

HOUSING & HOMES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 11 APRIL 2017

UPDATE REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING & HOMES

REPORT BY: COUNCILLOR PETER GRIFFITHS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Following my report to Scrutiny in July 2016 setting out my portfolio priorities for 2016/17, 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 accessing an affordable and decent home in thriving local communities.

The key steps I set out to Committee last July were as follows:

- Develop a housing strategy to ensure all those involved are responding to the needs of local people and improving place and that it develops internal and external partnerships which maximises the City's housing offer.
- Increase the provision of new homes, looking at alternative investment opportunities, different construction methods and development of new housing partnerships.
- Continue to work with our partners to reduce homelessness, tackle rough sleeping and develop a new Homelessness Strategy, including a review of the provision of temporary accommodation and the approach to preventing homelessness.
- Continue to work with partners to improve the provision of homes in the private rented sector and apply appropriate regulations designed to drive up the quality of homes and management offered.
- Maintain the existing good working relationship with tenant groups and City Housing Liaison Board.
- Implement the Housing Allocations Scheme and review after six months.
- Continue to maintain investment in our existing properties with an increased focus on investment in poorer dwellings.
- Ensure that the HRA Self Financing Business Plan continues to be robustly managed.
- Maximise rent collection through the efficiency of void turnaround whilst responding to the emerging impacts of welfare reform.

3. PROGRESS ON DELIVERING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY	PROGRESS
Develop a housing strategy	<p>The Housing Birmingham Partnership is taking the lead on developing a new housing strategy for the city. Two, well-attended workshops have taken place; attracting a diverse group of people including housebuilders, landlords, tenants, students and elected members. The workshops have identified the key themes of housing supply, quality, access and neighbourhoods which will now be developed collaboratively into a high level policy statement to provide the direction for the Housing Birmingham Partnership.</p>
Increase the provision of new homes	<p>We have continued to increase the provision of good quality, affordable and attractive homes for Birmingham residents through the Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT) programme, which was announced as ‘Provider of the Year’ at the Insider Residential Property Awards 2016.</p> <p>So far in 2016-17 the Council has completed 298 new homes, 219 for rent and 79 for sale. The Council has also started construction of 404 rent and 345 sale homes in this financial year, so that as of today the Council has some 921 properties on site under construction across 12 sites all over the city and plans to build around 2,000 further new homes for rent and market sale until 2020, to meet the housing needs of the City.</p> <p>We continued our programme of building 2 bedroom bungalows to encourage older households who are under occupying larger family homes to downsize their accommodation by completing a further 20 of these properties.</p> <p>The Council has also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • launched its direct sales programme under the brand name “Forward Homes” with major housing development schemes at Jarvis Road and Abbey Fields, Erdington, and Perry Common, Kingstanding, which will generate high levels of financial surplus for reinvestment in new social rented housing • approved proposals for the Council to buy privately owned sites, either on a voluntary or compulsory basis and we are working to acquire a number of sites which have been land banked by their owners • started construction of our first purpose build private rented housing scheme at St Vincent St in Ladywood, and obtained

	<p>Cabinet approval to work up proposals for a further 300 new homes to be delivered through InReach, the Council's wholly owned Private Rented Sector company, contributing to our goal of improving the quality of homes offered in the market rented sector.</p>
<p>Work with our partners to reduce homelessness, tackle rough sleeping and develop a new Homelessness Strategy</p>	<p>The Council is committed to reducing homelessness and I have personally identified this as a key priority. To support this, Councillor Sharon Thompson has been appointed as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Ambassador who will champion homelessness and identify good practice in Birmingham and across the UK to shape and inform our own direction.</p> <p>We held a Homeless Summit in October 2016 with partners and stakeholders to explore the key issues and identify the areas for change. This was followed up by a visioning day where partners signed up to the following vision:</p> <p>In Birmingham we will work together to eradicate homelessness.</p> <p>We have completed a Homelessness Review. This is a comprehensive review of the scale and nature of homelessness in the city and forms a key part of the evidence base for developing the forthcoming Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p>A Positive Pathway Programme has been established to drive transformational change across the whole homelessness system and review the internal homelessness system. The emphasis on all of this work is driving forward the early intervention and prevention of homelessness.</p> <p>To support this work we have been successful in bringing in £2.1million through the DCLG Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer and Rough Sleepers funds.</p> <p>Rough sleeping in Birmingham, similar to most cities across the UK, continues to rise and intelligence gathering to understand the root causes and journeys into rough sleeping is underway. This will be informed by the rough sleeping inquiry undertaken by the Housing and Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>We have listened to and responded to issues being raised by partners and service users and have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended the criteria for cold weather provision. At the time of this report it had been available for 78 nights. • facilitated additional hostel provision for people with dogs • established capacity within immediate access hostels for

