



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2015 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)  
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany

Councillor Joshi

Councillor Westley

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly: Assistant City Mayor, Housing

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**44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Veejay Patel.

**45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

Councillor Aqbany declared that a family member was a council lessee.

Councillor Joshi declared that a family member was a council tenant.

Councillor Newcombe declared that a family member was a council tenant.

Councillor Westley declared that members of his family were council tenants.

#### **46. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

##### Minute Item 32. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Newcombe asked for the agenda item to be amended to read 'a family member was a council lessee'.

##### Minute Item 36. Housing Revenue Account Budget (Including Capital Programme) 2015/16

Councillor Aqbany asked if there had been any information from other authorities proposals received. The Scrutiny Officer to follow up and circulate information.

##### Minute Item 37. Voids Improvement Project Update

Councillor Aqbany asked if there was an update available. The Director of Housing reported there was a piece of work being undertaken looking at voids, which would be brought back to the Scrutiny Commission when complete.

##### RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **47. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE**

In accordance with Council procedures, it was reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

#### **48. PETITIONS**

In accordance with Council procedures, it was reported that no petitions had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

#### **49. CITY MAYOR'S DELIVERY PLAN, HOUSING CONTRIBUTION**

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the service elements in the City Mayor's Delivery Plan that fell within the Housing Division, or which the Division made a contribution towards, and on progress up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

The Director of Housing highlighted the following points in the report:

- Good progress was being made on the provision of new affordable housing.
- Preventing homelessness – the Service prevented homelessness for 1,525 household – a steady rate at 72%. The numbers of people contacting the Service had gone down slightly.
- The Repeat Homeless list contained information on those people who had been in and out of hostels four or more times in the past two years, or who repeatedly slept rough. The number of people on the list fluctuated as

people joined and left the list. Though it was a small amount of people, it took a lot of time and resources to help people into a settled lifestyle.

- Other parts of the report talked about housings contribution to council-wide targets.

In response to a question, the Director of Housing said figures of homeless people on the list were a snapshot at different times in the year, i.e. 69 people on 31 March 2014, and 89 people as at the end of September 2014. She added the numbers would fluctuate, and it was too early to tell if winter would have a bearing on the figures. She added it was encouraging that 80 people had been able to get off the measure, were now settled and hadn't been back to the Services; she said this was a huge achievement.

Members said they would have liked more information included under Item 3 in the report, as follows:

- 3.1 – how were graduates were recruited, from what areas, and were the unemployment levels quite high in those areas.
- 3.2 – which firms had been given assistance under Enterprising Leicester.
- 3.3 – the target number of homes to be assisted under the internal Home Improvement Agency.
- 3.4 – where work on properties in the city had taken place, and where uncompleted works remained.
- 3.5 – in what areas landlords received discretionary grants for home energy improvements.
- 3.6 – whether home repair grants were repayable, and what the figures were for the grants.
- 3.7 – a request was made for data on cases of anti-social behaviour dealt with by Neighbourhood Housing Offices, where the cases were in the city, and if there were any recurring hotspots.
- 3.8 Members were pleased advice was being given to tenants and members of the public, but had concerns over any funding change for the service.

Members were informed details on the issues raised would take some time to gather, but would be provided to them. Information under Item 3.7 would be provided on a confidential basis.

The Director of Housing said that people sleeping rough in the city centre are always offered help by the Outreach Team. She added the Housing Department worked closely with the police to identify people in the communities who might be begging, but did have somewhere to sleep.

Members were also told the Head of Services was working with the voluntary sector to prepare proposals for the allocation of £15k for schemes to address loneliness and isolation, and was work in progress.

The Chair welcomed the information, and considered apprenticeships in the Housing Department as a great step forward.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing for the report, and looked forward to

a future report in due course.

RESOLVED:

1. that the report be received.
2. that a breakdown of information requested be provided to Members, with anti-social behaviour cases by ward area and hotspots be provided on a confidential basis.

