



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2013 at 5.00pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)

Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany  
Councillor Kitterick

Councillor Mayat  
Councillor Westley (Substitute)

In Attendance:

Councillor Connolly  
Councillor Chaplin  
Councillor Moore

– Assistant Mayor for Housing  
– Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission  
– Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission

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**35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair welcomed Members of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission to the meeting, who had been invited to attend for Agenda Item 11, 'Call-In of City Mayor and Executive Decision. It was agreed the agenda be heard out of order, and Agenda Item 11 be taken as the first item of business to be discussed.

Apologies were received from Councillors Glover, Joshi, V. Patel and Willmott. Councillor Westley was present as substitute for Councillor Glover.

**36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any interests they had in the business to be discussed on the agenda.

Councillor Aqbany declared a family member was a council tenant.

Councillor Mayat declared a family member was a council tenant.

Councillor Westley declared a family member was a council tenant.

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

Councillor Newcombe declared an interest in an Agenda Item 6 'Proposal to Move Band 5 Applicants from the Housing Register', as his name was included on the list. He said he would vacate the meeting when the item of business was to be discussed and hand over to the Vice-Chair.

#### **40. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

#### **41. CALL-IN OF CITY MAYOR AND EXECUTIVE DECISION**

The Chair had agreed to take the agenda item as urgent business in order to comply with City Mayor and Executive Procedure Rule 12(f).

The decision was called-in, and was referred to the Housing Scrutiny Commission for consideration under Council Procedure Rule 12(f), Part 4D of the Council's Constitution:

- Decision by the Assistant Mayor (Adult Social Care) to close Evesham House accommodation based support to people with alcohol misuse issues.

The reason for the call-in was the requirement by Members to have a clear plan to minimise the impact of the closure of Evesham House on users of the service.

The Chair thanked officers who had produced supporting documentation on the background of the decision, and details of the plans for service users. This was emailed to Members of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission and Housing Scrutiny Commission, and was tabled at the meeting. There was a break of five minutes in the meeting to allow Members to read the supporting documentation.

Cllr Moore asked an amendment be made on page 11 of the supporting information which should read Cllr Cooke, not Moore.

Kate Galoppi, Head of Commissioning and Bernadette Wharton, Lead Commissioner – Substance Misuse, were present at the meeting and presented the reports.

The Commissioning Manager said the proposal to close Evesham House was developed in response to two main changes in National Policy, outlined in the supporting information.

A Strategic Commissioning Review was undertaken, and a new model of service was designed, and included the removal of duplication of services. The new redesigned service would be implemented from April 2014.

The impact of the Welfare Reforms and the benefit cap had an adverse effect on all six residents, and equated to a shortfall of £59,400 to Leicester City Council.

It was reported that each of the options to mitigate against the financial impact of the welfare reforms, in the report were explored in detail. Option 3 was considered to be the most viable, and would require consultation prior to decanting and re-locating residents into suitable and affordable alternative accommodation to an agreed timetable, and introduce a peripatetic approach to meet the support needs of the residents.

A six-week period of statutory consultation took place with residents and staff. The consultation findings were presented to the Executive, with a recommendation to close Evesham House, with an interim period between closure and the new service.

Four of the six residents had moved to alternative accommodation already and were receiving a transitional floating support service from Action Homeless. Leicester City Council staff based at Evesham House would be redeployed within the Housing Department.

The meeting was informed there would be service continuity for the two remaining residents, with the level of floating support tailored to the individual needs of each resident. The support would be delivered through a floating support model within service users own homes, however if required service users would be able to access further support at the Action Homeless Engage harm reduction suite based at St James Terrace. There would be accommodation based support at Heathfield House, which was a 24-bed unit support service for substance misusers. It was reported the new model with floating support would be able to target more service users, increasing provision by 60%, and therefore provided better value for money than current provision, with increased coverage, reduced duplication, and an emphasis on supporting outcomes, within a reduced financial envelope.

The Lead Commissioner said current provision at Evesham House was for a maximum of two years, but the average length of stay was one year, with only the most severe cases remaining longer. Members were informed there was a strong evidence base that recognised the importance of stable housing in recovery from drug and alcohol use which had informed the development of the new model. The new model would link much better with treatment services and be part of the recovery community, and consisted of both accommodation based support (approximately 10-bed) and floating support.

