

## **Executive Annual Report 2017/18**

### **Councillor Warriner**

**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**

Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Enhanced quality of life of local residents through access to affordable, decent housing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health and wellbeing of our citizens is improved</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Maintain a financially stable position and strong financial forecast for the delivery of council services</li> </ul>

Success Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increase the number of improved homes</li> <li>•Improve access to housing by addressing evidence of need</li> <li>• Increase provision of social housing</li> <li>• Continue to try to establish a new build and acquisition programme to increase the number of council houses in the district</li> <li>•Complete feasibility study of selective licensing of private sector landlords</li> <li>• Increase the number of vulnerable households benefiting from Warm Homes Initiatives</li> <li>•Improve local air quality from long term improvements in transportation</li> <li>• Maintain a percentage of “broadly” compliant (rating 3 or higher) food businesses</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Develop and implement a range of further savings and income generation opportunities to sustain the council’s budget</li> </ul>

## **Progress made during 2017/18**

### **Environmental Health**

#### **PUBLIC PROTECTION**

##### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

- Established a dedicated and highly flexible Anti-Social Behaviour team taking on a wide range of cases dealing with issues around neighbour nuisance, mental health, drug dealing and substance abuse, and young people related ASB. Informal advice and warnings have been supplemented with formal powers (such as community protection warnings and notices, and new civil injunctions).

- Completed substantial research into young people related anti-social behaviour. This identified, for example, the benefit that some hang-out zones would cater as safe places where kids can be kids.

### **Environmental enforcement**

- Fly tipping and other wastes-related offences continue to be a significant public concern, as well as costing the council hundreds of thousands of pounds to clear up. A number of successful investigations and enforcement actions have been delivered, including prosecutions.
- The council's waste collection, street cleansing and enforcement services are coordinating efforts to improve the cleanliness of seriously affected local areas. More detail is appearing now in the Spring 2018 edition of 'Your District Council Matters'.

### **Dog fouling**

- The dedicated Dog Fouling Enforcement Officer service, funded by Morecambe Town Council and operated in the Morecambe area, continues to provide a high level of visible advice and deterrence. The most recently calculated pick-up rate for dog fouling is 99.4% and every offender has been formally dealt with by way of fixed penalty notices. This forms part of the council's busy Dog Warden team which once again has been kept very busy.

### **Air quality**

- Our officers have been busy working on specific projects, for example:
  - with the local taxi trade to introduce low emission electric vehicles to the fleet
  - with planning officers to increase the numbers of dwellings served by electric vehicle charging points
  - with the county council and Stagecoach on cleaner engine technology in the passenger bus fleet.
- They have been working more widely with public health partners on ways to improve local air quality, and with the Health & Wellbeing Partnership to promote walking and cycling opportunities and facilities (which have the added sociable

benefit that people in our communities are more engaged and less cocooned in their private cars).

### **Food Safety**

- Delivery of Safer Food Direct – completed 2 business start-up inspections and 6 “gain or retain” audits, generating £1,300 income
- Delivered 3 food hygiene training courses, training 43 food handlers (generating approximately £2,000 income)
- Delivered 2 sous vide training course, generating £2,600
- Designed and delivered Food Fraud training to 24 officers, generating £3,000
- Sold 17 “Eat Safe” food safety packs and diary packs for food businesses
- Carried out approximately 700 food hygiene inspections
- We have taken one food fraud prosecution case – trial date has now been moved to October 2018
- Increased our income generation from water sampling, ships inspections, “Eat safe” and “Safer Food Direct”
- Seized and destroyed 8 pallets of unfit frozen food

### **Licensing**

- Revoked 3 Taxi driver licenses due to serious matters putting public health at risk
- Carried out 180 unannounced taxi vehicle compliance inspections vehicles resulting in issuing 75 defect notices and 2 vehicle suspensions

### **Pest Control**

- The council’s pest Control service has launched its commercial trading arm called Unbugged, serving business clients with the aim of helping to subsidise the costs of our residents’ pest control needs.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

- The council’s officers have been a key part of organised community conversations around health and wellbeing needs. They have also supported a range of community wellbeing initiatives.

## **Early Action**

- New for 2018/19, the Lancaster district will have an integrated Early Action team across a range of agencies and with community involvement to tackle problems at an early stage before they become difficult to manage and resolve.

## **Civil Contingencies**

- During 2017 there was continuing progress in developing local emergency plans and by the end of the year ten communities in the district had completed and published their own plans.
- In November there was another extreme weather event that resulted in flooding in Galgate, Hala, Halton and other parts of the district. The council and emergency services response was fantastic and support to the affected communities continued during the post flooding clean up and beyond. Lessons learned from the debrief are already being implemented.

## **Private Sector Housing & Cemeteries**

### **HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY**

- The council's award winning in-house Home Improvement Agency (HIA) has continued to enable vulnerable residents to maintain independence and to remain safe, secure and warm in their own homes.
- The HIA manages and delivers the city council's DFG programme. All HIA clients are screened for possible DFG adaptations. The HIA has no waiting lists in operation and clients are assisted throughout the grants process.
- Lancaster's DFG allocation in 2017/18 was £1,775,217, compared to £783,000 in 2015/16. The average completed DFG in 17/18 is currently £5,360.31. The figure is well below the national average, which is in the region of £7000. Despite staffing

issues throughout 17/18, the HIA has increased the number of grants completed to 213 compared to 122 in 2016/17. Through the promotional work and the use of independent OTs, which now account for almost 50% of all referrals, the HIA has also increased the number of referrals received to 419 compared to 269 in 2016/17.

- The Handyman Service carries out minor work which residents find difficult to find a contractor to undertake and which helps them to remain independent in their own home. There is no charge for using the Handyman Service, however clients are required to pay for any materials.

### **HOUSING OPTIONS (HOMELESSNESS & CHOICE BASED LETTINGS)**

- Homeless acceptances have reduced over the last 10 years and are now starting to level off. 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. Rough sleeping is an ongoing issue, not in terms of numbers, but in terms of people's complexities. 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 contract until September 2019.
- Temporary Accommodation (TA) targets remain below government targets - currently there are 6 available family TA properties available within the district.
- Choice Based Lettings - An updated Housing Allocations Policy was approved in March. In the past 12 months we have advertised and let around 363 council tenancies and a further 122 Housing Association tenancies within the District.

- Oak Tree House homeless hostel for rough sleepers/entrenched homeless has been open for nearly 3 years in April 2018. The project provides 23 beds, 6 crisis beds, 12 move on beds and 5 self-contained semi-independent flats for the over 25s. The scheme continues to deliver a wide range of on-site services including health, drug, alcohol, training, education and in work support. The service is a North Locality provision with effect from March 2018 following a re-tender and recent re-commissioning of the service.
- We assisted with coordinating help and support to households affected by the recent floods in November 2017 by providing advice and assistance with rehousing into temporary accommodation and permanent rehousing.
- The Home Office approached the Council 2 year ago to assist with the Asylum Seekers Dispersal Programme for single people and families. In the past 12 months we have rehoused 5 households leaving SERCO accommodation who have been given leave to remain and registered a further 10 households on to the housing register.

## **HOUSING STANDARDS**

- The Housing Standards team continues to work across the district to improve standards of accommodation and management in the private rented sector. The team has dealt with 811 requests for service, and made improvements to 143 privately rented properties.
- An extensive 10 week public consultation was held at the end of 2017 on whether to introduce a licensing scheme for private landlords in Morecambe. Taking all views into account, the outcome was a decision to pilot an intelligence led enforcement approach concentrating on dealing with problems associated with rogue landlords. Alongside this, in partnership with Lancashire County Council, innovative and sustainable ways of building the resilience of people and communities will be developed with a more collaborative way of working with

partners including statutory services, non-statutory services, the voluntary, community and faith sector.

- The programme of grants awarded following the floods in December 2015 closed on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 when £700,000 of grant aid will have been allocated to residential properties. This includes several larger community projects, where a number of households have grouped together to install measures to prevent future flooding. Unfortunately, further flooding in November 2017 left another 276 properties in the district with flooded habitable rooms, requiring the team to be involved in a joint emergency response to ensure all residents were safely housed.
- Lancaster welcomed 10 resettled refugee families in July 2017. 10 houses were sourced and prepared for their arrival, and a contract awarded to a local organisation Global Link to provide integration support. We are also working with Serco who are providing accommodation for Asylum Seekers using 29 houses in the district.
- Following the Grenfell fire, the team has worked with Lancashire Fire and Rescue to identify all private residential high rise blocks in the district, and ensure they are safe.
- 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**

- We are continuing to observe a trend of slightly reduced burial numbers whilst the number of interments of cremated remains increases.
- Improvements to our chapel buildings began in 2017. Pew runners have now been installed into Torrisholme, Scotforth and Skerton Cemetery, with the aim to furnish Hale Carr Cemetery chapel during 2018.



- In order to allow the public to gain easy access to our service, we now have a Cemeteries Office representative based at Lancaster Town Hall for a scheduled day to allow for appointments. This has raised the profile of Lancaster City Council's Cemeteries Office, and offered improved customer service.
- The Cemeteries service looks forward to continuing these improvements in partnership with the Grounds Maintenance Department when it transfers to Environmental Services in the new financial year.

