



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2020 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)  
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany  
Councillor Gee

Councillor O'Donnell  
Councillor Pickering

In attendance:

Assistant City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin

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**53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

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

Councillor Pickering declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that she had a close personal associate who lived in a Council property.

Councillor Nangreave declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that she had a close personal associate who lived in a Council property.

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

agenda items.

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

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

## **56. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

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

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

## **58. RESPONSIVE HOUSING REPAIRS PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Director of Housing submitted a report to provide an update on the Division's performance on the completion of responsive repairs to Council properties. The report also provided an update about the implementation of service changes. The following was noted;

- Between 1st April 2019 and 31st December 2019, the repairs service completed a total in excess of 66,000 repairs.
- The service continued to receive a very low number of complaints compared to the overall number of repairs. However, performance in completing jobs first time and in category was not as good as it had been and was below target.
- The service had experienced difficulties in recruiting carpenters and craft workers to fill available posts, it was been looked into how this could be resolved. Currently recruiting trade operatives and apprentices to fill available posts.

Some of the next steps would be;

- Rolling out a programme across the city to cut back overgrown shrubbery, cleaning stacks and metal fence painting. This programme had already commenced in the St Matthews and St Peters areas.
- Channel shift - the introduction of booking of appointments online, which would reduce the call centre load.
- Staffing business needs would be looked into and the types of work that would need to be maintained in addition to technology changes gets factored in to determine the type of apprentices recruited.
- Introduction of a pilot to encourage high performance and accountability with better planning of time allocated to work jobs and much more to help towards a more efficient customer service.
- Officers were clear that Housing Officers needed to be customer focused, of which a meeting would be soon held with managers to discuss this requirement.
- Communal areas garden maintenance was based on need of residents

for instance ensuring tidiness, safety for children and ensuring the area doesn't encourage Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). However, if residents requested a 'wilder' looking garden which may encourage biodiversity/creating meadows – then this could be considered. This could be looked into more with the public realm funds whereby district managers could potentially consider this for certain areas.

- Through the capital investment fund, investments in housing stock and ongoing review of property components. A drive to continue proactive planned maintenance.
- The Chair thanked all the Housing Officer staff and requested that the thanks be passed on.

AGREED:

1. To note comments of the commission.

## **59. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Director of Housing submitted a report and presentation to provide a further update to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on progress in implementing Leicester's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023, since the last update to Scrutiny in August 2019.

During the presentation, the following was noted;

- Positive prevention and support solutions remained high.
- Aiming first for sustainment of current accommodation and, failing that, a new accommodation solution before homelessness occurred.
- Members were referred to a table which detailed an overview of outcomes for those people that the Council owed a homelessness duty towards.
- MyHOME mobile app and website had been established.
- It was noted that there was an 80% prevention rate and only 20% went on to needing temporary accommodation.
- A range of accommodation was in place including accommodation and support for singles, offenders, young people, rough sleepers and repeat homeless.
- Accommodation & support for offenders - New contracts were in place which increased provision from 30 to 40 units and offered a better range.
- Working closely with MHCLG – it had recently been confirmed that LCC had been successful in a new bid for funding in 2020/2021.
- A tender of Floating Support commissioned services was currently under evaluation.

Following Members queries:

- For the 10% of applicants that became homeless, it was noted that these people were generally less engaged with support services and represented more complex cases.
- For those applicants where contact was lost, there was always a follow up procedure including a call given and two letters sent out. There was always a number of attempts to contact them before concluding that the

customer was completely out of contact.

- The Officer explained the situation with private sector evictions. More work was now taking place with landlords which had now resulted in increased property lets to homeless people. A more detailed report would be brought back to a future Housing Scrutiny.

AGREED:

1. Good progress on the Homelessness strategy noted. Commission to receive regular update reports on this work.
2. MyHOME Mobile App - A detailed report to housing scrutiny in future on this.
3. Homelessness Strategy - Overview of outcomes slide – the numbers of private and public sector to be provided to members.

## **60. IMPROVED SERVICE OFFER FOR FAMILIES: HOMES NOT HOSTELS**

The Director of Housing submitted a report and presentation to advise Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on plans to implement the changes agreed as part of the homelessness strategy; a new service offer for homeless families.

- It was noted as a driver to provide homeless families with temporary self-contained homes.
- The project aim was to replace Border House Hostel with homes across the city, to minimise the impact on lives and enable people to remain in their current communities.
- This was noted as a cost-neutral decision and made to improve the Councils service offer.
- Border house was reported to be an outdated model and very institutionalised and even with major refurbishment Border House would not be conducive for those going through homelessness and to one's mental wellbeing. As well as taking into account a fire risk assessment expedition, the decision was made to propose to decommission Border House.
- The new offer had many benefits including to keep children in their existing schools.
- A new visiting support service for families was being proposed.
- Before the closure of Border House, Officers would ensure that the new model was robust and sustainable.
- Following the closing of Border House which would only be closed when all families had moved into their accommodation, the family support service would also close, those staying in temporary homes across the City would be able to continue to access Childcare arrangements they and their children were familiar with. Services would also be working closely with Children's Services. Less than 30% of families were cases with complex needs, most generally required only a home.
- A consultation would take place with staff/ trade unions.
- Customers had received this new service project in a positive way.

The Officers response to Members queries and also gave explanations;

- The impact of the Homeless Reduction Act had seen the service receive funds which allowed for the new recruiting of staff. However, the fund was short term and not guaranteed, and the level of staff would not be able to be maintained if the service did not receive it again.
- A full report would be bought back for the subsequent strategy. The purpose of the new strategy was to look at new resolutions and other initiatives to deal with overcrowding and under occupying.
- The Chair agreed that a report on overcrowding and what was being done to bring it down should be bought back to the commission.
- A Member of the Commission expressed agreement with the strapline 'Homes Not Hostels' which aimed to give families a home to live in not a hostel.
- There were currently 30 – 50 furnished temporary accommodation homes dispersed across the city.
- Once the Border House site was completely cleared and the service moved to the new model then the site/ building would be demolished, and the new purpose of the site considered.
- It was hoped that permanent full-time employees' posts would be absorbed into the new model or the Dawn Centre.
- It was proposed to ensure that every family was offered access to support services and an individual family worker.
- It was noted that there were 73 families, of which 33 lived in Border House and the remainder in self-contained houses. The team had already been reducing the number of families in Border House.
- Further discussions included ways of incentivising people to downsize homes,

#### **Private landlords and Licensing private rented sector**

- Private landlords charging high rental rates was discussed, of which the Assistant Mayor for Housing noted that a Landlords forum took place 6 months ago. The service would be looking to use the forum to strengthen relationships with the private rented sector.
- Potential landlords existed that could also assist with the homeless cohort.
- The Assistant City Mayor for Housing and Education - Councillor Cutkelvin had received a piece of work carried out to identify which areas would benefit from the selective private rented sector licensing scheme.
- Soft launches would continue to take place to inform people of the project's progress.
- At that point it would need to be clear what was hoped to be achieved from the licensing scheme, why certain areas were chosen and be clear on the narrative. Following this a consultation process would take place.

#### **AGREED:**

1. Support report for Homes not hostels, particular attention needs to be given to support families to transition. Commission to receive regular update reports on this work.

2. This Committee to receive further details on how overcrowding is being tackled including initiatives, targets and timescales.
3. Staff at risk should be supported and offered new roles where possible.
4. As explained by Asst Mayor – future report on private rented sector work to this commission.

*Council Pickering departed the meeting during consideration of this item.*

## **61. VOID PERFORMANCE REPORT: JUNE 2019 - DECEMBER 2019**

The Director of Housing submitted a report to update Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on Void performance for the second and third quarters 2019/20.

- The team had worked to improve performance and reduce down void times with some success.
- Issues facing a general lack of qualified/ appropriately trained staff.
- In response to a query regarding carbon neutral housing, the opportunity was taken with property void to carry out capital works and also try and ensure the highest energy efficiency while it was empty.
- Part of the service would be looking into building regulations and the other parts of the service would be looking at decarbonising housing stock. However, it was noted that lots of stock was older. Works were taking place to reach there.

AGREED:

1. Welcome this report on progress being made – still work to be done.
2. In relation to voids – the Council's journey towards climate change issues to be addressed.

## **62. EMPTY HOMES UPDATE**

The Director of Housing submitted a report to update Members of the Commission on the work that the Empty Homes Team were doing to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

- Housing wanted to make accommodation possible for anyone living in the city i.e. giving incentives to landlords to put their property back in use.
- Information was provided on the timelines and processes for tracking property which was empty for either 18months, 5years or 10 years. This was noted as reasonable.

AGREED:

1. To continue to support the work of the unit.

## **63. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Director of Housing proposed some changes to the items for the April

Housing Commission meeting – members agreed on the following;

- It was proposed that 3 items be put back to later meeting; rent arrears report, Goscote House Developments and Sheltered Housing project.
- And proposed 3 new items for the April meeting; Housing building, Anti-social Behaviour service changes and Central Housing) - to be discussed further at the agenda mtg.

**64. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

Meeting closed 19:51.