

A new housing strategy for Lewisham



Tell us your views on the new Lewisham
housing strategy 2020–26



Foreword from Councillor Bell



Over the course of the last housing strategy 2015–2020, Lewisham has achieved a lot. Through our building programme, we have built new social homes for the first time in a generation. We are proud of council housing and we now have the Building for Lewisham programme, which is starting to deliver the genuinely affordable homes our residents need. Our vision is that everyone deserves a safe, secure and genuinely affordable home. But this is not the reality for many households.

Lewisham, along with the rest of London, is facing an unprecedented housing crisis. There are not enough genuinely affordable homes for those who need them. The cost of housing has increased and incomes have not kept pace. Welfare reform has left households struggling unfairly. We face a range of challenges due to continuing budget cuts through government imposed austerity. This is stretching our already limited resources further. If it was not for our hard working staff both at Lewisham Council and Lewisham Homes, we would be left increasingly powerless to act against homelessness and poverty.

That is why we are developing a new strategy, to help us move closer to achieving our vision. This consultation document sets out the key challenges Lewisham residents are facing. It lays out our plans for the next six years, to make sure we continue to make a difference and try to deal with the housing crisis.

In Lewisham, we are committed to doing all we can. It is the residents of Lewisham that make it such an amazing place, and strong communities are at the centre of that. We recognise this and will put residents at the centre of decision making to help Lewisham flourish.

Your views are important. I would encourage you to respond to the public consultation, to help shape the direction for housing in Lewisham. Together, we can and will make greater progress.



Overview

Our vision is that everyone has a safe, stable and genuinely affordable home where they can live an independent and prosperous life. The new housing strategy outlines the strategic direction, key priorities and actions that will help us meet this vision.

There is an unprecedented housing crisis in London and Lewisham. There is not enough genuinely affordable housing for the households that need it. Our strategy summarises how we will tackle the housing crisis and achieve our vision.

The draft strategy is based on the views of residents and partners, and an extensive evidence base. Tell us your views at www.lewisham.gov.uk/TBC

How we will tackle the housing crisis

This document outlines the actions already underway and the approach we will take with all of our partners to work towards our vision. It also summarises how we will meet the Council's ambitions over the next six years. These are grouped into five themes:

1. delivering the homes that Lewisham needs
2. preventing homelessness and meeting housing need
3. improving the quality, standard and safety of housing
4. supporting our residents to live safe, independent and active lives
5. strengthening communities and embracing diversity.

To deliver the housing strategy we will work with a wide range of partners. This includes other council services, our housing management and registered providers, charities and local support groups, other local authorities, the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority.

The final strategy will be written following the public consultation. This will be published with an action plan. The action plan will give detail on the steps we are taking to achieve the goals set out in the strategy.

Priority 1: delivering the homes that Lewisham needs

There is a severe shortage of genuinely affordable housing in Lewisham. There is a risk that this housing crisis will impact not just on current but future generations. Many people in our local communities are struggling to afford to live in the borough they call home.

Social housing

Social rented homes are the only type of housing that remains genuinely affordable for the majority of people in Lewisham. We know how high the demand is from the over 9,500 households on our housing register.

New homes

To respond to this crisis, we have been working to deliver new homes. Since 2012 we have been building our own council homes again for the first time in a generation. Working with our housing partner Lewisham Homes, we have provided hundreds of new council homes in the borough. We are building safe, secure and genuinely affordable homes where families can settle and lead independent lives.

We will help new communities to thrive by delivering the community and commercial facilities needed as part of new developments.

More council homes

We know there is still more to do, and we are working to increase the number of new council homes. We are looking at underused Council land and regeneration of our current housing estates, where residents support it.

As part of this, we also want to provide better temporary accommodation and new supported living homes. We will deliver an ambitious and exciting development programme that will keep growing. This will allow us to build the council homes that Lewisham needs.

Private rented sector

As well as building more council homes, we need to improve the private rented sector, where around 25% of Lewisham residents live. Private renting has become more and more unaffordable, causing uncertainty and insecurity. Private rents grew by more than 50% between 2011 and 2017. Properties with lower rents have increased even faster.

Meanwhile, wages and benefits have not kept the same pace. This has resulted in more families becoming homeless. Almost 50% of homeless households become homeless because of the ending of a tenancy in the private rented sector. This makes it the biggest single cause of homelessness in Lewisham. To help set the private renting standard, we are delivering our own private rented homes with:

- long-term tenancies
- London living rent rates
- high quality management.

Affordable housing

There are many definitions of the term ‘affordable housing’. In Lewisham, “genuinely affordable” is defined as housing with rent charged at the target rent or London affordable rent levels. These are the only rent levels that are genuinely affordable to those on low incomes. Other types of intermediate affordable homes include London living rent and shared ownership.

We plan to deliver a diverse range of new homes for all our residents. Our priority is to build social rented homes.

How we will achieve this

Deliver as many social rented properties as possible, through:

- using underused Council land and assets. We aim to spread the benefits from investment and deliver social value for residents
- building council-owned homes at social rent
- working with partners to deliver social rent homes in Lewisham
- being innovative in how we deliver homes. This includes using precision manufactured homes' technology and community-led development.

