

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Thursday 13 October 2022

Committee Rooms 3&4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Mohammed Idrees (Chair)

Councillors: Kerry Brewer, Marje Bridle, Ray Goodwin, Saqib Khan and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Ian Ward, Leader of the Council

Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

Guy Chaundy, Housing Modernisation and Partnership Manager

Karen Cheney, Head of Service – Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit

Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods

Naomi Morris, Housing Modernisation and Partnership Manager

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Christian Scade, Interim Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

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 Roger Harmer and Councillor Lauren Rainbow.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2)

The following matters were raised:

- Delays in Birth and Death Registrations – through the winter evening burials are being piloted at Sutton New Hall Cemetery and this will be reviewed in the Spring;
- Letters to the Cabinet Member(s) in respect of the Petition and Request for Call-In considered at the September meeting have now been sent.

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the meeting held on 26 September 2022 were agreed;
- The action tracker was noted.

5. LOCALISATION

(See document 3)

Councillor Ian Ward, Leader of the Council, Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, and Karen Cheney, Head of Service – Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit, were in attendance for this item.

The Chair invited the Leader to introduce this item and the following key points were highlighted:

- Localisation and the idea of increasing influence over service provision at a local level is the one initiative where the least progress has been made over the last 4 years;
- The intention going forward is to begin to accelerate progress in this area, however we have to be mindful of the current economic situation, which is very different to 4 years ago, with sky high rates of inflation, rising interest rates and the cost of living crisis, which will all impact on this agenda and the broader agenda of the Council as a whole;
- Since May of this year, a working group has been set up to look at making progress and the Neighbourhood Action Co-ordinator pilot has been announced;
- 22 wards will have a CSDO officer as a single point of contact for elected members and the public, particularly around waste, fly-tipping, environmental and housing issues;

- There will be a small budget of £10,000 and in terms of determining how the money is spent, this will be in consultation with members in those wards and not the decision of officers;
- Each NDSO will cover two wards, so it is not quite the same model as the Ward Support Officers where there was one for each ward, as the funding isn't available for that model;
- Cllr Ward thinks this will be an invaluable resource for elected members – he has met with the officer in Shard End and there is a willingness to attend Ward Forums, HLBs etc – and if successful will have to find a way of rolling out across the city;
- There are two other localised budgets – one around transport, which is a small sum of money, and a housing environmental budget, determined with the HLB;
- The CWG devolved budget that activated arts, cultural and sporting activity seems to have been very well received by elected members and the public and in terms of engagement had worked very well;
- There is an ambition to try and create a legacy annual arts and culture festival in July/August if the resources can be found and, subject to members' comments, it would be good to find a way of doing that on an ongoing basis;
- Should our bid to host the European Athletic Championships be successful, it would be good to turn that festival into something genuinely international by 2026;
- Activating our communities as part of that would be very good and Cllr Ward would be interested to hear members' views;
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) differs across the wards, for example Ladywood has a large sum of money but there is one ward where there is a very small amount and there is an effort to add to that through a crowdfunding initiative;
- Neighbourhood planning continues to be encouraged and there are provisions for those wards that want to bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan. However, this does have to conform to the Birmingham Development Plan and it is a complicated process with a need to demonstrate community support through a ballot;
- A good way to localise services is to set up a parish council resulting in devolved and local control, however essentially this means asking people to vote for an increase in taxation which is probably not an option in the immediate future;
- Not all wards have a Ward Action Plan and Cllr Ward said he would be interested in the thoughts of this committee as to whether we connect up the ward plan to the availability of devolved budgets, ie not allow access to a devolved budget where there is no ward plan. That would put focus on engaging with local communities and developing a ward plan;
- All wards should be reviewing and submitting new ward plans by the January deadline. One has been done so far – North Edgbaston – and Cllr Ward referred to a letter Cllr Thompson had sent in relation to flexibilities that might be afforded to the ward, for example No Mow May which is about letting wild flowers grow;

- The committee might be interested in seeing that letter and it was agreed this would be circulated;
- The amount of human resource available to wards is currently being reviewed, with a view to reporting back to the working group on how this can be configured;
- The table attached to the letter the committee sent to the former Cabinet Member has been populated and circulated to the working group and this will be shared with committee members;

