

**NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE 17 MARCH 2016**

**UPDATE REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT
AND HOMES**

REPORT BY: COUNCILLOR JOHN COTTON

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Following my report to Scrutiny in September 2015 setting out my portfolio priorities for 2015/16, this report seeks to provide an update on the progress made and emerging future issues.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY PRIORITIES AND OTHER KEY PROGRAMMES

The key priorities for my portfolio support with the Council's future vision for the city: working together for a fair, prosperous and democratic city.

This includes the opportunity for every citizen to have a high quality of health and same life expectancy irrespective of where they live in our city, along with access to an affordable and decent home.

The key steps I set out to Committee in the autumn were as follows:

- Deliver integrated Place-based management, ensuring that neighbourhood services are coordinated and delivered efficiently, reflecting local needs and priorities.
- Develop a comprehensive housing offer, to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to enjoy affordable, safe and decent accommodation.
- Ensure that the growing private rented sector provides decent, affordable accommodation by making use of our licensing powers and ensuring a stronger partnership through our Social Lettings Agency, Let to Birmingham.
- Work with Districts to ensure they deliver a robust "Neighbourhood Challenge", holding both the council and other service providers to account for the quality and effectiveness of local public services.
- Work with Districts to ensure that our scarce resources are deployed in a manner that helps to improve the local street scene and environment.
- To continue to maintain investment in our existing properties and to build new properties that meet Birmingham's future housing needs.
- A review of housing services to older people, ensuring that we consult on the types of support services and the adequacy of the accommodation we provide.

- A review of tenancy conditions in line with proposed legislation in the current Housing Bill.
- Undertake consultation on the introduction of additional and discretionary licensing schemes within the growing private rented sector.
- Re-procurement of Council House Repairs and Maintenance and Investment Contracts to commence April 2016.

3. PROGRESS ON DELIVERING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY	PROGRESS
Deliver integrated Place-based management	<p>Place Managers are working with local communities, businesses and partners to come up with ideas and solutions to help improve local areas. We have broadened the role of the local housing service 'beyond bricks and mortar' into a wider neighbourhood management service, bringing together housing, environmental and other services to address broader issues, which impact on the quality of life and wellbeing of local residents.</p> <p>Place Managers are the single point of contact for their ward on neighbourhood issues. They bring together partners and the community to draw up Place Action Plans focused on those 'safe, clean and green' priorities identified by local residents. They will continue to work with local residents to ensure these plans are delivered.</p> <p>Place Managers are also responsible for ensuring that we are delivering the housing management function by for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letting properties quickly to those in need. • Helping tenants to keep to their tenancy conditions by offering support or advice if they fall into difficulties with rent payments. • Tackling unlawful subletting and taking firm action against those tenants who breach their tenancy conditions by causing anti-social behaviour or damage to their property. • Providing cleaning and maintenance services to communal areas of our high rise and low rise blocks to the specified standard. • Involving our tenants in monitoring our service delivery through estate walkabouts, surveys, HLB meetings and focus groups. <p>Place Managers will also work with other housing providers and</p>

	<p>partners to tackle issues that may affect all tenures in a neighbourhood, such as working with the Police to tackle community safety concerns or working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to offer assistance to those affected by welfare reforms.</p>
Develop a comprehensive housing offer	<p>On 22 January I was joined by the Leader of the Council, the Chair of Birmingham Social Housing Partnership (BSHP) and around 20 housing providers to discuss how to strengthen existing partnerships in the city to ensure enough quality homes and support services are available for Birmingham's citizens.</p> <p>Providers committed to support each other to develop a new approach to homes and neighbourhoods and develop a comprehensive housing offer for Birmingham.</p> <p>The housing sector is faced with a number of forthcoming changes such as the extension of Right to Buy, the proposed ending of secure tenancies, the continuing impact of Welfare Reform and Pay to Stay and the need to build more affordable housing in the city, despite a reduction in government grant.</p> <p>'Housing Birmingham' a Multi- Agency Committee, was subsequently established at an inaugural meeting on 15 February with a core membership comprising key City Council senior officers, Registered Providers, Health Service and the Third Sector.</p> <p>We have collectively developed and agreed a Terms of Reference and key work streams, with leads from across these organisations, to take forward this important work. These work streams include -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Housing provision now and the future: identifying key risks to social housing provision in the city and how we can collectively respond. • Private Sector Housing: including the need to effectively engage with the private rented sector. • Specialist need and vulnerable: including homelessness and young people. • Localities and Neighbourhoods: building on the work to date around Neighbourhoods and 'Place'. • Increasing provision and capacity: including inward investment and assets. • Welfare reforms and housing: The successful and nationally

