

## BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

<b>NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 17 SEPTEMBER 2015</b>
--

### **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 1400 HOURS IN COMMITTEE ROOM 6, COUNCIL HOUSE, BIRMINGHAM**

#### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Iqbal in the Chair;

Councillors Atwal, Cartwright, Harmer, Hartley, Jenkins, Lines, Mackey, Pears, Spence and Williams.

#### **ALSO PRESENT:-**

Councillor John Cotton	- Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management and Homes
Rob James	- Service Director Housing Transformation
Anne-Marie Powell	- Integrated Service Head – Housing Strategy
Jonathon Driffill	- Chair of BSHP
Rose Kiely	- Group Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Amanda Simcox	- Scrutiny Research and Policy Officer
Marie Reynolds	- Committee Services

---

#### **NOTICE OF RECORDING**

- 13 It was noted that the meeting was being webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site ([www.birminghamnewsroom.com](http://www.birminghamnewsroom.com)) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs. The whole of the meeting would be filmed except where there were confidential or exempt items.

---

#### **APOLOGY**

- 14 An apology was submitted behalf of Councillor Phillips for her inability to attend the meeting.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 15 Members were reminded that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests relating to any items of business to be discussed at this meeting. If a pecuniary interest was declared a Member must not speak or take part in that agenda item. Any declarations would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 

**MINUTES**

- 16 That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2015 having been circulated to members were confirmed and signed as a true and correct record.
- 

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

**Neighbourhood Management and Homes – to include Private Rented Sector and Lifespan of Tower Blocks – Agenda Item 7**

- 17 Councillor Lines requested a copy of the information pertaining to the above-mentioned item that was circulated by Mr Rob James at the previous meeting.
- 

**Wheelie Bin Roll-out**

- 18 The Chairman highlighted that the above-mentioned item would be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 15 October 2015.
- 

**Equalities, Community Safety and Cohesion**

- 19 Councillor Lines referred to the above item presented at the previous meeting highlighting that it gave no response to the community needs for gypsies, romany travellers. He further referred to the article that he had read several weeks ago, relating to the two plots of land that had been allocated for use by travellers, which he stated could have been used to provide valuable housing provision for the people of Birmingham.

Councillor Lines referred to a statement made by Councillor Ali, Cabinet Member for Development, Transport and the Economy suggesting that the plots had been chosen by the Government and if not utilised for this particular purpose, would be thrown out. In light of this, Councillor Lines under the Freedom of Information Act, obtained the information and highlighted that nowhere in the report was there a request from the Government to carry out this action.

Mr Rob James, Service Director, Housing Transformation, referred to the

above-mentioned report and confirmed that it had been presented by Councillor Ali to Cabinet. He stated that it was about the provision of travellers sites within the city and subsequently agreed to take back the questions raised by Councillor Lines, as to why it was not included within the original submission to this committee.

With regard to the above, Councillor Lines suggested that due to the inaccuracies made by Councillor Ali he should attend a forthcoming meeting of this committee to provide a response.

---

### **Big Lottery**

- 20 Following Councillor Harmer's comment relating to the above-mentioned item, the Chairman requested that it be followed up.
- 

### **TRACKING REPORT: WORKING WITH HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS**

The following report of the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management and Homes was submitted:-

(See document No. 1)

Mr R James, Service Director, Housing Transformation introduced the report highlighting that it was the second tracking report and stated that the working relationship with the City Council and Housing Associations had developed over the last 12 months and continued to strengthen.

He stated that one of the reasons for this was the impending legislation in the form of the new Housing Bill which was due to be published in October 2015. He stated that there was a great deal in there that gave a focus of attention on housing growth and the opportunities for people to buy their own homes. There were some issues around planning and development and over the course of the last few months, and since the Chancellor's budget statement, officers had been working very closely with housing associations and what that meant regarding the operation of the business as a whole, in terms of social housing provision within the city.

He referred to the recommendations within the report and requested that each one of the recommendations was signed off as achieved albeit some had been achieved late.

He further referred to the recommendation that had not been achieved, highlighting that the City Council together with the Housing Associations believed that there was an obstacle at present, in terms of joint procurement opportunities, adding that the relationship between BCC and the Housing Associations needed to be developed further, and that there were some legal consequences that required addressing which would be part of the ongoing work.

Mr R James referred to the comprehensive housing offer and highlighted that through the new legislation other areas would have to be recognised which included; social housing provided by the City Council, social housing provision by housing associations and the growth in the private rented sector which all needed to play a part in meeting the housing needs across the city. He therefore highlighted that the working partnership approach with housing associations needed to be strengthened and to include also the relationship with private landlords and house building programmes, so therefore it would be an overall look at the total housing provision in the city and how that impacts on neighbourhoods that the City was working towards.

Mr R James recommended that they move forward with the comprehensive housing offer and that the committee would not only have the opportunity to work with the directorate on that, but also be able to scrutinise the Executive report that would come forward as a result of that particular work.

Mr J Driffill, Chair of BSHP stated that the relationship with the Partnership and the City had always been generally good especially at an operational level which of course impacted on people's lives. He believed that the Partnership recognised the critical importance of an effective working relationship with the City. He referred to the challenges ahead particularly regarding the more recent budget announcements and the implications this would have. He advised that some of his colleagues had been frantically re-working over the summer period on their business plans as to what could be delivered on the ground which was something that needed to be shared very closely with the City Council. He further referred to the City Housing forum which was a very good opportunity to come up with joint solutions. He subsequently reiterated Mr James' comments relating to procurement and the associated issues relating to this.

### **Recommendation 1**

No comments were received from the Committee and it was agreed that they proceed forward.

### **Recommendation 3**

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Mr R James referred to the presentation he provided at the last meeting that detailed the structure charts for housing-related areas and other relevant departmental contact information.

### **Recommendation 4**

Following an enquiry from the committee relating to communication, Mr J Driffill confirmed that there was a guide for members which was in the process of being updated. When this had taken place he would advise members through the directorate where the information could be accessed.

**Recommendations 5 & 7**

In response to comments and questions from members, Mr R James confirmed the lengthy existence of the BSHP and that it had undertaken some excellent work with the City Council over the years. He highlighted for the need to change and refocus the relationship through the City Housing Forum and through the Birmingham Housing Partnership in order to respond to changes in time, new legislation and issues that were announced in the Chancellor's budget adding that there was certainly a need that required more joint working.

Mr R James referred to the £800m for social housing and agreed to provide further detail relating to the bidding proposal from colleagues in Planning and Regeneration. He confirmed that the 500 properties that had been discussed earlier, were the Birmingham Municipal Trust Properties built by the City Council.

Mr R James referred to the working and engagement with tenants and the amount of hard work that had been undertaken over the last 18 months with the City HLB and their constitution. He stated that tenants had put in a great deal of time, energy and effort, free of charge, to monitor and co-regulate the housing service and that they did a tremendous job in holding the service to account in terms of performance. He further stated that it would be sadly remiss of the service to exclude tenants of any changes and that they were regularly consulted about any developments within the housing service.

**Recommendation 6**

In response to comments, Mr J Drifill stated that the primary arrangement with HCA related to the bidding and although there was a sense in that Birmingham did not have much time and not as many projects as would have liked, the critical thing was that there was a continuing market engagement programme where bids could be worked on and submitted whilst going through the programme period. He referred to the recent budget announcements in terms of the effective reduction of 1% in the rental income over the next 5 years as opposed to the increase that was assumed, which meant, having to reign back on development aspirations. Joint representation from BSHP and Councillor Cotton, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management and Homes had been made to the minister presenting the issues to him. He further referred to the fact that there may be negotiations around 'Right to Buy' although the detail had not yet been driven, believed however now was the time to be making those business based points that could get listened to by the Government.

**Recommendation 8**

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman relating to the outcome of the meeting that had been scheduled for 11 September 2015, Mr R James confirmed that they had had a meeting with Midland Heart who had presented an outline paper to them around Neighbourhood Management. He stated that this was a particular initiative that they had come forward with, as they owned quite a lot of housing stock in Lozells and east Handsworth and therefore

wanted to explore the benefits of collaborative working with BCC management teams, in order to provide an overall service that complimented each other, and any new initiatives, projects or programmes in the future they would be looking into the opportunities for further collaboration.

**Recommendation 9**

In response to comments, Mr J Drifill referred to the rules and standing orders around procurement and the fact that during this time they were being closely scrutinised by the regulator in terms of the procurement process. He referred to the complexity of the rules and regulations around how local authorities had to procure their services and the timescales for renewals and processes that they had to go through in order to do this. He stated that some joint procurement could be a possibility in the future but at present it was not a priority.

The Chairman concluded by thanking Mr R James and Mr J Drifill for attending the meeting and reporting.

21

**RESOLVED:-**

That the information be noted;

That Mr R James provides the information requested relating to the £800m funding for social housing.

---

**CABINET MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT AND HOMES**

Councillor John Cotton, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management provided an overview of his priorities.

He highlighted the importance of good housing policy which was more than providing accommodation for people but also it was about the neighbourhoods that they lived in, the communities they were apart of and about the opportunities to shape and influence the services that operated within those neighbourhoods, as well as a wide set of agendas relating to health and wellbeing to succeed economically which was the platform that people built their lives on.

