

# **Barnet Housing Strategy 2019-2024**

## **Consultation Report**

March 2019

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## **1. Aim of the consultation**

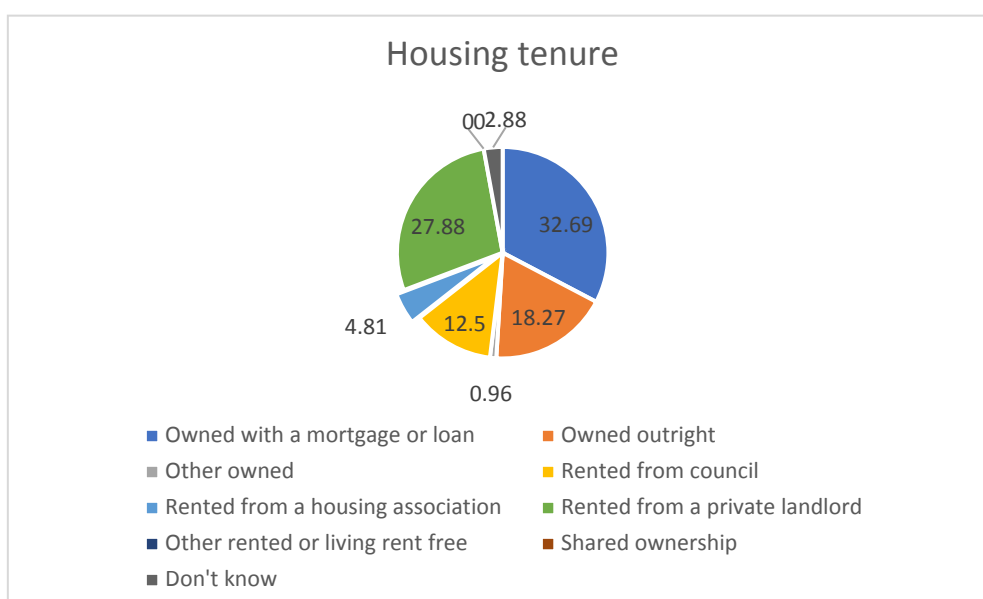
- 1.1 Barnet Council is introducing a new strategy to improve housing and tackle homelessness in the borough over the next five years. This strategy sets out our plans for managing housing in Barnet.
- 1.2 The main themes of the Housing Strategy are:
  1. to improve standards in privately rented housing,
  2. deliver more affordable homes,
  3. ensure housing is safe and secure.
  4. promote independence,
  5. tackling homelessness and rough sleeping,
- 1.3 As part of this process, a consultation was held to seek residents' feedback on the strategy document.
- 1.4 The Housing Strategy consultation ran for three months, from 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019, alongside the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy consultation. It primarily consisted of an online survey on Engage Barnet. Supporting documents were also available on Engage Barnet, allowing residents to view the draft strategy on there.
- 1.5 There were 172 responses received through this, with paper copies also made available on request. Paper copies of the strategy were also handed out at the Barnet House Customer Contact Centre and uploaded onto Engage Barnet.
- 1.6 Formal responses were also received from partners, including both external developers as well as departments and boards from within the council.
- 1.7 A response was also received from the Mayor of London and the GLA.
- 1.8 A roadshow was also held in November at Colindale Library for residents to meet Councillor Rozenberg, the chair of the Housing Committee, and give their views on the strategy. This event had a particular focus around private renters, inviting attendees to share their experiences of residing in that sector.

## 2. Methodology

- 2.1 The questionnaires were available on the council's consultation webpage 'Engage Barnet', while paper copies were available on request.
- 2.2 The questionnaires asked respondents how much they agreed with different priorities of the strategy, involving both the overarching five themes as well as individual priorities within those themes.
- 2.2 In total, 172 responses were received through Engage Barnet.
- 2.3 There were also open-ended, free text boxes which allowed respondents to add in what they thought was missing from the strategy as a whole and the individual themes within it.
- 2.4 The consultation was well publicised through the council's social media channels, primarily on Twitter where the council has over 16,000 followers. It also featured prominently on the council's website.
- 2.5 The consultation was also advertised in the Barnet Homes resident magazine *atHome*, which is distributed to 15,000 homes.
- 2.6 The strategy was publicised on social media, primarily Twitter and Facebook, with frequent tweets and Facebook posts encouraging participation.