Members asked for the location and cost of the new 10-bed unit. The Head of Commissioning said there was no proposal to site the new accommodation in Highfields, and the budget of the new facility which also covered Heathfield House was included in the £205k budget reported, which was a reduction in the budget for Heathfield House and Evesham House. She added the location of the new premises would be part of the tender process and current providers

would be able to submit tenders for the new service.

Members were concerned that vulnerable service users would have to visit St James Terrace and Heathfield House, both sited in an area in Stoneygate Ward which had issues with street drinkers. Members added there was no evidence to suggest there had been any other consultation with other departments at Leicester City Council, for example, Licensing. The Head of Commissioning said they worked very closely with Licensing and were aware of the Cumulative Impact Zone in the area, introduced because of street drinking issues. She added 'The Hub' at St James Terrace was an additional part of the treatment provision, and that there was no expectation for service users to attend here if not appropriate as they would be receiving floating support in their own homes.

Members were also concerned with the potential for Heathfield House to close in the future through the procurement plan. Members believed this would not be conducive for service users if they were made to move accommodation again, and asked if the level of service could be guaranteed. They also had concerns over the gap in service provision between the closure of Evesham House and the opening of the new 10-bed facility. They had been informed at the meeting that Heathfield House was full, and there were waiting lists for the service across the city. They said the service provision was for the treatment of the most vulnerable people, and they wanted to see the new unit established before closing Evesham House.

Members could not equate the closure of a facility that worked, and the opening of a new 10-bed facility. The Head of Commissioning said the needs of service users very much underpinned the design of the new model and combined accommodation base with good treatment support, and recovery from treatment services. She added there was no suggestion that the new model moved away from accommodation support. She gave assurance that the two remaining residents at Evesham House would receive the treatment and outcomes needed.

Members asked if the six residents at Evesham House were eligible for the Discretionary Housing Fund, and could it be used to cover the shortfall of benefit residents received under welfare reform changes. The Head of Commissioning advised that this option had been explored but had been advised that the fund was not sufficient for this purpose. The Director of Housing said there were many calls on the fund and criteria were locally determined.

Members said there was no information included in the report on the impact of the service changes on Action Homeless. The Lead Commissioner said Action Homeless was involved in the consultation with staff and residents, and Action Homeless would be able to bid under procurement process.

Members said the figures in the report were inaccurate and did not make the case for the closure of Evesham House. They said other benefits received by residents, for example, ESA, were an income for residents and not a cost, and

shortfall reported was questionable. They asked that a breakdown of costs and income be provided to the Scrutiny commission at a future meeting.

Members considered the building maintenance at £17k per year to be high, and also requested a breakdown of this figure. The Head of Commissioning responded the figure included annual rental, council tax and staffing costs. She added there was a separate budget for support costs.

Members believed Evesham House was intrinsically linked to other parts of a city-wide strategy for tackling substance misuse, but they were being asked to look at Evesham House in isolation. They asked that information be brought to the meeting on the impact on other agencies, information on the new model with examples of where it had been put into practice, and information on the National Plan.

Members were concerned there would be no night support for the six residents of Evesham House in the interim period. The Lead Commissioner responded it could not be said whether there would not be night support in the new model.

Members asked what discussions, if any, had taken place with departments, and had any consideration been given to transferring Evesham House to the voluntary sector, for example, Action Homeless could then claim Discretionary Housing Payment, and therefore continue to operate, but were informed that this had not been considered.

Members drew attention to Question 2 in the Equality Impact Assessment, where it was reported the vast majority of residents were White British, and there would be no negative impact to the residents. They objected to race being a factor in the consultation, and that treatment would be provided whatever the group.

Councillor Kitterick moved the following motion:

“This Commission is not satisfied with the level of detail supplied to the Commission on the closure of Evesham House. We therefore resolve that this decision be passed for consideration at the next meeting of the Overview Select Committee of Leicester City Council.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Mayat. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

The Assistant Mayor for Housing asked that officers be made aware of what information the Overview Select Committee would require, in order for them to respond to the call-in. It was agreed that a summary of the information requested by Members would be provided for officers.

The Chair thanked officers for the reports, and asked that further details on the points raised by Members be brought to the next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

RESOLVED:

that it be agreed that the Commission, being not satisfied with the level of detail in the report on the closure of Evesham House have the decision passed for consideration at the next meeting of the Overview Select Committee of Leicester City Council.

Councillor Moore and Councillor Westley left the meeting at this point.

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