

Analysis of:

STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY:

WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Caroline Abbott

Housing Research & Policy Officer

Housing Strategy & Enablement, Adult Care Services

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INTRODUCTION

Initial consultation was carried out to gather the opinions of providers and other key stakeholders on the range of issues to inform the draft Strategic Tenancy Policy. This included:

- Housing Joint Commissioning Partnership workshop – 7th March 2012.
- Housing Association Liaison Group – 14th March 2012.
- Six Town Housing Board – 30th May 2012.
- Elected Members' Training evening – 3rd July 2012.
- 4 Stakeholder groups:
 - Elizabethan Suite – 23rd July 2012.
 - Mosses Centre – 30th July 2012.
 - Longfield Suite, Prestwich – 10th August 2012.
 - Radcliffe Civic Suite – 13th August 2012.
 - A thorough examination of the policy by legal officers, including Counsel opinion.

In total, up to 100 participants were involved in the earlier discussions detailed above.

A more extensive consultation on the draft Strategic Tenancy Policy was undertaken following Cabinet approval in October, using a variety of methods to maximise opportunities for response, including:

- Tenants' and Housing Waiting List Applicants' Workshop:
 - Elizabethan Suite – 16th November 2012
- Stakeholder Workshops:
 - Elizabethan Suite – 29th October 2012
 - Radcliffe Civic Suite – 31st October 2012
 - Longfield Suite, Prestwich – 7th November 2012
 - Mosses Centre – 12th November 2012
 - Ramsbottom Civic Suite – 22nd November 2012
 - Jinnah Centre – 27th November 2012
 - Elizabethan Suite – 28th November 2012
- Staff Workshops:
 - Elizabethan Suite – 20th November 2012
 - Elizabethan Suite – 27th November 2012
 - Disabled Employees Group – 28th November 2012

In total, over 100 participants attended these events, the majority being tenants or people on the housing waiting list.

Interactive voting button sessions were undertaken at a number of these consultation events with stakeholders, tenants and staff during the consultation period subject to sufficient numbers attending. The overall objective of the session was to gather further views on the Council's draft Strategic Tenancy Policy. The interactive sessions enabled the results of the voting to be displayed instantaneously for attendees to view and then generate further discussion within the workshop sessions.

The interactive sessions took place at the following events:

- *Stakeholder:* Longfield Suite, Prestwich, Wednesday 7th November, 2-5pm
- *Tenant:* Elizabethan Suite, Bury, Friday 16th November, 9.30am – 12.30pm
- *Staff:* Elizabethan Suite, Bury, Tuesday 20th and 27th November, 9.30am – 12.30pm

Questions were asked in relation to lifetime tenancies, adapted properties, under-occupation, over-crowding, homelessness, affordable rent conversions and higher rents for higher income earners.

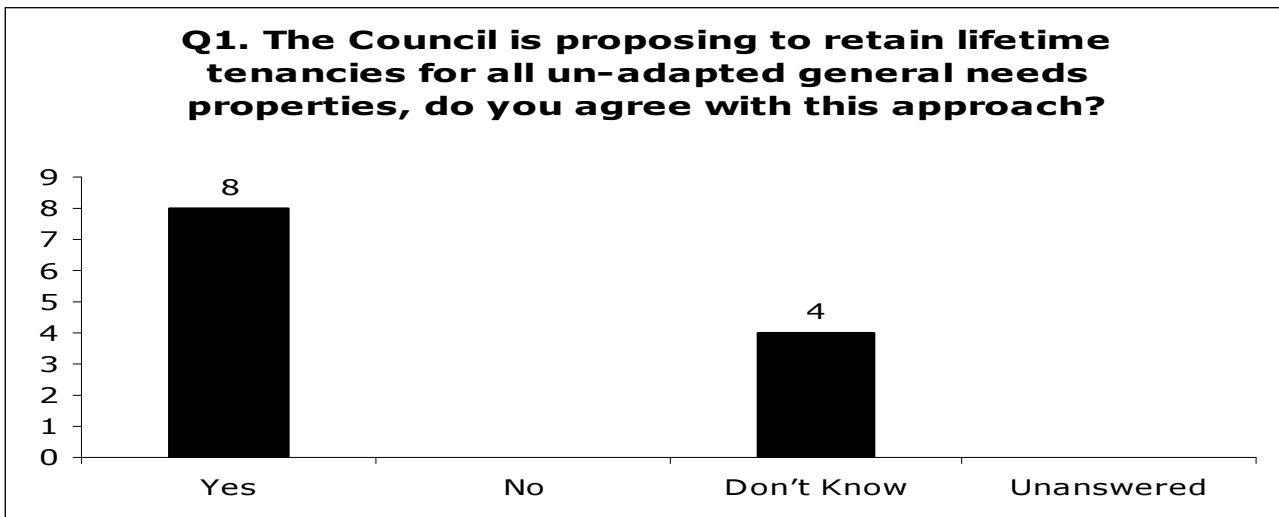
The analysis of the workshop sessions has been spilt by the three different types of events: *Stakeholder, Tenant and Staff.*

The analysis includes a breakdown of the interactive voting button sessions and a summary of the workshop discussions that complemented the results.

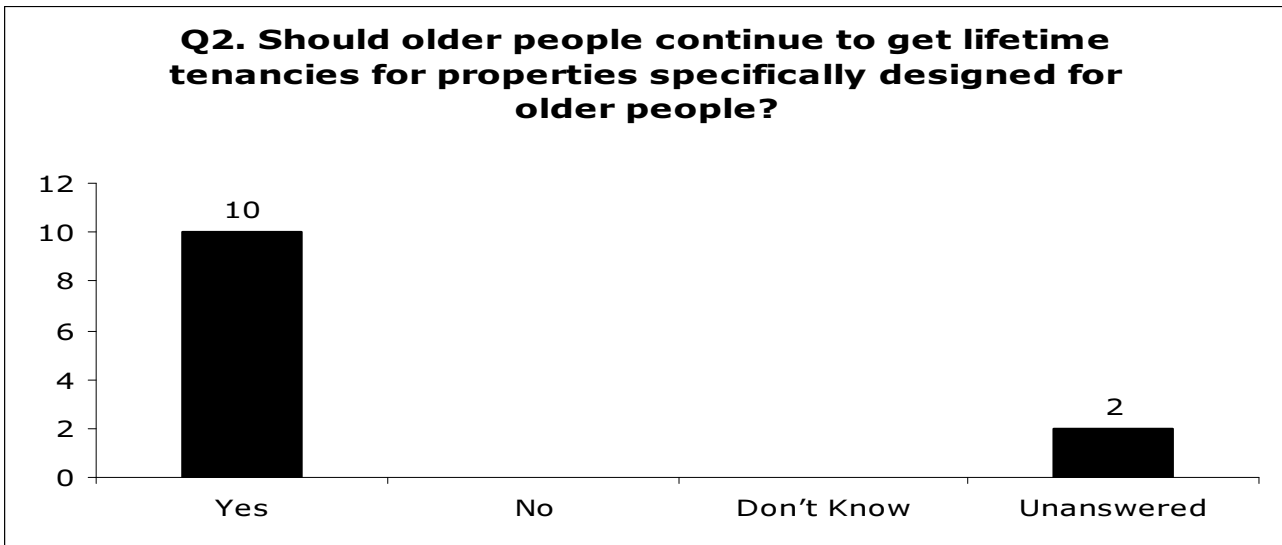
ANALYSIS

STAKEHOLDER EVENT

Lifetime Tenancies



Eight stakeholders agreed with the proposal to retain lifetime tenancies for all un-adapted general needs properties, and four did not have an opinion.



Ten stakeholders agreed that older people should continue to get lifetime tenancies for properties specifically designed for older people and two did not answer the question.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Nobody should be entitled to a home for life. Lifetime tenancies need to be negotiable. The time has come, where an individual's needs and the needs of a community have changed. This means the type of property being accommodated needs to review whether the individual or family do not want to move or not.
This does create uncertainty with individuals, as tenants do not want to move as they have invested money into their properties.
Lifetime Tenancies should be offered but reviewed every 5 years. This is to ensure new tenants are monitored to determine whether their circumstances have changed. Regular checks need to take place by STH.
Expectations are higher. Space is needed for residents with bigger families. Children should not be sharing rooms.
Finance can force tenants to stay in social housing.
People want and need security & support through a lifetime tenancy.
Five year tenancies would generally not be supported because of the unsettlement this would cause.
Short term tenancies would create a lack of commitment to the property.
People will not have pride in the property.
Tenants who disrespect their home should not be allocated a new better standard of house, as this is not right.
It is unjust to support challenging groups in social housing. Decent tenants should be considered and respected in the process too.
Agree that if you look at from positive view point, social housing can get people in the right house with number of rooms. However it is unfair to expect people who have lost family and/or their children have grown up to moved on, as they have memories in their accommodation.
Shortage of 1 bedroom accommodation.
Difficult to regulate as there are 8,000 houses.

This issue is also linked to unemployment, with the young. After 5 years may no longer be unemployed and could afford to rent in private sector. If you can afford to move out of the property then tenants generally opt out themselves, however there are a few tenants that stay within Council properties even though they can afford to rent privately or purchase their own property.

Give people an option to downsize through house swapping. Older people should not be forced to move but incentives should be provided.

Lifetime tenancy, if specific adapted property. Do we do same for sheltered properties?

The Council could offer incentives; help with moving costs, decorating properties as this will help with the stress around moving.

Older people should be given lifetime tenancies as they are more vulnerable to moving.

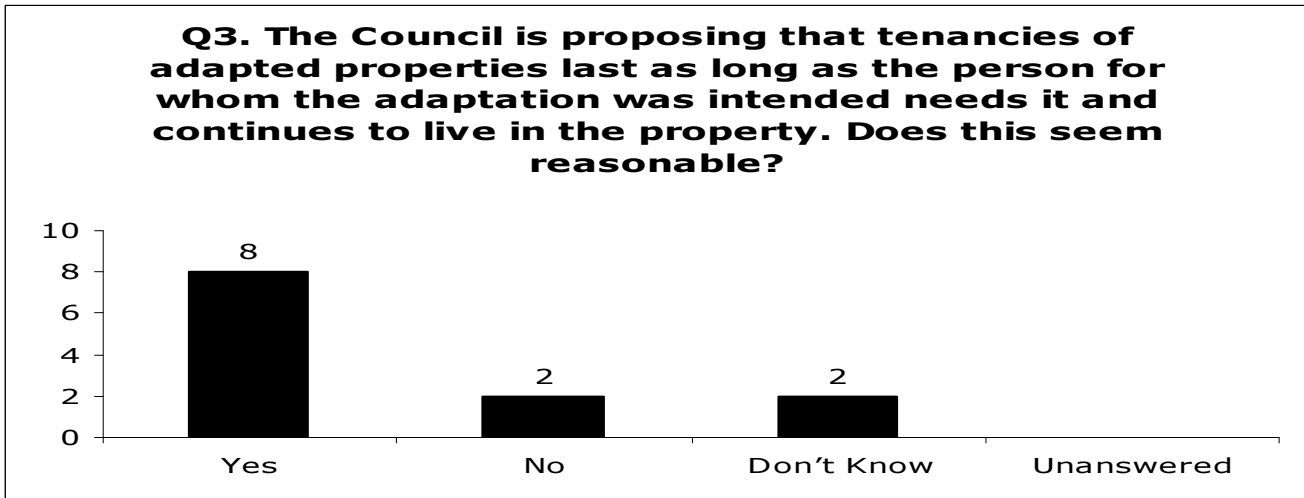
Assumptions are made people assuming that properties are only available for older people. Making sure we have good local lettings policy.

Downsizing when you have a lifetime of memories. Should be optional and make sure Council can offer incentives/services to help with the move. Conversions can create better products and gives people better options.

Our response:

- Stakeholders supported the continuation of lifetime tenancies for un-adapted, general needs properties. It was felt that five year tenancies would generally not be supported, due to the unsettlement this would cause and the lack of commitment tenants would have if the tenancy was only short term.
- A minority did however feel that lifetime tenancies need to be negotiable and reviewed every 5 years fixed to ensure that properties are used by customers with a particular need for the property and to determine whether the circumstances of the household have change.
- The benefits of promoting a regular turnover of properties is acknowledged, however, it is felt preferable to continue to allow lifetime tenancies for un-adapted, general needs properties, but with improved and proactive advice and support to tenants needing to better match their property to their housing needs.

Adapted properties



Eight stakeholders agreed that tenancies of adapted properties should last as long as the person for whom the adaptation was intended needs it, two did not agree and two did not express an opinion.

