

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**HOMES O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING**

**1400 hours on Thursday 14 March 2024, Committee Room 6, Council House**

**Minutes**

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**Present:**

Councillor Mohammed Idrees (Chair)

Councillors: Ziaul Islam, Saqib Khan, Ron Storer, Penny Wagg and Ken Wood

**Also Present:**

Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness (Online)

Claire Flowers, Assistant Director, Housing Development

Colette McCann, Head of Housing Development

Naomi Morris, Head of Strategic Enabling

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chair advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Public-I microsite and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

**2. APOLOGIES**

None.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Members were reminded they must declare all relevant pecuniary and other registerable interests arising from any business to be discussed at this meeting.

No interests were declared.

#### **4. MINUTES**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2024 be confirmed as correct and signed by the Chair.

#### **5. ACTION TRACKER**

The Chair confirmed that the contractor performance information had now been provided. The Committee requested that in future this type of information be presented in a more accessible format.

It was suggested that contractor performance should be discussed in a future meeting.

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the action tracker be noted.

#### **6. COMMISSIONER'S REVIEW AND COMMENTS ON THE AGENDA**

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee noted there were no comments on the agenda from the Commissioner.

#### **7. AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Claire Flowers, Assistant Director, Housing Development; Colette McCann, Head of Housing Development; and Naomi Morris, Head of Strategic Enabling, were in attendance for this item.

Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, was in attendance online.

The Assistant Director, Housing Development gave a brief overview of the report and set out the strategic context. The main points included the challenges to the delivery of affordable homes; the approach taken in Birmingham; and information on what else was being done around the country.

The Head of Strategic Enabling advised the Committee that reliance on social housing in Birmingham was 24% of the population whilst the average for the rest of the UK was around 18%. The level of deprivation in the city and the low number of affordable properties in the private rented sector were factors that pushed people towards social housing and Birmingham has in excess of 22,000 people on the housing register, with around 6,000 households in Band 1. The acute need in Birmingham was for family homes, and building larger family homes was challenging.

The Head of Housing Development provided the Committee with an update on the current position with the Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT) delivery programme. The main points included:

- There had been some funding through the European Regional Development Fund to test and trial energy saving technology to help inform future developments, addressing in particular the Route to Zero challenge and some of the issues residents face around fuel poverty.
- There was a forecast target of 108 new homes to be handed over within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) this year and they were around ten units short of that target due to some slippage on one of the schemes.
- An update was given on the Yardley Brook, Primrose Estate, Highgate Road, and Long Nuke Road new schemes.

During the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the main points included:

### **Right to Buy**

Around 500-600 properties a year were lost through Right to Buy and the Council has limited control and followed imposed rules around how to manage Right to Buy. There was a process in place to buy back properties, which does happen but there was no specific budget set in the HRA for this. A request was made for the Right to Buy regulations to be provided to committee members.

### **Affordable Housing Delivery**

The Government definition of affordable housing was 80% of market rent and social housing was significantly less at around 50% of market rent. There were affordable products in between and a healthy supply of affordable housing would include multiple models to suit multiple households.

The Housing Strategy produced in 2023 stated that 51% of the target of the Birmingham Development Plan requirement for 19,400 affordable homes by 2031 had been achieved. With regard to the planning system and the target of 35% affordable housing for all new developments, the Committee was advised that the Affordable Housing Team was now more engaged at the planning application stage to support negotiations and all new developments were independently assessed.

One of the challenges was the interaction between planning and the affordable housing grant that Homes England provides, which is one of the key ways developers and Registered Providers deliver social or affordable products.

BMHT has always tried to prioritise large family homes where possible and with regard to planning applications, it was about securing the right number and type of affordable homes. One of the challenges was that the grant system works on a per property basis rather than per bed space.

The Committee noted that the delivery of affordable housing was dependent on co-operation with housing associations (HAs) and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness informed Members that the Council has a good working relationship with HA partners who were keen to deliver in the city.

### **Housing Register**

In response to a query in relation to how many properties had been let to people on the housing register in the last year, the Committee was advised that there had been between 2,000-3,000 lets and the exact figure would be provided.

The Cabinet Member added that there was much work underway in terms of delivering housing and advised the Committee that the first meeting of the Housing Sub-Board, chaired by the Commissioner supporting Housing, had been held earlier that week. The Board was cross-party and will meet at least once a month.

**RESOLVED:**

That:

- The Right to Buy regulations be provided to committee members.
- The exact number of properties let to people on the housing register in the last year be provided to committee members.
- The report be noted.

**8. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair confirmed that the three items scheduled for the 18 April meeting were:

- Regulatory Compliance.
- Budget Challenge and Financial Recovery.
- Improving Standards of Re-let Properties Task & Finish Inquiry Evidence-gathering - City Housing.

It was agreed that the meeting would be extended by an hour to finish at 1700 hours.

**RESOLVED:**

That:

- The meeting on 18 April be extended by an hour to finish at 1700 hours.
- The work programme be agreed.

**9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

That the next meeting be held on Thursday 18 April at 1400 hours in Committee Room 6.

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

None.

**11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

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The meeting ended at 1440 hours.