



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Housing Asset Management Strategy

[2020–2025]

Introduction

At Brent, our housing service is committed to providing homes that meet the needs of existing and future residents, ensuring that we maximise the benefits of our housing stock.

The social housing sector as a whole is currently facing a number of key economic, political, social and environmental challenges. In Brent, we view it as vital that we take the opportunity to shape the future of asset management with these challenges in mind, whilst also fostering positive relationships with residents, building trust, accountability and new collaborative approaches.

Through effective management of our housing stock, we can provide homes and neighbourhoods that are safe and enjoyable to live in and visit, whilst also ensuring long-term viability and value for money.

This strategy introduces six outcome-based commitments. These commitments set out how we intend to build upon our existing services to not only ensure that the homes we manage are safe and well maintained, but that we also provide efficient services that put resident priorities at the heart of decision making.

Vision

This strategy supports the council's Borough Plan of ['Building a Better Brent' \(2019 – 2023\)](#) and works alongside other strategies across the housing service to:

- Support residents in taking ***every opportunity to succeed***
- Work towards ***a future built for everyone and an economy fit for all***
- Deliver ***a cleaner, more considerate Brent***
- Build ***a borough where people can feel safe, secure, happy and healthy***
- Build ***strong foundations for the future.***

National and Local Context

Repairs, maintenance and asset management sit at the centre of the work carried out by any housing service, but with the increasing financial pressures, shifting policy landscape and the evolving expectations of residents it is becoming more and more challenging to balance the delivery of effective and efficient services that meet the changing needs of residents.

In Brent, the health and safety of our residents is our priority. The impact that living in poor condition properties can have has been well researched, and legislation such as the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 recognise the importance of ensuring health and safety regulations are met and that homes are effectively maintained.

The importance of repairs

Residents often highlight the management of repairs as the most important part of a housing service, and this was evident in the most recent STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) project carried out in Brent during 2018, where satisfaction with our responsive repairs service was one of the biggest drivers of overall satisfaction with Brent as a landlord.

As a housing landlord, Brent manages 5897 flats and maisonettes, 2052 houses and bungalows, as well as 4619 leasehold properties. Across these properties through the year 2019, 30,000 repairs were carried out, averaging to 3.75 repairs per home. Property services, including repairs, is the biggest area of spend for Brent Housing Management, as well as being the most common reason for our residents getting in touch with us. A planned and an effective approach to delivering repairs is vital, both in providing a good service for our residents, as

well as supporting effective investment in, and maintenance of, our housing stock.

Fire safety and resident voice

The Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017 moved the housing sector into the spotlight, not only with regard to fire safety and building compliance, but also with a renewed focus on the importance of effective resident engagement.

Following the tragedy, Brent Housing Management worked to review our approach to fire safety. A low-rise fire safety programme was developed to address risks in 1208 converted and purpose built blocks. The works consisted of fire rated entrance doors to flats, fire retardant decoration, communal fire alarm systems and installation of emergency lighting. The opportunity to refurbish communal areas and provide a master key lock replacement system to communal front entrance doors is also part of the programme to be completed in 2020/1.

With regard to high-rise blocks, it was decided to go over and above regulatory standards by carrying out Type 4 Fire Risk Assessments across all of our tower blocks over 12 storeys, the outcome of which found no fundamental issues or safety concerns. The service is now in the process of developing a robust major works programme to deliver the highest standards of compliance, providing ongoing peace of mind and reassurance to our residents when it comes to fire safety in their homes.

The tower block works programme, to commence in 2021, will also benefit from wider integrated major works, as identified in the stock condition survey, and meet borough-wide climate strategy targets to make a positive impact on neighbourhoods and provide long-term

sustainable homes that are energy efficient and mindful of environmental impact.

Following the Grenfell tragedy, the report by Dame Judith Hackitt highlighted the importance of resident scrutiny (a whole chapter was dedicated to the 'Resident Voice'). With the recent launch of our new Customer Experience Panel as a high level resident involvement group in Brent, it is vital that we provide the opportunity for appropriate performance monitoring and resident scrutiny when it comes to our property services.

Climate change and energy efficiency

Climate change and its devastating effects on the environment, people and communities is one of the most pressing issues society currently faces. In May 2019, the UK government became the first country to declare a climate change emergency, committing to target net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In July 2019, Brent declared a local climate and ecological emergency, and has committed to working towards carbon neutrality by the year 2030. The Council has since adopted a holistic, organisation-wide approach to addressing the climate emergency, which is focusing on a range of inter-related environmental issues, from carbon reduction to fuel poverty, waste and resources, air quality and ecology to water conservation and climate change adaptation.

Energy used to heat and power housing is responsible for 43% of all territorial carbon emissions in the borough. A significant proportion of carbon emissions are as a result of inefficient housing stock. The latest figures from Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Energy (BEIS), from 2018, indicate that almost 16,000 households in Brent are in fuel poverty, equating to nearly 15% of Brent residents. This is the

second worst figure in London with only Newham having a greater proportion of households in Fuel Poverty.

Currently, 35% of Brent's council housing stock is performing better than the national average of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band D. However, 100% of housing stock falls short of EPC band B. London Councils have included a target of an average EPC Band B rating for London's housing stock by 2030 as part of its Joint Statement with the London Environment Directors' Network on Climate Change.

Good asset management considers both quality and value for money across the full lifespan of a home, as well as how current and future running costs might affect those who live there. It is important that our housing service prioritises work to improve the energy efficiency of the properties we manage, both in order to ensure effective ongoing maintenance and to appropriately support our residents in keeping their homes warm.

As a local authority, Brent is committed to tackling climate change, having recently launched the Brent Climate Assembly in November 2019, giving residents the opportunity to directly inform how the council responds to climate and ecological issues on a local level. Working towards a greener, more sustainable borough is a prominent feature of the current borough plan and it is vital that the housing service works within and to this to implement environmentally friendly and energy efficiency initiatives.

A key feature of the borough-wide climate strategy will be to achieve an average level of EPC band B by retrofitting all housing properties by 2030. Research and piloting work on this is underway for 2020/1 and will form part of this strategy.

Commitments

We have a good understanding of the condition of our housing stock and use this knowledge to target work, providing and maintaining quality, safe homes for our residents.

In order to effectively manage and maintain our housing stock it is vital that we hold accurate, up to date data around the condition of the properties we manage. A key recommendation put forward as part of the recent stock condition survey was to continue to carry out internal surveys to 20% of our properties on an annual basis. This will support us in developing a clear understanding of what work is required, where and when, allowing us to be increasingly efficient and targeted with our planned works programme.

Following the Grenfell tragedy and subsequent recommendations from the report put forward by Dame Judith Hackitt, Brent has carried out a number of key programmes to ensure both our high and low-rise blocks are safe and residents feel reassured. Towards the end of 2019, phase one of the Grenfell Inquiry was published, with phase two due in 2020/1. It is important that we, as a housing landlord, take a further opportunity to review and update our fire safety policies and procedures in light of these new recommendations.

As a local authority, our programme for building new homes across the borough is growing, with our current plan committing to 5000 new affordable homes in Brent, 1000 of which will be delivered through our own council building programme. It is important that we make sure these homes can be efficiently and economically maintained in the long-term so we can sustain the delivery of quality, safe homes for residents.

To achieve this we will:

- **Improve and maintain the data we hold on our properties by carrying out surveys to 20% of our stock on an annual basis.**
- **Develop a clear understanding of what work is required, where and when and what is affordable, allowing us to be increasingly efficient and targeted with our planned works programme.**
- **Explore and implement new technologies that give us additional insight and enable us to manage our properties more efficiently.**
- **Develop standard specifications for key components in new builds and carry out appropriate assessments before commencement.**

The homes we manage are fully compliant with all fire safety regulations and as a landlord, we take a proactive approach to delivering fire safety works and providing peace of mind for our residents.

For Brent housing service, the safety of those who live, work in or visit the homes we manage is a priority.

Following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, and subsequent recommendations from the report put forward by Dame Judith Hackitt, Brent has carried out a number of key programmes to ensure both our high and low-rise blocks are safe and residents feel reassured. Towards the end of 2019, phase one of the Grenfell Inquiry was published, with phase two due in 2020/1. It is important that we, as a housing landlord, take a further opportunity to review and update our fire safety policies and procedures in light of these new recommendations and consider where additional measures can be taken to provide reassurance for our residents.

