

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING AND HOMES O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1400 hours on Tuesday 20 February 2018, Committee Room 6

Present:

Councillor Victoria Quinn (Chair)

Councillors Gurdial Singh Atwal, Andy Cartwright, Roger Harmer, Des Hughes, Mary Locke and Ron Storer

Also Present:

Councillor Peter Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes

Councillor Barry Henley

Martyn Hale, Chair, Birmingham Social Housing Partnership and Vice Chair of Housing Birmingham Partnership

Sophie Hall, Housing Birmingham Lead Officer

Julie Griffin, Head of Housing Options

Rob James, Service Director, Housing

Jacqui Kennedy, Corporate Director, Place

Martin Tolley, Head of Capital Investment

Jayne Power, Research & Policy Officer, Scrutiny Office

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised that due to technical difficulties this meeting would not be webcast but that members of the press/public may record and take photographs.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Matthew Gregson, Gary Sambrook and Margaret Waddington.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES – 23 JANUARY 2018

(See document No 1)

The Chair updated Members on the outstanding actions.

- The notes were agreed.

5. HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

(see document No 2)

Jacqui Kennedy (Corporate Director, Place), Rob James (Service Director, Housing) and Julie Griffin (Head of Housing Options) attended for this item.

This item covered a verbal update on the Street Intervention Team, a progress report on Rough Sleeping and Prevention and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Implementation Plan.

The following were among the main points raised:

- Rob James talked Members through the progress report on Rough Sleeping and Prevention and highlighted the fact that the service is currently working to draft guidance on the Homelessness Reduction Act whilst awaiting final guidance;
- Clarification was provided with regard to the contract variation to some existing Supporting People contracts. This refers to outcomes, not the funding being awarded, and is about what we need partners to deliver to ensure compliance with the Act;
- The Chair referred to the discussion at the December meeting, when partners stressed that Housing First was not the only solution, and asked where Birmingham sits with regard to the Mayoral Taskforce. In response, Members were advised that Birmingham had put together the regional bid, implementation of which is currently being worked through, and Housing First would be a part of tackling homelessness and putting in prevention and relief measures;
- Members were updated on the work of the Street Intervention Team, which has now been in place for 6 months and is funded by the Trailblazer fund, and a draft report has been prepared which it is hoped will be released shortly through the Cabinet Member and Advisor;
- This is an integrated model focussing on delivering better outcomes and is already yielding positive results, supporting people to access accommodation, primary care, benefit support, drug and alcohol and mental health services ;
- A number of partners are involved, with one of the key partners with the most positive impact being an NHS nurse; the team is co-located with the aim of integrating services to provide a co-ordinated approach with tailored intervention;
- The approach is to engage, educate and enforce and in December there were over 1200 engagements with individuals which included taking people to health appointments;
- There has been a 267% increase in the number of referrals resulting in accommodation in the last 3 months and 6 on-street medical interventions every day;
- Pathways are being developed for benefit support and with the prison and probation service to link in with prisoners about to be released;

- The team is providing increased knowledge about what services are available and is working with the Combined Authority and Mayor as part of the Change into Action alternative giving campaign – where money is donated in Birmingham it is identified through data and re-spent in Birmingham, with just over £11,000 being raised in the first 7 weeks;
- Civil enforcement action is being taken where needed and criminal behaviour orders have been taken out against three individuals and there have been cases where individuals have taken up the offer of support as an alternative to a criminal behaviour order;
- Members were given two case studies where individuals had been supported into accommodation, one of these being a gentleman who needed accommodation with provision for pets;
- In terms of what is not working, there are issues around substance misusers and pressure on emergency services, also some people just won't engage;
- Members asked what work was being done in surrounding areas and were advised that patrols are being done just outside the city centre;
- Reference was made to people purporting to be homeless and Members were advised that work is being done with the Police on enforcement action around begging and in the Combined Authority region there is a rough sleepers group which shares intelligence and information;
- Birmingham links in with other West Midlands local authorities in instances where individuals might need to be moved outside of the area to get off the streets;
- The discussion moved on to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which comes into force on 1st April, and the challenges this presents;
- The Act is about not having a transactional process, it is about every organisation working to prevent homelessness;
- Every referral will need to have a Personal Housing Plan which will need to be regularly updated;
- An additional 20 officers are being recruited to deal with the anticipated 50% increase in demand and extra accommodation will need to be found;
- The service will receive additional funding of £1.7m on the basis that an implementation plan is in place;
- Member briefings will be held in March and April, with more extensive training being offered post-election.

