

Scrutiny Café – 20 September 2024

Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel

Top Priorities from Survey from within terms of reference:

- 1) Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation – 57
- 2) Council Home building – 43
- 3) Housing Strategy and Development – 41
- 4) Social Housing – 40
- 5) Planning Policy & Enforcement - 33

Top Priorities from the Scrutiny Café:

- 1) Aids & Adaptions
- 2) Fire Safety
- 3) How the Council communicates with its residents
- 4) Repairs and Maintenance
- 5) Use of Bailiffs

Specific Suggested Issues or Concerns:

No.	Suggestion	Comments and Feedback from Café	Priority – High, Medium or Low	Proposed Action (Item for Panel meeting/potential review/Cabinet Member Question/no further action)
1.	Aids and Adaptations	Delays in aids and adaptations and failure of different departments to adequately communicate with each other. Lack of clarity on the timescales for adaptation work. Lack of accessible housing in general. Maintenance of old housing stock used by vulnerable residents	High	Item for future Scrutiny meeting
2.	Fire Safety	Failure to remove cladding in high rise blocks. Council not transparent and honest with residents. Failure to take safety of residents seriously. Lack of accountability/transparency Lack of detail about works carried out.	High	Item for future Scrutiny meeting

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		Fire safety in unconventional buildings e.g. converted industrial units. Personal evacuation plan for disabled residents		
3.	Improvements on how we communicate with residents especially in relation to repairs	Lack of named housing officers How do we communicate with residents in TA and how do those residents access Council services when they are housed by another organisation. Slow response times from customer services. Communication between different council departments – things not being recorded and slippages. Failure to be transparent and failure to keep to agreed timescales. Lack of joined-up databases across the Council. Risks if technological upgrades aren't completed Being able to navigate residents through housing pathways and support from VCS organisations Poor communication between housing charities and the Council	Medium	Questions to Cabinet Member. A future report on repairs will be brought a panel meeting as part of an update on the Housing Improvement Programme.
4.	Repairs and Cyclical maintenance of estates	Delays in repairs. Cancelled appointments and repeat repairs. Delays caused by industrial action. Failure to undertake external decorations on estates. Quality of data. Health impacts from poor housing. Progress in meeting decent homes standard. Failure to carry out repairs to balconies on estates.	High	Item for future Scrutiny Panel meeting
5.	How do we monitor the work carried out by contractors and sub-contractors	Fire Safety Inspections and Repairs. Vetting/due diligence of sub-contractors. How do we ensure they are good tradespeople. Quality of value for money from contractors	Medium	Questions to Cabinet Member & repairs will form apart of a future update to the Panel on the Housing

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				Improvement Programme.
6	Progress in completing Energy Performance certificates and other compliance certificates	The quality of data on EPCs and other compliance certificates. How many homes are unassessed?	Medium	A future update to the Panel on completion of Actions from Housing Regulator.
7.	Housing Register and the length of the waiting list – 12k households. Impact of this on Temporary Accommodation	How can we reduce the length of time people spend on the register? Average Band 'B' case will spend over 10 years on the register. Should the bands be re-looked at? Should we prioritise local people of those most in need? Delays in carrying out Housing Register assessments. The Council needs to be better at identifying need in terms of housing prioritisation	High	Possible future Scrutiny Review into the Allocations Policy
8.	Impact of cuts to winter fuel payments and the uptake of local people to the warm homes discount.	Do we have data on numbers of eligible people taking up the warm homes discount?	Low	Written Question to the Cabinet Member.
9.	Planning	Performance of the Planning Services - delays in sites being given planning permission and the additional pressure put on housing.	Low	Question to Cabinet Member
10.	Private Rented Sector	Support for people being evicted. Standard of accommodation in private sector. Enforcement against bad landlords.	Low	Question to Cabinet Member
11.	Use of bailiffs	The Council's use of bailiffs for Council Tax arrears. There is a clear link between rent arrears and homelessness.	Medium	Question to Cabinet Member
12.	Empty Properties	A clear strategy for empty commercial and residential properties. There was a general feeling that the number had increased since the pandemic. How is the Council bringing empty properties back into use (voids)? Buying more street properties	Medium	An report on Voids to be brought to a future Scrutiny Panel.

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13.	Homelessness	What support do we offer to veterans? A feeling that homelessness provision was working better for single people, rather than families.	Medium	Question to Cabinet Member
14.	Greater resident involvement in contracting and procuring of services for Council tenants	Involvement of residents in building procurement and monitoring.	Low	Question to Cabinet Member
15.	Services for people who are not Council tenants.	There was a feeling that if you are in the private rented sector or a leaseholder then the Council doesn't really listen to you or provide anywhere near the same level of support.	Low	Question to Cabinet Member
16.	Leaseholders – Service charges. Leaseholder repairs	Expensive and a feeling that leaseholders get a bad deal. Repairs - Delays and expensive. Leaseholders being unable to carry out their own works. Disrepair to properties causing issues for neighbouring leaseholder properties	Medium	A report on Leaseholders was presented to the Committee at its July 2024 meeting.
17.	Housing advocacy service & support for older residents	There is no advocacy service for older people. How can we support older people to navigate the housing system. There is an increase in older people having housing issues and they tend to be more digitally excluded.	Low	Questions to Cabinet Member.
18.	Process of supporting people who want to move out of the borough	Are we doing enough to help those with secure tenancies, that want to move elsewhere, to realise this? Do we provide tailored support. It's not clear who a resident would talk to. A specific instance of a person having to liaise directly with Housing Director at Bedford – huge number of forms and documentary evidence required.	Medium	Questions were put to officers on this topic at the September 2024 meeting. A further update will be requested to a future meeting as part of an update on the Neighbourhood Moves scheme.