



Successful Tenancies 2012-14

So far so good?

Interim Progress Report 1 year on



Introduction

In April 2012 we launched our revised Successful Tenancies strategy in response to the changing economic and social landscape surrounding social housing. The Coalition Government's programme of radical welfare and tenancy reform has led to a complete reassessment of "What is our job now?"

Key drivers:

- Reduced public spending
- Welfare reform and the increased importance of financial inclusion
- Partnership working with residents, partners, peers and the voluntary organisations
- Promoting personal responsibility and independence
- Fixed term tenancies and enabling residents to move on through training and employment opportunities

What is our job now?

"Tenancy sustainment remains as important as ever but now with a greater emphasis on enablement. We need to concentrate far more on equipping tenants [and housing applicants] with greater levels of self-reliance and non-dependency to improve their lives and those of their children... this may mean they do not remain in social housing but are able to sustain improved lives, possibly in the private rented sector, or in homeownership."

In response we have identified four key theme areas to help meet this ambition.

This interim progress report seeks to identify how we are doing against those themes and in overall terms in relation to sustaining tenancies.

1) Financial Inclusion [Lead: Anne-Marie Isaacs]

“We know that younger tenants, new tenants and particular BME groups are at greater risk of tenancy failure”

It remains the fact that in Barnet that if you are younger, or Black African or a relatively new tenant, you are statistically more likely to have higher levels of personal debt and be at greater risk of tenancy failure.

Key Actions	Progress to date
<p>To further refine our customer insight information to enable us to target our financial inclusion resources more effectively</p>	<p>We have set up an area of Saffron to capture new information critical to understanding household finances and plan our support options. We continue to maintain the monthly profile tracking data that is reported across the organisation.</p> <p>Our performance team work closely with Rental Income to provide analysis of income profiles and arrears patterns as well as doing work that links the monthly customer profile data to customer arrears, this is used for example to inform the young persons and BME arrears tracking PIs</p> <p>We record the details of customers who take part in training and employment projects and link this to arrears to assess the effectiveness of these services.</p> <p>We will take a data extract at year end to inform the one year on analysis and also provide a baseline going forward to allow us to track the impact of welfare reform changes in 2013/14.</p>
<p>To review our approach towards financial inclusion against best practice and alongside our current approach towards housing benefit advice</p>	<p>The Rental Income Team (RIT) has been restructured to prepare for the impact of Welfare reform. Two welfare benefit advisors will be in place and will work across the organisation but focus 50% of time within Housing Options and 50% of time within the RIT. They will also take the lead on supporting our young adults on 2 year flexible tenancies.</p> <p>Three HB assessors are embedded within the RIT concentrating on Temporary Accommodation arrears but also supporting current tenants. We hope to retain this approach after the Council's Revenues and Benefits service is outsourced.</p> <p>We continue to promote Christians against Poverty (CAP) to assist and support those struggling with money management to become debt free.</p> <p>As a new service development for 2013/14 we have agreed £40,000 to support an approach in partnership with Islington Council to tackle fuel poverty.</p>
<p>To deliver the objectives of the “Reaching Communities” Big Lottery application to enable BME residents to reduce their risk of personal debt or tenancy failure</p>	<p>We have appointed a Community Link Officer (CLO) within the RIT. Excellent engagement has taken place with Churches in the community and to date we have 14 volunteers for training in the field of welfare benefit advice. Our CLO is also managing a small case load of our Black African tenants in arrears to help them reach a debt free position.</p>

