

**REPORT UNDER RULE 2(vi) OF THE COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

**REPORT BY COUNCILLOR DONALD NANNESTAD, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR QUALITY HOUSING**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this report I set out some of the performance data for service areas which come under my portfolio. In the main I have used data for Quarter 3 (to the end of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022) but in some instances I only had data for Quarter 2 available to me. In addition, data on health is increasingly difficult to obtain. The annual Health Profile for Lincoln which were extremely useful, but often included data that was two or three years old, has not been produced by Public Health England in recent years. I have included some information from the Health Index scores produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which is drawn from publicly available data and covers up to 2020. The Health Index scores come with a cautionary note as explained elsewhere in the report.

I highlight two issues facing us. Firstly, new Fire Safety regulations come into place later this month which is the outcome of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. The regulations apply to all buildings containing two or more sets of domestic premises which have common areas through which residents would have to evacuate in the event of an emergency. Buildings which are seven storeys or more are in a higher category. Shuttleworth House, Jarvis House and Trent View all fall into this category. We dedicated a small team to this issue, which has enabled us to respond to the changes to date. If resources allow, we will look to making this team permanent in the new financial year.

Secondly the issue of mould and damp. The Rochdale inquest held in November into the death of two year old Awaab Ishak and the Coroner's findings have highlighted the dangers presented by mould and damp. We have since received a significant increase in complaints about mould and damp both in our Council stock and in the private sector. During the current year we received an average of 8 inquiries a week up to the date of the inquest findings being published. In the two weeks after the Rochdale inquest was reported we received 95 inquiries and overall, in the period since the inquest we are averaging 33 inquiries a week. These figures refer to individual addresses. On many occasions more than one visit is needed and more than one repair is raised. In just one week in December 121 repairs were raised. We currently have a team of four operatives specifically dealing with mould and damp and if the current volume of repairs related to mould and damp continues, we will seek to make this team permanent in the new financial year. Some housing stock holders in other areas of the country have received mould and damp complaints from tenants living in newly built Passive Housing so it is not just about the age of properties. It is also not just an issue for Local Authority housing. The Council's private sector housing team is also receiving an increase in mould and damp issues being raised. The team received 10 complaints in November and 24 in December. The total mould and damp issues

raised with the private sector housing team for all of 2021-22 was 55 which equates to between four and five a month. It should be remembered that the initial complaint from private tenants is likely to go to their landlord and we do not have access to those numbers.

I finish this introduction with some thank yous. First of all, a big thank you to all members of the Council's staff working in the areas covered by my portfolio. They do an excellent job at a time when all local authorities are under increasing financial pressures. Secondly thank you to our Tenants Panel who have done some very valuable work during the last year.

## HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness continues to be a significant issue. The number of people approaching the City Council as homeless up to the end of Quarter 3 was 967 which is an increase of 36.7% compared to a year ago when the number was 707. Homelessness applications are increasing nationally and the increase is in line with national averages.

The percentages of successful preventions and relief of homelessness against the total number approaching the Council as homeless decreased to 44.23% which is just below the 45% low target. However, it proved to be increasingly difficult to prevent or relieve homelessness during the quarter into anything other than council accommodation, as most of the council's applicants were not able to afford privately rented accommodation.

The number of people on the housing register at the end of Quarter 3 was 1,573 against a figure of 1,448 a year ago. This is an increase of 8.6%.

## TENANCY SERVICES

The City Council has just under 7,800 properties of its own housing stock, of which 45% are houses and 42% flats with the remainder made up of maisonettes, bungalows and sheltered housing. The ratio between houses and flats has been skewed out of proportion by Right to Buy which has seen us lose a significantly higher number of family homes compared with the number of flats bought by tenants. In addition, eight out of 10 of our homes were constructed before 1974 which creates challenges – in particular, when it comes to improving energy efficiency.

Rent Collection has been maintained above the target figure up to the end of Quarter 3 which is testament to the work of tenancy services staff. The performance target is 96.4% rent collected of rent due. This continues to be a success story with the target exceeded in each of the first three quarters and in Quarter 3 106.91% was collected. Between 1 April and 31 December 2022 100.46% was collected which is an improvement on last year. Rent arrears as a percentage of rent debit was 3.33% at the end of Quarter 3 which is better than the target of 4.45%. In monetary terms the rent arrears at the end of Quarter 3 were £1.012 million which is a reduction of £40,000 on the same period last year and £118,000 less than at the end of Quarter 3 in 2020-21. These are excellent figures and have been achieved at a time when tenants, like all residents of the city, have been affected by cost of living issues. We can only wait and see if these improvements are maintained but a lot of work via the new tenancy

sustainability team and housing officers has gone into achieving these figures and this work will continue.

## VOIDS

The three performance indicators covering voids remain in red but are showing improvement compared to 2021-22. The target remains at 32 days for properties needing minor works (keys handed in to keys going out to new tenant) and 38 days where major works are required. Currently performance is at 43.3 days and 55.7 days respectively. In both cases this is an improvement on 2021-22. The percentage of rent lost due to vacant dwellings up to the end of Quarter 3 was 1.41% which is the same as the year end figure for 2021-22. The positive news is that the Quarter 3 loss was 1.1% which means we are getting closer to the target of 1%. The improvement in performance needs to continue to improve. Since my last report we have taken on three private contractors to carry out voids work in place of the single contractor we had in the past and this should help us improve.

## HOUSING REPAIRS

Out of the six performance indicators relating to housing repairs four are green, and two are amber. In relation to the two amber indicators both are showing an improvement on 2021-22. 99.42% of priority (one day) repairs were completed on time which is slightly below the 99.5% target. The percentage of urgent (three day) repairs completed on time was 95.03%. This was red at the time of my report last year when the figure was 90.69%. However, despite a significant improvement we are still below the target of 97.5%. 98.8% of repair appointments in the year to date were kept. 5,509 appointments were made with 5,443 kept.

## HOUSING INVESTMENT

The performance measures in this service area both remain amber. The data I have is to the end of Quarter 2. The percentage of council properties that were not at the Decent Homes standard (excluding refusals) was 1.43%. This was just outside of the low target for this measure of 1.5%.

99.08% of properties have a valid gas certificate which is below the target of 99.96%. Cases where the tenant refuses access for the gas safety inspection are, as a matter of course, referred to legal services for the appropriate action to be taken to ensure we gain access. In instances where we go to court to obtain an order we obtain an order for the lifetime of the tenancy.

## NEW BUILD

De Wint Court, our first extra care home, has opened since my last report to this committee adding 70 additional homes to our stock. As could be expected from a project such as this there have been some teething problems but things are now settling down.

Construction work is now close to completion of the Rookery Lane project which will add 42 new homes to our housing stock. It is anticipated these homes will be handed

over to us towards the end of March. Construction work on the first phase of the redevelopment of Hermit Street flats is anticipated to begin in late summer. This involves remodelling the existing properties with a number of additional new-build homes.

In addition, we are working with Barnardo's to provide supervised accommodation for care leavers. A site has been identified and is currently being investigated to ensure there are no issues with building. Barnardo's aim is to deliver this housing in 2024-25 provided everything goes to plan.

We have continued to acquire properties under the purchase and repair scheme using Right to Buy receipts (RTB). In the first three quarters of this financial year, we purchased 8 properties under this scheme. This has ensured our RTB receipts are spent within the required time. RTB receipts will be used towards the funding of the new properties which form part of the Hermit Street project.

In the first nine months of this year 39 properties were sold through Right to Buy of which 19 are three-bed.

## DECARBONISATION

We are committed to a policy that all Council new build homes commenced from the current financial year will be either net zero carbon or EPC A rated. We are also committed to raising the standard of all our housing stock to an average of EPC C rating

Recent new build projects such as the Markham House site and Rookery Lane have been low carbon and have EPC B ratings. Rookery Lane includes sustainable urban drainage. All recent new homes have been fitted with EV charging points.

In terms of our older stock (80% of which was built pre-1974) we are committed to review the Lincoln Homes Standard to improve energy performance. We will also consider retrofit solutions for our existing stock with trials to commence subject to funding.

How this work will be funded and a timetable will be included in the Housing Asset Management Strategy and the new 30 year Housing Business Plan which I aim to bring forward in July 2023.

