



Non-Verbatim Minutes

26th February 2019

16.30 – 18.00

Committee Room 5, House of Commons, Westminster

Present

MPs and Peers: Ian Mearns MP (Chair), Liz Twist MP, Liz McInnes MP, Tony Lloyd MP, Lord Best, Lord Shipley, Lord Stunell.

Non-Parliamentary Speakers: Tracy Harrison, Deputy Chief Executive, Northern Housing Consortium; Pete Bailey, Associate, Northern Housing Consortium; Warren Heppollette, Executive Lead, Strategy and System Development, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership; Cath Green, Greater Manchester Housing Providers; Robin Lawler, Chief Executive Officer, Northwards Housing; Will McMahon, Director, Action on Empty Homes; Chris Bailey, Campaign Manager, Action on Empty Homes.

Apologies: Luciana Berger MP, Lord Richard Rogers, Baroness Neuberger, Lord Bourne, Sir Graham Brady MP, John Healey MP, Jake Berry MP, Baroness Eaton, Debbie Abrahams MP.

Chair Ian Mearns MP began proceedings and welcomed all for attending during what was set to be a busy week in Parliament. For those attending for the first time, the All Party Parliamentary Group Housing in the North (APPG) has been running for around five years now and was established in the acknowledgement that the country was not experiencing one housing crisis, but several regional crises. The APPG acts as a forum for parliamentarians and stakeholders to discuss and progress northern-specific housing issues.

Tracy Harrison, Deputy Chief Executive, Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) was introduced next to give context to today's meeting exploring the themes of health and housing integration and the resources needed for the two to work in partnership effectively.

The last meeting of the APPG in October centred on the launch of research the NHC had conducted with the Smith Institute analysing the links between poor housing and health outcomes in the North. The report, [The Hidden Costs of Poor Quality Housing in the North](#), was commissioned to build on the findings of the [Commission for Housing in the North](#) and in particular the Commission's assertion that a pressing concern lay in the persistent low value, unfit and ultimately obsolete stock that characterised many northern areas.

Hidden Costs... represents a significant piece of new research analysing the change in stock condition over the last decade and, alongside further engagement with NHC members and other stakeholders, forms the beginnings of a case for finding new ways to secure investment in northern housing. Given the wider impacts of low-quality stock on health outcomes, particularly in the context of an ageing population, the argument becomes one of investing to save and the thoughts of the APPG are encouraged to help form and progress this case.

TH introduced Pete Bailey, Associate, NHC to (PB) to look further at findings outlined in the *Hidden Costs...* report.

PB began by welcoming the positive feedback the research had garnered since October – the NHC had consulted widely and were finding that organisations were coming forward to support the conclusions. The initial findings of *Hidden Costs...* were a cause for surprise, research highlighted it was actually owner-occupied housing where declining stock condition was the biggest concern, not the Private Rented Sector (PRS) as was first expected. It was known that mainly through improvements to social housing, the number of non-decent properties had fallen year-on-year. However, it was also known that progress had since stalled, caused by conditions in the private sector where non-decent homes had recently risen from 20% of all properties in the North to 22%.

Of these non-decent homes, the overwhelming problem came in the owner-occupied sector. Just less than 1 million non-decent homes pervaded northern regions. As mentioned, when overlaid with age demographics non-decent homes an even greater problem – 82% of all non-decent properties housing someone aged over 60 are owner occupied. The focus on conditions as a result of growth in the bottom end of the PRS was important yet these findings showed that this problem was not yet of the same magnitude in comparison to the owner occupied tenure, it was here where our attention was needed.

Central to the *Hidden Costs...* research was the finding that a greater percentage of these private non-decent homes were in the North rather than other parts of the country. In addition to an ageing population, further factors exacerbated the problem. A big issue for the North was households possessing lower levels of equity – in many Local Authority areas stock value had hardly risen since 2008 and in the time since had seen sales routinely fall consistently under £75K. Furthermore, poor economic conditions had contributed to the existence of low quality stock situated in a poor external environment the combination of which had resulted in concentrations of ill health and deprivation.

