

Housing Committee

10th October 2018

Public Questions and Speakers

Jasmin Parsons and Adanna Oji have requested to speak and will have up to 3 minutes each.

The total amount of time permitted for questions and speakers, is 30 minutes.

<p>Jasmin Parsons</p> <p>1.How are you able to say that your strategy is working when you are allowing council homes that will still be standing for several more years to be put on the private market at the same time making other council tenants homeless or pushing them into emergency accommodation (all homes managed by 'Barnet Homes')?</p>	<p>Neither the council or Barnet Homes are allowing existing council homes to be put on the private market. There will be instances where some ex-council housing stock that has been purchased under the Right to Buy has been let privately by its current owners.</p>
<p>Jasmin Parsons</p> <p>2.In your strategy I find it</p>	<p>The draft Housing Strategy sets out the council's aim to become the most family friendly borough in London by 2020 (p.5 and p.29), which includes all families including those with one parent, and recognises the need to prioritise larger family homes of three bedrooms or more in a market that is</p>

<p>impossible to find any definitive reference towards children and one parent families let alone a committed statement of intent? Can you point all references to me please?</p>	<p>predisposed to provide smaller units (p.13). The Strategy also sets out the council's approach to preventing homelessness amongst 16-17 year olds (p.29-30).</p> <p>In addition, the Strategy focuses on the council's approach to ensuring that the accommodation needs of children leaving care are met (p.30).</p> <p>More specific information the housing assistance provided for single parents is covered in the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which acknowledges that lone parents are the highest proportion of households being accepted as homeless, and provides case studies on how Barnet Homes have assisted single parents facing homelessness (p.20-21)</p>
<p>Jasmin Parsons</p> <p>3.LBB states that they are committed to ensuring affordable rents for residents, what formula are LBB 'Barnet Homes' using to achieve this for their existing and new council residents?</p>	<p>For existing council tenants, rents are controlled by the Government, which has required that existing rents be reduced by 1% for four years from 2016 onwards, following which council rents will be permitted to increase by CPI (Consumer Price Index) plus 1% for five years.</p> <p>For new council tenants moving in established council housing stock, rents can be charged at the formula level set under the previous rent setting regime which is based on January 1999 property valuations.</p> <p>The council's policy for new build council homes is that rents will be set at 65% of local market rents or local housing allowance, whichever is the lowest.</p> <p>The draft Housing Strategy sets out that where grant is received to subsidise the building of new council homes</p>
<p>Adanna Oji</p> <p>1.Regarding 1.4 on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, bullet point: <i>'Preventing</i></p>	<p>Barnet Homes are committed to delivering the Council's Housing Strategy by supporting clients threatened with homelessness to either sustain their existing tenancies (where possible) or find alternative suitable accommodation. In 2017/18 Barnet Homes prevented 1,140 households from becoming homelessness. All secure tenants affected by the regeneration programme are entitled a replacement home on the estate.</p>

<p><i>Homelessness</i>’- how can you address the responsibility of Barnet Homes contributing to homelessness – making residents from West Hendon (for example) ‘intentionally homeless’ on purpose?</p>	<p>81 non-secure tenants are affected in the current phase of the regeneration at West Hendon and so far, 61 have been rehoused (59 in borough of which 39 into social housing).</p> <p>Where a non-secure tenant has refused an offer of suitable accommodation there is a likelihood that they will have made themselves intentionally homeless. All non-secure tenants are given the opportunity to accept an offer and put in an appeal subsequently to avoid the risk of becoming intentionally homeless. Applicants are informed of the one offer only policy under the Allocations Scheme and their right to appeal. The risks of refusing a reasonable offer which may result in a discharge duty are clearly explained both at assessment and offer stage.</p>
<p>Adanna Oji</p> <p>2.Regarding 1.4 on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, bullet point: <i>‘Reducing the use of temporary accommodation and securing accommodation for people who are homeless’</i>, - Barnet Homes use of temporary accommodation when decanting West Hendon residents has been shown to be non-cost effective and unnecessary. Why are they attempting to forcibly move residents outside the borough, whilst resolving appeals, when they can (temporarily) relocate residents back on to the</p>	<p>As stated above of the 61 residents who have been rehoused in the latest phase of West Hendon, only two have been rehoused outside of the borough, and one of these in a neighbouring London borough.</p> <p>In cases where the council has discharged its homelessness duty, for example because a reasonable offer of accommodation has been refused, clients may be provided with alternative emergency accommodation on a discretionary basis whilst an appeal is considered. The council uses empty properties on the regeneration estates for long term temporary accommodation, and does not consider these as being suitable for use as emergency accommodation.</p>

