

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

**INTRODUCTION**

The major changes since my last report to this committee have been the Regulator of Social Housing (ROSH) expanding to cover local authorities from 1 April 2024 and policy announcements by Government since last year's General Election.

ROSH will be inspecting each Council Housing Revenue Account (HRA) every four years on consumer standards whereas other registered providers are also inspected on governance and value for money. For consumer standards the outcomes are graded from C1 (highest) to C4 (lowest). The majority of inspections so far have produced either C2 or C3 results with the occasional C1 and C4. ROSH requires a range of Tenancy Satisfaction Measures which we also scrutinise within our own Council through the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee. ROSH comes with a fee of around £64,000 a year payable to the Regulator.

In terms of Government announcements, the changes in Right to Buy will help. However, in the period between the autumn statement and the deadline for applications to be made under the previous system, we had over 90 applications. That is equivalent to the number which would normally be sold in around two years.

Our 30 year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan is in place with the priorities being neighbourhood regeneration, delivering new homes, addressing climate change and developing and improving core services.

There continues to be a housing crisis in the city. Although Local Housing Allowance (the amount available to be claimed for a property under housing benefit) has increased we are still in a situation where the vast majority of private sector rents are beyond the reach of anyone on housing benefit.

Homelessness numbers remain significant and the cost of temporary accommodation (which falls on the General Fund rather than the Housing Revenue Account) is a continuing challenge not just for our Council but for all Councils up and down the country.

We have continued to add to our housing stock during the last year and, as required by the ROSH, have increased the level of consultation with our tenants. This includes the re-establishment of Home magazine which we use to communicate directly with our tenants and also Tenancy Surveys carried out on a quarterly basis to measure satisfaction levels with the services we provide.

**HOMELESSNESS**

Homelessness continues to be a significant issue reflecting the situation that there is a housing crisis both locally and nationally. In Q3 there were 296 homelessness approaches to the City Council bringing the total to 934 for the current year.

The number of people on the housing register at the end of Q3 was 2,057 which is a slight drop in comparison to the end of Q2.

There were 18 rough sleepers identified at Q3 end.

## **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.

Tenancy services began a pilot scheme midway through last year with specialist teams of rent collection, anti-social behaviour and tenancy matters. Some changes have already been made in this to reflect workloads and the scheme will be evaluated at an appropriate stage.

The percentage of rent collected to the end of Q3 was 100.25% with arrears decreasing by £400,000 compared with the end of Q3. Tenant arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debit stand at 3.33%. For both measures rent collection performance is green and reflects the work taking place to ensure that rent is collected.

## **VOIDS**

The three performance indicators covering voids remain in red. The low target for re-let time (keys in to keys out) for all homes including major works is 45 days whereas up to the end of Q3 50.50 days was achieved. This was affected by the return to use of a number of long-term voids during December but despite this it is an improvement on the previous quarter. The percentage of rent lost due to vacant dwellings in Q3 was 1.46% with a low target of 1.1%. Our performance reflects the picture both nationally and locally.

## **HOUSING REPAIRS**

In Q3, 100% of priority (one-day repairs) were carried out within the time limit with a target of 99.5% putting this in the green category.

The percentage of urgent (three-day) repairs completed in the year to date at the end of Q3 was 96.85%. Around 40% of the three-day repairs that are not carried out within the time are due to not being able to gain access as a result of the tenant not being at home. There are additional instances where the tenant does not answer the door and has to be phoned before the operative gains access.

In the year to date at the end of Q3, 99.17% of appointments were kept compared to a target of 98%. The percentage of priority and urgent repairs completed on first visit was 97.62% which is above the target of 92%. Both of these are also green.

In Q3 satisfaction with repairs (a ROSH measure) was 72% which is based on a survey of 150 tenants. 23% indicated dissatisfaction with the remaining 5% neither one way of the other.

## **HOUSING INVESTMENT**

At the end of Q3 the percentage of Council properties that were not at the Decent Homes standard (excluding refusals) (HI1) was 0.45%, which is 35 properties, placing this in the green category with the target for the year end being 1%. These comprise 16 electrics, 13 doors, three windows, two chimneys and one roof.

At the end of Q3 the year 99% of homes had a valid gas certificate which is the target. We continue to get some refusals for access, and these are varying between four and seven a month. Where access is refused, the cases are referred to legal services and in a small number of cases we have taken out a court injunction to gain access. Where we obtain an injunction it is for the life-time of the tenancy.

## **FIRE SAFETY**

All three tower blocks were registered with the Building Safety Regulator prior to the deadline 1 September 2023 and Building Safety Case Reports have been completed on each of the blocks. In addition, in November last year, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue completed a Fire Safety Audit for each block and they were all found to be broadly compliant.

Fire Risk assessments have been carried out at all sheltered housing and on all low-rise blocks.

## **ADDITIONAL HOMES**

11 new homes in Hermit Mews, consisting of six three-bed and five two-bed properties, were completed and tenanted in the Autumn. The energy efficiency measures for these homes include heat pumps; triple glazing; and water butts to reuse rainwater. The use of a local contractor reduced carbon emissions and travel to work. Each of the properties has EV charging points and 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.

The next proposed development is on a site at Jasmin Green, Birchwood, and we have other potential sites to follow.

We have added a further 12 properties purchased through buy backs and at the time of writing this have another six in the pipeline. We have also agreed to purchase nine new builds currently under construction on the former Victory pub site on Boultham Park Road. These are currently scheduled to be completed by the early Summer.

In addition, work continues on the first phase of the Charterholme 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 plans to deliver 120 affordable homes and work on the bridge which gives access to that area is now well advanced.

## **DECARBONISATION**

Our short-term objective is to have every home at EPC C rating or better by 2030 and work has commenced on our decarbonisation strategy.

A high proportion are currently EPC rating B or better and we have submitted an application for Government grant SHDF3 (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund 3) scheme to fund work on 200 homes which are EPC D or below. We are currently awaiting the outcome of our application. If successful then the Council will embark on a £4m plus project to retro fit these homes.

At the end of Q3, 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 have recently contracted to inspect 20% of our properties each year which will give us additional information on the condition of our homes.

## **CONTROL CENTRE**

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

In the year to end of Q3, 98.45% of customers satisfied with their new Lincare Housing Assistance service connection to the Control Centre. During Q3 there were 43 new connections with 41 reporting as either very or fairly satisfied with the service provided. The percentage of Lincare Housing Assistance calls answered within 60 seconds up to the end of Q3 was 98.97 which is above target. In Q3 alone the figure was almost exactly the same at 98.98% despite the fact that there were 2,055 additional calls compared to Q2.

To conclude I wish to thank all members of the Council's housing staff. They do an excellent job at a time when all local authorities are under increasing financial pressures. Secondly a thank you to our Tenants Panel who have carried out very valuable work over the last year.

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