

Present: Councillors Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*), Liz Bushell, Christopher Reid, Edmund Strengiel, Pat Vaughan and Loraine Woolley

Apologies for Absence: None.

Also in Attendance: Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Steven Bearder (Member of LTP), Debbie Rousseau (Member of LTP) and Sheila Watkinson (Member of LTP)

51. Confirmation of Minutes - 12 August 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2019 be confirmed subject to the following change:

Councillor Nannestad's attendance to be recorded as a guest of the committee.

52. Matters Arising

Ermine A46 Pollution

The Committee discussed minute number 47 relating to complaints received about pollution on the Ermine area from the A46 bypass and advised that the trees had now been removed.

Daren Turner, Strategic Director Housing and Investment responded that the Pollution Control Officer had tested for noise and pollution when the Planning Application was submitted. The Planning Committee had determined that there was no issue and the application was granted. Since then the trees had been cut down along the A46 bypass. He suggested that he would raise this issue with Lincolnshire County Council.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP suggested that more tests be done on the area for noise and pollution. Darren Turner responded that he would speak to the Pollution Control Officer.

Housing Officers

The Chair referred to minute number 47 in relation to Housing Officer patches and explained that he had received a response from the Tenancy Services Manager advising that the details of the Housing Officer patches were available on the website. He further advised that Members would prefer to receive this information via email.

Daren Turner, Strategic Director Housing and Investment responded that the information could be circulated to all Members.

The Chair further stated that there needed to be more stability with the Housing Officers and patches that they covered so that residents knew who their Housing Officer was for their area. He suggested that a noticeboard be placed in all Communal areas within Council owned properties.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP advised that the Lincoln Tenants Panel had been doing some work to address this and suggested that he would bring a report to the next Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee on the work being undertaken.

Planned Works

The Chair referred to minute number 45 in relation to planned works for the forthcoming year being circulated to Members. Matt Hillman, Assistant Director of Investment had advised that he would circulate this information.

53. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

54. LTP Matters (Verbal Report)

Debbie Rousseau, Member of Lincoln Tenants Panel gave the following update:

- East Riding Council ran a scheme to support elderly, disabled and vulnerable people to live independently in their own home.
- Support included help and advice on managing money, downsizing and organising utilities etc.
- Currently Lincoln City Council did not offer a similar scheme so LTP were setting up a project to look into this.
- The first project meeting would be held next week and an update would be provided at the next Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

55. Customer Services Update (Verbal Report)

Jo Crookes, Customer Services Manager advised that she had been invited to attend this meeting to provide an answer to why the percentage of calls answered within 90 seconds was below target. She raised the following main points:

- 48% of calls received were answered within 60 seconds.
- The average call waiting time in September was 2 minutes and 49 seconds and the October statistics were very similar.
- There were currently vacancies within the Customer Services Team, it took time to train staff and for them to gain experience.
- There was a high rate of staffing changes as they often gained promotion and moved on to other areas within the Council, there had also been a number of retirements recently.
- Staff were working under very difficult circumstances and were doing the best that they could for the customers.
- The number of calls received were increasing for example last September 8308 calls were received compared to 10,645 calls received this September 2019.
- The team were also now taking Housing Solutions calls and had only 1 extra resource.
- The call length times were increasing, due to more complex calls, customers often had complex problems that took time to deal with.
- Customers were told their position in the queue and were offered a call back after 5 minutes.

- The team were frustrated as they felt that 2 minutes and 49 seconds was a reasonable amount of time for customers to wait compared to the waiting times of other companies.
- The priority was to deal with calls thoroughly rather than as quick as possible.

The committee discussed the matters raised and asked the following questions and received the relevant responses.

Question – Did the LTP have an input in setting the targets?

Response – Yes, they were consulted with.

Question – Was the target set too high?

Response – At the time it was felt that it was reasonable, however, we did not know that the number of calls would increase. For example Customer Services were now answering Elections phone calls due to the Election being called.

Question: Did the target need changing?

