



briefing no 21

Mayor's Housing Strategy for London

September 2007

policy briefing

INTRODUCTION

In July 2007, the Mayor was granted new housing and planning powers by Parliament. This has given the Greater London Authority direct responsibility for London's affordable housing budget which is worth over 1 billion. Prior to this, London's regional housing strategy on public housing was with the London Housing Board, with final decisions being taken by Ministers. Following a consultation period which commenced with the publication of *Towards the Mayor's Housing Strategy* in November 2006, the Mayor has now published a statutory Housing Strategy for London, which is in its first draft (September 2007).

The new housing responsibilities have provided the Mayor with powers to deliver a strategy for London which covers all tenures and all communities in London. And a major preoccupation of the Strategy concerns building new and affordable homes for Londoners.

The Strategy will replace the London Housing Board's *Capital Homes* strategy. The two key themes in the original strategy was increasing the numbers of homes in London and building sustainable communities. These two themes will also underpin the Mayor's new strategy. The reduction of carbon emissions from homes will also be an 'explicit objective', and the strategy will commit public funding only to those new homes which meet high standards of environmental performance.

This policy briefing will summarise the main objectives of the proposed Strategy as well as present a brief analysis of its implications for BAME groups and the voluntary and community sector in London.

THE CONSULTATION

The key debate issues for consultation reflect the areas which the Mayor believes 'policy or delivery needs to be strengthened significantly compared to the current *Capital homes* strategy'.

There are seven areas which will be essential to the Strategy:

Putting people first – Some of the things this initiative will aim to do include: reduce worklessness and child poverty in London; support regeneration schemes that create mixed and sustainable communities; improve housing for London's older and disabled people (for example, ensure that 10 per cent of new homes are wheelchair accessible or easily adaptable); ensure better understanding of the housing needs of London's minority communities

Building more homes – The Mayor's Housing Strategy will include clear proposals to secure land supply, speed up delivery and create desirable places to live. The Strategy is clear on its commitment to, not only making more homes available, but also ensuring that homes and neighbourhoods are of the highest quality design. With regards to new homes, the emphasis will be on *affordability*, and the projection is that there will be 50,000 new affordable homes over three years – 2008 to 2011.

Building the right homes in the right places – This policy initiative is led by the belief that building additional homes is vital for the capital's economic, social and environmental growth and well being. So that there is a need to improve co-ordination and joint planning among public investment agencies to make their combined interventions more effective; and to ensure also that there is a better fit between new homes being built and the current housing issues for Londoners. For example, there are over 300,000 households in London with at least three of the four main characteristics of deprivation: unemployment, low levels of education, poor health and substandard housing, and according to the Government's own research, London's Black Asian and minority ethnic communities make up 32 per cent of its population and statistically BAME people are 2 to 3 times more likely than White British people to end up homeless (ODPM 2005).

Designing places where people want to live – The Mayor's Strategy uses a broad definition of the term 'design' in this context, and includes the architecture, streets, spatial planning and green spaces. According to the Mayor's consultation paper:

In recent decades increases in the rate of new home building have often been at the expense of quality. The outcome has been too many places where people with choice move away, with low-quality buildings and unsafe open spaces, and a legacy of poor housing that needs to be renewed or replaced,

Reviewing Intermediate Housing – Intermediate housing are a range of housing options which help fill the gap between social renting and full home ownership, or market renting. Primarily, this takes the form of shared ownership. *Reviewing Intermediate Housing* will respond to rising house prices in London, and the fact that home ownership has become unaffordable to many people living or working in the capital.

Promoting choice and mobility – This bit of the strategy will seek to develop a pan-London lettings and mobility scheme in partnership with boroughs and

housing associations. This will enable people who are in housing need (if they wish) to move across London to be housed.

Tackling climate change – A key concern of the Strategy is to address the need for homes to be designed and built to reduce carbon emissions, increase renewable energy use, minimise waste and use water resources more effectively.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

The consultation period for the proposed strategy ended in April of this year, and the now published Draft mayor's Housing Strategy (September 2007) is comprehensive in its coverage of areas of concern for the capital's agencies that are dealing with housing issues. Moreover its determination to tackle issues such as homelessness and worklessness is commendable. Unfortunately however, it says very little about London's BAME communities, especially in relation to tackling homelessness and, for example, its connection to worklessness. This omission is important as research that is available in this area records BAME homelessness and housing problems as disproportionate compared to the capital's population as a whole. See for example, ODPM's Causes of Homelessness amongst Ethnic Minority Populations, September, 2005, and Shelter, 1997.

