

Summary of responses to the Westminster draft Housing Strategy

This report covers:

Section 1: Details of who responded

Section 2: Details of meetings attended to discuss the Strategy

Section 3: A summary of comments on each theme of the Strategy

Section 4: Comments on topics which should be included in the Strategy

Section 1: Respondents

- 1.1 The Housing Strategy consultation received 57 responses from individuals and organisations. The types of respondents are shown in table 1 below. The GLA and DCLG did not respond at this stage.

Table 1: Breakdown of responses	
Respondent type	No. of responses
Residents or individuals	21
Resident or neighbourhood groups	9
Housing associations or housing management providers	8
London Boroughs	6
Charities	6
Internal to Westminster Council (including Councillors)	5
Developers	1
MPs	1
TOTAL	57

Section 2: Meetings attended to discuss the Strategy

2.1 Officers attended a number of meetings to discuss the Strategy:

	Meeting	Attendees
1	Policy & Scrutiny Committee	Mix of councillors and developer/housing association witnesses
2.	CityWest Board pre meeting	Mixture of residents, councillors and independent reps
3.	CityWest managers	Mix
4.	Service Improvement Group	People in temporary accommodation and some council tenants affected by overcrowding
5.	CityWest Strategic Committee	CityWest resident representatives
6.	Westminster Residents Panel	Social housing tenants and leaseholders in Westminster (including some housing association tenants)
7.	Cardinal Hume Centre	People using the service – from a mix of tenures
8.	Housing Association Chief Executive Group	Registered provider Chief Executives or nominees
9.	Health and Wellbeing board	Mix
10.	Community Network	Voluntary organisations operating in Westminster
11.	Church Street Futures Steering Group	Local residents and councillors
12.	Westminster Advice Forum	Advice agencies – mainly voluntary sector

Section 3: Comments by each theme in the Strategy

CHAPTER 1: HOMES

Question 1. *Do you think our target of 1,250 new affordable homes over 5 years is reasonable? Do you have any ideas about ways we could boost delivery even further?*

Overall more consultees disagreed with the target than supported it; mostly on the ground that it was not high enough (although some thought it was too high and not deliverable). Most housing association respondents supported the target. There were also many comments about the planning system not delivering more affordable housing in new developments, a point also made at a number of the meetings. Comparisons to other London Boroughs' targets and approaches to affordable housing delivery were made. Some respondents made suggestions about how delivery could be boosted (e.g. development of brownfield land, increasing densities, taller buildings).

Question 2. *Do you agree we should focus on growing the intermediate sector in Westminster and focus on developing more products for people with lower incomes?*

There was more support than opposition for this proposal. Some consultees highlighted the benefits it could bring. Reasons for not supporting it centred on the effect it might have on supply for vulnerable people. Some consultees expressed caution that the homes would be genuinely affordable and that they would benefit the right people.

Question 3. *What are the characteristics of an intermediate home or housing product that households in this sector most need?*

There was a general view that products should be affordable to lower income and middle earners. There was a lot of interest at the meetings about how affordable intermediate housing would be, whether it would be a rented product and who it would be for. Intermediate rent was generally supported and there was interest in whether tenancies would offer long-term security or be fixed term.

Question 4. *Are there any groups of workers that particularly need to work in Westminster and should have higher priority? If so, why?*

There were many different views and suggestions on who should be prioritised – the most common response was that people working in the public sector and service industry should be supported. However there was also a view that households should not be prioritised on the basis of employment type. This opinion was echoed at the consultation meetings where people commented that workers that did not live in Westminster should not be supported as there were good transport links into the City.

Question 5. *What is the best approach to ensuring that receipts from disposal of affordable properties in Westminster are re-invested in Westminster? Is it more important to ensure the London-wide supply of affordable homes is increased?*

There was much support for disposal receipts being re-invested in Westminster but also a view that this was hard to achieve practically and that a pan-London approach to housing delivery would increase supply. This support was often qualified by concerns about concentrations of social housing being created.

Question 6. *Do you think Westminster should be using its resources to deliver homes outside the borough boundaries?*

Views were mixed, with almost equal support and opposition. Most of the opposition came from residents or members of residents' groups, while most of the support came from housing associations. There was a view amongst some that it is better to move into a secure tenancy in outer London than wait for many years in temporary accommodation for a home in Westminster. There were also mixed views at the meetings – while there was often a view that a new approach was needed – the need for strong local communities was also emphasised and that people (particularly the elderly) needed to live near to care and support networks.

Question 7. *Do you agree that we should continue with our current housing management model, and retain CityWest Homes as our housing management provider?*

Support and opposition for retaining CityWest Homes was fairly equal, however there were a number of negative comments about CityWest as a housing management provider – these mainly came from residents.

Other comments not relating to the questions:

Housing management

Suggestions for improvements included:

- sharing more services with smaller housing associations;
- co-locating services;
- improving resident engagement – perhaps the drawing up of a 'residents' charter';
- training front-line staff to offer broader care and support to customers;
- introducing damp and cold as a performance indicator.

CHAPTER 2: PEOPLE

Question 1. *What do older people want and need in terms of housing in Westminster?*

The general view was that older peoples housing should include a range of provision and services alongside it to provide for social interaction as well as just a home. It was also felt that studio accommodation is not appropriate and that the strategy should also recognise that not all older people need care and should consider their wider housing needs and a range of housing products/tenures to match. There were concerns raised about younger members of families having to move away from the older generation because of the cost of housing and suggestions for multi-generation housing to be developed as part of estate renewal.

