

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL (BMBC)

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

Report of the Executive Directors
PLACE & Communities

SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP (TFG) REPORT ON SOCIAL HOUSING

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To report to the recommendations as set out by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) from the investigation undertaken on its behalf by the Social Housing Task & Finish Group (TFG).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **Members endorse the responses to each of the recommendations made by the PLACE and Communities Directorates as outlined in section 4 of the report.**

3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 As part of its work programme the OSC agreed to undertake a TFG investigation into Social Housing provision in Barnsley. This was in response to, amongst other things, the publication of the Government's Social Housing Green Paper and the recent changes to Housing Services in Barnsley following the Housing Services Review.
- 3.2 The members of the TFG who undertook this investigation included the following: Councillor Gail Charlesworth (TFG Lead Member), Councillor Gill Carr, Councillor Malcolm Clements, Councillor Jeff Ennis, Councillor Joe Hayward, Councillor Sarah Tattersall, Councillor Kevin Williams and Councillor John Wilson.

4. Specific Recommendations and Responses

- 4.1 The TFG recognised the complexities involved in the provision of social housing and ensuring the needs of all our communities are met. This is against a backdrop of austerity, as well as national policies which compound the challenges being faced by services. Whilst recognising the excellent work being undertaken, the TFG made 6 recommendations in support of the continuous improvement of local services and support to local communities. Each recommendation has been considered and the response included below:
- 4.2 **Recommendation 1 ACROSS ALL TFGs: A Multi-Agency Conference is held in relation to addressing the complex needs in our communities covering Housing, Substance Misuse and Adult Mental Health.**

RESPONSE: *This recommendation is accepted. The recommendation has been made in three Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Reports in relation to housing, substance misuse and mental health. Whilst carried out as separate investigations, the discussions and findings demonstrated the significant overlap and interdependencies that exists across these areas. It is recognised that there is further work to be done in relation to addressing the issues and challenges that have been raised across the three areas. This work will be driven through existing mechanisms that are in place namely the Public Sector Housing Task and Finish Group, the Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat Group and the 'complex lives' work stream, where relevant officers and key partners at both strategic and operational levels, will work together to address the issues and identify solutions. The lead officers will take stock of developments and review the value/format of an event as this work progresses over the next 12 months.*

4.3 Recommendation 2: OSC Members are engaged in the upcoming review of the Council's Housing Strategy

RESPONSE: *This recommendation is accepted. The Council's Housing Strategy covers the period 2014-33. It is a Strategic Strategy which sets out the Council's ambitions for housing provision, investment and management in the borough over the next 20 years. Following adoption of the Local Plan in January 2019, officers will undertake a light touch review of the Housing Strategy in the autumn of 2019 to ensure consistency with the Local Plan, to consider our approach to Affordable Housing Need (following the completion of an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment planned for summer 2019) and to ensure that our 5 corporate priorities remain fit for purpose. There will be a consultation process on the DRAFT refreshed Housing Strategy. Officers are happy to meet with the TFG members separately as part of this process. The revised Strategy will need Cabinet/Council approval. The updated Housing Strategy will directly reference and link to the Supported Housing Strategy currently being developed by Communities (and of course vice versa).*

4.4 Recommendation 3: Increasing work is done to engage with private sector landlords

The group acknowledged the challenge this presents and the work being done in partnership with others to meet this need. This includes advising them in supporting vulnerable residents. The TFG however recognise that due to the shortage of social housing, there are increasing numbers of residents in private tenancies with vulnerabilities that need support services. This is especially prevalent within HMOs; therefore the TFG welcome additional work being undertaken to combat and manage this.

RESPONSE: *This recommendation is accepted. Deeper engagement with Private Sector Landlords is a developing cross cutting theme within the Council. A coordinating Task and Finish Group, under the leadership of the Head of Commissioning, is reviewing how differing Council teams are able to work with Private Sector Landlords to deliver better outcomes for the sector and Borough. This broadly includes but is not restricted to:*

- *Supporting Landlords re: how they can support vulnerable residents, especially those within Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's)*

- *Accessing the Private Rented Sector to support residents at risk of homelessness*
- *Improving the physical condition of properties, especially for those at risk of fuel poverty*
- *Improving the knowledge and skills of Private Sector Landlords through on going continuous professional development*
- *Improving the 'renting' offer and experience within the Borough*

4.5 Recommendation 4: OSC Members are involved in contributing to the review of the Tenancy Strategy

RESPONSE: *This recommendation is accepted. The Tenancy Strategy was reviewed during early 2019 as part of the 5-year review required under the Localism Act. It was determined that the policy continues to remain fit for purpose; striking an appropriate balance between offering our tenants security of tenure, creating sustainable communities where people want to live and meeting the needs of those in the greatest housing need. The revised Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in July 2019 for approval. The current Lettings Policy was agreed by the Council and implemented from April 2014 (following the 2013/14 Review). Although there have been minor amendments to the Lettings Policy over the last five years, the policy is, and has remained, fit for purpose. In brief summary, the changes in the period since 2014 have included:*

- *Revisions to the designated 'age restricted' properties*
- *Changes in the ways in which vacant properties are advertised and the methods by which applicants are able to apply for properties following the Access to Services Review.*
- *Changes required responding (and un-responding) to Universal Credit regulations relating to housing costs for 18 to under 22 year olds.*
- *Changes to ensure compliance with new legislation (and the accompanying Code of Guidance) following the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 coming into force (3rd April 2018)*

There are no current plans to amend the Tenancy Strategy nor the Lettings Policy further over the coming year, although this will be reviewed should additional legislation/policy emerge and/or the Council have concerns that the needs of those most in need of affordable housing are not being met. Consultation will be undertaken with local members, the 'tenant' engagement model and the Council.

4.6 Recommendation 5: All Elected Members are reminded of access to the Cautionary Contacts Database and the need to report any incidents to ensure timely updates are entered on the system

RESPONSE: *This recommendation is accepted. An email communication will be distributed to all members via the 'Councillors' inbox to advise on the Cautionary Contacts Database process.*

4.7 Recommendation 6: Proactive contact is made by local Housing Association Officers, especially with Elected Members where large numbers of particular Housing Association properties are located.

RESPONSE: *This recommendation is accepted.* In response to the recommendation, Members have already been provided with an updated list of contacts for the active Housing Associations operating in the borough and the Council holds a list of all Housing Association accommodation. Any new build schemes are subject to consultation with local members and the surrounding community (to the scheme) in advance of a planning submission. For schemes over 10 units, a community consultation event is required.

Officers hold regular liaison meetings with our framework general needs Housing Associations and will seek to replicate these meetings jointly with the RP framework of supported providers, once established. Should Members wish to raise any issues, they can do so via the Housing Growth Team and/or via the Housing Association directly.

5. Implications for local people / service users

- 5.1 The responses provided are in support of improving outcomes for people in Barnsley, especially in relation to meeting their housing needs.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

7. Employee implications

- 7.1 There are no specific employee implications.

8. Communications implications

- 8.1 Officers recognise the knowledge that local members hold on their communities and community issues and welcome further engagement with the TFG in the development of emerging strategies/policies, where appropriate.

9. Consultations

- 9.1 Consultations have taken place with: the Social Housing TFG Members; the OSC; Councillor Roy Miller; Council Officers from Housing Growth, Community Safety, Enforcement and Stronger Communities; Berneslai Homes; YHA; and the Council's Senior Management Team.

10. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

- 10.1 As outlined in the Corporate Plan, the three priorities for Barnsley are: a thriving and vibrant economy, strong and resilient communities; and citizens achieving their potential. It is essential the Council and its partner organisations work together to support these aims, which includes meeting housing needs across the borough, including support for our most vulnerable residents.

11. Promoting equality & diversity and social inclusion

- 11.1 In responding to the recommendations, the PLACE and Communities directorate aims to ensure that all Council services and activities are accessible to all its communities.

12. Tackling the impact of poverty

- 12.1 There are numerous information sources and academic studies which highlight the links between housing and poverty, including how housing can both mitigate as well as exacerbate the impact of poverty on people's lives. To tackle the impact of poverty it is important that efforts are made to limit rent costs, maintain good housing conditions in all tenures and monitor the impact of cuts to welfare benefits, especially for vulnerable residents.

13. Tackling Health Inequalities

- 13.1 There are large health inequalities between Barnsley and England and within Barnsley itself. Improving access to housing and reducing health inequalities will help local people to reach their full potential. The investigation undertaken by the TFG and recommendations made are in support of improving outcomes across the borough; with recognition that additional work is required in particular communities to help address health inequalities.

14. Risk management issues

- 14.1 This issue relates to the following risks currently logged on the Council's Strategic Risk Register (SRR), as follows:

- 3025 – 'Failure to Safeguard vulnerable service users'
- 3026 – 'Failure to achieve a reduction in Health inequalities within the Borough'
- 3047 – 'Failure to protect the health of the population from preventable health threats'

- 14.2 It is likely the recommended activities detailed in this report will contribute further to the effective mitigation of these risks, and it would be appropriate for any follow-up report to be cognisant of these risks.

15. Glossary

ALMO	Arm's Length Management Organisation
AMIB	All Member Information Briefing
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
BMBC	Barnsley Metropolitan borough Council
HMO	Houses in Multiple Occupation
HRA	Housing Revenue Account
OSC	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
RTB	Right To Buy
SCR	Sheffield City Region
SYP	South Yorkshire Police
TFG	Task and Finish Group

16. Background papers

- Barnsley Council Housing Strategy:
<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-strategies/housing-strategy/>
- Social Housing Green Paper: A New Deal for Social Housing:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-green-paper-a-new-deal-for-social-housing>

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

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