

Executive**On 21st March 2006**Report Title: **RSL Partnering Proposals**Report of: **Director of Social Services**Wards(s) affected: **All**Report for: **KEY****1. Purpose**

1.1 The report sets out a proposal for the selection by the Council of partner RSLs to work with on affordable housing developments.

2. Introduction by Executive Member

The role of RSLs in the borough has grown substantially in the last few years and it is set to increase further in the immediate future. Our relationship with the Housing Corporation and individual RSLs is central to the achievement of our Housing Strategy and, within it, our ability to deal effectively with homelessness and overcrowding. Our new "Prevention & Options" approach to Housing Advice and Homelessness, and our new government target of 50% reduction in Homelessness/TA by 2010, depend to a very large extent on our partnership with this sector.

The large and increasing numbers of RSL properties in the borough and the increase of new housing developments with RSL involvement have created a situation whereby the demands placed on the council to be able to play its proper role had exceeded the capacity of the council's previous approaches and resources to adequately respond. Mounting public concerns about new developments and increasing councillors' casework related to RSL tenants (most of whom were council nominated) have dictated the need to improve the council's monitoring and support to RSLs mechanisms.

An earlier Housing Scrutiny Review had provided some useful pointers as to the future direction and also the council has since created a Design Support facility for new developments and an expanded RSL support section, which between them have improved dramatically our capacity in this area of work.

In parallel we need to find ways of putting some order on what is taking place within the borough and make the whole situation manageable. Evidently it is difficult to have a proper mechanism for effective partnership and mutual support with the RSL sector when there are almost 50 different RSLs active in the borough and there is a target of achieving @700 new house completions a year. There is therefore a need to try to rationalise our

approach and to strengthen the synergy between agencies. This paper provides a starting point for approaching this issue.

The process of such a rationalisation has to be done in a way that the sector as a whole is benefiting, whilst at the same time we are improving our collective capacity to meet the various targets that the government has set for us, to maximise inward investment in our borough and to raise housing management standards and benefits to tenants across all the sectors.

The three key themes that it suggests are:

- (a) a partnering approach with a number of quality RSLs, which is
- (b) based on an agreed set of quality and capacity to deliver criteria and is
- (c) underpinned by a proactive approach driven through a plan identifying in advance the main development opportunities and the baseline requirements (in terms of targets and processes).

This paper is sufficiently well thought out, clear and informative, to begin the process of getting our heads round the issues involved and of discussing constructive suggestions for refining it before we move to the necessary next phase of the consultation.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Members agree to adopt the approach of selecting Registered Social Landlord preferred partners.
- 3.2 That the Executive receive a further report, for their approval, that will recommend the Council's preferred partners.

Report Authorised by: **Anne Bristow, Director of Social Services**

Contact Officer: Rupert Brandon
 Head of Housing Supply Group
 Tel: 020 8489 4890
 Rupert.Brandon@haringey.gov.uk

4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report sets out a proposal for the future working arrangements with RSLs in Haringey. It proposes that the Council select a limited number of 'preferred partners' to work with on the majority of future development schemes. This will enable a more co-ordinated approach to the delivery of affordable housing and to the standard of housing management in new stock.

This report also sets out an outline timetable for proposal.

5. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)

5.1 Outlined in body of report.

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

6.1 None

7. Background

- 7.1 There are nearly fifty Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) that have stock totalling 10,500 (11% of total housing) in Haringey. These range from small ones with only a handful of units to those that own thousands nationally. Of this number about a third develops new homes either directly or for smaller RSLs (typically BME ones). Of those RSLs with permanent stock in Haringey three have between 1700 and 1950 units. The next largest two have around 750-850. After this there are four RSLs with around 400, which includes two BME RSLs.
- 7.2 Administratively dealing with such a large number of RSLs can be challenging in terms of monitoring the quality of development and housing management services. Many local authorities have moved to a system of restricting the number of RSLs they work with on new developments in order to ensure a better strategic approach to meeting the Council's requirements around housing need, building design etc. A smaller number of key RSLs should make this easier to achieve.
- 7.3 The Housing Corporation provides the majority of funding that RSLs receive. To this end the Council will consult closely with it on moving towards a system of 'preferred partners' as the intention is that it is the 'preferred partners' that will receive the bulk of the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) via Social Housing Grant (SHG).
- 7.4 The 2004-06 Development Programme attracted over £70 million of inward investment to Haringey, and is delivering approximately 1,000 new affordable homes. The Borough has supported £160 million of bids for the 2006-08 programme, which is to be formally announced in early 2006.
- 7.5 The advantage to the RSLs that become preferred partners is that they know that they are supported by the Council and the Housing Corporation and can therefore plan their business activities within Haringey more securely. The advantage to the Council is that it will help ensure longer-term commitment to the Council and the wider communities particularly the tenants of the respective RSLs. It will also make the bi-annual Social Housing Grant bidding round to the Housing Corporation more straight forward.

