



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Joel (Chair)  
Councillor Zaman (Vice Chair)

Councillor Adatia  
Councillor O'Neill

Councillor Singh Patel  
Councillor Waddington

In Attendance

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**38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr Aqbany and Cllr Mahesh.

**39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair asked members of the commission to declare any interests for which there were none.

**40. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Chair highlighted that the minutes for the meeting on 30 October 2023 were included within the papers and asked members for comments.

It was noted that the terminology included in the migration update in relation to the number of migrants entering the UK via small boats was inaccurate and that it be corrected in line with net migration figures recently published.

The Director for Housing acknowledged the request.

**AGREED:**

- Subject to the above, it was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2023 were a true and accurate record.

#### **41. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer noted that none had been received.

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

The Monitoring Officer noted that none had been received.

#### **43. HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Director of Housing introduced the item, noting that the capital programme is an important part of the budget to ensure the housing stock remains in good condition and it is important for members to be aware of the detail of the capital budget investment when it comes to the HRA Budget report they will consider in January 2024.

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- The capital programme forms part of the Housing Revenue Account which is a ringfenced budget and primarily made up of income from rent. All monies must be used to the benefit of tenants through delivering services and investment to ensure compliance with decent homes standards or investing in additional stock.
- The HRA capital programme includes ongoing programmes of work, such as providing new kitchens, bathrooms or undertaking rewiring at properties. It also enables the delivery of new social homes through acquiring existing properties or developing new sites.
- Programmes use data and the decent home standards to develop programmes and identify where works need to be complete in accordance with the age and condition of properties as well as appropriate legislation. Kitchens and bathrooms are updated after 40years and homes rewired after 30years.
- Procurement exercises are undertaken to either utilise frameworks or tender on the open market to identify contractors to deliver works. Specifications are written internally, and works are monitored by the control team.
- The current HRA capital programme is forecast to spend £10m this financial year with further details of ongoing projects outlined in the report.
- The programme also includes the development of new social homes, including sites at Saffron Velodrome, Lanesborough Road, Forest Lodge Education Centre, Stocking Farm and Southfield and Newry. Units to be delivered at each site and associated costs of delivery is outlined in the report.
- 200 properties will also be acquired using monies from the capital programme.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- All properties currently receive investment in accordance with the identified timeframes of 40years for kitchen/bathroom replacement and 30years electrical rewire.
- A mixed approach is used for delivering the capital programme, although a significant amount is awarded to contractors with in-house teams undertaking some works such as kitchen refurbishments and boiler replacements.
- Properties for acquisition are identified by need in accordance with the housing register. It was agreed that further information would be circulated on the mix of the 200 acquisitions for this financial year.
- The figures contained within the report in relation to programme budget and current spend was taken at period 6 and some works are undertaken at different points throughout the year, but works are forecast for all budgets to be achieved.
- Properties will have either the kitchen or bathroom refurbished with an assessment of when the property last received investment and the condition.
- Housing developments are at various stages for tender with developers required to tender on price. Completion of sites will vary but expected to be delivered within eighteen months to two years, although this is dependent on external factors and regular updates will be provided to the Commission.
- New build homes will be built well above current building regulation standards and work is underway to explore how to improve existing stock through a fabric first approach to retrofitting.
- A process is in place to audit and identify properties that require improvements. Various criteria is reviewed including repair history and frequency, time from previous investment, expected life expectancy of products etc.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- Additional information be circulated to Members.
- Progress with housing development sites be added to the work programme for the Commission to be kept updated.

#### **44. DISTRICT SERVICES UPDATE**

The Director of Housing introduced the item, noting the important role of the service to provide support to tenants.

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- An ASB team was established in May 2023 in the community safety service to strengthen ASB services and respond to the changing needs of tenants. Previously housing officers would investigate reports, but this

work is now undertaken by the specialist team who also liaise with the police.

- The tenancy management service launched a new vision and consulted with tenants to identify priorities for support. This includes supporting tenants to live well, providing specialist accommodation, customer care, fire safety and better estates.
- The tenancy management service is split into three districts – east, south and west – with a district manager for each area. Services include a broad range of functions aimed to achieve the vision and address the priorities.
- Officers have information to ensure tenants can sustain tenancies and live well. Referrals are made if required for issues including cost-of-living, STAR, health, drug and alcohol etc.
- Welfare checks are undertaken by the team with visits increasing from 1,126 in 2021/22 to 1,515 in 2022/23.
- Some tenants do not engage and may not let the service inspect properties where there may be outstanding repairs or pest issues. A new procedure is in place to write to tenants to explain the purpose of the visit and breach of tenancy if they do not comply.
- Funding has been secured from the Department of Health to provide specialist support with a drug and alcohol team and supported housing manager. The Zip building has been acquired to provide *trainer flats*, that will support tenants to maintain a tenancy before moving into independent tenancies.
- A supported housing team is intended to be created in 2024 with officers reporting to one team leader who would have responsibility for the fourteen units and provide consistency.
- Customer care training is being provided to all housing staff to improve support and the service for residents.
- The Social Housing Act 2023 introduced new standards and a programme manager has therefore been appointed to ensure compliance. A tenant satisfaction survey is being created with findings required to be representative and reported to the regulator.
- Training is being delivered to staff responsible for undertaking fire safety inspections.
- An improved process for pest control has been established with the pest control team for ensuring better estates as well as a consistent service for grounds maintenance.
- A tenancy management online service is being developed.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Tenants were engaged with the consultation and feedback was utilised to identify priorities for enabling improvements.
- Tenants can self-refer online or a housing officer can make a referral for STAR.
- Officers receive a range of training to provide customer care and ensure data protection and safeguarding is complied with. Further training is being developed and will be piloted with front-line team leaders to

enable officers to improve dealing with sensitive situations, including how to manage expectations. Following the pilot, the training is intended to be rolled out to all front-line officers.

- The specialist ASB team is funded through the HRA but sits with the Crime and Anti-Social Behaviours Unit to enable better knowledge and specialism whilst also working closer with the police. The team investigate reports that would previously be looked into by a housing officer with other responsibilities too. They also gather evidence to go to court if required and enforce condition of tenancy although is reliant on court sanctions.
- The small number of Evictions that take place are usually associated to rent issues as opposed to ASB with any proposed eviction being reported to the Executive Lead Member before being progressed.
- STAR offices used to be located across the city, similar to housing officers.
- The drug and alcohol team have been recruited to support tenants to sustain tenancies but also engage with Turning Point where tenants require access to recovery support.
- Additional information would be provided to the commission on the sheltered housing team around how many units operate across the city, where schemes are located and the criteria for referring individuals.
- The tenant satisfaction survey will incorporate different methods for tenants to complete and ensure the response is representative of the population. This includes sending letters to all tenants, an online survey, door knocking and completing the survey when speaking directly with tenants.
- The tenancy management online is intended to ensure tenants can access the service more conveniently following the success of the housing repairs online service which includes mechanisms to access in different languages.
- The estate warden service is being reviewed to ensure value for money.

The Chair requested officers consider utilising community radio stations to share messages of the tenant satisfaction survey and for members to be involved in the piloting of the customer care training.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- Additional information be circulated to Members.

#### **45. CHANNEL SHIFT - HOUSING UPDATE**

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- There continues to be increasing uptake of tenants utilising the housing repairs online service, although there is variation across wards.
- Housing repairs previously were reported on the phone which prevented

customer services supporting other enquiries and often exacerbated wait times.

- There was a hard stop on calls to report housing repairs, except for emergency repairs and those repairs that cannot be reported online. Residents can report a repair via the telephone once and then will be supported to the online service.
- Individuals identified as digital excluded will continue to be able to report repairs through alternative arrangements. This will be reviewed periodically to determine whether circumstances have changed.
- The online service allows tenants to report repairs 24/7 rather than during telephone opening hours and without waiting to speak with an operator.
- A telephone helpline is available to support tenants having difficulties using the online service and neighbourhood services officers are also trained to provide support in libraries.
- Adult Education are providing training sessions across the city – initial feedback is positive and further feedback will be shared with the commission.
- 56% of users agreed the online system is easy to use.
- The number of appointments available online will continue to be increased and further repairs are intended to be added to be reported online.
- The programme manager provided the commission with a demonstration of the online housing repairs system.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Tenants are notified and kept updated when a repair is reported online to confirm receipt of the report and progress.
- The provider of the system is looking at developing an app but the current service is already accessible and compatible on mobile devices and other devices such as tablets and laptops.
- The system does not currently allow for those digitally excluded to call and press a specific number for particular repairs, but it was recognised to be a good suggestion and will be raised with the provider.
- Tenants who provided feedback to indicate they found the service difficult to use, individuals identified as digitally excluded and tenants not signed up to the service have been contacted about training sessions being delivered by the adult education service. Further sessions could be rolled out if there is sufficient interest from tenants.
- A support helpline is available for tenants to contact if experiencing difficulties utilising the housing repairs online system. Contact details were sent to all tenants and continue to be included on relevant information that is sent to tenants.
- Tenants identified as digitally excluded will continue to be reviewed to ensure those who can access the online system are and those who cannot are able to utilise alternative arrangements.

The Chair requested consideration be given to developing self-help resources

for tenants that may not be able to attend training sessions or to be utilised afterwards.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.

#### **46. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair noted the work programme continues to be developed with the service and reminded Members to share any other issues for consideration. It was further noted that the Commission requested a report on St Clements Court and arrangements were being explored.

#### **47. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

The Director of Housing highlighted the announcement by the Chancellor to unfreeze the Local Housing Allowance to enable access to up to 30% private rented sector but noted further detail and local figures are required from the Treasury to determine the impact for residents.

The Deputy City Mayor for Housing and Neighbourhoods noted whilst the announcement was welcome and hopes it will help local residents it does not solve the housing crisis which requires funding for more social housing.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 19.20.