



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2016 at 6:15 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly – Assistant City Mayor, Housing

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57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Byrne, Dawood and Joshi.

58. 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 Newcombe declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting as family members were council tenants.

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

59. PETITIONS

In accordance with the Council procedures, it was reported that no petitions

had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

60. 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.

61. HOUSING REVENUE BUDGET 2017/18

The Acting Director of Housing presented a report which sought the views of the Commission on proposals for setting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2017/18, before being taken to Executive and then Full Council.

It was noted that the budget would be set in the context of the government's decision to implement a 1% per annum rent reduction for the four year period from 2016 to 2020, and had placed the HRA under significant pressure to deliver a balanced budget, and it was proposed to set a one year budget for 2017/18. Total rent loss for 2017/18 was forecast to be £2.96million.

The Chair commented that almost £30million had been taken out of the HRA by the rent cuts imposed by the Government, which would have an enormous impact on the Council's ability to improve existing homes, provide estate environmental improvements and build new homes at a time when the housing crisis in the city was becoming more serious. He added the cuts had made it impossible to follow the 30-year business plan for the Housing Department to maintain, improve and add to social housing in the city.

It was noted that the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum were highly supportive of the proposed HRA Rent Setting and Capital Programme Budget for 2017/18 as outlined at Appendix H to the report, but did not support the proposed reduction to the Environmental and Communal Improvements budget by £250k.

Arising from Members' questions it was noted that:

- a) Current CCTV units were 20 years old and would require upgrading to digital at a cost. CCTV pod cameras and mobile units enabled the authority to be more responsive.
- b) The authority had a planned programme of cleaning, including shop fronts. The Estate Warden Service only operated from Monday to Friday and proposals to slightly reconfigure the service did not incorporate weekend cleaning.
- c) The reference to the council's potential commissioning role for supported housing services related to the homelessness strategy, and the proposal to remove 60 units as part of the homelessness review change, and any procurement of supported housing, would be done in conjunction with the Homelessness Strategy review.
- d) Additional proposals under Phase 3 of the Housing Transformation Programme in addition to those presented at the commission on the 19th

- December to deliver service improvement and efficiencies would be brought to the Commission for consideration.
- e) Under Right to Buy the Authority had lost, on average between 200-250 homes a year. For 2017 it was anticipated that 600 homes would be lost.
 - f) Universal Credit (UC) had not yet been fully rolled out (currently to less than 150 people) though it was acknowledged there would be future challenges in collecting rents from tenants. A future report would be brought to the Commission when UC was fully implemented.
 - g) Members requested that the charge for providing information to mortgage providers and solicitors (currently £125) be increased as a recommendation of the Commission to bring in more income and relieve the burden in other areas. The Acting Director of Housing said any increase would have to be reasonable but that he was happy to consider further to increase the amount.
 - h) Further information on the eight properties in the HRA that had protected rent would be provided to the Commission at the request of Members.
 - i) Private Sector (city wide) rents were taken from the Government's Private Rental Market Statistics for 2014/15 as detailed in the report. Members requested more recent figures when available.
 - j) Decorating allowances for new tenants were paid through a voucher scheme, redeemable at B&Q. The contract with B&Q would run for one more year.

The Chair made reference to Appendix G in the report, and the five major priorities for investment listed. Members of the Scrutiny Commission agreed to support the objectives. Members made observations on the priorities, and received the following responses:

- a) Members endorsed the Department's approach to meeting tenants' priorities, included kitchen and bathroom standards.
- b) If possible, information on how many repairs-related calls were repeat calls would be provided to Members of the Commission.
- c) Members asked that future proposals and achievements in maintaining and improving homes be broken down to Ward level. The Acting Director reported that the Annual Capital programme broken down by Ward would be provided after approval of the 17/18 budget.
- d) A pilot scheme on installing individual heat meters on the district heating scheme had showed tenants saved on average 33.35% on heating / hot water bills. Tower blocks in the St Peter's area had heat meter points installed for meters to be added. The Department would look to introduce to further properties where feasible, the Housing Division was investigating and considering the roll out to meet legislative requirements
- e) Detailed guidance on flexible tenancies under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 were awaited, and would see the phasing out of 'lifetime' tenancies, and the introduction of fixed-term tenancies, which would be introduced to new tenants. Due regard would be given to the protection of children up to the age of 19, end of life, and extensions to tenancies.

The Chair welcomed the comments and observations made by the Tenant's and Leaseholders' Forum at Appendix H to the report, including comments

about CCTV and the need to both upgrade and integrate existing systems, and potentially for other agencies to share the costs of upgrading and running them. The Commission also shared the same concerns as tenants about the reduced posts in STAR, and would look at the service in a few months to see how it was coping following the implementation of Universal Credit.

The comments at Appendix H to the report about tenants who behaved in an antisocial way were referred to and it was asked that quicker action be taken against them. The Acting Director of Housing said the Department had a policy for working proactively and incrementally on antisocial behaviour issues, and said it was a complex issue and needed to be certain when looking to evict someone that it was beyond reasonable doubt that antisocial behaviour had occurred and a court would agree to this being a reasonable action. He added that people could have health / mental health issues, and the Department had to be satisfied that at every step, assistance had been given to help save a tenancy, and that this had to be evidenced in court. Each case was thoroughly investigated and given due consideration, he stressed.

The Chair then asked the Commission to endorse the summary of proposals at Appendix I to the report, and each proposal was agreed. In response to Members' questions it was stated that:

- a) The specific rent figures for proposed 0.9% rent increase at Border House and the Dawn Centre were requested.
- b) The reduced spend on CCTV by £100k could potentially be linked to staffing numbers but this would be determined by the CCTV review
- c) The Anti-Social Behaviour service would be adjusted through the Channel Shift programme, and by working corporately and with LASBU to ensure the service was provided more holistically.

Councillor Connelly, Assistant Mayor for Housing stated the report outlined the budget savings and cuts that the authority would ideally not have to make, but the impact of the 1% rent reduction and increase in Right to Buy properties being bought had made cuts necessary. He thanked the Housing Scrutiny Commission for its constructive approach to the budget, and the Acting Director of Housing for the confident report and constructive way he had responded to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

The Chair thanked all those present at the meeting for their contributions.

AGREED:

1. That the report be received and the Commission support the proposals for the HRA budget for 2017/18, and that the proposals for budget reductions be noted subject to the comments made by Members.
2. The Commission asked that the charge for information to mortgage providers and solicitors (currently £125) be increased as a recommendation of the Commission to bring in more income and relieve the burden in other areas.

3. The Commission be updated on future progress of the budget as it progresses.

62. ANY URGENT BUSINESS

No other items of urgent business had been brought to the attention of the Chair.

63. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.32pm.