



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 20 AUGUST 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Byrne

Councillor Corral
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Willmott

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly, Assistant City Mayor, Housing

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12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from any Members of the Commission.

13. 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.

Councillor Alfonso declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that she had a family member who was a council

tenant.

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

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

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 25 June 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

Item 6 of the minutes required a minor correction, 'that further information be provided on the Bedroom Tax issues in relation to the 68 tenancies affected by the bedroom tax'.

Charlotte McGraw, Head of Service for Housing provided Members of the Commission with supplementary information relating to requests from the previous meeting rent arrears progress report: including termination reasons for the 68 tenants that ended their tenancy in year 2017/18 and were affected by bedroom tax and further information regarding Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's). *This information has been attached to these minutes.*

Simon Nicholls noted that the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) 2017 had been forwarded to the Scrutiny Policy Officer (SPO) and would be circulated to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

The SPO circulated this document to Members following the meeting.

AGREED:

1. That the customer service performance statistics/ report be circulated to Members of the Commission.

15. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

16. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or

statements of case had been received.

17. PREPARING FOR WINTER: PRESENTATION

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service for Housing gave a presentation on how the council dealt with the household boiler issues caused by the extreme cold weather in the early months of 2018. It was noted that several actions were taken to maximise resources to deal with the issues and attend to those properties concerned.

Members of the Housing Commission congratulated officers for the 24 hour work which was carried out.

A new product called the 'boiler buoy' was launched in February 2018 of which over 600 have now been installed into the internal condense pipe of properties. In addition, all new boiler installations where the condensate pipework has to run externally would have a boiler buoy fitted.

Following Members' concerns it was confirmed that the service was now in operation as usual.

18. REVISION OF CONDITIONS OF TENANCY

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the current conditions of tenancy used by Leicester City Council which were in need of modernisation and updating. As such, a project group was set up in 2017 to look at revising the Tenancy Agreement in light of the changing legislation.

Nick Griffiths, District Manager for Housing presented the report and noted that the conditions of tenancy document was still in a draft form but had now been updated and new clauses included:

- The document was drafted in consultation with legal services of whom would give it final approval.
- This stage was for internal colleagues, officers and Councillors to provide feedback.
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Forum had been consulted and would have until the end of August to submit comments.

Members of the Commission raised many points in relation to the condition of tenancy clauses of which the District Manager noted and responded to.

Some requests from Members to be considered included the following:

- The District Manager would go back and look at how clause 2.2.2 was drafted.
- It was suggested that an example be added for clause 3.5.
- Clauses 3.11.1 vs 3.11.6 'interfere'. The Officer noted this needed to be more clear as 3.11.6 was tailored for communal areas.
- Overhanging hedges on the highways or paths, it was noted that this was covered by Highways regulations, however the District Manager would look into this for Housing land.

- The Officer agreed that the final draft would be in plain/ clear English and ensure consistent language for people to understand.

Councillor Aqbyan left the meeting during the consideration of this item.

AGREED:

1. That a final draft be brought back to the Housing Scrutiny Commission to be approved.
2. That Members and new Members of the Commission be circulated with the completed document – so they could assist and advise members of the public in their role as a Councillor.

19. THE HOUSING COMPANY

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service for Housing presented the report to update Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the Council's decision to set up a Housing Company.

The Head of Service for Housing showed Members an example of the branding for the company which was currently in the process of being agreed.

An outline on what had been done so far was provided this included the identified locations of phase 1 sites, the company name which would be 'Housing Leicester Ltd', the governance structure and how phase 1 would be funded. It was noted that sites were currently being identified for phase 2.

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

- Reviews were carried out on back land and former garage sites, however there were several issues with access on a lot of the sites. The first four sites identified were straight forward. However, Members were also encouraged to recommend additional sites.
- It was confirmed that a statutory process would be followed in regards to the sites.
- The Housing Company would be following the Council's local procurement rules and guidelines.
- It was noted that the adoption of the new Local Plan would help the identification of sites for future phases of new house building for the Housing Company. It was hoped that this would be adopted in the next 12-18 months. The Head of Service would then bring back further details to the Commission when the Local Plan was adopted.

AGREED:

1. That a schedule of the sites identified be circulated to Members of the Commission.
2. That a progress report be brought to the Commission in six months.

20. VOID PERFORMANCE REPORT: QUARTER 1

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service for Housing provided an update on the Division's performance on the completion of void repairs to Council properties

for quarter 1 year 2018/19.

The Head of Service gave details on things which impact on void performance including craft staff vacancies, asbestos removal, refusal rates, productivity measures and peaks and troughs. Progress and future work areas included target setting, performance management, sheltered housing, the decorating voucher scheme and the stores review.