He referred to the enormous challenges faced around the housing policy in Birmingham highlighting the substantial shift in the housing market with BCC now only owning 15% of the total housing stock and the ever increasing demand for new homes by 2030. He referred to the issues relating to 'Right to Buy' which in time would reduce the stock further, and the rent policy change which would have a significant effect on the council housing revenue account, which in turn impacted on the new build programme and how BCC went forward with their investment of housing stock.

He made further reference to the many issues relating to the welfare provision, the tax credit system and although a great deal of intensive work had been

undertaken with tenants, the bottom line was that the current arrears level had increased significantly due to the changes.

With regard to the above-mentioned challenges he highlighted the themes in how they should be addressed. Reference was made to the importance of managing neighbourhoods properly and effectively with the joining up of the services at a neighbourhood level. He referred to the 38 Place Managers that were responsible for the 40 wards across the city, adding that the system was working well in his ward and that a systematic approach needed to be taken across the city.

He endorsed the importance of joint working with housing associations and looking at how the city could align more of their activity. Further reference was made to the new remit of district committees with developing a community plan and developing the neighbourhood challenge responsibility that would clearly filter up the work that would be done at a local and neighbourhood level.

He referred to the delivery of the housing offer related to people's needs and the changing market due to the old ways not now being sufficient for the task. It was highlighted that some real progress had been made with the Birmingham Municipal Trust which was the biggest single house builder in the city. Reference was made to the new and more transparent housing policy being taken forward at the moment and also the continuation to put investment into early intervention and prevention services.

A further response to people's housing needs was the establishment of the social lettings agency 'Let to Birmingham' which had been working with private reputable landlords in supplying housing provision which was working well. It was highlighted the need to ensure that BCC was cracking down on bad practice and that was the reason for the consultation on the introduction of selected and additional licensing schemes related to areas of the private rented sector, whilst engaging proactively with the Midland and National Landlords Association with regard to the regulations framework.

He highlighted the importance of putting people at the heart of what BCC were doing in policy terms stressing that housing was the foundation that people built their lives on and being able to meet their housing needs as well as the importance of ongoing engagement with them. Reference was made to the proactive work undertaken with the letting suites and also the assistance provided in helping people develop their financial capacity as well as preparing people for the impact of universal credit.

He reiterated that people needed to have the opportunities to shape and influence the services they received. He highlighted the tenant engagement that had been referenced earlier on the HLB movement which he confirmed was a vibrant movement, with lots of dedicated people volunteering their time to advocate on behalf of tenants and also to hold service delivery and performance to account at city and local level. He further highlighted the other forms of engagement that included the citizens' panel that had played a huge part in holding services to account. He concluded by stressing that it was a big agenda

and the importance of partnership working in taking it forward was crucial.

Following comments from members, Councillor Cotton agreed that housing did go down the political priority list and that it was a failure on both sides of the political divide over a number of years. He further agreed regarding the private sector issue and the subtle policy response and the fact that there was a great deal of good landlords doing excellent jobs in providing much needed accommodation. He added that the focus needed to be on where there was poor practice and unacceptable behaviour that needed to be challenged and targeted. Which he confirmed was supported by the majority of landlords and that was why they were having a broad dialogue with them on how BCC shape and regulate the sector that meets the aim rather than just affecting good landlord practice.

With regard to the issues relating to gardens, Councillor Cotton agreed to look into the area of discretion and on the matter of energy efficiency, confirmed that he was having an ongoing discussion with Councillor Lisa Trickett, Cabinet Member for Green, Smart and Sustainable City at the moment. He stated that it was important that properties were energy efficient, not just because of the long term sustainability, but also the implications it had on the individuals in those properties relating to their financial wellbeing. He agreed to provide further detail when it progressed further.

With regard to the usage of brownfield sites, Councillor Cotton confirmed that BCC were being proactive in developing sites and requested that if members were aware of any sites where it was believed little movement was taking place, to contact him and he would take forward.

With regard to the recent introduction of Place Managers, Councillor Cotton confirmed that the new system could take a little time to establish and requested that members provide him with details if they were not getting the rapid response they should expect. He referred to the role of the Place Manager which was to manage the services within the locality and to take forward residents' issues to a tasking type process. He highlighted that Mr R James had the overall responsibility of managing this area of work.

At this juncture, Mr R James stated that the main aim of the manager was to focus on the safe, clean and green in their allocated area. He stated that they would address not necessarily individual issues but long-standing problems in wards and ensure that they have solutions to problems by liaising with other service providers in the locality. In addition to that, they will help elected members in their respective wards to develop a ward plan that brings forward answers to what is contained in the community plan for the district, so there will be specific actions undertaken in the ward with targets and milestones that respond to the community plan developed in the district.