Key Outcomes and Measures	
Reduced % of black tenants in arrears	March 2013 49% of black tenants were in arrears compared with 49% in March 2012 = no change 😊 (against a backdrop of higher rents, welfare reform and economic downturn)
Reduced % of tenants under the age of 25 in arrears	March 2013 68% of young tenants were in arrears compared with 68% in March 2012 = no change 😊 (against a backdrop of higher rents, welfare reform and economic downturn)
Arrears as % debit top quartile in London	March 2013 2.38% compared with 2.41% in March 2012 - a further improvement and this is likely to be top quartile performance in London 😊
A real example of how we have changed someone's life through this work	<p>Ms A is a black African tenant living on the Grahame Park estate. She was offered an insecure tenancy in August last year and has always been in arrears since. She is married to a man who cannot work or claim any benefits until his migrant status is determined by the Home Office. Ms A has a 7 month old baby and is in receipt of child benefit and child tax credit. Our CLO Adjoke started supporting Ms A in January because we noticed that she had been sent a second arrears reminder and also that she is not claiming all entitled benefits.</p> <p>When we met Ms A, she explained that she works 1hr per week (cleaning) and earns £35 per month. She also receives Child benefit and Child Tax Credit, which amounts to £62 per week. She was struggling because she was the only income earner in the house. In order for her to be able to pay some rent weekly, we referred Ms A to the food bank in Grahame Park where she collected food weekly (this meant that she did not have to do much food shopping for food). We supported her to apply for Job seekers allowance and she has now started signing on and receiving help with CV writing and job search from the jobcentre.</p> <p>We have applied for a grant from a charity to help reduce her rent arrears to a manageable amount and a grant of £250 has been awarded.</p> <p>When this cheque comes through, Ms A will only be left with the sum of £96 rent arrears and will hopefully clear this very soon with a repayment agreement and steady payments, which will be possible because she now receives Job seekers allowance and has more income.</p> <p>Miss A has also asked for support to gain skills needed to find a better job and we are now trying to access free care training for her. 😊</p>

2) Welfare Reform [Lead: Kevin Turnpenney]

“The aim is to... deliver a system that is simpler, fairer and ensures that work always pays helping to break the cycles of deprivation that trap people in poverty and unsuitable housing.”

“This will encourage more people especially in the social rented sector, to manage their own budget in the same way as other households.”

“Welfare reform will work hand in hand with our plans for social housing to help reduce overcrowding, shorten waiting lists, increase mobility, incentivise work for tenants...”

Key Actions	Progress to date
<p>In partnership with other organisations, to improve our intelligence of our customers so that we can more accurately understand the impact of welfare reform</p>	<p>We are a key member of the Council’s Welfare Reform Steering Group working alongside other partners including Job Centre Plus/Department of Works and Pensions.</p> <p>We have used a number of approaches to ensure that our tenants who will be affected by welfare reform understand the implications and their options. We have achieved this through a campaign of around 1,000 home visits, posters and leaflets explaining welfare reform have been produced and delivered to all blocks. Welfare reform has featured at our Resident Hub meetings, in our At Home magazine and on our website.</p> <p>Our home visits achieved an 81% access rate and had the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% are looking to pay the shortfall in benefit • 18% are interested in moving to a smaller property <p>The remainder will either take in lodgers, receive information about training and employment or refused to answer.</p> <p>Housing Options have commenced visiting applicants in temporary accommodation on the changes and will shortly being visiting at risk tenants in the private rented sector as a proactive approach towards homeless prevention.</p> <p>We have created our own local partner network of community groups, RSLs and government agencies to support each other with shared resources and experiences.</p>
<p>To work with the members of the London Housing Directors forum to develop preventative strategies towards welfare reform and to share learning</p>	<p>We are a lead member of the Welfare Reform sub group established by the London Housing Directors Forum. Meeting are around 6 weekly to share experience, intelligence and approaches to welfare reform. Some of the group, including ourselves worked together on a well received You Tube video on welfare reform which has received widespread coverage.</p>
<p>To develop an approach to maximise the ability for tenants to move in response to changes in benefit payments for under-occupation</p>	<p>Where welfare reform visits have flagged a wish to trade down these cases have been registered for a move. Tenants were advised that realistically their quickest way to move would be by mutual exchange. We have held a “matchmaking” event for potential exchangers in November 2012 using the data we had on households that were under occupying. This included housing association residents and those that were overcrowded.</p>

	<p>The aim of the event was to get the message across regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Mutual Exchange and Trade Down • Welfare reform, • The changes in the allocation policy • Supply and demand of social housing. <p>We want to encourage residents to be pro active in finding a property to meet their family needs. The event was lively, sociable and was a real success. Using the information collected we have managed to move 12 families into the right size property.</p> <p>The second event held on the 10th April 2013 was by invitation as we held a waiting list from the previous one also utilised the information gathered from the Welfare Reform visits. Approximately 65 families attending with very positive feedback. Two households matched up and the exchange process has started.</p> <p>The next step is to hold regular Mutual Exchange surgeries including Housing Benefit, Rental Income (welfare reform) and Let2Barnet, behind the scenes we will be working on all the data gathered and match potential households together. The next Matchmaking event is to be held on the 10th July and we will be hosting for other Barnet RSL's.</p>
<p>To review our current approach towards Housing Benefit advice and to maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) where appropriate</p>	<p>We have worked closely with Housing Options to maximise use of DHP and Homeless Prevention fund to reduce threat of eviction/sustain tenancies. This has included payments made to existing secure tenants for the first time.</p> <p>A total of over 1,000 payments have been made to a total of £567k or 61% of the total monies available. This is more than the previous two years added together.</p> <p>DHP will now form part of the Crisis Fund and will in future be administered by the Council. We are currently meeting with the Council to ensure that appropriate protocols are in place for speedy decisions on DHP type awards are made for our customers.</p>
<p>To develop an agreed approach towards high debt levels and tenancy sustainment with Barnet Council</p>	<p>The Council's Welfare Reform Strategic Board has within their action plan a review of the income collection strategy by September 2013. This will enable us to agree a joint approach to debt management.</p> <p>A process is in place to measure the impact of under occupation charges over the first 2 months and how this is impacting arrears.</p>

Key Outcomes and Measures									
10% increase in tenants paying by direct debit over 2 years	<p>In Year 1 there has been a 5.9% increase in tenants paying by direct debit. 😊</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>March 2012</th> <th>March 2013</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Dwellings: 2040</td> <td>Dwellings: 2169</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Garages: 572</td> <td>Garages: 606</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total: 2612</td> <td>Total: 2775</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	March 2012	March 2013	Dwellings: 2040	Dwellings: 2169	Garages: 572	Garages: 606	Total: 2612	Total: 2775
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Maintain tenancy failure rates to within 10% of existing levels	Total tenancy failures [All evictions and abandonments] for 2012/13 was 31 compared with 22 in 2011/12 😞 In the main this appears to be as a result of increased rent arrears evictions as outlined previously								
Arrears as % debit top quartile in London	March 2013 2.38% compared with 2.41% in March 2012 - a further improvement and this is likely to be top quartile performance in London 😊								
98% Discretionary Housing Benefit used to sustain tenancies	<p>We spent 61% of the available DHP budget. 😞</p> <p>This still equated to more awards made and monies spent than in the previous two years combined potentially sustaining an additional 1,000 tenancies.</p> <p>Mr H was affected by the local housing benefit limits. His family composition is 2 adults and 3 children in a 3 bedroom private sector property. The rent is £500 p/w and Housing Benefit pays £340 p/w, the shortfall is £160 p/w. We requested DHP to pay the shortfall and this was awarded until end of March 2013 and has now been extended September 2013.</p> <p>We have able to sustain the tenancy because if DHP was not requested and awarded, the family would have been in rent arrears and evicted for non-payment of rent becoming a homeless presentation statistic in high cost emergency accommodation. This will buy both us and the family time to consider a more affordable long term solution to their housing position</p>								

3) Flexible Tenancies and Tenancy Support [Lead: Elliot Sweetman]

“There is a relationship between social housing and disadvantage that is often seen as a block to social mobility. Too many people are effectively trapped – lacking incentives to work, and often unable to move even if they wanted to. Both under-occupation and overcrowding are widespread.¹”

“The introduction of flexible tenure will, over time, increase mobility and encourage tenants and landlords to consider what is the most appropriate housing at the different life stages of tenants and their households.”

Key Actions	Progress to date
To establish a lean flexible tenancies process from pre-tenancy to review and determination of the tenancy	<p>We have developed a process covering the period of tenancy commencement to tenancy review has been developed, received legal ratification and is currently in place on an interim basis pending final approval following consultation in April 2013. A full suite of Indicators has been developed which includes the capture of; tenants in training/employment, tenants involved in ASB, tenants in rent arrears & tenant support referrals made.</p> <p>Work is currently in progress in conjunction with LBB regarding the development of a “pre-tenancy” process.</p>
To develop a communications plan both internally and externally to raise awareness and champion the benefits	<p>The Phase 1 Communication Plan has been delivered and has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created or reviewed documentation – tenancy agreements, welcome leaflets. • Drafted communications to all affected tenants and applicants • Informed Members and Board directors through briefings • Articles in At Home • Team briefings and Core brief to staff • Briefing packs done for managers • Article in Working Together • Website updated • Scripting and FAQs created and used for staff and on website • Changes communicated to local press <p>A Successful Tenancies best practice seminar offered to landlords is being arranged for June 2013.</p> <p>Phase 2 Communication Plan is currently in development.</p>
To develop a menu of services to support young tenants in flexible tenancies including referral routes and partner organisation delivery models	<p>The “Next Step Pack” has been developed which includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next Step Passport • Tenancy Risk Assessment • Menu of Support (which includes a comprehensive array of referral options) <p>Work is currently in progress in conjunction with LBB regarding the development of a “pre-tenancy” support process.</p>
To review the impact of the council’s Tenancy Strategy	Not yet due to be commenced.
To effect culture change	Internal stakeholder and training sessions have been held and

¹ Laying the Foundations: a Housing Strategy for England - November 2011

within the various tenancy management teams increasingly towards enablement and advocacy over traditional housing management approaches	this area continues to be developed, with an internal/external stakeholder session being scheduled for April 2013 to consult on the Flexible Tenancies procedure, and the effectiveness of referral agencies.
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Key Outcomes and Measures	
To establish a baseline of tenancies likely to be re-let as a result of flexible tenancies	Effective ongoing monitoring of flexible tenants through the existing measures will allow a baseline to be established once the tenancies have progressed far enough into their fixed periods. 😊
Real examples of the impact on someone's life through this work	<p>Mr A aged 19 was housed due to vulnerability and 'positive community contribution' through his building apprenticeship. He was also placed on a 6 month life skills programme to learn budgeting skills, cooking etc.</p> <p>His apprenticeship pays less than the minimum wage and it was noticed through tracking that he had increasingly irregular rent payments due to financial pressures. Our Housing Support team have applied for discretionary extra housing benefit and advised on other options including sign posting to furniture and food banks and the possibility of providing a bike (from police stores) to reduce travelling costs.</p> <p>Mr A continues to have a good dialogue with Barnet Homes so issues are flagged early with on-going support from Barnet Homes to fulfil his life plan (which he has shared with his housing officer). 😊</p> <p>A video testimonial of a successfully supported flexible tenant is due for completion to support the Successful Tenancies seminar.</p>
Menu of support services established with agreed referral routes	<p>The "Next Step Pack" has been developed which includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next Step Passport • Tenancy Risk Assessment • Menu of Support (which includes a comprehensive array of referral options) 😊 <p>Work is currently in progress in conjunction with LBB regarding the development of a "pre-tenancy" support process.</p>
Grants levels secured for support activity from external sources etc.	Housing Support team generated £150k of income in first 11 months of 2012/13 via backdated benefits of all forms and charitable grants 😊
Evaluation of the added value of the various elements of the menu of support	<p>Not yet due to be commenced but here are a few facts in relation to flexible tenancies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 80% of tenants on 2 year flexible tenancies owe less than 4 weeks rent • Over 85% of young people on flexible tenancies are in education, training or employment • No 2 or 5 year flexible tenancies are subject to action for causing nuisance • Average rent arrears for 5 year flexible tenancies are lower than for all other forms of tenancy [secure/non secure] 😊

4) Training and Employment [Lead: David Thomas]

Social housing tenants are less likely to be in employment than similar individuals in other tenures.

“The best way to help people build a secure future for themselves and their families is to help them find a job.”

