

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1300 hours on Thursday 23 January 2020, Committee Room 2

Present:

Councillor Mahmood Hussain (Deputy Chair)

Councillors Deirdre Alden, Marje Bridle, Roger Harmer, Shabrina Hussain, Mary Locke and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Gary Messenger, Interim Head of Housing Options and Private Sector Housing
Deborah Moseley, Acting Senior Service Manager, Housing Options and Private Rented Service

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.civico.net/birmingham) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE

Committee noted the appointment of Councillor Ken Wood to replace Councillor Gary Sambrook.

The Deputy Chair welcomed Councillor Wood and expressed the Committee's thanks and best wishes to Councillor Sambrook.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Penny Holbrook and an apology for lateness from Councillor Shabrina Hussain.

5. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2)

The following points were raised:

- The outstanding actions arising from the Performance Monitoring item in October to be chased with responses requested for the February meeting;
- The offer from Cllr O'Shea for a visit to be arranged to Tyseley and Four Ashes to be followed up.

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the meeting held on 21 November 2019 were agreed;
- The action tracker was noted.

6. UPDATE ON PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

(See document 3)

Deborah Moseley, Acting Senior Service Manager, Housing Options and Private Rented Service, and Gary Messenger, Interim Head of Housing Options and Private Sector Housing, attended for this item.

During the presentation and in response to Members' questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- The work of the Private Tenancy Unit is primarily governed by the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and they can intervene to prevent unlawful evictions and harassment;
- With regard to HMO licensing, where it is found that someone does not have a licence then civil penalties or prosecutions can be brought;
- The 2011 census says there were 68,000 private rented sector properties and nine years on it is estimated that there are now around 88,000;
- Members said it would be useful to know what the different types of properties are and how the mix has changed over that time;
- A request was also made for actual figures for each of the types of requests for advice and assistance;
- The PRS team consists of 29 posts and there are currently 7 vacancies;
- The backlog of HMO licences awaiting processing is being worked through and the recruitment to the vacant posts will increase capacity to deal with this;

- In the presentation received in March last year, Members were told that the vacancies within the team were being recruited to and concern was expressed that these had not yet been filled;
- There is a much broader picture regarding vacancies in Housing Options per se and it is important to recruit the right people for the service and it is hoped the PRS team will be fully staffed in the near future;
- It was acknowledged that in terms of homelessness we are some years behind other authorities, but we are working hard with private landlords;
- Since the last update to committee, work has been done on the IT solution. This is currently being tested and will hopefully be on stream from February 2020;
- Selective licensing is being considered as a way in which to improve the standard of private sector housing in the city and work is being done with Birmingham City University to map all properties in the city to identify where there are high volumes of HMOs or where there may be difficulties;
- There is government guidance which has to be followed when considering selective licensing and there are six criteria we are expected to meet – low demand, anti-social behaviour, significant and persistent, poor property condition, high levels of migration, high levels of deprivation or high levels of crime;
- Information collected to date means we will not be able to go for whole city selective licensing and therefore four options have been identified, with the preferred option being to progress the 25 LSOAs with sufficient evidence as a pilot, whilst continuing with the quantitative and qualitative data being collected;
- Members asked for details of the 25 LSOAs to be provided;
- In response to a question about enforcement, Members were told the team operates on an Educate, Encourage and Enforce basis, so if they have worked with a landlord and they are still not carrying out the repairs they are meant to then they will go down the enforcement route, either through a civil penalty or prosecution depending on the severity;
- Officers in the PRS Access Team carry out initial inspections and Environmental Health Officers also go and inspect properties to make sure they are up to standard;
- With regard to Empty Properties, the presentation refers to approximately 3000 properties being unoccupied for less than six months as at April 2019, an increase of 200 compared to October 2018, and a request was made for further information on the change in numbers of properties empty for over six months;
- The PRS Team has been working with Planning in relation to the Article 4 Direction which will come into force on 8th June. Recognising that there may be some duplication of work, a process is being put in place to ensure a

smooth transition whereby Planning will pass to the PRS Team anything they should be dealing with and vice versa;

- It was acknowledged that HMOs are fine if well managed and dialogue and consultation, both internally and with local residents, is important;
- Looking to the future, they are planning to develop a PRS strategy, develop their business plan and a new communications plan more co-ordinated with the Landlords Steering Group and Working Group;
- An additional £250,000 has been approved via the budget process to increase capacity within the service and they are looking at the best way to use that money and re-design the service;

RESOLVED:

- The additional information requested to be provided to Members;
- The update was noted.

7. STREET SCENE

(See document 4)

Members discussed the draft Terms of Reference for the piece of work on 'Reducing Fly-tipping' and requested that it be strengthened in terms of how O&S is adding value through this piece of work, the legal position and resources.

RESOLVED:

The Terms of Reference to be amended to reflect Members' comments and re-circulated for final agreement.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 5)

The work programme was discussed as follows:

- February – Re-modelling of the Housing Options Service and Performance Monitoring;
- March – Local Neighbourhoods (to be confirmed) – email to be sent to Members to identify what they would want to see covered if this session goes ahead;
- Update on PSPOs and Update Report from Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Parks to be programmed;
- Cllr Wood requested for a future meeting a report or presentation from the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership on how the council is working with Registered Providers to deliver the number of new houses required.

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted.

10. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None.

11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Councillor Deirdre Alden raised an item of urgent business in relation to the installation of sprinklers and asked the following specific questions:

- In what order are sprinklers being installed?
- What happens if residents do not want them – is there an option to opt out?

Councillor Harmer also requested an explanation as to why sprinklers had been installed in some tower blocks but not yet switched on.

RESOLVED:

That a briefing note be requested and circulated to Members outside of the meeting.

12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 1427 hours.