

Leicester
City Council

MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2015
TIME: 5:30 pm
PLACE: Meeting Room G.01, Ground Floor, City Hall, 115 Charles Street, Leicester, LE1 1FZ

Members of the Scrutiny Commission

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillors Aqbany, Joshi, Mayat, V. Patel, Potter and Westley

Members of the Scrutiny Commission are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business listed overleaf.

For Monitoring Officer

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If you have any queries about any of the above or the business to be discussed, please contact Angie Smith, **Democratic Support on (0116) 454 6354** or email Angie.Smith@leicester.gov.uk or call in at City Hall, 115 Charles Street.

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PUBLIC SESSION

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Appendix A

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 3rd February 2015 are attached, and Members are asked to confirm them as a correct record.

4. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer to report on the receipt of any questions, representations or statements of case received in accordance with Council procedures.

5. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer to report on the receipt of any petitions received in accordance with Council procedures.

6. COMMUNAL CLEANING TASK GROUP REPORT

Appendix B

The Chair will present the communal cleaning scrutiny task group report.

The Housing Scrutiny Commission is invited to approve the recommendations within the report.

7. RENT ARREARS REPORT

Appendix C

The Director of Housing submits a report on rent arrears for the period October 2014 to December 2014.

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

Appendix D

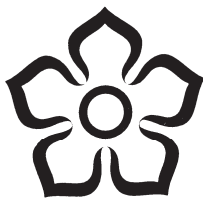
The Housing Scrutiny Commission is asked to note the attached notes from recent Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum meetings.

9. HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

Appendix E

The Housing Scrutiny Commission is asked to note the attached work programme.

10. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS



Leicester
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Appendix A

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2015 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany

Councillor Joshi

Councillor Westley

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly: Assistant City Mayor, Housing

* * * * *

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Veejay Patel.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Aqbany declared that a family member was a council lessee.

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

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

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

46. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute Item 32. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Newcombe asked for the agenda item to be amended to read 'a family member was a council lessee'.

Minute Item 36. Housing Revenue Account Budget (Including Capital Programme) 2015/16

Councillor Aqbany asked if there had been any information from other authorities proposals received. The Scrutiny Officer to follow up and circulate information.

Minute Item 37. Voids Improvement Project Update

Councillor Aqbany asked if there was an update available. The Director of Housing reported there was a piece of work being undertaken looking at voids, which would be brought back to the Scrutiny Commission when complete.

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 10th December 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

47. 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.

48. PETITIONS

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

49. CITY MAYOR'S DELIVERY PLAN, HOUSING CONTRIBUTION

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the service elements in the City Mayor's Delivery Plan that fell within the Housing Division, or which the Division made a contribution towards, and on progress up to 30th September 2014.

The Director of Housing highlighted the following points in the report:

- Good progress was being made on the provision of new affordable housing.
- Preventing homelessness – the Service prevented homelessness for 1,525 household – a steady rate at 72%. The numbers of people contacting the Service had gone down slightly.
- The Repeat Homeless list contained information on those people who had been in and out of hostels four or more times in the past two years, or who repeatedly slept rough. The number of people on the list fluctuated as

- people joined and left the list. Though it was a small amount of people, it took a lot of time and resources to help people into a settled lifestyle.
- Other parts of the report talked about housings contribution to council-wide targets.

In response to a question, the Director of Housing said figures of homeless people on the list were a snapshot at different times in the year, i.e. 69 people on 31 March 2014, and 89 people as at the end of September 2014. She added the numbers would fluctuate, and it was too early to tell if winter would have a bearing on the figures. She added it was encouraging that 80 people had been able to get off the measure, were now settled and hadn't been back to the Services; she said this was a huge achievement.

Members said they would have liked more information included under Item 3 in the report, as follows:

- 3.1 – how were graduates were recruited, from what areas, and were the unemployment levels quite high in those areas.
- 3.2 – which firms had been given assistance under Enterprising Leicester.
- 3.3 – the target number of homes to be assisted under the internal Home Improvement Agency.
- 3.4 – where work on properties in the city had taken place, and where uncompleted works remained.
- 3.5 – in what areas landlords received discretionary grants for home energy improvements.
- 3.6 – whether home repair grants were repayable, and what the figures were for the grants.
- 3.7 – a request was made for data on cases of anti-social behaviour dealt with by Neighbourhood Housing Offices, where the cases were in the city, and if there were any recurring hotspots.
- 3.8 Members were pleased advice was being given to tenants and members of the public, but had concerns over any funding change for the service.

Members were informed details on the issues raised would take some time to gather, but would be provided to them. Information under Item 3.7 would be provided on a confidential basis.

The Director of Housing said that people sleeping rough in the city centre are always offered help by the Outreach Team. She added the Housing Department worked closely with the police to identify people in the communities who might be begging, but did have somewhere to sleep.

Members were also told the Head of Services was working with the voluntary sector to prepare proposals for the allocation of £15k for schemes to address loneliness and isolation, and was work in progress.

The Chair welcomed the information, and considered apprenticeships in the Housing Department as a great step forward.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing for the report, and looked forward to

a future report in due course.

RESOLVED:

1. that the report be received.
2. that a breakdown of information requested be provided to Members, with anti-social behaviour cases by ward area and hotspots be provided on a confidential basis.

50. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY CONSULTATION

The Director of Housing and Assistant Mayor for Housing submitted a report - regarding recent consultation on the Housing Allocations Policy - which was presented by the Head of Service (Homelessness Section), and Service Manager (Housing Options). The Executive had sought the views of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy.

The Department for Communities and Local Government had issued guidance in June 2012 and December 2013 requiring housing authorities to review their existing housing allocation policies.

Proposed changes to four areas of the Allocations Policy were set out in Appendix 1 of the report:

- To give consideration to those who need to live in the city, to give or receive support from close family members, subject to meeting at least one of the outlined criteria, for example, to only consider applicants currently working within the city of Leicester for the last 12 months.
- To exclude people who owned their own home from joining the housing register unless there were extenuating circumstances, for example if the occupant was facing homelessness or fleeing from violence.
- To exclude households who had financial resources to secure alternative accommodation, i.e. households with a total income of £25k per year (single household), £40k per year (joint households), or capital assets of over £50k, to ensure social housing was allocated to those with the greatest household need.
- To give priority to working households or those in local training schemes who needed to move closer to their occupations.

As the proposed changes were considered to be major, it had been necessary to consult with registered social housing providers which had nomination agreements with the council, and consultation closed on 16 January 2015, and had received a total of 52 responses. The results were reported as follows.

In Favour	Not In Favour	Not Sure	No Answer
Leicester City Requirement			
37 (71%)	12 (23%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Owner Occupiers			
39 (75%)	10 (19%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
Financial Resources			

33% (63%)	13 (25%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)
Community Contributions			
34 (65%)	7 (14%)	10 (19%)	1 (2%)

The results of the consultation, and comments from Housing Scrutiny Commission Members, would be reported to the Executive for a decision.

Members said they were disappointed at the small number of people who had taken part in the consultation, and that it would be difficult to ascertain a true picture of city views from those results. Members said the changes appeared to be draconian and a way of removing people from the Housing Register. They also queried the right for people who owned their own homes to be allowed to go onto the housing register. They added that given the current housing shortage, they agreed the proposals suggested in the report were the best the City Council could provide.

Officers reported a wording change in Appendix 1 (1) of the report, under the Leicester City Requirement, the council was proposing a strong local connection to the city, and between proposals should read 'or'.

In response to a request from Members, comparison work with Nottingham, Derby and Northampton Councils would be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Commission.

The Chair asked that officers note the comments of Members, and to report back to the Executive that they had a few concerns. They also asked the report be taken to Group for comment.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Commission note the report.
2. that comparison work with Nottingham, Derby and Northampton, be circulated to Members.

51. PROVISION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR TEENAGE PARENTS

The Director of Housing provided a report on the provision of temporary accommodation for teenage parents. The report was presented by the Service Manager.

Members were informed the current contract with GAP would come to a natural end in July 2015, and the contract could not be extended any further. The report identified savings of £65k within the Homelessness Strategy 2013-18. With the current contract coming to an end, 15 units of accommodation would be returning to general housing.

