

# BEST VALUE COMMISSIONERS

**Housing Sub Board**  
**Monday 14 October 2024. 2pm – 4pm.**  
**Room 125, Council House & Microsoft Teams**

## **Board Members**

Jackie Belton, Commissioner and Chair  
Paul Langford, Strategic Director of Housing  
Stephen Philpott, Director of Housing, Solutions and Support  
Wayne Davies, Director of Assets  
Dave Ashmore, Director of Housing Management  
Jonathan Woodward, Head of Revenues  
Tracy Holsey, Head of Income Collection  
Naomi Morris, Head of Strategic Enabling  
Natalie P Smith, Head of Service, Housing Management  
Rishi Spolia, Head of Service, Housing Management  
John Jamieson, Head of Service, Housing Management  
Salim Miah, Senior Service Manager, Housing  
Andrew Healey, Finance Business Partner  
Councillor Penny Wagg, Lib Dem Housing Lead  
Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness  
Will Moody, Acting Business Support Manager

## **Apologies**

Guy Chaundy, Assistant Director, Strategy and Enabling

## **1 Welcome & Introductions**

1.1 Jackie Belton welcomed everybody to the meeting and introductions were conducted.

## **2 Previous Minutes & Actions**

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. No points of accuracy were noted. Actions were updated (please see action log).

## **3 Debt Management Update (Jonathon Woodward)**

- 3.1 In June 2024 BCC was awarded funding to allow the authority to look at debt management. Since then, BCC has struggled to obtain resources to initiate this project. Over the last 6 weeks traction has been gained with x2 employees starting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2024 with a multi-disciplinary team being formed.
- 3.2 The project initiation document is pending approval. Jonathon is to distribute this to Jackie and colleagues.
- 3.3 On the 30<sup>th</sup> July CLT agreed a change in scope with all debt recovery teams being brought together. The services which collect debt have been pulled into two workstreams. The team are currently working on short-term improvements and medium-term arrangements for debt collection and opportunities to consolidate activity.
- 3.4 Jonathon Woodward and Andy Healey to discuss the potential scope of TA former tenant arrears and confirm the current level of debt and provide age profiles.
- 3.5 Data on tenant arrears needs to be cleansed and matched to the data warehouse with then BCC being able to identify which individuals are able to repay their debt. Bcc are to progress on data cleanse to be reported to future meeting.
- 3.6 External suppliers can collect this data from mobile phone apps which can then be pulled together and profiled. Once this information has then been received, BCC can pick the most appropriate recovery method.
- 3.7 Cllr Francis enquired as to whether the debt could be collected by agency and if so, will the parameters of what and how to collect be defined by BCC confirmed that they can set parameters with suppliers.

## **The Commissioners:**

Max Caller CBE, John Coughlan CBE, Chris Tambini, Pam Parkes FCIPD, Jackie Belton, Myron Hrycyk, Lord John Hutton, John Biggs.

- 3.8 A write-off procedure was introduced last March. TA rents were not following this process. Debt was previously being written off for low-level-based criteria however, this was managed via a local policy. Confirmation required that housing are now following corporate write off procedure.
- 3.9 Jackie Belton enquired as to the delays in progressing this work. The delays amount from Jonathon being unable to be released from his previous post but also there has been a shortage in Business Analysts and Project Managers.
- 3.10 Jackie Belton is to raise with CLT regarding the delay in resources being put in place and the impact on savings delivery. Confirmation required that the resources now in place are sufficient to deliver the required savings for 24/5 onwards.
- 3.11 Jackie Belton also wished to understand the scale of debt collection within parking. PIDS are to be signed off between Chris Tambini and Jonathon Woodward.
- 3.12 Jackie asked when the reporting on former tenant arrears will be available. Jonathon has advised that this will be available in January. This will allow for the data to be cleansed. This is to be added to the forward plan and reported back.
- 3.13 A KPI comparator to allow benchmarking with other local authorities performance to be established.

#### **4 Rents**

- 4.1 Performance for the last year was presented alongside BCC's KPIs for the Rents sector. Currently, 37% of people pay by direct debit. The annual collection figure is £290m.
- 4.2 The collection figure for TA rents is sitting around 71%, there is therefore headroom in this figure to improve rent collection whilst accepting rent is harder to collect from individuals living in B&B accommodation.
- 4.3 Eviction panels are being held weekly to rent arrears which are made up of a multi-disciplinary team of officers.
- 4.4 6 areas are being benchmarked – slides to be sent separately in relation to this.

