

Southwark Housing Strategy 2009 to 2016 Consultation Feedback Report

A summary of the consultation responses

October 2009

www.southwark.gov.uk



Introduction

Since summer 2008 Southwark Council and the Southwark Housing Strategic Partnership¹ have been developing the new Southwark Housing Strategy 2009 to 2016. This is available on the Southwark Council website at www.southwark.gov.uk/housingstrategy.

We would like to give our thanks to everyone who contributed through the consultation process.

We think it's important to give feedback to residents and stakeholders who have contributed to this strategy. This document shows how we have used the comments to form our objectives and priorities. The consultation comments were balanced against an evidence base of stock condition and housing need in Southwark, and local, regional and national policy.

Due to the high number of responses received, in this document we have mainly focused on the comments made most frequently. We have collated all comments by topic using the adopted objectives and priorities of the new housing strategy. The comments will also be used to inform other housing related strategies, the Core Strategy, and service improvement.

The two stage consultation process

The first stage between September and November 2008 was a questionnaire to ask people what they thought were the main housing issues in Southwark, and asked what should be done about them. This was designed to be quick and easy to complete

¹ The SHSP is a multi-agency group which includes representatives from housing associations, private landlords, Southwark Council, tenants and homeowners.

and allowed people to make comments on issues they felt were important. Some of the responses were on topics that were outside the scope of the housing strategy. These we have passed on to the relevant department. We received many different comments on a wide range of issues.

The second stage between February and April 2009 involved stakeholders who were asked for comments on a condensed early draft of the strategy. The document included 30 questions as prompts, but respondents were not limited to these and were invited to make other comments.

The consultation was designed to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to participate. We visited many existing groups to raise awareness of the consultation and capture people's views to avoid an over-reliance on the written word.

Who was consulted?

Tenant Council, area housing forums, Tenant Conference, community councils, tenants and residents associations, Home Owners Council, Homeowners Conference, private tenants and owner-occupiers in different wards were consulted through a mailshot to over 800 households, Southwark Housing Strategic Partnership, Southwark Alliance and thematic partnerships, SOUHAG, Homelessness Forum, South East London Housing Partnership, Supporting People forums, councillors, Southwark Council officers, Southwark LGBT Forum, people at shopping centres, Southwark Primary Care Trust, the Greater London Authority and the Government Office for London.

We also advertised the consultation through an article in Southwark Life which is sent to all residents of the borough, through press briefings and the council's website.

Summary of the comments we received and our response

This section gives an overview of some of the most frequently made comments in the consultation. These are arranged by the objectives and priorities of the new housing strategy. Our responses demonstrate how comments were considered. Objectives and priorities are in bold purple type.

The housing strategy is a high level document that sets out our future plans for housing and housing services across all tenures. Understandably, some of the issues raised concerned operational services, but these could not be addressed in the housing strategy. Where we received comments on operational services or recommendations for service improvements, these have been forwarded to the relevant service manager.

Comment	No	Response
Objective 1: Improve the quality of existing housing and use it more efficiently		
Improve the quality of all homes	8	Agreed and adopted
Bring council homes up to the Southwark decent homes standard		
Finish the decent homes programme	4	Bringing homes up to the Southwark Decent Homes standard is still a key priority.
Use existing assets to better meet changing needs		
Give better incentives for under-occupiers, Need to provide high levels of support for elderly tenants under occupying during the move to a smaller property	5	We agree. This is contained in the new strategy. The key method is the "Small is Beautiful" scheme for social housing tenants who are under-occupying their homes. We are reviewing our current approach to under-occupation to see what other incentives may boost take up of this scheme, such as additional support.
Make better use of existing buildings	4	This was adopted. "Hidden Homes" and converting under-used supported housing are two examples of this.
Bring empty homes back into use		
Bring vacant properties back in to use faster	6	This was adopted. The strategy says how we will try to bring empty properties in all tenures back in to use.
Improve the energy efficiency of homes in all tenures		
Make all homes extremely energy efficient and upgrade ventilation systems. More energy saving devices	3	We agree, we are committed to reducing the borough's carbon emissions and the housing strategy explains how we will improve the energy efficiency of homes in all housing tenures.
Improve and maintain the quality of private housing		
Requiring energy certificates to improve the private rented sector is one step. It would be	1	Landlords are required by law to ensure that their property is safe, regarding gas and electricity. The Council's enforcement team works to ensure properties are free from category 1 hazards. Local Housing Allowance rates (housing benefit for