The report outlined the benefits to the client group of bringing the teenage parent provision in-house and managing the service by making use of the existing provision within Border House families' hostel. The Homelessness Strategy identified the need for 10 units of accommodation based support for

teenage parents.

Border House has self-contained units of accommodation including facilities for families with disabilities and benefits from the services offered by the Corner Club which include a range of activities for parents and children. The Family Support Service, also attached to Border House, provides more specialist support and can signpost to services including Doctor, Dentist and health Visitors. Border House would also provide an enhanced service as it is staffed on a 24 hour basis. Members were told that teenage parents would be accommodated with families at Border House, and the community arrangement and support of staff made it an encouraging environment for all who stayed there.

Members were told that provision would cater for children who were 16+ years, and only 2 in the past year had fallen into the 16-17 years age bracket. Parents under 16 years were the responsibility of children's services. They were informed the demand for accommodation could fluctuate, and if demand outstripped supply then the Housing Service would have to look at re-commissioning a specific service for the client group.

AGREED:

1. that the report be noted.

52. TENANCY MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Director of Housing submitted a presentation on the Tenancy Management Improvement Project, which was delivered by the Head of Service (Estate Management and Tenancy Support), and the Business Change Manager. The presentation outlined the aim of the project to identify efficiencies and service improvements. A report would be presented to the Director of Housing containing recommendations and final analysis.

In response to a question, Members were informed Red Quadrant Consultants had already undertaken work in Adult Social Care, and were appointed following a formal tender for the work.

The Head of Service reported the project would involve a number of reviews, including staffing arrangements, roles and responsibilities, and how tenants accessed services. Step one of the project included the need to establish what local tenancy management work was being carried out, the impact of Responsive Repairs Improvement, and how the Northgate system will work. A review of the use of council buildings around the city would also be undertaken, and insights gained on why tenants came into an office. Some would be signposted to Granby Street Customer Services, which may result in capacity issues there.

Members said it was important tenants were able to contact the authority easily, and there were still many older people who did not have access to or knew how to use a computer. It was important for residents who could not come into town to have access to the service in their areas.

Members were told that several services working from one location had also proved to be successful, and suitable offices needed in each area would be established. Members requested feedback on the Service Review following its completion at the end February / beginning of March 2015. They acknowledged that call answering times to the department and repairs service had improved.

Members asked for the following to be taken on board:

- Litter and lighting issues on St Marks.
- Lift problems in the St Marks flats.
- Morale of staff fell during staff reviews.
- There was no meat on the bones as to what the structure would be like.
- Tenants would be wondering what service was going to be offered.
- Members would like to see housing offices remain, as they were the first point of call for Members.
- Members wished to compliment the staff working in housing offices, as being extremely responsive, and a credit to the service.
- They wanted more information on the Northgate system and how it would work.

The Assistant Mayor for Housing thanked Members for their comments. He said he was aware of difficult times ahead for the staff involved in the review, but he had confidence in officers being able to provide workable recommendations. He said not all housing offices were in the best location and accessible for tenants or repairs staff, and the numbers of housing offices needed to be looked at. He took on board the point about possible capacity issues in customer services facilities in the city centre, and was willing to explore the idea of some form of housing office in the city centre which would be more accessible for tenants. He added he looked forward to future recommendations

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and asked that comments be noted by the Executive and Housing Officers.

RESOLVED:

1. that the presentation be noted.
2. comments be taken on board by the Executive and Housing Officers.
3. further information be brought to a future Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting on the Northgate System.

53. HOUSING SPENDING REVIEW AND HOUSING TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

The Director of Housing presented a summary for Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the HRA and Spending Review and Housing Transformation Programme. The meeting was informed a summary had been shared with staff, trade unions and the Tenants Forum.

The Director of Housing referred to the outcome of the spending review, when every cost centre in the HRA had been challenged. She said some of the savings identified were in the proposed HRA budget on which the Housing Scrutiny Commission views were sought. Members were told they would be informed if there were any service implications that would result in a decision for members.

The Assistant Mayor for Housing referred to the issues of rent. Officers and the Executive would look at the overall budget, and a decision would be taken at Full Council. Any efficiency savings would benefit tenants, for example allowing more homes to be insulated with monies saved, and any savings made would stand the council in good stead for next year in preparation of rent increases and difficult budget cuts. The Assistant Mayor for Housing also thanked Scrutiny Commission members for the supportive comments made of staff, and it was recognised that a lengthy review was not desirable.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing for the update.

RESOLVED:

1. that the summary be noted.

54. HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Support Officer introduced the Housing Scrutiny Commission Work Programme for Members' information

The meeting was informed a request had been made to add the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log to the work programme for March. The Chair agreed to add the report.

Housing Scrutiny Commission Members were also informed a draft Communal Cleaning Task Group Report would be circulated which would include tenants recommendations.

Members asked for the following reports to be added to the Work Programme:

- Empty Homes Scoping Document
- Housing Associations Report

AGREED:

1. that the work programme be noted.
2. that the following reports be added to the work programme.

55. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.10pm.

Leicester City Council

Communal Cleaning Task Group

Report to Housing Scrutiny Commission: 18th March 2015

Overview Select Committee: 23rd March 2015

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1. CONCLUSIONS

TENANT ISSUES

- 1.1 Tenants did not know the cost of providing the communal cleaning service, despite it being part of the information to new tenants and in updates through annual rent reviews. (See Recommendations 3.7; 3.8)
- 1.2 Tenants were not specifically consulted on the cost of the communal cleaning service, the level of service or whether they wanted it to continue or change in some other way. Tenants who did not receive the service were not asked if they wanted to receive it. (Recommendation 3.9)
- 1.3 Tenant and Member complaints about the service appear not to have been recorded and acted on despite their assertion that the issue has been raised repeatedly in the past. (Recommendation 3.1)
- 1.4 Conversations with tenants, for example during the survey conducted as part of this Task Group's work, indicated that their views about the service varied widely; many were happy while some were dissatisfied with the same service in the same building.
- 1.5 A tenancy condition (Appendix D Par 1.2) is that tenants are required to keep common areas clean and tidy. A recurring issue was that common areas (for example drying rooms and chute areas) were neither covered by the communal cleaning contract nor kept clean and tidy by tenants. This tenancy condition would appear to be difficult to enforce by housing staff or tenants. (Recommendation 3. 3)
- 1.6 The condition of areas outside individual flats varied widely and the requirement for tenants to keep areas associated with their own homes tidy was not always complied with or enforced. (Recommendation 3. 3)
- 1.7 No tenants said they did not want the communal cleaning service. However there was a desire for reforms and improvements. This could involve higher charges to underwrite, at least in part, improvements desired in the delivery of the service.

THE CONTRACTOR

- 1.8 It was acknowledged on all sides that the contract was difficult to manage and execute. Tenants, visitors to or trespassers in estate buildings in some cases leave common areas in a disgraceful state. Most front-line cleaning staff at some point have had to deal with the results of such behaviour.
- 1.9 Tenants and Members recognised that in a difficult environment many cleaning staff gave an excellent service, sometimes at personal risk to themselves due to the nature of hazards they had to deal with¹. Cleaning staff who knew the estates they worked on, and were able to develop friendly contacts with tenants, housing staff and tenant reps, were well-respected.
- 1.10 There was a comparatively high turnover of cleaning staff, though it was recognised that payment of the living wage may have helped to retain and recruit staff.
- 1.11 However council employment procedures mean it can take weeks to make a job offer. Some applications are only made through Department of Works and Pensions procedures with the “applicant” having no intention of taking a job. Other applicants’ circumstances may also have changed making it inconvenient, impossible or difficult to take up a job offer.
- 1.12 The vacancy rate of around 10% (30 posts), coupled with normal illness and injury absenteeism, meant that the service often had to be delivered by a standby team at short notice. In general terms, and for understandable reasons, satisfaction with the performance of the standby teams was less than with regular staff.
- 1.13 The City Cleaning Service supervisory team of just two part-time staff for 270 covering more than 100 sites across the city was inadequate for the task. Tenants often turned to council estate or office staff to raise problems with cleaning. The Task Group noted that the Cleaning Service was strengthening this function through recruiting two new supervisors.
- 1.14 The Cleaning Service communal cleaning contract operates to procedures, resources and standards set either in the 1990s or into terms under which a private contractor handed back the contract in 2006. The private contract was significantly cheaper than the original in-house contract bid, in terms of both staff and support costs, which was submitted in 2004.

