



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 25 JUNE 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany

Councillor Willmott

Councillor Joshi

* * * * *

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Byrne and Corrall.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

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

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

Councillor Westley declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that he had family members who were council tenants.

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

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 12 March 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

6. RENT ARREARS PROGRESS REPORT - APRIL 2017 TO MARCH 2018

The Director of Housing submitted a report to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission of progress on rent arrears from April 2017 to March 2018.

Charlotte McGraw, Head of Service, Housing who had recently become manager of the Income Management Team (IMT) presented the report and Zenab Valli, Income Collection Manager, Housing assisted in responding to Members queries. The following was noted;

- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) in relation to those affected by bedroom tax this year which had decreased in comparison to the previous year.
- There was a decrease in the number of evictions compared to the previous year.
- An update on the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) would be provided to the Commission in the Autumn.
- This year some further works would include the introduction of paperless direct debit facility, developing a web based rent self-service facility and developing smarter ways of contacting customers/ tenants.

Following questions and comments from the Committee, the subsequent points were made:

- The Committee were informed of the places where people with debts were directed to, including Money Management Advice, Welfare Rights and the in house rent management advisors. The biggest issue with debts was that tenants needed to inform officers of their debt issues.
- Four rent management advisors had now been appointed for two years and their role would be to support vulnerable clients in relation to UC. Councillors were informed of various methods for contacting the team directly if they had concerns.
- In preparation for UC, the team were;
 - Working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and job centres. In addition, officers would have enhanced skills to give correct advice.
 - A pilot would take place for officers from the IMT to be located in job centres. Works were taking place to also have an officer from the Homeless Team located at the job centres.

- Strong relationships with Leicester City Council Income Managers had also been developed with the Derby Service Centre where the UC claims would go. If there were arrears or delays easy contact could be made with them.
- Due to some Members concerns about the call centre and long waiting times for telephone calls to be answered, the Head of Service, Housing agreed to provide additional performance data. It was also noted that many calls were answered within a timely manner and individual call issues could be investigated.
- There were queries as to where people who went through the eviction process ended up. Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service, Housing noted that it was possible to monitor if evictions lead to homelessness i.e. if people came back to access services. The Head of Service had this information and would share.
- Assistant City Mayor for Housing Councillor Connelly thanked the Income Management Team for doing an extremely difficult job and reaching their key performance target.

AGREED:

1. That further information be provided about the 37 evictions and whether they were in receipt of DHP.
2. That further information be provided on the Bedroom Tax issues in relation to the 68 tenancies affected by the bedroom tax.
3. That additional performance data be provided in relation to telephone system calls.
4. That details of a number of eviction cases be mapped up to determine what happened to the evicted tenants and to assess the costs of actions taken.
5. That the report be noted.

7. VOID PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report to provide an update on the division's performance on the completion of void repairs to council properties for the financial year 2017/18.

Jo-Anne Hollings, Voids and Property Lettings Manager, Housing presented the report and gave a summary on the year end 2017/18 voids performance against targets. Also noted were the impacts on void performance such as asbestos removal, refusal rates and productivity measures. In addition, Members were informed of progress on these issues and about future work areas, including mobile working, target setting, performance management, sheltered housing and the decorating voucher scheme.

The following queries were raised by Members of the Commission and the Voids and Property Lettings Manager provided responses:

- Members were informed of the checks which were carried out when a property became void.
- Officers explained the necessary restrictions when a property became a building site and risks of showing properties to potential new tenants

whilst work was underway.

- Officers explained the issues that might arise if a prospective tenant viewed a property whilst the existing tenant still resided there.
- Assistant City Mayor for Housing, Councillor Connelly expressed concerns about a possible reduction in the number of offers a housing applicant/ tenant could receive before being suspended from the register.

AGREED:

1. That data be provided at a future meeting on how the 64 days on all voids during 2017/18 was worked out.
2. That the report be noted.

8. WHO GETS SOCIAL HOUSING?

The Director of Housing submitted a report to inform Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission regarding who got social housing during 2017-18 (quarter one to quarter four) which included Council and Housing Association homes.

Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service, Housing presented the report and provided information which would assist Members in advising constituents. Overcrowding was reported to be the biggest reason as to why people joined the housing register. A breakdown in the number of households on the Housing Register by band was provided.

Following questions and comments from the Committee the Head of Service and Kanwaljit Basra, Team Leader for Housing Register & Allocations, Housing made the subsequent points:

- It was noted that the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment which was carried out last year assessed how many housing units were anticipated in Leicester City, the types of properties and also other information.
- Chris Burgin, Director of Housing informed the Committee that the new social housing company would be delivered in phases. Phase 1 would be to deliver 50 units across 6 sites. Proposals to start a second phase for 600 units was hoped to be delivered by approximately 2021.
- The Director of Housing noted that the need for adaptations to accommodate disabled tenants was being taken on board.
- Works in relation to 'under-occupation vs overcrowding' were ongoing.

AGREED:

1. That Members of the Commission be provided with the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment 2017.
2. That a report be provided at a future meeting regarding works/ progress on the initiative 'under-occupation vs overcrowding'.
3. That the report be noted.

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

A member of the forum present at the meeting informed the Committee that Housing management had been invited to provide advice about grass cutting but the forum had received no response.

A Member of the Committee expressed concerns around land maintenance – cutting trees, walkways – attracting litter and the condition of slabs in certain areas.

AGREED:

1. The Director of Housing would look into the management invitation regarding grass cutting.
2. That the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log be noted.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the work programme and requested the following to be included in the future;

- Report on repairs and voids to be put into the work programme for further consideration.
- A presentation from Officers regarding infrastructure in housing accommodation i.e. bath tubs, cupboards. There was some concerns that some appliances had been damaged deliberately and also requested clarification on criteria for the installation of housing infrastructure.

11. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7:52pm.