

St Mungo's

Response to:

**The Mayor's London Housing Strategy – Draft for  
Public Consultation**

**Mike McCall**  
Executive Director of Operations  
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## **About St Mungo's**

St Mungo's is London's largest homelessness agency, with a particular focus on rough sleepers and people with complex needs, and we run a range of housing, from emergency shelters to independent flats, with a service or client in every single London borough. We back up our housing work with non-residential programmes addressing health, education and employment. We are now also helping prevent homelessness, through work such as our housing advice services in five London prisons.

In our response we concentrate on those areas of the Strategy that directly impact on homeless people. Although general issues of overcrowding and supply are vital, as they help prevent future homelessness, it is important that the strategy addresses the needs and aspirations of London's most excluded and vulnerable. In our response we are therefore seeking to represent the views of many of the homeless people we work with.

## **Foreword**

We are delighted that the Mayor confirms his commitment to the 2012 target, and will continue to work with the Delivery Board to help end rough sleeping in London. Even if this goal is achieved however, there will still be work to do to keep the numbers at zero. The need for efficient move-through from the ever decreasing number of emergency beds in London will be paramount, and this Strategy should state that tackling rough sleeping will be a continuing priority for future housing strategies. Furthermore, the aspirations outlined in this work should be supported through clear "read-across" to the Mayor's other responsibilities as outlined in forthcoming Health Inequalities and Economic Development strategies.

## **Capital Investment**

Priority Area 1 – Raising aspirations, promoting opportunity

1.3.2a Increasing specialist provision

We are pleased that the need for accommodation-based support is recognised – our experience is that there are many people in our hostels for whom the “best next move” is to high-support housing, not to a flat of their own with floating support. If we are to meet the 2012 target, the need to use London’s infrastructure of hostels efficiently has never been greater. Research carried out for the CLG in 2007 (by Geoffrey Randall) showed that over half the residents in hostels had medium to high support needs. Unless sufficient, appropriate move-on housing is delivered, and delivered soon, the target is in jeopardy.

Given this level of demand for high-support housing, we are concerned about the numbers. The strategy quotes (p.46) *Building For All 2007* as projecting a need, for the next 10 years, of 587 new supported housing units a year. Of these, it estimates that some can be provided by re-modelling existing provision, but that over 400 each year will need to be new homes. The implication that, of the 587 additional units required each year, 187 could be provided by re-modelling existing schemes, needs to be costed. Our experience suggests a unit cost of £60k - £75k each, resulting in an annual cost of £11m - £14m. This needs to be factored in to HCA spending plans.

It is clear that the indicative figure for investment is 1,250 over the 3 years 2008 – 2011, whereas the *Building For All* figure would be 1,761 – a variance of 511 units. Furthermore, these 1,250 units are intended for a range of groups, including increasing numbers of older people, who traditionally are prioritised by local authorities at the expense of other less politically popular groups such as drug users, offenders and rough sleepers. It is difficult to align these investment figures with the assertion that tackling ‘silt up’ in hostels is a priority for the Mayor.

The strategy should acknowledge the success of the ‘Places of Change’ programme and make clear that the HCA is expected to financially commit to its continuation. This capital programme has immeasurably improved the standards in many major hostels focusing on rough sleepers. We estimate a further £30 million will be needed over the next 3 years to deliver improvements to the remaining hostels.

## **The Private Rented Sector**

Priority Area 1 – Raising aspirations, promoting opportunity

1.4.3c Greater Use of the Private Rented Sector for vulnerable and homeless people

We agree that the private sector can and does play an important part in providing move on from hostels and in housing vulnerable people. In the financial year 2008/9 St Mungo’s helped 48 residents move to privately let flats. This represents 18% of all moves to self-contained accommodation and is an increasing proportion of move-on provision, year-on-year.

As the strategy makes clear (p64) the private rented sector needs to be part of a range of options. Some local authorities have indicated that it is their intention to offer private lets only to certain homeless applicants. Allocation of housing must be made on the basis of need, not on any ideological prejudice. During a client consultation on the Housing Strategy organised by Homeless Link, participants expressed the view that single people should not be ignored by the allocators of social housing, as their need for stability can also be great.

While we are enthusiastic about an increase in access to self-contained flats that the private sector promises to deliver, and of the potential for homeless people to have greater choice, we have genuine concerns about the level of insecurity that vulnerable people face in such a tenancy. The support and safeguards for those moving in to the PRS are often not in place, and there is a real risk of repeat homelessness if it is seen as a quick fix. Participants in the Homeless Link consultation expressed the view that PRS leaves people feeling insecure, fearing eviction, rent increase and lack of protection regarding maintenance and repair.

St Mungo's has been a participant in the For-Home Study, a three-year research project due to be published in 2010, which promises to provide useful data on private lets and other housing options. The Study has tracked 400 hostel and supported housing residents in London, Leeds, Nottingham and Sheffield who have moved to self-contained accommodation, including private lets. The Study's preliminary findings reveal that a higher proportion of private lets tenants, when compared to "social housing" tenants, subsequently left their accommodation to either return to homelessness, or to alternative accommodation.