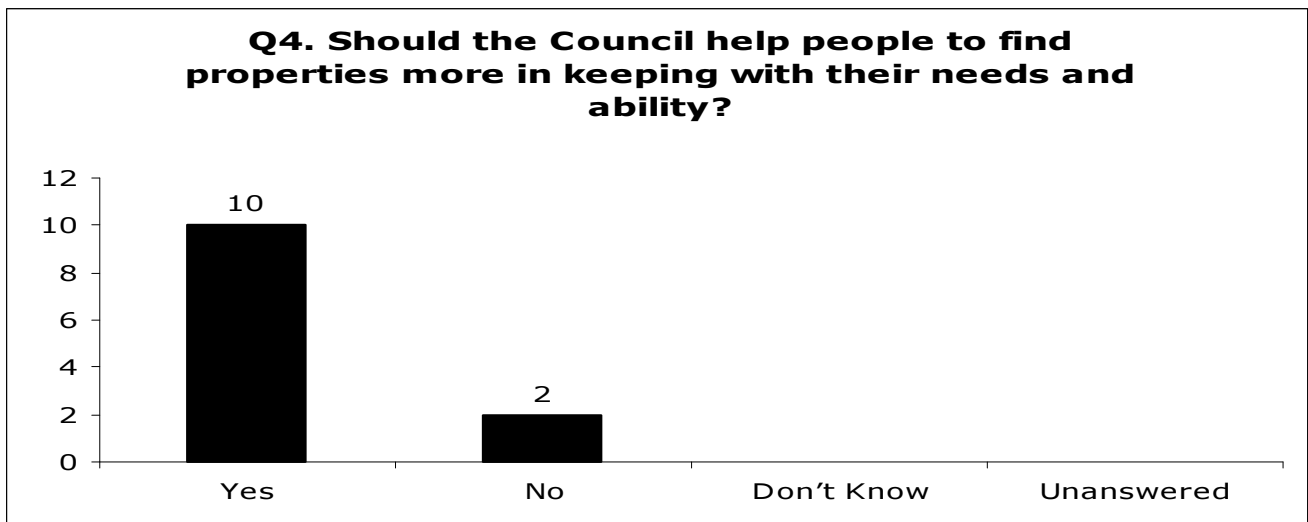
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Adaptations are expensive. Adaptations are installed to meet an individuals needs within the property.
More space is needed, adaptations need to be of good quality and are targeting the tenant who requires this.
Overall adapted properties should be made available to people with additional needs.
How long would an adapted property be left empty if a suitable tenant cannot be found. And would this be cost effective? Or would the property not be better utilised by allocating to a family/person who does not need adaptations once all other avenues have been investigated.
Bungalows that are adapted should also be made suitable for families, not just individuals or older people.
Council houses should be retained for people who need it and special cases regarding adaptations.
When a tenant no longer requires an adapted property they should then be moved from that property. However all issues should be taken into consideration. Essential to finding out what the tenant needs are, and relocate when adapted properties are not needed.
Each disabled tenant should be reviewed individually.
Possibility of dedicating blocks of properties to certain tenants with similar housing needs i.e. to promote independent living, possibly offering ground floor flats for disabled people so adaptations do not need to take place as circumstances could change.
Priority should be given to those who need adaptations.
Agree that if an adapted property no longer meets the needs of the tenant or tenants living in the property then they should be found alternative accommodation, and the adapted property should be used for disabled people in need of the adaptations.

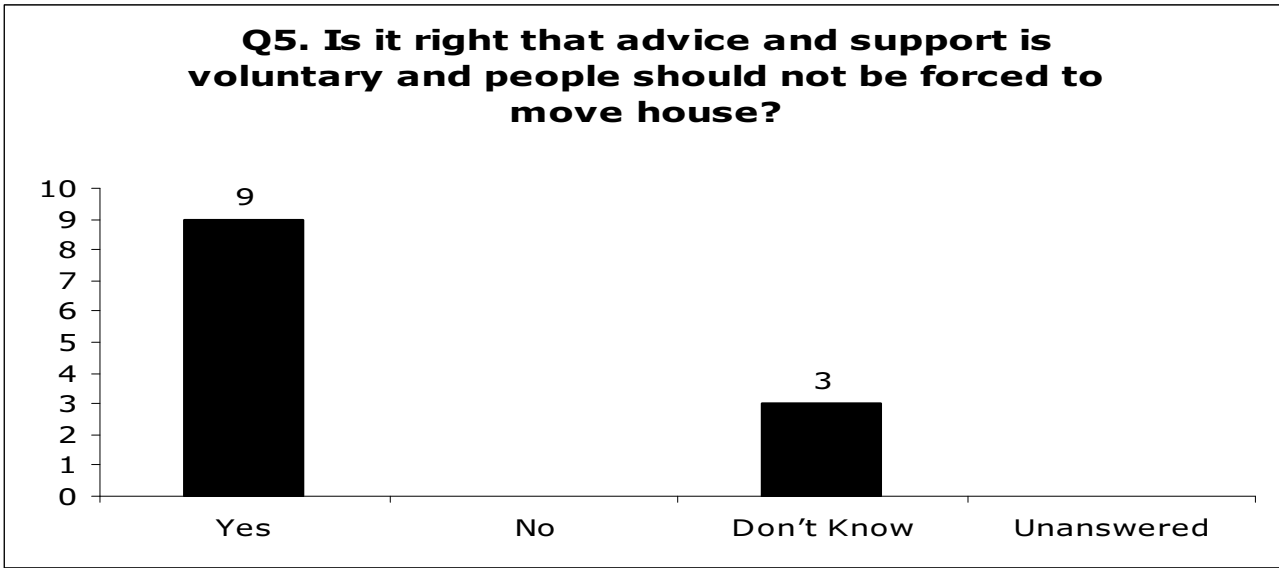
Our response:

- Stakeholders agreed that adapted properties should be for those disabled people who actually need the adaptations. However, it was felt that each case should be dealt with on an individual basis, particularly in cases of minor adaptations and the wording within the Policy has been amended to reflect this.
- It was also questioned how long the adapted property would be left empty if a suitable tenant cannot be found, and whether this would be cost effective. A suggestion was to use the property for a family/ or individual who does not need adaptations once all other avenues have been investigated.

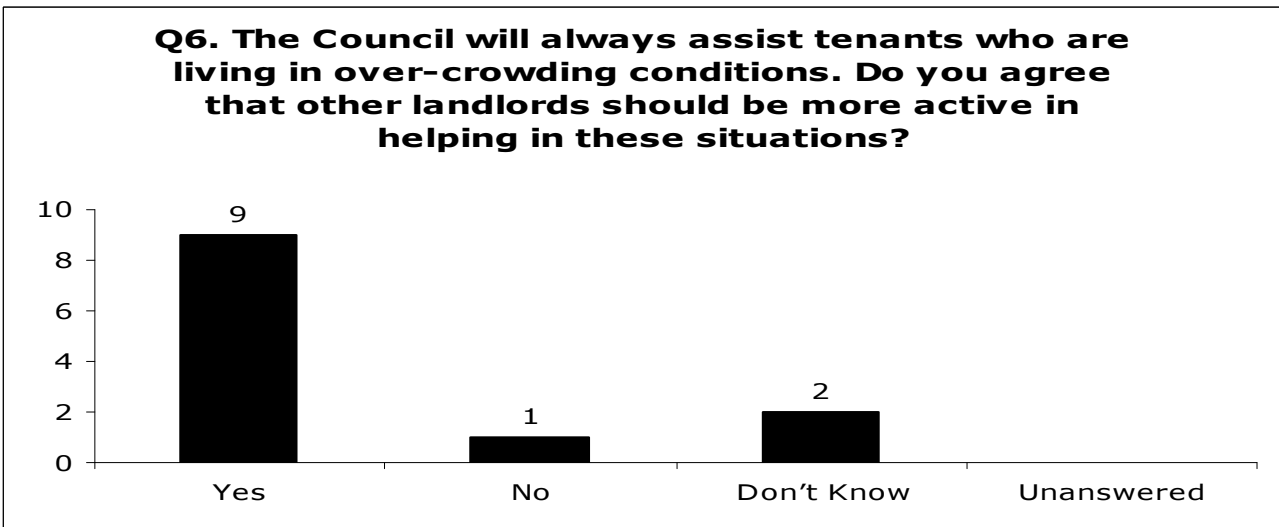
Under-occupation and over-crowding



Ten stakeholders agreed that the Council should help people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and ability and two did not agree.



Nine stakeholders agreed that advice and support is voluntary and people should not be forced to move house and three did not know.



Nine stakeholders agreed that landlords should be more pro-active in helping those tenants who are living in over-crowded conditions, one did not agree and two did not express an opinion.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Tenants need to look years down the line, and the Council/STH need to offer help with moving costs. If tenants are providing their property of decent standard and tenants then want to downsize they should be offered a home in the same standard.

If they want people to move, they need to offer an incentive. Incentives are needed to cover moving expenses and then people will be more willing to downsize.

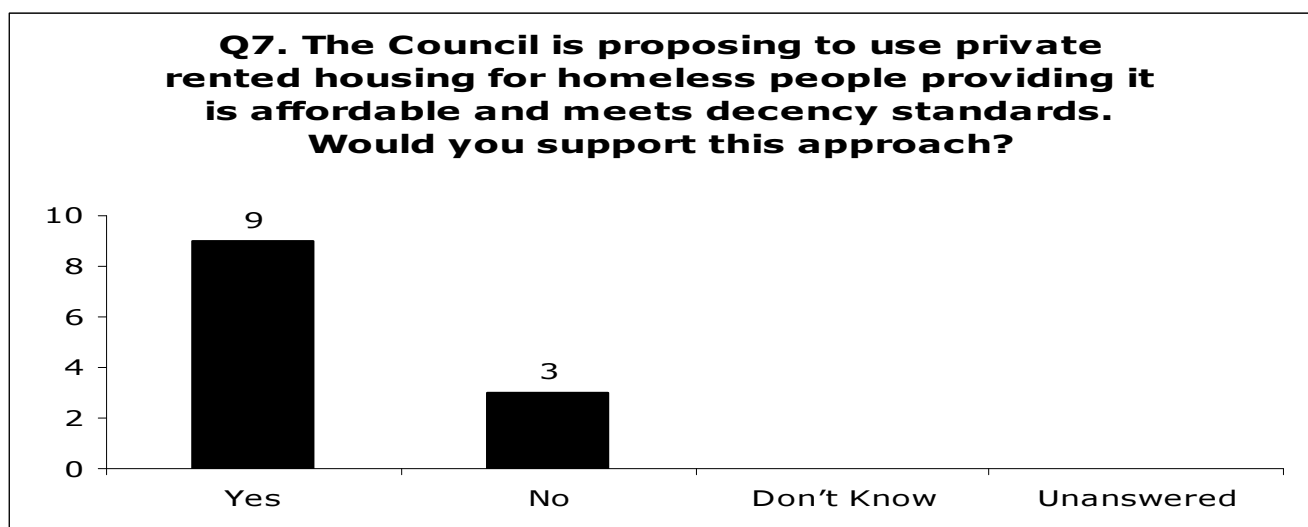
Tenants and residents should be able to voice there concerns regarding overcrowding.

It was suggested an officer or warden should be undertaking 'surprise' home visits on all estates every month, to check on new tenants and to clarify who lives at the property.
Help should be available to tenants downsizing. What could we do to give support? Cover removal expenses. If they do want to downsize make sure it does not cost them. Grants to help with decorating etc.
Some tenants just do not want to move and it is therefore difficult to encourage these people. The Council could demonstrate lower running costs but ultimately it is down to tenants whether they want to move.
More information should be shared with residents on re-housing opportunities.
Provide options and incentives to move/downsize e.g. pay removal charges, cost for carpets & curtains etc.
Good quality social and/or private housing should be used and not just smaller landlords. Good standard of properties are essential.
The Council should greatly encourage tenants to move and help downsize but not be forced to move. In each case circumstances need to be checked.
How can you control private landlords?

Our response:

- Stakeholders agreed that the Council should help people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and ability to pay and also agreed that advice and support should be voluntary and that people should not be forced to move.
- In addition, stakeholders agreed that landlords should be more pro-active in helping those tenants who are living in over-crowded conditions and offer incentives such as paying for the removal costs associated with moving.

Homelessness



Nine stakeholders agreed that the Council should be using accommodation in the private rented sector for homeless people and three did not agree with using this type of accommodation.

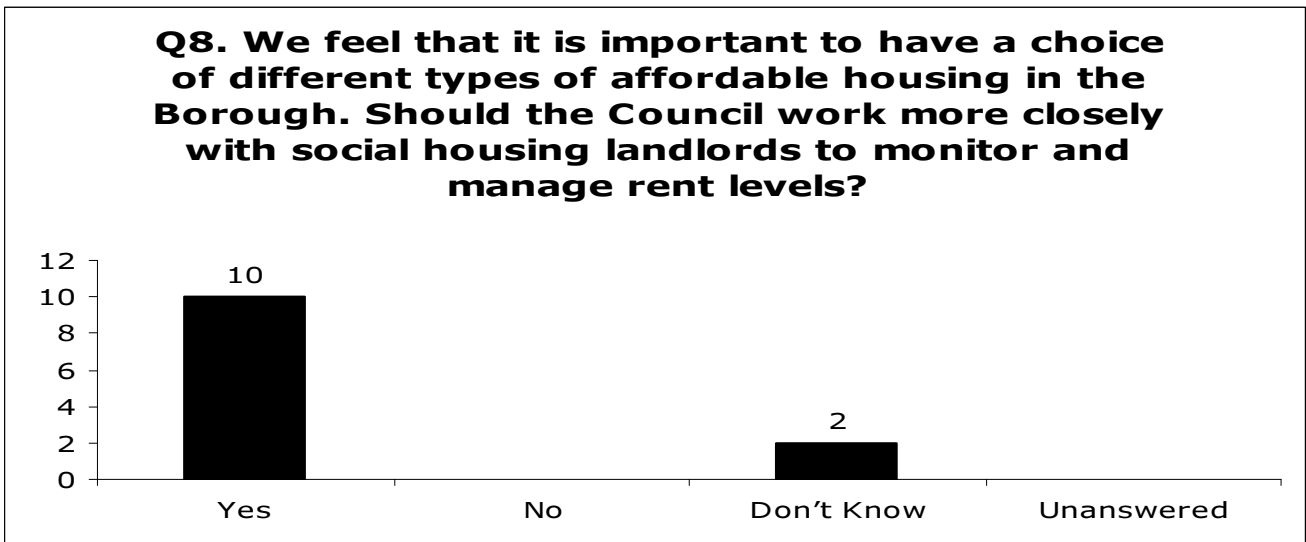
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Certain standards need to be met for tenants who are provided with private rented accommodation.
Temporary accommodation through private landlords should be offered to ease the use of Council stock.
Using private landlords to support homelessness demands – Yes but vulnerability of people must be considered when being located.
Working practice needs to be thorough and pro-active.
Good quality standard of service providers essential.
Monitor re-housed/homeless people to establish if they are happy with housing, and community they have been placed in.

Our response:

- Stakeholders agreed with the proposal to use accommodation in the private rented sector for homelessness people, as long as the property is in a decent standard and regular checks are undertaken to ensure the tenancy is being sustained.

Affordable rent conversions



Ten stakeholders felt that the Council should be working more closely with social housing landlords to monitor and manage rent levels to ensure there is a choice of different types of affordable housing in the Borough and two did not know.

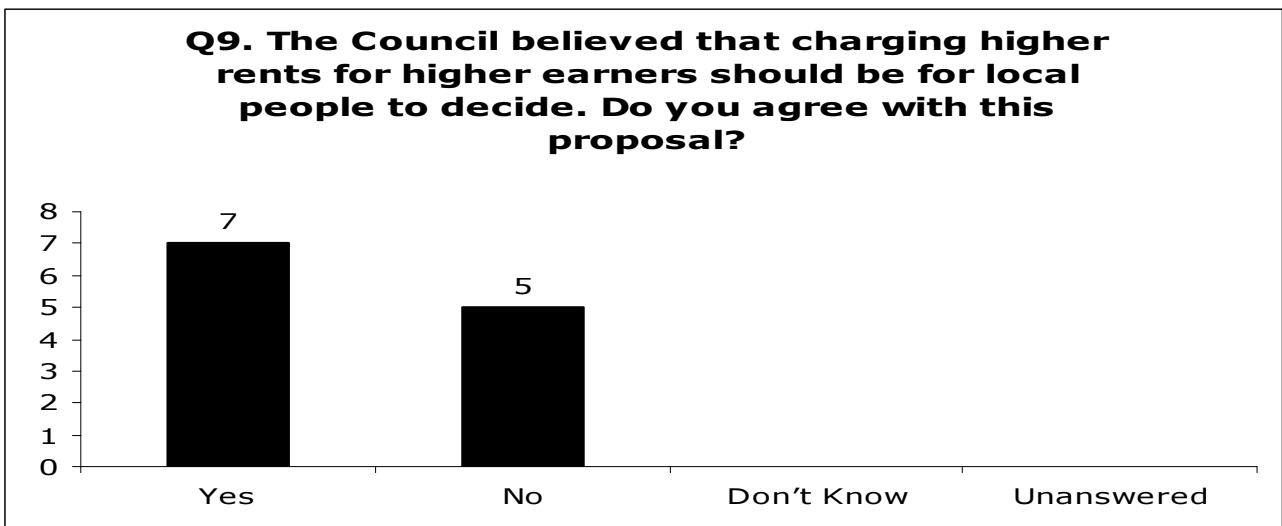
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Has to be affordable for tenants, Council accommodation needs to be the cheapest.
Rent increases are supported to a degree if funds are fed back in to social housing from housing associations. Also any monies generated should go to supporting housing in our Borough.
It is important to regulate numbers of conversions taking place. The Borough needs a mix of tenancies.

Our response:

- Stakeholders felt the monitoring of affordable rent conversions needs to take place to ensure the Borough has a mix of tenures available to meet different affordability levels.

Rents for higher income earners



Seven stakeholders agreed that the option to charge higher rents for higher earners should be a local decision and five did not agree.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Circumstances change and we cannot ask tenants to provide us with their income details in terms of protection of data. The theory is right but the practice is unworkable. Once people earn enough they will aspire to purchase their own property.
Issues could arise regarding Right to Buy and those tenants on high incomes choosing to purchase their Council property rather than be charged a higher rent, thus reducing the social housing stock levels in the Borough.
Circumstances can change and income within certain households could increase/decrease at any moment.

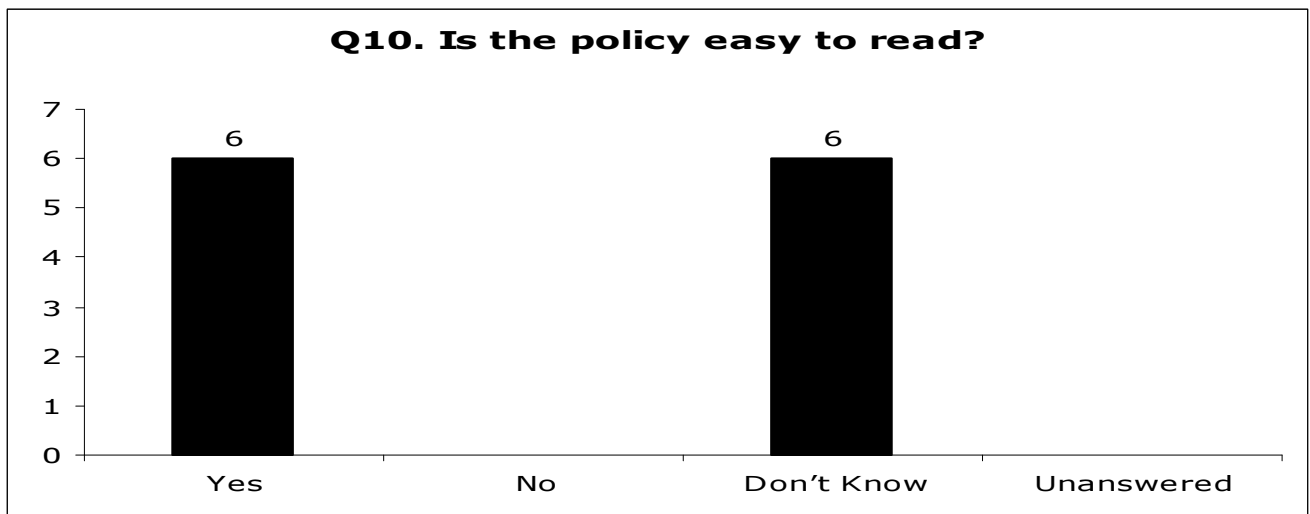
Some felt that people should not be penalised for increased earnings through career development.

This needs to be a local decision. Issue if more than £60/80/100,000 a year then increase rent. Should rents be means tested?

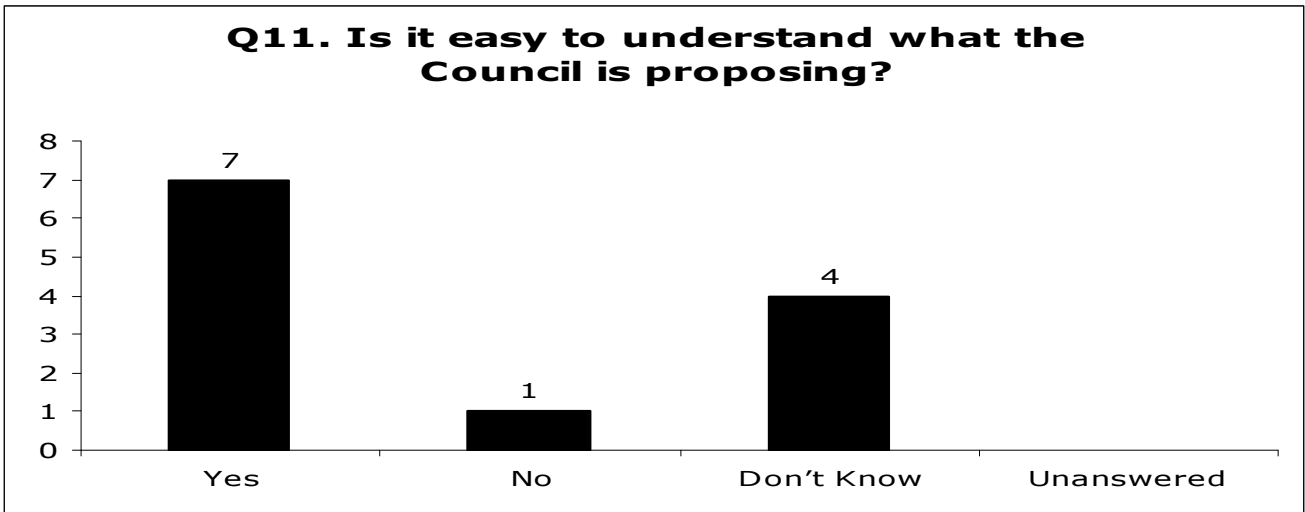
Our response:

- Stakeholders agreed that charging higher rents for high earning households should be a local decision. However, most did not believe that there were actually many of these households continuing to live in Council housing in Bury.
- In addition, it was felt that if people were penalised for having increased earnings this could affect their career development and that there could be an increase in Right To Buy sales due to these households choosing to buy their Council house instead of being made to pay a higher rent.

Format of the policy



Six stakeholders felt that Bury's draft Strategic Tenancy Policy was easy to read and six had no opinion which was possibly due to these people not reading the document.



Seven stakeholders felt the draft policy was easy to understand in terms of what the Council was proposing, one did not agree and four did not know.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

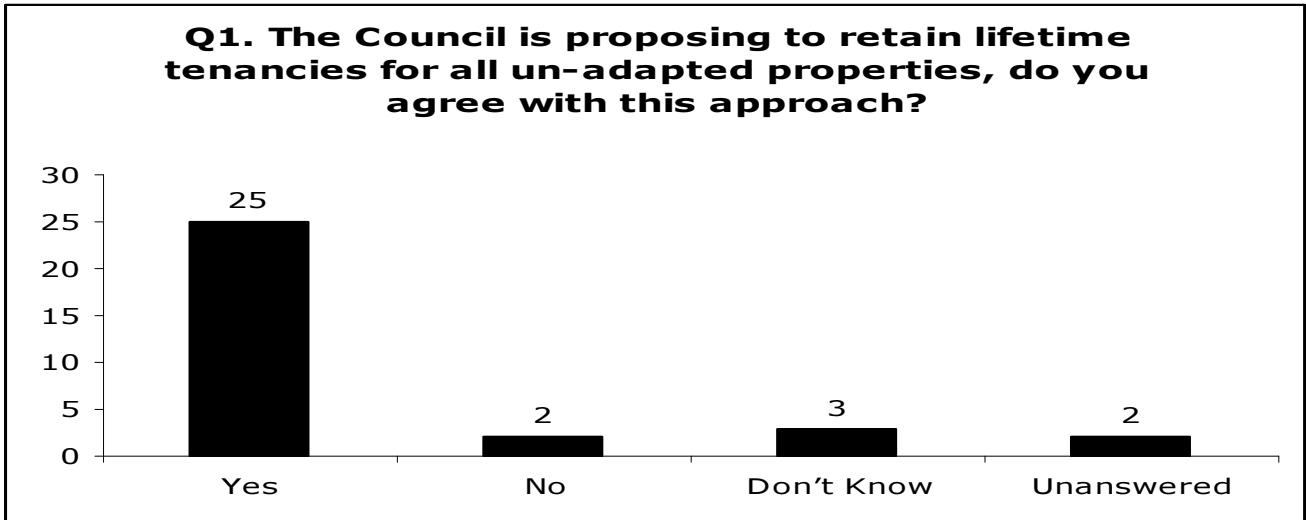
Yes we can understand most of the policy. How do we make it relevant to tenants? Without a fit for purpose policy we cannot make things better in terms of housing allocation.

