



Full Council
22 January 2018

**Report from the Director of
Performance Policy & Partnerships**

**Report from the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee,
Councillor Janice Long**

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Mark Cairns, Policy & Scrutiny Manager, mark.cairns@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Standing Order 36. The report covers the period from 18th September 2017 to present, detailing a programme of work and items discussed during the committee meeting on 27th November 2017.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 Council is recommended to note this report.

3.0 Detail

3.1 The Housing Scrutiny Committee's remit is to scrutinise housing functions within the Community Wellbeing department, including the transfer of Brent Housing Partnership; housing supply; housing growth numbers; temporary accommodation; landlord licensing; the private rented sector; housing policy; homelessness; registered providers; supported housing; floating support, and home adaptations. Its remit primarily covers the portfolio area of the Cabinet Member for Housing & Welfare Reform.

3.2 2017-18 Housing Scrutiny Committee Members

Councillor Janice Long, Chair
Councillor Carol Shaw, Vice-Chair

Councillor Shafique Choudhary
Councillor Mary Daly
Councillor Patricia Harrison
Councillor Orleen Hylton
Councillor Sandra Kabir
Councillor Kana Naheerathan.

- 3.3 The committee also has agreed to appoint a co-optee who is a leaseholder of a Brent Council home, and another who is a council tenant. A panel agreed by the committee advertised for candidates during the summer and autumn, and interviewed these in December. Nominations for these are scheduled to be agreed at the committee's meeting in January, and confirmed at this meeting of full Council.
- 3.4 There are two meetings of the committee to report upon since the last full Council meeting (including one in September which took place before the Council meeting, but after the report submission deadline).
- 3.5 At its September meeting the scrutiny committee considered the following items.

Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Performance Data

- 3.6 This report confirmed the transition of housing management from BHP back to the council with effect from October 2017.
- 3.7 Members learned about general performance and areas of operational concern, the reasons for underperformance and the steps being taken to remedy performance. Many of these related to the previous BHP housing model though more recent concerns had arisen as a direct result of the transition of housing services back to the council, exacerbated by a shortage of management during the transition period. There had also been ICT difficulties experienced during transition generating a rise in complaints.
- 3.8 The committee was told that steps have now been taken to address underlying issues, which are beginning to yield results although there is some way to go. While officers anticipate that the housing transformation programme being rolled out will address many of the inherent performance matters, members challenged the service over delays and quality of responses provided to customers using the Contact Centre and requested greater emphasis be given to face-to-face engagement with tenants and leaseholders. To this end Members requested further scrutiny of the proposed Resident Engagement Strategy once this was available.

Rent and Management of the Travellers Site

- 3.9 The committee received a progress update about rent collection and housing management of the travellers' site at Lynton Close. Members learned that rent arrears have risen in part as a direct result of the introduction of the 'Benefit Cap' which has resulted in some residents no longer being able to claim full Housing Benefit or afford to fund the housing shortfall. Officers expressed a commitment to review rent levels at the site and bring a proposal on affordable rent levels to Cabinet.

- 3.10 The committee scrutinised officers about current and future site management and associated costs - currently undertaken by Oxford County Council (OCC) on behalf of Brent. Whilst the existing arrangement is self-financing, a failure to collect rents poses some risk to the council with discussions underway with OCC to mitigate potential costs.
- 3.11 Officers assured the committee that the cost of planned improvement to the site would be met through the capital programme. They also confirmed that a team was being created to actively improve community engagement and tackle the ongoing matter of overcrowding.
- 3.12 The committee challenged officers about whether the council was meeting its obligation around the number of pitches available, and was advised that the council was planning to carry out a needs assessment amongst those living on site that would later inform any decision to find more space for increased capacity.

Local Government Ombudsman Recommendations – Update

- 3.13 The committee asked officers to update them on recommendations made by the Local Government Ombudsman and by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in relation to a case from 2016. Officers provided information on:
- the setting up of an internal project group to review domestic abuse processes and procedures
 - the roll out of annual domestic abuse training by Shelter
 - Brent taking the lead on a joint mystery shopping exercise amongst six boroughs
 - the launch of an outcome based review in October to enhance the service offer.
- 3.14 These initiatives will continue to be scrutinised by the Committee. Members challenged on the importance of victims retaining social housing status and Right to Buy (RTB) eligibility if relocated, as a result of domestic abuse. The issue of retaining tenancy following relocation was reported as an ongoing matter not readily resolvable (as it is dependent upon individual circumstances).
- 3.15 At the November 2017 meeting the scrutiny committee discussed the following items:

Leasehold Services

- 3.16 This item focussed on the minimum legislative consultation requirements under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and Common Law Act 2003 in order that service charges can be collected, for the provision of services and major works. Members learned about the complexity of consultation with service charge payers which the law requires before the landlord commences qualifying works. They were also told about the ways in which tenants and leaseholders are involved in consultation, and the various payment plan options available to leaseholders as well as support provided where leaseholders experience financial difficulty in meeting service charge obligations.
- 3.17 Members challenged Officers about the level, range and extent of leaseholder communication, as well as the extent to which the service engaged Resident

Associations. Officers acknowledged there was scope for improvement in regards to communication and were clear that they are actively working towards improving overall application of the consultation process, but assured the Committee that statutory consultation obligations were being met allowing the Council to collect service charge monies due.

- 3.18 The Committee was advised that contracts for leasehold work previously on hold were due to be released imminently, and the service would trial a new consultation process, with a view to capture lessons learned to improve the overall process.

Housing Complaints

- 3.19 This item focused primarily on complaint handling performance of the Housing Needs and Private Housing services within Brent Council and complaint handling of Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) in 2016/17. The committee noted an overall increase in the number of cases awarded compensation but noted average compensation per case had decreased. As in previous years the most common cause for complaint remained service delays and/or service failures.
- 3.20 Members challenged the procedures currently adopted in handling of members' complaints and requested specific protocols be put in place to address and escalate complaints as necessary. In regards to the increased complaints about private housing, members received assurances that officers are taking steps to deal with concerns as part of a wider reorganisation of the Housing Management Service, with specific planned improvements for the complaint handling process.
- 3.21 Future annual complaint reports will see Housing Management Services incorporated into the wider Brent Council performance, as this function is now run by the council directly. In the meantime the 8 recommendations agreed at the Cabinet meeting of 23rd October 2017 have been rolled forward and will be delivered. These recommendations will continue to be scrutinised to conclusion, by the committee.

Scrutiny Task Group - Brent Housing Associations (Update)

- 3.22 This was an update report to Members on the progress made, in regards to the original task group report of July 2016 about Brent's Housing Associations. Here the focus has been on developing the role Housing Associations in Brent play in terms of increasing the supply of affordable housing, widening housing choice and reducing pressure on housing supply.
- 3.23 The update highlighted some of the initiatives currently being undertaken to support the council's challenging aspiration to see 1000 new affordable homes delivered each year. This included:
- refreshing partnering opportunities with key Housing Associations; consulting on the new Housing Strategy and exploring joint opportunities to jointly increase affordable housing supply
 - an examination of opportunities to better inform tenure mix of upcoming estate regeneration on 2 estates
 - further opportunities to increase the supply of rented accommodation more efficient targeting of Section 106 agreements to meet internal housing supply using the recently established Invest 4 Brent (I4B) vehicle.

- 3.24 Members learned that the newly convened Housing Strategy and Investment Board brings together key housing services, Housing Associations and other stakeholders into a single forum to collectively work towards increasing housing supply, and addresses other wider housing and general wellbeing matters like fire safety. It is expected that this board will set the strategic direction and expectations of the council moving forward and promote a cohesive approach to increasing housing supply, and making best use of existing housing supply channels.
- 3.25 Finally, the report advised of research being conducted by Cambridge University into affordability levels by different tenures in Brent. It is expected that the research outcome will support more accurate assessment of both property types and rent levels needed to better manage Bands A, B and C of the council's Housing Register, and so improve turnaround times and rental income for the council.
- 3.26 Despite learning about these matters, the committee felt that this update did not provide sufficient information about the status of the recommendations made in the original task group report, and so requested that officers report again on these at the next meeting in January.
- 3.27 In addition to the above, a task group has been undertaken in the current year investigating the fire safety of domestic properties, including low rise properties. The group's work is complete, and it was scheduled to report to the committee's meeting on 16th January (after the submission deadline for this report).

4.0 Upcoming Scrutiny Meetings and Activities

- 4.1 The upcoming meeting on 22nd February 2018 will consider the following items:
- Find Your Home programme
 - Brent Housing Management development plans
 - Update on social housing performance and delivery by Brent Registered Providers (RP).

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications.

7.0 Equality Implications

- 7.1 There are no equality implications.

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon

Director of Performance Policy &
Partnerships

Housing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017-18

Thursday 27 July 2017

Agenda Rank	Item	Objectives for Scrutiny	Cabinet Member/Member	Attendees
1.	Fire safety measures for tower blocks across Brent	<p>1.To assess the risk of any event similar to that of Grenfell Tower occurring particularly in social housing in Brent, and provide assurance if appropriate</p> <p>2.Improved awareness of the mitigation measures in place for civil emergencies;</p> <p>3. Responding to wider public interest.</p>	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<p>Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing</p> <p>Peter Gadsdon, Director of Performance, Policy & Partnerships</p>
2.	Timeline of integration of Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) & Transformation programme	<p>1.Taking stock of the current state the transformation plan;</p> <p>2. Understand the impact on shared services for residents.</p>	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing
3.	Initial arrangements for co-opted members	Agree method and criteria for recruiting one BHP tenant and one BHP resident as co-optees.	Cllr Janice Long	N/A

