

DRAFT

HOUNSLOW

HOUSING STRATEGY CONFERENCE
REPORT

28 SEPTEMBER 2007

HOUSING STRATEGY CONFERENCE

**FRIDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER 2007 @ 10:00 AM
GROUND FLOOR ANNEX, CIVIC CENTRE,
HOUNSLOW**

ATTENDANCE LIST

Name	Organisation
Cllr Mark Bowen	LB Hounslow – Deputy Leader & Lead Member for Housing
Cllr Peter Hills	LB Hounslow – Bedfont Ward
Cllr Linda Nakamura	LB Hounslow – Independent Group
Cllr Jon Hardy	LB Hounslow – Syon Ward
Cllr Caroline Andrews	LB Hounslow – Syon Ward
Cllr Andrew Dakers	LB Hounslow – Brentford Ward
Cllr Felicity Barwood	LB Hounslow – Chiswick Riverside Ward
Cllr Phil Andrews	LB Hounslow – Isleworth Ward
Sue Witherspoon	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Barbara Perry	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Yvonne Birch	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Nadja Stone	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Amir Salarkia	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Trevor Pask	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Kamini Mangat	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services

Name	Organisation
Rani Dady	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Chetna Hirani	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Hema Azad	LB Hounslow – Housing & Community Services
Bob Spencer	LB Hounslow – CS&LL Asylum Team
James Hearn	LB Hounslow – Commissioning & Partnerships
Jean Breen	LB Hounslow – Commissioning & Partnerships
Lubna Aslam	LB Hounslow – Commissioning & Partnerships
Lindsey Chatralia	LB Hounslow – Traveller Education Service
Ian O’Hara	LB Hounslow – Connexions
Louise Butt	LB Hounslow – Teacher Recruitment
Stuart Harrison	LB Hounslow – Strategic Planning Policy
Julia Worboys	LB Hounslow – Strategic Planning Policy
Bernadette O’Shea	Hounslow Homes
Khalid Khan	Hounslow Homes
David Allum	Hounslow Homes
Kim Mitchell	Hounslow Homes
Vincent Kamara	Hounslow Homes
Alf Chandler	Hounslow Homes Board Member
Paula Lewis	Hounslow Homes Board Member
David A Procter	David A Procter & Associates
Mike Broom	A2 Housing Group

Name	Organisation
Kavita Thakar	Asra Greater London Housing Association
Shanaz Begum	Asra Greater London Housing Association
Matthew Biddle	Berkeley First Limited
Andy Reid	Catalyst Housing Group
Jason McLaggan	Crime Reduction Initiatives
Robert Dobbs	Co-op Homes
Gareth Turner	Dominion Housing
Carolyn Berry	Ealing Consortium
Denzyl Buhler	Ethnic Alcohol Concerning Hounslow
Walter Boyle	Equinox Housing
Abdul Fifani	Hestia Housing and Support
Abigail Ampofo	Hestia Housing & Support
Paul Summerton	Hestia Housing & Support
Rina Mehta	Hounslow Domestic Violence Outreach Service
Tina Howe	Hounslow Federation of Tenants & Residents Association
Reggie Lathbridge	Inquilab Housing Association
Mark Perlstrom	John Grooms Housing Association
Mark Addo-Quale	Network Housing Association
Joe Brennan	Notting Hill Housing Group
Kindy Bansal	Notting Hill Housing Group
Mark White	Notting Hill Housing Group
Tim Jones	Notting Hill Housing Group
Jerry Steven	Owl Housing

Name	Organisation
Rita Nath-Dongre	REAP Resettlement Agency
Paul Doe	Shepherds Bush Housing Group
Malcolm Wood	St Georges PLC
Robin Oliver	Thames Valley Housing
Trilock Domah	West London Mental Health NHS Trust
Reg Parkinson	West London YMCA
Daniel Haigh	West London YMCA

Housing Strategy Conference Report

Presentation 1

Councillor Bowen welcomed everyone to the conference and outlined the importance of Housing to the Council and that we now have two executive housing lead members.

He outlined the purpose of the conference and the reasons for updating our housing strategy:

- Our Housing Strategy has been in place since 2003 and expired in 2006
- There have been considerable changes since then including:
 - Changes in the local environment and local housing markets
 - Changes in funding, and Government thinking
 - the change in the Administration
 - changes in population and housing need

The conference is the first step to refresh and renew our Strategy, so that we can set out to all our partners, our vision, our priorities and our plans.

We need the benefit of the practical experience of partners at the Conference: in developing new homes, in improving homes, and in listening to your customers to make sure that the vision we have for Hounslow, is the right one, and that it is robust and practical.

Our vision is that local people are able to access local homes that are of good quality and good design that fit and blend into the local community.

We want a greater emphasis on family sized homes in all sectors and our Hounslow Plan target is for 35% of all new homes to be 3BR plus. The Mayor's Strategy suggests 42% 3BR +, but only for social rented housing, and 16% for intermediate housing. We need you to tell us, how we can make our happen and remove the barriers to achieving this.

We need to pay more attention to overcrowding, as well as those needing housing through the homelessness route and prevent homelessness as much as possible, and reducing the dependence of local people on council housing as the only option. We want a well regulated private rented sector, and a presumption against the loss of single family dwellings from this sector. We are developing a range of opportunities for people to become home owners, bearing in mind that owner occupation in Hounslow is lower than the national average. In Hounslow the level of owner occupation is 60% against the national average of 69%. Our excellent partnerships with local providers – Hounslow Homes, Housing Associations, private landlords and developers will be essential to deliver the vision

If we look at supply there are many factors:

- The Mayor's Housing Strategy will have statutory force in 2008, and our plans and strategies will have to be in general conformity with it
- We intend to work responsibly with existing regulators and other arms of Government – we won't oppose targets just for the sake of it.
- Many of the objectives of the Mayor's Strategy we share – or indeed we are ahead of the game. For example, the Mayor suggests 2.3.e *"The Mayor expects boroughs to implement HMO licensing and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System comprehensively, targeting the worst landlords and the poorest properties first. Delivering and sustaining improvements in the condition and management of private rented homes should be a central feature of each borough's housing strategy"*. Well, we agree – and indeed have already implemented both the statutory HMO licensing scheme and have been operating the HHSRS system for over 12 months. This is already in our Hounslow Plan, and we don't need the Mayor to tell us that this should be a priority. It already is.
- However, we have the responsibility to listen to local people and we have the knowledge of sites, partnerships, and people in housing need and we therefore consider it important that there should be a degree of local flexibility in the interpretation of the Mayor's targets.
- Other targets set by the Mayor therefore don't necessarily meet local expectations. I am referring to the 50% affordable housing on each site, and the split between rented and intermediate housing set at 70%:30% ratios. Whilst these are the current figures in the Housing Strategy at present, this is an area where we feel that there needs to be flexibility, depending upon local circumstances, local housing needs and local housing priorities. For example, there will be circumstances in which we will want to achieve a higher percentage of intermediate housing
- The proportions that we are achieving this year, with 50% of the affordable housing programme being rented, and 50% being low cost home ownership, are more in line with our Hounslow Plan targets, than those which the Mayor proposes to impose
- We remain committed to the provision of social housing for those who cannot afford to solve their housing problems by themselves, but we do not want Hounslow to become mono tenure - importing people in housing need from other boroughs, simply because their social housing programmes have been reduced.
- We therefore have no difficulty in remaining committed to the London Plan target of 445 new homes a year, of which 156 will be affordable rented; in fact, it is likely that we will exceed them

Overcrowding is an issue which is high on our agenda through our experience of case work raised by residents in this Borough. We agreed in the Hounslow

Plan to review our Allocations Policy and we have raised the proportion of lettings going to transfer cases from 28% to 31% already; and 50% of 3BR+ properties will be allocated to transfer cases. We welcome the Scrutiny Committee review of Locata. Other action we are taking to reduce overcrowding includes:

- A small programme to extend houses by providing an additional two bedrooms, to create larger properties;
- We are considering funding a larger programme for properties that can accommodate just one extra bedroom
- Use a Trading Places scheme – programme of £80,000 to help under occupiers move to smaller properties
- Encouraging development of larger properties in social housing programmes

But we recognise that overcrowding is only one of the range of housing needs; others, like housing need expressed through the Housing Register or those who are homeless need to be considered too. However we also need to recognise our limits – the Council is not the answer to everyone's problem, and we need to encourage people to find solutions for themselves.

The private rented sector has an important role to play in Hounslow, but we are concerned about the impact of the Buy to Let market on community cohesion. Houses in Multiple Occupation do offer accommodation to section of the market but these are often the most unsafe, poorest managed and poorest maintained property in the Borough.

The Mandatory Licensing Scheme which we have implemented vigorously does not touch the vast majority of HMOs operating in the Borough and we are working with Department of Communities and Local Government to develop an additional licensing scheme to cover a wider range of sizes and properties. We will rigorously prosecute landlords who evade their responsibilities and put tenants' lives at risk.

We also need to supply advice and support to Owner Occupiers but not at any price. We will work to create affordable housing opportunities as owner occupation is lower in Hounslow than national average and we have an aspiration to create 1750 new home owners by 2010 .There are a range of products on the market, but these are complicated, and only help a limited range of people.

We are interested in ideas that you have, to improve the affordability of low cost home ownership opportunities, and how we can meet the aspirations of families as well as singles and couples who have mostly benefited from the intermediate market.

Thanks for coming, to discuss with us, what we should be doing to understand the local housing markets and look forward to hearing from the various workshops, the ideas that you have, to move forward in Hounslow over the next three years

Presentation 2

Paul Doe, the Chief Executive Shepherds Bush Housing Group and Chair of Hounslow's Housing Association Forum gave a presentation on the Opportunities and Challenges for RSLs in Hounslow.

He made it clear that his views did not represent the views of his association but as Chair of the Forum.

The role of RSLs

The role of RSLs is to provide new homes for rent or sale but they have to compete in the market with developers who are not very charitable. They have to provide excellent management and have to answer to external auditors. There is also a role in the provision of good quality temporary accommodation and in supported housing which is a role that they want to develop grow as there is the demand from vulnerable groups. There is also a wide range of services to community development and 'housing plus' besides partners to many agencies and statutory bodies.

The Issues

- RSL tenants are overcrowded too (and under – occupying) too and therefore need to find joint solutions which are innovative. Offering a payment of £1000 per bedroom is not going to work.
- RSL have to meeting the Decent Homes target without grant (unlike ALMOs)
- High density heavily serviced estates which tenants have to pay for so there are issues of affordability
- Rising costs of building with reduction in grants. Housing said to expect 30% cut in grant – the idea is to have surplus which can plough back.

What is expected of RSLs?

- Bigger but affordable homes for rent and sale
- Local people to get access to homes – Locata is a fair system and it does work
- Opportunities for homeless – not just social rented
- High quality developments that meet eco standards and fit into communities
- Decent homes – street properties require a lot of work
- Need for supported housing but need revenue funding as well as capital. Cheapest is not always the best
- Recognise diversity and the full range of needs to be met.
- Keep rents low and service levels high
- Keep tenants and leaseholders informed
- Innovate with partners
- Be local; be sub regional and new mayor expects to be regional.

What we need

- For larger affordable homes need affordable land and planning assistance. In 2005/6 50% of all affordable homes through section 106 deals
- Affordability – whole cost approach – need to understand other costs such as service charges which can be high and external management charges. Need to work with planners to ensure costs are kept down.
- Need a bigger pool of aspirant home owners to work with. Only 650 people approved in the borough and therefore need more people to come forward. Conversion rate can be 1:20 as there will be choice for people
- Wider understanding about how we work. New councillors don't always know what we do except through their postbag.
- High performing services that we interact with e.g. Housing Benefit
- Respect for what we add – all profits ploughed back
- Local homes for local people – this needs flexibility in local lettings plans and information sharing on nominations
- A better and higher profile in Borough about work

The Future

- Our reputation – (Study is being commissioned and then will develop action plan)
- Involvement in wider provision – some RSLs developing commercial portfolio and housing for sale too cross subsidise development
- Better management of our homes – the respect agenda. Must respond positively to ASB
- Work with the Council on HMO issues
- Delivering your strategy

Questions

Question 1.

The question was asked about why the country is obsessed by buying and selling homes when the result is repossession.

Paul Doe noted that it was because it is a way of making money and ensuring the future. It concerns deep set cultural issues which we try to resolve the problem by developing a wider range of homes.

Sue Witherspoon: Homeownership is highly valued because it provides freedom and responsibility, and is a way to benefit from capital appreciation. Legitimate aspiration, but we must act responsibly and control. Don't push people down this route if they can't afford it.

HOUSING STRATEGY CONFERENCE

WORKSHOPS

Delegates were divided into 4 workshops to look from various viewpoints at the provisional housing strategy objectives:-

Provisional Housing Strategy Objectives

- Good Quality Social Housing
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing, particularly family sized accommodation (3B+)
- Preventing homelessness and reducing dependence on social housing
- Providing a range of opportunities for Hounslow Residents to become home owners
- Improving housing standards in private housing, particularly the private rented sector
- Working together to build healthy, safe and sustainable communities

WORKSHOP REPRESENTING VIEWPOINT OF DEVELOPERS

Q1: Are these the right objectives?

- Need to ensure some larger homes for renting
- In terms of whether flats are suitable for larger households the key issue is the need to look at design and management, also should these be under-occupied initially?
- There is a wide range of needs (the objectives should reflect this) and therefore a need for a range of sizes e.g. well designed 1B units needed for under-occupiers and the vulnerable.
- What is the offer for older people? In what circumstances are 2Bs appropriate for this client group? We need to work up ideas on this.
- Need to look at infrastructure issues such as schools and education.
- Empty properties need to be added to the objectives.
- The need for an open and honest dialogue with the public in terms of housing advice, giving people realistic aspirations should be explicit in the objectives.
- Will increasing larger units increase the demand for family sized units?

- Need to avoid stigmatising affordable housing.

Q2: Do these objectives take enough account of future housing issues

- The strategy needs to be long term over 20 years
- Lack of family housing is an issue for the Borough, there has been a growth in HMOS and Hounslow is ahead of the rest of London in dealing with this issue. Whilst properly run HMOs are a part of the housing market there is a need for a balance.

Q3: From the development perspective what challenges and issues will we need to address to achieve our objectives?

- Restricted supply of land: need to look at the smaller sites owned by LA and statutory agencies, need to look at industrial land.
- What is a mixed community, it is not just about tenure. Should there be all affordable housing on former local authority land?
- High density designs can lead to expensive service charges. On mixed tenure sites affordable housing may only get one vote on a management company
- Regional and sub-regional agenda and the issue of importing and exporting nominations.
- Impact of new development on schools
- Need to make the wheelchair quota effective
- Need to be innovative in retaining employment uses which are compatible with residential
- Is housing at the top of the agenda in terms of development in the Borough?
- Some sites may not be able to take high density housing due to traffic issues.
- Although existing residents may not like high density schemes, prospective residents may find this OK
- Need to synchronise the review of the Housing Strategy with the review of the core strategy.
- Need to look at extensions to the current stock

WORKSHOP REPRESENTING VIEWPOINT OF HOUSEHOLDS NEEDING ACCOMMODATION IN THE BOROUGH

Question 1 Are these the right Objectives?

The group felt that there was no mention of households who do not actually live in houses e.g. gypsies/ travellers.

