

Present:	Councillor Gary Hewson (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Pat Vaughan, Alan Briggs, Clare Smalley and Liz Bushell
Also in Attendance:	Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Caroline Coyle-Fox (Vice Chair of LTP), Mike Asher (Member of LTP) and Sean Newton (Member of LTP)
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Natasha Chapman, Councillor Loraine Woolley, Debbie Rousseau, Matthew Hillman, Donna Lyons and Laura Shipley

14. Confirmation of Minutes - 08 August 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 August 2024 be confirmed.

15. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Pat Vaughan declared a Personal Interest with regard to the agenda item titled 'Financial Performance - Quarterly Monitoring'. His grand-daughter worked in the Finance Department at the City of Lincoln Council.

16. Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP) Project Update

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP), provided a written report which highlighted the Panel's continued work on a variety of projects with tenancy services, fire safety assurance, maintenance, business management and resident involvement teams. The briefing note, designed as a regular update to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee, covered the following areas:

- Mick Barber continued to attend Social Housing Quality Network Panel and ARCH committee meetings
- LTP had attended all estate inspections and continued to monitor and review actions from the inspections
- TPAS delivered a training/networking day at City Hall on 14 September 2024 which was hosted by the LTP. North Kesteven District Council's Tenancy Advisory Panel (TAP) were invited to review the scrutiny processes, the impact of tenant satisfaction measures and consumer standards
- The Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel advised additional working groups had been created to review the following:
 - Incentive to Downsize Scheme
 - Grounds Maintenance Contract Renewal
 - Gardens Review – Housing Assistance Scheme
 - ASB Procedures
 - Tenancy Sustainment

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted with thanks.

17. Downsizing Policy and Review

Marianne Upton, Tenancy Services Manager:

- a) presented the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with an update on the initial 6-month pilot of the Downsizing Policy
- b) stated that the original policy was written and agreed in 2023 with a view to helping tenants receive Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to meet the shortfall in their rent due to being impacted by the spare room subsidy
- c) highlighted that the original budget for the 6-month pilot was £80,000 and it was anticipated that this could help up to 20 tenants downsize to a more suitable property. The 6-month pilot ended in June 2024
- d) explained that the LTP requested a review into the process and had been involved in this area of work. The Panel agreed to carry out a mini scrutiny exercise on the current policy and the outcomes, carry out benchmarking exercises against schemes that other housing providers operated and be involved fully in reviewing the scheme to make recommendations about the future of the scheme and improvements.
- e) referred to Appendix 1 of her report stating the current policy and its outcomes
- f) concluded that the next steps were for the panel to make proposals for any improvements to the policy, alongside proposals from officers involved in the process and co-produce an updated policy if it was recommended to continue
- g) welcomed members comments and questions

Question: How was the Policy going to be publicised?

Response: If taken forward, it would be advertised widely through internal communications. Officers were gathering more up to date contact details and the initial batch of people would receive letters. All Housing Officers were aware of what to do and were working closely with housing solutions to complete a downsizing application.

Question: What was the timescale of review before the decision making took place?

Response: It depended on the review of the scheme. It was beneficial to wait until the 5 had been completed to know the exact costs but ideally, as soon as possible.

Question: Would feedback be provided by the people involved?

Response: Yes, LTP members had been welcomed to provide feedback on behalf of the public.

Question: In relation to the eligibility of the scheme, why had low demand properties such as maisonettes and flats not been included?

Response: It wasn't part of the initial criteria, but it could be added in at a later date.

In addition to the above, Daren Turner, Director of Housing and Investment advised the Committee that the policy could be referred to as the Right Size Policy rather than Downsizing Policy. The key to the policy was maximising stock and ensuring that one move led to 4 or 5 other moves. Once the review had taken place, the scheme would be looked at from a wider perspective and how it could be used more effectively on all Housing stock.

Question: In relation to the 5 cases outstanding following the 6-month pilot, how would the scheme work in the future? How were arrears cleared?

Response: Incentive payments would be considered to look at debts owed. Officers would be in a better position to advise once cases were complete and agreed to set up a working group to discuss the outcomes once they had been decided.

Question: Who would manage the scheme going forward?

Response: The Tenancy Services Team were the lead on it.

Question: In relation to properties that weren't approved long term, was there reconsideration for the same person if they had a change in circumstance?

Response: Yes, it would be a consideration.

RESOLVED that:

1. A working group be set up to update the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the outcomes of the 5 outstanding properties following the 6-month pilot scheme, once completed.
2. The report be noted with thanks.

