

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

Apologies for Absence: Debbie Rousseau

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

1. Confirmation of Minutes - 9 March 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2023 be confirmed.

2. Matters Arising

Minute No 47: Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2022/23

Member's requested a response to an LTP comment made as to why the member was told by an Aaron Services operative that they wouldn't report a repair unless told to do so by the tenant concerned.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer referred to a Member response table previously circulated in response to member questions which would be recirculated.

Minute No 40: Matters Arising: Housing Revenues Business Plan 2023/28

In response to concerns previously raised regarding some of the compliance controllers on new heating systems being too sensitive, Mike Asher, LTP Member, reported that new restrictors had since been installed to radiators and everything was now working fine.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Pat Vaughan declared a Personal Interest with regard to the agenda item titled 'Housing Finance'.

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

4. Housing Finance

Colleen Warren, Financial Services Manager, presented her report on the Council's Housing out-turn position for 2022/23. She highlighted key points within the content of the report as follows:

- The report provided members with the provisional summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the revised budget for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Housing Repairs Service (HRS) and showed how any surpluses had been allocated to reserves.

- For 2022/23 the Council's HRA net revenue budget was set at £38,670, which resulted in an estimated level of general balances at year-end of £1,063,872.
- The HRA financial performance quarterly monitoring report for the 3rd quarter predicted an underspend of £961. The provisional outturn for 2022/23 now indicated an improvement of £119,614, resulting in an overall budget underspend of £120,575 (including additional transfers to/from earmarked reserves). This would result in HRA balances at 31 March 2023 of £1,184,447.
- Paragraph 3.3-3.8 of her report highlighted movement and variances to the outturn position and outfall summary.
- For 2022/23 the Council's HRS net revenue budget was set at zero, reflecting its full cost recovery nature.
- The HRS deficit figure reported at Quarter 3 was £403,727; resulting in a movement from Quarter 3 to Outturn of £181,882.
- The net trading deficit of £221,845 was the result of several year-end variations in income and expenditure against the approved budget. as detailed in Appendix F, while the key variances were summarised at paragraph 4.3 of her report:
- The main contributory factor to the deficit was the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges, being felt not just by the council but across the construction industry as a whole. This inability to attract and retain staff resulted in a greater reliance on the use of sub-contractors to ensure that service demands were met. The cost of using sub-contractors was however more expensive than the HRS's own workforce, due to the ongoing impact of Covid19, the current inflationary crisis and a reduced pool of contractors from which to secure services. These additional costs were therefore not fully offset by the vacancy and material savings achieved by not carrying out the work internally. These increased costs were further compounded by increased demands resulting from the higher level of voids currently being experienced, although this was partially offset by a reduction in responsive repairs works being requested.
- As the increased subcontractor costs were not reflected in the service hourly rate and overhead recovery was not recouped on sub-contractors this resulted in an under recovery of full costs from the HRA. Despite this, the overall level of rechargeable income was overachieved due to the volume of voids works being undertaken (of both a capital and revenue nature), albeit at a higher cost, compensating for a reduction in responsive repairs works.
- The forecast deficit also included the impact of the nationally agreed pay award implemented in December, which was significantly over and above the assumptions included within the MTFs, and the impact of increased inflation on utilities as a result of the escalating cost of gas and electricity supplies, as outlined in both the General Fund and HRA variances.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

Councillor Hewson, Chair, raised concerns that the 2022/23 insurance claims expenditure budget of £168,930 had been overspent by £115,330 at £284,260 actual expenditure.

Colleen Warren, Financial Services Manager, detailed the background behind the increase in disrepair claims. Private finance companies were targeting tenants of council homes and rented accommodation promising compensation payments, with the finance companies ultimately benefitting and little refunds ever reaching the tenants. This was a growing trend nationally which all local authorities and rented accommodation providers were having to manage.

Matthew Hillman, Assistant Director, Investment confirmed there had been an increase in disrepair claims in terms of damp/mould and condensation. Operatives would always enquire when visiting properties whether there were any condensation problems. It was difficult to identify such problems in circumstances when operatives were refused access to carry out repairs. A short life working group had been set up to look at the issues. New processes had also been introduced with test products being tried such as sprays, fans and humidity devices to help with condensation.. Additional administrative resources were also being employed together with an Insurance Officer within the Finance Section.

Councillor Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing highlighted that the Government was taking steps to restrict the operation of these type of finance companies.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP, highlighted that tenants were aware of these unscrupulous companies. Additional warnings on social media platforms would be used to make people aware.

Colleen Warren emphasised that any disrepair claims received which were not reported by the tenant were shut down immediately as there was nothing to report.

RESOLVED that the provisional out-turn position for the HRA and HRS for 2022/23 be noted.