Key Actions	Progress to date
<p>We will map out how we spend £1m per week and how much leverage for employment and training we achieve from that spending power</p>	<p>Our baseline shows that 50% of our staff live in the borough. With our main partners we employ over 220 staff within borough and over 20 apprentices. With our main partners we spend over £2m through local suppliers and we estimate that 37% of our staff will spend on average over £100 per month in local shops.</p> <p>We believe that we can increase our leverage through both our own spend and that of our contractors to the benefit of the local community and will look to do so over the coming year. In addition our new build programme gives a chance to develop further employment creation and to use small and medium sized local enterprises. We will look at the opportunities of the new Social Value Act 2012 to see if this can help ensure further benefits for the local community through future procurement exercises.</p>
<p>We will undertake a “Barnet Homes stat” based on Burnt Oak as the largest stakeholder to see how with partners we can develop a plan to enhance the life chances of residents there</p>	<p>Our Burnt Oak stat took place in October 2012 and saw a variety of statutory, voluntary and resident partners come together to hear about why we need to create a network in Burnt Oak to deliver improvement.</p> <p>The success of the event was shown by the building of new contacts between community groups and between Barnet Homes and community partners. This is part of a Barnet Homes approach which has led to similar events e.g. welfare reform partnering session, digital inclusion summit and is helping to reinforce a partnering spirit across the business.</p> <p>Since the stat took place we have set up a work club in partnership with JobCentre Plus, a youth club in conjunction with local faith groups and an e-learning pilot was delivered in conjunction with UK Online. A Community Interest Company has also been created to lead the network and has successfully applied for funding from the Council’s innovation bank to recruit a worker to run the network and build on our vision of a digital broker to secure training and equipment for those currently offline. We have now grown the network to include health partners and recently signed up the local GP network. We have worked with contractor partners to plan refurbishment of the Resource Centre</p>
<p>To develop a Barnet Homes graduate programme and to further enhance the work experience and apprenticeship programme</p>	<p>Our pilot Graduate Scheme has been implemented with a view to defining the scheme in the second year to move to a rolling corporate programme.</p> <p>Corporate Scheme – consists of 2 graduate trainees who will follow a typical graduate programme of different placements with a clear development programme. We are currently liaising with the National Local Government Graduate Programme for the development programme. This scheme focuses on growing</p>

	<p>future leaders.</p> <p>Business Services – The Business Improvement team has created 3 graduate trainee positions which will be based in the service with no placements to other service areas. These roles will then be converted to permanent positions after a two year programme</p> <p>Housing Options Service - An approach to growing the skills required for this key frontline service was adopted with a tailored programme of graduate trainees dedicated to developing the right skills, expertise and knowledge base. There are now 5 graduate trainees within Housing Options taken on incrementally between September 12 and January 13.</p> <p>Work Experience – we have developed good working relationship with Barnet Education Business Partnership [BEBP] who advertise placements in schools. To strengthen this partnership, we are developing a Volunteering Scheme which will see our employees visit schools to promote The Barnet Group as an employer to increase the numbers of students seeking work experience with us.</p> <p>Apprenticeships – We have 12 Apprentices and 1 on an advanced apprenticeship programme. This is in addition to the apprenticeships offered by our contractor partners. The apprenticeship programme is now in its second year and work has already commenced to ensure we meet our target for next intake. A local Apprenticeship fair has given with potential applicants to be following up on. We have considered BEBP as a potential recruiter for the next intake.</p>
<p>To secure further funding and delivery opportunities with partners to develop training and access to employment schemes</p>	<p>One of the key factors in the commissioning of our employability courses is always that they should be at no cost to residents. We are able to do this because of strong contacts across the sector in Barnet and our active role in the Barnet Employability Group.</p> <p>We want to develop a level three Chartered Institute of Housing [CIH] accredited course and also to explore whether Cheshire Hall could become a City and Guilds accredited venue which will allow us to expand the range of training offered.</p> <p>One of the key successes of our training programme is that other housing providers choose to purchase places for their resident this allows us to save money and also build good partnerships.</p> <p>Talks with existing repairs contractor Mears are ongoing with regards to construction training opportunities in three different types of schemes throughout 2013/14.</p>
<p>To review the effectiveness of the existing employment and training activity undertaken within Barnet Homes</p>	<p>Recent analysis shows that over 50% of delegates passed our CIH course (this is higher in the last couple of years as we have a new trainer). Of those that pass two thirds find employment and more than one in four go on to have further involvement with Barnet Homes including three Board members and four PAG members. The cost per person is £36 per day for the 12 day course.</p> <p>We now need to do similar analysis of other forms of training that we provide or facilitate.</p>