## 50. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY CONSULTATION

The Director of Housing and Assistant Mayor for Housing submitted a report - regarding recent consultation on the Housing Allocations Policy - which was presented by the Head of Service (Homelessness Section), and Service Manager (Housing Options). The Executive had sought the views of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy.

The Department for Communities and Local Government had issued guidance in June 2012 and December 2013 requiring housing authorities to review their existing housing allocation policies.

Proposed changes to four areas of the Allocations Policy were set out in Appendix 1 of the report:

- To give consideration to those who need to live in the city, to give or receive support from close family members, subject to meeting at least one of the outlined criteria, for example, to only consider applicants currently working within the city of Leicester for the last 12 months.
- To exclude people who owned their own home from joining the housing register unless there were extenuating circumstances, for example if the occupant was facing homelessness or fleeing from violence.
- To exclude households who had financial resources to secure alternative accommodation, i.e. households with a total income of £25k per year (single household), £40k per year (joint households), or capital assets of over £50k, to ensure social housing was allocated to those with the greatest household need.
- To give priority to working households or those in local training schemes who needed to move closer to their occupations.

As the proposed changes were considered to be major, it had been necessary to consult with registered social housing providers which had nomination agreements with the council, and consultation closed on 16 January 2015, and had received a total of 52 responses. The results were reported as follows.

In Favour	Not In Favour	Not Sure	No Answer
<b>Leicester City Requirement</b>			
37 (71%)	12 (23%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
<b>Owner Occupiers</b>			
39 (75%)	10 (19%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
<b>Financial Resources</b>			

33% (63%)	13 (25%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)
<b>Community Contributions</b>			
34 (65%)	7 (14%)	10 (19%)	1 (2%)

The results of the consultation, and comments from Housing Scrutiny Commission Members, would be reported to the Executive for a decision.

Members said they were disappointed at the small number of people who had taken part in the consultation, and that it would be difficult to ascertain a true picture of city views from those results. Members said the changes appeared to be draconian and a way of removing people from the Housing Register. They also queried the right for people who owned their own homes to be allowed to go onto the housing register. They added that given the current housing shortage, they agreed the proposals suggested in the report were the best the City Council could provide.

Officers reported a wording change in Appendix 1 (1) of the report, under the Leicester City Requirement, the council was proposing a strong local connection to the city, and between proposals should read 'or'.

In response to a request from Members, comparison work with Nottingham, Derby and Northampton Councils would be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Commission.

The Chair asked that officers note the comments of Members, and to report back to the Executive that they had a few concerns. They also asked the report be taken to Group for comment.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Commission note the report.
2. that comparison work with Nottingham, Derby and Northampton, be circulated to Members.

## **51. PROVISION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR TEENAGE PARENTS**

The Director of Housing provided a report on the provision of temporary accommodation for teenage parents. The report was presented by the Service Manager.

Members were informed the current contract with GAP would come to a natural end in July 2015, and the contract could not be extended any further. The report identified savings of £65k within the Homelessness Strategy 2013-18. With the current contract coming to an end, 15 units of accommodation would be returning to general housing.

The report outlined the benefits to the client group of bringing the teenage parent provision in-house and managing the service by making use of the existing provision within Border House families' hostel. The Homelessness Strategy identified the need for 10 units of accommodation based support for

teenage parents.

Border House has self-contained units of accommodation including facilities for families with disabilities and benefits from the services offered by the Corner Club which include a range of activities for parents and children. The Family Support Service, also attached to Border House, provides more specialist support and can signpost to services including Doctor, Dentist and health Visitors. Border House would also provide an enhanced service as it is staffed on a 24 hour basis. Members were told that teenage parents would be accommodated with families at Border House, and the community arrangement and support of staff made it an encouraging environment for all who stayed there.

Members were told that provision would cater for children who were 16+ years, and only 2 in the past year had fallen into the 16-17 years age bracket. Parents under 16 years were the responsibility of children's services. They were informed the demand for accommodation could fluctuate, and if demand outstripped supply then the Housing Service would have to look at re-commissioning a specific service for the client group.

AGREED:

1. that the report be noted.

