

Present:	Gary Hewson (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Pat Vaughan, Liz Bushell, Christopher Reid, Edmund Strengiel and Loraine Woolley
External Representatives:	Mick Barber, Steven Bearder, Caroline Coyle-Fox and Debbie Rousseau
Also Present:	Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing
Apologies for Absence:	Sheila Watkinson, LTP Member

97. Confirmation of Minutes - 2 November 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2020 be confirmed.

98. Matters Arising

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP noted that due to Sheila Watkinson LTP Member having Wi-Fi connection issues, she would be represented by Caroline Coyle-Fox Vice Chair of LTP at meetings for the meantime.

99. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

100. LTP Matters

Caroline Coyle Fox, Vice Chair of LTP updated Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee on a pilot proposal to erect a noticeboard on Winn Street, off Monks Road to improve communications between tenants and the Council. The notice board would include key messages for example on housing officer contacts, block cleaning, fire regulations, and LTP information.

The notice board would be A2 in size and lockable to meet fire safety regulations. The pilot would last for 3 months, followed by a resident's survey by LTP to assess its effectiveness with the potential for the scheme to be extended to other parts of the city.

Concerns were raised by the Director of Housing and Investment in relation to lack of funding available for noticeboards in this year's Housing budget.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP agreed to withdraw this proposal until further notice pending further discussions on funding streams.

101. LTP Grass Verge Survey Proposal

Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), and Caroline Coyle-Fox (Vice Chair of LTP):

- a. presented members of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with a report initially presented to Policy Scrutiny Committee on 24 November 2020 raising concerns that tenants were parking their cars on grass verges in city estates
- b. advised that all estates in Lincoln suffered from a lack of parking space available for cars, this caused a number of issues including blocked roads, junctions and parking on grass verges
- c. referred to paragraph 2.3 of their report explaining the number of different solutions to address the problem and advised that before any solutions were decided, an equality and diversity impact assessment would be carried out as part of the options appraisal
- d. reported on a pilot survey proposed by LTP on Hartsholme to gain a better understanding as to the scale of the problem and capture residents' views on possible solutions
- e. added that the survey could possibly be extended into other areas of the City if it was successful
- f. highlighted the questions that the survey aimed to answer as detailed at paragraph 3 of the report.
- g. reported on the 3 main methods to be used as part of the consultation:
 - An online survey advertised through Facebook but conducted through the City of Lincoln Council's website
 - Postal surveys sent out if a low response rate was received from online surveys
 - Zoom calls with residents conducted by LTP as part of a public meeting
- h. advised that the LTP would consult with residents of Hartsholme Estate and other local stakeholders such as local schools and the police
- i. advised that the next steps following the survey would be to report the results back to Policy Scrutiny Committee once collated and analysed
- j. invited member's questions and comments.

Members discussed the survey proposals in further detail. The following comments emerged:

- Comment: A hard standing for residents' cars had been installed in Woodfield Avenue, Birchwood which was a great improvement compared to Dellfield Avenue just around the corner where unsightly grass verge rutting could be viewed for 100's of yards.
- Comment: It was doubtful what the survey would achieve as the potential solutions were already outlined within the report. An online survey would not be truly representative of public opinion.
- Comment: Parking on grass verges was a real issue across the city. Warning notices should be issued then vehicles towed away that didn't take heed.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP emphasised that parking on verges on council estates in terms of risk to health and safety was a long established problem which was in need of attention. LTP members did not have all the answers however the survey was the most it could do at the present time due to the pandemic.

LTP members asked whether there were any available funds to address the issue of people parking on grass verges.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment advised that the Council had resorted to fencing off areas with bad parking problems in the past although there were no specific pots of capital money available. The proposal to hold a survey in Hartsholme was a good data finding exercise to understand the level of responsibility communities would like to see, data which members could then evaluate.

Members highlighted that the Highways Authority were happy to install dropped kerbs to people's properties if they were willing to fund the cost themselves, which was an option.

Daren Turner added that the City Council would offer financial assistance for dropped kerbs to people with disabilities under the aids and adaptations budget.

RESOLVED that members of LTP would discuss options to address issues of parking on grass verges further with Chris Morton, Resident Involvement Manager in order to seek a majority view regarding any potential further action.

