

Present: Councillors Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*), Alan Briggs, Jane Loffhagen, Mark Storer, Pat Vaughan and Loraine Woolley

Apologies for Absence: Steven Bearder

Also in Attendance: Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Caroline Coyle-Fox (Vice Chair of LTP), Mike Asher (Member of LTP) and Debbie Rousseau (Member of LTP)

27. Confirmation of Minutes - 3 November 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

28. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Pat Vaughan declared a Personal Interest with regard to the agenda item titled 'Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/28'.

Reason: His granddaughter worked in the Finance Section at the City of Lincoln Council.

29. Lincoln Tenants Panel Project Update

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel, provided a written report on the panel's continued work on a variety of projects with tenancy services, fire safety assurance, maintenance, business management and resident involvement teams. The briefing note was designed as a regular update to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee, covering the following areas:

- Within tenancy services LTP was working with the Voids Team and had agreed to change the format of inspecting voids – All LTP members were to attend a refresher voids inspection training programme and attend a quarterly working group to review voids process to enhance the process and to put forward recommendations. LTP understood inspecting a targeted one property a week may be difficult due to property type and availability, and had agreed to inspect as many as possible taking direction from the voids team – our aim was to increase from 5% to 10%.
- LTP continued to review the complaints process and we were due to hold our third meeting in Feb/March. We had requested recommendations to be shared with relevant officers together with a request for further feedback relating to some complaints.
- LTP were working closely with the Interim Maintenance Manager on the schedule of performance focusing on creating a marketing programme to deliver a consistent message and information to tenants on the benefits of the schedule of repairs project. We had posted eight schedule repairs posts on our Face Book Page to promote and encourage tenants to make an appointment.
- We continued to hold our monthly LTP meetings.

- We held our AGM and formally adopted our Constitution on Monday 7th November 2022. Two members of the public attended expressing interest, resulting in a new member of LTP.
- The Resident Involvement Manager hosted a celebration event on Wednesday 15th November 2022 to acknowledge all the challenging work over the last couple of years in creating the LTP Constitution and the Tenant Involvement Strategy. The Mayor, Director of Housing and Portfolio Holder for Housing attended and kindly presented LTP with a Thank You speech.
- LTP volunteered and assisted the Resident Involvement Manager at the Jarvis and Shuttleworth House fire safety exercise and engagement event. We found both events successful, in particular, tenants at Jarvis House actively engaged with officers and Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue.
- He had stood down from ARCH and was pleased to confirm Debbie Rousseau as his replacement. She attended a meeting in January 2023.
- In November 2022, five LTP members attended a free ARCH Conference. The conference delivered two workshops on decarbonisation and fuel poverty/cost of living and in addition to this, three guest speakers; Kate Dodsworth – Director of Consumer Regulation and Fleur Priest-Stephens - Tenant Engagement Manager for the Regulator of Social Housing, presented information on the proposed tenant satisfaction measures and regulatory changes. Caritas Charles – Policy and Insight Manager addressed the conference on resident engagement in building safety.
- Three LTP members were working with Keeley Johnson and Area Housing Managers to create an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) working group looking at ASB cases on a quarterly cycle and had recently completed their first review. The working group were also in the process of trying to obtain an ASB accreditation.
- In November 2022, he attended the Social Housing Quality Register Panel (SHQR) launch event which highlighted how the Resident Panel would run over the next 12 months, providing the panel with opportunities to discuss topics. The SHQR panel would focus on one of the chosen topics, “how complaints are managed by landlords and the Housing Ombudsman” via the online community, a platform used to share experiences of social housing and thoughts about related government policies, ensuring and enabling us to have direct communication with The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and help drive change for the future. The online community would involve a mixture of activities, questions and discussions on an aspect of the social housing quality programme.

RESOLVED that the content of the written update from the Chair of LTP be noted with thanks, to be continued as a regular agenda item.

30. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/28

Paul Hopkinson, Senior Housing Strategy Officer, presented his detailed report on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2023/28, which set out proposals to undertake a thorough review of the HRA during the first half of 2023 with the goal of developing an exciting 30-year business plan looking forward with what we wanted to achieve over the next 30 years.

He gave a power point presentation to members covering the following main areas:

- Our Five Strategic Priorities
- Strategic Priority 3 - Lets deliver quality housing
- Purpose of the Report
 - To consult on the HRA Business Plan for 2023/24
 - To discuss the development of a wide ranging 30-year Business Plan during 2023
- Introduction and Background
- Inhibiting Factors 2022
- What had Changed
- HRA Business Plan 2023-2028
 - Primarily a financial document
 - Outlined the environment the service operated in/main challenges
 - Set out income and projections for the next five years
 - Wide ranging consultation on the development of the plan
 - Financial details fully congruent with MTFS
 - Details of revenue and capital expenditure included
 - Detailed Action Plan included
 - Five-year business plan supported delivery of key housing services
- Looking to the Future -30 Year Plan
 - We knew the gaps and were starting to fill them
 - Allocated time and resources to set up a Project Team and develop a Project Plan
 - Goal to develop the 30-year business plan by summer 2023
- Summary
 - Setting a HRA Business Plan for 2023/24
 - Proposal for development of a wide ranging 30-year Business Plan during 2023.

Members discussed the content of the report and power point presentation in further detail.

The following comments/questions were made, responded to by officers as follows:

- Question: There was nothing in the HRA Business Plan regarding decarbonisation or our pledge to address net zero carbon emissions by 2030?
- Response: The City was in a better position than others in respect of decarbonisation saturation rates, currently at a SAP (energy efficiency) rating of 70 which was higher than the national average of 67. An extensive programme of improvements to council house stock over the next year included A Class replacement boilers, new double glazed windows, new external doors and heating systems, in order to improve home efficiency and get closer to the decarbonisation rate. The aspiration for future development of electronic/nitrogen replacement energy systems looking towards a sustainable future continued, although it was not yet available.
- Comment: The pledge to achieve Zero Carbon in the city by 2030 was a huge long-term vision which required extensive government funding to achieve. We must prove as a Housing provider that we were doing all we could.
- Response: The costs to achieve Zero Carbon in the city were phenomenal, we did not have the financial resources or the current technology to replace gas boilers. The ambition was to be carbon neutral by 2030.

However, it could not be said that all housing stock would be carbon neutral by 2030. Officers would look to add information to the HRA Business Plan to aid an understanding as to the actions we were taking towards decarbonisation and our pledge to address net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Hopefully there would be a technical fix available in the next 3 to 5 years.

- Question: How was the allocation of replacement kitchens, bathrooms, doors, windows and heating systems prioritised?
- Response: All the contracts were currently either procured or out for procurement using smaller local contractors. Work would be conducted in tranches on a cyclical maintenance programme according to need. There were issues in staff recruitment covering all professions across the whole country, which was a problem.
- Question: Was it possible to stop the 'Right to Buy' Scheme for council housing stock?
- Response: This was not an option at the current time. The scheme was set down under government legislation. We were keeping our housing stock at a healthy level with new builds. The Western Growth Corridor development would help. The only way to increase the number of homes was through investment, not just building our own properties but other organisations doing the same.
- Comment: An LTP member highlighted an issue with some of the compliance controllers on new heating systems being too sensitive.
- Response: Officers agreed to look into this matter.
- Question: What was the current position in relation to recruitment of tradesmen within the housing service?
- Response: The service was gradually catching up and was looking to different approaches on recruiting staff particularly around apprenticeship opportunities.
- Question: Was it possible to review the Tenancy Agreement Policy to make it mandatory for operatives to enter properties to carry out updated works?
- Response: It was not possible to insist that tenants had new kitchens or bathrooms installed if they didn't want them. Older people in particular did not want the upheaval.
- Question: How did the council deal with mould and damp in its housing stock other than painting over it? Was there a dedicated team to deal with this issue?
- Response: There had always been a mould and damp procedure. Many pre-war properties were not designed to be air-tight. Heat retention improved efficiency however ventilation was also important. There was a dedicated team of staff to deal with the increase in mould and damp complaints, also looking at best practice and updating procedures accordingly. Tenants would always be moved from their property if they were at risk of bad health due to mould.
- Question: Was there to be a revision of the Decent Homes Standard in the private rented sector?
- Response: This was in the consultation and development stage. Members would be updated in due course.
- Question: Would a Tenancy Verification Business Plan be produced?
- Response: The HRA action plan had not been approved as yet. Once agreed ID verification visits would be built into the service plan.

RESOLVED that the HRA Business Plan 2023/24 be noted and the development of an updated 30-year business plan during 2023 be supported.

31. Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Update (To Follow)

A written breakdown of statistical data for allocation of Council housing stock was presented to members, for information.

With respect to lettings by band, the authority was required to ensure that any household which was homeless or threatened with homelessness was prioritised for accommodation.

In addition, the Council had a quota for transfer applications to move into more suitable accommodation that met their changing needs. The target for transfers was 25% of all lettings to ensure we met local needs and Government priorities.

Members commented as follows:

- How did the council prevent tenants from making unscrupulous comments regarding homelessness to secure priority accommodation?
- Response: The Homelessness Policy was a very in depth document. If any person gave false information it was classed as fraud which would be reported.

RESOLVED that the content of the written update provided by officers be noted.

32. Draft Policy- Downsizing Incentive Scheme

Keeley Johnson, Tenancy Services Manager, provided a power point presentation to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee entitled 'Draft Downsizing Incentive Scheme', which covered the following main areas:

- Current Reality
 - Nationally there were large numbers of tenants under occupying their current general needs rented accommodation -many were older people occupying family houses whose families had grown up and left home.
- Current Waiting List July 2022
- Scope of the Scheme
- Under -Occupancy and Lincoln
- Aims of the Scheme
- Financial Incentive Proposals
- Eligibility
- Downsizing through a Mutual Exchange
- Help Moving
- Outcomes Desired
- Risks
- Further Considerations

Members discussed the content of the power point presentation in further detail.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP thanked the Tenancy Services Manager for her presentation. This was not a new scheme. There had been much discussion

between LTP members, councillors and officers, resulting in the draft proposal in front of us this evening. He hoped the initiative was adopted as it gave dignity to tenants in downsizing.

Questions from members followed:

- Question: Was it proposed that members could downsize from a four bedroomed home to a two bedroomed home rather than just to a one bedroomed property?
- Response: Yes there would be an element of discretion.
- Question: How long were tenants entitled to receive Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)?
- Response: This was administered by the Benefits Team. At the current time, there was a significant reduction in finance for the scheme available to local authorities. It was important to see tenants making the effort to move from DHP.
- Question: Was there a timescale for receipt of DHP?
- Response: The initial help was given for 6 months and then reviewed. It had been intended to be a short-term bridge for tenants until their circumstances changed.
- Question: It was good to see incentivisation in the proposed downsizing scheme. Would allowances be made for carers who needed separate bedrooms?
- Response: Yes each case would be dealt with on an individual basis according to need.
- Question: Would the policy on the Mutual Exchange Scheme be tightened up?
- Response: This was set out under government legislation with few grounds to refuse. It would be included in the Downsizing Policy.

RESOLVED that the content of the power point presentation be noted with a further report on progress with the Downsizing Policy to be brought back to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee in the new Municipal Year.

33. Change to Order of Business

RESOLVED that the order of business be amended to allow the report entitled 'Scheduled Repairs Update at Quarter 3' to be considered as the next agenda item.

34. Scheduled Repairs Update Quarter 3

Matt Hillman, Assistant Director of Housing and Investment:

- a. presented an update on the Scheduled Repairs project being delivered as at Quarter 3
- b. reported on the background to the Housing Repairs Service as detailed at paragraph 3 of the report
- c. provided an update on scheduled repairs performance at Quarter 3 as follows:
 - 4,139 Scheduled Repairs (SR) raised in Q3.

