



Brent

## **MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** **Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair), and Councillors Collymore (Vice-Chair), Fraser, Lorber, Molloy, Mistry, Rajan-Seelan and Smith, and co-opted members Mr Alloysius Frederick and Ms Rachelle Goldberg

In attendance: Councillor Promise Knight, Councillor Muhammed Butt

### **1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

- Councillor Matin, substituted by Councillor Lorber
- Councillor Afzal
- Councillor Begum

### **2. Declarations of interests**

None.

### **3. Deputations (if any)**

There were no deputations received.

### **4. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting on 21 September 2023 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **5. Matters arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising.

### **6. Brent Housing Management Update**

Councillor Promise Knight (Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security) introduced the report, which provided an update on Brent Housing Management performance. In particular, she highlighted the process of preparing for the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures detailed in section 4 of the report and the pilot for those measures which she hoped would be broadly reflective of the tenant population living in Council homes in Brent. Section 4.10 of the report detailed the areas that Brent Housing Management (BHM) was doing well, such as handling Anti-Social Behaviour and complaints, and the areas for improvement such as time taken to complete repairs. The report set out the plans to address those areas not performing as well in section 4.16, which included a remodelling of the repairs contract to include an in-house handy-person service and a cross-party working group to help steer the procurement. Councillor Knight highlighted that the Committee had previously paid significant interest in void turnaround times, which had now significantly reduced. In the previous year there were turnaround

times of 293 days, compared to post-July 2023 where voids were being turned around in an average of 43 days and the backlog of voids had reduced from 1,500 to 203.

In continuing the introduction, Ryan Collymore (Head of Housing – Property Management Services, Brent Council) added that, since BHM had last presented to the Committee, there had been an improvement in compliance and BHM were hitting mainly 100% against all compliance assets. The one challenge in relation to compliance was around EICRs due to difficulties gaining access to properties. Where there were access issues, all were being actioned and legal action was being taken where necessary.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their introduction and invited comments and questions from the Committee, with the following issues raised:

The Committee asked, in relation to Tenant Satisfaction Measures, what data was most significant and what was being done to mitigate any causes for concern in relation to tenant satisfaction. Councillor Knight explained that repairs satisfaction, particularly tenants feeling that communal areas were safe and well-maintained, was a cause for concern. The process of re-procuring the repairs contract was one way of mitigating those issues to increase satisfaction, particularly the proposal to contract an in-house handy-person service where staff were routed in the locality and understood the area. That in-house service would also mean broader access to councillors who were aware of some of the cases around disrepair and the length of time residents were waiting for issues to be resolved. The deadline for re-procurement was March 2024, with the expectation to have the new contracts and service running by 1 October 2024. To improve repairs satisfaction, the proposal was to split the borough in half so that one contractor looked after one half of the borough and another contractor had the other half. This meant that if a contractor was not performing well then the work could be passed on to the second contractor. BHM was trying to shape its services to fit with the new contract model, particularly making surveyors more area-based, and so in the meantime there was an upcoming restructure putting housing officers in area patches with surveyors, meaning there would be small area teams liaising with each other and having greater ownership of those areas. The aim was to build a community-based service which was hoped would raise satisfaction, and for the caretakers and handy-persons to work closely together to ensure communal areas were fit for purpose for residents to enjoy. The Committee asked for a further breakdown of satisfaction by ward.

The Committee asked what the timeline was for these improvements around repairs and repairs satisfaction. Members were advised that the Council was currently working towards the new contract. There would be a need to demobilise the Wates contract, which could be a difficult time to keep them motivated. BHM acknowledged this potential for demotivation as the Council came closer to the contract award date, and even if Wates were to bid on and win one contract they could not win both contracts with the new split model. Officers had met with Wates Senior Managers and explained the new contract model and strategy and raised concerns that they would become demotivated, and Wates had given a full commitment to continue their work to a high standard while they were within their contract.

In relation to how tenant and leaseholder views would be included within the repairs re-procurement, the Committee heard that there had been a number of outreach activities, including with councillors. Councillor Knight had organised and hosted cross-party briefings and created a cross-party working group of councillors to look at the repairs contract. Part of the engagement work would involve getting feedback from leaseholders, and Tenant Satisfaction Measures would also feed in to the process.

The Committee asked how BHM worked with the Housing Need Department to incentivise tenants to downsize where appropriate. Laurence Coaker (Head of Housing Need, Brent Council) informed the Committee that there was a dedicated team to liaise with tenants and encourage them to downsize to give the Council access to greatly needed larger

properties. It had been found that it was important to tailor the approach to the individual person or families' needs. The Council had a generous financial incentive package, but the experience was that it was not always about the money but what the family wanted in a property to encourage them to move. This could revolve around location and design, for example, some new builds allowed residents to pick the kitchen design of the property.

Continuing to discuss downsizing, the Committee asked whether the government's succession policy of charging a £20 fee for empty rooms had any impact on incentivising people to downsize. They were advised that the additional fee for empty rooms had not been a significant contributing factor to why people were choosing to downsize.

In considering the succession policy, the Committee asked what influence the Council had on encouraging or enforcing single people succeeding larger properties to downsize. They were advised that this was dependent on the type of succession rights the person had. If the successor was a spouse, they would have a statutory right to that home and the Council would not have any right to enforce them to downsize. Even in those cases, the Council reviewed them individually to consider whether it might be appropriate to encourage them to downsize. For example, if an elderly person was living in a 2-bed property, but that property was adapted to meet their needs, then it would not be encouraged, but if a much younger person succeeded a property then the Council might engage with them to discuss incentives to downsizing, focusing on their individual circumstances. There was also discretionary succession, or discretionary tenancies, which might be awarded to a child, when it was more likely there would be excess rooms. In those types of succession cases then the Council could enforce the person to downsize, and that person would be given Band A priority to bid on an appropriately sized home, or could accept a direct offer. Officers agreed to provide the Committee with the Succession Policy.

The Committee raised the issue of fly-tipping, which they highlighted was an emotive subject for many residents. They asked whether there was any reason behind fly-tipping in particular areas, what proactive action caretakers could take against fly-tipping, and whether residents were motivated to put rubbish in the correct bins. It was highlighted that a reduction in fly-tipping also reduced the Council's financial burden. Kate Daine (Head of Housing – Neighbourhoods, Brent Council) explained that the caretakers' responsibilities were largely around keeping estates clean and tidy, and there was a specific team to deal with dumped rubbish and fly tips reactively. The Council was now initiating a more proactive approach to rubbish, balancing out the costs of dumping rubbish and the cost of the resources involved in that and looking at newer, more innovative ways to work with tenants and residents on those issues. Fly-tipping came from many different sources. Some tenants may not know what fly-tipping was and mistakenly fly tip, which was where further education was needed, but there were also more prolific fly-tippers who knew it was illegal and some fly tipping was associated with businesses and buildings. For that reason, a targeted approach was needed to deal with all the different sources of fly-tipping. A specific Service Manager for Estates Services was now in post and as a Working Group had been set up, jointly with environmental services, to discuss how the Council could educate facets of society about how to dispose of waste and take an enforcement approach in 'hotspot' areas that had been labelled and designated. At present, caretakers did not have the power to issue tickets or enforcement work and were not trained to do that. In order to give caretakers that power there would be a need to change their job descriptions and train them to do that work.

The Committee asked how the Council was currently communicating messages about disposal of waste to tenants and leaseholders. They heard that the Council's waste contractor, Veolia, did proactive education around bin management and recycling. The Council was trying to continually reduce the amount of waste residents produced to improve the carbon footprint on estates. It had also increased estate walkabouts and part

of that involved conversations about fly-tipping and bin management, which often involved educating tenants and giving them better ways to report fly-tipping. In relation to whether this education piece was happening in schools for that early messaging, the Committee was advised that this had not yet been fully detailed. In response to whether CCTV and robust signs were in place to deter big fly-tippers, officers confirmed that this was the case.

