

Housing Strategy Summary

March 2010



Housing Strategy – Executive Summary

Introduction

Ealing Council's Housing Strategy 2009 – 2014 examines the key housing issues in the borough, and sets out how we aim to tackle these over a five-year period.

Our strategy will concentrate on four key priority areas following a thorough review of our previous housing strategy (2004 -2009); consultation with internal and external partners; and consideration of the results of our recent strategic housing market assessment (SHMA) and housing needs survey.

The strategy outlines both the major issues, and the actions we intend to take to help resolve them for each of our four priority areas. These are:

- Excellent services and choice for existing residents
- Increasing choice and managing demand
- Creating new supply
- Delivering decent neighbourhoods

The strategy reflects the Council's strategic and enabling role in meeting housing needs in Ealing.

Priority One: Service excellence and choice for existing residents

We need to make the best use of our housing stock by providing excellent services to existing residents, increasing choice and ensuring that council housing is used by the right people at the right time in their lives.

Our research indicates that of the 18,000 households living in council accommodation in Ealing, 20% wish to move within the borough, 37% want greater involvement in the service and 75% aspire to homeownership.

Key aims:

- Increase choices for existing council residents, improve mobility within the stock and reward responsible tenants
- Provide appropriate accommodation and services for older people
- Increase employment opportunities for people in temporary accommodation
- Provide excellent, value-for-money services to council residents
- Deliver local choice over housing services
- Improve life chances for people in temporary accommodation

Our strategies:

A. Delivering excellent services

Deliver excellent housing management services

The Council's arms length management organisation (ALMO), Ealing Homes, has been managing the borough's housing stock since 2004. However, it has not delivered the performance improvement we had hoped for. A recent Audit Commission inspection gave the service a one-star rating, with poor prospects for improvement.

Action: Review options for service delivery; market test services; improve partnership working

Delivering local choice

Research has consistently shown that greater involvement of residents in the running of services leads to the delivery of greater satisfaction, choice and power.

Residents want more involvement and choice in the service they receive, and the Hills and Cave reports of 2007 pointed out that this could improve performance and increase satisfaction.

Action: Deliver local investment and service boards; create a strategy for individual choice over service and rent levels; reward resident involvement

Supporting older people

Ealing's older population is expected to increase by 45% by 2031. We need to be able to provide appropriate services and accommodation for this group of people.

Action: End the use of bedsits in sheltered housing; create more extra care spaces; extend in-home support services

B. Increasing mobility and rewarding responsible tenants

Increasing mobility

Many of our residents are frustrated at their inability to move within our housing stock. They often wish to move to a better area or bigger home, or to be closer to employment. They see themselves missing out while others with different needs get ahead.

Action: Extend the Golden Transfer pilot; provide priority access to homeownership grants; review LOCATA's benefits for existing residents

Local Lettings

We want to take a sensitive approach to lettings to create more economically mixed areas.

Action: Review and implement sensitive local lettings plans; join the national debate on tenure reform

Increasing access to home ownership for council tenants

Our SHMA shows that 75% of council residents aspire to home ownership and we want to help meet their aspirations.

Action: Develop an equity stake scheme for council housing

C. Temporary accommodation

Reducing use of temporary accommodation

The council is working hard to reduce the amount of temporary accommodation used, as this is never the ideal solution. We would like to encourage residents to make long-lasting changes and take responsibility for their future if they find themselves living in temporary accommodation.

Action: Meet targets on reducing temporary accommodation households; extend our Housing Employment and Learning Project (HELP)

Priority Two: Increasing choice and managing demand

Supply of affordable housing continues to outweigh demand, while our current system has given residents unrealistic expectations of being re-housed in affordable accommodation. Affordable housing is not always the right answer for everyone, nor is it likely to be the fastest method of getting appropriate housing, which is why we need a service to provide rapid access to the borough's excellent wider housing offer.

Key aims:

- Enable all residents to access the widest choice from the whole range of housing on offer in the borough
- Create realistic expectations of, and manage demand for, access to affordable housing
- Ensure housing goes to those who need and deserve it most
- Prevent homelessness

Our strategies:

A. Taking advantage of the borough's housing offer

Increasing access to the private sector

Council and housing association homes are only a small part of housing available in Ealing. As 80% of the borough's homes are in the private sector, for many people, this will be the most appropriate form of housing to meet their needs and aspirations.

Action: Create an affordable housing lettings agency to open up access to a wide range of quality private sector lettings at competitive rents

Increasing access to home ownership

Residents aspire to home ownership and there is a maze of options on the market designed to help people onto the property ladder. However, with so many options, the market can be confusing, while affordability still remains a real issue, particularly for young residents.

Action: Create an affordable home ownership agency to give clear information on the range of options available; ensure affordable mortgages are treated fairly; lobby to simplify the range of products on offer

Preventing homelessness

Homelessness places great pressure on our limited affordable housing stock. We want to prevent people becoming homeless wherever possible, and will offer a range of different options to enable people to stay in their homes.

Action: Extend the county court outreach programme; extend our work in schools to prevent youth homelessness; improve partnership working; take advantage of G15, a group of 15 housing associations in London working to improve the affordable and temporary housing letting system

B. Managing Demand

Creating realistic expectations of housing chances

Demand for affordable homes is high and supply is low, so we need to manage residents' expectations. When residents come to us in need of housing, we want to be open with them about the options available and their chances of being housed from the Council's housing register.

Action: Create an online self-assessment system; make prompt assessments of homelessness; review our housing register.

Linking housing priority and employment

Ealing is generally prosperous, but there are pockets of deprivation, with high levels of unemployment and dependency on benefits. Residents in these areas often feel trapped. We want to encourage them to find training and employment, and at the same time promote mixed neighbourhoods by linking housing with job opportunities.

Action: Review allocations policy to reward people in training or employment

Priority Three: New Supply

Ealing is also committed to increasing affordable housing provision in line with targets agreed with the Mayor of London, which equates to 355 new affordable homes a year to 2011. Ealing's popularity means that more people want to live in the borough, and our population is predicted to grow to 350,000 by 2026, creating greater demand for housing. However, affordability is a real issue - 32% of people in the borough aged under 39 are unable to access home ownership and are ineligible for affordable rented housing.

Key aims:

- Increase supply of affordable housing
- Encourage development of homes to meet the needs of all income groups
- Make the best use of publicly-owned land
- Promote self-help development
- Promote initiatives to deliver supply that enables regeneration of further housing
- Develop affordable homes in appropriate locations

Our strategies:

A. Delivering new supply

Building new affordable homes

The Council has had some success in delivering affordable housing in recent years, but the economic downturn presents challenges for the supply of all housing. New strategies are needed to maintain supply and confidence in the housing sector.

Actions: Provide more affordable housing to meet the Mayor of London's targets; increase the amount of family accommodation; improve partnership working with housing associations and developers

B. Enabling development

Using public sector land

The Council already works effectively with partners to assist development. However, we can go further by looking critically at our own land and assets, and deciding whether they may be suitable for building new homes. We also need to be open about what opportunities are available in the borough to encourage more development.

Action: Encourage development on public sector land; improve the information available about public sector land opportunities

Developing intermediate housing options

Many residents find themselves ineligible for affordable rented housing, yet unable to access home ownership. Intermediate options are needed to help these residents fulfil their housing aspirations.

Actions: Pilot 'rent now buy later' and 'microstaircasing' schemes to help residents onto the housing ladder; improve the private rented offer; encourage institutional investment in private renting

C. Maximising supply opportunities

Bringing empty homes back into use

As of June 2009, there were 1212 long-term empty homes in the borough. Bringing these back into use is one way to increase our supply of available homes.

Action: Offer a stake in a home in return for work to bring an empty property back into use

Promoting community projects

The Council wants to harness the energy that exists in our successful communities and give them real control of community-based assets.

