



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 6 JUNE 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Chamund (Vice Chair)

Councillor Ali Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Fonseca Councillor Pantling

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crewe and Gee.

2. 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.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 23 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. PETITIONS

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

5. 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.

6. INTRODUCTION OF DISCRETIONARY LICENSING IN LEICESTER

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which considered the business case for the introduction of Discretionary Licensing within Leicester. The report provided details of the work undertaken to consult on the introduction of a Discretionary Licensing scheme within the private rented sector in Leicester and recommended the introduction of a Selective Licensing scheme in specific areas of the city.

The Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) referred to the links to health and wellbeing and the vast difference of suitable accommodation in social housing, with a need for the private rental sector to be improved as many lets were unfit. The role of the Council to support landlords was recognised, and the need for a private rental sector strategy was emphasised.

The Chair commented on the report and advised that it was also due to be submitted to the next Overview Select Committee, where the comments of the Commission would be reported.

The need to ensure that the residents' opinions were captured and recorded was emphasised and it was noted that a significant number of complaints were received concerning anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and other issues.

It was clarified that there was a list of known landlords who would be encouraged to join the scheme, and any 'rogue' landlords would also be known to the Council.

Tenants would also be encouraged to report any problems to ensure that their accommodation was fit and suitable.

The Chair commented on several issues which combine around HMOs and poor housing in general and referred to the 2019 House Condition Survey which had provided very useful and important information about housing in the city. In response it was reported that for HMOs, the standards would improve under the scheme, as the scheme would set conditions on a licence that were enforceable with input from the tenants being known.

A presentation was then given, which reinforced that selective licensing would give the Council the power to introduce, in a given area licensing for all tenures in the Private Rented Sector except holiday lets, business premises, student premises, Housing Associations and Council Housing and premises where the tenant is a family member. Additional Licensing required Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that had three or more unrelated tenants that shared facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms, to have a licence.

The Commission were advised of the options as follows:

Option A

- Selective Licensing within parts of the Wards of Westcotes, Fosse, Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields (West Cluster); Stoneygate (East Cluster); Saffron (South Cluster)
- The combined area covering the schemes covers less than 20% of Leicester's geographical area and less than 20% of privately rented homes in the local authority area and therefore if adopted would not need SoS permission.

Option B

- Additional Licensing that covers the entire City (citywide).

Option C

- Additional Licensing within parts of the Wards of Westcotes, Fosse, Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields and Stoneygate.

In terms of the Team structure, it was considered that the arrangements were adequate and shared working and best practice with neighbouring authorities had been undertaken.

AGREED:

1. That the Selective Licensing in the targeted areas (Option A) be supported and should be introduced as soon as practicable.
2. As the principle of Additional Licensing citywide (Option B) is also favourable, that this be revisited once Option A is embedded and there is further evidence of the success of licensing in raising standards in the sector, to allow time for any impact of the potential extension of the Article 4 directive to have been realised.
3. The proposed fees, discounts and penalties be supported.

7. HOUSING CRISIS

On behalf of Councillor Gee, who had submitted apologies for absence, the Scrutiny Policy Officer provided a verbal update and read a statement following the first meeting of the task group looking at the housing crisis in Leicester.

It was noted that the membership of the task group was drawn from across the entire spectrum of scrutiny members, taking in different interests and different political groups.

The Director of Housing was acknowledged for setting out the main issues which had contributed to increasing problems with housing, including health, overcrowding and a lack of affordable social housing.

Members of the task group had been encouraged to discuss a range of issues, including the planning system. Following the first meeting, it was felt a session devoted to the planning system should be a top priority.

The report to the commission on a register system for private rented housing highlighted other important issues and the task group would look at this issue and the 2019 house condition survey.

AGREED:

That the update be noted.

8. WHO GETS SOCIAL HOUSING - UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided an update on the 'headline' Housing Register and Lettings data, relating to the Housing Register.

The report dealt with the period starting 1 April 2021 and ending 31 March 2022 and it was noted that the number of households on the Housing Register had decreased by 5% from 6366 to 6053 in that period.

It was reported that the decrease was not because of lowered demand but was the result of a cleansing exercise undertaken where inactive applications were cancelled.

Details of the banding proportions were also explained.

The difficulties in dealing with overcrowding, compared to the 3 and 4 bed properties being underused and bedroom tax being levied was discussed. It was suggested that property exchanges should be promoted. The difficulties in trying to intensive tenants to move was highlighted,

In response to a question concerning Brexit and the demand on housing, it was clarified and confirmed that appropriate and proper eligibility checks were undertaken.

The impact of social economic factors and average salaries was noted, including comparisons with other authorities. It was suggested that a report on those factors could be provided to the Commission in due course. The Director of Housing also clarified that some houses were excluded and the links to adult social care and adapted properties was explained and noted, specifically in relation to the right to buy policies.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

9. HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY - UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided a further update on progress in implementing Leicester's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023, since the last update in October 2021.

The report provided important background information for the period and showed the latest progress made since the last update across the key strategic aims.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on service provision was recognised, particularly in cases where court action was required. The effect on the homeless team was explained and acknowledged.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

10. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION FINDINGS INTO THE PROPOSED HOUSING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TEAM

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which provided information on the Executive's response to the findings of the Commission's review of the proposal for a new Housing Anti- Social Behaviour Team.

It was noted that the review was a focused exercise to gain clarity and assurances over the new proposal for a central Housing ASB team that would work closely with CrASBU (Crime and Anti- Social Behaviour Unit), to find out how the new structure would work and how it would improve processes and outcomes and how the team would work alongside other agencies including CrASBU.

It was reported that the review resulted in several recommendations and requested feedback once the new structure was in place and impact of the team in dealing with cases of anti-Social Behaviour to be reported back to the scrutiny commission.

The Lead Member for Housing and the Director of Housing welcomed the findings of the review and agreed for the recommendations from the review to be incorporated into future service delivery to help enhance the service proposal.

The positive feedback from tenant representative partners was also welcomed.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

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

12. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm.