

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

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

**1400 hours on Thursday 17 December 2020, Online meeting**

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**Present:**

Councillor Penny Holbrook (Chair)

Councillors Deirdre Alden, Marje Bridle, Roger Harmer, Mahmood Hussain, Shabrana Hussain, Mary Locke and Ken Wood

**Also Present:**

James Fox, Principal Planning Enforcement Officer

Julie Griffin, Acting AD, Housing

John Jamieson, Head of Service for Housing Management

Martin Tolley, Head of Capital Investment

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny

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**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chairman advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site ([www.civico.net/birmingham](http://www.civico.net/birmingham)) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

**2. APOLOGIES**

None.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None.

**4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER**

(See documents 1 and 2)

The following points were raised:

- LAMS benchmarking data – Members requested that an informal explanatory session be arranged to help them understand and interpret the data;
- Performance monitoring report presented to the City Housing Liaison Board – Members referred to their request for this report to be shared with O&S and it was agreed this would be followed up and left on the action tracker until resolved;
- Community Safety – LPDG meetings – position with regard to invites to Members to be followed up;
- Report on HLBs – it was agreed this would be picked up under the Work Programme item.

**RESOLVED:**

- The action notes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 were agreed.
- The action tracker was noted.

## **5. HOUSING IN TOWER BLOCKS**

(See document 3)

Julie Griffin, Acting AD, Housing, John Jamieson, Head of Service for Housing Management, and Martin Tolley, Head of Capital Investment, attended for this item.

The Chair gave the background to this item and confirmed the areas Members wished to explore, including how tower blocks are maintained, the tenants' service charge contribution and safety issues.

The October Cabinet report updating on fire safety in high rise buildings had been circulated with the agenda papers.

Officers presented an overview and in the course of the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the following were amongst the main points raised:

- The Cabinet report referred to the recruitment of Block Champions/Inspectors being put on hold due to Covid-19 and Members were told that will be looked at in conjunction with Building Safety Managers, however it had been a difficult this year to move that forward;
- With regard to health and safety inspections, where there are issues such as rubbish left on landings or fire doors being wedged open, these issues are dealt with and if it becomes a persistent issue they would write to the tenants on that floor and if needed would carry out a more in-depth investigation to identify who is responsible;
- In response to a specific question in relation to mobility scooters, Members were told that there is a piece of work being undertaken on this at the moment in terms of health and safety issues. They are communicating with tenants with mobility scooters advising them they need to be kept in their own property unless there is a designated area, however there is a balance to be struck between equality and health and safety;

- It was suggested that cleaning schedules should be displayed in entrances so tenants are aware of when the block was last cleaned and what is going to happen when, if that is not already in place;
- Members were concerned about CCTV cameras being removed from blocks and, whilst understanding some of the reasons for the review of CCTV, asked whether there were contingency plans for putting it back in where there are problems that need to be addressed;
- Concern was also expressed about blocks once classed as “mature” blocks being turned into blocks for all age groups and complaints being received about anti-social behaviour;
- There are night-time security patrols with a schedule of blocks they are designated to visit each night, regardless of any issues, and the schedule should vary each night;
- There is an out of hours service which tenants can call and officers are on standby to deal with emergencies. Officers will attend and co-ordinate major incidents with emergency services;
- Members also raised the issue of capital investment being put into fire safety works and the impact this might be having on other work, eg replacing kitchens and bathrooms and basic work on low rise blocks;
- It was suggested that a separate report giving more detail on where we are with the programme of modernising kitchens and bathrooms could be requested;
- Members stressed the importance of ensuring blocks are sufficiently insulated and were told that improved insulation, heating systems, windows, etc, are all part of the package of works to improve quality of life;
- There was a view that tower blocks should be demolished to make way for family housing, however there was also an acknowledgment that high rise blocks do provide an opportunity for starter housing for young people;
- Housing development is a policy issue and that might be something the committee would wish to pick up with the Cabinet Member;
- Two potential strands of work were suggested for the committee’s proposed work on HLBs – the service charge and a comparison of the cost of Building Safety Managers/staff carrying out inspections versus an on-site concierge.

**RESOLVED:**

- The report was noted.

**6. HMO’S – PLANNING ENFORCEMENT**

(See document 4)

James Fox, Principal Planning Enforcement Officer, attended for this item and presented an update on HMOs and Article 4.

In the course of the discussion, and in response to Members’ questions, the following were amongst the main points raised:

- In respect of planning, HMOs are classed as small (3-6 people) or large (7 or more people);

- Prior to the city-wide Article 4 being introduced in June, changes from a family house (C3) to a small HMO (C4) did not require planning permission, however they now do;
- The cumulative impact of HMOs can now be considered, ie no more than 10% of residential properties within a 100m radius of the application site to be HMOs, not result in a family house being sandwiched between two HMOs and not result in 3 or more HMOs in a row;
- There are different forms of HMOs which are exempt accommodation and these fall within different categories which do not come under the Article 4 and do not require planning permission as they are a permitted change of use;
- There is an exempt pilot scheme and the operational delivery group is looking to bring service areas closer together to triage accordingly in terms of issues;
- There are a number of factors which determine whether occupants of a property form a single household – the “single household test”;
- From a planning enforcement perspective, there are a number of challenges - gathering evidence is problematic and there often needs to be a pattern of activity over a period of time to be able to reach any conclusions;
- Making internal inspections has been difficult during Covid-19;
- Enforcement action cannot be taken where planning permission is not required but where there are anti-social behaviour issues, these are referred on to relevant departments;
- Planning do not have any control over who lives in the individual properties;
- Appeals can take over 12 months from service of an Enforcement Notice;
- It was noted that Co-ordinating O&S Committee is undertaking a separate piece of work on exempt accommodation.

**RESOLVED:**

- The report was noted.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

(See document 5)

The work programme was discussed and it was agreed that the following items would be programmed for future meetings:

- Housing Repairs and Maintenance Contracts;
- Begging;
- HLBs;
- Localisation Update.

**RESOLVED:**

- The work programme was 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 CHAIRMAN 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.

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The meeting ended at 1600 hours.