



**Full Council**  
12 September 2011

**Report from the Director of  
Regeneration and Major Projects**

For Action

Wards Affected:  
All

**Proposed changes to Area Housing Boards**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 The Council's Constitution currently specifies that there will be 4 Area Housing Boards ("AHBs") as part of the Council's formal consultation network. Unlike other area fora, Members may not vote or Chair the Boards. The aims of the AHBs are broadly to be a conduit for information flow to and from the Council's tenants and leaseholders, with input from other interested groups.
- 1.2 BHP, with the agreement of the Director of Regeneration & Major Projects, now propose to move from the current AHB structure to a model based on a more open style consultation approach which will continue to focus on scrutiny and monitoring by residents of housing service delivery but will aim to significantly increase the numbers of council tenants participating in such events.
- 1.3 Several London boroughs continue to operate AHB style structures having nominated resident representation similar to the current approach in Brent. Others, such as Harrow, Ealing and Hillingdon for example are reviewing their AHB structure due to low attendance by residents. Westminster and Barnet have already moved away from an AHB structure and have adopted open style forums for monitoring, debate and consultation of housing issues with council tenants. Barnet's 'hub' scheme for example draws attendance from a pool of 1600 tenants made up of residents' association members and other tenants who have expressed an interest in attending such events. BHP intend to emulate the 'hub' scheme and introduce a similar scheme with the intention of capturing a much wider audience of council tenants than those currently attending AHBs which fulfils one of the main TSA regulatory framework criteria - to empower and involve more tenants in the management of their

homes. Amendments to Article 10 of Part 2 of the Constitution need to be made to bring these proposals into effect and such amendments can only be made by Full Council.

## 2.0 Recommendations

**That Members of Full Council approve the following recommendations in A – M inclusive as detailed below.**

- A. That the 4 existing Area Housing Boards (“AHBs”) be dissolved and replaced with a new structure, outlined in the body of this report, as a forum for consultation with Council tenants.
- B. That the new open forum structure be established with no geographical boundaries within the borough of Brent.
- C. That there will be four meetings each year to be held on a rotating basis in the same geographical areas as the current AHBs e.g. Wembley at the Town Hall, Harlesden & Brentfield/St Raphael’s at Gwyneth Rickus Building, South Kilburn (new venue to be found) and North Kilburn (East Brent) at Willesden Library Centre.
- D. That the Aims of the new structure will be:
  - (a) To involve customers in the provision of housing services
  - (b) To monitor the performance of housing management and contractors of BHP/Council’s housing management service and other parts of housing services
  - (c) To develop new ideas and methods for solving Council housing problems
  - (d) To influence the practices and policies that determine the provision of housing services
  - (e) To consider the wider community problems and find solutions to them
  - (f) To advise BHP/Council’s housing management service on local priorities for the provision of housing services and the allocation of resources
  - (g) To advise BHP/Council’s housing management service in the development of its business strategy/area strategy
  - (h) To liaise with other groups and organisations
- E. That there will be open Membership to the new structure for monitoring, consultation and debate on housing issues i.e. membership will be open to all residents in tenant or leasehold properties that are managed by BHP on behalf of the Council.
- F. That Councillors will be invited to attend the open forum.
- G. That there will be no voting rights for any attendees at the open forum.

- H. That the purpose of the new structure will be to consult, inform and empower tenants and leaseholders in the management of their homes.
- I. That each year in June one representative from each registered tenants' and residents' association may be put forward to join a forum organising team established by BHP/Council's Housing Management Service to seek advice on the composition of agendas, the format of the open forums and shaping outcomes from open forum sessions. The forum organising team will meet at least eight times a year. That there will be no voting rights for any attendees.
- J. Meetings will be organised and led by officers from BHP/Council's Housing Management Service. Any person may speak during open discussions and workshops. BHP officers, BHP board members, officers from the Council's Housing Management Service and members of the forum organising team may introduce individual agenda items and may lead workshops.
- K. That invitations to attend the open forum will be publicised in the residents' quarterly newsletters 'Partnership News'; BHP's web site; flyers; at Residents Association meetings; by email; personal invitations to all councillors; and by other appropriate means of communication.
- L. That the proposed new forum structure will be called "*Talkback*".
- M. That paragraphs 10.12 to 10.20 of Article 10 of Part 2 of the Council's Constitution are amended on the terms set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

### **3.0 Detail**

- 3.1 The principles and framework for the establishment of Area Housing Boards, together with the rules for meetings, were agreed by the Council's Housing Committee in October 1993. In 1994 nine Area Housing Boards were established: Stonebridge, Churchend and Chalkhill Boards ceased to exist in the late 90s; the six remaining boards South Kilburn, North Kilburn, North Wembley, South Wembley, St. Raphael's and Harlesden & Brentfield were merged into four boards in 2005 due to low attendance; the remaining four boards are South Kilburn, North Kilburn, Wembley and Harlesden & Brentfield/St Raphael's. These are specified in the current version of the Council's Constitution.

### **4.0 Reasons for proposed changes**

#### **Dissolution of Area Housing Boards**

- 4.1 The frequency of attendance of Residents' Association Representatives at all four Area Housing Boards during the period March 2010 to December 2010 is detailed in the following paragraphs (although the Council's Constitution provides for membership from a varied list of organisations, only Tenant and

Resident Association representatives have voting rights, so it is their attendance that has been examined).

- 4.2 North Kilburn has 13 Tenants Associations and 1 community group on their board and the average attendance by resident representatives for the period March 2010 to December 2010 has been 9 per meeting.
- 4.3 The number of Tenants Associations in the Wembley area is 12 and a further 9 community groups. The average attendance at the Wembley Area Housing Board has been 9 residents.
- 4.4 Harlesden & Brentfield/St Raphael's, have only 4 registered associations in the area but membership at this Area Housing Board has reduced over the last 12 months with the death of 2 very active members and another member being very ill. The average attendance over the 12 month period has been 6 residents.
- 4.5 South Kilburn have 10 registered associations and 2 community groups with 21 members on their area housing board. However attendance over the 12 month period March 2010 to December 2010 has been an average of 6 residents.
- 4.6 As can be seen from the above, the overall attendance at Area Housing Boards has been consistently low where BHP officers often outnumber residents at meetings. With the TSA focus on empowering and involving more tenants in the management of their homes, it was considered necessary to rethink the way in which a much larger proportion of Council tenants could be encouraged to become involved in regular consultation forums in the management of Council housing. The 'hub' style scheme for example in Barnet has been in existence for just over one year; they have 1600 residents on their database and have had 136 residents attending at least one Hub meeting. BHP will have a database of 3972 tenants who will be invited to participate in the proposed new structure and BHP anticipate a significant increase in the number of tenants attending consultation meetings than those currently reflected in the numbers attending AHB meetings.

## **Consultation**

- 4.8 In May 2010 BHP undertook consultation with the Chairs of all four Area Housing Boards to discuss the proposed dissolution of the Area Housing Boards. Further consultation with the members of all Area Housing Boards took place in June 2010.
- 4.9 All four Chairs were unanimously in favour of the proposed change from Area Housing Boards to a more open style method for monitoring, debate and consultation of housing services and recommended full consultation with Area Housing Board (AHB) members at the June 2010 round of AHBs. Three of four Area Housing Boards voted in favour of the proposed change. BHP officers considered consulting on the name for the new forum structure and when this specific issue was discussed with the AHBs, some members of the AHBs voiced their views that the AHB structure should not be changed.

However, officers remain of the view that the current AHB structure needs to change and become more inclusive for Council tenants and leaseholders.

- 4.10 If the new structure is approved by Members, BHP will still present performance reports to tenants by setting aside allotted time for standing agenda items so that tenants will still be able to identify performance trends in their own areas.
- 4.11 BHP Officers believe that the new structure would be a sustainable way of reaching many more tenants in the consultation process and thereby give a much wider audience the chance to get involved in discussions on the management of their homes.

