



London Housing Panel: Our priorities for the Mayor

March 2020



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London Housing Panel

Letter from the London Housing Panel

London's housing crisis is a concern for us all and must be the priority for the London Mayor. It matters both because safe and secure homes are at the heart of wellbeing and a healthy city, and because we all benefit from a more equal city. There are no quick fixes, but if London's politicians, civil society and communities work together with house builders and planners, then we can do more in the short term whilst working towards our longer-term vision.

The London Housing Panel brings the diverse perspectives and experiences of London's communities to the capital's housing crisis. We are at the sharp end of working with thousands of people who are being denied the right to adequate housing and are living in substandard, overcrowded and unsafe conditions. Each person who is experiencing the indignity and unfairness of the housing crisis has a story to tell which needs to be heard. We are not just attuned to what is failing communities, we are also working to achieve better outcomes – be that our approaches to advocacy, challenging empty homes, or through community-led and co-operative housing projects. The Panel is an opportunity to work in partnership with London's politicians, communities and others to plan and build for now and the future.

The causes of the housing crisis are complex – from the cost of land, inadequate planning, the loss of social housing stock from right to buy, through to high building costs and dependence on cross subsidy. Understanding these barriers are the first steps to breaking through them. In recent years there has been increased investment and commitment to tackling all aspects of the housing crisis in London, from rough sleeping through to building more housing at affordable rents, including social rents. This investment needs to be accelerated to meet the needs of all Londoners. This must include housing at social rent levels, and we believe that this should be the Mayor's priority going forward.

We have been working together as a Panel for the past year and now present our vision and ambitions for the future. We look forward to discussing them with the Mayor and working together to put them into action.

***'A problem this big needs an ambitious
Mayoral commitment to beat it'.***

Raji Hunjan, Chair, London Housing Panel

We call on the Mayor to commit to three actions

1. Massively increase social housing supply

and be bolder in the number of social rented homes that need to be built and prioritise achieving that.

Social housing should be treated as a social good, and yet the neglect of social house building over decades alongside the sale of existing stock, has taken its toll on huge swathes of London's communities. The private rented sector is unsuitable for many, and particularly those on the lowest income where rents are not covered by earnings or benefits. For too long, private investment and profit has been prioritised by landowners and developers.

This can be challenged through:

- Greater accountability. We want to see data published on social house building on public land. The more people know, the more we can ensure policy delivers in practice.
- Prioritisation of social rented homes on public land. Land that is owned by the Mayor is our best hope of building the social rented homes needed to reverse the impact of the crisis.

2. Support all Londoners to be heard and thrive

because they are your greatest asset in making a stronger case to national government and ensuring the long-term positive outcomes of house building.

Londoners are hugely impacted by planning decisions and yet are powerless in decision-making. Only a shift in this power imbalance – which particularly affects those from marginalised communities or who are vulnerably housed – will ensure that developers and investors will be compelled to consider people as well as profit.

This can be addressed through:

- More effective listening methods and ways of engaging ordinary Londoners.
- Demanding rigorous equalities impact assessments from planners and developers of housing, which can demonstrate that the needs of all communities have been considered.

3. Action on temporary accommodation

because we know that solving the housing crisis is not a quick fix, and that families, children and people living vulnerably need to be helped now.

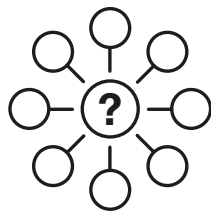
It is a stain on our city and our shared values that thousands of families with children are living in conditions that none of us would deem acceptable. They are stuck because suitable long-term options are limited leaving them powerless and without a voice.

This can be addressed through:

- Pan-London initiatives in which multiple stakeholders come together for better outcomes.
- A joint London-wide call for an increase in Local Housing Allowance and housing benefit rates, as well as addressing empty and under-used homes.
- The driving down of rents in the private rented sector, as well as improved standards.



The mass sell-off of public land is contributing to the housing crisis – just 2.6% of homes built on public land in England will be for social rent.ⁱ



Planning has a key role to play in achieving greater social and economic inclusion, promoting equality, and reducing poverty.ⁱⁱ



Nearly 90,000 homeless children are living in temporary accommodation in London.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ New Economics Foundation analysis, September 2019 <https://neweconomics.org/2019/09/mass-sell-off-of-public-land-fails-to-deliver-social-housing>

ⁱⁱ Town and Country Planning Association, October 2019, London - Planning for a Just City <http://bit.ly/TCPAINclusiveLondon>

ⁱⁱⁱ According to recent government figures (see <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/tom-copley/over-50000-households-in-temporary-accommodation>)



1.

