

Present: Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Pat Vaughan, Councillor Martin Christopher,
Councillor David Clarkson, Councillor Thomas Dyer,
Councillor Lucinda Preston, Councillor Mark Storer,
Councillor Joshua Wells and Councillor Loraine Woolley

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Rachel Storer

57. Confirmation of Minutes - 7 December 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

58. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

59. Change to Order of Business

RESOLVED that the order of business be changed to allow the report entitled 'Fire Safety Update' to be considered as item number 3 on the agenda.

60. Fire Safety Update

Matthew Hillman, Assistant Director of Investment:

- a. presented an update on the City of Lincoln Council (CoLC) current position regarding Fire Safety to the housing stock including high rise tower blocks, supported housing schemes and low risk flats
- b. reported that all of the high-rise tower blocks had a type 4 survey and the supported housing schemes had a current Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)
- c. stated that all low-rise blocks have had a FRA in the last three years (review frequency every two years in low rise blocks), however those showing as not having a current FRA would be prioritised for review
- d. noted that all three tower blocks had been registered with the building safety regulator prior to the deadline date of 30 September 2023
- e. advised that work on the Building Safety case report was underway and would be completed by 1 April 2024
- f. explained that Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue had completed Fire Safety Visits at the three high rise tower blocks in February/March 2023 and a training exercise at Jarvis House had also been completed
- g. detailed the fire safety audits that had been completed at De Wint Court and the three high rise tower blocks which provided reassurance that the day-to-day fire safety was being managed at these locations
- h. invited questions and comments from Members of the Committee:

Question: Some residents of De Wint Court were taking their mobility scooters into their flats to charge them due to lack of storage space available. Was this a fire safety concern?

Response: From a building perspective if there was a fire in a flat the compartmentation system would work to contain the fire. This was not ideal from a tenant perspective but work was ongoing with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue to educate customers on fire safety. The mobility scooter policy was currently under review to ensure that it was robust.

Question: How often did Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue visit the high rise tower blocks?

Response: Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue had been given additional powers and responsibilities under the Fire and Safety Act 2021. The Council worked closely with them and they could visit at any time. The Council had asked to be notified in advance of a visit so that some tenant engagement could be undertaken. It was expected that a visit would take place on an annual basis.

Question: How many fire doors had been tested to date?

Response: An answer would be provided following the meeting and the figure would be included in next years update report.

Question: Had the fire doors at Trent View been checked? There was a rush of airflow through the door which was different to the fire doors at Shuttleworth House.

Response: The fire doors at Trent View were notional and they had been inspected. The vent system was different at Trent View and Jarvis House compared to Shuttleworth House which affected the air flow. Work was ongoing with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue to ensure that they were happy with the vent system in place.

Question: How did the Council safeguard itself if there was an incident relating to e-scooters being kept in flats?

Response: The mobility scooter Policy was currently being refreshed to ensure that it was robust. The Council could not stop tenants storing their e-scooters in their homes, but we would work alongside Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue to advise tenants against it. Going forward the Council would be engaging with tenants much more than in the past. We were looking at better and more effective ways of engaging for example short videos, QR codes and shorter, plain english documents.

Comment: Short videos were a good way to communicate with customers with whom English was not their first language. People could often speak English but could not read or write it.

Response: Going forward we would need to gather more information on tenants. Work was ongoing with customers services to ask certain questions of customers to gather information which would help to be able to provide a better service to customers.

Question: Could the Council work with Lincoln Embracing All Nations (LEAN) to engage with tenants?

Response: Yes, there were already good links with LEAN via the Neighbourhood Working Team.

Question: Could excess damage to timber framed buildings be prevented when putting out fires in future?

Response: We would inform Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue of which buildings were timber framed.

RESOLVED that the fire safety update of the Councils Housing Stock be noted.

61. Portfolio Holder under Scrutiny - Quality Housing

Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing:

a. presented a report to Performance Scrutiny Committee covering the following main areas:

- Homelessness
- Tenancy Services
- Voids
- Housing Repairs
- Housing Investment
- New Build
- Decarbonisation
- Control Centre
- Private Sector Housing
- Health

b. suggested that in future this meeting be scheduled for one week later in the committee calendar due to the timescales and availability of the Quarter 3 data

c. invited questions and comments from Members of the Committee:

Question: Did the number of damp and mould issues that were reported relate to Council Housing Stock or Private Housing?

