

Acquisitions Project Review

1. Introduction

- 1.1 To help provide affordable housing solutions, Barnet Homes has developed and delivered a range of solutions, including developing a successful out of borough acquisitions programme. This has led to the acquisition of 90 affordable properties for Barnet's housing applicants.
- 1.2 This paper provides an overview of the programme to date, detailing the location of units acquired, the profile of households that properties have been let to and the support given.

2 Context

- 2.1 With high numbers of households in temporary accommodation and increasing demand in terms of homeless applications, increasing pressure is placed on already limited housing supply. Although there has been a reduction, the number of households in temporary accommodation has remained high and currently stands at 2,639. A consequence of this is the increasing cost of temporary accommodation to the Council's General Fund.
- 2.2 The cost of providing emergency temporary accommodation for homeless applicants in London currently stands at approximately £3,400 per annum net for each new household placed in a 2 -bedroomed property. To help mitigate against this and provide affordable housing solutions for Barnet's housing applicants, Barnet Homes has developed and delivered a range of solutions. This has included developing a successful out of borough acquisitions programme.

3 Scheme overview

- 3.1 In July 2016 the Council approved an outline business case for the acquisition of affordable homes outside of the borough (Phase 1). This was extended to include properties within London in November 2016 to utilise right-to-buy receipts. The programme saw the purchase of almost 50 affordable homes for housing applicants.
- 3.2 Building upon this success, the Council approved an additional phase of purchases (Phase 2) which saw the deployment of an additional £8m budget, and plans to acquire more affordable homes outside London. By the end of Q3 2017-18, The Barnet Group will have acquired 90 affordable homes for Barnet's housing applicants in a little over a year.

	Locations	Budget	No of Units
GF (Phase 1)	Bedfordshire	5m	28
HRA (Phase 1)	Greater London	6.4m	21
GF (Phase 2)	Beds & Cambridgeshire	8m	41
Total		19.4m	90

3.3 Whilst every effort is made to secure affordable accommodation in-borough, the lack of affordable accommodation in Barnet means that it is not always possible to provide this for housing applicants. However, there are occasions where out-of-borough acquisitions have proven to be a viable option:

- Households fleeing violence who need to be re-located to a safer area
- Properties are affordable – particularly for benefit capped households
- Voluntary moves – there are instances where households request out-of-borough moves
- Units have been acquired in adjoining boroughs such as Enfield and Brent. With Barnet being the second largest borough a placement into a neighbouring authority may be preferable to be moved to the other side of the Barnet.
- Due to the lack of affordable temporary accommodation in Barnet, some households are placed outside the borough and others are already placed out-of-London. In a number of instances, newly acquired properties have been offered to households already in the locale where they have already established connections such as work or education

4 Support

4.1 Households are supported by methodically assessing their needs to ensure a suitable offer of accommodation is made. Potential tenants are accompanied on viewings and are assisted through the sign-up process. Support provided by Barnet Homes includes:

- A suitability assessment
- A detailed offer letter
- An appeals process
- A post tenancy visit
- Property Inspections

4.2 A detailed suitability assessment is carried out to ensure the accommodation offered takes full account of the applicant's needs, including employment,

education, medical, care giving, care received, childcare, child welfare and affordability.

- 4.3 An individually tailored and comprehensive offer letter is prepared which details local amenities including schools, children centres, doctors, hospitals (including A&E), pharmacies, community centres and transport details including public transport and petrol costs.
- 4.4 Households can appeal against offers of accommodation. So far there have been 6 appeals for 38 units which have been let. 2 appeals have been successful, 1 was a benefit capped household who had found work and were no longer benefit capped. The other was a household with a carer where on appeal it was accepted that the household needed to be in borough.
- 4.5 Post tenancy visits and satisfaction surveys are carried out after the tenant has moved in. The visiting officer will sign-post households to relevant services, including schools. Only one household has been identified where a child was not relocated to a local school, and Barnet Homes have worked with the household to resolve this.
- 4.6 In addition, a programme of regular property inspections is carried out tailored to the needs of the household.

5 Greater London Acquisitions (HRA Phase 1)

5.1 Properties acquired

- 5.1.1 There have been a total of 21 properties acquired with a £6.4m budget since November 2016. A summary of the stock profile is provided below.

Number of units	21
Average purchase price	268,167
Number of 2 bedroom properties	15
Number of 3 bedroom properties	6
Number of in-borough units	3
Number of units in adjoining boroughs	2
Number of units in West London	5
Number of units in East London	10
Number of units in South London	1

5.2 The letting process

- 5.2.1 These units are let in line with the Council's Allocation Policy and let on 5 year flexible tenancies. Households are supported through the process by TBG's Voids & Lettings Service.
- 5.2.2 The Council exercises its discretion under the Allocations Scheme to prioritise families already living outside the borough in temporary accommodation for these units. This enables the Council, in some instances, to better meet the needs of such families as they can maintain social networks and support links already established in those areas.
- 5.2.3 Once let, properties acquired in London are managed by Barnet Homes' Neighbourhood Management teams. A Housing Officer will visit the tenants to carry out a new tenant visit 4 to 8 weeks after moving in, where the support needs of the household including children are discussed as well as rents, housing benefits, and repairs etc. If necessary, the Housing Officer will sign-post the household to relevant services and is able to make referrals to social services and other support services including the Floating Support service to ensure households support needs are met.
- 5.2.5 Many of the properties outside of the borough have been in desirable locations and close to areas in which there are existing tenants in temporary accommodation, providing the opportunity to move them to more secure homes. One example is of a household in temporary accommodation in east London who were victims of anti-social behaviour (ASB) where they were residing and were made an offer in the same postcode. This resolved their ASB issue and their child was able to remain in the same nursery.

