



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Corral

Councillor Joshi
Councillor Willmott

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly, Assistant City Mayor – Housing

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26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from any Members of the Commission.

27. 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 he had family members who were council tenants.

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 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 Corrall 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.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 20th August 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

29. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

30. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

31. GOSCOTE HOUSE DEMOLITION AND SPRINKLER INSTALLATION UPDATE

The Director of Housing updated Members of the Commission on progress made since the decision on 24th April 2018 to decommission and demolish Goscote House. The report also provided an update on the current situation since the decision in July 2017 to install sprinklers in all five council-owned high-rise blocks of flats.

Simon Nicholls, Head of Service for Housing, presented the report and made the following points:

- The decision to demolish Goscote House was made at the same time as the decision to refurbish Maxfield House.
- Lettings were closed and any vacant flats closed on the Northgate housing system, and tenancies were being allowed to decline naturally.
- Forty-two tenants were affected by the demolition. Twenty-four permanent residents would be moving to Maxfield House. Officers would work closely with other tenants to find new homes in areas they wanted to be in.
- Refurbishment of Maxfield House was due to be completed at the end of December 2018, subject to the installation of sprinklers, so Goscote House would remain partly-occupied until Summer 2019.
- Goscote house would be used by Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) to train fire-fighters on how to deal with a fire in a high-rise block.
- The timeline for the demolition of Goscote House was outlined in the report

Phase 2 had commenced with the appointment of a Project Team and was awaiting completion of Phase 1.

- The demolition of Goscote House would hopefully be completed by the end of 2019 and would use the same methodology as New Walk Centre.
- The decision to retrofit sprinklers was made following the tragedy at Grenfell. It had involved a comprehensive process of carrying out surveys, and block safety strategy on how to act in case of fire.
- Officers in the Council had worked with LFRS to ensure the sprinkler system was fit for purpose and had followed a compliant procurement route.
- Contractors were in a position to start sprinkler installation at Maxfield house, and later the remaining four blocks.

The Head of Service responded to the following points raised by Members:

- Some tenants had been disturbed, but disruption was likely to reduce over time. The sprinkler installation was a much smaller job than the refurbishment.
- A revised quotation had been received at circa £400k and would be added to the HRA capital programme.
- There was a loss of 134 units, but the department was working to replace the loss through increase housing development.
- A decision had been made to redevelop the site and a scheme would be brought back to the Commission later. It was anticipated that the scheme would be low-rise housing, but as the site was constrained officers would work carefully with planners on a scheme that was viable to replace the affordable housing lost.
- The Council was moving forward with its Housing Company proposal and it was envisaged more than 300 affordable units would be developed over 2019-2021 to compensate for (or offset) the loss of the 134 units.
- The current tenants of Goscote House would not have the new houses earmarked for them.
- Officers had met with LFRS and were yet to firm up dates for training, but they would be given the block of flats for a period of time. They wanted to set mock fires on the 17th floor, following production of risk assessments and method statements. LFRS also wanted to involve residents at a community event at the same time.

The Chair asked Members to endorse the report, and asked officers to keep Members of the Commission informed on developments.

AGREED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted;
2. A report on the future redevelopment of the site be brought to a future meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

32. HOUSING SYSTEM REPLACEMENT AND HOUSING CHANNEL SHIFT

The Director of Housing submitted a report to provide an overview and update of the Housing System Replacement Programme and Housing Channel Shift.

Charlotte McGraw, Head of Service for Housing, presented the report and drew Members' attention to the following points:

- Customers and tenants were being encouraged to access services online through Channel Shift, but the Customer Service Centre would still be available for face-to-face contact for the vulnerable and elderly.
- The service would continue to provide face-to-face and telephone contact.
- Key drivers for Channel Shift were to reduce costs and improve customer service by providing 24 hours a day online access to services.
- The highest call volume into Customer Services was for housing calls – 38%, with a significant number reporting repairs.
- From Spring 2019, tenants will be able to log certain repairs, including pictures for the repairs needed, and select an appointment.
- The Council has purchased a new mobile working solution; Total Mobile, which will improve reporting, assist managers with resource allocation, and enable repairs to be completed more quickly.
- The use of E-communications (text messaging, email functionality, text reminder to people) should reduce the number of tenants not in. Text messages could also be sent to people who had missed payments.

The following points were made in discussion:

- Officers reported to the Digital Transformation Board. There was a structure in place with clear plans and deadlines for the delivery of the Housing System Replacement Programme and Channel Shift. Also, the Tenants' Forum had been consulted on a number of occasions. A significant amount of work had been undertaken over the past year and tenants would start to see the benefits of increased reliability.
- There were targets in place with outputs clearly identified. It was not envisaged that for any of the services that there would be hard stops; no reduced calls or face-to face interaction, but a delivery of Channel Shift alongside.
- The 38% increase in calls for housing did not necessarily mean the service was not performing well. There were occasional spikes in the number of calls which could relate to other things; seasonal demand could increase call volume, or more people could be contacting the service rather than face-to-face.
- There were a number of larger scale events outside of the Council which would also have an impact, for example 'Beast from the East' the severe cold weather experienced earlier in the year; a failure of IT systems; roll-out of Universal Credit and advice wanted on the impact on benefits; Homeless Reduction Act 2018 – all of which would add to the number of people contacting the Department.
- Figures provided about the calls were for the total number of calls answered. Customer Services had been asked to monitor calls and abandonment rates. Members with specific concerns could pass them on to the Heads of Service to address directly. Members requested a report be brought to a future Commission meeting on data on the type of calls, including the number of calls that dropped off with people not waiting to be

answered.

