

Homes for Older Londoners

Age UK London/Positive Ageing in London event

18 Sept 17

1. Issues raised following presentations

1.1 In response to GLA presentation on the Mayor's housing strategy

- The strategy must deal with *empty homes*.
- *Benefits issue* for investment in new homes for older people was a concern.
- Older people need homes that are *comfortable, with enough space and green spaces outside*.
- There should be more focus on the *needs of older homeowners* who have assets but are cash poor. People need more options to move if they want to. Work with the development industry would help.
- It is important to ensure that *boroughs cooperate and act* especially around more affordable housing and housing accessibility (The London Plan will have a role here.)
- Concern was expressed that in some areas there is no consideration of the needs of older people. An example of massive development of student housing in a good location was given. A *better analysis of local housing needs* was required. (It was noted that the GLA had commissioned some work on needs assessment.)
- There was concern about *affordability criteria not being genuinely affordable* such as it is in existing social housing.
- There was concern that *private landlords will not accept people on Housing Benefit* due to low level/cap (It was agreed that some issues were for the Mayor and that others were for Government so the response to the strategy needs to be clear on this point)
- There is a *limited focus on repairs/house condition* especially given the age of, and poor condition of, London's housing stock and some concerns about right to buy people who must now pay for adaptations
- There was concern about the *dangers in tower blocks* given Grenfell and a suggestion that no older person should be offered a flat higher than the second floor
- There is a need for *intergenerational housing to encourage diversity*

1.2. In response to London Tenants Federation/Camden Private Tenants Federation presentation on issues for older people in social housing

- How to *influence private contractors* who undertake work for the local council
- A need for *greater enforcement of covenants* in leases

- A need for the strategy to ensure there are *organisations representing tenants in every London borough*
- A need to develop a process where there is *future scrutiny* so that the engagement with the strategy is not just a 'one off'

1.3 In response to the Housing Learning and Improvement network presentation on issues for older people in specialist housing

- Ensure that people do not buy a home in a specialist scheme and then it leave empty
- Find ways to *engage people in the development of homes* working with developers/housing associations

1.4 In response to Care & Repair England's presentation on older home owners: adaptations and repairs

- Home owners should be *offered loans/equity for capital works* to their homes
- All housing above one floor should be provided with lifts
- Support should be available to *help older people with clutter in their homes* to make them safer and more comfortable
- Some concern was expressed that *local councils do not have the capacity to offer grants* for repairs and have lost staff and skills

1.5 In response to Age UK London presentation on issues for older private tenants

- Landlord approval for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) has meant only a few being agreed. There is a need to *agree DFGs for private tenants* if there is a health/care need and not have to have landlord approval
- There could be a *tenant charter* as in Europe
- There was some concern about the *unfairness of buy to rent subsidies* particularly as other buyers do not qualify for these

2. Feedback from groups on what should be in the strategy

Group 1

- Need for restrictions on foreign buyers
- Address the issue of empty homes – from confiscation to raising rates for one year
- Home repair/adaptation loans at current rates should be available with money repaid when the house is sold
- Set up a formal register of reliable builders
- Develop more age friendly intergenerational housing
- Develop integrated housing coops for older people
- Create a level playing field between buy to let and buy to live in

- Need for more affordable homes for rent
- Need for more one and two-bedroom homes
- Need better accountability for private tenants – tenant associations
- Older people should not live above floor two in higher developments
- IT support for universal credit roll out should be available
- There should be sprinklers in all tower blocks
- Replace high rise with low rise longer term
- Adaptations should be available to support older people in need
- There should be proper regulation of home share/shared housing

Group 2

- Need for more social housing (private rented not working)
- Like the idea of housing coops for older people such as in Barnet
- Change to legislation to create lifetime tenancies
- Need to control rents and clarify affordability
- Compulsory purchase all empty properties to prevent buying to leave empty
- Need short term fixes as building new homes takes time including support for minor repairs
- Develop penalties for developers not building affordable housing

Group 3

- Make London an age friendly city
- Give older people more priority in new housing developments
- Create a database of all landlords and one on empty properties with powers to local councils to deal with bad landlords and those that leave properties empty
- Agencies are needed to support/advise older people in insecure housing
- Older people should have access to repairs and adaptations to help them to remain at home
- Develop more extra care for rent (important to have tenancy rights) and for older home owners to buy

Group 4

- **Health** - Must link the housing strategy to the health strategy and see the links between good housing and good health. There is a need for baseline housing standards for all tenures
- **Communities** - Intergenerational mix is the way forward and this must include how new homes are marketed (concern was expressed that most new homes are marketed for young professionals)
- **Housing across tenure** – all housing should be decent, secure, affordable – it is people's homes and this needs to be the starting point

Jane Minter, Care & Repair England, 21 September 2017