At this juncture the Chairman highlighted the excellent work that had been undertaken by the Place Manager located in his ward.

Councillor Cotton referred to the growing pressures around arrears and the



welfare changes and what was the equivalent of £11m in housing benefit taken out of the system which impacted on people especially young people having to find the funding from their own pocket. He referred to the work with tenants in addressing these issues which included the annual visits programme in undertaking financial assessment work, looking at options and understanding their needs as well as trying to do something bespoke for their situation. He suggested that the first point of contact for tenants should be their local housing team.

As a result of several comments and questions from Councillor Lines the following were amongst the points made:-

Councillor Cotton confirmed that there were monthly updates circulated to elected members relating to the implementation of the allocations policy. He referred to the housing revenue account and the shortfall of £60m that would be created due to the 1% reduction year on year over the next 10 years which in turn impacts on the budget for new build, provision for investment and other areas that were ring-fenced.

He referred to the self-financing deal and the business plan that had been drawn up as a result of it and the impact of the decision taken in the budget in July 2015 around the changes to the rent policy. He referred to the enormous problems it had caused due to the changes in terms of the resources available to take forward the new build programme. He confirmed that the programme would be taken forward however there were some difficult choices to make in order that BCC delivered on their obligations around direct repairs and maintenance and ongoing investment in the housing stock. He stressed that BCC took very seriously their obligations relating to the ring-fencing of the housing revenue account which was signed off by Section 151 officers to ensure the city remained within their legal responsibilities.

Councillor Cotton made reference to the letter sent to the minister and confirmed that he would be happy to share with Councillor Lines, adding that it had already been shared with citizens of the HLB. He further confirmed any response from the letter would also be shared.

In response to further comments from members, Councillor Cotton referred to the issues around houses of multi-occupation and the powers that were used to ensure that they were licensed and that regulations were being correctly followed

Mr R James stated that if there were issues relating to the sub-letting of council properties he confirmed that the department would like to know. However with regard to the sub-letting in the private sector to numerous people, this was a problem and that was where improvements have to be made in working with the private rented sector with the regulation of that sector.

Councillor Cotton agreed with members of the importance of the relationship between a place manager and an acting local policing team.

Mr R James referred to the importance of the work through the local delivery groups and the safety community groups which was important for both the city and the police in terms of managing the neighbourhoods. He referred to recent discussions with West Midlands Police regarding their current thinking on neighbourhood policing and that they want to look at implementing the new neighbourhood policing regime with the involvement of BCC regarding the design element.

The Chairman stated that the committee would be looking at neighbourhood challenges in February 2016 and subsequently requested an update from Councillor Cotton with his work on the districts.

Councillor Cotton stated that there had been a lot of work undertaken over the summer period regarding the recasting of the role of district committees and a great deal of intensive work undertaken with the chairs of districts, to ensure that they understood the new roles and responsibilities of districts. He confirmed that district committees were now starting to meet and shape out their new community plans and identify the subjects for what their neighbourhood challenges would be. He stated that he was liaising with district chairs and by February expected a much clearer picture and also an understanding of what some of the neighbourhood challenges had been focused on, and how the community plans inform what the districts were doing. He agreed to keep the committee updated as it was taken forward.

The Chairman concluded by thanking Councillor Cotton for presenting.

22

**RESOLVED:-**

That the presentation and comments be noted;

That Councillor Cotton update the committee with his work on districts at a future meeting.

---

**NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY SERVICES O&S COMMITTEE  
WORKING PROGRAMME**

Councillor Jenkins referred to the next meeting in October and requested that due to the volume of information, requested that it be circulated earlier.

Councillor Cartwright referred to the issues arising from travellers and whether something could be done to change the law. He therefore requested that the item be placed on the work programme for consideration.

The following paper was received:-

(See document No. 2)

23      **RESOLVED:-**

That the Work Programme be noted.

---

**DATES OF MEETINGS**

24      It was noted all meetings are scheduled for the following Thursdays at 1400 hours in the Council House:

15 October	-	Room 2
19 November	-	Room 1
17 December	-	Room 6
21 January	-	Room 6
18 February	-	Room 6
17 March	-	Room 2
21 April	-	Room 6

---

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

25      The Chairman advised that there had been no requests for call in/councillor call for action/petitions received.

---

**OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

26      No other urgent business was raised.

---

**AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS**

27      **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.

---

The meeting ended at 1540 hours.

.....  
CHAIRMAN