

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Thursday 23 September 2021 (On-line Meeting)

Present:

Councillor Penny Holbrook (Chair)

Councillors Deirdre Alden, Marje Bridle, Roger Harmer, Mahmood Hussain, Mary Locke, Mike Sharpe and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Shabrana Hussain, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

Guy Chaundy, Housing Modernisation and Partnership Manager

Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods

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

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Ceri Saunders, Acting Group O&S 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

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1, 2, 3 and 4)

The action notes of the informal meeting held on 8 July 2021 were noted.

The action notes of the formal meetings held on 17 June 2021 and 18 August 2021 were noted and will be agreed at the next formal meeting.

The action tracker was noted.

5. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS – PRIORITIES REPORT

(See document 5)

The Chair welcomed the new Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, Cllr Shabrana Hussain, to the meeting and reminded committee members that the reason for the invitation was to hear directly from Cllr Hussain what her priorities are and what O&S can do to help.

Guy Chaundy, Housing Modernisation and Partnership Manager, was also in attendance for this item.

In introducing the report, Cllr Hussain made the following comments:

- It is a privilege to be appointed to this post and to build on Cllr Thompson's legacy in this role and it has been a pleasure to meet the hard-working staff in both City Housing and City Operations;
- Although there have been a number of changes in the portfolio, Cllr Hussain will continue to work with Cllr Thompson to address a number of issues and challenges such as affordable housing, which impacts the lives of families and individuals across the city;
- Later in the meeting, Members will receive an update on Localisation, which is a key priority within the portfolio, and this will include a progress report on the delivery plans from the Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods and Birmingham's Collaborative Neighbourhoods reports;
- Cllr Hussain has had an update on previous actions and recently co-chaired her first meeting of the Localisation Star Chamber which has been established to provide an opportunity for Directors to highlight areas of good practice and existing localisation activities, as well as identifying and agreeing areas to focus on for the next 12 months to contribute towards the Council's ambition of localisation;
- There are a number of good examples and the Adult Social Care Prevention and Early Intervention Model was highlighted;
- A report is being put together which will summarise the findings of the Star Chamber sessions and this will be shared with committee members;
- There are a number of key priorities within the Housing Service including repairs and maintenance, the lack of affordable housing, problems around poor quality exempt accommodation (and the Co-ordinating O&S inquiry on this was welcomed); improving performance including Right to Repair and void turnarounds;

- It was noted that there will be challenges for residents over the coming months in relation to the lifting of the eviction ban, the ending of furlough and the reduction in Universal Credit;
- Letters have been sent to all our Universal Credit tenants asking them to get in touch with the Council if they are having problems paying their rent and earlier in the year letters were sent to residents in social or private rented housing encouraging them to seek early help and support and work will continue with partners to help support going forward.

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

- The list of priorities is quite extensive and it was queried whether it is a little ambitious to expect all that to be achieved in the next six months;
- Members were told that a lot of these pieces of work are in train at the moment and there is a Programme Board and tight governance with some of these items sitting within the Council's Delivery Plan and are monitored through the existing performance framework;
- It was agreed a simplified programme plan and milestones would be circulated to committee members;
- Concern was expressed in relation to voids and the standard of properties that we expect tenants to accept;
- Cllr Hussain will be going out to have a look at the state of our voids and it was noted that this committee will also be looking at voids and arranging visits to properties;
- The Affordable Housing Delivery Board will initially be set up as an officer group, not just from Housing but also Inclusive Growth and Finance, and then potentially bring in partners from the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership who sit alongside us on the Strategic Housing Birmingham Partnership to explore future models and options for increasing delivery of affordable housing;
- Concern was expressed that there was no intention for Elected Members to be on the Delivery Board, however assurance was given that at this stage the purpose of the group is to map out options and there was agreement that at a point in time it would definitely need Member input where decisions are being made and a Terms of Reference will be developed;
- The difference between affordable rent and social rent was also stressed and the need in Birmingham is for social rented family homes;
- There was concern around the length of time taken to get repairs done and this will be looked at, as well as getting people into properties as quickly as possible;
- There is a downsizing programme with financial support for those wanting to downsize so they don't have to incur costs around removal and fixtures and fittings and looking to align the properties they have got to those families who are in temporary accommodation;
- It was noted that this is not just for our own stock but also working with housing association partners around this approach to release family accommodation;

- With regard to the work Adult Social Care are doing to support people to remain in their own homes, it was pointed out that there is a need to look at the support given to carers as well;
- It was noted that one of the issues we might have is often a carer who has been living with somebody might not be on the tenancy and so when that person moves into long term care or sadly passes away, do we have a responsibility for that carer and do we have a carers' policy;
- This might be something to look at in the future;
- The position with regard to the former modernisation programme and fitting of new kitchens and bathrooms was queried and Members were told that there is still an existing capital programme, however there are increasing competing pressures on investment, for example putting in fire and safety measures;
- With regard to caring for residents in temporary accommodation, there was a view that those in purpose-built accommodation seem to be looked after but concern that support is not there in other settings, eg hotels, and Cllr Hussain said she would pick this up with Cllr Thompson;
- The issue of staffing within the Private Rented Sector Team was raised and the backlog in dealing with licences, although it was noted the exempt pilot had provided some short-term help;
- The PRS Team has moved to City Operations but reports to Cllr Hussain and Members were told that there are more staff now and the backlog should be cleared by the end of this calendar year;
- It was confirmed that the pilot had enabled on-ground resources until March and they are continuing to talk to Government about ongoing support;
- In terms of the impact of exempt providers shutting down and the possible increase in homelessness as a result, as part of the pilot an exit protocol and toolkit are being developed to work with individuals who are impacted by a provider closing down and the toolkit will form part of the future supported housing strategy;
- A request was made for the toolkit to be brought to O&S when it is completed;
- It was agreed an update on resourcing of the PRS Team would be programmed and a request was also made for the online list of HMOs by ward to be refreshed;
- With regard to potential energy price increases and how we might assist tenants, there is Local Authority Delivery Grant funding for fuel poverty and in response to recent issues there is work being done in the Financial Inclusion Team re help and support;
- In terms of Localisation, Cllr Bridle urged Cllr Hussain to look at the Pioneer Place videos and Challenge Case Studies and the Chair requested that these be sent to committee members as well as to the Cabinet Member;
- Both Cllr Wood and Cllr Harmer referred to one-to-ones and cross-party meetings they had been having with Cllr Thompson and looked forward to getting similar meetings in the diary with Cllr Hussain;
- The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for her report.