PB continued, it was of course not all bad news, the consultation process undertaken by the NHC has identified a wealth of best practice, often operating in isolation and waiting to be picked at a regional level. This included the valuable development of new ethical equity release and ownership products, the critical value found in increased Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding, and work to tackle fuel poverty and empty homes. Also noteworthy was the growing recognition of the potential role of Housing Associations working across tenures, typical of the work emerging in Greater Manchester. Alongside this however was the remaining challenge to identify how the savings stemming from investing in housing could be readily transferred to quantifiable efficiency savings for the NHS.

TH concluded by looking ahead to the next Spending Review, whatever form it may take. It was hoped that that we could now see a discussion begin around a more nuanced approach to housing investment that met local need. PB suggested that this could be akin

to The Decent Homes Programme but with funding flowing through city regions and allocated accordingly. This would mean a holistic approach to housing investment that aligned currently isolated funding streams that target for example criminal landlords, homelessness, and affordable warmth. The funding could then be shaped locally, better recognising the diverse housing issues the North faces whilst also rebalancing regional disparity in investment. Also central to this approach would be the recognition that we need to address housing quality as much as quantity.

TH confirmed the NHC are now working on a Spending Review submission that would propose such local housing investment deals. There was also a role for the NHC in acting as a hub and disseminator of best practice in preparation for funding becoming available. Although there is current uncertainty over when a Spending Review may take place, it was clear from discussions with NHC members that a great deal of importance should be placed on acquiring the funding to invest in our communities and make our homes fit for the future, allowing people to live in their homes independently or offering the choice to move to suitable accommodation if necessary.

Chair Ian Mearns MP thanked TH and PB and underlined the surprise at the *Hidden Costs...* findings and namely the prevalence of older people who find themselves in inappropriate accommodation whether in poor conditions or in a house unsuitable for their needs. Within this demographic group there would be a sizable amount of people who would be both equity and cash poor, it is important that solutions are found to support them.

Liz Twist MP agreed that work needed to be done to ensure people can access funding to improve homes and make them safe. It was essential to underline that decency should mean safe and applicable to a person's needs.

PB asked the APPG whether the local approach outlined was the correct one. For Liz Twist MP, this was a dilemma, solutions being too 'local' in some cases prevented the ability to scale projects up. On the other hand, having an approach that identified best practice (projects that were ready to be scaled up) seems appropriate.

Tony Lloyd MP underlined the the role of other agencies, for example the fire services in addressing trip hazards within the home. All partners should be brought in and relied on.

Cath Green, Greater Manchester Housing Providers (CG) highlighted that this was an approach already underway in Manchester with the GM Private Rented Sector Partnership. All services work together, including health, to support area-based work.

PB finally highlighted the experience seen in Scotland where a coalition of Home Improvement Agencies sought to implement large scale energy efficiency improvements but discovered any benefits would still be negated by the overall condition of the homes.

Ian Mearns MP thanked all for their contributions and welcomed the APPG's next speakers – colleagues from Greater Manchester attending to share their approach to housing and health integration.

CG gave attendees an introduction to the themes that were to be covered and an outline of how Greater Manchester (GM) had been able to get to this point. GM's devolution ambition is best summarised by the document '[Our People, Our Place](#)' – a set of aims that include targets for housing, healthy living, employment, and transport. A specific GM

housing strategy and 'housing vision' was in development and would sit alongside the GM Spatial Framework which was out for consultation.

GM is home to 2.8 million people and the population is expected to grow by around another 250,000 by 2037. Around two-thirds of this growth is expected to be in people aged 65 and over, and about 40% will be aged 75 and over.

GM is also one of the most economically diverse areas in the UK – having an economy larger than for example Northern Ireland. As a main driver of the northern economy, the GM city region generates nearly 40% of total output (GVA) in the North West and 19% across the North of England.

Greater Manchester Housing Providers (GMHP) are responsible for one in every five homes in the Greater Manchester. Around 95% of these homes are social rented homes, rents which are currently well below private sector rents. However, local authority housing registers still have over 85,000 people on them. Of this 85,000, 26,000 people are assessed as having priority need.

It was important to also acknowledge the PRS which had experienced considerable growth. Whilst there is an ambition to undertake a GM wide stock condition survey, it had to be noted that there was not the data available to accurately identify what % of this stock is in deprivation. Considering the English Housing Survey, an estimate would be around 27%.

These accumulated challenges emphasises the need for collaboration, it was with this in mind that GMHP approached then acting-Mayor Tony Lloyd around recognising a role that the social housing sector could play as devolution in GM progressed. In May 2016 a 'series of principles' between the Combined Authority and GMHP was signed. GMHP's commitment to the city region is evidenced by the document '[Our Ambition to Deliver](#)' which was presented to the GM APPG in July 2018.

Warren Heppolette (WH), Executive Lead, Strategy and System Development, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSP) spoke next. WH's role is specific to GM and centres around developing what the city region can contribute to placemaking. As devolution proposals advanced from 2014 it was clear that there had to be goals around health and social care and reducing the 'distance' between housing and the rest of the health care system. To address this fragmentation conversations began about how to maximise the 'health retention' of an area and who contributes whether it be health services, housing providers, or colleagues from the emergency services.

This 'structured conversation' proved to be beneficial. Talks were not explicitly centred around resolving service fragmentation but to create a strategy owned by all civil society. An initial driver was the inclusion of colleagues from Primary Care who had medical expertise but understood the importance of wider determinants of health – the natural and built environment, employment opportunities, financial situation etc. This became a model of integration which allowed partners to come on board. WH reiterated a comment previously made by Mayor Andy Burnham whilst Secretary of State for Health and was true to his own experiences: ultimately there is a limit to the impact the NHS can have on individual health and non-medical intervention can be significant.

Next, Robin Lawler, Chief Executive Officer, Northwards Housing set out ways in which GMHP were contributing to improving health. This included ambitions around becoming zero-carbon by retrofitting properties and exploring options around local energy renewal.

Also valuable was work around employability and skills – a driver of these projects was in the knowledge that a driver of good health will always be in having well paid, secure work.

Overall, an approach had developed where multiple local initiatives had been allowed to develop and it was a case of looking where the successes were. An example of such a project lay in a Northwards Housing approach to options for older people where prevention work was undertaken to assess needs before a crisis presented itself. An initial trial took place in northern GM and has subsequently been rolled out to seven of GM's ten districts. As projects grow joint funding from partners allows them to become sustainable and for best practice to spread with an increasing evidence base.

Social Prescribing, linking patients with non-medical support within the wider community, was also becoming an integral way of keeping people healthy. GMHP were working with a range of partners to provide packages around addressing poverty and promoting exercise, all within the framework of neighbourhood working. With a population in northern GM of around 30,00-50,000, collaboration between stakeholders in the community was essential to registered providers being able to offer residents quality of life.

An exemplar project outlining this collaborative model was Warm Homes Oldham. Established and funded jointly by Oldham Council, NHS Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group, and Oldham Housing Investment Partnership, the project supported affordable warmth and energy saving measures across Oldham. Significantly, the Warm Homes Oldham scheme was available to all tenures and had clear evidenced outcomes.

CG noted that an evaluation report of Warm Homes Oldham conducted by Sheffield Hallam University was available which provided a good overview of the project and pointed towards how it could be replicated elsewhere.

[Warm Homes Oldham Evaluation: Final Report can be viewed here.](#)

CG continued, when discussing initiatives to improve stock condition and subsequently health outcomes, it was important to acknowledge the efforts of partners to improve conditions in the PRS. This was also another example of the collaborative approach of GMHP and local partners. Here, a seminar attended by stakeholders produced a feedback report and recommendations – an agreed basis from which to progress.

CG expressed a balance that needed to be struck with public money entering the PRS through housing benefit it was clear that conditions in many properties should be improved; also, given the clear need for properties it would be counterproductive to denigrate the sector as a whole.

With a focus on standards, all ten local authorities in the City region area were reviewing their enforcement powers to identify gaps in resources. It was also clear a change in planning powers and longer tenancies would also improve the situation and a Government consultation on the latter was welcome.

CG praised Manchester City Council in relation to the PRS. Here a good balance of enforcement through licencing powers and supporting and promoting decent landlords through a renting pledge had began to address issues. Similarly, the role of housing providers was also important with the development of ethical lettings agencies and work being undertaken with Manchester City Council to buy up ex-Right to Buy properties that had entered the PRS.

In concluding, RL identified priorities which should be addressed in the aforementioned Spending Review submission. Firstly, a housing stock made up of high-quality homes needed a strong contribution from the social housing sector. Over a number of years Right to Buy sales had impacted on available social housing stock and the ability of providers to replace sold properties - this needed to be addressed. RL also raised the concern that we could potentially see ringfence funding lifted from DFG funds, this money was invaluable for residents to maintain personal independence and it should be a worry that this funding could be lost.

CG and RL underlined viewing Warm Homes Oldham as a model to replicate in other health projects – a joint venture with direct collaboration between housing, health, and local authorities. Overall GM is now getting to a point where examples of good practice are ready to be picked up. RL also stressed the importance of having multiple co-funded pilots working towards shared objectives that could be evaluated.

WH felt that having bold leadership made a big difference. GM was reaching a position where local authority chief executives were also Chief Officers of the local Clinical Commissioning Group. Mayor Andy Burnham had also made announcements advancing a move towards a single health budget and place-based commissioning tailored to local needs. This is how we get to co-funding, with an evidence base that outlined the benefits to all partners, including health.

Chair Ian Mearns MP thanked all speakers for their contributions and opened the floor to questions.

Lord Best stated that GM now has a responsibility to lead the way on integrated services. He noted RL's comment regarding ringfenced DFG funding. This money is the little funding we have for older people, what we need is more DFG funding and the flexibility on how to spend it. It was also essential to consider how we support impoverished owner occupiers, those in the PRS have a growing voice as do those in social housing. It was reasonable to suggest that the tide had turned against poor conditions in the PRS, notably through the support garnered for Karen Buck MP's Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill, now Act. The *Hidden Costs...* research shows that we have around one million properties where serious money needs to be invested.

Liz McInnes MP stressed the importance of the GM Spatial Framework as the central document that brings everything in to work together. Conversations around housing need to move beyond talk of building executive homes on greenbelt land.

Lord Stunell asked particularly where funding came from for zero carbon projects. We needed to link this work back to health and the obvious benefits of having good conditioned properties that could be heated affordably. RL answered that investment came in part from asset management decisions notably around investment in warmer homes and local renewable energy. There has been some involvement from Homes England in relation to supported accommodation but also examples where existing properties needed investment but resources to support were yet to be identified.

The natural next step to address this would be further educate low income, owner occupied households on why their properties needed investing in and where they can get support. For example, this may take the form of mapping out and linking up the work of Homes Improvement Agencies. It was also perhaps time to call for more national funding for renewable energy if nuclear projects had seemingly stalled.

PB felt it was time for the funding debate to be put out in the open. Currently 80% of affordable homes funding goes to southern areas. That is not necessarily a problem when looking solely at affordability, but the truth remains that southern areas are receiving resources to address their housing challenges. Northern regions should be able to expect resources to address their region-specific problems as well.

Regarding the GM Spatial Framework. CG expressed that work had been done to ensure housing need for certain groups were acknowledged, particularly in supported housing and ensuring homes were suitable for an ageing population. WH agreed that the GM Spatial Framework had improved in relation to health policy and creating naturally occurring retirement communities, not creating situations where homes become increasingly unsuitable with age.

Given discussions around the role of well-paid secure work to health, Lord Stunell questioned whether there is scope for a GM construction centre for skills and tertiary education. With skills a priority, is there not the critical mass to establish such an academy?

Ian Mearns MP agreed that the construction industry faced long term and fundamental challenges. Currently we are training 40% of the needed workforce. This is not helped by outsourcing where tenders do not demand training funding. There is a good argument for the tender process to require the inclusion of some form of training for future workers.

TH noted that the NHC were looking to bring housing providers together in the aim of pooling their training expertise and capacity budgets to bid for training contracts at scale, and potentially use their work with Combined Authorities to utilise their convening powers to progress the issue of skills training amongst stakeholders.

Ian Mearns MP concluded this section of the meeting and welcomed Lord Best to introduce the work of the Coalition for Community Investment.

With much talk of poor conditions throughout housing tenures, it was empty homes that were often the worst. Lord Best recalled work in Hull with Giroscope turning the worst properties into some of the best. Projects like this highlighted how investment in empty homes can drive whole area regeneration. New Homes Bonus funding was much sought after but local authorities can achieve similar funding bringing void properties back into use.

Will McMahon, Director, Action on Empty Homes (WM) followed Lord Best and gave an overview of what had brought us to this point. Action on Empty Homes (AEH) and the Coalition for Community Investment (CCI) had embarked on a coalition building approach – it was clear that with an intensification of interest in housing and the number of empty properties rising the time was right to build partnerships to address the issue. There was huge potential especially at the local level, to grow support. AEH / CCI would continue their efforts to bring all stakeholders together whether they be residents, partners in the emergency services, and politicians. You could expect to see more activity on the issue in parliament and individual discussions taking place.

WM passed on to Chris Bailey, Campaign Manager, AEH (CB) to look further into the detail of their advocacy document '[How Empty Homes can Help Solve the Housing Crisis](#)'. There were nationally 216,000 empty properties defined as 'long term empty' and this problem was more acute in northern regions, this comes at a time where nationally there

are one million people on housing waiting lists. The document shared with the APPG has three purposes – to underline the scale of the problem, to highlight the negative impact high levels of empty homes can have on communities, and finally to propose solutions.

The presence of empty homes can lead to a spiral of decline and many areas in the North are blighted by this reality. Houses become low investment options for landlords who can expect rent despite investing little to nothing in a property. As new homes are built, and others knocked down, isolated communities can appear with the properties that still stand ending up in the hands of absentee landlords. Shockingly, it was also the case that poor housing ended up going to some of the most vulnerable in society.

As part of their research AEH spoke to a number of residents to hear their thoughts. What they found was people felt a deep sense of unfairness with what had happened to their areas. People felt compelled to live in these poorly conditioned properties as it was ‘all they could afford’. But people were also hopeful that things could change, despite the challenges of poverty and decline, residents still felt a sense of pride in their community and wanted to do what they could to turn things around.

What was needed was a ‘mixed economy solution’ – a combination of new enforcement powers but also funding for area-based regeneration. AEH feel the correct way to go would be to first identify the neighbourhoods with a high percentage of empty properties, buy and improve those properties, before selling on to owner-occupiers who are committed to their property long-term.

CB offered the example of Methodist Action North West (MANW) who used £1million in grant funding (awarded under national empty homes programme) to renovate properties, leasing them for around three years from owners who had previously left them as long term empty homes.

MANW used £1million in grants under the last national empty homes programme to renovate 107 properties and lease these for those in housing need from the owners who had previously left them long-term empty for an average of three years. The benefits seen were widespread, with increased partnership working, local economic activity, and the housing of hundreds of people who would otherwise be homeless or in temporary accommodation.

Other case studies included were Giroscope working in Hull and the efforts of a Community Land Trust, Community Campus, working in Middlesbrough. What AEH had found was a range of approaches – clearly there was not a one-size-fits-all solution. Therefore, AEH now advocates channel funding through local authorities, to ensure that local solutions are developed.

Critically, polling by ComRes for AEH had highlighted the cross party support for investing in empty homes. 86% of MPs agreed that Government should place a higher priority on tackling empty homes and 72% ranked action on empty homes as one of their highest two priorities. Also significant was the consensus emerging on local solutions; over 80% of polled MPs supported targeted funding for local authorities and other community based partners to refurbish and/or take ownership of properties.

In concluding, CB shared AEH’s views on the scale of impact that could be achieved. It was felt that targeted regional funds of £25million would bring around 1,000 empty homes a year back into use. Scaling investment up, £50million of funding for a group of ten partnerships could return 2,500 long term empty properties to use. Finally, and looking at

the longer term, investment of £450 million could reasonably be expected to bring 20,000 homes back into use.

Ian Mearns MP thanked WH and CB. He asked whether AEH's research had identified the reasons why properties end up as empty stock. CB felt that a combination of an ageing population and the cost to run a property certainly contributed. Everyone would be surprised at the amount of three storey family homes that ended up as empty properties. Lord Stunell raised the successful actions of previous governments, namely the Coalition Government of which he was part introduced the Empty Homes Programme which brought thousands of homes back into use. Funding for this programme was ultimately cut.

At this point Chair Ian Mearns MP closed the meeting due to time constraints. Attendees and speakers were thanked for their contributions.

Parliamentarians will be notified of the next meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group Housing in the North once confirmed.

Other stakeholders interested in the work of the APPG can sign up to be notified of future meetings and other relevant information by contacting
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