

Executive Annual Report 2016/17

Councillor Karen Leytham

Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Housing and Environmental Health

Executive Membership

- Cabinet
- District Wide Tenants Cabinet Liaison Group
- Housing Regeneration Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman)

Executive Appointments to Outside Bodies etc

- Health and Wellbeing Partnership

Overview of Portfolio Responsibilities

Responsibility for Housing and Environmental Health

Corporate Plan Key Outcomes/Success Measures

Corporate Plan - Key Outcomes	Success Measures
Enhanced quality of life of local residents through access to affordable, decent housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased number of improved homes.• Improve access to housing by addressing evidence of need. Increase provision of social housing.• Continue to try to establish a new build and acquisition programme to increase the number of Council houses in the district.
Health and wellbeing of our citizens is improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete feasibility study of selective licensing of private sector landlords• Improve facilities on offer at Salt Ayre Sports Centre and ensure that they are financially sustainable

	<p>Increase the number of vulnerable households benefiting from Warm Homes Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve local air quality from long term improvements in transportation • Maintain a percentage of "broadly" compliant (rating 3 or higher) food businesses
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Once again environmental health and housing have had an extremely busy year. I was going to try and shorten my report but then I thought that would be unfair as they all work their socks off and deserve recognition for all their hard work. I want to thank every officer and member of staff for all that they do. Especially, the environmental health officers for pro-actively looking at income generation within the department and housing officers for all the effort they have put in to bring my dream of building new council houses closer to fruition. You all know who you are, thank you ☺.

Progress made during 2016/17

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

PUBLIC PROTECTION

Our Dog Warden services are working closely with Morecambe Town Council which is funding a popular service provided by a dedicated Dog Fouling Enforcement Officer. A full range of measures from preventative education to on-the-spot enforcement is being taken to prevent and minimise dog fouling offending. Our observations whilst on patrol tell us that 99% of dog owners responsibly clear up after their dogs. The remaining 1% we are committed to deterring or catching in the act, and making our streets and open places pleasant, clean and healthy for residents and visitors to enjoy.

This year the Dog Warden service has also implemented an electronic stray dog registration system, started working with the Blue Cross charity to deliver educational sessions about dog safety to school children, and begun work to enhance our service delivery on canine behaviour.

Dog-related problems are just one form of Anti-Social Behaviour which seem to be on the increase. The council is committed to tackling and reducing all forms of neighbour nuisance and wider anti-social behaviour and is implementing new powers such as Community Protection Warnings. We are committed to reversing some worrying trends and this year we have appointed an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer working across council services and with Lancashire Police, already identifying some good opportunities. With the support of Morecambe Town Council and the Transformational Challenge Award in the West End of Morecambe we are planning some new approaches. Alongside an early

intervention rapid response we will be piloting support alongside local communities and partner agencies to target challenging and persistent cases of anti-social behaviour driven by substance abuse, mental health and youth offending. Talking to local people, these proposals are receiving strong support.

Our Pest Control service has been kept busy keeping the district as free as possible from rats and others public health and nuisance pests. This service is proving more popular than ever with our residents, businesses and our contract customers and this year has seen a sizeable increase in demand. In the current economic climate we are seeing a significant increase in fly tipping and serious neglect for pest proofing and eradication.

Through our unannounced inspections of businesses to check on compliance, our Food Safety team can confirm that 96% (of over 1,200 food businesses) have a current Food Hygiene Rating of "broadly compliant" (3 rating) or higher. Approximately 90% hold a 4 or 5 rating. These figures are higher than the national average and increasingly we are working differently with some very positive feedback in offering some new Business Support and Advice services, helping food businesses to gain or retain their 'Five' hygiene rating:

- New Business Start-Up advice helping the operators of new food businesses to safely get established, maximise the value of the investment and avoid costly mistakes in planning their layouts, furnishings, equipment and food safety management
- Pre-Inspection Audit advice to help business operators spot any risks, implement improvements and strengthen food safety management
- 'Eat Safe' food safety management products designed to provide food businesses with essential food safety management documentation along with additional products to help the business maintain good food safety practices such as temperature checking and date marking

In addition to requiring any necessary food safety improvements we are offering innovative one-on-one coaching sessions to help a food business proprietor overcome obstacles and achieve better lasting food safety compliance and improved business confidence.

At the other end of the food safety spectrum the council has entered a fourth Primary Authority Partnership. Chameleon Bar & Dining has joined the ranks of our existing partnerships with Diggles, Lancaster Brewery and Mitchells and we are in discussions with a fifth multi-site company. These regulatory partnerships help to ensure a good level of regulatory compliance throughout entire chains of business premises and enabling more confident business growth. The costs are borne by the businesses involved.

Elsewhere however officers are seeing an underlying current of food crime. This is where food is either illegally produced in unsafe conditions, or where no longer saleable food is altered and relabelled before being put back on the market. Sometimes we're finding this in small-time food crime involving 'back door sales'. However we are carrying out several larger investigations working with the Food Standards Agency, the National Food Crime Unit and other councils into potential food fraud. In one case officers carrying out a routine inspection discovered and seized a quantity of chicken that had been unlawfully relabelled, extending its Use By date. In another case officers formally seized large quantities of frozen food stored in a local cold store due to lack of traceability sufficient to establish adequate food safety assurance. The subsequent investigation identified a national network of supply, illegal repackaging, and redistribution to retail shops.

Our Infectious Disease Control work to prevent or minimise notifiable infectious diseases and prevent further spread of infection has dealt with a number of suspected outbreaks. Our investigations this year identified one outbreak that could be linked directly to a food handler preparing salads within a food business, for which formal action has been taken. Increasingly we will be using sampling foods in businesses to obtain more direct evidence of food quality and safety practices that the food has undergone.

It has been another busy year for our Port Health officer. Alongside imported food inspections, ship sanitation inspections and sampling water supplies for Legionella, where we require corrective action if conditions were unacceptable, we have tested our arrangements working with emergency responders on infectious disease-related shipping incidents. Separately, working with Public Health England, this year we have put in place a monitoring program to sample mosquitoes and screen for Zika Virus.

This has been a busy year for Health & Safety at Work. Alongside unannounced inspections, which these days are only made to the very highest risk-rated businesses, our officers carry out investigations into reported accidents. One major accident investigation is ongoing. More widely we offer advice and assistance to health and safety duty holders and respond to public safety-related concerns. Following local reports our investigating officers found evidence of unsafe practices in one (now closed) tattooing business. In response to needs for improved customer and business confidence we are working with other local authorities to launch a Tattoo & Skin piercing registration scheme in April 2017.

Air quality has been in the news and the tough challenge of tackling vehicle exhaust emissions certainly does require a coordinated effort. The council has negotiated a key focus on air quality in the Transport Masterplan for Lancaster District published by the county council. We have also taken a county-wide lead in developing planning guidance on low emission policies for all new developments and securing its adoption. This adopted guidance encourages provision of charging points for electric vehicles in new buildings, and more widely the assessment and mitigation a development's air quality impacts. Officers have been working:

- with Stagecoach to ensure that improvements in engine technology made possible by a Green Bus Fund award of around £300,000 will directly contribute to reduced exhaust emissions along some of our major bus routes and especially in the city centre
- with planning and licensing officers, the county council and our in-house Parking team to encourage and support the use of electric vehicles

CIVIL CONTINGENCIES

2016 was the year when Civil Contingencies picked up the pieces after Storm Desmond and took forward the many recommendations of the debrief. Additionally, all parish councils were contacted with an offer to assist them to develop community emergency plans so that in any future widespread emergency they could implement a local plan to look after the community and particularly any vulnerable people. This work was greatly assisted by the award of grants from the Lancashire Flood Appeal to improve the resilience of a number of community centres and village halls. To date seven community emergency plans have been completed and several more are being produced. The work has extended

into the urban areas with further plans being developed around the use of church halls and community centres in Lancaster.

General preparedness continued through the year with a number of plans being revised and updated with 'Desmond learning' and several officers volunteering to join the Council's on call team as Emergency Incident Officers or Senior Emergency Officers and attending courses and exercises to prepare themselves for these roles.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING and CEMETERIES

HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) has continued to enable vulnerable residents to remain independent, safe, secure and warm in their homes. The HIA's aim is to provide a quality service, offering vulnerable residents independent advice and assistance to find solutions to their housing-related needs. The work of the HIA has a positive impact on mental health, quality of life, fear of accidents, fear of crime, prevention of hospital admissions and early admission to residential care. The HIA provides care and repair type services which includes advice and assistance to undertake repairs/maintenance as well as assistance in considering their housing options and ways to raise finance to undertake works. Handyperson services are also available to carry out minor works. The HIA is also responsible for delivering the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant programme.

The success of our HIA led to us being awarded 'Adaptation Service of the Year 2016' by Lord Best in an event held at the House of Lords.

In addition to the core services above HIA continues to provide a number of bolt on services for vulnerable residents including:

The delivery of the 'Sanctuary' and 'Haven' service, completing security works to the homes of 'at risk' clients suffering Anti-Social Behaviour and Domestic Violence in partnership with the Homeless team.

The Warm Homes Service has continued throughout the 16/17 winter months. This service is delivered by Lancaster City Council with funding from Lancashire County Council and the CCG. The aim of the service is to help vulnerable residents stay warm over the winter. The HIA provides practical solutions to help vulnerable residents keep their homes warm at an affordable level over the winter period.

HOUSING OPTIONS (HOMELESSNESS)

- Homeless acceptances have reduced to the lowest figure since the data collection began. With the introduction of five new Homeless Prevention Officers (HPOs) the team are now working at an even earlier stage and this has resulted in an increase in the numbers of successful homeless prevention cases. That said, the service is still facing challenges with the welfare reforms, with the impacts of reductions in housing benefits for the under 35's, benefit cap remains one of the biggest challenges for assisting homeless under 35's. We are also still unsure of the impacts of the roll out of the new Universal Credit. The new proposals set out by Government

to align Local Housing Allowance Rents in social housing and the possible impacts to temporary accommodation is also a real concern in terms of its potential impact on homelessness. We continue to manage the increase in presentations following the implementation of the single room rent rate for the under 35's with the assistance of the HPOs. The funding from the DCLG for single homeless provides pre-tenancy training, shared housing and a new accommodation finding service. Funding for these services are being extended for a further 12 months until April 2018 using a combination of external funding and the homeless prevention grant. The homeless prevention work continues to be delivered 'in house' with a substantial saving and an increased number of positive outcomes for single non priority need homeless and rough sleepers by offering outreach support through agency drop-ins such as probation, outreach support to rough sleepers and accommodation finding advice. Rough sleeping is on the increase due to a combination of reasons. EEA national with "no recourse to public funds" has increase rough sleeping by 50% locally, Christchurch is the only direct access shelter in the North West and we see an influx of homeless people coming in to the District from other areas.

The Refuge has been operational since April 2013. It provides 7 units for families fleeing domestic violence. The funding for this service was 'at risk' from March 2017 due to the cuts in the Lancashire County Council Supporting People Programme. Funding has been secured to extend the contracts until September 2017, Lancashire CC have also secured 1.25 million from the Early Help and Prevention Fund to allow DV services to continue to operate for the next 2 years.

The county council alongside the district council are undertaking a review of the Lancashire wide Homeless 16/17 year olds protocol. This is now complete with the formal launch and roll out taking place in April 2017. The Young People's accommodation based services had been under threat due to the reduction in the Supporting People Programme funding. Children's Social Care have agreed to fund the gap for a 12 month period to enable the District's to demonstrate the provision is used for statutory homeless care leavers and homeless 16/17 year olds.

Temporary Accommodation (TA) targets remain below government targets - currently there are 6 available TA properties available within the district.

In October 2012 the council, in partnership with Methodist Action North West (MANW), launched the new 'Social Lettings Agency'. The aim of the SLA is to increase access to good quality private rented sector accommodation for homeless households. 38 plus properties have now been leased from private sector landlords with further properties in the pipeline as part of the empty homes programme. This scheme will give the local authority access to a sustainable supply of good quality housing with 2-10 year lease arrangements.

Choice Based Lettings - A further review of the Housing Allocations Policy is under way in light of the high number of Ombudsman complaints nationally against local authorities for their unlawful allocations policies. Consultation is now underway before taking to Cabinet for approval in due course.

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant - Local authority allocations from the DCLG have just been announced with Lancaster receiving one of the highest allocations in

the County. The funding has been allocated according to a formula which reflects relative homeless pressures, while at the same time aiming to protect local authorities which currently have high levels of Temporary Accommodation. The DCLG have calculated relative homelessness pressures by adding the number of acceptances to the number of prevention and relief cases achieved by securing a private rented sector tenancy.

DCLG Homelessness data for the financial year 2015/16 was used to estimate levels of the DWP fee, then also projected into the future based on current trends. The funding will give flexibility to spot purchase temporary accommodation or support in house provision.

Oak Tree House homeless hostel for rough sleepers/entrenched homeless opened in April 2014. The project provides 23 beds, 6 crisis beds, 12 move on beds and 5 self-contained semi-independent flats for the over 25's. The scheme continues to deliver a wide range of on-site services including health, drug, alcohol, training, education and in work support. The county council cuts to supporting people funding now threatens the long term viability of the scheme, but recently there has been news of an extension of the SP funding contract until September 2017. In the interim Adactus and the City Council have been exploring options to keep the service running post SP cuts. Oak Tree has been identified as a priority service for county funding and this would mean the service would need to take people from outside the District rather than just Lancaster.

HOUSING STANDARDS

The Housing Standards team continues to work across the district to improve standards of accommodation and management in the private rented sector. 122 of the most serious (category 1) hazards and 211 of the less serious (category 2) hazards have been resolved, and over 500 properties have been visited. The team continues to work closely with the Housing Options team to prevent homelessness, to reduce the supply of poor quality accommodation and to inspect any housing used by the team.

In August 2016 a Project Manager was appointed as part of the Transformation Challenge Award. He has been working on a feasibility study for the introduction of Selective licensing in Morecambe, and on how to better connect agencies and develop community assets. As part of this project, a dedicated Housing Enforcement Officer is targeting problem HMOs in the West End of Morecambe.

Following the floods in December 2015, £463 000 of grant aid has been approved, and £297 000 paid out for flood resilience and resistance measures in affected residential properties. This includes several larger community projects, where a number of households have grouped together to install measures to prevent future flooding.

The team continues to work with Serco who are providing accommodation for Asylum Seekers in the district. 25 of a proposed 30 houses are occupied, and approximately 150 Asylum Seekers are resident in the district. Good links have been made with the voluntary sector who provide integration support including drop-ins, English lessons, and community activities. Work has started on the Refugee Resettlement Programme, with an anticipated arrival date for 10 families in July 2017.

The Lancaster University Approved Homes Scheme is developing well with our support, and has resulted in an improvement of property conditions in the student sector. The University is investing in marketing to promote and grow the scheme, and Housing Standards sit on their Advisory Board.

CEMETERIES

Throughout 2016/2017, the Cemeteries Team have continued to provide a professional and efficient service in order to primarily arrange interments within the council's cemeteries, and the reserving and managing of burial plots.

Throughout February 2016, there was a total number of interments within all of our cemeteries of 24, which has been significantly improved upon with a total number of interments to 33 in February 2017. This means that we are attracting more families to inter their loved ones in our cemeteries as opposed to the Crematorium, church graveyards, other burial areas elsewhere in the UK, or even private land..

Due to demand, a new burial section was opened in Torrisholme Cemetery in February 2017. This will provide our local, as well as wider community the opportunity to purchase grave rights within one of our more popular cemeteries. This section is non-consecrated ground, which means it is appealing to a wider range of people.

Recognising an increased interest in green or natural burials, the Cemeteries Officer is currently working on literature that should help guide those either planning their own funerals or for the bereaved to deal with the burials of their loved ones. This subject can be quite daunting to tackle as it often involves either not using the services of a Funeral Director, or interring remains in an unconventional location. We hope to impartially provide members of the public with information should they request it, and therefore provide a more in depth service as a result. Our Woodland Burial sites have certainly been of more interest in recent months.

The Cemeteries Office now benefit from an improved relationship with Lancaster Muslim Welfare and Lancaster Islamic Society. Both the Cemeteries Officer and Operations Manager have made efforts to rectify previous issues and to create a smoother working relationship with both organisations. This is in order to achieve burial standards expected from the Muslim community, and to simultaneously provide the Cemeteries Office with official requirements needed in order to carry out our role as a burial authority.

The cemeteries fees and charges have been extensively reviewed for 2017/2018 order to cater for the increased demand on our services.

COUNCIL HOUSING

- *Increased number of improved homes.*

2016/2017 has seen the continuing investment in council housing across the district with investment being maintained at over £4.3 million. This programme of capital and planned maintenance work has been delivered the Council's in-house repairs and maintenance service and through a number of external contracts.

Work on improving energy efficiency within the Council's sheltered housing has brought real benefits to sheltered housing tenants through a combination of energy saving improvements £20,000 per year has been saved in electricity costs and this has led to a reduction in service charges to sheltered housing tenants. The work also being carried out on converting unpopular sheltered housing bedsits has also been very well received by tenants and everyone who has visited these schemes. This is part of a continuing programme of modernisation of our Category two sheltered accommodation.

On our general need housing the programme continues to support kitchen and bathroom renewals, and ensuring the roofs and the exteriors of council housing is well maintained.

- *Continue to try to establish a new build and acquisition programme to increase the number of Council houses in the district.*

The Council's ambitions to directly increase the number of Council homes in the district remain frustrated by lack of clarity in Government policy over the security of investing in additional council homes, with the government still not having announced the details of its policy on the sale of higher value council homes.

However, two general needs housing schemes at Carnforth are being taken to full planning approval; this is alongside the progressing the scheme for additional sheltered housing bungalows; by converting the ex-scheme manager houses at Parkside Court, Westgate and Melling House, Hala to provide four sheltered flats. Work on all other schemes has ceased for now, until the impact of all the legislative and policy changes being introduced by Government are properly understood and have been appraised.

Officers are also exploring other options as to how the Council might seek to help increase housing stock outside the HRA, for example through the setting up of a housing company. Any proposals that may come forward will need properly assessed and scrutinised.

- *Income and service investment*

Prior to 2016/2017 the HRA was well placed to invest and enhance its service provision significantly, but the Council's opportunities in this area, as highlighted previously, have been fundamentally reduced as a result of recent Government policy changes. Through the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 the Government removed the flexibility that local authorities previously had in determining their own rent policies, and changes to welfare benefit continue to impact on the ability to maintain its rental income stream. The restrictions on rent setting to 2019/20, brought about by Government policy, have been estimated to have cost the Council around £90M in reduced income over the life of the HRA 30-year business

plan. In addition there is continuing uncertainty regarding Government rent policy beyond 2020.

Despite this background Cabinet has approved increased resources:

- To provide additional resources to meet the challenges of income management
- To increase the support we can give to tenants to enable them to sustain their tenancies
- To help tackle long term unemployment issues amongst tenants
- To provide better support for area based initiatives to improve neighbourhoods
- To enable increased partnership working with health, police, and DWP
- To improve our performance on void management through better management and co-ordination of void works
- To strengthen and provide greater overall service resilience

Work is currently progressing to implement a new service structure to deliver on these objectives.

- *Tenant, leasehold and resident engagement*

The Council continues to create many opportunities for tenants, leaseholders and residents to be involved in the service, for example the popular estate walkabouts, but the Council wants to look at how it can further develop its landlord services. The Council was one of the first local authorities to achieve accreditation for tenant involvement, and re- accreditation of the Council's engagement arrangements with tenants, leaseholders and residents is being sought in 2017/2018.