

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022

RESPONSE TO LATE QUESTION

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HAMISH MCCALLUM TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

A Freedom of Information request (FOI) revealed yesterday that Southwark Council only built 166 council homes in four years. With a waiting list of over 16,000 households, is the council doing enough?

RESPONSE

I'm delighted to have announced this week that we have exceeded our landmark target to have built or started on site 2,500 new council homes. 820 of these are completed, with nearly half of these delivered in the last four years.

We now have 39 new council homes sites under construction which will bring another 1,600 much needed council homes and only this week a further 12 sites are due to start work, which takes us beyond our 2,500 new council homes target for May this year.

This is all part of our long term council homes building programme, one of the biggest in the country. But we aren't just building – we will continue to use all tools at our disposal to increase the number of council homes available in our borough.

We are buying back homes that had been lost through Right-to-Buy and on new private developments. We are delivering more council homes through our strict S106 requirements on private planning applications.

We are bringing empty homes back into use. Our Empty Homes Action Plan has already seen success, bringing 230 homes back into use in the last financial year and a further 160 expected by the end of this financial year. As part of this plan we have established a £2m rolling-Compulsory Purchase Order Fund and will pursue Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) where appropriate to force landlords to bring their properties back into use for those on our waiting lists.

We have done all this despite the multiple crises in supply chains, labour shortages and price inflation caused by the continuing disruption as a result of the pandemic and Brexit. This is a phenomenal achievement

given the most difficult of times.

We will continue to campaign as forcefully as we have for years to get the government support we need to tackle the housing crisis locally – we need greater funding to build more homes, we need flexibility over council tax to penalise those who leave homes empty sooner, we need to be able to suspend Right-to-Buy which has forced the council to give up over 17,000 homes since its introduction. Where housing is lost to Right-to-buy we will continue to press government to let us keep the full receipt from the sale and to allow us to combine it with other funding to turbocharge our new homes programme. In addition, we need the government to urgently reassess the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) system and pitiful Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) levels which are so out of touch with London housing costs that they force so many families to seek support from their local councils.

We will continue to press on with our plans to deliver more homes and have committed to start a thousand more council homes by 2026, on top of the 2,500 we already have. In addition to this we will deliver 500 homes for keyworkers across the borough.

We have always said that there is a real human cost to the housing crisis, and as our waiting lists continue to rise we will use every power we have, exploring further sites for new homes and campaigning at a national level to tackle this most pressing crisis.