### 3. Demographics of respondents

- 3.1 Most of the 172 respondents were residents of Barnet (80.3%), while others responded as a Barnet business (1.2%), both as a Barnet business and a resident (0.6%) or a voluntary or community organisation (2.9%). 9% of respondents were out of borough.
- 3.2 The housing tenure of respondents is shown below, with a good balance between housing tenures as no single tenure was about 33% of respondents.



- 3.3 The council is also required by the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to ensuring people are treated fairly and particularly in relation to those with protected characteristics - age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, religion/belief and sexual orientation.
- 3.4 There was a good range of ages within respondents, with no group higher than 20.8% (45 – 54-year olds). There was a relatively low number of 18 – 24-year olds reached (4.0%), however this was partially addressed by presenting the strategy to the council’s Youth Board and receiving a consultation response from them.
- 3.5 The results for gender showed that 49.5% of respondents were female and 36.6% male, while 13.9% preferred not to say.
- 3.6 Disability was well balanced, as 14% of respondents considered themselves to have some form of disability, matching the 14% of Barnet residents that have a long-term health problem or disability as identified by the 2011 Census.

- 3.7 The largest ethnic group amongst respondents was White British (41.0%) but this is lower than the proportion in the wider Barnet population. Other large groups included Asian/Asian British – Indian (10%), white – any other (9%) and white – Irish (3%).
- 3.8 Religion was also similarly balanced, with Christianity the largest group at 33.7% of respondents, followed by prefer not to say (21.4%), no religion (20.4%) and Muslim (8.2%).
- 3.9 Sexual orientation showed that most respondents were heterosexual (68.4%), with a large portion also preferring not to say (23.5%), followed by bisexual (3.1%) and gay (3.1%). No respondents identified as lesbian.

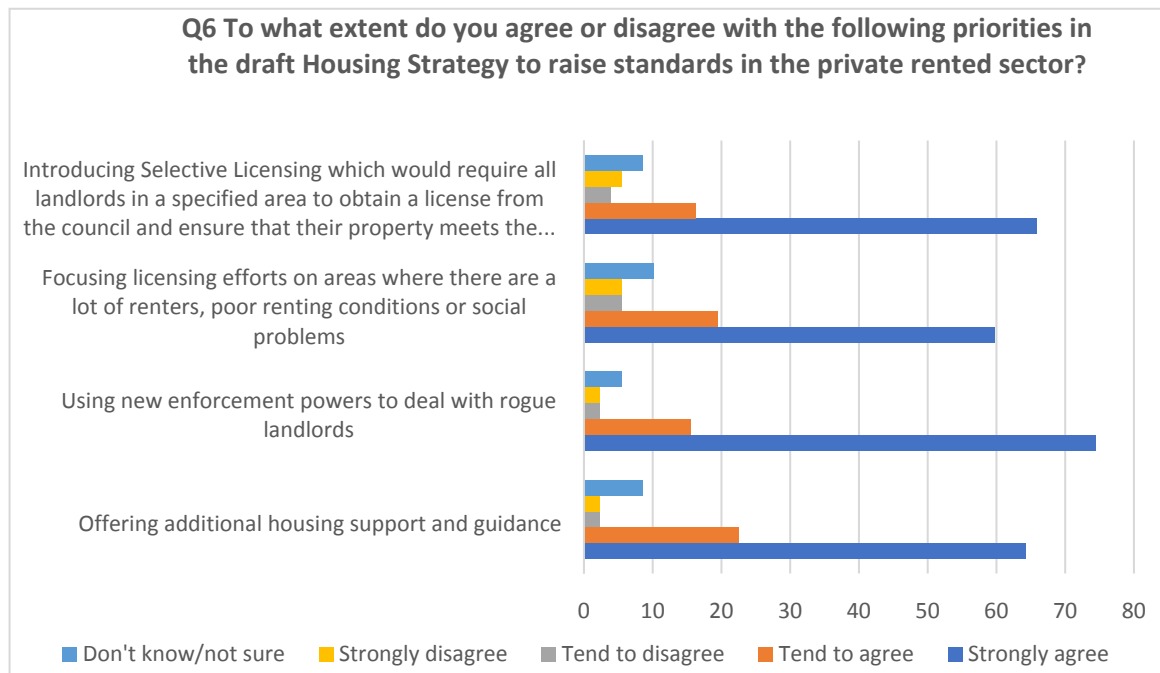
#### **4. Summary of key findings**

- Across the five themes, the mean average agreement was 83.2%, which demonstrates the strong level of support for the strategy overall.
- The draft strategy identified five main priorities for housing within Barnet. The consultation asked respondents whether they agreed with each priority, with options of strongly agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree and don't know.
- Support for all of themes was relatively high, with a large proportion of the respondents either tending to agree or strongly agreeing.
- The most popular priority was tackling homelessness and safe and secure homes, which both received 89% tending to agree or strongly agreeing.
- The other priorities still received high levels of support, with delivering more homes people can afford to buy or rent producing 83% agreement, raising standards in the private rented sector receiving 79% and promoting independence 76%.



