

- Present:** Councillors Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*), Liz Bushell, Christopher Reid, Edmund Strengiel, Pat Vaughan and Loraine Woolley
- Apologies for Absence:** None.
- Also in Attendance:** Councillor D Nannestad, Portfolio Holder, Quality Housing

1. **Confirmation of Minutes - 8 March 2021**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2021 be confirmed.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

3. **Change to Order of Business**

RESOLVED that the order of business be amended to allow the verbal report on Scheduled Repairs Pilot Feedback to be considered as the next agenda item, and that other agenda items be prioritised for discussion as required.

4. **Matters Arising**

Councillor Gary Hewson, Chair apologised for speaking out in error at Performance Scrutiny Committee the previous evening when he stated that changes to housing targets this year had not been agreed.

He now accepted that housing performance indicators had been altered for the Council year as agreed previously by Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee, then tabled at Executive. He recognised that the effects of COVID could affect the data and apologised for his mistake. The targets would be reviewed in six months' time.

5. **Scheduled Repairs Pilot Feedback (Verbal Report)**

Matt Hillman, Assistant Director, Housing and Investment, gave a verbal update on the Scheduled Repairs Pilot Feedback, covering the following main points:

- He apologised for a slight delay in the presentation of the report. It was due to be seen by the Director of Housing on Friday, it would then be made available to LTP members and passed through the normal Committee process.
- The hold-up in producing the report had been due to a delay in getting accurate updates on the figures, however, he was now happy with the data.
- Customer/staff feedback had been positive.
- The pilot scheme had helped in our aim to drive down carbon reduction and had also saved on fuel costs.
- He would share the report with Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee before it went through the Committee process, together with video footage on suggested recommendations.

- The pilot had been due to end in January 2021; however, it had been extended to ensure the data was comparable.

Debbie Rousseau, Lincoln Tenants Panel member highlighted that the appointed contractors were polite, professional, and friendly and had produced a good standard of work.

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel appreciated that these were difficult times and that the Council was trying to get back as much as it could to service as normal. Any new project would have issues; however, this approach was the right way forward, well done.

RESOLVED that the content of the verbal update be noted with thanks.

## **6. Update on Housing Dept Operations Post Covid 19**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment, and Matt Hillman, Assistant Director, Investment provided an update on the current operating position of the services within the Housing Directorate during current national lockdown arrangements. Members were advised that the City of Lincoln Council constantly reviewed and adapted its service offer to protect our customers, staff, and our partner's staff. The following main points were covered:

- The Housing Directorate was committed to keep elements of service in place during COVID, sometimes only responding to emergencies, for our most vulnerable customers.
- The Department was carrying out agile working, where work was needed.
- Following the release by the Cabinet Office in March 2021 of a 'road map' to gradually move the country into a fully 'opened' position potentially by 21 June 2021, the DELTA variant was causing a spike in case numbers across the country which meant that steps to reduce restrictions had been put back until 19 July 2021.

A more detailed update summary of the current position was provided within the Director of Housing and Investment's report, covering the following areas:

- Housing Strategy
- Safety Advisory Team
- Resident Involvement
- Maintenance (Repairs/Aids & Adaptations/ Fire Compliance)
- Hamilton House
- Voids
- Investment
- Aarons
- Homelessness/Housing Solutions
- Rough Sleeper Team
- Tenancy Services/Voids Support
- Lincare/Supported Housing.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

Councillor Vaughan praised officers on the work of the Department during the pandemic.

The following comments/questions emerged from discussions held:

- Now repairs were in-house/localised, would smaller contractors be used for installation of doors/windows and kitchens/bathrooms?
- Officer Response: Contractors would be brought in for kitchen installations in years 5 and 6 as a substantial number of properties would be due refits.
  
- Would the same kitchen standard be maintained?
- Officer Response: The kitchens would be of a higher specification. Bathrooms would be fitted with multi panels. The housing stock was in a great shape as verified by Savills. It was rewarding to be able to use our own operatives. Contractors would be brought in for larger jobs. The use of smaller contractors would benefit local suppliers. The service aspired to raise the standard of housing stock with the hope that properties would be maintained at an improved standard as tenants showed pride in their homes.
  
- The Chair of LTP, Mick Barber, welcomed the new way of working with use of local suppliers and contractors. He asked for a timescale for the re-opening of communal areas in sheltered housing.
- Officer Response: This was very difficult to determine due to the risk of infection, which had been avoided to date. The service would wait until the new date given by the government of 19 July 2021 to open these areas. Restrictions in larger communal areas had been eased a little.
  
- Would tenants receiving kitchen refits be given a choice of kitchen unit colours?
- Officer Response: Yes, Samples would be distributed.
  
- How effective was communication between housing officers and tenants during COVID?
- Officer Response: Communication had been mainly via telephone. The service wanted to return to the working practice of officers getting out and about in communities. Further technology was planned to use mobile devices to communicate more effectively and mobile working bays would be provided for staff.

Councillor Strenziel requested an update on the Birchwood Boiler House development. Matt Hillman agreed to e mail him directly on this matter.

The Chair reported that the Council was expected to work to the same standard from home as in City Hall to achieve the same service. The continuity of having regular housing officers was important to members of the community to enable them to associate with a familiar face.

RESOLVED that:

1. Councillor Strenziel be provided with an update from officers on the Boiler House project as requested.
2. The current operating conditions of the Housing Service and those proposed post announcement on 21 June 2021 be noted.
3. The verbal update on the delay in relaxing government lockdown restrictions until 19 July 2021 be noted.

## **7. LTP Matters**

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee advised that he had nothing to report at present.

## **8. Housing Finance**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment spoke to a report provided by the Financial Services Manager on the Council's Housing Out-turn position for 2020/21. He advised on the content of the report as follows:

- The report provided members with the provisional summary of actual income and expenditure compared to revised budget for HRA and HRS services and showed how any surpluses had been allocated to reserves.
- The full out-turn report for the Authority would be presented to Executive on 24 June 2021.
- For 2020/21 the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) net revenue budget was set at (£75,000), which resulted in an estimated level of general balances at year-end of £1,000,141.
- The financial performance quarterly monitoring report for 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter predicted an underspend of £772,391. The provisional outturn for 2020/21 now indicated an underspend of £71,514. This would result in HRA balances at 31 March 2021 of £1,074,653.
- For 2020/21 the Council's Housing Repairs Service (HRS) net revenue budget was set at zero, reflecting its full cost recovery nature.
- The financial performance quarterly monitoring report for 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter predicted a £204,670 surplus outturn for 2020/21. The provisional outturn for 2020/21 showed a trading deficit of £322,088, which had been repatriated to the HRA, as the major service user.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment highlighted that the HRA remained in a good position with a good level of reserves and funds set aside for future pressures.

Councillor Hewson, Chair, requested in terms of the figures for the out-turn position that a fuller report relevant to the Housing Service be provided the following year.

RESOLVED that the provisional out-turn position for the HRA and HRS for 2020/21 be noted.

## **9. Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Statutory Duties**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment:

- a. presented a report from Alison Timmins, County Homelessness Partnerships Manager with a summary of the Council's statutory duties in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- b. advised that the Homelessness Reduction Act placed new duties on English Councils so that everyone presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness had access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status or local connection to the authority they approached
- c. reported on several new duties introduced including:
  - Duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a Personal Housing Plan
  - The Prevention Duty: in cases of threatened homelessness
  - The Relief Duty: in cases where the applicant was homeless
  - New duties on Public Authorities; the Public Duty to Refer, and on applicants. Any applicant who failed to co-operate may cease to be eligible for further assistance.
- d. gave further detail to the duties/processes to be followed as outlined at Paragraph 3 of the officer's report.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report relating to the Council's statutory duties in relation to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 be noted.

#### **10. County Wide Covid 19 Homelessness Response**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment:

- a. provided a report to update Members on the work of the Homelessness Cell which formed part of the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF) response structure for Covid 19
- b. confirmed that when the Covid 19 crisis started in early March 2020 the LRF set up a structure of meetings/group to help coordinate the response to the Pandemic
- c. advised that The Homelessness/Rough Sleeping Cell was part of that structure and was commissioned as a sub cell of the Health and Care Cell (the upper cell)
- d. described the terms of reference/membership of the cell as detailed at Paragraph 2.3 of the report
- e. reported on the current position of the group which had now been meeting for 15 months, meetings having been moved from weekly to bi-weekly as a "battle rhythm" was established with the Chair immediately moved to City of Lincoln (COL) due to the pressures in the City and established connections
- f. advised that the terms of reference had been changed as the group developed and its role morphed from being a reactive body, initially triggered by the letter all councils received in March 20 from Luke Hall (MP) calling for Councils to respond over the initial lockdown period by getting everyone in off the streets, now known as the 'everyone in' campaign

