

## Executive Annual Report 2014/15

**Councillor Karen Leytham**

**Portfolio Holder for Housing, Environmental Health and  
Emergency Planning**

### **Executive Membership**

- Cabinet
- District Wide Tenants Cabinet Liaison Group
- Housing Regeneration Cabinet Liaison Group
- Planning Policy Cabinet Liaison Group

### **Executive Appointments to Outside Bodies etc**

- LGA Coastal Issues Special Interest Group

### **Overview of Portfolio Responsibilities**

#### **Council Service Objectives:**

Housing - Environmental Health - Emergency Planning

#### **Corporate Plan Key Actions:**

Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Enhanced quality of life of local residents through access to affordable, decent homes</li><li>•Health and wellbeing of our citizens is improved</li><li>•The Council's impact on the environment will be minimised</li></ul>

Success Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Increased number of improved homes</li><li>•Improve access to housing</li><li>•Increase number of affordable homes</li><li>•Maintaining adequate supply to reduce demand led unsustainable price rises in the housing market</li><li>•Improve the wellbeing of our residents through collaborative, preventative and reactive measures</li><li>•Increased number of vulnerable households benefitting from Warm Homes Initiative</li><li>•Maintain percentage of 'broadly' compliant food businesses (category 3-5)</li><li>•Maintain and/or improve average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating in council homes to a high level</li></ul>

*Every time I read through my annual report it still amazes me just how much Environmental Health & Housing do on a day to day basis. I'm proud of how committed and pro-active they are in what can be quite challenging times with less staff and reduced budgets.*

*I want to say a massive thank you to all the staff and officers throughout the council who have helped make my time on Cabinet a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Together we continue to move forward.*

## **Progress made during 2014/15**

### **❖ ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

#### **Public Health**

The Public Health Team dealt with a record number of public funerals, where no-one accepts financial responsibility for burying someone when they die. The Public Health team continued to build and strengthen relationships with other agencies in relation to vulnerable people, particularly as regards dealing with filthy and verminous premises. The council is planning innovative project working with the county's Director of Public Health team to locally address inequalities in health and tackle key health causes of ill-health.

The council's highly rated pest control service experienced an extremely busy year due to the hot summer of 2014, resulting in increased revenue. The pest control operatives have been accepted on the new Basis Prompt register, which is fundamental to the pest control service's involvement in the national Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use and recognises their suitable qualifications as quality pest control professionals.

Appointment of a Dog Fouling Enforcement Officer has helped to raise awareness in the community of the priority the council gives to fouling problems. The dog warden team worked proactively with several local schools on fouling problems and officers have carried out a number of fouling surveillance operations throughout the district. There have been increased numbers of Fixed Penalty Notices issued for Dog Control Order offences.

The dog warden team hosted a Dogs in the Community training course in conjunction with the Dogs Trust, covering areas of new legislation. This was very popular, attended by around 30 local dog-related businesses, illustrating growing relationships this licensed businesses sector. In another sector, permanent residents of caravan sites are supportive of the newly adopted improving standards under the Mobile Homes Act 2013 which will be further developed in the coming months.

### **Environmental Protection**

It has been another busy year for our team dealing with neighbour nuisance, pollution and anti-social behaviour. The team has successfully piloted an Early Intervention approach where officers rapidly get to the bottom of reported problems and will take improvement/enforcement action in appropriate cases. Officers are developing closer working with Lancashire Police and other partners to make an impact implementing new powers. At the same time, our Environmental Health teams have vetted hundreds of new planning and licensing applications aiming to identify and prevent possible noise and pollution problems before they start. There has been an increase in the number and complexity of substantial new development projects requiring specialist environmental assessment, for example onshore installations associated with the energy generating sector.

Officers are reporting an increase in cases where residents dump and accumulate household rubbish or dog waste in their back yards, gardens and alleyways. In addition to making public places unhygienic and unsafe to walk in, this has led to a number of smell and vermin problems for which formal action is taken. The council is committed to taking action to prosecute those who fail to comply with reasonable requests and persistently put their neighbourhoods at risk in this way.

### **Food Safety**

The council has entered into three new formal Primary Authority Partnerships with local multi-site businesses. This will offer effective regulation across all the premises in a multi-site business even if they are in another council's area, providing for regulatory consistency and closer regulatory working with and understanding the needs of

businesses. Under the scope of each agreement our partnering business pays for the council's officer time carrying out agreed partnership activity. As a result these businesses and their customers can become more assured than ever that risks are well managed.

Officers have investigated over 330 cases of infectious diseases, from home-cooking causing food poisoning to winter-time outbreaks of highly infectious Norovirus. We work to find common causes of disease transmission and minimise the risk of passing them on. The council has participated in a study run by Cumbria and Lancashire Public Health England into the spread of an infectious disease known as Giardia. There have been numerous notified cases of the infection locally. The study will help to grow understanding and control of this debilitating infective agent.

We have responded to over 500 service requests in 2014/15 relating to food standards, safety and quality. Appropriate investigation and improvement/enforcement action has been taken in every case.

Over 400 food businesses have been inspected, unannounced, to check hygiene and food safety standards are being maintained. Consumers will now be familiar with the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme stickers displayed by many businesses rating the business from 0 (Urgent Improvement required) to 5 (Very Good). 96% of our food businesses were assessed as "broadly compliant" with food safety law at the time of unannounced inspection, receiving a rating of at least 3, which is slightly higher than the previous year. We now have 91% of businesses with a rating of 4 or 5, and 80% with the top rating of 5.

Food Hygiene training is now available direct from the Food Safety team, translating what our inspectors see every day into high quality learning for food business employees.

### **Health and safety at work (and for customers)**

Whilst recent Government policy has reduced the number of workplaces inspected by Environmental Health Officers, we carry out alternative intervention projects in response

to identified concerns, assessing compliance with reasonable safety standards and acting on the findings.

There is still a legal duty to report workplace accidents and the council appears to be receiving an increased number of serious workplace accidents for investigation, these have included hospitalisation and fatal accidents in care homes. A number of serious / fatal accident investigations have been carried out during the year and prosecutions taken.

The courts have taken health & safety at work offending seriously, as demonstrated in fines and prosecution costs being awarded. For example a ten pin bowling centre received fines of £56,000 including £16,000 costs whilst £19,400 including £3,400 costs for carrying out work activity at height in an unsafe manner, putting themselves and members of the public at risk. These cases send important messages to duty-holders in the Lancaster district, and we will continue working to promote the benefits of positive compliance for protecting workers, businesses, and the people they come into contact with.

### **Emergency Planning and Response**

The council's volunteer Duty Emergency Incident Officers and Senior Emergency Officers have been kept busy with a number of emergency incidents including the Megazone fire on Morecambe Promenade and providing bottled water to motorists trapped in a motorway closure on a very hot day. Although the winter weather was not as severe as in the previous year tidal flood warnings were received which saw council resources being put on standby and storm boards installed. Training of staff in emergency roles has continued and a multi-agency Flooding Training event was held at The Platform and well attended as was a Beachmaster oil pollution course at Carnforth which the City Council hosted for all Lancashire coastal authorities. Our own emergency plans have continued to be reviewed and updated during the year.

## ❖ **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING and CEMETERIES**

- The size of the private rented sector continues to grow and it is an increasingly important source of housing. The Housing Standards Team has been concentrating on reducing the most serious hazards (category 1 hazards) in the sector, and on reducing fuel poverty by improving heating systems and insulation. Fire safety continues to be a priority and the team has a close working relationship with the Fire Service. The team is also working closely with Lancaster University to assist with the launch of their Approved Homes Scheme. This will help to assist Lancaster Universities to further improve the properties they use to accommodate their students. Housing Standards are involved in developing initiatives to make greater use of the sector in preventing homelessness.
- In 2014 the Council, in partnership with Lancashire County Council, were successful in a bid for Transformation Challenge Award Funding. The project will focus on addressing poor quality housing stock in the private rental sector, and tackling the underlying social and health needs of residents to deliver improved outcomes.

Bringing together public sector partners, it will ensure that every contact with communities maximises the opportunity to improve lives and reduce the impact on high-cost reactive services through:

- smart data collection, analysis and risk profiling tools
- work with focused populations
- developing an integrated neighbourhood service offer around early help and prevention
- utilising and building community strengths to reduce reliance on the public sector
- reducing repeat demand for services
- improving community safety and wellbeing outcomes

The project will connect with several large scale public sector programmes (Better Care Together, Prevention and Early Help for Children Young People and Families, Integrated Wellness Service, Early Response and Morecambe

Regeneration) through smarter use of data systems to inform strategic planning, and developing improved pathways to support.

- Unlawful and retaliatory evictions continue to be a problem, so links continue to be improved with the Citizen's Advice Bureau to address this.
- The option of introducing Selective Licensing into the West End of Morecambe continues to be explored.
- 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.
- In 2014/15 the HIA successfully secured continued funding from the framework of key partners including the County Council's Public Health (formerly NLTPCT), Adult & Community Services and the Supporting People programme. This funding enabled the HIA service to continue to meet the needs of vulnerable residents. In addition the 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 14/15 winter months. This service is delivered by Lancaster City Council with funding from Lancashire County Council's Public Health 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.

- Throughout 2014/15 the HIA has continued to promote the service extensively to residents in the district and maintain the close working relationships with key partners which have been developed to enable vulnerable clients to be referred to the agency. The agency continues to deliver essential outcomes for vulnerable residents, demonstrating excellent value for money with high levels of customer satisfaction.
- During 2014/15 the HIA also secured additional funding to deliver the following services; RoSPA and Public Health funding to deliver a Home Safety Service for vulnerable children under the age of 5 and Public Health funding to deliver a service to assist people with dementia remain safe and independent in their own home.
- Homeless acceptances are being maintained at the same levels as in the previous year and successful prevention cases continue to prevent homelessness. 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 and the new Universal Credit which is due to be implemented soon. 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 homeless prevention officers looking at shared accommodation and supporting people to maintain their existing accommodation. 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.
- The Refuge has been operational since April 2013. It provides 7 units for families fleeing domestic violence.



- The DCLG has continued to make available funding to the districts to assist with the implementation and roll out of the new Lancashire wide Homeless 16/17 year olds protocol. The main focus of the funding is to prevent young people becoming homeless in the first instance, support families to keep young people at home and prevent placing 16/17 year olds into inappropriate bed and breakfast accommodation. The funding has facilitated accredited medication training for a number of key agencies working with families and young people.
- 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 North West Methodist Action, launched the new “Social Lettings Agency”. The Social Lettings Development Coordinator is situated within the Housing Options team with the aim of increasing access to good quality private rented sector accommodation for homeless households. 38 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.
- Lancaster City Council along with Blackpool, Preston, Fylde & Wyre have been successful in a bid to secure £250k to commission new services for single non-priority need homeless people. The service will provide an accommodation finding, shared housing and pre-tenancy training package.
- Choice Based Lettings are now well established within the housing options team to support the delivery of choice based lettings and the team also have responsibility for the allocation of social housing within the district. Customers have now fully embraced the new on-line application procedure with limited disruption or complaint. This is down to officer commitment within the team and the superb support from customer services teams in Lancaster & Morecambe and the local voluntary and faith sector. A review of the Housing Allocations Policy was taken to Cabinet and approved in October 2014. The main changes to the existing

Allocations Policy will focus on Local Connection, Armed Forces applicants and the effective allocation to those most in need.

