



Westminster
Housing Strategy Summary
Draft for public consultation
Westminster City Council
June 2015



City of Westminster

westminster.gov.uk #CityforAll



Introduction

Introduction

This is a summary of Westminster City Council's housing strategy consultation document. It doesn't cover everything in the full strategy, which is available at www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy

Earlier this year we published "City for All" - our new vision for Westminster based on three themes:

- City of Aspiration – We will enable all our communities to share in the economic prosperity of the city
- City of Choice – We will create opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors to make informed and responsible choices for themselves, their families and neighbourhoods
- City of Heritage – We will protect and enhance Westminster's unique heritage so that every neighbourhood remains a great place to live, work and visit - now and in the future

Housing has an important part to play in achieving all of these aims. We are now consulting on a new housing strategy which explains some specific things we propose to do to make sure we deliver a "City for All". The draft strategy is divided into four chapters: Homes, People, Places and Prosperity. It sets out our plans for the next 5 – 10 years.

A good home in a high quality neighbourhood is important for everyone. However, in a world city like Westminster, achieving this is always going to be complex - space is limited; developing new homes is costly; and demand for affordable housing will always outstrip supply.

We are committed to developing 1,250 more affordable homes in Westminster over the next five years. Expanding supply will allow us to help a wider range of people – we will continue to help the most vulnerable, but we will also be able to give more opportunities to lower to middle income working people vital to the economy. At the moment there are few affordable homes for this group; increasing the supply of these homes will help ensure Westminster does not become home to only the very rich and poor.

Our approach is to help people to help themselves, seeing housing as more of a journey with people moving between different sorts of homes. This helps people make their own choices. It also means we can recycle housing, freeing up homes so we can help more people in housing need. Putting this into action means providing housing options for people at different stages of their lives and helping them take up the jobs and other opportunities their city provides. We cannot do this alone and we need to work with the other housing providers and a range of other agencies.

Westminster does not have the space to meet all its housing needs within its boundaries. London as a whole faces unprecedented housing shortages. Meeting this challenge will need cross-London approaches and the council will take a lead in working with other boroughs and the Mayor to develop these.

Tell us what you think

We want you to tell us what you think of the strategy. Please give us your comments by **Friday 31st July 2015**. You can:

- Complete the online feedback form which you can find on the council website www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy
- Complete the paper feedback form, which can be found at the back of the full strategy, and send this to our Freepost address below.
- Email us at: housingstrategy@westminster.gov.uk
- Write to us at **Westminster Housing Strategy, FREEPOST LON 17563, 19th Floor City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP**



Homes | 1

Homes

- **Intermediate housing** means housing for working people that cannot afford market housing, but are not eligible for social housing
- **Social housing** means housing for lower income people. The law sets out who should have priority
- **Affordable housing** is the term used to describe both forms of housing
- **Registered providers** – private organisations that provide affordable housing (they used to be known as housing associations)

What we plan to do and why

Demand for affordable housing is very high in Westminster. Over the next five years we will work with our partners to develop 1,250 new affordable homes in Westminster (250 each year) to meet this very high demand. Although this target falls short of what we actually need, it is higher than what we have been able to do in the past given the availability and cost of land.

Independent research has found that 240 of these new affordable homes we need should be intermediate and 180 should be social. In response to this we propose to change current planning policy so 60% of the new affordable homes we deliver by agreement with private developers each year, are intermediate and 40% are social. The current split is the opposite.

At the moment there are very few opportunities for people to get into intermediate homes in Westminster - only around 1.5% of housing in the city is intermediate compared with 25% social housing. There is a need for a more balanced housing market. This is particularly important in order to provide housing for workers that are vital to Westminster's economic success.

We will work with our partners to develop new kinds of intermediate housing for people at different stages of their lives. We will also develop our own intermediate housing focusing on that for people with lower incomes that are not currently well catered for. We want people to be able to move between, and on from, products – so they simply do not get stuck in one type of housing and so housing is freed up which can be used to help more people.

On top of the 1,250 additional affordable homes, we will see if we can develop some homes outside the city in places where there is more space and where homes could be cheaper. Despite doing everything we can to develop more affordable housing in Westminster, we can never meet demand - and developing some homes outside the city is one way of providing more housing and choice to our residents. More housing overall will help address London's chronic housing shortage.

We will ensure our housing provider, CityWest Homes, provides value for money through acting on some recommendations from a recent independent review. CityWest Homes provide a very good standard of service, but its costs are high. This is not only because our housing is expensive to maintain, but also because its 12 estate offices give rise to higher management costs than elsewhere. We will focus on providing value for money while maintaining high standards of service. The independent review also highlighted how well-placed CityWest Homes are to help tackle disadvantage in deprived neighbourhoods. We will work with them to make the most of these opportunities.



People | 2

People

What we plan to do and why

Poor quality housing can lead to poor health. We will invest £12 million to tackle damp and cold in council homes; we will also identify 450 council tenants who are at most risk of poor health and work with them on a one to one basis to help improve their living conditions. If unhealthy properties cannot be improved we will dispose of them and use the money to reinvest in better homes.

Currently we provide a range of housing for vulnerable people, but we need to ensure this is right for the future as needs can change over time. We will work with health, social care and other partners to identify the kinds of housing vulnerable people may need in the next few years. We will also work with our partners to ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent people from needing care in the future – a key principle set by Parliament in the Care Act 2014. Meeting these needs means having the right advice about housing options available as well as the right homes.

We want to ensure that older residents live healthy and independent lives for as long as

possible. Housing and other services play key roles in helping people make this a reality – and in preventing older people from going into hospital (and if they do, ensuring they can leave as quickly as possible).

Our older population is growing and alongside this illnesses such as dementia will increase; a high proportion of our older people also live alone. We will work with Adult Social Care to review our stock of 1,000 units of community supportive (sheltered) housing to ensure it meets the needs and preferences of older people. Some of this housing is poor quality and unlikely to meet the needs of older people in the future.

Around 1,000 council tenants are over-crowded. This can have an impact on their health, children's education and on family relationships. We plan a range of actions to address over-crowding for 1,000 households over the next five years.

We accept 600 – 700 homeless households for help each year. Households increasingly become homeless because a private tenancy comes to an end. Although we do everything we can to work with landlords to prevent people becoming

homeless, this is often not possible and they then move into a temporary private home where they can wait years.

Temporary accommodation often needs to be outside Westminster, as private rents in the city are so expensive they cannot be afforded by people who are out of work and on benefits. To help homeless households move quickly into more secure accommodation, we will offer them a private tenancy, where they can manage one.

Homelessness is not just a Westminster problem; it is a challenge for every London borough. We believe there must be a debate across London about the best way of managing it. While we are in the top 10 of London boroughs in accepting homeless households, we have much less capacity to develop new affordable homes than many. This means that homeless households are likely to wait longer for a social home here than in other places. A more strategic, London-wide approach may be needed with the Mayor taking more of a role. This is not because we are trying to avoid our responsibilities, but because the current system is not working well - for homeless people in particular.



Places | 3

Places

What we plan to do and why

Housing renewal is underway in Church Street, Paddington Green, Tollgate Gardens Estate and Ebury Bridge Estate. This will deliver more affordable homes which are both better quality and more energy efficient and also designed to high standards. It will also deliver more and improved community facilities and greater opportunities for local businesses. Because of these benefits, we want housing renewal to become “business as usual”, so it is always considered when and where investment is needed.

We are also working with the Mayor to get Housing Zone status for the next phase of our renewal plans for Church Street (Church Street Phase 2). If successful, this will help to bring in additional funding and support so we can provide more housing more quickly.

Housing services are often located in neighbourhoods where residents have many needs and look to the council and other services for help and support. CityWest Homes will work with registered providers to take a view on what is needed in these areas and look at ways on how a range of different services can be provided in one

place efficiently and cost-effectively.

There are over 40 registered providers with housing in Westminster. We want to do more to work with them and to learn from their experiences and the work they do to support their tenants. We would also like to work with them to have a vision for a local area. Some registered providers do not have a local presence and others have very little stock. Where this is the case we will investigate offering them CityWest Homes management services, or the option to run services from our buildings.

We want all social housing tenants to have good housing management services regardless of their landlord – this may include minimum standards and response times for repairs and complaints. With so many different registered providers operating in Westminster, this is hard to achieve. We will investigate a “preferred partner” system for registered providers – which means we will offer them opportunities to develop new homes with us as long as they sign up to a range of minimum standards.



Prosperity | 4

Prosperity

What we plan to do and why

High demand for social housing from homeless households means we have little ability to provide housing for a wider range of low income people. At the moment there is very little housing for working people with incomes of around £20k or less - even intermediate housing is too expensive for this group. There is a danger that low income workers will be forced out of London as they face long and expensive commutes. Over time we want to let some social homes each year to low income workers who wouldn't ordinarily have priority for them. Because at the same time we will increase social rented supply, the number of homes for vulnerable people will not decrease, however when doing this, we must always be able to meet our duties to homeless households.

Research shows that around half of Westminster social residents who receive Housing Benefit also claim benefits because they have a health condition which can be a barrier to getting work. Caring responsibilities and the cost of childcare are also factors in preventing people from working.

We already run a number of projects such as HELP and HELP Enterprise to help social housing residents and applicants get into work or start their own businesses. Currently we are trialing a new project called FACES (Families and Communities Employment Service) which provides more tailored and intensive support to help unemployed people with children into work. This approach is being expanded through the Working Capital Project with Central London Forward, which will focus on people with health conditions. We will also continue to work with Cross River Partnership and other business partners on the Recruit London project to help social housing residents to benefit from this programme which aims to match residents with West End jobs.

Tell us what you think

We have some questions that people commenting on our proposals might want to address:

Homes

1. Is our target of 1,250 affordable homes over the next five years reasonable? Are there ways we could deliver more?
2. Should we focus on growing intermediate housing and developing new kinds of housing for people on lower incomes?
3. What features of intermediate housing are most important to people on lower incomes?
4. Are there groups of workers who should be given priority because they particularly need to live in Westminster? If so, why?
5. Should we make sure that when providers sell affordable homes in Westminster, the proceeds are reinvested here? If so, how?
6. Should Westminster use its resources to deliver homes outside its boundaries?
7. Should we continue our current housing management arrangements through CityWest Homes?

People

1. What housing do older people in Westminster want and need?
2. What can housing services do to reduce demands on Adult Social Care and health services?
3. Is there a better way to tackle homelessness in London?
4. What is the best way of getting people's views about our housing policies?

Places

1. Are there any estates that should be included in future estate renewal plans?
2. How should residents be involved in estate renewal plans?

Prosperity

1. Should we allocate some social housing to low-income working households who wouldn't ordinarily be considered? If so, when is the right time to do it?
2. What more could we do to tackle long-term unemployment and take up opportunities in the West End?