

CABINET 13 MARCH 2024

Report title: Lambeth Council's Housing Strategy

Wards: All

Portfolio: Cabinet Member for Better Homes and Reducing Homelessness, Councillor Maria Kay

Report Authorised by: Fiona Connolly, Corporate Director for Housing and Adult Social Care

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REPORT SUMMARY

The report recommends our new Housing Strategy: Lambeth a Place we can all Call Home, for adoption by Lambeth. The strategy sets out our vision for housing in Lambeth over the next six years based on three key priorities.

Priority 1: More Affordable Homes

Priority 2: Delivering Excellent Housing and Repair Services

Priority 3: Supporting Healthy and Safe Communities

This strategy has been drawn up together with Lambeth residents and partner organisations, with engagement taking place across the borough with hundreds of residents. It is the Council's overarching strategic housing document, and will be underpinned by a detailed action plan which will be reviewed on an annual basis.

FINANCE SUMMARY

There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To approve the attached draft housing strategy.

1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 The attached draft Housing Strategy sets out an overarching vision and the aims for housing in Lambeth over the next six years. The commitment to a refreshed Housing Strategy was among the key findings of the Kerslake Review into affordable housing in Lambeth, commissioned by the Council and published in 2022.
- 1.2 There is not a statutory requirement to produce a Housing Strategy, but it is considered good practice. The strategy strikes an ambitious note, but recognises the challenges faced with a lack of government funding, inflation, and the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.3 The draft Housing Strategy was published for consultation on 20 October 2023 with the consultation ending on 19 January 2024. The consultation period was extended by six weeks in response to community requests for additional time. The attached housing strategy includes track changes to show what has changed from the consultation draft published in October.

2. PROPOSAL AND REASONS

- 2.1 Our borough plan, Lambeth 2030, has set a clear, bold ambition to make Lambeth a Place We Can All Call Home. Housing is central to this ambition. We want our residents to have safe, secure, and well-designed homes within which they can raise families, live well and independently, and have the conditions to thrive in good quality employment. These homes will be in neighbourhoods which are fit for the future, promoting good health and wellbeing and which are clean, vibrant, and sustainable. We also want Lambeth to be a home for those who are fleeing persecution, providing refuge and safety in our wonderful borough.

- 2.2 The strategy outlines our vision for housing in Lambeth:

“For all residents to have access to and benefit from safe, secure and high-quality local homes which are affordable and provide sanctuary, stability and the best conditions to grow up and age well – across all tenures.”

- 2.3 To deliver this vision, we have identified three priority themes to guide us over the next six years:

Priority One: More Affordable Homes

- 2.4 Lambeth will lead the way in providing more genuinely affordable homes for residents, making best use of resources, levers, and opportunities to innovate. Our Plan sets out how the Council will deliver its commitments, by:

Building new homes – through direct delivery, partnerships, and via others through the planning system.

Buying more homes – through registered provider and developer partners, via nomination rights, and directly to add to council stock where it is appropriate to do so, and by assessing opportunities to make best use of underutilised council property (including space above commercial premises and offices).

Making better use of existing homes – including tackling vacant homes, incentivising efficient occupancy, and investing in estate improvements.

- 2.5 In addition, our plan sets out how we will:

Tackle the Climate Crisis - the Council's approach to innovation in delivery and sustainability, including support for a Passivhaus demonstrator project and exploring how innovative solutions like modular housing and co-living models can be used to increase supply.

Work with Residents - to commit to including residents in the design process for new homes so that the homes we build reflect how people use their homes in the day to day thereby maximising the positive impacts the new homes have on peoples' lives.

- 2.6 Finally, in the context of a period of greatly increased construction costs impacting the financial viability of housing development across the country, the plan sets out the Council's approach to resetting its financial framework to ensure it can continue to secure the delivery of much-needed new homes in the borough now and into the future.

Priority Two: Delivering Excellent Housing and Repair Services

- 2.7 Lambeth will put residents first, providing services which value and meet the needs of residents – and rectify things if they go wrong. This chapter acknowledges that the Council is on a journey and still has some way to go before we are able to deliver good and then excellent housing services. The strategy talks about several areas:

The repairs service and tackling damp and mould. We know from talking to our residents that the repairs service, and specifically problems with damp, is a top priority. The strategy outlines our commitments to residents through the “Damp Charter” and discusses our approach to contract management.

Providing the best housing management service for our residents. This section explains our belief that residents have a right to expect openness and transparency and how an effective resident engagement service can support that. We also talk about our support for vulnerable tenants.

Leading by example to tackle climate change. Lambeth was the first London borough to declare a climate and ecological emergency as a recognition of the threat posed by rising global temperatures and to make a clear statement of our commitment to playing our role in tackling the climate emergency. The largest proportion of the Council's carbon emissions come from the use of gas and electricity to heat and power our homes. We have recently completed a comprehensive stock condition survey of our homes and are using this to inform a new Asset Management Strategy and the approach to energy efficiency and zero carbon. We will continue to lobby government for the required financial support.

Priority Three: Supporting Healthy and Safe Neighbourhoods

- 2.8 The homes and neighbourhoods we live in have an important influence on our health and wellbeing. We see housing as a crucial part of ensuring all residents have the best conditions and environment in which to grow up and age well. This chapter covers several areas.

Tackling Homelessness. Lambeth has a separate, statutory Homelessness Strategy which runs for five years and will be updated later in 2024. The housing strategy talks about our key priorities in tackling homelessness and also refers to our work with the Royal Foundation and focus on making homelessness rare, brief, and unrepeatable.

Better Standards for Private Renters. In many cases, the private rented sector is the only option for many residents who historically would have had access to social housing. Eliminating

poor-performing private sector landlords throughout the borough remains a priority. New licensing measures will be implemented to drive improvements into this crucial part of the borough's housing offer.

Keeping residents safe. The strategy talks about our approach both in terms of buildings (i.e., fire safety) and people (the role the Housing Service plays in tackling anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.)

Health and wellbeing. We will continue to develop the partnerships required to ensure that we have a collaborative approach to housing and social care delivery, enabling residents to live and age well in their homes. We want to enable people to live longer, live independently, and improve their health by getting the right support at the right time based on their need. Appropriate housing options – across all tenures – is critical to delivering this commitment.

Specific support for residents. The strategy also describes housing support for young people and how we can support residents into work.

Consultation

- 2.9 The main form of consultation has been via an online survey supported with in person events, workshops and drop-in sessions. We had had an excellent response to this survey with over 500 returns. Details on the approach to consultation is provided in Section 5 below.

Delivering the Strategy

- 2.10 Once agreed, the strategy will be subject to an action plan which will be reviewed on an annual basis and reported through to the Cabinet Member for Better Homes and Reducing Homelessness and the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Growth and New Homes. Lambeth already has an established performance management framework which includes business and improvement planning. The intention is to integrate the housing strategy into this process and avoid duplication.

3. FINANCE

There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report.

4. LEGAL AND DEMOCRACY

- 4.1 The Deregulation Act 2015 abolished the statutory requirement for English authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 4.2 Section 333D of the London Greater Authority Act 1999 provides that any local housing strategy of any London borough has to be in general conformity with the Mayor's London housing strategy. The London Housing Strategy from May 2018 main priorities were building homes for Londoners, delivering genuinely affordable homes, high quality homes and inclusive neighbourhoods, a fairer deal for private renters and leaseholders and tackling homelessness and helping rough sleepers. The councils proposed Housing Strategy is in general conformity with the Mayor's Housing Strategy.
- 4.3 Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 requires every local housing authority to periodically consider housing conditions in their district and the needs of the district with respect to the provision of further housing accommodation, and the need to review housing conditions under section 3 of the

Housing Act 2004 (licensing of HMOs, selective licensing of other houses, management orders etc.). This duty includes consideration of the needs of people residing or resorting to the district with respect to the provision of sites on which caravans can be stationed.

- 4.4 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on the Council in the exercise its various functions to have due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour; the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances; and re-offending in its area.
- 4.5 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out the public sector equality duty replacing the previous duties in relation to race, sex and disability and extending the duty to all the protected characteristics i.e. race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership and gender reassignment. The public sector equality duty requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under that act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
 - Foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it, which involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to-
 - (a) tackle prejudice, and
 - (b) promote understanding.
- 4.6 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—
- (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
 - (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it, including, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities;
 - (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- 4.7 Compliance with the duties in section 149 of the Act may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under the Act.
- 4.8 The Equality Duty must be complied with before and at the time that a particular policy is under consideration or decision is taken - that is, in the development of policy options, and in making a final decision. A public body cannot satisfy the Equality Duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
- 4.9 This proposed key decision was entered in the Forward Plan on 21 August 2023 and the necessary 28 clear days' notice has been given. The report will be published for five clear days before the decision is considered by Cabinet (Constitution, Part 7, Chapter A). Should it be approved and following the publication of the Cabinet minutes, a further period of five clear days, the call-in period, must then elapse before the decision becomes effective. If the decision is called-in during this period, it cannot be enacted until the call-in has been considered and resolved.

5. CONSULTATION AND CO-PRODUCTION

- 5.1 The main form of consultation has been via an online survey. We had had an excellent response to this survey with over 500 returns. In addition to the survey, we have run a series of five drop-in sessions at the Civic Centre for people who wanted help responding. We have run workshops for members of the public and community groups / partners, and the Housing Strategy was a topic of conversation at the Residents' Assembly, an event for Lambeth Tenants and Leaseholders held in November 2023. We also promoted the consultation by putting up posters on estates with paper copies of the survey available for those that requested them.
- 5.2 The attached consultation report presents the quantifiable information graphically and then summarises key themes from the free text questions with a sample of quotes provided as evidence. We want to be fully transparent in our presentation of the consultation results. The full survey results are being anonymised and are being made available on the consultation page of the Lambeth website for full transparency.
- 5.3 Where residents have made specific service suggestions which would be too detailed to address in a high-level strategy of this nature, these are being passed on to the relevant Associate Directors for consideration, and to integrate into service delivery where appropriate.
- 5.4 Below is a summary of the results from the consultation and how we've used this feedback to amend the document.

Introduction / Vision.

- 5.5 Overall, there is a strong level of support for the vision. 72% supported the vision compared to 12% against with 16% undecided.
- 5.6 Many people who supported the vision did have questions about its delivery with some people sceptical about whether it was achievable. Some of the responses and discussions at workshops referred to the need to see an associated action plan.
- 5.7 Some respondents thought the vision was wrong because of their own housing situation and their feeling therefore that the overall approach being taken by Lambeth needed to change.
- 5.8 Others said that we were too focussed on building additional homes when we should be more concerned about existing stock.
- 5.9 Some felt that overall the strategy wasn't doing enough to tackle the climate emergency and used their response to the question on the vision to put forward their disapproval of plans for estate regeneration.
- 5.10 There were a small number of comments on the information in the introduction.

Our Response (introduction and vision).

- 5.11 We have made some small amendments to the introduction in response to comments questioning some of the information provided. As there is a high level of support for the vision, we are keeping it the same, noting that not everyone has the same priorities.

5.12 Lambeth has an established performance management framework and service planning process and the delivery of the housing strategy will be integrated into this process and overseen by an annual review by the relevant cabinet members. We have added in new sections at the end of each chapter to be clearer about what our actual commitments are, so we can more easily see if delivery of the strategy is successful and there can be clear accountability.

Priority 1 - More Affordable Housing

5.13 There is broad support for the overall approach to the delivery of more affordable housing in the Borough, with 65% agreeing / strongly agreeing with the approach and 17% disagreeing / strongly disagreeing. Many respondents noted the scale of challenge the Council faces in delivering on this objective, directly and through the planning system, in the current environment.

5.14 Some respondents expressed concern, given the climate crisis, about demolition and replacement of existing homes, suggesting that the Council should prioritise retention and refurbishment wherever possible. There was support for specification of new housing consistent with the climate emergency.

5.15 Some respondents noted other impacts arising from housing development and estate renewal, including concern about impact on sense of community, density of development, pressure on infrastructure, and the ability of residents to be able to afford to stay in their local areas after redevelopment takes place. Conversely some respondents suggested that proceeds of development should be reinvested elsewhere in the Borough.

5.16 Many respondents raised the issue of housing affordability in the Borough, as well as the need for family homes and homes for older people. Concern was expressed about the number of empty properties across the Borough, with respondents suggesting these should be brought back into use as soon as possible, whether Council owned or privately owned.

5.17 Many respondents raised the issue of communication with, and listening to residents, particularly on estate renewal, as well as on housing delivery generally. Some respondents raised the Kerlake report's recommendation around development of a housing delivery plan.

Our response (More Affordable Housing)

5.18 We have reinforced in the strategy the Council's commitment to a balanced assessment of all options in relation to estate renewal and development schemes, including consideration of all options for retention and refurbishment in line with national best practice.

5.19 We have included references to the Council's approach to empty homes and the New Homes Programme, noting that the programme will provide metrics to enable progress to be tracked, and we have confirmed the Council's commitment to bringing empty Council-owned homes back into use, and clamping down on private landlords to ensure they do the same.

5.20 In response to the theme around community and resident engagement, we have included within the commitments a commitment to listen to resident views, ideas and concerns from the earliest stages, and to communicate in a clear and timely manner what the Council intends to do. We must continue to maintain an ongoing dialogue with residents in this area.

Priority 2 - Delivering Excellent Housing and Repair Services

5.21 There was a high level of support for all the priorities within this chapter with damp coming out at the top. There was more ambivalence towards sustainable travel with some quite negative comments though there was still a majority of residents agreeing it should be a priority.

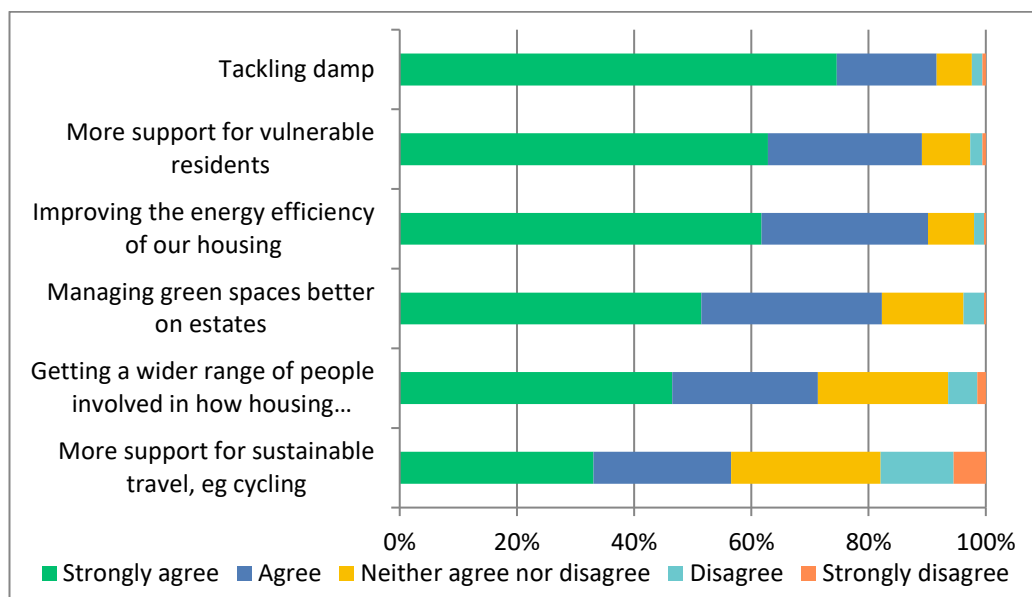


Figure 1 - Priorities for Housing Services

5.22 Respondents listed a number of things in response to the question "is anything missing". The most common comments related to repairs (including the need to reduce the money wasted paying disrepair claims and the need to improve contract management), estate management, resident engagement, and anti-social behaviour / noise. Some residents said that they wanted more detail in the strategy on how things were going to improve.

5.23 We asked how the council can best put our residents' lived experience at the heart of all that we do. Residents made a range of responses, often with a focus on improving the repair service. Many respondents talked about bringing the repairs service in-house and changing the relationship between the council and its residents. Some people criticised the quality of staff and contactors and generally poor customer service and said that residents would like a 'named-person' they could contact.

5.24 Some leaseholders / leaseholder representative groups felt that their interests were not adequately considered in the strategy and that there needs to be a place for leaseholders to have their views heard at a strategic level. There is also the misconception among some leaseholders that they are subsidising tenants, suggesting we need to improve our communication with leaseholders.

5.25 Particularly from the face-to-face consultation sessions, some residents felt that there were now not enough occasions to hold officers to account in public meetings and they missed the old engagement structures. Others said that they wanted to be involved but didn't want to commit to a formal role in a residents' association.

Our response (delivering excellent housing and repair services).

5.26 Customer experience was a main theme coming out from the consultation. This was already identified as a priority, the introduction to this chapter begins with this opening statement:

"People are at the centre of our approach to housing. Our ambition is to be recognised as a centre of excellence in service delivery, taking a human-centred approach to providing the best customer experience to our residents. It is important to us that our residents can easily access top-quality housing services, access and interact with housing staff, and have their feedback listened to, considered and acted upon appropriately.

This is part of a larger cultural change which will put our residents' lived experiences at the heart of all that we do, taking a compassionate and empathetic approach. We will transform our services so that there is one 'front door' for residents, and work to ensure that the needs of residents are prioritised and met first time. We acknowledge the frustrations some residents have faced previously and will place a greater emphasis on getting the basics right, as part of an excellent housing service standard."

5.27 There have been comments that this statement and others like it, are warm words but that it is not clear how improvements will be delivered or measured. Through ongoing dialogue, feedback mechanisms, and a commitment to understanding the unique circumstances of each resident, we aim to instil confidence in our repair services and uphold the principles of empathy and resident-centricity at the core of our strategy. We have added a specific commitment to delivering this, to be measured by increasing resident satisfaction.

5.28 Generally, we think that for many of the comments, the existing text adequately covers the points raised. For instance, we are already committed to providing a better customer experience and delivering services in-house where possible. Many of the changes need to be part of a cultural shift.

