

**GREATER MANCHESTER HOUSING PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY HELD
ON 11 MARCH 2021, AT 18:00 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

Councillor John Walsh (Chair)	Bolton
Councillor Martin Hayes	Bury
Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin	Manchester
Councillor Jill Lovecy	Manchester
Councillor Sharmina August	Salford
Councillor Charles Gibson	Stockport
Councillor Janet Mobbs	Stockport
Councillor Mike Glover	Tameside
Councillor Kevin Procter	Trafford
Councillor Amy Whyte	Trafford
Councillor Fred Walker	Wigan

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mayor Paul Dennett	Salford City Council
Neil Waddington	GMCA
Andrew McIntosh	GMCA
Steve Fyfe	GMCA
Joanne Heron	GMCA
Jamie Fallon	GMCA
Jenny Hollamby	GMCA
Paul Harris	GMCA

HPE 270/20 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor's Paul Cropper (Bury), Linda Robinson (Rochdale), Liam Billington (Tameside).

HPE 271/20 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

Members were advised that an additional committee meeting had been arranged on Friday 19 March 2021 to consider Bus Reform. Members were requested to confirm their attendance with Officers, to ensure that the meeting was quorate.

HPE 272/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED/-

No declarations of interest were received.

HPE 273/20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD 4 FEBRUARY 2020

RESOLVED/-

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2020 be agreed as an accurate record.

HPE 274/20 GM GOOD LANDLORD SCHEME

Mayor Paul Dennett, Portfolio Lead for Housing Homelessness and Infrastructure, introduced the report which outlined proposals for the implementation of a Good Landlord Scheme, as an element of GM support in addressing the issues facing the private rented sector (PRS) across the city region.

The PRS was under huge stress as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with many tenants and landlords challenged by the consequences of reduced incomes, increasing rent arrears, changing policy and legal position, and insufficient access to support from the welfare system, leading to uncertainty about the future of their homes.

Members were advised that the GMCA had committed to providing funding totalling £1.5 million, over three years, utilising surplus generated by the GM HILF. The aim was to strengthen the focus on enforcement in a Hub and Spoke way, noting that the design would be co-produced with districts, giving consideration to how best to apply and target additional enforcement resources (subject to the discussions it was proposed that 75% of the funding would be applied to strengthen enforcement activity).

The GM Landlord Scheme would focus on three elements;

- Continued work with districts and others to ensure tenants and landlords had access to accurate and up-to-date information and advice, including advice to tenants around housing and welfare rights and dealing with personal and household debt.
- Strengthened and focused enforcement capacity in a co-produced model with districts, and potentially with improved connections to housing advice and advocacy services, and to GMFRS, GMP and Trading Standards enforcement activity. While enforcement powers lie at district level, there was clearly resource constraints on teams locally which GM HILF surpluses could help to restore.
- Targeted capacity building for landlords (and agents) to help them better support their tenants, particularly those on low incomes, including training and access/signposting to help around retrofit and other funding opportunities or support.

To complement the strengthened enforcement capacity, exit routes from the sector for landlords would be offered through promotion of the active growth of ethical/social investors in the sector – including working with registered providers to achieve this via the ethical lettings agency ‘Let Us’, through investors such as the existing relationship with Resonance, and by using opportunities such as the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Fund available from MHCLG.

It was acknowledged that measures taken by Government to mitigate and delay a potential crisis have had a significant effect, but concerns continued to grow about what would happen when measures such as furlough, mortgage holidays and other financial support to tenants and landlords were withdrawn. Members were advised that evictions continued to happen, and now rent arrears accrued during the pandemic were counted in assessing ‘significant arrears.’ Once the ban on enforcing most repossessions ended (now expected on 31 March) there could be a

significant rise in court cases, and the number of people presenting as homeless to local authorities.

The GMCA would continue to lobby the Government for positive changes, and support to the sector, including the Renters Reform Bill, abolishment of section 21's, and reforming the welfare system so that households reliant on it had a sufficient and stable income to meet the realistic costs of a decent home.

Steve Fyfe, Director of Housing Strategy, added that Ministers had just announced a further extension to Section 21 legislation until 31 May 2021. Newly released data (to November 2020) showed that 30,000 more households (compared to January 2020) in the PRS were now claiming housing benefits, a total of 104,000 households in GM (update to paragraph 2.2 in the report).

Members raised the following questions:

- Members welcomed the renewed focus on enforcement but considered the negative impact this could have on the PRS, with the potential that Private Landlords may decide to sell their properties.

The City Mayor felt that enforcement should not be avoided, and emphasised that residents had a right to a decent home.

- The need for more social housing was highlighted.

The City Mayor agreed that more social housing was needed and felt that councils should be allowed to return to building social housing on mass, to reduce the dependence on the market, and ensure good quality affordable housing was accessible. It was acknowledged that as this was not currently an option the GMCA was working pragmatically with housing associations to maximise the number of affordable homes available. It was noted that many of the properties purchased through the 'Right to Buy' scheme end up in the PRS, within which quality was a problem.

- The challenges faced by those on benefits to secure good quality private rented properties from smaller landlords was discussed. Were there plans to engage with smaller landlords to promote the advantages of letting to those on benefits? It was noted that in some cases the local authority would pay the secure bond, and first month's rent to landlords, along with offering grants to improve properties.

It was confirmed that the Ethical Lettings Agency (ELA) promoted schemes to landlords including offering support to unplanned landlords (who did not plan to acquire property). The ELA offers rents capped at the housing allowance rate so that the properties were accessible to those on benefits.