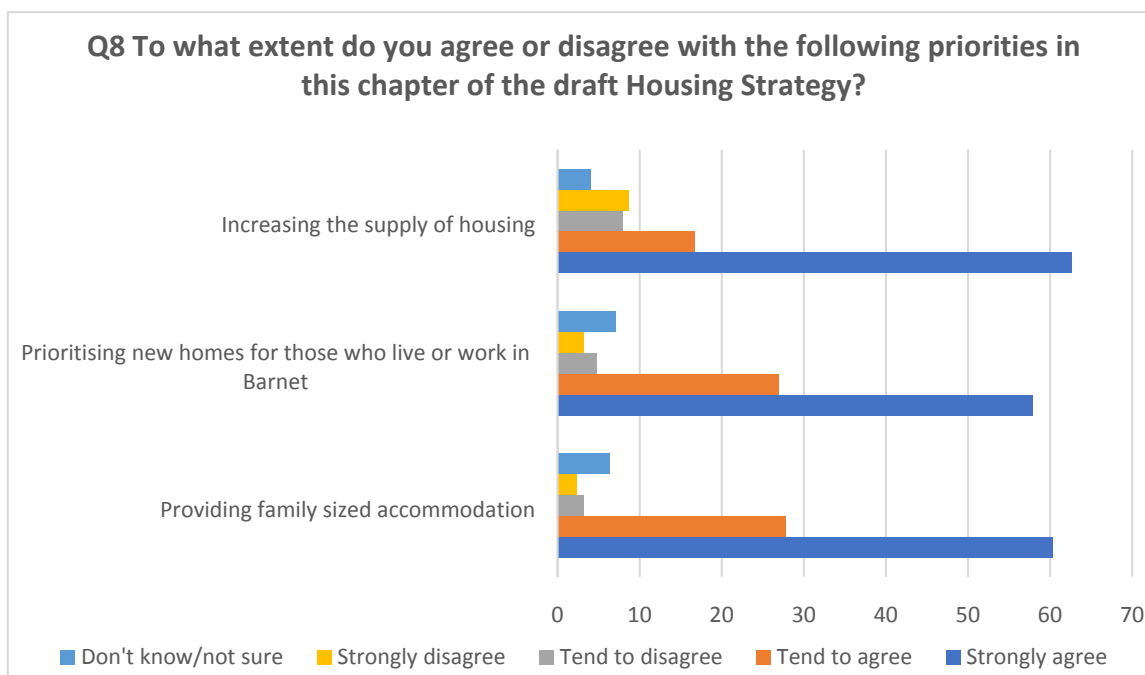


## Raising standards in the private rented sector



- Respondents were asked to assess their views on specific policies within this priority in this section.
- The responses showed a strong support for these policies, particularly using new enforcement powers to deal with rogue landlords, which 89.9% of respondents either tended to agree or strongly agreed with.
- There was clear support for all the priorities in this chapter, all receiving at least 79% agreement and low numbers disagreeing.
- A number of additional comments were added, including suggesting extending licensing to all private rented accommodation in the borough and a cap on private rents.

## Delivering more homes people can afford to buy or rent



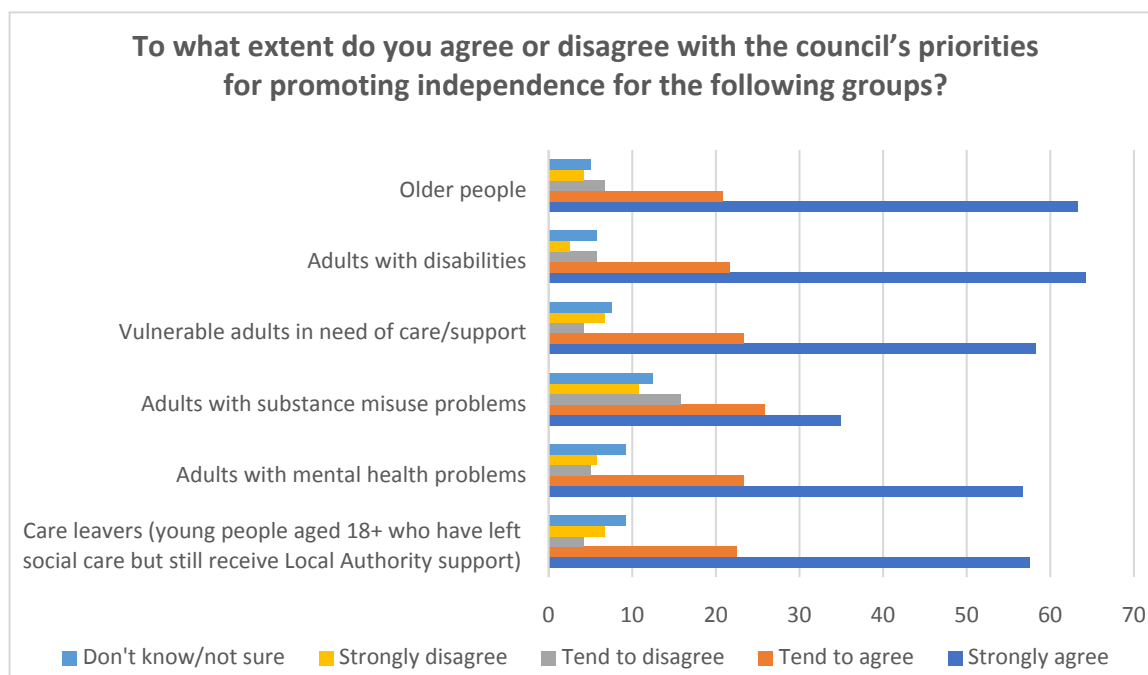
- Again, respondents were asked their views on more specific policies within this theme.
- There was also significant support for the priorities of this chapter, as summarised by the chart above. Providing family sized accommodation received 88.1% tending to agree or strongly agreeing, while increasing the supply of housing was supported by 89.4% of respondents.
- Free text responses emphasised the importance of community spaces when delivering housing, particularly parks and community centres.
- Another response stressed the importance of ensuring that housing of all tenure was affordable.

## **Safe and secure homes**

- The questions for this chapter asked respondents if there was anything more the council could do to make residents feel safe and secure in their homes.
- 43 responses were received to this question, highlighting two key issues to be considered -
  - A recurring answer was closer working with the tenants of social housing to hear their concerns and address them proactively before any issues arise.
  - Another suggested using private sector licensing to ensure properties are safe, while neighbourhood safety was also raised as a concern for a number of respondents.

## Promoting independence

- In



this chapter, respondents were asked to assess how much they agreed with the council's priorities for different vulnerable groups.

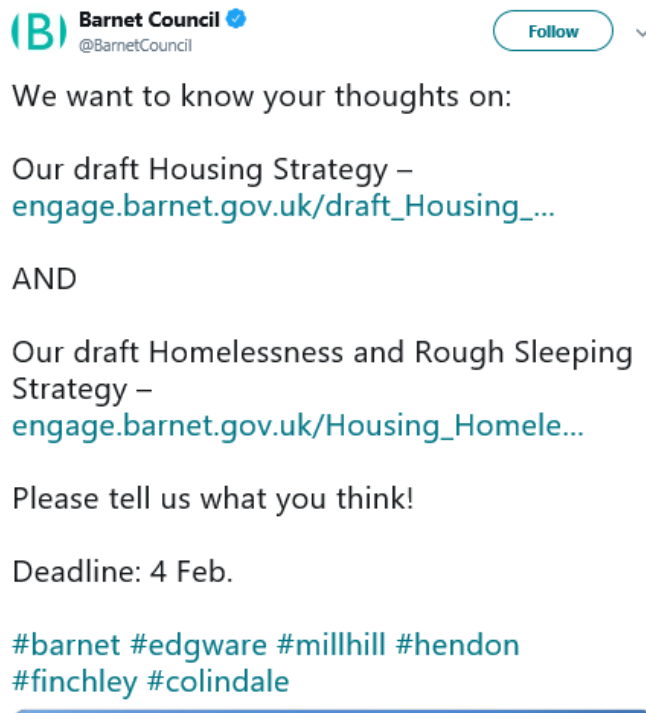
- Respondents were supportive of the priorities of the promoting independence chapter, although this did vary slightly between different groups.
- 85.9% of respondents were supportive of the council's priorities around adults with disabilities, while just 60.8% agreed with those for adults with substance misuse problems.
- The free text comments emphasised the importance of mental health support, with the recommendation that the council provide more information on housing options for those struggling.

