

# Summary of consultation on LB Newham's draft Housing Delivery Strategy

On 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Cabinet gave permission to consult on a draft Housing Delivery Strategy. The consultation ran from 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020 to 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

We worked with a wide range of groups and organisations long known to us who we recognise to have a valued stake and interest in a variety of issues relating to housing in Newham, to seek their views on the draft Housing Delivery Strategy.

The intention was to use a blended approach: to work with existing and established forums for organisations addressing housing issues in the borough, as well as creating opportunities for a businesses and other interested parties to give us their views on the draft document. This approach met with a very positive response.

Given the Housing Delivery Strategy is a high-level document, it was felt that this was the most effective way of gaining meaningful feedback. This work ran alongside consultation on our proposed changes to the way in which the Council allocates social housing in the borough. We wanted to capture detailed feedback on the specific proposals in the draft Allocations Policy, so a quantitative, survey-based approach was most appropriate for this. We were thrilled to receive more than 2600 responses to our Allocations Policy survey from interested residents across the borough.

## How we consulted on the draft strategy

We presented and discussed the draft Strategy in detail at a number of well-attended forums and events:

- Newham Homelessness Action Group
- Newham Homelessness Forum
- Newham Private Landlords Focus Group
- Newham Landlords Winter Forum
- Shelter's quarterly meeting

We set up a number of thematic stakeholder workshops, with:

- Over twenty representatives of voluntary, community, and faith sector organisations
- Representatives of four housing associations with units in Newham
- Representatives of a range of property developers and housebuilders operating in Newham, including on two major regeneration sites

We also held focussed discussions with representatives from a number of local campaign organisations with a particular interest in housing:

- Newham Citizens, with attendees including local residents and stakeholders
- PEACH, a community organisation in Custom House
- London Renters' Union, with attendees including local residents
- Focus E15, with attendees including a number residents from Victoria Street



The Newham Recorder published a lengthy article on the consultation at its launch (“Views sought on future of housing in Newham”, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020)

#### **Social media:**

Details of the consultation were shared by the Council’s account posts on Twitter (8<sup>th</sup> September, 6<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December) and Facebook (22<sup>nd</sup> October and 1<sup>st</sup> December) which were designed to attract notice.

#### **Email:**

Attractive and informative invites to stakeholder meetings were sent via email, with attendees invited to share details of the consultation to interested parties in their wider networks. Invites were sent to the VCFS stakeholder meeting via *One Newham* and existing networks with the faith sector and the *#HelpNewham* programme.

#### Limitations to the consultation

The consultation took place subject to the restrictions on gathering under tier 3, tier 4 and national lockdown at different points over the 12-week period. As a result, all meetings and events took place virtually, via Zoom. As with such events all over the country, this may have impacted the level of engagement of members of the public with the consultation, for the following possible reasons:

- People without internet access or lacking confidence with social media, Zoom and Eventbrite might have found themselves unable to participate, or unaware due to the way it was advertised and conducted online
- We were unable to offer refreshments or remuneration for taking part
- We were not able to integrate the consultation into a wider programme of engagement, which might have been easier outside of lockdown

## What the feedback told us

Overall, consultation participants welcomed the draft strategy. Key points included:

- The strategy is a very welcome sign of the Council’s commitment to tackling the housing crisis
- Overall agreement with the scale of ambition in the draft Housing Delivery Strategy, recognising that significant capital investment is required
- Recognition of the links between boosting housing and supporting the local economy, both being crucial to the future of the borough
- Residents want to be involved – in terms of both consultation and engagement, and being part of the solution. We had a lot of feedback around a collaborative or co-operative approach with voluntary sector, community groups and unions
- The need for the strategy to tie into other Council work, such as ‘50 Steps to a Healthier Newham’, and the ‘Towards a Better Newham’, the Council’s Covid recovery action plan.

Those agreeing with the focus of the strategy were very happy to say that it was a welcome statement by the Council, and fully recognised that the Council was investing resources to be part of the solution and wanted to be clear about what it was doing/going to do.

Others indicated a desire for longer-term, bigger picture solutions, highlighting the need for action from national Government on the housing crisis. Respondents also voiced concerns

that the draft strategy was not sufficiently tangible for residents, with a focus on Council processes over resident experience and outcomes. There were also questions as to how the final strategy will be publicised.