102. Verbal Update-Cleaning of Communal Areas-Covid Restrictions

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director, Housing gave a verbal update as requested at the last meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee on the cleansing of communal facilities within the Council's Sheltered Accommodation during Covid-19, covering the following main points:

- A cleansing regime had now been reintroduced, following advice taken from the Corporate Health and Safety Team.
- Guidance and work practices had been reviewed to enable the full cleaning of communal areas on a 6-8 week cycle.
- There had been no complaints received about the cleanliness of communal areas.
- Requirements for any additional cleansing needs were discussed between the caretakers and Keeley Johnson, Tenancy Services Manager.
- Keeley and Mick Barber would carry out spot checks of communal areas in future months.

RESOLVED that the content of the verbal update be noted.

103. Update on Housing Service Status

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment introduced an update on the current housing service status due to the pandemic, covering the following main points:

- The Housing Directorate was committed to continued provision of services.

- Despite being in a difficult situation due to recent further restrictions imposed due to Covid-19, service delivery had been reasonably successful, balanced against the safety of residents and our own workforce.
- The service tried to abide by the Government ethos to stay at home where possible.
- Top line PPE equipment was issued to all staff working in a mobile environment.
- There had been few outbreaks of Covid in City Hall although there were staff self isolating which caused issues.
- It was excellent news that key workers at the authority would be tested for Covid regularly to ensure their safety and that of others.
- Progress and performance were both going well under very difficult circumstances.
- There were no plans to furlough staff at the current time.

Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director, Strategy and Investment:

- a. presented a report to update Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee on the current services provided by the Directorate for Housing and Investment, taking into account the restrictions required in response to the current national lockdown requirements as a consequence of Covid-19
- b. highlighted that in advance of government restrictions in which local authorities in England had been moved into Tier 4 in December 2020, the scope of services that could be delivered had been further reviewed taking into account potential increases in Covid response restrictions
- c. advised that this preparation had enabled a swift move by Housing Services to the current lockdown requirements and in all cases had looked to maintaining service delivery in a way within the current government requirements to ensure the safety of residents and staff.

Each Assistant Director reported on the current service status within their own key housing areas as detailed within paragraphs 3-5 of the report as follows:

- Assistant Director Investment, Matt Hillman
- Assistant Director of Strategy and Investment, Andrew McNeil
- Assistant Director of Housing, Yvonne Fox

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail. Questions/comments were raised which received officer responses as follows:

- Comment: The new homes at Markham House were brilliant.
- Response: Thank you for your comments. Member input had been invaluable in shaping the final design of the build.
- Question: How was the Covid Testing facility at Sincil Bank funded?
- Response: The Covid-Testing station project was paid for by the Government through public health.
- Question: The work of housing repair staff formally at Sincil Bank Covid testing station, and now at Croft Street Community Centre was magnificent. Was the cost for these projects repatriated to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)?

- Response: Yes indeed. Staff had not been involved in the physical set up of the testing stations. Supplies used during testing would be recharged to SERCO.
- Question: Looking at the Strategic Housing Function to deliver Next Steps move-on accommodation for rough sleepers; would the properties purchased belong to the HRA or be part of a separate scheme?
- Response: The Next Step homes would be HRA properties. Funding would be received in the form of grants for each property and the rent paid for by the properties. There was also revenue funding available to help. The accommodation would be self-funding. Adequate income would be available to deliver our own repairs under the HRA. These would be predominantly one bedroomed flats for rough sleepers and occupants would not receive full Council tenancies due to the homes being temporary accommodation only.
- Question: Did the authority plan to retain blue collar apprentices?
- Response: The housing service still has apprentices, although there had not been any further recruitment due to Covid. The contracts of those apprentices due to finish in October 2020 were extended until Christmas 2020. The authority encouraged apprentices to apply for any vacancies and would advertise when vacant posts became available.
- Question: How long were voids properties empty during the current pandemic before being re-let?
- Response: The properties should be vacant for 72 hours, although the City Council carried out an enhanced cleaning regime to reduce the timescale to 48 hours.
- Question: In terms of supported housing visits, where was the line drawn between emergency visits which were continuing during the pandemic and non-emergency visits temporarily suspended?
- Response: Each case was assessed on individual merits together with knowledge and history held regarding the tenant's need. For example, if a tenant fell and injured themselves and did not have family members to wait with them for an ambulance, our staff would attend.

RESOLVED that the content of the report and discussions held be noted.

