

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS O&S COMMITTEE –
PUBLIC MEETING**

1400 hours on Thursday 25 March 2021, Online meeting

Present:

Councillor Penny Holbrook (Chair)

Councillors Deirdre Alden, Marje Bridle, Roger Harmer, Mahmood Hussain, Mary Locke, Shafique Shah and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Councillor John O'Shea, Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Parks

Julie Griffin, Acting Assistant Director, Housing

Gary Messenger, Head of Service – Housing Options and PRS

Deborah Moseley, Acting Senior Service Manager, PRS

Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene

Martyn Smith, Operational Manager (ECU Lead)

Martin Tolley, Head of Repairs and Capital Investment

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny

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) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

The Chair also reminded Members of the pre-election period guidance which had been issued by the Council's Monitoring Officer.

2. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Shafique Shah and expressed the Committee's thanks to Councillor Shabrana Hussain.

3. APOLOGIES

None.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

5. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2)

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the meeting held on 25 February 2021 were agreed.
- The action tracker was noted.

6. PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION: REDUCING FLY-TIPPING

(See document 3)

Councillor John O'Shea, Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Parks, Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, and Martyn Smith, Operational Manager (ECU Lead), attended for this item.

The Chair invited Cllr O'Shea to introduce the report and in doing so he made the following points:

- This first tracking report has been brought to Scrutiny soon after the report to City Council and there has already been good progress towards delivering on the outcomes;
- It was noted that this piece of work had helped to lay down some changes in policy and was a good example of what Scrutiny can do.

Darren Share added that everything is in place to complete the actions and offered to bring a report to the Committee's April meeting on the HRCs booking system.

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

- Members agreed the Cabinet Member's assessments except for Recommendations R03 and R04, which it was agreed should be changed from "1 – Achieved (Fully)" to "3 – Not Achieved (Progress Made)" as there was still some work to be done;
- It was noted that the request for one CPO per councillor was ambitious and the pilot programme was a starting point to test the concept and value for money;
- The success that Nottingham has had with this model was acknowledged, but there is a significant cost to roll out this programme and it is as yet unknown whether this will be the right model for Birmingham;

- The use of the word “pilot” was questioned as this would normally be done across a range of communities whereas in this case the six wards with the worst fly-tipping have been identified to test the model;
- Members were told that if it works in those wards it can be applied across the city and if it doesn’t work then those people can move back into other duties;
- However, Members were concerned that if the pilot doesn’t work in those six wards, there might be hotspots in other areas of the city where it might have worked;
- There will be additional resources and Love Your Streets will be rolling out the work that didn’t happen this year due to the pandemic, and some of that could be targeted on hotspots around the city;
- There was also a view that if the pilot is successful in reducing fly-tipping in those six wards, this could free up resources to tackle problems in other parts of the city;
- The recruitment process has started, with interviews due to start just after Easter, and it is not expected that there will be any difficulty in attracting candidates with the right qualifications;
- Members asked if they could see the role description for the CPOs and it was confirmed that, although there are a couple of job evaluation details to work through, there is a version which can be shared;
- It was suggested that a report on progress with the pilot be brought back to Committee in late summer/early autumn;
- With regard to the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), Members were told that each individual case has to be assessed on its own merits and no decision can be made prior to evidence-gathering, set within statutory provisions and a framework of legislation;
- There has to be a realistic chance of prosecution if the FPN is declined;
- When asked about the difference in the number of FPNs issued by Birmingham in comparison to other LAs, for example Barking & Dagenham, Members were told there is no practical difference between our approach and the approach of Barking & Dagenham, in the main the difference is around numbers and could be to do with what scale of fly-tipping other LAs are targeting;
- As had been highlighted previously, Birmingham has been doing a lot of work on tackling larger scale commercial offenders;
- The easiest way to extend FPN use within the legal framework is to increase the threshold of “small scale”
- With regard to the use of CCTV, more cameras are being purchased as soon as the budget is available, almost doubling the existing number, and that will be done under the corporate procurement scheme, allowing testing of the market in terms of costs and capabilities to ensure we get the best equipment to deliver what we want;
- There won’t be enough cameras to deploy in all wards, but they will be targeted on hotspots, not just limited to the worst wards;
- With regard to “naming and shaming”, officers are working on adapting the Barking & Dagenham policy on the use of CCTV to tailor it for Birmingham

and one aspect of that is including reference in the Council's enforcement policy to be transparent about how we go about delivering enforcement;