	recognised Welfare Reform Multi Agency Committee will continue as a sub-group of Housing Birmingham.
Improve Private Rented Sector	<p>We continue to work with the Birmingham Landlord Forum which provides us with an excellent opportunity to engage with responsible landlords.</p> <p>Over 150 landlords attended the Birmingham Landlord Forum this month, a joint event between the National Landlords Association and Birmingham City Council's Private Rented Service to help bring landlords up to speed with a range of issues including new housing legislation, the Council's work to clamp down on rogue landlords and how to ethically finance buy-to-lets.</p> <p>We have received £110,000 from the Rogue Landlord Fund to support our continued work in improving the private rented sector in Birmingham.</p> <p>The money will be used to enhance and expand the work that we have already been doing to target rogue landlords and poor practice in the private rented sector – including work with the Police to target criminal activity, cracking down on unregistered Houses in Multiple Occupation and targeting environmental problems caused by the poor management of properties.</p> <p>In particular, we will be using the extra funding to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get a proper data-sharing arrangement across the key agencies, so we can get a proper picture of where problems are and quickly target rogue landlords • develop some pre-checking procedures with our partners, so we can ensure that landlords are fit and proper persons • work with Police and Revenue & Customs to target inspections on high risk properties • increase our target inspection programme for unlicensed Homes in Multiple Occupation.
"Neighbourhood Challenge"	<p>The Neighbourhood Challenge was introduced as a new duty and power in the Council's constitution for 2015/16 building on the commitment made in the Improvement Plan to empower District Committees to undertake a robust challenge of public services on their area. Guidance on the exercise of the Neighbourhood Challenge was incorporated into the Cabinet report of July 2015 setting out the new remit for District Committees and Ward Committees / Forums. All District Chairs and Vice Chairs participated in a development programme</p>

	<p>between July and September 2015 which included workshop sessions on how to roll-out the neighbourhood challenge.</p> <p>Throughout the municipal calendar the Chair of Executive Members has held an open meeting approach at the monthly forum to explore and share progress on respective neighbourhood challenge work.</p> <p>As the end of the current municipal cycle approaches all Districts have engaged with the Neighbourhood Challenge and overall there have been a variety of approaches taken in each District with a range of subject areas explored. This is currently subject to review by this Committee.</p>
Improve local Street Scene and environment	<p>This work is integral to the role of Place Managers and reflected in their action plans, which have been developed with local Elected Members and the community. A fundamental review of cleaning and caretaking services is being undertaken to ensure that we have a targeted approach to those areas in most need. Place Managers and Street Scene Co-ordinators are working with Waste Management and Regulatory Services to ensure we have a holistic approach to cleaning services backed up with engagement, enforcement and education strategies.</p>
Investment in Council Housing and build new homes	<p>A £59 million programme of investment into council properties was approved by Cabinet in February.</p> <p>The programme for 2016/17 will deliver new kitchens and bathrooms, upgraded heating systems, insulation and window and roof replacements for around 5,800 homes.</p> <p>The Birmingham Council Housing Investment Programme for 2016/17 covers work to the cost of £59.108 million within a total Housing Investment Capital fund budget of £133.463 million, including clearance and house building costs.</p> <p>Not only will this substantially improve our tenants' homes, but by replacing inefficient heating systems, we can further reduce the city's carbon dioxide emissions and lower our tenants' heating bills.</p> <p>Alongside this, Cabinet approved a 1% reduction in rent in line with the government's new rent policy and will continue to press for recompense from the Treasury, given the impact this will have upon the previously agreed HRA Business Plan.</p> <p>1090 new homes have been approved through the Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT) since March 2015. These approvals include major regeneration schemes at Jarvis Road</p>