18. **Voids Recharges Report**

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP):

- a) provided the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with an update on the initial piece of work that the LTP had assisted in, in relation to recharges
- b) explained that the Council continued to maintain exacting standards of void cleanliness for tenants, recover the costs associated with cleaning voids, encourage tenants to leave properties in an acceptable condition and to streamline the process of preparing properties for new tenants, and reducing void turnaround times. This would drive down cost ultimately picked up by the tenants, ensure houses were let in a better condition and in a shorter time
- c) highlighted that the Housing department had an established recharge mechanism where tenants could be asked to pay for damage and associated cost that had been caused during a tenancy, and not considered reasonable. To instigate a complete review, the LTP had initiated, with the support of the Voids team, a pilot review of the void's elements of these charges
- d) referred to Appendix A of his report which outlined the adjusting cost and recharging tenants for cleansing upon leaving a City of Lincoln Council property
- e) thanked Officers for their outstanding efforts on this work, in particular Daryl Wright and Donna Lyons
- f) welcomed members questions and comments.

Question: Who was responsible for visiting the properties for the census?

Response: Additional resources had been put in place and two vacancies were currently being advertised for to carry out this work, with support from Housing Officers.

Question: How would other issues that were picked up during inspections such as hoarding, be dealt with?

Response: The responsible officer would be made aware and the issue would be referred.

Question: When a tenant vacated a property, was any support provided in terms of removals?

Response: The tenant was expected to make their own arrangements when vacating a property. Officers had previously engaged with tenants and provided skips and other removal equipment in the agreement they'd repay the Council for it at a later date.

Daryl Wright, Maintenance Team Leader, concluded the item and advised the Sub-Committee that conditions of a property would be more visible going forward which should inevitably alleviate the problem. Information was provided to tenants which informed them about recharges and it was also explained in the Tenancy Agreement the circumstances if properties weren't maintained. When a tenancy ended, tenants were provided with information on how property should be left and in what condition. Once completed, the tenant would be advised on why the recharges had been made.

Additionally, Paula Burton, Assistant Director, Housing Management advised that she would arrange for information on rechargeable repairs to be circulated to the Sub-Committee further to the meeting.

RESOLVED that:

1. Information on rechargeable repairs be circulated to the Sub-Committee for information.
2. The report be noted with thanks.

19. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 - 2024/25

Michelle Hoyles, Business Manager, Corporate Policy:

- a) presented Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a summary on performance indicators for the Directorate of Housing and Investment (DHI) for Quarter 1 of 2024/25 (April - June)
- b) added that regular monitoring of the Council's performance was a key component of the Local Performance Management Framework and supported its ongoing commitment to continuous improvement of Council services
- c) confirmed that there was a total of thirty-three performance indicators monitored by DHI; an overview of performance for the first quarter of 2024/25, against such indicators, was attached at Appendix A to the report
- d) reported that during the first quarter of 2024/25, 17 performance measures met or exceeded their agreed target; 3 were performing close to target; and 5 performed below target
- e) highlighted that of the 5 measures performing below target, one is a corporate measure related to call handling in the Customer Service Contact Centre.

This measure 'CS3' related to all calls received by the Contact Centre and therefore included data not linked to Housing Services

- f) referred to Appendix A of the report, specifically sections 5-11 which highlighted the key conclusions
- g) confirmed that further detailed information on the areas highlighted was provided within the report
- h) welcomed members questions and comments.

The Committee discussed the report in further detail, in particular, the redirection of calls that were currently being filtered through Customer Services to Hamilton House. Members queried whether calls could be forwarded directly to Hamilton House without going through Customer Services however Officers explained it was a complex issue that would require moving Customer Services staff over to Hamilton House.

Following this discussion, Members suggested to the Chair that an update from Jo Crookes (Customer Services Manager) on call times be added to the work programme for a future meeting.

RESOLVED that:

1. Jo Crookes, Customer Services Manager be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on call time targets.
2. The report be noted with thanks.

20. Financial Performance - Quarterly Monitoring

Adam Oxley, Principal Finance Business Partner:

- a) presented a report to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a summary of the first quarter's performance (up to 30 June 2024), on the Council's:
 - Housing Revenue Account
 - Housing Repairs Service
 - Housing Investment Programme
- b) provided information on the Council's:
 - **Housing Revenue Account** — For 2024/25 the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) net revenue budget was set with a planned contribution from balances of £101,220, resulting in estimated general balances at year-end of £1,030,024, after allowing for the 2023/24 outturn position. The HRA was currently projecting a forecast underspend of £607,544, which would result in HRA balances of £1,637,568 as at the end of 2024/25 (Appendix A provided a forecast Housing Revenue Account summary). Although the forecast position was an overspend there was a number of significant variations in income and expenditure. Full details of the main variances were provided at Appendix B.

- **Housing Repairs Service** – For 2024/25 the Council's Housing Repairs Service (HRS) net budget was set at zero, which reflected its full cost recovery nature. At quarter 1 the HRS were forecasting a deficit of £355,311 in 2024/25. Full details of the main variances were provided at Appendix C.
- **Housing Investment Programme** – The revised programme for 2024/25 amounted to £22.763m following the 2023/24 outturn position. At quarter 1 the programme had been decreased by £5,112m to £17.650m as shown at paragraph 7.2 of the report. The overall expenditure on the Housing Investment Programme at the end of quarter 1 was £2.517m, which was 14.26% of the 2024/25 revised programme. This excluded expenditure relating to Western Growth Corridor, which was currently shown on the General Investment Programme (GIP), to be apportioned at year end (current forecast outturn £0.984m) as detailed at Appendix G of the report. A further £1,082m had been spent as at the end of July 2024.

c) invited members questions and comments.

Members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee considered the content of the report in further detail, asked questions and received relevant responses from Officers thereon.

RESOLVED that the financial performance for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024 be noted with thanks.

21. **Briefing on Right to Buy and Section 106 Funds (Verbal Report)**

Paula Burton, Assistant Director, Housing Management, presented the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a verbal update on Right to Buy and Section 106 Funds. She outlined the following key points:

- Right to buy receipts were funds the Council received when a Council property was sold through the Right To Buy scheme. This applied to Right to Buy houses built before 2008.
- Receipts received were used to recover the cost to administer Right to Buy, debt and capital works. Any share not required by Treasury could be used for buying back former Council properties or additional homes for affordable or social rent.
- 5 elements were considered when making the calculation which were:
 - Transaction
 - Allowable debt
 - Local Authority Share
 - Buy Back Costs
 - Treasury Share
- The funds had to be spent within a 5-year period and failure to do so would result in it having to be paid it back to the treasury through the housing capital receipts pooling.

- Daren Turner, Strategic Director of Housing and Investment and Jaclyn Gibson, Chief Finance Officer retained delegated authority to determine how funds would be spent.
- Other funding options such as S106 contributions could be merged if it was related to housing
- At present, £4.46m was available in right to buy receipts in 2024/25 and 20 properties had been identified.
- There was currently no risk to pay the money back to Government as properties had already been purchased. The City of Lincoln Council was in a healthy position and wouldn't have to pay any of it back as the funds had been spent appropriately.

The Committee discussed the above information in further detail, asked questions and received relevant responses from Officers thereon.

In addition, the Assistant Director, Housing Management agreed to circulate a written briefing to the Committee after the meeting to digest at their leisure.

RESOLVED that:

1. The Assistant Director, Housing Management to provide a written briefing to be circulated to the Sub-Committee after the meeting.
2. The verbal report be noted by members.

22. Housing Management Structure Update (Verbal Report)

Paula Burton, Assistant Director, Housing Management:

- a) presented a verbal update in relation to the recent changes to the Housing Management structure in which she highlighted the following key changes:
 - The Tenancy Services team were now responsible for providing support to the Rough Sleeper Team. Fiona Chapman (Rough Sleeper Support Worker) and her team had moved across to Tenancy Services to promote Tenancy Sustainment as part of a temporary change
 - The Supported Housing Team were now under the management of Marianne Upton, Tenancy Services Manager as part of Tenancy Services
 - The Housing Solutions Manager role had been moved under Tenancy Services and Voids under the Maintenance Team which allowed the relevant Service Managers to focus on Allocations and Homelessness
 - The Rough Sleeper Team still remained part of the Housing Solutions team
 - Two additional Housing Officers and one Housing Assistant were currently being advertised for to work on the Tenant Census alongside a Housing Strategy Officer.

- b) highlighted that these changes took place following a review of the structure and reiterated that they were temporary and being piloted for 3 to 6 months
- c) explained that in relation to rough sleepers, some of the criteria was applied generously on what would be defined as a rough sleeper so officers had reverted back to stricter criteria. She agreed to provide a more in-depth update at the next meeting
- d) welcomed members comments and questions.

Question: Would the Rough Sleeper figures increase even more with early release of prisoners?

Response: It wasn't expected to increase drastically and there was currently no indication that it would.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. An update be presented by Paula Burton at the next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee.
- 2. The verbal report on structure changes be noted with thanks.

23. **Work Programme 2024/25**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the work programme for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2024/25 as detailed at Appendix A of the report
- b. highlighted that the work programme could be further populated in accordance with Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committees requests for topics of discussion and areas of preferred scrutiny to be used as a working document, added to or amended at members discretion at any time during the 2024/25 Municipal Year
- c. confirmed that the work programme included those areas for scrutiny linked to the strategic priorities of the Council and themed housing matters, to ensure that the work of the committee was relevant and proportionate. RESOLVED that:
 - a) The content of the Work Programme for 2024/25 be noted, subject to following additions for October 2024:
 - An update by the Tenancy Services Manager on downsizing results from the pilot
 - The Assistant Director, Housing Management to liaise with Democratic Services, to remove some items from the October work programme and arrange a Member Development session separately.
 - The Assistant Director, Housing Management to provide an update on the Housing Structure change progress
 - Jo Crookes, Customer Services Manager to be invited to provide an update on call targets
 - b) The work programme 2024/25 be noted and approved by the Chair.