

Leicester  
City Council

## **MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**DATE: MONDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2021**

**TIME: 5:30 pm**

**PLACE: Zoom Meeting**

### **Members of the Scrutiny Commission**

Councillor Westley (Chair)  
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillors Aqbany, Gee, O'Donnell, Pickering and Willmott

Members of the Scrutiny Commission are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business listed overleaf.

For Monitoring Officer

#### **Officer contacts:**

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## Information for members of the public

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[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCddTWo00\\_gs0cp-301XDbXA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCddTWo00_gs0cp-301XDbXA)

*Members of the press and public may tweet, blog etc. during the live broadcast as they would be able to during a regular Commission meeting at City Hall.*

*It is important, however, that Councillors can discuss and take decisions without disruption, so the only participants in this virtual meeting will be the Councillors concerned, the officers advising the Commission and any external partners invited to do so.*

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### Further information

If you have any queries about any of the above or the business to be discussed, please contact: Jason Tyler, Democratic Support Officer on (0116) 454 6359 or email [jason.tyler@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:jason.tyler@leicester.gov.uk)

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# **PUBLIC SESSION**

## **AGENDA**

### **LIVE STREAM OF MEETING:**

A live stream of the meeting will be available on the link below:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCddTWo00\\_gs0cp-301XDbXA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCddTWo00_gs0cp-301XDbXA)

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in the business to be discussed.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**Appendix A**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 11 January 2021 are attached and Members are asked to confirm them as a correct record.

### **4. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer to report on the receipt of any petitions received in accordance with Council procedures.

### **5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE**

The Monitoring Officer to report on the receipt of any questions, representations or statements of case received in accordance with Council procedures.

### **6. WOMEN TALKING, CITY LISTENING PROJECT**

**Appendix B**

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submits a report outlining the research undertaken by the City Listening Project team over the previous 12 months and summarising the key findings both directly and indirectly related to the Council's business.

A summary of recommendations is attached to the report (Appendix A).

The full report of findings is listed as a second appendix (Appendix B). This is not included in this agenda pack and can be forwarded separately on request.

**7. HOUSING MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS - UPDATE** [Appendix C](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report, which provides a progress update setting out progress on delivery of the Labour manifesto commitments made in 2019, and an update on progress since 7th July 2020 when the last report was provided on the matter to the Commission.

**8. RENTS PERFORMANCE BRIEFING** [Appendix D](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report, which provides information on the current rent arrears performance and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on rent collection and possession proceedings.

**9. VOIDS AND LETTINGS REPORT** [Appendix E](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report, which provides an update on void performance for the nine-month period from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

The report also provides information on the short-term measures underway and long-term aspirations to improve void relet times.

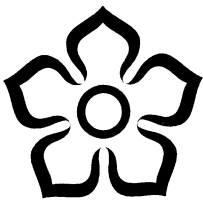
**10. EMPTY HOMES PERFORMANCE - UPDATE** [Appendix F](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report, which provides an update on the work of the Empty Homes Team to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

**11. WORK PROGRAMME** [Appendix G](#)

The Commission's Work Programme is submitted for information and comment.

**12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**



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# Appendix A

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)  
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillor Gee  
Councillor O'Donnell

Councillor Pickering  
Councillor Willmott

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## **108. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Aqbany.

## **109. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair declared an interest in item 7 “Housing Revenue Account 2021-2022 – Consultation” as members of his family lived in Council accommodation.

The Vice-Chair declared an interest in item 7 “Housing Revenue Account 2021-2022 – Consultation” as her partner lived in Council accommodation.

Councillor Pickering declared an interest in item 7 “Housing Revenue Account 2021-2022 – Consultation” as she lived in Council accommodation.

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 interest. They were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

## **110. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on 23 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

## **111. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer reported that there were no Petitions, in accordance with Council procedures.

## **112. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE**

The Monitoring Officer reported that there were no Questions, Representations or Statements of Case, in accordance with Council procedures.

## **113. COVID-19 IMPACT - UPDATE**

The Director of Housing gave a verbal update in order to provide the most up to date information to members on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

He commented on the recent award of funding and the launch of the 'Rough Sleepers Next Steps Strategy' which would be utilised to combat homelessness and other related issues arising from the Covid pandemic, including increased availability of temporary accommodation.

The continuing work with partners, involving outreach work with the homeless had been enhanced in view of the winter arrangements and 'project pathway'. It was also noted that around 100 occupants had been moved from Bed and Breakfast accommodation to more permanent accommodation and that there had been ongoing new demand for services who would also need temporary accommodation.

The initiative to increase support and the positive ambition to offer secure solutions was welcomed.

The Chair asked that the Commission's thanks and appreciated be recorded to all those concerned with the bid and the ongoing work following the launch.

In response to questions the separate allocations, including short-term and long-term revenue and capital funds were clarified. Support to complex cases at individual units was also explained, as some issues had been reported to Ward members. It was recognised that cases required proper assessment prior to more permanent accommodation being offered.

The purpose of the strategy was to ensure that rough sleepers were offered temporary accommodation at an early stage and the suitability of ongoing support and accommodation options required a longer timeframe.

The Director of Housing also confirmed details of the ongoing monitoring of the issues and the suitability of accommodation, leading to enhanced working arrangements with the police, landlords, hoteliers and their staff, tenant groups and other partners. The need to ensure adequate security and management of the accommodation was highlighted and the enhanced engagement with landlords was particularly welcomed.

It was confirmed that the joint procurement of service to assist the psychological issues arising from the pandemic continued to be discussed with the Clinical Commissioning Groups. This was welcomed and it was expected that progress could be made in the near future.

The update was noted.

#### **114. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2021-2022 - CONSULTATION**

The Director of Housing and the Director of Finance submitted a report, which asked the Commission to consider the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2021/22. It was confirmed that the draft report to Council, which was attached as an appendix, would be considered in February 2021.

The Director of Housing reported that the financial landscape of the four-year period from 2016 to 2020 was dominated by the government requirement that rents be reduced by 1% each year. Despite this pressure, it was noted that the HRA delivered balanced budgets.

It was reported that for the 5 years from 2020, rents were permitted to increase by up to CPI+1% and that whilst this relaxation helped to sustain a financially viable HRA and support investment in the housing stock, the continuing impact of Right to Buy (RTB) sales on rental income persisted.

The Commission was asked to;

- i) Note the financial pressures on the HRA and comment on the proposals for delivering a balanced budget;
- ii) Note the comments from the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum; and
- iii) Note rent and service charge changes for 21/22 as follows:
  - 1.5% increase to core rent;
  - 1.5% increase to garage rent;
  - 2.0% increase to service charges;

To provide further context, the Director of Housing referred to detailed information in the appendixes attached to the report to Council, including the comparison of council house rents to private rents in the city.

It was also clarified and emphasised that 60% of the council's current tenants would not be affected by any rent increase, as they were in receipt of Universal Credit or other benefit. The average rent increase would only be £1.11 a week.

A breakdown of capital items was submitted and explained, with the continued investment in stock and the significant programme of Council House building /acquisitions being noted. The changes within the capital programme were summarised, and it was noted that the housing team worked closely with the Council's energy team in the delivery of the de-carbonisation agenda. Work with DeMontfort University in relation to ongoing research in this area of activity was also noted.

The Chair thanked the Director for his report and asked the Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) to comment. Councillor Cutkelvin stated that the achievement to deliver a balance budget year on year was remarkable, particularly alongside ongoing financial pressures and stated that the money from this increase goes straight back in to investing in properties. Cllr Cutkelvin reiterated that 60% of the most vulnerable tenants being unaffected. She also commented on the effect of Covid-19 on the service. In conclusion Councillor Cutkelvin emphasised that income from the HRA was utilised within the department, with expenditure in the capital programme being invested in property improvement, including access to the STAR Service.

In response to comments, Councillor Cutkelvin also reiterated that the 40% of tenants facing a rent increase were also considered to be vulnerable, but that the most vulnerable would be unaffected. The issues of 'in-work poverty' becoming a greater issue and the increased use of foodbanks and additional external support was recognised.

Councillor O'Donnell suggested that the effect of rent increases on full-time workers with already stretched family budgets would be significant and should have received greater reference and consideration.

Councillor Willmott supported the view that the 40% affected would find the increase hard to find in family budgets. He also commented on the investment proposals and advised that he was not convinced of the requirement to invest further in IT provision, or to accelerate the work being undertaken in relation to climate change. He informed the Commission that if these items were removed from the programme, or had reduced ambitions, the recommended rent increase could be reduced to 1%.

The Director of Housing was asked to respond. He reminded the Commission that should there be no increase approved over 1% then this would impact on potential for further investment in the housing stock and the budget would be required to be balanced. It was highlighted that rent increases could not be made retrospectively, and the investment capability would be permanently lost.

The Chair then commented on the severe impacts of the governments decisions and he thanked officers for their efforts in delivering a balanced budget year on year. He advised that he supported the recommendation



adding that some tenants' representatives supported the proposed level of rent increases to ensure that future repairs and maintenance could be undertaken on the stock.

In conclusion the Commission noted the response circulated from the Tenants and Landlords Forum as part of the consultation.

**AGREED:**

That Council be informed that this Commission supports the budget for 2021/22 being set as a balanced budget, with a core rent increase of 1.5%.

#### **115. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR SERVICE OFFER PROPOSAL**

The Director of Housing gave a verbal update in order to present the most up to date information to Members, in particular in respect of the continuing consultation with tenant representatives.

It was reported that the proposal required further consideration by the Tenants and Leaseholder Forum and would therefore be submitted to the next Housing Scrutiny meeting.

The Chair commented on the unfortunate delay. It was confirmed that the previous funding proposals remained one of the aspects for future discussion and agreement with the Forum, and that other significant changes remained outstanding. It had not been considered appropriate to submit a report to the Commission before that agreement.

It was expected that a further meeting with the Forum would be convened shortly, with an update being submitted to the next meeting of the Commission.

The update was noted.

#### **116. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Commission's Work Programme was submitted for information and comment.

The items relating to future ecological and IT strategies arising from the previous discussion concerning the HRA consultation would be added.

**AGREED:** That the Work Programme be noted and update accordingly.

#### **117. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 7.00pm.



## Housing Scrutiny Commission

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### **Women Talking, City Listening: Summary Report**

Date: 22 February 2021

Lead director: Miranda Cannon

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## Useful information

■ Ward(s) affected: All

■ Report authors: Megan Arianna Law, City Listening Project Officer, Halima Abowath, City Listening Project Officer ■ Author contact details: [hetha.copland@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:hetha.copland@leicester.gov.uk)

■ Report version number: 1

### 1 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is;

1.2 To outline the research undertaken by the City Listening Project team over the previous 12 months and summarise the key findings both directly and indirectly related to the Council's business.

### 2 Recommendations

2.1 The report contains both national and local recommendations. The local recommendations outlined in this report are draft recommendations, subject to any comments or refinements. The Corporate Management Team, (CMT), and Executive have agreed the recommendations subject to review by Departmental Management Teams and leads for the service areas identified and subject to Scrutiny comments. This work is on-going and therefore the recommendations are likely to continue to be refined and built upon over the coming months.

2.2 The local recommendations, once finalised, will be integrated into the Equality Action Plan, which will be reported to Overview Select Committee, (OSC) and agreed by CMT and the Executive, as per the usual reporting and governance arrangements for the Equality Action Plan. The national recommendations have been provisionally made to the Government Equalities Office (GEO); however, a final report is due following this report to OSC. At the time of writing this report, we are awaiting feedback from the GEO. A copy of the list of the full set of recommendations arising from the research is attached as Appendix A.

2.3 The full research report is attached as Appendix B. The full report provides greater detail and also includes accounts of the lived experiences and views of some of the women who participated in the project.

2.4 **It is recommended that;**

2.5 OSC note the contents of the report, in particular the findings of the research project and the recommendations (both local and national).

2.6 OSC endorse the recommendations in principle, subject to any comment and/or revisions.

### **3 Background Information**

- 3.1 As one of the seven national Centenary Cities, Leicester City Council has been widely recognised for its work in celebrating the achievements of local suffragettes.
- 3.2 Following on from the Centenary Cities project, The Council were one of three cities successful in securing funding from the GEO to research women’s position in Leicester, today.
- 3.3 This research project sought to identify barriers to equality in modern Leicester and elevate the voices of women, using their insight to develop the recommendations made.
- 3.4 Using a range of research methods (focus groups, 121 semi-structured interviews, online consultation, Dialogue and email submissions) 330 women were involved in the project.
- 3.5 This summary report captures the ten key issues identified by this research:
- Careers and Motherhood
  - Community Support
  - Workplace – Policies vs Practice
  - Recognition of and Support for Carers
  - Sports and Access
  - Safety
  - Personalisation of Services and Communication to Service Users
  - Finance
  - Health
  - Covid-19
- 3.6 This summary refers to the full draft research report, which is attached as Appendix B. For ease of cross-referencing, the pages of each theme in the full research report are listed against the theme summaries in this report.

### **4 Introduction: Equalities and Recognition (Page 9)**

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 acknowledges nine protected characteristics; however discrimination cases currently must be brought separately for each protected characteristic. This means that intersectionality, for example racialised sexism, is currently not recognised to the fullest extent in law. Many of the women involved in the project had experiences of inequality and discrimination which were intersectional in nature. Section 14 of the Equality Act 2010, which deals with ‘dual discrimination’ was never brought into force. The following recommendations would aid in greater recognition of and in addressing the barriers and inequalities women face where multiple inequalities intersect with one another.

### **5 Careers and Motherhood (Pages 10-27)**

- 5.1 The most prevalent theme, highlighted by a vast majority of women, was the strain felt between pursuing career goals and managing childcare responsibilities. Almost all mothers spoken to were the primary caregiver of their child or children. 61.71% of women asked, said that family commitments hold them back.
- 5.2 Many women experience living through the triple shift: employed or seeking employment, expected to do most of the housework and the childcare. Many women expressed that these unpaid forms of labour are demanding, unrewarding and considered of lesser important. Many participants said that these roles are often learnt in childhood, reinforced through family structures and are difficult to shift.
- 5.3 A common frustration was **the desire to do paid work, but the feeling of being unable to**. Many mothers involved in the project felt that, while the early years funding programme for childcare of 3- and 4-year olds (15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year for all families, 30 hours a week for families where lone parents/both parents earn at least £139 per week) is a help, many do not feel this sufficient. This scheme doesn't account for families of multiple children under 5, families with a child under 3 with parents who wish to return to work, or the continuous need for childcare before/after school. The **steep cost of childcare** means that for many women in Leicester, their wages would entirely go to paying or supplementing childcare fees to ensure care provision during working hours, with some families even left at a deficit if the primary caregiver returned to work.
- 5.4 Many women identified **work as an important part of their identity**, and for mothers, working offers an opportunity to be in a different environment, interacting with other adults, and a break from immediate childcare responsibilities.
- 5.5 **Flexible working arrangements** and understanding managers who create a workplace culture that is inclusive of mothers were two significant ways women said that they were enabled to recommence work.
- 5.6 Being granted more opportunities to **network** was cited as another way to assist mothers working or seeking employment, by creating a culture shift from realising that previously unacknowledged skills can be utilised professionally.
- 5.7 For many, the skilled career paths they wish to follow **do not always accommodate part-time workers**.
- 5.8 Upon **returning to work** sometime after they have had a child/ren, many **women felt at a disadvantage to their colleagues**, due to the time that was spent away from work and how they are viewed returning to work as mothers. Networks of support are of importance.
- 5.9 Women also spoke of an over reliance on other female family members to support with childcare responsibilities, which is also likely to have an impact on

opportunities available to those family members.

- 5.10 Many women involved in the project spoke about not pursuing, or delaying, their career goals and not being able to fully contribute to the economy and also about the strain on their mental health, due to the stress and the chronic undervaluing of their unpaid labour (caregiving and housework).
- 5.11 There must be a greater **inclusion and acceptance of mothers in the workplace**. The following recommendations are based on the solutions offered by the women involved in the project;
- 5.12 **Recommendation 1: Flexible Working Arrangements (including flexibility in recruitment to facilitate job shares) to be implemented by employers in corporate policy and job advertisements.**
- 5.13 **Recommendation 2: Leicester City Council to integrate an action into its Equality Action Plan to support and publicise more opportunities for women employees, including networking events and promotion of the Council's employee groups.**
- 5.14 **Recommendation 3: Leicester City Council to further consider and integrate an appropriate action into its Equality Action Plan: ways in which to promote professional and employment opportunities and to provide more opportunities for women in the City to network (for example, an externally focused event, possibly in partnership with Economic Regeneration).**
- 5.15 **Recommendation 4: Leicester City Council's Voluntary Community Sector liaisons and Communications team to communicate news of both Council-affiliated and external networking events to women-majority community groups (for example, library and children's centre 'Toddler Time' attendees), to offer mothers who are not in employment greater professional opportunities.**
- 5.16 **Recommendation 5: Leicester City Council's Human Resources team to consider implementing employee policy for those returning from maternity leave to better support both the employee and their manager's facilitation or their re-entry into work.**
- 5.17 **Recommendation 6: That the government flexible working taskforce continue to campaign for employers to adopt flexible working practises in the public sector and the private sector.**
- 5.18 **Recommendation 7: That the Job Centre Plus continue to build on its work thus far to promote flexible working practises, by challenging appropriately and requiring adequate justification where an employer has communicated that an opportunity is not suitable for flexible working.**
- 5.19 **Recommendation 8: That governmental policymakers review the '30 hours free childcare scheme', taking into account and addressing the issues**

raised by participants, to give women a greater opportunity to re-enter work without suffering financially.