- The DCLG have made a small amount of funding available to roll out the governments 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) initiative across Lancashire. Lancaster City Council joined the national scheme in December 2012 which aims to make it easier for people sleeping rough to get the help they need. Street Link is a new simple scheme that will help members of the public to quickly connect rough sleepers to local services. Eliminating Rough Sleeping remains a key corporate priority for the council.

Anyone who sees a rough sleeper can report it in the following ways:

- By telephoning the 24/7 StreetLink phone line 0300 500 0914
- By using the StreetLink website [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk)
- By downloading the StreetLink App from the iTunes or Google Market store free of charge

For further information please visit -

[http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SWEP%20&%20CWP%20effective%20action%202012\\_0.pdf](http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SWEP%20&%20CWP%20effective%20action%202012_0.pdf)

- Following a successful bid to the Homes and Communities Agency in 2011 the new homeless hostel for rough sleepers/entrenched homeless is now almost complete. The new 23 bed supported housing scheme will provide 6 crisis beds, 12 move on beds and 5 self-contained semi-independent flats for the over 25's. The scheme will also deliver a wide range of on-site services including health, drug alcohol, training, education and in work support. The first residents will move in to the new scheme before the end of March 2015.
- 50 Portland Street opened in September 2013 providing a small interim project for rough sleepers/single homeless with complex needs. This will close at the end of March 2015 when the new scheme will open.

- A review of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 was completed in 2014 and is pending approval by Cabinet.
- Following the transfer of the responsibility for grounds maintenance within the council's cemeteries to Environmental Services in 2013 together with the on-going financial restraints, applications for Green Flag Awards for Morecambe Cemetery/Morecambe Parish Church and Torrisholme Cemetery were not submitted in 2014.

## ❖ **COUNCIL HOUSING**

### **General**

Council housing makes an important contribution to the provision of affordable and decent homes within the district. This year has seen a continuing commitment to delivering a service which is valued by residents. The council currently provides 3761 homes to rent with just over 29% of the housing stock being sheltered or bungalow accommodation. Progress has been made over the last twelve month in reviewing the investment needs of the housing stock to ensure that it properly maintained.

We have continued to ensure that involving residents in service development, delivery and improvement, remains important to ensure that the council is approachable, more accountable, more attuned to residents' views; providing a value for money service.

### **Quality of Accommodation**

2014/2015 has seen the continuing investment in the council's housing stock to ensure that it meets the needs and expectations of existing and future tenants. The council will have invested £4.8 million over the last year in its homes. The capital and planned maintenance programmes have been successfully delivered by the council's in-house repairs and maintenance service, and through a number of external partnerships and contracts.

Considerable impact has been made on the Branksome estate in Morecambe with the refurbishment and improvement to the common areas of the blocks of flats, and this work will continue throughout 2015/2016. We have also been able to continue the programme of converting sheltered housing bedsits into flats at Ripley Court in Lancaster. This work has been well received by existing tenants, and should ensure the future desirability of the accommodation; meeting current and future expectations of older people. There is the continuing energy efficiency programme where we have installed solar panels to 'off-gas' rural properties which again has been well received by tenants. During the year we have also commence a programme of renewing the communal lighting systems within our larger sheltered housing schemes with LED based systems which have reduced energy consumption and will reduce future maintenance costs as well. This is in addition to the ongoing central heating and boiler renewal programme to maintain and improve the energy efficiency of council housing across the district.

The overall programme continues with kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, external refurbishment – windows, external door, rendering and repointing, re-roofing, and boundary renewal across the district; informed by the stock condition survey.

In additional there has been a focus and response to changing regulation in key safety areas including ongoing fire safety improvements, management of asbestos, and management of legionella risks.

The capital and planned maintenance programme is reviewed on an annual basis projecting forward the next five years investment needs and beyond.

The council is still developing it plans for building new council housing and in October Cabinet gave its approval to detailed appraisals to be undertaken on a number of potential sites on the Carnforth estate, the Ridge estate, and at the sheltered housing scheme on Westgate. Work is progressing on these appraisals which will be brought back to Cabinet for final approval. Hopefully 2015/2016 will see the first council housing being built in this district for some decades.

