



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor O'Neill - Chair

Councillor Adatia
Councillor Gopal
Councillor Waddington

Councillor Bajaj
Councillor Halford

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97. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Modhwadia, Councillor Gregg and Councillor Zaman. Councillor Adatia attended as substitute for Councillor Modhwadia.

98. Declarations of Interests

The Chair asked members of the commission to declare any interests for which there were none.

99. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Chair highlighted that the minutes for the meeting on 27 August 2024 were included within the papers and asked members for comments.

Agreed:

It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 August 2024 were a true and accurate record.

100. Chairs Announcements

The Chair thanked officers for the site visits that have occurred and reiterated the invitation for Members to attend future site visits once arranged.

101. Questions, Representations and Statements of Case

It was noted that none had been received.

102. Petitions

It was noted that none had been received.

103. Homelessness and Complex Needs Inquiry Day Findings

The Chair submitted the report and Councillor Sahu from the Public Health and Health Integration Scrutiny Commission attended for this item. It was noted that:

- The inquiry day took place on 3rd October. It started at 9am and finished at 5pm providing a full day to consider the homelessness and complex needs in the city from a joint perspective of housing and health.
- The focus was on substance misuse and homelessness and the task group appreciated that there are many complex aspects to it.
- The variety of organisations who attended provided a great deal of insight.
- Some issues with miscommunications were identified in the pathways used by different organisations so the inquiry day allowed these to be addressed.
- Concerns were raised around the rough sleeper funding which was due to end and questions asked around what funding would look like in the future.
- The Police were not in attendance, but it was highlighted that there was interest in their perspective on the issue and whether this could be arranged.
- Overall, good services and provision were identified in the city for those who are homeless.
- The inquiry day identified further work was needed on families and homelessness in the city and pathways for those leaving prison.
- There has been limited housing stock in the city and the needs of the homeless population needs to be considered to support them so they may build a positive tenancy.
- The receipts from the Right to Buy scheme are needed by the council for tackling the housing crisis.

The Director of Housing thanked the task group and presented an update on the recommendations made in the report. It was noted that:

- Homelessness has been a hot topic due to the pressures involved. Tighter integration between housing and health has been pushed to address the complexities around homelessness so the task group

was a positive move towards this.

- There has been a proposed step up in relations and support to the families that are in temporary accommodation. Public Health and Housing have aimed to complete a piece of work on families in temporary accommodation.
- Work has already begun considering the pathway from prison and how this can be strengthened.
- 'Help Beyond Housing' has been working closely with health partners as part of a city-wide group. There are currently 67 cases where intensive floating support has been provided and 9 trainer accommodation units in the ZIP building. How this has worked will be reported to make the case for further funding.
- Contractors have progressed work rapidly at the Dawn Centre with a clear plan of delivery for the next few months. Partners are included in ongoing discussions in this period as the internal structure is shaped and services are explored for the centre. This will continue to be reviewed once the site is live.
- There has been further guidance issued to all staff on the subject of families and mental health support.
- The service has taken on board the recommendation around partner agencies referring individuals for support to prevent rough sleeping.
- The Director of Housing has met with national homelessness advisors and reiterated that all existing and further funding is required to strengthen services. Positively, £234,000 of additional funding has been given for winter support.
- The recent budget announcements by Government have stated significant change to the discounts for the Right to Buy scheme, although this will not take effect immediately. It has meant there has been a rush of applications for the purchase of properties.
- New council housing sites have been identified and new council housing will be built. There has also been proactive work with other teams to identify redundant council assets that could be brought into use.
- An extensive acquisitions programme has been ongoing.
- Budget reports have been scheduled for December at OSC and January at this commission.
- 125 leases have been requested but these have been difficult to get over the line.
- Prompt sheets have been put in place for staff to ensure partner agencies are informed to further support joint working and communications.
- The Joint Specific Needs Assessment has been embedded in the homelessness strategy.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- The inquiry day was a successful scrutiny model and should be considered for other topics moving forward.
- Families and homelessness had been a strong theme from the inquiry day.

- The ZIP building transformation has been done well and the support model that has been on offer in it looks good. This type of tenancy has not been considered for more complex cases though as they would need higher levels of support and intervention.
- The deadline for applications for the Right to Buy at the previous rates was 21st November 2024. The scheme is not ending but the cap has been reduced. Tenants are still entitled to exercise the right to buy.
- The engagement and work seen during the inquiry day and after demonstrates the commitment of those working in this area.
- Concerns were raised that it is impossible to live a normal, stable family life in bed and breakfast or temporary accommodation. The numbers of families in this type of accommodation has reduced though.
- On 5th November 2024, 517 families were in temporary accommodation. 143 families were in bed and breakfast accommodation with the rest in more suitable accommodation. The average length of stay has reduced to just under 90 days however work has been continuing to reduce this further.
- Out of hours support has been available for tenancy issues on 0116 254 9439.
- The homelessness emergency number 0116 221 2770 goes to the Dawn Centre. If a situation has been seen as critical, a district manager can be asked for. The importance of seeing and assessing an individual will be reiterated to staff.
- The council has aimed to provide consistent accommodation to those in temporary accommodation but sometimes the hotels have made changes to bookings. This has been negated where possible by making block bookings and bringing forward temporary accommodation models.
- Most temporary accommodations offered are in the city centre but if unable to accommodate this can sometimes be further afield. For children, employment etc, it is endeavoured to maintain the locality.
- The rough sleeper count was due to take place and Members were invited to attend the count.
- It has been positive seeing trauma informed approaches being used. It has been important to recognise that the individuals have needed consistency. There is not a universal approach that will work as often there are many layers of disadvantage involved.
- When weather is milder, the accommodation offer has not always been taken up. During winter, more accommodation has been provided to bring people off the streets as quickly as possible. VCS organisations have helped to facilitate this. They have also helped to build trust with individuals and take the opportunity to work with them where possible.
- Homeless Charter leaflet to be shared with Members.

Agreed:

Members thanked all involved for their work and the Commission endorsed the report.

104. Selective Licensing

The Team Manager of Private Sector Housing and Area Environmental Health presented the item, and it was noted that:

- The scheme was introduced in October 2022.
- The areas of the city which had been selected for the selective licensing scheme were based on data showing which areas had poor housing conditions, significant levels of private rentals and rapid turnover.
- Any rented properties in the areas identified had to apply for selective licensing. This meant submitting and paying for a licence to ensure the property was suitable and safe for tenants.
- 6 major metrics have been used to track progress. As of September 2024, there had been a shortfall in applications to reach the 85% target. There has been work to address this.
- The scheme has just entered year 3 of the 5 years.
- There were discounts initially for landlords, but this ended in spring 2024. The discounts created a flurry of activity but this slowed down. This meant the project has moved into the enforcement stage where the team has gone out to find the properties.
- Applications have still been received that are not completed correctly so work has been done to help landlords with this.
- A significant number of properties that have been inspected had at least 1 hazard.
- Encouragingly, there were 1124 properties without any hazards.
- The inspection covered 29 different categories of hazards.
- Different initiatives have been introduced to see which are most effective for encouraging applications.
- Following an inspection, landlords have been given the opportunity to correct the problems identified. An improvement notice has been served only if landlords fail to correct the problems. Only 10 improvement notices have been issued.
- Focused work has been done with the police to serve 19 prohibition orders.
- Prohibition orders have also been served where properties or rooms are not suitable for use or are uninhabitable.
- 16 investigations are still ongoing with evidence being gathered. Following this process the landlord is invited for an interview under caution. Some investigations have no further action, but it can be that a civil penalty up to £30,000 is issued or a prosecution is required.
- Areas in the city that have been under the selective licensing scheme include Spinney, Stonegate, Fosse, Westcotes, Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields and Saffron.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- In year 4 of the scheme, it will be reviewed to assess the impact it has had and then it will be decided how the scheme will look moving forward. This could change based on government changes to legislation such as the Renters Rights Bill.
- The scheme has been self-funding. The licensing fee has been £1290 with no discounts. There was an 18-month opportunity to have a discounted rate.
- This scheme has not considered rental costs, but other measures outside of selective licensing have done this.
- This scheme has helped to address the power balance between landlords and tenants where tenants have been fearful of reporting concerns. This scheme has allowed the council to access properties that otherwise they would have no right to enter as private rentals.

Agreed:

The Commission noted the report.

105. Housing Safety

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- It was an update for the 4 high risk buildings in the city.
- Post Grenfell, building safety is regulated by the Building Safety Regulator and a building safety case must be submitted.
- The report provided an overview of what a case looks like with information on the blocks and different risks and aspects of the building.
- There are plans that show the compartmentalisation that has maintained the 30-minute fire protection that is a large aspect of fire safety in the high risk buildings.
- A significant change has been that a responsible person must be named for the building safety regulator since Grenfell. A list of responsible individuals in Leicester City Council has been available.
- The responsible person has responsibility for making any changes required following risk assessments.
- Further work has been ongoing to reduce risk in the buildings such as talking to tenants and inhabitants to ensure they are informed, tenant fire safety workshops and permit to work contracts for contractors.
- A structural survey was carried out that was positive but recommended further structural testing.
- All flats have adequate compartmentation, and this has been assessed.
- There have been annual consultations with tenants to update fire safety notices.
- Risk in communal spaces has been highlighted.
- A property information box that has contained all the building plans and relevant information has been made available.
- There was no gas or cladding which has meant no remedial work since

Grenfell on these issues.

- The blocks have fire dampers to help prevent the spread of fire.
- There are passive fire protection practises in place that also help maintain fire safety.
- The tenant profiles are reviewed to ensure the emergency strategy for the block is appropriate.
- There has been a resident engagement strategy in place as Grenfell residents had felt they were not listened to. Consulting with residents has allowed them to voice their expectations and there is a dedicated email for this purpose.
- The system used has been upgraded so that all information will be kept in one place.
- The building case is to be updated on an annual basis to make sure all changes are completed and the building safety regulator has been updated.
- Fire information and safety has been taken very seriously and it was hoped that the report has reflected this.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- The report reassured Members, especially around the needs of more vulnerable tenants.
- There have been active tenants that feed back to the service and the team has an office in one of the blocks so there have not been any issues of communication but anyone who would like to advocate for tenants would be supported and an engagement strategy is being worked on.
- Most tenants have preferred to be contacted by email.
- 6 months has been the average for fire checks, but this has differed across different accommodation.

Agreed:

The Commission noted the report.

106. Work Programme

The Chair noted the work programme and asked that any suggestions be shared with officers.

107. Any Other Urgent Business

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 19.26.

