Area Boards Q&A

1. Area Board membership – who is eligible to be on the Boards?
As per the terms of reference, each registered TRA can nominate one member. This means the boards' potential sizes will vary depending how many registered TRAs there are in each area. At present this is:

North – 21
Central – 16
South – 14

There is no requirement for TRAs to nominate a Board member, so there may not be a member from each TRA.

Additionally, to allow for participation from residents who don't have a TRA (in particular, from street properties), each board has spots for up to 5 members who can self-nominate via the Lambeth 500+. However, these members must not live in areas where there is a TRA – residents who have the option of joining via their TRA must do so.

Members must meet basic eligibility requirements such as living in the area and not being in breach of their tenancy or lease (including by being in rent or service charge arrears that are not being paid off according to an agreed plan).

2. What is the role of a Board member?

Unlike the old Area Forums, residents do not attend meetings as delegates from their TRA to escalate local issues on behalf of their estate. Members will be there as residents who live in the Area rather than as a representative of the TRA per se. However, we would expect members to use relevant feedback from TRAs to help shape their considerations regarding service areas to review, including TRAs being asked to provide evidence directly to the Board by personal testimony or written statement.

This is also why there won't be deputy Board members – it's more about getting a consistent group of people to review area services together rather than having representation from each TRA at a meeting.

3. How many times a year will the Area Boards meet? What is the time commitment involved?

Boards will meet a minimum of four times a year for two hours. The meetings will follow publication of Lambeth Housing's quarterly performance data, to allow the Boards to review it. This means they will generally take place in February, May, August, and November.

Board members should expect to allocate time to read performance information and reports before each meeting – around two hours of preparation time should be sufficient.

Boards will be able to hold extra meetings if it is felt they are needed.

The Chair and Vice Chair of each board will also need to attend a quarterly Co-ordinating Committee meeting, which will meet in between board meetings.

If members volunteer for a Task & Finish Group there will be more time involved, but how much will depend on the scope and timescale of that particular group's review.

4. What is the time commitment involved in the accredited training?

There is no requirement to complete the Level 2 Accredited Scrutiny training but members are encouraged to undertake it. It is 30 hours spread over 10 tuition sessions, plus 3 assignments to be completed in your own time. The classroom session is currently an evening session 6-9pm on Tuesday evenings starting 14/11/17.

Additional training will be provided to the chair & vice chair and if the Board requires further training as a Board then it can be provided.

5. What will Board members do at the quarterly meetings?

At the first meetings in February, the Boards will review, amend, and agree a final set of Terms of Reference. They will also elect a Chair and Vice Chair and plan a work programme for the coming year. The work programme will set out which service areas the Board wishes to examine.

At a typical Area Board meeting going forward, it is expected the Board will review the quarterly area performance data and discuss this with the Area Manager. Using the performance data as well as reports from TRAs and the wider community, the Board can agree to examine service areas in more detail by requesting further reports or questioning the relevant manager. The Board may then make recommendations to management based on this initial review, or agree to recommend it to the Co-ordinating Committee as an area for a formal, in-depth service review, on the grounds of service failure, value for money, or good practice.

The Board will monitor performance of Estate Action Plans as well as helping determine priorities for bids for external funds such as S106 and Infrastructure Levy. The Board will also oversee grants for TRAs applying for Getting Involved Grants over £750.

6. What services will Area Boards look at?

The Board will review services based on failing performance, complaints, and cost as well as good practice. These services must apply to all residents irrespective of tenure.

Examples of reviewable services would include:

- Communal repairs
- Planned & cyclical maintenance
- Major works (exterior/services only)
- Estate cleaning including bulk refuse

- Estate grounds maintenance including landscaping
- Anti social behaviour
- parking
- communications
- IT
- Fire safety
- Health & safety
- Estate action plans
- Safeguarding including vulnerable residents

Any tenure specific issues cannot be dealt with by the Board, for example, rent setting which only affects tenants or insurance cover that only affects homeowners. These issues can be dealt with on a borough-wide basis via a Tenant Assembly or Homeowner Assembly which can be arranged with the relevant service area if agreed by the Co-ordinating Committee.

7. How will the formal service reviews work?

Each Area Board can recommend service review topics to the Co-ordinating Committee. The Co-ordinating Committee can select two service areas per year for Task & Finish Groups to carry out in-depth investigations on.

Task & Finish Groups will comprise interested volunteers from each of the Area Boards, and can also include other residents who aren’t Board members but who have been drafted in by the Group because of their particular expertise or relevant experience to contribute.

Once recruited, the Task & Finish Groups will agree the scope of each review, including which aspects of a service will be included and left out, the timescales for the review, and a plan of activities to be included. These can include interviews with managers and staff, doorknocking or inviting TRAs to providing evidence in writing or at a meeting, mystery shopping of a service, desktop review of data, benchmarking against other local authorities, etc.

The Task & Finish Groups will produce a written report setting out their findings and making any appropriate recommendations for improvement of the service. The relevant managers will respond with an action plan and Area Boards will monitor implementation of this.

The length of each review and the amount of work involved will depend on the scope, timescale, and activity involved in the review.

Area Boards can issue Notices to Act to senior management to ensure responses are made to service or performance issues. This includes reviewing accepted recommendations from Task & Finish Groups which haven’t been actioned or delivered.