	<p>couples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established a new network group with charities and volunteers. <p>Following the extensive budget consultation the reduced savings proposal of £3.2 million for the Supporting People programme and Third Sector grants programme will be presented to City Council on 28th February for approval. We are continuing to engage with stakeholders, service providers and Citizen representatives about what future services could look like going forward and the opportunities for co design.</p> <p>The Council will also continue to explore further European Social Fund match funding opportunities for vulnerable people, furthest away from the labour market.</p> <p>Birmingham has also submitted an alternative proposal to DCLG for a local authority led supported housing model. Further dialogue between the local authority, provider representatives and DCLG is planned for the 14 March 2017.</p> <p>The procurement of a new Private Sector leasing Scheme is currently out for tender. Work has commenced on 40, 4-bedroom empty properties in Newtown to bring them back into use as temporary accommodation.</p> <p>The Housing Options Centre in Newtown went live on 7th July 2016 and although a very busy office it continues to provide an enhanced homeless prevention service for the city. The award of the trailblazer funding will assist us in enhancing this offer and preparing the service for the impending Homeless Reduction Act.</p>
<p>Work with partners to improve the provision of homes in the private rented sector</p>	<p>The Council is reviewing its housing standards enforcement by consulting with communities and businesses over Selective Licensing in target wards with high levels of PRS (over 19%) and affected by issues of low demand, poor property conditions, or anti-social behaviour. The Council budget plan highlights the proposal to consult in the following 11 target wards, as a first phase: Edgbaston, Handsworth Wood, Harborne, Ladywood, Nechells, Selly Oak, Sparkbrook, Springfield, Soho and Stockland Green.</p> <p>Data sharing with Homelessness, Housing Benefit, Police and Fire Service is taking place to overlay against data on where in the key wards PRS is located to determine the first wards in a phased approach. The Council is required to formally consult in the target areas for a minimum of 10 weeks which is planned to start by the end of February 2017 and likely to complete by 31st May 2017. If approved, Selective licensing is likely to come into force in those areas in September 2017. The Council only has discretion as a local</p>

authority to introduce Selective Licensing for up to 20% of PRS stock or geographical area. Above this requires Secretary of State approval.

At present the Council only has data from the 2011 Census that shows the overall level of PRS in the city is less than the 19% limit set by Government as the threshold for an area with a high proportion of PRS. This means there would not be a robust case for city wide licensing if a case was presented to the Secretary of State.

The Council has identified the potential risk of displacement to other areas if Selective Licensing is introduced in certain wards. The Council will be evaluating the licensing approach and improving data sharing with partner agencies to determine if this risk factor actually occurs. This could lead to further licensing consultation in newly affected areas. Discussions will be held with Planning and Regeneration as part of the initial consultation to consider how use of powers under Article 4 may be appropriate to protect potentially vulnerable housing areas from this possibility.

The Council has responded to support Government proposals to extend mandatory licensing to all Houses in Multiple Occupation with five or more people sharing in April 2017, which will substantially increase the scope of control over poor quality housing.

Working with the PRS and the Landlord Forum

The Council works with landlords and agents to help improve standards and promote good practice. The Council is a partner in the HOMESTAMP consortium of West Midlands local authorities, Fire Service and National Landlords Association. Homestamp provides advice and guidance on standards and good practice to the landlords and tenants. The Council is also on the board of Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme which supports responsible landlords and is a useful guide for tenants when looking to rent.

The Council supports a Landlords Forum Steering Group which helps to arrange a conference each year. The next one will be held on 22nd March 2017 with over 100 landlords signed up to attend. The conference will provide an opportunity to update private landlords on new legislation as well as presentations on other related topics to the PRS.

Rogue Landlord funding

In 2016 the Council received £110K from the national Rogue Landlord Fund which was successfully used to resource investigations into unlicensed HMOs, potential organised crime in

	<p>the hostel sector and area consultation and/or surveys in Selly Oak and Stockland Green to determine whether enhanced PRS licensing was needed. This funding ceased in June 2016 and a report on outcomes has been shared with members of this Committee.</p> <p>The Rogue Landlord Fund resulted in 7 successful prosecutions in a 9 month period with fines totalling over £30k. The Private Rented Sector team continues to take legal cases against irresponsible and criminal landlords and for instance in December Private Rented Services had four successful prosecutions of landlords/agents for failure to obtain HMO licences and breaches of the HMO Management Regulations. Total fines of £5,521 were imposed and the Council's full costs were awarded in each case.</p> <p><u>Bringing long term private owned empty properties back into use</u></p> <p>In order to remove the negative impact of empty private properties in local communities and increase the supply of much needed housing, Cabinet approved a £4 million package to purchase more privately owned properties which have been empty for a considerable amount of time. Over the last year the Council has brought 303 long-term privately owned empty properties back into use through offering homeowners advice, guidance and support or where this fails through compulsory purchase.</p>
<p>Maintain the existing good working relationship with tenant groups and City Housing Liaison Board.</p>	<p>I have attended City Housing Liaison Board and visited a number of HLB meetings across the city to hear first-hand the issues affecting tenants, leaseholders and other residents.</p> <p>This year, we look to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the HLB movement in the city which is testimony to the hard work and commitment of tenant volunteers. A conference is being planned for HLB members and representatives of TMOs next month focussing on number of issues affecting tenants, such as welfare reform and the statutory changes to tenancy conditions. There will be a number of workshops throughout the day: Universal Credit and Rental Income, Online Universal Credit Application, Welfare Reform and Universal Credit (Including Benefit Cap), and Tenancy Conditions.</p> <p>Later this year we will also be looking at other ways in which HLBs can continue to engage with tenants given the openness and transparency agenda driven by the Council.</p> <p>HLBs continue to play a vital role helping to shape and improve housing services in the city, through co-regulation, checking how well the Council's services measure up to the four consumer standards, (Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Home, Tenancy, Neighbourhood and Community Standard). They continue</p>

	<p>to scrutinise local and district performance information to make sure services are running well and that the Council is providing a good service to tenants. The conference will provide members with useful information to share with those who may be affected, both within their tenant groups and other tenants across the city.</p> <p>There may be scope to involve the informed tenants in the ongoing work of the Welfare Reform subgroup, for example, by asking HLBs to aid potential projects that complement the group's work, focusing on Financial Inclusion, Digital Birmingham and Welfare Reform.</p> <p>City Housing Liaison Board also has a Performance Monitoring Group which helps the Council's housing team understand what tenants and leaseholders think about its performance. The group was set up to ensure that tenants and leaseholders have a greater say in how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed, and about the services they receive from the Council.</p> <p>The group monitors the Council's performance against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Performance Improvement Plan - the Housing Services team's formal plan to improve services • the Tenants' Quality Promise – the team's performance promises to tenants and leaseholders. <p>This often involves discussing performance issues with senior managers from the department, calling in repair contractors to explain for performance issues, making decisions and recommendations to City HLB and helping to develop and improve the performance information provided.</p> <p>The group also reviews the Council's targets and how performance is measured.</p> <p>I would like to thank tenant representatives for their time and commitment as we strive to make further improvements to the housing service.</p>
<p>Implement the Housing Allocations Scheme</p>	<p>From 20th April 2017, the new Housing Allocation Scheme will be operational which sees a change in the way we allocate social housing. Everyone on the current waiting list is being contacted with details about the new scheme and how to re-register.</p> <p>The new scheme will still ensure that social housing is allocated to those most in need, but the new criteria should help to give people a more realistic view of whether they are likely to be made a housing offer. Applicants will need to have some form of housing need in order to qualify to join the waiting list.</p> <p>New applicants will be able to apply under the new scheme as soon</p>

