

Housing Management Proposal Consultation.

PREPARED FOR



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1. executive summary

Following a thorough review of the management of its homes, Brent Council is considering bringing the management of its housing services back under its direct operation, which would mean that the service would no longer be provided by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP).

There are two main reasons the Council decided to do this:

- The government have reduced the amount of money councils have to spend on housing.
- There are problems with the performance of Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) (who currently manage housing for the Council) – and after considerable efforts have been made to put things right, problems remain.

The purpose of this consultation was therefore to gauge opinions and gather feedback from tenants and leaseholders, evaluate their attitudes towards the proposal and identify any concerns they might have.

Overall, nearly half (49.1%) of respondents support (34.4%) or tend to support (14.7%) the Council's proposal to move the management of its housing services under its direct operation. Leaseholders are more likely to favour the proposal, with 55.6% supporting the decision with or without some equivocations, compared to 47.3% of tenants. Most respondents have had negative experiences with BHP and/or believe that moving the housing stock under the Council's direct control could improve the service, overall performance and reduce costs.

Only 8.1% (6.1% leaseholders and 8.8% tenants) support or tend to support the retention of BHP. These respondents commented on the high quality of service received from BHP, had not experienced any issues and thus are not in favour of any change.

A very small proportion (2.5%) do not mind either way. The remaining respondents either did not express any views (22%), provide an explicit inclination towards one or the other provider (5.7%), are unsure (4.5%), need more information to form an opinion (3.8%) or do not support either option (2.1%).

During the consultation, many respondents commented on the service provided by BHP. The most common areas of improvement concerned query response times, communication and customer service, maintenance and repairs, security and safety and the use of contractors.

Section 3 of this report discusses the results for both tenants and leaseholders in more detail.

2. background and approach

Brent Council is considering bringing the management of its housing services back under its direct operation, which would mean that the service would no longer be provided by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP). Before any decisions were made, the Council wished to consult tenants and leaseholders to better understand their opinions about the proposal. The Electoral Reform Services (ERS) group was commissioned to undertake the consultation, analyse the responses and prepare a report, outlining the key themes.

All BHP tenant (7,844) and leaseholder (3,607) households were contacted and invited to express their opinion. Each household was sent a postal pack with information about the proposal and instructions on how to take part. Each pack contained contact details to obtain more information about the consultation and the proposal, as well as a leaflet with information about a series of consultation events being held by the Council. A multichannel approach was adopted to ensure that all tenants and leaseholders were given the opportunity to participate in a secure, unbiased environment, via a method of their choice. Respondents could:

- Return a paper questionnaire via a pre-paid reply envelope.
- Complete the survey online.
- Text their response via their mobile phone.
- Call a freephone number and complete the survey over the phone with a member of staff.

In addition, 500 tenants and 100 leaseholders were contacted via outbound telephone calls to avoid respondent bias and ensure that a wide range of respondents were approached.

Each household was provided with a unique reference number. All responses have been combined and validated using the reference number to eliminate duplicate or invalid responses. Multiple responses per household were checked against the number of registered residents in each property. If the number of responses was higher than the number of registered residents, all submissions were marked 'invalid' and deleted. Only validated responses with a valid reference number were accepted and used for the purpose of the analysis.

The consultation was open from 16th February – 17th March 2017, and a remainder mailing was sent on 6th of March 2017 to all non-respondents.

2.1 response rate

Overall, 2,937 valid responses from 2,266 tenants and 671 leaseholders were received, resulting in a response rate of 26%:

- 2,092 returned a valid paper questionnaire via post.
- 245 completed the survey online or called to complete it over the phone.
- 600 were contacted via outbound telephone calls – details about the telephone survey can be found in section 2.1.1 below.

2.1.1 telephone survey with 600 residents

600 telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of BHP tenants and leaseholders. Quotas were put in place by tenure (tenant/leaseholder) and for tenants only by number of bedrooms and areas. This was to ensure that we engaged with a wide range of tenants and leaseholders and that the results were as representative as possible. Table 1 below outlines the number of interviews conducted:

Table 1: Telephone interviews

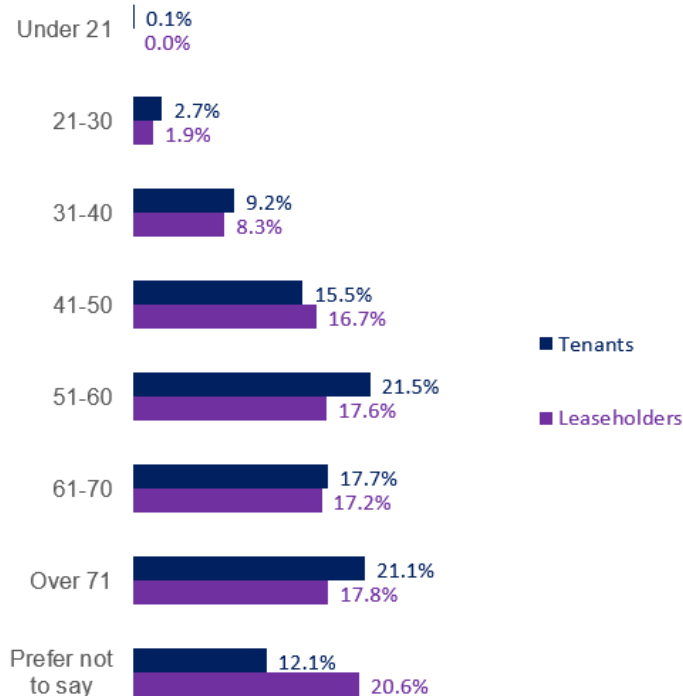
	Target number	Achieved number
Tenants	500	500
Leaseholders	100	100
TENANTS:		
BEDROOMS:		
1 or less	180	160
2	162	182
3 or more	158	158
AREA:		
North	133	133
Mid	137	137
South	230	230

All respondents received postal packs with information about the proposal and the consultation and confirmed that they had reviewed the information, had not answered the survey already and were happy to provide feedback via telephone. Calls were made over a period of 18 days, between 9 am - 9 pm from Monday to Saturday, and between 10 am - 9 pm on Sunday.

2.2 profile of respondents

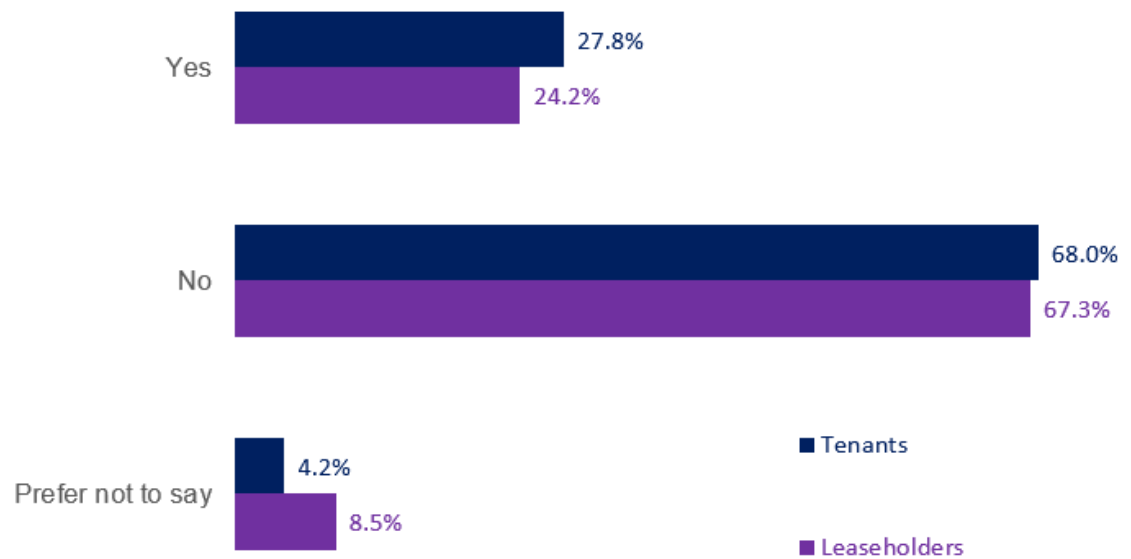
Figures 1 - 8 outline the demographic profile as well as property size and area of all respondents.

Figure 1: Age



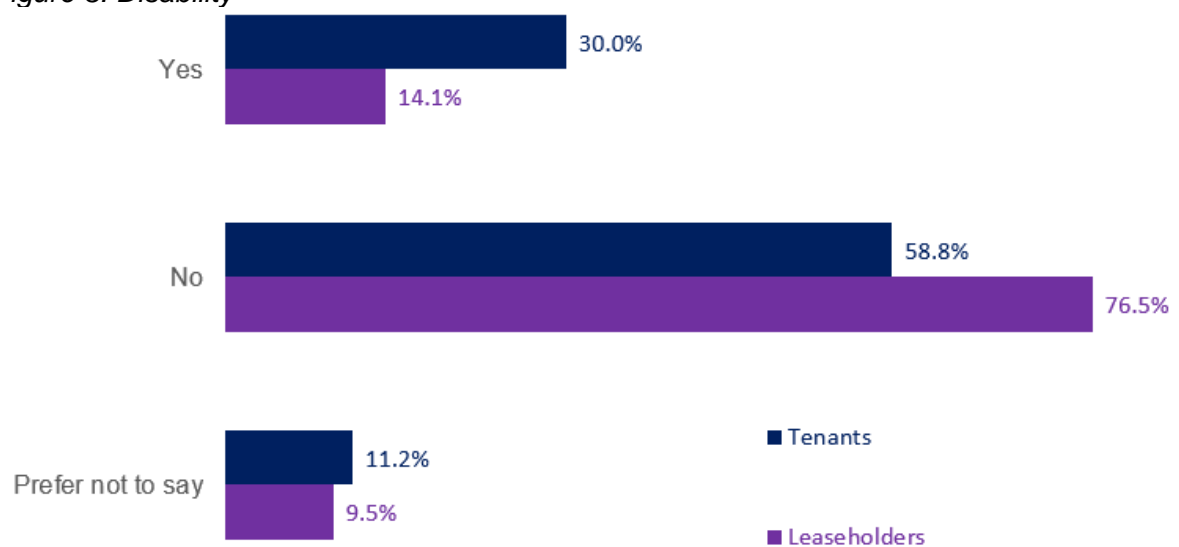
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q6. Please confirm your date of birth. Sample: Tenants (2,200) and leaseholders (647)

Figure 2: Dependant children under 18



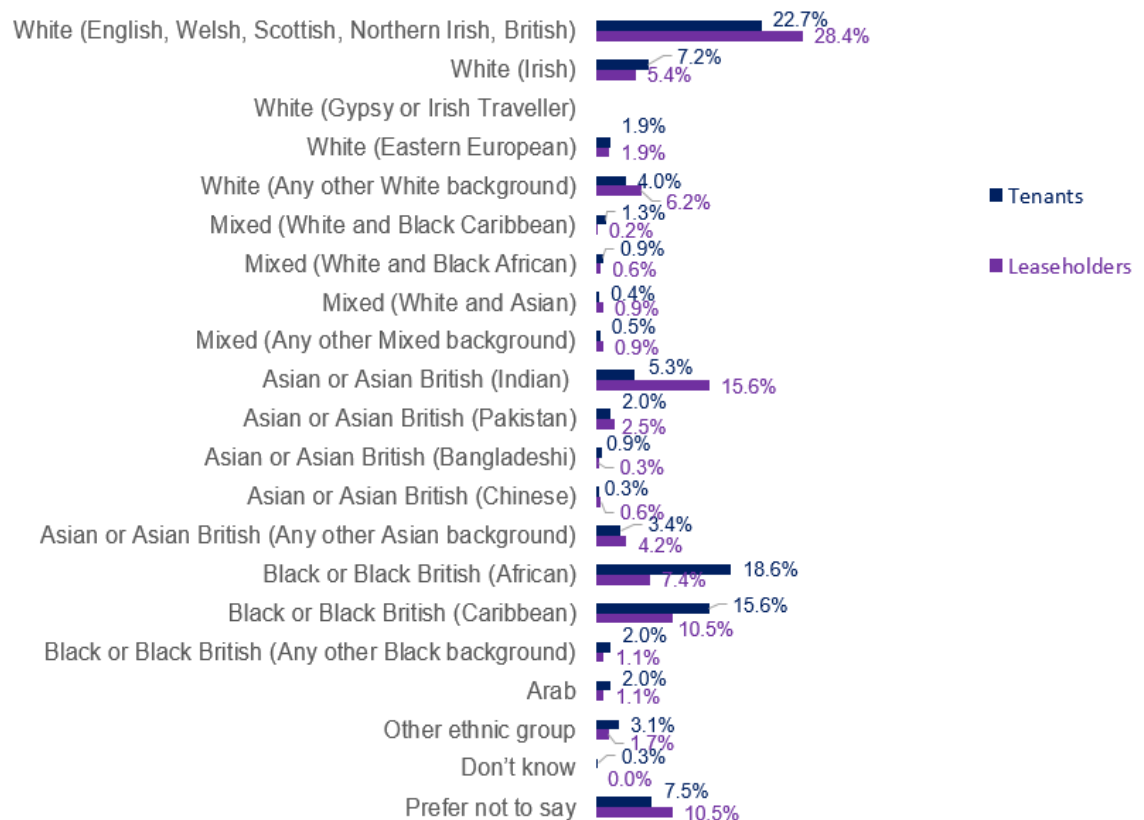
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q7. Do you have dependant children aged 18 or under? Sample: Tenants (2,200) and leaseholders (647)

Figure 3: Disability



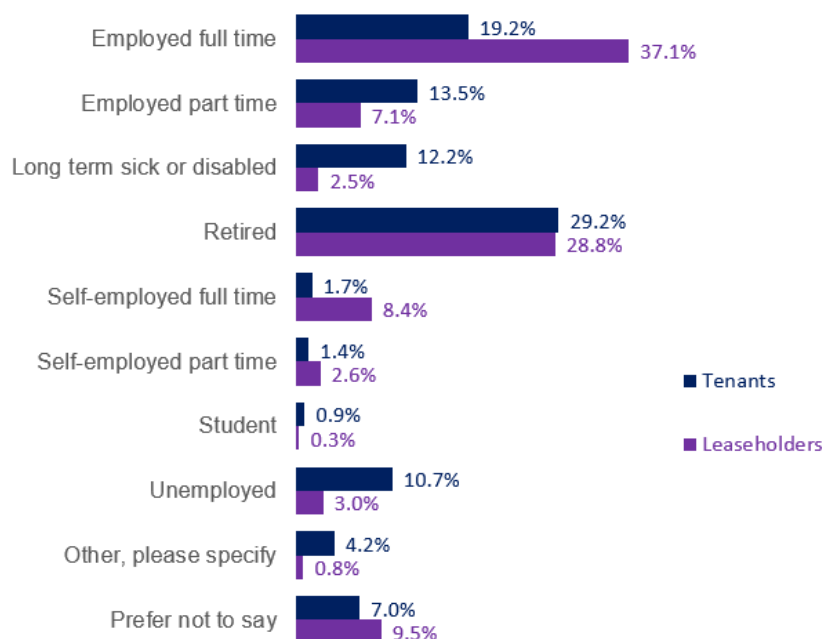
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q9. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? Sample: Tenants (2,136), Leaseholders (633)

Figure 4: Ethnicity



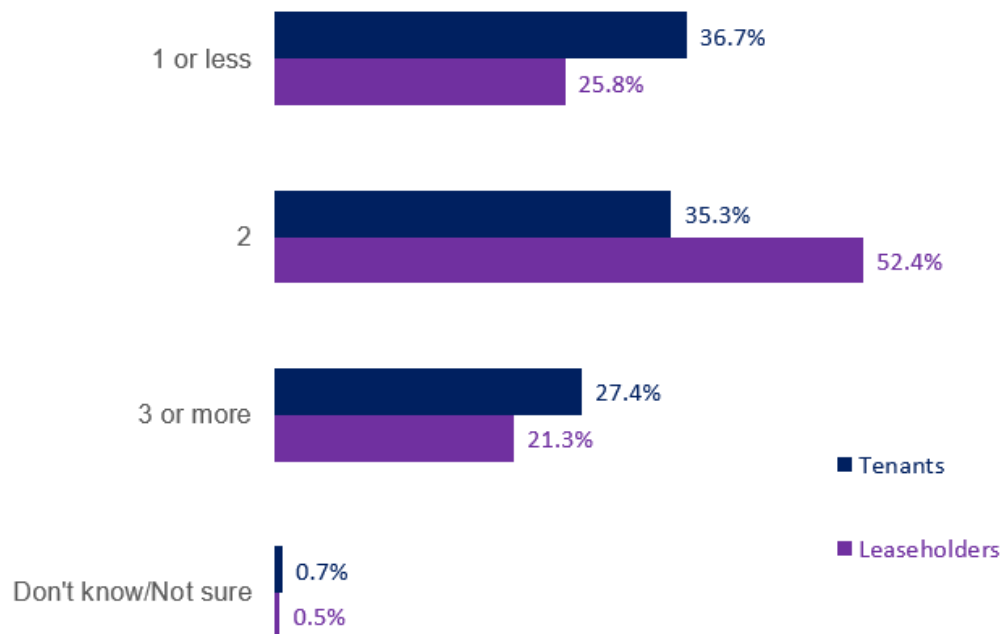
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q8. What is your ethnic group? Please select one option which best describes your ethnic group or background. Sample: Tenants (2,208), Leaseholders (647)

Figure 5: Socio-economic status



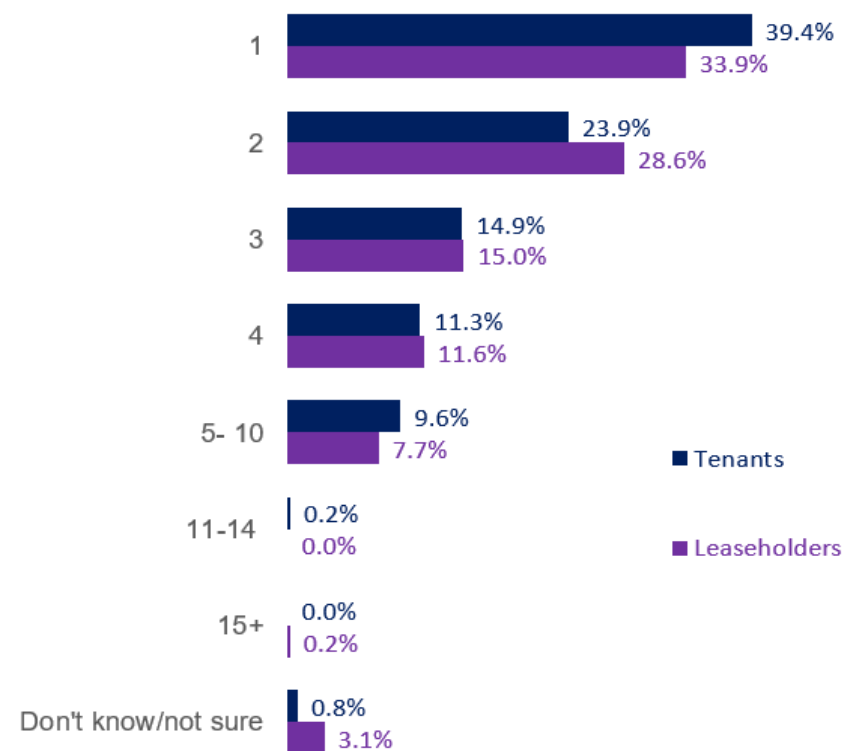
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q6. Please confirm your date of birth: Tenants (2,192), Leaseholders (645)

Figure 6: Property size



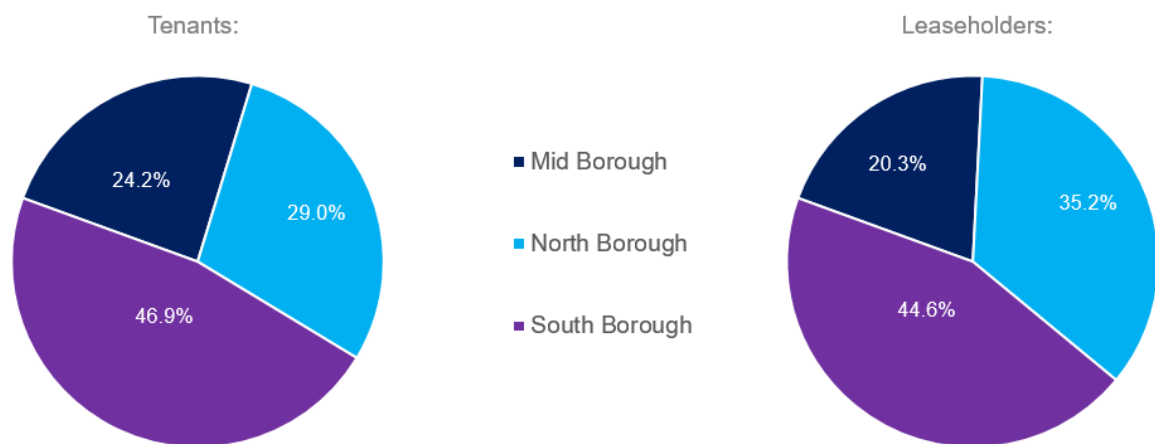
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q3. Could you confirm the number of bedrooms in your property? Sample: Tenants (2, 245), Leaseholders (642)

Figure 7: Number of residents per household



Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Q3. Could you confirm the number of bedrooms in your property? Sample: Tenants (2, 245), Leaseholders (642)

Figure 8: Area



Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Data assigned from Brent Council's database:
Sample: Tenants (2,265), Leaseholders (671)

All percentage figures were rounded to 1 decimal point. Where percentages do not sum up to 100, this may be due to computer rounding or the exclusion of "don't know/prefer not to say" categories.