good if housing benefit could be based on the quality of the property. Other tools could be grants, London Landlord Accreditation Scheme		those renting from a private landlord) are out of our control. We support the Landlords Accreditation Scheme which provides training and information for private landlords on how to ensure their properties are well maintained.
We could we have a private landlord 'blacklist'	1	We did not include this. Our preferred approach is to support landlords to improve their properties and become accredited landlords. So instead of seeing if a landlord is on a blacklist you can find out if a landlord has been accredited. We will also tackle bad landlords through enforcement where necessary.
Improve housing management		
Improve the repairs service	14	Responsive repairs and maintenance services for council homes are operational services, and are not included in the housing strategy. Issue referred to Southwark Housing Management service
Re-introduction of regular maintenance contracts	7	See above
More tenancy checks, better control of selling keys on. We would like to see better joint RSL/LA partnership working to tackle this.	5	The new strategy includes a commitment to tackle unauthorised occupation in social housing. We are working on a unique pilot to work with housing associations on this issue.
The lifts are always broken	2	Responsive repairs and maintenance services for council homes are operational services, and are not included in the housing strategy. Issue referred to Southwark Housing Management service.
Improve/Get rid of the Call Centre / Make it easier for tenants to speak to housing officers who can help them, rather than a call centre who cannot	5	Operational services are not included in the housing strategy. Issue referred to Southwark Client Services.
Better safety and security needed.	3	The housing strategy includes a priority about how we will tackle anti-social behaviour.
Don't give tenancies to drug dealers etc. Drug addicts and alcoholics can cause fear and trepidation to others. Children are kept in and the estates/streets become no-go areas	2	Southwark Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (SASBU) has enforcement powers to prevent people drinking in the street, selling drugs and generally engaging in anti-social behaviour. In many cases, anti-social behaviour can be reduced through better planning and design, creating areas that people are proud of.
Better auditing of service	2	Service charging is an operational service area. Issue referred

charges		to Home Ownership Service.
TRAs should do more	2	We are keen to encourage tenants and residents to become more involved in how we deliver services as detailed in the strategy.
Money should be spent better overall	4	The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) assessed the direction of travel of every authority, in terms of its finances and what it can achieve with the resources available. In February 2008 they told us that value for money was good and that the council has in place clearly funded plans for further improvement. The housing strategy explains how we will make the most efficient use of our limited resources.
The Council should listen more	4	We believe that one of the best ways to improve services is to find out from residents what needs improvement. During this consultation we have tried to reach as many parts of the community as possible to find out what people think are the highest priority housing issues in Southwark.
Objective 2: Increase the supply of good quality housing		
Increase the opportunities for housing development		
No comments were received about this specific priority but it is seen as necessary to achieving other priorities for increasing the supply of new housing.		
Increase the supply of housing, particularly family sized homes		
Increase the amount of affordable housing	10	This is a key priority of the new strategy. We are trying to maximise the supply of affordable housing but it still won't meet the all of the demand. We are therefore also trying to make the best use of the private rented sector, prevent people from losing their homes and improve the quality of existing housing.
The lack of family sized homes creates other social issues such as overcrowding which leads to anti social behaviour (ASB)	2	This is included in the strategy as overcrowding and the lack of larger housing is a big challenge in Southwark. We are pushing to increase the supply of larger family housing by setting targets for developers building new housing. We also convert some properties to make them larger. Overcrowding does not directly link to ASB but it can have an impact so it also important there are adequate community facilities in areas and this is reflected in the Core Strategy.
Build more family sized properties	6	This is a priority; we want to allow families to remain in Southwark.
Ensure new housing is of the right type and quality		
Too many flats and office buildings in a small space. No regard to flats on the ground and first floor. Get rid of high-rise accommodation	3	High density is possible but is dependant on good design, which is encouraged through the planning process with all new developments. In order to build the amount of housing needed in Southwark it would be impossible not to build past the second floor. We set targets for amenity space of new properties.
Build housing that meets people's aspirations,	10	Ensuring high quality new housing was included as a priority of the strategy. The standards are set out in the Core Strategy

