

Social Housing Scrutiny Report Recommendations

No	Panel Recommendation	update March 2019
1	That the Council should positively promote images of living in social housing through our communications activities. The Council should be proud of its investment in social housing. It should promote its tenants as being from all walks of life and representative of what it means to live in Haringey. Haringey should not only be promoted as a place for people to move their businesses to and buy homes, we should also present images of a borough that listens to our tenants.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: The council agrees that promoting life in social housing in Haringey is an important element of its communications activities. The council will continue to promote investment in social housing, including announcing improvements to existing housing stock and delivery of new council homes as they are delivered. The council champions residents from all walks of life through its existing channels, including Haringey People magazine, Haringey People Extra e-newsletter, social media feeds, website and press releases. This work will continue, and the council will also explore other options for celebrating the borough's different residents and communities, including working closely with Homes for Haringey on resident engagement and feedback.
2	That the Council actively seek to change legislation on service charges meaning that all residents of a development irrelevant of their service charge can use the same entrance. Explore the possible use of concessions for social tenants.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: People seeking to buy new build properties in flatted development expect high quality services, such as wi-fi, concierges, gyms, laundry services etc which are all paid for through service charges. As service charges must be set on the basis of actual costs, this means that they can often be very high indeed, and many of these may not be payable through Housing Benefit. In mixed tenure developments, this creates a significant problem. As it would not be legal to simply "overcharge" leaseholders to subsidise tenants, developers must either reduce services, making the flats less desirable to would-be purchasers, charge tenants a level of service charges that would make their home unaffordable or provide separate entrances (and/or restrict access to other facilities) so that they can charge different levels of service charges. It also needs to be recognised that most developments will have multiple entrances and for reasons of ease of management as well as service charge levels Housing Associations will want properties they are managing to be in the same block. It should be noted that the Council promotes tenure blind developments, meaning that blocks or parts of blocks should not be distinguishable by tenure and having separate entrances does not preclude residents of different tenure living in the same block (e.g. tenures living above one another can vary), where it is possible to design the accesses to accommodate this feature. This is therefore a tricky planning/housing issue and officers could be tasked to investigate further opportunities to either lobby for change in the law or to seek ways to make service charges more affordable.
3a	That the Council establish a wholly council owned development company to start building housing.	Cabinet, in February 2019, approved the incorporation of Haringey's wholly owned company to support its housing development programme.
3b	A target of 1000 council homes to be built by the council by 2022 through a combination of direct build and a wholly owned development vehicle. This should be in addition to properties built at affordable rent levels by external developers.	The Council has adopted this target in its Borough Plan and is putting in place the programme to deliver these homes.
3c	The affordability target for developments to be enforced at 50% and the setting of a maximum threshold within that target which is allowed at 80% market rent meaning that when a development comes forward only a limited proportion is at the top end of 80%.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: The adopted Local Plan policy is a 40% borough-wide target on a habitable rooms basis. To amend the target would require a review of the plan, which is a lengthy process and requires all policies to be supported by robust local evidence. It may therefore be best to rely on the adoption of the emerging London Plan and, therein, the aspiration towards a 50% affordable housing target. However, it is worth noting that over the plan period from 2011 to date, 50% of all new homes built were affordable including 70% on major schemes. With respect to the setting of affordable rent thresholds, this was clarified in the amended version of Appendix C agreed by Cabinet in February 2019 and recommended for approval at Full Council in March 2018. This makes clear that no Affordable Rent housing is currently being approved. It gives guidance on levels when Affordable Rent is still being built out.
4	The Council should in addition look at a variety of approaches, each one relevant to the individual site. This should include encouraging Community Land Trusts and Housing Cooperatives.	The Borough Plan commits to "work with partners to provide a diverse range of housing choices to meet local need, always prioritising homes that local people can really afford." To deliver that commitment, the Council is looking at a range of delivery mechanisms and community based initiatives; including working with the GLA and StART, a local Community Land Trust on the St Anns development, a site which is now owned by the GLA.
5	That the Council set in place a local policy that student housing does not contribute to the affordability mix.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: Policy DM13 lists the types of housing that do not contribute to the affordability mix, including unsecured student accommodation. The Housing Strategy also confirms that 'there is no identified need for additional student housing in the borough and proposals to develop student housing would not normally be supported and, in any event, will not fulfil the council's expectations for affordable housing.'
6	Haringey needs a robust mix of different sized properties, especially more family homes. That the Council set and enforce clear targets on numbers of bedrooms in new developments	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: The Housing Strategy does set very clear guidance on what mix of different sized properties are needed for social housing, set out in appendix C (as amended). That is, 10% one bed, 45% 2 bed and 45% 3 bed (of which 10% should be four bed or larger). But for market housing, the issue of housing mix is complex and requires having regard to the existing housing stock and changes in that stock, as much as it does to new housing development. Other factors that need to be considered include the housing need requirement, changing demographics, the location of available land and the affordability of new and existing housing. In addition local policy needs to be in general conformity with the London Plan and within national planning policy. The existing Haringey housing policies reflect these factors, and it would not be possible to simply introduce and then strictly enforce bedroom targets.
7	That a feasibility report be produced on the development of an in-house project team of architects, urban planners, and other professionals, to help improve quality and supply.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: The Council will be carefully considering the skills it needs to support its new building programme and wider supply ambitions, and the options for plugging the current skills gaps. There are options to improve quality and increase/speed up supply other than an in-house team which could be considered alongside the recommended approach.

8	That there be no sale of Council Land to companies for developments that fall below the minimum space standards. That homes developed to the minimum GLA liveability standards should not be accepted in the affordability mix.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: Sales of Council land is a decision for the Cabinet or Cabinet Member to take at the appropriate time and this can be a factor in any decision that they make.
9	That all social housing should be built to the highest design and liveability standards. This should include resident involvement so we can find out what people actually want, rather than telling them what they want.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: While it is accepted that all new social housing should be built to the highest standards, and residents should be involved in design, it is not always known which residents will live in new social housing. When new social housing is part of estate renewal then residents may be returning to live in the homes and would always be engaged appropriately. This has been the case at High Road West where residents worked with the ITLA to develop a Resident Charter and Design Guide and were involved in the procurement of the preferred bidder. When new social housing is additional, then future residents are not yet known.
10	That all new social housing units built, with more than one bedroom, have separate kitchens.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: All new social housing units will need to go through the planning process, and there is currently no policy in place specifying separate kitchens and living space. For new social housing built by the Council, this can be considered on a case by case basis.
11	To use the capital budget to help bring homes up to the decent homes standard as soon as possible.	The Council has set a target in the new Borough Plan that 95% of Council homes should meet the Decent Homes standard by 2022. Funding to deliver that aim was included in the budget agreed by Cabinet in February 2019.
12	That the council strongly considers whether high-rise is suitable social accommodation for young families. Similar densities can be achieved through good humanly scaled design like in Islington and Pimlico. If a family on our waiting list is offered a property above the 5 th floor, they should have the choice of refusing and waiting for an alternative offer. This should not count as their single offer.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: The majority of new family units being delivered in tall buildings are on the lower floors, although there continues to be a demand for larger properties at higher levels for private sale. However, a blanket rule against such housing would limit the ability to provide new family sized housing as part of an overall housing mix, particularly in developments where the Council is seeking employment space on the lower storeys. At present, only 8% (789) of the Council's two bed and larger homes are situated above the 5th floor. Most of these are two bed homes, with only 93 of these being larger family homes with three or more bedrooms. Most Council housing is let through the choice based lettings system, which means that people would be able to choose not to bid for properties on higher levels if they would not be happy living in such properties. However, households in temporary accommodation usually have just one offer of accommodation and can only normally refuse this if it is deemed unsuitable. This policy could be amended to allow for a second offer where this refusal is a property above the fifth floor. But the Council would not wish to deem these homes as unsuitable for families by definition, as in many cases they provide good quality homes for existing tenants. It should be noted that the quality and 'liveability' of a neighbourhood is not directly related to heights of buildings and is more related to the quality of design of the buildings and public realm, homes and communal spaces
13	That all high-rise council blocks in Haringey have sprinklers even if it means retrofitting them, as the safety and peace of mind of our residents is paramount.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: It is agreed that the safety of Haringey tenants and leaseholders is paramount and the Council needs to ensure compliance with all Guidance from Central government and the LFB. It is not yet clear what the final recommendations of the Grenfell enquiry or the review of building regulations will be. The recommendation to retrofit sprinklers is a welcome demonstration of commitment to fire safety and assurance. This needs to be taken forward in the context of available funding for this work, and whether the emerging reports on fire safety recommend other measures as more urgent. At present the additional funding from the Government does not cover retrofitting sprinklers. Provisions have been made within the Housing Revenue Account to retrofit sprinklers in high rise Council blocks and subject to Cabinet approval this can be incorporated into Homes for Haringey's Asset Management Strategy and Stock Investment Plan. However, committing to retrofitting of sprinklers at this point without fully understanding all of the recommendations may lead to installations being non-compliant with new regulations or guidance. Once new guidance is issued consideration also needs to be given to all additional fire safety measures, their impact on the building fabric and how they may interact.
