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**COMMUNITY**  
CONVERSATION



## Let's talk about.... The future of housing

Who should council housing be for and for how long?

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## Housing in Southwark 2013

- Southwark council is one of the largest landlords in the country. 39,000 of the council's properties are rented and 14,500 are occupied by leaseholders or home owners who have bought their properties from the council. The number of homeowners is likely to increase as the government has brought in more generous discounts on right to buy sales.
- Being one of the largest landlords does not mean that everyone who wants housing can get it. There is very high housing demand in Southwark with over 20,000 people on the housing register (our waiting list of people applying to live in social housing). The highest demand among most of those on the waiting list is for one-bedroom properties.
- There are not enough of the right type of homes available each year for people who need them most. About 3,000 homes become available each year, we have about 1,200 people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless asking us to help them find housing and about 6,000 overcrowded households on our waiting list. There are shortages of larger homes and adapted properties for those with disabilities
- About half of the population of the borough live in a property owned by the council.

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## Housing in Southwark 2013

- There is a high level of non-decent council housing (44% non-decent in April 2012). The council is investing over £320 million in improving housing but much more is needed. The costs of maintaining and replacing our stock are high. A lot of the housing stock is old and in need of repair or replacement.
- There are low average income levels, particularly in council housing where 70% of people have incomes less than £20,000 per year with over half below £10,000. If people on low incomes did not live in council housing they would probably have to live in poor quality private housing or leave the borough.
- Average rents in the private sector are more than double the average of about £96 a week in council housing.
- Two thirds of tenants in council housing are not in work however many of these are pensioners.

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## Housing in Southwark 2013

- About a quarter of council homes are lived in by people in retirement.
- About 15% of council housing classified as overcrowded but about a third of households live in under-occupied properties.
- Private house building is increasing but prices are high and beyond the reach of most residents.
- A council house in Southwark is currently a home for life if you pay your rent and respect your neighbours.
- **We want to hear your views on who council housing should be for.**
- **We also want to hear your views on whether you think council housing should continue to be a home for life, or whether it should be a safety net for a shorter period.**

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## What is the Housing Commission?

- A group of experts Independent of the council
- Set up in December 2011 to take an in depth look at the future of council housing in Southwark
- Looked at options for future financing, ownership and operation of Southwark's housing stock
- Commission reported in October 2012
- 3 key questions that we are consulting on arising from the report are:
  - **Who should council housing be for and for how long?**
  - **How much should there be and to what standard of quality?**
  - **How should it be managed?**
- Your views on these will feed into our long term plan for what we do about council housing 2015-2045

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# Who Should Council Housing be for and for how long?

- The Housing Commission commented on lettings (who can live in social housing)
- The Commission said that we would carry on having less housing than the numbers of people wanting to live in it
- **Southwark will therefore need to work out who are the most important groups of people to get council housing**

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## What is the Lettings Review?

- The Lettings Review was set up to look at changes to our lettings policy (rules on who can apply to live in social housing in Southwark)
- We have a lot of people on our waiting list for housing but are not able to find housing for many of them and this is likely to continue
- Central government brought in the Localism Act 2011 – it allows Local Authorities more freedom to set their own priorities for people looking for housing
- We set up what was called the Letting Review Group to look at this. The group had politicians of all political groups, council officers, members of residents groups and housing associations on it
- The group was asked to tell us what they think we should do so that we could go out and ask local people what they think
- **We now want your views**

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## The Lettings Review Consultation

- This is the first part of our consultation on the Housing Commission
- We want to talk with residents groups including Tenants Councils, Home Owners Council and our Area Housing Forums. These are groups that were set up and elected by residents to represent their views.
- We will also talk to local housing associations and voluntary sector organisations
- We want to hear from anyone who has an interest in council housing in Southwark whether they live in our housing or not
- Consultation will take place throughout February
- **The closing date for this part of the consultation is 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013. the rest of the Housing Commission consultation will carry on till June 2013.**

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# Who gets priority to apply for housing now?

- There are more than 20,000 people on our housing register (our waiting list of people wanting to live in social housing)
- What are called “bands” are used to make sure those in most need are given housing first
- There are four bands, band one is the highest priority and band four is the lowest.
  - **Band One**
    - Underoccupiers - people exchanging bigger properties for smaller ones.
    - Council tenants who need to move so that new homes can be built or old ones repaired.
    - Council tenants affected by fire and flood.
    - Social services nominations (families)
    - Statutory obligation – those who we have to house by law
  - **Band Two**
    - Urgent Medical Priority - people with a severe illness or disability that is made significantly worse by their current housing.
    - People who need to move because of serious harassment.
    - Multiple Need - people with more than one reason to move, for example, overcrowding and medical priority.
    - Social services nominations (care leavers)
  - **Band Three**
    - Homeless families with children or vulnerable homeless people.
    - People living in overcrowded housing.
    - Medical Priority - people who need to move because of their illness.
    - Council tenants whose relationship has broken down.
    - People who have no inside toilet, kitchen or bathroom.
    - People with no electricity or hot water.
  - **Band Four**
    - Everyone else.

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## How long does it take?