The report was noted and:

- The programme plan and milestones for the Cabinet Member's priorities to be shared with committee members;
- Cllr Hussain to speak to Cllr Thompson about support for residents in temporary accommodation other than purpose-built settings, eg hotels;
- An update on the resourcing of the PRS team to be requested;
- There was a request for the online list of identified HMOs by ward to be refreshed;
- Exempt Accommodation – toolkit to be brought to O&S when ready;
- Details of O&S work on Voids to be shared with Cabinet Member's support team.

6. LOCALISATION UPDATE

(See document 6)

The Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, Cllr Shabrana Hussain, was in attendance also for this item, together with Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, and Karen Cheney, Head of Service, Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU).

Cllr Hussain commented that localisation is key for the whole Council and there is a need to liaise with residents to get them involved.

Chris Jordan highlighted the key points in the report and progress on the Localisation Delivery Plan at appendix 1.

It was confirmed that the Star Chambers had been established and sessions had been held with all directorates including the Children's Trust. A summary of the meetings and the focus for follow-up sessions is being written up and that will inform the next stage of the process.

Karen Cheney added that updates on funding for community groups continue to be circulated on a regular basis with the latest one having been sent out that morning with four new funding streams.

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

- The Chair confirmed the request for the report on the first phase of the Star Chambers to be shared with this committee;
- They are seeking to refresh Ward Plans on a regular basis and they are currently being updated annually;
- They are reviewing the Ward Plan process ready for the new cycle next year;
- The importance of feedback from Members on blockages and challenges was stressed and reference was made to the fact that there used to be a cross-party group and it was queried whether there was any intention of bringing that back;
- Members were told that the cross-party group had served its time and it would be a political decision whether it should be re-established;
- The idea of a Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit was welcomed;

- There was a view that there should be an officer in Planning to promote the idea of residents and councillors doing Neighbourhood Plans;
- Confirmation is awaited around the Neighbourhood Planning bid and the understanding is that officer time has been built into that, it is not just about the toolkit;
- Going back to 2019, there had been criticism around neighbourhood planning and the support available through Inclusive Growth has got better over that time with named officers supporting areas of the city going through that process;
- A working group has now been set up across directorates with the NDSU and neighbourhood planners and that has been really useful in terms of learning and sharing different approaches;
- If we are not successful in getting the grant, the work will still be done and somebody has been assigned to do an update on the general information on neighbourhood planning to make it more user-friendly and named officers for particular geographic places;
- In terms of deployment of NDSU staff, the new staff have been in post for two weeks and the information on who is covering what and the update on Relationship Managers will go out to Members next week;
- The Ward Data Working Group sits within the Policy Team and work has been undertaken around what data sets are available to pull out of the system and provide to wards and a final report is awaited on what that can look like;
- In terms of follow-up actions arising from Pioneer Places meetings, the Star Chamber would seem to be the appropriate place to check how these are progressing;
- The additional NDSU £102k resources to set up new small grants scheme was effectively income that was brought in through management fees and therefore is a one-off pot of money and the original thinking was that that would be around capacity building within wards to utilise as grant funding but that needs to be taken back through the Cabinet Member for decision;
- Similarly, with the £100,000 available for Cabinet to put into Ward Plans, this was about linking Cabinet priorities to Ward Plan priorities and find a way to fund some of that;
- A piece of work has been done to pull out the actions and priorities in the Ward Plans and theme them by Cabinet portfolio and where they fall within Cabinet Members' priorities;
- With regard to Parish Councils, a view was expressed that before trying to encourage other parts of the city to go down this route there is a need to get it right for those we already had;
- It was acknowledged that there has been valid criticism regarding land transfer timescales, however there has also been some really positive work;
- There was a discussion about how to support those wards which have not yet produced a Ward Plan and it was noted that there is a strong correlation between those wards not having regular ward meetings and those which have not done a ward plan;
- It was also suggested that the ward structure, particularly for one member wards, might be having an impact;

- The Chair suggested that if a list of the wards which have not done Ward Plans could be provided, she could write to the Chief Whips on behalf of the Committee regarding support that could be offered and Members agreed this would be a good idea.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their time and a further update on Localisation will be scheduled into the Work Programme.

The report was noted and:

- The report summarising the findings from the first phase of the Localisation Star Chamber sessions to be shared with committee members;
- Pioneer Places videos to be sent to committee members;
- Chair to write to Chief Whips on behalf of the committee regarding support that could be offered to those wards which have not yet produced a Ward Plan.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 7)

The work programme was discussed and the following points were raised:

- LAMS performance information on street cleansing to be brought to Committee alongside performance monitoring reports;
- Visits to void properties to be arranged and the suggestion was for two properties to be made available in the north of the city and two in the south and for Members to be able to book time-slots.

The work programme was noted.

8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

The meeting ended at 1556 hours.