The Committee were encouraged by the improvement in void turnaround times and reduction in the backlog. Members asked what the target turnaround time was and what financial impact longer turnaround times had on the Council. Peter Gadsdon (Corporate Director for Resident Services, Brent Council) advised the Committee that the turnaround target for a minor void was 35 days and 72 days for a major void, which were recognised industry standard targets. In relation to the 170 properties that were being tracked as void pre-April in distressed condition, when those properties were eventually let they would show in the performance indicators as red, but since April 2023 BHM had been tracking newly void properties as averaging around 45 days turnaround. BHM now needed a period of time to work through those 170 pre-April voids before performance indicators started to improve. It was highlighted that Wates was performing on voids at the present time and the delays were being caused by issues such as clearing meter debt and arranging for other contractors to inspect properties for asbestos, legionella and other compliance related issues. There had also been issues with residents leaving properties in a poor state, meaning large rubbish clearances were needed before conducting a full specification on a property. The void process had now been improved significantly, with all voids identified and a suited key system to avoid delays accessing properties. It was estimated that the steady state on voids should be around 70 properties at any given time. In relation to the financial impact, the cost was two-fold. Firstly, the cost of losing rental income while the property was void could be significant, and secondly the cost of the void refurbishment itself. In value for money terms, if BHM was getting voids right then it greatly helped with the financing of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Committee requested further details of the financial impact of current voids.

The Committee asked whether there was a policy for pre-allocation of a void property to help reduce the waiting list faster. Laurence Coaker (Head of Housing Need, Brent Council) informed the Committee that the Housing Need Department was involved in that process. It involved close liaison between Housing Need and the Voids and Lettings Team. Housing Need was responsible for Locator, which was the choice based waiting list. The Voids and Lettings Team provided Housing Need with the pipeline of void properties and, when appropriate, the Housing Need Team would advertise those properties. The Committee heard that it was important to get the timing of that right, and once the team knew a property was nearing completion they would advertise, receive bids, verify that people's circumstances had not changed, confirm that they were eligible, and create a shortlist of verified nominations ready to arrange viewings.

The Chair invited representatives from Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) to contribute to the discussion. BYP asked what interventions the Council had in place to prevent young people from becoming homeless. Councillor Knight advised the Committee that BHM worked closely with Housing Need Department and the Children and Young People Department to ensure the Council offered the right assistance to young people who found themselves homeless in a position that was no choice of their own. The Council also worked with external partners and charities, particularly those focused on youth homelessness. Laurence Coaker added that, in relation to care leavers specifically, there were protocols in place to ensure a path for housing for any care leaver. The majority of care leavers went into social housing as opposed to the Private Rented Sector, but that was not a blanket approach and the support was tailored to the need of the young person. For example, if a care leaver was to go to a different part of the country to study and subsequently wanted to settle in that part of the country, then the Council would assist them to access privately rented properties in that area.

Continuing to discuss children and young people, the Committee asked how BHM engaged young people. Councillor Knight highlighted section 4.8 of the report, which detailed that 464 tenants had been surveyed from a broad range of individuals, some of which would be young people, although she felt there was more BHM could do to engage young people. She felt that the work of BYP would be helpful in allowing BHM to engage with more young people, but the challenge was that BHM was focused on the tenant population living in council homes, where oftentimes the tenure would be slightly older.

In relation to compliance, the Committee were advised that BHM checked Fire Risk Assessments, legionella, asbestos, conducted yearly gas checks and domestic electrical checks, and did block electrical checks in all Council-owned properties. The Committee asked what powers BHM had to ensure privately owned or leased properties were compliant with health and safety in blocks where 50% of properties were Council-owned and occupied by Council tenants. Members were advised that the Leasehold Teams and Home Ownership Team handled that side of compliance and should contact leaseholders asking them to provide gas safety and EICR certificates. This may not be done on a routine basis as it was in BHM but it was expected of those teams. There were some private properties that had asked BHM to manage compliance assets on their behalf, where BHM would do those checks routinely.

The Chair thanked those present for their contributions and drew the item to a close. He invited the Committee to make recommendations, with the following RESOLVED:

- i) To recommend that there is liaison between BHM and leaseholder services to ensure there is compliance by private owners and leaseholders in Council blocks, to ensure that all tenants residing in those blocks are safe.

Several information requests were also made throughout the discussion as noted below:

- i) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive an infographic detailing how different services work in a joined up way to ensure repairs work is completed.
- ii) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive information around any recruitment and retention issues within BHM and what impact the savings proposals are having on BHM.
- iii) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive further details on the financial impact of current voids.
- iv) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to be provided with the Council's Succession Policy.
- v) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive a breakdown of tenant satisfaction by ward.

## **7. New Single Homeless Prevention Service**

Councillor Promise Knight (Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security) introduced the report, which set out the rationale for the move of the Single Homeless Service to an in-person, face to face service. The Council had found that the previous online appointments system was unable to cope with the volume of demand, which was unprecedented, and could not meet the needs of single homeless people within the borough. The new face to face service was accessible, better placed to identify immediate need and was within 5 minutes walking distance of key delivery partners such as Crisis, Job Centre Plus and DWP. The Committee was asked to note the importance of

co-location and the wraparound support single homeless people would receive, outlined in section 4.5 of the report.

