



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 10 JULY 2017 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cank (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany

Councillor Halford

Councillor Hunter

In attendance

Councillor Connelly – Assistant City Mayor, Housing

* * * * *

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Byrne.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 20 March 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

AGREED:

that the Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Commissions be noted.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION 2017/18

AGREED:

that the membership of the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2017/18 be noted.

6. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION 2017/18

Members were asked to note the dates for future meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2017 / 18 as follows:

14 August 2017
18 September 2017
27 November 2017
18 December 2017 (Special Meeting)
15 January 2018
12 March 2018

All meetings to commence at 5.30pm.

AGREED:

that the meeting dates for the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2017 / 18 be noted.

7. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

8. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

9. DISTRICT MANAGERS' PRESENTATION - 12 MONTH CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

The Commission received a presentation from Nick Griffiths, the District Manager on the East District Neighbourhood Area, a copy of which was attached to the agenda and is also attached to the back of these minutes.

During the ensuing discussion, a number of comments and queries were raised which included the following:

- The new staffing structure was noted and it was queried whether this was likely to remain as it was or whether further changes were planned. Officers responded that with forthcoming changes in the pipeline, such as the full roll out of Universal Credit in Leicester, further amendments to the structure could not be ruled out. People were facing challenges with the reduction in their benefits and there was a need to ensure the service helped people to remain in their homes. The staffing structure had already been changed to enable a focus on tenancy management.
- A Member commented on the desirability and demand of two-bedroom houses and questioned whether anything could be done to make bedsits more appealing. Officers responded that affordability was an important factor, but historically they had not been very popular. Bedsits also attracted

vulnerable people and could create management issues for a block or area. There could be positive reasons however why someone might want to move out of a bedsit in a particular area.

- The new Housing Allocations Policy had amended the banding system from five bands to three and this reduced the Housing register from over 11,000 applicants to 7000 applicants with many of those with no need, or very little need, removed from the register. There was an opportunity to appeal if someone was dissatisfied with the decision.
- Concerns were raised about litter and residents dumping rubbish around the bin area in St Matthews. Officers responded that there was a budget challenge and reduction; there had been a reduction of two members of staff on one estate, but officers were working on this issue and ensuring bins were emptied on time. The priority of Estate Wardens had been on bin areas, chutes and the emptying of bins to ensure fire compliance and due to the BIFFA contract operational issues that had been going, the level of litter picking had to be reduced, but they were trying to encourage more of a community spirit amongst residents. Where culprits were identified, fines would be issued. The Chair commented that she was pleased that efforts were being made to keep the bin areas clean as litter presented a fire hazard.
- In respect of pest control, work was being carried for the treatment of rats and also to eradicate bed bugs in Goscote House, one of the high rise blocks.
- In response to a query about capital investment for replacement boilers, the Commission heard that during 2016/17 over £3m was spent on the replacement of boilers city-wide. On average, a boiler installation cost about £2,500 which included any necessary pipework and new radiators.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and thanked the District Manager for the presentation.

10. GOSCOTE HOUSE - FUTURE USE

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the approach to the refurbishment of Goscote House. Simon Nicholls, Head of Service presented the report and Members heard it was planned for Goscote House to be refurbished and reconfigured to reduce the number of bedsits in order to provide more flats. Points made included the following:

- The reconfiguring would result in 134 units reduced to 101 larger units; these would be more desirable and would better meet demand.
- Goscote House was currently being used to provide some temporary accommodation for some tenants whose flats were being refurbished. This was likely to continue until the end of 2018, after which Goscote House would be empty and the building work could commence.

- A consultant would be employed to ensure that the work was carried out correctly.
- The Commission would be kept updated on the progress and a site visit was offered to Members.
- Sprinklers would be fitted but it was necessary to use the right specification to ensure the system was fit for purpose. The Fire and Rescue Service were happy for a standard charge system to be installed.
- In accordance with the current regulations, sprinklers were normally fitted in the flats rather than communal areas. The likely place for a fire to break out was in a flat rather than the landing area and if a sprinkler went off on a landing, water would inevitably cascade down the stairs making them hazardous.
- Residents in the City Council's tower blocks were being visited and given fire safety advice as well as being shown how to test their fire alarms. Officers had also checked to review any existing Personal Evacuation Plans and if any new residents needed a Personal Evacuation Plan (for example if they had a disability or their health circumstances had changed).
- Officers were asking people if they had household contents insurance and those that did not were encouraged to take out a policy. In response to a question, officers stated that they did not have details as to how many people did not have contents insurance or did not intend to take out a policy, but this information would be collated in future. There were insurance companies that offered inexpensive insurance for social housing.
- In response to a query about possible electrical surges which might cause a fire, Members heard that the electrical wiring in the blocks of flats was new. Tenants had also been alerted about the make and model of the fridge freezer appliance that was believed to have caused the fire in Grenfell Tower.

The Chair thanked the Head of Service for the report and asked that the Commission be kept updated on the refurbishment of Goscote House.

AGREED:

- 1) that the report be noted; and
- 2) that the Commission be kept updated on the refurbishment of Goscote House.

11. RENT ARREARS PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report that informed the Commission of progress relating to rent arrears over the financial year from April 2016 to

March 2017.

Members considered the report and during the ensuing discussion, comments and queries were raised and responded to by officers. Points raised included the following:

- The impact of the Bedroom Tax continued to be a concern for Members and queries were raised relating to the level of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Members heard that the amount of DHP for 2016/17 was comparable to the previous year. As far as officers were aware, the fund was not being reduced but it was under review. The Income Management Team would look for ways to help the resident; this might be by down-sizing or a referral to a food bank.
- Officers were trying to find ways to alleviate the impact of the bedroom tax; for example by down-sizing. A Member commented that people might need to move out of the area in order to find a smaller property and this was something which they may be reluctant to do. Officers responded that they understood that this could be an issue, but they tried to talk to the tenant about the option to move to a different area and having a fresh start. People were actively trying to avoid the under occupancy charge by looking for a different option.
- DHP was designed to be a short term measure.
- A Member questioned whether there had been any impact on the receipt of council rents now that there was no longer an option to pay these at Post Offices. The meeting heard there did not appear to have been any impact; there were various options to pay including by direct debit and standing order and through pay point facilities in many newsagents. A Member asked whether the number of people paying by direct debit had increased. The officer said that paying by Direct Debit was mandatory for new tenants and promoted to existing tenants. She would provide this information and requested that it would be included in future reports.
- A Member referred to the Benefit Income Cap and the Commission heard that since the lower income cap had been introduced, there had been an increase in the number of people affected. Some tenants were struggling financially but officers had been trying to help them.

Councillor Connelly, the Assistant City Mayor, Housing, offered his congratulation to the Income Management Team on their achievements during very challenging circumstances.

12. TOWER BLOCK FIRE SAFETY REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report that provided information on fire safety in Leicester City Council's high rise housing blocks.

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service presented the report and points made

included the following:

- The council had six high rise blocks of flats in the city; none of which was fitted with external wall insulation.
- None of the blocks had sprinklers fitted, but a decision had been made to fit sprinkler systems in those blocks awaiting refurbishment, and to retro-fit in those blocks that had already been refurbished.
- All blocks had a 'stay put' policy which would be reviewed in association with the Fire and Rescue Service or any National Policy changes.
- All blocks had a current fire risk assessment and weekly fire safety inspections were carried out.
- There was no gas in the blocks.

A Member expressed concern that following the fire in Grenfell Towers, he had emailed to request a briefing but had not received a response. There was some uncertainty as to whether the email had been received but the Assistant City Mayor confirmed that Members could always request briefings; however a briefing session on this issue for all Members was being held later in the week.

A number of queries and comments were raised by Members, and in response to those, the following information was given.

- Leicester City Council had a very good relationship with the Fire and Rescue Service; the service had attended very quickly in the past when fire alarms had been activated and would continue to do so.
- There were no regulations relating to cladding on houses; they could be clad with wood for example. However there were fire regulations on all blocks around the city, not just high rise tower blocks.
- Officers were in the process of visiting tenants in the high rise tower blocks and whilst not everyone had yet received a personal visit, all had received a calling slip with a request to contact the housing office. As part of the visits, officers were checking whether people needed a personal evacuation plan (for example in the event of their having a disability). However, a person's needs might change, if for example they developed a disability during their tenancy. Therefore there was an issue around personal responsibility and the importance of good communications with the housing officers. Officers were also looking at the council's allocation policy and ensuring that it was fit for purpose.
- In response to a suggestion to provide a letting booklet reminding tenants of the need to inform the housing office of any change of circumstances, officers explained that an audit had shown that most people did not read them. Officers were looking to publicise certain rules for tenants and reminding them of the importance of maintaining an ongoing dialogue, but it

was considered that the best way of doing this was by posting information on the council's website.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and thanked officers for the helpful report.

13. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the work programme and agreed to add a report on tenants' home contents insurance.

AGREED:

for a report on home contents insurance for tenants to be added to the Commission's work programme.

14. CLOSE OF MEETING

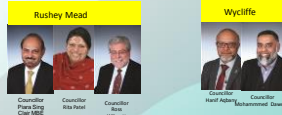
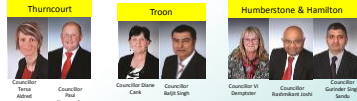
The meeting closed at 7.30pm

East District Neighbourhood Area

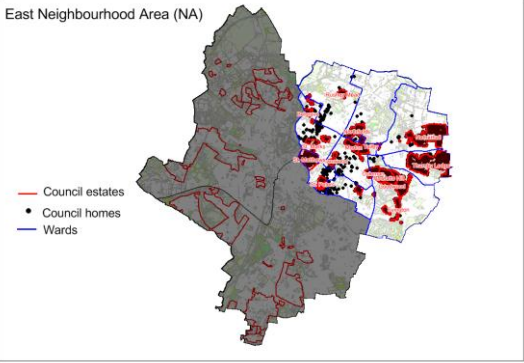
2016/2017
 Nick Griffiths
 District Manager



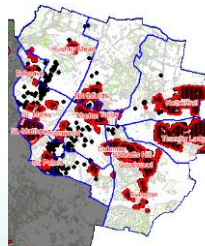
East Neighbourhood Area



East Neighbourhood Area (NA)



East Area - Housing



- c46,000 households
- 7600 council homes
- Estates:
 - St Matthews / St Marks
 - St Peters / Highfields
 - Thurnby Lodge
 - Netherhall
 - Northfields
 - Tailby and Morton
 - Rushey Mead
 - Rowlatts Hill
 - Belgrave
 - Evington



East NA - demographics

East Neighbourhood Area

- Religion
 - 27.9% Hindu
 - 29.7% Muslim
- 50.9% describe themselves as Indian
- 40.7% report English not first language
- 12.6% state cannot speak English well or at all

South & West

- 6.3%
- 10.9%
- 2.4%
- 18.3%
- 3.8%



East – Deprivation

- Most deprived – St Matthews
 - 14th most deprived in Leicester
- Next most deprived – Tailby Estate (18th in City)
 - Claydon Road, Martival and Portwey area
- Both neighbourhoods in most deprived 5% nationally
 - Fewer than for South or West
 - Average of ranks is lower than South
- Least deprived – Maidenwell Road (Hamilton)
- Ranked 185 out of 192 (2015 Indices of Multiple Deprivation)



East Area – Council Housing

- Inner city high density
- High rise
- Outer estates – “traditional” 1930/1950/1960
- 20 % maisonettes (0.3% West & South)
- 38.7% households with dependent children
 - 29% for East and South
- Only 33.9% houses, 57% in West and South



East – Vacant Properties

- 444 adverts in past year
- 17 of the 20 highest “bidded” properties were 2 bed
- Remaining 3 were 3 bed
- Bedsits- fewest bids
- Citywide data:
 - Bedsit 7.7 bids per advert
 - One beds 55.4 bids per advert



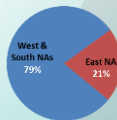
East NA – Data (36% housing stock)

Rent Arrears



- 30 % of City arrears
- 31% of East NA arrears are in Wycliffe Ward
- 2015/16 – 18 evictions
 - 3 family, 15 single
- To Dec2016 - 17 evictions
 - 5 family, 12 single

ASB



- 2015 year
 - 192 cases
 - 917 citywide (c 20%)
- 34% nuisance
- 32 % conflict with neighbour
- No ASB evictions between April 2015 – Dec 2016



East NA - Summary

- High density
 - Emerging communities
 - 35% Asian households
 - 5.1 % West & South
 - Language barriers
 - Lack of houses
 - Overall deprivation
- But
- Low ASB
 - Average Rent arrears
 - Main problem seems to be parking !



East NA – Capital investment

	Boilers	Electrical Improvements	Kitchens/Baths	Upvc Windows/Doors	Re-roofing	Upvc Fascias/Soffits	Total Spend/properties
Humberstone	£381,660	£306,900	£130,000	£0	£10,000	£0	£828,560
Properties	198	26	0	2	0		226
Roughs Hill	£442,954	£263,500	£205,000	£4,000	£5,000	£285,600	£1,206,054
Properties	170	41	1	1	84		297
Central East	£166,560	£12,450	£300,000	£4,000	£5,000	£34,000	£521,060
Properties	8	60	1	1	10		80
Total spend	£991,174	£582,800	£635,000	£8,000	£20,000	£319,600	£2,556,674
Total properties		376	127	2	4	94	603



St Peters Refurbishment

- 4 x blocks
- £10 m capital, est 6 years
- Framland & Clipstone – complete
- Gordon due June 2017
- Maxfield – commencing Sept 17
 - Internal alterations
 - Renew heating
 - New kitchen and bathroom
 - Asbestos removal
- Carrying out fire safety works at same time
- Decision pending on Goscote.



Environmental Projects completed

Included

- Parking spaces
- Bulb planting
- Multi-use area
- Fencing
- Bins and bin stores
- Communal painting
- Flooring



From this....



Ontario Close, St Matthews

To this



Spring has sprung



Charnwood Walk



Now you see it



Now you don't



Beatty Avenue



Rona Gardens



Bowhill Grove

- Open grass area
- Unightly
- Mud
- Not inviting



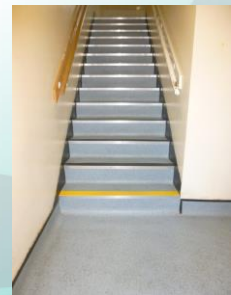
Improved



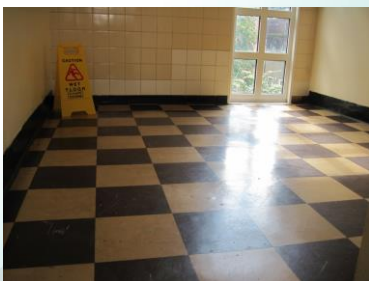
Redwood Walk



Internal Improvements



Old and tired



Refreshed



2017/ 2018 Proposed Projects (examples)

- Parking on Chester Close.
- New gates Everest Court / Bellholme Close.
- Repainting bin room doors.
- Rendering to maisonettes.
- Parking in Charnwood.
- Additional lighting.
- Resurfacing paths in Netherhall.
- Bulb planting in Morton.
- Internal painting.
- Fencing to green areas.
- Lighting to bungalows.
- Landscaping.



Estimated spend – 2017/18 Environmental Improvement Budget

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| • Wycliffe | • £120,000 |
| • North Evington | • £61,000 |
| • Humberstone/Hamilton | • £10,000 |
| • Troon | • £20,000 |
| • Thurncourt | • £55,000 |
| • Evington | • £12,500 |



Questions



