



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 14 AUGUST 2017 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Cank (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Byrne

Councillor Dawood
Councillor Halford

Councillor Hunter

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly, Assistant City Mayor, Housing

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15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Byrne declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that she was a council tenant.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the interest was not considered so significant that it was likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest. The Councillor was not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of the relevant items.

17. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair agreed to take the following as an item of urgent business due a recent incident significantly affecting a number of tenants in Goscote House.

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service updated the meeting on the fire that had taken place in the early hours of Saturday 12th August 2017. A formal briefing would be prepared for Ward Councillors and the Housing Scrutiny Commission, following the investigation of the cause of the fire. The meeting was informed the incident was attended quickly by Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS), the Police and Housing Officers, and 28 residents were evacuated.

Early indications were the fire was accidental, that it had started in the ground floor bin room and had been put out quickly by LFRS. A spark had also ignited rubbish on the 18th floor.

During the course of the incident, it was planned to open St Peters Community Centre with support from British Red Cross, however this was not needed. Residents were allowed back after a short period apart from 18th floor residents who were not allowed back for three hours due to water damage and clean up. They were sheltered in the security office on the ground floor of Goscote House.

Members were also informed of a small fire at Framland House over the weekend, and had been attended by LFRS. The fire had been extinguished by a resident. Officers have been out to Framland House and Goscote House to assess the situation, and arrangements were in place to clean up the fire damage.

The Chair thanked the officer for the update, and looked forward to receiving the formal briefing.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 10 July 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

19. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

20. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

21. FEEDBACK FROM VOIDS TASK GROUP REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a departmental response to the Housing Scrutiny Voids Task Group. Simon Nicholls, Head of Service provided a brief overview of project, and presented the update report.

The report highlighted several recommendations, and the following additional points were made:

- Officers were proactive in finding out reasons for refusal of a property, which were recorded;
- The new letting standard was now published and implemented, and had been positively received by tenants;
- The pilot paint pack schemes allowed decoration items to be delivered to tenants' houses for them, and had received positive feedback from tenants;
- The department was close to meeting its targets for normal voids and long term voids (Long-term voids could be due to several reasons, for example, structural issues);

The Chair requested an update on the pilot paint pack schemes and tendering process be brought to a future meeting of the Commission.

Members considered the report. Queries raised were responded to by the officer, and the following points made:

- A breakdown of figures for normal, long term and all voids would be brought to the Housing Scrutiny Commission;
- People could request a specific design of kitchen once allocated a property;
- The staffing numbers in the voids team had reduced in line with the reduction in voids numbers;
- A large number of voids had a recharge due to previous tenants, for example, disposal of waste left at a property. Repairs to significant alterations to a property would be carried over as a debt, and were easier to recoup if the tenant moved to another council tenancy. Figures for the percentage of voids due to tenants' actions would be provided to the Commission;
- Members reported examples of tenants not receiving letters of offers, and missing the 3-day response deadline. It was noted that offers were usually followed up with a phone call or text by officers;
- The estate of a deceased tenant would be liable for the clearance of a property;
- Furniture left in a property was recycled if suitable, though very few voids had any suitable furniture.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report, and asked that requested updates be brought to the Commission.

AGREED:

That:

1. the report be noted.
2. an update on the pilot paint pack schemes and tendering process be brought to a future meeting of the Commission;
3. a breakdown of voids figures for short, medium and long term voids lets be brought to the Commission;
4. figures for the percentage of voids due to tenants actions be provided to the Commission

22. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REGISTER AND ALLOCATIONS POLICY / WHO GETS SOCIAL HOUSING?

The Commission received presentations from Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service, copies of which were attached to the agenda.

