

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 performance data for service areas which come under my portfolio and where possible have used data for Quarter 3 (to the end of 31st December 2023) but in some instances this has not been possible due to the 9th January midday deadline for producing this document.

My portfolio includes both housing and health. The City Council has a direct influence in housing through planning, as a major stockholder owning almost 8,000 properties, and having a regulatory role in private sector housing. In health the Council's role is less direct and more of an influencing role. Household income, housing conditions, air quality, access to leisure facilities together with Commons and public parks all have a huge influence on the physical and mental health of our residents and are areas the Council can influence through its policies. Data on health is not as up to date as housing and the most recent information published by the Office of National Statistics is for 2021. This is not a change and in the days when Public Health England published annual health profiles for each local authority area this could be as much as five years out of date. Unfortunately, annual health profiles are no longer published but some data is available.

The areas of performance data produced for housing are set by Council members. However, from 1 April the Social Housing Regulator is expanding its role to include inspections of Local Authority owned housing departments and will require its own performance measures some of which coincide with what the Council already produces and some of which are different. In the light of that it may well be worth members reconsidering the data that is monitored both by this committee and by housing scrutiny committee.

One of the most significant events since my last report to this committee has been the approval of a new 30-year Housing Business Plan which sets out our overall strategy to 2054. The priorities within this strategy are improving core housing services; delivering additional affordable homes; regenerating neighbourhoods and estates; and reducing carbon emissions. There will be a £1.5 billion investment in our housing stock over the next 30 years. Importantly, all Councillors and tenants were given the opportunity to have their say in this over a series of workshops which were well attended.

A significant development in progress is the Housing IT Replacement (HITREP) which is scheduled to go live in the early Summer. Once fully operational this will improve both housing performance and data gathering.

We also continue to build new homes. The latest development handed over to us was at Ward Paddock, off Rookery Lane, and work has started on construction of 11 new houses at Hermit Street.

The Council has produced a new Communal Areas Policy and updated the Repairs and Maintenance Policy. Work is currently underway on a down-sizing policy, an aids and adaptations policy and strategies for garage sites and tenancy services.

Changes in senior housing personnel have been made having in January last year had two permanent assistant directors plus a temporary assistant director in post. There has been a realignment of roles, together with departures, and I am pleased to report that shortly before Christmas appointments were made to the two vacant permanent assistant director posts. There is no current need for a temporary assistant director.

Housing has faced major challenges over the last 12 months and similar challenges face the Council in the year ahead. There is a housing crisis both in Lincoln and across the country. Increases in private rents have put these out of reach of anyone on benefits due to the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which is the amount available to be claimed under housing benefit for a property. The Government announced in its Autumn Statement that this freeze will be lifted as of 1 April but this is a one-off increase and the freeze will then be reimposed which means that as landlords increase rents then their homes becoming increasingly unaffordable to tenants on benefits. Lincoln has a further problem in that our Local Housing Market, the geographic area within which our LHA is assessed, covers both the city and Gainsborough. Private rents are lower in Gainsborough and so that reduces the LHA for Lincoln. Our research has shown that it is very rare for any private rented property to be available within Lincoln where the rent will be totally covered by LHA.

The effect of private rents not being covered in their entirety by LHA together with the continuation of no-fault evictions are two of the main factors that have led to an increase in people presenting themselves as homeless to the City Council. This in turn has led to a huge increase in the need for temporary accommodation as the Council often has no alternative but to place homeless families and individuals in bed and breakfast/hotel accommodation. The cost of this varies depending on the time of year and what events are taking place but the Council can only claim back a fraction of this cost through housing benefit with the financial burden then falling on the General Fund rather than the Housing Revenue Account. The problems outlined here are identical to those faced by councils up and down the country. We have been working with the District Councils Network (DCN) on this and they lobbied over the Autumn Statement and are continuing to lobby both over the issues with LHA and Temporary Accommodation. The considerable increase in temporary accommodation costs has been described as “district councils’ social care moment” with some districts in other parts of the country warning the additional costs could force them into bankruptcy.

