

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING AND HOMES O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1400 hours on Tuesday 11 October 2016, Committee Room 2

Present:

Councillor Victoria Quinn

Councillors Gurdial Singh Atwal, Andy Cartwright, Matthew Gregson, Roger Harmer, Des Hughes, Mahmood Hussain, Mary Locke, Gary Sambrook, Sybil Spence and Ron Storer

Also Present:

Councillor Peter Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes

Councillor Paulette Hamilton, Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

Councillor Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member for Transparency, Openness and Equality

Jim Crawshaw, Head of Housing Options

Jacqui Kennedy, Acting Strategic Director for Place

John Hardy, Commissioning Manager – Prevention, Commissioning Centre of Excellence

Rob James, Service Director, Housing Transformation

Pat Merrick, Assistant Director – Universal, Prevention and Early Intervention

Jayne Power, Research & Policy Officer, Scrutiny Office

Max Vaughan, Head of Service – Universal and Prevention

Mike Walsh, Head of Service – Intelligence, Strategy and Prioritisation, Commissioning Centre of Excellence

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

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. ACTION NOTES

(See document No 1)

RESOLVED:-

To note the action notes.

5. CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPARENCY, OPENNESS AND EQUALITY

(See document No 2)

The Cabinet Member for Transparency, Openness and Equality, Councillor Waseem Zaffar, highlighted his portfolio priorities for the year and progress to date.

Members welcomed the actions taken to take forward the recommendations of the Child Poverty Commission and noted that the Cabinet Member will be attending the Schools, Children and Families O&S Committee meeting on 8th February 2017 when progress of those recommendations will be tracked.

The Cabinet Member would value Scrutiny's contribution to the development of an integration plan for new communities. He referred to both the Helsinki and Coventry models which he would like to share with Scrutiny and would welcome the opportunity to discuss with and be guided by this committee with regard to what might be the best model to adopt.

There was a discussion around the current services provided to asylum seekers and refugees and the Cabinet Member undertook to get back to the Committee in writing on how effectively the City Council is dealing with Section 17 requests. Members also requested an update on progress with the Action Plan arising from the former Governance, Resources and Customer Services O&S Committee inquiry into Children and Families With No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) which was presented to City Council in December 2013.

RESOLVED:-

- Cabinet Member to share the Helsinki and Coventry models of integration with Committee Members with a view to setting up a working group to look at what might be the best model to adopt;
- Cabinet Member to get back to Members on how effectively the Council is dealing with Section 17 requests and to provide an update on the NRPF Action Plan.

6. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HOMES

(See document No 3)

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes, Councillor Peter Griffiths, gave an update on the development of a Housing Strategy for Birmingham.

Members were advised that a multi-agency committee, Housing Birmingham, which has been established is seen as a key contributor to the delivery of the strategy.

The Chair referred to the World Homeless Day Event held at SIFA Fireside with particular reference to the SIFA/Big Issue 'Streetwise' photographic exhibition and whether this could be brought to the Council House.

Members requested an overview of how the housing strategy workstreams and other strands of work fit together and what the timescales are.

With regard to the review of sheltered accommodation, Cllr Harmer requested that Members be kept in the loop and be promptly given results of reviews for accommodation in their wards.

RESOLVED:-

- Cabinet Member to investigate bringing the SIFA Fireside/Big Issue 'Streetwise' photographic exhibition to the Council House
- Members to be provided with an overview of how the housing strategy workstreams and other strands of work fit together and what the timescales are
- Committee members to be kept up-to-date on the review of sheltered accommodation and all elected Members to be kept in the loop with regard to sheltered accommodation in their wards

Mike Walsh, Head of Service – Intelligence, Strategy and Prioritisation, Commissioning Centre of Excellence gave an update on the new housing allocations scheme, drawing Members' attention to the timescales for implementation.

RESOLVED:-

- Members to be provided with the Policy Document and Summary once finalised.

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

REQUEST FOR CALL IN: REMOVAL OF GATEWAY SERVICE – CORPORATE REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

(See document No 4)

This Request for Call In relates to the removal of the Gateway Service within the Corporate Revenue Budget Monitoring report which went to Cabinet on 20th September 2016.

Members noted the Monitoring Officer's advice that there was no Executive decision to call in but that Scrutiny could carry out its role in terms of scrutinising the performance of the Executive and/or Chief Officers. The Committee, therefore, considered the Request for Call In brought by Councillors Sambrook and Storer on that basis.

Members highlighted their concerns, about the process for accessing supported housing which related to:

Impact on Vulnerable People

- It was thought that some services had spare capacity due to referrals decreasing due to this uncertainty.

Governance, Accountability, Transparency

- the level of consultation with providers and partners and whether enough time had been given to prepare - an email had been sent out on 5th September advising that the service was closing on 30th September and a meeting which had been scheduled had subsequently been cancelled.
- the need for a city-wide communications policy to be put into place when withdrawing services which impact on vulnerable people

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, Councillor Paulette Hamilton, set out the responses to the Call-In request:

- The Gateway service has not been closed and the process will continue pending consultation;
- A communication had been sent out to providers advising them that the service would continue for a period of time;
- A consultation meeting with providers had been arranged for Monday 17th October (which committee members were welcome to attend); and
- Once the consultation period is over (the next month or so) a decision will be made on the future of the Gateway service.

Members requested that a record of the officer decision be provided, together with the data upon which that decision had been made and noted the Monitoring Officer was undertaking an investigation.

Members noted the Monitoring Officer advice that it was not an executive decision and the decision to close the Gateway Service had been taken by an officer. As the proposal would realise savings of above £200,000 Members felt this should have been a Joint Cabinet Member/Chief officer decision and therefore subject to call in.

The Committee resolved to call in the decision by a vote of 7 (from the ten Members present).

On 26 October 2016 Committee Members received a notice from Kate Charlton, Acting City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, setting out:

- That a valid Call In can only be made following an Executive Decision taken by Cabinet, Cabinet Members or Chief Officer jointly with Cabinet Members;
- That there was no Executive Decision by which a Call In could be affected in accordance with Article 7.8 of the Constitution; either in respect of the Corporate Revenue Budget Report presented to Cabinet on 21st September 2016 or the Removal of the Gateway Service referred to at Appendix 2 of the Report; and
- Her decision that the Call In cannot stand and was, therefore, not valid.

8. HOMELESSNESS

(See document No 5)

John Hardy, Commissioning Manager – Prevention, Commissioning Centre of Excellence advised Members that there is a Government requirement for Local Authorities to carry out an annual rough sleepers count and that this year the count in Birmingham will take place on 10th November.

The Terms of Reference for the short inquiry into Tackling Winter Rough Sleeping were noted. Members to let the Chair and/or Scrutiny Officers know if there are specific people they would like to bring in for the evidence-gathering session on 8th November. There was also a request from the Chair for Members to engage with homeless people or homelessness organisations over the next month in order to gain the same insight Councillors Sambrook and Storer had by going out recently with the Have a Heart Help the Homeless charity.

RESOLVED:-

- Further information to be provided to Members regarding arrangements for the rough sleepers count on 10th November
- John Hardy to provide a list of contracted providers and other agencies dealing with rough sleeping in the city
- Members to let the Chair and/or Scrutiny Officers have details of anyone they want to bring in for the 8th November evidence-gathering session
- Members to engage with homeless people or homelessness organisations to feed into the inquiry

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

(See document No 6)

The Work Programme was noted.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

The meeting ended at 1751 hours.