

# London Tenants Federation

Report March 2008

## **LTF 'Open Meeting' 20<sup>th</sup> February 2008 The Draft Mayors Housing Strategy - Climate Change Issues**

### **Aims:**

1. To facilitate a meeting, open to London's council tenant and leaseholder representatives, about what the Mayor is saying in his draft housing strategy on 'tackling climate change' and how this will impact at the local level.
2. To enable the London Tenants Federation and borough wide tenants' federations and organisations in London to respond to consultation on this particular issue.
3. To assist tenant representatives in evaluating policies and 'improvement' proposals relating to 'addressing climate change' as they develop at the local level - in terms of effectiveness, cost and sustainability.

**Meeting format:** The meeting was attended by more than 50 tenants and leaseholder representatives of 14 borough wide council tenant federations and organisations - (Southwark, Lambeth, Camden, Islington, Haringey, Enfield, Hammersmith & Fulham, Ealing, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Harrow, Lewisham, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster). Tenant representatives from Bromley and from a housing cop-operative in Camden also attended. Apologies were given from representatives of borough wide tenants' federations / organisations in Newham, Hackney, Hounslow, Barnet and Brent.

The meeting was chaired by LTF members - Bev Brigden (Sutton Federation of TRAs) and Henry Talman (Hammersmith and Fulham Federation of TRAs).

Suzanne Le Miere from the Mayor's Energy Team and Tony Rose from the Greater London Energy Efficiency Network attended the meeting as invited speakers.

Workshops were organised on issues on 'Fuel and Cool Poverty'; 'Water Supply and Flooding'; 'Design of New and Existing Homes' and 'The London Picture and Sustainability'

Guest facilitators worked alongside LTF members in each of the workshops. These were – Jenny Bates, London Campaign Co-ordinator, Friends of the Earth, Barry Atkinson, Consumer council for water, Jennifer Daothong, Housing Policy Officer, Housing and Homelessness Unit, GLA and Irene Fernow, Project Manager, Energy Centre for Sustainable Communities)

The meetings plenary session feed back main points of discussion in each workshop.

Information packs were distributed to attendees (pack attached to this report)

## Speakers:

**Suzanne Le Mierre** focused on the Mayor's Climate Change Action Plan which the draft Mayors Housing Strategy complies with. In her presentation she informed the meeting attendees that -

- Cities are responsible for 75% of the world's CO2 emissions.
- The Mayor has a comprehensive plan to reduce emissions. Strategies relating to housing and which refer to climate change include – the Mayors Housing Strategy, the London Plan (recent alterations particularly), the 'Green Homes' and 'Green Energy' programmes.
- Londoners will not have to reduce their quality of life to tackle climate change, but will have to change the way we live.
- The Mayor's target is to reduce carbon emissions in London by 60% by 2025 (25 years earlier than national targets).
- His targets can only be achieved with help from central government and many of the organisations in London.
- 38% of emissions in London (when aviation emissions are excluded) come from domestic dwellings, which produce 44 mt of CO2 each year.
- 54% of domestic CO2 emissions come from space heating and cooling; 18% from water heating and the rest from appliances, lighting and cooking.
- The Mayor has significant powers over new housing in London. The London Plan suggests the need for 540,000 to 728,000 new homes over the next 20 years. It is vital to minimise CO2 emissions. This is an easier task in new homes than in existing ones. The Mayor's housing strategy sets a minimum level 3 (of the Governments 'Code for Sustainable Homes' standards) for publicly funded schemes. Innovation and Opportunity Fund homes are to attain levels 5 and 6 sooner than others.
- The Mayor's powers are limited in relation to existing homes. He aims to go beyond decent homes and develop a 'Decent Environment Standard' with the support of an Innovations and Opportunity fund. The Climate Change Action Plan and the Green Homes Programme were launched in 2007. Schemes initiated to support these include - advice provision in partnership with the Energy Savings Trust; London-wide insulation projects for cavity walls and lofts (in partnership with British Gas); websites, such as 'DIY planet' and the 'Mayors Insulation Campaign' - aimed at encouraging people to change their behaviour, (e.g. turning off lights or reducing central heating thermostats by one degree)
- The Mayor's targets relate to fuel poverty, but he has limited control over the major issues relating to this – i.e. fuel prices. His 'Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Strategy' will include policies and proposals on fuel poverty, mostly through developing cheaper and more efficient decentralised energy – (combined heat and power).

- The Mayor will expect housing associations to show they are becoming green organisations. Other initiatives for organisations include – training local authority officers, the Green 500 scheme for large organisations, and Better Building Partnerships for Major Commercial Landlords.
- The Mayor's Housing Strategy was published in Nov '07. Consultation with the London Assembly has now closed. Public consultation will commence in May '08, after the Mayoral election.
- The call for evidence on the Mayors 'Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Strategy' also to be published after the election.

