

- Present:** Councillors Councillor Pat Vaughan (*in the Chair*), Alan Briggs, Liz Bushell, Jane Loffhagen, Christopher Reid and Loraine Woolley
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Edmund Strengiel and Caroline Coyle-Fox
- Also in Attendance:** Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Mike Asher (Member of LTP), Steven Bearder (Member of LTP) and Debbie Rousseau (Member of LTP)

**41. Confirmation of Minutes - 24 January 2022**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2022 be confirmed.

**42. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**43. Other Matters**

Mike Asher, LTP Member, advised that he had recently called the Council Tax Team at the City Council acting in the capacity of an anonymous 'happy shopper' to enquire about the £150 Council Tax rebate.

He was pleased to report that he had been very well informed by the officer who spoke to him. He asked how to receive the payment and was told that those residents not on the internet or paying their Council Tax via direct debit would be contacted by post in the near future.

He gave praise to the Council Tax Team for their valuable help and assistance.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment agreed to pass these comments on to the Revenues and Benefits Team.

**44. Annual Report from Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing- Councillor D Nannestad**

Councillor D Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing:

- a) presented his report regarding activity and achievements within his portfolio
- b) added that his report which was similar to that presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee previously, without the information on health and private sector housing which was not within this Committee's remit
- c) reported that the last 12 months had continued to be a challenging time for housing with various levels of Covid restrictions affecting housing performance, issues experienced in the supply of materials, a shortage in the labour market, together with the performance of voids further affected by the sub-contractor concerned having gone into administration

d) advised that his report covered the following main areas:

- Homelessness
- Tenancy Services
- Housing Repairs
- Voids
- Housing Investment
- New Build/Allocations
- Decarbonisation

e) highlighted some excellent performance in areas such as rent collection and the imminent completion of De Wint Court extra care home as a flagship development for the Council, which members of LTP and Councillors would have the opportunity to inspect on Friday 23 March 2022

f) reported also on progress with a housing development on Rookery Lane to add 42 new homes to the Council's housing stock, together with work anticipated to start later this calendar year to remodel existing properties at Hermit Street to provide additional flats for 2/3 people and a number of new-build homes

g) praised housing staff for their tremendous support and the Lincoln Tenants Panel for their valuable work which continued to help improve the satisfaction of tenants

h) invited questions from Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the content of his report.

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

- Members highlighted that the date of inspection for De Wint Place conflicted with a special meeting of Council.
- Response: The dates and times of the De Wint inspection would be revisited to accommodate Member's availability.
- A request was made for actual figures on performance measures to be provided in future reports rather than percentages.
- Response: The Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing referred to several measures within his report already expressed as a figure although he would try to expand on this in future reports.
- Tenants were still encountering delays in the fitting of replacement kitchens.
- Response: The Decent Homes Standard was still in place. Kitchens requiring replacement or damaged beyond repair would be installed as part of a scheduled programme of works starting in July 2022. Adequate notice would be given to tenants of when the work would be commenced, which would be completed in tranches within areas of the city.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted with thanks.

#### **45. Tenancy Sustainment Update**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment;

- a. presented a report to update Members on the current position regarding the sustainment of tenancies, as requested by the previous Chairman of this Committee
- b. advised that Tenancy sustainment continued to be a key priority within the Directorate of Housing and Investment (DHI), working towards the implementation of the Sustainment Team on 1 April 2022, although this was later than anticipated, due to delays with recruitment during Covid-19 and securing a job evaluation panel due to lack of Union representation
- c. highlighted that three offers of employment on two-year contracts had been made to two external and one internal individual with a wealth of experience across the support and voluntary sector
- d. reported that the initial plan was for a robust process to be put in place for pre-tenancy work, with a focus on vulnerable applicants, the aim to ensure that tenants were set up to thrive in their tenancy offering assistance with welfare benefits forms, signposting to necessary support and assistance with furniture through local charities
- e. added that the team would be an advocacy and signposting service for vulnerable tenants who required help with support in times of crisis
- f. presented figures on the current position regarding sustainment of tenancies and enforcement action; eviction used only as a last resort, as detailed at paragraph 3 of the officer's report
- g. requested that members note the actions taken to support tenants in order to improve levels of tenancy sustainment.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

Councillor Nannestad commented that evictions were very costly for the authority, therefore it was advantageous to offer support to tenants rather than go through a lengthy court process.

Members welcomed the introduction of the Sustainment Team to assist residents in maintaining their tenancies.

The following discussions took place:

- Question: Would care leaders who were entitled to council tenancies get additional support?
- Response: Yes they would be particularly targeted.
- Comment: Concerns were raised regarding figures provided within the officer's report stating that the current amount of arrears was over £1million, and that 275 properties were affected by the under occupancy charge.
- Response: The amount of rent arrears was not high compared to the huge amount of rent collected per year. The Tenancy Sustainment initiative

should drive down this figure. As household costs such as energy bills increased it would get worse.

In terms of under-occupancy, the Revenues and Benefit Team worked with those tenants struggling to find smaller tenancies to obtain Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to help supplement their rent.

- Question: Could a further breakdown be provided on debt levels, for example, how customers in receipt of Universal Credit were affected? This could act as a pointer to where greatest support was needed.
- Response: 90% of debt increases currently related to Universal Credit. A further breakdown would be provided.
  
- Comment: There were tenants in under occupied properties on DHP who chose not to be on the Council waiting list as they did not wish to move, at the expense of those residents with special needs requiring larger properties and extra space.
- Response: A review of DHP payments was carried out each year. Those tenants in under occupied properties who were not actively seeking alternative accommodation were at risk of having DHP reduced.
  
- Question: Was it possible to provide a payment incentive to encourage people to down-size? Many elderly residents may need help to move.
- Response: There was a scheme currently in operation to offer support to tenant's to down-size. Officers were looking to see whether other incentives could be brought forward. The Housing Department also promoted good neighbour schemes in supported housing accommodation. Also, people's expectations had changed, some properties popular in the 70's were no longer suited.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP requested that LTP members be involved in the remodelling of existing sheltered accommodation and good neighbour schemes. A lot of sheltered accommodation was labelled as bed-sits whereas it was indeed independent living. LTP wished to make their contribution.

Councillor Vaughan asked whether the six people evicted since October 2021 were aware at the time of the Housing Appeals Panel?

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment confirmed the clients would have been made aware. He added that some people with complex needs were beyond the help of the Council as a housing landlord. In such circumstances it was kinder to take away the tenancy in order for the people to get the proper professional help they needed.

- Comment: The housing authority had a duty to house homeless people with these complex needs.
- Response: We did house vulnerable homeless people in temporary move-on accommodation with assistance from support workers, with the aim of them becoming re-engaged in the community.

RESOLVED that:

1. A further update on progress on Tenancy Sustainment be presented to the Sub-Committee towards the end of the calendar year.

2. A further breakdown on the source of debt levels be provided to Committee members.
3. The content of the report and members comments be noted with thanks.

**46. Revised Tenant Involvement Strategy 2022-2025**

Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director, Housing Strategy:

- a. presented the revised Tenant Involvement Strategy 2022 to 2025 for comments prior to referral to Executive, which replaced the 2018 to 2021 Strategy
- b. advised that the regulatory Framework for social housing and the social housing white paper required social housing landlords to have a transparent Tenant Involvement Strategy in place.
- c. highlighted achievements realised to improve the tenant involvement service over the last three years at paragraph 3 of the report
- d. highlighted the objectives for the Tenant Involvement Strategy:
  - Co-design services with residents
  - Facilitate community engagement
  - Communicate key messages to residents
  - Co-regulate with Lincoln Tenants' Panel
  - Expand the ways residents can get involved.
- e. advised that the involvement of tenants and leaseholders in these ways would help in the delivery of the top priorities identified
- f. explained how the action plan would be delivered and how the outcomes of the Strategy would be monitored as detailed at paragraph 5 of the report.

The committee considered the contents of the report.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP referred to roadshows planned around the city to talk to tenants as a means of getting them involved in their communities.

Members asked what process the strategy flagging system would follow and how the Council would respond.

Andrew McNeil advised that the star ratings awarded by tenants together with suggestions for improvement coming forward would be looked at by officers and responses given direct to the tenant.

RESOLVED that the revised Tenant Involvement Strategy 2022 to 2025 be supported and referred to Executive for approval.

**47. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2021/22**

Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director of Housing Strategy:

- a. provided Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with a quarter three report on Performance Indicators for the 2021/22 financial year (April 2021-December 2021), as detailed at Appendix A of the report provided, which combined all performance relevant to Housing Landlord issues
- b. advised that of the 21 measures, 8 were on or exceeding targets for the year (year-end), and 12 had not met the normal targets set
- c. highlighted that of the 12 measures that did not meet the target, 5 of these were within 5% tolerance of their respective targets (amber rating), 3 of the 5 were year-end targets (Decent Homes and 2 financial measures) and one measure did not have a target set (Complaints replied to in line with corporate policy)
- d. reported that over the last twelve years the Council had been working with the Lincoln Tenants Panel to improve external scrutiny and to meet the standards implemented by the Tenant Services Authority
- e. reported 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, amended with effect from April 2012, although the principles remained the same
- f. referred to Appendix A which attempted to simplify the overall analysis of the data by listing performance on a service functional basis (rents, repairs, etc) and then showing the source of the indicator (reason)
- g. added that for comparison purposes each indicator showed last year's performance against the target for the current year (where applicable) and progress made in the current year
- h. referred to paragraph 4.3 of the report and highlighted areas of good performance:
  - % of Rent Collected as a % of Rent Due
  - Arrears as a % of Rent Debit
  - Complete Repairs Right on First Visit (Priority and Urgent)
- i. reported at paragraph 4.4 of the report on reasons where we were close to achieving our targets (amber rating) as follows:
  - % of Homes with Valid Gas Safety Certificate
  - % of Non-Decent Homes
- j. further highlighted a brief explanation of reasons where we had not achieved our targets as detailed at paragraph 4.5 of the report:
  - Average Re-Let Period- General Needs (Excluding Major Works) - (Days)
  - Average Re-Let Period- General Needs (Including Major Works) - (Days)
  - % of Urgent (3 Days) Repairs Carried out Within Time Limits (HRS)
- k. stated that although there were no direct financial implications arising from the report, there were several indicators that did affect the HRA including

the amount of rent collected and repairs and improvements; there had been an increase in material and labour costs, struggles with recruitment into vacant positions and an increase in voids due to the standard of returned property

l. added that our financial position with finance colleagues continued to be monitored

m. invited committees' questions and comments.

- Members discussed the content of the report in further detail, commenting and asking questions in the following main areas:
- Question: How long would it take before the two roofs requiring replacement to meet the non-decent homes standard would be actioned?
- Response: The officer would make investigations and report back to the member concerned.
- Comment: Could Performance Indicator 37 be shown numerically rather than as a percentage.
- Response: Yes this would be addressed.
- Question: Why were planners being asked to prioritise 3 day jobs over 100 day tickets?
- Response: This was down to operators' ways of working towards the end of a day, 100 day tickets already in the diary were currently being prioritised over 1-3 day jobs as they were less urgent. This needed to be addressed. A new repairs co-ordinator would be employed to reinforce best practice between the operatives and planners.
- Question: Were our contractors internal council staff?
- Response: Some of our contractors were in-house. Voids were completed by a specific contractor Capital work by Kier had ceased. A balanced approach aimed at using in-house contractors was taken.
- Comment: It would be beneficial to identify unoccupied properties through council tax/rent records to avoid operatives wasting time attending those homes for gas service inspections.
- Question: Could yellow stickers be put across doors at properties classed as unsafe in relation to gas safety inspection?
- Response: The operative would not always know there was an issue with the gas certificate until entry to the property was obtained.
- Question: Were customer satisfaction figures for repairs collected?
- Response: Yes this data was analysed.
- Question: Were the 58 replacement front doors required due to fire safety regulations?
- Response: They were part of the current door replacement programme.
- Question: Would the 82 properties failing to meet the decent homes standard be prioritised to bring them up to this standard?
- Response: Yes. They were at the highest risk for gas/electrical safety and first focus to get access to the properties.
- Question: Where did bathroom and kitchens fall in relation to non-decent homes? There were 4 replacements that were known to be outstanding.
- Response: They were completed on a programme of works. Some occupants refused installations. He would investigate further if supplied with the details of the four properties concerned.
- Comment: It was thought people telephoning to make a repair requests were not asked if they were elderly or vulnerable.