5. Housing Fire Assessment Update

Matt Hillman, Assistant Director, Investment:

- a. updated Committee on City of Lincoln Council's (CoLC) current position regarding Fire Risk Assessments of Housing stock including High Rise Tower Blocks, Sheltered Housing Schemes and Low Risk Flats only
- b. reported that The Fire Safety Act 2021 came into force 16 May 2022 which clarified which of our buildings The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applied and highlighted areas to be covered within fire risk assessments
- c. updated members on progress to compliance advising that the position of Technical Officer (Fire Safety) within the Safety Assurance team was vacant pending job evaluation and that a fire risk assessor had been engaged to undertake Fire Risk Assessments of low-rise (general needs)

properties and was making good progress in reducing the backlog of premises yet to be assessed

- d. gave an update on the current position regarding the Fire Risk Assessments within the table at paragraph 3.3 of the officer's report
- e. requested members feedback on the content of the report.

Members discussed the report in further detail.

Comments/questions were raised and responded to by officers as follows:

- Question: When would the fire risk assessments be 100% complete?
- Response: This would be by the middle of August 2023 if all went well.
- Question: What was the estimated timescale for replacement of fire doors on entry to properties in high rise flats?
- Response: The fire doors would only be replaced if they were not up to the required standard; there was no immediate plans to replace all the doors. Legal advice was being taken in respect of leaseholders of fire doors in communal areas to ensure the best route forward for the safety of the blocks.
- Question: For what length of time were fire certificates valid?
- Response: They were valid for 2 years.
- Question: What was the average life span for a fire door?
- Response: They were changed as and when they needed replacement. The average lifespan was 40 years, however, regular fire inspections were made.

RESOLVED that the fire risk assessment update to Housing stock be noted.

6. Scheduled Repairs Review

Matt Hillman, Assistant Director of Investment:

- a. presented a review of performance in the area of Scheduled Repairs, the scheme commenced on 07/02/2022 following a trial extension period ending on 04/02/2022
- b. highlighted that the data gathered within the officer's report showed a comparison from the most recently completed cycle of scheduled repairs 2 January 2023 (1st day of north cycle) until 16 April 2023 (last day of south cycle) and the first full cycle of 2022 to show a similar time of year comparison from 7 February 2022 (first day of north cycle) until 29 April 2022 (last day of south cycle)
- c. reported that scheduled repairs continued to be delivered following the completion of the extended trial on 4 February 2022
- d. detailed the background to the Housing Repair Service (HRS) prior to August 2020, which operated on a Responsive Repairs basis whereby all non-urgent repairs were completed within 20 days and emergency repairs within 24 hours
- e. presented a comparison to the benefits of the Scheduled Repairs system with non-urgent repairs at no risk to tenants carried out in one

geographical area for a concentrated period, to achieve more repair jobs completed with the same amount of labour resource

- f. provided positive performance data comparison, as detailed within the table provided at paragraph 4.1 of the officer's report
- g. detailed several improvements identified in the review of Scheduled Repairs, which could be introduced to further refine service delivery, as detailed at paragraph 4.2 of the officer's report
- h. invited committees questions and comments.

Comment: It was welcoming to see the benefit from the work of the Resources Team Leader which had been very impressive so far.

Question: How was a Service Level Agreement achieved?

Response: This was coordinated between the Housing Investment/Repairs Service and Customer Services in advice given to tenants.

Question: Had staff from Customer Services been deployed from City Hall to take calls from Hamilton House?

Response: Four members of staff were to be based with the Resource Planners at Hamilton House to maintain service continuity, however, Customer Services staff were reluctant to move over and the process was currently being navigated around. In addition, an extra Resource Planner had been employed on a temporary contract.

Comment: The Tenancy Agreement should identify the onus on tenants to provide up to date information/details of resident contact details.

Response: The introduction of a new Hardware Interface Programme would make it easier to update contact details remotely on the customer portal.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP highlighted the importance of working together with Customer Services to achieve improved customer satisfaction when tenants rang in and to ensure the incoming telephone number matched the one recorded on screen Steps were in place to bring about improvements.

RESOLVED that:

1. The delivery of Scheduled Repairs be continued.
2. North, Central and South welfare units at Lenton Green, Newland Street West and Birchwood be introduced respectively with continued utilisation of the Greetwellgate site subject to satisfactory planning regulations.

7. Change to Order of Business

RESOLVED that the order of business be amended to allow agenda Item No 10 'Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 4 2023/24' to be considered as the next agenda item.

