

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Pat Vaughan

Also in Attendance: Councillor D Nannestad, Portfolio Holder, Quality
Housing.

15. Confirmation of Minutes - 23 June 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2021 be confirmed.

16. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

17. LTP Matters

Mick Barber, Chair of LTP advised on the activities of Lincoln Tenant's Panel as follows:

- Estate Inspections were currently being undertaken. He would bring an update back to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee the meeting after next.
- Mutual Exchanges Lincoln Tenants Panel wished to revisit the Mutual Exchange Policy to see if it needed any tweaks.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director, Housing highlighted that the Mutual Exchanges Policy was set down in law. People could apply if they met the criteria and could not be refused. The only discretion within the Council's control concerned repairs.

Mick Barber advised that there were some alterations to repairs etc which required addressing within the policy and requested a report be presented to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

18. Other Matters

Councillor Hewson, Chair, asked why Housing Appeals Panel had not met for a good length of time.

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director, Housing advised that Housing Appeals Panel was still available to be called as required, however, the Council had not been serving notices of evictions due to Covid 19 regulations imposed by the Government and currently the need had not arisen.

19. Performance Monitoring Report - Quarter 1 2021/22

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing:

- a. provided Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with a quarter one report on Performance Indicators for the 2021/22 financial year (April 2021- June 2021), as detailed at Appendix A

- b. advised that of the 21 measures, 8 were on or exceeding targets for the year (year-end), 10 had not met the targets set and 3 indicators were currently not available at the time of this report
- c. highlighted that of the 10 measures that did not meet the target, 2 of these were within 5% tolerance of their respective targets (Amber rating), and one of these represented a year-end target (Decent Homes)
- d. reported that over the last eleven years the Council had been working with the Lincoln Tenants Panel to improve external scrutiny and to meet the standards implemented by the Tenant Services Authority
- e. reported that from April 2010 all social landlords were required to have local offers in place alongside the national standards as set out in the new Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, amended with effect from April 2012, although the principles remained the same
- f. referred to Appendix A which attempted to simplify the overall analysis by listing performance on a service functional basis (rents, repairs, etc) and then showing the source of the indicator (reason)
- g. added that for comparison purposes each indicator showed last year's performance against the target for the current year (where applicable) and progress made in the current year
- h. referred to paragraph 4.3 of the report and highlighted areas of good performance:
 - Arrears as a % of rent debit
 - Completed repairs right on first visit (priority and urgent)
- i. further highlighted a brief explanation of reasons where we had not achieved our targets as detailed at paragraph 4.4 of the report:
 - % of calls answered within 90 seconds
 - % of complaints completed within target time
 - Void's performance
- j. highlighted that although there had been many challenges for the directorate struggling with raw materials and supply chains, all in all performance was holding its own under difficult circumstances
- k. invited committees' questions and comment.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail. The following key questions and comments emerged:

- Question: What was the projected out-turn for voids in the next quarter?
- Response: This could not be predicted in the circumstances due to the void's contractor having gone into administration which was unprecedented. So many people were in temporary accommodation who could not be pre allocated into properties as we didn't know how long this would take. We were working to minimise the impact on our customers

employing local contractors to help HRS with void work and by the end of September we would hopefully have a better idea of where we stood.

- Question: How did the increase in rent arrears compare against other Councils?
- Response: The Council did conduct benchmarking exercises with similar authorities, and performance fared well against these. Collection rates were down to 95% in some areas of the country, compared to this we were doing well at 99%.
- Question: Was the increase in calls regarding repairs down to an ease in COVID restrictions?
- Response: The reason why the volume of calls had gone up was not quite certain. Further investigations would be made prior to reporting back to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.
- Question: The percentage of complaints replied to in line with Corporate policy was recorded as down. What was this attributed to?
- Response: The Corporate Complaints Policy was complex in nature. Various information was required including site visits, it was likely to be a volume issue. It could simply be it was half a day out of target not weeks. With staff not at their desks this could possibly cause a couple of days slippage. We kept up liaison with tenant's meantime regarding any complaints.
- Question: The percentage of complaints replied to within target time was set at a top target of 70.37% for quarter 1. This was not in line with Corporate policy at 98.18%? What was the reason for the difference?
- Response Councillor Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing: It may be that the Housing directorate held a different target to that of Corporate Policy which covered the whole authority. Clarification would be sought on the reason for the differing figures to be reported back to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.
- Comment: People telephoning in were not getting the required action. This was disappointing, whether or not staff were working from home. The target for 'complaints replied to within target time' had been raised to 95% although actual performance was recorded at 70.8% in the previous year.
- Response: The member of staff responsible for dealing with complaints had unfortunately been off with long term sickness. We now had someone in place to monitor complaints which would improve performance. Telephone calls were often complex requiring further information to be sourced and supplied to customers.
- Question: If calls were recorded, was it not possible to pursue why action wasn't taken?
- Response by Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing: A temporary appointment had now been made to fill the gap.
- Comment: Tenants were not always sure which housing officer they were speaking to over the telephone if someone unfamiliar picked up the call.

- Response: The Housing officer patches were up to date on the Council's website. If there happened to be a vacancy, then the Area Housing Manager would pick up the call.
- Question: Was it possible to include a commentary alongside the performance indicators in quarter two giving reasons for their status?
- Response: Yes, this was possible although this volume of information would need to be displayed in smaller type to fit the page.

RESOLVED that:

1. The current performance outcomes during the financial year 2021/22 be noted
2. Additional information on reasons for performance indicator status be incorporated into the analysis of performance data in future from quarter 2 report onwards.
3. Further investigations to be made prior to reporting back to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee on reasons for the increase in calls and response times/percentage of complaints replied to within target time not in line with Corporate policy
4. A commitment to continued reporting on a quarterly basis and to determine a programme to have more interim in-depth reviews of service specific performance be noted.

20. Allocations Policy Update - Update on Implementation of New Member Policy and Analysis of Housing Register - Update on Numbers in Each Band (Verbal Report)

Yvonne Fox, Assistant Director of Housing, gave a verbal update on the implementation of a new member Allocations Policy and the numbers of people in each band on the housing register, covering the following main points:

- There were 1,222 active applications on the housing register.
- 329 of these were requests for transfers.
- 893 were classified as housing regulation applications.
- There was a very high demand for four-bedroomed properties.
- 1 bedroomed properties were also in high demand.
- Numbers of People in House Bands:
 - Band 1: 216
 - Band 2: 337
 - Band 3: 1,069
- 146 properties in total had been let this year to date.
- 110 one bedroomed properties had been let.
- 1 four bedroomed property had been let.
- The remaining properties let were two or three bedroomed properties.
- The majority of voids properties were one bedroomed.
- There was a slow trickle of family houses with demand far outstripping supply.

- 22 people in Band A were in overcrowded accommodation, with only 1 four bed roomed house having been let.
- Last quarter there had been 124 lets and 146 as of 1 August 2021.
- 28% of the requests for lettings were applications for transfers.
- 13.7% were housing regulation applications
- 58% of requests for lettings were clients either homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- A minimum of 25% transfer applications must be maintained to allow 'good' tenants the ability to move house should circumstances change.
- The Housing Directorate was still under government direction to give priority to homeless people or people at risk of homelessness.
- There were 20 cases today in temporary accommodation.
- Void repairs on properties were awaited.
- 25 people had been matched to a property when it became available.
- 13 people needed a match to be achieved.
- The Directorate was under pressure in terms of homelessness and was bound by law to work to legislation.
- We needed to give preference to homeless cases and 25% transfer allocations to operate within legislation.

Members discussed the content of the verbal report in further detail. The following questions and comments emerged:

- Question: If a person was made homeless and couldn't be placed, where did they go?
- Response: The majority of homeless people were housed in private rented accommodation or supported accommodation. Temporary accommodation may be provided if required, perhaps through NOMAD or YMCA housing association.
- Question by Chair: Was it possible to receive the above data in writing in order it could be scrutinised every six months?
- Response: These figures would be circulated to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.
- Question: Did the definition of homeless people include rough sleepers?
- Response: Yes, Rough sleepers were included in this group and were allocated accommodation in line with policy.
- Question: A number of properties offered to clients were not accepted first time round. Why was this?
- Response: 78% of properties were accepted first time. There were specific reasons why properties were turned down, for example, if they were close to someone needing to flee violence. Sometimes people changed their minds after viewing the property. The reasons for refusal were monitored and any issues flagged up at Voids meetings.
- Question: Some people moving into a property for the first time may be paying more rent than their neighbours next door having been a tenant for some time. What was the difference in rent between first time tenants and existing tenants?

- Response: The difference between rental costs varied according to property components. It could be as little as 50p or £5 dependent on the size of the property and local amenities.

RESOLVED that:

1. Further written detail on the figures relating to the Allocations Policy and the numbers of people in each band on the housing register be provided to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.
2. The content of the officers' verbal report be noted.

21. Analysis of Housing Register - Update on Numbers in Each Band (Verbal Report)

This agenda item was incorporated into the previous minute for tonight's meeting.

22. Work Programme 2021/22

The Chair:

- a. presented the work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee for 2021/22 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.

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel requested an update on communal areas as part of the Sheltered Housing Scheme, an item which had been delayed due to COVID.

RESOLVED that:

1. An update on Communal Areas as part of the Sheltered Housing Scheme be incorporated into the Work Programme in 2022.
2. The content of the work programme be noted.