

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 4 March 2025
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present Councillors Stowe (Chair), Barnard, Bellamy, Booker, Bowler, Bowser, Denton, Eastwood, Hayward, Holling, Lodge, McCarthy, Morrell, Moyes, Osborne, Sheard, Webster, N. Wright and P. Wright

50 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

Apologies for absence were received from xx in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

51 Declarations of Interests on matters contained within the Agenda

Councillor Hayward declared a non pecuniary interest as a landlord within the Barnsley Borough.

Councillor Lodge declared a non pecuniary interest as an employee of a Social Landlord and family members who are landlords within the Barnsley Borough.

Councillor Morrell declared a non pecuniary interest as a landlord within the Barnsley Borough.

Councillor Sheard declared a non pecuniary interest as Cabinet Support Member – Public Health and Communities.

Councillor Webster declared a non pecuniary interest as family members are landlords within the Barnsley Borough.

Councillor P Wright declared a non pecuniary interest as family members are landlords within he Barnsley Borough.

52 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 January and 4 February 20025 were received.

53 Private Sector Housing Plan 2030

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Jane Brannan – Group Leader Housing & Community Safety, Barnsley Council
- Paul Brannan, Head of Safer Barnsley, Safer Communities, Barnsley Council

- Al Heppenstall – Team Leader, Housing & Case Management, Barnsley Council
- Amy Forster – Project Manager, Safer Communities, Barnsley Council
- Cllr Wendy Cain - Cabinet Spokesperson, Public Health and Communities, Barnsley Council

Councillor Cain provided members with a brief introduction to Housing Plan which was introduced in 2022 and set out the ambitions and commitments to raising standards in the private sector. Members heard how there would be significant changes to the Housing Plan arising from the Renters' Rights Bill which was due to be enacted.

Members inquired about the possible effects of the Renters Rights Bill on the availability of rental housing. Officers responded that although this concern had been raised, no specific projections regarding the impact on the number of rental properties in Barnsley had been undertaken.

It was acknowledged that there was a concern around the funding available in order to deliver the enforcement required within the Renters Rights Bill. Members were informed that a piece of work had been carried out to put a paper to the Department for Levelling up for Housing and Communities. This estimated that there would be 1 officer per 800 private rented houses to discharge all duties as there were currently 6 full time equivalents within the service. In the social and council housing sector, Berneslai Homes for example have around one housing officer per 300 to 400 properties. It was estimated that around 23 members of staff would be required in Private Sector Housing to support these new duties. An additional concern was around the availability of staff members country wide as all Local Authorities would be vying for more staff to discharge the new duties. There were plans to establish apprenticeships with the objective of developing skilled professionals internally. It was not known what the financial settlement would be from central government, if in fact any, in order to discharge these duties. It was reported that if no additional funds were to be received then there would be a need to utilise existing resources and redefining roles to prioritise duties related to the legislation.

One challenge identified was effectively communicating information so tenants understand their rights and responsibilities, and ensuring they know who to contact when issues arise without fear of retaliatory actions from landlords. The Renters Rights Bill aims to prevent retaliatory actions, such as forced evictions following complaints.

An annual Landlord Event was scheduled for 26 March 2025, with invitations sent to 450 landlords. The event was publicised through social media and websites. Landlords received support through drop in sessions and a dedicated landlords website which holds all necessary information and advice. A quality mark for endorsing landlords for providing good services had been considered and would be taken away to look into developing this.

It was noted that there was no official registry for landlords to sign up to. The Service relied on land registry, council tax, tenants and 192 in order to find contact details. It was hoped that in time there would be a requirement for landlords to register on a database. Members queried whether there was a way to search land registry in

order to find out whether landlords were purchasing multiple properties to build up their portfolios. In response members were informed that around 21,483 properties were private rented in the Borough and that the situation was constantly evolving. It was reported that there were a number of landlords that did not live in the Country which also created challenges.

The Service had a list of letting agents in the Borough who were part of a mailing list for quarterly newsletters for landlord updates. A landlords accreditation scheme had been in place at one point but there was not enough uptake from landlords to make it cost effective to keep running.

Members were informed that there were around 400 known Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) within the Borough. In terms of unregistered HMOs, officers were proactive in going out and visiting properties that were reported to them either by elected members or members of the public. Reports indicated that many unregistered HMOs were located in the Town Centre areas. Members were encouraged to report any properties that raised concerns as systems relied on intelligence and information.

It was reported that the Service had good relationships with partner organisations such as South Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue and the Ambulance service. These services were in a good position to report concerns as to vulnerable people living in unsatisfactory conditions. Social Services also report housing conditions when undertaking house checks for people accessing the 0-19 Service, Early Intervention or Adult Social care. There were hopes to develop an app in the future for postal workers, delivery drivers and supermarket delivery drivers to notify the council of any concerns about people and their living conditions, this would be addressed within the 2025-28 refresh of the Plan.

Members inquired about the measures being taken to assist prospective tenants who have poor or no credit history. In response members were informed that a significant amount of work was being undertaken with the Homelessness Team, Housing Options Team and private landlords to guarantee or underwrite deposits to get people into housing. Members were informed that under the Renters Rights Bill advance payments and bidding wars would be banned and prevented from happening.

Members were informed that regarding potential tenants exhibiting antisocial behaviour, the service takes a comprehensive approach to addressing these behaviours and environmental decline through coordinated efforts.

Members raised concerns around cannabis grow houses and whether there could be an awareness campaign for landlords and members of the public as to what to look out for. They were informed that a successful Cannabis Awareness scheme developed in Barnsley had been recognised nationally as good practise details of which would be circulated to elected members. Members were informed that enforcement action had been taken against two large cannabis farms in privately owned bungalows and that thinking ahead and working with landlords and tenants was key to future enforcement action. Members requested a members briefing on Cannabis Awareness.

Members inquired about student accommodations within the Borough and were informed that there are no specific student lets in Barnsley. It was explained that most students likely secure standard short-term tenancies with extended rolling contracts.

The Private Sector Housing Plan 2030 was coproduced by officers across the Council and the four commitments chosen and set out in the report had to fit with the ambitions of the Housing Strategy. Members heard how a starting point was about looking into what does it take for people to be happy in a home and the area they live. It was acknowledged that physical buildings alone were inadequate if the surrounding environment remained cluttered with waste grounds, plagued by antisocial behaviour, and crime was prevalent on the streets. Housing standards were important as conditions contribute to good or ill health. The environment around could add or takeaway from investment in a sense that long term tenancies would mean commitment to the area. Where there are a high and rapid turnover of tenancies it is more difficult to achieve safe pleasant streets that we would strive for. By considering each component and acknowledging the role of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in addressing housing needs, supporting landlords, taking firm action against non-compliant landlords, and identifying hidden vulnerable individuals, a comprehensive approach could be developed to maintain standards, enhance behaviours, and improve environmental standards. The Service was able to monitor the performance standards through a delivery plan supporting the Private Sector Housing Plan 2030. Officers met quarterly to monitor performance against each of the commitments to identify what is going well and what requires improvement. The Renters Rights Bill would finalise new commitments within the Private Sector Housing Plan 2030.

Members asked who they should contact for reporting purposes. Officers commented that there was a dedicated phone line, that there was information online in detailed pages and anything could be reported to the email address: safer@barnsley.gov.uk and it would always be picked up and actioned. Members also heard that the members enquiries online reporting tool had a landlords option.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (iii) that a Cannabis Awareness Session be held for all elected members;
- (iv) that members share intelligence with safer@barnsley.gov.uk if they have any concerns over occupancy within properties in their ward; and
- (v) that Officers consider the development of a quality mark or similar scheme to promote 'good' landlords to members of the public.

Chair