Minutes of City Housing Liaison Board  
Thursday 24th January 2019, 18:30 hr - 20.30 hr  
Committee Rooms 3 and 4, Council House, Victoria Square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present: CHLB Members:</th>
<th>HLB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joan Goodwin</td>
<td>Yardley Wood and Warstock (CHLB Chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie Howard</td>
<td>Highgate and Ladywood (Vice Chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Horton Griffiths</td>
<td>Bartley Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neon X</td>
<td>Harborne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Nicholl</td>
<td>Quinton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek Lay</td>
<td>Kingstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Horton</td>
<td>Hall Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike McCartan</td>
<td>Hodge Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill Evans</td>
<td>Shard End (deputy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zafar Mir</td>
<td>Washwood Heath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Lees</td>
<td>Deputy, standing in for Aaron Blake Knight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget O’Brien</td>
<td>Weoley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm Nicholls</td>
<td>Druids Heath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Shipton</td>
<td>Sutton Coldfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Harrison</td>
<td>Sheltered Housing Liaison Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Hands</td>
<td>Vice Chair Hodge Hill HLB (Observer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazell Abbots</td>
<td>Shard End (Observer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Walton</td>
<td>Aston HLB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At 7.30 p.m. Simon Walton left the meeting due to ill health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officers/Councillors</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colin Hanno</td>
<td>RI &amp; TMO Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Spurrier</td>
<td>Tenant Participation Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob James</td>
<td>Strategic Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey Radford</td>
<td>Head of Housing Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Haydon</td>
<td>Parks and Services Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parmjit Phipps</td>
<td>Finance Business Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Campbell</td>
<td>Resident Involvement and TMO Support Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianti Dianti Suparyanto</td>
<td>Resident Involvement Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanya Hardanto</td>
<td>Resident Involvement Intern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Councillor John Lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derrick Novell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Walters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart Scandrett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arron Blake Knight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl McCooty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Middleton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Fitzgibbon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
01. Apologies and Welcome
Joan Goodwin, CHLB Chair made a statement about conduct. She reminded all members to make sure they were professional and that appropriate language was to be used in all instances. The Code of Conduct was in place and was to be adhered to by each member and any threats or bad language would not be tolerated.

Joan pointed out that a complaints procedure was in place to be used if necessary; it was inappropriate to ‘bombard’ volunteer tenants or officers and that all must be respectful to others.

02. Minutes of last Meeting – 6th December
Page 2, Councillor Lines had asked for an update about the sprinklers. Tracey Radford said she would ensure Councillor Lines was responded to. They were looking at inviting the Regeneration Officer to the next CHLB meeting in February 2019.

Page 2 under Matters Arising, line four should read, ‘how will BCC resolve the issue’. This would be corrected.

With the above amendment made and comments noted, the minutes dated 06/12/2018 were accepted as factually accurate.

03. Matters arising
Eddie Howard confirmed that he did visit the Birmingham Back to Backs and he was impressed with them and how people used to live in the old houses.

04. Chair Comments
Joan confirmed that as there had been the Christmas break, there wasn’t much to report. She attended a meeting earlier today and would go through this during the course of the meeting.

Something had come in regarding the Hackett report about the sprinklers; Rob James would explain further.

Tonight would look at the finance report as it was coming to the end of the financial year, what we have left and what the future held for us.

05. Rob James, Housing Green Paper Update
Parmjit Phipps is relatively new to our organisation and has picked things up quickly. I would like to express my gratitude for the work she has undertaken so far.

The Green Paper came out of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The Green Paper was the Voice of the Tenant. All elements of the Green Paper is about making social housing more acceptable, more affordable and recognising the importance of it.

Tenants have worked with officers nationally and you submitted your own response. From the Birmingham City Council perspective a response had been submitted and also from the Town Council perspective.

Retained council housing had put in their response too. Jointly, we were all of the same view. The views reflect what we all think about it and how we think we should move forward.
On a number of occasions, from the Green Paper I was able to say, ‘we already do that in Birmingham’. It is about involving tenants. That demonstrates what we think of you as tenants, also the time, effort and energy we all put in to improve social housing.

There are five key principles in the Green Papers.

Safe and decent home - We all want that, so that term should be made clearer. The decent homes standards weren’t decent at all. We want legislation; what specifically is a safe and decent home, so that landlords know what they are supposed to do.

It is not just about the property but also outside the property, communal areas and the whole neighbourhood.

We cited that our tenants should be involved in block champions, Housing Liaison Boards and Estate Walkabouts. We think these are good examples of what other landlords would adopt with their tenants.

Who is best to tell us if things are going wrong? It’s you; you have a role to play in that. Our response following Grenfell, regarding our communication with tenants shows what a really good working relationship we have.

There are also other organisations that we tap into, for example the Fire Service and the visits in tower blocks. We recognise we have to work collaboratively with other services and we should be comfortable with asking for support from other services.

You have an escalation process; if you don’t get things done you bring them to your HLBs. We have good examples of how we manage complaints and how you manage us in terms of performance. You have HLB chairs and local Councillors, in Birmingham we involve you and you hold us to account.

One of the suggestions in the Green Paper was about having league tables to compare other Local Authorities and Housing Associations. I’m not so sure that’s a good idea. Competition is great but if you are not comparing the same size of stock, areas etc., it invites unfair criticism.

We could instead look at how we spend the rent and turnaround on void properties but it also depends on the age of your property. There are lots of variables so this can skew the timescale. For example, all housing association properties are only 10 years old.

I do think our reporting is good.

The role of the regulator - Groups had made complaints and the Tenant Management Organisation did nothing about them. The Tenants Action Group said they didn’t know there was a higher body they could complain to at the time. They will investigate any complaint.

There was a suggestion about stock transfers in the Green Paper and we rejected this, we did not think this was a good idea. It referred to community led housing. We have no objection to this as we already we have this.
There has got to be a mixed provision but it is not a good idea to wholesale transfer our properties to another organisation for them to manage. Council housing is a vital element to the whole housing agenda.

Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities - some tenants said there was a stigma attached to living in a council house. I don’t see that, tenants are proud to live where they do. They are proud of the council provision in this city where tenants are living in properties and getting on with their neighbours. We have a strong track record of being proud of being council tenants, if you look at Birmingham in Bloom, what a fantastic event and residents take part in that every year.

Building social homes that we need – There was an announcement at the conservative party conference about lifting the volume cap so we can borrow more money to build more houses. The point though is, can we afford to pay back and whilst we are paying that back, what are we not doing? If they reverse the rent reduction we can invest more. It is good news as long as we can pay it back.

Some MPs saying that Right to Buy has had its day. In the Green Paper it says there is a need to consider the impact of Right to Buy on social housing. Sons and daughters of the right to buy tenants often rent out the house privately so they are not looked after in the same way. It is important to have an assessment of the impact of Right to Buy.

From the Hackitt Review, there are 52 recommendations around building regulations. We will be working through each of these regulations.

Thank you again for your time and effort for producing your response to the Green Paper

Eric Shipton: The debt cap has to be abolished. Does the debt on the HRA account have to be taken into account before building new homes?

Rob James: No, that’s my point about affordability, borrowing more money and debt repayment. We have to retain a contingency.

John Harrison: Where is the letter of response on the Green Paper that was sent on our behalf?

Jessica Fitzgibbon will circulate it with the minutes.

Finance report. Parmjit Phipps, Finance Business Partner
Parmjit led the CHLB members through the HRA self-financing business plan 2019+ and this should be attached to and read in conjunction with, these minutes:

This year we are in good health, the presentation is around our proposals for the next financial year and these plans will be based on the council’s budget.

On the national context there are shortages in private and social housing. We are looking at our stock; there is a continued pressure in terms of homelessness.

There is financial impact regarding welfare reform notably the roll out of Universal Credit across the UK. It hasn’t completely rolled out yet but there is an increased level of debt. These welfare reforms impact the financial numbers.
Service and financial objectives (as detailed in the presentation):

**Building new homes and maintaining our stock**
Continuing building new homes through BMHT (1866) and maintaining current stock
Replace major elements, e.g. heating and windows
Statutory day to day repairs and health and safety
Adaptations to properties for independent living.

**Local Housing and Estate Services**
Continue modernisation of services
Remodel Estate Services
Improving performance on rent collection/empty properties

**Strong Financial Discipline**
National rent policy to 2019/2020. Next year there is a 1% reduction on rent charges and we are looking at debt ratios and how we are making sure we are providing a sustainable model.
Strategic sustainability/affordability indicators e.g. debt rations, property debt levels. How can we remodel how we operate, so that we are more efficient and cost effective?

Key changes are on property numbers, (new builds and demolitions). Over the next 10 years 270 new units being built.

**Pension contributions**
The 2019 Government policy on the levy on high value voids hasn’t materialised; that cost has now been taken out.

**Sprinklers** - we are looking at re-profiling.

Parmjit Phipps went through the HRA Business Plan 2019+ figures detailed on the presentation on pages 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Page 6: There will be a high level look at the next four finance years and what the changes are each year.