Key Outcomes and Measures	
Numbers identified as benefiting from our training and employment activity	In-house training courses = 96 Referrals to LBB Platforms = 38 Signposting via mail outs = 118 Total 252 😊
Numbers achieving employment as measured 6 and 12 months later	From CIH of the 43 passes 30 are now in employment or are self-employed but more work to be undertaken on analysing the outcomes of our other courses provided 😊
Change in leverage achieved from £1m per week spend	Baseline established, forward target for local employment added to TBG Business Plan. One contractor targeted to review spend with local suppliers. To be re measured in around 18 months time. 😊
Real examples of the impact on someone's life through this work	<p>Ms J has been a tenant at current address since 2000. Rent payments have always been erratic resulting in court action for rent arrears. Having been made redundant in 2010 Ms O saw an article in AtHome magazine for the CIH level 2 housing course. She thought the course sounded interesting and would enable her to widen her career choices.</p> <p>Ms J she found she gained a lot of knowledge about social housing, different tenancy types, legislation and customer care. She also enjoyed her work experience opportunity with Barnet Homes while on the course, giving her hands on experience in customer care and how to relate to customers.</p> <p>Following the course Ms J no longer receives Job Seekers Allowance having secured a permanent job working in housing. She has paid her arrears and her rent account is up to date. She is now managing her income to pay off other accumulated debts while keeping her rent payment up to date. 😊</p>
Outcomes from contractor and partner organisation activity	<p>Newly procured contracts have seen an intake of 10 trade apprenticeships in 2012/13 with an increased target for 2013/14</p> <p>Our contractual requirement for increased proportions of direct labour has meant significantly increased numbers of directly employed local trades-people across our 4 main contracts.</p> <p>We are currently in discussion with our repairs contractors Mears, to develop a menu of trade skills training options resulting in a qualification and a guaranteed apprenticeship interview.</p> <p>Training opportunities from Mears including – refurbishing a void property, DIY skills and use of the Mears training facility in Welwyn Garden City</p> <p>Support for the Love Burnt Oak project through refurbishment of the Resource Centre</p>

Conclusion - Overall tenancy sustainment

Have we evicted less tenants for rent arrears whilst improving collection rates

Key Performance Indicator	Then	March 12	😊 or 😞	March 13	Last 12 months 😊 or 😞	Last 6 years [or so]
Rent arrears as % of the total debit collectable	2006/07 2.93%	2.41%	Down 18% 😊	2.38%	Down 1.2% 😊	Down 19% 😊😊
Court referrals for rent arrears	2006/07 358	146	Down 59% 😊	190	Up 30% 😞	Down 47% 😊
Rent arrears evictions	2005/06 40	9	Down 78% 😊	13	Up 44% 😞	Down 70% 😊😊
Average new tenant arrears after 6 months	2007/08 £262	£180	Down 31% 😊	£209	Up 16% 😞	Down 20% 😊
Tenants owing more than 5 weeks rent	2006/07 6.87%	4.7%	Down 32% 😊	4.0%	Down 15% 😊	Down 42% 😊😊
Tenancy failures [all evictions and abandoned tenancies]	2006/07 62	22	Down 42% 😊	31	Up 41% 😞	Down 50% 😊😊

As expected the last 12 months have been challenging as the result of a combination of factors:

- The continued economic down turn
- Rent increases, price rises for key household consumables such as utility bills and a wider squeeze on disposable income and wide spread pay restraint in place
- Increasing proportions of customers being reliant on full or more particularly partial housing benefit
- Welfare reform

Whilst collection rates have remained strong there are beginning to be signs of pressure on tenancy sustainment. When we look overall at the longer period of time we can still see significant benefit from our new approach but it is clear tenancy sustainment is going to be a major challenge going forward.

It is interesting to see that the impact of flexible tenancies has been positive and that there is much to learn from this approach in relation to both secure and non-secure tenancy management.

The bigger challenges of bedroom tax, benefit caps and universal credit either are or will shortly be upon us. It will be interesting to look at this again in 12 or 24 months time to see how our preventative measures are holding up.

Derek Rust
Director of Operations [April 2013]