



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Held: THURSDAY, 3 MARCH 2011 at 5.30pm

P.R.E.S.E.N.T.

Councillor Bhavsar – Vice-Chair (in the Chair)

Councillor Aqbany  
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Bajaj  
Councillor Newcombe

Also In Attendance

Councillor Westley

Cabinet Member for Housing

\* \* \* \* \*

**160. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clair, Grant and Scuplak.

**161. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applies to them.

There were no declarations of interest.

**162. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the meeting held on 3 February 2011 along with the minutes of the Special Meetings held on 3 February 2011 and 15 February 2011 were confirmed as a correct record.

**163. PETITIONS**

The following petition with 57 signatures, submitted by Councillor Bayford, was

submitted to the Board in the following terms:

*“We the undersigned are residents of the Avenue Road cul-de-sac, Leicester.*

*Some of us live in the sheltered housing accommodation at the end of the road, and some in other homes on the road.*

*We, the undersigned, request that the Avenue Road cul-de-sac be routinely gritted during icy or snowy weather.*

*There are 41 older people living in two sheltered housing blocks at the end of the road – between the ages of 55 and 97 years. The sheltered housing blocks encourage independent living and all facilities are provided to ensure this happens. Although this winter had been particularly inclement, every year the snow and ice along the cul-de-sac has meant that residents are stranded for days on end, and sometimes weeks, even after all the surrounding roads have become accessible. Because there is no through traffic, all other roads become clear before our road is. The steep camber on both the road and the pavement and the narrowness of the pavement make it difficult to walk along at the best of times, and the pavement is certainly impossible when there is snow or ice.*

*One resident has already slipped over this winter and another slipped over last year. The resident hurts his head and hand which required checking at the A&E Department. The scheme manager of the two sheltered housing schemes, a more able-bodied person than most residents, slipped on the cul-de-sac and suffered bruising when going about the business for which she is employed. Carers, family visitors and taxi drivers have all raised concerns about using the road and, on at least two occasions, people due to come to the sheltered housing scheme refused because they felt it was too unsafe to access. A family visitor refused to use the road in order to bring in essential shopping for a resident at Vernon House, and a taxi driver left his customer at the top of the cul-de-sac, deciding that it was too dangerous to drive down”.*

RESOLVED:

That the aforementioned petition be referred to the Monitoring Officer for consideration and action as appropriate.

#### **164. QUESTIONS/ REPRESENTATIONS/ STATEMENTS OF CASE**

There were no questions, representations or statements of case.

#### **165. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT**

The Director, Corporate Governance submitted a report that further updated Members on the monitoring of outstanding petitions.

RESOLVED:

That the current outstanding petitions be noted.

## 166. REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

The Director of Housing Strategy and Options submitted a report that recommended changes to the Housing Allocations Policy, in light of new statutory guidance issued by The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG), to improve transparency and to simplify the Council's Policy.

The Head of Housing Options introduced the report to the Board. She explained that the report recommended the Council to adopt a banding scheme for allocating housing rather than the existing points-based system. Members heard that a banding scheme had been introduced by most housing authorities. It was reported that a twelve week consultation on the proposals took place with over 30 key organisations and stakeholders.

Members were informed that the proposed changes would give higher priority to single parent families, severely overcrowded families and those leaving residential care or likely to require residential care to support the Adult Social Care transformation programme.

It was further explained by officers that within a particular band, priority would be determined by the date the application was placed in that band, with the person who had been waiting the longest within that band having the highest priority.

Should the proposals receive Cabinet approval, it was reported that the revised Housing Allocations Policy would be implemented by August 2011, and the performance of the new system would be monitored after a period of six months.

Councillor Westley, Cabinet Lead Member for Housing was also in attendance and addressed the Board in relation to this report. He welcomed the revised scheme, and felt that it would respond more quickly to people's housing needs than the present points based system. He was of the view that the system was both simpler and fairer, and stated that it was designed to help particular groups of people including single parents and those who had returned from duties with the Armed Forces. He also stated that it would benefit those who had been waiting for a suitable property for significant periods of time. This in particular was welcomed by Board Members.

It was commented that tenants often produced medical certification in order to hasten their progress in applying for Council housing, and that the reasons were often vague. The Cabinet Lead Member agreed that certifications were often used by tenants to assist with applications, but that clear evidence of a need was also required, often from a medical consultant.

Clarity was sought in connection with assistance provided to applicants placed in Band 5 with the equivalent of no housing points. The Head of Housing Options confirmed that 2,900 tenants would be placed in band five, and that

these people would be offered a property if no offers had been received from applicants in higher bands.

A Member of the Youth Council questioned what level of support was provided to Children leaving the care of the Council's Children and Young People's Services. Councillor Westley confirmed that all elected members were corporate parents, and it was deemed necessary for young people leaving the care of the Council to be placed in the highest band to provide the best opportunity for such individuals to be appropriately housed, and that assistance in doing so was provided to them by officers.

In response to a query around the allocation of families that had split, the Cabinet Lead member acknowledged that a surge in such cases could lead to a depletion of housing stock, but stated that it was necessary to take into account parental arrangements when determining the appropriate housing tenure for those who had temporary access to their children.

The proposed revised Housing Allocation Policy was generally welcomed by the Board, and many felt that it would assist their role of responding to queries around housing allocations to constituents.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the recommendations contained within it be endorsed.

## **167. CUSTOMER ACCESS TO LEICESTER HOME CHOICE**

The Director of Housing Strategy and Options submitted a report that advised Members on customer access to the Leicester HomeChoice scheme and levels of participation since its launch on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2010.

The Head of Housing Options introduced the report and stated that it was being presented as a result of a request at a previous meeting of the Board to receive an update on the progress of Leicester HomeChoice. Members were informed that the scheme launched on 21 April 2010, as the new method of allowing tenants to participate in the lettings process which provided transparency and greater choice for applicants with regards to where and when they wished to move.

It was stated that there were four main methods by which an applicant could apply for a property through Leicester HomeChoice. The most popular of these was through the internet, with this being the method for 92% of all bids to date. The other methods used were an automated phone system, text messaging and via digital television services. It was made clear that applicants could also request a paper copy of the scheme.

The Head of Housing Options reported that the scheme had operated by working closely with a number of key services that included libraries, customer services and housing and community centres.

The meeting was informed of the work undertaken to assist those who could

not easily access the scheme. Such methods included home visits and officers submitting automatic bids on behalf of customers. Furthermore, written information on the scheme was distributed to those who had not participated in the bidding process, and that the level of overall participation had consequently risen.

The Head of Housing Options referred to an appendix which compared the ethnicity of customers in relation to current applicants, bidders, lettings and refusals. In terms of the latter category, it was noted that there were relatively high levels of refusals from people within Asian communities, and that a piece of research to analyse this further was to take place. On this matter, it was questioned whether penalties were issued for those who refused the offer of a property. In response, officers explained that if an applicant refused three separate offers, then their application would be refused, and potentially suspended for up to 12 months. Councillor Westley, Cabinet Lead Member for Housing was in attendance and stated that it was important that such sanctions were in place to minimise abuse of the scheme.

Clarity was sought in relation to bids submitted on behalf of applicants. In reply, it was explained that applicants selected general locations that they wished to live within, before officers pursued any bidding. Councillor Westley also spoke of the intention to widen access to the scheme by installing access points in all housing offices in Leicester.

In response to a question around those who had been allocated housing that was unsuitable for their needs, officers reported that such cases should be referred to dedicated housing officers to discuss issues of concern. With regards to incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB), Councillor Westley informed Members that all low level ASB was now dealt with by local housing offices and that more serious incidents were dealt with by LASBU.

A question was asked with regards to the length of time at applicants should wait to receive a PIN in order to access Leicester Home Choice. Officers explained that the target time to issue a PIN was within 10 working days, though member stated that they were aware of a case where an applicant had to wait significantly longer.

Members generally welcomed the progress made with regards to Leicester HomeChoice and felt that overall the scheme had been operating well since its inception.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the current access methods and levels of participation to the scheme be noted.
- (2) That the strategy in place with non-bidders be noted; and
- (3) That the process in place for dealing with customers who may be experiencing difficulty in accessing the scheme be noted.

## **168. CITY CENTRE CAR PARKING STRATEGY SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)**

The Strategic Director, Development, Culture and Regeneration, submitted a report that sought consideration of the City Centre Car Parking Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Members generally welcomed the proposals outlined within the report. It was pointed out that a further report would be presented to the Board later in the year which covered a city-wide parking strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the recommendations contained within it be endorsed.

## **169. POLICY FOR CONSERVATION OF ROAD SALT STOCK LEVELS**

The Strategic Director, Development, Culture and Regeneration submitted a report that asked members to consider a policy concerning Conservation of Road Salt Stock Levels.

An officer from the Highway Maintenance Group introduced the report to Members and explained that the Council's supply of road salt had proved resilient during the last 3 winters and the City had not run out of salt. However, national salt supply shortages meant difficulties had arisen in obtaining replacement stock in good time. He stated that following the severe recent winter weather, the government advice is that local authorities should prepare a Road Salt Conservation Policy to deal with possible shortfalls. The Council's proposed approach assumed a phased withdrawal of elements of the winter service based on the prevailing risk factors and salt stock levels. Members heard that it was intended to protect key major roads as part of the policy.

The officer reported that the need for the application of salt conservation measures depended on the degree of risk that arose from a number of factors including the current stock level, the weather forecast, the time in the season, expected restocking dates and the potential for delays and actual usage rates.

Following further clarity around the prioritisation for road gritting, the Board were informed that when road salt levels reached a particular point, certain elements of the service were reduced, with secondary routes being omitted firstly. It was further stated that due to funding constraints, contributions towards the provision of grit bins via ward budgets were welcomed, and in such cases, the Council would be responsible for associated ongoing maintenance costs.

In light of an anticipated increase in expenditure on road salt, it was questioned

whether the authority could presently purchase a full capacity of stock, prior to the rise in price. In response, the officer explained that 1,000 tonnes of road salt was ordered in November which would take the total stock to approximately 2,000 tonnes, and agreed that it was necessary to maximise the level of stock of road salt.

It was also questioned whether officers considered altering the prioritisation of road gritting as a result of accident rates. It was explained that such trends could potentially guide changes to the classification of particular roads, and that a review is undertaken annually to determine 'hot-spot' areas with a proportionally high number of accidents.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the recommendations contained within it be endorsed.

## **170. PRIVATE SESSION**

### **PRIVATE SESSION**

RESOLVED:

that the press and public be excluded during consideration of the following reports in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, because they involved the likely disclosure of 'exempt' information, as defined in the Paragraph detailed below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and taking all the circumstances into account, it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the information as exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

#### Paragraph 3

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

#### Paragraph 5

Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

## **171. ICT STRATEGY - MODERNISING THE BUSINESS**

The Director, information, submitted a report that considered the ICT infrastructure needed to be put in place as part of the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy and to support the Council's programme of transformation.

RESOLVED:  
that the report be noted.

**172. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 7:40pm.