## **Council Housing**

### **Introduction**

- The year is ending with the government promising a 'wide-ranging, top-to-bottom review of the issues facing the Social Housing sector', with the Council continuing to play a significant role in directly providing good quality and affordable homes to rent through its council housing service in an increasingly challenging environment.

### **Improved customer satisfaction**

- We have had the result of our two yearly tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey undertaken by an independent market research company. The survey tells us that overall satisfaction with the service has increased to 86%.
- Significant effort is being made to improve our repair and maintenance service and the Council should be able to report improved satisfaction and performance in this part of the service.

### **Supporting tenants, protecting income**

- 2017/18 saw two new Household Intervention Officer posts being established to support tenants with vulnerabilities and other support needs. The objective being to encourage tenant independence and support tenancy sustainment. Since June 2017 they have intensively worked with over 100 vulnerable households. I am pleased to report that Cabinet approved further resources for this area in the 2018/19 budget and an additional Household Intervention Officer is to be appointed.

- Through the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, the Government removed the ability of the Council to determine its own rent policy. As a consequence, from 2016/17 to 2019/20 most property rents continue to be reduced by 1% year on year. This has provided some medium term financial challenges, and this has been compounded with the full roll out of Universal Credit within this district presenting many financial challenges to our tenants and has been reflected in rising rent arrears and increasing numbers of tenants getting into debt.
- However, despite these challenges, the Council is successfully managing its Council housing rent collection to help mitigate against the full impact of these changes. During last year's budget process the Council made provision for additional resources to support this work with a new post of team leader – Income Manager being established in June 2017 to develop the income management services we provide within council housing. A further Income Management Officer is also to be appointed in 2018/19 to help manage the increase in the number of tenants who have found themselves in rent arrears.

### **Greater awareness of all stakeholders of service standards**

The service will have by April 2018 re-published service standards giving tenants and leaseholders a clear indication of the service standards being provided. This year has also seen increasing interaction with service users and tenants through social media (Facebook, and I would recommend everyone to follow the council housing service via Facebook).

### **Community development**

Through its council housing services the Council has continued to promote its broader community engagement, investment and development objectives, and continued to support the Ridge Community Centre and the Marsh Community Centre in the work they are doing in their areas.

## **Improved tenancy support and management**

- The service has also been reviewing other areas of tenancy management and a review has been undertaken of the Council's tenancy agreement to ensure that it remains current and effective. A statutory consultation with tenants on the proposed changes will take place over the coming months with a view to issuing a revised tenancy agreement in September 2018.
- It is pleasing to note that the 2017/18 tenant survey showed increased satisfaction from tenants with the way anti-social behaviour reports are being handled and that the Council is amongst the top quartile in satisfaction when compared with other comparable landlords.
- A review has also been undertaken to improve tenancy enforcement, and procedures and review working practices have been reviewed, including the HRA financially contributing the establishment of the pilot ASB team within Health and Housing Services. The ASB team, together with the Tenancy and Estate Management, have successfully tackled some extremely difficult and persistent cases which have impacted on our estates.

## **Decent homes and decent neighbourhoods**

- As a Council we continue to perform well in this area. The challenge is to ensure that we continue to maintain and update asset information to ensure that the investment we are making delivers decent and sustainable homes. This is an ongoing process and through the Repairs and Maintenance Service the 5 year investment plan is annually revised and updated.
- This investment needs to continue to be delivered through the annual capital and planned maintenance programme. Over this last year we will have spent over £4m on capital and planned maintenance works on the Council's housing stock.
- We also continue to seek to achieve ambition of new council housing and hopefully by the end of 2017/18 full planning approval for potential new build schemes at Carnforth will have been obtained. At this stage the financing of the build will need to be confirmed, and a report will be brought back to Cabinet to consider how this scheme can be moved forward to conclusion later in the year.

## Looking forward

- Over the forthcoming year, as highlighted in the HRA budget report, the Council is focusing on:
  - developing and implementing a marketing strategy to rebrand council housing to become 'housing of choice';
  - continuing with aspirations for new build council housing to meet demand and investigate alternative vehicles for delivery;
  - protecting current income and increase going forward through reducing empty home turnover and improvements to the 'end to end' lettings process to generate efficiencies (i.e. lean thinking);
  - continuing to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Repairs and Maintenance Service (RMS) through investment in technology to extend mobile working;
  - improving tenancy management and support by increasing capacity in early intervention and prevention to support tenants struggling with maintaining tenancies, debt (impact of Universal Credit) and promote pathways into employment;
  - continuing to support wider community development and engagement in the council housing services of the Council.