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| Mersey South Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny |
| Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Across the Division |
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| MERSEY SOUTH SCRUTINY PANEL |

June 2014

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# Summary

The topic was chosen by the Scrutiny Panel for two reasons. Firstly, as tenants we see Anti -social behaviour (ASB) as a great concern for both tenants and communities. Secondly we wanted to look at strategies, and performance indicators; that have been put into place by Riverside Mersey South to tackle Anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Current indications show some improvement and value for money. There is a robust multi agency approach to tackling ant-social behaviour.

The development of The Tenant Relations Team is welcomed and is seen as a positive move in developing the service further.

The involvement of tenants in developing policy and practice is crucial and should be pivotal to driving the service.

The Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the staff of Mersey South for their help, honesty and co-operation as we have carried out this scrutiny. We hope our report will be a useful tool in evaluating service delivery and performance.

# 1. Introduction: tenant scrutiny in Mersey South Division

The Scrutiny Panel currently consists of six Riverside tenants from across the Division who responded to a request for volunteers for the new Mersey South Divisional Scrutiny Panel. In 2013 we went through a selection process and were then trained for our role.

The role of the panel is to provide robust tenant scrutiny of housing services within the Division, acting as Riverside’s ‘critical friends’. We do this by:

* Maintaining a watching brief on housing management performance and compliance with regulatory standards.
* Scrutinising the effectiveness of the strategies, policies and procedures of Mersey South in comparison to other Divisions across the Riverside Group and other similar Providers
* Identifying issues of concern to tenants and residents and carrying out in depth scrutiny reviews
* Making recommendations to the Division.

The Mersey South Resident Scrutiny Panel will report its findings to the Divisional Board and to other Riverside scrutiny panels.

#  The Anti-social behaviour scrutiny

The Panel met during the period April 2014 to June 2014 to scrutinise the strategies and services utilised to address the issue of anti-social behaviour within the general needs properties of Riverside Mersey South. We focussed on the following:

* Anti-social behaviour, strategies, policies and procedures
* The information provided to tenants about the service
* If the Division ismeeting its regulatory obligations
* How performance is managed
* Equality and Diversity
* Resident involvement and feedback
* Value for money

## 2.1 Why this service

In response to the service review and subsequent ASB Strategy document 2011 this scrutiny was chosen because:

1. In discussions with management it was highlighted that the service has undergone a major review by Tom Maguire. The panel felt that an in depth look at the progress of subsequent recommendations from the review was warranted.
2. Statistical information showed only a marginal increase in STAR survey and KPI results.
3. It was unclear how tenant experience had an influence in driving strategic development.

## 2.2 How we worked

We approached the gathering of evidence to inform our scrutiny and our final analysis in a number of ways.

We studied a range of relevant documents (see list) and interviewed staff. We visited the CSC and were given a detailed presentation of how the CSC deal with calls relating to ASB

When we had completed our information gathering we met to review our findings and check that our conclusions were evidence-based before preparing our report.

**This report represents our findings at the time of the scrutiny exercise**

**3. Key findings**

**3.1 Policy and Procedure**

The panel were unable to see how the Tenant Relations Team linked to the Riverside Group Corporate Plan. This may have been the case because the plan had only recently been published. However the Divisional Director has indicated that by July 2014 the TRT will have fulfilled this requirement.

We were told that tenant involvement is currently limited to the “closing conversation” at the completion of a case. There was no evidence presented to show how this information is utilised to inform practice. Indeed we found no evidence of tenants being involved in either policy or practice development. It is felt this issue needs to be addressed to ensure tenants experiences are reflected.

The TRT ensure that RIPA {Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000} guidelines are followed.

**3.2 Staff**

The panel were told that the Tenant Relations Team (TRT) was set up in June 2013 in order to respond to local needs. The TRT consists of 4 officers with one being an ASB specialist. Each officer works in a neighbourhood with links to the local housing officer;, who responds to ASB issues concerning domestic violence and race hate issues. In addition Lee Valley and Halton have wardens to deal with low level ASB. There is additional support provided by the Making Waves project which offers advice to tenants.

In our interviews we were informed that TRT staff had internal and external training, although no evidence of this was provided at the time.

