



Housing Scrutiny Committee

16 January 2018

Report from the Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing

Update on Scrutiny Task Group Report on Housing Associations in Brent

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report updates Housing Scrutiny Committee on the changes made to the Council's work with Housing Associations in Brent, and relates these to the recommendations in the scrutiny task group report of July 2016.
- 1.2 The Council has changed its approach to working with Housing Associations significantly since the report was written and it has done this in line with wider developments in the sector. It is important to note that these developments were not always as planned, for example, the extension of Right to Buy to Housing Associations has not progressed, been extended, as was expected when the report was written.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Task Group Report on Brent's Housing Associations made a number of recommendations grouped into appropriate themes. Committee Members are asked to note and comment on the update on each as well as the broader update on the work the Council does with Housing Associations.

3.0 Detail

3.1 The context for the detailed update against each recommendation is that the Community Wellbeing Department, in particular housing, have worked hard to transform the relationship with Housing Associations as we recognised at the time we needed a more proactive and positive relationship in order to achieve the aims set out in the Housing Strategy, including, to:

- increase the supply of affordable housing in Brent
- improve the standard of social housing in Brent,
- develop resident engagement to drive improvements in social housing and housing management, and
- join up services and support which improve the wellbeing of residents, and make the links to Council wellbeing services and support, for example, financial inclusion services, health promotion, children and adult safeguarding.

3.2 CWB has done this through three primary mechanisms:

1. Six monthly strategic meetings between the Council (Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing and Operational Director Housing). These meeting explicitly address the priorities set out above
2. Reviewed and relaunched the Housing Association forum in Brent as the Housing Strategy and Delivery Board, which is chaired by a Housing Association director and supported by the Housing Supply and Partnerships team
3. Re-focused the Housing Supply and Partnerships team to take on wider engagement remit, providing the staff resource to drive the actions coming out of 1 and 2 to deliver the objectives set out in 3.1 above. However, they also have the remit to help with individual resident enquiries and complaints where the Housing Association is not picking them up and act as the access point for Housing Associations to all services in the council.

3.3 The table below provides an update against the specific recommendations in line with these broader changes.

<p>1. Strategic Director Community Wellbeing convenes a working party dedicated to Right to Buy (RtB) with registered providers which meets to monitor the impact of the policy in Brent and helps to mitigate any potential problems which are caused.</p>	<p>The RtB extension was not implemented as extensively as expected, so the continues focus for RtB is largely LA owned stock rather than the majority of RP owned stock. The council continues to look at methods of mitigating the effects of RtB on stock developed to replace property lost through this statutory obligation. When the extension is prioritised we will be in a good position to work with our HA partners as required.</p>
<p>2. Cabinet Member for Housing sets out a common position to all registered providers operating in Brent that the</p>	<p>As set out above, in the strategic meetings we are very clear about the housing supply need. In addition,</p>

<p>local authority would like homes of four bedrooms or more, specially adapted housing, and older people's housing exempted from the Right to Buy.</p>	<p>recent analysis of Housing Needs in Brent has further improved our understanding of need and we will be communicating this to all partners in the borough.</p>
<p>3. Strategic Director Community Wellbeing and Cabinet Member for Housing develop agreements with housing associations and the Greater London Authority which maximise the number homes replaced in Brent, including four-bedroom properties, as well as homes for social rent.</p>	<p>See 2 above. The Cabinet Member, Strategic Director and Operational Director convene regular meetings with senior Directors in all major Has in the Borough and are clear that Brent wants to work with them to bring forward the right developments. These meetings are beginning to bear fruit as major RPs are now in discussion with the Council on major developments and regeneration.</p>
<p>4. Strategic Director Community Wellbeing invites housing associations operating in Brent to fund jointly an anti-fraud investigator for a time-limited period to help housing associations' investigations into Right to Buy fraud and offer free training for staff on fraud and speculative buying practices.</p>	<p>See answer to 1 above. We have been clear that we are ready to provide expertise as required and the Housing Strategy and Delivery Board, provides the forum for these issues to be escalated.</p>
<p>5. Director of Policy, Performance and Partnership to consider integrating Right to Buy into Brent's financial inclusion strategy so that tenants are better informed about interest rates, mortgages, cost of major works, responsibility for repairs, and the operation of companies who encourage purchasing of homes under Right to Buy.</p>	<p>The Director of Policy, Performance and Partnership has been commissioned to carry out a review of how Financial Inclusion functions across the council can be aligned to look more holistically at people's needs.</p>
<p>6. Cabinet Member for Housing requests that housing associations advise tenants of their financial options, and inform them of the wider responsibilities of becoming a leaseholder as part of the purchasing process for Right to Buy.</p>	<p>This is a requirement of the Homes and communities Agency and the HAs already provide full details of Leaseholder obligations. Additionally a leaseholder cannot obtain a mortgage without full information concerning financial details.</p>
<p>7. Cabinet Member for Housing ensures a working party of registered providers convened around the Right to Buy extension shares information and expertise about properties going into the private rented sector.</p>	<p>See answers to 1 and 4, the Housing Strategy and Delivery Board, provides the forum for these discussions as required.</p>
<p>8. The Strategic Director Community Wellbeing and Lead Member for</p>	<p>In the strategic discussions we have found HAs to be responsive and</p>

