



Southwark Housing Campaign

Focus group + survey report

June 2013

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01. Pre-campaign consultation

Introduction

Represent ran two pre-campaign focus groups on 9th and 10th April 2013. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather young people's opinions on the main topic of the campaign and discuss how the campaign should be run to maximise its impact and reach.

Who

- Gender: 4xFemale, 3xMale
- Age: Between 16 and 20
- Status: 2xEducation (FT), 2xEmployment, 1xWork experience, 2xNEET
- Housing type: 3xCouncil house, 2xHousing association, 2xHouse owned by family

Who do you think council housing should be for and for how long? (Core question)

In each group, two participants were given the core question and the rest were provided with a list of four different examples in addition to the question:

1. Unemployed 24 yo single mother with two children aged 3 and 4
2. Unemployed 40 yo homeless man with no family
3. Working parents with five children aged 4,5,7,9 and 11 (income less than £15K)
4. Retired couple aged 63 and 65 who receive the State Pension (£120/wk) and have some savings (they do not own any property)

Responses:

'People who earn under a certain amount per annum... single parent families...maybe if you're on benefits...? (...) I live in council housing myself and I've been living in the same house since I was born. I wouldn't like to move somewhere else especially because we have made our home there.'

'[After listening to an answer from another participant who was given the list] Oh, I didn't think about homeless people. I forgot. I think family with kids should be prioritised..like over crowded houses. For instance, at my house we only have two rooms and my sister needs to sleep with my mum.'

'My main concerns were children. I thought growing up you wanna have somewhere you can call home and lay your head. You don't wanna move around and it's not fair for children especially when it comes to their education. So, I thought a single mother and a family with many children are main priorities.'

'My first priority is single parents. It is very unfair to be dragging 2 kids from house to house. Then, it took a while for me to think who to put next... but I thought a family with children should be prioritised next. And then a 40yo homeless. I am unemployed myself and it's difficult. (...) I think they should be able to stay as long as they need it.'

'Council housing should be for those who are unable to work such as disabled people, those without financial support who are single parents, those who do not earn enough to pay rent but do work, the

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homeless at least until they get a job, the elderly that do not own homes or do not get a high enough pension to rent and the unemployed'

Findings:

- **When no example was given**, young people (YP) heavily relied on their personal experience and this sometimes resulted in limited answers. Our research showed that good examples could show different aspects of the topic, thereby enriching YP's answers.
- **Time limit:** apart from one participant, most of the participants thought there should not be a fixed time limit on how long they should be entitled to stay in a council house. However, most participants agreed that a structured support system should be put in place to make sure residents do their best to improve their situation (e.g. job scheme).

Re-phrasing the question

Participants were asked to create their own version of the original question. Participants agreed that the original question presented a lot of information in one single sentence. They often forgot to answer to the second half of the question (*for how long*).

Participants' questions:

- Q1: Who do you think should qualify for council housing and why? Who do you think council housing should be for and why?

- Q2: What do you think the conditions are for how long someone should be able to rent council housing and why? Do you think being given a council house should have a time limit? If yes, how long should it be?
- Additional question: Is there anyone/any types of people who you think should not be able to attain council housing?

Structure of the campaign

Participants thought that the structure of the campaign is chronological and 'makes sense'.

Online survey:

Both groups thought the survey should come after the first show.

'It will be better if they can be informed first.. Then they will know exactly what we are asking (...) like you today gave us a bit of information in the beginning.'

Also, putting the survey on the news section of the website, together with relevant news stories, would make it easier for people to participate.

Content of the shows:

1. **Leader of the council:** participants generally liked the idea of the leader coming down to the station. If the leader joins the show, it should be a combination of informative and Q&A sessions.

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'(...) because I live in council housing... I have a lot of questions to ask... it's normally not possible to talk with official people..so it would be nice to have somebody from the council on the show.'

2. Other people on the show: presenters and DJs from different shows at Reprezent can form a panel and discuss this issue. It would also attract more listeners. Famous musicians would attract more listeners but participants emphasised that they should have something meaningful to say about the topic.

Promotion:

Newspaper; other shows at Reprezent; social media

Prize for the online survey:

Most participants did not think it was a good idea to hand out a very expensive prize but agreed a smaller prize could be a good trigger: something that could give them an experience like a gift card from Ticketmaster or Amazon.



02. Post-campaign consultation

Introduction

At the end of the campaign project, we ran two further focus groups on 14th May 2013. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative answers from young people to the core questions amended from the first two focus groups. Some of the survey responses were also shown to the participants to expand the discussion.