	<p>as it is becomes operational. More information about the criteria applicants need to meet to qualify for social housing can be found at birmingham.gov.uk/allocation-scheme.</p> <p>All Councils must have an Allocation Scheme to determine priorities for allocating social housing and the procedures that will be followed. Birmingham City Council's Allocation Scheme describes the criteria that the Council will use to prioritise applications for homes owned by the Council and homes offered to people on the Council's housing register by registered providers through nominations agreements. The scheme also sets out who will be assisted, how to apply for housing and how homes will be allocated.</p> <p>A number of briefing sessions have taken place for staff, organisations and groups across the city and all Members have received a number of updates on progress, including a market place stall at the Full Council meeting on 7 February. A further session is planned for 4 April, in preparation for the new scheme going live. The new scheme has also been promoted well through the media.</p> <p>Additional support is being offered by the re-registration team on 0121 303 7410 and by email at registration@birmingham.gov.uk</p>
<p>Maintain investment in our existing properties with an increased focus on investment in poorer properties</p>	<p>A £183 million three year programme of investment into council properties was approved by Cabinet on 14th February.</p> <p>This programme will deliver improvements to around 20,000 existing Council properties and will include the provision of new kitchens and bathrooms, upgraded central heating systems, door, window, roof replacements and structural works to traditional/non-traditional construction type properties including electrical and thermal efficiency works, replacement double glazed PVCU windows, replacement heating system, roof replacement works and external/internal improvements.</p> <p>The Council Housing Improvement Programme for 2017/18 to 2019/20 covers work to the cost of £168.626 million and other programmes (including Adaptations) of £14.797 million within a total Public Sector Housing Capital budget of £358.969 million, including clearance and redevelopment costs.</p>
<p>Ensure that the HRA Self Financing Business Plan continues to be robustly managed</p>	<p>The HRA Self Financing Business Plan has been updated and has been reported to Cabinet (14th February) and City Council (28th February). This sets out the key outcomes and priorities for the delivery of Council Housing and the financial projections over the next 10 years (this includes our investment, rent and debt strategies).</p> <p>In summary, the new national rent policy of -1% until 2019/20 has</p>

	<p>had a major financial impact (reduced resources by £42m or 25% of the service budgets). In spite of this, the plan will continue to focus on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investment of £379m over the next 10 years of new homes (almost 150 new properties per year) • investment of £579m over the same period for the maintenance of existing properties and the replacement of major property elements e.g. central heating, windows, rewires, roofs and facias • investment of £669m in the day to day repairs service (including empty property repairs)
<p>Maximise rent collection through the efficiency of void turnaround whilst responding to the emerging impacts of welfare reform</p>	<p>Void property turnaround has improved throughout the year against stretched targets, as a result of the reduced timescales for repairs completions, introduced as part of the new Housing Repairs and Maintenance Contracts (which commenced in April 2016) and improved processes, including the co-location of void management teams with our repairs contractors.</p> <p>Significant improvements have also been made in letting previously long-term hard-to-let dwellings and (although this can impact on overall average turnaround times) these service improvements have enabled the target of available council homes (99.5% of all stock) to be consistently exceeded throughout the year. Currently at 99.6%.</p> <p>The HRA 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)</p> <p>Universal Credit is a single means tested welfare payment which will be paid directly into the bank accounts of eligible households, monthly in arrears including housing costs. This is a Government initiative which is seen as an incentive to encourage people back into work as they should be better off financially which, in turn, empowers people to be responsible for their own budgeting.</p> <p>Rent is currently collected weekly, in advance, and the Universal Credit system disconnects us from the familiar Housing Benefit administration arrangements around which collection systems have been designed and delivered for a generation.</p> <p>We need to adapt rent service design and delivery in unison with cross service functions to deliver a unified, joined up approach to respond to this unprecedented threat to rental income collection.</p> <p>Evidence from other pilot authorities indicates there will be a sharp</p>

	<p>rise in rent arrears when full service is implemented in November 2017. Currently the City Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offers a triaged, 12 week support package is offered by our Lettings Teams for introductory tenancies • delivers a House to Home scheme out of a property in Sparkbrook that shows prospective tenants how to furnish a property on a budget • provides debt advice to those current tenants who need it and are encouraging take up of Discretionary Housing Payments, via the Benefit Service, as a short term measure to assist people in managing their money. The Corporate priority has to be encouraging people into work. • has recruited a Project Manager within the Rent Service to lead on developing and managing a Universal Credit Plan which is now in place and a working document is being continually developed. The keys aims of the plan are to minimise and protect the impact on rent collection, prevent homelessness and support the sustainment of tenancies. A programme board was set up and has been meeting since January. The Board consists of members from across service areas including the Rent Service, Benefit Service and Landlord Services. <p>We will also be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out a service redesign with a view to maintain current rent collection as a minimum • looking to join up the Rent Service with other services within the Council to assist our tenants to sustain their tenancies • looking to introduce a pre tenancy workshop for people on the waiting list which includes information and guidance on how to household budget • Increasing the ways in which tenants can pay and provide new options that will meet individual needs.
<p>Completing the review of housing services to older people</p>	<p>We have undertaken a review of our housing services to older people. A report, approved by Cabinet on 24th January 2017 set out future plans for the service which followed widespread consultation with sheltered housing residents, Trades Unions, councillors and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The review followed the need to make savings whilst at the same time deliver a service that meets users' needs with an onsite</p>

