

# **BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

## **CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING**

**1000 hours on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020, On-line meeting**

### **Action Notes**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Carl Rice (Chair)

Councillors: Deirdre Alden, Albert Bore, Debbie Clancy, Liz Clements, Roger Harmer, Penny Holbrook, Ewan Mackey and Rob Pocock.

#### **Also Present:**

Cllr Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member, Homes and Neighbourhoods

Julie Griffin, Service Director, Housing

Guy Chaundy, Senior Service Manager Housing Strategy

Uyen-Phan Han, Planning Policy Manager

Deborah Moseley, Senior Service Manager, Housing Options and Private Rented Service

Peter Barton, Area Planning Manager

David Kinnair, Head of Benefits, Revenues and Benefits

Balwinder Kaur, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care

Shazia Hanif, Head of Service (Operations and Partnerships), Adult Social Care

James Fox, Principal Planning Enforcement Officer, Inclusive Growth Directorate

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

#### **1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chair advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site ([www.civico.net/birmingham](http://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 Cllrs Lou Robson and Kath Scott.

#### **3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

#### **4. ACTION NOTES**

(See document No 1).

##### **RESOLVED:**

The action notes from the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020 were agreed.

#### **5. EXEMPT ACCOMMODATION**

(See document No 2).

Guy Chaundy introduced the session with a presentation on exempt accommodation and current activity in the city. Balwinder Kaur also emphasised some of the issues encountered and the need to be fully sighted on needs and support.

Cllr Sharon Thompson noted that there are growing issues across the city, and she has been doing roadshows across the city, about private accommodation and exempt accommodation, in relation to the supported housing pilot being rolled out in the city.

She would like to see scrutiny pick up on the citizen's voice, and look at the growth and entry points into exempt accommodation (i.e. are we doing enough to ensure the right checks are in place), with a view to developing recommendations around what the Council needs to be talking to Government about. There are concerns about inadequate legislation with regards to planning, benefits and regulation and Government Ministers are open to having a conversation on these matters. The breadth of the issues concerned is why this work best sits with the Co-ordinating O&S Committee.

The Cabinet Member also said thank you to all the partners and officers working tirelessly on this work, in particular Spring Housing. She also emphasised that not all providers are bad providers, there are some very good ones in the city, but we do want to drive out bad practice.

In the following discussion, Members then made a number of points:

- We are told that providers have to be not for profit but research by residents in Edgbaston shows that some are making extortionate profits. Guy Chaundy responded that the profits tend to sit with the organisations providers are leasing in to source the properties and deliver the support. David Kinnair added that the Council conducts checks on the status including at Companies House and with the regulator; all are registered as not for profit. One had changed to for profit and that has had status removed. There is potential to exploit loopholes on this and other matters.
- It was confirmed that data on the number of units of exempt accommodation, recently sent out in response to a written question, would be updated and re-sent.
- The other authorities that bid for the pilot funding (Blackburn, Hull, Bristol and Blackpool) were successful and there is a national steering group led by MHCLG.

They have had a series of meetings already and shared issues, albeit at different levels – Birmingham is by far the largest.

- David Kinnair confirmed that the enhanced rate of housing benefit does not pay for support, that is funded elsewhere, but is for additional costs that the provider may incur e.g. increased maintenance, refuse collection and cleaning – enhanced because of the customer group and increased throughput.
- It was noted that the Health and Social Care O&S Committee picked up that those in exempt accommodation suffer disproportionately poor health status, and therefore as part of the inquiry Members should ask Public Health to look at the health needs of this group to ensure the appropriate directing of support.
- It was confirmed that the pilot was Birmingham wide, regardless of density, issues remain and so the work to improve support standards is across the city. The inspection work will be targeted on those wards with very high numbers and density.
- In Ladywood, local members are mapping exempt accommodation and houses of multiple occupation in the ward to ensure all are registered and not contravening planning requirements.
- When asked what three things should change, Guy Chaundy responded that there should be an increased focus of regulators on ensuring providers are not for profit, as there are connections with organised crime; to strengthen powers in housing benefit regulations so that a clearer definition of levels of support and evidence is required; and the ability to control growth where the strategic needs assessment can restrict growth;
- The Chair emphasised that the inquiry was to identify real issues and pressure points so that the Council has got an evidence based scrutiny report when talking to Government. The Cabinet Member reiterated that she saw the value of the inquiry in ensuring residents and councillors can shape the future model, ensure we are addressing the challenges, and provide evidence. She also confirmed that MPs are involved.
- Guy Chaundy confirmed that the financial breakdown was set out in the Cabinet report.
- Members welcomed the work, recognising the huge frustration residents experience, but understand how limited our powers are.

The Chair confirmed that a draft terms of reference and programme of work would be circulated to members after the meeting. The Cabinet Member requested that it was made clear that the inquiry was focusing on exempt accommodation, not all HMOs.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their time.

## **6. WORK PROGRAMME**

(See documents No 3 and 4).

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services, updated the committee on items including:

- Customer services inquiry – an informal meeting of members to look at the proposed protocol for managing member enquiries will be held the following week;
- The draft Scrutiny Framework will be shared with members the following week. The Chair said that an informal meeting of the committee would be held to agree a draft for consultation.

A question was asked on the quality of broadband, as raised at the last meeting, and further information requested.

Cllr Clements informed members that the Sustainability and Transport O&S Committee had been looking at the work of the Route to Zero taskforce and asked members to note that this would have implications across all portfolios.

#### **DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 1000 hours.

#### **7. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL-IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)**

None.

#### **8. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

#### **9. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS**

RESOLVED:

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

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The meeting ended at 1120 hours.