104. Sustainment Report

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director, Housing/Keeley Johnson, Tenancy Services Manager:

- a. presented a report to update Members on the current position regarding the sustainment of tenancies, which continued to be a key priority for City of Lincoln Council with an increased need to provide tenants with essential support and guidance in light of the Covid-19 pandemic
- b. advised that there had been a continued reduction in income for many tenants with ongoing reductions in welfare benefits and an increase in zero hours contracts together with added financial difficulties of Covid-19 meaning that those people not only unemployed but in low paid employment faced significant challenges trying to sustain a tenancy
- c. reported that prior to the national government ban on evictions at the start of the pandemic the City of Lincoln Council had made a very clear promise not to evict any tenant due to Covid-19 where an individual was engaging;

evictions had already halved in the 2019/20 financial year with a significant emphasis placed on multi-agency working to keep tenants in their homes

- d. presented figures on the current position regarding sustainment of tenancies and government assistance available as detailed at paragraph 3.1-3.3 of her report
- e. reported further on several measures that had been put in place as a local authority to support tenants covering the following areas:
 - Rent Free Weeks
 - Discretionary Rental Hardship Payment Fund
 - Befriending Service
 - Community Helpline
 - Early Intervention
 - Communications
- f. advised on the development of the Sustainment Team now approved with the pre-tenancy process completed in preparation for recruitment of the team hopefully in the next six months as detailed at paragraph 4 and Appendix A to the report
- g. highlighted that the Allocations/Voids and Tenancy teams had worked together to develop this new streamlined and effective support mechanism to help tenants particularly in the first three months of their tenancies
- h. added that the authority was also in the process of working with external agencies to provide a furniture donation service
- i. requested that members note the actions taken to support tenants in order to improve levels of tenancy sustainment.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

The following discussions took place:

- Question: How did the council recover charges for under occupancy in cases of tenants struggling due to having lost their jobs during Covid or on zero hours contracts?
- Response: The housing service would normally look at moving those tenants to more suitable accommodation but this was not possible during the pandemic. Working with welfare advice officers made sure all eligible benefits had been applied for. If it was the case that Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) was not applicable in a particular circumstance the authority would meet the full charge for over occupancy until the end of Covid. The Tenancy Support Team had assisted with over 100 applications for DHP in the last few months. It wanted to maintain tenancies for those people engaging and help as many people as possible on a case by case basis.

Staff had also helped to claim welfare payments under the severe disability premium project amounting to £309,000 backdated into claimants' bank accounts. This benefit was frequently under claimed.

- Question: Was the Sustainment Team only available to Council tenants?
- Response: The initiative was extended to NK and city wide. A working group was already active made up of the Allocations/Tenancy and Homelessness Teams, so that once the Sustainability Team was set up it could hit the ground 'running'. A press release would be made as soon as this was possible.
- Question: How did the Sustainability Team operate?
- Response: The Tenancy Sustainability Team was open to all tenants although not all tenants needed it. Tenants that hit the vulnerability criteria were offered help automatically. It was also particularly helpful for new tenants. People required different levels of support. No tenant would be threatened with eviction before first being supported by a Tenancy Officer and offered free legal advice.
- Question: This initiative was very welcomed. Would the team be able to manage success in terms of performance?
- Response: Yes there were key performance indicators in place for the Sustainability Team e.g. level of support/cost of evictions reducing/ average level of debt/ number of referrals/customer satisfaction. Happier tenants made for happier communities which aided income collection and a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED that the content of the report and members comments be noted with thanks.

105. Work Programme Update 2020-21

The Chair

- a. presented the work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee for 2020/21 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.

RESOLVED that

1. The content of the work programme be noted.
2. The following reports be scheduled into the work programme
 - Update on delivery costs being repatriated to HRA from NSAP scheme
 - Setting of Performance Targets: 2021/22.

106. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of exempt or confidential information.

107. Performance Update-Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing:

- a. advised members on the current performance of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Teams, which was particularly challenging during the current Covid-19 pandemic
- b. reported on continued prioritisation of homeless households and former rough sleepers for accommodation in line with Government guidance as detailed at paragraph 2.3 of the report
- c. highlighted that as at 11 January 2021 there was nobody sleeping out in the city
- d. detailed the current position in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping at paragraph 3 of her report
- e. reported on anticipated challenging times ahead for the teams during quarter 4 as detailed at paragraph 4 of her report
- f. requested that members note the current position relating to homelessness and rough sleeping.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

108. Rents Report

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director for Housing:

- a. updated member of the current position regarding the collection of rent and rent arrears at the end of Quarter 3 31 December 2020, as detailed at paragraph 3.2 of her report
- b. outlined next steps to maximise rent collection and minimise rent arrears as detailed at paragraph 4 of her report
- c. requested Members' comments and feedback.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.