The Chair thanked colleagues for their introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

The Committee asked about the £500,000 price increase of the new contract with the Single Homeless Prevention Service, which had been retendered at £2.1m. Laurence Coaker (Head of Housing Need, Brent Council) explained that the contract went through the tender process and the final contract price had increased by £500,000, but the contract was outcome based. Compared to a traditional contract where the Council would commission the service following tendering, then pay for that service and monitor it through KPIs, this contract would only be paid for if the contractor delivered. The paper set out the different delivery outcomes that the specification expected from the service, which were to complete Personal Housing Plans, to prevent and relieve homelessness, and to support tenancy sustainment. If those deliverables were unsuccessful then the contractor would not get paid. The funding for the service came through the Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant which the Council received every year to finance the outcomes of the service. The grant went into the General Fund where the service was then paid for. A written response would be provided in relation to section 8.2 which stated that there would be no grant subsidy as seen in previous years.

The Committee asked for further details on what the factors were resulting in single people becoming homeless. They heard that the number one factor driving homelessness was affordability as a result of the rising cost of living and high cost of housing in Brent, with privately rented properties beyond the reach for a lot of people. In terms of demographics, there were not many young people presenting as a single homeless person, and where there was a breakdown of family relationships causing a young person to want to leave home, the Housing Need Department worked with the Children and Young People Department to mediate and keep the young person at home where appropriate.

The Committee asked for further information regarding the co-location space in Designworks. Laurence Coaker highlighted that Designworks was the name of the building, and the Council had named the service within that building the Turning Point. The Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS) was collocated with the Council's Single Homelessness Team, who had also relocated from the Civic Centre to the Designworks building, who were contracted to help with the prevention and relief of single homelessness. In relation to the division of labour between the Council and SHPS, the Committee heard that all presentations of single homelessness came to the Council, who did a triage assessment and determined the circumstances of the individual. Those with higher vulnerability and more need were dealt with by the Council's Single Homelessness Team and SHPS picked up clients with lower vulnerability and lower needs, which helped to free up resource for the Council's team to focus on those with additional support needs.

The Committee asked for assurance that the Council was able to sustain this service and cope with the current demand. They were advised that it was a statutory, demand-driven service so the Council was required to deliver it. The move to Turning Point in Designworks was designed to increase capacity by co-locating the teams and being in close proximity to other service so that the passage for homeless people was smoother and more efficient. The Council was focused on continuing to develop services to make them more efficient to meet demand.

The Committee requested information on what tangible mitigations were being put in place to alleviate the 20-25% increase that the Council had seen in homelessness over the recent period. Laurence Coaker informed the Committee that a big part of moving the Single Homeless Prevention Service to Harlesden and rebranding as Turning Point was to make it better for service users and also for officers. The demand for housing was

unprecedented across the whole of the country, particularly in London, due to the high cost of housing, which was having a real impact on stress and causing issues recruiting and retaining officers. The previous online system was adding to the stress of officers because single homeless people were not able to get an appointment quick enough and were being forced to use an online system that was not suitable for their needs, resulting in many turning up at the Civic Centre in crisis. The new face to face service in Harlesden, co-located with the Council's Housing Need officers and other key services, helped to alleviate that stress. In section 5.2 of the report, it detailed that the Council had now cleared the backlog where there were around 500 cases before. Most recently, the service was seeing an average of about 43 presentations and had an average of 25 referrals, and people were receiving additional support and signposting to other provisions available to single homeless people. As such, the service was seeing some tangible benefits since launching Turning Point in August 2023 and was dealing with people quickly and effectively.

The Committee asked how closely the homelessness teams worked with health services in the borough. Members heard that the health service was coming to deliver the services outlined in section 4.7 of the report.