The subsequent section analyses the responses to the open ended question about the proposal:

What are your views about the Council's proposal to move the housing management service back under its direct operation?

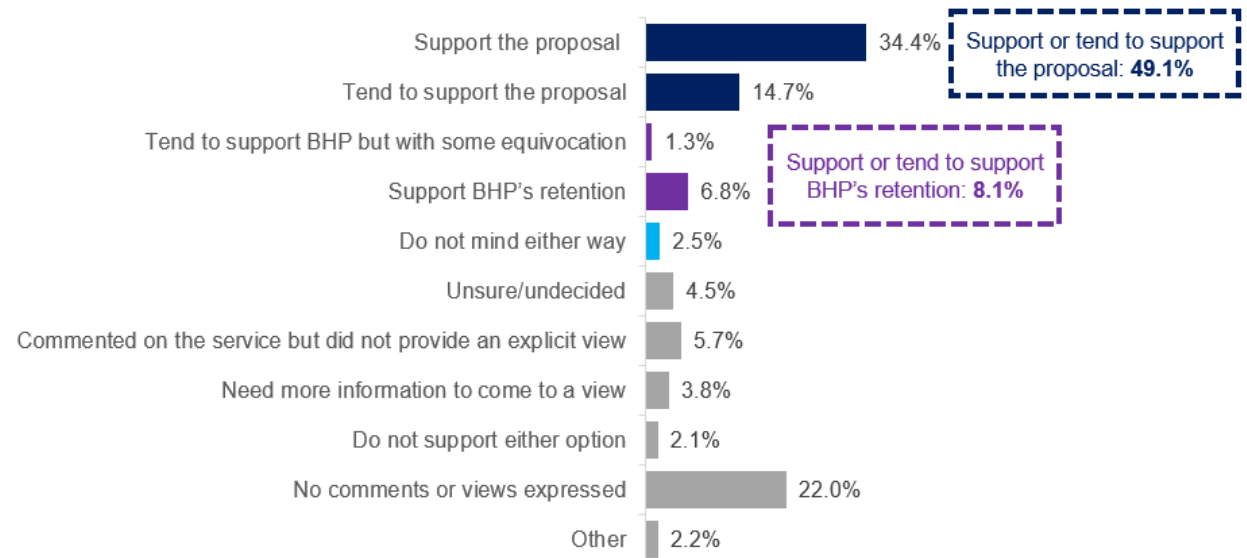
This would mean the service would no longer be provided by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP). Please share your opinions below.

Verbatim comments made by respondents have been used throughout this interim report to help illustrate and highlight key findings. All verbatim comments have been anonymised. Each verbatim comment sets out the individual view of the respondent who made them. They do not reflect the views of the ERS Group nor Brent Council, but are presented here to illustrate views made to us during the research exercise.

3. key findings in detail

Overall, both tenants and leaseholders are inclined towards the Council's proposal to move the management of the housing service under its direct operation (49.1%).

Figure 9: What are your views about the Council's proposal to move the housing management service back under its direct operation? This would mean the service would no longer be provided by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP).



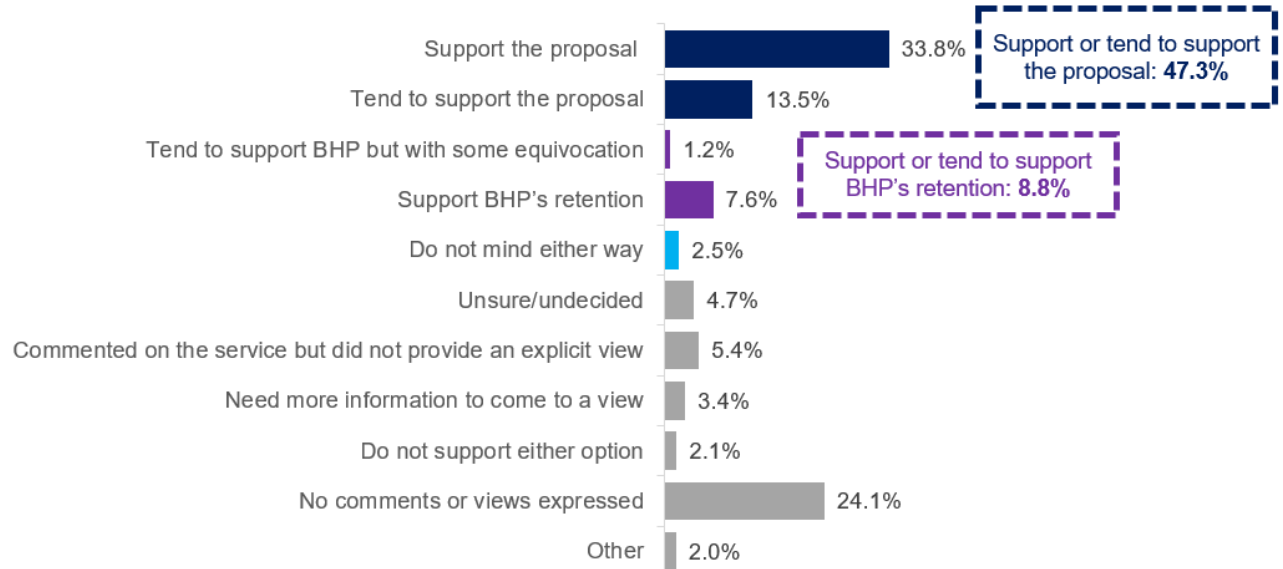
Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Sample: Tenants and leaseholders (2,937)

Only a small proportion (8.1%) of both tenants and leaseholders tend to support BHP's retention (with or without prevarication) and 2.5% do not mind who manages the housing stock. The remaining 40.3% are unsure, need more information to form an opinion, do not support either option, commented on the service but did not explicitly express a preference towards either of the providers, did not provide any comments or views, or submitted comments not relevant to this consultation. The subsequent paragraphs look at the responses provided by tenants and leaseholders in more detail.

3.1 Tenants

Nearly half (47.3%) of the tenants who completed the survey support or tend to support the proposal to move the management of housing stock back under the Council's direct operation.

Figure 10: What are your views about the Council's proposal to move the housing management service back under its direct operation? This would mean the service would no longer be provided by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP).



Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Sample: Tenants: (2,266)

3.1.1 SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL (33.8%)

One third of tenants expressed their unequivocal support for the proposal to move the housing service back under the Council's direct operation. In general, most of these tenants had a negative experience with the BHP, do not think that they provide a high quality service and believe that the Council is much better placed to manage and run its housing stock.

"We hope this will be better for the residents and leaseholders as single management will operate the system and we will have less charges and better quality service."

Tenants who expressed issues or had complaints regarding the service provided by BHP mentioned problems with maintenance and repairs, poor communication and customer service, inadequate staff manners, long waiting times and high charges.

"I find most of the issues with BHP is very lacking on customer service, communications, repairs, quality of home improvements etc."

Others do not approve of subcontracting housing services and believe that all of the Council's services should be managed by one organisation (i.e. the Council). This would put the Council in a better position to look at each tenant from a holistic perspective and assess their overall needs. Managing the housing stock in-house would also provide more transparency, accountability and control over the quality of the services provided to council tenants.

"We think it would be a good idea to go back to the council, as lines of accountability would be more transparent; less complicated to navigate. While BHP offered a good service, we would like direct communication with Brent Council and our housing concerns."

Cost saving is another significant factor impacting tenants' views. Many tenants believe that any decision that offers cost savings is a good decision and thus might

increase the amount of funds available for housing services, especially maintenance and repairs.

3.1.2 TEND TO SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL (13.5%)

Around one in ten tenants tend to support the proposal, however their view is conditioned on the basis that the service improves. Many have had a negative experience with BHP and are thus sceptical about the Council's ability to improve the services. These respondents need reassurance that they will not be affected by the changes, the service will improve, the Council will offer savings and that services will not be cut.

"As long as there are no additional costs, are more efficient, complaints are addressed in a timely manner and the focus of the people is the primary concern then should be fine."

They are only willing to support the proposal if their concerns regarding service quality are addressed and positive changes are put in place.

"As long as the service improves and benefits the tenants then it's a good move. However more information needs to be presented about the changes and the new structure."

These respondents also noted that services were only likely to change if BHP replaced all of their current staff with new and appropriately skilled and trained employees.

3.1.3 TEND TO SUPPORT BHP BUT WITH SOME EQUIVOCATION (1.2%) OR SUPPORT BHP'S RETENTION (7.6%)

A small proportion of tenants (8.8%) prefer the housing service to remain under BHP's management. They have not experienced any problems and are satisfied with the quality of the service, thus do not see any reason for changing the current management.

"I am happy for Brent Housing Partnership to continue providing our services as I feel that it's a much better service than when Brent was in control. If Brent gets back into control of the services then Brent would have to make sure it is to the same standard of BHP or better."

Others simply do not want to undergo any change, and/or are worried about the potential impacts it might have on them and their properties.

A proportion have had negative experiences with the Council (through housing/and or other services) and thus are sceptical about the Council's ability to make any improvements or substantial changes.

"Work done faster with BHP and much better regarding maintenance, under the council it wasn't good at all - really don't want it to change."

3.1.4 COMMENTED ON THE SERVICE BUT DID NOT PROVIDE AN EXPLICIT VIEW (5.4%)

A small proportion of tenants has commented on the service (provided by either of the providers) but has not explicitly stated whether they do or do not support the proposal. Their experiences have been both negative and positive and they often described a very specific issue they encountered, however, they did not mention whether they are in favour of the proposal or prefer to retain BHP thus we are unable to classify their opinions as either for or against.

3.1.5 REMAIN UNSURE/UNDECIDED (4.7%) OR NEED MORE INFORMATION TO FORM AN OPINION (3.4%)

Some tenants remain undecided, are unsure, or need more information to form an opinion. Some felt that they do not have enough experience with either of the providers to develop a view, and others find it very hard to make a decision as they are unfamiliar with housing management operations and its requirements.

“Really I'm not sure about it because all the time I deal with BHP. I've not dealt with the Council. So the difference, I don't know.”

Others require more information about the recurring issues with BHP and the plans put in place to address these, to enable them to make an informed decision.

“Undecided - as not enough information to clarify whether the decision to move would be better for me as a tenant.”