- 7.6 The experience of other local authorities is that ‘preferred partners’ play a wider role in the community, contributing to community initiatives and regeneration issues as outlined in community plans, as they feel more involved due their longer-term relationship with the council. It is easier to have a closer and more productive relationship with a smaller, more manageable group of RSLs – for officers, Members and residents.
- 7.7 The advantage to the Council is that it will be able to focus the work of a smaller more dedicated group of RSLs than previously. It will be able to undertake better monitoring of their performance from scheme development through to site management of completed projects. In addition more stability can be achieved amongst our partners and with this can come greater co-ordination and understanding of each others work. Partners are more likely to develop closer links with the community and its representatives.
- 7.8 One disadvantage of having preferred partners is that there could be a risk of complacency if the partners thought they were assured of continued sources of funding. It could also be that non-partners will be discouraged from active property or community development if they felt permanently excluded.
- 7.9 In order to mitigate some of the disadvantages the partners will be under annual review and their performance closely monitored to ensure satisfactory progress. Any partner not reaching acceptable standards will be removed from ‘preferred partner’ status. This could then provide an opportunity for a replacement to be found from amongst non-partners. Additionally in order that ‘preferred partners’ do not receive all funding allocations a percentage of the programme will be set aside for specialist housing providers, non-partners and innovative schemes that may be brought forward by RSLs not currently working in Haringey.
- 7.10 It should be noted that the arrangement will take place against the backdrop of sub-regional allocations in which the Council has a lesser role than before and cannot therefore insist on any particular RSL receiving an allocation from the Housing Corporation. The Housing Corporation has its own system of preferred partners, which means the Council’s will have to be compatible with this. However, it is worth remembering that the Council’s approval does still carry some weight, and in addition, the Borough can insist on its choice of partner for schemes where Haringey is the landowner, or where no Housing Corporation development grant is being made available.
- 7.11 Decisions about future funding arrangements for RSLs may change in light of the review of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and its powers. Any implications that may arise from this will be reported to Members.

8. Description

- 8.1 The Council will consider a number of factors to determine who its 'preferred partners' should be. These will be based upon their current development activity, the number of permanent units they have, their success in spending their SHG allocations, how they meet the Council's housing needs and corporate objectives, their performance on housing management issues e.g. rent arrears, repairs, etc.
- 8.2 A limited number of RSLs will be invited to bid for 'preferred partner' status having qualified through the first two criteria above, namely their current development activity and the number of permanent units they have in management. An average number of partners is between 5 to 10 and within this it is normal to include BME RSL/S.
- 8.3 Many of the performance issues are monitored by the Housing Corporation (annual Performance Indicator Profile report). The Council will consult with the Housing Corporation over its findings and inform RSLs that these will form an integral part of its proposal. Other matters will be informed by the Housing department's own records and those of other departments e.g. Planning.
- 8.4 In seeking to secure a number of 'preferred partners' the Council will be seeking to improve standards throughout new developments. This will mean a protocol being drawn up that will list new standards specifically required by the Council as well as the minimum ones required by the Housing Corporation e.g. around consultation, design and site management. These are listed in Appendix 1. They would also work closely with the Borough on initiatives such as common housing management standards, public realm management, research and strategy formulation.
- 8.5 Liaison will be undertaken with RSLs about both the performance measures that are to be used and the standards that are to be drawn up for 'preferred partners'.
- 8.6 It is intended that selection of 'preferred partners' will take place by the end of June. This will then allow a full year before the next Housing Corporation bid round for the new RSL partners to work up schemes. It will also allow a period of transition for the RSLs and the Council to identify existing schemes that will require support to ensure completion.
- 8.7 The process will start in January with consultation with the Housing Corporation and the submission after of this report to Executive. Further liaison will take place with RSLs after this with selection taking place in June. A recommendation about selection will be made to members thereafter. Appendix 2 sets this out in full.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 This is being undertaken with the Housing Corporation and housing association partners.

10. Summary and Conclusions

10.1 By having a 'preferred partner' agreement with key RSLs the Council will be better able to improve its aims for new development by having a protocol around design and management issues for new dwellings.

11. Recommendation

11.1 That the Executive approves the process as outlined in the report.

11.2 That the Executive receive a further report, for their approval, that will recommend the Council's preferred partners.

