



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Chamund (Vice Chair)

Councillor Ali Councillor Crewe
Councillor Aqbany Councillor Gee
Councillor Rahman

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education)

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70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Byrne.

71. 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.

72. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

73. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to some key issues to be discussed on the agenda, making particular reference to agenda item 7 concerning the housing crisis, looking at the issues regarding social issues, community wellbeing, community safety and security, and financial and economic factors.

74. 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.

75. PETITIONS

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

76. HOUSING CRISIS

The Director of Housing submitted a report which provided information on the housing crisis nationally and particularly the effect on services in Leicester.

The report explained the problems of housing availability and affordability, including private renting and the severe lack of truly affordable homes which was placing peoples finances, health and wellbeing at serious risk.

The report contained information on the following aspects:

- The Changing face of Housing in the country and Leicester
- The Affordability of Housing
- Homelessness
- Collapse in the supply of truly affordable homes
- The Council's efforts to tackle the Housing Challenges

The report was also intended to drive national policy change and alongside this suggested the need to be clear about local commitments to address the housing crisis.

In accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Chair allowed a question to be put by Mr Stannard. As the question was not received in time to be formally considered, in the interests of openness and transparency, the question was put under rule 8.

Mr Stannard read the following question:

“Given that it is LCC's intention to declare a housing emergency in our city, can you ask our local MPs to raise with the government the 2012 housing debt settlement (on which LCC paid £8.8m interest in the last full tax year), and suggest that the settlement nationally be cancelled or renegotiated.”

It was noted and accepted that Mr Stannard would receive a written answer to his question, and he was asked to remain in the meeting room to listen to and consider the debate on the housing crisis, but the Chair indicated that he would not be allowed further involvement in the discussion on the item.

The Chair referred to the recommendation in the report and supported the need to establish a Task Group to undertake a review of the situation, including the need to understand the regional pressures on housing allocations and ensuring that affordable homes were available. As part of the Terms of Reference of the Task Group, the need to lobby government to increase local authority housing was emphasised.

Councillor Gee was appointed as the Chair of the Task Group, and members of the Commission were encouraged to join forthcoming meetings.

AGREED:

That the Commission note the urgency of action on the Housing crisis and in response set up a task group, to be Chaired by Councillor Gee, to determine clear asks of central government and the local authority.

77. ENVIRONMENTAL BUDGET 2022/2023

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which outlined how the Environmental Budget would fund improvements on estates across the city in 2022/2023.

It was reported that 21 schemes were being proposed for the city to invest in estates, to improve parking, green areas, measures to reduce anti-social behaviour and to generally make the environment safer and improve the quality of life for residents, making them places where people want to live.

In response to a question, it was noted that the Vice-Chair would be informed of the locations and availability of recycling sites, including bottle banks.

AGREED:

That the report and aims of the Environmental Budget be noted.

78. BUILDING SAFETY BILL (INCLUDING SAFETY COMPLIANCE)

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which gave details of measures in place to ensure that all Council homes were safe for tenants to live in and for staff and contractors to work in. The report also provided an update on the work currently undertaken relating to water hygiene, asbestos and fire safety.

The Chair commented on the timing of new legislation, particularly referring to fire safety as outlined in the report and the fact that the government was warned about cladding fire safety issues in 2002 and 2003 but failed to act until 2018, after the Grenfell disaster. It was also noted that as a result, Council's had been required to improve the safety of their buildings, without any financial support.

It was also reported and recognised that a robust fire safety strategy was in place, prior to the Grenfell disaster, and that adequate and suitable fire doors and sprinkler systems were installed in the Council's buildings. It was not expected that the new legislation would therefore have a significant effect on existing budgets.

In terms of the management of the estates and buildings and in regard to building safety and fire safety, it was suggested that an update be submitted to the Commission on an annual basis, to ensure continued compliance.

AGREED:

That the report be noted and an update be submitted on an annual basis.

79. RETROFIT AND CARBON REDUCTION UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update since the previous report in April 2022, on ongoing work to ensure the Council's target to be carbon zero by 2030 could be met.

The Chair commented on the numbers of homes involved in the range of improvements, which was minimal in terms of the properties in the Council's stock, and also the private sector stock. In response it was explained that increased pressure on government and successful bidding had led to an increased ambition and an understanding and recognition that the responsibility was being taken seriously. The numbers of properties involved in future projects and programmes to 2030 in respect of retrofitting was acknowledged.

AGREED:

That the report and progress be noted

80. GOSCOTE HOUSE DEMOLITION AND INSTALLATION OF SPRINKLERS - UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update on progress made since the demolition of Goscote House and the installation of sprinkler systems in tower blocks.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

81. HOUSING ONLINE REPAIRS

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which outlined the current position of the online provision for Housing repairs services, including key repairs functions undertaken online as well as any key barriers. The report also set out recommendations for the next steps of delivering online services for repairs including the potential to hard stop the two main areas of repairs calls to the customer service centre of reporting repairs and repairs enquiries.

The details report described the support in place for all tenants to enable access to online services including provision for tenants who do not have access to IT or may not be able to use it or for those tenants who are housebound.

The Director of Housing provided a live demonstration of the accessibility to services online. During the demonstration, it was emphasised that the registration/log in process would only be required once, and subsequent access would be faster and simpler for tenants.

The need to engage with and request the support of the Tenants Forum was highlighted.

Commission members supported the proposal but had concerns with the availability of support to some tenants, and therefore requested an update on the revised service at a future meeting, noting the 4 month review period.

AGREED:

That the report be noted, and an update be submitted to the Commission in due course.

82. WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission's Work Programme was submitted and noted.

83. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.45pm.

