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Matter 3 – Meeting Southwark’s Housing Needs

3.3 Is the housing requirement/target of in general conformity with the London Plan? Is it correctly identified on the proposed Housing Trajectory? Are there circumstances which justify an alternative approach to the calculation of the housing requirement and the use of a different method? If so, what are they and what would be the resulting housing requirement?

Southwark’s housing requirement is wrongly assessed on the housing register. There are currently over 11,500 people on the waiting list. We cannot see accurate figures that represent the need of the housing list. A third party agencies called Now Medical is used to assess the housing applicants for council homes. Assessments carried out by Now Medical use key words to determine medical need. People who are in wheelchairs with steps in properties are wrongly being assessed and given no priority to move. This means that the housing waiting list which is being used to demonstrate the housing need of the borough is wrong. Assessing the banding of tenants within the register and building homes in response to that is not enough. There needs to be a vigorous test that looks at housing need of existing and new tenants not need based on banding people are placed in as it is not accurate.

[Bureau of Investigative Journalism NowMedical: Concern over outsourced medical assessments used to decide homelessness support by Southwark Council - Southwark News}

New homes are being built on estates and existing tenants of estates are asking that a smart matching system is used within estates where properties are being built or available and matched to someone in housing need to keep the community of the estate rather than people with housing need rather than tenants having to move away.

3.10 Is the policy justified, effective and consistent with national policy? How will the target of 50% of all new homes to be either social rented or intermediate tenures be achieved against a minimum 35% requirement on qualifying new development?

In Southwark we have seen social rented estates demolished and replaced with shared ownership housing. These homes are sitting empty and would have otherwise been helping elevate the housing situations of people on the council waiting list.

3.16 Is the proposed fast track justified, effective and consistent with national policy and the London Plan? Are the exceptional circumstances for the use of the fast track route limited to the particulars set out in 4(1.), and 4(2.)?

All new council homes should be council rents with secure tenancies. Intermediate housing takes away stock which would otherwise be council housing and able to offer life-long secure tenancies at an affordable rate.

3.18 What is the basis for the site size thresholds and the proportions of affordable dwellings sought? Is this justified and consistent with national policy?

Housing policy does not take into account the many families that are overcrowded. Some families came into social housing with a baby and child, these children grow and the one bed property they were previously all expected to share is no longer suitable for them, some families have been bidding for over 14 years in these overcrowded situations.

3.23 What is the basis for the tenure split sought and is this justified?

SGTO supports that all tenures should be council tenures and offer the security of council rent and life tenancies.

3.25 Are the expectations for shared ownership housing in respect of household income and the market value of such justified?

We have seen the level of empty homes in the borough reflect the inaccessibility of shared ownership as people are unable and unwilling to move into properties offering shared ownership as they are unaffordable to people who live in the borough.

P2 – New Family Homes

3.27 Is the policy justified, effective and consistent with national policy and the London Plan?

3.28 Is the approach to a mix of tenures and the size of dwellings justified and supported by evidence? Is it sufficiently flexible?

In local plans 20% of new builds are to be family homes of 3 or above rooms.

People on the Southwark Council housing list are expected to share properties with siblings and for front rooms to be used as bedrooms – meaning that a family of 5 can be expected to share a one bedroom property. Southwark Council are updating their allocation list and Band 1 amendment will include: Statutory Overcrowded Households who lack 2 or more rooms.

P3 – Protection of existing homes

3.29 Is the policy justified, effective and consistent with national policy and the London Plan?

In estate regeneration schemes in Southwark two schemes have been offered ballots for major works where demolition is being proposed as an option.

Groups of tenants and residents make part of a Resident Project Group (RPG) with a trusted third party facilitator. Ledbury Estate RPG have commented on how positive the engagement has been with them as they feel their views have been listened to and respected.

Southwark Council estates are undergoing huge infill plans. Residents are falsely led to believe they can have an influence on whether the development plans go ahead or not. Tenants and Residents have asked for ballots on all infill sites.

3.41 How will the housing and accommodation needs of elderly persons be met in the Borough, both C3 housing (supported living etc) and C2 bedspaces? Is the plan justified in not seeking specific provision on allocated sites? (noting references to C2 provision on some sites has now been removed). Is there evidence that the market will provide this type of housing in the Borough on a 'windfall' basis?

Southwark has registered as a 'age friendly borough' however, older people are not able to live here unless already own a property. The average house price as reported by Foxtons Estate Agent is £783,142.

Foxtons also reports the average private rent is £740 per week for a two bedroom property and the local housing allowance will only cover £310 leaving a £430 per month shortfall. Older renters in the borough unable to meet the cost of private renting through housing benefit naturally look to social housing as a secure solution. Has there been analysis of housing need of people living in existing estates and those no longer able to afford private rents.

Some Southwark Council hostels during Covid-19 have had their use changed.

Southwark Council sheltered accommodation needs to be fit for purpose as district heating outages are also experienced in these properties.

P7 – Wheelchair accessible and adaptable housing

3.42 Is the policy justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

The assessment used within the housing allocation scheme to assess number of people who need adapted homes is incorrect. Tenants with mobility needs are not being offered adapted homes and are being forced to remain in social housing unsuitable for them.

Policy P9 – Supported housing and hostels

3.48 Is the policy justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

The policy of hostels needs to be updated as shared facilities in a global pandemic have become unsuitable.

Hostels and supported housing must be brought up to a suitable standard, during the pandemic there have been district heating outages leaving residents in hostels cold. Part of the Woodvale hostel was left without district heating for a week during the pandemic.

3.61 Would the policy be effective in ensuring that any open space secured in the OKRAAP is usable for all residents when compared against the London Plan calculator?

SGTO argue that the green spaces of estates are not opened up to be consumed by all residents. Green spaces are there for the enjoyment of estate residents and are greatly needed by estate residents. This land should not contribute to Open Space Ratio for the wider area.

3.62 Should the policy provide guidance on the density ranges expected across particular site types in the Borough?

Southwark Council estates should use a policy of no net loss of green space per current and potential new resident in protecting and securing more green space for existing residents and any new residents on estates. This should be strictly enforced and monitored.