

- Present:** Councillors Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*), Liz Bushell, Christopher Reid, Edmund Strengiel, Pat Vaughan and Loraine Woolley
- Apologies for Absence:** Steven Bearder, Debbie Rousseau and Sheila Watkinson
- Also in Attendance:** Mick Barber (Chair of LTP)

**83. Confirmation of Minutes - 7 September 2020**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2020 be confirmed.

**84. Matters Arising**

The Chair referred to minute number 81 and asked for an update on the communal facilities within the Councils Sheltered Accommodation.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing advised that the situation had changed since the last meeting due to the increase in Covid-19 cases. Therefore the communal areas were unable to open for safety reasons.

The Chair asked if the cleaning regimes could be increased within the communal areas within flats?

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing advised that at the start of the pandemic the cleaning of the communal areas in low rise flats had stopped on the advice of Health and Safety. Since then cleaning had re-started however, to keep staff safe they were not allowed to brush or mop as Covid -19 was an airborne virus. The guidance would be closely monitored and the full cleaning regime would be resumed once allowed to do so.

The Chair commented that everyone should be made aware of this, Members had received complaints regarding the cleanliness of the communal areas.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing advised that messages had been displayed on the intranet as well as Facebook to explain why the communal areas had not been cleaned.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP asked if tenants were aware that they should not be brushing or mopping the communal areas?

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director – Housing confirmed that she would find out what advise had been provided to tenants and she would report back .

**85. Declarations of Interest**

In the interest of transparency Councillor L Bushell stated that a member of her family was currently looking to become a tenant of the Council. She left the virtual meeting during the discussion on the item entitled “Voids”

**86. LTP Matters**

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP presented a report to update committee on the activities of the Lincoln Tenants Panel. He gave an overview of the following:

- The proposed new structure of the Lincoln Tenants Panel
- A scrutiny review of gardens
- LTP members had taken part in the judging of the garden competition and have selected the winners
- Carried out an estate inspection to check the work being undertaken and hear about plans for the seasons work at the Hospital Plantation land in Birchwood which was maintained by Hill Holt Wood.
- LTP were looking to build a closer bridge between the Birchwood Neighbourhood Board and Hill Holt Wood.
- A parking survey would be carried out on the Hartsholme Estate to assess the scale of parking on grass verges and what sort of solutions tenants would like to see.
- At the next LTP meeting the restarting of Estate Inspections would be discussed.
- Requested an update report on Tenancy Sustainability be brought to a future meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director Housing of Housing responded that an update on tenancy sustainability would be provided as part of the Performance update, but if further information was required then a report could be provided early in the new year.

Members commented on the fantastic work that had taken place at the Hospital Plantation Land at Birchwood.

The Chair referred to parking on grass verges and expressed concern that the majority of houses in the Hartsholme area were privately owned and suggested that if the money was coming from the Housing Revenue Account then would it be better to look at an area that were mostly tenants of the Council.

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP responded that the area had been chosen at random and voted on by LTP. The project would be undertaken and if it went well it could be rolled out across the City.

RESOLVED that

- 1.) the report be noted.
- 2.) an update report on Tenancy Sustainability be provided at a future meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

## **87. Our Befriending Service During COVID-19**

Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood Manager – Sincil Bank:

- a) presented Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with a report on the Befriending Service that was set up during the Covid19 lockdown in Lincoln with the following aims to be achieved by the service:
  - A trusted service to support those who were most isolated in our communities

- A service that would provide mutual benefits for our customers and our staff
- Effective working with our signposting service, created to aid and support organisations to deliver vital help to those most in need.

b) explained what had been achieved:

- There was a peak of over 500 people using the service during May
- 54 befrienders from across the council's workforce were deployed to make calls
- Over 18,000 people across the city were contacted to see if they wanted calls

c) highlighted that:

- The Befriending Service positively impacted almost every person who was involved.
- Residents and staff were more connected, had support when they wanted and needed it, and above all – were listened to when they felt they had no-one to talk to.
- Whilst our intention was for light-hearted conversation to ease the potential loneliness of lockdown, we could never have anticipated the friendships and meaningful conversations that were created as a result of the befriending service.

d. invited Members questions and comments

Members commented on the fantastic work undertaken on this project.

