

Philip Grant's Deputation for Scrutiny Committee: item 9 – Poverty Commission Update

The Poverty Commission Update report asks you to 'Note progress on implementation of the Poverty Commission recommendations as agreed by Cabinet.'

You are a Scrutiny Committee, and you should be questioning this report, not just noting it.

Please look at paragraph 3.7, on Housing. What progress has been made on that?

Lord Best's Poverty Commission identified the cost of housing as a major contributor to poverty in Brent, and recommended a substantial increase in investment in social housing.

Brent's Cabinet agreed Recommendation 4, which said: 'We recommend that in pursuing its strategic target to secure 50% of new homes as affordable, Brent gives special consideration to achieving more social rented homes.'

Yet you look at "Housing" in the Update report, and there is not a single mention of social rented homes!

The Update report says that the Council is making great progress with its New Council Homes programme, but how many of those homes are genuinely new homes for people on the housing waiting list?

Of the 655 homes already delivered, 209 at Gloucester & Durham in South Kilburn are actually replacement homes for tenants whose flats were demolished to make way for that development.

Of the homes delivered or 'onsite', 92 at Knowles House are for temporary accommodation, not permanent Council homes.

At Grand Union in Alperton, the figures include 23 for shared ownership. The 92 rented Council homes there will be for London Affordable Rent, which is higher than social rent levels.

If you ask how many of the New Council Homes Brent says it can deliver by 2024 will be at social rent levels, I think you'll find the answer is "none".

One place where Brent could increase investment in social housing is the former Copland School site. It is vacant land, owned by the Council, which has had full planning permission to build 250 homes there for over a year.

I wrote to Cabinet members last August, when that item was on their agenda, urging them to fulfil their Poverty Commission promises, and make at least some of this development homes for social rent.

Instead, they approved a proposal which allows 152 of the new homes there to be sold privately. Of the 98 Council homes, 61 would be for shared ownership, and only 37 for London Affordable Rent.

Overall, the Wembley Housing Zone scheme claims to provide 50% "affordable housing". But the balance of that is 54 flats at London Affordable Rent level on the Ujima House site, and only 8 of those would be family-sized homes.

There would be NO social rented homes. That's the reality hidden in this Poverty Commission Update.

You, as a Scrutiny Committee, need to challenge that, and demand that Brent Council does better.

You can recommend that in meeting its Poverty Commission commitments, it should invest in more social rent housing as part of the New Council Homes programme, including at its Cecil Avenue development.

Thank you for listening to me. I'd be happy to answer any questions.