



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2015 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Westley

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly: Assistant Mayor, Housing

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56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Joshi and V. Patel.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they had in the business to be discussed on the agenda.

Councillor Aqpany declared that a family member was a council tenant.

Councillor Newcombe declared that he was a council tenant.

Councillor Westley declared that members of his family were council tenants.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interest. Councillors were not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion on the agenda items.

58. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute 49, City Mayor's Delivery Plan, Housing Contribution

Members had received a written response for questions raised at the last

meeting.

Minute 50, Housing Allocations Policy Consultation

The Chair noted an amendment to the minutes of the meeting on 3rd February 2015, Minute Item 50, final paragraph to read "They also asked that wider member consideration of the report would be required".

Cllr Aqbany noted other questions raised and not included in the minutes would be presented to the Chair in written form.

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 3 February 2015, subject to the above amendment, be confirmed as a correct record.

59. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

In accordance with Council procedures, it was reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

60. PETITIONS

In accordance with Council procedures, it was reported that no petitions had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

61. COMMUNAL CLEANING TASK GROUP REPORT

The Chair presented a report to the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the review of the communal cleaning service undertaken by the City Cleaning Services on behalf of Council tenants and leaseholders.

The Chair said a number of meetings and site visits alongside tenants had taken place, and was a very useful review undertaken in the light of concerns expressed by councillors, tenants and tenant representatives about the standard, value for money and effectiveness of the communal areas cleaning service. The report contained a number of short term and long term recommendations.

Members noted there were some areas that were difficult to clean by staff. They requested that the floor coverings in difficult to clean areas be looked at, and if the budget could be looked at with the possibility of replacement floor coverings in certain areas. Mats had also been removed from outside of flats, which meant dirt was being taken into flats. It was reported that a resident had contact the fire service, and he had been informed that mats outside of flats did not pose a fire risk. He asked if they could be reintroduced.

Task Group members had also highlighted the differential in charges, as the foremost of tenants concerns, and the variation of charges from flats to flats. Members said that there needed to be some consistency in charging, and that

the different charges were causing a lot of problems. A tenant representative also asked that shutter doors also be maintained.

The Chair thanked everyone involved with the review. The Assistant Mayor for Housing echoed comments and welcomed the report.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Commission note the Task Group report and supported its recommendations.

62. RENT ARREARS REPORT

The Income Collection Manager presented a report relating to rent arrears for 6th October 2014 to 2nd January 2015. He summarised details in the report and answered questions from Members as follows:

- There was a 1.69% improvement in the amount of cash owing compared to the same quarter last year, despite economic problems and the impact of welfare reforms.
- There was a 19% increase in tenant numbers with serious rent arrears, but overall the number of cases was less than 2011/12.
- It was estimated an extra £1.34million in cash would need to be collected as a response of the bedroom tax.
- The arrears among those affected by Bedroom Tax had decreased, and reflected the efforts made by officers in this area of work.
- There were 78 evictions in the nine months up to 2nd January 2015, compared to 44 for the same period the previous year. 56 were single people and 22 were families. Only 12 of the evictions were directly affected by the impact of welfare reforms, with some but not all having an element of Bedroom Tax impact. Members were interested in where people went who had been evicted. The Income Collection Manager said the information on a case by case basis would take time to accumulate, and would be provided at a future meeting.
- Of the 3,816 people owing 2 weeks or more arrears, about half were long term cases, and had been in debt for a long time. A lot of officers' work was with the same families over a period of time. The other half dealt with their arrears or ended up abandoning the property.
- Members asked if officers provided benefits information for people facing hardship. They were informed that there had been little take-up of the service Clockwise offered, with only five applications for rent payment accounts having been processed, though it was believed interest would increase once Universal Credit was implemented.
- Assistance was given to people in arrears if they engaged with Housing Services, including benefit entitlement assessment, and steered towards services people could access, for example, Citizens Advice Bureau, the welfare benefits service at the council, Christians against poverty helping people to budget, and deal closely with revenue and benefits.
- There had been problems retrieving the figure for the proportion of rent collected (formerly BVPI 66(a)), and at the time of the meeting the figure was not available, and would be reported at the next Scrutiny Commission

meeting. However, it was reported that rent arrears for the four months from December 2014 were approximately £22k less than at the same point the previous year. The figures stated that Leicester was quite good in comparison with other authorities, at around 99.11% collection rate at year end. Members requested further background information in comparison with other authorities.

Members asked the minutes to note that the future Housing Scrutiny Commission be asked to look at the eviction policy, and what help individuals received throughout the eviction process. The Scrutiny Officer noted the request for the work programme of the Scrutiny Commission in the new municipal year.

The Chair thanked the Income Collection Manager for the report.

RESOLVED:

1. that the progress report be noted by the Commission Members.

63. TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM ACTION AND DECISION LOG

The meeting was informed it had been agreed at a previous meeting that the minutes from the tenants and leaseholders meeting would be attached to agendas for the Scrutiny Commission Members to note.

AGREED:

1. That tenants and leaseholders meeting minutes be attached to future agendas for Commission Members to note.

64. HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair thanked everybody for their contributions and work over the last municipal year, and looked forward to working with everyone in the future. The meeting was informed the new work programme for the Scrutiny Commission would be developed in the next municipal year following the local election.

65. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

1. Councillors thanked tenants' representatives for their work with scrutiny, the Director and officers in the Housing Department for their work for the betterment of tenants, and officers supporting the Scrutiny Commission. The Assistant Mayor for Housing also thanked Councillors, officers and tenants for the constructive work undertaken.

66. CLOSE OF MEETNG

The meeting closed at 6.10pm.