

4in10 Submission to the Westminster Housing Renewal Strategy (October 2009)



14 December 2009

4in10: The End Child Poverty London Project

4in10 is a two-year London-based project coordinated by End Child Poverty, a coalition of over 150 organisations who believe child poverty in the UK is unacceptable. The project has more than 160 organisations engaged at community, regional and national levels, over 30 of whom work with families in Westminster. 4in10 is working to tackle the specific challenges London faces in two ways: firstly, to increase awareness of the issues and strengthen campaigning; and secondly, to identify projects that have been shown to have a positive impact on the levels of child poverty in the capital, and to develop strong networks through which knowledge of this good practice can be shared.

4in10 Westminster Work

Since March 2009, 4in10 has been working with local third sector organisations in Westminster to identify the most important issues affecting children, young people and parents from low income families. The overwhelming response has been that lack of housing stock, leading to overcrowding, is the most pressing need and deemed the most important issue by our supporters in the borough. We know that bad housing can have a huge impact on children's lives. Research by housing charity Shelter supports this, having shown that overcrowding causes anxiety and depression, limits educational success and harms the health of children¹.

Over 1,000 households in Westminster are currently experiencing overcrowding, and 8,394 households are on social housing waiting lists in the borough². Overcrowding legislation states that kitchens and living rooms can be counted as suitable sleeping places; that children under ten years count as half a person and that babies under one do not count at all. It is therefore arguable that those households officially classified as overcrowded represent only those in the direst need, with the problem extending beyond these figures. We know that Westminster council takes the issue seriously and that it is working to overcome the significant barriers to an easy resolution of the problem. To quote Cllr Phillippa Roe on overcrowding; "It is unacceptable that, in the 21st century, so many people continue to live in homes that are far too small for them, often exacerbating already vulnerable situations."³

We therefore welcome this strategy, and also the opportunity for our members to feed into its development moving forward.

¹ Research by housing charity Shelter. More information can be found on their website: http://england.shelter.org.uk/what_you_can_do/campaigning/sign_our_overcrowding_petition

² Figure provided by Shelter. More information can be found on their website: http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/waiting_lists

³ Cllr Phillippa Roe, (2009) *West End Extra – Letters to the Editor*. New Journal Enterprises

1) Vision and Objectives of the Strategy

The Renewal Strategy sets out its vision and objectives as the following:

'Westminster's Housing Strategy aims to involve local people in designing plans to provide better quality homes in prosperous neighbourhoods to create thriving mixed communities. It will achieve this by bringing together national experts and local residents to identify where we can change existing buildings, street patterns and local facilities to do better for the people who live there.'

*'To deliver this vision we have four objectives. First, increase the amount of affordable rented homes, including options for families. Second, provide more affordable homes for local workers. Third, provide a better range of community and retail facilities. Fourth, to create a more distinct sense of neighbourhood, ending the divide between Westminster's 'estates' and local streets.'*⁴

Whilst we recognise each of these priorities as valid, we would like the strategy to focus on the alleviation of overcrowding for existing tenants living in the renewal areas, and for this to be the first priority. This is broadly addressed in the strategy's ten point commitment to local people, given later in the document, but we believe that this should also be specified from the outset.

With regard to family homes, 4in10 would like to see a specific target set on the percentage of three bedroom or larger properties planned.

4in10 would also like a stipulation in its vision that the strategy is not simply committing to physical regeneration, but that it will look at holistic and ongoing 'community renewal', providing sustainable funding for whole family initiatives to ensure that the needs of communities are met and to increase the quality of life for tenants in the borough.

The Renewal Strategy acknowledges that both shared ownership and private rental are outside of the realm of affordability for those on a household income of £25,000 (the average income of those on the Homeownership Westminster Register). Included in objective one, we would therefore like the term 'affordable' rented homes to be defined in relation to average incomes, and for targets to include the minimum percentage of social housing required in order to re-house overcrowded families already living in the renewal areas.

2) Neighbourhoods included

*'This Strategy will focus initially on four areas – the Church Street neighbourhood and the Brunel, Tollgate and Ebury Bridge estates...Officers are in the process of consulting residents about a number of smaller schemes through the Community Build programme to develop new housing on under-utilised pieces of land around existing housing blocks: Avenue Gardens; Bourne Terrace undercroft; Little Venice tower blocks' undercrofts; Dudley House; Sheringham House; Gloucester Gardens; Adpar Street; Parsons House; John Aird Court; Luxborough Street; Blomfield Mews; Warwick Estate / Harrow Road.'*⁵

⁴ (2009) *Westminster Housing Renewal – A Strategy for Involving Residents in Designing Thriving Communities*. City of Westminster Council

⁵ (2009) *Westminster Housing Renewal – A Strategy for Involving Residents in Designing Thriving Communities*. City of Westminster Council

The four neighbourhoods identified for master planned renewal are undoubtedly deserving of investment, with high concentrations of social housing, disproportionate levels of overcrowding⁶, health problems and disparity in life expectancy⁷.

The Mozart Estate in Queen's Park Ward is cited in the Renewal Strategy Report as a regeneration case study. While this estate has no doubt been physically improved by the regeneration, it still faces severe deprivation and has one of the highest levels of child poverty in the country⁸. 4in10 would therefore argue that following physical regeneration, which has made significant improvement to the estate's layout and appearance, sustained community investment is needed to combat social exclusion and deprivation.

3) The benefits of increased housing supply and mixing of tenures

We agree that adopting a mixed tenure approach has been shown to promote social cohesion, reduce social exclusion and create stronger communities⁹. However, we are keen to stress the importance of careful management to ensure positive outcomes are achieved. Evidence is mixed regarding the success of mixed tenure developments, but research has shown that adopting the following principles can offer a greater chance of success:

- A carefully planned layout and high quality neighbourhood facilities¹⁰
- Landscaping to provide local services linked by footpaths and cycle-ways, facilitating greater social interaction¹¹
- Ensuring a high proportion of residents are families facilitates greater interaction across tenures and wider benefits to schools¹²
- 'Pepper potting' whereby different tenures are integrated throughout developments to encourage greater social interaction across tenures¹³
- Ensuring that tenure mixing does not only apply in areas of local authority housing and new developments, but also in areas of predominantly owner-occupied housing¹⁴

4in10 is supportive of the council's commitment towards developing mixed tenure neighbourhoods, but would like to stress that this must be undertaken in conjunction with strategies to address the severe overcrowding of existing tenants, and that private housing should not be allowed to replace social housing without provision being met elsewhere in the borough. We have concerns that the strategy may lean towards attracting new households into tenures other than social housing at the expense of existing residents.

4in10 would therefore encourage the council to secure social housing in wealthier neighbourhoods in addition to encouraging wealthier tenants to move into previously

⁶ (2009) *Housing Register Applicants – Summary Report by Rehousing List and Bedsize* Westminster City Council Housing Needs Team database.

⁷ (2009) *Strategy for Tackling Health Inequalities in Westminster* City of Westminster and NHS Westminster

⁸ (2007) *Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index*. Department of Communities and Local Government, Indices of Deprivation

⁹ Bailey, N and Manzi, T (2008) *Developing and Sustaining Mixed Tenure Housing* Developments Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹⁰ Allen, et al., (2006) *Mixed Tenure Twenty Years On: Nothing Out of the Ordinary*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹¹ Allen, et al., (2006) *Mixed Tenure Twenty Years On: Nothing Out of the Ordinary*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹² Silverman, et al., (2005) *Mixed and Balanced Communities? Attracting and Retaining Families in Inner City Mixed Income Housing*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing and Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹³ Andrews, L. and Reardon Smith, W (2005) *Challenging Perceptions: Case Studies of Dispersed and Mixed Tenure New Build Housing Developments*. Newbury: Sovereign Housing

¹⁴ Bailey, N and Manzi, T (2008) *Developing and Sustaining Mixed Tenure Housing Developments*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

social-housing dominated areas. Moving some social housing into wealthier areas would lead to the creation of truly mixed communities across Westminster. We would also urge that tenants should be given the choice of remaining in their area or of moving to a wealthier neighbourhood, and if they choose the former sufficient social housing must be provided in the relevant renewal estates to enable this to happen.

4) Issues concerning higher density building

Strain on local infrastructure should be carefully considered when building to higher densities. Examples of issues which should be considered are adequate sound proofing to ensure privacy, provision of and access to open spaces which are safe for children to play in, schools, GPs, pharmacists, dentists, community centres and other community facilities. It is critical that densification not be at the expense of the provision of green or play space or of necessary community services and infrastructure. Each individual area will have its own specific issues.

