



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 13 JANUARY 2020 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 Willmott

In attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor, Housing and Education
Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor, Environment and Transportation

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43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Pickering.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Westley declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting 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 interests. The Councillors were not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion of the agenda items.

45. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute 29: Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Willmott felt that he had communicated his apologies for absence from the last meeting which were not recorded.

Minute 34: Goscote House and sprinkler installation update:

The Vice-Chair asked a number of questions in relation to the demolition of Goscote House and the need to be reflective. The Director of Housing was requested to provide a briefing for the Vice-Chair to discuss the issues raised in the questions.

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 4th November 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

46. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Due to the clash of several diary events, it was requested that the date of the next Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting be rescheduled.
- It was noted that the proposal to close Border House would be on the next Housing Scrutiny Commission Meeting agenda prior to a final decision being taken.

47. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

48. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

49. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET (INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME) 2020/21

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which considered the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for the 3 years from 2020/21 to 2022/23.

In presenting the report, the following was noted:

- Several pressures brought about by government were noted, including the requirement to reduce rents by 1% during 2016-2020, despite this the HRA still delivered balanced budgets. However, further pressures from central government included Right to Buy sales whereby Leicester City Council lost in excess of 400 properties last year, the rollout of Universal Credit and inflationary pressures, reference was made to 4.2.1 table 1.
- The 2019/20 capital programme was £48m, with more than half of this relating to the Council House Acquisition and New Builds Programme. A further £70m was added in November 2019 following Council approval to extend the programme of increasing affordable housing, this would also help to deliver the commitment of quality, energy efficient new homes and acquisitions.

- Appendix B detailed the proposed HRA Capital Programme 2020/21 to 2022/23 and it was noted that there would be an investment of £5m for Public Realm Works including communal areas and estates.
- Reference to Appendix E noted planned Capital works in Council dwellings, it was noted that works were only undertaken after the item was inspected and the repair history for the property was checked ensuring money was only spent where it was absolutely necessary.
- The report recommended that the budget for 2020/21 was set as a balanced budget, continuing the approach of only drawing on reserves to fund time-limited or one-off schemes.

In response to Commission Members' questions, the following issues were discussed and noted:

- In order to see where money would be best spent for housing and estates, district managers had been meeting with Ward Councillors to get information on priorities that would be included in proposals and a satisfaction survey to tenants would be carried out to obtain input of improvement areas.
- The Assistant City Mayor for Housing had offered to do housing briefings with Ward Councillors, for members to provide information as to what the priorities were for their ward areas.
- The Director of Housing clarified the proposed rent and service charges percentage increase in terms of costs. On average a two-bedroom property house with the 2.7% increase converts to approximately £2.76 on average. Service charge increase was pence, the increased hostel rents were to cover additional financial pressures. To not increase the rent and service charges would mean that investment would have to be reduced from the proposed budget. It was noted that 99% of hostel rents were covered by Housing Benefit.
- The core programme remained at a consistent level.
- Talks were in progress with the Sustainability Section of Estates and Building Services regarding proposals to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions from existing properties including installing PV panels, further external wall installation, with the overall aim of reducing carbon emissions and reducing tenants' heating costs.
- Over 340 heat metres had already been installed in properties connected to the District Heating. Consideration would now be given to the other 2000 units on District Heating.
- Increases to loft insulation and the installation of energy efficient boilers would also continue to take place. The district heating scheme was proposed to have further investment to upgrade pumps and heating exchanges in sub stations.
- Time would be spent this year looking into what could replace gas Boilers e.g. hydrogen boilers and ground source heating. In addition, the installation of solar PV panels – possibly with battery storage – would be considered as longer-term solutions to provide renewable electricity for waylighting of communal areas. However, due diligence would need to be first carried out prior to any proposals.
- It was noted that the figures for the demolition of Goscote House were

provisional until a detailed specification could be provided, and procurement completed.

- It was agreed that the Director of Housing would circulate papers to Members of the Commission about the free WIFI proposal and also papers on the social value of Goscote House were requested.

Discussion took place on the feedback provided from the consultation with Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum in relation to rent and service charge proposals which was to;

- I. Increase rents by 2.5% (not the proposed 2.7%)
- II. Increase service charges by 1.7% (not the proposed 2.0%)
- III. Increase the hostel rents by 0.0% (not the proposed 2.0%)

It was proposed that the Commission should support Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum views. Upon being put to the vote the proposal was carried.

Agreed:

1. To note the financial pressures on the HRA and comment on the proposals for delivering a balanced budget.
2. To recommend to Council that the increases proposed by the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum should be supported.
3. All other aspects of the budget were agreed.

50. LEICESTER'S CLIMATE EMERGENCY CONVERSATION

The Director of Estates and Building Services submitted a report to inform Members about draft proposals for the city's response to the climate emergency, as well as the associated programme of community consultation and engagement entitled "Leicester's Climate Emergency Conversation".

The Chair noted that following the Climate Emergency consultations, this item would be brought back to Housing scrutiny as a matter of priority.

Duncan Bell, Corporate Environmental Consultant gave a presentation on the Climate Emergency. The following was noted:

- The Council declared a Climate Emergency in February 2019 to address the urgent action required to prevent global heating from exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Consultations were now in progress in various formats including an online questionnaire, community discussions, one day workshops for adults and young people, primary school discussions, a physical pack and use of the Council's new moderated online discussion platform: Dialogue.
- Following the consultations, feedback from the public would inform the development of a draft action plan for the Council's response to the emergency, which would be adopted in 2020.

In response to concerns of the Commission:

- Potential ways in which we could work with the private sector to

encourage them to achieve carbon reductions would include using the selective licences scheme.

- It was encouraged to lobby central government to do more and the Chair requested that Commission Members and Assistant City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin wrote to their local MP's and inform them of the Climate Emergency consultation.
- The Director of Housing noted that plans to be more carbon neutral had already started and this would be demonstrated in phase 2 housing plans.

Agreed:

1. That the progress made since the climate emergency declaration, including the consultation and engagement programme currently underway be noted.
2. Commented on the proposals for discussion, including their implications for the city and for the Council;
3. That all Councillors to help to publicise the Climate Emergency Conversation through their role as Ward Councillors and inform their local MP's; and
4. Following the consultations, this item be brought back to Housing Scrutiny as a matter of priority.

51. WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing Scrutiny Commission work programme was noted.

52. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 7.04pm.