The Committee asked what happened when someone presented as a single homeless person at Turning Point. Members were advised that the Council would assist in ending the homelessness duty, primary through helping to find suitable accommodation in the Private Rented Sector. For single people, a 1-bed property would be considered suitable. The law set out what was considered suitable and the duty on the Council to end homelessness. There were different duties – the prevention duty, relief duty and main duty. For single homeless people, they rarely reached the main duty as they did not meet the criteria in legislation. The prevention duty would usually be triggered for single homeless people, which ran for 56 days. If the person was not housed within those 56 days then the person would be deemed actually homeless and would enter the relief duty, which stated that the local authority must take reasonable steps to assist in relieving homelessness. If the person's homelessness could not be relieved then the case was closed and the duty was ended as they would not meet the criteria for main duty homelessness as a single homeless person. The main duty stated that the local authority must secure suitable accommodation.

The Committee asked how the service dealt with someone who presented as a single homeless person but was actually pregnant and expecting a child. Laurence Coaker advised that this would be picked up by the Families Team who dealt with single homeless people who were pregnant. Many single people who were pregnant would present at the Turning Point, so they would be included in the self-referral figures, even though at the stage it was discovered they were pregnant, usually at interview, they would be referred on to the Families Team.

The Chair invited representatives of Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) to contribute to the discussion, who asked what was being done to promote this service to young people specifically. Councillor Knight felt that more could be done to engage young people, however, the target cohort for the service and the people who presented at the service were over 18 years old. Young people under the age of 18 who found themselves homeless would be dealt with using a joint approach with the Children and Young People Department. The Committee highlighted that, even though young people might not be users of the service, they may be the best communicators to older cohorts in the community who may be in need of the service. More generally, the service was promoted with large campaign posters across the borough, through the Council's website and through communication channels.

Brent Youth Parliament also asked whether there was guaranteed housing in Brent for Care Leavers who wanted to live in Brent. Officers confirmed that there was a policy with

the Children and Young People Department around accommodation for Care Leavers that ensured suitable accommodation for Care Leavers.

In response to whether there was specialist support for those aged 18-25, who were still considered young people but were adults legally, officers explained that there was a commissioned service to deal with young people and provide that age group with supported housing.

In relation to promoting the new location for services, members highlighted that the public had reported that the recording when using the telephone line still referred people to the Civic Centre for the service. They asked for this to be checked and confirmed that the internal recorded system had now been updated with the new location. Officers confirmed this would be investigated.

The Committee asked what engagement work had taken place with the Black Community Action Plan Champions into an appreciative enquiry approach to understand homelessness and Black households. Laurence Coaker advised members that a lot of the engagement work was done through the Homelessness Forum, chaired by Crisis, which had around 30 different agencies across the spectrum of housing and homelessness agencies in Brent. The Forum was the main form of consultation and planning for the new service and met every 2 months at the Civic Centre. The Forum looked at the details of planning for relocation and the operational details of how things would work practically with the implementation of the new service.

In relation to the number of presentations, the Committee asked how many amounted to referrals and how many of those who presented were subsequently housed. They were advised that performance was detailed in section 6 of the report and was focused on the prevention and relief of homelessness, which was detailed in Table 1. There was confusion in regards to the table in Appendix 1 – the Equality Impact Assessment, where figures for different age groups and ethnicity groups had been merged together. The Committee highlighted that it would be useful for future reports to have more readable, realistic and digestible data.

The Chair thanked those present for their contributions and drew the item to a close. He invited the Committee to make recommendations, with the following RESOLVED:

- i) To recommend that, before the contract is due for renewal in 2027, the Council does a viability assessment of the cost and implications of in-housing the Single Homeless Prevention Service.
- ii) To recommend that future reports present demographics data in a more readable, digestible way.
- iii) To recommend that officers ensure that the internal telephone line is signposting people to Turning Point in Harlesden and not Brent Civic Centre.

In addition to recommendations, the Committee made several information requests, as recorded below:

- iv) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive data on how many single homeless people have been discharged on the grounds that they had declined suitable accommodation.
- v) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive further information on what mechanisms are in place to stop single homeless people being discharged for various reasons.
- vi) For the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to receive a written response in relation to section 8.2 which stated that there would be no grant subsidy as seen in previous years.



## 8. **New Selective Licensing Scheme**

Councillor Promise Knight (Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters) introduced the report, which detailed performance, quality and impact of the new Selective Licensing Scheme, which launched on 1 August 2023 covering the wards of Dollis Hill, Harlesden & Kensal Green, Willesden. She advised the Committee that the scheme was set in the context of the Council's wider priorities to tackle housing need, improve property standards and reduce anti-social behaviour. She felt that improving standards in the Private Rented Sector was essential to the homelessness crisis, and asked the Committee to note the increase in officer capacity of an additional 8 Compliance Officers to help enforce the new scheme.

The Chair thanked Councillor Knight for her introduction and invited comments and questions from those present. The following points were raised:

The Committee asked for further details about the financing of the scheme. Spencer Randolph (Head of Private Housing Services, Brent Council) advised members that the scheme was self-financing, so the money brought in from the licence fee could only be used for the enforcement and administration of the licensing scheme. Landlords were responsible for paying that fee, and the Council tried to keep that fee to a reasonable amount to avoid that fee being passed on to tenants. The cost of the licence was £640 for a 5 year licence, which amounted to a relatively low cost per week and per year and was tax deductible. The license helped to ensure tenants were living in safer accommodation and allowed the Council to enforce a regime to inspect more properties. The aim was to inspect 50% of properties that had a selective licence. It was added that the new scheme started on 1 August 2023 so was still in the stage of processing applications. There had been 3,000 applications received already and 2,000 draft licenses had been processed. The Council had already issued 1,000 full licences.

The Committee asked about the remaining privately rented properties in licensable areas that had not submitted license applications. Spencer Randolph explained that the Council never anticipated that 100% of landlords owning privately rented properties would make license applications within the first few months. In the past, the schemes the Council had implemented had exceeded the number of properties it had expected to be licensed by approximately 135%, so the Council had confidence that with the communications plan those license applications would come in over the period of the scheme. In response to how the Council would motivate less willing or responsible landlords to apply and comply, the Committee was informed that there were various strategies to do that. A 5 year enforcement plan was in place that combined the current scheme and the larger licensing scheme, which would conduct targeted inspections in particular areas where there was the potential for high levels of selective licensable properties. Part of the communications strategy was not just requiring landlords to make applications but also for tenants and neighbours to report properties they thought should be licensed, so there was a multi-faceted approach being taken.

The Committee asked how confident the Council was that Brent would eventually have borough wide selective licensing, and asked why Wembley Park ward was excluded from that ambition. Members heard that there was a strong case for introducing licensing across the borough, but the decision was for central government to make. In relation to excluding Wembley Park, officers advised the Committee that licensing could only be brought in to an area if it met certain criteria. The criteria that would apply in Brent focused on anti-social behaviour and poor property condition. While there were approximately 8,000 privately rented properties in Wembley Park, there should not be any of poor condition because they were all

new properties and were being managed well. There were several properties in Wembley Park that were multiple occupied, and they would require a HMO licence.

In relation to the 8 additional Compliance Officers, the Committee asked whether the Council was confident that this capacity would be enough to meet the demand. Spencer Randolph informed members that there had been 4 Compliance Officers already in post, so with the additional 8 officers there were now 12. The Council had done some forward thinking in relation to the number of officers required if the Council were to receive approval from Central Government to introduce selective licensing across the whole of the borough, and pre-empted that by budgeting for a total of 15 officers to cover the entire borough. It was estimated that would give the Council 15,000 inspections over the life of the 5-year scheme, and the Council was confident that was manageable between 15 officers on the basis of how many inspections officers should be able to complete a week.

Clarification was provided that the Selective Licensing Scheme was different and separate to the Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) Licensing Scheme. Every HMO that was licensed must be inspected, and Brent had licensed more HMOs than any other borough in London. The Council now had the ability to fine landlords in breach of their HMO licence through fixed penalty notices, which had resulted in approximately £900,000 worth of income which could be reinvested into enforcement of the schemes.

The Committee asked what residents should do if they had issues in their property and were in social housing. Members were advised that social housing was exempt from the Selective Licensing regime and if social housing tenants had issues they should go through the complaints process of their Housing Association or Council and if not they were not satisfied with the response then they could go to the Housing Ombudsman.

As no further points were raised, the Chair drew the item to a close. He invited recommendations from the Committee, with the following RESOLVED:

- i) For officers to ensure that ward councillors were well informed on the work being done and that there was a process in place for ward councillors to feed back to constituents on that work.
- ii) Members felt that there were significant issues in relation to Houses of Multiple Occupancy, and recommended that the expanded team concentrate initially on HMOs to find unlicensed properties.

## **9. Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24 Update**

The Committee noted the recommendations tracker.

## **10. Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 7:55 pm

**COUNCILLOR KETAN SHETH**  
Chair