

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Thursday 25 February 2021, Online meeting

Present:

Councillor Penny Holbrook (Chair)

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

Also Present:

Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

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

Aidan Hall, Graduate Trainee, Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit

Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.civico.net/birmingham) 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 and 2)

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021 were agreed.
- The action tracker was noted.

5. UPDATE ON LOCALISATION

(See documents 3, 4 and 5)

Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, Karen Cheney, Head of Service – Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit, and Aidan Hall, Graduate Trainee, Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit, attended for this item.

The Chair invited Councillor Thompson to make some initial comments and the following points were highlighted:

- In some ways progress with localisation has been slow at times but it was noted that during the pandemic some acceleration had been seen due to the reactions of local people;
- There has been some great work done in terms of supporting pioneer wards;
- Where progress has been slow, there are many variables in terms of people, culture, behaviours, and structure that need to be looked at across portfolios;
- Working with local communities has been at the forefront of moving forward;
- With regard to ward forum meetings, ward plans, and the forward-facing local leadership role, this has stalled in some wards during the pandemic meaning there hasn't been the level of consistency across the city but there is definitely a commitment to it moving forward;
- There are some areas where things are working well across directorates, for example the Digital Team and the Deputy Leader around making sure platforms are accessible for local members to engage with local people;
- There have been several meetings with different groups around regeneration;
- There has also been a lot of work done around Cllr Zaffar's portfolio on climate change and also the low traffic neighbourhoods.

Chris Jordan then introduced the report and he and Karen Cheney made the following additional points:

- Things have moved on from District Committees and there have been a couple of policy papers pulling together some key strands;
- This year, the opportunity was taken to reflect through a piece of work around community organisations and what might be learnt in terms of relationships and how things might need to change;
- Five or six areas have been highlighted in terms of the platforms they are building on;

- There are some recommendations as to what should be looked at going forward;
- There is a baseline around ward forums, which have had to change this year due to the pandemic and there have been changes in attendees, with a platform in place on You Tube;
- The ward planning process has progressed but still not there in terms of a full set of ward plans, with 45 out of 69 currently;
- They have tried to attach growing importance to those ward plans by trying to link other things to them as opportunities arise and some of this is around funding streams and the Commonwealth Games Celebrating Communities pot of money and also work in relation to the Local Community Infrastructure Levy (in wards where that is applicable);
- There has been on-going work with the 10 Pioneer Places and there has been progress with regard to peer to peer support, networking, training in capacity building with national organisations, including linking up with an organisation called Economy who have been doing some training with Pioneer Places to understand the world of economics and how budgets and finance work to enable people to have an understanding of the language that is used and to be more informed to ask questions;
- Locality membership has also been purchased to provide further training and networking;
- Unfortunately, the national conference, where this work would normally be showcased, which was supposed to be in Birmingham had been postponed due to the pandemic and was held virtually;
- All strands of work have been difficult due to the need to do things virtually;
- Ward Forums have been held virtually throughout the pandemic using Teams and Teams Live and it has been interesting to see the numbers who are attending has gone up, compared to face-to-face meetings, although more analysis is needed on that;
- The meetings have also been recorded and a You Tube channel has been developed and it is interesting to note as many people are watching after the event as are actually attending;
- Most wards have now had at least one ward forum meeting in what has been a difficult time and the Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit are there to support;
- With regard to neighbourhood/parish councils, there are three areas of the city actively looking at whether this might be a potential way forward;
- There is a need to build on the original high level statements in the 2018/19 policy papers to pull together a specific policy around parishes and governance and the mandate process for undertaking local governance reviews, which is currently making its way through the system;
- The nine recommendations in the Birmingham's Collaborative Neighbourhoods report are being worked through;
- Members' attention was drawn to the action plan which gives detail about what has happened so far and the sorts of things they are seeking to do next.

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

- Members agreed this is a very important agenda but there is a long way to go with regard to developing a localised approach and residents seeing any difference;
- There were concerns expressed that the Ward Plans are not proving successful in taking things forward and that one example of this was the recent decision on the Acocks Green conservation area, where this was at local discretion and it had been decided the criteria had not been met;
- The view was that if a local community wants this and it is not entirely out of kilter with national criteria, then they should be able to have it;
- It was recognised that the Local Partnership Delivery Groups are moving forward some local issues;
- It was pointed out that the role of the Neighbourhoods Team is to put together the framework to get voices heard but is not responsible for the outcome in other areas, one example of this is with ward forums where some use the tools and some do not;
- It was acknowledged that more can be done in terms of the ward plans and coming together to look at things through a localism lens, for example with the conservation area issue;
- The Relationship Managers are also there as a tool to be used and there is some work being done around how that model can be modified;
- Aidan Hall, Graduate Trainee with the Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit, is undertaking this work and told Members that through discussions with Members and Relationship Managers he is trying to build a picture and identify where improvements can be made;
- It was suggested that O&S members could contribute to this and agreed that Aidan would email them with a view to setting up meetings;
- There has been progress with the ward plans now on the BCC website, making them open and transparent, and external grant organisations are being directed to them;
- Members felt there needed to be a re-start on localisation post-pandemic, with a delivery plan and someone driving this at director level;
- It was suggested that O&S could help with getting other directorates to be involved, with the Neighbourhoods Directorate setting the framework, and the Chair said she would be happy to meet with the Cabinet Member and officers to discuss taking this forward;
- It was agreed that a further report would be brought back to Committee in June.

RESOLVED:

- That a further report be brought back to Committee in June;
- The report was noted.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 6)

The Chair outlined the planned items for future meetings:

- March – Reducing Fly-tipping progress report; Housing Repairs and Maintenance Contracts (to be confirmed);
- April – Performance Monitoring; HLBs/Tenant Engagement (to be confirmed).

In addition, the following issues were raised for consideration:

- Following on from the written questions to the 23rd February City Council meeting, the position with regard to staffing in the PRS team in relation to HMO licensing;
- Exempt accommodation and the recent press article regarding Prospect and how this is being tackled;
- CCTV city-wide policy to be added to the list of items to be programmed.

RESOLVED:

- The work programme was noted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

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

None.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

An item of urgent business was raised by Councillor Wood in relation to a return to face-to-face meetings and the Chair confirmed that this would happen as soon as it is possible to do so.

10. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN 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 1557 hours.