Analysis of the 2001 Census results show that BAME households are almost three times as likely as White households to be homeless, also, there is a strong correlation between poor neighbourhoods and BAME residence. According to the ODPM's report, BAME communities tend to suffer disproportionately poor outcomes where housing is concerned, and as a result are nearly twice as likely as White households to live in homes that are unfit for habitation or in need of repair or modernisation. ROTA's position is that more is needed in the Strategy which sets out to address some of the housing issues and concerns for London's BAME communities.

For example, the Strategy in its *Putting People First* initiative emphasises the Mayor's concern with integrating housing policy with other policy areas which affect the lives of people living in London, as housing issues have an impact on other areas of people's lives such as education, health and employment. This understanding of the inter-relatedness of policy and its impact on people's lives, provides the ideal context for the Mayor to make specific reference to housing policy initiatives which the Strategy will ensure addresses the needs of BAME communities. In particular, the links between housing and unemployment, education, and health. Research literature, on all of these policy areas, which have been consistent in its findings for the last 30 years shows that London's BAME groups have a poorer experience of these services than the rest of the population. There is no shortage of literature on the experience of people of African descent, residing in and outside of London, and the mental health and education services for example: Breaking the Circles of Fear, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, London (2002). Also, high profile reports, some commissioned by the Government, on the state education of young Black people include the work of Professor Gus John (2005), Dr David Gilborn (2002), Dr Cecile Wright (1995), and Bernard Coard (1976)

With regards to education, the Strategy has been drafted at a time when the African Caribbean community for example continues to experience over representation in school exclusion as well as poor academic performance figures; and in fact the Mayor's office, along with Dianne Abbott MP has been involved in initiatives over the past five years on this issue. This involvement has been in the form of several annual held conferences and follow-up initiatives. The first *Educating the Black Child* conference was held in London, in March 2002.

It's unfortunate then that the Strategy failed to acknowledge the clear links between housing as a policy area, and the life chances of inner city young Black people for example. Equally, the Strategy's commitment to creating mixed communities, omits to make reference to the importance this initiative will hold for BAME communities if these, sometimes socially excluded communities are to have greater access to good schools and better homes.

There is already good practice in London's voluntary sector, with regards to BAME communities and housing issues, see for example the work of Youth A.I.D, Lewisham which tackles in a holistic fashion, Black youth unemployment, poor education and housing issues. So that attention to this area of concern by the Mayor does not have to necessarily break new ground, but at least acknowledge the evidence and use the Strategy which is pan-London and statutory, to encourage dissemination and replication of good practice throughout London.

The London Councils in its response to the Strategy (*Response: Towards the Mayor's Housing Strategy, February 2007*) would agree with this and stresses the importance of the Strategy identifying, encouraging and supporting work already being carried out by others already engaged in tackling the capital's housing. In this context, the Councils recommends that the Mayor supports the various London boroughs' 'innovative work on overcrowding and homelessness and help and encourage them to evaluate the impact and spread good practice'.

ROTA views the Strategy as a positive step in ensuring London's strategic plans for housing policy addresses, overall, those areas which speak to the current housing needs, including gaps, in 21st century London. In particular the positive position the Mayor has taken on treating housing policy as integral to other key policy areas. ROTA commends the Mayor on producing a strategy which is innovative and thoughtful in its approach to a policy area which traditionally has failed to deliver effectively, primarily because of lack of innovation.

We hope therefore that there will be further consultations and reflection, in particular with regard to London's BAME communities so that their needs features more prominently in this new strategy, aimed at improving the housing experience of all Londoners.

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ROTA is funded by London Councils, Capacitybuilders, Commission for Racial Equality, The City Bridge Trust, Safer London Foundation, Equal, City Parochial Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Cabinet Office, London Development Agency.