



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)  
Councillor Chamund (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany      Councillor Rahman

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education)

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**45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

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

**46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

The Vice-Chair declared an interest as a member of her family lived in Council accommodation.

Councillor Aqbany declared an interest as members of his family 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.

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

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 4 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **48. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair advised that the Task Group that examined the role of the proposed new anti-social behaviour team had met again on 3 November 2021 and agreed a number of draft recommendations.

It was confirmed that those recommendations would be included within a final report being prepared for submission to the Commission in due course.

#### **49. PETITIONS**

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

#### **50. 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.

#### **51. KEY HOUSING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update on the progress of the key strategic priorities, as set out in the Labour Manifesto.

The Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing commented on the significant progress on the manifesto commitments since February 2021, as well as the substantial headway made into the action plan tackling homelessness and the complex needs of women and BAME communities regarding housing.

It was noted and welcomed that the Division was on task for achieving their expected outcomes. It was however also noted that there was still much more to do to achieve the aims of the 2019 manifesto pledge.

The Chair asked that in relation to the pledge to provide 1500 homes, could it be confirmed how many of these will form part of the council housing stock, and how many new council homes had been provided to date, or have been committed to be provided.

The Director of Housing clarified that all new housing acquired would be made available to the public as housing stock on both a proactive and reactive basis.

It was also noted in response to a further question that estate wardens were being assigned to a number of areas across the city.

In conclusion, Commission members asked that the statistics be broken down into Wards for future understanding, for ease of future reference.

The Chair thanked The Assistant City Mayor and the Director for their update and advised that an update would be provided in due course.

AGREED:

1. That the report and progress concerning the Key Housing Strategic Priorities be noted;
2. That future updates be inclusive of statistics broken down by Wards;
3. That a further update be presented in due course.

## **52. HOME OFFICE BRIDGING HOTEL AND AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT ACCOMMODATION**

The Director of Housing submitted a report, as previously presented to the Overview Select Committee (OSC), which provided a strategic update on the Home Office Bridging Hotel and the Council's offer to re-settle 10 Afghan families within the City.

It was noted that the Council had agreed to participate in the accelerated relocation of Locally Employed Staff (LES) who have been supporting the UK forces in Afghanistan. The scheme has been prioritised due to the withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan, and the following escalation in violence.

The Afghan LES and their families were being offered relocation in recognition of the fact they were at increased personal risk, having worked side by side with coalition forces and officials.

The Home Office had placed a number of families within a bridging hotel in the City and work continued with the families in the hotel, providing them with wrap around and resettlement support that would reside in Leicester once longer-term accommodation had been identified for them.

The Minute extract from the OSC was also submitted for reference, as a detailed in the summary of the report. It was noted that the report had been noted and welcomed by that Committee and would form part of their ongoing work programme. It was therefore acknowledged that future standing item updates would be presented to OSC and not to this Commission.

The following key points were noted:

- The Chair thanked all those involved in helping the resettlement of refugees in the city, and the support and dedication the community provided towards helping those in needs.
- Members enquired about the Home Office representative stationed in Leicester City Bridging Hotel, they were informed by the Director of Housing that they were a representative associated with the Midlands Office.
- Members asked whether the housing provided to the refugees was the Council's own stock of Housing. It was clarified that, as stated in the report, that all accommodation currently in consideration or already procured is housing offered under private landlords, externally from the Council's own housing register.
- Concerns were expressed regarding about how refugees would pay for private housing and living expenses, the Director of Housing reassured that refugees assessed to be eligible for financial support will be supported by the Council, to be re-imbursed by Home Office over a three year period, which was in line with amounts received under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. It was noted that some applications had already been rejected, and Members stressed the importance of vetting the suitability of both housing and refugees for the financial support available.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing for the report.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

### **53. REPAIRS, VOIDS AND GAS PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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

It was noted that the 2021-22 performance statistics used in this report were based on those at Q2 (to September 21). The report also provided an update on the continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on service delivery and an update about the implementation of service improvements that will drive improved performance into the future.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chair it was confirmed that the data showing weekly monitoring of outstanding works due to the Covid-19 pandemic was being considerably reduced across all categories.

In terms of the categories it was clarified that significant effort was made to ensure that the highest priority category works were completed, and that this was often affected by safeguarding issues as well as consideration of the time a job may be outstanding.

It was accepted that the current numbers of around 7600 outstanding jobs should be compared to the approximate 6000 requests that would be normally received pre-pandemic.

In response to questions it was noted that a feasibility study was in place to ensure that energy supply meters could be properly accessed and issues concerning case work would be taken up by the Director separately.

In respect of the numbers of outstanding jobs, the Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) asked the Commission to note that due to the pandemic, some tenants had demonstrated a reluctance for maintenance officers to enter their homes. This impact on the data was accepted by the Commission.

In conclusion and in response to further questions, updates were provided on works and progress at St Peters former Housing Office and at Goscote House.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

#### **54. EMPTY HOMES - UPDATE**

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

The Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) commented on the importance of ensuring that all empty homes were brought back into use and referred to the links to the homelessness strategy. The complex nature of Government requirements were referred to and it was hoped that revised legislative powers to provide greater devolved local governance would be forthcoming.

In response to questions the numbers of properties acquired under Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) was confirmed, together with an update on the success of the buy-back scheme.

In conclusion the Chair commented that it was always frustrating to hear of empty properties when so many people needed housing and that he fully supported and commended the work of the Empty Homes Team.

AGREED:

That the update be noted.

## **55. INVESTMENT IN COUNCIL HOUSING AND UPDATE ON HOSPITAL CLOSE**

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update on the ongoing investment in council housing and specific one-off projects, including Hospital Close.

It was noted that the Division were responsible for around 20,000 council houses and needed to make sure that they continue to meet the Decency Standard, conform to all legislative health and safety requirements and meet the expectations of our tenants. An extensive capital programme ensured that homes were always being invested in and upgraded as well as a programme of planned maintenance work to ensure all elements of our homes continue to work and be safe.

The Chair asked for an update in relation to progress with the Leys, and in response it was advised that the project was due for completion in late Summer/Autumn of 2022.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

## **56. WORK PROGRAMME**

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

AGREED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

## **57. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 6:50pm.