Who

- Gender: 5xFemale, 2xMale
- Age: Between 16 and 22
- Status: 5xEducation (FT), 2xWork experience
- Housing type: 4xCouncil house, 1xHousing association, 2xHouse owned by family

Core questions

- Who do you think council housing should be for?
- Why do you think they should get a council house?
- Do you think being given a council house should have a time limit? If yes, how long should it be?
- Why do you think there should be or should not be a time limit?

These four questions were put to the participants.

Responses:

'I tried to avoid a stereotypical answer. I think young adults and vulnerable people should get a council house and also people with children and homeless people. I think they should be over 23... because I think at that stage people should be leaving home but they might need some support to be independent. [Regarding the time limit] I think as it happens already there should be a yearly probation period so that if people abuse the system they can be knocked off and someone who will value it more can have it.'

'Anyone really...who is in need of housing on low incomes or with children or homeless...because they are vulnerable and need support. Affordable housing with a council can offer security.. I am a single mum myself and it's important to have a house... the same place you can go back everyday. I think there should be a time limit but it should be dependent on individual circumstances.'

'Vulnerable people... people with dependencies..homeless people..people who don't earn enough... they should get council housing because there are the people who need to be looked after and not exploited. [as for the time limit] I think potentially those who earn a certain amount should move on when they earn enough to rent privately...like means tested.'

'Those with lower income..single parents..elderly and disabled...I don't believe there should be a definite time limit...however, people should be means-tested every two to three years to see if they have enough income to move out.'

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'I think there should be a time limit but it should be dependent on individual economic circumstances... not a set time limit for everyone.. everybody's case is different.'

Findings:

- Participants' answers to the first question (*'Who should council housing be for?'*) were generally similar to the ones gathered from the first two focus groups. However, as some participants listened to the campaign shows on Repezent 107.3FM, they were more familiar with the topic and naturally their answers were more comprehensive.
- A separate question on the time limit (*'For how long?'*) was developed after the first consultation as most participants found the original question too broad to answer (see Page 3): *'Should there be a time limit? If yes, how long should it be?'*

Interestingly, this question in fact helped participants to consider the time limit issue more carefully. Instead of coming up with a definite number of years or simply answering 'as long as they need it', after the lengthy discussion, both groups arrived at the conclusion that there should be a 'sort of' time limit such as 'a probation period' to encourage people to make an effort to improve their situation. And yet, both groups disagreed with the idea of setting a fixed timeframe that applies to all cases.

Four example cases

In the two post-campaign focus groups, we used the four examples (see Page 2) as a group exercise so participants were able to share their views with each other. Both groups found it very challenging to prioritise the list, particularly between the case of a single mother and that of working parents with five children. The discussion let the participants realise how complicated individual cases could be and how many elements the council should take into consideration to decide on who should have a council house. The following are some of the extracts from the discussion:

'I didn't put homeless people in my first question....mainly because of the stereotype I have on them...I am still not sure if he should be given a high priority....but I can see where everybody comes from [that a homeless man should be given a house]...I will probably add the homeless on my original answer.'

'We cannot really say she[single mum] is taking an advantage of the system...hmm...the man's not around....that can be hard...but his family might help? It's difficult.... We really need more information and to look into the whole case...like family history and current support that she might get from the council...it's really difficult.'

Single mother

Some of the survey participants raised concerns around the relation between teenage pregnancy and council housing. We showed some of these comments to the participants and asked their opinions:

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'I mean I see what they mean... child should not be used as a means to get a house...or free things... I don't agree with this at all.. child should not be use like this...but how can we know all single mums are like that? We don't know.. they might really need a house for their children.'

'That's only a small minority of people who are doing that... there are so many more people who actually need a house for their kids. People just judge teenage mothers... people and the media only look at the small negatives but not the positives...'

Feedback

Overall, the post-campaign consultation re-affirmed that young people do care about this issue and they think the policies around council housing should become stricter and fairer for both people who already have a council house and who are on the waiting list. They were quite keen on getting feedback from Southwark Council and told us that it would be great if they could hear what's happened as a result of this consultation.

'What's gonna happen now? How is this going to be used? We'd really like to hear what's happened...it was nice to have the Leader on the show but it will be also great to hear from them what's happened as a result....'



03. Online survey

This is the summary of the online survey which was run during the campaign.