Response: A question about call waiting times had been included in a questionnaire to the Citizens Panel to find out how long customers thought was a reasonable time to wait for a call to be answered. Depending on the replies the target could be amended.

Question: Were calls passed to customer services when Officers were out of the office?

Response: Yes, Officers who were often out in the community diverted their calls through to Customer Services when they were away from the office.

Question: Were more staff needed?

Response: There was peak times when calls were received, if more staff were employed they would be busy during peak times but there would be quiet periods when they would have nothing to do. The team did the best job they could within the resources available.

Question: Were customers encouraged to go online?

Response: Yes we encouraged everyone who could go online and use email to do so.

Question: How long did customers have to wait for a call back?

Response: The phone system would keep the caller in the queue and call them back when it was their turn.

Question: How did tenants know that when they left a message with Customer Services for their Housing Officer that the message was being passed on?

Response: The tenant would be informed who their message had been emailed to. Generally it would not be followed up, except when a customer chased it up for not receiving a response, it would then be escalated to a Manager if necessary. Regular meetings were held between Customer Services and Tenancy Services to address any issues.

The committee discussed the system of a single point of contact for Members to raise enquiries. The Chair gave an example of where a Councillor used this system and had not received a response from the relevant Officer.

Following the meeting the Councillor concerned contacted Officers to advise that the example given at the meeting was incorrect and a swift response had been received to the enquiry.

RESOLVED that Jo Crookes to attend the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with the responses received from the Citizens Panel questionnaire.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing gave a verbal update on Homelessness, Action Lincs and Rough Sleeper Interventions and raised the following main points:

- Action Lincs had been established to support rough sleeping in Lincolnshire.
- There were 135 people rough sleeping in Lincolnshire and collectively they had spent 500 years on the streets.
- The scheme would provide accommodation and extensive support to assist this client group with independent living.
- The Council initially agreed to lease 15 properties to P3 but following further discussions it was agreed to lease 20 one bedroom properties throughout the City.
- P3 undertook all of the management of the properties.
- Council Officers regularly met with P3 to discuss any issues.
- There had been a few issues with low level Anti- Social Behaviour due to the chaotic nature of the client group. P3 had swiftly dealt with any issues that had arisen.
- Everyone had maintained their tenancies with the support of P3 and there had been no evictions.
- The project would end in 2021 and all being well they would become Council Tenants.

The committee were very supportive of the scheme and asked the following questions and received relevant responses:

Question: Had there been a reduction in the number of rough sleepers?

Response: The numbers of rough sleepers fluctuated depending on a number of things but currently the general trend was that the numbers were reducing.

Question: There were a lot of rough sleepers in Lincoln on a Friday and Saturday night. Did the Intervention Team only work during Office hours?

Response: The Intervention Team also worked weekends, they were engaging with the majority of rough sleepers in Lincoln. The people that were begging were not necessarily rough sleepers.

Question: Did the people taking part in the scheme have an affiliation with Lincoln?

Response: Yes it was one of the conditions of the scheme.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

57. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 - 2019/20

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing

- a. presented the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with an end of quarter report on performance for the second quarter of the year 2019/20 (July 2019 – September 2019)
- b. advised that of the 21 measures, 12 were on or exceeding targets for the year, 8 had not met the targets set and 1 did not have a required target.
- c. referred to paragraph 4 of the report and highlighted areas of good performance:

- Average Days to Resolve ASB Cases
 - Tenant Satisfaction with Repairs
- d. further highlighted areas that had not achieved their target and explained the reason for this:
- Average Re-Let Period – All Dwellings (Including Major Works) – (Days)
 - Arrears as a % of Rent Debit
- e. invited committees questions and comment.

Question: Referred to Performance Indicator 126 Arrears as a percentage of rent due and asked what was the target?

Response: The target was the same as last year at 3.65%

Question: Would the figure for the percentage of rent due reduce over the next quarter?

Response: Yes, everything possible was being done to minimise the impact of Universal Credit. Officers were confident that it would be below target by the end of the year.