- Steve Fyfe provided a brief overview of the approaches being adopted by both the Welsh and Scottish Governments, which included offering loans and grants to cover the rent arrears which had arisen throughout the pandemic. It was advised that co-ordinated Government lobbying with GM and national partners (e.g. Shelter, Crisis, NRLA and other city regions) on both short term interventions and longer term reforms was being undertaken, which included suggesting a similar approach.

- A Member felt that there was an imbalance in power between many landlords and their tenants which needed to be addressed, with many tenants scared to raise issues for fear of being evicted.

The City Mayor confirmed that a multi-faceted approach would be adopted, which would include a focus on empowering tenants by supporting them to understand their rights and how to exercise them. The ELA also provided an exit route to struggling landlords

- Given the scale of the housing crisis, was the response significant enough?

It was acknowledged that austerity had greatly affected councils, with revenue budgets decimated, which had impacted on the support councils were able to provide. The funding provided a welcome opportunity to utilise the resources available to address the growing issue.

- A Member requested further information on the quality of data available, in particularly whether an ethnicity breakdown was available.

The challenges in accessing contemporary housing data was highlighted, in particularly on the PRS. It was confirmed that the Census would be an informative resource once published. Steve Fyfe highlighted that the last Census showed that approximately 16% of white households resided within the PRS, with around 25% of Black African Caribbean households, which was not expected to have changed dramatically. Members were advised that those who reside within the PRS spend a bigger proportion of their money on housing costs than those households in social housing.

- Members considered the approaches taken by other areas such as the Liverpool City Region whose Landlord Licencing Scheme was rejected by Government. The challenges around enforcement of unregistered landlords was highlighted.

The City Mayor confirmed that there was a suite of powers which local authorities could utilise from CPO powers, to civil prosecutions, which would be dictated by the circumstances.

RESOLVED/-

That the update be noted.

HPE 275/20 GM BROWNFIELD HOUSING FUND (BHF) TRANCHE 2 SITES

Mayor Paul Dennett, Portfolio Lead for Housing Homelessness and Infrastructure, introduced a report which provided an update on the approach being taken and criteria applied to the prioritisation of sites that were to be allocated Grant Funding as part of “Tranche 2” (remaining spend) under the Brownfield Housing Fund.

It was confirmed that following Government’s announcement of a £400m Brownfield Housing Fund (“BHF”) (in March 2020), in late June 2020 the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) allocated the funding to Combined Authority areas, with GMCA, receiving

an initial allocation of £81.1m over a 5-year period, with the aim to strive to unlock 7,500 homes (which equates to £15,000 per home). The announcement took place under the 'Build, Build, Build' series of announcements, and as part of Government's Covid-19 recovery plan.

Members were reminded that given the spend requirements set by MHCLG for 2020/21, the sites prioritised under Tranche 1 was based upon deliverability, and the ability of the site to spend at least 50% of the overall Grant Ask during 2020/21. This related to 24 sites, amounting to £38.422m of the overall £81.1m allocation (a potential 4,353 units across GM).

Following a further competitive stage for up to £40m of funding, GMCA was awarded a further £15.8m, and in addition to this, a further £1.94m revenue spend had also been allocated to the GMCA to support delivery of housing on brownfield sites.

Following engagement with Leaders, Chief Executives, and Directors of Place, the Tranche 2 selection process was designed to focus investment through a more place-based approach to align with the GM Strategy and principles as set out in the CSR submission to Government. The prioritisation process comprised of an Eligibility Criteria, and Prioritisation Criteria (Deliverability 30%, Value for Money 30%, Strategic Fit 40%).

It was confirmed that a 'Call for Information' stage was undertaken in November/December 2020 and following this the GMCA received submissions for 66 sites across GM, which totalled a grant requirement of more than £200m. Following the prioritisation process a prioritised list was identified which was due to be considered by the GMCA at the end of March 2021 for approval. Major changes to the priority sites was not anticipated, however, should any sites be unable to meet the associated timescales, and not be sufficiently progressed by 30 June 2021, a reserve list had been developed to enable the monies to be re-allocated.

Members raised the following questions:

- The Chair welcomed the update and explored whether there was confidence that the schemes could be delivered within the required timescales.

City Mayor Paul Dennett advised that progress was regularly being reviewed at various meetings including by Directors of Place. It was confirmed that should any issues arise a reallocation process was in place.

- It was highlighted that the full prioritisation criteria was not outlined within Appendix 1 as described.

Members were referred to section 2 within the report which provided an overview of the Prioritisation Criteria, and section 3 which outlined the contingency planning arrangements (clawback arrangements).

- A Member requested further information about what was classed 'on the ground' and how reassurance was being sought in relation to delivery timescales.

It was confirmed that contractors must have started onsite by the end of this Parliament. Members were reminded that in Tranche 1 the GMCA were required to spend at least 50% of the overall Grant ask during 2020/21, and subsequently 24 sites, amounting to £38.422m of

the overall £81.1m allocation was committed. Members were advised that the GMCA was trying to make progress as quickly as possible to ensure that future targets could be met through a 'positive gaining' approach, providing the money upfront to get the schemes on site. Robust contingency plans were mitigate any issues.

Andrew McIntosh, added that the deliverability criteria was the main driver for assessment, and spend had been forecasted ahead of the timetable dictated by Government. Regular monitoring arrangements were in place so that there was adequate time to reallocate the funding, whilst still meeting the commitment.

RESOLVED/-

1. That the update be noted.
2. That Members comments on the proposed process and criteria to be applied to prioritising sites for grant funding under "Tranche 2" of the Brownfield Housing Fund be noted.

HPE 276/20 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED/-

That the Work Programme be noted.

HPE 277/20 REGISTER OF KEY DECISIONS

RESOLVED/-

That the Register of Key Decisions be noted.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 19 March 2021