Totals:	375,680	52,225	152,915

9. Recommendations:

With parking seen as being a high priority for estate improvement (as per NWLDC Car Parking Strategy (V3 June 2017) the TSP suggests the following:

1. NWLDC considers the possibility of assisting as many tenants and residents as possible to ease lack of parking by encouraging provision of space to park within the boundaries of their own homes where possible.
2. The TSP suggests the following:
 - 2.1 For tenants the ongoing property rental would be increased to take into account any rise in the value of the property; therefore the current and all subsequent tenants would pay for this work long term.
 - 2.2 To limit costs involved in land purchase we recommend that NWLDC sympathetically use existing green spaces to provide additional parking

spaces, retaining trees etc. where possible, as well as transforming parts of front gardens of properties to provide tenants' own parking spaces.

2.4 That NWLDC negotiate a favourable and cost effective contract through economies of scale to install individual parking spaces on council properties. Private homeowners could be offered the opportunity to take advantage of the contract prices to get the same work done themselves, paying the contractors direct.

3. With regard to the fencing issues on Riverview the TSP recommends that NWLDC conducts an estate wide consultation with tenants with a view to seeking their views and suggestions in respect of this issue. We suggest the following option is included the consultation:

When a property on Riverview area becomes vacant the fence or hedge at the front of the property is removed – thus returning the appearance of the property to that of an open plan.

4. Given the significant underspending on budgets the TSP feels that funds allocated to improving properties and the local environment should be properly planned and projects identified before the beginning of each financial year so that the money available is used accordingly. The TSP believes it is unacceptable to have underspent budgets for improving neighbourhoods when neighbourhoods need improving.
5. Additionally the TSP recommends that a procedure is developed to allow Housing Management to access relevant underspent Asset Management budgets to allow them to tackle environmental elements of estate improvements.
6. The TSP also feels that cyclical elements of budgets should be reviewed to determine if the periods of time allowed is adhered to.
7. The TSP recommend that Refuse Collection Teams are reminded to ensure that any litter that is dropped or blown out of the recycling bins on the streets is picked up by the relevant team as they are working and before leaving the area.
8. The TSP also recommend that NWLDC review the number and locations of bins across their area as a whole, including dog waste receptacles.
9. The TSP recommend that the housing service ensures that the service level agreement with the Parks Department with regards to grass cutting is adhered to and properly managed – i.e. grass to be cut 14 occasions per annum where cut grass is not collected and 1 time per annum where cut grass is collected. The TSP are not confident this is currently happening. Additionally we recommend a review of the grass cutting contract which at present does **not** require collection of grass cuttings and question whether this should be changed to call for collection and composting of cuttings.

Janet Higgins, Chair, On behalf of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel