

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

24 MARCH 2021

LATE QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR NICK JOHNSON

Tonight's theme is about Economic Renewal and Fair, Equal and Inclusive. Let's forget the noise about starting council homes and 11,000 of propaganda about housing delivery. The fact is that in the last 10 years Southwark Labour demolished over 3000 council homes and built less than 1000 plus nearly 1000 long term empty and has over 15,000 people on their waiting list.

Does the Leader agree that a decision by this decade old administration to loosen the temporary accommodation policy to shift families on the waiting list for council homes further and further outside the borough including beyond the M25, is a failure of Labour's Fairer Future promise to all generations? (noting many have children in schools in Southwark)

RESPONSE

According to Shelter, there are nearly 250,000 people in Temporary Accommodation (TA) in the UK. We know that this disproportionately affects London and Southwark, with over 3,000 households placed in TA at the end of 2020. Our waiting list for council properties has expanded considerably during the pandemic and continues to remain high, with nearly 15,000 households on our register at the beginning of March.

It is under this extreme pressure that we agreed the Temporary Accommodation Action Plan at Cabinet in March.

The first and most pressing element of this plan is to expand supply through our own housing stock wherever we can to ensure we can offer as many homes as possible in the borough. You can see this in how we have brought homes back into temporary use on our estates pending redevelopment, such as Ledbury and Aylesbury. At the most recent Budget in February, we have also agreed an additional £4m in spending to help us meeting increasing demand for TA, especially since we predict a further increase in demand as COVID restrictions on enforcement and evictions are lifted.

In terms of the private sector, we have also brought forward our Empty Homes Action Plan, which will enable the council to grip every possible lever to bring empty homes back into use across Southwark. However, government caps on Universal Credit (UC) and the London Housing Allowance (LHA) significantly curtail increasing supply in the private sector, which continues to price people out of the borough. We will always try to place residents within or as close to the borough as we can, within the constraints of the benefits system as it stands.

Under our new policy, households will continue to receive up to two offers, and will retain their right to bid for council housing in Southwark. It is important to note that we

remain absolutely committed to prioritising those with the highest need, which includes family and schooling links to the borough, in particular those with SEN and children due to undertake important exams, when allocated housing both in and nearest to the borough.

We are also driving up the quality of temporary accommodation through our Good Homes Standard, which builds on our existing commitment to rule out use of Bed & Breakfasts. Among other things, the Standard aims to drive up tenure security and ensure that basics such as cookers and refrigerators are available to families when they first move in.

In my view, if we can find residents good quality, affordable accommodation that they are willing to accept, even if it is a bit further away, then they should be able to take up those offers, safe in the knowledge that they can remain on our waiting lists in Southwark.