## **52. TENANCY MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

The Director of Housing submitted a presentation on the Tenancy Management Improvement Project, which was delivered by the Head of Service (Estate Management and Tenancy Support), and the Business Change Manager. The presentation outlined the aim of the project to identify efficiencies and service improvements. A report would be presented to the Director of Housing containing recommendations and final analysis.

In response to a question, Members were informed Red Quadrant Consultants had already undertaken work in Adult Social Care, and were appointed following a formal tender for the work.

The Head of Service reported the project would involve a number of reviews, including staffing arrangements, roles and responsibilities, and how tenants accessed services. Step one of the project included the need to establish what local tenancy management work was being carried out, the impact of Responsive Repairs Improvement, and how the Northgate system will work. A review of the use of council buildings around the city would also be undertaken, and insights gained on why tenants came into an office. Some would be signposted to Granby Street Customer Services, which may result in capacity issues there.

Members said it was important tenants were able to contact the authority easily, and there were still many older people who did not have access to or knew how to use a computer. It was important for residents who could not come into town to have access to the service in their areas.

Members were told that several services working from one location had also proved to be successful, and suitable offices needed in each area would be established. Members requested feedback on the Service Review following its completion at the end February / beginning of March 2015. They acknowledged that call answering times to the department and repairs service had improved.

Members asked for the following to be taken on board:

- Litter and lighting issues on St Marks.
- Lift problems in the St Marks flats.
- Morale of staff fell during staff reviews.
- There was no meat on the bones as to what the structure would be like.
- Tenants would be wondering what service was going to be offered.
- Members would like to see housing offices remain, as they were the first point of call for Members.
- Members wished to compliment the staff working in housing offices, as being extremely responsive, and a credit to the service.
- They wanted more information on the Northgate system and how it would work.

The Assistant Mayor for Housing thanked Members for their comments. He said he was aware of difficult times ahead for the staff involved in the review, but he had confidence in officers being able to provide workable recommendations. He said not all housing offices were in the best location and accessible for tenants or repairs staff, and the numbers of housing offices needed to be looked at. He took on board the point about possible capacity issues in customer services facilities in the city centre, and was willing to explore the idea of some form of housing office in the city centre which would be more accessible for tenants. He added he looked forward to future recommendations

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and asked that comments be noted by the Executive and Housing Officers.

RESOLVED:

1. that the presentation be noted.
2. comments be taken on board by the Executive and Housing Officers.
3. further information be brought to a future Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting on the Northgate System.

### **53. HOUSING SPENDING REVIEW AND HOUSING TRANSFORMATION PROJECT**

The Director of Housing presented a summary for Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the HRA and Spending Review and Housing Transformation Programme. The meeting was informed a summary had been shared with staff, trade unions and the Tenants Forum.

The Director of Housing referred to the outcome of the spending review, when every cost centre in the HRA had been challenged. She said some of the savings identified were in the proposed HRA budget on which the Housing Scrutiny Commission views were sought. Members were told they would be informed if there were any service implications that would result in a decision for members.

The Assistant Mayor for Housing referred to the issues of rent. Officers and the Executive would look at the overall budget, and a decision would be taken at Full Council. Any efficiency savings would benefit tenants, for example allowing more homes to be insulated with monies saved, and any savings made would stand the council in good stead for next year in preparation of rent increases and difficult budget cuts. The Assistant Mayor for Housing also thanked Scrutiny Commission members for the supportive comments made of staff, and it was recognised that a lengthy review was not desirable.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing for the update.

RESOLVED:

1. that the summary be noted.

#### **54. HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Support Officer introduced the Housing Scrutiny Commission Work Programme for Members' information

The meeting was informed a request had been made to add the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum Action and Decision Log to the work programme for March. The Chair agreed to add the report.

Housing Scrutiny Commission Members were also informed a draft Communal Cleaning Task Group Report would be circulated which would include tenants recommendations.

Members asked for the following reports to be added to the Work Programme:

- Empty Homes Scoping Document
- Housing Associations Report

AGREED:

1. that the work programme be noted.
2. that the following reports be added to the work programme.

#### **55. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 7.10pm.