

# **Making scrutiny real at Harrogate Borough Council**

*Barbara Rickards, Tenant Representative*

*David Allford, Tenant Involvement Officer*

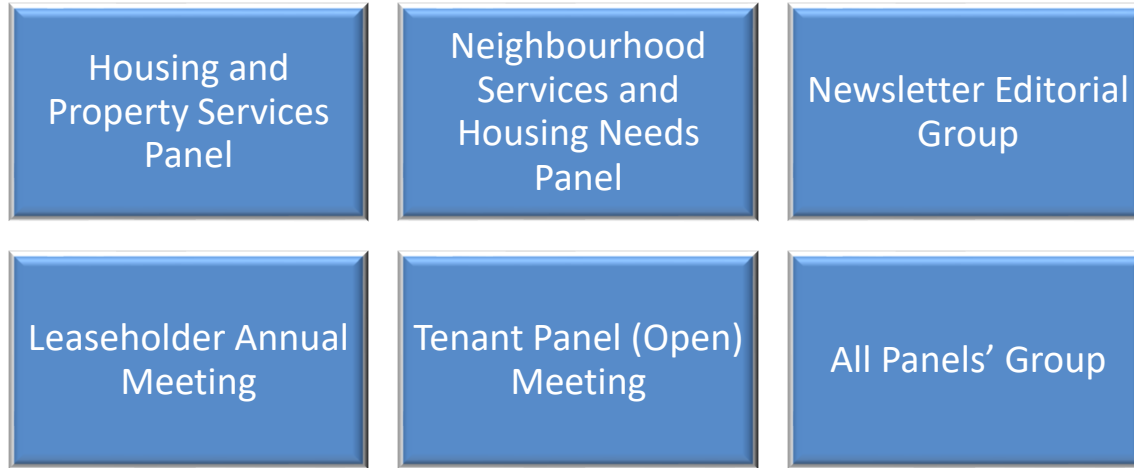
# We'll be covering:

- Our tenant involvement structure
- How we chose the scrutiny subject
- Forming the scrutiny group and allocating work
- Getting to know our subject / the priorities we agreed
- Engaging with others / our tips for a good survey
- Reaching our findings and writing our report
- Taking our report to decision makers
- Action planning and monitoring
- What's been the impact?



# Our tenant involvement structure:

Panel based:



In addition – facebook page; occasional focus groups; STAR surveys etc



# How we chose the scrutiny subject:

All Panels' Group proposed subject based on response to quarterly property refusals report

All Panels' Group determined membership of the scrutiny group

SUMMARY OF REFUSALS Quarter 4 (Total 24 for the quarter)

We set up 80 tenancies in Quarter 4, of which:

- 11 were amendments of existing tenancies (joint tenants switching their tenancies to a single person, etc.)
- 5 were mutual exchanges
- 64 were tenancies arranged for new tenants allocated from the Housing Waiting List

The total number of households on the Housing Waiting List at the end of Quarter 4 was 1820.

LETTINGS AREA	ADDRESS	PROPERTY TYPE	REF.	REASONS FOR REFUSAL	APPLICATION OUTCOME
Ripon		2BGFF	37172 36878	Property too small door public transport	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
Staveley			40913	homeless applicant with a Relief duty fleeing domestic violence from out of the area, living in Harrogate	offer regarded as suitable via a homelessness review. The applicant accepted offer and the tenancy has commenced.
Boroughbridge		28630+		Refuge accommodation. Wants a 3 bedroom house	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
Knaresborough			41059	Transport reasons - daughter travelling to Harrogate for school	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
Pateley Bridge		2BH	41098	Not keen on area	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
Minsterley Moor		2BGFF Cat2	58377	Too small	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
		2BGFF30+	37591	Wants Pateley Bridge but not that particular location/property	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
Pateley Bridge		28630+	36130 40924	Too far from son's school transport	2 <sup>nd</sup> offer refused - application cancelled
Harrogate		2BGFF30+	40773	Bungalow is too near a main road	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
			36975	Too far from town despite being close to the high street	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused
		2BGFF30+	41138	Not keen on area	1 <sup>st</sup> offer refused

# Forming the scrutiny group and allocating the work:

Keep it small!

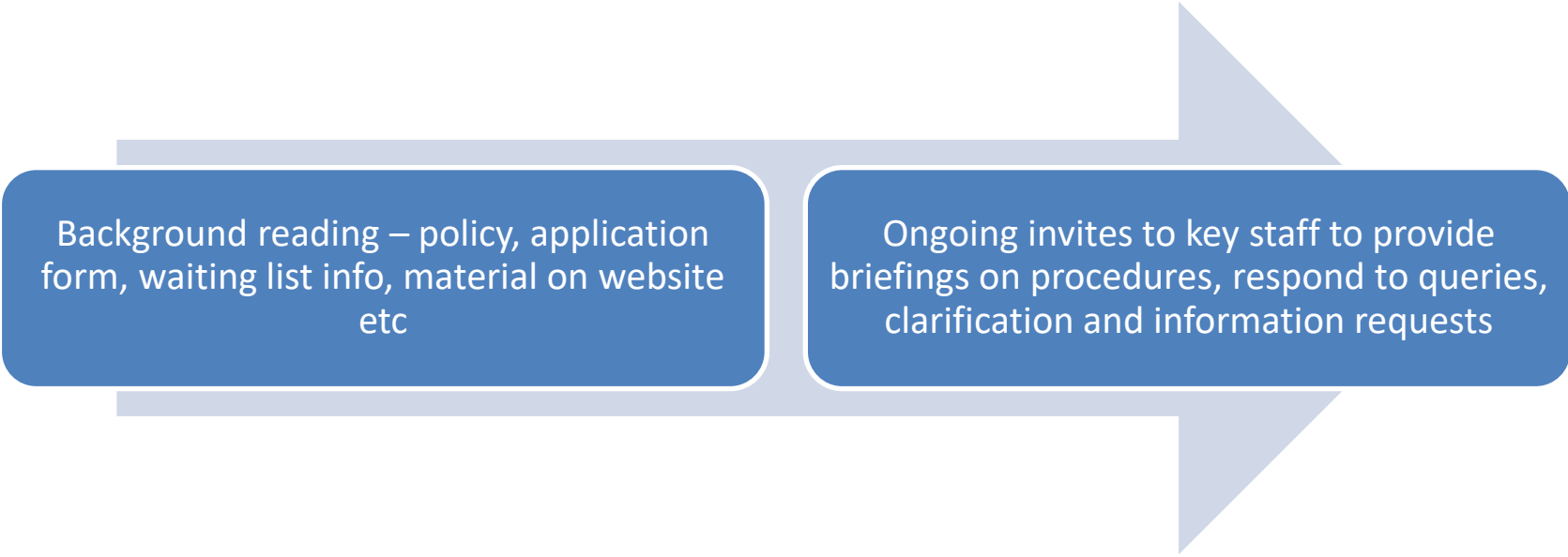
Sharing the work

# Getting to know our subject:

First meeting of scrutiny group held in early Feb 2019

Briefing session held with Neighbourhood Services Manager and Allocations Team Leader

Scrutiny group prepared a list of 17 questions / info requests which were addressed by Allocations Team Leader and Officer at second meeting



Background reading – policy, application form, waiting list info, material on website etc

Ongoing invites to key staff to provide briefings on procedures, respond to queries, clarification and information requests



# The priorities we agreed:

Reviewing the information people receive when they go on the housing waiting list

Managing expectations about our stock and availability

Looking at the information provided to people with the offer of a home

Reviewing the application form

Looking at the number of geographical areas people have to select

# Engaging with others:

Survey sent out to all people allocated a new home in the last 12 months

Recipients of survey asked to indicate their willingness to attend focus groups

Two focus groups held

# Our tips for a good survey:

Keep the questions simple

Give people a chance to add comments

Incentivise with shopping voucher etc

Freepost return envelope

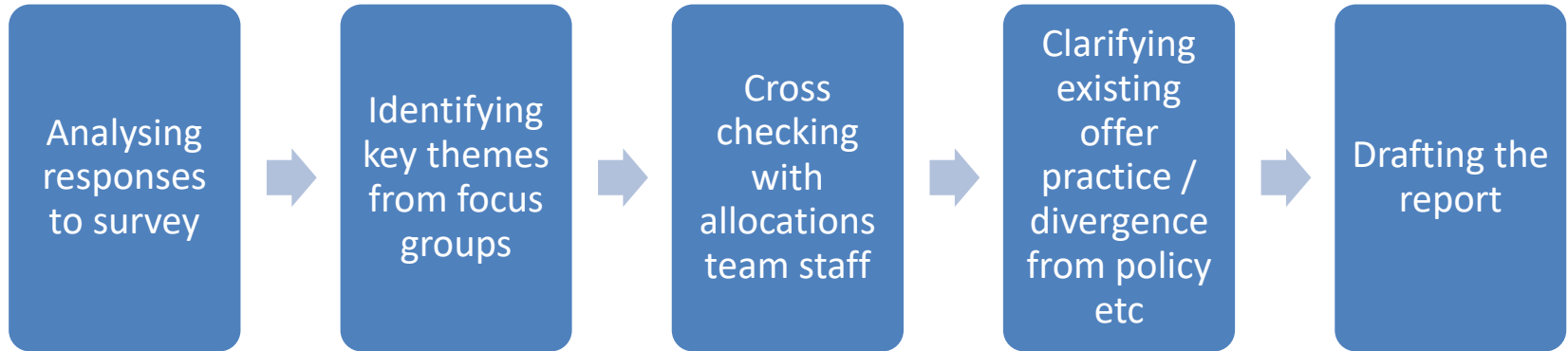
Reminder mailing to non-responders

Invitation to focus groups optional

Importance of data protection – make clear how information being used or shared

Make it clear that scrutiny group completely independent from landlord – importance of survey being seen to come from Scrutiny Group and not HBC

# Reaching our findings and writing our report:



# Our findings / recommendations:

1. Need for applicants to have improved access to information relating to the localities HBC covers, the nature of the housing stock and amenities to be found in particular areas
2. Amendments to the housing application form
3. Reducing the number of geographical areas which must be selected to 2
4. Adherence to existing policy in terms of viewings and offers
5. Concerns regarding reported condition of some voids – beyond scope of scrutiny but passed to relevant department

# Taking our report to the decision makers

Presentation to  
Neighbourhood Services  
Manager and Allocations  
Team Leader

Preparation of action  
plan with responsibilities  
identified

Presentation to Cabinet  
Member for Housing

# Drawing up an action plan and monitoring the landlord's response

6 monthly monitoring and report to All Panels' Group

# Our scrutiny work – what's been the impact from previous reports produced by the group?

## VOIDs

- Property handover visits implemented with staff meeting with outgoing tenant at property
- Reasons for refusals of tenancy offers now reported quarterly to tenant panel
- Void period target reassessed and now averaging 10-12 days

## Repairs

- On-line repairs reporting being trialled / major software update underway
- Ability of call centre improved to diagnose basic repairs
- Introduction of clear priority system for repairs



## ASB

- Revised diary sheets introduced
- ASB cases categorised according to severity
- Staff training improved
- HBC has become signatory to Chartered Institute for Housing (CiH) Respect Charter and drawn up additional action plan to ensure Charter commitments are being achieved

# Questions ...

For more information:

*Barbara Rickards – [br4125@btopenworld.com](mailto:br4125@btopenworld.com) / 01423 771475*

*David Allford – [david.allford@harrogate.gov.uk](mailto:david.allford@harrogate.gov.uk) / 01423 500600 ext 58411*