Additional costs re property and changes, revenue contribution regarding property levels and net movement in terms of cost.

Page 7: How your rent is spent
You will see a number of increases and decreases, driven by what we are doing with the stock, e.g. in debt repayment. Overall weekly rent goes down by 1%

Page 8: Capital Investment Plan
What we are going to be spending and these are the movements.

Page 9 is the total sum of what we are investing in 2019/2020. New units, new builds. There is a whole number of investments going there.
Page 10: Key indicators
Looking at the number of properties within the HRA, next year £60,566 and so on and so forth.

There is a debt ratio of four to one. We are looking to gradually reduce this to a debt ratio of two to one by 2050.

Next steps. The plan will go to Cabinet in February 2019, which will then go to City Council for approval, this will also take place in February.

Questions
Eddie Howard, Vice chair: Is the Housing Revenue account still ring-fenced?
It was confirmed that the account is still ring-fenced.

Jim Nicholl: Please explain, in the Council’s budget, I am surprised there is an attempt to remove two contact centres and the Tenancy Estate Management which will then be in the corporate call centre. The proposed saving is £175,000. Why then is that saving not including the tenants? Are council tenants still paying for the upkeep of the call centre in our rent? If so, why are they paying for something they don’t use? The Corporate call centre is funded through council tax so what saving is this?

Tracey Radford: Firstly the saving is general funds savings. If there wasn’t any savings around the collaboration of those services, required by the HRA (Housing Revenue Association), would come back into the housing revenue accounts. It’s about ensuring there is collaboration across the council and making sure tenants have the best service.

There will be IT improvements that local housing teams wouldn’t be able to fund. We are talking to staff through a formal consultation with unions next week and will be closely monitoring. Arrangements will be put into place so that the service continues to run excellently.

Rob James: It’s about efficiency and the best possible service for the tenants. There is a contribution from the housing revenue account that provides services specifically for tenants. This will be reviewed at least annually. We are not paying for services we do not receive.

In respect of leaseholders and their contributions, I will need to look into this.

Jim Nicholl: When it was a free service we still had to pay for the phone calls, leaseholders do not use the call centre as their repairs are their own entirely. I was told years ago that the upkeep of the call centre was £1.75 but is now £17. If it was a free service, why do leaseholders have to pay that?

Rob James: We will look into this and come back to you.

Eric Shipton: Universal credit won’t be rolled out nationwide at the moment as they want to conduct a pilot in the Midlands with 10,000 people to learn from lessons so far.

Eddie Howard: Universal credit is now going to affect 55,000 pensioners on pension credit. There are tenants in my area in receipt of universal credit and I feel sorry for them. Once they have paid rent and council tax, what they are left with is unbelievable.
Rob James: From a housing perspective, we will do all we can to support tenants to make sure they get the right amount of benefits. From the Local Authority’s point of view that’s all we can do but we will point people in the right direction to get the right benefits.

Joan Goodwin: It is disgusting that in this day and age we are the sixth richest country in the world and people in work have to have universal credit.

I am very proud of the work Birmingham City Council has done and the House of Lords want to know how we do it, helping our tenants in the best possible way but we shouldn’t have to do that, they should be on a living wage.

Diane Horton-Griffiths: With regards to adaptions for properties for independent living, how are you going to identify the properties and what people will need in them? Neighbourhood support officers are covering six schemes and in between that, referrals and tenants meetings, how will they ever get round to assessing adaptations?

Also, when some of these people are moved into the blocks, they are already connected for a washing machine and they may have a shower but if they don’t have them, we’re told housing officers are saying ‘tough luck, you’ll have to get your own’. How are we going to identify people who do need adaptions?

Rob James: Adaptions are called Disabled Facilities Grants. These are grants that come into the Local Authority and they are for all council and private properties. There is an assessment made through adult Social Care for what is required. There are two stages; minor adaptions are taken from adult social care budgets. These would be referred to our capital investment team in order to undertake. Then there are major adaptions. This requires major capital work to the property. Occupational therapists refer these cases.

Government had made an extra £55 million available next year for Additional Disabled Facilities Grants, which means an extra £1.3 million for us.

This is a start and we should welcome it. We will look at how we get the best use of that grant. The Capital Investment Team will work with adult Social Care to streamline to make sure people get the right adaptations.

A number of people need to move into adapted properties but we don’t have enough of those. How can we invest into these homes so they are ready and completed for people to move into?