**Tony Rose** spoke about fuel poverty. He said -

- It is generally accepted that a fuel poor household is one which needs to spend more than 10% of its income to heat its home to an adequate standard of warmth (generally 21 degrees centigrade in living rooms and 18 in other rooms).
- There are 3 main components of fuel poverty – incomes, fuel prices and the energy efficiency of homes.
- The effects of fuel poverty are increased economic hardship and low indoor temperatures. Low indoor temperatures present a significant potential health hazard. Temperatures of below 18 degrees centigrade, causes some discomfort and risk of adverse effects occurring – such as respiratory infections, bronchitis, heart attacks and strokes. There are significant risks of hyperthermia in household temperatures of below 10 degrees centigrade.
- We tend to underestimate the numbers who are fuel poor in London. The government definition of income includes housing costs – these are much higher in London and so inflate income calculations.
- Every 1% rise in fuel prices increases the number of fuel poor households by 40,000.
- Deregulation (privatisation) of gas and electricity that has resulted in huge increases in costs. Immediately after they were privatised prices fell, but have continued to increase since then.
- In 1996 there were 5.1 million fuel poor households. By 2003 figures has dropped to 1.2 million.
- Reductions were mostly through income measures and only 17% due to energy efficiency measures.
- Figures for the number of fuel poor households have risen again to 4.4 million. This increase has been as a result of fuel price increases.
- Fuel poverty also increases the number of households in fuel debt. Nationally over 1 million gas and 1 million electricity customers have a long term fuel debt.

- The Citizens' Advice Bureaux receive approximately 80,000 enquiries about utility debt per annum.
- Energy companies penalise customers who don't use direct debit. And despite being asked by the regulators to equalise methods of payment for gas, the differences have continued to increase.
- Only 31% of Londoners pay for gas by direct debit, whilst in the SE, 46% of households pay by direct debit.
- Most of the consumers who use pre payment do so to avoid getting into debt. Pre payment costs per unit are much higher than direct debit.
- One of the best things that could be done to reduce fuel poverty would be to bring the direct debit rate to those who use pre payment.
- 'Social tariffs' are being introduced, but they assist only minimally. For example, British Gas had equalised the pre payment cost per unit, with that of direct debit for only 750,000 'vulnerable customers' by Feb 2007.
- Each local authority should have in place a fuel poverty strategy.

#### **Questions and comments to speakers:**

- Clarification was requested on heat loss / CO2 emissions through building fabric / single glazed and poorly fitted windows.
- There are around 3 million damp old existing homes in London. New housing stock might go up to 700,000 over the next 20 years. Tenants are not permitted to go to the energy savings trust and get insulation. What's the ratio in terms of funding in relation to addressing climate change issues, for new and existing homes (including advice agencies)?
- Combined heat and power stations were being built 15 years ago in Islington, but the council wouldn't make use of this on local housing estates because of the cost of the pipe work. Will the Mayor pay for this?
- Concerns about the cost of fuel to those who are just above the benefit levels were expressed.
- Information was requested around private leaseholders who need to have additional insulation in their homes, but who can't afford it.
- There are many existing local authority communal heating systems that are not properly maintained. The Mayor would need to tell them to maintain any new systems properly.
- There are issues of residents living in under occupied homes who find it difficult to heat their homes.
- For most tenants direct debit is impossible. You can't set up an account if you get paid weekly and even if you get paid monthly there can be problems around going into the red.
- If you could chose to introduce an unfair fuel cost system it would be the one currently in existence - cheaper rates for direct debit and higher rates

for pre-payment. Representations need to be made at government level about this. Direct debit is about free market economics - selling as much as possible by what ever means possible.

- Construction of new homes will get the priority over existing homes.

### **Plenary session – reports from workshops:**

**Fuel and Cool Poverty** - facilitated by Irene Fernow (Energy Centre for Sustainable Communities) and Michael Beverley (Kensington and Chelsea TMO)

*One in six British households is 'fuel poor'. The Government's targets for eradicating fuel poverty are not being met. 'Cool poverty' (households are unable to afford to buy or run systems to cool their homes) is also a problem in London where we increasingly suffer overheating during the summer months. Will the Mayor's Housing Strategy address these problems?*