quality, design, materials size, type landscaping, noise insulation etc		and the Housing Design Specification Guide for Affordable Housing. We try to ensure a good supply of new housing to meet needs and set targets to ensure new housing is of the type needed. We can't meet everybody's aspirations for social rented housing as even with building high numbers of new affordable housing, there will still be a shortage. Therefore we are also trying to make other tenures more accessible and attractive.
Ensure a supply of new affordable housing to meet a range of needs		
Replace old housing stock with a mixture of public and private housing. Better mix of public and private housing. Encourage more professional and higher end housing.	4	The council is committed to a number of major regeneration schemes to replace poor quality housing stock. We recognise the need for new homes to be made available for residents with a range of incomes. This means ensuring a mix of tenures, including: market housing, social housing and intermediate housing.
Have less social housing in some areas due to issues like effects on schools	2	We are developing planning policies which will create more mixed and balanced communities. Developers have to make a contribution towards providing services in an area they are developing. This contribution is managed through a Section 106 agreement.
Better social integration. Create more mixed communities	5	We recognise the need for better social integration in housing and are developing housing and planning policies which will create more mixed and balanced communities.
More social rented properties needed as they're affordable	4	We are trying to increase the supply of social rented properties. We are also trying to make other tenures more affordable such as shared ownership or renting in the private rented sector.
Build more council housing	9	Until recently the most effective way to maximise the new supply of affordable housing has been through building housing association properties. However we will explore all the different funding options to see whether we can efficiently build more council rented properties.
People don't necessarily want to stay in their area. Supply is more important than considering the local demand	2	Whilst this may be true for some households, others would be reluctant to have to leave an area to find an affordable home. It is important to have a supply of homes in a range of areas to allow choice, and allow families to continue their lives in an area they choose.
A lot of families want a house with a garden. More open spaces with trees lining the road. More green spaces	7	We understand there is a lot of demand for homes with gardens. Ground floor properties are also suitable for older people and people with disabilities so are in very high demand. There is a shortage of suitable properties for these groups. Given the shortage of land, not all properties can have gardens but we do have targets for private amenity space for new properties as well as communal space.
There is a need to	19	The Council agrees that the infrastructure around a

protect commercial and employment space and for a good mix of housing tenure to help ensure the local economy is sustained. Housing needs good local facilities There's not enough for kids to do		development is important in supporting the sustainability of the neighbourhood. The Southwark Core Strategy sets out the policies for infrastructure and commercial space.
As places like the Heygate are getting regenerated, what plans for care and carers that support vulnerable people on these estates, have been made?	4	The process of moving people out of a major regeneration scheme is extremely complex and the Council has tried to do this with the minimum of inconvenience to residents. A range of support services are available including special packages to ensure that in cases involving someone with a disability have an occupational therapist's assessment to make sure their new home is suitable.
Objective 3: Enable choice while meeting housing needs		
Enable options for renting in a high quality private rented sector		
The Council should work better with private landlords	4	The shortage of affordable housing means that we need to rely more on the private rented sector to help meet people's housing needs. The housing strategy includes a lot of detail of how we will encourage and work with good private landlords while tackling bad landlords.
The Rugg Report provides a good analysis of the different sub sectors that make up the PRS. It is probably worthwhile considering how these different sectors would apply to Southwark	1	The SHSP also discussed how there are many sub sectors of the private rented sector, both in terms of types of landlord and types of tenant. The partnership agreed we need a whole range of responses between support and enforcement.
Provide options to sustain home ownership		
This priority is a response to a very low level of home ownership in the borough. Therefore to ensure mixed communities we need to help people sustain home ownership where possible and prevent homelessness. We have been monitoring closely how the credit crunch has affected residents and will continue to ensure that we are able to do what we can to help those at risk of repossession or eviction.		
Provide options to access home ownership		
Residents need assurance that their sons and daughters will have a reasonable chance to get on the housing ladder to enjoy owner occupied housing. This is	2	The Strategy includes initiatives to increase home ownership such as shared ownership. We cannot control house prices across the private sector so the reality is we can't guarantee that everyone can have a reasonable chance to access owner-occupied housing. Private property in Southwark can be very expensive and the recent credit crunch has made it more difficult for first-time buyers to get a mortgage, without a large