- g. highlighted that the group were able to achieve that initial critical milestone of taking virtually everyone off the street during the initial stages of lockdown
- h. reported on the most positive outcome from the formation of the cell being the network it had created and the partnership working that it had enabled; closely working together, in order to respond to the pandemic, had led to the creation of trust amongst not only the public bodies but also all the organisations involved in the homeless rough sleeping response which had resulted in successes across a range of areas as detailed within the report
- i. reported that, from learning over the last year, The Cell felt that research should be done into why people got into the rough sleeping system in the first place and then measures be put in place earlier to prevent the move to rough sleeping
- j. added that The LRF had now altered its structure slightly as it moved towards a recovery basis, The Upper Health and Care Cell had been stood down and we were advised that the Homelessness Cell should continue but report to a newly formed Community & Voluntary Sector Engagement (CVSE) Recovery Cell, moving forward, likely to be chaired by the new County Wide Homelessness Coordinator

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

Were rough sleepers with additional needs given assistance to support their tenancy?

Officer Response: In cases of a client in care they should be receiving support to maintain their tenancy and their needs managed through appropriate services. We were now looking at further resources in supporting tenancies.

It was not fair to categorise sofa surfers as not being homeless as they did not have proper living conditions. Vulnerable clients should get help from other Councils rather than being given priority over local people seeking accommodation.

Officer Response: It must be understood that this situation was not of our making as it was controlled by government legislation. We did refer clients back to their own areas.

It was understood there had been a reduction in Housing Related Support.  
Officer Response: Yes, the contract for funding this service had been reduced by £1m at the start of 2020/21 but delayed until October 2020 due to the pandemic.

Councillor Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing added that there was government money available under the 'everyone in' campaign' and provision of 'move on' accommodation for homeless people, although additional funding was required for Housing Related Support.

RESOLVED that the content of the update report be noted.

## 11. Work Programme 2021/22

The Chair

- a. presented the work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee for 2021/22 as detailed at Appendix A of the report
- b. advised that this was an opportunity for committee to suggest other items to be included on the work programme.

RESOLVED that the content of the work programme be noted.

**12. Exclusion Of Press and Public**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of exempt or confidential information.

**13. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 4 2020/21**

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing

- a. presented the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with an end of year report on performance indicators for the 2020/21 financial year (April 2020-March 2021)
- b. reported that over the last eleven years the Council had been working with Lincoln Tenants Panel to improve external scrutiny and to meet standards implemented by the Tenant Services Authority
- c. added that from April 2010 all social landlords were required to have local offers in place alongside the national standards as set out in the new Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, which was amended with effect from April 2012 although the principles remained the same
- d. referred to Appendix A of her report which detailed performance of the various targets in greater detail/clarity with further information on areas highlighted at paragraph 4 of her report
- e. invited committees' questions and comment.

Members discussed the content of the report, asked questions, and received relevant responses from officers thereon.

RESOLVED that:

1. The current performance outcomes during the financial year 2020/21 be noted.
2. A commitment to continued reporting on a quarterly basis and to determine a programme to have more interim in-depth reviews of service specific performance be noted.

**14. Anti Social Behaviour Update 2020/21**

Francesca Bell, PPASB and Licensing Services Manager/Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing:

- a. provided Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with an overview of the reports of ASB received by the Housing Service in 2020/21
- b. provided further detail within the report on ASB cases listed by ward and by type, as summarised at Appendix A
- c. reported that Housing Services successfully obtained accreditation for the ASB services the Tenancy Services Team provided for our tenants in 2017
- d. added that over the last four years we had seen significant improvement in the quality of the help and advice we gave to our tenants; the service was due to be inspected again in 2020 but this was postponed due to the pandemic and it was anticipated that this would now take place later this year
- e. highlighted that LTP was significantly involved in the development of our services and would be involved with the next inspection; providing an excellent service to address reports of ASB was key in an excellent housing service and gaining the accreditation highlighted the quality of the service we provided.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail, asked questions and received relevant responses from officers thereon.

RESOLVED that:

1. The breakdown of ASB cases opened during 2020/1 be noted.
2. A commitment to continue to provide the excellent service that we provided to address any reports of ASB and to look for ways to improve and develop the service further be noted.