- Schemes exist in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea around helping fuel poor vulnerable residents
- Inefficient and expensive communal heating and hot water systems should be ripped out.
- It is important that individual residents are able to manage heating controls of communal systems in their own homes.
- Huge percentage increases in heating charges for communal systems have been imposed recently – without consultation.
- Residents living on limited means have to contribute disproportionately to the cost of communal systems, where they are unable to control use.
- Other problems with communal systems include – arbitrary 'heating periods' – September to May; frequent breakdowns, especially in mid winter with no guarantees of refunds for loss of service or compensation for use of expensive electrical heaters; arbitrary mechanisms employed to arrive at average costings per household.
- Could individual energy meters be installed in homes where there are communal systems?
- There are no existing incentives available for linking up neighbourhoods where combined heating and power facilities exist.
- Insulation schemes should be neighbourhood or borough wide in approach – rather than targeting individual households.
- Initiatives exist within the private sector to provide insulation.
- Local authorities should work with Primary Care Trusts to achieve local solutions.
- There is a need for energy efficient windows and insulation.

- Cost effectiveness (long and short term) of 'improvements' is a significant issue.
- Red tape often gets in the way of reality.
- Consultation is often meaningless.
- There should be direct input into local policy changes through tenants and our landlords at the local level, rather than imposition by government.
- An example of a success story from Enfield was given. The scheme included the provision of secondary double glazing, the removal of a plant from the roof top and replacement with a super controlled system, hot water supplied at no additional costs. Charges are apportioned differently.
- We should be collecting other examples good as well as the bad.
- Could we contribute to raising awareness of how much people are being 'ripped off' by the direct debit system?
- Should we not also be saying that the direct debit system is 'bad' – given that it seems to be cheaper at the expense of those who are poorer paying a higher price through pre payment?
- The benefit system is not compatible with direct debit.
- Many of the poorest in our community do not have access to bank accounts.

**Water Supply and Flooding** Facilitated by Barry Atkinson, Consumer Council for Water, Clive Palmer (Tower Hamlets tenant) and Sharon Hayward (LTF Support Worker)

*A 2006 House of Lords Select Committee report highlighted the Government's failure to analyse demand and supply of water as well as of potential flooding in relation to its house building targets. What is the Mayor doing about this? How affordable is water metering? Are we paying the price of water companies' failures to address London's crumbling water infrastructure?*

- Water metering is a con – and will not impact significantly on water usage. Poorer households will reduce their water usage, whilst those who can afford to pay are unlikely to reduce their usage.
- 40% of homes are anyway un-meterable.
- Properties built after 1990 are metered.
- There are huge issues relating to crumbling water infrastructure (and as it is mostly underground its poor condition is hidden from us).
- The structure as it exists will not be able to support the levels of new build proposed by the Mayor. This is a big problem when most of the homes being built are not what we want and not what is needed.
- There has been a huge failure to assess the impact of new build on the existing water infrastructure. It is easier for us to see and assess the

impact on local schools or doctors, but we can't see and most of us are ignorant of the situation underground.

- There is no obligation on the government or the Mayor to consult with water companies about the impact on water infrastructure of huge amounts of new housing.
- There are two strategies relating to water in London – ‘The Mayor’s Water Strategy’ and ‘The Mayors Climate Change Action Plan’.
- Reductions in water pressure have impacted detrimentally on local authority tenants. London Councils agreed to accept a 50% contribution from Thames Water towards the cost of additional pumps for medium and high-rise accommodation. This was without consultation with tenants. The contributions made by local authorities met from the Housing Revenue Account – i.e. tenants are footing the bill through their rent payments.
- The aim of reducing water pressure was to minimise leakage and reduce the number of new leaks. We need to get back to the pressure we previously had. Thames Water is making a fortune whilst at the same time failing to address water leakages in the crumbling pipe work. At its current pace of pipe work replacement, it could take it 128 years to replace the network.
- How much of Thames Water’s profits are going into addressing this problem? Wouldn’t we be better to renationalise this utility? How much of the pipe work could be replaced with Thames Water’s profits?
- New pipes and infrastructure is essential and requires huge amounts of money. The problem is that private companies don’t want to pay and nor does government.
- Are the water pressure reductions here to stay?
- The sewerage system is just as old and is also crumbling.
- There are huge issues about the levels of competence of the various private companies involved in both the assessment of problems and of carrying out works.
- There is failure on the part of local authorities to maintain water storage tanks.
- We need sustainable urban drainage systems.
- Using filtered rainwater for washing cars, clothes, flushing toilets, watering parks and gardens is not practical.
- The House of Lords Select Committee Report (2006) recommended large scale re-use of treated wastewater – but this is expensive in terms of carbon emissions.

**Design of new and existing homes** – facilitated by Jennifer Daothong / (GLA Housing and Homelessness Team) and Chris Graham (London Leaseholders Network).

