

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Thursday 10 November 2022

Committee Room 6, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Mohammed Idrees (Chair)

Councillors: Marje Bridle, Ray Goodwin, Roger Harmer, Saqib Khan, Lauren Rainbow and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment

Jonathan Antill, Head of Business Improvement and Support, City Operations

Mira Gola, Head of Business Improvement and Support, City Housing

Paul Langford, Interim Director of Housing Management - online

Gary Messenger, Assistant Director, City Housing Services and Support - online

Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement

Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene

Natalie Smith, Head of Service for Housing Management

Steve Wilson, Project Director, Asset Management - online

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Amelia Murray, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's meeting You Tube site (www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw) and that members of

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

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Kerry Brewer and an apology for lateness from Councillor Ken Wood.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2)

RESOLVED:

- Cllr Harmer referred to the outstanding action for an updated list of HMOs by ward and requested this be progressed;
- The action notes of the meeting held on 13 October 2022 were agreed;
- The action tracker was noted.

5. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(See documents 3 and 4)

City Housing

Mira Gola, Head of Business Improvement and Support, presented the City Housing Performance Report.

Natalie Smith, Head of Service for Housing Management, was also in attendance for this item and Paul Langford, Interim Director of Housing Management, Gary Messenger, Assistant Director, City Housing Services and Support, and Steve Wilson, Project Director, Asset Management, were in attendance online.

The key points were highlighted, including that there was a placeholder in the report for a corporate KPI on Tenant Satisfaction which, although signed off by Government, won't be implemented until April 2023.

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

- **Number of Households in B&B and Temporary Accommodation** – Oscott Gardens has been developed to house larger families and is being used for families who have been in B&B for too long. Whilst it has kept B&B numbers a little lower, it is not quite full yet and it is expected that will happen over the next month or so;
- It was acknowledged that B&B numbers are quite high but there is a national housing crisis and it is a struggle to secure affordable accommodation;

- Birmingham is a little bit behind some other local authorities in terms of using private rented accommodation as an alternative to social housing;
- There is a team that works with private sector landlords and when families are threatened with homelessness, if they approach the council, this team, along with the Housing Options service, will negotiate to keep them in their homes where possible. However, this is likely to get more difficult with the higher interest rates, etc;
- It was recognised that the only way real progress can be made is to create more accommodation and ideally build more houses for social rent, or if not to do more along the lines of Oscott Gardens;
- Members were told there were a number of bespoke programmes to mitigate the use of B&B but all the different projects and programmes have to be balanced;
- The big picture is that Temporary Accommodation has doubled across the country due to a lack of social housing. The key is to try and prevent homelessness in the first place and this includes discharging into the private sector;
- **Percentage of Housing Applications awaiting assessment** – The drop in performance due to reduced resources was queried and Members were told that the council has been proactive in recognising backlogs have built up and a backlogs team has been created to address that;
- Applications did start to climb and a couple of agency workers had been lost, which resulted in the drop in the percentage over the last month or two, however the team is now back to full strength and it is hoped the figure will go back up to 85%;
- **Percentage of Repairs resolved within 30 days** – it was queried whether this included where there are routine repeat issues (an example was given of a broken shower door due to mould where this had been fixed within the period but in a matter of months it broke again, because the issue is actually the mould, not the shower door);
- Where there are follow-on repairs, both would be factored into the calculation. Repairs are counted individually so it would have been two repairs in the example given;
- All members should be aware that the repairs contract is up for renewal in 2024 and a right first time indicator will be built in to monitor how many repairs are completed on the first visit;
- There are 250,000 repairs a year, so almost 1,000 every working day;
- **Tenant Satisfaction** – With regard to the new system the Government is introducing, it was queried how the council currently measures tenant satisfaction, where this is reported and how the Government proposal is different from what is being done already;
- In line with the legislation from the White Paper, there are currently 19 tenant satisfaction measures that need to be completed and published;
- This will be quite different to the transactional measures which allow services to be changed more rapidly;
- In terms of transactional satisfaction, there is only ASB currently being measured when cases close;

- **Void turnaround times** – the current contractors are Equans in the North and since April also in the West, Central and East (replacing Waites), and Fortem in the South;
- Equans are doing a really good job, turning voids around in 20-23 days, which is really positive and a massive improvement;
- Performance in the South is not so good and is adversely affecting performance across the city with collective performance currently 31 days. This is 5 days improvement since the summer but it needs to be 28 days to achieve the target;
- Meetings have been held with the Chairman and Managing Director of Fortem and they have been given an intervention notice. They are being made to pay for all rent loss and council tax cost for the duration they hold any void property so the longer they take, the more they will pay;
- As part of a deep-dive review it was noted that not only was there a time delay issue but also a quality issue and a bold decision was made to get the quality right and the next stage is to improve times;
- Fortem are taking this seriously. They are trying really hard and have recruited a new Operations Manager;
- **Right to Buy** – Right to Buy has been in place since the 1980s and the rules have changed over the decades;
- When selling on a Right to Buy property, there is an obligation in the first 1-10 years to offer the council the right to buy it back, and the council has now started to use that legislation;
- Where a property is sold on within 5-10 years, this has to be at market value;
- If sold within 1-5 years, any discount has to be paid back;
- It was agreed the Right to Buy rules, including the qualifying period for accessing Right to Buy, would be shared with members;
- **Empty Property Strategy** – there is an acquisition programme – purchasing 220 properties with a £60m budget for the benefit of temporary accommodation and buying up empty properties is one of the things they are trying to do;
- **Affordable housing** – the percentage of genuinely affordable housing is below target and anything that can be done to increase the affordable housing supply will help address those issues previously discussed.

City Operations

Jonathan Antill, Head of Business Improvement and Support, presented the City Operations Performance Report.

Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, and Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement, were also in attendance for this item.

The key points were highlighted and members were asked whether they would like the Community Safety KPIs to be included in future reports, with attendance from the Assistant Director of Community Safety and Resilience, and this was agreed.

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

- **Private Rented Sector Team staffing issues** – When the Private Rented Sector Team moved to City Operations in September 2021 a review of staffing was undertaken and a strategy was produced, accompanied by a service review and restructure with proposed new posts;
- The Licensing Team was understaffed by 30% (4 posts) and the Empty Properties Team was understaffed by 25% (1 post). Members were told these posts are now being recruited to;
- It was noted that recruiting Environmental Health Officers was difficult;
- **Reported Missed Collections** – Reference was made to the Ombudsman quote that “continued failure to address public concerns effectively is as much a matter of corporate leadership as it is of day-to-day service delivery” and it was stressed that the root cause needs to be sorted out;
- Members were told that there had been a trend of failure throughout the whole of the year and the service is working hard to try and correct that;
- Where collections have been missed, the crew report back on the reason, for example whether they ran out of time, there was a vehicle breakdown or a staffing issue, etc;
- Additional resource has been added to the management team to tackle ongoing issues and there has been a major change in data and data reporting;
- There are still issues at the moment due to operating with paper maps and paper reports and performance will increase once the crews move to electronic live data in the “slab in the cab” – one depot is now fully operating on that and another has started to implement it and will have rollout into cabs by the end of December;
- In response to a question about whether Members could go out and see it working, it was confirmed a demonstration could be arranged;
- **Recycling** – It was queried how recycling had improved since the introduction of the mobile household recycling centres and Members were told that there has been a greater tonnage of residual waste rather than recycle, with just under 100 tonnes of recycle coming through that process.

RESOLVED: -

- That the Right to Buy rules, including the qualifying period for accessing Right to Buy, be shared with Members;
- That the offer of a demonstration of the “slab in the cab” technology be followed up;
- That the report be noted.

6. PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION: REDUCING FLY-TIPPING

(See document 5)

Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment, and Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, were in attendance for this item.

Councillor Mahmood reported on progress with each of the outstanding recommendations – R01 and R03 – and in the course of the discussion the following were among the main points raised:

Recommendation 01 – Cabinet Member’s Assessment ‘2’ (Achieved – Late)

- There would be another Grimewatch video released the following week;
- Another 10 cameras had been ordered and discussions were taking place regarding a new type of solar camera and a new software system;
- Members said that they would welcome more information on this and expressed concern that it had taken so long to release another Grimewatch video since the first one had been in March;
- The delay had been due to legal hurdles with very strict guidance from the legal team as to what could be publicised and when;
- The Committee did not agree with the Cabinet Member’s assessment for this recommendation and agreed it should be changed to ‘3’ (Not Achieved – Progress Made) with a further report back to Committee in January 2023.

Recommendation 03 – Cabinet Member’s Assessment ‘2’ (Achieved – Late)

- Members were not satisfied that this recommendation had been achieved and stressed that a proper review of prosecution strategies was needed;
- Councillor Mahmood said that he would need to have a conversation with the Leader, the Chair of Licensing and Public Protection and legal officers;
- A request was made for the statistics for the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued to be provided and Members were told the Licensing and Public Protection Committee publishes this information online;
- Councillor Mahmood informed members that the mobile household recycling centres have been operating for over a year now and fly-tipping has decreased;
- The Committee did not agree with the Cabinet Member’s assessment for this recommendation and agreed it should be changed to ‘3’ (Not Achieved – Progress Made) with a further report back to Committee in January 2023.

RESOLVED: -

- That the Cabinet Member’s assessment for both recommendations R01 and R03 be changed to ‘3’ (Not Achieved – Progress Made);
- That a further report on progress be brought back to Committee in January 2023;
- That the report be noted.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 6)

The following matters were raised:

- Cross-committee work – the Co-ordinating O&S Committee will be having a session on Domestic Abuse on 17th February and an invitation will be sent to Housing and Neighbourhoods O&S members;
- December meeting – Cllr Cotton’s Priorities Report and the Annual Report of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) are on the agenda. Members were given the opportunity to flag anything they would want to see included in the BCSP report;

- January meeting – Reports back on Reducing Fly-tipping.

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

The date of the next meeting was noted.

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

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR 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 1532 hours.