

**Present:** Councillors Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*), Liz Bushell, Christopher Reid, Edmund Strengiel, Pat Vaughan and Loraine Woolley

**Apologies for Absence:** Steven Bearder (Member of LTP)

**Also in Attendance:** Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Caroline Coyle Cox (Member of LTP), Debbie Rousseau (Member of LTP), and Sheila Watkinson (Member of LTP)

**90. Confirmation of Minutes - 12 October 2020**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2020 be confirmed.

**91. Matters Arising**

The Chair referred to Minute Number 84 and asked for an update on the cleansing of communal facilities within the Councils Sheltered Accommodation during Covid-19.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing advised that she had spoken to the Corporate Health and Safety Team responsible for carrying out risk assessments on the caretakers. She had been informed that the Council had a duty of care in terms of health and safety to its workforce going into unknown environments potentially to clear bodily fluids, and advised tenants to contact the caretakers of communal areas in circumstances where this type of cleansing regime was required. Tenants were being advised to make their own decision as to whether it was safe to carry out light cleaning as required.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing referred to previous advice given to keep staff safe that they were not allowed to brush or mop as Covid-19 was an airborne virus. The guidance would be closely monitored and the full cleaning regime would be resumed once allowed to do so.

The Chair asked whether tenants were being updated via social media of the need to be careful and to take precautions in any attempts to carry out light cleaning. It was felt that in circumstances where the Council withdrew normal services or altered services there should be a means put in place to make sure our tenants were made aware of this

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing agreed to re-consult with the Corporate Health and Safety Team as to a view on whether an announcement should be made on social media in this respect.

RESOLVED that a further verbal update on the regime for cleaning communal areas during COVID restrictions be given to the next scheduled meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

**92. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

### **93. LTP Matters (Verbal Report)**

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP discussed and requested clarification on procedure in relation to the following main areas:

- Mutual exchanges
- Sustainability of tenancies.

Officers offered advice as follows:

Mutual Exchanges – The authority continued to follow guidance in relation to mutual exchanges and non-essential moves. At this time it would consider requests for mutual exchanges on a case by case basis and emergency or essential moves would be approved subject to the tenants' agreement to comply with guidance. If we were able to offer alternative housing advice or solutions then we would explore this with the tenant at this time.

Sustainability of Tenancies - At present, the focus for Tenancy Services was on sustainment and the Team had identified tenants who needed additional support at this difficult time. A job evaluation decision on grading was awaited after which time it was possible that a team of a Team Leader and two sustainment officers would be recruited to enhance the work that Housing Officers had already been doing.

RESOLVED that the content of the verbal report be noted.

### **94. Homelessness and Rough Sleeping**

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing;

- a. presented Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with a report and supporting data outlining information relating to homelessness and rough sleeping issues within the City
- b. reported that preventing homelessness and rough sleeping were key priorities both locally and nationally, and that the Council received significant funding from MHCLG to address the issues of rough sleeping together with annual funding for initiatives to assist the Council with the delivery of its statutory functions outlined in legislation and the Code of Guidance
- c. stated that the Council delivered statutory homelessness services via the Council's Homelessness Team and provided a 24/7 service, 365 days per year
- d. reported that all policies and procedures fully complied with the relevant legislation, (Housing Act 1985, Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act 2011 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) the code of Guidance, Statutory guidance and advice and Case Law
- e. highlighted with regard to the prevention and response to rough sleeping in the City, the Council had received significant funding from the MHCLG's Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding (RSI), being the first of 11 local authorities to receive funding, together with additional funding received year on year to fund the Councils Rough Sleeper Team, support services

such as the Cornerhouse Project, specialist support workers and move-on accommodation

- f. reported further on the work of the Council in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping, covering the following main areas:
- Homelessness Team
  - Rough Sleeping Team
  - Temporary Accommodation
- g. requested feedback from members on the content of the report.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail. The following comments/questions emerged:

- Comment: Officers were commended for the work done within their teams to deal with homelessness and rough sleeping in such difficult times. Joint working arrangements were making a huge difference in the City.
- Question: Why had there been a reduction in costs for bed and breakfast accommodation which came to £132,404.74 during the period April-September 2019 reducing to £109,113.99 in the period April to September 2020?
- Officer Response: The authority had procured a number of temporary accommodation units in the private sector and had also used its own properties to house homeless people using MHCLG funding.
- Question: Was there any further funding forthcoming to help with homelessness in the second lockdown?
- Officer Response: There was no further funding available at this stage which was disappointing. The authority had received a sum of £62,000 for ongoing support. It also received funding from the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Initiative until April 2021. It was possible for capital funding to be used in the future for move on accommodation, however, this did not help with day to day costs. There had been no receipt to date of monies from the County Council from the funding allocated to them by the Government.
- Comment by LTP Member: The council had accommodated a homeless man who couldn't read or write and his son in a property within three days of presenting themselves which was very good going.
- Officer Response: Officers would not expect anything less than this of the Homelessness Team.
- Question: What banner did homelessness come under since P3 support had ceased?
- Officer Response: Housing related support was administered by the one provider Lincolnshire County Council Adult Support Team. Officers at the City of Lincoln Council had been offering help to those tenants not requiring such intensive assistance. Following a job evaluation exercise it was hopeful to be able to appoint Tenancy Support Officers to offer assistance.
- Comment: It was important for members to scrutinise expenditure on homelessness provision in the city to ensure it was cost effective, although currently it fell within the parameters set.
- Officer Response: The authority had a legal obligation to provide temporary accommodation as a statutory service. It was not always possible to reclaim 100% of costs from housing benefit, although the

council would always try to minimise costs to the General Fund within the parameters set.

- Question: Did the authority pay Framework for the cost of advice as a provider of a service to people with specialist needs
- Officer Response: There was now only one contract for housing related support between the County Council and Framework, The City of Lincoln Council did not contribute financially to this in any way.
- Comment: An amount of £109,113.99 between April-September 2020 seemed a large sum of money to spend on temporary accommodation considering numbers currently amounted to only 44 people housed there.
- Officer Response: The cost was recovered on expenditure for clients housed in our own accommodation and private rental accommodation. In terms of bed and breakfast accommodation the authority had no other option than to pay the commercial rate. There tended to be about 12 people in bed and breakfast accommodation at any one time and the authority always tried to minimise costs.
- Question: What efforts were made to prevent homeless people coming into the City from other areas?
- Officer Response: An individual was able to approach any local authority in the country for advice in such a situation and could not be turned away. Officers always recommended people returned to the area they came from, however, a decision had first to be made in each individual case as to whether there was a statutory requirement to offer assistance anyway.
- Comment: The current variance in the charge to the General Fund for temporary accommodation was within parameters set. Provision of help to the homeless was a statutory duty. Lincoln was on the right track and should be commended for all the hard work it was doing.
- Comment: It was important to look at our Allocations Policy in relation to housing those people already associated to the City.
- Officer Response: A new Allocations Policy was scheduled to be introduced the first week of 2021. Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions in force only essential moves were permitted in respect of homeless people and rough sleepers. The Council had a duty to ensure it offered assistance to those most in need of help as a priority.

The Director of Housing emphasised the incredible work the Homelessness Team were involved in. Lincoln was a major City in a large rural area which brought additional problems. The authority received core funding from the Government for this statutory service. Every effort was made to try to drive down bed and breakfast accommodation costs. Having a major hospital and a prison was also a challenge in respect of homelessness provision. Some temporary accommodation for families hadn't been of a high enough standard which had driven up costs in some instances and had been unavoidable.

RESOLVED that:

1. An update be provided to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee every six months on the homelessness cell chaired by the Director of Housing.
2. The content of the report be noted.

## 95. Scheduled Repairs Pilot

Matt Hillman, Assistant Director, Housing:

- a. provided a report giving an interim review on the implementation of the Scheduled Repairs Pilot within the Housing Repairs Service
- b. reported that the Housing Repairs Service had recently begun a pilot of a new way of managing housing repairs for scheduled repairs that needed to be completed although not urgent and unlikely to cause risk to our customers, their home or belongings, carried out at set times of the year across set areas of the City
- c. advised that the City had been divided into four areas for this purpose; North- Ermine East, West and Newport, East-St Giles and Monks Road, Central- Boutham Moor, Bracebridge, Manse, City Centre, South-Birchwood and Hartsholme, with repairs for each of these areas scheduled in every 12 weeks over a three week period
- d. emphasised that priority repairs would continue to be prioritised within 24 hours and urgent repairs within 3 days
- e. reported that based on previous feedback, our customers had said they would like fewer appointments and follow on work, less missed appointments, minimal disruption and more flexibility in appointment time slots
- f. added that scheduled repairs allowed the service to plan all the work in each area to ensure the correct resources and materials were in the right place to complete any repairs reported in the one visit, which gave customers more certainty that the repair would be carried out on the expected date
- g. reported further on the background to the pilot scheme in relation to the following:
  - Repairs Data
  - Vehicle Data
  - Travis Perkins Data
  - Customer Survey
  - HRS Staff Survey
  - Communications
  - Welfare Unit
- h. gave a power point presentation to members on the background to the new way of working to illustrate his report covering the following main areas:
  - Repairs Data
  - Fuel Expenditure
  - Mileage
  - Deliveries
  - Operative Visits to Stores
  - Social Media Reach
  - Productivity North (9-27 November)
  - Customer Survey Responses
- i. requested members' feedback on the content of the report.

