

**Present:** Councillors Councillor Gary Hewson (*in the Chair*), Alan Briggs, Liz Bushell, Mark Storer, Pat Vaughan and Loraine Woolley

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Jane Loffhagen and Mike Asher

**Also in Attendance:** Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Caroline Coyle-Fox (Vice Chair of LTP), Steven Bearder (Member of LTP) and Debbie Rousseau (Member of LTP), Councillor Donald Nannestad (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

### 1. **Confirmation of Minutes -10 March 2022**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair, subject to an amendment to Minute No:45 'Tenancy Sustainment Update' Page 5 to be corrected to read as follows:

- *Question: Would care leavers who were entitled to council tenancies get additional support?*

### 2. **Matters Arising**

In relation to Minute No 45 'Tenant Sustainment Update' members asked whether the policy to encourage tenants in under-occupied properties to relocate/downsize had been updated?

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment highlighted that work was ongoing to inspire the incentive scheme to become more attractive; results would be reported back to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee in due course.

### 3. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Pat Vaughan declared a Personal Interest with regard to the agenda item titled 'Housing Finance'.

Reason: His granddaughter was employed in the Finance Section of City of Lincoln Council.

### 4. **Housing Finance**

Colleen Warren, Financial Services Manager, presented her report on the Council's Housing Out-turn position for 2021/22. She advised on the content of the report as follows:

- The report provided members with the provisional summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the revised budget for HRA and HRS services and showed how any surpluses had been allocated to reserves.
- The full out-turn report for the Authority would be presented to Executive on 20 June 2022.

- For 2021/22 the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) net revenue budget was set at £14,910, which resulted in an estimated level of general balances at year-end of £1,059,743.
- The financial performance quarterly monitoring report for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter predicted an underspend of £31,226. The provisional outturn for 2021/22 now indicated an underspend of £19,339. This would result in HRA balances at 31 March 2022 of £1,025,202.
- Paragraph 3.3-3.4 of her report highlighted movement and variances to the outturn position and outfall summary
- For 2021/22 the Council's Housing Repairs Service (HRS) net revenue budget was set at zero, reflecting its full cost recovery nature.
- The financial performance quarterly monitoring report for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter predicted a £713,876 deficit outturn for 2021/22. The provisional outturn for 2021/22 showed a trading deficit of £42,757, a movement of £286,119. This movement was a result of the delay in billing of void jobs at Quarter 3, which made forecasting the outturn position difficult.

Councillor Hewson, Chair, highlighted that this information had been presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee. In terms of the figures for the out-turn position he requested that information as to the meaning of the letters alongside each item be included in future reports, together with the reasons for the overspend/underspend. He also asked that the relevant appendices be circulated to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee for information/

RESOLVED that the provisional out-turn position for the HRA and HRS for 2021/22 be noted.

## **5. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 4-2021-2022**

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment

- a. presented the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee with an end of year report on performance indicators for the 2021/22 financial year (April 2021-March 2022), which combined all performance relevant to Housing Landlord issues
- b. reported that over the last twelve years the Council had been working with Lincoln Tenants Panel to improve external scrutiny and to meet standards implemented by the Tenant Services Authority
- c. added 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, which was amended with effect from April 2012 although the principles remained the same
- d. reported that of the 21 measures in total; 10 were on or exceeding targets for the year (year-end), 10 had not met the normal targets set, of which 3 were within 5% tolerance of their respective targets (Amber Rating), and one measure did not have a target (complaints replied to in line with corporate policy)

- e. referred to Appendix A of the report which detailed performance against the various targets in greater detail/clarity with further information on areas highlighted at paragraph 4 of the report
- f. invited committees' questions and comments.

Members discussed the content of the report, commented, asked questions, and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

- Question: Why was there a high level of refusals from tenants in terms of voids being re-let. There had been 108 refusals in total which equated to 23.8%?
- Response: The current practice allowed three refusals in total. There were a variety of reasons for this including the layout of the property, size of the garden, location of the property, presentation of the property and the upkeep of the neighbours garden. Officers were currently unable to identify any trends as to why properties were refused.
- Question: Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel suggested further investigation on the reasons for refusals on properties be undertaken as the figure was quite high. Why would homeless people turn down a property?
- Response: The incidence of refused properties from homeless people was extremely low.
- Comment: The incidence of refused properties added further time on to the re-let period.
- Response: The Housing Directorate was working exceptionally hard to do all within its power to re-let council properties, for example redecorating vouchers were available.
- Question: Who decided which customer had the first viewing on a re-lettable property?
- Response: This was down to need and the circumstances of the bidder.
- Question: Once a bidder backed down, was the property offered to the next bidder?
- Response: This was dependent upon how long the tenant had been on the waiting list.
- Comment: In a past policy LTP Panel members had inspected the condition of void properties, they did not come across anything terrible with 9 out of 10 having no issues.
- Question: What measures were being taken to bring voids figures back on target?
- Response: The housing Service was doing everything it could to bring void figures back on target. Bench marking measures carried out across other authorities revealed they were in a similar position.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment provided a detailed power point presentation to members which demonstrated the multiple measures undertaken to monitor and encourage take-up of re-let properties. He emphasised that the properties had to be at a lettable standard and safe for tenants. He highlighted that three Tenancy Sustainment Officers had been appointed to assist vulnerable tenants who struggled with day to day tasks to manage their tenancies for a longer period. This would also bring about improvements.

Councillor Hewson referred to problems in terms of the turn-around time for housing repairs being completed after customer services received the repair request call. He highlighted a high incidence of customer services calls chasing repairs already reported. He asked whether tenants were made aware at the time they registered a repair how long they would be expected to wait?

Phil Longhorn, Interim Maintenance Manager, Investment commented as follows:

- He was conscious of the points raised; however, the detail was in the problem that calls were received from customers who did not know how the system worked.
- Customers were now issued a date for their repair request at the first point of call which reduced the number of repeat calls into the customer services team.
- Repair requests could also be reported on line which speeded up the process.
- It was important to communicate to customers via press releases and other public relation opportunities to spread awareness.

RESOLVED that:

1. The current performance outcomes during the financial year 2021/21 be noted.
2. 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.

## **6. Scheduled Repairs Pilot Update (Verbal Report)**

Phil Longhorn, Interim Maintenance Manager, Investment, gave a verbal update on the Scheduled Repairs Programme covering the following main areas:

- The extended Scheduled Repairs trial period commenced on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021 and was completed on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022.
- The revised way of working carrying out scheduled repairs in one geographic area for a concentrated period of time meant that overall, a greater number of repairs could be undertaken with the same amount of labour resource.
- It was considered that there were numerous advantages and benefits, for tenants and for the Council, to delivering Scheduled Repairs in this manner compared to service delivery via the previous system. These advantages related to tenant satisfaction, operational efficiency, operational performance, potential financial savings, and the environmental benefits.
- The trial was extended in order to obtain data that could be used to establish meaningful conclusions with regard to increased productivity and efficiency. The additional data was required in order to carry out a like for like comparison to a previous comparable period. This comparison was not possible previously as a result of various factors that influenced and corrupted the data, these included:
  - The backlog of 1700 non-urgent repairs
  - The impact of lockdowns during the trial period upon the volume of repairs completed

- A potential decreased demand in repairs reported and completed due to what may have been a reluctance of tenants to admit operatives into their homes for non-urgent matters
  - The reclassification of repair timescales during the reporting period
- Figures were encouraging with the number of first time fixes having improved massively together with a massive reduction in no access appointments. Efficiencies were starting to kick-in.
  - Carrying out scheduled repairs in a more methodical manner allowed properties to be identified which were not receiving regular repairs and therefore vulnerable of becoming void.
  - The relationship between the Scheduled Repairs Team and Customer Service Staff taking the calls was important in terms of staff having the required depth of questioning/experience to establish the repair required/needs of vulnerable tenants.

