

## ASTON WARD MEETING NOTES – 4<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2024

<b>WARD:</b> Aston	<b>DATE:</b> 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
<b>VENUE:</b> Broadway Academy School, The Broadway B20 3DP	<b>START/FINISH TIMES:</b> 6.30pm – 8.30pm
<b>COUNCILLORS</b> Ayoub Khan & Mumtaz Hussain	<b>NOs OF ATTENDEES:</b> 22
<b>OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:</b> Laksmi Kerrison & Wiqas Maqsood, Private Rented Sector Team Sergeant Muland, West Midlands Police Pat Whyte, Community Development & Support Officer Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager	

<b>MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING INCLUDING LOCAL CONCERNS:</b>
<p><b>1. Welcome &amp; Notice of Recording</b></p> <p>Councillor Khan welcomed all to the meeting and advised that members of the press/public could take photographs and record the meeting except where there were confidential or exempt items.</p> <p><b>2. Police Update</b></p> <p>Sergeant Muland (Small Heath team) explained he had been working with the Aston Team due to personnel changes. Sergeant Aaron Pugh would be taking up the post of sergeant for the Aston Team. He then made the following main points –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neighbourhood policing was a priority for the Chief Constable but the number of calls and responding to urgent demand had taken priority.</li> <li>- The Aston team did however have 2 dedicated PCSO's for the area.</li> <li>- Local team priorities included Tesco/Aston Lane in relation to Tesco/HMO's/ASB/Crime. The Aston team worked with Small Heath &amp; Nechells teams to address these issues and ensure there was always a team on duty to respond.</li> <li>- Warnings issued to those involved in ASB, escalated to arrests if warnings breached.</li> <li>- Working with BCC around parking issues and PCSO's had parking operations planned.</li> <li>- Aston was a high demand area in respect of calls for service.</li> </ul>

- Residents urged to email via the team email address any issues of concern so that the team could concentrate on local priorities – [aston@westmidlands.police.uk](mailto:aston@westmidlands.police.uk)

In response to questions from Councillor Khan meeting advised that 999 call response times had greatly improved and were hitting targets. The team would be involved through ASB issues at HMO properties and there were 2 dedicated officers working on multi-occupied properties across the city, although it was acknowledged this was insufficient. Offender Management would also have a role to play. A multi-agency approach would aspirationally be a welcomed and Sergeant Muland undertook to raise with Sergeant Pugh.

The high turnover of sergeants for the area and lack of continuity was acknowledged but this was an issue across the Force and there were reasons for staff movement. The Aston team would benefit from 2 additional officers from April.

In response to issues raised regarding nitrous oxide, meeting advised that changes in legislation now classed it as a Class C drug and therefore, use was recorded as a crime. In the first instance this would be dealt with via drug rehabilitation, out of court disposal and restorative justice.

With regard to police reassurance around Ramadan, the Sergeant undertook to raise with Sergeant Pugh in respect of visits to local mosques but would pass on contact details to mosque representative present, at the conclusion of the meeting so they could work together. Councillor Khan referred to incidents of vulnerable people being targeted during Ramadan in their homes during prayer time and asked that this also be raised with the new sergeant.

There were queries regarding youth engagement and the meeting was advised that there was an Aston schools' officer and neighbourhood police teams strived to undertake youth engagement and work with local groups etc including AVFC Kicks Project. Youth groups were encouraged to make contact. It was acknowledged that the team was not good at communicating the work that it did within the community and that the Inspector had highlighted this as a local priority.

### **3. Selective Licensing Scheme for Properties in the Private Rented Sector**

Laksmi & Wiqas provided an overview of the Selective Licensing Scheme across 25 wards, including Aston, implemented as a way to ensure properties met certain conditions and to assist in dealing with issues associated with multiple occupied housing. The licensing schemes for other properties not covered in the selective licensing scheme - HMO's mandatory licence & additional licensing for smaller properties – were also explained. It was noted

that exempt accommodation was not covered by the licensing schemes. From June 2023 it had become an offence to rent a property without a valid licence.

Compliance and inspections of properties began in January, all licensed properties to receive an inspection and properties not found to be properly licensed would be reported. In Aston as at end of February, 602 applications had been received, 344 licenses issued, and 1650 further applications expected.

Residents were advised that any concerns around privately rented properties could be reported using the following contact addresses –  
[pl@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:pl@birmingham.gov.uk)  
[prs@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:prs@birmingham.gov.uk)

In response to questions from Councillor Khan the meeting was advised that the income generated from the licensing fees could only be used for the delivery of the scheme and it had to be self-financing. The major costs of the scheme was staffing, advertising costs, enforcement. The selective licensing scheme wards had been chosen in relation to the number of private rented properties in the area, to help reduce ASB & crime, improve private rented stock and ensure landlords were providing decent standards for their tenants. Tenants in a licensed property could be assured that it was safe to live in. Government had not allowed for a city-wide scheme, and the council had to choose wards based on the criteria.

Councillor Khan said that residents had been unaware of the consultation on the licensing pilot scheme. They felt aggrieved, as the cost of the licence in relation to rents charged was too high and therefore it discriminated against certain wards. Residents commented that the majority of 'problem' properties were exempt properties and therefore not subject to a licence. Family homes rented to local families did not generally cause problems and the rents charged by landlords of those properties were minimal. The meeting was advised that the cost of the licence was £700 and covered 5 years. Evidence was being gathered around the need for legislation to govern exempt accommodation, but the law currently did not allow for Registered Social Landlords to be included in the Selective Licensing Scheme as there was separate rules governing those properties.

Councillor Khan called for a multi-disciplinary approach from BCC and partners to look at the crime/ASB aspect associated with some rented property as in Aston private landlords renting to families were being penalised as these were not the 'problem' properties. Although he acknowledged the need for control around safety checks etc. The crime/ASB figures would not be reduced through this type of licensing in Aston and therefore, for that reason, the income raised would not benefit the ward.

Laksmi advised that the next phase of work was to find eligible properties that had not come forward for licensing. Officers undertook to take specific details at the conclusion of the meeting.

#### **4. Local Updates/Councillor Updates/Local Issues**

- a) Councillor Update – Councillor Khan updated on the Council’s financial situation and advised the budget would be discussed at the City Council meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March. The proposed cuts would have a devastating effect, especially on deprived areas but there were campaigns in opposition, including one to save local libraries. Councillor Khan undertook to circulate information.

In response to concerns regarding the flats in Perry Barr, Councillor Khan said he believed the sale of the site, as a whole, to one organisation was under consideration.

#### **b) Local Issues**

- Road Safety, Park Lane – residents expressed concern regarding unsafe driving including jumping red lights, aggressive driving, cars travelling the wrong way along one-way streets. Councillor Khan asked details be forwarded to him as a matter of urgency.
- Mosque Food Banks – meeting advised that more people were accessing the food banks having been referred by the council, but concern expressed that the level of demand was unsustainable without city council support.
- Litter Picking – residents said that working with mosques etc to mobilise the community to help themselves and find solutions to local problems was the way forward, eg litter picking. Councillors supported the idea as local people understood their community and although the council would remove rubbish/fly tipping it repeatedly reappeared, and the answer was to break the cycle by acting collectively. Residents suggested a steering group to work with councillors.