



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 30 JANUARY 2017 at 6:15 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)  
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany  
Councillor Byrne

Councillor Cank  
Councillor Dawood

Councillor Joshi

In Attendance

Assistant Mayor for Housing – Councillor Connelly

\* \* \* \* \*

**64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any interests they might have in the business to be discussed.

Councillor Aqbany declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that family members were council tenants.

Councillor Byrne declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that family members and herself were council tenants.

Councillor Cank declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that family members were council tenants.

Councillor Joshi declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that family members were council tenants.

Councillor Newcombe declared a Prejudicial Interest in the report at Appendix

D, Review of the Housing Register / Housing Allocations Policy – Feedback of the Consultation Exercise, in that he was for the time being on the Council's housing waiting list, though with a very low priority. He stated as this item only dealt with feedback from consultation, he did not consider it necessary to leave the meeting, but would hand over the Chair to the Vice-Chair during consideration of the item and would take no part in the discussions.

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 of the agenda items.

## **66. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

An amendment was made to previously circulated minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> November 2016, Minute Item 52, third paragraph to read 'The Chair commented it was a really good piece of work undertaken in order to ascertain the background and effect of gambling on *residents*', word amended from 'constituents'.

AGREED:

Subject to the amendment above, that:

1. The minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 15 November 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.
2. The minutes of the Special Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 19 December 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

The Chair drew attention to Minute Item 50, and the request that consultation results on the Homelessness Strategy be re-presented. He asked when the information would be available. The Director of Housing confirmed the information would be provided to the Commission Members.

AGREED:

That the Director of Housing provide re-presented results on the Homelessness Strategy to Commission Members.

## **67. PETITIONS**

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

## **68. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE**

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

## 69. AREA MANAGERS' PRESENTATION - 12 MONTH CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Suki Supria, Head of Service, delivered the presentation on the West Neighbourhood Area. The following points were covered during the presentation:

- Marie Murray was District Manager for the area.
- Schemes were going to plan, and the £400k spend for environmental and community projects should be achieved.
- Key tasks were outlined in the presentation for the new organisational structure.

In response to questions from the Chair and Members, the following information was given:

- The Environmental and Communal Project budget was always historically and remained split dependent on how many properties were in each estate
- In a number of cases, it became extremely difficult to take action against perpetrators of anti-social behaviour for a number of reasons, for example, human rights or disability. Processes could take a significant amount of time with complex meetings taking place with other agencies. The Council had to clearly demonstrate that any action taken had been reasonable and just. Barristers' advice was sought to ensure the Council was not at risk of legal challenge.
- Rent arrears share for the area at 38.9% of the city's total was high, and historically the west area had higher rent arrears due to the make-up of people in the area, i.e. families had less income, there were many vulnerable people entitled to benefits. It was noted the rent collection rate for the city was 99%.
- The Council had a robust system to minimise evictions which were a last resort, and wherever feasible tenants were referred to other agencies for assistance, but the Council had a statutory responsibility to maximise its income. The increase in the number of evictions from 17 to 21 in the past year was not considered to be significant, with the majority of people evicted being single.
- The Council was proactive rather than reactive and conducted welfare visits to certain tenants to identify vulnerable people in the tenancies. For example, someone not paying their rent might be an indication there were other issues for the tenant, such as poor health. Assistance given to tenants to maintain their home meant less voids and cost less money in repairs and maintenance.
- Under the Housing Transformation Programme, there would be a review on how anti-social behaviour was managed.
- Flexible tenancies were expected around September 2017, which were different to secure tenancies, requiring the Council to set a fixed time for the tenancy and then towards the end of the period review the persons eligibility to retain and renew the tenancy. A paper would be presented to the Commission later in the year.

- Staff had recently gone through significant changes, and motivation and support would ensure they were skilled up to focus on their service areas and deliver the best possible service.
- Following Transforming Neighbourhood Services and the Using Buildings Better programme, the New Parks Centre had now reopened. It still had had housing on site. Self-service kiosks provided a digital offer, with assistance provided from floor walkers. Likewise in Beaumont Leys, staff had seen an increase in customer numbers with the movement of libraries and STAR into one hub building. Face-to-face support was also available at the Customer Services Centre on Granby Street. The Chair stated it would be useful to receive customer feedback on the new centres in 12 months.
- There were 160 Homecome properties in the city. Figures for those in the West of the city would be provided to Commission Members, and a future report on the properties would be brought to a future Commission meeting.
- There had been an increase in the number of Right to Buy properties, with slightly over 500 purchased in the city for 2016/17 financial year, resulting in a loss of rental income. Limited funding was available to replace social housing properties. There could potentially be a change in the level of staffing required as the number of tenancies was reduced.
- An issue with the call centre not recognising that the Council was responsible for District Heating service would be looked into further.
- The estate warden service would be structured to ensure it was aligned to new District areas was due to start and it was also considered as an opportunity for work placements on the service and an apprenticeship programme. Estates did not attract the levels of rubbish as in earlier years, and the cleansing team also operated on the estates.
- Members requested a report on how the three Gypsy and Traveller sites were being used, if there had been any issues, and further detail on management arrangements for each site.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation.

AGREED:

that:

1. The report be noted;
2. The Director of Housing to provide to the Commission customer feedback on the centres in 12 months;
3. The Director of Housing to circulate figures on the number of Homecome properties in the West area to Commission Members, and a future report on the properties to be brought to a future Commission meeting;
4. The Director of Housing to provide a report on how the three Gypsy and Traveller sites were being used, if there had been any issues, and further detail on management arrangements for each site.
5. The Head of Service to look into issues around the call centre not recognising the Council's responsibility for the District Heating service.

## 70. CUSTOMER SERVICE - HOUSING CONTACT

The Director of Finance submitted a report that provided the Commission with an overview of Housing contact for the Tenants Advice and Repairs Service (TARS). The report also reflected customer activity for the period January 2016 until December 2016 as requested by the Commission and explained the future channel shift opportunities for tenant customer interaction. The Commission were invited to comment on the report. It was recommended that a report be brought to the Commission every six months on current performance and improvements made.

Alison Musgrove, Service Manager Revenue and Customer Support, presented the report, and made a number of points in relation to staffing, performance, customer satisfaction and changing options for customer engagement. Members were informed that information on repeat calls for one issue would be manually gathered over the next few months, and a report brought to the Commission at a future meeting.

In response to Members' questions, the following information was given:

- The service would commence a staff review in the next few weeks;
- The service was looking to see what messages could be put on the phone line to reduce the abandonment of calls;
- People struggling with language would be supported. Where the language could not be supported online, a translation could be provided at Granby Street, though customers would be guided towards Citizens Advice Bureau for assistance with form completion;
- Depending on circumstances, visits would still be offered to residents, or meetings arranged at centres out of the city;
- Through the 'Channel Shift' programme, efficiencies would be made, and the Housing Revenue Account contribution to the telephone service would be reduced;
- School Admissions and Electoral Services provided funding contributions for the call centre service.

The Chair requested that he be kept informed of the ongoing development of the service level agreements before they are formally reported to the Commission. He also asked that the Commission review the cost charged to the Housing Revenue Account for the service, and be provided with a list of all central costs charged to the Housing Revenue Account.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report.

AGREED:

that:

1. The report be noted;
2. The Chair receive updates on the ongoing development of service level agreements before periodic service performance updates were presented to the Scrutiny Commission;
3. The Commission review cost charged to the Housing

- Revenue Account for the service, and be provided with a list of all central costs charged to the Housing Revenue Account.
4. A report be brought to the Commission every six months on current performance and improvements made.

## **71. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REGISTER / HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY - FEEDBACK OF THE CONSULTATION EXERCISE**

The Chair, Councillor Newcombe, handed the Chair to the Vice-Chair, Councillor Alfonso, as previously stated in his declaration of interest.

The Director of Housing submitted a report which provided the Commission with feedback on the consultation exercise in relation to the proposals that were contained in the report on the 'Review of the Housing Register / Housing Allocations Policy' that was presented to the Commission on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2016. It was recommended that the Commission consider the responses from the consultation exercise, and provide feedback to the Executive.

Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service, presented the report, and highlighted the rationale behind the review, some details of the responses to the consultation and future plans.

Members were informed that mapping of under-occupancy would commence, and a presentation on resolving housing needs, for example, Mutual Exchanges, and provision of further options for tenants would be brought to a future Commission meeting

In response to Members' questions, the following information was given:

- Registered social housing providers had given feedback to the consultation exercise, and their consultation responses were appreciated. Each provider had service level agreements and levels of stock used for nominations although registered providers did have their own registers and allocated directly to those. The intention was to keep the nomination process in place;
- The online consultation was held for a period of six weeks, and paper copies were provided on request. It noted that the majority of responses were agreement in principle with the proposals;
- In response to a comment regarding the removal of Bands 4 and 5, it was suggested that it may give the false impression that the remaining three bands would receive offers of accommodation quicker. The meeting was informed that average waiting times in the bands was provided to waiting list applicants at regular intervals, and the reduction of bands would not increase the number of properties to rent;
- The opportunity for those on the register that may be under or over occupying was being taken forward proactively by Housing in order to support people obtaining suitable housing;
- Waterloo Housing Group was a provider of affordable housing in the city, and in discussions with the authority about their hard to let stock that could be utilised and potentially made available to those on the Housing register;
- People due to be removed from the lower bands would be contacted before

being taken off the register to ascertain if their housing needs were the same. It was also noted that some people might be in unaffordable private sector housing, and might be placed in the higher bands.

Councillor Connelly, Assistant Mayor for Housing, responded to a question from the Vice-Chair on the licensing scheme for private landlords in Manchester. He informed the meeting the scheme was due to end soon, and they were not proposing to renew it due to its heavy burden. However, Nottingham were looking to introduce a licensing scheme which required government approval. Leicester City Council would wait for the outcome of Nottingham's application, and if successful, would look at the issue for Leicester again. It was noted the government believed landlord licensing penalised good landlords.

The Chair asked that the Commission be kept informed on the progress for Nottingham, and final result.

The Chair thanked the officer and Assistant Mayor for Housing for the information.

AGREED:

that:

1. The report be noted;
2. Information on the landlord licensing scheme in Nottingham be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Commission;
3. A report be brought to the Commission with regard to under/over occupation and work to address this through the use of Mutual Exchanges.

Councillor Newcombe took the Chair.

## **72. HOUSING ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES**

The Director of Housing submitted a report which informed the Commission of Leicester City Council's approach to the provision of housing, advice and assistance to Armed Forces personnel. Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service, presented the report.

The Commission was informed the Council was proactive in framing the allocations scheme to support members of the armed forces, and in practice engaged with those who were leaving or planning to leave the armed forces during their last few months. It was noted that not all those leaving the forces approached the council, but had five years to make an application for accommodation within five years of discharge.

It was further noted that the numbers of armed forces personnel requesting assistance from the Council was low, and when they did they were usually placed in the Band 2 priority, though individual was looked at on a case by case basis where circumstances were looked at, for example, medical

conditions. The Chair asked if the numbers of people assisted could be provided.

AGREED:

that:

1. The report be noted;
2. Figures on the number of armed forces personnel assisted by the Council be circulated to Commission Members for information.

### **73. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair asked that the work programme to be amended to show the next presentation to the Commission would be on the South Neighbourhood area.

AGREED:

that the Work Programme of the Commission be updated and noted.

### **74. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.31pm.