

Bristol Homes and Communities Board

Minutes of the meeting 14 May 2020, 3.00 pm Venue – City Hall, Bristol

Board members:

Councillor Paul Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing (Chair)
Councillor Nicola Beech, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Spatial Planning and City Design
Alistair Allender, Bristol Housing Partnership
Peter Daw, Tenant Representative, Housing Management Board
David Ingerslev, St Mungo's
David Mellor, Bristol Chamber of Commerce
Lindy Morgan, Community Led Homes
Robert Kerse, University of Bristol - Chief Financial Officer
Ian Knight, Homes England
Kathryn Pennington, Vistry Partnerships
Tom Renhard, ACORN
Penny Walster, ACFA: Advice Network
Laura Welti, Bristol Disability Equality Forum

Other attendees:

Jez Sweetland – Bristol Housing Festival
Deanne Klein – Housing Policy and Projects Manager, BCC
Julian Higson – Director of Homes and Landlord Services, BCC
Zoe Willcox – Director, Development of Place, BCC
Paul Owens – Programme Manager, BCC
Paul Sylvester – Head of Housing Options, BCC
David Ader – City Office
Tim Southall – Affordable Housing Development Manager, BCC
Corrina Haskins – Democratic Services, BCC

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from: James Durie and Cathy Provenzano (Chair of Bristol Association of Letting and Property Management Agents).

2. Public Forum



A question was submitted by Acorn.

On behalf of Acorn, Tom Renhard set the context for the question:

- Acorn had been supporting communities in dealing with the impact of the Covid 19 crisis;
- There was a need for better support for people renting and Acorn were asking for:
 - an end to Section 21;
 - a rent waiver for the duration of the crisis;
 - Prevention of eviction extended to lodgers;
- It was important for the Council to take a strong stand;
- Accountability and transparency were essential;
- Council and Housing Associations should continue to minimise evictions once the protection was lifted;
- A message should be sent to private landlords asking that evictions be minimised in recognition of the exceptional circumstances.

Question:

“In order to protect tenants and mortgage holders from eviction and debt during the COVID-19 outbreak, ACORN calls on Mayor Marvin Rees, Cabinet member with responsibility for housing Paul Smith, and Bristol City Council to:

- *Recognise the exceptional circumstances most tenants are in, and the exceptional measures needed to address the threat of mass evictions and debt once the government suspension of evictions is lifted;*
- *Support and publicise ACORN’s national campaign to protect renters and mortgage holders during the Coronavirus crisis: <http://chnq.it/NTrM8JYJtH>*
- *Write to Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, urging him to implement the demands in the above petition;*
- *Write to all private and social landlords in Bristol, urging them in the strongest possible terms not to evict tenants (particularly after the government protections end), and to offer rent waivers and reductions to ensure this.*

Will you commit to these actions?”

Councillor Smith gave a verbal response as follows and undertook to organise a formal written response to Acorn:

- The Council did not want to see people made homeless or evicted as a result of this crisis or under any circumstances;
- The Council had a social duty, as well as specific legal duty, to prevent homelessness and worked with tenants and landlords to prevent evictions;
- He supported an end to Section 21, but also wished to see significant changes to Section 8 (which allowed landlord to evict tenants for arrears);



- He also supported a review of the housing benefit system as, in terms of rent arrears, this could benefit more people than a waiver for people affected by Covid 19;
- He supported what Acorn were trying to do in relation to a freeze on mortgages and interest payments, but this was outside the remit of the Council;
- In relation to the point about lodgers, he suggested this needed further thought as changing the legal relationship between the lodger and the host could have a detrimental impact on lodging opportunities;
- He undertook to contact the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the points the Council supported.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

In relation to the discussion at the previous meeting about the importance of a co-ordinated approach in relation to tackling homelessness, Members noted that the Covid 19 crisis had resulted in different groups working together to tackle the issue.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the 16 January 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Covid-19/Lockdown Recovery in relation to Housing Issues

1. Presentation by Paul Sylvester – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: let's not return to normal

In introducing his presentation, PS confirmed that there had been a citywide approach to providing a temporary shelter for rough sleepers/homeless. He asked Board Member to consider what support could be offered by their organisations to ensure that people did not return to living on the streets and the provision of sustainable move on accommodation.

- Situation before Covid:
 - 120 people sleeping rough;
 - 140 people in night shelters;
 - 600 + households in temporary accommodation;
 - 1100 + in hostels and other supported housing;
 - 13,000 households on the waiting list;
 - Social lettings reducing year on year;
 - Private renting sector difficult to access;
 - Gaps in support in terms of health provision and funding.
- Current situation:
 - 280 people in hotels or similar;
 - Interim housing for people with no recourse to public funds;
 - Continued flow of people onto the streets and close working between Bristol City Council and St Mungo's to meet the needs of these people;



- Moving home temporarily suspended (until 13 May)
 - Increase in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates returned to 30th percentile = £100 increase;
 - Project governance – support from Senior Management at Bristol City Council, Jacqui Jensen, Julian Higson and Hugh Evans.
- Opportunities:
 - Looking at Housing Associations/private landlords providing move on accommodation;
 - Property acquisition through different funding initiatives;
 - Buying properties on stalled new developments;
 - Ambitious new build programme to provide affordable housing;
 - Bristol Housing Festival and modular accommodation.
- Support needed for people to sustain their tenancy:
 - Alcohol and drugs;
 - Mental health;
 - Jobs and training.
- Immediate response and sustained change:
 - Focus on moving people on from hotels;
 - Assessment of needs;
 - Move on plans – interim, supported, affordable, bespoke;
 - Extending access to some hotel accommodation;
 - Campaign to increase supply of affordable Private Rented Sector;
 - Joint work across homelessness sector – organisations were working together;
 - Targeted letting of Social Housing.

Councillor Smith asked the different sectors to comment:

Voluntary Sector:

- The voluntary sector welcomed the project and the proposal for move on accommodation and was well placed to provide the support needed;
- Access to accommodation and getting people into the right accommodation was key to preventing people returning to the streets.
- Welcomed the support from senior leadership at Bristol City Council and joint working across sectors;
- There was a need to build homeless prevention into the project;
- In terms of the “ask” from Bristol Homes and Communities Board – how many households were in hotels with no recourse to public funds? There was a need for a creative response to this and a call to the wider city to help.

PS responded that there were approximately 50 households, 10 asylum seekers and 40 European nationals that were not working. The latter group was being supported to get into work, but it was more challenging in relation to asylum seekers.



Disability Equality Forum

- Could people on the housing register looking for somewhere accessible be prioritised as this could free up accommodation elsewhere to meet the needs of people leaving temporary accommodation?
- How many of the people housed in hotels had access needs and were these needs met?

PS responded that it had been a challenge for people with access needs in hotels as, although hotels had lifts, they often had showers over baths rather than accessible facilities, but other accommodation was also available for those with specific needs.

University

- Bristol University had been in dialogue with housing associations about using the university accommodation on a short term basis, some of which was suitable for disabled people, but no one had taken up the offer;
- The university could be able to offer land for a Launchpad to provide temporary housing, but would not be able to provide capital funding for such a project. It was noted that the Council could fund this type of project if the university could supply land;
- The university also had some small properties which it may consider selling.

Community Led Housing

- There were sites available to provide interim housing within the city and fast tracking options should be considered to enable this to be progressed.

Housing Festival

- Bristol Housing Festival and Bristol City Council were looking at the option of demountable housing to provide good quality accommodation on interim sites that could be relocated in the future.

Private Developers:

- Many developers would have problems with cash flow as the result of the crisis and may be willing to sell stock to Local Authorities and Housing Associations.

Housing Associations:

- It would be useful if the presentation could be shared with Bristol Housing Partnership as there were opportunities to secure housing to address the short term need.
JH responded that he had met with Dame Louise Casey who was leading a taskforce on rough sleeping and had followed up the meeting with asks which he hoped would be met with resources.

Homes England

- How successful has the project been in getting clients to accept accommodation and have there been any issues with anti-social behaviour?

PS responded that although there were some issues, and some people had to leave the temporary accommodation, work was still carrying on to re-house them so they would not be returning to the



streets. DI confirmed that St Mungo's were supporting 3 of the 5 sites and 70% had welcomed the hotel accommodation and the opportunity to self-isolate and there had been very few cases of Covid 19. An outreach team had been supporting clients with prescriptions to help drug and alcohol additions.

2. Presentation by Paul Owens – Housing Delivery Covid 19

Context

- Covid-19 would impact on the Council's ability to deliver the Mayor's commitment of building 2000 homes, 800 affordable a year by 2020 but the full impact was not yet fully understood;

Strengths/Opportunities:

- BCC had an established Affordable Housing Grant Funding Programme;
- BCC had strong established partnerships with Housing Associations/ developers;
- Housing Delivery should be a key part of Bristol's Economic Recovery Strategy;
- BCC was in a strong position to effectively respond to any infrastructure/housing economic stimulus packages to support a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery, have a number of sites that could be brought forward.

Impact of Covid-19 on Mainstream Housing Market

- Short Term – Practical difficulties due to restrictions had reduced completions (no viewings/valuations) but changed in last few days;
- Medium Term - Buyers more cautious due to uncertainty and impact on wealth (unemployment/ stock markets);
- Longer Term – unknown impact of Covid-19 on earnings and wealth;
- Currently both demand and supply had reduced;
- Recession may cause a drag on housing delivery in Bristol.

