

London Tenants Federation

Consultation Pack on the London Housing Strategy

This will be London's first statutory housing strategy which all boroughs will be obliged to comply with.

What will this mean for your community?

Does the strategy address your community's needs regarding new and existing homes?

Make sure your views are heard

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London Tenants Federation is an umbrella organisation bringing together London's borough-wide council tenant federations and organisations.

We exchange information, make shared responses to government consultations and sometimes campaign together. Where we can, we work with tenants of other tenures and with other community and voluntary sector organisations. We operate by consensus.

The London Tenants Federation has representation on the Mayor's Housing Forum. One of our delegates chairs the Forum's Community Engagement Sub-group.

The London Tenants Federation was the only tenants organisation, and one of only a few voluntary sector organisations, invited to attend and give evidence at two Examinations in Public of alterations to the London Plan.

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Knur Unger, Rhur District Tenants Associations speaking at the LTF Conference 2006

The Greater London Authority has awarded us a small grant to encourage tenants organisations to respond to consultation on the draft London Housing Strategy.

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London Housing Strategy

The London Mayor is responsible for publishing a strategy setting out his vision for addressing London's housing problems. It will be London's first statutory housing strategy which London's councils will have to comply with.

Funding for the Mayor's plans: The Mayor has responsibility over London's resources for investment in new and existing housing. The resources comprise three different parts:

- £5 billion over the next three years for new, affordable housing.
- £440 million for 2008/11 for London boroughs to meet the decent homes standard by 2010/11
- £285 million for 2009/11 for a range of programmes entirely at the Mayor's discretion that come under what he calls his 'Targeted Funding Stream'.

Consultation: Consultation on the draft London Housing Strategy has already taken place with London Assembly Members and as a result some changes are likely to be made.

A three-month public consultation period begins in May, after which further alterations may be made. The final strategy is likely to be published in the autumn after gaining approval from the Government.

The London Tenant Federation (LTF) encourages its member borough-wide council tenants' federations and organisations to respond to the consultation as well as taking part in a London-wide response.

London Housing Strategy

LTF tenant consultation pack: This pack provides information on the Mayor's proposals, LTF comment, key points made by London Assembly members in their response and space at the end for your comments.

Section 1. Affordable housing

Section 2. Mix of homes and mixed communities

Section 3. Design quality, standards and process

Section 4. Regeneration

Section 5. Private rented housing

Section 6. Environmental standards

Section 7. Empty homes

Key points from the London Assembly Members' response

Your comments: Please email or post your comments to us (comment sheets at the back of this pack). Contact details on the front page of this consultation pack.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

1. Affordable Housing

Background:

- 330,000 households are registered on London council waiting lists.
- Around 54,000 households (three quarters of which have children) are living in temporary accommodation in London.
- The cost of helping an existing tenant into low cost ownership, releasing an empty social rented home, is half that of building a social rented home.
- Current market conditions have seen a continuing fall in house prices a slump in sales and rising repossessions.

The strategy proposals:

- 50,000 new affordable homes to be built by 2011, 30,000 of which will be social rented.
- The 50% affordable housing target to be scrapped. The Mayor will instead negotiate a target with each borough.
- The current split of the affordable homes, 70% social rented and 30% intermediate, to be changed to 60/40%.
- Use of £130 million to develop a 'First Steps' housing programme to encourage more low-cost home ownership. The scheme is aimed at young professionals. Those with a household income of up to £72,000 a year will be eligible to access the scheme.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

1. Affordable Housing

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- There should be higher targets for social rented housing.
- Building new council homes should be a priority.
- Many people have been forced into home ownership, often way above their means, because of the lack of low-cost rented homes.
- Intermediate homes are not 'affordable', even for those they are designed for.
- In February 2009, 10,060 shared-ownership housing association homes were unsold and empty.
- A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report of November 2008, suggested that shared ownership cannot be regarded as a 'stepping stone' to full home-ownership, since only half of those in the sector move on to full ownership.
- The Council for Mortgage Lenders forecasts UK repossessions will hit 75,000 in 2009. Around 500,000 people are now unable to support their mortgage payments.
- Right to Buy has fallen by 85%
- *Will the Mayor's proposals address London's housing needs? If not, what needs to be changed?*
- *How should 'affordable housing' be defined?*

London Housing Strategy Proposals

2. Mix of homes and mixed communities

Background:

- 200,000 London homes are overcrowded.
- Only 30% of the homes in the social rented sector have three bedrooms or more, compared to 60% in the owner-occupied / private sector
- An extra 587 'supported' homes are needed for each year until 2017.
- Almost 70% of London's housing association wheelchair homes are being let to households with no wheelchair user

The strategy proposals:

- The target for larger homes (3+ bedrooms) in the social rented sector to be increased to 42%.
- Mixed tenure developments will be encouraged.
- The Mayor's Targeted Funding Stream will include converting and building extensions to social rented homes.
- The GLA will produce regular updates on housing supply, property prices and repossessions.
- Standards for 'lifetime' and wheelchair-accessible homes will be enforced through monitoring of new accessible homes.
- New social rented housing should not be built in areas where there are already existing high levels.
- 1,250 new supported homes will be built by 2011/12.
- Disabled tenants to be included in choice based lettings.
- Mobility across borough boundaries will be encouraged.
- A better match between wheelchair users and wheelchair accessible properties will be achieved.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

2. Mix of homes and mixed communities

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- The London Tenants Federation supports the setting of increased targets for family-sized homes, in order to do more than just maintain the present level of overcrowding.
- Standards for accessible housing must be clearly specified in the strategy.
- There is increasing evidence of management problems on mixed tenure estates; relating particularly to young and transient private tenants of buy-to-let landlords.