estate?	
<p>Adanna Oji</p> <p>3.Regarding 1.4 on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, bullet point: '<i>Establishing effective partnerships...</i>'- On 18th July 2018 at a public Partnership Board Meeting, Barnet Homes refused an arbitration-like resolution to the issues residents in the cpo2 eviction were experiencing. Instead they have opted for discharge of duty notices with no attempt to fairly resolve problems. How can the council establish effective partnerships to prevent and support homelessness when Barnet Homes are not resolving issues in an effective and communicative manner?</p>	<p>The council alongside Barnet Homes works effectively with the West Hendon Partnership in the providing alternative accommodation of both the secure and non-secure tenants affected by the regeneration programme, and a representative of Barnet Homes attends monthly partnership meeting with residents.</p> <p>As part of the decanting process, Barnet Homes attended surgeries where non-secure tenants could discuss their housing matters. In addition, the council has employed an Independent Tenants Adviser who has been involved with the scheme for over 3 years and is experienced in housing issues, who is available to provide free and impartial advice to tenants.</p> <p>Housing duty has been discharged to only 4 non-secure tenants on the current regeneration phase. All 4 refused an offer of suitable accommodation within the borough, including 2 new build housing association properties. Each of the non-secure tenants concerned were offered the option to accept the offer of accommodation and still retain the right to appeal against it. This was intended to safeguard their position and ensure that should the outcome of the appeal be unfavourable they would not be made homeless.</p> <p>The statutory consequence of refusing an offer of suitable accommodation is that the housing duty would be discharged. The only avenue to appeal against the discharge of duty by requesting a review of the decision to discharge duty under S202 of the Housing Act 1996. The non-secure tenants concerned have done so. Whilst this is in progress, it would not be appropriate to engage in any other 'dispute resolution' process.</p>
<p>Adanna Oji</p> <p>4.Regarding 1.4 on the Homelessness and Rough</p>	<p>The Council offers 2 or 5-year flexible tenancies for Council owned stock, apart from hostels and properties that are due to be demolished as part of the regeneration programme. These are renewable, subject to the on-going needs of the tenants. This allows the Council to make effective use of its limited housing stock. The Council's Tenancy Strategy however makes provision for the</p>

<p>Sleeping Strategy, bullet point: <i>‘Reducing the use of temporary accommodation and securing accommodation for people who are homeless’</i>- With the choice made to introduce non-secure council tenancies, does that not increase the use of temporary accommodation? Would it not be more cost effective and secure for residents and those who are vulnerable, to have ‘secure’ tenancies?</p>	<p>most vulnerable clients to be offered ‘secure’ tenancies. There are clear criteria which set out who will qualify for a ‘secure’ tenancy – see Appendix 2 Tenancy Strategy 29th June 2015 (insert footnote with link).</p> <p>The use of non-secure tenancies has provided a supply of affordable temporary accommodation in the borough pending the regeneration of the estates.</p>
<p>Addana Oji</p> <p>5.Regarding 5.6.2 on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy: <i>“The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. The nine protected characteristics are”</i></p>	<p>Barnet Homes fully adheres to the provisions of The Equality Act and ensures that clients with a disability are given enhanced access to its services. Barnet Homes ensures a holistic housing assessment to ensure all the individual needs of an applicant are considered. Housing assessment interviews are provided at home for clients that require them. Medical assessments are also provided to ascertain the individual needs which will later inform the offer of accommodation.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Disability</i> -Barnet Homes have been discriminating against residents with disabilities: withholding valuable and important medical documentation, ignoring emails and dismissing the severity of the disabilities to the individuals. How can you ensure that vulnerable individuals with hidden disabilities are adequately and properly supported, treated fairly and are aided when they are being discriminated against by housing establishments like Barnet Homes? 	
<p>Adanna Oji</p> <p>6.Regarding 1.6 on the Housing Strategy 2019-2024:</p> <p><i>'The Housing Committee considered the above matters in June 2018,</i></p>	<p>Rents for new affordable homes in the private sector are determined largely by the subsidy arrangements which are provided in the form of affordable housing grant by the Mayor of London. These rents are generally higher than for existing council rents, but cheaper than those charged in the private rented sector. Housing benefit is available for lower income households, subject to an assessment of eligibility.</p> <p>A detailed affordability assessment is carried out by Barnet Homes as part before households are offered alternative accommodation. This ensures any property offered is affordable for the</p>

<p><i>and instructed council officers to prepare a new draft Housing Strategy based on the following themes'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Delivering more homes that people can afford.</i> <p>-A lot of the new buildings in the private sector (including housing associations) are deemed as being affordable because they are 70-80% of the going market rent yet, If tenants are moving into properties where they are forced to apply for housing benefits in order to reside there (such as those moved by Barnet Homes to A2dominion properties in Cricklewood); how is that providing 'affordable' homes?</p>	<p>individual applicant.</p> <p>Many of the tenants rehoused by Barnet Homes were already in receipt of Housing Benefit, and in these cases any increase in the rent they pay will be met by additional housing benefit payments.</p>
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<p>Adanna Oji</p> <p>7.Regarding 1.6 on the Housing Strategy 2019-2024:</p> <p><i>‘The Housing Committee considered the above matters in June 2018, and instructed council officers to prepare a new draft Housing Strategy based on the following themes’</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safe and secure homes.</i> <p>-What safeguards are there, in regards to secure tenancy agreements, for vulnerable individuals who are trying to get on to the property ladder yet their disability makes it difficult to find accommodation that will be safe and secure if their disability causes complications with their employment and therefore their income?</p>	<p>Housing law provides safeguards and protection for secure tenancy agreements. In respect of housing applicants with disabilities as above the following safeguards are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic Assessments ensure all individual needs are taken into consideration • Detailed medical assessments and recommendations for future housing offers • Detailed affordability assessment to ensure offers are affordable for individuals • Tenancy sustainment support offered by Barnet Homes, external agencies and partner housing associations
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