# BEST VALUE COMMISSIONERS

**Housing Sub Board**
**13th January 2025 – 14:00hrs to 16:00hrs**
**Room 125/Microsoft Teams**

**Board Members**
Jackie Belton, Commissioner and Chair
Paul Langford, Executive Director, City Housing
Stephen Philpott, Service Director, Housing Solutions and Support
Jenny Antill, Business Support Manager, Commissioners Support
Cllr Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness
Dave Ashmore, Service Director, City Housing
Wayne Davies, Director of Asset Management, City Housing
Councillor Bruce Lines, Shadow Cabinet Member, Housing and Homelessness
Noami Morris, Head of Service, Strategic Enabling
John Preston, Group Auditor
Craig Price, Principal Group Auditor
Will Moody, PA, Commissioners Support

**Apologies**
Joanne Roney, Managing Director
Andy Healey, Finance Business Partner

**1    Welcome & Introductions**
1.1    Jackie Belton welcomed everybody to the meeting and introductions were completed.

**2    Previous Minutes & Actions**
2.1    The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record. The action tracker was also updated (see separate document).

**3    BCC's performance on Voids**
3.1    There has been ongoing challenges with Fortem's voids performance (a BCC contractor in the south of the city). Formal contractual escalation commenced in November 2024 as they were not meeting contractual requirements and terms. Notice of the required improvement was issued in December. In addition, some VOID work has been redistributed to Equans.
3.2    The volume of work issued to Equans will be closely monitored to ensure there is no detriment to their overall VOID performance. Fortem will be assigned 10 voids at a time and their performance will be tracked to ensure it meets the contractual requirements. Fortem has reported that they are struggling due to insufficient resource capability and an earlier reduction in capacity within their internal teams. Their performance needs to significantly improve on major VOIDs.
3.3    BCC's performance on voids is being closely monitored as it is linked to savings plans for next year.
3.4    Action: An update to be provided at the next Housing Sub Board Meeting on VOID's performance.

The Commissioners:
Max Caller CBE, John Coughlan CBE, Chris Tambini, Pam Parkes FCIPD, Jackie Belton, Myron Hrycyk, John Biggs.

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### 4  Tenancy Fraud

4.1  A paper outlining BCC's approach to tackling tenancy fraud was presented to the board. This housing fraud activity is provided by the Application Fraud Team, hosted by Birmingham Audit.

4.2  A tenancy fraud policy is being reviewed and commented upon. This policy will go through a consultation process to test its effectiveness. Action: Commissioners require earlier sight of this policy for feedback and comments.

4.3  The board agreed effective oversight from housing management was crucial to drive the increased focus and activity on identifying tenancy fraud within BCC stock. Greater engagement and communication is planned with tenants on the tenancy audit activity taking place and BCC's commitment to greatly increase housing officer visits in their stock during 2025.

4.4  The Application Fraud Team have had one successful prosecution of a BCC tenant who let their property through Air BnB but are unable to gain information from Airbnb to ascertain whether further BCC properties are being advertised on the platform. Currently, a court order is required before Air BnB will share the requested information. Action: BCC to work with other local authorities to establish whether this is a wider landlord issue.

4.5  Jackie Belton recommended that BCC check if there is a policy perspective from the government which may add weight to Air B&B handing over information.

4.6  The tenancy fraud team will utilise available data from across the Council to identify high-risk properties, for greater focus.

4.7  The data warehouse is being used to identify and address tenancy audit anomalies quickly. The data warehouse is now old technology, and a project is underway to implement a more modern version.

4.8  Housing officers are being provided with the technology and training on a new policy necessary to better identify and flag housing management issues highlighted from their visits.

4.9  During 23/4 a total of 42 properties were recovered by the Application Fraud Team as a result of their investigations. Jackie Belton pointed out that the number of recoveries appeared lower this year and queried why this was. John Preston confirmed this is due to long term sickness in the small team.

4.10  Jackie Belton asked John Preston to outline the current referral process. Referrals are received from LA's, the police and other bodies, the intelligence team then review this information by checking council systems and pulling reports together such as credit reports. At this point referrals are either closed or progressed. If progressed visits are made to the property, to neighbours and other investigative actions take place.

4.11  There are currently 230 cases open which include allegations of subletting. There is a backlog of 49 cases which remain inactive and unallocated. This is due to the team struggling with a lack of resources and staff sickness absence.  A query was raised as to whether the team investigate other fraud across the organisation. It was explained that they do look at Council Tax fraud, Benefits fraud and some other smaller areas, such as School Admissions fraud, but that Social Housing fraud is the core work of the team and that many cases involve more than just one fraud type.

4.12  The average length of time per investigation can vary massively, 70-80% of the expenditure of the fraud team gets recharged to housing.

4.13 Any communication to tenants must be clear and appropriate ensuring BCC's systems and processes are able to respond to any increase in tenancy fraud referrals. Action: Jackie requested sight of the related communications plan.

4.14 Jackie Belton requested a review of tenancy fraud in four months. Action: this is to be added to the forward plan. BCC are to check to see whether legal colleagues are required to attend.

4.15 Information to be provided in July on the scale of cuckooing in housing stock and BCC's approach to dealing with this. Action: to be brought back in July.

4.16 KPIs in this area need to be identified, measured and monitored closely. If there are issues surrounding resources, this needs to be flagged with senior management, as this is an important piece of work which could contribute to future savings and brings back stock to be allocated to people on BCC's housing waiting list.

## 5 Housing Solutions and Support

5.1 Rough sleeping – new contracts were awarded in December 2024. It should be noted SWEP activations increase demand for the rough sleeping service.

5.2 HOC paper and purchase of Washington Court has gone to informal cabinet for approval. Action: report to be shared with Commissioners.

5.3 The service has received notification of 25/6 homelessness grant uplift. The service is identifying what if any additional activity is required to meet the conditions of the grant. Paul Langford advised that the use of the grant will be reflected in the MTFP cabinet report in February.

5.4 It should be noted presentations and applications in 2024 was up 22% compared to 2022 but was 2% lower than 2023.

5.5 There was on average 538 applications per week in 2024 – with 837 applications being assessed per week.

5.6 HOC remains closed, progress update provided. This will be reported monthly.

5.7 An update on temporary accommodation was provided. For the end of December 2024 there were 698 families with dependents in TA for over 6 weeks. The team had seen a subsequent increase in referrals to the service due to post-Christmas pressures which has taken a number of families in bed and breakfast for more than 6 weeks to more than 700 households.

5.8 Temporary accommodation is provided via hotels provided by ClickTravel – this is a procured service which allows for the council to book travel and hotels across the organisation. The ceiling amount of expenditure with ClickTravel is £10m has been breached. ClickTravel was procured off an existing framework, approval by Cabinet is necessary to remove the contract ceiling value. The team advised that the financial breach was not a procurement issue. Jackie Belton asked to be kept updated and indicated this breach was likely to be of wider commissioner interest. The report should be shared for Commissioner comment as soon as possible.

## 6 Making Best Use of Stock

6.1 The team advised that lessons have been learned with the allocation of the new housing at Perry Barr to maximise the release of larger family housing by prioritising under occupiers. The learning from the scheme will be reflected in BCC's under occupancy policy and approach to allocation and properties.

**The Commissioners:**
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6.2 The team advise home swapper is now going to ensure that exchanges in properties are more automated. Allocations will then be matched to individuals. Jackie Belton advised housing officers should be given targets to support under-occupying tenants to consider moving, thus, increasing the number of properties available to be relet. BCC to ensure that the current incentives and processes are sufficient to support tenant moves. Action: Jackie asked for a separate meeting with Naomi and her team for them to present their learning on the allocation of Perry Barr. Any proposed changes to policy and procedure will be reported back to the Housing Sub Board in July.

## 7 Regulator of Social Housing
7.1 Confirmation has been received advising that BCC can now award asbestos contracts. There are no further updates to report on from RSH.

## 8 Sheltered Housing Review
8.1 Tenants in sheltered housing reported lower levels of satisfaction with their homes compared to other types of housing. The team are exploring this feedback in more detail and will bring back revised sheltered housing strategy report by July 2025.

## 9 Forward Plan
9.1 Update on under-occupancy, tenancy fraud to be added to the forward plan.
9.2 Perry Barr - lessons learned to be presented in July 2025.
9.3 Date for sheltered housing strategy report to be confirmed.

## 10 AOB
10.1 26/7 HRA business plan refresh will reflect the impact of the new repairs and maintenance contracts which are due to start in April 2026. This report is to be added to the housing sub board forward plan, to be reported on in Sept/Oct 2025. Date TBC.
10.2 BCC reported that there is a session next week on resident engagement. This will review the new processes that have been put in place. Feedback to be provided at the next board.
10.3 CCTV pilot – conversation next week to come back to the next meeting.

## 11 Actions
11.1 An update to be provided at the next Housing Sub Board Meeting on VOID's performance. Wayne Davies to update verbally
11.2 Commissioners require early sight of tenancy fraud policy for feedback and comments.
11.3 BCC to work with other local authorities to establish whether this is a wider landlord issue (see 4.5 for context).
11.4 Jackie requested sight of the related communications plan for tenancy fraud.
11.5 Review tenancy fraud again in July 2025 HSB.
11.6 HOC paper and purchase of Washington Court report to be shared with Commissioners. Washington Court briefing note has been shared alongside Norman Power/Northbrook
11.7 Report on ClickTravel procurement to be shared with Commissioners.
11.8 Jackie asked for a separate meeting with Naomi Morris and her team for them to present their learning on the allocation of Perry Barr. Any proposed changes to policy and procedure will be reported back to the Housing Sub Board in July. Meeting scheduled
11.9 Formulate forward plan for the next 6 months – based upon actions from recent meetings/discussions. Completed
11.10 26/7 HRA business plan refresh report to reflect new repairs and maintenance contract – this is to be added to the forward plan.

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11.11 Feedback to be provided on resident engagement session.

11.12 Conversations surrounding CCTV pilots to be discussed at next housing sub board.

11.13 Information on scale of cuckooing within BCC housing stock to be brought back to the board in July.

**12  Date of Next Meeting:**

12.1  10th February 2025

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