



Work Outline / Terms of Reference

Improving Standards of Council Homes Inquiry

Reporting to Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<p>Our key question:</p>	<p>How can the Council improve the quality of its housing for Council tenants?</p>
<p>1. How is O&S adding value through this work?</p>	<p>The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Framework, 2021, outlines suggested criteria to ensure inquiries add value. This inquiry meets the criteria listed below:</p> <p>A high degree of public interest, political importance or sensitivity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue identified by members as a key issue for public. • Public interest issue covered in local media. <p>Implications for the City Council's wider governance role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Government guidance or legislation. <p>Service delivery and efficient management processes, where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about service performance. • A high level of service user dissatisfaction with the service. • A high priority afforded to the service by customers/users. • High level of budgetary commitment to the service/ policy area. • Issues raised by external audit reports. <p>In January 2023, the Council declared a 'housing emergency' in Birmingham. Shortly afterwards, the Housing Ombudsman published a special report into Birmingham which made recommendations into four key themes: repairs; record keeping; complaints handling, and compensation. All Members receive daily complaints from tenants highlighting significant concerns about the quality of their council housing. Local media such as the Birmingham Evening Mail are also regularly featuring stories which also draw attention to real life cases. During the January 2023 debate in Council, it was reported that 29% of the proportion of Council homes in Birmingham do not meet the Decent Homes standard (compared with 7.8% nationally).</p> <p>This year, the Social Housing Regulation Bill has been introduced, which places new responsibilities on landlords such as Birmingham City Council, and the City Housing service is already responding to the challenges highlighted by the Housing Ombudsman and presented by the new Bill. The intention of this Inquiry is not to duplicate this existing work, but to complement and enhance it. The inquiry presents an opportunity for Members to use their unique insight to consider these challenges in a different way, and as a result make recommendations which can make a tangible difference to the housing for tenants in this city.</p>
<p>2. What needs to be done?</p>	<p>The Inquiry will receive evidence from a range of stakeholders to consider the following key issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current condition of the Council's housing stock including the views of tenants.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condition of properties becoming void and current standards for re-letting. • Concerns raised by the Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator for Social Housing, and how City Housing intends to/is responding to this. • What does an excellent Repairs and Maintenance service look like? How does the Council currently compare to this? • City Housing's Transformation programme and how this intends to improve standards. Measurable impact of this programme to date. Challenges to overcome in the future and barriers. • The strategic and national landscape – what are the changes introduced by the Social Housing Regulation Bill for all social housing providers? How does the Council intend to respond to this? • What are the standards adopted by other social housing providers within the region? How can the Council learn from this?
<p>3. What timescale do we propose to do this in?</p>	<p>The Homes O&S Committee intends to report and make recommendations to Council in April 2024.</p> <p>Scoping: Outline Terms of Reference: to be agreed at O&S Committee on 21 September 2023.</p> <p>Delivery Plan: to be completed by O&S Committee on 19 October 2023.</p> <p>Evidence Gathering: scheduled to commence by end October.</p> <p>Key Findings and Recommendations/ Report Preparation: to be confirmed once the evidence gathering has commenced. However, it is anticipated that this will take place late January/ early February.</p> <p>Council: The Homes O&S Committee intends to report and make recommendations to Council in April 2024.</p>
<p>4. What outcomes are we looking to achieve?</p>	<p>This inquiry will make recommendations which will contribute towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make Council homes safer for tenants (Outcome 1) • Improve tenant satisfaction with their Council Homes and the services they receive (Outcome 2) <p>Birmingham City Council's Corporate Plan 2022–2026 Priority 11: Increase affordable, safe, green housing. Priority 12: Tackle homelessness Priority 13: Tackle health inequalities</p>
<p>5. What is the best way to achieve these outcomes and what routes will we use?</p>	<p>A Task and Finish Group has been the recommended approach by the Committee to gather and review evidence for this inquiry. This Task and Finish group will comprise cross party membership.</p> <p>Stakeholders The following stakeholders will be requested to provide information to this inquiry:</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birmingham City Council’s City Housing Directorate • Council’s Housing contractors • Local Government Association (LGA) • Social Housing Providers in Birmingham and West Midlands • Tenants • West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) <p>Other stakeholders may be identified during the further scoping to be completed during October.</p> <p>The inquiry also welcomes suggestions for additional stakeholders to seek evidence from all stakeholders listed above and Members of the Council. All suggestions should be highlighted to the lead officer listed below.</p> <p>Members All Members of the Council will also be invited to provide evidence. In addition to this, all members of the Council may request to attend evidence gathering sessions. If a Member is interested in this, they are invited to contact the lead officer for further information.</p> <p>Evidence Stakeholders will be invited to provide evidence in a variety of formats. This will be finalised as part of the scoping stage. In general terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For organisations, this may be information in writing and/or a face-to-face presentation. Organisations will be advised of the relevant format for their evidence individually when invited to provide information to the inquiry. • For tenants, the inquiry group is currently determining the best approach. This will be informed by the current type and nature of the information collected by City Housing. <p>The inquiry group also intends to undertake site visits to empty (void) Council properties to support their inquiry.</p>
--	---

Member / Officer Leads

Lead Member:	Chair: Cllr. Ken Wood
Members of the Task and Finish Group:	Councillors Saqib Khan; Mohammed Idrees; Lauren Rainbow; Penny Wagg
Lead Officer and support:	Lead Officer: Amelia Wiltshire Support Officer: Jayne Bowles An expert witness from City Housing will be identified to support this inquiry.