

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING AND HOMES O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1400 hours on Monday 12 December 2016, Committee Room 2

Present:

Councillor Victoria Quinn

Councillors Gurdial Singh Atwal, Andy Cartwright, Roger Harmer, Mahmood Hussain, Mary Locke, Gary Sambrook, Ron Storer and Margaret Waddington

Also Present:

Councillor Peter Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes

Chris Gibbs, Service Director, Customer Services

Pete Hobbs, Service Integration Head, Private Rented Sector

Rob James, Service Director, Housing Transformation

Kalvinder Kohli, Service Lead, Commissioning Centre of Excellence

Mary Latham, West Midlands Representative, National Landlord Federation

Jayne Power, Research & Policy Officer, Scrutiny Office

Benita Wishart, Overview & Scrutiny Manager, Scrutiny Office

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised the meeting to note that this meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.birminghamnewsroom.com) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Matthew Gregson.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. ACTION NOTES – 8 NOVEMBER 2016

(See document No 1)

The Action Notes were noted.

The Chair reminded Members that with regard to Gateway the first formal consultation event with providers had been held on 22nd November, with a wider

stakeholder event having taken place on 6th December. Members were requested to ensure they had the Members consultation event on 4th January in their diaries to make sure they are able to formally feed into the consultation process.

5. PROPOSED BUDGET 2017-18

(See document No 2)

Councillor Peter Griffiths (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes), Rob James (Service Director, Housing Transformation), Chris Gibbs (Service Director, Customer Services) and Kalvinder Kohli (Service Lead, Commissioning Centre of Excellence) attended to present the budget proposals for those areas relating to the remit of the Housing and Homes O&S Committee.

Members felt it important that the budget lines presented were expressed as a percentage total of the overall budget lines so that the size of reductions to services could be made clear.

The following points were made in relation to specific budget lines:

CC5 - Surpluses expected to be generated on the Housing Benefit Subsidy Grant

- Officers were confident in their ability to meet targets and generate the surplus;
- It was noted that introduction of Universal Credit with payments in arrears could impact on the HRA.
- Core Cities and other West Midlands authorities to be asked about how they are using their incentive payments.

HN7 – Asset and Property Disposal Programme

- Members questioned the capital values required for selling off assets to meet the revenue targets;
- Members reiterated the need for consultation with Ward Members prior to sale of assets;
- Further information to be provided on the value of assets proposing to be sold in order to generate this level of revenue savings on debt repayment.

HN11 – Extension of the INReach Housing Programme (up to 200 homes)

- Some concerns raised about availability of voids to put into INReach whilst the waiting list gets longer;
- Members requested written information on INReach by the January meeting
- This to be both generic in terms of INReach and explicit in terms of how 200 properties will be identified out of the 5,000 that become available each year and how these will then be let at market rates – eg how INReach works
- Members requested this be better explained in the budget explanation.

HN12 – Realign funding of specific housing services

- Members were assured that this would not lead to a service reduction, but was about a more accurate balance of HRA and General Fund contributions.

HW1 – Supporting People

- Members raised concerns about impact on vulnerable people, and the ability of third sector providers to mitigate the costs;
- Concerns were raised about deliverability of the proposals and if details would be known prior to the budget vote;
- Further details on the consultations to be provided, specifically:
 - Where will the impacts occur;
 - Evidence of views back from the Supporting People Engagement Group;
 - Details of proposed mitigation plans;
 - Equality Analysis.

HN4 – Selective licensing

- Given the growth in the private rented sector and the ending of the rogue landlord funding, the importance of a team supporting tenants facing poor housing was noted as important;
- Concerns were raised about the costs of setting up a licensing scheme in advance of obtaining landlord revenues and whether this has been sufficiently costed in the budget proposals;
- Members requested details of the evidential basis for the 11 wards proposed and specific costs around setting up of licensing scheme;
- Members will continue to examine the private rented sector in January and will form a view on the potential effectiveness of a wider licensing scheme.

RESOLVED:-

- This item to be brought back to the January meeting for further discussion.

6. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

(See document No 3)

Councillor Peter Griffiths (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes), Rob James (Service Director, Housing Transformation), Pete Hobbs (Service Integration Head, Private Rented Sector), (Chris Gibbs (Service Director, Customer Services) and Mary Latham (West Midlands Representative, National Landlord Federation) attended to start the discussion on the Private Rented Sector.

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

- Chris Gibbs confirmed that data sharing exists between Revenues & Benefits and the Private Rented Sector Team, principally around empty property data.
- In terms of Revenues, the City Council 4 years ago made the decision when given discretion around certain discounts and exemptions for council tax to remove the empty property discount and add a premium for properties empty for a considerable amount of time to act as an incentive to landlords to bring those properties back into use.

- In terms of data within the Benefits set, with the rollout of Universal Credit, as we start to lose claims for Housing Benefit that data set becomes less and less useful to the Council and we need to be mindful that we will lose the integrity in terms of having that information at our fingertips and we may need to seek to build further communication with colleagues in DWP around that.
- Supported Exempt Accommodation – often referred to within Housing Benefit as Regulation 13 – here, both registered providers and indeed private sector providers if they provide care support and supervision and they are a not-for-profit organisation or a social landlord, can receive Housing Benefit above the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. The Government has recently launched a consultation paper on how this might work differently with the advent of Universal Credit and the intention is to pay the core rent at LHA rates with a further element for support care and supervision, not necessarily linked directly to the housing cost element. Currently under this regulation care support and supervision only has to be above minimal. The outcome of this consultation will help to inform debate going forward.
- Landlords will soon be facing huge changes to the tax regime resulting and increased rents and many landlords leaving the traditional market and going into what is known as serviced accommodation. It was suggested this would be exacerbated with additional licensing.
- Additional government funding had been received for targeted enforcement which had been effective and appreciated by good landlords.
- In terms of using the data we have, before the rollout of Universal Credit, provided the data is anonymised and is not prescriptive to individuals then the data can be used for trend analysis. We will still hold data historically and the properties which are classed as exempt accommodation are destined to remain outside of Universal Credit so, subject the consultation previously referred to, we will retain responsibility for paying Housing Benefit for those properties and therefore will retain the data.
- The Cabinet Member advised Members that a meeting had taken place with the Homes and Communities Agency who are willing to seek to improve the practice of registered providers and they have agreed to work with us on a pilot scheme.
- In terms of licensing, the City Council currently has a statutory duty for licensing houses in multiple occupation - 5 or more people, 2 or more households, 3 or more storeys, sharing facilities. There are currently about 1800 properties in the city that fall into that definition that licences have been issued for and these can be seen on the Council's website under the HMO Licence Register.
- In the Housing Act there are two other powers that a Local Authority have discretion to use, one for additional licensing (which is the consultation begun in Selly Oak) and the other for selective licensing, where there are impacts for the Local Authority of anti-social behaviour and low demand.
- Around 3,000 requests a year are received from tenants requesting intervention with their landlord over an issue, which could be illegal eviction,

harassment, bullying, disrepair and so on. Of these, a reasonable proportion (14%) are resolved informally. The rest go into a process which is enforcement-led to try to resolve those issues.

- What licensing does in areas or across cities is to give a stronger framework.

RESOLVED:-

- This item to be brought back to the January meeting for further discussion and consideration.
- Committee members, officers and members of the public to filter in through the Committee any questions or issues with regard to licensing for inclusion at the next meeting.

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

None.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

(See document No 4)

The Work Programme was noted.

Members agreed to pause the Rough Sleeping Inquiry report and take to City Council in February rather than January on account of the data from the rough sleepers count not being available until late January.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

The meeting ended at 1623 hours.