- In response to a question about whether private CCTV footage can be used, Members were told that the use of third-party CCTV would be a difficult proposition due to issues around ownership, data protection and privacy
- Reference was made to the problems associated with collecting waste from flats above shops and it was recognised that better solutions do need to be found to tackle this;
- It was agreed that although there was no recommendation in the report specifically relating to this, the Committee would monitor this issue going forward;
- It was stressed that the role of residents is important in tackling the issue of fly-tipping and this is about education and encouraging people to have respect and not dump rubbish on streets;
- A question was raised around the sharing of the LAMS data following the informal session which had been held last month and it was agreed that a further informal session would be arranged for officers to go through the suggested format with Members;
- The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the work being done and it was agreed that a further report to Committee will be scheduled after the AGM.

RESOLVED:

- The CPO role description to be circulated to Members;
- A further report to Committee to be scheduled after the AGM;
- An informal session to be arranged to look at the format for sharing LAMS data;
- The report was noted.

7. HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

(See document 4)

Julie Griffin, Acting Assistant Director, Housing, and Martin Tolley, Head of Repairs and Capital Investment, attended for this item.

Julie Griffin introduced the report which included an overview of the capital repairs and maintenance division and the response throughout the pandemic, and the performance and contract extension process.

Martin Tolley took Members through the report and highlighted the following points:

- The service has performed well bearing in mind the pandemic and the impact that has had on people;
- Void performance has been affected, however they have looked at the process from end to end to identify areas within that process that could be improved and will continue to work through that with the contractors;
- Some improvements have been seen and they are currently developing a new approach with contractors. Once this has been done, a report can be

brought back to O&S on the changes being made and how performance is being improved;

- The capital investment programme is on track to achieve the required budgetary outturn for 2020/21;
- There had been limited problems with accessing flats comparative to the size of stock;
- The installation of sprinkler systems has now reached a point where around 180 of the 211 blocks have been completed and the remaining blocks should be completed around September/October;
- A report had been agreed at Cabinet the previous week giving delegated authority to extend the contracts for a further two years or to go out to re-procure contracts if necessary and that is being worked through now with Procurement and engagement with the contractors;

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

- Members expressed their thanks for the high standard of the report and asked that thanks be passed on to the contractors and staff for the level of service which had been maintained throughout the pandemic;
- A request was made for a breakdown of where we are with the sprinkler installation programme, ie which blocks have been completed and which have not, and it was agreed that a report on this could be brought to a future meeting;
- In response to a question about the average cost of bringing a void property back up to specification, Members were told that costs vary based on the works undertaken but this could be provided in a future report;
- In view of the climate emergency, a question was raised as to whether when doing work on voids the opportunity is being taken to make significant improvements to insulation to bring properties up to standard;
- In response, Members were told that improving energy efficiency is considered wherever possible across the programme generally;
- The council now has probably one of the best asset management information systems it has ever had, and stock data is used to determine the investment programme in terms of kitchens, bathrooms etc;
- There is a need to consider budget availability versus demand but there has been an increase in the budget throughout the year;
- The biggest priority is the fire safety management work, which dictates that the majority of investment is looking at high rise;
- Customer satisfaction has always been quite high, but this is obviously reliant on the number of people providing feedback and has increased significantly in this contract compared to previously, however it comes down to how many complaints are being made;
- They have been changing the audit regime and on-time audit approach, seeking to get feedback the same day the contractors have been out and have been receiving positive feedback from customers and staff, however they are seeing that it might be better to obtain the feedback 24 hours after appointments;