12. Comments of the Director of Finance

12.1 There are no financial consequences to take account of in this report.

13. Comments of the Head of Legal Service

13.1 The process of selection of preferred partners needs to be robust and transparent in order to avoid possible challenge. In the course of devising preferred partner arrangements, consideration should be given to the impact upon Nomination Agreements with RSLs if they are to be subject to potential removal from preferred partner status.

13.2 It should be noted that planning applications from RSLs for development must be assessed on the basis of their objective compliance with UDP policies whether or not the RSL concerned is a preferred partner.

14. Equalities Implications

14.1 Throughout its work, Haringey Council is committed to reflecting the full diversity of the community it serves and to promoting equality of opportunity for everyone.

14.2 We aim to ensure equal access to our services by all citizens on the basis of need, and to provide services in a manner that is sensitive to the individual whatever their background. We will represent the needs of our diverse communities to other agencies and make equal opportunities a key guiding principle in all our work with our partners. We will ensure that our workforce reflects the community we serve, and will take positive action to realise our equality of opportunity policy.

14.3 We will also ensure that our partners and other agencies we work with including key RSL's are committed to equalities and diversity through their equal opportunities policy and service provision. We will make sure that the suppliers, contractors and consultants we use are aware of this policy. If we discover that they are discriminating against someone while working for us, we will ask them to put things right. We will also review our agreements with them.

14.4 We are committed to eliminating discrimination on grounds of age; disability; colour, ethnic origin, national origin or race; gender; HIV status; marital status; religious belief; responsibility for dependants; sexuality, and unrelated criminal conviction.

15. Use of Appendices / Tables / Photographs

15.1 Appendix 1 – Schedule of Standards to be Included in Preferred Partners Protocol

15.2 Appendix 2 – Timetable

Appendix 1 – Schedule of Standards to be Included in Preferred Partners Protocol

Design

- Housing Corporation's Scheme Development Standards (SDS)
- Secure by Design
- All schemes to be assessed by the Council's Design Panel
- 10% of developments to be fully wheelchair accessible
- All non-wheelchair properties to be built to Lifetime Homes standard
- Minimum space standards – as set out in SPG 3a. This will be subject to revision.

Density

- Sites to achieve maximum density allowable by Planning (taking into other design and mix standards)

Property Features

- To meet Decent Homes Standard
- Achieve Eco Homes rating of 'Very Good'
- On mixed development sites all properties to achieve standard external appearance

Development Mix

- Affordable rented – 20% x 1b, 40% x 2b4p, 25% x 3b5p, 10% x 4b and 5% x 5b
- Intermediate Housing – 40% x 1b, 50% x 2b3p and 10% x 3b5p.

BME Provision

- 20% of all schemes to be developed either for ownership or management by a BME RSL

Housing Management

- Agreed standards to be adopted. A separate project is underway to agree and implement common housing and estate management standards for social landlords in Haringey. A joint working party is due to present its recommendations in April 2006.

Scheme Consultation

- All schemes will need the appropriate RSL/S to undertake a consultation exercise with interested parties prior to a formal planning submission. This will be undertaken at an early stage and involve the public, Members and officers from Housing and Planning with a view to incorporating appropriate observations.

Site Management

- This will need to be in line with any conditions set out in the planning permission. RSLs will need to have a plan for site management that covers issues such as site running (e.g. time of work and deliveries) to ensuring the site appears neat and tidy.

Monitoring and Implementation of Protocol

- The activity of partner RSLs will be monitored by the Council to ensure compliance with the protocol. Members will be encouraged to take part in this process with their observations and views. An annual review of all partners will be reported upon to Members.
- RSLs will be encouraged to engage with Council officers and Members through activities such as estate visits and scheme openings.
- Any serious breach of performance will be investigated and could result in a partner being removed from the list.

Appendix 2 – Timetable

January/February 2006

- Consult with Housing Corporation on performance indicators and general performance of RSLs within Haringey and to seek its view on the proposal.

February/March

- Start consultation with RSLs and set out the minimum selection criteria. This will be based on RSLs e.g. having an existing development programme, manage a minimum number of permanent properties. All preferred partners will need to be either existing 'preferred partners' of the Housing Corporation or have agents acting for them. A launch event will be held to seek their views on the proposal and seek expressions of interest in 'preferred partner' status by end of March. Send them the draft protocol.

April

- Write to RSLs that have expressed an interest setting out the process for selection and asking for any relevant information not held by the Housing Corporation.

May

- Receive expressions of interest by the end of the month.

June

- Report back to Members and recommend preferred partners for Executive approval.

July 2006 onwards

- Work towards identifying suitable schemes for the 2008/10 NAHP and schemes that may be brought forward into the existing funding round 2006/8.
- Start development of agreed management standards.
- Start new monitoring arrangements of partners.