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

- Void performance was reportedly slow to pick up during quarter 1 of 2018/19 as it was felt important that the 6 vacant void craft staff posts would be filled by the latest cohort of apprentices that were due to come out of their time this September.
- At this meeting, further discussion took place from which was noted at the previous meeting in regard to reducing the number of offers a housing applicant/ tenant could receive from three to two. One suggestion was to implement a freezing policy which would suspend a successful applicant from bidding again within a certain time. Members had differing opinions on this topic.
- A Member of the Commission requested that the next report made reference to the Armed Forces Covenant.
- The Head of Service noted that fourteen sheltered housing schemes were being looked at across the City. It was noted that some schemes were unpopular due to them being bedsits/ flats, so reconfiguring was being looked at.
- A voids working party was suggested to Members of the Commission by the Chair, Vice Chair and Head of Service. The Scrutiny Policy Officer (SPO) would work with Housing to establish the terms of reference. Members should inform the SPO if they were interested.
- The Chair noted that a report on sheltered housing would be presented at the next Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting.

Councillor Byrne left the meeting during consideration of this item.

AGREED

1. That the next update would be expanded and provide more information on refusal rates.
2. Members to inform the Scrutiny Policy Officer if they were interested in the voids working party.

21. EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service for Housing updated Members on the work that the Empty Homes Team had been doing to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

It was noted that Leicester City Council compared favourably to other Local Authorities in terms of empty homes. Details of how long term empty homes

were monitored, current numbers of empty homes and what the Council did to bring them back into use was provided.

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

- Due to issues encountered with some properties where a local company was seeking to claim ownership and title to properties subject to CPO action – known as adverse possession, the Empty Homes Team with the support of Legal Services were investigating and hoped to resolve this soon.
- The ‘10 year Empty Letter’ was explained in more detail and that one of the reasons some properties remain empty for so long was because partners/ siblings often sell houses to each other.
- It was noted that improvements to reduce empty homes and increase more occupancy could be factored if the team were able to submit another bid into the transformation fund. Members present at this meeting agreed to support officers in this bid.

AGREED:

1. That the Housing Scrutiny Commission Members would support the Housing Department in submitting a bid for the Transformation Fund.

22. RENT ARREARS: QUARTER 1

Charlotte McGraw, Head of Service for Housing presented the rent arrears progress report of work over the first quarter from 2nd April 2018 to 1st July 2018.

The Head of Service noted:

- The cash amount owing at week ending 1st July was 0.70% higher than at the end of the previous financial year. However, the number of tenants in serious debt, owing more than 7 weeks rent was 13% lower than the last year.
- Of the 8 evictions which took place during quarter 1 due to non-payment of rent (compared to 9 at the same point in the previous year), 2 were families and 6 were single people.
- That the report to be presented at the Housing Scrutiny Commission in November 2018 would provide further details into the Universal Credit (UC) full service, the impact of the roll out and the impact with job centres. UC updates would also be included in future rent arrears progress reports.

AGREED:

1. That the impact of UC roll-out be brought to the Housing Scrutiny Commission November meeting and be included in future reports on rent arrears.

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

No comments were received from Members in relation to the Tenants' and

Leaseholders Forum Action and Decision Log.

24. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

25. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.47pm.

Supplementary Information request - Q4 Annual Report

Termination reasons for the 68 tenants that ended their tenancy in year 2017/18 and were affected by bedroom tax.

Reason	Number	Comments
Moved to Other Accommodation	8	Combination of Move to private rented Housing Association Other Council Other City Left the Country Family & Friends
Internal Transfer	17	Combination of reasons Management Cases Downsizing Affordability Harassment
Mutual Exchange	13	Property exchanged with another council / RSL tenant
Property Abandoned	2	Tenancy brought to an end due to abandonment
Downsizing	7	Downsized to smaller accommodation
Right to Buy	7	Property Purchase
Deceased – No successions	4	Tenant died
Eviction – ARREARS	2	Evicted due to non-payment of rent
Other / Unknown	8	Could be a number of reasons not recorded or not provided
Total	68	

DHP's - From the 37 evictions carried out in year 2017/18 a total of 4 tenants had received DHP's within the two years prior to their eviction. 2 out of 37 tenants had received one lot of DHP and a further 2 had received DHP on 3 separate occasions.

A total of 8 from the 37 had made a DHP application which was considered but the decision to award was refused.

A total of 25 had no DHP because they were either working or not entitled to HB which in turn means they don't qualify for DHP. Majority of the evictions are for single people and mostly non-engagers which makes it difficult for the team to support them with HB and DHP applications.