Response: It related to Council Housing Stock.

Question: Could damp and mould be caused by lack of ventilation at a property?

Response: Each case was considered on its own merit and information was provided to the tenant.

Question: Did the plaster have to be replaced in the properties that were affected by damp and mould?

Response: We would look at different ways of improving the situation for example fitting vents. Plaster was replaced if all other solutions had been exhausted.

Question: Where would the new builds referenced in the report be located?

Response: Goldsmith Walk.

Question: There had been reports of issues with kitchen fittings at De Wint Court. Was this an issue in other De Wint Court flats?

Response: There had been a number of issues at De Wint Court. The Contractor had visited the site and would be investigating and addressing the issues.

Comment: When a Councillor reported a repair on behalf of a tenant, we did not receive any feedback as to whether the repair had been completed or not.

Response: Councillors should receive a response. This would be discussed with the relevant team to ensure this happens in future.

Question: Lincoln scored low in the statistics for health within the county. The City of Lincoln Council (CoLC) needed to do more to address this. Could the Portfolio Holder for Housing attend the Health Scrutiny Committee at Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) instead of the Chair of Policy Scrutiny Committee?

Response: The representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee at LCC had to be a back bencher and could not be a Portfolio Holder. The member representing CoLC had the same rights on the committee as the other district councillors. The Portfolio Holder attended many meetings relating to health at LCC. The CoLC could improve the health within the city through other ways such as addressing issues within housing and employment.

Response: Suggested that at the next Scrutiny Chair meeting, consideration could be given to how the information from Health Scrutiny Committee could be reported back to CoLC members.

Question: The number of damp and mould reports had increased year on year and there had been issues raised at 772 properties this year to date. How much compensation had the Council paid in disrepair claims?

Response: This information would be provided following the meeting. There had been an uptake in disrepair compensation claims recently due to no win no fee solicitors advertising to tenants. The legislation needed to be changed to address this issue.

Comment: The Council should be more proactive at logging cases of damp and mould in council houses.

Response: Improvements had been made at logging this information.

Question: Could more context be provided on the Downsizing Policy?

Response: This policy would be presented to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee. It was difficult to persuade people to move to a smaller property, but we considered ways to incentivise people to downsize.

Question: Would there be a significant cost to the Council due to the changes with the Social Housing Regulator?

Response: An annual fee would have to be paid to the Social Housing Regulator which would be based on the number of properties in the housing stock. It was currently under debate as to whether it was fair to pay for a service that was already provided.

Question: There was a large cost to the Council for temporary accommodation. There had been previous discussions about procuring a facility for temporary accommodation. Had this been secured?

Response: The proposed site for temporary accommodation was more expensive than expected and therefore was not progressed. Other solutions were being considered.

Question: Had the Council been notified of the Social Housing Regulator performance measures?

Response: The Social Housing Regulator had provided draft performance measures, of which some were already measured by the Council and some would be new measures.

Question: Why was the percentage of urgent repairs carried out within time limits (3 days) below target?

Response: Some repairs had been allocated incorrectly as urgent repairs when they should have been scheduled repairs. Once these were entered into the computer system they could not be changed. Staff from Hamilton House had listened to customer service calls to address the issue. There had also been an increase in the number of repairs reported due to the recent storms which had affected the figures.

Question: How often were the communal areas of flats cleaned? Was there an issue of items being left in communal areas which prevented cleaning?

Response: A new policy had been implemented recently and cleaning of the communal areas was on a 6 week cycle for low rise flats and the high rise flats had a dedicated caretaker. If there was an ongoing issue that a communal area could not be cleaned due to items left in the communal area, then this would be reported to the Housing Officer who would visit the tenant. It was not an issue that regularly occurred.

Question: Did Housing Officers receive regular training for example on safeguarding and domestic abuse?

Response: The Housing Department had an internal training co-ordinator who provided all the training for the Department. Domestic abuse and safeguarding had been completed and the training was being implemented as a number of safeguarding issues were reported.

Question: Why was there a number of gaps in the commentary of the performance indicators?

Response: This was due to the timing of the Quarter 3 data being available. The information would be included in the report when it was presented to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

Question: There were issues with the Housing Department adhering to the Member Contact Protocol. What had been done to address this?

Response: This was an issue within the Department and the response times to members questions and complaints had been slow. Some of the delay is caused by the sheer volume of service requests coming in from a number of members. The issue would be reviewed and discussed with managers again. The appointment of the two new Assistant Directors would help to address this issue. A response on how improvements would be made would be circulated following the meeting.

Question: Contractors used by the Council sometimes sub-contracted work to contractors that the Council may not use. It was important to maintain standards and get best value for money. How many direct award contracts had been given for over £25K?

Response: Contractors did use sub contractors, however the contract requirements and service standards laid out in the contract remained relevant. The Council would ensure the main contractor delivered what was expected. Any issues relating to workmanship or service standard were for the main contractor to deal. The number of direct wards across the council was not a number we had to hand.

Question: When would the Housing IT Replacement Programme be implemented?

Response: The main areas would be implemented in May and some additional areas would be rolled out in September 2024. The new system would improve

customer service as it would send messages to tenants about appointments etc and request feedback.

Question: Could more information be provided on the strategy for garage sites?

Response: The Garage Strategy would be considered by Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee shortly. The strategy would set out the vision, goals and objectives. Once this was in place an operational policy would be produced which would include the details such the pricing structure etc.

Question: Could surplus University accommodation be used as temporary accommodation for homelessness?

Response: This was being considered and discussed with the University.

Question: With regards to decarbonisation, every property was heated by a gas boiler. Was there any plans to trial the installation of heat pumps?

Response: The 11 new properties at Hermit Street would have heat pumps installed so we would be able to learn from those. Consideration would be given to retrofit some heat pumps in older properties.

Question: With regards to the Lincare Housing Assistance service customer satisfaction, how many surveys were sent out?

Response: 105 surveys were sent out in Quarter 2 2023/24. 41 responses were returned of which 40 were satisfied (97.56%) with their new Lincare Housing Assistance service connection to the Control Centre.

Comment: The report gave a false impression of high customer satisfaction as it stated that only 1 person was dissatisfied with the service out of 41 responses, although less than half of the surveys were returned.

Question: How had the team progressed with gaining access to properties to undertake pre-void inspections?

Response: It was difficult to gain access to some properties as they became void due to the tenant passing away. We would aim to visit all properties annually so in future we would have better information on properties prior to them becoming void. Instruction videos had been produced to advise tenants on how a property should be left. We were also looking at the recharge mechanisms available to us for those tenants that left a property damaged or full of rubbish.

Question: An amendment to the Tenancy Agreement in relation to De Wint Court was referenced at a recent Audit Committee. It was stated that the amendment would not made until 2025. Why would this take so long to make the amendment?

Response: A answer would be provided following the meeting.

Question: There had been reports to Councillors of issues with utilities at De Wint Court. Were residents aware of what they were paying for as part of their management fee?

Response: All Tenants were given a breakdown of the service charge last year and would be given a new breakdown towards the end of March for next year's charge so they were fully aware what they are paying for. This was sent to all tenants, irrespective of whether they paid their own rent or were in receipt of any benefits.

Comment: There were a number of issues reported to Councillors regarding De Wint Court that needed addressing.

Response: Individual cases would need to be discussed outside of Performance Scrutiny Committee. Please provide a list of specific issues to the Director of Housing and they would be addressed.

RESOLVED that the annual report be noted.

62. Work Programme 2023/24

The Chair:

- a. presented the work programme for 2023/24 as detailed at Appendix A of the report
- b. advised that the work programme for the Performance Scrutiny Committee was put forward annually for approval by Council; the work programme was then regularly updated throughout the year in consultation with the Performance Scrutiny Committee and its Chair
- c. reported that items had been scheduled in accordance with the existing work programme and officers' guidance regarding the meetings at which the most up-to-date information could be reported to the committee; the work programme also included the list of portfolio holders under scrutiny
- d. requested any relevant comments or changes to the proposed work programme for 2023/24.

RESOLVED that the work programme 2023/24 be agreed.