	<p>and Abbey Fields in Erdington, Kings Norton, and Perry Common in Kingstanding. As at 5 January 2016 1,934 new homes have been built, 1,104 homes for rent and 830 homes for sale.</p> <p>One of the biggest challenges in housing is the need to increase the supply of new homes by direct provision but also by supporting the private sector to accelerate development. Due to the interdependency between land supply and Birmingham's housing needs, this is best tackled at a city region level. We are working with our partner councils in the Shadow West Midlands Combined Authority, in the context of the devolution deal already agreed, to explore opportunities to develop a city regional approach to unlocking brownfield sites for more new homes. As devolution develops further we need to ensure that we work closely with the government to ensure that investment in the West Midlands is steered by local needs and priorities.</p>
Review of housing services to older people	A fundamental review of our services to older people is necessary resulting from previous rounds of budget cuts. We need to ensure that we are providing value for money, efficient services and be sensitive to the needs of our older tenants. We are also undertaking a fit for purpose assessment of all of our sheltered housing stock.
A review of tenancy conditions	Lifetime tenancies are expected to come to an end under legislation proposed in the Housing and Planning Bill. Whilst this will create a significant administrative financial burden to the authority we are taking the opportunity to review all our tenancy conditions to ensure that they reflect the behaviours we expect from our tenants and, where appropriate, manage demand for services. This review will help deliver both Place Management and Street Scene Initiatives.
Consultation on the introduction of additional / discretionary licensing schemes within the growing private rented sector	<p>Responses to the consultation on extending licensing for the Private Rented Sector highlighted a number of areas where licensing powers may be needed. There is a particular issue relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation and it is my view that they should all be required to have a licence. We are looking at how we might be able to achieve this, but in the immediate term, we will be bringing forward an initial business case that will be focused upon tackling HMOs in the Bournbrook and Stockland Green areas and also managed hostel accommodation across the city.</p> <p>The consultation has also identified areas of concern in Soho, Sparkbrook, Lozells and Moseley & Kings Heath. Officers are working to gather additional evidence and will be engaging with local members, community organisations and District Housing</p>

	Panels to take these proposals forward.
Re-Procurement of Council House Repairs and Maintenance and Investment Contracts	<p>From 1 April tenants across the city will benefit from an improved repairs and maintenance service following an intensive evaluation process that has also secured major savings estimated at around £13 million over the next four years.</p> <p>Currently, most tenants have two contractors to deal with – one for repairs and one for any issues with gas. The new four year contracts will operate on a geographical basis and will deal with all repairs, maintenance, gas servicing and home improvements.</p> <p>From 1 April the new arrangements will see-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenants living in the north of the city served by Keepmoat Regeneration Limited • tenants living in west central and east Birmingham served by Wates Construction Limited • tenants living in the south of the city served by Willmott Dixon Partnerships Limited <p>I must pay tribute to those tenant representatives who volunteered to take an active role in the re-procurement of these contracts which required significant time and effort. Their involvement provided a balanced approach with business need, but also the requirements and aspirations of the tenants and leaseholders of Birmingham.</p>

4. UPDATE ON HOUSING PERFORMANCE/SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

There are two Council Business Plan measures within my portfolio. I am pleased to report that both are exceeding target:

- **‘Number of homes built that were ‘affordable’ homes.’** 325 new affordable homes have been completed in Birmingham in the first two quarters of 2015/16 against a target of 258 units. These homes have been delivered via a number of funding sources including Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust and include 44 high quality affordable homes for older people at an extra care scheme in Bournville.
- **‘Private sector empty properties brought back into use.’** The latest performance information available shows that in January 333 private sector empty properties were brought back into use against a target of 250 by this month. The overall target for the year (2015/16) of 300 has now been exceeded.