- Even if you are in the highest priority group it can take up to 18 months to get housing
- In Band 4, the lowest priority you are unlikely to ever get housing
- In Band 3 it can take more than 5 years
- This table shows for each of bands 1-3 how long it can take to find a home:

	<b>Bedsit</b>	<b>1 bed home</b>	<b>2 bed home</b>	<b>3 bed home</b>	<b>4 bed home</b>
<b>Band 1</b>	1 month	6 – 14 months	6 – 18 months	5 – 11 months	6 – 12 months
<b>Band 2</b>	2 months	2 – 8 months	2 – 10 months	4 – 19 months	7 – 23 months
<b>Band 3</b>	14 months	21 – 24 months	34 – 37 months	40 – 55 months	37 – 69 months

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# Question 1

## Did you know? . . .

- Half (over 10,000) of all the people on our waiting list for housing are in what is called Band four (the lowest priority) on the waiting list which really gives no priority and there is very little chance of getting a home
- Social housing in Southwark is allocated through what is called “Homesearch”. This means that every week we advertise all the properties that are available (whether they are from the council, housing associations or even other boroughs) on our website and people on the waiting list can bid for them.
- This gives people the chance to choose where they want to live.
- Demand for social housing is much higher than the number of properties that become available and as a result only those in greatest need are likely to have a successful bid.

**Question 1: What do you think about having a band which is very unlikely to result in the person applying getting a home?**

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## Question 2

### Did you know? . . .

- To be able to apply for housing in Southwark you need to have a “local connection” for at least 6 months
- The Lettings Review recommended increasing this to two years
- “Local Connection” normally means you live or work in Southwark or have another special connection

**Question 2: How long do you think that applicants should have a “local connection” to be able to apply to live in social housing?**

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## Question 3

### Did you know? . . .

- The council has a special policy of getting homes for residents in council housing who have to move so that regeneration or major works (rebuilding or major repairs) to take place
- These residents are given a priority on “Homesearch” or entitled to a new home if one is available
- Homesearch means that every week we advertise all the properties available (whether they are from the council, housing associations or even other boroughs) on our website and people on the waiting list bid for them.

**Question 3: What do you think we should do for residents who have to move to allow regeneration?**

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## Question 4

### Did you know? . . .

- The government says that only children over 21 years of age should have their own bedroom. They call this the “bedroom standard” which categorises families as overcrowded if they have children over 21 who do not have their own bedroom
- The council's lettings policy says that all children aged 16 or over should have their own bedroom

**Question 4: Who do you think should be entitled to their own bedroom?**

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## Question 5

### Did you know? . . .

- The Localism Act lets council's give priority for housing to people who make a community contribution
- Community contribution can mean people who do voluntary work, foster carers, members of the armed forces etc.
- Community contribution can also mean people who are working

**Question 5: Who do you think should be given priority for homes in Southwark because they make a community contribution?**

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## Question 6

### Did you know? . . .

- The money that we spend on looking after council housing mainly comes from the rents we collect from the people who live in it. However, about 60% of people get some housing benefit that is paid for from taxes.
- Central government has set what is called a 'formula' or 'target' rent for what it thinks our rents should be and wants all social housing providers to use this.
- Central government wants our rents to be the same as the 'formula' rent by 2015/2016. This is called 'convergence'. Our average rent is about £96 a week, the government's 'formula' rent is about £105 a week.
- Using what is called annual rent affordability limits (what people who live in our housing can afford to pay), Southwark won't 'converge' until 2021/22
- Reaching the target rent before 2021 could mean we have more money to do improvements to housing but this means higher rents that will affect low income households
- This could be speeded up if, for example, all new people getting housing went straight to formula rent (not existing tenants or transfers)

**Question 6: What do you think we should do about rents? Do you think we should increase our rents more quickly to help to improve the standard of housing or should we keep to the current plan of increasing them more slowly to protect low income households?**

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## Question 7

### Did you know? . . .

- Sheltered housing is housing that has been specially adapted for older or disabled people to allow them to carry on living independently
- Sheltered housing is specially adapted or designed housing where residents can be comfortable have the companionship of other residents around them and has extra security
- The council lets people apply for sheltered housing if they are over the age of 60 or 55 if they have a disability
- People now live much longer and some older residents don't want younger people moving in to sheltered housing as they can have different lifestyles. Some people think it is better to have a mix of ages and abilities/disabilities because this can be better for community activities.
- Extra care housing is different to sheltered housing and designed for older or disabled people who can live independently in their own home, but need 24-hour support. We have two extra care housing schemes in Southwark, giving 24-hour support, practical and personal care, leisure and recreation facilities, and a safe environment for residents. To live in extra care housing a social worker carries out an assessment to see what people's needs are and if this sort of housing is right for them.

**Question 7: Who do you think should be allowed to apply for sheltered housing? Should this be for a mix of ages and abilities/disabilities, just for those who need more support or only for those over retirement age?**

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## Question 8

### Did you know? . . .

- Most council tenants are called secure tenants this means that as long as a council home is their only and main home, we cannot make them leave without a court order. This means that unless they do something wrong they can keep their tenancy for life.
- From 2003 the council brought in what are called introductory tenancies for new tenants. These last for 12 months after which they automatically become secure tenancies unless the council has started legal action to reposses their home.
- No one under 18 can have a council tenancy. Instead, we give them a licence to live in the property until they are 18.

**Question 8: The council is not proposing to change this. How long do you think people should be able to live in council housing? Do you think there are certain people who need a tenancy for life more than others, for example, older people or people with disabilities?**

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## Question 9

**Is there anything else you want to say on who should be able to live in council housing?**

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## We want to hear from you:

### Please let us know what you think by ...

- Contributing to the consultation taking place at meetings
- Telling council officers what your views are
- Putting your comments in an email to:  
[housing.options@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:housing.options@southwark.gov.uk)
- Or, write to:  
Housing Commission Consultation,  
25 Bournemouth Road,  
London, SE15 4UJ.
- Please let us know what you think before **6th March 2013**.