¹ Sharps, drugs paraphernalia and human and animal excrement were among issues they had to deal with

- 1.15 Perhaps the most significant change to the contract was the decision to stop periodic deep-cleans. This cost around £500k a year and to be maintained would require an increase in current charges to tenants. This single decision was the most significant in creating the gap between income raised from tenants' charges and the actual cost of the service to the housing department – around £250k this year.
- 1.16 Tenants and the cleaning service said the restoration of the periodic deep-cleans would be the single most significant improvement which could be made to the service, making the weekly cleans easier to do and improving the environment. There was no evidence that tenants were consulted about the ending of this service or had been given an option about it being re-introduced.
- 1.17 The times allocated for cleaning on a storey by storey basis seemed inadequate for current building conditions and social requirements. Buildings surfaces have deteriorated over 20 years, making them both harder to clean and leaving them looking shabby even after they have been cleaned properly².
- 1.18 On-site cleaning facilities have been lost over time. For example, there are fewer available water taps which cleaners can access within buildings. Storage areas for cleaning and other materials have also become less available, making it more difficult to complete tasks adequately and on time. Equipment was inadequate, in some cases, to do the work required in the times allocated.
- 1.19 Attempts to keep to tight schedules led to work being rushed and not done properly. During the review tenants suggested that rebalancing of the weekly frequency of cleaning schedules, with longer times being allowed to do each floor within a block, might help address this problem.³
- 1.20 The Cleaning Service raised these and other issues with the housing department and tenants in a major meeting but reported that they were frustrated to find that no action was taken (see Cleaning Service Report Appendix E Par 45).

² It also acknowledged that some surfaces were being repaired or replaced to make them easier to clean.

³ The Task Group welcomed the news that a pilot project along these lines had been developed and would be interested to know the outcome.

THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT

- 1.21 Communal cleaning issues were recognised as being only part of the challenges facing housing estate management staff. Building repairs and maintenance, tenant welfare and family protection⁴, anti-social behaviour on many levels and the challenges of households facing increasing debt were all acute and increasing demands on the skills and energy of front-line estate management staff, as well as neighbourhood housing officers and are strategic priorities for the department.
- 1.22 The department and many tenants felt that they were faced with a long-term decline in community commitment, leading among other things to a failure to maintain tidy communal areas.
- 1.23 There are specific tenant responsibilities for areas outside their flats as well as a shared responsibility for keeping communal areas such as drying rooms and chute areas tidy. Estate management staff did not appear to have the procedures to enforce those responsibilities. This issue merged into the wider dissatisfaction with the communal cleaning service.
- 1.24 The communal cleaning service has given rise to complaints and concerns by tenants. This has impacted on tenant satisfaction with the housing service in more general terms. For example, tenants complained about untidy common areas not covered by communal cleaning when asked about the communal cleaning service.
- 1.25 Tenants and members felt that the service, for a variety of reasons, was no longer fit for purpose, a view which appeared to be shared by the contractor. The housing department has a key role in reforming the service.

⁴ Not to say animal welfare in one notable incident during a New Parks site visit

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Tenants should ensure records of meetings fully reflect the issues they raise and proposed resulting actions should be monitored on a regular basis
- 2.2 Estate management staff should take proportionate steps to ensure able tenants clean the areas for which they are responsible. If necessary tenancy conditions should be amended to make this easier to enforce
- 2.3 Signage showing cleaning schedules and scope and cleaners' sign-offs should be on all estate buildings which have the service. Sign-off boards should be monitored regularly by City Cleaning Service supervisors. Assistant estate management officers should also monitor the sign-offs on a regular basis and report concerns to the cleaning services team as appropriate
- 2.4 The cleaning service should be more proactive about devising new work patterns to deal with the current problems caused by ageing work surfaces, (for example by extending the time allowed for cleansing a block while at the same time reducing the frequency of cleaning)
- 2.5 The housing service should invest in infrastructure within estates to support the cleaning service, including storage areas and accessible water supplies. This should form part of the HRA environmental improvements programme
- 2.6 The cleaning service needs to invest in fit for purpose equipment, including trolleys to carry water and cleaning equipment and materials to enable front line staff to move more easily around the areas they are required to clean.

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.7 A complete renegotiation of the communal cleaning contract is required. Recognising that it will impact on all parties a working group should:
 - (i) define what areas should be covered by a communal cleaning service
 - (ii) re-calibrate work patterns to ensure enough time to do the required work. This should include further investigation into alternative frequency of cleaning associated with more times being allowed to do the work
 - (iii) establish new cleaning standards reflecting current conditions. This should include investigating the cost and value of re-introducing annual and other period deep-cleans.

The tenants and leaseholders forum could be a suitable vehicle for developing these issues, with the cleaning team joining it for the specific programme of developing new contract structures.

- 2.8 Charges should be simplified and more closely reflect the actual cost of the service provided. Tenants and leaseholders should be consulted on the level of service they require and what they are prepared to pay for it.
- 2.9 A clear consultation process should be put in place to specifically ask tenants what service they want, its frequency and the likely cost. This should be repeated on a three-year cycle to ensure consultation is reasonably relevant to all tenants. It could be part of wider tenant satisfaction consultation work. It should include tenants and leaseholders who do not receive the service.
- 2.10 The cleaning service should consider new methods of organising delivery of the service through more locally-based teams, possibly including the setting up of community co-op style contractors to develop greater community connections between contractors and users of the service.

TENANT FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS

2.11 The Tenants' and Leaseholders Forum met on 29th January 2015 to consider possible recommendations to the Task Group. These are set out in the below table and should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations above.

No.	Recommendation
1.	Regular cleaning times and dates need to be set
2.	Clear information needs to be available on notice boards to say when cleaning takes place and what is cleaned
3.	A cleaning record should be pinned to notice boards and the cleaner should sign, with their name, after each clean
4.	Produce a document that describes what an "acceptable" standard of cleaning is.
4.	A more effective, workable system should be in place for Estate Management Officers and cleaning supervisors to check cleaning has been completed and this is to an acceptable standard. This could be linked to fire safety inspections
5.	People should be made aware of the cost of the cleaning service
6.	A more effective system needs to be in place to cover cleaners when they are on holiday or sick
7.	Work needs to take place to encourage tenants to take more responsibility of keeping communal areas clean and tidy themselves. New tenants need to be advised what responsibilities they have and the responsibilities of the cleaners.
8.	Include window cleaning as part of the cleaning service, also cleaning of communal doors and removal of all cobwebs
9.	Ensure the cleaners have access to hot water to clean and a review to take place to ensure they are provided with the most appropriate cleaning materials and products
10	Take steps to make the communal areas smell nicer
11.	Consider using the Community Payback scheme or the Neighbourhood Improvement Operatives to improve the appearance of the communal areas
12.	Pilot reducing the frequency of the cleaning, but increase the time available to clean when this takes place. To be agreed with tenants prior to the pilot taking place.
13.	Over a specific timeframe review communal cleaning in each block to establish whether people want this to continue, and if so what standard of cleaning they want, involving tenant reps in this process
14.	Review the communal cleaning charges to ensure the charge to tenants actually reflects the cost of the service
15.	Consider using electric machines to carry out cleaning tasks e.g. steamers
16.	If recommendations are implemented but do not improve the service consider whether it is more cost effective to use an external provider.

3. MAIN REPORT

INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 This is a review of the communal cleaning service undertaken by the City Cleaning Services on behalf of Council tenants and leaseholders. The service involves the periodic cleaning, by sweeping and mopping, of areas within blocks of flats and other housing complexes owned or operated by the Council. The areas vary but can include stairways, hallways, lifts and passages.
- 3.2 The frequency of cleaning varies from block to block and this is reflected in a wide range of charges which are made to tenants. The details of cleaning of each block can also vary, which also contributes to the range of charges made to tenants and leaseholders.
- 3.3 This review has been 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.
- 3.4 A report on the service previously came from the Housing Department to the Housing Scrutiny Commission in December 2013. The link to this report is <http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/s60168/3d%20Communa%20Area%20Cleaning%20V%204.pdf>.
- 3.5 The report formed the department's written evidence to the Task Group, which was set following agreement of the Housing Scrutiny Commission and Overview Select Committee to the [scope of the review in August 2014](#).
- 3.6 It set out the numbers of tenants who paid for the service, the blocks or communities which receive the service and the charges made to tenants in those blocks. (See par 3.12).
- 3.7 From the outset, members were determined that tenant and leaseholder representatives were equal partners in the development of the review.
- 3.8 With the help of Housing Department officers, tenant representatives took a full part in task group meetings, site inspections and a limited but informative tenants' survey.
- 3.9 Tenants representatives had also started their own scrutiny of the cleaning service, and needed to be convinced that housing scrutiny commission members were not simply piggy-backing their own review on the tenants' scrutiny work.

- 3.10 Members assured tenant representatives this was not the case, and adopted a joint approach to an issue of shared concern. The tenants' own scrutiny report on the service at Neston Gardens was presented as evidence to the Task Group. Scrutiny Support Officers met regularly with the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum as part of this joint approach.

HOUSING DEPARTMENT DATA

- 3.11 Baseline data for the review came from the report from the Housing Department to the Housing Scrutiny Commission of December 2013. Main points included:
- 4735 tenants and 220 leaseholders received the cleaning service on 154 sites across the city.⁵
 - There were 11 different weekly tariffs; four applied to just one site
 - The lowest rate, 93p a week, was charged to residents at Neston Gardens
 - Income at that time was £722,200 a year. That rate rose roughly in line with the rise in rents in April; [the report on proposed Housing Revenue Account](#) increases to this Commission in February 2014 suggested service charge income would rise by three per cent (around £21,600 in a full year) to around £743,800. That increase was implemented in April 2014⁶.

⁵ Updated figures (October 2014) were that 4954 properties are cleaned, and 1926 are not covered by the service. The number of rates has been reduced to nine.

⁶ Leaseholders pay approximately £44,000 a year for the service.

Table 1: Sites and tenant numbers covered by different service charges

Weekly service charge (£)	Number of sites charged the rate	Number of homes charged	%age of total homes covered
0.93	1	63	1.33
0.95	4	50	1.06
1.04	11	357	7.54
1.11	1	23	0.49
1.28	1	48	1.01
1.72	44	996	21.03
2.04	17	577	12.19
2.61	3	19	0.40
2.64	2	29	0.61
3.34	1	24	0.51
4.23	69	2549	53.83
Total	154	4735	100.00

Source: Housing department report to scrutiny: 10th December 2013

Table 2: Distribution of charges by homes covered

Weekly service charge (£)	Number of sites charged the rate	Number of homes charged	%age of total homes covered
4.23	69	2549	53.83
1.72	44	996	21.03
2.04	17	577	12.19
1.04	11	357	7.54
0.93	1	63	1.33
0.95	4	50	1.06
1.28	1	48	1.01
2.64	2	29	0.61
3.34	1	24	0.51
1.11	1	23	0.49
2.61	3	19	0.4
Total	154	4735	100

Source: Housing department report to scrutiny: 10th December 2013

3.12 It can be seen that:

- 54% of tenants covered by the communal cleaning scheme come into the highest payment band
- 87% of tenants (and 84.4% of sites) are covered by just three payment bands 13 sites are covered by a further seven pay bands and 25 by eight bands
- Four bands had just one site covering them.

So while there was a wide and somewhat confusing range of charges, almost 90% of sites and tenants were covered by just three charges, making it possible to consider streamlining the charges and the range of services provided.

3.13 The report noted that in many cases “most of these arrangements have been in place for many years...they were originally established in response to requests from the tenants in the block living there at the time.” The charge is

reviewed annually and moves in line with general Housing Revenue Account rent increases.

- 3.14 Cleaning contracts were “monitored and checked by the Area Offices, who (addressed) any issues arising with the service provider.” Local area office staff “regularly inspect the communal areas of all flats, maisonettes, houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and tower blocks (including Aikman Avenue flats)”, the report said.
- 3.15 Regular fire inspections also take place and estate and fire inspections are documented and actions taken noted. Additionally, Estate Wardens also check for issues in the communal areas as they go about their work.
- 3.16 Initial observations from members and tenants are that despite these procedures there was:
- a wide and confusing range of charges
 - little understanding of what was required of the cleaning team; and
 - little understanding, despite the information provided within the report, of how work was monitored by either the estate management team or the cleaning team themselves.

SITE VISITS

- 3.17 Site visits were made by Task Group councillors and tenants to inspect the effectiveness of communal area cleaning. The Task Group was helped by area managers and estate staff to conduct these visits.
- 3.18 On Monday 13th October visits were made to Emburn House, Fairburn House and Gorseburn House (in the New Parks management area) and to blocks in Lombardy Rise (St Andrews).
- 3.19 The St Matthews estate (covered by the St Matthews housing office) was visited on Friday 17th October. Councillors Newcombe and Alfonso went on the visit, along with tenant representatives Gwen Clifford and Peter Hookway. Jean Williams was the estate tenant rep on the visit.
- 3.20 Comments from members on the site visits were reported to the Task Group. These were unedited so as to give the immediate authentic sense of members’ comments.
- 3.21 Points which emerged were from comments during the visits and written feedback included:

- The age and deteriorating condition of the buildings contributed to the difficulty of cleaning the surfaces and to their poor appearance after cleaning
- There were significant “no-go” cleaning areas where no-one – tenants, housing management or cleaners – had taken responsibility. Members were particularly concerned about the state of the drying rooms at the Lombardy Rise flats.
- This was also an issue on the St Matthews Estate. Here there was also concern about the state of the rooms used to put rubbish down the chute (and the state of the skips used to collect rubbish)
- There was criticism of the performance of the cleaning service on St Matthews – but also praise for individual cleaners who knew the estate and who were considered diligent and thorough in the way they did their work
- The cover team, used to fill in for absences in the normal cleaning personnel were not considered to perform as well as regular staff
- Some areas which were tenants’ responsibility showed evidence of extensive and long-present dirt and detritus. This was sometime seen as the fault of the cleaning team when it was not their responsibility
- Cleaners spoken to during the inspections said they were not subject to physical or other abuse by tenants; however they complained of antisocial behaviour which included urine and sometimes faeces in communal areas
- Some areas with high tenant satisfaction were associated with cleaners who knew the area well, were committed to the community and who were trusted by the community and community reps
- Lack of on-tap hot water for cleaners was a significant problem on some estates
- Tenants who littered public areas, or who smoked in non-smoking communal areas, or who were indifferent to or refused to report antisocial behaviour of this kind were a contributory factor to the problems faced by tenants, housing management officers and cleaning staff.

CLEANING SERVICE REPORT

- 3.22 Cleaning Services manager Bev Packwood and head of facilities management Alick Doyle reported on the work of the Cleaning Service and the challenges the service faced. (See Appendix E).
- 3.23 The service is within the property division of the city council, and is responsible for a wide range of council-owned building, including City Hall and community buildings. There are fewer school cleaning contracts and reduced

community facilities to be cleaned, and the tenants' communal cleaning service accounts for around 80% of the service workload.

- 3.24 The Task Group was told around 270 operatives delivered the service. There were also around 30 vacancies. The first line of supervision consisted of two part-time staff, but this was being strengthened by two further supervisory staff.
- 3.25 The nature of the work made it sometimes difficult to recruit staff. Procurement procedures meant that it could take several weeks for the department to get to a position of being able to offer a job after a post became vacant.
- 3.26 This was further complicated because many applicants were only going through the motions of applying for work, under pressure from the Department of Works and Pensions, but who had little intention of taking up a work offer according to evidence from the Cleaning Service team. There is no evidence for this and it should just be left as difficulties in recruiting etc.
- 3.27 Members were particularly concerned to understand how the prices for the service were set and service standards and performance indicators were met. They were told that:
- There was no formal contract between the cleaning department and the housing department
 - There were no performance indicators or service standards on which to judge the service.
- 3.28 Times set to complete tasks, including getting equipment from floor to floor as well as times for completing tasks on a storey by storey basis, had been devised in the 1990s when the service was first provided. But in the intervening years many of those surfaces had deteriorated, making them both difficult to clean and more shabby.
- 3.29 Furthermore, on-site facilities for cleaners such as water taps and storage for cleaning materials became less available, meaning that these have to be carried for greater distances. In particular, hot water has become less readily available.
- 3.30 The Task Group was told of two key episodes; Citywide Cleaning Services (CWC) had won the cleaning contract in 1998 under Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) regulations. Under a further tendering procedure, a four year contract was let to ISS in 2004, but in 2006, 18 months into the contract, the contractor walked away from the project, saying that it was unable to deliver the service for the contract price.

- 3.31 The Cleaning Services team said it had supported ISS despite a lack of resources by the contractor. When ISS terminated the contract, the City Cleaning Service was asked to take on the work under the same terms and costs as those applying to the ISS contract.
- 3.32 These have been subject to annual inflation-related increases, but the outcome has been that the cleaning team has struggled to deliver the service on stretched and under-funded resources.
- 3.33 The cleaning team made it clear in evidence to the Task Group that it had made repeated attempts to address this issue with the housing department, but without success.
- 3.34 The Building Cleaning department was asked a series of questions about costings which led to responses being provided after the last meeting of the Task Group.
- 3.35 The department confirmed that
- Building Cleaning service set the rates charged to the housing department for communal cleaning
 - The charge was based on overhead costs, cleaner wages and cleaning products and consumables
 - No negotiations on rate-setting took place with the housing department
 - There was no formal contract with the housing department
 - Payment was made on a recharge basis.

TENANTS' SURVEY

- 3.36 The task group agreed that a survey should gather tenants' views on the communal cleaning service. It was agreed that estate management staff and where possible Members (of the Commission and ward members) and tenant representatives should accompany scrutiny officers undertaking the survey interviews.
- 3.37 The surveys were conducted at St Matthews, Neston Gardens, Beaumont Leys and New Parks. A total of 77 residents were interviewed. The report to the Task Group is in Appendix F.
- 3.38 The main conclusions were that:
- Tenants knew there was a cleaning service for their communal areas.

- Only one tenant knew the cost of the service. This included new tenants who might have been expected to have been recently told about the charges
- Tenants were asked what they *thought* the service cost. In every response (except one) the cost was over-estimated, in some cases by three times.
- Almost 80% could describe what the service provided
- There was a range of attitudes to the service; many comments were positive; some felt cleaners were not given enough time to do a proper job
- There was widespread criticism or concern that the tools provided were not adequate for the required work
- There was considerable support for some cleaners who were felt to know and were committed to the communities they worked with
- By contrast it was felt relief teams did not have the same knowledge and commitment, and the service may have suffered as a result
- Five tenants said they had complained in the past about the service
- Most tenants would direct any complaints they had to the local housing office
- Common areas such as drying rooms and chute rooms were left uncleaned and should be included in the specification for the service
- Tenants were largely happy with the quality and effectiveness of the service, in terms of cleaning the communal areas, so long as chronic problems, such as spilled rubbish, urine and faeces, needles – were also dealt with.

THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT

- 3.39 The department has a key role in the administration of the city cleaning service. Effectively it acts as the representative of the client – in this case the tenants who pay for the service.
- 3.40 It also acts as a key intermediary in the maintenance of service quality in that tenants normally go to the local housing office or estate management staff if they have a concern or a complaint about the cleaning service (and a wide range of other housing management issues).
- 3.41 This is particularly important in the context of a highly stretched cleaning service departmental supervisory team which, according to the evidence to the Task Group, consisted of just two part-time supervisors.
- 3.42 The department on an annual basis consults with tenants' representatives on the increases to rents as part of the review of the wider Housing Revenue

Account budget, which includes investment in housing repairs, new homes and estate and environmental projects.

- 3.43 Increases in charges, including communal cleaning charges, have been traditionally linked directly to the wider rent changes so service charges have risen at the same rates as rent increases.
- 3.44 Charges to tenants have over time outstripped the charges by the cleaning department to the housing department to such an extent that the charge to tenants for the service is now around 50% higher than the cost of the service. The surplus goes into the HRA and over five years this amounts to around £1m.
- 3.45 The department can point to the long record of consultations on this and other services, and has said that there is no record within tenants' forum meeting notes of concerns about the service. However, members and tenants have said they have repeatedly complained about the quality of the communal cleaning service. (These complaints have been made alongside evidence that tenants are in some cases failing to observe their own responsibilities to keep areas not covered by the service clean and tidy).
- 3.46 Tenants were concerned enough to do their own investigation into cleaning standards, producing a report on the service at Neston Gardens for the tenants and leaseholders Forum which formed part of the evidence to the Task Group.
- 3.47 The origins of the service lay in the department asking tenants if they wanted to have a cleaning service and the level of service they wanted. Over time most of the tenants originally consulted have moved out for a variety of reasons.
- 3.48 There is no current mechanism for consulting tenants about whether they want the service and the level of service to be provided. As a result almost no tenants have currently been consulted about whether they want the service to continue and the level of service they would like. Also, performance monitoring and customer satisfaction mechanisms?
- 3.49 Some estates have notice boards at the entrances to individual buildings setting out what is provided by the communal cleaning service. These include in some cases sign-off by cleaners on when they have visited the building and cleaned it. This is however not a feature of all sites which receive the service.

CONCLUSION

The Commission is asked to agree the following actions:

1. That the recommendations in Section 2 above be approved
2. That the recommendations from the Tenants' Forum in paragraph 2.11 be accepted by the Scrutiny Commission and integrated into the main recommendations from the Task Group as a submission from the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum
3. The Departments be asked to respond to the recommendations set out in Section 2 within three months of the report's approval by the Overview Select Committee
4. That the response includes detailed information about contractual arrangements between the Housing Department and the Cleaning Service department, including information on how cleaning rates are set and who sets them.
5. That the Housing Capital Programme includes a specific line providing funding to repair and improve worn and damaged surfaces in communal areas.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Peter Coles (Principal Accountant) x374077

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Jeremy Rainbow (Supervisory Legal Executive) x. 371435

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This review looks at the relationship between two council departments and their relationship with an external client group – namely council tenants and leaseholders who use their services.
- 6.2 The objective of the review is to make proposals which improve the service to tenants. Initiatives/recommendations that lead to improvements will impact tenants across all protected characteristics in a positive way. Well managed communal spaces can contribute to a sense of belonging and can foster good relations between, and within communities.

Surinder Singh (Equalities Officer) x 374148

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The chair of the Task Group would like to thank all those who helped in providing information and assistance in the course of this review. They include

members of the task group, including tenant representatives, who are set out in Appendix A.

- 7.2 Within the Housing Department I would like to thank Marie Murray and Suki Supria, who acted as main liaison officers between the department and the Task Group. I would also like to thank to Dipesh Joshi and his colleagues for the work in liaising with tenant reps.
- 7.3 The work done by Bev Packwood and Alick Doyle in providing evidence and information on behalf of the Cleaning Service is appreciated, as was the evidence from Enid Grant in respect of financial issues relating to leaseholders.
- 7.4 I would also like to thank Jon Browne, who was with the scrutiny team on a graduate placement and who has now left to start a Ph.D, for his work. Thanks also to Yusuf Sader, on work experience placement from Judgemeanow Community College, who provided help with this report.

CLLR PAUL NEWCOMBE
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JANUARY 2015
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Jerry Connolly
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Graduate placement officer
Jon Browne.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – NOTES OF MEETING ON 12TH DECEMBER 2014

Present

CLLrs: Dawn Alfonso, Paul Westley, Rashmikant Joshi,

Tenant Reps: Wendy Biddles, Redvers Forryan, Ebrahim Jassat, Joe Carroll, Gwen Clifford

CASE-da: Ian Wilson

City Cleaning Services: Bev Packwood, Alick Doyle

Business Service Centre: Enid Grant

Housing: Suki Supria

Scrutiny Team: Jerry Connolly, Jon Browne

Item 1 - Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllr Paul Newcombe, Cllr Hanif Aqbany, Cllr Mian Mayat, Marie Murray

Item 2 – Notes from the last meeting

Approved

Enid Grant – Verbal update about Leaseholders and Complaints information

1. Enid explained how leaseholders sit under her responsibility. Previously only anecdotal evidence about leaseholders and service charges was known to the Business Service Centre.
2. Tenants can buy Council property under the right-to-buy system, becoming leaseholders. Communal areas still require a charge from leaseholders to cover costs of maintenance and upkeep.
3. Leaseholders also contribute to a designated reserve fund (also known as sinking funds) which builds up reserves to fund new improvements such as doors/windows/other structural improvements, repairs and replacements.
4. The funds have been found to be holding too much of the leaseholders' money – around 720 leaseholders have been given back £1.5m so far in a scheme to pay back excess money held in the sinking fund. There is around £500,000 still to give back to leaseholders who haven't responded so far.
5. Cleaning charges made to leaseholders are on a par with those made to tenants.
6. Any charges made to leaseholders need to have levels of consultation to a similar and appropriate level as with tenants.
7. Anecdotal evidence shows that approximately four leaseholders have made complaints to business service centre – in relation to:
 - Not being happy with charges in relation to the reserve funds

- Not being happy with the conduct of other leaseholders and the state in which they leave communal areas
8. Cllr Westley asked what the financial contribution is that leaseholders make towards communal cleaning.

ACTION:

- It's believed to be around £30,000. Jerry Connolly and Enid Grant will confirm this
- The Task Group will consider conducting the same survey that was conducted for tenants, again for leaseholders. Enid to work with Jerry to organise the survey
- Enid to provide Cllr Westley with the costs of the communal cleaning to leaseholders

9. Red Forryan asked how capital investments are charged to tenants. Enid explained that they're not – not for large scale capital investments in the property.

Item 3 – Tenant Survey report feedback

10. Jon Browne invited questions and comments on the paper.
11. It was stressed that not a single tenant interviewed knew the cost they were paying for the service, and this was felt to be very interesting and illuminating. It was said that previous use of rent cards broke down the different charges – highlighting to tenants what they were paying for.
12. It was suggested that the cleaning charges be frozen until the whole service is reviewed/reformed.
13. Cllr Westley stated that Leicester City Council should be sending out clear information that outlined what tenants pay for and how much.
14. Cllr Joshi outlined how, to him, it seemed that the crux of the issue is the quality of the cleaning and the inconsistency of the cleaning provided.
15. Jon Browne outlined the main conclusions of the survey work:
- The survey provided useful qualitative information and a general sense of the views of tenants
 - It must also be noted that the results were based on only 77 respondents
 - The vast majority of tenants were aware of the cleaning service and what it provided, but the variance in descriptions of the cleaning provided highlighted the confusion and lack of awareness amongst tenants about what they are paying for.
 - In a large majority of cases, tenants are happy with the cleaning that is done, when it is done, therefore the pertinent issues are in relation to the inconsistency in the delivery of the service and the lack of information that

tenants receive about the charges and what the service should be delivering.

16. Suki Supria added that in many cases, the building materials present in blocks and communal areas are not conducive to good cleaning.

Item 4 – Communal Cleaning – report from City Cleaning Service

17. Gwen Clifford raised concerns over the wording and design of the cleaning standards – with ‘basic’ and ‘prestige’ designations – it was seen to be an insult to tenants that there was a variance in the cleaning standards, with one standard for tenants and another for other areas/buildings. Why not one standard and one price?
18. Bev Packwood explained how the names of the standards did not relate to the quality of the cleaning, but rather the hours invested in the cleaning.
19. Bev supplied the task group with photographic evidence of some of the worst areas.
20. Tenant representatives highlighted how whenever they visit Council buildings such as City Hall or the Town Hall, they see many cleaners that are well equipped, yet out in the housing estates and in tower blocks they often don’t have the tools for the job.
21. Bev explained that new cleaning products and methods are continually being piloted and new bespoke trolleys were being designed. Steam cleaners have been considered, but they require power points – which are rarely available in the estates.
22. Cllr Alfonso asked what proportion of the cleaning service is taken up by communal cleaning. She also asked whether the cleaners were paid the Living wage.
23. Bev confirmed that all staff are paid the Living Wage of £7.85 per hour and that approximately 80% of the cleaning service is taken up by communal cleaning.
24. There are several issues relating to staffing:
 - Turnover is high
 - Filling vacancies can sometimes take 10 weeks
 - 270 staff provide the cleaning – with a cover team of only 12
 - It’s a continual challenge to get staff to cover areas at the right time
 - There is approximately 30 vacancies

- Some staff are not committed to the job and only present due to job centre obligations
 - Currently there is only 2 part-time supervisors covering the entire city and staff of 270 cleaners; two more are beginning in the new year.
25. Bev confirmed that the service currently does not have in place, a service level agreement, written contract or performance indicators, although they do have standards to adhere to, including a required pass rate of 85%.
26. Bev outlined the process of the contract being taken over by the Council. In 2004 the contract was put out to tender, with the aim of reducing the cost of the service.
27. Alick Doyle explained how ISS won the contract on price and quality set then and when it came back in house, the same rationale – that the service had to continue at that price – was never revised.
28. Suki Supria, explained that the cost of the cleaning service is around £550,000 per year. Cleaning arrangements are set by the majority of tenants. Cleaning services don't have a contract – they just pay in line with prices set per block, which cleaning services charge Housing with monthly. Cleaning charges change annually in line with rent.
29. Questions from members of the task group highlighted several issues:
- How is it that tenants and leaseholders pay £800,000 and yet the service costs £550,000?
 - It seems that LCC has less stock than housing associations and yet provides a worse service and less value
 - Mechanisation and capital investment in the cleaning services is required
 - It's unclear what level of consultation tenants receive in relation to cleaning arrangements and charges
 - Housing should look to prioritise zero tolerance enforcement of tenancy agreements
 - New cleaning arrangements could trial longer, less frequent cleaning times.
30. In terms of budgets, housing area managers set the charges and budgets; housing dictates to cleaning services the amount of money available for cleaning services to deliver cleaning to each block or estate. After housing set the price, cleaning services receive the charge, but the charge to tenants is more than what cleaning services receive. Whilst charges go up in line with rent, cleaning services do not receive similar increases.

ACTION:

- Alick Doyle to provide the task group with details of the annual upgrades to the cleaning budget from the last 5-10 years.

31. Members of the task group discussed the possibility of repurposing old storage cupboards throughout blocks, to store water/cleaning products, reducing the need to transport cleaning tools around and therefore reducing the time pressure on conducting the cleaning.
32. In relation to the potential for the mechanisation of the cleaning service, it was highlighted that power points were a barrier. Firstly many would need to be installed; they may become a target for vandalism and health & safety concerns would need to be addressed.
33. Benchmarking the service against other Councils was also raised as a possible recommendation for the task group.

ACTION:

- Alick Doyle to provide the task group with details of the LCC commissioned report into benchmarking, from last year.
- Alick and Bev to provide details of the ongoing trials of new products and ways of working within the cleaning service

34. The task group concluded that the biggest issue is that the organisation of the whole service, from Leicester City Council's perspective is vastly inadequate.
35. Bev believes that a complete review of the service is required; it has been on the agenda for many years but there's never been a formal response.

Item 5 – Different ways of working – briefing from CASE-da

36. Ian Wilson attended the meeting. He works for CASE-da (Co-operative and Social Enterprise – development agency), which provides support in the formation and growth of community enterprises and co-operatives. He gave a short briefing to the task group on three main ways of working in this area:
 - Tenants form a legal body and run the service
 - Community Cashback – break down management of the budget to a tenant ran organisation, they chose who gets to deliver the service and all surpluses are reinvested into the organisation
 - Spin-Out – tenants manage and run the service themselves

37. Additionally the Teckel approach would allow tenants to set up a separate organisation – ran in accordance with Leicester City Council policies – without a tendering process – but would operate separately from the Council.
38. CASE-da strongly advocates ownership and control over simple consultation.
39. CASE-da is happy to provide additional support and information to the task group and to the Tenant Representatives Forum.

Item 6 – AOB

40. None was raised

Item 7 - Next meeting: 6th January 2015 – consideration of final report and recommendations to the Housing Scrutiny Commission

Meeting closed at 12:00pm

Appendix C

Report to Housing Scrutiny Commission

Date of Commission Meeting: 18th March 2015

Rent Arrears Progress Report October 2014 to December 2014

Useful information

Ward(s) affected: ALL

Report author: Vijay Desor, Mike Watson

Author contact details: Vijay.desor@leicester.gov.uk Ext 37 5177

Report version number: 1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Scrutiny Commission of progress in the above area of work on a quarterly basis, as requested.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report covers the period from the 6th October 2014 to the 2nd January 2015.
- 2.2 The cash amount owing as at 2nd January was £1.300m, this is 1.69% lower than the same quarter last year – see 3.1, table 1.
- 2.3 The number of tenants in arrears is 3,816, which is 19% more than the same quarter last year – see 3.5, Table 2.
- 2.4 The number of tenants in more serious debt, (owing more than 7 weeks rent) is 1,617, some 45% **higher** than this quarter last year.
- 2.5 For the current financial year from April '14 to March '15, c. £1.34m extra (based on latest estimates) rent will be collectable as a result of the "bedroom tax." See 3.16 below.
- 2.6 £218,350 was paid by Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) for all Council tenants, of which £145,376 was for those affected by the Bedroom Tax, from April to December 2014.
- 2.7 The arrears among those affected by the Bedroom Tax has fallen by £5,864 since 6th April 2014.

3. REPORT

Rent Arrears

- 3.1 Rent arrears at the end of the second quarter (3rd October) of 2014 and previous financial years were:

Table 1. Quarterly Arrears

Financial year	Arrears at end of Quarter 3
2011 / 12 Q3 (Oct to Dec)	£ 1,032,325
2012 / 13 Q3 (Oct to Dec)	£ 1,084,656
2013 / 14 Q3 (Oct to Dec)	£ 1,322,406
2014 / 15 Q3 (Oct to Dec)	£ 1,300,041

(N.B. Depending on calendar variations, week 26 or 27 figures have been used to provide consistent comparisons)

- 3.2 There is a clear seasonal trend for rent arrears to increase in the first part of the year, falling rapidly towards the latter part of the financial year. The rent collection figures for Leicester remain good in comparison with other authorities.
- 3.3 Rents rose by 3.2% on average in April 2014. The increase in the arrears between April 2013 and April 2014 is 13.4%, compared to an increase of 11.3% from 2011/12 to 2012/13.

Number of Cases

- 3.5 After removing monthly payers (i.e. Direct Debits, Wage Stops, Arrears Direct (DWP), Bank Standing Orders) the number of tenants with rent arrears is shown in table 2. below:

Table 2. Breakdown of Arrears Cases

Date	Owing 2 Weeks or more Net	Owing 7 Weeks or more Net **
Quarter 3 (Oct to Dec) (2011/12)	4,007	1,351
Quarter 3 (Oct to Dec) (2012/13)	3,473	1,210
Quarter 3 (Oct to Dec) (2013/14)	3,204	1,117
Quarter 3 (Oct to Dec) (2014/15)	3,816	1,617

N.B. Where no net rent is payable (i.e. on full benefit), full rent has been used as a default value to calculate number of weeks owing)

*** Those owing 7 weeks or more rent are included within the figure for owing 2 weeks or more.*

- 3.6 The number of cases in arrears increased by 19.1% over the previous year's figure for quarter 1. The number of more serious cases rose by 44.8%. There is a lot of variability in these figures, but the overall trend is upwards.

Arrears per Tenancy

3.7 The total arrears divided by the total number of tenancies are shown in table 3. below:

Table 3. Average debt

Date	Average Debt
Quarter 3 (2011/12) (Oct to Dec)	£47.45
Quarter 3 (2012/13) (Oct to Dec)	£50.08
Quarter 3 (2013/14) (Oct to Dec)	£61.85
Quarter 3 (2014/15) (Oct to Dec)	£61.02

3.8 This figure reflects the slight decrease in the actual rent arrears given in 3.1. As can be seen, arrears have been increasing steadily over three of the past four years, since the economic downturn began.

Highest 10% of Debt (by value)

3.9 Table 4. Below shows the highest 10% of arrears cases:

Date	No.Cases	Highest Case	Lowest Case	Average	Total Value
Quarter 3 (2011/12)	754	£ 2,727	£ 298	£ 517	£ 486,272
Quarter 3 (2012/13)	771	£ 2,986	£ 368	£ 618	£ 476,810
Quarter 3 (2013/14)	754	£ 3,378	£ 452	£ 727	£ 563,234
Quarter 3 (2014/15)	930	£3,790	£389	£659	£613,811

Skewed by one unusual case: we will remove this case.

3.10 This shows that the highest arrears cases have increased in total value since last year, and the trend has been increasing in value over the last four years, in line with the other figures reported. This is reflecting the annual rent increase, the effect of the "Bedroom Tax" and the continuing poor financial climate.

Rent Arrears Comparison with 2013/14

3.11 Arrears started the year running consistently about £200k higher than last, as a result of Welfare Reforms, the cost of living squeeze and the general economic downturn.

3.12 However, over the last four months the gap between this year and the previous period has been closed, due to the robust recovery actions taken by the Income Management Team. At the end of December '15, arrears were roughly £22k less than at the same point last year

3.13 Appendix 1 shows the detailed comparison of rent arrears this year with the last financial year.

Proportion of Rent Collected (formerly BVPI 66(a))

- 3.14 The “proportion of rent collected” is a relative measure used for national benchmarking purposes. Concerns had been raised regarding the accuracy of this figure, and this year refinements have been made to the calculation. The figure shown is now **net of pre-payments** (credits on rent accounts) and with a more accurate measure of ‘technical’ arrears.
- 3.15 At the time of writing this figure is not available, but will be reported at the next meeting.

Impact of the Bedroom Tax

- 3.16 On the 29th December 2014, 1,904, 8.9% (21,308) of our tenants were affected by the bedroom tax. The estimated extra rent collectable for 2014/15 is £1.34m for the full financial year.
- 3.17 From the 2,057 cases that were identified at the start of the year, by 2nd January 2015 the number of active cases had reduced to 1,904. This is because the numbers affected are constantly changing as people come out of the bedroom tax, and new cases arise, due to changes in household composition or financial circumstances.
- 3.18 Further facts:
- **152 tenancies had been terminated (by the tenants themselves) from 1st April 2014 to 2nd January 2015. Of these, 14 had completed mutual exchanges and 54 were transfers through the housing register. 10 of the Mutual Exchanges, and all but one moves through the register, resulted in downsizing.**
 - **By week 39, for those affected by the bedroom tax, the number in arrears had fallen to 54% (1036 out of 1904) since the start of the year.** In week 53 this was 58%, so the number of affected tenants in arrears has decreased by 4% in the first three quarters.
 - From October '14 to December 2014, a total of £145,376 of Discretionary Housing Payments had been received on behalf of Council tenants affected by the Bedroom Tax.
 - The arrears among those affected by the Bedroom Tax have decreased by £5,834 since the start of April 2014.
 - These numbers will continue to change as the situation evolves.

Impact of Benefit Income Cap (BIC)

- 3.19 An estimated 86 LCC tenants were affected by the BIC as at 2nd January 2015. The average loss of Housing Benefits for this group is £45 per week. The changes have been phased in as cases are identified by DWP.

3.20 Projecting from this quarter up until the year end, this would equate to an extra collectable rent of about £198k over the whole year. The arrears among those affected by the Benefit Income Cap have decreased by £4,629 since the start of April 2014.

Evictions

3.21 There were 78 evictions carried out for non-payment of rent from the 6th April 2014 to the 2nd January 2015. At the same point in the previous year this figure was 44.

3.22 This compares to 68 evictions in whole of the previous year.

3.23 Of the 78 evictions, 22 were family cases and 56 were single people.

3.24 There were 12 evictions whose debt included some Bedroom Tax.

3.25 Single people were almost 3 times as likely to be evicted as families.

3.25 Only one sixth (12 out of 78) of the evictions were directly affected by the impact of Welfare Reforms. Bedroom Tax and BIC cases account for about 10% of all tenants, but roughly 15% of eviction cases. The majority of evictions, along with the majority of the rent debt, occurred among the 90% of tenants NOT directly affected by Welfare Reforms.

3.26 The cost of living crisis resulting from a range of economic impacts affects all households, and is thought to be the biggest single factor in the increase in evictions.

4. Priorities for Income Management Team 2014/15

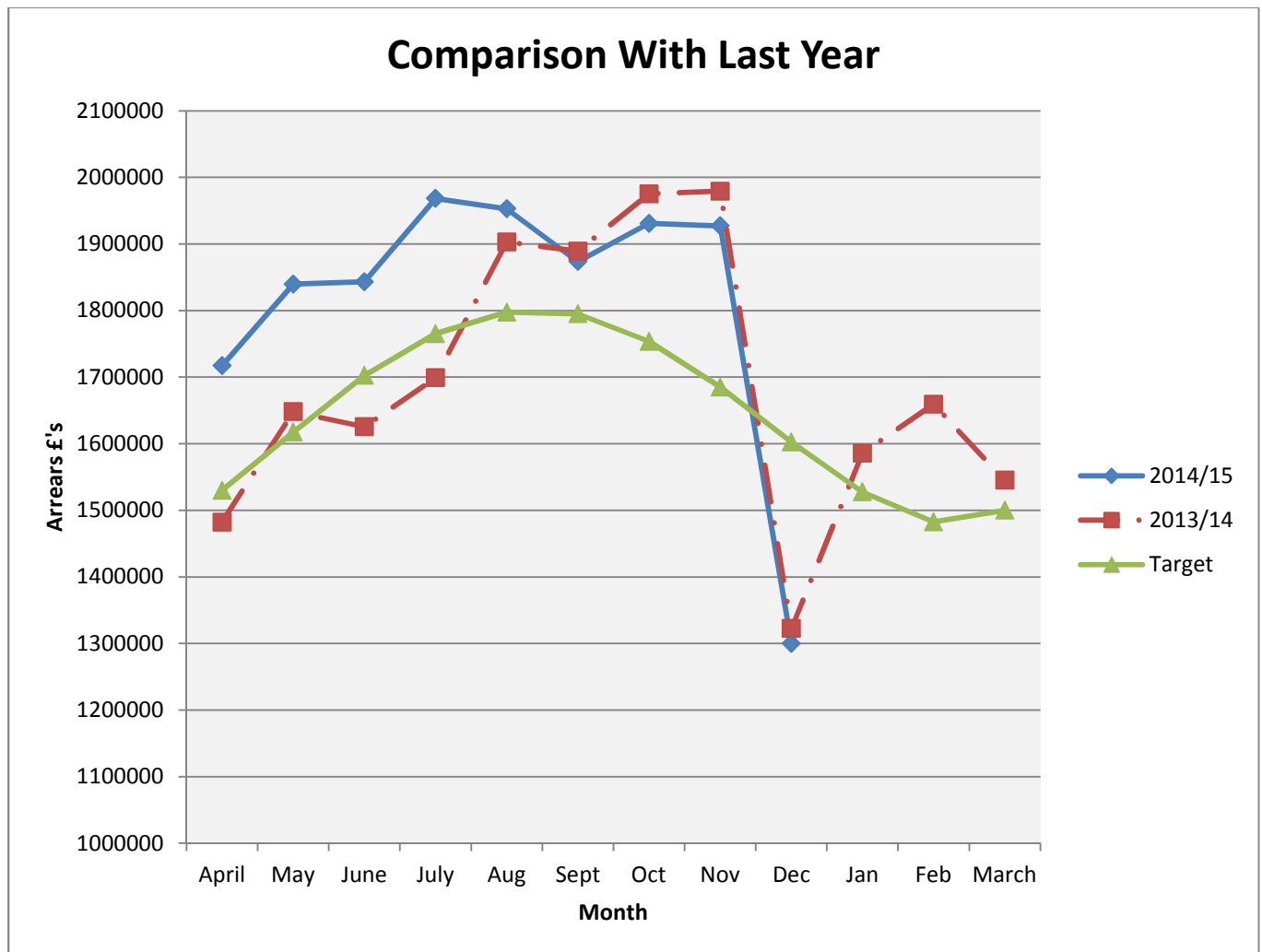
4.1 The priorities identified for the coming year are:

- **Preparation for Universal Credit:**
 - Communications with tenants and staff
 - Links with DWP
 - Adapt working practices
 - Identify vulnerable tenants for direct payments
- **Sustain tenancies when DHP ends:**
 - Budgeting / rehousing advice
 - Prompt, preventative actions
- Promote the use of Direct Debits and Bankers Standing Orders.
- Promote Rent Payment Accounts (ClockWise).
- Develop further payment technologies (e.g. mobile applications).

5. REPORT AUTHORS

- 5.1 Vijay Desor, Head of Service, tel.37 5177
Mike Watson, Income Collection Manager, tel.39 5550

Appendix 1 Rent Arrears Comparison With Last Year



⋮

GLOSSARY

Gross annual rent. This is the total amount due on a property over the course of a year. E.g. if the average rent is £78, times 22,000 properties, times 50 payable weeks = approximately £86m.

Collectable rent – the gross annual rent, plus the carried forward arrears, less Housing Benefit payments, less void loss or any other miscellaneous income. E.g. £86m (gross rent), plus £1.3m arrears, minus £50m Housing Benefit, minus £2m void loss, less £250k miscellaneous income, EQUALS £35.05m actual cash to be collected from tenants.

The percentage of rent collected shown is based on the proportion of gross rent, less void loss and miscellaneous income that has been received. HB received is included in this calculation, as is the arrears carried forward. This figure is used for comparative purposes only.

Poly. (Polynomial) – a statistical function used to generate a curved target line that reflects the established annual trend.

Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log

29th January 2015

Forum members present: Wendy Biddles, Jean Williams, Gwen Clifford, Joe Carroll, Peter Hookway, May Jones, Janet Statham, Redvers Forryan, Pauline Lowey, Paresh Shah, Ebrahim Jassat

Also attended: Helen McGarry, Dipesh Joshi, Tim Draper,

Apologies: Moussa Rugerinyange

Actions outstanding from previous meetings

No.	Action	Progress
1	Simon Nicholls to advise Jean when the lighting and painting programme is to be completed in St Matthews	Simon Nicholls to be invited to the next Forum meeting

45

Appendix D

Actions and decisions from meeting on the 29th January 2015

No.	Agenda item	Actions and decisions
2.	Action Log Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New tenants need to be advised how to access the new gates in Neston Gardens. • A list of Income Management Team surgeries at each Neighbourhood Housing Office to be given out at the next meeting. • Invite Suki and Gurjit along to the next Forum meeting to provide an update on the Tenancy Management Review.
3.	Consultation on the General Fund Revenue Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forum agreed a statement to be sent in response to the consultation.
4.	Kitchens and bathrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forum discussed the briefing that outlined the criteria for selecting properties for the kitchen and bathroom programme. The Forum requested that Simon Nicholls attends the next meeting to talk through this in more detail.
5.	Communal cleaning recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forum agreed recommendations for improving the communal cleaning service, to be forwarded to Jerry Connolly. • The Forum requested that one further meeting is held with the Scrutiny task force group to conclude this piece of work.
6.	Review of the Forums terms of reference and code of conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum members were requested to review these documents and suggest amendments, if necessary. Feedback will be taken at the next meeting and amendments agreed.
7.	Future meeting dates	<p>26th March 2015 4th June 2015 30th July 2015 24th September 2015 All meetings will be held at the Town Hall between 1.00 pm and 4.00 pm</p>

8.	Any other business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A request was made for Tony Waterfield and Chris Burgin to meet with Forum members to discuss issues raised with tenant repair responsibilities. • Red Forryan advised the meeting of an initiatives taking place for councils to run their own gas and electric supplies. • Joe Carroll advised the meeting of an organisation called Zyntha who help people have difficulties paying gas and electricity bills • The Forum identified the need to review the Conditions of Tenancy. Helen advised Forum members that this was an action identified within the Tenancy Management Review for later in the year. The Forum requested that they are involved in this review. • The Forum was advised of the next Housing Scrutiny meeting on the 3rd February 2015 and people asked if they wanted to attend. • A briefing was distributed to keep Forum members updated on national housing news. • Forum members were provided with the Capital Programme report and record of decision notice for information • The Forum was advised of the new policy which allows the filming of meetings when requested.
Next Tenants and Leaseholders Forum meeting date		Date: 26th March 2015 Time: 1.00pm – 4.00pm Venue – Room 1.24, Town Hall

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Housing Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2014 – 2015

Meeting	Topic	Actions Arising	Progress
18th March 2015	Communal Cleaning – Task Group Report Rent Arrears Tenants and Leaseholders Forum – Action Notes	Draft report for agreement Quarterly update report For information	When agreed to go to OSC on 23/3/15 for endorsement

N.B. Outstanding items have been noted for the new commission's consideration next year.

