

London Tenants Federation

London Housing Strategy Consultation Meeting 06.05.09 Hosted by Hammersmith and Fulham Federation of TRAs

London Tenants Federation consultation packs on the draft London Housing Strategy were laid around and parts of the pack were used as exhibition material for a drop-in session prior to the special London Housing Strategy meeting hosted by Hammersmith and Fulham Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (HAFFTRA).

Present: Attendance sheet attached.

Welcome: Marie Thomas, Chair of HAFFTRA welcomed everyone to the meeting. Speakers for the event, Debra Levison from the Mayor's Housing and Homelessness Team and Jean Kerrigan from Lambeth Tenants Council and one of the LTF delegates on the Mayor's Housing Forum were introduced.

Debra Levison's Presentation: The draft London Housing Strategy was published in November '08 for consultation with the London Assembly members. A further draft will be published by the 21st May, when a three month public consultation with the general public will commence.

The Mayor's powers: The Mayor was given new powers by the GLA Act 2007. He is required to produce a statutory housing strategy. He has powers over housing investment and has a range of planning powers. The Homes and Communities Agency, which replaces the Housing Corporation has a London board which the Mayor is responsible for chairing. It is England's only regional HCA board. The HCA must have regard for the London Housing Strategy.

The Mayor oversees the allocation of funds for new build via the HCA, the allocation of decent homes funding for the boroughs and also has a 'targeted funding stream' for things such as bringing private sector homes up to a decent standard and for extensions and conversions of council homes to provide family sized homes.

The London Housing Strategy: The economic landscape has changed significantly since the credit crunch, with falling house prices and problems for investors. Until now new social rented housing has been delivered in part on the back of private development, but this is now falling apart. The strategy has to address housing need, issues of affordability, quality of new and existing homes, climate change issues, providing opportunities for people to move into other tenures and to get into work.

Raising aspirations: The strategy covers the need for all homes in London, rented and owner occupied. The Mayor has promised 50,000 new affordable homes in the next three years. He wants a mix of social rented and intermediate homes and wants more family homes. He is introducing a new

'First Steps' programme – a low cost home ownership scheme to get people onto the housing ladder. He wants to create mobility across boroughs and to provide better protection for the private rented sector through investment from large organisations like those dealing with pension funds.

Improving the quality of homes: The Mayor is dedicated to improving the quality of homes. In the summer he is publishing a housing design guide. Greening homes is also part of the strategy. New homes will be required to meet laid down environmental standards.

Regeneration schemes: Many regeneration schemes are dependent on cross subsidy. The Mayor and the HCA are currently pumping money into stalled schemes in order to kick start them.

The Mayor is also allocating money to bring empty homes back into use.

He is looking for new models for publicly funded homes.

He wants to see an end to rough sleeping. He intends to improve management of homes and to empower tenants.

The Mayor will hold a conference on the strategy and produce other documents which relate to the strategy will also be out for consultation in the near future. They include

- A regional investment plan
- The London Plan
- New planning guidance
- The Housing Design Guide

Questions and comments to Debra (numbered) and responses (in italics):

1. One glaring omission is that of the needs of sheltered tenants. Housing services are being removed across the UK because of cuts to supported housing grants. There needs to be consultation with sheltered tenants to find out what they need and want.

There is a section in the strategy that relates to supported housing. The money though for supported housing is a borough led budget over which the Mayor has no control. The strategy provides standards for wheelchair accessible homes and the Mayor is keen for older people to access better mobility across London. If people have ideas about how he could influence borough policies please include these in consultation responses.

This is about elderly people being part of a community, not just about housing standards

- 2 RSL tenants should be represented at the regional level.

The Tenants Services Authority is strong on tenant consultation. They may be able to help in addressing this issue.

- 3 The change in the split of social rented and intermediate homes will be of detrimental in Hammersmith and Fulham. We have lost 180 – 200 social rented homes in a project in White City. How will the Mayor ensure that council sticks to policies to ensure 30,000 new social rented homes are delivered over the next three years?

