



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Gee
Councillor Halford
Councillor Joel
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Porter
Councillor Thalukdar
Councillor Westley

In Attendance

Sir Peter Soulsby
Councillor Elly Cutkelvin

City Mayor
Assistant City Mayor

* * * * *

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Govind, and Deputy City Mayor Councillor Russell.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to disclose any pecuniary or other interests they may have in the business on the agenda.

With regards to agenda items, Councillor Westley declared that some of his family Members were tenants of private landlords.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest. The Member was not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

39. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that, as Members were aware, he had previously invited the Vice-Chancellors of the University of Leicester and De Montfort University

to attend Overview Select Committee to outline their strategic vision and sustainability plans. To date, neither had confirmed to join the meeting, though the Chair had arranged to meet officers from both universities later on in the week.

The Chair would discuss with the universities the continued desire of the Overview Select Committee for the universities to engage with the Committee, and hoped they would be able to in the near future.

40. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Porter noted from the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 27th July that the Police and Crime Commissioner would be invited to a meeting of the Committee. The Chair noted the Police and Crime Commissioner would be invited to the meeting scheduled on 24th March 2022.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

41. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

Members received a full set of updates, appended to the minutes for information.

Councillor Porter had requested update figures around the number of voids of council housing, after having previously been reported at the Housing Scrutiny Commission in February 2021 that there were 500 empty houses, which meant the Council had lost over a £1m in rent.

Chris Burgin, Director of Housing, reported there was an inclusion in the Progress on Actions which reported the position statement that the number of voids in the Leicester City Council housing stock currently stood at 299, which represented a significant (40%) reduction from the 495 void properties held during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2021. It was noted Housing normally operated at about 250 void properties, and was heading back towards the level where it needed to be. Linked also was a question on Council Tax loss and the response included properties had remained void for longer than expected due to the pandemic, and the council had been robustly acquiring additional properties which had taken a while to come online.

The Director of Housing further noted that as part of the Manifesto Commitment by the end of 2021 Housing would have delivered 1,250 properties to the housing which would have added to additional void levels, as well as the delay in the demolition of Goscote House which would have added to Council Tax loss, the eligibility of which would be removed in early 2022 once works commenced on the building.

The Chair noted the information on the actions arising.

42. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received in accordance with Council procedures.

43. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

44. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which provided an update on the status of outstanding petitions against the Council's target of providing a formal response within three months of being referred to the Divisional Director.

AGREED:

That the status of the outstanding petitions be noted, and to remove those petitions marked "Petition Complete" Ref: 21/02/01, 21/04/02, 21/07/01 and 21/07/02 be removed from the report.

45. COVID-19 VERBAL UPDATE

Rob Howard, Consultant in Public Health (Medicine), was present at the meeting to provide an overview of the latest picture of ward trends, including Covid-19 infection rates and vaccinations. During presentation of the information, the following points were noted:

- Overall in terms of rates of infections, things were looking good. Since the summer Leicester had lower rates than national rates, but rates had started to go up slightly over the past few weeks as national rates had reduced, which had caused concern, particularly the rate in the over 60s.
- But the last week up to 4th November had seen a significant drop, and were currently at 297 per 100k per week, compared to the national rate of 372. The rate in the over 60s had come down significantly over the past week, and there were continued low rates in the 17-21 age bracket and secondary school children.
- The number of people being admitted to hospital was fairly steady with 39 residents admitted in the week up to 5 November 2021 having testing positive for Covid-19. The number of deaths was tragic but relatively small numbers, with 5 people dying week ending 29 October 2021.
- Highest rates of infection were in Hamilton, Abbey, Rushey Mead and Beaumont Leys wards, although not hugely higher than other ward areas.
- Overall in terms of age groups, highest rates were in secondary school age children, and the second highest rates in the 30-44 year old group, possibly the parents of the children, which had been a pattern seen over the pandemic, particularly in multi-generational households.
- In older people, the rates were coming down slightly, with a few cases in care homes but relatively figures currently.
- The highest rates for over 60s for the week were in Rushey Mead, Latimer

South and Beaumont Leys.

- In terms of vaccination rates compared to statistical neighbours, overall the city was doing OK, but was not seeing the right sort of rates for school age programme, and the rates for the third vaccination (booster) were also low.
- Of particular concern were care home rates which should be priority for the CCG responsible for the programme, and was really chasing for information, and working with the City Mayor and Directors to put the pressure on to get the booster rates up, particularly into the care homes.

