

Exempt Accommodation Inquiry – Executive Commentary

I would like to thank the Chair and Members of the Co-ordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee for carrying out this extremely important inquiry.

I would also like to thank the many Birmingham citizens and partner agencies who contributed to the inquiry, sharing their experiences of exempt accommodation and bringing to light the sometimes devastating impacts that poorly run exempt accommodation can have on the day to day lives of residents, vulnerable individuals and the wider community.

The inquiry acknowledges that while Birmingham has been an outlier in growth to date that this is now beginning to be seen in other authorities across the country. There has been a worrying growth of poorly managed, unsafe exempt accommodation, delivering inadequate support and safeguarding, particularly for people who experience homelessness and have multiple support needs.

The inquiry clearly sets out and acknowledges that the City Council has little or no powers in relation to regulation and management of the exempt sector, especially in regard to planning, benefits and provider regulation. However, officers were able to outline the work being undertaken through the government pilot which has seen the following activity to date:

- Inspection and oversight of accommodation standards and providers
- Assessment of support provision and quality of support assessments
- Increased scrutiny of Housing Benefit claims and the introduction of 2 monthly reviews
- Investigations into serious Anti-Social Behaviour and links to organised crime
- Undertake a Strategic Needs assessment and developing Supported Housing Strategy
- Launch and roll out of Quality Standards and a Charter of Rights.

This Scrutiny review will help inform the ongoing work we are doing with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) looking at establishing the key areas requiring national policy and regulation change and also establishing best practice across the sector. It will further provide key evidence to inform the external evaluation of the national pilots.

We will continue to keep Scrutiny updated on progress against the key recommendations coming out of the review

Councillor Shabrana Hussain

Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods