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Dear Councillor Filson

Thank you for the feedback from the Scrutiny Committee, which we considered at our Board meeting in July.

As you know BHP is an organisation established to further the engagement of tenants and leaseholders. This extends to the running of the organisation and the delivery of our services. We have a clear brief to be high performing in all respects and this is something that the Board takes very seriously. We are pleased to be launching our own Customer Scrutiny Co-ordination Group, which residents will lead and which will work closely with our staff team to review and develop our services on an on going basis.

In addition we are to embark on a fundamental review of our operating model in the light of the Summer Budget announcements and housing policy changes. With our purpose and ethos at the centre of our thinking we will be exploring all ways that we can better deliver the needs and aspirations of Brent's current and future residents. Better, more cost effective services will be our drive.

In response to your specific areas of review:

Void times

The voids time for standard or short-term void properties (i.e. those that need less work) is too long you are right and it is a matter of concern for the BHP Board. We are reviewing this closely and have asked for a sustainable improvement plan to be submitted to the September Board meeting.



Our performance on major voids (i.e. those that require substantial work such as structural work or more extensive internal work) compares well against other organisations. It has improved in 2015/16 year to date by over 10 days from 74 days last year to 63 days in the first four months of 2015/16. However, we continue to look at how we can reduce this period when a home is not available to let to a resident. The Council's investment programme, which we are delivering, is one way to contribute to this.

Complaints

This is also an area of focus for the BHP Board and we are pleased to be able to report improvements. The latest figures for BHP's response to Members Enquiries is 95% for July, with 85% for year to date. The backlog of complaints has been cleared and the Board has tasked the Managing Director with ensuring that responses are managed more closely. We have undertaken a review with residents of our complaint handling recently which helped us consider ways to improve. We are also looking at ways to prevent complaints arising in the first place and shall be looking at introducing a new performance measure, which quantifies "days ruined". BHP has a committed staff team, but presenting performance in this way helps staff to understand the importance of getting things right, first time for residents.

Communications

We fully agree that effective communication in writing is very important. We will be investing in the training and development of our staff team and we are supported by a Reader's Panel of residents who help us review our communications especially those that go to a wide group of residents.

Repairs

Repairs is a key issue for our residents and getting these right first time is part of that as you state. We have recently moved to a new contract with Wates and here the emphasis is on a right first time and a 'price per property' model where the contractor doesn't get extra money if they have to return to the same property to do more repairs that same year. It is early days and it will take time to get this right but we are very focused as a Board on making this work. The latest data on repairs satisfaction is encouraging (although the sample numbers are small) with the June and July figures showing around 85% satisfaction with the quality of the repairs service.

Notices Seeking Possession

Notices Seeking Possession (NOSPs) are issued when rent arrears rise to over £200. Costs are only incurred when a case is referred for possession proceedings and not when the NOSPs are issued. Generally, court referrals are only made when arrears have reached a minimum of 8 weeks gross rent and after attempts to repay the arrears have failed.

The number of NOSPs issued has been fairly consistent over the past few years, and it should be borne in mind that with a significant number of our residents on benefits arrears of £200 can actually be in relation to a number of months of non-payment. NOSPs have to be renewed on an annual basis, leading to the appearance of a high number of them. This includes cases where agreements to pay have been made and are being adhered to.

Illegal sub-letting

It is a key part of a Housing Officer's role is to routinely investigate any reports or circumstances which trigger a possible illegal sublet. Some of the triggers that Housing Officers will observe are:

- reports from external agencies
- properties where the gas team force entry due to a delayed gas inspection
- a report from the income team where there is high credit on the rent account
- reports on tenant verification and audit visits
- properties where access is difficult during major works
- reports from wardens, cleaners, estate services and customer response teams.
- cases where a fraudulent application has been made for succession or assignment.

In looking at wider sampling of hotspots or cases of subletting, BHP looks at:

- properties where block letters are returned to BHP
- Publicity on subletting/tenancy fraud where surgeries or tenants meeting are held.

BHP also works with TRA's and estate champions to identify examples of illegal sub-letting.

In the previous financial year, 52 active cases of illegal occupation, tenancy fraud and subletting were investigated. Out of the 52 properties BHP recovered 16 properties where outright possession orders were issued. In addition in the last year three cases of fraudulent RTB applications were stopped. Currently we have 22 cases awaiting court dates. In addition in the last 6 months we have recovered 5 properties where keys have been handed in without the need for court action. This work follows successful publicity of subletting being illegal where the individuals in question were provided with leaflets stating that subletting/tenancy fraud was a criminal offence.

BHP has a very strong working relationship with the council's Audit and Investigation Team (A&I). The A&I team is involved in all cases where illegal occupation or tenancy fraud is suspected and BHP has a shared database with the team. As a Board we will continue to monitor progress in this area.

Board accountability and representation

The representation of residents on the BHP Board is consistent broadly with the overall tenant/leaseholder split. The Board has also agreed to co-opt a younger person representative (who is neither a tenant nor leaseholder but does live in a council property) as we feel this will provide a valuable voice. The key point is that all BHP Board members are there to represent the broader interests of BHP and our communities overall whether they are there as a tenant, leaseholder, independent or councillor. We work very hard as a Board to ensure this is the case.

As I mentioned in the beginning we have established a new Customer Scrutiny Co-ordination Group. This will provide for residents to look at areas of the service they (or indeed Board Members or your committee) have concerns about and consider how this can be improved. We hope that the Chair of this Group will also join us at the Board.

Thank you for providing the Board with feedback from your Scrutiny review. Please be assured we take these matters extremely seriously and value the challenge and are committed to responding.

Yours sincerely

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**Joanne Drew on behalf of the BHP Board
Chair of Brent Housing Partnership**