Two issues taken from Westminster Housing Commission's Final report¹⁵ are:

'i) for family accommodation, it is more difficult to create homes with gardens or other external space, and to make family-friendly environments, if higher densities mean apartment-living. This is not inevitable, however, and high densities can be achieved, for example, with town houses of three (or more) storeys;

iv) in many developments, high densities mean high maintenance costs and service charges. Lifts and common areas can be expensive. For affordable housing, this can undermine the usefulness of such developments (and charges for 'luxury' services like gyms will not be covered by Housing Benefit).'

With these issues in mind, 4in10 requests that maintenance costs are kept to a minimum, and that sufficient play space is provided for children. Children need opportunities and a good environment for play – it is critical to their overall physical, emotional, mental, social and healthy development. Mounting research evidence shows that access to and playing in natural and green environments helps counter behavioral problems and has a positive overall effect on children's lives. Planning for space for play is therefore critically important, and adequate children's play provision needs to be built in to any new housing developments. Not to do so will sow the seeds of more anti-social activities. 4in10 believes that the Supplementary Guidance on play provision in new housing developments produced by the previous London Mayor as part of the London Plan should be taken into account when allocating play space. It specified a minimum of 10 square metres of play space for every child expected to be in a development of over 10 housing units, by use of a formula linked to the number of bedrooms¹⁶.

5) Socio-economic factors

The Renewal Strategy states its aim to *'...work with appointed economic regeneration specialists and other partners like local businesses to develop sets of interventions and actions which reflect local issues and barriers to taking up training or work experience within particular areas'*.

Working with partners such as local businesses and social landlords should be key to any renewal strategy, and is supported by the findings of Capital Gains (the London Child Poverty Commission's final report which recommended a requirement by the

¹⁵ Commission Chair Richard Best et al., (2006) **Report of the Westminster Housing Commission**. Westminster Housing Commission.

¹⁶ For details please see <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/spg-children-recreation.jsp>

Mayor of London for 'social landlords and their partners to provide closer integration of housing and employment services.'¹⁷. This recommendation comes from the identification that residents in social housing tend to achieve poor outcomes across the board.

We would recommend that the council looks to collate examples of best practice in work with tenants to improve economic wellbeing. 'Westminster Works on Estates', co-ordinated by Vital Regeneration, Paddington Development Trust and their social landlord partners, has been particularly successful in its approach of embedding Employment Advisers in the communities in which they are targeting, by placing them in accessible locations such as neighbourhood offices. The programme also trains frontline housing management staff in Westminster Works' approach, so tenants can be referred as appropriate¹⁸. The Beethoven Centre's multi-agency drop-in service is another very successful local initiative which brings together a wide range of services including housing suppliers and advisors, local councillors, benefit and debt advisors and others.¹⁹ The service, coordinated by A2Dominion, offers local residents a one stop shop for advice and guidance, with translators on site to make it as accessible as possible to residents in the community.

Outreach is often the best way of contacting those residents in need of support who would not seek this themselves. A highly successful example of this is EC1 Connect., a scheme coordinated by EC1 New Deal for Communities. Residents are visited by advisors who can offer advice about services to help them. These can include training courses to help find employment, childcare services or services that will improve their quality of life in other ways. The service has gained the trust of the community leading to many informal referrals, and is particularly effective at targeting those who may be harder to reach through traditional channels²⁰.

Third sector organisations, in particular, have a reputation for effective engagement of hard to reach groups, which could prove a valuable resource for social landlords looking to engage with their tenants.

6) Other Social Issues

Crime and the fear of crime, anti-social behaviour and community cohesion can all be tackled through successful renewal schemes. Opportunities for local people to be more involved in neighbourhood governance and participation should be provided and encouraged in innovative ways.

Long term and continued investment through 'community renewal' is needed for a regeneration initiative to be truly successful. A good example is offered by Circle 33 and their redevelopment of Holly Street in Hackney. Ten years ago, 80% of residents had applied to leave Holly Street. Today, thanks to the regeneration of the area, 93% of people who live on the estate want to stay²¹. This success is due to continued investment and provision of community activities where a demand is established, reviewed and changed where necessary on an ongoing basis. For example, popular youth activities have led to higher youth employment and engagement in productive alternatives to criminal activity.

¹⁷ (2008) *Capital Gains*. London Child Poverty Commission.

¹⁸ More information can be found on Vital Regeneration's website: www.vitalregeneration.org/our-projects/westminster-works/about

¹⁹ More information can be found at A2Dominion's website: <http://www.a2dominion.co.uk/rte.asp?id=903>

²⁰ The Evaluation of this project can be read here: <http://www.yourec1.com/editpics/66-1.pdf>

²¹ More information can be found on this initiative here: <http://www.circleanglia.org/corporate/regeneration/case-1-holly-street.144.LA.html>

Westminster itself offers good practice in community engagement, having recently received a Green Flag commending its work in this area from the Audit Commission²². The report concluded that through LARPs (Local Area Renewal Partnerships), uniting public sector partners, those most vulnerable in each area are engaged and supported. As well as tackling crime, Westminster's LARPs have also addressed issues such as health inequality. For example, in Church Street the LARP has helped to reduce the life expectancy gap from 16 to 9 years when compared to the least deprived ward in the city, by developing a thorough understanding of health needs in the area and tailoring services through the LARP to meet these.

The Renewal Strategy should look to good practice internal and external to the borough, to ensure that social issues such as crime and health are addressed both through and subsequent to the physical renewal works.

7) & 8) Proposals for engagement in the strategy and development process

The Renewal Strategy outlines a comprehensive ten point commitment to local people, as given below:

- 1) The renewal programme is for the benefit of local residents – any tenant or leaseholder wanting to remain living in their area will be able to do so.*
- 2) We will involve local residents as fully as possible in the development of options for improvements to the area and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute their views and ideas.*
- 3) We want local stakeholders to be involved in the development of draft improvement proposals to meet local objectives. Proposals will only be included in a renewal programme where there has been thorough dialogue and consultation with stakeholders.*
- 4) The community will have the opportunity to tell us their preferences relating to options to refurbish existing homes and community facilities or whether to redesign and redevelop.*
- 5) Consultation and engagement will be ongoing throughout the delivery process and not just an isolated period without further opportunities to give feedback.*
- 6) There will be a named lead officer contact for each area where we propose to develop a renewal plan.*
- 7) Consultation will be led by local steering groups of residents and ward councillors.*
- 8) We will work with any established local groups.*
- 9) We will hold one-to-one surgeries for residents who want them.*
- 10) We will provide regular updates on plans as they progress.²³*

4in10 fully supports this comprehensive commitment to involving local people, particularly that consultation will be ongoing, and that it will engage with established local groups.

Concerning point two, we would posit that the best way to engage with residents on the ground would be through an outreach scheme which uses existing infrastructures. In particular, 4in10 would encourage the use of children's centres, community centres and other third sector organisations already working to engage residents, as well as more traditional tenants associations. The council should undertake a thorough Equalities Impact Assessment before the consultation, and should therefore commit

²² More information can be found here: <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/localpriority.aspx?region=51&area=422&priority=4423>

²³ (2009) **Westminster Housing Renewal – A Strategy for Involving Residents in Designing Thriving Communities**. City of Westminster Council

resources to ensure that marginalised / vulnerable groups, such as those with disabilities or from minority ethnic communities, are properly engaged. To avoid the most vocal having the loudest (but often unrepresentative) voice at a community level, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recommends: 'Rather than expect everyone to participate in formal governance equally, we should try to make more people's everyday civic engagement count, by designing the formal structures of governance in a way that taps into the informal, routine spaces of community life, such as the school gate, places of worship or local post office.'²⁴

The second draft of this plan should be presented to all stakeholders and be made easily accessible to residents, including clear figures on targets for social housing and family homes, with a definition of 'affordable' housing and an outline for proposed sustained community development.

The 24 members of the 4in10 network that have signed up to these common principles are:

A Moveable Feast (AMF)
Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre
Beauchamp Lodge Settlement
The Cardinal Hume Centre
CHAS (Catholic Housing Aid Society)
Children England
Communities Empowerment Network (CEN)
Home-Start Westminster
Honeypot
London Early Years Foundation (LEYF)
Marylebone Bangladesh Society
Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum
Migrants Resource Centre
Octavia Foundation
Paddington Development Trust (PDT)
Queen's Park Bangladeshi Association
School-Home Support (SHS)
Somali Management Development Centre
St Paul's Church
St Paul's Community Centre
St Vincent's Family Project
Westminster Befriend a Family
Westminster Refugee Consortium
The Westminster Society for People with Learning Disabilities

²⁴ Paul Skidmore, Kirsten Bound and Hannah Lownsborough (2008) *Do policies to promote community participation in governance build social capital?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Organisations supporting this submission:

