

St Mungo's

Towards the Mayor's Housing Strategy

Consultation response

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February 07

About St Mungo's

St Mungo's is opening doors for London's homeless. Every year we help more than 5000 homeless and vulnerable people find responsive and integrated solutions for problems with housing, employment, training and health.

Many vulnerable people have had difficult childhoods, experienced traumatic events and have complex problems. We offer a range of specialist help to address their needs - from mental health and drug use, to setting up a new home.

Our staff, volunteers and supporters help homeless people unlock their potential for a better life.

We only work in London and provide accommodation and support services for clients from all 33 London boroughs.

Introduction

We have longed been concerned at the lack of joined up thinking in addressing homelessness in London and welcome the decision to grant new strategic powers to the Mayor in respect of housing. We fully support the ambition of the Mayor to increase the quality, quantity and sustainability of home building and ensure that housing is fully integrated with social and economic planning. We hope too his ambition stretches to ensuring that the most vulnerable homeless people receive not just the housing they deserve, but also the help they need to rebuild their lives away from the streets.

Putting People First

Homeless people with support needs are not being factored into thinking around sustainable communities. The proportion of supported housing developed through the Housing Corporation's Affordable Housing Programme has collapsed from 12% to around 3%. New large-scale **developments should be required to set aside 10% of new homes for people with support needs.**

Worklessness among homeless people is a major challenge. 98.5% of our hostel residents are not in paid work, and 50% have been out of the labour market for 5 years or more. Supporting People has provided a funding stream that allows people to access the help they need to hold on to their accommodation. We need a parallel **Work Related funding stream** that will facilitate low threshold skills development and help into work for homeless people who can't access mainstream learning and advice services.

Good housing is rightly recognised as a major contributor to the health and wellbeing of Londoners. We have been able to upgrade several of our central London hostels to improve the physical environment for clients, but are frustrated in our attempts to get strategic buy in and practical support for addressing the chronic health needs of the homeless and excluded people we house in them. The average age of those who died in our hostels last year was 39. We need **the Mayor to champion the health needs of homeless people.**

The failure to make progress with Custody Plus means that support for many ex-offenders continues to stop at the prison gates. St. Mungo's provides housing advice and tenancy rescue services in four London prisons, but the shortage of accommodation options on discharge means that many will return to the streets. A London wide Resettlement Strategy is being developed through GoL, and we need to see the Mayor recognise the problem and offer his support to finding solutions in **breaking the cycle of offending and homelessness.**

Building More Homes

Homes are still going out of the affordable housing sector. Poor standard or high value homes are being sold off by Housing Associations to enable them to fund "decent homes" works on their remaining stock. We need to switch some of the Housing Association focus away from the easier prospect of developing new sites, and back on to **retaining and improving existing stock.**

We need **a London wide system of site registration** to ensure Housing Associations do not compete with each other, and push up the price, for the development of new sites.

Building the right homes in the right place

We would encourage the GLA to undertake **a major mapping exercise of London's hostels**, identifying the geographical spread, client groups, access and exit routes. This is vital if we are to ensure the challenge of meeting the needs of rough sleepers and transient and unpopular clients groups is recognised and shared across London.

Intermediate Housing

Recruitment into the vital services we provide is hampered by the shortage of affordable housing. We call again for **a broadening of the definition of keyworkers** to include not just public sector workers, but also those on low incomes providing essential public services in the third sector.

Designing Places Where People want to Live

We have worked hard to improve client involvement in the development of our services. Our service user group Outside In is now an important part of our planning and activity. It is vital to place clients at the centre of new development initiatives and develop **effective consultation mechanisms which embrace the views of people who are hard to reach**. Such work may require additional support, and help from the Mayor towards that would be vital ingredient in ensuring design results fit with user aspirations.

Promoting Choice and Mobility

There are fewer hostel beds in London now than at any time in the last 30 years. As an emergency accommodation resource it can only now work if throughput in these hostels is swift and effective. The Mayor's strategy has to address this issue head on, and ensure sufficient "move on" accommodation is available. The needs of those in hostels have grown, 75% of our clients have complex and overlapping needs around mental and physical health, drugs and alcohol. Although the private sector may seem a convenient and attractive option for addressing move-on, it is expensive and unstable, and not suited to many. We need a range of affordable options, and in particular **more high support accommodation**, if we are to stop bed blocking in hostels.