- Not all costs for Northgate were met up-front. There had been associated costs identified in order to provide a mobile solution. Information on costs would be provided to Members in due course.
- Tenants with no knowledge on the use of computers would be assisted by floor walkers at Granby Street and at Housing Offices.
- The mobile working solution was coming to the end of the testing phase. Members of staff would be trained over the coming months with a view to the system going live in the early part of 2019.
- There was a commitment that staff in libraries give help and support, and if there were examples of complaints where no help was available they should be reported.

The Chair requested that a report on some of the times Members had raised complaints be provided, and performance in those areas monitored.

AGREED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted;
2. Members requested a report be brought to a future Commission meeting on data on the type of calls, including the number of calls that dropped off with people not waiting to be answered;
3. Information on additional costs for Northgate to be provided to Members in due course.

33. RESPONSIVE HOUSING REPAIRS PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Director of Housing reported on the Division's performance on completion of responsive repairs to council properties and the implementation of service changes.

Ian Craig, Head of Service, presented the report, and the following points were highlighted:

- There was an improvement in the electronic customer satisfaction monitoring with timely satisfaction / dissatisfaction data reporting.
- With the roll-out of the mobile working solution, there was an ongoing programme of hardware replacement of hand held PDAs / tablets.
- There were enhanced communications around materials deliveries to homes which informed tenants at all stages of the repairs process.
- A report on the pilot for the delivery of glass from the supplier would be provided to the Assistant Mayor for Housing as part of efficiency savings.
- Internal tracking devices monitored driver behaviour and provided an efficient service with the allocation of drivers to jobs.
- A managed stores service for materials would be procured during 2018-19.
- A de-scaling programme for soil and vent pipes, particularly in high rise flats, would be introduced in 2019.
- A programme of planned work would be launched across the city, commencing with communal areas.

The Chair congratulated the department on its apprenticeship and employment policy; this was a great example to the private sector and construction industry which for decades had failed to provide the training base needed for its long-term stability. He asked if there was a period of time once they had qualified that they had to stay with the Council. The Head of Service reported that there was a two-year agreement that if people left within that time, they would have to pay back the cost of training, on a sliding scale over the two years.

In response to Members' questions, the following information was provided:

- Approximately 10% of tenants were not available for previously arranged appointments. Officers had tried ways to reduce the figure, for example by texting people the day before, on the day, and en-route to the job. With the new mobile working solution, operatives would be able to phone the tenant on the way, or ring the tenant if they got to the property and they were not there.
- Quite a few issues had been raised about waste stacks on St Matthews. Officers were moving forward with a proactive programme of waste stack cleaning/descaling
- Issue of feeding pigeons raised – a practice which also encouraged other pests. Officers were looking at installing signs advising against feeding birds and on how to dispose of rubbish correctly.
- There were repeat offenders who were not allowing operatives to gain access for repairs. Tenancy management would investigate to find out if people were actually living at the property. Sometimes there were genuine reasons for no access, for example, a crisis. If people were not in, the job would be cancelled, unless it was dangerous not to complete the job. The last step taken would be to gain entry under landlord powers to access the property.
- Operational challenges to completing jobs on first visit could be caused by many things,
- Operational problems with the old mobile working solution included jobs not being returned to the system as outstanding, and problems with IT systems, which should be resolved with the roll-out of the new mobile working software.
- With regards to electronic customer satisfaction / dissatisfaction feedback, data was being collected, and reported information would be brought back to the Commission as part of the Repairs report at a future meeting.
- With regards to 6. Next Steps in the report, a six-month update would be brought to the Scrutiny Commission.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

AGREED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. A report on electronic customer satisfaction / dissatisfaction feedback would be brought to a future meeting of the Commission as part of the Repairs performance report.
3. A six-month update would be brought to the Scrutiny

Commission.

34. WORK PROGRAMME

The Commissions work programme was submitted and noted.

The Commission was informed that a report on Private Sector Housing would be taken to the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission on 5th December 2018. Housing Scrutiny Commission Members would be invited to attend the meeting.

Consideration would be given to a possible task group review on an insurance scheme for tenants to cover household contents. A discussion would be held with the Chair.

35. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no other items of urgent business.

36. RIGHT TO BUY CONSULTATION DRAFT RESPONSE

In accordance with Rule 1 of Part 4B of the Constitution (Access to Information – Procedure Rules) Cllr Westley moved the resolution to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the report to be discussed, as it was only in 'draft' form and only circulated to Members of the Commission, and was not available in the public domain. This was seconded by Councillor Alfonso.

AGREED:

1. That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the report.

The Chair stated that comments from Members of the Commission would be sent to the Director of Housing for inclusion, where relevant, to the submission on the Government's Right to Buy Consultation on Tuesday 9th October.

Members were supportive of the draft submission.

37. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.50pm.