

Cllr David Marlow,
Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Housing
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
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Friday 14th February 2014

Draft London Housing Strategy
Housing Policy Team
Greater London Authority
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London
SE1 2AA

Via email: housingcovenant@london.gov.uk (Draft London Housing Strategy)

Dear Sir/Madam,

“Homes for London, the London Housing Strategy”, Response from Cllr David Marlow, Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Housing, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Thank you for the opportunity for Richmond upon Thames to respond to ‘Homes for London, the London Housing Strategy’.

First of all I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about how in Richmond upon Thames our priorities have been shaped by our residents’ views through extensive engagement and consultation since we took office. These have been further informed by analysis to identify the Borough’s current and future needs. In this way, we have ensured that we are focusing upon issues most important to local people.

Our residents greatly value the environment of the Borough and good quality homes and neighbourhoods are important for us. Where residents have highlighted the need for improvement we have followed through with a programme of work to improve the public realm in our ‘Uplift Areas’ including Whitton High Street and Hampton. The Council and partners are also engaging with our residents (working with the Prince’s Foundation) in Ham Close on their ideas to best enhance this area. Our approach, based upon listening to local people is reflected in our most recent Resident Survey (2013) with 96% of residents being satisfied or very satisfied with their local area.

Our response to the London Housing Strategy is therefore always informed by putting the needs of local people first. There are some areas of the draft Strategy which appear to have a detrimental impact on our residents. On these issues we are compelled to challenge the proposed view. A case in point has been our opposition to the national relaxation of permitted development regulations from office to residential use. We have the highest number of applications in London. This has the potential to be disastrous for local businesses and employment opportunities whilst evading our own robust local policies on affordable housing contributions from ex-employment sites. Putting the needs of local people first is therefore at the heart of our response.

We strongly support the measures to give greater priority to working and local households accessing social housing and here in Richmond upon Thames we have already implemented a new allocations policy that gives greater priority to working and local households on our Housing Register. We have also implemented the Military Covenant. Good design standards are intrinsic to making sure Richmond upon Thames remains a great place to live and we strongly support the London Housing Design Guide Standards. We have already publically expressed our support for these standards. We also welcome the focus on increasing the supply of new homes where they are well designed and meet local needs. The Council has worked hard to achieve local affordable housing, using its own capital funding to support the delivery of 433 homes between April 2010 and March 2014 (with 394 already completed and 39 more due by March 2014). We are also using our own sites to help deliver even more affordable housing, helping to achieve larger family homes. This is because as an attractive Borough (with large green spaces and parks, historic buildings and many conservation areas) these positive attributes make it a popular place to live, yet constrain housing development, making it more challenging.

There are areas of the strategy where I welcome the GLA having a more informed discussion with Officers to develop a local tailored approach. One such area is the affordability of Discounted and Capped Rent properties. We want to ensure that we 'make work pay' and our detailed response provides more information around our concerns in this area. Richmond upon Thames is a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) authority and we are aware we have already experienced a disproportionate level of conversions to Affordable Rent. We do not want conversions or disposals taking away hard won resources for local families in genuine housing need. Therefore we would like to discuss local solutions to keep resources for our residents' benefit. We welcome solutions such as cross subsidy through market sale, to support local Registered Providers to develop in the Borough.

I am surprised to see the Mayor's London Housing Strategy containing such 'top down' and apparently bureaucratic policies on pan London mobility and the cascading of intermediate homes across London. These new proposals would see us losing valuable local resources whilst gaining nothing in return. We have evidence to support this position. I would urge the Mayor to reconsider these policies.

More detailed information on specific policy areas of the strategy are provided in the attached appendix.

Should you have any further questions about any of the issues raised here, please contact at officer level either Dan Butler, Housing Policy & Research Manager on 020 8831 6017 or dan.butler@richmond.gov.uk, or Nicky Simpson, Planning and Policy Manager (Housing) on 020 8831 6221 or n.simpson@richmond.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr David Marlow
Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Housing
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames