

# Housing, Finance and Corporate Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> June 2015
<b>Classification:</b>	Public
<b>Title:</b>	New Westminster Housing Strategy for Consultation
<b>Report of:</b>	Julia Corkey – Director of Policy, Performance and Communications Ben Denton- Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	Housing, growth and prosperity, City for All
<b>Financial Summary:</b>	No specific financial implications
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	Rebecca Fuhr, Principal Policy Officer, Tel: 0207 641 2342 Email: <a href="mailto:rfuhr@westminster.gov.uk">rfuhr@westminster.gov.uk</a> Cecily Herdman, Principal Policy Officer, Tel: 020 7641 2789 Email: <a href="mailto:cherdman@westminster.gov.uk">cherdman@westminster.gov.uk</a>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The draft housing strategy (attached) has been developed over the past year in consultation with the Cabinet Member, Cllr Daniel Astaire and in discussion with other stakeholders. It was discussed at Growth Board, Health and Wellbeing Board and the Executive Management Team (EMT). It is underpinned by independent research in some key areas and by further qualitative research on intermediate housing.
- 1.2 The draft strategy is closely aligned with the council's City for All vision. It is directed at encouraging prosperity for all in Westminster, contributing to the city's growth and helping residents share in the benefits of that growth. Proposals include; increasing the supply of affordable housing; changing planning policy so that in new developments 60% of new affordable housing is intermediate and

40% is social rented, to better match demand; stimulating a London wide debate on the best way to tackle homelessness in the capital; and investing £12m in council housing to tackle damp and cold.

- 1.3 The draft strategy is being publically consulted upon throughout June and July and will be completed in December. Committee members are invited to consider and give their views on the draft strategy and to comment on the consultation process.

## **2. Developing the strategy**

- 2.1 The draft strategy has been developed over the past year in conjunction with the Cabinet Member, Cllr Daniel Astaire and his relevant Cabinet deputies. It has also benefitted from review and input by the Growth Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, Executive Management Team and other stakeholders.

- 2.2 It is informed by independent research:

- Ecorys and Wessex Economics reports on Westminster's housing market. These are available on line at:  
[www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy)
- Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion research into the reasons for lower levels of employment amongst council residents and the success of associated employment programmes (this is available on request).
- Public Health research into the relationship between poor health and poor quality council housing locally (this is available on request).

- 2.3 It has also been informed by the work that has been done on other council strategic documents, including the development of proposals for revision of the City Plan policies dealing with housing issues and work on employment and enterprise.

- 2.4 Additionally, seminars were held on intermediate housing in Westminster. These looked both at need for intermediate housing and the products available. Alongside these focus groups of households on the intermediate register were held. A survey of local residents and businesses was also undertaken, asking for their views on how important they thought it was for the council to focus on affordable housing, compared with other issues, and how the lack of affordable housing in the city affected them.

- 2.5 The draft strategy is aligned with the council's City for All vision and is directed at encouraging prosperity and choice for all in Westminster, contributing to the city's growth and enabling all residents to enjoy the benefits of that growth. It emphasises the importance of housing in creating high quality neighbourhoods in

which people are glad to live. It also highlights a number of other cross cutting themes that are impacted on by housing, including health, social care needs, sustainability and the environment.

### **3. Themes and proposals**

- 3.1 A summary of the main proposals and the reasons for them is below. They are grouped around four themes; Homes, People; Places; and Prosperity.
- 3.2 **Homes** – this theme looks at the mismatch between supply and demand for affordable housing in Westminster and proposes to develop 250 new affordable homes each year, a target which is beyond past levels of delivery. Over and above this, it suggests some out of borough affordable housing is investigated, as we can never meet all our demand in Westminster and a more strategic capital-wide approach would improve customer choice and contribute to meeting London’s housing shortages. It is also proposed that planning policy is changed so 60% of affordable housing in new developments is intermediate and 40% is social rented (currently planning policy asks for the reverse). This responds to the research findings which show a greater demand for intermediate housing than social rented across the city and to the need to grow the intermediate sector from a very low base. This will help to provide a more balanced housing market in Westminster which will in turn support the strength and diversity of the local and London economy. In particular, it is proposed to investigate new forms of intermediate housing that can help people into home ownership and to provide a greater range of products for lower income households.
- 3.3 **People** – this theme looks at the impact of housing on different aspects of a person’s life such as their health and wellbeing. Proposals respond to the challenges of providing suitable housing for vulnerable people. A review of the council’s sheltered housing stock is proposed, alongside research into the housing needs of vulnerable people more generally. The strategy seeks to tackle poor housing conditions in view of the impact they can have on health and proposes; investing £12m to tackle cold and damp in 5,800 council homes and working with tenants at particular risk of poor health and working with them to improve their living conditions. It also proposes a range of measures to tackle overcrowding in social housing. A London wide debate on homelessness is suggested – as homelessness is a national or regional issue, but is addressed locally and this results in poor outcomes for homeless people. As demand from homeless households is very high and affordable housing supply is low in Westminster, homeless people often face very long waits in temporary accommodation.
- 3.4 **Places** – this theme highlights the benefits of our housing renewal programme, which not only provides better quality and more homes but also provides greater opportunities with better shops; business workspace infrastructure and community facilities and improves local environment quality. It sets out that we

