

REPORT TO COUNCIL BY COUNCILLOR PETE WEST, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING

Thank you for the opportunity to present this annual report.

It is inevitable, but all matters relating to housing have been overshadowed by the horrific pictures of the Grenfell Towers fire and the tragic consequences. The ramifications from this will, I predict, last for many years and must include, at the very least, changes to the fire safety regulations as a whole but particularly as they relate to high rise buildings and their refurbishment.

Turning to the domestic field and initially the public sector.

There have been changes to the management structure with the appointment of Andrew McNeil as Assistant Director – Investment and Strategy. Andrew started at the beginning of the year and we hope it will be a long and fruitful relationship. This appointment will allow more focus on the delivery of our longer term programme.

Unfortunately, this appointment has been offset by the resignation, for personal reasons, of Karen Talbot. Thus we have to restart the search to fill the AD – Housing Management position. On a personal level I am very sorry to see Karen go, she has always been very supportive and helpful.

One of Karen's very successful pieces of work was to review and revamp our whole ASB procedures and then guide the Department through an assessment to achieve accreditation for the service. This came following a significant failure only two years previous.

On our programme to deliver more good quality housing we have made some real progress. In co-operation with Waterloo Housing alone we are in the process of delivering some 139 Council properties and 71 for the Housing Association across various site within the City. This rapid progress has been helped by the HA's ability to access some grant funding which would not be available to us. I have specifically mentioned Waterloo since their involvement is biggest but they are not the only ones we are engaged with on similar schemes.

The next major project is an ambitious scheme dubbed Queen Elizabeth Road but actually on the land to the rear of the Views on Ermine East. This is a scheme to deliver some 300+ properties of various types and tenures over a period of 4-5 years. This is very exciting but does present some challenges and is currently with the Planning Department for consideration.

On the other strand of our delivery methodology - the private housing company - the progress has been much slower but at long last there is some movement. The delay has been caused by the need to carry out due diligence on the legal and financial model proposed.

As previously reported, there has been a full viability assessment carried out at De Wint Court and it has been decided that it is no longer fit for purpose in the modern era. It was decided that to reconfigure the existing building was not viable and thus the decision was taken to demolish it. Since the building is now empty that will go ahead. The future proposal is to redevelop the site to include the Council's first Extra Care Facility, this will be a multi-million pound investment and may be done with some support from the County Council.

Following extensive consultations with the residents at the various sheltered units, work is ongoing to devise a scheme which is more responsive but tailored to their individual needs. It might also be a model which could be spread more widely across other groups with similar needs. One integral arm of any such scheme is likely to be our Emergency Call Centre. A further piece of good news on that front is that a consortium led by East Lindsey have been awarded the County contract for supporting people in their homes and as part of that it is proposed our call centre will be utilised. Turning to the more prosaic issue of performance figures - and there are plenty for this area - with the figures quoted being to the end of December.

A very challenging target of 2.15% was set for current tenant arrears. As is always the case there has been a significant drop in the arrears during December from 2.65% to 2.22%. It is thus anticipated that the year-end figure will not be too far from target. For tenants who suffer the bed-room tax the figure is somewhat higher at 3.07% but the rate is showing a general decline. The next major challenge is, of course, the effect full implementation of Universal Credit will have on these figures.

The re-let time for all voids during the month was 21.7 days with a year to date figure of 27.2 days against a target of 25 days. The figures excluding major works were 19.6 days and 21.5 days against a target of 20 days. We did have a problem in the early part of the year, partially due to issues with our then asbestos contractor, but the team have worked exceptionally hard to regain the position and November saw some of the best figures ever achieved - 18 days for all voids.

The repairs service continues to work well. All emergency repairs (some 750) and the reactive repairs (2390) were above target at 98.9% against the target of 97.5% with a running total for the year at 97.0%. The average time to taken for all reactive repairs in December was 5.4 days against a 8 day target and the right first time figure has exceeded the target of 90% for the last two months.

The number of homelessness applications is slightly down this month at 15 - this is perhaps to be expected - with a yearly total of 183. The numbers do seem to remain fairly stable except for the blip in September. The acceptance rate was significantly down this month at 45.8% but the figure for the year still runs at 72.7%. There were no cases in Bed and Breakfast during December and the average stay remains at 3.6 weeks against a target of 4 weeks for a family. Equally there were no cases in temporary accommodation and again the figure remains at 9.6 weeks against the 12 week target.

As mentioned previously, we achieved accreditation for our ASB system during the year. The figures continue to show that positive improvement with the percentage of cases resolved at over 99%, the time to resolve cases being within 62 days despite

this month's figure being above target and the percentage of cases being risk assessed being over target.

Allocations is, perhaps, the one area of some concern, there have been some staffing issues - even I have lost my 'go to' person. People have stepped up and done a valiant job but it still leaves that big gap and the loss of experience. Efforts are being taken to address this but getting appropriate experienced replacements is not always easy. In the short term the need to change some elements of the letting policy and the imminent introduction of new IT system will not help the position. The figure indicate there are 1653 live applications and the first time acceptance of offers is down to 75% for the year but the level of refusal due to the area or property not being suitable is surprising. The real difficulty is the registration of applications where only just over 25% are registered within the 10 day target and this is a good month and not typical of the year.

On the private sector front, we have seen the retirement of Alan Jones. He has been the mainstay of that department for many years and his experience will be sorely missed. Hannah Cann has taken over and she has a hard act to follow but will surely do that.

The Article 4 Directive for HMOs is through its self-registered stage and is now well into the implementation stage were all non-registered properties require planning permission. This has been handled well and efficiently despite some minor hiccups. Our Landlord Accreditation scheme is up and running but despite it being in its early stage the initial uptake has exceeded our expectations. We do realise that this is only likely to attract the better landlords to partake in the scheme.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Rogue Landlord initiative is now staffed up and will gather pace. As at the end of October there have been over 600 addresses visited and some 273 inspections – this is slightly down on expectations but may now be stepped up. The delay has been caused by the need to prepare paper for prosecutions. To date there has been 1 very successful prosecution with all the attendant publicity and there are others within the system.

We are also trialling a scheme with Gelders which could speed up the delivery of items required under Disabled Facilities Grants. There are still some teething issues but new are working together to overcome these. Even as I write this, we have received notification that we can use an underspend from the Better Care Fund to fit central heating systems for vulnerable persons within the private sector.

As most will know, this will be my last report and I thank members for their forbearance. Equally I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Officers, past and present, for their support and advice during my stewardship of this position.

Pete West
Portfolio Holder for Housing