# Minutes of City Housing Liaison Board

# Thursday 20th April 2023, 16:30 p.m. -18.30 p.m.

# Microsoft Teams

| **Present: Members: Name** | **Surname** | **Housing Liaison Board** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Eric | Shipton | Sutton Coldfield |
| Malcolm | Nicholls | Druids Heath |
| Jennifer | Walters | Lozells & East Handsworth |
| Michael | Dodd | Quinton |
| Dadirai  | Tsopo | Harborne |
| Jeff | Horton | Hall Green |
| Carl | McCooty | South Yardley |
| Collette | Bailey | Aston |
| Samantha | Vaughan  | Perry Barr |
| Pat  | McCartan | Bromford |
| Bruce | Pitt | Frankley |
| **Officers/Councillors** |  |  |
| Councillor Zakar | Choudhry |  |
| Paul | Langford | Interim City Housing Director |
| Stephen  | Philpott | Housing Solutions & Support Director  |
| Jonathon  | Robertson | Housing Manager (Acting) - Lettings |
| Natalie  | Smith | Head of Service Housing Management |
| Wendy | O’Malley | Housing Manager |
| Colin | Hanno | Engagement Manager |
| Winnie | Edwards | Change Management Officer |
| Jean  | Campbell | RI & TMO Support Officer |
| **Apologies** |  |  |
| Councillor Richard | Parkin |  |
| Rishi | Spolia | Interim Head of Housing Management  |
| Wayne  | Davies | Director - Asset Management |

1. **Apologies and Welcome**

**0.2 Introduction to the Meeting**

**Eric Shipton** welcomed all to the meeting**.**

**0.3 City Housing Update by Paul Langford**

BCC’s final submission has been sent to the Housing Ombudsman, regarding the issued Paragraph 49 report. We have received a positive response from the Housing Ombudsman regarding how BCC has responded to the action plan to improve the way customer complaints also the quality of BCC’s services. are dealt with. Also, regarding the quality of BCC’s services. The issues/cases contained within the Paragraph 49 report range from 2008 -2021. We have addressed some of the process issues contained within the overall action plan, also the quality and nature of some of the services that are provided. During last winter the number of complaints received by BCC were very high. The complaints related to damp and mould conditions. We have allocated additional resources into the Compliance team. BCC response and turnaround times have been affected, a holding response will be sent to the residents and stake holders. The Housing section and the Contact Centre are trying to deal with the complaints backlog. We anticipate bringing this under control within the next few months, as there is high demand for housing services. The tragic death of the young boy Awaab Ishak’s (in Rochdale), during 2022. Also, the cost-of-living issues, disrepair issues, have all compounded and led to this situation. We are beginning to see some improvements in levels of performance.

The Housing Revenue Account business plan we are working with external consultants in order to ensure that our investment plans are completely affordable moving forward. We have received requests from the Social Housing Regulator to share performance and compliance information. We are in the process of obtaining bids for the Repairs and Maintenance procurement contract. A new contact will start in 2023/24.

**0.4 Minutes of last Meeting**

Minutes of the last meeting were checked for points of accuracy. The minutes were approved by the CHLB members.

**0.5 Matters Arising**

**Collette Bailey** asked regarding cleaning, is it defined as sweep/wipe, or it is only to wipe the ground floor? The cleaning in the block has not been done properly. Other tenants in the block have made complaints.

**Natalie Smith** responded the Caretaker should walk around the block daily. The cleaning should be carried out daily. The concern can be raised with the local manager if the cleaning has not been done.

**0.6 Chairs Comments**

We will hold one minute silence for Diane Horton-Griffiths who has passed away. Diane was a very vocal and hardworking member of the HLB and the PMG group. Diane will be sorely missed.

**Eric Shipton** stated regarding the PMG reports. The reports are good. The contractors were having problems but have now brought in extra staff and resources to resolve the issues.

**0.7 Homelessness update by Stephen Philpott**

The key themes of the presentation are below:

**Housing Solution & Support Service**

* **Services and Interventions:** There areHubs for Domestic Abuse, Youth, Offenders and Vulnerable Adults. New Aston House for in-person homeless applications. Accommodation Finding Team, work with Private Landlords.
* Welfare advice and benefits. There is a Mediation Service. There are Home Visits to tenants.
* **Part 6 (Housing Register) Cases Per Week:** The number of applications received, and decisions made continues to exceed previous years. New Allocation Policy launched on 18th January 2023
* **Current Housing Solution Initiatives**: There are Property Acquisitions. Private Sector Leasing. Local Housing Allowance. Improvement Grants for nominations and Building Affordable Homes.

For further details see the full presentation slides

**Eric Shipton** asked how many people who make a claim/application for homelessness are local, from Birmingham or are people coming from other parts of the country?

**Stephen Philpott** responded BCC have a statutory duty, we must assess whether the applicant has a local connection as part of their homeless application. The local connection means to have immediate family in Birmingham, or are employed in Birmingham, or have lived in Birmingham three years out of the last five years. Or have lived in Birmingham for at last six months. The applicant must pass one of the tests. Unless the applicant is fleeing from violence in the household and cannot safely stay where they were previously living in their own Local Authority. If a person does not have a local connection and are not fleeing violence. Then the team would carry out an assessment. We would then refer them back to their Local Authority. There is a set of tests that we apply relating to local connection criteria.

**Eric Shipton** stated I understand there was a piece of legislation, especially for private landlords, which states no blame, no eviction. If the landlord wanted the tenant to move out of the property. The landlord could rent the property to a new tenant at a higher rent. Is this still the case?

**Stephen Philpott** responded this refers to section 21, which is the No Fault Eviction, where the tenant of a private landlord has an Assured Shorthold tenancy. The landlord does not have to give a reason why they are evicting the tenant. The landlord will have to go to Court. The landlord can legally evict the tenant without evidence such as rent arrears, nuisance to the neighbours or without anti-social behaviour. The only reason required the landlords wants the property back. There is no change in the legislation.

**Eric Shipton** stated the Government has released finances for homelessness, does the funds go towards the cost of accommodation to avoid the use of hotels, bed & breakfast. Also, to convert properties into accommodation.

**Stephen Philpott** responded BCC has a single Homeless Accommodation program we buy properties to be available for people with disabilities who may also, have been a rough sleeper. BCC has received a grant from the Government which is the Homeless Prevention grant this is used to lease properties. BCC does not have enough affordable social housing; people are dependent upon the private rented sector. The Government reduced their targets for building affordable homes, in Birmingham this has contributed to the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless families/people.

The wider development programme BCC is currently using the general fund as capital to buy properties in Birmingham. An example previously used for student accommodation Oscott Gardens, Perry Barr, Birmingham, BCC has purchased the property. BCC need to ensure we are building homes for the people that need accommodation, part of the biggest challenges is finding homes for larger families.

**Collette Bailey** asked we have a rough sleeper in the block, people who are homeless and are vulnerable, who receive welfare benefits. Dose your team have a Support Worker who could provide guidance to rough sleepers. Vulnerable people need help with rent payments made directly to the Rent Service/landlord.

**Stephen Philpott** responded where a person lives in supported housing, for example a hostel, the rent can be paid directly to the landlord. There was a change to Universal Credit, this affected people who do not live in supported housing. Welfare benefits can be paid directly to the individual. The individual can request the rent is paid directly to the landlord. BCC has a Housing First scheme which allows vulnerable people to have their own flat, support is offered to the tenant to pay their rent and other bills.

**Councillor Choudhry** asked how many families with three to four children? The families came from outside Birmingham and are in a hostel or bed & breakfast accommodation. Also, how many bedrooms do they have?

**Stephen Philpott** responded regarding the people from out of city. Currently there are 286 families or households in bed & breakfast accommodation. The number of bedrooms per family, will depend on the bed and breakfast or the hotel and how big the rooms are. It also, depends on the number of people and the ages of the children. Also, it will depend on whether the family use a cot or beds for the children. Or if a bunk bed is used for children.

**Councillor Choudhry** asked do the families cook their own meals in the hostel or bed & breakfast accommodation. I have received complaints, issues and concerns have been raised within my constituency. There are family's that have been in bed & breakfast or hostel accommodation for over six months.

**Stephen Philpott** responded regarding cooking facilities, it will depend on the hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation due to the number of households concerned. The team will consider how suitable the accommodation is. For example, the Travelodge, will not have cooking facilities. The rooms will have a kettle, a fridge and may have a microwave. There are some hotels that we use which have installed kitchens for the families to use. The facility will be shared by different families. We aim to ensure that families have access to kitchen facilities.

**Councillor Choudhry** asked how long will it take to get the homeless accommodation situation back to normal? If the family is in bed & breakfast or a hostel for six-twelve months, what can BCC provide for the family for the family to get back to normal.

