

SPARKBROOK & BALSALL HEATH WARD MEETING NOTES

WARD: Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath	DATE: 19 th July 2023
VENUE: Sparkbrook Health & Community Centre, Grantham Road B11 1LU	START/FINISH TIMES: 7pm – 8.55pm
COUNCILLORS Shabrana Hussain & Saima Ahmed	NOs OF ATTENDEES: 25
OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Deborah Moseley, Senior Service Manager (PRS) Yvonne Cowley, Housing Modernisation & Strategy Manager Steven Egnor, Licensing Services Manager Jugjeet Mankoo, Supported Exempt Inspection Officer Olga Oleskevic, Exempt Accommodation Officer Ishmail Shah, Planning Enforcement Amer Khan, Neighbourhood Action Co-ordinator	

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING INCLUDING LOCAL CONCERNS:

1. Welcome

Councillor Ahmed welcomed all to the meeting & advised that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. Exempt Accommodation & HMO Properties

Officers from the Exempt Accommodation Team, Private Rented Sector Team and Planning Enforcement provided an overview of the numbers of properties in the sector, legislation around properties in the private rented sector, the definition of HMO properties and exempt accommodation and the schemes available to the council to tackle issues –

- Mandatory Licensing Scheme for HMO properties
- Additional Selective Licensing Scheme for smaller HMO's of 2 or more tenants, pilot across 25 wards including Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East (including flats above shops, bedsits and other shared accommodation).
- Licence fees were dependant on size/type of property.
- Licence breaches were subject to prosecutions/fines/banning orders.
- In response to resident's questions/comments the following responses were provided –
- Problematic properties could be those not properly managed, issues relating to waste/rubbish, ASB, association with crime etc.
- Additional staff were being recruited to the Selective Licensing team and officers worked with other council services to make a difference in the wards covered.
- Residents were asked to continue reporting problems and to keep a diary so that any issues could be investigated.
- Email addresses for reporting – prs@birmingham.gov.uk and pl@birmingham.gov.uk
- The process to apply for a licence started with the landlord completing an application form, providing relevant safety records and signing a declaration that all information was true and correct. Any inconsistencies were taken up with the landlord before a draft licence was provided, with conditions, after which a five-year licence would be issued. Compliance officers undertook property checks during the licence period.
- The application could also be completed by a managing agent with the landlord as an interested party.
- There had been no revocation of licences issued for properties in the ward, but a number had been revoked across the city. There had to be a serious breach over a period of time to revoke a licence eg fire safety, over-crowding
- Officers worked with the police over noise nuisance & other complaints received. Evidence was needed for successful prosecution.
- Supported accommodation provided care for vulnerable adults managed by regulated providers not the local authority which did not have any regulatory powers over those types of properties. There was no definition of

care/support just that it must be more than minimal.

- Properties were inspected when complaints were received or there were issues around support/care raised with partners.
- City Council had lobbied for national reform around registration, support etc for exempt accommodation and a Bill passed recently that had become an Act of Parliament was due to be implemented Autumn 2025.
- Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East had 357 supported exempt accommodations, 5th highest across Birmingham.
- BCC was putting into place a Charter of Rights, Housing Benefit reviews and an Accreditation of Standards to improve standards across the sector. Complaints from residents were responded to through inspections and involvement of managing agent, registered housing provider, police etc depending on the issue. BCC could not stop properties opening but had recently agreed with the Probation Service that it would stop housing people from outside Birmingham into exempt accommodation in the city. Every effort was being made to improve the situation with the power available to the council.
- Tenants in these properties were not council tenants or ex-council tenants and were not the responsibility of the council but were individuals who required support. The council did not house people in these properties.
- A local housing provider referred to the Quality Standard and Charter of Rights and queried why Spring Housing & BVSC had been chosen and how BCC was to monitor without a definition. There was also a query regarding a lack of communication from Spring Housing and BVSC. Yvonne Crowley undertook to take further details at the conclusion of the meeting and email direct.
- Local authorities were unable to prevent businesses operating but BCC had listened to residents, worked to make a difference and as a result there was an Act of Parliament in place.
- The planning enforcement regulations and how the team responded to complaints were explained.

- Residents shared their issues associated with multiple occupied properties including anti-social behaviour, criminal activity involving burglary, drug taking/selling, begging, rubbish in gardens & on the street. It was

having an affect on everyday lives as these properties had opened within residential areas. Those living in those properties were drunk on the street, smoking drugs, fighting etc at all times of the day meaning people were afraid to leave their homes and it was having a negative impact on children. Much of the information provided appeared concerned about tenant welfare rather than welfare of residents & neighbours living amongst these properties. The local area was deteriorating rapidly because of the influx of HMO/exempt accommodations.

- Residents acknowledged that the council was working to improve the situation but 2025, when the Act would become law was some way off, during which time more HMO/exempt accommodation was likely to open and residents would still have to live with all the issues that they brought. The problems associated with properties housing multiple occupants had been evident in the area for a while and although the work being undertaken by the council was acknowledged, residents were suffering because providers were driven by profit rather than care. There was a plea to involve residents going forward as well as local officers, such as the Tenant Participation Officer. Resident's experiences needed to be considered and complaints acted upon as matters of urgency.
- Residents commented that tenants in these properties were technically in the social care system and therefore support should be monitored through the CQC – it was not a housing issue. The provider was paid to give care and should therefore be accountable and if not should be challenged.
- Councillor Hussain said she received numerous complaints regarding certain addresses but when visited it was reported that there were only one/two non-compliances while drug taking, urinating in public, fighting in the street and other anti-social behaviour was a regular occurrence. Processes that were in place were not helping residents living amongst these properties.

Councillor Hussain said she would arrange a meeting with officers and residents and asked that the presentation and relevant email addresses be circulated.

3. Councillors Update/Residents Updates

Councillor Hussain updated as follows –

- a) Next 'Cuppa with a Copper' 2nd August Sparkbrook Mosque 10am-12
- b) MHRC dates – 24th July – Dolobran Road – 7am – 12
- c) Community Litter picks – Spark Park, 21st July 6pm, Farm Park, 25th July
- d) Next meeting 20th September 7pm Sparkbrook Health & Community Centre – main item for discussion – highways/potholes/parking

ACTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS MADE	WHO	BY WHEN
1. Meeting re PRS/HMO/Exempt Accommodation	1. Councillor Hussain to arrange with officers & residents	1. asap
2. Circulation of presentation/email addresses	2. Kay Thomas	2.asap