

Present:	Councillor Bob Bushell (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Alan Briggs, Kathleen Brothwell, Chris Burke, Sue Burke, Helena Mair, Lucinda Preston, Christopher Reid, Hilton Spratt and Naomi Tweddle
Also in Attendance:	None.
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Gill Clayton-Hewson

30. Confirmation of Minutes - 18 December 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2018 be confirmed.

31. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

32. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee were noted.

33. Introduction from the Chair

Councillor Bob Bushell, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, introduced members to the meeting which, as part of the scrutiny review into the local impact of welfare reform, would be focussing on the impact of Universal Credit and housing accessibility and affordability from the perspective of tenants.

34. Summary To Date - Jay Wilkinson

Jay Wilkinson, Strategic Development Project Manager provided a brief overview on the following:

- On 6 November 2018 the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee explored the topic of Universal Credit and the supply of affordable housing. As part of this review the committee heard from the following 4 witnesses:
 - John Stewart, Policy Manager at the Residential Landlord Association
 - Kieron Manning, Planning Manager
 - Simon Colburn, Assistant Director of Health and Environmental Services
 - Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director of Housing Investment and Strategy
- On 18th December 2018 a special Community Leadership took place following the announcement by the Department of Work and Pensions that it's universal credit support scheme which was currently provided by Local Authorities would be delivered by Citizens Advice from April 2019. As part of the review the committee heard from the following 3 witnesses:
 - Graham Metcalfe, Partnership Manager at the Department for Work and Pensions
 - Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

- Helen Oliver, Chief Officer at Citizens Advice Lincoln and District
- This meeting would be the third and final review of Universal Credit and it's links with Housing, in particular accessibility and affordability from the perspective of tenants. The review would cover both the social and private rented sector. As part of the review the committee would hear from the 4 following witnesses:
 - James Wilkinson, Strategic Development Project Manager
 - Dave Ward, Acting Tenant Services Manager
 - Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits
 - Helena Mair, Senior Case Work for Karen Lee MP
- Invited members comments and questions

Question: When people applied to go on the housing list, would it have to be within the city?

Response: They could be housed outside the city boundary but they would need a local connection to that area.

Question: Had the Council ever considered releasing land for regeneration purposes?

Response: The Local plan would designate and allocate places across the city. The Brown field site register was published for potential change of use.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

35. Case Studies from Key Witnesses

(a) Dave Ward - Acting Tenancy Services Manager

Dave Ward, Acting Tenancy Services Manager:

- provided the committee with a brief presentation in relation to accessibility and affordability of Universal Credit from the perspective of tenants
- explained that the total arrears relating to Universal Credit was 41.10% as of week 37 (10.12.2018)
- highlighted that there were 114 claimants currently under a suspended order for possession in relation to rent arrears
- stated that the landlords role was to:
 - help tenants sustain their tenancies
 - manage rental income effectively and minimising the impact of welfare reform
- advised that there were currently 978 applicants on the housing waiting list
- Invited members questions and comments

Question: Was Universal Credit debt recoverable?

Response: The City of Lincoln Council would attempt to get it back

Question: How would it be recovered?

Response: If the tenancy was still live, they would be instructed to set up managed payments

Question: What impact has carrying arrears had?

Response: The City of Lincoln Council has had to accept that people won't pay. Some rents were put up to cater for the people who haven't paid. A bad debt provision had been set aside each year and it would be reduced accordingly with what they were able to collect.

Question: Were tenants assessed before applying for a tenancy? A lot of people could not cope with Universal Credit

Response: The City of Lincoln Council needed to firm up their tenancy arrangements and improve relationships between teams within Housing.

Question: Could there be a pre stage intervention to inform the tenant what they would need to do when applying for a tenancy?

Response: The Council were looking at opportunities around maintaining tenancies with improvements put in place. Officers were in the process of changing the tenancy agreement policy and break it down for people who don't understand or speak English.

Question: Could the City of Lincoln Council do anything to help people budget?

Response: The Lincolnshire Finance Inclusion Partnership were working with people to provide more financial support

Question: Was there a tenancy agreement only available in English?

Response: There was a version available in Polish.

RESOLVED that the content of the presentation be noted.

(b) Martin Walmsley - Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits:

- provided the committee with a presentation in relation to Universal Credit customers accessing and maintaining accommodation and the key challenges that they faced.
- went through a number of case studies which identified the main issues customers faced when applying for Universal Credit.
- explained that customers had difficulty with budgeting their money as they did not know what they would receive until the end of their Universal Credit assessment.
- highlighted that with fluctuating earnings, disabilities and childcare it made it impossible to budget or pay via direct debit.

- stated that the main challenges officers faced when responding to tenants needs were:
 - customers not knowing their own financial circumstances/debts
 - the payment cycle and entitlement of Universal Credit
 - Varying of wages
 - Accounts only being available to view online
 - Lack of engagement from tenants
 - Log in details being forgotten
 - Lack of preparing in budgeting
- Invited members questions and comments

Question: Had the case studies been tracked from start to finish?

Response: The Universal Credit Support team followed cases through as far as possible and appropriate, although capacity on the team was limited so could not review every single case at a future date/s.

Question: How were people who had been housed after being homeless helped with furnishing a property?

Response: The City of Lincoln Council had links with a number of local charities who could help with furnishing a property.

Question: How would the Universal Credit support change if it was transferred over to the Citizens Advice?

Response: There had been little detail about it however there had been discussions around joint working.

RESOLVED that the content of the presentation be noted.

(c) Helena Mair - Ward Councillor for Park Ward

Helena Mair, Secretary for Karen Lee MP:

- provided the committee with a couple of case studies that she had dealt with on behalf of the MP of Lincoln
- detailed that the issues behind the cases were mainly due to when Universal Credit was paid and the waiting period which caused the individuals to fall into arrears
- Invited members questions and comments

Question: What was the reason for individuals being sanctioned?

Response: It was usually due to no proof of evidence or lack of employment.

Question: Could people be unsanctioned?

Response: Yes if they proved they could abide by the rules.

Question: With regards to landlords refusing to take tenants on who were on Universal credit, was there any specific criteria that they had to match?

Response: All landlord associations used different criteria.

36. Draft Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2018/19

Jess Cullen, Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the draft work programme for 2018/19 as detailed at Appendix A of her report
- b. advised that the work programme for the Community Leadership Committee was put forward annually for approval by Council; the work programme was then regularly updated throughout the year in consultation with the Community Leadership Committee and its Chair
- c. reported that items had been scheduled in accordance with the existing work programme and officers' guidance regarding the meetings at which the most up-to-date information could be reported to the committee; the work programme also included the list of portfolio holders under scrutiny
- d. requested any relevant comments or changes to the proposed work programme for 2018/19.

RESOLVED that the work programme 2018/19 as detailed at Appendix A to the report be noted.