The City Mayor stated that he, the Consultant in Public Health (Medicine) and officers would meet with NHS colleagues on 12 November 2021 to press for the concerted effort to ensure that boosters were taken up, children vaccinated, and care homes for the elderly were prioritised. There is clearly some work to be done but was a shared effort.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions, and the following information was provided:

- For the 12-15 secondary school age vaccination programme, this was an age group that officers had been putting a lot of pressure on and numbers had improved, however, the uptake across the age range was very low at 16.5%, compared to Leicestershire up at 24.7% and Rutland 26.9% and England as a whole at 27.3%. One reason given was consent levels of parents of the school children was quite low. It was noted, however, that the consent form sent to parents was complicated and took little consideration of the fact many of the families had English as a second language, or consideration of literacy levels. It was not necessarily the fact that parents did not want their children vaccinated, but the process put in place was complicated, as the level of those who had rejected consent was very small. Different ways would be discussed with the NHS on alternative ways to get consent from parents.
- Not all GP practices were distributing booster vaccinations. Pfizer needed to be stored at an extremely low temperature, so specialist equipment and fridges were required which was a logistical and operational barrier to having every practice to deliver the booster. The NHS was trying to ensure there was a good offer of the booster across the city, from community pharmacies to pop in centres such as mobile buses that people would attend without booking an appointment. Officers would discuss with the CCG its operational plans and gaps across the city to improve rollout.
- The NHS was supposed to send out letters for people to have boosters at six-months from the last vaccination received, but there was slippage with some people not being invited until seven months. It was noted the booster could now be booked by people at just five months after the second vaccination, to receive the booster at six months. It was important to promote the pop-in centres, and as the booster take up was quite low, there were no queues being seen at various distribution points. It was further noted it was possible for people to book appointments online at venues other than GP surgeries.
- Information on the number of people in hospitals was not received as a matter of course but received when requested. It was known, however, that

of the people with the most serious condition in hospital, the majority were unvaccinated. It was emphasised that it was still important for people to get the vaccination to protect them from serious illness, and for the City of Leicester it was important for people to keep pushing the message out to get vaccinated.

- People had been turned away because of mis-communication that they believed at the time of making the booking they could have a booster jab at just five months after their second vaccination, and that it should be made clear at the time of booking there needed to be a period of six months. The City Mayor commented that it was far more important for people to get the booster rather than turning people away because they were a few days early, and the NHS would have the question put if the timing could be more flexible rather than discouraging people from having the booster.
- Booster figures were at levels lower than needed. For care homes it was around 30% for residents, and a lot of care homes who had not had any offer of the booster at that point. Members found it concerning that a priority group had not been targeted and noted there would be fourth vaccination in April being delivered by a system that wasn't working. Members also wanted information on the number of care home staff that had opted out of having the vaccinations. The latest data would be circulated to Members following the meeting.
- An issue with some GPs not seeing people face to face or being uncontactable was reported by Members. It was reported that many GPs were working incredibly hard and it was easy to criticise them. It was further noted that more people wanted to be seen by a GP, but there were still some people that wanted to continue to have appointments by phone. Members were informed if there are individual cases of urgency they could be picked up and referred through to the various complaint procedures available through the practice or CCG.
- Members thanked the City Mayor for the regular Covid-19 update circulated. They asked if vaccination booster rates could be included which would be helpful to Ward Councillors.

The Chair of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission informed the meeting the Commission had looked at booster vaccination rates. Noted was the issue of low rates which was a generic problem across the UK and not peculiar to Leicester. Of concern was the low take-up of the vaccine amongst 12-15year old children and care homes. Further noted was access to GPs had been in crisis in the city before Covid-19 and the pandemic had made the situation worse, with not enough GP hours in the city. A suggestion was made that technology could enable some GPs who were retired / semi-retired, on maternity leave etc. who could be given the option of doing online consultations which might provide those hours that the city badly needed.

It was also put to the meeting that it was the responsibility of the Overview Select Committee, Members, and specifically Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission to push the issue of the problems with accessing GPs with the CCG, to get them to push Government to increase the number of GP hours in the city, and to express concern about school take up and care home booster rates.

The Consultant in Public Health (Medicine) said the issues raised would be picked up and discussed with the CCG. Top priority was vaccination booster rates in care homes and children.

The Chair in in summing up said it was clear members were in touch with what was going on in the community and was pleased the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission were looking into the issue of GPs and availability of hours. He added there needed to be clear a message sent out to get those young people in schools vaccinated, as the low rates were of huge concern.

Members of the Committee were asked to write to the City Mayor or Director of Health with details of any issues they wanted to bring to their attention.

The officer was thanked for the clear guidance and information.

AGREED:

That:

- A further update on Covid-19 be brought to a future meeting.
- Data on vaccination booster rates in care homes for the elderly and children age 12-15 be provided to Members of the Committee.
- Information on the number of care home staff who had opted out of having vaccinations be provided to Members of the Committee.
- Information on booster rates be included in the City Mayor's Covid-19 information circulation.
- That the Commission express its concerns with the CCG over the problems experienced by residents in accessing GP surgeries, the low vaccination rates in 12-15 years olds, and the low booster vaccination rates delivered to care homes for the elderly.

46. HOME OFFICE BRIDGING HOTEL AND AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT ACCOMMODATION IN LEICESTER

The Strategic Director (City Development & Neighbourhood Services, Capital Programmes) and Director of Housing submitted a report to the Overview Select Committee, which provided a strategic update on the Home Office Bridging Hotel and the Leicester City Council offer to re-settle 10 Afghan families within the city.

The City Mayor introduced the report, noting the city continued to provide full support to those individuals based in the Home Office bridging hotel. He reported that wrap around support had begun on the 4 October 2021, with the STAR AMAL team providing a very wide range of support, such as, getting children in the hotel into school, GP access, ESOL learning where required, and engaging with charities on service provision.

The meeting was informed the Council had also been advocating with the

Home Office for individuals. Currently there were 16 families (74 individuals) in the hotel, but was a changing picture as people moved in and out of the hotel, sometimes into permanent accommodation. Feedback had been good from those families who had thanked STAR AMAL during their time Leicester.

The Council will offer 10 properties to those from Afghanistan and were expecting the first family to take up that long-term accommodation in Leicester at the end of November 2021.

It was further reported that Home Office personnel were now regularly in the hotel so they could address families' issues directly, and as a result, families felt they were being listened to. The Council were pushing the Home Office for clarity on a number of things, such as the impact of employment and local placement of families.

The City Mayor said that as the scheme began to evolve, behind the Council's approach was a commitment to welcome and support where it was able to those seeking refuge, whether hotel or long-term accommodation, and that there was a determination to do all it could to help.

Members welcomed the update from the City Mayor, and the report which would be taken to Housing Scrutiny Commission. It was asked if it was known how long the Home Office would be in the city. The City Mayor noted the bridging hotel would be in place for some time to come as there were a significant number of people who would require long-term placements. He added that at this point it was difficult to assess a timeframe but would want to do all that was necessary longer term to provide support.

The Chair said the care in which the City through the City Mayor and Officers had shown towards those people who had found themselves in that position through no fault of their own was impressive, and there was a lot of work to be done. The Chair looked forward to further reports at future meetings and added would remain on the Overview Select Committee workplan as a standing item.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

47. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING - CORPORATE OFFER

The Strategic Director City Development and Neighbourhood Services, Director of Housing and Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a to the Overview Select Committee, the purpose of which was to brief Members on strategic plans for undertaking work within Leicester City's Private Rented Sector (PRS). The Committee was recommended to note the content of the report and provide any comments and feedback to the Directors submitting the report and/or Executive.

Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing, introduced the report. It was noted the city had not had the equivalent of a PRS strategy before, and that historically the Housing section had rightly focussed

on the Housing Revenue Account and council housing stock.

It was reported the document as presented was a first attempt at developing the strategy and was a live document which, following the Overview Select Committee meeting would be shared with other partners in the sector and tenants and residents to garner their opinion on what the paper contained.

Members were informed the paper had been written in recognition that the PRS had doubled in size over the past 20 years, and that council house ownership was down to 15% (previously 36% in 1981). The Council was also aware that the demographics of those who rented properties had dramatically changed with more families reliant on the PRS.

It was further reported that 74% in the PRS had no savings, and that 28% living in the city in the PRS were claiming Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. The housing section was having to rely more than ever on the PRS for some of the most vulnerable residents in the city, so needed to develop meaningful relationships and reform the sector to both support residents, and challenge standards, as insecure tenancies, no fault evictions, disrepair and crisis in conditions had an inevitable impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Councillor Cutkelvin stated that a decent affordable house should be a basic human right and the authority needed to do all it could to protect standards, and to support vulnerable tenants moving forward. She added that the paper demonstrated a meeting of minds between the Planning, Housing and Enforcement sections in how to support a healthy PRS economy.

The Strategic Director for City Development and Neighbourhood Services continued to present the report, which read across a number of areas of the council. It was noted an enormous amount of work had gone into the strategy and brought together holistically tools to enable the Council to engage with the PRS, to support tenants, to support landlords, and to have those key strands of work in one place.

It was reported that officers had also looked at the options around taking forward the PRS in the city including what had been learnt from research with other cities, and it was recognised as best in practice approach. The document also discussed the adoption of a licensing scheme which had been included as a separate report on the meeting's agenda.

The Director for Housing informed Members that the strategy represented joint working between Community Safety, Housing and Planning, and offered the Council the opportunity to take positive, holistic action in relation to the PRS in the city. It was noted the Strategy proposed a number of initiatives, some of which were in progress and some that were new, ultimately all with the aim of improving housing conditions to ensure there was a robust but balanced model of support and enforcement for landlords and tenants in the private sector.

The Director reported confidence that the approach laid out would raise housing standards around important health and safety matters, energy

efficiency, ensure that landlords felt supported, had access to information and knew where to go when problems arose, ensured tenants had their rights within their homes protected, further strengthened the work in this area and ensured tenants had advocacy and support when needed and knew where to get it from. The Strategy had a multi-faceted approach required due to the diversity of activity the Council took in the sector. It was noted that Licensing alone would not resolve many of the problems at present.

Members noted report outlined planned actions laid out against the six priorities at Appendix 1 to the report. The report also included a high-level sequence table at Appendix 2 which set out timelines for each workstream. The order of planned actions gave the Council the best opportunity to strengthen the PRS and develop strong relations with the PRS key players.

A number of positive steps in strengthening the offer to both landlords and tenants in the online advice included repayable repair loans, facilitate disabled facilities grants, and also extended the strong offer to landlords to get them to work with the Council to utilise their accommodation offer through a leasing scheme which had already been launched and was paying dividends to the Council and those on the housing register in need of housing. It was reported there were already over 50 new private sector homes delivered for new people because of the launch. The Council was working to deliver stronger working relations with landlords and agents in the city to work together to tackle problems together through forums. It was also proposed to extend homelessness services to landlords to work with them more intensely in a 'Call before you Serve' offer.

The Director concluded the Strategy would enable clear standards and expectations to be set through such items as the Landlords Accreditation Scheme, and proposed use of Article 4 in new areas, and proposed licensing in the city. He added work was already moving forward through Operation Mandarin / and Operation EPC to address existing HMO licensing and drive up efficiency levels in the sector. The PRS Strategy set out a clear governance structure at Appendix 3 to the report, to oversee the effective delivery of the strategy. Members' attention was drawn to Section 6 that set out the benefits of moving forward with Strategy.

Members then discussed the report and made the following comments:

- It was noted in the report there was 35% private rented housing compared to 22% social housing. It was stated there was a housing crisis across the country and the Council needed to build more social housing. The Council had to work with private landlords to provide accommodation needed but people could not afford the rents that landlords were charging. Members did not want to just accept private landlords and wanted to see a commitment to fight for social housing and increased building.
ACTION: Members asked that the report to be taken to the Housing Scrutiny Commission.
- Members noted the report as very comprehensive, robust and ambitious in the plans it set out. It was reiterated that the Council needed to be very

mindful of how it worked in partnership with PRS landlords, so as to weed out the bad eggs and encourage the good ones who were doing good work. It was further stated that housing had an impact, not just on adults, but the health and wellbeing of entire families, and it had been seen how mental health had been exacerbated by the pandemic through poor space and living conditions.

- It was further emphasised that facilities within housing should be adequate and fit for purpose so as not to exacerbate poverty which would lend itself to affecting education, and needed to be targeted for positive impact, and the PRS activities monitored accordingly.
- Members asked if the numbers of landlords self-nominating to work with the council could be provided.

ACTION: Officers to provide information to Members.

Councillor Porter made a number of comments on the report as follows:

- He stated the report was confusing with questionable data. In referring to the figure of 142,379 dwellings in Leicester, with 43% owner occupied, and 35% in the PRS (49,832), he also noted the report talked about addressing rogue landlords, but without statistical data on the number of rogue landlords, the Strategy brought in measures to deal with a problem that had not been backed up by data.
- The Council's Planning Policy and Local Plan did not address insufficiencies nor would improve the controls within the PRS, and that better space standards needed to be adopted to provide proper sized accommodation and better housing conditions.
- The new Strategy was going to address empty homes, but the Council needed to address the number of voids it had in the city, which was at 300 properties. Also, the Council had lost over £1,906,000 in rental as a result of empty homes.
- Challenged was the figure of 33% of carbon emissions from housing in Leicester, which was double the figure quoted in the Government's document Greener Homes which said 15% of carbon emissions were produced by housing. Therefore, clarification was sought on why Leicester, as first Environment City in Europe, had such a high figure of carbon emissions from housing.
- The number of HMOs was down to policy, and figures for the number of HMOs that would require a licence were not included in the report.
- The proportion of threats of eviction from the PRS was 24%, but could the actual figure be provided.
- The document talked about preventing homelessness, but currently the Council did not help people unless they could get a letter saying they were going to be evicted, and it was unclear how the Strategy would address the issue.
- The report mentioned that if people got into rent difficulties, the Council could step in and subsidise the landlords. It was asked what safeguards would be place so the system wasn't abused by schemes set up between the tenant and landlord.
- There was nothing in the document tangible on how much it would cost the Council. It was suggested the landlords of the almost 50k PRS properties in

the city could be charged a small amount to run the service.

The City Mayor said that a lot of points had been made by Councillor Porter, and he hoped he would accept a meeting with officers to seek to clarify the points made.

The Assistant City Mayor said she was happy to extend an invitation to a separate briefing on the Strategy to Councillor Porter between herself and officers. She informed Members the Strategy was not just about rogue landlords but improvement across the sector, and gave assurance the Council only would work with good landlords who would be licensed.

The Chair said that until the Government took housing seriously, PRS housing was needed, and in some wards the figure of 35% PRS was meaningless and was more like 60% of private rented properties, and the Council needed to work with good landlords to get good housing.

Councillor Kitterick said the report contained real issues. He stated there was a problem with private sector landlords in the city that had been going on for decades. He noted a reference in the report made to people wanting to subdivide houses, and that it was not the city planners that put the applications forward to subdivide houses, but private sector landlords. He further noted that part of the report referred to the Council's aspirations for minimum space standards, and how the authority worked with cooperative landlords and should be read in conjunction with future report brought forward. He questioned the legitimacy of the figure of statutorily recordable homes of multiple occupation recorded in the report, which he believed wasn't anywhere near the actual number in the city.

He concluded that the report was commendable, and that private sector housing did a lot of hard work, but the next agenda item should discuss the step change up.

The Chair said the report highlighted how complicated housing was. He proposed that the report be taken to the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

AGREED:

That:

1. The Overview Select Committee note the report.
2. The report be taken to a meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.
3. The numbers of landlords self-nominating to work with the council could be provided to Members of the Committee.

48. DISCRETIONARY LICENSING (SELECTIVE AND ADDITIONAL LICENSING) IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The Strategic Director (City Development & Neighbourhood Services, Capital Programmes), Director of Housing and Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report to the Overview Select Committee,

the purpose of which was to brief Members on Licensing in the Private Rented Sector and shared the key considerations with respect to the Council's existing Mandatory Private Rental Sector Licensing scheme, and the plans to potentially introduce a Discretionary Licensing Scheme in the City (Additional Licensing and/or Selective Licensing). The views of the Committee were sought on the proposals including suggesting next steps.

Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing, introduced the report, noting the importance of working with the PRS to get the right standards for residents. It was reported informal consultation was undertaken in 2019 on selective licensing, which led to a Labour Manifesto pledge to introduce more licensing in the PRS in the city. Whilst undertaking that work it had become apparent that there needed to be a Strategy for the sector to drive up standards, with steps on how the authority could do this.

The Assistant City Mayor noted the report included links to the MHCLG website which well documented the positive impact that discretionary licensing could have on the sector. In particular, a proactive inspection process increased meaningful dialogue with landlords, and immediately improved safety standards. Also noted was the contribution that discretionary licensing made to economic resilience in the community by using licensing along with existing enforcement powers.

The Assistant City Mayor reported that in doing the work, it was recognised that it would not be a "fix" for all problems faced within the private rented sector. The authority would have to choose what the key problems were and where its focus should be in the coming months and years, to raise standards in the sector and benefit vulnerable tenants.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services delivered a presentation which summarised the reports contents as an overview for the Committee and is attached to the minutes for information. Points noted during its delivery were:

- The ambition for the Council was to ensure the PRS provided good homes and were places of safety for the most vulnerable.
- PRS accommodation in Leicester was at 35%. The National average was 19%. A large portion of the wards had a percentage of PRS properties, which predicted 49,501 PRS stock.
- A Housing Conditions Report stated there were 9,649 HMOs in the city.
- The percentage of private rented stock was mapped and showed predominance in Fosse, Westcotes and Castle.
- Also, HMOs showed predominance in Westcotes, Fosse, Castle and Stoneygate.
- A map of the city showing concentrations of complaints and issues relating to properties in the PRS such as poor housing conditions, challenges around safety, damp and electrical issues. Other issues included anti-social behaviour, which showed high concentrations of complaints in Westcotes, Fosse, Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields and Stoneygate.
- Three years of case data from 2017 to 2020 was analysed for complaints

and issues relating to housing conditions and anti-social behaviour. 17% of complaints came from HMOs, 10.8% from PRS and below 10% for non-HMOs.

- Noise complaints, housing conditions, public health, for example, pests, and fly tipping complaints were highest amongst HMOs.
- Various parts of the Housing Act 2004 dealt with licensing: Part 2 with mandatory licensing and also additional licensing, about smaller HMOs; Part 3 Selective Licensing. With a licence there were prescribed conditions, such as, gas safety certificates, installation of smoke alarms, and so on.
- Supplementary conditions could be added pertinent to the locality, for example, adequate security. Imposed conditions had to be relevant.
- A licence holder had to be a fit and proper person.
- There were currently 1,027 mandatory licences in the city for properties with more than five tenants with shared facilities, with two or more parties from separate households, and the number was seen as comparable with other cities, namely Bradford (254), Derby City (524), Hounslow (1,130), Coventry (comparative), Luton (435), Lewisham (827).
- Additional licensing and small HMOs definition was given as three or more unrelated tenants that shared facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms to have a licence. It was noted an additional licensing scheme did not require Secretary of State approval.
- For additional licensing it needed to be demonstrated that a significant proportion of HMOs were being badly managed, for example, poor property conditions, issues to do with anti-social behaviour, and so on.
- The authority also had to demonstrate it had followed other courses of action, which was why it was important to have a PRS Strategy which had been presented earlier to the meeting.
- Selective licensing covered all tenures. There needed to be a sound evidence base, and there were some exceptions to be considered, for example, holiday lets, university student premises.
- To introduce selective licensing without Secretary of State approval, the area identified must only form less than 20% of the City's PRS and/or geographical area. As before the authority should consider other courses of action available to them before making a designation which reinforced the need for a PRS Strategy and must significantly assist in achieving objectives, such as poor property conditions, migration, deprivation and crime.
- Benefits include landlords being identifiable on the public register, being able to deal with rogue landlords and poor standards.
- Risks include the need to have a strong business case or the authority could be subject to a potential judicial review.
- Additional Licensing dealt with the smaller HMOs, and could be applied city-wide to create a level playing field for all areas and prevents certain areas of the city being labelled as less desirable.
- Officers did not believe that data provided enough evidence to have a city-wide selective licensing scheme, therefore remaining under 20% seemed appropriate.
- Points of key learning for the authority included information from MHCLG, who had looked at responses from 273 local authorities in a review.

Information was also received from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Chartered Institute of Housing Report “A Licence to Rent” that covered 27 schemes, and officers had undertaken their own research. The overall conclusion was that there was no “quick win” solution, and that a scheme when introduced, would need to be part of a package of targeted programmes of work to deal with the issues identified.

- Key learning from other local authorities included the need for a strong business case, good communication with the sector, and a streamlined application process.
- Potential options included but were not limited to:
 - a) Targeted selective licensing (Westcotes and Fosse) – this would not exceed 20% of the City’s PRS and/or geographical area.
 - b) City-wide additional licensing scheme.
 - c) Targeted additional licensing scheme (focussing on Westcotes, Fosse, Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields and Stoneygate – all highest complaint wards).
- Fees would be used to administer PRS licensing schemes, and a profit could not be made.
- In a number of areas across the country the fee was around £1,000 for a 5-year licence. The fee would form part of consultation, which would be for 12 weeks commencing the end of November 2021, and would also cover areas outside of the city as it was recognised that some landlords lived away from the city.
- Feedback was requested from the OSC and other Members as representatives of the community on the scheme shared during the presentation, and a request was made for feedback from Members on the design of the formal consultation.
- Following consultation, responses would be reviewed for quantitative and qualitative data in order to ensure that any scheme put forward would be supported by evidence, and would not be subject to judicial review. The final business case would then be presented to Full Council.

Members were then given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions:

- It was asked if it was known how many rogue landlords were believed to be in the city, as some wards did not receive many complaints about PRS landlords.
ACTION: An officer to provide a response.
- Under climate emergency implications in the report it was reported that housing was responsible for 33% of carbon emission in Leicester. It was asked why Leicester was more than double the national average at 15%.
- ACTION: An officer to provide a response.
- It was observed that the number of complaints from residents might be due to the number of HMOs being allowed to open in the city centre, many in cramped accommodation without decent sound proofing and that planning policy needed to be changed.
- It was asked what proportion of the 35% PRS dwellings were rented out to

students.

- ACTION: An officer to provide a response.
- In identifying that Westcotes and Fosse wards were hotspots and taking on board the 20% limit for Selective Licensing (prior to needing Secretary of State approval), it was asked what percentage of properties would there be and how close would the scheme be taken to the 20% limit. It was reported that it would be about 4% (2,000 properties) and 8,000 properties would edge towards 20%, but not so close that it would require Secretary of State approval. It would also be dependent on areas chosen.

Members said it was important to get the consultation moving and recommended the Committee steer Fosse and Westcotes to be chosen for a Selective Licensing scheme in consultation with Ward Councillors and other wards where Councillors had identified issues. In terms of Additional Licensing, identifying the number of landlords was difficult, but easily identifiable were areas with a number of complaints, some of which were in affluent areas of a high student population. It was believed that representatives from student unions were keen to see a licensing scheme in those areas and it was asked that officers engage with student unions.

Members also suggested that alongside the proposed Fosse and Westcotes Wards priority Selective Licensing Scheme; with the opportunity of including other problem areas into the scheme, a conversation be had with the student unions about the possibility of bringing in an Additional Licensing Scheme alongside.

The Assistant City Mayor noted the Planning Policy was an important part of the Strategy going forward with the PRS along with other policies in the Council, such as, Enforcement Policy, and Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. It was noted it took many approaches to be brought together to solve problems.

The Assistant City Mayor informed the Chair the scheme would be worked up to just under 20% of PRS in the Selected Licensing Scheme . Ward Councillors would then be approached to garner their views for such schemes, and provided with information on the benefits that could be gained with Selective Licensing.

It was not known how many rogue landlords operated in the city, but it was important to note it was not just about rogue landlords, but about poor standards. Not all landlords were rogue because they had ill intent, but just needed educating and needed support to raise their standards. It was further noted there were rogue landlords in every area of the city.

The Chair welcomed the report and supported its move towards consultation. He asked that Ward Councillors be consulted on its design.

Officers were asked to provide responses to questions raised.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report be noted and officers note the comments raised by Members.
2. The proposed Fosse and Westcotes Wards be a priority for a Selective Licensing Scheme in consultation with Ward Councillors, with the opportunity of including other problem areas into the scheme.
3. Officers engage with Student Unions to consider an Additional Licensing Scheme to run alongside the proposed Selective Licensing Scheme.
4. Officers respond to the actions and unanswered questions raised.

49. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report which provided a six-monthly update to the Committee on the progress of implementing Leicester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023 at the request of the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission, and a minute extract from the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting on 4th October 2021 was attached at Appendix A to the report.

Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing, introduced the report. She said that it was an important reminder that rough sleeping was the tip of the iceberg when talking about homelessness. The report demonstrated how much homelessness prevention work was vital in the city, and talked to strategic aims around increasing the levels of council homes in the city through building and acquisitions. It also talked to strategic aims around good tenancy sustainment services and good partnership working, with the NHS, Police, VCS, and business.

The Assistant City Mayor stated she had inherited strong partnership working in the homelessness sector, which continued to be recognised on a national level. The challenges faced over the past couple of years namely because of the pandemic had really put pressure on the service, and had had to re-design the service delivery through the loss of dormitories, the loss of day centres, the 'Everybody In' scheme which was continued in the city longer than other authorities in recognition of Leicester's continued lock-downs, the emergence of sofa-surfers who had been managing their homelessness through friends and family which was something that they could no longer rely on given the spread of the virus.

The Assistant City Mayor was immensely impressed with officer and partners who had risen to the challenge and levels of resilience they had shown. Pressures continued to build, but it was a good time to bring the Strategy to the Committee in recognition of the good work and resilience shown.

Councillor Westley, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission, was pleased to have referred the report to the Committee, as it was important to recognise success in dealing with cases of homelessness and rough sleeping, and it was

clear that staff had done an excellent job under challenging circumstances. He congratulated the Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing, the Director of Housing, and all staff involved in achieving very good progress over the past six months.

He added it was important for all Chairs of all Commissions to examine the report given that it had been a while since a report on homelessness and rough sleeping had been brought to the Committee, and the implications it had across various service and departments across the authority, and it was known that tackling the root cause of homelessness could only be done in conjunction with all service areas and partners.

The Chair of Housing Scrutiny Commission said Leicester should be really proud of how the authority had managed the important issue of homelessness, which had cross-departmental implications, such as health.

The Chair commented on the report as it highlighted an issue, namely, if problems of begging were tackled in the city centre, the problem was pushed out to the outer areas, and the question was how it would be dealt with in other areas. It was pointed out that not all beggars were homeless.

The Assistant City Mayor noted that it had pointed out correctly that there were hotspots in the city of aggressive begging, and that the good work undertaken in the city centre by the Street Lifestyle Operational Group (SLOG) had been taken to other areas in the city to tackle similar issues.

Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service Housing, reassured Members that officers were aware of and work being done to tackle an encampment on Great Central Way. She added as part of the Strategy Outreach teams had been extended, and were working during the day and evening to visit hotspots. It was noted the StreetLink site was very well used in Leicester and responded to all public alerts of rough sleeping and street drinking, to initially support individuals, including accommodation, then moving to deal with difficult situations, and there was the enforcement arm when required.

The Committee noted progress updates on the Strategy would be taken to the Housing Scrutiny Commission twice yearly. The authority had a duty to produce the Strategy. There would be a new Strategy in 2023, and would look at further improvements to prevent homelessness which was the key objective.

John Leach, Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services, informed the Committee the street lifestyle work was a multi-agency approach which had been running since 2017, initiated by the City Mayor and former Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). That work had been instrumental in supporting a bid made to MLCHG, now the Department for Levelling Up, and had successfully secured funding of £2.6million to be spent over three years to help people facing multiple disadvantage. Work had now moved to other areas, including Narborough Road, and the City Mayor had supported an extension of multi-agency approach by investing in an enforcement team that had been active in places like Great Central Way. The LGA had recognised the model as

good practice in reaching people in difficult circumstances.

The Chair said the authority had gone a long way in responding to homelessness, and that praise needed to be passed on to the Housing Department and everyone involved in taking the Strategy forward.

The Chair added it would be interesting for the Neighbourhood Scrutiny Commission to look at this report.

AGREED:

1. That the Overview Select Committee note the report.
2. The report be taken to the Neighbourhood Scrutiny Commission as an item of interest.

50. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019 - 2021

Councillor Cassidy, Chair of the Overview Select Committee presented the draft Scrutiny Annual Report for 2019-21 which summarised activity of each of the Scrutiny Commissions.

The Chair noted the report was usually compiled annually, but no report had been completed for 2019/20 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Chair further noted that it had been a difficult period for the Council and the people of Leicester. It was reported that scrutiny had looked carefully at the work undertaken in response to the pandemic and the report included a summary of activity during the period.

The Chair added the report focussed a lot on the pandemic but had not ignored other important work. Given that further scrutiny reviews were continuing, as Chair of Overview Select Committee, he felt that that scrutiny was in good hands in terms of officers working with Members in a positive way, and he hoped the report showed how scrutiny had served as a critical friend to the Executive.

The Chair recommended that the report be presented to the meeting of Full Council on 25 November 2021. This was seconded by Councillor Joel.

AGREED:

That the draft Scrutiny Annual Report for 2019-2021 and the Chair's comments be noted and forwarded to the meeting of Full Council on 25 November 2021.

51. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

1. Question from the Chair, Councillor Cassidy:
'In light of the Government's withdrawal of the £20 weekly universal credit uplift, what impact are we likely to see this have upon our most vulnerable residents and families in Leicester? And what else can we do to try and support those most severely affected by this withdrawal?'

The City Mayor stated in response that the impact of this would be harsh and significant for families, and whilst the authority could do things to mitigate the impact this alone would not be enough. It was noted that in October, the Government had withdrawn the uplift to the personal allowance element of UC which had been in place from March 2020.

The City Mayor had asked officers to try and assess the numbers involved, and had been provided with the following information:

- 48,000 households across the city were affected, comprising of 35,000 UC households and a further 13,000 household receiving Working Tax Credit.
- Each of those households faced the prospect of losing over £1,000 a year, and the loss of income would be devastating.
- It was recognised that 5% of benefit recipients (over 2,000 households) would not be able to meet essential costs, and this included many families with children affected.
- It was suggested in looking at the national impact that a further 10% who were already unable to make ends meet would be pushed deeper into poverty. This equated to a further 4,500 households in Leicester and affected many people.
- The cuts in benefits were against a backdrop of rising inflation, a rise in energy bills and food costs, and while those figures were significant for those experiencing poverty, those bills would be a higher proportion of income and severe impact would be felt.
- The Council was seeking to provide additional funding, to help with discretionary housing payments to take the total funding up to £1.8million, increasing council tax relief by taking funds to £1million, and awarding grant funds of around £500k.
- The context of scale and loss meant there was a need out there that could not be met.
- In addition the Council was to communication to people information about where they could look for help from the Council and others. A message would be sent to people struggling to pay Council Tax to consider make alternative arrangements.
- Discretionary relief would be focused where it would be of most help. Over 700 households had already been helped, over 500 of which were households in receipt of UC.
- It was believed that by the end of September 2021, 30% of households claiming UC experienced significant debts, which ran the risk of being exacerbated with the increased loss of the uplift payment.
- The Council was looking to use the £3.4million Household Support Fund to help households meet higher fuel and food bills, and would be particularly targeted at those households in most need.
- Also, the Council was seeking to provide debt advice to people, and an additional two Debt Advisers had been invested in for the city over the winter. The Authority was also working with Citizens Advice who had very helpfully provided a useful budgeting tool.
- Officers had also targeted Welfare Rights support on challenging DWP decisions on other benefits. For example, the removal of Personal

Independence Payments for disabled people, and had a high success rate of over 90% in doing so, bringing in over £2.5million for people.

The City Mayor concluded that some of the most deprived and poorest people in the city were suffering due to the withdrawal of the benefit. He stated that the Council would do all it could to help them, but they could not simply issue to them the money that had been taken away.

Members were informed the information provided would be made available to them.

Members present were asked if they had any further questions for the City Mayor.

2/ Question from Councillor Porter:

The meeting was informed that the liquidators report with regards to the Haymarket Theatre was online. The City Mayor was asked if the Council would chase the Haymarket Consortium for the £600,000 lent to them by the Council?

The City Mayor asked Councillor Porter to send him an email with a request for information, and that a response would then be provided by an officer.

3/ Question from Councillor Gee:

With regards to disabled access for Abbey Park, could the Council look at signposting the appropriate entrance at the event and allow for movement at the venue for disabled people?

The City Mayor thanked Councillor Gee for the question. He stated that he had noticed that people were able to access the area for disabled people at the event, but he acknowledged there may be issues in getting into the venue and would check the level of signposting which was there. He referred to how well security had managed disabled access and were courteous and helpful towards people.

52. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for the Committee was noted.

The Scrutiny Support Manager, in consultation with the Chair, would look at the allocation of the reports for future planned meetings.

53. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 8.22pm.