



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany
Councillor O'Donnell

Councillor Pickering
Councillor Willmott

In attendance:

Assistant City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin

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79. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Gee.

80. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Aqbany declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that he had family members who were council tenants.

Councillor Westley declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that he had family members who were council tenants.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interests. The Councillors were not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion of the agenda items.

81. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute 71 - Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Service Proposal:

The Director of Housing provided an update in relation to the agreed action that 'a report would be brought back to the Committee [in September] with the results following the Tenants and Leaseholders consultation'.

It was noted that the consultation had taken place and comments/ opinions taken on board, which were currently being collated in addition to the Members comments given at the last meeting. Following this, further works would be taking place with the Tenants and Leaseholders Forum and they would also be notified of any further proposals.

Minute 76 - Tenants and Leaseholders Forum Action and Decision Log:

The Chair noted that the Vice Chair for the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum had concerns regarding the accuracy of the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log dated 02/06/2020. This would be looked into following the meeting.

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 7 July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

82. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

83. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Chair noted that some questions had been received out of time to be taken at this meeting. The Monitoring Officer would be reviewing the questions.

84. ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF NEW BUILD HOUSING

The Director of Housing submitted a report to update Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the climate credentials of the new build council houses proposed at Saffron Velodrome and Lanesborough Road.

- The report provided the Commission with an update on progress in association with Leicester City Council new builds and the services commitment to improving energy efficiency of the new builds.
- Phase 1 of the new build programme was in progress and the first of the new homes was anticipated for completion and ready for occupation in October 2020.
- The current and future phases would also help address the shortage of 2 bedrooled and wheelchair accessible accommodation.
- The presenting Officer clarified points following Members queries including the difference between 'passive House' standards and the 'Leicester Standard' which was explained that passive houses were generally more airtight. The 'Leicester standard' which the service would be concentrating on, was noted to be simple to understand, based on fabric first approach and flexible. Heat exchangers were also explained.
- The next two phases would be Saffron Velodrome and Lanesborough Road. The sustainability and energy efficiency approach that would be adopted for these two phases was explained.
- Some Members of the Commission requested a comparison of the costs

of building more traditional houses compared to the new build houses proposed. The presenting Officer noted that this would be clearer once the builds had taken place and a builder company appointed, of which the tender process had now commenced. Once a supplier had been secured, a further report would be brought to the Committee.

- This model being used was chosen to ensure a balanced approach of new technology and generation insulation. The service was constantly looking at how to build new homes and future phases would attract various approaches and different methods would still be explored especially with the advancement of technology.
- On the topic of social value clauses would be included in the tender documents relating to local employment and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Discussions would take place with Housing colleagues to look into the possibilities of upskilling people/ existing staff to deliver the installs and how this would take place. The Assistant City Mayor for Housing – Councillor Cutkelvin requested that the Head of Service, Housing – Simon Nicholls liaise with Assistant City Mayor for Policy Delivery and Communications - Councillor Myers who had recently been leading on social value within procurement, to look at some of the work already identified in this area.

AGREED:

1. To recommend that when Members and Officers were considering planning applications – not just housing, but offices and commercial developments – that they strongly encouraged site layouts which would maximise the use and efficiency of solar power as an energy source.
2. That social value clauses be included in housing contracts which support training, development and employment at the local level.
3. That Members welcome the building fabric improvements which proposed up to a 70% improvement based on current building control standards.

Councillor Wilmott joined the meeting during deliberation of this item.

85. OVERCROWDING REDUCTION STRATEGY

The Director of Housing submitted a report to inform Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission of a new initiative to develop and implement an Overcrowding Reduction Strategy.

- Overcrowding was noted as the biggest reason that families joined the housing register.
- The reduction strategy looked at ways to reduce overcrowding within Council stock and later roll out any successful elements to other housing sectors in the city where practical.
- Figures were noted for overcrowding and under-occupation.

The aim of the strategy which comprised of five broad priorities were explained in detail, these included;

1. To further develop a detailed profile of overcrowding and under-occupation within LCC stock.
2. To provide a range of enhanced housing options to overcrowded and under-occupied households.
3. To ensure that the service was making the best use of current LCC housing stock.
4. To maximise opportunities to develop new social housing to meet the needs of overcrowded and under-occupying households.
5. To ensure that solutions, whether through the Housing Register or other options, had longevity and sustainability at the core.

- For the next steps, a programme Board would be set up to take the aims and objectives of the strategy forward, with regular updates and progress being provided to the Housing Scrutiny Commission.
- The strategy would be a live document with lots of strategic objectives and actions to report back on. The private rented sector would also be looked at with this strategy.
- Several Members expressed the requirement for something to be in place for those with psychological issues of giving up homes and moving to another home. Handholding and support were noted as crucial especially for the elderly. In addition, concerns regarding the supply of affordable housing were noted.
- A Member of the Commission expressed a personal concern on behalf of a constituent, the Chair requested that this be discussed with the Officers following the meeting.

Working Party:

The Chair noted that a Working Party would be set up for this agenda item, of which Councillor Nangreave would Chair. Councillors Aqbany and O'Donnell offered their support and Councillor Pickering showed interest if in convenient circumstances i.e. meeting times. Councillor Nangreave planned to keep the meetings online.

