

London Tenants Federation

Summary of LTF meeting 20.01.09

The London Housing Strategy A Greater London Authority policy officer gave a presentation at the meeting on the draft London Housing Strategy, published in November '08.

London Assembly members have an opportunity to make comment first, and then a formal period of public consultation takes place in the spring.

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

The Mayor is responsible for producing the strategy and is also the chair of the London region's Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) board. This is a new agency replacing the previous Housing Corporation and English Partnerships and allocates money to housing associations for new development. The presentation noted:

Current challenges: relating to the Housing Market. Housing Associations are finding it hard to borrow from banks (to match fund public money allocated through the HCA). Homes they have constructed for sale remain empty. House prices are falling, but building industry costs are still high.

Existing housing problems: 301,000 on London council waiting lists, 150,000 overcrowded homes, lack of affordability, design quality and climate change. The draft strategy includes the following proposals:

- A target of 50,000 affordable homes to be built within the next 3 years.
- Targets for social rented and intermediate homes to be changed from 70/30% to 60/40% respectively.
- Development of a new scheme for low cost ownership products, called 'First Steps Housing';
- Eligibility for accessing intermediate housing to be raised from an upper limit of household income of £60,000 a year, to £72,000 a year.
- Tenants to be able to move more easily across borough boundaries should they wish to.
- Production of a new design guide, better space standards, a new Parker Morris standard and policies to design out crime.
- £77 million is to be targeted at estate regeneration and £60 million on bringing empty properties back into use.
- Greening homes to meet higher efficiency targets

LTF member borough-wide tenants' federations and organisations will make a collective response to consultation and will encourage their members to discuss the strategy and to also make individual responses.

Debate at the meeting focused on the following

- Transparency around the consultation process, what weighting would be given to tenants responses?
- The change in the social rented element of the affordable housing target, given the increasing need and demand for social rented housing.
- Whether or not the strategy factors in increasing population levels in London.
- The problems for smaller housing associations and cooperatives in accessing funds to build new homes.
- Concerns around over-development, lack of concern the impact of this in areas of special environmental interest and lack of concern for the need for community infrastructure in developments.
- The definitions of affordability.
- Higher rents in the Housing Association sector.
- Lack of evidenced demand for intermediate housing. One study found 0.8% interested in intermediate housing, a third of those in intermediate housing said they would prefer to live in social rented housing. The same study found 82% of council tenants happy to remain as council tenants.
- The failure to mention council housing in the strategy and the fact that most council tenants want to see more council homes and a 'right to rent'.
- The Mayor's expectation that the market will solve the problems, when the recession shows that this is a failed strategy.
- Large numbers of empty family-sized homes in the council sector and the lack of available funding from the GLA to bring these homes up to a decent standard.
- The expectation that issues such as improving the environment and tackling climate change can occur without additional resources. It should not be expected that the housing revenue account will cover these things.
- Would the Mayor support RSL tenants having the same security of tenure as council tenants?

A summary of the draft London Housing Strategy can be found on www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/strategy/docs/strategy-summary.pdf and the full draft strategy on www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/strategy/docs/strategy.pdf

LTF 'Challenging the Stereotypes' video The LTF's work plan this year includes making a video which challenges prejudiced and stereotyped images of council tenants, which will be posted on its website and on YouTube. If LTF representatives or others tenants from their organisations or estates are interested in taking part in the video either being filmed or making comment on tape, they should let their LTF representatives know; or contact the LTF support worker directly on 020 7874 5464 (Mon – Wed).

LTF Communications Strategy LTF members were asked to consider a first draft of its communications strategy and ways in which the organisation might improve its communication with borough wide council tenant federations and organisations and other voluntary sector organisations with whom it has links.