

London Tenants Federation

Proposal for formal involvement of the community and voluntary sector in regional strategic and statutory housing policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following a meeting with Alan Benson and Dominic Curran on 6th September, LTF is very pleased to put forward a proposal for voluntary and community involvement in developing and monitoring regional statutory and strategic housing policy to the London Mayor, as proposed by officers at that meeting.
- 1.2 LTF is an umbrella organisation bringing together mostly borough- and London-wide federations and organisations of tenants of social housing providers, but also London Federation of Housing Co-operatives and the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations. A number of its member organisations involve both council and housing association tenants and a few (a minority) also involve some private tenants.
- 1.3 LTF facilitates a consensus voice for tenants of social-housing providers in the capital. Its key focus is engaging its member organisations in London-wide strategic regional housing, planning and community related policy. It had representation on the Mayor's Housing Forum from 2005, although the Forum no longer seems to be in existence. LTF delegates are often invited to attend London Assembly housing and planning committee meetings. Its members have attended, by invitation, almost all the Examinations in Public of the London Plan since 2007, particularly relating to housing and regeneration policy.
- 1.4 LTF maintains strong links with other community and voluntary sector organisations in London that also have an interest in strategic and statutory housing issues.

2. Background

- 2.1 There have been opportunities in the past for engagement of some tenant and other voluntary and community sector groups in the development and monitoring of regional housing policy albeit, in our view, insufficiently effective. LTF was involved (from 2004/05) in the Mayor's Housing Forum / Housing Forum for London as were Brent Private Tenants and Shelter.

A Community Engagement Task Force was established in 2005 as a result of a proposal presented to the Forum by LTF around consulting and engaging tenants and hard to reach groups in the regional agenda. The Task Force's report resulted in the establishment of a Community Engagement sub-group of the Mayor's Housing Forum. The Task Force's aims were never fully implemented as sadly the sub-group was dissolved by Boris Johnson soon after becoming Mayor.

- 2.2 Some voluntary and community sector groups have been involved in some housing policy discussion through being members of the GLA's equalities standing group.
- 2.3 Boris Johnson increasingly focused involvement with those delivering housing to the exclusion of engaging formally with the voluntary and community sector who have wide grass roots experience of the impact of decades of unsuccessful housing policy in the capital. While both the 2010 London Housing Strategy and its revision of 2012 talked about empowering tenants and of them having greater opportunities for community involvement, this did not occur. Indeed, in a letter of July 2011, Boris Johnson assured the London and Voluntary Service Council that he would consider establishing formal voluntary and community sector groups representation on all the new cross sector partnerships created as a result of his new powers. Again, implementation of empowerment and greater opportunities for involvement did not occur and all mention of tenant and other community and voluntary sector involvement was completely removed in the 2014 London Housing Strategy.
- 2.4 At the same time, voluntary and community sector groups were discussing what they wanted in terms of involvement with the Mayor around housing policy. In 2012 LTF brought together a range of voluntary and community sector groups to produce a collaborative response to consultation on the Revised London Housing Strategy. The response focused particularly on the Mayor's new statutory and strategic housing powers in London. A section of this document, which was drafted and supported by 16 voluntary and community sector groups¹, contained a full section on involvement of the voluntary and community sector.
- 2.5 LTF, with London Voluntary Services Council, Camden Federation of Private Tenants and Just Space organised a further collaborative response to the draft London Housing Strategy 2014, supported by 30 voluntary and community sector groups in London. This response again raised issues of "strengthening VCS representation within the housing partnership structures that develop and implement the London Housing Strategy. It also proposed the establishment of a quarterly VCS housing forum, administered by the VCS but meeting at City Hall and to be attended by the Mayor's representatives. It proposed resources to support engagement with VCS on housing issues, either within existing GLA budgets or in part by taking control of London's proportion of the government's Tenant Empowerment Fund".

3. Proposal

- 3.1 Overview: Given that the London Mayor has significant powers around statutory and strategic housing policy, combined with the serious ongoing housing crisis in London, it is essential that he show a commitment to meaningful and effective involvement of

¹ London Civic Forum; Homeless Link; Just Space; London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies; Housing Justice; London Voluntary Service Council; London Federation of Co-operative Housing; Camden Federation of Private Tenants; Kings Cross Railway Lands Group; Zaccheaus 2000 Trust; Hayes Community Development Forum; London Tenants Federation, Stonewall Housing; London Gypsy and Traveller Unit; 4in10, Age UK London

the voluntary and community sector in the development and monitoring of London housing policy. London has a rich mix of groups whose remit is around housing (either totally or significantly), and whose expert knowledge and understanding is informed by experience (particularly of lower income households) at the grass-roots level.

3.2 To achieve this LTF proposes that the Mayor should

(a) **Support the establishment of a voluntary and community sector housing forum, facilitated by members of the forum, and supported through existing GLA budgets.**

The forum should comprise groups whose work is focused on homelessness, overcrowding and poor quality homes along with representatives of social and private tenants' organisations and advocates groups with particular needs such as gypsies and travellers.

Forum meetings, including distribution of meeting papers and invitations to guest speakers and GLA officers should be undertaken by members of the Forum. LTF would be keen to take on this role, potentially with others, if this were supported by other community and voluntary sector group members. It would be happy to be commissioned to carry out initial discussion with a variety of housing groups - to collate information on their ideas around how such a forum might operate. LTF has wide experience in this kind of work having developed and supported networks of tenants and other community groups in the two Mayoral Development Corporation areas over the last four years, funded by Trust for London and a UCL research project. The main focus of these networks has been on influencing planning policy.

The forum should meet at least four times a year at City Hall and be attended by the Mayor's representatives either routinely or as requested.

Its remit should be to:

- (i) provide wide specialist voluntary and community sector involvement in the development of statutory and strategic housing policy in London (both the London Housing Strategy, the housing chapter of the London Plan and any supplementary guidance relating to housing)
- (ii) assist in monitoring the effectiveness of policy;
- (iii) invite speakers including occasional specialist contributors as well as GLA officers
- (iv) provide regular engagement of individual groups with GLA officers.

(b) **Add representation of six members of the proposed voluntary and community sector forum to the Homes for Londoners Board** to ensure that delivery is properly informed by those with grass roots expertise on the social impact of housing policy in London. The forum should nominate its representatives.

(c) Facilitate full grass-roots engagement of council, housing association and private tenants, groups.

All groups should be provided with effective engagement mechanisms for engaging with the Mayor's office. Tenants of private and social / affordable housing face particular difficulties caused by a lack of government acknowledgement of affordability problems, as well as the detrimental impact of increasing levels of transience on individual households and communities in London.

The GLA should set a particular budget line within its expenditure for tenant engagement. Local providers of social and affordable housing do not feel they have a remit to support engagement of tenants in strategic housing policy at the regional level and the vast majority of private tenants and many housing association tenants lack access to formal engagement even at the local level.

Since the Mayor has responsibilities for the allocation of London's share of national resources for investment in housing and regeneration, LTF feels that he should enable engagement of social-housing tenants in the allocation of funding for sustaining existing social rented homes or estate regeneration schemes, and in the monitoring of its effectiveness. We propose specifically that this should include social landlord's adherence to the good guidance or protocol on regeneration, currently being produced by Mayor's office, and an invitation to LTF delegates to meetings where discussions on allocation of the Mayor's funding on regeneration will take place.

(d) Organisation of an annual or biannual housing conference by the forum with the Mayor, to facilitate wider engagement in housing policy as it is clear that housing forms at least a small part of the work that many voluntary and community sector groups are engaged in.

Together, these would demonstrate a clear commitment by the Mayor to working in partnership with London's voluntary and community sector around development and monitoring of regional housing policy.

Yours sincerely

Pat Turnbull and Ron Hollis
Regional delegates,
London Tenants Federation

Address: 50 Memorial Avenue, West Ham, London E15 3BS **Telephone:** 07931 214 913

Web address: www.londontenants.org **Email:** info@londontenants.org

London Tenants is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England / Wales No 8155382