



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor O'Neill (Chair)
Councillor Zaman (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj
Councillor Gopal

Councillor Gregg
Councillor Halford

Councillor Joshi
Councillor Waddington

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In Attendance
Deputy City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin – Housing & Neighbourhoods

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr Modhwadia, Cllr Joshi attended as substitute. It was noted that the Regulator of Social Housing representatives were in attendance online.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes for the meeting on 7 January 2025 were included within the papers and asked members for comments.

AGREED:

- It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2025 were a true and accurate record.

4. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair updated the commission on the site visit to Saffron Lane, which took place on 6 February 2025. She noted that the visit gave members the opportunity to view the early stages of the development. This visit was the final one in the series of highlighted sites scheduled for the commission's visit.

5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The following representation was submitted by Mr S. Raja.

1. Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) & Compliance

- The recent FOI response (Ref: FOIA 33570) confirmed that while all council-owned residential properties have an FRA, 700 properties have not had an assessment in the past three years.
- Can the council confirm its timeline for conducting up-to-date FRAs on these properties?
- Will residents be given access to FRA schedules for their buildings?
- If the council was so confident in the FRA from 2017, how has January 2025 on one of seven hundred properties found concerns? Were the internal reviews flawed?

2. Fire Safety Concerns & Transparency

- The council claims that no inquiries from Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) have gone unanswered.
- However, can the council provide a record of past concerns raised by LFRS, action taken, and deadlines met to ensure full transparency?

3. Right to Buy (RTB) Delays & Complaints

- The council has refused to provide data on financial losses or complaints related to RTB delays, citing retrieval costs.
- Given the significant increase in RTB applications, does the council have sufficient staffing and resources to process applications without unnecessary delays?
- Can the council commit to publishing RTB complaint statistics quarterly to improve transparency? I understand there is no measure at present and so the leadership demonstrates they have no control over potential improvements.
- I request a measurement of the RTB (Right to Buy) team's case response rates. How long do they currently take per case? Will the council commit to an improvement plan? Currently, there are no publicly available statistics, meaning no transparency or accountability on this matter.

4. RTB Lease Pack Charges & Accountability

- The council charges £125 per lease pack but does not track total revenue from these charges.
- Shouldn't this be a recorded financial transaction, given that it

involves resident payments? How does the department ensure the finances are allocated correctly back to RTB or Housing?

- Can the council provide a breakdown of what this charge covers and how it is justified? If no account is kept, then how have they made up this figure and justify it?

5. Impact of RTB Sales on Affordable Housing Supply

- Given the budget strain expected from the spike in RTB applications, what specific measures is the council taking to offset housing stock depletion?
- Can the council outline its strategy to replenish lost social housing in the coming years?

6. Estate Management & Housing Services

- The last Scrutiny Commission meeting highlighted concerns about fly-tipping and estate maintenance in council-owned housing. I would think the estate maintenance would include commitment to fire safety.
- What enforcement strategy is in place to tackle fly-tipping, particularly in council housing areas?
- Given the confusion around the roles of City Wardens vs. Estate Wardens, can a clear responsibility guide be provided to tenants?

In Mr Raja's absence, the representation was taken as read. The Director of Housing provided a summary response, and it was noted that:

- The full, written response was to be sent to Mr Raja in due course.
- All council-owned blocks of flats have a Fire Risk Assessment, the frequency of which are based on the block risk. The block this enquiry referred to held the lowest risk and there was no mandatory timescale for conducting the assessment. The FRA was last carried out 7 years ago. The new FRA had now been completed and it identified a few minor issues that had since been completed. The process was not felt to be flawed.
- Leicester City Council's working relationship with Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service was very good. Independently chosen sites were audited, and any further requests for information had to be met by a specific date which had always occurred on time.
- There had been a significant increase in Right to Buy applications, which has affected turnaround times.
- The lease pack charge of £125 reflected administrative costs and established financial governance procedures had been followed to ensure appropriate management of payments.
- Estate Wardens carried out regular ongoing maintenance of estates, while City Wardens worked with Housing officers to address instances where waste had been fly-tipped, and tenants needed to be interviewed and possibly fined for the offence.

The Chair asked whether members had any questions or comments. It was noted that:

- City wardens were going to be working outside of their usual locations for several weeks, meaning more pressure may fall on Housing Officers. Appropriate communications were suggested.

6. PETITIONS

It was noted that none had been received.

7. SUCCESSION POLICY

The Director of Housing submitted a report to set out Leicester City Council's succession policy and to give an overview of the legislation that undergirds this policy.

It was noted that:

- Succession occurred when a qualified individual took over the tenancy of a deceased tenant. This process did not require permission from the council or a formal application.
- Under the 1985 Housing Act, family members who had resided in the property for at least 12 months before the tenant's death were entitled to succession. However, the Localism Act 2012 amended this provision, limiting automatic succession rights to spouses or partners only.
- The council's policy on succession had not been reviewed since 2020 due to the pandemic and other factors. Therefore, it retained the old position of permitting other family members to succeed in a tenancy.
- The succession procedure in the council had been to assess the suitability of the surviving family member who meets the succession criteria, to continue to live on the property. Where the property was deemed unsuitable, the council assisted with relocation to a more appropriate home.
- The succession policy also contained specific guidelines on changes from sole to joint, and joint to sole tenancies.
- When a bereaved family member occupant was deemed not to have the right to remain on a property, conversations about relocating them would be challenging and sensitive. This ensured the Council approached such discussions with empathy and understanding.
- Notices were generally served no more than 6-12 months following the tenant's passing.
- The future options for the council to explore were whether to adopt an automatic right of succession or allow officers to exercise discretion based on individual circumstances.
- A key consideration in formulating the succession policy was to encourage communication regarding succession rights to the council's tenants, particularly when they were adults who were dependent on

care.

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

- The council did not have the authority to grant succession; it occurred automatically when the legal criteria have been met.
- Where an individual was unlawfully occupying a property, the council was entitled to charge mesne profit, which was the equivalent of the rent that would have been payable on the property. In such cases, the council could also work with the occupant to review their other rights and explore alternative housing options, which could lead to them being relocated to a more suitable property.
- The council tried to prevent homelessness as much as possible. Therefore, if an occupant was not qualified to succeed, they would normally be allowed to remain on the property until they are rehoused.
- If a decision was made against a tenant's succession claim, they would have no legal right to appeal.
- Rehousing rightful tenants was not done through direct let, eliminating the need for tenants who were waiting to be rehoused to join a waiting list.
- The council's policies were expected to align with the legal frameworks on succession, and best practice was to review every 3-5 years.
- In a case of joint tenancy, both tenants held equal rights. Either of them could give notice, which effectively brought the tenancy to an end.
- Extending the timeframe for informing bereaved occupants about their lack of succession rights or potential rehousing would impact other benefits, such as Universal Credit.
- Tenancy succession was not a gift, but a right bestowed by law that is non-transferable. Consequently, a couple could not decide if their child would succeed them.

AGREED:

The Commission noted the report.

8. TENANT INVOLVEMENT PROPOSALS

The Director of Housing submitted a report which provided an update on the formation of a Divisional and Communication Strategy for the Tenants and Leaseholders who live in properties owned and managed by Leicester City Council.

The Deputy City Mayor introduced the item, and it was noted that:

- Previously, the infrastructure that existed in the local authority

and VCS was far larger and there were far more active tenant associations in the city. Unfortunately, years of austerity, budget cuts and the Covid pandemic fundamentally eroded them.

- A key complaint faced was that tenants had not been able to contact their housing officer. The role of the housing officer had evolved to meet the increasingly complex needs of tenants which meant that the service had changed as well.
- The Council recognised the role they needed to play in responding to tenants.
- Tenancy engagement was first discussed 18 months ago. The Council wanted to provide a more consistent offer that allowed equal opportunity for engagement.
- Engagement sessions had begun last year. Out of these had come clear messages from tenants which had led to the development of the pop-up Housing offices. Further work was needed to build on what had been started and to use the good practises found and this was to form a bigger piece of work moving forward.

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

- The report provided an update on the strategy and structures that were being put in place which would allow tenants to scrutinise the Council, including the Tenant Engagement Strategy.
- It was highlighted that this was a journey to improve engagement, and success was to be measured by tenant satisfaction.
- The first Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) occurred in 2023. This showed that 40.2% of tenants felt that they were listened to, and 46.8% thought that they were kept informed on important issues.
- The tenants were asked for their preferences, and alongside this were conversations in a pre-engagement process with tenants, the Tenancy Management Team and Neighbourhood Housing Officers.
- 6 engagement sessions occurred across the city, either on or near council housing estates in September 2024. The sessions provided a representative sample of tenants through face-to-face conversations and surveys. The methodology used attempted to capture the views of as many tenants as possible. However it was recognised that some demographics may not have fed into the pre-engagement period. It was hoped that these demographics would be captured as the engagement progressed.
- 54% of the respondents wanted service updates by email or text and 23% via phone.
- Respondents wanted more information on repairs, a means for contacting their housing officer, and concerns were raised on the difficulty of getting through via phone lines.
- For future engagement with the Housing Division, the majority of

respondents were in favour of in-person events, community events or the use of surveys.

- The Social Housing (Regulation) Act received Royal Assent in July 2023 which granted more powers to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). This allowed a more proactive management regime for the providers of social housing. The Act introduced consumer standards, which were to allow assessment of performance and outcomes for customers. A Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard was also introduced. Along with this, there was a variety of legislation which the Housing Division must comply with, including the Housing Acts and the Landlord and Tenant Act.
- A revised Code of Practice was published, which advocated for tenants being at the heart of decision making. This was taken forward in the strategy.
- The current engagement structure had allowed tenants to be involved in shaping a number of services through consultation and engagement.
- The survey had informed the strategy and had increased the focus on opportunities for face-to-face interactions, improved communications and increased use of WhatsApp, email and text.
- The recruitment of 3 district engagement officers was planned. These were to work across the city to help engage with tenants and facilitate the pop-up housing offices.
- The strategy had been launched at a city-wide event in January. 80 tenants attended and the response appeared enthusiastic.
- Tenants were encouraged to be involved in the tenant's scrutiny panel which was to scrutinise the housing services. The first meeting took place on 18th March. The initial meeting considered the terms of reference, agenda and work programme. The tenants had already identified areas of performance they wanted to monitor.
- It was noted that linking the two scrutiny commissions would be beneficial.
- It was an ongoing part of the strategy to consider how to encompass the diverse population of the city.

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

- Attempts had been made to engage with as many tenants as possible using alternative methods, such as leaflets and the incoming engagement officers who would be able to visit tenants in their homes or arrange sessions out of working hours, which allowed for work or childcare.
- The buildings that housed the housing offices were closed many years ago due to the cost of running them and the decreased footfall. Many of the housing offices and front of house service offer had been incorporated into other community hubs such as

libraries.

- There had been a move to online services, but there remained a cohort of tenants who want face-to-face interaction. The advantage of the pop-up offices was that they allowed face-to-face interactions without the associated costs of running a building.
- Concerns were raised that there was a lack of communication for those applying to be council tenants, particularly while on the register. The development of an engagement strategy aimed at those applying or waiting would be useful.
- There were around 6000 people waiting to be council tenants. Once they had applied, a letter of acknowledgement is sent, which makes the lack of social housing clear.
- A different team was allocated to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The drop-in sessions demonstrated that Homelessness Officers needed to be out in the community in a similar way to the Housing Officers. There was a lack of Homelessness Officers, but recruitment had now taken place with 30 officers in position, and the team was now looking to set these sessions up.
- It was queried whether AI technology could be used to help tenants, particularly with different languages. There was an ongoing corporate piece of work ongoing which was considering the use of AI to respond to basic enquiries.
- Members requested that pop-up housing office dates and locations were to be circulated for them to share with their constituents.
- There remained a landline for Housing Options which is 0116 454 1008. The Council needed to make better use of social media and WhatsApp. Doctors and dentists for example, were far more adept at using these channels for communications.
- Members asked that updates and the outcomes of the tenant panels be brought to this Commission.
- The most marginalised communities still faced barriers such as language and technology access including lack of email addresses.
- There were those who were illiterate in their first language, demonstrating the importance of engaging with local community groups with community language speakers.
- It was intended that the engagement officers would start work on how to reach and engage with the pockets of hard-to-reach communities in the city.
- The workforce was representative of the city, and the officers were deliberately placed in areas where their language skills would be of the most use. There was also a telephone translation service, and if IT literate, the web system can translate automatically if needed.
- The pop-up offices were a pilot which was to be reviewed after 12 months. At this point, it was intended to consider how it had

worked and what could be taken forward based on the need and benefit found in the communities.

- The housing team had several initiatives in mind and there were different ways that tenant engagement could be incorporated. However, this was to be dependent on the engagement that was received and whether it was representative. It was intended that a periodic report would measure this as the strategy was rolled out.
- There were 500 tenant responses on the consultation which resulted in changes after it was considered by the Deputy City Mayor and the Director of Housing. This was done in addition to a consultation on anti-social behaviour and took nearly a year to finalise as it was continuously reviewed based on the feedback received from tenants and partners. If changes were not feasible, feedback was always provided to explain why.

AGREED:

1. The Commission noted the report.
2. A report to come back the Commission on engagement with prospective tenants who have applied or are waiting on the social housing register. Including developments of the Homelessness Officers work in the community.
3. Update to be brought from tenants' scrutiny and ensure that their attendance at Housing Scrutiny Commission is enabled.
4. Pop-up office dates to be circulated to Members.
5. A report on the pop-up office pilot to come back in 12 months.

9. HOUSING CRISIS DELIVERY UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report to update the commission on progress made on the delivery of the Housing Crisis actions. It was noted that:

- The capacity of the Council to respond to housing needs had been significantly undermined by the introduction of the Right-to-Buy (RTB) scheme. In response to this, the council declared a housing crisis in 2022.
- This report served as an update to the one presented previously 12 months. It showed good progress had been made on the delivery of the LCC action plan. Of the 16 actions, 11 had been completed and 5 were in progress. Of the actions set out by the Government, 12 were in progress and 4 had been completed. The council remained on track to deliver 1500+ homes by 2027.
- An additional £500m had been added to the Affordable Housing programme by Government and the council was accessing this funding.
- In line with its commitment to strengthening private rental sector quality, the council had also made progress on its Private Rented

Sector (PRS) strategy, including the introduction of a Selective Licensing scheme.

- No increase to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was expected in 2025.
- The Renters Reform Bill would introduce changes including a national landlord register. Other proposed legislative changes included the abolition of Section 21 'no-fault' evictions, new rules around holiday accommodation, and changes to council tax on second homes. These changes were expected to have a positive impact. Section 21 was a significant contributor to homelessness, with many affected individuals needing the council for support.
- The council had provided a strong response regarding the qualification period before RTB. Local authorities would also be able to retain capital receipts from RTB sales.

In response to comments and questions, it was noted that;

- The national housing allowance had been set at the 30th percentile of local rents. However, with rising mortgage costs for landlords, rent affordability remained a challenge.
- Only 3% of the market was affordable for the PRS tenants on low income before the Local Housing allowance uplift in 2024.
- The Renters Reform bill was progressing through political processes and was expected to be completed in 2025.
- To meet the city's housing needs, the council had a well-established programme targeting 1500+ units.
- The new Local Plan would allocate new housing sites for development and was expected to be completed between late 2025 and early 2026. Work was already underway on sites currently allocated to Housing, and this positioned the council to be ahead of schedule once the Local Plan was approved.
- The status of the Local Plan was that certain modifications had been agreed upon with the inspectors following the initial examination. There would be further consultations on these modifications.
- The applicability of changes to the law on section 21 would be to all tenancies, both existing and new.
- Council tax on second homes would be subject to double council tax. If the property remained vacant for an extended period, the council could charge up to 400% as this time increased.
- There had been national challenges with the construction industry because of factors like COVID-19, the Ukraine War, and other factors. The strategy deployed by the council to mitigate this was ensuring that builders would have early sight of its plan, allowing them ample time to decide whether to tender any bids. This approach has led to more submissions and fostered long-term partnerships with contractors.
- The council had reviewed its procurement policy to ensure it was amenable to the market.
- The Selecting Licensing Scheme had recorded successes, and

- there were measures in place to address defaulting landlords.
- Some properties are excluded from the RTB scheme. The exclusion of some ground-floor flats in the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme would only occur if there had been adaptations made to the properties.
 - The impact of government policies in Leicester could mean the Council would face a £6M overspend on temporary accommodation for 2025/26; this would have been significantly worse without the current strategy.

AGREED:

The Commission noted the report.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited members to make suggestions, and it was noted that Maintenance Charges should be included on the agenda for the next meeting, if possible, since it was previously postponed.

11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 19.39.