### **Aims**

- 4.12 The aims of the new structure are broadly similar to the aims of the current Area Housing Boards shown at Article 10 of Part 2 of the Council's constitution. These are:

- (a) To involve customers in the provision of housing services
- (b) To monitor the performance of housing management services and contractors and other parts of housing services
- (c) To develop new ideas and methods for solving Council housing problems
- (d) To influence the practices and policies that determine the provision of housing services
- (e) To consider the wider community problems and find solutions to them
- (f) To advise the housing management service on local priorities for the provision of housing services and the allocation of resources
- (g) To advise the housing management service in the development of an area strategy
- (h) To liaise with other groups and organisations

- 4.13 BHP proposes to consult with customers at the 'hub' style meetings on the following topics over the next 18 months:

Health and Safety
Communal Areas on Housing Estates
Delivery of Repairs
Providing Services for customers with disabilities
Providing Services for the elderly
New Tenancies and the First 6 months
Communicating with Customers
Providing services for the Young
Major Works from a Customer Perspective i.e. what could be improved when a major works contractor arrives on site.
Digital TV

- 4.14 Officers from the retained Housing Service and from the Consultation Board will need to work with BHP to clarify how consultation will be undertaken in respect of non-BHP functions which are not included in the aims of the proposed new structure.
- 4.15 The meetings of the proposed new structure will be conducted more like an open forum, with presentations from staff and residents, breakout groups, question and answer sessions and general discussion. They will be facilitated and co-ordinated by the Resident Involvement Manager but there will not be formal Chair requirements. The proposed new forum will be called “Talkback”.

### Membership

- 4.16 The number of residents currently represented by a residents’ association or community group is 5348. There are 3972 tenants and 1376 leaseholders represented by 39 associations and 12 community groups. The area breakdown is as follows:

Wembley		North Kilburn		South Kilburn		Harlesden & Brentfield/St Raphs	
Tenants	L/holders	Tenants	L/holders	Tenants	L/holders	Tenants	L/holders
1012	593	749	346	1308	254	903	183

Wembley		North Kilburn		South Kilburn		Harlesden & Brentfield/St Raphs	
Resident Assocs.	Comm Groups	Resident Assocs	Comm Groups	Resident Assocs	Comm Groups	Resident Assocs	Comm Groups
12	9	13	1	10	2	4	0

- 4.17 In addition there are 407 residents represented by 2 Tenant Management Organisations in Kilburn. The total number of residents represented by a residents’ association, community group or TMO is 42% of all council tenants and leaseholders.
- 4.18 The membership of the proposed new structure will be 3972 tenants and leaseholders but over time as other tenants who are not currently represented by a community group or residents’ association express an interest to attend this database will grow.
- 4.19 The meetings will be facilitated by the Resident Involvement Manager and these meetings will not have formal chair or quorum requirements.
- 4.20 At present, these arrangements only involve Council tenants and leaseholders of properties that are managed on behalf of the Council by BHP. These arrangements do not involve the tenants of Council properties on the Stonebridge estate that are managed by Hillside Housing Trust and which used to be owned by Stonebridge Housing Action Trust.

## **The role of Councillors**

- 4.21 Ward Councillors often attend their local AHBs and it is not proposed to change Councillor's role.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 BHP estimates that the new structure will result in a saving of approximately £1000 per annum on officer time and overheads associated with servicing the current 16 Area Housing Board meetings which take place each year.

## **6.0 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The Council is obliged by section 105(1) of the Housing Act 1985 to put in place such arrangements as it considers appropriate for consultation on housing management matters for its secure tenants – the proposed new structure will be one current method of discharging that duty. The duty will still be capable of being discharged should Members agree to the proposed changes.

- 6.2 A review has been carried out by Navigant Consulting on behalf of the Council regarding the future of BHP and the Council's relationship with BHP. A review is currently taking place of the governance arrangements of BHP. Following the decision of the Council's Executive meeting of 18 July 2011 regarding the future arrangements for ownership, investment and management of the Council's housing stock, consultation will take place regarding the preferred option of Brent Housing Partnership managing the Council's housing stock as an optimised Arms Length Management Organisation focusing strongly on housing management.

## **7.0 Diversity Implications**

- 7.1 It is anticipated that there will be an increase in the number of tenants and leaseholders attending the new style meetings and therefore a subsequent increased number of residents from BME and ethnic minority groups who have the opportunity to get involved in the management of their homes.
- 7.2 A copy of the Equalities Impact Assessment regarding the proposed changes is attached to this report and this has been considered by the Council's Diversity Team.

## **8.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)**

- 8.1 None

## **Background Papers**

Minutes of Harlesden/Brentfield and St Raphaels AHB Meeting of 10 June 2010;

Minutes of East Brent AHB Meeting of 15 June 2010;

Minutes of South Kilburn AHB Meeting of 17 June 2010;

Minutes of Wembley AHB Meeting of 21 June 2010;

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