



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 5 AUGUST 2019 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Gee

Councillor O'Donnell
Councillor Pickering

Councillor Willmott

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed new Members on the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

Apologies were received from Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor for Housing and Education.

The Chair announced a change to the running order of the agenda, with the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum item to be heard earlier in the meeting.

2. 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 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 11th March 2019 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 2019/20

AGREED:

That the membership of the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2019/20 be noted.

6. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION 2019/20

Members were asked to note the dates for future meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2019/20 as follows:

5 August 2019
16 September 2019
4 November 2019
6 January 2020
17 February 2020
20 April 2020

All meetings to commence at 5.30pm.

AGREED:

That the meeting dates for the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2019/20 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. TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM MEETING NOTES

Wendy Biddles, Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum representative, presented

the Action and Decision log from the meeting held on 6th June 2019.

The Commission was informed that the Forum had 14 members drawn from all housing areas across the city. The Forum's aim was to make sure issues raised were reported to the Council and to help the Council find solutions. The Forum also took part in consultations to help shape services, and to help the Council manage the impact of Universal Credit. Council officers attended in a support role.

The Forum had an online presence with its own web page and held a meeting every two months. The group is an elected group and each member represents a geographical area. This is not a public group. Any vacancies for the Forum were advertised in Housing offices.

The Leaseholder Forum was also mentioned and this was explained to be an open forum which allowed any Leaseholders to attend.

The Chair asked the Director of Housing for a list of all the representatives for the tenants across the city to be sent to all Members of the Scrutiny Commission.

The Chair thanked Ms Biddles for the information.

AGREED:

That:

1. the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log be noted.
2. the Director of Housing circulate to Commission Members a list of all the representatives for tenants across the city to Members of the Scrutiny Commission.

10. MANIFESTO HOUSING COMMITMENTS

The Director of Housing provided a verbal update on the manifesto programme relating the Housing Scrutiny Commission's remit.

The Chair requested that the Vice-Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission work with the Director of Housing and the Assistant City Mayor for Housing and Education on the manifesto programme for relevant items.

The Director reported on Labour's Manifesto commitments. 'For the Many not the Few' contained eight specific sections covered within the document and that the Housing Division would continue to contribute towards many of the broader themes and elements within them. The following information was provided:

The document contained 12 main Manifesto commitments that the Housing Division had primary responsibility for delivering. Most of the commitments sat under the Manifesto section 'Homes for All'.

Commitment to **‘Provide 1,500 more council, social and extra care homes’**.

There were three proposed strands to delivering the commitment:

- (i) The first was a new **residential acquisition programme** involving buying available and suitable properties on the open market to be a part of Leicester’s Council property stock. Work had already started and since May 2019 the Local Authority had purchased or had offers accepted on 84 properties (£15m) with an ongoing pipeline of purchases being delivered during the manifesto term.
- (ii) The second was to deliver **new build houses** that again would become part of the Local Authority’s council stock. This work had also started, and planning permission and builder were already in place for the first phase of properties on five different sites, with a sixth pending planning to deliver the first new Council properties in a number of years (29 units). A second phase of sites had been identified and work was ongoing to submit planning applications for those sites. (110 units – 3 sites). Work was just commencing to consider an ongoing pipeline of potentially suitable sites to continue to deliver new build housing across the City.
- (iii) The third strand was to build **new extra care schemes**. The Housing Division had been working with Adult Social Care colleagues whom had recently identified the need for over 630 units over the next ten years. Work again had already commenced, with two specific Extra Care Schemes on Tilling Road and Hamelin Road (155 units) due to commence build in 2019/20.

Although the full mix of the three strands had not currently been determined to deliver the 1,500 new council homes, work was ongoing.

Commitment to **‘Use our Housing company to tackle housing shortages’** would be met by what had been set out above. In extension to this the house building programme would be used to deliver house types not delivered by the market, including bungalows and adapted properties.

The Housing company will also be used to target hard to use / small and less profitable spaces that the open market did not find appetising.

