

Submission to Haringey Council's Fairness Commission

This submission contains comments under 15 headings, with a total of 21 recommendations. We are also asking for an opportunity for members of Haringey Council Housing to give evidence to the Fairness commission in person.

Estate renewal

The demolition and redevelopment of council housing (and housing association estates) became a major theme of public policy after 2010.

Haringey Council's policy on this is opaque and unclear. No revision of formal policy has taken place since the council elections in May 2018, including on the ballots before demolition which were promised in the Labour manifesto. Although there appears to be no substantive written policy at all on this subject, the Portfolio title of the Deputy Leader gives a clue (Estate renewal being a euphemism for demolition), and when members of the Stop HDV campaign met the new Council Leader Cllr Joe Ejiogor on 25 June 2018, he was explicit that there would be no change to the list of demolition estates inherited from the previous administration. Since then several estates have in fact been reprieved, so we know that the Leader can change his mind. The previous leadership had never actually published any list of estates at risk of demolition, the only list we have is the one we have compiled ourselves, from official sources. We have looked at the GLA's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, and this shows some of the areas where demolition is planned. But residents have never been given any proper or accurate information about what is being planned. Even when the council leadership was promoting the demolition of particular estates very hard, at the same time residents would be told by their housing officer or Councillor that their home was not to be demolished.

Recommendation 1: The Council should tell the truth to the people about its intentions.

Recommendation 2: The demolition of any housing including even one council or housing association tenant or leaseholder should be subject to a decisive yes/no ballot.

Recommendation 3: Estate demolitions destroy decent housing with secure tenancies, and are destructive of communities. The estate demolition programme should be abandoned.

Higher house prices

Higher house prices are the prime drivers of forced gentrification and social exclusion, and are essential to the viability of estate demolition schemes. Please see the slide entitled Investment Proposition on p 3 of the presentation 'Tottenham Regeneration - High Road West Masterplan' by Sophie Camburn of Arup, which was given at a Haringey Council meeting on Monday 30 March 2015.

https://www.newlondonarchitecture.org/docs/sophie_camburn--arup.pdf

This is a very clear statement that the purpose of public investment is to permanently increase the values of house prices and retail floorspace. Local people, especially private renters and aspirant marginal home owners would be priced out.

Recommendation 4: The detriment to ordinary people from higher house prices and private rents following large scale development must be factored into decisions about whether or not to agree these developments.

Health impacts

On the negative welfare and health impacts including earlier death, arising from estate demolition and other housing-led area transformation schemes, see the Centre for London, 'Another Storey' (2016), and Bob Dumbleton, 'Help Us, Somebody' (2006).

Recommendation 5: Negative welfare and health impacts should properly considered in estate redevelopment proposals.

Funding and viability

Funding and viability is an under-examined aspect of policy on estate demolition schemes. Funding gaps and funding pressures mean that there is pressure to break any promises to residents once the scheme has been agreed.

For example, the Arup report on redevelopment of Broadwater Farm showed public sector funding gaps of between £124.7m and £239.3m for scenarios with a 40% to 50% loss of social housing (2013).

Northumberland Park had a viability gap of more than £100m in 2016, yet came forward for redevelopment in 2017 with no mention of the funding gap and no detail on re-provision of the social homes to be demolished.

Recommendation 6: Haringey Council should be open with residents and Members about the funding gaps for redevelopment schemes, so that they can make a full and proper assessment.

Right of return

Despite claims by the Council that the right of return is both set in stone and written in blood, Haringey Council in fact offers no right of return to residents who are asked to leave their homes prior to demolition. Instead people are asked to move away permanently, for the ease of the demolition process. The Council has put the evidence on line, including the important Tenant B case. Please see our Wordpress site for more information:

<https://haringeydefendcouncilhousingblog.wordpress.com/2017/11/15/love-lane-right-to-return-means-right-to-leave/>

The Council offered the HDV (its proposed joint venture with Lendlease) exemption from right of return for housing association tenants. The HDV was promised that it did not need to prioritise right of return for any residents.

Recommendation 7: Past mistakes should be properly investigated and acknowledged. Rehousing activity at Love Lane should be investigated through the examination of officer team meeting and 1-2-1 performance management notes, and by taking evidence from residents at Love Lane.

Recommendation 8: In any future cases of demolition, residents should have an unfettered and fully-supported choice whether to move away permanently, or wait to be rehoused on the new development.

Recommendation 9: Where tenants have moved away permanently, they should still be offered the right of return to the new development. All tenants who have been moved away from Love Lane should be offered the right to return.

Rent and service charges after demolition

On demolition estates, Secure and Assured tenants are presently offered a new home with a rent set using the Formula Social Rent setting regime. This can mean that both rent and service charges are considerably higher, and this is not acceptable because it is a cause of increasing poverty.

There have been an increasing number of cases where a new 'Social Rent' is set without using the rent setting formula, but going straight to the Formula Rent Cap instead. This is even worse, more than £45 pw (+45%) higher than normal council rents for a two bed property. It appears that this is what Argent Related want the Council to agree to at the Welbourne site. Even more poverty would result, were this to go ahead.

Recommendation 10: On demolition estates, Secure and Assured tenants should be offered new homes with the exact same rent and service charge as now. There should be no increases at all.

Resident Leaseholders after demolition

Resident Leaseholders on demolition estates are frequently offered inadequate levels of compensation, resulting in much misery and long delays. It should be recognised that these are forced sales, and the level of compensation should reflect this.

Recommendation 11: Resident Leaseholders on demolition estates should receive an equivalent new property on the rebuilt estate, or an equivalent amount of compensation to buy a new home elsewhere.

Temporary accommodation tenants on demolition estates

Recommendation 12: Temporary accommodation tenants on demolition estates should receive new permanent tenancies. Haringey Council should blaze the way forward in including these tenants in the process. There should then be no pressure to vote one way or the other in the demolition ballot.

External decoration programme

External decoration and the decoration of communal areas are 'preventative maintenance' – they preserve and extend the life of housing components, and save money for the Housing Revenue Account. External decoration (to be done usually every 5 years for each property) is a landlord obligation which the Council itself inserted into Haringey Council's tenancy agreements around 2006.

Yet there is no evidence of any rotational programme of external decoration and preventative maintenance to the council housing stock. External decoration is not included in the New Investment Standard. The appearance of the outside of our homes, and the communal areas of housing blocks, is a huge issue for residents. It is also a major campaigning point for the people who want to see our homes demolished. We suspect that this latter factor (in order to retain and enhance a stigma against council estate residents) is the reason that the Council does not prioritise a rotational programme of external decoration and preventative maintenance to our homes.

Recommendation 13: The Council should reinstate a rotational programme of external decoration and preventative maintenance, to comply with its own tenancy agreements.

Resident Service charge

Haringey Council has declined since 2016 to consult tenants on service charge increases. This has made it harder to challenge practices where HfH managers and outsourcing partners can pass on all costs 100% to residents. We have seen service charges rise the fastest for outsourced services: Street sweeping (waste management) up 40% over two years, Door entry systems maintenance up 41% this year, and TV aerials up 72% this year. These charges provide a high and increasing income stream to outsourcing companies, from people many of whom have no money. In many cases of course, it is the general taxpayer who pays the outsourcing companies through Housing Benefit.

Recommendation 14: There should be proper consultation so that excess charges can be properly challenged.

Recommendation 15: All council housing services should be insourced.

Equality Impact Assessments

Haringey's Equality Impact Assessments on proposed housing schemes systematically ignore who can and cannot afford to buy or rent the homes to be provided. A scheme may on balance benefit those with protected characteristics, while benefiting those who do not share the protected characteristics much more, thus increasing inequalities. This has never been assessed in any Haringey EqIA. Instead we typically have a simple tally of benefits and disadvantages. This is not acceptable because it does not address the question of whether the proposal widens or narrows existing inequalities. We would expect to see an evaluation which understands that possibly every group with protected characteristics may benefit or have a neutral impact, if those without protected characteristics benefit much more, then existing inequalities will widen. This is more or less the picture sketched out by the Council's better EqIAs, however the last part, that then existing inequalities will widen, is never examined or faced up to.

Recommendation 16: Equality Impact Assessments should be carried out properly. Where proposed schemes would increase inequalities, then they should not go ahead.

Barriers to accessing new homes

Most of the tenures that developers want to us have advance payments or deposits. Haringey's Housing Needs Survey 2013 showed the disadvantage of the poor and minority households. 48% of households in Haringey had no savings or were in debt (excluding mortgages), 61% of households of mixed heritage, 69% of black households, and 74% of Asian households. The comparative figure was that 37% of White households in Haringey had no savings or were in debt.

Recommendation 17: No to any housing policies which widen existing inequalities.

The segmentation of housing by tenure

The segmentation of housing by tenure (poor doors) is a developer priority.

Recommendation 18: Haringey should follow a policy of fully inclusive and pepper-potted developments.

Recommendation 19: Tenure integration should be a standing item in all Planning Reports, to allow for properly structured discussions at Planning Sub Committee meetings.

Child Yields

Faulty data on Child Yields, used by developers to avoid their planning obligations and by planners to dream of child free developments, should be rejected and publicly opposed. No way to deadbeat data.

Recommendation 20: Haringey should adopt the use of the GLA's population calculator version 2.1 (2017) immediately.

Haringey's influence

Recommendation 21: Haringey Council has led the way in the fight against forced gentrification. Council leaders should speak out boldly alongside local people, to improve GLA and government policies.

Request to give evidence in person

This is a submission from Paul Burnham.

Haringey Defend Council Housing would like to give evidence to the Fairness Commission in person. Please can you advise me whether this can be arranged.

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