5.20 **Recommendation 9: That governmental policymakers consider exploring the merits and risks to implementing an allowance or financial benefit (subject to certain conditions), where women are relying on family members informally to take on childcare responsibilities to enable them to work, to ensure that family members (particularly female family members) are supplemented and are not experiencing detriment financially.**

## 6 **Community Support** (Pages 27-31)

6.1 Having a purpose to meet and an activity to do presents an opportunity for women to form **support networks** and open up where they may have otherwise felt uncomfortable to directly seek emotional support. In these groups, women forged friendships and supported one another – as well as providing crucial signposting information and advice.

6.2 In a context of chronically strained NHS mental health services and increasing poverty (Rose and McAuley 2019; Power, Doherty, Pybus, Pickett 2020), community groups play an ever more important role in supporting individuals. These groups serve many **functions**, such as providing a sense of belonging and collectivism, therapeutic interaction, escapism and even career support.

6.3 However, the project heard from many women who had created initiatives in their communities, who voiced the perceived **threats to the future of these services**, namely, a lack of funding. This was also felt by the Council-commissioned community services, with concern that the tendering process is always becoming narrower, and this could threaten the longevity of an established service that provides essential advice and support.

6.4 Group organisers spoke about the **difficulty with accessing funding** for community groups, such as Ward Funding, and suggested that more information events for applicants and simplified application systems would be beneficial. The Council's Ward Engagement Officers do hold information sessions for those applying for funding, however it was apparent that participants involved in community group leadership weren't always aware of this.

6.5 Additionally, if participants are describing the funding bid process as complicated and difficult to undertake, there is possibly an issue with the **accessibility** of systems used for funding applications. As the Council champions accessibility, it is recommended that any in-house bid application processes be reviewed, in light of this feedback.

6.6 Other barriers to accessing groups were linked to finance, transport or location. In the Council, we have a directory of care and support called '[MyChoice](#)', which was mentioned only by the participants who were Council staff members, suggesting that this valuable informational hub requires greater advertisement.

6.7 Some participants also suggested a mapping system would be helpful. In light of



these comments, **MyChoice could streamline with Leicester Open Data to offer a mapping system**, locating where particular community groups meet. Leicester Open Data platform has already been piloted for this purpose by mapping support as part of the Covid-19 response. The Open Data platform also has the benefit of being collaborative, meaning that Voluntary and Charitable Sector, (VCS), organisations and individuals can add any groups or support that the Council are unaware of, thus promoting a more comprehensive picture. By utilising visual mapping, the Council will be able to **identify and then target underserved areas and overlay with other maps (such as public transport routes)**, ensuring that any barriers, such as lack of transport, can be identified and addressed.

6.8 **Recommendation 10: Leicester City Council to review all funding application systems, to check accessibility and make the relevant changes where any issues with accessibility are determined.**

6.9 **Recommendation 11: Leicester City Council teams dealing with bid funding applications (within both Neighbourhoods and Procurement) to consider how contact information for advice and support is published, to ensure maximum uptake of such offers of support.**

6.10 **Recommendation 12: Adult Social Care and others who may have an interest in mapping the support offer to consider whether it may be beneficial to align to Leicester Open Data, in order that information isn't replicated and can be found in one place.**

6.11 **Recommendation 13: Leicester City Council to develop a Comms plan which fulfils two functions; 1. to make VCS organisations and community groups aware of the Open Data Platform and to encourage as many as possible to add information to the relevant map and 2. to make citizens of Leicester aware of the Open Data Platform and how to use it.**

6.12 **Recommendation 14: Once the Open Data Platform is more developed, consider overlaying VCS support map with public transport routes map to establish whether there are any issues which need to be addressed. This will need to be in partnership with public transport operators.**

## **7 Workplace – Policies vs. Practice (Pages 32-49)**

7.1 Participants frequently spoke about the following issues relating to work: unhealthy working environments where the workplace culture stifled women from being retained or progressing in their organisation, guilt for exercising supportive policies such as flexible working or parental leave and such policies not being properly implemented by managers, discriminatory behaviour, sexual harassment and poor, potentially illegal, employer practice.

7.2 This highlighted that some organisations are complicit, to a certain extent, in sustaining inequality.

7.3 Many participants expressed that efforts to advance equality have seen society

significantly progress – leading some to falsely believe we have now achieved full equality. In the context of the workplace, many women believed this has led to protective law and policy often becoming a tick-box exercise, which ‘proves’ equal treatment and opportunity upon audit. Participants reflected that under-exercised policies which are not meaningfully applied, coupled with forms of discrimination evolving to become more subtle, can also make it hard for employees to recognise, call out and resolve such issues.

- 7.4 Individual ownership is important, but an organisation-wide culture shift, starting with the right ‘tone from the top’ is essential to making the working environment equally safe, fair and respectful for all.
- 7.5 A significant proportion of women said that **Flexible working arrangements** (FWAs) and the ability to reduce contracted hours are important in aiding employees who have had a change in circumstance or additional needs to continue to succeed in their employment. However, where women utilised such FWA policies, they expressed that this way of working is not normalised and has a stigma attached to it.
- 7.6 In the context of Covid-19, flexible working is already becoming somewhat of a ‘new normal’. Now is the ideal opportunity to make FWAs a staple part of working culture, post-Covid. It is appreciated that standardisation of flexible working may have some financial implications for employers i.e. IT equipment costs which smaller businesses or those in the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) may not be able to shoulder independently, which should be accounted for.
- 7.7 Regarding part-time work, women who had reduced their hours expressed frustration in that their hours (and consequently, pay) were reduced, but their workload wasn’t. Women also perceived their requirement for part time work, as limiting the number of opportunities to progress. Women make up a disproportionately large share of part-time employees (Office National Statistics: House of Commons 2020). Therefore, women are disproportionately impacted by such barriers.
- 7.8 **Unconscious biases** are learned stereotypes that are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, and able to influence behaviour. Whilst direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of a protected characteristic, as defined under the Equality Act 2010, is prohibited, unconscious biases that are acted upon are often more elusive or subtle in nature, which makes it very difficult to evidence unfair treatment and inequality.
- 7.9 Such perception and treatment can impact on how suitable an employee is perceived to be for a progression opportunity. Black and Minority Ethnic,(BAME), and working-class women spoke to their experiences of being treated differently in the workplace, as well as a workplace culture that left them feeling excluded or othered. Some BAME women expressed how they felt more barriers in relation to their ethnicity or race than their gender and spoke about feeling a need to be more diligent than their white counterparts, in order to be respected in their role.

- 7.10 In some specific fields, women said that their career goals were incompatible with family goals. A common report of women in employment was that many managers deem it acceptable to ask about their female staff's fertility, and that this can have an impact on the desirability of an employee for opportunities in work.
- 7.11 Women returning to work following maternity leave were sometimes met with dissuasion. It was made clear that women who are mothers (or even just perceived of as likely to become a mother) do need more support progress in their careers in the same way that other employees are able to. Family responsibility has to be acknowledged in both recruitment and workplaces without stigma or as a perceived weakness, and rather, **an accepted part of life experienced by a significant proportion of the working population.**
- 7.12 Participants also expressed that fertility is a topic for discussion when in the perceived interests of the employer, however health concerns or conditions such as periods and the menopause, are taboo topics in the workplace. It was largely felt that there should be a **greater awareness of these health issues in the workplace.** Where participants had policies or open dialogues in the workplace addressing these issues, they voiced being able to address their health needs and establish adjustments to enable them to do their job more effectively.
- 7.13 Women spoke of **assault or harassment in their line of work** by managers, staff and service users - these stories most commonly arising from women in lower paid, particularly service, roles.
- 7.14 Resolves to eradicate barriers relating to the workplace must be focused on shifting the workplace culture, with senior staff members held accountable for modelling this.
- 7.15 One of the main resolutions suggested was access to **safer spaces.** Safe spaces refer to a 'place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm' (Oxford Dictionary definition). Acknowledging the immense challenge of tackling inequality and to avoid making commitments that cannot be met which can undermine trust, operating on a 'safer space' policy would be more appropriate currently.
- 7.16 Safer spaces can be created by having zero-tolerance equalities policies, diversity and inclusion training for staff of all levels, encouraging staff to create or partake in employee groups and supporting staff members equally to engage, adopting a dignity framework to practically manage conversations and encouraging all employees to learn about how they can support a culture of equality and inclusion.
- 7.17 In recruitment, participants drew attention to **lack of diversity on interview panels** and how a lack of relatability already places interviewees from protected and under-represented groups at a disadvantage. The value of 'banter' or 'off the cuff chats' utilised by candidates of greater privilege to relate to their

interviewer was criticised heavily by participants, who advocated for more structured interviews as a means to fairer recruitment.

- 7.18 The researchers heard numerous accounts of unfair recruitment practices which are often undetectable. A hidden preference in recruitment for those who aren't a **'pregnancy risk'** was commonly felt by women of 'prime child-bearing' age, and discriminatory practice and reasonable adjustments not being implemented in recruitment, despite having been agreed prior, were mentioned.
- 7.19 Recruitment bias can be reduced by implementing measures such as standardised curriculum vitae, (CV), -blinding, mandated diverse recruitment panels, ensuring inclusive terminology in advertisements, seizing non-traditional recruitment opportunities such as having a stall or scheduling an agenda slot with a minority advocacy network's event, and choosing to conduct structured interviews that enable decisions to be made strictly on evidence of suitability for the role.
- 7.20 Regarding diverse recruitment panels, it is essential that all panel members are in positions of direct or indirect professional relevance to the recruiting post, and that all members have the same briefing and/or training to prepare for the task. This is to ensure panel participation is meaningful and all panel members are able to contribute with value.
- 7.21 **Recommendation 15: That Leicester City Council's Equality Action Plan 2021 incorporate work internally to support line managers to understand organisational support mechanisms which are particularly relevant to the issues that participants have raised (such as the flexible working policy, time off for dependents policy) how those policies and support mechanisms support equality and how to make decisions which promote a supportive environment and also more flexible working, where it is practicable. This is likely to be achieved most effectively through some form of training or workshop style events.**
- 7.22 **Recommendation 16: Leicester City Council to consider what training and/or guidance managers are currently having on Occupational Health and consider reviewing this to promote an understanding of Occupational Health as a supportive tool, not a disciplinary measure.**
- 7.23 **Recommendation 17: That further work is undertaken with other services within the Council, for example economic regeneration, tourism and culture, to establish whether there are any actions that could be included in the Equality Action Plan 2021 which would encourage other employers in the City to promote supportive policies and work environment, for example flexible working and increased part-time working and job share opportunities, where practicable.**
- 7.24 **Recommendation 18: Organisations should review their policies collaboratively with their employees, by seeking feedback on how policy is currently used and understood. This could be facilitated by an anonymous internal survey, the information gathered aiding meaningful policy**

refinement. It is not within Leicester City council's remit to implement this in other organisations, but the Council should pay further consideration to how they might be able to influence and share best practice with employers across the City.

- 7.25 **Recommendation 19: Awareness raising and information sharing locally and nationally to ensure that women understand their rights in relation to employment, and to increase women's confidence and ability to challenge effectively, where they have experienced both overt and/or covert discrimination, harassment or victimisation. This also links with a recommendation under 'Safety' to ensure that women are confident and equipped to raise concerns and complaints in relation to service provision (p. 75)**
- 7.26 **Recommendation 20: That policymakers consider providing some form of funding to small and medium sized enterprises, (SMEs), and VCS organisations to enable them to purchase equipment, for the specific purpose of encouraging and enabling them to implement flexible/ home working.**
- 7.27 **Recommendation 21: The government flexible working taskforce/ policymakers to consider how they might influence employers to more openly consider employee part-time proposals and support part-time employees to do an effective job within contracted hours.**
- 7.28 **Recommendation 22: The government flexible working taskforce/ policymakers to consider how they can promote and encourage employees to offer job shares, to better support part-time employees to progress in their careers into more senior or skilled roles – benefitting both employer and employee.**
- 7.29 **Recommendation 23: Leicester City Council to consider implementing a zero-tolerance approach within the review of the Dignity at Work Policy.**
- 7.30 **Recommendation 24: Policymakers to consider ways in which to either encourage or mandate transparent recruitment processes that are publicly available for scrutiny and are designed using positive action where lawful, to reduce recruitment bias.**
- 7.31 **Recommendation 25: Leicester City Council to ensure that guidance on how to use the positive action provisions under the Equality Act and guidance on recruitment panel make-up is included in updated recruitment guidance for managers.**

## **8 Recognition of and Support for Carers (Pages 49-66)**

- 8.1 The role of a carer (for an older or disabled family member) is frequently delegated to female family members. Women expressed that these responsibilities meant they have had to put both career and education goals on hold, sometimes indefinitely. Many did not identify with the term 'carer', instead

they saw it as a 'family duty'. This may mean that people are not accessing the carers support they are entitled to.

- 8.2 Many of societies structures do not recognise carers or their responsibilities and this can create multiple barriers to work and education – for example, trying to get GP appointments or time off for these appointments and accessing health and well-being support. This further isolates an already marginalised group. A lack of adequate support can be a significant contributor to mental health conditions. Greater awareness is required of how carers can be discriminated against by virtue of their association with an older or disabled family member. In addition, some participants spoke of their experiences of having been a young carer and feeling let down that this was not identified by their school and so they did not receive support.
- 8.3 **Recommendation 26 Leicester City Council to work with schools in the City to help to introduce guidance, training or professional development, as deemed appropriate, for teachers - to aid them in identifying young carers and referring to the relevant support. To publicise tools to aid schools in identifying young carers, for example the young carers identification tool for education staff on the schools intranet.**
- 8.4 **Recommendation 27: Policymakers to consider the issue more widely to see whether there are any additional national measures which could be put into place to better equip teachers in identifying young carers.**
- 8.5 **Recommendation 28: Leicester City Council to consider the merit of personal, social, health and economic, (PSHE)/Citizenship in the City's schools including a lesson on being a carer and having meaningful conversations about caring. Although this is not directly within the Council's remit, it is worth considering how the Council might effectively engage with schools to achieve this.**
- 8.6 **Recommendation 29: Leicester City Council's Adult Social Care/ Communications teams to share information with schools in the city on what support is available for young carers.**
- 8.7 **Ineffective support:** Many carers gain knowledge from speaking with others in carer support groups. This community information-sharing function was felt as an absence in formal service communication. Many carers felt they wouldn't have enough knowledge of services available, if such community groups didn't exist.
- 8.8 **Recommendation 30: Leicester City Council's Adult Social Care Department to work with health partners to review the way in which information is shared with carers; to make information packs more easily accessible, so that service users know exactly what support is available and whether they are entitled to such services. To utilise the Council's communication mechanisms, including social media, to raise awareness of information and support for carers.**

- 8.9 **Caring and respite:** Women spoke about financial constraints and financial support not adequately covering their needs. Unpaid carers indicated that it was frustrating to be paid less than professional workers to do a greater share of caring. They also expressed mistrust for external paid support based on negative past experiences. Participants voiced paid respite did not cover the essential needs and had long waiting times. The difficulty of the care recipient adjusting to respite care and unpaid carers mistrust mean that sometimes respite care does not provide an adequate break for the unpaid carer, as intended. There is additional pressure to use the respite care available, even if the carer doesn't feel comfortable – otherwise such support, that was hard to fight for, is lost.
- 8.10 **Recommendation 31: Undertake further work locally with the relevant service area to understand and respond to the issues raised by participants in relation to respite.**
- 8.11 **Caring and aspirations:** Caring responsibilities put a pause on primary carers life aspirations. Opportunities were hindered due to the incompatibility of goals and caring responsibilities. Where individuals tried to pursue their aspirations and maintain caring responsibilities, they were met with significant strain. They felt there was little to no choice but to prioritise their dependants care and well-being. These setbacks cause low self-esteem, leaving carers to underestimate their skillset, when in fact community group members would help others realise the transferable skillset gained from caring.
- 8.12 They voiced feeling frustration at having to be reliant on the state for insufficient income. Carers also voiced feelings of loneliness; living a less typical life. Organisations should be more adaptive and take a more carer-friendly approach, offering flexibility in the workplace, education and other settings, this will benefit individuals holistically. Many carers express how they want to work for financial independence, being in a better financial position, being part of a community, fulfilling their goals and being positive role models for others. If more carers get into employment that is adapted, more will learn that they too can commence work or education and have fewer barriers in achieving their goals.
- 8.13 **Disparity between primary carers and paid care staff:** All carers and advocates highlighted the unfairness of their financial support against the job they do, further accentuated by wages received by external care staff. There is sometimes an inability to commence work as the prescribed hours to be eligible for Carers Allowance are not commonly available in the working world. Frustration was voiced with the lack of government's perceived lack of understanding that their caring duties are a restricting and real barrier to work. All carers we spoke to have a desire to work for various reasons but are unable to. There is no acknowledgement that goes into carers benefits and allowances that consider costs innate to living in a house with a care recipient (e.g. bills). At best the chronic undervaluing of unpaid carers results in damaged sense of self-worth and fosters frustration and tension with paid care support. At worst this causes some of the most isolated and vulnerable members of society to live in some degree of poverty.

