



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2016 at 6:15 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Newcombe (Chair)  
Councillor Alfonso (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany

Councillor Dawood

Councillor Joshi

In Attendance

Councillor Connelly – Assistant Mayor for Housing

\* \* \* \* \*

**44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Byrne and Cank.

**45. 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 family members were council tenants.

Councillor Joshi declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting in that family members were council tenants. He also declared an Other Disclosable Interest in Agenda Item 7, Monitoring the Homelessness Strategy (24 Months) – Feedback of the Consultation Exercise, as he worked for a voluntary organisation for people with mental health problems. He had not directly been involved with the organisations mentioned in the consultation process and approached the agenda item with an open mind.

Councillor Newcombe declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting as family members were council tenants.

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

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

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 10 October 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **47. ACTION POINTS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

There were no actions to report from the last meeting.

Most of the items in the recommendations of the previous meeting would be programed into future meetings of the Scrutiny Commission.

#### **48. PETITIONS**

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

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

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

#### **50. MONITORING THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY (24 MONTHS) - FEEDBACK OF THE CONSULTATION EXERCISE**

The Interim Director of Housing submitted a report to the Housing Scrutiny Commission which provided feedback on the consultation exercise in relation to the proposals that were contained in the report on the first 24 months of the Homelessness Strategy that was presented to the Housing Scrutiny Commission on 11th August 2016. The Commission was recommended to consider the feedback and responses to mitigate the assumed negative impacts of the proposals, and provide any feedback to the Executive as a result of the consultation exercise.

The Chair commented on the way the consultation results had been presented, as the figures had included responses from those who did not comment, or had no opinion. He added it had the effect of reducing the impact of the figures in relation to whether the proposal of a budget reduction would have a negative effect. The Chair asked that the figures be re-presented at a future meeting of the Commission, to omit non-responses or no opinion.

The report was presented by Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service. It was

recognised that any proposed reduction could have a potential negative impact on service users, but with the number of people seeking assistance rising and the budget cuts, the Council needed to ensure the service could be targeted and offered to as many people in need as possible and be cost effective.

Eric Waweru, Chief Executive, The Centre Project, addressed the Commission at the invitation of the Chair, making the following points:

- The feeling of most stakeholders was the Centre Project provided a holistic service, and was a link to other services people may need;
- The removal of grant subsidy meant the service would not be sustainable, and the most vulnerable service users would not have the service as and when they needed it;
- The proposal that people would go to the 'Y' Support Project was not supported by evidence;
- The equality impact assessment assumed people would go to the Dawn Centre, but for various reasons people had stated they would not – the two services catered for different groups of people;
- The Centre Project helped people become independent, and provided them with a support network;
- Support would have to be provided by another centre, so there was not money saving, and was a false economy.

Two attendees then gave their views;

- "I used the Dawn Centre when I was homeless for showers and food, but over time I stopped drinking, got a job, and a partner. I left that service behind and now go the Centre Project. I need to move forward and have more confidence. I don't have to go back. I want all these people behind me to move forward with me and not backwards."
- "I still use the Dawn Centre – I use the shower there. There are good people there. Some people have drug problems, alcohol, personal problems. The Centre Project is similar but people there are vulnerable with learning difficulties. The Dawn Centre is a scary place to go. The Centre Project built my confidence up. They are totally separate places. The Dawn Centre AND the Centre Project need to stay open, but not together, they are different centres. It won't work."

Jerry Connolly, Scrutiny Policy Officer then read out a representation received prior to the meeting (name and contact details provided - attached to the minutes for information). The representation referred to the need for protection of tenants from Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, and the way landlords could evict tenants for spurious reasons. The Chair requested a report on Section 21, and how enforcement and monitoring of landlords in the city worked be brought to a future meeting of the Commission.

The Chair asked those present if they wished to provide further evidence if they had tenancies which had broken down and how it had affected them, to the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

In response to further questions and comments from Members it was noted that:

- Paper copies of the consultation had been made available to enable a wide response from members of the public and service users to respond. Most service users who wanted to respond to the consultation were assisted to do so, and all responses were included in the report.
- The Centre Project expressed concern that the consultation document had been difficult to explain to service users as all the proposals on different services had been placed together.
- The proposals in the report were not about a reduction in family accommodation, but about supported housing linked to singles. It was believed that individuals and their move-on strategy could be sustained by providing floating support services to support and sustain those individuals and tenancies.
- One of the justifications for changing the supported housing model was the welfare changes and anticipated housing benefit cap introduced by Central Government. The model of supported housing would no longer be viable. The reduced bed spaces from 290 to 215 related solely to the Supported Housing units, no reduction in temporary hostel bed spaces was proposed. The supported units are proposed to return to LCC housing stock.
- The authority currently had 21k homes, and it was projected that another 2.5k homes would be lost through Right-to-Buy over the next 4 years.
- There was well regarded floating support provided to the most vulnerable service users from Supporting Tenants and Residents service who had a link to homeless services and with those who had an awareness of people with vulnerabilities. The intention was to maintain a programme where people could move on with floating support.
- The grant to Centre Project was £24k (35-40% of their annual income) with other projects, such as Leicestershire Cares receiving approximately the same. One Roof project had received a one-off grant of £15k.

Eric Waweru, Chief Executive, The Centre Project, responded to Members' questions and made the following points:

- The Centre Project was funded by grants and other funding to provide other activities, but did not have a core grant. It was stated that if the grant funding of £24k was removed, then open drop-in sessions would cease.
- The Centre had seen 185 people the previous year, had been the first point of contact for some of those who had visited the service, and had enabled them to get support without an appointment, signposting them where necessary to other support services. It was not the case that service users would access another service, as not all would go to the Dawn Centre.
- Trustees for the Centre Project were aware of the proposed cut in grant funding and had tried to build up reserves of approximately £50k (including restricted funds). In addition the grant was supplemented by the Church who provided the premises for them to operate.
- Estimated numbers of users in one week for the 3-day drop-in was 45 people – the Centre was contracted to 35 people a week, and already provided a higher service than the £24k grant subsidy.

- Nobody presented with just a housing need, but with multiple needs. If a person presented as homeless they would be referred to Housing Options, and accompanied for support.
- The Centre was a support network of people they trusted, and was an opportunity for them to talk to somebody and feel less isolated.

Members discussed the issues and made the following comments:

- It was stated that the project did provide extra help, and Members' were of the opinion that the £24k funding that the Centre Project received gave them legitimacy to gain further funding because they were providing a service. They added that the social impact and other benefits of the project provided a service in excess of the £24k funding.
- Councillor Dawood, seconded by Councillor Aqbany, moved a recommendation from the Scrutiny Commission that the Centre Project maintain its funding. Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried. Members believed that continuance of the £24k grant gave the organisation legitimacy to gain funding from other organisations.

Councillor Connelly, Assistant Mayor for Housing, was invited to comment on the report. He thanked the Head of Service for the report. He said he was aware that any review about the homelessness strategy was difficult and concerning to those who used the service, but the strategy had been successful and had assisted many people in the city and prevented them from becoming homeless. Though a large report, he thought it was important that the Housing Scrutiny Commission were presented with the same information as he had. He noted that significant savings had to be made as a result of government cuts, and each service area had to be looked at to find savings, whilst protecting people from becoming homeless or getting back into secure tenancies as quickly as possible.

The Assistant Mayor added that he understood what Eric had said about the difficulties in engaging with people during the consultation process, and wanted to thank him for the constructive way he had assisted during the consultation, and gave credit to the Project. He also thanked representatives for the Centre Project who had attended the and everyone present that recommendations arising from the meeting would be taken back to the Executive for consideration. It was also noted that there was no point in reducing services if more needed to be invested in the future to provide more help to people who had become homeless again because they could not access support services.

The Chair thanked all who attended the meeting, to those who had shared their experiences, and for the useful debate of the report. He added he was in agreement for the Centre Project to retain the current grant subsidy, and that all Members of the Commission were in favour of the proposal.

The Scrutiny Policy Officer informed the meeting that with the Chair, a letter would be written to the Executive summing up the debate, concerns and issues expressed at the meeting both by the Centre Project and Members. The letter would be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Commission and the Assistant

Mayor for Housing by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November.