The following sections break down the feedback, using the structure of the six chapters in the draft strategy

### Putting people at the heart of housing

Key messages from the consultation were:

- Re-establishing resident associations was widely welcomed
- Explore new ways to inform and engage residents
- Co-production and really meaningful engagement needs to be actively supported as a new way of working through sustained resourcing, training for residents and officers and a clear set of protocols
- Residents should be able to evaluate processes and services, not just a limited role in regeneration – for example influencing how an estate is managed, or how the repairs service works
- There's a need to be proactive in supporting residents on issues like debt and tenancy sustainment
- Work with the voluntary sector to understand the community's needs and reach a broader group of residents
- People may get disillusioned by consultation if it isn't matched by action from the Council
- Some people, for example those with complex needs or experiencing mental health issues, can fall through the gaps in services – need to be better joined up with training for staff, joint working protocols, and the National Reform Mechanism looped in where appropriate

The actions set out in 'Putting People at the Heart of the Housing' also met with strong agreement in the survey.

### Building, buying and securing more and better homes

Key messages from the consultation were:

- Build more homes, especially social-rented homes, large homes and lifetime homes
- Speed up processes to make use of vacant land for housing
- More clarity is needed around what is meant by affordable, genuinely affordable, social-rented and intermediate housing, as these terms are confusing
- Making plans visible to the market would enable the Council to work better with the private sector
- The Council should make smaller sites available for small or niche providers
- The strategy should be clear about the Council's support for CLTs and their potential
- Additional infrastructure, schools and GPs to match the delivery of new homes
- End the Right to Buy which reduces the supply of Council homes
- Keep the history and culture of the Borough alive and avoid poor quality, 'faceless developments'

The actions in this section were the most popular in the draft strategy, with 81% of survey respondents agreeing with our approach and the forum/workshop attendees expressing clear support for more affordable housing to be built in the borough.

Many respondents stated their support for building more social rent homes in particular. There was some confusion and suspicion around other 'affordable' tenures, with Council homes being favoured.

It is notable in the feedback to this chapter that many respondents overestimated the Council's powers to deliver social housing, for example asking why the Council could not deliver 100% social housing, why it was selling off properties through the Right to Buy.

### Addressing the Climate Emergency

Key messages from the consultation were:

- Landlords find government grants for green retrofit to be unsuitable for older Victorian properties
- Concern among some respondents that measures to tackle the climate emergency will result in additional costs for residents
- Support for the adaptation and re-use of existing buildings, rather than demolition and re-build

The actions on the climate emergency produced the greatest share of 'neither agree nor disagree' survey responses, which might stem from the themes of the other chapters feeling closer to respondents' day-to-day experiences.

### A safe and secure private rented sector

Key messages from the consultation were:

- Concern over runaway rents
- Need strong action against rogue landlords
- Concern over ongoing problems with illegal evictions and harassment of PRS tenants
- Landlord accreditation could develop a better informed, better supported landlord sector
- Partnership approach needed with landlords to boost the housing supply and drive up quality
- Investment and support is needed to keep people in PRS tenancies
- Tenants need more information about their rights – the Council could work in partnership with NHS, police, faith leaders to spread awareness
- Overcrowding and poor standards in the PRS are a huge problem for families, especially in the Covid-19 pandemic – could the Council alleviate this with more places for children to play and study

There was a strong majority in favour of actions to improve the private rented sector (PRS). Some respondents suggested measures to tackle high rents that are beyond the powers of the Council, such as rent controls.

## Better Council stock and specialist housing

Key messages from the consultation were:

- Better support and incentives to encourage those living in larger Council properties to downsize when the space is no longer needed
- People on the housing register (waiting list) should be given a clear indication of how long they'll have to wait
- Issues like fly-tipping and rodent infestation affect people's experience and perceptions of Council housing and the Borough as a whole
- Better set out how the Council will support vulnerable young people, adults with mental health issues, people with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence and abuse and people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) into housing

The actions set out to improve Council stock met with widespread agreement. A number of issues raised in resident meetings and through the survey were specific to one individual or their street or estate, but link to wider themes around a desire for greater investment in properties, or linked to antisocial behaviour.

## Tackling homelessness

Key messages from the consultation were:

- Ensure the any temporary accommodation the Council uses is of a high standard
- Build on successes to ensure that we don't return to pre-Covid levels of rough sleeping
- Continued support for people who have formerly slept rough
- Temporary accommodation should be provided inside the borough as far as possible
- A regular forum should be set up for temporary accommodation residents as well as regular communication, to ensure that they have a voice
- Wraparound support to prevent homelessness, including tenancy sustainment
- Continue to support households that have been moved out of borough (regardless of whether the move is voluntary or the only option)
- Work with and support the informal, voluntary-operated services which can offer trusted relationships
- Identify members of the Armed Forces Community and reach out to charities where appropriate
- The National Reform Mechanism should be looped into homelessness/rehousing decisions where appropriate

Respondents welcomed the actions but were able to flag additional concerns, particularly around rough sleepers and the large number of households in temporary accommodation for long periods.