

## **Executive Annual Report 2018/19**

### **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)
- Flooding Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman)

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

- Health and Wellbeing Partnership

### **Overview of Portfolio Responsibilities**

- Responsibility for Housing and Environmental Health

### **Progress made during 2018/19**

## **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING**

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

- Homeless acceptances have reduced over the last 10 years and are set to reduce even further with the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. For the year 2017/18, the total

acceptances were 75. During the same period, officers dealt with a total of 651 cases where homelessness was prevented or relieved to remain in existing accommodation or assisted into alternative accommodation before being made homeless. Lancaster received the highest amount of flexible homelessness grant funding in Lancashire due to our successful prevention work. Rough sleeping is an ongoing issue, not in terms of numbers, but in terms of the increasingly complex needs of some people. 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 during the winter months.

- Increasing temporary accommodation - we have commissioned 12 new units of homeless accommodation in Lancaster, including Portland Street and Aldcliffe House. This has enabled the Council to make placements for single homeless households, including rough sleepers. Oak Tree House provides supported accommodation for rough sleepers and single homeless with complex needs. Out of 95 referrals, 58 placements have been made for people who were either rough sleeping prior to accessing the service or have a history of rough sleeping/repeat homelessness over the past 12 months. In November 2018, the housing districts and the County Council were successful with a pan Lancashire bid to provide additional funding worth £1.2 million across Lancashire for dedicated children's workers, BME support and funding for those with no recourse to public funds and dispersed units for those more complex families not suitable for communal refuge
- Funding bids for Rough Sleepers and the Rapid Housing Pathway from the Ministry of Housing for Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are currently in progress
- We are working with substance misuse partners and have developed a Substance Misuse Forum with a local partnership working protocol, with the aim of preventing homelessness and improving housing pathways for homeless leaving accommodation based services. Housing Options also provide housing drop-ins at Walter Lyon House and Littledale Hall.
- Choice Based Lettings (CBL) - An updated Housing Allocations Policy was approved in March 2018. In the past 12 months, we have advertised and let around 265 council tenancies and a further 145 Housing Association tenancies within the District. During 2018, CBL officers, for a trial period, have taken on the role of the viewing and sign up process, with a view to improving the time taken to re-let properties and reduce void times.
- Plans are in place to commission a "lived experience" piece of research to inform the review of the Homeless Strategy, which is due in 2019.

## **HOUSING STANDARDS**

- A landlord in Lancaster was successfully prosecuted in January 2019 for failure to carry out repair works to a privately rented property and fined £2000, with £2000 costs.
- Lancaster City Council and Lancaster University were shortlisted for The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) Excellence Awards, 2018, for the Approved Homes Scheme, developed to promote good quality off-campus student accommodation.
- Lancaster welcomed a further 5 resettled refugee families from Syria in July 2018, bringing the total number of families resettled in Lancaster to 15. The Council continues to work in partnership with Lancashire County Council and the third sector to support the resettlement of the families. Serco continue to provide accommodation for asylum seekers in 32 houses across the district.
- Lancaster was successful in their bid for funding from the Rogue Landlord Enforcement Fund to create a training programme for enforcement staff across Lancashire.

## **HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY**

- In 2018, the HIA was highly commended for their 'Adaptation Service' in a national award ceremony held at the House of Lords.
- 2300 enquiries were received by the HIA from residents and partners.
- 990 residents were helped to complete small Handyperson jobs in their home and 500 residents assisted to raise funds and undertake work in their own homes
- 578 Minor Adaptations were completed. This service forms part of the agreement in place with the County Council and enables residents to receive a fully integrated adaptation service.
- Lancaster's Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation in 2018/19, including carry forward, was £2.46 million, compared to £1.93 million in 2017/18. This includes an additional £214k of funding applied for and awarded in December 2018.
- 471 Referrals were received for DFG assistance in 2018/19, compared to 446 in 2017/18. This increase is despite a reduction in referrals from the County Council OT service and is the result of extensive promotional work and the use of independent OTs. This way of working provides a speedier process for clients.

- 360 DFG grants approved in 2018/19 compared to 273 in 2017/18.
- 381 DFG grants completed in 2018/19 compared to 232 in 2017/18.
- £2.33 million forecasted spend on DFG grant work in 2018/19.

## **COUNCIL HOUSING**

### **Improved Customer Satisfaction**

- A concerted focus on performance improvement within the Repairs and Maintenance Service (RMS) has led to an 89.8% customer satisfaction following day to day repair jobs.

### **Supporting Tenants, Protecting Income**

- 2018/19 saw an additional Household Intervention Officer (HIO) post established to support tenants with vulnerabilities and complex support needs. Since April 2018, HIOs have intensively worked with 117 new vulnerable households.
- The service has provided match funding with European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to establish an Employability Coach. This role will support tenants and community members to develop their skills and employability through tailored programmes.
- Against the continued backdrop of welfare reform (including the implementation of Universal Credit) the service has worked closely with tenants and other agencies to realise a reduction in current tenant rent arrears by 19% in the space of 12 months.