will deliver our existing renewal programme and that we will work with the Mayor to secure Housing Zone status for Church Street Phase 2 – which will support and accelerate the delivery of affordable homes there. It is proposed that housing renewal becomes business as usual across the city. This theme also looks at how we can improve places in partnership with registered providers (housing associations), for example by having a shared vision for an area and by looking at how they might run services and community programmes from our buildings.

- 3.5 **Prosperity** – this theme looks at the connections between housing and the local and London economy and at ways of supporting social housing residents into jobs that help to enable them to make their own housing choices in the future. Those in social housing have lower rates of employment than other tenants so, in line with the council’s wider Public Service Reform agenda, we will be providing targeted, tailored support to help the long term unemployed move towards work. At the same time we want to help low income working households find suitable housing. Businesses in the centre of London need a ready local supply of staff, but many people on lower incomes are not eligible for social housing and find themselves priced out of the private rented market and are forced to move out of London. In addition to growing the supply of intermediate housing (see theme 1 Homes), the strategy proposes to allocate up to 100 social homes, over time and where supply allows it, to low income workers that wouldn’t ordinarily have priority. However it highlights that this has to be done in ways that doesn’t compromise our responsibilities towards homeless households.

#### 4. **Consultation and timescales**

- 4.1 The consultation period will run from 2<sup>nd</sup> June until 31<sup>st</sup> July. It will be opened by way of a press release. During the consultation period officers will attend a range of meetings/partnerships as and when they occur, to take the opportunity to gather views. A list of meetings where the housing strategy is already on the agenda is in Appendix 1 and officers will attend any further meetings as they occur or where requests are made.
- 4.2 Links to the draft strategy and the summary document have been sent out to over 400 stakeholders including; registered providers, health professionals, business representatives, developers, think tanks, the GLA, housing applicants, providers and resident and neighbourhood groups.
- 4.3 All stakeholders are able to respond to the consultation face to face by way of the above meetings, by post or electronically via a dedicated email address. The strategy asks a number of specific questions about the proposals and consultees are invited to answer these, or to comment on any other aspects of the strategy, or on areas they think should also be included. All consultation documentation is available online via the council website, and in hard copy as appropriate and required. We will also be making use of social media.

- 4.4 To support the consultation we have prepared a brief summary of the document in plain English, which will be used at consultation meetings and will be distributed more widely such as in libraries and area housing offices.
- 4.5 Half way through the consultation period a further email alert will be sent highlighting that there is “still time to respond” and a “One week to go” reminder will also be sent.
- 4.6 With the consultation underway, the Committee are invited to consider the main themes and proposals put forward in the draft strategy and give views on what is being suggested and any areas where we could do more or are not included. There are a number of specific consultation questions in the strategy which the committee may wish to respond to. Any comments will be taken into account as the strategy is refined, following the consultation period.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 None

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Cecily Herdman, telephone 020 7641 2789, email [cherdman@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:cherdman@westminster.gov.uk)**

## **APPENDICES**

1. List of Consultation Meetings
2. Westminster draft Housing Strategy and summary document for consultation (attached)

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

1. Ecorys: Westminster Housing Market Study. Final report to Westminster City Council [www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy)
2. Wessex Economics: Westminster Housing Market Analysis: Final Report December 2014 [www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy)
3. Wessex Economics: Westminster Housing Market Analysis: Summary Report December 2014 [www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housingstrategy)