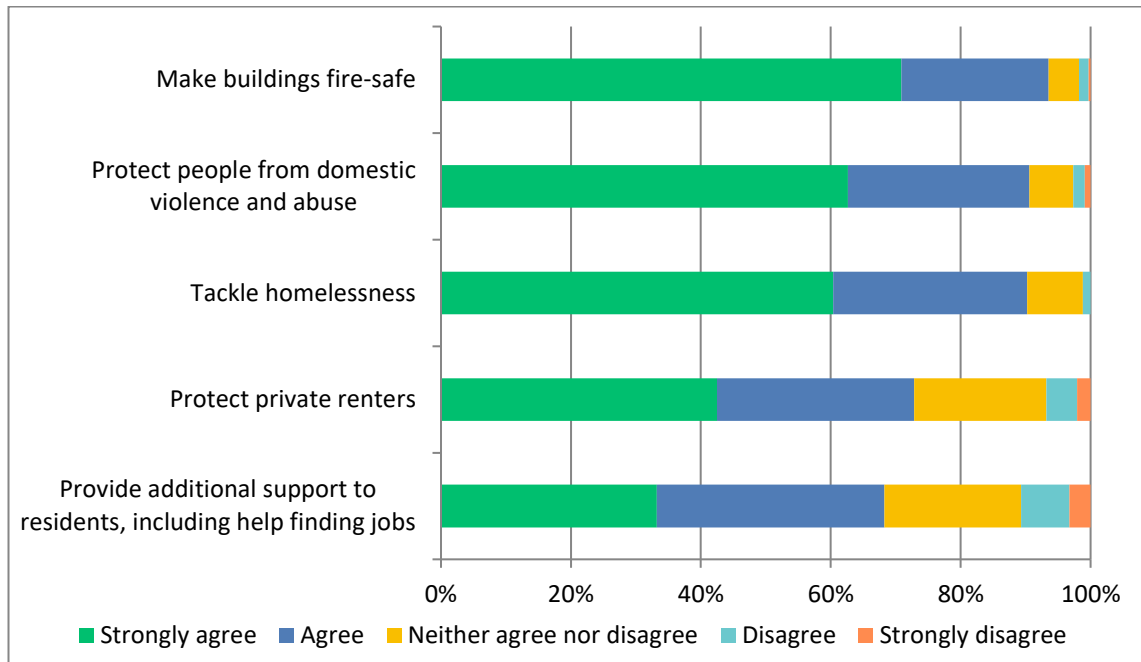
5.29 We have made some changes to the text, recognising the need to reduce the number of legal disrepair claims and that contract management is an area we need to improve. We've also amended the section on resident engagement to include reference to a wide range of ways to become involved in how the service is run which meet the needs of residents and that officers can be held to account. We're currently looking at how resident engagement is delivered within Lambeth housing, using the principles within this draft strategy as a guide.

5.30 During this consultation there was no option for Lambeth leaseholders to identify themselves as such, they were included together with other homeowners. For future consultations by the housing department we will make this an additional category.

5.31 We've noted the request for more detailed explanations in certain areas and think more clearly pulling out the commitments will help with this, but do need to bear in mind that it is a high level strategy and detail would be for the action plan.

Priority 3 - Supporting Healthy and Safe Communities

5.32 There was a high level of support for prioritising making buildings fire-safe, protecting people from domestic violence and abuse, and tackling homelessness. There was also support, but at lower levels, for prioritising protecting private renters and providing additional support to residents including help finding jobs.



5.33 Part of the consultation involved discussions with partners including the Staying Healthy Board, Lambeth Together (our local care partnership) and children's services. They had a number of suggestions that we need to better reflect their priorities.

5.34 There were a diverse range of answers to the "what's missing" question, but no obvious recurring themes. Some thought that we should focus on our core responsibilities and leave the delivery of wider social benefits to other departments / organisations.

5.35 We asked about the housing impacts on health and wellbeing, beyond repairs and expensive rents. Many respondents referred to the impact of living in housing that didn't meet their needs. There were a wide range of reasons why this might be the case including the physical environment and not having a stable place to call home.

5.36 One issue which came up several times in the workshop discussions was that people found it frustrating to get hold of the right person or feeling they weren't listened to.

5.37 Several leaseholders made reference to having to pay bills being a source of stress. Anti-social behaviour and noise also came up as aspects of housing that impacted negatively on people's wellbeing.

5.38 In response to the question about what the council and its partners could do, the feedback referred to the comments above including the need for affordable housing and improvements to housing services, and concerns about noise and anti-social behaviour.

Our Response (supporting healthy and safe communities)

5.39 We have added to the text more details on our support for looked after children, foster carers and our approach to tackling serious youth violence. We've also made some changes in terms of how we describe the interaction of housing with health services.

5.40 There was no specific mention of noise in the draft housing strategy. From the consultation it is clearly an issue for many residents, and is also an area which has been recently highlighted by the Housing Ombudsman. We have added a new section explaining the difference between noise

caused by day-to-day living and anti-social noise. Lambeth aims to deliver a service which promotes good neighbourhood relationships.

5.41 We note that some people feel that the housing department should focus on its core business and leave addressing wider issues to other teams. We try to take a "One Lambeth" approach, aligning resources behind shared priorities and emphasising the importance of working together.

5.42 One of the "what's missing" responses referred to fuel poverty; this is something Lambeth is committed to tackling and we've added in a reference to this chapter.

5.43 We very much agree with the sentiments that an improved housing service and better supply of more suitable accommodation will improve wellbeing and believe that the housing strategy sets the right framework for this to happen.

Equalities Breakdown of Survey Respondents

Age

Under 25 Years	1.3%
25 to 44 Years	26.4%
45 to 64 Years	41.8%
65 Years and Over	26.1%
Prefer not to say	4.4%

Race / ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Responses
White	55.3%
Black African/ Caribbean	18.9%
Mixed Ethnicity	4.1%
Asian (Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Other)	2.5%
Other	19.3%

Sex

Male	29.4%
Female	59.8%
Prefer not to say	9.2%
Use another term (for example, non-binary)	1.6%

Respondent has a disability or long term health condition

No	59.7%
Yes	30.3%
Prefer not say	10.0%

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 Risks associated with delivery of the Housing Strategy will be managed through the Council's usual risk management framework.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An impact assessment has been carried out on the housing strategy and was considered by the Corporate EIA panel on 21 February.

7.2 The EIA found that the strategy will have a positive impact overall on equality groups. Increasing the supply of affordable housing, better housing and repair services and support for healthy and safe neighbourhoods are all intrinsically positive aims to support communities in Lambeth.

7.3 The EIA recognised that new development can cause a negative impact on certain groups and these are managed through the delivery of the New Homes Programme.

7.4 The housing strategy is very a high-level document; equality impact assessments are carried out on the delivery of individual projects.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY

8.1 The strategy includes sections on anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

9. ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Environmental

9.1 The housing strategy includes our approach to tackling climate change in residential dwellings.

Health

9.2 The strategy highlights the impact of housing on health and wellbeing.

Corporate Parenting

9.3 The strategy includes details of housing support for care leavers.

Staffing and accommodation

9.4 Not applicable.

Responsible Procurement

9.5 Not applicable.

10. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

10.1 Following approval the strategy will be launched on social media and the action plan in place by the end of April 2024 as part of the usual business planning process.

10.2 The table below details the stages and deadlines for implementing the recommendations:

Activity	Proposed Date
Date published on Forward Plan	21.08.23
Publication on Decisions online	05.03.24

Officer or Cabinet Member Decision	13.03.24
End of Call-in Period (key decisions only)	26.03.24
Execution of Contract	N/A
Mobilisation Period for Contract	N/A
Commencement of Contract	N/A

AUDIT TRAIL

Name and Position/Title	Lambeth Directorate	Date Sent	Date Received	Comments in paragraph:
Councillor Maria Kay	Cabinet Member for Better Homes and Reducing Homelessness	02.07.24	07.02.24	
Councillor Danny Adilypour	Deputy Leader of the Council (Sustainable Growth and New Homes)	02.07.24	07.02.24	
Fiona Connolly, Corporate Director Housing and Adult Social Care	Housing/ Adults Social Care and Health	02.02.24	02.02.24	
Shanka ShivaAnanthan Finance	Finance and Property	01.02.24	02.02.24s	3.0
Greg Carson, Legal Services	Legal and Governance	01.02.24	01.02.24	4.1 to 4.8
Mary Bosah, Democratic Services	Legal and Governance	02.02.24	08.02.24	4.9

REPORT HISTORY

Original discussion with Cabinet Member	13.12.23
Report deadline	29.02.24
Date final report sent	29.02.24
Part II Exempt from Disclosure/confidential accompanying report?	No
Key decision report	Yes
Date first appeared on forward plan	21.08.23
Key decision reasons	Community impact
Background information	Lambeth 2030 : Our Future, Our Lambeth Lambeth Council Kerslake Review of Affordable Housing in Lambeth Housing Strategy Consultation
Appendices	Appendix 1: Draft Housing Strategy Appendix 2: Consultation Report Appendix 3: Housing Strategy EIA