Impact of Covid-19 on Housing Delivery

- Majority of house builders and Housing Associations development sites were closed although it was hoped this would change following the latest government advice;
- Development sites were slowly beginning to reopen but social distancing requirements could delay programmes by up to 50%;
- Section 106 acquisitions were not being pursued due to concerns about Shared Ownership values;
- Tenures of some affordable homes may change due to concerns over Shared Ownership values
- Completions and transactions were forecast to significantly reduce for Q1 and Q2;
- Some development teams had been furloughed;
- Long term land opportunities were still being explored but all bids were heavily caveated in the short term.

Challenges:

- Increased build costs (Estimated +15%)



- Reduced Residential Values (Estimated 5-10% potentially recovering in 2022)
- Fewer transactions;
- Falling incomes could create further affordability pressures;
- Risk pressure to stimulate economy quickly, which could compromise high quality design / sustainability

Opportunities:

- Potential to change how people think about houses and homes - greater value placed on good quality housing design / sustainability/ Place Making;
- Promote Green Economy;
- Expand BCC's HRA Development Programme;
- acquire affordable homes within existing developments (up to 50%) utilising BCC Grant Funding

Housing Delivery Team's current response to Covid-19

- Working with Housing Associations/Developers to identify what the Council could do to support/ enable delivery and inform emerging policy responses;
- Utilise the Affordable Housing Grant Funding Programme to support Housing Associations in acquiring land and affordable homes from developers on site;
- Prepare to support Housing Associations in re-negotiating Section 106 Agreements quickly, if necessary, to assist delivery in a different housing market;
- Creating a pipeline of viable de-risked development opportunities by completing ground investigations and securing outline planning permission on allocated housing sites owned by the Council.

The Chair invited comments from representatives of Developers/Homes England on the impact of Covid 19:

Vistry Partnerships:

- In Bristol, most developers stopped completely during the lockdown period;
- Since the change in Government advice for people to return to work, the restart had gone well with the supply chain at 80% and productivity at 65%, and it was anticipated that there would be 95% of people on site by the end of May with new adjustments to the new social distancing arrangements and staged working hours and a return to 90% productivity by the end of the year.
- In terms of sales rate across country and in Bristol, this was about 60% of usual sales;
- In terms of housing associations most had paused activity while looked at finances but opening up on the whole with some exceptions;
- Biggest challenges would be availability of mortgages for homeowners, but there was positive news this week in relation to 90% mortgages and the return of physical valuations;
- Another challenge was the cost of running a construction site;
- One "Ask" would be about support for planning teams as many Local Authorities had diverted Planning Officers to Covid 19 emergency works and this could result in developments being held up.



ZW confirmed that this was not the case in Bristol City Council and staff had been continuing to work from home to support the planning service. She confirmed that there had been a drop in the number of planning applications which had a financial impact on the service, but hoped that this was temporary.

Homes England (HE)

- In terms of sites across the country that HE owned and controlled, the experience of returning to work had been 50-60% in terms of staff and productivity;
- HE were actively working with MHCLG to consider what could be done to support the housing sector, HE could do a lot to support the sector within its current budget to support SME sector;
- anticipate seeing a greater uptake of affordable housing on HE sites partly funded by additional contributions from affordable housing programme;
- HE had Housing Associations that were strategic partners and were committed to meeting funding obligations;
- Before the crisis, an Affordable Housing Programme with a budget of £12b had been announced but the prospectus had not yet been released and there was a degree of uncertainty about the level of funding and the tenures that would be supported as affordable housing, but it could unlock delivery from major housebuilders.

The following comments were made:

- In terms of support for communities, it was important for affordable housing not to drop off the priority list and to identify where community land trusts could play a role;
- Concern that there would be a depression, rather than a recession, as a result of the crisis;
- Ask BCC to highlight the following points to Robert Jennick:
 - There would be a big impact on the housing market and, due to the correlation between housing market and economy in the UK, the impact on the general economy as a whole would be great;
 - Council tenants do not have the benefit of a rent holiday and were not all are cushioned by Housing Benefit.
- In view of the Government commitment to increasing and diversifying, Bristol needed to promote its innovation and modern methods of construction to attract investment to the region;
- From a local economy perspective, re-training was important so that the skills were available for modern methods of construction;
- Housing was key to the social and economic recovery of the city.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Board Members noted that the date of the next meeting was Thursday 25th June at 3pm and items on the agenda included climate change and fuel poverty.

6. Any Other Business



David Ader asked Board Members to contact him if they were interested in getting involved in the work of the One City Economy Board in relation to an economic recovery strategy.

Meeting finished at 4.50 pm

CHAIR _____