- Response: They were indeed trained to ask this question.
- Question: Could property inspections be carried out more often than every five years in the interests of health and safety?
- Response: Best practice was for gas inspections to be conducted once a year and 5 years for electrical safety. To bring them down below that level would incur financial resources.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP agreed to act as an anonymous 'happy shopper' to obtain confirmation that staff asked tenants if they were elderly or vulnerable.

RESOLVED that:

1. The current performance outcomes during the financial year 2021/22 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.

#### **48. Target Setting 2022/23**

*(Councillors Loffhagen and L Bushell left the meeting at this stage in proceedings)*

Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director, Housing Strategy:

- a. provided a report to advise Members of the proposed performance indicator targets normally reported to Scrutiny for 2022/23, to agree the targets and consider how performance information could be monitored and reported throughout the year, together with ensuring that Housing targets were aligned to higher level strategic corporate targets for the authority as a whole
- b. stated that performance information was reported to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on a quarterly basis, and targets reviewed on an annual basis with both tenants and the Committee at the March meeting
- c. highlighted that throughout Covid-19 normal management information had been collated as well as performance against targets; management information was provided wherever practically possible, and members made aware of reasons for any changes to service and performance during this challenging period
- d. reported that throughout 2020/21 there had been delays in repairing and allocating empty properties due to the pandemic and Government instructions on non-essential moves and holding properties for homeless households, therefore the council was currently reviewing voids performance and procedure considering these measures against external restrictions on performance
- e. highlighted that there was now an increase in properties being completed and re-let so performance for the remainder of the current financial year would likely increase, however this was due to numerous longer-term voids now being released



- f. reported on a few properties each month which had not allowed access for annual gas inspections and referred to legal services to seek an injunction from the County Court to obtain entry
- g. referred to continued challenges in respect of rent collection due to changes to legislation for landlords in place until October 2022; Universal Credit claims had increase by 1,028 compared to the previous year, therefore, Tenancy had placed significant emphasis on contact through calls and visits with new targets in place for staff
- h. reported that realistic targets were proposed for 2022/23 based on current performance, national guidance, and benchmarking with similar authorities, as detailed at Appendix 1
- i. advised that LTP members and the Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing had also been consulted on the proposed indicators, and some amendments had been made
- j. summarised that a lower target was proposed for rent loss due to non-payment of rent in order to maximise income and for the non-decent target to reflect that due to the number of properties managed it was not possible to achieve a zero return, all other targets remained unchanged
- k. requested members' feedback on the content of the report.

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

- Comment: Performance Indicator 50, in relation to the percentage of non-decent homes seemed a little high at a target of 1%. It was unlikely to be met as it hadn't reached that figure before.
- Response: It could perhaps be realistically reduced to 0.8%.
- Comment: Performance in respect of rent arrears was likely to be affected by fuel price rises announced from April 1, 2022.
- Response: Fuel price increases only came through three weeks ago. Officers would wait and see what affect this had on rent arrears.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment advised that the Tenant Sustainability Team would be available to offer assistance to help tenants sustain their tenancy, giving support with welfare benefits forms and signposting customers to other available support. Housing officers would be out and about offering face to face interaction with residents.

RESOLVED that the proposed performance targets for 2022/23 be approved subject to a revised target of 0.8% for PI 50: Percentage of Decent Homes.

#### **49. Work Programme Update - Looking Forward to 2022/23**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. advised members that a draft work programme for 2022/23 would shortly be circulated to officers for comments and would be forwarded to the Chair of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee and the Chair/Vice Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel today for individual input/comments ready for use as a working document at the first meeting of the new Municipal Year

- b. reported that the work programme 2022/23 would be regularly updated in consultation with the Chair of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee and Chair/Vice Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel
- c. highlighted that the work programme included those areas for scrutiny linked to the strategic priorities of the Council and housing matters, to ensure that the work of this committee remained relevant and proportionate.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment advised that it was for the Chair and Members of LTP to determine the agenda for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee and encouraged them to add items to the work programme as they felt appropriate. He highlighted that it was advantageous to plan ahead with requests for discussion topics to allow officers time to investigate in full and prepare more detailed responses to Committee

RESOLVED that the work programme for 2022/23 be circulated to officers, Chair of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee and the Chair/Vice Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel for individual input/comments ready for use as a working document at the first meeting of the new Municipal Year.