

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR DONALD NANNESTAD, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR QUALITY HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

This is my first report as Portfolio Holder for Housing having taken office in May 2018. It has been all-change for housing with the previous director retiring and the appointment of Daren Turner who commenced work during October. In both our cases we have slightly different responsibilities to our predecessors. In my own case the Portfolio area now covers health as well as housing.

Since taking office the director and I have held a series of briefings with staff which has proved very informative particularly for me as it has helped me build up my knowledge of housing.

Housing is changing rapidly. Council housing is no longer housing of last resort and many private housing tenants in the city now aspire to be tenants of the City Council. Over the last 12 months we have added to our housing stock with the biggest increase in houses for at least 40 and possibly 50 years. Next year, 2020, sees the centenary of the first Council housing built in Lincoln and that gives us an opportunity to celebrate council housing and the important part it has played in the lives of many Lincoln people over the years.

I am looking for the department to build on the performance figures which we currently have achieved with the aim of reaching excellence. It should be recorded that the department has two nominations which have been short-listed for in the 2019 Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. Matt Hillman, the maintenance manager, is one of two City Council employees short-listed for the Rising Star category. This is a fantastic achievement for the Council to have two of the six short-listed candidates in a national award. In addition our supported housing service is shortlisted in the Public/Public Partnerships category along with the other Lincolnshire districts which form the consortium which delivers the Lincolnshire County Council Wellbeing Service.

The national scene as regards social housing is also changing. The decision of the Government to lift the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap means that we can now start planning to add even more properties to our stock. These are much needed as there continues to be a housing crisis in the city. In addition the inquiry into the Grenfell fire is likely to result in a number of changes in social housing in the future and we wait to see what these will be.

Finally I would like to thank staff for their hard work over the last year sometimes in very challenging circumstances. Many of the performance figures are excellent and that is down to the effort put in by the workforce.

HOMELESSNESS

Since April 2018, on average we have received 58.4 homelessness applications each month. These figures are significantly higher than the previous year due to the Homelessness Reduction Act changes which came into force in April 2018. Since the changes came into effect, we have successfully prevented 159 cases of homelessness and relieved 134 cases. At the end of December there were 10 cases in Bed and Breakfast and 8 cases in Temporary Accommodation. The average stay in Bed and Breakfast is 3.58 weeks against a target of 4 weeks and the average stay in Temporary Accommodation is 7.33 weeks against a target of 12 weeks.

Rough Sleeping has been identified as an emerging and significant issue within the city. Although our official Annual Count carried out on 1 November identified 26 rough sleepers which was two less than the 2017 annual count. However, anecdotally we are aware that there have been up to 40 people sleeping rough in the city from time to time.

A significant amount of resources have been obtained to deal with the issues of homelessness in the city.

During 2018 the City Council successfully bid for Government funding to tackle rough sleeping and have secured £376,747 for 2018/19 and a provisional allocation of £519,396 for 2019/20. This money has been utilised to recruit a Rough Sleeping Team within the council. The team consists of a Co-ordinator and two Housing Solutions Officers, plus a specialist Mental Health Nurse and an Addiction Worker. There is also an additional Street Outreach Worker based with the team at P3. We have also set up access to a Day Centre at the Nomad Centre and 15 units of supported accommodation for those with complex needs at The Cornerhouse run by Framework Housing Association.

In October 2018 a further funding round was announced by Government and in December we were advised that we have been selected as one of only 11 successful bids out of over 150 submitted. In this tranche of funding we have secured £110,438 for 2018/19 and a further £441,750 for 2019/20 for an assessment hub, two Support Planners, four Support Workers and additional temporary accommodation.

Since October we have housed 17 people into supported accommodation, six into accommodation in the private rented sector, reconnected five people to their home town, and dealt with 15 people leaving either hospital or prison with no suitable accommodation to go to. This is an excellent example of partnership working across a number of agencies within the city including the YMCA, P3, Framework Housing Association, Addaction, Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust and Lincolnshire County Council.

This is in addition to ACTion Lincs, the entrenched rough sleepers project for Lincolnshire, which has been funded under the Government Social Impact Bond. The City Council is now the lead authority for this project. This is a three and a half year programme launched in September 2017 with the intention of supporting 120 of the most entrenched rough sleepers using a housing first approach.

Strategically we have facilitated the progress of homeless move-on accommodation for LEAP. The housing strategy shows a need for self-contained accommodation in this area. We identified a site at Gaunt Street which the Council has given approval to dispose to LEAP for this purpose. Planning permission has been obtained and it is anticipated that building work will commence shortly.

TENANCY MANAGEMENT

The roll out of Universal Credit (UC) which began in the city in April 2018 has had a significant impact on the level of rent arrears owed by Council tenants and by Universal Credit claimants in particular. Housing Officers' workloads in dealing with UC tenants in rent arrears have risen proportionately, as many tenants in this situation present with varying levels of vulnerability and need support from our own officers and other agencies to have any chance of sustaining their tenancies. A challenge ahead is continuing to manage our rent arrear levels and achieve consistent rent collection despite the continued impact of the Universal Credit full service. At the end of December we had 973 UC claimants, of which 687 were in arrears. 47% of our total arrears are people claiming Universal Credit.

Tenant arrears currently stand at 2.47% (target 3.65%) with 99.83% of rent collected (target 98%)

The completion and letting of new-builds on several of our estates has led to increasing pressures on Housing Officers some of whom have had their workloads significantly increased.

It is acknowledged that more work needs to be done with applicants prior to them being offered a Council tenancy to ensure that they are prepared and in the best place to maintain their tenancy and to have effective support in place to assist them with this.

Tenancy Services continues to strive to maintain and improve on the high standards of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) service delivery which resulted in it being awarded Housemark Accreditation in early 2018. The figures to the end of quarter three (December 31) show that the average length of time to resolve ASB cases was 65.25 days (target 70 days). The number of new cases that have been risk assessed is 92.81% (target 90%). In addition 99.13% of cases that were closed were resolved (target 94%).

NEW BUILD/ALLOCATIONS

During 2018-19 the City Council will successfully complete 172 new Council homes. This is the largest increase in Council houses in Lincoln in a single year for over 40 years. Currently 138 of these properties have been completed and let with the remaining due to before the end of March. Given the demand for Council housing, and the fact that we have been losing between 60 and 70 homes a year through Right to Buy, it is important that we continue to identify sites for further Council housing. During the year outline planning permission was granted for 325 new homes on the Queen Elizabeth Road site which is land behind the Views on Ermine West some of which is

outside of the City Council boundary. The current intention is that the housing on this site will be a mix of tenures.

The number of live applications for Council properties currently stands at 978 which is a significant reduction. Some of this has been due to the number of new properties becoming available but the main factor is that there has been a review of the applications which has meant the removal of those who have shown no signs of activity. That means they have not logged on to the system, have not bid for any properties or have made no contact with the department.

The % of offers of tenancy which have been accepted first time have improved greatly during the year after a poor start. In April 2018, the first month of the current year, just 61.54% of tenancy offers were accepted first time but at the end of quarter three the figure was 83.73% compared to a target of 85%.

The target of 90% of applications becoming live on the system within 10 working days is not being met. Currently work is ongoing to restructure the housing solutions team and I expect the performance figures to show a dramatic improvement once this is completed.

HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Our annual housing improvement programme this year included the following works: kitchen and bathroom replacements, the installation of over bath showers, electrical improvements, roofing works, thermal comfort work, communal hard-standing improvements, replacement heating systems which also included a new communal heating system at Derek Miller Court.

In addition work started in October to replace the fire doors and door frames of flats in the Council's three multi-storey blocks and at Derek Miller Court and St Botolph's Court

Currently we have 188 (0.27%) non decent properties. 167 of these are due to tenants refusing the proposed works, and the remaining 21 properties are contained within the current works programmes and will be completed over the next few months. The completion of these 21 properties will mean that the target of nil non-decent properties (excluding refusals) will be met.

HOUSING REPAIRS

The housing repairs service continues to meet, and exceed, its targets. In the performance figures to 31 December 2018 100% of emergency repairs were completed within the target time (target 99.5%); 98.51% of reactive repairs were completed within the time target (target 97.5%); the average end-to-end time for all reactive repairs was 7.41 days (target 8 days); and 96.37% of tenants were satisfied with repairs and maintenance (target 95%). The first time fix rate was 93.57% (target 90%) which compares extremely well with recent years - 80.1% in 2015-16 and 86.1% in 2016-17.

The re-let time for all voids at the end of December was 28.4 days, against a target of 25 days. The number of void properties within the process has significantly increased due to the New Build Project and an increased amount of evictions taking place, which in turn has increased the workload and pressures on all areas within voids. Receiving offers on available properties from applicants is a contributing factor for the delay on the overall void time. Work is continuing within the Housing Solutions team to remedy the situation.

SUPPORTED HOUSING

Plans for an Extra Care facility on the site of De Wint Court have made considerable progress over the last few months. This will be our first Extra Care facility and will provide 70 one and two bed apartments with communal facilities including a restaurant, a hair salon, and a sensory garden. This was granted planning permission in December and we are now finalising the budget for the scheme and will be tendering for a delivery partner. The need for this project has been highlighted by the housing strategy and a which identified that Lincolnshire has the least provision in the country for Extra Care. This scheme has attracted funding from Homes England and Lincolnshire County Council

A review of our supported housing service is ongoing with consultation already having taken place with customers about possible changes to the way the service operates. The key changes proposed are to move to a more responsive mobile service and to upgrade the equipment on site to make best use of emerging technologies. Case studies are being produced to show how the changes will affect customers with differing support needs.

The Lincare control room is continuing to grow monitoring 6,500 customers across Lincolnshire with the aim that the service provided is cost effective and available to all. The key upcoming issues are the first inspection under the new Quality Standards Framework taking place during this month (January) and the development of plans to respond to the analogue to digital agenda due to be completed by 2025.

The percentage of alarm calls answered by the Control Centre within 60 seconds was 99.06 (target 97.5%). The percentage of support plans reviewed for sheltered housing residents was 97.65% (target 95%)

The City Council is also a key partner in the Lincolnshire Wellbeing Service which has been shortlisted in the Public/Public Partnerships category of 2019 LGC (Local Government Chronicle) awards. The contract to provide the service from 1 April 2018 was won by a consortium of the seven Lincolnshire district councils with East Lindsey as the lead bidder and managers of the scheme. The City Council's main role is in delivering the part of the contract which requires the wellbeing service to provide 24/7 telecare response services to anybody in the county who has a lifeline installed irrespective of who provides it.

CONCLUSION

Vision 2020, the Council's strategic plan, sets out a number of high level success outcomes for the quality housing portfolio. These include: i) Increasing the availability and provision of housing in Lincoln; ii) Improving the quality of both public sector and private sector homes; iii) Increasing the availability of supported housing for older people with high levels of need. This report, I believe, shows we are making significant progress in achieving these outcomes.

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