

Browne Jacobson advises Bromley Council on the first social housing initiative of its kind to tackle homelessness

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Across the UK, homelessness is an urgent crisis, and one that is set to grow amid the rising cost of living. Local authorities are at the forefront of responding to this crisis, but with a lack of properties that are suitable for social housing across the UK, vulnerable individuals and families are often housed in temporary accommodation, such as hotels and hostels. It's widely known that inadequate housing is a major contributor to poor health, poor education and poor employment opportunities and the pandemic is likely to have made this worse.

To address this problem the London Borough of Bromley turned to Browne Jacobson to advise on a groundbreaking initiative to help many of the 1200 homeless people and families the Council supports.

Associate **Lucy Gregory** was part of the Browne Jacobson team which helped the Council to create a joint venture partnership with Orchard & Shipman, a social housing provider, securing £85m in funding to provide up to 300 affordable housing units to the people of Bromley who needed it most.

Lucy Gregory, Associate

"I was only a year qualified at the time, and to be involved in advising the London Borough of Bromley on its first joint venture partnership of this kind to help some of the most vulnerable people in society, was massively rewarding."

Early in her career at the time, the project gave Lucy broad and varied exposure to complex legal issues which made a tangible difference to people's lives. "I was only a year qualified at the time, and to be involved in advising the Council on its first joint venture partnership of this kind, to help some of the most vulnerable people in society was massively rewarding", said Lucy. "More experienced team members of the team made a point of involving me in their various workstreams, making sure I understood at every stage and explaining the rationale behind our advice. This made it even more meaningful for me."

Browne Jacobson's role in advising on the creation of the joint venture partnership for the Council involved several of its teams and offices coming together to advise on the banking and finance, property and local government aspects of the project. This was the first time a project like this had been undertaken and the Browne Jacobson team was able to connect the different needs of the Council, social housing developer and the lender in finding a solution to a pressing social issue.

"Our knowledge of local authorities from a cultural as well a legal perspective was really important to our client and to the success of the project", said Lucy. "The quality of the housing stock, as well as the ongoing care and maintenance of the properties once the residents were in them, were key drivers for the Council and the social housing provider in forming this partnership," she continued. "We worked in a really integrated way with the client team, walking them through each of the documents and unpicking the Council's concerns/needs at each stage of the process."

Due to the complexity of the project, working effectively, together as one team was essential for Lucy and her colleagues. The project had many layers, with each team working on different elements all of which had to be knitted together. “Finance isn’t an area I know much about but colleagues in that team took the time and effort to explain to me how their advice related to the overall project” Lucy explained. “Even though I was working with colleagues I hadn’t had the chance to meet in person before, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration at Browne Jacobson, so we quickly developed a great working relationship. This project really embodied learning on the job and gave me an amazing amount of exposure so early in my career.”

This Council joint venture partnership was created to address one of the most urgent societal issues we face – the need to tackle homelessness by providing good quality housing – and is something that could be replicated by other local authorities facing similar challenges moving forward.

Reflecting on her experience, Lucy said: “I’m proud to have been involved in a project that has such an important social purpose and which addresses a real problem in society. We look forward to sharing our learnings with other local government bodies to support them with similar challenges.”

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