The Housing company could also be used to deliver private rented sector accommodation (something that the Local Authority could not do).

Commitment to **‘Reduce the number of families and individuals placed in temporary accommodation’**. Delivery of the new social housing set out in the above commitments would already deliver more permanent homes for the city and help deliver the commitment. In extension to and in line with the Homelessness Strategy, Housing would be working to maximise existing Homelessness services to achieve the best prevention rates it could. It was also intended to continue to bid for additional funding that could be used to enhance Homelessness services. In the last year Housing had been successful in bidding for almost £1million of extra funding that had gone to increasing front line Homelessness services. Work had already been approved to deliver greater types of stepped accommodation for differing needs and client groups, which would enable the Local Authority to offer more suitable types of property to greater meet customer needs. Work had also already started to re-procure existing Leicester City Council provision to deliver more units that the council

had previously had and to look to reconfigure the Council's internal services and accommodation to also achieve the commitment. Housing were also working closely with registered providers and had a number of new agreements in place for them to provide more permanent accommodation to those facing homelessness through the Housing First route.

Commitment to '**Ensure that no-one has to sleep rough on our streets**'. The Council already had very strong services to deliver on the commitment and while all of what had already been reported would feed into strengthening delivery of the commitment, continuing to deliver the remaining actions within the Homeless strategy would also deliver the commitment. Work had started to increase the amount of single temporary accommodation available in the City. Work was also already ongoing to enhance the Outreach and Revolving Door services to refine and enhance Housing's offer. Housing were also working to deliver a second safe space providing more sharp end beds, and there was additional funding to support people into accommodation, and there was additional staff working to source additional private sector accommodation. Officers were also developing closer working arrangements with the prison to ensure people leaving Leicester Prison had a clear pathway and service. Close working relations continued through the Homelessness Charter with lots of stakeholders whom had a passion to meet the commitment.

Commitment to '**Establish a residential facility for people experiencing multiple and complex needs, many of whom are rough sleeping**'. Work was ongoing, and a final business case was currently being prepared for consideration of the City Mayor to create a facility which would provide a further type of accommodation to meet those most complex customers, supporting up to 12 complex clients to get the help and support they needed to address their personal issues.

Commitment to '**Support further work to meet complex needs experienced by women and Black and Minority Ethnic communities who may not be sleeping on our streets but are homeless**'. While no specific needs or gaps were identified in the thorough Homelessness services review in 2017, to meet the commitment it was proposed to do a more focussed piece of work to identify any weaknesses or gaps which required a response and action.

Commitment to '**Make Leicester a place of refuge for those fleeing conflict across the World, with a comprehensive offer of housing, support and learning**'. Leicester City Council gave the commitment to offer a place of safety and home to 45 families as part of the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme. It was confirmed Leicester was meeting the obligation with 36 families housed and supported to start new lives in Leicester with the further nine planned over the next 12 months. Housing were working closely with the new provider of Asylum Seeker services to develop a more effective pathway for those receiving positive decisions. We are also working with groups through the Homelessness charter especially Red Cross to enhance support and help for refugees and asylum seekers facing destitution.

Commitment to '**Maintain our existing adaptations services for all**

homeowners and undertake a programme of council housing adaptations to allow people with disabilities to remain or move into our properties’.

The City Mayor through the Disabled Facilities Grant Budget already provided £2.1m to provide adaptations for people that needed them in Leicester. Through the Housing Revenue Account the City Mayor also provided a further £1.2m specifically for Council tenants. Both delivered over 370 adaptations for the people of Leicester, and the Housing teams worked closely with Adult Social Care colleagues in order to deliver them. A detailed review had started of all cases that required adapted properties on the Housing register in order to work towards positive individual solutions for them. A budget of £500k had also been set up that would support the commitment and also meet the next commitment of;

Commitment to **‘Establishing a home extension fund for council tenants to reduce overcrowding in council properties’**. Cases that were severely or statutorily overcrowded on the housing register would be reviewed to see if it was possible to extend the families’ existing home to address the overcrowding.