Some also noted that although they do not know how to decide/who to support, they trust the Council to make a suitable decision on their behalf following the consultation.

3.1.6 DO NOT MIND EITHER WAY (2.5%)

A very small proportion noted that they do not mind who provides the housing management services. They have not had any negative experiences with either, do not have any strong opinions or simply do not believe that the decision will impact them.

3.1.7 DO NOT SUPPORT EITHER OPTION (2.1%)

Some tenants expressed concerns about the ability of either of the providers to supply the service. They do not believe that either the Council or BHP can make a substantial difference to the way services are provided and thus do not support either. A few noted that they would welcome another alternative – perhaps a cooperation between the two or another party.

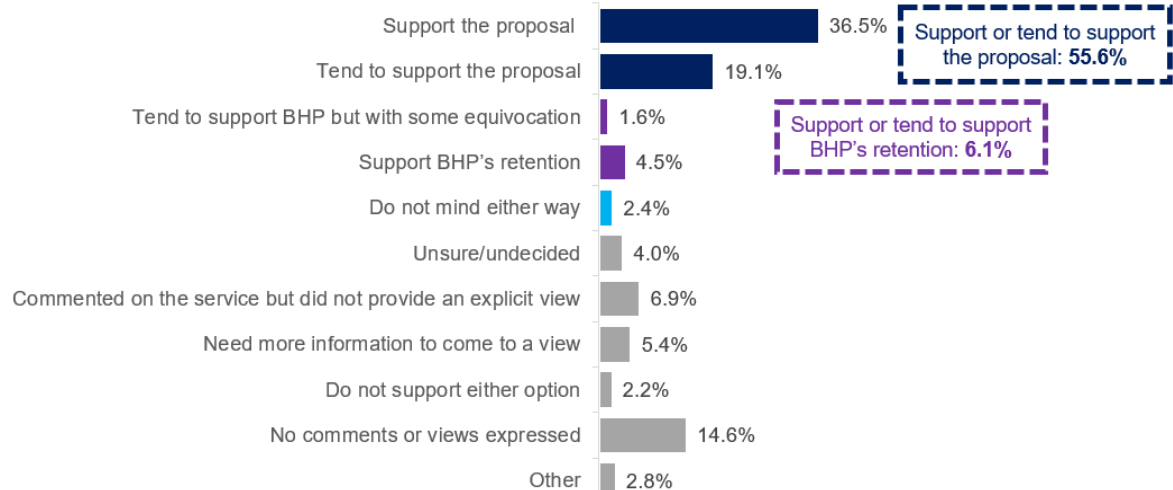
3.1.8 NO COMMENTS OR VIEWS EXPRESSED (24.1%) OR NOT APPLICABLE TO THE PROPOSAL (2.0%)

Nearly a quarter of tenants (24.1%) did not express any opinions or comments whatsoever or submitted a comment not related to the proposal or the housing services.

3.2 Leaseholders

Leaseholders are more likely to be in favour of the proposal with over half (55.6%) expressing unequivocal support or inking towards the decision to move the management of housing stock under the Council's direct operation.

Figure 11: What are your views about the Council's proposal to move the housing management service back under its direct operation? This would mean the service would no longer be provided by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP).



Brent Council Survey, February 16th – March 17th 2017. Sample: Leaseholders: (671)

3.2.1 SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL (36.5%)

Over a third of leaseholders support the proposal to move the management of housing services under the Council's direct operation. Most have had a negative experience with BHP and are keen for the Council to take back control. Some noted that any provider other than BHP would be an improvement.

"I agree with your view of Council moving the housing management service back to its direct operation. The present management company does not do the job as promised."

"We would be absolutely delighted if the Council were to move housing management under its direct operation. BHP leaseholder department is a poorly managed, incompetent organisation. Any change from BHP would be an improvement."

Many have expressed complaints about the lack or poor quality of repairs despite high perceived costs and thus are particularly keen to see the proposals promise of significant savings. Leaseholders also expressed concerns about the high levels of payments and service charges and poor value for money, and thus hope that any savings can be translated in fee reductions.

"I am pleased to know that the housing organisation is being brought back under single organisation. Hope this move will lend to increased efficiency and same cost & money wherever possible which can be reflected in reducing service charges for the leaseholders and tenants."

"I think this is a good idea partly because I expect this will save money. Also access to help for problems should be easier when no third party is involved. As a leaseholder I expect this will mean a reduction in management fees + service charge."

Some also hope that bringing the service in-house will provide the Council with more control over the costs and accountability for the quality which will result in overall service improvements.

3.2.2 TEND TO SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL (19.1%)

Around a fifth of leaseholders (19.1%) are likely to support the proposal but only if it improves the quality of the services and reduces costs. They tend to think that managing the service in-house is better than outsourcing it to contractors but are sceptical about the Council's ability to live up to the expectations and provide value for money. Many condition their views on better outcomes for them as leaseholders and their tenants and want a guarantee that the service will improve.

"I am in favour of the proposal as long as the quality of service, the outcomes, & response to complaints improve. The Council must provide a better quality of service with clear objectives & outcomes."

"Yes but only provided that lessons have been learnt from the problems of BHP and it won't cost more to leaseholders/tenants. Depends on their strategy for managing the properties."

Those who have not had any issues with BHP but are not opposed to the Council's proposal would like reassurance that the same quality of service will be provided.

"Happy enough as it is now but if we got the same level of service I would be happy. Understand it is good to save money. Outsourcing has helped however and BHP have done better job."

Again, cost savings and efficiencies are significant drivers behind leaseholders' tendency to support the Council's proposal.

3.2.3 TEND TO SUPPORT BHP BUT WITH SOME EQUIVOCATION (1.6%) OR SUPPORT BHP'S RETENTION (4.5%)

A small proportion of leaseholders is keen for BHP to continue to manage the housing service. They are satisfied with the service and/or had a negative experience with the Council. Some also believe that the rationale for change is not strong enough, and they would like to offer BHP another chance.

"As a leaseholder I have always been very satisfied with any dealings I've had with BHP - I would be very concerned that the same level of response would continue if services were moved to direct Council management."

3.2.4 COMMENTED ON THE SERVICE BUT DID NOT PROVIDE AND EXPLICIT VIEW (6.9%)

Similarly to tenants, a small proportion of leaseholders commented on the service provided, by either BHP or the Council, but has not explicitly stated whether they do or do not support the proposal. Their experiences have been both negative and positive and they often described a very specific issue they encountered, however, they did not specify whether they are in favour of the proposal or against it.

3.2.5 REMAIN UNSURE/UNDECIDED (4.0%) OR NEED MORE INFORMATION TO FORM AN OPINION (5.4%)

Some noted that they were undecided or needed more information to be able to develop an opinion. These leaseholders have limited contact with BHP or the Council, do not know what the difference between them is/or could be and thus do not feel in a position to express an opinion.

"Haven't got a comparison so no strong views. Haven't had any negative views on the service."

Others would like more information to obtain a better understanding of why the management should be changed, what the issues are, what the Council's plan of action is, etc. In addition, they raised concerns about how the change would impact them as leaseholders and whether any savings would be to be passed onto them or their tenants.

“It is difficult to form an opinion because we have not been provided with information about the implications of the proposed change. Will it improve the service we receive as leaseholders?”

3.2.6 DO NOT MIND EITHER WAY (2.4%)

A very small proportion noted that they do not mind who provides the housing management services. They have not had many experiences with either the Council or BHP, do not have any strong opinions on the matter or simply do not believe that the decision will impact them.

Some also noted that they do not believe that their opinions will make a difference and thus are indifferent about the outcome.

3.2.7 DO NOT SUPPORT EITHER OPTION (2.2%)

Again, similarly to tenants, a small number of leaseholders were sceptical about the ability of either provider to improve the quality of the service. They do not believe that either the Council or BHP would make any difference to the way that services are provided and thus do not support either.

3.2.8 NO COMMENTS OR VIEWS EXPRESSED (14.6%) OR NOT APPLICABLE TO THE PROPOSAL (2.8%)

Other leaseholders either did not provide any comment or opinion (14.6%) or submitted feedback which was not relevant to the consultation (2.8%).

3.3 Notes for service improvements

During the consultation, many respondents commented on the service provided by BHP. The following section highlights the most common areas in need of improvement.

- **Query response time.** Many noted that the amount of time taken to process and address queries and issues is too long (10 days) and often incorrect information is provided. Respondents would like a speedier and more effective process to deal with their requests.

“Currently when you contact leaseholders via e-mail they respond saying it will be at least a 10 day wait until you receive a reply, and more often than not this is the case or you wait longer. In addition when they respond sometimes they do not have the correct information and you get referred elsewhere.”

- **Communication and customer service.** Respondents mentioned that they do not feel consulted or involved with decisions that have an impact on their properties. They are not notified when changes or decisions are being made and there is a lack of communication between the different team members and the tenants/leaseholders. Some noted that customer service is poor and that staff members are often unhelpful and do not appear to be trained well.

“Member of staff are not well trained. Have poor communication skills, poor telephone manner and most of the time they are unprofessional and unhelpful (except for few people who are really pleasant).”

In addition, many noted that if the proposal was to go ahead, a complete overhaul and replacement of staff would be required. Without this, respondents are sceptical that any improvements would be achievable.

- **Lack of maintenance and repairs.** Many commented on the inadequate state of their property/building/communal areas and the poor quality of repairs. Often, faults have not been addressed or repaired to the requested standard and quality. Lack of cleaning and general maintenance was often noted.

“There is no maintenance of the front of the property and it is currently in disrepair. When asked if the tenants can take on the remedial work themselves we have been told it is not our property and we must not undertake work ourselves. When undertaking major works, BHP have been unable to provide a breakdown of the work undertaken on the property, which would be fine if tenants were not then expected to foot the bill.”

- **Concerns about security.** A few expressed concerns about safety and security. Some reported anti-social behaviour around their properties that haven't been addressed and dealt with. They feel that flats are not adequately secured and 'open' which makes them feel unsafe.

“The flats are all opened up, anyone can walk into them. Tenants are not nice.”

- **Contractors.** There is a general feeling that housing services should not be outsourced to contractors as they do not provide satisfactory service levels and are too costly. One company noted for poor service in particular was 'Wates' – respondents commented on their negative experience with their staff/service.

“Far too many contractors are used. On-call plumbers who respond to out of hours services coming all the way from Southend and the further reaches of Essex. The council should employ its own maintenance staff directly and not use contractors except for very specialised jobs. Train and employ local people. Simple.”

- **Concerns about service changes.** Some expressed concerns about the potential changes to the service provided if the proposal was to go ahead. They wanted to know whether they would still be able to contact the Council about an issue, have a dedicated line/contact number, who their housing officer would be, etc.

Respondents would like to see these areas improved and issues solved irrespective of the result of the consultation.

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