### **Community Development**

- The service has begun to pilot estate/community profiles, to identify the needs of a specific community and improve services in that area. A scheme of summer community events is planned, taking place at three estates across the district, in partnership with the health and wellbeing services and support services, as well as the Police and the Fire and Rescue Services.

## **Improved Tenancy Support and Management**

- A focus on lean thinking principles in void management has seen a reduction in average empty property re-let time, from 66 days (Jan 2018) to 26 days (Jan 2019) - an improvement of 61%. This equates to approx. £100K additional rental income in 2018/19.
- We continue to develop partnership work with the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Team. In addition, our Estate Management team are developing the skills for the use of legal actions, such as Community Protection Warnings and Notices, alongside more traditional tenancy enforcement tools.
- We have forged improved inter-agency links by supporting prosecutions for environmental crime, working together in cases where organised serious crime is suspected, and jointly attending bi-weekly meetings with the police. This improved tenancy enforcement allows us to provide better support for vulnerable households on our estates.

The service attained its Housing Quality Network Accreditation in Income Management; along with reduced rent arrears, a particular focus is given to the support we provide to tenants (and prospective tenants) in arrears, and to tenancy sustainment in general.

## **Looking Forward**

Over the forthcoming year, Council Housing are focussing on:

- The Mainway project: incorporating planned capital works to the communal areas, replacement lifts and new roofs, within an estate wide scheme to refurbish the windows, facades and entranceways. Proposals will also consider remodelling of the external spaces, facilities and traffic. The project will engage in early consultations with local tenants to help establish priorities and project options. Preparatory work will take place within 2019/20 for a full project start date within 2020/21;
- Continued aspirations for new build council housing to meet demand, including the investigation of alternative vehicles for delivery;
- Continuing to develop shared resources and expertise with the corporate ASB team in response to community priorities, including an increase to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) contribution to the ASB team;

- Continued focus on reduction in empty home turnover, ensuring sustainability of improved performance;
- Building on and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Repairs and Maintenance Service (RMS) through investment in technology;
- Mainstreaming of support to community centres, and continued development of community led services through cross-service working.

## **PUBLIC PROTECTION**

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

- Completed the piloting of a highly successful anti-social behaviour service employing a wide range of informal & formal interventions and enforcement methods including prosecutions and civil injunctions
- Working closely with neighbourhood policing teams, carried out focused support and interventions to tackle anti-social behaviour concerns in Lancaster city centre and in Poulton ward. Further focussed interventions will take place in 2019-20 responding to priority needs
- Partnered with Lancaster University and Students Union to address student-related anti-social behaviour concerns including noise nuisance, also worked with letting agents
- Focussed on young people and causes of anti-social behaviour. Appointed a seconded PCSO to lead on case work with young people.

### **Environmental enforcement**

- Introduced high profile Operation Peregrine with a strategy to target and minimise fly-tipping, using a range of awareness-raising, deterrence and targeted enforcement methods
- Implemented new enforcement methods for wider fixed penalty notice enforcement and suspect vehicle seizure
- Delivered a range of formal enforcement interventions and a number of successful prosecutions sending a clear message, making maximum use of social media

## **Dog fouling**

- Continued to partner with Morecambe Town Council on dedicated dog fouling enforcement. Observed dog mess pick-up rates continue to exceed 99%.

## **Air quality**

- Major work is ongoing leading to the production of a new Air Quality Action Plan for the Lancaster District in 2020. Consultation is ongoing
- Major grant of over £600k for taxi / private hire electric vehicle charging points to be installed across the county

## **Food Safety**

- Introduced new service model, bringing food industry experienced professionals into the team alongside new products, such as individual support to very new food business start-ups
- Completed a two year complex investigation into sale and distribution of frozen chicken that was unfit for human consumption and had been relabelled so as to mislead the public. Successful prosecution with a fine of £70,000

## **Port Health**

- Delivered and completed an EU Exit preparation project at Heysham Port, analysing shipped goods coming ashore to help identify potential challenges post-Brexit

## **Health and Safety**

- Completed a three year complex investigation into the death of an elderly resident of a local care home. Successful prosecution with a fine in excess of £140,000

## **Licensing**

- Changed our licensing administration service to make it more business-friendly in providing at the point when business people need advice and support.
- Established a multi-agency licensing team with proactive focus and information sharing to achieve common objectives, partnering with police, fire, trading standards, CSE officers, environmental health officers, etc.

## **Pest Control**

- Trading as 'Unbugged', provided specialised pest control support on contract on large and complex premises and industrial sites

## **Civil Contingencies**

- Advised and assisted a range of local communities at parish and ward level on planning, preparedness and recovery from emergencies. Two new communities, Wennington and Scotforth, have completed their community emergency plans this year, bringing the total to 13 completed and 3 in preparation.
- In the autumn, we held a flood training workshop for community groups, attended by 80 people involved in established community emergency plans. A similar event will be held later in 2019.

## **Early Action**

- Established a multi-agency team to help vulnerable people who are experiencing difficulties, with the aim of preventing them from escalating.