## 5. Formal responses

- 5.1 A number of formal responses to the strategy were received, including from developers that are partnered with the council and internal departments and boards within the council.
- 5.2 One developer supported the principles of increasing the housing supply to meet affordability but wanted the housing targets in the strategy to reflect the increased figures in the draft London Plan.
- 5.3 Another developer wanted an explicit reference to the build to rent market, due to their belief that it is an asset class.
- 5.4 Internal boards and departments represented the views of a number of key stakeholders.
- 5.5 Barnet Council's Family Services department's highlighted the need to be clearer with regards Corporate Parenting responsibilities towards care leavers, and the need to ensure that affordable housing options are available for care leavers.
- 5.6 Barnet Council Public Health had a number of suggestions around the link between housing and health, for example targeting selective licensing in the private rented sector where housing stock is older and the health risks associated are higher.
- 5.7 The strategy was also presented to the council's Youth Board, made up of seven 11 to 18-year olds from the borough. Their main feedback was around ensuring housing was affordable, while they were also keen to stress that bedrooms should be of a good size and access to green space should be considered an important part of housing development.
- 5.8 Additionally, there was a response from the Barnet Council Labour group, who provided two recommendations for the strategy. They suggested:
  - Adopting a 50% target for affordable homes across developments
  - Develop new council homes at a maximum rent of 50% of market rates, scrapping the 65% rent policy
- 5.9 The Mayor of London was supportive in his response to the strategy, highlighting the similarity with the central themes of his London Housing Strategy. He provided some suggestions for the strategy, such as resident ballots on regeneration estates and compliance with housing targets, including on affordability.
- 5.10 A key stakeholder group that was engaged with was the Barnet Homes Performance Advisory Group, a number of Barnet Homes leaseholders and renters. They were presented with the strategy and expressed overall support for the themes involved.
- 5.11 They also suggested some suggestions of how to enforce the provisions, particularly in terms of rogue landlords. These included prominent advertising of the reporting system in *atHome* magazine.
- 5.12 These recommendations have been considered and will be reflected in the final strategy document.

## **6. Social Media**

- 6.1 A key part of the consultation involved social media, in order to allow the council to reach residents who may not use the traditional channels of Engage Barnet.
- 6.2 Though this means that the council holds less data about who it is making the comments, it still allowed for increased engagement with the strategy.
- 6.3 The consultation was frequently advertised on Twitter, with tweets such as below.



- 6.4 There were also regular Facebook posts, with ‘boosts’ used as a form of targeted advertising to ensure more residents saw about the surveys and had an opportunity to respond. One example of this took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> January and reached 6,214 people, leading to 156 ‘post clicks’.
- 6.5 The comments that people made on social media were also recorded, with 30 comments noted from the various posts.
  - 6.5.1 These involved a number of suggestions, with particular concern about the size of rooms and houses in general featuring prominently.
  - 6.5.2 There was also concern about affordability within the borough, a theme which emerged consistently throughout the consultation.

## 7. Roadshow

- 7.1 A roadshow was held on 21<sup>st</sup> November as part of the consultation. This involved a two-hour session which allowed residents to give their views on the strategy to Councillor Rozenberg, chair of Barnet Council's Housing Committee.
- 7.2 This session was focused around private renters due to the increased focus on raising standards in this sector.
- 7.3 8 residents attended the session and gave their views at Colindale library.
- 7.4 Feedback focused on the fact that those on low incomes often struggle to access the private rented sector and efforts to improve that sector should aim to do so while ensuring accessibility for those on low incomes.
- 7.5 There was also an issue raised about how those reliant on income support or benefits often end up in the lower end of the private rented sector, due to the lower rents, but this is often poor quality.
- 7.6 These comments have been reviewed and fed back into the strategy.

## **8. Conclusion**



- 8.1 The findings from the consultation overall show a strong support for the priorities of the Housing Strategy.
- 8.2 All four priorities received at least 76% agreeing or strongly agreeing, with the references to affordability and standards in the private rented sector in the free text boxes emphasising this further.
- 8.3 Within each theme, the specific policies also received strong support. Respondents seem confident that these are the right ways to achieve the overall priorities.
- 8.4 The only area where agreement was slightly lower was on whether respondents support the council's priorities on promoting independence for those with substance misuse issues, which 60.8% supported.
- 8.5 The consultation also highlighted a number of additional suggestions which will feed into the strategy document and be considered.
- 8.6 The internal boards and teams that were presented to were also generally supportive, with additional suggestions and areas of focus, often around their key stakeholders, mentioned.
- 8.7 We thank all those who took the time to respond to the Housing Strategy survey, commented on social media or came along to our roadshow event.