

ITEM 13.3

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|  Brent | Full Council 9 July 2018 |
| | Report from the Director of Performance Policy & Partnerships |
| Housing Scrutiny Committee - Chair's Update Report | |

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| 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: | 0 |
| Background Papers: | N/A |
| Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small> | Jackie Barry-Pursell Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Jacqueline.barry-pursell@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. The report covers the period from 16th January 2018 to present, detailing a programme of work and items discussed during this period.

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 and Wellbeing department, including Brent Housing Management; 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 appointed two co-optees - a leaseholder of a Brent Council home, and a Council tenant – Michele Lonergan and Karin Jaegar. These were confirmed at the meeting of full Council in January 2018.

3.4 There are three meetings of the Committee to report upon.

3.5 At its **January meeting** the Scrutiny Committee considered the following items.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Rent Setting

3.6 This report set out the proposals for the 2018/19 rent and service charges, provided an overview of the Council's capital investment spend for housing as well as outlining the proposed mitigation strategy prior to full roll out of Universal Credit (UC) scheduled for November 2018.

3.7 Members heard that a 1% reduction on rent charges was planned for 2018/19, and that service charges were not covered by the rent reduction policy and therefore an increase of 4% would be proposed for the next financial year.

3.8 The impact of the upcoming full rollout of Universal Credit was discussed, in particular the impact of changes to payments – i.e. rents would be paid directly to households and not the Council who is the landlord. Members were reassured that housing management services has a strategy in place to review and manage the potential increase in arrears.

3.9 The Committee received an update on the Travellers site at Lynton Close. Members heard that there was commitment from the Council to review the mobile home pitches' rent as well as modernise the site. Members were informed that transition plans were in place to transfer site management. Arrears were discussed and a plan outlined to progress this.

3.10 Further discussion focused on the Capital Programme and the amount allocated for aids and adaptations as well as activity included as part of the ongoing stock condition survey.

3.11 The Committee was informed that the Council operates a fixed service charge policy which means that the Council could not increase service

charges based on the cost of the actual service, and was investigating whether any further changes were required in the future.

Task Group Report on Fire Safety

- 3.12 Following the fatal fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 there has been significant focus by different levels of government on the fire safety of domestic properties across the country. However, the committee felt there was a compelling case to investigate fire safety measures for low-rise properties in addition to high rise blocks. A task group set out to examine fire safety measures for Council housing and social housing managed by Registered Providers (RPs), as well as how they communicate with their tenants and leaseholders in respect of these issues. The group also looked at housing allocations policy, the risks posed by bulky items in common areas, and emergency vehicle access for social housing estates.
- 3.13 The Task Group made 11 recommendations that were agreed by the committee, and subsequently presented to Cabinet. These will be followed up in a progress report in the current municipal year.

Metropolitan Housing

- 3.14 The Committee were joined by representatives from Metropolitan Housing – one of the borough’s Registered Providers. The level and quality of services delivered to local residents was outlined. During the discussion Members sought further details on a range of issues including the repairs services, housing performance, communication with residents and Councillors, grounds maintenance issues and preparation for the Universal Credit roll out. Further clarification was sought by Members about future plans for surveying the condition of its housing stock. It was agreed that further information on “right to buy” would be circulated to Members. Finally, in the context of resident engagement, Members heard that Metropolitan Housing was taking an active role in reviewing performance, contractors and shaping activities and improvements focused on residents’ needs.

Brent’s Housing Associations: Scrutiny Task group report (July 2016)

- 3.15 The Committee received a progress report on the task group report from July 2016 on Brent’s Housing Associations, which had been presented to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee when housing was part of that Committee’s remit.
- 3.16 The report provided a detailed update against a range of recommendations, demonstrating continuing commitment to a more productive and proactive approach and transforming the relationship with Housing Associations in order to achieve the aims as set out in the Housing Strategy - such as increasing supply of affordable housing, improving the standard of social housing and developing resident engagement. Members heard that most actions from the report had been completed or had expired.

- 3.17 Members also discussed a number of areas including, future service charges in respect of “right to buy”, service charge payment options, housing association forums and fixed-term tenancies. The contents of the report were noted and it was agreed that information on “pay to stay” be shared with the Committee.