Make places where people want to live, through:

- designing good quality housing and open spaces for residents
- provide the community and commercial floorspace needed to allow new neighbourhoods to thrive

- building a wide range of both adaptable and purpose built homes to meet people's varying needs. This includes homes for older people who want to be independent; specialist housing for people with learning disabilities; and homes for homeless households.
- focussing on future maintenance, management-friendly designs and proactive approach to sustainable development. These will keep costs down and create the best possible environment for our residents.

Increase the supply of high-quality temporary accommodation, through:

- developing, obtaining and leasing of homes
- improving the standard of temporary accommodation, both owned by us and used by our residents
- transforming under-used Lewisham Council assets into much needed accommodation.

Priority 2: preventing homelessness and meeting housing need

Homelessness

Lewisham residents are increasingly facing severe and challenging housing needs. Changes in national policy and lack of genuinely affordable housing have led to an increase in homelessness in Lewisham. The number of families who have to live in temporary accommodation, after the loss of a stable home, has risen to unprecedented levels.

In September 2019 there were over 2,200 homeless households in temporary accommodation. Over 600 of them live in the most expensive and unstable forms of temporary accommodation. We also have nearly 200 rough sleepers across Lewisham, an increase of 35% since 2015–16.

Homelessness has a serious and harmful effect on those who experience it. No household should ever have to experience homelessness. Our approach is to prevent homelessness at the earliest point, before families become homeless. We have a separate homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. This will be published at the same time as the new housing strategy.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is another serious issue for many households in Lewisham. In September 2019, almost 5,100 families on our housing register were living in an overcrowded home and in need of a larger one.

The number of social homes available is far below the need. Since 2011, there has been a 45% reduction in the number of social housing lets for households on the housing register. For every social home we let, there are around 10 households that need that home. Unless there is a major change in the funding to build social homes, it is unlikely that the number of social homes will match the demand. As a result, we have to look for alternative solutions, such as the private rented sector.

Specialist support

There is also high demand for housing that includes specialist support. This might be for older residents, people with mental health needs or learning disabilities.

In 2018–19 almost 500 people were referred for supported housing. In September 2019, over 270 households were on the housing register waiting for sheltered housing.

How we will achieve this

Provide support as early as possible, through:

- continuing to improve the housing options service, to ensure we give residents high quality advice at all times
- encouraging residents to seek support as early as possible when they are in housing need
- increasing our effective health and employment partnerships
- using our information and data to identify residents in need. This will help us give personalised support earlier.

Support Lewisham residents at times of urgent need, through:

- working with partners to provide a joined-up and effective response to urgent housing need
- ending the use of nightly paid bed and breakfast
- increasing the availability of much-needed specialist accommodation
- finding solutions to reduce rough sleeping
- making the best use of the private rented sector to solve housing need
- working to bring households living away from Lewisham back to or near to the borough
- making sure our social homes are let in the most effective way to solve housing need.

Priority 3: improving the quality, standard and safety of housing in Lewisham

Conditions of private rented homes

One in four residents in Lewisham live in the private rented sector – double that of 15 years ago. We estimate that a quarter of private rented properties are non-decent. Between January 2015 and October 2018 we received over 2,000 complaints about the condition of private rented properties. We inspected all these properties and around half of them had an energy efficiency rating of D or below.

Improving property standards

Ensuring the quality and standard of the private rented sector is a priority for us. We are using all the tools we have to enforce against poor standards. Following a public consultation in summer 2019, we are taking steps to increase the number of private rented sector properties that need a licence. Putting a new licensing scheme in place will help improve property standards. We will set the standard in the private sector by developing a new generation of private rented homes with longer tenancies and rent clarity. We will take steps to tackle fuel poverty.

Health and safety

Health and safety and fire safety are of extreme importance. Lewisham Homes and our other management partners continue to make sure that the fabric of the buildings meet the required standards. We have carried out checks to ensure that all tall buildings in Lewisham are safe. We are also working with partners to prepare for new building safety legislation. We will make continuous investment in our homes our priority.

Climate Emergency

In 2019 we declared a climate emergency, and committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. As a large contributor to carbon outputs, housing has a key part to play in reducing emissions.

How we will achieve this

Improve standards in the private rented sector, through:

- applying for a borough-wide licensing scheme for all private rented properties and extending our house in multiple occupation licensing scheme
- working with good landlords and landlord associations to improve standards and practice across the borough
- using data from our licensing schemes to improve our service
- developing a new generation of private rented homes with longer tenancies and rent clarity.

Invest in homes in Lewisham, through:

- an ambitious programme of works to improve the condition of our social homes and estates, delivered through our partners
- making the best use of grants and loans for private homeowners. This will improve the quality and standard of their homes.

Lead on health and safety, fire safety and tackling the climate emergency, through:

- working with London Fire Brigade and other partners to improve fire safety
- ensuring the fire safety of our homes
- improving the energy efficiency of the homes we own, promoting efficiency measures and tackling fuel poverty
- take measures to reduce the carbon footprint of housing.