On top of these issues the Council continues to face financial pressures in housing. The Government guideline for rent increases is CPI as at September plus 1%. However, in September 2022 CPI was 11% but rent increases were capped at 7%. The cost of sub-contractors at the end of fixed price contracts has increased by more than 20% and considerable efforts are being made to reduce this. As an example the

Council operatives now have the required training to install fire doors which means this can now be carried out in-house.

We also have additional costs imposed on us. The Social Housing Regulator is, from 1 April, expanding its role to include Council housing departments which will involve submission of performance data and inspections. This comes with an anticipated charge to the Council which is currently expected to be £60,000 a year.

Workforce recruitment is another issue for us as it is for other local authorities and for private construction companies. The Council is investigating with partners solutions to this.

Finally in this section I wish to thank 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 carried out very valuable work over the last year.

HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness continues to be a significant issue reflecting the situation that there is a housing crisis both locally and nationally. In Q2 of 2023-24 there were 299 homelessness approaches to the City Council. This was an increase of 16% when compared to Q2 of 2022-23 when there were 258 homelessness approaches, and an increase of 106% when compared to Q2 of 2021-22 where there were 145 homelessness approaches.

The percentages of successful preventions and relief of homelessness against the total number approaching the Council as homeless decreased to 35.9% 44.23% which is below the 45% low target. This reflects the difficulty in finding accommodation in the city.

The forecast net cost of providing temporary accommodation in 23-24 is £650k, as at Q2 (this may change for Q3)

In 21-22 the net cost was £387k and in 22-23 it was £470k. Budgets for 24-25 are based on a net cost of £661k.

The number of people on the housing register at the end of Quarter 2 was 1,912.

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 with a lesser number of flats bought by tenants. Eight out of 10 of our homes were constructed before 1974.

The percentage of rent collected to the end of Q3 was 100.46% which is above the target of 97.5%. Arrears are 2.86% of rent debit which is again well below the target of 4% and is despite the fact that rent collection has become increasingly challenging in recent months with tenants, like all residents of the city, affected by cost of living issues. Rent collection is a priority for housing and in the next few weeks there will be

a concentration of efforts with the aim of improving this. Cost of living issues are not the only factor in this with another issue being the migration of tenants on to Universal Credit which means that in the majority of cases those on UC will no longer have their rent paid directly to the Council whereas previously the authority received this money directly in the form of housing benefit.

98.97% of anti social behaviour cases that were closed were resolved. The average time taken to resolve cases was 44.1 days which is well within the target of 70 days. Both measures are categorised as green.

VOIDS

The three performance indicators covering voids remain in red but continue to show improvement. 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 in the first three quarters of the financial year is at 41.1 days and 47.72 days respectively. In both cases this is an improvement on the 2022-23 figures and in instances where major works are required this is a reduction of eight days. Taking Q3 alone the average re-let period for homes excluding major works was 38.43 days which is the first time occasion in recent times this has fallen below 40 days. The percentage of rent lost due to vacant dwellings in Q3 was 1.13% which is very close to the target of 1%. There were 263 relets in total in the first two quarters with 177 of these being in the category that did not require major works. The number of voids in the system at the end of Q2 was 76.

Although there has been a positive impact on performance the number of properties that require cleansing prior to works starting continues to have a significant impact on the overall performance. The need for cleansing can delay works commencing by up to two weeks. To help reduce this impact, the team is focused on carrying out pre-void inspections, which will allow conversations with tenants to take place focused on encouraging them to ensure the property is fully cleared when they leave. In time this should help to reduce the number of void properties being returned requiring significant cleansing.

HOUSING REPAIRS

At the end of Q3 four of the six performance indicators relating to housing repairs showed as green. 99.45% of priority (one-day repairs) were carried out within the time limit with a target of 99.5% putting this in the amber category. The number of priority repairs to the end of Q2 was 2,111.