Question: What support was being provided to help people who were affected by Bedroom Tax?

Response: Tenants could apply for Discretionary Housing Payments which would provide time for them to find alternative accommodation or a new job to increase income.

Comment: There was no support for people who were affected by Bedroom Tax and there were no properties available for people to downsize to.

Response: If tenants were working with the Council and trying to find alternative accommodation but there was none available, the DHP payments would continue. Information on properties available were provided and priority was given on the housing waiting list to those that needed to downsize.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

58. Tenancy Agreement

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing

- a. provided an update on the request by Members to introduce a shortened Tenancy Agreement that was easier for tenants to understand and refer to.
- b. referred to the shortened Tenancy Agreement at Appendix 1 of the report and advised that it had been shortened from 44 pages to 8 pages long.
- c. advised that the Tenancy Agreement was a legal document prescribed by law which meant that the agreement had to contain certain information.
- d. explained that the shortened version would be available on the website and would be easier to translate in to other languages or make available in large print.
- e. advised that the sign up procedures for new tenants would be considered and new arrangements would be established to ensure that new tenants were fully aware of their obligations as tenants and that they had the

support and guidance to help them sustain their tenancy.

- f. suggested that the shortened Tenancy Agreement be trialled and a report be brought back to a future meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee to include customer feedback.
- g. invited committees questions and comments

Question: Tenants were not given a copy of the Tenancy Agreement until they received the keys, how could they read it during this time?

Response: In future the shortened version of the Tenancy Agreement would be posted to the applicant when they agreed to take on a tenancy. The time taken between offer of the tenancy and sign up would be used to ensure that the tenant was aware of their obligations.

Question: Asked for clarification of where it stated that tenants must keep their gardens tidy?

Response: It was within Section 6 of the shortened Tenancy Agreement.

Question: Referred to Section 4 of the shortened Tenancy Agreement and asked if it would be better to say that Council Officers should always show their ID card?

Response: Yes this could be changed.

Question: Referred to Section 2 of the shortened Tenancy Agreement and asked how the storage of mobility scooters in communal areas was enforced?

Response: The tenant would be given a period of time to remove it from the communal area. If a tenant chose to purchase a mobility scooter they would be required to have somewhere to store it. If a tenant needed a mobility scooter for a medical reason the Council would have to provide storage.

RESOLVED that

1. the contents of the report be noted.
2. a report on the 6 month trial of the shortened Tenancy Agreement including customer feedback be scheduled into the work programme for 6 months' time.
3. the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy be scheduled into the work programme for January 2020.

59. Annual Report to Tenants 2018/19

Chris Morton, Resident Involvement Manager

- a. presented the draft Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders 2018/19 for comments.
- b. advised that there was a requirement by Homes England to produce and submit an annual report to tenants and leaseholders each year.
- c. advised that the annual report had been developed in consultation with tenant representatives through the Lincoln Tenants Panel and the Editorial Panel.
- d. highlighted the theme and content of the Annual Report:
 - Successes achieved by housing and to report performance information for 2018/19.

- To celebrate the communities in Lincoln.
- e. advised that the annual report when published would help to deliver the councils strategic priority of 'Lets deliver quality housing'. The report provided performance information to tenants to allow them to see how well the Council had performed as their Landlord. It then allowed tenants to use the information to challenge the Council and hold to account.

The committee supported the contents of the report.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be approved.

60. Work Programme Update 2019/20

The Chair

- a. presented the work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee for 2019/20 as detailed at Appendix A of the report.
- b. advised that this was an opportunity for the committee to suggest other items to be included on the work programme.

The Chair requested that an update on Resident Involvement be scheduled into the work programme.

RESOLVED that

1. the work programme be noted.
2. The following reports be scheduled into the work programme
 - Resident Involvement Update
 - Shortened Tenancy Agreement Customer Feedback
 - Tenancy Sustainment Strategy
 - Housing Officer Areas – Report from LTP