8. Performance Monitoring Report Q4 2023/24

Matt Hillman, Assistant Director of Investment

- a. presented Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with an end of year report on performance indicators for the 2022/23 financial year (April 2022-March 2023), which combined all performance relevant to Housing Landlord issues
- b. reported that over the last twelve 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. reported that of the 21 measures in total; 11 were on or exceeding targets for the year (year-end), 5 had not met the normal targets set, of which 4 were within 5% tolerance of their respective targets (Amber Rating), and one measure did not have a target (complaints replied to in line with corporate policy)
- e. referred to Appendix A of the report which attempted to simplify the overall analysis by listing performance on a service functional basis (rents, repairs etc) and then showing the source of the indicator (reason)
- f. added that further information on the areas highlighted was provided at paragraph 4 of the report
- g. invited committees' questions and comments.

Members discussed the content of the report, commented, asked questions, and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

- Comment: It would be beneficial to have a more rapid turnaround of paperwork to ensure vacant properties were brought back into use as soon as possible to avoid anti-social behaviour /damage.
- Response: The new initiative of interactive information videos would help prospective tenants with useful points to consider. In the sad circumstances when a tenant passed away, the property remained the responsibility of relatives whilst in the probate period.
- Question: It was noted that Performance Indicator 58 Average re-let period – All dwellings (excluding major works) – (days)' was currently in red. Was it possible to provide a further breakdown as to how many terminations in tenancy were due to deaths/residents moving into nursing homes?
- Response: This information would be provided by officers.
- Question: Was it possible when signing up to a tenancy agreement to verify in advance that in the event the property became void, there would be free access by the Council if there were no other relatives involved?
- Response: This would not be practical as it would be too far in advance in many circumstances in relation to the power of attorney.
- Question: What was the difference between a void without major works and one with major works. The target for re-let of properties was a lot less than the actual performance?
- Response: This was controlled by the House Mark Standard. Officers would forward the relevant information to members.

- Question: The % of complaints against target time had increased every quarter. What plans were there to make improvements?
- Response: Most of the complaints related to housing repairs. Officers had been through the data to look for trends such as 'discuss the issue further appointments/low quality work' but there were no apparent reasons. The customer base was different to years gone by and people complained on a regular basis, due to changes in the tenant profile. Extra resources were being allocated. Operatives were being instructed to make sure any repairs needed were actioned accordingly. He would arrange a meeting with LTP members and staff to discuss the issues further.
- Comment by Councillor Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing: It was important that members used the single point of contact (SPOC) for any complaints in order that problems were always logged. This was a policy formerly agreed by all members.
- Response by Mick Barber, Chair of LTP: The SPOC was a good system. The logging of data regarding complaints was essential to make future improvements and to enhance service delivery. LTP had helped set up templates on how to address complaints and there was a huge improvement on what had gone before. We needed to modernise our working systems to deal with customer issues.

RESOLVED that:

1. The following supplementary information be provided to members:
 - A further breakdown as to how many terminations in tenancy were due to deaths/residents moving into nursing homes .
 - Further detail of the House Mark Standard.
2. The current performance outcomes during the financial year 2022/23 be noted.
3. A commitment to continued reporting on a quarterly basis and a determined programme to have more interim in-depth reviews of service specific performance be noted.

9. **Lincoln Tenants Panel Project Updates**

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.

LTP continued to work with tenancy services, fire safety assurance, maintenance, business management and resident involvement on a variety of projects.

He gave a brief overview of the projects being covered in these areas:

- LTP recently attended a voids refresher training course delivered by tenancy services and resident involvement. All members of LTP had signed up to become a voids inspector.
- He continued to hold quarterly meetings with the voids team leader reviewing void inspections and targets.

- We had successfully inspected twelve voids December – April and all had surpassed our standards. We understood inspecting a targeted one property a week may be difficult due to property type and availability, we had agreed to inspect as many as possible and take direction from the voids team – our aim was to increase from 5% to 10%. A suggestion to conduct multiple void inspections was currently under review by the void team's leader.
- The complaints review group continued to hold quarterly meetings - We had requested recommendations shared with relevant officers together with a request for further feedback relating to some complaints.
- The ASB working group had completed the second review cycle and had identified improvements - Three LTP members were also in the process of trying to obtain an ASB accreditation.
- The schedule of repairs (SOR) working group had put forward recommendations to increase awareness of the SOR programme on Facebook together with link to main calendar.
- LTP volunteered and assisted various officers from City of Lincoln Council (CoLC) at a fire safety exercise at Jarvis House, we found the events to be successful, in particular, tenants at Jarvis House actively engaged with officers and Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue.
- LTP had reviewed CoLC Lincoln standards, fencing and communal area policies and submitted recommendations.
- We continued to hold our monthly LTP meetings and had recruited a new LTP member, we now had eleven inducted LTP members.
- LTP continued to represent COLC at Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) and Debbie Rousseau was now a fully opted committee member allowing the Chair of LTP to represent COLC as a panel member on the Social Housing Quality Register online community Panel attending online webinars.
- LTP had joined TPAS – the leading tenant engagement experts. TPAS were a not-for-profit organisation and had been representing Registered Provider's, Local Authorities, ALMO's (arms-length management organisation) etc since 1988. It promoted, supported and championed tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England. We had recently completed an introductory online seminar and were in the process of joining online training sessions and webinars covering housing related subjects.