RESOLVED:-

- The report was noted.

6. CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2017/18

(see document No 3)

Martin Tolley, Head of Capital Investment, attended to present his report and Councillor Barry Henley attended as an interested councillor expert to talk specifically about the issue of retro fitting sprinklers in tower blocks.

The following were among the main points raised:

- An implementation plan has been developed for the retro fit of sprinklers in tower blocks and is awaiting sign-off;
- Cllr Henley told Members that he is of the view that the £31m investment in the retro fit of sprinklers would not save lives and the money would be better spent on reducing risks;
- The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes advised that the decision to retro fit sprinklers in tower blocks was based on advice received from the West Midlands Fire Service;
- Members were advised that the investment into sprinkler systems would not affect the current capital works programme and would be funded from additional borrowing and a request had been made to government to fund £19.4m of the £31m expenditure;
- Members felt there was a need to balance the cost of fitting sprinklers with the likely life cycle of the buildings and were told that some tower blocks are designated for clearance, with investment only being made where there is an additional 30-40 years
- In response to a question about component life cycles, Cllr Hughes was invited to visit the team to learn more about the approach taken;
- In response to a question from Cllr Harmer about tower blocks in his ward with no external insulation, Martin Tolley undertook to look into the matter and respond directly to Cllr Harmer.

RESOLVED:-

- Response to be provided direct to Cllr Harmer with regard to the tower blocks in his ward;
- The report was noted.

7. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HOMES – UPDATE REPORT

(See document No 4)

Councillor Peter Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes, attended to present his update report, accompanied by Martyn Hale, Chair, Birmingham Social Housing Partnership and Vice Chair of Housing Birmingham Partnership, and Sophie Hall, Housing Birmingham Lead Officer.

The following were among the main points raised:

- Members were concerned that there was nothing around anti-social behaviour (ASB) included in the update report and whilst ASB is primarily within Cllr Chatfield's portfolio, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that there is housing related ASB and this should be included;
- The number of current housing stock properties being used for temporary accommodation is around 700;

- With regard to the number of properties improved in the private rented sector as a result of Local Authority intervention, it was requested that a percentage figure be provided;
- Members stressed the importance of a commitment to Total Place and were advised that models of practice were being developed to work together with RSLs and it was hoped to start piloting in the next 3 months;
- In response to a question around the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund, Members were told that Housing Associations are able to apply and some have done so;
- The Chair asked if it would be possible for Members to attend meetings of the Housing Birmingham Partnership Board, as observers, as is the case with the City Housing Liaison Board meetings. Officers confirmed this would not be a problem and it was agreed that dates and details would be circulated.

RESOLVED:-

- That the following information be forwarded to Members:
 - (i) Percentage of demand for intervention we are meeting for improving properties in the private sector;
 - (ii) Dates of Housing Birmingham Partnership Board meetings.
- Members to send the Chair/scrutiny officers any additional questions for forwarding on to the Cabinet Member.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18

(See document No 5)

Members discussed the work programme. The following points were raised:

- The Chair confirmed that the March meeting had been moved to 6th March and the items for that agenda would be evidence-gathering for the HMO inquiry and the Waste Service Improvement Plan.
- The Chair asked Members if they were happy to sign off the remaining outstanding recommendation (R02) from the “Working with Communities to Prevent Relationship Violence” scrutiny report as the Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy has now been presented to Cabinet. Members confirmed that they were happy to do this.

RESOLVED:-

- Members agreed to sign off the remaining outstanding Recommendation 02 from the “Working with Communities to Prevent Relationship Violence” scrutiny report;
- The Work Programme was noted.

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

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

The meeting ended at 1730 hours.