The percentage of urgent (three day) repairs completed on time was 89.49% with the number of repairs being 2,942. This is the sole red indicator within this section with the target being 97.5%. The average time to complete urgent repairs was 2.18 days which is a very slight improved performance on the year end 2022-23 when it was 2.2 days with both figures within the 3-day target.

96.64% of repair appointments to end of Q3 with a target of 97%. In Q2 4,843 appointments were made with 4,694 kept. The percentage of priority and urgent repairs completed on first visit was 93.4% which is above the target of 92%.

100% of priority gas repairs were carried out within the one-day time limit by our contractor Aaron Services to end of Q2. This was 838 repairs.

In the first two quarters of this year there has been an increased demand for both priority and urgent repairs and monitoring has taken place to ensure that requests are placed in the correct category. In addition, there has been a restructure of operatives which has increased resource and availability to ensure more work can be completed on the first visit.

As regards scheduled repairs the Council has started moving from a 12-week cycle to a 9-week cycle.

The number of damp and mould issues raised during 2022-23 increased by 38% year on year with 227 cases compared to 164 for 2021-22. This is in the main due to publicity arising from the Rochdale inquest which has led to people being much more aware of the danger damp and mould can pose. In the previous years the number of cases fluctuated between 130 and 205. In the year to date issues have been raised at 772 properties.

HOUSING INVESTMENT

At the end of Q3 the percentage of council properties that were not at the Decent Homes standard (excluding refusals) was 0.86% placing this in the green category with the target for the year end being 1%.

In Q2, 98.52% of properties have a valid gas certificate with a target of 99 % - again placing this as amber. 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 life-time of the tenancy.

As I reported previously fire risk assessments are now required on all of the Council's low- and high-rise blocks of flats. Assessments for the three high rise blocks were completed and registered with the Building Safety Regulator before the deadline. The Council has completed assessments of 84.1% of low-rise blocks. Those not having a current assessment are those that are due a review having previously been assessed in 2021 and this work is imminent.

NEW BUILD

Since my last report to performance scrutiny committee the 42 new homes at Ward Paddock, off Rookery Lane, have been completed and tenanted.

Construction work has now begun on 11 new houses as the first phase of the redevelopment of Hermit Street. These new homes, Hermit Mews, consist of six three-bed and five two-bed properties. The energy efficiency measures for these homes include air source heat pumps; triple glazing; and water butts to reuse rainwater. The use of a local contractor reduces carbon emissions and travel to work while 90% of waste will be recycled. Each of the properties will have EV charging points and will have two parking spaces. In addition, there is a biodiversity net gain of 17% through introduction of grassed gardens, additional landscaping, and removal of some tarmac hardstanding.

Work has started on the first phase of the Western Growth Corridor development. This will see the construction of 3,200 new homes of which 640 (20%) are scheduled to be affordable homes. The first affordable homes to be constructed are in phase 1B which is to be accessed off Tritton Road. This phase includes 120 affordable homes.

We continue to work with the charity Barnardo's to provide supported accommodation for care leavers with on-site staff. A site, owed by the City Council, has been identified for what would be the first so-called Gap housing project provided by Barnardo's in England. The project is referred to as Gap housing because the proposal is to utilise suitable sites within gaps. This would be a Barnardo's, rather than a City Council project, but we have enabled and supported this by offering our land.

We have continued to acquire properties under the purchase and repair scheme using Right to Buy receipts (RTB). At the end of Q3 we had purchased five properties. A further 10 are in conveyancing (which includes three new build), three more are awaiting sign-off to purchase following valuation and a further property is awaiting valuation.

In the first nine months of this year 22 properties were sold through Right to Buy of which 19 are three-bed.

DECARBONISATION

We are committed to a policy that, where possible, 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.

As at 2 January this year 6,646 of our Council housing stock were rated at Band C or above. That is 85.3% of our houses. The average score across all our dwellings is 72.04. Band C covers between 69 and 80. The 14.7% of properties below Band C are as follows: Band D - 1,133; Band E – 4; Band F – 2; Band G – 0.

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.

CONTROL CENTRE

There are two performance measures for the Control Centre which are related to the Lincare Housing Assistance service.