Our response:

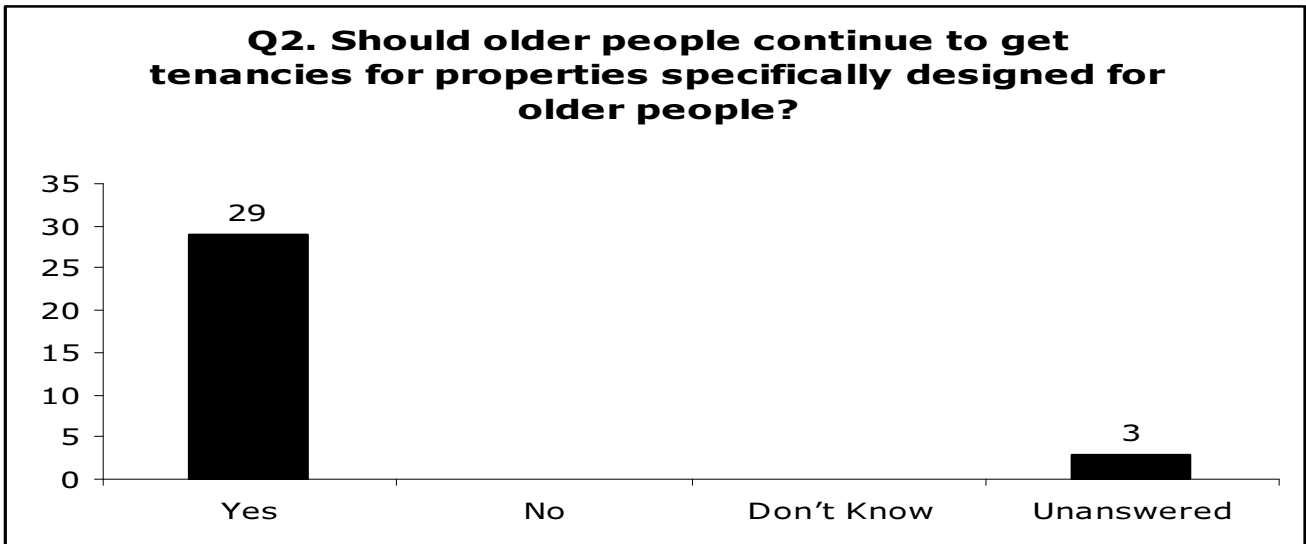
- Stakeholders found the policy easy to read and were able to understand what the Council was proposing. However it was suggested that the policy needs to be more relevant to tenants.

TENANT EVENT

Lifetime tenancies



Twenty-five tenants agreed with the proposal to retain lifetime tenancies for all un-adapted properties, two did not agree, three did not have an opinion and two did not answer the question.



Twenty-nine tenants agreed that older people should continue to get lifetime tenancies for properties specifically designed for older people and three did not answer the question.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

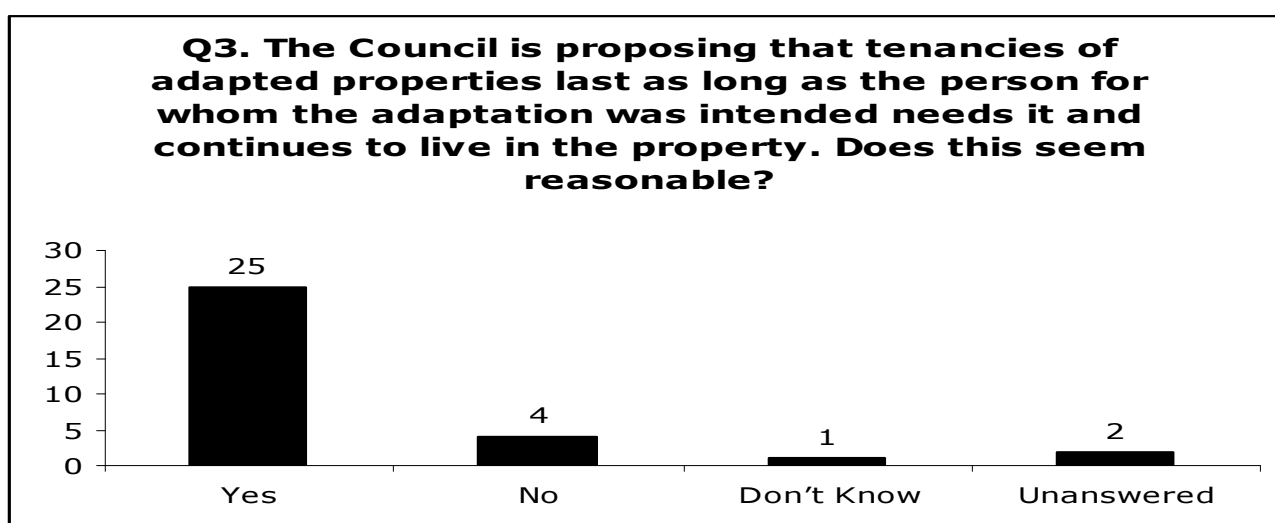
- Tenancies should be for life, proving tenants meet the rules of their tenancy.
- Up to tenants to move if they wish.
- Not realistic to expect people to move on in this economic climate.

Tenants need security – it’s their home
It will cost a lot of money to bring homes back up to standard after some tenants leave because they will not maintain them.
It was felt that in Bury if a tenant was able to move on to private rented or their own home they would do by their own volition.
There should be a follow-up appointment checking that the housing need was assessed properly.
Unanimous opinion that older people should have lifetime tenancy it would be very traumatic to ask them to move.
Lifetime tenancies should not be provided but instead tenants should be given a property for 3-5 years and then reviewed after that time.
Issues arose regarding new tenants, and whether a 12 month period is long enough, should it be 18 months.
Continue lifetime tenancies with older people. Older people should not be moved from property to property as this will cause too much stress for tenants.
The lifetime tenancy contradicts with the downsizing approach.
Need to clarify that the lifetime tenancy is with that person and not the property.

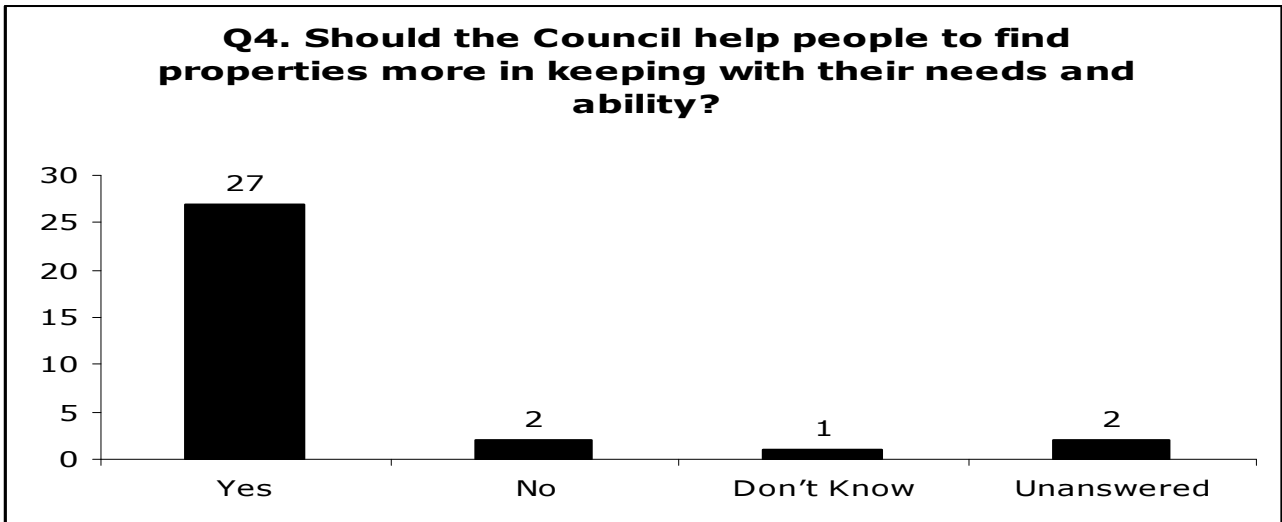
Our response:

- The majority of tenants supported the continuation of lifetime tenancies for un-adapted, general needs properties. It was also felt that older people should not be moved from property to property as this will cause too much stress.
- A minority did however feel that lifetime tenancies should not be provided, but instead tenants should be given a property for 3-5 years and then reviewed after that time.

Adapted properties



Twenty-five tenants agreed that tenancies of adapted properties should last as long as the person for whom the adaptation was intended needs it, four did not agree, one did not express an opinion and two did not answer the question.



Twenty-seven tenants agreed that the Council should help people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and ability, two did not agree, one did not know and two did not answer the question.

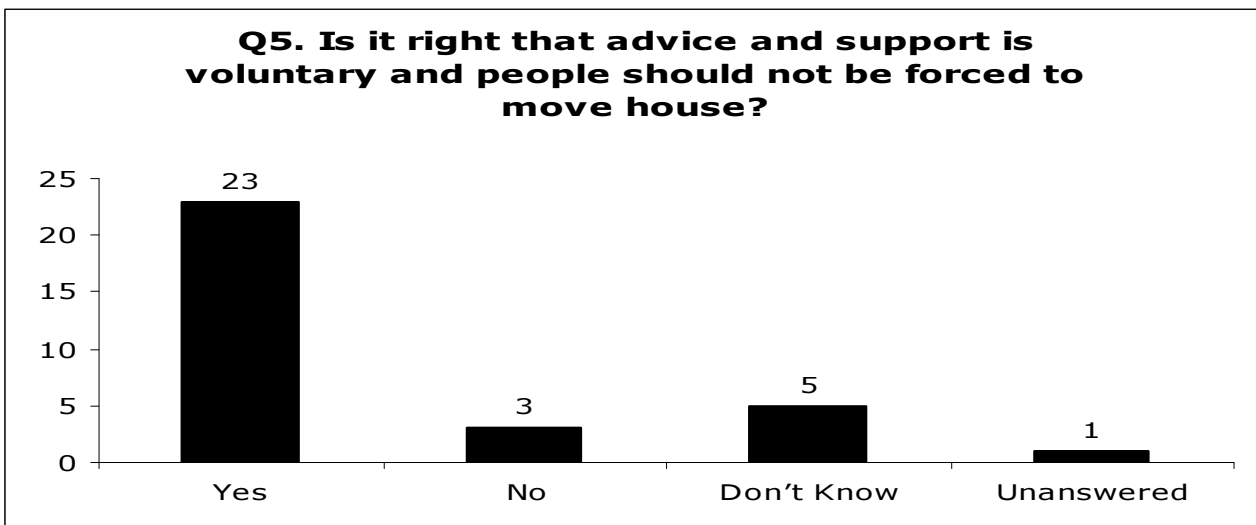
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Would tenants be forced to move to a different estate? They may like or need to live close to friends and family.
This should be for new lets only.
If the tenant is elderly it could be very traumatic to ask them to move.
It was agreed that this was a difficult situation, and perhaps a criteria can be used (including age) to determine if the remaining tenant(s) must move from the adapted property.
What happens when that tenant no longer needs an adapted property? We would re-locate people to suitable accommodation. Group agreed that this is right. What happens to adapted property if someone does not want it, how long will the Council leave it empty? The property will be left empty for a certain length of time to try and accommodate someone who needs the property, could be someone homeless, and there needs more important instead of looking for someone who needs adaptive property. Group agreed that they do not want to see empty properties but also do not want to remove adaptive equipment.
Direct lettings should lower adapted properties becoming empty as direct lets can match people's needs to that particular property. Need to provide further information on adapted properties.
The Council in the past have accommodated people who are able bodied to adapted properties and then the tenant has received a lifetime tenancy. This needs to be reviewed to be able to accommodate disabled people more efficiently.