Brent Housing Management has instituted an annual remedial action programme for each of its 39 high-rise blocks to mitigate risks that arise and developed and implemented a low-rise programme to improve fire safety in each of its 1208 converted and purpose built blocks to be completed in 2020/1. In addition, it was decided to carry out Type 4 Fire Risk Assessments across all of our tower blocks over 12 storeys to inform a programme of major works that would be ahead of the findings and recommendations of the Grenfell enquiry. The programme will start in 2021/2

To achieve this we will:

- **Carry out an additional, updated review of our fire safety policies and procedures in light of future Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations and “Building Safer Futures” legislation, continuing to build on our robust approach to fire safety.**
- **Develop and promote clear evacuation plans for residents living in our tower blocks, ensuring there are additional measures in place to allow the safe evacuation of vulnerable residents in the event of a fire.**
- **Deliver a programme of sprinkler installations and compartmentation works within the homes of our high-rise properties under the tower block refurbishment programme commencing in 2021/2.**
- **Complete the low-rise fire safety programme in 2020/1.**

The work we do is informed by residents' priorities and feedback and we use what residents tell us about their experience to provide homes and estates where residents feel proud to live.

Brent housing management values the input and feedback we receive from our residents, whether that is through a satisfaction survey, feedback given to a staff member or in the unfortunate event of a complaint. Feeling listened to was identified as one of the biggest drivers of overall satisfaction in results from STAR 2018 and we want to work on developing the opportunities available for residents to have a say in how we manage and maintain their homes and the areas around them.

STAR 2018 results showed that 65% of our residents are satisfied with the overall quality of their home, which is low when compared to similar landlords through benchmarking exercises. Also, when comparing STAR 2018 to the 2018 Resident Attitude Survey, it is evident that residents living in council homes are twice as likely to be unsatisfied with their neighbourhood when compared to those living in private properties. As a housing service, we want to change this.

The importance of resident scrutiny was highlighted in the most recent Social Housing Green Paper, as well as the review of building regulations and fire safety following Grenfell. Feedback as part of the consultation in developing this strategy also identified strong themes around needing to improve transparency and communication around our work programmes.

By taking the opportunity to build on and develop how we engage with our residents, we can provide the opportunity for appropriate performance monitoring and resident scrutiny when it comes to our property services.

To achieve this we will:

- **Deliver a programme of investment on estates which seek to address the issues that residents have already highlighted (i.e. anti-social behaviour, parking and waste management) and includes localised engagement so residents have a say on the work that is carried out.**
- **Develop a robust, impartial feedback mechanism following all major works so we can hear from tenants and leaseholders about their experience of having work done in their home, using this to improve the process.**
- **Review complaints made to the service and use any insights gained to target improvements.**
- **Work closely with our contractors and involved residents to monitor performance and ensure appropriate resident scrutiny and transparency of services is in place.**

The homes we manage are efficiently managed and opportunities to create greater economic and social value are recognised.

Ensuring that our housing stock is fit for purpose and delivering value for Brent residents is important to us as a local authority. Every penny of the income we spend on managing and maintaining our homes, comes from residents so it is vital that our services and our assets are providing as much value for money as possible.

Responding appropriately to housing need across Brent is one of the housing service's top priorities. By making informed decisions about how we might re-purpose properties when they become empty, (e.g. by building an extension to create a larger, family home) or better utilise land on estates, we can ensure that our housing stock is more effectively meeting the needs of Brent residents. This also means we can support homelessness services to reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation.

Some assets on estates we manage are under-utilised (e.g. garages or community halls) and have the potential to be providing more value for local residents than they currently are. When we are carrying out improvement work on estates, we want to work with our contractors and local residents to review how these assets could be put to better use, providing more value for the local community.

To achieve this we will:

- **Develop a decision making process that incorporates a balance of social, financial and economic factors so we can make informed decisions around the repurposing of properties (e.g. loft conversions, extensions) to better meet the needs of our residents.**
- **Drive forward the delivery our infill programme, identifying under-utilised land on estates that could be better used to provide more affordable homes in the borough.**
- **Review how we manage assets on estates (e.g. garages) and identify where more effective approaches can be taken and opportunities created to provide greater value for the local area and the HRA business plan.**

The homes we manage are energy efficient and the services we deliver are mindful of environmental impact.

Following the parliamentary announcement of a climate change emergency in early 2019, Brent followed suit, declaring a local climate and ecological emergency in July 2019. Our [borough plan](#) highlights the ways in which we, as a local authority, plan to work toward delivering a greener, more sustainable borough and it is vital that the housing service supports this work and feeds in to these commitments. London Councils has set a target to achieve an average Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band B across all housing stock by 2030. Our recently carried out stock condition survey identified that none of our properties are currently meeting this standard, so it is important that we consult and plan to begin works, driving up EPC ratings across the properties we manage.

When we asked our residents during STAR 2018 about where they think we should target our resources in the future, improving the energy efficiency of their home was the fourth most popular answer. By delivering energy saving initiatives across our properties, we can provide homes that are easier and more affordable to heat, not only saving money for our residents but also better supporting households who may be experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, fuel poverty.

Energy Efficiency programmes will assess property types holistically to identify the most cost effective approach to fabric, heating system and ventilation improvements. This will ensure that work programmes limit unnecessary disruption to residents' homes, achieve value for money and that properties meet the needs of our residents today while accounting for potential future changes due to climate change, such as mitigating the need for future cooling.

To achieve this we will:

- **Commission a feasibility study to identify packages of measures that can reduce carbon for typical housing types in Brent and design and install a pilot domestic retrofit exemplar scheme in 2020/1.**
- **Complete a study to identify the most appropriate heating systems to be included in holistic energy efficiency upgrades over the lifetime of this strategy and develop an effective policy to ensure compliance with the Heat Metering and Billing Regulations**
- **Consult on and plan finances to retrofit all housing properties to an average level of EPC band B by 2030 in line with the London Councils target. This will include grant funding and tenants paying an energy service plan to Brent which is the equivalent of their previous energy supplier(s) bills.**
- **Commission a transport impact review to establish how the housing service can work towards reducing the negative impact that our own vehicles and the vehicles of our residents have on the environment.**
- **Utilise estate improvement work to identify opportunities for environmentally friendly initiatives (e.g. additional bicycle storage, tree planting and improved recycling facilities).**
- **Assess the feasibility of achieving net zero carbon for the Council's new build housing schemes and identify funding for a pilot low carbon new build exemplar project.**

We provide a quality repairs service that is accessible and accountable to our residents.

Ensuring that we have a fit for purpose repairs service not only helps us to make sure that the properties we manage are being properly maintained but also supports our residents to live safely and comfortably in their homes.

Results from STAR 2018 show that only 56% of our residents were satisfied with how Brent Housing Management handle repairs and, as satisfaction with the repairs service was found to be one of the biggest drivers of overall satisfaction, we have worked on improving this. Speedier repairs, getting things right the first time and better communication were the areas that our residents told us would improve how they felt about the service they receive. By working in partnership with our contractors and gaining feedback from front-line staff and residents we identified specific areas for improvement and drove up transactional resident satisfaction with their last repair to consistently sit at above 85% and reaching 90% during the CV19 lockdown period.

The repairs service has embarked on the second phase of the ongoing improvement plan in 2020/1. Building upon the work and collaboration of phase 1, the second phase focuses on improving processes for complex works, Wates' supply chain performance as well as improving internal communications and actions of leasehold, tenancy and property services teams. Feedback gathered as part of the consultation for this strategy also identified the need for improvements in communication with our residents throughout the repairs process. Phase 2 of the ongoing improvement plan includes work to ensure that the resident is kept informed and their expectations are managed when it comes to work being carried out in their home.

To achieve this we will:

- **Build upon the improvements in our responsive repairs service to focus on larger and more complex repairs by utilising input and feedback from trade operatives, supply chains and tenants to establish a clear understanding of where and how things can be improved.**
- **Gather insight on how we communicate with our tenants about complex repairs, ensuring we are being clear about what we will deliver and are managing expectations effectively**
- **Develop an updated approach to gaining feedback from tenants following one-off repairs in their home, enabling us to generate more detailed insight around peoples experience of our repairs service and embed empathetic staff practices when it comes to any and all interactions with residents**
- **Utilise the data we gather and hold on repairs to inform our planned works programmes, enabling us to target work where it is most needed.**
- **Develop an effective recharges policy that provides clarity around tenant responsibilities when it comes to damage to and repairs in their home.**