The Chair asked if those people who had wanted to continue receiving calls had been followed up.

Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood Manager responded that everyone who wanted to continue receiving calls had been transferred to one of the third sector partners which were Age UK, YMCA/ Community Lincs or Assist.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

## **88. Quarter 2 (2020/21) - Performance and Finance Report (To Follow)**

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 2020/21 (July 2020 – September 2020)
- b. advised that of the 21 measures, 10 were on or exceeding targets for the year, 6 had not met the targets set and 5 indicators were currently not available.
- c. referred to paragraph 4 of the report and highlighted areas of good performance:
  - Arrears as a % of rent debit
  - % of rent collected as a percentage of rent due

- d. further highlighted areas that had not achieved their target and explained the reason for this:
- % of homes with valid gas safety certificate
  - Voids – a separate report was provided and considered later in the meeting.
- e. advised that performance in relation to allocations, repairs and ASB were all performing well despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and demonstrated how well the service and its staff teams had responded and supported tenants.
- f. invited committees questions and comment.

**Question:** A report to Audit Committee showed that the number of complaints received in this area had increased substantially and asked for the reason why?

**Response:** The target of 10 working days to respond to complaints was a locally agreed target with the Lincoln Tenants Panel. There was not a target for responding to complaints corporately. All complaints were different and some took longer to respond to than others. The 10 working day target needed to be considered to see if it could be realistically achieved and would need to be discussed with the Lincoln Tenants Panel. It would be better to measure an average time taken to deal with complaints. The level of complaints had decreased in quarter 1 and quarter 2 of this year. We needed to clarify where the numbers reported to Audit committee had come from.

The Chair requested that a verbal update on complaints be provided at the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

**Question:** Would the tenants with a large amount of arrears be supported?

**Response:** Yes, we work very closely with the tenants who would engage to support them wherever we can. Action would need to be taken for those tenants who would not engage. The moratorium for evicting tenants with arrears was coming to an end. We do not want to evict people and would provide all of the support that we could before action would be taken.

RESOLVED that

1. the report be noted
2. a verbal report on Complaints be provided at the next Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

## 89. Voids

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing

- a) presented an update to provide information relating to the current number of void properties and the time taken to let void properties.

- b) advised that as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 there were 65 properties in the void process and highlighted which stage of the repairs or lettings procedure each property was at, as detailed at Appendix A of the report.
- c) advised that of the 65 properties:
- 37 were in the repairs process
  - 28 were in the early void stages (lock change, asbestos check, cleansing or works ordering)
  - 16 were ready to let
- d) advised that of the 16 ready to let:
- 4 supported living properties had no one place bids on them
  - All of the other properties that were ready to let had bids on them and they were currently in the process of signing up.
- e) referred to the table at Appendix A of the report and advised that it provided details of keys that were due in and the property types, and also provided details of the number of days taken to let properties from April to September 2020.
- f) explained that due to Government Directives regarding the allocation of properties and operational constraints relating to repairing properties, it was difficult to effectively monitor the re-let times using the normal targets.
- g) invited members questions and comments

**Comment:** Referred to the overall void time and commented that 50.4 days was a significant increase.

**Response:** It was difficult at the moment to complete all of the repairs as quickly as normal due to the supply chain being affected by Covid-19. Senior Officers were holding weekly meetings to monitor each property in the voids process and to identify any issues that needed rectifying. The overall target would not be met by year end, however, it was expected to see an improvement month on month.

**Question:** Were any safety precautions put in place for viewing properties?

**Response:** Yes guidance was being followed for example all doors were opened prior to visits so that they did not have to touch door handles, officers did not go into the property with the prospective tenant. If the property was refused it would be re-cleaned. Very few people were refusing properties at the moment which meant that the offer accepted first time target had seen an improvement.

**Question:** What was the cost in money terms of voids properties?

**Response:** It was different at the moment due to the pandemic, there was not the usual availability of materials due to the supply chain being affected. The number of workers allowed to work on a property at the same time was also currently reduced. Some decent homes work had been completed and the quality of the kitchen units etc had been improved, this would mean that they would last longer.

The Chair requested that a report reflecting the costs of voids be brought to a future meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.