more achievable through taxation and planning policies, than from a local authority housing strategy.		deposit. We are encouraging developers to build more intermediate housing that is affordable.
Enhance social rented housing options		
Not enough properties on Homesearch	2	The number of properties we have been able to advertise has fallen in recent years, partly due to a low turnover in the social rented sector. We are working to increase the supply of new housing. We are also working with partners, like housing associations to extend the advertising of their properties through developing a common housing register. But we know that supply still won't meet the demand so we are working to make other tenures more attractive and accessible.
The current allocations system is failing to optimize the use of the housing stock to appropriate tenants	1	The current system works well, for example by giving Band 1 (top) priority to under-occupiers who will release a larger home, but there is a severe shortage of supply relative to the numbers of people on our waiting list. We are therefore more reliant on the private rented sector and housing associations to meet housing need.
The current rehousing policy is unfair. Homesearch needs changing. The old allocations system worked better for people in my situation. Having a medical problem and being in Band 3 means I will never be a successful bidder. Something should be done for those people in Bands 3 and 4	9	The Choice Based Lettings system allows people to choose where they would like to live. Many people think this is fairer than the old system where applicants had only limited choice over where they would receive an offer. We recognise that there are many people who would like to move to a more suitable property for medical reasons and in the most severe cases these cases are prioritised in a higher band. The reality is that even if supply is increased, there will not be enough housing to meet everyone's need. We therefore have to prioritise housing for those most in need. We are also trying to make the private rented sector more attractive and accessible as this may better meet people's needs.
Prioritise British born citizens on waiting list	3	The lettings policy prioritises rehousing for the people most in need. The Council follows legislation that tells us who is eligible for housing and who is not. Most foreign households are not eligible for social housing until they have been working or have been resident in the country for a length of time, so are far more likely to live in the private rented sector.
Ensure the right type of housing for an ageing population, supporting independent living		
Increased provision of supported housing for older people with mental health needs	2	One of our sheltered schemes has recently been upgraded to help this client group and other vulnerable older people. The new Housing Strategy recognises the need for the right type of housing to suit people's needs.
Provide support for young people to live independently		
There should be more	2	The current shortage of supply has meant that many young

help for young people without children to find housing. The private sector would be ok but would like help to find properties and people to share with		people have found it difficult to find good quality affordable accommodation. We can provide advice on benefits and how the private sector can help to meet these needs, and will ensure there is a supply of new affordable housing for those wishing to buy their first home.
Local housing allowance rent levels set for people under 25 are not sufficient	1	Setting rent levels is outside of our control; however this does suggest that under 25s may be required to live in shared housing We will monitor how young people are affected by this in Southwark and lobby to have LHA rates which reflect the realities in Southwark. The South East London Housing Partnership will be exploring this over the coming year.
Raising awareness of options of employment and housing, raising aspiration, currently many young people aspire to social rented housing	1	We agree this is very important. Our housing options officers can give advice on what options are available for young people. The housing options centre explains about other options in other tenures as well as providing support for improving skills and finding work to improve income and raise aspirations.
Provide for special housing needs, supporting independent living		
Keep conversions in place. Where possible retain some disabled properties for temporary moves whilst conversions to properties take place	3	The housing strategy includes targets for building new wheelchair homes and lifetime homes. For existing adapted homes, where major adaptations have been made to properties, they are logged on a national database. When a property becomes available to relet, details about any adaptations are logged, so that we can find someone else that has those specific needs. We also provide a small number of temporary homes that households can live in while adaptations are being carried out to their existing home.
Improve life chances by contributing to preventing and tackling worklessness		
Social housing landlords should work in partnership with organisations in Southwark to organise skills and employment awareness events for their residents on their estates. Landlords have a responsibility to facilitate tenants back to into work. We need to encourage people away from benefits dependency	4	The new Southwark Works team is already supporting residents to find work and maintain their employment. Southwark Council has incorporated advice on training and finding work in to its housing options centre. We will continue to support people who are looking to improve their life chances by accessing employment. We are aware that due to the current financial situation there has been an increase in the number of people who receive benefits, particularly those who have been made redundant and are now seeking work.