The Mayor is in the process of negotiating targets with London boroughs. He prefers to use the carrot rather than stick approach. Some of the 50,000 affordable homes are already in the pipeline.

- 4 There are problems about mobility between boroughs – particularly when you have boroughs like Hammersmith and Fulham that have good schools and NHS services. People with poorer services will want to move here leaving less for local residents in housing need.

One of the main reasons for attempting to address mobility is that much of the new housing will be in East London, so there needs to be mechanisms to meet that need pan London.

- 5 We need quality not just quantity. Lack of noise insulation is a big problem and a key concern for many tenants.
- 6 Regeneration schemes are grinding to a halt here. One here, in White City was supposed to be a public scheme with the health authority. There is a 20 flat site and the council can't decide whether it wants housing association or private. In another scheme no private developer is interested. They are emptying an estate in the south of the borough and a decision has been taken to knock down, but I don't see where people are to move to. It seems that the most of the funds for social rented housing is going to go to Newham and Hackney, not to places like Hammersmith and Fulham that already have sites where homes could be built.

Where homes are to be built relates to boroughs housing capacity studies. The reason that boroughs like Newham are getting more is that they have greater capacity there for new homes.

But if you are not careful sites in Hammersmith and Fulham will go the same way as the Ferrier Estate in Greenwich.

HCA investment is going into schemes that have ground to a halt.

- 7 Will £60,000 to bring empty homes back into use as social rented housing be enough?

The Mayor will focus on homes that have been empty for more than six months. Its a start and is more than has been invested in the past.

Jean Kerrigan – London Tenants Federation delegate on the Mayor's Housing Forum: Jean began by explaining that the LTF is an umbrella organisation bringing together representatives of borough wide tenants' federations and organisations to discuss issues that are of concern to tenants

together, until a consensus opinion is reached. LTF delegates try to speak on behalf of London tenants where ever we can.

LTF has two delegates on the Mayors Housing Forum and by virtue of the fact that the LTF also chairs the Community Engagement sub-group of the Forum it also gets an additional third seat at the table.

Most of the members of the Forum are statutory organisations or developers but LTF representatives do try to work with others from voluntary sector organisations that are there, like Shelter, Homeless Link and private tenants.

LTF believe it is very important for tenants' federations and organisations to respond to consultations like the London Housing Strategy.

Its member representatives have already had some initial discussion on the proposals and will also use former responses to previous London wide housing and planning strategies in its formal response to consultation. It will also make use of the reports from the three consultation meetings including this one. Reports from these meetings can be submitted with the LTF response or from individual borough federation / organisation responses.

The statutory organisations and the developers will make their responses and it is important that tenants' voices are heard too.

LTF members are sceptical Mayors proposals for addressing London's housing problems. There is huge need in every London borough – people spending years on waiting lists, in temporary accommodation and in overcrowded homes. LTF members believe that building more council housing is the best solution, particularly in the current economic climate.

They question what 'affordable' is. For example the Mayors 'First Steps' low cost home ownership will be open to households earning up to £72,000. This means that relatively high earners will benefit from public subsidy at the expense of people in greatest need.

It was reported at the Mayor's Housing Forum meeting in January that very few private developments are occurring in London and minimal social housing is being built. The response to this from the Mayor's office was that there should be more low cost ownership / intermediate housing, even though housing associations are struggling to sell them and that there are 10,000 or more sitting empty. At the last meeting some one from the Mayors office proposed that intermediate homes should be there to rent for a while then buy. There seems to be a total reluctance to accept the fact that this and the market generally will not address housing need in London.

LTF delegates consistently argue for the need for accessible, affordable homes for families to live in London. The question is how do we get this?

We all know people who are overcrowded – in situations where people are unable to have a proper family life.

There also seems to be too much emphasis on empty private sector homes. We know that in most boroughs, councils are selling off street property family homes that could be bought back into use if money were available to do this.