4.	Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2017-18	The report updates Members on the Committee's Work Programme for 2017-18	Cllr Janice Long	N/A
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Thursday 14 September 2017

Agenda	Item	Objectives for Scrutiny	Cabinet Member/Member	Attendees
1.	BHP performance data, resident engagement strategy and map of all BHP properties in each ward	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of performance indicators to understand delivery of housing services; 2. Use the current data as a baseline for future points of comparison after BHP's transition. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance.
2.	Rent and management of Travellers site	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scrutinise rent levels and rent collection; 2. Management and delivery of services for residents. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance; 4. Oxfordshire County Council.
3.	Implementation of actions previously recommended by Local Government Ombudsman	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evidence of action taken based on the recommendations from the Local Government Ombudsman. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of

				Finance.
4.	Scope – task group on Fire Safety of low-rise domestic properties (up to nine storeys)	1. Agree scope (to have regard to work already done and previous reports to committee and full Council).	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance; 4. Sanjan Haque, Senior Policy Officer
5.	Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2017-18	The report updates Members on the Committee's Work Programme for 2017-18	Cllr Janice Long	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sanjan Haque, Senior Policy Officer

Wednesday, 1 November 2017

Agenda	Item	Objectives for Scrutiny	Cabinet Member/Member	Attendees
1.	Leaseholder services	Section 20 consultation process: 1. notice of intention; 2. notification of estimates; 3. notification of award of contract.	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance.
2.	Brent's Housing Associations: scrutiny task group report (July 2016)	1. Evaluate progress on recommendations from original report to CWB Scrutiny Committee in July 2016.	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance; 4. John Magness, Head of Housing Partnerships
3.	Housing complaints	1. Scrutinise housing complaints from annual complaints report and determine key messages; 2. Scrutinise handling of vexatious complaints; 3. Review new complaints handling mechanism after BHP dissolved	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance
4.	Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2017-	The report updates Members on the Committee's Work Programme for 2017-18	Cllr Janice Long	1. Sanjan Haque, Senior Policy Officer

Tuesday, 16 January 2018

Agenda	Item	Objectives for Scrutiny	Cabinet Member/Member	Attendees
1.	Housing Revenue Account (HRA) rent setting	1. Pre-scrutiny of decision;	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance
2.	Fire Safety task group report	1. Review final report before submitting to Cabinet	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform; Task Group chair (Cllr Janice Long);	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing
3.	Brent based Registered Providers (RP) delivery of social housing	1. Use of existing assets 2. Future strategy for Brent 3. Welfare issues addressed by RP (methods, means, and areas of collaboration with LBB) 4. Commitment and action between RP and their section 106 commitments	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. One registered provider (TBC).
4.	Brent's Housing	5. Evaluate progress on	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead	1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director

	Associations: scrutiny task group report (July 2016)	recommendations from original report to CWB Scrutiny Committee in July 2016.	Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 4. John Magness, Head of Housing Partnerships
5	Review short-listed candidates as co-opted members for the committee	1. Evaluate short-listed candidates as co-opted members for the Housing Scrutiny committee.	Cllr Janice Long	1. Mark Cairns, Policy & Scrutiny Manager
6.	Scaffolding protocol			Hakeem Osinaike Sean Gallagher

Thursday, 22 Feb 2018

Agenda	Item	Objectives for Scrutiny	Cabinet Member/Member	Attendees
1.	'Find your home' programme	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Performance of the scheme in Brent; 2. Understand whether programme is fit for purpose based on social needs; 3. Understand the relationship with welfare reform; 4. Impact on homelessness with special focus on Children & Young People. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance.
2.	BHP Development plans	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Size of portfolio; Value of portfolio; 2. Management and usage plans beyond integration of BHP within LB Brent Housing; 3. Financial forecast. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance
3.	Brent based Registered Providers (RP) delivery of social housing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of existing assets 2. Future strategy for Brent 3. Welfare issues addressed by RP (methods, means, and areas of collaboration with LBB) 4. Commitment and action between RP and their section 106 commitments 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance;

				4. One registered provider (TBC).
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Wednesday, 21 Mar 2018

Agenda	Item	Objectives for Scrutiny	Cabinet Member/Member	Attendees
1.	Homelessness Reduction Act	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Role of the Trailblazer programme in delivering reduction in homelessness; 2. Council's preparation for the delivery of the new legislation. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance.
2.	Brent based Registered Providers (RP) delivery of social housing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of existing assets 2. Future strategy for Brent 3. Welfare issues addressed by RP (methods, means, and areas of collaboration with LBB) 4. Commitment and action between RP and their section 106 commitments 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance; 4. One registered provider (TBC).
3.	Outcome Based Review – domestic abuse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. OBR/pan-London domestic abuse progress report. 	Cllr Harbi Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phil Porter, Strategic Director Community Wellbeing; 2. Hakeem Osinaike, Operational Director Housing; 3. Minesh Patel, Head of Finance;