- *What are your views on mixed tenure communities? Do they help to create 'sustainable' communities?*
- *Should there be more opportunities for tenants to move across boroughs in London?*

London Housing Strategy Proposals

3. Design quality, standards and process

The Mayor believes there are many examples of well designed and innovative housing schemes in London, but also many that are poorly designed. He wants better designed new housing, with better space standards and the adoption of Secured by Design principles to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime.

The strategy proposals:

- A London Housing Design Guide will be produced to ensure higher quality homes are developed with public funding. Private developers will also be encouraged to adopt the standards set out in the guide.
- Guidance on space standards, safety and security, sound-proofing, daylight, natural ventilation and access to private and public open space is to be included in the guide.
- The existing situation, where disabled people are more than twice as likely to be living in unsuitable housing as other Londoners, to be addressed.
- New affordable and market homes to be compliant with disability standards and adaptable.
- Housing associations' expertise in design and management to be built into the design process where affordable housing is delivered through section 106 (planning gain) agreements.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

3. Design quality, standards and process

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- The London Tenants Federation has consistently argued for good internal and external space standards.
- LTF members have also argued that standards should include access to community, play and youth facilities.
- We believe good standards should be implemented across all tenures of housing.
- Standards relating to accessibility and adaptability should be specified in the design guide.

- *Should the production of the design guide be left exclusively to the professionals? Should tenants have an input?*
- *What processes should be in place for reviewing the guide and monitoring its impact?*

London Housing Strategy Proposals

4. Regeneration

Background:

- London has 4 of the country's 10 most deprived wards.
- Levels of London's social rented homes have declined from 35% in 2001 to 26%.
- Social rented housing is increasingly allocated to the most disadvantaged.
- Associated problems in deprived areas include high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, poor educational standards, child poverty, mental and physical health problems.
- The Homes and Communities Agency has recently allocated £186 million to kick-start regeneration projects that have faltered as a result of the current economic climate.

The strategy proposals:

- A common criteria for funding regeneration schemes and the outcomes to be achieved, will be developed.
- Housing regeneration to include social and economic programmes to help people into work.
- Physical improvements to include: designing out crime and improving physical accessibility and thus inclusion.
- Regeneration to be delivered in partnership with existing communities.
- Mixed communities will be promoted.
- Long-term sustainability and the impact of regeneration on equalities target groups will be assessed.
- Best practice relating to social cohesion, tackling anti-social behaviour, reducing crime and engaging communities and gaining their support for proposals to be promoted.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

4. Regeneration

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- Many London tenants have found that regeneration schemes and promotion of 'mixed tenure' communities often results in a loss of social rented homes, green space and community facilities, in order to build luxury flats.
- Increases in buy-to-let, have resulted in more private rented homes where tenants move frequently, promoting temporary rather than stable and sustainable communities.
- Changing an area's social mix by providing housing for wealthier residents does reduce average indicators of deprivation; however recent Joseph Rowntree Trust research found that this can make things worse for poorer communities, since it often results in increased costs of local goods, services and housing.
- *Should councils and housing associations be responsible for addressing the unemployment levels of their tenants – or should they simply focus on managing and maintaining their homes?*
- *If you have been involved in a regeneration scheme, were priorities of the scheme genuinely set by your community? Did you feel fully involved in the scheme?*

London Housing Strategy Proposals

5. The private rented sector

Background:

- The private rented sector has grown rapidly through buy-to-let and now represents almost 20% of London households.
- Standards are worse than in other tenures. Nationally 41% of private rented homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- Almost 50% of vulnerable households in the private rented sector live in non-decent housing.
- Private rents in London can be up to £1668 a week.

The strategy proposals:

- The Mayor will work with the Homes and Communities Agency, London boroughs and other partners to improve the condition and use of private rented homes occupied by vulnerable households. Funding will be allocated through the Mayor's Targeted Funding Stream.
- A London Rents Map, a web based guide giving details of rents in the capital, will be set up.
- The supply of intermediate rented homes will be increased.
- Awareness of Tenancy Deposit Schemes will be raised through tenants and landlords.
- Full use will be made by councils of the private sector to house homeless households where there is an accredited landlord and a minimum 2-year tenancy.
- The number of accredited landlords will be doubled.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

5. The private rented sector

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- There are an increasing number of buy-to-let flats on council estates. Often this has resulted in flats being let to a young transient student community, sometimes causing anti-social behaviour problems.
- Lack of security of tenure in the private sector contributes to the transience of that community. The LTF would support private tenants having security of tenure.
- Huge amounts of money are being paid out in benefit payments to house homeless families in temporary, expensive privately-leased accommodation – some of which are ex-council flats. This money should be spent on providing permanent low-cost rented homes.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

6. Environmental standards

Background:

- The capital's 3.2 million homes account for 38% of London's total carbon emissions (excluding aviation).
- 740,000 London households live in fuel poverty.
- Existing homes will represent roughly two-thirds of the homes that will still be with us in 2050.
- A significant number of homes in the private sector are energy inefficient.

Proposals:

- Reduce carbon emissions by 60% by 2025
- New publicly-funded homes will meet Level 3 of the government's Code of Sustainable Homes (of levels 1 – 6).
- All London homes will reach a Standard Assessment Procedure (energy) rating of at least the UK average by 2016
- Help will be given to private home owners to improve the condition of their homes with an emphasis on improving energy efficiency, accessibility, environmental performance, adapting to flood risk, overheating and water scarcity.
- The Mayor will invest £6 million in improving the quality and safety of London parks and plant 10,000 street trees by the end of his term of office (2012).
- A Better Neighbourhoods standard will be developed as a successor to the Decent Homes Standard and resources identified to implement it.
- The Mayor will work with energy suppliers, housing organisations and advice services to encourage Londoners to switch to lowest cost tariffs and to tackle fuel poverty.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

6. Environmental standards

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- Many local authorities have ignored the possibility of including environmentally friendly improvements within the Decent Homes work – e.g. not providing the choice of a shower rather than a bath.
- There are huge concerns that improvements made through the Decent Homes Standard cannot be maintained unless the current under-funding of management, maintenance and major repairs to council tenants homes (some £2.35 billion per annum nationally) is addressed.
- *Where will the money come from for retro-fitting council homes and achieving a Better Environment standard?*
- *Do you have suggestions as to how councils could easily help to reduce carbon emissions in council homes and also help to reduce fuel poverty?*

London Housing Strategy Proposals

7. Empty Homes

Background:

There are currently 84,000 empty homes in London, 67,000 in the private sector and 17,000 owned by councils, housing associations or other public bodies. Some of these properties remain empty for just a short period, as they await a sale or refurbishment, but more than half of them (35,000) in the private sector have been empty for more than 6 months.

The strategy proposals:

- No more than 1% of homes should stand empty or unused for over 6 months.
- Long-term empty homes, derelict homes or listed buildings should be bought back into residential use.
- Better information should be available to help target action on abandoned and derelict homes.
- There should be no financial incentives (such as council tax rebates) to keep homes empty, as these may encourage the problem.
- £60 million from the Mayor's Targeted Funding Stream will be used to bring private homes back into use.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

7. Empty Homes

London Tenants Federation comments and questions below.

- Many local authorities have large numbers of empty family-sized street properties that could, with extra funding, be brought back to use, rather than being sold off at auction.
- The Mayor's Targeted Funding Stream should be made available to bring these homes back into use.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

London Assembly Members' Response

The London Assembly Members draw attention to the credit crunch and note that new house building in the private sector has effectively shut down. Specifically, they:

- Want details on how the Mayor will ensure delivery of housing developments over the next year.
- Welcome the commitment to retain the 50,000 affordable housing target (over the next 3 years).
- Want targets for family-sized homes, which may be too low, reviewed.
- Suggest there need to be new arrangements and development models to deliver more housing, e.g. Community Land Trusts, mortgage support, local housing companies, co-operative housing, and partnerships.
- Say the strategy should recognise the contribution council house building can make to increasing the supply of affordable housing. They want the Mayor to support councils' ability to apply for social housing grant.
- Raise concerns that the 50,000 affordable homes target could be reached with little new housing supply (e.g. regeneration schemes where homes are demolished and new, lower densities are built; potential double counting of market homes that are converted into intermediate homes; and the possibility that intermediate homes could revert to market homes after the first sale).
- Question the removal of the 50% affordable housing target and seek assurances on new infrastructure.

London Housing Strategy Proposals

- Want to know how the Mayor will respond to boroughs where affordable housing targets are not being met.
- Say the Mayor's argument for changing the 70/30% split of social rented and intermediate homes to 60/40% is based on an out-of-date forecast.
- Want public funding focused on building more social rented homes.
- Ask how attractive intermediate housing is at a time of falling house prices and restricted access to mortgages that risk arrears and home repossessions.
- Suggest the Strategy should include a review date for the Mayor's First Steps programme.
- Ask when a policy will be produced to encourage mobility across London boroughs.
- Support the Mayor's wish to see the highest possible design standards, energy efficiency and water conservation.
- Want to see further detail on how the Mayor will work with boroughs to bring the 35,000 homes that have been empty for over 6 months into use.
- Want grant rates increased for new and approved housing association schemes that are now financially unviable.
- Propose exploration of opportunities for partnerships that could see the public sector take equity stakes in affordable housing, e.g. pension funds investing in new intermediate rented housing.