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.

10. Allocations Update

Alison Timmins, Housing Solutions Manager:

- a) provided statistical data relating to allocation of Council accommodation during 2022/23 for member's information
- b) emphasised there was a shortage of one bed flats for single people and homes with more than two bedrooms to accommodate larger families
- c) advised that during 2022/23 the Council allocated 570 properties, with further analysis of allocations by property type also provided

- d) reported that the Council had set a quota of 25% of all lettings for transfer of applicants into more suitable accommodation that met their changing needs, which had finished the year only slightly below target, ensuring we balanced local needs and Government priorities.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

The following comments/questions from members were responded to as follows:

Question: Who made the allocations?

Response: There was an Allocations Team with a Team Leader to exercise this function. Homeless legislation prioritised any household homeless or threatened with homelessness. After this, people on the housing register were allocated properties according to those most in need and having been the longest on the waiting list.

Comment: The Council also had a duty to tenants having to tolerate Anti-Social Behaviour in their neighbourhoods.

Response: The Tenancy Team was responsible for taking appropriate action in relation to ASB in Council properties. Tenants that were evicted were not able to re-join the housing register. It was acknowledged that the eviction process could be lengthy.

Question: Were housing officers made aware of tenants moving into their housing patch to enable them to manage any issues that may arise effectively?

Response: Yes this information was passed on. Tenants were made aware/signed up to their tenancy obligations.

Question: Were existing neighbours taken into consideration when new tenants were allocated a property?

Response: The existing make-up of the neighbourhood was considered, however, the Council had a duty to rehouse clients and all accommodation was next door to one neighbour.

Question: Were tenancies monitored?

Response: Housing officers were active out and about in the community. They were able to take action in respect of any disrespect of tenancy laws if necessary, however, tenants could not be forced to engage if they did not wish to do so. We had a duty of care to our tenants and tried our best to ensure tenancies were allocated appropriately.

Question: Was the current 58% allocation of properties to homeless people likely to reduce?

Response: No this was unlikely.

Comment: It was important for all tenants to enjoy quality of life. Help was available for those that needed support. Existing tenants were valued too.

Response: Not all tenants had significant need. There were also low need families housed in our accommodation. There was a range of support available through introductory tenancies, the Tenancy Sustainment Team and local housing officers. The Council had no other option than to discharge its legal responsibilities to the 58% homeless families.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

11. Downsizing Policy (Verbal Report)

RESOLVED that this item be deferred to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee to be held on 10 August 2023.

12. Housing Planned Works 2023/24

Kevin Bowring, Investment Manager:

- a. presented a schedule of planned works for 2023/24, to be delivered within the Council's housing stock as detailed at Appendix 1 of his report, amounting to 1,850 items of programmed work as at 1 June 2023
- b. reported that the programme was a live document compiled; further addresses would be added to the programmes during the remainder of the year, for example following surveys or referrals from the Housing Repair Service, and occasionally addresses would be removed from the programme due to refusals and failed access for example
- c. requested that members consider the content of the officer's report.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

Question: Could the programme of works be updated to reflect changes in Ward names.

Response: Yes, the document would be amended accordingly.

Question: Previously members were issued with a breakdown of planned works for the year across four areas. This aided communication with tenants

Response: Further breakdowns could be circulated if requested if the information was useful. Many years ago the programme was issued on the website. Although this action was time consuming, it was possible for this style of presentation to be reintroduced if required.

Comment: There were two blocks of flats on Woodfield Avenue with communal entrance doors containing glass panels dating back to 1910.

Response: These would be identified as part of the fire door inspections. At the time of construction building regulations would have deemed the doors to be compliant and they had probably not been replaced since as not in a state of disrepair. As part of the fire door replacement scheme inspections, more and more would be replaced.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

13. Work Programme 2023/24

The Senior Democratic Services Officer:

- a. advised members that a draft work programme for 2023/24 had been circulated to the Chair and Vice/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 from the first meeting of the new Municipal Year

- b. reported that the work programme 2023/24 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.

RESOLVED that:

1. A further item be added to the end of the 2023/24 work programme requiring an update on insurance claims paid in respect of disrepair claims lodged.
2. The work programme for 2023/24 be noted.