

PUTTING TENANTS FIRST



A CO-OPERATIVE APPROACH TO HOUSING IN BARNET

Regeneration will bring great benefits to Council Tenants

Thanks to the last Labour-led Council there are going to be big changes in the social housing sector in Barnet. Massive regeneration is planned for the 4 big estates: Spur Road, Grahame Park, West Hendon and Dollis Valley. Over the next 10 years, billions of pounds will be spent on improving residents' homes. The rest of the housing stock will probably be transferred to an Arms' Length Management Organisation (ALMO). It will mean that the Council will eventually cease to manage social housing in the borough.

Residents must be given more say in running their estates

If the Council is not going to manage the properties, should it just be left to the housing association or ALMO managers? The Co-op Party believes that the next Labour Council should seek to enable residents to have a much greater say in how their estates are run. After all they live in them. Labour should:

- Extend tenant participation by building on the base of the Tenants Compact by investing in tenant training and capacity building schemes.
- Help tenants to set up Tenant Management Organisations/Co-operatives
- Campaign for the adoption of a Community Gateway Model constitution if an ALMO is to be set up. This would enable the ALMO to develop into a tenant-led organisation if the tenants wanted one. It would also be very flexible and would allow tenants to decide how much they wished to participate at any given time.
- Support the establishment of fully-mutual new housing co-operatives which are owned and run by tenants. The Council should make land available to the co-operatives directly or to a Community Land Trust.

TENANT MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS

Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) are tenant controlled organisations through which tenants manage their estates through an agreement with the Council. Most TMOs do more than that. They are usually important players in their local communities. Tenants make good managers. A recent Office of the Deputy Prime Minister report has shown that most TMOs perform better than their local councils and compare favourably with the top 25% of local authorities in England in terms of re-lets, rent collection and tenant satisfaction. The recent Survey of English Housing showed that 77% of all TMO tenants were satisfied with their TMO. Tenant managers are fairer too. Because they are democratically elected, they tend to be more inclusive. Women and black and minority groups are better represented on TMO boards than on local councils. More than 80% of black and minority ethnic residents told a recent survey that they felt 'their TMO *'treated all types of people fairly'*. There are approximately 130 TMOs in London. None in Barnet. It is time that Barnet's tenants were given more freedom to run their own estates by being helped to form TMOs.

COMMUNITY GATEWAY MODEL ALMOs

In the near future, the Council intends to transfer its remaining stock to an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). That's about 9000 properties. Though the tenants will remain Council tenants, the management of their homes will pass to the ALMO. But who controls the ALMO? Its board will be one third council nominees, one third independents and one third tenants. But why shouldn't the tenants run the ALMO if they want to and have the ability to do so. The Community Gateway Model form of ALMO seeks to do just that. A conventional ALMO would be set up but within its constitution there would be a positive obligation to move towards the ALMO becoming tenant led with the tenants having a majority on the Board. This would not take place overnight as it would take time for training and capacity building to be undertaken. Also if later on, the tenants wish to reduce their participation the Model caters for this and the ALMO would revert to its original form. This is called stair-casing. The Model is strongly supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing, the professional housing organisation. Labour should press for Barnet's ALMO to adopt the Community Gateway Model in its constitution.

FULLY MUTUAL HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES

With fully mutual housing co-ops, the residents jointly own the buildings and the land on which they stand. They are owner-occupiers but not individually. Co-ops are democratically controlled by tenants with one person having one vote. Fully mutual co-ops can be equity co-ops or part of the rented social housing sector. Equity co-ops may involve substantial capital investment to buy a share. Commonhold is another kind of common ownership for leaseholders of flats. For social housing, the finance usually comes from the Housing Corporation and a building society. In most cases co-ops only accept nominations from the local council's waiting lists. High land costs are a major problem in London. So as with housing associations, development is usually only possible if a Social Housing Grant is available or if the land is 'gifted' by the local council or the statutory agency either to the co-op or a Community Land Trust. Labour should support the setting up of local Community Land Trusts and housing co-ops.

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