Our response:

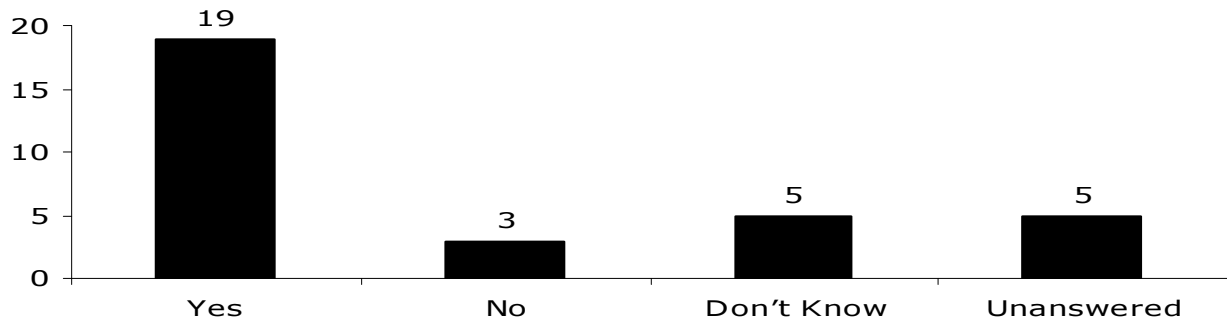
- Overall the tenants agreed that adapted properties should for disabled people who actually need the adaptations only and if an able bodied tenant is living in an adapted property this needs to be addressed.
- The tenants agreed that each case should be dealt with on an individual basis, particularly in cases of minor adaptations and the wording within the Policy has been amended to reflect this.
- Tenants did not want empty properties awaiting tenants who exactly match the property, but also did not want to remove the adapted properties if they were not required.

Under-occupation and over-crowding



Twenty-three stakeholders agreed that advice and support is voluntary and people should not be forced to move house, three did not agree, five did not know and one did not answer the question.

Q6. The Council will always assist tenants who are living in over-crowding conditions. Do you agree that other landlords should be more active in helping in these situations?



Nineteen tenants agreed that landlords should be more pro-active in helping those tenants who are living in over-crowded conditions, three did not agree, five did not express an opinion and five did not answer the question.

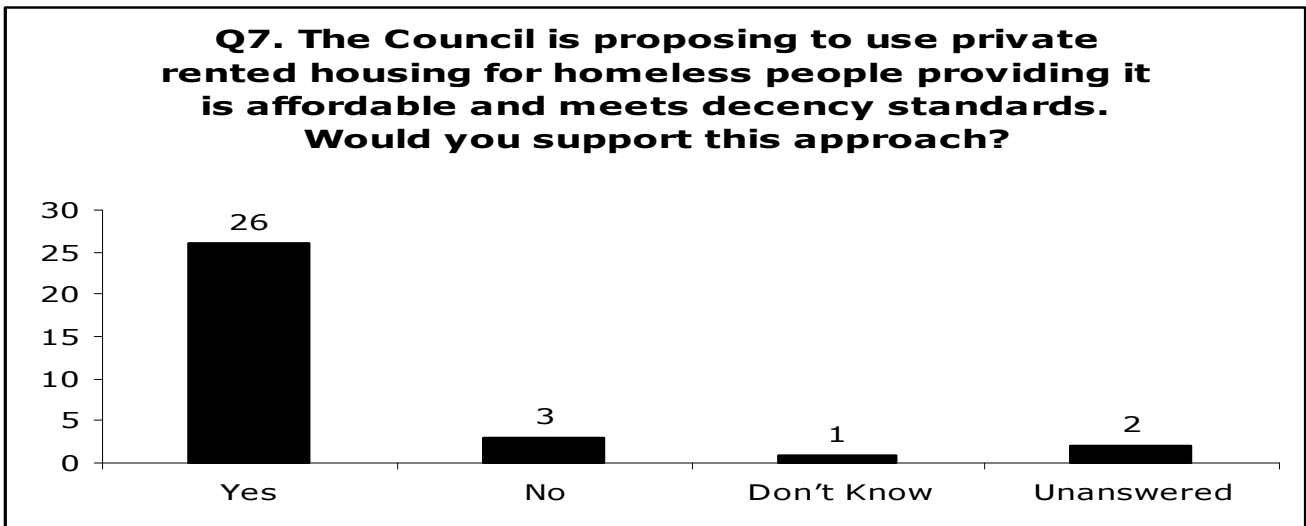
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

There needs to be a survey of tenants and their bedroom numbers.
The location of the properties for tenants downsizing is very important, they should not be asked to move away from their estate unless they want to.
Incentives to help tenants downsizing could include helping with moving costs, help changing utility bills, support for elderly tenants, follow-up contacts after the move and provision for pets.
Any tenant downsizing should be able to choose the area where they wish to live.
Tenants who are in overcrowded accommodation should be offered bigger properties to help meet their needs.
What incentives could be offered? Group discussed the benefits of downsizing. Increased priority for people to downsize is now Band 2. How could the Council help with move? Physically help tenants moving, give tenants financial help to move. Good tenants should receive financial rewards, should be prioritised. Especially focus on older residents who are moving. People could also be happy to swap accommodation with other tenants.
Agree with encouraging moves due to over-crowding or under-occupying

Our response:

- Tenants agreed that the Council should be helping people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and agreed that advice and support should be voluntary and that people should not be forced to move.
- Assisting tenants with the move and offering incentives would help to entice people to downsize.

Homelessness



Twenty-six tenants agreed that the Council should be using accommodation in the private rented sector for homeless people providing the property is affordable and meets decency standards, three did not agree with using this type of accommodation, one did not know and two did not answer the question.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

There are problems with the classification of homelessness, where will the deposit come from? how will they afford the rent?, what about people that become intentionally home is there a cycle of homelessness to tenancy to ASB, this needs to be addressed and the area they go to needs looking at, but the group felt that private rents were perhaps not the way forward.

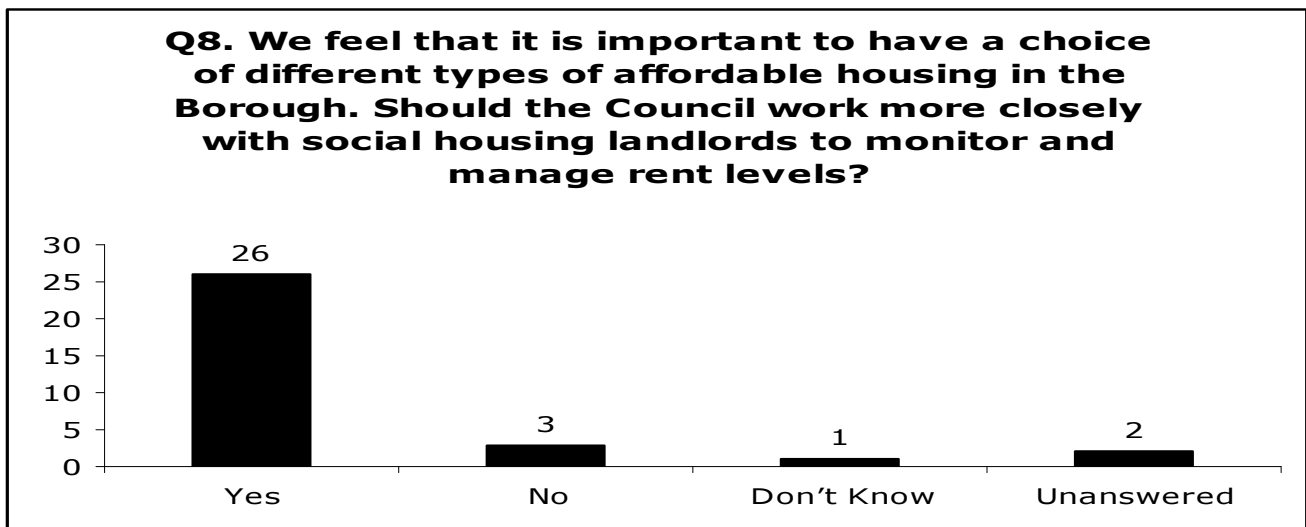
Agree with using private sector in support with the environment.

It was agreed that people fleeing domestic violence should be given the option to access private rented accommodation to help them move away from estates where they may be recognised.

Our response:

- Tenants agreed with the proposal to use accommodation in the private rented sector for homelessness people, as long as the property is in a decent standard.
- In addition tenants felt that people fleeing domestic violence should be given the option to access private rented accommodation to help them move away from the areas where they may be recognised.

Affordable rent conversions



Twenty-six tenants felt that the Council should be working more closely with social housing landlords to monitor and manage rent levels to ensure there is a choice of different types of affordable housing in the Borough, three did not agree, one did not know and two did not answer the question.

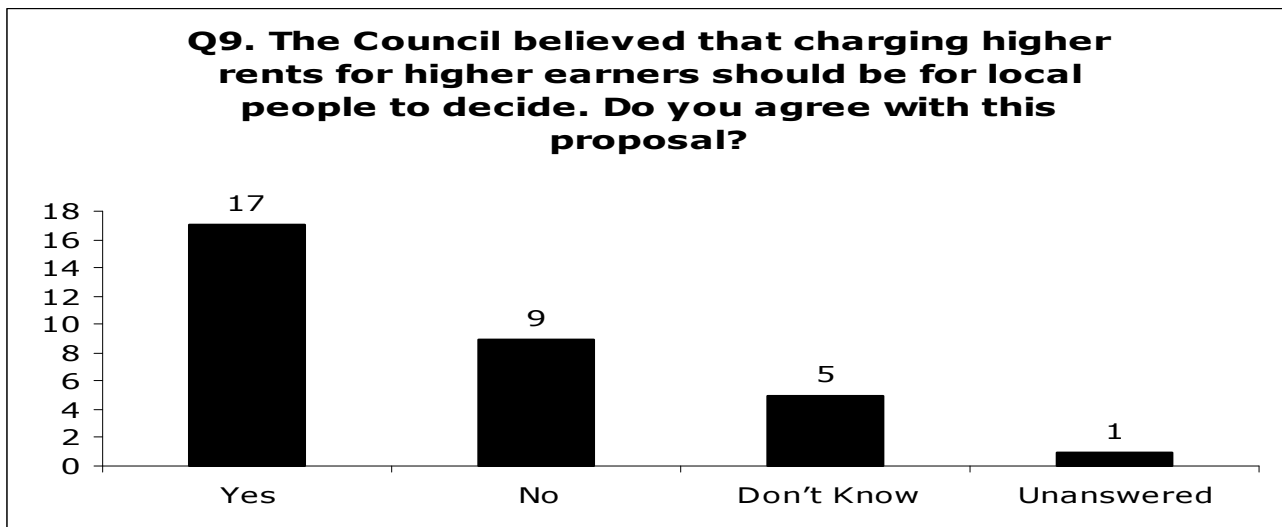
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Should we monitor housing association rent levels? No – Housing association rents are appropriate for the standard of accommodation.
Rents are higher but the standard of the properties are higher.
Rents are higher in flats as there is cleaning of communal areas
Concerns if Borough-wide affordable rents would be localised or standard throughout Bury
More worried about rents and the standard of properties with private landlords.
Group discussed that the increase is not a big amount.
Agreed that the Council should monitor and manage rent levels within private housing.

Our response:

- Tenants felt the monitoring of affordable rent conversions needs to take place, but it was expected that rents for a housing association property tend to be higher due to a better standard of accommodation.

Rents for higher income earners



Seventeen tenants agreed that the option to charge higher rents for higher earners should be a local decision, nine did not agree, five did not know and one did not answer the question.

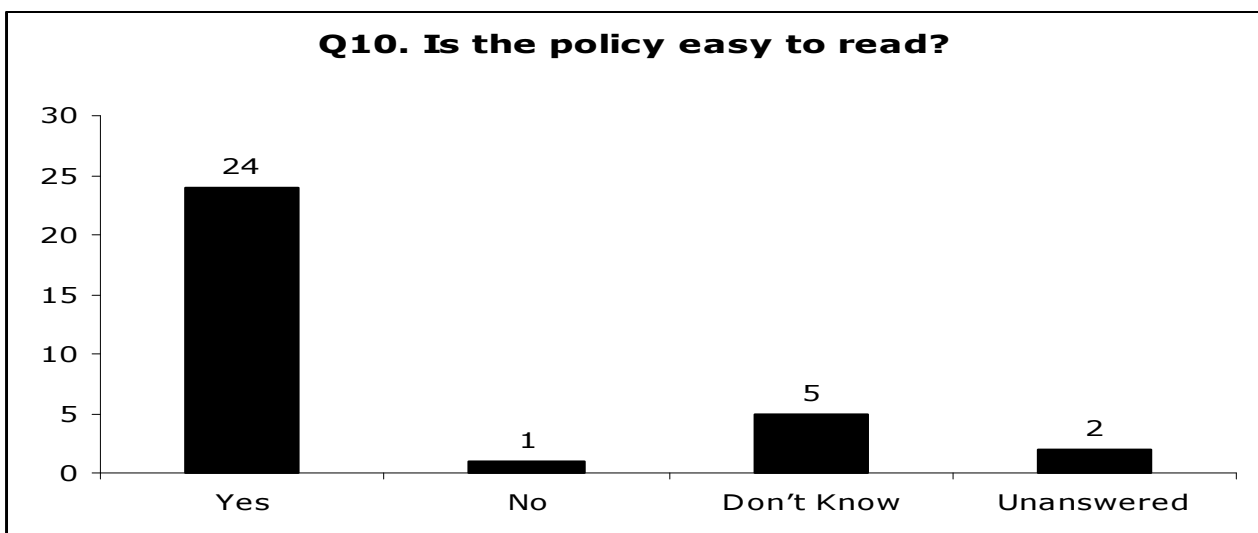
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Local decision.
People that work hard should not be penalised.
What happens if their situation changes – how long will it take to respond?
The problem does not really apply to Bury.
Local decision, as it is not that big an issue.
Hard to regulate and monitor.
Not our Boroughs concern.
Some people pay the same amount of rates for completely different accommodation.
Cases should be reviewed individually e.g. the number of people contributing to household income.

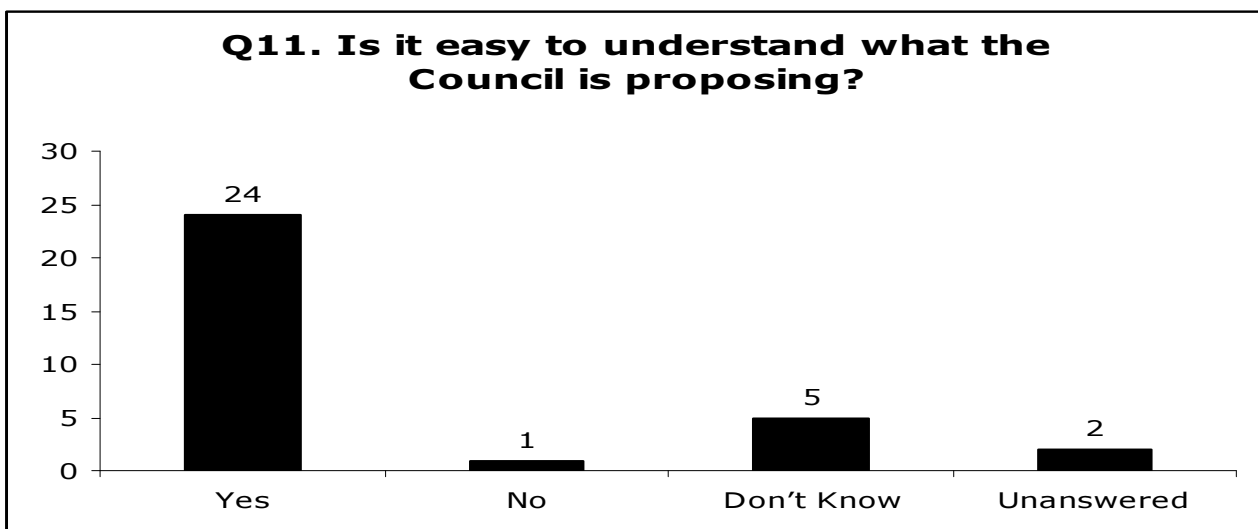
Our response:

- Tenants agreed that charging higher rents for high earning households should be a local decision although it was felt that this is not a particular issue in the Borough of Bury.
- In addition, it was felt people should not be penalised for working hard and it would be hard to regulate and monitor.

Format of the policy



Twenty-four tenants felt that Bury’s draft Strategic Tenancy Policy was easy to read, one did not agree, five did not know and two did not answer the question.



Twenty-four tenants felt the draft policy was easy to understand in terms of what the Council was proposing, one did not agree, five did not know and two did not answer the question.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

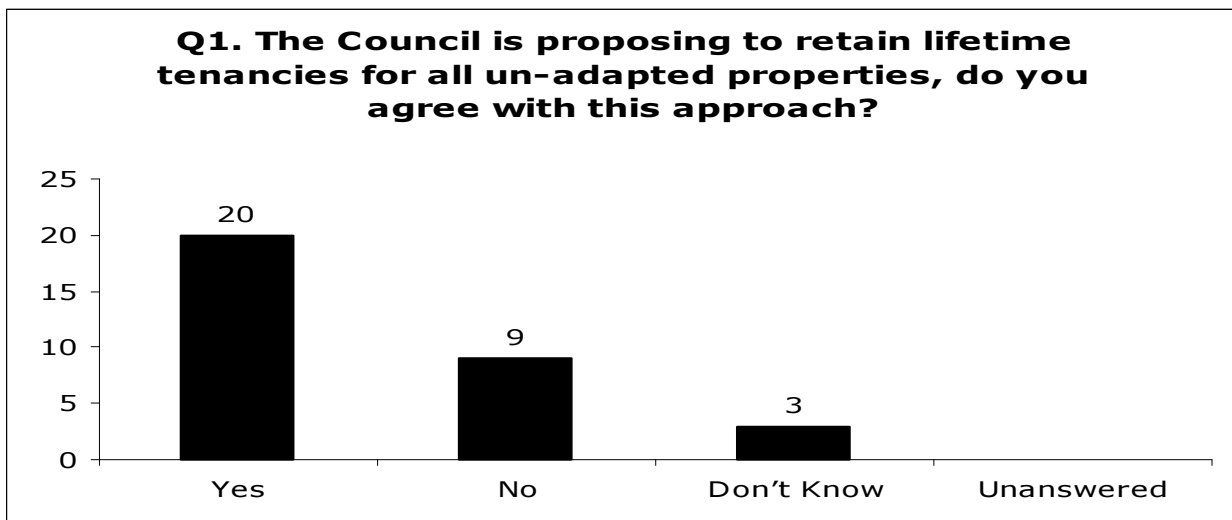
Some issues with the policy were not clear.
Need clarification and explaining to tenants through workshops.

Our response:

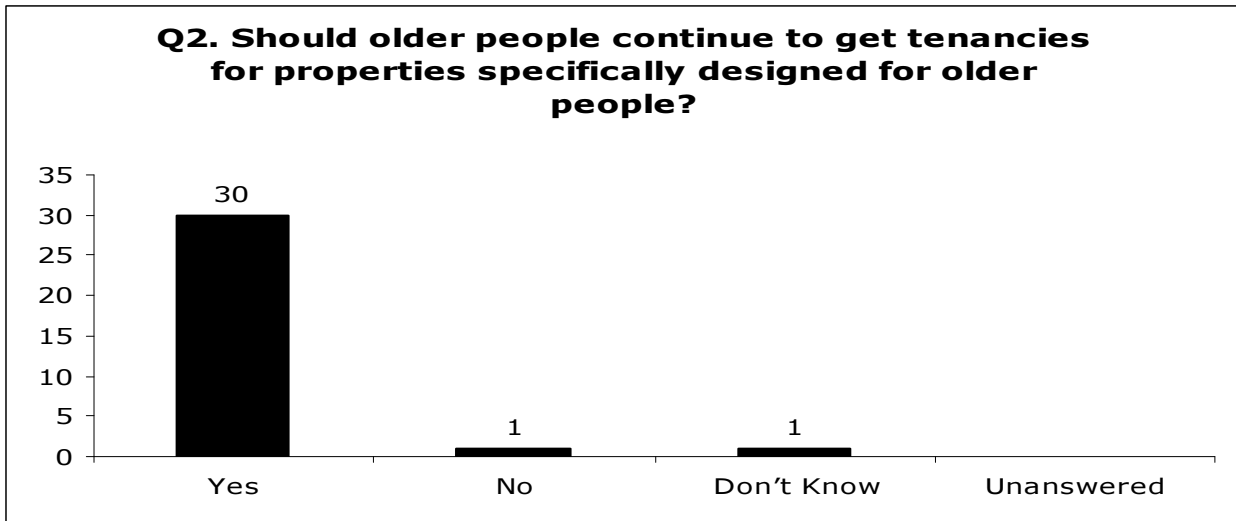
- Tenants found the policy easy to read and were able to understand what the Council was proposing. However it was suggested that further clarification and explanation of the policy to tenants through the use of workshops would be required.

STAFF EVENT

Lifetime tenancies



Twenty staff members agreed with the proposal to retain lifetime tenancies for all un-adapted properties, nine did not agree and three did not have an opinion.



Thirty Bury Council staff members agreed that older people should continue to get lifetime tenancies for properties specifically designed for older people, one did not agree and one did not know.

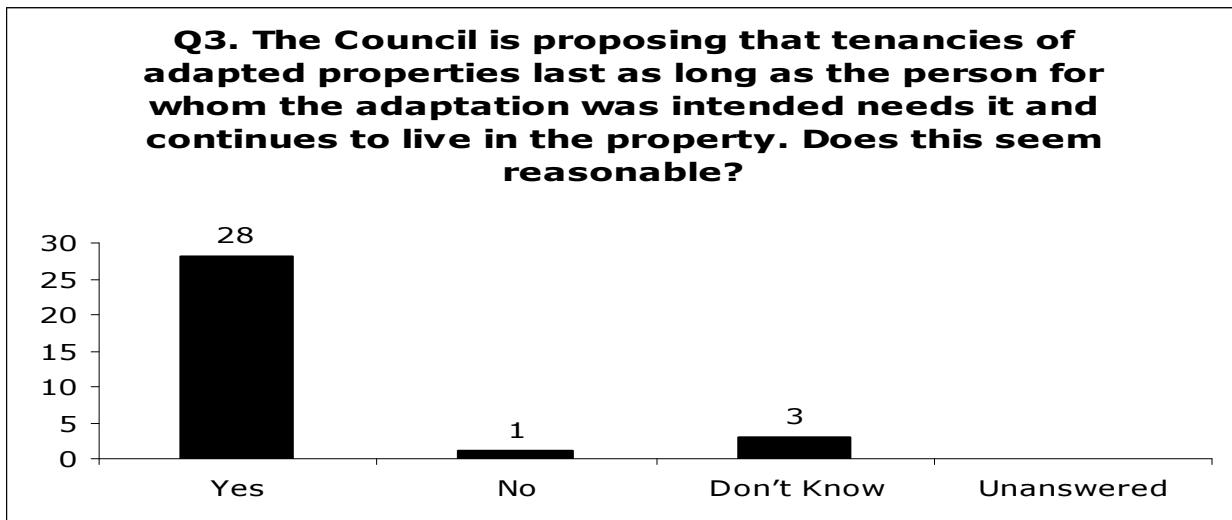
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

People's situations can change. The Council do not have enough stock to offer lifetime tenancies. The group questioned that this is hard to monitor. Do not want lifetime tenancies, what happens to existing tenants with a lifetime tenancy?
Asked whether housing associations would need to implement this strategy into their policies. Discussed that this is maybe the reason people opt for council properties. Group agreed that tenants should not be given lifetime tenancies.
Group agreed that lifetime tenancies should be offered to older people. May not be a substantial amount of time that the tenant accommodates that property. Hassle of older people moving.
Do not give lifetime tenancies and review over what period of time. A regular assessment of need is required. Review after minimum 5 years as a household's housing need may change.
10 years would be an acceptable period, if made mandatory would be able to get into properties to view the state of them.
Annual visits do not occur for all tenants, so would be difficult to police.
Average length of a tenancy in Bury is 5-10 years.
Housing benefit changes may force people to move anyway.
However the majority of older people in lifetime tenancies do not want to move, if we offer incentives e.g. find accommodation, helping with decoration, could be beneficial. Supporting older people within that process, does not necessarily mean financial incentive.
Tenants should be assessed on individual cases and should be monitoring within the first few years of their tenancy.
Agreed that older people should receive lifetime tenancies.

