

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS O&S COMMITTEE –

PUBLIC MEETING

1300 hours on Thursday 27 February 2020, Committee Room 2

Present:

Councillor Penny Holbrook (Chair)

Councillors Deirdre Alden, Marje Bridle, Roger Harmer, Mahmood Hussain, Shabrana Hussain and Mary Locke

Also Present:

Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

Mira Gola, Head of Business Improvement and Support

Julie Griffin, Acting Assistant Director, Housing

Karen Huxtable, Business Support Manager

Simon Williams, Performance and Business Support Manager

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. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Ken Wood.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2)

The following points were raised:

- A request was made that the response to the performance actions from the October meeting be re-circulated;
- The Chair advised Members that she would be speaking to the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities about bringing an update on PSPOs to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the meeting held on 23 January 2020 were agreed;
- The action tracker was noted.

5. HOUSING OPTIONS POSITION BRIEF

(See document 3)

Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, and Julie Griffin, Acting Assistant Director, Housing, attended for this item.

The Chair explained that this item had been programmed following a referral from the Resources O&S Committee due to concerns about overspend in the Housing Options Service, particularly around temporary accommodation.

Councillor Thompson and Julie Griffin highlighted some of the key issues as follows:

- Councillor Thompson explained the difficulties with regard to resources in this area due to the transient nature of homelessness;
- The council gets up to 600 presentations per calendar month, which is equivalent to filling four 20 storey tower blocks;
- There is a commitment to drive out the use of some of the B&B facilities across the city and numbers have reduced significantly, with around 350 households currently in this type of accommodation;
- The Homelessness Reduction Act, introduced in 2018, placed extra duties on local authorities in terms of prevention and, added to that, there is a national crisis with a shortage of affordable housing;
- There are a number of unique factors in Birmingham – there is increasing demand for housing, a decrease in affordable housing and a shortage of land availability;
- In the last 4 years, there has been a 125% increase in people coming into temporary accommodation (from 1200 in 2016 to 3100 at the present time);
- Two temporary accommodation units were mobilised last year – Barry Jackson Tower and Magnolia House – however this is still not enough to meet demand;
- It was pointed out that B&B is not only the most costly type of temporary accommodation, it also has the most detrimental impact on households and the aim is to minimise its use;

- There is a Temporary Accommodation Reduction Plan in place and taskforce meetings are held every week with a view to increasing temporary accommodation and preventing homelessness;
- The new model, which will be mobilised in Spring of this year, will look to embed and enhance the HOC prevention offer and in order to do this it is important to have the right tools and expertise, with access to properties other than social housing;
- The service is working with private landlords to provide good quality, sustainable accommodation, as we do not have the stock to meet demand;
- There is a commitment from Cllr Thompson and Cabinet colleagues that they will try and spread prevention work across all service areas and there is a need to go even further and work with commissioning colleagues to make sure prevention is key to what they deliver;
- The new operating model will aim to support households to remain in their accommodation if it is safe to do so, and where they have to be moved into temporary accommodation to make the stay as short as possible;
- All of this will hopefully help to reduce the overspend and drive down spending in future years;
- Councillor Thompson told Members that the latest rough sleeping statistics had just been released and there has been a reduction in Birmingham from 91 to 52, the largest drop in any core city.

In the course of the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- Members were pleased to hear the focus is on "move-on" as temporary accommodation is not a long-term solution;
- Barry Jackson Tower and Magnolia House is supported accommodation, supported by officers within the Housing Options Service;
- This support is about ensuring issues such as financial inclusion and domestic abuse are addressed to enable people to sustain permanent accommodation when they move on;
- There is no limit to the length of time people can stay but the intention is that it will only be for a short period of time. However, given the lack of move-on accommodation, this can be longer than expected;
- The aim is to use the homeless centres as assessment centres and then move people on quickly;
- Members asked what the average length of time spent in these centres is and Julie Griffin undertook to come back with a response;
- In response to a question about best practice, Councillor Thompson told Members that visits to Liverpool, Manchester and some of the London Boroughs had taken place and pointed out that others identify Birmingham as good practice;

- Birmingham has a significant challenge due to its size and a lot of housing is being lost through Right to Buy;
- Good practice is prevention and looking at why people present, with the main reasons being the termination of shorthold tenancies, relationship breakdown and domestic violence;
- More resources are being invested in prevention with a PRS access and sustain scheme being launched to offer a mediation service between landlords and tenants to prevent eviction;
- Cabinet Members will be meeting to discuss how all areas of the council link together on homelessness and it is important to take a city-wide approach;
- In response to a question about the use of temporary accommodation outside of Birmingham, Members were told that this only happens when it is absolutely unavoidable;
- There was also some concern around over-crowding and the need to ensure families have appropriate accommodation, however Members were told that larger family properties are more difficult to find;
- The Housing Service is working closely with Development in terms of the Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust and what is needed;
- They are also working closely with the Landlords Steering Group and one ask is that the council works with tenants to support them when they move into private housing;
- From a customer perspective, there is a need to be able to offer good quality, sustainable private rented housing;
- It was agreed that a report would be brought back to Committee in six months' time to update on progress with implementation of the new model and any issues, and a further report six months after that to see how the new model is working.
- The Chair noted that it was pleasing to see users helping to design the service as it should be about communities designing outcomes, however it was important for councillors to have realistic conversations with constituents about the lack of social housing and what their options are;
- In response to a question about whether there was any reason why the council cannot directly enter into tenancies with private landlords, Members were told that there is no legal reason why not and there will be a forthcoming Cabinet report;
- Information was requested on the capital cost of bringing Barry Jackson Tower and Magnolia House into operation versus the savings being made and Julie Griffin undertook to provide a response on this;
- Councillor Thompson put on record her thanks to staff, elected members and partners for their work.