Improve life chances by contributing to improving the education and skills of residents		
This priority is included as it is part of supporting delivery of the Southwark Community Strategy, Southwark 2016		
Improve life chances by contributing to tackling poverty		
Tackle the squalor	2	Our regeneration schemes aim to deliver sustainable communities by improving areas that require the investment the most. We are continuing to look to help residents with their finances by working with partners to: provide financial advice; encourage those entitled to benefits to claim them and by providing services to help people back to work.
Improve life chances by contributing to improving the health of residents		
We need to look at the mechanisms for Housing, Environmental Health and Southwark Health and Social Care for sharing information and working at local level to combat deprivation and ill-health	2	This comment was noted and we have written in more detail how housing and other outcomes, including health, are linked in the new Strategy.
Objective 4: Prevent homelessness and reduce the use of temporary accommodation		
Maximise homelessness prevention		
Homelessness and rough sleeping is pretty bad in some areas	2	The new Housing Options centre has been successful in preventing homelessness by providing advice and information about a range of options available to homeless households. This has led to significant reductions in the number of homeless acceptances. We are also working with a range of partners to tackle rough sleeping.
Reduce the use of temporary accommodation		
No comments were received about this priority but this is important and we have national and London targets to meet on this.		
Issues that are specific to particular community groups, ethnicity, race, disability, sexual preference, faith and belief, age or gender		
We also asked if there were any specific housing issues that affected certain parts of the community. These were used to produce our equalities impact assessment. A selection of the comments is included below.		
More properties for disabled people should be built. This should be done with the assistance of Social Services, carers etc. Open plan properties not just on the ground floor		Many people with disabilities are living in properties that are unsuitable for their needs. As well as the work the Adaptations Team and Home Improvement Agency do, (following an assessment from an occupational therapist) to help vulnerable people remain in their homes, Southwark also upgrades 20 properties per year to make them suitable for wheelchair users. We also require developers to adhere to the Southwark Plan target that 10% of new properties built should have wheelchair access. All new properties should be built to the lifetime homes standard ensuring they are easily adaptable to changing needs.

<p>Due consideration needs to be given to the relocation of elderly residents who occupy 3 bedroom properties which are too large for them, to be rehoused in purpose fitted single bedrooms.</p>		<p>We are currently considering a fresh approach to the incentives we can offer those with properties that are too large for them. We will add these suggestions to the review. We agree that financial incentives are likely to be secondary consideration to households in these circumstances and that support to find a new home and settle there are probably more important to someone wanting to be rehoused.</p>
<p>There should be more publicity of cases where homophobic abuse has been tackled. This will deter potential abusers and help people who may be victims</p>		<p>Unfortunately cases of homophobic abuse still occur in Southwark. Victims may feel less willing to talk about it to council officers as they may feel vulnerable or feel that they will be ignored. We have already started a training programme for housing options officers to better understand the needs of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender young people and are looking to expand the training to officers in other departments.</p>
<p>Some communities are not given attention in current strategy – e.g. gypsies & travellers</p>		<p>The consultation document was a deliberately short draft of the strategy (for ease of reading) including just the key points. We have tried to cover most groups in the new full strategy. We have now made reference to the needs of gypsies and travellers in the Strategy,</p>
<p>Most of the issues reported by community groups during consultation were ones that commonly affect many households in the borough. Overcrowding, homelessness and issues around using Choice Based Lettings were issues commented on by many community groups.</p>		

Future consultations

We are very grateful to everybody who participated in this consultation. If you would like to be involved in future consultations such as around developing a strategic approach to the private rented sector, or housing for older people please contact us using the details below. If you would like to contact us in the meantime, to contribute to our understanding of housing issues in Southwark, we would like to hear from you.

Email: housingstrategy2@southwark.gov.uk
Phone: 020 7525 1230/1217

Postal address:
 Policy Performance Unit/Housing Strategy
 Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
 Housing Regeneration Initiatives
 5th Floor Hub 3
 Southwark Council
 PO Box 64529
 London SE1