**Stephen Philpott** responded the bed and breakfast stay on average is 18 weeks. On a daily basis the team will look at what properties BCC has available. We review the list of family/people who have been in bed and breakfast accommodation the longest time. We review the list and try to match family/person to the property. The reason the family/person does not match could be because the number of bedrooms needed. It could be because it may not be safe for the family/person in the area. The number of people approaching us as homeless increased by 25% in the last two years. The issues such as the cost of living, landlord evictions in the private rented sector. These factors have an impact upon the number of people that are presenting as homeless. The pressure on the Homeless service is growing. We access private landlords we try to find alternative accommodation. Also, the programs where BCC are buying homes in Birmingham, particularly larger family homes.

**Councillor Choudhry** asked if a family with three or four children the requirement is a four-bedroom property. The family are willing to accept a three-bedroom property. The Homeless team inform the family a four-bedroom property is needed. Is there any flexibility in the way the size of the property that is offered?

**Stephen Philpott** responded there is a new Allocations policy which recognises that families may choose, if they prefer to bid down a bedroom size. If a family are allocated a four-bedroom property on the housing register. Also, the family can decide to bid for a three-bedroom property. The family can register on Home Choice, and they can record their bid accordingly.

**Malcolm Nicholls** asked during the evenings when the team are searching for homeless people, do they look in a variety of places? Also, how accurate does the team count the numbers of homeless/rough sleepers’ numbers at night?

**Stephen Philpott** responded on the reports, the homeless count there are two lines on the report. The first line will count the numbers of homeless people. The second line refers to intelligence. There is a team of at least 12 people who work physically on the streets on a daily basis. The team receive reports from the public, Street Wardens also various people inform us where homeless people are bedding down for the night in the area/s. If the team are physically unable to safely go to where there are rough sleepers in the middle of the night, because it may be a building that is not safe to enter. There could be a canal side that we are not able to walk down. We will still include the people in the intelligence bracket. We capture this as intelligence which is in the report.

The Outreach team can check a person’s Welfare benefit claim to determine if the person has accommodation or not. The team also, work with the Community Safety team. There is a campaign which is Change into Action we asked the public to consider whether they should give money or food to people who are begging on the streets. We have Day centres for homeless people. We offer food and the use of the showers, also the homeless can meet a Housing Officer. The homeless/rough sleepers will receive information regarding supported accommodation.

**0.8 BCC Lettings Procedure update by Jonathon Robertson**

The key themes of the presentation are below:

* **Lettings Overview:** A customer will have been shortlisted for a property by the Allocations team. The Voids team will complete the Viewing with the customer and refer the customer to the Lettings team when a property has been accepted. The customer will be contacted to complete a Pre-let interview. On the day of the Letting, the customer is asked to complete a Lettings Interview.
* **Types of Lettings:** There are various types of letterings: General Housing Lettings. Sheltered Housing Lettings. Mutual Exchanges. Also, other types of Lettings.
* **First 12 weeks of tenancy:** Assist customers with advice/queries. Confirm moved into their new home. Rent account monitoring. Registerer customer with Utilities. Support offered to customers with complex needs.
* For further details see the full presentation slides.

**Eric Shipton** asked regarding new tenants moving in a property there are problems with the gas and electric company, the tenants explain to the utility company they are a new tenant.

**Jonathon Robertson** as part of the Lettings process, we complete the online portal and add details of the new tenant onto Ovo portal. Also, give the tenant information such as the Tenancy Agreement. The tenant will be given advise to register with a utility company.

**Eric Shipton** asked regarding the Rights of Succession how carefully do you check if a person is eligible. If a family member tries to move into a property and they are not legally supposed to be there, but the person has made a claim for the Rights of Succession.

**Natalie Smith** responded the team will go out to the property to assess if a person will succeed. For example, if a partner has died and the person is occupying the property. The person must have lived in the property for 12 months. If the tenant has passed away and the person living in the property does not have succession rights, this will be classed as a lodger in occupation. The person will have to prove that they have been living in the property for 12 months. Also, the property is suitable for them, and that it meets their needs. The person would need to have the property allocated to them. The team will request Bank statements to prove that it has been their address. The team will check, any records in relation to Schools, also the Doctors Surgery record of address. The team will carry-out data warehouse checks. The Audit team carry out checks to ensure our team are accurate. If the person does not have Rights of Succession, BCC will take the person to Court and not grant the person the property. for example, if the person does succeed and it is a three-bedroom property this would not be suitable for only one person to live in a property of that size. The team is in the process of reviewing the policy in relation to Rights of Succession.

**Mike Dodd** asked regarding Sheltered housing scheme the new tenants are unsociable. We asked how the tenants are given a place in the Sheltered housing scheme. We have been informed by the Sheltered housing management team the local team allocate people for the Sheltered schemes.

**Wendy O'Malley** responded there is an age-criteria which will reduce to age 50 years if there are no bids for the property. There are people aged 50 years and over eligible to live in sheltered housing schemes. This is in line with current Allocations policy. People are allowed to make bids on Home Choice. The team will work with the Allocations Manager to assess people for Sheltered housing schemes. The team can provide support for individual tenants.

**Bruce Pitt** asked is the report classed as confidential. Are we able to discuss with other residents.

**Jonathon Robertson** responded the process is general information which can be discussed with other residents.

**Councillor Choudhry** asked regarding the procedures that is followed to repair the property and make sure it is in a good condition. For example, does the team carry out thorough checks on the property to make sure it is free from mould and other conditions.

**Jonathon Robertson** responded the voids and Asset Management teams will make an assessment of the property to see if any repairs or upgrades are needed. For example, if the property needs rewinding, the contractors carry-out the work. The Contract Works Officer will assess and carry-out an Audit of the property. When the property is suitable the officer will advise the Lettings team when repairs have been completed. The Contract Works Officer will advise the property has met the void property standard for the city. The property will be passed to the Allocations team and will be able to let the property.

**Councillor Choudhry** asked regarding the kitchen units in the property. Do you check the units for mould. I have received letters of complaints stating once the properties have been let. The tenants were promised that the work to repair the kitchen will be carried out in the near future. There are residents who are still waiting for the repair work to be completed.

**Jonathon Robertson** responded the kitchen will be assessed while the property is empty, if the kitchen reached the end of its life. We have let properties where there has been a new kitchen and bathrooms fitted. There can be replacement with new kitchen units which meets the standards.

**Asha Patel** responded for example if a kitchen and bathroom are fitted by the Capital Works team when the property is void. The team will monitor if there are any repairs needed due to workmanship or there might be a problem with the installation of the kitchen or bathroom. The defect will be covered under the guarantee.

The Housing Officer can agree that the tenant can move into the property. There can be some repairs done in occupation. The repairs should be carried-out within a given time scale following the tenant occupation. The property is fit to let and does not have any category one hazards. The property is safe, secure, warm and decent it is fit to be lived in by the tenant. We are improving on the standards.

**Councillor Choudhry** stated regarding work carried in Bakeman House. The rewiring of the block. I have received complaints from residents there are rodents in the property. There are mice and rodent droppings in the tenants’ flats. The report states the rodents and mice are getting in through the pipelines, also the rodents have found new channels to get into the block.

**Wendy O'Malley** responded we are aware of the infestation. Environmental services went out to the property. The pest control work in Bakeman house is ongoing.

**Any Other Business**

**Bruce Pitt** statedtoday I was able to join the CHLB meeting and remain connected online without any assistance. Thank you to Jean Campbell for assistance in the past.

**Carl McCooty** asked regarding the progress on finding a venue for face-to-face CHLB meetings.

**Eric Shipton** responded there are still some problems with finding a suitable location that will fulfil all the needs of all the CHLB members. In the future we will need to have hybrid meetings. There are new people who will be joining the meetings, when they get their internet access, computers, and IT equipment setup. BCC is closing some of their official office buildings. The process to find a suitable location is ongoing.

**Asha Patel** an update on the query raised regarding Welsh House Farm Estate. We visited the property at Rilstone Road. The team established at Rilstone Road there were a number of properties with missing door handles, inside on the rear door. This has been fixed. Some of the properties had front and rear door handles missing also, the front door was not closing, this has been rectified. The repairs have all been recorded and rectified.

The issue regarding the doors because a lot of the doors are Que Mark communal doors, they can only be repaired by contractors who are licensed and able to have the accreditation to carry out the repair work. We have arranged for this repair work to the Que Mark doors to be carried-out. We have also, arranged for some security screws to be fitted. We hope this will prevent further incidents. We will continue to monitor the situation.

The Que Mark doors have standards that we need to follow. If there are problems in other areas, we will extend this out. We intend to check security door repairs in blocks across the city.

For a copy of the presentations please e-mail ResidentInvolvement@birmingham.gov.uk

**Eric Shipton** thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

**The next meeting of the City Housing Liaison Board will be held on:**

**Date: Thursday, 18th May 2023: Time: 4:30pm - 6:30pm**