RESOLVED:

- The following information regarding Barry Jackson Tower and Magnolia House be provided to Members:
 - The average length of stay;
 - The capital cost of bringing the two centres into operation versus the savings being made from not using B&B accommodation.
- A report to be brought back to Committee in six months' time to update on progress with implementation of the new model and a further report six months after that to see how the new model is working;
- The report was noted.

6. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(See document 4)

Mira Gola, Head of Business Improvement and Support, and Karen Huxtable, Business Support Manager, Julie Griffin, Acting Assistant Director, Housing, and Simon Williams, Performance and Business Support Manager, attended for this item.

Mira Gola highlighted the key points in the monitoring report and confirmed that, since the last performance report in October, the following requests have been actioned:

- In the 'Increase Reuse, Recycling and Green Waste' measure, bottom ash has been separated out;
- With regard to missed collections, the title of the measure has been changed to 'Percentage of **reported** refuse and recycling collections achieved'.

All the service delivery measures have exceeded target except 'Percentage of waste presented to landfill' and 'Average days void turnaround – excluding void sheltered properties'.

In the course of the discussion and in response to Members' questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- In terms of housing repairs and maintenance, there is a Performance Monitoring Group which monitors performance by contractor and area and the data also goes to the City Housing Liaison Board which has its own PMG;
- Every HLB should also be receiving this information on a quarterly basis, however Members questioned how this is being sent out and whether it is actually reaching the HLBs;
- Officers undertook to follow this up and ask the HLBs how they would like to see that information going forward;
- The importance of keeping Members involved was stressed and Committee made a formal request for the more detailed repairs and maintenance performance information to be brought to Scrutiny;
- It was agreed this could be shared as long as it is not commercially sensitive;

- With regard to missed collections, the view was expressed that the way this is reported masks the problem;
- It was acknowledged that it is difficult to find the right way to capture missed collections, as they are only known about if they are reported;
- The reporting is based on customer reports only, so does not include depot reports of wagon breakdowns;
- It was agreed that there was a need to think about how a more realistic picture could be given and that perhaps this was something which could be raised with the Cabinet Member when he attends the next meeting;
- It was also suggested that there should be a clearer title for this measure, with
- Members were told that there is a search function on the website, which the public can access, to search by road to see where there are outstanding collections and depot reports of missed roads, with an indication of when collections is likely to be and any operational or access issues;
- It was suggested that the title of this measure should be 'Number of Reported Missed Collections' rather than 'Collections Achieved' and it was agreed this would be raised with the Cabinet Member;
- In response to a request for emails to be sent out to councillors alerting them to roads which have been missed, rather than having to go online to check, Members were told that there was a move away from emailing due to resource issues but this would be looked into;
- With regard to street cleansing, Members were told that when the Cabinet Member attends in March he will be presenting information on the new system which it is hoped will enable all councillors to have access to street cleansing data collected as part of the Land Audit Management System (LAMS);
- Members were pleased to see that bottom ash has now been separated out in the 'Increase Reuse, Recycling and Green Waste' measure (as this is the way DEFRA recommends performance should be measured) and asked how we compare to other local authorities;
- Officers undertook to take that away to see if they can benchmark and provide that information.

RESOLVED:

- The following requests and suggestions to be followed up:
 - Housing repairs and maintenance performance information by contractor and area to be shared with Scrutiny;
 - How performance information is disseminated to HLBs;
 - Bottom ash – benchmarking with other local authorities;
 - Change of title from 'Percentage of reported refuse and recycling collections achieved' to 'Number of reported missed collections'.
- The report was noted.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 5)

The work programme was discussed as follows:

- In March, the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Parks will be attending and a further report on Local Neighbourhoods has been requested;
- The Chair advised Members that she would be asking the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities to bring an update on PSPOs to the March meeting;
- With regard to Councillor Wood's request for a presentation from the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership on how the council is working with Registered Providers to deliver the number of new houses required, the Chair suggested, and Committee agreed, that this would be referred to the Chair of the Economy and Skills O&S Committee as this falls within their remit, with a request that if they do look at this they report back to this Committee.

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted.

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

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. 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 1449 hours.