- 8.14 **Recommendation 32: Government to include policy ideas to address the nuanced issues raised in this report in relation to unpaid caring responsibilities, particularly in terms of the financial difficulties that they face, in the Green Paper on Social Care, and publish for public consultation.**
- 8.15 **Undervalued as a carer:** Many females felt overlooked both in their endeavours to advocate for correct support for care recipients and in attention paid to supporting carers to care and stay well whilst doing so. They expressed various struggles surrounding being acknowledged and listened to.
- 8.16 **Caring and health:** Many carers prioritise the health and well-being of those they care for over their own. However, if carers don't look after themselves, they are unable to provide the best care to those that they care for. The neglect of their own health and well-being impacts physical and mental health.
- 8.17 **Recommendation 33: Leicester City Council to ensure that the relevant corporate policies acknowledge carers and the discrimination they can face arising from their association with someone with a disability/ies (discrimination by association).**
- 8.18 Participants felt specific acknowledgement of carers by private businesses via occasional free treats (proposed by participants as free cinema tickets every few months) would go a long way in recognising carers and the work they do, as well as the limited incomes many have.
- 8.19 **Recommendation 34: Leicester City Council to consider offering carers discounts, deals or occasional free treats at City Council run sites (museum and heritage sites, for example) and events, to acknowledge the hard work of those who care and the minimal disposable income available. To encourage other businesses in the City (who are in a position to do so), to also consider offering discounts or deals for carers.**
- 9 Sports and access (Pages 66-69)**
- 9.1 The main barrier felt in accessing sports is the gendering of certain sports as 'male'. This can be reinforced by segregation of physical education, (P.E), activities in school. This is further supported by a lack of clubs targeting girls and women in the community, causing women to accept participating in 'female' sports as this is their only opportunity to engage. Participants noted that, even in 2020 some schools don't offer the same P.E lessons for girls and boys, reinforcing gender scripts.
- 9.2 Some participants expressed a desire for 'women only' spaces when referring to sport, health and exercise. This was sometimes due to a cultural or religious reason and in other instances due to safety concerns.
- 9.3 **Recommendation 35: The Department of Education to give guidance to schools and colleges relating to the P.E. Curriculum and equal access to sports in practice, to ensure education providers are aware that while they**



can separate by sex for P.E. lawfully, they are obliged to provide the same opportunities for both girls and boys to engage in sports.

9.4 **Recommendation 36: Existing Council-operated sport and gym facilities to consider expanding their selection of ‘women only’ classes where there is evidence of need and to offer these at a range of days and times, accommodating for the many responsibilities women take on (as highlighted throughout this report). In addition, to advertise services more widely to enable women to participate.**

## 10 Safety (Pages 70-78)

10.1 This was a common concern to the women. This section explored how real safety concerns impact on how women live, how unsafe situations can be mitigated and where crimes have occurred, women’s experience of engaging with the police and sport services.

10.2 **Safety methods, fear barriers and solutions:** Common safety methods include getting lifts with family or calling friends on the way home. Such methods rely on trusted support networks that are the norm for many women. However, if a woman doesn’t have someone to rely on to boost confidence and aid in their safety, the fear of danger may impact the way women are able to live their lives. Not having safety mitigations in place caused women to avoid doing what they want to and not making the most of opportunities available to them. Regarding solutions to make cities safer, the project supports Plan UK’s call for women and girls to be made a priority in the future redesigns of cities and involved in the processes. Women voiced several problems relating to neighbourhood safety with clear solutions, in particular better and more street lighting. Whilst Leicester is striving to be as green as possible given the declared climate emergency, safety remains a priority. Residents must feel some confidence to travel by foot at night.

10.3 **Recommendation 37: Local Authorities to consider keeping intermittent streetlights on to ensure no one area is pitch-black. This local strategy should be individually tailored to neighbourhoods, with priority given to areas of higher criminal activity.**

10.4 Safety in travelling to and from parked cars and not enough safe parking spaces were also raised. Participant expressed feeling patronised being given rape alarms and that this did not wholly make them feel safer. Safety and the night-time economy were addresses as a point of concern. Being in such space’s women experience harassment and should they not meet advancements they are met with intimidation and aggression. The theme of victim blaming, a fundamental element of rape culture was also rife in discussions of safety.

10.5 **Recommendation 38: Leicester City Council to consider the merit of PSHE/Citizenship in the City’s schools including a lesson on a rape culture and identifying harmful views and behaviour around love, sex and sexual assault, (such as shaming women who are sexually active or based on how many sexual partners they have, rape jokes, victim blaming, judging**

what women wear, 'cat calling'). Whilst this is not within the Council's direct remit, it is worth considering how the Council might effectively engage with schools to achieve this.

- 10.6 **Recommendation 39: Feed the issues raised in this section to the Smart Cities Team and Community Safety to consider whether we can use technology as a means to collaborate with citizens, to identify problems in their neighbourhoods and help facilitate a safer Leicester.**
- 10.7 **Recommendation 40: The Council's Community Safety and Protection team to support local community awareness initiatives relating to standing against rape culture and violence towards women (i.e. in externally circulated communications such as Your Leicester).**
- 10.8 **Recommendation 41: National policymakers consider ways in which women who have experienced domestic violence are enabled to safely stay in their own homes should they wish to, and instead perpetrators are required to leave the household.**
- 10.9 **Experience with authorities:** Women's experiences of working with the authorities following victimisation were polarised. Some praised the service, and others raised concerns. Some described experiencing a lack of help from other civilians during an incident. One particularly poignant account from a participant described how she felt racially discriminated against and that her life, rather than her abuser's life, was being unnecessarily disrupted. Some women questioned 'who polices public authorities?', demonstrating that some are not aware of independent scrutiny bodies or means of escalating complaints. Ensuring more public awareness of these mechanisms could strengthen perceptions of public authorities. Additionally, advocacy for women, particularly more 'vulnerable' women such as those with disabilities, would help women to receive the correct service provision.
- 10.10 **Recommendation 42: Leicester City Council to do some awareness raising work on how citizens can raise complaints and escalate concerns about any public body/authority if they feel that their complaint has not been sufficiently dealt with. Work may also need to be undertaken nationally to ensure that women are equipped to challenge effectively. This links with a recommendation in the section 'Workplace – Policies vs. Practise' (p.35) which recommends that awareness raising work is undertaken to ensure that women are aware of their rights in employment and are equipped to challenge where these are breached and where they have experienced discrimination, harassment and victimisation. It may be that these two recommendations can be combined, if appropriate.**
- 10.11 **Domestic Violence and Resources:** Many victims of domestic abuse are unaware that they are experiencing abusive treatment. It takes good support from indirect services to flag this up and help the individual become conscious of their situation. Being unaware of the extent or feeling unable to leave a situation when it is in a familial setting was described as some women as, in part, due to cultural expectations and not bringing the extended family into disrepute. Some

experiences of abuse can be insidious and therefore hard to identify. Women also reported not going forward to report or pursue divorces and separation proceedings due to the costs. Further detriment was felt by some of the women involved in the project as women are often the one to leave the household, whilst abusive partners remain at home. Feelings of being trapped are heightened during the pandemic, especially the initial strict lockdown period. Participants expressed that there must be more community education and discussion about domestic violence and community assistance to help victims acknowledge abuse is not acceptable and safety is more important than stigma.

10.12 **Recommendation 43: Leicester City Council and the Government Equalities Office to continue to support campaigns to increase awareness and recognition around the different types of abuse, where and how to get support, both locally and nationally.**

10.13 **Recommendation 44: Leicester City Council to ensure our relevant commissioned services (in Community Safety, Housing and Social Care) continue to make available practical help and support to survivors of domestic violence, taking into account the lived experiences of those seeking support and taking steps to ease the process of resettling and in some cases, becoming independent for the first time.**

11 **Personalisation of Services and Communication to Service Users (Pages 78-92)**

11.1 Many women raised the importance of receiving a person-centred service. Many women felt that seeing numerous different professionals contributed to a lack of consistency or personalised support, for example seeing a different GP or support worker at an employment agency were commonly raised. This fostered feelings of just being a number going through the system. This led to feeling a loss of trust in service providers, therefore being less forthcoming in experiences of such services, leading to poorer quality interactions that sustain ineffective service provision. This also led to women feeling anger towards others in similar situations to themselves, who felt the support they received was not as effective as the support that someone else had received, causing internal class friction.

11.2 **Housing and financial support:** A considerable amount of the population in Leicester experience economic deprivation. Living through economic hardship caused a reactionary anger, leaving many working-class people resentful towards other working-class people who had experience similar hardships. Particularly in conversations about housing and welfare. Regarding housing, people felt frustrations around accessible housing and support. Another common frustration was that of working-class families where the parent/s work full-time struggling to make ends meet and don't receive financial support, when comparing their situation to other people receiving more support.

11.3 Some of the women with council tenancies expressed feeling in an equally precarious situation, in that they felt unable to progress in their career, for fear they will be forced out their home to a more dangerous situation should they commence work.

- 11.4 Private renters placing blanket bans on recipients of DSS was recently ruled as unlawful under the Equality Act 2010, as a form of indirect discrimination (Richardson 2020). This recognition is a positive step for fairer access to private tenancies, however work to debunk the prevailing expectation of private renters not taking on those who are in receipt of benefits may be required.
- 11.5 **Jobseekers:** Many women voiced negative experiences with employment agencies that came down to a lack of tailored support. They would often make references of current experiences to historical ones, detailing the infrequency of meetings and one-to-one support, the formal nature of their support which can be intimidating and off-putting and makes women feel as though it is a 'tick box system'.
- 11.6 There was mention of being placed in unsuitable jobs and this acting as a deterrent to return for support. Work should be suitable for skill and practically for the individual's lifestyle and somewhat relevant to an individual's interests and goals. If not, it becomes a temporary stop-gap solution, not a long-term fulfilling investment for the individual and their employer. Everyone deserves to be satisfied in their work. Personalisation is important to ensure a good fit for individual to work and ensure the experience of job seeking is respectful and not daunting.
- 11.7 Personalised services would be beneficial to both those using employment agencies and employees. Employees in that they see a customer through their job-seeking journey, facilitating greater investment and personal reward to see their assigned cases succeed.
- 11.8 **Caring and correct support:** Women with caring responsibilities frequently voiced that within health and social care, the support received was of an inconsistent standard and highlighted the frequency of falling through the gaps. Women spoke of red flags being overlooked (regarding timely diagnosis or adequate support, as listed in care plans), their advocacy being dismissed by health and care professionals unless they possessed the knowledge and interpersonal skills, and clear cross-agency miscommunication, all of which lead to poor care experiences. Where individuals don't know the regular protocol or information, it raises the question on the quality of care and support they are receiving and whether this is appropriate. With regards to mental health, poor interagency communication was also highlighted.
- 11.9 Similarly, in the context of school – parents with children with additional needs voiced frustration with 'lip service' meetings. Concerns not being met with sufficient action. Where oversights occurred in relation to correct care it resulted in interagency scapegoating, leaving women unsure of where to turn to, to rectify a situation. Multiple women expressed trouble getting diagnosis for their children with SEN and/ or autism. Concerns aren't taken seriously until an external agent expresses concerns of disruptive behaviour etc. This is frustrating and demeaning for parents; the child misses out on earlier support to live with their condition. The struggle to get the correct level of support was felt by many, and many feeling the only way to gain support is to persevere with force.

- 11.10 This section sheds light on the difficulty of carers advocating, or people with caring needs, in accessing the appropriate health and social care. The female carers spoken to evidently have had disparaging experiences which with the right knowledge and interpersonal skills can be fought against, but not all will have the same assets to hand to push for fair treatment.
- 11.11 **Recommendation 45: Ask the clinical commissioning groups, (CCG) to suggest that general practitioners, (GPs), document conversations on concerns voiced over dependant's behaviours and commit to listening and exploring these with the advocate.**
- 11.12 **Recommendation 46: Reviewing the sharing systems of key information in health and social care patient files.**
- 11.13 **Recommendation 47: Social care workers and health workers to provide service users date deadlines to provide updates/information where possible.**
- 11.14 **Child to adult support transitions:** Participants in situations that made them more dependent on services spoke about a drop-in support when transitioning from adolescent to adult. This can leave many in a situation of instability as new adults.
- 11.15 **Recommendation 48: Social care services to continue to review the way in which dependant services users go through from child's to adults' services and respond to feedback to ensure a gradual and manageable transition for the service user.**
- 11.16 **Education:** We heard of what good service provision looks like, one participant spoke of how her reasonable adjustments were met, she suggested it helped her to perform her best as did support from her mentor in college. This illustrates how good service provision can be, when tailored and consistent. However, many young participants students going to university rather than those taking other routes into further education or employment. Students deserve to feel informed and listened to when proposing post-college, and colleges have a duty to be the primary source of information to support their students in making informed decisions that are right for them – providing comprehensive support for all options.
- 11.17 **Recommendation 49: Feedback to colleges the need for post-college lessons to both pay fair attention to all career paths (not putting the onus on University) and for such sessions to take a more collaborative structure, in which students are made to feel comfortable asking questions, and confident their query will be met with a response.**
- 11.18 Many women over the age of traditional students today (over 25) expressed a desire to return to education. However, they needed to consider childcare and financial or employment related constraints. Many women spoke of positive experiences where employers supported employees with further learning.

Women also suggested that having a childcare facility attached to educational settings was also beneficial.

- 11.19 **Recommendation 50: Universities and other adult learning institutions to identify and establish whether there is a need for childcare facilities and act accordingly to accommodate for this. This may be in the form of creating links with nearby nurseries to offer parents subsidised rates or priority places for children.**
- 11.20 **Recommendation 51: Employers in Leicester and across the country to be encouraged to support their employee more widely in gaining additional qualifications.**
- 11.21 **Health:** Many women voiced feeling let down by their primary care services, whether due to inaccessibility, sudden drops in care, lack of information or the effects of procedures relating to female health. These are explored further under mental and physical health. This sub-section focuses on the quality of service received. Concerns were raised about post-natal care where they could not access the services needed to aid physical post-natal recovery, alongside the dramatic drop in care six-weeks post-partum. As mentioned earlier, a different professional on every service encounter also led to experiences that were not person-centred and resulted in inconsistent information and guidance.
- 11.22 Women highlighted the differing rules accepted for patients and GPs with regards to appointment cancellations. Women also expressed the need or preference to choose which gender GP to visit. However, some participants stated that getting a GP appointment was difficult, so accepted talking to a male doctor about female health issues. Challenges were raised around being able to discuss comorbidities and overlapping health conditions, due to the 'one issue per appointment' rule.
- 11.23 Also, worth noting under this section is that menopause is spoken about very little in society, due to the nature of the condition and stigma, it is personal. Sensitivity and consistent information sharing are key to making the menopause a manageable experience.
- 11.24 **Recommendation 52: The GEO to consider feeding back to the Department for Health the expressed need to assign 'lead GPs' to patients and prioritise this GP as the care provider, for patients to receive consistent care. Similarly, in a longstanding condition, the GP first approached with the concern/s should be the one to oversee this care, to ensure continuous support, non-conflating information or guidance offered, and lesser oversights via inter-GP communication.**
- 11.25 **Digital exclusion:** This was one of the main concerns surrounding access to services, in terms of those who are digitally excluded not having the same access to services as others. Whilst digitalisation has many benefits, digital inclusion is a privilege not afforded to all. Whilst the percentage of adults with disabilities using the internet has been steadily declining, in 2018 23.3% of adults with disabilities were not internet users, compared with 6.0% of adults

without a disability (ONS 2018). Digital exclusion also affected women who have English as a second language or have poor literacy skills.