Committed to continue to **‘Undertake an ongoing £80m council home improvement programme’** during the next 4 years. For 2019 alone investment of over £26m would be going in to maintain and improve current council housing stock and that capital investment would continue to be used to achieve the improvement programme exceeding the £80m commitment.

Commitment to **‘Continue our environmental investment programme on council land and estates’**. To meet this commitment it was proposed to continue to invest more than £750,000 in estates using Housing’s environmental budget. It was also proposed to continue to fund the Neighbourhood Improvement and also the Estate Warden services whose primary focusses were estate-based improvement work. The house building work on estates would also enable investment in improving estates as well as addressing banks of land that could be a target for fly tipping/ASB and environmental issues.

Commitment to **‘Provide Free Wifi on council estates’**. The commitment was specifically to ensure that as with the City Centre where free wifi could be obtained in external communal areas the same opportunities were rolled out in our estates. Work had already started with Corporate colleagues and discussions were ongoing with a number of companies to deliver this.

In response to Commission Members’ questions, the following information was given and noted:

- The 1,500 units were primarily social housing in three streams: council house building, acquiring and extra care, working with housing associations and cooperatives. Money could be used and given to registered providers to help them deliver some of the 1,500 affordable housing units.
- £250k was available for grants to repair private properties.
- Dropped kerb requested made by council tenants would usually be

forwarded to Highways and would be looked at on an individual basis.

- Each development site would have an individual business case to determine the mix and type of accommodation and would provide the opportunity to progress and develop different techniques, for example, methods of build. Each development would be discussed with ward councillors
- The first housing would be delivered through the Housing Revenue Account and would be part Right-to-Buy receipts and part borrowing funded. The authority could deliver some for-sale housing, the funds of which would be recycled to provide social housing.
- With regards to climate change, from a house building perspective it was important to make properties as energy efficient as possible, with a balance against build cost. Housing were also working with fleet colleagues to replace old vehicles with electric or less polluting vehicles.
- There was potential for buying back ex-local authority properties and influencing the housing market and the authority would never pay over the market value. The law did not protect the property from Right-to-Buy in the future, but there was a cost floor for 15 years that will ensure that the purchase price restricts the level of discount that can be obtained.
- Of the 5,800 people on the waiting list 3,400 were in overcrowded housing. Equally there were a number of people under-occupied. It had previously been reported that a pilot had taken place to try and marry up overcrowding and under-occupancy. A further report was scheduled to come to a future meeting of the Commission.
- Planning submissions over a certain size had Section 106 (S.106) obligations and was managed by the Planning Department. S.106 monies should be usually spent in the area of the development. Equally the developer might provide a service to the area, for example, a play area. Members queried whether all S.106 money was spent in the areas. The Director of Housing would raise the query with Planning and provide information to Commission Members.
- Depending on where a development was in would dictate the number of affordable housing that needed to be built.
- 29 new affordable houses would be delivered in the first phase of Housing Leicester Council Housing, and contracts would have clauses to engage with the local workforce, including providing apprenticeships, and would be monitored by the Council.
- Provision of housing for those with complex needs was being considered and this was being led by Public Health and overseen by the Health & Wellbeing groups. The aim would be to have wrap-round support to those in this accommodation.

The Chair requested that a report be provided to the Scrutiny Commission setting out how the manifesto commitments would be fulfilled, the timetable for delivery, and an item to be added to the work programme for the Commission for an update be provided every three months. It was also requested that a copy of the manifest be sent to each Commission Member.

AGREED:

That:

1. the update be noted.
2. a report be brought to the next meeting of the Commission with detail on how the manifesto commitments would be fulfilled and a timetable for delivery.
3. the manifesto commitments be added to the Commission work programme.
4. a copy of the manifesto be sent to each Commission Member.

11. RENT ARREARS PROGRESS REPORT - APRIL 2018 TO MARCH 2019

The Director of Housing submitted a report of progress on rent arrears for the financial year from April 2018 to March 2019.