## **Allocations and Lettings**

It is predicted that over 400 households will have been rehoused by the council over the year. The demand for council housing remain high with over 2800 applicants on the council's housing register; a slight reduction over the year. Those in greatest need in Band A Emergency Housing Need and Band B form 7.8% of the register. The number of applicants in Band C Medium Housing Need form 38.5% of the housing register. However the greatest proportion of applicants are in Band D Low Housing Need and Band E Very Low Housing Need; together forming just over 53.7% of the register.

The highest demand for accommodation remain for one and two bedroom properties forming 88% of the households on the housing register.

## **Neighbourhood and Community**

Over the last few months council housing have been trialling new working arrangements within the tenancy and estate management team. Estate managers carry out a wide range of functions including managing the termination and starting of tenancies, dealing with tenancy enquires and changes to tenancies, dealing with breaches of the tenancy agreement, tenancy conduct, and anti-social behaviour, identifying and tackling wider estate management issues. The focus of the review has been to trial methods of improving the time available to deal with some of the more complex and difficult case of anti-social behaviour, together with creating a more proactive and community engagement role in other tenancy and estate issues. There is recognition that the estate managers have a key role in working with and involving tenants to deliver an effective service. 2015/2016 will see a further tenant satisfaction survey being undertaken, and it will be good to see if overall tenants' satisfaction is improved.

Preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour, working together with residents and other agencies, on the council's estates remains a high priority. Tenancy management takes a significant amount of time. The housing management team have again dealt with over 200 new cases during 2014/2015. The greatest number of complaints, related to noise nuisance. Other areas of main complaints related to verbal abuse, pets, and untidy gardens.

Every year the District-wide Tenants' Forum allocates funding to support community projects to improve the environment of the council housing estates and neighbourhoods. 2014/2015 saw a variety of projects supported across the district: communal patio area at Gummers Howe, Carnforth; raised accessible planters at Princes Avenue, Greaves; landscaping of redundant garage area at Prospect Grove, Morecambe; contribution to funding for play area at Langridge estate, Morecambe; wheel chair friendly communal area at Alder Grove, Marsh; parking facilities at Artlebeck Close, Caton, and The Roods, Warton.

All tenants have been recently asked for projects to be put forward for the 2015/2016 programme. Projects can include play areas, improving community spaces, up-grading neglected areas, improved communal lighting, new signs, and landscaping works. This kind of approach is central to the way the council engages with residents, supporting them to help improve their neighbourhoods.

### **Financing of Council Housing**

2014/2015 saw rents increase by just 1%. However, Cabinet has recently set an average rent increase of just 2% for 2015/2016, and has adopted a policy that for 2016/17 onwards target rent increases be set at 3% per annum. This should ensure that the future funding needs of council housing are met both in the medium term, and the long term. The council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is self-financed, primarily from income received in rent. This covers all the day to day expenditure for providing council housing including the costs of maintaining and improving the housing stock.

Over the coming year the council will be undertaking a review to establish a rent setting policy that supports the development of an on-going council housing building programme meeting identified housing needs and taking into account the impact on the long term management and investment needs of the council's housing stock.

### **Tenant Involvement**

Again, this year the District-wide Tenants' Forum and the various Tenant Quality Groups have worked with the council and have looked at a number of aspects of the service;

including a joint void property inspection with members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The council maintains a national accreditation for resident involvement through the TPAS Resident Involvement Quality Standard (RIQ) - an independent guarantee of excellence in resident involvement and is one of only two local authorities to have this accreditation. 2015/2016 will see the council seeking reaccreditation and recognition of its resident involvement model. Early this year a presentation on the model we have adopted was given to members of the Association of Retained Council Housing at a seminar in Sheffield.

The council remains represented on the Association of Retained Council Housing National Tenant Representation Panel by the chairperson from the District-wide Tenants' Forum.