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

- One of the key issues is how to get ward plans delivered and how success is measured;
- Those measures of success, services localised to the area and officers working together more, will result in councillors feeling they have more influence over things to make improvements happen locally and residents would feel their concerns are being acted on;
- Cllr Ward responded that this needs to be tested through the pilot – the Neighbourhood Action Co-ordinators will be convening local partnership meetings to deal with issues on the ground and in those meetings the ward plan and how it is delivered will be discussed;
- Whilst the Council is providing services in local areas, there are other partners who can help with this;
- In terms of taking localisation forward and the need for clarity on how this will be achieved and the timeline, it was agreed that the Leader would come back to committee in March with an update, to include a review of the NAC pilot and how to take this forward and case studies from the 22 wards;
- Following discussion about attendance at ward meetings, there was a view that there needs to be flexibility about what is considered a ward meeting. Cllr Wood pointed out that in his ward they had at least 5 or 6 extra meetings a year in relation to developments, but these didn't count towards the four required ward meetings;
- It was acknowledged that this is something that should be looked at in terms of giving more flexibility to ward members needing to hold extra meetings and also how these meetings are facilitated;
- Chris Jordan added that some of those meetings held don't count as ward forums and that there is some criteria about ward forums being open to all to attend;
- Cllr Goodwin said that he is of the view that we need to be innovative about how we engage with communities and used the example of a community safety meeting in his ward which had been held on Facebook Live with 60 people present and over 2,000 watching online and commenting;
- It was agreed this was a really good idea and there are other wards who have done things in a different way;
- With regard to the CIL, the difficulties with getting projects through was highlighted and it would be interesting to know how much money has been lost through not being spent;

- Members were told that Hayley Claybrook would be able to provide more information and information on claw-back because of failure to spend in time, which it was hoped would not be a big number;
- In terms of how the CIL can be used, Members were told that it doesn't apply everywhere and we were very conservative about where it would apply and what to so as not to stifle investment into the city and there will be a review of how it is being spent;
- A request was made for the directorate self-assessments that have come out of the Star Chamber to be shared with the committee;
- In response to a question about which NAC pilots are up and running and which wards are being paired, Members were told that an email had gone out to members. This will be circulated again and in a week's time they will be able to put a named person down for each ward;
- The issues with Legal Services around Community Asset Transfers was raised and the blockage in getting legal clearance to make these transfers;
- There was a discussion about the use of Alexander Stadium for other events not just athletics and Members were told that there is a desire to get the facility used as much as we possibly can;
- Investment in the stadium involved Birmingham City University relocating their sports faculty, Birchfield Harriers and UK Athletics are based there and there are talks with others about holding events there.

The Chair thanked the Leader and officers for attending.

RESOLVED: -

- Leader to come back to committee in March with a further update;
- Populated version of the table attached to the letter sent to the former Cabinet Member to be circulated to committee members;
- Letter from Cllr Thompson to the Leader regarding ward plan to be shared with committee members;
- Email sent to members regarding the NAC pilot and pairing up of wards to be re-circulated and named person to be added for each of the wards;
- Directorate self-assessments which came out of the Star Chamber to be shared with committee members;
- The report was noted.

6. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS: PRIORITIES 2022/23

(See document 4)

Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, attended to present her priorities for 2022/23.

Guy Chaundy and Naomi Morris, Housing Modernisation and Partnership Managers, were also in attendance.

Cllr Thompson highlighted the following priorities:

- One of the key things is the supported housing strategy regarding exempt accommodation and how this is managed across the city. This follows on from the pilot done previously and the scrutiny report;
- In relation to repairs contracts for council properties, contract extension arrangements and re-tendering for the south need to be completed;
- A HRA business plan will be completed and priorities identified for the capital investment programme for 2022-23;
- Following the decision to prioritise fire safety after Grenfell there were a number of properties that won't have had bathrooms and kitchens done so there is a need to re-prioritise;
- It is important to have a housing strategy to go alongside the supported housing strategy and there is an associated delivery plan;
- A robust plan to be developed setting out delivery of the retrofit programme for council properties as part of achieving route to zero targets, which is a huge undertaking;
- This will include the 300 homes pilot in East Birmingham and also working with housing associations looking at brand new technology in their properties;
- Completion of a self-assessment of progress in delivering against the Social Housing White Paper and the Regulator's Consumer regulations;
- Ensuring Housing contributes effectively to the cost of living crisis;
- Deliver key changes to ensure delivery of the Private Sector Housing Strategy;
- Establish an affordable housing delivery board;
- Have a modernised approach to tenant engagement;
- Ensuring there is a more sustainable and effective Temporary Accommodation Strategy, which will be needed more and more with the cost of living crisis and more people presenting as homeless;
- Birmingham has been known for working effectively with central government and partners and agencies and will continue to build on those existing relationships and put Birmingham at the forefront of new initiatives.

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

- **Housing provision:** The housing list is in excess of 22,000 live applications and having spoken to Cabinet Members across the country, some waiting lists in smaller authorities are between 17,000 and 20,000, so Birmingham is not particularly out of kilter;
- There are about 60,000 council properties across the city and on average about 3,000 come up each year;
- There are a number of things being done – Birmingham is the biggest council house builder but not building quickly enough; money has been put aside for buying properties back that were previously right to buy, one reason being to use as temporary accommodation; other types of build are being looked at, eg modular builds in smaller spaces; working more closely with housing associations; trying to make the private sector more affordable; and reducing the numbers of exempt accommodation which takes out family housing;
- Everybody talks about the need for more housing but not many want it on their own doorstep;

- Elected members need to be more open about spaces available in their wards;
- **Tenant Engagement Review:** Members were told that off the back of the recommendations from the review work has been done with existing tenants to develop a delivery plan and action plan;
- TPAS who undertook the review are doing a piece of ongoing work around re-engineering engagement with new tenants and developing workshops outside of the HLB structures to try and broaden engagement;
- One of the areas that needs working on is understanding more around tenant satisfaction and from a recent survey with all tenants who could communicate electronically or over the phone 181 came back and said they wanted to be involved in the new engagement structure;
- There won't be a report to Cabinet as it is not a key decision but the delivery plan and action plan can be brought back to this committee before it is finally ratified;
- **Land ownership:** The issue of land ownership was raised and one of the key things being reviewed as part of the housing transformation programme is the approach to the GIS mapping system to ensure there is accurate data on where our land is so frontline staff can easily access that information if there are disputes about land;
- **Exempt accommodation:** The Cabinet Member was complimented on the exempt accommodation seminar held recently, which had highlighted the issues. The event was attended by 220 people and Cllr Thompson put on record her thanks to Cllr Wood and Cllr Harmer for the cross-party work on this topic;
- It was felt that as well as working with the government, the Council should be using the powers it has, such as covenants, and it was queried whether Legal Services might not be prepared to do that;
- Cllr Thompson told members that she had a meeting the day before with officers and the Exempt Accommodation Sponsor Board which includes the Cabinet Members for Finance and Resources, Social Justice, Community Safety and Equalities and Health and Social Care, where they went through every action on the scrutiny review;
- Assurance was given that they are getting back on top of that in terms of the Council side and an email had been sent to Legal Services reminding them they have a part to play in driving forward those legal aspects, eg covenants;
- **Repairs contracts:** the timeline for the contract extensions and re-tendering was requested;
- **Retrofit:** it was queried how this is going to be done, how it will be paid for and how it will be decided whether a property is worth doing and whether retrofit or knock down and rebuild is the cheaper option;
- There are discussions taking place around the need to be sensible and when best to retrofit or when it is not financially viable;
- There is a huge challenge in terms of the cost of delivering targets around route to zero – about £3.6b in Birmingham for our stock – and this won't be done through the normal HRA;
- The HRA is being assessed in terms of stress testing capacity over the longer term to increase borrowing capacity to deliver on strategic priorities;

- Right now, they are doing all they can to maximise available grant funding, for example the Decarbonisation Fund;
- **Role of developers in addressing the housing shortage:** The Director of Inclusive Growth is very clear that we need to make sure developers are supporting our agenda in terms of the delivery plan and this is something which could be brought to committee at a later time;
- **Wider approach:** how these priorities tie in with the Combined Authority was queried as this is not just a Birmingham problem and Cllr Thompson told members that we are part of the broader picture and that she chairs the West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Advisory Group and sits on the Land and Delivery Board;
- **Housing management:** the priority about self-assessment is around compliance and includes how effectively we manage our tenants and tenancies and maybe something could be brought back to committee on where we are with that self-assessment;
- **Developing small plots of land:** they are looking at how these can be packaged up to encourage developers and registered providers to work with us to develop those quicker than we can;
- **Tenure mix of developments:** there is clearly a need to maximise affordable and social rent housing from any new development, whilst recognising there is also a need to ensure the aspirations of local people to move into home ownership are met.

RESOLVED: -

- Tenant Engagement Delivery Plan and Action Plan to be brought to committee before being finally ratified;
- Timeline to be provided for the repairs contracts extension arrangements and re-tendering for the South;
- Affordable Housing Plan to be brought to future committee meeting;
- The report was noted.

7. CITY WIDE HOUSING STRATEGY 2022-2027 CONSULTATION

(See document 5)

Guy Chaundy and Naomi Morris, Housing Modernisation and Partnership Managers, attended for this item.

Guy referred to the presentation which was included in the agenda pack and pointed out that some of this had been covered in the previous item.

The following key points were made:

- Birmingham is a large city and we need to embrace the size and diversity of the city;
- Key changes are needed and there are challenges in terms of providing housing and employment space for a growing population;

- We do not have swathes of land – the Housing Strategy is a shared, sector strategy, not just a Birmingham strategy and is very much about how we work with investors, developers, the private sector and registered providers;
- We have delivered on the new housing target but not the affordable target and with high numbers on the housing waiting list and the fact that we can't rely on council stock, there is a need to look at the range of opportunities;
- The Housing Strategy is due to go to Cabinet in December with a formal launch in January;
- In terms of the consultation, there have been big stakeholder events with Homes England, the Chief Executives of the Housing Associations across the city, and the third sector, for example the Chair of the Homelessness Taskforce, about what the strategy should look like;
- There has also been consultation through Be Heard and speaking to the City Housing Liaison Board, as well as resident surveys regarding aspirations and quality of current housing;
- A lot of that data and intelligence has fed into the priority setting;
- There are three key priorities:
 - **Supply** – building and maximising availability of existing stock, working with providers and creating incentives. There needs to be a collaborative approach with those who can access government funding, land and can deliver quicker;
 - There are affordable housing challenges and issues around the capacity and capability in the Council to deliver at pace;
 - There is a cross-directorate Affordable Housing Delivery Board, trying to make sure that all parts of the Council are joined up – Planning, Property Services, Housing and City Operations;
 - There is no member-led group at the moment but that's not to say it won't happen in the future;
 - **People** – this is about citizens being able to access and sustain housing that meets their needs;
 - Key issues are financial resilience, early intervention and prevention, good offers for young people and older people and looking at links between housing and health and strengthening those partnerships;
 - There are real issues in terms of the increased demand around homelessness and temporary accommodation, specifically around families and the need to find the right type of suitable accommodation
 - The Temporary Accommodation Strategy will feed into this priority;
 - **Neighbourhoods** – making sure existing stock is good quality, how route to zero is achieved and the strategic approach to retrofit;
 - There is an increased reliance on the private rented sector and a need to make sure PRS is accessible, affordable and good quality;
 - This is about working with landlords to make sure they are not charging extortionate rates, licensing, landlords working with us, etc;
- The last few slides in the presentation cover the refreshed approach to make this a living working document, delivery and action plan and governance routes, eg Sponsor Board for Exempt Accommodation.

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

- It was queried whether the Council has a list of reputable landlords which we can offer to people, or if not is there an intention to get one;
- Members were told that there is an Accommodation Finder Team specifically tasked with going out and finding good landlords and they are building up a portfolio of private rented landlords;
- Developing a list is not that easy because of the affordability issue, but the team is trying to make it an attractive package to landlords and trying to develop that base;
- Residents being forced to move out of the Birmingham area and what can be done to help people remain in Birmingham was queried;
- The difficulty is that we are in the middle of a national housing crisis, with over 4,000 families who do not have a permanent home at the moment in temporary accommodation;
- Cllr Thompson has spoken to colleagues, particularly in the London boroughs, and their numbers can be worse than ours;
- No authority wants to send people outside of their area and this only happens in an emergency;
- We have to ensure temporary accommodation meets the standards we want and part of the strategy is about having more centres which we manage ourselves and which are secure, for example Barry Jackson Tower and Oscott Gardens, rather than sending people outside of the city;
- One of the issues is that when these proposals come forward, there is always an argument about "not on my patch";
- There was concern around PRS rents already being high and with the interest rate rising these will increase even more and people will be struggling with the cost of living crisis;
- Cllr Thompson told members she does anticipate it will get much worse and we have to be prepared for that and make sure there are timelines behind the strategy so we have places to move people to.

RESOLVED:

- The report was noted.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 6)

It was proposed that the November, December and January meetings are extended by half an hour to accommodate the sessions on Cleaner Streets and this was agreed.

It was also suggested that the March meeting could also be extended to allow time for the Leader's update on Localisation and the planned piece of work on Voids (to be confirmed).

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

The date of the next meeting 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 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 1600 hours.