

# BEST VALUE COMMISSIONERS

**Housing Sub Board**  
**19 September 2024 – 2pm to 4pm**  
**Room 125, Council House**

## **Board Members**

Jackie Belton, Commissioner and Chair  
Dave Ashmore, Director, Housing Management  
Paul Langford, Strategic Director of City Housing  
Stephen Philpott, Director of Housing Solutions and Support  
Sarah Scannell, Assistant Director, PPS  
Wendy Griffiths, Director of Centralised Services  
Jo Podmore, Corporate Complaints Lead  
Andy Healy, Finance Business Partner  
Wayne Davies, Director of Asset Management  
Cllr Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness  
Grant Kennelly, Programme and Change Manager  
Samantha Sill, PA, Commissioners Support Team

## **Apologies**

Graeme Betts, Acting Chief Executive  
Naomi Morris, Head of Strategic Enabling  
Will Moody, Commissioners Support Team  
Councillor Penny Wagg, Lib Dem Housing Lead  
Councillor Bruce Lines, Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

## **1 Welcome & Introductions**

1.1 Welcome and introductions were completed.

## **2 Previous Minutes**

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. Everybody in attendance agreed that the minutes truly reflected the last meeting.

## **3 Action Tracker**

- 3.1 Jackie Belton asked for actions to be reviewed and distributed following the meeting.
- 3.2 10.1 – is to be discussed at the October meeting, for Q1 and Q4 only.
- 3.3 10.5 – Myron Hrycyk to attend the 27.10 meeting. Invitation not sent.
- 3.4 10.7 – Future meetings to be held on this with a list of full costs to BCC.
- 3.5 Actions Closed: 10.2; 10.3; 10.4; 10.5; 10.6, 10.8.

## **4 Housing Solutions and Support – Progress Update**

- 4.1 The number of rough sleepers is increasing month by month.
- 4.2 Prisoners approaching housing support has increased but is lower than the predicted volume. This will be kept under review.

## **The Commissioners:**

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

- 4.3 The table in the slide pack shows the increase in approaches, assessments and acceptances since 2020.

## **5 Prevention and TA admissions**

- 5.1 Birmingham compares well with other LA's and core cities on prevention activities, despite this, there continues to be an increase in the numbers going into TA which is higher by 5 per week than originally predicted and allowed for within the budget. This is being monitored closely, the service is identifying mitigations to reduce budget growth in 25/6 however, it is likely despite these mitigations that some level of growth will be required. Progress on mitigations and development of growth projections is being monitored closely and will be reported to the housing sub-board.
- 5.2 Meetings with Manchester City Council on their use of TA have taken place to identify opportunities for learning and good practice. Initial feedback has indicated that Manchester has better access to affordable PRS (including outside of the city) and greater delivery of affordable housing in the city. Currently, Manchester has no one in B&B accommodation as of September 2024. Service continues to review the housing policy to identify if any further changes are required. Any proposals will be reported back to future meetings. Birmingham continues to benchmark its performance with other local authorities.

## **6 Temporary Accommodation**

- 6.1 The need for bed and breakfast has increased for families to 656 this month against the target of 433 last month. This is outside the MHCLG target and not in line with government legislation.
- 6.2 There may be benefits to BCC if the HB cap is upgraded, this will be kept under review and budget implications identified.
- 6.3 The allocation policy remains under review and any proposed changes will be reported back and will be subject to formal cabinet approval.
- 6.4 The Cabinet paper was approved at the September 2024 Committee however, a long-term plan needs to be put in place to deliver a significant increase in the provision of affordable housing. BCC is currently reviewing off-site contributions particularly on new by-to-rent housing blocks, increasing S106 affordable housing provision to contribute to an increase in family housing across the city. Discussion with the planning committee on 4 Oct 2024 to identify what else BCC can do to drive up the delivery of affordable housing which has been below target for several years.

## **7 Housing Register & BCC Accommodation**

- 7.1 83% of housing register applications are now within the target time to assess. Significant progress has been made since the start of the year. Performance will continue to be monitored closely
- 7.2 The number of BCC voids available to let has reduced considerably since 20/21.
- 7.3 Commissioners have requested a report to be provided on the reasons for the reduction in VOIDS to include a review of eviction numbers and comparative reasons for the ending of tenancies. E.g. rent arrears, ASB, tenancy fraud and property handbacks.

## **8 Perry Barr Update**

- 8.1 The allocation of the Perry Barr housing block has been delayed whilst the safety team assesses the level of work required to meet fire standards. Timescales on completion of works are not yet available, a delivery plan to be provided at the next meeting indicating when the property will be fully let. The indicative date suggested for occupation is January 2025.

## **9 Finance Update**

- 9.1 Housing to confirm that the projected overspend on legal costs is included in the HRA budget forecast outturn.
- 9.2 Projected overspend of 2.7% at P4 for 2024/2025.

- 9.3 Housing Sub Board to be updated on risks of HRA recharges and share any feedback from the external auditor. Opportunities for additional income by applying appropriate service charges to tenants will be reflected in the refresh of the HRA business plan.
- 9.4 Concerns were raised about the delays in commencing the redesign of the housing management service which is now due to launch on the 26th of September 2024. Dave Ashmore to share the business case for change and provide updates on progress at future boards.
- 9.5 1.9-million-pound pressure for housing solutions in 24/5. The budget was set on an increase of 15 households per week into TA. Currently, the number of TAs has increased by 5 to 21. Housing to provide a breakdown of the projected 20m growth request for homelessness and TA for 25/6, with an explanation of how this is being populated and the likely impact of planned mitigations.
- 9.6 A recent stock condition survey has been taken on the homeless centres and works are required. Need to monitor closely to ensure the centre remains open to provide accommodation. 1.2m has been approved for works by spend control. Commissioner raised concerns about the scale of works required and requested assurance that regular stock condition surveys will be undertaken in future.

## **10 R&M Procurement 2026 Update**

- 10.1 Cabinet Report is on track for October 2024. Early sight is required by Commissioners who will want assurance on how the procurement risks are being managed.
- 10.2 Ensure any feedback by scrutiny is reflected in the October cabinet report. Wayne confirmed that additional consultancy support will be in place. BCC plans to have and has timetabled 6 months of contract mobilisation to ensure a smooth transition to the new contracts.
- 10.3 There is a major concern about BCC's capacity to support change. This is subject to CLT discussion.
- 10.4 Housing management to outline how they intend to improve the quality and productivity of the services they provide to residents using IT. Priority IT improvement plan to be presented at future meetings.

## **11 Commissioner Feedback**

- 11.1 The reported position on decent homes is 28% decent and H&S compliance is worsening because of the important work being undertaken on stock condition surveys and H&S compliance audits.
- 11.2 BCC needs to review its improvement plan to achieve compliance to identify if further capacity or capability is required and identify likely implications for the HRA business plan. There is a need to see significant progress on the audit recommendations by Jan 2025 when Savills will be reauditing the information.
- 11.3 The audits have confirmed that BCC does not yet have assurance across reported performance KPIs (including how no access is reported). Also, concerns have been raised about the accuracy of data and a plan must be implemented to address these weaknesses.
- 11.4 This reiterates the importance and need to keep focus and prioritisation on the housing landlord services.
- 11.5 General fund – continued concern about the number of families in B&B for more than 6 weeks. Important that BCC continues to identify any actions to reduce the numbers and length of stay in B&B.
- 11.6 The homeless numbers and reduction in VOIDs and number of acceptances means that BCC must focus on working with partners to drive up a consistent and sustainable pipeline of affordable housing.
- 11.7 Important to understand and ensure that BCC's asset sales support the delivery of more affordable housing.
- 11.8 Concerns were expressed in commencing the restructure of the housing management service, consultation has now commenced and needs to be progressed at pace.

## **12 Social Housing Regulator**

- 12.1 BCC's response to the Savills Report will be provided and discussed with the regulator at the October meeting.
- 12.2 The reduction in the complaints backlog is very much welcomed.
- 12.3 As part of Housing improvement – BCC need to prioritise the development of a digital strategy and ensure they have the right IT transformation capacity and capability in place. This will require sign-off by CLT, and progress is to be reported back.

### **13 Supported Exempt Accommodation Options Paper**

- 13.1 The options paper is to be revised to include the option of redesigning the service to be delivered within the likely carry forward of 523,000 pounds into 25/6. The growing MTFP budget gap means there is unlikely to be any funding available to substitute for the ending of grant funding. BCC should instead work closely with MHCLG to highlight the risks and implications of the funding not continuing into 25/6. Also, any options appraisals must include finance comments. The revised plan is to be shared for commissioner comments.

### **14 AOB:**

- 14.1 None.

### **15 Actions**

- 15.1 Next meeting to focus on BMHT and affordable housing across the city.
- 15.2 Commissioners have requested a report to be provided on the reasons for the reduction in VOIDS to include a review of eviction numbers and comparative reasons for the ending of tenancies. E.g. rent arrears, ASB, tenancy fraud and property handbacks. Dave Ashmore to feedback at a future meeting.
- 15.3 Housing to confirm that the projected overspend on legal costs is included in the HRA budget forecast outturn.
- 15.4 Concerns were raised about the delays in commencing the redesign of the housing management service which is now due to launch on the 26th of September 2024. Dave Ashmore to share the business case for change and provide updates on progress at future boards.
- 15.5 Housing to provide a breakdown of the projected 20m growth request for homelessness and TA for 25/6, with an explanation of how this is being populated and the likely impact of planned mitigations.
- 15.6 Paul Langford/Wayne Davies will review current arrangements of homeless centres to ensure they are optimum, and all risks are managed appropriately. This is to be reported back to the HSB.
- 15.7 The details of the projected overspend and indicative growth requirements are to be provided to HSB.
- 15.8 BCC need to prioritise the development of a digital strategy and ensure they have the right IT transformation capacity and capability in place. This will require sign-off by CLT, and progress is to be reported back.

### **16 Date of Next Meeting:**

- 16.1 Monday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024