Tracey Radford: Sheltered schemes
12 months ago, Carol Dawson and I presented to you that we had £3 million stopped from supported funding for sheltered housing, so we delivered a new model to you; we had to scale it down because money is not available.

If the officers in these schemes feel a referral for an assessment for adaptions is appropriate, they will do so.
Diane Horton-Griffiths: Some of the neighbourhood support officers are worked very hard and I see this myself regularly. There are not enough officers for the schemes; can't there be loans for tenants who need adaptations?

Tracey Radford: I understand your concerns about officers being spread too thinly but that is due to being cut £3 million pounds. This is the reality but services are being looked at.

For vulnerable tenants our team can help them get white goods etc. and we will endeavour to support them to get these installed. Looking forward we will look at what more we can do to help people in this particular way.

Eric Shipton: Under the Right to Buy scheme, ministers said for every house sold we would build a new one but how many were built? We need to build new properties.

Parmjit explained that the 2012 HRA self-financing settlement included an estimated number of Right to Buys expected each year and associated income, over a 30 year period, which was determined by Central Government. The Council is obliged to pay Central Government 75% of the assumed value of these RTBs, net of the assumed debt on the properties and a fixed sum admin charge per property – set at £1,300. The income retained is classed as a general RTB receipt and can be used to fund HRA capital investment or HRA debt repayment. (Note that the HRA BP 2019+ includes a debt repayment in the Housing Revenue Account for all RTB sales to ensure that the HRA remains financially viable in the longer term).

Ron Lees: I am now getting fed up that pensioners are having to have stand up washes as they can't get into the bath. In order to have showers fitted, the staff said you can have one fitted but you will have to pay for it.

Tracey Radford: There is a criterion for adaptations and each individual has their own assessment. I am happy to take particular issues away and look at them.

Ron Lees: I will get names and flat numbers.

Tracy Radford: Please email them to me

Jim Nicholls: Under Universal Credit, does the Local Authority pay rent directly to them, rather than a lump sum?

Rob James: Landlords can apply to have rent paid direct with the tenant’s agreement. There is a review of universal credit. There is a process but it is a drawn out one.

**07. Joe Hayden, Grounds Maintenance Update**

The Grounds Maintenance Contract finishes at the end of March 2019. We explored options for going forward and took these to Cabinet. A decision was made to bring the grounds maintenance back in-house.

The existing external contractors are Engie and Glendale. All their staff will transfer to BCC and will come to us at the end of March. The advantage for this is supervision, accountability and monitoring.

We went to about 13 national companies and asked them to give us an idea of price if we went out
back into the market. Were told 20 to 30 percent increase of what it is now; Birmingham City council do not have the money for this increase.

We face the threat of a legal challenge as we reduce the contracts year on year but we can deliver the existing contracts if we bring them back in house.

Two of the external contractors pay their staff minimum wage. As Birmingham City Council is signed up to the living wage there will be an increase there, so we will look at what we are delivering to ensure good service.

We are looking to carry out an amenity grass cut, 12 times a year. This is the minimum we can get away with using the grass cutters as they will not cope with grass that has been left longer between cuts.

As the service is coming back in-house we have to buy a complete kit of new equipment. We will be changing the triple mowers to a rotary mower; this will cut a greater length of grass and larger surface area so we will be proposing 10 cuts a year when we have this equipment. We are confident that with the new machines the finished cut will be the same.

We have a staggered programme for cutting, when we go to 10 cuts we will cut the grass every 3 weeks from March.

Sheltered schemes will remain at 21 cuts with the traditional mowers. Shrubs and gardens will stay the same. What we propose is within the current budget envelope.

Derek Lay: They don’t conduct a litter pick before they mow where I live. When they do the shrubbery, the debris is left and not cleaned up.

Eric Shipton: If you are taking the staff on who are already there, will there be much retraining as some of the people are out there and shouldn’t be?

Joe Hayden: Yes they will all receive new training.

Jim Nicholl: So you won’t be using agency staff on minimum wage anymore?

Joe Hayen: There will be some agency staff in the summer but we haven’t paid minimum wage in years. They are paid the same as permanent staff.

Jim Nicholl: Will there be a Service level agreement for the hedges? Hedge height at the front of the properties with no spreading to the side? On Hagley Road West, by the high hedges, three people have been mugged. There are those who don’t want hedges to the front of their property.

Joe Hayden: I will come out with you again.

Malcolm Nicholls: When there is rubbish on the grass, some mower men will pick it up. Otherwise they mow around it. If they don’t, it’s confetti all over the grass.

Joe Hayden: When the service comes back in-house, we are keeping the same ground maintenance specification so rubbish is to be picked up before mowing. If they don’t, it will be investigated. When it is back in-house it can be more effectively monitored.
Ron Lees: I agree with that sentiment; there is no management around. When it moves back can you assure us they will adhere to the policies set out?

Joe Hayden: Yes.

Joan Goodwin: On our walkabouts we pick litter up. I am glad we are trying something better because, sometimes a contractor can’t come out because he hasn’t got a spare. I’m pleased to hear you’re buying a new fleet because we’ll get the hedges cut.

Tracey Radford: The Cabinet member for housing has asked me to circulate to you what she will send to the councillors tomorrow. Can you all read and let me know if you agree it so I can take it back to Cabinet tomorrow?

All CHLB members read the proposal.

Neon X: Leaseholders have to pay for it.

Tracey Radford: What is going out to the Councillors and MPs is to let them know that we are fitting the sprinklers and to try to get funding for that. There will be no charge; you asked if we could write to everybody. As it is a three year programme we will be doing that block by block to make sure everyone gets the message.

Malcom Nicholls: 5th paragraph down, ‘balcony panels removed’. What are they removing?

Tracey Radford: It’s the in filled panels.

Malcom Nicholls: You will start a mass panic.

Tracey Radford: As we start the work we will be talking to the tenants, why and how we are doing it, contractors will be on site so anyone who has an issue can speak to them at that time.

Rob James: We have been approaching the Government since Grenfell. It will cost £30 million. We are not charging leaseholders as that wouldn’t be fair.

We thought it was unfair for tenants to pay for this through their rent so we started lobbying Government and we have used some capital funds. Leaseholders will benefit but in our calculations, out of that £30 million, we are asking Government for a contribution to that, for each party and leader. We have asked them for £19.4 million. That has not been forthcoming despite all efforts.

All councils are asking for this, not just Birmingham. They want to join this lobbying to government for a contribution and want other Local Authorities to as well. Sharon is prepared to lobby on our behalf.

Jim Nicholl: Will it cover Tenant Management Organisation properties as well?
Rob James: Yes, we need to manage the TMOs in respect of what they are doing; we will not make them take responsibility or accountability.

Diane Horton-Griffiths: During the CHLB held on 20/09/2018, Jim Nicholls asked a question about sprinklers in each flat. During CHLB held on 06/12/2018 Councillor Lines echoes this. What if tenants refused the sprinklers? There have been no direct answers to this question.

Rob James: I would want to see sprinklers in each flat. Where we have talked to other Local Authorities, the show flat is really important to allay fears and so that all tenants know what it means for each individual flat. We don’t want one or two to compromise the safety of others in the block but we don’t want to force them either. Communication around this is key. In Croydon, they had some resistance but when they showed them what it would involve and what it would look like, they came round to the idea.

Eddie Howard: When I went into Adelaide Tower I thought it was excellent. You can’t even tell the sprinklers are there, all you see is the disk, and it was excellent.

08. Any Other Business
Jim Nicholl: As chair of Quinton HLB, we try to deal with the issues around council tenants. I am inundated with complaints from leaseholders about service charges. Sheltered housing – complaints about lack of communication and someone is reporting back to Leaseholder liaison board.

Joan Goodwin: You are well aware the leaseholder board has not operated in quite some time. You as a leaseholder should be sorting out the leaseholder board. You need to go back to the leaseholder board officer and find out the issue.

Jim Nicholl: I was told all was ok and above board but that’s not happening. It was set up in 1999 and operated nicely.

Rob James: I don’t have the answer. I need to get the officers to investigate it and bring something back here. Tracey Radford and Colin Hanno will do this.

Tracey Radford: Sheltered Housing - Joan Goodwin had raised the issue of services charges and the caretaker’s charges and how they are shared across the city. We are doing a review of all the services charges, e.g. universal credit is not going at a pace it will be brought back to CHLB.

Eddie Howard: I agree, £30 a week service charge and we aren’t getting value for money.

Tracey Radford: We will come and talk to you as part of the review.

Jill Evans: When the properties were empty and decent furniture left in, who is responsible for this? I had an issue with two tenants. Who do I complain to? Tracey Radford: Please email me.

Joan Goodwin thanked all for attending and gave out date and time of next meeting.

The next meeting for City Housing Liaison Board

Page 11 of 12
will be held on:

Date: 28/02/2019

Time: 6.30 till 8.30

Venue: Council House, Committee Rooms 3 and 4