Members questioned whether customer services staff were given full training.

Officers advised that call handlers were not experts. There was a need to gain knowledge in housing matters for them to be able to assist effectively. Some aspects of scheduled repairs were not in our full control. The online service provided was very detailed and effective.

RESOLVED that the content of the verbal report be noted pending a written report to be presented to the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

## 7. Asset Management Strategy Workshops (Verbal Report)

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel, updated members on the Panel's involvement in Asset Management Strategy Workshops, covering the following main points:

- As a representative of LTP, he was very happy to be asked to be part of a working group and attended Asset Management Strategy Workshop in March and April to provide feedback, views and opinions.
- The working group discussed the following priorities;
  - Decarbonisation
  - Decent Homes/Lincoln Standard
  - Repairs and Maintenance
  - Estate Regeneration
  - Health and Safety Compliance
- The aim of the workshops had been to ensure LTP was a key member of the working group to establish and determine where City of Lincoln Council resources were allocated and the standards to expect.
- At the wrap up session LTP were asked to put the areas in order of priority and proposed:

Ranking	Service
1	Repairs and Maintenance
2	Health and Safety
2	Decent Homes/Lincoln Standard

4	Estate Regeneration
5	Building Additional Homes
6	Decarbonisation
6	Cyclical Maintenance
8	Other

Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director, Housing Investment and Strategy advised that the Asset Management Strategy had now been written and would be presented to Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee in due course.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted with thanks.

**8. Allocations Breakdown April 2021 - March 2022**

A written breakdown of statistical data for allocation of Council accommodation was presented to members, for information.

Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment referred to the vast number of homeless enquiries/people at risk of homelessness and rough sleepers. He suggested this may have an impact on how tenancies were managed in the future with great pressure on the workload of our Tenancy Sustainability Officers.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

**9. Lincoln Tenant's Panel Review of Constitution**

Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director, Housing and Investment:

- a. presented a report containing proposed amendments to Lincoln Tenants' Panel (LTP) Constitution taking into account this committee's views, to make these changes prior to Executive approval being sought
- b. advised that the purpose of the LTP Constitution set out how the Lincoln Tenants' Panel was to operate, reviewed on an annual basis: the last constitutional amendments were agreed by Executive on 26 February 2018, a copy of which could be found at Appendix 1 to this report with the proposed revised Constitution detailed at Appendix 2
- c. highlighted that the current LTP Constitution required that any proposed changes to the Constitution may only be made by a two-thirds majority of voting members attending an Annual General Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting called for that purpose.
- d. reported that the amended Constitution proposed that the requirement for an Annual General Meeting be removed and replaced by a General Meeting held every 3 years or that an extra-ordinary meeting be called in the event of any changes to the Constitution, or any other issues deemed to require a decision by LTP
- e. clarified that this revised Constitution if agreed would require an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting to be arranged to formally adopt and sign the Constitution
- f. summarised the main proposed changes to the LTP Constitution as detailed at paragraph 3 of the officer's report

- g. requested feedback from members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the proposed amendments to the LTP Constitution for referral to Executive for consideration.

Members discussed the content of the report in further detail.

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel thanked all officers involved including the Legal Team for their guidance and support in the preparation of this document.

RESOLVED that subject to minor amendments as detailed within the officer's report, the LTP Constitution be referred to Executive for final approval.

#### **10. Work Programme 2022/23**

The Chair:

- a. presented the work programme for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2021/22 as detailed at Appendix A of the officer's report
- b. advised that this was an opportunity for committee to suggest other items to be included on the work programme.

RESOLVED that:

1. An agenda topic entitled 'LTP Matters' be brought forward as the first agenda item for each meeting.
2. The content of the work programme be noted