#### **5 Housing Management**

- 5.1 Housing Management priorities were outlined to the board. The new locality model was presented to the board which is currently in consultation. This will increase local presence and visibility.
- 5.2 There will be a reduction in a number of roles however, this can be offset by a number of vacancies.
- 5.3 The consultation timeline was presented to the board. Please see the slides for further information.
- 5.4 There is currently a service delivery issue with Fortem at the moment. There is a deadline of the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2024 to deal with the level of VOIDS BCC has. This is currently above the normal run rate. Report on Fortem's VOID performance to be reported back in January.
- 5.5 Jackie Belton asked for the income and expenditure position of Careline and confirmation on whether it fully covers its costs and/or generates a surplus. Careline is available to any tenure within Birmingham and the system pays for itself. There are opportunities for the generation of income from Careline. Work is to be undertaken with ASC to establish whether Careline costs could be covered by residents rather than BCC.
- 5.6 The current Careline costs for the Council are 1.005m yet it generated 1.26m in return. This service requires neutrality according to finance. Jackie has asked to see the position of the Careline service and how these correlates and why this cannot generate a surplus. Finance are to liaise with Adult Social Care and feedback. Breakdown of costs and income, details and users and projected outcome for 24/5 to be reported back to the board.
- 5.7 JB raised the question about why housing management provides security services separately to corporate FM arrangements. Plans for the consolidation of security in the city are ongoing. Update to be provided at the next meeting.
- 5.8 Reported fraud activity has reduced however it is highly unlikely that the frequency of fraud has reduced. JB requested a report back to the board with a plan to strengthen and extend fraud activity work across housing management and across TA stock. This needs to be appropriately resourced, closely monitored and reported back to the sub board. This activity could contribute to delivering savings on homelessness if additional homes are released for allocation potentially to residents in temporary accommodation. Report to come back in December.
- 5.9 Jackie Belton questioned how housing Out of Hours service provision is provided and the opportunities available to consolidate activity e.g. the CCTV pilot currently being undertaken, if successful should be consolidated into the control centre in Priestley Wharf.
- 5.10 By the end of November, the new housing management structure will be in place and BCC will be able to look across the piece to make sure there is a sustained focus on under occupancy, tenancy checks and fraud activity. Report on progress on implementing new structure to come back to future meeting.

#### **6 Sheltered Housing**

- 6.1 There are currently 125 sheltered accommodation homes in Birmingham. Locality housing officers maintain a relationship with these tenants.
- 6.2 Decisions need to be made around BCC's own stock ensuring certainty that there is a good offer there. The next sheltered housing strategy update is due in February 2025. There is a clear challenge around the quality of the current accommodation being offered by BCC. Improvements in the offer should result in higher numbers of under occupancy moves. Report to be shared with Commissioners for early input.
- 6.3 DMT local lettings consultation plan has finished with 50% to go to under occupiers and 50% to normal allocations. Naomi is to share a report on this with the Housing Sub Board.
- 6.4 The Council currently has one Wise Move officer. Within the new locality operating model, it will be every housing officer's job to facilitate appropriate moves. There is a lot of potential with this offer due to there being 102 housing officer posts within the new structure, however, officers will need training and target setting to ensure this activity is prioritised. KPIs need to be developed to monitor and track progress.

## **7 Housing Solutions and Support**

- 7.1 Rough sleepers' data is approximately double of 2023. The reasons for this were outlined to the board. Homelessness presentations are up with actions to deal with these presentations being presented.
- 7.2 Homelessness by reason firstly is 1<sup>st</sup> generation migrant, under 700 individuals are currently in B&B accommodation.
- 7.3 BCC are discharging duty to out-of-area cases. Some individuals are resettling away from Birmingham completely. There is a statutory requirement to keep people as close to Birmingham as possible. Temporary accommodation is also starting to move into different areas out of the city.
- 7.4 100% of applications to the housing register are assessed within 8 weeks.
- 7.5 Family accommodation is considered Band A.
- 7.6 Shortfalls in social homes and completions were presented.
- 7.7 Discretionary housing payments have reduced over recent year. Table of DHP to be added.

## **8 AOB:**

- 8.1 None.

## **9 Actions:**

- 9.1 Johnathon Woodward to circulate PID document.
- 9.2 Jonathon Woodward and Andy Healey to discuss the potential scope of TA former tenant arrears and confirm the current level of debt and provide age profiles.
- 9.3 Data on tenant arrears needs to be cleansed and matched to the data warehouse with then BCC being able to identify which individuals are able to repay their debt. BCC progress on data cleanse to be reported to future meeting.
- 9.4 Confirmation is required that housing are now following corporate write off procedure.
- 9.5 Confirmation required that the resources now in place are sufficient to deliver the required savings for 24/5 onwards.
- 9.6 6 areas are being benchmarked – slide to be sent separately in relation to this.
- 9.7 Breakdown of costs and income, details and users and projected outcome for 24/5 to be reported back to the board.
- 9.8 JB raised the question about why housing management provides security services separately to corporate FM arrangements. Plans for the consolidation of security in the city are ongoing. Update to be provided at the next meeting.
- 9.9 Report on fraud activity to come back in December.  
Report on progress on implementing new structure to come back to future meeting
- 9.10 Decisions need to be made around BCC's own stock ensuring certainty that there is a good offer there. The next sheltered housing strategy update is due in February 2025. There is a clear challenge around the quality of the current accommodation being offered by BCC. Improvements in the offer should result in higher numbers of under occupancy moves. Report to be shared with Commissioners for early input.
- 9.11 Discretionary housing payments have reduced over recent year. Table of DHP to be added to minutes.
- 9.12 Report on Fortem's VOID performance to be reported back in January.

## **10 Date of Next Meeting:**

- 10.1 Monday 11th November 2024