	<p>presence, handyman service, a twice weekly visit and a new floating support service.</p> <p>The changes will continue to support tenants retain their independence and provide support to those that need it, despite the considerable budgetary challenges.</p> <p>Until 2012/13 the support element of the Sheltered Housing service was funded through the supporting people grant - £2.7m per annum - with the property related element funded through service charges to tenants in receipt of the service. In 2013/14, all Supporting People funding to the HRA sheltered housing service ceased and the support element of the services provided to tenants has been fully funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Given the substantial savings to be delivered within the HRA of £42m per annum by 2019/20 the Council needed to reshape the sheltered housing service in order to make it sustainable.</p> <p>There are 4,890 sheltered housing units in Birmingham across 127 sheltered housing schemes. The service provides housing related support to assist older people who are vulnerable to live as independently as possible.</p> <p>Our extensive consultation process with tenants will now move to the implementation stage, and residents will be kept informed of progress. We are also in the process of working through the changes with our workforce.</p>
<p>Review of tenancy conditions in line with Housing and Planning Act 2016.</p>	<p>It is good practice for local authorities to periodically revise their conditions of tenancy to reflect changes in legislation, council policies and any new housing management issues.</p> <p>The existing Conditions of Tenancy were last reviewed in 2010 and now require updating to reflect the following changes:</p> <p>Responses to new legislative requirements - Including for example, the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which sets out changes to succession rules, and introduces the requirement for all authorities to move to flexible tenancies, ending the use of lifetime tenancies for new tenants. There are also new ASB enforcement tools, including mandatory possession orders in the Crime & Policing Act 2014, the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 (subletting for a profit being a criminal offence) and the Immigration Act 2016 introducing the requirement for Right to rent checks for council tenants taking in lodgers. These are not reflected in the current agreement.</p> <p>Responses to Welfare Reform -Including the roll out of Universal credit, the reduced benefit cap and social sector size criteria, all of</p>

	<p>which impact on tenants incomes potentially resulting in non-payment of rent, and presenting a financial risk to the HRA. This has increased the level of interaction with our tenants, as we seek to assist and support those whose financial circumstances are most significantly affected by the changes.</p> <p>Changes in the Council's Allocations Policy –Introducing emphasis on homeless prevention and making best use of stock, including exclusion criteria relating to anti -social behaviour and debt owed to the council together. In addition tenants having 'no housing need' as defined by the Allocation Policy will be unable to join the register.</p> <p>These are not reflected in the current agreement.</p> <p>A programme board is now in place to oversee the review of the tenancy conditions and deliver the statutory tenant consultation. Membership of the board is cross directorate and a Terms of Reference has been agreed. The Board is meeting monthly, overseeing progress. The timescale to implement the statutory consultation phase is indicative at this stage pending the regulations for the use of flexible tenancies due to be issued in the autumn 2017. As a result it is envisaged that the revised Conditions of Tenancies will come into effect in winter/spring 2018 to enable the required procedural and IT changes.</p>
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4. UPDATE ON HOUSING PERFORMANCE/SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

There are five Council Business Plan measures within my portfolio. I am pleased to report that all are on track:

- **'Number of homes built that were 'affordable' homes.** This measure is reported on a half yearly basis. For the period April to September 2016, 353 properties were completed and ready for occupation, therefore exceeding the target of 203 for this period. 178 of these homes have been built on city owned land. Affordable homes have been developed through a number of different funding programmes to enable a range of housing options to be made available across the city.
- **'Private sector empty properties brought back into use.'** The latest performance information available shows that in December 262 private sector empty properties were brought back into use which is above the cumulative year to date target of 243. The work undertaken within the Empty Property Team to achieve this result includes a mixture of enforcement, encouragement and education.
- **Number of properties improved in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) as a result of Local Authority intervention'** was a new Council Business Plan Measure for 2016/17 and has exceeded the target each month; the end of year target of 288 properties was surpassed in November 2016 and in December had increased to 374. The team is continuing to perform well with the help of the Rogue Landlord Fund

project (RLF) which commenced in February 2016. The RLF provided additional resources for inspection and follow up action. The PRS team has managed to receive an extension to the RLF until the end of March 2017.