Chris Morton, Resident Involvement Manager and Rachel Jackson, Resident Involvement Officer presented a power point presentation to members on the responses received as a result of the customer survey, covering the following areas:

- Uncompleted surveys- 40% responded out of 186 properties surveyed.
- Complaints before August-majority of tenants said they were happy before the new pilot began.
- Disruption due to scheduled repairs- most reported less disruption.
- Fewer repair appointments-55 responses said there were fewer repair appointments.
- Repairs carried out in one visit-most tenants responded agreed.
- Completed by repair date-most responses agreed with this.
- Flexibility in time slots-51 people felt there was greater flexibility.
- Difficulty in receiving different trade repairs-69 tenants responded they had no difficulty in receiving all different types of trade repairs.
- Scheduled repairs within timeframe- the majority of responses received said they either always or very often received appointments within the timeframe.
- Scheduled repairs accessibility-most responses answered accessibility was easier or no difference.
- Weekdays or weekend repairs-more than half of respondents requested evening or weekend repairs.
- Literature on scheduled repairs-most people happy with information provided.
- Housing Repairs Service-future communication-text messages preferred option.
- Materials used- majority of responses said they were good or excellent.
- Additional comments received – two positive and 2 negative comments received.

Members discussed the content of the report and associated presentations in further detail, commenting/raising questions as follows:

- **Comment:** If the survey was conducted in the first area of work tenants would be happy to be a part of the first trench of scheduled repairs.
- **Question:** How would the number of repairs in each customer property be monitored going forward to ensure it could be compared against measured data?
- **Officer Response:** Repairs were booked out on multiple tickets based on job type. If one operative was able to carry out all repairs in the household it would be measured as a one job. Consistent monitoring would be carried out to ensure exact data was compared
- **Comment by LTP Member:** Concerns had been raised regarding repairs taking more than 28 days and being deferred to the next cycle. Customers only got one week's notice before work started and were told they would only get repairs when operatives were in the area. There were also some repairs outstanding from March.
- **Officer Response:** The procedure was to finish repairs in the current cycle within the allocated timeframe. Officers were aware of minor issues with regards to the completion of contracts during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters and were looking at redirecting resources to deal with this. Operatives worked in each zone for three weeks. Urgent repairs continued to be prioritised

within 24 hours and urgent repairs within 3 days. There were only a few cases now of outstanding repairs since March which were due to COVID 19 restrictions.

- Question: LTP Member: Had the council carried out a Quality Impact Assessment with regard to vulnerable/disabled customers in relation to the Repairs Policy?
- Officer Response: The policy contained a section on vulnerable people, however, the process would be refined to potentially include a Handyperson scheme for such customers in need.
- Question: Lenton Green was being used as a temporary welfare unit for staff operatives in the north of the city. Were there any plans for the north zone?
- Officer Response: The Newland Street West Depot would incorporate a welfare unit to serve central and north area relocated from Turner Avenue as it offered better resilience especially to the new team working on fire doors.

RESOLVED that:

1. The continuation of the Scheduled Repairs Pilot making changes to the service based on customer feedback be supported.
2. The continued development of data to provide exact comparisons be supported.
3. The provision and delivery of the 'drop down' sites be supported.
4. Development of further assistance to vulnerable customers in terms of the Repair Policy be included as an agenda item at the next scheduled meeting of Lincoln Tenants Panel

## **96. Complaints (Verbal Report)**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing provided a verbal update to the Sub-Committee following on from a report to Audit Committee which highlighted that the number of housing repair complaints received had increased. He offered the following points of clarification:

- The report to Audit Committee covered the years 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- In terms of where we were now between April to the end of September 2019 there had been 105 complaints received regarding repairs compared to 74 for the same period April to the end of September 2020.
- Repairs were now being completed in 6 working days.
- There was no corporate policy target for responding to complaints due to the complexity of the types of complaints received.
- All complaints were dealt with as quickly as possible as a matter of course.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.