



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillor Gee Councillor Pickering
Councillor O'Donnell Councillor Willmott

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education)

* * * * *

118. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Aqbany.

119. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared an interest as members of his family lived in Council accommodation.

The Vice-Chair declared an interest as her partner lived in Council accommodation.

Councillor Pickering declared an interest 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. The Members were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

120. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 11 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

121. PETITIONS

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

122. 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.

123. WOMEN TALKING, CITY LISTENING PROJECT

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report, which outlined the research undertaken by the City Listening Project team over the previous 12 months and summarised the key findings both directly and indirectly related to the Council's business. A summary of the full report of findings was also submitted.

It was noted that the report contained both national and local recommendations. The local recommendations outlined in the report were draft recommendations, subject to any comments and it was noted that The Executive had agreed the recommendations subject to review by Departmental Management Teams and were subject to Scrutiny Commission comments.

It was noted in this regard that the work was on-going and therefore the recommendations were likely to continue to be refined and built upon over the coming months. The links between separate Scrutiny Commissions and overlap of Terms of Reference were noted and recognised.

It was confirmed that the local recommendations, once finalised, would be integrated into the Equality Action Plan, which would also be reported to Overview Select Committee.

The full research report was submitted as an appendix to the report, which provided greater detail and an account of the lived experiences and views of women who participated in the project.

Commission members commented on the detailed report and joined the Chair in thanking all those involved for their considerable efforts in producing the

paper and welcomed the detailed descriptions of the findings of the research project.

In discussing the report, the issues arising from Covid-19 restrictions were particularly referred to, including the increased reports of domestic violence incidents. The continued and enhanced multi-agency work including links to the STAR service were noted.

The Vice-chair also referred to the recent improvements to lighting in communal areas around council housing that had provided greater security for women. In response to other questions the issues concerning accessibility to housing options and the gender data relating to applicants was noted and it was confirmed that specific statistics could be forwarded to individual Commission members on request. It was also noted that the issues arising from the research project would be a significant role for the Equalities Manager to undertake, which was a post yet to be appointed to.

In response to questions it was confirmed that the Probation Service and women working in the sex industry had been invited to contribute to the research project. The enhanced links and collaborative work with the Zinthia House project were also discussed and noted.

In conclusion it was confirmed that the issues arising from the report would be submitted regularly to future meetings of the Commission.

AGREED that:

1. That the report and update be noted.
2. That the department's responses to the relevant recommendations within the report be submitted to a future meeting.

124. HOUSING MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS - UPDATE

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

It was noted and accepted that some of the commitments in the manifesto were jointly held across separate portfolios.

it was also noted that significant financial resources had been committed to providing new housing and the contribution from the HRA would exceed the manifesto commitment.

Commission members welcomed the report and congratulated the department on its achievements in accordance with the manifesto, particularly given the ongoing and continued Covid-19 restrictions and challenges.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

125. RENTS PERFORMANCE BRIEFING

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

It was noted that the impact of Covid-19 had been substantial. During the challenging period, it was reported that the performance management data showed impressive results against similar comparable local authorities.

The Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education), Councillor Cutkelvin, encouraged Scrutiny members to arrange visits to the service to experience the impressive work undertaken by officers in the department.

It was confirmed, in response to questions, that Ward data could be provided to Commission members separately on request.

AGREED:

1. That the update and report be noted.
2. That a briefing meeting between Commission members and the team managing tenants' debt be arranged once COVID regulations allowed.

126. VOIDS AND LETTINGS REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided information on the void performance. It was noted that in April 2020, the target was met, but the performance deteriorated due to Covid-19. Void operational performance had continued to be affected throughout the year.

The total number of all void properties and deficit was reported and noted. The direct and indirect impact of Covid-19 on the Void and Property Lettings service was accepted and understood by Commission members. Additional resources were being drawn from the Repairs & Maintenance service and external contractors had been appointed to address the high number of void properties. It was expected that it would take several months to redress the situation.

In response to concerns raised by Commission members it was confirmed that regular update reports could be submitted in due course.

Comment was made on the possibility of obtaining compensation from Government in view of the situation concerning void properties.

The issues concerning the complications arising from the difficulties experienced by Robin Hood Energy were also debated. It was noted that the Council had been careful in the original contractual arrangements and significant problems were not expected.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

127. EMPTY HOMES PERFORMANCE - UPDATE

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

It was reported that during 2020/21 efforts on reducing the total number of private sector properties empty had been maximised and despite the service being closed for several weeks due to the national lockdown, and the need to only carry out critical visits, the results were encouraging. Quarterly data and comparative statistics were presented and noted.

In response to a question it was confirmed that data relating to second homes could be provided separately to Commission members. In this regard it was also confirmed that information concerning void flats over shops could also be provided noting that planning use classes often affected the circumstances of these particular void properties.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

128. WORK PROGRAMME

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

129. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.20pm.