Basic info

- Survey period: 15th April – 14th May
- How many? 88
- Gender: 59% female: 41% male (52:36)
- Age: Between 13 and 29, Average 19

Questions developed from the first consultation:

1. Who do you think council housing should be for?
2. Why do you think they should get a council house?
3. Do you think being given a council house should have a time limit?
4. If yes, how long should it be?
5. Is there anyone who should not have a council house?
6. If yes, who would it be?
7. Which of these people should be housed as the first priority?
 - a. Unemployed 24 year-old single mother with two children aged 3 and 4
 - b. Unemployed 40 year-old homeless man with no family
 - c. Working parents with five children aged 4,5,7,9 and 11 (income less than £15K)
 - d. Retired couple aged 63 and 65 who receive the State Pension (£120/wk) and have some savings (they do not own any property)

8. Which of them from Question 7 should be housed as the second priority?
9. If you could change any previous answers, would you?
10. If yes, which question would you like to answer again and why?
11. If you could change anything about council housing, what would it be?

1. Who should it be for? Why?

Most responses included people who are in need of financial help to find a place to stay such as 'those on low incomes' or 'people who cannot afford'. Also, families with children and single parents were among the most mentioned groups. Additionally, homeless people, those with disabilities, unemployed people and the elderly appeared in the responses. This shows that young people elaborated on different examples of vulnerable people in society.

Example responses:

1. *I think Council housing should be for anyone who is unable to earn enough to rent privately. Also, I think families and the elderly should get main priority because every child deserves a place to call home, and the elderly need somewhere stable and rural so that accessing other places can be made easier.*

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7. *Because it will help them progress.*

2. Do you think being given a council house should have a time limit? If yes, how long should it be?

- 39% yes : 61% no

61% of the survey respondents said there should NOT be a time limit. Female participants (64%) appeared to be more against the idea of having a time limit than male participants (58%).

Of the respondents who said there should be a time limit, 71% said it should be less than 5 years.

1 year	1
2 years	5
3 years	7
4 years	4
5 years	7
7years	1
10 years	1
15 years	1
Others*	7
Total	34

* Other answers: 1) *As long as the person is still financially, and functionally unable to get a house on his/her own.* 2) *Case-by-case depending on income increase.* 3) *There should be a limit but not a fixed one applied to everybody. Should be dependent on each case*

4) *Until the council is satisfied that the person is financially stable.*

5) *When they can afford to come off.* 6) *When they no longer require it.* 7) *Whenever that person is fit to do so.*

3. Is there anyone who should not have a council house?

- 66% yes: 34% no

People who should not be eligible for a council house according to the respondents were mainly those who can afford to rent or purchase a house: 'the rich', 'people who earn more than £20K', 'people how earn enough money or are financially stable to pay for their own home'.

4. Which of these people should be housed as the first priority?

- Unemployed 24 year-old single mother with two children aged 3 and 4
- Unemployed 40 year-old homeless man with no family
- Working parents with five children aged 4,5,7,9 and 11 (income less than £15K)
- Retired couple aged 63 and 65 who receive the State Pension (£120/wk) and have some savings (they do not own any property)

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First priority	Second priority
47% single mothers	39% working parents with five children
38% working parents with five children	27% single mothers
9% homeless men	18% retired couples
6% retired couples	16% homeless men

As seen in the first question, the survey participants gave a high priority to people with low incomes and children. Generally, female participants (48%) appeared to be more sympathetic towards the situation of a single mother than male participants (44%). Similarly, male participants (11%) tended to sympathise with a homeless man more than female participants (8%).

5. If you could change anything about council housing, what would it be?

Two things jumped out from the responses:

- Stricter rules and fairer processes to prevent people from abusing the system and make sure people who need the most get it.
- Better maintenance and security

Also, a few survey participants raised concerns around the stigma attached to council housing and the negative portrayal of it by the mainstream media.

1. *It needs to be well maintained to give out a positive message to those living in the community. There needs to be more of it.*
2. *Cases should be looked at on a more individual basis, so that those who truly need it can receive it. Also, more council houses need to be provided.*
3. *It will be the construction or refurbishment of the homes. I feel like with council houses not much care or interest is put in it in terms of fixing tiles, boilers, dealing with infestations. So I will say spending more time and money on building better homes before locating people to them.*
4. *It should attend to the needs of everyone who owns a council house because I've known of cases where a brother and sister had to share their bedroom even after 18, which is illegal but it took years for them to get another house with more room.*
5. *Try and change the stigma attached to it (although that'd probably be extremely difficult/impossible) ... maybe some people make choices on purpose so they can be given council housing, I think it should however be viewed as something you're not automatically 'entitled' to just because of your life situation (...).*