The new vehicle fleet contract has now started. There is currently a crossover period with the old contract. The reason for this is that we are receiving the vehicles in a sporadic handover which is as and when they arrive. This is caused by the ongoing issues caused by Brexit and by supply issues regarding parts caused by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

## PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

The private sector housing market has been undergoing changes not just in Lincoln but throughout the country. As a result of this we intend to produce a piece of research looking at issues such as supply and demand, rent rises and how any of these impact on the demand for Council housing.

Our role within the private rented market is a regulatory one but we also have the additional duty of carrying out checks on properties referred to us under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

By mid-December, the Council's private sector housing team had received a total of 182 service requests in the current financial year. Of these 85 were for disrepair with a further six being complaints of illegal eviction. Other issues raised relate to houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and overcrowding. The majority (61%) of private-rented accommodation complaints, as last year, are in two wards – Abbey and Park. These are areas where we have previously done a significant amount of work as part of the Rogue Landlord scheme during which our officers carried out house to house visits.

We continue to act against private landlords in cases of unlicensed HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) and breach of HMO tenancy regulations. Several final Civil Penalty Notices (CPNs) have been issued with further investigations underway. In some cases, the CPNs have been paid and in other instances the landlord has appealed to the Regional Property Tribunal (RPT). Unfortunately, the RPT currently has a backlog of cases to deal with and this leaves these appeal cases unresolved. Our projected income from HMO licenses for 2022-23 is £76,180 which will surpass the budgeted projected income.

Our empty homes working group resumed meetings in the summer and is proving effective in bringing back into use some of the long-term empty properties in the private sector. At the end of Quarter 2 there were 449 private sector in the city that have been empty for six months or more including some that have been empty for many years. We have an annual target of returning 50 empty homes into use. 17 properties had been brought back into use by the end of October.

The private sector housing team has carried out checks on 73 properties referred to us under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and have continued to do these within five days of these being referred to us. Four of the 73 were not approved these being due to space and over-crowding issues.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and other Housing Assistance. DFGs are funded from Government grant money which is passported to the City Council by the County. The grants go towards adapting homes in the private sector to assist people to live in their own homes for as long as possible. The 2022/23 grant received by the City Council is £851,990.00 and we also have a significant carry over from previous years which is available to be spent. By mid-December, the amount spent was £413,000 with a further £303,800 approved. In addition, another £235,000 has been committed but awaiting approval. This means that 100% of the current year grant will be spent plus at least £100,000 of the money carried over.

The private sector housing team has been working with a shortage of staff which has caused extra pressures in relation to capacity. In addition, further work is likely to be generated if and when the Government brings in its proposed changes in private sector housing, the Renters Reform Bill. Consultation has already been carried out on introducing a decent homes standard for the private rented sector and the Government has also committed to banning section 21 no fault evictions.

The Council has obtained £2,203,194 to deliver the Sustainable Warmth Programme in the current financial year. This grant will fund the retro fitting of up to 300 private sector homes. So far 23,210 households have been contacted and 278 applications have been assessed and £946,000 has been spent to date. All installations are due to be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March. Additional funding of £632,100 has been approved to extend the scheme to March 2025.

## HEALTH

The annual health profiles for each local authority area are no longer produced by Public Health England. This was valuable information but often quite dated due to the delays in the publishing of data. In November 2022, the Office of National Statistics published the Health Index for England which is a comparative table. It must be viewed with some caution. The document sets this out as it states “The Health Index is currently an experimental statistic. It aims to summarise a selection of indicators into a single value for the health of an area which can be tracked over time. While data used to construct the Health Index are publicly available, the Index itself is still being tested and developed; so, users should exercise caution when drawing conclusions from the summarised data.”

Lincoln’s Health Index Score for 2020 is 84.8 – a significant improvement on 2019 when it was 78.8. However, our score is the second lowest in the East Midlands but the improvement was one of the highest of any local authority in England. There was a fall in the index scores for England in 2020 bringing the figure back to what it was in 2015. The scores are based on 100 being the average for England in 2015. Some of the data available for previous years was not published for 2020.

This link will take you to fuller details on the ONS data: [Health in England - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/health)

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