## **Worklessness**

(Priority Area 1 – raising aspirations, promoting opportunity)

### 1.3.3a Promoting Opportunities

We welcome the commitment, through the LDA, to tackle barriers to employment in social housing and to offer specific help to "hardest to reach" groups. Change is overdue – the most recent effort, the "Skills for Jobs" programme, has been an early victim of the recent round of LSC funding cuts, less than six months after it was launched with a great fanfare.

Homeless people, and especially rough sleepers, have overlapping needs, which exacerbate the severity of each other. 83% of St Mungo's hostel residents have one serious health problem; and 96% are unemployed. Clearly someone who is ill is considerably less likely to obtain work; and someone who is ill is also less likely to cope well in low-support housing.

The stated aim of promoting a stronger bond between housing and opportunity requires effective co-ordination of services. We ask that the Mayor includes a specific new duty on the LDA to ensure that the shameful unemployment rate amongst rough sleepers is tackled.

Through the Places of Change programme there has been an effort to raise aspirations around work and learning. The facilities are now there, but there are few resources available to deliver the sort of on site programmes that are the vital first steps. We have charitably funded a Pathways to Employment programme in our modernised hostels, and we believe it will provide a template for the future which the Mayor should adopt.

## **Social Initiatives**

Priority Area 2 – Improving Homes, transforming neighbourhoods

2.3.1c Targeting regeneration

We note the acknowledgement that in order to promote successful, strong and mixed communities, housing regeneration needs to be aligned with complementary social and economic initiatives. We support this sentiment and would highlight the success of our Neighbourhood Links scheme in Islington as a way of tackling the links between crime, mental health and homelessness through partnership working. This scheme aims to prevent people with mental health problems who are involved, or at risk of being involved, in crime, from becoming homeless. Link workers refer clients to appropriate mental health services and also work to improve their practical or social circumstances, which may be contributing to their distress and to their offending behaviour. The service was praised as a model of 'exceptional' practice in the Bradley Review, and is a model which could be rolled out across London.

[http://www.mungos.org/services/recovery\\_from\\_homelessness/our\\_mental\\_health\\_team/](http://www.mungos.org/services/recovery_from_homelessness/our_mental_health_team/)

## **Emergency Shelters**

Priority Area 2 – Improving Homes, transforming neighbourhoods

2.3.3 b Reducing the number of empty homes

It is good to see the Mayor champion a reduction of long term empty and derelict buildings, particularly as more and more redevelopment schemes have been mothballed over the last year.

The Places of Change programme has raised the standard of hostels, but has as a consequence reduced the capacity of emergency shelters across London. We have some expertise in bringing larger empty buildings back into use as shelters for homeless people, which would be one way to alleviate some of the pressure on emergency provision. Public sector landlords should be encouraged to consider this option.

## **Effective Delivery**

Priority Area 3 – Maximising delivery, Optimising Value for Money

3.1 Delivering across London

The Strategy is clear that many decisions are most appropriately taken at the individual borough level. However, where cross-borough working *is* needed, there is no clear expression of the role of the Mayor, the sub regions and the local authorities.

The strategy commits to considering the need to provide cross-borough specialised supported housing services, particularly for more mobile groups. The introduction of Supporting People, however, increased borough based marking of territory, and access to what were once seen as pan London housing resources have been constrained instead to people from the locality. The strategy needs to specify what lead the Mayor will give in order to counter this trend. Similarly, whilst we are encouraged by the statement that the Mayor will be working with the HCA, London Boroughs and other partners to develop cross-borough pilot projects that combine accommodation and support to reduce reoffending, we are again troubled by the lack of detail concerning the mechanics for delivering this, and by the lack of a firm time frame.

The Mayor needs to use the HCA investment powers to invite and encourage joint borough working on new supported housing schemes more generally. There are some green shoots to this effect in the West London sub-region, but there are few signs elsewhere. The Mayor also needs to detail exactly how the adequate revenue funding will be delivered in line with anticipated increase in the number of new supported homes.

Outside In, a St Mungo's client group, expressed concern about 'borough-lottery' inequalities occurring when commissioning is too local. Clarification of the Mayoral, sub-regional and local roles in service planning and commissioning is essential if unacceptable geographical gaps in service provision are to be avoided.

## **Health and Homelessness**

### 3.2.1 Tackling homelessness

The strategy should more explicitly address the challenge around health and homelessness, given the Mayor's specific responsibilities around health inequalities. While the commitment is given in 3.2.1c that "people in temporary accommodation should given full access to education, health and where required, social services", the only identified action to achieve that is to ensure use of NOTIFY. In order to ensure access to primary healthcare for the residents in our hostels, we have found it necessary to provide services onsite. The quality of healthcare in hostels is patchy, and homeless men and women are not getting the medical assessment and treatment they need. There is an opportunity in this Strategy to state clearly that standards will be set for the level and quality of health care delivered in hostels.

Regarding mental health, St Mungo's were instrumental in causing the Homeless and Mentally Ill Initiative to be set up in the 1990s and will be calling on the Department of Health to review this initiative. We would appreciate the Mayor's support for this call, and for that support to be documented within the Strategy. It is our view that without breaking the link between mental health and homelessness the 2012 target will not be met.

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**Mike McCall**  
**Executive Director of Operations**  
**St Mungo's**

Email: [Mike.McCall@mungos.org](mailto:Mike.McCall@mungos.org)  
Tel: 020 8762 5500