Massively increase social housing supply

Our vision

Our vision is for a housing and planning system that prioritises social rented homes for London's diverse communities built on land that is publicly owned. This is a must if we consider the needs of vulnerable groups, and how their housing issues cut across other social issues they are facing. Be it disabled people, women fleeing violence, children in temporary accommodation, ageing communities privately renting – stable housing provides the security people need. We want all Londoners to be able to live safely and contribute positively to our city.

'It's not just about the scale of the problem, it's how it impacts on people's lives. Housing needs to be seen as a public good rather than simply a commodity. The current system is broken'.

Member of London Housing Panel

This can be achieved with a commitment to:

- Calculate the number of social rented homes needed to address the crisis now and to future proof housing supply. Civil society groups and organisations* have made their own assessments; we should all work together to lobby for adequate funding to meet these.
- Back the campaign that is calling for public land to be put to public use through social house building, not sold to build unaffordable private homes.
- Ensure transparency of data that tracks the number of social rented homes built, including those built on public land, and how these homes are distributed.
- Exert influence over London boroughs to set aspirational and specific targets for homes for social rent; and to make available small sites for community-led housing development.
- Ensure transparency of viability assessment in order for communities to be able to hold boroughs to account for these targets.

**The London Housing Panel seeks to work alongside other networks and campaigns that have similar aims including Chartered Institute of Housing, Just Space, Nef, National Housing Federation and Shelter as well as Panel members' own campaigns.*

Why these asks matter

For too long the balance of power has weighed heavily in favour of private housebuilders. This can be shifted if communities have the knowledge and data needed to effectively contribute to decision-making. The Panel believes disaggregated data on social rented and other house building, as well as greater scrutiny of the equalities impact of decisions on housing, land and planning will enable communities to work more collegiately with the Mayor to achieve the targets on social rented homes that we need.

To maintain its richness of diversity and ability to function as a world class city, London needs more social rented homes because other tenures or rent structures are unaffordable. We are too reliant on welfare benefits to make up the difference, and yet benefits fail to do so. Each time public land is sold for private use and not public good, it hurts ordinary Londoners and we need to do more to reverse this.

Our evidence

- Only 2.6% of the 131,000 homes set to be built on public land released by the government will be for social rent, according to the New Economics Foundation (NEF).^{iv}
- London has consistently built fewer social rented homes than needed^v. Even taken together social rent and London Affordable Rent starts are only 20%.
- Protected equalities groups are being disproportionately affected by a shortage of social rented homes and the equalities awareness in London borough planning departments is weak^{vi} despite the public sector equality duty. London Housing Panel obtained evidence of disadvantage across the following protected characteristics: disability, LGBT, Gypsy and Traveller, BAME as well as the challenges reported by younger and older people.
- In 2019, in London there were: 56,950 households living in temporary accommodation^{vii}; 243,551 households on the social housing waiting list^{viii}. Unless the next government commits to build more social rented homes, the number of people experiencing bad housing and homelessness will only continue to spiral. However, just 986 social homes were delivered in London last year.^{ix}
- The effects of the lack of social house building are compounded by stagnating incomes, welfare reform and other effects of austerity, people being priced out of the market, driven by financialisation of the housing market, runaway land prices and perverse incentives of people on housing benefit being pushed into the private sector.
- Expert voices are increasingly saying publicly that the ‘cross subsidy’ model is broken. Shared ownership and intermediate housing reinforces a focus on home ownership but neglects those who can only afford social rent.

^{iv} New Economics Foundation analysis, September 2019 <https://neweconomics.org/2019/09/mass-sell-off-of-public-land-fails-to-deliver-social-housing>

^v Shelter, “Capital in Crisis” March 2020 https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/report_a_capital_in_crisis

^{vi} The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) report, ‘Planning for Inclusive Communities in London’ (<http://bit.ly/TCPAInclusiveLondon>)

^{vii} House of Commons Library, “Households in temporary accommodation (England)” June 2019 <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN02110>

^{viii} London Datastore; “Households on Local Authority Waiting List, Borough” April 2019 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/households-local-authority-waiting-list-borough>

^{ix} Figures from Shelter social media campaign and taken from @ShelterLDN on 10 December 2019



2.

Support all Londoners to be heard and thrive

Our vision

Our vision is for housing planning decisions that are driven by the needs and aspirations of all Londoners, including those who are living most vulnerably. The diverse experiences and vision of ordinary communities will ensure house building creates better longer-term outcomes for those living in the capital.

'We need to proactively include those whose experiences are least likely to be taken into account, including children and young people, people with disabilities, migrants, Gypsy and Traveller communities, the elderly and so on and involve them in ways that are accessible and suitable for them'.

Member of London Housing Panel

This can be achieved with a commitment to:

- Embed listening structures in the GLA with a focus on Housing and Land, and Planning, so that all people with housing needs – whether they are homeless, temporarily or vulnerably housed or in stable accommodation – are heard.
- Proactively include those whose experiences are least likely to be taken into account, including children and young people, LGBT+ people and older people, migrants, disabled people, women fleeing violence and people who are homeless, Gypsy and Traveller communities, and involve them in ways that are accessible and suitable for them.
- Require evidence of listening to Londoners in applications for planning and affordable housing fund applications; and add enforcement and scrutiny of this request to the remit of senior GLA personnel.
- Require that the Mayor's Annual Equality Report set out where Londoners have been listened to and what was done with the views they expressed; and that this is reviewed annually by the Homes for Londoners board.
- Require an equalities impact statement in applications for affordable housing funding, showing how they address specialist accommodation needs and add enforcement and scrutiny of this request to the remit of senior GLA personnel.

Why these asks matter

The building of housing that is unsuitable or unaffordable for the majority of Londoners, is reinforcing housing inequality and leaving people feeling powerless. It is in the interests of a thriving London for power to be shifted away from house builders through effective community engagement, inclusion and public scrutiny being made integral to decisions about the allocation of money and land.

Our evidence

- The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) has published guidance for local authorities on increasing the inclusiveness of planning impact assessments, which are used as part of the development of Local Plans. In this report^x they state: ‘Planning has a key role to play in achieving greater social and economic inclusion, promoting equality, and reducing poverty. At the same time, however, planning processes (either through action or inaction) can do and have done harm by leading to outcomes that reinforce and entrench existing inequalities and forms of exclusion.’
- TCPA’s Planning out Poverty report highlighted that: ‘planning has multiple and complex effects on people’s lives because its decisions often involve the allocation of resources. Crudely, there are winners and losers from planning decisions, and planning therefore has the power to help promote greater or lesser levels of equity and social justice.’
- The introduction of ballots in estate regeneration has been broadly welcome and the Mayor’s guidance makes clear that estate regeneration requires involvement of all residents including those living in temporary accommodation. But the reality has been that people in temporary or transitional housing, or who are homeless, are likely to be excluded^{xi} from these processes as they may not be perceived as residents, and those carrying out consultations may not think to reach out to non-mainstream housing locations. Only existing residents are consulted, leaving homeless people without a voice or a role.
- While neighbourhood plans are valuable, they still rely on volunteers and communities to monitor what is delivered post-approval.^{xii}

^x <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/guidance-for-councils-assessing-local-plan-policy-impacts-on-equality-and-inclusion>

^{xi} <https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/unregulated-exempt-accommodation>

^{xii} Neighbourhood Planners London, “Neighbourhood Planning in London: investigating its potential in areas experiencing high levels of deprivation” June 2019 <http://bit.ly/NPLDeprivation>



3.

Action on temporary accommodation

Our vision

Our vision is for a housing system where temporary means temporary; where homeless households, including families with children and other vulnerable people move swiftly through a pathway from homelessness application to secure, stable, high quality homes they can afford; and, when they are living in temporary private accommodation it is suitable for their needs, and they feel safe and not forgotten. It is essential that their voices are listened to. As part of this, we know that, for some, long-term suitable housing will also need to include specialist support.

‘One of the greatest hardships faced by homeless households is that after going through the system for months or years, they are often given a 12 month private rental out of borough. This leads to either displacement or rejection, which in turn continues the cycle of homelessness. Councils should be pushed to treat social housing as part of the solution rather than relying too heavily on the PRS’.

Member of London Housing Panel

This can be achieved with a commitment to:

- Set up a commission, with London boroughs, to find solutions to London's temporary accommodation crisis, and ensure that this includes the voices of those who have experienced homelessness and temporary accommodation.
- Work with London boroughs to develop pan-London quality standards in the use of temporary accommodation, including accommodation provided by the private rented sector, B&Bs, hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation provision.
- Use the London Model of the private rented sector to continue to lobby national government for more powers, but ensure this blueprint has consideration for those living in temporary accommodation.
- Take a stand against the use of conversions carried out under 'permitted development rights' and work with councils to discourage and enforce against developments that do not meet space, environmental and safety standards.