14	As an alternative to demolition of estates, the council should consider increasing density on existing estates through adding floors to low-rise and using land space better to build further low-rise blocks.	Homes for Haringey is currently considering the capacity for "top hatting" or adding additional storeys to existing Council buildings, but this investigation is still in its early stages.
15	That an exemption should be sought from the DCLG from the 1% rent reduction, as well as further reductions, to Council and HfH properties within the HRA.	This action is no longer required as the 1% rent reduction will no longer apply from April 2020.
16	The Panel recommend that additional investment is made to ensure the cleanliness and upkeep of existing estates:	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: Homes for Haringey is carrying out a root and branch review to develop and implement new estate service standards based on satisfaction feedback from residents and input from staff. This includes an analysis of where levels of satisfaction with cleanliness and upkeep are lowest. Following completion of the review Homes for Haringey will identify where and how additional investment should be targeted to ensure the cleanliness and upkeep of existing estates. The results of the review and proposals for investment will be presented to the Council for commissioning approval.
16a	That HfH instigate a regular cyclical decoration programme for all its estate, for the communal and external decorations required.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: Regular Cyclical decoration forms part of the holistic approach to stock investment as set out in Homes for Haringey's new Asset Management Plan.
16b	That HfH instigate a regular window-cleaning programme for all external windows on all its estates.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: The delivery of a regular window cleaning service across all estates will require the creation of a new service charge to cover the costs of the service. While the service charge will be pooled for tenants resulting in an average charge, the costs for leaseholders will be block based. There could be significant additional charges for leaseholders in high rise blocks where there will be the highest costs. The current review to develop and implement new estate service standards based on satisfaction feedback from residents and input from staff will establish if there is a general desire from residents to pay for this service. If there is a demand Homes for Haringey will currently identify the cost of implementing a window cleaning programme on estates and will present proposals and options to the Council for approval to commission this.

16c	That HFH instigate facilities / resources to do a "deep clean" when needed on all its estates, internal communal areas.	There is no change to the position as reported in July 2018. That is: Following the estate services restructure in 2017 there are no spare staff resources to deliver deep cleans. Deep cleaning programmes did take place before the reduction in the establishment in 2017 and its considered that this could be a very effective use of additional resources whose costs will be covered through the internal cleaning service charge. If funding of approximately £95K were made available for 2019 /20 then the team could be established.
17	When the council considers selling off land to a housing association or developer, that it undertakes tendering on a "Fixed Price" basis, in order to prioritise quality standards and affordability levels of new homes.	The Council will generally seek to use the land it owns to build its own Council housing. Where it does determine that land should be disposed of - and these are likely to be rare cases - the sale will only be undertaken on the basis that it secures the maximum possible affordable housing and other benefits for the community .
18	That a feasibility assessment be undertaken around applying to the DCLG for a local debt cap exemption for Haringey, following Treasury's announcement that authorities will be allowed to bid for increased HRA debt caps from 2019/20.	This action is no longer required as the HRA debt cap has now been removed.
19	The Panel endorse the following recommendations for lobbying central government put forward by the Royal Town Planning Institute: · Remove the debt cap on the Housing Revenue Account. · Councils to retain all right-to-buy receipts and use them to build replacement housing. · To review the relevant weightings in the distribution of the £44bn housing subsidy (from Homes England via the GLA) to give more priority to social and affordable housing and less to market housing for sale. · To clearly state that local authorities can build and provide housing under housing companies created under the Localism Act	The recommendations in the RTPi report - if implemented by government - would allow the Council to build more affordable homes, and in particular more homes for social rent, so officers will continue to endorse these proposals publicly. However, the Government removed the HRA debt cap which has significantly increased the HRA's capacity to build new homes.
20	That the Council make a commitment that affordable housing should be set at social rent levels or equivalent. Only truly affordable homes for rent or shared-ownership should be classified as such.	Cabinet agreed amendments to Appendix C of the Housing Strategy in February 2019 in order to ensure that affordable housing is delivered at levels that are affordable to its residents who need this most. It clarified that the Council's preferred affordable housing is housing at social rent levels, or London Living Rent levels where the housing is intermediate housing. The new housing strategy will further develop this policy.
21	That the Council be proactive in amending local policies, such as the Planning Policy and Housing Strategy to ensure that the delivery of housing in Haringey better meets the needs of all of its residents, such as affordable homes set at market rent levels. Having a clear policy setting out local criteria on affordability levels will help create a tougher planning regime and provide clear grounds to refuse unsuitable developments.	The Cabinet has adopted new Appendix C of the Housing Strategy which sets out guidance on Affordable Housing and is drafting a new Housing Strategy which will set out more detailed aims
22	That positive social impact should be at the heart of the Council's approach to regeneration. In particular, the Panel emphasised the need to ensure that any regeneration programme put the physical and mental wellbeing of residents at the forefront of its aims. The Panel recommends that a robust matrix be developed which measures the social impact through the entirety of the regeneration process and accurately measures community benefit.	This recommendation is closely related to the following recommendation. In looking at new schemes, the regeneration service look at wider community impact and social value, utilising the Social Life Framework.
23	The Panel commended the work done by Social Life to use a social sustainability framework to measure the impact of social regeneration. The Panel recommended that the work being done by Social Life and the GLA continue to be monitored and that Haringey adopt the use of the regional framework and accompanying performance indicators developed. The framework should underpin a systematic approach to measuring social impact and commissioning external projects across all regeneration areas in Haringey.	Following the Scrutiny Panel recommendations, the Social Life framework has been adopted as part of the standard process for developing project objectives and monitoring impact across all regeneration projects. This is in the process of being rolled out on new projects to ensure that these issues are being considered at the outset, and embedded within projects. Recent examples of this include the Good Growth Fund projects at Bruce Grove.
24	That the Council explore ways of promoting greater cooperation between the Council-led scrutiny process and the HFH scrutiny process in order to improve political oversight of HFH. It is recommended that the Councillors that sit on the HFH Board feed into scrutiny and give reports to the HRSP.	It is proposed that a report should come to Cabinet in April 2019 recommending a review of the delivery of housing management and other Council housing services. A key criterion in this review would be Accountability, including direct accountability to residents through elected members; and accountability to key stakeholders in the service including tenants, leaseholders and homeless households. This would seek to ensure the most effective possible relationship between the HFH Board and the Council's Scrutiny arrangements.
25a	That the Council explore ways of having a broad representation of residents, leaseholders and resident's associations.	As stated for recommendation 24, it is proposed that a report should come to Cabinet in April 2019 recommending a review of the delivery of housing management and other Council housing services. As with scrutiny, the Accountability criteria would require the Review to explore ways of having a broad representation of residents, leaseholders and resident's associations.
25b	It is also recommend that the Council set up an independent advocacy body for residents.	There is no change to the Council's position as reported in July 2018. That is: The Council could facilitate this, for example by providing rooms for an independent advocacy body to hold meetings. However, other bodies (e.g. the CAB) may be better placed to set up an independent body.

25c	Residents need to be engaged with throughout the regeneration process and that there should be funding provided for this.	The Council is committed to engagement with residents throughout the process of estate renewal. On High Road West the Council had provided a dedicated engagement officer and a team of rehousing officers to ensure that view so local resident are included, and residents have been involved in the Resident Charter, the Resident Design Guide and the Procurement of the Preferred bidder
26	That a full consultation should be undertaken with residents of estates prior to any decision being taken in respect of estate regeneration. The consultation should also include a ballot of all residents and leaseholders on any affected estate.	There is no change to the Council's position as reported in July 2018. That is: Prior to any regeneration scheme, the Council has carried out extensive consultation and surveys, and the addition of formal ballots will be a useful extension of this to ensure that each scheme is taken forward with the support of the community. The precise methodology and timing of ballots will need careful consideration, to ensure that the most meaningful and appropriate impression of resident opinion can be discerned.