Our response:

- Staff supported the continuation of lifetime tenancies for un-adapted, general needs properties for older people. It was also felt lifetime tenancies should not be offered as a rule, and that a review after 5 years needs to take place to determine whether circumstances have changed.

Adapted properties



Twenty-eight staff members agreed that tenancies of adapted properties should last as long as the person for whom the adaptation was intended needs it, one did not agree and three did not express an opinion.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Agree property should be given back as there is a high need for adapted properties.
There are costs associated with having to adapt another property because the able bodied tenant refuses to move out.
If it is a low level adaptation then just take it out. Need to match the property with a tenant first.
Look at housing options before agreeing to the adaptation. i.e. stair-lift ordered for property and tenant moved to Red Bank before it was fitted.
Possibility of an officer to review new tenants after 2/3years. Incentives for helping move people who do not need adapted properties anymore.
Re-audit properties and assess the equipment, question is do we have enough resources to do this. Applicants and properties need to both be reviewed.
Suggestion to lease stair lifts/equipment within properties on a semi-permanent basis to provide additional benefits.
We do a lot for people who have mobility issues but we adapted properties for people who are visually impaired.

If someone needs an adaptation, then their accommodation should be altered to fit needs.

Concerns were raised with regards to how it fits with equality issue in terms of excluding tenants in terms of what adaptations they need?

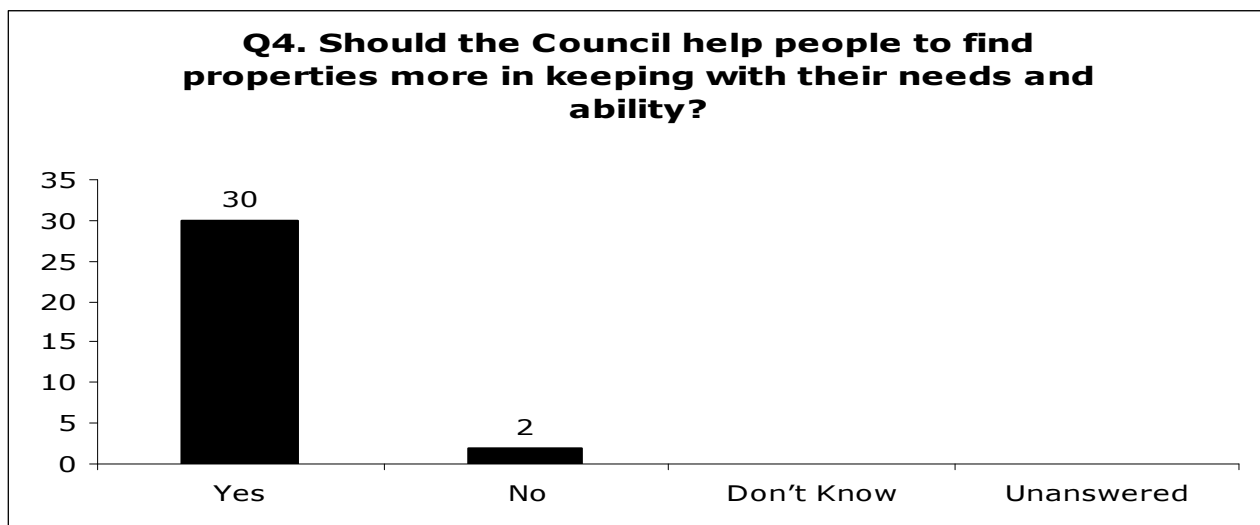
Issue is that Council is then left with too much stock with adapted conversions.

Direct lets will help a lot as adapted properties in the past have been housed to tenants who do not require adapted accommodation due to choice base lettings. The group agreed that adapted properties should only be distributed via direct lets.

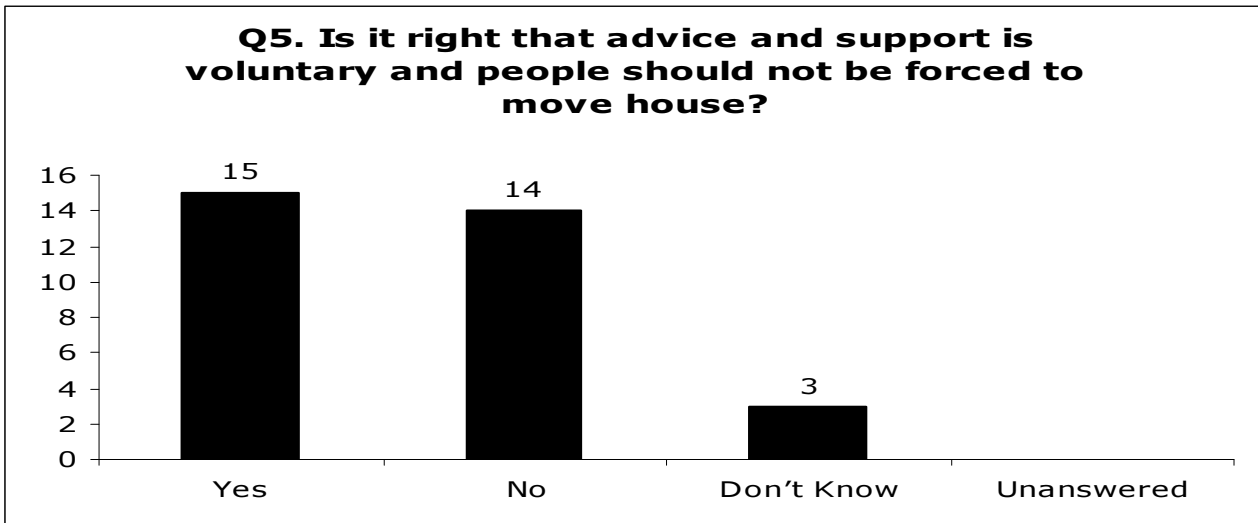
Our response:

- Overall staff agreed that adapted properties should be for disabled people who actually need the adaptations only and incentives should be offered to entice those people living in adapted properties to alternative accommodation.

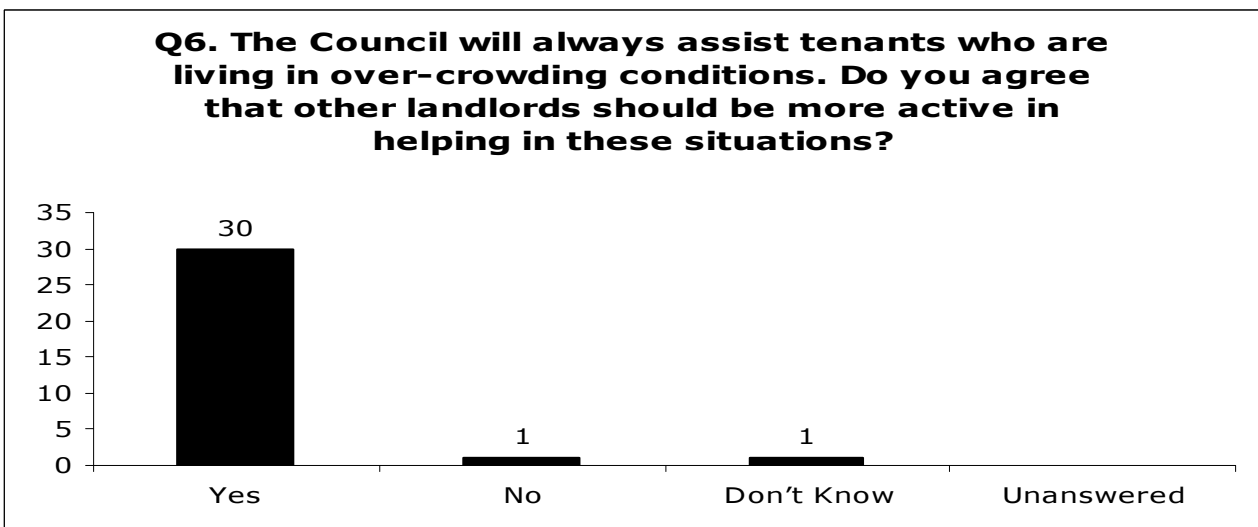
Under-occupation and over-crowding



Thirty staff members agreed that the Council should help people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and ability and two did not agree.



Fifteen Bury Council staff members agreed that advice and support is voluntary and people should not be forced to move house, fourteen did not agree and three did not know.



Thirty Bury Council staff members agreed that landlords should be more pro-active in helping those tenants who are living in over-crowded conditions, one did not agree and one did not know.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

If dealing with private landlords, a reviewed list is needed. A lot of private landlords would not accommodate tenants on housing benefits. Private landlords are concerned on welfare of their properties.

Tenants would rather opt for lifetime tenancies within Council.

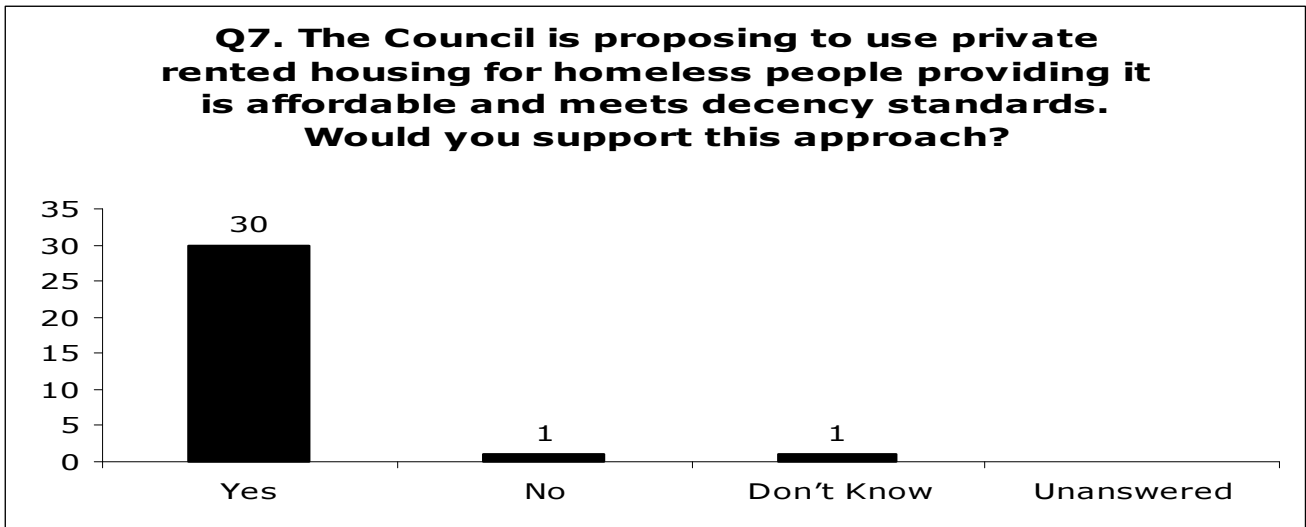
All comes down to the incentive for tenants to downsize, i.e. helping people with moving charges, offering proper support and advice, covering removal costs.

Group discussed bedroom tax, depends on whether a tenant can afford to accommodate as a single person in a 3 bedroom property. Lifetime possessions and memories, trying to respond to older tenants in Bury, try to accommodate to 2 bedroom property. If someone is downsizing then they could access a property they would like and need.
Need help and support to move.
Needs to be approached sensitively.
Could be a role for someone to proactively contact tenants and hold their hand through the process.
Some elderly only want to move to bungalows in specific areas and will wait for it to become available.
Promote mutual exchange and home swapper.
Most landlords will not be concerned that their tenants are living in overcrowded properties.
Maybe offer one bedroom more than required as an incentive. i.e single person move from 3 / 4 bed to 2 bed
Should not force people, they should be encouraged and given the support they need to downsize. All about giving incentives.
Problems are people do not want to move due to memories, the hassle of moving. Need to let tenants know what is available.
We need to change the attitudes of tenants, need to suggest people to go to private sector. Affordable rent levels, around 80% of market value, will not be able to get affordable rents to private sector prices.
Overcrowding relates to the Council not knowing if people are willing to downsize. Incentives are needed for under-occupation.
Should encourage them, negotiate issues concerning with overcrowding so tenants are aware of the need to downsize.
Communication is important to tenants. Promote benefits of moving i.e. reducing housing bills, helping tenants to de-clutter.

Our response:

- Staff agreed that the Council should be helping people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and agreed that advice and support should be voluntary and that people should not be forced to move.
- Assisting tenants with the move and offering incentives is key. It was suggested that an officer is employed to concentrate on downsizing and 'hold the tenants hand' throughout the process.

