

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 26th October 2009
Q 'N' A: Cabinet Member for Housing – Councillor Bevan

Question	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
		Questions from Councillor Mallett	
1	General	How do you see sheltered housing provision contributing to the overall housing strategy?	<p>Meeting the housing needs of older residents is critical to the successful delivery of Haringey’s ten-year Housing Strategy. Priority actions contained in the Strategy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the conclusions of a supported housing review, responding to the need for more flexible models of housing support and for the development of extra care sheltered housing for those older people with higher levels of need, and making best use of the decent homes funding allocated for the purpose of bringing the Council’s supported housing up to the decent homes standard. • Developing and implementing an Older Persons Housing Strategy, building on the goals identified in ‘Experience Counts’, Haringey’s Strategy for improving the quality of life for older people. <p>A report on the outcome of the supported housing review of four sheltered housing schemes will be presented to Cabinet on 17 November 2009 and Haringey’s Older Persons Housing Strategy will be completed and published in Autumn 2010.</p>



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2	General	What changes do you foresee in the demand for sheltered housing in the next 10 years?	<p>Over the next 10 years, I expect that demand for the traditional type of sheltered housing will continue to decline.</p> <p>Given a choice, most people would prefer to remain in their own home and to receive the care and support they need in order to remain independent for as long as possible.</p> <p>The Personalisation agenda will provide people with more of a say on the type of social care and support they receive, and how and by whom it will be provided.</p> <p>Nationally, older people are demanding a range of integrated housing and social care options, and many Councils have already started to develop and provide some of these options.</p> <p>As people are living longer and are generally in better health, they are tending to move into sheltered housing at a later age than people have done in the past. For most, the traditional sheltered housing model (developed in the 1960s) does not meet their needs, aspirations and lifestyles.</p> <p>Some of the Council's sheltered housing is poorly designed and requires substantial investment to bring it up to modern standards and attract new residents. To meet home owners' need for sheltered housing, we should encourage and support the development of mixed tenure sheltered housing schemes.</p>



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3	General	How many sheltered housing units are vacant at the moment, and what is being done to allocate them?	<p>Each week, an average of two or three of the Council's sheltered housing properties becomes vacant.</p> <p>At present, there are 39 voids in sheltered housing, 29 of which have already been repaired.</p> <p>Almost all of these voids have been allocated or pre-allocated by the Supported Housing Lettings Officer.</p>
Questions from Councillor Newton			
4	Emergency Accommodation	Has the proposed reduction of around 400 for the period May 2009 to end Oct 2009 been achieved and what is the current number in Emergency Accommodation?	<p>Emergency Accommodation (EA) is the term we use to describe the nightly-purchased temporary accommodation that the Council provides for homeless applicants while it investigates their homelessness application and looks for somewhere more settled to accommodate them.</p> <p>Temporary Accommodation (TA) <u>includes</u> the full range of accommodation that the Council uses: B&B, hostels, EA, private sector leasing (PSL), housing association leasing (HALS) and supplier-managed PSL.</p> <p>The number of households in Emergency Accommodation (EA) in May 2009 was 1669 and, by 16 October 2009, this figure had reduced, by 331, to 1338. By the end of October, the number is expected to be less than 1300.</p>



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5		For the 5 month period November 2009 to April 2010 a reduction of around 1100 is planned. What measures are proposed to achieve a reduction of 275% in this time frame?	<p>There are several strands to the EA Reduction Project, each of which is expected to help achieve the overall target::</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="1305 496 2179 715">1. Conversion of EA to AST – Where households in EA are happy with their accommodation and the agent or landlord is also happy with how the tenancy has been maintained, EA has been converted into an assured shorthold tenancy (AST), enabling the household to remain in the property, as a private tenant, for a period of at least 2-3 years.<li data-bbox="1305 756 2179 898">2. New ASTs – A quarter of the households we have visited in EA have expressed an interest in moving into the private rented sector, rather than spend years in temporary accommodation awaiting the offer of social housing.<li data-bbox="1305 940 2179 1082">3. Auto-bidding – As a result of a recent change to the Council’s Lettings policy, households living in temporary accommodation who reach a certain points threshold will be subject to auto-bidding. <p>When the points threshold has been reached and the applicant has met with a Housing Officer to discuss auto-bidding and their housing options, the auto-bidding software will be switched on and the Home Connections system will bid for all suitable properties on their behalf.</p> <p>If applicants subsequently refuse a reasonable offer of accommodation, the Council’s homelessness duty will be discharged and their temporary accommodation will be</p>



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			<p>withdrawn. The purpose of this change in policy is to encourage residents of temporary accommodation to take up suitable accommodation when it becomes available.</p> <p>4. Supplier-managed PSL – on 13 October 2009, Cabinet approved the appointment of six housing suppliers to provide the Council with a total of up to 400 private sector leased properties for use as alternative temporary accommodation for households moved out of EA.</p> <p>We are expecting these properties to come ‘on stream’ from the end of November 2009. Although these are a form of temporary accommodation, they are not EA.</p> <p>5. Housing association leasing – Invitations to tender for HALs contracts have been advertised. Tenders are due to be evaluated and approved by mid-December 2009.</p> <p>All of these initiatives will contribute to the Council’s target of reducing EA to just 200 units by the end of March 2010.</p> <p>During the first five months of the EA Reduction Project, a lot of the groundwork has been prepared and the work has concentrated on initiatives designed to discharge the Council’s homelessness duty and reduce its use of TA.</p> <p>From the end of November 2009, we will start to move homeless households out of nightly-purchased EA and into the newly procured supplier-managed PSL accommodation.</p>



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			<p>A few weeks later, we will start to benefit from the newly procured TA supplied by the housing associations.</p>
6		<p>Are the 400 units of supplier-managed private sector leased accommodation just for emergency use and are the Council leasing for a short term as only 200 should be required after April 2010?</p>	<p>These units of accommodation are being procured as a replacement for expensive, nightly-purchased Emergency Accommodation.</p> <p>The leases for the supplier-managed accommodation will normally be for 3 years.</p> <p>Homeless households should only spend a short time in EA, while the Council investigates their homelessness application and, where there is an ongoing duty, arranges alternative temporary accommodation.</p>
7	Temporary Accommodation	<p>What length of time do you expect households to be housed in Temporary Accommodation and how is this monitored?</p>	<p>The time that homeless households spend in temporary accommodation depends on the size of the accommodation they need and how flexible they are about where they live.</p> <p>Although we closely monitor the movement of households in and out of temporary accommodation on a weekly basis, we do not monitor the length of time that homeless households spend in temporary accommodation. Average waiting times (for all housing applicants) are calculated annually.</p> <p>Of the 890 council and housing association lettings completed during 2008/09, the average amount of time that successful applicants spent on the housing register was as follows:</p>



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-bedroom home – 3 years • 2- bedroom home – 5 years • 3-bedroom home – 7 years • 4- bedroom home – 7 years • 5 bedroom+ - 7 - 8 years <p>Unfortunately, these figures are not especially informative, since there are many factors that affect applicants' waiting times, including choice of areas, whether or not they have a disability or restricted mobility, and the nature and level of their engagement in the choice based lettings bidding process.</p>
8		Do you monitor how quickly different households ie number of children/adults etc are moved out of TA?	<p>At present, with the existing points system, we do not differentiate between homeless households in TA and other housing applicants on the housing register.</p> <p>However, as the TA number reduces, we will certainly consider how best to collect and use this data.</p>
9		What is the current min/max amount of time a household can expect to be in TA?	There is no minimum or maximum time that households spend in temporary accommodation, as the length of time depends on the size and type of property they require, the number of points they have been awarded, their choice of area and their level of engagement in the bidding process.
		Questions from Councillor Winskill	
10	Affordable warmth	Please give more details and information on how this will be advertised to residents.	Haringey Council is taking the following action to raise residents' awareness of affordable warmth issues and the action that can be taken to reduce heating costs:



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every other year, at the start of the winter, we arrange a mail-out to all 16,000 households containing someone in receipt of a benefit that is likely to qualify them for a Warm Front grant. The letter they receive describes the help available and how the household can apply for it.• Haringey Council has also adopted NI 187 as one of its key National Indicators. This indicator is concerned with the SAP rating of the homes of people in receipt of Council Tax or Housing Benefit. Each year we conduct a survey of approximately 7,000 households to determine the SAP rating of their homes. When we have the survey results, we will engage a contractor to visit each of the properties to determine what measures are necessary to improve the energy efficiency of the property.• Haringey Council employs a dedicated Fuel Poverty Officer to deal with questions and queries from residents. Staff in the Council's call centre and in Customer Services also hold up-to-date information that they can give to householders when they contact them.• Each winter, we promote the installation of insulation measures by running advertisements in Haringey People and on lamp posts and advertising hoardings throughout the borough.• This winter, we are planning to produce a DVD (showing the type of help that is available) and then distribute it to residents in those parts of the borough where people are most affected by fuel poverty.



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the Haringey Council website, there is a suite of pages devoted to insulation and energy efficiency, including the borough's thermal image that enables residents to check on how much heat their home was losing on the night that the thermal image was taken. • The Fuel Poverty Officer attends and holds a stall at many events throughout the year, particularly those targeted at vulnerable / older people within the borough. <p>On 2 November 2009, a Government Minister will launch Haringey's Affordable Warmth Strategy with a large event held at Tottenham Hotspur Football Club.</p>
11	Affordable Accommodation	<p>A great deal of affordable accommodation is delivered as part of private housing schemes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please tell us how the recession has affected this process – are figures available from the past three years that indicate the numbers of start up projects and units of housing involved? • Do you know how many projects have been moth-balled? • What is being done to attract developers to the borough? • What discussions have there been with our partners in the Social Housing sector? • Please indicate the headline needs and 	<p>In common with most other parts of London, the recession has had a significant adverse impact on the amount of new affordable housing that has been delivered in Haringey through S106 planning agreements on private developments.</p> <p>The weak state of the housing sales market (with many prospective buyers being unable to obtain affordable mortgages and most lenders being a lot more reluctant to fund speculative schemes) has led to the reduction in the amount of private sector schemes coming forward.</p> <p>As a consequence, there has been a reduction in the number of new affordable homes that are produced by Section 106 agreements in relation to those private sector schemes.</p>



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		opportunities identified in the Investment plan due to go to the HCA in December.	<p>This reduction in activity is demonstrated most clearly by the affordable housing completion figures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2007/8 – 301 homes• 2008/9 – 415 homes• 2009/10 – 180 (forecast) <p>These figures reflect the sharp slowdown of new starts in 2008/9, resulting in fewer completions from 2009/10 onwards.</p> <p>It is difficult to provide any meaningful estimates on the number of projects that might have been 'mothballed' (other than by reference to the forecast completion figures above) because a significant number of these projects will not yet have progressed to the planning application stage, so will not appear in the data held by the Council.</p> <p>Haringey's current annual target for new affordable housing (340 units) was exceeded in 2008/09 and the borough has the capacity to achieve this target in 2009/10 and beyond.</p> <p>It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the reduction in development activity during 2008/9 is 47% (the same as the forecast shortfall against the target completions for 2009/1).</p> <p>Having said that, 2009/10 is now seeing a recovery in the number of new starts, due to increasing RSL activity and the major regeneration at Tottenham Hale.</p>



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			<p>We are now forecasting that the number of starts during 2009/10 will have recovered sufficiently to deliver approximately 498 affordable homes from 2011/12.</p> <p>Development in the borough is being encouraged in a number of ways: through working closely with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on new funding initiatives such as direct investment (as seen at Hale Village) and also with our RSL partners to acquire sites in the depressed market and to lead new housing development rather than act as a subsidiary developer partner.</p> <p>Acknowledging the viability issues, the Council is willing to consider a more flexible approach to tenure and has already agreed to vary S106 agreements on a number of sites to allow “rent to purchase” tenures rather than direct home ownership. This has enabled prospective buyers who are currently unable to complete a purchase to take on an intermediate rented tenancy and purchase the property at a later date. This removes the element of sales risk and encourages development of those sites that may otherwise have been delayed until the market has recovered.</p> <p>In September 2009, the Cabinet agreed that Officers should examine the options for promoting the development of Council owned land through partnership in a local asset backed vehicle (LABV) or similar method.</p>