- In terms of the contract extensions, they are looking at the number of complaints received rather than the percentage and will make contractors more accountable going forward;
- Members agreed it would be useful to see the data in a future report, as a 200% increase in customer satisfaction sounds good but it does depend on the numbers;
- A deep-dive review of the HRA business plan has been commissioned to inform future investment over the next 5-10 years;
- Members felt that the HLB performance report was useful in terms of seeing performance across the city by contractor;
- It was queried why the Quarter 3 HLB report had not yet been circulated and it was agreed that this would be followed up;
- There are two payment KPIs relating to performance and contractors are penalised financially for not meeting required performance levels;
- One of the contractors is currently piloting a tracking system to give customers more information about where the contractor is in relation to their appointment;
- Any time the contractors do not get to a job first time, this increases their costs and reduces their profits so it is not in their interest to not make that appointment;
- Members asked about the target for gas safety inspections and were told that the objective has always been 100% but that might be marginally missed this year due to Covid - at the moment it is roughly 98.9%;
- In terms of the budget for the capital investment programme, 100% had been used and additional money had been identified in this financial year resulting in an additional £5m being put in to increase capital works and investment and it is hoped that can be increased moving forward;
- The Chair thanked officers for the update and it was agreed a further update would be scheduled later in the year.

RESOLVED:

- That a further update would be scheduled for a future meeting;
- The report was noted.

8. RESOURCING OF THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR TEAM

(See document 5)

Julie Griffin, Acting Assistant Director, Housing, Gary Messenger, Head of Housing Options and PRS, and Deborah Moseley, Acting Senior Service Manager, PRS, attended for this item.

The Chair explained that this update had been requested due to the Committee's concerns about the resourcing of the PRS team and the specific request from Cllr Harmer at the last meeting. It was noted that Members are aware there are improvement challenges and are also clear about the role of the PRS team and that it does not include Exempt Accommodation, which is a separate project.

In taking Members through the update report, officers highlighted the following main points:

- Recruiting to the vacant posts had proved challenging and they will be doing a review of the PRS service over the next few months;
- The additional £250,000 allocated to the staffing budget will go some way towards improving the offer, but it is felt more will need to come as part of that review;
- There are currently 30 members of staff in the team, five of which are funded through the Controlling Migration Fund;
- They are now going out to recruitment and it is expected the earliest new staff will be in post will be May 2021;
- There is a national shortage of enforcement and prosecution officers and in light of this they are looking at bringing in an apprenticeship scheme which will be on three levels – Entry (Admin), Technical (Prosecution) and Graduate (Environmental);
- Members noted the national challenge with regard to recruitment and that it is a very competitive field with a lot of people choosing to work for smaller local authorities where the work burden may be less;
- Members were told that a lot of good staff have been lost to other councils and it is about turning the tide, investing in the service and demonstrating that Birmingham is a place to come to rather than leave and that there are good opportunities to thrive and be promoted;
- As part of the apprenticeship scheme they will be looking at this and they do go into Birmingham University to talk to students about the reality of the job;
- Members agreed that it would be good to target some of our communities with the lowest level of employment to offer young people a way into a career and to also look at our connections with schools;
- The importance of long-term planning was stressed and the need to look at age groups, diversity, schools, academies and other LAs to get the best talent possible;
- With regard to the backlog of licences to be processed, they are working with Acivico to reduce this and additional agency staff have been recruited to issue licences;
- It was acknowledged that there have been delays due to Covid;
- They are also looking at ways to improve the system to make it more efficient;
- The Chair suggested that a further report be brought to Committee in a couple of months' time in terms of recruitment and the apprenticeship scheme and in the meantime would have a conversation with officers about what O&S might be able to do to help.

RESOLVED:

- That a further report be programmed for a future meeting;
- The report was noted.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 6)

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

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

None.

12. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

13. 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 1614 hours.