New Scaffolding Protocol

- 3.18 The Committee heard a verbal update on the new scaffolding protocol applicable Borough-wide. The Council in its lead role is accountable for the work, duration and location of scaffolding. Officers stressed the importance of providing a value for money service to residents and the importance of communication with residents. It was noted that a fixed sum was payable by the Council and so no additional payments would be made for scaffolding kept longer than instructed by the Council. The function will sit within Housing Management going forward and officers assured Members that scaffolding would not be erected without first communicating with residents.
- 3.19 When erecting scaffolding, parking can pose a particular challenge, and so plans are in place to resolve these, with the intention being to use the TMOs (Traffic Management Orders) to help improve the situation in general.
- 3.20 At its **February meeting**, the Committee considered the following items.

Genesis Housing – Registered Providers

- 3.21 The Committee welcomed representatives from Genesis Housing, a Registered Provider with more than 6000 properties in the borough as of March 2017. Discussions included the forthcoming merger with Notting Hill Housing, including the proposal to appoint a local contact officer. Genesis Housing highlighted the plans in place to improve engagement with residents, for example, undertaking site inspection visits that residents were invited to join.
- 3.22 The Committee discussed the conversion of social tenancies to affordable rents, and was advised that the overall turnaround of converted tenancies was relatively low, at about 2%, due to the low annual number of voids. Generally, conversion of rents from social to affordable was based on a combination of factors including the housing association’s ability to build, grants attached to the property, grants available from central government and the revenue required to be raised, with an affordability assessments carried out on each instance. Members were also given an update on Genesis’ Leasing Scheme. Work is underway by Genesis to attract more landlords and increase the availability of temporary accommodation. Further discussion took place in relation to performance, property maintenance, community funds and fire safety arrangements.

Find Your Home Programme

- 3.23 Members received a report focused on the Find Your Home Programme. The Head of Service explained that following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2017 the Council had initiated the Find Your Home (FYH) scheme. Members heard that since its launch in 2015, the scheme had helped over 3000 and that it formed part of an overall housing strategy. Members welcomed the scheme but also noted that private rented sector accommodation was not a long-term solution but a short-term intervention.

Housing Development Plans and Infill Programme

- 3.24 The Operational Director for Housing gave an update on the Council's Housing Development Plans and Infill Programme. He explained that housing demand in Brent was in line with the overall London trend and that the plans, which were part of the Council's Housing Strategy, were aimed at responding to the service needs. Members emphasised the importance to consult with residents on any incentives available from contractors as well as looking at overall price and quality of the service provided.

- 3.25 At its **March meeting**, the Committee considered the following items.

Catalyst Housing

- 3.26 The Committee received a presentation from Catalyst Housing that set out the context of the organisation – it manages in excess of 21,000 properties ranging from social rented homes to shared ownership properties. Further discussion focused on customer satisfaction, investment and improvement works. Engagement with both residents and Councillors was discussed and in particular how this could be improved. Members also raised fire safety, in particular smoke alarms and information-sharing with residents about maintenance. Catalyst Housing confirmed that there was a fire evacuation strategy in place for each building.

Homelessness Prevention Programme

- 3.27 Members received a report on the Homelessness Prevention Programme. The report set out the key changes and implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which was due to take effect from 3 April 2018, an overview of the role and performance of the Council's Single Homeless Prevention Scheme (SHPS) and lessons learned to date. Members sought further clarification on the number of people who had used the scheme. Officers said that following the introduction of the Act there would be a new statutory duty of public bodies to make referrals to the Council of families under threat of becoming homeless in order to prevent this at an early stage, with the Council committed to early intervention. Members also enquired about the financial implications of the Act and how it would compare to other councils, with officers explaining that Brent was well placed in preparation for the new Act but financial predictions were difficult at this stage as spending and demand had not yet started.

Landlord Licensing

- 3.28 Members also received a report on Landlord Licensing. The report set out the impact of Landlord Licensing on private rented sector tenants since its introduction in January 2015. Discussions covered licensing fees, the impact on landlords and tenants and tackling fly-tipping. There was a recommendation to Cabinet that a KPI should be introduced to measure the changes to tackling fly-tipping in areas which have licensing.

Customer Service Performance

- 3.29 Members then received a report on Customer Service Performance. They heard that some significant improvements in relation to the performance of the Housing Contact Centre had been made since October 2017 and that progress was ongoing. At the time of the meeting, an action plan was being developed to progress improvements in areas such as call handling. Key points in the plan included the need to review the waiting times and align it more closely with the service standard.

4.0 Upcoming Scrutiny Meetings

- 4.1 The meetings for 2018/19 have been agreed as:

- Thursday 12 July 2018
- Thursday 13 September 2018
- Thursday 29 November 2018
- Wednesday 6 February 2019
- Wednesday 27 March 2019
- Thursday 25 April 2019

- 4.2 A work planning meeting took place on 11 June, and a work programme is being developed for 2018/19.

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