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			<p>Such 'special purpose vehicles' may be used to generate development in the current market by the public sector sharing risk and the private sector accepting a lower return. This may allow development to be accelerated compared to traditional disposal methods and, through partnership, would allow the Council more control to achieve its regeneration and housing supply objectives. Investigation of the options is in progress as well as discussions with the HCA on their recently announced Public Land Initiative (PLI) that follows a similar model but under the umbrella of the HCA.</p> <p>There is a frequent and wide ranging dialogue with our social housing partners through regular 1:1 review meetings to consider individual sites and broader RSL and developer forums to discuss wider development and stock management issues. These forums are also attended by representatives of Haringey's Planning & Regeneration and Property Services teams and the HCA who provide information on new initiatives and developments in grant funding policy. The next forum meeting will take place on 9th November 2009.</p> <p>Our RSL preferred partnership arrangements have also been revised to include all RSLs who wish to develop affordable homes in the borough, rather than being limited to just the 6 preferred partners we have worked with in the past. Under the new partnership arrangements, RSLs seeking support for development and grant funding will be required to sign a partnership agreement laying down performance</p>



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			<p>standards for development and the long term management of their properties. It is intended that this will help raise and maintain common development and management standards in social housing across the borough. Draft proposals have been agreed by the Integrated Housing Board and are currently out for consultation with our partners.</p> <p>Our RSL partners are also being encouraged to acquire sites and take forward development both through the acquisition of Council owned land (such as the Tottenham Town Hall, Plevna Road and Aneurin Bevan House sites) and also privately owned land (such as the Park Tavern and Hesta Annex [Great Cambridge Road] sites) that have all now received confirmation of grant funding from the HCA.</p> <p>The draft Local Investment Plan (LIP) currently in negotiation with the HCA will highlight the diverse needs of Haringey's communities, focusing on Haringey as a place with planned regeneration, housing and associated infrastructure projects fitting together as part of local area plans rather than the previous programme based approach that tended to react to opportunity rather than place shaping to meet local community needs.</p> <p>A significant proportion of the new homes delivered over the next ten years will be supplied at Tottenham Hale and Haringey Heartlands which are designated as an Area of</p>



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			<p>Opportunity and Area for Intensification respectively.</p> <p>The LIP will detail these and other significant regeneration opportunities in Haringey, particularly the wider Tottenham area including the Seven Sisters corridor linking through from the major regeneration of Woodberry Down in Hackney to Tottenham Hale including Lawrence Road and extending to the Spurs Stadium development and other strategic projects such as Hornsey Town Hall and Depot sites.</p> <p>These projects will produce housing supply in a range of tenures and sizes that take into account the diverse needs of the borough, including the supported housing requirements of vulnerable people and the training and employment opportunities that provide the foundations needed to create mixed and sustainable communities.</p>
12	Homelessness	<p>To tackle homelessness, overcrowding and under occupation by making best use of Haringey's social housing stock, bringing empty homes back into use encouraging housing mobility, extending and promoting choice based lettings, and removing barriers to the private rented sector.</p> <p>Are there any indicators available to demonstrate the effectiveness of these measures?</p>	<p>We are currently working with RSLs to develop a borough-wide incentive scheme to encourage under-occupying tenants of social housing to 'downsize' to smaller accommodation (through the transfer system, mutual exchanges, the Seaside & Country Homes scheme or, perhaps, the private rented sector). We have adopted a casework approach to a number of identified under-occupiers and our Project Worker is in contact with each tenant discussing bidding through Home Connections and making bids on behalf of tenants where appropriate, liaising with Seaside and Country Homes and organising removals.</p>