*Much of the Government and the Mayor's focus is on reducing carbon emissions in new homes. Should there be a greater emphasis on existing homes - or on commercial buildings? If so what could be done and who will foot the bill? How might we evaluate any short or long term benefits?*

- The down side of having a compact city is the heat island effect – resulting in growing issues of ‘cool poverty’.
- Higher densities reduce the city's carbon footprint.
- Generating power locally reduces loss and utilises waste heat.
- A more highly skilled workforce is required to attain high performance buildings.
- There are legislative requirements – the Code for Sustainable Homes; the British Research Establishment's Green Building Code; the Decent Homes Standard; planning regulations; local and regional planning policies.
- The Code for Sustainable Homes covers: energy and CO2 emissions, water, materials, surface water run off, waste, pollution, health and well being, management and ecology.
- What are the environmental issues regarding the existing stock?
- Standards for local authorities should be enforced.
- There is need for more apprenticeships.
- There should be enforcement of a higher code on private developers.
- High density levels are not favourable to families with children.
- There are too many one and two bedroom flats being constructed across London.
- We seem to be chasing our tails; filling every bit of space with homes that we don't need whilst the serious issue of building enough low cost rented homes is ignored.
- There are problems of water scarcity and potential flooding.
- Where can tenants go for advice?
- We must respond to the consultation on the draft Housing Strategy.

**The London Picture and Sustainability** – facilitated by Jenny Bates (Friends of the Earth) and Dave Morris (Haringey Federation of Resident Associations)

*How does ‘tackling climate change’ link with other ‘sustainability’ issues in London - such as general overdevelopment of the wrong type of housing and facilities; lack of social amenities and infrastructure? What are tenants and residents priorities? How can tenants and residents in each London borough*

*work with environmental and other organisations to address climate change issues?*

The discussion in this workshop was introduced with an explanation that members of the LTF had, in 2003, set out a definition of 'Sustainable Communities', which can be summed up as: 'Stable communities that evolve through bottom up solutions, having community spaces and activities accessible to all and homes that meet our needs via good consultation and democratic accountability'

The workshop facilitators stated that in the light of the threat of dangerous climate change there was need to consider how such social sustainability can link together with the urgent need to also create environmental sustainability. To assist with discussion, additional background papers produced by Haringey Federation of Residents Associations were distributed to participants (enclosed with the LTF information pack).

Discussion was prompted by three questions.

**How do we press for genuinely sustainable communities and neighbourhoods, with the type of housing, open spaces, local facilities and amenities we need?**

- In the 1940s, 50s and 60s housing was planned with all the facilities in the immediate neighbourhood; the ability to plan has been lost especially as cash-strapped Local Authorities these days have less resources for public services and amenities.
- Housing now is not adequate, not for big families. Very few new homes built are for those who need them (social housing).
- People used to be able to live next door when married, families stayed together.
- Housing is built so that every sound travels.
- Housing is put up without concern for how environmentally sustainable it is - it is just about money.
- You should be able to open the window and breathe God's free (clean) air, and for there not to be a draught if the window is closed.
- Climate change is the big thing and most of the problem is the type of housing.
- We need more input into decisions; more local power
- Local Development Frameworks are now long-term strategies and are top down

**What kind of environmentally sustainable policies, practices and lifestyles are needed and relevant to our lives? Eg. Regarding travel options, waste reduction and recycling, food, consumer choices, workplaces and jobs etc.**

- The need for proper monitoring because of the waste of money if things are not thought through.
- If people are given a poor toilet seat and then can afford to replace it, they will (i.e. the waste of that).
- Getting dual-flush toilets can be a battle.
- Documents that have a large amount of black in them that waste toner when printed are a problem.
- Problems of how recycling is collected mixed - after previously having separated it out.
- Waste should be a source material for anaerobic digestion producing a biogas, we should not transport waste out.
- The finances of a free collection of food waste.
- Improvement of public transport systems so that people can leave cars at home. We should be able to grow much more food locally (allotments etc).

**How can we promote these policies, link up with others also concerned in our own boroughs, and take action together? How can we ensure that tenants and residents (and our local associations) are fully involved in this process and that we find bottom up solutions which fulfil our needs and empower rather than disempower us?**

- Form alliances in each borough such as of Residents and Tenants Associations, Friends of Parks groups, allotment groups and local Friends of the Earth groups. The Sustainable Haringey Network was used as an example.
- Emphasise not just the negatives about climate change but also the positives about how sustainability is good for people and good for the environment like if walking and cycling and public transport are easy/safe/affordable.

*LTF is an umbrella organisation bringing together London's borough wide council tenant federations and organisations*

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