

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Tuesday 8th January 2019, Committee Room 6

Present:

Councillor Penny Holbrook (Chair)

Councillors Akhlaq Ahmed, Gurdial Singh Atwal, Marje Bridle, Eddie Freeman and
Mahmood Hussain

Also Present:

Jim Crawshaw, Head of Housing Options/Private Sector Housing
Kalvinder Kohli, Head of Service - Commissioning
Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer, Scrutiny Office

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 Deirdre Alden and Roger Harmer.

4. ACTION NOTES

(See document no 1)

Councillor Marje Bridle referred to the Budget Consultation 2019+ item and her request for a report to be brought back to Committee on the proposals for joined-up working on the street scene, including plans to tackle fly-tipping, and asked that this be added to the action tracker.

RESOLVED:

The action notes of the meeting held on 11th December 2018 were agreed.

5. ACTION TRACKER

(See document no 2)

The action referred to above to be included on the next version of the action tracker.

RESOLVED:

The action tracker was noted.

6. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR – EXEMPT ACCOMMODATION

(See document no 3)

Jim Crawshaw, Head of Housing Options/Private Sector Housing, and Kalvinder Kohli, Head of Service – Commissioning, attended for this item.

Members were provided with an overview of the exempt sector. They were then given some background to the recently published Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board report on 'Risk, Safety and Wellbeing in Shared 'Exempt' Accommodation in Birmingham' and highlights from the proposed action plan.

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

- The definition of "exempt accommodation" in the housing benefit regulations is "where a non metropolitan county council in England, within the meaning of Section 1 of the Local Government Act 1972, a housing association, a registered charity or voluntary organisation where that body or a person acting on its behalf also provides the claimant with care, support or supervision";
- With exempt accommodation, landlords can secure additional housing benefit funding for an individual living in their accommodation if this criteria is met, and in order to receive these enhanced payments providers do need to demonstrate to the benefits service what care, support or supervision they are providing;
- Nationally, there are about 650,000 units of exempt accommodation and of that around 11,500 units specifically in Birmingham and about 15% of these are commissioned directly through the Council;
- There are a range of providers of exempt accommodation, eg commissioned providers (such as St Basils and Women's Aid), the Council (for the provision of our homeless hostels), private landlords and a range of different registered providers, housing associations;
- It was acknowledged that there are a lot of really good providers in the city providing vulnerable people with the support they need, however there are a number of providers who are of concern in terms of the level of support and the quality of the accommodation;
- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has recently consulted on the way the exempt sector could be funded in the future, including a proposal for funding to be given to local authorities to commission this type of accommodation. However, the response to the

consultation is that this will not happen and the funding will remain in the housing benefit system. However, the Ministry has committed to working with local authorities to look at how to drive up the quality and ensure clear standards are met within the sector;

- The council is also working with the social housing regulator with a view to driving up standards;
- The exempt sector has been a priority for the Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board (BSAB) for the last two to three years due to concerns being raised by a number of agencies regarding the increasing numbers of vulnerable people being placed within the sector with little or no regulation or quality assurance and the risks in relation to the mix of vulnerable people being placed together;
- As a result of these concerns, the BSAB and the Community Safety Partnership commissioned Birmingham University to do a more in-depth study with a focus on risk, safety and well-being in shared exempt accommodation;
- The report is small scale and qualitative, it was not intended to and does not give a full picture, but it highlights concerns that there are no standard referral processes, no platform to share good practice or raise concerns and the lack of information available to individuals regarding what their rights are and what they can expect when moving into that provision;
- The report also provides some recommendations in terms of improving safety and well-being of, and information provided to, vulnerable people and clear referral protocols for agencies;
- The study also focussed on legislation, policy and research around HMOs, shared accommodation, homelessness and vulnerable adults;
- The report highlighted that this sector is providing accommodation to vulnerable people at the point of crisis, therefore preventing people from sleeping on the streets, right through to step-down and move-on and recovery;
- In terms of conclusions, it is clear that a strategic approach is needed across the city, we need to continue to influence the MHCLG and the social housing regulator and to work in collaboration with agencies and with sector providers;
- The report has been taken to Corporate Management Team and a task and finish group has been set up – led by Rob James – initially an internal group but then to invite wider agencies;
- The report has also gone to the Homelessness Partnership Board, which requested that an action plan be developed. A draft has gone to the task and finish group and is now being worked on; the intention is to then take that through the relevant governance arrangements which will include Cabinet, Housing Birmingham, the Homelessness Partnership Board, the Community Safety Partnership and Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board;
- The action plan will cover strategy and policy, benchmarking with other core cities, how we administer exempt claims, commissioning and market shaping,

preparing a local statement of expectations which links back to quality standards and to prepare a shared housing guide for practitioners, protocols, guidance for residents, safeguarding training and a charter for residents;

- In response to a question around how we are managing move-on accommodation and why the council can't be a direct provider of exempt accommodation, Members were told that currently our allocations scheme does allow those coming out of commissioned support the ability to secure priority for permanent accommodation while freeing up those beds for other people needing that support, but we don't have that for non-commissioned providers;
- The council is a direct provider in terms of families, having temporary accommodation across the city which is exempt accommodation with support workers located in each of the homeless centres and two more will be opened up before the end of this financial year;
- However, we are not a direct provider for single people at the moment;
- There are models elsewhere in terms of shared accommodation and there is something about affordability and working with people to maximise their income so shared or single accommodation becomes a realistic aspiration for them;
- In terms of commissioning, the council has to look at the pros and cons of internal versus external provision, to see where the expertise is and who is best placed to provide the support. Funding and value for money is also part of this consideration;
- Members asked how they can feed in local knowledge of people reporting lack of support or poor quality accommodation and were advised that these are usually reported to the private rented sector team who will check what type of property it is and if it sits within that team they will go out and visit the landlord; if it does not sit within that team they will collect evidence and where possible speak with the provider;
- If the recommendations in the action plan are implemented, the aim is to get a link between local members and exempt accommodation providers for their locality with a formal channel of communication for raising issues and working collaboratively to respond to those issues;
- In terms of geographical spread of this type of accommodation, Members were advised that a needs assessment is carried out before the commissioning process begins and the view was expressed that needs assessments should be neighbourhood based;
- Further PRS sessions to be arranged.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No 4)

The work programme was discussed and the following points were raised:

- The Chair advised Members that the update on the CT scanner, originally scheduled for this meeting, had been deferred and a new date would be advised as soon as possible;
- Further PRS sessions to be arranged – Councillor Bridle asked if Committee could look at what powers the council has to encourage private landlords to get tenants to look after their properties where there are issues in certain areas and the Chair suggested this might be a conversation with Regulatory and Legal Services;
- Councillor Bridle referred to the report on Localisation scheduled to go to Cabinet on 22nd January and requested that this Committee looks at how that is going to be delivered. The Chair undertook to discuss this with the Chair of Co-ordinating O&S Committee;
- Councillor Ahmed requested if a visit could be arranged to the Housing Options Centre in Newtown;
- Members were invited to attend the Children’s Social Care O&S Committee meeting on Wednesday 16th January for the Youth Justice Plan item.

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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 1505 hours.