

WARD END WARD FORUM MEETING**Friday 23 September 2022****9.30am – 11.00am****Dolphin Women's Centre - Cloverlea Annex****262 Northleigh Road****Ward End****B8 2DH****Meeting Notes****Councillor:** Bushra Bi**Officers in Attendance**

Emily Blackhurst – Exempt Accommodation Team Leader

James Carless – East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Team

Wayne Dawkins – Exempt Accommodation Housing Officer

Beverly Edmead – Community Governance Manager

Mary Jordan – Community Network Officer

Matthew Smith – HMO Licensing Team

Pat Whyte – Community Development & Support Officer

Apologies

Cllr Sharon Thompson – Cabinet Member, Housing and Homelessness

Number of attendees – 30**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Following introductions, Cllr Bushra Bi welcomed everyone to her first Ward Forum Meeting as the Elected Member for Ward End after the Local Elections on 6 May 2022.

2. Notice of Recording

Residents were advised that members of the press and/or public could record and/or take photographs of the meeting.

3. Exempt Accommodation and Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Cllr Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness who was the invited Guest Speaker, but now unable to attend due to another urgent appointment.

Cllr Bi advised that a petition against the increase in HMOs and Exempt Accommodation in the ward had been submitted at the recent meeting of the City Council and thanked residents who had signed the petition.

Following officer introductions, Matthew Smith briefly explained what was meant by an HMO – Homes of Multiple Occupation.

The most common type of HMOs found in neighbourhoods were the type where three or more

unrelated people occupied a property, paid rent for their own bedroom but shared living space and amenities (kitchen, bathroom, living room etc).

The Housing Act 2004 introduced the mandatory licensing scheme for HMOs with five or more people in occupation, who formed two or more households.

The licence was renewable every 5 years and the landlord had to prove s/he was a 'fit and proper person' before a licence was granted. These were the most common type of HMOs in neighbourhoods – and not all were badly run or problematic.

However, where a HMO had been granted a licence, the City Council also had the power to revoke/take it away and close the premises down if the landlord was not adhering to the requirements of the license and/or the occupants were causing a severe nuisance/ASB.

Residents with concerns regarding HMOs should contact the Private Rented Sector team at PRS@birmingham.gov.uk

Martin added that it was important to continue to report incidents so that an evidence trail could be developed, and that often action was being taken by Officers that was not always visible or able to be reported to residents.

Exempt/Supported Accommodation

Emily Blackhurst explained that this was a provision set up by Government to provide housing and /or shelter for those most in need and were often the most vulnerable.

However, a loophole in legislation meant that anyone could apply to become an Exempt or Supported Housing provider, which had led to influx in these types of accommodation in residential neighbourhoods, and in turn had led to disruption, an increase in crime/anti-social behaviour/acts of criminality and in many residents' views, the deterioration of community spirit, cohesion and general normal behaviours in neighbourhoods.

Emily further advised there was no requirement by providers to notify Officers/Planning Department of their intention to set up/provide exempt or supported accommodation, and Officers were only made aware once issues and concerns were raised by residents.

Visits and investigations were made by officers from the Exempt Accommodation Team once complaint were made by local residents, hence the importance of reporting issues and concerns.

Residents advised of the following:

- crime, including drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, acts of violence and general nuisance behaviour and littering were a regular occurrence at these types of properties – whether HMO or Exempt accommodation.
- There was very little evidence of support or management of the occupants by the landlord or support workers.
- Street begging as rife and residents living in close proximity to these types of accommodation were left feeling very vulnerable and frightened by the behaviours of the occupants.
- Several properties in Foley Road and Southern Road were particularly problematic – crime and anti-social behaviour ongoing on a daily basis; regular visits were made to the premises by drug dealers and residents being threatened/feeling threatened by their presence on a daily basis.
- Regular reporting was made to the police, but little or no action appeared to be taken – even when evidence, including video recordings were submitted.
- Robust proactive action must be taken against the owners/landlords of these types of

properties and a change in government legislation was needed to close the Housing Benefit and financial loophole currently being exploited by the 'housing provider(s)'.

- obstructive parking and excessive littering was also an ongoing problem

Acknowledging residents comments, Emily explained that many of the Exempt/Supported Accommodation popping up in residential neighbourhoods were unregulated and currently did not need planning permission; there was no requirement by providers to notify the City Council, and Officers were only aware of these premises when they became problematic -which was why it was essential that residents contacted officers or the local police team as soon as nuisance behaviour began so that these could be logged from the outset.

Wayne added that currently, a significant number of properties in the ward were being investigated, and that whilst details of the investigations could not be shared publicly, it was important for residents to keep reporting and logging the issues. A Police Liaison Officer working solely on exempt accommodation issues was also based within the PRS Team.

Emily further advised that Officers were also having to deal with the ways in which exempt/supported housing service users were 'targeted' by providers – there was no vetting or referral processes in place and social media sites used to advertise these types of accommodation. A change in legislation was essential if these issues were to be properly addressed and managed.

Emily and Wayne both reiterated the need to continue to report concerns and incidents as it was important that these were logged if action was to be taken.

Cllr Bi suggested that one of the ways forward, particularly with safety issues could be for residents to form a StreetWatch Group, which was supported by the police. Regular patrols in numbers could be carried out on a weekly basis and any concerns/issues logged and passed on to Officers.

Residents interested in setting up/joining Streetwatch should contact Cllr Bi following the meeting.

Cllr Bi and residents thanked the Officers from the Private Rented Sector Team for their attendance and information updates.

4. Cllr Bi's Local News and Updates

Cllr Bi advised of the following:-

- pavement damage to several roads in the ward caused by business owners driving their vehicle over them – Ward End Forum Street Patrols had been instrumental in identifying the locations – these included Washwood Heath Road, Asquith Road, St Margaret's Road/Avenue – all had been reported to Kier for repairs.
- Business/trade waste disposal on Washwood Heath Road was also an ongoing problem – currently working with James Carless/East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Team to tackle the issue
- Working with St. Margaret Unity Hubb to close the square and develop a paved pedestrian Area - Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) had already been granted.
- increase in general rubbish dumping on Washwood Heath Road by tenants living in the flats above the shops who were unable to have wheelie bins due to lack of suitable storage space.
- StreetWatch and SpeedWatch Groups – volunteers needed to help with patrols – full training

given and activity supported by the PCSO(s) from the local police team.

Interested residents encouraged to speak to Cllr Bi following the meeting.

5. Date and Theme of Next Meeting – Road Safety Special

Friday 30th September 9.30am – 11.00am, Unity Hub, St Margaret's Church, St Margaret's Road.

Cllr Liz Clements, Cabinet Member, Transport will be the Guest Speaker.

Bringing the meeting to a close, Cllr Bi thanked residents for their attendance and very active participation, and the Officers for their attendance and presentations.

Meeting closed at 11:15am