

Present:	Councillor Gary Hewson (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Alan Briggs, Liz Bushell, Emily Wood and Lorraine Woolley
Independent Person(s):	Mick Barber, Caroline Coyle-Fox, Sean Newton and Debbie Rousseau
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Pat Vaughan, Councillor Natasha Chapman and Mike Asher

36. Confirmation of Minutes - 31 October 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

37. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

38. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 -2024/25

Michelle Hoyles, Housing Strategy Manager:

- a) presented Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a report on performance indicators for the Directorate of Housing and Investment (DHI) for Quarter 2 of 2024/25 (July – September) which covered those measures related to the Council's responsibility as a landlord
- b) reported that Lincoln Tenant's Panel had been consulted about this report and had confirmed they had no comments
- c) added that regular monitoring of the Council's performance was a key component of the Local Performance Management Framework and supported its ongoing commitment to continuous improvement of Council services
- d) confirmed that there were a total of thirty-three performance indicators monitored by DHI; an overview of performance for the second quarter of 2024/25, against such indicators was attached at Appendix A to the report
- e) explained that the template for Appendix A included performance 'direction of travel' information to aid interpretation of how performance fluctuated between quarterly reporting periods; benchmarking comparisons would be provided annually at each fourth quarter
- f) reported that during the second quarter of 2024/25, 15 performance measures had met or exceeded their agreed target, four had performed close to target and six had performed below target, the remaining measures were volumetric
- g) highlighted that of the 6 measures performing below target, one was a corporate measure related to call handling in the customer contact centre; this measure 'CS3' related to all calls received by the contact centre, and

therefore included data not linked to Housing services, and was also reported to Performance Scrutiny Committee

- h) confirmed that further, detailed information on the areas highlighted was provided within the report
- i) invited comments and questions from Members of the Committee.

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

Question: Why were measures for voids still showing as red, although there was now a designated team concentrating on rent collections?

Response: This was down to a loss of rent due to the properties being void for a longer period than expected, rather than a duty of the rent collection team.

Question: The average re-let time in calendar days for all dwellings including major works performed at 48.79 days in quarter 1 and 50.28 days in quarter 2. It was quoted that there were several factors that could influence void re-let times, often influenced by external factors outside of the Council's control. Which internal teams worked to re-let voids as quickly as possible?

Response: The Housing Solutions, Voids Support, Housing Repair Service Support teams, followed by tenancy support were responsible for this area. External factors outside of the Council's control, for example, could be the scene of a crime cordoned off by the police, or high levels of asbestos on site preventing access to the property in a timely manner.

Comment: Instances of voids taking longer to re-let affected rent loss. Reports to Performance Scrutiny Committee summarised reasons for changes in performance figures.

Question: Average re-let time of voids in calendar days for all dwellings excluding major works was not meeting targets set and deteriorating. Did the target need lowering to make it achievable?

Response by Chair: As members we did not set the targets, they were set by officers in consultation with Lincoln Tenant's Panel. However, we wanted them to remain at the same level but improve and it was hoped this would happen.

Officer Response: Delays getting access to void properties could be caused by utility companies having work to carry out first, or tenants having passed on with access delays related to probate/legal reasons. We were trying to maximise the number of properties made available for tenants to move into balanced against housing needs. Transfers were increasing, which resulted in further voids, however, we were moving people into suitable housing for their needs which was good. Sometimes, two to three transfers were achieved out of one void property. There had been an unusually large number of tenancies ended this quarter with 40 sets of keys being handed back in one week. A financial balancing act was required between properties remaining void longer which incurred rental loss, against employment of experienced sub-contractors at extra cost to achieve quicker results.

Question: Why were so many tenancies being ended?

Response: More properties were being brought into stock and there had been an increase in transfers to deal with overcrowding/adaptation needs. We were still in the upper quartile for re-let of housing properties compared with elsewhere in the country and therefore still performing well. These were positive reasons why

tenancies had ended. Less than 1% out of our 7,800 housing stock was void at the current time.

Question: When would the Authority know how many Right to Buy transactions would be processed and how was the loss of these properties going to be recouped?

Response: There had been 90 applications received in the last four weeks. The Housing Revenue Account 30-year business plan proposed to increase its housing stock by 50 additional properties each year. There would hopefully be less losses due to voids moving forward over the next ten years as the short-term deficit ironed out.

Question: What was the maximum amount of discount permitted for Right to Buy transactions?

Response: This sum was £24,000. A consultation period was currently ongoing as to whether new properties should be excluded from the scheme.

Question: What type of properties were popular for Right to Buy applications?

Response: There was a variety of preference across the board.

Question Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel: Was it possible to receive a breakdown on the types of property that were purchased through Right to Buy?

Response: Yes, officers would circulate this information separately to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Comment by Officers: The following link informed members of the summary wording by the Government in relation to Right to Buy: [Right to Buy: summary booklet - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-buy-booklet)

RESOLVED that:

1. Further information be provided to members as requested above.
2. The current performance outcomes during Quarter 2 of the financial year 2024/25 to date, be noted.

39. **Financial Performance Quarterly Monitoring**

Adam Oxley, Principal Finance Business Partner:

a) presented a report to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a summary of the second quarter's performance (up to 30 September 2024), on the Council's:

- Housing Revenue Account
- Housing Repairs Service
- Housing Investment Programme

b) provided information on the Council's:

- **Housing Revenue Account** — For 2024/25 the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) net revenue budget was set with a planned contribution from balances of £101,220, resulting in estimated general balances at year-end of £1,030,024, after allowing for the 2023/24 outturn position. The HRA was currently projecting a forecast underspend of £519,410, which would result in HRA balances of £1,549,435 as at the end of 2024/25 (Appendix A provided a forecast

Housing Revenue Account summary). Although the forecast position was an overspend there was a number of significant variations in income and expenditure. Full details of the main variances were provided at Appendix B.

- **Housing Repairs Service** – For 2024/25 the Council's Housing Repairs Service (HRS) net budget was set at zero, which reflected its full cost recovery nature. At quarter 2 the HRS were forecasting a deficit of £17,146 in 2024/25, an improvement of £338,165 since quarter 1, which had subsequently been repatriated to the HRA. Full details of the main variances were provided at Appendix C.
- **Housing Investment Programme** – The revised programme for 2024/25 amounted to £17.650m following the Quarter 1 position. At quarter 2 the programme had been decreased by £0,219m to £17.432m as shown at paragraph 7.2 of the report. The overall expenditure on the Housing Investment Programme at the end of quarter 2 was £5.730m, which was 32.87% of the 2024/25 revised programme. This excluded expenditure relating to Western Growth Corridor, which was currently shown on the General Investment Programme (GIP), to be apportioned at year end (current forecast outturn £1.3m) as detailed at Appendix J of the report. A further £1,091m had been spent as at the end of October 2024, although this was still a low percentage of expenditure at this stage of the financial year, works had been constrained by the availability of contractors and materials, however, new contracts were in place and spend expected to increase by the end of the financial year.

c) invited members questions and comments.

Members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee considered the content of the report in further detail, asked questions and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

Question: Were the wider site costs for the Western Growth Corridor approved at Executive on 22 July 2024 funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)?

Response: Yes. This was correct. The HRA owned 79% of Western Growth Corridor land.

Question: How many tenants were on the waiting list for aids and adaptations, which had increased substantially over the last two years?

Response: The budget came from the capital programme. Officers would investigate further and report back to members in due course.

Comment: Developers might wish to take account of the opportunity for new tenants to qualify for help with aids and adaptations on completion of their build.

Response: Aids and adaptations were included within our technical specifications for new builds.

Question: New builds were classified as houses for life?

Response: Yes, together with adaptations.

Councillor Alan Briggs complemented officers on their achievements to bring about a reduction in void loss garage rental income.

RESOLVED that:

1. Further information be provided to members as requested above.
2. The financial performance for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 be noted with thanks.

40. Acquisition, Disposal and Land Use Strategy Update

Michelle Hoyles, Housing Strategy Manager:

- a) presented a report to update Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the Directorate of Housing and Investment's progress on development of a proposed Acquisition, Disposal and Land Use Strategy
- b) shared with the Sub-Committee a 2-page summary, which set out the proposed content and direction for the strategy, in order that feedback from the Sub-Committee could be incorporated into strategy development
- c) invited members of Lincoln Tenant's Panel the opportunity to comment on the contents of the report at this meeting
- d) reported that the Council had a duty as a social housing landlord to demonstrate that its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) delivered value for money to its tenants
- e) described the Council's HRA, as one of the city's largest landowners; therefore, how it monitored its land and property assets had a significant impact on both the financial sustainability of the HRA, and the quality of our neighbourhoods
- f) explained that the proposed strategy would bridge the gap between these policies and the overarching Housing Revenue Account Business Plan by incorporating how the Council would repurpose under-utilised land in this strategy, it would also enable the Council to fully progress its plans to make better use of sites such as garages and other land types that could be redeveloped, or undergo other investment for the benefit of tenants and the HRA
- g) invited members comments on the summary of the proposed content for the forthcoming strategy as detailed at Appendix A to the officers report.

Members welcomed early consultation and involvement in the Acquisitions, Disposals and Land Use Strategy.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted.

41. Asset Disposal Policy Update

Michelle Hoyles, Housing Strategy Manager:

- a. provided an update to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the Directorate of Housing and Investment's progress on development of its Asset Disposal Policy, which sat underneath the strategy discussed within the previous agenda item

- b. shared with the Sub-Committee an extract from the current draft policy, at Appendix A, which listed the proposed considerations the Council would take into account when deciding whether to dispose of an HRA property asset
- c. advised that Lincoln Tenant's Panel had been consulted on this report and would be involved in greater depth, prior to the full Disposals Policy being presented to the Sub-Committee in early 2025
- d. reported that the Council's HRA was one of the city's largest landowners, and its primary landlord, would from time to time need to consider disposing of land and property in its ownership
- e. advised that to ensure disposals were considered and enacted consistently and in the best interests of tenants, the service was developing an Asset Disposal Policy, a draft policy was almost complete and would shortly undergo consultation, prior to referral to the Sub-Committee in early 2025
- f. reported that a key section of the policy, which proposed the considerations the Council would take account of when deciding whether to dispose of an asset was ready for circulation at this stage, and officers were seeking feedback from the Sub-Committee on this extract to inform the final draft of the policy
- g. highlighted that Appendix A consolidated and clarified the approach the Council already took to asset disposal, which was robust and supported the making of sound decisions about land in HRA ownership; having an Asset Disposal Policy enabled the Council to better demonstrate these decisions were consistent as well as robust, by providing a published framework for decision making
- h. welcomed members feedback on the content of the report.

Members discussed the report in further detail, commented, asked questions and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

Comment: Members of Lincoln Tenants Panel were looking forward to being involved in this piece of work next year, which was progressing well.

Question: Within the General Fund Account temporary accommodation had to be provided under a statutory obligation to pay for suitable accommodation for homeless people, although the full cost was not totally covered by Government contributions. Were we any further forward with dealing with this problem?

Response: The Housing Authority were actively looking at opportunities to renovate existing buildings and also use modular construction types (pod format). We were also looking at leasing opportunities with other housing providers to minimise cost and maximise the needs of households. The long-term solution was to provide people with a permanent home. This was not a quick process which needed to flow through longer-term housing solutions.

Question: Was it possible for plots of land across the city used for student accommodation to be used as temporary housing needs moving forward?

Response: We could make use of surplus student accommodation; however, it was not always suitable for families due to it having shared studio facilities.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted with further consultation welcomed in due course.

42. Downsizing Policy Update

Paula Burton, Assistant Director, Housing Management, provided a verbal update on the Draft Downsizing Policy, which covered the following main points:

- The Downsizing Pilot Scheme finished in June this year.
- Nine applications were received.
- Five applications had been approved.
- Two tenants had already moved homes.
- One move had been rescinded due to the condition of the property/tenancy issues.
- Another two had been approved but suitable accommodation was still being sought.
- Although two of the approved cases had still to either find a suitable property, or move to one, they had been offered the maximum amount of £18,500 that would be spent from the budget of £80,000.
- Of the cases approved, approximately. £6,500 would be used to clear arrears and other housing related debts.
- The amount of £61,500 remaining from the original budget allocation would support more tenants (beyond those originally identified as in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to move to a more suitable, manageable and affordable home, release more larger properties to relieve homelessness and clear significant arrears and other housing debts.
- The next steps for the Lincoln Tenant's Panel would be to have further meetings with officers involved in the process and co-produce an updated policy if the recommendation was for it to continue.
- The written version of the Downsizing Update report would be circulated to members via Democratic Services.

Members discussed and offered comments on the content of the verbal update as follows:

Comment: It was pleasing to hear that progress was being made, although regrettable that many households were not utilising or in need of the larger properties which they were living in. Lincoln Tenant's Panel was looking forward to working with officers to encourage tenants to downsize properties if this was the best option for them moving forward.

Question: Did we notify those tenants on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) that they were able to downsize and how long were the payments likely to continue?

Response: We already notified tenants in receipt of DHP. An invite would be extended to Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director, Shared Revenues and Benefits, who was responsible for administration of the payment to report into the next meeting with an update on the current scheme.

RESOLVED that:

1. The written version of the Downsizing Update report be circulated to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee via Democratic Services.

2. Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director, Shared Revenues and Benefits be invited to attend and report into Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 6 February 2025 with an update on the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme.
3. The content of the verbal update be noted with thanks.

43. Work Programme 2024/25

The Senior Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the work programme for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2024/25 as detailed at Appendix A of the report
- b. highlighted that the work programme could be further populated in accordance with Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committees requests for topics of discussion and areas of preferred scrutiny to be used as a working document, added to or amended at members discretion at any time during the 2024/25 Municipal Year
- c. confirmed that the work programme included those areas for scrutiny linked to the strategic priorities of the Council and themed housing matters, to ensure that the work of the committee was relevant and proportionate.

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel requested a wider review be conducted on estate inspections to cover issues such as fly tipping, accountability, Anti-Social Behaviour and wider area issues rather than just the condition of people's gardens and communal areas etc.

The Chair suggested that this topic area be included as an item for consideration at the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be held on 6 February 2025.

Officers agreed that a review of estate inspections was welcomed in this timely fashion as a place shaping initiative.

RESOLVED that the content of the Work Programme for 2024/25 be noted, subject to the following additional items to be included on the agenda for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be held on 6 February 2025:

- An update on Discretionary Housing Payments (Martin Walmsley)
- A wider estate inspections review.