- **Available council homes as a % of total stock** was a new Council Business Plan measure for 2016/17 and throughout the year has remained above the 98.8% target. In December, the performance was at 99.6% therefore just 0.04% of the total stock was unavailable (241 properties unavailable out of a total of 62,558).
- **Increase in the number of cases where homelessness is prevented or relieved:** whilst performance in December at 1983 cases was below the monthly target of 2250, overall the service is on course to achieve the annual target of 8,000 preventions.

The Council was successful during December in securing 2 grants from DCLG aimed at homelessness: £400,000 to seek to reduce the number of rough sleepers in the City and £1.7 million to seek to prevent homelessness for as many households as possible over the next 2 years.

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

- **We will respond to emergency repairs within 2 hours.** December performance at 81.5% was below the target of 98.1%; however performance has steadily improved throughout the year. A new repairs contract was introduced in April 2016 and this introduced new Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) systems for operatives to record their work activity. Anecdotal evidence shows that operatives have been failing to record their arrival at properties and this is being addressed by the contractors. Additionally the contractors have established separate Quick Response Teams to also improve performance.
- **Resolve routine repairs within 30 days.** The monthly target is 92.6% and in December this was above target at 92.9%. Performance has been steady throughout 2016/17.

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 £284m in 2016/17 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 interest on outstanding debt.

I am also responsible for a capital budget of £116m in 2016/17 /for investment in the existing stock and the building of new homes (this totals £359m over the next three years from 2017/18 to 2019/20).

In addition, I have responsibility for a revenue budget of (£0.4m) and capital budget of £6.7m 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 also have responsibility for the Housing Option Service (this transferred from the People Directorate in October 2016) – the net revenue budget for the service is £2.9m and there is a capital budget of £2.6m in 2016/17. These resources are utilised to provide housing advice to homeless people and to ensure that temporary accommodation is provided for people affected.

I am projecting a balanced HRA outturn for 2016/17 and inevitably due to national policy issues there are pressures on the Housing Options and Private Sector Housing Services. In total, these pressures are estimated at £4.1m for 2016/17 and a number of actions are being implemented to contain the pressure, including:

- Completion of the Hostel refurbishment programme
- Returning former properties into use for temporary accommodation (Newtown)
- Maximising the recovery of housing benefit
- Working with our partners on prevention measures
- To secure more dispersed properties and leased properties.

The public finances will continue to be under pressure over the medium term from 2017/18 to 2020/21 (as set out in the Council's Public Budget Consultation in December 2016 and the Budget Report to City Council in February 2017).

Despite this, additional resources of £3m will be invested in the Housing Options Service (this will ensure that the financial pressures in 2016/17 will be substantially mitigated for future years). In addition, there will be significant investment in the provision of new market renting through the Council's InReach wholly owned company. The HRA will continue to be influenced and affected by national policy developments, in particular the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the Housing White Paper published in February 2017.

I am pleased to report that the government will no longer be implementing the 'Pay to Stay Policy' (this following significant concern from the housing sector, including the tenants of Birmingham). I am hopeful that the government will also not proceed with the proposed levy on Councils relating to the disposal of high value voids.

I will be working hard on behalf of the tenants and citizens of Birmingham to secure the best policy developments relating to the Housing White Paper. This includes a wide range of measures including leaseholders, private sector tenants and landlords and the role of local authorities in the building of new homes. We will be responding to the consultation on the proposals by the deadline of 2nd May 2017.

I am hoping that the Housing Minister will visit Birmingham to see at first hand all the excellent housing work that is being undertaken in conjunction with our stakeholders and important partners.

I will continue to work with Scrutiny colleagues, members, officers and partners across the city, regionally and nationally, to make further progress on our priorities.

Councillor Peter Griffiths
Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes