



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 1 AUGUST 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Chamund (Vice Chair)

Councillor Fonseca Councillor Pantling

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education)

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13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali, Aqbany and Gee.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest separate from those recorded in the Members' Register.

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 6 June 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

16. TERMS OF REFERENCE

AGREED:

To note the Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Commissions as set out in the Council's Constitution.

17. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

AGREED:

To note the membership of the Commission for 2022/23 as follows:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Chamund (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ali
Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Fonseca
Councillor Gee
Councillor Pantling
Councillor Crewe

18. DATES OF COMMISSION MEETINGS

AGREED:

To note meeting dates of the Commission for 202/23 as follows:

Mon 6 June 2022
Mon 1 August 2022
Mon 19 September 2022
Mon 7 November 2022
Mon 9 January 2023
Mon 27 February 2023

19. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Petitions had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

20. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Questions, Representations or Statements of Case had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

21. RENT ARREARS YEAR END REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which informed Members of the rent arrears progress over the full financial year, from April 2021 to March 2022.

It was reported that at the end of the financial year to 3 April 2022 the cash amount outstanding was £1.577m, for current tenant rent arrears within the

general housing stock. This was 12% lower than at the same point in the previous financial year and the lowest for the last 4 years.

It was noted that the proportion of rent collected between April to March 2022 was 99.86% which was above target. The team had actively supported tenants to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments and a 6% decrease in awards compared to the previous financial year was noted. The data concerning Universal Credit and the assistance provided by the Team in partnership with her Housing Options Service was also acknowledged, particularly regarding households at risk of homelessness. It was also reported that only 7 evictions were carried out over the past year since the eviction ban was lifted in June 2021. This was the lowest number of evictions since the inception of the specialist rent team. In terms of the low number of evictions, it was noted that 3 of the cases related to anti-social behaviour and not because of rent arrears.

The Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) commented on the excellent work of the Team and made a comparison to the private sector where significantly more cases were heard at Court. The work in ensuring that support was provided to Council tenants was welcomed and encouraged.

The Chair referred to the positive outcomes, where a more support-led approach had been carried out compared to enforcement. The support and interpretation of the Discretionary Housing Payments compared with the previous year was also recognised. It was suggested that benchmarking and comparisons to other authorities in the region could be extended.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

22. HOUSING MANIFESTO DELIVERY - UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update setting out progress on delivery of the Labour manifesto commitments made in 2019.

It was reported that overall good progress had been made with the delivery of the manifesto commitments with a large proportion of the manifesto commitments having been delivered in full. The report focussed upon those that remained live and in progress.

It was confirmed that the homelessness strategy work was in development and the Communications Team had been engaged in progressing the issue, with a report expected to be submitted to the Commission in due course.

The delays in adopting the new Local Plan had been significant and the need to meet the target of providing new homes was emphasised. The associated work of the safeguarding and homelessness teams was noted. The planned improvements to the Dawn Centre and other strategic improvements to support the homeless were reported and noted.

The Chair commented on the praise received concerning the refugee resettlement programme.

The Director of Housing concluded by stating that there was a limited opportunity for development, given the lack of available land to develop new housing. The consultation on the Local Plan was ongoing but challenges were evident in terms of available sites attractive to house builders.

It was suggested that the progress of the Local Plan and the challenges concerning housing developments should be reported to the Commission in due course.

AGREED:

That the progress made with the Key Housing Strategic Priorities be noted.

23. UPDATE ON HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided information on the Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) 2017. It had been concluded that Leicester's estimated level of Affordable Housing Need per annum for the period 2011-31 was 786. The average number of Affordable Housing completions achieved per year during the period 2011/12 – 2018/19 was 156; less than 20% of the evidenced need.

Associated to the previous item, it was noted that the Manifesto included an ambitious target to achieve 1,500 more council, social and extra care homes, a delivery target that was at least double the completions achieved in any prior administration.

The Chair commented on the HEDNA data across from 2011 to 2031 and stated that there were increasing numbers of older people in the city who might need sheltered housing or care packages in their own homes.

The report also set out progress towards meeting the manifesto commitment with more than 1,100 units either completed or in progress to be delivered. An update on Hospital Close was also submitted as part of that ongoing work.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

24. REPAIRS, GAS AND VOIDS PERFORMANCE

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update on the performance of the Division's Repairs and Maintenance service, which included the Voids and Gas functions, over the last financial year, 2021-22.

The report also provided an update about the implementation of service improvements that would drive improved performance into the future.

In response to questions and concerns relating to void properties, it was clarified that significant assistance was offered to potential tenants when viewing void properties and that close liaison with colleagues in the construction hub was provided.

The work of the Task Groups in terms of assessing void properties was recognised, and the Director of Housing answered queries concerning the state of void of void properties and the need to ensure that properties were fit for accommodation.

It was suggested that a report be submitted to a future meeting relating to the standards of voids being offered for let.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

25. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT / HOUSING ADAPTATION

The Director of Housing gave a presentation in respect of the Disabled Facilities Grant and Housing Adaptations.

It was noted that all adaptations were recommended by Adult Social Care (ASC) and the definitions of minor and major works were reported and noted. The protocol agreed with colleagues in ASC where priority points and completion of works in order of need were also noted.

The Commission asked that their thanks and appreciation be passed on to the members of the Team implementing the adaptations programme.

AGREED:

That the presentation and update be noted.

26. WORK PROGRAMME

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

27. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.08 pm.