In relation to available Council property stock, the number of days a property is void is 13% less compared to the same period last year and at 28 days is below the 30

day target. We also have 52% less void properties compared to the same period last year.

There are two Birmingham Promise measures relating to Housing which are as follows:

- **We will respond to emergency repairs within 2 hours.** Quarter 3 performance at 96.7% was above the contractual target of 95%. C.9000 emergency repairs are reported each quarter. This means that c8703 were completed within the contractual target. The first two quarters also performed above target at 95.7% and 96.9% respectively. January has seen a slight dip in performance at 94%. Performance is addressed through regular meetings with the contractors.
- **Resolve routine repairs within 30 days.** Quarter 3 performance at 94% continued the steady improvement throughout the year (91.6% in quarter 1; 92.5% in quarter 2). Performance in January was at 93.9%. c.32,000 routine repairs are reported each quarter; this means that c 30,000 are completed within timescale.

5. UPDATE ON KEY BUDGET ISSUES/KEY FUTURE BUDGET ISSUES

I am responsible as the Cabinet Member for the provision of social and affordable rented housing to tenants through the Housing Revenue Account (this service includes expenditure of £290m in 2015/16 and is funded by an equivalent amount of income from rents and service charges). These resources are used to repair and maintain existing stock, provide valued estate services (e.g. caretaking, cleaning, door entry services and older people housing support services), tenancy management services and payment of income on outstanding debt.

I am also responsible for a capital budget of £98m in 2015/16 for investment in the existing stock and the building of new homes (this totals £347m over the next three years from 2016/17 to 2018/19).

In addition, I have responsibility for a revenue budget of £1.3m and capital budget of £13m for private sector housing services. This is utilised for managing the responsibilities of the private rented sector housing (including HMO Licensing, empty properties), safer local neighbourhood services, the troubled families programme and partnership working with registered providers of social housing.

I am projecting a balanced HRA outturn for 2015/16 (even after repaying debt of £9m), a minor underspend in the private sector housing budget and full expenditure on the capital programme (after taking into account schemes that were commenced in 2015/16 and completed in 2016/17).

The public finances will continue to be under pressure over the medium term from 2016/17 to 2019/20 (as set out in the Council's Public Budget Consultation in December 2015 and the Budget Report to City Council in March 2016). In particular, the Housing Revenue Account will be under financial pressure over the next five years as a result of:

- the impact of the welfare reforms and roll out of universal credit (tenants finances will continue to be under enormous pressure)

- the proposed Draft Housing and Planning Bill that will introduce 'Pay to Stay' market rents for working tenants by April 2017 (with the additional income clawed back by the Treasury), review of lifetime tenancies and the disposal of high value vacant council homes
- the impact of the new national rent policy of -1% over the next 4 years to 2019/20 (it is estimated that this policy will reduce revenue resources in the HRA by an estimated £42m by 2019/20 – this is the cumulative effect by the end of that particular year and is equivalent to almost 14% of total income).

The proposals to ensure the continued long term sustainability and affordability of the provision of social housing, whilst protecting investment in new build and maintenance, are set out in the Budget Report to City Council in March 2016.

6. POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

I have, together with the Chairs of Birmingham Social Partnership and City Housing Liaison Board written on several occasions to the Housing Minister (August & November 2015 and January 2016) to express our joint concerns on the policies in the proposed Bill and have sought to establish a constructive engagement on the future development of housing policy. We are still awaiting some outstanding responses to these letters.

I have also responded to the 'Pay to Stay' consultation that closed on the 20 November and the HMO Licensing consultation on Extending Mandatory Licensing that closed on 18 December (the outcomes are awaited from the Department for CLG).

I have recently submitted evidence to the CLG Commons Select Committee Homeless Inquiry, who will be visiting Birmingham to learn about homeless services and will also be working with the LGA Housing Commission to influence future housing policy development.