Members raised the following other points that could be potential recommendations at the working party:

- To have a dedicated project worker across the city.
- Successive rights – allocation of inheritance of properties when a relative passes away.
- The Chair welcomed the presentation/ report and requested that the Officers provide as much regular input to the Working Party.

Councillor Nangreave would work with the Scrutiny Support Officer for the Working Party terms of reference.

AGREED:

1. Welcome the commitment to bring regular reports from the programme Board to the commission on the results and proposals arising from the work.

86. VOID PERFORMANCE REPORT: JANUARY 2020 - MARCH 2020 - YEAR END

The Director of Housing submitted a report to update Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on Void performance for the final quarter and year end 2019/20.

All to note:

- Void performance in the final quarter of 2019/20 had remained consistent, with the all void average remaining under the 90-day target and void rental loss in 19/20 had reduced from the previous year.
- It was anticipated however that the performance in the next quarter would reflect the impacts of Covid-19.
- Members attention was drawn to several tables in the report some of which detailed the average re-let timescales and rent loss as a percentage of rent roll and comparator data which showed that Leicester were positioned in the middles of other comparator authorities.
- Void turnaround times were reported to be not as good as aspired to this year due to a number of factors including the below points and more;
 - Covid-19 resulting in the suspension of Leicester HomeChoice and moves being placed on hold. However, a recovery plan was in place and a report in relation to the impact of Covid-19 would be brought back to the Committee.
 - There had been an increase in the poor condition that properties were being returned in.
 - A recent issue of reduced capacity of contractors to complete capital works in void properties.
 - A pilot project was currently in place to determine whether the number of days for a kitchen to be fit could be reduced from the average 10 working dates it generally takes to be completed.
 - Other factors for poor void turnaround times were the management of a tenant's keys leaving a property, recruitment and the issue of there always being employment vacancies in the Void Team.
 - The presenting Officer went through the immediate priorities to address service matters.

Following Members comments the below responses were provided;

- The service did take appropriate action.
- All authorities had different definitions for average calculating void times, therefore it was difficult to make a comparison.

- It was confirmed that extra replacements in homes were only done if things were in a bad state or posed a health and safety risk. In the case of kitchens, these were only replaced if not in suitable health and safety condition and over a number of years old.
- The Chair noted the potential for a Void & Repairs working party.
- A Member had received complaints from constituents in relation to repairs being carried out incorrectly by contractors.
- A Member of the Commission queried the timescale for getting back properties and reletting them again and whether it was worth looking at a dedicated team and learning what other authorities were doing well to get a faster turnaround. The officer responded that the service was now dealing with the acquisition programme with improved turnaround times.
- The presenting Officer explained that when a tenant left a property, they tended to cancel any outstanding repair works, therefore when officers entered the property as a void, all was dealt with at that point. The service didn't currently have the resources to do this and it would have to be on an appointment-based system, the service was currently still a manual system. IT were currently looking at a mobile system.
- It was also noted that the service tried pre-void inspections previously however there were access issues as the departing tenants were generally not interested in booking slots for the work to be carried out.
- The Assistant City Mayor for Housing noted that voids and turnover times remained very important. The plan was to identify any barriers which were taking long to identify voids and number of voids coming back due to mistreatment of the property.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

Councillor Aqpany departed the meeting during deliberation of this item.

87. RESPONSIVE HOUSING REPAIRS - 2019/20 YEAR-END PERFORMANCE REPORT AND UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report to update Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the performance of the Division's Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) service and the implementation of future service changes aimed at improving performance. It also provided a brief summary of the impact on the R&M service as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

- The Officer noted the following information from the report:
The number of repairs completed by work area 2019/20, Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), percentage of repairs completed on first visit, the number of repairs which were outstanding and out of category, percentage of day to day repairs carried out within target time, percentage of repairs which lead to a complaint, 2020-21 first quarter performance, R&M Improvement Action Plan for 2020-21, Channel shift and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The aim was to embed a performance culture within the repairs function, which was based on a very clear and simple message. This would be

measured on four KPI's and everything the service did would aim at achieving the right thing first time and Managers trusting/ empowering staff to do that.

- Sessions had already been established with the Operational Development Team and the service was trying to embed a culture within management team, team leaders and staff to ensure all demonstrated man leaders demonstrate the correct qualities to carry out high quality repairs first time round. The Member who initially posed the query identified this as the correct approach and offered support as a Member.
- It was always encouraged for the correct van stock to be on the vehicle to undertake the job and no excessive materials. Any hand tools are encouraged to be securely locked in vehicles or removed in the evening.
- Several Members extended their thanks and well done for the report.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

88. DISABLED ADAPTATIONS, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND DISABLED FACILITY GRANTS

The Director of Housing submitted a presentation for noting to the Commission which provided an update on the Disabled Adaptations, Housing Revenue Account and Disabled Facilities Grants.

All to note:

- LCC carried out 584 disabled adaptations in 2018/19 and 535 in 19/20.
- It was explained what was causing the reduction in spend and details about Disabled Facility Grants (DFG's) and funding.
- The presenting Officer informed the Commission on how the waiting list had been managed during Covid-19 and plans going forward.
- The service would be carrying out a piece of work to identify the reasons why people refuse disabled adaptations.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

89. TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM ACTION AND DECISION LOG

AGREED:

1. That the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log be noted.

90. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

AGREED:

1. The Director of Housing would bring an update on the Border House situation, the homelessness strategy and improved service offer for families: Homes Not Hostels to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

91. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.42pm.