Priority 4: supporting our residents to lead safe, independent and active lives

Good-quality, secure and genuinely affordable housing is the basis from which residents can achieve their full potential. It is important for us to help residents lead safe, independent and active lives. We will do this by using our own resources and by working with partners.

Residents' health and wellbeing

Housing has a key role to play in the health and wellbeing of residents. The bad condition of a property, or stress from being unable to pay rent, can negatively affect the physical and mental health of our residents. Physical health needs, particularly for older residents, can restrict the ability to live independently without home adaptations.

Earnings

Incomes in Lewisham have decreased over the last five years, and are among the lowest in London. In 2018 the median household income was under £29,000, the third lowest median income in London. Housing costs have remained high as incomes have decreased. There is a huge pressure on households in Lewisham to use their limited incomes on housing. It is important to us and our partners that we help residents keep their tenancies.

Disabled facility grants

Disabled facilities grants help people remain in their home for longer. A survey about the effectiveness of disabled facilities grants found that over 80% of people felt the works had a positive impact on their wellbeing and quality of life. This work is very important in helping people remain safe and independent.

How we will achieve this

Help residents be independent, through:

- supporting people to stay in their home where appropriate
- working with social care and health partners to increase the uptake of grants and loans
- giving personalised and high quality advice to residents on their options
- making sure households threatened with homelessness are referred effectively by partners
- ensuring people have a smooth journey in and out of supported accommodation.

Promote the physical and mental wellbeing of Lewisham residents, through:

- working with social care and other related services to ensure a joined-up approach and understanding of support available
- promoting an active lifestyle through work with our social care and health teams and housing providers
- informing residents about the support services available to meet their needs
- ensuring housing providers are consistent in their approach to support vulnerable residents.

Priority 5: strengthening communities and embracing diversity

Lewisham is a vibrant and exciting place to live because of its diverse and welcoming communities. We have a strong community ethos and are proud of our long tradition of openness and acceptance. Working with our residents to strengthen communities is a key part of our housing strategy.

The first step to a strong community is having a place to call home. Strong communities are built by active and empowered residents. We are committed to giving residents control over the future of where they live. The residents of Achilles Street recently voted to approve proposed changes to their area. Listening to residents is essential for the growth of strong communities.

It is important that the work we do provides opportunities for local residents through employment opportunities, community investment and more. We will work closely with partners to ensure that work programmes deliver positive outcomes that go beyond the work itself.

Lewisham has a proud history of supporting refugees and migrants. We aim to become a borough of sanctuary, as described in our sanctuary strategy. Our vision is that Lewisham is a welcoming place of safety for all. We are proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and oppression.

How we will achieve this

Ensuring residents have a meaningful voice, through:

- introducing a residents charter to guarantee the rights of residents on estates we are re-developing
- promoting the rights of residents in the private rented sector. We will do this by creating a private sector tenants union
- giving residents a louder voice through active participation in the future of their estates. We will do this through co-design of new estates, ballots and steering groups
- continue supporting existing residents associations and encourage the creation of new ones
- delivering social value as part of new and ongoing works delivered by ourselves and with our partners.

Embracing diversity, through:

- working with our housing partners to ensure they recognise diversity and equality in their services. For example, through disability and LGBTQ+ inclusive service provision
- becoming a sanctuary borough
- welcoming refugees through our resettlement programme.

Tell us your views at www.lewisham.gov.uk/TBC

Glossary

Borough-wide licensing	We recently consulted on proposals to seek permission to implement a borough-wide licensing scheme. This would require all private landlords to license their property and maintain certain requirements.
Climate emergency	In February 2019 we declared a climate emergency and embarked on the process of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.
Disabled facilities grants	We provide grants and loan assistance where appropriate to adapt properties to assist households in remaining independent in their home for longer.
Formula rent	The formula by which rents are set for existing council housing.
Genuinely affordable	Housing where the rent is set at London affordable rent or below.
House in multiple occupation	A house with over three tenants, which contains more than one distinct household and with some shared facilities.
Intermediate housing	Housing for rent or sale above social rents but below market levels as nationally defined.
London Affordable Rent	A housing product introduced by the Mayor of London. These are benchmarked against formula rent.
London Living Rent	Housing where rent levels are set at one third of average local household earnings. These homes are being made available for existing renters in London with a household income of less than £60,000 p.a.
Nightly paid bed and breakfast	Temporary accommodation with shared facilities that the council pays for on a nightly-by-night basis.
Precision manufactured homes	Housing where much of the property has been manufactured off-site and then transported for completion, assembly and occupation.
Sheltered housing	Housing for elderly or disabled people with some shared facilities and a warden.
Social value	Opportunities made available to local communities in and above the benefits of any work itself.
Supported housing	We provide support for vulnerable people to maintain and improve their ability to live independently in their own homes, as well as providing a range of specialist supported housing.
Temporary accommodation	Accommodation that a household may be placed into whilst a decision is being made on their homelessness application, or after their application has been accepted.