<p>Housing to initiate further discussions with other London local authorities about collaborative arrangements for the provision of social housing in the future.</p>	<p>aligned to the aims we are trying to achieve. Should there be a need to tackle this from a multi-borough perspective we will do so.</p>
<p>9. Brent's Cabinet Member for Housing to consider setting up a forum for smaller housing associations to be able to gain expertise and knowledge in business planning and other areas from the larger registered providers operating in Brent.</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy and Delivery Board is an inclusive forum, and the agenda is developed by participant HAs, so this can be tackled there as required. Until this point, this has not been requested, which may be because there are other sources of information / expertise.</p>
<p>10. Cabinet Member for Housing and Strategic Director Community Wellbeing put in place mechanisms to signpost residents to information about the Community Land Trust Network and Federation Confederation of Cooperative Housing and self and custom-build networks and organises a one-off event to stimulate interest in developing other social housing models.</p>	<p>As part of the housing supply action plan, this will be considered, but the pressures on supply and the 1000 affordable homes a year target, mean that larger scale initiatives have taken precedence.</p>
<p>11. The Strategic Director for Community Wellbeing commissions a feasibility study about developing affordable self-build on marginal areas of council owned-land which is not suitable for its own house building programme.</p>	<p>The Housing department has commissioned research on affordability in 2017 as part of developing the new housing supply action plan. This has taken precedence as it provides the framework to understand what supply to focus on, the Supply and Partnerships team have been working on key supply routes as a result of this, and will be able to consider smaller scale opportunities like this in 2018.</p>
<p>12. Brent Council to update its Housing Strategy 2014-19 to weight available council owned land not intended for the council's own house-building programme towards housing association or partnership developments which house social tenants and vulnerable people in line with the council's political commitments.</p>	<p>The revised Housing Strategy 2018-23 is reconfirms the target for 1000 units of affordable accommodation per annum. The strategy does not define the use of Council land, which is set out in the Council's Strategic Asset Management Strategy. However, the supply action plan identifies a range of supply routes for delivering the target and has increased the focus on use of Council land. Also, through the work of the One Public Estate programme, the CCG and Council are nearing the</p>

	conclusion of a piece of work to align their asset strategies, in order to prioritise land for development for a range of developments including housing.
13. Brent Council to continue to work closely with social landlords in the borough to evaluate the effects of welfare reform, in particular the overall benefit cap, and to develop appropriate processes and procedures that facilitate the achievement of this.	The Head of Housing Needs and the Head of Revenues and Benefits, are working together, with other key partners, to address the effect of welfare reforms on Brent residents.
14. Cabinet Member for Housing to request that housing associations operating in Brent report regularly to the council outlining any progress they are considering in implementing Pay to Stay.	This issue will be an Agenda item on the Housing Development and Strategy Board in 2018.
15. Cabinet Member for Housing organises more frequent forums around specific issues such as rents, welfare reform and employment as well as linking with London wide housing groups so there can be a useful exchange of information and expertise.	This is already in place and a number of meetings have taken place.
16. The Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing organises a housing summit each year to bring together all the registered providers in the borough in addition to the regular quarterly forum meetings.	The new Housing Development and Strategy Board was launched in 2017 which meets quarterly and considers all issues of this nature. Additionally the Strategic Director has regular scheduled meetings with senior leaders within all of the locally active HAs. There has not been a great deal of interest in an annual forum as HAs prefer bi-lateral meetings to focus on specific projects, however, work on a wider Homelessness Summit is underway and will take place in 2018.
17. In collaboration with housing associations, Brent Council develops mechanisms that will enable housing association tenants to share their concerns and service priorities.	Scrutiny panel will be meeting senior leaders from relevant RPs early in 2018 which will provide the opportunity to progress this issue.
18. Cabinet Member for Housing to write to housing associations to encourage tenants' representation at the board level of housing associations by	The importance of tenants' representation and equally importantly, tenant experience driving housing management services is a focus for all the strategic meetings, which was

bottom-up elections.	seen as a more productive way of raising the issues and looking for potential solutions than a letter.
19. Cabinet Member for Housing to develop a partnership model which is more weighted towards those providing in-demand tenures and housing.	As a result of the strategic meetings (and being clear about this priority in those meetings), and the work of the Housing Supply and Partnerships team, a number of specific projects are now being jointly with HAs.

- 4.0** In addition to the recommendations above a number of questions were raised
- 4.1** Number of properties sold by Brent RPs under right to buy from FY15 – FY 17;
2016/17 – The figure was in the band 0-10 units at 7 units
2015/16 – The figure was in the band 0-10 units at 12 units
These figures have been derived from the Statistical Data Return from the HCA and published by DCLG.
- 4.2** Pay to stay – number of RP households affected; the proposal for Compulsory Pay to Stay was abandoned and there have been no known plans to introduce it on a Voluntary basis in Brent.
- 4.3** Right to stay - number of BHP/Brent Council households affected before the policy was made non-compulsory for Council's in Nov 2016. The Council introduced Fixed Term tenancies in 2012 and as the 5 year tenancies are now coming to an end, officers are now looking to apply agreed criteria to decide on renewals.
- 4.4** Effect of social rent reduction (1% rent reduction) for RPs– number of affected properties, total loss of revenue. It has not been possible to establish this information.

Report sign off:

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