The problem

The lack of suitable housing has led to a crisis of temporary accommodation. It is so unsatisfactory, and inevitably leads to competing demands for those who are suffering the most – be that children, families, women fleeing domestic abuse, care leavers, people with disabilities and others in vulnerable situations – with groups being played off against each other. Each story is heartbreaking. Inadequate housing is putting people's health at risk, damaging people's lives, and making it impossible for boroughs to meet their statutory responsibilities to provide safe and secure housing.

Instead of smoothing a pathway from homelessness into a stable social rented home, placement in temporary accommodation interrupts this pathway, often moving people away from support networks, removing their access or threatening them with loss of access to social housing. Councils' own approach to interpreting their responsibilities under the Homelessness Reduction Act also varies, which can be stressful and hard for vulnerable people to navigate.

There are no quick wins and boroughs are overwhelmed by the scale of the problem, but we believe that bold leadership from the Mayor, working together with London boroughs, could enable some significant changes.

There are GLA initiatives that we would want to continue to support (empty homes, Landlord and Agent Checker) as well as London Councils initiatives (Capital Letters, Setting the Standard, London Councils Out of Area Placements Protocol where the GLA is an observer).

Our evidence

- The number of children that are homeless and in temporary accommodation is at its highest since 2006. In London the numbers have risen by 33% since 2014^{xiii}. In 2019 the top ten local authorities in England with the highest numbers of children in TA were all in London^{xiv}.
- Between April 2018 and March 2019, councils spent almost £1.1 billion on temporary accommodation – an increase of 9% in a year and 78% in five years^{xv}.
- Homeless households can be stuck for months or years in temporary accommodation: in a sample London borough in 2019 the average stay was 21 months; this is in line with earlier pan-London data which showed nearly 40% of households stayed 2 years or more.^{xvi}
- Children are growing up in dangerous and unsuitable temporary accommodation. This includes sharing facilities with people with substance misuse and mental health difficulties and in blocks with serious anti-social behaviour problems. Some are living in properties never intended for residential use such as converted office blocks and shipping containers as well as bed and breakfast accommodation.^{xvii}
- The housing pressure in London is so acute that local authorities are housing people in TA outside their area, even sending people to other cities. Roughly 1 in 3 households in TA at end 2018 were placed out of home borough. 9 in 10 out of borough placements originate in a London borough.^{xviii}
- Specific groups of people are either invisible or especially vulnerable: people placed by children's services because their family is 'intentionally homeless', or classed as having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF); women who flee domestic violence and find a place in a refuge who lose access to social housing; care leavers who lack funds for a deposit and experience discrimination against people in receipt of benefits^{xix}; people in council-owned B&Bs which are not subject to legal limits.^{xx}
- Organisations supporting individuals to get support around homelessness from councils say people find the process inconsistent and extremely stressful, especially for anyone with additional vulnerabilities.
- Much of the temporary accommodation used by councils is now supplied by private providers. The amounts going to private providers nationally nearly doubled in five years to £939m.^{xxi}

^{xiii} Shelter (3 December 2019) Generation Homeless: The numbers behind the story

^{xiv} Shelter (2019) Generation Homeless: The numbers behind the story

^{xv} Shelter (February 2020) Cashing in How a shortage of social housing is fuelling a multimillion-pound temporary accommodation sector February 2020

^{xvi} What do They Know? "Temporary Accommodation" June 2019 https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/temporary_accommodation_77" Also Shelter 2014 briefing "Temporary accommodation in London: research findings and policy recommendations" https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/919093/Temporary_Accommodation_.pdf

^{xvii} Children's Commissioner for England (August 2019) Bleak Houses: Tackling the crisis of family homelessness in England quoted in Just for Kids Law (6 December 2019) Shocking but not surprising: The latest figures on child homelessness show that something needs to change

^{xviii} Unpublished FOI data. Also The Guardian, "Councils 'forcing homeless families to relocate miles away'" 22 May 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/22/councils-forcing-homeless-families-to-relocate-miles-away>

^{xix} Centrepont (2017) From care to where? Care leavers' access to accommodation.

^{xx} McCabe J. (2019) 'Revealed: homeless families face long stays in council-owned hostels', Inside Housing

^{xxi} Shelter "Cashing In" research – quoted in House of Commons Library, "Households in temporary accommodation (England)" June 2019 <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN02110>



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London Housing Panel's work is underpinned by three principles:

There is an urgent need to build more social housing in London to tackle its housing crisis and we will always push for prioritising the building of and increasing the amount of social rented housing over other forms of tenure.

By understanding the needs and aspirations of all Londoners, including those who are living most vulnerably, we can ensure house building creates better longer-term outcomes for Londoners.

In addition to the building of new, stable homes at social rent, we want more action taken now to address homelessness, particularly statutory homelessness.