AGREED:

that:

1. The report be noted;
2. It was the recommendation of the Housing Scrutiny Commission that the Centre Project maintain its funding, and the to the Centre Project would give the organisation legitimacy to gain funding from other organisations, and should not be stopped;
3. The Chair would write to the Executive, summing up the debate, concerns and issues expressed at the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting, both by the Centre Project and Members. The letter to be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Commission and the Assistant Mayor for Housing by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November.
4. A report on 'Section 21' and the monitoring of landlords in the city be brought to a future meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

Councillor Dawood left the meeting at this point and did not return.

The meeting adjourned for five-minutes and resumed at 8.19pm.

## **51. TECHNICAL SERVICES PROGRAMME OVERVIEW**

The Interim Director of Housing submitted a report for noting, that provided an overview of the Technical Services Programme. Phil Davison, Programme Manager, Housing Systems, presented the report.

It was reported that the second phase of the programme was given a total savings target of £7million per annum in savings through contract consolidation; streamlining services; having appropriate staffing levels, and budget consolidation.

In response to questions from the Chair and Members, the following information was given:

- Transforming Depot Services – a map of the sites across the city which had been closed, how large they were, and what they were used for, would be provided to Members;
- Stores Transformation Project – procurement of a managed service would combine two main elements; how the service was delivered, and expertise and general management of the services, for example, the purchase of materials at the most competitive price. Decisions over use of a suitable site for the procured Stores service would form a part of this procurement. Decisions over future use of existing sites would be made as clarity around the procurement was achieved. The meeting was informed that staff had undergone a redundancy exercise and staffing arrangements were currently being progressed. Reassurance was given that staff were being kept fully updated with regular communications and supported by Management;

- Energy and Environment – there was a lot of work to be undertaken in this area. The Energy and Environment Team had just started a review so there was not much to report at the present time, although a £400k saving had been attached to the Technical Services Programme in that area.
- With regards to site closures and disposals, an exercise to identify sites would be done to see if there was opportunity for development. The streamlining of the process for the disposal of sites would also be looked into, to reduce costs associated with security and maintenance.
- Contracts with the external stores suppliers was discussed, and the programme manager confirmed the need for robust management arrangements to be in place along with appropriate review, challenge and break clauses associated to performance.

Councillor Alfonso requested further information on the 8 sites identified, what kind of storage of materials were proposed (e.g. stock and scanning, 'B&Q' type storage), and what type of contract would be negotiated. She also asked for further information on the figures contained in the report. The Programme Manager said the benefit of an external provider was the authority did not have to carry the cost of holding materials, and the external provider would manage stock, and liability / risk would lie with them. He added that with regard to moving depots, a paper had recently gone to the Programme Board, and costs of upgrading locations if they remained have been factored into the programme.

In response to a question from the Chair, the delivery of target savings of £7million per annum had been presented to the Finance Team and had been confirmed as achievable.

The Chair thanked officers for the report, and in summing up asked for more information on:

- A map of the location of depot sites;
- More information on energy and environment impact be provided to Members;
- Recommended a report be brought back to a future meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on how the Programme was working, and that the item be added to the Commission's Work Programme.

AGREED:

that:

1. The report be noted;
2. More information be provided in the form of maps of the locations of the different sites affected be circulated to the Scrutiny Commission;
3. More information under the heading Energy & Environment impact be provided to the Scrutiny Commission;
4. The Technical Services Programme be added to the work programme of the Scrutiny Commission, and an update report be brought to a future meeting.

## **52. STAR GAMBLING SURVEY 2016**

The Director Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report for noting which provided the Housing Scrutiny Commission with information about the STAR (Supporting Tenants and Residents) survey of clients who might have difficulties with gambling.

Jerry Connolly, Scrutiny Policy Officer, presented the report, and provided the following information:

- The survey helped to assess issues facing people who used hostels, etc. and the impact of gambling on vulnerable people.
- There was no-one collecting information on people's gambling habits. The survey found that people did not provide straight answers when asked if they had a problem with gambling, but many people who were clients of STAR expressed they had serious difficulties.
- The information had been passed to the Gambling Commission at their request, the East Midlands Scrutiny Network and the national conference of the Local Government Association. The Deputy City Mayor was due to provide the information to a Select Committee.
- Some of the data gained was from users who attended Gamblers Anonymous, who had spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on fixed odds betting terminals.
- There was little evidence that Licence holders intervened to stop vulnerable people betting.

The Chair commented it was a really good piece of work undertaken in order to ascertain the background and effects of gambling on residents.

Members noted how the most deprived areas were usually the very place that gambling premises appeared. The Scrutiny Policy Officer suggested the information be fed into the Local Plan to stop licensed gambling premises, and money lending premises being placed into vulnerable communities, close to each other. It was also noted there were issues around addictions to scratch cards and lottery cards, but it was a problem trying to get people to admit they had an issue.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

AGREED:

that the Star Gambling Survey 2016 be noted.

## **53. TENANT FORUM - MEETING NOTES**

The Scrutiny Policy Officer submitted the Tenant Forum Meeting Notes from 28<sup>th</sup> July 2016 and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016 for noting by the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

AGREED:

that the Tenant Forum Meeting notes be noted.



**54. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair drew attention to the Housing Scrutiny Commission Work Programme for noting.

AGREED:

that the Housing Scrutiny Commission Work Programme be noted.

**55. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

No other items of urgent business had been brought to the attention of the Chair.

**56. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.06pm.



# Minute Item 50

## Dear Esteemed Councillors & Guests,

Homelessness has become a real problem. It is only just the start of never ending complications for individuals and families which also results in a further drain on local services and resources and so can no longer be ignored.

I've looked at recent studies done by the 'Shelter Organization' 'Homeless Link' & 'Government Figures' on the reasons why people in particular families with young children become homeless.

-By the end of March 2016 there were 71,540 households living in temporary accommodation that's an increase of 11% on the same time last year.

-Also 9% more households were accepted as being homeless than during the same period in 2015.

Furthermore, the number of households made homeless due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy has continued to rise, both in quantity (4,650) and by proportion (31%).

*"Yet again, the private rented sector is shown to be a major contributor to the figures with more people falling out of tenancies and into homelessness, while it offers few solutions to help people out of it."*

(Rick Henderson, Chief Executive of Homeless Link 2016)

Compared to Quarter 1 2015 the latest statistics show that in Quarter 1 2016;

- Homelessness due to the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy remained the biggest cause of homelessness at 31%.

**As a mother of 3 including a disabled son I have been the victim of landlords abusing the assured shorthold tenancy to their advantage. I am currently also going through the same difficult process again as I have recently been given notice by my current landlord.**

Previously, my landlord issued me with a section 21 through the courts claiming he needed the house back so his ill mother could occupy it. Having been the perfect tenant with all the rent being paid on time along with the house being maintained to a high standard the landlord had no choice but to use the Section 21 to evict me with his 'reasons'. To my horror after being evicted the reasons used by the landlord turned out to be false as immediately after I moved out he moved a new tenant in. Here the landlord not only used the section 21 to his advantage but also perjured in court with his reasons as he never intended to move his 'ill-mother' into the property.

**Section 21- Absurdly gives landlords a blanket right to evict families for no reason.**

I'm seeking protection for families from Section 21 being used without a valid reason. Along with consequences for landlords who choose to use Section 21 with malicious intent i.e. revenge evictions. Families across the UK especially in Leicester are in urgent need of long term protection from this cruel practice. The current 6 month protection for tenants is not adequate unless the landlord is selling the property or is himself becoming homeless. A lot more needs to be done to prevent tenants with families being evicted. A mutual agreement from both party should be put into place where a reasonable time frame can be agreed

upon. Moreover, tenants having to pay the court fees under Section 21 brought by the landlord should be totally scrapped.

The whole experience has a lasting effect on everyone involved. My experience has made me feel lost, an unworthy parent, unprotected, weak and at the mercy of my landlord. The local authority who are already stretched were nowhere to be seen. Having put my name and bid on the local housing list numerous times over the past 2 years but to no avail has left me in a further state of depression. Stemming from the fact that all landlords have the ability to take full advantage of the situation without any accountability.

**Today I request you to inform me on what measures you can or will put in place to end these practices and at the same time what immediate support can you offer to people like myself in this situation.**

Thank you.