Zenab Valli, Income Collection Manager, presented the report. The following points in the report were highlighted and Members' questions answered:

- A 4.34% decrease in more complex cases was recorded.
- Of the 35 evictions, eight were family cases.
- 1,879 council tenants made a new claim under Universal Credit (UC) – 9.32% of all current council tenants.
- Rent Management Advisors supported the most vulnerable tenants to help set up email and bank accounts to assist tenants with rent payments.
- Income Management Officers had assisted 704 UC claimants from Job Centre Plus Offices, 46% of which were council tenants. Some claimants had just required advice and signposting.
- The Housing Online (Rent Self-serve) portal had been rolled out successfully.
- The Team was maximising rent collection activities despite economic pressures on tenants.
- For people moving onto UC, there was an initial spike in rent arrears which would in time balance out and stabilise.
- Families moving onto UC that had not had benefits before could claim for an advance. Also, STAR provided tenancy sustainment, particularly for vulnerable families who could be referred for specialist support. The Chair requested a breakdown of rent arrears by ward to be included in a future report to the Commission. It was noted that there was very little council stock in some wards.
- It was noted that there would be an additional £25.25 million to be collected, and requests to pay direct to landlords on individual cases not always agreed. Officers were constantly looking at ways of maximising collect and used Clockwise rent payment accounts to promote regular payments. It was noted that rent collection was a ring-fenced account which went to the HRA budget to provide all of the service. A review of arrangements in the Income Management Team was underway to continue to provide effective and strong services
- If the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) make a negative decision on claims, the Team engage with the tenant to support and could ask Welfare Rights to assist the claimant to make a challenge with the DWP so the claim can be reconsidered.

- Pensioner couples, where someone of pensionable age and the other not were expected to make a UC claim was also a concern, but no actual details of how many people this affects or consequences were currently available.
- GDPR regulations did not allow officers to see private tenants' rent and UC claims, though the Council did assist private sector tenants at risk of homelessness that required help through difficulties with UC while they are working at DWP offices. There was also the floating support service and homeless prevention officers available in each of the three DWP offices for those potentially facing homelessness.
- The 500 cases with the highest arrears were hard and complex to manage. A lot of work by the team and combination of factors had brought the total of arrears down.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

The Chair requested information on the processes of rent collection, courts, etc for new Members on the Commission. Members of the Commission were invited to visit the Income Management Team, and a suitable date would be arranged by the Director of Housing.

AGREED:

That:

1. the update be noted.
2. a breakdown of rent arrears by ward to be included in a future report to the Commission.
3. the Director of Housing to arrange a suitable date for Commission Members to visit the Income Management Team.

12. EMPTY HOMES: UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report which updated the Commission on the work that the Empty Homes Team were doing to bring long-term empty private sector homes back into use.

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

- The process of bringing empty homes back into use was a 20-stage process, with compulsory purchase being a last resort.
- Empty homes were often notified to the Council by members of the public. Only domestic properties were dealt with under the process, not commercial or second homes. Most properties were brought back into use by working with the owners. There were currently seven cases being considered for Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO).
- During the CPO process the owner of a property could put in an appeal which would halt the process. If the council did CPO the property the owner received compensation. Upon successful completion of the CPO process the council put the property into an auction.
- The Council received a New Homes Bonus payment from central

- government for bringing empty homes back into use.
- There were currently 50 properties empty for longer than five years. Figures for Leicester compared favourably with other authorities in bringing private sector homes back into use.
 - Flats above shops were currently not included because a property was mixed use. Housing were looking at applying for planning permission to get a change of use for commercial to residential and adding it to the caseload.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

13. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a presentation for noting to the Commission on the ongoing work to implement the Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 since the last report to the Commission in November 2018.

Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service, delivered the presentation, and the following additional points made:

- There is a legal duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy every five years.
- The strategy was a public, working document, and regularly reviewed to fill gaps and confirm progress. It included a set of actions, objectives and action plan. A smaller presentation would be arranged to be delivered to new Members of the Commission on the Homelessness Strategy.
- One of the priorities within the action plan was to increase partnership working and a Homelessness Charter was launched with partners in October last year.
- A re-directed giving scheme was to be launched in the city scheme to enable the public to donate to specific themes around homelessness. The Charter also provides information about the many services available to homeless people.
- Another strand of homeless prevention looked to help those who were facing homelessness and there was also the provision of an emergency duty team for those who were homeless and out of hours services.
- The My Home (Housing Options Made Easy) app was now interactive and details steps to assist people facing homelessness, available for Android and Apple devices.
- The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 had been implemented successfully, including the duty to refer. Additional homeless prevention officers had been recruited.
- The service was seeing more families, through the termination of assured shorthold tenancies. Landlords are nervous around UC, and a Landlord Forum was held recently to try and look at putting different incentives in place, for example, Home Come – where the Council lease property from landlords for a fixed term. The Council was looking at incentives for landlords to reassure them of rent payment, to try and stop notices being

served.

- There were currently four families in B&B. Families were moved out as quickly as possible into temporary accommodation, and Leicester worked hard to not have any families in B&B for more than six weeks which was the government target. The objective was to have no families in temporary accommodation but move on was an issue due to the number of families requiring accommodation and the lack of homes available.
- The duty to prevent homelessness in singles was as important as families. There were 14 available spaces in the Safe Space at Andover Street. Another Safe Space in the city was being considered.
- The Dawn Centre had 45 bed spaces and was a multi-disciplinary centre, including health teams.
- There were 30 units for offenders, which had high-level support, as well as lower level, step down accommodation. Surgeries were held at Leicester Prison for planned discharges into units.
- The new single person service offer was ready to procure. It was recognised that one size did not fit all, and different types of accommodation for different, sometimes complex needs was needed.
- As part of being a corporate parent, the service was working with Children's Service to jointly commission accommodation-based support for young people aged 16-25 years. Information on progress would be brought to a future meeting of the Commission.
- Under housing-related support, a transitions worker would stay with a homeless individual from the beginning through to the end.
- £350k funding for rough sleepers had been confirmed and would enable 20 additional hostel beds and staff support. A further £211k would fund Rough Sleep Navigators work with local charities.
- Day centres would be reviewed to remove duplication. It was noted that a person did not have to be homeless to go to day centres. Surgeries would be taken to No.5 centre.
- When managing narrative, the team worked hard with the press team to release good news stories. In relation to rough sleeping and street lifestyles in the city centre, most were known by name and their individual problems, and most were not homeless but supporting their addictions.
- Regular rough sleeping counts were carried out 2.00am – 5.00am. The city had seen an increase in street lifestyle numbers. It was noted that someone who was entrenched in a street lifestyle and substance use often found it difficult to move on from this lifestyle. Information from the Street Lifestyle groups would be included in a future report to the Commission. Commission Members were invited to the street counts if this was something that they would be interested in taking part in.
- It was further noted that there appeared to be a lot of people with a drug addiction issues living in Vestry House, where it was reported that conditions were bad. The Director of Housing stated he had met with the owners and discussed the challenges. It was suggested there was more that registered providers could do in the city. A breakdown of stock in the city with registered providers would be shared with the Commission Members.

The Chair thanked the officer for the presentation and information provided.

AGREED:

That:

1. the presentation be noted.
2. a smaller presentation on the Homelessness Strategy would be arranged for new Members of the Commission.
3. information on street lifestyle numbers to be included in a future report to the Commission.
4. the Scrutiny Policy Officer would liaise with Members to attend a street count.
5. a breakdown of stock in the city with registered providers would to be shared Commission Members.

14. TASK GROUPS

Members were invited to propose topics for review.

The following items for review were suggested:

- Private landlords and the licensing regime – to be led by the Vice-Chair.
- Lettings and voids – to be led by Cllr Aqbany

The Scrutiny Policy Officer would design the Terms of Reference for the task groups.

It was confirmed that the Vice-Chair would look at the manifesto ongoing.

15. WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

That the work programme would be amended to include the manifesto commitments.

16. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other urgent business, the meeting closed at 8.13pm.