5.3 Households properties were let to

- 5.3.1 Of the 16 in London units let, 3 have been let to households fleeing violence, 12 have been moved from out of borough temporary accommodation within the locale and 1 has been let to a benefit capped household. A summary of households who have moved into properties in Greater London is provided below.

Table 1 – Household profile of tenants in properties in Greater London

Household Type	Number of households
Couple and child	2
Couple and non-dependent	1
Couple and 2 children	4
Couple and 3 children	1

Couple and 4 children	1
Mother and child	5
Mother and 2 children	1
Mother and 3 children	1
Total	16

Table 2 – Household ethnicity of tenants in properties in Greater London

Ethnicity	Number of households
Asian Bangladeshi	1
Asian Indian	1
Asian Other	2
Asian Pakistani	1
Black African	3
Black Other	2
Not recorded	3
Other European	1
Somali	1
White Other	1
Total	16

6 Out-of-London Acquisitions (General Fund)

6.1 Properties acquired

6.1.1 There have been a total of 69 properties acquired with a £13m budget since November 2016. A summary of the stock profile is provided below.

Number of units	69
Average purchase price	148,231
Number of units in Bedfordshire	41
Number of 2 bedroom properties	25
Number of 3 bedroom properties	16
Number of units in Peterborough	28
Number of 2 bedroom properties	5
Number of 3 bedroom properties	21
Number of 4 bedroom properties	2

6.2 The letting process

6.2.1 Out-of-London units are allocated with regard to the Councils' Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy, and an assessment is carried out to determine the requirements of the household including the children. The assessment determines whether the household has:

- Priority to be located in the London Borough of Barnet
- Priority to be located close to the London Borough of Barnet
- No priority to be located either within or close to the London Borough of Barnet

6.2.2 Those with the lowest support needs that have no priority to be located within or close to the borough are considered for out-of-London placements.

6.2.3 In accordance with the Children's Act, the Council has due regard to the principal needs of any children in the household, and the need to safeguard and promote the children's welfare. In particular, regard will be had to any disruption to schools and education, medical care, social work, other key services and other support.

6.2.4 Households are supported through the letting process by Barnet Homes' Housing Options Service with accompanied viewings and a programme of regular property inspections tailored to the support needs of the family.

6.3 Households properties were let to

6.3.1 Of the 22 out of London units let, 4 of have been let to households fleeing violence, 7 have been re-housed from other temporary accommodation within the locale and 3 have been let to benefit capped households. A summary of households who have moved into properties outside London is provided below.

Table 3 – Household profile of tenants in properties outside London

Household Type	Number of households
Couple and 1 child	3
Couple and 2 children	3
Mother and child	6
Mother and 2 children	8
Mother and 3 children	1
Mother & 7 children	1
Total	22

Table 4 – Household ethnicity of tenants in properties outside London

Ethnicity	Number of households
Asian Bangladeshi	1
Asian Other	1
Asian Pakistani	1
Black African	4
Black British	2
Black Caribbean	1
Iranian	2
Not provided	5
Turkish	1
White British	1
White Irish	3
Total	22

- 6.3.2 In one instance an applicant was rehoused from temporary accommodation in Barnet to a newly acquired home in Bedford after her daughter had secured a place at a college in Bedford.
- 6.3.3 In another instance, a tenant was moved to a property outside of London at her own request following reports of violent harassment in her existing temporary accommodation in London.

7 Equalities, diversity and customer satisfaction

- 7.1 Members of Barnet's black and minority ethnic communities and women are over represented among those living in temporary accommodation. Over 70% of households in temporary accommodation are from non-white households, and the main applicant is female in 65% of households.
- 7.2 While the sample size is small for households placed in newly acquired properties, it is in line with those in temporary accommodation generally. Of the units let, 77% are to non-white households.
- 7.3 Of those placed in out of borough acquisitions, females make up 84% of main applicants (63% being from single parent households). This is higher than the overall figure for temporary accommodation. However, the units acquired have been family units (2 and 3 bedroom) rather than 1 bed and studio accommodation.
- 7.4 The impact will continue to be monitored to ensure that these groups are not adversely affected. As more properties become let a more representative sample will become available, however, it is not expected that these groups will be adversely affected.
- 7.5 Post tenancy satisfaction surveys have been conducted with tenants. The initial feedback has been positive with the majority describing themselves as either satisfied or very satisfied with the lettings process. Only 1 negative comment has been received. The feedback we have received regarding the

condition of the properties has also been good, with just 2 negative comments and the rest describing themselves as either satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of the properties.