

HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23 SEPTEMBER 2021

PRIORITY REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

REPORT BY: COUNCILLOR SHABRANA HUSSAIN

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report sets out my portfolio priorities for 2021/2022

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

I have accountability for:

Council housing management services	Oversight and direction of estate management services and best use of BCC housing stock. Investment programme, Repairs and maintenance programmes.
Registered Social Landlords	Liaison with the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership on neighbourhood management initiatives and the housing growth agenda to deliver the Housing Strategy. Exempt Supported Housing.
Private Rented Sector	Licensing and regulation. Private Tenancy Unit activities.
Tenant engagement in social housing	Tenant engagement in the management and development of social housing and Housing Liaison Boards.
Neighbourhood Management	Development of the Council's neighbourhood engagement model and work with wider Council and partners to ensure integration at the local level.

3. PRIORITIES

In July 2019 Cabinet adopted the refreshed Council Plan as the overarching statement of intent and direction to drive the Council's improvement and deliver the right outcomes for the City. The Council plan set out six outcomes for Birmingham to be:

- An entrepreneurial city to learn, work and invest in

- An aspirational city to grow up in
- A fulfilling city to age well in
- A great, clean and green city to live in
- A city whose residents gain the most from hosting the 2022 Commonwealth Games
- A city that takes a leading role in tackling climate change.

The Council's Delivery Plan to 2022, as approved by Cabinet in November 2020, outlines the activity to deliver on the commitments made to residents, customers and the city as a whole, and are summarised below, following recent change to the Homes and Neighbourhoods portfolio.

By 2022:-

- We will have made significant progress on the Council's localism agenda by delivering on the actions contained within the Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods Policy, building a cross-council approach and framework for a locality-based model.
- We will have modernised our approach to tenant engagement so that it is representative, transparent and open.
- We will have refreshed our housing strategy and delivery plan for the long term.
- We will have improved living conditions by completing installations of fire safety and sprinkler systems in council-owned high-rise
- We will have finalised the licensing regime for private rented sector housing

4. OTHER PRIORITIES

In addition to the priorities outlined above, there are a number of other portfolio priorities that I will be progressing during 2021/22 including:

- We will have in place a supported housing strategy to set out how we will ensure the overall provision of the exempt accommodation meets the needs of the community.
- We will have undertaken a root and branch review of housing management and capital investment, repairs and maintenance including benchmarking.
- We will have completed contract extension arrangements for the North East and Central West areas of the city and will have retendered to contract for the South area. 2022/24
- We will have identified our priorities for the capital investment programme 2022-3.
- We will have completed the Strategic Housing Needs assessment.
- We will have delivered energy efficiency improvements to BCC and private dwellings as part of the Local Authority Delivery Grant.
- We will have developed a robust business case setting out delivery of retro fit activity for BCC dwellings as part of achieving route to zero targets.

- We will have undertaken a self-assessment of our progress in delivering against both the Social Housing White Paper and the Regulators Consumer regulations.
- Following the corporate review into complaints we will have analysed root causes to move to more prevention approach and so reducing complaint levels in the service.
- We will have introduced a Private sector Housing Strategy.
- We will have undertaken an evaluation of the HRA business plan identifying greater opportunities to create investment.
- We will have established an affordable housing delivery board and approach setting out how we will deliver increased affordable housing through innovative approaches i.e. Housing Company, SPVs. etc.
- We will have developed a comprehensive business plan setting out how we will deliver improvements to, and rationalisation of the HRA Garage portfolio.
- Within Housing Management we will develop a longer term offer in regard to contributing to early help intervention and prevention.
- We will have improved performance in key areas of Housing Management including Void turnaround and right to repair.

Following the announcement of the Waking Watch Relief Fund (WWRF), a national £30 million fund to pay for the costs of installing a Common Fire Alarm System in eligible private high-rise residential buildings with unsafe cladding systems, Birmingham City Council has been allocated up to a maximum of £1.7m of the WWRF which is administered through MHCLG. This will enable costly Waking Watch measures to be reduced or replaced in buildings waiting to have unsafe cladding removed and avoiding the need for leaseholders to meet the upfront costs of the installation of fire alarms. A report will be presented to Cabinet in November setting out further detail and providing an update on Fire Safety in High Rise Buildings 2021, post Grenfell.

Our housing development programme through BMHT is responding to the Route to Zero and has successfully secured over £0.5m of funding from ERDF to test new energy saving technology on a scheme at Gressel Lane, Hodge Hill we are also working with Planning colleagues in the design of BMHT's first Passivhaus scheme which we anticipate submitting for planning this year. In addition, the BMHT build specification has been updated anticipating the changes to Building Regulations, our improved specification will take our homes beyond the minimal requirement for increased thermal efficiency, further helping to reduce fuel poverty and ensuring our new homes are future proofed.

We have progressed our commitment to support Community Led Housing (CLH) through joint work with Pioneer Housing to deliver a development of 124 new homes at Farnborough Road in Castle Vale, 24 of which we are building on behalf of Pioneer. We continue to work closely with Housing 21 and their cohousing for older people development programme, with 5 pipeline sites coming forward for disposal. Further sites

for CLH and self-build are progressing with planning colleagues, West Midland Community Homes and Witton Lodge Community Association.

I am keen to ensure the Government and partner agencies remain focused on conditions in the private rented sector, where some of the most vulnerable citizens are housed and welcome the ongoing support of Scrutiny looking into the issues of exempt accommodation which is having a major impact on neighbourhoods across the city.

5. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Quarter 1 Homes & Neighbourhoods portfolio performance *at appendix 1*

Month 5 performance is due to be presented at this Committee on 14 October.

6. CHALLENGES/FINANCIAL PLANNING

HRA Capital Programme

The HRA capital programme consists the new build programme, clearance of dilapidated stock and investment in the current stock. The current approved HRA Business Plan 2021+ includes investment of £0.4 billion over the next 10 years to build over 2,100 properties for rent.

The main issues facing the HRA capital programme are the need to undertake a substantial retrofit of current stock in order to meet Route to Zero by 2030, together with an increase in new build costs, both to meet the Route to Zero agenda and the increase in material costs that is currently facing the construction industry. The HRA Business Plan 2022+ will be updated over the next couple of months, and this updated take into account additional investment requirements.

HRA Current Rent Arrears

Covid has had a big impact on HRA current rent arrears due to the negative economic impact on tenants. The budget on HRA current rent arrears provision was increased from £1.5m (2020/21) to £4.1m this financial year due to the problems being experienced. Currently the negative impact on tenants has been eased because of furlough and the additional £20 per week to tenants on universal credit. Based on current trends the budget is forecast to underspend by £2.1m. However, this forecast does not take into account the stopping of the furlough scheme and the additional payment to tenants on Universal Credit this month. It is anticipated that this will have a negative impact on the current forecast, although it is not clear on the level of impact. Due to the uncertainty the current forecast has not been formally reported to Cabinet.

Councillor Shabrana Hussain

Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods