

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1400 hours on Thursday 16 February 2023

Committee Room 3&4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Mohammed Idrees (Chair)

Councillors: Marje Bridle, Ray Goodwin, Roger Harmer and Lauren Rainbow

Also Present:

Cllr Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment

Waqar Ahmed, Assistant Director, Community Safety and Resilience

Jonathan Antill, Head of Business Improvement and Support, City Operations (On-line)

Heather Collett, Programme and Change Manager

Mira Gola, Head of Business Improvement and Support, City Housing

Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement

Paul Langford, Acting Strategic Director, City Housing

Asha Patel, Interim Director, Asset Management

Stephen Philpott, Acting Head of Housing Solutions and Support

Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene

Natalie Smith, Head of Service, Housing Management

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny 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

Apologies were received from Councillors Kerry Brewer, Saqib Khan and Ken Wood.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents No 1 and No 2)

RESOLVED:

- That the action notes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 were agreed;
- That the action tracker was noted.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No 3)

The Committee agreed the Terms of Reference for the piece of work on Voids.

The Work Programme was discussed and the following items and changes were agreed:

March meeting: Voids (Part 1); Localisation to be deferred to April.

April meeting: Voids (Part 2); Localisation; Reducing Fly-tipping; Cleaner Streets. Members agreed to extend the time for this meeting by one hour (to be held from 2.00-5.00pm)

Tenant Engagement to be deferred until the next municipal year.

RESOLVED: -

That the Work Programme was agreed, subject to being updated as above.

6. CLEANER STREETS

(See document No 4)

Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment, and Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, were in attendance to provide an initial response to the Committee's recommendations.

Councillor Marje Bridle, Deputy Chair, introduced the report and made the following points:

- The Committee wants to work with the Cabinet Member to make this happen and requests that consideration is given not just to the recommendations but “What success looks like” as well.
- By a locality approach and local operating model, what is needed is to build ongoing relationships with ward street cleaning crews and managers.
- Prevention work is also important to stop littering in the first place and Members would like to see the City Council being proactive and campaigning to encourage people to stop littering.
- Recommendation 4 relates to messaging and the importance of working with schools was emphasised and that children are key to reaching the parents.
- Reference was made to the fact that this Committee had previously started to look at a litter bin policy but that this was meaningless without a litter prevention strategy.
- Recommendation 8 relates to local ward money being made available to enable crews to work more flexibly and reference was made to the example seen in another council where a “shopping list” is provided for items such as bins.

The following additional comments were made by Members:

- Local engagement is really important and one way that could work would be giving some responsibility to Neighbourhood Forums, for example deciding where anti-flytipping cameras are located for a period of time and the community then monitoring whether they have worked or not. More people would then attend Neighbourhood Forum meetings as they would feel they can change what the Council does.
- It was pointed out that what people want will vary area by area and communication is key to resolving issues and achieving a more effective delivery of services.
- With regard to education programmes with schools, what happens after secondary school is also important to continue to change things for the better.

The Chair invited Councillor Majid Mahmood to respond and in doing so the following points were made:

- Councillor Mahmood said he was grateful for the Committee’s work and welcomed the recommendations. He told Members that a lot of the work is already happening but just needs to be more visible.
- Part of that is inviting Members to visit the local depots and invitations will be sent out to all Members by the end of March.
- The recent elected members’ survey – with a 70% completion rate – was referenced and that had provided a lot of data in terms of local issues.
- Education in the city is key and work has already started with schools. It was suggested that this should be expanded to colleges and universities as well and they are already working with Birmingham University and talking to South Birmingham College.
- From April, they will be rolling out, and talking to Members about, a local approach and they are working with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families.

- With regard to the education programmes, Cllr Mahmood would like to see this extended to include parks, allotments, nature and tree planting, etc, not just focussed on street cleansing.
- There does need to be a bins rationalisation programme, with input from Members on location of bins, and work has already started on a Litter Bin Policy.
- They are developing costings for Friends Groups for benches, bins, etc and will look at that for streets as well.
- Local engagement is part of the Love Your Streets remit and they engage, for example, regarding alleyways where the community takes up ownership.
- With regard to culture and workforce, they are now fully staffed in Refuse Collection. There are about 68 vacancies in street cleansing and they are recruiting.
- The success of the Love Your Environment project was highlighted and an example was given where in Bordesley Green the amount of litter picked up had reduced from 672 bags on the first litter pick to 67 bags in the most recent litter pick, which shows the level of cleanliness is improving.
- Love Your Environment is not just about the street cleansing teams, but also the parks, graffiti and planned maintenance teams.
- Prevention is key and it is important to look at how to get more officers issuing Fixed Penalty Notices.
- There is a piece of work that needs to be done on the graffiti policy, working with the Chair of Licensing and Public Protection and Councillor Cotton.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mahmood for his comprehensive response and it was agreed that he would attend Committee in April to present a step-by-step implementation plan and timescales.

RESOLVED:

- That the report and recommendations were agreed and would be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Environment for formal response;
- That the Cabinet Member for Environment would attend Committee in April to present a step-by-step implementation plan and timescales.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(See documents No 5 and No 6)

City Operations:

Jonathan Antill, Head of Business Improvement and Support, was in attendance on-line to present the Month 9 City Operations Performance Report.

Waqar Ahmed, Assistant Director, Community Safety and Resilience, Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement, and Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, were also in attendance to respond to service-related questions from Members.

Jonathan Antill presented the report and pointed out that it now included the Community Safety KPIs, bringing the total indicators to 15 – 5 vital signs and 10 corporate plan measures.

During the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the main points included:

- **Missed Collections** – An explanation was requested regarding the data for reported missed collections and number of dropped roads as there is not a particularly close correlation between the two. Darren Share said that he would go back and look at the data on this and provide an explanation.
- **ASB** – There was a Member view that something needed to be done in terms of getting better performance indicators on ASB. For example, there is one on percentage of enquiries responded to but what that actually means was queried, as if this is simply an acknowledgment, that is not a response to a complaint.

Members were told the indicators will evolve over time and Community Safety are working closely with City Housing, looking at a broader approach to ASB and interrogation of data. Some of the data is solely from a Council perspective but they also have data being captured by West Midlands Police and they want to avoid duplication of data being presented back in.

Particular reference was made to serious issues in sheltered accommodation and that it would be good to see a KPI on the number of ASB reports in this type of housing, particularly Category 1.

It was noted that this had been raised at Committee previously and there is a Housing dashboard which gives them visibility on how often they are contacting customers regarding ASB cases. There has been a lot of development and they are on a journey to improve the data and have a performance-driven response. This is something that can be shared with Committee.

Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for Littering – The work being done in suburban areas was acknowledged and welcomed but there were concerns that, looking at the data, the service is too heavily biased to the city centre. Members were told this is a contracted service with another third party organisation and most services are provided in the city centre, where the highest rate of littering is observed. This includes cigarette butts and spitting and around 11 FPNs were issued in the last year for spitting and all have been paid.

City Housing:

Mira Gola, Head of Business Improvement and Support, was in attendance to present the Month 9 City Housing Performance Report and the Ombudsman Update.

Paul Langford, Acting Director, City Housing, Asha Patel, Interim Director, Asset Management, Stephen Philpott, Acting Head of Housing Solutions and Support, Natalie Smith, Head of Service, Housing Management, and Heather Collett, Programme and Change Manager, were also in attendance to respond to service-related questions from Members.

Mira Gola presented both the performance report and the Ombudsman update and highlighted the following key points:

- Of the 7 vital signs, 3 are green, 3 are red and the seventh is the Total Number of Households in Bed & Breakfast.
- Of the 3 corporate KPIs, 1 is blue, 1 is red and the third is the Total Number of Households in Temporary Accommodation.
- It was pointed out that in the Ombudsman Update there was a typo on page 86 and the total number of matters not upheld should be 12, not 11.

During the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the main points included:

- **Quality of Housing** – In response to a query regarding the issue of damp and mould, Members were told there is no formal KPI for this at the moment but there are discussions with the Performance Team about analysing the data in a more proactive manner.
There is a Decency KPI which is not included in the report but the Committee can be furnished with that information if required.
The HRA Business Plan shows how much the Council can afford to borrow and invest and that Business Plan will come forward later in the year when it has gone through due diligence. At that point, the path from the current position to getting homes back to where they need to be will be clear, including what work will contribute towards preventing damp and mould. There is a national picture of under-investment in social housing and when compared to similar landlords, the Council performs as well if not better in terms of reports of damp and mould.
There will be Government legislation coming through and a report to Cabinet on a damp and mould policy, to include proposals for a revised KPI. A specific report on damp and mould could be brought to Committee if required.
- **Voids** – It was noted there had been an overall rise in the number of days to turn around Voids and that this seemed to be an issue of north versus south with the north being 24.5 days and the south, 64 days.
It was acknowledged that there are problems with the contractor relationship and performance in the south and officers have met with Fortem to discuss improvements and can report that the necessary action is being taken in terms of rectification and in terms of financial consequences, rent loss and council tax loss is being met by the contractor for that area at the moment. There is commitment from Fortem that they will deliver incremental improvements.
Natalie Smith told Members that she had recently visited Dudley to look at their voids and had also looked at their KPIs and how they are reported. It was noted that other areas report on Routine and Major but there is not that breakdown in Birmingham, as we report on Average. Some analysis is being done on this and the detail will be presented at the Voids session in March.
- **Temporary Accommodation** – Reference was made to the massive difference in levels of Households in Temporary Accommodation in Sheffield

and Leeds compared to Birmingham and it was queried what they are doing differently.

It was noted that Leeds is recognised as one of the leaders in this field and are ahead of Birmingham in terms of working with the private rented sector (PRS) to secure solutions.

Overall numbers in B&B are slightly up, however it was pointed out that there are now 600+ people presenting each week, with a lot of families and individuals who have not been seen before. With the cost of living crisis and other factors, people are falling behind with payments and PRS evictions are twice what they were a year ago, and we are probably not seeing the peak of that yet.

On the positive side, prevention work has seen a significant increase in performance and there should be an improvement with the new allocations policy and a more pragmatic look at people who have been in temporary accommodation for a long time. It will take a few months for that to flow through, but they would expect to see a reduction in the number of families in B&B for more than six weeks by April time.

- **New Allocations Policy** – the new Policy came into effect on 18th January and everyone on the waiting list has been written to. An updated briefing note has also been sent to Members by Councillor Thompson.

With regard to monitoring the length of time people are on the waiting list, it is possible to see this from business intelligence reports, however it is about assessment of need and it does also come down to how wide people are willing to look in terms of bidding.

- **Affordable Housing** – With increasing levels of people presenting, how the Council works with partners to increase the supply of genuinely affordable housing in the future is very important and part of the solution has to be PRS.

There is an accommodation finding team of 14 staff and they have achieved 170 family houses in the last year for families who are homeless to move into. One of the key components of that is Local Housing Allowance. The calculation is that only 7% of private lets in Birmingham are affordable to those on housing benefits and the vast majority of people presenting are on housing benefits. The team seeks to strike deals with private landlords to bridge the gap and the Council will pay rent deposits and provide guarantees to try and open those doors for families.

- **Ombudsman Matters** – With regard to compensation claims, concerns were raised about the length of time it takes to get compensation paid out and it was queried whether there is effective management of the caseload.

The directorate is making sure that everything in the action plan is delivered by April and in terms of the compensation issues, the team will be looking at more proactive use of arbitration.

RESOLVED:

- That an explanation would be provided regarding the data for reported missed collections and dropped roads.
- That the reports were noted.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

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

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR 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 1556 hours.