Homelessness

Homelessness as an issue is increasing, both in Birmingham and nationally. Birmingham like other major cities has seen a huge increase in the number of vulnerable individuals finding themselves having to sleep on the streets.

On the morning of 29 January I joined other Elected Members, representatives of partner organisations and the Council's street outreach team to see for myself the scale of the problem and the complexity of the issues faced by street sleepers in Birmingham city centre. We encountered and engaged with 25 individuals and although this was a little lower than the 36 street sleepers registered during the official annual count in November 2015. I consider this to be wholly unacceptable.

We have already undertaken a detailed root cause analysis of street homelessness with a range of partners and stakeholders and talked with street sleepers themselves to gain a better understanding of their issues and expectations.

As a result of this we have developed a number of shared proposals that we will be discussing with partners and stakeholders so that we can improve services and reduce inequality.

NEXT SIX MONTHS

Over the next 6 months I will continue to work with colleagues and partners across the city, region and nationally, to make further progress on our priorities, responding to challenges and further develop the following areas of work:

National Housing Summit

Building upon the comprehensive housing offer (Housing Birmingham), we are aiming to hold a national summit in the summer that develops and expands on the Housing Birmingham offer and sets out the wider impacts that housing inequality and social inequality is having and is likely to have on citizens, in particular the most vulnerable in society. This summit will seek to explore how we might establish a national call to action on some of the impacts that we as housing providers across the country are facing.

Tackling Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

I can confirm that due to the priority that the Leader and I have given to homelessness, the budget for commissioning homelessness services has remained the same as last year at £1.068m and this will allow us to continue to work with partners to provide much needed support services for homeless people in the city.

DCLG have announced funding of £200,000 in order to reduce temporary accommodation in Birmingham and we are currently looking at a number ways to use this one off grant. Cabinet has also agreed to invest in the refurbishment of three of the Council's homeless hostels, one has just been completed and the other two should be finished during the next six months.

Since my last update, the Council has introduced an Accreditation Scheme to co-ordinate and make best use of voluntary outreach services and food distribution agencies. Further organisations are being contacted to join the scheme and a training event is being organised for all agencies. The aim is to bring voluntary groups and charities together with statutory services so that we can help people in a more effective way, coordinating with outreach and medical support and avoiding duplication of food runs too. 12 organisations have signed up to the scheme to date.

The HOST service, operated in conjunction with the Police to deliver targeted response to reports of street sleeping and begging predominantly within the city centre, is currently being reviewed with the support of Colmore Business Improvement District (BID) to ensure the service can become even more effective in appropriately responding to reports and to develop an integrated system for recording outputs and outcomes.

We have launched a pilot scheme with Westside BID for a joint outreach and response service between the Midland Heart Outreach Service and the BID wardens which will be reviewed in March. We are also:

- tendering for a Welfare Service, which will provide a central hub for vulnerable single homeless to access housing advice, wellbeing services, and health services and will be opened in April 2016.
- exploring with partners and businesses an alternative giving scheme which will enable the public to give financially in a way that ensures funds will go to services that directly support homeless people and avoid direct giving to individuals that can perpetuate their life on the street and delay access to needed services.
- undertaking discussions with the Police, BIDs and Outreach Services to strengthen the partnership approach to dealing with public place management and to ensure resources are appropriately deployed to respond to the complex issues.
- exploring with businesses the possibility of establishing a 'store room' to make the best use of donations such as clothing, food, blankets etc.

Housing and Health

There is a clear interplay of cause and consequence between health and housing and in particular homelessness that is played out in the wider context of social and health inequalities. Recent reports such as Hard Edges show that there are key points in a person's life where early service intervention could prevent individuals slipping into severe disadvantage of homelessness and exclusion.

I will continue to work with the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care and key strategic leads from health to forge new relationships with the wider housing sector and explore how we can collectively and collaboratively work to bring about the required changes to systems and services.

Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Pathway

I have been working with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to implement a Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Pathway for Birmingham.

Support has been secured from DCLG to help us to formally adopt and embed the new pathway as part of the future operating model for Children's Services.

The aim of the pathway is to ensure that young people aged 16 – 18 have somewhere safe and suitable to live, to help them make a positive transition into adulthood. The success of the pathway is dependent upon ensuring that we collectively work together, share our knowledge, skills and resources to provide the right support and interventions for children and young people at the right points of their journey towards independence.

The framework will focus upon a number of areas including;

- Early preparation work with children and young people for the reality of their future housing options.
- Planning young people's accommodation and support option with them.
- Reduce housing crisis.
- Access housing and support as needed, including support to engage with health and wellbeing services and also employment, education and training.
- Access and successfully manage longer-term, move-on and support options.

Officers from a number of directorates are now working with third sector organisations and young people themselves to shape the pathway.

The approach taken also highlights the importance of commissioning good quality housing support and housing responses alongside informing and improving upon social work responses in pathway planning for young people as part of their care leaving journey. The pathway will feed into the Housing Birmingham response to young people.

Learning Disabilities Housing and Employment

On the 19 January, a report was presented to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the current position relating to support to adults with learning disabilities, with particular reference to housing and employment. The findings of the report highlighted the following:

- **Housing:** There is a range of good quality support and housing provision within Birmingham which offers people with learning disabilities the opportunity to live more independently within their communities. This includes the development of community based housing with support options as alternatives to more institutional settings, support to access social housing and housing and tenancy support interventions. Nevertheless a more coordinated approach including improved intelligence gathering in relation to tenancy based support options will ensure that we continue to enable people with learning disabilities live independently within our communities.
- **Employment:** Nationally, only 6.6% of adults with learning disabilities are reported to be in some form of paid employment. Whilst there are a number of initiatives being led across the City which support the most vulnerable and therefore considered to be the furthest away from the labour market into work, there is a real lack of a coordinated approach to improving access to people with learning disabilities. Case studies from voluntary sector service providers illustrate the characteristics of successful employment support including; a recognition that for many people with learning disabilities this can be a long journey which requires a holistic response including support to overcome isolation, feeling confident within work settings and practical skills. Another key area is support to employers to confidently support people with learning disabilities within the workplace.

A targeted response for people with learning disabilities has been secured as part of the successful Youth Employment Initiative Bid (aged 15 – 29) to the European Social Fund.

The funding will be utilised to commission intervention workers to support both the young person and the employer.

Initiatives and issues highlighted within the report will feed into the work we are undertaking through Housing Birmingham.

Youth Employment Initiative Match Funding

The Supporting People (Housing support) young people's commissioned services have provided a funding match for the successful Youth Employment Initiative. The combined successful matches across a number of funding streams will provide additional employment, training and support opportunities for over 16,000 young people across Birmingham and Solihull, this includes support to young people at risk of homelessness, risk of offending, complex needs, care leavers' support needs relating to their mental health or learning disability.

Homeless Advice Centres Proposals

Consultation with the public and interested parties has closed on proposals to provide one Housing Advice Service based in Newtown which would create a centre of excellence for homelessness and for homeless and housing advice for the city.

Currently the Homeless and Pre-Tenancy Service is based in four Housing Advice Centres across the city – Erdington, Newtown, Northfield and Sparkbrook in addition to the Youth Hub in Digbeth. The proposed changes to service delivery do not impact on the Youth Hub.

A report is due to be presented to Cabinet on the 22 March, alongside a report on the future operating model for Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service. If agreed the one Housing Advice Centre will go live in June 2016.

Housing Allocation Scheme

The implementation of the Housing Allocation scheme will now take place on 22 September 2016.

The decision to implement the new Scheme in September of this year has been strongly influenced by the ongoing Neighbourhood Advice & Homeless & Pre-Tenancy Services proposed changes, which go to Cabinet for a decision on 22 March, following extensive consultation. This means that the resource-intensive re-registration process, which is crucial to the new Allocation Scheme, will take place once the new working arrangements are in place for these services.

As we approach the key milestones of this scheme, Members will receive updates.

Councillor John Cotton
Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management and Homes