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

- Letters on the review of banding had been sent to tenants on 20th July. Members reported some tenants had not received the letters until 11th August, past the 21-day deadline to appeal. They believed it was due to postal workers not able to gain access to flats. Members were informed the period to appeal had been extended, and could be completed online or by phone to Housing Options. Approximately 3% of the 6,000 who had been removed from or changed banding on, the register had appealed;
- It was noted that some band changes were due to tenants not reporting changes in circumstances;
- The Housing Allocations Policy is a local policy. Following a full consultation exercise the register had been reconfigured by removing Bands 4 and 5, and had removed applicants with little or no chance of receiving an offer of accommodation;
- Under the old system, people needed to choose where they wanted a property. Under the Northgate system, a bid could be made for any area. It was noted it was harder to let property in some areas than others;

Cllr Connelly, Assistant Mayor for Housing, was invited to comment on the presentations and points made by Members. He said that most postal workers would have keys or fobs to access flats with security doors, or Royal Mail would contact a housing manager. He added the council had taken the sensible approach to go out to consultation regarding the housing register, as the number of council houses required were not being built and the council had to target the housing available to those in greatest need.

Gwen Clifford, Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum representative stated she believed it was wrong that 20 year olds could vote, marry, and fight for Queen and country, but could not have a bedroom of their own at 20.

The Chair drew the discussions to a close and thanked the Head of Service for the presentations.

23. PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE UNDER OCCUPATION PROJECT

The Director of Housing submitted a report on progress against objectives set out in a pilot to tackle under-occupation and overcrowding in Leicester City Council tenancies, and offered options for the next steps in the initiatives. Justin Haywood, Business Change Manager, presented the report.

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

- House Exchange was still an available product, but the council supported Home Swapper;
- Steps had been made to draw the attention of all council tenants to Home Swapper which is currently advertised online. All the under-occupied tenants on the Housing Register have been written to, followed up by phone calls to increase the number of those registered with the scheme and to promote the product as another housing option for this group.
- Potential refurbishments stayed with a property as part of the capital programme, and did not move with the person during a property swap;
- There was no time limit for people being on the Home Swapper scheme. Similar to the housing register, people had to periodically log in to keep their information fresh;
- The cost was free for tenants to use, at an annual charge to the council of £11,000.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

24. RESPONSIVE HOUSING REPAIRS UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the Division's performance on the completion of responsive repairs to council properties, and an update on the implementation of service changes previously reported to the Commission and agreed by the Executive in February 2016. Ian Craig, Head of Service presented the report.

Members considered the report, and queries responded to:

- It was considered better for an operative to take responsibility and to complete a job on first visit. If a second appointment was required, the same operative would usually be sent to complete the job;
- There were some vacancies within the section, and they were looking to recruit apprentices in September, which would enable them to reduce outstanding jobs;
- There were a limited number of agency workers in the section. Throughout the service provision, vulnerable people were given priority;
- There had been complaints with people not having the right materials in vehicles to carry out jobs. Sometimes there would be incidents whereby materials would need ordering. Members asked for information on the number of jobs put back because stock was not on an operative's vehicle.

The Chair requested details on the next round of refurbishments be provided to Members of the Commission.

Councillor Connelly was invited to comment on the report. He noted the number of repairs complaints had significantly reduced, and the service was far better than before, now, having directed resources in the right place. He added

it would be interesting to see the customer satisfaction reports.

The Chair agreed that Members did not get the number of repairs complaints in recent months, which showed the system was improving. She thanked the officer for the report.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. Details on the next round of refurbishments be provided to Members of the Commission.

25. TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM - MEETING NOTES

The Chair introduced the meeting notes for information, and thanked the Forum for inviting Councillor Alfonso and herself to a recent meeting, and making them welcome.

The Forum also thanked Jerry Connolly, Scrutiny Support Officer for providing the forum with a wider view of scrutiny and about how it worked in the city.

26. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair drew attention to the Housing Scrutiny Commission Work programme for noting.

The Chair asked that an item on the Customer Service Centre be added to the programme.

AGREED:

1. That the Housing Scrutiny Commission Work Programme be noted.
2. An item on the Customer Service Centre be added to the Work Programme for the Commission.

27. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.24pm.