- SR repairs completed within target time – 99.24%
 - SR First Time Fix – 96.11%
 - SR Appts Made and Kept – 98.43%
- d. reported that Customer Services were now offering appointments at first contact, this should reduce the additional workload on the Resource Planning Team
 - e. highlighted that the service area was seeking to increase the efficiency of SR by reducing timescales from a 12-week cycle to a 9-week cycle, which should improve customer satisfaction by reducing the amount of time residents waited for the completion of non-urgent repairs
 - f. advised that a Process Manual for SR Team Leaders was currently being written in order to provide consistency across the service
 - g. referred to considerations that had a significant impact upon service area performance as detailed at paragraph 4.2 of the report
 - h. invited committees questions and comments:

Comment: There had been a decrease in the number of apprenticeships. It was pleasing to see the scheme was to be relaunched.

Response: The Council would engage with Lincoln College in a community scheme to offer paid work during the school holidays to students studying two year apprenticeship schemes at College. This enabled them to gain the practical experience they required.

Question: When would plans for scheduled repair timescales to be reduced from a 12-week cycle to a 9-week cycle come into effect?

Response: The service was currently carrying out a rebalancing of scheduled repairs across all areas, which would gradually reduce the 12 week cycle to 9 weeks.

Comment: Tenants were aware that Customer Services were not reporting repairs to the Resource Planning Team.

Response: Appointment times were left open for this purpose. Officers would investigate this matter further.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

35. Tenancy Sustainment Update

Keeley Johnson, Tenancy Services Manager;

- a. presented a report to update Members on the current position regarding tenancy sustainment within Tenancy Services
- b. advised that Tenancy sustainment continued to be a key priority for City of Lincoln Council (CoLC); the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent increase in the cost of living had seen and increased need to provide tenants with essential support

c. highlighted that:

- Sustaining tenancies had long been important for social landlords wishing to not only maximise income into the housing revenue account but also to maximise tenant's income.
- We aimed to allow tenants to thrive in their homes and reduce the risk of tenancies failing.
- Evictions on average costed between £7,000 and £10,000 without including any further temporary accommodation costs which could be in the region of £140 a night for a family should B&B be required.
- With the increasing numbers of homelessness and pressure on the housing register, there had never been a higher need to sustain tenancies and stabilise communities.

d. explained that in April 2022 three Housing Officers on two-year contracts were created, dedicated to working on our sustainment objectives, split into four phases as detailed at paragraph 3 of her report as follows:

e.

- Phase 1 - Pre tenancy support for vulnerable tenants
- Phase 2 - Roll-out of referrals to any tenant at risk of enforcement action
- Phase 3 - All general referrals accepted for any tenant experiencing some type of hardship
- Phase 4 - Forming strong relationships with the third sector

f. presented figures on the current position regarding sustainment of tenancies and enforcement action; eviction used only as a last resort, together with information on arrears and benchmarking as detailed within the officer's report

g. highlighted that members were not being asked to agree the three posts to be added to the establishment as this required a business case to be prepared to carry forward this process

h. requested that members note the actions to support tenants in order to improve levels of tenancy sustainment.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP gave credit to the work of the Tenancy Team.

Members asked:

- Question: Were referrals for accommodation made to other private housing providers e.g. Framework, Eden Housing Association?
- Response: Yes this was the case.
- Question: Was the pre tenancy support offered to vulnerable tenants voluntary or compulsory?
- Response: This type of support was not compulsory as the council could not force tenants to engage. It was only a small number of tenants that needed this support, however, a minority of cases could take up a huge amount of time. There were no causes for concern in this area.
- Question: At what point in the process did officers approach tenants to ask whether they required any pre-tenancy support?

- Response: This was done by telephone or letter prior to the tenancy contract being signed. This allowed this dedicated resource to be prioritised according to need before the tenancy was taken up. The Allocations Team also offered assistance.

Members praised the work of the Tenancy Sustainment Team in assisting residents in maintaining their tenancies.

RESOLVED that the content of the presentation and discussions held be noted.

36. Work Programme 2022/23

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the final work programme for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2022/23 as detailed at Appendix A of the officer's 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.

37. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

38. Kier Contract-Final Account Settlement (Verbal Report)

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment provided members with details of the final account settlement in respect of the Kier contract as agreed with the Legal Team.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.