Action: Promote community-building projects; promote self-build where there is demand

Broadening the quality of our housing stock and enabling regeneration

Ealing's council property is concentrated on housing estates, a number of which are involved in our major regeneration programme. Regeneration often requires residents to move out of their property, creating additional pressure on our affordable housing. We need to explore ways to speed up the process of moving residents out of blocks due for demolition without impacting on an already limited supply of affordable housing.

Action: Purchase street properties to help re-house residents during the regeneration process and for use in our Golden Transfer scheme; bid for funding to build new Council housing

D. Building the right type of housing in the right areas

Reviewing planning policies

Local planning policies play an important part in ensuring that we build the right type of homes in areas where people want to live. We also recognise that a lack of clarity in planning policy can hinder development opportunities.

Action: Review affordable housing planning guidance; investigate ways of funding infrastructure improvements

Priority Four – Delivering decent neighbourhoods

We are on track to bring all our Council-owned stock up to the national Decent Homes Standard by 2013. However, we know from our consultation with our residents that this standard is set too low for them. We have been working with residents to make real improvements to their neighbourhoods.

Delivering decent neighbourhoods also entails exploring how to deliver low-carbon neighbourhoods and a low-carbon economy, as well as improving community safety to make Ealing one of the safest places in London.

Key Aims:

- Deliver regeneration on our Council-owned estates to tackle deprivation and poor design and management on estates identified as needing a high level of intervention
- Make Ealing a better place to live by delivering low-carbon homes and supporting a low-carbon economy to meet our LAA¹ targets to reduce CO₂ emissions per capita
- Create an integrated approach to community safety
- Deliver decent homes across the Council's housing stock
- Establish a long-term investment strategy for the Council's housing to deliver an investment standard that residents want

Our strategies:

A. Estates Regeneration Programme

Delivering a programme of regeneration

We have embarked on an ambitious programme to regenerate 25% of council housing stock through comprehensive, wholesale change and redevelopment to deliver new neighbourhoods. Eight of our estates in need of high intervention are currently involved in this redevelopment programme, and we have already selected a partner on one of these estates.

Action: Complete reviews with residents on all eight estates; complete the process of selecting a developer partner, and developing wide-scale plans for change where appropriate; explore options for Council, housing association and developer-led regeneration on other council owned sites

Encouraging high quality design

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), have given a poor rating to 21% of affordable developments in England against their Building For Life criteria. This is unacceptably high. Ealing wants to encourage high quality design on our affordable housing developments.

Action: Integrate the Mayor of London's design standards into Ealing's affordable and regeneration development; support design panels and awards; support the introduction of a design champion

¹ Local Area Agreement, the agreement that the Council has committed to with the government to improve services and deliver on targets

B. Encouraging low-carbon homes and a low-carbon economy

Reducing carbon emissions

The Mayor has set an ambitious target for reducing carbon emissions by 60% by 2025. Our own Local Area Agreement includes a target to reduce emissions by 10% over three years to 2010/11. To help us meet our targets, we can insist upon high environmental standards in new developments, and work towards improving standards in existing homes.

Action: Achieve Level Four standard, or higher, in the Government's Code for Sustainable Homes for our estates regeneration programme ahead of schedule; pilot a 'retro-fit' home project to reduce carbon emissions in an existing Victorian property; improve energy efficiency in private sector housing

C. Improving neighbourhoods

Improving community safety

Our comprehensive regeneration programme has provided us with a unique opportunity to make significant changes to the design of homes and surrounding neighbourhoods. Improvements to the management of our estates and community safety must also be an integral part of the programme.

Action: Ensure new developments meet 'secure by design' standards; ensure high quality management services are delivered; encourage landlords to achieve consistent standards

D. Improving standards of council housing

Delivering Decent Homes

Ealing Homes was established in 2004 to secure funding for the delivery of the Decent Homes Standard across the whole of the Council's stock. To date, we are on target for completion by 2012/13. However, we wish to accelerate our progress and are aiming to complete the majority of the programme by the end of 2011. There is still much work to do and many residents tell us that they want us to go further.

Action: Complete Decent Homes programme; implement a strategy for future investment to deliver standards that residents require for decent local neighbourhoods.