Homelessness



Thirty staff members agreed that the Council should be using accommodation in the private rented sector for homeless people providing the property is affordable and meets decency standards, one did not agree with using this type of accommodation and one did not know.

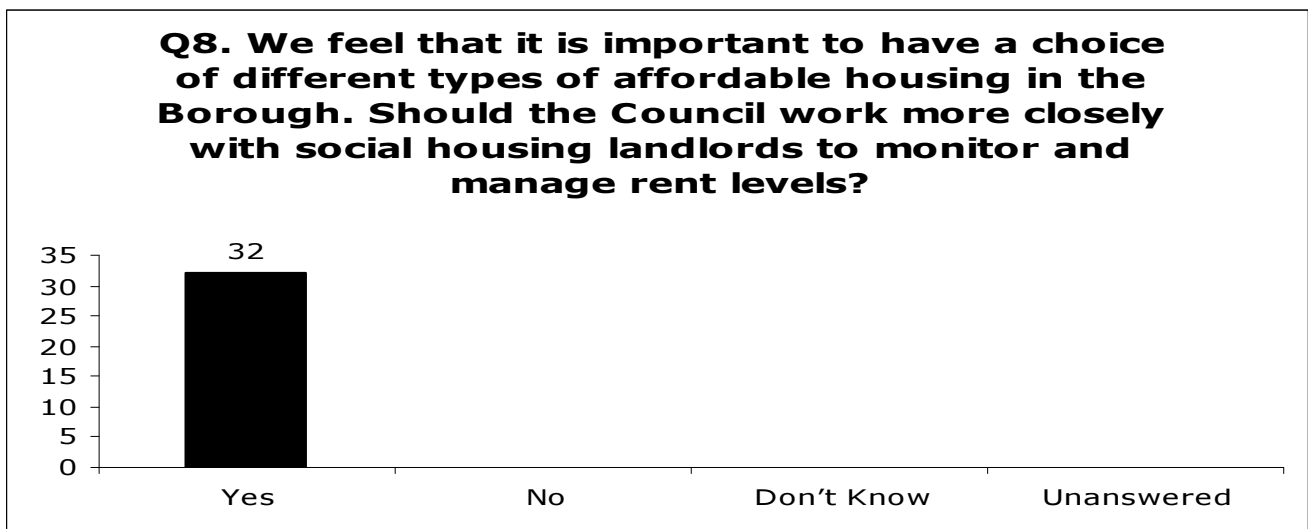
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

First step - should be allowed on housing register whilst they are looking for something more permanent.
Trying to give people a greater security and that they have more permanency, could be offered another 12 months.
Affordable rent issues, tenants cannot necessarily afford private rented properties as in some cases private properties are rising. Single tenants then do not necessarily have anywhere to go.
Homeless people would probably say no to this.
Using accredited landlords only.
Need to do more marketing and customers expectations are above and beyond. How do we make better use of communication team.
People are worried in private sector as they think it's not secure.
Issue on suitability, the Council needs to make sure that properties are safe, the need to pay for annual checks for gas and electricity.
Important that private landlords provide good standards of care.

Our response:

- Staff agreed with the proposal to use accommodation in the private rented sector for homelessness people, as long as the property is in a decent standard and the tenancy was sustained.

Affordable rent conversions



Thirty two Bury Council staff members felt that the Council should be working more closely with social housing landlords to monitor and manage rent levels to ensure there is a choice of different types of affordable housing in the Borough.

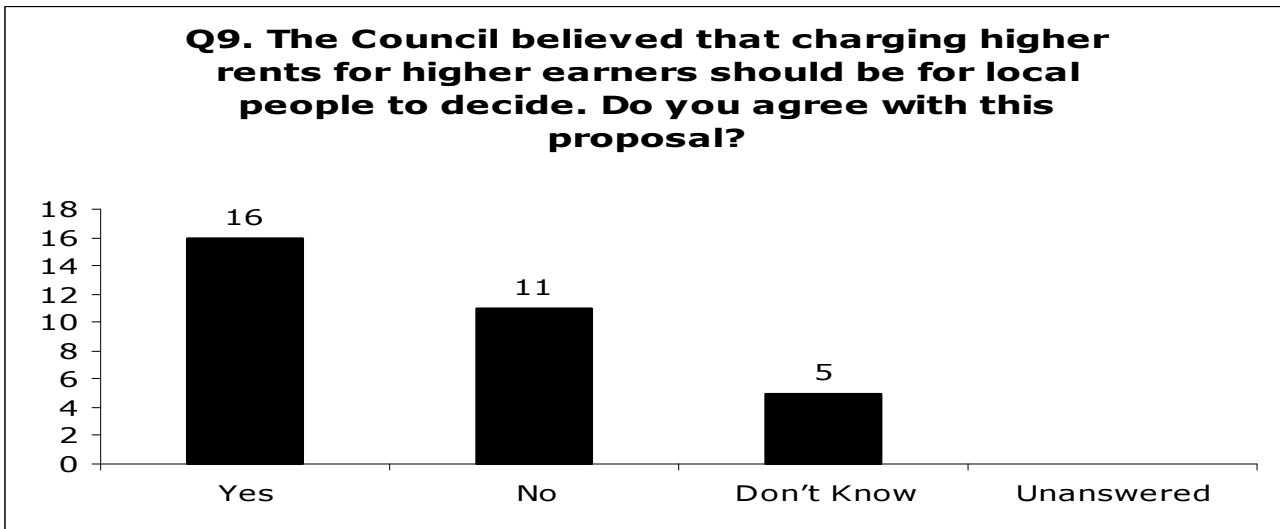
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Group questioned which houses should be used within the affordable rent conversions. Need to be able to monitor properties, do not want to alienate rent conversions. Need to be more pro-active with housing associations.

Our response:

- Staff felt the monitoring of affordable rent conversions needs to take place and that we need to be more pro-active when working with housing associations.

Rents for higher income earners



Sixteen Bury Council staff members agreed that the option to charge higher rents for higher earners should be a local decision, eleven did not agree and five did not know.

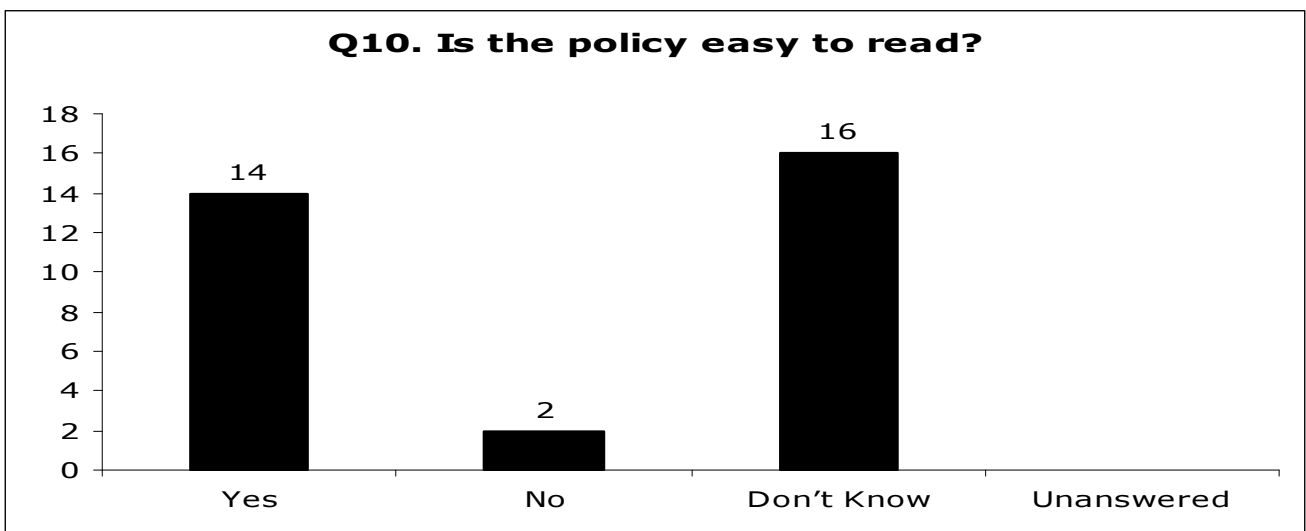
Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

How can you monitor income details? Initially you can, but how do you monitor a tenants earning 5 years down the line as circumstances can change.
Group discussed that higher earners would not perhaps need to be a concern as most tenants who earn the 'higher income' costs would not necessarily be staying within the Council accommodation.
If people were sub-letting this could be an issue, questioned again how we monitor this. Do not necessarily have enough staff to monitor this.
Would this be an incentive for tenants to go for a job, group discussed whether tenants could turn down promotions if it means they can keep there current accommodation.
Most of our tenants are not high earners. Most would want to buy and possible move away from council estates.
Very difficult to monitor. If wages go up and takes you £1 over the threshold but rent goes up £5, tenancy would be worse off.
Push people to Right to Buy. Group discussed how if you are on high money then you would not want a Council property.
Should social housing provide properties with housing needs?
Do not know what tenants spend there income on, could have additional expenses.
People naturally move on. Concern that people could have lived in property for a long amount of time.
The group agreed that the Council cannot assess what income each tenant earns throughout their time with Council housing.

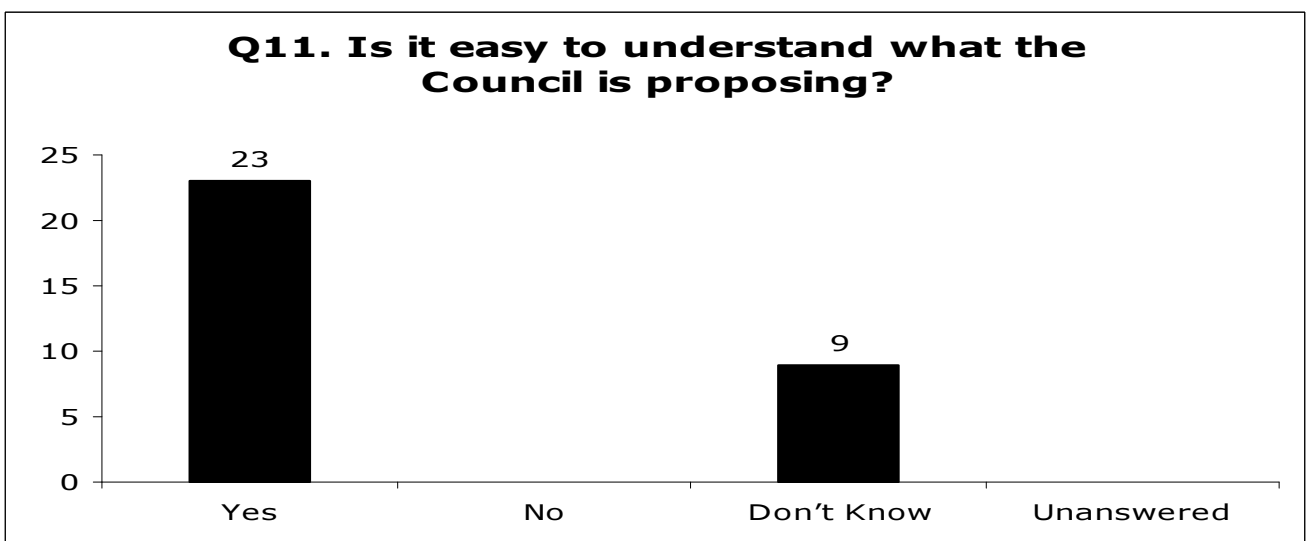
Our response:

- Staff agreed that charging higher rents for high earning households should be a local decision although it was felt that this is not a particular issue in the Borough of Bury.
- In addition, it was felt the continuous monitoring of income levels with tenants would be a strain on staff resources.

Format of the policy



Fourteen Bury Council staff members felt that Bury's draft Strategic Tenancy Policy was easy to read, two did not agree and sixteen did not know.



Twenty-three Bury Council staff members felt the draft policy was easy to understand in terms of what the Council was proposing and nine did not know.

Comments made in the workshop sessions are detailed below:

Easy to read for staff that work in allocations.
Need to digest the policy, jargons have been used and as Housing staff they had an understanding but tenants would not necessarily know what everything house related means.
The group agreed that the policy is fairly easy to read and understand.

Our response:

- Overall staff found the policy easy to read, and were able to understand what the Council was proposing. However, concerns were voiced as to whether tenants would be able to fully understand the content due to the Council jargon used.