

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Tuesday 9 April 2019, Committee Room 6

Present:

Councillor Mahmood Hussain (Chair)

Councillors Gurdial Singh Atwal, Marje Bridle, Eddie Freeman and Roger Harmer

Also Present:

Guy Chaundy, Senior Service Manager, Housing

Julie Griffin, Acting AD, Housing

Ashley Innis, Project Manager, Athletes Village

Ian MacLeod, AD, Planning

Colette McCann, Head of Housing Development

Tim Savill, AD, Revenues and Benefits

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer, Scrutiny Office

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. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Penny Holbrook, Akhlaq Ahmed and Deirdre Alden.

4. ACTION NOTES

(See document 1)

RESOLVED:

The action notes of the meeting held on 12 March 2019 were agreed.

5. ACTION TRACKER

(See document 2)

The outstanding actions from the last meeting will be followed up and the further information from the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods with regard to the update on the CT scanner to be requested for the next committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

- Outstanding actions to be followed up;
- The action tracker was noted.

6. UPDATE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT

(See document 3)

Tim Savill, AD, Revenues and Benefits, attended for this item.

The following were among the main points raised:

- This update is a follow up to the initial report to Committee last October which described the impact of the first six months of Universal Credit (UC) full service in the city;
- There are now over 10,000 of our own tenants in receipt of the UC housing element;
- Initially targeted at households where there were single working age people, there has been a gradual move towards more types of households and in January the cap was lifted on UC for families with more than two children and so they now claim UC instead of housing benefit;
- Further details are awaited from DWP about what happens to people who stay on housing benefit and when they will transfer to UC;
- A pilot will be run in Harrogate from July this year and once that has taken place we will have more details about the migration of existing housing benefit claims;
- At the moment, all new claims go straight on to UC;
- People who are currently claiming housing benefit and have a significant change in circumstances, for example getting a job, moving in with a partner or having a child, will move on to UC;
- In terms of the impact on rent arrears, although only 16.9% of tenancies are claiming UC, this currently accounts for 44.9% of arrears;
- There are also impacts in other areas, council tax collection and housing benefit overpayment recovery is becoming more difficult and there is a lot of debt sitting with the DWP awaiting recovery;
- In terms of implications and mitigations, the biggest change with UC is that the payment generally goes directly to the tenant and not the landlord and we have conducted our own Eviction Prevention Panel and have just started working with registered social landlords to pilot eviction prevention;

- The Financial Inclusion Partnership which meets every quarter has a good range of partners and UC is discussed at every meeting with a view to working together to mitigate the impacts of UC;
- The Council is running its own UC pilot around early intervention for people on UC with officers based in job centres to make referrals straight away and try and get people into the right habits to fit their circumstances, as well as identifying vulnerability issues to offer the right sign-posting and support;
- There has been a reduction in the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Fund for 2019/20 and the Council already has its own DHP policy in place to try and maximise the use of the funding where the support is needed most;
- In response to a question around how we are managing the reduction in the DHP funding, the appendix to the report describes the sort of period a payment might be made for and one example would be where someone is subject to their benefit being reduced for under-occupying a property we would be wanting to see what efforts that person is making to move to a more suitably sized property or finding work and improving their income situation;
- With effect from 1st April, personal budgeting support and assisted digital support has ceased and there is a new service called Help to Claim operated by the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- The Council will continue to work closely with the DWP both locally and nationally, monitoring the pilot in Harrogate, as well as continuing with its own mitigations.

RESOLVED:

The update was noted.

7. OPTION TO RETURN POLICY FOR HOUSING REGENERATION SCHEMES

(See documents 4 and 5)

Julie Griffin, Acting AD, Housing, Guy Chaundy, Senior Service Manager, Housing, and Colette McCann, Head of Housing Development, attended for this item.

Councillor Julien Pritchard was also in attendance.

Members had received with their papers the draft policy together with a note summarising how the policy has been shaped following comments made at the last committee meeting.

The following were among the main points raised:

- The policy is specifically around enabling the ability for all residents affected by proposals requiring them to re-house to have the option to move directly within the regeneration scheme or to move out and have priority to move back ;
- It is not a policy about how we deliver regeneration, it is about how we deal with the re-housing element, enabling communities to stay together where there is an aspiration to do so;

- The process does need to follow the Council's approval Allocations Scheme in terms of eligibility;
- It is not just about Council tenants, it includes owner occupiers and private tenants affected by compulsory purchase orders where there is an obligation to re-house;
- Following input from Scrutiny and a meeting with residents in Druids Heath, nine additions have been made to strengthen the policy, specifically around the need for early consultation, capturing people's aspirations who want to return at that stage and classing them as a returner at registration stage, with intelligence being used where it can to help shape what that development looks like whilst balancing that with any impact on the viability of any scheme;
- Clearly there is a need to make sure there is support for all residents affected and to emphasise the need for flexibility where it can be applied because each scheme is different and each individual circumstance is different;
- With regard to scheme development and phasing, there are concerns that people might still have to move twice and where possible the scheme should be developed in such a way that people only have to move once. However, Members were told that this would not always be possible to achieve;
- Following a question at the last meeting, an addition has been made to the policy for people in temporary accommodation where we have a duty and in line with the allocation policy. Local connection criteria will be applied so anyone who has been in temporary accommodation in an area for 12 months or more will have the option to return;
- It was reiterated that this is a set of policy principles. All schemes are different and individual Local Lettings Plans will capture the detail around eligibility and what is required to deliver the policy principles;
- In response to Members' comments, the policy now includes two offers to return, rather than one, in line with the allocations policy;
- Members had previously made the point that this should be a Right to Return policy as it was felt that calling it an Option to Return watered it down. However, it was pointed out that a Right to Return would raise people's expectations and with some schemes it might not be possible to deliver on that;
- Concerns were raised with regard to the reference to residents who may not be allowed to return due to rent arrears and that the policy should include some discretion or guidance about the level of, and reasons for, those arrears;
- Members were told that where there are rent arrears, this will be dealt with in line with the Allocations Scheme where there is flexibility around eligibility depending on the individual circumstances and Julie Griffin undertook to provide Members with the thresholds that are applied;
- It was also pointed out that where there are rent arrears and these can be covered out of the home loss compensation, that payment would be reduced accordingly;

- It was agreed that a slight amendment would be made to the policy regarding rent arrears to include a caveat around due consideration of individual circumstances;
- In response to a comment about keeping the wording simple so that people can understand the policy, it was suggested that once approved the team administering the scheme could produce an FAQ sheet;
- Members felt that the process of engaging with Scrutiny to develop the policy had worked well.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

8. COMMONWEALTH GAMES VILLAGE – HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

(See document 6)

Ian MacLeod, AD, Planning, and Ashley Innis, Project Manager, Athletes Village, attended for this item.

The following were among the main points raised:

- The overall programme will make a good contribution to the city's housing need;
- There is an opportunity for legacy planning, using the Commonwealth Games to drive regeneration;
- There will be 58 houses available for social rent, maintained by the City Council as part of our BMHT programme, and 254 other homes which will be affordable (161 within the extra care scheme and 93 others that will be affordable across the site);
- In response to a question about the number of green roofs on this site and why not all of the roofs are green, Members were told that the sustainability factor has to be balanced with affordability. Green roofs come at a significant cost in terms of the infrastructure to support the building and this has to be balanced with the viability of the development overall;
- Cabinet has given approval to a CPO which deals with the land outside of the City Council's control. That CPO, which is progressing well, covers a significant area, including a number of residential properties. There are currently about 16 objections left and the date for the public inquiry is July this year. Assuming the Order is confirmed, the Council should be in a position to vest any outstanding land interests by January 2020;
- A lot of land has been acquired through voluntary negotiation and the Council is in dialogue with BCU and other land owners;
- There is obviously risk involved in delivering a development of this scale within the timeframe we have to do it. To try and mitigate this as much as possible, an experienced contractor has been brought in who has delivered this type of scheme before and they are confident it can be delivered on time and within budget. Risks are being monitored all the time with updated risk register presented to the Capital Projects Board. Inevitably there will be teething problems but there are warranties in place from all of the tier 1

contractors that they will fix any problems and looking at arrangements for who will manage this on site during the games themselves;

- Energy efficiency – looked at most efficient way of providing energy to the site eg CHP, however due to lack of commercial space traditional gas boilers were the most efficient way and this was supported by an energy and sustainability assessment which went to Planning Committee;
- Relocation of National Express depot – a site has been identified on Aston Hall Road which will future-proof their operation and that will be the subject of a planning application later this year so the public will have chance to comment as that works its way through;
- In response to a question about redevelopment on the Wellington Road side of Birchfield Island, Members were told that this was looked at but there is a limit to the funding envelope and from a CPO point of view there was no rationale for the Commonwealth Games so a case could not be made;
- The Highway works are the subject of a separate Cabinet report;
- The differences in CPO values were queried, however Members heard that all offers are based on red book valuations and there will be variations depending on a whole range of factors;
- With regard to the contractor and its social value commitment, Lendlease is the principal contractor and has a significant social charter and there will be a skills and training centre on site to support people in terms of development.

RESOLVED:

The briefing was noted.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 7)

The work programme was discussed and a request was made that Waste be included on the work programme for early in the new municipal year.

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

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

None.

11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

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 1528 hours.