Other key groups had also not been mentioned for example refugees, young adults and supporting housing in general was hardly mentioned in the presentation and in our objectives.

The general feedback was that we have too many strategies which contain similar information however do not link up with each other.

Supporting Housing is all about partnership working however the group felt that it was very difficult to link areas together. However this is key on delivering our services as we should be relying on each other. Therefore the general feedback was that more work needs to be done with these groups that deal with supporting housing.

Question 2 - Do they take enough account of likely future Housing Needs?

The group felt that the objectives do not take into consideration future housing issues for supporting housing.

The feedback was that we should be doing more background research, for example, looking at stats on the aging population/disabilities etc.

We should be looking at ways of attracting under occupiers to move onto smaller properties. We should be researching applicants currently residing in 3 beds and offering initiatives to move on.

Question 3: From the perspective of your group what challenges and issues will we need to address to achieve our objectives?

The group felt that the main issues in achieving these objectives was that supporting housing was always over looked and in particular certain groups.

The group felt that consultation was key and that we should consult different groups. We should be asking what would work for them, what their aspirations are. From this we should be looking at short/long term objectives.

They felt that we were not looking at the bigger picture, which they felt at times means that this sometimes requires us to look at individual cases to be able to establish the bigger picture.

Housing for vulnerable people is a mindful not only for officers dealing with these group let only our customers trying to resolve their housing needs. We need to look at simplifying our processes.

The group felt that when we look at new builds we should be looking at the bigger picture especially for existing communities. The feedback was that new builds- especially high density accommodation results in more population which as a result affects doctors, schools etc.

WORKSHOP REPRESENTING VIEWPOINT OF ORGANISATIONS MANAGING HOUSING

Comments on the Objectives: should these issues also be addressed?

Airport- impact

- Sound insulation
- Homelessness
- Private sector impact of the need for IBR flats – migrant workers
- There is clearly a high level of demand registered fuelled by the successful economy of the south east, and in Hounslow, by the airport
- Impact of jobs on local housing market needs to be clear

Role of direct provision

- The Council needs to be clear about our position on what role we want to play, and what role we want the ALMO to play
- Prepared to do new build
- Be an enabler as well as a direct provider

How to get the right size?

- Through the ALMO only?
- Can it be done with SHG, to provide the right size of home?

Disability access

- This is missing from the current objectives, and needs to be an objective within the strategy.
- Time bomb ticking away
- Age/ disability/ children
- We are not good at matching people to housing in an individual way
- Lifetime homes/ is this the right way forward
- Under occupiers – this needs more attention
- Adapted housing register – required
- Individual cases/ individual solutions

WORKSHOP REPRESENTING VIEWPOINT OF BOROUGH RESIDENTS

Are they right objectives?

1. Need good quality social housing – building quality
 - Quality management
 - Poor communication
 - Ineffective resident associations
 - ASB
 - Quality checks/Enforcement

2. Increase supply of 3 beds?
 - Do they take enough account likely future housing issues?
 - Work with under occupiers
 - Trading places low take up
 - More effective incentives
 - Audit of properties to reveal under occupiers
 - Money not always an issue for under occupiers, wider issues

2. Preventing homelessness & reducing dependency on Social Housing
 - Reducing dependence on social housing
 - Social Housing people have no choice change the way this part is worded look at other options
 - Do more for key workers
 - Labour want to increase social housing – buzz word
 - Social Housing tenants scared of becoming owner occupiers
 - Financial issues – mortgages
 - Council should not push for shared ownership
 - Should high service charges be capped?
 - high rents – paid by HB

3. Missing Objectives
 - Revenue service not managed well. Key part of HS & homelessness strategy
 - Overcrowding
 - Climate change
 - Flats – recycling
 - promotion of bikes racks

Ad hoc additional issues:

- Housing Association Forum - Invite councillors
- Need a sub group to discuss HA management issues

Future Housing Issue

- High density