- 11.26 Participants voiced that there are misconceptions that going digital is easier universally, but this is not the case. Essential services that promote online use significantly over other forms of contact result in women who are digitally excluded finding it harder to access these services.
- 11.27 **Recommendation 53: Leicester City Council to continue to ensure where decisions are made to channel shift our services, that an equality impact assessment, (EIA), is completed - demonstrating consideration of our public section equality duty, (PSED).**
- 11.28 **Recommendation 54: Leicester City Council to ensure that service users are given notice of our services digitising and to make online access an option to using services, not the only method of using the service.**
- 11.29 **Recommendation 55: In recognition that digital inclusion plays an important role in enabling women to not only access services but also to engage fully in public life (including work and education), particularly given some of the additional barriers posed by Covid-19, the Smart Cities, Equalities, Adult Skills and Learning and Neighbourhoods, in addition to other relevant services, will work together to scope a proposal for a project to deal with issues that have been highlighted as part of this project and more widely in response to Covid-19 – such as lack of access to devices, including appropriate devices for work and study and lack of access to adequate internet connection.**
- 11.30 **Acknowledging diverse needs in service provision:** Several participants from multiple marginalised demographics addressed the failure of services designed to support them, in meeting their needs. This is a practical translation of intersectional barriers not currently being fully recognised in the Equalities Act 2010. This subsection explored the accessibility and quality of services for those who are apart of multiple marginalised communities, focusing on these intersectional barriers when accessing support.
- 11.31 **Recommendation 56: That the Government should evaluate and review existing legislation and policy to ensure it takes an approach which fully considers the interaction between sex and other protected characteristics, or ‘intersectionality’ in addressing inequalities disproportionately experienced by women, many of which are covered in the later sections of this report.**
- 11.32 **Recommendation 57: That the Government should make it possible to bring a single discrimination claim based on an individual’s full identity (which is likely to include multiple intersecting protected characteristics), by reviewing and then implementing Section 14 of the Equality Act 2010. Whilst Section 14 covers ‘dual discrimination’ there may be merit in considering intersectionality of more than two protected characteristics in conjunction with one another, as part of the review.**

## 12 Finance (Pages 92-98)

- 12.1 Leicester is a city experiencing significant and chronic economic deprivation (The English Indices of Deprivation, ONS 2019); widespread poverty likely to be further exacerbated by the impact of Coronavirus (The World Bank 2020). The economy has historically hit women hardest in a variety of ways. In this section the main concerns women voiced will be explored: impacts of change to benefits including introduction of Universal Credit, dependency on male partners in heterosexual monogamous relationships, a lack of understanding of gender pay gaps and pension, Period Poverty and mental and physical health implications of being disproportionately affected by poverty and economic hardship.
- 12.2 **Period Poverty:** In March 2020 it was announced that the luxury taxing of menstrual products was to be abolished as of January 2021. The news is wholeheartedly supported by the project; prior to this, participants voiced frustration at the unfair tax classification of such products. Despite this good news there will remain many people who have periods who are unable to afford the appropriate menstrual products for their needs, known as 'period poverty'. Nationally, 27% of women and girls in the UK cannot afford menstrual products. In Leicester this rises to 35% of the female population. Trans men are at higher risk of poverty and homelessness (Action for Trans Health) and experience the additional barrier of either 'outing' themselves and risking their safety or avoiding asking for help altogether when experiencing period poverty.
- 12.3 Menstrual care product donations are often neglected when it comes to homeless shelter collections. This neglect may in part be due to the stigma surrounding periods, but menstrual care is an essential need.
- 12.4 **Recommendation 58: Leicester City Council to address period poverty in the Equality Action Plan - as part of that work opening a dialogue with Leicester's Homeless Charities on access to menstrual care products for people experiencing period poverty.**
- 12.5 **Recommendation 59: When calling for physical donations, Homeless Charities in Leicester to include mention of menstrual care products on their donation list. When calling for fiscal donations, Homeless Charities in Leicester could mention this money, in part, will buy menstrual products – to boost awareness around this essential need often overlooked.**
- 12.6 **Recommendation 60: Leicester City Council to commit to providing free menstrual products in all Council buildings that are accessed by the public.**
- 12.7 **Recommendation 61: That the Government consider the proposal that those eligible for free prescriptions be able to request free menstrual care products from primary healthcare services such as GPs and GUM Clinics.**
- 12.8 **Recommendation 62: Leicester City Council's Public Health, Sustainability (within Estates & Buildings Services) and Education services to consider**



**the procurement of menstrual cups to be provided in school to each young person with periods, appealing to the Department for Education and their commitment to fully-fund access to free menstrual products in schools and colleges for funding.**

- 12.9 **The effects of economic hardship:** Stress caused by financial hardship and navigating ever-changing welfare systems in addition to many other stressors can manifest with mental and physical health conditions. People are left feeling trapped when there is a lack of clear direction or advice available. The mental toll of living in longstanding poverty and consistently being knocked back in efforts to escape this leads to mental health conditions including suicidal thoughts. As demonstrated, the impact on the health and wellbeing of women in economic hardship is significant and must be addressed. This will be explored further in the subsequent subsection: Health.
- 12.10 **Changes to support including universal credit:** Navigating government financial support can be complex but reviews of support add an element of instability which for women who are eligible causes an additional source of anxiety. This can leave women in stressful and financially precarious and unstable situations. The main issues highlighted were the five-week waiting period for a decision and the impact this can have on eligibility for other benefits; this leaving women to take some chance, and potentially having to repay payments – not to mention the complexity of navigating the system when eligible for multiple benefits. The offer of being paid some welfare in advance while waiting for a UC verdict was seen as an impractical solution to the long wait time due to those who are financially disadvantaged feeling a need to avoid incurring debt. This instability and ever-changing eligibility of benefits being a barrier to women making efforts to get qualifications to work. The potential of financial support being lessened to those who are already financially disadvantaged, exacerbating poverty in Leicester. Those in lone or no-income households, with no other safety nets worst hit by the Universal Credit process.
- 12.11 Clear and definitive advice needs to be given to those seeking it from associated services. This can only be realised with further revision of services such as Universal Credit to shorten wait-times and more comprehensively assimilate welfare benefits to avoid risks of women shouldering government debt. By penalising benefits based on attempts to prepare for work, there is a discouragement of attempts to become financially independent, contradicting the efforts of employment services.
- 12.12 **Recommendation 63: Benefits, both current and those being phased out, to be assimilated by the Government, to ensure no eligible recipient is left waiting for payments and that no debts occur from overpayment – with any debts incurred to be gradually redacted from the overarching eligible payments.**
- 12.13 **Recommendation 64: The Government to review the Universal Credit assessment process to cut down wait-times for a verdict.**
- 12.14 **Recommendation 65: The Government to ensure that those who are**

**jobseekers do not receive a benefit penalisation for attempts to make them better adapted or skilled to work.**

- 12.15 **Financial dependence and awareness:** Many women in heterosexual monogamous relationships remain reliant on their husbands financially, whether for expenditure or future planning. Pensions were unanimously an aspect of finances that participants were unaware of how to manage and access. With 43% of consultation respondents saying they 'didn't know very much' or they 'knew nothing' about their pension. In light of the Women Against State Pension Inequality, (WASPI), campaign, it is increasingly important that particularly women have control and knowledge of their pension.
- 12.16 The project found that there was a general unawareness surrounding the race and gender pay gaps. Some participants were aware of it, but similarly to issues of discrimination and organisations separating themselves from this issue, women were unaware of the complicities of their employers' pay gap. In not being aware of such gaps or where opportunities to discuss pay is blocked, it dodges accountability for organisations and stifles worker attempts and recuperation.
- 12.17 **Recommendation 66: Organisations to offer information to their employees on pension as a mandated part of their starter pack.**
- 12.18 As of 2017, employers with 250 employees or more, must publish their gender pay gap data every year.
- 12.19 **Recommendation 67: Organisations should consider periodically publishing data on their pay gaps in relation to protected characteristics beyond gender and making this information publicly accessible.**
- 13 Health (Pages 98-109)**
- 13.1 This section pays attention to the most prevalent health issues impacting women, including specific physical and mental conditions and experiences of care, as well as how accessible healthcare is.
- 13.2 **Postnatal needs:** Postnatal experiences including postnatal depression and difficulties in breastfeeding were significant areas of concern for women. Participants felt there wasn't enough postnatal care to identify and support post-partum women, who are often isolated with breastfeeding with their mental health. Women stressed how individualised support (which not all get) is essential in helping women to successfully breastfeed. Additionally, participants experienced being given conflicting advice from different professionals and dismissal of concerns was an issue raised.
- 13.3 An additional barrier was the societal pressure on women to be happy and enjoy life after having a baby, and the associated guilt with not fitting this expectation. This acted as a barrier in accessing potentially life-saving help. Many voiced that when they addressed their mental health concerns, medication was offered. This felt dismissive and not the solution they wanted – advocating instead for accessible community support in which they could speak with other women

about their experiences.

- 13.4 **Coping with miscarriage:** Miscarriage is more common than generally expected: among women who are aware they are pregnant, an estimated 1 in 8 pregnancies end in miscarriage (NHS 2018). Women volunteered stories of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancies and their experiences of recovering from traumatic experiences. The commonality being insensitive or insufficient care and support. Insufficient support has many forms, including employers not allowing any time off to recover, not having enough support following a miscarriage or pregnancy complications. Miscarriage needs to be recognised by employers in the same way other medical conditions are. Signposting is also essential to ensure the safety and well-being of women following such traumatic experiences.
- 13.5 **Managing Periods and Endometriosis:** There remains lots of stigma around periods with people who have periods feeling pressured to hide them and the associated symptoms. Women are made to feel as though to be a full member of society you should not appear to have periods or not being 'female'. These pressures to hide risks people not getting the right adjustments in place to fulfil their duties to the best of their ability and discourages people from addressing abnormalities and concerns about their menstrual health with a GP when necessary. The impact on daily life was also highlighted in voiced experiences of endometriosis. In the context of the workplace, where participants vocalised struggling with their period to be met with trust and flexible options from their employer, this contributed positively to the employees' sense of being respected and consequently work output.
- 13.6 **Menopause: assumptions and stigma:** Like periods there is prominent stigma surrounding menopause and a lack of acknowledgement of the menopause as a health condition. Sustaining this taboo means many people lack the knowledge to understand what is happening to them or where to turn to for information. There is an additional stigma in the form of ageism, that menopause only impacts older people. This alienates younger people experiencing early menopause from understanding their condition.
- 13.7 **Seeking healthcare: 'Pain Bias':** Women are more likely than men to be inadequately treated by healthcare providers. Pain bias refers to people of certain demographics being taken less seriously in health services than others. The data gathered supported the claim that some women are less likely to be taken seriously than other women – namely, **BAME women and younger women**. This pain bias acts as a barrier to individuals from marginalised groups having their needs met in healthcare, and as mentioned in 'Personalisation of Services', consistently poor standards make service users adverse to engaging with the service until it is "something really serious". Myths about different people experiencing pain differently need to be debunked.
- 13.8 **Recommendation 68: If not already, healthcare practitioners should undergo some form of unconscious bias training to ensure they are providing care that is fair and consistent to all patients.**

- 13.9 **Recommendation 69: Leicester City Council’s Public Health to discuss with healthcare practitioners the need for training staff on ‘pain bias’ and dispelling myths of different pain and symptoms experienced by people of various backgrounds.**
- 13.10 **Barriers to smear tests:** BAME women are less likely than white women to attend cervical cancer screenings, with 36.9% saying they would feel unsafe attending a doctor’s surgery as a result of the current pandemic, compared to 27.2% of white women (Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust, 2020). There was mention of how due to culture people are discouraged from having their tests, it can be quite invasive. On the other hand, others expressed frustration with assumptions made about not attending such appointments, and the betrayal of confidence in speaking to others about the issue. There are numerous reasons as to why women don’t want to attend screenings however, these were not fully explored in the research.
- 13.11 **Living with disability/ies and autism as an adult:** Participants living with disability/es or those advocating, commonly brought up issues surrounding dignity and accessibility. Speaking of busy shopping streets across the city, they mentioned failures in accessibility such as pavements not being wide enough or public toilets not being open. A participant mentioned how the pandemic has highlighted how little the public consider particularly hidden disabilities. She mentioned how there needs to be greater awareness of sunflower lanyards. There was also mention of the lack of value given to ensure dignity.
- 13.12 In relation to employment, participants expressed fear they have or would be discriminated against due to their disability. It was apparent that there is lack of awareness of people with disabilities rights for example in job interviews. Participants with disabilities were also unsure about applying for free bus travel and whether their carers could get free travel to assist them.
- 13.13 **Recommendation 70: Community-based officers should touch base with community group leaders to ensure they are aware of relevant support their participants may be entitled to. This could support constituents who don’t have direct contact with the Local Authority to be more aware of support mechanisms in place and access the full range of support available to them.**
- 13.14 Many participants spoke of getting a late autism diagnosis and highlighted long waiting times for adult Asperger’s support. Autism is understood in terms of common traits exhibited by males but tends to present differently in females. Participants stressed female traits are under-researched and thus frequently overlooked in standard diagnostic tools. Additionally, women learn to mask traits to conform with their gender role and societal expectation. These late diagnoses leave women with little to no support which can disrupt their lives in significant ways.
- 13.15 Participants with children who have disabilities spoke about incorrect support being offered by schools, schools not being equipped for the child’s needs These act as a barrier to children’s education and impacting women’s – being

the primary caregivers, ability to work. As a carer frustration were felt on tighter restrictions imposed on repeat medications making getting the medication at the right time more of a concern.

- 13.16 **Mental Health:** Participants frequently expressed distress experienced by long waiting times for mental health treatment both before and after diagnoses, with many stating that it took years to get some support. Alongside, a need to be persistent with health professionals, otherwise concerns were ignored. Participants also spoke of how mental health was not treated with the urgency and priority that it should be, compared with physical health. Individuals are increasingly told they should speak to a professional if they have mental health concerns, yet when they do so, there is no support available. This leaves many already 'vulnerable' people to feel let down. Misinformation and stigma led to the validity of some participants' conditions being disbelieved. Participants spoke of mental health impacting their ability to work, access the doctors, and a contributing factor to feelings of isolation and loneliness. An absence of understanding and support contributed to this. These highlight the essential need for mental health and community support services.
- 13.17 For some participants with anxiety, trying to get an appointment with a doctors' surgery wasn't feasible, due to calling and providing reasoning for appointments, due to their condition they were unable to do so. This highlights the need for multiple forms of contact, or doctors' surgeries not requiring a reason where a service user doesn't feel comfortable disclosing.
- 13.18 Mental health and appropriate support are particularly essential in today's climate of living through a global pandemic. People should feel they are able to go to their GP and know they will be adequately cared for, with the same urgency in response as a physical ailment. This cannot be achieved by a one-off cash injection; NHS mental health serviced need to have long-standing, consistent, increase in financial investment.
- 13.19 **Recommendation 71: Government to create long-term solutions to currently 'underfunded' (Mental Health Policy Group 2020) mental health support within the Comprehensive Spending Review.**
- 13.20 **Recommendation 72: Leicester City Council's Public Health to request local GP surgeries to offer multiple forms of contact and not require a reason to give an appointment, where a service user doesn't feel comfortable disclosing.**
- 14 Covid-19 (Pages 109-110)**
- 14.1 As part of our consultation we asked women about the impact of Covid-19. Of the 175 responses, there were 128 responses. There were no additional themes identified. Responses highlighted the existing inequalities that women face in society; as the unpaid carer, at home and in society the little value placed on this. Many reported increased demands on their household workload. In addition to regular childcare, home-schooling was an additional 'unpaid' role they were expected to carry out. Participants mentioned often fathers didn't take on this

role as their workplaces did not make allowances for children being at home. Men were still expected to be as productive as they were in the office. However, this was an issue for women too. To make up for this, women expressed that they worked more hours at home or in some cases were forced to leave their jobs.

- 14.2 Women also reported how school vouchers were helpful, however they still had trouble in managing increased living costs (bills, groceries). Some women reported being trapped in abusive households with abuse increasing during the pandemic. Other comments surrounding Covid-19 were largely in relation to increased feelings of isolation, fear and anxiety. The mental health impacts of this may be long-lasting, providing further support for need for long-term investment in NHS Mental health services.

## **15 Appendix List**

**Appendix A – List of Recommendations**

**Appendix B – Women Talking, City Listening Full Research Report**

### **Financial implications**

No specific financial implications arise from this report. The research should be taken into consideration when making future policy and strategy decisions, and any costs should be included as required. Similarly, any specific initiatives that might arise should be costed and funding identified at the time. - Colin Sharpe, Deputy Director of Finance, tel. 0116 454 4081

### **Legal implications**

The Women Talking, City Listening is a research project funded by the Government Equalities Office with the aim to learn about the barriers faced by women and how women can be better supported in the City. The research has been split thematically into the specific areas it consulted on. This report summaries the findings of the consultation and research which has been annexed to the report. Officers have derived a number of recommendations specific to each theme / area it had identified following the research.

The summary report in section 2 has explained that the main recommendation is that the Local Authority should use the research in future policies and strategies.

Whilst the research is not legally binding, the Local Authority can use the findings of the research to assist in developing future policies. Further legal advice should be sought at the time as and when these policies develop.

It is worth noting that some of the recommendations within the report would be applicable

to the Council, some which the Council may have influence over (e.g. VCS groups etc) and some which fall outside its remit (e.g. the changing of legislation)

Suraiya Ziaullah, Solicitor, 0116 454 1487

### **Climate change and carbon reduction implications**

There are no significant climate change implications directly relating to the presentation of this report. However, many of the issues raised and recommendations made will have significant links to the council's sustainability work, for example where they cover access to public transport, digital inclusion and homeworking, street lighting and various other areas. These implications should be considered individually when assessing implementation of the recommendations made.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

### **Equalities implications**

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which means that, in carrying out their functions decision makers have to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report makes a number of recommendations which support the aims of the PSED and other duties placed on public authorities under the Equality Act 2010, including responsibilities under the equality Act as an employer. Whilst the report specifically focuses on the experiences of women, a number of intersectionalities are identified and the project involved women from a range of different backgrounds with different characteristics and identities. It is worth noting that some of the recommendations within the report would be applicable to the Council, some which the Council may have influence over (e.g. VCS groups, employers in the City etc) and some which fall outside its remit (eg. the changing of legislation). Different organisations may have different levels of responsibility under the Equality Act.

The Local Authority can use the findings of the research to assist in developing future policies and projects and can be utilised to improve service delivery from an equalities perspective. Further equalities advice should be sought on any proposals for changes to or new policy, practice, projects or provision developed arising from this research. In many cases, new proposals or changes to existing policy and provision are likely to require equality impact assessment to ensure that any disproportionate negative impacts for any protected characteristic groups are identified and mitigated, opportunities to progress equality of opportunity are maximised and to ensure that due regard to the

PSED is paid before and at the time a decision is taken.

Hannah Watkins, Equalities Manager ext 37 5811



## Women Talking, City Listening: List of Recommendations

Below is a full list of the recommendations proposed by the Women Talking, City Listening research project. The report was split into ten key themes. For ease of cross-reference, the pages of each theme in the full research report are listed against each theme heading. The recommendations are numbered, corresponding to the summary report.

The recommendations listed below are initial recommendations endorsed by the Women Talking, City Listening Steering Group and have been proposed to CMT. The recommendations will be built upon and refined in senior leadership meetings.

### **Careers and Motherhood** (Pages 10-27)

- **Recommendation 1:** Flexible Working Arrangements (including flexibility in recruitment to facilitate job shares) to be implemented by employers in corporate policy and job advertisements.
- **Recommendation 2:** Leicester City Council to integrate an action into its Equality Action Plan to support and publicise more opportunities for women employees, including networking events and promotion of the Council's employee groups.

**Recommendation 3:** Leicester City Council to further consider and integrate an appropriate action into its Equality Action Plan: ways in which to promote professional and employment opportunities and to provide more opportunities for women in the City to network (for example, an externally focused event, possibly in partnership with Economic Regeneration).

- **Recommendation 4:** Leicester City Council's Voluntary Community Sector liaisons and Communications team to communicate news of both Council-affiliated and external networking events to women-majority community groups (for example, library and children's centre 'Toddler Time' attendees), to offer mothers who are not in employment greater professional opportunities.
- **Recommendation 5:** Leicester City Council's Human Resources team to consider implementing employee policy for those returning from maternity leave to better support both the employee and their manager's facilitation of their re-entry into work.
- **Recommendation 6:** That the government flexible working taskforce continue to campaign for employers to adopt flexible working practises in the public sector and the private sector.
- **Recommendation 7:** That the Job Centre Plus continue to build on its work thus far to promote flexible working practises, by challenging appropriately and

requiring adequate justification where an employer has communicated that an opportunity is not suitable for flexible working.

- **Recommendation 8:** That governmental policymakers review the ‘30 hours free childcare scheme’, taking into account and addressing the issues raised by participants, to give women a greater opportunity to re-enter work without suffering financially.
- **Recommendation 9:** That governmental policymakers consider exploring the merits and risks to implementing an allowance or financial benefit (subject to certain conditions), where women are relying on family members informally to take on childcare responsibilities to enable them to work, to ensure that family members (particularly female family members) are supplemented and are not experiencing detriment financially.

### **Community Support (Pages 28-32)**

- **Recommendation 10:** Leicester City Council to review all funding application systems, to check accessibility and make the relevant changes where any issues with accessibility are determined.
- **Recommendation 11:** Leicester City Council’s teams dealing with bid applications (within both Neighbourhoods and Procurement) to consider how contact information for advice and support is published, to ensure maximum uptake of such offers of support.
- **Recommendation 12:** Adult Social Care and others who may have an interest in mapping the support offer to consider whether it may be beneficial to align to Leicester Open Data, in order that information isn’t replicated and can be found in one place.
- **Recommendation 13:** Leicester City Council to develop a Comms plan which fulfils two functions; 1. to make VCS organisations and community groups aware of the Open Data Platform and to encourage as many as possible to add information to the relevant map and 2. to make citizens of Leicester aware of the Open Data Platform and how to use it.
- **Recommendation 14:** Once the Open Data Platform is more developed, consider overlaying VCS support map with public transport routes map to establish whether there are any issues which need to be addressed. This will need to be in partnership with public transport operators.

### **Workplace – Policies vs. Practice (Pages 32-50)**

- **Recommendation 15:** That Leicester City Council’s Equality Action Plan 2021 incorporate work internally to support line managers to understand organisational support mechanisms which are particularly relevant to the issues that participants have raised (such as the flexible working policy, time off for dependents policy) how those policies and support mechanisms support equality and how to make decisions which promote a supportive environment and also more flexible

working, where it is practicable. This is likely to be achieved most effectively through some form of training or workshop style events.

- **Recommendation 16:** Leicester City Council to consider what training and/ or guidance managers are currently having on Occupational Health and consider reviewing this to promote an understanding of Occupational Health as a supportive tool, not a disciplinary measure.
- **Recommendation 17:** That further work is undertaken with other services within the Council, for example economic regeneration, tourism and culture, to establish whether there are any actions that could be included in the Equality Action Plan 2021 which would encourage other employers in the City to promote supportive policies and work environment, for example flexible working and increased part-time working and job share opportunities, where practicable.
- **Recommendation 18:** Organisations should review their policies collaboratively with their employees, by seeking feedback on how policy is currently used and understood. This could be facilitated by an anonymous internal survey, the information gathered aiding meaningful policy refinement. It is not within Leicester City council's remit to implement this in other organisations, but the Council should pay further consideration to how they might be able to influence and share best practice with employers across the City.
- **Recommendation 19:** Awareness raising and information sharing locally and nationally to ensure that women understand their rights in relation to employment, and to increase women's confidence and ability to challenge effectively, where they have experienced both overt and/or covert discrimination, harassment or victimisation. This also links with a recommendation under 'Safety' to ensure that women are confident and equipped to raise concerns and complaints in relation to service provision (p.75)
- **Recommendation 20:** That policymakers consider providing some form of funding to SMEs and VCS organisations to enable them to purchase equipment, for the specific purpose of encouraging and enabling them to implement flexible/ home working.
- **Recommendation 21:** The government flexible working taskforce/ policymakers to consider how they might influence employers to more openly consider employee part-time proposals and support part-time employees to do an effective job within contracted hours.
- **Recommendation 22:** The government flexible working taskforce/ policymakers to consider how they can promote and encourage employees to offer job shares, to better support part-time employees to progress in their careers into more senior or skilled roles – benefitting both employer and employee.
- **Recommendation 23:** Leicester City Council to consider implementing a zero-tolerance approach within the review of the Dignity at Work Policy.
- **Recommendation 24:** Policymakers to consider ways in which to either encourage or mandate transparent recruitment processes that are publicly

available for scrutiny and are designed using positive action where lawful, to reduce recruitment bias.

- **Recommendation 25:** Leicester City Council to ensure that guidance on how to use the positive action provisions under the Equality Act and guidance on recruitment panel make-up is included in updated recruitment guidance for managers.

### **Recognition of and Support for Carers (Pages 50-67)**

- **Recommendation 26:** Leicester City Council to work with schools in the City to help to introduce guidance, training or professional development, as deemed appropriate, for teachers - to aid them in identifying young carers and referring to the relevant support. To publicise tools to aid schools in identifying young carers, for example the young carers identification tool for education staff **on the schools intranet.**
- **Recommendation 27:** Policymakers to consider the issue more widely to see whether there are any additional national measures which could be put into place to better equip teachers in identifying young carers.
- **Recommendation 28:** Leicester City Council to consider the merit of PSHE/Citizenship in the City's schools including a lesson on being a carer and having meaningful conversations about caring. Although this is not directly within the Council's remit, it is worth considering how the Council might effectively engage with schools to achieve this.
- **Recommendation 29:** Leicester City Council's Adult Social Care/Communications teams to share information with schools in the city on what support is available for young carers.
- **Recommendation 30:** Leicester City Council's Adult Social Care Department to work with health partners to review the way in which information is shared with carers; to make information packs more easily accessible, so that service users know exactly what support is available and whether they are entitled to such services. To utilise the Council's communication mechanisms, including social media, to raise awareness of information and support for carers.
- **Recommendation 31:** Undertake further work locally with the relevant service area to understand and respond to the issues raised by participants in relation to respite.
- **Recommendation 32:** Government to include policy ideas to address the nuanced issues raised in this report in relation to unpaid caring responsibilities, particularly in terms of the financial difficulties that they face, in the Green Paper on Social Care, and publish for public consultation.
- **Recommendation 33:** Leicester City Council to ensure that the relevant corporate policies acknowledge carers and the discrimination they can face

arising from their association with someone with a disability/ies (discrimination by association).

- **Recommendation 34:** Leicester City Council to consider offering carers discounts, deals or occasional free treats at City Council run sites (museum and heritage sites, for example) and events, to acknowledge the hard work of those who care and the minimal disposable income available. To encourage other businesses in the City (who are in a position to do so), to also consider offering discounts or deals for carers.

### **Sports and access** (Pages 67-70)

- **Recommendation 35:** The Department of Education to give guidance to schools and colleges relating to the P.E. Curriculum and equal access to sports in practice, to ensure education providers are aware that while they can separate by sex for P.E. lawfully, they are obliged to provide the same opportunities for both girls and boys to engage in sports.
- **Recommendation 36:** Existing Council-operated sport and gym facilities to consider expanding their selection of 'women only' classes where there is evidence of need and to offer these at a range of days and times, accommodating for the many responsibilities women take on (as highlighted throughout this report). In addition, to advertise services more widely to enable women to participate.

### **Safety** (Pages 71-79)

- **Recommendation 37:** Local Authorities to consider keeping intermittent streetlights on to ensure no one area is pitch-black. This local strategy should be individually tailored to neighbourhoods, with priority given to areas of higher criminal activity.
- **Recommendation 38:** Leicester City Council to consider the merit of PSHE/Citizenship in the City's schools including a lesson on a rape culture and identifying harmful views and behaviour around love, sex and sexual assault, (such as shaming women who are sexually active or based on how many sexual partners they have, rape jokes, victim blaming, judging what women wear, 'cat calling'). Whilst this is not within the Council's direct remit, it is worth considering how the Council might effectively engage with schools to achieve this.
- **Recommendation 39:** Feed the issues raised in this section to the Smart Cities Team and Community Safety to consider whether we can use technology as a means to collaborate with citizens, to identify problems in their neighbourhoods and help facilitate a safer Leicester.
- **Recommendation 40:** The Council's Community Safety and Protection team to support local community awareness initiatives relating to standing against rape culture and violence towards women (i.e. in externally circulated communications such as Your Leicester).

- **Recommendation 41:** National policymakers consider ways in which women who have experienced domestic violence are enabled to safely stay in their own homes should they wish to, and instead perpetrators are required to leave the household.
- **Recommendation 42:** Leicester City Council to do some awareness raising work on how citizens can raise complaints and escalate concerns about any public body/authority if they feel that their complaint has not been sufficiently dealt with. Work may also need to be undertaken nationally to ensure that women are equipped to challenge effectively. This links with a recommendation in the section 'Workplace – Policies vs. Practise' (p.35) which recommends that awareness raising work is undertaken to ensure that women are aware of their rights in employment and are equipped to challenge where these are breached and where they have experienced discrimination, harassment and victimisation. It may be that these two recommendations can be combined, if appropriate.
- **Recommendation 43:** Leicester City Council and the Government Equalities Office to continue to support campaigns to increase awareness and recognition around the different types of abuse, where and how to get support, both locally and nationally.
- **Recommendation 44:** Leicester City Council to ensure our relevant commissioned services (in Community Safety, Housing and Social Care) continue to make available practical help and support to survivors of domestic violence, taking into account the lived experiences of those seeking support and taking steps to ease the process of resettling and in some cases, becoming independent for the first time.

### **Personalisation of Services and Communication to Service Users (Pages 79-93)**

- **Recommendation 45:** Ask the CCG to suggest that GPs document conversations on concerns voiced over dependant's behaviours and commit to listening and exploring these with the advocate.
- **Recommendation 46:** Reviewing the sharing systems of key information in health and social care patient files.
- **Recommendation 47:** Social care workers and health workers to provide service users date deadlines to provide updates/information where possible.
- **Recommendation 48:** Social care services to continue to review the way in which dependant services users go through from child's to adults' services and respond to feedback to ensure a gradual and manageable transition for the service user.
- **Recommendation 49:** Feedback to colleges the need for post-college lessons to both pay fair attention to all career paths (not putting the onus on University) and for such sessions to take a more collaborative structure, in which students are

made to feel comfortable asking questions, and confident their query will be met with a response.

- **Recommendation 50:** Universities and other adult learning institutions to identify and establish whether there is a need for childcare facilities and act accordingly to accommodate for this. This may be in the form of creating links with nearby nurseries to offer parents subsidised rates or priority places for children.
- **Recommendation 51:** Employers in Leicester and across the country to be encouraged to support **their employees more widely in gaining additional qualifications.**
- **Recommendation 52:** The GEO to consider feeding back to the Department for Health the expressed need to assign 'lead GPs' to patients and prioritise this GP as the care provider, for patients to receive consistent care. Similarly, in a longstanding condition, the GP first approached with the concern/s should be the one to oversee this care, to ensure continuous support, non-conflating information or guidance offered, and lesser oversights via inter-GP communication.
- **Recommendation 53:** Leicester City Council to continue to ensure where decisions are made to channel shift our services, that an EIA is completed - demonstrating consideration of our PSED.
- **Recommendation 54:** Leicester City Council to ensure that service users are given notice of our services digitising and to make online access an option to using services, not the only method of using the service.
- **Recommendation 55:** In recognition that digital inclusion plays an important role in enabling women to not only access services but also to engage fully in public life (including work and education), particularly given some of the additional barriers posed by Covid-19, the Smart Cities, Equalities, Adult Skills and Learning and Neighbourhoods, in addition to other relevant services, will work together to scope a proposal for a project to deal with issues that have been highlighted as part of this project and more widely in response to Covid-19 – such as lack of access to devices, including appropriate devices for work and study and lack of access to adequate internet connection.
- **Recommendation 56:** That the Government should evaluate and review existing legislation and policy to ensure it takes an approach which fully considers the interaction between sex and other protected characteristics, or 'intersectionality' in addressing inequalities disproportionately experienced by women, many of which are covered in the later sections of this report.
- **Recommendation 57:** That the Government should make it possible to bring a single discrimination claim based on an individual's full identity (which is likely to include multiple intersecting protected characteristics), by reviewing and then implementing Section 14 of the Equality Act 2010. Whilst Section 14 covers 'dual discrimination' there may be merit in considering intersectionality of more than

two protected characteristics in conjunction with one another, as part of the review.

## **Finance** (Pages 93-99)

- **Recommendation 58:** Leicester City Council to address period poverty in the Equality Action Plan - as part of that work opening a dialogue with Leicester's Homeless Charities on access to menstrual care products for people experiencing period poverty.
- **Recommendation 59:** When calling for physical donations, Homeless Charities in Leicester to include mention of menstrual care products on their donation list. When calling for fiscal donations, Homeless Charities in Leicester could mention this money, in part, will buy menstrual products – to boost awareness around this essential need often overlooked.
- **Recommendation 60:** Leicester City Council to commit to providing free menstrual products in all Council buildings that are accessed by the public.
- **Recommendation 61:** That the Government consider the proposal that those eligible for free prescriptions be able to request free menstrual care products from primary healthcare services such as GPs and GUM Clinics.
- **Recommendation 62:** Leicester City Council's Public Health, Sustainability (within Estates & Buildings Services) and Education services to consider the procurement of menstrual cups to be provided in school to each young person with periods, appealing to the Department for Education and their commitment to fully-fund access to free menstrual products in schools and colleges for funding.
- **Recommendation 63:** Benefits, both current and those being phased out, to be assimilated by the Government, to ensure no eligible recipient is left waiting for payments and that no debts occur from overpayment – with any debts incurred to be gradually redacted from the overarching eligible payments.
- **Recommendation 64:** The Government to review of the Universal Credit assessment process to cut down wait-times for a verdict.
- **Recommendation 65:** The Government to ensure that those who are jobseekers do not receive a benefit penalisation for attempts to make them better adapted or skilled to work.
- **Recommendation 66:** Organisations to offer information to their employees on pension as a mandated part of their starter pack.
- **Recommendation 67:** Organisations should consider periodically publishing data on their pay gaps in relation to protected characteristics beyond gender and making this information publicly accessible.

## **Health** (Pages 99-110)



- **Recommendation 68:** If not already, healthcare practitioners should undergo some form of unconscious bias training to ensure they are providing care that is fair and consistent to all patients.
- **Recommendation 69:** Leicester City Council's Public Health to discuss with healthcare practitioners the need for training staff on 'pain bias' and dispelling myths of different pain and symptoms experienced by people of various backgrounds.
- **Recommendation 70:** Community-based officers should touch base with community group leaders to ensure they are aware of relevant support their participants may be entitled to. This could support constituents who don't have direct contact with the Local Authority to be more aware of support mechanisms in place and access the full range of support available to them.
- **Recommendation 71:** Government to create long-term solutions to currently 'underfunded' (Mental Health Policy Group 2020) mental health support within the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- **Recommendation 72:** Leicester City Council's Public Health to request local GP surgeries to offer multiple forms of contact and not require a reason to give an appointment, where a service user doesn't feel comfortable disclosing.





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## Manifesto Delivery Update – Housing

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

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Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Chris Burgin
- Author contact details: Chris.Burgin@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: V.1

## 1. Summary

1.1 This report provides a progress update to the Housing Scrutiny Commission setting out progress on delivery of the Labour manifesto commitments made in 2019, and is an update on progress since 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020 when the last report was provided on the matter to the Housing Scrutiny commission.

1.2 Overall, good progress has been made with the delivery of the manifesto commitments. Some challenges exist in 20/21 to the speed at which delivery on these manifesto commitments can be achieved but overall good progress is being made.

## 2 Supporting information:

2.1 Labour's Manifesto commitments 'For the Many not the few' has eight specific sections covered within the document and the Housing Division will continue to contribute towards many of the broader themes and elements within them.

2.2 The document contains 12 main Manifesto commitments that the Housing Division has primary responsibility for delivering. Most of these commitments sit under the Manifesto section 'Homes for All'.

### 2.3 Maintain our Adaptations service for all home owners & Council tenants

2.3.1 Strong progress and work has been delivered in 2019 on this manifesto commitment with 529 people assisted to stay in their homes through adaptations completed in private homes and council tenant homes with a total of over £3m invested in achieving this.

2.3.2 This year due to significant access issues to properties work has had to be focussed upon external works such as ramps and overall this has seriously impacted what has been completed in this area but overall £2.15m has been spent overall on both private and Council owned properties.

### 2.4 Undertake an ongoing £80m council home improvement programme

2.4.1 The council housing improvement programme in 19/20 totalled £31m . A programme of investment for 20/21 including installing Kitchens & bathrooms, Boilers, Rewiring properties, Re-roofing, Windows & Doors & Door Entries has continued to improve stock and invested a further £17m. Any areas that have slipped because of

COVID will be caught up during 21/22.

2.4.2 The proposed HRA budget for 21/22 includes ongoing investment in these areas totalling £17m again in the coming year. It is proposed to continue to invest in our housing stock in future years which will meet this manifesto commitment.

## **2.5 Provide 1,500 more council, social and extra care / tackle housing shortages**

2.5.1 The Executive have now approved a total of £70m to the delivery of this manifesto commitment with a further £30m proposed in the 21/22 HRA budget making a total of £100m investment.

2.5.2 Delivery of Housing Leicester Phase 1 of new Council Housing has delivering 29 units across 6 small sites including bungalows which are wheelchair accessible with ongoing completions of phase one through to March 21.

2.5.3 Two extra care units are identified (Tilling and Hamelin) but delayed due to technical issues and so alternative sites are being sought.

2.5.4 Full planning has been secured on Saffron Velodrome for 38 properties and procurement is ongoing to secure a builder for this site which is aiming to start build as planned in Spring 2021. Additional Phase 2 sites are also being worked on to deliver a further 10 new units. Planning permission was submitted for Lanesborough Road on 4th May to build an additional 58 units. Planning permission is pending.

2.5.5 Work is now starting on Phase 3 & 4 of the new build programme across a further 10 sites with potential delivery of 200 homes. A pipeline of delivery of 1500 units on multiple sites has been identified and agreed by the Executive for the 4 year term.

2.5.6 The Council has now acquired 262 open market homes and has offers accepted on another 60 properties to improve their condition and deliver new affordable Council housing. The purchase of 175 more homes is close to completion and acquisition of market homes continuing and other large opportunities are also being taken forward.

## **2.6 Reduce the number of families and individuals placed in temporary accommodation / Ensure that no one has to sleep rough**

2.6.1 Leicester has sustained the Everyone in Homelessness offer since March (unlike other Authorities) and we will continue to provide this throughout the winter through to at least March 21. To date since March we have helped over 600 people and secured over 180 additional self contained accommodation units. .

2.6.2 The overall approach has meant a big reduction of people on the street with our Annual rough sleeper count reducing by almost 50% year on year and nearly in to single figures with only those continuing to refuse accommodation left on the streets

2.6.3 We have been successful so far in obtaining £1m of additional funding to strengthen Homelessness services linked mainly to the Short term Next Steps revenue funding (securing an additional 60 units for 6 months)

2.6.4 Our much extended Homelessness offer and expanded accommodation offer has continued through winter and working with our partners Action homeless, one Roof and

Help the Homeless we have added more units to this during winter.

2.6.5 We have had verbal confirmation about a longer term funding bid we made for over £2.5m to provide a further 64 units of long term accommodation for the single client group to add to the 269 core unit and 26 winter self contained units we have already.

2.6.6 We currently have over 90 single people in B&B. The reason for this is that we continue to see demand for people losing their accommodation, primarily being unable to stay with friends and relatives

2.6.7 From a families perspective we currently have no one in B&B's and have also now completed the exercise to empty the existing temporary accommodation Border House. This is a step towards achieving the commitment and drive towards homes not hostels.

## **2.7 Establish a residential facility for people experiencing multiple and complex needs, many of whom are rough sleeping**

In conjunction with Action Homeless we have recently mobilised a further 12 units of accommodation linked to the successful bid to the Protect pathway for those extremely complex Rough Sleeping cases. In conjunction with this there are enhanced, physical, mental health and substance recovery support packages provided through our partners at Turning Point and Leicestershire Homeless Mental Health Team & Inclusion Healthcare.

There is an intention to deliver a specific PIE accommodation environment working with public health however this work has been delayed this year due to other priorities.

## **2.8 Establish a home extension fund for council tenants**

2.7.1 This commitment has been met and a home extension fund for Leicester City Council tenants has been set up and funding of £500k has been set with the HRA budget for 2020/21. The focus of the scheme is those in overcrowded homes that can be extended.

2.7.2 While this work has been challenging this year, four extensions have been completed and planning permission is pending for a fifth property spending a total of £70,000 of the funding. Other properties have been identified to be a part of this ongoing work.

## **2.9 Continue our environmental investment programme on council land and estates**

2.9.1 To date there has been the completion of annual programme for 2019/20 of parking/laybys and the programme for 20/21 will be fully completed shortly with full spend of the £750k anticipated, totalling spend at £1.5m. The HRA Budget 21/22 proposes a further budget of £750k to invest on Council Housing estates.

2.9.2 The Neighbourhood Improvement service continues to operate offering work

opportunities for 12 month with the continued focus upon estate based improvement projects and work. An Estate Warden Service continues to be funded that proactively targets estate based areas to maintain and enhance their appearance.

2.9.3 Good progress has been made on Public realm works in St Peters & St Matthews in year 1 of the programme with the focus being around setting up a Green team, consulting on the future garage offer on the estates and a large multi phased scheme on Ottawa Road. A landscape architect is to be engaged to develop wider proposals. The approved budget for the full project over the 3 years is £5m

2.9.4 Capital investment of £100k in neighbourhood pathways in 19/20 and 20/21 is again proposed in the coming year budget of 21/22.

2.9.5 Investment & improvement to the Saffron Velodrome car parking is to be undertaken in conjunction with the new LCC house building on the adjacent site

## **2.10 Support further work to meet complex needs experienced by women and BAME communities who may not be sleeping on our streets but are homeless.**

2.10.1 Work has commenced to shape this piece of work by meeting with partners to engage over the required remit and focus of this manifesto commitment. A resource has also now been set in place to work on reviewing the existing service offer in Housing linked to Domestic Violence. This work will extend to include specifically women and those from the BAME community fleeing their home and domestic violence.

2.10.2 A wider piece of engagement work will be starting post lockdown with key stakeholders and organisation to identify priority areas that meet the wider manifesto commitment to enable the development of a formal plan.

**Summary of appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Phase 1 Housing Delivery









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# Rents Performance Briefing

Housing Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

Lead director: Chris Burgin

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**Useful information**

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Zenab Valli
- Author contact details: 0116 4543573
- Report version number: 1.0

**1. Summary**

- 1.1 This briefing provides information on the current rent arrears performance and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on rent collection and possession proceedings.

**2. Recommended actions/decision**

- 2.1 No decision is required. The purpose of the briefing is to present a report on rent performance to inform scrutiny.

**3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement**

- 3.1 The report is presented on a quarterly basis to Housing Scrutiny Commission.

**4. Background and options with supporting evidence**

No background information presented. Supporting evidence is contained with section 5.

## 5 Rent Performance

5.1 There was a sharp increase in the arrears performance since lockdown, the weekly arrears have continued to fluctuate due to the current pandemic and economical challenges. It's anticipated that the arrears performance will remain unstable and may continue to increase due to the external pressures.

Despite the challenges faced by the team they are working incredibly hard to maintain good rent collection and reduce rent arrears. Despite not being able to take possession actions the performance figures outlined in the table below demonstrates the teams' tremendous efforts.

**Table 1. Performance at end of each Quarter - 2020/21**

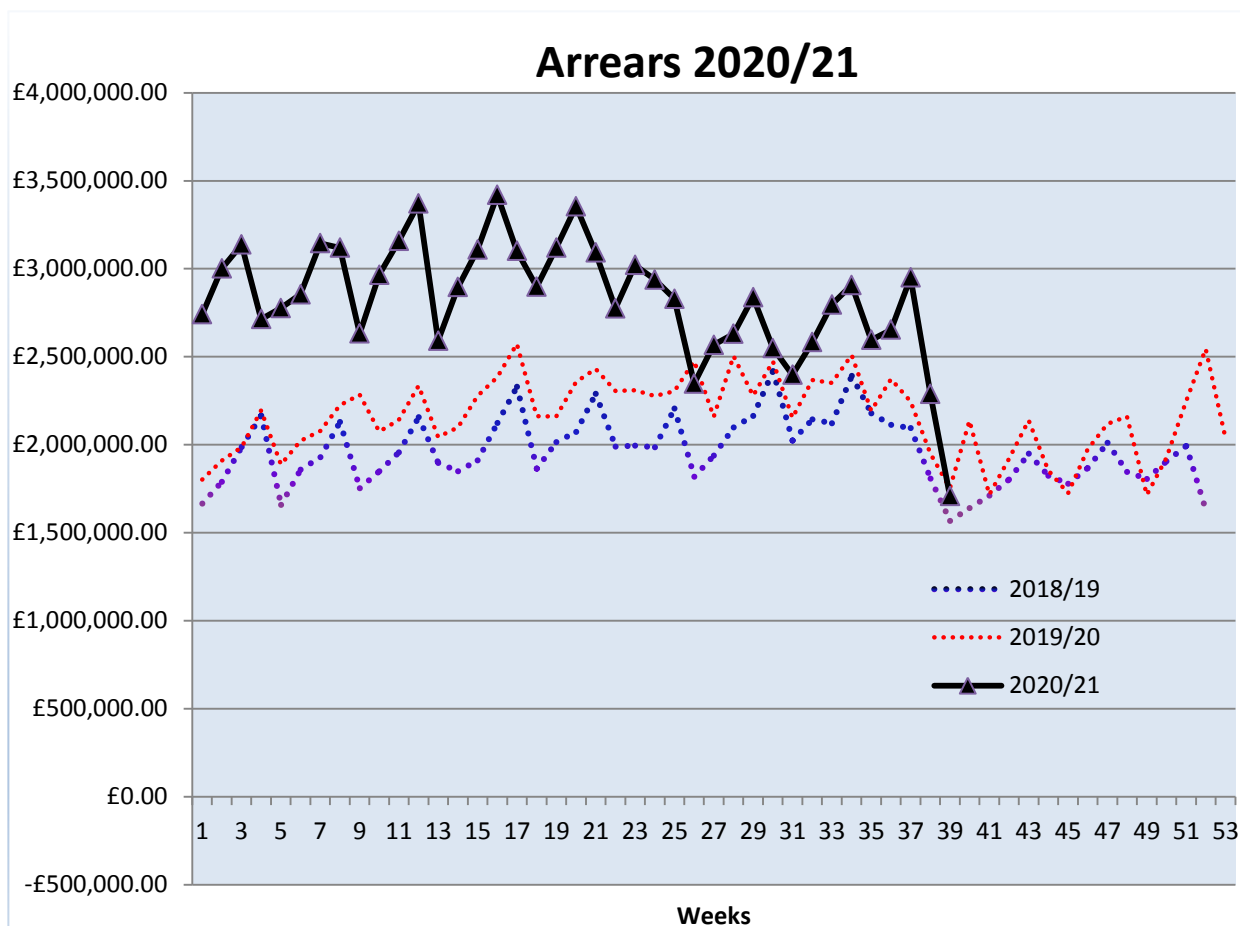
Month	Quarterly Arrears Value	Percentage difference compared to same point 2019/20	Percentage change compared to previous quarter	Number of tenants in rent arrears
<b>Starting Point 05/04/2020</b>	£2,036m	25% Increase	N/A	7,643
<b>June – Q1</b>	£2,612m	27% Increase	28% Increase	9,062
<b>Sept – Q2</b>	£2,347m	5% Decrease	10% Decrease	8,887
<b>Dec – Q3</b>	£1,707m	2% Decrease	27% Decrease	5,470

**5.2 Table 2. Percentage of Rent Collected Council Residential Tenancies only**

Week No.	Percentage of Rent Collected Last 52 Weeks
<b>June</b>	97.14%
<b>Sept</b>	98.69%
<b>Dec</b>	100.36%

5.3

**Graph showing weekly performance**



**5.4 Current Position**

5.5 It's now almost 10 months since the start of the pandemic and its impact on rent collection. The ongoing Government guidance is that tenants should continue paying rent and abide by all terms of their tenancy agreement to the best of their ability and have encouraged, tenants and landlords work together in these unprecedented circumstances. The government continue with their financial support package to help people where needed allowing rent to be paid as normal.

5.6 We continue to see 49% of our tenants in receipt of full or partial Housing Benefit (HB) which supports rent and eligible service charges, this is paid directly into the tenants rent account. A further 26% of our tenants receive Housing Costs through Universal Credit.

5.7 Tenants continue to be supported with Income maximisation and support to claim Discretionary Housing Funds (DHP), referrals for food parcels and to specialist agencies if tenants are facing financial or debt worries i.e. referrals to CiTAL, Community Advice & Law Centre and STAR.

The council have been awarded a grant to support Covid related activity. Part of this funding will be used to top up the DHP fund by £0.9m for vulnerable tenants in the city. The team will continue their focus on supporting tenants facing hardship by assisting with DHP application forms.

5.8 Rent Management Advisors are supporting tenants that need to make claims for Universal Credit. They received **181 referrals** by the end of Quarter 3 and 80 of those cases required long-term support lasting for a period of 6 months. They are regularly conducting research and sharing information within the team so we can respond to tenants needs and provide the most appropriate advice. The team are working closely with the Department for Works & Pension (DWP) partnership managers on a regular basis, to raise any issues / concerns and obtain updates on welfare benefits enabling us to best support our tenants and maximise their incomes. They are supporting all tenants and most importantly, any coming through our doors that were previously in paid employment and not familiar with the welfare benefits, its processes or how to navigate this system.

The team recently proposed the delivery of a Tenancy Sustainment Pilot which includes all financial and welfare benefit support for Council tenants to be delivered in-house by the RMA's for an initial period of six months. Due to the ongoing uncertainty and restrictions the start of the pilot has been delayed until April 2021. In the meantime, the support for tenants continues to be available and provided by the STAR service.

5.9 We have needed to suspend face to face contact with tenants intermittently over the past year so, tenants have been encouraged to contact the Income Management Team by phone / text and email and virtual meetings. Despite the current lockdown announced January 2021, essential face to face contact and home visits will continue on very urgent cases where there are pending possession actions.

5.10 It's with regret that a very small number of tenants continue non-engagement with the team and other services that are trying to help. A very small number of tenants (17) have not paid any rent since the start of the pandemic (March 2020). They have a combined total debt of £20k. The value of debt starts at £200 with only 4 of the 17 cases owing more than £1,000. This demonstrates majority of our tenants are paying rent in a timely manner, keeping up with payment arrangements or making sporadic payments and engaging albeit intermittently.

5.11 The government started with a ban on all rental possession and eviction cases from March 2020 which got extended before finally being lifted on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020. The legal Notice of Seeking Possession continues to be served with a 6-month expiry opposed to the previous 4-week rule (until March 2021) however, under exceptional criteria for example, unpaid rent for 6 months, a 4-week notice can be served.

5.12 Under new rules, rental possession cases don't get listed or heard until the Council serve a 'reactivation notice' to tenants and file a copy in court. The team started to serve the notices in November and from the **26 cases** that were stayed due to the pandemic, only **10 cases** required a reactivation notice as the other tenants had either cleared their rent arrears or substantially, reduced arrears and / or were paying according to their payment agreement. From the 10 cases a total of 2 tenants, have entered into a payment agreement since and the others, are being encouraged to do the same. This demonstrates that the threat of possession / court action can change behaviours and tenants payment patterns.

Interestingly, a total of **32 cases** that were previously adjourned in court in 2019 with a strike out date of 12 months. These cases were also reviewed for reactivation as the strike out period was nearing an end. It was found only **3 cases** needed to be served with a reactivation notice because again, all other tenants had either cleared their rent arrears or substantially reduced arrears and / or were paying according to their payment agreement.

Following the review of stayed and previously adjourned cases the team will now focus on any new cases that need to be listed for possession hearings due to non-payment of rent. The cases will be very carefully considered and all avenues to avoid this action will be explored in the first instance. The cases will be reviewed by a team leader and manager before any potential submission of court summons.

5.13 There have been no evictions taking place as Leicester's localised lockdown continued to suspend that action, following government orders for bailiffs not to enter properties in Tier 2 & 3 areas. Eviction resumes are being considered and warrant requests being submitted where it's absolutely necessary with a view that ongoing efforts to sustain tenancies continue to be provided until such time an eviction takes place. Due to the current national lockdown the government has changed the law in England to ensure bailiffs do not enforce evictions for 6 weeks until 22<sup>nd</sup> February, with no evictions expected to 8<sup>th</sup> March at the earliest. This will be kept under review. Tenants are encouraged and given plenty of opportunities, to reach reasonable payment solutions to avoid possession orders /evictions which are considered as an absolute last resort.

Within the latest briefing on Covid protection for renters the Government have suggested *the package of support* is reducing the number of evictions as applications to the courts for possession by private and social landlords were down 86% between July and September 2020, compared to the same quarter in 2019. Furthermore, no repossessions were recorded between April and end September 2020 compared to 14,847 in the same period last year.

Although this may be fact there seems to be no information gathered in support of the issues faced by landlords for example, how many cases landlords are ready to proceed through eviction or possession route but are reluctant due to the ongoing restrictions and to prevent risk to public health.

5.14 There are significant challenges the team are facing when dealing with County Court as they have a significant backlog of cases that need processing and are not operating at their full capacity. We are finding difficulty reaching courts by phone and lack of responses being received when emailing them using their own designated priority email address. Matters get escalated to the Managers but again responses are being received after several chaser emails. The assumption is that this will continue until such time the courts return back to some type of normality and catch up with pending actions on possession cases.

5.15 On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021 the Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space) legislation will be enforced. In summary, this gives debtors the right to legal protections from creditor action. There are 2 types of breathing space: a standard breathing space and a mental health crisis breathing space. A standard breathing space gives legal protections from creditor action for up to 60 days. The protections include pausing most enforcement action and contact from creditors and freezing most interest and charges on debts.

A mental health crisis breathing space is only available to those receiving mental health crisis treatment by an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP). The mental health crisis breathing space has some stronger protections than the standard breathing space.

A breathing space can only be started by debt advice providers who are authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to offer debt counselling. The types of debt can include credit cards, store cards, personal loans, pay day loans, overdrafts, arrears on utility bills and joint debts, like arrears on a joint mortgage or rent arrears on joint tenancies can be included in a breathing space, even if only one client goes into the scheme. The joint debt



would become a breathing space debt, and the same protections apply to both parties.

A breathing space is not a payment holiday. While creditors cannot enforce a breathing space debt the debtor is still legally required to pay their debts and liabilities. During the breathing space, the client should still continue to pay any debts and liabilities they owe, and creditors can continue to accept these payments

During a breathing space, a creditor or their agent cannot contact the debtor about enforcing a breathing space debt. This includes them demanding payment or starting any legal proceedings against the debtor. This will mean the team will need to put markers on Northgate Revenue accounts to ensure these cases are identified and prevent communication being issued to chase debts.

The types of actions that must be suspended due to the breathing space include:

1. Enforcing a court order
2. Pursuing a warrant for eviction
3. Starting any action or legal proceedings
4. Serving a notice to take possession for rent arrears or takes possession of their property for rent arrears if a notice has already been served. Creditors can still serve a notice or take possession on grounds not related to rent arrears during a breathing space
5. Apply to DWP for a new third-party deduction to be taken from an individual's benefit payments

After breathing space has ended the creditor can take any action to enforce debt, including contacting the debtor can resume.

5.16 Overall, the team continue to push ahead with tremendous commitment and efforts to help support tenants alongside balancing the Divisions expectations to achieve a high rent collection rate and minimise any loss of revenue to the Council.



## Housing Scrutiny Commission

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Void Performance report: April to December 2020

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: all
- Report author: Suzanne Collins / Jo-Anne Hollings
- Author contact details: Ext 37 5189 / 37 5346
- Report version number: V6

### 1. Summary

Void performance from April to December 2020 has declined, with the 'All Void' average for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 inclusive at 133.8 days, therefore exceeding the 90-day target. In the month of April, the target was met, but the performance deteriorated from this month onwards in conjunction with COVID and the lockdown of the Country.

Void operational performance has continued to be impacted throughout this year.

Void rental loss in the nine months was £856,771 with a yearend projection of £1,096,624.

The total number of all void properties held as of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 was 499. This is an increase in the usual total which would, under normal circumstances, be around 250.

There have been various challenges over the nine-month period, which we continue to manage, mostly attributable to COVID and the direct and indirect impact it has had on the Void and Property Lettings service.

Additional resources are now being drawn from Repairs & Maintenance and external contractors to work to address the current high number of void properties, but it is expected that it will take over 5 months to redress this.

### 2. Purpose of report

To update members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on Void performance for the nine-month period from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

To inform members of the short-term measures underway and long-term aspirations to improve void relet times.

### 3. Supporting information:

The table on the following page summarise the key performance indicators for the Void service.

Measure / Target	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21				
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Total Lets			170	175	184		529
Routine Voids* (days) – 45-day avg. target	62.1	64.1	99.6	109.5	119.2		109.6
All voids (days) – max 60 days avg. target	85.8	123.3	118.4	140.6	141.3		130.1
Number of voids held	NA	293	301	328	340		340
Total annual rent loss No greater than £800k pa	£985,903	£911,060	£265,704	£282,608	£308,459		£856,771
Ready to let to Occupation** (days) 10-day target	5.9	4.5	21.3	16.3	11.3		16.1

\*This figure is the number of days void from the end of one tenancy to the start of the next including weekends.

\*\*This figure is the number of working days between when the property is ready to when the new tenancy starts.

### **Definitions**

**Routine voids** - are those properties that require a comparatively lower level of work prior to being re let.

**Long term voids** - are those properties which require a higher level of repair before it can be re let, the reasons maybe:

- Damp proof work, wood worm treatment.
- Asbestos removal (licenced)
- Structural repairs
- Major adaptations
- Fire damaged properties
- The property is being used as an office, by a resident's group or the police
- Projects (such as the tower blocks)
- New meters and supplies.
- Pest control.
- Rewires, new capital kitchens and bathrooms

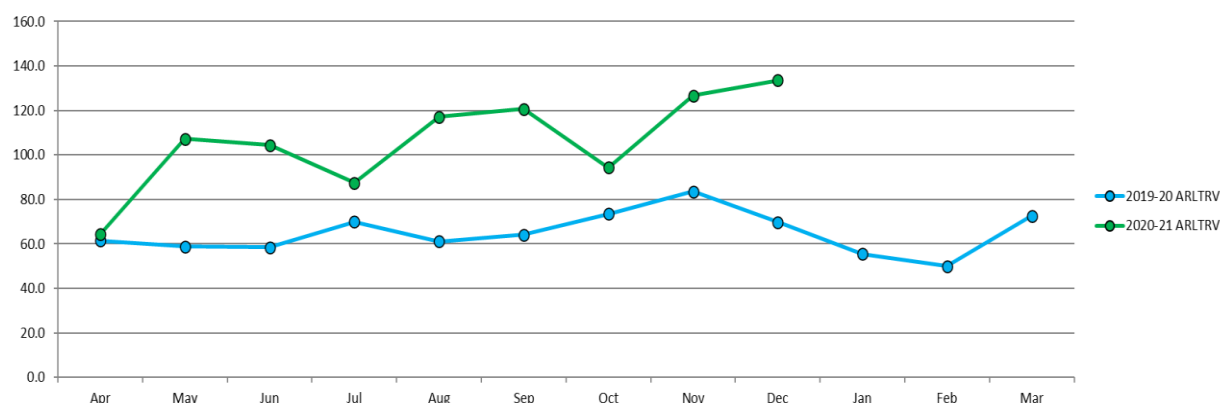
**All voids** - This is the term used when talking and reporting on all voids regardless of if they are routine or long term.

**Number of voids held** - This is a snapshot of the number of vacant properties we hold at any one time; this should be less than 2% of the total stock and excludes decants

**Total annual rent loss** - This is the amount of rental income we have lost as a result of a property being empty and is based on a daily rate, the longer the property is empty the greater the amount.

**Total annual council tax loss** - We become liable for paying council tax on void properties at a daily rate as soon as the property has been empty for 1 calendar month. There are exceptions to this but in the majority of cases this will apply. We work closely with Council Tax to ensure this information is correct and it is audited quarterly.

The chart below sets out the worsening performance compared to 2019-20 performance. It demonstrates the worsening of performance from March 2020 onwards when the first lockdown commenced.



#### **4. Issues affecting void times:**

##### **4.1 COVID 19**

COVID 19 has had a devastating effect on void times. The course of events is listed below. Some effects were direct and others indirect.

##### **March and April 2020**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 the government announced a national lockdown lock down and this immediately effected Voids in the following ways:

- Just prior to this date we had started to develop COVID Business Continuity Plans and COVID Risk Assessments. We anticipated that processes would need to change in response to COVID with Risk Assessments in place.
- Whereas some services in the Council closed, Voids and Property Lettings, due to the fact that we directly address the needs of the homeless in Leicester, were deemed a 'critical service' and we strove to ensure the service continued as best we could under the circumstances.
- The Government instructed as many staff as possible to work from home. As our Housing Allocation and Lettings Officers and Voids Technicians have laptops, they could do so immediately. Admin staff had to continue to work from COVID safe offices.
- However, our craft workforce cannot work from home and following government guidance at that time, we adopted a one void, one operative policy to ensure they remained safe while working on voids. Sharing vehicles was not allowed at that time.
- In addition, Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) staff had to go home as per government advice. Those living with Vulnerable family were also advised to stay at home to protect them. Where they had laptops, they could work from home.
- Therefore, with the craft workforce, approximately 30% had to remain at home to comply with Government Guidelines and Leicester City Council COVID policies, so the amount of work carried out on voids was reduced dramatically because of the

loss of resources.

- This was compounded by staff who were off work with COVID, or self-isolating which further depleted resources.
- Schools closed, causing issues for staff with younger children and we helped them access school places as they had key worker status.
- As moving house was not allowed, we closed the Housing Register and the Choice Based Letting website. We ceased escorted viewings and there were no tenancy signups except in emergency situations., particularly homelessness.
- In those emergency situations, we made disinfected keys available for lone viewings and created a small COVID safe signup area at the Ian Marlow Centre.
- As a result, the signup process was split into two, a verbal and a physical sign up where some tasks were carried out over the phone and the physical signing of documents took place at a new COVID safe sign up area.
- In addition, staff at the Dawn Centre and Border House assisted with physical signups for their clients in a COVID safe way.
- House moves that were able to take place were hampered at times by the inability for applicants to get removal services, also applicants sometimes had to self-isolate. In these instances, the properties were held for the applicant until such time they were able to move.
- A number of applicants also chose not to move home during the pandemic and so properties had to be held and delayed pending an agreed time from the applicant.
- Contractors furloughed a lot of their staff immediately and the work we had allocated to contractors slowed down considerably. We had hoped to pass more work to them, but most had declined to take any additional work as they had to comply with the furlough scheme to access funds to pay their staff.
- The Housing Offices and Libraries where tenancy services are based had closed and so keys could no longer be dropped there when tenancies were terminated. We changed the system to receive keys at the Ian Marlow Centre in a COVID safe way.
- New COVID Risk Assessments were written immediately in order for all aspects of voids work to be carried out safely. These were approved by Corporate Health and Safety as well as the unions.
- Utility companies ceased all but emergency works which made it hard for us to clear utility debts from previous tenants, further hampering voids work.

### **May and June 2020**

During this period there was a partial easing of lockdown

- Voids Driver Labourer staff assisted with COVID related duties such as delivering meals and furniture for Leicester City Council staff working from home. Other Voids and Property Lettings Staff assisted with calling vulnerable residents in support of the C19 Team.
- The Housing Register reopened so that people could apply for housing although the Choice Based Lettings website remained closed. The most urgent cases were referred to us so we could arrange direct lets.
- Risk assessments were reviewed, and measures put in place so that operatives could work in pairs and travel in vehicles together which meant we could recommence larger works, such as kitchens.
- Contractors commenced some work in non-tenanted properties but were still not up to their pre COVID capacity.

- Schools reopened and staff with children who couldn't work from home, were able to return to work.

### **July and August 2020**

At the beginning of July Leicester went into a 'local lockdown' due to the number of COVID cases. It gradually eased over the month of August.

- The choice based Letting website opened partially in July and fully in August.
- Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable staff who could not work at home now returned to work after Individual Risk Assessments had been carried out and appropriate measures put in place where necessary.
- Inspections and works to tenanted properties resumed in a COVID safe way.
- Recovery plans for Voids and Property Lettings were in place and were constantly being updated as government and corporate guidance emerged.
- Childcare provision was inconsistent and as many summer schemes had been cancelled some staff who could not work from home struggled to attend work.
- Signups resumed for Choice Based Letting offers, and the lone viewings and two-part signup process continued.

### **September and October**

At the start of September it felt as if things were returning to normal, cases were low, and restrictions eased, schools reopened after the summer break. However, as September commenced, COVID cases and subsequent deaths started to increase.

- Schools returned although a little late which made it easier for staff with children to work. There was some sporadic staff absence due to their children having been sent home to self-isolate.
- All staff, including the vulnerable people were initially back at work, except for those off sick with COVID or self-isolating. However, shielding for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable was extended and so these staff were required to remain at home.
- The Property Lettings Team have been assisting Housing Management with Mutual Exchange signups in the COVID safe signup area, which will continue.
- Contractor capacity improved to a degree.
- We were able to focus on turning around priority voids for the most urgent of our applicants particularly those in temporary accommodation.

### **November and December**

As November and December progressed, COVID cases increased and hospital admissions were approaching first wave levels. Deaths increased from approximately 200 a day to 400 and we could see that further restrictions might be imposed on or around Christmas.

- Clinically Extremely Vulnerable staff were still required to stay at home but we only have 5 craft staff in this category and so that had a minimal impact.
- Staff attendance continued to be good although many were required to reduce their annual leave allowance to below 30% of their total allocation. This resulted in a huge number of staff requiring to take leave in December which had a significant



impact on our service in December.

- Just before Christmas it was announced that there would be a further period of national lockdown and schools would be closed.
- Works in tenanted properties was again reduced to emergencies only.

### **January 2021**

The period from the first national lockdown in March to present had brought about a depletion in resources, increase in demand and a resultant backlog of void properties.

To address the number of Void properties that had built up and to speed up delivery of properties, the decision was made for Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) as well as other areas of Housing to assist with voids. This was to reduce the backlog and make more voids available to applicants especially those in temporary accommodation.

This assistance commenced on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and within two weeks R&M have started work on 60 properties and we anticipate that they will return 10 completed voids a week. In addition to help with the repairs work to voids, we have received support from the Admin and Planning Sections as well as additional Voids Technician support to ensure the flow of work is maintained.

The aspiration is to reduce the number of voids held from 500+ to 200+. Note that we will normally always hold approximately 200 voids at any one time due to processes.

If Repairs & Maintenance return 10 backlog voids per week it will take approximately 20 weeks, 5 months to get to pre pandemic VOID levels of in the region of 200-250 voids held.

### **Impact on Staff**

COVID has had not just a massive impact on our service area, but also on our staff. It has been a time of great stress and worry in both their private and working lives. We have had to introduce multiple changes in processes and procedures in response to COVID and they have embraced these changes positively. Staff in all areas of the service have shown a huge commitment to their work and absence other than COVID related issues, has been very low.

Staff wellbeing is paramount and regular welfare checks and other tools are used to ensure morale is maintained in such difficult times.

## **4.2 Non-Covid Challenges March to December 2020**

### **Utilities**

Prior to March last year, we had a utility company called Robin Hood that took over the Gas and Electricity accounts for all void properties. This was reduced to emergencies only from March 2020 due to Covid and Robin Hood ceased operating altogether in August 2020 and went into administration in November 2020 their customer base being bought by British Gas but not the utility contract. This utility partnership made it easy to start work on the property and carry out Gas and Electrical tests. Without a utility partner it means we have to arrange the utility handover and bills for all properties with a multitude of providers who all have different processes instead of

being able to deal with one. It is a complex and time-consuming process which delays many voids.

All voids must have gas and electrical checks before being let and utilities available for the new tenant to take over. Arrangements are being put in place for an alternative utility company to take over this role, subject to Leicester City Council procurement and legal rules.

In the meantime, we have been given additional resource to support Voids in doing this and Finance colleagues have enabled a route to addressing any debts on meters.

### **Condition properties returned in**

This has been an ongoing issue and we know tenants have been reporting fewer responsive repairs to us during COVID than they would do during normal times. The volume of repairs completed between April and December 2020 is 28% lower than the same period twelve months earlier. With fewer repairs being reported to us, this is likely to have an impact on the condition that properties are returned to us when they do become void

### **Recruitment**

We have recently recruited successfully to a number of vacancies with new staff starting during January.

## **5. Returning to Business as Usual**

The main objective over the coming months will be to work towards getting back to Business as Usual (BAU).

Currently it is hard to predict how long the current national lockdown will last, although it would appear to be at least until the 8<sup>th</sup> March and whether there will any additional measures in place after lockdown ends.

Our aspiration would be to return to normal as soon as possible after lockdown ends and as mentioned, we are focussing on reducing our backlog at this time in preparation for the months to come.

Key actions:

- Between January and July, the Voids and Property Lettings Services continues delivering voids, signing up approximately 90 applicants per month
- Between January and May, if lockdown continues, Repairs and Maintenance will assist Voids and Property Lettings with their backlog and deliver 40 completed voids each month for 5 months totalling 200 voids.
- Contractors utilised to undertake Void work
- Additional temporary staff added to the Voids establishment
- Target of voids held by July to be between 200-250 properties.
- Learn from the COVID crisis and look at possible new ways of working.
- Long term we will look at ways to improve void turnaround times including:
  - Ensuring we maintain a full establishment of staff
  - New 'affinity deal' with a utility provider to make power and gas available

more promptly

- Works on occupation where possible
- Review processes and procedures for void management
- Prioritising 'quick' voids, to turn around those voids with minimal works
- Use of a new more agile contract so capital works are completed more quickly
- Move to mobile working and then use of SOR's for specifying and carrying out works
- Continuing to ensure signups occurs as soon as possible after a property is 'ready to let'.

#### 4. Details of Scrutiny

Report for HSC

#### 5. Financial, legal and other implications

##### 5.1 Financial implications

None sought – for information only

##### 5.2 Legal implications

None sought – for information only

##### 5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

None sought – for information only

##### 5.4 Equalities Implications

None sought – for information

##### 5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

## Housing Scrutiny Commission

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### **Empty Homes Update**

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Councillor Elly Cutkelvin

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

Lead director: Chris Burgin

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: Citywide
- Report author: Simon Nicholls/Carole Thompson
- Author contact details: simon.nicholls@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: V1

### 1. Purpose of report

To update members of the Housing Scrutiny commission on the work that the Empty Homes Team are doing to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

### 2. Supporting evidence

- During 200/21 we continue to maximise our efforts on reducing total number of private sector properties empty over 18 months 5 and 10 years. Despite the service being closed for several weeks due to the national lockdown and the need to only carry our critical visits.

QUARTERLY COMPARISON OF TOTAL VACANTS AS AT 31/12/19							
Description	Baseline as at 31.03.20	Q.1 as at 30.06.20	Q.2 as at 30.09.20	Q.3 as at 31.12.20	Q.4 as at 31.03.21	Trend since last Quarter	Cumulative Trend
Active Caseload	307	307	248	306		Up 58	Down 1
Total Vacant over 18 Months	330	394	385	344		Down 41	Up 14
Sub Total Vacant over 5 Years	47	53	56	46		Down 10	Down 1
Sub Total Vacant over 10 Years	9	10	11	10		Down 1	Up 1

The Council Tax database is our primary data source of information for newly vacant properties, this number is constantly changing as properties

become vacant and are re occupied. As part of the process we identify those that are unsuitable for residential use, misreported or 2<sup>nd</sup> homes, belong to limited companies or the NHS, this then leaves us with a list of properties that we can add to our caseload.

Data analysis is carried out on a monthly and quarterly basis for misinformation (MI), second homes and non-priority housing. If the original reason is no longer valid and

properties have become empty again, these are added back onto our caseload. This exercise ensures the quality of data held by the empty homes team is as accurate as possible with only genuinely empty properties added to our active caseload. Whilst this is a desk top exercise initially officers have to visit these properties to identify if they are actually occupied or not, Council Tax are then notified so they can update their records and pursue the resident for non-payment of council tax.

## 2.1 Working Smarter

Empty homes officers are all highly experienced with good skills and local knowledge which is shared within the team. We are flexible, negotiate with owners on a wide range of individual and varied property situations, no matter what each empty property presents. We are committed to continually working with each owner to ensure properties are returned into occupation.

This involves:

- contacting all owners at an early stage.
- providing advice & support and information about their options.
- further information is available on the empty homes' website at: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/housing/privately-owned-empty-homes/>
- owners can also complete the on-line e-statement of intentions form.
- agreeing Undertakings with timescales to bring the properties back into occupation.
- practical assistance through leasing schemes.

## 2.2 Leasing options include:

- HomeCome/lease
- LeicesterLet or
- Renting through private agents

## 2.3 Outcome of Council Intervention June 17 to Dec 20:

The outcome of council intervention has brought a total of 723 properties back in to use, though clearly others have become vacant.

## 2.4 Over 5 Year Empties Forecast for 2020-21:

The forecast for reducing over 5-year empties is set at 45.

As a result of the service being closed work to maintain the 5 year empty caseload stopped temporarily, the figures for Q1 and Q2 reflect this, however since the team have been back a concerted effort has been made and this is reflected in Q3.

Baseline 31.03.20	Q1	Q2	Q3
47	53	56	46

## 2.5 Comparison of Total Active Caseload (Apr 2016 to December 2020):

Workstream	31/03/16 Baseline	31/03/17	31/03/18	30/09/19	31/12/19	31/03/20	2016-20 % Reduction
18 Months	378	345	292	319	313	344	9%
5 Years	74	66	52	50	53	46	37%
10 Years	19	15	7	7	8	10	47%

The total active caseload has reduced noticeably when compared to the baseline in 2016. 18-month have reduced by 9%. Over 5-year empties have fallen by 37% with 10-year empties falling by 47%.

## 2.6 Over 5 Years Empty Letter

Most properties between 5-9 years empty are sent a “5-Year Empty Letter”, giving owners 6 months to improve and occupy properties otherwise a report will go to the Executive seeking approval for proceeding with a CPO. This measure has proved successful in reducing the over 5-year empties which are currently at 46. Many of these properties have an owner in care, the property is at probate or works are in progress. We continually review progress or monitor for change of circumstance on an ongoing basis.

## 2.7 Over 10 Year Empty Letter

Many of our properties empty over 10 years change owners, multiple times. Every time there is a new owner the process must start again at stage 1 because the CPO is against the owner not the property. Most owners are sent our “10 Year Empty Letter” (like the 5-year empty letter) giving them 6 months to improve and occupy these properties. This is an ongoing process. We have had great success in reducing the number of over 10- year empties.

Where we are unable to negotiate terms for the purchase of properties by agreement or are unable to locate owners, we will continue to use Compulsory Purchase Powers (CPO) to bring long term empty properties back into use

## 2.8 CPOs Approved by the Executive:

Since 2004, as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 a total of 120 cases have been approved for Compulsory Purchase Orders. (Appendix A)

## 2.9 CPO Forum:

Bimonthly forums are held with Legal Services and Estates and Building Services to review and progress compulsory purchase cases and those undergoing negotiated purchase and sale at auction. The empty homes team also receives advice on CPO cases with complex or individual issues. The forum has proved to be invaluable for joined up thinking, deciding ways forward for complex cases and for sharing information.

## 2.10 Cases currently with Legal Services:

There is a total of 9 properties with Legal Services at various stages of compulsory purchase.



## 2.12 **Negotiated Purchase:**

This is a tool we use to try and avoid CPO action, we give the owner the opportunity to sell their long term empty home to us, we then either sell it at auction or bring it into the HRA stock. There has been no negotiated purchase during this period.

## 2.15 **Council Tax Liability:**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 some council tax exemptions have been abolished and then replaced with a locally set discount premium unless the Valuation Office assess the property as uninhabitable. All empty properties will receive 100% discount for one month only and will then be liable for full charges. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 properties empty over two years will become liable for an additional 100% premium and from April 2020 over 5-years empty will be charged three times the council tax of occupied homes.

## 2.16 **Keeping Council Tax Informed**

Following site visits the empty homes officers provide evidence confirming whether empty or occupied to enable Council Tax to update their records so the information held on their database is vastly improved in accuracy and keeps in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## 2.17 **Council Tax Charging Orders**

The team works closely with Council Tax liaising on the best way to recover council tax arrears which can often be thousands of pounds. Once an empty property reaches the stage where we are considering CPO, a management decision will be made on who will pursue it. Council Tax now have a system in place to recover council tax arrears by using Enforced Sale or a Bankruptcy Orders.

As a last resort the Empty Homes team will continue to progress the CPO. The Empty Homes Team liaise closely with Council Tax to ensure that any property being pursued for CPO with council tax arrears has a Charging Order against the property to reclaim any outstanding arrears from the owner's compensation.

## 2.18 **New Homes Bonus:**

The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid by central government to local councils to reflect and incentivise housing growth in their areas. It is based on extra Council Tax revenue raised for new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. There is also an extra payment for providing affordable homes.

## 2.19 **Comparison of how other Local Authorities perform:**

There is no information available that allows us to benchmark ourselves against other local authorities, each local authority has their own reporting mechanisms. Leicester's stats are from Council Tax data source and excludes properties which do not fall under the Empty Homes remit whereas we do not know the source of the other information provided or how it is made up.

Another difference is that Leicester City Council targets long term properties empty over 18 months because we find the majority of these are genuinely

empty. We have evidence to show there is less abortive work by targeting long term empties over 18 months rather than 6 months when we find that approximately half of those empty over 6-month become occupied without council intervention.

## 2.20 **Second Homes (2<sup>nd</sup> Homes):**

There is an ongoing concern that second homes often mask empty properties.

Council tax regulations split unoccupied properties into:

- “vacant” (unoccupied and unfurnished) and
- unoccupied and furnished (including second homes)

A second home is considered to be “in use” as a 2<sup>nd</sup> home so there is no need for legislation to bring it into use as it is not “empty”. There is also no need to exclude or include it from Local Authority powers and legislation because taking action is not relevant.

Local Authorities have powers around the amount of Council Tax charged and the normal powers that apply to the condition of “in use” housing such as dangerous structures, overgrown gardens etc but there are no powers to intervene with “use” as a second home as mentioned before. The legislation around abandonment would not apply either unless there were clear or stated evidence of abandonment should owners walk away from any interest in their property.

### 21.1 **Council Tax’s Definition of Second Home:**

- Furnished property that is no-one’s main residence because they live elsewhere
- Furnished and unfurnished homes ie a property is substantially unfurnished or furnished with a bed, chair furniture in situ like a holiday home.

Second homes are the cause of much frustration because if a property presents as boarded-up, inaccessible, overgrown gardens, numerous complaints are being received. It can bear the hallmarks of an empty property but will be outside our remit if Council Tax have classified it as furnished and no-one’s main home. Therefore, Empty Homes Team cannot add these to our caseload

## 3. Details of Scrutiny

**Report prepared for Housing Scrutiny Commission.**

## 4. Financial, legal and other implications

### 4.1 Financial implications

By bringing properties back into use, the Council benefits financially through

increased collection of Council Tax and additional income through the New Homes Bonus.

Stuart McAvoy – Principal Accountant

## 4.2 Legal implications

The Council is entitled to acquire land and property for the purpose of providing housing in accordance with Sections 9 and 17 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended). This includes acquisition by or if considered appropriate by the use of compulsory purchase powers. As explained in this Report the Council will need to ensure that any acquisition or other action (including use of Compulsory Purchase powers) is in accordance with the Council's adopted Empty Homes Strategy and is compliance with both the legal basis and criteria for compulsory purchase (including published guidance).

John McIvor, Principal Lawyer, ext. 37-1409

## 4.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Where refurbishment work is carried out to empty properties to bring them back into use, this provides an opportunity to improve the energy efficiency of the property – for example through insulation, draft proofing, replacement lighting or new heating systems. Where this is possible, it has the potential to reduce the carbon emissions when families move into the homes. By reducing the need for new housing to be built, the service also helps to reduce the 'embodied' carbon emissions from manufacture of the construction materials.

Aidan Davis

**Sustainability Officer**

37 2284

## 4.4 Equalities implications

In carrying out its duties, the council must comply with the public-sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

The report provides an on the work that the Empty Homes Team are doing to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

Bringing empty homes back into use can help to meet demand for affordable housing in the city and potentially households on the housing register and provide housing for people in need of a home. Empty homes brought back into use can help to meet the diverse housing needs of all sections of our communities

The benefits of returning an empty home into use can impact on the wider community, homes that are lived in help to support safer communities.

The impacts of returning empty homes into use would be positive on people from

across all protected characteristics.

Surinder Singh Equalities Officer 37 4148

**Appendix A  
Outcome of all CPOs agreed by Executive as at 31.12.20**

	Pre-April 2020	Apr – June 2020	July – Sept 2020	Oct – Dec 2020	Jan – Mar 2021	Total
Total Number of CPOs agreed by the Executive.	120					120
Withdrawn before Public Inquiry ie Occupied	56	1				57
Withdrawn before Public Inquiry ie Restarted, Misinformation, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Hm	20					20
Public Inquiry held - Order Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	8					8
Public Inquiry held - Order Not Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	3					3
Written Representation - Order Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	6					6
Written Representation - Order Not Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	4					4
Non contested CPO's Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	13					13
Non contested CPO's Not confirmed by DCLG/LCC						

**5-9 Year Empties Percentage Breakdown of Reasons**

Reason	No	%
Owner in Care	5	11%
Works in Progress	20	43.5%
Assessing Structural Problems	1	2%
Property for sale	5	11%
Property Sold Subject to Contract	1	2%
EHT Confirming Let	1	2%
New Owners – Restarted at Stage 1	2	4.5%
Owner is long term sick	2	4.5%
Legal Issues	3	6.5%
Probate	2	4.5%
CPO Notices 1-3 being served	1	2%
LCC Possession	1	2%
Following CPO Transferred to HRA	2	4.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100%</b>

**10-Year Empties Percentage Breakdown of Reasons**

Reason	No	%
Owner in Care	3	30%
Works in Progress	5	50%
Property for sale	1	10%
Claim HIMO as Misinformation	1	10%

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>
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**HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

MEETING DATE	MEETING ITEMS	LEAD OFFICER	ACTION AGREED
Meeting Date 7 July 2020	Seven questions on behalf of the Climate Leicestershire Group  ASB service proposal  Housing division covid response and update  Manifesto delivery – housing  Rent arrears progress report April 2019 to March 2020  Who gets social housing  Tenants' and leaseholders' forum action and decision log	Action Leicester and	
Meeting Date 7 September 2020	Update on the House Building & Climate Change  Overcrowding Strategy – including tenants Incentive Scheme  Voids & Lettings Report – Year-end report  Repairs performance and update Report  Disabled Facilities Grant / Housing Adaptation Update presentation	Simon Nicholls  Caroline Carpendale  Martin Clewlow  Kevin Doyle  Simon Nicholls	
Meeting Date 4 November 2020	Local plan special meeting	Grant Butterworth	

<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 23 November 2020</p> <p><b>Agenda Date:</b> 4 November 2020</p> <p><b>Deadline for papers</b> 11 November 2020</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> 13 November 2020</p>	<p>COVID 19 update</p> <p>Housing Capital Programme update</p> <p>District Service Priorities &amp; performance including ASB service performance</p> <p>Who gets Social Housing</p> <p>Update on Homelessness Strategy &amp; Rough Sleepers Next Steps</p>	<p>Chris Burgin</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Gurjit Minhas</p> <p>Caroline Carpendale</p> <p>Caroline Carpendale</p>	
<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 11 January 2021</p> <p><b>Agenda Date:</b> December 2020</p> <p><b>Deadline for papers</b> December 2020</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> January 2021</p>	<p>HRA Budget</p> <p>COVID 19 – Housing response update</p> <p>LCC ASB service offer proposal</p>	<p>Chris Burgin</p> <p>Chris Burgin</p> <p>Chris Burgin</p>	<p>Verbal update to be able to provide the most up-to-date information to the Commission</p> <p>Verbal update to be able to provide the most up-to-date information, in particular about consultation with tenant representatives</p>
<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 22 February 2021</p> <p><b>Agenda Date:</b> 8 February 2021</p> <p><b>Deadline for papers</b> 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> TBC</p>	<p>Housing Manifesto Commitments update</p> <p>Rent arrears report</p> <p>Voids &amp; Lettings Report</p> <p>Empty homes update</p> <p>ASB service proposal</p> <p>Women talking, city listening project</p>	<p>Chris Burgin</p> <p>Charlotte McGraw</p> <p>Martin Clewlow</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Gurjit Minhas</p> <p>Hetha Copland</p>	



12 <sup>th</sup> April 2021	Goscote House & Sprinklers redevelopment	Simon Nicholls	
	Public Realm investment – investment in our council housing estates	Gurjit Minhas	
	Repairs performance and update report	Kevin Doyle	
	Corporate complaints consultation	Chris Burgin	
	Update on retro-fitting and other climate emergency-related issues	Simon Nicholls	
	How IT investment and channel shift are influencing tenants and the department	Charlotte McGraw	
<b>TO BE CONFIRMED</b>	Sheltered housing project	Simon Nicholls	

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