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			<p>In terms of overcrowding we have identified those in our own stock who are severely overcrowded.</p> <p>Homes for Haringey (HfH) is undertaking a feasibility study to determine whether properties can be extended or converted to meet the needs of the tenant.</p> <p>Where HfH identify that the property cannot be altered, tenants are referred to our Project Worker who is applying a similar casework approach to help resolve their situations.</p> <p>This includes checking that they have the right priority on the housing register and advising them of their chances of a transfer, advising about HomeSwapper and mutual exchanges as well as promoting the private rented sector as an alternative and a more immediate solution to their situation.</p> <p>So far 5 families have expressed an interest in the private rented sector. We are also preparing for a special event that offers the opportunity to match under-occupiers with overcrowded households and encourage and maximise mutual exchanges.</p> <p>We are also consulting on the allocations policy to ensure under-occupiers and overcrowded households receive priority on the housing register.</p> <p>Initiatives to address under occupation and overcrowding (together with the moves achieved) are closely monitored and progress reported regularly to the CLG.</p>



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			<p>The Private Sector Lettings Team was established in August 2008 to concentrate on working with landlords and tenants to remove barriers to the use of the private rented sector as a sustainable option for households in housing need.</p> <p>The team is committed to procuring good quality, affordable homes in the private rented sector which they then make available to households who are either threatened with homelessness or who would otherwise be roofless, often managing to secure and facilitate a move into new private rented accommodation for homeless households on the day they first approach us for help.</p> <p>Relationships with private landlords have improved and feedback through the Landlord Forum is increasingly positive. The number of lets achieved is monitored and September 2009 saw the highest level of lets achieved since the team was introduced. In September 2009, 137 households were accommodated through Haringey's Home Finder Scheme into the private rented sector, 68 did so by accepting a qualifying offer and leaving their temporary accommodation.</p>
13	Fire risk assessments	<p>On 5th October, BBC London reported that 6 of Haringey's tower blocks have no valid fire risk assessment. Can Cllr Bevan confirm these figures and tell us what is being done to ensure the safety of residents in these blocks.</p> <p>Why did it take a television investigation to remind HfH that fire risk assessments were required and</p>	<p>Homes for Haringey has an ongoing programme for Fire Risk Assessments and we have completed all assessments for the blocks of greatest concern to the Fire Brigade (high rise and sheltered stock).</p> <p>Subsequently, we have carried out major works to six blocks and, in line with the Fire Safety Order, these fire risk</p>



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		<p>are a fundamental component of measures needed to ensure safety of tenants?</p>	<p>assessments required updating. These have been completed following routine reassessment. The nature of the major works in these blocks is unlikely to have had any affect on the fire risk assessment. The blocks affected are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cedar House, N22 • Daphne House, N22 • Kenley, N17 • Northolt, N17 • Reed Road, N17 • Trulock Court, N17 <p>Homes for Haringey routinely updates fire risk assessments to blocks following major works.</p>
14	Decent Homes Standard	<p>Can the Lead member tell us the specification for boxing in pipes subsequent to the renewal of boilers? Does he feel that the balance between access (for maintenance work) and safety is satisfactory?</p> <p>Does the Lead member feel that 12 months guarantee on a new boiler is adequate?</p>	<p>The general standard is to only box in pipes where they are vulnerable to physical impact such as vertically in hallways and between worktop surface and underside of boilers. There is no safety aspect to pipework in General Needs housing relating to pipework as the system's radiators are at the same temperature as the pipes. The same standards are applied to Decent Homes.</p> <p>There is no legislative requirement for domestic piped services such as heating or hot water to be boxed in General Needs housing in the UK.</p> <p>Boiler Warranties are for two years in Decent Homes work.</p>



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15	Decent Homes Standard	Following completion of works, contractors invite tenants to “sign off” the work. Naturally many tenants will lack the technical competencies or might not have the appropriate English needed to do a thorough sign off. What safe-guards are in place to ensure that any deficiencies in workmanship or materials that subsequently come to light are retrospectively addressed?	Prior to ‘sign off’ a number of quality checks are undertaken by the compliance team. Any defects need to be rectified before hand over. Following this a one year defects liability period from scheme practical completion. During this period the contractor is liable for rectifying any defects. Tenants and leaseholders are provided with contact details to report any defects and are reminded in advance of the period expiry. If defects are reported to Asset Management or through Repairs then HfH will refer on. The contractors’ Resident Liaison officers are notified of any language requirements prior to work starting on site so arrange for appropriate translations.