Question 2. *How can housing services best help to reduce the burdens on adult social care and health services?*

A number of improvements were suggested to the housing stock such as improving energy efficiency and installing high speed broadband. A joint approach to preventing the need for care services was strongly supported by Adult Social Care. Residents that responded emphasised the need for families to stay close together and for older people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

Question 3. *Are there better ways to address London's homelessness problem?*

Charities, housing associations and other London Boroughs tended to support a London-wide debate on the issue and there was recognition that the current system didn't work well. A number of suggestions were made about how to address homelessness such as making use of vacant and empty homes.

Question 4. *What is the best ways of getting people's views about housing policies?*

A variety of methods were suggested, but face to face consultation received the most support. The importance of early consultation and involvement was also emphasised. There was also a view that consultation could be more extensive, in plain English and that it should be advertised in more public areas e.g. GP surgeries and libraries.

Other comments not relating to the questions:

Overcrowding

There is a proposal in the Strategy on overcrowding but not a direct question. Some consultees felt that letting just 60 units a year to overcrowded households is too low and that the problems with overcrowding in Westminster are hindered by; the failings of housing associations; the system of prioritisation which should be revised so that length of time on the waiting list is given a higher priority and too many small units being built. Solutions such as the sale of smaller units to fund delivery of larger ones and introduction by housing associations of space for homework clubs (to alleviate the problems children face in crowded homes) were welcomed.

Housing quality

The proposal in the Strategy to address damp and cold in council homes were generally welcomed, although some consultees would have liked it to provide more detail about how it will be implemented. Pressure by the City Council on housing associations and private landlords to address damp and cold and other quality issues in their own stock was suggested. There was a view that the Strategy was too focused on the social sector and that many vulnerable residents are at risk from poor quality housing in the private rented sector too. Some consultees would like to see the council lobbying government for more energy efficiency funding.

CHAPTER 3: PLACES

Question 1. *Are there any estates that you would suggest for inclusion in the future estate renewal programme?*

Overall there was support for more estate renewal and also support for wider improvements beyond housing supply. A number of estates/locations were suggested for renewal:

- Churchill Estate
- Millbank Estate
- Lillington Estate
- Ebury Bridge Estate
- Harrow Road
- Victoria Fire Station
- Queen's Park (for intensification)
- Brunel Estate

Question 2. *Involving residents in estate renewal plans*

Responses mainly came from residents and housing associations. A variety of approaches were recommended, overall face to face consultation was supported the most, along with wider advertising of consultations.

Other comments not relating to the questions:

Use of council buildings and housing associations having a local presence

These proposals were generally supported at the meetings. However some (particularly housing association) respondents made the point that having a local physical presence was against the general direction of travel of moving to a more self-service approach among housing associations.

Partnership working

Where it was addressed, the preferred partner approach suggested was welcomed. There were suggestions that the City Council could join forces with neighbouring boroughs to develop a preferred partner scheme as many housing associations work across boundaries.

CHAPTER 4: PROSPERITY

Question 1. *What other approaches could we consider to help address long-term unemployment and help local people access the economic opportunities in the West End?*

Some respondents thought the topic did not belong in a housing strategy while others welcomed its inclusion. Consultees criticised the Strategy for not being clearer on what sort of people would be helped into employment. Partnerships with other services, organisations and established charities were suggested to solve long-term unemployment.

Question 2. *Should we allocate some social housing to low income working households that wouldn't ordinarily have priority? If so, what should be taken into account when deciding when to do this?*

Although there was some concern about how the homes would be allocated and who would have priority for them, there was support for this proposal. Some consultees considered however that this would be unjustifiable in the face of such high need for social housing.

Section 4: Comments on areas not included in the Strategy

National policy changes

A number of consultees commented on the announcements and suggest the final strategy is not published until the full impact is known. There is a lot of concern about the changes and their impact particularly on Westminster's social mix.

Private rented sector

The lack of reference to the private rented sector was commented upon by many consultees and at three of the consultation meetings. It was felt that the draft strategy is too focussed on social housing and given that the council discharges its duty to some residents on its waiting list by placing them in the private rented sector, and because of the sheer size of the sector in Westminster, it merits reference in the Strategy. Respondents pointed out that users of social housing experience similar problems to those in the private rented sector and suggested that a private renter's forum could be set up to enable clear dialogue with renters across the city.

Some respondents thought the strategy should address high deposits and letting agency fees (proposing that the council might act as a guarantor), tenancy length and standards of accommodation. There was also a view that the London Rental Standard and London Landlord Accreditation Scheme should be promoted by the Housing Strategy.

Empty homes

Some consultees felt that the number of empty homes, or homes bought as an investment and then left empty is unacceptable and should be addressed. It was suggested that the City Council should lobby for the disclosure of empty property ownership; owners of properties which are not occupied should be penalised

financially; the properties used as temporary accommodation for those on the waiting list; and incentives offered to bring empty properties back into private use. Some consultees strongly opposed “buy-to-leave investments” and thought that the City Council should prevent off-plan sales to foreign markets.

Definition of affordable housing

Some consultees considered that the Strategy should be clearer about what is meant by ‘affordable housing’ and, in particular, about what ‘affordable’ means in a Westminster context. There was a lot of interest in the cost of affordable housing at the meetings.