The panel visited the Customer Service Centre (CSC) we were very impressed with the overall management of delivery of service by the CSC. We were informed that service improvement has been identified through a training needs analysis. This will take the form of a pilot project to run from June-Dec 2014.

We were shown examples through the training system of how ASB calls were handled and logged onto the Hub.

As tenants we were keen to test Riversides drive towards improving the service. We were pleased to be informed that staff were using the term “incident” rather than ASB to reassure the caller in order for them to make the complaint in total confidence.

In order for tenants to be reassured that all ASB is properly recorded the panel feel that a clear option on the answering service and on the website for reporting ASB should be installed as soon as possible.

Tenants calling the CSC are informed of Riversides responsibilities to ASB and also when incidents become police matters or fall outside of the service remit.

We were told that the TRT attend regular appraisals and their electronic diaries were kept up to date and can be monitored by managers. The TRT staff work to a lone worker policy and we were informed that training was provided although no evidence of this was shown at the time. The panel requested a copy of the training programme however we were informed that this was not available

## 3.3 Residents involvement

The only evidence of tenant involvement of which we were informed was in “closing conversations”. However in Riverside Mersey South ASB strategy June 2011 it states *“work will be carried out to establish a tenant support group, of tenants who have been through the court process and are willing to advise other tenants about what is involved”*. There is no evidence that this has transpired and the panel strongly recommends that this happens with immediate effect. While the STAR survey indicates some satisfaction with the service, we feel that there are encouraging signs for improvement.

**3.4 Equality and Diversity**

Evidence provided showed comprehensive universal profiling of tenants. It may be beneficial to the TRT to extend this information to identify vulnerable tenants in order to indicate those at risk.

It is the role of Housing Officers to deal with Domestic Violence and Race Hate although there is no clear indication why the latter has been singled out from other hate related anti-social behaviour issues.

The Tenant Relations Team has a good degree of experience and knowledge. Current key performance indicators show some improvement in the reduction and the team have built good relationships with other agencies improving value for money which is favourable for tenants.

**3.5 Multi Agency Approach**

Although robust protocols exist between police, local authorities and voluntary organisations and RMS; the panel felt that potential funding restraints and future planning should be taken into account. Wardens also work alongside other agencies in providing low level seasonal support, during summer months, bonfire and mischief nights. This shows a positive response to a multi- agency approach.

**3.6 Value for Money**

TRT costs are recovered through current staff budgets, which signify no changes to the overall budget. We looked at these areas to gain a sense of value for money, in the form of the impacts of the turnover time of voids, damage and legal costs. We have no evidence of VFM at this point as an audit will not take place until June 2014. The current Making Waves is funded until October 2014 and a proposed 6 month extension to the project funded by Riverside MS is welcomed by the panel. However this should only take place on the proviso that it is used to train TRT staff in the use of services and resources.

# Recommendations.

1. Despite a statement in Mersey South ASB strategy (see 3.3) in establishing a Tenant support group consisting of those who have been through the process; this has not been acted upon. The panel recommends that this is addressed as soon as possible.
2. Tenant involvement is currently limited to “closing conversations” at the completion of an ASB issue. We saw no evidence to reflect that this information is utilised to inform policy and practice. The panel recommends that this could be improved and better evidenced to show how services are informed. .
3. The introduction of a direct button at the CSC to report ASB to a dedicated and specifically trained team member.
4. The introduction of a direct button on the website to report ASB.
5. The publication of results in tackling ASB on the website and in the newsletter.
6. The 6 month extension to the Making Waves contract is used primarily in the training of TRT in the use of resources and equipment.

The panel would like to extend our congratulations on providing an excellent service and wish to thank all those staff members involved in supporting this scrutiny exercise for their honesty and professional approach.

# References

Riverside STAR Survey (2013)

KPI Targets

ASB Strategy (2013)

ASB Policy (2013)

Riverside Corporate Plan (2014-2017)

ASB Incident Graph

Tenant Information Leaflets

Tenant Relation Forms

ASB Report South East (2011)

Equality and Diversity Monitoring forms

Tenant Profile

Multi Agency Protocol

ASB Review Report (2011)

Riverside Behaviour Policy

Riverside ASB Performance Framework

Riverside Statement of Policies and Procedures on ASB (Housing Act 1996 sec 218a) Nov 2010

Mersey South ASB Strategy (June 2011)

Making Waves Documentation