

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)

61. Confirmation of Minutes - 4 November 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 be confirmed.

62. Matters Arising

Ermine A46 Pollution

Daren Turner, Strategic Director Housing and Investment gave an update on minute number 52 in relation to the complaints received about pollution on the A46 bypass where trees had been removed. He advised that he had spoken with the Highways Manager for the area who had confirmed that work would be undertaken on the A46/A15 junction on the roundabout to include additional lanes. The Highways Officer had offered to attend a future meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee to answer any questions, however the committee did not feel that it was necessary at this time.

The environmental impact had been considered by the Pollution Control Officer who had advised that although pollution levels were higher than he would like to see they still remained within the parameters. Acoustic fences had been installed at the properties which backed on to the road to reduce the noise. Also the shrubs that had been removed would not have made a difference to noise levels, however, the psychological impact of greenery could be that people perceived it to be less noisy.

Mick Barber the Chair of LTP advised that some resident involvement work was being undertaken in the area affected and he would like to speak to residents on this matter to find out their views. He would report back to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

Housing Officers

The Chair referred to minute number 52 and advised that a list of the Housing Officers and their patches had been circulated to all members. Within a month another list had been circulated with changes, there needed to be more stability with Housing Officers.

Notice Boards

Daren Turner, Strategic Director of Housing and Investment referred to minute number 52 and advised that a range of options had been looked at. There were

750 blocks of flats, to place a notice board in each block it would cost £48,600 for the noticeboards plus labour to install them, it would cost a total of £78,000. Another option was to install 1 noticeboard outside each block of flats.

The Chair commented that he thought that the noticeboards should go ahead as they could include details of Housing Officers, fire procedures and cleaning records.

63. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

64. LTP Matters (Verbal Report)

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel gave the following update:

Noticeboards

- Noticeboards had been discussed at the Allocations and Tenants meetings.
- There was an average of 680 noticeboards needed.
- The Green paper stated the information on fire points would be required but they were still waiting for the white paper to be published.
- There was currently no information available for fire points.
- LTP would like to run a pilot notice board in the Cannon Street area.
- The Council's Caretakers could install the noticeboards which would reduce labour costs.
- Residents felt that these should have been installed a while ago.
- The communal areas in the flats needed to be cleared.

Housing Officers

- LTP would like to see a breakdown of which Housing Officer covered which area and what they were responsible for.

Keeley Johnson, Tenancy Services Manager responded that there had been a number of Housing Officer staffing issues recently including long term sickness, secondments and maternity leave. The Housing Officers did provide a consistently good service. The team would be back up to full resources shortly.

Lincoln Tenants Panel

- Jo Crookes, Customer Services Manager had been invited to attend the next LTP meeting regarding the call answering times.
- The panel would be supporting a change in the target for the call answering time.
- The Moving Policy would be going to the next LTP meeting.

65. Update on Housing Officers - Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel (Verbal Report)

This item was discussed under LTP matters.

66. Tenancy Sustainment (Verbal Report)

Keeley Johnson, Tenancy Services Manager gave a verbal update on Tenancy Sustainment and raised the following main points:

- Tenancy Sustainment was a key priority for the authority.
- With the continued changes to the welfare system it was important to help tenants sustain their tenancy.
- The Council had an eviction protocol which meant that eviction was only used as a very last resort.
- New tenants would be visited within the first week of moving into a property. This would provide an opportunity to welcome the tenant and provide advice on sustaining their tenancy.
- A vulnerability survey would take place at the beginning of the tenancy.
- Officers were looking at resources to see if they could be allocated to set up a separate Tenancy Sustainment Team.
- The Tenancy Sustainment Team would specialise in providing advice on benefits etc and assist people with sustaining their tenancy.

The committee discussed the verbal update and raised the following main points:

Comment: The new systems were working as the Housing Appeal Panel were being held much less often than previously.

Response: Issues were being addressed before they reached a point where they needed to go to a Housing Appeals Panel.

Question: Why was helping people to downsize not a priority?

Response: It was a priority, Officers tried to approach this in a holistic way which included visiting tenants and explaining the benefits of moving, however, people could not be made to move if they did not want to.

Question: What support was available for people who wanted to downsize?

Response: Housing Officers, Allocations and Welfare Officers could all provide advice and support to those tenants who wanted to downsize.

Question: Would tenants still be charged spare room subsidy if they proved that they were actively trying to move house?

Response: It was clear in legislation that there would be a reduction in Housing Benefit if there was one or more spare room. Tenants could make an application for Discretionary Housing Payments.

Question: When were prospective tenants taken through the tenancy agreement?

Response: Currently they received a copy of the Tenancy Agreement when they signed up. However this was not ideal and was being changed so that they received a copy of the Tenancy Agreement when they were allocated a property. They would then have time to read it between allocation and sign up.

Question: How many Housing Assistant posts were there?

Response: There were 3 posts.

Question: Could more visits take place?

Response: Housing Officers were regularly out on the Estates, however, tenants had the right to peaceful enjoyment of their homes.

The Strategic Director of Housing and Investment explained that there was currently a lot of work being undertaken to help tenants sustain their tenancies. Officers were considering setting up workshops for new tenants to provide support and to signpost tenants to access services. The aim was to provide every opportunity to assist tenants.

The Tenancy Services Manager added that nationally there had been large cuts to the advice and support sector. The Council wanted to be approachable, empathetic and to help tenants keep their tenancies.

The Chair commented that it was important to measure how well the Authority was achieving in this area and suggested that some Performance Indicators be included in next year's targets.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

67. Housing Planned Works (Verbal Report)

The Chair explained that the Committee had previously asked for the planned works for the forthcoming year be circulated to all members for information. He confirmed that members had received this information and asked why the planned works had been changed since the beginning of the year?

Kevin Bowring, Maintenance and Investment Manager presented the data from the Asset Management System. He gave an example of kitchen and bathroom installations and explained that the data dealt with 'on average' figures assuming that all kitchens and bathrooms needed to be replaced after 20 years. He further explained that this may not be the case as on inspection the kitchens or bathrooms may not need to be replaced if they had been looked after. Also, throughout the year tenants would report faults with their kitchen or bathroom, the process was that an inspection would take place and they would either be repaired or if necessary replaced which would be added to the planned works. The planned works would be constantly updated throughout the year.

The Chair commented that the budget had been significantly reduced since the beginning of the year and asked why the money had been taken out of the planned works budget?

The Assistant Director of Housing explained that the initial planned works programme was set at the beginning of the year, it was then tweaked and altered throughout the year. He explained that money would be reallocated if there was any left in the budget due to a number of reasons. He advised that this could be due to the work that was expected to be completed at the beginning of the year but was then found to not be needed which meant there was money left over. He clarified that this did not mean that less work was being completed, as the money was only reallocated once all of the necessary work had been completed.

RESOLVED that the verbal report be noted.

68. 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 committee to suggest other items to be included on the work programme.

The Chair requested that the following reports be scheduled into the work programme:

- Tenancy Agreement update
- A breakdown in expenditure between repairs/maintenance and Management.

RESOLVED that

1. the work programme be noted.
2. the following reports be scheduled into the work programme
 - Tenancy Agreement update
 - A breakdown in expenditure between repairs/maintenance and Management