There are problems with the mixed tenure estates that the Mayor wants. On our own estates, homes that have been sold through the right to buy are increasingly being occupied by private tenants of leaseholders – leading to transient rather than stable and sustainable communities. These tenants have no security, know they are not going to be there for long, have little interest in engaging with or caring for the community they live in. It is often the cause of anti-social behaviour.

Jean encouraged federations TRAs to respond to the consultation that will formally commence on the 21st May.

Questions and comments (numbered) to Jean and responses (in italics):

1 The issue of affordability or lack of it is a key concern for many of us. People need rented homes that they can afford. The majority can't do this without claiming benefits. The priority must be to ensure everyone has a roof over their heads at rents they can afford; somewhere they can live in peace and harmony, have a good family life and raise children. There is an obsession with this 'climbing up the housing ladder'.

2 I thought there was supposed to be £169 million for a regeneration scheme here. What's happened with these finances?

Presumably this is a government issue.

There was a refusal at the Mayors Housing Forum to simply accept many schemes dependent on the private sector have failed and that a new model is required. They are taking about kick starting schemes to produce homes that people in need won't be able to afford. It would be better to put money into family homes that both councils and RSLs could bring back into use for rent rather than putting them up for sale and being lost to the social rented sector for ever.

3. The Assembly members are sceptical about the change in split of social rented and intermediate housing and preferred the previous Mayor's set targets rather than individually negotiated ones.

Estate renewal has often meant a loss of social rented homes. In Kensington and Chelsea this is being proposed.

4. Hammersmith and Fulham was one of the few boroughs that took up on a scheme to help people move from under occupied homes. Most boroughs were not interested. More money should be put into schemes like this – it's a good scheme where there are people that do want to move.

There was a proposal in the borough for a £5 million HCA scheme to clad tower blocks. They were looking at selling flats on the upper floors of a 23 storey block rather than leaving them empty. The idea was also to have a

concierge. There was investigation into whether anyone might market the scheme. Estate agents were approached but most said they couldn't see the scheme working in a block of council tenants.

The Mayor and the HCA are really trying to grapple with the problems and looking to come up with new models that will deliver and have allocated money to kick start regeneration schemes.

5. Money allocated to kick start schemes in Southwark have resulted in one which was designed to be a mix of private and social rented ending up being all 'affordable housing', which is good – but presumably not what the Mayor intended. In another on the Aylesbury Estate money has been allocated to start the scheme, but it is not clear whether anything but a first small section will actually get built.
6. The other problem about mixed tenure is the lack of engagement by leaseholders or private tenants. These are people's homes, there is such transience in the private sector. This is my community; social housing tenants are different from private tenants. I'm proud to be a council tenant. We need to look at the reality. We want to be here to build our communities where the next generation of our families can live near us. We want them to stay here not be more mobile.
7. We want affordable homes with affordable rents.

The assumption of the desire for mobility is based on the private sector. You should ensure you challenge this in your response to consultation.

Mobility provides choice (Debra Levison)

8. Youngsters have no choice, they are forced to move. My family has lived in the same area for five generations, but my children and grandchildren have been forced to move. That's not because they want to.

If people are given a choice of getting a home in East London rather than not getting one then they may well want to move. (Debra)

That's forced choice.

9. That's what the Nazi's used to do.
10. I want to challenge the mixed tenure community's focus. How can you have a community when everyone is moving all the time anyway?

Thanks from Maria: Maria thanked Debra, Jean and the LTF for coming out to Hammersmith and Fulham to present information about the London Housing Strategy. She said she felt that HAFFTRA was now in a position to be able to go through the debate at the meeting and to be able to put together a response to the consultation. She said she hoped that those attending from Kensington and Chelsea and Ealing would also make responses to the London Housing Strategy consultation.

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

London Tenants Federation, C/o Camden Federation of T&RA, 11- 17 The Marr, Camden St, London NW1 0HE
E-mail info@londontenants.org Tel 020 7874 5464 Web Address www.londontenants.org