

Housing Sub Committee

Monday, 27 September 2021

Present:

Councillors E Parker-Leonard (Chair) John Hunter,
A Percy, M Thirlaway, J Walker, K Barrie, M Green,
J Mole and S Phillips

Apologies: Councillors L Darke, A Newman and G Westwater

HO6/19 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitutes reported.

HO7/19 Declarations of Interest

Councillor M Thirlaway declared a non-registerable personal interest in Item 5, Construction Project, as his father works for North Tyneside Council.

HO8/19 Minutes

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

HO9/19 Construction Project

The sub-committee received a presentation which provided an update in relation to the Construction Project, including the financial benefits realised, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and current position and performance.

Members were informed that the financial benefits realised as part of the Construction Project had allowed for re-investment in the housing service. The overall net benefits realised would be around £3.5 million. Investment priorities from these benefits included an increased focus on sustaining rental income, improved empty homes standards and the provision of pest control services to tenants. The benefits realised had also allowed the authority to be more ambitious in the delivery of affordable homes.

The sub-committee was informed of the impact the Covid-19 lockdown had on the housing service. It was explained that at the beginning of the pandemic several services, including non-urgent repairs, planned works and routine lettings, were stood down. Emergency, urgent repairs and out of hours service continued with risk assessments in place. A risk-based approach was taken to standing services back up, with a focus on staff and tenant safety. It was acknowledged that as a result of the pandemic non-urgent repairs would build up and there would be an increased number of empty homes.

As part of a staged recovery, a plan was developed to deal with outstanding repairs, gas safety checks where access was not possible and the increased number of empty homes. Plans were implemented for covid secure workplaces and vulnerable staff were supported via Covid 1-2-1's. The recovery plans developed and implemented dealt with a backlog of 4,600 jobs that had built up. This was achieved using in-house resources, employing some of the local supply chain and engagement of some agency staff. The outstanding work had all been physically completed and the back-office processing was coming to an end. Risk assessments and safe operating procedures continued to be monitored, as well as sickness levels and self-isolation that could impact on service delivery.

Members were informed of the current performance in relation to responsive repairs and how this compared to pre-covid (2019/20) and during covid (2020/21). The sub-committee was informed of plans to procure a unified system to coordinate all jobs. The Authority deployed a number of systems which were also supported and supplemented by spreadsheets and data outside of these systems. A unified system would bring benefits of improved data sharing, improved customer experience and potentially at a lower cost. A tender exercise for a new system would begin in September 2021, with a view to going live at the beginning of April 2023, following a period of design, building, testing and training of staff.

The sub-committee was made aware of emerging issues around the supply of materials. The increase in the number of people carrying out home improvements during the pandemic, combined with a shortage of HGV drivers, meant that there were delays in the supply and delivery of some materials. Increased costs on many materials had been found during the annual refresh of prices. Some mitigation measures, including bulk buying and alternative suppliers/products, had been put in place. The contact centre was communicating with tenants that there may be a delay in relation to certain jobs. A member of the sub-committee suggested that if supply problems continued, local authorities could work together to share out the resources needed.

The sub-committee was informed of the apprenticeship programme across the housing service. There were 25 apprentices across the service at different stages and the Health and Safety apprentice had been shortlisted through the Association for Public Service Excellence for a national award. All apprentices have a work place manager and a mentor for support. Following questions from members, it was explained that the majority of trade apprentices end up with permanent contracts with the Authority, as long as they meet the required standards and that many staff were willing to put themselves forward to mentor apprentices.

The Chair thanked the officers for the informative presentation.

It was **agreed** to note the information provided.

HO10/19 Community Protection

The Community and Public Space Protection Manager was in attendance at the meeting to provide the sub-committee with an update in relation to anti-social behaviour. The presentation covered the roles and responsibilities of the Community Protection team, current key headlines and partnership working.

Members were informed that the services delivered by the Community Protection team were: housing related anti-social behaviour; environmental crime; dog warden services; security operations and CCTV control room; public space disorder and victim support.

The sub-committee was informed that there were 3786 new anti-social behaviour related cases since the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. In comparison to the previous 18 months, this was an increase of 800 cases. Noise complaints had increased since lockdown and independent mediation was used in some cases to manage situations.

The sub-committee discussed project Vita which was in operation to help prevent youth related anti-social behaviour. The project helped to engage young people in activities that they wanted to do and offered support to those that were vulnerable. The project had been seen as a model of best practice to deal with youth related anti-social behaviour.

Members were informed of partnership work undertaken to tackle anti-social behaviour in the borough. This included operation coast watch in the summer months to help reduce anti-social behaviour linked to alcohol consumption. This was done in conjunction with the Tynemouth/Cullercoats Collective and Northumbria Police and helped to reduce anti-social behaviour in the area by 42%. The Community Protection team also carried out joint visits with Northumbria Police to residential properties where there were reports of anti-social behaviour.

Members were informed that as part of changes in the way that anti-social behaviour is tackled, all victims are now risk assessed to find out about any support needs they may have in dealing with the impact of anti-social behaviour. This involved victims completing a survey with a number of questions that provided a score at the end to indicate the level of support required.

The sub-committee discussed the security cameras that were in use around the borough, both fixed and mobile, to capture and deter anti-social behaviour. The mobile cameras could be moved quickly to areas where most needed and where people were not used to them being there. The control centre operating the cameras worked closely with Northumbria Police and responded to requests to reposition cameras when police were responding to incident calls.

Anti-social behaviour on the Metros was raised and it was acknowledged that there were challenges to addressing anti-social behaviour at stations and on the trains themselves. New CCTV had been installed on trains and at stations, along with the recruitment of customer assistants. The Authority held regular conversations with Nexus about the issue of anti-social behaviour on the Metro.

Members were reminded that at the previous meeting of Housing sub-committee it was agreed that a sub-group be established in relation to anti-social behaviour. Volunteers had been sought to serve on the group and discussions would be held with the Chair of the sub-committee and relevant officers to help shape a scope for a study prior to the initial meeting of the group.

It was **agreed** to note the information provided in the presentation and discussion.