In Q2 the percentage of customers satisfied with their new Lincare Housing Assistance service connection to the Control Centre was 97.56%. This outturn is above the high target for the measure of 95%. Of the 41 responses received, just 1 response was dissatisfied with the service. The respondent who was dissatisfied raised they had received limited communication around the cost of the lifeline. All negative feedback is forwarded onto the Lincare Manager to review.

The percentage of Lincare Housing Assistance calls answered within 60 seconds in Q2 was 97.33%. This is 0.17% below the low target for the measure of 97.5%. In the

quarter 14,840 calls were handled by the Lincare Team. Within the quarter 53 of the calls missed were answered just outside of the target within 65 seconds meaning the measure was very close to achieving its target during the second quarter. There is no clear explanation for the slight drop in performance in this latest quarter. However, this appears to correlate with the system switch over from analogue to digital - as more digital devices are being used, performance has reduced. The system supplier is currently assessing whether there are any technical reasons resulting in a lower number of calls being answered within the target time, rather than it being down to staff not answering calls as quickly.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

Within private sector housing the Council has a regulatory role over landlords. Amongst other additional duties we oversee Disabled Facilities Grants, work to bring long-term empty homes back into use and carry out checks on properties referred to us by the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Performance measure PH1 refers to Disabled Facilities Grant cases and the length of time taken between receiving notification from an occupational therapist to completion of the required work.

In Q2 of 2023-24 the average time for this to happen was 29.9 weeks compared to the low target of 26 week which puts this in the red category. 38 grant adaptations were completed in Q2 and although there continues to be a backlog on cases being allocated, this has significantly reduced, reducing from 6 months down to 3 months. This is due to team members being directed onto this particular element of work. During Q2 the Private Housing Team were successful in appointing to a previously vacant Technical Officer role with employment commencing in September 2023. It is anticipated that there will be an improvement in the performance of this measure from Q3.

Measure PH2 relates to the regulatory role the Council has in the private rented sector and is the average time from date of inspection of accommodation to removing a severe hazard to an acceptable level. The average time taken in Q2 was 21 weeks when the target is a minimum of 20 weeks. During this quarter the team resolved and closed 36 housing disrepair / condition cases. Although it was anticipated that this performance would deteriorate due to greater emphasis being placed on the DFG programme the outcome was consistent with the Q1 figure of 21.2 weeks.

The final measure in this area is PH3 which is the number of empty homes brought back into use. This is an area where we have had some success and by the end of Q2 the Council had brought back into use 20 long-term empty privately owned properties which is above the target. This has been enabled by the diligent work carried out by the empty homes officer aided by the Council's empty property working group. As a result of negotiations with owners, work has begun on bringing back into use a number of properties that have been empty for in the region of 30 years.

HEALTH

In November 2022 the Office of National Statistics published for the first time the Health Index for England which is a comparative table and is described as “an experimental statistic”.

Lincoln’s Health Index Score for 2021 (the latest available) is 85.3 in comparison to the overall score for England which is 100.8. Although the Lincoln score is an improvement on 2019 (when it was 80) it is slightly down on the 2020 score of 85.6. Of more concern is the fact that the score for Lincoln fell in 2021 whereas nationally the overall England score increased.

Data at a local level is produced split into three domains – healthy people, healthy lives and healthy places. Lincoln scores below the level for the County as a whole in each of these although in individual areas , for example, distance to GP surgeries, distance to pharmacies and internet access, all three of which are in the healthy places domain the city scores above the County.

Taking healthy people, we are the lowest ranked of the seven Lincolnshire districts at 79.9. In the Healthy Lives domain we are comparatively better with a score of 92.6 putting us ahead of Boston and South Holland but on Healthy Places we are again seventh out of seven.

Just to take one area of health. In 2021-22 73% of the adults aged over 18 in Lincoln were classified as either overweight or obese. Although this is an extremely high percentage of people Lincoln was not the worst even in Lincolnshire with West Lindsey and South Holland having 77% of adults in this category.

More detailed health data is included with the appendices to this report.

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